

Weekend Warriors: Teams prepare for playoff run

10-29-2021, Rutland Herald, by Adam Aucoin



Rutland High School quarterback Trey Davine (10) makes a pass under pressure from Essex High's Tanner Robbins (2) during their matchup at Alumni Field.

File photo by Jon Olender

Twenty-four Vermont high school football teams all have a dream. That dream is to hoist a championship trophy on Rutland High School's Alumni Field on Saturday, Nov. 13.

Unfortunately for 21 of those clubs, only three squads will succeed in that mission.

The work to see what three teams that will be starts this weekend as high school football playoffs open up Friday and Saturday.

Division I The Tampa Bay Buccaneers played last year's Super Bowl on their home field, the first NFL team to do so. Rutland would love to take a page out of Tom Brady's book and play on its home field in the Division I title game.

The Ravens' perfect 7-0 regular season makes them the favorite to make that happen.

Rutland's offense has been one of the best in state, led by Trey Davine, who two weeks ago threw for six touchdown passes in a single game. Davine has weapons galore at his disposal with guys like Slade Postemski, Jack Coughlin, Ben Parker and Jonah Bassett all having big play potential.

Their defense has made a habit of causing multiple turnovers a game as well. The bulls-eye is squarely on Rutland's back and it's up to the rest of the state to take their best shot.

No. 8 Burlington/South Burlington, winners of three straight, is the first team looking to upset the Ravens. Rutland hosts the Seawolves Friday at 7 p.m.

No. 4 Essex meets No. 5 St. Johnsbury on Friday at 7 p.m. The teams played each other in Week 5, with the Hilltoppers winning by a touchdown.

No. 2 Hartford got blown out in its regular season finale against Rutland and hope to bounce back in Friday's D-I quarterfinal, hosting No. 7 BFA-St. Albans.

The teams met in Week 2, where the Hurricanes won 20-6. Hartford had a pair of three-game win streaks during the regular season.

Sophomore Brayden Trombly has had an impressive opening season under center for the Hurricanes and has solid offensive pieces around him in Brody Tyburski, Brandon Potter and Jacob Seaver, among others.

No. 3 CVU and No. 6 Middlebury meet in the lone D-I quarterfinal on Saturday.

The Redhawks won their game against Middlebury in Week 6 by three touchdowns, one of their biggest statement wins of the season.

When locked in, the Tigers are one of the best defensive teams in the state, keeping opponents under 10 points four times during the regular season.

Division II Bellows Falls is the team to beat in Division II. That was made incredibly clear during an 8-0 regular season, where they no team kept a game close with them.

The top-seeded Terriers host No. 8 Fair Haven on Friday in a Division II quarterfinal. Bellows Falls cruised to a 56-0 win against the Slaters in Week 4.

Fair Haven has been hit by the injury bug and is younger than it has been in years past, but has had some silver linings sprinkled in. Sophomore Joe Buxton took over for an injured Sawyer Ramey at quarterback a few weeks into the season and has impressed.

No. 4 Brattleboro and No. 5 Lyndon met in Week 2 with the Vikings edging out a 21-20 win. The teams meet again on Friday in the D-I quarterfinals.

The Colonels have found their groove after a 1-4 start to the season. Multi-score deficit wins against U-32 and Rice were their most impressive of the season and they came in the second half of the season.

If Bellows Falls has been the hottest D-II team, Mount Anthony is right there behind them. The No. 2 Patriots are winners of five straight heading into the playoffs and host No. 7 Rice on Friday at Spinelli Field.

MAU's offense is quarterbacked by sophomore Tanner Bushee, who has impressed in his first year under center. Ayman Naser and Hayden Gaudette are tough to bring down out of the Patriots backfield and Austin Grogan is a great threat at wideout.

Central Vermont football fans will have their eyes on the No. 3 U-32-No. 6 Spaulding matchup Friday night.

The Crimson Tide's best football has been played in the second half of games. Strong second-half efforts were crucial in Spaulding's first two wins, coming against Lyndon and Mount Abraham.

The Tide's offense has been humming late in the season, putting up 88 points across the last two games. Andrew Trottier leads the Tide at quarterback with a host of weapons in running back Grady Chase, wide receiver Christian Titus and utility guy Zack Wilson.

U-32 has built itself upon quality defensive play. Outside of a blowout loss to Mount Anthony, the Raiders haven't allowed more than 20 points in a game.

Cameron Comstock and Ismeal Cruz have a pair of interceptions for U-32. Henry Beling and Aiden Boyd both have a sack, while Anthony Concessi leads the team with 38.5 tackles.

Comstock quarterbackes the Raiders, but they do the most damage in the running game, where Beling has rushed for 701 yards and 10 touchdowns.

Division III

Undefeated Windsor is the team to beat in Division III and the Yellow Jackets host No. 8 Poultney on Saturday at 1 p.m.

The Yellow Jackets cruised past the Blue Devils in Week 6 just as they have to most opponents this season. Their biggest challenge was a showdown with BFA-Fairfax/Lamoille in Week 7, where they won 54-35.

In that game, running back Ben Gilbert had four touchdowns. Gilbert is one of the many elite offensive pieces Windsor possesses.

The winner of that game gets the winner of the only D-III playoff game being played on Friday, where No. 4 Woodstock hosts No. 5 Springfield.

You have to look back to Week 1 to see the previous matchup between these schools.

The Cosmos held the lead at halftime in that game, before the Wasps dominated the second half and pulled away.

Springfield has a solid club, led offensively by veteran quarterback Sam Presch and wideout Chris Jeffers. The team has been up and down a bit throughout the season, but had their most impressive win in Week 8, beating Otter Valley 20-6. No. 2 Fairfax will be the heavy favorites in D-III quarterfinal with No. 7 Oxbow on Saturday. You have to look no further than the teams' matchup last week, where the Bullets won 39-0.

The winner in that game takes on the winner of the Rutland County matchup between No. 3 Otter Valley and No. 6 Mill River.

The Otters' biggest win came in Week 7, a 41-35 overtime win against Woodstock. Otter Valley quarterback Caleb Whitney was big in that game and scored the game-winning touchdown. His favorite target Brady Diaz has been elite all season.

Mill River has gotten healthier as the season has gone on and found more wins because of it. Heading into the playoffs, the Minutemen have won three of their last four games, including a gutsy 26-18 win against Poultney in the final week of the regular season.