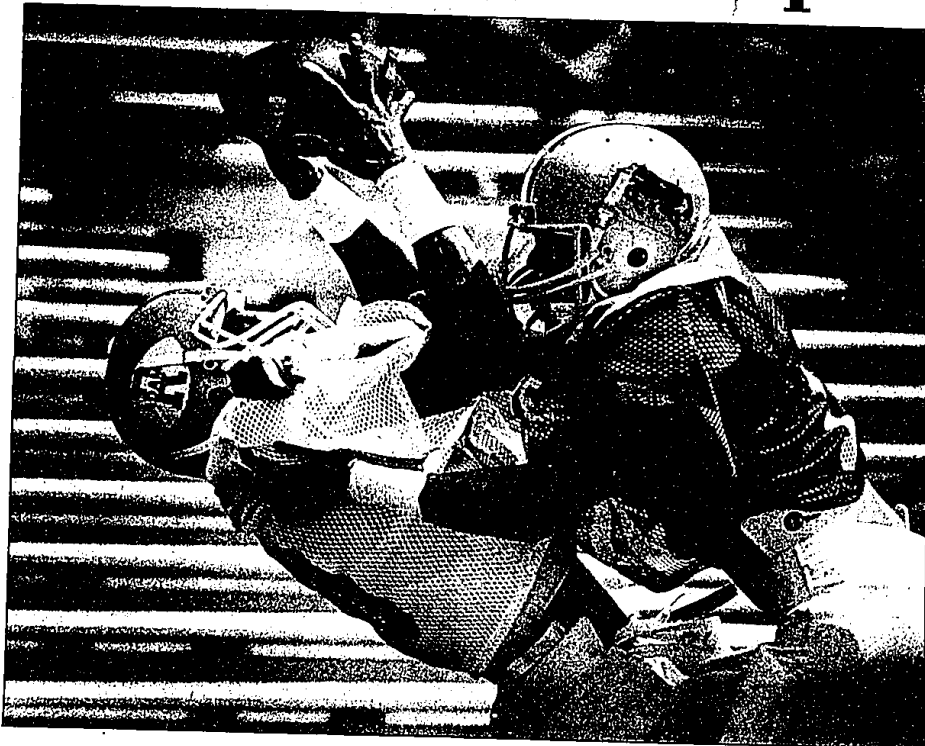


# All-Stars turn on sparse crowd



Rochester Adams' receiver Terry Allen hauls in an apparent 30-yard touchdown pass, but the play was nullified on an offensive interference call.

GARY CASKEY/staff photographer

By Chris McCooley  
staff writer

"Ladies and gentlemen, the attendance for the third annual High School Coaches Association All Star game... 5,708."

A queer alliance spread across spacious Spartan Stadium on the campus of Michigan State University in East Lansing after MSU sports information man John Pearson read off the day's attendance figures.

In the press box, several high school coaches lowered their heads. For the third straight year, their game — the showcase of Michigan high school football — had failed to win the support of the fans. It had again lost money.

The coaches were not pleased. They had put on a good show and nobody saw it. They put the best football players in the state on the same field and let them go at it. The result was an intense, exciting football game.

But, hardly anybody saw it.

"I WISH WE'D have had more people out there," said Livonia Franklin head coach and offensive coordinator for the East All-Stars, Armand Vigna. "The kids deserve it. I thought it was a great football game. It was a wide-open affair on both sides. There was a lot of passing, a lot of sacks. There were long kick-off returns. People would have enjoyed watching this game."

The East, led by the strong and accurate arm of Farmington Harrison quarterback Ken Kish, prevailed over its opponents from the West, 24-10.

Kish, who leaves next week for Albion College, completed six of 14 passes good for 191 yards and two touchdowns. Kish gained more yards passing than the West squad gained in total, 191-143.

The West took the opening kickoff and promptly marched down to the East 18-yard line before the East defense stiffened. After West quarterback Marcelle Carruthers of Lansing Easterns was sacked by Westland John Glenn's Jack Walker and Brother Rice's Mark Nicholas, Lance Loughman kicked a 45-yard field goal to stake the West to a 3-0 lead.

ROCHESTER ADAMS' split end Terry Allen, who didn't find out he was

playing in the game until a week before practices started, hauled in a 45-yard strike from Livonia Franklin quarterback Richard Popp to get the East offense moving. Allen was a last-minute substitute for Kevin Harris of Fordson.

Allen's catch set up a 15-yard touchdown run by Riverview fullback John Blackwell. Farmington Harrison kicker Dave Blackmer added the point after.

On the West's first play from scrimmage after the touchdown, DuWayne Pitts intercepted a Carruthers' pass. Five plays later, it appeared Allen had caught a 30-yard touchdown

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pass from Popp. The referee, however, ruled that Allen pushed off on the defender and the score was nullified.

Kish came in at the start of the second quarter and promptly turned the ball over to the West by fumbling a bad snap. On his next series Kish atoned for the mistake.

Kish, with the help of two outstanding catches by Dan Glidden from Owen-Gage, marched the East 80 yards in seven plays and capped it off by firing a 39-yard strike to Glidden. Blackmer hit the extra point and the East led 14-3 with 3:49 left in the half.

TWO PLAYS LATER, Pitts picked off his second pass of the half. That set the stage for the state's premier place-kicker Blackmer. From 44 yards out, the University of Wisconsin-bound kicker split the uprights with plenty of yardage to spare.

The next play alone was worth the price of admission. After his field goal, Blackmer kicked off to Dean Altobelli of the West. Altobelli handed the ball off on a reverse play to Glenn Smith and Smith zig-zagged 98 yards for an apparent touchdown. Unfortunately for the West, clipping was detected on the play and the score was nullified.

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Jim Hughes

## Change of site may be answer

"We're committed to it. It's just going to take a few years to get it going."

— Armand Vigna

**B**EFORE WE GET into the meat of this one, I want to make it clear that the Michigan High School Football Coaches Association should be commended for the work it has put into its annual all-star football game.

Those who questioned whether or not the game would fly seem convinced now that it can — evidenced by the exciting 24-10 East victory Saturday at the third all-star game in East Lansing. Gentlemen like MHSFA president Dick Harris and secretary-treasurer Don Lessner (to name just two), have put a great deal of time into staging the game, which showcases some of the best high school football players from the previous season.

The game should continue. That's all there is to it. But making it work is the problem with which the association is confronted. And when it has its annual meeting Nov. 30 to pick the regional football coaches of the year, it must make decisions as to how the game will make money.

THE BIGGEST enigma is finding a way to beef up the attendance for the games. In each of the three contests, attendance figures fell well below the number the coaches hoped to get. In 1981 at the inaugural game, approximately 7,000 were on hand to see the East pull out a 6-3 victory. The following year, about 7,300 fans showed up, and the coaches association was sacked for an \$8,000 loss.

This year, an even sparser crowd (5,708) saw the all-star game, and the association can expect an even bigger loss in the numbers column, since Lessner said it would take between 12,000-15,000 fans just to break even.

There have been a couple of suggestions for eliminating this problem. One is to get McDonald's to underwrite the cost of the game, thus lifting the burden off the coaches' backs. Proceeds — so far there hasn't been any — would go to support the Michigan Ronald McDonald House. Certainly the association isn't to blame for the lack of fan

support. Press releases far in advance give notice to media in the state. There's even a press day a week before the game. Hometown newspapers eat that stuff up, though the same isn't true with the dailies.

Another possible alternative is moving the site of the game from Michigan State University to a facility nearer the Detroit area where it's more populous. That's not to say MSU hasn't been a gracious enough host. It just seems people from the Detroit area are not willing to travel that far on a Saturday afternoon in August to watch an exhibition football game.

THAT WAS my number one concern when the game originated three years ago. The attendance figures since then reinforce my belief. Sunday, I bumped into my former high school coach — and Jack Bridges from Edsel Ford — and we got talking about the possibility of moving the game. Bridges was one of those coaches who was apprehensive about the game from the outset, but is all in favor now.

"As far as making it a financial success, they have to come to where the people are," Bridges said. "Now, arranging a facility, that's going to be a substantial block."

Akin to the "State's Great" bumper stickers, the coaches have discovered an overwhelming satisfaction with the facilities on the East Lansing campus. Everything is available to them — from dorm rooms and food commons to the practice facilities and Spartan Stadium.

"We get great cooperation from Michigan State," Lessner said. "They're first class all the way. We've had no problems, there's just not enough attendance."

Farmington Harrison head football coach John Herrington, who also is public relations director for the association, echoed Lessner's sentiments.

"MICHIGAN STATE is so good in giving us room and board (\$135 per athlete for 10 days), and I doubt we could get that somewhere else, but I don't know," Herrington said. "A move is possible, but it seems the on-site people support it more. I think unless

we get a sponsor to underwrite the game, we won't have a game."

Lessner also indicated outstate people are more supportive, and a move to the Detroit area isn't necessarily the answer.

"We have clinics for the coaches association, and our worst attendance is in the Detroit area," he said. "We've had them at Troy Athens and in Southfield, and there weren't very many coaches. Outstate coaches support them (the clinics) better."

Livonia Franklin coach Armand Vigna sees a move as a possible alternative, although he's not convinced a journey this way would solve the problem either.

"A move to a big center of population that's easier to get to possibly would help," Vigna said. "I have mixed feelings. Michigan State has treated us real nice. It's a nice place to play the game, but at the same time, you recognize you have to put people in the stands to make the game."

"DON'T FORGET the people from the western part of the state and the Upper Peninsula. A central location is fair. But if it means (moving the game) to continue it, I'd be for moving it."

My personal feeling is to give it a shot closer to the Detroit area. Possible alternatives would be Eastern Michigan University, the University of Michigan, or the Pontiac Silverdome. Eastern and U-M have the facilities, it's just a matter of making it economical for the association.

The Silverdome would cause some problems since the players would need room and board near Pontiac — and at that time, the Detroit Lions are stationed at Oakland University. Cranbrook may be the answer there, again — if it's affordable.

I certainly would hate to see this game go down the tubes. It's a great experience for the kids, and a fitting conclusion to their high school careers. It would be a shame to lose it, especially after all the hard work the coaches association has put into the game.

I wouldn't want to bet on the likelihood of a fourth all-star game. But I am willing to bet the association will do everything it can to preserve it.

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