

Marian Not All Bad

By PETER TESTA

Last year at this time controversy surrounded the football situation at Marian. After reaching the final game against Joliet Central with a perfect record in Illini-8 play, an overtime loss to the Steelmen not only threw the Spartans into a three-way deadlock for the conference championship, but through a complicated set of circumstances, Coach Dave Mattio found himself on the outside looking in. I-8 coaches voted eventual 4A-winner Joliet Catholic and Joliet Central into the 16-team playoffs ahead of the Spartans.

But when Marian dropped its last game of this season, a 7-6 decision at Bolingbrook that once again extended beyond regulation time, it wasn't nearly as traumatic a blow since all that defeat did was put the finishing touches on a 504 campaign, and lowered the Spartans into a more pedestrian third-place finish in its I-8.

Although the Spartans failed in their bid to ace out the remainder of this year with four straight victories in the one-point setback at the hands of the Raiders, the players of the week both offensively and defensively were juniors, so Mattio will have some ammunition for next year.

MIKE Petrarca had a difficult time getting untracked in the early games, but the 5-foot-6, 155 pound halfback dominated the ball-carrying in the last three contests against Romeoville, Joliet West and Bolingbrook. Toting the ball on 64 of Marian's 118 rushing plays in the final three games, Petrarca's hard-charging running earned him the team leadership in ground yardage with 426 yards in his junior year.

It was the defensive unit that enabled the Spartans to climb back from a pair of shutout losses to the top two teams in the Illini-8, Joliet Catholic and Lockport, and leading the way among stop troop performers last week was another junior, Jeff Schied.

With 14 tackles, eight of them individual efforts, and a pair of sacks of Raider quarterback Al Horsman, the 5-11, 195-pounder played his best game as a varsity member last Saturday. His continued improvement will be a key factor in the development of next year's team, as Schied will help to fill the void created by the graduation of all-area candidate Todd Bruni, a tackle on both lines of scrimmage.

"In many respects the future seems to be bright," said Mattio in looking forward to 1978.

"We'll have our backs returning and we'll also have a lot of people back at the skilled positions and among the linebackers."

BRIAN Blue directed the Spartan offensive platoon when senior signal-caller Karl Volkman was knocked out of further action when the 601, 170-pounder suffered a shoulder injury against Romeoville. The 6-foot, 155 pound junior enjoyed his best passing game in the finale with four completions in nine attempts for 57 yards. Two of the catches were made by Scott Janus, for the first two receptions of his varsity career. Since both Blue and Janus are juniors, the pair will become the next aerial tandem for the Spartans.

Petrarca may have a new running mate in next season's backfield if Dave Brockhagen becomes eligible to play. The 6-2, 200 pound fullback was declared scholastically ineligible for his sophomore year after impressing Mattio in pre-season practices.

Returning among the secondary will be John Velo, who picked off three of Marina's 10 interceptions this season, and Tim O'Meara, who gained some playing time in the Bolingbrook game. Mike Broderick and Mike Bartolomei broke into the starting defense in their junior years at linebacker posts, and both contributed to Marina's feat of holding its last four opponents to merely 19 points.

Inconsistency was the hallmark of Marina's play this year, and Mattio cited two reasons for the lack of cohesion. "First of all, we had a young club going into the year, and we realized this would be a problem. Then we had the injuries."

STRIKING mostly within what might have been a powerful attack unit, the first of three damaging injuries that ended varsity careers in each instance occurred in the final minutes of what was to be by far the most impressive triumph by Marian in 1977, a season-opening 30-9 clobbering of Hillcrest.

Jeff Martin, who might have developed in the best back in the Illini-8, suffered a fractured ankle carrying out a blocking assignment after running for 104 yards and grabbing three Volkman passes for an additional 65 yards. The 5-10, 180-pounder could have conservatively been counted on for at least 75 yards per game.

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After speeding to the top of the list among area pass receivers with 19 catches at mid-season, Mark Blankenberger went out on a routine pattern in Marian's 8-6 win over the team they deadlocked with in the *-8, Joliet Central. Limping to the bench with a broken leg, the 5-10, 160-pounder took his receiving and rushing ability along with him, as Blankenberger also ran for a pair of scores among his 26 points that tied him for the team leadership with Petrarca. Blankenberger was averaging 50 yards per game in pass receiving.

Volkman had compiled 637 yards through passing and running until a Romeoville blitzfinished his action as a Spartan, so the loss of the three main Marian offensive threats resulted in the removal of 225 yards from Marian's attack.

THE offensive line was not immune to injuries either. "We lost Jimmy Denman, Mike Sass and Peter Aleck for varying lengths of time during the season," Mattio stated. "Everyone except VanDyck (sophomore center Tom), Bruni and Janus were out for at least two games. But if there was one good thing about it, a lot of juniors got to play.

There were two major areas that the Spartans had trouble with throughout the season. "We committed too many turnovers (26) and penalties." Marian was assessed 610 penalty yards on 66 infractions. "It's a lot harder to be in a first-and-15 situation than in second-and-five," Mattio said.

The old saying about a defense that bent but didn't break applied to the 1977 Spartans. "Defensively we gave up some yardage, but it

wasn't enough to hurt us," Mattio declared. "But the bad thing about giving up the yards was that we also gave up a lot of field position.

"If we could have been in a situation where we only had to go about 50 yards on drives, we would have been better off," continued Mattio. "Instead we had to make 80 yard drives, and when we had to do that, there was an increased chance for fumbles and mistakes."

BRUNI opened many pathways for Petrarca to ramble through and kept opponents from doing much damage to the Spartans through the middle of Marian's defensive line. Tony Jiganti's four interceptions led all Spartans, and his 52-yard runback of a Joliet West pass in the final minute and a half beat the Tigers.

Other seniors who saw some action this year were defensive back Dave Klupchak, fullback and linebacker Jerral Stringer, defensive ends Tom Shander and Tom Wieser, and defensive secondary members Don Prior, Charlie Funk, Jim Thompson and Mike Leegan.

Ron Limebeck's sophomores posted the same ledger as the varsity, with five victories in nine games, and a 4-3 third place tie in conference play. Halfback Jimmy Dee and guard Rich Fordon were brought up to the varsity because of the numerous injuries, while halfback Tim McGugan, quarterback Mike Matchinis, fullback Tom Zarlengo, linebacker Bill Ranieri, and defensive back Bob Klupchak

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