

SPORTS

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BRAD EMONS

Here's the case for football excellence in Western Lakes

The Westland John Glenn football team got an earful from the Redford Catholic Central fans as they were warming up Saturday afternoon at Irvin Kionka Field prior to the Class AA-Region III pre-regional matchup.

The host Rockwells were chided by the CC fans basically for playing in what they perceive as an inferior league, the 12-school Western Lakes.

Chants of "You play Churchill," referring to the Livonia school in the WLAA with a 1-62 record during the 1990s, rang out frequently.

Apparently, the only good football played is in the Catholic League Central East and West divisions.

So was Glenn's 15-14 victory over CC Saturday some sort of vindication?

Not really, because the Western Lakes doesn't have to apologize to anybody for the quality of football they've played throughout the years.

Its record in the state playoffs speaks for itself.

I feel somewhat skeptical, however, when somebody tells me that CC plays the toughest schedule in the state.

If my calculations are right, the WLAA went 3-0 last week in the playoffs while the Catholic League Central Division went 1-2.

WLAA teams Farmington Harrison, a 45-30 winner over Detroit Chadsay, and Walled Lake Western, a 46-29 victor over Battle Creek Central, both won on the road.

Meanwhile, vaunted Birmingham Brother Rice bowed out in the first round of the playoffs for the third consecutive year, a 35-31 victim to Gross Pointe North on Saturday.

Detroit DePorres was the sole winner from the Central Division. But we're talking Class CC, not Class AA or A.

How tough was the CC schedule this year? On the surface, if you looked at it closely during the preseason, it was mighty tough. But reflecting afterwards, there were some chunks in their opponents' armour?

Those indications came during the final week of the season when DePorres had to rally in the final quarter to beat Belleville, the fourth place team in the Mega-Red Division.

And, if my memory serves me correctly, Plymouth Salem (6-3), probably the fifth or sixth best team this year in the WLAA, opened the season with a victory at Belleville.

Another sign was Dearborn Fordson's 36-6 demolishing of 6-2 Warren DeLaSalle, considered to be among the upper echelon of the Catholic League. Also, Hinsdale Woods Notre Dame was a 41-20 victor over South Lyon of the Kensington Valley League, losing 41-21.

To be honest, looking back, CC's schedule, in some respects, wasn't as tough as Livonia Franklin's, a WLAA team which finished 6-3 and right behind the Shamrocks for a playoff spot.

Franklin played two poor teams this year, Churchill (0-9) and Northville (1-8), but it also met four playoff teams, all of whom won in the first round last Saturday — Harrison, Western, Starling Heights Stevenson and Trenton.

Besides beating Trenton in the season finale, Franklin handled three other decent teams from the WLAA — Livonia Stevenson (6-3), Walled Lake Central (4-6) and Plymouth Canton (4-5).

CC's quality opponents included Detroit Pershing (6-3), Ann Arbor Pioneer (5-4), Rice twice (8-2), Divine Child (8-1), DeLaSalle (6-3) and Orchard Lake St. Mary's (6-3).

But how tough is the PSL? Last weekend, all three Detroit teams, Denby, King and Chadsay, went down to defeat in the playoffs. Also, Pioneer was waxed in its season finale by Ann Arbor Huron, 50-29. Then there's U-D Jesus (1-7), a perennial doormat in the Catholic League.

And when it comes to playoff appearances the WLAA doesn't have to take a backseat to anyone.

Harrison (16), John Glenn (8), Stevenson (9), Northville (3) Western (2), Salem (2), North Farmington (2), Canton (1), Franklin (1) and Churchill (1).

In the Central Division, DePorres leads with 16, followed by Rice (11), CC (9), St. Mary's (5), Divine Child (3), Bishop Gallagher (1) and DeLaSalle (1) for a total of 46.

Since 1975, the Catholic League has 21 playoff berths in Class AA or A, while the Western Lakes, with four more schools, has 38.

When it comes to playing in state finals, the WLAA has won eight and finished runner-up six times. The Central Division Class AA or A teams have won nine and lost four. Divine Child DePorres, St. Mary's and Bishop Gallagher are 10-2 in Class B, CC, Class C and D.

CC is 4-3 and Rice 4-1 in state finals, while Harrison is 7-2 (some of those in Class B).

So when it comes to football, the Western Lakes is right up there with the Catholic League.

I don't want to hear any more of that hogwash. And, by the way, Churchill and Glenn haven't met on the gridiron since 1990.

Hawks aim for regional title

■ Harrison and Trenton will meet for the first time on the football field Saturday when they play for a regional title.

BY DAN O'MEARA
STAFF WRITER

Ryan Szokola is the focus of Farmington Harrison's defense this week, not just because he's the Trenton quarterback but what he can do with the football.

The Hawks will have to keep Szokola in check if they're to win a regional championship and advance in the Class A playoffs.

Game time is 1:30 p.m. Saturday at Trenton. Both teams have 9-1 records.

Szokola is the leading rusher for the Trojans and also a dangerous passer who is quick to scramble rather than wait in the pocket.

The 6-foot-2, 180-pound senior has rushed for 1,089 yards and 14 touchdowns while passing for almost 800 yards and seven TDs.

"He's a great leader for us," Trenton coach Bob Czarnecki said. "He has great vision, incredible feet and good speed. I've caught up watching him from the sideline."

Szokola is the best quarterback Harrison will have faced this year, according to Harrison coach John Herrington, who compares him to Walled Lake Western's Frank Stanford.

"Whenever there's a big play to be made No. 7 is involved," Herrington said. "He's an outstanding athlete. It will be a long afternoon if we don't contain the quarterback."

The trouble is he avoids the rush well. He looks quick to pass and, if nothing is open, he runs off and is very tough to stop. He doesn't get sacked very often, because he sees the rush coming and is gone."

Szokola's favorite receiver is senior tight end Phil Nagy (25). He's caught 24 passes, five for touchdowns, and has most of the receiving yardage; he's also the leading tackler at inside linebacker for the 6-2 defense.

Like the Hawks, the Trojans have been giving the ball to their fullback a lot late in the season, too.

Senior Bob Adams (6-2, 225)



STAFF PHOTO BY TOM HOFFMASTER

Senior leader: Kevin Bambeneck, scrambling to avoid a rush against Livonia Stevenson, will be quarterback for the seventh time in a playoff game Saturday for the Hawks.

rushed for 137 yards and scored the winning touchdown on a 39-yard run with 2½ minutes remaining Saturday to give Trenton an 18-14 victory over South Lyon. Adams has gained nearly 600 yards and scored four TDs overall.

"The amazing thing is Bob Adams was a guard last year," Czarnecki said. "He had 4-5 weeks of the season he's been catching on to what we want him to do as a fullback."

"I think all three will be college players. Bob is the sleeper in the

drift this year. Once people see film on him, he'll draw a lot more interest."

Harrison will focus on those three but can't forget about senior tailback Harold Leavell (5-7, 150), who gets the ball on option pitches.

He hasn't had his number called much in recent games, but he does have almost 700 yards rushing and eight touchdowns this season.

"They like to run the fullback, and the quarterback will pull the ball and keep it," Herrington said. "Then

they'll fake to the fullback and throw to the tight end. They do a lot of other things, but that's basically what they do."

"We haven't played an option team exactly. The closest in style would be Plymouth Canton with Rob Johnson, who fakes to the fullback and keeps the ball a lot."

The Hawks were impressive in their playoff opener, too, building a 38-6 lead over top-seeded Detroit Chadsay and winning 45-22.

See PREVIEW, C4

Loss was wake-up call for Trojans

BY DAN O'MEARA
STAFF WRITER

Just one week after experiencing the low point of its 1996 football season, the Trenton High School football team was at its zenith.

The Trojans pulled off a major upset in the first round of the Class A playoffs last week with a stunning victory over Region 3 favorite South Lyon, 18-14.

The win and resulting turnaround followed a 24-16 loss to Livonia Franklin in the final game of the regular season, costing the Trojans a chance at an undefeated record.

"It took more of an emotional toll than I thought," he said. "We came out a little flat against Franklin."

"The kids decided they didn't want to play like that again. Franklin is a very good team, but our kids felt

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was a good loss," Trenton coach Bob Czarnecki said.

He added the Trojans played defending Moga White Division champ Dearborn and had focused on winning their first championship in 11 years against Redford Union in Lyon, 18-14.

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"If a loss can be good for you, that

they didn't play the way they could have. It was a wake-up call for us."

South Lyon was a state finalist last year and considered a solid contender for the title after winning the Kensington Valley Conference crown again.

"Our kids just went out there with the mindset, regardless of what happened, they were going to play 48 minutes, and that's what happened," Czarnecki said.

"If there was a key play, it might have been the opening kickoff when they fumbled and we scored. It dawned on the kids they could win the game."

Trenton will play host to Farm-

ington Harrison for the regional championship at 1:30 p.m. Saturday, but some of the Hawks were hoping for a rematch with South Lyon since the Lions defeated Harrison in a playoff game last year, 40-0.

"At first they were kinda shocked about it, but (Monday) they said what matters is that we're in," Harrison coach John Herrington said, regarding his players.

"I'm sure some were looking forward to playing South Lyon, but now we're looking forward to playing the team that beat South Lyon."

The only team to beat Trenton is

See PLAYOFFS, C4

Sibling rivalry

District hoop tourney could match sister against sister

BY DAN O'MEARA
STAFF WRITER

The driveway of their Farmington Hills home is where sisters Amy and Susie Roble have tested and honed their basketball skills playing against each other.

That's been the limit of their sporting rivalry, but that could change next week should their teams reach the final game of the Class A district tournament at Bloomfield Hills Lohr.

The sisters will be on opposing sides for the first time in an actual game competition if Farmington Harrison and Farmington Hills Mercy play for the championship Nov. 22.

Amy Roble is a junior on the Harrison basketball team, which finished second in the Western Lakes Activities Association, and Susie Roble is a freshman on the Mercy varsity.

"We talk about it a lot, what we'd do if we played each other, how we'd

react and things like that," Amy said.

Susie was on the same AAU team with Amy and many of her Harrison teammates last year and would be playing against friends as well as family.

"Amy and I share the same bedroom and have talks about what we did that day and how basketball went," Susie said. "When I think about it, I got so nervous, it would be real exciting and kinda weird."

To reach the final, Mercy must get past Lohr and West Bloomfield, which will be no small task. Harrison needs to win one game, against the Farmington-North Farmington winner.

If things do fall into place, the two days between the Wednesday semifinals and the championship game will rise to spirited debate around the Roble house.

"We'll talk about how my team is going to beat your team, how we're

going to beat their team, how we're



Amy Roble: all-league junior guard at Harrison.



Susie Roble: freshman point guard on Mercy varsity.