

# Redemption at last: Mira Costa edges Alemany for third CIF title

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With a shot at a CIF title seemingly slipping away, Mira Costa receiver Kyle Nunn told himself he wasn't coming away empty-handed.

Not this time. Not this season. And certainly not with this team.

Nunn reached high into the chilly night air on a third-and-12 play and came up with his biggest catch in a season of gargantuan receptions.

Over four defenders no less.

Nunn's staggering catch set up Alex Noroceca's tiebreaking 28-yard field goal, and Mira Costa celebrated its third CIF title with a 24-21 win over Alemany in the CIF Southern Section Western Division final Friday night at College of the Canyons in Valencia.

"I knew the team really needed me, and that made me want it more," Nunn said. "I honestly didn't know there were four defenders on me. I saw one in front of me, and I told myself I was bringing this down."

The best part? Quarterback Kyle Demarco said it was a pass that got away from him. He was actually targeting Jackson Morrow.

"It's probably from baseball - I was squeezing it too hard," said Demarco, also a baseball standout. "It was one of the worst passes of the year, one of those ducks, but Kyle goes up and gets it. He's been doing that all year for us."

Nunn came down on the Alemany 30. Mira Costa then turned to running back Morgan Reece, who carried the ball on the next six plays for 19 yards to bring the ball to the 11.

From there, it was a chip shot for Noroceca - who has four field goals of 45 yards or more - with 4:52 left.

"I knew I had to make that kick, but I had no idea the bearing it would have on the game," Noroceca said. "Adam Lawrence had a great hold, and as soon as it hit my foot, I knew it was going straight through."

"I was over the moon. When I realized it was going to be the difference, I was so ecstatic." There was still plenty of time left for Alemany (10-4), a hard-nosed team that matched Mira Costa blow for blow the entire way.

Yet J.R. Oshima picked off Alemany quarterback Vernon Adams on Alemany's next play from scrimmage with 3:49 left to essentially seal the game.

"I knew that was my ball," Oshima said. "I was so excited, I knocked over a bench on our sideline. Now I get to put a ring on my finger."

Mira Costa (12-2) picked up a pivotal first down on a fourth-and-1 Demarco sneak from Mira Costa's 45-yard line before punting with 16 seconds left. Three plays later, Mira Costa's Jordan Tavai ended the game with a sack on Adams.

It punctuated Mira Costa's third CIF title in eight appearances, adding to the 1993 and 1997 crowns.

It was also particularly redeeming after Mira Costa was shut out in last season's final at Quartz Hill.

"I'm so happy for the seniors," Mira Costa coach Don Morrow said. "These are great-effort guys, and I couldn't be happier for them, especially after what they went through last season. To get back here and finish it off is an unbelievable feeling."

Nunn finished with five catches for 107 yards despite cramping in the second half.

Reece bruised and battered his way to 97 yards on 25 carries. Rico Wright totaled 57 yards on 11 carries, including a 4-yard touchdown run in the first quarter to tie it at 7.

Demarco completed six of nine passes for 121 yards, and added 47 rushing yards and a pair of clutch scoring runs. He had a 3-yarder in the second quarter to give Mira Costa a 14-13 halftime lead and a 1-yard run to cap a 13-play, 67-yard drive that ate up the first 6:01 of the second half.

"It's an amazing win," Demarco said. "This was our dream for four years, since we were freshmen. All the hours of work we put in, it turned out exactly the way we wanted it." Running back Malcolm Marable did his best to put Alemany on his back in the school's first CIF final appearance in its 53-year history.

The Oregon State-bound Marable tallied 190 yards and two touchdowns on 20 carries along with 30 receiving yards on four catches. His 25-yard scoring run on a quick burst up the middle and Chike Mbanefo's two-point conversion catch of a pass from Adams tied the game, 21-21.

"This isn't how I imagined it at all. I'm disappointed," Marable said. "I tried so hard, but sometimes everything isn't enough. I'm proud, but it's kind of bittersweet. It's our first time here, but we didn't win it."

On the other side of the field, Mira Costa players were still reveling in the school's first title in 12 seasons, posing for photos, celebrating with family and friends and congratulating themselves on a season in which they won their final 11 games.

"It means everything, man," said defensive stalwart J.R. Tavai, who turned in another stellar performance. "Norocea got the big kick, which was a heart reliever. It was a total team effort."