

Showdown on Thanksgiving Day

-Joel Katz

Two Teams: One Title. On Thanksgiving Day, the Marblehead Magicians face off against the Big Blue of Swampscott with everything on the line. Both teams have undefeated 4-0 records in the conference, and whoever wins this game heads to the playoffs for more football. The Magicians, 7-2 overall, are coming off a huge 13-12 win over NEC powerhouse Beverly. The Big Blue come into the game with only one loss. Both teams have been reeling off wins as of late, but only one can continue their streak on Piper Field Thursday morning.

To understand the magnitude of this game, one must look at its result over the course of the last three years. Each meeting has come down to the final plays, and has ended in triumph for the winner and heartbreak for the loser. In 2008, with Marblehead trying to play spoiler to Swampscott's Super Bowl run, Swampscott won a close 21-13 game with a last-second interception in the endzone. A year later, Marblehead defeated the Big Blue on a heroic, late fourth-quarter drive with a trip to the playoffs on the line. Marblehead went on to the Super Bowl for the first time in team history. Last year, the game again came down to another spectacular fourth-quarter drive, with Marblehead scoring a touchdown on a desperation pass with no time remaining. Down by one point, Marblehead went for the 2-point conversion and the win, but the try was stopped by the Swampscott defense.

This year's matchup is shaping up to be another amazing showdown. Both teams have shown they can move the ball on offense. For Swampscott, senior quarterback Mike Walsh leads the way in their dynamic, pass-heavy offense. The Big Blue have had little trouble scoring points this year, proving so in a 47-14 conference win over Danvers and a 33-15 win over the formidable Fishermen of Gloucester. The Marblehead team has struggled at times this season, but has come on strong in the latter half of the season. After suffering a devastating 28-26 loss to Newburyport, in which the Magicians surrendered a 26-7 lead with two minutes remaining in the game, the team fell to a 3-2 record heading into conference play.

However, instead of hanging their heads, the Magicians rallied and rolled into Gloucester with their swagger renewed. Marblehead beat Gloucester 22-6, and thus began their conference winning streak. The Magicians defense hung tough and allowed totals of only 6, 7, 6, and 12 points in victories over Gloucester, Salem, Danvers, and Beverly. Marblehead's offense, anchored by standout senior runningback Will Quigley, also proved its ability to sustain drives and wear out opposing defenses. Having played with pride and urgency in the last four games, the Magicians silenced the incessant hype surrounding conference foes Swampscott and Beverly, and now find themselves with only one thing standing between them the playoffs.

This is what Thanksgiving is all about. It's time for all the families, friends, classmates, teachers, co-workers, townies, and reporters to gather and watch a game unlike any other. Two teams will collide, and only one can prevail and achieve the glory that really lasts a lifetime in Marblehead. Yes, football is a game, and there are bigger problems in the world, but for a couple hours on Thanksgiving morning, between the cheers, shouts, and roars; the cowbells, thundersticks, and vuvuzelas (those horns you see all the fans blowing into in World Cup matches); on the hallowed ground of Piper Field, nothing else matters. In the moments before the game, the Magicians players will look upon all the adversity they have faced in their lives leading up to this game. This adversity will become fire that keeps the players going the entire game, and it burns stronger late in the fourth quarter, even when all hope seems lost. There is nothing left for either side to leave on the table. For the 21 seniors of Marblehead, this is the biggest game of their lives—the last chance to defeat their sworn rivals, and maybe the last time they will ever put on football pads in their lives. People will watch from the bleachers, from the fence, from the hill, from the parking lot, and potentially from the tops of cars to see these two teams lay it all on the line one more time. This is it. It is time for the game of the year.

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