

One shot at Thanksgiving glory

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FITCHBURG -- Kids in Fitchburg grow up dreaming that one day they will get the opportunity to play against archrival Leominster in the annual Thanksgiving Day football game.

For three Fitchburg High seniors -- Elijah Allen, Ron Fernandez and Alexis Rivera -- that dream is now a reality.

Thursday morning will mark the first and only time they get to experience the thrills, chills, pain and pride of playing varsity football on Thanksgiving morning at Crocker Field against the Blue Devils.

"It's kind of crazy to think I'm already a senior and I'm putting on the pads for the last time on Thursday," said Allen after practice at Amcott Field on Monday evening. "It's my first Thanksgiving game as a senior and I'm super excited and I can't wait to play."

Fernandez also shared in that excitement. He said: "I'm definitely excited to play in this last game of my senior year. It's my last time being a Raider, and it's the last time ever putting on these pads for our school."

Allen, Fernandez and Rivera are all rough-and-tough linemen, who love physical contact in close quarters while in the trenches.

They also love the fact that the Red Raiders (5-5) are on the upswing and can be pieces to the puzzle in ending Leominster's recent dominance on Thanksgiving Day.

"We've had our ups and downs, but we're going to pick it up as a team and individuals and we're going to go out there and fight," Rivera said. "(The season) has been crazy, thinking it's our last game on Thanksgiving. It's OK, we're going to just go out there and fight."

Fernandez just wants a win for the program and for the city.

"I've never played in a Thanksgiving Day game, not one of my high school years," he said. "It's definitely going to be a big-time thing to finally win after a long time."

Rivera said he expects it to be a good game.

"We're going to come out here and fight and they're probably going to come out and fight, but we've got it," he said. "We're going to go out there and show way more. We're going to be ready to go."

"It's our last chance to go out there and fight against Leominster."

Fitchburg hasn't beaten Leominster on Turkey Day since 2008.

"We're going to try to put an end to it this week," Allen said.

Fitchburg football coach Tom DiGeronimo says he's extremely proud of Allen, Fernandez and Rivera. He's also proud of everyone who has sacrificed for the betterment of the FHS football program this fall.

"I've worked very closely with them in the school," DiGeronimo said. "To see them come out this year and finish the season... the three of them have played very well for us. I couldn't be happier and more proud of those three gentlemen, plus all of our kids. I'm lucky. I have good kids; I'm real lucky."

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