

**Nov. 18 CJ III Football Playoffs – Happy Birthday Coach Caruso!!!**



*Adam Riese dives over on a one-yard sneak to give Steinert a lead it would not give up in tonight's 32-27 win over Woodbridge. Helping Riese into the endzone is Mike Remboski (72) and Shaiful Ali (on ground). (Photo by John Blaine/purchase photos by e-mailing [jbsportsphoto@aol.com](mailto:jbsportsphoto@aol.com)).*

**Incredible win over Woodbridge puts Steinert one win from state crown!**

**By Ken Weingartner**

**Fish4scores.com**

**Nov. 18:** What do you get the coach that has everything for his birthday? How about a trip to the state championship football game.

That's what the Steinert football team gave coach Dan Caruso for his birthday today.

But Caruso won't be going alone to the game. All the Spartans are going with him. In fact, the beauty of the gift is it can be enjoyed by the entire school, the township – even Mercer County football as a whole.

Steinert, which a week ago won the first playoff game in school history, advanced to December's NJSIAA Central Jersey Group III title game with a thrilling 32-27 win at Woodbridge.

Adam Riese ran for three touchdowns, including the game-winner on a 1-yard sneak with 11:09 to play, and threw for two more scores to lead the seventh-seeded Spartans to their second road victory of the postseason and up their record to 8-2.

"I'll take a gift like this every year if they don't mind it," a beaming Caruso said after being serenaded with a chorus of "Happy Birthday" from his players.

“I can’t say enough about these guys. It’s a cliché to say they never say die, but these guys have been through so much and they just keep playing football. They just love to play football.”

Steinert’s defense came away with six turnovers, including five interceptions, to send the Barrons to their third loss in 10 games. Kazier John, Jeff Mattonelli, Ryan Malagrino, Tyler Zandomenego and Jordan Dunn had picks for the Spartans while Dean Lucchesi had a fumble recovery.

Dunn also caught nine passes for 78 yards.

Said Dunn, “The defense did an incredible job. We got hurt with a couple passes, but we adjusted and picked it up. Our secondary and linebackers did great. They were on their game. When we needed the stops, we got the stops. They had good receivers, but we have good (defensive backs) and are up to the challenge. We faced the challenge and we won.”

For all the many great games Riese has enjoyed during his career at Steinert, none were better than today’s effort. He shook off two early interceptions to completed 20 of 31 passes for 288 yards. He connected on his final nine attempts, including six on the drive that proved to be the game winner.

Riese also ran for 60 yards on 18 carries.

“I don’t even know what to say,” said Riese as tears of joy streamed down his face. “After the last game I said I was at a loss for words, and this is even worse. It’s incredible. I’m just so proud of everybody – defense, offense, every single player on this team.

“To win our first playoff game and then go to the semifinals and win that and move onto the state finals, it’s just incredible,” Riese said. “We knew we could do this. We knew our players could make plays. (My receivers) just gave me everything they had. I can’t ask for



*Steinert's Tyler Zandomenego tries to slip past Jeff Rodriguez during tonight's CJ III win at Woodbridge (Photo by John Blaine/purchase photos by e-mailing [jbsportphoto@aol.com](mailto:jbsportphoto@aol.com)).*

anything more than that. It's just incredible."

After the teams exchanged turnovers on three consecutive possessions in the first quarter, the game turned into a see-saw shootout.

John's interception led to an eight-play, 45-yard drive that ended with a 1-yard touchdown run by Riese.

Woodbridge struck back in three plays, with Kyle Anderson connecting with Cody Zalar on a 61-yard pass to set up an 11-yard TD toss to Mika Graham and give the Barrons a 7-6 lead.

The Spartans fought back on their next possession. Riese lofted a perfect pass to Vanel Dossous along the left sideline, with Dossous making a leaping grab over a defender near Woodbridge's 35 and racing to the end zone.

"I knew the ball was going to come to me," said Dossous, who finished with three catches for 130 yards. "I just concentrated, caught the ball and scored. We thought we could move the ball on them because we have multiple threats."

"We knew he was capable of it," Caruso said. "The lights were on, the stage was set, and he showed up."

The Barrons reclaimed the lead 14-13 early in the second quarter, but Steinert responded again. Riese hit Dossous with a 53-yard completion two plays before scrambling for his life and firing a laser between defenders to Keon White for an 8-yard TD pass with 2:05 remaining in the first half.

Woodbridge scored in the final minute of the period to send the game to halftime tied at 20.

Malagrino's interception in the third quarter set up an 11-yard touchdown run by Riese to give Steinert a 26-20 advantage. The Barrons, though, got a 95-yard touchdown catch-and-run from Zalar to reclaim the advantage 27-26 midway through period.

That's when Steinert went on the winning drive. The Spartans methodically went 62 yards in 13 plays, taking more than seven minutes off the clock, to claim the lead for good. Dossous' 10-yard catch on third-and-7 from the Spartans' 41 was the key play to keep the march alive.

"(Riese) was putting the ball in pinholes," Caruso said. "He stepped up and took his game to another level. The leadership he brings to the field; I don't want to talk about next year, but we're going to miss him so much.

"We thought we could move the ball on them. We knew their adjustment was going to be to bring heat, and that's what they did; they started bringing the blitz. Our linemen did a good job picking it up and we were able to move the ball at will most of the game."

Woodbridge drove to the Spartans' 35 in the final seconds, but two long passes fell incomplete as Steinert sealed the victory.

"We were able to force turnovers the whole game," Mattonelli said. "They put up some points on us, but I've never seen a defense play with more heart. We wanted this so badly. We got the turnovers and that was the difference. We were able to get our offense the ball and keep the ball away from them a lot of the game."

Steinert now has two games remaining, the annual Thanksgiving Day clash with rival

Hamilton West, and the Central Jersey Group III championship.

“We told them last week that they had a chance to make history and the theme was the same this week,” Caruso said. “And I’m sure it will be the same two weeks from now.”

Which is when Caruso gets to enjoy his birthday gift, and share with all those who made it possible.