

Sports

suburban life inside



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(F18)

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Spotlight shines on champion North

By Chris McCosky
staff writer

The television cameras were rolling. The spotlight was on a high school football coach from the Farmington Public School District.

And it wasn't John Herrington. No sir. This time the spotlight was on coach Jim O'Leary and his North Farmington Raiders.

O'Leary got a little tongue tied, muffed a couple of his lines, but on the whole, he was marvelous.

The same could be said for his football team Friday night. The Raiders stumbled a little bit against Northwest Suburban League rival Westland John Glenn.

They muffed a punt and made some frightening turnovers. But, on the whole, they too were marvelous.

The Raiders beat host Glenn 20-7 to win the NSL undefeated and outright.

"I'm just real happy for our kids," said O'Leary, still blinded some by the camera's lights. "They really deserve this. You know what we thought we had come back from a year ago (not much it was thought). But, the kids de-

football

located themselves and worked real hard over the summer. When it came time to play, they were ready."

WITH A perfect 6-0 record, North had started to get some long-deserved statewide acclaim coming into Friday's contest. Unfortunately, the Raiders didn't really show on dilly papers and the local television cameras what they were capable of doing on the football field.

"We were our own worst enemy tonight," O'Leary said.

Glenn, though, was no slouch. The Rockets were picked by many to burst into the state playoffs. Injuries have since derailed the Rockets' hopes, but they put up a stiff fight against the Raiders.

"In some respects, it's been disappointing," said Rocket head coach Chuck Gordon. "But, not tonight. I felt the kids played hard. I'm proud of them. I think Jim O'Leary will agree with this, we gave them a great ball-game tonight."

The Raiders' first drive set the tone for the type of night it would be. They fumbled on their second play but regained possession. Then, quarterback Eric Engel hit Steve Goss for 45 yards to the Glenn 17. Another fumble, again retained, stalled the drive.

On their second possession, the Raiders turned it over. Bill Grissmer picked off Engel's pass. Glenn, however, couldn't capitalize on the break. Story of the night.

NORTH FINALLY got it going in the second quarter. The offensive line began blowing huge holes in the right side of the Glenn defense. Scott Knoll ripped through for 23 yards. Then Marc Brown went through for 38 and 9 yards.

Brown wound up scoring on a 4-yard run. Goss missed the extra point.

Glenn then got a break. North botched the snap on a punt and Glenn recovered on the Raider 37. Seven plays later, Tony Boles scored on a 4-yard run. Chris Piazza added the point after.

With 2:03 left in the half, North marched 62 yards in five plays to recapture the lead.

"That was the key to the game," O'Leary said.

The score was set up by a 25-yard pass from Engel to Buddy Pope. The touchdown came on a 20 yard pass to Scott Knoll.

North added another score with just two seconds left in the game — a 2-yard run by Brown — but, Knoll's TD was the game winner.

GLENN'S MAIN offensive weapon is Boles. Accordingly, Gordon went to him often. For the most part, the Raider defense was equal to the task. Boles gained 95 yards on 29 carries.

"Our defense has played great all year," said O'Leary. But, perhaps not any better than they played in the fourth quarter Friday. Twice they stopped Glenn drives on third-and-1 plays. Another time on a fourth-and-1 play.

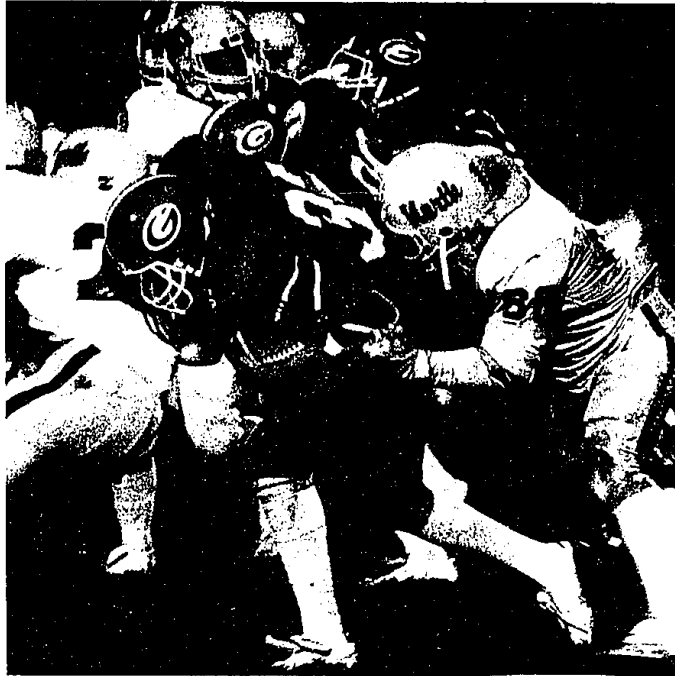
Glenn had one final shot at North. With 4:05 left, the Rockets took over at midfield. On second down, Boles gained 8 yards. Then North shut him down on third and fourth down.

"Boles is our key," Gordon said. "You've got to stop Boles and we figured we could do some things with him tonight."

Brown had the big night. He gained 103 yards for North.

Glenn falls to 2-3 in the NSL and 4-3 overall. North is 5-0, 7-0 overall.

Let the spotlight fall on the champions.



photos by DAN DEAN/staff photographer

North's Troy Hiner (No. 60) demonstrates how to stop a speeding Rocket, namely Tony Boles, in the Raiders' 20-7 win at John Glenn Friday night.



Matt Tijen bats away a Rocket aerial intended for Ron Taji.

Miller goes beyond 1,000 yards as Harrison romps past Canton

By Chris McCosky
staff writer

It was an afternoon of milestones. It was an afternoon of friendship and reunions. It was homecoming day for the No. 1-ranked Farmington Harrison football team and the Hawks treated the large and enthusiastic crowd to a 40-7 drubbing of Plymouth Canton.

But above the celebration hovered a pall, a sense of impending despair.

The players weren't cognizant of it. The coaches did their best to put it out of their minds. But it was there. It was the main topic of conversation among the fans. It has been the main topic of conversation in prep football this year.

Harrison, clearly the best prep football team in the state and ranked among the top 20 in the nation, will very likely miss out on a chance to win the state championship.

Because of a terminally unfair playoff system devised by an ingenious bunch of bureaucrats that call themselves the Michigan High School Athletic Association, Harrison needs a miracle to make the playoffs — despite its 7-0 record and despite averaging more than 40 points per game and yielding less than seven.

TO GET IN the playoffs, at least two of the following teams must lose: DeLaSalle, Sterling Heights Stevenson or Birmingham Seaholm.

"That'll never happen," said Harrison coach John Herrington, who is trying like the dickens to remain optimistic.

"Obviously, it would be a big disappointment if we didn't make it," he said. "We are not just a good team. We are a great team."

"But I still feel that we'll get in. We have the best team and somehow, something is going to happen to get us in. I really believe that."

Herrington will be on the state's playoff committee next year. He said that he is cer-

tain the playoff format will be changed. Hopefully, it won't be a year late for Harrison.

"Right now," said Harrison's All-American back John Miller, "I'm not even thinking about the playoffs. I'd be bummed out if we didn't make it. But I'm having the time of my life playing with this football team. I've been here for four years now and I have never had more fun than I am this year."

IT WAS A hallmark day for the amazing senior. He gained 188 yards in 20 carries and scored three touchdowns. He has gained more than 1,000 yards rushing this year and over 4,000 in his career.

"I really wanted to get that. I have been looking forward to it," he said.

The Chiefs were simply no match for Harrison and coach Rich Barr extended his own feelings about the playoff system.

"It would just be a shame if that football team doesn't make it," he said. "Anytime something like that happens, it just cheats the kids. If the playoffs are supposed to represent the true champions of this state, then it would be unfair if Harrison's not there."

The Hawks scored on their first four possessions of the game.

The first scoring drive was all Miller. The drive went 71 yards in 10 plays. Miller carried on all 10 and scored from the 7.

Canton quarterback Dave Knapp fumbled on the next possession and Jason Talbert was there to pounce on it. The biggest cheer of the day came when it was announced that Talbert recovered. He had many relatives in from out of town to see him play — it was a nice moment for a hard-working young man.

TWO PLAYS later, quarterback Vince Enright hit his favorite target, Brian Smolinski, for a 36-yard TD.

Enright had another huge day. He completed seven of 10 passes (including his first

five in succession), for 158 yards and two TDs. He had one pass picked off by Knapp in the third quarter.

Smolinski caught four passes for 91 yards.

The Hawks' third score was vintage Miller. He busted through the Canton line, made a nifty fake on a linebacker then cut back across the field outrunning the secondary. The play covered 54 yards.

The Hawks' fourth possession looked like a Vince Enright highlight film. First he hit Smolinski for 15 yards. Then Miller for 10. Then Smolinski again for 21. On the fourth play he rested. He handed to Miller, who took it in from the 13.

In the third quarter receiver Jeff Shottroff ran the wrong pattern but still scored on a 39-yard pass from Enright. When things are going good, even busted routes turn into scores.

The Harrison second team finished the scoring. Scott Bissell scored on a 2-yard run.

THE CHIEFS got on the board early in the fourth quarter. A questionable pass interference call put the Chiefs deep in Harrison territory. Two plays later Knapp hit Matt Flower on a pretty 19-yard pass play. Dave Liuzzo added the point.

The Chiefs gained just 123 yards in total offense and Knapp accounted for 50 of them. He ran for 42 and passed for 33 more. Sean Budlong caught two passes for 27 yards.

Ken Hixon, Miller, Smolinski, Dave Delekta, Ben and George Saracovich were punishing on defense for the Hawks.

Harrison's offense accrued 408 yards on the day.

"You can't get let the players get down about the playoff thing," Herrington said. "If they do, then this won't be any fun for them. And if you can't have fun on this team, something's really wrong."

Nettle added seven solos and three assists.

Farmington quarterback Chris Green connected on 11 of 24 passes for 125 yards. Ab Hazen caught four of those. The Falcons had 200 yards rushing and 325 total.

CVILLE 30, LUTH. EAST 16: Andy Lunderback set the pace for Livonia Clarenceville, rushing for 128 yards on 21 carries, putting two touchdowns on the scoreboard in the second quarter and scoring three two-point conversions in the Trojans win over visiting Harper Woods Lutheran Friday.

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Spartans burst Falcon bubble

Peter Huddy raced 20 yards with the winning touchdown with just 1:40 remaining to spark Livonia Stevenson to a 14-10 victory over visiting Farmington Friday.

Huddy's TD romp was set up by Chris Luczkowski's second interception of the game at the Farmington 42. Brian Trainor was Spartan-like in his effort during the winning march, gaining 31 of the 38 yards.

The win left both teams at 5-2 overall.

Farmington, however, is the Lakes Division champion with a 4-1 mark, meaning the Falcons will meet Farmington Harrison for the Western Lakes Activities Association (WLAA) title Saturday. Stevenson, 3-2 in the

WLAA, visits Northville Friday.

The Spartans scored first, as Don Roschacki grabbed the opening kickoff and sprinted 90 yards for the TD. Huddy tacked on the placement for a 7-0 lead.

Farmington tied it on Dave Cunningham's 7-yard bolt in the first quarter and Bruce Kratt's kick. Kratt added a 23-yard field goal in the second period to put the Falcons on top, 10-7.

Chuck Donaldson completed six of 12 passes for Stevenson for 73 yards, with one interception. The Spartans had 143 yards rushing and 216 total. Rob Allie led the tacklers with 11 solos and two assists. Norm