

Undefeated Trojans plan for lengthy tournament run

BY RICHARD L. SHOOK
STAFF WRITER

Way back before the start of the football season new Coach Greg Hudkins met with the first Livonia Clarenceville team he would be coaching.

"How," he asked his youngsters, "would you feel about practicing Thanksgiving morning?"

"The kids didn't know what I was talking about," Hudkins said the week his team began what it hoped would be a long and successful run in the Michigan High School Athletic Association football playoffs.

Undefeated Clarenceville hosted Clinton (6-4) Friday night at 7:30 p.m. in a Division VI playoff game.

The winner moved on to play the survivor of the game between Hudson and Erie-Mason.

What slowly dawned on the kids was that in order to be practicing Thanksgiving Day, the Trojans would have to be playing Saturday in the Silverdome. In the state championship game for

FOOTBALL

their division.

"I told them that it's okay to talk about it," Hudkins said. "Don't be afraid to set those goals high. And there's a certain price to be paid."

"We talked about the playoffs, at least to the point where we said we expected to make the playoffs. If you don't talk about it, you may not make it."

"So we talked about it. It's not how good or bad you are. We're in the playoffs. We've got a shot. It's not a surprise that Livonia Clarenceville is in the playoffs. Yet again, it is."

The Trojans made the playoffs last season for the first time but got bombed out in their first game by Capac.

"Capac was a nice team," Hudkins said. "I've got the film of that game. But Capac and Montrose, those teams are up in Division V this year."

Clarenceville not only lost the game to Capac, it lost its coach, Chuck Donaldson, who got fired.

The Trojans also graduated their All-Everything running back, Walter Ragland.

Athletic Director Chuck Sorrentino hired Hudkins from the staff at Monroe, a very successful Class A high school football program.

Given those facts and no others, it might be reasonable to assume Clarenceville would struggle through a period of adjustment. But the cupboard wasn't bare.

Paired with Ragland last year was a back who gave his team a glimpse of its future from time to time — freshman Tim Shaw.

This year Shaw, who runs about 6-foot-2 and 200, routinely ran for anywhere between 150-300 yards per game. He ended the regular season with 1,777 yards and 25 touchdowns.

"I had seen his work ethic, all summer and in the weight room," Hudkins said, "so I saw how he developed."

"I'm looking at the kid and comparing him to what I was used to in Monroe. He's pretty good. He's a tough kid."

"I have no idea what Walt's record was. But I think he passed it."

Quarterback Tim Riedl did more than hand off to Shaw. Riedl did a nice job throwing and utilized wingback Scott Wion, a junior who returns to the lineup after miss a game and a half with an ankle injury.

Getting the versatile Wion back will help because it gives Clinton one more thing to worry about.

"Everybody's so excited," Hudkins said. "All they've wanted to talk about the last couple of weeks, ever since we beat (Grosse Pointe University) Liggett, is playoffs, playoffs, playoffs."

"Nobody wanted to talk about (playing Bluefield Hills) Cranbrook and (Macomb Lutheran) North."

"We had a big meeting Monday about starting a new season. Refocusing. Going over our plans and everything. I told them I'm not so sure what they expected."

Clarenceville outscored Cranbrook, but gave up more points than it had all season, and struggled to defeat Lutheran North.

"We were struggling with our focus, I think," the rookie coach said. "All this stuff was new to the kids. Being undefeated, league champions ... this was all new to us."

"Going into the North game we were 8-0, had our league championship wrapped up, and were in the playoffs. Those were all goals of ours."

"It was like we were playing not to lose instead of playing to win. We had three fumbles, and that's not like us."

Shaw made All-Metro Conference but was beaten out for Offensive Player of the Year by Aaron Brock of Hamtramck, who rushed for 2,000 yards, but only got 50 of it against Clarenceville.

"The difference between this year's team and last year," Hudkins said, "is that we were shutting teams down this year. So he (Shaw) was always playing two quarters or so."

The Trojans' defense is anchored by middle linebacker Katen McPherson, the Metro Defensive Player of the Year.

"That's a good compliment to our defensive coordinator, Shane Richard. (I coached him at Mon-

roe on our semifinal team in 1995.)"

The Trojans' defense will be going against a Clinton team that runs multiple formations and features four effective running backs. It's a team with only four seniors.

McPherson missed the Cranbrook game but returned the following week. At one point against the Granes the Trojans were using sophomore running back Steve Meadows at middle linebacker and strong safety Joe Fioretti at strong-side linebacker.

"What's helped," Hudkins said, "is that we only had five players go both ways this year. And we've been able to spell them."

"As a coaching staff, going into the season we thought we had the talent to win games."

"The kids jelled offensively pretty fast. Defensively, you get kids to run around and hit people; it usually doesn't take quite as long."

Things came together well enough that it's okay to dare to think about practicing football on Thanksgiving Day.

Hawks rally to beat Yellow Jackets

FOOTBALL

Chris Roberson's fourth-quarter touchdown run Saturday clinched a 17-13 victory over host Detroit Country Day and a berth in the state playoffs for Farmington Harrison.

The junior tailback, who rushed for 136 yards on 24 carries, sprinted 29 yards for the winning touchdown with 7 minutes remaining in the game.

Needing a victory to qualify, Harrison finished 5-4 and made the Division III playoff lineup as a wild-card team. Country Day was an automatic qualifier in Division V with a 6-3 record.

Harrison senior Kris Wong tied a school record by kicking three field goals of 40, 47 and 40 yards.

Paul Rogind kicked three against Northville in 1976, and Dave Blackman did the same versus Walled Lake Central in 1982.

Wong's first two field goals,

the second coming after the first of two Brian Nelson interceptions, gave the Hawks a 6-0 lead in the second quarter.

But the Yellow Jackets took a 7-6 halftime lead with Jason Probert's 4-yard run and the extra-point kick. The DCD touchdown resulted from a Harrison fumble at its 18.

Nick Hall's interception in the third quarter set up Wong's third field goal and restored the lead to Harrison, 9-7.

DCD's Brendan Sledge-Mellon picked off a Harrison pass and returned it 25 yards for a touchdown later in the third quarter, but the two-point conversion failed.

In the fourth quarter, Harrison had DCD pinned deep in its end when the snap from shotgun formation went into the end zone

for safety. That put the Hawks within two, 13-11.

After the Roberson TD, Nelson's second interception cut short DCD's next possession. Harrison ran the clock down to 1:20 with a ball-control drive in which Roberson gained another 40 yards.

Harrison outgained DCD, 184-61. The Hawks had 146 yards on the ground, the Jackets 41.

Roberson also caught two passes for 36 yards. DCD quarterback Matt Collins was 8-of-18 passing for 20 yards. All three completions went to Jeremy Battier.

Brad Porson led the Harrison defense with eight tackles. Nelson and Aaron Kennedy made seven tackles apiece.

The Hawks also sacked Collins four times. Porson, Kennedy, Kent Taylor and Marcus Mennotti had one sack each.



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