

Nov. 13 Fish4Scores.com Athlete(s) of the Week



The 2011 Steinert High football team brushed all the other playoff losses under the mat Friday night with its history-making win over Wall (Photo by John Blaine/purchase photos by e-mailing jbsportsphoto@aol.com).

Steinert's playoff win over Wall was also a win over past disappointments

By Rich Fisher

Fish4Scores.com

Nov. 13: What the Steinert football team did on Friday night was so much more than just beat Wall.

It beat history.

It conquered demons.

It buried ghosts.

First off, the Spartans were fighting the perception that Mercer County can never beat a Shore Conference team. Anyone who follows football in the area knows of the failures of Mercer against any non-county team in the playoffs the past few seasons, particularly against those from down the shore.

Secondly, and even more significantly, it put to rest nearly four decades of football frustration on the corner of Klockner and Yardville-Hamilton Square Road.

Steinert had never won a state game since the playoff system was implemented in the 1970s. Heck, it never even reached the states until 11 years ago.

Since the school opened in 1958, Steinert has been known for championship baseball and soccer, while other sports have had their runs of glory off and on.

Football was one of those, most notably the 1966 unbeaten team. Two eras of grid teams have reached the playoffs for three straight years, including this group.

But until Friday night, none had won a state game in six previous tries.

Finally, the onus has been lifted.

And in looking back on all the years of Steinert football and many of the exciting wins over Hamilton, we would have to rank this victory as the greatest ever in the NJSIAA playoff era, and tied for the greatest of all time.

The only other one that compares with this, as far as overall significance and importance, is when the 1966 team beat Hamilton on Thanksgiving Day without starting quarterback Gary Hohman, giving the Spartans what is still the only undefeated season in school history.

Would that team had won a playoff game? Maybe, maybe not.

But this one did.

And for that, the entire Steinert High varsity football team is the *Fish4Scores.com Athlete(s) of the Week* for the week ending Nov. 13.

We polled players as to what it means for them to be part of school history. Here are the responses we received:

Receiver Keon White: "It means the world to us! We worked so hard for this since the Friday after Thanksgiving and we came out confident. We knew we were playing a tough team but we were a tough team too. It felt like winning the championship. But now we have to stay focused because we still have another playoff game."

Defensive end Dean Lucchesi: "It feels great. We expected to win this game even though a lot of people doubted us."

Quarterback Adam Riese: A lot of it hasn't even hit me yet. Everything about it. The history making win, things that went on with myself, significant days, stuff like that. Winning on 11/11/11 eleven years after our first playoff game. Just crazy stuff.

"This game is probably gonna be one of the most memorable games of my life, just because it's history for Steinert and our senior class – guys I've been playing Pop Warner with since I was seven years old. That bond, that chemistry, just the feeling that came out."

Kicker Barri Deptula: "Making school history feels amazing. I knew the guys could do it. All week, you could see that we wanted it. Being one of the younger players, not really knowing what going to playoffs felt like, winning this game is probably the best feeling I've had all season."

Lineman Eric "Andy Reid Jr." Fink: "It feels great."

Guard Shaiful Ali: "It means a lot to me. Just knowing that we made history is a great feeling being the first team to win a playoff game. I always tell the team 'How do you want to be remembered?' We don't want to be history . . . we want to keep making it."

Lineman Matt Spurgin: "Our team has been dedicated and working hard since the week after last season ended. This win is just another indicator of how all the blood sweat and tears paid off in the end. We've had great athletes, coaches and fans in the past 50-plus years but I think this year's record is showing this season we've got a perfect blend of knowledgeable, and more importantly, faithful coaches; talented hard-working and selfless players, and supportive fans.

"Making history with this win means anybody can do anything if they want it bad enough. Another big thing though, is that it means if we can beat them, we should be able to beat anyone. The only thing that can stop us is ourselves, but I don't see that happening any time soon."