

## Nov. 5 Football: Spartans spanked



*Jeff Mattonelli hauls in a first-quarter touchdown pass that gave Steinert a short-lived 7-6 lead against WWPS today (Photo by Dennis Symons Jr./purchase photos at [www.dennissymons.com](http://www.dennissymons.com)).*

### **Caruso's fears were well founded as flat Steinert rocked by WW-P South**

**By Ken Weingartner**

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**Nov. 5:** Coach Dan Caruso had a bad feeling about Steinert's football game today against West Windsor-Plainsboro South before the Spartans ever set foot on the field.

The feeling didn't change once the game began.

Steinert took an early 7-6 lead against the Pirates, but was unable to sustain any momentum on its way to 40-21 loss. Fortunately for the Spartans, the defeat will not prevent them from qualifying for the NJSIAA Central Jersey Group III playoffs, thanks to Hamilton West's 25-0 setback at Rancocas

Valley.

Last week, we had our worst week of practice we've had all year and it showed on the scoreboard," Caruso said. "I was very concerned. There is such thing as being loose and ready to go, but I think we were too loose, too lax. Maybe this was the reality check we needed.

"We just didn't seem like ourselves all day. We as coaches have to do a better job and the players have to execute better. We stunk up the joint today."

The Spartans scored on a 72-yard drive on their second possession, but were otherwise limited to 66 yards until the final two minutes of the game, when they embarked on an 87-yard touchdown march.

WW-P South harassed Steinert quarterback Adam Riese much of the afternoon, limiting him to 121 yards on 11-for-23 passing.

"They have a very good secondary," Caruso said about the Pirates. "They forced us to go up top; they took away all the underneath stuff. When you go up top, it's a low percentage. And we certainly didn't hit on many of them today."

WW-P South, which improved to 8-1 and is playoff-bound in Central Jersey Group IV, scored on its first possession, with Christopher Evans tossing a 25-yard touchdown pass to Thomas Efstathios. Evans finished 13-for-17 for 185 yards and four TDs.

The Spartans responded with their 72-yard drive, which was kept alive by Keon White's 12-yard reception on a third-and-7 and capped by Jeff Mattonelli's 12-yard TD catch.

A fumbled punt return by Steinert late in the first quarter set up the Pirates' second touchdown drive. WW-P South converted on a fourth-and-6 before Brian Schoenauer scored on a 3-yard run. Schoenauer finished with 118 yards and two touchdowns on 18 carries.

WW-PS made it 19-7 midway through the second quarter on Martin Flatley's 11-yard touchdown catch, but the Spartans immediately cut into their deficit on Eddie Ashley's 85-yard kick return. It was the final bright spot, though, for Steinert.

Evans hit Patrick Boyle on a 31-yard touchdown pass to extend WW-P South's lead to 26-14 at halftime.

Over the final 16 minutes of the first half, Steinert ran just six plays from scrimmage.

"That was huge," Caruso said. "We only had four drives in the first half and three of them were three-and-outs. Our defense was on the field the entire first half. We had chances to stop people and we just missed tackles all day. We were making mistakes that we haven't made here since preseason.

"It's like we hit a time warp and went back to early August. It was hard to make adjustments because it seemed whatever we tried to do we were making mistakes and doing it wrong."

In the second half, Schoenauer scored on a 15-yard run and Evans threw a 16-yard touchdown pass to Efstathios to give WW-P South a 40-14 lead with 11:03 to play.

Steinert closed the game with its 87-yard drive, capped by Riese's 20-yard touchdown pass to White with nine seconds on the clock.

The loss snapped the Spartans' six-game winning streak, which included a 21-10 victory last weekend at Notre Dame.

"We needed a wakeup call," Steinert senior running back Tyler Zandomenego said. "The six wins got us all thinking we were the best and we could slack off, but this shows we can't. It shows we've got to practice and play a lot better than we did today.

"We'll be ready for the playoffs, though. We've proved that we can, beating Notre Dame and winning six games in a row, but I think it got to our heads a little bit this week. We were kind of flat from the beginning. You can't blame one person for it. It was everyone's fault."

Senior Jordan Dunn agreed.

“We have to use this to get better for next week’s game,” he said. “We’ve got to come ready to work next week and get better and be ready to play as a team. We didn’t make plays when we needed to. Everybody wasn’t as hyped as they needed to be. I don’t think we were ready today.”

The Spartans will have new life next week as they prepare for the state sectional playoffs. Steinert is likely to be the seventh or eighth seed in the Central Jersey Group III and would face either Northern Burlington or Burlington Township.

“It’s nice, but right now we’ve got a lot of things to fix before the playoffs,” Caruso said. “Obviously, that’s a playoff team we just played. Unless we fix the mistakes we made today, we will not go very far.

“The playoffs are huge,” the coach added. “It’s hard to forget this game and remember that we’ve had a very good season thus far and we want to continue on that path. These kids deserve to be in. I know today’s effort wasn’t there, but it was there the rest of the season. I’m happy for us as a team.”