

Shamrocks bank on a better season

By Brad Emmons
staff writer

A 5-4 season could be considered a decent year for most high school football teams — except at Redford Catholic Central.

The Shamrocks went into 1983 as the state's top-ranked team but finished the year with four defeats, due largely to numerous injuries and a murderous schedule.

CC had six starters out with injuries, including All-State pass guard Mark Messner, when Traverse City beat them in the season opener at the Pontiac Silverdome. Losses followed to Redford Bishop Borgess, Birmingham Brother Rice and Warren DeLaSalle (those teams had a combined record of 20-3).

"They rated us No. 1 early, but I think that hurt our character a little bit and we ignored the basics," said CC's

Tom Mach, who enters his ninth season as coach. "This season we're young, so it's kind of hard to diagnose. They practice hard and they're a very coachable team. They're dedicated and they'll come to play. They listen to instructions and they all want to learn."

BECAUSE OF INJURIES, CC was forced to play a lot of sophomores and juniors last season. That may have been a blessing in disguise for 1984.

CC, which lost three running backs in the early part of 1983 due to injuries, found a replacement in 6-foot-1, 200-pound Tom Bridenstine, who ended up leading the team in rushing.

Bridenstine now moves over to fullback to make room for 1-9, 170-pound sophomore Tim Lafferty at tailback.

"He's not big," said Mach of Lafferty, "but he has good cutting ability and he's strong."

"They (Bridenstine and Lafferty) are not great, but they're more versatile backs. We don't have anybody like Aaron Roberts (now at Michigan State) who was a breakaway threat, but they run and block well."

Last year's back-up quarterback, senior Todd Thomas (6-3, 200), is ready to direct the Shamrocks' ball control attack.

football

But Mach said his QB has the ability to throw, the main target being 6-4, 205-pound wide receiver Ron Wandell. The other pass-catching threat is senior Dan Logan.

"He (Wandell) is one of the better receivers I've seen," said the CC coach.

MACH BELIEVES "the consistency of the run opens up the pass." That means CC will rely on its linemen to get the job done.

The returnees include center Ed Turek (6-0, 190), a co-captain along with Bridenstine; Kelly Kroll (6-2, 235), tackle; and Nick Varajon (6-2, 230), junior guard.

CC's big line, however, may be overshadowed by kicker Tom Rice, who will handle extra points, field goals and kick-offs.

"Tom did a nice job for us last year and he has the experience of kicking under pressure situations," said the CC coach.

The defensive line is powerful with the likes of Eric Hietke (6-5, 235), Mark Lopez (6-2, 235), junior Mickey Redding (6-1, 225) and Jeff Schwartz.

The linebacking corps has Turek stepping in to play along with Kevin Tully, who saw action as a sophomore. The secondary, meanwhile, is led by Wandell and Logan.

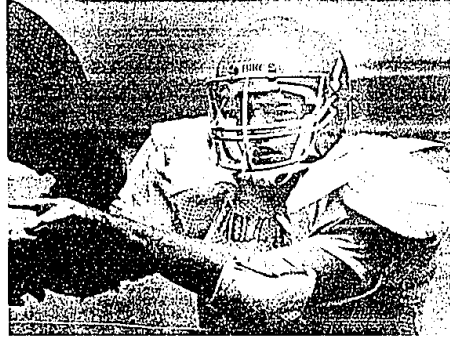
"We'll be young," Mach said, "but we do have some with varsity experience. We had four or five sophomores up last year."

"Linebacking is a concern because we have only one back. We have a couple of people, though, that look good in the secondary."

THE CC coach hopes to challenge for the tough Central Division crown by "going back to the basics."

"We won't be fancy," Mach promised. "We've thrown more than most of our league opponents, but we're not recognized as a passing team."

Nobody is talking state championship this year at CC, but then again, nobody talked about it in 1980.



CC co-captain Tom Bridenstine, a 6-2, 200-pound senior, is not only a bruising defensive lineman but one of the team's top ball carriers.

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