

## Steinert's football defense turns it around

By Rich Fisher

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**OCT. 22:** At the start of the season, a lot was being made of Steinert High's football team not scoring a point in its first two games.

Truth be known, the defense wasn't all that hot either.

But a tinker here, a dabble there and the Spartans have suddenly become one of the stingiest defensive units in the Colonial Valley Conference.

Heading into Saturday's much-ballyhooed game at Trenton, which is coached by former Spartan mentor Carl Jordan (he, of the controversial dismissal), the players are thinking more about how to stretch a win streak rather than beating an old coach. If a few old grudges get settled, so be it.

But Steinert has come too far to let outside stuff like that get in the way, especially on defense.

During its winning streak, the Spartans have allowed just 544 yards and 21 points in three games, which averages out to 172 yards and seven points per contest.

In two of those games, Steinert was playing an undefeated team (Princeton) and a once-beaten unit (Lawrence).

Actually, the Spartans didn't play horrible defense for the most part in a loss to Hightstown, but some big passing plays killed them.

After that, second-year defensive coordinator Bob Ziegler decided on some alterations.

"We made a couple changes after the Hightstown game and man, it's been clicking ever since then," Ziegler said. "We're energetic, we're running to the ball and doing what we're coached to do.

"We put a safety down in a linebacker spot and moved another one of our 'backers outside, and we moved one of our linebackers down. We kind of just shifted everybody down a little bit. It's been great since then. We made minor changes and they've played outstanding."

Head coach Dan Caruso has enjoyed watching it all come together.

"I knew we had talent on defense, I guess we've had it since day one," Caruso said. "We just have a lot of key components to replace from last year and the young guys got mature real quick. When they started playing together, things meshed and they're playing out of their minds now."

The players will not disagree.

"We're coming together as a team," said junior linebacker Jonathan Pulley. "The leadership is there, everyone wants to play. I think we're doing a really good job bringing it together and shutting it down."

"We just play the way we know we're capable of playing football," said senior linebacker Pat Ferrara.

"Coach Zig always puts together a great game plan. Our guys may not be the biggest, but we've got heart. That's something that matters even if it's not on paper."

Ferrara, who earned the CVC 12<sup>th</sup> Man Club's Defensive Back of the week, feels Ziegler has made a big difference.

"He's been great," Ferrara said. "He's brought a lot of new ideas around here that I don't think a lot of people have seen. I don't know any other team that runs the 3-4 other than us. It's different, but if you play it right, it works."

Pulley felt the same way, adding that "I think he has a good way about himself, about the way he carries himself, and I think it trickles down to the team. I think it's bringing us together and everybody's doing better."

Ziegler is a 2001 graduate of Steinert, where he played linebacker and guard. After playing defensive line for Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pa., he stayed there and coached the defensive line for three years.

He returned to his high school alma mater last season and got a job teaching history at the school this year.

"He's really done a great, great job," said Athletic Director Rich Giallella, who coached Ziegler in baseball. "He's making a big difference."

Ziegler saw some potential during training camp this summer.

"We thought we would be pretty good," he said. "We had a lot of kids coming back from last year. We started out really slow in camp and scrimmages. Since the second half of Hightstown, we've been night and day."

Against Lawrence, the Spartans held talented sophomore running back Jihad Bryant to just 32 yards on 14 carries.

“We were slanting a lot,” Ziegler said. “We watched a lot of tape. We just played good, all 11 guys did their job. We got lucky a few times, they missed some guys. But we need all 11 guys to do what the coach tells them.”

That has been the key – all 11 guys. There could be a different standout each week, like Ferrara one week, Pulley the next. Then there’s linemen Mike Garofola or Charles Antinoro. Ziegler said linebacker Jason Miller played outstanding against Princeton.

“Every week, it’s somebody stepping up,” Ziegler said. “You need all 11 guys every week.” For the past three weeks, that’s exactly what Steinert has gotten.