

DEFENSE

FROM PAGE C1

Following is a brief profile of each player named to the first team by area coaches.

KARL ESCHACH, Brother Rice: The Warriors' 6-1, 245-pound captain turned in a stellar senior campaign in the trenches, helping his teammates reach the Division 2 state title game. He proved to be a force on both offense and defense.

"He was a steady player for two straight years," Rice coach Al Fracassa said. "He rated out as our leading point-getter in tackles. He always made a great effort and got better and better as the year went on."

PAT FLANNERY, Oxford: A three-year starter and four-year letter-winner for the Wildcats, Flannery rarely came off the field. Standing 6-3 and 235, Flannery, a captain, was a top lineman on both sides of the football and also held duties as long snapper.

"He led by example," stated Oxford coach Bud Rowley. "He's the type of kid who really loves football and has a great work ethic."

WILL JOHNSON, Lake Orion: A junior competing in his initial varsity season, Johnson was a force for the Dragons from his outside linebacker/defensive end position. The 6-4, 255-pound Johnson helped the Dragons gain a share of the OAA Division 1 title and chalk up a post-season victory.

"He's a real force," said Dragons coach Chris Bell. "He grew into the position and came a long way. He learned the position and could really dominate."

JAY LEYBOURN, Country Day: In the era of players occasionally taking a play off, Leybourn wouldn't even occasionally let the thought enter his mind. Bringing it 100 percent of the time, Leybourn caused havoc for opposing ball-carriers with his 6-3, 235-pound drive for the football. A three-year starter and captain this season, Leybourn collected 40-plus tackles, four sacks and three fumble recoveries.

"I referred to him as our 'Ironman,'" CDD coach Dan MacLean said. "He has a great attitude and is very unselfish. He comes hard every play. With Jay you knew what you were getting every game."

BRANDON WILLER, Harrison: Imposing, intimidating - no way! Relentless, reliable - way! A junior competing in his first season of varsity action, Willer used all of his 6-3, 160-pound frame to enjoy an outstanding season at nose guard for the Hawks.

"The first game he played we knew we had something special," Harrison coach John Herrington said. "He's quick, athletic and has a great work ethic."

JEROME BENNETT, Southfield: A four-year starter in the Blue Jays lineup, Bennett moved into a linebacker slot for the first time this year and emerged with team MVP hon-

ors. The 6-1, 220-pound senior totaled 77 solo tackles, 59 assisted tackles, five sacks and three interceptions.

"He really filled a spot we needed," Southfield coach David Reese said. "He was our most polished defensive player and our toughest all-around kid."

JIM COURETAS, Lake Orion: The Dragons' three-year starter eliminated a stellar prep career by being a key contributor on both sides of the football. The 6-0, 220-pound captain totaled 102 tackles and racked up four sacks from his linebacker position and also averaged 6.8 yards per carry at fullback.

"Jim is a multi-talented guy," Bell said. "He ran the ball well and tackled well. He's the kind of guy that never came off the field."

RYAN BRITTAIN, Brother Rice: One of the state's top linebackers, the 6-3, 227-pound Warrior captain finished as the team's leading tackler for the third straight season. Brittain also proved to be a reliable force on offense at tight end.

"He was our producer on defense," Fracassa said. "He's been a great leader who was born to tackle."

BRAD WALSH, Farmington: A mainstay in the Falcons lineup the past four seasons and a starter the last three, Walsh led his teammates in tackles with 109 and finished his brilliant prep career No. 2 on the all-time list. A two-year captain, the 6-0, 220-pound linebacker split his playing time by also

handling fullback duties.

"He's very dedicated," Farmington coach John Bechtel said. "That hard work really paid off for him and he became a great high school player."

KEVIN ZERBO, Harrison: The Hawks senior linebacker certainly knew how to hand out punishment as he led his teammates in tackles and assists. A three-year varsity performer, the 6-3, 200-pound Zerbo also spent time at fullback and proved to be a solid blocker.

"He's the hardest hitter we've ever had," Herrington said. "He has great instinct to get to the ball and loves to make contact."

NICK MERLO, Rochester: The son of head coach Mark Merlo, Nick a 6-2, 180-pound junior contributed in several ways in his first season of varsity play. Merlo excelled at free safety and inside linebacker, totaling 34 solo tackles and assisting on 38 others. He also did a solid job of splitting quarterback duties.

"He's a hard worker who understands the process," the older Merlo said. "He's smart enough and sees the big picture to be in position to make plays."

CHARLES PICKETT, Harrison: Competing in his second varsity campaign, Pickett did an outstanding job in the Hawks secondary, leading the team with four interceptions, and also at wide receiver. His speed and shiftness enabled him to be a continuous threat as a punt and kick-off return man.

"He's been one of my favorite players," Herrington said. "He could really tackle and just loves to play football."

CHASE RAMSEY, Seaholm: Dependable might be an understatement for this Maple senior. Competing in his third varsity campaign, the 6-2, 190-pound Ramsey started 35 straight games in the Seaholm secondary. This season he finished with 47 tackles, three interceptions and two fumble recoveries and set a school mark with 14 pass deflections. Ramsey also spent time at receiver where he hauled in 19 passes for 247 yards and punt returner.

"Chase is the most savvy player I have ever coached," Seaholm coach Bob Carleton said. "He's very reliable and always had a knack for being in the right place at the right time."

JARRETT SMITH, Groves: The Falcons' "emotional leader" concluded his second varsity campaign with six interceptions and a host of pass deflections from his defensive back position. The 5-10, 160-pound captain also filled in at quarterback for better than half the season and served as holder on place-kicks.

"He was our emotional leader all year," Groves coach Brendan Flaherty said. "He accepted the challenge of playing QB and did a great job."

BRANDON MOORE, Rochester: Moore's booming leg got the Falcons out of plenty of jams and backed up the opposition. A senior, competing in his second varsity season, Moore averaged 40 yards per punt with a long of 65 yards against rival Adams. Ten times kicks went better than 50 yards and 10 times he pinned opponents inside their own 10-yard line. As a receiver, Moore hauled in 36 passes for 382 yards and one touchdown.

"He's definitely one of the best punters we've ever had," Merlo said. "He has a great leg and really works hard at it."

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