

# Grid semifinal: Battle of peninsulas

By DAVE SCHWARTZ

It will be much more than a football semifinal game when Livonia Stevenson meets Escanaba this Saturday at Lansing Sexton High School.

It will be a battle of the peninsulas. Seemingly half the upper peninsula will come down to Lansing to see coach Jerry Cvetogros's Escymos, the first team from the U.P. ever to make the playoffs in Class A or B.

Meanwhile, the city of Livonia will be psyched to see their Spartans continue a Cinderella quest for a state title. Game time Saturday will be 1:30 p.m.

J.W. Sexton High School is on the west side of Lansing. Take I-96 to Lansing and branch off at the I-495 exit. Take 496 to the Logan Street exit, then turn right. Go to Michigan Avenue and take a left. Sexton High School is seven blocks up on Michigan.

Maps can be obtained at Stevenson High School also.

NEITHER TEAM expected to be in such a lofty position earlier in the year.

Escanaba lost its third game of the year to Traverse City, before getting red hot.

The Escymos were the decided underdogs last week to an undefeated Grand Blanc team in the quarterfinals.

Led by sensational quarterback Steve Smith, Grand Blanc jumped out to a huge lead early in the game. It ap-

peared to be no contest. But with a comeback that is already legend up north, Escanaba roared back for a heart-stopping 36-35 victory.

Spartan coach Jack Reardon led a party of four Stevenson scouts who were in attendance last week in Saginaw.

What did Reardon think?

"We were very impressed, not just with Escanaba, but with Grand Blanc. We felt that they were the best two teams that we had seen all year."

"The game was one of the most exciting that I had ever seen. They went back and forth, all day."

"We felt that the last team who had their hands on the ball would win. It was that kind of game."

"I'VE ONLY coached one other game like that ever," said Cvetogros, who, in an 18-year record of 122-31-3, has coached some big ones.

"That was back in 1973 when we came from way behind to win. We didn't consider it (Grand Blanc) an upset."

The U.P. is all aglow from the Escymos success. Escanaba is one of only three Class A schools in the whole U.P. The others are Marquette and Sault Ste. Marie.

"We play as many many Class A schools as possible within 300 miles," said Cvetogros. "We played five in all, this year. A lot of people say that we have an advantage in the playoff system, but it actually works out to be a disadvantage. We have to play a lot of

Class B and C schools."

Located on the Bay de Noc on the shores of Lake Michigan, just 55 miles away from the Wisconsin border and 70 miles southeast of Marquette, Escanaba will literally be a ghost town when the boys play Stevenson.

"I've never seen the U.P. band together like this," exclaimed Cvetogros. "We've got charter planes and charter busses going the 375 miles down to Lansing."

"When you have a game like this, it's much more than school against school. It's a battle between the areas."

"It's fun to represent an area that's as loyal and gung-ho as the U.P. All the college students at MSU and Central Michigan that are from the U.P. called and said that they'll be there, rooting us on."

The Escymos' only loss, to Traverse City, was really their turning point of the season. Even though Escanaba lost 29-14, they could have easily won.

"That game did much more good for us than harm," said Cvetogros. "Somewhere in that game we grew up as a team."

The Escymos had a different story when they played Green Bay West, who went to the finals in the Wisconsin state football playoffs for large schools in '78. Escanaba prevailed 34-0.

In all, the Escymos outscored their regular season opponents 288-70, including convincing defeats of their two biggest rivals, Sault Ste. Marie and Marquette. Sault Ste. Marie hasn't beaten the Escymos in 18 years.

Escanaba runs an I-formation offense, with two tight ends and a flanker.

Their tight-end-linebacker, Jeff Nault, is a killer. The 6-4, 220-pound senior was named the outstanding line-man in the U.P.

He was a one-man show against Grand Blanc, catching three touchdown passes and sacking QB Smith five times. Nault has caught 12 TD passes on the year.

Escymo quarterback Mike Beveridge is another standout.

Beveridge, one of 29 seniors on the experienced Escymos, completed 51 percent of his passes, good for 1300 yards and 23 touchdowns.

Fullback Chris Murray was Escanaba's leading ground gainer, with 886 yards and an average of 6.5 yards per carry.

Flanker Kevin Young is a speedster. He caught seven TD passes and ran punts back for two more scores. Young, at free safety and Nault anchor the Escymos' 5-3 defense.

ESCANABA MAY be the school that everybody is worried about, but the sleeper team of the whole state has to be Livonia Stevenson.

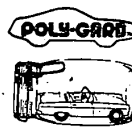
If anyone would have ventured to say, earlier in the year, that the Spartans would be in the semis, they would have gotten some disdainful looks.

But over the last six weeks, the Spartans have played as good as anybody in the state.

"The Niles game was a good ball-game," said Reardon. "But I think that this one is going to be a little better."

"Our preparations are not going to be any different. In fact in the last couple of weeks we've shortened up the practices a little bit."

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