

Oct. 14 Football: Week 5

Steinert (3-1) at Trenton (2-3); Saturday, 2 p.m.

Spartans choose to turn tough situation into a bonding situation

By Rich Fisher

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Oct. 14: Dan Caruso should open up one of those lemon-aid stands for 25 cents a cup.

He would probably clean up.

Caruso, his staff and his Steinert football team are doing a good job of making lemon-aid out of the lemons they were dealt over what was supposed to be a nice, peaceful bye week.

The Spartans had to endure a ton of controversy which, unless you were living under a rock the past two weeks, is well known to Spartan football followers. It doesn't need to be re-hashed here.

But the big questions are, how did it affect the Spartans as a team, and how will it affect their focus entering Saturday's game at Trenton?

Steinert chose to take a negative and use it as motivation.

"Football is a beautiful game because for two to three hours every day you get to forget all of your troubles and be with your friends," the fourth-year coach said. "Other people don't have that luxury. We are the lucky ones."

That "luck" could be bad if energies are focused in the wrong areas. But the coaches and players took the opposite route.

"The main thing the coaches, captains and team leaders have been preaching these last few weeks, is that when we are on the football field we are there to work and win football games," Caruso said. "We call the football field the 'No Drama Zone.' We strive to keep all outside factors that may be bothering us off that field.

"Of course sometimes there are situations that affect us directly and we have trouble keeping problems off the field or away from the team. When situations like that happen it does tend to bond the team together even more."

The Spartans can hardly afford to be a splintered bunch against the Tornadoes, who are coming off a 48-6 loss to Notre Dame but are vastly improved this season.

"We know that we are going over to Trenton High and they are going to try to beat our butts, so we better focus on them or we will end up with L on our record," Caruso said. "I am proud to say my team is very focused on the task at hand."

That focus will be on a quick, big offense that can explode if given the chance.

"Trenton has a very gifted quarterback (Jabree Jackson) and one of the shiftest running backs (Ryan Wharton) in the county," Caruso said. "They will give us fits if we can not contain them.

"They also have a very big, physical line that can dominate up front. They play on their opponent's side of the ball and if we do not follow our rules and block properly we are going to be in trouble. The key to this game is going to be the offensive and defensive line for both teams."

Fortunately for the Spartans, they will come into the game healthy. Steinert was beat up in several areas entering the bye, but Caruso said the week off was key for re-charging the batteries and fine tuning some things.

"Everyone is back, healthy and well rested," he said. "Over the bye week we wanted to get back to basics; work on blocking, tackling, passing and catching.

"We did not try to re-invent our offense or defense this past week. We just really focused on

taking care of the little things.”

Another plus, is that Steinert was in a good mood for two weeks as it was coming off a victory over Hightstown. A year ago, the Rams were winners, which gave the Spartans two weeks to stew.

“It is much nicer going into the bye after a win,” Caruso said. “Last year we had to recover both emotionally and physically from a pretty bad loss.”

There is a flip side, however.

“It is a double edged sword because going in after a loss the kids are very motivated and ready to work,” the coach continued. “You have to be careful because going into the bye with a win some kids try to rest on their laurels and not take the off week seriously. That is something we really had to combat this week.”

Along with some unwanted distractions, that got drowned in a sea of lemon aid.

Hamilton, Nottingham off this week

Hamilton comes off its first loss of the season with a bye, and Nottingham comes off its second loss with a re-scheduled bye. The Northstars were supposed to play Notre Dame this weekend but due to a schedule conflict, the game has been moved to the Friday after Thanksgiving.