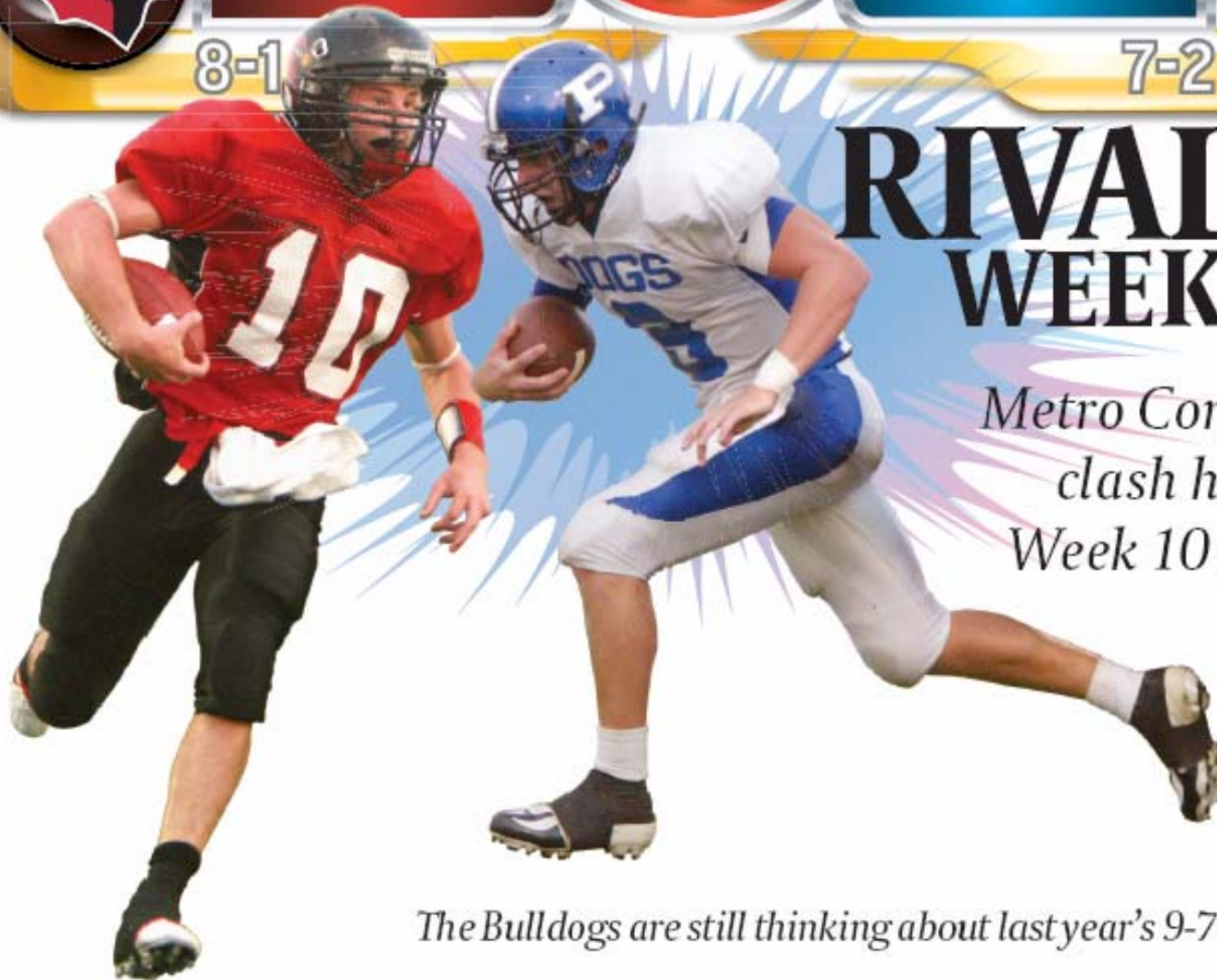


THURSDAY
Section C
October 25, 2007
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Blitz The Vindicator
Start the countdown

Canfield **VS** Poland

8-1 7-2



RIVALRY WEEKEND

*Metro Conference
clash heads
Week 10 games*

The Bulldogs are still thinking about last year's 9-7 loss.

“Obviously, for both teams, there’s a lot riding on the outcome. For the two teams in this rivalry, it’s the most important game of the season. Everything else is a bonus.”

Mike Pavlansky

Canfield High coach (and 1981 Poland graduate)

By JOE SCALZO

VINDICATOR SPORTS STAFF

YOUNGSTOWN — The newspaper clipping, with the headline “Canfield wins by a Whisker,” is taped to Mark Brungard’s wall.

Two photos, one of Canfield posing with the traveling trophy and the other showing the scoreboard (Canfield 9, Poland 7), has been taped to the Poland weight room wall since December.

“This summer, when some of the players were giving speeches to the team, we had to stop them from saying, ‘Beat Canfield,’” said Brungard, the Bulldogs’ coach. “We were like, ‘Hey, we have to beat Hubbard first.’”

Think Poland forgot about last year’s loss to Canfield?

“It’s been in the back of our minds all year,” said Brungard. “This game is pretty doggone important.”

Welcome to Rivalry Week. As games like Fitch-Boardman, Chaney-East, Struthers-Campbell, Howland-Niles, Springfield-South Range, Hubbard-Brookfield and Crestview-Columbiana dot Friday’s schedule, one game stands out above them all: Canfield at Poland.

Unlike the past two years, the game probably won’t decide the Metro Athletic Conference title. (Niles needs to upset Howland for that to happen.) But there’s still plenty riding on it. Community bragging rights. The traveling trophy. And, of course, the playoffs.

Like last year, both teams most likely need to win to get in.

“Obviously, for both teams, there’s a lot riding on the outcome,” said Canfield High coach (and 1981 Poland graduate) Mike Pavlansky. “For the two teams in this rivalry, it’s the most important game of the season.

“Everything else is a bonus.”

Poland lost last year’s game on Pat Sankovich’s last-second 31-yard field goal that squeaked over the crossbar in the middle of a windy downpour. The game cost the Bulldogs a playoff spot and gave

Brungard an 0-2 record in the rivalry.

Pavlansky is 4-2, having won three straight. He also went 2-0-1 as a player in the series and was a member of the Mahoning Valley Conference championship team as a sophomore. Although he has terrific memories of Poland, he’s changed his allegiances.

“I had some tremendous times in high school, but Canfield is a wonderful place to work with great people and great kids,” he said. “What makes it so special is the communities are mirrors of each other.”

And, like many years, the teams are mirror images of each other. Each team has a terrific defense. Poland is led by DE Jacob Hochendoner and LB Mark Turnbull, while Canfield’s defense, led by DE Jordan Graham, has drawn favorable comparisons to the Cardinals’ defense in 2005 when they advanced to the state final.

Both teams have a three-headed running attack on offense with Poland relying on running backs Trent Vallinger, Tyler Vallinger and Greg Sabol and Canfield going with QB Mark Carrocce and RBs Pat Fening and Dan Banna. Carrocce is the better running QB, while junior Gannon Hulea is the better passer.

"The team that avoids turnovers and plays better special teams generally ends up on top," said Pavlansky, whose team, incidentally, was slightly better in both those areas last year.

Poland's two losses have come against Division II teams: Howland (9-0) and Parma Normandy (8-1). Canfield's lone loss came against Howland. The Bulldogs are seventh in the Div. III, Region 11 standings. Canfield is sixth in Div. II, Region 7.

When asked his chances of making the playoffs if his team loses Friday, Brungard said, "Pretty bleak."

Boardman (6-3) is in a similar situation in Div. I, Region 1, although the Spartans will probably make it either way. Boardman, which has lost five straight to Fitch (1-8), is fifth in the computer ratings and would almost certainly make it if it wins.

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RIVALRY

Continued From C1

Howland has clinched a playoff spot and is eyeing both a league title (its first since 2003) and a home playoff game. South Range has clinched a home playoff game and has a shot at the top spot in Div. V, Region 17. Columbiana has clinched a playoff spot and can get a home game. Niles, East and Crestview are still alive, but barely.

In short, there's a lot riding on this weekend.

"The teams that have the toughest time in rivalry games are the ones

who want it so bad, they can't play the way they're supposed to play," Pavlansky said. "You have to enjoy the game, enjoy the competition and enjoy the bragging rights that come with it, but you can't get overwhelmed."

Brungard agreed.

"You can lose your focus if you have all this angst about, 'What if we lose?' " Brungard said. "My goodness, we're not solving world hunger here. You have to enjoy the moment, coach hard, play hard and keep loose and relaxed. If you play like the Indians did during the last three games of the ALCS, you're in trouble."

scalzo@indy.com