

Motivation comes Super-sized for Flaherty

2A

League and teams

CAPE ANN LEAGUE/NORTHEASTERN CONFERENCE TIER 2: Beverly, Danvers, Gloucester, Marblehead, Salem, Swamp scott

MIDDLESEX LIBERTY: Burlington, Melrose, Stoneham, Wakefield, Watertown, Wilmington

ATLANTIC COAST LEAGUE: Dennis-Yarmouth, Falmouth, Marshfield, Nauset, Plymouth North, Plymouth South, Sandwich

BAY STATE HERGET: "Dedham, Milton, Natick, Norwood, Walpole, Wellesley
* - Competing as an independent

PLAYOFF MATCHUPS: CAL/NEC Tier 2 vs. Middlesex Liberty, Bay State Herget vs. Atlantic Coast League

By KAT HASENAUER CORNETTA

BEVERLY — Even though the game was nearly two years ago, Brendan Flaherty still uses Beverly's 2010 Division 3 Super Bowl victory as motivation.

Flaherty, the Panthers' star senior running back/defensive back, might even be using that rallying point more this season than he did last year.

"In 2010, we were down by a lot because we had lost our first couple of games, and in that Super Bowl game itself, we were down by a lot," said Flaherty. "Both times we came back by just working hard and staying at it, and that's what we will have to do in every game this year."

If anyone on the Beverly roster knows how to keep a sustained level of performance despite challenges, it is Flaherty. He finished last season with 73 yards, 17 receptions, and 12 touchdowns. That was after a sophomore campaign in which he scored 21 touchdowns and amassed 1,274 yards rushing and 159 yards receiving.

Flaherty's junior campaign was somewhat subdued because of some nagging problems that limited his training. Even with that challenge, he remained Beverly's go-to guy on offense, thanks to his speed and a keen awareness of opposing defenses.

"When he's in an open field, he can make defenders around him miss," said Panthers coach Dan Bauer. "We can use him at inside running back, outside running back or receiver, and he makes the right play to create space."

Flaherty's ability to read defenses comes from the dual role he has for Beverly: he is also the team's starting safety and defensive play-caller. "The two safeties make our calls on defense," said Bauer, "and he reads offenses well there."

The 6-foot-1 Flaherty does to opposing offenses what they can't do to the Beverly offense — keep them from going downfield. Heading into the season with three experienced backs (Flaherty and fellow seniors Dom Abate and Kenny Pierce), opposing defenses could be left unable to contain the Panthers' offensive options.

"With our three running backs this year, it's a lot harder for defenses to read everyone," said Flaherty. "We have a lot of different weapons, and the defense doesn't know what its going to see next."

Flaherty will not just team with Abate and Pierce in the backfield, but with leadership responsibilities as well. The three join line-man Mark Babcock and quarterback Dave Rollins as the Panthers' five captains, guiding a team with 27 seniors into its second season in the combined Northeastern/Cape Ann League Tier 2.

"We've been playing together since Pop Warner," said Flaherty of his fellow captains. "Being senior leaders together is great because we have been together for so long."

Flaherty, who also plays lacrosse, hopes to study business while continuing his athletic career in college next fall. But first, he wants to get another taste of a high school Super Bowl.

"We're going out at every game to win, and if we come out to practice and continue to work hard, we could do just that," said Flaherty.

DIVISION

BRENDAN FLAHERTY

Beverly definitely in the running

By DAN VENTURA

Beverly appears to have all the ingredients to make a run at a Super Bowl title for the second time in three years.

The Panthers return two of the top running backs in the league in Brendan Flaherty and Kenny Pierce, a solid quarterback in Dave Rollins and a veteran line led by Michael Dooling. Dom Abate is a two-way stalwart for Beverly, which may very well be the best team in the entire Cape Ann League/Northeastern Conference conglomerate.

In the newly named Middlesex Liberty, Burlington looks to be the team to beat with standout running back Marcus Odiah and an improving Shane Farley at quarterback. The road to the crown won't be an easy one as Melrose and defending champion Wakefield will likely have something to say about it.

Dennis-Yarmouth was the beast of both the Atlantic Coast League and Division 2A last year. The Dolphins likely won't run roughshod over the ACL, but figure to have enough to defend their crown.

It will be just like the old days in the Bay State Herget. **Natick and Walpole**, Walpole and Natick, John Lee vs. Tom Lamb or Lamb vs. Lee, if you prefer. Barring an upstart like **Norwood** crashing the party, the Herget should come down either the Rebels or the Red and Blue.

League champions: Beverly, Burlington, Dennis-Yarmouth, Walpole

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STAFF PHOTO BY PATRICK WHITEMORE