

Holding the line

Jim Donaldson writes that oddsmakers seem unmoved by the Patriots' close call on Sunday. Column on **Page C5**.



FRIARS PUT THE BITE ON THE BLACK BEARS: View the gallery at Projosports.com/pc

Death of a player

Redskins star Sean Taylor dies from gunshot wounds suffered at his home on Monday. Story and reaction on **Page C2**.

Close to the top

La Salle, which played in last night's football semifinals, is one championship shy of tying East Providence for most Division I titles:

SCHOOL	NO.
East Providence	15
Cranston East	14
La Salle	14
Rogers	11

For up-to-the-second stats and scores: **HSgameTime.com/rhodeisland**

SECTION C



WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 2007

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PLAYOFFS
For more playoff coverage, C6

SUPER BOWL BOUND

Malo shines bright in spotlight

PAWTUCKET — He's 16 years old, stands 5-foot-10, and until last night, teammates and family members probably were the only people who knew Tyler Malo was a member of the St. Raphael football team.

JOHN GILLOOLY



Raphael football team.

But under Tuesday Night Lights at Pariseau Field, Malo made sure that when fate put him in the spotlight he didn't waste

the opportunity to shine — even if he was suffering from stage fright.

"I was wicked scared," Malo said about his assignment to take over at quarterback for St. Raphael's injured star, Stanley Dunbar, in last night's semifinal-round game of the R.I. Interscholastic League Division I playoffs.

Malo certainly had every reason to be a little frightened. After all, it was only about a month ago that the St. Raphael coaching staff asked him if he wanted to try playing quarterback.

Malo, a junior, figured why not give it a try. After all, there wouldn't be any pressure on him. Dunbar was the superstar. He was leading St. Raphael to an undefeated season with spectacular running out-of-a-shotgun offense. By the time St. Raphael took the field last Wednesday night for its final regular-season game, Dunbar had already run for 1,430 yards and scored 19 touchdowns.

But then on the third play of the Thanksgiving eve game, Dunbar suffered a severe ankle injury. Malo came on the field that night and handled the quarterback chores as the Saints posted a 15-0 victory over Rogers. But there's a big difference between coming on in relief with the ball a yard away from an early touchdown in a game that meant nothing in the standings, and starting from scratch in a playoff game.

Make no mistake, Malo still is a long way from delivering the type of performances that Dunbar thrilled St. Raphael fans with all season.

But last night, with Dunbar standing on the sidelines with his right foot in an orthopedic boot, Malo made his presence known as St. Raphael earned its first berth in a Division I Super Bowl in 23 years with a 6-0 victory over Cranston West.

Not only did Malo produce the game's only points with a 2-yard touchdown plunge early in the first quarter, but, in a game where one mistake could have turned the tide, he didn't make any rookie errors.

"He moved to quarterback five weeks ago," St. Raphael coach Mike Sassi said about Malo's career move. "When we played La Salle earlier this year, I had to put him in for Stanley [Dunbar] on a kick return and he had a lot of poise. He ran the return back 80 yards. It was called back for a penalty, but it showed me this kid has poise."

That poise was especially evident in the fourth quarter last night when had a couple of big runs and delivered a clutch 15-yard pass on a third-and-12 situation, helping St. Raphael protect its slim lead.

An impressive night's work for an unknown with stage fright.

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THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / KRIS CRAIG

Bishop Hendricken running back Branford Sowah is upended while trying to turn the corner against La Salle at Hendricken last night in their Division I semifinal playoff game that was won by the Hawks, 9-7.

Surgento's on the mark as Hendricken overtakes La Salle

BY ROBERT LEE
JOURNAL SPORTS WRITER

WARWICK — Bishop Hendricken senior kicker Chris Surgento has hit some big field goals, but none of them was bigger than the 30-yard kick he put between the uprights last night with 9:19 remaining in the Hawks' Division I semifinal game against La Salle.

The field goal gave Hendricken a 9-7 lead and the Hawks' defense did the rest, forcing a three-and-out on La Salle's ensuing possession and then intercepting two passes on the Rams' final two drives as Hendricken advanced to the Division I Super Bowl.

"It was just another kick," Surgento said of what he was thinking just before he hit the game-winning field goal and his third field goal of the game. "It was nothing big. It

was just another kick in the game. I didn't feel any pressure. I was warmed up. I was ready."

His teammates weren't surprised he hit the field goal.

"He works hard every single day in practice, kicking every single day, and he came up huge today," Hendricken quarterback Thomas Verdi said. "He won the game for us. He's a pressure player."

It was because of Verdi, a sophomore who was thrust into his second starting role because Hendricken senior QB Anthony Ferreira broke his ankle this season, that Surgento was able to star. After struggling against a fired-up La Salle defense that limited Hendricken's offense — the best in Division I (31 points per game) — to just 62 first-half yards, Hendricken coach Keith Croft put the ball in Verdi's hands. "I had

butterflies before the game but after the first initial hit, I got out of it and played like I know how to play," Verdi said. "Taking [Ferreira's] spot is tough, but I did what I could do."

Trailing 7-3 at halftime, Verdi completed 8-of-11 passes for 107 yards in the second half to guide the Hendricken comeback.

"I was pumped up going into the second half," Verdi said. "I knew what I had to do and got the job done."

"He did a great job coming in his first big game," Surgento said of Verdi.

On their first possession of the second half, the Hawks marched 71 yards down the field and cut La Salle's lead to 7-6 on a 26-yard Surgento field goal.

Hendricken's defense forced a turnover on the Rams second play of their ensuing drive, which set up Surgento's game-win-

ning field goal.

Hendricken's defense forced six turnovers, countering Rams running back Kendall Perry, who finished with 154 rushing yards.

"That's a great football team we beat," Surgento said. "They have a great defense, a great offense. It was tough but everyone played well and I got the opportunities to kick the field goals."

La Salle fullback Neal Rooney scored on a 3-yard touchdown run on the Rams opening drive of the game, but Hendricken's defense kept La Salle out of the end zone the rest of the way.

Hendricken will play St. Raphael Academy in Saturday's Super Bowl at 1 p.m. at Pierce Field.

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THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / GRETCHEN ERTL

Cranston East running back Geoffrey Gillson scoots past Toll Gate's James Capirchio in third-quarter action last night.

Energized Titans stand tall, shock Bolts'

BY PAUL KENYON
JOURNAL SPORTS WRITER

CRANSTON — Doug Johnson had all the answers last night, except one.

Johnson, a 6-foot, 200-pound junior running back had just played the game of his life. He scored three touchdowns, ran for 225 yards and spearheaded his Toll Gate team to a 26-6 upset of top-seeded Cranston East in a Division II playoff semifinal at Cranston Stadium.

When it was over, Johnson was standing in the end zone with his teammates, most of whom were screaming, "Super Bowl, Super Bowl, Super Bowl." They were celebrating perhaps the biggest victory in school history when Johnson realized he did not have the answer to one question — the one about the Super Bowl.

"I don't even know the last time Toll Gate went to a Super Bowl," he said. His coach, Steve Spaziano, provided the answer.

"Only once, in 1990. I was on the team," Spaziano said. "We got beat by one of those great Rogers teams, 24-0."

Spaziano not only was on the team, he was the captain for coach Emo DiNitto.

Spaziano has not made a big deal of the Super Bowl. He has spent more time getting his players to believe in themselves. Toll Gate has not been a football power. What's more, when it met East in the regular season, the Bolts won, 28-6.

"We were intimidated. You could tell we were intimidated," Johnson said of the first meeting between the teams. "We weren't ready to play. Tonight we were ready to play."

"We changed some things," Spaziano said. On defense, Toll Gate featured three and four-man fronts to slow Cranston East star running back Geoffrey Gillson. Gillson, who injured his ankle in the Thanksgiving Day victory over Cranston West, did not play in the first quarter. He did play in the last three, but never got room to run.

Johnson, on the other hand, got plenty of room. "The line was awesome," he said.

"The holes were there." Even when the holes were not there, Johnson ran over and through tacklers.

Toll Gate took the lead when Michael Zincone flipped a short pass to Joel Haduch on its second possession. Haduch broke two tackles as he caught the ball and raced 72 yards for the game's first score. Cranston East responded by scoring on an 8-yard pass from Shay DiPina to Phillip Gibbs on its next possession.

That's when Johnson took over. He completed an 87-yard, 9-play drive with a 12-yard scoring run.

Then, in the final minute of the first half, as Toll Gate seemed to be running out the clock, Johnson took a handoff, went left, cut back to the right, broke at least two tackles and ran 70 yards to make it 19-6. Johnson added another score, from 37 yards, to clinch it in the final quarter and send the Titans to the bowl Saturday against fellow upstart South Kingstown.

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