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St. Charles North breaks free in 3rd quarter

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Just before the second-half kickoff, St. Charles North's Jeff Stolzenburg had a few words for North Stars head coach Mark Gould.

"I told the coach, 'I'm going to run this back,'" said Stolzenburg.

And that's exactly what the 6-foot-4, 175-pound senior did, as he raced 95 yards for a touchdown on the kickoff to open the second half.

The score served as a catalyst for the North Stars, who exploded for 27 unanswered third-quarter points during Friday night's season-opening 43-13 nonconference triumph over host Batavia.

"He called it," Gould said of Stolzenburg's special teams highlight. "That just lit a fire under everybody. Not that the defense needed it but the offense kind of needed it.

"I think it helped us play more relaxed. At 9-7, you're a little bit tight so that extra score certainly helped relax things a little bit."

Limited to 23 yards of total offense in the first half, Batavia made things interesting right before halftime when an acrobatic interception and 30-yard return by sophomore defensive lineman Alec Lyons helped set up fullback Braden Hartmann's 1-yard TD plunge with 16.4 seconds remaining. Stolzenburg helped the North Stars recapture some of that momentum just 15 seconds into the third quarter before fullback Michael Ghanem took a screen pass from junior quarterback Jake Bergren and rumbled 42 yards downfield for a touchdown that upped the visitors' lead to 23-7.

Less than 4 minutes later, senior linebacker Dominic Imbordino scooped up a fumble and returned it 40 yards for a touchdown to make it 29-7 before Bergren found the end zone on a 7-yard keeper to cap the North Stars' third-quarter onslaught.

"It was a total team effort - that's what we were looking for," said Gould. "I don't think we had any runbacks or defensive returns for touchdowns last year. We didn't have a lot of big plays last year. You need those kind of things sometimes that kick-starts you and gets you going."

Defensively, the North Stars made life tough for the Bulldogs' offense as often-harrassed quarterbacks Noel Gaspari and Kevin Flinn combined to complete 9-of-26 passes for 87 yards.

"The defense did a fantastic job," said Gould. "We put them in a bad situation late in the first half but they kept us in the game. It took a half for the offense to get going but with the help of the defense - and special teams - it did. The defense allowed us to play more relaxed."

Batavia tailback Nick Janacek's 22-yard touchdown run with 6:13 remaining capped the scoring.