

Forgotten Before Graduation

Pennsbury Welcomes Sroba



By Bob Savett

HEAD DOWN, Joe Sroba sat glued at the Neshaminy High bench, staring at soggy Falcon Field.

Pennsbury's 23-21 victory hadn't left him with the energy for a mad dash to the Redskin team bus.

He had played nearly 48 minutes. He had caught a 63-yard touchdown pass from Bob Grupp that made him Lower Bucks County's scoring champion, with 146 points in 11 games — no mean feat when you're only 5-foot-9.

But one play was engraved in his memory: Grupp's pass with 27 seconds to go.

Joe Sroba pulled it in at the Pennsbury 11 and was bombarded by Ron Dundala, jarring the ball loose. Down the drain went both the Lower Bucks Section 1 and Big Eight championships.

Up in the Pennsbury lockerroom, players were throwing each other into showers. Some champagne was uncorked — and poured over players' heads after not very extensive tasting. Coke coated players' hair. One bottle of red wine was passed around.

Even Joe Sroba was offered a taste.

Joe Sroba? Admist the victory celebration? Yes.

He wasn't in the Pennsbury lockerroom to congratulate the winners — but they were congratulating him. Even lining up to shake his hand.

Ben Watson, Neshaminy tackle who earlier had engaged in a sideline fight, was beside him.

Huh?

"They took off without us," the 180-pound halfback explained bitterly. "The buses couldn't wait. They can't even wait 'til we graduate to forget about us.

"We thought we'd be more welcome here."

Various Falcon fans vied for the privilege of driving the Redskins back to Langhorne.

SROBA SET UP Neshaminy's final march by hauling in fullback Len Barker's fourth down, 14-yards-to-go pass at the Falcon 16 for a 28-yard gain. He didn't know why the Redskins then threw and completed three short aerials instead of running to set up a short-range field goal attempt:

"But we never established our running game," he offered, mindful of the team's total of 29 yards rushing.

He knew Dundala barreled into him "just as soon as I caught it. Bobby (Grupp) didn't throw it too hard, and he (Dundala) was right on me. He drove me back about five yards before I lost it. Since my forward motion was stopped, the play should have been blown dead.

"But there's no use talking about it. Nothing

can be done now."

"I didn't even know it was Sroba," Dundala said. "I just saw someone in red slipping across. I just saw red. I came up and gave it all I got.

"I heard everybody on our side yelling, looked up, and saw (John) Lerch laying on the ball.

"I didn't know Sroba had fumbled. He's a good halfback. He can do anything. He's quick and he's got the moves."

CHUCK KANE was startled to see Sroba, wearing his No. 32 red jersey, plus Watson (No. 67), mingling with their gleeful arch-rivals.

But the Pennsbury coach wasn't amazed at their sincere respect for the winners — and vice versa.

"I'd rather play this game than any other," Kane declared. "Against other teams, we get kicked, gouged in the eye, things like that.

"This is just clean football. No one's out to destroy anyone physically. There is emotion, but it's not to kill or maim. You hit to try to get the ball.

"We have a lot of respect for each other. We try to beat each other legally and cleanly. There's no unfriendly feeling."

Sroba and Watson stayed for a good 10 minutes. The Falcons were proud to have the two on their side, if only for a visit.