

Sports

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North standout to play for Chippewas

By Steve Kowalski
staff writer

The phone call awoke Central Michigan University women's basketball coach Donita Davenport, but she didn't mind.

North Farmington senior guard Eve Claar had some news worth awaking for.

Claar tried and tried Tuesday night, but could not reach Davenport in Mount Pleasant until shortly after midnight. When they finally talked, Claar told her she was accepting a basketball scholarship to CMU.

Claar signed a letter of intent and sent it out Wednesday, the final day of the early signing period.

Davenport, talking Friday from her office, explained why she couldn't be reached earlier Tuesday.

"I WAS WAITING for Eve to call, but I have a cordless phone and the night before I turned it off inadvertently," Davenport said. "By the time I realized and turned it back on it was 11:20. I went to bed, thinking Eve would call in the morning. I was very, very happy she called."

For obvious reasons, Claar averaged 25 points and eight rebounds per game for the Raiders, a rebuilding team that finished 9-13 overall. Claar chose CMU over the University of Detroit.

"She (Davenport) stressed to me all week how much she needed me because she lost two other top guards that were on her list and she was kind of stuck," Claar said. "I sat down with my parents (Les and Helen) Tuesday night and weighed the good and bad points of both schools, and it turned

girls basketball

out Central was the best place for me."

Claar visited U-D the weekend of Nov. 16-17 along with West Bloomfield guard Amira Danforth. The pair also visited CMU the first weekend of November.

Danforth, a point guard who sat out her entire senior year with a knee injury, signed a letter of intent last week with U-D.

"WE WOULD have loved to have both (Claar and Danforth), but we're glad to have at least one," Davenport said.

"We think Eve Claar is a very good all-around guard, but definitely her strength is her outside shot. She has one of the best outside jump shots I've seen in a high school player. Her footwork is excellent — when she catches the ball she's ready to shoot it. We made the decision in late August that Eve Claar is the guard we wanted."

Claar said Danforth's decision to attend U-D had no bearing on where she will attend school. The two played together last summer on the Metro Defenders AAU team, coached by West Bloomfield coach Ronna Greenberg.

"I would have loved to play with Amira," Claar said. "But she has a good head on her shoulders, and I'm sure she feels confident with her decision."

"I was leaning toward Central for a whole week, but I think I was getting a little cold feet.

With U-D being so close to home, I decided to give it a good look."

NORTH COACH Lance Davis calls Claar the best girls basketball player he has ever coached. Claar was responsible for nearly 70 percent of North's points and made 42 percent of her shots from three-point range.

All this despite facing gimmick defenses the entire year. "Whenever we needed a basket or three-point shot, we could get one from Eve, and I don't think I'll ever have that luxury again," Davis said. "She's a very good shooter — I would think the best in the state — off the dribble or a pick."

"Eve is an outstanding student-athlete. Very quiet and nice off the court and glib and hard-nosed at times on the court. She's very intense."

Claar, a 3.5 student who plans to major in business, was impressed by the coaching staff, players and a new state-of-the-art recreational center on CMU's campus.

CLAAR ALSO looks forward to not having to be the only option on offense with the Chippewas.

CMU finished 14-14 overall and in fifth place at 7-9 in the Mid-American Conference race a year ago. The Chippewas, with five starters returning, are expected to contend for the MAC title this season.

"This year I had to face two or three girls each night," Claar said. "At Central I'll be surrounded by girls who can really play, and I won't have to be the focal point. I think my shooting is my strong point, but I have to work on defense to get ready for college."



SHARON LEMIEUX/staff photographer

Eve Claar, who averaged 25 points per game for the North Farmington girls basketball team, signed a letter of intent with Central Michigan.

AA state champs! Barbara, CC roll over King for title

By Steve Kowalski
staff writer

The television cameras were rolling Saturday afternoon, so why not ask the question?

Hey, Jon Barbara, where are you headed, now that you and your Redford Catholic Central football teammates have captured the Class AA state title?

"We're going to Disney World," said Barbara, standing inside the Pontiac Silverdome press lounge after the Shamrocks' 21-0 win over Detroit Martin Luther King.

Barbara, along with teammates Frank Youkam and Arshon Stewart, broke out in laughter, and it's no wonder since the Shamrocks finally had a chance to relax. Capping a marvelous playoff run, CC won its first state title since 1979 and in the process avenged an earlier, 20-7 loss to King.

CC's defense ran its streak of scoreless quarters to eight and the Shamrocks offense scored on two drives and Youkam's 58-yard punt return. CC has gone to the state finals three of the last four years — but for once the Shamrocks found a happy ending.

"Fifteen weeks is a long time to be playing and we didn't come here to lose," said Barbara, who gained 56 yards on 13 carries and scored two touchdowns. "They talked a lot in the paper and we kept our mouths shut, came out here and won. I was called up two years ago (from the junior varsity) for the state final (a loss to Traverse City) and saw how disappointed the seniors were. We didn't want that to happen to us."

KING, WHICH lost to Muskegon, 16-13, in last year's Class A final, finished at 12-1 overall. CC kicker

Kerry Zavagnin pined King deep in its own territory with several long kickoffs and the Crusaders didn't help themselves with nine penalties and two interceptions.

Trailing 14-0 at halftime, the Crusaders took the opening second half kickoff and marched to CC's 15-yard line before self-destructing. King lost 15 yards for clipping on the next play and on first-down and 22 from CC's 27, a pass thrown by quarterback Dwight Brown was intercepted by CC safety Mike Thomas.

Brown, who did not complete a pass in four attempts, was intercepted later in the half by CC defensive back Brett Walter. CC sacked Brown six times and limited the Crusaders to eight first downs and 111 yards in total offense.

CC defensive ends Dave Dominick and Brian Chaney led the charge, recording two and 1½ sacks, respectively. The Shamrocks lost defensive tackle Gary Gurgold with a leg injury in the first half, but 6-foot, 210-pound junior Steve Paciorka filled in admirably.

"Our kids played tremendous defense," said CC coach Tom Mach. "We stressed intensity so we're real proud of them. At the start of the year we were looking for ends. It was the one place defensively we didn't know about. Dominick and Chaney really responded."

Linebacker Jeff Rees led CC with 16 tackles, while Dominick, Thomas and cornerback John Brand had eight each. Lineman Dan Gusoff and linebacker Kirk Kowalski were in on seven apiece.

"I THINK ON this day field position made a big difference," When coach James Reynolds said. "When

you're backed up all day, it's tough. CC did what it had to do. We had to go 80 yards to do anything.

"Penalties don't help. We've been able to play over them all year, but as tough as today's game was, we were not able to play over them. I've seen CC all seasons and they were good when we played them but they're even better now."

The Shamrocks, who gained 103 of their 163 total yards by halftime, opened the scoring with a 14-play, 66-yard drive that ended with 8:37 left in the first half. Barbara capped the drive with a 2-yard run.

CC lined up for a field goal three plays earlier, but on fourth-down and four at the 18, King was called for encroachment — which gave the Shamrocks a first down at the 13. Keeping the drive alive earlier was a 22-yard pass from quarterback Jason Carr to Youkam which brought the ball to King's 44.

Youkam came up with an even bigger play midway through the quarter. Only a junior, Youkam fielded a King punt at his own 42 and returned it for a touchdown and 14-0 lead with 7:14 left in the first half.

It was Youkam's second punt return for a TD this season and it is the second-longest in state final game history. King's Gerald McBurrows had the last chance to get Youkam at the Crusaders 14, but Youkam managed to break free of his grasp.

The Shamrocks finished the scoring with a six-play, 38-yard drive that ended with 11:32 remaining. Barbara's 14-yard run over right tackle and Zavagnin's third extra point gave the Shamrocks their final lead.



JOHN M. DISCHER/staff photographer

Jon Barbara, Catholic Central's powerful fullback, buries his head and plunges forward during the Shamrocks' 21-0 win Saturday over Detroit King in the Class AA final at the Silverdome. Senior Eric Wiklund (right) lends support.



JOHN M. DISCHER/staff photographer

Brian Chaney, one of Redford Catholic Central's heroes on defense, kisses the Class AA plaque in front of the CC cheering section. CC blanked Detroit King, 21-0, Saturday at the Silverdome.

Defense stops Crusader surge

By Dan O'Meara
staff writer

Football coaches like to say "Offense wins games, but defense wins championships."

That was never more true than Saturday when Redford Catholic Central shut down Detroit King 21-0 to win the Class AA championship in the Silverdome.

The Shamrocks stuffed King's potent offense, holding the Crusaders to 111 yards — all of it rushing — and all-state tailback Ed Davis to 96 net yards.

"Their coach said they had the best defense in the state," said CC defensive end Brian Chaney as he carried the championship trophy up the tunnel. "We wanted to prove him wrong, because we have the best defense."

"WE JUST focused on their whole offense. (Davis) was just in it, so we got him, too."

Chaney had one sack, helped on another, deflected a pass and chased quarterback Dwight Brown out of the pocket, which led to a King pen-

alty when Brown passed beyond the line of scrimmage. "This is my senior year and the last time playing for Catholic Central," Chaney said. "There's no better way to go out than with a state championship, and I did all I could to help win it."

Fellow senior Dave Dominick was the end on the other side of the CC defense, and he was just as instrumental in containing King's speed and preventing any big end runs.

"WE KNEW we had to win the line of scrimmage," said Dominick, who had eight tackles, including three (two sacks) for lost yardage. "We did that — and it was over. They had some big guys, but we just outplayed them."

The Shamrocks had a tradition for strong defense to uphold, but they also were driven by determination, having lost to the Crusaders 20-7 in the third week of the season.

"That was it right there," Dominick said. "We just had the will to win, to take it."

Senior defensive back Mike Thomas was playing in only his second full

game, having missed a chunk of the season with an ankle injury, but he was another big contributor with eight tackles and an interception at the CC 12-yard line, stopping a King drive on the opening series of the second half.

"ANY TIME you come back from an injury and contribute to a state championship ball club, it's a feeling that just can't be compared," Thomas said.

"Earlier in the week, we set our goals for today. We planned on shutting them out, so we accomplished what we set out to do."

Senior linebacker Jeff Rees was the leading tackler with 16, but fellow backs Matt Roney, Brett Walter and John Brand all made big tackles either in the open field or in support of the line.

"It's a team thing, and that's how we played," Thomas said.

THE TEAM approach was evidenced in CC's depth when senior two-way tackle Gary Gurgold injured an ankle while making a first-half sack.

Dan Kelly went in at nose guard and Dan Gusoff replaced Gurgold at tackle. Senior two-way lineman Rob Sylvester moved from guard to tackle on offense, and Steve Paciorka took his place.

"We play intensely on every play, and we play as a team," Sylvester said. "We have a reputation for shutting down good backs — and Davis is a good back, but when you play as hard as we do on every down, that pretty much assures he's not going to get too many yards."

THE SHAMROCKS were 3-2 after losing to Detroit DePue, but CC finished with eight straight wins and avenged both of its defeats.

"Winning today shows we are the best team in the state because we've beaten teams that are either state champs (Brother Rice) or in the state finals (DePue)," Sylvester said.

"Earlier in the year, we weren't that focused," Thomas said. "But in the middle of the year, when people started getting hurt, we came together and started playing as a unit. We played hard, and this is the reward we get."