

# Titans score on late pass to beat Bulldogs

By John Hetzler

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Stevenson and Romeo combined for 79 points, 936 yards and one whale of a football game. In the end, though, only one team got to take home a share of the MAC Red Division championship.

That team was Stevenson after junior wide receiver DJ Mershman hauled in a 29-yard touchdown pass from Jason Fracassa

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**Stevenson 43**

**Romeo 36**

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with 40.2 seconds remaining to cap the Titans' 43-36 comeback victory over Romeo in a MAC Red Division barnburner on Friday night at Runkel Field.

"It's the best football game we've ever played, and we got to

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Macomb Daily staff photo by Ray J. Skowronek  
**Titans' running back Justice Wright escapes the grasp of a Romeo tackler en route to one of his two touchdowns on the night.**

# TITANS: The two teams put up more than 900 yards in total offense

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win a MAC Red championship with it," said Mershman, who finished with nine receptions for 159 yards and two touchdowns. "It's so amazing."

Fracassa, a junior, completed 21 of 34 passes for 341 yards and four touchdowns. He also ran in a two-point conversion after Mershman's final score.

Junior running back Justice Wright rushed for 115 yards and two touchdowns, Robert Strong caught a 62-yard screen pass for a score and Marcus Beurem had a 32-yard TD reception to help Stevenson improve to 4-1 in the MAC Red and 7-1 overall. The Titans won a share of the division title along with Dakota, which also finished 4-1 in the MAC Red after a 17-0 victory over Eisenhower on Friday.

"Everyone," Stevenson coach Rick Bye said, "played a big part in this."

The Titans needed everyone and every yard to overcome a Romeo squad that rallied from an 18-point deficit early in the second half to take a lead late in the fourth quarter before falling short in the final seconds.

"I was proud of our kids," said Romeo co-coach Kurt Rienas, whose team fell to 3-2 in the MAC Red and 6-2 overall.

Romeo quarterback Ricky Roth completed 22 of 35 passes for 282 yards and a touchdown,

and he also rushed for a touchdown for the Bulldogs.

Ben Brown carried the ball 27 times for 138 yards and three touchdowns, Taylor Brynaert caught five passes for 94 yards and a score, and Jason Schirmer had seven receptions for 97 yards for Romeo.

"Romeo's pretty darn potent, too," Bye said. "This is a game that was worth the price of admission."

Fracassa started perfectly, completing all four of his passes for 66 yards on the opening drive to set up Justice Wright's 5-yard touchdown run for an early Stevenson lead.

After Robert Finn's 23-yard field goal late in the first quarter, Stevenson struck on the first play of the second quarter when Fracassa threw a screen pass to Strong, who cut back across the field and raced 62 yards for a touchdown and a 14-3 Titans' advantage.

Romeo followed up with an eight-play, 73-yard drive that Brown finished off with an 18-yard run with 9:34 remaining in the second quarter.

Stevenson, though, kept rolling, and Fracassa hit Mershman for a 12-yard touchdown pass with 1:13 left in the first half to send Stevenson into the intermission with a 21-10 lead.

An interception by Robert Fortier - Roth's first interception of

the season - set up the first touchdown of a back-and-forth second half, a 16-yard run by Wright that gave Stevenson an 18-point lead.

The two teams exchanged touchdowns the rest of the third quarter.

Roth threw a 25-yard TD pass to Brynaert, Stevenson responded when Fracassa hit Marcus Beurem for a 32-yard score and Roth answered back with a three-yard run to bring Romeo within 35-23 at the end of the third quarter.

Romeo's defense then forced Stevenson's offense into a pair of three-and-outs to start the fourth quarter, and the Bulldogs' offense took advantage both times.

Brown scored on a six-yard run after the first defensive stand, and he scored again, this time on a 25-yard run with 4:42 remaining in the game to give Romeo its first lead of the game at 36-35.

Stevenson's offense mounted a drive into Romeo territory, but the Bulldogs stuffed Wright on a fourth-and-1 play with 2:22 left.

Stevenson, though, got one more chance after its defense forced Romeo to punt after just three plays, and Strong made a fair catch at the Titans' 38-yard line with 1:35 remaining.

That was enough time for Fracassa, Mershman and Stevenson. Fracassa hit Wright for 16 yards on the first play. Following



**Romeo's Jason Schirmer, who caught seven passes for 97 yards, runs with the ball as Stevenson's Benjamin Kollsmith pursues.**

Macomb Daily  
staff photo by  
Ray J. Skowronek

a penalty on the Titans, Fracassa connected with Strong for 23 yards.

After an incompleting, Fracassa went over to his coach and asked to run a corner route to Mershman, who had scored on the play earlier in the game.

"He said, 'Coach, it's there. It's there. We've got to call it,'" Bye said.

They did, and it was there. "DJ just put a great move on him, and he was wide-open," Fracassa said.

Romeo had one more shot, but couldn't muster a first down after sacks by Carl Davis and Brian Falta.

For the Bulldogs, it was the

second straight heartbreaking loss following last week's 17-14 setback at Eisenhower.

Romeo, playing in the MAC Red for the first season, went into Friday's game with a shot at claiming a share of the league title.

"That's why we wanted to be in the Red," Rienas said. "If you don't get tested with games like this, you don't get better."

For Stevenson there was jubilation after the Titans claimed their 15th league championship since Bye took over as coach in 1975.

"It feels great," Fracassa said. "It's so great to see everyone happy and going crazy."