

Top 20 High School Football Rankings

Southeastern Pennsylvania Football

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

September 6, 2005

(All teams are 4A unless indicated otherwise)

1. Saint Joseph's Prep (1-0) The Hawks return to the top spot following a one year absence on the strength of a convincing 28-14 road win against formerly top ranked Neshaminy. Following a 76 yard TD strike from QB Chris Whitney to Bill Edgar on the first play from scrimmage, the Hawks rolled to a 14-0 half time lead that ballooned to 28-7 in the 4th quarter. Last year saw the Hawks begin the season atop the rankings for a brief stay preceding consecutive losses to Pittsburgh Central Catholic 38-12, and Saint Ignatius from Cleveland, Ohio 26-6. After last Friday's powerful statement, it will take something special to knock them from their lofty perch this year. That *something special* could be this week's opponent Saint Ignatius, ranked 7th in last week's USA Today Midwest Regional Poll. They'll have to play the perfect game to beat a focused St. Joseph's team in its home opener seeking revenge for last year's debacle.

2. North Penn (1-0) North Penn started the season strong, trouncing Glen Mills 30-6. The Bulls coach said words to the effect that the Knights weren't everything people were saying they were, that his team stayed with them. And the Bulls did manage to keep it close on the scoreboard (14-6), until the 8:47 mark of the 3rd when the big back Pete Stoll broke loose for a 54 yard scoring run. Talk about bull, Stoll bulldozed his way for 151 yards on 14 carries. The Knights dominated this one in first downs 20 to 9, rush yards 317 to 96, and total yards 378 to 176. Next up is a classic that will mimic the hype, (hopefully with more drama) of last week's encounter between St. Joe's and Neshaminy when 3rd ranked Cardinal O'Hara visits North Penn. Last year's battle was a titanic struggle between evenly matched teams. This year may be no different except that North Penn will have extra incentive based on a few issues. Last year's loss to O'Hara marked the end of the defending state champion's 17 game winning streak. That's no small thing. The loss was especially painful when after an 11 yard punt, O'Hara took over at North's 38, punching it in to tie the score at 14-14 with just 23 seconds left in regulation. The Lions got it first, scored, and made the extra point. In their possession, the Knights scored but had the point after blocked and lost 21-20. This one may be just as close.

3. Cardinal O'Hara (1-0) Defending Red and Blue Division champs squared off at Ocean City High in Jersey Saturday with the Red champ Cardinal O'Hara coming away with a tougher than expected 26-0 victory. Even though it was the first game of the year for both teams, few gave Archbishop Wood much of a chance. Wood may come from the smaller enrollment division but they had plenty of fight and talent, enough to be down 6-0 with 33 seconds left in the 3rd quarter. O'Hara's final 2 scores came in the last 5 minutes. Statistically O'Hara dominated, holding a 418 to 67 total yardage advantage. And they held Wood's fine running back Bryan McCartney to 33 yards on 11 carries. So the D was there. But the O, going 16.1 yards to get a single point needs to improve. Factor in a good effort by Wood's defense, until faltering late, against the larger, deeper Lions. The next game is against North Penn. This is a game O'Hara can win. They're catching the Knights developing a quarterback, while their own, Anthony Walters, demonstrated last week he got all the playing time needed last year splitting time with

Tom Ward. Walters is also a dangerous double-threat. His stats last week were 3/6/0 for 96 pass yards and 71 yards rushing on 9 carries. More than anything it's the Lion defense, one of the best in the state that could take over the game.

4. Neshaminy (0-1) The Skins dropped to 4th in the rankings after losing large to St. Joe's in their opener *at home*, but should find solace in playing the Hawk's even on the scoreboard in the 2nd half, 14 to 14. St. Joe's was the better team that day. Neshaminy will likely regroup. They're home again Friday for Archbishop Ryan who lost their opener last week to Pennsbury 29-15. The Skins struggled with this team last year, winning in the last 30 seconds of the game on a 37 yard Kevin Kelly FG after squandering a 20-7 lead. That was a young team playing in its 2nd game of the year. Things are different this year. If last year's narrow win against Ryan, where they were fortunate to win, coupled with last week's loss to St. Joe's doesn't bring out Neshaminy's A game, with attitude, you can begin to wonder if they'll have the magic for a deep run this year. The thought here is they do have it and will roll over Ryan for a convincing win.

5. Strath Haven (1-0, 3A) There isn't a better way to start a football season than by winning and shutting out a good football team in your home opener with the pedigree of the Frankford Pioneers from Philly's Public League, District 12. In the process they managed one of the best running backs in the area by holding Brandon Norris to 102 yards on 19 carries, and keeping him out of the end zone in the 24-0 win. The defense rose to the occasion with the shut out, allowing Frankford 187 total yards. The Panther's got 267. As is typically the case with the disciplined, often mistake free Panther's, the 267 total yards of offense produced 24 points. That's a decent 11.1 yards to get a single point (See O'Hara), and that's good production in game 1 against a respected opponent. They'll need more of the same Friday when they visit Conestoga, the team that ended their 74 game regular season winning streak last year. Prior to that, they hadn't lost since 1996 (to Conestoga!), winning 8 consecutive Central League and District 1 titles, and 2 AAA state titles. Conestoga's 31-21 win was largely the result of QB Josh Cohen having a career night, throwing 2 TDs and getting 17/26/1 for 251 passing yards. Despite Cohen's rifle arm and ability to put a defense back on its heels, the Panther's held the Pioneers to 82 yards on the ground, and should do even better this year with Cohen graduated and a predictable re-emphasis of the run. Stoga has trouble putting points on the board last week in a 6-0 win against a young team from West Chester East. That spells trouble for them here against a potent group of Panther's.

6. Coatesville (1-0) The Red Raiders won impressively in their opener with a 28-7 win against Archbishop Carroll. The scary thing here is they already have the most illusive back in the area in C.J. Gray who did his thing to the tune of 137 rush yards. Now they've unleashed junior quarterback Scott Ahara, who completed 7 of 8 passes for 112 yards in his first start. How's that for an opener. Last year's unit averaged 30 points per game and allowed 12. If you thought C.J. was a load last year, imagine him on a team that is balanced offensively, to see something of the potential of this team. Saturday finds the Raiders on the first leg of consecutive road trips, beginning with always tough Bethlehem Catholic (1-0), followed by Lancaster McCaskey (0-1) the following Friday. Catholic is coming off a rebuilding year where they went 7-5 following a rare 4-6 campaign. Typically this is one of *the* powers in the Eastern part of the state. Last year's

team lost a tough 10-0 decision to North Penn and a 19-10 loss to powerful Bethlehem Liberty (10-2). Liberty lost in the 2nd round of States last year to Easton 14-7. All of that suggests Coatesville has its hands full this weekend.

7. Pennridge (1-0) The Rams survived a tough opener to get past surprising Hatboro Horsham 21-15. We'll have to keep an eye on the Hatters who visit Upper Dublin this week before coming home for 3 consecutive home games. The near miss against Pennridge says last year's success may have rubbed off and stuck on this year's group. For Pennridge, unless the Hatter's are repeating as a dark horse, they'll need to up their game for the encounter Friday night in Harrisburg against Central Dauphin. The CD Rams, who also where green and white and are called the Rams, are the defending Mid Penn Commonwealth champ. They're coming off a 10-2 season (28-7 last 3) that concluded with a 36-34 2nd round loss to Bishop McDevitt in States. The other loss was to Pennridge, 16-0 in the 2nd game of the season. That was quite an accomplishment by the Ram defense knowing CD averaged 31 points per game playing in the Commonwealth against Carlisle (11-2), Harrisburg Bishop McDevitt (10-3), Cumberland Valley (8-3), State College (7-4), and Harrisburg (5-5), where George Chaump is trying to return the Cougars to the glory days of old. Suppose to have some real talent this year. Like the Suburban One, the sprawling Mid Penn is quite a conference. Pennridge has all the tools to win against a quality opponent like Central Dauphin, particularly with a veteran, steady QB and good numbers returning to the defense. Central Dauphin proved themselves with last week's road win at Manheim Central, 31-20. So it seems they've reloaded and as always will be difficult to beat in front of a large crowd for their home opener.

8. Henderson (1-0) Henderson's young squad opened *last season* with a narrow 33-26 win at Chester. This year they opened with Chester again but with far different results. The Clippers didn't know what struck them as the Warriors unveiled an aerial attack to go along with their option attack. So now we have two strong and balanced teams in the Ches-Mont, Henderson and Coatesville. What a race that will be. Back to the game: Henderson ripped the Clips for 449 yards of total offense in the first game of the season. That's impressive. The new QB Drew Constable was 5 of 10 (1 interception) for 110 yards and ran for another 77 yards in 5 trips. Power back Stephan Adams (6-1, 235) blasted for 183 yards on 19 carries. For the night, Henderson rushed for 349 yards. That's balance. The final was 42-6. The Warriors are home again Friday against Governor Mifflin (0-1), who is coming off a 21-14 loss to Downingtown East. GM resurfaced last year in the Berks Inter County Conference at 7-5 following 1-9 (03) and 3-7 (02) seasons in the Lebanon- Lancaster League. Looks like the move from the LL to the BIC did them good as they tied Pottsville for the title.

9. Ridley (1-0) After falling behind 9-0 at the half, Ridley woke up for a 22 point 2nd half comeback to pull out a win at home against Bensalem. Both teams looked out of sync, even for an opener. The bright spot for Bensalem was all purpose back Raju Easterling with 51 yards on 14 carries and another 13 yards on 3 receptions. His 40 yard punt return for a score gave the Owls a 6-0 1st quarter lead. Josh Cimino's 36 yard FG upped the lead to 9-0. His kickoffs and booming punts (5 for 43 average yards) kept Ridley in poor field position throughout the half. For Ridley, Dino Vasso stole the show with 2 touchdown receptions, a 2 point conversion catch, plus a 35 yard punt return for

the other score. On the night he napped 8 receptions for 122 yards. His interception in the closing minutes ended the Owls final possession. New QB Al Humes had a solid night for the Raiders, completing 14 of 24 for 214 yards with no interceptions. Although Easterling looked like he could break one at any time, the Raider D kept the Owls from scoring an offensive touchdown, while holding them to 96 total yards. The next opponent is Lower Merion in Ardmore. Ridley rolled last year 27-7 but will find a more confident opponent this year with the Aces coming off a 32-26 triple overtime win against Harriton.

10. Downingtown East (1-0) East opened the 2005 campaign successfully by beating District 3's Governor Mifflin on the road without starting quarterback Pat Devlin. Governor Mifflin's QB Hughes also missed the contest. Still, they jumped on East early, racing out to a 14-0 half time lead. It took a 21 point comeback to pull this one out, allowing the Cougars to prevail 21-14. They should get an even stiffer challenge Saturday night when William Tennett's surprising team pays a visit. Tennett is the defending SOL Continental Conference champ. Their 8-3 season won a berth in States where they lost in the 1st round to Coatesville 24-20. That was a game they could (should?) have won. They don't have Brandon Pirrone this year but you've got to give Coach Keeny credit. The way they took Cheltenham apart last week 35-7, says an upset here would not surprise. QB Devlin's status for the game is unknown.

11. Conestoga (1-0) Visiting Conestoga got a 6-0 win against West Chester East to help ease the pain of transition from the Josh Cohen era to, well, something other than Air Stoga. QB Cohen will be sorely missed. He was a large part of Conestoga's rise in power last year that elevated them to the top of the Central League and beyond, briefly, where they lost to North Penn in the playoff's 1st round, 28-13. This year the QB is Brian Ikeda. His 17 yard TD strike to WR Dwuan Clark in part accounted for the Pioneers win. Credit also a bone jarring defense led by Andrew Tyshovnytsky's 4 sacks. At 6-4, 267 lbs, he's a major player in the DL. That and a strong linebacking corps should have them in every game with just a little production from the offense. In Dwuan Clark, they have one of the most gifted athletes in the area. It's just a matter of getting the ball into his hands as often as possible, beginning Friday night against Strath Haven. Both teams have strong defenses but the Panther's won't go scoreless like last week's opponent. Strath Haven is more than West Chester East.

12. Interboro (1-0) Interboro won their opener last week against Garnet Valley 35-9. The good news is they demonstrated the ability to score many points in short order, by scoring all their points in the 2nd half. In fact, the Jaguars had a 9-0 lead with 9:09 to go in the 3rd period. So the Bucs really exploded on them after the Jags played well defensively into the 3rd quarter, and not bad offensively with RB Rusty Booth pounding away for 155 yards on 15 carries. The flip side of that for Interboro, meaning the bad news part is the Bucs went scoreless the 1st half. But in the 2nd half, Tim Ridewood took over, starting with a 91 yard kickoff return, an interception run back 77 yards for a score, a 20 yard TD run, and an 18 yard punt return that set up another score. Not bad for a junior. The next game is Friday against Monsignor Bonner (0-1). Bonner lost to Upper Darby last week 34-6, but gave the Bucs a battle last year 14-3. The Friars look to be in real trouble here.

13. Central Bucks East (1-0) The Patriots opened with a resounding 47-7 win against Philadelphia Public League opponent Murrell Dobbins. They did the same last year, winning 35-7 before going into a 1-5 nose dive over the next 6 games. The win came against Council Rock North, 9-0, where East had a slight scheduling advantage in having a game under their belt. It was the Indians 1st game. That's not the case this year with CR North getting the shutout last week against University City 41-0. Look for another competitive game here.

14. Pottsgrove (1-0, 3A) Pottsgrove's big team and running back Brent Carter made a statement about their 3A playoffs aspirations by trouncing Radnor 42-6. With their poor record against another Central League team, it had to feel good beating up on Radnor. They get a chance to beat on a fellow Pioneer Athletic Conference member, Perkiomen Valley, in their home opener Friday. This was a war last year. Pottsgrove barely survived, nipping the Vikings 29-28. After Perk Val things get more difficult with home conference games against Boyertown and Lansdale Catholic.

15. Quakertown (1-0) A series of events occurred that allowed Quakertown to advance this high in the rankings. First off, teams like Plymouth Whitemarsh and Cheltenham lost big. Other's like Roman Catholic and Upper Merion, suffered what could be called mild upsets. But the real clincher was Quakertown's destruction of Central Bucks West 28-6. The Bucks came into the season the clear favorite in the American Conference, while Quakertown entered with a number of questions. Evidently many of those questions were answered against the Bucks. As a reminder, the Panther's schedule begins favorable with 4 of the first 5 games at home. Wissahickon, who edged the Panther's last year 20-14 is up next at Quakertown Friday.

16. Central Bucks West (0-1) After the Battle of Gettysburg Lee said, "we can't always expect victories". Coach Felton probably didn't say that following the dreadful loss at Quakertown last Friday but he must have been just as stunned as the rest of us by the enormity of the loss. Much has changed since the championship run but West just doesn't lose games like that. Well they do, but to the likes of North Penn in '03 and Pennridge and St Joe's in '02. Losing to Quakertown 28-6 rippled right across the state where it was likely interpreted more as a typo than an accurate score. But hey, hats off to Quakertown. Now we'll see what these Bucks are made of, whether they have the resiliency to bounce back or not. Rival Central Bucks South has enough to stay with West Friday, so this could get real interesting.

17. LaSalle (1-0) We mentioned in the preseason rankings the real possibility of there being considerable change in the lower 10 teams in the rankings. But few thought it would be this soon or this profound. Still, teams play their way in and out of any rating system and the Explorer's did just that last week with the 42-21 drubbing of previously ranked Plymouth Whitemarsh. Nice pay back for last year's 25-14 loss. They get another shot at the same Friday against George Washington, a team that beat them last year 35-10. LaSalle has a lot of young talent but some big people up front. GW graduated the core of their team so the Explorer's should be able to take this one.

18. West Catholic (1-0) West went to Wildwood last week and shutout Roman Catholic 14-0. That's the same score they beat Roman by last year. Nice win for West but who

expected that! A bright spot in what had to be a dull game (scoreless until the 3rd quarter) was the Burr's defense that was in mid season form. Roman was held to 47 rush yards on 22 attempts, and 50 passing yards. West's offense didn't exactly light it up either with 75 rushing yards and 91 through the air. But, Roman came into the year with more questions about their offense than the defense which is expected to be fine. West should be 2-0 after playing visiting Saint John's from Washington D.C. Saturday.

19. Lansdale Catholic (1-0, 2A) The Crusader's scored early and often, just like last year's squad to open the season with a big win against Methacton 48-7. Not a bad start for the defending AA State Champ. This one was over by the half with LC in front 41-0. Things ramp up considerably in terms of competition Friday when they travel to Boyertown to face the only team that beat them last year, 28-16 in *Lansdale*. You know Catholic will be pumped, but so will the proud Bears who have a solid, though less known program of their own. When you're located in District 3 and play in District 1, it's hard to get known. The Bear's have been in the PAC since 2002. Over the last 3 they've won 25 of 36 games. The 3 years before that they went 21-15 for a 6 year won loss of 46-26. Unspectacular for sure, but solid. So it will again be a real collision when these two get together. Hopefully there won't be any fights this time.

20. Norristown (1-0) Back in 1999 and 2000 the Eagles were flying high, winning two consecutive SOL Liberty titles. Actually they ended in a tie with Pennridge and Plymouth Whitmarsh in '99, and again with the Rams in '00. It was pretty heady stuff with a 9-3 won-loss followed by a 10-2 season. Both editions made the playoffs only to lose in the 1st round to North Penn 28-27 in '99, and again to Downingtown the following year, 20-7. Since then the program has been on a downward slide. In '01 they went 6-6. 2002's team dipped below .500 with a 5-7 campaign. Then it all fell apart in '03, bottoming out to a 1-11 record. Winning the one game was miraculous with a defense allowing 26 points per game, crippled by an offense that averaged 9 ppg. The point to all that was to demonstrate how high they were recently, how far they've fallen, and how significant last season's mild turnaround was. Norristown went from 1-11 to 4-7. They had narrow losses to what we know were strong Tennett and Souderton teams, 21-17 and 26-20 respectively. And they turned their *points scored* and *points allowed* around from 9 for and 26 against, to 21 ppg scored and 23 allowed last year. Last week's surprising 17-13 win against Upper Merion says the turnaround has continued into this season. And it's always nice getting a confidence building BIG win early. A win against Methacton at Norristown Friday could propel the Eagles onto a strong season.

Honorable Mention

Malvern Prep

Archbishop Wood (0-1)

Roman Catholic (0-1)

Frankford (0-1)

Upper Merion (0-1)

Springfield, Delco (1-0, 3A)

Upper Darby (1-0)

Abington (1-0)

Tennett (1-0)

Plymouth Whitemarsh (0-1)