

# Rockford stands between CC and repeat

BY STEVE KOWALSKI  
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Within the Rockford Files is a game that certainly catches the attention of Detroit Catholic Central football players. It not only makes them overconfident, handing into the Class AA state championship game.

Rockford brings an 11-1 record into its first-ever state finals appearance, with the only loss to Birmingham Brother Rice, 41-14, in the regular-season finale.

A Rockford File that lacked suspense is a head scratcher because Rice is a team CC handled with ease, 35-14, in the third week of the season.

Comparative scores alone should make the Shamrocks prohibitive favorites but CC coach Tom Mach prefers to focus on what Rockford has done lately, beating three playoff opponents by a combined score of 114-35.

The Rams reached the state final with a 48-7 semifinal win Saturday over Lake Orion.

CC, a five-time state champion trying to become the first Class AA team to win consecutive state titles, will battle Rockford at 1 p.m. Saturday at the Pontiac Silverdome.

"Any time you get to a semifinal game and beat someone 48-7, that's got to wake up a lot of people," said Mach, who's probably also reminded his players that Rice's preseason all-state quarterback candidate Tim Craddock played against Rockford but not against CC because of a knee injury. "I talked to (Rice coach) Al (Fraccassi) and he said they just caught them at a time when

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they had just made the playoffs and Rice was still fighting to get in. Looking at them, it might have been a great thing for them because they're playing great right now. Losing sometimes motivates you better than a win.

"They look very good. They do a lot of different things, throw all over the field and put a lot of pressure on your defense. Their quarterback is very good, very mobile."

Rockford coach Ralph Munger was asked what he said to his players after the Rice loss.

"We've got another football game and it's back to work," he said.

Rockford's defense has allowed nearly 300 yards per game, which sounds inviting if you're a CC offensive lineman or running back, but the defense was Ram tough against an impressive Lake Orion offense.

The Rams led 34-0 at halftime and Lake Orion quarterback Darren Tooley, a Division I prospect, was sacked several times, completing only six of 24 passes with two interceptions.

That said, the Rams are playing the Shamrocks, who had a pair of runners, Casey Rogowski and John Kava, rush for more than 100 yards each several times, completing only six of 24 passes with two interceptions.

The line, led by junior guards Mike Morris and Steve Dominguez, has seldom been better.

Munger lost to Grand Rapids

Catholic Central in a Class B semifinal one year when he was coach at Frankenmuth, but knows this CC isn't an identical twin.

It's probably far more powerful.

"CC is obviously a very good team, well coached, very fundamental, and makes very few mistakes," Munger said.

The Rams have made the playoffs in five of Munger's seven years, including three straight trips to the semifinals.

The school has a new football stadium that is routinely filled with several thousand fans. A big following might be the best equalizer Rockford has against CC.

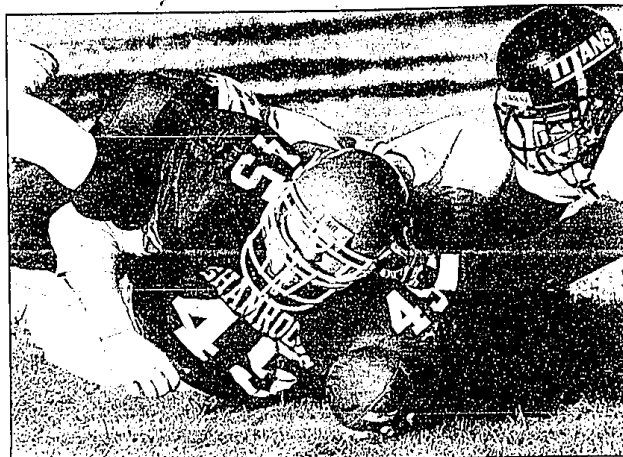
"We've got a great following and we're very blessed that way," Munger said.

A lot of high school followers thought Rockford's team last year, led by all-state quarterback Mike Segard, would end up in the finals. Rockford was upset by Ann Arbor Huron in the semifinals, 17-14.

It was a powerful team, probably the best we had in quite a while," Munger said. "That was last year and now we're playing with a new group of guys."

Senior quarterback Dan Richard leads Rockford on offense, completing 76 of 135 passes for 969 yards and seven touchdowns with four interceptions. Four of his receivers have at least nine catches and Courtney Yon leads with 16 receptions for 148 yards.

The Rams run the ball by committee with Chris Maksim leading the way with 418 yards in 61



Bruising fullback: Senior Casey Rogowski scored five touchdowns Saturday in CC's 35-21 semifinal victory over Sterling Heights Stevenson in Class AA.

carries (for a 6.9 yard average per carry), and five others gaining more than 200 yards.

The defense is led by senior Luke Batisia (5-11, 225) and junior Mike Lundberg (6-foot, 190), both inside linebackers. Lundberg leads the team in tackles.

"The heart of any defense is

the linebackers," Munger said.

Rogowski, out the first four weeks with a broken leg, has become the leader of the CC defense at inside linebacker. He had 16 tackles last week and is there if the Shamrocks' outstanding front three of Jeremiah Hicks, Lou Willoughby and John Abshire don't make the tackle.

"I was real happy with Casey's running, the way he played both offense and defense," Mach said. "He's come a long way back."

"Those three guys (Abshire, Hicks and Willoughby) are as good as we've had as down three together. They're not as big as we've had but are very good in terms of mobility."

# Mach earns 200th win as Shamrocks smash Titans

BY STEVE KOWALSKI  
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Detroit Catholic Central football coach Tom Mach is pleased with where he's at, and absolutely thrilled about where he's

going.

A 35-21 win over Sterling Heights Stevenson before 6,000 fans on Saturday at Port Huron Memorial Stadium put Mach at 200 career wins and, more importantly, sends CC back to

the Pontiac Silverdome to defend its Class AA state championship. Mach, 200-42 in 23 seasons, became the 25th coach to reach 200 wins and he did it faster than any other coach.

Stevenson, which has lost to

CC in three of the last four semifinals, took the first lead on a 41-yard touchdown pass from quarterback Kurt Hunsanger to Jesse Lombardo with 8:48 left in the first quarter.

But the Shamrocks responded

with 21 unanswered points and led 21-14 at halftime.

The first CC scoring drive came after Stevenson jumped offside on fourth down during a Shamrocks' punt at midfield. The penalty gave the Shamrocks a first down and five plays later, senior fullback Casey Rogowski scored the first of his five touchdowns on a 30 yard run with 1:43 left in the first quarter.

"We work on that (drawing teams offside)," Mach said. "We learned that from (former Fordson coach) Charlie Jestice, who did it to us in 1979 and have used it ever since."

Rogowski also scored on runs of 5, 2, 5 and 5 yards and finished with 115 yards in 24 carries. His backfield mate, junior John Kava, added 136 yards in 19 carries.

"The coaches gave me the opportunity and I felt I could do the job," Rogowski said. "This is very special (Mach's 200 victory). He deserves it. I think he's one of the best coaches in the state, or the country."

Stevenson's star back Michael Tennessee was held to 47 yards in 10 carries, 30 coming on one carry. Tennessee also caught three passes for 22 yards.

Hunsanger finished 19 for 36 through the air for 225 yards, including a 20-yard touchdown pass to Dave Dunlap with 12 seconds left to cut the final deficit to 14. Dunlap, who finished with six catches for 77 yards, also caught a 6-yard TD pass from Hunsanger near the end of the first half.

Stevenson coach Rick Bye has

heard talk that this is Mach's best team ever - and he tends to believe it.

"When they walked on the field I got a real good picture of how big they are," Bye said. "They're tall but they're put together. They pride themselves on stopping the run and Michael is a great back but he's not Superman. His picture has been plastered all around in the media. You don't think it's hanging up in teams' locker rooms?"

With CC ahead 21-14 early in the third quarter, senior defensive back Justin Cassante made a key play, stripping the ball from a Stevenson receiver at the CC 35 after a 21-yard gain.

Cassante made the tackle, strip and recovery, ending a potential Stevenson scoring drive.

The Shamrocks moved the ball into Stevenson territory but the drive ended at the 25 when Stevenson's Dan Manduzzi recovered a CC fumble.

CC quarterback Dave Lusky completed four of 13 passes, all to Nick Brzezinski, for 81 yards and the last was the biggest.

With CC still ahead 21-14 and facing a third down and eight late in the third quarter, Lusky dropped back to pass. He was nearly sacked but on his way down heaved a strike to Brzezinski, who was tackled at Stevenson's 17. Four plays later, Rogowski scored on a 5-yard run for a 28-14 lead with 10:50 remaining.

CC took its biggest lead of the game, 35-14, after Rogowski scored on another 6-yard run to cap a 14-play, 58-yard drive.

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