

## Middletown South rises back into high school football top 3

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Middletown South is back in the same spot in the Asbury Park Press Top 10 as it was at the start of the season.

The Eagles, who began the season ranked No. 3, but dropped to No. 9 after a 35-28 loss to Manalapan on Sept. 20, have moved back to No. 3 with five consecutive wins.

The key wins in Middletown South's move back up the poll were a 38-14 win at then-No. 5 Howell on Oct. 2 and a 13-3 win over then-No. 3 Brick Memorial on Oct. 15. The Howell win moved the Eagles to the No. 5 slot and the Brick Memorial victory moved them to No. 4.

Middletown South's rise back into the top three was completed this weekend when it defeated Brick, 41-6, and Manalapan, which was ranked No. 3 last week, was defeated, 21-7, by Brick Memorial.

Since there is a grouping among Middletown South, Brick Memorial and Manalapan, the teams are ranked by record and latest results, with Manalapan's win over Middletown South being the least recent head-to-head result between the teams.

Middletown South's ranking will be immediately put to a test this week as it plays at No. 2 Lacey on Saturday.

The only other movement in the poll this week was Manasquan, which has won five consecutive games since a 24-18 loss at Raritan on Sept. 18, moving back into the poll at No. 10.

It is the third time Manasquan has been ranked No. 10 this season. The Warriors dropped out after the Raritan loss, only to move back in on Oct. 4. They then dropped out again after a 7-6 win at Shore on Oct. 8.

There could be some movement in the rankings next week as Lacey hosts Middletown South, No. 4 Brick Memorial is at No. 8 Howell, and No. 5 Manalapan visits No. 9 Toms River North. Also, No. 7 Red Bank Catholic has a potentially tricky game at Toms River East, which has lost three games to teams with a combined record of 23-1.

**1. MATAWAN 7-0.** Last week: No. 1. The Huskies, who defeated Holmdel, 49-14, in their last game on Oct. 22, did not play. They appear to have already clinched the No. 1 seed in the NJSIAA Central Group II playoffs. In quarterback Jared Allison and running backs McArthur Underwood, Keith Beaty and Cassius Williams, Matawan had three of the Shore's top 30 rushers entering this weekend. Next game: Saturday vs. New Brunswick (0-8).

**2. LACEY 8-0.** Last week: No. 2. Jarrod Molzon returned from a hamstring injury and caught two TD passes from Craig Cicardo, scored on a 55-yard run and kicked a 38-yard field goal as the Lions recorded an impressive 38-0 win against last week's No. 8 team, Neptune. Cicardo also scored on a 1-yard run. Lacey appears to have clinched the No. 1 seed in the South Group III playoffs. Next is a game that could give Lacey a legitimate claim to be ranked No. 1 in the Shore. It is against a team that has shut the Lions out the last two seasons. Next game: Saturday vs. No. 3 Middletown South (6-1).

**3. MIDDLETOWN SOUTH 6-1.** Last week: No. 4. Senior wide receiver Taylor Rogers hauled in three TD passes from quarterback Howie Brey and senior running back Andrew Suarez ran for two TDs and scored another on a punt return as the Eagles rolled to a 41-6 win over Brick. Middletown South will attempt to clinch the No. 1 seed in the Central Group III playoffs this week, but the assignment will be tough. Even with a loss, the Eagles still have a good chance at the top seed in the section. Next game: Saturday at No. 2 Lacey (8-0).

**4. BRICK MEMORIAL 7-1.**Last week: No. 5. The Mustangs defense continued its season-long excellence as it held Manalapan's standout tailback Josh Firkser to a 105 yards on 29 carries in a 21-7 win that most likely earned Brick Memorial a top-two seed in the Central Group IV playoffs. Brick Memorial scored all its points in the second quarter as Anthony Miller and Jihaad Howard scored on 1-yard runs and quarterback Mike DiGuilmi threw a 37-yard TD pass to Jordan Loiodice. The defense will get tested by the Shore's best passing attack this week. Next game: Friday at No. 8 Howell (4-3).

**5. MANALAPAN 5-2.**Last week: No. 3. Quarterback Mike Bimonte's TD on a 1-yard sneak gave the Braves an early lead, but Brick Memorial rallied with three second-quarter TDs and recorded a 21-7 win. The Braves will be trying to earn a first-round home game in the Central Group IV playoffs with a win this week. The opponent will not be easy and always has one of the Shore's most rugged defenses. Next game: Friday at No. 9 Toms River North (5-2).

**6. FREEHOLD 5-2.**Last week: No. 6. Senior defensive end Louis Toscani and senior defensive back Jesse Hunt combined for a sack of Colts Neck quarterback Dylan Cottrell on a 2-point conversion attempt in overtime to preserve the Colonials' 14-13 win. Freehold clinched the Class B North public title and a share of the division's overall title, along with non-public champion Red Bank Catholic, with the victory. A 25-yard Sterry Codrington to Derrick Bender TD pass and Mike Hembling's extra point gave Freehold a 14-7 lead. It was Freehold's third overtime win this season, all of them coming in October. A win this week could give the Colonials a top-two seed in the Central Group III playoffs. Next game: Saturday vs. Monsignor Donovan (2-5).

**7. RED BANK CATHOLIC 6-1.**Last week: No. 7. Senior running back Andrew Casten ran for 130 yards and three TDs and also scored on a 79-yard pass from quarterback Ryan Spahr as the Caseys clinched a tie for first place overall in Class B North with a 33-0 win over Ocean. Joe Coscarelli made 14 tackles, including three for a loss, and had two sacks to lead a defense that recorded its first shutout of the season. Spahr, who has been hot over the last two games, was 8-for-10 for 202 yards and threw a 65-yard TD pass to senior tight end Jack Tabb. Next game: Saturday vs. Toms River East (4-3).

**8. HOWELL 4-3.**Last week: No. 9. The Rebels, who were trounced, 54-27, by Manalapan in their last game on Oct. 22 and have lost two straight, did not play. It appears Howell needs to win this week to qualify for the playoffs. Quarterback Ryan Davies, who leads the Shore with 2,053 yards passing and 29 TD passes, and wide receiver Mike Clark, the conference leader with 799 yards receiving and 14 TD catches, will take on one of the Shore's best defenses. Next game: Friday vs. No. 4 Brick Memorial (7-1).

**9. TOMS RIVER NORTH 5-2.**Last week: No. 10. The Mariners, who suffered a tough 14-10 defeat at Brick Memorial on Oct. 22 in a result that cost it the Class A South championship, will try to give themselves a chance at a home game in the South Group IV playoffs this week. The opponent has one of the Shore's best running backs. Quarterback Demetri Davis is averaging 7.34 yards per rushing attempt and has run for 14 TDs. Next game: Friday vs. No. 5 Manalapan (5-2).

**10. MANASQUAN 6-1.**Last week: Not ranked. Senior tailback Tariq Turner rumbled for 178 yards and two TDs on 38 carries as the Warriors put themselves in position to earn a home game in the first round of the Central Group II playoffs with a 20-7 win over Holmdel. The defense came up with five turnovers and held Holmdel to 212 yards. Next is a game against a team that will be playing with enthusiasm because it just broke a 33-game losing streak. A win could give Manasquan the No. 3 seed its section. Next game: Saturday vs. Lakewood (1-6).

Dropped out: Neptune.

Steven Falk: [sfalk@njpressmedia.com](mailto:sfalk@njpressmedia.com)  
Robert Ziegler: [rziegler@njpressmedia.com](mailto:rziegler@njpressmedia.com)