

Spartans in Intensive Care

By PETER TESTA

With only a pair of away games left, Marian has entirely reversed the pattern of play Coach Dave Mattio predicted for his young squad.

Going into tomorrow night's contest with Illini-8 cellar-tenant Joliet West in Joliet, it has become increasingly obvious that Marina's defensive unit will have to provide the momentum for a hoped-for second-place deadlock at the conclusion of the season a week from Saturday.

The offensive contingent that was supposed to provide many enjoyable afternoons has slowly but quite surely been falling apart in front of Mattio's eyes due to an inordinate amount of injuries suffered at the skilled positions.

SENIOR halfback Jeff Martin gave an indication of his ability with 169 yards of total offense in the season-opener against Hillcrest, but a late-game broken ankle was the first sign of the break-up of what might have been an explosive attack force.

Mark Blankenberger, a combination wide receiver, slotback, and tailback, easily out-distanced the area's other pass receivers through the first half of the year with 19 catches, and a 48 ½ yards per game average, but the 5-foot-10, 18 pound senior will not be able to add to his statistics.

Running a routine pattern in an 8-6 Spartan victory over Joliet Central two weeks ago, Blankenberger pulled up with a knee injury to become the second of the three key members in Marian's offensive plans to be declared out of any further action.

After playing in last season's defensive secondary that helped lead the Spartans to a three-way share of the I-8 title, senior Karl Volkman was installed as Mattio's quarterback in pre-season drills. The 6-1, 170-pounder quickly sped to the top of the list among area signal-callers, completing 47 percent of his passes, and running for 201 yard, in compiling 637 yards of total offense.

BUT while attempting to throw a pass against a heavy rush in last Saturday's Marian 12-0 blanking of Romeoville, Volkman was thrown to the turf

and fractured his clavicle, leaving Mattio wondering where the next severe loss may occur.

Junior Brian Blue, 6-feet and 155 pounds, will advance to the starting quarterback post for tomorrow's contest with the Tigers, with another junior, Mike Petrarca, and sophomore Jimmy Dee completing a totally underclassmen backfield.

Leading the way for the past two triumphs that have vaulted the Spartans into third place in conference play has been a punishing defense. "Our overall defense was super," Mattio declared concerning the Spartans' effort in the shutout of Romeoville that was the first for Marian this year.

"We had been working for a shutout and we finally got one," Mattio said. "They played like we wanted them to be playing all year long."

TODD Bruni, the gigantic Marian interior lineman, was principally important in halting Romeoville's running game, bringing down 19 opposition ball-carriers, with ten of the stops solo efforts.

"Since I've been at Marian, I've never seen a sounder performance by a lineman than Bruni's last Saturday," Mattio exalted. "He did a great job on the pass rush, and even when he didn't get to the quarterback, he made it possible for someone like our other tackle, Jeff Schied, to get in on the play."

Seniors Jerral Stringer and Tony Jiganti were the other prominent leaders in the stop unit that held Romeoville to just 22 yards.

"Stringer was just super as a linebacker," stated Mattio. Playing as noseguard, Stringer frequently broke up both running and passing plays before they could begin. According to Mattio, the six foot, 190 pound Stringer "really came to play ball."

Jiganti swiped a pair of passes from Romeoville signal-caller Greg Ulman, to match junior John Velo's feat of two interceptions the previous week.

THE STAR
Thursday, October 27, 1977