

The Hot Corner

By JOHN E. MEYERS

Three women, all in their 40s, were walking through the Hillcrest parking lot in the direction of the football field from whence a loud and joyous sound arose.

"Oh," said one, "the wrong side is cheering." A man passing in the other direction advised, "Yeah, it's Marian 26 to 0."

The "wrong side" spent the rest of Saturday afternoon cheering. The cheer for 26-0 was for the sophomores. A few hours later Hillcrest had been soundly trounced by Marian Catholic, 30-9.

NOW IT IS possible Hillcrest isn't as good as it has been the past several seasons and 30-9 shouldn't get Marian fans worked up about playoff tickets.

It might be the Hawks are really better than 30-9, weren't ready for the season opener and will right themselves directly and head for a playoff berth of their own.

"Things fell in place for us," said Marian coach Dave Mattio. "Maybe we were lucky." This is the Mattio who two years ago moved from the ranks to replaced Bob Voss, the man they said no one could replace.

"I wasn't worried about the X's and O's," said Mattio, recalling the day he was named to succeed Voss. "I wondered if I could relate to the kids, motivate them."

"I STILL HAVE some misgivings," he confessed. "Do I yell at them too much or don't I yell enough? Do we practice too long or don't we practice long enough?"

The portions of yelling and practice must have been just right. Hillcrest had won four conference championships. You don't beat Hillcrest 30-9, you don't beat Hillcrest in Country Club Hills, you don't beat Hillcrest at all.

Victory had a price. Jeff Martin had surgery Saturday night for a broken ankle. "He'll be out for the season," mourned Mattio over the senior who Saturday ran for 100 yards in 12 carries and caught three passes for 59 more.

"We'll probably go with Mike Petrarca, although we are exploring several possibilities," Mattio added.

MARTIN'S INJURY ASIDE, Mattio said, "To be honest, I was very surprised (at the size of the score). It was a delightful day."

The Spartans overcame their own mistakes while making the most of Hawk miscues. "We got the break on the fumble recovery," Mattio admitted.

But it was what Marian did after the recovery that really counted... and what happened before.

"The jury was still out on our defense," Mattio said. "We held them the first time they threatened us." Hillcrest went from its own 13 to fourth and six at Marian's 10. Ted Chakos kicked a three-pointer. On the kickoff Mark Blankenberger slipped and fell a yard from the goal, his own.

MARIAN MADE THREE first downs to get out of the hole, punted and Hillcrest had the ball on its own 44. Tom Shander sacked Jack Phillips for a minus 23 and Dennis McCarron recovered a fumble to put the Spartans on the Hawk 16.

Right there, quarterback Karl Volkman showed how good he is. Faking a handout he went wide for a score.

"I was surprised at how well our defense played," Mattio admitted. "I knew our offense was sound, but I didn't expect we'd pass as much. They were stacked to stop our inside game and the situation dictated we pass. That wasn't Hillcrest's regular defense. It was more like Joliet Catholic's defense."

Volkman passed 12 times, completed nine for 176 yards and two touchdowns. Blankenberger nabbed six for 117 yards and the two touchdowns.

Martin will be missing, they'll be coming after Volkman and Blankenberger will see double and triple teaming, but Marian's got the linemen. "Games are won at the line of scrimmage," said Mattio.

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