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Country Day leaves Metro, seeks Class C playoff berth

By Marty Budner
staff writer

It's a year of change in the football programs at Detroit Country Day, Orchard Lake St. Mary's, Bloomfield Hills Cranbrook and Auburn Hills Avondale.

Cranbrook and St. Mary's each have new coaches. Joe D'Angelo is still the man in charge at DCD, and Rick Brewer still heads the staff at Avondale, but the Yellow Jackets have dropped out of the Metro Conference and the Rhinos have filled the void. Both teams will compete as an independent this year as Avondale's membership will not take affect until the spring of 1986.

Following is a brief rundown on each team.

DETROIT COUNTRY DAY: Country Day lost its season-ending game last year to non-league foe Orsted which ruined an otherwise perfect season.

Things may not be so easy this year. DCD wrapped up its fourth straight Metro Conference championship last fall. And, after nearly owning the Metro Conference gridiron this decade, the Yellow Jacket coaching staff is looking for new challenges.

"As I see it we're playing a stronger schedule this year," said D'Angelo, whose team compiled an 8-1 mark last year and is 31-5 the past four years. "When you have a demanding schedule it keeps the interest up more."

The Yellow Jackets play teams like archrival Cranbrook, Culver Military Academy of Indiana, DeWitt High School and Western Reserve of Ohio. "Our first six games will be more difficult than in past seasons," he said.

DCD will have a well-balanced offense, directed by junior Charles "C.J." Johnson (5-9, 150 pounds). "He's not big, but he's quick, he throws the ball well and he's a good leader," D'Angelo said.

Brian Stephens, a junior tailback who scored 17 touchdowns last year and gained more than 1,000 yards, will key the rushing attack. The receiving corps will be anchored by senior Terry Barr and transfer student Jeff Jones.

Seniors Joe Centeno (6-3, 2-5) and Jeff Taylor (6-1, 195) are mainstays on the line.

Chris Keiser (strong safety), Jeff Jones (end), Mike Garmaiton (linebacker) and Bob Combs (linebacker) are four of the top defenders. Barr will do the punting and sophomore Chris Ginski will place kick.

AVONDALE: The Rhinos are looking to return to the glory days of Avondale football, when victories were commonplace. Avondale has not enjoyed a winning season since 1982 when the Rhinos were 5-4. That followed years of 0-9 and 0-1.

"Last year, we had some big victories, then we were upset," Brewer said. "We don't want to be upset winners this year. We want to be the favorite."

Avondale has six returning starters from last year's team — linebackers Gene Tallorico and Sid Diomberg, defensive ends Bob Callahan and Lee Henning and defensive back Tom Freeman.

Offensively, Chris Hudson returns as a running back with Tallorico and Diomberg on the interior line. Freeman at split end and Henning at tackle. Henning is the biggest of the bunch at 6-4, 220.

In preseason practice, the Rhinos were in search of a

Country Day Avondale St. Mary's Cranbrook

starting quarterback as three candidates vied for the job.

"We have seasoned veterans on defense," Brewer said. "Our strength is our defense and experience on the offensive line. We do have a lot of depth this year."

Until Avondale gets into the Metro Conference, the Rhinos will face a steady diet of Class A teams as six of their nine foes are A.

"We play a lot of Class A teams, so that's tough," Brewer said. "We don't want anyone feeling sorry for us, because nobody will."

ST. MARY'S: Rob Hager is a bottom-line man.

"We want the kids and the people to be the bottom line in our program," said Hager. "We're going to be results oriented in all phases of our life."

"We think the people who are going to come out and watch us will see some exciting football," he said.

Hager, who graduated in 1977 from Novi High School, takes over the St. Mary's program from John Bechtel. Hager arrived from Western Kentucky University where he was an assistant coach.

"It was always my goal to be a coach in the Detroit Catholic League," he said.

Hager inherits a squad that won only two games last year (over St. Florian, 21-0, and Flint Holy Rosary, 14-6). The Eagles finished fourth in the Catholic League "C" Division.

The Eagles' tri-captains this season are seniors Charlie Moran (quarterback, free safety), Paul Zomba (defensive end, offensive tackle) and John Parow (running back, defensive back).

Hager said other key players will be seniors Greg Cameron (center), Keith Sadowski (split end, cornerback) and Jim Shadwell (tackle), plus juniors Stefan Stration (running back, linebacker) and Scott Kowakowski (tight end, linebacker).

CRANBROOK: Dave Schuele has been a high school football coach since 1969 so he brings a wealth of experience to the Cranbrook High School team.

The former head coach at Plymouth Canton High School and assistant coach at Highland Park High School hopes to transmit that knowledge to his new squad as quickly as possible.

"The youngsters have picked up the offense and defense very quickly," said Schuele, who graduated from Central Michigan University in 1962. "I'm pleasantly surprised that they've picked them up so rapidly. They work very hard and they're very coachable."

Junior Carlos Smith returns as the Crane quarterback, and he will be backed up by receiver Jim Nance. Senior captains Ned Lebo and Kurt Graves return as members of the Crane backfield.

Steve Hull (center, defensive tackle), Curt Kious (tackle, punter) and David Wahl (split end) will be other key members of Cranbrook.

"We're down number wise and we won't be big," Schuele said. "Getting people in shape and keeping them that way will be a key."

WLAA expanded

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they are both small and inexperienced.

But, Franklin has the potential to be somewhat explosive offensively. They were the winningest team at the EMU summer football camp for quarterbacks, receivers and defensive backs.

Quarterback Dave Drabicki, if given time, will pick opposing secondaries apart with his strong arm.

Brad Norrid, Chris Parenti, Mark Kerpet and Craig Dugos are the most experienced returnees. Others include Bob Solikowski, Chuck Roth, Tony Volletti and Jeff Kroll.

OTHERS: Of the non-Observant teams, Northville looks to be the best. With a 7-2 record last year, with the majority of the starters returning, and one of the area's best JV teams moving up a notch, the Mustangs look formidable in the Western Division.

Walled Lake Central, as always, will field a large, aggressive football unit. The question marks will be in the skill positions.

Walled Lake Western, by all accounts, could be in for a long season. They are young and small, a bad combination in the tough Western Lakes.

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