

Hawks, Rockets favored to repeat

By Steve Kowalski
staff writer

Judging from preseason indicators, the 1989 football season in the Western Lakes Activities Association could be a repeat of the previous one.

Farmington Hills Harrison and Westland John Glenn, the division champions and league finalists a year ago, are expected to field strong teams once more and, come late October, could end up playing for the title again.

Farmington Hills Harrison, the reigning WLA and Class B champion, is the Observer sports staff's pick to win the Western Division title this fall. Think that his something to do with the return of Mill Coleman?

Watch out for Livonia Churchill, though, because the Chargers have one of the state's biggest, most explosive offensive backfields.

In the Lakes Division, defending champion Westland John Glenn is expected to challenge from Plymouth Salem.

North Farmington, the Rockets to the early favorites in their half of the WLA.

Clinton lost do-it-all Bryant Satterlee to graduation, but quarterback Eric Stover returns for his senior campaign after an impressive junior year.

Following is a capsule look at all the teams in the WLA, beginning with the Lakes Division and with teams listed in order of expected finish:

WESTLAND JOHN GLENN

The Rockets, who last year lost to Harrison in the WLA title game, return senior quarterback Eric Stover, a starter all of '88.

Glenn finished the season at 9-3 after being ousted in the Class A quarterfinals by Redford Catholic Central. The Rockets' major loss to graduation was Bryant Satterlee, a two-way starter at tailback and linebacker.

"I think we'll be more balanced," said coach Chuck Gordon, in his 15th year. "With Satterlee it was foolish not to run. Eric is a good quarterback and one of the best keys to the season. He has as good an arm as we've had."

Sixty players are out for Glenn's varsity and the co-captains of the group are Tom Luxton (5-10, 165), a senior backup tailback, and senior defensive end Kevin Shuman. Senior Shannon Layne (5-10, 170) is the incumbent to start at tailback and the fullback is senior Paul Blay (5-11, 140).

Catching the ball will be senior wide receiver David Rynn (6-0, 161), and senior tight end Garrett Woody (6-3, 205).

Defensively, the Rockets' 5-3 alignment will be keyed by Kahan (6-1, 185), a three blitzer. Others to watch include Roseguard Mark Weddington (5-8, 170) and linebacker Mark Johnson (6-3, 230), who also starts at offensive tackle.

PLYMOUTH SALEM

The Rocks' wishbone offense has potential with the return of seniors Ryan Johnson, Pat Bowie and Rob Kowalski.

Johnson and Kowalski shared time last year at quarterback, but the signal caller this year will be Kowalski. Johnson (6-3, 216) will line up at fullback, Bowie returns at fullback and an impressive newcomer is fullback Chad Johnson, who sat out last year after transferring from Redford Catholic Central.

The problem is, Salem, with only Casey Nichols and Joe Rosa returning on the line, will need to open some holes for the signal caller.

"We're so thin up front, we converted two backs to linemen," coach Tom Mohrman said. "It will be a while before the offensive line becomes mature enough to handle what it has to handle. The beauty of our backfield is you can't ignore one of those backs, because of all the carries the football."

Johnson rushed for 537 yards and eight TDs in '88, and Bowie carried for a team-

high 619 yards and five TDs. Senior Bryan Schultz, a promising returning receiver, will miss the start of the season, however, after undergoing arthroscopic knee surgery.

Salem lost All-Observer linebacker Mike Jarvey to graduation, and his position will be manned by Chad Johnson. Steve Burleson (6-1, 180), a converted defensive back, will be an outside linebacker. Ryan Johnson returns to strong safety, leading the secondary.

NORTH FARMINGTON

North is building its 1989 team around defense, even though the defensive standouts Zaim Cumulala and Joe Sturtis, have graduated.

Among the returnees is heavy-hitting senior inside linebacker Rob Zeno (6-11, 170), and secondarymen Chris White and Jerry Dolak. The Raiders were 7-2 a year ago, and coach Jim O'Leary counts on an experienced secondary to make up for any other deficiencies the team has.

The junior varsity also was 7-2 a year ago and O'Leary is confident those players will continue to be successful on the varsity.

"I never worry about defense," coach O'Leary said. "Defense is a lot easier to teach than offense. If the kids are aggressive, they might make mistakes, but the secondary should be able to cover for them."

White (6-3, 170) is only a junior and he is also a weapon on offense where he caught 33 passes for 423 yards as a sophomore wide receiver. Senior Ken Kraus is backup to the graduated Mike Filipovich last year, will get the call at quarterback. Kraus (5-10, 160) has more quickness and running ability than Filipovich, so there might be more puntout passing in North's offense.

Sturtz, who rushed for 1,091 yards last fall at tailback will be replaced by Rust Sinakis, the noseguard in '88. Dolak returns at upback. Cumulala leaves a big void on the line where a host of new players will get their chance.

Former soccer player Mike Cowen, a first-year player, is the placekicker and punter.

WALLED LAKE CENTRAL

The Vikings lost quarterback Derk Wallace to graduation, but seven starters return on both offense and defense.

Central finished the season at 4-5 overall, 3-3 in the Lakes Division. The Vikings are a senior-laden group, but sophomore Mark Tartack (5-8, 170) might be the replacement for Wallace, who threw for 737 yards and earned all-division honors as a safety.

The other quarterback candidate is junior Lawrence Kerber.

"We'll roll a lot with Mark," coach Gary Tux said. "We'll get him outside and throw the ball with him. Ideally, I wouldn't want a sophomore at quarterback because we're basically a senior team, but right now the seniors have taken to him. I hope he can jump on their bandwagon and sit right in."

The tailback is junior Joe Gough (6-1, 195), who gained 630 yards on the ground and 340 in passing yardage last year. Three starters, including 6-5, 250-pound senior tackle Brian Marsh, return on the line.

The Vikings' 4-3 defense is led by senior middle linebacker Nick Kiffer (6-1, 225), the leading tackler in '88. The placekicker/punter is Darryl Piotrowski, a junior who has 45- to 50-yard field goal range, Tux said.

Central won four of its last five games last fall, shutting out the opposition twice during that span. Tux said Central was "three catches from a 7-3 season," recalling losses to Churchill, Salem and Milford.

"We'll have to drop the mental mistakes," he said.

LIVONIA STEVENSON

Coach Jack Reardon, entering his 24th year, is coming off a 4-5 record in 1988, his first losing season in 17 years.

Improving on its record will be a difficult task for Stevenson, with only four returning starters and seven seniors on the roster. The most impressive senior is Brian Piorgetti (6-11, 182), an all-purpose back last season, who will start at quarterback and play safety.

Western Lakes

"He might be one of our top three football players," Reardon said. "Last year he started every position for us. He works hard and loves the game of football."

The tailback position will be filled by either Rob Peirce (5-10, 188), a senior who missed most of last season with a broken collarbone, or junior Tim Marakke (5-8, 148).

Kevin Corradi, a 6-0, 176-pound senior, gives the Spartans a reliable player at tight end.

All-Observer first-team tackle Eric Roth is missing from the offensive line after graduating, and Reardon is faced with the task of rebuilding the whole line. Only two seniors, Doug Pascoe (5-10, 200) and Barry Green (6-4, 211) are expected to be among the playing group.

Stevenson, with only three players listed over 200 pounds, will "have to have a great pursuit defense," Reardon said.

FARMINGTON

The Falcons were winless in nine games, so second-year coach Rick Milhizer is eager to get that first win under his belt.

He'd like to get it Friday at West Bloomfield, before the Western Lakes Activities Association season kicks off later next month.

Leading Farmington's offense is senior quarterback Chris Schmidt, who started the last three games a year ago. Tailback Dave Winney returns for his senior year after gaining 350 yards, and one of Schmidt's best targets will be senior flanker Brian Vicchio.

The tight end is Eric Miller, who started the '88 season at quarterback, and the biggest lineman is Derek Mehraban (6-4, 235). Numbers are slim, however, at Farmington, and Milhizer will be forced to play nearly all his starters both ways.

The players are starting to understand what it takes to be a winner," Milhizer said. "Being a winner isn't just winning on game day. It's being a winner all the time. The little things are important, but we're still hurt by numbers."

Western Division

FARMINGTON HILLS HARRISON

Opposing teams are hoping Mill Coleman isn't saving his best for last.

Coleman enters his senior year with one Class B state championship already behind him, and the Hawks are expected to contend for that honor again. The 5-foot-9, 145-pound quarterback — rated among the best high school players in the country at his position by the Sporting News — threw for 1,074 yards last year and has thrown for more than 5,000 yards in his career.

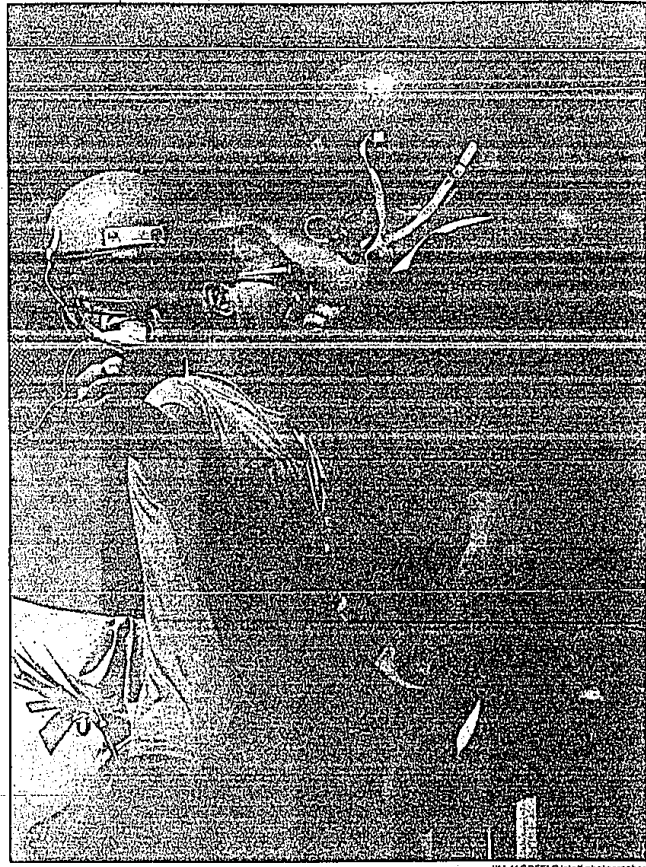
Coleman completed 103 of 171 passes last year in leading the Hawks to a 13-0 record and the WLA title.

So what's left as an encore?

"I don't know how he can improve on his play after last year," coach John Herrington said. "But he's a captain now and he'll have to show some more off-field leadership."

There is concern at Harrison because the Hawks have to replace Coleman's favorite targets, Bryan Wauldon and Chad Burgess, who graduated. Also gone from the offensive line are Dale Kato and Jeff Skinner and their replacements are inexperienced.

But Herrington has a trio of impressive senior returnees in the backfield — Matt Conley (5-11, 192), Joe George (6-0, 185) and Steve Hill (6-3, 210). Conley gained a team-high 463 yards and scored 13 touchdowns last year. Hill, one of the state's premier kickers with 62 extra points last year, makes the Hawks a threat every



Livonia Franklin coach Armand Vigna makes a point with John Revels while teaching the techniques of defensive line play. Vigna says the Patriots will abandon their emphasis on the run offensively and throw the ball more.

time they pass midfield.

Hill also will be one of Harrison's most important defensive players, lining up alongside Blazo Sarcevic (6-3, 212) at inside linebacker.

Last year, Harrison yielded only 63 points in 13 games and no team scored more than two TDs against the Hawks in any game. The down linemen and secondary are young, but Harrison seems intent to reload, not rebuild.

LIVONIA CHURCHILL

The Chargers are making a bid to become one of the Western Lakes surprise teams.

Churchill returns an explosive backfield — highlighted by senior fullback Andy Sapientza — and is expected to improve on its 4-5 record. A tough early season schedule, featuring North Farmington and Farmington Hills Harrison in the first three weeks, might be the only thing preventing improvement.

Sapientza (6-2, 218) is the brother of former Livonia Bentley standout Steve Sapientza and may have more major-college potential.

"The potential is there," coach Herb Osterland said of his second-team All-Observer standout. "We're looking for Andy to run up the middle, because he's a big, strong and tough kid. If we win the first couple games, it's really going to make for a positive situation."

Others expected to carry the ball are senior swingback/fullback Trent Naumcheff and junior Mike Brooks. The tailback is Mike Spacarcotella, a 5-7, 155-pound package.

The linebacker group will be a strength in Churchill's 52 defense. Sapientza and John Altman will line up as outside linebackers and the inside linebackers will be Naumcheff and Rob Margo.

Others to watch on defense are noseguard Jim King (6-1, 190) and senior Kevin Fletcher (6-10, 195).

LIVONIA FRANKLIN

Could Franklin coach Armand Vigna be erasing words like pick and option from his playbook?

Unless he's playing a game with the media, it appears so.

"The option game is gone, no more pitching the ball, we're throwing if anything," Vigna said in an earlier interview. "We're using a backwards approach. We're going to pass to set up the run."

Senior Brian Bariz, who possesses a strong arm, looks like the perfect candidate to run such an offense. A catcher on the baseball team, Vigna said Bariz has one of the strongest arms dating back to Rich Popp, the quarterback of the 1982 Franklin team.

Vigna's line is stacked, so he's not opposed to running the ball. Leading line returnees include senior tackles Derek Flock (6-1, 211) and Ray Moldovan (6-1, 210). Junior guard Paul Rhoads (6-2, 210), senior center Christopher Counts (6-2, 207), and tight end Brian Stover (6-1, 180). The Patriots' 4-3 defense will be led by tackle Dan McKay (6-2, 216) and newcomer Chris Roberts (6-0, 237), also a tackle. Junior Bobby Johnson (6-1, 240), shows promise at linebacker and as a punter and placekicker.

PLYMOUTH CANTON

The Chiefs ended the 1988 season with an upset win over Plymouth Salem, marking the first time they ever beat the Rocks.

Price graduated so those duties will belong to either senior Steve Bastian (5-10, 160) or sophomore Ryan Hojak (5-11, 145).

WALLED LAKE WESTERN

Coach Chuck App, entering his 11th year at Western, has only three starters returning on offense and two on defense.

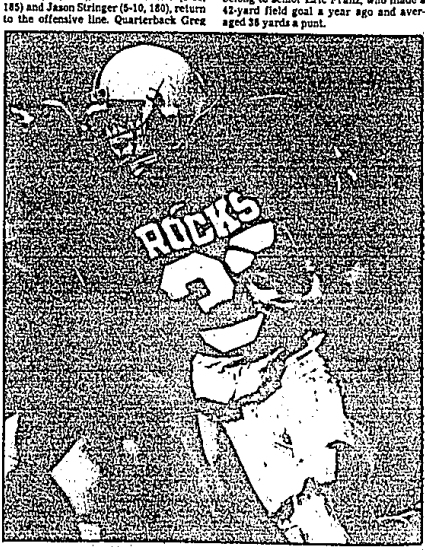
One of the significant losses to graduation was Shane Seannell, a quarterback and outside linebacker who is playing this fall at Wayne State University.

Still, App remains optimistic. "We're going to be better," he said. "We have a young team — we'll start two sophomores. The first three games (at home against Novi, Westland John Glenn and Northville) will dictate a lot to us. If we knock a few out in the beginning, that would put us on the right foot."

Senior tailback Sean Litzinger, a fullback in 1988, is the most impressive returning starter because of his 4.6 speed and strength. The other returning offensive starters are wide receiver Chris Johnson (5-10, 147), a 4.8 sprinter, and center Brent McCallum (5-7, 161). The quarterback is Todd Brion (6-1, 160), who had an "accidental scrimmage," according to App, against Detroit Country Day.

Newcomers expected to contribute are sophomore running back Matt Middleton, who scored 16 touchdowns on the freshman team, and sophomore lineman Chris App.

Defensively, the Warriors' 5-2 alignment will be led by senior inside linebacker John O'Mell (5-9, 170) and senior noseguard Todd Heister (6-0, 181). The placekicking and punting responsibilities belong to senior Eric Franz, who made a 42-yard field goal a year ago and averaged 33 yards a punt.



Ryan Johnson and his Plymouth Salem teammates hope to challenge John Glenn for supremacy in the Lakes Division this fall.



Jack Reardon, the veteran coach of the Livonia Stevenson football team, enters his 25th year with the Spartans. Stevenson, coming off a 4-5 season, is led by running back Brian Piorgetti.