Feasting on the Falcons

Westlake’s Anthony Sardo runs for two TDs as the Wildcats cruise past Albertus Magnus and reach the Class B Championship Game.
Panthers Rout the Bears in the Season Finale
By Justin Thomas

It may not have been the playoff end to the season that either team wanted, but both Pleasantville and Briarcliff/Hamilton were still ready to add another chapter in the long-standing rivalry between the two schools.

On an eerily calm Halloween afternoon, it was the Pleasantville Panthers who proved to be the monsters to be feared as they came into Briarcliff and put a 42-0 whooping on the Bears.

The Bears were looking like they could possibly tie it up as they were soon driving into Pleasantville territory, but then senior quarterback John Plimpton’s pass was tipped and intercepted by McPhee, giving the Panthers the ball at their own 20-yard line. Howe and the offense took over from there, and started to lead a long, sustained drive. A punishing rushing attack moved the ball down the field, before Howe decided to take matters into his own hands with a 40-yard pass to Jack Minerva that moved the Panthers all the way down to the 1-yard-line.

Senior running back Michael Hammond took it in from there to make it a 12-0 game. From then on, the Bears couldn’t seem to get much going on offense, and could do nothing to stop Pleasantville. Panther head coach Tony Becerra was proud of his freshman quarterback, and all of his young players. “The future is bright for Pleasantville football,” Becerra said. “Not just for Jack [Howe], but we had a number of sophomores that we started as well…so there’s a lot of upside.”

Panther fans got a healthy glimpse of the bright future of the program as Howe, McPhee, Ian Esliker and others completely took over the game. In the second quarter, the Panthers put up 16 points to extend their lead to 28-0 with impressive play on both sides of the football.

Howe got things started in the second quarter by showing that he can get it done with his legs in addition to his arm. On a bootleg quarterback keeper, Howe took it 48 yards to the house.

Not to be outdone, the defense took advantage of the deep field position the Bears were stuck with by sacking Plimpton on a first-and-10 at their own 11-yard-line, pushing the Bears back to their own 1-yard-line. With the visitors’ section rocking, the Panthers’ defense stopped the Bears’ running game up in the end zone for a safety.

Then just before halftime, Howe found McPhee again, this time on a 63-yard bomb to give Pleasantville its 28-0 lead at the end of the first half.

The Bears received the ball first in the second half, knowing they had to get something going to get back in the game. They picked up one first down on a facemask penalty by Pleasantville, but the drive stalled after that, forcing Briarcliff to punt the ball away. That punt landed in the arms of senior running back Javaun Smith, who fielded the ball just beyond midfield and burst through his blocking to take it 52 yards for a touchdown, all but sealing the game for the Panthers.

Esliker tacked on one more touchdown for the Panthers before the end of the third quarter, stretching the Panther lead to 42 points and putting an end to the day’s scoring.

Even though the game goes down in the books as just a consolation bowl game to end the season, it meant so much more to all of the seniors playing for the last time in high school.

For the Briarcliff and Hamilton seniors, nothing could be done except hug each other and their coaches and thank them for the great years and memories. For the Pleasantville seniors, their career ends with a win, and a proud coach was thrilled to send them off in style.

“We sent the seniors off the right way, and hopefully set the tone for next season,” Becerra said. “They [the seniors] were just tremendous leaders…if we are able to succeed in the next year or two, they’ve already said they’ll be very proud. Even though they won’t be a part of it, but they will in a sense.”
Westlake Cruises Past the Falcons in the Sectional Semifinal

By Andy Jacobs

When John Castellano took over as the new football coach at Westlake High School back in the spring, it didn’t take him long to realize he was inheriting a team with some potential.

“When I first got the job in April,” Castellano was recalling late Saturday afternoon, “I met with them and I said we’re gonna run a little mini-camp, or whatever you wanna call it, at the end of the spring. And after running about four plays with them, I said, ‘You know what, you guys are pretty special. You’re pretty special.’”

Castellano’s early words of praise to his new players turned out to be rather prophetic because the Wildcats will soon be playing for the Section One championship. Led by its stingy defense and Anthony Sardo’s 148 yards and two touchdowns, Westlake cruised to a 28-0 victory over visiting Albertus Magnus on Saturday in the Class B semifinals.

The Wildcats, now 7-2 this season, scored three touchdowns in less than eight minutes bridging the first and second quarters to take command of what had been a scoreless game. Mike Love then picked off a pair of passes by Falcon quarterback Benny Storms in the final two minutes of the half, enabling Westlake to walk off the field at intermission with a 21-0 cushion.

“In 35 years, I’ve been in these games plenty of times,” said Castellano, who wasn’t about to let his Wildcats get complacent. “It’s 0-0 at the half, and that’s what I told ’em.’

Westlake, which has now blanked four different teams this season, kept the Falcons off the scoreboard the rest of the way and put an emphatic end to their title hopes when Sardo ran seven yards for his second touchdown of the day with 2:35 left in the fourth quarter to conclude a six-play, 48-yard drive.

As the final seconds ticked off the clock, Castellano was able to turn his back to the field and applaud the large home crowd that had turned out to support the Wildcats. After saluting the fans, he had plenty of praise for his team’s smothering defense.

“When I met these kids six months ago, I told ’em you win championships on defense,” he said. “You need to buy into what we’re doing defensively, and if you do you’ll be special.’ And they have. We’ve got four or five shutouts this year. They believe in defense, they play it, and that’s the whole key: You win these championships with defense.”

It was a big defensive play that helped prevent Magnus from getting on the board first. The Falcons advanced past midfield on the opening possession of the game, but quarterback Storms, facing third-and-seven at the Wildcat 44-yard line, was clobbered by Joseph Ferri and fumbled away the ball. Late in the quarter, Magnus punter Aidan Condon let the snap from center slip right through his legs and was forced to fall on the ball at his own 11-yard line.

Ryan Duffy ran two yards on first down, then quarterback Tom Castro scampered around left end for a nine-yard touchdown that put the Wildcats ahead to stay. Love provided the first of his four extra points as Westlake grabbed a 7-0 lead with 3:58 to go in the first quarter.

“That’s what we’ve gotta do,” said Castellano. “You’ve got to take advantage of your breaks.”

Magnus quickly went three-and-out and the subsequent short punt by Condon sailed out of bounds at the Falcons’ 35-yard line with 1:35 remaining in the period. It took the Wildcats six plays to score again, with Sardo running to his right for a two-yard touchdown on the second snap of the second quarter.

Another poor Magnus punt soon gave Westlake the ball again at the Falcons’ 36. Sardo ran for a yard on first down, then Jason Kalle bolted down the left sideline on the next play for a 35-yard touchdown that, with the PAT by Love, stretched the Wildcat lead to 21-0 with just under eight and a half minutes left in the half.

“Special teams is 33 percent of the game,” said Castellano, asked about the Falcons’ misfortunes trying to punt the football. “There’s three phases of the game — defense, offense and special teams. We work hard on defense and we work hard on special teams. We’ve got enough weapons offensively to make people worry about us.”

Magnus had a chance to get back in the contest late in the half after starting a drive at the Wildcats’ 37-yard line. But Nicholas Sirena sacked Storms on first down, and on fourth-and-13 a long pass by Storms was intercepted by Love. When the Falcons got the ball back a minute later, this time at the Westlake 45, Storms’ toss on first down was intercepted once more by Love.

It was the Westlake defense that stepped up again four minutes into the third quarter as Falcon running back Roberto Galindo was stopped short by three players on fourth-and-three at the Wildcats’ 26. Any doubt about the outcome ended when Sardo later carried the ball five consecutive times, collecting his final 42 yards of the day and his second TD with less than three minutes remaining.

So now the Wildcats have reached the Class B final, to be played at noon on Saturday at Somers High School. Awaiting them will be a 9-0 Nanuet team that won the regular-season meeting between the teams 12-0, a game that was still scoreless at halftime.

“I thought we played pretty well there that day,” said Castellano. “And we’ve been waiting since that day to get another shot at ’em.”
The Briarcliff girls’ soccer team celebrates after scoring its second goal of the game in a 2-1 playoff victory over host Pleasantville last Tuesday afternoon.

Alex O’Brien of Pleasantville controls the ball in last Tuesday’s season-ending playoff game vs. the Briarcliff Bears.

Byram Hills’ Jack Beer moves the ball up the field in last Thursday’s playoff game vs. Tappan Zee.

Briarcliff players, including left to right, Kelly O’Donnell, Kaho Maeda and Julia Ventura form a wall as Pleasantville’s Remi Manna gets set to kick the ball.

Byram Hills’ Ryan Starker heads the ball during last week’s semifinal playoff game vs. Tappan Zee.

Briarcliff’s Rachel Julie goes high in the air to put the ball away during last Tuesday’s home match vs. Valhalla.

Above: Maria Capasso of Briarcliff bumps the ball while teammate Isabella Pisani looks on in last week’s match vs. the Vikings.

Above: Caroline McQuade of Valhalla tries to send the ball past Briarcliff’s Rachel Julie in last Tuesday’s match, won by the Vikings in five games.

Left: Valhalla’s Kayla Gleason (left) and Alyssa Giordano rise together to block the ball in the Vikings’ three-games-to-two road win over Briarcliff.
Jessica Kennett of Byram Hills battles to get control of the ball in last Tuesday’s playoff win over visiting Nanuet.

Byram Hills’ Nicole Kim moves the ball across the field in the Bobcat victory vs. Nanuet.

Ally Steffen of Byram Hills sends the ball up the field in Thursday’s playoff victory vs. visiting Harrison.

Byram Hills’ Nicole Pappalardo gets set to serve in Friday’s playoff win over the visiting Tigers.

Maria Violante of Fox Lane puts the ball away during the Foxes’ three-games-to-none playoff win over Mamaroneck.

Fox Lane’s Brianna Dawson bumps the ball in Friday’s playoff win over Mamaroneck.

The Bobcats’ Kelsey Goldring regains her balance as she gets around a Nanuet defender and moves past midfield during the sectional playoffs.

Above: Sorvina Carr of Fox Lane sends the ball over the net in the Foxes’ playoff victory vs. Mamaroneck on Friday afternoon.

Dina Sokol of Byram Hills races up the field with the ball in Thursday’s playoff game against the visiting Harrison Huskies.

Ariel Zaccagnino of Byram Hills pursues the ball in front of the goal during last week’s 1-0 playoff win over the Golden Knights.

Ariel Zaccagnino of Byram Hills pursues the ball in front of the goal during last week’s 1-0 playoff win over Sleepy Hollow.

Byram Hills’ Carly Schwartz controls the ball in the Bobcat defensive end in last Tuesday’s playoff contest.

Jessica Kennett of Byram Hills battles to get control of the ball in last Tuesday’s playoff win over visiting Nanuet.

Byram Hills’ Kate Khouri keeps her eyes on the ball during the Bobcats’ playoff win last Tuesday over Sleepy Hollow.

Byram Hills’ Carly Schwartz controls the ball in the Bobcat defensive end in last Tuesday’s playoff contest.
Vikings Defeat YMA in the Season Finale

The Vikings' John Cho returns a kick in Friday night's home win vs. YMA.

Bobcats' Lou Filippelli Sets a Section 1 Record for Single-Season Passing

Byram Hills senior quarterback Lou Filippelli established a new Section One record for most passing yards in a single season on Friday night. The southpaw signal caller began his final varsity game needing just eight yards to eclipse the old mark. He wound up the evening with 357 yards and tossed three touchdown passes, though the Bobcats fell to host Harrison 45-33. Filippelli finished the season with 2,595 passing yards. He also added more than 700 yards on the ground and ran for 18 touchdowns.

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Greeley Defeats Scarsdale to Advance to Class A Final

There’s nothing like the sight of Horace Greeley Quaker girls playing field hockey in November. Grab your coats, hats and gloves because the Quakers will be facing Mamaroneck in the Section 1 Final today (Tuesday) at 5:00 in Brewster.

It was a long, hard road, but the girls earned their spot in the Class A championship game. A motivating pre-game speech by injured captain Olivia Green started it off on Saturday. Greeley and Scarsdale battled throughout the first half, but finally the Quakers broke through when Lauren Neff deflected a rebound out of midair and beat the Scarsdale goalie for a 1-0 lead. The Greeley defense once again was outstanding, anchored by Ellie Mercer, Annie Lindenthal, Fiona Grant and Lindsay Hauptman. They stifled Scarsdale throughout the first half and Greeley actually dominated the last 10 minutes of the half with terrific defense and possession offense.

Nikki Potter was all over the place again, doing a great job at midfield with teammates Kat Brennan and Katie Graham winning 50/50 balls, regaining lost possession and battling the speedy Scarsdale players. Forwards Megan Graham, Katie Jakacki and Neff were terrific all game fighting to keep the offensive pressure on the Raiders. Graham injured her hand on a high-hit ball by Scarsdale and was replaced late in the first half by Sophie Berkowitz, who not only filled in admirably, but also made numerous strong plays to keep the pressure on the Scarsdale defense.

The Raiders altered their strategy to start the second half down by a goal, pushing nine players forward and putting intense pressure on Greeley. Willa Kuhn made a bunch of great saves and the defense held strong, but ultimately Scarsdale converted on a corner by putting a second-chance rebound into the net to tie the game at 1-1. Emily Kerstein replaced an injured Annie Lindenthal midway through the half and did a superb job stopping three straight Scarsdale rushes.

The final 13 minutes were harrowing, with both teams mounting pressure but neither able to score, sending the game to overtime. Two 10-minute overtime periods were played, with Greeley dominating the first 10 but being unable to score. Scarsdale came on strong during the last five minutes, but Kuhn stood tall keeping them off the board. After 80 minutes, the teams were still tied and headed to a suspense-filled shootout in which five players from each team are given a 10-second breakaway against the goalie.

Scarsdale shot first using its best player, Erin Nicholas, who was initially stopped but eventually put the ball past a diving Kuhn to make it 1-0 Scarsdale. Nikki Porter evened it up for the Quakers with a nifty move past Scarsdale’s goalie to tie it. Kuhn then made some great plays, not only on players she stopped, but also initially stopping players who ended up beating her on the rebound. She wound up stopping three of the five shots she faced. With the Quakers trailing 2-1, Fiona Grant deked beautifully past the onrushing goalie to tie the shootout at 2-2. Megan Graham soon scored too, beating the goalie with another super move to make it 3-2. Willa Kuhn made two terrific saves on Scarsdale’s final shooter to lock up the victory.

Once again, head coach Sukhwinder Sandhu and assistant coach Brittany Paulus had the perfect strategy and motivation to help the Quakers get to Greeley’s first Section 1 field hockey final ever.

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Bobcat Disappointment

Oliver Grossman and Byram Hills Lose in Overtime to Tappan Zee in the Section One Tournament