Malvern Prep wins Inter-Ac title

* By Nate Heckenberger Nov 13, 2008

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PHILADELPHIA - Gamp Pellegrini has won a few Inter-Ac football championships in stylish fashion in his 31 years at the helm of Malvern Prep.Saturday, beneath a drab, misty sky, Pellegrini's unbeaten Friars grinded out yet another Inter-Ac title - that's 20 in 31 years for those counting at home - with an 18-0 shutout over host Chestnut Hill Academy.

Quarterback Billy Conners returned a fumble for a touch-down and threw two scores to Neil Willis, and the defense kept the Blue Devils out of the end zone to give Malvern a perfect 9-0 record for the season.

"I'm so proud of these kids," Pellegrini said. "We were slowed down offensively and should have had a couple more touchdowns but we screwed up. … But we're the outright champs and that's the important thing."

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Chestnut Hill (3-2 league, 7-4 overall) played tough football, hoping to gain a tie for the league crown with Malvern. But on the sixth play of the game, Dan Gallagher fumbled right into the hands of Conners, who took it 69 yards for the score, giving the Friars' defense all they would need.

"I was fortunate it bounced right into my hands and I had a lane," Conners said of the fumble. "We have a strong defense and the two early turnovers meant a lot."

Conners grabbed an interception on Chestnut Hill's second drive before he could even get a play on the other side of the ball.

Malvern struggled offensively, compared to its 46.5 points-per-game average coming in. On their first drive, though, the Friars methodically moved the ball 79 yards, capped by Willis taking a wide receiver screen through the middle of the defense from 27 yards out.

After going scoreless in the second quarter, Malvern gave itself more breathing room the first drive after halftime when Willis snuck out of the backfield on fourth-and-17 to catch his second touchdown, this one from 31 yards.

"[Chestnut Hill] was really chasing Joe Price all day," Pellegrini said. "Joe's a great receiver. Willis does it all and he consistently does the job. When they double Joe, we go to Willis."

The senior running back accumulated 140 total yards, 81 coming on the ground, while Conners connected on nine of his 12 passes for 155 yards.

Ibraheim Campbell caused the most concern for Malvern. Coming into the game Campbell had over 1,600 yards and 22 touchdowns. Friars' defensive line-men C.J. Mooney, Bobby Panchisin, Matt Devlin, Joseph DiTrolio and Sean Ferguson harassed both Campbell and Gallagher all day.

Campbell was held to 91 yards on 15 carries, while Gallagher completed just two of his 10 pass attempts and spent most of his time dodging traffic.

"It's great having played with these guys on defense for a couple years and having everything come together this year," said Mooney, who helped Malvern to its fourth shutout of the season.

The story of the second half was penalty flags, as both teams tallied up nearly 20 total penalties for almost 200 yards. Both teams had touchdowns called back due to infractions. Both teams missed field goals. Both teams put the ball on the ground, but in the end, only one team would etch its name on the Inter-Ac trophy. This one belongs to Malvern for the second consecutive season.

"It seems unreal there were that many penalties in a game like that," Pellegrini said. "It was a hard-fought game, with Chestnut having a chance to half us for the league championship. They were very emotional about it."

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