

Area's grid talent always first rate

Talk about a dream team! If a coach were to take the 1996 All-Observer football team on a barnstorming tour, the 26 players featured on this page would be a part of it.

Overland talent is always among the best in the state, and this year is no exception. Westland John Glenn, the Western Lakes Activities Association champion and a Class AA semifinalist, leads the way with seven first-team selections.

Catholic League champion Redford Catholic Central and Class A runner-up Farmington Harrison have four players each on the squad.

Six players are repeat honorees: Francis Gajek, Rob Johnson, Matt Griglio, Greg Call, Lorenzo Guess and Nick Shiehl.

Scott Wiemer of Lutheran High Westland was chosen Coach of the Year after guiding the Warriors to an 8-1 record in his first year as head coach.

Lutheran High began the season with a 16-14 loss to Harper Woods and then won its last eight games. The Warriors just missed qualifying for the playoffs, however, finishing fifth in Class C Region 4 behind Southgate Aquinas, Alton, Decker and Harper Woods.

"We were disappointed we didn't make the playoffs, but we had a very, very good year," Wiemer said. "We felt we could have competed with those teams, because our defense had improved so much in the last four games."

FIRST-TEAM OFFENSE

Matt Lawson, lineman, Franklin: Lawson is a two-year starter at offensive and defensive tackle. He had 42 tackles and four sacks. Only a junior, he is one reason the Patriots expect to have a strong team against next season.

"He's a real student of his position," coach Rick Lee said. "He has quick feet and was a dominating lineman. Against the big teams we played, Matt played even better."

Eric Jachym, lineman, John Glenn: Much of the reason Glenn was effective in the air and on the ground was due in large part to the blocking of this two-year starter.

Jachym used his superb footwork and balance to keep defensive linemen in check. According to Glenn coach Chuck Gordon, his outstanding ability to move for a player his size made the difference.

"Eric works very hard," Gordon said. "He had a great off-season in preparing for his senior year. He's one of the best linemen we've ever had at Glenn."

Francis Gajek, lineman, Farmington: Gajek was a three-year varsity player and the best lineman on Harrison's offense and defensive line this year. He played offensive guard and defensive tackle; he was second in tackles (96) with 66 first hits in 13 games. He also earned a fumble 73 yards for a touchdown.

"I was told by one college scout he might be one of the best two or three tackles in the state," coach John Harrington said. "He has great athletic ability for someone that size."

Kevin Bambenek, Farmington: Bambenek was a very tough, hard-nosed player. Nobody liked to run toward him, and we loved to run over him on the goal line.

Jay Myrand, lineman, Franklin: Myrand started 27 games at left guard and also was a two-year starter at defensive tackle. He was a key to making the running game go; he had 54 tackles and five sacks. Myrand can bench press 360 pounds.

"Jay has been the foundation of the program since I took over," Leo said. "He was the first kid we looked at to tell us we were a sophomore. He contributed on and off the field with his leadership; he is well respected by his coaches and his peers."

Matt Kuska, tight end, Thurston: Kuska was a three-year starter who excelled on both sides of the ball.

At tight end, he caught 30 passes, including three for touchdowns; he also caught a pair of two-point conversion passes. He had 17 career catches. As a tightback, Kuska had 109 tackles, including four sacks and 13 for losses. He had two interceptions.

Albert Cook, tight end, Westland: Cook was a first-class, quality kid. "He is the only one we've ever had on both sides of the ball. He rarely missed a snap and, for a big guy, has excellent reach and tremendous hands."

Paul Terek, wide receiver, Franklin: Terek was an all-around player for the Patriots, but he excelled as a pass receiver with 32 receptions for 609 yards and seven touchdowns.

He had 1,128 all-purpose yards, which included 19 punt returns for 200 yards and a touchdown, 10 kickoff returns for 224 yards and 10 rushing attempts for 102 yards.

As a defensive back, Terek had four interceptions, five pass deflections and 38 tackles (15 solo).

He's the best pure athlete I've ever coached and one of the best athletes to ever play football at Franklin High School," Leo said. "Even in double coverage, he would go up and take the ball big plays for us all year long."

David Jarrett, wide receiver, Glenn: Jarrett did just about everything for the Rockets except kick extra points. The two-way starter was most resourceful at wide receiver with 29 receptions for 542 yards and five touchdowns.

Jarrett also excelled at defensive



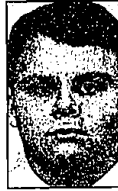
Matt Lawson
Franklin



Eric Jachym
Westland John Glenn



Francis Gajek
Farmington Harrison



Jay Myrand
Franklin



Matt Kuska
Thurston



Paul Terek
Franklin



David Jarrett
Westland John Glenn



LaVelle Guess
Wayne Memorial



Rob Johnson
Plymouth Canton



Kevin Bambenek
Farmington Harrison



Justin Berent
Westland John Glenn



Gade Clark
Livonia Stevenson



Albert Cook
Lutheran Westland



Reggie Spearman
Westland John Glenn



Coach Scott Wiemer
Lutheran Westland

back where he picked off seven passes.

He also returned a fumble for a score, and he even rushed for two touchdowns.

"David is a very exciting player and a big-play threat," Gordon said. "He did it all. He was at his best in the big games."

LaVelle Guess, wide receiver, Wayne: Guess wasn't overshadowed by his brother this season as he put his own talents on display, with the help of Lorenzo's passing.

Guess became one of the area's leading receivers. He caught 28 passes for 456 yards and 10 touchdowns. On defense, he recorded 39 tackles and interceptions and two pass deflections.

"He also ran back punts and kickoffs and played great defense," Wayne coach Chuck Howton said. "He did it all. He was truly our most valuable player."

Rob Johnson, quarterback, Canton: Johnson made his college choice last weekend when he committed to Northwestern University. He displayed his intelligence on the field as well, doing a bit of everything for the Spartans.

Johnson was 68-of-154 passing for 966 yards, with eight touchdowns and three interceptions. He also rushed 79 times for 359 yards and seven TDs, returned nine kickoffs for 313 yards and two TDs and had two punt returns for 67 yards and a score.

"Rob is the only one we've ever had (recruited) to a Division I school," said Canton coach Bob Kohnke. "He could help (Northwestern) as a wide receiver, defensive back, punt returner, kick returner; he could do anything, really."

He'll get his first shot at Northwestern as a quarterback, though.

Kevin Bambenek, quarterback, Farmington: Bambenek became the starting quarterback in the sixth game of his sophomore year and led the Hawks to two state finals, a Class A championship and two league titles. Harrison had a 27-4 record with him at quarterback.

Bambenek was 94-of-160 passing for 1,701 yards and 11 touchdowns. He was 15-of-24 and passed for a state-finals record, 262 yards in the Silverdome this year.

His career passing numbers are 201 completions, 371 attempts, 3,150 yards and 21 TDs. He also became an effective runner this year, rushing for 202

yards and 12 touchdowns.

"He really matured as the season progressed," Harrington said. "He was required to do more and more; he was just terrific in the playoffs."

Clark said his best season in his career. The only other quarterback who played that much (in his career) was Matt Coleman.

Justin Berent, quarterback, Glenn: Berent led the Rockets to another WIAA title and the Class AA semifinals. Berent gave more than just his own defense and tailback Reggie Spearman to worry about.

The second-year starter was able to establish an explosive passing attack. He set school records with 301 completions and 179 attempts while passing for 4,448 yards and 30 TDs.

"Justin is a very hard worker and has made tremendous improvement during his career at John Glenn," Gordon said.

Gade Clark, back, Stevenson: Clark, who started in every game (23) since his freshman year, was a stellar performer for the Spartans. Due to his durability, the senior tailback gained a school-record 3,200 yards in his career.

Clark saved his best season for last as he gained 1,270 yards on 213 rushes (an average of 24 carries a game), including 14 touchdowns. He also caught 10 passes for 109 yards and returned 18 kickoffs for 393 yards.

"Gade was an absolute force this year," Stevenson coach Tim Gabel said. "He really had an ideal senior season in that all his talents came together in a complete package. He learned to blend his quickness and power with knowing when to cut and when to lower his shoulder."

Reggie Spearman, back, Glenn: Spearman used his cutback ability and elusiveness to rush for 1,330 yards on 108 carries and find the end zone 13 times. He also started as a defensive back.

The tailback was forced to miss Glenn's regional championship victory over Dearborn Fordson with a sprained ankle but played the semifinal game against Sterling Heights Stevenson.

"Reggie is very quick and runs hard," Gordon said. "He is also an excellent cover guy as a defensive back."

Albert Cook, back, Lutheran High: The Warriors had their best season ever,

and they wouldn't have been able to do it without Cook.

He was not only named Metro Conference Defensive Player of the Year, but he was probably the most explosive performer on offense as well.

Cook scored 20 touchdowns and also converted 13 two-point conversions for 148 points. He carried the ball 156 times for 1,275 yards (8.2 average); he had two games of more than 200 yards.

On defense, he played linebacker and had 98 tackles, one interception, two fumble recoveries and a blocked punt. He returned a kickoff 75 yards for a touchdown.

"Albert was a leader through his performance and intensity in all our games," coach Scott Wiemer said.

"Being able to put up such good numbers on both sides of the ball showed his durability and impacted the drive of other team members. Although he is a quiet individual, Albert was very vocal about his desire to be successful on the field."

FIRST-TEAM DEFENSE

Rich Deputila, lineman, Redford CC: Deputila played equally well against the pass and rush for the Shamrocks.

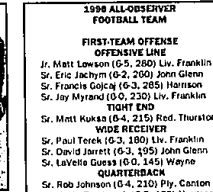
The two-year starter at defensive tackle had seven sacks. His 58 total tackles placed him third on the team behind Deputila recovered four fumbles and scored a touchdown while lining up at fullback.

Rich played hard from beginning to end, never took a break," CC coach Tom Mach said. "He caused all kinds of havoc. If a play was across the field, he'd get there."

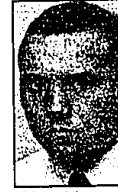
Ira Bargon, lineman, John Glenn: Bargon was the best player. He started two seasons at defensive tackle and was named the team's MVP on four occasions. He had 50 first hits and assisted on 26 more.

Bargon drew high praise from his coach, who has seen his share of fine defensive players pass through Glenn.

"He has very good speed and some of the best work habits I've ever seen," Gordon said. "He's a very good player



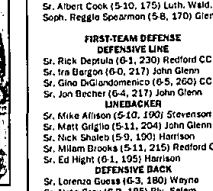
Rich Deputila
Catholic Central



Ira Bargon
Westland John Glenn



Gino DiGiamandrea
Catholic Central



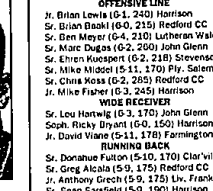
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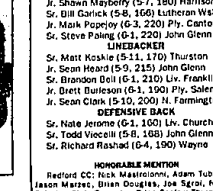
Nick Shaleb
Farmington Harrison



Milan Brooks
Catholic Central



Ed Hight
Farmington Harrison



Lorenzo Guess
Wayne Memorial



Nate Gray
Plymouth Salem



Greg Call
Catholic Central

and was a real key to our success."

Gino DiGiamandrea, lineman, Redford CC: After hardly playing as a junior, DiGiamandrea developed into Observers' top pass rusher with nine sacks.

He had 49 tackles, including 26 solos and 24 assists. The one-time soccer goalkeeper also recovered two fumbles.

"He was relentless. The way he'd pass rush," Mach said. "He developed a lot. No one could block him on one. Teams ended up double teaming him as time went on."

Jon Becher, lineman, John Glenn: Becher's speed made him one of the most dangerous defensive ends in the WIAA. In addition, he provided much of the leadership and heart that propelled the Rockets to the Class AA semifinals.

He recorded 30 solo tackles and assisted on 24 others. The team captain also was a force on offense where he started two seasons at tight end. He grabbed seven passes this year and was a key blocker.

"Jon had a great senior year," Gordon said. "He worked very hard and was one of the best leaders we've ever had."

Mike Allison, linebacker, Stevenson: Allison recorded 86 tackles (nearly twice that of the next leading tackler), knocked down four passes, recovered a fumble and had two interceptions. Both of his interceptions led to game-winning touchdowns.

"His toughness and mobility stood out, but he is also a very savvy player," Stevenson defensive coordinator Conrad Newman said. "We relied on him to make our reads and calls on the field, and he used those keys to always be around the ball."

Allison also scored three touchdowns as a fullback on offense.

Matt Griglio, linebacker, John Glenn: The three-year starter saved his best season for last as he recorded 75 solo tackles and 57 assists this season.

Griglio will graduate as the leading tackler in Glenn history.

"Matt is very smart and understands what to do," Gordon said. "He's worked so hard the past three years. It's been a real pleasure to coach him."

Nick Shaleb, linebacker, Harrison: Shaleb, a three-year starter, recovered a fumble and had two interceptions. Both of his interceptions led to game-winning touchdowns.

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Matt Griglio, linebacker, John Glenn: The three-year starter saved his best season for last as he recorded 75 solo

better than Brooks.

He plugged the gaps as his role required and finished with a team-high 97 total tackles.

As a fullback, the three-year letter winner rushed for 300 yards in 52 carries and two TDs. Brooks sparked the Shamrocks to the Catholic League title with 244 yards on 11 attempts against Brother Rice.

"Milan is an impact hitter," Mach said. "People knew when they got hit by him and wouldn't want to come back twice. His aggressiveness is what we pattern ourselves after."

Ed Hight, linebacker, Harrison: Hight was a two-year starter at inside linebacker and Harrison's leading tackler each season. He had 129 total tackles this year (with 75 first hits) and 246 for two seasons. Hight also started at offensive guard.

"He was the hardest hitter on our team," Harrington said. "We moved him from tackle to linebacker as a junior; he adapted quickly to the position and was outstanding. Ed came to play all the time; he had a mean disposition on the field."

Lorenzo Guess, back, Wayne: Guess, who committed to play Michigan State University, ended his career by being a stellar season on both sides of the ball.

He made 39 tackles, intercepted two passes and recovered one fumble. The four-year starter at quarterback threw for 590 yards and 12 touchdowns.

Lorenzo leads by example on the football field, on the basketball court and in the classroom," Howton said. "Hard work and commitment are the keys to his success. His work ethic is unparalleled; he was never outworked."

Greg Call, back, Catholic Central: The three-year starter on both sides of the ball had four interceptions, two fumble recoveries and 48 total tackles.

At quarterback he completed 34 of 75 passes for 412 yards with only one interception and two touchdowns. Call executed the option attack and rushed for 261 yards on 93 carries. He also filled in as a placekicker, converting one extra point and a 26-yard field goal.

"I'll always associate Greg Call with the word winner," Mach said. "He's one of the best athletes to come through CC and one of the reasons we were so successful. He's a great leader whose competitive attitude is contagious."

Nate Gray, back, Plymouth Salem: Gray was a three-year varsity player and two-time starter at quarterback and defensive back.

He had three interceptions and returned two for touchdowns of 72 and 91 yards. He had 33 tackles, caused one fumble and recovered another.

Gray directed Salem's winless offense, rushing 95 times for 444 yards and eight TDs. He completed 42 of 93 passes for 707 yards and five TDs.

"He provided great leadership and was a catalyst," Salem assistant coach Tom Garrett said. "He set the tone with his toughness and attitude. He's a real winner; he's the kind of guy who refuses to lose."