

Highs, lows of college football

By Chris McCosky
staff writer

The reason clichés become clichés is because the overused word or phrase generally holds a good deal of truth.

Take, for example, the saying "offense sells tickets, defense wins football games." Never was that cliché more in focus than last Saturday in Ann Arbor.

The University of Michigan's defense didn't allow a touchdown. It allowed just 153 total yards and 13 first downs. The Michigan State defense allowed three touchdowns, 380 total yards (219 via the pass) and 22 first downs.

You might remember that U-M won the game, 37-6.

Ironically, it was Michigan's defense that was considered the team's soft spot coming into the game. Especially so, said the critics, was its pass rush.

That might come as a shock to harried MSU quarterback Dave Yarema, who was sacked six times for 63 yards in losses and was hurried on virtually every pass he threw.

At the eye of the Maize and Blue storm that hounded Yarema was Redford Catholic Central product and All-Area star Mark Messner. The pre-season all-America candidate and a 1985 first-team all-Big 10 choice made two solo sacks of Yarema and had six solo tackles.

"Mark played a terrific game," said Michigan defensive line coach Jerry Meyer. "We asked Mark to do some very demanding extra things out there and he performed very well. We put him in a position to make the plays. If he didn't perform, we weren't going to put pressure on the quarterback."

After a great season a year ago, and all the pre-season hype this season, Messner's name hadn't been mentioned much through the first four games of the season.

"MARK, TO some extent, hadn't been as productive as last year," Meyer said. "But we've been asking him to do different things. He's played well for us. It's just that last year, he was in a position to be seen easier."

In other words, Messner has been drawing a lot of double and triple teaming this year. Last year — playing alongside the likes of all-American Mike Hammerstein, now with the Cincinnati Bengals — Messner drew primarily single coverage on the line.

Messner, with the same youthful exuberance he flashed at CC and again last year, seemed to set the emotional pitch for the Wolverine defense Saturday. After every inch, to every key hit, Messner led the team in hugs and high-fives.

college sports

"Mark, like our entire defensive line, played with more confidence this week," Meyer said. "When you are a confident player, you tend to be more excitable. The confident player tends to be more contemplative on the field."

THE CONTEMPLATIVE figures on the field Saturday were green and white.

There was Farmington Harrison product John Miller and Dean Allobelli on their knees in the end zone staring forlornly at each other while U-M players celebrated the clinching TD behind them.

It's perhaps unfair, but that one play seemed to symbolize the entire nightmarish day for the Spartan defense.

It was a close game at that point: 13-3 Michigan with 3:39 left in the third quarter. MSU had made a sterling goal-line stand right before the half. It was Miller who made the big play, stopping Michigan's Thomas Wilcher on a 3rd-and-1 play from the Spartans' 1. He ignored Michigan's deceptive misdirection fakes, burst through the line and stuck Wilcher back at the 2. Instead of a 17-3 Michigan halftime lead, it was 13-3 and MSU was charged up and still in contention.

Miller, in fact, played a strong game overall. He was in on five tackles, four solo.

Then came the cruncher. Michigan had been using primarily short, control passes. Only twice had the Wolverines thrown deep. Then quarterback Jim Harbaugh sent John Plesner and Walter Strunk past Miller. Allobelli was late coming over to help. The ball was underthrown. Miller leaped. Allobelli leaped. Kolesar caught the ball in the end zone, 42-yard TD. Ball game.

MICHIGAN'S THIRD TD came in the fourth quarter when Harbaugh drilled a 7-yard strike to Jeff Brown between Miller and several other Spartan defenders.

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Logjam in Lakes

Potential 3-way tie has ADs scrambling

By Brad Emons
and Chris McCosky
staff writers

IT'S TIME TO reveal the secret document.

Who will represent the Lakes Division in the Western Lakes Activities Association football championship (Oct. 25) if there's a three-way tie for first between North Farmington, Westland John Glenn and Livonia Stevenson? All three schools could very well wind up tied for the Lakes crown with 5-1 records each because they're all playing the lower division teams this weekend.

The winner will play Western Division champ Farmington Harrison, which has already locked up a spot in the final, even if it loses Saturday to Walled Lake Western.

A tie-breaker format will be used to determine which Lakes Division team will be awarded the chance to play for the title, contingent upon North getting by Farmington, Glenn over Plymouth Salem and Stevenson over Walled Lake Central.

HEAD-TO-HEAD competition can't be used because Stevenson beat North, North beat Glenn and Glenn beat Stevenson.

Confusing? Western Lakes athletic directors reportedly met Wednesday morning to clear up the matter. Rumor has it that state high school athletic association playoff point formula, based on opponents' wins and losses, will be used to break the tie.

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grid predictions

cs, will be used to break the tie. Last week, Emons went 11-3 to push his overall season record to 45-24, but McCosky maintains the overall lead at 48-21, even though he slipped to 9-5 in Week No. 6.

FRIDAY'S GAMES
(All games at 7:30 p.m.)

LIV. FRANKLIN at LIV. CHURCHILL: The Chargers (5-1) could be getting in position to make a run for the state playoffs, but a victory over the Spartans (5-1) is not a given. After scoring 37-0 last week, Patriot coach Armand Vigna calls the Chargers "the best team I've seen." Should be another defensive battle. Picks — Take the Chargers in a year.

LIV. STEVENSON at WALLED LK. CENTRAL: The Spartans (4-2) can clinch a tie for the Lakes Division title. Past history says they shouldn't worry over the worst team in the W.L.A.A. Picks — Stevenson topples the Vikings (1-5).

WESTLAND GLENN at PLYMOUTH SALEM: Could be the highest scoring game of the night. Last week, Salem (1-5) couldn't hold a 14-3 lead against North Farmington. The Rocks, however, do not match up well against Glenn (5-1), particularly on the line. Picks — Glenn makes its move.

PLYMOUTH CANTON at NORTHVILLE: The game, pitting a pair of 2-4 teams, hinges on defense. Don't expect many points to be scored, unless Jack Sylvestre is doing the kicking for Northville. Picks — Northville wins its third straight.

ROMULUS at GARDEN CITY: The Cougars (3-3) came to life last week, downing Dearborn in a mild upset. It's homecoming this week for GC, which meets an independent, Romulus, a 31-12 loser last week to Class C state-ranked Saginaw Norwalk. Picks — Cougars on the prowl once again.

DEARBORN at REDFORD UNION: Red (3-3) still has a chance to claim a share of the Northwest Suburban League crown. The Panthers edged Woodhaven last week, 14-12. Picks — Emons says Dearborn runs the party. McCosky says coach Jim Gibbons lights another fuse under it.

WAYNE MEMORIAL at WYANDOTTE: The only concern for Wayne (3-3) is Wyandotte's muddy field. The Bears (1-5) are still seeking their first Wolverine A Conference victory. Picks — Not the time, Wayne prevails.

SATURDAY'S GAMES

N. FARMINGTON at FARMINGTON (1 p.m.): Last week Salem made the dangerous Scott Selzer earn his yardage, but North quarterback Scott Simon burned the Rocks' secondary. The Raiders (5-1) will be tested by a Farmington team (2-4) with a better-than-average defense. Picks — North clinches a share of the Lakes Division crown.

WALLED LK. WESTERN at FARM. HARRISON (1 p.m.): Harrison (11-1) is getting ready for its fifth straight W.L.A.A. championship game. Western (2-4) didn't put up a fight if Junior Mike Hall goes loose. Unfortunately, Hall doesn't appear to have the supporting cast. Picks — Harrison wins the Western Division outright.

CLARENCEVILLE at HARPER WOODS (1 p.m.): The Trojans (3-3) are hurting, as quarterback Gregg Burt will sit out the game with a bruised rib. Joe Jentzer, a wide receiver, will take over. The host Eagles (0-6) are undoubtedly the worst team in the Metro Conference. Picks — The Trojans go back over 500.

ANNAPOLIS at REDFORD THURSTON (2 p.m.): The Eagles (1-5) are still eyeing their first Tri-River League win after falling in the final 55 seconds to Taylor Center last week, 9-7. Annapolis (1-5) hasn't shown much of late. Picks — Emons says it's a happy Thurston homecoming. McCosky, begrudgingly, agrees.

REDFORD ST. AGATHA at ORCHARD LK. ST. MARY'S (2 p.m.): A win by the Eagles (4-2) could set up a showdown for the C-Section title on Oct. 25 with division leader Pontiac Catholic. Agatha coach John Goodard fears the Eagles (4-2), especially running back Marcus Rufford and lineman Scott Kowalski, son of former Detroit Lion Bob Kowalski. Picks — The Eagles set sail in Orchard Lake.

REDFORD BISHOP BORGESS vs. WARREN DeLA SALLE (7:30 p.m. at Garden City Junior High): The Spartans (4-2), who suffered a heart-breaking 6-0 overtime defeat last week to Harper Woods Bishop Gallagher, got a boost last week when Catholic Central upended Brother Rice, creating a four-way tie for first. DeLaSalle (4-2) is big and strong, but may not be able to match the Spartans' quickness. Picks — Emons says Borgess stays in the hunt. McCosky disagrees.

REDFORD CATHOLIC CENTRAL vs. HARPER WDS. NOTRE DAME (7:30 p.m. at Clarenceville): It's payback time for the Shamrocks (4-2), who remembered last year's stringing 7-0 loss to the underdog Fighting Irish. Notre Dame (2-4) simply can't match up with CC's stingy defense. Picks — CC runs its Central Division mark to 3-1.

CC turns Rice mistake into win

By Brad Emons
staff writer

There's a logjam at the top of the Catholic League's Central Division.

Thanks to Redford Catholic Central's come-from-behind 7-3 football victory Sunday over Boys Bowl rival Birmingham Brother Rice before 6,000 fans at Pontiac's Warner Stadium, four teams are tied for first place.

CC, Rice, Redford Bishop Borgess and Warren DeLaSalle are all 4-2 overall and 2-1 in the division.

"There's no puzzle involved in our league," said a happy CC coach Tom Mach. "Any team can beat anybody on a given afternoon. It just happens this year it has taken place."

The loss by Rice was damaging in more ways than one. The Warriors could have been sitting pretty, all alone in first, with only two games remaining. And Rice all but knocked ruined its chances for a post-season playoff berth.

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CC PROVED to be opportunistic in the final quarter, scoring on third down when Greg Haeger found tight end Pat McGrath in the corner of the end zone for a 5-yard TD pass with 2:43 remaining. (Bob Malleck added the extra point.)

"We ran a pass to wide side to give him (McGrath) to give him more room," explained Mach. "The tight end fakes into the line and runs wide."

But the break CC wanted came just minutes earlier when the Shamrocks' special teams man Mitch Quint joined the ball loose from Rice punt returner Charlie Brennan. Ted Welling fell on the loose ball with 5:30 left to give CC great field position at the Rice 23-yard line.

It then took the Shamrocks six plays to punch the ball in.

"Rice took our passing game (game) away most of the game," said the CC coach. "They're quick defensively. It was the type of game where you have athlete versus athlete."

The final statistics bear out the kind of job CC's defense turned in.

The Shamrocks held Rice to 135 yards total offense. Junior halfback Jason Wolf, who rushed for over 150 yards the previous week against DeLaSalle, was limited to 28 yards in 11 carries. (Tom Giroux was Rice's top rusher with 51 yards in 14 carries.)

"WE KNEW WOLF was their best runner, but they have others, too," Mach said. "We did key on him a little with our monster back in spots."

"But our defensive coordinator, Rick Coratti, deserves a lot of credit after we held them to three points."

CC defense, which yielded 14 points and 25 points, respectively, in losses to Ann Arbor Pioneer and Redford Bishop Borgess.

"Our defense wasn't what we thought it would be early in the part of the year," said the CC coach. "The last couple of games we've come on. We knew we had to make things happen defensively because they're a good football team."

"Things worked out well. We didn't give up at all. I'm proud of

them and this is a tremendous victory for us. We had to believe in ourselves."

Rice took a 3-0 lead with only 15 seconds left in the half on a 39-yard field goal by Jim Nagy.

But that was the extent of the Warriors' offense, which stalled much of the second half.

Late in the third quarter, Rice's Paul Ferguson returned a punt 55 yards for an apparent touchdown, but the play was whistled back because of two illegal blocks.

CC's OFFENSE was also stymied much of the afternoon. The Shamrocks had only 122 yards total, with exactly half recorded by junior running back Chris Kowalski, who rushed 21 times for 61 yards.

If anybody has an advantage the next two weeks in the Central Division race, it's CC. The Shamrocks host last place Harper Woods Notre Dame and then travel the following week to play DeLaSalle.

Rice, meanwhile, must meet formidable challenges from Gallagher and Borgess.

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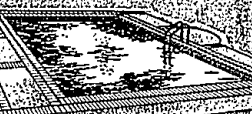
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