

Smith, Ross, Leonard shine in North-South all-stars game

by John Hough, Sports Writer
June 14 2015 3:00 PM



Most high school football player's seasons have long been over since mid-October and for a handful more in November. Now in mid-June only the ones that have been recognized for their superior athleticism, accolades, or simply being standouts, are still in it for one more game to cap their high school football careers.

Carrollton quarterback Jacob Smith was that prototypical player.

Having been a thoroughbred for the Hawks in his career and at SHG Stadium in Springfield, he showed it as the South all-stars defeated the North 28-23 in the 27th annual West Central Illinois All-Star game. The South now trails the North 13-7 in the series.

"That was definitely a great experience. It was just a great experience to watch all these guys playing out here one last time," Smith said.

He led the South all-stars in total yards as he compiled 77 yards. Smith was 7 of 9 passing with 66 yards and a touchdown. He also rushed for 11 yards on 3 carries.

"That's great, but I couldn't keep track during the game," Smith jokingly said. "I'm very honored to have that and there's a bunch of great athletes in there for me to do that so I'm very proud," Smith said.

The head coach of the South was Carrollton's own Nick Flowers. Flowers also had an entourage of assistant coaches from his Carrollton staff as well.

"It was great to be with our staff one last time," Smith said. "That was great to be with all those guys that I would never be with again otherwise."

The WIVC was the most represented conference with 27 players. The majority hailed from the Greene County schools and the players were all too familiar with one another over the years, which made for a tight connection.

"Our conference represented very well. There were seven guys from North Greene alone and that was great to see our conference do that," Smith said.

Logan Ross of North Greene was one of those seven Spartans from North Greene, but loved playing with his "rivals."

"For being rivals with Carrollton and Greenfield we came together close," Ross said. "We got the W too and you got to be a family to win a football game."

For Ross this was the first ever all-star football game he had ever seen, but it was everything he thought it would be.

“It was definitely everyone talked it out to be. It was awesome. It was my first all-star game and my last football game ever. It was awesome,” Ross said.

The North was the first to score by virtue of a 43-yard pass from New Berlin’s Jake Hunt to Zach Lonergan of Jacksonville to make it 6-0. However two possessions later the South took a 7-6 lead as Nathan Randall of North Greene hooked up with Greenfield-Northwestern’s Austin Plogger from 17-yards out. Plogger finished the game with 34 yards receiving and 23 yards rushing.

The North re-took the lead 9-7 on a 23-yard field goal. The North looked to score again after they forced a three and out on the South, but after Ross punted the ball away, it hit off of a North player and Carrollton’s Cody Leonard recovered it at the North 45-yard line. On a couple of plays later Justin Scheets of Greenfield was on the receiving end of a 31-yard pass play that took the South into the red-zone and the drive was capped by Carlinville’s Kinney Myles as he ran the ball from 3 yards out. The South led 15-9 after a successful 2-point conversion attempt.

On the next possession for the South came the play of the game. It was a fourth down and 1 on the North 32-yard line. Freeburg’s Robby Vall was caught dead behind the line of scrimmage, but lateraled to Smith, who was about 5-yards back. He then fired to a wide-open Ross, who caught the ball and trotted into the end zone.

“It was a busted play and I was screaming at Robby ‘Give me the ball!’ He heard me I guess and turned around and pitched it. I originally just thought I was going to run, then I saw Ross with nobody near him so I pitched it out there, and he took it the rest of the way,” Smith said.

For Ross his role in that play was quite simple to him.

“I was just there.” Ross said. It was a messed up play in the backfield and I was there to catch the ball.”

That was Ross’s only reception and the biggest gain of the day for the South as they took a 22-9 lead into halftime. On the first drive for the North, Leonard picked off Hunt for his last meaningful action. He ended his day with 3 tackles, the interception, and the fumble recovery.

However North landed on their feet and scored on their following possession to make it 22-16 and recovered a fumble minutes later. Hunt threw his second touchdown pass of the day and the North regained the lead 23-22.

Near the end of the third quarter, Alton's Kareem Hamilton returned a punt 41 yards to the North's 13-yard line as he broke several tackles and broke a couple ankles on the play as well. He finished the game with 9 yards on the ground as he mostly appeared as a return man on special teams. His punt return set up the last score of the game as the South scored on a 4-yard rushing touchdown.

With about 12 minutes remaining in the contest the game was halted because lightning was spotted. The crowd evacuated the stadium as the rain began to come. Finally, after a 30-minute delay, at 8:10 p.m. the game was officially called. The teams shook hands right outside the locker rooms in front of their friends and families.

Smith, Leonard, and North Greene's Zach Reische career's aren't over just yet. They will be representing the South All-Stars next week on June 20th at Illinois Wesleyan, in Bloomington, for the Illinois High School Shrine Game.

