

Dec. 3 CJ III State Final Football – Bad Result But Great Experience



Head coach Dan Caruso and quarterback Adam Riese (14) lead Steinert out of the tunnel and onto the field at Rutgers High Point Solutions Stadium today for the start of the Central Jersey Group III championship game. The whole Rutgers experience provided the Spartans with a nice memory despite the outcome (Photo by Mike Dill/purchase photos at www.michaeldillphotography.com).

Emotions range from excitement to frustration to pride after Spartans loss By Rich Fisher

Fish4Scores.com

Dec. 3: When are things bad when they are also good?

When you lose a Central Jersey Group III championship game in a Division I football stadium.

Steinert experienced that this evening, letting a 14-point lead evaporate in a 47-28 loss to Neptune at Rutgers' Highpoint Solutions Stadium in Piscataway.

The setting was incredible to perform in, but the outcome was brutal to accept.

"This just sucks," quarterback Adam Riese said when it was over. "I hate it. I hate this feeling right now."

"It sucks," said Jeff Mattonelli, echoing the common refrain. "We worked hard for this all year. We set this as our goal, we just came a little short."

Asked to put his feelings in words, coach Dan Caruso came up short.

“You can’t,” he said. “I’m upset. You’re disappointed, frustrated.”

And that is exactly how players and coaches should feel after being just 24 minutes away from a historic championship after taking a 28-21 halftime lead.



While the venue was first rate all the way, if there was any down side to playing at Rutgers High Point Solutions Stadium today it was having to deal with wannabe tough-guy NJSIAA security people like this one. Photo by John Blaine/purchase photos by e-mailing jbsportsphoto@aol.com.

“It was a special day for two special teams.”

And although it ended badly for Steinert, it can not detract from a special season. The Spartans did things no other team in school history accomplished.

“It was such an amazing season for all of us,” Riese said. “This was one of the most fun years I ever had playing football my entire life. I loved playing with every player on this team and I wish the juniors, sophomores and freshmen the best of luck next year.”

Mattonelli is one of the players receiving those well wishes, but he feels that Riese’s class deserves the props.

“I’m so proud of the seniors,” he said. “They built this program up to where it is today. I’m so proud of my team, the coaches. We did what no other team is able to do.”

But the bitterness of the loss could not take away from the uplifting feeling each and every player enjoyed, from running out of the tunnel to seeing replays of themselves on the huge endzone scoreboard.

“This is awesome,” Riese said. “The Birthplace of College Football. It always awes me to come here, just to sit in the stands here or anything like that. But standing on this turf, it’s awesome.”

Asked if he snuck a few peeks at himself on the scoreboard, Riese laughed.

“Yeah,” he said.

He probably wasn’t alone.

“This was amazing,” added Mattonelli. “I’ll always remember it. This team will never be together again. I have another year here but nothing is ever gonna be as good as this, playing for a championship in this stadium.”

It is something that the Spartans deserved, and Caruso was happy to see them get it.

“To be on the field, to run out of the tunnel, it was an amazing experience for the kids and an experience they’ll take with them the rest of their lives,” the coach said.

No one knows that more than Caruso, who will probably have a lot of emotions at next week's banquet when he bids farewell to the seniors who were freshmen his first season as head coach.

"I'm proud of all of the players for the whole year and what they did, they're a great bunch of kids," the coach said. "I'll be sorry to see the seniors go because they're the class that built this program from freshman year up. They came out and left it on the field."

But being the competitors that they are, even playing in a spectacular venue couldn't take away the sting of defeat.

"This was a great experience," Mattonelli said. "But it sucks to come out of it losing."

"I know there are better things to go on to in life," Riese said. "But this is gonna hurt for a while."

Rest assured, when it stops hurting, the memories of it all will be some of the greatest these players ever enjoy.