

Marian Guns For I-8 Title

By BILL O'CONNELL

Tomorrow will be a night of firsts for Marian Catholic, or at least Coach Dave Mattio hopes it will be.

Playing the first night home game in the school's history, the Spartans will also be seeking their first Illini-8 conference championship and a consequent berth in the Class 4A state playoffs.

One stubborn obstacle stands between Marian and the outright I-8 title - Joliet Central, a team which has just one conference setback, a 22-8 loss to Joliet Catholic in the first week of the season.

MARIAN, after staging a dramatic fourth-quarter drive, climaxed by Shawn Janus' sensational grab of a 17-yard pass from Nick Calvi, escaped with a 17-14 over host Lockport last Friday night.

That victory assured Marian of at least a share of the I-8 title and boosted the Spartans' conference record to 7-0 and overall mark to 7-1.

Coach George Legan's Joliet Central squad, after whipping Argo 48-12 last Friday, also enters with a 7-1 overall record. But the Steelmen stand 6-1 in the conference, winning every game since the opening loss to the Hillmen.

Marian's only setback of the year was a 34-14 loss to Elgin - the same team Joliet Central beat 22-18 earlier in the season. But Mattio isn't concerned with those statistics. If you base a team's chances on comparative scores, Marian should not have beaten Joliet Catholic, as it did 16-6 two weeks ago.

"ACTUALLY our loss and Central's win over Elgin should give our kids some incentive not to let up," said Mattio. "But as I look back on the Elgin game, there were a lot of facets involved that make the score deceiving. Not to make any excuses, but I thought we gave the game away as I said earlier in the year. Plus, Central played Elgin at home. And that traveling has to have some effect on a team."

Mattio is concerned with the amount of momentum the Steelmen have gathered since their opening loss to Joliet Catholic.

"Central has been very impressive," said the

coach. "Most of the coaches think they are the most formidable team in the conference at this time. Since their first loss, they've come on strong. Central's won seven games in a row and they'll be looking for No. 8."

The playoff picture is simple if Marian wins; complicated if the Spartans lose tomorrow night. A victory over Central would give Marian sole possession of the I-8 title and an automatic berth in the playoffs.

AND IF Joliet Catholic finishes its regular season at 8-1 with a victory over Lockport tomorrow, the Hillmen would probably be an at-large selection.

There are 16 teams in each division of the state playoffs, 14 conference representatives and two at large choices. Based on the fact, the Hillmen claimed last year's state title, they would likely be chosen.

Assuming Marian loses to Central and Joliet Catholic beat Lockport, there would be a three-way tie for the I-8 championship and the decision would be left to the conference coaches. Mattio believes the nod would go to Central if it came down to a vote.

ALTHOUGH Mattio understands the possibilities and the consequences, he doesn't expect his Spartans' future to be determined by a vote.

"Our kids know there may be no tomorrow if we lose," he said. "Our only alternative is to win this game. Our goal at the start of the year was to win the conference and represent it in the state playoffs."

"We've already attained at least a part of one of those goals (a share of the I-8 title) but now it's important to win the thing outright. The kids know and understand this."

"You'll definitely see some hitting. I know Central will be and you better believe Marian will be ready to play football."

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