

## **Hershey wasn't ready to yield a victory to West Catholic, Bethel Park athletes**

**By Josh Funk  
For PA Football News**

Following the conclusion of the 52<sup>nd</sup> annual Big-33 Football Classic, fans were shouting for Curtis Drake's autograph. Drake had, moments earlier, put on a show for the Pennsylvania all-stars in a 38-31 loss to Ohio.

He directed the blue and gold on two double-digit comebacks from deficits of 17-7 and 31-17. His total all-purpose yardage for the game exceeded that of former Woodland Hills star Steve Breaston, who lit up Ohio in 2002, and is mentioned later in this article.

The only two athletes in the Big-33 game that accumulated more yardage than Drake were West Catholic teammate Rob Hollomon (295 all-purpose yards; 31 rushing, 43 receiving, 221 kick ret. yds.) and Ohio MVP Austin Boucher (298 total yards of offense, 2 TD).

Drake, who at times resembled former West Virginia quarterback Pat White in his play in PA's "WVU spread" offense, had run for 104 yards on 14 carries and scored on two short touchdown runs. He threw for 161 yards on just eight completions and did not throw an interception. He added a 22-yard kickoff return. But somehow, some way, it just wasn't enough.

Drake, though, wasn't upset.

"This was great," the soon-to-be-Penn-State athlete said. "This was greater than our state championship game (in December). We may not have won, but it was a hard-fought game."

Usually, Hershey yields kindly to athletes who play in the Big-33 game that previously lost in state championship games on its turf. Drake and Hollomon were both part of a West Catholic team that set a Philadelphia record for points scored in a season (775), but fell inches short on a failed two-point conversion attempt in double overtime against Wilmington Area, 35-34.

Also on Pennsylvania's team were two Bethel Park athletes – running back Lyle Marsh and wide receiver John Schademan. Bethel Park lost a heartbreaker in overtime to Bethlehem Liberty, 28-21.

However, athletes who lose in both a state championship game at Hershey and the Big-33 Classic are just as numerous as those that make up for December shortcomings with summer victories.

Such athletes include Mark Malloy and Mark Yezovich, both of Woodland Hills (L, 2001 state finals, L, 2002, Big-33); Brian Hentosz, Pittsburgh Central Catholic (L, 2003 state

finals, L, 2004 Big-33); Neil Walker, Pine-Richland (L, 2003 state finals, L, 2004 Big-33); and Kevin Kelly, Neshaminy (L, 2004 state finals, L, 2005 Big-33).

But some players in the Big-33 Classic are fortunate to end their high school careers with a victory on the Chocolatetown turf.

The earliest example of this comes from the 1989 Classic, when Aliquippa's Sean Gilbert had, only months before, been part of a stunning 13-0 loss to Berwick Area. Aliquippa had been projected to win the inaugural "AAA" state final, but George Curry & Co. saw otherwise. Gilbert was part of a Pennsylvania team that beat Maryland, 29-19.

The very next year, 1990, saw two athletes atone for cruel endings at Hershey. Kerry Collins (Wilson-West Lawn) had his career end with a 12-7 loss to Upper St. Clair in the "AAAA" state finals, while Berwick's Tom Robsock played in one of the most questionably-officiated PIAA finals ever, a 20-8 loss to Perry. Both were part of PA's 42-28 victory over Maryland. Collins threw for 208 yards, completing 60 percent of his passes.

Demond "Bob" Sanders, who is currently in the NFL with the Indianapolis Colts, was part of an Erie Cathedral Prep team that lost to CB West in the 1999 "AAAA" title game by one point. In the 2000 Big-33 game, Sanders and Pennsylvania won, 31-14.

Fast-forward to 2002. Steve Breaston, an all-everything athlete for Woodland Hills High School, had been stuffed in a Hershey mud bowl by underdog Neshaminy, 21-7. WH had entered that state final ranked #3 in the nation by the *USA-Today*. All Breaston did in the summer of '02 was account for 281 all-purpose yards and score two touchdowns in a Pennsylvania 40-17 victory.

In the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary program of the Big-33 Classic, it ranked the Top-25 athletes to play in the game. Breaston's performance came in at #4.

In 2005, Andrew Lee and Andres Morales, both of Bethlehem Liberty, had to settle for state silver against McKeesport. In the 2006 Big-33 game, the two were on a PA roster that set a record for points scored in the game (61). Pennsylvania won in a shootout, 61-42.

Dan Persa may have had the worst nightmares about Hershey Stadium. As a junior, his Liberty Hurricanes were mercy-ruled by Dan Kopolovich and McKeesport Area, 49-10. One year later, Persa and the Hurricanes were again mercy-ruled, this time by Dane Conwell and Upper St. Clair, 47-13. In those two title games, Persa was relegated to running for his life or watching as potent LHS offenses were stuffed by even more potent WPIAL defenses.

In the Big-33 game, Persa was named Pennsylvania's MVP, running for 65 yards, throwing for over 100 more, and tallying three touchdowns in a 28-10 victory for Pennsylvania.

One year later, John Laub (Parkland) was on the wrong end of the first shutout in “AAAA” state finals history. Laub’s Trojans and their Wing-T attack were stifled by Pittsburgh Central Catholic, 21-0. The next year, Laub played as part of the QB rotation with PCC’s Tino Sunseri, and Pennsylvania defeated Ohio, 31-16.