

Marian's Homecoming

By PETER TESTA

Besides the usual circumstances surround any Homecoming game, there will be a novel factor, rapidly spreading throughout the Illini-8, to take into account when Marian welcomes Joliet Central to Sarff Field for the annual event Saturday.

For lack of a better phrase, this strange development will have to be termed the "home-field dis-advantage." Playing on familiar turf is supposed to provide at least a psychological edge, but conference contests held up to this point are really giving that theory a thorough working over.

Of the first 16 league games, 10 have been captured by the visiting teams, which works out to a winning rate of 63 percent.

THE SPARTANS have accomplished more than their share to maintain this phenomenon, producing the most impressive all-around display of the fall last week, when they came away from Lockport with a 13-0 conquest of a Porter club which was unblemished in I-8 play.

"It came at just the right time because of what happened to us against Joliet Catholic," said Marian coach Dave Mattio. Just about everything turned sour when the Spartans were blanked by the league powerhouse, then just as swiftly, Marian caught most of the breaks as Lockport endured the kind of evening it probably would like to forget about.

Mattio declined to accept the credit for any overnight turnaround, preferring instead to cite another reason for the inspired effort. "The kids themselves decided that it was time to re-examine the situation," declared Mattio. "It was a tribute to the attitudes of everyone who went out there."

Singled out for praise from Mattio for turning back the Porters every time a threat seemed to be gearing up were the linebacking corps and secondary group of defenders. In the early moments, senior Tom Zarlengo and Bill Ranieri closed off Lockport's rushing attempts.

FINDING themselves in need of scoring in a hurry, the Porters switched to the only available route, an aerial blitz both at the end of the opening half and again as time was running out.

Three defensive backfield starters, Bob Klupchak, Joe Plomin, and Mike Joyce, each hauled down an interception, then Zarlengo snared his second turnover by stealing another Lockport pass.

"In particular, Joyce had an outstanding game," Mattio pointed out. "Some of the hits he made early in the game set the tempo for the whole night." Despite a five-foot-seven, 150-pound frame, Joyce recorded two tackles for losses.

Showing an almost total disdain for passing, Marian rushed on 44 of its 46 snaps, churning out gains on a steady basis. Five of the six backs who carried enjoyed averages of at least 3.5 yards, with quarterback Mike Matchinis netting almost seven yards per try and halfback Tom Klupchak following with slightly over five yards for each attempt.

"IF WE CAN control the line of scrimmage, we can control our destiny," Mattio explained, and center Tom Van Dyck, guard Bob Ziltz, tackle Jay Schweikart, and both tight ends, Jeff Boylan and Jim Donahue were all instrumental in the 67-yard touchdown drive which gave the Spartans a quick seven-point lead, and another seven-minute march at the beginning of the final period.

It's especially difficult to predict how Marian will react to its latest success, which came at a point when virtual elimination from any chance at the conference title was only one defeat away.

For one thing, the uneven nature of the Spartans is reflected in their 3-0 mark in away games as opposed to one victory in the first three home encounters. Not only that, but the outcome of a battle which won't be staged until tomorrow night (the Joliet Catholic-Lockport match-up) is likely to affect what takes place Saturday.

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