

Rematch revives memory of Western upset

BY PAUL BEAUDRY
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When asked to describe Walled Lake Western's offense, Redford Catholic Central football coach Tom Mach started laughing.

When asked to describe the CC's offense, Western coach Mike Zdebki felt like crying.

And whether it's laughing or crying or something in between, emotions will be high when the two meet at South Lyon High School Saturday in a Division 1 semifinal game.

The winner of the 1 p.m. game not only earns a trip to the Pontiac Silverdome, but it will have bragging rights over the other Western beat defending state champion CC in the 1999 district final, 24-7, en route to a state title of its own.

"They do the same thing now that they did then," said CC coach Tom Mach. "They play very good defense, confuse you with stunts and looks and put a lot of pressure on you. It wasn't that we hadn't seen a team like that, but they forced us into mistakes. Their defense made us do things we didn't want to do."

Those mistakes led to some timely scores for the Warriors.

"The only difference between the two teams was that we were able to capitalize on the mistakes they made," said Zdebki. "We had a cornerback return an interception for a touchdown and another return that led to a field goal. And we had a defensive lineman return the ball to their 6. That was most of the scoring."

The two teams aren't as similar to each other this time.

FOOTBALL

"They've got more formations than I've ever seen a team have," Mach said, laughing. "They do a lot of shifting and motion and difference formations. It makes you do a lot of extra work on defense."

And at 10-2 - losing only to Plymouth Canton and Farmington Harrison - Western's offensive mix-up must be working.

"We don't have the size of CC, so we have to use more smoke and mirrors," Zdebki said. "But we try to do what we can in any given game. So sometimes we're a little unconventional."

Fullback Steve VanNortwick leads the Warriors with about 1,200 yards rushing and 12 touchdowns, while running back

Steve Bell has 1,100 yards and 17 touchdowns rushing and another 600 yards in receptions. Quarterback John Michaud is the glue that makes the offense work.

"He's another coach on the field," said Zdebki, whose team had 353 yards in total offense in last week's 60-12 rout of Detroit Pershing. "He makes sure we get the right play called for the defense that's presented."

That hasn't escaped Mach's eye either.

"They make you do a lot of adjusting on the run," said Mach. "Last game, they wore arm circles with plays on them, so when they ran a no-huddle, they were ready to go. We're going to have to prepare for that."

Where the game might be won is the battle between Western's front eight and CC's offense.

"They've been taking it to every team they play," Zdebki said. "I mean, they had a running clock against John Glenn. That's why we have to keep moving and shaking on defense. If we sit still, their big kids will grab us and move us into the end zone. We don't match up against them size-wise at all."

And with linemen like 5-foot-7, 160-pound Adam Leener, that might be true. But the Warriors also have free safety Michael Pisha, linebacker B.J. Opong-Owusu and defensive end Peter Buceusligo to help out.

"We're going to have to run around them," said Zdebki. "We're going to be like squirrels running for nuts."

GRID PREDICTIONS

(All games start at 3 p.m.)

Clarenceville (23-0) vs Capac (20-3) at Birmingham Groves: You really hate to keep mentioning one player, because a successful team is the sum of its parts.

But geez, after a game-winning drive Saturday night against Detroit Crockett after a brilliant game against Country Day, after becoming the state's all-time leader in rushing yards, after becoming the state's all-time leader in touchdowns, how can you pick against Clarenceville and that show boy? As they say in the Midwest Truck Rally commercials: "Portage Silverdome, next Saturday - DEEEEE There. POKS! Clarenceville - Beauty, Emors, Risk, O'Mears."

Harrison (12-0) vs Saginaw (15-0) at Phil Alwood Stadium: You want the real state championship game in Division 3?

Head up the road and go here. Saginaw is the one team in the state, not the division but the state, capable of knocking off the Hawks. Jerome Jackson will be a handful for the Hawks' defense to stop - especially after rushing for 400-plus yards last

week against Urbanon Seaholm. According to Student Sports Feb 50, both teams are among the top 50 in the nation, with Harrison at No. 8 and the Trojans ranked 44th. But it won't matter - Harrison is the best the state's seen since Saginaw Beauty in 1973. POKS! Harrison - Beauty, Emors, O'Mears, Risk.

Redford CC (9-3) vs. W.L. Western (10-2) at South Lyon: As I said, the Shamrocks have had problems with teams named Warriors - losing their last three against Brother Rice and the painful knockout in the second game of the 1999 playoffs by Western. It won't be easy, CC started out slow, but as coach Tom Mach said all along, once his team started playing, they'd be very good. (Hint: A six-game win streak is very good.) And after watching CC rip off a couple of scoring drives against John Glenn, the temptation is to pick the Shamrocks. But that same little voice is crying out... POKS! CC - Emors, O'Mears, Western - Beauty, Risk.

(Paul Beaudry is the Redford Garden City sports editor for The Observer and can be reached at (734) 953-2106.)

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Livonia Clarenceville and Capac have some history in the state football playoffs.

The two schools, who meet 1 p.m. Saturday at Birmingham Groves in the Division 5 state semifinals, squared off in a first-round playoff game in 1998 with Capac's Wing-T offense exploding for a 48-28 victory.

Only two Clarenceville players were on that team as freshmen - Tim Shaw, the state's all-time leading rusher and touchdown lender; and Bill Nesbitt, a linebacker who is out of the playoffs with a broken ankle.

Capac is 10-2 with playoff wins over Goodrich (54-20), Inlay City (17-10) and Saginaw Nouvel (17-14). The Southern Thumb co-champions lost twice during the regular season (to Richmond and Deckerville).

This the first time Capac has reached the semifinals. The Chiefs were regional finalists three straight years - 1997-99.

Clarenceville coach Greg Hudkins and his staff have been busy preparing for the Chiefs, who employ a 5-2 defense.

"Their defense moves all over the place," Hudkins said. "Their three interior linemen bear-crawl and shoot the gaps, and they always send a linebacker. It's something we really haven't seen yet, but the good thing about our offense is that we have strict blocking rules no matter when the ball is snapped."

Senior Jake Miekie (6-1, 180) is Capac's leading tackler. He is joined in the secondary by senior Brendan Harris (5-9, 160), Rick Schmidt (6-1, 180) is a three-year starter at linebacker. Junior Steve Pfeifer (6-0, 190) likes to rush from his end spot.

Junior fullback Gino Mallo (5-6, 150) leads the team in rushing with 1,600 yards. Senior halfback Pat Abel (5-6, 160) has 800 yards. The quarterback is Tim Lewis (6-2, 175).

Capac's offensive line has good size with Josh Beischer (6-1, 250) and Joe Hilgendorf (6-4, 270) at the tackles, guard and junior Rivas (6-0, 210) and center Burke Jenne (6-9, 210).

"They execute well and they're fundamentally sound," Hudkins said. "They let the other teams make mistakes, and they capitalize. They're opportunistic."

After going 5-4 a year ago and just missing the playoffs, Topo instituted a two-planet system.

"The fact that nobody plays both ways has helped us out," Topo said. "We thought we could do this when not a lot of people said we could at in a school this size. But you can't let others influence your thinking."

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