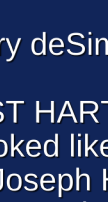




CLASS M



ST. JOSEPH 21



BROOKFIELD 20

[Photo Gallery Link](#)

[Video Highlight Link](#)

Gerry deSimas, Jr. / CollinsvillePress.com

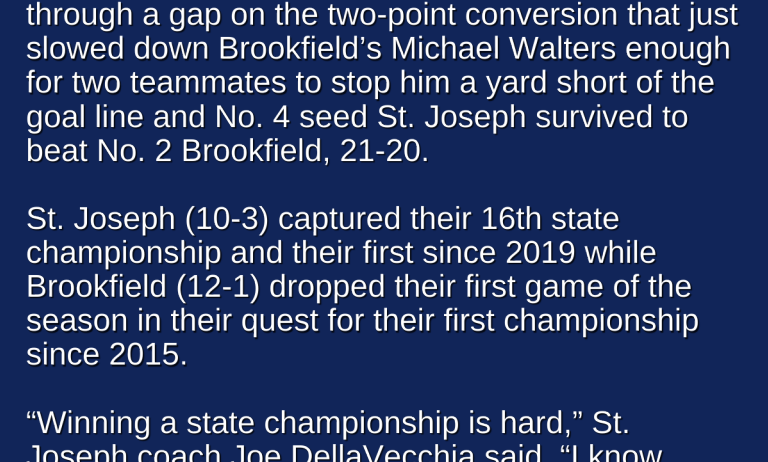
EAST HARTFORD, Dec. 14, 2024 – For a while, it looked like there might be a coronation for the St. Joseph High football team Saturday in the Class M championship game at Rentschler Field.

The Cadets built a 21-point lead early in the third quarter.

But undefeated Brookfield wouldn't fold.

The Bobcats used two long scoring drives to cut the lead to one score. Brookfield got the ball with 3:11 remaining in the game and marched 89 yards on 14 plays to cut the Cadet lead to one with a touchdown with 1:02 remaining.

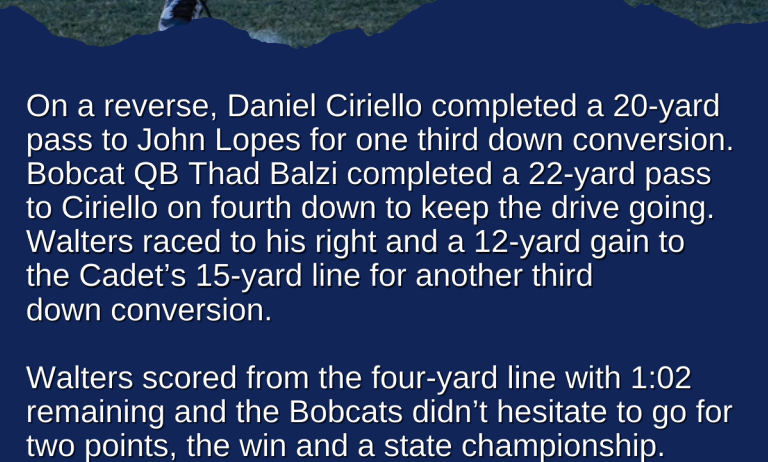
Brookfield lined up for a two-point conversion with an attempt to win the game and the state championship.



But St. Joseph sophomore Finn Kilmartin shot through a gap on the two-point conversion that just slowed down Brookfield's Michael Walters enough for two teammates to stop him a yard short of the goal line and No. 4 seed St. Joseph survived to beat No. 2 Brookfield, 21-20.

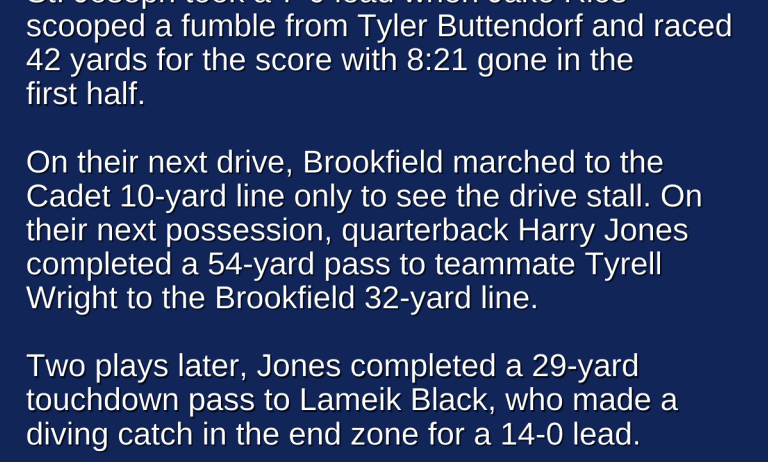
St. Joseph (10-3) captured their 16th state championship and their first since 2019 while Brookfield (12-1) dropped their first game of the season in their quest for their first championship since 2015.

"Winning a state championship is hard," St. Joseph coach Joe DellaVecchia said. "I know we've won a lot but it's hard. Everyone is gunning for you. It takes a lot of heart and character. For these guys, it was just one heck of a ballgame." Trailing by seven, Brookfield took over on their own 11-yard line with 3:10 remaining in the game. The Bobcats had two big conversions on third down to keep the drive alive and a conversion on fourth down and three from the St. Joseph 49-yard line to keep marching.



On a reverse, Daniel Ciriello completed a 20-yard pass to John Lopes for one third down conversion. Bobcat QB Thad Balzi completed a 22-yard pass to Ciriello on fourth down to keep the drive going. Walters raced to his right and a 12-yard gain to the Cadet's 15-yard line for another third down conversion.

Walters scored from the four-yard line with 1:02 remaining and the Bobcats didn't hesitate to go for two points, the win and a state championship. "The kids responded. They fight," Brookfield coach Bryan Muller said. "Three yards. We just needed three yards." A two-point conversion play is run from the three-yard line.



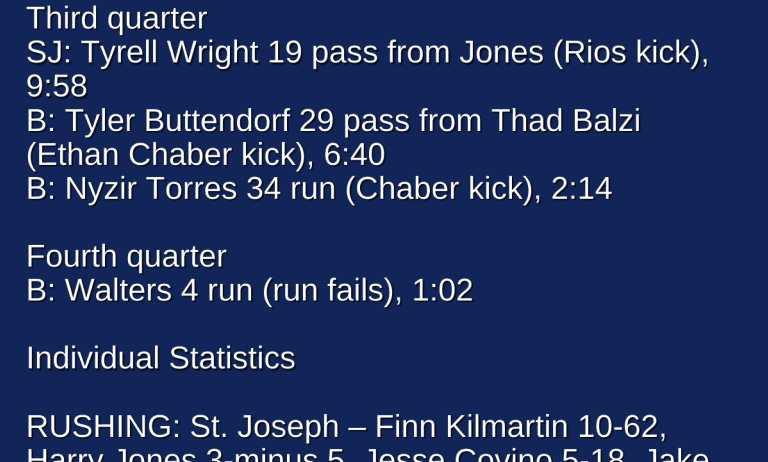
"And they made a play. Hats off to them. They made the play," he said. "It's football. Inches matter."

St. Joseph took a 7-0 lead when Jake Rios scooped a fumble from Tyler Buttendorf and raced 42 yards for the score with 8:21 gone in the first half.

On their next drive, Brookfield marched to the Cadet 10-yard line only to see the drive stall. On their next possession, quarterback Harry Jones completed a 54-yard pass to teammate Tyrell Wright to the Brookfield 32-yard line.

Two plays later, Jones completed a 29-yard touchdown pass to Lameik Black, who made a diving catch in the end zone for a 14-0 lead.

Afterwards, Jones said his knee was bothering him before the game. "I knew I would have to trust my guys and let them make plays," he said.



St. Joseph made it 21-0 on a 19-yard touchdown reception from Jones to Wright with 9:58 left in the third quarter.

Brookfield responded with a seven-play, 69-yard drive, scoring on a 29-yard touchdown pass from Balzi to Buttendorf with 6:40 left in the quarter. On its next drive, Brookfield cut the lead to seven, 21-14, on Nyzir Torres' 34-yard run with 2:14 left in the third quarter.

Kilmartin led the Cadets with 62 yards on 10 carries on the ground with Jones completing 10-of-18 passes for 195 yards and two touchdowns. Walters led the Bobcats with 76 yards and a touchdown on 19 carries with Torres running for 79 and Balzi scrambling for 68.

Class M Championship
St. Joseph 21, Brookfield 20
At East Hartford

St. Joseph (10-3) 7 7 7 0 -- 21
Brookfield (12-1) 0 0 14 6 -- 20

First quarter
SJ: Jake Rios 42 fumble return (Rios kick), 8:21

Second quarter
SJ: Lameik Black 29 pass from Harry Jones (Rios kick), 11:20

Third quarter
SJ: Tyrell Wright 19 pass from Jones (Rios kick), 9:58
B: Tyler Buttendorf 29 pass from Thad Balzi (Ethan Chaber kick), 6:40
B: Nyzir Torres 34 run (Chaber kick), 2:14

Fourth quarter
B: Walters 4 run (run fails), 1:02

Individual Statistics

RUSHING: St. Joseph – Finn Kilmartin 10-62, Harry Jones 3-minus 5, Jesse Covino 5-18, Jake Rios 1-minus 3; Brookfield –Michael Walters 19-76, Tyler Buttendorf 3-8, Matt Ackerly 3-8, Nyzir Torres 9-79, Thad Balzi 14-68

PASSING: St. Joseph Harry Jones 10-18-1, 195; Brookfield --Thad Balzi 8-16-0, 87, Daniel Ciriello 1-1-0, 20

RECEIVING: Brookfield – Matt Ackerly 1-17, Michael Walters 3-6, Tyler Buttendorf 1-29, John Lopes 1-20, Daniel Ciriello 1-22, Derrick Scott 1-14; St. Joseph – Jake Rios 3-32, Tyrell Wright 3-72, Lameik Black 1-29, Jason Pagano 3-52

MISSED FG: Rios 38