

New Canaan Gets Defensive in 20-0 Turkey Bowl Win Over Darien

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Date : November 28, 2019



With a strong wind blowing out of Darien High School's north end zone, it looked like the elements would be a factor in Thursday morning's Turkey Bowl between the Blue Wave and the New Canaan Rams.

In the end, Mother Nature had nothing on New Canaan's defense.

On the strength of four turnovers, three of which led to scores, the Rams pulled off a shocking 20-0 win over No. 3 Darien.

"They outplayed us start to finish," Darien head coach Rob Trifone said. "We certainly had our opportunities, we were in the red zone quite a bit but we couldn't cash in. They had a great game plan and we couldn't stop them."

The loss was the first of the season for the Blue Wave (9-1) and the third consecutive Thanksgiving Day defeat at the hands of New Canaan (8-2), which despite clinching a playoff spot last night played as though

its playoff life depended on it.

After a demoralizing 58-14 defeat to St. Joe's back in early October, the Rams reeled off six straight wins and will enter the Class L bracket as the four-seed. New Canaan will host No. 5 Wethersfield on Tuesday.

"It's moments like this and teams like this that you coach for," New Canaan head coach Lou Marinelli said. "To watch them at their lowest point and then bounce back and knock off an undefeated team like this, our rival, one of the best teams in the state—it doesn't get any better than this."

The Rams dominated time of possession, thanks to powerful rushing game, something New Canaan has showcased over the course of a six-game win streak to close out the regular season. 204 of its 270 total yards came via the ground, with junior Christian Carson leading the way with 94 yards on 17 carries and one touchdown.

New Canaan senior co-captain Drew Pyne completed 8 of 10 passes for 66 yards and a touchdown and also ran for 42 yards and a score, earning the game MVP for the Rams.

The Wave outgained New Canaan in total yards compiling 272 overall including 207 from senior quarterback Peter Graham. Senior receiver Jackson Peters had a strong game for Darien with five catches for 97 yards and was the Wave's game MVP. Senior Ryan Mulliken added six receptions for 56 yards.

New Canaan set the tone from the first series of the game. Senior Andrew Morse recovered a high snap that went over Graham's head, setting up the Rams with a first down at the Wave 31.

Two plays later Pyne hit junior Christian Sweeney for a 31-yard touchdown and a 7-0 lead with 8:50 left in the first quarter.

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The Rams defense came up big again on the ensuing Darien possession. Junior Braden Sweeney picked off an underthrown pass, giving New Canaan the ball at its 37-yard line.

Nine plays later Pyne capped off the drive with a 13-yard touchdown on a QB keeper, putting the Rams up 14-0 with 2:36 remaining in the first.

Darien appeared to gain some momentum early in the second quarter. New Canaan marched 70 yards in 13 plays and was set up with a first-and-goal from the Wave 7. Senior defensive back Sam Wilson stepped in front of Sweeney on a slant route and picked off the ball at the goal line.

On its first play from scrimmage, senior Sam Wilson electrified the Darien crowd with a 60-yard scamper up the left sideline for a first down at the New Canaan 39.

The Wave however, were unable to capitalize as New Canaan's defense forced a turnover on downs, preserving the 14-0 advantage into the half.

The storyline continued into the second half, as Graham's first pass of the third quarter was picked off by New Canaan senior Dean Ciancio at the Wave 38. 11 plays later Carson ran it in from three yards, extending the New Canaan lead to 20-0 with 1:46 left in the quarter.

Darien took the ensuing drive down to the New Canaan six-yard line, however the Rams defense once again did not break, forcing yet another turnover on downs.

The fourth quarter saw much of the same, as Darien was unable to move the ball with any sustainability and New Canaan continued to utilize its ground game to milk the clock.

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When senior co-captain Drew Guida picked Graham off with 6:08 left in the game, the once-packed stands at Darien High School began emptying out.

Despite the loss, the Wave are in good shape for the Class LL playoffs. Darien will be the three-seed and will take on number-six Greenwich at home in the quarterfinals. The game will be a highly anticipated rematch of last month's thriller—a 27-21 Darien win at Cardinal Stadium.

Until then, the challenge for Trifone and the Wave is to not let Thursday's loss affect the team's mindset moving forward.

“We have to put this behind us,” Trifone said. “The strange thing is we had incredible practices leading up to this. In forty-one years of doing this, usually the way you practice is the way you play. I was surprised. All the credit goes to Lou and his staff and his players. Again, they outplayed us in every phase. We have to regroup and show up on Tuesday and play our hearts out.”

NEW CANAAN 20, DARIEN 0

NEW CANAAN 14 0 6 0 —20
DARIEN 0 0 0 0 — 0

1st Quarter

NC – Christian Sweeney, 31-yard pass from Drew Pyne (Nick Radman kick), 8:50

NC – Pyne, 13-yard run (Radman kick), 2:36

2nd Quarter

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No scoring

3rd Quarter

NC – Christian Carson 3-yard run (kick blocked), 1:46

4th Quarter

No scoring

Records: Darien (9-1); New Canaan (8-2)