



Photo by Stephen Goldsmith

Princeton High running back Josh Gordon breaks free on his way to an 82-yard touchdown run in the Little Tigers' 30-6 win at Hightstown on Friday.

Defense sets tone in PHS win

Little Tigers gearing up for CJ III playoff berth

By Bob Nuse
Sports Editor

FOOTBALL

HIGHTSTOWN — Ryan Rudich is no stranger to state playoff football.

For three straight years, he was part of a Colts Neck program that qualified for the Central Jersey Group IV playoffs. Now, as a senior, Rudich is on a Princeton High team that not only wants to make the playoffs, but make a statement once they get there.

Rudich transferred to Princeton High from Colts Neck, where he played for three years before, after moving to Cranbury in the spring.

"It was tough," the senior said of the move. "But I am glad to be a Tiger. This is a team with 22 seniors and everyone has been nice to me. Everybody has been playing together since freshman year and before that Pop Warner. But they've been great to me since I've been here."

On Friday night, Rudich and the Princeton High defense made a statement early, holding the Hightstown offense in check until the offense and special teams got

going. The end result was a 30-6 win that helped the Little Tigers improve to 6-1 on the season.

"One of the things we talked about was (Hightstown) could come out and be emotional and make plays and we could ride that wave," Princeton coach Steve Ewerette said. "Or, could we come out and make sure it never got emotional? We had a great start and the defense played, outstanding, especially in the first half. It was about business. It was about getting to 6-1 and getting closer to that playoff berth."

Princeton all but assured itself

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of a spot in the CJ III playoffs with the win. Now, they'll look to secure a home game in the opening round with an upset win over Notre Dame on Saturday.

"It's nice being 6-1," Everette said. "It's a great job by our kids and our coaches. I think tonight was an outstanding night. If we want to go far in the playoffs we have to be firing in every aspect of the game."

"If we find a way to win (the Notre Dame) game we're probably looking at a home playoff game. That's important to us. But more importantly, we want to beat Notre Dame. They're the next great team we have to play."

The Little Tigers took a 7-0 lead late in the first quarter on a touchdown run by Trevor Barsamian. After a Brian Vieten field goal made it 10-0, the Little Tigers got an 82-yard touchdown run from Josh Gordon to make it 16-0. On the next Hightstown drive, Princeton broke the game open when senior Taariq Parker blocked a punt, scooped it up and raced to the end zone for a touchdown.

"That was all about emotion right there," Everette said. "A lot of people don't realize member Mario Israel, who passed away a couple of years ago and today is his birthday. He was Taariq's cousin and Taariq actually switched his number and wore No. 28. One of the other kids sacrificed and let him wear the number tonight and Taariq got a blocked punt and a touch-

down. If you believe in those kinds of things that was all a spiritual thing.

"Taariq is one of our seniors and he's up and down and all around. Tonight he made a play. He said he was going to get it, and he went out and got it."

Parker and Gordon are both part of the senior group that now includes Rudich, who couldn't be happier with his place on the Little Tigers. He played running back and defensive back at Colts Neck, but has found a home as a safety for Princeton.

"We were pretty good and usually in the mix every year for the playoffs," Rudich said of his Colts Neck days. "Last year we lost to Sayreville in the first round. I love playing on this defense. We have so much depth. It's not a big deal to me not to play running back because those two are just something else. I am happy to be playing on defense and on special teams. I just like being out on the field and playing."

That's the philosophy of this Princeton team, just go out and get the job done.

"He's done a great job," Everette said of Rudich. "He came in last April and he has bought into our whole 'Band of Brothers' philosophy. He's bought into working hard and sacrificing for everybody. He's given us a good strong safety presence and been real physical on defense."

Gordon finished with 168 yards rushing and a touchdown, while Barsamian ran for 95 yards and a pair of touchdowns.

In other games this past weekend, West Windsor-Plainsboro South moved a step closer to a berth in the CJ IV playoffs with a 39-13 win over Nottingham. Jack Dennehy caught a pair of touchdowns passes from Chris Evans and the defense scored a pair of touchdowns for the Pirates. Andrew Manley returned a fumble 55 yards for a touchdown and Ryan Brazel ran an interception back 101 yards for a score.

"Our defense has played well the whole season," said South coach Todd Smith, whose team improved to 4-3 with the win. "Now our offense is starting to come around. We're excited about having an opportunity to get back to the playoffs. That is always a goal for us at the start of the season."

The Hun School moved a step closer to a Mid-Atlantic Prep League title with a 13-10 win at Peddie on Saturday. Brendan Morgan ran for a touchdown and Brendan Dudeck connected with Chris Alston for a late touchdown to give the Raiders the win. Hun is 4-2 overall and 4-0 in the MAPL.

WW-P North dropped a 37-7 decision at home against Notre Dame to fall to 4-3 on the season. Sean Reed ran for 177 yards and scored the lone touchdown for the Knights, who need a win at Hamilton on Saturday to secure a berth in the CJ III playoffs.

Montgomery slipped to 5-2 with a 38-0 loss to Westfield. Princeton Day fell to 3-4 with a 30-8 loss to Perkiomen. Davon Reed scored a late touchdown for the Panthers.

Fenley