

## Nov. 4 Football Previews: Week 8



*While Hamilton's Ruben Desane (25) and his Hamilton teammates will be trying to run down down a must-have victory at Rancocas Valley today, Steinert's offensive players will be trying to escape the grip of West Windsor-Plainsboro South defensive back Chris Evans (1) (Photo by Ellen Schwartz).*

**WW-P South (7-1) at Steinert (6-1), Saturday at 2 p.m.**

### **Football reigns supreme at Steinert with titanic showdown looming**

**By Rich Fisher**

**Fish4Scores.com**

**Nov. 4:** Is this really Steinert High School, where soccer and baseball have long been kings?

“People have been coming up to me in school to talk football that never usually do,” said head coach Dan Caruso. “There is a great buzz in the school right now and it started last week (before the Notre Dame game). It is a very exciting time at Steinert High School. There seems to be a lot more pride in our school and our program and that is what high school football is all about, being proud of who you are and where you are from.

“The fact that we are even playing in a game that means this much for both teams speaks volumes for the hard work this group of players and coaches have put forth the last few years. We are

back to the winning tradition that existed here in the early 2000s under Frank Gatto. Now the goal is to qualify for the playoffs and win the first playoff game in school history.”

And it all comes down to what is probably the Game of the Year in Mercer County, when once-beaten West Windsor-Plainsboro South (7-1) visits the once-beaten Spartans (6-1) at 2 p.m. today.

These are truly heady times for Steinert, which is 6-1 for the first time since doing it in both 2000 and 2001 under Gatto. Current Spartan assistants Bob Ziegler and Mike Costello were both seniors on that the 2000 team.

Caruso, who took over the program amidst the Carl Jordan controversy four years ago, has proven time and again he was the right man for the job.

And yet, with all this good stuff, the Spartans still have not locked up a Central Jersey Group III playoff berth according to Caruso’s figures.

Entering the final weekend in which power points can be accumulated, Steinert is seventh with 99 (the top eight qualify). The outcome against WWPS could be the difference between a home game and no playoffs at all.



*Sophomore place kicker Bari Deptula and her holder Tyler Zandomenego hope to have a few opportunities to kick PATs against WW-PS today. Deptula has made her last 15 extra points (Photo by Dennis Symons Jr/purchase photos at [www.denissymons.com](http://www.denissymons.com)).*

“If we win, we could be the number three seed,” Caruso said. “If we lose and Hamilton wins we could be tied with 112 each and it would go to common opponents (Nottingham), which would knock us out.

“If we win and Hamilton wins, Hamilton and Steinert would both be in, which would be nice. The main point is, we are in the driver’s seat and if we go out and play like we are capable and come out on top Saturday, we will be in with a possible home game.”

All they have to do is beat what seemed to be unstoppable juggernaut until last week, when Allentown did the Spartans no favors by upsetting the Pirates (who are currently second in CJ IV power points). At the same time, Steinert was busy playing an outstanding game by beating Notre Dame.

“Congratulations to Allentown, that is a program changing victory for coach (Jay) Graber and I wish him the best,” Caruso said, before adding with a laugh, “That win for them was a statement. . . but did they have to do it the week before we played South?”

“But all kidding aside, it just means extra motivation for the Pirates. But to be honest, if their kids weren’t pumped for this game, then something was wrong. I know Coach (Todd) Smith will have his guys ready for us on Saturday.”

West Windsor has one of the finest teams Smith has ever coached. It leads Mercer County in

rushing yards (1,925), total offense (2,706) and points per game (34.3). Defensively the Pirates are first against the run (589 yards) and points allowed (10.5 per game) and second in total yards allowed (1,434).

But the Spartans are not too shabby as they are second in Mercer in passing yards (1,131), total yards (2,226) and points per game (30.3). Steinert is fifth in total defense, allowing 1,654 yards per game, and tied for second in points allowed (13.6).

Both teams have major playmakers.

Adam Riese can pass and run, has a cadre of big-play receivers and some shifty running backs. WWPS counters with running back Brian Schoenauer, the most dangerous player in the county on offense and one of the most dangerous from his safety position on defense. In fact, the Pirates secondary is an offense unto itself with the turnovers they produce.

“Schoenauer definitely scares me more with the ball in his hands,” Caruso said. “He is a great defender, but it is easier to game plan for a great defender than a great running back. The same goes for (quarterback/DB) Chris Evans, who I think is a special player and the key to their team.”

Schoenauer leads Mercer in rushing with 1,302 yards and 17 touchdowns, and averages 7.3 yards per rush. He has a total of 20 touchdowns.

“What makes him such a good runner is his patience, vision and toughness,” Caruso said. “He is a great cutback runner. He sees lanes and hits them hard.

“His linemen give him ‘two way goes’ and he uses them. The fact that he is tough enough to run the ball 50 times a game if they needed him to, speaks volumes of the kid. He is a special player.”

Just one of many in what should be a special game.

The kind of game that has them talkin’ football in the halls of Steinert High.

**Hamilton (5-2) at Rancocas Valley (5-2), Saturday at 2 p.m.**

**Thawed out Hamilton will try and slow down streaking Rancocas Valley**

As Caruso pointed out, Hamilton is still in the hunt for a playoff berth, although it has to win and have a lot of other things happen.

Hornets coach Tom Hoglen is only concerned with the “has to win” part of the equation.

“We are concentrated on winning this football game,” he said of Saturday’s game at Rancocas Valley. “That is the only thing that we can control at this time.”

That in itself, will not be easy to control as RV has won five straight and is coming off a victory over Nottingham in which the Red Devils capitalized on numerous ‘Stars mistakes in the icy weather.

Hamilton was fortunate enough to survive a snow storm, getting an overtime touchdown from Mark Acquaviva to escape with a 6-0 victory over Trenton.

“The team has recovered from the frozen tundra of Saturdays game,” Packer fan Hoglen said.

Now they must concentrate on Deshawn Jones, RV’s outstanding running back who was slowed by the weather last week.

“It was tough to run in those conditions,” Hoglen said. “Their running back is more versatile than others we have faced, in that he is also a good receiver.

“They are very balanced on offense and will pass and run at any time. They have good receivers to go along with a solid running game.”

Hamilton has a pretty fair running game in its own right, as it is fourth in the county with 1,440 yards on the ground. Bret Stroman has rushed for 926 yards and had 140 in the snow last week.

Much of that is due to a solid offensive line, which has gotten a boost from the return of Gary Stern, who was hurt all of last year. Stern was the 12<sup>th</sup> Man TD Club's Offensive Lineman of the Week.

"Gary has done a great job this season, along with the rest of our offensive line," Hoglen said.

**Princeton (3-5) at Nottingham (4-3), Saturday at 2 p.m.**

## **Like Hornets, Nottingham is taking a win-and-see approach to playoffs**

After last week's icy loss to Rancocas Valley, Nottingham's playoff hopes are slip slidin' away.

And like his Hamilton West counterpart Hoglen, Northstar coach Jon Adams can't waste his time worrying about it as he prepares for the invasion of Princeton.

"Power points matter little to me," Adams said. "Win and hope. That is our situation. We need at least two or three teams to lose. I can not control that. I can control how we prepare for Princeton.

"I expect a tough game with a well-coached team. We must win or these other three games will not matter. So strap it up boys and let's get after it!"

The Little Tigers are an improved squad from recent years, although they have fallen on hard times lately. Eric Shorter is a dangerous receiver (35 catches, six TDs, 19.2 yards-per-catch average) and Princeton has allowed just 496 passing yards, the second best total in Mercer.

"They have improved," Adams said. "The coaching staff over there has done a nice job rebuilding after a tough, injury-plagued season. We have a lot of respect for them. (Shorter) is a problem. They do a nice job defensively and run the ball.

"If our defense comes to play with the same passion and intensity it did last week I think we can do a great job on them. Offensively we are healthy up front and Wroway (Williams) is finally back. We did not have him last week at RV. The kids have had two very focused practices so we will be ready."

Nottingham is coming off a brutal week in Mount Holly, where it was forced to play a very physical team in an ice storm. Now it must bounce back, which it has done after every loss so far this season.

"Our kids stood in that crap for over three hours," Adams said. "My first concern this week was to get them ready physically and they have responded.

"Second, of course, is our mental prep this week. We know we are playing for our playoff lives so that is an extremely important factor in keeping us sharp and focused on the plan to win."



*After an icy weekend at Rancocas Valley, Nottingham's Tyree Paterson (6) and Gabe McGovern (41) hope to thaw out by stopping Princeton's offense today (Photo by Mary "Mom" Malone).*