

Teams gain positive late momentum

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Otter Valley's Brady Diaz looks to run past a Woodstock defender during Saturday's game at Markowski Field in Brandon.
Adam Aucoin / Staff Photo

Teams are going to go through rough patches in their season and not everything is going to go their way, but how will they respond in those adverse situations?

A pair of teams were stuck in one of those rough patches, after a fast start top open the season, and righted the ship at the right time with big Week 7 wins.

Midway through the season, it looked like Otter Valley would be among the top dogs in Division III. The Otters had been dominant through four games, but then the big bad wolf of D-III football, Windsor, came into Brandon and showed them they had a long way to go. Another loss in Week 6 had them reeling, so with the stakes as high as ever in Saturday's matchup with Woodstock, the pressure was on.

Otter Valley proved that it thrives under that pressure and outlasted the elite Wasps squad 41-35 in overtime. The Otters got big plays all over the field in each facet of the game.

Whether it was Caleb Whitney creating at the quarterback position, the defense coming up with big stops or the special teams unit blocking a punt, the Otters were locked in.

U-32 had hit its own rough patch in Division II. Similar to the Otters, the Raiders were riding high at 4-0 midway through the season, but then Mount Anthony brought them back down to earth. They continued to struggle in Week 6 against Brattleboro.

Their Week 7 opponent Lyndon was coming in with a lot of positive momentum, following a comeback win against Fair Haven, so U-32 had to be at the top of its game to get back in the win column.

The Raiders used what brought them to the dance in the first half of the season, stout defense, to hold the strong Vikings attack to just six points.

One of the two cracks the overall top 10 this week in the *Rutland Herald/Times Argus* football power rankings and the other moves up the top-five ranking in their division and find themselves in bubble position. Let's jump into the rankings. Previous week rankings are in parentheses.

1. Rutland 6-0 (1). The Ravens returned to action this week in dominant fashion, besting one-win Colchester 43-7. Rutland goes for a perfect regular season on Friday, but its biggest hurdle of the season awaits in Hartford. These two teams have been the class of southern Vermont football in Division I, so it should be battle.

2. Bellows Falls 7-0 (2). The Terriers' offense is one of the best in the state, but what about their defense? It has allowed a team to score in double figures just twice this season. This past week against Springfield was not one of those times. The Cosmos had just eight points.

3. Hartford 6-1 (4). The Hurricanes pass over CVU, a team that was off in Week 7. Hartford had one of its biggest battles of the season, besting Burr and Burton by just two points. Don't let the Bulldogs' two-win record fool you, they are a well-coached, skilled team. It says a lot about the Hurricanes that they fought to get that win.

4. CVU 5-1 (3). The Redhawks were idle in Week 7, so I can't drop them far. They look to be a serious state championship contender in D-I with one of the state's most explosive offenses. Essex provides a tough challenge to finish the regular season.

5. Windsor 7-0 (5). The Yellow Jackets are the lone undefeated team left in Division III, beating BFA Fairfax/Lamoille on Saturday, and putting up their fourth 50-point outing of the year. Windsor should have home-field advantage in the D-III playoffs. Woodstock is on the schedule in Week 8.

6. Middlebury 4-3 (7). The Tigers snapped a two-game losing skid and move up a spot in the rankings this week after beating Mount Mansfield convincingly over the weekend. A BBA team that almost knocked off Hartford in Week 7 is a tough regular season finale game for Middlebury.

7. Mount Anthony 5-2 (8). The steady rise for the Patriots continues in these rankings. MAU is a winner of four straight following a fairly dominant win over the weekend against Rice. Fair Haven comes to Spinelli Field to finish the regular season. The teams played an instant classic in 7-on-7 last fall.

8. Essex 4-3 (UR). The Hornets move off the bubble this week and into the top-10. Essex posted 14 points late against BFA-St. Albans to pull away for a win. The Hornets could be a dangerous middle of the pack team in the D-I playoffs.

9. U-32 5-2 (UR). The Raiders move back into the top-10 with an impressive win over Lyndon on Saturday. If their defense can carry them like it did in Week 7, they could make playoff noise. I think U-32 is in a tier below Bellows Falls and Mount Anthony in D-II, but they are a team to watch out for.

10. Fairfax/Lamoille 5-1 (10). The Bullets suffered their first defeat, but they still put up 35 points on the best team in Division III. All signs point to a potential rematch on state championship Saturday if both teams take care of business come playoff time.

On the bubble: St. Johnsbury, BFA-St. Albans, Otter Valley

Our top fives:

Division I: 1. Rutland; 2. Hartford; 3. CVU; 4. Middlebury; 5. Essex.

Division II: 1. Bellows Falls; 2. Mount Anthony; 3. U-32; 4. Spaulding; 5. Brattleboro.

Division III: 1. Windsor; 2. Fairfax/Lamoille; 3. Otter Valley; 4. Woodstock; 5. Springfield.