

Farmington schools going to OAA

BY DAN O'MEARA
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Farmington Public Schools will change its league affiliation to the Oakland Activities Association beginning with the 2002-03 academic year.

What was considered to be a foregone conclusion became official Tuesday when the OAA board of governors voted unanimously to approve Farmington's application for membership and FPS accepted the offer to join.

Farmington's move to the OAA will end a 20-year association with the Western Lakes Activities Association.

Many of the coaches in Farmington had expressed their dissatisfaction with the WLAA and lobbied internally for such a change for several years.

The move is expected to create parity

for Farmington teams and allow them to compete on an equal footing with schools having similar enrollments.

In many cases, the smaller Farmington schools are unable to compete against bigger ones comprising the majority of the WLAA's membership, many of which have twice the number of students.

"Everybody I've talked to is pretty excited about the move," FPS Athletic Director Brian Swinehart said. "It's something they've wanted for a while. I think they're looking forward to next year."

"We'll be going against schools our own size; that's the important factor. We'll compete against schools that have the same kind of student bodies and represent the kind of diversity we have."

Farmington High football coach John Bechtel thought the move was long overdue, not just from a football standpoint but all sports.

"It becomes purely mathematical," he said. "If the Farmingtons have between 1,000 and 1,250 students, it's not fair to be playing teams with 2,300 to 2,600 kids every week. It's just not right."

"It gives us a better chance to build and maintain a program. We want to be in a position on a week-to-week basis where we know our kids can compete on a similar level."

"We're all motivated when teams are successful. We have greater participation, greater motivation and greater support."

The Falcons were 0-9 this season, and the OAA, which divides teams into four divisions based on their enroll-

ments and strength of program, will place them in a more competitive environment.

"It doesn't guarantee success and that's one thing that's important for our kids and parents to understand," Bechtel said. "But, hopefully, it will level the playing field long term."

"That's not to say there isn't great football in the OAA because there is. But at least we got a chance to compete with numbers. It's a real positive for football and most sports."

Bill Pinnell, longtime girls cross country and track coach at North Farmington, is another who favors the move.

"I think we'll have more competitive meets, because it seems we either win big over opponents or lose big. Here, it

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Here's wish list for grid playoffs

Things I'd like to see during this playoff season:

■ Catholic Central quarterback Tom Jakacki check off on the Shamrocks' first offensive play against Cody, change the play on his own and throw deep for a completion.

■ Westland John Glenn coach Chuck Gordon announce that his team would like to play an easier team for homecoming next year. And he'd be happy to take Lloyd Carr up on his offer for John Glenn and Michigan to meet for U-M's homecoming game.

■ Harrison's seniors realize that not everyone is going to get a Division I ride next season, but they still want to play together. So they compromise and announce they're going to package themselves to one college - Northern Michigan - so they can still wear green and gold.

■ Farmington sports editor Dan O'Meara say, "It's only football," and opt to cover a district soccer final on Friday night instead of Harrison football.

■ Canton coach Tim Baechler not only start 5-11, 360-pound Will Stinson and 6-2, 340-pound Derek Johnson at fullback and running back against Novi, but keep them in the backfield for the first series.

■ Someone from Bishop Borgess or St. Agatha kick the ball through the north goal posts at Borgess, then have to climb the fence into the parking lot at Detroit Diesel Allison to get the ball back.

■ Clarenceville coach Greg Hudkins show a little more emotion on the sideline.

■ CC coach Tom Mach show a little less emotion on the sideline.

As far as the picks go - three of us were a perfect 16-0 last week. None of the three of us was named Plymouth-Canton's C.J. Risak, who tumbled to a 14-1 week - his best performance since getting drilled in the head with a soccer ball at a media game last year.

Overall, Livonia-Westland's Brad Emmons is your regular-season winner at 111-20, followed by O'Meara at 105-26, me at 102-29 and Chuckles at 100-31.

But it's a new season now and anything can happen - and will.

FRIDAY GAMES

Redford St. Agatha (5:45) at Redford Bishop Borgess (6-3), 4 p.m.; I can hear the whining now - no, it's not the sound of my own voice - "Did you pick against us this week, Paul?" It's going to come from Werner Blinsky. I know it's going to be because one of his assistant coaches always tells him I pick against him, even when I don't.

Actually, this is going to be a fun one. I'd pay money to see Dan Boutler against Darrell Anglin. But I'd also pay money to stay warm and dry. The only other time the two schools met was on Sept. 10, 1997 - Borgess won, 26-24. I don't think it will change this time. PICKS: Borgess - Baechler, Risak, O'Meara; Agatha - Emmons.

Novi (6-3) at Canton (8-3): A year ago, Canton coach Tim Baechler promised to dye his hair or shave his head or paint his nails or some other silly promise if his team won a playoff game. This year, he promised his team that if it wins three games he's going to paint his head red and white. (Just trying to help motivate the team there, Timmy...)

Actually, this is the first time the two schools have ever met in football. You'd figure with the school districts so close, they would have played at least once - but no-o-o-o. Maybe after Friday night. Dave Kobus and friends might show why they haven't played before. PICKS: Canton - Baechler, Risak, Emmons, O'Meara.

Westland John Glenn (7-2) at Belleville (7-2): Two of my favorite people in the whole world are coaching this one. Dr. Rocketboy Church has been coaching high schools forever. And Bob LaPointe has too, except for that one stint when he was interim head coach at Eastern Michigan. Like I said, LaPointe's been at high schools all his life.

Actually, they share a common bond - they both think I'm a pest. And they both would throw a fit if I threw a football but have had success in the air. The Rockets hold a 6-2 advantage in all games played - the last being a 14-0 playoff win in 1994. In the last six meetings, the Rockets have outscored the Tigers 188-12. Of course this current team can't be blamed for that, since that stretch dates back to 1983. But I don't see the trend changing any time soon. PICKS: John Glenn - Baechler, Blinsky - Emmons, O'Meara, Risak.

Fowlerville (6-3) at Harrison (9-0): It is in this point of the column where we're going to estim-

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Goal scorer: Farmington's Matt Okopyn (left) is congratulated by Matt Cave (15) and Kacey Lopata after scoring a goal Monday.

FOOTBALL

BY DAN O'MEARA
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Fowlerville becomes the first team with the unenviable task of taking on Farmington Harrison in the state football playoffs.

The 9-0 and top-seeded Hawks, two-time defending champions in Division 3, will play host to the Gladiators (6-3) in a first-round district tournament game Friday at 7 p.m.

Harrison, which has always chosen to play post-season games on Saturday, elected to play Friday, because a number of players will be taking the ACT test Saturday.

The Hawks, who have the home-field advantage for the first three rounds should they continue to win, will return to playing Saturday afternoon next week.

Harrison is making a state-record 20th appearance in the playoffs, has won a record 11 state titles and is seeking its fifth consecutive state championship.

"What a great challenge for our football team," Fowlerville coach Jack Wallace said. "Obviously, they're the

premier program in the state, so I guess it's a heckuva way to measure (his own program)."

"We're going to go down and play hard and do the best we can do. We're excited about being in the playoffs and looking forward to a huge challenge."

The Hawks enter the 2001 tournament with a 31-game winning streak, the longest in school history, and five playoff victories will give coach John Herrington a career total of 299.

Furthermore, Harrison is ranked No. 1 in Michigan overall and among the top 10 teams in the country in every poll.

"That's a nice honor, something the kids deserve," Herrington said. "The winning streak is quite an accomplishment when you have a state tournament, when you have to play the best."

Many consider the Hawks a shoe-in to win the Division 3 title again, figuring they could just as easily win in Division 1 or 2 this year.

"Obviously, people have expectations for our team and we do, too," Herrington said. "But there's no such thing and anybody can be beaten. There are 12 undefeated teams in Division 3. There are some good teams out there, and they

Please see FOOT

Salem wins showdown over Harrison, takes WLAA title

BY RICHARD L. SHOOK
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Remember the 'Blues Brothers'? Well, at Plymouth Salem they've got the 'Blues Sisters' - and they're on a mission from Fred.

That's Fred as in coach Thomann, whose Rocks have an agenda that includes wrapping up an undefeated regular season between now and the Nov. 7 finale of the Western Lakes Activities Association.

Salem dispatched host Farmington Harrison, 47-38, Tuesday to clinch the WLAA title as well as the top seed in the conference tournament.

The Rocks improved to 16-0 overall and 9-0 in the WLAA. The Hawks are

BASKET

8-8 overall but had won seven of their eight WLAA encounters before losing to Salem.

Some coaches are superstitious talking about zeroes. Thomann has a superstition about losing.

"I've always had a philosophy that you can't worry about game 20 or 25," he said. "All this does is let you get ready to play your next game."

"We've got game No. 17 coming up at Farmington, and we know they're going to pack it in and play a 2-3



Try for two: Harrison's Ayana Richmond goes up between two Salem defenders in the final minutes of the game Tuesday. Salem won, 47-38, and clinched first place in the Western Lakes regular-season standings.

STAFF PHOTO BY PAUL THURMANN

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