

By Steve Hare

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On a stage built for Ohio's best, **Jake LaVerde** made sure his final game stood out.

The Kirtland standout capped his high school career with MVP honors in the Ohio North-South All-Star Football Classic, helping lead the North squad in the Divisions IV–VII game at Paul Brown Tiger Stadium to a hard-fought 14-14 overtime tie.

And it didn't come easy.

"We were down 14-0 right away," LaVerde said. "We couldn't get anything going early. But once we settled in, we just kept grinding."

The South struck quickly with touchdowns on its first two drives, putting the North in an early hole. But from that point on, the game flipped.

The North defense clamped down, holding the South scoreless the rest of the way, while the offense found its rhythm behind LaVerde's leadership.

A 75-yard touchdown strike from LaVerde to **Trevor Baxter** (Columbus Grove) ignited the comeback, and Cardinal Mooney's **Ike Lake** powered in the equalizer to knot the game at 14-14 and force overtime.

From there, the momentum belonged to the North.

After a key interception in overtime, LaVerde took control of the game with a punishing stretch on the ground.

"I ran the ball six straight times down to the one-yard line," he said.

Facing fourth-and-one, the North turned to a potential game-winning field goal, but the ending had one final twist.

The kick attempt never got off cleanly—the kicker struck the center with the ball on the attempt, ending the game in a tie after just one overtime period.

“It was a weird ending,” LaVerde said. “Their whole team was celebrating like they won, and we were upset because we felt like we had it.”

Even without a win, LaVerde’s performance left no doubt.

He finished with roughly 20 carries, a touchdown pass, multiple defensive stops while rotating at outside linebacker and strong safety, and the steady presence that helped fuel the North’s comeback—earning MVP honors in the process.

Still, what stood out most wasn’t the stat line.

“It was awesome,” LaVerde said. “Just being around all those guys all week—practice, meals, hanging out—it felt like we’d known each other way longer than a few days.”

That connection showed up when it mattered most.

“You could tell we had something going,” he said. “We had all the momentum.”

Now, LaVerde turns the page.

He’ll continue his academic career at Ohio State University, majoring in business finance, bringing his football journey to a close after one final, memorable performance on one of Ohio’s most iconic stages.

Not every ending is clean.

But few are this unforgettable.