

Defense leads Spartans to third straight win

By Rich Fisher

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OCT. 19: A Steinert football season that started out in a pit of scoreless acid, has rejuvenated itself in a big way.]

After going 0-2 without a point to open the campaign, the Spartans have roared back with three straight victories.

Today's may be the most impressive yet, as Steinert blanked Lawrence, 6-0, on the Cardinals field.

The win comes on the heels of a victory over then 4-0 Princeton.

The Spartans slow start makes the last three weeks all the more impressive.

"I was just telling the guys, teams get 0-2 and they go into the tank," coach Dan Caruso said after the game. "We didn't go into the tank. The guys always believed and that's due to senior leadership. The seniors kept the guys going and we got a couple wins and when you're winning, practice is a lot more fun."

So are games, as Steinert is finding out.

Judens Goimbert scored the only points necessary when he tallied from three yards out on the first play of the second quarter. The score was set up by a 48-yard completion from Adam Riese to Dan Danaso.

After that, the ever-improving defense took over.

Lawrence entered the contest with the Colonial Valley Conference's fifth leading rusher in Jahid Bryant (636 yards, five touchdowns) and fourth leading passer in Chris Coyle (52.1 completion percentage, 552 yards, seven TDs).

But Bryant was held to 32 yards on 14 carries, while Coyle was 7-for-14 with an interception for 75 yards. Lawrence amassed just 38 rushing yards and 113 in total offense.

That effort was needed, as Steinert rushed for just 99 yards and had 184 in total offense.

"We kind of set back offensive football a little bit, but we'll chalk that up to a defensive stalemate," Caruso said. "They're one of the top teams in the county, we knew we had to play our best game, defensively especially, to hang with them. I think we did it."

Steinert set the tone on the game's first offensive series. After Lawrence moved to the Spartan 43, Tyler Smith's interception gave the Green & White possession at its 33. Steinert marched to the Lawrence five before an interception thwarted the drive.

But on its next series, Danaso made his long reception down to the three and Goimbert scored easily on the next play.

Little did he, or anyone else, realize it would be the game's lone points.

"I didn't know it would be the end (of the scoring)," said the senior, who continues to progress coming off a knee injury last year. "We definitely have a lot of potential to put more points on the board. After the first one I thought we could keep it rolling. I guess it didn't happen, but we were tough enough to come out with the win."

Lawrence did not threaten in the first half but drove to the Spartan 28 in the third quarter before turning it over on downs. On the Cards last possession, with under five minutes left, Jason Miller sacked Coyle for an eight-yard loss on first down and Jonathan Pulley stopped Marquis Bradshaw for just a one-yard gain on fourth-and-9.

"That was just a good play call by (defensive coordinator Bob Ziegler)," Pulley said. "I just happened to get in there at the right time."

Steinert took over at the Cards 33 with just over two minutes left. Goimbert, who led all rushers with 49 yards, ran for four and nine and Lawrence could not stop the clock after the first down.

As time ran out, seniors like linebacker Pat Ferrara got to enjoy one of the high points of their career.

"This team, especially this group of seniors, we faced a real lot of adversity the four years we've been here," Ferrara said. "We were 0-2 and hadn't scored but we knew we were a heck of a lot better football team than that."

"We turned it around and started working hard, started turning things around a little bit. After our first touchdown it started to roll. Once we got that first touchdown things started coming a little easier for us."

But the Spartans are not making it very easy on other teams.

This Saturday could provide a huge test against winless Trenton, however. The Tornadoes are coached by former Spartan coach Carl Jordan, who had a controversial dismissal at Steinert last year.

Rest assured, the Tornadoes will want to win one for their coach.

But with a state playoff berth still a possibility, the Spartans will want to win one for themselves just as much.