

The Hot Corner

By JOHN E. MEYERS

If Joliet Catholic doesn't win the third straight 4A state championship next month, there is at least one team lurking in wait so good nobody will believe it.

Gordon Gillespie brought his Hilltoppers to Sarff Field, where last year they lost the only game in the 13 they played.

This time it was almost as though it was foreordained Marian would commit an early error, fall behind and spend the rest of the afternoon suffering from a bad case of futility.

Truth of the matter, Marian was outclassed. The Spartans played tough, but against a superior opponent they could not play well.

MARK JURCZYK FUMBLED the opening kickoff and Mike Purviance recovered for the Hilltoppers on Marian's 19. Woody Hayes lets Rod Gerald pass so why shouldn't Gillespie let Dave Abens do the same?

Three yards was possible, but it was too wet for a cloud of dust so Abens on first down passed to Paul Benigni for a score. Only 26 seconds had elapsed.

A few minutes later Joliet Catholic had the ball again and marched 83 yards on 18 plays for another score. Abens threw seven times during the drive, connected on four for 33 yards. Dave Matichak plunged four yards for the score and then ran for a two-pointer.

First time Marian accomplished something, (Mike Petrarca put a punt down on Catholic's 5) the effort was wasted by a 15 yard penalty. When Jerral Stringer tackled Scott Kinsella for a yard loss on fourth and one at the Marian 30, the Spartans' initial first down followed. Then Marian was set back 15 yards by a penalty after which Petrarca, rushed all game, punted a scant 28 yards.

KINSELLA DID MOST of the carrying early for the Hilltoppers, but he was playing hurt and left. His replacement, Ron Nagel, produced the third TD on a 45-yard run.

Petrarca returned the kickoff to midfield, but a 15-yard clipping infraction wasted the field position. Karl Volkman passed 19 yards to Mark

Blankenberger, but the next time he threw Mike Tyrell intercepted.

Catholic's chance of improving on a 20-0 lead were excellent early in the third quarter, first down on the Marian 3, but Todd Bruni, Dave Klupchak and friends stopped the try.

It didn't help. Petrarca punted from behind the goal, got a hard rush and kicked out of bounds on his own 28. Abens passed 15 yards to Benigni and it was 26-0.

A PUBLIC HIGH school must make do with the athletic material available from within its boundaries. A private school has no boundaries. Public school coaches have been crying about recruitment practices by Chicago Catholic leaguers. Joliet Catholic, a member of the Illini-8 doesn't need to recruit.

So great is the Hilltoppers' football reputation every boy in Catholic grade school in all the Joliet area wants to play for Gillespie.

John Piazza is Joliet Catholic's middle linebacker. He is so good the outside linebackers are far outside. Piazza takes care of the territory from end to end. Piazza lives in Lockport.

Since state football playoffs were instituted in 1974, Joliet Catholic made the quarterfinals, and then won two straight 4A titles. There is more glamour than ever attached to playing for the Hilltoppers.

A PUBLIC SCHOOL will, after a runoff successful seasons, become less successful for a year or two (see Hillcrest). A public school's athletics are subject to up and down cycles. A private school can develop a dynasty.

Gillespie may have developed a dynasty at Joliet Catholic.

This arrangement might have a weakness. Joliet Catholic is getting so much football talent begin cut are those who could play almost anywhere else.

This gets around and the tide of talent headed for the Hill might abate. The rub there is the confident ones will still enroll.

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