

Championships to be Decided in District 6

By Brian Carson

Now this is something to be thankful for.

The Thanksgiving holiday means one thing to high school football fans around the state – time for PIAA playoffs. The holiday week is when most districts have crowned their champions or have finals staged to begin the hunt for state gold.

That brings us to a new week and the championship showdown in District 5-6 Class AA and District 6 Class A. Also on tap are the semifinals in District 3-6 Class AAAA. Good stuff all around.

What we have here folks is a football fanatics dream week - pro games on Thanksgiving and Sunday; and high school and college games on Friday and Saturday. Who could ask for anything more? Accept for turkey and stuffing that is.

With that being said, here's a preview of the District 6 playoff contests heading into week 13:

District 6 Class A Finals

No. 5 seed Juniata Valley (9-2), a 6-0 overtime winner over top seed Purchase Line last week, will face No. 3 seed Bellwood-Antis (9-2), a 24-7 winner over Southern Huntingdon, for the championship on Saturday at Mansion Park in Altoona.

Bellwood-Antis is in the district finals for the third straight year and looking for its second title in that span.

The Green Hornets rely on the efforts of running backs Joey Basil (859 yards, 8 TDs) and Sean McCrum (744 yards). The defense has pitched four straight shutouts and six on the season, while giving up only 8.2 points a game.

Josh Kleinfelter (238-1,840-28) is the main cog of the Blue Devils offense. The senior has amassed over 5,000 yards in his stellar career and will be the catalyst if Bellwood wants to make a run at the title. Jon Davila, who ran for 148 yards last week, has 408 yards on the ground from his fullback spot. QB Evan Hughes has thrown for 618 yards and six touchdowns. Davila (95 tackles), Bruno Degol (82 tackles, 4 interceptions) and Devon Clapper (9 picks) lead a defense that gives up only 7.5 points per game.

District 5-6 Class AA Finals

Two state ranked and very familiar teams face off for the Class AA title when No. 2 seed Bishop McCort (10-1), a 34-10 winner over P-O last week, goes against top seeded Tyrone (12-0), a 46-22 winner over Forest Hills. The two teams will duke it out Friday night at Mansion Park in Altoona.

It will be the third straight year the Golden Eagles and Crimson Crushers have met in the playoffs: Tyrone beat McCort in the 2004 championship game, but the Crushers got revenge last year with a semifinal victory in Tyrone.

Both squads have high-powered offenses – Tyrone averages 33.3 points per game and Bishop McCort scores 31.6 a game – as well as stingy defenses. The Crushers allow only 7.1 points per game and the Golden Eagles are close at 7.8 a contest.

The Golden Eagles, ranked third in the state by PFN, are loaded with talent on offense. Johnny Franco (215-1,574-24) and Tyler Gillmen (123-880-14) form a potent 1-2 punch in the backfield, while Justin Schopp (31-779-8) is a big-play threat at wide receiver. QB Tyler Golden (1,274 yards, 12 TDs) is not flashy, but consistent. All-State DT Tyler Hoover (8.5 sacks), Jason Reese (8 sacks), Johnny Shaffer (6 sacks) and Schopp (9 int.) are the leaders of the Tyrone defense.

The Crushers, winners of 10 straight since an opening week loss to Bedford, win because of a power running game and a stifling defense that has given up only 78 points all season and a measly 24 in the last six games. Bishop McCort is ranked 10th by PFN.

Scott Lewis (128-1,028-9) and Brad Barbin (152-793-18) power the rushing attack for Bishop McCort. QB Jordan

DeFrances has thrown for 1,283 yards and eight touchdowns with Chris Seidel (31-572-2), Barbin (21-306-1) and junior TE Michael Cruz (19-191-3) his go-to guys. Cruz has already given a verbal to Pitt even though he's a junior. Lewis leads the defensive attack with 85 tackles and eight sacks. Chris Kawchak has 71 tackles and six sacks from his DE spot.

District 3-6 Class AAAA Semifinals

No. 4 seed State College (10-2), a 29-26 winner over Central Dauphin last week, will meet No. 8 seed and familiar foe Bishop McDevitt (9-3), who stunned top ranked Harrisburg 20-18 last Saturday. The game is slated for Friday evening at Memorial Field in State College.

The Crusaders, the defending District 3-6 Class AAAA champion, defeated the Little Lions 20-17 in the title game last year and also own a 24-16 win over State College back on September 30 of this year.

State High, ranked fifth in the state by PFN, runs a high-powered offense that's scored 434 points on the season – good enough for a 35.6 average per game. QB Brook Hart has thrown for 1,904 yards, on 128-of-215 passing, with 24 TDs, a new school single-season record. Andrew Kerr (41-562-8) and TE Nathan Stupar (30-482-6) are his prime targets.

On the ground, Matthew LeClair (57-577-11) and Terna Ityokumbul (50-450-7) have combined for over 1,000 yards rushing. The defense, led by returning All-State LB Stupar, has held opponents to only 14 points per game.

Bishop McDevitt has a nice balance between the run and the pass. Dave Onorato (165-881-6) and Mike Jones (112-508-8) take care of the ground work, while quarterback Kyle Koncar (109-of-206, 1,487 yards, 11 touchdowns) does it in the air. His favorite targets are Julian Harrell (53-813-4) and Mike Comasco (22-354-7). Chris Henderson, Matt Vargo and Comasco (seven interceptions) lead the Crusader defense.

PIAA Class AAA Playoffs

District 6 champ Hollidaysburg (8-4), a 40-0 winner over Indian Valley last Friday, begins its quest for PIAA gold with a first round game against District 8 champion Oliver (10-2), a 12-2 winner over Brashear last week. The contest will be held at George Cupples Stadium in Pittsburgh on Friday.

The Golden Tigers are led by running backs Brad Nocek (178-894-12) and Matt Wimbush (106-507-9). Nocek is coming off a 173-yard, 3 touchdown performance in the District 6 Class AAA championship game last week. QB Patrick Smith has thrown for 1,021 yards and four scores with receivers Jared Wilson (26-359-2) and Brock Porter (18-179-1) getting most of the action. David Glunt (91 tackles), David Lafferty (four interceptions) and Nocek (3 picks) are the go-getters on defense.

The Bears give up only 8.9 points per game and it was that tough defense that propelled them to the Pittsburgh City League championship. Oliver has out-scored its opponents 310-70 on the season. This is Bears' first appearance in the state tournament and their first City League title since 1942.

Oliver is lead by QB DeV Vaughn Copeland, RB Lamar Copeland and receivers Jacque Robinson and Terrell Scott.

Week 13 Schedule:

Bishop McDevitt (3) (Dist 3 AAAA 9-3-0) @ State College (Dist 6 AAAA 10-2-0)

Bishop McCort (Dist 6 AA 10-1-0) @ Tyrone (Dist 6 AA 12-0-0)

Hollidaysburg (Dist 6 AAA 8-4-0) @ Oliver (Dist 8 AAA 10-2-0)

Saturday's Games

Juniata Valley (Dist 6 A 9-2-0) @ Bellwood-Antis (Dist 6 A 9-2-0)