

## Short Picks

The "Great Eight" have arrived at the doorstep of Hershey Park Stadium. For high school players, coaches and their fans this must be a dream come true. What an accomplishment it is for a team to get through fifteen rugged weeks of football to make the trip to Hershey and enjoy the sights, sounds and especially the smell of "Chocolate Town" as you play for a state championship.

Last week's games were very humbling for this prognosticator as I correctly picked 3 of the 4 games on Friday night, but I got shutout on Saturday by going 0-4. Wow! However, I did check the picks submitted to PFN by other courageous gentlemen from around the state. It looked like we were all in the same boat! No real standouts in that crowd. This week I'm going for a perfect four.

Couple of things before I make my selections. I wish all of our PFN readers a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. The same goes to all the contributors and our beloved editors at PFN. Also, a reminder to watch the PIAA Championships TV show on Thursday at 7-9 on PFN. You will get insights to all four games from a very knowledgeable panel of sports journalists including PFN's guru Tom Elling.

Looking at the final eight teams, I thought it interesting to look back at the very beginning of the season to see which of the eight teams were given a better than 50-50 chance of getting to Hershey. Six of the teams were deemed as having a decent chance of making the trip to the finals. Central Dauphin and Tyrone were mentioned but the road would be filled with potholes for both the Golden Eagles and the Rams. Thus I would consider the Golden Eagles and the Rams somewhat of the "Cinderella Teams" for the tournament. Every tourney has a Cinderella team. Also, you will notice District 3 has three teams in the finals. Nice going! It takes a lot of talent, little or no injuries, and a little bit of luck to make it to the championship finals. Congratulations to all.

Tyrone was one of my featured picks in the first week of the season. I knew Tyrone was good, and I thought they would make a deep run into the states. But I thought the run would end last week against the speed of the Quips of Aliquippa. Tyrone proved me wrong. This week the Golden Eagles have the daunting task of controlling the explosive offense of the Lancaster Catholic Crusaders. The Crusader offense purrs on all cylinders with QB Andrew Dzurik and running backs Roman Clay and Brandon Hollister. Tyrone's offense is anchored by Akron University bound quarterback Steve Franco. Looking back to week one, I picked the Golden Eagles to win the opener and now I'm picking them to win the closer...**Tyrone.**

Southern Columbia's Tigers may hold the record for the most trips to the state finals (see PFN Resource Guide). The Tigers have six state championship trophies in the case. The Tigers face the Clariton Bears who also are no strangers to the state finals. This is the fourth straight trip for the Bears. The offensive stats of the Bears and the Tigers are equal in production with both teams scoring an average of 42 points per game. The difference between the two is on the defensive side of the ball where the Bears yield just over 4 points per game while So. Columbia gives up 15 points per game. In the last four playoff games Clairton allowed just 21 points. I really like great defensive teams and I really like...**'Da Bears.**

After the first three weeks of the season, one had to wonder if the North Penn Knights had any chance of making it to Hershey. The Knights absorbed two losses to LaSalle College in week one and St. Joe's Prep in week three as the Knights were outscored a combined 95-60. Knights head coach Dick Beck regrouped his squad then went on to win 12 straight including last week's win over LaSalle College. North Penn hopes to continue the win streak when they meet the Rams of Central Dauphin. The Rams are a bit of a surprise in their run of late especially the wins over Wilson two weeks ago and North Allegheny last week. In the last four playoff games Central Dauphin's defense kept the game close while the offense scored just enough points to squeak out victories. The Rams' offense is led by QB Brandon LaVia and the multi-talented Zayd Issah. North Penn should be able to handle Brandon and Zayd as the Knights garner their second state championship...**North Penn.**

Archbishop Wood scored 70 points in last week's semi-final. I bet Rich Vetock is looking in his "PFN Resource Guide" to see if it is a record. Wood's offense exploded behind the blocking of offensive linemen Brandon Arcidiacomo, Frank Taylor and tight end Colin Tompson. The trio provided running lanes for running back Demon Peoples. In this grand finale, the offensive teamwork of the Vikings will be the focus of the Wood Vikings' opponent Bishop McDevitt. McDevitt's head coach Jeff Weachter will be burning the midnight oil to work out a defensive scheme to slow the Vikings. Bishop McDevitt has some offensive firepower also in the name of QB Alec Werner (228 yards last week) as he led his team to a 41=32 victory. With this much offensive talent on both sides of the field, the stadium scoreboard might have a meltdown. Last team with the ball wins...**Archbishop Wood.**

It's been fun! I sure hope your favorite team wins.