

'Stars win defies logic, but give West some credit for making it a classic

By Rich Fisher

Fish4Scores.com

OCT. 11: I gave it a day to sink in.

I thought maybe then it would make some sense.

But it still doesn't.

How did Nottingham do it?

How does a team give up 35 straight points in a football game, then find enough guts and gumption and ability to score 34 straight on their own. . . in just over 15 minutes!

Just Steinert's luck. On a day the Spartans knock off an undefeated Princeton team for what should be the day's biggest story, their township neighbors steal the show in the backyard brawl.

There's just no denying it. The Northstars 41-35 victory over Hamilton Saturday is truly one of the most amazing games I will ever see in my lifetime. I'm sure some other folks would agree. In 29 years of covering high school football, one thing has always been constant – when the score got to 35-7 late in the third quarter, my only problem was tracking down names of JV kids who aren't on the roster who get into the game during garbage time.

Nottingham was one bad series away from making it garbage time.

It never came.

The Northstars kept scoring and scoring and scoring until they tied it.

But that's not what made this one so incredible.

There have been comebacks before. Teams have rallied and roared past the opponent like it was nothing. Or, they tied it and took it into overtime.

There have also been nutty endings before, but the events leading up to them weren't quite so drastic.

This was different, and here's why.

As crazy as this is going to sound, it was Hamilton's tenacity at the end that turned this into an "Instant Classic."

Granted, the Hornets will have a tough week of practice. The coaches will be pounding it into the players' brains about coughing up a 35-7 lead in the final 15:14 of play.

But guess what?

With 48 seconds left, a reeling, staggering, punch drunk Hamilton team pulled itself together and behind quarterback Jake D'Angelo, came excruciatingly close to winning it on a last-second pass that was ruled down at the one.

From down the sidelines it looked like Marvins Leontus might have crossed the goal line, but it's impossible to say for sure from the vantage point I had.

That's not the issue.

The point is, Hamilton had enough moxie to put itself in a position to win a game it was ready to lose.

With no timeouts left, D'Angelo spiked the ball with 2.6 seconds left and the Hornet field goal unit hurried onto the field in frenzied desperation. In a whirlwind effort like that, it's sometimes tough to get everything right.

I'm not making excuses for the Hornets and I'm sure the coaches don't want to hear it. But sometimes things happen when kids are rushing around.

And in just a matter of 20 seconds, Hamilton went from trying to win the game, to trying to run down Dennis Hernandez, who blocked the attempt and ran it back 90 yards for a touchdown. Everything had to break right and bounce right for Nottingham.

That usually doesn't happen.

This time it did.

And the Northstars deserve accolades upon accolades for what they did.
The Hornets, meanwhile, will try and forget this game but will likely always remember it.
But let's give Hamilton a little credit. Yes, the Hornets blew an unthinkable lead and yes they made a costly mistake to lose it.
It is because they were still trying to win, right down to the very end, that Hamilton deserves some props.
Afterall, you can't have a classic, without both teams contributing something good.

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As for the Spartans, their effort obviously deserves applause. This was a team that couldn't score a point in its first two games and suddenly it's at 2-2 and knocking off unbeaten.
A huge test comes Saturday against 4-1 Lawrence.
Suddenly, however, the Spartans seem to have more of a chance than they did just two weeks ago.