



Defensive stop: North tackle Mike Poissant brings down Farmington running back Jeff Miller and knocks the football loose in the process.

Mustangs sneak past Hawks, 24-21

By LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

Three minutes into Saturday's football game, Farmington Hills Harrison saw the things that would eventually come and go. "Like, for instance, Northville running back Kevin Shaw, who took a handoff on the first play of the Mustangs' opening possession and promptly ran 36 yards for a touchdown, contributing to his team's 24-21 victory over the Hawks in Western Lakes Activities Association action.

For Harrison, it was the onset of big plays and a bad day. An assortment of ill-timed breakaways led to the game-breaking plays for Northville, which eventually earned its win on an innocuous 36-yard field goal by Mike Hirvela with 5:33 left. The Hawks stalled in the ensuing drive on the Northville 30, quarterback Jeff Cisló swarmed for a 4-yard loss with 3:27 left. The Mustangs dutifully ran out the clock.

Football

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Joe Danielewicz, who is sidelined for the duration with a broken collarbone.

North used the first nine minutes of the third quarter with a 79-yard, 16-play scoring drive. Anderson carried 12 times for 63 yards, including the final 4 for the TD.

Sophomore Nigel Whitt scored the Farmington TD on a 19-yard run early in the fourth quarter. He showed his ability on the final possession of the game when he rushed four times for 71 yards, giving him 125 yards on 11 attempts overall. "He's a good back; he makes a difference," Call said. "When he goes outside we can run the ball."

The Raiders finished 3-2 in the Lakes Division and stand 4-3 overall. Farmington is 0-5 and 0-6.

"We can get the next two (games against Livonia Churchill and Redford Union) and we're going to," Call said. "We were afraid of this all year, slipping back, but we can get the next two."

North rushed for 278 yards and passed for 24. Chuba added 67 yards on seven carries. The Falcons had 160 yards on the ground and 29 through the air.

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As a result, Northville scored its first football victory against Harrison in 22 years — a recurring phenomenon for teams this season as the perennial power-house has been treated more like a HUD house.

"We just didn't play good defense all day," said Harrison coach John Herrington. "We let their fullback get away from us. Our offense did all right, but not great."

Upback Nick Williams, Cisló and tailback Scott Gurke scored touchdowns for the Hawks, who amassed 288 yards in total offense (195 rushing, 93 passing).

Gurke's 8-yard scamper and a two-point conversion pass from Cisló to tight end Dave Gietzner tied the game, 21-21, with 1:08 left in the third quarter. The TD provided a moment of redemption.

On the previous possession, Gurke fumbled on the Harrison 36 and Northville linebacker Brian Kelley recovered.

The Hawks' defense stopped the Mustangs' lead on seven plays, including a rather peculiar fake punt attempt that was eaten up like a file mignon dropped in a pond of emaciated alligators.

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State's only JC team features ex-area stars

By C.J. RISKAS
STAFF WRITER

The misconceptions surrounding junior college football are plentiful. First and foremost: Such a thing exists?

After that, questions range from who plays it and why, the caliber of talent, and — most basic of all — where do you find it? Let's deal with the last item first. Grand Rapids Community College is the only two-year school in the state that fields a football team. And just how good is it?

Better than most would think. "The caliber of players I play with is as tough as a lot of (NCAA) Division I teams, certainly as good as many Division II," said Ryan Johnson, a sophomore at GRCC from Plymouth Salem.

Said Eric Stover, the Raiders' quarterback and a Westland John Glenn grad, when asked if it was much different than prep ball: "It's definitely a level above high school. There's a lot better competition, bigger guys, and a lot of guys you have to beat out."

Johnson and Stover are two of seven players from Observerland playing for GRCC. The surprise is this isn't a team consisting entirely of wannabes, nor is it a bunch of academic failures. Johnson attended Eastern Michigan, but after a disagreement with the coaching staff, he left.

Stover took his ACT admission test late during the summer after his senior year and came up one point short to play collegiate sports. He enrolled at Henry Ford CC to play baseball, but missed football. That brought him to GRCC.

One of GRCC's top offensive threats this season, and one of the bigger names coming out of Observerland, is Roy Granger, the former Farmington Harrison standout. Granger had his sights set on attending Michigan State, but he didn't have the grades.

Enter GRCC. Granger enrolled and lives with two former Harrison teammates, Greg Piscopink and Mike Gietzner, both starters with the Raiders. Kendrick Harrington, also starts at wide receiver for GRCC, and Chad Myers, from Livonia, is a reserve running back.

"I didn't know much about it," Granger said of his initial reaction to GRCC. "I didn't have a clue what it would be like until I came here."

Granger was disappointed he would not be able to go to MSU, but he says now, "After I got here,

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Eric Stover
GRCC quarterback

I knew it was tough. And in the long run, it will work out best for me.

Like most of his Raider teammates, Granger figures this year will be a blessing in disguise simply because he's playing instead of sitting and watching, as most freshmen at Division I schools do. He still plans on attending MSU next year.

Johnson is hoping to attend an NCAA II school, perhaps Grand Valley State. The Lakers also recruited Stover out of high school and may still be interested in him. Stover would like to continue playing football, probably at Division II, but he isn't ruling out anything — including baseball.

All three firmly believe their futures have been aided by their stay at GRCC, and all three believe their football playing days will extend to a four-year school. One more thing: All three are enjoying GRCC.

And, by necessity, they are improving. According to Raider coach Fred Johnson, at least a half-dozen players on his current roster were in the high school all-star game. "If they're just coming up here thinking they can play, it's not that easy," warned Julian.

"There's tough competition."

And it needs to be, because the Raiders play a first-rate schedule. Indeed, at their level it's easily the most formidable schedule of any collegiate team in the state.

Can you imagine Michigan or Michigan State playing five top-10 ranked teams during the regular season? GRCC will this year. And the Raiders handle a similar schedule successfully every season. They were 5-1 going into last Saturday's game at Triton College; in 1991, they finished 6-4. In Julian's 7½ years, GRCC has gone 63-17-1.

There's post-season play, too, although it doesn't match the playoff system of Divisions IAA, II and III. The coach's poll is the sole determining factor in deciding who plays in the post-season. The top two teams in the poll

play in the Mid-American Bowl in Tulsa for the NJCAA title. A half-dozen other bowls games feature the remaining top teams.

GRCC has been to four bowl games in the last six years. The Raiders only lost this season was to defending NJCAA champion Northeastern Oklahoma A&M.

"I'm getting smarter as the games go by because I see so many different defenses," said Stover. But recognizing and reading defenses isn't all he's learned: "That and throwing the ball on time," he said, adding, "What you have to have is experience."

Stover is confident he has the ability to quarterback at a four-year school. His strength? "Being a leader," he answered. "You have to have a leader on offense, and people naturally look at the quarterback. You have to take charge and let them know you're confident."

Granger has been learning a lot, too, and not just on the football field. Unlike football freshmen at four-year colleges, he had to learn how to fend for himself, from disciplining himself to make morning classes to buying his own groceries.

And then there's football. Granger has been strictly a wide receiver for the Raiders, and he's been a standout, leading the team in touchdowns. The first time he touched the ball, on the opening kickoff in the first game of the season, he returned it for a touchdown.

But the rest hasn't been so easy. "In college, you've got to run your pass routes real good," said Granger. "In high school, you can just run, but in college on certain patterns, you have to have your steps down."

Has all this helped? "If I go to MSU next year, I feel I can step right in and play," Granger replied confidently.

Johnson, who played linebacker his first year at GRCC, switched to tight end this season. "I love it," he said of the change. "I feel I've got a good pair of hands."

He doesn't lament leaving EMU for GRCC. Like Stover, Johnson will graduate in December, which means that whatever four-year college he chooses, he'll be able to play spring ball.

"I've never had any doubt about my decision," said Johnson. "I just wanted to play football. I'd do whatever it takes to play."

"The experience I'm getting here has to stand for something."

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