



CLASS L

NEW CANAAN 28

DARIEN 21

By JIM FULLER
Special to CIACSPORTS

EAST HARTFORD, Dec. 9, 2023 - Ryan Barnard's late forced fumble and fumble recovery led to Alexander Benevento's go-ahead touchdown as second-seeded New Canaan topped No. 8 seed Darien 28-21 in the CIAC Class L championship game at Rentschler Field.

New Canaan tied the game on a 12-yard pass from Lawrence Robinson to William Langford with 5:03 left to play.



Darien had plenty of time to drive for a potential game-winning field goal but Barnard came off the edge to jar the ball free from Darien quarterback Benjamin Rolapp. Barnard also recovered the fumble to set up the Rams in the red zone.

"Our offense has just scored and it was time to step up and make a play," Barnard said. "When we got the ball, I knew it would be on me to get the pressure. Once I got there, all the practice and all the hard work kind of took over.

"It is so special, I could only ever have imagined it, it is an amazing feeling. This is the best way to end my football career. This rivalry is so special and I am so happy for my team."



The scoreboard at Rentschler Field had a No. 6 trophy in honor of the late former UConn cornerback Jasper Howard. The game-winning score was a 6-yard run by a player wearing uniform No. 6.

"That is [special], I didn't know that but it is nice to find out," said Benevento, who also had a 24-yard touchdown reception. Briggs McGuckin, who also wears No. 6, gave Darien the early lead with a 3-yard run. A 1-yard touchdown run by Luke Reed and Benevento's first touchdown of the game gave New Canaan a 14-7 lead.



Charles Thom had a pair of 1-yard scoring runs for Darien (9-4).

"You can tell, the passion between these two teams, everybody knows each other and to play them on this stage and in this arena, the high level of competition it was incredible to watch," Darien coach Andy Grant said.

"One play, maybe two plays [decided the game] and that is just the work ethic our guys have. We didn't play great against them on Thanksgiving and we really stepped up our game today."

New Canaan (12-1) won its 14th state title and improved to 4-0 versus Darien in state championship games.

Veteran New Canaan coach Lou Marinelli thought the game might come down to one key play late in the game.

"That [sack and forced fumble] certainly turned the game around," Marinelli said. "Before that, I am thinking, 'oh my God' because they are running the clock down and that is a hell of a football team. If we played them 10 times, I don't know if we would beat them five. It is a lot to be said about our senior class, there is so much grit, they never gave up and we got a break and that is how we won the game."



New Canaan 28, Darien 21
(at East Hartford)

Darien 7 7 7 0-21
New Canaan 7 7 0 14-28

First Quarter
D-Briggs McCluckin 3 run (Anson Sikora kick) 7:46
N-Luke Reed 1 run (Tucker Stevens kick) 4:18

Second Quarter
N-Alexander Benevento 24 pass from Lawrence Robinson (Stevens kick) 9:10
D-Charles Thom 1-yard (Sikora kick) 0:39

Third Quarter
D-Thom 1 run (Sikora kick) 3:21

Fourth Quarter
N-William Langford 12 pass from Robinson (Stevens kick) 5:03
N-Benevento 6 run (Stevens kick) 2:39
Records: Darien 9-4; New Canaan 12-1