

Spreading the wealth

League members share football glory

By Jim Hughes
staff writer

Football coaches in the Metro Suburban Activities Association annually talk about parity among the league rivals, and the words are well-founded. Since the turn of the decade, six of the eight member teams have claimed league titles.

West Bloomfield and Rochester, beginning their third year in the MSAA, won Greater Oakland Activities League crowns in 1981 and 1982, respectively. Rochester also captured the MSAA title during its inaugural season in the league.

In the past five seasons, five different teams have had a piece of the Metro Suburban title: Birmingham Groves and Lathrup (tied in 1980), Royal Oak Dondoro (1981), Bloomfield Hills Lahser (1982), Rochester (1983) and Lathrup (1984).

That leaves Troy Athens and Rochester Adams to make a mark in the 80s, and both are hoping to add their school's name to the football trophy.

ATHENS: The Red Hawks, 4-3 in the league last year and 5-4 overall, came closest to winning a league championship in 1981 when they posted an 8-1 record. Only a 21-20 loss to Dondoro thwarted the effort.

The Red Hawks' title drive will be sparked by 12 returning starters from last year's team.

Offensively, senior ball carriers Kendall Kowalski (5-foot-11, 163 pounds), Tony Knight (5-8, 195) and Jeff Cavazos (5-10, 200) return and join senior quarterback Joe Erringer (6-0, 180) to form an experienced backfield. Also returning at skill positions are senior wide receivers Dave Tooley (6-0, 193), and Tom Loftis (5-8, 152).

Returning starters on the interior line are tackles J.R. Lufall (5-11, 238) and Scott Creaman (6-0, 233). Creaman is moved to tackle from the center slot. Guards John Shaffer (5-10, 190) and Vaughn Drobnich (5-11, 213) also return.

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Defensively, Tooley and Kowalski join Scott Sweeney (6-1, 158) in the secondary, with Cavazos at linebacker, Lufall at nose guard and Shawn Mallory (6-0, 183) at end.

"Our secondary will be a strong suit, and, we have a senior offensive line, which really makes a difference," Athens coach John Walker said. "Our short passing game looks real good. I think we'll be a ball-control team as opposed to being explosive."

"I think we have a good chance in the league," he added. "We could be one of four considered to challenge. I'm happy we have so many people returning. That makes a difference early in the season."

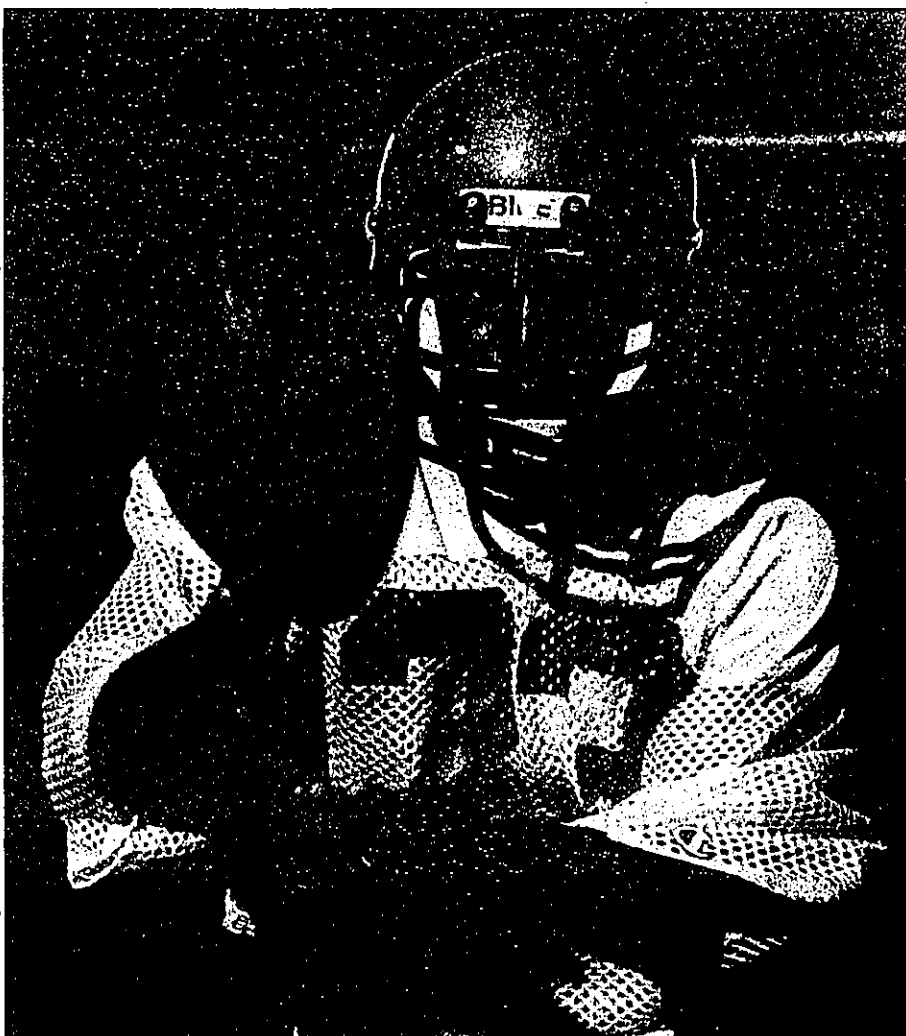
ADAMS: After posting a 2-16 record the past two years, the Highlanders are looking to move up in the standings under second-year head coach Jack Runchey. Adams, with seven returning starters and a year working with the Highlanders under Runchey's belt, could be a team to challenge this year.

The senior returning cast includes running back/linebacker Tom Mulinas (5-11, 185), wide receiver/defensive back Clay Martin (6-2, 185), running back/linebacker Todd Helzer (5-11, 195), defensive linemen Greg Wicorek (5-11, 215) and Mike Brown (5-11, 175), defensive back Tim Stuart (6-1, 180) and offensive and defensive tackle Doug Daugherty (6-5, 220).

With senior Tim Taylor (6-2, 250) and junior Don Scott (6-5, 238) vying for offensive line spots, the Highlanders will have plenty of beef along the interior.

The biggest question mark early in the Highlanders' camp was the quarterback slot, where Runchey is casting a close watch over a trio of candidates.

"Our strength is going to have to be defense and the offensive line," Runchey said. "We have to be strong there to be effective. I'm pleased with the team's improvement in agility, physical strength and attitude. We started work the Monday after our last game last season."



JERRY ZOLYNSKY/staff photographer

Southfield-Lathrup running back Chris Davis will be counted on this season as the Chargers attempt to defend their Metro Suburban Activities Association championship.

GROVES: The Falcons have been perfect-season spoilers the past two years, as they fended bids from Rochester (1983) and Lathrup (1984) for 9-0 marks. This year, Groves would like to be the hunted rather than the hunter.

Veteran head coach Bill Rankin enters his 14th year in charge of the Falcons, and he welcomes the return of seven starters from a 5-4 team that tied Rochester for second place (5-2) in the league.

Offensively, returning starters include senior quarterback Bill Bushnell (6-1, 155) and running backs Pete Jackson (5-10, 185) and Eric Mackey (5-8, 180). Alden Lysaght (6-6, 210) returns at tackle.

Defensively, the returnees include Steve Crane (6-0, 200), linebacker Matt Flood (6-1, 190) and back Sean Sexton (6-1, 160).

"It looks like we'll have a strong running game with the return of our backfield," Rankin said. "We need a lot of work on the offensive and defensive lines. Those players

returning certainly are our strength, but we don't have too many back. We just don't have the depth."

Rankin will have a tough time finding depth as just 26 players reported for varsity workouts.

LATHRUP: The Chargers averaged nearly 24 points a game last season, and allowed just 8.4 during their 8-1 season. With a pair of skilled players returning, plus a promising senior tailback, Lathrup again will be a threat to put points on the scoreboard.

Annually, the Chargers field gifted athletes at the skill positions, and this year, they're led by returning starting quarterback John Lee (6-0, 175). He is joined by running back Chris Davis (6-0, 185). The only other returning starter from the league championship team is tackle Mike Zolkover (6-1, 230). Davis also returns at the line-backer slot.

Additions at the skill positions is senior halfback Ike Lipsey (6-0, 180) and junior wide receiver Eric Stokes (5-11, 155).

"The skill positions are our strength," Lathrup coach Bob Marten said. "We have one senior on the line, the rest are juniors. All our players are about 5-11, 180. We don't have anyone over 200 pounds."

"We have five pretty good starters, but we've got to find some depth. I've brought up three sophomores to fill out the squad, and there's a possibility of adding a couple more."

If Lathrup is to repeat, it will have to avoid injuries since depth already is a concern to Marten.

"We have to stay healthy," he said. "John Lee is our best safety, but I don't know if we can afford to use him defensively. If we can stay healthy, we could contend again, and maybe surprise some people."

LAHSE: Knight coach Bob Kelgen is in a good news-bad news situation. The good news is seven defensive players returning from last year's 4-5 team. The bad