

Marian Moves Back Into Focus

By PETER TESTA

The roller coaster ride which Marian has traveled all season long reached its unquestioned zenith Friday night in Lockport.

Controlling crucial portions of the action with an offense which was unrelenting in its efficiency and manufacturing drive-killing plays with regularity on defense, the Spartans jumped firmly back into the Illini-8 title chase by handling the Porters a startling 13-0 setback.

It was Lockport's homecoming, and the scenario for the Porters seemed to be pleasant: first subdue Marian and then go on to play Joliet Catholic for the conference crown next week.

THE MESSAGE the Spartans were only on the field to play the role of passive guests never had much of a chance to sink in, as both clubs must now be given an equal shot to derail the Hilltoppers, each owning identical 3-1 league records and 402 overall marks, one game behind Joliet Catholic.

Marian gave a quick indication of just how belligerent it was going to be right from safety Bob Klupchak's return of the opening kickoff which deposited the Spartans on their own 33-yard line.

Tom Zarlengo, who stood out not only at fullback but at linebacker, dashed through the middle for eight yards on the initial play of the series before junior halfback Tom Klupchak's 11-yard scamper earned the first of 13 Marian first downs. Another eight-yard pickup, this one by halfback Greg Murray, moved the Spartans across midfield.

Aided by a Porter offside infraction, Marian ground out another fresh set of downs when Zarlengo bulled to the 26. Smartly moving ahead, Klupchak added six more yards to his opening gain, and on third down another Lockport mistake kept the march alive.

WHISTLED for a personal foul, the Porters were backed up to the 7. The next play was all it took for Marian to seize the lead. Bill Ranieri, seeing his first backfield duty of the year, carried the remaining distance off the left side of the line. When Rich Fordon split the uprights for Marian's first successful extra point of the year by kicking, the Spartans had posted a 7-0 advantage.

Although only 5:52 had been consumed, the pattern for the entire game was set on that drive. First of all, Marian never was forced into a passing stance, grinding out each of its 10 snaps over land.

All but one of the advances netted three or more yards, as the Spartans finally shoved around what had been one of the league's better rushing defenses for a grand total of 188 yards. Klupchak, Zarlengo, Ranieri and senior quarterback Mike Matchinis split 159 of those yards between them.

Matchinis tried just two passes, both in the scoreless second period, and each dropped incomplete, meaning that Marian pulled off a rarity, winning without gaining any aerial yardage.

ZARLENGO crashed across the line to dump Lockport signal-caller Tim Sartori for 10-yard loss which ruined the first Porter series, but on the following possession, Lockport began to pick up steam.

Fullback Phil Varsek rambled for 13 yards as the Porters reached the Marian 27 on the first quarter's last play. Varsek's rushed accounted for 43 of only 72 ground yards allowed by the Spartan defense.

Eric Johnson's end spring, enabled Lockport to advance to the 15, but the time for Marina's stoppers to shine was at hand, senior defensive back Joe Plomin pounced on a fumble, squelching the threat.

Faced with a third down deep in his own territory moment later, Sartori, who completed 12 of his 27 throws for 122 yards, was instead hit with the first of his four interceptions, as again Plomin delivered the turnover.

PORTER WIDE receiver Doug Rigoni corralled two of his eight receptions as Sartori filled the air with passes in the waning minutes of the first-half. Again, Lockport navigated to the 15, and once more the Spartans reversed the direction, with Bob Klupchak picking off a goal-line interception with 25 seconds left before halftime.

Almost duplicating Marina's opening kickoff march, the Porters used Sartori's arm to move to the Spartan 17 from the second-half boot, the last 15 of those yards gained due to a pass interference call against Marian.

Pitching out on an intended option, Sartori's toss never did find its mark on the first snap after the penalty, as Zarlengo scooped up the loose ball and rambled like the fullback he is. After a 52-yard return, Sartori finally caught up with Zarlengo.

Unable to capitalize on that break, Marian did maintain field position, forcing Sartori to throw from his own 21 on the next Porter possession. Spartan Mike Joyce stepped in front of that toss, carrying back to the Porter 33.

MATCHINIS saved the series by alertly crossing the width of the field for a 26-yard gain on third down, eventually going out of bounds on the 11. After Ranieri moved to the 8, Tom Klupchak started up the middle and suddenly veered away around right end to record the clinching six-pointer with 2:29 remaining in the third period. Fordon's kick just failed to catch the left upright.

There were still 11 ½ minutes left when Sartori left Marian on its own 8 with a 42-yard punt. From that point, the Spartans set out on a seven-minute run which removed vital time from any Porter comeback ideas.

Rigoni worked on the sidelines for five catches in the final period as the Porters tried to catch up, but Zarlengo iced Marian's second shutout of a conference opponent with another theft.

"This one ranks right up there with some of our biggest wins," beamed Spartans coach Dave Mattio. "We've been trying for weeks to get four quarters of consistent football," he added, "it was a total team performance."

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