

Marian Can Reach 4A

By PETER TESTA

The driving, all-out, end of the season finish.

It's a factor which has gone a long way toward determining pennant winners and division champions in all sports. It's also one of the main allies Marian will carry into tomorrow night's Illini-8 finale with Joliet West in Joliet, a game which stands almost unparalleled for importance in the school's 19-year football history.

Strong windups to campaigns have been more the rule than the exception for the Spartans in recent times. Two years ago, Marian captured three of its final four contests. Those wins were diminished by a 2-3 first-half mark, limited Marian to a third-place conference standing.

LAST SEASON, the Spartans really concluded their year with momentum, demolishing the final four opponents. It turned out that Marian needed each victory to attain a winning ledger, because the 1978 start was only 1-4.

Part one of the current equation was accomplished when the Spartans survived the first five outings with a 3-2 slate, including two league triumphs against a single loss to Joliet Catholic. It was clear after the Hilltoppers rolled past Marian that another setback would ruin any title dreams.

Three weeks have passed since, and the Spartans transformed offensively and revived defensively. First came the most formidable challenge, a visit to Lockport, the Porters fell 13-0. In rapid succession, Joliet Central was disposed of (23-6), and last Saturday, Romeoville was overmatched by a 29-0 count.

Now, a trimming of the Tigers would reap all sorts of goodies; no worse than a three-cornered split of the I-8 crown, and even more inviting, what has to be considered under the circumstances to favorable chance to stage Marian's first-ever appearance in the Class 4A playoffs, as the conference's representative.

WHAT WAS a confusing post season picture when the Spartans jumped into a share of the top spot following Joliet Catholic's loss to Lockport has begun to simplify itself somewhat.

While the Spartans are engaged in Joliet, Wheaton-Warrenville will square off with the kingpin of the DuPage Valley conference, Wheaton North, also tomorrow evening. Already assured of a playoff berth with an unblemished league record, Wheaton North must win once more to open the door for Marian.

Wheaton-Warrenville was one of Lockport's pair of non-league opponents, meaning that its overall record affects the Porter point total in the "At Large" point system used by the Illini-8 in three-way ties for the championship.

A loss by Wheaton-Warrenville gives it a 4-5 mark, and means that Lockport will finish with a reading of 14 regular points. The Porters will be heavy favorites to extend their league mark to 6-1 (against Joliet Central) while Joliet Catholic is expected to follow suit in its windup with Romeoville, both games taking place tomorrow night as well.

SHOULD Warrenville end below the .500 level, the focus would then shift to a SICA East battle between Hillcrest and Bremen in Midlothian the following afternoon. These two were Marian's out-of-conference foes. If Bremen wins, the Braves would gain a

winning record (5-4). Marian's opening game victory over Bremen would then be worth the maximum 24 points, for a total of 26 for the Spartans.

However, a triumph by Hillcrest could lead to complications. In that event, Marian would pick up just eight points for the Bremen win, and gain six for its loss to the Hawks. Then, the Spartans and Lockport would be forced into flipping a coin (probably Saturday evening) to select the I-8 berth.

THE ONLY hope for Joliet Catholic to defend its state title would be if the Porters slip against Joliet Central. Lockport would capture the "At Large" derby with 30 points should Warrenville surprise Wheaton North.

All this figuring is meaningless if Marian doesn't fulfill its part of the bargain by getting past Joliet West.

Coach Dave Mattio, who nearly guided the Spartans into the playoffs in 1976 until an overtime loss to Joliet Central in the season-windup sent both Joliet Catholic and the Steelmen into the tournament instead, realizes how close the Spartans are to a post-season slot.

"As I look at the situation, we've won some big games in the past," Mattio explained, "but we've never won a game that has won us a conference championship or has qualified us for the state tournament. This game is of that nature."

EMPLOYING the original T-formation with a seven-man line and a trio of backs behind quarterback, Mike Matchinis, Marian has enjoyed command of the action during its three-game string, out-gaining the last three foes by a 747-184 margin on the ground. "The line has done a creditable job of opening up holes and our backs have taken advantage to pick up some big yardage," pointed out Mattio.

Once Marian had established a firm hold last week, Matchinis became more air-minded, connecting with tight end Jeff Boylan for his third touchdown pass of the year. "We'll probably have to put the ball up in the air a little bit more if we're going to keep West honest," Mattio noted.

A defense which has posted three shutouts in league play, and heads the conference in preventing points will be tested by the ability of Joliet West's skilled position operatives.

The Spartans will have to cool off Tiger quarterback John Lynch, whose 200-plus yard passing display almost whipped Lockport, the Porters escaping with a 21-18 verdict. Joe Plomin, Mike Joyce and Bob Klupchak have stood out in the secondary, while Marian's line backing corps of Bill Ranieri, Tom Zarlengo and Tom Seibt are consistently delivering authoritative hits.

"They have a lot riding on this game too," said Mattio, "it'll mean a winning season for them (Joliet West is 4-4 compared to Marian's 6-2 slate), and it will be the final home game for the seniors who have been in the West program for four years."

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