

Sep. 17 Football

Spartans turn back RV thanks to strong running game and clutch defense

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Sep. 17: There will be no 0-2 start for Steinert this year

“Finally, thank God for that,” said coach Dan Caruso with a laugh, after his Spartans’ football team held on for a 20-13 victory at Rancocas Valley today. “Being 1-1 feels a whole lot better.”

In the previous two seasons, Steinert started 0-2 but made the states. Caruso didn’t want to try and have to do that again this year.

So with the score 7-7 at intermission, he had a chat with the troops.

“I really challenged the kids at halftime,” Caruso said. And they really responded to the challenge I put forth them. They didn’t want to start this season 0-2 either.”

“The coaches really motivated us at halftime,” said quarterback Adam Riese, who ran for two touchdowns and threw for another. “We knew we had to come out and run the table.”

Steinert didn’t exactly run it, but they did enough. The Spartans came out in the third quarter and got a 7-yard touchdown pass from Riese to Mattonelli. Bari Deptula added her second PAT to make it 14-7 with 5:44 left.

The Spartans were stunned late in the quarter when RV’s John Wilson returned a punt 55 yards for a touchdown. The PAT failed, but the Red Devils were back in the game.

Ironically, Steinert had punted one play earlier and RV was penalized on a sizable return, so the Spartans decided to take the penalty and kick it again.

“We tried to punt it out of bounds, and we got it within about two yards of the sideline, but it wasn’t close enough,” Caruso said.

The game was way too close, however, and it got even tighter in the fourth quarter.

On a third down play, two Steinert players actually pushed a runner across the first-down marker and on the next play RV went 55 yards to the 5-yard line.

“Give Jordan Dunn credit,” Caruso said. “He could have given up. He got beat on the play, but he made up for it and tackled him on the five.”

Steinert stuffed two straight running plays and on third down, safety Eddie Ashley came up with a huge sack of quarterback Dylan Finelli for a 12-yard-loss.

“Dean Lucchesi forced him outside,” Caruso said. “Dean forced it, and Eddie finished it off.” Lucchesi felt the Red Devils offensive line let up slightly on the play.

““They were taking it easy,” he said. “They took for granted what they had, and we pushed through. Luckily we got to the quarterback and brought him down.

“I was on the outside. I shot the C gap. There was no tight end, so they let me right through and I had a nice, clear shot on him. It was great. Eddie rocked up too and we both got in on the hit.”

In doing so, Ashley made up for a costly play a bit earlier.

“The coaches kept me up,” Ashley said. “They told me to keep my head in the game and I was able to come back and make some big plays.”

RV still had a chance for the lead but missed a field goal. Steinert then stuck home the dagger, reeling off an 80-yard drive that was capped by Riese’s 2-yard touchdown run.

“The offense stepped up and ran the clock when they had the opportunity,” Caruso said. “A lot of people know us as a passing team but we ran the ball well.”

They did indeed, racking up 230 rushing yards as Riese gained 132 and Mattonelli had 69. It was a marked improvement from last week's effort in a one-point loss to Nottingham.

"We did a few different things," Caruso said. "We just felt we could take advantage of them on the option game, Adam made some good reads and made some great runs. He did a good job of running clock."

Riese completed six of 15 passes for 92 yards while Dunn caught two passes for 50 yards and Mattonelli had two for 31.

Steinert limited RV to 89 rushing yards and 260 yards of total offense.

"We had a real good time today," Lucchesi said. "We worked together as a team. We had a hard week of practice."

"I still don't think we're playing up to our potential," Caruso said. "We show flashes. I guess we just flashed at the right time."