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THANKSGIVING DAY FOOTBALL: NEWINGTON VS. WETHERSFIELD

Spirit runs high, but time runs out

Pep rally, fan support not quite enough to lift Indians to victory



Above: Bob Struzenski lifts Carmine Rinaldi into the air as a line of their teammates look on at Wednesday's pep rally.

Cheered on by a wave of support from soaked fans, alumni, cheerleaders, and band members, Newington High's gridiron warriors played their hearts out on Thursday — but fell short of a comeback victory, losing the Thanksgiving Day classic to archrival Wethersfield, 20-15.

Neither rain nor wind nor a darkened scoreboard could deter the football

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Above: A dejected QB Travis Meyer walks off the field Thursday after a fumble ended the Indians' hopes of a comeback victory.

Car crash wreaks havoc at game

President Stevens "okay" after accident which knocked out Alumni Road power

Right: Senior Class President Tim Stevens gestures to the crowd at Wednesday's pep rally. Less than 24 hours later, Stevens was involved in a car accident which disrupted the Thanksgiving Day football game.



A "t-bone" car crash on Alumni Road Thursday morning sent Senior Class President Tim Stevens to the hospital for Thanksgiving and darkened the scoreboard at the football field, disrupting the very game which Stevens had helped promote one day earlier when he co-hosted the NHS student council pep rally.

In an e-mail sent Saturday morning to his

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"I am okay... I have so much to be thankful for now."

—Tim Stevens

Stevens “okay” after car accident

Class president broadsided en route to football game; power knocked out

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“Complaint of the Week” mailing list, President Stevens assured everyone that he is “okay.”

“I fractured my hip and am currently using a cane to get around. It is painful sometimes but I do have drugs and am coping quite well,” Stevens wrote. “So, honestly, don’t worry. In a week I will be back in school, good as new.”

Stevens chose not to send out one of his weekly gripes for the Thanksgiving weekend, telling his readers that “It seems in poor taste, in light of this event and the holiday, to issue a Complaint. I mean, I have so much to be thankful for now.”

“Yes, it was I who knocked out the power at the football game,” Stevens added in a postscript. “I am very sorry for that.”

Because the Thanksgiving Day classic was a daytime event, the loss of electric power did not prevent the game from continuing. However, the scoreboard was dark and public address announcer Stephen Ludlow silent throughout the third quarter and into the beginning of the fourth.

Ludlow resumed his commentary when power was restored midway through the fourth quarter, but the scoreboard was never brought back up to speed. When Newington threatened a dramatic comeback in the final minute of the game, only the referees had the exact official time.

With his public address system back up and running, Ludlow advised fans of another side effect of the

accident: traffic was blocked off on the south portion of Alumni Road. All fans leaving the game had to exit by way of the Veterans’ Hospital.

No further information was immediately available on the cause or details of the accident.

President Stevens said in his Saturday morning e-mail that he will be out of school for a period of time while he recovers. “In a week I will be back in school, good as new,” he wrote.

In the mean time, if the class president has any official duties—most likely in the area of prom planning—to which he must attend, Vice President Lauren Correll and the other class officers would presumably take care of them in his absence.



Above: Pep rally co-host Tim Stevens gestures toward the crowd as he talks to his good friend, cheerleader Marel Nasinnyk, shortly before the rally. Stevens was involved in a car crash the next day.

Sullivan 10th in age group at Manchester

Finishes 108th overall in road race; Boisvert scores in all-star game

Newington High School senior Shaun Sullivan finished tenth in the 14-18 age group, second among Newington runners of any age, and 108th overall out of 8,821 finishers in the 62nd running of the Manchester Road Race on Thursday.

Sullivan, Newington’s best cross country runner and the only Indian to complete in the State Open this year, ran the 4.748-mile Manchester course in a time of 27 minutes, 26 seconds.

Pat Salonia, a 1997 graduate of Newington High, was the third-fastest Newington runner with a time of 29:07, putting him at 217th overall. Jeff Karnilowicz, an NHS sophomore, finished the race in 29:20, making him 241st overall, fourth among Newington runners, and 30th in the 14-18 age group. Other NHS students finishing in the overall Top 500 were sophomore Dan

Procko (30:23, 325th overall, sixth in Newington, 46th in age group), junior Tom Barnicle (30:42, 360th, seventh, 50th), and senior Jared Lantzman (31:10, 411th, eighth, 58th).

Elsewhere in local sports, NHS senior Tara Boisvert scored the only goal for the White team in its 1-1 tie of the Blue team in the Connecticut Soccer Coaches Association Girls Senior Soccer Bowl on Saturday.

“I just saw the open corner and tried to knock it in,” Boisvert told *The Hartford Courant*.

“I thought we stepped up in the second half. We started clicking better,” added Boisvert, whose goal came with 18:29 remaining in the game. “It’s hard playing with girls for the first time, but we improved ourselves a lot in the second half.”

NHS football squad goes down fighting

Cheered by soaked fans, Indians battle back from 14-0 down, but lose Thanksgiving Day classic despite last-minute heroics

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players from putting forth their best effort in this battle for bragging rights between two teams who both began the day with 1-8 records.

The weather did not scare away the die-hards among Newington's fans, either — and those who stayed to the bitter end were treated to a thrilling, rollercoaster finish which nearly carried the Indians to victory.

Trailing 14-0 at the half, Newington cut Wethersfield's lead to 14-8 on David Estanislaw's third-quarter touchdown, only to see the Eagles strike back on their next possession and make it 20-8 after three quarters. Much of the fourth quarter went by uneventfully, but then with less than a minute remaining in the game, the pouring rain caused the Eagles' Craig Pasternak to fumble the snap when Wethersfield attempted to punt the ball from deep in its own territory. Newington's Carmine Rinaldi recovered the ball and ran it six yards for a touchdown. With the extra point, Newington had cut Wethersfield's lead to 20-15.

Desperate to get one final chance on offense, Newington attempted an onside kick. Wethersfield's kickoff team had employed a similar strategy against Newington earlier in the game, and it had worked — not surprising with the heavy rain and resulting slippery conditions. When Newington tried it with 51 seconds to go in the game, it worked again, spurring a wild celebration on the Indians bench. Newington's offense had the ball back, and that meant one last shot at victory—one last chance to break Wethersfield's Thanksgiving Day winning streak, which stretches back to 1994, and at the same time end Newington's overall home losing streak, which dates to October 1996.

But on the first play of what the Indians hoped would be a 50-yard, 48-second drive to victory, the ball was dropped behind the line of scrimmage in an attempted handoff. Wethersfield recovered the fumble and began celebrating its fifth consecutive Thanksgiving win.

"I'm disappointed, no doubt about it," Newington coach Dick Vida told *The Herald* of New Britain, "but we came out and played."

The football players aren't the only people to whom Vida's statement could apply. The

marching band came out and played, too—and played on even when they were told they could go home after halftime because of the miserable weather conditions. A good number of band members—fifteen, at least—stayed for the duration of the game in a heroic display of school spirit.

Both drum majors, Myke Cocolla and Jaimie Kwassman, went home after the halftime show, so those who stayed were left to lead themselves. Members took turns conducting the group and choosing songs; at one point, senior Josh Rubin, who isn't even a regular member of marching band because of religious convictions which prevent him from attending Friday and Saturday games, was able to get the group started in nearly perfect time with a spontaneous cry of "School song! 3, 4!"

The band went through nearly its entire repertoire during the course of the third quarter, and the sound produced was of remarkably high quality and volume given the small number of players and the abnormal blend of instruments. In the fourth quarter, the marchers lined up along the front of the bleachers to get closer to the action, then headed down to the track fence to get even closer, and then finally trotted out onto the track and marched in formation up and down the sideline playing the school fight song—all the while dripping wet from the continually pouring rain.

The soaked cheerleaders worked in tandem with the "skeleton crew" band, putting forth maximum effort and displaying maximum spirit despite the downpour. A good number of fans—students and alumni alike—stuck around for the finish of the game as well, and some even stayed a few extra minutes to line up outside the locker room after the game and applaud the Newington players as they came off the field after the heartbreaking loss.

"This is what football is all about," 1978 graduate Al Carson, who came dressed in full "Indian" attire, said in an interview with *The Herald* of New Britain. "The rain does not stop anything."

Citing the "awesome" support given to her girls soccer team by a number of football players, Michelle Bowman said Wednesday that "I'll be there in the rain, in the wind, to support the team."

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Above: Newington's players—some wearing raincoats—gather on the field to talk things over after the 20-15 loss.

Pep rally stirs Newington's school spirit

Football team was sent into battle Wednesday by enthusiastic crowd

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"The rain is no problem. Newington loves their players," senior Tim Jorel told *The Herald*. As usual, Jorel and fellow senior Greg O'Donnell acted as Newington's "mascots," both marching around the sidelines shirtless and covered with blue-and-gold war paint.

It seemed that more Newington fans than usual were "bleeding blue and gold" on Thursday, perhaps in part because of the motivational boost provided by the student council-sponsored pep rally which took place "ninth period" Wednesday in the gymnasium.

Wednesday's rally was the fulfillment of a campaign promise made last year by Student Council President Brynna Johnson. President Johnson, who co-hosted the rally along with Senior Class President Tim Stevens, opened the festivities by welcoming the gymnasium-full of students to "a historic event" — Newington High's "first pep rally in eight years!"

A number of students, obviously revved up to cheer in their final half-hour at school before Thanksgiving break, responded with a pro-Brynna chant of "BJ! BJ! BJ!"

President Stevens spoke next, drawing a thunderous cheer from the crowd — as well as a pointed wave from Ryan McBride, the former president whom he ousted last June — when he asked for "a big round of applause for this year's football team, and the rest of fall sports."

After the marching band and the cheerleaders did their part to pump up the crowd, Stevens and Johnson introduced the team captains of Newington's six non-football fall sports, each of whom received a loud ovation.

"And now, the moment you've all been waiting for—" Johnson announced, her voice rising— "the NHS varsity football team!"

As the crowd began to erupt, the cheerleaders quickly

"Tomorrow,
when we play
Valley..."
—Carmine
Rinaldi

unfurled a huge banner reading "GO NHS FOOTBALL." The banner didn't last long; seniors Bob Struzenski and Carmine Rinaldi burst through it and slid across the gym floor, smiling all the way. They were followed by a teammate who cartwheeled halfway from center court to the three-point line, and behind him was the rest of the team, all of whom followed their leaders into a huge pigpile near

the corner of the basketball court. All the while, Newington's marching band played the school fight song, while much of the student body cheered wildly. The non-football fall athletes, all of whom were seated together, gave the 1-8 football squad a standing ovation, a show of support which was later commended by student council advisor Maureen Gossoo. For the exuberant football players, it was a real love-fest.

Senior captain and quarterback Travis Meyer was given the opportunity to speak, but stated that "Carmine is much funnier than I am, so I'm turning it over to Carmine Rinaldi!" Rinaldi proved that comic ability, delighting the crowd with a reference to the preppy enthusiasm of pep rallies before football games between "Bayside" and "Valley" on NBC's high-school sitcom *Saved by the Bell*. "Tomorrow, when we play Valley..." Rinaldi began, evoking a huge round of laughter and applause from the crowd, and a rim shot from the band.

"Tomorrow when we play Wethersfield," he continued more seriously, "they're a good team and all—I hope to see you guys all there." Rinaldi paused, then went on, "Actually, they're really bad, and, uh, I hate them."

Brian Putorak spoke next. "I'm really glad everyone showed up today. It's kinda fun," Putorak stated in his typical laid-back style. "I hope I see everybody tomorrow at the game, cheering for us. We're going to give it our best, play our hearts out."

When Nino DiBiase came to the microphone, sporting his newly shaved head, he was greeted with hollars of approval from the crowd. Meyer jumped in and quipped, "It's okay to bald! Now let him talk!" Rinaldi then got up to wave his hands around DiBiase's bald head.

Next, head coach Dick Vida thanked those responsible for organizing the pep rally, then said, "More importantly, I want to thank the players for their hard work and dedication."

"I think we're ready to rock and roll... against Wethersfield," Vida added. "We have our focus on bringing that trophy back to Newington where it

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Above: Carmine Rinaldi and Bob Struzenski slide across the gym floor after storming through the cheerleaders' "GO NHS FOOTBALL" sign.

More pep rally photos, pages 5-6

First pep rally in 8 years deemed a success

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belongs.”

The speeches were followed by a series of chants and cheers, including a version of the cheerleaders’ “N-H-S” cheer in which Meyer, Struzenski, and Rinaldi held up the “N,” “H,” and “S” signs.

The rally ended with a series of thanks, the last coming from President Stevens, who thanked “each and every one” of the students in attendance “for showing your support in such a rowdy manner.”

Although not *everyone* was actually rowdy—after all, the entire student body was *required* to attend the event, and some clearly would have preferred to just go home early—more than enough students showed their support to make the rally loud and successful. And although Coach Vida’s goal of bringing the Thanksgiving trophy back to Newington was not met this year, the pep rally—which took place as part of a daylong, schoolwide “Spirit Day” on which students were encouraged to wear gold and blue clothing—undoubtedly played a big role in injecting an extra dose of school spirit into fans and players alike, helping the Indians fight to the finish in Thursday’s tough game.

“I’m very excited, because this is what I wanted, and I’m glad that it happened,” said President Johnson, the student primarily responsible for bringing the pep rally tradition back to NHS after its eight-year hiatus. “I know it might not have been up to what some people thought it [should be], but I think it was amazing that it really happened, and I’m very, very excited about it.” Johnson added that she hopes a winter sports pep rally will be in the cards as well, and that the tradition of having pep rallies will continue in future years. “I think we were very successful,” she stated.

President Stevens, Johnson’s co-host for the event, agreed, saying that things went “much, much better than I expected.” He explained that hosting the rally “was one of those things [where] either we could drown out there, or we could do an excellent job with it, and I think we carried it off... I think, overall, a victory.”

“The pep rally was very nice. I guess it’s been a long time since there’s been a pep rally here,” said Athletic Director Gerald McGrath. “The students were very enthusiastic, very well-behaved... and it was nice to have our student athletes for the fall recognized.”

“I thought it was wonderful,” said NHS Principal Paul Hoey, who gave permission for the pep rally to go

“I haven’t seen this much school spirit in years here.”

—Mr. Hoey

“We have pep rallies now? What is this, *Grease*?”

—Kate Morran

forward when the event was in its early planning stages. “I thought the kids did a great job of planning and organizing the event. I haven’t seen this much school spirit in years here, and I think it’s a credit to the members of the student council who put this all together and got it to work.”

“I’m glad it went well, and it’s an incentive to do more,” Hoey added.

“It was very, very emotional, and fun,” said boys soccer goalie Jeff Brunetti. “It was a nice new event to have in this school, and I hope they continue them.”

Some of the strongest reaction to the rally came not from administrators or from current students, but from Class of 1998 graduates who were visiting NHS for the day because they were home on Thanksgiving break.

“I love pep rallies,” said last year’s senior class president, Matt Carbray. “I’m excited, exhilarated. What a great place to be, Newington High School.”

“We have pep rallies now?” asked Kate Morran. “What is this, *Grease*?”

“It’s *The Twilight Zone*,” said Ashley Meyer, reacting to the rarity of pep rallies in recent NHS history. “This isn’t Newington High School. This is— this is Bayside.”



Above: Gold and blue were the fashionable colors of the day Wednesday, “Spirit Day” at NHS.



Right: Students react to Carmine Rinaldi’s “Valley” joke.
Below: Fans yell along as the band plays “Hey!”



PHOTOS FROM THE PEP RALLY



Left: Jenn May shows her spirit, waving a genuine NHS pom-pom from the school store. Right: Members of the boys soccer team do their traditional "Eye of the Tiger" hand movements as the band plays the popular pep song.



Left: Travis Meyer helps out the cheerleaders by holding up the "N" for the "N-H-S" cheer. Bob Struzenski and Carmine Rinaldi assisted as well. Right: Football players signal "We're #1" as they gather together in a pigpile after storming onto the gym floor.



Above left: Soccer player Dennis Chow rises above the crowd to enthusiastically applaud the football team. Above right: Showing her "Indian" spirit, Student Council Vice President Kristin Vasil gives the "We're #1" signal after the pep rally, as fellow officer Rakhee Mishra looks on.

**More pep rally photos coming soon to the *NHS Life & Times* website:
http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/Brendan_Loy/**