

## O &amp; E STAFF'S FOOTBALL PICKS

| WEEK 13                          | Jim Toth      | Marty Budner  | Tim Smith     | Dan Stickrad  | Ken Abramczyk | Dan O'Meara   |
|----------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| <b>SATURDAY</b>                  |               |               |               |               |               |               |
| Allen Park vs. Blm. Brother Rice | Brother Rice  | Brother Rice  | Brother Rice  | Brother Rice  | Brother Rice  | Brother Rice  |
| DeWitt vs. B.H. Lahser           | Lahser        | Lahser        | Lahser        | Lahser        | DeWitt        | DeWitt        |
| D. Country Day vs. Montrose      | Country Day   | Country Day   | Country Day   | Country Day   | Country Day   | Country Day   |
| <b>LAST WEEK</b>                 | 4-0 (1,000)   | 4-0 (1,000)   | 2-2 (.500)    | 2-2 (.500)    | 3-1 (.750)    | 3-1 (.750)    |
| <b>SEASON TOTAL</b>              | 128-50 (.719) | 132-46 (.742) | 119-59 (.669) | 122-56 (.685) | 128-50 (.719) | 132-46 (.742) |

## Amazing success continues in certain locale

Unparalleled. Unbelievable. Uncanny. That's the best way to describe the success of the Birmingham/Bloomfield Hills high school teams during the 2002 football playoffs.

Brother Rice, Country Day and Lahser are three of 32 prep teams across the state with title hopes still in sight.

The Warriors went down to the wire before knocking off their regional final opponents, while the

Yellow Jackets were in control from the outset in their victory over Erie-Mason.

All three teams stand only one win away from finishing their seasons inside the Pontiac Silverdome with the opportunity of playing for a state championship.

(Last week's picks: 4 right, 0 wrong. Season's marks: 128 right, 50 wrong.)

Allen Park (11-1) vs. Birmingham Brother Rice (10-2) at Berkley, 1 p.m. Saturday. The Warriors are on a roll, but so are the Jaguars. Since a season-opening loss to Fordson, the Jaguars have reeled off 11 consecutive victories. And as impressive as their offense has been throughout the season, the defense has matched that effort in recent weeks. They may catch a break with the Warriors' health problems, but that still won't be enough to push them through.

DeWitt (10-2) vs. Bloomfield Hills Lahser at South Lyon (12-0), 1 p.m. Saturday. OK, so one win certainly would have been impressive and two unequalled, but three playoff wins by the Knights? No way. Coach Dan Loria's squad has done everything asked of an unbeaten team. They'll have to do even more against the offensive-minded and unbeaten Panthers. Tight goals, extra points - Lahser placekicker Rob Roney has delivered when called upon, and one more successful boot may be just the ticket to the Silverdome.

Country Day (11-1) vs. Montrose (12-0) at Port Huron Memorial Stadium, 1 p.m. Saturday. The Rams come in with the best record, but not the best team. The Jackets are going to be one of the best for a long time to ever qualify for the playoffs, and they'll prove it again by shutting down a potent veer offense run by the Rams.

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## Allen Park, Rice meet for first time

BY MARTY BUDNER  
STAFF WRITER

What a contrast in playoff opponents.

In its first three playoff games, Brother Rice defeated rather familiar foes in Farmington Harrison, Warren DeLaSalle and North Farmington.

This week the playoffs serve up a completely new foe.

Brother Rice plays Allen Park in a Division II state semifinal game scheduled for 1 p.m. Saturday at Berkley's Harrison Stadium. In 40 years of football, the Warriors have never played Allen Park.

"This is all brand new to us. You have to start all over," said Brother Rice coach Al Fracassa.

"When we played DeLaSalle and Harrison last year, we were familiar with it. It made our preparation simpler."

"Now we have to familiarize ourselves with some whole new offensive sets. Allen Park runs a complicated offense, and we have to get prepared for that."

And to compound matters for the Warriors, they head into the state semifinal with a bag full of injuries.

Jeff Stachowiak (shoulder) and Brian Mahler (ankle) - Rice's top two receivers - are banged up and doubtful for Saturday's game. Linebacker Ryan Britain is back after having missed one playoff game, and linebacker Jeff Magnatta is still not a hundred percent after suffering a knee injury. A cou-

ple of key linemen are also hurt. Junior Ryan McMahon will start at one receiver spot, and Fracassa plans to rotate Anthony Jackson and AJ Gioutos at the other receiver slot.

"We have to compensate for those injuries by giving other players a chance. It's been done before," said Fracassa. "We just have to work with what we have. Sometimes success comes if your injury free. Now we have to work around our injuries."

Allen Park, appearing in the playoffs for the 12th time and state runner-up in 1995, finished in a three-way tie for the Mega Conference Red title with Belleville and Dearborn Fordson. The Jaguars are an explosive group, having scored 350 points out of their multiple-set offense en route to an 11-1 overall record.

Allen Park's only loss was in the season opener to Fordson, 29-6. Since then they've reeled off 11 consecutive victories, including an impressive 41-3 triumph over Farmington last week to win its regional championship.

The Jaguars have a fairly balanced offensive attack led by junior quarterback Anthony Grose. Their leading rusher is junior tailback Brian Brighnon who had 1,330 yards and 25 touchdowns on the season, including three last week against Farmington. The fullback is junior Christian Sinnott and the defense is led by linebacker Tim Vezina.

## CC

FROM PAGE D1

Eisenhower, but we don't scramble as much."

Dakota might be the best balanced team that CC has faced in this post-season. The offensive line is a little on the short side (averaging about 6-4) and Giannone says it's "probably 85- to 90-percent out of the shotgun."

"Our line is kind of short and squat, so we have our smaller and faster kids at tackle," said Giannone. "We figure if we're going to throw, we'll put our athletes on the outside."

And that's the kind of thinking that gives defenses fits.

"To stop that, we have to get pressure on (Thiel) and disrupt

his reads and get some fresh bodies in there," said Mach. "You have to mix them up on defense and keep them off balance, instead of them keeping us off balance. You want to stay a step ahead of them, instead of them staying a step ahead of you."

The Cougars have small running backs - Steve Osowski and Roger Tuck are both under 5-8 and weigh less than 140 pounds, but they've combined for 1,600 yards rushing. And the receivers are talented, too, with Ty Warcinsky and Jason Bakou as well as tight end Scott Druzinski.

"I'm not sure about their offense," said Mach. "It's not confusing, but they do things that cause problems because of the formation they run. They can score a lot of points."

Even with the wide-open offense, the Cougars also play a solid defense, having held Eisenhower to just 26 points in their two wins over the Eagles. "And we scored 21 points in

the second game with Eisenhower and our defense had seven," said Giannone. "We play 4-3 and we're pretty solid up front."

The defensive leader is line-backer Andrew Allen, a 6-1, 208-pound junior who leads the team in tackles.

"Our defense is predicated on him making most of the tackles," said Giannone, whose team's lone loss was 14-11 to Chippewa Valley on the last game of the regular season. "He's aggressive and he goes sideline-to-sideline very well."

Mach has noticed. "They play a solid defense," said Mach. "They bend but they don't break. They have a lot of kids who get to the ball fast."

While most of the CC players have been in the playoffs before, it's new to the Cougars - although new doesn't translate to nervous.

"You look at a team like CC and a lot of people might not give us a chance and think we can't play with them," said

Giannone. "Actually, I think our being young and not being there before helps us. It's kind of like little kids playing on monkey bars on a playground. You try it and if you fall off, it's no big deal."

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