



Andrew Douglas of the Stamford Hornets breaks the tackle of Ryan Mattei of the Sir Winston Churchill Bulldogs in high school football playoff action Friday.

Top dogs rise to challenge

By Bernie Puchalski

With his Sir Winston Churchill Bulldogs trailing the Stamford Hornets 15-7 at the half Friday in AAA football semifinal play, Alex Coutu took it upon himself to rally the troops.

He got in teammates' faces, he slapped helmets and he delivered an emotional half-time speech to his team just prior to the second half. The Grade 12 student's message obviously got through as the Bulldogs rallied for a 16-15 victory over their heated rivals from Stamford.

"This season I've been a little more restrained because this team is a developmental team and we've all grown together," Coutu said.

The 17-year-old's restrained approach ended Friday.

"We went from being that great team I know we can be to not being so good and not meeting our standards. With that, I wanted us to play the way we can play and I did not want to let it slip away from us," he said.

Given that the 6-foot-2, 185-pounder will likely move on to a Canadian university program next fall added some urgency to the moment.

"These are my brothers here and I want to get a win. I want to beat St. Mike's next week and get that feeling of winning a championship," Coutu said.

The receiver/defensive back was a member of Churchill's championship teams in his Grade 9 and 10 years, but was a bit player.

"I rode the bench then and this year is completely different because I'm a real part of it. This game means everything to me and it feels amazing," he said.

Coutu is one of the players the young Churchill team looks up to," Churchill head coach Peter Partridge said.

"We're a very young team. We were pinned early, we didn't know who to look to and no one was stepping up. We were lucky to get out of the first half down the margin we were down."

And as it usually goes in high school football, when a team's best players step up and make plays, that team usually wins.

Churchill's string of big plays began when Alex Christie blocked a punt late in the second quarter with his team trailing 9-0. That set up a 12-yard pass from Andrew Krzeczkowski to Coutu which cut the lead to 9-7 at half-time. Then early in the third quarter, Coutu slipped a tackle after a reception and caused a Stamford defender to take a face-mask penalty which brought the ball to the Stamford 20-yard line.

Three plays later, Krzeczkowski hit Mike McCormick for a three-yard TD pass to cut the lead to 15-13.

On its next possession, the Bulldogs marched to the Stamford 21-yard line and appeared to settle for a single point after Luca Petriello missed a 28-yard kick. But a contacting the kicker penalty on Stamford kept the drive alive and Petriello was able to hit a 13-yard game-winning field goal that made the score 16-15.

The Bulldogs held the Hornets to one first down in the second half but needed a game-saving tackle from team co-captain Josh Harris on the Bulldogs' final punt to preserve the win.

"Our best players stepped up today and made the plays. That's how it has been all year and we're going to need them next week, for sure," Partridge said.

For Stamford, it was another agonizing playoff loss to the Bulldogs in what has become one of the best rivalries in Niagara high school football.

"It's another close game unfortunately. I would like to win one eventually," Stamford coach Brad Martin said. "A blocked punt and a roughing the kicker (penalty) is pretty much what did us in. I thought both teams played well defensively and at times both teams played well offensively."

Martin was hoping his "great bunch of kids" could be a little more successful, but the team is young and is returning a lot of players.

"Our season hasn't been about our ability, It has been about our mistakes and they bit us all year long," Martin said.

Mustangs 42 Redcoats 0

The unbeaten St. Michael's Mustangs rolled into the AAA championship game Friday with a 42-0 semifinal victory over the visiting Governor Simcoe Redcoats.

Scoring for the Mustangs were: Jordan Provenzano on a pair of punt returns; Zack Hildebrand on TD catches of 20 and 30 yards from Tanner Cranford; Chris Groves on a short pass from Cranford; and, Dylan Smythe on a 20-yard run.

Redcoats head coach D'Arcy McCardle was philosophical in defeat.

"Our kids played OK, but we picked a bad day to lay an egg."

With Simcoe's October 2011 population dipping below 900, the Redcoats will be returning to the AA league in 2012.

"We're going to play in the appropriate league where we belong," McCardle said.

Patriots 32 Redmen 21

St. Paul (6-2) concluded its AAAA football season with a 32-21 victory Friday over the Denis Morris Redmen (1-6).

The two teams had their first game of the season cancelled and Friday's game was a four-point contest. Under the league's tie-breaking formula, St. Paul clinches first place in the league and advances to the Golden Horseshoe Bowl playdowns.

"We're very happy, It is the first time in school history," St. Paul head coach Rick Oreskovich said.

Ryan Nieuwesteeg led St. Paul with TD runs of 40, 25 and 50 yards and Kory Kemp added a one-yard TD run.

The Patriots built 30-7 half-time lead and held on for the win.

Darcy Baes led the Redmen with TD runs of 10 and 30 yards and Dustin Cichocki caught a 70-yard scoring strike from Aidan Farrell

Irish 12 Gators 11

Johnny Augustine scored on a two-yard run with 30.6 seconds left on the clock and Neco Costable booted the winning convert to lift the visiting Notre Dame Fighting Irish (5-2) to a 12-11 victory Friday over the Lakeshore Catholic Gators (5-2).

Costable added a 28-yard field goal and singles on a kickoff and a missed field goal to round out the scoring for Notre Dame.

Scoring for Lakeshore were: Morgan Lavoie with a rushing major; Josh Hayes with a field goal; and, Jesse Benson with a two-point convert.