

Top 20 High School Football Rankings

Southeastern Pennsylvania Football

Featuring District 1, 12, the Philadelphia Catholic League and the Inter Ac
October 31, 2006

All teams are 4A unless indicated otherwise

A look at District Two's Top 4 teams:

Last week we took a look at District Eleven's top three teams in a short feature entitled Who's afraid of the big bad wolf, coming to the unscientific conclusion that Easton, Parkland and Liberty may not be so big or bad after all, despite the high rankings bestowed on them by numerous polls. Time will tell.

Moving on, I thought it might be fun to take a look elsewhere, beyond our borders to the far off hinterlands of District Two for a look at four teams having strong seasons, Abington Heights, Hazelton, Wyoming Valley West and Delaware Valley, all 8-1 through last week's games. This is what I found.

Abington Heights, Lackawanna Football Conference, Division 1: Looking back over the last seven years by way of EpaSports.com, you'll find the Comets have been a steady program, with only one losing season and 5 PIAA playoff appearances. Their 7 year won-loss is 55-23. Against D-1 in *States* they're 0-2, losing to Central Bucks West in '99, 35-7 and Cheltenham in '02, 21-14. This year's team looks like one that could make a dent in the playoffs. All that separates them from an even better record is a missed extra point in the second game of the season against powerful Wyoming Valley West with :48 left to play. WYW left Clarks Summit with a 28-27 win after statistically pounding the Comets 255 rushing yards to 87. Since then they've have been on a roll, beating Lakeland, Valley View and Delaware Valley. Lakeland (7-1) and Valley View (5-3) are both solid AA teams, particularly Lakeland. What the smaller schools don't have is depth, but they can have a strong first unit. Lakeland does. The 21-13 win at Delaware Valley was impressive. All totaled, the Comets have faced 4 Quads, two 3A teams and two AA teams. The combined won-loss of their opponents is 46-26, against which they've scored an average of 32 points per game, while allowing 11.

Delaware Valley, Lackawanna Football Conference, Division 1: Delaware Valley may be a newcomer to the D-2 power structure but they seem to be a legitimate one. From '99 through '01 they won 4 games against 27 losses. From '02 on they went 7-4, 5-5, 9-2 and 8-3 last year. Their seven year won-loss is 33-41. The bottom fell out of the 2005's season when injuries devastated the team, ruining an 8-0 start. Ironically, that was the only season in the last seven years that they made the playoffs, losing to Hazelton 42-21. This year they've played five AAAA, three AAA teams and one AA. They are clobbering most opponents except for Abington Heights who beat them in Milford 21-13. The Warriors average 39ppg and allow 13. The combined won-loss of their opponents is 33-40. A division one talent plugs the middle of their defense. At 6-2, 330 pounds, nose guard Trevis Romer usually gets the attention of two opposing linemen. He's joined by juniors Brendon Myer, 6-2, 225 and Ben Webb, 6-2, 238 and Don Bickman. It's a young but fast group. Last year's # 1 tackle, senior linebacker Ian Summer, 5-10, 220 and NG

Romer are the heart and soul of the defense that yields 112 rushing yards per game. The OL averages 230, mostly juniors, with a monster sophomore, Chris Conklin, 6-5, 286. The line has evidently jelled with senior running back Kenny Domzalski at 1273 yards through the Scranton game. With all that youth up front, he must hit the hole quick. QB Josh Navitsky filled in last year, throwing for 500 yards and has surpassed the 1000 yard mark this year. Most of their receivers return. They score on average 39 points per game and allow 13. Coach Keith Olsommer says they have great speed defensively and get to the ball well. Offensively, they have a few that could make the track team so they seem to have skills and weapons.

Hazelton, Wyoming Valley Conference, Division 4A: Here's an old, historic power that has gone 41-15 the last five years. They are 2-4 in *States* after four appearances since 1999. Against district one they are 0-1, losing to Interboro 41-35 in 2002. Last year's playoff hopes were crushed by Liberty in the second round, 42-7. Following that 10-2 campaign, Hazelton set their sights high for this season. With a decent nucleus returning, why not? Then the reality of a sneaky good Abington Heights team came to town and stuffed them in the opener, 21-0! That could have been a fatal blow, but Head Coach Rocco Petrone rallied the troops. They've since gone on a eight game winning streak. Last week they went to East Stroudsburg to face a good South team (7-2), and came home with a hard fought 28-12 win. After giving Wyoming Valley West their first loss of the season the week before, 19-7, E-Burg South was a tough road opponent. On the year they're averaging 24ppg offensively. The schedule to date is made up of six AAAA and 3 AAA teams. The season ends Friday at Berwick. They evidently have a decent ground game and defense. Against WWV, they rushed for 157 yards while holding the Spartans to 89 yards. For the year they've allowed 89 points, or 10ppg. If they can hold down a Curry coached Wyoming Valley West team, you suspect they can play with a number of teams.

Wyoming Valley West: Wyoming Valley Conference, Division 4A: Wyoming Valley West has a new head coach this year whose name may ring a bell to many of you, George Curry. Coach Curry left Berwick after a 35 year stint to take up the reins at Valley West. WWV went 30-24 from 2001-2005, so it was clear the proud program was going in the wrong direction. In came 61 year old Coach Curry to straighten things out. The Spartans are back to their winning ways again with a typical Curry team that runs over most opponents with a monster sized team. They got out of the gate on fire this year by winning their first seven games, averaging 227 rush yards per game. Then came the Hazelton game two weeks ago where the Cougars manhandled them, holding them to 89 yards rushing in a 19-7 loss. But they bounced back with a 57-13 win at Pittston. Mimicking the Central League, their schedule is a mixed bag of 4A and 3A teams. This year they've played six AAAA teams and three AAA teams. The offense is huge at 34 points per game while the defense is disappointing at 15 ppg. Physically, they're huge across the lines, averaging 6-4, 265.

Summary

It's difficult getting a handle on these teams since they don't go beyond their borders in non-conference games. Abington Heights has two impressive road wins, Hazelton and Delaware Valley. In terms of playoff experience, most of it came between 1999 and

2002. They've had one appearance since then, a 13-10 loss to Whitehall last year. Delaware Valley is impressive on paper but lost at home to Abington Heights. Their only playoff appearance was last year where they lost to Hazelton 42-21. Hazelton got good playoff experience last year advancing to the second round before losing to Liberty 42-7. The win two weeks ago against Wyoming Valley West in Hazelton says they may have taken the next step. Although Wyoming Valley West lost at Hazelton, they won at Abington Heights and will only get better under Coach Curry's guidance. That's why they should make noise in *States*, with savvy, playoff experienced Coach Curry at the helm. The question, can they get out of the district?

*** *The number following a team's won-loss is the projected seeding order for playoff purposes through last week's games.***

1. St. Joseph's Prep (7-2, 6-0, #1 CLRed) The combination of St. Joseph's beating North Catholic 28-0 and Ryan upsetting LaSalle sewed up another Red Division championship for the Hawks, their second in a row and fifth in the last seven years. The win also locks up the top seed for the playoffs with Roman and LaSalle two games off the pace at 4-2. For the second consecutive year, the Hawks play Cardinal O'Hara in the regular season final. At the beginning of the year, didn't we think this was going to be a titanic game? But O'Hara has struggled mightily, losing to Roman last week in a game that seriously jeopardizes their chances of making the playoffs. Their won-loss is 3-6. You always have great expectations when these two get together, but unless there is a miraculous turnaround over the next few days, look for the Hawks to handle the Lions as convincingly as they did last year, 31-7 in the regular season and 41-7 on the Red Final.

2. West Chester East (8-1, 6-0, #4) Go west young man, go west! That would be a bad idea this year in the district with teams like these Vikings, Downingtown West and Downingtown East lying in wait. Even Henderson's getting in on the action by winning three of their last four, lifting their selves up to a 5-4 record. And do you really want to mess with a mean, albeit struggling bunch of Red Raiders from Coatesville? This year East took full advantage of a favorable schedule that saw Dtown West, Coatesville and Dtown East come to them. These weren't narrow victories either. Rather, each one was defeated by significant margins of 35-24, 31-14 and 28-7 respectively. The defense allows a suspect 17 points per game, but considering it is forced back onto the field every few minutes with a high flying offense averaging 39 ppg, it has done pretty well. They're home against Rustin Friday meaning the first units should get valuable time off.

3. Ridley (9-0, 8-0, #3) Ridley beat winless Lower Merion 49-0 last week to secure their first outright Central League championship in 15 years. The drought makes more sense when considering the historic run Strath Haven made over the years with some monster teams. Conestoga and Upper Darby had good teams as well. Strath Haven won league championships in 92, 93, 96, 97, 98, 99, 00, 01, 02 and 03. They also won District One titles in all those years as well as last year. Then there were state titles in 1999 and 2000. So there has been one big, bad Panther in the neighborhood to deal with over the years! Check out *havenfootball.net* for more. Back to Ridley; for a change, Ridley's D is getting some press as well it should by allowing 23 points the entire season! No one has scored

on them at home. This is statistically the best defense and offense they've had the last eight years. At 27ppg, they finally have an offense to support the defense. That wasn't the case over the years, especially in postseason action. After beating Neshaminy in 2002's first round, 17-16, they lost to North Penn 28-7 with an offense averaging 23ppg and a defense allowing 13. 2003's offense was just as powerless against North Penn who beat them again by a 28-7 score. Ridley averaged 21 a game that year and allowed 13. In 2004, they lost the opener to Pennridge, 14-6, despite the Rams coughing up 3 interceptions and 2 fumbles. The score was 7-6 until Ryan Greiser broke loose on a 74 yard scoring jaunt at the 10:54 mark of the fourth quarter. That edition could only manage 20ppg offensively. The difference between previous Raider teams and this group is a big offense, for a change, coupled with the quickest group of defenders they've ever had.

4. Council Rock North (9-0, 6-0, #1) If defense wins championships, expect Ridley and this Council Rock North team to go far. Factoring in playoff experience is another issue but well coached teams have a way of getting past that. North is averaging 30 points per game while yielding 8. In the highly competitive Suburban One-Continental Conference, they've shutdown their main antagonists, Hatboro Horsham, Tennett and Souderton. Hatboro averages 27ppg but North held them to 14. Souderton averages 30ppg but North held them to 10 *at* Souderton. Same for Tennett. They were held to 7 points on *their* turf, 21 points below their season average. If they can get by *arch rival* Council Rock South Saturday, they'll have sole possession of first place and will have avenged last year's 16-7 home loss to the Hawks. They'll also have secured the top seed in the playoffs. What a turnaround for a team that had one heartbreaking loss after another in last year's 5-6 campaign.

5. Archbishop Wood (8-1, 6-0, #1 CLBlue) Archbishop Wood kept their eye on the prize last week by defeating Cardinal Dougherty 44-6. The win keeps them one game ahead of West Catholic, setting up a grand finale against the Burrs at Widener University Saturday. West has come alive the second half of the season, winning five of their last six games. Hard as it is to believe, the Vikings are going for their *fourth consecutive* Blue Division championship. They had some issues a few weeks ago, going into a slump against Archbishop Ryan and Archbishop Carroll. They lost to Ryan 21-19 but came back from a 25 point deficit to defeat Carroll 26-25. Since then they've been unstoppable, rolling over five opponents by an average score of 33-7. Don't forget, this is the team that beat North Penn in the opener and good Penn Charter team the following week.

6. North Penn (7-2, 6-0, #7) After a rocky 0-2 start, this is not what the rest of the district wanted to see; a healthy North Penn team firing on all cylinders on a seven game winning streak. Anyone seeing how they took apart Neshaminy two weeks ago knows this is just about where Coach Beck wants his team at playoff time. They routed Truman last week 41-0 and will probably do the same in the closer Friday against Central Bucks South.

7. Pennsbury (8-1, 5-1, #5) Almost every year Pennsbury and Abington provide us with some of the most competitive games in the district. As far back as 2002, Abington's 2-8

team gave Pennsbury's 6-4 group a hard time before falling 26-13. In 2003, they lost 21-12. In 2004 the Ghosts pulled one out, beating Pennsbury 14-12. In last year's classic, a 7-5 Abington team was nipped by an 8-3 Falcon team 21-20. But the topper was last week's show stopper that went four overtimes before the Falcons were able to eke out a 35-28 win. After a game like that, you've got to hope there's a place for a team like Abington in the playoffs. The win keeps Pennsbury one game behind North Penn in the National Conference race with one game to go, at Neshaminy Friday night. The Skins routed them last year in Fairless Hills, 35-14 and could pay for that here. I was remiss in failing to mention Pennsbury's Jackson Fagan running for 333 yards two weeks ago at Penridge.

8. Downingtown West (8-1, 4-1, #2) Downingtown West turned back Coatesville 20-14 to stay one game behind West Chester East in the Ches-Mont with one game to go. They close out the regular season at Bishop Shanahan where their ninth win of the season will secure an extremely high seed for the postseason. Maybe it's time to reflect briefly about the proud program at Downingtown. In the four years before the school splitting into East and West, Downingtown was one of the top programs in the state, with a won-loss of 40-7 (85%) the preceding four years before the split. Not even Central Bucks West topped that, although they did come close at 42-8, a winning percentage of 84%. There was the state championship in 1999! Stepping down a classification, Strath Haven took overall honors with a 58-2 won-loss and two state championships. If we stray to the Catholic League, Archbishop Carroll had their great run in that period, cranking out a 45-7 record, for an 86% winning mark. Pardon that aside. For West, things went south as they limped through a 5-6 season, followed by consecutive 4-7 campaigns after the split. The point of all that was to say they are having a fine and special year as this year's group brings that winning tradition back to the old school at West.

9. Souderton (7-2, 4-2, #9) 9th ranked Souderton lost to 14th ranked Harboro Horsham October 13th, 21-14. Part of the problem in having rankings make even a little bit of sense is that by their very design, they must become convoluted over time. As an e.g., unranked Cardinal O'Hara, with a 3-6 record, would have to be ranked above North Penn, a team they beat 14-0 in the second week of the season if the rankings were forever pegged to that one game. Ryan at 3-6 would have to be above Archbishop Wood's 8-1 after upsetting them September 18th. And then there's the matter of *where* a team was positioned before winning or losing. The bottom line, shouldn't rankings reflect the level a team is playing at now and not always be a reflection of what they did in the past? Back to football, Souderton got their second shutout of the year last week by blanking last year's divisional champ Central Bucks East, 35-0. It gets tougher Friday in an important Continental game at second place Tennett. Souderton edged the Panthers last year 34-28. If they can duplicate that, they'll likely end up facing them one more time in the First Round of the playoffs. In previously road games the Indians defeated Spring-Ford, CB West and Norristown, while losing to Harboro Horsham. Tennett should be their toughest road game of the season.

10. Tennett (6-2, 5-1, #8) Tennett got past improving Council Rock South last week 21-14. Didn't the weather mirror the season's first week with steady rains turning the fields

to quagmires? The difference in this game was turnovers. Tennett had one, South had five and still lost by only a score. No one said road wins were easy. Senior Kevin Rose rushed for 148 yards on 18 carries. Because CR South is struggling with a depressing 2-7 record, you don't hear much about them, but they do have a quality back in Ryan Phares. He has had a couple big games this year and had one last week, cranking out 165 yards on 13 carries. Up next for Tennett is Souderton. Their home schedule is far more difficult than Souderton's away schedule, facing the likes of Downingtown East, Council Rock North and Hatboro at home. This should be one of the very best games to see Friday.

11. Downingtown East (6-3, 3-2, #12) Downingtown East fell to 3-2 in the Ches-Mont but is hanging on for a spot in the postseason after losing to West Chester East 28-7. It will be interesting seeing how they respond to their second straight loss. Realistically, many teams would be in trouble facing Downingtown West and WC East on consecutive weekends, especially with your quarterback sporting a non-throwing hand cast and used in passing situations only. What a tough blow for QB Pete O'Connor. They can't afford any let up Friday with red hot Henderson in town. The Warriors, winners of three straight and four of their last five are a *bubble team* fighting for a playoff spot. A steady dose of running back Richie Walls could burst their bubble.

12. LaSalle (7-2, 4-2, # 2 CLRed tied) After straying for four weeks in a surprising losing slump, Archbishop Ryan came back to the fold by upsetting the Explorers 14-12. The win puts them in a dead heat with O'Hara for the 6th and final seed in the Red playoffs, meaning, if they beat Father Judge Saturday, they're in, unless O'Hara upsets St. Joe's. Both Ryan and O'Hara are 2-4 with O'Hara holding the tie breaker by way of a regular season 14-13 win at Ryan. Back to LaSalle; after starting the year 7-0, they're now in the throes of a two game losing streak, not a good way to enter the playoffs. They're also in a tie with Roman (4-2) for the second seed that will be decided on the field Friday at Roman Catholic. That's a tough closer but at least the issue will be decided on the field.

13. Neshaminy (6-3, 4-2, #13) It's certainly been a disappointing season for the Skins but there is definitely no *give up* in them. After the St. Joe's loss they came back with a 27-7 win at home against inconsistent but dangerous Archbishop Ryan. Following the 33-13 home loss to Pennridge, they came home to beat Central Bucks South 43-29. And finally, after the 29-7 loss at North Penn, they returned home to beat Bensalem 21-7. Before judging them too harshly in the Bensalem win, remember North Penn beat the Owls 24-14. Plus, the Owls D at 20ppg is well improved over last years unit that allowed 27ppg. A more accurate measuring stick may be check how that Skins have done against plus .500 teams. The answer is 1-3. That does not bode well with Pennsbury in Friday. This is the biggest Falcon attack in years at 27 points per game, backed by an equally impressive defense allowing 12ppg, a 7 year "low" in terms of points allowed. For all their troubles, Neshaminy still fields a sizeable offense at 25ppg, with a defense that allows 16 a game. There are a number of schools out there that wish they could have a team *as bad* as this one! Look for a knock down back yard brawl in Langhorne Friday as we see what Pennsbury has after the multi-overtime heavyweight slugfest with Abington.

14. Hatboro Horsham (7-2, 4-2, #6) Hatboro held on to their high seed and third place in the Continental (tied with Souderton) by routing Norristown 28-6. They are a legitimate team if some tried and true indicators mean anything. They're winning on the road with a 3-2 won-loss and 4-2 against winning teams. At 16ppg yield, this is their best defense over the last eight years. The offense is sizeable at 27ppg so this is an exciting team that also plays decent D. Central Bucks East is up next on the road, Friday. The Pats beat the Hatters last year 20-7.

15. Roman Catholic (7-2, 4-2, #2 CL Red tied) Roman Catholic is having a great year. The only team to beat them decisively is St. Joseph's six weeks ago. In what has to be called an upset, Father Judge beat them 10-7 two weeks. Last week they beat Cardinal O'Hara 17-7, holding the Lions to 135 total yards of offense while Roman got 242. 189 yards of Roman's total were rushing yards. They are home Saturday in a game against LaSalle that will decide second place in the Red Division and the 2 seed that goes with it.

16. Penn Charter (6-2, 3-0) William Penn Charter makes their first visit to the Top 20 after beating Malvern Prep last week 23-19. The win puts them in sole possession of first place in the Inter-Academic League. Penn jumped on Malvern Prep with unaccustomed ease, getting a quick touchdown in the first quarter, followed by two more in the second to take a 23-7 lead into the locker room. But this is Malvern Prep. No team coached by Gaspare Pelligrini ever went away easy. Back came the Friars with a safety, a TD strike from QB Ryan Nassib to Joe Hoban and a 27 yard field goal by Joe Buckley, cutting it to 23-19. Malvern made one last effort in the fourth quarter, moving to Penn's 3 yard line with 14 seconds left in the game. But a goal line stand and a powerful hit resulted in a fumble as time expired. Penn moves on to play Haverford School (1-8, 0-3) at home Friday before closing out the season with a tough road trip to Germantown Academy (6-2, 2-1).

17. Malvern Prep (5-2, 2-1) It wasn't a shock but it was a mild surprise seeing the Friars go down to defeat at Penn Charter last week. We were set up by their going through the Inter-Ac schedule last year without a defeat. The thing about Penn is they very often have good teams that somehow take a back seat to Malvern Prep despite the Quakers having tremendous success in the league. The loss means that Episcopal Academy (4-4, 0-3) will probably have a long day against the Friars Friday, maybe as long as last year where they lost at home to Malvern, 39-0. Excluding the 3-8 anomaly of 2004, the Prep is 9-1 following a loss since 1999.

18. Interboro (7-2, 3-0, #10) On the strength of a blocked field goal, Interboro fell to Delaware's # 1 team, Salesianum, by a narrow 14-13 margin in overtime. One thing is certain, the team that battled the Sals is not the same team that lost to Unionville in the opener. Fullback Harry Broomall filled in admirably for FB/LB Mike Sullivan who went down with a season ending injury two weeks ago. 6-5, 290 pound OL/DL Rob Johnson had a monster game as well. Broomall rushed for 53 yards on 13 carries with Tom Ridewood leading the Bucs with 74 yards after 21 attempts. Salesianum's fine tailback Sal Viscount led all rushers with 154 yards on 32 carries. The Bucs are at Chichester Friday looking to gather in another Del-Val title and enter the playoffs with momentum.

19. Frankford (6-1, 5-0) Frankford won their sixth consecutive game with a 20-0 win at Northeast last week. The win also locks up Frankford's first outright Philadelphia Public League Red Division title, having shared last year's with George Washington and Northeast. Thursday's game has them against the Public League White Division champion, Philly Central (7-1, 5-0). About the upcoming playoffs, eight District Twelve teams make the 4A playoffs, with the winner facing whoever comes out of District 2/4/11 Sub Regional playoffs. Frankford isn't as powerful as last year but they do have size and speed that will represent the Pub well should they get that far.

20. Abington (5-4, 3-3, #17) It isn't often but sometimes you have to reward a team for losing. That was the case this week with Interboro's outstanding performance against Salesianum, losing by a point in OT and this Abington team forcing Pennsbury to four overtimes before succumbing 35-28. If Abington gets into the playoffs they are going to be a handful for whoever they play. The schedule maker did them no favors this year with away games at Plymouth Whitmarsh, Neshaminy, North Penn and Pennsbury. Four of the five winning teams faced to date were played on the road. Only Pennridge, a team the Ghosts destroyed by 21 points played at Abington. Aside from the oddity at Whitmarsh, a 26-9 loss, and North Penn shutting them out 35-0, they are averaging 27ppg. They're allowing 24ppg but remember they had close calls at Neshaminy, a 27-21 loss and last week's thriller at Pennsbury. If you can take those two teams to the edge, you can hang with just about any team in the district.

Honorable Mention

Chestnut Hill Academy (7-1, 2-1)

North Catholic (5-4, 3-3, #4 CLRed)

Father Judge (5-4, 3-3, #5 CLRed)

Coatesville (5-4, 1-4, #22)

Plymouth Whitmarsh (5-4, 4-2, #16)

Wissachickon (7-2, 4-2, #15)

Upper Darby (7-2, 6-2)

3A Sun Valley (7-2, 4-1)

3A Unionville (7-2, 5-1)

3A Strath Haven (6-3, 6-2)

3A Garnet Valley (7-1, 4-1)

3A Upper Perkomen (8-1, 7-0)

3A Upper Moreland (7-1, 5-1)