# Hamilton-Wenham football team comes up short in season finale

**By Dom Nicastro / HW Chronicle Correspondent**

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All they’re talking about in Ipswich High School football circles is the upset, the 22-20 overtime win over Hamilton-Wenham on Thanksgiving Day.

They’re talking about Ipswich junior quarterback Ben Yanakakis, who had two running touchdowns and as many 2-point conversion passes, including the crucial game-winner to Alex Bruhm in overtime.

They’re talking about how the win was just Hamilton-Wenham’s second loss of the season and gave the Tigers a split of the Cape Ann League Baker crown with Hamilton-Wenham and Lynnfield.

Those talking points are all well and good. But this story started a few weeks earlier, when Ipswich lost to Salem, 34-14, on the road Nov. 3. The Tigers had just come off their 36-14 playoff loss to Stoneham.

“We went into that Salem game and they beat us in every which way,” said Ipswich coach Kevin Fessette, whose team finished 6-5. “You know, they could beat us 10 times out of 10, and I’m not taking that away from them, but it was the way our kids came out on the field that night in that game. We had to have a meeting afterwards. We asked them, ‘Are we done for the year?’”

That gut-check, heart-to-heart worked for the Tigers. They weren’t done, in fact, and began to show signs of major life with a solid 26-0 win over Shawsheen less than a week later. Then, it was 16 days off and lots of solid practicers before hosting Hamilton-Wenham on Turkey Day.

“We got the seniors to really open up and I thought was a pretty good moment and a good teachable moment for me as a young coach to understand where the kids are coming from and kind of explain what it meant to them,” Fessette said. “Let’s forget what happened. So regardless of the result of the (Hamilton-Wenham) game, the effort was going to be there and we focused on the effort, rather than the results, and the results kind of came from the effort.”

Ipswich held a two-touchdown lead over the Generals but saw Cam Peach rush in a score and catch a 12-yarder from third-string quarterback Ian Coffey, who was playing due to injuries. Billy Whelan was lost for the season (broken collarbone) against Stoneham in the Division 6 North finals, and backup QB Hunter Wilichoski hurt his ankle on the opening kickoff and was lost for the game.

“Everyone deals with injuries toward the end of the year,” Hamilton-Wenham coach Jim Pugh said. “These last two games we just weren’t able to pull it out. It came down to extra points.”

Coffey, normally at running back, also hit Phil Durgin for a 2-yard TD toss.

“Our kids really wanted to play hard and our best week of practice was the week before the Shawsheen game, which I think is a very good and respectful team, and our kids came out flying that week,” Fessette said. “And then it obviously carried right into this following week.”

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The last two games certainly did not go according to script. The Hamilton-Wenham Regional High School football team was 9-0 and on top of the world.

Two two-point losses later, the Generals finish the season with a pair of losses and without two coveted trophies – one for the Division 6 North championship and another for a Thanksgiving Day win.

Stoneham won the North title with a 20-18 win, and Ipswich pulled off the shocker of the North Shore with a 22-20 overtime win over the Generals on Turkey Day in Ipswich.

The impact this team had on the program as a whole, however, is not lost on senior captain Phil Durgin, who played his last high school game on Thanksgiving. Heading into the game, Durgin told the Chronicle the seniors on the team had a confidence and enthusiasm about them that was infectious throughout the program.

“As for the senior class, they have all been role models for the underclassmen,” Durgin said. “Their work ethic day in and day out, as well as their love of the program, has made this team great.”

Jim Pugh, in his second year with the Generals, said his hats are off to the seniors this season. It was a team that had plenty of talent but also great leadership. The seniors helped established Hamilton-Wenham as not only a talented team but one that was not going to be pushed around.

“You can go right up and down our roster,” Pugh said, “and we had so many kids that were making plays.”

Junior quarterback Billy Whelan, who missed Thanksgiving with an injury he suffered in the Stoneham game, finished with more than 1,600 yards. Ian Coffey was the leading rusher with more than 700 yards.

Cam Peach had nearly half of Whelan’s passing yards and caught nearly 40 passes for nine TDs from him. Jake Lanciani was another main target for Whelan with 600 yards and six TDs.

“I mean, it was just right up and down, the roster,” Pugh said. “We had seniors that played their hearts out.”

Pugh said he was proud of the way his team played physical football all season. Week after week, the team lived up to the hype and never had an off-day. If you consider the two losses “off days,” consider this: they are four points away from an undefeated record and trip to Gillette Stadium for the Division 6 Super Bowl Saturday, Dec. 2.

“Our kids played with confidence and played well,” Pugh said. “When you get into the playoffs, you’ve got to have some breaks go your way. The first nine weeks they were going our way. And the last two weeks we had some things that didn’t work out for us. That’s what happens. But that’s what football is all about. Our coaching staff is incredibly proud of the year and the effort that the kids put in and the senior class, we tip our hats to them. They had a great year.”

Continuing to build on this year’s success starts with strong work in the offseason, Pugh said.

“This year we were being more physical,” Pugh said. “Next year starts by getting in the weight room and being stronger than we were.”

# Hamilton-Wenham senior captain Morgan Liphardt reflects on season

**By Dom Nicastro / Correspondent**

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This season, the Hamilton-Wenham Regional High School football team pretty much lived up to the hype of the preseason.

The Generals were touted as one of the best teams on the North Shore and in their Division. Finishing undefeated and battling Stoneham to literally the last second before losing 20-18 in the North final, they more than proved worthy of people’s expectations.

And the statistics? Impressive as you can imagine.

Quarterback Billy Whelan had thrown for more than 1,600 yards as he prepared for the final game – Thanksgiving Day against Ipswich.

Ian Coffey rushed for nearly 700 yards on nearly 90 carries to go along with 11 touchdowns.

Cam Peach added more than 200 yards rushing and five TDs, and Phil Durgin had about 200 yards on 30 carries.

Peach had nearly half of Whelan’s passing yards and caught nearly 40 passes for nine TDs. Jake Lanciani has been another main target for Whelan with 600 yards and six TDs.

But beyond the statistics, what made this season and this senior class special was the Generals’ attitude and perseverance, according to senior captain Morgan Liphardt.

The Generals weren’t always the biggest or fastest team, he said, but always found ways to win and pretty much dominated at times. It was because they remained focused and relentless at all times.

“One thing I really think this senior class brought to the table was relentlessness,” Liphardt said. “With a lot of the games we went into we were outmatched with either size or speed so I feel we had a relentlessness to never give up and power through adversity. This is the best team I’ve ever been a part of.”

It’s important to Liphardt and fellow seniors to pass on this approach to the younger players. The Generals 2017 season is winding down but Generals Football never will.

Coach Jim Pugh remarked when he took over for the Generals last year after leading Masconomet that they’ve always been known for bringing forth competitive teams in many sports.

Football is no exception, and they’ve made deep playoff runs under Pugh’s predecessor, Andrew Morency.

What is the message for the younger players?

“Some advice I would have for the younger guys is to just have the right attitude,” Liphardt said. “I don’t mean be a jerk and trash talk. I mean go into every game with confidence and think you can win. Because as soon as the team thinks they have no chance you play worse.”

Liphardt and crew were looking to keep that same attitude against Ipswich. The Tigers represent the seniors’ last hurrah. Ironically, Ipswich fell to the same team Hamilton-Wenham did in the playoffs – Stoneham. The Spartans beat the Tigers Oct. 27 in Round 1 of the playoffs, 36-14.

Ipswich lost to Salem, 34-14, and beat Shawsheen, 26-0, in its two consolation games.

“Playing in Thanksgiving is nothing like other games,” Liphardt said. “It’s like a playoff atmosphere with a huge crowd because of the rivalry. The goal is to win and give the seniors a good last Hamilton-Wenham football memory. My advice for our young guys is to play it like a normal game. As soon as you start letting the crowd and atmosphere of the game get to you is when you get nervous and start making little mistakes that could change the game.”

**Ipswich stuns Ham-Wen in overtime, earns share of CAL Baker crown  
By Dan Harrison Correspondent, Salem News**

**Nov 23, 2017   
 Updated Nov 28, 2017**

IPSWICH — Those in attendance at Thursday’s Thanksgiving Day tilt between host Ipswich and Hamilton-Wenham that were hoping to get home for an early lunch would be disappointed.

Those fans wearing Black and Orange of the host Tigers, however, weren’t complaining one bit.

The Tigers stunned the Generals, 22-20, in overtime, handing the visitors just their second loss of the season while earning a share of the Cape Ann League Baker Division title along with H-W and Lynnfield.

“It came down to the wire,” said Ipswich junior quarterback Ben Yanakakis, who had two rushing scores and a pair of 2-point conversion passes, including the game-winner.

“It’s really exciting. Everything we did was for the seniors. We had to dig deep. All the hard work we did in the offseason came down to that final play.”

After the Generals scored to open overtime while failing to convert for two, Ipswich (6-5) responded with a Yanakakis 2-yard TD plunge before the signal caller hit Alex Bruhm on a pop pass for the game-winning, 2-point conversion.

The hosts’ offense may have been held silent in the second half, but with the game on the line the Tigers made a very loud statement.

“I don’t even know what to say. This offense just works overtime,” said Yanakakis.”Over time you can’t stop it, so we decided to keep working and keep running into that wall until it broke down.”

After scoring a pair of unanswered touchdowns in the opening half, Ipswich sputtered offensively after halftime as Hamilton-Wenham (9-2) battled back to tie the game at the end of the third quarter. They did so thanks to a pair of scores by senior captain Cam Peach, with one coming on a rush at the goal line and the other a 12-yard pass hookup with Ian Coffey.

Peach finished his senior season with 18 total touchdowns and 108 points, both second on the North Shore.

The Tigers and Generals played to a stalemate over the final 11 minutes of regulation, setting up overtime in the historic rivalry.

“We never got momentum and fumbled the ball too many times — and that was the whole game,” said Hamilton-Wenham head coach Jim Pugh, whose club had three fumbles and an interception. “But hats off to (Ipswich) coach (Kevin) Fessette; they did a great job. It’s another three-way tie (for the league title); good for them.

“Respect to our guys ... they left it all out on the field.”

The Generals struck first in OT when Coffey found senior captain Phil Durgin out of the backfield for a 2-yard TD pass, but the ensuing 2-point rushing attempt was stuffed. Ipswich, which hadn’t scored since the first half, got the ball down to the 2-yard line thanks to an option to senior captain Pat Gillis before Yanakakis rammed his way across the goal line, setting the stage for the game-winning conversion.

“We didn’t execute the plays and weren’t making the right reads,” Fessette said of his team’s second half execution. “But the kids had fun like they did all year, and they came back and had a great win.”

Ipswich executed its offense in the opening two quarters with Gillis burning Hamilton-Wenham for 71 yards on nine touches, including a 30-yard TD scamper to open the scoring in the first quarter.

Gillis and Justin Moran were able to get to the edges for a handful of big runs. Yanakakis, meanwhile, added a 2-yard touchdown run on a sneak up the middle before connecting with Izzy Morrissey for the 2-point conversion, making it 14-0 with just over 30 seconds left in the opening half.

The lead proved crucial as the Tigers eventually locked up their share of the CAL Baker title.

“It’s huge for us,” said Fessette. “We came up at 6-5 on the year, but had some key losses. They weren’t playing for anything but the love of the game, and that’s something special. There were a lot of seniors doing the right thing. They deserve it.”

With Billy Whelan out for the season after suffering a broken collarbone in his team’s Division 6 North final playoff loss to Stoneham two weeks ago, the Generals turned to Hunter Wilichoski for the QB duties. But the senior injured his ankle on the opening kickoff and would not return. That meant that Coffey, the team’s leading rusher, had to move under center, and the Generals’ offense spent the first half adjusting and trying to find its rhythm. The visitors managed only 80 yards of offense in the first half while turning the ball over twice.

**THANKSGIVING LEFTOVERS**

\* The seniors for both clubs graduate with an even split in their Thanksgiving rivalry, as each team won the Turkey Day tilt twice in the last four years.

\* Hamilton-Wenham junior down lineman **Thomas Moynahan** played like a man possessed on the defensive front. He registeriedsix tackles in the backfield while also blocking a punt that gave the Generals the ball at the Ipswich 8-yard line, setting up the game-tying score.

\* **Pat Gillis** churned out 128 yards on 20 carries for Ipswich while Hamilton-Wenham star **Cam Peach**registered 136 yards from scrimmage as the two top offensive producers in the Thanksgiving bout. Peach also had a 54-yard punt, into the wind, in the fourth quarter.

\* Hamilton Fire Chief **Philip Stevens** lost his bet with Ipswich Acting Fire Chief **Andre Theriault** and will have to install 50 smoke alarms in various Ipswich residents while wearing a Tigers’ jersey.

\* Ipswich’s **Tommy Herron** came away with a clutch interception inside the red zone in the first half to preserve a 6-0 Ipswich lead. On the play, Herron broke nicely on the ball to beat the receiver to the spot before hauling in the clutch grab.

# Hamilton-Wenham at Ipswich Thanksgiving preview, Salem News

**HAMILTON-WENHAM (9-1) at IPSWICH (5-5)**  
**Thursday, 10 a.m.**  
**at Jack Welch Stadium, Ipswich**

**All-time series**: Hamilton-Wenham leads the holiday series, 23-19, which began in 1975. Ipswich, however, leads the all-time series, 37-30-2.

**Recent streaks**: The visiting Generals have captured six of the last seven holiday encounters, including last year's 23-19 home triumph.

**Leading rushers**: HAMILTON-WENHAM: **Ian Coffey** (87 carries, 678 yards, 11 TDs), **Cam Peach** (29 carries, 218 yards, 5 TDs), **Phil Durgin**(31 carries, 194 yards, TD); IPSWICH: **Pat Gillis**(115 carries, 787 yards, 6 TDs), **Justin Moran**(77 carries, 555 yards, 6 TDs), **Ben Yanakakis**(76 carries, 467 yards, 12 TDs).

**Leading passers**: HAMILTON-WENHAM: **Billy Whelan** (97-for-170, 1,606 yards, 18 TDs), **Hunter Wilichoski**(5-for-9, 120 yards, 2 TDs); IPSWICH: **Ben Yanakakis**(20-for-50, 364 yards, 3 TDs), **Cam James**(13-for-26, 244 yards, TD).

**Leading receivers**: HAMILTON-WENHAM: **Cam Peach**(38 catches, 782 yards, 9 TDs), **Jake Lanciani**(33 catches, 601 yards, 6 TDs), **Phil Durgin**(17 catches, 248 yards, 3 TDs); IPSWICH: **Tommy Herron**(14 catches, 264 yards, TD), **Alex Bruhm**(7 catches, 149 yards, 2 TDs), **Izzy Morrissey** (9 catches, 119 yards).

**Intangibles**: **Hunter Wilichoski**will take the quarterback reins after starter **Billy Whelan** suffered a broken collarbone in the Division 6 North playoff final against Stoneham. Wilichoski threw for a pair of touchdowns in a relief role in that contest ... Ipswich is the only school in the area to have three players (**Pat Gillis, Justin Moran**and **Ben Yanakakis**) to have rushed for at least 450 yards this season ... Hamilton-Wenham has scored 21 rushing touchdowns and another 22 through the air ... The Tigers have rushed for 2,079 yards, which accounts for more than 77 percent  of their total offensive production (2,685 yards) ... The Generals have 3,167 offensive yards, 1,854 of which has come via the pass ... **Cam Peach**(38) and **Jake Lanciani**(33) of Hamilton-Wenham have each caught more passes individually than the Tigers have as a team (33) ... This contest features three of the top 10 scorers in the Salem News coverage area in Peach (96 points), Ipswich QB **Ben Yanakakis**(78) and Generals' RB **Ian Coffey** (78).

**Hamilton-Wenham seniors**: **Jake Lanciani**, WR/CB; **Dan Tobin**, WR/LB; **Andrew Riccio** (inj.), RB/DB; **Hunter Wilichoski**, QB/LB; **Phil Durgin**, FB/ILB; **Bryson Cala**, WR/CB; **Cam Peach**, FL/FS; **Alec MacDonald**, C/DL; **Matt Wieman**, LT/DT; **Jack McWhirter**, OL/DL; **Jonah Trujillo,** OL/DL; **Morgan Liphardt**, RT/DT; **Anthony Pallazola**, WR/DB; **Mike Crowley**, TE/DL.

**Ipswich seniors**: **Matt Rugo**, WR/FS; **Garrett Labrecque**, RB/DB; **Christian Fabbri**, OT/LB;  **Johnny Vitale**, RB/LB; **Will Zambernardi**, RB/LB; **Blake Emerson**, WR/DB; **Owen Tracy**, RB/DB; **Pat Gillis**, RB/LB; **Kevin Swenson**, OL/DL; **Aidan McAdams**, C/DL; **Kieran McCormack**, OL/DE; **P.J. Bussing**, OL/LB; **Caleb Comeau**, OL/DL; **Peter Spinale**, OG/DT; **Tommy Herron**, WR/CB; **Jake Wile**, WR/DB; **Alex Bruhm**, TE/CB.

**HAMILTON-WENHAM OFFENSE**

**No. Pos. Name Yr.**

 3 SE Jake Lanciani Sr.

73 LT Matt Wieman Sr.

56 LG Henry Smith Jr.

69 C Alec MacDonald Sr.

64 RG Thomas Monahan Jr.

78 RT Morgan Liphardt Sr.

85 TE Mike Crowley Sr.

44 FL Cam Peach Sr.

15 QB Hunter Wilichoski Sr.

22 FB Phil Durgin Sr.

13 RB Ian Coffey Soph.

**HAMILTON-WENHAM DEFENSE**

**No. Pos. Name Yr.**

15 DE Hunter Wilichoski Sr.

56 DT Henry Smith Jr.

78 DT Morgan Liphardt Sr.

43 DE Henry Schibli Jr.

 4 OLB Dan Tobin Sr.

38 ILB Sam Webber Jr.

22 ILB Phil Durgin Sr.

85 OLB Mike Crowley Sr.

 3 CB Jake Lanciani Sr.

26 CB Bryson Cala Sr.

44 FS Cam Peach Sr.

**IPSWICH OFFENSE**

**No. Pos. Name Yr.**

40 WR Izzy Morrissey Jr.

65 LT Will Ginolfi Soph.

50 LG Kevin Swenson Sr.

52 C Aidan McAdams Sr.

74 RG Peter Spinale RG

27 RT Christian Fabbri RT

88 TE Alex Bruhm TE

82 WR Tommy Herron Sr.

10 QB Ben Yanakakis Jr.

 5 RB Justin Moran Soph.

44 RB Pat Gillis Sr.

**IPSWICH DEFENSE**

**No. Pos. Name Yr.**

50 DE Kevin Swenson Sr.

74 DT Peter Spinale Sr.

68 DT P.J. Bussing Sr.

56 DE Kieran McCormack Sr.

44 LB Pat Gillis Sr.

27 LB Christian Fabbri Sr.

24 LB Jack Sotiropoulos Jr.

34 LB Will Zambernardi Sr.

88 CB Alex Bruhm Sr.

82 CB Tommy Herron Sr.

1. S Matt Rugo Sr.

**Generals' unbeaten season comes to an end in North final**By Phil Stacey Executive Sports Editor

 Nov 11, 2017

HAMILTON — From elation to agony, all in a span of about 10 minutes.

As the sun started to set behind the visitor's stands at the Hamilton-Wenham Regional High School field Saturday afternoon, that's the cruel twist of fate that befell the host Generals. Believing that their unbeaten season would remain intact, a sectional title would be headed their way and they'd be one victory away from a trip to Gillette Stadium for the state finals ... it all disappeared.

On his team's 58th and final rushing play of the afternoon, Stoneham junior running back Christos Argyropoulos scored from a yard out with just 28 seconds to play. It was the margin of victory for the visiting Spartans, who claimed the Division 6 North title with a 20-18 triumph.

"Boy, you talk about going from feeling ecstatic to feeling lousy," admitted Hamilton-Wenham head coach Jim Pugh afterwards. "That's a tough way to lose."

The top seed in the section, Hamilton-Wenham (9-1) had rallied from a 14-point third quarter deficit to punch in three unanswered touchdowns. They had taken their first lead, 18-14,with 6:36 to play when Hunter Wilichoski hit running back Ian Coffey with a pass in the flat, then watched as the defender covering Coffey slipped, allowing the Generals' sophomore to speed 57 yards untouched to paydirt.

But Stoneham did not panic. Getting the ball back on their own 37-yard line, the Spartans stuck to their double wing ground attack (they did not attempt a pass all game, save for a successful 2-point conversion try) and chipped away at both the Generals and the clock. Three yards on a trap here, four yards on a sweep there, three more yards on a dive, and move the chains.

It was the football equivalent of death by one thousand paper cuts. But it also worked.

On the penultimate 15-play march downfield, Stoneham (8-2) converted four first downs, two of those coming on third down and one on 4th-and-1 from the H-W 23. Tre Pignone (28 carries for 139 yards) and Argyropoulos (18-64) both carried the ball seven times on the drive, with Pignone gaining six yards on 1st-and-goal from the 9 and two more on second down before his backfield mate scored the game-winner.

"There's no good way of losing," said Pugh, whose team lost its starting quarterback, junior southpaw Billy Whelan, to a broken right collarbone in the third quarter. "I feel so bad for our seniors; they left their heart and soul out there. They played like warriors ... we just came up 30 seconds short."

Unable to get untracked offensively in the first half, the Generals made an unlikely comeback over the final two quarters.

Pignone's 3-yard TD run on a toss sweep right had given Stoneham a 14-0 lead midway through the third quarter, but the hosts responded on the ensuing drive. Forced to come in after Whelan was injured on a third down incompletion, Wilichoski kept the drive alive with an 8-yard pass to Jake Lanciani. Four plays later, he found captain Phil Durgin in the right flat, who corralled the pass and scored from 26 yards out to make it 14-6.

"He came in and did a nice job. He made some nice touch passes, some bullet passes ... we're proud of him and the job he did to get us back in the game," Pugh said of Wilichoski.

A successful onsides kick gave Hamilton-Wenham the ball back, and after a terrific 21-yard catch along the left sidelines by Cam Peach, he took it in himself from 2 yards out to open the final quarter. Wilichoski's 2-point pass to him on the far right side of the end zone, however, was ruled incomplete, and the Generals trailed by two.

"To be honest with you I thought we'd be able to run the ball a little bit better, especially in the first half," Stoneham head coach Bob Almeida said. "(Hamilton-Wenham) did an excellent job; they were tough and very physical with what they were able to do. But our kids stayed the course.

"We felt like we were going to go down and score and put the game away (after H-W's first touchdown), but they got the onsides kick. I give Coach Pugh and his team a lot of credit; that offense is tough to stop."

On its next series, Stoneham went for it on fourth down from the H-W 38, but quarterback Jack McCabe was sacked by Wilichoski. Switching over to offense, Wilichoski (5-for-8, 120 yards, 2 TDs) found Coffey over the middle, and he took advantage of the defensive mishap to sprint into the end zone.

But as it had done for most of the afternoon, Stoneham controlled the clock, and ultimately the game, on its final possession. Their game-winning drive took 6 minutes and 8 seconds, leaving the Generals with scant time to forge a comeback.

For the afternoon, the Spartans more than doubled Hamilton-Wenham in terms of time of possession (30:17 to 13:43).

"These are great kids, real overachievers. They've done a great job all year," Pugh said of his squad. "Now we've got to take it out on Ipswich on Thanksgiving."