



DAN O'MEARA

Hold get-well cards; Falcon gridders are feeling much better

This will come as good news to fans of the Farmington High School football team.

Conversely, it will not be so well received by teams opposing the Falcons. That means Garden City this week and, hopefully, more down the road.

It might seem like a tidbit of insignificant news to some, but it could be a huge factor as Farmington tries to put together an extended playoff run.

Here it is. The Falcons are only now starting to become a healthy football team. As well as they've done this year, the Falcons have seldom if ever had all of their primary players available to play at the same time due to injuries.

That Farmington is 7-3 and where it is, competing for a Division II district championship Friday night, is a tribute to the depth on the team.

As the Falcons begin to have more people ready to suit up, the depth chart gets deeper, and that means keeping more players fresh in tough games that could lie ahead.

How good can Falcons be?

In view of how well Farmington played last week in its 24-6, first-round victory over Novi, opponents might find it a little scary when coach John Bechtel says the Falcons have never been in better shape physically as an entire team.

"We haven't been healthy all year, and (Monday) was about as healthy as we've been all year," Bechtel said. "We had everyone there except (senior running back Mike) Addison, who broke his foot five weeks ago."

The Falcons welcomed back one of their four senior captains, Dustin Gress, who has missed most of the season with a broken hand.

Gress remained visible and an active part of the team despite the injury, however. If you've been to Farmington games, you've seen No. 81 roaming the sideline, cheering on his teammates.

During timeouts, he would fly into action, grab the water bottles and dash on to the field with them. If there was anything he could do to help, he wanted to do it.

After the Novi game, when the team gathered at one of the field as most do for a post-game talk from the coaches, Gress addressed his teammates, too.

Unfortunately for me, he had his back to me, and I couldn't hear everything he said. Bechtel helped me out, however.

"He told our kids 'All I want you to know is it's my first day back (Monday) and, if you're in my way, I'm going to knock you down,'" Bechtel said. "He's just so excited to be back."

New role for returning player

Bechtel added Gress provides the fresh legs I referred to earlier. Gress (6-1, 178) has played wide receiver and defensive back, but the Falcons might use him at defensive end Friday night.

"We're thinking of bringing him off the corner, because he's so quick," Bechtel said. "We want to find a place for Dustin to fit into that 11. If today is any indication, it's going to work out great, because he can fly."

"He can help us with some pass rush off the weak side. We'll work him into the secondary as well and special teams; he'll certainly be on the field. Like he says, 'I just want to play.'"

You had to be happy for Gress when it was apparent Farmington was going to beat Novi, because Bechtel said he would return to practice Monday if the Falcons won.

At the same time, you had to feel bad for senior inside linebacker Rory Crittenden. Though he was dressed for the game, he didn't play either due to a sprained knee.

But it was the first game he missed all season. He has been such a big part of Farmington's success and solid

Please see O'MEARA, C5



Playoff competition: North Farmington's Samantha McComb, being guarded by Emily Jackson, scored 15 points in a 37-35 Western Lakes playoff loss to Harrison.

STAFF PHOTO BY BILL DREFAER

Hawks notch tourney win over Raiders



Farmington Harrison held on for a 37-35 win Tuesday when a last-second shot didn't fall for visiting North Farmington in a girls basketball game.

BY DAN O'MEARA
STAFF WRITER
domeara@homecomm.net

The right player had the ball in the right place at the right time Tuesday, but Samantha McComb and her North Farmington teammates didn't get the right result.

That was a relief to Farmington Harrison coach Pete Mantyla as his Hawks escaped with a 37-35 victory in the first round of the Western Lakes Activities Association girls basketball tournament.

McComb's three-point shot as time was running out missed its mark, ending a late comeback that nearly won the game for North but allowed Harrison to hang on and win.

The Hawks (13-5) will play at WLA regular-season champ Plymouth Salem (17-1) in a semifinal game Friday.

"I was at their Walled Lake Central game, and they were down two with under 10 seconds left," Mantyla said. "Everyone knew (McComb) was going to get the ball. She did and she beat them."

"That was the last thing I wanted to see when they got the ball back in her hands."

The Hawks had a 37-31 lead with 36 seconds remaining Tuesday and appeared headed for a sure victory.

But they missed a one-and-one opportunity after which Danielle Kelmigian sank two free throws for the Raiders (11-7).

McComb stole the ball on the Harrison inbound play and made a layup with 12 seconds to play, pulling North within two points, 37-35.

The Raiders forced another turnover after the Hawks inbounded the ball, and a teammate passed to McComb, who was open on the left wing near the arc.

McComb, who finished with a game-high 15 points but was well under her average, wheeled and fired a shot as she hurried to beat the clock, but the ball was wide right of the iron.

"There's nobody else I'd want shooting it with confidence," North coach Linda Perkins said. "She's pretty good at shooting it in that situation, off balance."

"The kids had a great second half and comeback. They put themselves in a position to win it, and that's truly

Please see GIRLS BASKETBALL, C4

Falcons face Cougars for district crown

BY DAN O'MEARA
STAFF WRITER
domeara@homecomm.net

The Farmington and Garden City football teams have a lot in common.

Both are enjoying their best seasons in a long time, and both won their first-ever playoff games last week.

But it all comes to an end for one of them Friday when the Falcons (7-3) go on the road again to battle the Cougars (8-2) in a Division II district championship game. Kickoff is at 7:30 p.m.

Farmington was very impressive last

FOOTBALL

week while dominating host Novi for a 24-6 victory. The Falcons played with great confidence and played like a team on a mission.

"I think that is the case," Farmington coach John Bechtel said. "It's been the case with this class since it has been at Farmington. It's been a dream of theirs, not just to get there but get there and finish it."

"Deep down did they really believe

it? It took the course of a season for the kids to get to the point they know they can play with anybody, and that means a lot."

"After we won last week, you didn't get the sense we had won the Super Bowl. It was 'OK, this is one; put it in the bank, get on the bus and get out of here.' They were there on a mission to win the game, and it was the next step. Now we go back to work."

Like the Falcons, the Cougars also avenged an earlier defeat in their playoff opener, beating Wyandotte, 27-14.

Garden City, a big team that com-

pared favorably in size to Farmington, lost back-to-back games and ended 4-2 in the Mega Conference White Division but has won three straight since then.

The Cougars are led by junior running back Mike Sparks, who has rushed for 1,476 yards and scored 14 touchdowns on 233 carries (6.3 average).

"Sparks is their go-to guy, but that's not to say he's the only guy who can move," Bechtel said. "The wingback and quarterback can run. They have

Please see FALCONS, C2



Going for the goal: Harrison's Brian Nelson tries to get in the end zone after catching a pass at the Andover 4-yard line Saturday.

STAFF PHOTO BY SHARON LAMBLEY

Harrison maps plan for visit to St. Clair

BY DAN O'MEARA
STAFF WRITER
domeara@homecomm.net

Having been in the playoffs more times (18) than any team in the state, you would think Farmington Harrison had played just about every football team there was to play.

For the second time in as many weeks, the Hawks will face a first-time opponent Saturday when they travel to St. Clair for a 7:30 p.m. kickoff in a Division III district championship game.

"It's like the days when we were in (Class) BB, playing Monroe St. Mary's and teams you don't normally see," Harrison coach John Herrington said.

"We look forward to going to St. Clair. They have a beautiful stadium and a lot of fan support. It will be fun to go out there and play."

The Hawks (6-4) will see a wing-T offense for the second week in a row, too. St. Clair runs virtually the same offense as Bloomfield Hills Andover, which Harrison routed 49-0.

"We're fairly deceptive, but we don't try to hide the football like Marine City does," St. Clair coach Pete Fox said. "It's a fairly sophisticated offense. We've moved the ball well and played solid defense."

A key player for the Saints (7-3) is senior quarterback Rob Hamilton (6-11, 177), a double threat who has passed for more than 1,000 yards and rushed for about 500, according to Fox.

Senior upback T.J. Brinker (5-11, 175), senior tailback Brandon Avila (5-5, 165) and senior split end Matt Diehltrath (6-4, 185) are other key offensive players.

"They have a good power back in (Brinker), and (Avila) has real good speed," Herrington said. "The quarterback runs a nice play where he fakes to a running back and keeps the ball off tackle. He made a lot of yards on that play, so we have to be prepared to stop it."

"One of the wingbacks ran well against Country Day. We had a little trouble with the fullback against Andover, and they have a strong fullback; so we have to be strong up the middle."

St. Clair has good size on the left side of the line with senior center T.J. Pavlov (6-1, 215), senior guard Jim Jurysta (6-2, 215) and junior tackle Josh Turner (6-3, 237).

The Saints have scored nearly as many points as the Hawks, but they

Please see HAWKS, C7