

Defending champ counts on former area gridders

By C.J. Rieck staff writer

It was hot — so what's new? — and the artificial carpet that serves as the focal point of Spartan Stadium amplified it, like turning the oven knob from bake to broil.

The 80 players who volunteered to sizzle themselves on this skillet of a football field had been going at it for over two hours. Temperatures were in the mid-90s outside Michigan State's stadium; inside, it was well over 100.

Anyone in their right mind would have just rolled over and said, "Let's just play it out and survive. This game doesn't mean anything. They would have been more than sensible; they would have been quite correct. All-star games, like Saturday's eighth annual Michigan High School All-star Football Game, don't make a bit of difference.

But as time ran down in the final quarter, emotions were running high. And it seemed the East team, which lost for the second straight year, this time by a 17-10 margin, would have liked nothing more than to (gulp) play one more quarter.

IT WAS PROBABLY the best game of the series. The big-name stars, guys like Birmingham Brother Rice's Jason Wolf (11 carries, 65 yards rushing) and Flint Beecher's Courtney Hawkins (12 rushes, 40 yards) and Grand Rapids Catholic's Perry Foster (10 attempts, 52 yards), came through with dazzling performances.

The defenses had their moments, too. For the East, Livonia Stevenson defensive tackle Mike Nettie was in on five tackles and Redford Catholic Central middle guard Eric Knuth and Farmington Harrison linebacker

football

Chris Cox each finished with four. As Plymouth's talented offensive guard Jay Blaylock described it, "It was a great game. It was the hardest hitting I've ever experienced. I knew it would be a tough time out there. You could see it would be intense before the game even started."

BOTH OFFENSES moved the ball well, but neither could finish a drive for the first three quarters. The game was scoreless until Dennis Nicholl of Ulica Elsenhower booted a 37-yard field with 8:13 left in the third quarter to put the East on top, 3-0.

The West tied it on their next possession when Portage Northern's John Albertson converted a 27-yard field goal with just 47 seconds remaining in the third period.

To that point, the play had been good, but frustrating — at least, offensively. The West changed that by scoring again when they regained possession. It didn't come easy; a nine-play, 54-yard drive culminated when Saginaw Arthur Hill fullback Martin Buchanan bulled his way into the end zone on a yard out.

It took Buchanan three carries from two yards away to score, but he did, and the West was ahead 10-3.

THAT'S WHEN things got spicy. There are certain restrictions in all-star games, like no blitzing linebackers, but the West apparently forgot that rule.

"They blitzed like three times in a row," said Cox, "and you're not supposed to do that. Then we blitz once and get beat for a touchdown."

That was the back-breaker. After some curious officiating — when West linebacker Kirk Carruthers tossed East running back Ray

Jurecki for an 8-yard loss on a third-and-19 play, they were called for an illegal blitz, no penalty was assessed; instead, the East took the play over, this time third-and-21 — the East faced a fourth-down-and-21.

A Dennis Hinton pass was incomplete, giving the West the ball at the East's 38. On the first play, West quarterback Matt Hufnagel beat the East's blitz by sweeping left end and racing into the end zone to give his team 17-21 lead with just 2:27 left.

THE EAST never gave up, however. Wolf returned the ensuing kickoff 39 yards to the East 43, and in five plays the East had its only TD, scored by Dean Hestrin on an 8-yard run. The East then tried an on-side kick and nearly recovered, but the West retained possession and ran out the clock.

"It was disappointing," said Knuth afterward. "You come up here and practice for 10 days and you want to win. (The West) were doing some things I don't want to get into."

Giving up a couple of weeks in the middle of their summer seemed worth it to most of the East players. Blaylock: "It was definitely worth it. Anyone chosen for it, I'd never tell them not to do it."

Cox: "It was good preparation for a week-and-a-half from now (when practice starts at Eastern Michigan). But I was expecting to win."

Knuth: "The 10 days I spent here, I had the best time. Even if I hadn't played I would have liked it."

There were only a few problems, according to the participants. Like not enough plays for everybody (Jeff Graham, a light end from Western John Glenn, said after limited action, "The number of plays I played, it wasn't worth 10 days of my summer." Graham was forced to miss a practice because of a death in the family), and the heat (Blaylock: "The only time I noticed it was on my feet. They were burning."

And, of course, the final outcome.

Caesars extends reign

By Steve Kowalski staff writer

With all the new faces in Redford Caesars lineup, folks in Johnstown, Pa. might not recognize the Livonia Collegiate Baseball League champion when it arrives next week for the AABA tournament.

And if Caesars first baseman Ken Wandzel has his way, neither will the players' parents. "We're all getting flat tops (to celebrate)," said Wandzel after Caesars assured itself of a second-consecutive appearance in Johnstown with a 7-6 win Tuesday night over Tom Holzer Ford at Ford Field. The LCBL playoff champion gets an automatic bid to the Johnstown tournament.

Caesars' coach John Moraitis might not approve of Wandzel's idea — "I'm conservative, like (Tigers president) Jim Campbell when it comes to haircuts" — but he can't wait to take this group east. Caesars fought back from a 6-2 fourth-inning deficit, and won on an RBI single in the sixth inning by right fielder Chuck Hammonette.

The season doesn't end for Holzer's either, which fell to 22-8. Holzer's and Walter's Appliance, which finished third in the LCBL, will play in the National Amateur Baseball Federation College Division regional that begins today at Ford Field.

the sixth inning. "I feel privileged to go as a player."

Holzer's needed to defeat the regular-season champion Caesars twice Tuesday to earn a trip to Johnstown, and for four innings it looked as though they might do it.

HOLZER'S LED 6-2 after scoring three unearned runs in the top of the fourth off Caesars' starter Anthony Yandura.

But Gorman started Caesars comeback with a single in the bottom of the fourth that scored Steve Leney with the third run. Hammonette led off the fifth with walk and scored on a single by Steve Malgay to cut the margin to 6-4, and Caesars tied the score with one out when Andy Fairman's throwing error allowed both Malgay and Derek Dowling to cross the plate.

Hammonette's one-out single in the bottom of the sixth scored Bob Kocchie — who was on second after Gorman's sacrifice — with the winning run.

Moraitis pulled Yandura after the fifth inning and inserted Steve Witt, who retired six of Holzer's final seven batters to earn the win.

Yandura surrendered seven hits in his five innings of work, but showed signs of firing in the 90 degree heat. "He got dizzy, and the heat got to him," said Moraitis. "We had Witt all ready to go anyway. He was throwing in the bullpen for awhile."

CAESARS ADVANCED to the playoff final, shutting out Walters Appliance, 4-0, at Ford Field Sunday. Kocchie drove in two runs, and Malgay had two hits and one RBI for Caesars, which scored all its runs in the sixth.

Holzer's got to the playoff final against Caesars after defeating both Hines Park Lincoln Mercury and Walter's Appliance Sunday at Ford Field.

Holzer's blanked Hines Park 10-0 behind the three-hit pitching of Dan Hilliard, who departed after the sixth inning. Bob Tatro, Rick Tavormina and Paul Newitt each drove in two runs for Holzer's. Tavormina hit a solo home run in the second.

In Holzer's 11-4 win over Walter's, Steve Rudelic singled three times and scored three runs. Scott Peterson had three singles and four RBIs, and Fairman and Newitt collected two hits each.

Mike Salach earned the win, allowing seven hits in six innings.

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