



North Farmington fans were jumping for joy when their Raiders ended Birmingham Brother Rice's long winning streak in the state Class A semifinals at Birmingham Groves. (Staff photo)

Finished 2nd in Class A

North Farmington near perfect

North Farmington's 1978 football team was best described by an opposing coach, Al Fracassa of Birmingham Brother Rice.

"North Farmington is a first-class football team," said Fracassa on a chilly Saturday afternoon last November. His Brother Rice Warriors, on top of the Class A high school football polls for most of the season, had just been stunned by North Farmington, 26-7, in the semifinals of the state playoffs.

The game was played before a spillover crowd of more than 8,000 fans at Birmingham Groves High School.

For Brother Rice, the loss meant the end of another great season. Fracassa's teams had won 24-straight games over the past two seasons and had concluded the 1978 campaign at 10-1.

For coach Ron Holland's North Farmington Raiders, the win over Rice meant the continuation of an outstanding season and a trip to the Class A state finals on the following Saturday in the Pontiac Silverdome.

North's near-perfect performance in the semifinals made it the clear favorite to win the Class A championship. All the Raiders had to do was beat Traverse City.

But a win over Traverse City just wasn't on. The outstate Trojans, with a large part of Traverse City there to support them, capitalized on several North mistakes and ground out a 20-14 win before 17,116 spectators in the Silverdome.

TRAVERSE CITY scored a pair of touchdowns in the second quarter before North evened the score with two TDs in the third quarter. Both North touchdowns were scored by Mike Miller, a speedy tailback. Rich Nutter kicked both extra points.

Traverse City's go-ahead touchdown was a controversial one. With 2:53 left in the final quarter, Trojan fullback Bill Rossetti plunged in on a fourth-and-one play. North's defense seemed to have Rossetti stopped short of the goal line, but he squirmed forward for the winning margin.

North may have lost the game — and the state championship — but it certainly finished on top in the rushing statistics.

North rushed for 207 yards to Traverse City's 114. North completed three of 11

pass attempts for 61 yards. The Trojans completed three of 16 for 40 yards through the air.

Mistakes — 99 yards lost through 10 penalties — really killed North. One of North's most crucial penalties came late in the game with the score tied at 14-14. An illegal procedure penalty caused the Raiders to lose a first down at midfield.

Miller was the leading ball carrier with 126 yards on 18 carries. Jeff Cohen, another North speedster, gained 31 yards on six carries. For Traverse City, Rossetti was the leading runner with 58 yards in 18 carries.

NORTH PLAYED some exciting football before the playoffs final. On the Saturday before the Brother Rice game, the Raiders whipped Livonia Churchill, 14-3, in the playoff opener at Berkley High.

The Raiders started their regular season in the same Silverdome with a 21-12 win over Pontiac Northern. On the way to their next appearance in the Dome, the Raiders won nine-straight games and a Northwest Suburban League championship.

North's only close call came midseason at Westland John Glenn. Glenn, always a league football powerhouse, fell 9-7 in a rugged game.

For all North's accomplishments — an undefeated season and a league championship — it almost didn't make the post-season playoffs. The complicated playoff qualifying system, which gives contending teams points for their opponents' success, has kept many unbeaten teams out.

The playoff picture looked grim for North going into the final game of the regular season, a home contest against city-rival Farmington High. North's playoff fate was decided the same afternoon on Wayne State University's field, where Detroit Northern defeated Detroit Northwestern, 8-0, in overtime.

Northern's victory eliminated Northwestern from playoff contention, and allowed North Farmington to qualify as a representative of Region 3. Had Northwestern won, North Farmington would have been eliminated.

With their morale boosted by the news they were in the playoffs, the Raiders went on to smother Farmington High, 55-0, in the regular-season finale.



Vince Paul, a member of the North Farmington band, tossed up his drum as the Raiders won another big game during the state playoffs held last season. Coach Ron Holland's team finished with an 10-1 mark. (Staff photo)