

Marian's 4A Playoff Hope Slips Away

By PETER TESTA

It happened back in 1973, then again two years later. Friday night in Joliet, the jinx surfaced once more. And this might have been the most difficult one of all for everyone associated with Marian's football program to swallow.

On that first occasion, Joliet West fought the Spartans to a mid-season tie, creating the half-game margin which decided the Illini-8 championship in favor of Joliet Catholic. Sailing along through the early stages of the 1975 conference chase, Marian ran up against the Tigers and was stung with a two-point loss from which it never quite managed to fully recover.

With a second league tri-championship in the past four years lost one win removed from the Spartans' grasp, the pattern for victory which has been followed for the past three weeks seemed to still remain intact when guard Rich Fordon booted a second quarter field goal for the game's first three points.

FROM THAT point on, Joliet West spent most of the rest of the contest raining on Marian's parade for yet another time, controlling the action in the second half to upset the Spartans 14-3.

This game erased most of the complications which had been developing concerning the I-8's championship picture and Class 4A playoff selection.

Marian's conference record slipped to 502, relinquishing claim to any portion of the title, and actually falling into third place. The teams the Spartans had beat, deadlocked with Lockport and the Hilltoppers, both coasted home in their season enders to wind up co-champions.

Since the Porters dumped Joliet Catholic in the head-to-head meeting, Lockport, not Marian, qualifies for its first ever post-season appearance, something for which the Spartans had held the inside track until the Tigers repeated their spoiler act.

IT WASN'T until the fifth series that either side could produce a first down, a feat finally accomplished by the back-to-back seven and nine yard gains of Joliet West tailback Terry Matchak. Marian linebacker Bill Ranieri halted any further advance when he intercepted Tiger quarterback John Lynch's toss over the middle and raced to within just 27 yards of the goal line.

Three plays later, the Spartans had retreated a total of 13 yards due to two losses and a penalty. Senior signal-caller Mike Matchinis' nifty running revived the march, regaining 19 yards on the rollout across the field.

Fullback Tom Zarlengo, who gained 69 of Marian's 110 rushing yards, began the second period with four straight carries, goof for 14 yards. With second down and goal-to-go from the 11, Matchinis fired his first pass, in the direction of senior Jeff Boylan, who had found open spaces in the left corner of the end zone.

Boylan appeared to have made the catch, but juggled the ball as he was falling backward, finally holding on for good somewhere in the vicinity of the back line of the field of play. The officials ruled it an incomplete pass.

DID MARIAN coach Dave Mattio feel that a touchdown should have been awarded? You can draw your conclusions from his response when asked about the play. "It's a shame that when we

have to play a big game like this in Joliet, that we have Joliet official," Mattio said.

Fordon's fifth field goal of this campaign, a 34-yard kick with 7:56 left in the first half, thus capped the 11-play march with a reduced bounty of three points.

Just 63 seconds later, Tiger fullback Craig Gustafson showed exactly how precarious a three-point edge is by scampering 68 yards along the Joliet West bench for a touchdown. When Matchak swept across for two extra points, the Tigers had reclaimed the upper hand, 8-3.

Joliet West, which landed the final berth in the conference's first division with a 403 record, drove all the way from its own 25 to the Spartan 7 in 16 time-consuming plays before senior rover Mike Joyce picked off Marian's second theft and returned it 12 yards with just 12 seconds remaining in the third quarter.

TIME WAS beginning to become precious even at this point, but the Spartans knew that one touchdown, no matter how long it took to grind it out, could produce a one-point lead and a possible victory. From Joyce's interception, Marian began the process.

Junior halfback Tom Klupchak and Zarlengo totaled 13 yards on three attempts. Faced with a first-and-15 call, Matchinis connected with Boylan for 28 yards as Marian crossed midfield on the third period's last snap.

Zarlengo and Klupchak alternated for three more downs, picking up 19 yards to the Tiger 23. After an illegal motion penalty, the law of averages descended on the Spartans. Klupchak had carried 107 times this season without fumbling, but on the 108th try he lost the handle, and Matchak recovered for Joliet West.

Matchicak hardly lost contact with the ball once the Tigers went on offense, getting the call on 10 of the 14 plays which comprised the clinching score for Joliet West. None other than Matchak bulled over from two yards out with only 4:32 to play, the Tigers rolling for a 76-yard march.

FORCED INTO catch-up football, Klupchak's diving reception delivered the Spartans to the Tiger 37, but Brek Snyder's interception two plays later enabled the Tigers to run out the cock on their surprise.

Matchak's power running gained 137 of Joliet West's 219 ground yards, as the Tigers held a total offense edge of 256-165 and a first down command of 14-5.

Running off 36 of the second half's 19 plays, Joliet West snapped the ball 52 times, 14 more than the Spartans, who had been winning with their ball-control tactics in recent games.

"We didn't really play a bad game," Mattio explained, "we just didn't catch the breaks like we did in some of our other ball games. If we could have punched in that score when we were driving in the fourth quarter, it might have been different."

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