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Newark's defense steps to forefront

Wildcats hope to have same performance at Gahanna

BY JOSH HACHAT • SPORTS WRITER • SEPTEMBER 11, 2008

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NEWARK -- There was a different sound emanating from Thomas Worthington when the Newark defense was on the field last Friday.

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In what has been a rarity more than a consistent turn of events, there was constant chatter and the distinguishable sound of pads crunching against offensive players.

The Newark defense put together its best performance of this year -- and perhaps the past two -- in a 19-13 victory against Thomas Worthington -- the Wildcats' first win of the year.

"It really felt like the defense came together," junior Ryan Sole said. "Everybody was popping, and there was a lot of excitement."

That physical play had been absent most of the past two seasons, but the Wildcats (1-2) hope to carry that into their Ohio Capital Conference-Ohio

Division opener Friday at Gahanna (1-2).

The performance, however, caught coach Jeff Buchanan's attention.

He was high on the play of Nic Barber and Terrence Steele -- both had interceptions, with Steele getting his in his first start of the year -- and said senior Josh Abshire had his strongest game of the season in helping limit TW to minus-1 rushing yards and 196 total yards.

NEWARK AT GAHANNA

- **WHEN:** 7:30 p.m. Friday
- **WHERE:** Gahanna High Sch
- **LAST WEEK:** Newark beat T Gahanna lost 31-0 to Cleveland
- **OF NOTE:** Gahanna has wor including a 2005 first-round play made the playoffs the past three held TW to 196 total yards last w

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"There's been tremendous improvement from Week 1 to Week 3," Buchanan said. "We covered the pass well, got more pressure and had more hits that game than the first two combined."

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Said Abshire: "We came together. We've definitely improved on our fundamentals. We were all flying around, and we built a lot of confidence defensively."

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The defense delivered several big hits, a sign the Wildcats were playing with confidence for the first time this season.

After struggling to ingest new terminology and a new defense at the beginning of the year, Buchanan thinks the group also feels more comfortable with their individual duties.

"At this point, they're playing aggressive and they're responding, not thinking," Buchanan said. "There was a lot to throw at them at the beginning of the year."

"They're a lot more confident right now."

Gahanna is a difficult team to gauge because its two losses have been blowouts, but they came at the hands of two of the state's top teams in Cleveland Glenville (31-0) and Upper Arlington (42-7).

The Lions are running the spread under first-year coach John Snoad, and Buchanan knows Gahanna still boasts plenty of athletes.

Gone is standout running back Darius Reeves, but the Wildcats don't want to let up a week after a strong defensive performance.

"I just want to see them continue to play at this level," Buchanan said. "They see the difference of not turning it over."

Gahanna, which has won the past three meetings against Newark, including a 2005 first-round playoff game, will try to fluster Newark with a variety of inside blitzes out of its 3-5 defense.

The Lions also have made three straight playoff appearances. But this year's team has been prone to allowing big gains on the ground, something Newark could use to its advantage.

Tim Williams' 35 carries for 127 yards helped keep TW's defense at bay.

"I want to run the ball as effectively as we have the last couple games," Buchanan said.

The defense also knows what it wants again.

"We have to step up and be physical," Sole said.

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