

Oct. 11 Boys Soccer – 'Stars stun Spartans



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*Nottingham's Aaron Stovall goes above Steinert's Alex Seunath for a headball during today's thrilling game at Nottingham (Photo by John Blaine/purchase photos by e-mailing [jbsportsphoto@aol.com](mailto:jbsportsphoto@aol.com)).*

## deStasio's overtime goal caps incredible comeback for Nottingham

By Rich Fisher  
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**Oct. 11:** An oft-repeated cliché in soccer is that one of the most dangerous leads to have is a two-goal advantage.

The reason being, the team ahead might feel it has a cushion, but if the team that trails gets one back it can light a fire and the next thing you know, you're in a war.

It all came true today.

Trailing by two goals with under seven minutes remaining, the Nottingham High boys' soccer team mounted a furious comeback to take a 3-2 overtime victory against visiting Steinert in the Battle of Klockner Road.

The game was decided with 5:20 remaining in the first OT when Luca deStasio got a pass from his brother Fulvio and hit a headball that spun off the crossbar and over the goal line.

But the tide actually turned when Luca scored his first goal with 6:27 left in regulation, which pulled Nottingham within 2-1.

"The momentum completely shifted over and we knew we could win," Luca said. "After that it was all adrenaline. There was no stopping us."

"Our guys are well aware of (the two-goal danger)," said Steinert's Todd Jacobs, who lost to the Northstars for the first time in his nine years as head coach. "We say that two goals is the worst to be up by, you have to find a way to get that third.

"But these guys know, we have a good group of guys here it's just the ball's not bouncing our way in games like this and we flat out lost our composure in the end."

Which has been happening frequently to the Spartans (4-7-1), who have lost four straight. All four have been by one goal and the last two have been in overtime. The Spartans are 1-3-1 in OT and have lost their last three that have gone beyond regulation.

"We have to have guys step up in a game like this," Jacobs said. "We're not having certain guys step up and lay it on the line. At that point it's a matter of knocking it around, holding possession. They know what to do, we weren't able to get it done."

Steinert has lost five of its last six overall, while Nottingham (8-2) won its second straight after losing two out of four.

"This is one I really wanted," said Nottingham coach Mike Braender, now in his fifth season at the helm. "With me being an alumni of Steinert and this is the first time I beat them as a coach, it's big.

"I give all the credit to the kids playing through. Being down 2-0 with under 10 minutes to go, nobody would have thought that we'd come back there."

Steinert took a 2-0 lead in the game's first 12 minutes when Mike Fornaro headed in a cross from Connor Moffat and John Powers kicked a loose ball into the lower right-hand corner.

At that point, things were all going the Spartans' way.



*Nottingham's Gary Rojas is joyfully tackled by teammate Luca deStasio after scoring the game-tying goal with 3:31 left in today's game with Steinert (Photo by John Blaine/purchase photo by e-mailing [jbsportphoto@aol.com](mailto:jbsportphoto@aol.com) ).*

"Give Jacobs and (assistant coach Mike) Hastings credit for preparing their guys, they came out and put two on us quick," Braender said. "We've definitely had some slow starts.

"I even told them before the game we gotta come out like we practiced, and we didn't. I told them the first half was our 40-minute practice, they got it out of the way, let's do it now."

It took a while, but Nottingham began to take the play midway through the second half. The Spartans appeared as if they would hold on as Devon Downs made some big saves to keep it scoreless. But with 6:27 left, deStasio scored on a low shot and Nottingham seemed to catch fire.

"One goal can do that for you," Braender said. "That was the one that did it for us. I can't explain how much heart the kids showed today. The bottom line is playing through all 80 minutes, it's what we stressed all year. We did it today, plus some."

Just under three minutes after deStasio's goal, Gary Rojas' blast went off the right post and over the line to tie it.

Nottingham continued to attack and Luca deStasio nearly won it when his late shot went wide.

It was uncertain how much OT would be played with darkness starting to fall, but Nottingham struck with 5:20 left in the first one.

The winning goal came when Fulvio deStasio out-hustled a Steinert player to the ball, worked a give and go with Shiek Bangura and then sent one over to Luca deStasio, who headed it in off the crossbar. The ball spun downward and over the goal line, much the same way Nottingham lost to Trenton last week.

"I really didn't think I had much of an angle," deStasio said of his first golden goal in high school. "I just pretty much headed it, and I guess the backspin took it in."

"I thought the ball was gonna go out of bounds," Braender said. "Luca came out of nowhere and put it in."

The goal sent Nottingham's players into a delirious celebration, and no one knew when the last time the 'Stars had beaten the Spartans beyond the start of the Jacobs' era.

"You're definitely feeling a little empty, a little shocked when it happens like this," Jacobs said. "Especially when it's so quick, in the last seven minutes like that."

Last year, Nottingham rallied from a 4-0 deficit, only to fall to Steinert 5-4 in overtime.

"It would have been tough to come back again and see another loss in overtime," Braender said. "This was big to pull it out.

"We made some changes, pushed another guy up front and left three defenders in the back. They held their own and gave us time to come back and put some in."

Luca deStasio called it a "quality win" and feels it can get Nottingham back on track after their recent uneven stretch.

"We're shifting gears," he said. "We lost two of the last four, but this certainly is putting us right back in the right direction."

### **Fornaro's injury not serious after being taken away in ambulance**

Besides losing a heart-breaking game, Steinert also lost one of its top performers in freshman midfielder Mike Fornaro.

After a second-half collision landed him on his head, Fornaro was taken away in an ambulance for precautionary measures after suffering what looked like it might be a neck or head injury. But it wasn't as serious as it first appeared, as he has no concussion or fracture, just soreness in the face.

According to his father, Rich, he might only miss one game.

Still, Fornaro's absence during the second part of this one didn't help Steinert.

"That hurt us big time because he is a very special player," Jacobs said. "He certainly doesn't play like a freshman. He brings a lot to our team and missing him definitely hurt.

"He's the one who got us going today (with the first goal). But any time you land on your head like that, you have to take precautions. It was the right thing to take him off."

Not having him for even one game will be tough for Steinert as it tries to dig out of a four-game losing streak.

"They could very well pack it in but that hasn't been us," Jacobs said. "We're in every game and that's what they gotta look at. They're knocking at the door. Today we have a two-goal lead and let them back in. Now they gotta learn to close the door."

## **WW-P North strikes quick to take down Hamilton**

West Windsor-Plainsboro North scored four first-half goals and cruised from there in a 4-0 victory over Hamilton West. Kyle Rogers had 10 saves for the Hornets, who fell to 0-12-1. North improved to 3-7-1.