

Week 2: Sep. 15 Football Previews

Steinert looks to avoid another 0-2 start by winning at RV

By Rich Fisher

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Sep. 16: Of the three township football teams in action Saturday, probably no one has more on the line than Steinert.

Afterall, battling back from an 0-2 start can get a little tiresome after a while.

But that is the prospect the Spartans face if they can not bounce back in their 1 p.m. game at Rancocas Valley. Steinert is attempting to rebound from last week's frustrating one-point loss to Nottingham in which a special teams slip-up cost the Spartans a chance to tie.

Granted, Steinert has come back from 0-2 the last two years to make the playoffs, but coach Dan Caruso certainly doesn't want to climb that mountain again.

And from all indications, the Spartans seem to have put their defeat behind them.

"Our players responded very well to the loss against Nottingham. . . the best they could respond at least," Caruso said. "I know many of them were heart broken, but come Tuesday they had put it out of their minds and were ready to move on.

"Our Tuesday and Wednesday practices this week might have been the best two practices we had all year. It was a great mix of business-like attitude and having fun with your coaches and teammates."

Fun time will be over by the time they line up in Mount Holly, as Rancocas Valley is also hurting for a win after opening with a 47-27 loss at West Windsor-Plainsboro South.

The Red Devils' strong running game was limited to just 115 yards on 27 carries, but was hurt by the fact leading rusher Deshawn Jones left with an injury after rushing for minus-5 yards on five carries.

"I am sure not having him hurt them against South a bit," Caruso said. "But they do also have a very good quarterback (Dylan Fannelli) that can both run and pass it well. That is certainly a concern for us.

"Rancocas is a big, physical team just like last year. I am sure they are hungry for a win, just like us. They do have a powerful run game if everyone is healthy."

The Devils took a 16-6 win over Steinert last year, although quarterback Adam Riese missed that game due to a knee injury. Last week, Riese was 15-for-23 for 253 yards and a touchdown but only rushed for 21 yards.

"Our pass protection was excellent all day," Caruso said. "Adam threw the ball well and we ran good routes. But our run blocking was extremely poor.

"We also didn't convert on a few of our plus plays (four dropped passes) which could have been touchdowns. We have to be able to convert when we are given big opportunities like that."

Defensively, Steinert got a big game from sophomore linebacker Ryan Malagrino, who came up with 16 tackles in his first varsity game. But the Spartans have work to do on that side of the ball.

"We played very high on the defensive line and got pushed around," Caruso said. "We blew some assignments on defense that led to big plays for Nottingham. And we didn't have any takeaways. We are going to need them in the future."

Caruso added that there were a few other bright spots.

“With the exception of one PAT, our kicking game was excellent and we didn’t turn the ball over,” he said.

Nottingham looks to pressure young Hightstown quarterback

Jon “Big Dawg” Adams and some assistants were on hand to watch Hamilton beat Hightstown last week, and what they saw was Rams sophomore quarterback Dustin Kollman have a pretty solid game in his varsity debut by completing 9 of 17 passes for 194 yards in a 28-22 setback.

He will be a focal point for Frank Gatto’s defensive unit when Nottingham has its home opener with the Rams at noon Saturday.



The Nottingham football team celebrates last Saturday after pulling out a 21-20 win over Steinert to win the Klockner Klash (Photo by Wes "Media Mogul" Kirkpatrick).

“They did some real nice things offensively and the kid can play,” Nottingham coach Adams said. “I think we have to pressure him, which usually is a good recipe for success against a young quarterback.

“If given time he can find one of those two really good wide receivers (Cameron Harper, Kevin Lenart), and (Harper) is a real concern. We must get pressure and our secondary has to play better this week.”

Nottingham allowed over 250 passing yards last week and was fortunate that Steinert dropped several wide open passes that would have gone for six had they been caught. The ‘Stars also caught a break when a missed PAT enabled them to escape with a one-point win.

“We *must* eliminate our mistakes,” Adams said. “Alignment mistakes and mental errors killed offensive drives in the second half.

“Also, we must be aligned properly this week. Steinert took advantage of defensive mistakes in alignment and coverage to get back into the game. The good news is everything we saw on film is correctable.”

Despite all that, Nottingham got a strong effort from its offense (except for some silly penalties on third-and-short) as it showed the ability to run and pass.

“I honestly thought offensively we played very well for most of the game,” Adams said. “It was just those few times where a guy forgot a snap count or we forgot to line up properly that hurt us.”

Hornets take on a Lawrence team licking its wounds

After just one game, it’s hard to say if Lawrence’s 48-0 loss to Notre Dame was a tribute to how good ND is or an indication of how much work the Cardinals need.

Either way, Hamilton will be meeting a riled up team in Lawrenceville Saturday morning (11 a.m.) as the Cards try and bounce back from last week’s embarrassment.

Hamilton is coming off a nice, 28-22 victory at Hightstown in which the Hornets allowed a fair

share of big plays but made two of their own in the final quarter to win it.

It was a good start for a West team that is still trying to fit all the pieces together after graduation losses.

“Last week there was a lot of excitement,” said quarterback Mark Acquaviva, who ran the offense well in his first varsity start. “It was the first game, on a Friday night. Our (newly built) offensive line opened up some pretty big holes for our running backs.”

The game featured a coming out party for Bret Stroman, who rushed for 201 yards and three touchdowns, including the game-winner late in the contest.

Acquaviva said it's time to put that game behind.

“We've been working hard in practice,” he said. “We're just trying to grow from last week.”