

Middletown South gave playoff hopes a boost

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Middletown South was in the unusual position Saturday night of perhaps seeing its chances of qualifying for the NJSIAA playoffs placed in jeopardy if it did not beat Howell.

Not only did the Eagles have this game at Howell, but they also have upcoming games with Brick Memorial, ranked No. 4 in the Asbury Park Press Top 10, and No. 2 Lacey. The prospect of being 4-4 at the cutoff date and out of the playoffs for the first time since 1996 was very real.

Making matters more difficult for Middletown South was it was playing Howell and its prolific passing offense without starting quarterback Scott Meeker and starting middle linebacker Matt Saulnier, who are both injured. Meeker is sidelined 2-3 weeks with a fractured left fibula. Saulnier will miss the rest of the season with a dislocated knee.

"We were like a cornered rat," Middletown South coach Steve Antonucci said.

The Eagles gave their playoff hopes a huge boost with a resounding 38-14 win over then-No. 5 Howell.

"This wasn't a must-win, but this is a huge win," Antonucci said. "Our kids came (Saturday night) and they were emotional."

Toms River North enters the rankings for the first time this season. The Mariners have won three consecutive games, outscoring their opponents a combined 109-16, since a 48-17 loss at Howell in Week 1.

Manasquan, which is in sole possession of first place in Class C Central, is back in the Top 10 for the first time since after Week 1, when it beat Point Boro. The Warriors have posted back-to-back victories since a last-minute loss to Raritan in Week 2.

Those teams come in at the expense of a pair of teams from Class B North, which has started to cannibalize itself.

Neptune, which was ranked No. 6, lost to unranked Freehold this week, 24-21, in overtime. Both teams are 2-2. Also this week in Class B North, No. 3 Red Bank Catholic defeated then-No. 9 Long Branch, 45-6, dropping the Green Wave to 2-2.

Barnegat and Shore, while both still unranked, remain unbeaten and both get an opportunity to greatly enhance their resumes next week when Barnegat hosts Lacey and Shore hosts Manasquan.

1. MATAWAN 4-0. Last week: No. 1. Jared Allison ran for three touchdowns, threw for another and caught one receiving from freshman quarterback Kashaun Barnes as the Huskies survived a first-half scare from Rumson-Fair Haven and recorded a 48-21 win. Allison accounted for 243 yards of total offense and McArthur Underwood ran for 118 yards and two TDs, including a 72-yarder. An interesting game against a team with similar attributes is up next. Next game: Saturday at Long Branch (2-2).

2. LACEY 4-0. Last week: No. 2. Craig Cicardo ran for two TDs and threw for two more, and Jarrod Molzon ran for one and was the recipient of one of Cicardo's TD passes as the Lions rolled to a 41-6 win over Manchester. Lacey has outscored its first four opponents, 148-13, but its defense will face an interesting test this week against one of the Shore's best quarterbacks and passing attacks. Next game: Friday at Barnegat (3-0).

3. RED BANK CATHOLIC 3-0. Last week: No. 3. Andrew Casten ran for 196 yards and four TDs and the defense held Long Branch's game-breaking quarterback Miles Shuler to just 17 yards rushing on 18 carries as the Caseys recorded a resounding 45-6 win to remain in sole possession of first place in Class B North. The defense, led by tackle Joe Coscarelli, held the Green Wave to three first downs and 93 yards of total offense. Another stern test against a team with athletic ability and size is up next. Next game: Saturday at Freehold (2-2).

4. BRICK MEMORIAL 4-0. Last week: No. 4. Free safety Ray Contrucci had three interceptions and senior linebacker Matt Hoffman returned an INT 41 yards for a TD as the Mustangs defeated Southern, 28-0. Mike DiGuilmi threw a TD pass to Jordan Liodice and Vincenzo Diodato and Jihaad Howard added TD runs for Brick Memorial, which has outscored its first four opponents, 110-13. A four-game stretch against ranked teams begins in two weeks. Next game: Friday at Toms River South (0-3).

5. MANALAPAN 3-1. Last week: No. 7. Josh Firkser's 5-yard TD run in the fourth quarter gave the Braves a hard-fought 20-14 win over Freehold Township. Firkser ran for 196 yards and also had a 3-yard TD run in the first quarter, and Mike Bimonte threw a 32-yard TD pass to Mike Bravaco. Next game: Oct. 15 vs. Old Bridge (2-1).

6. MIDDLETOWN SOUTH 3-1. Last week: No. 8. Andrew Suarez ran for 137 yards with a 40-yard TD run and returned a kickoff 86 yards for a TD, and backup quarterback Howie Brey threw for 132 yards with a 61-yard TD pass to Taylor Rogers and ran for a score as the Eagles upended previously unbeaten and last week's No. 5 team Howell, 38-14. The defense sacked Rebels' quarterback Ryan Davies eight times for a total loss of 76 yards. Next game: Saturday at Marlboro (1-2).

7. HOWELL 3-1. Last week: No. 5. Ryan Davies' 349 yards passing were not enough for the Rebels as they were defeated, 38-14, by an emotional Middletown South team. Davies did throw a 22-yard TD pass to Ryan Handy, who made a sensational diving catch in the right corner of the end zone. Next game: Friday vs. Middletown North (1-3).

8. MONMOUTH 3-0. Last week: No. 10. The Falcons were idle this week after scoring 17 unanswered points in the fourth quarter to defeat Colts Neck, 17-14, on Sept. 25. Brandan Ford kicked a game-winning, 21-yard field goal to cap a nine-play, 68-yard drive with 26.7 seconds remaining. Ford also caught five passes for 100 yards and the game-tying TD. After Rumson-Fair Haven, Monmouth plays three consecutive games against divisional opponents that all are or were ranked at one point this season. Next game: Saturday vs. Rumson-Fair Haven (2-2).

9. TOMS RIVER NORTH 3-1. Last week: Not ranked. Quarterback Demetri Davis rushed for 149 yards and three TDs on 22 carries to lead the Mariners to a 42-10 victory over Toms River South in the latest installment of the "Civil War." It was Toms River North's ninth consecutive victory in the series. Davis scored on runs of 8 and 6 yards in the second quarter as the Mariners built a 14-0 lead and added a 50-yard TD in the fourth quarter. Anthony Carrington and Scott Buxbaum each returned interceptions for TDs. Next game: Saturday at Colts Neck (1-3).

10. MANASQUAN 3-1. Last week: Not ranked. Tariq Turner carried 28 times for 297 yards and five TDs as the Warriors routed an overmatched Metuchen team, 35-13. Turner scored on runs of 57, 53, 8, 5 and 31 yards to lead a rushing attack that generated 418 yards on 49 attempts. Manasquan has won two consecutive games since losing to Raritan on a TD with 26 seconds left in Week 2. The Warriors visit Shore, which is 3-0 for the first time since 2005, before their bye week. Next game: Friday at Shore (3-0).

Dropped out: Neptune, Long Branch.