



CLASS L



NEW CANAAN 35



DARIEN 21

[Photo Gallery Link](#)

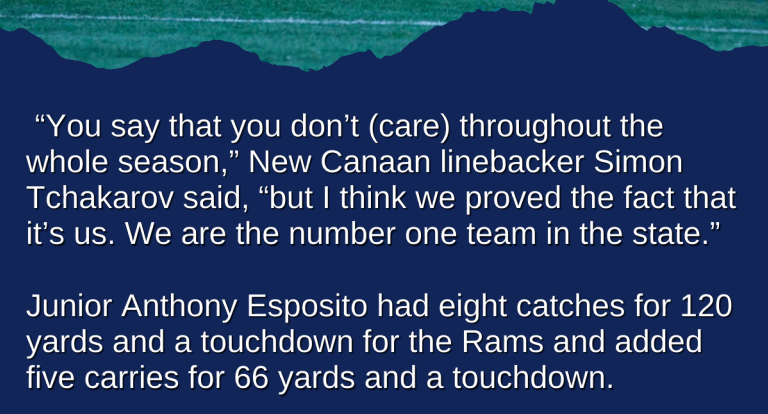
[Video Highlight Link](#)

By New Griffen, Special to CIAC Sports

December 14, 2024

New Britain — Senior Luke Robinson completed 17 of 24 passes for 238 yards and three touchdowns as second-seeded New Canaan beat fourth-seeded and rival Darien on Saturday, 35-21, to win its third-straight CIAC Class L championship at Arute Field.

It was the 15th state title for the Rams (12-1), third best in state history. They also staked their claim for No. 1 in both the GameTimeCT Top 10 poll and Hartford Courant state coaches' poll as they were ranked third in both before the playoffs, and both No. 1 and No. 2 Windsor lost in states.



“You say that you don’t (care) throughout the whole season,” New Canaan linebacker Simon Tchakarov said, “but I think we proved the fact that it’s us. We are the number one team in the state.”

Junior Anthony Esposito had eight catches for 120 yards and a touchdown for the Rams and added five carries for 66 yards and a touchdown.

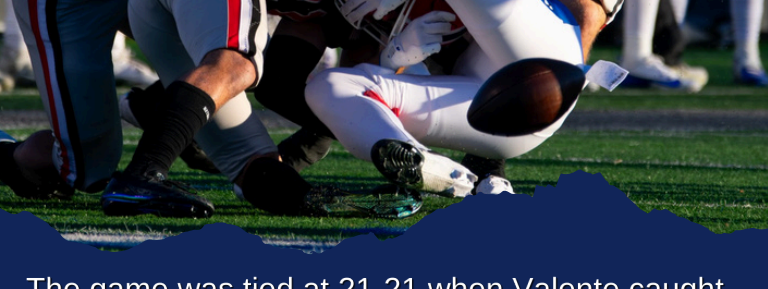
Junior James McNerney scored on a 32-yard run and senior Chris Cuesta (36 yards) and junior Jake Valente (11 yards) both caught touchdown passes for New Canaan. Senior Will Sullivan added two sacks.



Junior Ben Rolapp completed 20-of-28 passes for 288 yards with two touchdowns and an interception and ran 19 times for 52 yards and a score for Darien (10-3).

Junior Thomas Herget caught seven passes for 139 yards and a touchdown for the Blue Wave and senior Kevin Roche had six catches for 105 yards. Senior Charlie Thom also caught a 6-yard touchdown pass.

“We struggled to tackle in the secondary,” Blue Wave head coach Andy Grant said. “The defense was on the field an awful long time in the first half, and we just couldn’t get ourselves off the field defensively. And on offense, we couldn’t put drives together and that was tough.”



The game was tied at 21-21 when Valente caught his touchdown pass from Robinson. Senior Tucker Stevens’ extra point put New Canaan ahead, 28-21, with 10 minutes, 12 seconds left in the game.

Darien had a second-and-5 from its own 42 on its next drive when Rams junior defensive back Ryan Brooks blitzed and forced Rolapp to throw the ball away for an intentional grounding penalty.

It was the game’s biggest play as it backed up the Blue Wave and cost them a down. They had to punt two plays later.



Esposito caught a 69-yard touchdown pass from Robinson on the second play of New Canaan’s next drive to push its lead to 35-21 with 7:29 to play.

“That was when we really knew we put that final pin into the board,” Tchakarov said about Brooks forcing an intentional grounding call. “We finally kicked them in the throat enough where we had a good chance of winning.”



New Canaan 35, Darien 21
(At Arute Field, New Britain)

Darien 0 7 14 0—21
New Canaan 7 7 7 14—35

First quarter
NC—Chris Cuesta 36 pass from Luke Robinson (Tucker Stevens kick)

Second quarter
NC—James McNerney 32 run (Stevens kick)
D— Ben Rolapp 4 run (Edwin Rapp kick)

Third quarter
D—Thomas Herget 65 pass from Ben Rolapp (Rapp kick)

N—Andrew Esposito 55 run (Stevens run)
D— Charlie Thom 6 pass from Rolapp (Rapp kick)

NC—Jake Valente 11 pass from Robinson (Stevens kick)
NC—Esposito 69 pass from Robinson (Stevens kick)

RUSHING — Darien, Ben Rolapp 19-52, Ben Curtis 2-15, Patrick Gately 3-5, Tommy Karczewski 1-1, Thomas Herget 2-(-2); New Canaan — Andrew Esposito 5-66, James McNerney 3-38, Jack Crowell 3-32, Henry Stein 8-29, Michael Smith 4-7, Hudson Kenny 2-2, Luke Robinson 2-1.

PASSING — Darien, Ben Rolapp 20-28-288-1; New Canaan — Luke Robinson 17-24-238.

RECEIVING — Darien, Thomas Herget 7-139, Kevin Roche 6-105, Tyler Spellman 4-30, Charlie Thom 2-17, Jimmy Benedict 2-10; New Canaan, Andrew Esposito 8-120, Chris Cuesta 2-45, Michael Smith 3-32, Matt Reed 1-16, Charlie Koch 1-12, Jake Valente 1-11, Henry Stein 1-2.

RECORDS: NC 12-1; D 10-3.

