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Top Stories

'Reloaded' Townies don't lose a beat

Terry Nau

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EAST PROVIDENCE -- It has become an old cliché by now but it bears repeating when the subject is East Providence High football. The Townies don't rebuild, they reload.

When all-stater Jamie Silva departed for Boston College after four terrific seasons as a Townie, coach Sandy Gorham pulled junior Jerome Blair off the junior varsity and inserted him into Silva's position.

"I think Jerome was a little nervous about taking over for Jamie," Gorham admitted on Tuesday evening after practice had ended. "But he very quickly has developed his own identity. He has been a huge addition to our team."

Blair, a 5-foot-11, 183-pounder, merely leads all Times' area with 781 rushing yards and 12 touchdowns. At this rate, he'll run for over 1,500 yards this season.

Just last Friday night, Jerome ran for 266 yards and four TDs during a 48-8 romp over St. Raphael Academy.

"I'm feeling pretty good," Blair was saying earlier this week. "My teammates are doing a great job opening holes for me. I did the same thing in junior varsity but there was no way I was going to replace Jamie. He was in on every play on both sides of the ball last year."

Gorham said Blair has worked hard to redefine his body over the past year.

"Jerome went to work in the weight room and dropped from 216 pounds to around 183," Gorham said. "His body was still a little immature so he dropped the extra weight and added some muscle. We had to stop him from losing any more weight. Now he has great quickness. In the type of offense we run, the tailback has to run a certain path through the line of scrimmage. Jamie was great once he got into the secondary but I think Jerome is better at running through the holes. Jerome is very quick. He just isn't as powerful as Jamie."

The Townies, whose toughest game this year was a 20-6 conquest of Division 2 West Warwick, have romped by big scores in their other four wins. They take a 5-0 overall record (3-0 in Division 1) into Saturday's road test at Portsmouth, which is 3-1 in Division 1 and hoping to stay on track for a playoff berth.

"East Providence is the biggest, most physical team we've seen this year," Portsmouth coach Bob Monteiro admitted. "They have so many ways they can hurt you all over the field. Their defense is very fast."

Portsmouth utilizes a deceptive Wing-T offense that requires plenty of preparation by East Providence's defense.

"We stopped practice at 5:30 on Tuesday," Gorham said. "The best way to prepare for the Wing-T is with a lot of repetitions in practice. Portsmouth runs the same play out of so many different formations. And it's up to our kids to recognize those



formations as quickly as possible."

East Providence's defense has been drawing raves from opposing coaches. St. Raphael Academy's Mike Sassi said it is one of the fastest defenses he's ever seen on the high school level.

"Without question, our defense is the strength of this team," Gorham admitted. "I would agree we are very quick. Sean Arlan is probably the fastest safety going to the ball that I have ever coached. He had seven interceptions last season and he already has five this year."

Arlan, a 6-1, 195-pound senior, runs a 40-yard dash in 4.5 seconds. He's the new Jamie Silva this season, playing virtually every play on both offense and defense. The big quarterback is second behind Blair among area rushers with 549 yards on 49 yards -- which averages out to around 11 yards per pop.

Arlan has also connected on four touchdown passes.

Other strong defenders for EP include defensive tackle Bob McCutcheon, cornerbacks Kevin Walsh and Lamont Valles along with returning all-stater Colin Winter (defensive end) and outstanding linebacker Brian Nallen.

Portsmouth will counter with sophomore QB Bobby Sewall, who has come along faster than even Monteiro expected. Sewall hit running back Jimmy Toppa with the game-winning TD pass last month against South Kingstown.

Toppa is a 5-11, 175-pounder who keys the Portsmouth offense from his wingback position.

The Patriots hit a snag last weekend, losing 28-14 to Hendricken after leading 14-9 in the first half.

"We have a very young team," Monteiro said. "I can only hope we'll rebound from our loss with a good effort against East Providence. We have several freshmen and sophomores starting on offense and defense. Overall, we have around eight senior starters."

Gorham sees the road game as an excellent test of his team's mental toughness.

"Portsmouth is a program that has experienced a great winning tradition over the years," he said. "They look like a playoff team to me this year. And I have a lot of respect for "Bubba" Monteiro, their coach."

"Bubba" feels the same way about EP's coaching staff, including his good friend Jay Monteiro (no relation).


"East Providence is a great program for a lot of reasons," Bob Monteiro said. "They have a thousand boys in the talent pool. The private schools like Hendricken and La Salle probably choose from that many kids, too. I have a lot of respect for Sandy Gorham and his coaching staff. It's going to be a great day for football. From what I hear, we have the two best marching bands in the state playing at halftime."

Jerome Blair and Sean Arlan will probably be doing some marching, too.

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