

Sports

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A sportswriter's dream comes true

JUST CALL me coach.

I like that title. kinda has a nice ring to it. Of course, that would mean trading in pen and paper for a whistle and a clipboard and discarding adjectives and verbs for Xs and Os.

What the heck, I'll give it a shot.

Beginning today, I'll be a part-time, non-salaried assistant junior varsity football coach for two weeks at Avondale High School in Auburn Hills. Why, you may ask? The answer is three-fold, really.

I've always dreamed of coaching football, and this will allow me the opportunity to write a series of stories on the coaching profession — in first-person format. Plus, it will help me pass the time while I anxiously await high school games at the Silverdome Saturday afternoons at Farmington Harrison

and Notre Dame handing Michigan an old-fashion stomping.

I MAY NOT know what I'm getting myself into, but Avondale head varsity coach Rick Brewer seems to think it's a good idea. Who knows, it may open up a whole new career. I could move on to varsity for a few years, pile up a few Ws and hang loose until there's a college opening in South Bend, Ind.

Ah, the old Walter Mitty syndrome.

I want it understood that I'm not going into this half-cooked. Football has been my sports love since I was old enough to roll a pigskin on the carpet. My dad says he never pushed me into the game, but I know that football didn't come from the delivery ward.

Dad was quite a football player at St. Alphonsus High School in Dearborn. He coached in the Catholic Youth Organi-



Jim Hughes

zation and later in the little leagues in Dearborn. Consequently, I was surrounded by the game and learned to time my feelings for halftime.

No regrets here.

This coaching escapade will allow me to return to my favorite pastime.

I played little league, junior high and high school football before going to Central Michigan University where I was the starting quarterback for four

years. (Well, it was intramurals at CMU, but that's irrelevant).

IF MEMORY serves me correctly, I played nearly every position in little league before I concentrated on quarterback and defensive back in junior high and at Edsel Ford High School. I didn't throw the ball very far, but I sure was slow.

To me, there was nothing more en-

joyable than football season. I didn't even mind those double-session practices during the hot and muggy Michigan Augusts. There was nothing like game day during the fall — the anticipation, the game itself and reflections afterward.

Miss it? You bet.

I'd have loved to continue on at CMU, but there's not many spots on a Division I team for a 5-foot-9 kid who needs a calendar to be timed in the 40-yard dash. So, I did the next best thing. I majored in journalism and wrote for the sports section on the campus newspaper.

To complement my major, I minored in physical education with an emphasis on athletic coaching. That way, I could get a feel for all aspects of the games.

Now, this escapade may really pay off. Instead of understanding a

coach's technique, I can apply what I've learned.

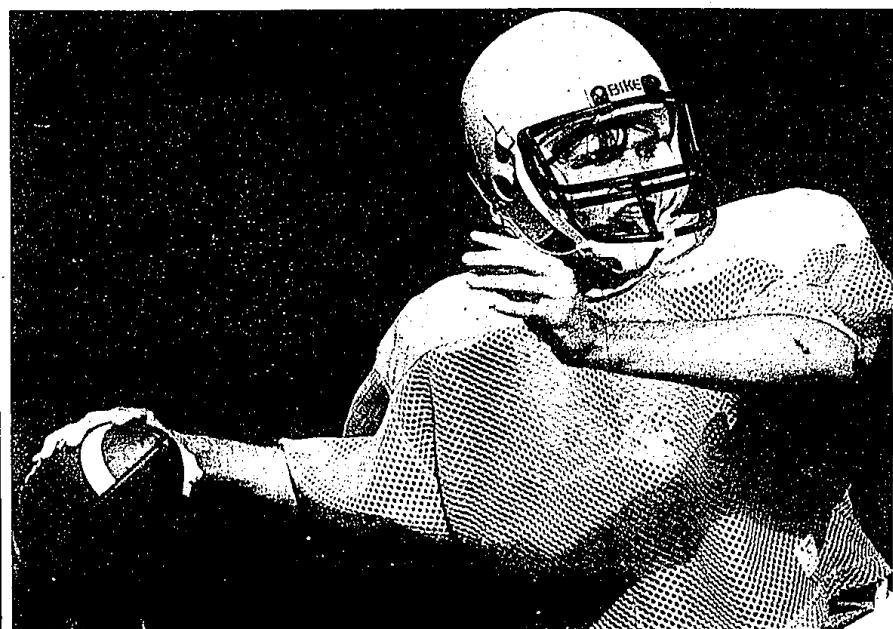
I wonder if Brewer knows what he's getting into. I think we come from two different schools of the game.

I'm the kind of coach Rochester High assistant Jerry Murphy would want on staff. I believe a football should be thrown. Why do you think there's air in a football?

Brewer is a throwback to the old Big 10 days, when the only time the ball was in the air was when it was kicked. He believes, and I quote, "If you have to throw the ball, you're losing."

Don't worry Rick. You're the boss. I'll do whatever you want. If you don't want footballs in the air, just say so.

If things don't work out, maybe Murphy will give me a call next year. Unless, of course, they need me in South Bend.



RAYMOND BOST/Staff photographer

Harrison grad Vince Enright will be one of five scholarship-granted quarterbacks gathering for fall football practice at Eastern Michigan University. Enright expects to be red-shirted this season.

Waiting their turn

Observerland standouts hope to crack EMU lineup

By Chris McCosky
staff writer

Maybe Vince Enright ought to seek out Scott Jurek this fall when the two former Observerland standouts gather for football practice at Eastern Michigan University.

When Enright, the All-Area quarterback from Farmington Harrison, gets to EMU this fall, there could be five quarterbacks ahead of him.

There's Robert Gordon, who started every game for the Hurons last year, and Ron Adams, who was impressive in relief roles last year. Also, Steve Coulter is returning after sitting out as a red-shirt last year. He was the Huron quarterback in 1982 and 1983.

If that's not intimidating enough for the freshman quarterback, the Huron hierarchy, namely head coach Jim Harkema, is optimistic about the futures of both Don Vesling, a baseball star at EMU who was also a highly touted quarterback, and Tom Sullivan, another freshman.

SULLIVAN WAS one of the brightest stars at last weekend's Michigan High School East-West All-Star game at Spartan Stadium Aug. 3. He led the West to victory by completing 6-of-16 passes for 172 yards and a touchdown.

"I saw what I had seen in the films," Harkema said about Sullivan. "The young man has tremendous instincts for the game of football."

Enright was at Spartan Stadium and saw Sullivan's performance.

"As soon as I got home, I threw for two hours and I have been throwing every day since," Enright said. "In fact, I'm going out to throw right now."

Scott Jurek has felt the anxiety Enright is now feeling.

Jurek, an all-state, All-Area performer at Plymouth Salem in 1984, was one of Harkema's top recruits last year. Jurek came to fall camp with high expectations. He saw himself as EMU's fullback.

When he got to camp, there were five fullbacks ahead of him. One week into camp and Jurek was a linebacker.

"Vince is faced with the exact situation I was faced with last year," Jurek said from the Weston Hotel in Toronto where he was vacationing last week. "I came in and I was running like a fourth-string fullback. I thought I was good enough to play fullback there, but after a week I could tell I was going nowhere."

THE POSITION switch proved to be a good move for Jurek. Although he was eventually red-shirted, he was listed on the EMU depth-charts among the second-unit linebackers late last season.

Jurek, bigger and stronger than when last seen on the Centennial Educational Park gridiron, figures highly in Harkema's plans for the upcoming season.

"Well, we think he had just one great spring," Harkema said. "Right now, I'd have to say he's our second-string inside linebacker. We're very high on Scotty. He has good instincts for a linebacker. He has to really get at it for us this fall."

"I can't tell you he's going to blossom this year like he thinks he will, or like his fans hope, but we expect him to play a key role for us."

Said Jurek: "Last year was a little frustrating. It's tough to go to practice when you know that you weren't going to play in the game. But I'm coming in that very few freshmen play for Harkema. He really likes to red-shirt. The year before, something like 18 of 19 freshmen were red-shirted."

Indeed, very few freshmen come to college expecting to start immediately. Certainly Jurek had no such delusions last year, nor does Enright this year.

"I guess I fell all along that I would be red-shirted this year," though Harkema hasn't yet indicated that, Enright said. "I wasn't going in thinking I would play. I'm just going in and try to learn as much as I can."

SAID HARKEMA: "With Enright, we have a kid with real raw talent that needs refinement. He is a tremendous athlete that needs to learn how to be a quarterback."

Harkema sees the quarterback kid as a very positive element to his

Huron team, and hopes the five quarterbacks feel the same.

"It's such a pivotal position, you just can't afford to get caught short," he said. "We have a couple of our sister schools (University of Michigan and Central Michigan) get caught short at quarterback last year. We're losing Coulter and Gordon after this season and Vesling could easily get drafted into professional baseball. It's possible we could be down to just Adams real soon."

Jurek's advice to Enright is simple: Give it your best shot — anything can happen.

"A lot depends on what he does in the fall," Jurek said. "Just look at what Gary Patton did last year. He came in from Ohio and was the fourth or fifth tailback. He just worked his way up in practice. He was just running past senior defensive backs. The coaches will take a look at everyone. They won't overlook you just because you're a freshman. If the guy can play, he'll play."

ENRIGHT, LIKE Jurek, knows his chance will come. But even if it didn't, Enright figures he'll come out ahead.

"Even if I never play a down, I'm getting four years of free education," he said. "A lot of people have to work in the kitchen to pay for their education. VII pay for mine playing football. That's not too bad."

Sound perspective.

By C.J. Risak
staff writer

The upcoming Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (GLIAC) football season is being billed as the "year of the quarterback," as well it should be, with starters returning at six of seven schools.

Three of those six quarterback returnees hail from the Observer & Eccentric coverage area. And that means the outcome of this year's GLIAC race could very well rest in the throwing hands of those three.

"He's without a doubt our main offensive threat," said Hillsdale College coach Dick Lowry of senior Mike Gatt, a Livonia native and Redford Catholic Central grad who will start his third season as the Chargers' quarterback.

"He has the best command on the field of any kid I've coached," said Wayne State coach Dave Farris of sophomore Rich Popp, a Livonia Franklin alumnus and second-year starter for the Tartars.

BOTH HILLSDALE and Wayne State are expected to give defending GLIAC champion Saginaw Valley State a battle for this year's championship. At Wednesday's 11th annual Football Media Day, Saginaw Valley was voted to retain its grip on the No. 1 spot, a position it's maintained for the past two years.

Hillsdale was second in the coaches poll, followed by Northwood Institute, Wayne State, Grand Valley State, Ferris State and Michigan Tech.

One surprise in the voting was the elevation of Grand Valley. The Lakers were 9-10 last season and have a new coach, Tom Beck. Beck, who previously served as backfield coach to the Chicago Blitz of the USFL (1984) and as head coach at Elmhurst College (1978-83).

Beck saw no reason for such optimism. "I don't see us being a real force in the conference," he said. "There are a lot of problems to rectify."

One, Beck said, is at quarterback, which "is not solidified, that's for sure." The leading contender to start is senior John Erickson, from John Calvin graduate who was a walk-on at Grand Valley.

LAST YEAR, Pann completed 39 of 82 passes (47.6 percent) for 374 yards, with two touchdowns and four interceptions.

"I was very pleased with him in the spring," Beck said of Pann. "He's going in (to fall drills) as the No. 1 quarterback. He's got good passing ability, but he lacks playing experience. He's the kind of kid, if he had a lot of support, we could win with him. But he can't win by himself."

That's not the case with either Gatt or Popp, both of whom are being counted on heavily to spur their teams to success. Gatt, an academic all-American last year, had solid stats on the field as well, completing 11 of 203 passes (5.4 percent) for 1,411 yards, with 10 TDs and nine interceptions.

And yet, Lowry thinks Gatt could have been better.

"His foot speed a year ago was not what we would have liked," the Chargers coach said. "But he's improved that. He's lost 15 pounds (to 175), which is something he knew he had to do."

One of our problems last year was that we didn't score enough points. I feel we have to score 31 points a game (to win)."

Farris is looking for equally big things from Popp, who was a pleasant surprise last year. Popp tied or set six Wayne State records as a freshman, completing 138 of 257 attempts (53.7 percent) for 1,798 yards, with 13 TDs

and 13 interceptions.

"WHAT WE WANT from Rich," Farris said, "is continual improvement. He'll start the season as a good quarterback, and I think by the end of the season he'll be a great one. I look for him to throw for a minimum of 2,000 yards."

While Popp possesses a strong arm, it's his head that impresses Farris. "He's super at reading defenses," the Tartar coach said. "He can see the whole field. And he never gets shaken, he always stays cool and calm."

If something happens to Popp, John Romano, a sophomore from Garden City, is waiting in the wings. Romano started the Kentucky State game last year when Popp was hurt and completed seven of 16 passes for 69 yards and two TDs. Pat Schneider, who quarterbacked Livonia Bentley last year, was one of Farris' top recruits.

Two more O&E area quarterbacks waiting for a chance are at Saginaw Valley. Mike Leibinger is entrenched as the starter, but backing him up is Matt Wilczewski, a sophomore from Catholic Central, and Rick Wilson, a senior from Westland John Glenn who transferred from Central Michigan.

The major reason Saginaw Valley is picked to repeat as GLIAC champ isn't its quarterbacks, however. Defense is the Cardinals strength.

ANCHORING THAT DEFENSE are senior linebacker Darrel Barkotzki, a Plymouth Canton grad who was the team's second-leading tackler in 1984, senior strong safety Dave Cramton from Garden City, and junior defensive tackle Phil Jean, considered the Cardinals toughest lineman against the run.

At Hillsdale, Plymouth Salem grad Jeff Hubert, a senior, is back at strong safety for his third season as a starter. Junior Matt Chiodo, from Birmingham Brother Rice, could start at linebacker, while junior Keith Urban, from Salem, will start at guard.

Junior Keith Percin, from Bentley, is "more comfortable" playing safety for Wayne State this year, Farris said, and senior John Erickson, from John Calvin, will return as a starter at outside linebacker. Sophomore Steve Gregor, another Bentley grad, was switched during spring from quarterback to safety and could challenge for a starting role.

Beck figures Grand Valley got itself a player last year when John Sladinski joined the team as a walk-on. Now a sophomore, the Southfield-Lathrup alum could be the Lakers third wide receiver.

"He doesn't have great speed or size, but he can really catch the ball and he's a great competitor," said Beck. John's younger brother Steve, also from Lathrup, will join the team this year as a walk-on at defensive back.

SENIOR JIM OSTROWSKI, from Brother Rice, is back for Grand Valley to handle the kicking chores. Ostrowski connected on eight of 13 field goals and seven of eight extra points for 31 points, and averaged 35.7 yards a punt last year to win the special teams MVP award.

Steve Tracy, from Livonia Churchill, returns for his senior season at Michigan Tech. Tracy caught 23 passes for 418 yards and two TDs last year and booted 28 of 36 extra points. But he, a sophomore, will be back at running back for the Huskies.

At Northwood, junior Randy Hart, from Rochester, will see action at both defensive end and safety. Hart is an able pass defender, a trait he displayed last year against Ferris State with three break-ups.