

# CC reigns in hockey – again

## Hockey from page D1

BY BRAD MONASTIERE  
STAFF WRITER

Redford-Detroit Catholic Central now stands alone atop the high school hockey world.

By defeating Marquette 6-1 Monday night, CC became the first team in state history to win four straight Class A or Division I state hockey championships.

The Shamrocks are on a 24-game postseason winning streak, unprecedented in state history, and they defeated four different teams to win each of their recent state titles.

CC downed Port Huron Northern 3-2 in the finals last year, while Alpena (2000) and Enat Kentwood (1999) were the previous championship game victims in the current streak.

The Shamrocks have won six state titles in all, second behind the 10 won by Bloomfield Hills Cranbrook since 1976.

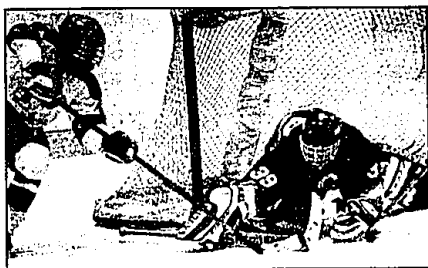
Five of those six state titles have come in the past six seasons, a streak interrupted by Trenton's championship in 1998.

Playing for a program like CC, pressure comes with the territory. But the players never lost faith. Even after a 1-3 start, even after falling behind Livonia Stevenson, 4-1, before rallying for a memorable, double-overtime win in this year's regional final.

Make no mistake, this wasn't the same team that galloped, relatively unchallenged, through the schedule as it did in 2000-01 when it rang up a 27-0-3 record.

"Our athletes were younger than those we've had in the past," CC co-coach Gordie St. John said at the team's pep assembly Tuesday afternoon.

"We felt a great deal of pressure early in the season, and we had some real rough days in there. But we melded into a real



STAFF PHOTO BY JIM JACOBELLI

**Puck stopper:** CC goalie James Blanchard makes one of his many saves in the state final Monday, this one on Marquette's Steve Dales.

team, and these guys became warriors."

CC's football team took a very similar path to this year's state title as the hockey team did. After a 3-3 start, even making the playoffs was a big question mark for the football team. But coach Tom Mack and the players rallied together, got hot at the right time, and upended Utica Eisenhower 24-21 in the Division I finals. St. John said that team was an inspiration for the hockey team.

"I'd like to thank the football team, because they proved in a very real way, that the way you start a season doesn't dictate how you finish one."

Like the football team, the hockey team used a total team effort in its playoff run. Juniors Eric Giosa and Brandon Naurato scored a number of crunch-time goals for the Shamrocks in the close games they won. Naurato said it was a matter of being in the right place at the right time.

"It's been about working hard

and getting some breaks in the playoffs, and we had both," Naurato said. "The first month was real tough for us, but we fought through it together. We got used to being in games where it was tied 2-2 going into the third period."

Naurato scored the game-winning goal against Stevenson and Farmington, the former coming with 20 seconds left in the second overtime. Giosa put CC ahead 3-2 in the semifinal game against Port Huron Northern, keeping the momentum on its side during the team's run of six straight goals after being down 2-0 in the first period.

"We knew we had to be the hardest working team in the state," Giosa said. "We stayed positive the whole time, and we never doubted ourselves once."

Confidence, clutch play, experience, and a winning tradition. All those things add up to championships, and the Shamrocks of Catholic Central know the formula as well as anyone.

power play goal with 1:16 left in the game, just a prelude to the wild celebration that would follow.

After the game, senior captain Jeff Davis fought back tears as he reflected on the amazing accomplishment his team just achieved.

"This is a dream come true. Best time of my life," he said. "I am so fortunate to play for a team like Catholic Central and with a bunch of guys who will not quit and have so much heart. That's how we won, with a lot of heart."

Heart may have gotten CC to the state finals, but special teams played a big part in helping to get a victory in that game. The Shamrocks rendered Marquette's power play totally ineffective. The Redmen went 0-for-7 with the man advantage, and were unable to convert on a 5-on-3 power play at the beginning of the third period.

"Special teams killed us," said Marquette coach Mike L'Huillier. "Cc is too talented and has too much skill to keep giving them chances like we did. We dug ourselves a three-goal deficit, and it was just too much to try and come back from."

Although the Shamrocks didn't score on its three power-play chances in the first period, they were able to seize control of the flow of the game and prevent Marquette from generating any consistent pressure. Giosa's goal came four seconds after the team's first power play expired, opening the scoring.

"There were so many penalties called in the game, it was a good thing our special teams were good," Johnson said.

Naurato, junior Patrick Col-dren, senior captain John Perkovich and Giosa picked up assists in the game. The balanced offense in this game was indicative of the way the team

won this season, with no one or two players scoring most of the goals. That kind of teamwork was a key ingredient in this state championship according to Johnson.

"We won playoff games where three different lines of players were the heroes," Johnson said. "In the past, we've had two scoring lines and two checking lines, but this team had three lines that could be either on any given night, and that's a tough thing to overcome."

CC outshot Marquette 25-20 in the game, but sophomore goaltender Jim Blanchard was rarely tested in the way he was earlier in the playoffs. Credit for that can go to CC's defensive corps, which in the most underrated part of the team, according to Johnson.

"Our defensive zone coverage has been outstanding," he said. "We went 10 games without giving up an even-strength defensive-zone goal. Playing in the defensive zone is one of the toughest things to teach, and we responded well as a five-man unit."

CC didn't play with the lead for extended minutes very often

in the playoffs, but had to after the two quick goals in the second. Perkovich said the pressure the power-play team generated was a key in preserving the lead. "We didn't stop pressuring them, even after we got the 4-1 lead," he said. "Our penalty killing was phenomenal, and if they couldn't score on us when they had the power play, it was going to be tough on them."

In the end, winning state titles is about more than killing penalties, good passing and consistent defense. It's also about the emotion of playing and rising to the pressure of living up to the Mt. Everest-level expectations. The emotion was evident on the players' faces, not just on the pictures with the state championship trophy, but long afterwards, when cheers led to tears knowing high school careers for the seniors, were now over.

"Playing at this school puts a lot of pressure on you," O'Malley said. "But guys on this team really thrive on it."

"I'm just so proud of everyone on this team," Perkovich said. "I can't believe it's over, but you can't ask for a better ride than what we've had here."

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