

Nottingham football visits Hamilton in the Backyard Brawl

By Ken Weingartner

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Oct. 9: The players in Saturday's meeting between the Hamilton and Nottingham football teams will not need to look for extra motivation when preparing for the contest. The rivalry provides enough incentives.

"It's the Backyard Brawl," Nottingham coach Jon Adams said. "We're very close in proximity; the kids grew up playing (youth sports) with each other and know each other by first names. Families know each other. It's become a real intense and real fun rivalry.

"This is our big rival and we're going to let it all hang out. It's Homecoming for them and we're going to give them the best battle possible."

Hamilton coach Tom Hoglen agreed about the intensity.

"Both teams are going to play with a lot of emotion," he said. "The team that can get that emotion under control the earliest will probably be in the best shape."

Both teams are coming off victories. Hamilton (2-1) defeated West Windsor-Plainsboro South, 17-10, and is only an overtime loss, 35-28, against Lawrence from being undefeated.

Nottingham (1-3) won 34-0 over Hightstown last week. The Northstars suffered a five-point setback against unbeaten Princeton in their opener and a one-point loss, 41-40, to Lawrence in the second week of the campaign.

"The turnover bug has hurt us in the early part of the season so far, especially in our first game," Adams said. "But our attitude has been very positive. We have real good kids and I'm very proud of them, especially our young guys. We have about five starters on offense that are sophomores; real young guys that are starting to come into their own and play well. We're pretty pleased with our progress.

"We have a lot good leadership on the team, so I see a lot of positives in that regard."

Nottingham comes into the game averaging 25.5 points per contest while Hamilton has been stingy in its wins, allowing only a touchdown against WW-P South and a kickoff return TD in a 33-8 victory over Trenton.

Last year, Nottingham won the Brawl, 33-28.

"We gave up a lot of yards against them last year," Hoglen said. "If we can't stop the run, we're going to be in trouble. They have guys that make them well balanced. They're able to run the ball and throw the ball, so that's going to be a difficult task.

"The key to any game that's going to be tight is turnovers. We've talked to our team about not turning the ball over and we've been lucky and not done a whole lot of that so far this year."

Said Adams, "The keys for us are going to be to handle their aggressive style of play on defense and to hold on to the football; not turn it over and give them a short field because when we've turned it over in the past they've always hurt us. We need to eliminate their opportunities to make big plays against us. They bring a lot of pressure, so we don't want to be in second- and third-and-long situations. We want to try to have success on first down.

"They feed off the big play so we have to eliminate that and play well on defense and special teams."

If the recent past is any indication, fans can expect a thriller. Hamilton won 31-28 in 2007 and 17-7 in 2006. Nottingham won 41-39 in 2005.

"It's going to be exciting," Hoglen said. "After a tough loss to Lawrence, the kids bounced back and played a great game last week. We've got our hands full again this week. We're going to need another great effort out of our whole team. It's a big rivalry game. Both teams are excited to be there."