



# A TICKET TO OHIO

## Cardinals post fifth shutout in historic victory over defending East Region champs



Front and back page photos by Brad Waters

Cardinal football players celebrate after St. John Fisher College's 31-0 win over visiting Rowan University. The victory made Fisher the East Region champions and set up a Final Four showdown in Ohio with perennial Division III power Mount Union. The Cardinals' record now stands at 12-1, the best mark in the program's history.

ASST. SPORTS EDITOR  
**MIKE SPIER**

St. John Fisher will be playing defending national champion Mount Union a little earlier than the expected 2008 season opener.

After shutting out defending East Region champion Rowan 31-0 at blustery Growney Stadium, the Cardinals came away with a College-record fifth shutout against the self-proclaimed "Beast of the East." Fisher is now ready to push forward to the NCAA Division III national semifinals.

"Whether we want to call our-

selves the new beast of the east or not, our kids played well," Cardinals' head coach Paul Vosburgh said. "The team should be recognized as the best in the region now."

Waiting for the Cardinals is the perennial powerhouse Purple Raiders, who claimed the North bracket from the Capital Crusaders, 17-14. While this is uncharted territory for the Cardinals, Mount Union is very familiar with the big game situations. The Purple Raiders have won eight national championships in the past 13 years. Their national championships came in 1993, 1996-1998, 2000-2002, and 2005. Entering the quarterfinals, Mount Union (48.4 points per game) and St. John Fisher (40.3 ppg) were first and second in scoring offense, respectively.

Although they will surely be slated as the underdog, the position has been one in which the Cardinals have thrived.

"I think it's always fun to play the underdog role," Vosburgh said. "Everybody likes Rocky movies and we are fighting like Rocky right now."

To continue their success, the Cardinals will not only need a spectacular performance from the offense and special teams, but the defense must again step up like recent weeks and stop the Purple Raiders powerful offense.

"Ever since the first Springfield game, our defense has been more physical, which has resulted in turnovers," Defensive Coordinator Blaise Faggiano said. "We need to

continue to do that in order to slow Mount Union down."

That game plan worked well for the defense against Rowan as they forced three first-half turnovers and limited the Profs to 120 yards. The offense did their part as well, tallying 335 yards total offense on the third best defense in Division III, which coming in the game allowed an average of 192.4 yards per game.

Fisher used those turnovers to their advantage, especially on the Rowan's first drive when they were gaining yards by using a hurry-up offense. On the sixth play of the drive, senior quarterback Mike Orihel hurried too much and threw the ball to junior Steve Stepnick. Stepnick's 14th interception extended his lead on the career interceptions list.

"I saw Orihel looking to my side of the field," Stepnick said. "I knew I had protection behind me, so I figured I take a shot at the ball. I just got lucky and came down with it."

On Rowan's next possession, they had to punt after sophomore linebacker Josh Gottlieb recorded the first of his two sacks on the day. The punt hit off the turf and was scooped up by sophomore wide receiver Jimmy Smith, who ran 56 yards for the score with 2:13 left in the first quarter.

"I had great blocking in front of me and a seam just opened right up," Smith said. "Thank God the kicker didn't catch me."

On the first play of Rowan's next drive, Orihel completed a screen pass to junior wide receiver Dustin

Katcher at the 42-yard line, but was stripped by junior defensive back Scott Miranto; sophomore Turell Ahmed recovered the fumble. Seven plays later, junior quarterback Rob Kramer found junior wide receiver Corey Jackson in the middle of the end zone for a 12-yard reception making the score 14-0. Kramer finished the day 13-for-20 with 160 yards and three passing touchdowns.

In the middle of the second quarter, Miranto forced another fumble, stripping sophomore running back Davon Edwards. Fisher capitalized with a 25-yard field goal giving them a 17-0 lead at halftime.

"Fisher is a team you can't have self-inflicted wounds with," said Edwards, who was the Profs' main offensive threat with 45 yards rushing and two receptions for 21 yards. "They are a team that will use it against you."

Rowan's head coach Jay Accorsi agreed with his tailback's assessment.

"We never recovered from those first-half turnovers," Accorsi said. "St. John Fisher is one of the best, if not the best, teams we've seen all year."

Fisher scored on their first two

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- Rowan Head Coach  
Jay Accorsi

drives of the second half with receptions by junior tight end Chris Harmon for 15 yards with 9:43 in the third quarter, and Smith for five yards with 3:39 in the third quarter, to cap off the Cardinals' scoring at 31.

Even though the Cardinals weren't expecting to face the Purple Raiders so soon, they are ready to see where they rank against one of the best teams in the nation.

"Even though we were supposed to face Mount Union in 2008, it is even better we get to face them now," Vosburgh said. "This game will show the nation where this program is really at."

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Brad Waters

Tight ends Chris Harmon (80) and Matt Kelly (48) celebrate after Harmon's touchdown.

## THE ROAD TO THE FINAL FOUR

Follow the Cardinals' path to a semifinal showdown with Mount Union.

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