

Game 1, September 13, 1997: La Salle 31 – Valley Forge Military Academy 0

by Matt Mlodzinski, Inquirer

Penalties Help Doom Trojans; Valley Forge Military Was Bedeviled By Flags In a 31-0 Rout By La Salle

The La Salle Explorers were antsy to play their first football game of the year Saturday, the previous week's scheduled opener against West Catholic having been canceled because of the Catholic high school lay teachers' strike.

The players for La Salle's opponent, Valley Forge Military Academy, seemed a little too antsy to get across the line of scrimmage.

Brett Gordon completed 17 of 31 passes for 251 yards and three touchdowns to lead the Explorers past the visiting Trojans, 31-0. Valley Forge was hit with 11 penalties - most of them for being offside - for a total of 80 yards.

The Trojans, who were without injured running back L.P. Spence, managed only 123 yards of offense. They have been outscored by 71-0 in their first two games.

The Valley Forge defense put some pressure on Gordon, coming up with a pair of sacks and forcing a pair of interceptions.

"We played a little sloppy offensively," Gordon said. "It's been tough, waiting to play our first game, but hopefully, we can come out next week [against Kennedy-Kenrick] and be more focused."

With La Salle up by 3-0, Gordon hit wide receiver Jeff Pietrak (six catches for 99 yards and two touchdowns) with a 3-yard scoring pass. There were 2 minutes, 13 seconds left in the opening quarter. On their next possession, the Explorers marched 85 yards in nine plays. They scored when Obi Amachi took a short pass from Gordon, made a nice inside fake, and broke toward the corner of the end zone for a 17-yard touchdown at the 8:10 mark of the second period.

La Salle put the game out of reach on the last play of the third quarter, when Gordon evaded the Trojans' rush and hit Pietrak in stride for a 32-yard TD.

Game 2, September 19, 1997: La Salle 59 – Kennedy-Kenrick 0

by Rob Maaddi, Inquirer

Kennedy-Kenrick Proves No Match For La Salle In 59-0 Loss

It wasn't as close as the score indicated. Not that 59-0 is close. But La Salle's rout of Kennedy-Kenrick in a nonleague game Friday night could have been worse.

La Salle (2-0), the two-time defending Catholic League champion, thoroughly dominated both sides of the ball, outgaining Kennedy-Kenrick 487 yards to 118 en route to extending its winning streak to 27 games.

The Explorers defense held its second consecutive opponent scoreless.

"They just kicked our butts," Kennedy-Kenrick coach Dan Bielli said.

Senior quarterback Brett Gordon played catch with wide receiver Jeff Pietrak in the first half, completing nine passes to his favorite target for 131 yards and two touchdowns. Pietrak made all his receptions in the first half.

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"Jeff was running great routes," said Gordon, who completed 15 of 24 passes for 240 yards and three touchdowns. "The offensive line blocked well and I was able to get the ball to him. Our passing game was working well."

So was the running game, which kept Kennedy-Kenrick (1-2) off balance. Senior Eric Seiferth, a speedy 5-foot-6, 150-pound running back, gained 131 yards on 17 carries, including touchdown runs of 27 and 10 yards.

"I'm fairly confident," Seiferth said. "The offensive line has blocked really well. I actually have an agreement with them that if I go over 100 yards, I have to take them out to dinner." Well, there's a free meal.

La Salle built a 31-0 halftime lead, scoring on four of its seven possessions. Gordon led the Explorers into the end zone on the team's first two drives of the second half before the starters retired to the bench. Junior Rich Krauss (5 carries, 77 yards) capped the scoring with touchdown runs of 33 and 26 yards. "It's difficult to maintain a high level of performance throughout the game," La Salle coach Joe Radvansky said. "It's a tribute to the quality of players we have."

Game 3, September 28, 1997: La Salle 61 – Cardinal Dougherty 13

by Ted Silarity, Daily News

Again, La Salle Star QB Comes Up Tall

Brett Gordon could accumulate 4,000 yards and 50 touchdowns this season while gunning passes at 85 mph and to most Division I-A college football coaches . . .

It just wouldn't matter.

Some would give Gordon no thought at all. Others at least would watch him perform on tape and admire his talent and leadership skills, but then they would shake their head and mutter, "If only this kid were taller."

La Salle High's football roster lists Gordon's height as 6 feet - about a 1 1/2-inch exaggeration. He might as well be 3 feet.

What the Division I-A schools want now is the same thing they wanted when Gordon's father, Drew, was creating flinging fireworks for Bishop McDevitt in the 1966 and '67 seasons: a quarterback with height. "It's funny," Drew Gordon said, choosing his words carefully. "You watch some of these teams - and I don't have any specific team in mind - and when they get films, they send it back with the note, 'Thank you very much, but we're recruiting only quarterbacks who are 6-3.' These are teams with 3-8 records that don't complete passes. I find that ironic."

With an ease that bordered on ridiculous, Brett Gordon yesterday completed 10 of 16 passes for 229 yards and five touchdowns as the Explorers torched visiting Cardinal Dougherty, 61-13, in a Catholic North opener at Springfield (Montco) High.

La Salle's outburst ranks No. 2 all-time in Catholic League regular-season history, trailing only North Catholic's 64-0 destruction of (long-defunct) St. Thomas More in 1945. It's also a school record, topping the 59 points scored last week in a non-league blanking of Kennedy-Kenrick.

Also, La Salle extended its city-leagues record (Public, Catholic, Inter-Ac) for consecutive wins to 28. The previous mark belonged to North Catholic, which swept 25 in a row from 1948-50.

Gordon's scoring passes came in the first 18 minutes, 49 seconds, and capped his team's first five series. There were shorties to John Travers (16 yards), Mike Lorusso (14) and Lorusso again (9), then longies to Eric Seiferth (61) and Lorusso one more time (60).

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Gordon could have tied the single-game, city leagues record of six touchdown passes, but he tossed one incomplection late in the half and two more early in the third quarter before sitting down.

"It's frustrating," he said, referring to the ever-increasing short work days. "When you think about all the time you spend in practice, then you come out on the field and you're pretty much done at halftime . . . On the other hand, I can't complain. We're doing what we set out to do."

Already, Gordon owns the city leagues records for touchdown passes in a season (28) and career (62). And with 4,892 yards, he needs 38 more to break the city leagues record set in 1994 by Monsignor Bonner's Mike Mitros.

Mitros now starts at Division II West Chester and, of course, there's no shame in that. But Gordon is aiming for at least I-AA.

"My biggest concern," he said, "is going where I can fit into a good system and get a chance to play without having to sit on the bench for four years. Everything will be figured into the equation.

"Sometimes I wonder, 'Where will I be next year?' But I have to forget about that mostly and keep performing. If I don't do that, nothing will matter."

Sustained interest in Gordon, who boasts a 3.3 grade-point average and 1,110 on the Scholastic Assessment Test, is being shown by two I-A schools, Vanderbilt and Boston College, and five I-AA schools: William and Mary, Villanova, Holy Cross, Penn and Lehigh.

Last summer, Brett and Drew, the offensive coordinator under La Salle coach Joe Colistra, made unofficial visits to five I-AA schools, mostly to check out facilities and academic opportunities. Also, Drew asked two longtime friends, Tim Rooney and Fred O'Connor - Villanova assistants during Drew's career there - to watch tape and give him honest evaluations of Brett.

Rooney is the player personnel director of the New York Giants. O'Connor is out of football.

"They both said Brett was capable of playing at I-A," Drew said, "but it would have to be in the proper program, one that does things the way we do them. They both said his overall skills were pretty well suited for I-AA."

The way La Salle does things is uncommon for high schools, and even for many colleges.

Almost never is Gordon, 42-for-74 for 702 yards and 11 touchdowns in three games this season, told beforehand where he must throw the pass. He drops back, reads the defense with amazing perception and then takes what he's given. Seizes it, usually.

Gordon is given numbers for the formation and play. With the help of a list taped to his left wrist, he then assigns individual patterns for four or five receivers (depending on whether a back is needed for blocking). Thanks to center Tom Cross, guards Marc Benante and Puri Garzone, tackles Paul Weinacht (6-5, 275) and Chris DiLeonardo and guard-tackle handyman Brendan McGlone, ample time to throw is almost always available.

"In the huddle, I usually do a paragraph's worth of talking," Gordon said. "But it's exciting to run this offense. It's challenging. I get to go back there and make decisions.

"What we do is dictated by the defense. If the opposition really wants to cover one guy, we'll go elsewhere. That's why our leading receiver [statistically] any given week can be pretty much anybody." In college, Brett Gordon intends to major in finance or business management with designs on someday operating his own business.

Here's a suggestion, kid. Join forces with your father and open a quarterback school.

IN THE 60s: Since the Catholic League began playing football in 1920, six teams have scored at least 60 points in a regular-season league game. (None has done so in a playoff.) Here are the details:

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1945 North Catholic 64 – St. Thomas More 0
1997 La Salle 61 – Cardinal Dougherty 13
1984 Cardinal O'Hara 60 – Roman 14
1983 Cardinal O'Hara 60 – Roman 0
1967 Roman Catholic 60 – Bonner 30
1951 Roman Catholic 60 – La Salle 6

Note: The most points scored by a CL team in any game is 69. In '93, Neumann beat Southern (Public League), 69-13.

by Frank Bertucci, Inquirer

La Salle Airs Out Another Foe, 61-13; Mike Lorusso Caught 3 TD Passes From Brett Gordon. Dougherty Never Had A Fighting Chance

Mike Lorusso is proof that anyone can catch passes from Brett Gordon.

A year ago, Lorusso was a starting guard as the Explorers roared to a perfect 14-0 season and their second straight Catholic League championship. Now at tight end, Lorusso caught seven passes yesterday, three for touchdowns, as La Salle rolled to a 61-13 blowout of Cardinal Dougherty in a Catholic League Northern Division game.

It was the Explorers' 28th consecutive victory.

"Last year we had Jack Hammond and Mike Marsell at tight end, so the coaches asked if I wanted to move," explained Lorusso. "When I moved back to tight end, I had some background."

Lorusso's TD receptions covered 14, 9 and 60 yards, and he gained 129 yards overall.

"If you can run a pattern, and the offensive line does the job, Brett gets the ball to you," he said.

"We concentrated on getting the ball to Mike this week in practice," Gordon said. "We knew we had to get him the ball. That gives people someone else to worry about."

Gordon still hasn't played a full game this season, as the Explorers have routed their first three opponents by a cumulative 151-13. His passing yesterday accounted for 228 yards (10 for 16) and five TDs, with no interceptions. For the season he has passed for 719 yards (42 for 71), with 12 TDs and just one interception.

"Brett's more mature, he's more of a leader this year," said Eric Seiferth, who rushed for 82 yards and one TD, and broke his only pass reception for a 61-yard touchdown with the aid of a crushing block by Jeff Pietrak on a Dougherty defensive back. "When Brett rolls out, I try to get open and he'll get the ball to me."

La Salle scored seven times in the first half against the Cardinals (1-3, 0-1), five times in the second period. The last four touchdowns of the half came within a period of 4 minutes, 2 seconds.

After Dougherty scored on a 27-yard run by Bruce Perry to get within 21-7, Gordon and Seiferth connected on their 61-yard score three plays later.

Dougherty went three downs and punted, and Gordon and Lorusso connected on their 60-yard TD on first down.

When Dougherty quarterback Ryan Hamilton was sacked by La Salle's Chris Pennington three plays later, Paul Dorazio recovered the fumble on Dougherty's 2, and Matt Chapman went over on the next play.

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When Hamilton fumbled again on Dougherty's next play, Anthony DePasquale recovered, and Seiferth went 16 yards on third down for the Explorers' seventh TD of the half.

La Salle should finally be tested when it hosts Father Judge on Sunday, and by then Gordon may have found another new receiver.

October 3, 1997, by Frank Bertucci, Inquirer

Gordon Gets Big Boost From Line; Good Protection Gives La Salle's Quarterback Impressive Numbers

The numbers keep climbing for Brett Gordon, and he owes a lot of that to his offensive line.

The La Salle High quarterback is 32 yards short of 5,000 for his career and has thrown 63 touchdown passes, with seven games to play in the regular season and probably a few more in the Catholic League playoffs.

All along, the senior has received the protection that has let him stand in the pocket and find second, third and, sometimes, fourth receivers.

This year, that protection comes from center Tom Cross (6-foot, 200 pounds), guards Puri Garzone (6-2, 230) and Marc Benante (6-1, 200), and tackles Paul Weinacht (6-5, 275) and Chris DiLeonardo (6-2, 235). All are seniors.

"We have a great offensive-line coach in Joe Wilus," La Salle coach Joe Colistra said. "I coached the offensive line for 17 years with Tex Flannery, and this man has it."

This line is the second completely new one that Gordon has had in front of him. He had five seniors protecting him during his sophomore season, and Wilus rebuilt the wall before last season. Cross, Garzone and Weinacht are the holdover starters from last season.

"It takes a while for the unit to mesh," Cross said. "A lot is studying assignments and knowing what to do. We're confident when we give Brett time he can make things happen."

"It was a little easier this year," Garzone said. "We had three guys who understand everything, and two new guys who knew the offense but needed game time."

Weinacht is the showpiece of the line. He already has been offered scholarships by Iowa and Temple and been invited by Wake Forest and Pittsburgh to make recruiting visits. He also is being recruited by Vanderbilt, Miami and Florida.

"Paul has tremendous upper-body strength; he pushes you down with just his hands," Colistra said. "He's mobile - he can really move - and I don't remember him getting knocked off his feet."

"I knew what I had to do as a senior," Weinacht said. "I had to be more physical, more aggressive."

Weinacht, who said he has committed only to Iowa as one of his five recruiting visits so far, owes thanks to Gordon for some of the college interest he has received.

"When Brett sent a tape to Vanderbilt, their coaches saw me on it and called and said they noticed me," he said.

Rebuilding the line before last season wasn't an overnight job for Wilus. Cross had played linebacker as a sophomore and Weinacht was a center as a freshman and sophomore, and then the coach moved a former tight end, Mike Lorusso, to one guard opposite Garzone.

"I figured I'd end up at linebacker," Cross said. "Then I figured I'd be a guard. Center took me by surprise."

"Tom Cross is the heart and soul of the line," Colistra said. "He's a technician. That's the right place for him."

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When Lorusso was moved back to tight end this season, Garzone was switched to Cross' left after playing on the right side, next to Weinacht, last season.

Colistra calls Garzone "the emotional leader of the team," and the senior guard gives the impression that he enjoys being a part of the Catholic League's most devastating offense.

"It's exciting," Garzone said. "To see the ball fly over your head, even though I don't always see it, is exciting.

"And having as good a running game with [Eric] Seiferth is great."

The Explorers, who crushed their first three opponents, will host 3-0 Father Judge on Sunday at Springfield High (1 p.m.) in a rematch of last season's Catholic League championship-game teams. The linemen know they won't get the second half of the game off, as they have in the first three games.

"I didn't like playing only a half," Weinacht said. "I work hard in practice, and I'd like to play a full game."

"I think their running game is more explosive [this year]," Garzone said of Judge. "Their situation on the offensive line is the same as ours. They're experienced, bigger and faster."

This game might mean a little more to Garzone than the rest of his teammates.

"I live right around the corner from Judge," the Northeast Philadelphia resident said. "Three of my friends start for the team.

"I wasn't going to go to La Salle until February of my eighth-grade year. I never thought I'd get in. I took the chance, and it's been perfect."

Twenty-eight consecutive La Salle wins, currently the longest for a Pennsylvania high school, have been perfect, too.

That's a number that's as important to La Salle's offensive line as Brett Gordon's numbers.

Game 4, October 5, 1997: La Salle 31 – Father Judge 7

by Ted Silary, Daily News

Gordon Shows He Can Take The Heat

Brett Gordon is accustomed to receiving impeccable protection while firing footballs for La Salle High's high-octane offense.

But if the defenders storm close enough to count his fillings, it's not like he panics.

In fact, it's like he views those situations as an opportunity to elevate from great to stupendous, and he often takes advantage.

"In practice," Gordon said after yesterday's 31-7 victory over Father Judge, "most of the drills I do are not with straight dropbacks. There's a lot of moving around and we work with the receivers on what they're supposed to do [on scrambles]. When game time comes, it's second nature."

On the day Gordon, a 5-10 1/2, 170-pound senior, claimed two more career city leagues records, he punctuated his performance with a pair of passes that had everyone buzzing and darn near frothing.

On both, Gordon was flushed out of the pocket and wound up running - "For my life," he said, smiling - toward the right sideline. On both, he waved his hand to direct his receivers. On both, he released the ball just before stepping out of bounds. On both, he displayed the perfect blend of velocity, touch and accuracy.

Terrific Toss No. 1 occurred just before halftime and produced a 22-yard gain to Ed Cattie. TTN2 occurred on the second play of the fourth quarter and produced a 15-yard score to Mike Lorusso.

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Some opined the first play was more impressive because Gordon found Cattie tucked behind a group of bodies that included Judge defenders and another La Salle receiver. Others favored the second because Gordon at first scrambled to his left before changing direction to his right.

This is fact: Any QB at any level would have been bursting with pride after making either play.

"If I'm running around, the receivers are taught to come back to the ball," Gordon said. "And to rotate. I mean, if I'm running right and we've got somebody standing on the left, that's not going to do us any good. Lorusso came way across from left to right [on the 15-yard TD]."

Gordon finished 17-for-28 for 211 yards and three TDs. In four games this season, he has passed 59-for-102 for 913 yards and 14 TDs. His career totals: 366 completions, 685 attempts, 5,103 yards, 65 TDs.

Gordon owned the career TD record before the season started. Yesterday, he steamed past 1995 Monsignor Bonner grad Mike Mitros (4,929) in yardage and past 1990 St. Joseph's Prep grad Frank Costa in attempts.

by Ted Silary, Daily News

La Salle's Bongard A Hit In His Return To Football

Beautiful fall days are not perfect only for football. They're also perfect for something else, and Ed Bongard could tell you about it.

Bongard, a 6-4, 200-pound senior, is now a Division I linebacking prospect on La Salle High's football powerhouse.

But where was this kid two years ago, when the Explorers were beginning to flex their championship muscles?

Playing fall baseball. Specifically, he was playing in an independent program sponsored by the Ivy Ridge Panthers, an American Legion team based in Roxborough.

"Baseball was always my favorite sport," Bongard said. "I figured that was the one I could do something with [to become a college prospect], so I decided to give it more of my time."

But . . .

"Maybe halfway through that season, I really started missing football," Bongard said. "My friends were saying, 'Why don't you come back out?' I didn't think that would be right, so I told everyone I'd stick with what I was doing and try football again in 11th grade."

Yesterday, Bongard involved himself in 12 tackles and made an interception as La Salle crunched visiting Father Judge, 31-7, in a Catholic North showdown between the Nos. 1 and 2 teams, respectively, in the Daily News City Top 10.

Also, the Explorers captured their 29th consecutive win.

Bongard rocked folks at the line of scrimmage. Dragged them down along the sideline. Looked impressive in pass coverage.

Wake Forest, Villanova, Richmond and Columbia are making regular phone calls to Bongard, and East Carolina is sending multiple hunks of mail. As the season progresses, so will the attention.

"I had no clue this was going to happen," said Bongard, who maintains a 3.1 grade-point average and has scored 1,040 on the Scholastic Assessment Test. "When I went back out for football last year [he'd been a linebacker and part-time running back on the freshman team], I was doing it for the fun of it.

When our coach [Joe Colistra] told me after the season that some colleges were going to be looking at me, it caught me by surprise."

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One could make a strong case for Bongard, who lives near Castor and Rhawn in Rhawnhurst, as the city's top athlete. In baseball, he received third-team All-City honors last spring at catcher and in basketball last winter, he was a starting forward.

"Basketball, that's just for fun. I'm not really good at that," Bongard said. "Right now, what sport I'll be doing in college is iffy.

"People keep telling me the interest for baseball will come. But it's been kind of slow. I'll just go through this season and see what happens [with recruiting] and then wait and see what happens with baseball. My thoughts used to be only about baseball, but now it's up for grabs. Maybe I could try to do both sports.

"It's pretty mind-boggling to think that a college is going to give me [scholarship] money just because I can play sports. But if they're going to do it, I have to accept it."

La Salle's defense includes nose guard Paul D'Orazio, tackles Puri Garzone and Joe Dillon, ends Tim McDonald and Doug Appleby, linebackers Shawn O'Connor and Bongard, cornerbacks Tim Fenningham and Justin Primus and safeties Hugh Donnelly and Chris Pennington. D'Orazio, Bongard, Primus and Donnelly are returning starters.

The Explorers had one rough moment early in the second quarter yesterday when Judge's Jim Casey broke a counter for an 86-yard touchdown. But Casey began vomiting after returning to the sideline and he played no more.

"That takes a little zip out of what you're trying to do," said Judge coach John "Whitey" Sullivan. "The guys you put in don't know football the way he does."

Without Casey, the Crusaders did next to nothing through three quarters and had a good scoring chance in the fourth terminated by Bongard's interception.

Which begs the question - since Bongard has good hands, why does he not play receiver?

"Because you don't get to hit people," he said.

"That was what I missed about football," he added. "It's the best sport for being physical. I missed the competition thing, too."

by Frank Bertucci, Inquirer

La Salle Wins 29th In A Row; Once Quarterback Brett Gordon Got Going, The Explorers Rolled Past Father Judge, 31-7.

Brett Gordon started slowly in La Salle's Catholic League football showdown with Father Judge yesterday. His first three passes were incomplete, and his fourth was intercepted.

But by the end of La Salle's 31-7 triumph - the Explorers' 29th consecutive win - Gordon had completed 17 of 28 passes for 211 yards and three touchdowns, boosting his three-year career passing totals to 5,179 yards and 66 TDs.

"He's a great high school quarterback," Judge coach Whitey Sullivan said. "He covers the whole field. He makes big, big plays you don't make in high school."

Gordon gave La Salle (4-0 overall, 2-0 Northern Division) a 3-0 lead with a 34-yard field goal in the first period, which was played at Springfield High School in Erdenheim.

But when Jim Casey broke away on an 86-yard touchdown run early in the second quarter for a 7-3 Judge lead, La Salle trailed for the first time this season.

"We looked at it as a challenge," Gordon said.

Gordon answered that challenge by conducting a six-play, 73-yard scoring drive in which he completed all four of his passes for 45 yards, the last to Jeff Pietrak for 10 yards and a touchdown.

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After Judge (3-1, 1-1) went three and out, Gordon directed a six-play, 58-yard drive on which his lone pass resulted in a 31-yard completion. Eric Seiferth ran the last yard for the touchdown.

In La Salle's three second-period scoring drives, Gordon was 8 for 8 for 111 yards and two TDs as he exhibited his ability to keep a play alive and find open receivers.

On a 25-yard completion to Ed Cattie during the third TD drive, Gordon scrambled almost from sideline to sideline, throwing the ball just before he was slammed out of bounds.

"I never saw the catch, but I heard the cheering," he said.

"He makes it easy," said tight end Mike Lorusso (seven catches, 105 yards, two TDs). "They're not all set plays. He knows how to react."

Gordon was forced to scramble much more than usual. The result was the best rushing total of his high school career - 50 yards.

"That's the most running I've ever done," he said. "Every year, Judge is the toughest defense we play."

While Gordon rewrites the Catholic League record book, La Salle's underrated defense dominates opponents. Leading that unit yesterday were linebacker Ed Bongard, who was in on 13 tackles and made one of the Explorers' four interceptions, and tackle Paul Dorazio, who raced up three sacks. But it's Gordon's passing show that gets the headlines as long as La Salle keeps winning.

by Rick O'Brien, Inquirer

La Salle's Defense Throttles Judge, 31-7

With the dynamic Brett Gordon returning at quarterback, the only question marks surrounding La Salle as it entered the 1997 football season concerned a defensive unit that lost seven starters to graduation, and a much-hyped Father Judge team.

Keyed by two of its senior captains, middle linebacker Ed Bongard and middle guard Paul D'Orazio, the Explorers emphatically answered both of those questions yesterday.

In a rematch of last year's Catholic League championship game, La Salle's defense held the previously unbeaten Crusaders to a second-quarter touchdown and intercepted quarterback Joe Tyer four times en route to a convincing 31-7 victory at Springfield High.

Gordon completed 17 of 28 passes for 211 yards - upping his Catholic League-record career total to 5,179 - and three touchdowns to spearhead the offensive attack. But the game was truly decided on defense, where Bongard and D'Orazio repeatedly swarmed to the ball.

The 6-foot-4, 200-pound Bongard led the way for the Explorers (4-0 overall, 2-0 league) in the first half, when he was involved in eight of his team-high 13 tackles. He registered six solo tackles in the game, batted down a third-quarter pass and made a fourth-quarter interception at the La Salle 7-yard line.

"Our whole deal was to try to fly to the football and gang-tackle people," said Bongard, a two-year starter.

"We knew Judge was a lot bigger than us, so we wanted to rely on our speed and technique."

La Salle's only defensive gaffe came early in the second quarter, when it allowed Judge senior running back Jim Casey to slip through the middle of the line and race 86 yards for a touchdown. Excluding that play, the Crusaders (3-1, 1-1) netted only 115 rushing yards.

Bongard accepted blame for the breakdown. "I took a step to the outside and their tackle was able to take me out of the play," he said.

The 5-11, 210-pound D'Orazio, a three-year starter, sacked Tyer three times in the second half.

Through four games, the two-time defending league champions have allowed only 20 points.

"They've inspired the rest of the defense, and that's been key for us," said Joe Colistra, La Salle's coach.

Game 5, October 11, 1997: La Salle 34 – North Catholic 0

by Rick O'Brien, Inquirer

Seiferth Runs Into Spotlight In La Salle Win; The Running Back Got A Rare Chance To Star As The Usually Pass-happy Explorers Routed North Catholic

Glory is seldom experienced when you're a running back for a pass-happy team that throws the ball upwards of 30 times per game.

Eric Seiferth's rushing statistics for La Salle would no doubt be more impressive if his career had not coincided with the Brett Gordon era. As it is, with Gordon casually setting new passing records, Seiferth relishes every carry he gets.

Seiferth was overjoyed Saturday afternoon, when he was given the rare opportunity to showcase his abilities. The 5-foot-6, 150-pound senior carried 18 times for 84 yards and caught two touchdown passes as the host Explorers overwhelmed North Catholic, 34-0, in a Catholic League Northern Division matchup at Springfield High.

"I wasn't expecting to see the ball 18 times, but today the coaches gave me the ball more," said Seiferth. "I was just trying to make something happen every time I touched it."

The Explorers improved to 5-0 overall and 3-0 in the Northern Division as the area's No. 3-ranked team also claimed its 30th consecutive victory. The Explorers also notched their third shutout of the season in defeating the Falcons (2-4, 0-3) for the 11th straight time.

With La Salle leading by 28-0 midway through the third quarter, head coach Joe Colistra decided to give Gordon the rest of the afternoon off. The senior quarterback finished 11 of 15 for 197 yards and two touchdowns, raising his league-record passing total to 5,376 yards.

Seiferth gave the Explorers a 14-0 lead late in the first quarter, when he caught a pass along the left sideline, then sidestepped two would-be tacklers on the way to a 32-yard touchdown.

In five games this season, Seiferth has rushed 68 times for 450 yards, an average of 6.6 yards per carry. He gained a career-high 131 yards on 17 attempts, including touchdown runs of 27 and 10 yards, in a 59-0 romp over Kennedy-Kenrick in the squad's second game.

"He's a great back and we have to find ways to get him the ball, either coming out of the backfield or by using him as a receiver," said Gordon. "He's definitely a big part of our offense."

Just before leaving the game, Gordon rolled right and fired a 9-yard touchdown pass to Seiferth, who held on despite taking a pounding.

Game 6, October 18, 1997: La Salle 45 – Bishop McDevitt 17

by A.J. Moore, Inquirer

La Salle Romps As Amachi Has A Break-out Day; The Junior Caught Three TD Passes And Ran A Kickoff Back For A Score In A 45-17 Win Over McDevitt

The wide-open shotgun offense employed by the La Salle Explorers allows for quarterback Brett Gordon to employ many weapons. Against Bishop McDevitt Saturday afternoon, he unleashed junior wideout Chikwere Amachi.

Amachi caught three touchdown passes from Gordon and returned the second-half kickoff 86 yards for another score to lead the Explorers past the Lancers, 45-17, in a Catholic League North Division matchup. It was their 31st consecutive win.

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"I have been waiting for such a long time to break out like this," said Amachi, who finished with four receptions for 85 yards.

Even though Amachi had a majority of the game's big plays, the Explorers (6-0, 4-0) didn't do anything special to get him the ball.

"In our offense Brett has one simple rule - get the ball to whoever is open," said coach Joe Colistra.

On the other side of the ball, there was little McDevitt coach Pat Manzi could do to stop Amachi: "Against La Salle you have to cover the entire field. If you become fixated on just one player, then you will get burned by the rest of the team."

The first Gordon-Amachi hookup came midway through the opening quarter from 24 yards out, tying the score at 7-7.

The Lancers (1-6, 1-3) had surprised the Explorers by taking the opening possession right down the field and scoring on Bill O'Meara's 1-yard run.

McDevitt regained the lead at 10-7 early in the 2nd quarter after Tim Martin kicked a 22-yard field goal.

On the ensuing possession, Gordon found Amachi wide open for a 28-yard touchdown pass to give the Explorers the lead right back.

Gordon gave La Salle a 17-10 halftime lead with a 26-yard field goal. In what has become a routine day for him, he would finish 15 of 24 passing for 280 yards, giving him a total of 5,656 passing yards for his career.

Amachi's kickoff return made the score 24-10 at the beginning of the second half. Rich Krauss threw a fine clearing block.

"Everybody in front of me made great blocks that put people on the ground," Amachi said.

The Lancers closed the gap to a touchdown on the following series when O'Meara scored on another 1-yard plunge.

But Gordon struck right back with an 11-yard touchdown pass to Mike Lorusso and a 21-yard scoring connection with Amachi.

The Lancers were led by O'Meara's 79 yards on 21 carries and Sean Tuffy's six catches for 115 yards.

Game 7, October 25, 1997: La Salle 28 – Archbishop Wood 0

by Bill Iezzi, Inquirer

La Salle Strikes In Short Order And Routs Wood; The Explorers Needed Only 47 Seconds To Score. They Went On To Make Wood Their 32d Consecutive Victim

La Salle, the two-time defending Catholic League champion, didn't waste any time setting the tone Saturday in its 28-0 victory over visiting Archbishop Wood in a Catholic League Northern Division matchup at Springfield High.

The Explorers (7-0 overall, 5-0 league) recovered their own opening kickoff and went 46 yards in two plays for a touchdown they scored 47 seconds into the game. It was kick, pass, run, score - just like that, La Salle was on its way to its 32d win in a streak spanning three seasons.

"The coach told Jeff [Pietrak] to kick it low on the ground," senior quarterback Brett Gordon said. "Jeff hit the kid [a Wood player], and it turned out perfect for us.

"I wasn't really ready to go on the field at that point, but I heard them cheering, looked, and saw we had the ball. We went to work from there."

On the first play from scrimmage, Gordon hit Pietrak with a 5-yard pass. Then senior tailback Eric Seiferth saw a big hole on the right side and sprinted 41 yards for the score.

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La Salle increased its lead to 21-0 when Gordon nailed Pietrak with touchdown passes covering 10 and 21 yards, the second with 3:40 to in the second quarter.

"We didn't want them to get any wind under their sails," La Salle coach Joe Colistra. "We wanted to strike early and often."

La Salle's offensive line - Paul Weinacht, Chris DiLeonardo, Marc Benante, Brendan McGlone, Tom Cross and Puri Garzone - opened holes for the running backs, but it also gave Gordon plenty of time to pick his receivers.

The quarterback used five receivers in completing 17 of 27 passes for 225 yards and three touchdowns. His favorite target was Pietrak, who made seven catches for 84 yards and caught all three of the TD passes. He scored the final touchdown on a 21-yard pass from Gordon with 8:41 left in the game.

The Vikings (5-2, 3-2) made a comeback attempt in the third period, when Mike Becker (16 for 30 for 182 yards) engineered a nine-play drive from his 27-yard line. The march looked to have been capped by a 23-yard touchdown pass to John Traczykiewicz with 5:13 left in the period. But Wood was penalized for a chop block on the play, and the drive fizzled.

"Any time you have a touchdown called back, it will deflate you," Wood coach Tom Magdelinkas said. "That would have made it a 14-point game, and our offense was moving the ball. We were able to move the chains, which is what our game plan was. But when we got inside the red zone, we didn't smell blood. We didn't deliver the knockout punch."

Actually, the closest Wood got to the end zone was the 22-yard line late in the fourth quarter. La Salle's defense held the Vikings to 96 yards rushing.

Game 8, November 1, 1997: Archbishop Ryan 14 – La Salle 13

by Jay Nagle, Inquirer

La Salle's Streak Comes To An End; The Explorers Had Won 32 Consecutive Games Before Falling Just Short Against Archbishop Ryan, 14-13

For the better part of three seasons, the streak had been their companion.

It traveled with them to home and away games. It accompanied them to practices. People read about it and inquired about its health.

But the La Salle Explorers' 32-game winning streak, which ended Saturday with a 14-13 loss to Archbishop Ryan in a Catholic League Northern Division game at George Washington High, never seemed to hold the same fascination for the players that it held for other people.

"We never really thought that much about the streak, so it really doesn't bother us now that it's over," said defensive lineman Paul D'Orazio.

"It bothers me that we lost today, that's what bothers me. But as far as the streak goes, that never really entered my mind."

Before Saturday, La Salle's last loss had come in its second game of the 1995 season, a 17-14 defeat by Cherokee (N.J.). Since then, the Explorers (7-1 overall, 5-1 league) have won back-to-back Catholic League championships, and despite this setback, they have firmly established themselves as a serious threat again this year.

They fell behind, 14-0, when quarterback Jim Corsanico of Ryan (7-1, 6-0) fired a pair of third-quarter touchdown passes, one a 25-yarder to wide receiver Dave Udowenko, the other a 9-yarder to tailback Jeff Moore. Mike Gavaghan added the PATs.

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But the Explorers closed to within 14-13 on a pair of TD passes by senior quarterback Brett Gordon, who raised his career total to 76, a Southeastern Pennsylvania record.

Mike Lorusso caught the first, a 37-yard, third-quarter strike. Chikwere Amachi caught the second, a 5-yard toss with 3 minutes, 36 seconds to go in the fourth quarter.

Gordon added the first PAT, but the second was blocked by Raiders defensive back John Price.

La Salle had one final opportunity to grab victory when it moved to the Ryan 30 with 2:08 to go. But four straight incompletions ended the threat - and the streak.

"I never felt one way or the other about it, to be very honest with you," said La Salle head coach Joe Colistra of the winning streak.

Said Gordon, who finished the game 13 of 34 for 191 yards: "I'm really not even thinking about that right now. It's over. It's done with."

by Ted Silary, Daily News

La Salle's Gordon Sets Marks

Shoulders back, head up, eyes dry, a mud-covered Brett Gordon stood stoically outside the visiting locker room at George Washington High bracing himself for an uncommon chore.

Discussing a loss.

Moments earlier Saturday, his La Salle High football team had been stunned by Archbishop Ryan, 14-13, in a Catholic North classic and had waved bye-bye to a 32-game winning streak, the longest in city leagues history.

Despite his disappointment, the 5-10 1/2 Gordon was determined to stand not just tall, but gigantic.

He wasn't going to whine about the weather and he wasn't going to cry about the fact his PAT with 3 minutes, 36 seconds remaining, which would have created a 14-14 tie, was blocked by a guy, John Price, who probably should have been penalized for being offsidess.

"It looked like maybe he was offsidess, but that's the official's call, not mine," Gordon said. "We just have to live with it."

By game's end, only a drizzle was falling at Mickey Young Memorial Stadium. But for almost all of the first three quarters, the rain was never less than strong and often was heavy.

"Both teams had the same conditions," Gordon said. "I'd be a liar if I said the weather didn't affect things, but that's not an excuse. We were still able to throw the ball a little."

A little? Try a lot.

Gordon completed 13 of 34 passes for 190 yards and two touchdowns while claiming the two most cherished career passing records, TDs and yardage, in Philadelphia-area history.

Gordon has thrown for 76 TDs, two more than 1973 Upper Merion grad Bobby Baker. He also has thrown for 5,997 yards, 69 more than 1992 Cherry Hill East grad Kevin Foley (5,928).

Both marks fell on the same play, a TD (75) for 37 yards (5,951) to Mike Lorusso with 33 seconds left in the third quarter.

But it was not an easy day. Gordon suffered losses seven times, and seven of his passes were deflected by Ryan defenders.

With 2:08 left, La Salle still had a chance to overcome the blocked PAT with first-and-10 at Ryan's 47. An immediate 17-yard completion to Jeff Pietrak stirred the Explorers, but Gordon then went 0-for-4 on two slants to Pietrak, an out to Pietrak and a fade to Lorusso.

"That's the way it goes sometimes," he said, sighing.

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La Salle dropped its first two games in '95 - 34-33 to West Catholic, 17-14 to Cherokee (N.J.) - and then won 11 to finish that season, all 14 last season and the first seven this season.

"That was a great thing we accomplished," Gordon said. "But nothing is over. We're still going to the playoffs. We still have a chance at another championship. We'll come back from this."

Game 9, November 8, 1997: La Salle 43 – Conwell-Egan 8

La Salle quarterback Brett Gordon tossed four touchdown passes in a 43-8 win over Conwell-Egan to improve his career total to 80 and break the state record

Game 10, November 15, 1997: Father Judge 47 – La Salle 14 (PCL Qfinal)

by John Knebels, Inquirer

Judge Stuns La Salle In League Quarterfinal

Father Judge senior Jim Casey looked at the scoreboard and made a request.

"Somebody pinch me," he said. "Somebody tell me this isn't a dream."

Amazingly, Father Judge's 47-14, Catholic League playoff quarterfinal annihilation of two-time defending champion La Salle yesterday at Northeast High was quite real.

Led by a torrid running attack and dominance on defense and special teams, the Crusaders advanced to next week's semifinals while La Salle, which had won 33 of its last 34 games, could only look ahead to a season finale on Thanksgiving against St. Joseph's Prep.

"Everyone came to play today," said Casey, after contributing 209 yards rushing and three touchdowns on 27 smash-mouth carries. "Our success has to start with the running game. Today, we were really solid in that department."

That was an understatement. Judge (8-2) accumulated 409 of its 423 total offensive yards on 66 carries. Along with Casey's heroics, quarterback Joe Tyer gained 76 yards on 10 carries and scored four touchdowns, one on a 44-yard burst late in the first quarter. Fullback Ed Guzak added 112 yards on 19 carries.

"We did a great job of handling them up front," said Judge coach Whitey Sullivan. "Plus, we didn't make too many mistakes."

La Salle (8-2) couldn't make the same claim. The Explorers lost four turnovers and dropped several catchable balls thrown by star quarterback Brett Gordon, who finished with 13 completions in 28 attempts for 197 yards, two touchdowns, and three interceptions, two of them by Judge linebacker Tom Walsh.

"We just tried to keep Gordon in the pocket," said Walsh. "The last time we played them [a 31-7 La Salle victory], he was able to roll out all day long and pick his spots. This time we were able to put some pressure on him and limit his options."

Already ahead by 26-14 at halftime, the Crusaders took the second-half kickoff and needed eight plays to forge a 32-14 lead. For the remainder of the game, La Salle would ultimately run only 13 plays and keep the ball for 4:03 of a possible 24 minutes.

"We had a lot to prove today," said lineman Sean McGlashen, who swatted three Gordon passes to the ground. "I think we were successful."

by Ted Silary, Daily News

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Walsh Glad Judgment Made Him A Crusader

Tom Walsh lives in Bensalem and would have been happy going to high school at Conwell-Egan in nearby Levittown.

But his father, Tom, started at guard and linebacker as Father Judge won the Catholic League and city championships in 1964.

Don't forget, these are the days of open enrollment. Kids go where they want. Or, sometimes, where their fathers make them.

"I didn't really want to go to Judge," Walsh said. "My dad was pressing for it, though. He was in favor of a single-sex school. And he knew Judge had a great sports program.

"We had some arguments about it. We were leaning different ways. But, he persuaded me."

He stopped for a moment and raised his voice.

"I'm so happy I came here," he said. "I love it."

Walsh, a 6-foot, 230-pound senior, plays linebacker for the Crusaders. Like everyone Saturday at Northeast, he was shaking his head after one of the more amazing playoffs in CL history.

Judge dismantled La Salle, the two-time defending champion, by a deceiving score of 47-14 in a quarterfinal. Deceiving fits because the Crusaders could have won by more.

Forty-seven points represent a CL playoff record. They were scored because tailback Jim Casey rushed 29 times for 222 yards and three touchdowns. And because quarterback Joe Tyer rushed 11 times for 87 yards and a playoff record-tying four TDs. And because fullback Ed Guzak added 114 yards on 19 carries.

Judge amassed 444 yards total offense and 156 more on returns (65 for Casey) for exactly 600.

Just as impressive was the Crusaders' ability to throttle quarterback extraordinaire Brett Gordon.

Gordon finished 13-for-28 for 199 yards, but nine completions, 155 yards and both touchdown passes came in the first 13 minutes. Thereafter, he was intercepted three times - twice by Walsh, once by Dan Casey (Jim's brother) - and was unable to create any magic.

"He's an awesome quarterback. He has a great arm and sees the field so well," Walsh said. "You can never control him. The only thing you can hope to do is contain him inside the pocket.

"You can hope to force him into mistakes. But usually, he's the one putting you through misery."

In addition to his INTs, Walsh made eight tackles and batted down a pass. End Sean McGlashen batted down three passes while nose tackle Sean Friel and the other end, Mike Brzycki, exerted constant, under-control pressure.

"Our emotions were outrageous," Walsh said. "We were so excited to play this team. The odds were against us, but we knew we could win.

"The line's job was to keep Gordon inside, so he'd have to throw through us. The linebackers' job was to stay underneath, so he couldn't throw short real easy. The backs' job was to flash to the ball, and prevent long ones."

In the teams' regular-season meeting, Gordon passed 17-for-28 for 211 yards and three TDs in a 31-7 win. In four games in '95 and '96 combined, La Salle had swept by a score of 79-10.

"They'd whupped us so often," Walsh said. "It feels great to finally beat them, especially by such a large margin."

Game 11, Nov 27, 1997: St. Joseph's Prep 20 – La Salle 16 (Thanksgiving)

by Sam Carchidi, Inquirer

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Interception Seals Win For St. Joseph's Prep; Jermaine Slade's Play Clinched A 20-16 Victory Over La Salle High

In an ironic twist, La Salle High's Brett Gordon, the most prolific quarterback in Philadelphia-area history, had his final career pass intercepted yesterday - and it cemented the Explorers' 20-16 loss to St. Joseph's Prep before nearly 8,000 fans at La Salle University.

Senior cornerback Jermaine Slade, a Division I recruit who was named the game's most valuable player, intercepted the pass at his 38-yard line and returned it 38 yards with 47 seconds left, preserving an emotional, hard-earned win at McCarthy Stadium.

La Salle (8-3) had a fourth and 13 when Gordon rolled right and tried to hit Jeff Pietrak with the last-minute 25-yard pass. The 6-foot-2, 185-pound Slade, in man-to-man coverage, was in perfect position.

"He's the best one-on-one cover guy in the league," said Gil Brooks, the St. Joseph's coach. "There's nobody he can't cover."

"I knew they were going to Pietrak because it was fourth down and he's their go-to guy," said Slade, who also intercepted a second-quarter pass that was intended for Pietrak - in the end zone - to end a threat. Gordon threw into a swirling crosswind in the 4th quarter. The wind didn't help his final high school pass. "I tried to lead him down the sideline and underthrew it," Gordon said. "The wind affected us a little today, but on the whole, we were able to execute. We just got beat by a better team."

Gordon, a 5-foot-10 1/2, 170-pound senior, completed 21 of 38 passes for 323 yards and two touchdowns, with two interceptions. He finished the season with 33 touchdown passes - one shy of the Philadelphia-area record, set by Ridley's Joe Emmi in 1965.

Gordon finished with a state record of 84 career touchdown passes and a local best of 6,837 career passing yards.

"Right now, that doesn't mean anything," said Gordon, who hopes to make recruiting visits to Villanova, William and Mary, Penn and Lehigh. "We lost. That's all that matters."

La Salle lost because the Prep (11-2), led by Aaron Brown, was able to grind out 341 of its 428 total yards on the ground.

"We tried to keep the ball away from Brett," Brooks said. "He's the greatest quarterback to ever play in the Catholic League, and the less times he has it, the better for us."

Brown, a rugged 6-foot, 216-pound senior, scored on runs of 2 and 6 yards and gained 153 yards on 24 carries. John Wagner, a 5-5, 228-pound fullback, added 60 yards on 10 carries.

Milton Johnson, a speedy sophomore who had 11 carries for 50 yards, and junior quarterback Steve Comly, who had eight carries for 78, also sparked the offense.

Comly completed five of 10 passes for 78 yards, including a 9-yard touchdown pass to tight end Victor Hobson with 31 seconds left in the half.

The drive started when Slade made his end-zone interception with 2:12 remaining in the half. The Prep then went on a nine-play, 80-yard drive that featured a 40-yard catch and run by Slade, who has been offered scholarships by Georgia Tech, Iowa, North Carolina State and Temple.

The drive gave the Prep a 14-3 halftime lead.

In addition to Slade's performance, St. Joseph's, which will face Archbishop Ryan for the Catholic League title on Dec. 6, received strong defensive efforts from Hobson and fellow linebackers Sean Killeen and Brown, along with linemen Derek Osborne, Warren Spivey, Dan Gress & Kevin Komelasky. Brown registered two of the Prep's four sacks, and his team held Eric Seiferth to 19 yards on 11 carries.

Notes: Slade has seven interceptions this year. . . . The Prep, which did not commit any turnovers yesterday, will be trying to avenge a 27-0 regular-season loss to Ryan.

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by Ted Silary, Daily News

Gordon Breezes To Records In Loss

The polls are closed and the numbers are in. What they show is overwhelming.

Brett Gordon, a 5-10 1/2, 170-pound senior, completed one of the more storied football careers in Catholic League history yesterday. His team, La Salle, lost to St. Joseph's Prep, 20-16, at La Salle University, but Gordon put on an amazing show considering that strong winds were whipping all game long.

Gordon completed 21 of 38 passes for a career-high 323 yards and two touchdowns, a 7-yarder to Mike Lorusso and a 26-yarder to Eric Seiferth.

He finished the season 175-for-301 (58 percent) for 2,647 yards and 33 touchdowns. The yardage total broke the city leagues record (2,547) set in 1989 by St. Joe's Frank Costa and the TD total extended Gordon's own city leagues record, broken earlier this season. He threw a record 28 in 1996.

In three varsity seasons, Gordon passed 482-for-884 for 6,837 yards and 84 TDs. All four numbers represent city leagues records and the 84 TDs are a state mark.

Not to be overlooked are Gordon's kicking feats. He had a 32-yard field goal and a PAT yesterday, giving him six field goals and 35 PAT for 53 points.

Careerwise, he had 91 PAT and 15 field goals for 136 points. The PAT and points numbers are four and 13 short of the city leagues records, respectively.

A month ago, the Explorers were riding high with a 32-game winning streak and expecting to win a third consecutive championship. But they lost to Archbishop Ryan, 14-13, in their next-to-last division game and, after rebounding with a 43-8 destruction of Conwell-Egan, were hammered by Father Judge, 47-14, in a quarterfinal.

"Honestly, at the time, I didn't think the end of the streak would affect us very much. But maybe it did," Gordon said. "We weren't ourselves against Judge. We came to play today, but . . . we didn't make enough plays.

"We could walk out with our heads high, though. We gave it our best shot."

For college, Gordon is looking at Villanova (alma mater of his father, Drew, also a quarterback), Penn, William & Mary and Lehigh.

"I'm hoping to visit all four," he said.

