





## Another big game from Ryan Palmieri leads Pine-Richland to WPIAL quarterfinal win



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When Ryan Palmieri plays defense for Pine-Richland, he wears gloves. On offense, he takes off the gloves.



Gloves or not, Palmieri had his prints all over Friday night's WPIAL playoff game.

Pine-Richland earned a trip to a semifinal game for the ninth consecutive season, and Palmieri added another chapter to his story of changing positions – and Pine-Richland changing the course of its season.

Palmieri, a senior who plays quarterback and defensive back, had 313 yards offense and was the primary reason Pine-Richland defeated visiting Penn-Trafford, 31-17, in a Class 5A quarterfinal game.


Palmieri, a 5-foot-11 senior, rushed for 236 yards on 20 carries and scored all four Pine-Richland touchdowns on runs. He also was efficient throwing the ball, completing all six pass attempts for 77 yards. And he played safety for a defense that was staunch until late in the game when Penn-Trafford scored two touchdowns to make things a little interesting. But the



defending WPIAL and PIAA champion Warriors (6-5) saw their season end short of the semifinals for only the second time in six years.

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Ryan Palmieri's switch from running back to quarterback has been one of the main reasons Pine-Richland turned around its season after 1-3 start.  
He had another big game against Penn-Trafford with 313 yards offense.

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“We just talk about letting him be special and sometimes he just does his thing,” Jon LeDonne, Pine-Richland’s first-year coach said of Palmieri.

This is turning into a special season for Pine-Richland (8-3) and that position switch of Palmieri from running back to quarterback is making LeDonne and his staff look brilliant. Pine-Richland was 1-3 with Palmieri at running back. The Rams are 7-0 with him at quarterback.

“I think I brought a little bit of fire,” Palmieri said of playing QB. “But our offensive line has been playing stellar and Ethan Pillar has really stepped up at running back with the running game.”

But Palmieri has stepped up running – and throwing. He doesn’t throw a ton, but is quite effective when he does. In the past six games, he is 46 of 63 (73%) for 544 yards. In the past six games, he also has rushed for 879 yards on 106 carries.

“Every single year I’ve been with him, his No. 1 trait is his leadership,” said Ryan Cory, a standout offensive lineman for Pine-Richland. “There’s just a different feel with him at quarterback. Nothing against the other quarterbacks, but he’s just a natural born leader and everybody is so in line with him. We’re just flowing. I don’t know how to explain it.”

Pine-Richland’s seven-game winning streak explains it pretty well.

“A lot of it is the guys he has in front of him, too,” LeDonne said. “Those guys are blocking their butts off. We’ll take 5 yards and 5 yards, and sooner or later we’re going to bust one.”

Pine-Richland used a staunch defense and two fairly long drives to take a 14-3 halftime lead. Pine-Richland held Penn-Trafford to 109 yards offense in the first half, and 61 of those came on a run by Owen Demeri.

Pine-Richland had touchdown drives of 60 yards in 12 plays, and 65 yards in six plays. Palmieri capped both marches with TD runs of 10 and 14 yards. Palmieri rushed for 62 yards on 10 carries in the first half. Then on the first play of the second half, he ran off the right side for a terrific 71-yard touchdown play. A Penn-Trafford defender caught him at the 15 and had his hands around Palmieri’s ankles. But Palmieri somehow broke loose and headed into the end zone.

Grant Argiro added a 33-yard field goal with 4:18 left in the game and it looked like Penn-Trafford might score its fewest points in a playoff game since losing to North Hills, 20-3, in 2010. But Penn-Trafford came back and made things interesting. Daniel Tarabrella caught a 40-yard touchdown pass from Conlan Greene with 2:30 left in the game. Penn-Trafford then recovered an onside kick and Demeri caught a 4-yard touchdown pass from Greene with 1:33 left.

Penn-Trafford then tried another onside kick, but Pine-Richland recovered. Two plays later, it was Palmieri striking again, this time running 44 yards for a touchdown to clinch the game.

“Our coaches have done a great job game planning,” Palmieri said. “We came out with a good scheme and we executed.”

Cory said, “That was a little bit of a scary ending to the game. But I think our defense has been a little overlooked just because of what the offense is doing.”

Pine-Richland will play in Friday’s semifinals against Woodland Hills, which upset No. 3 seed Franklin Regional, 21-0.

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