

Round 53: Steinert (8-2) at Hamilton (5-4), 10:30 a.m.



For a second straight Thanksgiving, Hamilton lineman Steve Clayton (71) will be putting the pressure on Steinert quarterback Adam Riese (14), and Clayton hopes to have the same kind of success he had last year, as shown in the photo below (Photos by Donna Brihn).

What do you give the game that has everything? How about even more

By Rich Fisher

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Nov. 23: The game that has it all, has even more this year.

When you say Steinert-Hamilton football, it immediately conjures up images of an enduring Thanksgiving rivalry with memorable games, warm reunions and good 'ol American fun.

That's the case no matter how good or bad the teams are.

This year, we get a bonus when the two kick off at 10:30 a.m. for their 53rd annual meeting at West.

There's a heck of a lot at stake.

Steinert is going for a state title next week so there is a buzz surrounding the Spartans. But in the here-and-now, both teams are playing for plenty on Thursday.

If Hamilton wins for the second straight year, it will clinch three things – a winning season, the outright West Jersey Football League Valley Division championship and the outright Joe Logue Trophy for Hamilton Township supremacy.

If Steinert takes the turkey, it will force a three-way tie for both the Valley Division crown and Logue Trophy, with all three township teams getting a piece of both the pumpkin pies.

And then there is the senior star power.

Hamilton has one of Mercer County's top running backs in Bret Stroman, while Steinert has one of its best quarterbacks in Adam Riese. Both guys can make a game their own personal showcase.

In a perfect world, this is the perfect game.

"Thanksgiving is the most important game of the season," Hamilton coach Tom Hoglen said. "It will be a large crowd and the one these players will remember for the rest of their lives.

"The fact that our seniors will be playing their last game means that it is very important for our young players to understand that and go out and play hard for this senior class."

While Hamilton ends its season today, the Spartans have one more uber-important game with Neptune in the Central Jersey Group III final at Rutgers next week.

But if there is ever a game a player won't look past, even with a state final looming, it's Steinert-Hamilton.



“We are in a unique situation for Steinert High School but I firmly believe one of the reasons for our success this year is because we have not looked ahead and we have approached every game like it is the most important game of the year and we stick to our routine,” Steinert coach Dan Caruso said. “I have been telling the kids all year that in football, the most important game of the season is the up coming game.

“I can't change my philosophy now. There are three things I told them they can't say this week – Neptune, Rutgers and State Championship. That being said there is an extra buzz in the school and community. People are excited and I am sure we will get a great turnout for this game.”

If Steinert needs any extra motivation – other than the fact it trails the series 32-19-1 – it just need look back to last year when it blew a 14-0 halftime lead and fell 29-14. Hornet running back Jamie Williams put on one of the great one-half performances in the history of the series to power Hamilton.

With that in mind, there was never even a thought to resting any players to assure they are healthy for Neptune.

“We are approaching this game the same,” Caruso said. “Of course if the score isn't close we will get starters out of the game but I think we can agree the chances of that happening are slim.”

As are the chances of Steinert tanking it.

“Many people have suggested to me that I should lay down or pull my starters out,” an incredulous Caruso said. “I answer that by saying “What kind of message would I be sending? How can I look my players in the eye and tell them to give up when I have been preaching to them for years now to always keep fighting and never give up? How can I tell them to quit in football and not expect them to quit in other aspects of their life?”

“This is not a meaningless game. Not to me, not to my players, not to everyone at Hamilton West, and not to our community. This promises to be a great game and I can't wait. I want to win this game.”

As does Hamilton, which looks to show that it can play with a state finalist.

“We have clinched at least a tie for the Joe Logue trophy and the division but our players are excited about playing a team who has a good shot at a state title,” said Hoglen, who is without injured starters Ruben Desane and Greg Williams. “I don't think we will ever be completely healthy at this point. But all of our players will be suited up and will play their hardest.”

Caruso knows his team will be facing a hungry squad.

“Hamilton has everything to be motivated for,” he said. “If they win this game they are the outright winners of the Logue trophy. If they win, years from now when people look at that trophy they will say that Hamilton was the best team in the township in 2011, even if we go on to win on December 3rd.

“This is the last time their team gets to play together as a group and I am sure they want to go out with a happy memory. Believe me, there is no need for extra motivation for either team.”

And while football is one of the ultimate team games, where missing one block or shooting one wrong gap can topple the whole operation, it will still be fun to watch the game within the game as the stars come out.

Stroman has rushed for 1,144 yards and 12 touchdowns in Hamilton's ground-oriented attack. He is capable of going the distance every time he touches the ball and has also been stellar at safety.

“Brett Stroman is a great football player,” Caruso said. “He is better than any running back we have seen in the playoffs. He is a special talent. He has the ability to take a game over completely and carry his team.

“He’s fully healthy now so I am sure he can’t wait to get out on the field Thanksgiving Day. He presents a great challenge for our defense.”

As does Riese, who has played at another level since having a sub-par outing against West Windsor-Plainsboro South three weeks ago. The first quarterback to ever start four Thanksgiving games, Riese has completed 57 percent of his passes for 1677 yards and 19 touchdowns and rushed for 686 yards and 11 touchdowns.

He was nothing short of spectacular in last week’s playoff win at Woodbridge.

“Adam Riese is playing great football at this time,” Hoglen said. “He is a tough challenge for our defense and we need to be aggressive and do our best to rush the passer.

“They have a lot of weapons on offense and Adam is making great reads. He has tall receivers who are making big plays in big situations.”

Riese vs. Stroman.

Potential titles vs. shared titles.

Steinert vs. Hamilton.

Always special.

This year, extra special.