

Defense Rises to Challenge in Sunset Showdown

By **Steve Galluzzo** - September 18, 2025



Safety Demare Dezeurn returns the last of his three interceptions for a touchdown in the final minute Friday, September 12, at Brentwood.

Photos by Steve Galluzzo

By STEVE GALLUZZO | Sports Editor

For the last two years the Palisades Charter High School football team has been known for its explosive offense. Last Friday, September 12, however, it was the defense which came through in the clutch to secure a 49-34 victory over Brentwood in the teams' annual Sunset Showdown.

It was the first win in three tries against his former squad for Dolphins head coach Dylen Smith, who was given a hug by his mentor Jake Ford in the handshake line after a spirited effort that saw Palisades improve to 3-4 in a Westside series that started in 2018.

After intercepting two passes in the first half, one of which he returned for a touchdown that was subsequently called back on a penalty, safety Demare Dezeurn saved his most electrifying play for last, picking off a

deflected ball at around the Dolphins' 25 and racing untouched to the end zone for the clinching score with 43 seconds left.

"After the first two I knew I had to get one more for the guys," said the junior transfer from Bishop Alemany, who had verbally committed to Oklahoma three days before. "I play both ways so I wanted to show it on defense today. The last one was a tipped ball ... I broke outside and took it all the way. All glory to God."

Dezeurn's pick six cemented the victory, but only after Tavian Talbert preserved it by tackling Eagles quarterback Ben Mikail shy of the goal line on a two-point conversion attempt. If successful that would have tied the score 36-36 with 2:51 remaining.

"I saw it was a broken play and the dude that I was supposed to guard wasn't running a route so I spied on the quarterback and slammed him to the ground," said Talbert, who moments later recovered a loose ball on the ensuing onside kick. "I don't take any team lightly. It feels good beating them on their own field because last year they beat us on ours."



Palisades players celebrate as the clock runs out to end the seventh annual Sunset Showdown. The Dolphins prevailed 49-34.

Last season, Mikail scrambled nine yards for the decisive touchdown in double overtime at Stadium by the Sea—Brentwood's third consecutive win in the series. This time he had scoring passes to Dean Pretlow and Kaymon Jackson; Robert Sullivan and Enzo Longhi each ran for a score and Kruz Jackson scored on a 70-yard punt return for the Eagles (2-2).

Jack Thomas threw three touchdowns passes—two to King Demethris and the last to Malachi Ross that covered 41 yards with 2:23 left—and increased his season totals to 994 yards and 14 touchdowns with zero interceptions through three games.

Harrison Carter ran for 59 yards and a touchdown, had three receptions for 36 yards, and scored on an 85-yard kickoff return in the third quarter for Palisades (3-0).

A snap over the punter's head led to a safety. Deveron Kearney capped the Dolphins' subsequent drive with a 14-yard run that increased their lead to 36-21 midway through the fourth quarter.

Skyler Walters, Nico Townsley and Enzo Allen each had nine tackles. Talbert, Aidan Wilson-Turner and Michael Tobin made eight tackles apiece. Tobin added two sacks and Augie Evans had one.

Sophomore kicker Carter Schwartz converted five of six extra-points in his varsity debut.

“No lead is safe in a rivalry game ... we learned that lesson last time we were here,” Smith said, referring to the 2023 game in which Palisades led by 10 points at intermission only to get blanked in the second half. “I got really nervous when they scored on that punt return. Malachi’s touchdown wasn’t a designed play but Jack bought time with his legs and Malachi happened to get free downfield.”

Smith, a quarterback himself at Santa Monica High in the mid-1990s, was an assistant for nine years under Ford at Brentwood before taking over at Palisades, where he has won 21 of 27 games so far. Last fall the Dolphins set a program record for points in a season (582), averaging 41.6 per game. They are on pace to better that in 2025, averaging 48.3 points in their first three games.

“Last season we didn’t utilize our best athletes on both sides of the ball enough,” Smith said. “Demare is a gifted athlete who can affect a game in multiple ways so we want him out there on every play. I told the kids if we put up 50 points week in and week out we’ll be in good shape.”

Sunset Showdown Results

Year	Score	Site
2018	Brentwood 14, Palisades 13	Brentwood
2019	Palisades 21, Brentwood 13	Palisades
2020	Game canceled (COVID-19)	
2021	Palisades 42, Brentwood 24	Brentwood
2022	Brentwood 28, Palisades 21	Palisades
2023	Brentwood 43, Palisades 24	Brentwood
2024	Brentwood 33, Palisades 30 (2 OT)	Palisades
2025	Palisades 49, Brentwood 34	Brentwood

Palisades’ JV squad fell to Brentwood 29-6 on Thursday, September 11, to drop to 1-3 and has this week off. The varsity travels to Woodland Hills to take on El Camino Real on Friday night, September 19. Kickoff is at 7 p.m.

The Royals are off to a 2-2 start with home wins versus Knight and Panorama and road losses to Grace and Heritage Christian.