

Steinert (5-1) at Notre Dame (4-3) , Friday, 7 p.m.

Steinert hopes to keep the music way down low in Lawrenceville tonight

By Rich Fisher

Fish4Scores.com

Oct. 28: Dan Caruso knows what song he does NOT want to hear tonight.

“I have to admit that it is a great fight song,” Caruso said of the legendary Notre Dame fight song. “It’s not my favorite but certainly Top Five. I prefer Rocky at the top.

“However I have been conditioned, ala Pavlov’s Dogs, to wince when I hear the Notre Dame fight song. When I hear it, usually something bad has just happened.”

For the first time in a zillion years, Caruso’s Steinert High football team did not have to hear it last year as the Spartans stunned ND. It mattered little to Steinert that the Irish were down to a third-string quarterback, as it was still a huge win.

But it’s a loss that Notre Dame will remember, and obviously want to avenge tonight. It is like role reversal for Steinert, who was out to avenge its own loss against West Windsor-Plainsboro North last week (and did so with rousing success).

“I know they have been looking forward to this game all year,” said Caruso, whose team is riding a five-game winning streak. “Many of their players probably circled this day on the calendar last year.

“That being said, even without the revenge factor, this was still going to be a huge game for their program and ours. Two good football teams going at it on Friday night, what could be better.”

Notre Dame does not have its usual glittering record and sits in third place in the WJFL Capital Division. But the Irish are always dangerous and probably more so now while trying to salvage their season.

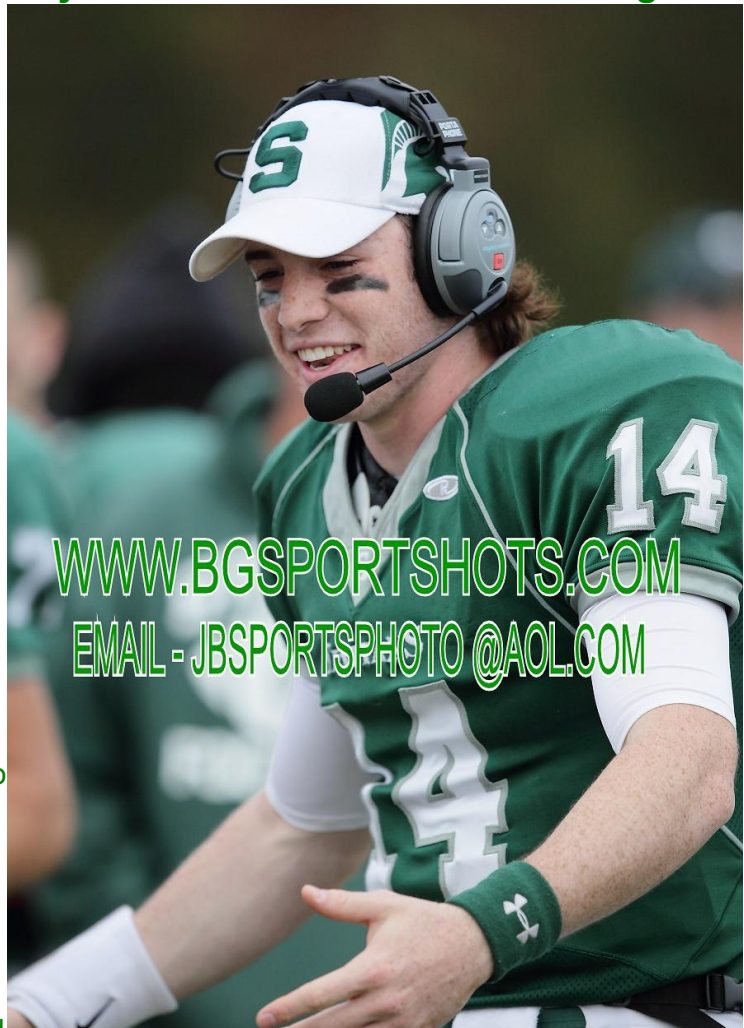
ND has struggled offensively recently, while Steinert’s starting defense has not allowed a touchdown in nine straight quarters (sitting out three others due to blowouts)

Still, Caruso knows this will be a war.

“Notre Dame is a very dangerous team for a lot of reasons,” he said. “They are traditionally a powerhouse that plays with a lot of pride and tradition in their program.

“They are a very talented team that had some bad breaks this season, and they are looking to stay over .500 and finish their season strong. And there’s the revenge factor.”

Steinert will look to maintain the strong running game that it displayed last week, when Jeff



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Unfortunately for Notre Dame's defense, Adam Riese is giving up his career as a coordinator to return to quarterback for tonight's big game (Photo by John Blaine/purchase photos by e-mailing jbsportsphoto@aol.com).

Mattonelli had a sick yards-per-carry average of over 30.

“The key to winning this game is to limit the mistakes on both sides of the ball and if our line can block their defensive line,” Caruso said. “If we can protect Adam (Riese) and get some push in the running game we will be successful.”

Riese will be back at quarterback after his 10-minute hiatus as a coordinator during last week's game.

Despite their record, the Spartans pretty much *have* to be successful in order to reach the Central Jersey Group III playoffs for an unprecedented third straight year. Last season, four wins were enough to punch a playoff ticket.

Today, Steinert has five wins and is seventh in the CJ III power point ratings.

“The Central Jersey three race is crazy,” Caruso said. “If we lose this game we will most likely be out of the playoffs. There are a ton of good teams in this bracket and we have not been getting a lot of points from the teams that we beat.

“We need some of the teams we beat to go on runs. However, we really control our own fate and if we win our next two we will be going into the playoffs in good shape.”

And as much as the township teams root for each other when they are not playing each other, Steinert is forced to root for Rancocas Valley to beat Nottingham and Trenton to beat Hamilton, since it owns wins over both of those teams and can pick up valuable points if they win.

Nottingham (4-2) at Rancocas Valley (4-2), Saturday, 2 p.m.

Rancocas Valley offense presents a big challenge for Nottingham

The start of Steinert's winning streak was also the last game RV lost, as the Red Devils carry a four-game win streak into Saturday's fray.

“They would have been hot all season if they had been healthy all year,” said coach Jon “Big Dawg” Adams, who lived to keep his parking spot another week. “I know Deshawn Jones got hurt early against West Windsor South and did not play against Steinert. He's as good a back as any we have, or will see, all year. His fullback is healthy also. When you see how well they run the ball it makes their play-action game that much more difficult to defend.

“The quarterback (Dylan Fannelli) is a stud who can really throw the ball and they have an outstanding receiver. We will have our hands full trying to slow them down. On defense they are very quick and pursue well. It will be a real challenge.”

When it comes down to winning the game, it's all about basics and Don Gatto.

“We need to tackle well and keep things in front of us defensively,” Adams said. “I feel The Godfather (defensive coordinator Frank Gatto), has a real good approach on D.

“Offensively we have a solid plan. The thing of course we need to do is execute, which was an issue in both losses.”

The good news is quarterback Esayah Obado is coming off one of his best games as a high school varsity player, and the defense also had a strong game in a win over Trenton.

Adams has watched that success carry over in attitude.

“The kids have really buckled down this week and are excited about playing this game,” the coach said. “Despite Trenton's record, they are huge and very physical. We came out relatively healthy and are excited about playing this game.”

Especially since, like Steinert, Nottingham is scrapping for a playoff berth as it sits in ninth place in CJ III

“This has huge playoff implications for both teams,” Adams said. “When talking earlier in the week we discussed that. If we are going to compete in CJ Group three, this is exactly the type of team that we need to compete with. We must atone for the ‘Sins of our past.’

“We played very inconsistent football against West Windsor South and Hamilton and paid the price for it. We need to continue to improve daily and focus on our assignments. We still have yet to play a complete game. We still have yet to play our best football. No better time than against an excellent team like RV!”

Trenton (2-5) at Hamilton West (4-2), Saturday, 11 a.m.

Hamilton looks to snap two-game skid against struggling Trenton

Two teams struggling to right the ship will have at it on Hall of Fame Day at West, as Trenton has lost three straight and the Hornets have dropped two in a row.

Hamilton’s losses have been to Northern Burlington and West Windsor-Plainsboro South, who happen to be the leaders in CJ IV and CJ III power points, respectively. The Hornets are 12th in power points in CJ III and need to win their next two and have a lot of other things go right in order to qualify.