

Class A grid playoff features SMA powers

By DENNIS O'CONNOR

You could see the excitement in his eyes.

Although he realizes his football team is one of the luckiest state qualifying squads in the history of the playoffs, coach John Finlayson couldn't help but speak confidently as his unpredictable and always exciting Blue Jays prepare for a quarterfinal action against league rival Hazel Park.

"I know we're going to give 120 percent," said the Jays' coach about the Southeastern Michigan Association rematch which starts at 1:30 p.m. Saturday at Pontiac's Wiser Stadium.

"It won't be because we're not going

to try. Our kids don't give up. There's pride and determination going on both sides."

Southfield, 8-1, is the surprise Class A team to join the elite eight in the chase for the state title. The Jays, no better than fifth in their region going into the final week of action, saw three of the four teams ahead of them lose their final games — opening the gate for their "second season."

This marks the first time over in the five-year history of the playoffs that two teams from the same league qualify for the post-season event. Hazel Park, also 8-1, was the only team to defeat Southfield during the season, as both squads finished first and second,

respectively, in the SMA.

Finlayson downplays the revenge factor of this game, although he would like to erase the memory of that 21-14 setback on the seventh week of the season.

His first concern, however, is getting his team physically ready for the game.

Quarterback Pat Charette, who was originally hurt in the Hazel Park game and missed the second half because of bruised ribs, is now nursing a strained knee. He only saw action in overtime of the Jays' 22-21 victory over Southfield-Lathrup last Friday.

So Finlayson will use the extra day of a rest to his team's advantage.

"I don't think we've played very good ball the last few weeks," he said. "We've been playing hurt physically and mentally in the last few weeks."

"But now we've got a second chance to redeem ourselves."

THE JAYS have been billed all season as the "big play" team, characteristic of the way their offense has exploded and come back in many situations when they've been behind.

"That's why we've got the reputation of a big-play team. We're opportunistic, and we take advantage," the Southfield coach said.

"We've been criticized . . . about how we're the big-play team. We've

had to win four of five games (with the big play) and we've beaten some pretty good teams."

"The only team we've come up short (against) was Hazel Park, and I'm not so sure if Pat Charette was in there, if we would have come up short."

"He'll play — knowing him," Finlayson said about his quarterback's physical condition. "He's a super kid, and he's our leader. He sets the example, and that's why we've been so successful. He has mental and physical toughness."

The fact remains, however, that

Hazel Park dominated play against the Jays in the first meeting of the two schools.

And the Jays gave the Vikings one touchdown toward the end of the first half, fumbling on their own seven-yard line, setting up a go-ahead touchdown.

"We've got to control the ball better," Finlayson said. "They (Hazel Park) had 20 more plays (in the first game). We had only 13 plays at half-time, and we still should have gone in (at halftime) 7-7. Defensively, that was our poorest game."

It's Stevenson versus Niles

Livonia Stevenson football coach Jack Reardon has taken a low-key approach this week while preparing the Spartans for their clash with Niles 7:30 p.m. Friday in a Class A state playoff quarterfinal.

The game will be played at Shadford Field in Ypsilanti. To get there, take I-275 south to I-94 west. Get off I-94 at the Michigan Avenue Exit (181 B). Drive right on Michigan to Hewitt Road. Turn left on Hewitt Road and go to Packard. Go right on Packard one block to the field.

The Spartans, winners of eight games in a row after a season-opening loss, will match their 8-1 record against Niles 9-0.

"We're not changing anything,"

Reardon said of his week of preparation. "We don't want the kids to be all uptight. We're not going to do anything different. We want to have fun and to play a good football game. The season is over. This [playoff] is supposed to be a game."

Stevenson has not reached its peak this season, according to Reardon. In fact, the veteran coach says he isn't sure how long his charges can really perform.

"We're a good football team. I don't know how good we're going to be yet, but we're getting better all the time," said Reardon.

Just how good has Stevenson been?

Consider that the Spartans have won four consecutive Inter-Lakes League

championships. The have won 20 conference games in a row.

The '79 team set school records for most points in a single season (244), most yards rushing in a season (1,845) and most team interceptions in a season (20).

All of that was accomplished with the starters sitting out much of the time due to the one-sidedness of some of the scores.

The Spartans crushed Milford Lakeland 51-7, Waterford 38-13, Flint Northwestern 26-0, Farmington 37-6, and Livonia Churchill 37-7.

The average score of a Stevenson game this season was 27-8.

The Spartans have been led by David Hall, who plays quarterback and safety. Don Hauck has supplied the ball-carrying muscle at tailback. Cap Pethers and Rick Arnold have been favorite pass receivers of Hall.

Jack Snyder has set a school single-season pass interception record with eight.

Stevenson has proved itself on both sides of the scrimmage line.

"We've been playing awful good defense," said Reardon. "The reason our

rushing game is so good is that our defense has been so tough. Other teams haven't had the ball much. We've had good ball control."

As good as the Spartans are, they will have to be ready for a serious challenge from Niles, which has lost only one game during the last two seasons.

The Vikings are led by quarterback Ken Gourlay, who is a three-year regular. He has been injured, but is expected to start Friday.

Poncho Hankerson, Niles' tailback, has run for 1,041 yards this fall. He also throws on a halfback-option pass which the Vikings like to use in tight situations.

Hankerson has completed seven of eight throws and five have resulted in touchdowns.

Todd Zimmerman has caught 13 passes this season for 190 yards.

Niles, which uses the I-formation, is a run-oriented team.

Defensively, the Vikings line up in a 5-2. Two of their bigger defensive players are Kevin Knoll, a 6-1, 215-pound linebacker, and Don Rutkowski, a 6-2, 235-pound tackle.

CC playoff bound

The only thing the Catholic Central-Dearborn Fordson football playoff competition needs to be a Hollywood screenplay is for Frank Merriwell to win the game on a 107-yard interception after regulation time expires.

Everything else about the game is pure storybook.

The number one and two ranked teams in Class A will match forces Saturday at Birmingham Groves High School. Game time is 1:30 p.m. Groves is located on 13 Mile Road, just west of Evergreen Road.

For a tension-filled matchup, for a game with the utmost fan interest, and for just a sheer powerful pairing, you couldn't have written a better script than the Shamrocks vs. the Spartans.

The numbers tell it all. Fordson, 9-0, rated number one in Class A, (or number two, depending on who you talk to) outscored opponents 308-31. That's just the beginning.

It's always a football hotbed for the Tractors. Coach Charles Jestic has a super 61-14 overall record in his 10th year at the helm of Fordson. This year's crop of players is second to none.

The Tractors run a winged I-formation offense, which is spearheaded by senior tailback Eddie Guido. Guido, a three-year starter, scored an imposing 19 touchdowns and gained 1,035 yards. Blocking back Mike McGowan's 10 TD's were in the shadow on this team.

John Gross, a senior, is the quarterback. He had a pass-completion rate of 60 percent and threw for 11 touchdowns. His favorite target is end Dino Berri, a senior, who nabbed seven touchdowns passes.

Plowing out the holes on the line are tackle Randy Davis, another senior and three-year starter, and guard Alan Preis.

The defense allowed only one touch-

down pass all year. That occurred on the last play of the regular season against Dearborn Edsel Ford. Ron Hasen, Guido and McGowan man the secondary.

The key to Fordson's outstanding 5-2 defense is linebacker Steve Krumins, the leading defensive point getter for the Tractors. Nose-guard Mike Hardin gives Fordson its third three-year starter. Ends Mark Lytwyn and Mark Rowe are outstanding. Lytwyn led Fordson in quarterback sacks.

Of the aforementioned players, only McGowan and Lytwyn are juniors. The senior-laden team matches up perfectly with CC.

THE SHAMROCKS of coach Tom Mach are enjoying their best season in years. They are unbeaten in nine games.

Fresh off their first Catholic League championship in 19 years, the Shamrocks had to be up every week for a super tough schedule. Not much more can be pointed out about CC that hasn't already been said.

Beating Flint Southwestern, Ypsilanti, Bloomfield Hills Andover, Birmingham Brother Rice, Harper Woods Notre Dame and Detroit DeLaSalle was no small accomplishment.

The Shamrocks love to control the ball and the clock. Their offense is tops at grinding it out. Their defense has not been scored upon in the last four games.

Aaron Roberts, Mike Lewis, Pat Moug, Dave Yudasz and Tim Geran all won all-Catholic recognition. Roberts led CC rushers with 1,005 yards in '79. Lewis, a three-year starter at quarterback, is the heart and soul of Shamrock pride.

After the brutal schedule, Fordson is regarded as just another hurdle to the boys on Breakfast Drive.

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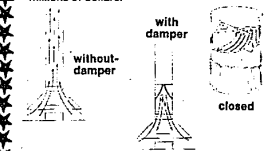
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