

Shamrocks meet different group of gridiron Warriors

By JEFF KOWALSKI
Sports Editor

When Detroit Catholic Central football players think of Warriors, Catholic League rival Birmingham Brother Rice usually comes to mind.

But a school that has the same nickname, Walled Lake Western, gets all of its attention this week. Along with sharing a nickname with Rice, Western is gaining quite a reputation in football.

CC and Western, both 10-0, battle in a Division I District 2-1 game Saturday at Kraft Field in Redford Township.

The Shamrocks, winners of 28 straight games, are two-time defending state champions in Class AA and have won the state's subsequent No. 1 team throughout the season.

The Warriors, who were the Class AA state champs in '96, are ranked No. 2 in Division I.

The Warriors depend on a stingy defense that emphasizes speed and quickness more than size.

Western's top defensive back, senior Lorenzo Parker, has made a verbal commitment to play at Vanderbilt.

"They look very aggressive; they come at you very hard on defense," CC coach Tom Mach said.

South Lyon was held to 101 total yards in a 28-16 loss to Western last week. Afterward defensive tackle Delora Berman made a statement to the Detroit Free Press that was noticed by the CC team.

"No one can run on our defense," Berman said. "I think we've got the best D-line in the state."

"I'll just answer to it on the field," CC defensive tackle Jeremiah Hickey said.

The Warriors feature a spread-out offense which Mach likens to last year's

Backyard team. Senior tailback Cole Wright has 1,097 yards in 140 carries with 19 touchdowns. Quarterback Chris Payton is a runner to run and pass, rushing for 216 yards in 68 carries with 13 touchdowns and completing 81 of 86 passes for 886 yards, two touchdowns and two interceptions.

"They have good speed and create lanes," Mach said.

Western first-year coach Mike Zischel said the Shamrocks are by far the best team the Warriors have faced.

Senior tailback John Kava has 1,008 yards in 197 carries and 18 touchdowns and fullback Mike Witt has 478 yards in 122 carries with 11 scores.

If the Shamrocks have a weakness it's the passing game. John Hill has completed 26 of 70 passes for 807 yards with five touchdowns and no interceptions.

"They're a very, very good football team," Zischel said. "They play with a tremendous amount of confidence. If we're going to have a chance, it will have to be a defensive struggle. They're big, strong athletes. If anyone beats them it will be a tremendous accomplishment."

"I've never seen a team this good. We thought we played some pretty good teams, but we haven't played anyone like CC."

MACH REPORT: CC preview lineman Mike Morris and defensive back Mark Wiloughby were injured in the playoff win over Livonia Stevenson but are hoping to play Saturday.

Morris suffered a shoulder injury in the first half and watched the second half with an ice pack on his shoulder.

Wiloughby injured his knee after being tackled following an interception. He's seventh of the year. He played the rest of the game, but his practice time was limited this week.

It's all-Birmingham final: Rice-Groves

By MARTY BURNER
Staff Writer

What a perfect way to end the millennium! Birmingham Brother Rice against a Birmingham Public Schools team in a football playoff game. It doesn't get any better.

The last time this situation occurred was 1993 when Birmingham Seaholm upset Brother Rice, 14-13, in a thrilling playoff encounter. It still stands as one of Seaholm's most vivid victories.

This year it's Groves' turn to challenge the Warriors.

The Division II District final is set for 1 p.m. Saturday at Seaholm High School.

"You know, the last time it's played a Birmingham school it

FOOTBALL

was Seaholm and they beat us in a first-round game," said Rice coach Al Fracassa. "I don't know what it is. Everybody we play treats us like it's a big game."

"Everybody wants to out-do Brother Rice, which is good. If they do that, then it's a feather in their cap. We know we're going to have a battle on our hands, but we've had 10 battles already this year."

Groves coach Jim MacDougall knows the Falcons will be underdogs, he's certain his program has risen to a competitive level no matter who the opponent.

"Just a few years ago we could

n't have fathomed this could have happened," MacDougall said. "I've been excited about games before, but this is one I really am excited about. It will show us where our program is."

"I'm certain we'll be underdogs, but I don't think the kids will go into it with any fear or trepidation. I know the kids believe we can win it, and that's kind of exciting."

"We're a decent football team and this is going to be fun."

Groves (9-1) tied a school mark for wins set back in 1978 when Bill Rankins' squad finished 9-0 in the regular season. The Falcons earned their first playoff berth that fall, losing a first-round game to Rice, 21-7. That

was the last meeting them. The Falcons thrive on an aggressive ground game that features the talented tandem of Ron Ramirez and Dorian Sutton. Each has rushed for more than 700 yards, and they've combined for 28 touchdowns. Sutton is the power back while Ramirez is more the elusiveness type.

Because of that powerful rushing attack that has led Groves to a 32.4 game score average, the Falcons have not passed much.

Senior quarterback Lewis Scott is a talented runner and is a formidable threat to break a big play. However, he's completed only 28 of 68 pass attempts all season.

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defensive play, and he was the leading tackler in the county during the regular season.

Now here the Falcons are in the playoffs, and he can't play. Seeing No. 31 standing on the sideline, I think he was no doubt hurting inside and probably feeling a little left out.

Afterward, during the team talk, Bechtel looked over to the periphery of the huge huddle to where Crittenden was standing and said, "This one was for you, too, Rory."

Crittenden went through the pregame warm-up and could have played if needed, according to Bechtel. But things went so well from the start for Farmington that Bechtel said he decided not risk further injury since Crittenden was not 100 percent.

"He's a pretty quiet kid, even when he's playing," Bechtel said. "He's very intense and he loves to play. Our kids look to him."

I told the kids before the game "We need another day, we want to play another game, because we want to give Dustin a chance; we want to give Rory a chance."

The reason the Falcons could afford to keep Crittenden out of the game was that junior Scott Cave played so well in his place. It's yet another example of the quality depth on the Farmington team.

"He's an awfully good football player, and he handled that position very well," Bechtel said. "As good as Rory is, we probably have as much depth at that position, because Scott Cave is backing him up. He's going to be one of the best linebackers we've ever had by the time he graduates."

That's saying a lot since the Falcons have some other good ones this year besides Crittenden. I'd be remiss if I didn't mention senior Matt Webb, the other inside linebacker, and senior outside linebackers Brian Brinden and Ben Lukas.

"Webb is just so, so quick; it's amazing," Bechtel said. "The (Livonia) Stevenson coach was saying they couldn't handle our blitzing linebackers."

"But we hadn't blitzed at all. He and Rory read keys so well, and they're in the backfield so fast. Scott Cave is the same way. They not only hit you, but they can move, too."

Senior running back-defensive tackle Scott Ryecers, who returned for the Lakeland game in Week 9, was back in action against Novi, as was senior guard-tackle Jenkins Elsbarn, who gives the Falcons more depth, size and quickness on the defensive line at 6-11 and 234.

Plus, senior two-way and Justin Milus has played regularly during the key stretch run and after a nagging foot injury caused him to miss a chunk of the regular season.

So let's hope it's all coming together at the right time for the Falcons.

No offense was intended

The Farmington High School varsity cheerleaders were upset about what Observer reporter Rich Shook wrote in his Garden

City-Wyandotte football story that ran in the Sunday paper. Shook threw in a few closing lines and meant it all in good fun when he wrote the Garden City cheerleaders are in better condition since they do a push-up for every point their team scores.

Two of the Farmington cheerleaders were nearly irate when they called her to express their outrage. Fortunately for yours truly, they left their responses on voice mail.

They wanted it known the Farmington cheerleaders also do a push-up for every point scored and are just as well-conditioned as their counterparts at Garden City.

So we duly acknowledge that here and would add no offense was intended. But, if that was the result, then by all means the Observer sports staff apologizes to you.

Now let's have a big cheer for the cheerleaders, too. And you have a good game Friday as well, ladies.

CORRECTION NOTICE:

The Mistletoe Madness Rd that appeared in the Sunday, October 31, 1999 issue contained an error. The event on November 30th is NOT a BLACK TIE EVENT.

Our winning team is looking for players. See our ad under "General" in today's Employment Section.

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