

Rice was a Cinderella champ

By JOHN BOZZO

It was a typically hot, muggy August day one year ago.

After winding up his second practice session of the day, Brother Rice coach Al Fracassa began assessing his team's chances for the upcoming 1977 campaign.

On paper there wasn't much to be optimistic about. There were seven returning lettermen from a team which finished 5-3 overall and 3-2 in Catholic League action.

In addition to the inexperience there was a lack of size. Only one lineman tipped the scales over 200 pounds.

Perhaps it was his training as a player

under former Michigan State University head coach Duffy Daugherty who was famous for always building up his team's chances, but instead of making excuses, Fracassa praised his team.

"I like to talk positively," Fracassa said. "Sometimes you become what you think of yourself. If you visualize yourself winning, you'll probably win. We're going to try to win them all."

And win them all they did. Nine consecutive victories, including a Catholic League title. After that there were three state playoff triumphs and a Class A state championship.

FRACASSA ALSO predicted his team would be exciting. He was right about that too.

The leading excitement maker was 6-3, 183-pound quarterback Jon English, who returns for his senior year this fall. English received first team all-state honors for his exploits.

His favorite passing target was Marty Martinez, a 6-2, 155-pound end who returns this fall for his third year as a starter.

They put the ball in the air often, which always creates a lot of excitement. However, after awhile it wasn't the number of passes thrown, but when they did the throwing which caused the stir.

Rice was trailing Lake Shore in the semi-final game when the team came face-to-face with a fourth down with one yard to go for a first down. Fracassa surprised everyone by having English pass to Martinez for five yards and a first down.

"Now," Fracassa said, "no one will know what I'm going to do."

In the quarterfinal game, one week earlier, Michael Haffey made the big plays. Although only a 5-9, 170-pound defensive back, Haffey had two punt returns of 48 and 49 yards respectively. He also inter-



Orchard Lake St. Mary's dominated every opponent

By JOHN BOZZO

When Orchard Lake St. Mary's finally reached the Class C State Championship football game, the question wasn't whether they would win, but only by how much would they win.

Orchard Lake's Eaglets not only won all 12 games, the Catholic League and Class C state championship, but they won big.

On offense the Eaglets averaged 40 points per game. Defensively, Orchard Lake held opponents to an average of six points per game. That's an average winning margin of 34 points.

Looming as the potent force in every victory was everyone's all-state pick, Jim Paciorek. Now on a football scholarship at the University of Michigan, Paciorek played quarterback and defensive safety.

He made Orchard Lake's old-fashioned wing-T offense click. Whenever his teammates in the backfield were stopped, Paciorek would slip around end or power up the middle for a first down.

Paciorek was equally adroit in the air ways, passing whenever he wanted to because the Eaglets were never in trouble.

WELL, THERE was just once when the pressure was on. Orchard Lake's only close game was the first of three state playoff games.

Royal Oak Shrine was the heavy favorite to beat St. Mary's. This put the Eaglets, under coach Art Paddy, in the underdog role for the first time all season.

Late in the Shrine game, Barry Riddick scored a touchdown from three yards away which gave Orchard Lake a slim 18-13 lead.

Paciorek added two more points to that gap when he completed the crucial points after touchdown pass to Robert Carlini.

Not to be denied, Shrine came back to score a touchdown of its own and trailed 20-19. The Royal Oak team failed in an attempt for the two-point conversion which would have netted them the victory.

Again it was Paciorek, along with teammate Gregory Williamson, who made the big play. They knocked the intended receiver out of bounds.

Paciorek had covered the defensive secondary like a rug. He was in on 15 first hits and kept the ball out of the end zone twice.

At quarterback, Paciorek completed five of six passes for 61 yards and rushed for 42 yards on 13 carries.

PACIOREK'S PERFORMANCE impressed the next Eaglet opponent, Lake

Michigan Catholic, in the semi-final game.

"Our scouts came back and said that Polish quarterback of theirs does everything but sell popcorn at halftime," said Lake Michigan Catholic head coach Terry Rose.

Lake Michigan Catholic billed its team as a bunch of "street fighters." There's an old football story about good street fighters who can't play good football. Orchard Lake won in a laugher, 59-8.

In the championship game, Orchard

Lake humbled Iron River-West Iron County, 48-12.

Orchard Lake's Eaglets taught the Lake Michigan Catholic "street fighters" a lesson in football without the benefit of a scouting report.

After the season Art Paddy resigned from coaching. He indicated then that the turning point in the season was his team's 20-19 win over Royal Oak Shrine.

"We never realized how good we were," Paddy said.



Jim Paciorek, Orchard Lake St. Mary's all-state quarterback, led the Eaglets to a Class C football title last year. (Staff photo)

cepted one pass and batted down another toss that seemed a sure long-gainer. In addition, Haffey was second on the Rice tackle charts with eight that day.

Showing off a punting game which was as good as the Detroit Lions had last year, Ed Lynch hit punts of 48 and 49 yards in that quarterfinal game.

WHEN THE CHAMPIONSHIP game against Portage Central rolled around, Fracassa pulled out all the stops.

Trailing by one touchdown and faced with a fourth and five at the Portage 49 yard line, Lynch lined up to punt, but he never touched the ball. Matt O'Connor received the snap from center and raced 35 yards for a first down. He scored off tackle on the next play.

A few plays after the fake punt Lynch did get a chance to kick the ball. And kick he did, a 69-yard boot, which Portage coach Bob Knight said took the wind out of his team's sails.

Rice took a 10-7 lead on Brian Swanson's 27-yard field goal. Joe Fontanesi's five yard run made the final score 17-7.

Still, probably the most exciting game of the season was a 9-6 come-from-behind victory over Detroit Catholic Central in the annual Boys' Bowl trophy game.

Rice trailed 6-0 from the first quarter until the final three minutes of the game. English had engineered a touchdown drive which tied the score, but Rice had failed in a try for the two point conversion.

After forcing Catholic Central to punt, Rice's English led the team on another march. With 19 seconds left to play, Swanson booted a 33-yard field goal off the frozen turf to ice a Warrior victory.

There could be more of the same in store for Rice fans this season. The Warrior passing combinations return this fall, as well as the kicking game.

In addition, Rice's freshmen posted an perfect 9-0 record, outscoring opponents 288-28.

Our Cover

Coach Al Fracassa and members of last year's Class A state champions from Birmingham Brother Rice proudly display their trophy after defeating Portage Central in the finals at the Pontiac Silverdome last November. (Staff photo by Dick Kelley).