

FALCONS

FROM PAGE D1

do some very sophisticated things on offense.

"They have great size and speed; they're going to be difficult. Their kids understand their schemes and execute at a very high level."

Central running back Pierre Walker was FSL Back of the Year in 2001 and has excellent quickness, according to Bechtel.

The Trailblazers operate basically from a one-back set or the I-formation. They throw about 15 percent of the time, much less than Detroit Henry Ford, the team Farmington rallied to defeat in the first playoff game Friday, 21-14.

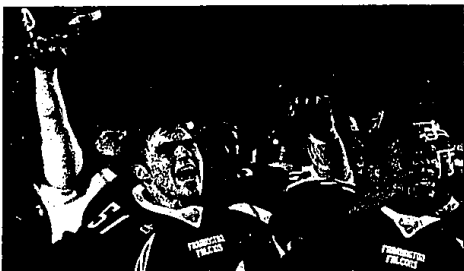
"They would prefer to run the football," Bechtel said. "They're tailback oriented. He's going to carry the football."

"Actually, they look a lot like us. Their uniforms are almost identical, and their formations are similar. You wouldn't know which team is which except their offensive line is a little bigger than ours."

The size and quality of Central's offensive line concerns Bechtel the most. The Trailblazers average 280 across the front, and their line is anchored by tackles Rivers Culhoun and Donald Jenkins.

"They appear to be 6-4 and 315; they're real quick players," Bechtel said, adding both play defense, too. "(The Trailblazers) have more size up front than anybody we've faced."

Farmington's defensive scheme relies on the quickness of end Chad Burns, noseguard



Farmington High School football players John Ledbetter (left) and Steve Gray celebrate with their teammates following the team's 21-14 victory over Detroit Henry Ford in a playoff game Friday night.

BILL BRESLER/OBSERVER

Martin Wilson, tackle Courtland Bartlett and outside linebacker Sherman Taylor, the biggest of the group at 6-foot, 210. Bartlett weighs 175, Burns and Wilson 165.

"The question is, with their big line, are our down kids quick enough to avoid those blocks and get a little penetration to disrupt that offense?" Bechtel said. "They've done that all year, and they certainly need to be able to do that this week."

"They don't have the big physical back. (Walker) is more the 170-pound type. Physically, I don't think he's going to wear us out, but he has great quickness and is very elusive. Again, the offensive line is the threat, I think."

The Falcons have a big, effective offensive line, too, that is anchored by senior tackles Jim Thubis (6-0, 270) on the right side and Kyle Washer (6-1, 167) on the left.

The other starters are juniors Max Mayer (6-4, 225) at center, John Ledbetter (5-11,

200) at left guard and Ben Catlin (6-1, 265) at right guard.

Senior Matt Nickels (5-9, 193) started in place of Catlin, who injured an ankle in the North Farmington game, last week.

"That group has been outstanding for us all year," Bechtel said. "If you've seen us play the last couple weeks, we haven't been filling the air with the football. That has caused other teams to put eight or nine guys in the box, and the reason we're still able to move the football is because those guys are so tough."

"Thubis is as fine an offensive player as there is in our area. He's a dominant run blocker. All those inside runs, those traps, are made by John Ledbetter. He's a fine athlete and a tough kid."

"Mayer keeps getting better and better. Washer's play has really improved throughout the season, too. He's a big strong kid who has played well. "Catlin is really going to be a gifted offensive lineman, and

Nickels has done a fine job when we needed him."

Taylor doubles as the tight end on offense, and he plays on all special teams except for kickoffs.

"Like (senior fullback and linebacker Brad) Walsh, he's on the field the whole time," Bechtel said. "He's been a fine player for us."

Central's offense is more one-dimensional and doesn't present the multiple threats Henry Ford did, which has a good and bad aspect to it where Farmington's defense is concerned.

"The tailback is going to carry the ball most of the time," Bechtel said. "They're not going to throw the ball all over this place. The question is can we stop that one play? We've done well against teams that come right at us."

"But we have to prevent the big play. The one problem we had last week was against counter action, because our defense flows so well. From what we've seen, they don't run a lot of counter action."

The Falcons will try to win their second district title in four seasons and play for a regional championship next week.

"We need to start the game a lot quicker than we did last week," Bechtel said. "We need to get that offense in higher gear and keep playing well defensively and on special teams."

"If we do that, I think we'll be OK; we'll certainly have a shot. If we win the district, there's only eight teams left and anything can happen."

NORTH

FROM PAGE D1

17, after a pair of Brian Balzerini extra-point kicks.

"I think our defense allowed too many big plays too quickly," North coach Rich Burrell said. "They jumped on us right away. (The Warriors) have some tremendous talent."

"I'm proud of our kids. They came ready to play; they believed. In the end, their skill kids made a difference."

"I think, physically, we got banged up, too. We played an incredible first half and sold out to win."

Quarterback Doug Pickens passed 31 yards to Jeff Stachowiak for the next Rice TD late in the third quarter.

Following interceptions by Stachowiak and Al Gioutos, the Warriors scored on runs of 47 and 9 yards by Jason Horton and Chris O'Brien, respectively, early in the fourth.

"Our boys had to play with passion and they did, especially on defense," Freacusa said. "On offense we got rolling a bit, thank you. We got our backs to run well; we had a couple nice passes, and it worked out nicely."

In the first half, the Raiders (6-3) capitalized on a fumble recovery by Marcus McComb at the Rice 45-yard line for their first TD.

Quarterback Bryan Smith passed 28 yards to McComb for that score and 34 yards to Adam Veider for a second TD the next time North had the ball.

With nine seconds left in the first quarter, the Raiders had a stunning, 14-0 lead after a pair

of PAT kicks by Kyle Lambert.

Rice answered with a four-play, 69-yard scoring drive that ended with Pickens passing 15 yards to Brian Mahler for the TD.

On the final play of the half, Lambert made a 34-yard field goal to give the Raiders a 10-point halftime lead.

"We played the perfect half," Burrell said. "We had the perfect game plan. In the second half, they planned us in, and that changed our game plan a lot. We were cornered down here, and they got decent field position."

The Raiders were stuck in their end much of the second half. They crossed midfield just once, and that was late in the game when they reached the Rice 46.

"Maybe it was our best and worst (halves of the year), but you have to play four quarters in this game," Burrell said.

"We had a great year. To go toe-to-toe with one of the best teams in the state says a lot about our team."

Jackson had 100 of his 140 rushing yards (12 carries) in the second half. Horton added 98 on seven attempts. Pickens was 6-of-10 passing for 88 yards.

Smith, who completed all five pass attempts in the first half, was 10-of-14 for 175 yards, and he rushed 17 times for 78 yards to lead North on the ground.

Marcus Thornton added 55 yards and Ken Uy 52 yards on 14 and 13 rushing attempts, respectively. McComb caught five passes for 117 yards.

Rice had 15 first downs and North 14. But Rice had 10 in the second half, North 10 in the first half.

VACANCIES

■ St. Agatha is looking for a varsity softball coach for the spring. For more information, please call athletic director Trish Rich at (313) 532-2285 or send a resume to her at 25707 Pembroke, Redford, MI, 48240 or by fax at (313) 532-2277.

■ Farmington Public Schools are looking for the following coaches for the winter sports season: an assistant boys swimming coach, two assistant wrestling coaches and freshman, JV and varsity volleyball coaches. Interested parties should send a letter of interest and resume to Ron Holland, 33000 Thomas, Farmington, MI, 48336 or a fax to (248) 474-3802.

■ Redford Union is looking for a varsity basketball coach, varsity volleyball coach and boys varsity swim coach. To send your resume, please contact athletic director Brett Steele, 17711 Kinloch, Redford, MI, 48240, or fax it at (313) 592-4058.

For more information, please call (313) 592-3408.

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