

Shore Conference Football Heats Up – Week Three Recap

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The divisional races started to heat up in Week Three of Shore Conference football, headlined by a big win by Toms River North in Class A South.

One week after suffering their first loss of the season, the Mariners came back to knock off defending division champion Southern on the road with a thrilling 17-14 win. It was the Rams' first divisional loss since 2010, and it injected Toms River North right back into the thick of things in one of the Shore's most talented and competitive divisions. A 45-yard field goal by standout kicker Chris Gulla with 2:40 left in the game was the difference against a Southern team that had not allowed a point in its first two games.



Senior Keyshawn Rice helped Neptune win a match-up of unbeaten teams with Long Branch to extend the Shore's longest current winning streak to 13 games. (Photo credit: Cliff Lavelle).

“In the first half the defense kept us in the game, and we knew if we stayed within one score we were in the game,” Toms River North coach Chip LaBarca Jr. said. “The kids came out fired up in the second half and really did the job. They showed a ton of character.”

The victory ensured Toms River North would stay right on the heels of unbeaten Brick Memorial and Lacey in the Class A South race with a game against Brick Memorial still looming on Oct. 12. Special teams were crucial in the win, as junior Joey Fields also had a 37-yard punt return for a touchdown.

Lacey and Brick Memorial continue to be impressive. Lacey was locked in a tie game with Toms River East before dominating the second half en route to a 42-14 win in which senior tailback Kyle Spatz ran for 204 yards and three touchdowns and senior Bill Belford had a 95-yard interception return for a touchdown one week after Spatz registered one against Toms River North.

Brick Memorial junior running back Mike Basile scored four touchdowns in a 34-7 win over Jackson Memorial to give him 10 touchdowns in three games and nine in the last two. He also had two sacks and a forced fumble on defense to continue his outstanding early season. Toms River South picked up its first win by routing Brick, 40-13, on Saturday night with back-up quarterback Tymere Berry leading the way with a 91-yard touchdown run and two touchdown passes and running back Otis Kearney running for a career-high three touchdowns.

Another Ocean County team that made a statement in a divisional game was Monsignor Donovan, which went on the road to Barnegat and knocked off the defending Class B South champions with a 24-21 victory. The Griffins jumped out to a 24-7 lead and held on, as Vincent Grasso ran for touchdowns of 47 and 52 yards and senior Grant Klimek ran for a 72-yard score and also booted what proved to be the game-winning 27-yard field goal with 9:27 left in the game.

Monsignor Donovan has now won two straight after a 40-point loss in its season opener and looks to be right in the hunt for its first division title since 1993 and its second in program history. Point Boro is also unbeaten in Class B South after its 20-14 victory over Central thanks to a pair of defensive touchdowns by Kevin Kelly and Kurt Van Benschoten. Point Boro will square off against Monsignor Donovan on Oct. 5, and the Griffins have two weeks to prepare because of their bye week.

Lakewood also got back on track in Class B South with a 49-14 win over Pinelands after suffering a loss to Monsignor Donovan a week earlier. After missing the game against the Griffins for precautionary issues related to dehydration, Piners senior quarterback Tyrice Beverette returned to the lineup to throw two touchdowns and run for another. Sophomore Chapelle Cook also ran for a career-high three touchdowns. Jackson Liberty also remained firmly at the front of the pack in Class B South when it improved to 3-0 for the first time in program history with a 28-12 win over Manchester.

In Monmouth County, it was Neptune that picked up an impressive divisional victory when it upended Long Branch, 27-14, to run its Shore Conference-best winning streak to 13 games. The victory ended a seven-game winning streak by the Green Wave and gave the Scarlet Fliers an early leg up in the race for the Class B North title.

Neptune had not played in two weeks after receiving a forfeit from Ocean last week, but there were no signs of rust as the Scarlet Fliers scored 20 points in the first 6:30 of the game. Senior Keyshawn Rice returned the opening kickoff 88 yards to set up a touchdown run by Sekou Harris, and then seniors Kyle Lewis and Myles Martin each returned interceptions for touchdowns for all the points Neptune would need. The win was the start of a big stretch for Neptune, which will now face unbeaten Matawan and Brick Memorial back-to-back.

Matawan kept pace with Neptune thanks to a 27-13 win over Ocean on Friday night in which it roared back from an early 13-0 deficit. Junior quarterback Kashaun Barnes continues to play well as he ran for one touchdown and threw another to senior John Alston, who ran for a 30-yard touchdown of his own. Also in B North, Freehold picked up its first win with a hard-fought, 17-14 victory against Wall. The Colonials led 10-0 before Wall scored twice in the third quarter to take the lead, but Freehold responded when quarterback Bradley Jones hit Rayshon Webber on a screen pass that he took 18 yards for the game-winning score with 3:48 remaining. Sophomore Josh Dixon then made his second interception of the game with 1:03 left to seal the win after having returned his first pick 64 yards for a touchdown.

In Class A North, Manalapan and Middletown South both picked up victories to set up a big showdown on Friday night at The Swamp in Middletown. Manalapan rolled 35-6 over Middletown North thanks to a career-high four touchdowns by junior wideout Saeed Blacknall, including a 99-yard kickoff return. Middletown South took care of Howell, 35-7, as senior Jake Ripnick went over 150 yards rushing and had a touchdown, and senior Eli Smith ran for a touchdown and had a 55-yard interception return for a score.

The third contender in Class A North appears to be Colts Neck, which is 3-0 after beating Marlboro 34-6 on Saturday behind senior quarterback Mike Campbell, who threw two touchdown passes and ran for two more in the win.

In Class A Central, Manasquan got into the win column with a 42-17 win over Raritan at home thanks to a stifling defense and a strong running game. Junior Joe Fittin ran for a 3-yard touchdown and had a 70-yard interception return for a score, and junior Joe Murphy ran for three touchdowns to help the Warriors get back on track. Top-ranked Red Bank Catholic rolled to its 17th straight win over Shore Conference competition with a 45-14 victory over St. John Vianney in which six different players scored touchdowns.

Rumson-Fair Haven continued its dominance over Holmdel by winning a match-up of unbeatens, 27-6, over the Hornets thanks to three touchdown passes by senior quarterback Danny Roberto for the second straight week.

There was no divisional action in Class B Central, as all the teams were playing crossover games against their counterparts in the Greater Middlesex Conference. The Shore teams went a combined 3-2, as Keyport routed Cardinal McCarrick 48-6, Shore Regional blanked Metuchen 45-0 and Point Beach beat Spotswood 44-16. Point Beach has scored 40-plus points in all three of its games and will play its first Shore Conference opponent this week when it travels to winless Mater Dei Prep. Keansburg suffered the toughest loss with a 33-31 setback to South River in a match-up of unbeatens despite a combined five touchdowns between rushing and passing by senior quarterback Ryan Kurtz.