

Hillsborough JR Raiders Defeat Fort Lee in Round 1 and Advance to State Finals



Melillo leads Hillsborough Jr Raiders to State Finals 32-20 over Fort Lee.

It was a slow start for the Hillsborough Jr Raiders this past Saturday as the team looked flat early. After a quick 3 and out by Hillsborough, Fort Lee drove the ball 60 yards for the first score of the game and was off to a quick 7-0 lead. But on the next series the Hillsborough offense came alive after a diving catch by TE Jimmy Suseck good for 22 yards and a first down. A few plays later Zach Williams took a pitch 40 yards to the 2 yard line before Ryan Melillo punched it in for the TD. The extra point pass to Dan Stoddard was good and the score was tied 7-7.

Fort Lee drove the ball again on the next series but turned it over on downs at the Hillsborough 27 yard line. That's when Ryan Melillo and the Hillsborough offense went to work. Melillo took a pitch 73 yards to the house behind some great blocks by Paul Michinard and Dan Stoddard for a Jr. Raider TD and a 13-7 lead. Melillo had 18 carries for 230 yards and 3 TDs on the day. The offensive line of Sam Crisci, Connor Genes, Ben Pasternack, Mike Grabon, Nick DiGirolamo, and Jimmy Suseck opened holes all day for backs Michinard and Melillo.

The Hillsborough defense stiffened on the next series and forced a turnover at the Fort Lee 42 yard line as Melillo went low and Frankie McCarter went high jarring the ball loose which Dan Stoddard

recovered. A couple of plays later Rob Wardell, who was 7 for 9 passing for 107 yards and 2 TDs, hit Zach Williams for a 42 yard TD pass. The extra point by Zach Eilbacher was good and Hillsborough led 20-7 at half.

But back came Fort Lee with an impressive TD drive of their own narrowing the deficit to 20-13. It was pretty clear they had made some halftime adjustments. After a roughing the passer penalty was assessed on the kickoff, Fort Lee pinned Hillsborough on it's own 17 yard line. The Hillsborough line took over mounting an 83 yard drive with a balanced passing and running attack as Michinard (4 carries for 26 yards and 1 pass reception for 19 yards) and Melillo chewed up huge chunks of real estate. Michinard set up the score with a tremendous 19 yard catch and run to the 2 and Melillo punched it in for a 26-13 lead. Two plays later Fort Lee came roaring back for a TD to cut the deficit to 26-20 heading into the 4th quarter. It was a back and forth game all day with neither team backing down.

Once again Hillsborough moved the ball but on 4th and 1 Fort Lee made a great stop and took over at the Hillsborough 47 yard line. Two plays later Fort Lee was knocking on the door again when Dan Stoddard grabbed a hold of the Fort Lee running back and Dillon Zimmerman came in and punched the ball loose for the defensive play of the game. The fumble was recovered by Jimmy Suseck on the Hillsborough 4 yard line. On the next play Ryan Melillo took a pitch in the end zone and stopped, stuttered and juked his way through the Fort Lee defense 77 yards to the Fort Lee 19 yard line. It was his best run of the day. 4 plays later Rob Wardell found Cole Curran wide open for a 3 yard TD pass and Hillsborough took a commanding 32-20 lead with 3:53 left in the game.

Hillsborough's defense led by Frankie McCarter, Al Fisher, Ben Pasternack, Shay Sarkar, Genes, Suseck, Matt Matson, Stoddard and Gonzalez, stiffened and forced a 4 and out by Fort Lee and Hillsborough took a couple of Victory knees for a 32-20 win and a chance to play for the State title next weekend. It was the 7th straight win for this Hillsborough Jr Raider team.

Hillsborough will play Jersey City in the State Finals of the NJ Unlimited Weight Youth Football Association (NJUWYFA) on Saturday December 10th at noon at Englewood, Durie Ave, Englewood, NJ. Hillsborough won the first ever NJUWYFA state title in 2008 and has won 4 of 7 Jr Skyland Conference championships since the conferences inception in 2005.

Game MVP: Ryan Melillo