

Top 20 High School Football Rankings

Southeastern Pennsylvania Football

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

September 26, 2006

All teams are 4A unless indicated otherwise

1. St. Joseph's Prep (2-2) LaSalle's poor showing against North Catholic combined with St. Joseph's overwhelming win against a good Roman Catholic team, lifted the Hawks back into the top spot. Although no one knew it then, the game against Roman was over in the opening few seconds as St Joe's Brian Brinkmann returned the opening kickoff 80 yards for the score. The final 34 points were then, ah...pointless? The Hawks got their first shutout of the year, 40-0. The next opponent is scrappy Archbishop Ryan. It's easy to say the entire southeast corner of the state is in a down cycle, but that's a bit vague and too inclusive unless you're discussing historic powers only. Then it's perhaps uniquely true since we haven't suffered a power outage of this proportion in years. The point of that aside is to say some teams are actually experiencing an "up" year. This Ryan team is one of them. After an 0-2 start that included a 3 point loss to Pennsbury and a misleading 27-7 loss to Neshaminy (Raiders led 7-0 at half), they regrouped and upset Archbishop Wood 21-19 on the road, then pounded Monsignor Bonner last week, 41-20. None of that means they can hang with the Hawks, but a schedule read says they won't be intimidated, while their performance to date says they are capable.

2. LaSalle (4-0) The Explorers dropped a notch in the rankings after squeaking past North Catholic 14-6. That's no disrespect to North, they are improved and it was the Red Division opener for both teams. Still, more was expected from a LaSalle team that was averaging 37 points a game. Back to North for a moment; this is a team that has not had a winning season since 1987, 19 years ago! That matters little to the players who approach each game with expectations of winning, expectations well founded with an offense averaging 25 points per game and a defense allowing a respectable 16. Last year's team allowed 29 a game. Their won-loss is 2-2. Don't be surprised if they pull the upset somewhere along the line this year. For LaSalle, that's one down and six to go in Red Division play. Talk about teams that are *up* this year, here's a great example in Father Judge, 3-1, fresh off a 35-28 win at Cardinal O'Hara. Except for O'Hara and St. Joe's who have clearly come back to the pack, and poor Bonner who, hard as it is to imagine, are diminished, the rest of the division is improved. So hold tight for what should be one of the most competitive Red Division seasons in a long time. That will be the case Saturday when LaSalle visits Judge, their first road game since September 1st.

3. Pennsbury (4-0) The Falcons have gone undefeated against a pretty decent schedule. They're not pouring it on with 35-7 wins and probably won't in their scheme. They are very happy handing the ball off to a number of talented, versatile backs, keeping it on the ground and eating up clock. Why pass if you don't have to, especially in high school. The problem comes if you have to and can't. But so long as the defense and special teams continue playing as well as they have thus far, they won't have to pass. Last week it was again special teams and defense that won the game with a late 4th quarter interception by linebacker/kicker/running back C.J. Marck, who moments later nailed a 31 yard field

goal with 6 seconds left on the clock to quell the talented Titans. I know, calling the Titans talented sounds off. In the SOL, once you get a rep you're stuck with it. That's compounded by the league having such stellar programs as North Penn, Neshaminy and Pennridge to name a few, then going back not so long ago, Central Bucks West. The problem is when another good team comes along, few believe they're for real. I think that was the case in 2004 despite Tennett's 8-3 team barely losing in the postseason to Coatesville 24-20. A fumble at the goal line prevented their winning that one. Hatboro had a strong team as well, but sat on the sidelines with a glittering 10-2 record. Last year many called Central Bucks East a pretender, despite their beating Conestoga in the first round and losing to Neshaminy in the second round, 19-16. A similar bias could prevent CR North, Hatboro, Souderton and a combative CB South team from getting due recognition. Abington may be 2-2, with a talented quarterback injured and not playing, but you've got to give them props for the fight they gave Neshaminy last Saturday. Back to Pennsbury; for the Falcons to have any chance in Lansdale Friday against North Penn, they have to decrease penalties. They had 12 penalties for 103 yards at Glen Mills and 10 against CB South. The feeling here is that Pennsbury is a better team than North Penn. The question is, does Pennsbury believe that?

4. Souderton (4-0) What's not to like about this team? They're on a 10 game winning streak including the 2005 season, are well coached by Coach Ed Gallagher, have great team speed and special teams, power and speed at the running back positions with Ronnie Powell and Ryan Brown, an accompanying strong line that opens things up, a steady quarterback in Mike Franklin with good receivers, especially Ryan Dickerson and decent depth. And check out Coach Gallagher who after going 0-11 his first year, has since gone 9-3, 9-3 and 4-0 this year. The winless '03 team scored on average 8 points per game and allowed 36. The '04 team scored 26 and allowed 18. Last year's edition scored an average 24 points per game while allowing 18. This year's team is averaging 39 ppg and allowing 7. Keep in mind from 1999 to 2003 they won a total of 7 games. Talk about a coach, staff and dedicated players turning things around! So long as these guys stay healthy, it's going to be a fun season and postseason. Imagine going 9-3 two straight years and not making the playoffs! That will not be the case this year. Council Rock South is up next. This was a strange bunch that last year lost to Norristown and Truman, and beat CR North and Souderton. Go figure. This year they are off to a bad start at 0-4, but have a good running back in Ryan Phares.

5. Neshaminy (3-1) Neshaminy won their third straight game and conference opener against an unexpectedly competitive Abington team playing without quarterback Kevin Morton. Freshman Sam Kind filled in. A win is a win but the Skins got a real scare from the Ghosts who tied it up at 21 all with 2:45 left in the game. Then, on the first play from scrimmage, running back Jason Ulmer went 67 yards for the score, putting Neshaminy up 27-21. Abington blocked the extra point attempt. The Ghosts marched right down the field only to stall on Neshaminy's 30 yard line. What a game, and something of a heads up that things are wide open everywhere, even in the Suburban One National Conference. *Status Quo* is often the reality for a number of leagues in more recent years. For years it was Strath Haven in the Central, St. Joe's or O'Hara in the CL Red, Wood and Carroll in the Blue, Interboro in the Del-Val, Coatesville or Downingtown East in the Ches-Mont,

Malvern Prep in the Inter-Ac and one of the *big three* in the SOL-National, North Penn, Neshaminy or Pennridge. That is changed this year as early scores demonstrate with the Neshaminy-Abington outcome, Pennsbury nipping Central Bucks South 17-14, even North Penn edging Pennridge 19-13. Nothing is a given anymore in the National. Neshaminy will get win # 4 Friday at Truman in their first road game of the year. Then they're home for two straight against Pennridge and Central Bucks South. You've got to thank the schedule maker for that one with six or their first 7 games at home.

6. Upper Darby (4-0) Upper Darby moved to 3-0 in the Central League by crushing Lower Merion 54-20. This one got out of hand early with the Royals putting up 13 points in the first quarter, 21 in the second and 14 in the third quarter for a 48-6 lead entering the final quarter. LM got a couple cheap scores in the fourth against other than first unit players. On the year, the Aces are 0-4 and have scored 26 total points while allowing 176. Basketball season cannot get here soon enough! Upper Darby had 492 total yards of offense. Quarterback Blaine Fox continued to impress, completing 7 of 12 for 158 yards and no interceptions. He tossed two scoring strikes of 17 and 24 yards to the big target at tight end, Dave Wilson, 6-5, 215. The maturity of Fox and Wilson and a ton of backs running behind a substantial line have their attack larger and more versatile than usual. They haven't produced at this level since the 2000 team that went 9-3, with a 31-9 *points for, points against* average. The three losses came to Ridley (8-4), 14-7, AAA State Champion Strath Haven (15-0), 7-0 and Central Bucks West (14-1) in the first round of playoffs, 32-8. No one touched the Bucks that year until the State Final when they lost to a great Erie Cathedral Prep team 41-35. This week the Royals face another 0-4 team, Springfield before they *finally and hopefully* get a test from Strath Haven.

7. Downingtown West (4-0) With Downingtown West out the gate at 4-0 and Downingtown East off to a 3-1 start with road wins at Tennett and Coatesville, imagine the team we'd have if the school didn't split after the 2002 season. As is, both field powerful teams that will face off October 20th at West. The Whippets continued their winning ways last week by overpowering Boyertown 38-0. It was worse than that actually with total yardage stats showing West ahead 460 to 138. Hopefully running back Roshaad McCain will soon get credit as one of the more exciting backs in the area. He motored over and around the Bears for 248 yards on 21 carries. All totaled, West rushed for 363 yards to the Bears 115. Like running back McCain, West Chester East has flown under the radar in most polls and papers but not here. The Vikings are up next with their huge offense, 41 ppg, and improved defense. They got into a wild one with Newark, DE two weeks ago, losing 50-48. That skewed the stats to a 26 point average yield. Minus that one and they're at 17 a game. Stats are fun, but only an indicator at best. More than an indicator, they kept up with fast breaking Newark on one hand; while on the other, they went toe to toe with a struggling but physical Conestoga team, winning 33-13. Conestoga's losses came to teams with a combined won-loss of 11-1. This is a tough spot for West since the feeling here is West Chester East is the Ches-Mont dark horse, and a talented one at that.

8. Ridley (4-0) Ridley didn't drop in the rankings but were leapfrogged by Upper Darby and Downingtown West because of a second consecutive mediocre performance by the

offense. Having said that, they got it done in the end by going on a 70 yard scoring drive with 5:30 left in the game to beat Conestoga 7-0. The defense was there as it has been all season, holding the larger Pioneers to 10 first downs and 156 total yards of offense. When Stoga gets it together, beginning this week at home against Lower Merion, it will be in part because of their fine running back Tyreek Clark who dented the Raider D for 135 yards on 21 carries. Stoga's got some players, but an opening slate of West Chester East, 3-1, Upper Darby, 4-0 and Ridley, 4-0, made for a tough start for a rebuilding team. They'll win the next four to be 5-3 going into Strath Haven October 27th. Ridley has smooth sailing the next two against Radnor and Haverford. Then there's 3A playoff hopeful Marple Newtown, 3-1, before the Upper Darby game October 20th. Radnor is up next, on the road Friday.

9. Council Rock North (4-0) Council Rock North is off to a great start, having beaten a strong Father Judge team in the opener, then winning three consecutive road games. The transition from the rugged Suburban One-National to the highly competitive Continental Conference has been a positive one with the Indians winning the conference opener at Tennett 17-7. Unbelievable as it sounds, we are coming to the mid point of the season, which means it's time for a schedule read. The majority of North's toughest games in the coming weeks are home against Hatboro Horsham, Norristown and CB East. Road games have them visiting a strong Souderton team, CB West and rival Council Rock South. The season ends November 3rd for North, meaning if they qualify for the playoffs, they'll get an extra week practice for a postseason that has expanded to 16 teams. Playoffs are predicated on winning and another big step in that direction will occur Friday night if they beat an undefeated Hatboro Horsham team. Hatboro and Souderton are North's chief contenders for conference honors, although CB East and Tennett will have an influence. This is a huge game for both teams. Both are putting up big numbers while largely shutting the other guy down, so it will be an exciting game.

10. Hatboro Horsham (4-0) Hatboro closed out last season on a 3-1 roll and started this season even hotter. 4-0 with three road wins is a great start. Getting the fourth consecutive road win should be more difficult with Council Rock North dead ahead. The Hatters handled Council Rock South last week 28-7, but will find the team to the North a more difficult challenge. Hatboro is primarily a passing team. Quarterback Marshall Vogel has great vision at 6-4, and has completed 45 of 86 attempts (52%) for 658 yards. Weighing in at 220 makes him hard to bring down. His favorite target is senior Nick Lackman. At 6-0, 180, he's a big target. The OL averages 212 pounds and is anchored by junior Travis Poston, 6-5, 278. It's a quick line that has opened holes when necessary (493 rush yards), for senior fullback Matt Zoback, 5-8, 190 and sophomore Michael Bolorin, 5-11, 190. Sophomore Dan Schandain's speed (5-9, 165) compliments the power running of Bolorin and Zoback. The DL is quick and light, averaging 200. Fullback Matt Zoback doubles at linebacker where he is the team's top tackler. Council Rock North is led by quarterback Scott Bradish. Like Vogel, he has great vision at 6-4, 190. He's completing 60% of his passes (many to wide receiver Jeremy Lugg), and has bulked up enough to run with authority. Talented running back Dan Collins averages 6.0 yards per carry! The D led by linebacker Michael McCorry, is a tough one, allowing 9 points per game. DB Colin Firz-Maurice can make things happen to. Hatboro and CRN haven't

played each other since 2002 when North won 28-3. These two seem so even that it will probably be something like an untimely turnover or penalty and special teams play that determines the outcome. But you've got to like North's balance in Bradish and Collins, the defense, home field edge and a solid field goal kicker.

11. West Chester East (3-1) East put a hurtin on Henderson last week winning 44-19. Henderson has speed all over the field but couldn't keep up with the multi-faceted Viking attack. Senior quarterback Bob Brice has been red hot this year. Last week he completed 10 of 13 for 168 yards and a score. Add to that the running of Jarrod Williams who gained 150 on 6 carries and powerful Fred Maldonado (5-11, 190) gaining another 78 yards, to get a glimpse of East's big, balanced attack. They'll need it Friday when undefeated Downingtown West pays a visit. The Whippets have a balanced attack themselves, and score 32 points a game. Like Council Rock North and Hatboro, here's another team with a big quarterback in Nolan Kearny, a 6-4, 220 pound junior. He's not alone. Fullback Rhett Bull, as the name implies at 5-10, 210, hammers people while Roshann McCain, 5-11, 180 is more than impressive. The defense is allowing a paltry 7 ppg! Last year's game saw a younger but scrappy West Chester team lose a tough one to West, 27-21. This is going to be one of the best games in eastern PA. Upset?

12. Downingtown East (3-1) Downingtown East rolled out a quarterback last week who did as good a job of imitating state passing record holder Pat Devlin as could be done. Junior Pete O'Connor threw for 320 yards and completed 21 of 28 passes at previously undefeated Coatesville. When someone comes into your house and does that, they deserve to win, almost have to win as Downingtown East did, 30-21. What has often gone unmentioned at D-town East is the number of quality receivers they develop. Someone has to catch those passes and it seems everyone on the team can including Justin Blye, Danny Weber and running back Richie Walls who caught a second quarter strike of 24 yards to knot the score at halftime 14 all. The Raiders got some easier than expected yards on the ground against the Cougars but not enough with their ability to come back so quickly. Looking at the schedule says there are only two team left that have a reasonable chance of beating the Cougars, West Chester East and Downingtown West. East is home next week where they should get their fourth win of the year against 3-1 Avon Grove.

13. Coatesville (3-1) When a quarterback scorches your defense for 321 yards passing, it's safe to say you're having a bad day. More impressive, it was accomplished by a junior quarterback, Pete O'Connor, in only his fourth start. Now, put that quarterback on the road against one of the top teams in the area to see what a sterling performance it truly was. Looking on the bright side for Coatesville, the likelihood of a similar occurrence happening again this year is remote. And if you could eliminate a fumble returned for a score and a safety, it's 21 all. But you can't do that, it's part of the game, so the bottom line read Downingtown East 30, Coatesville 21. East is the first team to shutdown fullback Derrick Morgan, holding him to 57 yards on 15 carries. That kind of attention freed up Raider back Kieron Hutchenson for 198 yards rushing on 22 carries, 9 yards per carry. Not to rain on East's parade, but unless they are able to duplicate

O'Connor's passing feats weekly, they'll be in trouble with such a sieve-like defense against the run. And that's another bright spot for the Raiders, the OL and running game are fine. After such a tough loss, going to Glen Mills is probably not what the doctor ordered. Glen Mills is Glen Mills, but they gave Coatesville their toughest game of the year last season before losing 21-14. The Bulls are usually about unfulfilled potential, with talent everywhere negated by fumbles and penalties. They have a good line with plenty of beef and a running back in Raymone West that is one of the best in the area. A good Pennsbury team couldn't stop him two weeks as he ran for 143 yards on 27 carries. The Red Raiders just came through a hard game and disappointing loss. Any hangover would be fatal here. With no conference title to go for, all they are talking about at Glen Mills is making the playoffs.

14. Father Judge (3-1) Father Judge 35, Cardinal O'Hara 28. How surprising was that score? It's hard calling this an upset with Judge out rushing O'Hara 220 yards to 93 and winning the total yardage battle 374-361. Quarterback Paul Volpe completed 9 of 13 for 155 yards. Running back Jim LaVelle had a super night, gaining 170 yards on 25 attempts. For the year, the Crusaders are averaging 28 points a game and allowing 17. Since the 20-14 season opening loss to undefeated Council Rock North, they've rolled over Philly Northeast, Neumann Goretti and now O'Hara by an average score of 32-16. Because there are many quality backs in the Red Division receiving most of the press, running back Jim Lavelle has gone unnoticed. He's averaging 4.9 yards per carry on 87 carries for 430 yards. Quarterback Paul Volpe is getting little press despite having one of the top completion percentages in the area at 61% after completing 34 of 56 passes. Good returning linemen in Brendan Kwisz and Dave Smith coupled with underclassman wide bodies filling holes have provided for a good line. Round 2 in the Red Division wars begins Saturday at home against LaSalle.

15. Archbishop Wood (3-1) The one constant about good football teams, especially championship caliber teams is they usually and somehow find a way to win, despite circumstance. When you put two of the classier programs on the same field, there is some likelihood of viewing a demonstration of that scenario. By the third quarter of the game between Archbishop Wood and Archbishop Carroll, Wood found themselves in a 25 to nothing hole, without their quarterback Sean McCartney. No problem, in comes Mike Cattolico who throws two touchdowns (2 interceptions), and completes 10 of 23 passes. Not bad! Wood exploded in the third quarter for 20 points, got another 6 in the fourth quarter, all the while holding Carroll to zero points and eking out a 26-25 win. No one except these two have won the CL Blue Division title over the last 6 years, so it was almost appropriate we get a game like this. If Wood can win a tough road game like that against a respected opponent, who's going to prevent them from a 4-peat? They're home Friday against Kennedy Kenrick.

16. Cardinal O'Hara (1-3) Back to the drawing board! There is a great quote from Vince Lombardi when his team was just abysmal, seemingly not knowing up from down, where he stood in front of them and said "This is a football". Don't you get a sense that that's where Coach Ageo and staff are this week after losing to Father Judge 35-28? So it

will probably be pretty vanilla at North Catholic Saturday, keeping it simple and fighting off another improved Red Division team.

17. North Penn (2-2) After starting the season 0-2, 2-2 is a good place to be. North Penn beat Carroll two weeks ago then won at Pennridge last week 19-13. All of that is prelude to the big game Friday against undefeated Pennsbury. Both have played a comparable schedule, although the Knights have played more "name" teams, teams that in some cases have proven to be less than advertised. Pennsbury beat an underrated Ryan team, and handled Frankford's and Glen Mills size and speed, then beat a solid CB South team last week 17-14. It's tough calling a game like this one but the Knight's have home field advantage and must be feeling desperate at 2-2, relative to the Falcons coming in 4-0. But Pennsbury has a lot of talent and maybe the most underrated back in the SOL in Jackson Fagan (520 rush yards, 7 TD's), accompanied by bruising fullback Josh Parkes. Defensively, C.J. Marck solidifies a strong defensive front. North Penn's fine back Tyrece Ervin is rounding into shape after missing the first two games. Already he has run for 350 yards. This promises to be a hard hitting affair, with two of the better running backs on display.

18. Malvern Prep (2-0) The Friars were idle last week after thumping Chester in the opener, 42-0, and Henderson two weeks earlier, 31-7. Evidently they've replaced a particularly talented array of skill people from last year. They are home Saturday against Peddie School of New Jersey. Peddie lost at home last week to Penn Charter 19-0, and to Malvern Prep last year 44-24. The Friars will get past this bunch with ease, then go on the road against undefeated Salesianum (3-0) of Wilmington, Delaware, the # 1 team in the state.

19. Roman Catholic (3-1) Roman Catholic lost to St. Joseph's Prep 40-0. You felt this one coming, not the enormity of the loss, but the fact that St. Joe's was in a mood to pound someone after 3 point losses to some of the best football teams in the country. Roman was blindsided in this one and held to 58 yards rushing. Remember, they have a back, Balial Lewis, who quietly came into this game with a 6.1 yards per carry average after toting it 55 times for 336 yards. But the Hawks had his number all night, holding him to 25 yards on 14 carries. Quarterback Chris Johnson was held to 4 completions on 11 attempts for 78 yards. The Cahillites got it handed to them but you know they'll bounce back. The competition is especially difficult this year in the Red Division but the schedule is favorable with most of the better teams including Ryan, O'Hara, LaSalle and North, coming to them. The road games are Bonner and Judge with Bonner up next.

20. Abington (2-2) The Galloping Ghosts remounted last week, riding into Langhorne on a mission. Because junior quarterback Kevin Morton was sidelined, the mission was even more difficult. But they battled hard, with the goal line in sight 30 yards distant as time expired, allowing Neshaminy to pull out a 27-21 win. What an effort and what a baptism under fire for Abington's freshman quarterback Sam Kind. Their running back Kahlil Pittman rushed for 122 yards on 30 carries. Down the road the Ghosts may look at this one as the one that got away, especially with future dates at Central Bucks South, North Penn and Pennsbury. The home schedule features Pennridge, Bensalem, Truman

and Souderton. The reason things are looking dicey at 2-2 instead of 3-1 to qualify for the expanded playoff number of 16 teams, is because qualifiers will likely have to get to the 7 win level if the last 6 years history means anything. Since 2000, the number of 4A teams winning 7 or more games has gone as follows; 16 teams in 2000, 15 in 2001, 16 in 2002, 16 in 2003, 16 in 2004 and 15 last year. The study caused double vision so leave room for error, and did not take into account points, that could see a 6-4 team with a higher total than a 7-3 team. Still, to be safe, you better win 7 games. Looking at the schedule above says Pennridge is a must win game for Abington Friday. To do that, they have to stop Tristan Roberts who has already rushed for 530 yards.

Honorable Mention

Archbishop Ryan (2-2)

North Catholic (2-2)

Pennridge (2-2)

Central Bucks South (2-2)

Tennett (1-2)

CB East (2-2)

Wissahickon (4-0)

Plymouth Whitemarsh (2-2)

Interboro (3-1)

Glen Mills (2-2)

Strath Haven (2-2, 3A)