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"Grandville controlled the ball and moved it; if that happens, we're in trouble," Herrington said. "We have to keep them from getting 6 and 7 yards on first down, which Grandville did and always seemed to put us in a bind."

"Some teams that run a few formations and a few plays are harder to stop. You know what they want to do, but stopping them isn't easy to do."

While the passing game isn't a big part of the Dow offense, the Chargers are apt to spring a surprise and do just that.

Senior quarterback Mike Johnson is the Dow captain and "pretty much our team leader," according to Altmore.

"When we have to throw, we throw," he said. "But you like to

dance with who brought you, and that's been primarily the running game."

"We were down 10 points to Saginaw and threw the ball. We throw the ball just about the time you don't want us to throw."

The emphasis on the running game is quite a departure from the offense Dow used when Altmore took over as head coach 15 years ago. But it was a change necessitated by circumstances, he said.

"We were a one-back team and used a lot of motion," he said.

"We were very much like the teams you've seen in your league (Western Lakes Activities Association), enamored with the passing game."

"We got in the playoffs one year at Traverse City and ran into mud, and I decided we were no longer a passing team. We were playing every year for the playoffs."

The change was necessary, "especially for northern teams because the fields are going to be bad; the weather is going to be bad," Altmore added. "We figured the path to the playoffs would go through places like Traverse City and Escanaba."

"We changed to a hard-nosed running game, which we felt complemented our defense even better."

The Chargers also have an excellent kicker in junior Phil Brabbs, who has booted nine field goals with his longest being 49 yards.

"And he kicks under pressure," Altmore said, adding Brabbs kicked a 25-yarder on the last play of the game to beat Saginaw in the regular season.

While the Dow offense had eight starters back from last year and is mostly seniors, the defense was a largely a new unit at the start of the season but has performed well.

"The juniors (seven starters)

have filled in the spots on defense, and that's been the strongest part of the team," Altmore said.

In their 5-2 defense, the Chargers are led by junior inside linebacker Andrew Smith and senior outside linebacker Doug Church. Both are All-SVC players.

Church's lack of size (5-8, 165) belies how well he plays. He had six sacks and 14 solo tackles in the win over East Lansing.

"He's like a Pocket Hercules," Altmore said, comparing Church to the Olympic weightlifter from Turkey. "He's one of the strongest kids we have on the team."

"He's a sprinter on the track team, too; He quit wrestling to devote himself to being a better football player."

The Chargers have the fastest 11 players on defense the Harrison coaches have seen, according to Herrington.

"(Smith) seems to be able to go sideline to sideline, and they bring great pressure from the corners with the two ends," he said. "No. 5 (Church) destroyed East Lansing; he was all over the place."

The Harrison Grubbers "will have to do the job on those guys," Herrington added. "It's hard to evaluate their secondary, because not too many teams have tried to pass on them."

The Hawks have a balanced offense to keep the Dow defense guessing, and the indoor climate could help a passing game that lagged due to the weather and game circumstances the last two weeks.

Quarterback Jared Hopkins is having a fine season but was 8-of-20 for 145 yards and one touchdown in the previous two games after throwing for nearly 300 yards against Dearborn Edsel Ford in the playoff opener.

"The good conditions (in the Dome) will help, but it depends

on the flow of the game," Herrington said.

"Once we got the ball back (from Seaborn in the fourth quarter), we wanted to eat up the clock and not give them two possessions and a chance to tie the score."

"The conditions the week before were not very favorable to the passing game. We have to come out of our playing-in-the-mud mode to play on the quicker stuff."

TEAMMATE REMEMBERED: Shawn Mayberry, who died in a drowning accident last summer, was a junior and the starting noseguard for the Hawks in last year's Class A final. He was overcome with grief when Harrison lost to Grandville, 24-17.

He would've relished the chance to play for the championship in the Silverdome again.

"We all remember his intensity and his love for the game," senior tackle Mike Fisher said. "He always fought back and never gave up. It keeps you going when you know he'd be right there with you."

"When he died, it brought us closer as a team. People realized you can't take things for granted. It made us stronger as individuals."

THE COACHES: Frank Altmore is in his 15th year as head coach at Midland Dow and his 31st overall. His career record at Dow is 85-48.

He is only the second coach in Dow history, having replaced Al Quick, who was the coach in 1976. Altmore was previously the defensive coordinator at Midland High.

John Herrington, the only head football coach Harrison has ever had, is 24-7, 54-3 in his 28 seasons.

WHO'S WHO: You'll have to be paying attention to know which team is which Friday. Harrison and Dow have the same school colors: green and gold.

"We're going to look the same," Altmore said. "The only difference is we just don't throw the ball as much as Harrison. I believe whichever team can run the football is going to win the game."



STAFF PHOTO BY BRYAN MITCHELL

Headed for the end zone: Senior Zack Cornwell rushed for two touchdowns in a playoff win over Edsel Ford.

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speak of their late teammate and remember Shawn Mayberry at that time, too.

Mayberry, who died last summer in a drowning accident, would have been a senior on this team and an integral part of the Harrison defense.

"When we have the Senior Farewell, we'll mention him," said Herrington, whose eyes turned watery and had to compose himself before continuing. "We had to say farewell way too early."

"That's going to be hard. He would've had fun this year. Football was his life."

The Hawks, who have worn a decal with Mayberry's No. 72 on their helmets all season, will have to put emotion aside on Friday, however.

Harrison players vowed to remember Mayberry and honor his memory with their hard work and dedication to excellence.

They've been true to their word; the results have been superb. The Hawks have backed up their No. 1 ranking all season and have progressed within one victory of the pinnacle in high school sports by winning all 12 games they've played.

"I think it's been in the back of their minds the whole year, and they'd like to get the job finished that they started," Herrington said.

But the Hawks haven't relied on emotion to carry them this

far. The 1997 season has not been marked by highs and lows from this team but rather a steady, consistent effort.

On the field, the Hawks have been very businesslike. That's where their maturity comes into play and being good students translates to being good team players.

One game remains to be played, and it's the most important now. It will take another solid performance against what promises to be a formidable opponent from Midland Dow.

If the Hawks play it the way they did the first 12, however, this one should produce the right ending and perfect season for a team of Hawks who deserve to be state champions, too.

■ The Class AA matchup should be an interesting game. Ann Arbor Huron is the Cinderella team, Catholic Central the old pro in games played at the Silverdome.

Huron is a big, well-rounded team that reminds me of Harrison. The Rats were impressive in wins over Belleville and Walled Lake Western that I witnessed. I thought the better team won, but I don't think Huron is 21 points better than Western on a dry playing field.

The difference Saturday? Confidence and experience in these games. The Rats toppled No. 1 Rockford, but it's their first time in the Silverdome and they'll be facing a real juggernaut in CC.

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