

Great Escapes

By **Steve Galluzzo** - October 23, 2025



Jack Thomas tosses one of his five touchdown passes against Venice. He completed 25 of 43 passes for a career-high 473 yards.

Photos by Steve Galluzzo

Pali High Football Poised to Win League Title after Dramatic Victories over Venice and University

By STEVE GALLUZZO | *Sports Editor*

Seven nights after outscoring Venice in an offensive shootout the Palisades High varsity football team found itself locked in a defensive stalemate against University and, for a second straight game, it took a heroic effort to preserve a two-point victory last Friday night on homecoming at Santa Monica College.

The Dolphins were clinging to a 19-17 lead when the visitors marched all the way to the five-yard line with 90 seconds left. The Wildcats lost three yards on a first-down run and on the next snap the quarterback was chased out of the pocket, got hit by two defenders, and fumbled. Adrian Romero scooped up the loose ball and sprinted to midfield before being dragged to the turf with 49 seconds left.

“I was so tired... I missed the sack but I saw my guys knock the ball out,” a jubilant but exhausted Romero said. “I saw the ball fly out of his hand, I picked it up and ran for my life.”

Having lost to the Dolphins 15 times in a row dating back to 2008, University was supposed to be easy pickings but the result was proof that anything can happen on the gridiron.

“We got very lucky and when you watch the film you’ll see why,” said third-year head coach Dysten Smith, who is now 26-6 overall and 11-1 in league play since taking over in 2023. “We can’t settle for this. Come to practice ready to work on Monday.”

Coming off a career-defining performance against Venice in which he threw for 473 yards and five touchdowns, quarterback Jack



Malachi Ross leaps for a sideline grab against University.



Lineman Liam Hudson leads the charge onto the field Friday.

Thomas struggled to find a rhythm against University, connecting on 17 of 31 attempts, throwing an interception and losing a fumble. However, he also tossed a pair of 19-yard touchdown passes—the first to Demare Dezeurn midway through the second quarter and the second to Malachi Ross with 8:01 left in the fourth quarter that wound up being the game-winner. Dezeurn also scored on an 18-yard reverse to give Palisades its first lead, 7-3, in the first quarter. Ross had eight catches for 107 yards.

Despite an “off” night, Thomas upped his season totals to 2,392 yards with 30 touchdowns and only three interceptions.

University (6-2, 1-2) sacked Thomas on fourth-and-goal late in the third quarter, then took a 17-13 early in the fourth on a 75-yard run by Kamari Jones.

Linebacker Enzo Allen, whose interception near the 50-yard line with 10 seconds remaining sealed the Dolphins’ 56-54 win at Venice, wreaked havoc Friday to the tune of 18 tackles. Skyler Walters had 14, Romero and Nico Townsley had 13 apiece, Tavian Talbert had 12 and Chean Flowers and Augie Evans each had 11. Gabe Golub knifed through the line to block a 22-yard field goal try early in the second half that was crucial to the outcome.

Receiver Go Moriya jogs back to the huddle after catching a pass for a first down versus Venice in a game that had seven lead changes.

Palisades (8-0, 3-0) stayed on track for an Open Division playoff berth and can clinch at least a share of the Western League title with a victory at fifth-place Hamilton on Friday. The Dolphins will close out the regular season Oct. 30 versus Fairfax at SoFi Stadium. The game will kick off at 6 p.m.

The 59th and latest matchup between Palisades and Venice was one of the best ever. Dezeurn had three touchdown catches and scored on a 48-yard interception return. The teams combined for 1,168 yards from scrimmage and 55 first downs.

Demare Dezeurn returns an interception 48 yards for a touchdown in the Dolphins’ 56-54 league victory at Venice on October 10.