

## Nov. 30 CJ III State Final Football

### Ziegler and Costello coordinate success on the field and friendship off it

By Rich Fisher

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**Nov. 30:** In 2000, the Steinert High football team made its first state playoff appearance.

Eleven years later, the Spartans have won their first playoff game and are going for their first Central Jersey Group III state title.

There are two common denominators between those teams – Bob Ziegler and Mike Costello.

At the turn of the century, Costello was a tight end/defensive end/kicker for the Spartans, who fell to Edison 15-14 in that historic first game. Ziegler was an offensive guard and outside linebacker for that same team.

Both went on to play college ball – Ziegler at Dickinson (where he is third in career sacks) and Costello at Temple, New Haven and Kutztown (after New Haven dropped its program).

They eventually found their way back to Steinert, where Ziegler teaches and Costello works in security, and an already-strong bond intensified.

“We are good friends,” Costello said. “We have been either competing or teammates since we were 10 years old. We grew up a couple houses away and always watched football and played backyard football.”

Like most good friends, they remember things differently. Ziegler says the relationship started further back and their houses were closer together.

“We’ve been friends since we were eight,” he said. “We’ve lived next door to each other.”

The bottom line is, they both agree their relationship is a close one.

“We’re very good friends off the field,” Ziegler said. “We were on two state title baseball teams (at Steinert) and the 2000 Post 31 Legion World Series team.

“Luckily, success has followed us over the years. We see each other a lot off the field and still play baseball in the summers in the YMCA baseball league. We’ve gone to many clinics over the past four years to further our knowledge of the game.”

That knowledge is paying off for the present-day Spartans, as Costello has made Steinert’s offense one of the most formidable in Central Jersey while Ziegler’s defenses are renowned for their ability to constantly improve over the course of a season.

Ziegler is aided by Brad Harris and Joe Ferrara, while Costello gets help from Terry McCarthy and Todd Zimmerman.

In the end, though, the decisions fall to Costello, Ziegler and head coach Dan Caruso.

What makes the coordinators more effective is their willingness to lean on each other. When



*Whether it was as high school pals, Steinert coordinators or YMCA baseball teammates, Bob Ziegler (left) and Mike Costello have been side by side enjoying athletic success through the years.*

going to war, it's always nice to know what the other side thinks.

"I listen to a lot of what he has to say," Costello said. "If I want to put in a formation or play, I always ask him how he would defend it."

"We constantly bounce ideas off each other," said Ziegler, adding with a laugh. "We have been known to argue pretty loudly at practice. But it has never come to blows. . .yet."

There have been more agreements than disagreements, of course.

And both agree on the fact that in the 11 years since Steinert first discovered the football playoffs, the Spartans were more prepared to handle things this time around than when Ziegler and Costello played.

"We were definitely glad to make it to the playoffs for the first time," Costello said. "This year, I think the mindset was a little different, in that these kids were a part of the playoffs in the previous two seasons.

"They had a bad taste in their mouth from the past two years in the playoffs and didn't want that outcome again. They worked extremely hard in the offseason and all year and I am extremely happy for all the seniors."

Ziegler said that in 2000, the team thought it was ready, but got some playoff lessons.

"We were on a pretty good roll and confident that we'd be able to beat Edison," he said. "Our strength back then was our guys up front and I remember thinking we'd be able to control the line of scrimmage. That game turned out to be a bad dream. We had a TD called back for offensive pass interference and their kicker drilled a long field goal as time expired against the wind. The same kid had missed an extra point earlier.

"The mindset of this year's team was a little different. This year we had the experience factor on our side. Also many of the players used last year's slaughter to Middletown South as inspiration in the offseason."

And as Steinert has made the playoffs a regular affair over the past few years, both men have tried to instill their previous lessons with the players.

"I do try and use some of the experience from playing in the game," Costello said. "We just tell them to approach every single game the same, by working hard in practice and paying attention to detail."

"Our kids have faith in the systems on both sides of the ball," Ziegler added. "We try to instill the fact that whether it is the state finals or the first game of the season, the coaching staff will have them prepared and the game plan will be sound."

And the guys drawing it up have plenty of experience to fall back on.

Together.