

Hawks, parochial teams have common link



DAN O'MEARA

The art of coaching can be broken down into two aspects. The first has to do with strategy — the planning, plotting, scouting, play calling and decision making. The second is more abstract. It has to do with inspiration, emotion and the motivational games coaches play to get players in the right mental frame.

Most of the preparation goes into 90 percent of the former, but coaches tell you success in football involves 90 percent of the latter.

Coach John Herrington and his Farmington Hill Harrison staff have been challenged on both levels the last two weeks but especially the latter. The Hawks have experienced both ends of the emotional spectrum in that time.

They spent last week trying to get their players off Cloud Nine following a double-overtime win over Westland John Glenn in the Western Lakes Activities Association championship game.

And this week they're trying to bring the guys up from the depths, restore their confidence and get the team back on track for a playoff game after a 35-0 loss to Birmingham Brother Rice.

"We went from the peak last

week to the valley this week," Herrington said. "But the good thing is we're in the tournament, so we can get right back at it instead of thinking about it all winter."

Harrison could meet Rice again in two weeks should the Hawks get past Edsel Ford and win a playoff matchup with Northville. Most people are making Rice the favorite now to play Portage Central for the Class A championship, but I think they still plan to play all the games in the meantime.

Give Hawks credit

Harrison deserves a pat on the back and some sort of medal for doing what few public schools will do: Play Catholic League teams in the regular season.

In a nine-week crossover the last two years, the Hawks have played the third-place team in the Central Division: DeLaSalle and Rice. By the way, why did Class AA Dearborn Fordson get the fourth-place team — Class BB Notre Dame this year — and Harrison the bigger schools?

Ironically, Harrison has much in common here with the parochial powers, especially Redford Catholic Central, which is why the Hawks had to take the crossover element.

All are victims of their own success. They're perceived as too powerful and too good, with the odds stacked in their favor. So nobody wants to schedule them.

Rice and CC are seen as having an unfair advantage, being able to draw players from wide areas. But Harrison? The Hawks have imposed limits even with open enrollment.

As strange as it seems, Harrison is a public school with a parochial image in football. Twelve playoff appearances and twelve titles have a lot to do with it.

Southfield and West Bloomfield wanted off the schedule in the late '80s. That led to playing DePorres and Divine Child in season openers the last three years.

Another suburban school asked to be let out of a contract, which forced Harrison to schedule Divine Child instead.

On the other hand, a ninth game with Standish-Sterling showed the Hawks playing anybody was no good either. The result was Toledo Central Catholic (Hawks won 33-7 in 1991) and the Central Division teams in the season finale.

Some years, you can beat teams like CC and Rice, but in and year out it's going to be difficult," Herrington said. "In '91 we had the big team and were able to compete (winning 32-0 over Rice)."

New, old opponent

Harrison will play Oxford in the ninth game next year, which will be a rematch of the 1990 state semifinal won by the Wildcats. Oxford has been a Class BB pow-

er ever since.

"We wanted to get into a stable situation, so we knew who we were going to play and could scout them right from the start," Herrington said. "We spent time scouting Notre Dame and DeLaSalle, because we thought Rice would be in the Catholic League playoffs."

"We like to play comparable schools — Class A schools of about 1,000 kids. Oxford is BB but they have an excellent program. We definitely want to play good teams."

Harrison has no first-game opponent for next year but has made overtures to Class AA Brighton, and Herrington would like to play teams from A schools like Lahser, Groves or Seaholm.

I'd like to see a North Farmington-Harrison game more often. They've played just once in the last seven years, but it's a natural rivalry waiting to happen.

But the events of 1993 have prevented it. That year, both played for the WLAAs championship and again the next week in the season finale.

CC deserved chance

Nobody is feeling sorry for Redford Catholic Central this week because the Shamrocks aren't in the Class AA playoffs. But let it be said here they should be playing another game.

For those who say "Give someone else a chance; CC is in the playoffs all the time," I say con-

sider this: It's the same teams every year, not just CC. Look at the first-round pairings. I see Fordson, Arthur Hill, Eisenhower, Muskegon, Troy, Brighton, Stevenson, John Glenn, Henry Ford and Adrian. Those schools have been in plenty.

The irony, of course, is that Henry Ford made it at 8-1 after losing 24-0 to CC in the first game and the Shamrocks didn't despite one loss.

Here's another strange twist of fate. Playing Class C Bluhoff Gallagher with four wins in the Prep Bowl hurt CC. The Lancers were in the game because they won a tiebreaker with AA Bracket tri-champs Divine Child and DePorres. But Class BB Divine Child with four wins would have given CC the needed points.

CC has been in the playoffs five of the last six years, so it's not as if the deck is completely stacked against it. The Shamrocks did make it with a 7-2 record in 1990 (and won the state title).

But the situation this year does point up the problem CC faces: trouble getting games with suitable opponents (right class and good competition) and the state of the Catholic League.

Too big for league

It's my observation CC and Rice have outgrown the league in terms of their enrollment and quality of football talent.

They're big schools in a Class B-C league. Only DeLaSalle, Oc-

ford and DePorres are any competition for them, but two of those schools don't provide the necessary and now all-important playoff points.

The Central Division and Double A aren't what they once were. Notre Dame and Detroit-DeWitt are B schools, and that affects the playoff situation, too.

Here's another stat: In the last 18 years (1976-93), the Central Division has won 16 league titles — 15 by either Rice or CC. In the preceding 17 years (1959-76), excluding 1971-72 when the league declared co-champions, the AA won 11 times with one tie.

There's no easy solution, except what one person suggested: Don't lose. I don't think either wants to leave the league and, if getting games is hard, try getting into a new league with comparable public schools.

A six-team league with Rice, CC, DeLaSalle and three Catholic schools in Toledo has been discussed. But that still leaves four open dates.

All three have scheduled public schools more aggressively and made the playoffs in years when they should have. But, for the above reasons, there's always a chance what happened this year will happen again.

The strength of its schedule combined with some lower-class opponents has made getting into the playoffs more difficult for CC than actually winning the playoffs.

Battle of Birmingham: Brother Rice vs. Seaholm

BY MARTY BUDNER
STAFF WRITER

The rhetoric just adds to the hype.

According to Seaholm coach Doug Fraser, the Maples don't stand a chance.

According to Brother Rice coach Al Fracassa, the Warriors are preparing for anything and everything.

That's what this wacky, intense football rivalry is all about. You never know what you're going to hear.

All you have to do is mention Brother Rice and Seaholm in the same breath and frenzied fans frolic at a fever pitch. Alumni from each school get in on the act and it makes for tremendous theater.

So there should be a good crowd and a pumped-up atmosphere when Seaholm (7-2) and Brother Rice (7-2) clash in a first-round Class A pre-regional playoff game set for 1:30 p.m. Saturday at Pontiac's Wisner Stadium. It marks their second playoff encounter over the past three years (Rice won 14-7 in 1991).

"One thing is for sure, it makes for a very exciting week," said Fraser. "Brother Rice has a program known not just state-wide, but nation-wide as well."

"It's a real thrill to have the opportunity to play them — not to mention one heck of a challenge," he said. "We don't stand a chance, but who cares, it's still exciting."

Fracassa said his team needs to approach this game just like any other and simply discount the rivalry factor.

"I just have to tell them it's another game, they have to play hard and they have to respect Seaholm like we do all of our other opponents," said Fracassa.

Although the teams bring iden-

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tical records into the game, Brother Rice is an overwhelming favorite for a number of reasons.

Rice was ranked the state's top team regardless of class throughout most of the season while Seaholm lost two of its first three games and frantically fought for its playoff life. On the field, the Warriors are bigger, stronger, deeper, more experienced and in better health right now than the banged-up Maples.

Seaholm's biggest injury centers around Lloyd Abramson, the outstanding senior quarterback who is being courted by a number of major colleges. Abramson suffered a season-ending knee injury in the seventh game and will not play against Rice, despite rumors to the contrary.

Abramson's experience as a leader, not to mention his ability to complete the big-play pass, will be sorely missed.

The fill-in will be sophomore Bill Feldmaier who has done a credible job in Abramson's absence. He led the Maples to victory in the final two games over Bloomfield Hills Andover and Birmingham Groves.

In fact, Feldmaier set a school record with 270 yards passing against Groves after completing nine of 15 passes — three for touchdowns — last Friday at the Silverdome. He is Abramson's heir apparent and has demonstrated fine potential, but undoubtedly Rice will offer a more formidable challenge than any he's faced so far.

"We'll certainly miss Lloyd's experience in this kind of a game," said Fraser. "But it's a neat opportunity for (Feldmaier)."

From Rice's standpoint, the

Warriors will have to prepare for Seaholm's Run-and-Shoot offense regardless of who plays quarterback.

"We're going to prepare for Seaholm like Abramson's going to play," said Fracassa. "He's a big, strong kid and he throws the ball well. But we know the other kid (Feldmaier) is very good. The thing is you just have so many routes you can run."

Both teams feature outstanding tailbacks.

Senior speedster and all-state candidate Marcus Harvey has rushed for 1,131 yards and scored 12 touchdowns this year. Last week, behind his outstanding offensive line that averages 250 pounds, Harvey rushed for 190 yards on 31 carries. He also threw for a touchdown.

Seaholm's Jordan Herrick, only a sophomore, rushed for a season-record 1,153 yards on 145 carries and scored eight touchdowns. Herrick had a 90-yard touchdown run last week against Groves and finished with 140 yards on 17 carries. Herrick injured an ankle against Groves and did not practice on Monday, but is expected to play against the Warriors.

Another nagging problem for Seaholm involves senior linebacker Adam Munder who suffered a leg injury prior to the Groves game. Although he plays against the Falcons, he was less than full strength.

"Seaholm is a very good team," said Fracassa. "Feldmaier is no slouch and they have a good offensive system. They can throw the ball well and Herrick is as good as they come."

Brother Rice, owners of four Class A state championships, is led by quarterback Derek Canine. The junior signal-caller has completed 74 of 123 passes for 769 yards and seven touchdowns on

the season.

Another standout for Rice is senior defensive back/wide receiver Brian Kalczynski (6-foot-2, 175 pounds). Kalczynski is not only an important defensive leader, but Fracassa likes to use him in key passing situations.

A few of the huge linemen Rice employs include senior captains

Dan Gibbons (6-4, 285) and David Ewing (6-1, 230), and seniors Larry Allor (6-3, 295) and Mick Ide (6-2, 300).

"Size is a major factor for us. We just can't line up and go toe-to-toe with them," said Fraser. "They key for us is not to make any mistakes and contain Marcus Harvey. We'll just have to have

great pursuit against him all over the field."

"Offensively we'll have to mix things up to keep them off guard because their defensive line is bigger than their offensive line," he said.

On Saturday, we'll see who has the final word.

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