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Mike Scandura

11/28/2003

EAST PROVIDENCE - After La Salle Academy and East Providence High clashed for the 76th time on Thanksgiving Day, perhaps the only question remaining was "What can these teams do for an encore?"

The answer would be "not much," because they left nearly 7,000 Pierce Stadium fans limp from exhaustion after East Providence edged La Salle, 28-27 in overtime, on quarterback Sean Arlan's four-yard run and Sam Lovett's extra-point kick.

Among other things, East Providence:

- Clinched the Division 1 title (8-0) and finished the regular season undefeated (10-0).
- Grabbed the number-one seed in the Division 1 Tournament (the Townies host No. 4 Portsmouth in a Dec. 2 semifinal game).
- Handed La Salle (7-1, 9-1) its first regular-season loss since Tim Coen took over as head coach prior to the 2000 season.
- Gave La Salle only its second loss (period) during this stretch, the other coming in last year's Super Bowl (EP rallied for a 35-21 victory). To be more precise, the Rams are 44-2 since Coen came on the scene and, since then, only the Townies can say they own victories over La Salle.

"It's a senior team ... it's a veteran team," said EP coach Sandy Gorham. "We teach poise and intensity. That's what our key words are, poise and intensity. Keep your head, don't let things distract you. It's not always going to go well.

"We have a veteran team and we expect them to maintain their poise and intensity."

In retrospect, that's exactly what happened in overtime.

La Salle got the ball first and quarterback Liam Coen fired a 10-yard touchdown pass (on fourth down) to Ryan Boehm for a 27-21 lead. But Dan Coffland, who was perfect on three previous extra-point attempts, was wide left on his fourth.

That left the door open for EP, and the Townies knocked it down when Arlan blasted in from the 4 and Lovett, a converted soccer player, nailed his fourth extra point.

"(The touchdown) was great, but I was just hoping we'd make that kick," said Arlan, who ran for two scores and passed for another. "(Lovett) did a great job kicking it."

As a team, the Townies did a great job overcoming a lackluster first half which ended with La Salle leading 7-0 on Liam Coen's 41-yard, second-quarter TD pass

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to Ryan Boehm. In fact, the Townies were so flat that they ran only 16 plays for 54 total yards and three first downs, as compared with La Salle's 33 plays for 196 yards and nine first downs.

"We were trying to downplay the game because we didn't want to get wrapped up in case we lost the game," said Gorham. "What happened three years ago was we lost to La Salle and we came into a playoff game with Portsmouth and got spanked. We didn't want to throw all our emotion here.

"Maybe in the beginning they did downplay the game. My brother (Ted) was up on the phones and saying 'They don't seem to have that spirit that they should have.' Maybe I downplayed it too much. So, at halftime, I got in their faces a little bit about it. I said 'I told you to downplay it but I didn't tell you to go to sleep. Let's get out there and play with some fire.' I thought they did in the second half."

How true, because EP received the second half kickoff and marched 65 yards in 15 plays, with Jerome Blair scoring on a 25-yard run.

La Salle countered on its next possession when Liam Coen (who completed 17 of 31 passes for 272 yards and three TDs), lofted a 39-yard touchdown pass to Boehm for a 14-7 lead at the break.

"Probably, to me, he's the best quarterback I've ever faced in 28 years of coaching high school football," said Gorham. "He puts the ball right on the money."

The same could be said of Arlan who played an integral role in the fourth quarter.

After a quick kick by La Salle gave EP a first down at the Rams' 47, Arlan gained 40 yards on the option and then ate up the last 7 for a 14-14 tie.

Then, after La Salle went three-and-out, Arlan wound up making one of the game's key plays. On fourth-and-nine from La Salle's 26, Arlan checked off and threw a 26-yard TD pass to Khalil Kallimullah which gave EP a 21-14 lead with 3:26 left.

"Actually, the coaches wanted to run a running play but I switched off at the line because (Kallimullah) said he could beat (Liam Coen, who doubles as a cornerback on defense) deep," explained Arlan. "I just threw it up and he went up and got it."

As Gorham was quick to point out, Arlan, a senior, would not have went for that play a year ago at this time.

"He didn't understand the (option) offense last year the way he does this year," said Gorham. "Our offense is difficult to run. It's not turn around and hand the ball off. There's a lot of pressure on the quarterback.


"He checked off. It was a great play ... he showed a lot of confidence. I think this is the third time this year he's checked off for a touchdown pass. Sean's terrific ... he's outstanding."

Much to EP's chagrin, Liam Coen also was outstanding on La Salle's next possession which began at the Rams' 20. In a mere two minutes and 15 seconds, he guided an 80-yard drive which ended on Drew O'Connell's six-yard touchdown run - with 1:07 left in regulation, and which set the stage for OT.

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