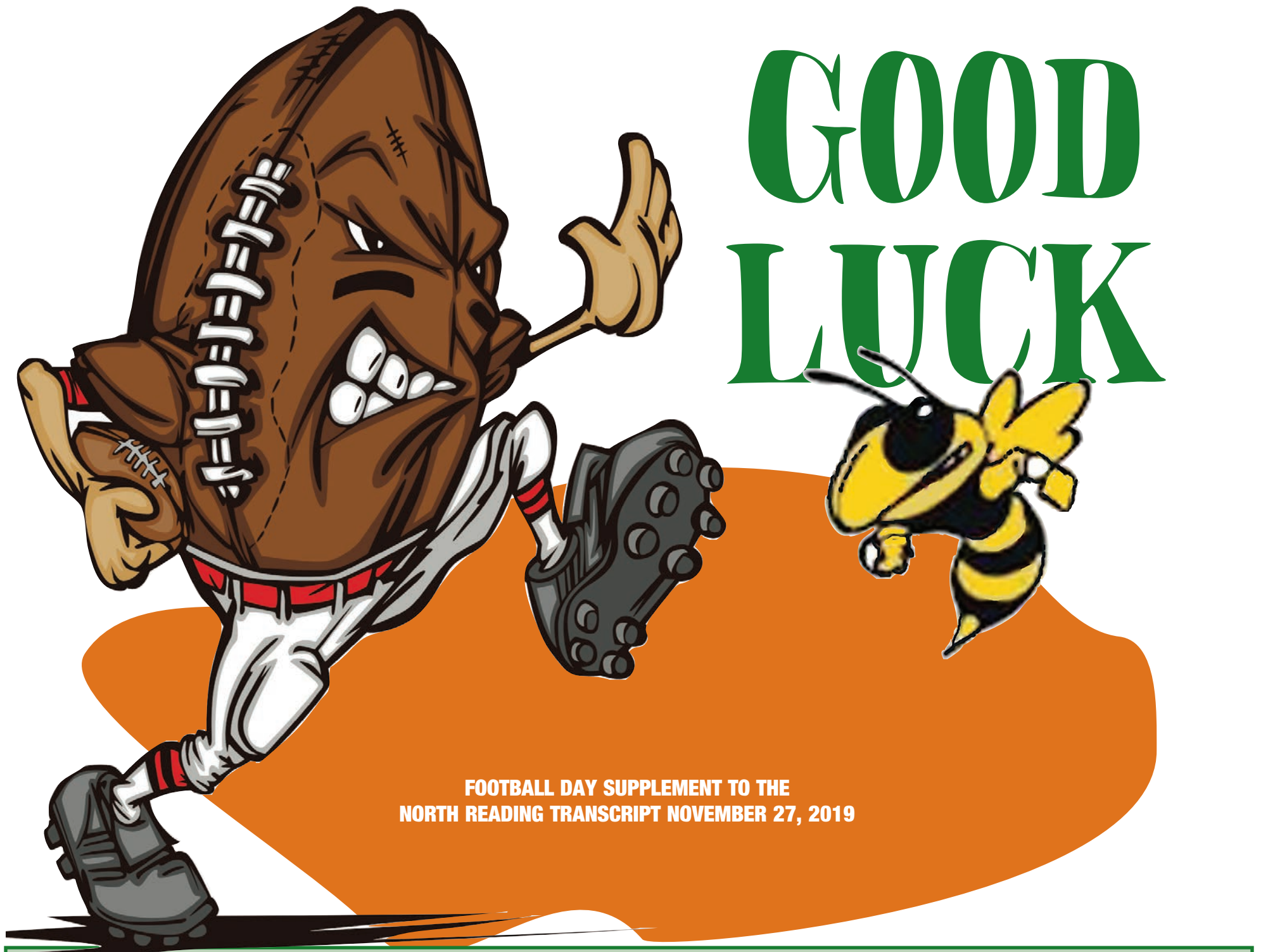


SUPPLEMENT TO THE NORTH READING TRANSCRIPT, WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2019



FOOTBALL DAY SUPPLEMENT TO THE
NORTH READING TRANSCRIPT NOVEMBER 27, 2019

buzzing the field this
Thanksgiving
2019 Hornet Football team



THE 2019 NRHS FOOTBALL TEAM. THE SENIORS ARE MATT LUCIANO, RYAN KAVANAUGH, AIDAN CARUCCI, CAM RANDAZZO, JIMMY CURRIER, JOHN CUDDY, MATT CONLEY, GERRY CALLAGY, JACK KELLER, GREG DEMETRI, GIOVANNI COLUCCIELLO, SEAN MCCULLOUGH, BRENDAN DOWNER, ERIC BENECKE, MICHAEL LUKER, NICK TORMEY, STEVEN KANE, JORDAN MADDEN, NICK MCGOVERN, MICHAEL DUQUETTE, JACK RICH AND JARED ZIMMERMAN. THE JUNIORS ARE SEAN BROWN, WILL O'LEARY, ROBERT TAMMARO, BRIAN HEFFERNAN, BRAYDEN SCRIBNER, WILL TAYLOR, RYAN GOOD, JACK DONOHUE, AIDAN O'SULLIVAN, ZACH SAMPSON AND KYLE BAKER. THE SOPHOMORES ARE RYAN MCCULLOUGH, DEVIN TRAN, JOHN JENNINGS, JACK TERRANOVA, AIDAN SMITH, SPENCER BEANE, ANDREW POWELL, DANIEL ANCRI, ETHAN BARNES-FELIX, RYAN LONG, JUSTIN BAILEY, LUKE BENECKE, WILL TORO AND ADAM BAKR. THE FRESHMEN ARE ALEX CARUCCI, MICHAEL HEMME, LOGAN SCRIBNER, MATT GUIDEBECK, TY RICH, CHRISTIAN DACOSTA, ANDREW HOPFER, NICHOLAS CABRAL, MATEO ACUNA, ZACH ROSATONE, SAM MORELLI, OWEN DELANO, ANTHONY PINO, JACK FLAHERTY AND ALDO VITTOZZI. (COURTESY PHOTO)

Top two teams in CAL ready for epic 61st annual Thanksgiving showdown

By DAN ZIMMERMAN

NORTH READING — This is not an insult intended for the scores of hard-working cooks, many who labor for hours over hot ovens perfecting their craft, but holiday meals tend to taste just a little bit better on the tables of Thanksgiving Day high school football winners.

At the tail end of last season, the post-game turkey dinners on the plates of the North Reading Hornets and their families were somewhat more savory following a decisive 32-0 blanking of archrival Lynnfield in the 60th edition of their traditional holiday meeting. That Hornet win, on one of the coldest Thanksgivings in history, marked the third straight but overall, Lynnfield maintains a 33-27 win-loss advantage since the 1958 inception of this rivalry.

As the Hornets go through their paces, preparing for the final game of the season and a chance to wrap up with an enviable 8-3 record, many would admit the club has an axe to grind, despite

the obvious success.

Down the stretch, North Reading sustained three defeats in four outings, including Pentucket (28-0) in the regular season finale, Marblehead (27-7) in the Division 4 North playoff opening round, and last week, to a vastly-improved Wakefield (42-35) club in a postseason consolation game. A 34-26 win over Burlington in Week 9 thwarted an all-out collapse. For the Hornets, the rocky finish was a bitter pill to swallow after reeling off six straight wins at the outset of the 2019 campaign.

But the Thanksgiving game, which will be contested on home turf this year, has a tendency to right all wrongs, particularly for the departing seniors.

"Last year, prior to Thanksgiving, we had lost three-in-a-row," recalled second-year coach Ed Blum, who has already successfully improved on his inaugural season finish of 6-5. "It was a really good way for that team and the program to end the year on a high note, playing really well. There was a car-

ry-over into the offseason with the kids motivated and determined to use that as a springboard to further success."

Blum agreed that there is a huge motivational gap between finishing 6-5, as compared to 5-6 had the Hornets fell in defeat last Thanksgiving.

Instrumental in the Hornet's success this season and the win over Lynnfield last year, senior Jack Keller had this to say about the upcoming Thanksgiving clash.

"It's always nice going out against your rival and having success," said the wide receiver and return man. "With that being said, that was last year and we're looking to do some of the same this year. This team is special despite a few losses and this game means a lot, especially to the seniors. As long as we come out flying around, the boys should be eating good on Thanksgiving."

Reaching 61 years on Thursday, the North Reading-Lynnfield holiday feud is tried-and-tested. According to longtime football scribe Tom Condrado, who covered this event for four decades — 11 seasons patrolling the North Reading sideline followed by 29 with Lynnfield — a lot has changed in high school football since his tour began in the mid-'70s.

"The biggest thing that has changed is the facilities," Condrado said. "Everyone has lights and turf where in the '70s, everyone had grass fields. The only team in the Cape Ann League that had lights was Newburyport."

Condrado went on to say that the one constant in high school football has been the dedication of the coaches who, as he explains, "devote an enormous amount of time putting the kids in a position to succeed."

Covering both teams for such a long stretch, it stands to reason that Condrado remains the sage for the Thanksgiving Day game history over the years and has shared some of the more note-

worthy clashes in his football blog.

In the late '70s, for instance, he writes about a formidable North Reading program that dominated both the Cape Ann League and Lynnfield, winning five straight holiday duels from 1977 to 1981. But the Pioneers turned the tables, claiming the Thanksgiving laurels from 1982-1986. Perhaps the most meaningful game during that era took place in 1978 when North Reading captured their first CAL title with a 28-8 defeat of Lynnfield on Thanksgiving. The next year, with a second straight league title locked up, a Hornets' 13-6 win ensured a trip to the Division 3 Superbowl.

One of the reasons Lynnfield currently leads the series by six wins is due to the early years. The Pioneers reeled off seven straight before North Reading dealt them a 3-2 defeat in an obvious 1966 defensive struggle. The Hornets won two additional matchups before suffering eight more consecutive losses. But in the seventies, North Reading fared much better.

Since the turn of the century, North Reading holds a 12-7 record over Lynnfield, including three straight since 2016. From a scoring standpoint, the Pioneers hold a wide 1048-830 point margin over North Reading during the 60-year span. But part of the disparity is due to a slow start in the '60s by North Reading, which scored only 58 total points in 10 meetings with the Pioneers.

Despite pitfalls for each team this year, North Reading and Lynnfield arrive at the Thanksgiving season finale healthy and hungry to wrap up 2019 with a win. The Pio-

neers hold a slight edge with an 8-2 record to North Reading's 7-3 mark but one could argue that the Hornets had a more difficult schedule, particularly down the stretch. Regardless, this game is for the athletes who have toiled through the heat of August and the cold of November to reach this point.

"In my mind, the Thanksgiving Day game is an important football tradition," said Hornet senior Jimmy Currier. "You're playing in your last game with kids you grew up with. As for our team and the brothers I've been fighting side-by-side with for the last four years, I'm confident we're capable of anything."

"We've been fortunate in recent years to enjoy success on Thanksgiving and there's no better feeling than ending your season with a win," said coach Blum. "And for the seniors, no matter the up-and-downs over four years with the program, they'll always remember their last Thanksgiving Day game."



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1979 HORNETS were super

2019 STANDINGS

By TOM CONDRADO
NORTH READING — It has been 40 years since the only post-season appearance by the Hornets in the Division 3 Super Bowl, but no one should forget that 1979 Hornet juggernaut at Boston College.

The '79 squad turned out to be the meat of a three-year Cape Ann League championship sandwich for the powerhouse Hornets that rolled to a 26-2-2 mark over those three seasons.

Head Coach Ed Sapienza, the architect of the late '70s North Reading football dynasty, came to town in 1976 and turned around a struggling football program. After a 3-6 mark in the Bicentennial year, the Hornets went 5-5 in 1977, including a watershed 30-0 thumping of Lynnfield that launched the Hornets' championship run.

The 1978 Hornets defeated Lynnfield 21-8 on Thanksgiving Day to finish 7-1-1 and take the CAL crown, but they finished in third place in the Super Bowl ratings.

In those days, only the top two teams moved on. Sapienza certainly expected big things from the '79 club. He told me in a post-year interview that before the season his answer to the question of how the Hornets would do was simple. "I told them we were going to win all our games." The enthusiastic head coach wasn't off by much as the Hornets steamrolled through the CAL with a 9-0-1 mark, the best ever for a North Reading team and good for second place in the D3 rankings and a post-season berth.

Before the season, Sapienza lamented the losses his team suffered, specifically along the offensive and defensive fronts. "We will be thin in the line," the coach told me. They weren't thin for long as the defensive line of Mike Connor, Doug Barnard, Kevin Brennan, Paul Correlle and Dean Demetri and the tri-captain linebacking corps of Kevin Jones, Mark Rogers and Brian Mahoney became the strength of the team. The ferocious "D," which I dubbed "The Green Line" allowed only 52 points in the 10 games preceding the Super Bowl and posted two shutouts.

The defense needed to play strong since the offense was spotty. Despite a strong running game led by Mahoney, Billy Warnock and Jim Tremblay, the Hornets struggled to put points on the board. Quarterbacks Bob Murdock and Paul Texiera and receiver Jones played well, but their 161 points scored were almost 80 less than the Hornets had scored in 1978. In fairness, the CAL was much stronger in '79, and where the '78 team snuck up on teams, everyone was gunning for the defending champs in '79.

The Hornets began the season with a non-league win over Northeast Regional, then opened their CAL season with victories over Triton and Amesbury. They squeaked by previously unbeaten North Andover, 6-0, but were outplayed the following week by unbeaten Hamilton-Wenham, escaping with a 6-6 tie.

The Hornets then traveled to Ipswich to face the division's number one ranked Tigers. The Hornets completely stifled the vaunted Tigers' offense in a 14-7 win, holding them

to 12 yards rushing and three first downs while forcing four turnovers. Ipswich's only score came on a flea flicker late in the game.

The following week the Hornets had to "guard against a let-down as the host league doormat Masconomet," as I reported in the Transcript's pregame story. They handled the Chieftains easily 25-7.

Then came the dramatic "Miracle on Park Street" against Newburyport. Trailing the Clippers 12-6 with less than a minute to play, Texiera blocked a punt and Barnard returned it for a touchdown. Marco "The Toe" Vittozzi nailed the PAT with 53 seconds left to give the Hornets a 13-12 lead. It wasn't over yet as the Clippers marched to the NR 24 and missed a last second field goal that secured the win.

The Hornets won their second straight CAL crown the following week with a 19-6 win over Pentucket, setting the stage for the Super Bowl-clinching win over Lynnfield.

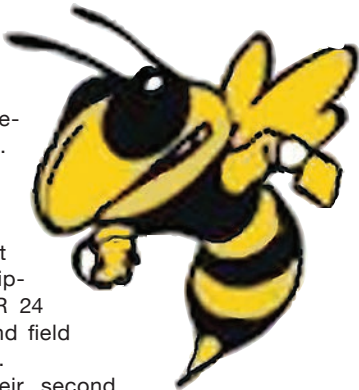
The Hornets faltered in a 28-6 loss to Canton at BC, but that in no way diminished what they had accomplished. Sapienza, ever the motivator, summed it up to me this way: "If we had gone undefeated and gone all the way to win the Super Bowl, what would there be left to do?"

What was left to do in 1980 was to win a third straight CAL title, which was almost as unexpected as the '78 crown. Graduation took half of the Super Bowl team but Connor, Brad Hillard and Ron Doucette returned to captain the Hornet squad to a 9-1 record, but again finished third and just out of money for a Super Bowl berth.

Other members of the '79 squad were Warren McNeil, Les Montford, Brad Hilliard, Jim Brosseau, Jim McCormack, Mark Texiera, Graham Clewer, Chris Berton, Ron Doucette, Mike Gallahue, Mike MacDonald, Jim Donahue, Tony Morlani, Tom Pottle, Tom Brady, Kevin Freeman, Scott Tilton, Billy Welch, Tom Gregory, John Rex, Sam Angelini, Billy Germino, Fran McNeil, Rob Selfridge,

Eric Pucillo, Bill Gallant, Jason Losso, Paul Wilkes, Dan Romeo, Barry Brooks, Terry Stanfield, Chuck Russek, Dan Batchelder, Bob Phinney, Chris Martino, Joe McCormack, Peter Newbern, Jeff Hull, Mike Libertini and John Pierce.

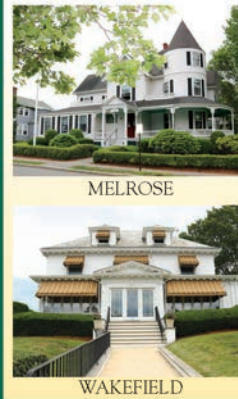
There is no question those Hornet squads had great talent. They also had great coaching as Sapienza's assistants were Ed Nizwantowski and Gary Sverker. "Niz" went on to coach Peabody for 23 years, winning nine GBL titles plus two Super Bowl titles in five years. Sverker went on to be head coach of the Hornets and was later the head man at Lynn Tech for 19 years until his retirement in 2010.



Kinney	League				Overall				
	W	L	T	PTS	W	L	T	%	PTS
N. Reading	3	1	0	6	7	3	0	.700	14
Masconomet	3	1	0	6	6	4	0	.600	12
Pentucket	2	1	0	4	8	2	0	.800	16
Newburyport	1	3	0	2	4	6	0	.400	8
Triton	0	3	0	0	2	8	0	.200	4

Baker	League				Overall				
	W	L	T	PTS	W	L	T	%	PTS
Lynnfield	3	0	0	6	8	2	0	.800	14
Ipswich	1	1	0	2	5	5	0	.500	10
Hamilton-Wen.	1	1	0	2	4	6	0	.400	8
Amesbury	0	3	0	0	4	6	0	.400	8

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A look back on the Hornets 2019 campaign

NORTH READING — The Hornets of North Reading High head into the 61st Thanksgiving Day Classic against Lynnfield with a 7-3 record and a three-year winning streak on Turkey Day.

Following is a week-to-week recap of the season, courtesy of our man on the gridiron Dan Zimmerman.

Storm past Northeast in opener

As the clock ticked down to the intermission during NR football's season-opener on Sept. 6 pitting North Reading against Northeast, the only unanswered question was whether the fast-approaching remnants of Hurricane Dorian would impact the second half. The game itself, at this juncture, was all but decided.

On the strength of five throwing TDs from QB Brian Heffernan, four in the first half alone, North Reading handily defeated the Northeast Golden Knights, 42-14, and handed head coach Ed Blum a win to kick off his second season at the helm.

At times, the Hornets looked like they were already in mid-season form. This became evident in the first minute of play when Heffernan led a hurry-up offense over 56-yards, finishing with a 28-yard screen to Jack Keller for an early lead.

"We have some guys on this team that

are very well-conditioned," said Blum. "It's a credit to the players when they can successfully execute the hurry-up. An offense that can do that for you just lifts the whole team and sets the opposition back on their heels."

In this instance, however, Northeast proved resilient. Down 6-0 after North Reading missed the 2-point conversion try, the host Golden Knights answered on their first drive, capping an 11-play, 60-yard series with a 4-yard bull run from Izzy Lainez.

Then, on the next North Reading possession, receiver Ryan Kavanaugh lost the handle after gathering a Heffernan toss, snuffing out a promising drive with a turnover deep in Northeast territory.

Trailing 8-6 at the start of the second quarter, Heffernan went to work, leading receiver Greg Demetri, who came up with a diving grab to breathe new life into a faltering drive. The Hornets then fed the Golden Knights steady doses of Will O'Leary, whose powerful running delivered his team to the red zone. From there, it was the capable arm of Heffernan finding Matt Luciano for a 20-yarder. North Reading further erased the deficit, making it 14-8 on a Keller to Will Taylor

2-point conversion.

"That was an incredible catch by Demetri," said Blum, who agreed that his squad is loaded with depth at the skill positions. "We were down at that point with a third-and-long and it was a timely conversion."

Heffernan, who compiled 241-yards passing on 13-of-19 attempts, added a pair of TD throws before the break to put the Hornets ahead, 28-8. The junior QB found Demetri for a 12-yarder and later, capitalized on a Sean McCullough fumble recovery, with a flip over the top to Luciano who won a foot race for a 45-yarder.

"Heffernan does a good job reading the play," said Blum, who was the offensive coordinator with the Hornets for the past two seasons. "He has a knack for making the defense make the wrong decisions. This is a fun offense to watch."

The North Reading defense impressed, as well. Linebacker Nick Tormey rang up a number of key tackles, including a sack of Northeast QB Owen Halley that forced a punt and ultimately led to a Hornet's score. Tormey and his defensive teammates delivered punishing hits time and again, forcing a pair of costly turnovers.

"At times, I think our defense is under-sized but their effort to compensate for that is impressive," said Blum. "Players like Tormey — across the whole defense — they all have the drive. They run through tackles and it's just awesome to watch from the sidelines."

North Reading wrapped up their scoring early in the fourth quarter with an O'Leary 3-yard TD rush. Place-kicker Robert Tammaro, automatic, split the up-rights to finish the night 4-of-4.

"There are a number of things we can get better at," said Blum. "We'll watch the film and see where we can clean up mistakes and improve execution. But with that said, this was a good first game and we'll certainly take it."

Hornet offense rolls again; beats

Greater Lawrence 35-20

Despite stiff competition from a pair of non-conference opponents, the North Reading football team claimed back-to-back wins during the first two weeks of the season and is off to an impressive start.

North Reading traveled to Andover on Sept. 13 to take on the Greater Lawrence Reggies and came away with a convincing 35-20 win to improve to 2-0.

Facing Greater Lawrence matinee-style, starting in the late afternoon due to mosquitoes and the growing Triple-E threat, the Hornets rendered most of their offensive damage in the second half, reeling off 20 points to outpace a stubborn Greater Lawrence squad and put it away. It has become evident, in just two games, that this North Reading group doesn't panic and is capable of scoring in bunches.

"There are times when we execute the game plan really well and others when we just have to clean up," said North Reading coach Ed Blum. "We stepped up and made plays when we had to and it's a credit to the offense, defense, and special teams."

It was a dramatic special teams play that turned the tide for the Hornets midway through the third quarter, moments after QB Shamil Diaz electrified the Greater Lawrence spectators with an 18-yard TD rush, reducing his team's deficit to 15-12. The Reggie's sideline was still buzzing about Diaz when North Reading's Jack Keller gathered the ensuing kickoff, started the trek upfield, and quickly found a seam to daylight and an 88-yard TD return.

"That was a huge kickoff return from Jack," said Blum of his senior wide receiver, whose brilliant return later proved to be the game-winner. "It was the response we needed to the touchdown they had just scored."

"We work on it quite a bit at practice,"

said Keller, when asked to describe the game changer. "Our opponents don't focus as much on special teams as we do so we were prepared. I knew my blocks were going to be there so I trusted my blockers and just took off."

Following a scoreless first quarter, Greater Lowell threatened early in the second soon after Anthony Alves picked-off QB Brian Heffernan. Diaz, who rushed his team to a win over Wakefield in their season-opener, was also adept from the pocket and found receiver Chris Tineo twice to reach the red zone. But the offensive-minded Hornets can also play defense and refused to yield, forcing a 24-yard field goal try. That, too, failed, as Kevin Matul sliced the kick wide right.

North Reading made quick work of the next possession, capping a brief series with a Heffernan to Greg Demetri 45-yard TD. Clearly, the Greater Lawrence secondary was guilty of blown assignments, as Demetri was left uncovered in the flat. The Hornets added the 2-point conversion as place-kicker Robert Tammaro set up for the PAT but instead, tossed to Keller for an 8-0 lead.

With 1:08 left in the half, Greater Lawrence closed the gap with a 24-yard rushing TD from workhorse Maleek Dejesus. Greater Lawrence missed the 2-point try and trailed 8-6.

With less than a minute remaining before the break, the Hornets could have taken their lead to a safe corner of the field and discussed second half adjustments. Instead, Blum and his staff sought insurance and launched their two-minute offense. Heffernan, who was 14-24-1 for 217-yards, took aim, rifling time-preserving sideline throws to Matt Luciano, Aidan Carucci, and Keller to gain the 6-yard line with :11 seconds left. A Greater Lawrence pass interference infraction handed the Hornets a fresh set of downs but time was an issue. After a pair of misses, Heffernan finally connected with Luciano (6 receptions, 44-yards) with no time left.

"Our coaching staff just puts us in a really good position to win games," said a humble Heffernan, who amassed nine TD throws in just a pair of games. "We have a lot of good athletes who can make plays. We focus on executing."

The teams traded scores late in the third, including Keller's kickoff return which put the Hornets in front 22-12.

With 10:07 remaining, Diaz stunned the Hornets with a 49-yard TD throw to Alvin Torres. Dejesus rushed for a 2-pointer to draw to within a score, 22-20. But North Reading would have the final say. Heffernan capitalized on yet another secondary snafu, finding Keller alone for a 56-yard score. And on the next series, he hit Ryan Kavanaugh for a 40-yarder. Tammaro suffered his first PAT miss but it mattered little because the Hornets were comfortably in front, 35-20.

"It doesn't matter whether it's home or away," said Blum. "What matters most is that we keep working hard, as a group. We need to keep building and getting better."

Hornets conquer Generals in home-opener

After the Triple-E threat forced school

CAMPAIGN Page 5

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NORTH READING — Thanksgiving Day football tickets are on sale in the NRHS Athletic Office through today, Wednesday, November 27. Tickets are \$7 for adults and \$5 for students. Game-day tickets are \$10 at the gate for all ages. North Reading hosts this year's 61st turkey tilt at Arthur J. Kenney Field. Kickoff is at 10:30 a.m.



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CAMPAIGN Continued from Page 4

officials to reschedule the first two contests of the football season for afternoon kickoffs, the North Reading Hornets held their first home game under the lights in front of a boisterous crowd on Sept. 20.

Their bout with Hamilton-Wenham yielded a third straight win for the Hornets, as they outlasted the Generals, 41-15.

North Reading enjoyed balanced scoring throughout, putting a 20-spot on the scoreboard in the first half and duplicating that tally after the break.

A pattern emerged with this group that bode well for the remainder of the season. The North Reading coaching staff has been very proficient at making adjustments and the athletes, to their credit, have been equally adept at executing the transitions. The Hamilton-Wenham defense, for instance, fielded a relatively effective secondary and neutralized QB Brian Heffernan's typical targets. In response, the Hornets resorted to what proved to be a potent running game led by Will O'Leary, who rushed for a trio of scores.

"We have some smart kids who listen to the feedback and take what the other team is doing and learn from it," said North Reading coach Ed Blum. "We're a well-conditioned team and we're able to play a full forty-eight minutes and finish a game."

Of course, it's also a plus when the opposition is struggling to hang on to the ball. Hamilton-Wenham suffered the frustration of a half-dozen turnovers, including three that ultimately led to North Reading points.

At the outset, for example, the Hornets went three-and-out with the opening possession and punted away but got the ball right back when John Jennings recovered a muffed punt. Heffernan and company quickly advanced into the red zone and the junior QB finished with a textbook 6-yard slant to his favorite receiver, Matt Luciano (6 catches, 55-yards). The score remained 6-0 after a failed 2-point try but marked Heffernan's tenth TD throw of the young season.

Hornet linebacker Jack Donahue sacked Hamilton-Wenham QB Ian Coffey for a substantial loss, icing a threat as the first quarter wrapped up. North Reading took possession and marched 72-yards on 10-plays to make it 13-0.

O'Leary, who split rushing duties with Greg Demetri, capped the series with a 10-yarder.

Just when it looked like the Generals were doomed offensively, Coffey pulled off a desperation Hail Mary. Facing a 4th-and-21 and under pressure, the senior QB heaved the ball 59-yards downfield. Emerging from a crowd of green and white jerseys was Ryan Monahan with a stunning reception that halved the deficit, 13-7.

But just as they've done several times before, the Hornets answered quickly. On the next series, the Demetri-O'Leary tandem combined to place their team back in the driver's seat, on the General's 5-yard line. There was one rush, in particular, that was rather impressive. O'Leary took the handoff and ran into the teeth of the line, as he often did. Eight or nine defensive linemen converged but the powerful tailback literally carried them on his back for several hard-fought yards. O'Leary would soon put the Hornets in front, 20-7, with his second of the night.

"I think we're a very versatile team," said the humble tailback, who amassed 92-yards on 12 carries. "We have a one-two punch with me and Greg Demetri and we're capable of pounding the ball when we need to. We also work really hard at our conditioning and I think it has paid off."

An ugly turnover sequence took place as the second half got underway. Neither team seemed to want the ball. Coffey fumbled on a keeper, Heffernan threw a pick, and Coffey fumbled again, handing the ball back on the North Reading 1. O'Leary was dealt the daunting task of trying to run out of the end zone but was promptly taken down, resulting in a safety. Hamilton-Wenham also converted on a short field after the free kick, closing the gap to 20-15 on Coffey's 8-yard TD rush.

If the turn of events concerned the North Reading sideline, it was short-lived. Like he did the week before when he torched Greater Lawrence for an 88-yard kickoff return, Jack Keller added an 80-yarder to his resume, putting the Hornets in front for good, 27-15, with 1:24 left in the third.

O'Leary notched the football version of a hat trick with a 5-yarder several plays after Brayden Scribner picked Coffey and ran it back 58-yards to the Hamilton-Wenham 11.

With 8:24 left in the game, Demetri (16 carries, 142-yards) got in on the scoring with a 3-yarder. Robert Tammaro, a perfect five-for-five for PATs wrapped it up for the Hornets.

"Credit to Hamilton-Wenham for giving us a great game - they always have an excellent game plan," said Blum. "There's obviously plenty of things we

can do to get better but you have to like the passion and heart of these kids."

Defense steps up in 28-14 win over Clippers

In previous weeks, the story was usually about a North Reading football team that won games behind a potent offense, both through the air and over the ground. But in Sept. 27's bout in Newburyport, the Hornet defense stole the headlines.

The North Reading clutch secondary picked off Newburyport QB Charles Cahalane on three occasions, twice cutting short potential scoring threats.

The Hornets remain undefeated on the season, improving to 4-0 while host Newburyport fell to 2-2.

Unlike the first three games of the season, where the outcome was more or less determined by halftime, the Clippers proved formidable, on both sides of the ball, and the score was deadlocked 14 apiece at the break. In fact, the decisive play didn't take place until there were less than 3-minutes remaining in the game. Trailing 21-14, Newburyport was effectively driving toward another potential tie score, with Cahalane repeatedly connecting with favorite receiver Trevor Ward to move into North Reading territory.

Cahalane targeted the elusive Ward on a 3rd-and-10 play. It was noted that had Ward hauled in the throw, there was nothing between him and the end zone

except six points. But Hornet defensive back Brayden Scribner picked off the throw and returned it 53-yards to the Clipper 22, setting up an eventual insurance score.

"Newburyport had a great game plan and just came out and played us tough," said North Reading coach Ed Blum. "But we have guys on defense who can make plays. Some of them stepped up and got better as the game went on and started to take care of their responsibilities. Thankfully, that effort helped us win this game."

North Reading lost the services of QB Brian Heffernan, who sustained a shoulder injury in the home-opening win over Hamilton-Wenham the week before. Sophomore Ryan McCullough got the start and did not disappoint. While he didn't throw as frequently as his predecessor, he was accurate. On the third play from scrimmage, McCullough dumped a short pass over the top to Jack Keller who did the rest, racing 73-yards for a go-ahead score. Robert Tammaro's PAT made it 7-0 for the visitors, just 45-seconds into the game.

The Clippers answered without delay, however, capping a 60-yard, 8-play series with a 1-yard plunge by Walker Bartkiewicz to draw even.

Not to be outdone, North Reading re-

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THE JANICE SULLIVAN TEAM

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captured the lead, 14-7, on a McCullough 58-yard keeper.

"Heffernan got hurt in the last game," said Blum, who was pleased with the effort of his backup QB. "We had to find another way to win offensively. Both our offensive line and McCullough stepped up and executed across the board."

Following three scores in as many possessions to start the game, the respective defenses forced a brief offensive hiatus. But midway through the second quarter, QB Cahalane found his legs, rushing for 35-yards on 4 carries to reach the Hornet 25-yard line. From there, he rifled a pinpoint pass to Bartkiewicz who side-stepped would-be tacklers for the game-tying score.

"We knew coming in that we had to execute," said Blum. "At times, we didn't and Newburyport took advantage of it."

When play resumed for the second

half, the Hornets defense forced a three-and-out but then handed the ball back to Newburyport on a muffed punt. Backed up on their own 23, the Hornets dug in and came up with a defensive play that marked a turning point in the game. As Cahalane released, his pass was deflected into the hands of Jack Donahue. Not only did the Hornets take the ball back, they converted the turnover into points, marching 77-yards on 13 grueling plays, capped with a 22-yard TD rush from Jack Keller.

Keller accounted for the go-ahead score with 3:16 left in the third quarter and added insurance with a 12-yard scamper several plays after teammate Scribner picked off Cahalane.

"There is a nice internal competition going on amongst the kids," said Blum. "They push each other during the week and push each other for the full 48 min-

utes of each game."

Hornets move to 5-0 with 21-14 win over Masco

If there were any doubters in high school football circles who failed to agree that the North Reading Hornets were the genuine article, their skepticism was likely silenced on Friday night when Masconomet came in for a mid-season skirmish.

In a nail-biter, not decided until the final moments, North Reading claimed a dramatic 21-14 victory to remain undefeated at 5-0. Once again, the Hornets pulled out all the stops in the second half, this time stunning the Masconomet Chieftans, who suffered their second defeat to fall to 2-2.

Knotted at 14-apiece, the Hornets took possession on their own 38-yard-line with less than three minutes remaining in the game. Running back Greg Demetri advanced the ball to midfield on three carries. Jack Keller added another 15-yard rush to the Masconomet 35. But then the drive stalled with a Brian Heffernan incompletion and a holding penalty. Facing a 3rd-and-20 at the 44, Heffernan dropped back and released, putting some air under a deep, arching throw intended for Keller, who was laboring to shake off a double team. Timing his leap to perfection, Keller went up and pulled down the throw. The defenders, meanwhile, both fell to the turf and watched helplessly as Keller turned and ran in the game-winner.

"We've had a couple of close games over the last two weeks but the kids are finding a way," said North Reading coach Ed Blum, alluding to a similar winning scenario the week before over Newburyport. "That's expected when league play gets underway. But they're finding a way to win. Sometimes, the difference is one or two more plays than the other team."

Prescient words, indeed. In the case

of the win over Masconomet, it was three plays that ultimately put this one to rest. Along with Keller's TD catch and run, Brayden Scribner came up with another clutch pickoff, ending a Chieftan last chance drive. And Keller was back in the final seconds, needing 8-yards for a first down but rushing 28-yards to extend the final possession and burn the clock.

"Keller is a team-first guy," said Blum. "He's always looking out for his teammates. In that last game in Newburyport, after it had ended, he was more concerned with one of his injured teammates than himself."

Bringing his best game was Will O'Leary, who carried 14 times for 55-yards, including a 5-yard TD on North Reading's opening series.

Masconomet answered late in the first quarter on a 24-yard TD toss from QB Marshall Lastes to Jack Corcoran. Charlie Stark's kick, however, was a miss, leaving the visitors trailing 7-6.

Heffernan looked no worse for wear after missing the previous game with a shoulder. Answering the Chieftan's score, the junior QB came out firing at the start of the second quarter and added his 11th of the season with a 34-yarder to Kavanaugh. Mr. automatic - Tamaro - made it 14-6.

Masco briefly quieted the NR faithful, many dressed in some form of pink costume in honor of breast cancer month, with a long third quarter scoring drive, capped with a Lastes 1-yard keeper. The Chieftans tied it at 14-14 with a successful 2-point conversion.

The teams traded punts early in the final frame until Heffernan, who now has 12 TDs to his credit, combined with Keller to ensure a North Reading win.

"I saw the call come from the sidelines and I knew something big was coming my way," said Keller, who now has 5 TDs. "I knew we needed it in a close game -

tie game, actually - saw the ball in the air and went up and got it like I'm taught. Masconomet is such a great team and it felt good to beat them."

Beat Triton on Senior Night 43-20

After a timely bye week, the North Reading Hornets got back to the business of football on Oct. 18 and picked up where they left off, sending a message loud-and-clear that they are the team to beat as the playoff season looms.

The latest casualty was the one-win Triton Vikings, who came in woefully undermanned and seriously banged-up. The well-rested Hornets steamrolled the visitors, reeling off an unanswered 36 first-half points before taking the foot off the gas on the way to a 43-20 final.

North Reading, which has outscored opponents by a wide 210-97 margin, remains undefeated, improving to 6-0, and currently leads the Cape Ann League, one win better than Pentucket.

Ready to face Triton, in front of a raucous crowd on a chilly night, was Greg Demetri, who gathered the game-opening kickoff and jetted 82-yards for a go-ahead score. Robert Tamaro kicked the Hornets to a 7-0 lead, 17-seconds into the contest.

Throughout the season, the highly-disciplined Hornets have been one of the least penalized teams in the league. On their third series, however, yellow flags were flying, slowing forward progress on a promising drive that began with three straight Will O'Leary rushes followed by a nice 30-yard pickup when QB Brian Heffernan linked-up with Ryan Kavanaugh. Determined, the Hornets didn't allow the setbacks, including back-to-back holding calls, to negate a scoring chance. Ultimately, Heffernan found O'Leary with a short throw in the flat and the receiver did the rest for a 16-yard TD. Matt Luciano, on a direct snap, rushed for 2-points to make it 15-0 with 2:59 left in the first quarter.

North Reading capitalized on a short field, several plays after Tamaro returned a punt 49-yards to the Triton 24. Jack Keller polished off the quick series with a 4-yard TD rush to make it 22-0.

While the Hornets were piling up the points, the Vikings struggled against a stingy defense which featured series-ending tackles by Jordan Madden, Jack Donahue, and Will Taylor, who knocked down a Ty Scholtz throw to force a fourth straight punt.

"We're fortunate enough to have executed well in this game," said Blum.

"Mr. Automatic" - Tamaro - was a perfect five-for-five with PATs on the night and added a defensive score to his resume on a 55-yard pick-six with 4:14 left in the half. On the next Hornet possession, Heffernan, who was an efficient 9-14-1 for 131-yards added his 14th TD throw of the season with a 27-yard strike to Keller.

Leading 36-0, Blum subbed the Hornet starters immediately following the intermission. Triton took advantage of the "breather," snapping the shutout at the start of the second half with a Scholtz 1-yard TD pass to Christopher Colby.

In between two Triton TDs, tailback Jack Donahue added a 4-yarder to wrap up the Hornet's scoring. Donahue, who rushed for 52-yards on 6 carries, enjoyed

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Lynnfield/North Reading vs. Common Opponents			
Lynnfield 8-2	2019	N. Reading 7-3	
(43-7 W)	Newburyport	(28-14 W)	
(27-26 W)	Hamilton-Wenham	(41-15 W)	
(27-12 L)	Pentucket	(28-0 L)	
97-45	(2-1) Total (2-1)	97-29	
Lynnfield/North Reading vs. Non-Common Opponents			
(31-8 W)	Medford		
(33-6 W)	Malden		
(34-24 W)	Amesbury		
(28-22 W)	Ipswich		
(27-3 W)	Newburyport		
(30-23 L)	Amesbury		
(25-22 W)	Wilmington		
	Northeast Metro	(42-14 W)	
	Greater Lawrence	(35-20 W)	
	Masconomet	(21-14 W)	
	Triton	(43-20 W)	
	Marblehead	(27-7 L)	
	Burlington	(34-26 W)	
	Wakefield	(42-35 L)	
208-108	(6-1) (5-2)	244-136	
305-153	(8-2) Total (7-3)	341-165	

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the opportunity along with many of his teammates who typically see little action. "At the end of the day, it's not about that," said Blum when asked about conceding a potential shutout. "Obviously, you want to win the game. But every single guy on this team matters, every single guy puts in the hard work throughout the week, and when we can reward them with some playing time on senior night under the Friday lights in front of their peers cheering for them, it is really special for them."

Shut out by Pentucket

The glass half-empty folks might say that the North Reading football team spoiled what could have been a perfect season by not playing up to their usual standards. The half-full optimists, meanwhile, would likely claim that it's better to get that first defeat out of the way before the playoffs commence.

The Hornets ventured into uncharted territory on Oct. 26, suffering their first loss of the season 28-0 to the Pentucket Sachems.

While the prevailing late-October conditions featured t-shirt warmth, the Hornets went ice-cold at a most inopportune time. Leading up to the meeting with Pentucket, North Reading had scored 35-points per game on average but the Sachems had an answer for that – simply take away the receivers. When QB Brian Heffernan was able to find a target downfield, which was infrequent, the pass pro-

tection he'd grown accustomed to faltered. Many of his throws were hurried. And the Hornets' ground game – well, it never really got off the ground.

"You have to tip your cap to Pentucket," said North Reading coach Ed Blum. "They played tough, they played physical, they're well-coached, and they have some really good players."

One of those really good players was Jake Etter. The senior wideout wreaked havoc in the North Reading secondary, hauling in 11 of QB Peter Cleary's 20 completed passes, including a 34-yard TD catch to close out the afternoon's scoring.

At the outset, this was a battle of attrition. Twice in the first quarter alone, Pentucket engineered sustained drives to reach the red zone. And twice, the Hornets came up with huge defensive stops, from the 14 with a sack of Cleary and later, a knockdown of a pass intended for Etter in the end zone.

"It could have been a lot worse in the first half," said Blum. "Pentucket made a lot more plays than we did but our kids kept fighting."

North Reading pieced together a decent drive midway through the first quarter, advancing the ball from their own 10-yard-line to the Sachem 42 on 8 plays. Keeping the possession alive with key receptions was Ryan Kavanaugh and Jack Keller but the effort was derailed on a third-and-long overthrow.

On the next possession, Pentucket would not be denied, marching 77-yards on 14-plays, capped with a 3-yard TD plunge from Andrew Melone.

The Hornet defense came up big once again in the final seconds of the half, preventing the Sachems from scoring points off a turnover. First, Michael Luker chased down Cleary, forcing the QB to throw it away. And on the final play, the line blocked a 32-yard field goal try, keeping the deficit at one score heading into the intermission.

The Hornets weren't quite done with the defensive heroics, however. When play resumed, Pentucket deftly moved the ball from their own 14 to the North Reading 6 on a dozen plays but on a third-and-goal, Sean McCullough flushed Cleary out of the pocket, forcing an errant throw which was picked by Aidan Carucci. If points were awarded for defensive plays, the Hornets would have won this one walking away.

With 4:02 remaining in the third, Pentucket doubled the lead to 14-0 on a Cleary to Keegan O'Keefe 45-yard link-up. The score soon climbed to 21-0 when Andrew Joyce leaned in from the 2, followed by Etter's TD catch in the waning moments.

North Reading, meanwhile, failed to advance the ball any further than their own 36-yard-line on five second half possessions.

Fall to Marblehead in D4N quarter-finals

Coming off the first defeat of the season, a discouraging 28-0 blanketing dished out by Pentucket in the regular season finale, the hope was that the North Reading Hornets could shake it off in time for the MIAA North Division 4 quarterfinals on Nov. 1.

Unfortunately, No. 4 North Reading was eliminated from the playoffs, suffer-

ing a 27-7 defeat at the hands of a visiting No. 5 Marblehead club. Despite a valiant defensive effort, the Hornets couldn't slow tailback Tim Cronin, who helped staked his team to a 21-0 halftime advantage. Cronin rang up a rushing score on the Magician's initial series and then hauled in a TD throw from QB Joshua Robertson midway through the second quarter.

Marblehead came into North Reading the underdog on paper, having lost two straight down the stretch, but certainly didn't look the part of a struggling football team. The Hornets got the ball first and pieced together a promising drive, starting with a 15-yard Will O'Leary rush into Magician's territory. Greg Demetri and Jack Keller contributed with decent gains to reach the 28. The Hornets came up empty, however, when a pair of penalties and a QB sack ended the threat.

The North Reading series consumed half of the first quarter. Marblehead effectively used the other half, marching 76-yards on 14-plays to reach the Hornet 6-yard-line. Cronin polished it off on the first play of the second quarter to claim a 7-0 lead.

Despite the disparate final score, the North Reading defensive feat was praiseworthy. Much like the week before, when they frustrated Pentucket on three red zone trips, the Hornets stonewalled the Magician's second drive, stopping them cold on the 18. The ensuing possession proved ill-fated as a Heffernan throw was tipped and picked by Cameron Janock on the North Reading 7. Several plays later, QB Joshua Robertson capitalized on the takeaway, finding Cronin to forge ahead, 14-0.

"I agree our defense has played really well throughout the year and it showed up tonight," said Blum. "But we put ourselves in a bind with field position and turnovers. A couple of things didn't go our way. That deflected interception was tough."

The other costly giveaway occurred with seconds left in the half when a wayward punt was inadvertently touched by a Hornet return man and recovered by Janock. QB Robertson later made good on it, running it in himself from the 12 for a 21-0 Marblehead lead at the break. Thoughts of a second half Hornet rally, while still alive, were rapidly fading.

Marblehead made it four unanswered scores when Robertson found favorite receiver AJ Russo from the 23-yard-line with 2:59 left in the third.

The Hornets refused to hang their heads. Playing inspired football, despite the deficit, was Ryan Kavanaugh. On one series in particular, the senior wide receiver hauled in a 22-yard reception, fighting off a defender who tried to rip the ball from his grasp. Kavanaugh also rushed twice for a dozen yards each. Under the circumstances, it was an impressive achievement.

Often overshadowed in the grand scheme of high school football is the punter, earning little notice until something goes awry. Senior Jimmy Carrier consistently put his best foot forward, literally, in the game against Marblehead and many others before it. Carrier represents one of the few worries for Coach



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14	1964	0	20
6	1965	0	14
2	1966	3	22
0	1967	7	23
12	1968	20	6
18	1969	0	12
42	1970	14	29
16	1971	6	6
38	1972	8	12
30	1973	14	28
12	1974	7	20
16	1975	12	6
6	1976	0	0
0	1977	30	12
8	1978	21	21
6	1979	13	35
6	1980	7	21
15	1981	20	18
26	1982	6	14
20	1983	7	35
26	1984	7	35
13	1985	0	28
27	1986	6	20
6	1987	16	13
26	1988	22	0

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CAMPAIGN Continued from Page 7

Blum and his staff.

Small victory, perhaps, but North Reading snapped the shutout midway through the fourth quarter on a Heffernan to Matt Luciano 19-yard link-up.

"Sometimes, that scoreboard doesn't go your way," said Blum. "But again, they were fighting and battling and it was a gutsy effort. I thought our guys played their hearts out and that's all we could ask of them."

Beat Burlington 34-26

There are those in the Massachusetts high school football community who would argue that, since the inception of the revised MIAA playoff format, the games that follow a postseason defeat are nothing more than meaningless filler. Perhaps, but the hardy souls who braved sub-thirty degree conditions to support North Reading and Burlington in Friday night's consolation game would likely disagree.

This contest saw a half-dozen lead changes, dramatic play of both sides of the ball, and was not decided until the final moments.

North Reading prevailed, snapping a two-game skid with a 34-26 win over the Red Devils.

In last week's playoff letdown to Marblehead, North Reading yielded points off costly turnovers. But facing Burlington, the tables were turned with a pair of timely pickoffs. The clutch takeaways, by Gerry Callagy and Will Taylor, led to the undoing of a Red Devils rally try.

"There is nothing bigger than making two pickoffs in the fourth quarter to seal the win," said North Reading Coach Ed Blum, who improved to 7-2 overall.

At the outset, positive yardage was at a premium as the respective defenses made statements. The first three series were mired between the forties. But midway through the first quarter, Burlington QB Khyle Pena capitalized on a blown coverage, finding Griffin Carter for 69-yards. Cam Randazzo came up with a touchdown saving tackle at the 1-yard-line but it was a foregone conclusion. On the next play, Pena leaned in for the go-ahead score.

The Hornets enjoyed a short field on the next possession, starting from the Burlington 39. QB Brian Heffernan fired a pinpoint pass to Matt Luciano for 8 followed by a nice 13-yard Will O'Leary rush into the red zone. Jack Keller finished it but his 18-yard TD was negated on a block-in-the-back infraction. On the next snap, however, Greg Demetri followed his blocks through the line and then burst through a seam for an 18-yard score. A low throw on a 2-point try left the Hornets in arrears, 7-6, with 5:46 remain-

ing in the quarter.

For the most part, the Burlington offensive scheme was one-dimensional. If Pena wasn't throwing slants to favorite receiver Shawn Pinkham, he was running the ball himself and he was tough to stop, compiling 97-yards on 24 carries. But in recent games, the North Reading defense has stonewalled a number of scoring threats. At the tail end of the first quarter, with the Red Devils working from the 22-yard-line, Randazzo knocked down a throw earmarked for points in the end zone. And on the next play, Nick Tormey flushed Pena from the pocket, forcing an errant toss to end the series.

With 9:51 left in the half, North Reading claimed a 12-7 advantage on a Keller 4-yard TD rush. The money play on the series was a 62-yard catch and run by Luciano. He also added a 14-yard reception from Heffernan before Keller polished it off.

The lead was exchanged once again, 13-12, after Burlington wrapped up a marathon 17-play, 82-yard possession to close out the first half.

The Hornet's running game has been quiet, to say the least, in recent weeks. But with an axe to grind, Demetri and O'Leary carved out great rushes, particularly on the go-ahead scoring series with 4:35 remaining in the third which was capped with Keller's second of the night. North Reading made it 20-13 with a Heffernan to Luciano throw for 2-points.

The Red Devils refused to go away quietly, however. Pena knotted it at 20-20 with a 1-yarder on the opening play of the fourth quarter but North Reading answered with a hat trick from Keller, from the 3 to surge ahead, 27-20. The Hornets were making good on second half adjustments, staying one step ahead of their opponent on a busy scoreboard.

With 6:22 remaining, Pena found Pinkham for a 53-yard TD to draw to within a point. But a missed PAT put the Hornets in the driver's seat down the stretch. The Red Devils employed an onsidies kick and came up with the ball on the Hornet 47. Trouble loomed until Callagy got under a deflected Pena throw for an interception.

Keller, with three scores to his credit, made it four with an electrifying 60-yard TD run with 3:16 left to quickly convert the takeaway.

Burlington, trailing 34-26, had ample clock to work with but Taylor handed that clock back to the Hornets with yet another pickoff.

"The defense played awesome, the offense played awesome - it was just a good overall game played by all," said Blum. "A shot of cold weather like this isn't so bad when you come out with a win."

Fall to Wakefield 42-35

Several months ago, when 90-degree temperatures were still common and the new school year was just getting underway, the North Reading football team made the brief trip over to Wakefield and handed the Warriors a 14-6 pre-season defeat.

Ten games later, in a rematch on Nov. 15, the Hornets were dealt a 42-35 defeat by a much-improved Warriors squad. North Reading has now suffered losses in three of the last four outings after reeling off six straight out of the gate.

Hosting Wakefield on Friday night, it was unlikely that the North Reading coaching staff had any interest in engaging in an offensive shootout, particularly with a club that came in averaging more than 30-points per game in their last four.

From a coaching standpoint, most would agree this contest could have used a little more defense. Both clubs, for the most part, chronically failed to slow the opposition's forward progress to any degree. But from a spectator's view, this was a highly-entertaining, action-packed shootout. Along with 77 total points scored, there were nine lead changes, and the contest featured some of the most dramatic offensive plays seen this season. The Hornet faithful, huddling against the cold in the stands, were also treated to a pair of comebacks from two-touchdown deficits.

Throughout the season, Greg Demetri has proven to be a dangerous return man. Collecting the initial kickoff on his own 6, Demetri set off in search of decent field position for the all-important opening drive. He delivered a 56-yarder to set up the Hornets on the Wakefield 39. A brief 8-plays later, Will O'Leary put the Hornets in front with a 1-yarder.

The Warriors answered without delay, however, with 11 straight rushes capped with a 7-yard equalizer from fullback Daniel Hurley.

The Warriors later moved ahead, 14-7, quickly capitalizing on a pickoff of Heffernan. But North Reading proved resilient, with Heffernan wrapping up the next possession by rifling a 13-yard slant to Ryan Kavanaugh for the game-tying score at the half.

The Wakefield offensive scheme was uncomplicated and entirely predictable. With three potent backs in their arsenal, Aidan Sweeney, Tucker Stikeman, and Hurley, the Warriors simply pounded the ball. Save for several attempts by QB Alden Joseph in long yardage situations, it was all rush, including the 10-play, 75-yard scoring series after the break, polished off with a Sweeney 19-yarder.

Trailing 21-14 late in the third, North Reading went three-and-out but got the ball back quickly on Cam

Randazzo's fumble recovery on the Warrior 29. The Hornets were soon anchored in place after several negative yardage plays. Facing 4th-and-22 from the 30, Heffernan took the snap, faked right, wheeled left and fired, hitting Keller in stride for the TD. Robert "Mr. Automatic" Tammaro, perfect on the night, kicked the game-tying PAT with 1:31 left.

The Warriors' Sweeney silenced the still-celebrating Hornet fans as he took off for the long play of the evening, a 57-yard TD romp to front his team, 28-21. Wakefield added insurance with 9:17 left in the game on Sweeney's fourth score.

North Reading closed the gap to 35-28 on a 4-yard linkup from Heffernan to Keller with 5:25 left. Earlier, Keller went up, shredding a double team for a 25-yard catch on 4th-and-long, to extend the drive.

The comeback trail included one of those plays that require nerves of steel and great hands. Matt Guidebeck booted the onsidies kick with perfection and it was recovered by Ryan McCullough on the Wakefield 49. McCullough also hauled in a key 26-yard reception to lead the Hornets to another score, capped with a Demetri 7-yarder with 2:26 remaining.

"Ryan McCullough came up big in the fourth quarter," Blum said of the sophomore. "He's a young player who has been developing very nicely for us. He was happy that he could step up and help us the way he did. We also got huge contributions from Luciano and Kavanaugh."

After the TD drew the Hornets to within a point at 35-34, the coaching staff briefly considered a two-point conversion try and the lead outright. Instead, Tammaro was deployed for the sure thing.

"We were thinking about the two-point play but with the amount of time left, it wasn't necessarily going to guarantee that it would be for the win so we decided instead to go for one and tie it," Blum explained.

Wakefield snapped the tie, however, forging ahead 42-35 with 1:05 left. As the Warriors threatened inside the red zone, Blum instructed his defense to let them score. The Hornets obliged, stepping aside as Sweeney jogged in his fifth TD.

The offense chose the worst time to misfire, progressing just six yards on four plays to wrap it up.

"It was a tough thing to execute in that situation," said Blum who next hosts the 8-2 Lynnfield Pioneers on Thanksgiving morning. "Our strategy was to let Wakefield score, preserve the clock, and give our offense one more chance. We have some outstanding athletes and we were trying to get them in space. Our kids absolutely played their hearts out tonight."

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