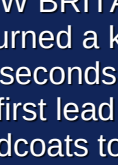




CLASS M



BERLIN 20



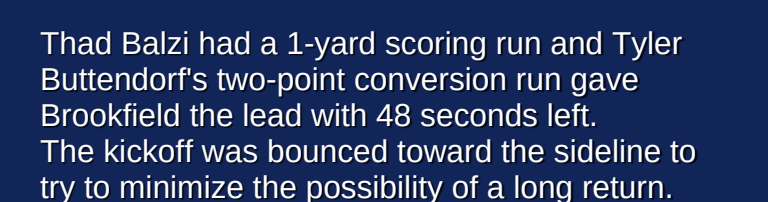
BROOKFIELD 15

[Photo Gallery Link](#)

[Video Highlight Link](#)

Jim Fuller / Special to CIAC

NEW BRITAIN, Dec. 13, 2025 – Berlin's Eli Rice returned a kickoff 80 yards for a touchdown with 33 seconds to go, one play after Brookfield took its first lead in the CIAC Class M final to lift the Redcoats to a 20-15 victory and the program's first state title since 2009.

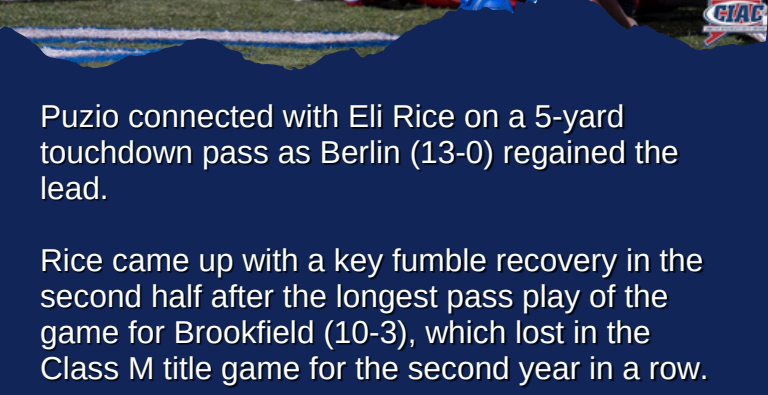


Thad Balzi had a 1-yard scoring run and Tyler Buttendorf's two-point conversion run gave Brookfield the lead with 48 seconds left. The kickoff was bounced toward the sideline to try to minimize the possibility of a long return. Rice had other ideas during his game-deciding play.

"I just said, keep going, keep going until I was in the end zone, it was barbeque chicken from there. I always practice my speedwork and agility with some of the guys, so really breaking through helped me get there."

Berlin's Braden Kelly recovered a fumble on Brookfield's third offensive play to set up Cody Puzio's 1-yard touchdown run.

The Bobcats answered back on a 54-yard scoring run by Tyler Buttendorf late in the first quarter.



Puzio connected with Eli Rice on a 5-yard touchdown pass as Berlin (13-0) regained the lead.

Rice came up with a key fumble recovery in the second half after the longest pass play of the game for Brookfield (10-3), which lost in the Class M title game for the second year in a row.



Brookfield appeared to be in business after a 28-yard pass, but Berlin's Rice ripped the ball away. Berlin wasn't able to score on that drive.

Brookfield used a 55-yard pass from Thad Balzi to Chase Sylvia to set up a go-ahead score.

"We have fight," Brookfield coach Bryan Muller said. "We are always in the game, we fought all the way down to the last play. We came back, we went for 2. I am sure everybody is holding their breath. Hat's off to Berlin, No. 18 (Rice), a hell of a run back. Our kids, I can't be happier with the way we played. A couple of times we could have given up a score early on and we keep fighting and that is the character of these kids."



Puzio led Berlin with 67 rushing yards, while Ryan Lavender had six tackles. Buttendorf ran for 83 yards for Brookfield. Balzi led the Bobcats with six tackles.

CLASS M FINAL
BERLIN 20 BROOKFIELD 15

Brookfield 7 0 0 8-15

Berlin 7 7 0 6-20

Be-Cody Puzio 1 run (Collin Sullivan kick)
Br-Tyler Buttendorf 54 run (Zachary Costa kick)
Be-Eli Rice 5 pass from Puzio (Sullivan kick)
Br-Thad Balzi 1 run (Tyler Buttendorf run)
Be-Rice 80 kickoff return (run failed)
Team records: Brookfield 10-3, Berlin 13-0

Rushing: Brookfield - Tyler Buttendorf 5-83, Thad Balzi 9-2, Matt Ackerly 4-0; Berlin -Cody Puzio 17-67, Ryan Lavender 10-35, Brandon Sadowski 7-34

Passing: Brookfield - Balzi 5-7-0 115; Berlin 5-9 40 0-0

Receiving: Brookfield John Lopes 2-39, Tristen Becker 2-25, Chase Sylvia 1-55

