

## Sep. 9: Week 1 Football Previews

### Nottingham-Steinert opener should provide more offensive fireworks

By Rich Fisher

Fish4Scores.com

**Sep. 9:** Do ya like defensive battles?

Then avoid Klockner Road at all costs on Saturday.

That is no knock on the defenses of Steinert or Nottingham, but a commentary on just how powerful the offenses of both football teams can be this year.

And they will be on display against each other to start the season, as the Northstars visit Steinert for a 1 p.m. kickoff in the annual Klockner Klash.

“This may be an offensive war,” said Nottingham coach Jon “Big Dawg” Adams. “But weather conditions could play a big part (if it rains).”

Last season, Nottingham opened with a 40-27 victory over the Spartans in one of the most entertaining games of the year.

“Listen,” said Andy Reid, er, Steinert coach Dan Caruso. “I would love for this to not be as close as it was last year, but I think everyone knows on both sides that it isn’t going to play out that way.

“I am sure all the coaches agree they would like to see better defense played this year but we do realize with the amount offensive talent on the field it could be a high scoring game again. The fact that we have some inexperience on defense and they on offense could play a role but I think a game like this causes players to grow up real fast.”

The key to this one is which team’s youngsters grow up the quickest.

Steinert has numerous holes to fill on defense, while Nottingham has plenty of new faces on offense. The difference could be that the Northstars have their leader back in quarterback Esayah Obado, and also have some veterans up front.

But Steinert defensive coordinator Bob Ziegler is one of the best in the business and is up to the challenge of molding a unit. Doing it in time to slow down Nottingham, however, could be tough.

“We are young and inexperienced, but we are freakin’ fast and athletic,” Adams said. “Our O-line is stronger than in recent years and full of guys who have been through the battles.

“The running backs may be young but they run hard and have shown lots of promise. We brought over two of our tougher guys (from defense) in Kyle James and Tyree Patterson to handle our fullback job.”

And despite all of Obado’s passing ability, Caruso feels it’s important to stifle Nottingham’s run game.

“They have two very big powerful backs behind Obado who can wear defenses down,” he said. “We have to be better conditioned for this as we lost the game because of it last year.”

On the other side of the ball, Nottingham has a stronger defense than last year under Frank Gatto, and lineman/linebacker Dennis “The Manster” Hernandez is always in the middle of some big plays. They will have to contend with four-year quarterback Adam Riese and a bevy of veteran Spartan receivers.

“Their wide receivers are tall and fast,” Adams said. “Jordan Dunn presents a real problem. The kid can play the game and is very talented.

“He is not alone. They have some people. They have a good tight end and plenty of hard running backs. I like the way they come off the ball up front. They are a real problem offensively.”

All things considered, this is one of those games that keep coaches up at nights . . . more so than usual.

“Going up against Nottingham is always a fun game but make no mistake, for a coach to go up against a rival in week one is very stressful,” Caruso said. “But that is why we coach.”

“The main concern for this game is the unknown. They have a bunch of new players who are very gifted but we don't have a ton of film to find tendencies or analyze what they are trying to do offensively and defensively to attack us.”

The good news is that both sides enter the contest healthy. Nottingham had 83 players come out for the team and will two platoon.

“We had a couple injuries to some of our back-ups but I think we are fine,” Adams said. “This is one of the hardest working teams I have had and this team is in tremendous shape.”

“We have one or two injuries, but nothing serious as of right now,” Caruso said earlier in the week. “We are tweaking with our lineup a bit this week and people are going to win and lose jobs this week.”

Just as teams are going to win and lose on Saturday. And while an opener is “just one game” of at least 10, this one has some significance.

“There's much at stake for both of us,” Adams said. “The Joe Logue Trophy (for township supremacy), the Western Jersey Football League (Valley Division) championship and plenty of points down the road for playoff seedings. While it's the first game, it's going to be a key early game for both of us.

Caruso agrees.

“The season opener is very important psychologically for the team,” he said. “I am still very much amazed we were able to overcome 0-2 to make the playoffs two straight years.

“I will say even though we lost to Nottingham last year our team was very confident coming out of that game. We realized how good Nottingham was and we were with them step for step. All the kids realized that we had opportunities to win the game. A corrected mistake here or there and maybe the outcome would have been in our favor . . .I'm not saying it didn't hurt a ton, but the kids learned from it.

“That being said, I never want to open up 0-2 again. This year it is important for us to get out to a fast start.”

To do that, it looks like points will have to be scored.

That shouldn't be a problem for either side. . .all year.

## **Hamilton hopes for repeat performance in opener against Hightstown**

**Sep. 9:** Hamilton West gets started tonight with a 7 p.m. kickoff at Hightstown, a team it handled fairly easily in last year's opener with a 20-0 win. The Hornets rushed for 278 yards in that game.

There is one catch, however. A lot of the key players from that contest are gone.

From both teams.

Hamilton lost a ton, including several Division I players, while the Rams lost its most important offensive players in quarterback Kevin Monahan and running back Abdul Namoya.

The Hornets enter with a new offensive backfield, a new secondary, some new linebackers and

linemen and a few new receivers. Hightstown, which was 4-6 last season after an 0-3 start, has a very green defense.

If new quarterback Mark Acquaviva can get into an early groove and Bret Stroman can fulfill his potential at running back, the Hornets should be able to control the ball and come away with a victory.