

Yep, it's football season; that means grid picks

BY BRAD EMMONS
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Wait a minute! Don't tell me it's football season already, a week before Labor Day weekend?

In case you're counting, the expanded playoffs now make it a 14-week season, so if you're Redford Catholic Central and Farmington Harrison, the two-time defending state champions in their respective classes (AAA), you make plans for five rounds of playoffs instead of four.

Now all the six-win teams get into the big dance. I say play an eight-game regular season and let everybody in for one last shot.

Good thing the weather has been cooperating so far with the reduced training camp schedule.

But what if temperatures soar back into the 90s?

You could see a lot of yellow hankies flying Friday night with teams only given three weeks to prepare.

But one thing remains constant, the prediction race will not change.

Yours truly finished strong last year, correctly picking 27 of the final 28 games played by the

PREDICTIONS

downtrodden Irishman, better known as Dan O'Meara (no relation to the golfer Mark; that's for sure).

The final totals for 1998, if you had forgotten — Emmos, 103-27; O'Meara, 100-30.

What's in store for Week No. 17? Let's give it a go and roll the dice (not at the new MGM, please).

FRIDAY'S GAMES

(all start at 7:30 p.m. unless noted)

St. Catharines (2-7) at Bishop Borgess (6-4), 7 p.m. Football returns to Appleton Street (in the shadows of Detroit Diesel) as the speedy Spartans look to improve on last year's mark. Borgess drilled Detroit St. Catharines 40-12 a year ago. **PICKS:** Borgess wins the opener.

Liv. Churchill (2-7) vs. Redford Union (6-3), 7 p.m. at Kraft Field: The Panthers were bigger, faster and stronger than nine of their 10 opponents a year ago, reaching the playoffs for the first time ever. Several key players were lost, but senior Mike Mackie (6-1, 214), who rushed for 4,389 yards, and new quarterback Dave Brown could give Churchill more headaches. The Chargers will put 31 seniors on the field, led by lineman Mike Gura (6-3, 320) and QB John Bennett. **PICKS:** Mackie give RU the edge.

Lincoln Park (4-5) at Liv. Franklin (1-8), 7 p.m.: The Raiders downed the Patriots 19-0 in last year's opener, but this could be a more even matchup. Franklin quarterback Joe Ruggiero can put zip on the ball, the key question is whether he'll get enough protection. **PICKS:** Lincoln Park squeaks out a win.

Det. Cooley (4-8) at Westland Green (2-7), 7 p.m.: Cooley coach Tom Mosa is turning running back Joseph Tansie (700 yards) and quarterback-defensive back Leslie Davis. Playoff-tested Glenn returns a strong nucleus despite the loss of all-time leading rusher Reggie Spearman with the likes of new tailback Eric Jones, along with Ben Harris, Jake Tharp and Dave Leonardowski. Glenn beat the Cardinals a year ago, 24-6. **PICKS:** Glenn roars out of the gate.

Wayne (4-6) at Romulus (10-1), 7 p.m.: The Zebras started out hot in 1998, winning four of their first five before dropping their final four. It will be a young Wayne team for sure. So it's good that Romulus, a Class A regional finalist a year ago, graduates All-State running back Freddie Russell. **PICKS:** Romulus grounds the Zebras.

D.H. Crestwood (0-8) at Garden City (2-7), 7 p.m.: The Cougars closed without Crestwood in last year's season opener, 38-5. This year's Cougar squad will rely heavily on quarterback Rob Hudson, who will give GC a more diversified attack. The primary runner is tailback Josh Fee. **PICKS:** The Cougars start out 1999 feeling good.

Red. Thurston (5-4) at Willow Run (2-7), 7 p.m.: The Eagles do not have Scott Genrod (Indiana) to carry the load and they don't have a home field this season either. The Class B Flyers have only 18 players,

but they have a good one in tailback Josh Allison (6-1, 185). The Eagles counter with fullback/inside linebacker Brian Reid. **PICKS:** Flip a coin; it's Thurston again.

Dearborn (9-2) at Liv. Stevenson (6-4): Stevenson took the opening drive and marched down the field and scored, only to lose 19-7. There's no more C.J. Kruger and Colin Wilkinson to contend with, so the Spartans, returning a slew of talented skill players, should be on a more level playing field this time around. Dearborn's top returnee is lineman Scott Golem. **PICKS:** Stevenson looks very formidable.

Ply. Canton (3-8) at Ypsilanti (8-3): Ypsal, coached by Dan Brown, moves up to the Mega-White. Canton, which severed ties with perennial playoff foe Monroe in the season opener, is coming off a 26-25 win in the 1998 season finale over rival Plymouth Salem. Can the momentum continue for second-year coach Tim Beechler? **PICKS:** Canton has the edge.

Pt. Huron Northern (5-4) at Pky. Salem (4-8): No more Belleville on the season card for Rocks coach Tom Moshimer, who was a big proponent of the newly expanded playoff system. Port Huron Northern won its last five games of 1998 after losing its first four. Northern's offense appears ready to catch up with the defense. **PICKS:** Despite heavy construction zones, the trip is well worth it for Northern.

Novi (5-4) at Farmington (6-3): New lights, high expectations and a quality opponent are the face of the host Falcons, who are expected to challenge for the Lakes Division title in the WLA. Novi, won't be a pushover. The Wildcats have a talented split end in 6-2,

195-pound Pat Muston, who averaged 21 yards per catch, along with quarterback Mitch Malar. Novi won last year's matchup, 38-7, but had to give back the win after using an ineligible player. **PICKS:** Farmington doesn't disappoint the home fans.

Roseville (1-8) at N. Farmington (1-9): The Raiders will also go under the home lights for the first time. Their only victory was a forfeit win over Orchard Lake St. Mary's (actually a 42-0 loss at the Pontiac Silverdome). Roseville is led by 6-1, 175-pound quarterback/free safety Kevin McClelland, along with linebackers Eric Fox and Steve Gatto. They will also install a new 4-3 defense against the Raiders, who will use a variation of the Wing-T. **PICKS:** Roseville is slightly better.

Oxford (8-3) at P.H. Harrison (13-0): The Hawks were the superior team last year, beating Oxford twice — 48-0 in the season opener and 48-7 in the state semifinals. Oxford is led by one of the top linemen in the state, 6-4, 261-pound power tackle Eric Obichiesi, who is high on the lists of Michigan and Michigan State. He was also a runner-up in the Division II state wrestling tournament as a heavyweight.

St. Agatha (2-3) vs. Garrettsville-Port Sandus (0-7): The Aggies reached the play offs a year ago only to lose to Peck, 28-14. Dan Boulier, a 6-3, 180-pound sophomore, will be the key whether he's at quarter back or running back. Port Sandus, trying to revamp its program, scored only three touchdowns all of 1998. **PICKS:** The Aggies are off and running.

Redford CC (12-0) vs. A.A. Pioneer (6-3), 7 p.m. at Pontiac Silverdome: No more Rogowski, Lusky, Braselton, so what's a coach like Tom Mach to do? Don't worry, the Shamrocks have 69 varsity players and some veterans to build another strong nucleus around including Mike Morris, John Kawa, Matt Loder, Steve Dominguez and Jeremiah Hicks. Pioneer, which returns 15 starters, won its last six games of 1998 and should be a playoff contender. Running back Steve Shipman (6-1, 195) could be one of Washtenaw County's best. **PICKS:** CC shows the Lions how to perform at the Silverdome.

rather Walter Regland, but new coach Greg Hudkins has a pair of gems in Scott Wilson and Tim Shaw. Harper Woods beat Claremont in last year's matchup, 35-6. **PICKS:** Harper Woods establishes itself.

SATURDAY'S GAMES

(all at 1 p.m. unless noted)

Wayne Mt. Carmel (5-8) at Liv. Westland (0-9): Mount Carmel did not fare well in the Catholic League's D-Section, while Lutheran Westland went winless in 1998. Coach Gary Kamin has a thin roster, but returns Josh Molderhauer, Charlie Horst and Andy Molderhauer give the Warriors some offensive punch. **PICKS:** Mount Carmel spoils the Warriors' opener.

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O'Meara from page C1

Publishing on Monday a few years ago, our deadlines were such that we couldn't get Saturday games in the Sunday paper. About the time teams were kicking off to start the second half, the Farmington edition was going on the press.

The start of Friday night football has heightened the excitement that ordinarily accompanies the start of a new season.

Harrison enters the 1999 campaign as the two-time defending Western Lakes and Class A state champion with a 26-game winning streak.

I believe the Hawks will have another good, if not great, year. But I think the anticipation on the eve of a historic season is greatest at Farmington High, which appropriately has been playing football a lot longer than its sister schools.

The Falcons have a veteran team with size, speed, strength and experience. Adding to the interest is the fact Farmington plans to use a varied offense and no huddle. That should keep opposing defenses guessing.

"We can control the tempo of the game (with the no-huddle)," coach John Bechtel said. "Our kids like it. It's a fun thing and the more fun we make it the better we play. The most important factor is we can run twice as many plays in practice."

The addition of former Wall Lake Central coach Darrell Harper as offensive coordinator in combination with Bechtel's ideas should make for an interesting mix.

"We'll probably be more one-back if anything, but we're going to be everywhere," Bechtel said. "We're going to spread people

out.

"When we defense coach Harper (when he was at Central), he forced us to play very basic on defense, because we couldn't load up and take chances."

Bechtels also knows the other Western Lakes coaches know Farmington has a lot of positives going for it. Therefore, the Falcons can't expect to snook up on anybody.

"We have to be at the top of our game," he said. "If we got to the point we play without a great level of consistency and control the ball, we'll be a pretty good football team."

If all goes well, the Falcons could either replace or join Harrison as the Farmington representative in the post-season playoffs.

The expanded format — every

team with a 6-3 record qualifies now, and some 5-4 teams will be used to round out the field — means more teams will get in.

It would be nice, as well as a first, if all three Farmington teams were to qualify. Farmington has had two qualifiers just once, that being 1991.

The Falcons have never qualified for the playoffs, and this could be their year. But maintaining their focus is essential.

Farmington opens with Novi, and the Falcons need only recall what occurred last year to do that. The game was a disaster from the start, and Farmington ended up losing 38-7.

"Novi will be a good football team as we'll play all year, and they're going to be ready, too," Bechtel said, adding the Wildcats are among the Kensington Valley Conference favorites.

"We haven't set team goals; that's something we haven't talked about. The only team goal

we have right now is Novi week. That's the only thing we can focus on now."

"For us to be successful, we have to focus and do all the little things. The key to success in football is turnovers. We can't turn the ball over or have penalties."

"I told the players, for the next 16 weeks, nothing is more important in our lives than the football. If we have it, we want to keep it; if we don't have it, we want to get it."

Bechtels added this, which the Falcons might consider words to live by as they begin this most promising of football seasons: "What we say is not significant; what we do counts!"

MORE THAN BRAIN: The Falcons have brains, too, and they use them. Besides other honors the Falcons hope to garner, Bechtel wants his team to be an academic all-state team.

The 11 players with the highest grade-point averages determine the

team's standing. Farmington was fifth in Class A last year, but only the top four are recognized. The team's GPA last semester was 3.81.

BLAST FROM PAST: Well, not exactly. It was an old memory but not something the Harrison coaching staff recalled fondly.

John Harrington begins his 30th year as the only head coach in school history and Rob Sutter his 27th as a varsity assistant. Sutter has been coaching at Harrison for 30 years, too, but he was a JV coach the first three.

Anyhow, the construction at the school reminded them of what it was like in 1970 when the school was new and the program was getting started.

When practice began Aug. 9, the coaches had their office in the shower, where all the desks, chairs, file cabinets, etc., had been moved.

"(They, nobody ever said Harrington, a member of the coaches Hall of Fame with 261 career victories, was all well) Anyhow, when asked about their coaching longevity, Sutter said:

"We feel like we're starting over. (That first year) we practiced at Beechview (Swim Club), and we put the equipment in the shower."

ONLY 18 GAMES LEFT AT "THE CORNER"

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Fri Aug 27 7:05 Fireworks Spectacular! (WCX, UPN-50, UN Office Solutions, OBE)
Sat Aug 28 5:05 Historic Tigers Cap! (Entertainment)
 Ernie Harwell Autograph Session / 3:30-4:30
 Signing copies of "Michigan & Trumbull" - The Video
Sun Aug 29 1:05 Collector Card Set #4 / Kirk Gibson and Gates Brown! (Ballpark Brands)
 Gibson and Brown autograph session - 11:30-12:30
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