

Good Teams, Outstanding Individuals

It's true that among teams in the south suburbs, Providence, Hillcrest, Reavis, Eisenhower and Rich South qualified for the state football playoffs this fall.

It's also true that Marian Catholic was the co-champion in the Illini-8, and those schools like Stagg, Bremen, Bloom and Thornton enjoyed their best seasons in some time.

But the spotlight this year fell on individuals. The blasting and breakaway backs, the sticky-fingered ends, the usual blue-chip linebackers, and the linemen who did the blocking and the tackling were the individual headliners that made 1976 a grid year to remember, considering what happened to all south suburban teams in the playoffs.

SO IT SHOULD come as no surprise that the 1976 Star Publications All-Area team is just as good as it's ever been. The 44-man squad will be honored December 9 at the Holiday Inn at Harvey.

Start sportswriters did the choosing after consulting the all-conference teams selected by the four South Inter-Conference Association divisions, the Illini-8 and Private School league. And it wasn't just a rubber stamp of what the coaches picked: Providence's George Donald didn't make the PSL team, but he's part of our squad after leading the Celtics into the playoffs.

A couple of things make this year's squad different from past units. It's the first time ever that no one was selected on both offense and defense. And the representation among the different schools was as widespread as it's ever been.

Reavis, Hillcrest and Bremen each had four players nominated to the team, while Marian Catholic, Stagg, Thornton, Rich South and Bloom landed three apiece. But the team success was not a requirement: individual merit was.

IN ONE RESPECT, Rich South led the voting, even though Shawn Janus of Marian is the honorary All-Area Captain.

An easy choice as the No. 1 quarterback in the south suburbs was the Stars' Biff Fulmer. He completed 95 of 160 passes for 1,445 yards and 14 touchdowns, double the statistics of any other signal-caller.

Another South Star was halfback Greg Stevenson, the only junior to make the team last year and thus the only repeater on this year's squad. Stevenson churned for 960 yards and scored 72 points.

The entire backfield would make any college coach foam at the mouth. Recruiters spent much of the season looking at and chasing standouts like Stevenson, Donald, Bill Ziska of Stagg, Alan Douglas of Hillcrest, Herb Simpson of Thornton, Eric Pryde of Reavis and Mike Hunt of Bremen, who combined for over 7,000 yards rushing.

DONALD, IRONICALLY, didn't make the All-PSL Team but was the leading ground-gainer in the area with 258 carries for 1,279 yards. He tallied 71 points this year and had a two-year total of 128 to tie a school record. And played some defense, too.

The best all-purpose back was probably Thornton's Simpson, who gained 900 yards (more than any Wildcat since 1969) and had a total offense figure of 1,600. Two other breakaway threats were Douglas, with 13 TD's and 1,073 yards, and Hunt, with 979 yards and 12 scores.

Fullback-types Pryde of Reavis and Ziska of Stagg complete the backfield. Pryde bulled his way for 900 yards and pushed the Rams into the playoffs, while Stagg was 603 with Ziska a one-man offense. He totaled 942 yards and actually missed two games.

If this mythical team ever took the field, they'd be running behind centers Bob Campell of Stagg and Jeff Matheny of Bradley, plus interior linemen Steve Ford of Thornton, Dave Krawczyk of Stagg, Don Petrosius of Reavis, Dan Veschak of Bloom, Scott Rollins of Bremen, Tony Mitchell of Marian, Wayne Ford of Thornridge and Tom McKee of Rich Central.

FULMER WOULD have at least one familiar target in Rich South's Ray Garbaciak, who was one of the top receivers in the state with 43 catches for 570 yards and three scores. Two-way standout Jerome Johnson of Bremen had 37 career receptions for a team that didn't throw much. Crete-Monee's Scott Weber nabbed 20 aeriels for 462 yards, and Eisenhower's Lou Tiberi was the best long distance threat since Cliff Branch, Weber and Tiberi are the only two juniors selected to the team.

Every year it seems they grow the linebackers meaner and bigger in the south suburbs, and this year was no exception. Marian's Janus was the leader, but what college wouldn't like to have defensive terrors like Tom Chakos, of Hillcrest, Rich Bielecki of Tinley Park, Bernard Hammond of Providence, Rich Shipbaugh of Reavis, Don Gordon of Bloom, Doug Wicks of Eisenhower and Ray Anderson of Sandburg?

Traditionally, area coaches put their best athletes at linebacker. It's no accident, therefore, that coaches in their respective conferences nominated Chakos, Johnson, Shipbaugh, Gordon, Wicks and Anderson for All-State.

Seven defensive linemen from seven schools are represented, including Brian Long of Rich East, Tom VanderVeen of Oak Forest, Larry Jackson of Tinley Park, Cyril Czopek of Reavis, James Hall of Hillcrest, Chris Matz of Homewood-Flossmoor and Andy DeRosa of Marian.

AND WHILE MOST teams didn't throw the ball much this season, it was harder than ever before for Star sportswriters to settle on seven defensive backs.

Kankakee Westview's Greg Wilson tops a talented unit that also features Mike Healy of Thornton, Pat Petrelli of Bloom, Brian Muick of Hillcrest, J.D. Johnson of Thornridge, Tony Banks of Bremen and Dave Fleming of Rich Central.