

Paul Finch

With the help of his teammates, Aquinas' Arel Gordon evades a trio of Nyack defenders during the first quarter of the state Class A football championship game at Syracuse's Carrier Dome Dec. 1.

Clutch plays carry AQ to state title

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

SYRACUSE — Fourth-down conversions. A key interception in the waning seconds.

Throughout the state Class A football final, Aquinas Institute put forth its best effort when it was most urgently needed.

"In big games like this, you step up and make big plays. That's what it comes down to," said Little Irish senior quarterback Mark Zappia.

Linell Greene made a game-saving interception with just over 1 minute remaining, and the Irish survived a late comeback by the Indians for a 20-15 win Dec. 1 in the Carrier Dome. The victory gave Aquinas its second consecutive Class A championship.

"It's the best feeling in the world, back-to-back state champs," exulted Greene, a senior defensive back, shortly after he exchanged high-fives with AQ fans hanging over the bleachers' first-row railing.

Aquinas, the state's top-ranked team, finished with a 12-1 record. Previously undefeated Nyack ended up 12-1 as well.

AQ drew first blood, going up 7-0 when senior tailback Calvin Hall made a 6-yard touchdown run with 1:01 remaining in the first quarter. Nyack made it 7-7 on Alex Jeanty's 5-yard scoring run with 53 seconds to go before halftime. But AQ took a 13-7 lead into the locker room after a quick drive that ended with a 3-yard TD run with :03 left by senior tailback Arel Gordon, who was named the game's Most Valuable Player.

The third quarter saw the Irish

make another strong drive for what proved to be the winning touchdown. On fourth-and-12, Zappia fired a 24-yard strike to senior receiver Ian Goodberlet, giving AQ first-and-goal at the Nyack 9-yard line. Three plays later, in another fourth-down situation, Hall smashed into the end zone from 1 yard out with 2:52 left. Goodberlet added his second extra-point kick of the day, and it was 20-7.

In addition to the two big fourth-down plays on that drive, the Irish offense had converted a fourth-and-4 to set up Hall's first touchdown. AQ Coach Dave Nieman said that with his club's ability, he saw no need to play conservatively with punts or field-goal attempts.

"This offense is a scoring offense. When we have the ball in our hands, we want to score touchdowns," Nieman stated.

Kudos for fourth-down success also belong to the AQ defense, which stopped the Indians on a fourth-and-goal play at the 3-yard line early in the second quarter.

The Little Irish defense came up big in the turnover department as well: Along with Greene's interception, AQ recovered two Nyack fumbles in the second half and held a 3-0 edge in takeaways for the day.

Despite these successes, Nyack rallied with a relentless ground attack that produced a 3-yard scoring run by Judin Pierre-Louis with 8:01 left in the game, making the score 20-13. Aquinas was then forced to punt but, with 1:08 left, Greene made his memorable interception at the AQ 15-yard line on a throw from Nyack quarterback Eric Clegg. Greene leaped high to snag the ball away

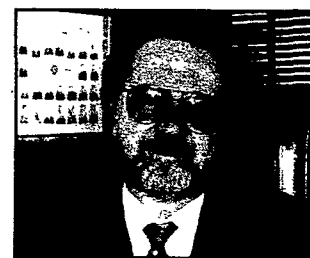
from Indian tight end Will Leone.

Still, the game wasn't clinched. AQ took an intentional safety with :31 remaining to bring the score to 20-15, and Nyack then got past midfield before Clegg made a last-ditch pass on the game's final play. The ball danced off Leone's fingertips at the 10-yard line, and as it hit the ground, AQ players and coaches rushed the field in relieved exuberance.

"Two times in a row, my senior year. You can't beat it," Goodberlet said.

Added Nieman: "When we won last year, I told the team it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. To do it again, I can't put it into words."

Thoughts to Consider



EDWIN SULEWSKI

Funeral Director

How can I help someone who is grieving?

You can help in a number of special ways. Through reaching out and offering support in the form of listening and presence you will help a great deal. Ask your friend how they are doing. Mention the deceased by name and allow the bereaved to continue discussion about the deceased if they wish. Many bereaved report feeling isolated. You can help by including them in your social groups. Contact with the grieving is most important during the period right after the death and in the three or four months following when the bereaved feel especially isolated. Reach out and make your presence felt.

SCHAUMAN-SULEWSKI FUNERAL HOME

NEW LOCATION

1717 Portland Avenue

Just North of Ridge Road

585-342-3400

SPONSOR A HOMELESS CHILD FOR \$10

"...Nothing is impossible to those who have Faith as a Mustard Seed."



ATTENTION: Catholic School Principals, Teachers, Directors of Religious Education, Pastors, Deacons, Social Action Ministries, Youth Groups, and all other Catholics truly interested in missions for needy youth. **This Lent** we're offering Quarter Cards to schools, parishes and groups. Each card has forty \$.25 slots, one for each Lenten day. The deadline for ordering cards is 1/1/03. Call Fr. Roy (716) 852-2076 or Mr. Richard (585) 232-1101 for information.

PLEASE COMPLETE & MAIL TO:

**FR. ROY HERBERGER, MUSTARD SEED SUPPORT SERVICES,
400 FIRST STREET, ROCHESTER, NY 14605**



Name of Group: _____
Mailing Address: _____
City: _____ Zip: _____
Phone: _____ Number of Lenten Cards Requested: _____
Contact Person: _____

The Mustard Seed is a Lay-Volunteer, Catholic Mission that assists street children, orphans, and other destitute in Ghana, West Africa. We operate on Faith in the belief that "...nothing is impossible to those who have Faith as a Mustard Seed."

God bless your efforts for the "least of our brethren."