

Nov. 17 CJ III Football Playoffs

As Caruso and Riese have grown together, so have Steinert's fortunes

By Rich Fisher

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Nov. 17: Dan Caruso and Adam Riese have a few things in common.

Both are leaders of the Steinert High football team – Caruso as its head coach and Riese as the quarterback.

Both acquired their roles in 2008 under adverse conditions. Caruso took over in the wake of the Carl Jordan fiasco, while Riese took over the offense as a freshman due to an injury.

Most importantly, both have proven to be winners as they have “grown up” together with the Spartans.

Winners unlike any other coach/quarterback tandem in school history, as seventh-seeded Steinert earned the school's first playoff victory in seven attempts last Friday at Wall. The Spartans will try and take it a step further Friday night at sixth-seeded Woodbridge.

There has been a steady rise in Steinert's fortunes over four years, and at the heart of it has been the growing relationship between coach and quarterback.

“You look at the correlation between the two,” Caruso said. “He was a freshman thrown into the varsity scene. We didn't want to throw him to the wolves but those injuries had come up.

“With me, as a first-year coach there's a lot of feeling-out. You have a lot of things you want to do and of course you want to change the world. You want to put in all your changes and start your own program but it doesn't start overnight.”

Especially when you're starting with a freshman quarterback.

But when that QB is Riese, a tall, rugged player with a strong arm and churning legs, the upside is obvious.

It's really obvious this year as Riese has amassed 1,990 yards of total offense with 25 touchdowns.

“It really takes time to develop what you want,” Caruso said. “This senior class is a program-building class. And having a marquee player like Adam to build your program around always helps.”

Riese recalls those early days as just trying to get by.

“I remember not really knowing the coaches that much,” he said. “But they knew who I was and now we have a good bond that's grown over the years.

“Coach Caruso and I have a good connection. Our relationship definitely grew from that point on.”

Which is important to any football team. Coaches and their quarterbacks need to be on the same page in order to make things run smooth.

That's not always the case with Riese, who will sometimes speak his mind in the midst of a game.

“We still differ on a lot of things,” Caruso said. “We get heated at each other sometimes. We don't scream or yell, but we'll voice our opinions.

“He'll come up to me on the sidelines and say ‘Coach, this is not working.’ Or ‘Coach, this is what we could do.’ It happened during the Wall game where he told us they were keying on him, things like that.”

Riese is one of those fortunate players whose understanding of the game gives him a little more credence when it comes to making suggestions.

“I would hate to say that I take what he says more serious than other players, because we listen to anyone who has something to say,” Caruso said. “But I certainly trust him a lot more than some players I may have had in the past.

“I know if he sees something on the field, he wants to make adjustments for the betterment of the team. We take that into account, so it is like having a coach on the field. If he ever wants to be on this staff, he’s got a spot.”

But he won’t be in charge of football pools (for entertainment purposes only of course). One thing the two definitely did not agree on was last year’s BCS Championship game, when Riese told Caruso Oregon would crush Auburn.

“I told him ‘You’re crazy,’” said Caruso, who was proven quite right. “We joke around like that sometimes. We have to keep the player-coach thing going, but it’s a special relationship between a coach and a quarterback. We get close with the other players as well, of course, but the relationship between a coach and quarterback is big.”

When Riese was a freshman, he was just trying to find his way so he wasn’t busy analyzing his coaches. As time has gone on, he has liked what he has seen in Caruso.

“I trust him, that he’s here to make the program better, and he’s obviously shown that,” Riese said. “Over the years, we’ve grown as a team. We’ve gotten to the playoffs three times, now we get our first playoff win.

“Every year it keeps growing and growing. Nothing is better than that.”

It’s what being a winner is all about.