

U-M's Messner: star on the rise

By C.J. Riak
staff writer

Factors that prognosticators utilize when determining how good a football player will be are all black and white: size, speed, experience.

By those standards, University of Michigan defensive tackle Mark Messner probably shouldn't be a starter. He stands 6-foot-3 and weighs in at a paltry 235. At Michigan State last Saturday, Messner faced behemoths like Tony Mandaric (6-6, 269) and Steve Bogdan (6-4, 255).

And Messner is only a sophomore. He's starting on a team that was 500 a year ago, a team that, when pre-season predictors applied the above-mentioned factors to its players, figured to be no better this season.

What those predictors cannot measure is what really makes the difference in football: heart, desire, incentive, teamwork. That's why U-M's 5-0 this season, a shock to even the most loyal Wolverine fans.

EVEN THE U-M players are a bit surprised by their astounding success. The defense has been the reason, first and foremost — it has allowed just one touchdown this season while recording two shutouts, including a 31-0 win over MSU Saturday.

"It all depended on whether or not we could come together as a team," said Messner, a Redford Catholic Central graduate. "Eleven guys are really tough to beat."

Messner has contributed to the Wolverines' success. True, he has little experience and nearly all the offensive linemen he faces are bigger. But Messner provides U-M with something it had little of before — quickness and a pass rush.

His abilities shone brightly against MSU. Unofficially, he was in on six tackles, five for losses. He sacked Spartan quarterback Bobby McAllister twice, once in the opening quarter for a loss of eight and again in the second for a 12-yard loss.

Messner also nailed freshman split end Andre Rison for an 11-yard loss on an attempted reverse in the third quarter.

IN A BIG TEN loaded with strong-arm quarterbacks like Iowa's Chuck Long, Illinois' Jack Trudeau and Purdue's Jim Everett, a pass

rush is essential for success. The Wolverines and Messner have proved they can supply it.

"We're smaller and quicker, that's why," said Messner. "It's the way our defense is structured. We keep the offensive line off balance. They don't know what we're going to do."

Part of that strategy calls for Messner to move from the right side of the line to the left. Although he's listed as a defensive tackle, he often lines up like a defensive end.

Against MSU and the scrambling McAllister, his assignment was clear: "Contain. All we wanted to do was contain him. We thought if we could do that we could stop him."

This week's assignment, against No. 1-ranked Iowa, will be more difficult. Long is considered by many to be the nation's top collegiate quarterback.

"It's the same principal," said Messner in looking ahead. "We've got to contain him. We have to pressure him because if he starts moving his feet, he's more dangerous."

WHEN YOU give away at least 20 pounds to your opponent, trying to muscle your way to the quarterback won't work too often. Messner is well aware of it.

"I can't tangle with the big guys," he admitted with a smile. "I've got to get around them."

That strategy has worked well. Messner is tied for the team lead in quarterback sacks with five. He has seven tackles for 71 yards in losses.

The jelling of the U-M defense into a cohesive unit, perhaps the most dominating in the nation, is based on what happened last year.

"We're playing as a team," he said. "When someone makes a big play, everyone congratulates him. Last year that didn't happen. A guy would make a big play and no one would come up to him, or he'd just turn his back on them."

Going 6-6 last season is the major reason for this season's success. The bitterness of the 1984 campaign and predictions of another dismal year in 1985 remain the driving forces behind the Wolverines.

Incentive and pride propel a defense U-M has a lot of both going for it, which is why the Wolverines are again a top contender for the Big Ten title.

sports shorts

● OBSERVERLAND IVY LEAGUES

The freshmen football game last week between Ivy League rivals Princeton and Dartmouth had an Observerland flavor to it.

Craig Morton, All-Observerland standout from Plymouth Salem, started for Dartmouth, while George Sarcevic from Farmington Harrison and Scott Knoll of North Farmington — both All-Area choices last season — started for Princeton.

Final score: Dartmouth 21, Princeton 17.

Morton figured prominently in the

Dartmouth win, catching touchdown passes of 35 and 39 yards. Knoll started at middle linebacker and called the defensive signals for Princeton. Sarcevic was the starting offensive tackle.

● TENNIS LESSONS

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Observerland sports people

Cameron makes Big Daddy go

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

A baseball manager usually signals to the bullpen for his relief help. Championship drag racer Don Garlits calls to Farmington Hills for

And Joe Cameron doesn't even have to warm up, as the Farmington Hills alum already possesses a vast repertoire of mechanical skills. But the distance from the bullpen to the mound is considerably shorter than the trips Cameron makes as Garlits' fly-in mechanic.

This year, Cameron has been to Pontiac, Montreal and Denver, as Garlits recently clinched the National Hot

Rod Association (NHRA) World Series Championship.

Garlits, the oldest racer on the NHRA circuit at 53, offered Cameron a shot in the starting rotation as a full-time member of his pit crew. But with a full-time managerial position at Ramchargers Performance Center in Livonia and commitments at home, he turned the offer down.

INSTEAD, GARLITS gladly pays for Cameron's air fare to come to his races on the weekends.

"It fits right in with the schedule I have at the store," Cameron said. "I don't have to drive on the road between races, and I still get to see the races in

person. I have the best of both worlds."

What makes his unique position even more enticing is that Cameron is a longtime drag racing enthusiast. It took one look at a hot-rod magazine in the second grade to get him hooked.

"They're a scary looking kind of thing," said Cameron of drag cars. "Nothing is more exciting than the noise they make and the power they have."

Cameron plunged into auto mechanics at Farmington High and built a beam engine (the same kind used in most drag cars) for a 1970 Cuda. After he graduated in 1977, he went to MoTech, a mechanics school owned by Chrysler. That, plus what he learned

from his boss at Ramchargers, Phil Goulet, helped him on his way.

THEN AT MILAN dragway, he met up with his longtime idol who he used to watch on TV — Garlits.

"I was just in the right place at the right time," Cameron said. "I never had an idea then that I would be in the position that I'm in now."

Said Garlits: "A lot of guys come around because they just want to get involved. Joe came around and wanted to help, so we let him. It's worked out real well."

Being in Garlits' pit crew is not exactly like selling ice cream. It involves plenty of work in a stressful environment.

"It's just plain mechanic's work," Garlits said. "It's not real glamorous."

Between every race, Cameron and two others strip the engine down (including pistons and valves) to check for defects. They only have 90 minutes to do it.

If something major goes askew, like recently in Indianapolis when Garlits' clutch went out, the pressure intensifies.

GARLITS, WHO'S WON won six of 13 races on the NHRA tour, still managed to win in Indianapolis despite having his car's rear end, transmission and bell housing dismantled in addition to the regular engine breakdown.

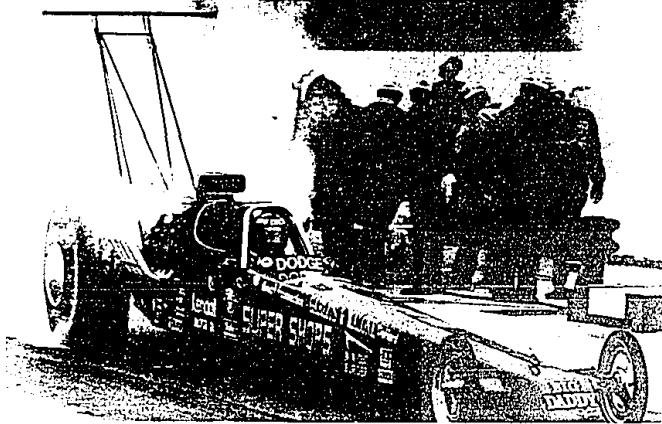
"The whole thing had to come apart," recalled Cameron. "We really had to tear into it."

"When you work that hard and the car wins, you really feel like you've accomplished something."

Cameron admitted still being awestruck by Garlits, who's been racing for 30 years.

"He's a perfectionist," he said of Garlits. "He's kind of intense. Things are to be done a certain way, and you better pick up or you're not going to be around long."

It appears Cameron is going to be around Garlits for a while.



Don Garlits' Top Fuel drag racer is kept running lean and mean by Farmington Hills mechanic Joe Cameron.

Livonia kickers succeed

The Livonia Hawks, a girls under-12 Bonanza League team, finished second in their division last weekend at the Washington Area Girls Soccer (WAGS) tournament in Fairfax, Va.

The Hawks, the youngest Michigan

team ever to compete in the WAGS Tournament, fell to Burlington, Ontario, in the final, 3-1.

The Hawks, coached and managed by Tom and Kathy Coyne, reached the championship with 2-0 and 5-0 victories over Sterling, Va.

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