



Butler and Mountain Lakes meet in another unbeaten showdown; other happenings in Morris County

Published: Friday, October 21, 2011, 6:00 AM Updated: Friday, October 21, 2011, 11:00 AM



By **Sean Reilly/For The Star-Ledger**



Mitsu Yasukawa/The Star-Ledger

Whippany Park is playing much better this year. Two of the main reasons are quarterback JoeLoBracio (7) and running back Brett Protasiewicz, both pictured above.

It's time for Week 7 of the high school football season.

What does that mean around **Morris County**?

For **Mountain Lakes** and **Butler**, it's time for another meeting with both teams boasting unbeaten records.

For **Pequannock**, it's time to finally play a home game.

At **Delbarton**, it's time for Morris County's most lavish homecoming celebration and a chance to gain at least a piece of the Northwest Jersey Athletic Conference-National Division championship.

The weekend is also an important one for teams like **Randolph, Parsippany Hills, Morris Knolls, West Morris** and **Morristown** --- just to name some --- who are moving forward in the quest for berths (or in the case of West Morris, a first-round bye) in the upcoming NJSIAA playoffs.

For others, like **Whippany Park**, it's another opportunity to continue to improve as the regular season hits the home stretch.

Mountain Lakes (6-0) plays host to **Butler** (5-0) on Saturday at 1 p.m. at Wilkins Field in Mountain Lakes. This marks the third straight year that the teams were unbeaten heading into their regular-season matchup.

In 2009, both teams were 7-0 heading into their game at Mountain Lakes. The hometown Herd won that game, 14-7, and then later on defeated Butler, 48-7, in the North Jersey, Section 1, Group 1 final in what was the final high school game played at Giants Stadium.

Last year, when both teams were 6-0, Mountain Lakes had to mount a dramatic scoring drive in the final minutes to earn a 17-14 victory in Butler.

Mountain Lakes has won 37 straight games against Morris County teams since a loss to Boonton in 2005. There was a time or two early in that streak where I foolishly picked Mountain Lakes to lose. But over the past few years, my policy has evolved into one where I will pick the Herd to win each week against a county opponent until someone knocks them off. Butler is definitely capable of doing so this weekend, and a victory by the Bulldogs would hardly surprise me. They are a very good outfit. But until someone local defeats Mountain Lakes on the field, they are my pick to win this game, which will not only likely decide the NJAC-Independence Division title, but also greatly affect the North Jersey, Section 1, Group 1 picture as well.

Elsewhere...

Pequannock (4-2) finally gets to play a game at renovated Golden Panther Stadium on Friday night at 7 when **Whippany Park** (1-5) comes to town. The work at the field, which included the installation of FieldTurf, was supposed to be completed in the summer. But problems related to soil testing results caused delays that forced the team to play its first three scheduled home games on the road. Expect the home team to be fired up for this one.

As for Whippany Park, it may have only one win (21-0 over Morris Catholic two weeks ago) but its record is hardly indicative of how much the Wildcats have improved under first-year coach **Todd Callaghan**. Last year, with many of the same players, Whippany Park was 0-9, with eight of the games requiring a running clock in the second half because the team was behind 35 points or more -- sometimes a lot more.

This year, Whippany Park has played the same schedule, but has been in a running clock situation just once -- in the second game of the year against Butler. Its most recent outing was a 34-21 loss last Friday to Mountain Lakes. A year ago, the 'Cats lost to the Herd, 48-0.

What's one of the best things about Whippany Park playing competitively again? Two words -- **Brass Bonanza**. For the past few years, the very talented Whippany Park marching band has played the song whenever the team scored a touchdown. Problem is, that didn't happen too often. Brass Bonanza was the official fight song of the NHL's Hartford Whalers, but disappeared when the team moved to North Carolina in 1997. Thankfully it lives on in other places, like Whippany Park. The Marching Wildcats could also be the only band anywhere to have both "Video Killed the Radio Star" by the Buggles AND "Sweet Child of Mine"

by Guns N' Roses in its repertoire.

Delbarton (6-0), which is closing on the NJAC-National Division title and possibly the top seed (and possible first-round bye) in the Non-Public Group 3 playoffs, plays host to **Mendham** (0-6) on Saturday at 2. It's Homecoming day at Delbarton, which means anyone attending the game who loads up on their breakfast is foolish. Bring your appetite for this one, especially if you like to indulge in free six-foot subs and fried chicken. (In a testament to the importance of the Butler at Mountain Lakes game, I will be there rather than sample the various food spreads at Delbarton).

There are several other interesting games this weekend, most of them within the NJAC-National. **Morris Knolls** (3-3) plays Friday night at 7:30 at **West Morris** (5-1). Morris Knolls has lost two straight, but is still in contention for a spot in the North Jersey, Section 1, Group 4 bracket. But it needs to win either this week or next week at home vs. Mendham to have the required .500 record to stay in contention. West Morris is currently the leader in the Section 2, Group 3 standings, and is heading towards a first-round bye since it's looking like only six teams will qualify. The Wolfpack can't avoid slip-ups however, since a trip to Morristown is on deck next weekend in its eighth game.

A game with very similar implications will be taking place on Friday night at 7 at John Bauer Memorial Stadium in Randolph when **Parsippany Hills** (4-2) visits **Randolph** (3-3). Randolph, much like Morris Knolls, is floating near the eighth and final spot in Section 1, Group 4. Its eighth game is at home next Saturday night against Delbarton. Parsippany Hills is currently in fourth place in the Section 2, Group 3 standings, and has a mathematical shot at one of the expected byes. But Par Hills needs to take care of business on its own end, beginning with this game and ending with next Saturday's home date against Roxbury.

One other team right in the middle of the Section 2, Group 3 mix is **Morristown**. The Colonials are 3-3, with a game Friday night at Roxbury (2-4) and a home game next week against West Morris. Because Motown is part of that scuffling Section 2, Group 3 section, all they need is to go 4-4 to enter the tournament. This is where we recall last year, when the Colonials were 3-3 at this point, then defeated Roxbury and lost to West Morris to qualify as the fourth seed in a seven-team bracket. The rest is history -- the Colonials defeated Plainfield, West Morris and Nutley to emerge sectional champion. Can the same thing happen again? Why not? It's high school football!

Roxbury (2-4) is probably relegated to a spoiler role over the next couple of weeks. Even if the Gaels can defeat Morristown on Friday and win next week at Parsippany Hills in order to reach .500, they are currently in 13th place in the Section 1, Group 4 standings. Unless some really bizarre stuff happens in Bergen, Passaic and Hudson counties, that's too much ground to make up at this point in the season.