

East beats West in Robeson game

Steve Brown's appearance at halftime makes for uplifting moment

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WEST CALDWELL— It may go without saying, but winning is better than losing.

For everyone associated with the East squad, a 41-20 victory by the locals (Essex County and the Paterson area) over the West (Morris, Sussex and Passaic counties) in the 21st annual Paul Robeson East/West All-Star Football Classic on Tuesday night, June 10, at Robeson Stadium in East Orange, was a very happy experience and one which very much helped the players from James Caldwell High put the bad memories of the season-ending state finals setback that the 11-1 Chiefs suffered during their senior season completely in the rearview mirror.

"Hey, when you win, it's better than when you lose," said Ray Iodice, who is one of three JCHS Chiefs chosen to play in the 2014. "It was great to win in my last high school game. In fact, winning on Tuesday was way better than losing to Mountain Lakes in the state finals. Way better."

Iodice, a running back, had a huge hand in the East's victory, as he hauled in a 35-yard pass from signal-caller Damion Thomas of East Orange Campus during second stanza PRC play. That effort put the East ahead for good and made the score 14-7 with 6:16 left in the first half.

The East, which now leads the series 18-3 and which was using a spread offense, didn't run the ball all that well, with Iodice totaling just 11 yards on four carries.

However, Montclair High head coach John Fiore, who served as

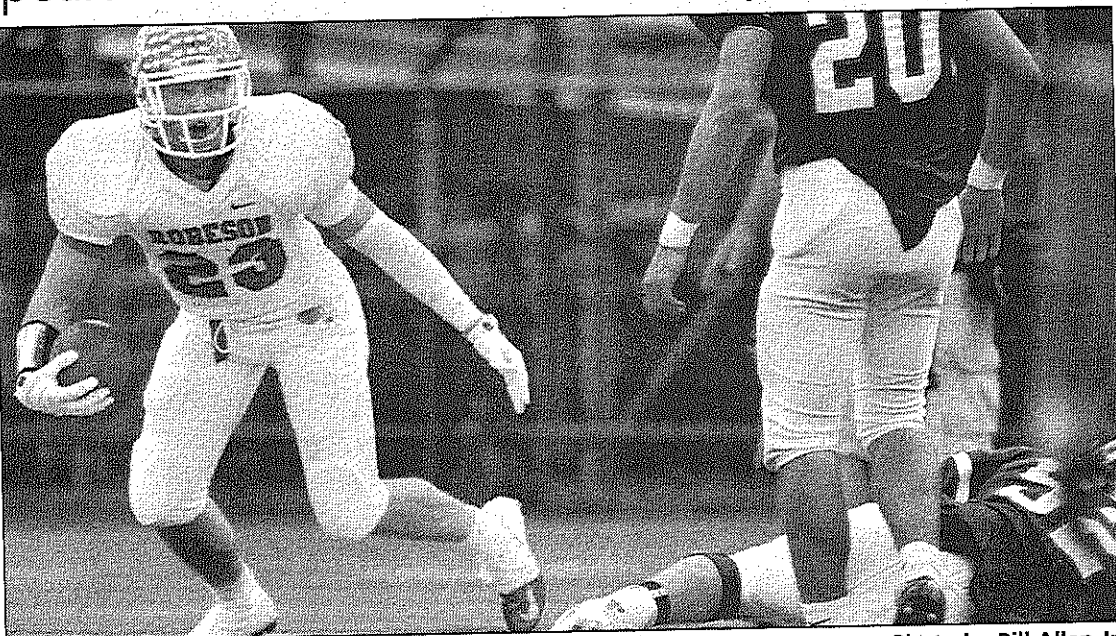


Photo by Bill Allen Jr.

Caldwell High School running back Ray Iodice celebrates after hauling in a 35-yard touchdown pass, an effort which gave the East a 14-7 lead over the West with 6:16 left in the first half at the 21st annual Paul Robeson Classic Tuesday night, June 10, in East Orange. The East won, 41-20. For more on the Robeson game, please visit theprogressnj.com.

the East's head coach, came up with a different way to utilize Iodice's talents.

"Coach Fiore saw that the safety was cheating towards (Cedar Grove wideout David) Njoku and that there was a chance to use me on a 'wheel' play," recounted Iodice, referring to the Miami-bound standout receiver and high-jumper who had caught a 16-yard TD toss to open the game's scoring.

"So, the 'wheel' is sort of an out-and-up pattern. I run into the flat and get the linebacker to bite on that, then I take off on a go pattern and Damion (Thomas) did a great job of getting me the ball in a great spot.

"I was beaming," said JCHS head coach Ken Trimmer, the East side's general manager. "He had two defenders all over him, but still made the catch and to see him celebrate with the other kids after that was just outstanding. That catch came at a critical point in the game."

The game was tied at seven-all at the end of the first quarter, but, after Iodice's catch, the locals never looked back and were ahead, 27-7 at the intermission and 34-14 heading into the final quarter. The other two Chiefs on the Robeson roster were best friends Jimmy Stille and Steve Brown.

Stille, an inside linebacker, to-

taled four tackles and broke-up two passes in the win.

However, his happiest moment came when Brown, who is undergoing treatment for just-diagnosed leukemia appeared on the field with his family at halftime.

"It was cool to play with all those top players and great to win, but the best thing was when Steve was able to leave the hospital and come to the game," smiled Stille.

"That was a heartwarming and uplifting moment for everyone," said Trimmer.

The Robeson Classic Foundation will be making a contribution of the Leukemia Foundation in Brown's name.