BINGHAMTON – In their first year in eight-man football, Notre Dame came home with a championship with a hard-fought 38-36 win over the Tri-Valley Bears from Grahamsville.

“I’m so proud of our kids and the coaching staff,” said Crusader coach Mike D’Aloisio, “for just facing some adversity with some injuries and some guys who weren’t eligible and pulling out a victory and stepping up when they really needed to step it up big time during a big game. I just can’t say enough about those coaches and players.”

The first play of the contest foreshadowed the game for Notre Dame when Crusader lineman Hunter Homerda crashed through the line and forced and recovered a fumble by Bear quarterback Keegan Streimer.

Erik Charnetski had a 12-yard run before Kyrese Fisher score from 12-yards out two plays later for an early 6-0 lead.

On their next possession, Notre Dame turned the ball over on an interception by Brauke Hunt. Da Bears took full advantage when Streimer overthrew a receiver only to have the ball drop into the hands of Drew Hartman, who outran Isaiah McKay for a 38-yard score to tie the game.

Da Bear defense stymied the Crusaders, forcing a punt on a fourth-and-19. The officials called a procedure penalty on Notre Dame and they faked the punt on fourth-and-24 and came up short.

Tri-Valley handed the ball off to Alex Schultz nine times on the ensuing drive for 54 yards with the final carry – a 1-yard plunge – for the score. Hartman ran in the conversion for a 14-6 lead.

The Crusaders started their next drive at midfield after a solid return from Steve Schmidt and a facemask call. Fisher opened the possession with a 14-yard run and Charnetski carried Bear tacklers for a 16-yard gain. After an 8-yard pass from Charnetski to McKay, Fisher found the corner on the away sideline and dove into the endzone just inside the pylon to narrow the Tri-Valley lead to two.

With the half closing down, the Bears put together a 10-play drive that reached the Crusaders’ 9-yard line only to see Streimer cough up the ball and Nick Viselli recovered.

Charnetski called his own number and improvised on a broken play and zig-zagged across the field for a 42-yard scamper. Two plays later, Notre Dame ran a hook and lateral that would have made Tony Nathan and the Miami Dolphins proud. Charnetski hit Ben Cook on a three-yard pass. Cook then lateraled to Fisher in full stride and Fisher sped 43 yards for the touchdown with fifty seconds left.

Charnetski connected with Fisher on the conversion for a 20-14 lead.

Tri-Valley ran Streimer on four consecutive plays on their next possession. After crossing midfield with under ten seconds left, Streimer scrambled on a pass play. Trying to avoid the sack, he threw a pass into the arms of Isaiah McKay, who raced sixty yards – dodging and breaking tackles as the clock expired – to reach the endzone for a 26-14 lead at the half.

“Isaiah McKay made a big play,” D’Aloisio said. “He made a couple mistakes earlier in the first half but finished it off in the right way. Adversity doesn’t build character; it revealed it in him. He stepped up.”

The Crusaders opened the half without the services of Fisher, who was in concussion protocol, but the Crusaders extended their lead with a 10-play drive with Charnetski carrying the ball six times for 30 yards and McKay with two totes for 26 yards. Charnetski scored midway through the third for a 32-14 lead.

The Bears answered with a 16-yard touchdown run from Ethan Shaver and a two-pointer by Schultz to narrow the Crusader lead to ten.

Notre Dame then burned nine minutes off the clock with a 12-play drive. McKay capped the drive with a 12-yard run. On the failed conversion, Homerda suffered a leg injury and, after a fifteen-minute delay, was wheeled from the field and taken away in an ambulance.

On their first play from scrimmage, Schultz busted through a somber Crusader defense for a 56-yard touchdown run and then added the two-point conversion to trail 38-30.

On a gutsy call, Tri-Valley opted for an onsides kick and Hartman recovered. Seven plays later, Streimer hit a wide-open Hartman on an 11-yard strike.

A two-point conversion would tie the game. Da Bears handed off to Schultz and the Crusader defense rallied with Charnetski and gang-tackled Schultz for a loss.

“Our defense stepped up stopping the two-point conversion,” D’Aloisio said. “Everyone contributed tonight and that’s why it makes me so proud to be part of this game.”

Charnetski finished the game with 145 yards on 21 carries and was named the game’s Most Valuable Player.

“He’s a prototype fullback for us through the years who turned into a quarterback,” D’Aloisio said. “I told him tonight and all week that probably after the third game of the season we started being on the same page. I’m really excited for him and for how hard he works at things and the progression he made this season. He’s like – it’s the old adage – like a coach out there for us.”

Fisher finished with ten carries for 105 yards in only a half of play while McKay finished with 56 yards on the ground and a big Interception.

Homerda earned Outstanding Defensive honors with Schultz gaining Outstanding Offensive honors with 162 yards rushing.

“I’m glad they took me along for the ride,” an emotional D’Aloisio said. “I’m not sad it’s over. I’m just glad they took me along for the ride this year.”