

Thanksgiving games lead to little movement in high school football Top 10

Asbury Park Press - By ROBERT ZIEGLER and STEVEN FALK • STAFF WRITERS • November 28, 2010

This season's Thanksgiving games gave us various types of games, from expected routs to upsets, like Red Bank's victory over Long Branch.

It also produced spectacular individual performances. Manalapan running back Josh Firkser crossed 2,000 yards for the season, Red Bank Catholic running back Andrew Casten scored five touchdowns and intercepted two passes and Matawan quarterback Jared Allison accounted for four total touchdowns.

What this week's games didn't lead to was much movement in the Asbury Park Press Top 10. The only change this week saw rivals Shore and Rumson-Fair Haven trade spots at the bottom of the rankings.

Shore, which climbed a spot to No. 9, handled Point Beach to secure the Class B Central title outright. Rumson, meanwhile, was overmatched by rival Red Bank Catholic, which has dominated the series between the teams in recent seasons.

There figures to be more movement in the final rankings with seven teams competing in NJSIAA sectional finals Saturday.

Lacey and Matawan, the top two teams in the rankings, can complete undefeated seasons and intensify the debate over which should be ranked No. 1.

Matawan plays Rumson in one of two all-Shore Conference sectional finals. The winner of the other, which pits Middletown South against Freehold, would have the inside track on a Top 3 spot if Brick Memorial falls to Sayreville.

1. LACEY 11-0. Last week: No. 1. The Lions, who defeated Winslow Township, 34-14, in an NJSIAA South Group III semifinal on Nov. 20, did not play and began preparations for the South Group III championship game. The opponent is 3-1 all-time against Lacey in playoff play. Next game: Saturday vs. Delsea (10-1) in the NJSIAA South Group III championship game.

2. MATAWAN 11-0. Last week: No. 2. Senior quarterback Jared Allison ran for two TDs, threw for one and caught another to lead the Huskies to a 42-7 victory over St. John Vianney. Allison had 210 all-purpose yards in the win, which clinched the outright Shore Conference Class A Central championship for Matawan. It is Matawan's second straight outright divisional championship. With the score tied 7-7, Allison led a 13-play, 80-yard drive and scored on a 9-yard run to give Matawan the lead, and it never looked back. Keith Beaty ran for 84 yards and two TDs on three carries. Next game: Saturday vs. No. 10 Rumson-Fair Haven (8-3) at Kean University in the NJSIAA Central II championship game.

3. MIDDLETOWN SOUTH 9-2. Last week: No. 3. Scott Meeker threw a 69-yard TD pass to Taylor Rogers on the first play of the game, scored on a 1-yard run later in the first quarter to put the Eagles ahead for good and Connor Ryan kicked field goals of 28 and 24 yards as Middletown South made it 10 straight wins over Middletown North with a 20-7 win. An opponent that has defeated Middletown South three out of the last four meetings awaits as the Eagles try to win their first sectional championship since 2006. Next game: Saturday vs. No. 5 Freehold (9-2) at Rutgers University in the NJSIAA Central Group III championship game.

4. BRICK MEMORIAL 9-2. Last week: No. 4. The Mustangs, who advanced to the NJSIAA Central Group IV championship game for the third straight year with a 37-0 wipeout of North Brunswick on Nov. 19 in an NJSIAA Central IV semifinal, did not play and were able to begin preparations for the Central IV championship game. The opponent is one Brick Memorial defeated two years ago in the sectional final and one the Mustangs have developed a good rivalry with. Next game: Saturday vs. Sayreville (10-1) at Rutgers University in the NJSIAA Central Group IV championship game.

5. FREEHOLD 9-2. Last week: No. 5. Quarterback Sterry Codrington ran for two touchdowns and went over the 1,000-yard rushing mark for the season and Derrick Bender and Jazzmar Clax each added TD runs as the Colonials defeated Freehold Township, 27-7, in the first meeting between the two schools in 11 seasons. It was Freehold's ninth straight win after an 0-2 start. The Colonials will try for their second sectional championship in three years this week. The opponent is the same one they defeated in the sectional final in 2008. Next game: Saturday vs. No. 3 Middletown South (9-2) at Rutgers University in the NJSIAA Central Group III championship game.

6. MANALAPAN 8-3. Last week: No. 6. Thanksgiving Day was a big one for Josh Firkser as he ran for 214 yards and four TDs on just 12 carries and also caught a 44-yard TD pass from his younger brother, Anthony, in the Braves' 47-20 win over Marlboro. The performance enabled Firkser to go over 2,000 yards for the season. He finished the season with 2,053 yards, 27 TDs rushing and 32 TDs total. The win enabled Manalapan to clinch Class A North championship outright. It was the Braves' first outright divisional title since 1996 and their 16th straight win over Marlboro. Next game: Season completed.

7. RED BANK CATHOLIC 8-2. Last week: No. 7. Andrew Casten made his final scholastic game a memorable one as he ran for four TDs, scored another on an interception return and had two INTs in total as he led Red Bank Catholic to a 40-14 win over NJSIAA Central II finalist Rumson-Fair Haven. Casten finished the season with 1,450 yards, 25 TDs rushing and 28 TDs total. Chris Donald also added a TD on a 35-yard interception return in which he gathered in a tipped pass before it hurt the turf with 35 seconds left in the first half. It was Red Bank Catholic's eighth straight win over Rumson. Next game: Season completed.

8. MANASQUAN 9-2. Last week: No. 8. Defensive tackle Jack Cuttrell made a game-changing play as he returned a fumble 51 yards for a TD in the third quarter to put the Warriors ahead for good and Manasquan went on to record a 21-16 win over Wall to clinch outright possession of the Class C Central championship. It was Manasquan's third straight divisional title and second straight outright. Senior tailback Tariq Turner ran for 126 yards and a TD and threw a 21-yard TD pass to Bryan Abadrabo in which Abadrabo outfought a Wall defender. Turner also had a 41-yard reception. He finished the season with 1,750 yards and 20 TDs rushing and 21 TDs total. Next game: Season completed.

9. SHORE 10-1. Last week: No. 10. Evan Ruane threw a 24-yard TD pass to Shane Carroll, scored on a 1-yard run and threw a 2-point conversion pass to Pat Maggio as the Blue Devils defeated Point Pleasant Beach, 34-6, and clinched outright possession of the Class B Central championship. It was Shore's first outright divisional title since 1996. The Blue Devils will try to conclude their magical season by winning their first sectional championship since 1997. The opponent has an explosive running back. Next game: Saturday vs. Dunellen (10-1) at Rutgers University in the NJSIAA Central Group I championship game.

10. RUMSON-FAIR HAVEN 8-3. Last week: No. 9. Mike Villapiano threw TD passes of 7 yards to Nico Giamio and 14 yards to Jack Wise, but it was not enough to overcome four interceptions thrown by Rumson quarterbacks and five Andrew Casten TDs as Red Bank Catholic defeated the Bulldogs, 40-14, and snapped Rumson's six-game winning streak. The Bulldogs will be a heavy underdog as they try to win their first sectional championship this week. The opponent is the defending sectional champion and one that already beat Rumson, 48-21, earlier this season. However, the Bulldogs trailed just 28-21 at halftime. Next game: Saturday vs. No. 2 Matawan (11-0) at Rutgers University in the NJSIAA Central Group II championship game.