

# Shamrocks do battle again with Titans in AA

BY STEVE KOWALSKI  
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Detroit Catholic Central jumped to an early 14-0 lead over Sterling Heights Stevenson in last year's Class AA state semifinal football game.

"We started off pretty crappy and I remember thinking 'Is this going to be a mercy game or something?'" Stevenson coach Rick Bye said. "We came back, found some ways to move the ball. Then it just went back and forth the rest of the game."

The Titans led 17-14 with about 5 1/2 minutes left, leaving the Shamrocks feeling some of the desperation they had earlier. A fumbled punt was recovered by CC's Joe Sgroi and returned inside the Stevenson 5, leading to the winning touchdown and a 21-17 victory for the Shamrocks.

"Any time you're ahead right up until the last minutes against

## FOOTBALL

a team as strong defensively as CC, you hate to see it disappear like that," Bye said.

When it comes to the state semifinals, it seems like these two teams keep reappearing. CC and Stevenson, the east side power, will meet for the third time in the last four years in a Class AA semifinal at 1 p.m. Saturday at Port Huron's Memorial Stadium.

CC is a five-time state champion, winning four Class AA titles in the 1990s and losing once in the finals.

This is the sixth straight semifinal appearance for Stevenson, which lost in the 1996 state final to Walled Lake Western.

The Titans also lost in the 1986 state final.

CC coach Tom Mach needs one win for 200 in his career, which

started in 1976 with the Shamrocks. Bye, at Stevenson since 1975, needs 11 wins to reach the same plateau.

The Titans are led by senior tackle Michael Tennessee, who has more than 2,000 yards rushing, including a high of 446 against Mt. Clemens Chippewa Valley.

"If he gets shut down you have to go to someone else or keep trying him," Bye said. "With a team as good as CC, you can't put any number on anything. You don't know if you can do anything against that defense. Their defensive backs are big, strong kids, not midsize like our defensive backs."

Stevenson also has an outstanding senior quarterback, Kurt Hunsanger, and a durable wide receiver, Dave Dunlap.

Hunsanger also throws a lot to his fullback, junior Rod Hunter, and not just because he's

his brother.

As always, the Titans are big across the offensive and defensive lines and quick at the linebacker and secondary positions.

Sean Pavlik, a 6-5, 275-pound senior, leads the offensive line. Scott Martin, a 6-3, 256-pound senior, is a standout on the defensive line and at tight end.

"It looks like the same team," Mach said. "They have a great back — we definitely have to stop him — and one of the differences is the quarterback is a year older and a lot better. Defensively they're very similar to us. They have a tradition, consistency in their coaching staff and produce a great product."

Bye said. "A tight end who can catch it is really tough to defend. Kava's been the guy who carries the mail, nickel and dime you."

CC senior linebacker Casey Rogowski has returned to 100

year against Stevenson, playing only in the defensive backfield.

"The thing about Luskusky was I noticed him last year as a free safety and I thought 'What an ideal size for a free safety,'" Bye said. "He can run, come up and hit you. We end up playing against him, and he's mauling all these plays, and I'm thinking 'How this kid is really good.' Then I found out he's the heir apparent to quarterback and he's done a great job at quarterback."

He thinks junior tailback John Kava has been key to the Shamrocks' offensive attack and isn't sure how they'll defend senior tight end Nick Brzezinski.

"Brzezinski's unbelievable," Bye said. "A tight end who can catch it is really tough to defend."

Kava's been the guy who carries the mail, nickel and dime you."

CC senior linebacker Casey Rogowski has returned to 100

percent since suffering a preseason broken leg. If the Shamrocks' front three of Jeremiah Hicks, Jon Abshire and Lou Willoughby don't make a tackle, Rogowski will.

Mach is hoping Abshire, injured in the 22-19 win over Troy, can get in the lineup.

"Rogowski moves pretty well even with a broken leg," Bye said. "Their down three are really quick, hard to block. You can't get a piece of them. They're just tough kids."

The Shamrocks have gotten solid blocking on the offensive line from Brock Nuyemith, Mike Morris, Marc Frum, Brian Parent and Steve Dominguez.

**DIRECTIONS TO GAME:** Take I-94 east to the downtown Port Huron exit. Stay right on business 69, pass a Super Walmart and at the next light (24th Street) take a left. The stadium is about a half-mile down on the right.

# Catholic Central rallies to beat Troy, win regional

BY STEVE KOWALSKI  
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Detroit Catholic Central led 20-13 early in the fourth quarter and Troy faced a first down and 13 inside its own 1-yard line.

As Troy senior offensive tackle Brian Otney dropped into a three-point stance, all CC senior defensive tackle Lou Willoughby could think of was two points.

The Colts tried to run behind their all-state lineman but Willoughby and fellow lineman Marc Frum fought off their blocks and smothered the ball carrier for a two-point safety and a 22-13 lead.

The play may have been the difference in the Shamrocks' 22-13 victory over the Colts in the Class AA football regional final Saturday afternoon at Pontiac's Wiener Stadium.

Dave Luskusky's 37-yard punt had pinned the Colts at their 4-yard line and a holding call on first down negated a 9-yard Troy completion and put the ball inside the 1.

They had been running the huddle dive all game and Otney got down in a loaded stance and

## FOOTBALL

I knew it was coming," Willoughby said. "All week long people said I had to handle Otney. I didn't have the half we needed in the first half, but I think I did my job in the second half."

The Shamrocks, who trailed 10-0 at one point, have become the Cardiac Kids of the football season, rallying to win their third straight game by seven points or less.

The win sends CC (10-0) into the semifinals Saturday against familiar playoff foe Sterling Heights Stevenson at Port Huron Memorial Stadium.

Luskusky, who also played splendidly at quarterback and at safety, made another crucial punt with 3:22 remaining that prevented a possible two-point safety.

A snap sailed over Luskusky's head and went into the end zone where he picked up the ball and kicked it rugby style to the CC 34.

Troy's Tim Fralick, who had 10 catches for 140 yards, made a

leaping catch in the corner of the end zone from 24 yards out with 2:56 left to cut Troy's deficit to 22-19.

John Kava blocked his second extra point of the game to leave the margin at three, and the attempted inside kick went out of bounds. The Shamrocks picked up a first down on three straight carries by Kava, who finished with 128 yards in 29 carries and one touchdown, and ran out the clock.

"Coach (Reg) Dudas says when the ball goes over my head, get it out of there any way I can," said Luskusky, who completed five of seven passes for 84 yards and one touchdown and was sacked four times. "You have to hand it

to Troy. That's a great football team, with a big line and receivers and a great quarterback."

Troy led 13-7 at halftime but an interception by CC's Casey Rogowski led to a 56-yard, eight-play drive that put the Shamrocks ahead to stay.

A 26-yard pass from Luskusky to Jason Woelke on third-and-6 tied the score at 13, and Luskusky's extra point put the Shamrocks ahead 14-13 with 5:42 left in the third.

"We saw they were in man coverage, looked at each other and all I did was lay it up for him and he ran under it," Luskusky said. "It was all him."

Troy appeared to have recov-

ered a CC fumble on a punt less than two minutes later but the referees ruled a Troy player interfered with an attempted fair catch, giving the Shamrocks possession.

CC responded with a seven-play, 40-yard drive that was capped by Kava's 2-yard run, giving CC a 20-13 lead.

Troy coach Gary Griffith didn't agree with the penalty call.

"The referees on our side of the field didn't have a clue all game and he made the call," Griffith said. "Tim (Fralick) is a great athlete and you want your top kids to play their best against the best. He was one of several guys who made big plays, but we just needed one

more big play."

Troy quarterback Mike Clinton completed 14 of 31 passes for 189 yards, including a 22-yard pass to Fralick in the second quarter that gave the Colts a brief 13-0 lead.

CC responded with a 59-yard, 11-play drive capped by Rogowski's 1-yard dive that cut the deficit to 13-7.

The Colts scored their first touchdown on a 6-yard run by Matt Kroge in the first quarter following his fumble recovery at CC's 40.

CC's first scoring drive and a stingy pass defense that allowed Clinton to complete only five of 17 second-half passes were key for the Shamrocks.

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