

SPORTS RALLY *extra*

Young season yields some pleasant surprises

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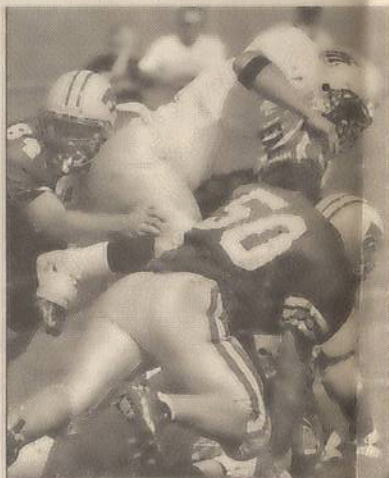
SURPRISE, SURPRISE.

Though it's still very early in the season, at least five teams — Marlboro, Monsignor Donovan, Holmdel, Long Branch and Keansburg — rate as pleasant surprises.

FOOTBALL NOTES

Not forecast to raise many eyebrows in 1999, they are off to fast starts and thinking state playoffs as well as making runs in their respective Shore Conference divisions. Here's a capsule look at reasons for their early success and whether it will continue:

Marlboro (3-0). Last winning season — 1994. Emergence of junior Drew Danish at quarterback has blended nicely with key returners, including senior running back Nick Lenart and wideout Jon Kobrinski. Another factor is the Mustangs defense, for which tackle Anthony Alfano and defensive end Tom Shultzel have been ferocious. **Outlook:** Should be in the Class A North race to the end. Games with Middletown South and on Thanksgiving with Manalapan could be huge. Will face No. 1 Brick in two weeks.



STEVE SCHOLFIELD/Staff Photographer

● **Middletown South's James Sorrenti** tries to get past Pine-lands' Eric Leigh (84) and Brendon Barrett (50) Saturday.

Monsignor Donovan (2-0). Last winning season — 1993. Griffins are a heartwarming tale of an apparent end of several years of suffering.

After going 4-42 since 1993, which included a 25-game losing streak, Donovan has been sparked by jun-

ior quarterback Sean Nassoioy, senior running back/linebacker Ryan Pannorfi and senior running back/lineman Michael Mageros. **Outlook:** May still have hands full in Class B South with the likes of Manasquan, Central and Lacey, but coach Tom Farrell's team has turned the respectability corner.

Holmdel (2-0). Last winning season — 1991. First-year coach Don Sofilkkanich has a veteran cast playing well. Passing of quarterback Jason Pozarowski and rushing of Russ LaPlante (5.1 yards per carry) and Chris Hernando (4.3 yards) has brought offensive balance. Opening day one-point Class C South victory over Monmouth Regional may have been the key to the season. **Outlook:** A solid club. Only Rumson may stand in the way of a division title.

Long Branch (2-0). Last winning season — 1997. One of the Shore's quality programs had an off year (3-7) in 1998. David Rodriguez (four TD passes), a 1,000-yard passer last season, tight end Derek Warren (two TDs this year), and running back/linebacker Jeff Dennis have helped build early momentum for first-year coach Dan

George. **Outlook:** A very difficult schedule may take its toll starting this week vs. No. 8 Matawan. Ahead there's No. 5 Raritan, Middletown South, No. 3 Toms River South and No. 2 Neptune.

Keansburg (2-1). Last winning season — 1996. Times have been tough with just four wins since the 1996 days of the Billy Shea-led undefeated Central Jersey Group I champions. Throw out opening day loss to Neptune and Titans appear to be significantly improved. Junior Luca Abrusci already has three touchdowns for a team that was held to one field goal over its final five games last year. **Outlook:** Still a Class C North dark horse. Game with Shore this week could determine whether Keansburg is a legitimate division force again. Tough battles loom later with Mater Dei and Keyport.

Profile in courage

Brick senior tackle Mike Rivera broke his right fourth metacarpal toward the end of the first half Saturday night vs. Toms River South but played the entire second half.

Dr. Daniel Fox, an orthopedic surgeon on the Brick sidelines,

took the player and his mother to his office a few blocks away where he reset the fracture, placing it in a small cast.

"It was pretty painful," Rivera said yesterday. "I wanted to play in the second half. That was the first question I asked when I came off the field. I didn't want to miss the rest of the game."

Brick won 17-7 for coach Warren Wolf's 300th career victory.

Rivera said he practiced yesterday. "Coach Wolf was pleased I came back into the game and was real happy with Dr. Fox," Rivera said.

"This is something you see in Division I or the NFL," said Jim Barber, Brick's eighth-year athletic trainer. "You don't usually see this on the high school level."

A rare shutout

Holmdel's 28-0 victory over Asbury Park marked the first time the Bishops had been shut out since a 41-0 defeat by Neptune in the final game of the 1995 season.

□ *State high school football notes appear on page C6.*