



April 9, 2011

New England Wins Season Opener

MEDWAY, MA – The New England Intensity, of the Independent Women’s Football League (IWFL), began their 2011 campaign with an 18-0 road victory in Portland against long-time foe Sothern Maine. Mother Nature would largely cooperate, serving up a sunny breezy afternoon with temperatures around 50 degrees (not bad for Maine in early April).

The hosting squad put forth a very motivated, tough effort, actually playing the Intensity to a tie in the 2nd half (after surrendering 18 points in the 1st half). The victory for NE was their 7th straight over the Rebels, during which time the Blue has outscored Southern Maine 224-13.

Much of the acrimony that had grown from a simmer to a rolling boil over the course of the 2010 season between Southern Maine and New England seemed to have dissipated over the course of the off-season, occasional facebook chest thumping (and misspellings) aside.

It is worth noting that the normally-atrocious officiating that has become synonymous with playing on the road in Portland was not the case at all during this game . . . Rather, quite surprisingly, a fair and relatively foul-free game took place—with only 6 accepted penalties all afternoon (2 on the Rebels, 4 on NE). Both teams, coaching staffs, and fans noticed and enjoyed the difference!

A rather challenging off-season and pre-season for the Intensity (with many comings and goings, weather/illness/scheduling obstacles, and on-going personal matters weighing heavily on numerous key members of the franchise) came to a welcome end at 5pm on April 9th, with the regular season for New England officially beginning by way of the Southern Maine Rebels squibbing the kickoff to rookie TE Kate Schoenen (pronounced Shay-ninn), who scooped it up and advanced 5 yards in the right direction before being tackled. She, along with several rookies and free agents, would be slightly out of uniform for this game—the Intensity uniform order encountering shipping delays—and be forced to wear old Intensity game jerseys, borrow ones from injured players and even spray paint (or silk screen) a number on the back of a practice jersey. A little low-rent to be sure, but as the old marketing slogan goes “It’s what’s inside that counts.”.

Head Coach/Offensive Coordinator Jason Fernald, the all-time winningest coach in franchise history, back for his 3rd consecutive season, was one such individual who’s return was largely in question for much of the off-season and pre-season. All of Intensity Nation is exceedingly happy and enthused he has remained at the helm! He had QB Alex Montone come out firing on first down, unfortunately the pass fell incomplete.

All-world RB Steph Samuelson (a 3-time All-Star coming off of her best season ever—amassing 1207 yards and 17 rushing TDs in 9 games last year), recently elected as Team Captain for the 4th consecutive season, picked up right where she left off, slashing her way to a 10 yard gain on 2nd down. An inopportune holding call negated this effort of Steph’s. She would get 4 of those yards back on the next play, but the 3rd and long pass attempt of Montone’s slipped out of her had a little on the release, missing her mark by a mile. Old friend Riss Nardelli, returning to the team she began her career with (Riss played for NE from 2005-2007, before spending three years playing in New York), came on to punt on 4th down, sending the ball 29 yards past scrimmage. Quick on the coverage was 2010 Defensive MVP Lisa Vincent and rookie Jen Lewis met the ball carrier and tackled her for zero return yards.

Defensive Coordinator Johnny Johnson’s D took the field, eager to get some play against a different color uniform! Vincent, knifed in on the first down run play, bringing down the runner 2 yards deep in the backfield. Promising 3rd year DT Bri Giarrusso, poised to have a phenomenal year after a great off-season, shed her block and stopped the Rebel RB for a short gain to bring up 3rd and long. A focus area for Coach Johnson’s defensive scheme has been to



well-defend the pass . . . and this focus bore fruit early, with Intensity Hall of Famer DB Jojo Gauthier making her first of three interceptions, this one tipped by 2nd year LB Erica Adams.

Montone came back out firing, connecting with the versatile Gauthier for a 7 yard pickup that was nullified by another holding call on NE. Montone gained three yards with her feet on the next play, but over threw a 2nd and long pass intended for Samuelson. She was more accurate on the 3rd down attempt, but Donovan, clearly interfered with on the deep route, did not get the call, and the Intensity would have to punt again. Nardelli uncorked another 29 yard punt (it is worth noting that free agent Center Michelle Breden—who played in Maine for the previous several seasons—had a very good day snapping, especially long snaps and shot guns) that Vincent and Adams covered well (Vincent drilling the returner, causing the ball to come loose, and Adams tackling the Southern Maine player who hopped on the ball).

Newly-elected Team Captain DE Lisa Close (1 solo and 5 tackle assists) and Vincent combined for tackle that held the Rebel first down run to a mere 2 yards. However, the hosts dialed up a 10 yard run with their massive FB before DB/LB Andrea Covelli (playing in her first game since a season-ending injury in the 2010 opener—also versus against Southern Maine) and Vincent. This gain was all but erased with a 7 yard tackle for loss by LB Charlene Casey (2 solo and a team-leading 11 tackle assists) and Vincent. The 2nd down pass was nearly intercepted by Covelli. Casey and Giarrusso (team-leading 3 solo and 9 tackle assists) slammed the door on 3rd down, forcing up 4th and long and another punt from the Rebels. Close, with her impressive speed, effort and athleticism, found a way to get a hand on the punt and deflected it out of bounds after traveling only 10 yards past scrimmage. As an aside, NE did a great job winning the field position battle, their average starting position for the day being midfield, while Maine's was their own 35.

Hall of Famer Samuelson, who would finish the day with 142 yards on 17 carries (including 3 first downs and a TD), scampered for 12 yards on first down to the SMR 30. Bad blocking hung WR Tricia Donovan out to dry on the ensuing reverse play, losing ground and bringing up 2nd and 13. Steph gained 4 yards on the next play, but Donovan was again hit down field during the pass route (and, again, no PI call from the officials). Fernald elected to go for it on 4th and 9, taking to the air and, with some great blocking on the left side by Captain OL/DL Coco Edwards picking up two Rebel players that bought Montone time to launch a pass to WR/DB Donna Bruce (another huge free agent signing), who's wily veteran effort extended the ball just over the goal line as she fought with Rebel defenders to score the Intensity's first TD of 2011! Nardelli's PAT was low and the score remained 6-0 with 1 minute remaining in the 1st quarter.

A relatively short kick by Nardelli was well covered by Vincent and Donovan who held Southern Maine to another zero-yard return. The home squad, always a big and physical bunch, did find some traction with their power running game (ending up with 142 yards on 41 carries), especially early on this drive. Consecutive runs of 9, 19, and 11 yards moved them to inside the Intensity 25 and had the hosts thinking they were about to match NE's score. Giarrusso came up big on the next two plays, combining with veteran DE Nancy O'Loughlin for solid stop on 1st down and then getting a solo tackle for loss on 2nd down. The Rebels fumbled on the exchange but were able to recover the ball; however, they now faced 4th and 10. Rather than attempt a long field goal, Maine tried to pass for a first down . . . in hindsight, a poor decision, as Gauthier picked off the QB again and returned it 25 yards.

In a very underwhelming series, Samuelson somehow fought through three attempted tackles in the backfield as the blocking broke down and managed to get a yard on the 1st down run. She was tackled, literally, by her shoestrings on 2nd down---there was a lot of green ahead of her. There was not much of a hole for her on 3rd down and Fernald decided to punt on 4th and 4 from the NE 41. Gauthier downed Nardelli's short punt at the SMR 43.

OL/DL Torrance Brown, for the first time since 2005 was neither pregnant nor injured (or both) during the preseason, found herself a new Team Captain for 2011 and playing DT on this 1st down play, fought off her block and drilled the RB right a scrimmage. The home team decided to try passing again . . . with the same result—a



Gauthier interception! This one a record-breaking 56 yard return for a TD--pushing the score to 12-0, NEI, with 6:15 remaining in the first half. Suspect blocking again hurt NE as the 2pt run attempt by Samuelson was quite ineffective—she was drilled 2 yards behind scrimmage.

Nardelli unloaded a 37 yard kick that was returned 15 yards before Giarrusso brought down the ball carrier. A 14 yard 1st down run was the high point of this possession for the Rebels, as rookie DL/OL Aimee Gauvin and Giarrusso stood strong on the next play. Casey and 2010 Lineman of the Year?All Star Bridget Cambria did the same on 2nd and 6, with Vincent and Casey (also a 2010 All Stars) crashed the RB and forced a 4th and 3 and punt—which got a very favorable (for Maine) and debatable spot by the sideline official at the NE 10.

Montone, struggling with her accuracy, misfired on 1st down. Samuelson rattled off runs of 8 and 7 yards around the 2 minute warning. Donovan was open on 1st and 10 from the NE 25 but overthrown incomplete. In another record-setting effort, Samuelson bounced out to the left and out ran the entire Maine team (with some noteworthy blocking by LB/FB Erica Adams) for a 75 yard TD run! A nice defensive play by Southern Maine to break up the pass to Samuelson on the 2pt attempt kept the score at 18-0.

Free agent Jenn O'Connor and Gauthier (1 solo, 6 tackle assists to go along with her 3 pickles) tackled the kickoff returner with the 2nd quarter rapidly approaching it's close. Giarrusso and Casey held the first down run attempt to a mere 2 yards, though Maine did gain 9 on 2nd down before O'Loughlin (3 tackle assists) and DB Stacey "Hulk" DeLuca stopped the RB. Adams (2 solo, 7 tackle assists), Close and Gauvin forced a 2nd and 7 with a solid run defense. This now, a predictable passing down, saw Cambria slice in for her first sack of the season (and move half of a sack ahead of teammate Charlene Casey for the franchise all-time lead). Consecutive incomplete passes by the home team turned the ball over on downs. Samuelson would get off an 8 yard run before the teams adjourned for halftime.

Fernald was generally pleased with the 18-0 lead the team had built, all things considered, but did call on the squad to reduce the mistakes and really put this game away, not giving Southern Maine the chance to think they can hang around and compete in the 2nd half.

The Intensity kicked off (a 35 yarder by Nardelli that Gauthier and Covelli covered after an 11 yard return to the SMR 36). Much to coaching staff's chagrin, the Intensity did not appear to be heeding the halftime guidance of their Head Coach, surrendering an 8 play (all rushes) drive to start the 3rd quarter. The Rebels marched systematically down to within the NE 35. During this time, an injury scare with Nardelli (she was okay) took place after a punishing 6 yard run by Maine. On 1st and 10 from the NE 39, Gauvin tripped up the RB for a one yard gain, with O'Connor (1 solo and 6 tackle assists) and Vincent stuffing the run respectably and forcing a 3rd and 5. Adams and Close penetrated into the backfield and notched a one yard tackle for loss, brining up another punt for the home team. Nardelli and Brown assaulted the punt team and got their hands on the ball and NE would take over from their 42.

A drive that was looking very promising—starting with a 14 yard first down run by Samuelson, and two plays later, a 26 yard pass play from Montone to Samuelson—turned ugly quickly as Southern Maine got a lucky fist on the ball, knocking it loose and allowing the Rebels to recover the ball at their 29.

The Intensity had a strong defensive stand: With Gauthier coming up with a big solo tackle on first down, a penalty on Maine on the next play, followed by a 5 yard tackle for loss by Adams and Nardelli. Gauthier narrowly missed her 4th INT of the day on the 3rd and 14 pass attempt. The host team then punted and downed said punt at their 42, where NE's offense would take over.

Fernald would chew some time off the clock on this drive, with several consecutive running plays . . . an 8 yard run by Samuelson on 1st down, then several runs by Montone (-1, 8 and 6 yards). Montone bobbled a snap on the next



play, losing 6 yards as the 3rd quarter ended. On 3rd and 10 from the SMR 27, Samuelson was stopped barely 2 yards beyond scrimmage, serving up a 4th and 8 for NE. Montone sailed an open Donovan, turning the ball over on downs.

Johnson's Defense continued to perform well, with O'Loughlin and Nardelli jamming the RB for no gain on first down at the SMR29 and Casey taking a wallop from the wrecking ball of a FB but keeping her progress to just 4 yards. On 3rd and 6, the home team elected to pass and what was probably a highlight reel sack by Cambria coming from the blind side was ruled an incomplete pass. Maine launched a decent punt that went out of bounds at the NE 42.

New England's offensive woes in the 2nd half annoyingly persisted, with two runs that netted -7 yards and an incomplete pass (though Donovan was again victimized by what seemed to be pass interference-level contact by everyone except the guys with the striped shirts—this time, the DB did not even look back for the ball). Nardelli helped the Intensity cause with a 32 yard punt that was downed.

Despite the shortcomings on O, the D continued to hold the line . . . Another three and out for Southern Maine led to a punt. The punt play saw NE flagged for an offside, prompting the Rebels to re-punt. Another poor decision in hindsight, as the punter booted it off her own player in the backfield and allowed Bruce to recover it at the SMR 24! A gift-wrapped opportunity to put some points up and seal the game . . .

A gift that would not materialize . . . a short run by Montone, another NE penalty, and 3 incomplete passes (an open Donovan watching two passes sail uncatchably over her head, and Bruce almost coming down with an impressive heave up the right side that might have ended up as a TD). The turnover on downs occurring shortly before the 2 minute warning gave the Rebels enough time to piece together a drive an break the shut out.

Southern Maine would never make it to the Intensity side of midfield, with standout plays by Giarrusso and O'Connor (a 2-yard tackle for loss on a run), a pass defended—almost intercepted--by rookie Jen Lewis, and stops for very short gains by Gauvin and Adams on one play, Adams by herself on another, and O'Connor and Giarrusso (again) on a 3rd. Time would expire and the final score was 18-0 in favor of the visitors.

These two squads will play each other again on 4/23 in Medway. Between now and then, New England will be heading north of the border for a match next Saturday with the 2010 IWFL Champion Montreal Bltiz, who put the wood to the Intensity 53-14 during the Quarterfinals of last years playoffs in Montreal. In fact, it was 2005 when New England last defeated Montreal (they have lost 4 straight against them since).

The Blue will look to have a much-improved showing up there next week, buoyed by an intriguing result of the 4/9/11 contest between the Blitz and Manchester Freedom (in which Montreal won a squeaker at home, 12-6). Begging the question did Manchester rise or Montreal fall (or both) . . . Either way, the Intensity will be hard a work preparing. Stay tuned!!

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The New England Intensity is the leading women's professional football franchise in the region. For more information, visit www.newenglandintensity.com.

