

Sports

Dan O'Meara, Editor 313-953-2141

on the web: <http://observer.com/cic.com>

The Farmington
Observer
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Thursday, November 27, 1997



DAN O'MEARA

'97 Harrison team
desires to make its
own history Friday

Just minutes after Farmington Harrison had earned a berth in the Class A championship game Saturday, word arrived at Rochester High School the Hawks would be playing Midland Dow for the title.

Someone asked coach John Herrington, as he fielded post-game questions following a semifinal victory over Birmingham Seaholm, if the Hawks had ever played the Chargers.

Being the history teacher he is, Herrington explained the first time Harrison played in the Silverdome more than two decades ago Dow was the opponent.

"Did we win?" asked a young Harrison fan, the excitement in his voice indicating his desire for a positive answer.

"We lost that one!" Herrington said, recalling the Hawks still made history in November, 1976.

Harrison participated in the second Class A championship game that year, but it was the first to be played indoors at the Pontiac Silverdome.

'97 Hawks make own history

Dow won the game, 36-27, but time and many successes in the intervening years have lessened the sting of that defeat.

"I've been waiting 20 years for a rematch," Herrington said tongue-in-cheek, knowing that score has little relevance this week or to the players who will play Friday afternoon.

"I told the kids 'If we get there and play Dow, I want some revenge.' But, coach?" they said. "We weren't even born then! It doesn't matter to them."

This will be a state record 11th visit to the Dome for the Hawks, who have won seven state championships.

But the players on this year's team are eager to win an eighth for themselves and finish the season with a state title of their own.

And for inspiration there was this quote on the blackboard in Herrington's classroom Monday: "Just getting to the Dome is not enough." The author was identified as Plato.

"I put that up there," Herrington said, branching out from teaching the U.S. Civil War to dabble in ancient Greek philosophy.

"Not one of the kids has commented on it," he added, sounding disappointed. "I don't think they know who Plato is."

He was kidding! Actually, this is a team of smart players, many of whom are accomplished students in the classroom. Herrington's other hope this week is that his team be nominated for academic all-state honors, too.

Special team for special year

For reasons such as that, the 1997 team has earned a special place in the hearts of the Harrison coaches. A strong work ethic and good citizenship are among their collective character traits.

"All teams are special in their own way, but this group has a number of players who've been with us three years," the coach said. Herrington said, adding the entire team has been well-behaved off the field, too.

"They're respectful to the coaches and other adults associated with the program. And they've done well academically."

"They're a great bunch of kids," coach Bob Sutter said. "I got nervous before a game, because I want them to do so well and accomplish all they're capable of."

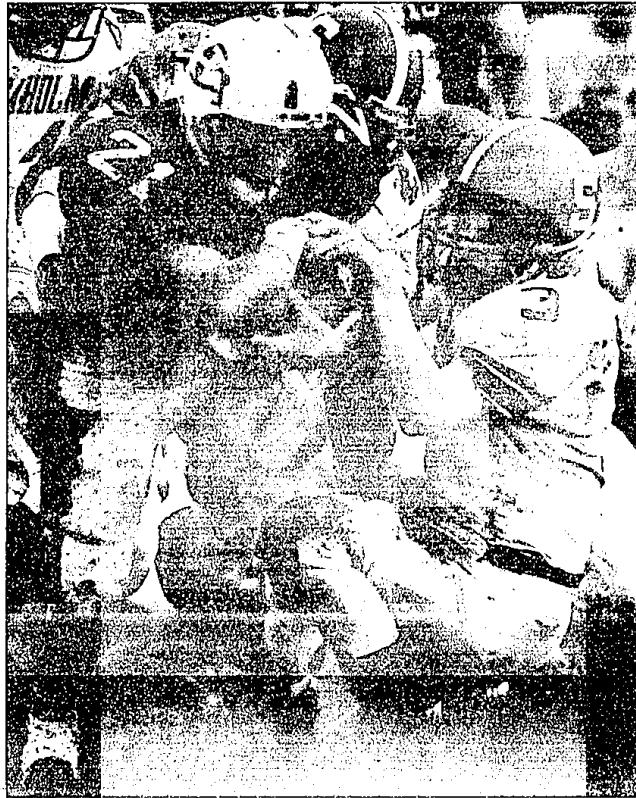
That sentiment is one reason the Senior Farewell is likely to be an emotional event Thursday.

The Senior Farewell is a tradition for Harrison teams going to Dome and taken place at the end of the last practice, which will be late morning on Thanksgiving day.

"The team gathers under the goal post; I say something about each senior, and the seniors come through the line of underclassmen," Herrington said.

The other reason is the Hawks will

Hawks one win from state title



STAFF PHOTO BY JERRY ZOLTAN

Hard-running Hawk: Harrison senior Chris Ghannam runs over Seasholm defender Adam Ritter en route to a 146-yard game Saturday in a Class A semifinal contest.

A generation later, Harrison meets Midland Dow on the same Silverdome playing field to decide the Class A football champion Friday.

BY DAN O'MEARA
STAFF WRITER

The objective for the Farmington Harrison football team is clear but not so simple. Achieving it will require one more outstanding effort.

The No. 1-ranked Hawks (12-0) will attempt to complete the fifth undefeated season in school history and win an eighth state championship Friday afternoon.

"For this team, getting to the Dome is not enough," Harrison coach John Herrington said. "They want to go there and win it."

Midland Dow (11-1) is the last team standing in the way of reaching that goal and will challenge Harrison for the Class A title at 1 p.m. in the Silverdome.

The Chargers are playing in their first state championship game since defeating the Hawks in the 1976 Class A contest, 36-27.

Dow is champion of the rugged Saginaw Valley Conference and features a potent running game led by senior tailback Matt Samocki and a strong defense.

"We don't have many stars, but we have a lot of good kids," Dow coach Frank Altimore said.

"We're not very big, but we're pretty tough and we are fast! That's a requisite for our defense. You can't play Flint, Saginaw and Bay City and not have speed."

Samocki rushed for more than 1,500 yards last year and has gained 1,470 this season while scoring 12 touchdowns.

He had a game like Harrison tailback Chris Ghannam did Saturday. Samocki ran for 145 yards on 32 carries and the game's only TD as Dow blanked East Lansing, 7-0. Ghannam had 145 yards and a touchdown on 31 attempts in Farmington Harrison's 21-7 win over Birmingham Seaholm.

Samocki has good balance and good feet anyway, and he'll be even quicker on the carpet," Herrington said.

"So the first thing we have to do is stop him, but the fullback is 6-3 and 235 pounds. They have the big powerful running back we don't have."

Senior upback Jason Spiece has received scholarship offers from Big Ten schools and complements Samocki, rushing for 750 yards and nine touchdowns.

"They're Mr. Inside and Mr. Outside," Altimore said, adding Samocki is a little speedster and Spiece a great blocker.

"The strength of our team lies in our defense and a very strong running game. In the process, our running game complements our defense. We keep the ball; the defense goes in and does its job."

Harrison has been good against the run this year and hopes to prevent Dow from doing what Grandville did in last year's Class A final. The Bulldogs rushed 56 times for 303 yards in a 24-17 victory over the Hawks.

Please see HAWKS, C4

Grubbers continue proud tradition

BY DAN O'MEARA
STAFF WRITER

Ask any opposing coach about the 1997 Farmington Harrison football team, and he'll probably say its best asset is its offensive line.

He might not know the names of each individual lineman, but he knows what they can do collectively.

And that's what makes a Grubber.

The qualities that best represent what a Grubber is and does are anonymity and performance.

"They're the hogs up front; they just do their job day in and day out," Harrison line coach Bob Sutter, giving the official definition of a Grubber. "They block and keep their mouths shut; they

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develop pride in doing their job."

As the longtime head of Grubberdom, Sutter gets credit for building an esprit de corps among his offensive linemen, for giving them their own identity to rally around, for creating a tradition within the larger Hawk tradition.

"We're like a team within a team," senior center Brian Lewis said. "We're like a lot of pride in being a Grubber."

You don't get a lot of glory, but you know in your heart you're a major part of the team. You're a team victory; it makes us feel good to know we contributed if we don't get all the press."

Ah, the press! That's for the Glory-boys, the running backs and guys who score touchdowns, not a Grubber!

The Grubbers have a strict code, and avoiding publicity is at the top of the list.

The penalty for breaking the code is doing down-ups, which means this story is good and bad news for Grubbers. They get some deserved recognition but will pay for it. Not even Sutter is immune from the rule.

"It means we'll have to do a few," Lewis said, adding he had to do so early in the season. "Coach Sutter did 130 before the state championship game last year. That's the record. He did all of them, too."

The Grubbers didn't even mind that Sutter did his down-ups on a mat in the gym instead of the practice field.

"We're not going to say anything," Lewis said. "He did them and that's good enough for us."

As for their performance this year, the Grubbers have had few ups and downs. They've been steady all season and played well in the Hawks' 12-0 finish for another state championship Friday.

That has other coaches and longtime Harrison watchers thinking the '97 Grubbers are one of the best units the Hawks have ever put on the field.

Please see GRUBBERS, C5

Farmington athletes fare well in 'A' finals

BY RICHARD SHOOK
STAFF WRITER

They were good — and they might get better.

Farmington Hills Mercy's girls swim team finished a solid sixth in the state Saturday in the during Class A swim meet at Michigan State University.

The Marlins scored 94 points in the highly-competitive meet. Birmingham Seaholm won it with 169 points. North Farmington tied Walled Lake Western for 13th with 38 points, and Farmington Harrison deadlocked Brighton for 20th with 16.

It was a sound improvement for Mercy, which was 13th in the previous Michigan High School Athletic Association Class A meet.

"Looking at the situation now," Marlins coach Jim Downs said, "we probably could have scored another eight to 10 points out if we'd done some things differently."

"For instance, Amy McCullough swam faster the second day than she did the first in the 500-yard freestyle. She swam 5:05 and 5:02."

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Downs explained that swimming faster on the qualifying day would have put her in the speedier heat for the finals. Finishing last in the fast heat scores more than winning the slower, which is what happened.

"For a freshman, what she did was pretty good, though," Downs said. "She broke a school record that had stood since 1980."

The best showing by an area swimmer was the runner-up finish by freshman sensation Hannah Pawliewicz of North Farmington.

She swam 58.07 in the 100 butterfly and placed second in the 200 individual medley.

Mercy's Erin Downs was fifth in the same event with a 58.97 clocking.

McCullough was a strong third in the 200 freestyle, timing 1:54.03. It was



STAFF PHOTO BY ESTAN MECHELL

One of the state's best: Sophomore Elizabeth Posvar was a top-six swimmer in two events and helped Mercy score in two relays.

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