

Oct. 28 Football

No shortage of heroes for Steinert in their second straight win over ND

By Rich Fisher

Fish4Scores.com

Oct. 28: Where to even start?

Should it be with Eddie Ashley's bullet-like 22-yard kickoff return to open the game and set the tone? Or the hard-nosed running of Tyler Zandomenego? Or the continued strong play of receivers [Vanel Dossous, Keon White and Jordan Dunn](#).

Or maybe it's the big fourth-down stuff by A.J. Mostrangeli? Or perhaps the goal line interception by Sam Park. Or Alex Amodie's fumble recovery on a punt

Wait a minute. Forget where to start. Where do we end?

The contributors were seemingly endless under the lights at Notre Dame High School tonight as Steinert's football team won its sixth straight, 21-10, over the Irish.

It is the second straight year the Spartans have beaten the Irish, putting to rest any thought last year was a gift because ND was playing with a third string quarterback. It is the first time they have won at Notre Dame since 1997.

"I know some people were saying it might have been a fluke last year, things like that," quarterback Adam Riese said. "We wanted to come out and prove that Steinert football has changed. We're for real and we're here to play."

The numbers certainly say they're for real. Coach Dan Caruso plans on pouring through the yearbooks this week to see when the last Spartan team won six straight and/or started a season 6-1.



Keon White made an outstanding 32-yard catch in the third quarter tonight to help set up Steinert's second touchdown (Photo by Dennis Symons Jr./purchase photos at www.dennissymons.com).

These are heady times indeed, for the Green & White, who set up a colossal showdown with West Windsor-Plainsboro South after the Pirates were upset tonight.

"It's great man," said Zandomenego, who rushed for 81 yards and a touchdown on 12 carries.

“We’ve been working toward this since after Thanksgiving last year. We knew they were coming for us, so it made this that much sweeter.”

Was it Steinert’s best game this year?

“Aw definitely,” Zandomenego said. “It was the best opponent we played. All aspects of the game, offense, defense, special teams. Our special teams picked it up and we had a couple turnovers too. Our defense is working their tails off all week against our offense, and it’s working for them.

It’s all working in Spartan Land these days and the heroes are everywhere.

“Every player came up big today,” said Riese, who was 11-for-22 for 174 yards and two touchdowns and rushed for 61 yards on 11 carries. “I threw bad balls and my receivers came back and made the catch.

“I can’t say enough about our running backs, especially Tyler, falling forward for yardage every single time. He just wanted it and kept fighting it the whole time. It’s amazing how he does that.”

After Ashley started things with his hard-running return, Steinert went 70 yards in 10 plays, capped by Riese’s 16-yard touchdown toss to Jeff Mattonelli. The running back bobbled it at first, but recovered in the flat and zipped into the endzone.

ND responded with a field goal, and the remainder of the first half settled into a defensive slugfest.

The Spartans had a chance to tack on after Amodie recovered a muffed punt at the ND 26 but an intentional grounding call on Riese (after he was well out of the pocket) sidetracked that drive.

Early in the second quarter, a play that had nothing to do with the outcome but typified Steinert’s attitude occurred when Darin Stokes caught a punt and was crushed immediately on a huge hit. The crowd roared, but Stokes hopped up and walked off as if nothing happened . . . as if to say “Not tonight Irish.”

A few minutes later, one of the game’s biggest plays came from Mostrangeli. With Notre Dame facing a fourth-and-1 at the Spartan 10, ND ran a quarterback keeper and the linebacker burst through the line to stuff Sam McDermott for a four-yard loss.

“I went from defensive lineman back linebacker about the third game,” Mostrangeli said. “The big thing I learned was developing plays. They develop in the backfield.

“It was a mesh read and they were going to have a quarterback keeper. It was a slow mesh, I don’t want to sound cocky but I was there, I was ready.

“I was ready for this game. It was a big stop, but it was the whole defense. There was a lineman in front of me taking up some guys so I could get there.”

Caruso termed the play “huge” and had some big praise for the senior who made it.

“I thought for sure they were gonna pass it, run a timing route or a hitch or something like that,” the coach said. “But we had a stunt on, AJ was able to slip underneath and make the play.

“AJ played great tonight. We asked him to do a lot of things. He played linebacker, we put him down on the line, and he was all over the place. He played really, really well tonight. Even little things, getting his hands up, making them float passes. Big.”

Steinert then drove to the ND 29 before stalling, but got it right back when Mostrangeli (there’s that name again) recovered a fumble at the 50.

On the first play, Keon White made an outstanding catch for a 32-yard gain. Two runs by Riese set up a nine-yard touchdown scamper for Zandomenego.

“My touches have been limited this year, but I knew it was coming,” the running back said. “I’m just happy it was this game against a good opponent when it really mattered.”

The game remained 14-3 thanks to yet another new hero emerging in the third quarter.

Notre Dame (4-4) marched from its 27 to the Steinert 10, but on second-and-8, Sam Park intercepted McDermott and had an outstanding return (though part of it was nullified to a penalty).

“I don’t want to take credit for anything,” Caruso said, “But I literally turned to coach (Bob) Ziegler and said ‘Man we could use an interception right now.’ And he threw it.

“It was a route we worked on all week. Sammy saw the route, he jumped it and was able to get some yards off it. That was huge. They go in there and score it’s a different ball game.”

Instead, it remained 14-3 into the fourth quarter and after an 18-yard punt that gave Steinert possession at the Irish 41, the Spartans struck quickly as Riese lofted a perfect pass to Dossous for a back-breaking touchdown. Barri Deptula then tacked on her 15th straight PAT.

“We knew all week what they were gonna set up in our situations,” Riese said. “I saw the one-on-one match-up and I liked it from the beginning. I always trust them over any defender. I threw the ball up there, he went and caught it and got into the endzone. It was great.”

Notre Dame came back for a touchdown with 6:28 left. It was the first TD scored on Steinert’s first-string defense in 13 quarters.

It mattered not, however, as the Spartans offensive line maintained its intensity and the visitors actually chewed up the entire 6:28 on 11 straight running plays to cap a spectacular night of football for Steinert.

The offense was so balanced it was ridiculous, as the Spartans passed for 174 yards and rushed for 173. Defensively they allowed 140 rushing yards and 137 passing, but constantly made the big play.

“I’m so proud of my defense,” Caruso said. “Coach Ziegler said it perfect, when he said ‘I’ve never seen a squad execute a game plan so well.’ Even the adjustments we made, they picked them up just like that.

“They’ve stepped it up big time since the Lawrence game. The kids played well on special teams and our offense got the job done.”

The whole thing left Mostrangeli speechless . . . almost.

“I’m so proud of my team tonight,” he said, “I can hardly even speak.”

His actions spoke loud enough.

As did everyone else’s