

Top 20 High School Football Rankings

Southeastern Pennsylvania Football

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

September 20, 2005

(All teams are 4A unless indicated otherwise)

1. Saint Joseph's Prep (2-1) The Hawks fell behind Maryland's top ranked Gilman School 16-0 before clawing their way back with two 2nd half scores and two successful 2 point conversions to force the overtime where they connected on a 37 yard field goal. It wasn't enough. Gilman (2-0) took it in on 3rd down to pull out a thrilling, albeit disappointing 22-19 win. Because the loss was to a nationally ranked team outside our area, the Hawks retain their # 1 ranking. No coach would admit it but you've got to feel good about a 2-1 start against formerly top ranked Neshaminy, Ohio's 8th rated Saint Ignatius, and Maryland's top team. Wow, who else has an opening 3 games as difficult as that? And what a tune up for Red Division play beginning Friday at home against Roman Catholic. Roman is off to a rough start following bitter losses to West Catholic 14-0 in the opener and Valley Forge Military Academy last week, 14-6. The losses bracket a win against Germantown Academy, 25-13. In all 3 games the defense has been there, but an offense needs to develop before the D is worn down. St. Joe's took last year's game 7-0, in the 7th game of the season. They came in 4-2 against a far more confident Roman team (5-1), on a 5 game winning streak. But after the Hawks opening slate, who knows what they have left for this one. Another tight game would not surprise against proud Roman.

2. North Penn (3-0) The Knights are off to a great start, building a head of steam for Friday's SOL National Conference opener after defeating Archbishop Carroll 41-21. While the score suggests an easy time of it, Carroll stayed with them, battling the Knights to a 14-14 stalemate at the 8 minute mark of the 3rd quarter. And why not, the Patriots have a proven ground game despite facing North Penn without their top back Josh Halladay. RB Jake Szulinski also sat. The Pats were tested in the opener against Coatesville where they rushed for 148 yards, then ran all over Upper Merion for 383 yards in King of Prussia. So it shouldn't surprise that they rushed for 197 yards against North Penn for an impressive average of 5.3 yards per carry. No one's done that this year, not Glen Mills who got 96 yards rushing on 28 attempts, or Cardinal O'Hara who generated 176 yards on 42 carries. Maybe that's a chink in the Knight's armor. Carroll battled well but fell under the weight of 4 second half North Penn scores. That brings us to the opener Friday in Lansdale against Pennridge. These two locked horns last year for two of the best games in the state. In the first, the Knights (2-1) were coming off a physical encounter and overtime loss to Cardinal O'Hara, 21-20. The Rams were 3-0, blowing everyone away beginning with Hatboro Horsham 47-31, Central Dauphin 16-0 and finally Bonner, 35-13. And they had a running back, Ryan Greiser. Nobody was stopping him. Still, the Knights showed great resiliency by taking a 27-14 3rd quarter lead. But a series of penalties, fumbles, and Ryan Greiser rumbling for 220 yards culminated in a comeback that saw the Rams out score the Knights 21-0 to win 35-27! They met for the second time, again at Pennridge, in District One's PIAA Semifinal where a Jon Striefky 32 yard FG with 14 seconds left in the game was the difference. North prevailed 24-21. Last year Pennridge not only had Ryan Greiser, they also had the

luxury of playing North Penn twice at home. Neither of those conditions exist this year, and the roles are reversed with the Knights coming in confident and powerful at 3-0, while the Rams are 2-1, already with an embarrassing 42-7 loss to another state power, Central Dauphin. Central Dauphin is slick and lightening quick with a passing scheme that overwhelms you. The Rams folded under that pressure and will do the same against North Penn's pounding ground attack.

3. Cardinal O'Hara (2-1) Cardinal O'Hara struggled with key personnel sidelined with injuries including 2 running backs, an offensive lineman and QB Walters (second half only), but had enough to hold off mistake prone West Catholic 14-12. It was a sloppy game by both teams with West committing 7 turnovers (5 interceptions, 2 fumbles) to the Lion's 4. But West's mistakes proved fatal. They missed both the extra point attempt after their first score, then the 2 point conversion after the second score. Otherwise, the Burrs won the statistical battle by out rushing CO 177-139 yards, out distancing them through the air 107 to 59, and gaining more first downs, 13-10. Obviously O'Hara's offense needs to turn it up but wins against Wood, West and the tight loss to arguably the best team in the PIAA, North Penn, was a good showing preceding Red Division play. That kicks off Saturday at Father Judge. Judge scored more points on O'Hara than anyone last year in a losing 46-26 effort. O'Hara can name it here but may not have the energy.

4. Neshaminy (2-1) The Skins continued their 2 week blitz by routing Central Bucks South 48-0. That followed a 47-18 romp over Archbishop Ryan the week before. Both scores suggest the Skins are well recovered from the season opening loss to St. Joe's. Since then they've averaged 48 points per game while allowing 9. Looking at it another way, they've scored 109 points while allowing 32 since the 1st half shutout by the Hawks. The SOL-National opener is Friday in Abington where they may need some of that fire power to overcome Abington's powerful offense. As odd as it sounds, this is a clash of undefeated teams. The Galloping Ghosts hold the 17th spot in this week's rankings at 3-0, and are on fire, winning 6 of their last 7 going back to last year's 3-1 finish. That's some hidden momentum that could get them off to a good start. The Skins rolled last year 45-7, and won 4 of the preceding 5 games by an average score of 34-17.

5. Downingtown East (3-0) Downingtown East is off and running with 3 impressive defensive outings against Governor Mifflin (2-1), Tennett (2-1) and Elizabethtown (1-2, 3A), where they allowed 21 total points. 2 of the 3 were road games. Mifflin has a 20-18 win against Henderson to its credit and a 20-0 shutout of Reading last week. Tennett has shown some energy by putting up 35 against Cheltenham and 58 against Cardinal Dougherty in winning efforts. East's defense last year allowed 14 a game. To date they've improved that by 7. That's good because the Malvern team they play Saturday is capable of putting up some big numbers. East struggled against last year's team before winning at home 9-0 on the strength of 3 field goals. It'll be even more difficult at Malvern Prep (2-0) in their home opener. The Friars are coming home off strong road wins at Chester 35-0 and last week at West Chester where they surprised Henderson 28-27.

6. Conestoga (3-0) Conestoga may have suffered a mild letdown after beating Strath Haven two weeks ago but they also ran into a pretty good football team in Penncrest and barely escaped with a 7-0 Central League win. Nice try Penncrest. Penncrest's quarterback Greg Tyrrell was the primary weapon, going 20 for 30 with no interceptions for 199 passing yards. On the ground, Conestoga nailed them, holding the Lions to 28 yards on 17 attempts. Conestoga's got a nice quarterback of their own in Leroi Leviston. He went 6/13/2 for 96 yards and ran for another 36 on 10 carries. A 32 yard TD strike from Leviston to WR Dwuann Clark in the 2nd quarter was the difference. League action continues Friday at home against Upper Darby. Stoga, Darby and Haverford are tied at 2-0 atop the Central League. Upper Darby returns almost their entire team from last year and they're playing like it, rolling over all opposition by an average score of 31-6. Unlike last year where Conestoga scored a pile of points quickly (31ppg), this year's team is struggling, averaging an anemic 10 points a game, or 31 total points for 3 games. 6 of those came in overtime against Strath Haven. The defense is there and it's a brute, allowing 4 points per game. This should be a great game because the Royals have more skill people and speed than Conestoga has faced this year. Conestoga won last year 34-14 at UD.

7. Strath Haven (2-1, 3A) Strath Haven needed to just dominate someone after the double overtime loss to Conestoga and did they ever against Central rival Ridley last Friday in Wallingford. The game was barely 7 minutes old when Strath Haven had a 14-0 lead. The Panther's looked like the Panther's of old with a powerful and punishing ground game supported by a suffocating defense. Ridley rushed for 57 yards. Jared Bradley looking especially energized, tore into the Ridley defense for 188 yards on 28 carries. All totaled Haven got 255 total yards, 19 through the air, in their 28-6 demolition of the Raiders. The win keeps them 1 game behind the leaders in the Central League race and abreast of other 3A hopefuls for the playoffs. After Frankford, Conestoga and Ridley, this week's opponent Radnor, looks like easy pickings. But they are home following their first win, a road win in Springfield, 14-0. Haven beat them last year 56-0.

8. Coatesville (2-1) Coatesville got a dose of Red Tornado football but escaped with a 34-29 win against J. P. McCaskey. That was a nice win after a physical encounter and loss to Bethlehem Catholic the week before. And it was their 2nd consecutive road game where you just want to get out of there with a W. Next up is a homer against Conestoga Valley. The Buckskins (0-3, 4A) play in District 3's Lancaster-Lebanon League, Section 2. That may ring a bell since that's the division Strath Haven's 3A playoff rival Manheim Central plays in. Quick sidebar: Manheim Central went to the 3A Final last year and lost to Thomas Jefferson 56-20. After opening *this* season with a 31-20 loss to Central Dauphin, the same CD team that pounded Pennridge 2 weeks ago, they've made a loud return to the 3A playoff arena by thumping Dover 65-0 and Solanco 61-0 in subsequent weeks. Back to Conestoga Valley: The Buckskins are in real trouble at Coatesville this weekend. They are grossly overmatched against the speed and manpower Coatesville brings to the field. They've been pounded by Hempfield 42-13 and Garden Spot 41-21, and lost their home opener last week to Lebanon 20-19. The loss to Hempfield is understandable. Hempfield is a good team (D-3, 3-0, 4A, Landisville) flying under

everyone's radar this year. But Garden Spot and Lebanon are unspectacular 3A teams. Long night for the Bucks.

9. Pennridge (2-1) The Rams played well last week against a dangerous but short handed Bonner team and got the shutout, the first of the year, 33-0. The Friars were without starting QB Marc Verica, sidelined with a separated shoulder. Still, the opportunities were there. But an uncharacteristic 7 penalties for 56 yards and 3 fumbles, all lost, disrupted any flow and all momentum. On the other side of the field, the Rams had a good night on the ground, getting 170 yards on 35 carries. QB Hughes had 2 TDs, 1 interception and 89 yards passing on a 5 for 12 outing. All in all the Rams put together a tight, efficient attack of 259 total yards, produced a lot of points and shutout their opponent. Well done. Pennridge plays North Penn Friday. See North Penn write up above.

10. LaSalle (3-0) How about those Explorers! This is a team coming off a 4-8 season averaging 12 points a game and allowing 19, to one that's averaging 41 ppg while allowing 11 this year. It's early, but those are big numbers against Plymouth Whitemarsh, George Washington and Germantown Academy. There hasn't been a LaSalle team like this in years. That includes the 1999 8-5 team, the 2000 9-4 team, and 2002's 8-4 group who were all pedestrian in comparison. Each had requisite solid defense, but none averaged more than 22 ppg offensively, so we're talking real speed, and good skill people with this group. LaSalle beat GA last week 47-7. The year before they won 7-3. So it looks like Northeast Catholic, known as North Catholic is in for a rough time Friday.

11. Ridley (2-1) Ridley's Green Raiders came crashing back to Earth with the lopsided loss to their neighborhood nemesis Strath Haven, 28-6. They were shut down hard, getting but 9 first downs, 57 yards rushing and a *not ready for prime time* performance by the OL and QB per unrelenting pressure from Haven's defensive front. They gave it their all, but were overmatched. Anything that got through was gathered in by Strath Haven's quick and physical linebacking corps. With that said, this is a young but talented Ridley team that should come together with each game. The next 2 are tough, Penncrest and Conestoga. Penncrest is home, Friday. After Conestoga comes Radnor, Haverford and Marple Newtown. The last 3 are home against Upper Darby, Springfield and Interboro. The progress from game 3 to game 9, Upper Darby, should be substantial. And they'll be catching the Royals coming off back to back games with Strath Haven and Penncrest. But first there's a difficult pride of Lions to take care of Friday in Folsom. Ridley beat last year's 3-8 team in Media 17-0. Lion wins against Bishop Shanahan 28-7, the road win at Springfield 12-7, and last week's 7-0 loss to Conestoga says this is a Lion with teeth. Should be a great game. Toss it up!

12. West Catholic (2-1) This isn't typical but on the strength of a 14-12 loss to Cardinal O'Hara, West Catholic advanced 2 rungs. Call it an adjustment because this is a strong team. Another influence, the only reason the game didn't go to overtime was because WC missed the point after following the first score, and the 2 point conversion after the second score. Otherwise, the Burr's dominated the statistics including turnovers where they led the Lions 7 to 4. See the O'Hara write up above. When you out gain an opponent

284 to 198 total yards, counting 177 rush yards for a 5.9 yards per carry average, you expect to win. And they would have minus the turnovers. Still, how about those yardage totals against a defense like O'Hara's. In other words, West's offense has a lot of athletic talent and will probably do just fine if they can shake the turnover bug. Blue Division play starts Saturday at Bishop McDevitt. The Lancer's are 2-0 with wins against Wissahickon in the opener, 25-24, and North Catholic last week, 35-6. West won last year 33-6 against McDevitt's 3-8 team. More of the same here if they're over the O'Hara loss.

13. Malvern Prep (2-0) The Friars made a big leap in the rankings by getting the upset at hard luck Henderson 28-27. 2 weeks ago the Warriors were nipped by Governor Mifflin 20-18. But it was sweet pay back for last year's 52-35 win at Malvern. You knew the Friars were too proud a program (43-18 W/L '99 -'04) to not show dramatic improvement over last year's 3-8 squad. They were a young group then, meaning big numbers were returning this year. But to win on the road against a team like Henderson shows more maturity than expected. Make that 2 road wins with the 35-0 win at Chester in the opener. Over the years the Friar's have owned the Ches-Mont, winning 13 of 16 games, 81%, from 1999 through 2003 against Downingtown, then D-town East and West with the split in '03, Henderson and West Chester East. Last year's 3-8 team went 1-3, for a 6 year 14-6 won-loss. Saturday is their home opener against another Ches-Mont team, Downingtown East. The Cougars are having trouble scoring on the road with so-so performances at Governor Mifflin and last week against Elizabethtown where they won 16-0. That, combined with Prep's ability to put 28 points on the board at Henderson says Downingtown East will have to bring it LARGE to get past these Friars.

14. Henderson (1-2) Lightning struck for the second week in a row when the Warriors were upset by Malvern Prep 28-27. The term "upset" may be the wrong word here knowing Prep has beaten Henderson 6 of the last 7 years, so it's more like a pattern than anything. Whatever word you use they are certainly snake bit the last 2 weeks. If they don't get it together soon they'll lose to a tough St. Mark's team in Wilmington, DE Friday. The Spartans began the season with a 35-6 win against Charter Force. Not a bad start considering they graduated 7 defensive starters. Then last week they took on the Defending II State Champs from Concord (2-0, # 3 in DE) and lost 20-7 in a hard fought game. So they're not a pushover (# 14 in DE) and will be especially difficult to beat in their second straight home game. For any playoff considerations, this is a must win for the Warriors. Then, if they can run the table against Penn Wood, West Chester East, Bishop Shanahan and Downingtown West, and that's doable, they'll be 6-2 before the showdowns with Coatesville and Downingtown East.

15. Lansdale Catholic (3-0, 2A) Lansdale Catholic made it look easy last week with a 41-7 Pioneer Athletic Conference win over Pottstown's Saint Pius X. With Pius limping in off a 33-0 drubbing by Delone and a 33-14 loss to Phoenixville, it was suppose to be easy. Predictably, the Crusader's racing out to a 28-0 half time lead, and coasted from there. A significant part of Catholic's success this year, despite the loss of record setting running back R.C. Lagomarsino, is the maturity and steady influence of his brother Drew at quarterback. Against the same opponents faced last year, Methacton, Boyertown and

Pius X, the numbers are almost a mirror image this year. Actually, the offense is up from a 35 points per game average to 41 ppg. The defense is allowing a trophy level average of 9 ppg. The string of wins, 9 straight counting last year, should increase to 10 at Springfield Saturday. LC won last year against the Ram's 4-8 squad 49-6. This year's team is improved at 2-1, currently in a tie with LC and Phoenixville atop the PAC at 2-0. They come in with the momentum of a 2 game winning streak against Upper Perkiomen and Owen J. Roberts following the opening day loss to Souderton. But LC is on another level and will roll here.

16. Norristown (3-0) That's a nice start for a team coming off a 4-7 season. Tack on the 2 wins at the end of last year and you've a modest 5 game winning streak. When you're coming off a won-loss of 10-25 since 2002, you jump on whatever bit of good you can find. The Eagles 17-16 win at Cheltenham last week could pay dividends the rest of the season. Winning a close one on the road can set the tone for a number of games to come. We'll see if that gets them past a Quakertown team that has been their nemesis since 2000. That's the last time they beat the Panther's. Quakertown opened the season with a misleading 28-7 win against a Central Bucks West team everyone is now beating, badly! Since that win, they've dropped 2 close calls to Wissahickon, 21-14, and Upper Merion, 27-21, so they're scoring points, 21 a game, but giving up way too many at 18 per. Apart from being home and having an improved defense at 11 ppg, the Eagles must be thinking their time has come with these Panther's. It's the SOL-Continental opener and a brand new season for both, but the feeling here is Norristown settles a 4 year old score.

17. Abington (3-0) Abington remains undefeated after another solid win, this one at home against Upper Dublin 28-6. The Ghosts are showing signs of being more than a 17th rated team through the first 3 games. In the opener, they traveled to J. P. McCaskey and left with a 37-21 victory. That's the same team Coatesville snuck past last weekend 35-29. Road wins are confidence builders and Abington got a nice one there. The following week they were home and survived Da'Rel Scott and company from Plymouth Whitemarsh with another big outing by the offense, and enough D to hold the Colonials at bay 46-26. Then last week they did what you're suppose to do against a weaker opponent by winning comfortably. All that bodes well for the conference opener Friday against Neshaminy. This will be Neshaminy's first game in Abington's new Schwartzman Stadium, and the place will be jammed. Young QB Kevin Morton and others are putting big numbers on the board for Abington at 37 points per game. And the defense is acceptable at 18 ppg so long as the offense stays large. With a team like Neshaminy up next, the 21 and 26 points allowed to JPM and Whitemarsh are a concern. Coach Sorber has his Ghosts playing well but they'll need their very best here against the Skins who seem to have jelled. Last year's 5-7 team was bowled over 45-7. If Abington can get the early lead, cause some doubt and stress, it could get interesting.

18. Council Rock North (3-0) Maybe we have something special here the way Council Rock North exploded onto the football landscape with 3 overwhelming wins thus far. The Indians are generating big numbers early, which have given them good momentum. After routing University City 41-0, they won on the road against a quality opponent in Central Bucks East, 28-10. Last week they swamped Conwell Egan 39-0. That's 2 shutouts in

their first 3 games with an offense averaging 36 points per game! This weekend offers the chance to show how special they are in a road clash against undefeated Pennsbury in the SOL-National opener for both. Pennsbury won the first ever encounter with North last year 26-14. But that was against a 3-7 team that bore no resemblance to this group. There are a lot of good match ups out there this weekend, and this is one of them.

TIE

Pottsgrove (2-1, 3A) Big drop in the rankings for the Falcons after losing *at home* to Boyertown 14-10. Top teams rarely lose at home. No dis to Boyertown whose first 3 games were against 3 undefeated teams, Muhlenberg, Lansdale Catholic and Pottsgrove. The Boyertown team that showed up in Pottsgrove is the one we expected at the top of the season, but the Muhls took them 20-14, then LC beat them 34-12. For Pottsgrove, it's do or die time *next week* against Lansdale Catholic. They are idle this week.

19. Upper Darby (3-0) Here's another team off to a great start. Like Council Rock North, they are performing at high levels, scoring 31 points a game and allowing 6 through games against Monsignor Bonner, Radnor and Marple Newtown. None of those teams have a winning record and they were all played at home. So the road game against Conestoga will be the first. Conestoga won last year 34-14, their 1st of only 2 wins against the Royals the last 6 years (info provided by epasports.com). Against Conestoga, Upper Darby needs to get the lead early, forcing the Pioneers out of their comfort zone. And the Royals have the weapons to be a dangerous adversary with the big line and super quick backs-receivers, speed throughout the team and a kicker in Dan Dibona who has already made field goals of 23, 28, 31 and 39 yards. QB Blaine Fox is 20 of 33, 61%, for 281 yards. Standout tailback Simoni Marco Lawrence has rushed for 488 yards on 65 carries, 7.5 yards per carry. This is a big, quick, powerful team that is getting its first test.

20. Pennsbury (3-0) The Falcons got off to a good start *last year* winning 5 of 7. Then came the 0-3 finish. They are again off to a hot start while racking up impressive numbers against Archbishop Ryan, 29-15, Frankford, 28-7 and York High's Bearcats, 31-14. Great start. Let's see if it continues against equally hot Council Rock North in the National Conference opener. With the likes of North Penn, Neshaminy, Abington and Pennridge also residing in the National Conference, you may not see more than 2 representatives moving on to the playoffs, despite this being one of the very best conferences in the state. But again, with so many *name teams* already having a loss, who knows how it will shake out in the end. Nothing is guaranteed, but most agree the two will be North Penn and Neshaminy. Yet with so many capable teams in the National, the chances of an upset or two are real.

Honorable Mention

VFMA (2-0)

Roman Catholic (1-2)

Penncrest (2-1, 3A)

Interboro (2-1, 3A)

Truman (3-0)

Tennett (2-1)

Central Bucks East (2-1)

Boyertown (1-2)