

Playoff contenders abound

By Dan O'Meara
staff writer

AS THE REGULAR SEASON winds down, interest in the high school football playoffs is increasing. No less than seven Overland teams are either sure-bets to qualify for the post-season field or have a legitimate chance at doing so. Plus, three others are longshot possibilities.

Three games to be played this weekend pit playoff contenders against each other. The outcome of the Northville (Class A) vs. Plymouth (Class AA), Wallis Lake (Western) vs. Westland John Glenn (AA) and Farmington Hills (BB) vs. Farmington (A) games will help one team and hurt the other.

The Harrison-North contest also will decide the Western Lakes Activities Association championship. It marks the first time in five years the teams have played each other. Harrison won the 1986 title in 1986 with a 3-7 win over the Raiders.

Redford could have three teams in the playoffs, and Union (A), St. Agatha (C) and Catholic Central (AA) will try to remain on that track. RU has the most difficult game, playing host to Waterford.

Lutheran Westland (C), Farmington (A) and Redford Bishop Borgess (CC) could make the playoffs but need victories and a lot of help in the last two games.

In the prediction contest between Observer sports editors, Brad Ennos was 15-0 last week and trimmed two games off Dan O'Meara's lead. O'Meara (13-3) is 81-22 overall. Ennos 15-1.

FRIDAY'S GAMES

(all games at 7:30 p.m.)

Lutheran Westland at Waterford: The Warriors (10-1) lead the 22-10 season. The Spartans are 6-7 and struggling this year. They were beaten 34-14 by Eden (20-0) last week. One of their best players is senior QB (10-1) and Trenchard (10-1). Lutheran Westland defeated Trenchard 23-10 and lost to Lincoln 14-10. Waterford is 10-1 and is led by Randy Lawrence, a best at passing. Dan Bernath averages nine tackles for the Spartans. PICKS: The (Red) Warriors bring home a victory.

Northville at Plymouth: The Hawks (13-3)

grid predictions

have won four straight and should move up to AA-Region II. Season first-place Ann Arbor Pioneer, No. 4 Jackson also has a good chance for one more in the top four. Salem was sixth last week. Northville (6-7) rebounded from its loss to Harrison with a 18-7 rout of Livonia Churchill. The Mustangs, who went to the A semifinals last year, were ninth in their region. This game features two of Western Wayne County's top offensive players — Salem tailback Russ Hunter and Northville quarterback Ryan Huxley. The game should be a close one. PICKS: Salem picks up a lot of bonus points with a win.

W.L. Western at Westland Glens: Western (4-3) has never made the playoffs and must beat the Hawks to get there — a tall order for any team. The Warriors were seventh in A-Region III, which includes North and RU, but four of the top seven teams lost. Glens, no stranger to the playoffs, was right behind Salem in A-Region II. The Hawks (13-3) have been in post-season play the last three years and five of the last six. PICKS: Glens keeps alive its playoff hopes.

Ply. Canaan at Liv. Stevenson: After impressive starts, both teams have struggled, finishing fourth in their respective leagues. Canaan (3-3) beat Monroe in the opener but has since defeated only Livonia Churchill. Livonia (10-1) in triple overtime and Glens (11-0), both suffered lopsided losses to Northville and Salem (14-13) last Friday. PICKS: Give the edge to the home team.

Liv. Churchill at W.L. Central: One team will continue for the first time this season. Both are 0-7, but one will be a winner this week. After close games the previous week against Canaan (10-1) in triple overtime and Glens (11-0), both suffered lopsided losses to Northville and Salem (14-13) last Friday. PICKS: Give the edge to the home team.

Clarkston at Garden City: Despite a 1-4 record, Garden City has not been blown out in any game. A pair of 21-0 losses to Woodhaven and Livonia kept the Raiders (1-3) out of the playoffs. The Cougars face a big challenge this week, however, when No. 2-ranked Clarkston (6-1) pays a visit to the Raiders (1-3). PICKS: The Raiders (1-3) will have to be quarterback Dugan Hill, who has committed to play basketball for

the University of Michigan but could probably commit to Clarkston. PICKS: Clarkston should win.

Water, Most at Red. Union: The Panthers (3-3) have won three in a row and are enjoying their best season in years. RU has lost only to Eden (20-0) in its last six games and knocked off suburban Woodhaven 14-7 Friday to gain a share of the Northwest Suburban League championship — its first league title since 1978. The Panthers were fifth in their region but strengthened their playoff situation with No. 4 Hometown loss. Most (4-3) should be another good test for RU. The Corsairs whipped Lake Orion the previous week and lost 20-14 to a good Pontiac Northern team. PICKS: Ennos thinks the Panthers are ripe for the upset after beating Woodhaven, but O'Meara says that win made a believer out of him.

Monroe at Wayne Memorial: Let's see if we have this right? Wayne beat Adrian, which beat Alpena, which beat top-ranked Traverse City. Hometown does that mean the 20-0 should be No. 1 in the state? That might be stretching it since Wayne (3-4) and has lost its last two games and four of its last five. The 20-0 came up about as fast as Fordson and Southgate, in each case by a 14-0 score. Monroe (3-4) isn't doing much better, though it beat the 20-0 35-17 in its last game. PICKS: The coin flip says Monroe.

Red. Thornton at Allen Park: The Eagles (1-8) go from the frying pan into the fire this week when they take on the Silver River League champion, Allen Park (7-0). The Jaguars, ranked No. 7 in Class BB and headed for the playoffs, averaged 46 points a game in the league and 41 overall. They have allowed two touchdowns per TFL contest. Allen Park reached the 60-point mark for the second time last week, defeating Taylor Truman 60-4. PICKS: The Jaguars finished 7-0 in the league.

Liv. Chenevix-et-la-Peche: The host Eagles (1-8) have won the last four straight, including a 14-10 loss to Cranbrook last week, after starting the season with three straight wins. Just as the Trojans and Livonia East have beaten the Raiders (1-3) took its turn playing Livonia in the Metro Conference last week and lost 48-0. The Trojans and Livonia East have beaten the Raiders 40-0 and 40-0, respectively. PICKS: The home teams come out ahead.

Bishop Borgess and A.C. Cabral at Garden City: If high goals are 2-2 in the Tri-State Conference of the Catholic League and 3-4 overall. The Spartans have lost to some tough teams — Inca, Divine Child, Orchard Lake St. Mary and Saginaw Nowell. Jona (10-0) and Novia (10-0) are going to the playoffs. Borgess was 19-0 in CC-Region IV before losing 27-

8 to Nowell last week. PICKS: The Spartans crown the champions.

SATURDAY GAMES

(1 p.m. unless noted)

Farm. Harrison at N. Farmington: For a change Harrison won't be playing Glens for the W.L.A. title. The Hawks and Glens have been huge finalists every year since 1986, which is when Harrison and North last played each other. After beating the Raiders to win the league title last year, the Hawks defeated North again the following week, 29-20 in the regular-season finale. The Hawks (7-0) have won the Western Division title, not year since 1991 when W.L.A. was organized. Harrison has won seven W.L.A. championships, including the last three. The Hawks are No. 1 in Class BB, North No. 2 in Class A. The Raiders (4-1) were Lakes Division tri-champs in 1988-89 and won their first outright title this year. North is in its last game. They could qualify with a 4-1 record but don't want to back into the playoffs in Class BB. PICKS: Harrison remains W.L.A. king.

Liv. Franklin at Farmington: The Falcons (2-4) have been through the grid the last three weeks, losing to Lakeland Power Salem, North and Garden City. Franklin (3-4) was routed by Harrison and hopes to end a two-game losing skid. Looking at common opponents, Farmington defeated Wallis Lake Western (11-1) and Stevenson (11-1) in OT. The Patriots lost to Stevenson (11-1) and W.L. (11-1). The Falcons have a pretty good defense and a fine running back in Chris Marling. PICKS: The Falcons extend their record to 3-0.

Redford CC at Notre Dame, 1:30 p.m.: The Fighting Irish (8-3) in the Central Division, 1-4) won their first game last week, 27-0 over Southgate Aquinas. But there won't be any winning over Notre Dame, who has won 48-0 (CC 10-0 and 7-0) up next on the schedule. The Irish lost by pretty big margins to teams CC has dominated. The Warriors defeated Notre Dame 48-0, the Shamrocks defeated DePue 21-0. No. 2-ranked CC to top in AA-Region III and would be virtually assured of a playoff berth without win. PICKS: It's a mismatch CC wins big.

Red. St. Agatha vs. Drbn. St. Agatha, 7:30 p.m.: At RU's Kirby Field, this game is the C-D Division equivalent of the CC-ND game — the final three teams against the last three teams. St. Agatha (4-0 and 7-0) scored 39 points in the fourth quarter Saturday to beat St. Clement 36-10. The Ags can complete a sweep of the division this week. The Ags (10-0 and 1-4) haven't won since beating Holy Redeemer in the opener. St. Agatha is the leader in C-Region IV and will play East Catholic in the Prep Bowl on Sunday. No. 3

Hawk swimmers win

Farmington Hills Harrison won three of the last four events Tuesday to defeat visiting Farmington 97-88 in girls swimming.

The Falcons won three straight races — the 100-yard butterfly and the 100 and 500 freestyles — to get within a point, 63-62.

Harrison won the 200 freestyle relay, backstroke and breaststroke to clinch the victory. The Hawks were second in the 400 freestyle relay.

Veronica Forberger, Wendy Leland, Cassie O'Sullivan and Dana Dixon won the 200 freestyle relay in 1:51.89. Slacey Kraus was first in the backstroke (1:05.07) and Dixon in the breaststroke (1:16.33).

"THIS WAS A very emotional meet," Harrison coach Terese Button-Peterson said. "When we won the 200 freestyle relay, it ignited the kids. We scored real well in the backstroke and breaststroke (11-8), which is where the meet was decided. All we had to do was safely finish and place in the last relay."

Harrison won the 200 medley relay with Krause, Dixon, Lisa Schaner and O'Sullivan finishing in 2:07.51. Jenny Domino was first in the 200 freestyle (2:13.23), and Elaine Trager had a career-best 258.85 points to win the diving competition.

Trager is 11.10 points from equalling the school record of 289.95 set by Sue Humphries in 1979. The Hawks have one more home meet next week.

Farmington had double individual winners in Becky Weary and Jill Hawkins. Weary won the IM (2:26.05) and butterfly (1:06.55), Hawkins the 50 freestyle (27.00) and 100 freestyle (58.46).

Both helped the Falcons win the 400 freestyle relay. They combined with Jill Benavenga and Kim Seed for a 4:07.46 time. Seed also won the 500 freestyle in 5:52.37.

The Hawks are 3-5 in dual meets, Farmington 1-5.

Marlins sink swim foe

Oakland County co-champion Farmington Hills Mercy won nine of 12 events Wednesday and defeated host Grosse Pointe North 127-59 in a swimming dual meet.

Senior captain Amy Dombrowski recorded a career best in diving with 214.10 points. Jen Buckley (154.8) and Beth Milewski (153.15) gave the Marlins a sweep in diving.

Mercy (2-2-1) also received a strong performance from Erika Smith, who won the 200-meter individual medley (2:18.65) and the 100 freestyle (55.95).

"We turned in several nice times after some very good swims at the county meet," Mercy coach Terri Eudy-Teeters said, "and our divers continue to improve."

The most exciting race of the meet was the 500 freestyle, featuring Mercy's Andrea Hoefflin and Katie Scallan and North's Jenny Palucci. Hoefflin won the state cut by less than two seconds. Hoefflin won the event in 5:27.23.

Another exciting race was the butterfly in which Mercy's Katie Knipper and North's Christine Jamerino split first place as both recorded a state cut time of 1:02.63. The team of Beth Minick, Jenny McCombs, Knipper and Amy Machacek won the 200 medley relay in 1:57.

Mercy 17th in 'A' meet

Western Lakes Activities Association runner-up Livonia Stevenson fared best among Overland teams Saturday in the Class A girls tennis finals in Midland.

The Spartans scored seven points and finished 12th in the 27-team competition.

Farmington Hills Mercy was 17th with four points. Meghan Leadbetter had a first-round bye and won her first match (two points). No. 1 singles, she lost to No. 2-seeded Shannon Byrne of Grosse Pointe Ligtet, the flight runner-up.

Mercy earned two points in doubles play with the No. 2 team (Karuna Mantana and Jackie Rajkovich) and the No. 3 duo (Jeanne Lissia-Peggy Mueller) scoring one each. Mantana and Rajkovich lost a three-setter to Ann Arbor Pioneer, and Lissia and Mueller were defeated in two sets (both tiebreakers) by Okemos.

"WE WOULD like to have gotten a couple more points, but we got a tough draw," Mercy coach Jim Kerwin said. "Most of them lost to seeded players."

"I was satisfied with the way we played. We fell right about in the middle, which is about where I thought we would be."

Plymouth Salem had three points and tied for 18th place with four other teams.

Debra Stevenson scored two points and reached the quarterfinals at No. 4 singles, and the No. 3 doubles team of Adrienne Weckerle and Anne Bartalucci accounted for the other.

"I was pleased we made it (to state), and it gave the girls an opportunity to see what kind of competition they can expect at that level," Salem coach Judy Braun said. "It will give them something to work toward next year."

North Farmington had two points and tied with three other teams for 23rd. Sophomore Keely Jones scored both points at No. 2 singles, losing to runner-up Rachel Fichtner of Birmingham Seaborn.

CC gridders defeat Cubs

Redford Catholic Central clinched the Catholic League-Central Division football championship Saturday with a 21-0 win over host University of Detroit-Jesuit.

The Shamrocks, 7-0 overall, are 3-0 in the Central Division with one game remaining. The win earned CC a berth in the Prep Bowl on Sunday, Nov. 3, against Double A opponent Detroit St. Martin DePorres.

DePorres clinched the Double A title Saturday with a 14-7 win over Dearborn Divine Child.

CC scored in the first, second and third quarters and gained 23 yards in total offense. CC's defense triggered the win, allowing 10-10 minutes in yards rushing and 54 yards in the air. CC had 10 sacks, including three by Joe Lopez, two by Dan Kelly and 1-4 by Joe Subajda.

LINEBACKER Joe Herman led CC with 12 tackles and Gary Stegall made nine stops. Brett Walter and Ken Rys had one interception each.

CC took a 7-0 lead in the first quarter on a 1-yard run by quarterback Chris Barbara, capping an 11-play, 59-yard drive. Barbara's 19-yard pass to Matt Roney was the key play on the drive, bringing the ball down to the U-D 30-yard line.

Rys' interception set up CC's second score 3:41 before halftime on a 1-yard plunge by fullback Dan Gussoff.

In the third quarter, Roney recovered a U-D fumble at the Cub 14-yard line and four plays later fullback Jeff Tibaldi went over from the 4 to give CC a 21-0 lead. John Raasch, subbing for Kerry Savagino as the CC placekicker, kicked all three extra points.

Hawks, North to decide issue of grid champion

Continued From Page 1

The Hawks have only a 14-0 half-time lead against Northville two weeks ago but eventually won 38-7. Class AA playoff contender Salem's only losses were to Harrison (21-12) and the Raiders (12-13).

North prefers to run the ball and will try to do that Saturday. Junior tailback Todd Anderson has rushed for 837 yards and eight touchdowns on 157 attempts, running behind line men like Vern Hatfield (10-225) and Brad Pawlowski (6-5, 240).

"WE'RE GOING to dance with what got us here, and that's basically the running game," O'Leary said. "We think we have a pretty good offensive line. We have to try and establish something and see what works."

"We believe in our kids. If you try to change things now, it's an indication you don't have confidence in yourselves — and we do."

The Hawks will try to control the ball, because they're a quick-scoring team. We might drive down and score a touchdown, and they could come back in one play and get you."

North will probably need more than just Anderson and will have to use all of its offensive weapons.

Quarterback Mark Temple has completed 32 of 59 passes for 544 yards and eight TDs, and he has fine receivers in Brian Lee and Mike Jettie. Lee has caught 10 passes for 188 yards and three scores.

Sturtz is mainly a blocking back, but he averages 5.9 yards per carry and has nine receptions for 145 yards and a TD — the one that beat Salem in the final minute.

HARRISON HAS dominated every team but Salem on the line scrim-

age. The Hawks are usually bigger with people like Leon Jefferson (6-1, 265), Jason Gietzner (6-3, 252), Mike Spitz (6-7, 280), Mike Gietzner (6-3, 242) and John Spitz (5-10, 200). Harrison also has an outstanding linebacker in Mike Poon (6-2, 255).

"We have a weight advantage, but North has a well-coached offensive line," Herrington said. "They run a good power offense, and we have to make sure we stop that."

Harrison has plenty of skill players, too, beginning with senior tailback Roy Granger, who has gained 899 yards (7.8 average) and scored 18 TDs — many on runs of 50-plus yards from scrimmage.

Senior quarterback Andy Fitzpatrick is a different kind of quarterback at 6-4 and 200 pounds, but he has produced numbers that rival those of former Harrison star Mill Coleman. Fitzpatrick also has completed 54 percent of his passes (51-93) for 944 yards and 13 TDs.

"His completion percentage is excellent for someone who has played only about half the games," Herrington said. "He stands tall in the pocket and does a great job."

The Hawks always come up with fine receivers, too. Harrison is solid

at those positions despite the loss of Greg Piscopink and Dan Hight to injury. Seniors Duane Anderson and Matt Gordon have proved themselves as speedy pass catchers.

"DUANE AND MATT showed football last year," Herrington said. "We didn't know he was going to be this good. Last year he was just learning to play football."

Hight (broken collarbone) might return for the first playoff game. Herrington fears Piscopink (torn knee ligaments) might be done for the year but holds out hope he can play again in several weeks with rehabilitation.

Seniors Key Smith and Jeff Clato have replaced Hight and Piscopink in the defensive secondary and played a role in shutting down Northville's run-and-shoot offense.

"We think (Piscopink) is a Big Ten prospect," Herrington said. "We've had scouts tell us he's the best defensive back they've seen this year. Obviously, it's tough to replace someone like that."

Those kids (Smith and Clato) have been playing for a few weeks now, and I think we can play over (the loss of experience). Both have decent speed and are good athletes."

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