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Giagunto rallies St. Joseph to a 37-29 win over Absegami

In the rich history of St. Joseph football, probably no player has embodied the program better than Anthony Giagunto.

It's not just that Giagunto is tough. It's not just that he has a knack for making plays. It's not just that he's 19-0 as a starting quarterback, with two state titles under his belt and another on the way.

It's that he's 5-foot-8. Maybe. And for a small school with a coach who's 5-foot-6 (another maybe), there's something extra-special about a diminutive quarterback who beats the bigger guys on a weekly basis.



Phil Anastasia

"We always seem to get the little guys," St. Joseph coach Paul Sacco said after his Wildcats followed Giagunto's inspiring lead to a 37-29 victory over Absegami on Saturday in an exhausting and entertaining Cape-Atlantic League American Division opener.

That's not exactly true. St. Joseph has been cranking out Division I players for years, and most of those guys were big-time athletes in every sense — like last year's twin defensive stars: 6-1 linebacker Kaiwan Lewis, who went to South Carolina, and 6-5 defensive end Max Valles, who went to Virginia.

But Sacco is 257-54-5 in 31 seasons because he has built a program that has blended those top athletes with scrappy, hard-nosed kids who best represent the 380-student school in the heart of Hammonton.

An army of 5-10 offensive linemen have lived in that weight room in that dingy garage behind the practice field, and an endless parade of fireplug-like fullbacks and squat and sturdy linebackers. But nobody has symbolized St. Joseph football better than Giagunto.

"It's sad," Sacco said. "If he was 6-1 or 6-2, he could go anywhere he wanted [in college] because of his ability to play this game."

Giagunto might have played the best game of his career in leading St. Joseph to a comeback victory over an athletic Absegami team that was on the verge of sneaking out of Bill Bendig Field with an upset for most of the hot and humid afternoon.

Giagunto didn't let it happen. The senior was 12-for-16 passing for 165 yards and two touchdowns. He ran for one two-point conversion and passed for another. He made a touchdown-saving tackle that was worth four points, because it forced Absegami to settle for a field goal.

But the play that summed up Giagunto's game — and probably his career, too — was an extra-



St. Joseph's Cody Sampson dives across the goal line for a touchdown behind a block by teammate Ricardo Quiridongo on Absegami's Emil Robinson. Maurice Hubbard is at left. MICHAEL S WIRTZ / Staff Photographer



Anthony Giagunto, St. Joseph's 5-foot-8 senior quarterback, was 12-for-16 passing for 165 yards and two touchdowns.

point attempt by Absegami with 1 minute, 32 seconds remaining in the fourth quarter.

Remember, the weather was brutal, with players on both sides dropping with cramps for much of the second half. This was part football game and part war of attrition, with St. Joseph losing running back Miles Pease with a shoulder injury in the first quarter, and Absegami junior David Hood, who put on a scintillating show with three long touchdowns in the first half, missing most of the second half with cramps.

Giagunto had cramps, too. He was limping for much of the

game. But he played every snap on offense and defense and returned punts, too. His "rest" periods were during kickoffs and St. Joseph punts.

"I never played in a game like this before," said Giagunto, who lives in Williamstown. "I'm exhausted."

With just 92 seconds left in the game, and with St. Joseph holding a 37-29 lead after an Absegami touchdown, Giagunto had to make one more play — on a largely meaningless extra-point attempt.

"I told [junior] Cody Sampson to go inside," Giagunto said. "I said, 'I'm blocking this.'"

ONLINE EXTRA

See and hear from St. Joseph quarterback Anthony Giagunto.
www.philly.com/rallyvideos

That's just what he did, rushing from the right side, laying out, and snuffing the kick.

Sacco shook his head and smiled when asked about Giagunto's block.

"What does that say about him?" Sacco said. "It says he's one of the best football players in South Jersey."

Giagunto is the best player on the team that will be No. 1 in South Jersey in Monday's Inquirer rankings, that has won 19 in a row, that has its sights set on all those Group 5 and Group 4 foes in the newly realigned Cape American.

He's also 5-foot-8. Maybe. At St. Joseph, that seems just right.

Absegami	7	13	0	9	-	29
St. Joseph	7	7	7	16	-	37

SJ: Miles Pease 11 pass from Anthony Giagunto (Jon Ryker kick)
St. Joseph
A: David Hood 69 pass from Mike Dolan (Nick Della Vecchia kick)
SJ: Cody Sampson 12 run (Ryker kick)
A: Hood 62 run (Della Vecchia kick)
A: Hood 60 run (kick failed)
SJ: Luke Ordille 12 pass from Giagunto (Ryker kick)
A: FG Della Vecchia 34
SJ: Robert Thompson 80 kickoff return (Giagunto run)
SJ: Sampson 9 run (Ordille pass from Giagunto)
A: Dustin Miller 12 pass from Dolan (kick failed)

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Schalick shuts out Gloucester Catholic

By Tim McManus
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

At halftime Saturday, Schalick held a lead over Gloucester Catholic that it probably felt fortunate to have.

The Cougars made their own luck in the second half as they pulled away for a 21-0 victory in a West Jersey League Diamond Division game.

Gloucester Catholic moved up and down the field and outgained Schalick by more than 100 yards in the first half, but the Rams produced nothing to show for it on the scoreboard. Instead, it was Schalick that took a 7-0 lead into the break, courtesy of a big defensive play that set up a score.

Tariq Furbush returned an interception 60 yards. Tyrell Hart took it from there, tossing a 12-yard touchdown pass to Jarred McCafferty.

That was just the beginning of what turned out to be a big day for Hart.

With the Gloucester Catholic defense crowding the line in the fourth quarter, Hart broke a 60-yard touchdown run around the right end to give Schalick a 14-0 lead. He added a 38-yard touchdown to seal the victory later in the quarter.

The junior finished with 137 yards on 10 carries.

After rushing for just 37 yards in the first half, Schalick turned the tables for 190 in the second. Gloucester Catholic had outgained Schalick in total yards, 166-57, in the opening half.

Junior Pat Rafferty led Gloucester Catholic with 142 yards on 23 carries.

Colonial Liberty Division

Woodbury scored three first-quarter touchdowns to build a big lead and cruised to a 42-7 win over Collingswood.

Woodbury scored twice on special teams, getting a 20-yard return of a blocked punt by Cameron Gamble and a 55-yard punt return by Anthony Averett.

The punt return was one of three touchdowns Averett was involved in. He opened the scoring with a 50-yard touchdown run. He also connected with Gamble on a touchdown pass.

Dwuan Martin also ran for a pair of 3-yard touchdowns for Woodbury.

Jamir Beston led the defensive effort, which allowed just a second-quarter touchdown. He had two sacks and eight tackles.

Collingswood's touchdown came on a 16-yard pass from Donny Barr to Jordan Wallace.

West Jersey National

Mitch Harbaugh threw for two touchdowns to lead Clearview to a 29-7 win over Winslow Township.

Harbaugh, a senior quarterback who threw for more than 500 yards last season, opened the scoring with a 55-yard pass to Troy Darpino. He also completed a 25-yard scoring pass to George Kerasinis.

Clearview scored a safety on a strange play in the third quarter.

Clearview kicked off to Winslow Township, which attempted a reverse on the 4-yard line. The ball was fumbled into the end zone and Mike Zammerelli made a tackle for a safety.

Fullback Adam DeCecco also rushed for a Clearview touchdown.

Matt Pike, Luke Eisenhart, and Austin Deinarowicz were key parts of the strong defensive effort for Clearview.

Nonleague

Audubon took advantage of four turnovers to beat Overbrook, 22-14.

The Audubon defense forced two fumbles and intercepted two passes.

Postponement

The inclement weather that moved through the area Saturday impacted at least one game.

West Deptford was scheduled to play at Lindenwold, but the contest was pushed back. It was rescheduled for Monday at 6:30 p.m. at Lindenwold.

Contact Tim McManus at rallysports@phillynews.com.

Falcons' Thomas does a bit of everything

The Burlington Twp. senior had TDs by air, ground, and interception in a 27-7 triumph over Willingboro.

By Kate Harman
FOR THE INQUIRER

Senior Mike Thomas did a little bit of everything for the Burlington Township football team Saturday.

He rushed for a touchdown, caught a touchdown pass, placed two punts inside the Willingboro 5-yard line, and scored on an interception for the only touchdown of the first half.

But when the game was over, the first thing he wanted to talk about was his mistakes.

"On one of my catches, I went offside. That's my fault," Thomas said, shaking his head.

His multifaceted game was part of the reason the Falcons defeated Willingboro, 27-7, at Carl Lewis Stadium in a season-opening battle of favorites in the West Jersey Football League Patriot Division.

"If it was my first year playing, I'd feel the pressure, but I have experience playing since freshman year," Thomas said of having so many roles

to fill for the Falcons. "It just comes to me when I get on the field."

Thomas even served as a play-caller on his receiving touchdown, when he changed the call at the line of scrimmage.

"The original call was a slant, but I audibled to my quarterback because the [defensive] back was pressed up on me and I felt I could jump up and get it," he said.

Displaying his athleticism, Thomas looked like a defensive back going up for the ball before wrestling it away from a defender.

Closer than the score indicated, the game was a real dogfight, demonstrating the intensity of the league rivalry.

Burlington Township coach Tom Maderia didn't like that he had to play a conference game so early in the season, and called his team "fortunate" to come away with an important first conference win.

A turning point for the Falcons came when Maderia replaced junior

quarterback Bobby Palentchar with sophomore Khalil Troutman. Palentchar went 5 for 12 in the first half for 45 yards, but on the first series of the third quarter, he threw an interception. Jalen Davis returned the ball 65 yards for a touchdown, giving the Chimeras much-needed momentum and tying the score.

The next time out on the field, the Falcons had a new quarterback, Troutman, who had already been in the game as a wide receiver.

"I thought Bobby was a little bit nervous. I thought in the third quarter he came out in the first series and he just wasn't throwing very well," Maderia said.

Troutman went on to rush for a touchdown and throw one to Thomas.

"It's kind of like in baseball, if the pitcher is having a rough day, you pull him out and put the relief pitcher in," Maderia said. "We are fortunate that we have two kids and are able to do that."

Willingboro quarterback Anthony Robbins, out much of last season with a broken wrist, was rusty in the first half and had difficulty

getting settled. With Robbins still trying to gain his footing, the offense belonged to Robert Cleveland, who had 15 carries for 113 yards in the first half alone.

Listed at 5-foot-7 and 160 pounds, Cleveland put his head down and used his quick legs to make his way through a large Burlington Township defensive line. However, a leg cramp put him out of commission for most of the second half.

To Robbins' credit, he settled down in the second half, but a lot of his passes were dropped by receivers, including a few that would have extended drives. Throughout the game, the Falcons had high pressure on him, with tight coverage in the secondary leaving few open looks.

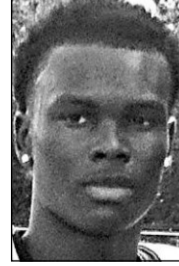
Burlington Township	7	0	13	7	-	27
Willingboro	0	0	7	0	-	7

BT: Mike Thomas 13 interception return (Joe Pizzigoni kick)
W: Jalen Davis 65 interception return (Aaron Lynch kick)
BT: Thomas 4 rush (kick failed)
BT: Khalil Troutman 1 rush (Pizzigoni kick)
BT: Thomas 17 pass from Troutman (Pizzigoni kick)

Contact Kate Harman at rallysports@phillynews.com.



Mike Thomas also punted well for the Falcons.



Khalil Troutman substituted at quarterback in the second half.