

Marian Starts New Season

By BILL O'CONNELL

It is the end of one season and the start of a new one for Marian Catholic.

First-year Marian Head Football Coach Dave Mattio's Spartans mastered five consecutive Illini-8 conference opponents in the first season.

Victories over Bolingbrook (20-0), Joliet East (28-6), Joliet West (12-0), Romeoville (14-6), and Argo (17-0) are history. The new season awaits the Spartans.

"NOT TO take anything away from our first five opponents, but what our season actually comes down to is these next four games," said Mattio.

"So far each opponent has proved to us that they were capable of beating us on a given day. We had a difficult time with Romeoville. But the most important games are ahead of us."

The crucial new season Mattio is referring to is the final stretch in the Spartans' schedule, beginning tomorrow night at Elgin, a Class 5A opponent.

Marian follows with difficult I-8 confrontations with defending 4A state champion Joliet Catholic, impressive Lockport, and Joliet Central, the conference's surprise team for 1976. Catholic is the only other undefeated I-8 team besides Marian, while Joliet Central has lost only the Hillmen (22-8), Lockport always present problems for the Spartans, according to Mattio.

"IN THE minds of the kids, they've accomplished their first five goals of the season. No. 6 is Elgin" said Mattio. "Sure, we're pointing toward Joliet Catholic, Lockport and Joliet Central. But I really feel the Elgin game is important because are a 5A team and that gives us more consideration for post-season berths."

"Plus, if we were to continue the winning streak, it would add even more momentum for the conference games ahead. Whether or not this is going to be a successful season or just a good one will be decided in these next four weeks."

Mattio labels Elgin the "best 4-4 team in the state" mainly because of running back Rich Hersey.

"Hersey will definitely be the best back we'll face this year," said the coach. "He's the type of player I can score from anywhere, at any time and in any manner."

"ELGIN'S impressed me with their ability to score. They execute well and put a lot of points on the board."

But does Elgin's defense follow suit?

"We scouted Elgin and St. Charles and they were leading 35-21 with about six minutes to play, so left,"

said Mattio. "And we found out the next day they lost 44-43."

Joliet Central, the No. 3 team in the I-8 behind the Catholic powers had to resort to a last second TD pass to escape with a 22-19 victory over Elgin earlier this year.

"Elgin has a lot of incentive," said Mattio. "They are 1-4 and probably shouldn't be because they're a better team than that. And it's their homecoming."

Elgin may also have last year's 28-27 double-overtime loss to Marian in the back of its mind Friday night.

Despite Marian's unblemished record, Mattio is still not completely satisfied with the Spartans' offensive execution.

"For each of the last three weeks we've tried to commit ourselves to running outside and passing to see how balanced of an attack we have," he said. "We've had too many fundamental breakdowns. We've been a bit lucky in that we've been able to put points on the boards when we've needed them."

"BUT AS the schedule gets more difficult, it's more and more difficult to maintain a balanced attack. Against a good team, we can't afford to make fundamental mistakes that stop drives. We'll just put ourselves in a hole."

Despite the offensive breakdowns, one member of the Spartans' backfield has continually run in high gear. Fullback Joe Zarlengo rushed for over 100 yards for the fourth time this season last Saturday at Argo, picking up 146 yards on 24 carries and scoring one touchdown.

Zarlengo's hard-nosed running highlighted the finest offensive drive the team has produced this season. It showed very little balance. In fact, it was all Joe Zarlengo as he rushed for 66 yards of the 97-yard drive, including the seven-yard TD run.

Dave Mattio's first season as a head coach is turning into a two-sided affair. And if the Spartans are hoping for a happy ending, they can take one step in achieving that goal tomorrow night.