

# Football - A State of Denial: Lacey 21, Central 6

Written by Scott Stump - Managing Editor Saturday, 22 October 2011 21:24



**LACEY** - Junior tailback Kyle Spatz privately boiled about how all the talk was about the running back on the other team.

Junior linebacker Casey Sirotniak woke up at 6 a.m. on Saturday, unable to stop thinking about the challenge of slowing down one of the state's top running backs.

Senior two-way lineman Tyrell Smith relished the challenge of shutting down an old friend while shutting



Lacey junior tailback Kyle Spatz followed the crushing blocks of teammates like senior Tyrell Smith (left of #4) to rush for 246 yards and two touchdowns in a 21-6 win that denied Central a share of its first division title since 1994.

up the talk from an upstart team.

All of that emotion from the Lacey side was released in front of the Lions' biggest regular-season home crowd in years with a 21-6 victory over rival Central on Saturday afternoon that denied the No. 9 Golden Eagles (4-2, 3-2) a share of their first division title since 1994. The win also had the black-and-orange faithful at Barnegat smiling, as the Bengals can now clinch the outright Class B South title with a victory over winless Pinelands on Thanksgiving because of Central's loss.

The Lions (4-3, 3-2) rolled up 332 yards rushing, highlighted by 246 yards and two touchdowns on 32 carries by Spatz, who outshined his more heralded counterpart. Central senior tailback Kalyph Hardy entered as the state's second-leading rusher with 1,283 yards in five games, but was held to a season-low 94 yards and one touchdown on 26 carries by a defense ranked in the top five in the Shore Conference in fewest yards allowed.

"(Hardy) was talking on the field and everything," said Sirotniak, who had two booming hits on Hardy. "We can't let him talk on the field and run over us. It felt so good to win, especially with their Facebook page and everything they were saying. They started it. They said we were talking, but they were talking the whole time. They asked for it, basically."

The victory marked Lacey's ninth straight win over their former Thanksgiving rivals, and the Lions now lead the all-time series 22-7. It also gave Lacey a huge boost in its bid to qualify for the NJSIAA South Jersey Group III playoffs after winning the title during last year's unbeaten season. Spatz was a major reason, as he repeatedly gashed the Central defense behind Lacey's imposing offensive line and fullback Jake Timony, rushing for 149 yards and a touchdown in the second half to help ice the win.

"I took it as a big challenge," Spatz said about facing Hardy. "I wanted to play harder and show that I could do the same things as him."

"I told Spatz, 'You're going to end this game with better yardage (than Hardy),' and he believed in the whole offensive line," said Smith, a 6-foot-5, 310-pound tackle who has multiple Division I-A offers. "He's one of the best backs in the Shore, hands down. He's little, but he has heart and he runs hard. We took it very personally that nobody gives us any props for our running game, and I think (Spatz) deserves props for running hard."

Lacey set the tone from the outset when it mounted a monstrous, 13-play, 91-yard drive on its first possession of the game to chew 6:13 off the clock and take a 7-0 lead on a 2-yard run by Spatz with 3:46 left in the first quarter. The drive was highlighted by a 23-yard pass from sophomore quarterback Tom Kelly to senior tight end Jordan Powell on 3rd-and-12 to move the chains to the Central 20-yard line. That was the way the score would remain until halftime, as both teams hurt themselves with penalties, while Lacey ensured that Hardy never got loose for any runs of 20 or more yards.

"I grew up with (Hardy), and he's a beast," Smith said. "Of course he's going to want the ball, and we know he wants the ball, so the object was to shut him down. It was about not chasing him upfield because he's a real shifty kid who has nice cutback moves. Our coaches said to stay on the line of scrimmage and wait for him to cut to you. That's what we did, and that's why he had trouble."

"They were very big up front, and at times we held our own against them, but I thought clearly they won the battle of the lines on both sides," said Central head coach Vinnie Casale.

Lacey put Central in a 14-0 hole by taking the opening kickoff of the second half and driving 65 yards in nine plays, scoring when Spatz ran around the right side and leaped into the end zone for a 21-yard touchdown with 7:01 left in the third quarter.

"We changed up some of the blocking in the last two weeks and just made sure that everyone did their job right," Spatz said. "I guess we just had more heart, and we made sure all of our assignments were executed perfectly."

"We're doing a better job of getting it to the point of attack with some blocking," Lacey coach Lou Vircillo said. "Our guys are capable if they understand who to get."

Central made it interesting when it answered Spatz's second touchdown with a 10-play, 65-yard scoring drive that Hardy capped with a 4-yard bull rush up the middle. The key play on the drive was a 22-yard pass from quarterback Javon Hardy, Kalyph's cousin, to wideout Kyle Gordon. However, Lacey blocked the extra point to keep the lead at 14-6 with 2:14 left in the third quarter.

The Golden Eagles appeared poised to possibly tie the game when senior Keith Stokes recovered a fumble by Spatz at Lacey's 32-yard line with 42.8 seconds left in the third quarter. Three plays later, Lacey sophomore defensive back Chris Jensen picked off a pass by Javon Hardy at Lacey's 13-yard line to end the threat. Central's defense then forced a three-and-out to get the ball back at Lacey's 42-yard line, but Lacey junior defensive back Brandon Boos erased that drive with an interception that he returned to Lacey's 41-yard line.

The Lions then put the game away when sophomore Christian Tutela, who finished with 101 total yards, took a handoff and bolted 53 yards up the middle for a touchdown to make it 21-6 with 5:27 left in the game. Lacey reasserted its dominance over its old rival, whom the Lions won't play in the regular season until at least 2014 because Lacey has been realigned to Class A South for the next two years and does not have nondivisional games scheduled against Central. There still is a chance the two could meet in the postseason, as both are in the South Jersey Group III bracket.

"We had to bring some alums into the breakfast this morning and explain this rivalry because our kids haven't really been in a rivalry," said Vircillo, who is the only head coach in Lacey's history. "The whole town came out today, which I haven't seen in a long time, which was great to see."

"What I was most proud of was that our kids played hard the entire game," Casale said. "They didn't quit, and for a championship game, I thought it was exciting. Although we can't get B South, we still have the goal of getting into the playoffs (for the first time since 2001), and that's what we're going to try to do."

For the Lacey defense, it was the latest feather in the cap for a unit that has swallowed up some talented rushers over the years. Lacey held Pinelands' Matt McLain, who set a Shore Conference single-season record with 2,544 yards rushing last year, to a season-low 81 yards. Vircillo even remembered back to the 1980s, when Lacey was the only opponent to hold Freehold legend Joe "The Jet" Henderson under 100 yards in two straight seasons.

Lacey will now take a two-game winning streak into a crucial nondivisional showdown with No. 5 Neptune next week in a game that will give the winner a large boost in the power-point standings in their respective brackets.

"This gives us a lot of momentum," Smith said. "I think if we play together, we can beat anybody."

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#### Box score

#### Lacey 21, Central 6

	L	C
First downs	15	10

Rushes-yards      41-332      33-111

Passing            5-9-0      3-9-2

Passing yards    59            64

Penalties         7-74        4-37

Fumbles-lost     2-1          1-0

Central (4-2, 3-2) 0 0 6 0 - 6

Lacey (4-3, 3-2) 7 0 7 7 - 21

#### **Scoring summary:**

L: Spatz 2-yard run (Dolly kick).

L: Spatz 21-yard run (Dolly kick).

C: K. Hardy 4-yard run (kick blocked).

L: Tutela 53-yard run (Dolly kick).

#### **Individual statistics**

Rushing - L: Spatz 32-246, Kelly 2-6, Timony 2-9, Tutela 3-65, Jensen 1-3, Grochowski 1-3. C: K. Hardy 26-94, Gordon 2-27, J. Hardy 4-(-11), Stokes 1-1.

Passing - L: Kelly 5-9-0 59. C: J. Hardy 3-9-2 64.

Receiving - L: Tutela 4-36, Powell 1-23. C: Gordon 3-64.

Interceptions - L: Jensen 1-0, Boos 1-20.