

# *Mark Makes the Spartans*

By PETER TESTA

Scoring on the game's opening drive, Marian relied almost exclusively on its defensive unit for the remainder of yesterday's Illini-8 battle with Joliet Central at Sarff Field to notch an 8-6 triumph that changed the complexion of the conference race, if not for the championship at least for second-place.

Mark Blankenberger, the Spartans senior halfback, displayed a different than usual ability in sparking the early offense that Dave Mattio's squad amassed in raising their overall mark to 3-3, and league record also to .500 at 2-2.

The 5-foot-10, 160 pound Blankenberger ran from the deep position in the I-formation, carrying the ball on seven of the eight plays that comprised the Marian scoring drive immediately after the opening kickoff.

AFTER POWERING for the first of three Spartan first downs with his first three rushes, Blankenberger broke through the center of the Steelmen line for a 280yard pickup to the Central 14-yard line, and tallied the first Marian score in over 105 minutes of play from four yards out, capping the only real touchdown threat the Spartans could manage against George Legan's squad.

Senior quarterback Karl Volkman, who failed to employ much passing, preferring to keep the ball on the ground, took the snap in Marian's try for the two point conversion and bulled his way through for the three yards that turned out to be the margin of victory.

An exchange of possessions left the Spartans in a punting situation on its own 30, when junior Mike Petrarca went back for the boot, but found himself unable to kick as the Steelmen line applied pressure, Petrarca falling to the ground at the Marian 27.

Junior Steelmen tailback Tom McEvelly, the I-8's second-ranking rusher going into the weekend, started off his 23-carry, 107-yard afternoon by going for 18 yards on Joliet Central's first pair of plays after the takeover, and following a Steelmen offside from Marian's 4. The 5-foot-11, 188 pound tailback, broke away from the Spartan front to crash into the end zone from nine yards away to slice the Spartan lead to within a conversion from a tie.

BUT THE Steelmen once again tried to crack the Spartan middle for its tying attempt with fullback Curtis Carson, however a gang tackle left Carson two yards shy of the goal line, keeping Marian two points ahead, and in a position to repay Joliet Central for its two-point overtime victory that was Marian's only I-8 loss of 1976.

Blankenberger's 51 yards in 10 attempts led a balanced if not particularly potent Marian running attack that totaled 191 yards, the most since the Spartans' season-opening win over Hillcrest.

Receiving two of Volkman's three completions in five passes, Blankenberger hobbled off the field after running a second-quarter pass pattern, an injury that sidelines him for the remainder of the game.

Senior defensive tackle Todd Bruni, junior defensive end Mark Panozzo, and a pair of seniors, defensive backs Tony Jiganti and Don Prior, effectively handled the Steelmen (who were hoping to enter next week's contest with conference mark) with the exception of McEvelly. The Steelmen only gained 70 other yards of offense besides the efforts of McEvelly.

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