



JUSTIN PELLETIER | SUN JOURNAL

Portland High School's Joe Esposito (31) slips the tackle of Thornton Academy's Michael Laverriere (16) on his way to scoring a touchdown in the Class A state title game in Portland last month.

Portland star wins state's Gatorade football award

BY ERNIE CLARK
BDN STAFF

Joe Esposito, a running back and linebacker who led Portland High School to the Class A North championship this fall, has been named the 2015-2016 Gatorade Maine Football Player of the Year.

The 6-foot-1, 198-pound senior rushed for 1,795 yards and 26 touchdowns on 256 carries in 11 games this season for coach Jim Hartman's Bulldogs, who finished with a 10-1 record.

He ranked second among Class A North rushers during the regular season with 1,057 yards and 16 touchdowns on 143 carries, then added 738 yards and 10 more touchdowns in three postseason games as Portland remained undefeated until falling to Thornton Academy 24-14 in the state championship game Nov. 21.

The Class A North Player of the Year also caught seven passes for 198 yards and four touchdowns, while defensively the two-time All-Region first-team selection recorded 124 tackles, 1½ quarterback sacks, two fumble recoveries and two interceptions, one he returned for a touchdown.

"Joe Esposito was the

best player we saw this season," Oxford Hills of South Paris head coach Mark Soehren said. "He is big, fast and strong. He is fundamentally the best player we played against."

Esposito also has maintained an A average in the classroom and was named to the Class A North all-academic team this year. A Portland High School ambassador for incoming freshmen, he has volunteered locally with the Stuff the Bus food drive and as part of multiple community-service initiatives through his church.

He has yet to determine where he will attend college.

Esposito is the third Gatorade Maine Football Player of the Year to be chosen from Portland High School, following Quinton Porter (2001) and Carl Frye (2003).

Esposito joins Joe Fitzpatrick (2014-15, Cheverus of Portland), Ben Lucas (2013-14, Cony of Augusta), Andrew Libby (2012-13, Thornton Academy), Louis DiTomasso (2011-12, Wells), Peter Gwilym (2010-11, Cheverus), Jack Mallis (2009-10, Windham), Jack Heary (2008-09, Deering of Portland) and Justin Villacci (2007-08, Gorham) as recent Gatorade Maine Football Player of the Year honorees.

scoring passes against only four interceptions, is missing 138 catches and 16 TDs with the absences of Gronkowski and Edelman.

The veteran quarterback hopes third-leading receiver Amendola (49 receptions) will return after sitting out last weekend's loss. Starting linebackers Hightower and Collins were limited in practice Thursday for a defense yielding 19.3 points.

EXTRA POINTS: Philadelphia has lost consecutive games by at least 28 points for the first time since 1971. ... Brady, who is 4-0 versus the Eagles, needs one TD pass to move pass Dan Marino (420) for sole possession of third place on the all-time list. ... Bradford has eight TD passes and zero interceptions in his last four games against AFC foes.

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Northeastern finally began to pull away in the last 4:18 of the quarter. Francesca Sally opened what would eventually be a 17-point run with a jumper, then DeFreese sank two foul shots.

Te'Erica Easton followed with two free throws, then Jess Genco hit a 3-pointer, while Sally and DeFreese each made layups as the Huskies extended their lead to 43-31 with 47 seconds remaining in the quarter.

UMaine never got closer than 10 points after that.

The Black Bears are back in action with a Sunday 2 p.m. contest at Dartmouth.

Edward Little girls beat Bangor in season opener

BY KEVIN MILLS
SUN JOURNAL

AUBURN — Basketball is often referred to as a game of runs, but Friday night, those surges were few and far between.

In a game in which Bangor and Edward Little traded defensive stops and occasional offensive sparks, it was two Red Eddies spurts that opened the lead in a season-opening clash of two Class AA North contenders. EL held off the Rams in the final quarter for a 43-37 win.

"That's a great win," EL coach Craig Jipson said. "Bangor's a really good team. (Katie) Butler's one of the best players. (Emily) Gilmore and (Sarah) Bragg are great senior athletes and players. (Olivia) Sharrow hit a couple of huge 3s.

"I think this is how our season is going to be," he added. "There's no terrible teams on our schedule. Every night is going to be a

war. We just have to get better and better."

Emily Jacques led EL with 17 points while Karli Stubbs added 15. They combined for eight of EL's 10 fourth-quarter points, all from the free throw line.

Piper Norcross added seven while Jordyn Reynolds chipped in four.

Bangor got 15 from Katie Butler and eight from Gilmore. Sharrow and Jenna Bishop each had six. The Rams shot just 2-for-8 in the third and 3-for-14 in the fourth.

"We're not used to playing with each other," Bangor coach Joe Johnson said. "We had a couple injuries to start the season. That was only the second time Katie's been on the floor. When she gets in the flow, the ball will move a little easier and we'll get some better looks at the basket."

It was a hard-fought, back-and-forth game through the first half. The

largest lead was three, and the half finished with the teams deadlocked at 20.

Then, EL jumped out with a 6-0 run to start the third. The Red Eddies made some key steals and fed the offense on the other end to build a 26-20 lead.

Reynolds scored the first basket, and Stubbs followed with a rebound hoop. After a Jacques steal, she fed Stubbs on a nice fast break. Bangor tried to rally and got a jumper from Butler, but that was the only field goal the Rams had through the first 6:52.

EL then ran off another seven straight to build a 33-22 lead. Sharrow hit a 3 with 1:08 left to close the gap.

"It just felt really good," Stubbs said. "We worked really well together tonight. We're really young, but I think as the season goes on, we'll get really better."

Bangor got within four three times in the fourth

and cut it to 36-34 on a Sharrow 3 with 3:17 left. EL managed to get some key defensive plays and timely offense to preserve the lead.

Bangor could never get a sizable run of its own. Jake Perry had the steal. Jacques drew a charge, and Reynolds had a big block to keep Bangor at bay. After Sharrow's 3, Stubbs opened the lead again with two free throws. Then she and Jacques finished the game off from the line down the stretch.

For a Bangor team that graduated standouts Mary Butler and Cordelia Stewart from a team that beat EL in the Eastern A semifinals last year, the deficit was tough to overcome for a team still learning to play together.

"We had a couple of wide-eyed kids that haven't been in that situation before," Johnson said. "I thought they responded well after they relaxed."

NFL official defends facemask call against Lions

THE SPORTS XCHANGE

The NFL's top official defended the facemask call against the Detroit Lions that gave the Green Bay Packers an untimed down for Aaron Rodgers' Hail Mary touchdown pass.

Rodgers gunned a 61-yard pass to tight end Richard Rodgers on the final play to give the Packers a shocking 27-23 win over the Detroit Lions on Thursday night at Ford Field.

Before the stunning outcome, the Packers needed a big break just to have a final chance. Aaron Rodgers threw a desperation pass on the previous play. After a couple of laterals, the ball wound up in

the quarterback's hands again with no one behind him. But as Rodgers tried to run forward, Lions defensive end Devin Taylor touched his face mask, drawing a flag. That gave the Packers another play with time expired.

At full speed, it looked like a clear call as Taylor's hand connected with Rodgers' face mask. Upon slow-motion review, Taylor's finger hit the facemask but it may be debatable whether he grasped or pulled the facemask.

The facemask call gave the Packers one last untimed play — along with 15 extra yards — that resulted in Rodgers' Hail Mary touchdown pass.

In a tweet issued immediately after the game, NFL vice president of officiating Dean Blandino defended the facemask foul by saying an official "is going to make that call almost every time."

In an appearance on NFL Network after the game, Blandino suggested that, even if replay review were available to overturn the ruling on the field, it may not have been reversed.

"It's a close play, but even looking at the replay, the hand is up near the mask, the finger looks like it gets caught in the mask and the head gets turned," Blandino said. "So I'm not convinced it wasn't a facemask even looking at the

replay, but live at full speed the referee is going to see that hand at the mask and the head turn and he's going to make that call every time."

Blandino was asked whether the call, which by rule is not subject to replay review, could have gone either way.

"You know, it's one that it's really close and so we made the call," Blandino said. "I think when you watch the play live I was just like everybody else. You thought, 'That's a facemask,' and then you see the replay and it's a lot closer than it initially seemed. But again, hand up near the mask, finger caught in the bottom bar and the head does turn."

UM, MMA players nominated for Good Works Team

Basketball players Liz Wood of the University of Maine and Zach Radcliffe of Maine Maritime Academy have been announced as nominees for the 2016 All-state National Association of Basketball Coaches Good Works Team.

Through the program, the NABC and the Women's Basketball Coaches Association recognize student-athletes for outstanding community service achievements.

Radcliffe, a senior guard,

is an international business and logistics student from Rumford. His off-court efforts have included serving as a member of Maine Maritime's Student Athletes Advisory Committee, volunteering with the Bocce tournament and the Dribble Kids program, and serving as a counselor at summer camps.

Wood, a senior guard/forward, is a biology major with a concentration in pre-medical studies in UMaine's honors school. This is the

third time she has been nominated for the Good Works Team.

Among many nonathletic contributions, she has been active organizing an anti-hazing, under-21 tailgate for students on Homecoming, overseeing the coordination of visits to local schools, dinners at Ronald McDonald House, helping with Toys for Tots and a soap drive for homeless shelters, and volunteering with the Special Olympics.

Wood was named the

America East Female Scholar-Athlete of the Year for 2015 and is a two-time America East Women's Basketball Scholar-Athlete of the Year. She serves as the president of UMaine's Student-Athlete Advisory Committee and was the America East National SAAC representative.

Two 10-member teams, each including five players from Division I and five from Divisions II, III and the NAIA, will be announced in February.

Patriots

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rank among the bottom half in the league. Not only have the Eagles surrendered five touchdown passes apiece to Tampa Bay's Jameis Winston and Detroit's Matthew Stafford, but starting cornerback Nolan Carroll suffered an ankle injury in last week's loss. Running back DeMarco Murray has only one 100-yard game while second-year wideout Jordan Matthews has a team-high 58 catches.

ABOUT THE PATRIOTS (10-1): New England remains in the driver's seat for the top seed in the AFC and can clinch its seventh consecutive AFC East title with a victory and a loss by the New York Jets. Brady, who has thrown for 28

scoring passes against only four interceptions, is missing 138 catches and 16 TDs with the absences of Gronkowski and Edelman.

The veteran quarterback hopes third-leading receiver Amendola (49 receptions) will return after sitting out last weekend's loss. Starting linebackers Hightower and Collins were limited in practice Thursday for a defense yielding 19.3 points.

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Women

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from the floor, but also committed seven of their 12 turnovers in the period.

Gustafsson made a 3-pointer in the first minute of the third quarter to push UMaine's lead to 26-20, but it was pretty much all downhill after that.

Claudia Ortiz answered with a 3 for Northeastern, then DeFreese scored a layup off a UMaine turnover.

DeFreese followed with a jumper off another miscue, but Sophie Weckstrom answered with a 3-pointer to give the Bears a 29-27

edge at the 6:35 mark.

Northeastern finally began to pull away in the last 4:18 of the quarter. Francesca Sally opened what would eventually be a 17-point run with a jumper, then DeFreese sank two foul shots.

Te'Erica Easton followed with two free throws, then Jess Genco hit a 3-pointer, while Sally and DeFreese each made layups as the Huskies extended their lead to 43-31 with 47 seconds remaining in the quarter.

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Hockey

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It was originally ruled that the puck hit the crossbar but a video review revealed that the puck hit the back of the net.

Morgan gave Maine its first lead when he swooped on the rebound of an Andrew Tegeler shot, carried the puck around Tirone and deposited it into the half-empty net.

Smith got the equalizer when he drove to the net front and shoveled a Shane Eiserman rebound past Morris from 10 feet out.

The Black Bears dominated the first period and had a decided edge in offensive zone possession.

But Tirone made 19 saves, including 11 of the Grade-A variety, to keep them off the scoreboard.

UNH's took the lead at the 9:50 mark.

Matias Cleland's shot from the point sailed wide of the net to the right of Morris but Kelleher tracked the puck down behind the net and fed a wide open Poturalski in the left circle.

Poturalski took a quick writer labeled for the far post and Morris kicked it out.

However, Correale was able to get inside position on Maine's Merchant and swept the rebound home for his fifth power play goal of the season and ninth overall.

Maine had a series of glorious chances during a wild flurry in front of the net but Tirone made a couple of gems and another Bear attempt hit a UNH defenseman who was down on the ice behind Tirone.

Broncos

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a game that counted toward the season coming forward," Gilpin said.

"They played really hard, so credit to them for doing that," he added. "We're probably an intimidating team, coming into our place after our success last season, so we have a big target on our back."

Sophomore Ian McIntyre was a potent post presence, scoring 13 points (6-for-6 shooting) with four rebounds. Senior Brendan McIntyre netted eight points, while Jake Black and Billy Campbell added six points each.

"We knew we had a size advantage, and we wanted [Ian McIntyre] to touch the

Bangor

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them put those players in position to have good games."

No one had a bigger game than Iman, whose older brother Yusef led EL to back-to-back Eastern A championships in 2009 and 2010 before going on to play at the University of Maine at Farmington.

"He's shied away from offense a lot, and I'm trying to get him to be more aggressive," said Adams. "I've actually said to him in practice that if you're going to be our best player you have to be our best

ball early and often," Bartlett said.

McIntyre enjoys his role in Hampden's well-balanced scheme.

"It's good because if I'm getting doubled or I'm not having a good game, I've got guys all around me that can do a lot of good things," he said.

Skowhegan, which is shorthanded because of injuries, demonstrated good offensive balance. Issac Witham tossed in 14 points, while Garrett McSweeney (five rebounds) and Cam Barnes tallied 12 each.

Coach Tom Nadeau's Indians, who shot 31 percent (15-for-49), had difficulty matching up with the bigger Broncos and got into foul trouble.

Skowhegan trailed only 34-26 at halftime, but

player all the time, not just in spots. He was slow to start tonight, I didn't think he had 31 but he had the ball and he made things happen for us."

Smith made four of his 3-pointers in the first half, including one to start an 11-3 run fueled by defensive pressure that gave Bangor a 29-24 lead at the break.

Another 3-pointer by Smith capped off a 7-0 run that gave Bangor a 45-39 edge entering the fourth quarter, but Edward Little amped up the pace of the game and induced seven Bangor turnovers over the final eight minutes of play while Iman and Shea provided the necessary late-of-

Hampden opened the third quarter with a 15-3 run. McIntyre got the surge started, scoring from down low, then Gilpin sank two free throws and made a 17-footer in transition.

Barnes answered with a back-door layup off a Brendan Curran pass, but two McIntyre foul shots, one by Conar Moore and Gilpin's 3-pointer play pushed Hampden's lead to 45-28 with 5:14 to play.

Witham countered with a free throw, but Nick Chasse made a baseline runner and Zach Boss converted a putback to make it 49-29.

"We had a few things not go our way to start the third quarter and they got momentum," Nadeau said. "You can't give a team like that momentum, and they took advantage."

fense to rally the Red Eddies.

"I thought we were tight to start the game, even our veteran guys, but in the second quarter we settled down a bit," said Parker. "The fact of the matter is maybe we got a little tired, too, but Mike's kids also made free throws better than we did."

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