

Kowalkowski key man on defense

THIS IS WHAT was supposed to happen:

Scott Kowalkowski returns home in triumph. The junior defensive end makes a shambles of University of Michigan's offensive line, sucking the quarterback a half-dozen times, falling on a fumble or two, dumping a running back on his tail in his own end zone for a safety.

And his Notre Dame team holds onto its top ranking in the national polls with a convincing win over U-M.

As any Wolverine fan now knows — at least any fan who entertained visions quite opposite of the aforementioned — dreams don't always come true.

Kowalkowski's didn't. He didn't get a half-dozen sacks or a safety. Heck, he didn't even get to play defensive end.

BUT HE'S HARDLY complaining.

After all, Notre Dame did "Rocket" past U-M 24-19, Kowalkowski did recover a fumble (it set up the only offensive touchdown of the game for the Irish), the other two came courtesy of Flahib "Rocket" Irmal's kickoff returns and the Orchard Lake St. Mary's graduate (from Farmington Hills) did play a pivotal role — bigger than anyone might have anticipated.

The statistics may not have reflected it — six tackles, one for a 2-yard loss. His second-quarter recovery of Michael Taylor's fumble led to Notre Dame's 24-yard touchdown drive, and to casual observers that was his biggest contribution.

Irish coach Lou Holtz saw more to praise. Much more.

"I thought Devon McDonald and Kowalkowski played well," he told the media after the game. "I felt defensively we made a lot of improvement, especially up front. I felt that coming into the game."

"You had to be impressed with the way Kowalkowski and Devon McDonald did it at outside linebacker, for not playing there that much."

THAT'S RIGHT — outside linebacker. Kowalkowski, listed as a 6-foot-2, 226-pound rushing defensive end, switched positions.

"There was an injury to (starter) Andre Jones, so I was moved," Kowalkowski said in the tunnel outside Notre Dame's locker room.

And when did this change occur?

"Early this week," he answered, then added, almost as an afterthought, "So I'm playing a new position."

He made it sound so simple, as if it was a minor adjustment. No big deal. That was not the case. Not by a long shot. At his normal rushing end position, Kowalkowski pressured the quarterback and contained the run.

At linebacker, he shifted all over the place. The majority of the time he faced off against U-M tight end Derrick Walker.

But not always. He lined up right, he lined up left, he dropped back into coverage, he blitzed.

BEST OF ALL, he came up strong on Wolverine running plays, containing them, turning them back to the middle, toward his speedy defensive teammates. Michigan gained 94 yards on the ground on 34 attempts — a measly 2.7 per try.

North relays champ

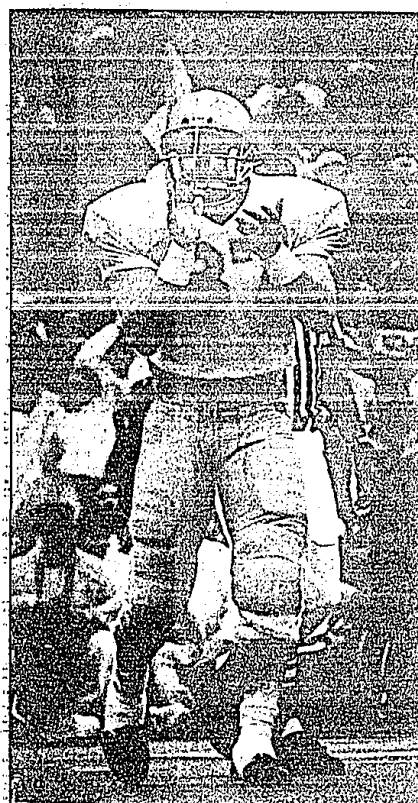
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"If those two do what we think they're capable, that will make us a little stronger."

Farmington's 280 freestyle team of Katie Hohl, Missy Kendall, Jill Hawkins and Laura Hryczek had the other meet record. The team won

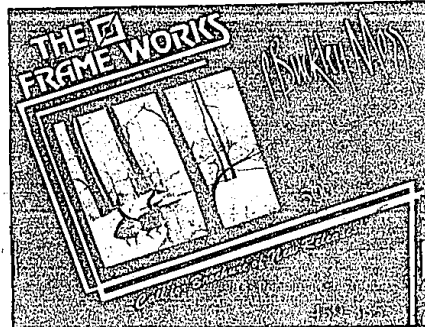
the race in 1:48.30 and clipped the time of 1:50.24 that Livonia Churchill posted three years ago.

Churchill's Michelle Berry, Jenny Zober, Ellen Lessig and Kari Hamman won the 200 butterfly, and Northville was the 200 medley winner.



JIM JAGGELD/staff photographer

Scott Kowalkowski, a Farmington Hills resident and graduate of Orchard Lake St. Mary's High School, played a pivotal role for Notre Dame.



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