

Nov. 18 CJ III Football Playoffs



In a game of enormous magnitude tonight, Steinert hopes to keep a business-as-usual approach, which means Dan Caruso (left) will be coaching his hardest; Alex Amodie (51) will be snapping the ball to Adam Riese and blocking linemen; and trainer Chris McLaughlin will look interested but be secretly fretting whether the 49ers will suffer an embarrassing upset to the Cardinals Sunday (Photo by Dennis Symons Jr/purchase photos at www.dennissymons.com).

Spartans past the point of being intimidated as they set sights on Barrons

By Rich Fisher

Fish4Scores.com

Nov. 18: Playoff football is about more than ability.

It's about attitude.

And the seventh-seeded Steinert High football team has developed the necessary attitude as it prepares to visit sixth-seeded Woodbridge in tonight's Central Jersey Group III playoff semifinal.

It was apparent in last Friday's upset win over Wall, which the Spartans won 19-7 to give the school its first playoff victory in seven tries.

And it's likely enhanced after that one.

"The guys have the attitude that players from other schools like, Wall and Woodbridge, are the same as them – kids that love to play football," coach Dan Caruso said. "They breathe the same air, they sweat the same, they bleed the same blood, they prepare the same as we do.

"I think that is the right attitude to have. Respect and confidence, not fear and timidness."

Both teams enter the 7 p.m. contest with 7-2 records. Woodbridge is coming off a 24-21 win at Burlington Township in which the Falcons blew several opportunities to win the game.

The Barrons' sluggishness may have had something to do with the long ride from northern Middlesex County to Burlington County, which can drain a team. It's not much better from Hamilton to Woodbridge.

"We're leaving at 4 o'clock to get there with plenty of time to spare," Caruso said. "There's a fine line though, because you don't want to get there too early and be standing around with nothing to do."

When they finally arrive, the Spartans will find a team with both size and speed. Six of the Barrons' wins have been by 14 points or more and they played 8-0 South Brunswick tougher than any other team this year in a 28-24 loss (SB has beaten teams by an average of 25 points per game).

"Woodbridge is a very fast football team," Caruso said. "They have a lot of playmakers and they can score very quickly. Their running back (Isaiah Johnson) is very shifty and can make people miss. Their one receiver (Cody Zalasar) is one of the best playmakers in the state."

Woodbridge averages 178 passing yards per game and 133 rushing yards. Johnson has rushed for 619 yards and eight touchdowns, and averages 5.5 yards per carry.

Quarterback Kyle Anderson has completed 85 of 151 (56 percent) for 1571 yards and 22 touchdowns with just seven interceptions. Zalasar has caught 28 passes for 736 yards (26.3 per catch) and 13 TDs, and will challenge a Steinert defense that shut down Wall's vertical game.

Defensively the Barrons are led by Mike Linebacker Jeff Rodriguez, who leads the team with 70 tackles. Defensive end William Hairston has 53 tackles and a team-high six sacks.

"Rodriguez, to me, is the guy that makes their program go," Caruso said, noting he is also valuable at fullback. "He does all the dirty work and is very good at it. They also are huge up front and they move people."

Steinert will counter with quarterback Adam Riese, who has passed and rushed for nearly 2000 yards and 25 touchdowns. The Spartans have their own deep threats with Keon White and Vanel Dossous (19.9 yards per catch, six touchdowns), while backs Tyler Zandomenego and Jeff Mattonelli are effective in the short passing game.

A key for Steinert is how well it comes down off the high of last Friday's win and re-focuses on Woodbridge.

"We made history, but history isn't over, we want to make more history," Riese said. "We have to come out focused and ready to play."

Caruso has liked the preparation.

"The guys are very focused this week," he said. "They know what is at stake and they are not looking ahead."

"The team and school are very excited to be where we are right now. I am glad to see we are approaching this week the same way that we approached it last week."

And we all know what happened last week.