

Top 20 High School Football Rankings

Southeastern Pennsylvania Football

Featuring District 1, 12, the Philadelphia Catholic League and the Inter AC

November 29, 2005

(All teams are 4A unless indicated otherwise)

The AAAA Playoff Picture Across The State

EAST: The regular season and playoffs have whittled the field down to 4 teams. Where did the year go? At this point there are no flukes, no flashes in the pan. We're left with 4 excellent teams that will provide us with a great finish. Saturday's action sees North Penn traveling to Allentown to battle Liberty of nearby Bethlehem. The 12-1 Hurricanes had no trouble with Philadelphia's Frankford High last week, crushing the Pioneers 42-6. They've crushed *all* comers in the playoffs by an average score of 44-8. Opposite them is battle tested North Penn, also 12-1. The Knight's had the more difficult journey, getting here after negotiating the Suburban One National Conference for a 2nd place finish behind Neshaminy. But they earned enough points to get the top seed, then won it outright by routing Downingtown East last week 55-20. Before that they beat Coatesville and Central Bucks East. The Knight's quality schedule and tradition rich history, their playoff experience-coaching, and some big punishing bodies opening holes for unstoppable Pete Stoll to run through will be the difference Saturday.

WEST: There is one undefeated AAAA team left in the state, 13-0 Bishop McDevitt of Harrisburg. Knowing they come from the Mid Penn Commonwealth Division makes that all the more impressive. How's this for a slate of divisional opponents; State College 9-4, Harrisburg High 7-3, Carlisle 8-3, Central Dauphin 7-4, and Cumberland Valley 8-3. Three of five were road wins. The non-conference game was a road win against Berwick. Their depth is such they've survived the loss of LeSean McCoy, one of the premier running backs in the country. They beat State College last week 20-17. In 1995 they beat Burrell for the title at the AA level. Their opponent this week is equally experienced McKeesport, 12-2. The Tiger's won the AAAA title in 1994, beating Downingtown 17-14. After stumbling in the opener at North Hills (8-3) 33-7, and again in the regular season final against Highlands (3-7, AAA) 26-7, they beat good teams impressively, including Mount Lebanon (8-4), 39-3, Trinity (7-4), 48-7 and Gateway (7-4), 47-17. In the playoffs they've defeated Shaler, both North Hills and Mount Lebanon again, and Woodland Hills (10-3) and Erie's Cathedral Prep (9-4) by an average score of 38-10! This is where McDevitt imploded last year against Pittsburgh Central Catholic, losing 44-0. But they're a year older, and good as the Tiger's are, they are not Pitt CC. The game is scheduled for Mansion Park Stadium in Altoona, Saturday at 1 PM.

The AAA Playoff Picture Across The State

EAST: Manheim Central has again bowled over all the opposition in District 3's Lancaster-Lebanon Section 2 by an average score of 53-8, and are now feasting on other playoff hopefuls the way they often do this time of year. From 1999 to 2001, they

advanced to the Semifinal, losing in all 3 years to their nemesis Strath Haven. A rebuild in 2002 yielded an 8-3 record and an exit in the 1st round. It all came together the following year when they edged Pine Richland 39-38 to win the state championship and finish 15-0. Last year's 13-2 team got to the Final but lost to Thomas Jefferson's great team 56-20. This year's group is 12-1, with playoff wins against Cocalico (8-3), 28-6, Northern (9-3), 42-14, and Muhlenberg (10-3), 48-21. Opposite them is Pottsville. The Crimson Tide come from District 11's Berks Inter-County Conference, Section 1. They are 12-1, with playoff wins against strong teams from Wyoming Area, Whitehall, and last week's stunner against Strath Haven 32-0. This is the 2nd season they've played at the AAA level. Last year's team went 10-2 with a close loss to Berwick in the 2nd round. Before that they were AAAA. Their 7 year won-loss is 48-30. Central's is 86-10, plus, they are right where *they feel* they're supposed to be. Pottsville's a class act, but taking down the Barons after beating Strath Haven is a tall order, one the Tide is not accustomed to. The game is at Hershey Stadium, Friday night at 7 PM.

WEST: Here's the other *large school* (4A-3A) undefeated team, General McLane at 12-0. The Lancer's are a playoff experienced team-program with a 7 year W/L of 57-17. They are one of the perennial District 10 powers, playing in the District 10 League, Region 5. They've been to *States* 4 consecutive years, generating a 38-7 won-loss during that time. Their offense is huge at 42 ppg, with a D allowing 17. During the course of the season they beat Erie Strong Vincent (9-2), the other AAA power in the area, and Erie Cathedral Prep (9-4), another constant in the state's AAAA power structure. In the playoffs they beat Warren, Strong Vincent again, and Pittsburgh's Perry Traditional Academy 41-20 last week. Their opponent in the Semifinal is Franklin Regional, the Section 4 rep from District 7's WPIAL. The Panther's are 13-1. The loss came to another AAA power in D-7, Hampton (9-2), 20-17. Franklin eliminated them in the postseason 31-14. All you need know about the Panther's is they defeated West Mifflin (11-1), 24-21 and defending state champ Thomas Jefferson (11-2), 31-14, on consecutive weekends in the playoffs. So you know Selinsgrove (11-2) was no match for them last week where Franklin cruised to a 35-7 win. The game is at Slippery Rock U, 7 PM, Friday night.

1. North Penn (12-1) North Penn moved into the top spot on the strength of their overwhelming win against Downingtown East and St. Joseph's surprising loss to LaSalle. The Knights beat the Cougars the old fashioned way with a punishing ground game leading to inevitable big plays, and a dominating defense. They rushed for 494 yards! Quarterback Kyle Feiser passed for another 186 yards by completing 6 of 9 passes. Running back Pete Stoll and North's line softened Dtown's front by pounding away for 233 yards on 18 carries. Brandon Turner sprinted for another 141 yards. Tyrece Erving's 65 yard scoring run gave North Penn a 20-13 halftime lead after both teams raced to a 13-13 tie with less than 6 minutes left in the 1st quarter. The 3rd quarter opened with more big plays from Turner and Stoll respectively on 70 and 66 yard scoring runs. Stoll added a 20 yarder to conclude North Penn's 21-7 3rd quarter explosion that put East in a 41-13 hole. East's back Richie Walls punched one in cutting the lead to 41-20 at the end of 3. A 79 yard Feiser to Jim Leven TD strike combined with Pete Stoll blast of 5 yards accounted for the Knight's 4th quarter scoring and final score of 55-20. Downingtown's Pat Devlin was held to 7 completions for 95 yards on 16 attempts with 1 pick and no touchdowns.

Credit North Penn's pressure for those low numbers and an inordinate number of dropped balls by Dtown's receivers. On Saturday North Penn visits J. Birney Crum Stadium in Allentown for the State Semifinal against Liberty High from Bethlehem. The Hurricanes of District 11 play in the Lehigh Valley Interscholastic Athletic Association, Northampton Division. They are 12-1 with playoff wins against Easton 48-10, Hazelton 42-7 and Frankford 42-6. They've had 3 winning seasons the last 7 years and have a 7 year won-loss of 46-31. *Thanks to ePaSports.com for that information.* Last year's 10-2 team made the playoffs but were eliminated in the 2nd round. That's their only playoff experience the last 7 years. During the regular season they averaged 32 points per game while allowing 7. The Lehigh Valley plays great football but no one in the state plays it like they do in District One's Suburban One League where representatives made it to the State Final 7 of the last 10 years, winning gold 5 times! In 8 of 11 years a District One rep made it to the Final with Downingtown getting silver against McKeesport in '94. Liberty has a fine team but no one's getting in the way of this North Penn team, at least not until the Final.

2. Saint Joseph's Prep (10-2) Most accounts said St Joseph's lost to LaSalle 14-13 in overtime because of a failed extra point attempt. That's true, but it's only part of the truth. When you hold your opponent to *negative* 3 rushing yards, and 113 passing while you get 341 total yards, you're suppose to win comfortably, in spite of a muffed snap. The Hawk's exceeded the Explorer's total yardage figure in pass yardage alone, 114 yards, while running for another 227 yards. So the Explorer's had great success keeping the Hawk's out of the end zone. Stats show how effectively that was accomplished. St. Joe's scored 13 points off 82 plays and 341 total yards. That's 26.23 yards per point. That's bad. On the other side, LaSalle was ultra productive in putting 14 points on the board after gaining but 110 total yards. That's real efficient production at 7.85 points per yard, on 47 plays. Think about that stat, 47 plays to St. Joe's 82. Wow! The Explorer's defined "*bend but don't break*" in that one. Special teams play was decisive as always with LaSalle blocking a Prep field goal with a few seconds left in regulation. That, combined with a bad snap for the extra point in overtime remind us how pivotal the kicking game is in close contests. Next up is the Red Division Final against Cardinal O'Hara. Won't the loss to LaSalle add some intensity to practice this week!

3. Cardinal O'Hara (9-2) With no traditional Thanksgiving Day game, Cardinal O'Hara was granted a extra week of preparation for this week's Red Division Final against St. Joseph's Prep. They'll need it! Catching the Hawk's coming off a loss has to be the worst of all scenarios for the O'Hara faithful. The Hawk's will have enough incentive, if any beyond the norm is needed as a result of last year's 14-13 loss to O'Hara that ended their run of 3 consecutive Red titles. In this year's regular season game, St. Joseph's scored 21 unanswered points in the 3rd quarter to break open what had been a tight 7-7 game. A 4th quarter field goal provided for the 31-7 final. The Lion's score was the result of a 1st quarter fumble recovered in the end zone, despite rushing for 213 yards. They'll need to improve on that as will the Hawk's on last week's performance. On the year, CO's scoring 24 points per game and allowing 12. St. Joe's is much larger, averaging 32 ppg on offense while allowing 8 defensively. And the Hawk attack is more balanced with a 7-3 run to pass ratio verses O'Hara's 8-2 ratio. A repeat of the regular season's game would

be a real surprise. It's more likely we'll see a competitive game that mimics last year's 1 point final, with the Hawk's coming out on top this time.

4. Downingtown East (11-2) Downingtown East suffered their first loss in the last 9 games by losing in the quarterfinal to North Penn. A week ago saw the Cougar's rally on the road against Neshaminy while hanging 45 points on the board in defeating the Skins 45-38. This week, another Suburban One team from the National Conference returned the favor by trouncing the Cougs 55-20. Last week we mentioned that defense was Downingtown's *Achilles Heel*, but who expected this? And we felt that defeating Neshaminy and North Penn on consecutive weekends was difficult, "*because the Knight's are not Neshaminy*". "*They won't get in a running game with them like the Skin's did. Rather, they are much more like Pennsbury, but stronger, more talented, more veteran in playoff experience and, they are home*". Still, a 35 point Mercy Ruling with 9 minutes to go!? Anyway, East is carrying on the great Downingtown tradition by advancing to the Quarterfinal in the school's 3rd year of existence since the split in 2003. Well done!

5. Neshaminy (10-2) *Season over.*

6. Malvern Prep (10-1) Malvern Prep got their 5th shutout of the year by downing Monsignor Bonner 21-0. Bonner ended the year 2-9 while the Friar's rebounded from the loss to Valley Forge Military Academy 2 weeks ago. The Inter-AC champ also got their 2nd 10 win season in the last 7 years.

7. Central Bucks East (10-2) *Season over.*

8. Strath Haven (3A, 10-3) This was the week of profound scores with LaSalle shocking St. Joseph's, North Penn not just beating but demolishing Downingtown East in a mercy rule romp, and Strath Haven getting pounded by Pottsville. How often can you say that about a Kevin Clancy coached team? But they were pounded, with The Crimson Tide rolling up a total of 441 yards to Strath Haven's 56, and a 25 to 4 first down advantage. Usually you don't drop teams for losing to an out of area team, but the enormity of Strath Haven's 32-0 loss and the magnitude of North Penn's win against Downingtown East, combined with Central Bucks East's tight game against the Knight's earlier, edged them past the Panther's. The dagger in Haven's heart against Pottsville was quarterback Jake Wartella completing 18 of 25 passes for 241 yards and 4 touchdowns. He had no interceptions. Senior fullback Andy Buziak, 6-1, 202, bulled his way to 88 yards on 10 carries, with another bruiser, Junior Matt Feeney, 6-1, 212, rushing for 76 yards on 12 carries. Steve Pilconis, a 6-5, 196 pound wide out, nabbed 8 passes for 118 yards. With the yardage totals above, you'd think it was a romp throughout. Actually Strath Haven was only down 14-0 at the half. Then, two 3rd quarter scores followed by Wartella's 4th TD toss of the game (4th quarter) completed the destruction. The loss was the Panther's worse loss in their playoff history. Bad as the loss seems, it was only their eighth loss in 7 years. But it is worth noting that 63 % of those losses, 5 games, came in the last 2 years. Still, an 89-8 won-loss, another District One title, and a deep run in the playoffs is a fine place to be.

9. Coatesville (8-3) *Season over.*

10. Conestoga (10-2) Conestoga returned to form by edging Great Valley (6-6, 3A) on Thanksgiving Day 13-6. *Form* this year has been a series of close calls that has seen them win 4 games by 7 points, 2 by 6 points and 1 by a single point. Their 2 losses were both by 2 points! Valley stacked the box forcing Stoga to the air where quarterback Leroi Leviston hit Zach Young with a 66 yard touchdown strike to break a 6-6 tie in the 4th quarter. The win puts the Pioneers in the double digit win column for the second year in a row. Stoga has had a run of talent, paving the way to 8-4, 10-1 and 10-2 seasons the last 3 years. Next year's team will build around sophomore 6-3, 290 Jake Crooks on the OL, supported by a number of young wide bodies moving up. And there's another Cohen at quarterback, soph Jake Cohen, 6-5, 175, and a pile of good looking running backs. Stay tuned.

TIE

LaSalle (9-4) LaSalle did what Neshaminy and Ohio's St. Ignatius couldn't do, and what took Maryland's top ranked Gilman School (9-0) overtime to do by beating St. Joseph's Prep last week 14-13. It's true, the Hawk's blew them off the field statistically, then muffed an extra point that would have tied it at 14 all in the first overtime period. But the real trouble was LaSalle's sophomore quarterback John Harrison who dented a veteran and supposedly solid Hawk secondary for 113 yards and 2 touchdowns. That, plus special teams coming up BIG in a blocked Hawk field goal with 7 seconds left in the 4th quarter was the difference. All in all the Explorer's have hung pretty tough after starting the year with 5 straight wins, then going .500 the last 8. Each loss was followed by a win against a schedule that had them playing SJP and CO twice, and Roman once. Other games were against Ryan twice and Bonner once. What a way to end the year!

11. Pennsbury (8-3) *Season over.*

12. Archbishop Wood (9-2) Archbishop Wood had last week off after defeating Conwell-Egan 43-0 in the Blue Division Semifinal. They should be well rested for the Final Saturday at Northeast against West Catholic. A win Saturday gives the Vikings their 3rd consecutive Blue Division championship.

13. West Catholic (10-2) West Catholic eased past a 1-11 Penn Wood team Thanksgiving Day 13-6. That's the 3rd consecutive week the offense sputtered. In the regular season final, they lost to Archbishop Wood 21-12. In 2nd round Blue Division playoff action they edged Archbishop Carroll 12-0. The Burrs have scored 14 points or less 5 times this season, and 21 or less on 5 other occasions. They'll need at least 3 touchdowns Saturday to keep up with Wood's well oiled machine. In the regular season match, Wood's quarterback Joe Kosich lit them up by completing 12 of 21 for 274 yards and 3 TDs. That was his best game of the season. Running back Bryan McCartney (1024 rush yards to date) had his second best game of the year with 24 carries for 131 yards. And the Wood defense put the clamps on tailback Dennis Shaw (1537 rush yards to date), holding him to his worst outing of the season, 40 yards on 15 attempts. You can't put it

all on the D, so West's offense needs to step up in this one for the Burrs to have a chance to prevent the 3peat.

14. Souderton (9-3) Season over.

15. Upper Darby (9-3) Upper Darby responded in a big way to the 49-48 upset by West Chester East by routing Haverford 40-7 last Thursday. UD started slow, with running back Simoni Marco Lawrence warming up in the first quarter on a 3 yard burst for 6. The 2nd quarter saw him cross the goal line 3 more times, then twice more in the 3rd period to blow the thing open. He finished the game with 163 yards, bringing his season total to 2137 yards. Too bad others didn't get to see Simoni in the playoffs. He's a special talent. The Royals end the year with another 9 win season, their 5th in the last 7 years.

16. Interboro (9-3, 3A) Interboro won their 3rd straight game and 6th of their last 7 by defeating Ridley at Ridley Thanksgiving Day 7-6. This was a slugfest between the two meanest kids on the block. The Bucs proved to be the meanest by denying the Raider's late in the 4th quarter with a 1st and goal from the 6. Four Raider efforts were blunted as the Bucs held on for the 1 point win. Earlier in the game they blocked an extra point. They've grown as the season progressed from the team that lost to Downingtown East by 27 to one that trounced high flying Chichester to win their 8th consecutive Del-Val title. Add a road win at Ridley to see how far this young group has come. The Bucs have won at least 9 games 6 of the last 7 years and may improve on that next year.

TIE

Ridley (7-4) Ridley lost their annual Thanksgiving Day bash to Interboro 7-6 on the strength of a blocked extra point. For Ridley, 7-4 is a bad year. But it really was a young team that was oh so close to a 9-2 campaign except for one point losses to Marple Newtown and Interboro. The 7 point loss at Conestoga was anybody's game, and the 32-17 shellacking of Upper Darby spoke of things to come. They were an exciting team this year and should be at least 2 wins better next year.

17. Pennridge (7-5) On November 11th, Pennridge sat in the midst of a so-so 5-4 season looking forward to a road game at Bensalem. The Rams hadn't put consecutive wins together the *entire year* but this sure looked like the place to do it. After all, the Owls were a woeful 1-8. For the Rams, an 8-4 campaign was eminent if they could win upcoming road games at Bensalem and Cheltenham, and the season ending homer with Quakertown. Despite a 1-8 won-loss, Bensalem was somehow scoring 15 points per game on average. But the defense was a total disaster at 30 ppg. The Rams weren't world beaters themselves in allowing 17 a game while yielding 19, but they were more than Bensalem. Somehow none of that mattered as the Owls grew very long talons to defeat the Rams 30-20. The point of all that was to suggest the Rams were in new territory with the loss since the season could have gone south real quick unless they turned things around. They did, by recovering on the road the following week at Cheltenham (6-6) 21-9. Last week they finally won 2 consecutive games by beating Quakertown 28-7. So instead of tanking as they might have following the Bensalem loss they ended on a high note by winning their last 2 games.

18. Abington (7-5) It really looked like Abington would end the year on a 3 game winning streak with Cheltenham visiting them Thanksgiving Day. They were 3-3 at home with the losses coming to Neshaminy, North Penn and Pennsbury. Except for the 1 point loss to Pennsbury, they were understandable losses. Cheltenham wasn't in that league but they brought 1 more point to the game than Abington and upset the Ghosts 36-35. The loss combined with the Pennsbury loss is all that separates them from a 9-3 won-loss. This season established a solid foundation for next year where the Ghosts should again be an exciting team.

19. Plymouth Whitemarsh (8-3) *Season over.*

20. Tennett (7-4) *Season over.*

Honorable Mention

Roman Catholic (7-5)

Archbishop Carroll (8-5)

Henderson (6-6)

Cheltenham (6-6)

Norristown (6-5)

Chichester (9-2, 3A)

Phoenixville (10-2, 3A)

Unionville (11-1, 3A)

Lansdale Catholic (9-3, 2A)

Marple Newtown (7-4, 3A)