

# Sports

THE NEW JERSEY HERALD

Coming Sunday

■ A preview for the football game between Pope John and Sparta

Inside

■ The Lenape Valley football prevails thanks to 27 second-half points/C2

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AP Photo/Mel Evans

New York Giants tight end Michael Matthews and quarterback Eli Manning stand on the sidelines late in the fourth quarter of their game at Giants Stadium last Sunday. Green Bay's offense did anything it wanted, leading the Packers to a 35-13 victory.

## Defense vents after early struggles

By TOM CANAVAN  
AP Sports Writer

NFL: NEW YORK GIANTS

EAST RUTHERFORD — The frustration of an 0-2 start that has seen the New York Giants defense give up 80 points got to Pro Bowl middle linebacker Antonio Pierce on Thursday. Pierce didn't rant a couple of days before the Giants headed to Washington to play the Redskins (2-0). He just reverted to the "us-against-them" mentality that he employed a year ago when New York started 1-2. There was sarcasm in his voice. He refused to talk about the defense much. Occasionally he pulled an air horn from under a towel and let out an annoying blast. And when pressed about the defense, he asked fans and the media to come up with solutions since the

players and coaches haven't. "We're asking the media and the fans, if you all know how, to help out the New York Giants defense," Pierce said. "We would appreciate it. Send it to Giants.com." The only time he sounded genuine was when he talked about giving up 80 points to Dallas and Green Bay, the franchise's worst combined opening two-game total since 1966. "The fact is, we are 0-2, we have given up 80 points and we're 29th, I believe, in defense," Pierce said. "We are a bad team right now. That is a fact. But it is a long season. We have 14 games left. I have seen a lot of teams go 2-0 and not go to the Super Bowl. I have seen 0-2

teams bounce back." Seven-time Pro Bowl defensive end Michael Strahan was just as chippy. He ripped a television report broadcast during last week's loss to Green Bay that said the defenders had no spark sitting on the bench. His focus this week was on winning. "You can't think about yesterday's spoiled milk, you have to worry about the delivery today," Strahan said. "We are worried about what we are going to do on Sunday and that is our whole focus. You can't be upset. You can come out here and work harder, that is about the only thing you can do, and hopefully that will rectify what happened the last few weeks by getting a win on Sunday."

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HS BOYS SOCCER

## Wally inspires Rangers

By ADAM REGAN  
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HARDYSTON — Whenever the trials and tribulations of soccer start to get to Mike Ramos, the Wallkill Valley forward thinks about his friend and teammate Brian Wally.

If ever he feels tired after making a long rush to the goal, Ramos quickly forgets about the pain because it is what Wally would do if he were out there. But Wally isn't out there.

The junior is busy fighting a battle for his life — cancer — and the rest of the Wallkill Valley team is scrapping along with him.

"This season is for him, there is no question about it," Ramos said of his teammate whose tumor just below the knee will keep him out this season. "Besides being there for him, that is all we can really do."

Before each game, the Rangers remind themselves that their season has more meaning now than any other. Each second played is honoring their teammate, who cherished every moment he was on the soccer field.

"Soccer is what he loves most in the world," said Ramos, who grew up playing with Wally. "He is fighting for his life every day. The least we can do is play hard for 80 minutes."

So far, the spoils of their blood, sweat and tears have yet to come to fruition. The Rangers sit at the bottom of the SCIL standings at 1-4, with their first win coming Tuesday against Hopatcong.

While Wallkill Valley's struggles could never equal those of Wally, the players and coaches agree that if Wally can return to the soccer field, anything is possible. This includes a Rangers' berth in the state tournament.

"Brian is always on our minds," junior goalkeeper Alex Dandorf said. "We want to come together as a team (this season) and honor him properly."

Improvement takes place on the practice field, a place where Wally excelled, according to coach Larry Hildebrand.

As the Rangers work on new offensive schemes and defensive sets, Hildebrand can only think how useful Wally, a dangerous ball-mover, would be on the field.

In many ways, however, Wally is still present at practice. When he is able to attend school in between recovering from chemotherapy treatments, the junior always shows up at practice to shout words of encouragement or give high-fives to the team.

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HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL: JEFFERSON AT VERNON

Jefferson (2-1)	0	0	7	13	— 20
Vernon (2-1)	7	6	0	6	— 19



Photo by Randy Mills/allproshots.com

Jefferson quarterback Dom Macaluso hands off to John Kaschak in Thursday's game against Vernon at Skylands Park. Macaluso rallied the Falcons to a 20-19 victory over the Vikings.

## Flying high

By ADAM REGAN  
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### Falcons come back to defeat Vikings in final minute

AUGUSTA — Following a late fourth-quarter fumble, Jefferson quarterback Dominick Macaluso was certain his Falcons wouldn't get another shot at the end zone.

Then again, he'd been wrong before. The senior signal-caller changed his tune as soon as he watched the Falcon defense force a three-and-out with less than two minutes left in a 20-19 win over Vernon on Thursday.

Then came the guarantee. "I knew we were going to score as soon as we got the ball back," Macaluso said.

His instincts were batting .500 for the night after he hit a wide-open Travis Smith for a 43-yard touchdown

pass with 25 seconds remaining to give Jefferson its first win over the Group IV-Vikings in five years.

Macaluso was caught off guard as he saw a lone gold-and-white, No. 83 jersey streaking down the field. What he wasn't surprised at was the amount of time he had to locate Smith.

"Our offensive line was getting it done all night

long," Macaluso said. "They deserve a lot of credit."

The line's efforts went unnoticed, however, until after halftime when the Falcons dug out of a 13-0 hole. A fake punt which set up a John Kaschak score and Smith's first receiving touchdown of the game depicted a whole new team.

Jefferson head coach Joe Mattessich may have had a bit to do with that.

His halftime speech not only motivated his players, but challenged them on another level.

"Let's just say that a lot of things were said about their manhood," said Mattessich, who was on the losing end of a one-point game against Vernon last season. "And they responded as they should have."

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## Uncomfortable Red Sox get ready for playoffs

By JIMMY GOLEN  
AP Sports Writer

BOSTON — The Red Sox don't have to worry about a repeat of their historic 1978 collapse this season: Even if they fail to win the AL East, they're still a shoo-in for the playoffs as a wild card.

"From now on, you're going to see who is who," Red Sox shortstop Julio Lugo said Wednesday night after Boston's lead in the division fell to 1 1/2 games, its smallest margin since April. "We've just got to win. We're playing hard but things are not working out. We've got to start winning somehow."

The Red Sox led the AL East by 12 games on July 5, when they were 22 games above .500 and the Yankees were two games under. Since May 30, when New York was 14 1/2 games back

MLB: AL EAST RACE

and tied for last with Tampa Bay, the Yankees have gone 67-35 and Boston 54-48.

"When we were 14 1/2 back, ... I just never really thought about the division. I didn't," Andy Pettitte said after the Yankees swept the Baltimore Orioles. "I wanted to make the playoffs, and then I knew if we continued to play well maybe that would be something that we could set our sights on."

"And, obviously, there we are. We're right here now."

The Yankees lead the Detroit Tigers by 5 1/2 games in the wild-card race, and Boston's magic number to clinch at least a playoff berth is only three. So even if the Red Sox can't hold off New York, they almost assuredly will make

the playoffs. Not good enough, closer Jonathan Papelbon said.

"I want to win the division probably more than anybody," said Papelbon, who gave up a grand slam in Wednesday night's loss. "That's part of the goal, to win the division. Right now, we need to put our sights on winning that division and go out there and execute and do it."

Boston had the best record in baseball for most of the season — a total of 124 days before losing Wednesday night. The sweep in Toronto dropped Boston behind AL Central and West division leaders Cleveland and the Los Angeles Angels, and left the Red Sox in danger of making the playoffs as a wild-card team.

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AP Photo/Adrian Wyld

Red Sox designated hitter David Ortiz pops up on Wednesday. The Yankees have whittled the Red Sox lead to 1 1/2 games.