

65 Years of Red Devils Football

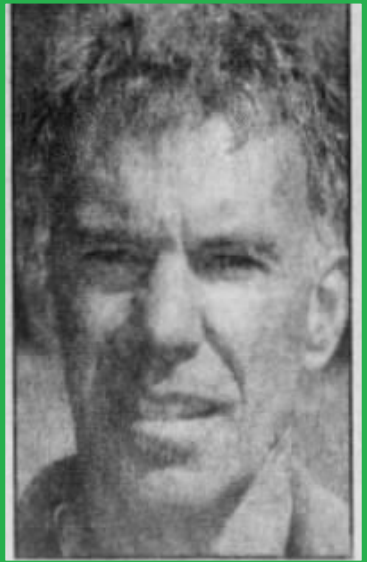
1961



2026

A NEW ERA BEGINS

**Ridge expects
Falato as coach**



After Ridge captured its first state championship in 1987, Coach Bush retired and the program entered a period of transition. In 1991, Tom Falato took the reins, beginning a new era and laying the foundation for future success.

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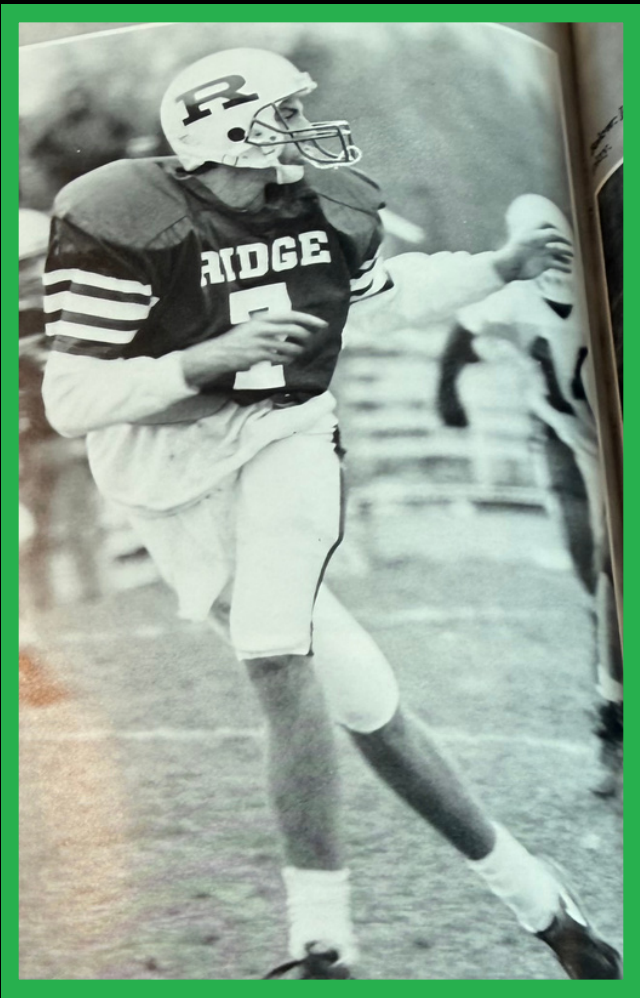


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A WINNING START

1991

Ridge	Opponent
35	Newark Central 12
7	Immaculata 10
21	North Plainfield 13
27	Manville 21
9	Dayton 28
28	Roselle 12
9	Governor Livingston 0
27	Middlesex 13
14	Hillside 6



- Ridge finishes **6–3** in Coach Falato’s first season.
- Defense allows just **12 points per game**.
- A strong foundation was laid for the years ahead.

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GROWING PAINS

1992-1994

Central rallies past Ridge

Ridge errors boost Hillside to big victory

Immaculata blanks Ridge to maintain streak

HILLSIDE — For the Ridge High School football team, the 1993 season has been one with few bright spots.

- 1992 and 1993 tested Ridge as Coach Falato rebuilt the program.
- By 1994, the Red Devils showed clear signs of progress despite a 3-6 record.
- The 1994 yearbook called it Ridge's most successful season since Coach Falato took over.

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THE RISE OF RIDGE

1995-1999

Diversified attack carries Ridge over Roselle Park

Dial throws for 216 yards, two touchdowns as Red Devils open with easy win.

By JERRY CARINO
Staff Writer

ROSELLE PARK — The Ridge High School football team picked up the 1995 season where it left off in 1994 — in the air.

On their first play from scrimmage in Friday's opener against Roselle Park, the Red Devils sported four wide receivers and had quarterback Erik Dial in the shotgun formation. It was a precursor of things to come, as Dial racked up 216 passing yards and two touchdowns in a 37-7 victory over Roselle Park.

This addition of the 'Air Devils' has a twist — they can also run the ball. Senior tailback John Carola managed 75 yards and two touchdowns on 12 carries.

"With this offense, the running game helps out tremendously," Dial said. "It's a lot easier with a good run-

RIDGE	37
ROSELLE PARK	7

ning back because they're not dropping eight guys back to defend against me throwing the ball."

Carola ran three times on Ridge's first possession and reached the end zone on a 3-yard sweep around left end. It would be the only score of the first quarter.

"We're really a passing offense," said Carola, who also caught two passes for 45 yards and a touchdown. "They said the field was fine, so I didn't think I'd be running this much. But they kept calling my number, and I had great downfield blocking."

Dial took to the air in the second quarter. He fired his best pass of the night — a 15-yard missile to his favorite target, Rob Falato — to give the Devils a 13-0 lead with 10:10 left in the half.

"Our quarterback made tremendous reads and was able to throw the ball very well," said Ridge coach Tom Falato.

Ridge broke the game open on the next play. When Roselle Park quarterback Anthony Gabriele lofted a screen pass in traffic, Red Devil cornerback Mark Ayzenberg stepped in front of the receiver and raced 43 yards with the interception. His touchdown gave Ridge command, 21-0, going into halftime.

In the second half, Carola continued to run wild. He swept around left end for a 17-yard touchdown to conclude Ridge's first possession.

"We expected to mix him in as superback and receiver," Dial said of Carola. "But he ran so smoothly, we kept him in there."

A 47-yard pass from Dial to Falato, who caught five passes for 75 yards, set up that score.

Eight minutes later, Carola applied the icing to the cake with a spectacular 37-yard fingertip catch of a Dial

"With this offense, the running game helps out tremendously. It's a lot easier with a good running back because they're not dropping eight guys back to defend against me throwing the ball."

Erik Dial
Ridge quarterback

toss. He zig-zagged around two defenders on his way to the end zone.

"We're still a passing team, obviously," coach Falato said. "But when the defense gives us the run, we'll take it. Carola's a tough runner. Running the ball is one of our goals for this year."

Ridge's defense also played well, sacking Gabriele four times and forcing three Roselle Park turnovers.

Other receivers who had big games for Ridge included Jeff Burns, who hauled in three passes for 53 yards, and Ayzenberg, who grabbed three balls for 39 yards.

"That's standard for Ridge," coach Falato said of the many receivers who were involved in the offense. "When you throw five receivers out there, they're a pretty group to stop."

Big second half lifts Red Devils

Ridge rolls past Gov. Livingston

- 1995: Winning season (6-3)
- 1996: Another winning season (6-3)
- 1997: MVC Champions (8-1), first conference title in a decade
- 1998: Another winning season (7-3), offense averaged over 30 points per game
- 1999: Finished 7-3, extending Ridge's streak to five consecutive winning seasons

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STARS OF THE 1990S

Ed Esposito

- Rushed for over **1,000 yards**
- One of Ridge's **premier running backs** of the 1990s
- Helped lead Ridge's return to winning football

Esposito helps Ridge raise its play

The Ridge file

PLAYER TO WATCH: Ed Esposito, senior running back. Esposito burst onto the scene with 200-yard game early last year and was consistent throughout.

**Esposito
powers
Ridge**



**Esposito runs
past 1,000 yds.
as Ridge rolls**

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STARS OF THE 1990S

Erik Dial

- Completed **163 passes** for **2,333 yards** and **23 touchdowns**
- Rewrote Ridge's **passing record**
- Helped lead Ridge to the **1997 MVC Championship**

Dial, Ridge shoot down Roselle Park

Dial completed 17 of 24 passes for 232 yards and two TDs to power Ridge past Gov. Livingston, 39-7, yesterday in Basking Ridge.

Erik Dial

School: Ridge

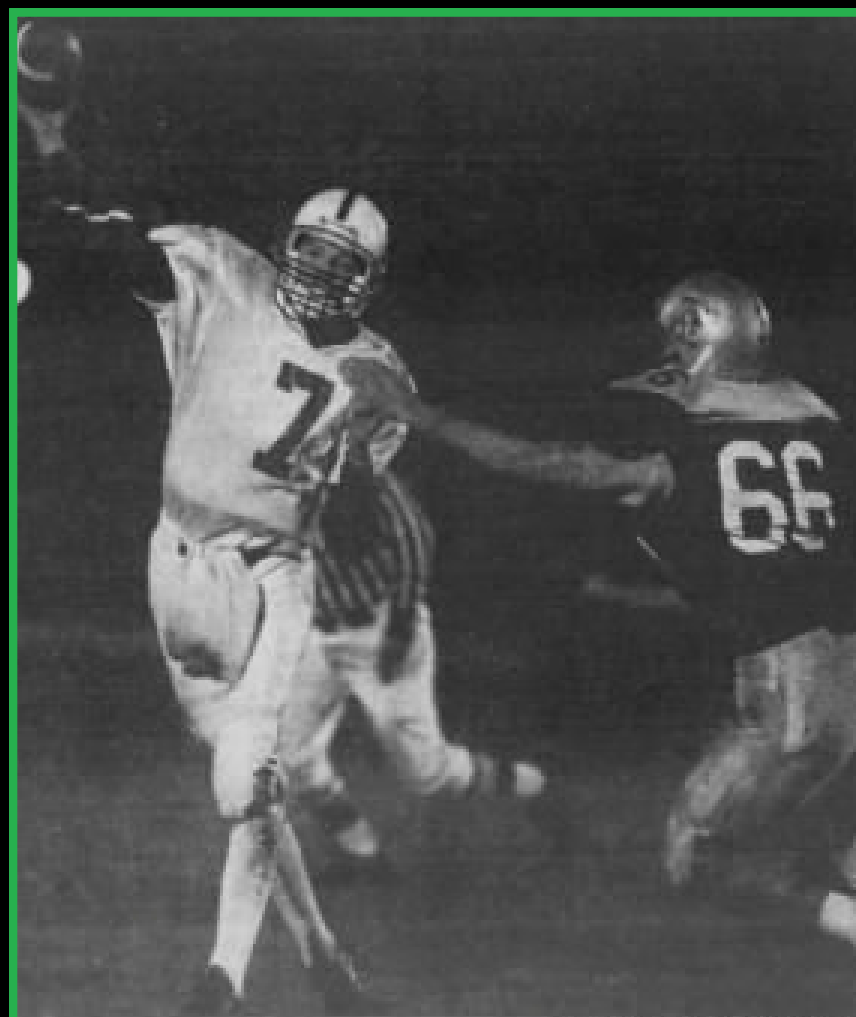
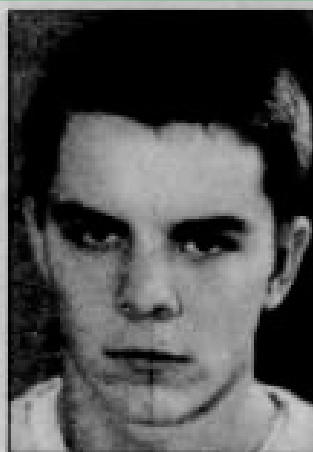
Position: Back

Size: 6-2, 175 pounds

Class: Junior

Key statistics: Completed 163 of 309 passes for 2,333 yards and 23 touchdowns.

Summary: Ridge (7-3) won five of its last six with Dial directing a potent passing attack that included junior wide receivers Rob Falato, Mark Ayzenberg and John Carola. "Erik has a great arm and excellent vision," said coach Tom Falato. "He has the ability to pick out his second and third receivers."



Courier-News photo by Ed Murray
Ridge quarterback Erik Dial (7) gets this pass off despite pressure from Immaculata's Jim Gabriel Monday night.

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STARS OF THE 1990S

Bert Watts

- Scored **25 TDs** as a senior
- Helped lead Ridge to the **1997 MVC Championship**
- Excelled at quarterback, running back, wide receiver, and safety

Watts leads Ridge, 60-0

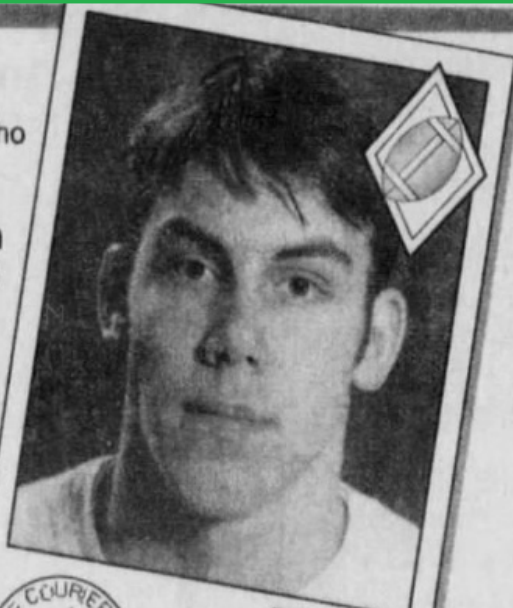
Watts, Stout propel Ridge by Immaculata

WATTS: Doing it all

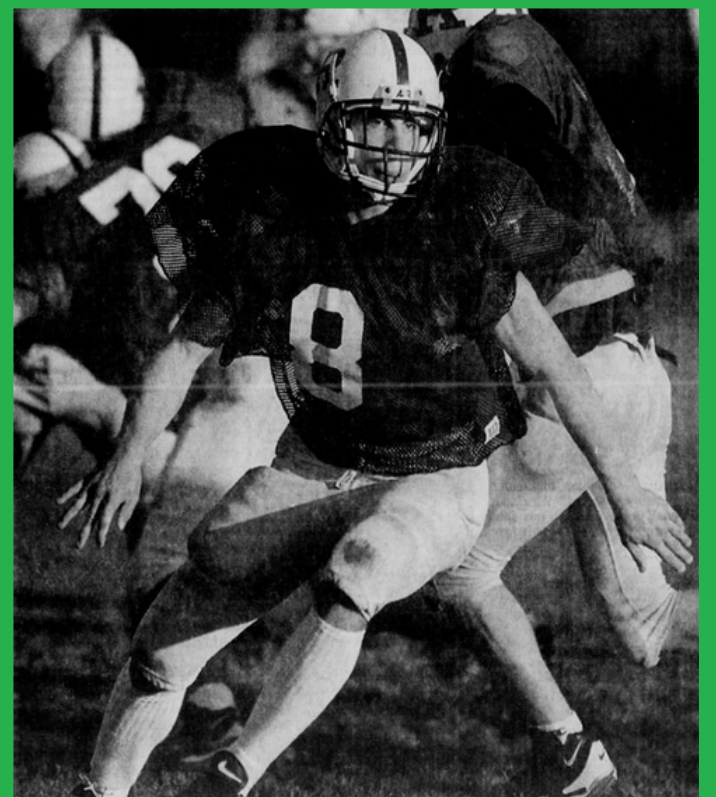
YEAR: Senior. **HEIGHT:** 6-1. **WEIGHT:** 190.
POSITION: Halfback.
FAVORITE ATHLETE: His father, Richard, who played football at San Jose State.

Season Highlights: Watts scored both Ridge touchdowns as the Red Devils beat Immaculata, 14-13. He led Somerset County in scoring with 150 points, recording 25 touchdowns. He also starred on defense, returning an interception for a touchdown in a 38-6 win over Bound Brook.

Career highlights: Watts led Ridge to an 8-1 record, the best in school history. The Red Devils also won the Mountain Valley Conference Valley Division title.



BERT WATTS
Ridge



Courier-News photo by Kenny Pa...

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STARS OF THE 1990S

Joey Stout

- 42.6-yard punting average
- 60% of kickoffs resulted touchbacks
- All-Somerset
- placekicker as a junior
- Helped lead Ridge to the 1997 MVC Championship

Watts, Stout spark Ridge by Immaculata

Joey Stout

School: Ridge

Position: Punter

Size: 6-1, 190 pounds

Class: Senior

Key statistics: 42.6 punting average, two field goals

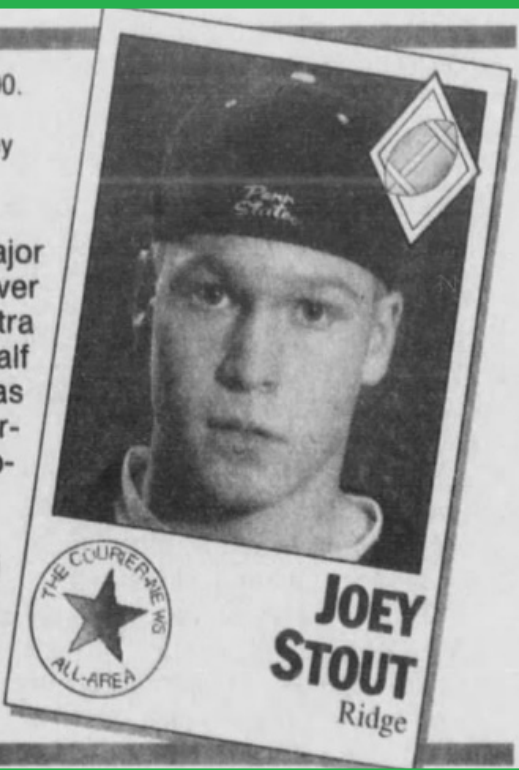
Summary: Sixty percent of Stout's kicks went for touchbacks this season. Stout, the All-Somerset placekicker as a junior, would like to continue his career at an Atlantic 10 college or Rutgers.



YEAR: Junior. HEIGHT: 6-1. WEIGHT: 190.
POSITION: Punter.
FAVORITE ATHLETE: Mets shortstop Rey Ordenez.

Season Highlights: Stout was a major player in the team's 14-13 win over Immaculata. He converted both extra point attempts, opened the second half by kicking an onside kick that was recovered by Ridge. That led to a scoring drive. He also made an interception to seal the victory.

Career highlights: Stout, who had a 42.6 punting average and two field goals, saw 60 percent of kicks go for touchbacks.



PUNTER/KICKER

#1 JOE STOUT

Ridge, 6-0, 190, Sr.: Made 19-of-21 conversions last season and averaged 41.6 yards per punt.

2. JASON KRIEGER, Westfield 5-11, 150, Sr.
3. ERIC AKERBLUM, New Prov. 6-0, 160, Jr.
4. MIKE DOLIDA, Bridgewater 5-11, 165, Jr.
5. BRIAN BUCHANAN, Somerville 6-0, 170, Sr.
6. DARRYL KENNEDY, Plainfield 6-2, 200, Jr.
7. JEFF SMITH, Gov. Livingston 6-2, 170, Sr.
8. RICH CARR, Hunterdon Central 6-0, 185, Jr.
9. JASON ROMAN, Middlesex 6-1, 209, Sr.
10. BOBBY GEIEGER, Immaculata 5-11, 170, Sr.



Courier-News photo by Kenny Pang
Joe Stout had seven punts downed within the opponents' 10 last year.

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THE 1990S:

A DECADE OF RENEWAL

The foundation was in place for an even bigger achievement in the years ahead.

Next stop...

2003