

# *This Zarlengo Runs the Ball*

By BILL O'CONNELL

Football is a tradition in the John Zarlengo family.

Marian Catholic high school has reaped the benefits of that custom.

In the 70s, one Zarlengo after another has played varsity football at Marian and 1976 is no exception. In fact, senior Joe Zarlengo may be the finest contribution the family has made to the Spartans' program.

"Joe Zarlengo is a football player, period!" stresses Marian first-year head coach Dave Mattio. "The Zarlengo's have a proud heritage. Each brother feels he has to do a better job than the brother before him. Consequently, they work much harder. Joe's one of the finest athletes I've ever been associated with as a coach."

JOE ZARLENGO has followed the same path traveled by brothers John and Paul. John, a two-year starter at guard, graduated in 1973. Paul, a powerful defensive tackle, gained All-State recognition in 1974.

Joe is cut from a slightly different mold than his brothers. At 5-10, 206 pounds, he has the size and strength to be a lineman. But Joe plays fullback and he plays the position well.

Through the first six games of the '76 season, Zarlengo has rushed for 553 yards on 94 carries in leading the Spartans to a 5-1 record. He's rushed for more than 100 yards in four games, including 146 against Argo. He's also scored four touchdowns.

Zarlengo was born 17 years ago at St. James Hospital, just a few blocks away from Sarff Field, the site where Joe matured into a complete football player.

"PLAYING football is something I've basically always wanted to do," said Joe, who has gained nearly six yards every time he's touched the ball. "There was a little bit of pressure on me when I came into high school because of what my brothers had done. But I was proud of them. I wasn't trying to outdo them. I just always wanted to play since I was little."

Zarlengo's childhood desire has blossomed into reality and Mattio has been an eyewitness to the cycle.

"Joe's become a total football player," said Mattio. "He's a super competitor and a fiery one. When things are the roughest, he's at his best. He has great ability, but he's also looked upon as a leader. And when you talk to him, the first thing he'll probably do is compliment the offensive line. He's that type of person."

Mattio had Zarlengo pegged. Joe isn't conceited and he does choose his friends wisely. His two best friends are center David Goss and guard Mike Wilczynski.

"THIS IS the best offensive line I've ever seen," says Zarlengo. "The holes have been great. Anybody could

run through them. I'd be willing to say this is the best offensive line in Marian history."

Zarlengo may be running through huge gaps provided by his offensive line this year, but last year he was more accustomed to closing gaps.

He played linebacker as a junior, employing the same aggressiveness he does at fullback. The rushing was left up to Greg Damiani, the leading ground gainer in Marian history, while Zarlengo was content playing defense.

But when Damiani departed and Mattio succeeded Bob Voss, the picture changed. "Joe was impressed with the idea of carrying the football from the start," said Mattio. "In fact, as a sophomore, that's exactly what he did. But with a runner like Damiani in the I-formation, there wasn't much room for anyone else in the backfield. This year, we needed a strong fullback and Joe's taken that role."

ZARLENGO did have some initial regrets about the switch. "At the start of the year I wanted to play defense because my brother Paul did," said Joe. "But Coach Mattio explained that it would help the team more if I played offense, so I felt that's what I should do."

The transition hasn't cramped Zarlengo's reckless style. "Fullback and linebacker are a lot alike," he explained. "I thought at first that I wouldn't be able to do any more hitting. But I do a lot of hitting without the ball. I just have to make sure I don't get carried away and forget what I'm doing."

Although Marian suffered its first loss of the season to non-conference foe Elgin last Friday, Zarlengo is expecting big things to happen.

"I feel this is the year for Marian," insists Joe, whose team faces its stiffest challenge of the year Saturday at home against Illini-8 conference rival Joliet Catholic.

"WE'VE had a few let downs along the way, but we've got too much going for us. I've never won anything since the seventh grade, but I'm hoping that changes this year."

"A lot of people think we're going to fall, like past Marian teams, but I don't think so."

And if it doesn't happen this year?

Tommy Zarlengo, a freshman protégé of Joe, will be around to carry on...

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