

GRID NOTES

HECKUVA COMEBACK: Hudsonville was 1-8 last year but rebounded to have a five-season. Furthermore, the Eagles lost their 1998 opener to Jensen in Class AA playoff qualifier, but have won their last 11 games in a row.

"Last year we weren't as bad as it looked," coach Dave Duram said. "We had 17 kids miss games because of injuries, eligibility and illnesses. We had an awful lot of good talent sitting on the bench, including our tailback, quarterback and several linemen."

"Playing in the conference we do (OK White), there are no weak teams. This year the last-place team won both non-conference games, including beating the champion of another conference. Most conferences just don't have that."

"We had one of those years when anyone could go wrong and did go wrong. We had 10 years of bad luck in one year. That it gave a lot of playing time to young kids who weren't ready at that point. It hurt us last year and is paying off this year."

JENISON REVISITED: "We had two backs over 100 yards," Duram said. "We moved the ball up and down the field and stole ourselves in the foot with penalties and silly little mistakes at the wrong time."

Jenison has a good program and when we looked at the film we felt pretty good about ourselves. It wasn't like last year when we didn't have the horses and couldn't match up. If we could eliminate the mistakes, we thought we could have a pretty good season."

UNRANKED, UNKNOWN: While Farmington Harrison has been ranked No. 1 all year in Class A and even nationally by USA Today, Hudsonville's Eagles went through the season virtually unnoticed, no doubt due in part to losing their first game.

"Nobody paid any attention to us until the eighth or ninth game, when people realized we had a decent team," Duram said. "We haven't blown too many people away. We've scraped and clawed."

"We have a group of kids who love playing football. We're not a bunch of tremendous athletes but kids who like playing and work hard. We haven't been a big powerhouse as far as putting a lot of points on the board. We've just played good, tough football."

"This might be one of the most intelligent group of athletes we've ever had. We can make adjustments with them that in years past we wouldn't have tried. They really enjoy playing the game, learning and studying the game."

LINEBACKER HIGH: That's how Hudsonville High is known in the Grand Rapids area because of its history of producing outstanding linebackers.

Former Hudsonville greats include Ray Bentley (Central Michigan, Michigan Panthers, Buffalo Bills), Joel Sweeney (Western Michigan, New Orleans Saints, Jacksonville Jaguars), Mike VanderBeek (University of Michigan), Chris Wise (Central Michigan) and Greg Duggins (Michigan State).

DURAM ON HAWKS: "They're just an

awesome team," he said. "The coach down there has to be one of the better coaches in the country. He consistently turns out good teams. They're well coached. I don't see them make mistakes."

"From our point of view, our kids love challenges and all year they've had to face teams that are pretty darn good. I don't think we've seen anybody quite this good."

"But I tell the kids we have no control over how good the other team is. All we can control is how good we are."

COACHES' RECORDS: Dave Duram is 21-18 in four years at Harrison. Heaton, Eagles qualified for the playoffs once previously in 1993 in Class BB.

Harrison coach John Herrington is 260-54-1 in 29 years at Harrison. Heaton, 58, laughed when asked if he's thought about No. 300 yet.

"We're just thinking about 261," he said.

The Hawks are 46-8 in the playoffs with eight state titles and a record 12 appearances in the state finals, including three straight and six in the last eight years.

"Our playoff record overall is something we take pride in, because our wins and losses against the best teams are very good," Herrington said. "That proves you have a good program when you can win in the state tournament."

ALL IN THE FAMILY: Senior Ricky Bryant hopes to match older brother Kevin, who played on back-to-back state championship teams at Harrison in 1993-94. Bryant, who has played the equivalent of five-plus seasons, has started every game since he was a freshman, and Friday's game will be his 49th in a row.

Senior Dave Pesci could be the first in his family to play on back-to-back championship teams. His brothers, Mike (1991) and Joe (1993) were key players on winning teams as seniors.

Senior Matt Turney is the first son to follow in his father's footsteps and play for Harrison. Tim Turney was a two-year varsity player (1972-73) and 1974 graduate of Harrison. Tim, a fullback, and all four years at Harrison, which opened in 1970. Matt's mother, Janet Turney, is a 1975 Harrison graduate and was a four-year member of the school's cheerleading squad.

HEAD HEARS RECORD: It would require an exceptional game Friday, but Harrison senior linebacker Mike Head is 18 tackles shy of breaking Blazo Sarcevic's record for career tackles. Head has 282; Sarcevic (1988-90) had 299.

Bryant is the leading receiver with 40 catches for 802 yards and 13 touchdowns. Head has caught 21 passes for 405 yards and five touchdowns.

Pesci has completed 61 percent of his passes (101 of 167) for 1,836 yards and 24 touchdowns with only five interceptions.

Kevin Woods is the leading rusher with 850 yards on 75 carries. Matt Reed has 102 carries for 608 yards. Blake Ashley 47 for 350 and Corey Davis 34 for 285.

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each year," Slobin said, adding Slobins became part of the entire team routine in 1989, not just for linemen.

"The rest of the year, I'm there 1 p.m. Dec. 1 through Aug. 1. From the day the season ends to the day conditioning begins, we're there, and rarely do we dip below 15 to 20 guys."

"I have no conventional hobbies — no golf, no tennis, no hunting! My sons and this!" The players have bought into the purpose of the weight program, and nobody can argue with the results as the Hawks continue to produce solid linemen and winning teams.

"These guys don't want to go to the mall," Slobin said. "They want to do what the guys before them did."

"I tell them 'You're not any different than kids who go to different schools. What will you do between now and September that will set you apart? They're willing to work at it.'"

It's all completely voluntary, Slobin adds, but nothing begets success like success.

"You're talking about guys like (current players) Mike Head and Brett Foster," he said. "They mean business. It's contagious. Kids want to be like Head and Foster."

Slobin tells the players it's not hard work or a sacrifice to be in the weight room, especially in the summer months.

"It's commitment and privilege," he said, telling his pupils "You're at a school where there's great tradition and organization behind everything we do. The opportunity is there to make yourself better. It's up to you. How hard do you want to work?"

Slobin, who can bench press 400 pounds of free weights, and Wiese are still dedicated weight lifters who set the example, too.

"All the stuff the players do we do," Slobin said, and adding to add, "except pushing cars."

Hub? What's that all about? "Every Wednesday during the summer, we push cars around the perimeter of the school parking lot," Slobin said. "That's after weights and conditioning."

One guy gets behind the wheel with the car in neutral. Three others get behind it and push. As guys get better at it, the number



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL DESEER

Hawk Grubbers: Harrison linemen Dario Otero, Brett Foster and Mike Araquil get ready to run the next play.

is reduced to two. If someone gets really good, he pushes by himself.

"Even if the man you have to block weighs 300 pounds, that's a helluva lot lighter than that car you pushed all summer," Slobin tells them.

"People are way easier to push than cars. After an average of four to five reps every Wednesday, men get light."

What kind of cars do they push?

"Blake Boesky's big Bronco! Any car we've got!"

Slobin is thinking of expanding that part of the conditioning program to include carrying sandbags up hills and dragging tires filled with cement.

Of the players on this year's Mizzou have been the most dedicated lifters, according to Slobin, but certainly not alone in their commitment.

Boesky, Jory Hannan, Corey Davis, Matt Turney, Zach Burton, Jake Taylor, Bryan McGhee and Dario Otero were regulars.

SPORTS FEATURE

Who: Bill Slobin; **Age:** 35; **Education:** Harrison High School (1989), University of Michigan (1990); **Personal:** married (Tracy) with two sons (Stephen, 5; Jake, 3); **Professional:** mortgage sales and 12 years of Mutual Fidelity Services in Farmington; **Hobby:** strength and conditioning coach for Harrison High School football team.

Hawk supporter: Besides photos of family and Harrison football on the walls of his office, Slobin's computer screen has a trailer that reads in gold letters with green backgrounds: "Go Hawks — 1997 Class A Champions."

He hopes to change the year to 1998 when he returns next Monday. His motivation: "Only high school kids who want to improve themselves badly. That's the goal of everyone in that (weight) room and, to positively impact these kids, is the greatest thing I can imagine."

Slobin said. "They spend nine months together getting stronger and growing closer together."

"This isn't a team that disperses in November and reconvenes in August. When the season starts, they're not just getting to know each other. They're already part of each other."

Staying ahead of the competition requires a year-round program, he added.

"It used to be you'd show up in August, and whoever had the best athletes would win," Slobin said. "Now it's who has the most well-conditioned athletes."

"You can't show up in August and put together a team. It used to be that way. It takes more work now. Times have changed."

Through the weight program, Slobin has developed a special rapport with the players. He arranges his work schedule to attend practice every day and, while not directly involved in that part, is there to offer words of encouragement.

"If the coaches are doing constructive coaching, I'll give the boys eternal optimism," he said. "I give them the viewpoint 'Even if you're doing things technically wrong, take the coaching! It's good for you!'"

The 1998 season ends Friday, and Slobin is already thinking about next season.

"We have a great bunch of kids coming up," he said. "It's far from over; it's just beginning."

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