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Nottingham's Esayah Obado dives forward for yardage before being brought down by Notre Dame's Jeremy Keegan in tonight's season finale (Photo by John Blaine/purchase photos by e-mailing jbsportphoto@aol.com).

Nov. 25 Football

Despite career-ending loss, Obado looks back on his career with a smile

By Ken Weingartner

Fish4scores.com

Nov. 25: As Esayah Obado walked off the field at Notre Dame High School tonight following his final scholastic football game and reflected upon his career, not once did he mention statistics or individual accomplishments. Although his name will appear repeatedly in Nottingham's record book, his experience went beyond the numbers.

"Nottingham has played a big role in my life," the senior quarterback said. "I'm going to miss the coaches and all the players. Nottingham football coaches taught me how to be a man. I'm going to take a lot out of my career here. It feels good to be a Northstar."

Then Obado smiled. He could have been expressing the feelings of many of his teammates, particularly the seniors, even though Nottingham's season ended with a 37-20 loss to the Irish. The Northstars finished the campaign with a 6-4 record. They were 7-3 last year.

"I felt my team played well this year," Obado said. "We had a winning record even though we lost so many seniors from last year. A lot of guys stepped up this year, which helped us get that winning record. We could have played better at times, including myself, but for the most part I thought we played well."

The Northstars started quickly against Notre Dame, but were unable to sustain the momentum as the Irish took advantage of special teams miscues in the first half and turnovers in the second half.

Ayoub Kamara scored on a 3-yard run on Nottingham's first possession, capping a 65-yard march that took more than five minutes off the clock and gave the Northstars a 6-0 lead.

Notre Dame got a 65-yard return from Kevin McCarthy on the ensuing kickoff, which set up Mike Young's 40-yard field goal to cut Nottingham's advantage in half.

A short punt gave the Irish the ball inside Nottingham territory on their next possession, which ended with Sam McDermott's 15-yard touchdown run to put Notre Dame ahead, 10-6, late in the first quarter.

In the second quarter, Notre Dame blocked a punt to gain possession at the Northstars' 21. Seven plays later, McDermott scored on a 2-yard run to make it 17-6. McDermott added a 14-yard TD run with 51 seconds remaining before halftime to increase the Irish's lead to 24-6.



Larry Pittman is pursued by Notre Dame's Jeremy Keegan and Troy Becker after making a reception in tonight's game (Photo by John Blaine/purchase photos by e-mailing jbsportspphoto@aol.com).

Nottingham, though, rallied in the limited time that remained. Wroway Williams ran for 13 yards before Obado connected with Kamara on a 55-yard scoring strike. Kamara hauled in the pass at Notre Dame's 31, stepped out of a tackle, and raced to the end zone. Robert Liedtka's 2-point conversion reception pulled the Northstars within 24-14 at the break.

The Northstars kicked off to begin the second half, but the kick caromed off a Notre Dame player and was recovered by Fritz Louis. Nottingham drove deep into Irish territory, but Phil Mahotiere's leaping interception in the end zone thwarted the chance for points.

Nottingham's next drive also ended inside Notre Dame's territory, this time on downs. McDermott then scored on 3-yard touchdown runs on consecutive fourth-quarter possessions to put the Irish ahead, 37-14, with 6:25 to play.

Williams got the Northstars' final touchdown 34 seconds later when he scored on a 1-yard run. The TD was set up by a 40-yard run by Williams and a 37-yard pass from Obado to Luke Westerberg.

"This game was a microcosm of our season," Nottingham coach Jon Adams said. "We were a streaky team; we were never consistent. We were hot and cold. It was the story of many games this season.

"Despite the mistakes we made, we had a chance to get back in the game but couldn't score. Special teams killed us in the first half. In the second half, we just couldn't make the plays. It's a shame because I don't think the score indicates how good our football team is."

Williams finished the game with 115 yards on 19 carries. Westerberg had two catches for 78 yards while Kamara finished with two receptions for 60 yards. Bryan Butchon had four catches for 39 yards and Larry Pittman had three for 23 as Obado completed throws to six players. One of the passes was caught by offensive lineman Michael Olmeda after the ball was deflected by an Irish defender.

Obado was 14 of 27 for 206 yards and was intercepted three times. The third interception came in Notre Dame's end zone on a tipped pass on Nottingham's final possession.

"I threw those picks and I feel like I let my team down," Obado said. "It was a pretty tough game."

The outcome did nothing to diminish Obado's significance to his team over the past two seasons.



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The Nottingham drill team celebrates America during halftime of tonight's game at Notre Dame (Photo by John Blaine/purchase photos by e-mailing jbsportsphoto@aol.com).

“He operates our offense as well as any QB in the state,” Adams said. “He has accepted the pressure of being ‘The Man.’ The one thing that I can say about the young man is simply that he is as nice a young man as there is. He is polite, respectful; a competitor – yet humble.

“Kids who have his abilities may tend to be cocky. This guy is just a pleasure to coach and be around.”

Obado was one of the Northstars’ captains, along with Dennis “Manster” Hernandez, Kyle James and Matt Hedden, who was a four-year starter on the offensive line.

“The kid has always worked his butt off,” Adams said of Hedden. “I will never forget the first game he played as a freshman. We were playing Princeton and Kendrick Williams was our tailback. It’s fourth-and-1 and he get’s right in my face and says, ‘Coach! We are going for it! Run behind me – we’ll get it!’ His face was flush and you could just see the fire in his eyes. He’s this freshman telling me in his first-ever varsity game to go for it.

“Guess what? We did and we made it running a sneak right behind him. All he did as a freshman was pave the way for one of the greatest backs in Mercer County history. I would put him on my all-time team. He’s maybe the best lineman ever in Northstar history.”

Hernandez will forever be remembered for blocking a field goal and returning it 90 yards for the winning touchdown in the final seconds of Nottingham’s 41-35 win over Hamilton West in 2009. The Northstars trailed, 35-7, with four minutes to go in the third quarter.

“He wasn’t even supposed to be in (the game),” Adams said. “Our defensive line coach, Larry Kelliher, grabs him and tells him to get in there for an injured guy. All he does is block a field goal and score a TD to complete the greatest comeback win in Mercer County football history.

“Whenever we needed a play this was the guy on defense that always seemed to be there. He’s a worker and one of the strongest players on our team. He’s another kid I will miss.

“I can go on – Kyle James, Larry Pittman, Zach Baker, Tyree Patterson – they are all great. I will miss these guys. I really enjoyed being around my guys every day; in the weight room, school, practice – whatever. I love ’em all!”

Adams hoped to see the seniors finish their careers with a win.

“I just wish there were some words I could give them,” he said. “But I know all these kids are going to be successful in life because they’re great kids and they work hard every day.”