

# North win remembered as major upset

I suspect a few more students, especially those who play football, have stopped to look at one particular display in the trophy case at North Farmington High School this week.

Behind one of the glass enclosures is a tribute to the 1978 Raiders football team, the state runner-up in the Class A tournament.

What catches your eye first is the large team photo. Among the items of memorabilia is a recognition of North's 27-6 victory over Birmingham Brother Rice in a semifinal game.

At times, as I've stood in the hallway outside the gym waiting for a varsity basketball game to begin, I've looked at that and wondered if the students who've passed that way in the years since have any idea how big a win it was.

That win - and finishing second in the state - was one of two major achievements in the school's football history. The other was winning the mythical state title in 1970.

Rice was the defending state champion in 1978. The undefeated Warriors were not just ranked No. 1 in the state but also the country by USA Today.

North, obviously, had a good team, too. The Raiders also were 10-0 at the time, but they were still big-time underdogs. I'd say their win remains one of the biggest upsets in playoff history.

Now a second meeting between the North and Brother Rice football teams in a playoff game Saturday has revived memories of the first one 24 years ago.

"I just remember the tremendous fan support and what a tremendous win it was for us," said North coach Rich Burrell, who was one of the North players in 1978.

"It was much like this time. Nobody was giving us a chance.



No, it's not an advertisement for the U.S. Marine Corps. The guys with the fresh haircuts are members of the North Farmington football team. The majority of the Raiders shaved their heads in celebration of being Oakland Activities Association Division III co-champs with Farmington. As for head coach Rich Burrell (front row, third from the right), well, he just wanted your basic haircut - a trim around the edges and a little off the top. The shearing session was part of the team's Selection Sunday party at the school. The Raiders got together to watch the announcement of playoff pairings on television. The Falcons did the same at Farmington High School.

All we heard was how Rice was going to beat us soundly. We were the only ones who believed.

"For us to upset a team that was touted as one of the best in the country was just incredible. There were probably 6,000 people there. There weren't enough seats; the fence was lined."

In those days, there were only four classes, and there was a maximum of three playoff games.

North opened with a 14-6 win over Livonia Churchill, and the next game was with Rice. Unfortunately for the Raiders, they lost the following week to Traverse City in the state final at the Silverdome.

North's lineup included full-back-strong safety Jeff Cohen, tailback Mike Miller and line-backer Pat Collins, all of whom earned all-state honors and played college ball at Michigan, Pennsylvania and Hillsdale, respectively.

"They had some very fast backs," longtime Rice coach Al Fracassa said. "They executed their offense very well. They got

some long runs on us that resulted in touchdowns. They beat us in every phase of the game."

Burrell was supposed to start at quarterback that year, but he suffered a broken thumb in a preseason scrimmage. Greg Goldstein took his place, but Burrell returned to play free safety in the playoffs.

The Raiders were coached by Ron Holland, who attended the team's Selection Sunday party at the school Sunday evening and spoke to the team, as did longtime assistant Ralph Temby.

"All of us who remember that game and can pass that memory on to the kids have given them a lot of strength, to know they can be successful," Burrell said.

"Our kids have been underdogs all year. Maybe the program has been down for too long. Nobody wants to believe we might have a pretty good football team. But the kids really rally upon that."

Fracassa expects the Raiders to use the memory of the 1978 game to their psychological

advantage.

"Oh, yeah, you have to tell your players about those things," he said. "You want them to know the history behind the schools."

"I'm sure (Burrell) told them about the shelling they gave us and how they were supposed to lose. They're probably thinking, 'We did it before; we can do it again.'"

"He's done some great things over there. All you hear is Farmington Harrison, Farmington Harrison. Now North Farmington is doing their own thing."

We can add Farmington to that statement, too. The Warriors aren't playing the Falcons, so Fracassa's act of omission is excusable.

With all three Farmington schools in the playoffs at the same time, it's an exciting week for all, and let's hope we have some good football games this weekend.

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## NORTH-RICE

FROM PAGE D1

larities."

Rice, which has won five state titles, is co-champion of the Catholic League Central Division and has a 7-2 record. Its losses were to Division I powers Redford Catholic Central and Muskegon.

Making its first playoff appearance since 1991 and its third overall, North is co-champion of the Oakland Activities Association Division III and is 6-2, one of its losses being a forfeit.

"This is where we want our program to be," Burrell said. "We're playing in our bracket with two of the best programs in the state. If we want to be there, we have to be willing to compete against them."

Al Fracassa, the Rice head coach since 1969, remembers the first time the Warriors and Raiders played and doesn't want a repeat of that outcome.

"We have to play hard," he said. "We can't just show up and say, 'Here we are; we're Brother Rice; we're going to beat you.'"

"They're good and a lot of people don't understand that. I'm sure they respect us, but we sure have a whole lot of respect for them."

Rice quarterback Doug Pickens didn't play last week due to a concussion, but Fracassa was hopeful Pickens would have a doctor's permission to play Saturday. If he doesn't, Junior Jason Scimeca (6-1, 170) will start in his place.

"He did a good job against Muskegon," Fracassa said of Scimeca. "He hasn't been in there too much, because all our games have been very close. Last week we gave him an opportunity to run the offense, and he did a very good job for his first time."

Pickens is an excellent passer with multiple receivers, including Jeff Stachowiak and Brian Mahler, and backs Anthony Jackson, Jason Horton and Al Goutsos are receiving as well as running threats.

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"(Pickens) has the great arm and excellent mobility," Burrell said, "and I'm impressed by their tailback (Jackson); he has great speed."

"For us, the biggest scare is their passing game and their quarterback. We look forward to a great game."

North has relied on a balanced attack, too. Quarterback Bryan Smith is a threat to pass or run. Marcus Thornton and Ken Uy have rushed for nearly 500 yards apiece, and Marcus McComb is the leading receiver with 16 catches, four for TDs. The defense hasn't allowed a point in the last four games.

"I don't think we're playing anybody inferior," Fracassa said. "They're an awfully good football team. I've watched them on film, and they get better and better each time."

"They have a good quarterback, a big running back and a ferocious defense. Not very many people have scored on them. I don't think they've given up more than 50 points."

For the Raiders to win, they have to do "what we've been doing the last couple weeks," Burrell said, "and that's to play mistake-free football."

"We have to move the ball on offense and continue to play defense the way we have been. We have to control their skills kids; we have to stop the big play."

"We see this week as the same kind of challenge. This week we're playing a great program, one of the best teams in the state, and we get to see how we fare."

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