



CLASS SS

JOEL BARLOW 21

WATERTOWN 20

By JIM FULLER
Special to CIACSPORTS

EAST HARTFORD, Dec. 9, 2023 - It took a stop on the two-point conversion, a successful onsidies kick recovery and a late interception for No. 7 seed Barlow to repeat as state champions with a 21-20 win over No. 8 Watertown in the CIAC Class SS championship game at Rentschler Field.

No. 8 seed Watertown went for two points after pulling within one point with 1:38 left but the two-point conversion run by quarterback Brayden Gambee, who ran for 74 yards in the game, was stopped short to deny Watertown its first state title since 1986.

Barlow (9-4) scored a pair of touchdowns less than four minutes apart to turn a seven-point deficit into a 21-14 lead.



Luke Bishop had a 17-yard run and after a fumble on Watertown's next offensive play, Barlow quarterback Jack Gilbert scored on a 1-yard run with 4:08 left in the third quarter.

It was Gilbert's second scoring run of the game. "On those 1-yard plays, I am confident," said Gilbert, who ran 11 times for 41 yards.

Barlow had dropped four straight games after a 3-0 start and it wasn't even certain that the Falcons would be able to try to defend the Class SS title they won with a 61-6 win over Valley Regional.



"We were in such a hard place, we were 3-4, you had to look at yourself and work hard," Gilbert said. "For us to get to this point, it is incredible. It is so much more rewarding when you have a slump and you get out of it."

Watertown (7-6) also had to battle to earn a playoff spot. The decision to go for two points and take the lead by Watertown coach Shawn Stanco was applauded by his players.

"Coach is a stud for going for it," said Aiden Arline, who had a 60-yard scoring run in the first half and finished with 86 yards on seven carries to go with three catches for 38 yards. "We did the same thing at Holy Cross but we decided to kick instead and we didn't make it so let's go for it."

Cole Peterson led Barlow with 56 yards on 15 carries and also delivered a couple of huge hits on defense while Dylan Taylor rushed for 46 yards and Bishop added 45 yards. Barlow joins New Canaan and North Haven as the only teams to successfully defend its 2022 championship.

"I think it is a testament to them and how hard they worked all year," Barlow coach TJ Cavaliere said. "Obviously, your hats are off to Watertown, I thought they played a phenomenal game. Our kids dug down and made a play at the right time and that is a testament to all the work they put in."



Barlow 21, Watertown 20
(At East Hartford)

Watertown 0 14 0 6-20

Barlow 0 7 14 0-21

Second Quarter

B-Jack Gilbert 1 run (Keane Horne kick) 7:23

W-Aiden Arline 60 run (Samuel Paoletto kick) 5:52

W-Brayden Gambee 2 run (Paoletto kick) 0:19

Third Quarter

B-Luke Bishop 17 run (Horne kick) 7:51

B-Gilbert 1 run (Horne kick) 4:08

Fourth Quarter

W-Arline 12 run (run failed) 1:38

Rushing

Watertown - Aiden Arline 7-86, Brayden Gambee 12-74;

Barlow - Cole

Peterson 15-56, Dylan Taylor 9-46, Luke Bishop 4-45, Jack

Gilbert

11-41, Scott Romano 6-39

Passing

Watertown - Gambee 8-13-1 55; Barlow - Gilbert 0-1-0 0

Receiving

Watertown - Arline 3-38, Adam Hassinger 3-11

Team Records: Watertown 7-6, Barlow 9-4