

Football Weekly - BY MATTHEW HATFIELD
High School Football Playoffs Round 2 - Friday, November 26th, 2004

Eastern Region Division 6 Championship:

Landstown [10-0; 1-0] V. Oscar Smith [10-0; 1-0] - 7:30 PM - Hickory

Coming into the playoffs I prepared to write about the Oscar Smith-Landstown Eastern Region Division 6 Championship. What I was going to make the topic is how Landstown has just breezed by every team the last two seasons and are going to get a wake-up call vs. Rich Morgan's Tigers. After watching them defeat Deep Creek by 35, I can honestly say this team looks somewhat close to unstoppable and Oscar Smith better do some major game planning. Two words says it all for me and they are not Greg Boone. He is very critical in this game, but if I am Coach Morgan here's the two words underlined on my chalkboard: **Force Turnovers**. The defense has been stellar all season long for the most part giving up just under ten points per contest. Oscar Smith has not been as sharp offensively in recent weeks as they were during the middle part of the season. They finished up the 2004 campaign scoring 40.4 per game, yet have averaged 25 the last three outings. Granted, Granby, Hickory and Indian River aren't shabby ball clubs. Still, they may need to score between 28-35 points to get by Chris Beatty's Eagles, who right now are clicking on all cylinders. We know how talented juniors Damon McDaniel and Percy Harvin, who together accounted for four of the seven touchdowns vs. Deep Creek, are and what they can do on the football field. Depth is something every Head Coach would love to have and Beatty has it at Landstown. If you try to concentrate on Harvin and/or McDaniel then Ryan Goings or Enrique Cox or Darren Jones beats you. Defensively Deveon Simmons is an NFL caliber hitter and he has so many instinctive guys around him such as Devone Wiggins (13 tackles and an INT. vs. the Hornets) and Lawrence Brown (six solo tackles against Deep Creek).

Speed kills and Landstown has it at the need positions like receiver, defensive back and linebacker. Don't think Oscar Smith lacks speed because Tommie Lawrence finished the season with seven touchdown receptions just one ahead of senior Jahkari Taylor's total of six. Lawrence burns people on special teams too. He's really Landstown's version of Harvin in the sense he makes opponents miss tackling him. Andre Cook has really been the star of the offense with Boone not performing up to his par since the Hickory game. It was Cook going over 200 yards vs. the Hawks and rushing for 146 yards and 2TD last week that's gotten them here. The difference between Oscar Smith and Deep Creek and really all the Beach District teams that Landstown has faced this year is this: Oscar Smith can throw the ball often and efficient. Boone's ability to get outside the pocket and make plays with his feet is important.

Pick: Landstown 37-27

--- Look let me get this straight from the get go here. I think each team - Landstown, Oscar Smith, Hampton and Phoebus has about the same chance of winning their respective game. I'm not just saying that either because before the season even started I had all four of these schools in my top five. Defense will likely decide this one from the standpoint of forcing turnovers, making stops inside the red zone and putting their other team in 3rd or 4th down situations. Julius Macklin,

Tim Happer, Joseph Jones, Dexter Merritt and Naron Sanderlin are five young men to watch on the Tigers defense. The Eagles also must mix in the run well like they have in the past by letting quarterback go, using reverses, tosses or pitch outs or even that lateral play will do the trick. Again, the goal for Oscar Smith will be what it was for Deep Creek - eliminate the big play, while Landstown attempts to keep rolling up tons of yards on those 40+ yard gainers.



Landstown linebacker Deveon Simmons (shown pictured courtesy of rivals.com), who suffered an injury that was nothing serious, made eight total tackles and rushed for two touchdowns in the team's victory last week over Deep Creek. He's the heart and soul of a defense that will be looking to put its stamp on the season by making Oscar Smith work for everything they get.

Eastern Region Division 5 Championship:

Phoebus [8-2; 1-0] V. Hampton [10-0; 1-0] - 7:30 PM - Darling Stadium

These two schools together have won six of the last nine Division 5 State Championships. So I guess I wouldn't it be much of a bold statement to say Phoebus and Hampton have been in this position before. One of the best if not the best High School Football rivalry that's been developed of the past few years here in the Commonwealth state. Bill Dee's Phantoms are the last Peninsula District team to win it as they won back-to-back titles from 2001-02. Mike Smith, who has well over 350 wins to his credit, has been coaching at Hampton since 1971 and is responsible for helping them win 11 (two in D-6) in a span of 30+ years. Earlier this season when the Crabbers and Phantoms met the final score was 33-22 in favor of Hampton. However, Phoebus eliminated their foe on Friday night in last year's playoffs after suffering defeat during the regular season to them. Can they do it once again? Good question and I say yes - it's a possibility. Offensively both are loaded. Elan Lewis, considered one of the elite running backs in the country, set the state AAA career rushing record when he ran for over 300 yards and six touchdowns in last Friday night's 70-34 win over Woodside. To score 70 on any team is impressive and don't think they will do it against Hampton, a defense that surrendered just five points per game coming into the playoffs.

When I look a little deeper into this game I see a Phoebus team that's really inspired and playing hot right now. Following the loss to Hampton they went on to beat

Gloucester 69-0, Warwick 57-10 and Bethel 30-20. Okay, so those teams aren't as good as Hampton. True, but the Fighting Bookers of Booker T. Washington, led by freshman QB James Vann, trailed 22-6 at half-time. Most people thought the Crabbers defense would completely shut them out. Hampton did not play mistake free football either turning the ball over four times and committing ten penalties. On the other side, Phoebus exploded in the second quarter. They were tied 14-14 and finished the game with 431 rushing yards, no turnovers and just three penalties. Not to mention, Woodside is better than Booker T. Washington in basically all three aspects of the game. One game big deal you say. I don't believe it will be a blowout either way. I see this being close down to the wire. Hampton has three unbelievable stars on offense in QB Tyrod Taylor, running back Trayce McPherson (25TD runs through the first nine games of the season) and receiver Todd Nolen. Their offensive line is one of the top two in the state according to some of the people that have spoken to me. And we know how good their defense is - it's like a broken record over and over and over again.

Pick: Phoebus 35-28.

--- UPSET! I know what the Hampton people are going to say right away - no way are defense will give up 35 points. Well, didn't it give up 12 to a Booker T. Washington offense that averaged just around 20PPG? Also, didn't their defense allow Phoebus to score 22 points? We know they are going to load the box with eight and nine at times to stop Lewis. What some may be underestimating is the o-line of the Phantoms. It has played dramatically better in recent weeks and can step up and block the opposing team's defenders effectively. The real key in my opinion is the quarterback Taylor. McPherson and Nolen (200+ receiving yards vs. Phoebus in '04) are going to get their touches and makes plays regardless. How Taylor, a sophomore, handles the magnitude of this game from the start will go a long way towards determining the outcome. He's the best QB the school has had since Ronald Curry and totaled 416 yards of offense producing five scores in their 11-point victory over Phoebus. Right now the momentum leans slightly with the underdog here and Aaron Ward could be the x-factor for them. #38 gives them a great shot of pulling a stunner, too.



Phoebus running back Elan Lewis will play football next season at Virginia Tech. He ran for 154 yards and two touchdowns in the team's loss to Hampton earlier this year. Some are forgetting, though he was not 100% healthy then. I'd say he is right now considering he just went over 300 yards and found the end zone more times than an entire Woodside team that scored 34 points did.

All photos used in this article are from the following websites: - Thank You!
<http://www.virginiapreps.com> <http://www.rivals.com>

Note:

Since I am short of time this week in preparing for the Thanksgiving Holidays - I did not do my wrap-up on each team's season. Continue to check back on the website - www.matthewwhatfield.com for more on HSF and my early season predictions for next year!