

Marian's Season Not Finished Yet

By PETER TESTA

Smiles were in extremely short supply around the visiting locker room last Friday night at Joliet West. It was an understandable reaction for Marian, considering that what likely would have blossomed into the school's first playoff berth in the annals of the Class 4A series had just vanished in the form of a 14-3 loss to an aroused Tiger squad.

"It was a pleasure playing with you guys this year," senior tight end Jeff Boylan quietly remarked with all the sincerity that the dejected atmosphere permitted.

Two other seniors, free safety Bob Klupchak and offensive guard Bob Ziltz, congratulated each other for the effort which produced the best overall record the Spartans had compiled in three years, (6-3) secure in the knowledge that their high school football experience had come to a somber end.

THE FINAL weekend of the regular season came and went, and with it, more reasons were added for Marian to go around feeling somewhat victimized. Not only did Wheaton-Warrenville lose as the Spartans had hoped, but Bremen complied with Coach Dave Mattio's wishes by winning.

That was the victory which would have delivered Marian into playoffs had there been a three-way share of the Illini-8 crown. Thanks to Joliet West, there was no tri-championship, and all that seemed left was for Mattio to collect the uniforms and gear from his team and store it all away for the next season.

There was something brand new on the scene, a post-season tournament for teams which were co-champions or runners-up in all the various Chicagoland area conferences. Mattio spoke of the possibility of Marian participating in this invitational last week, when the Spartans appeared to be on their way to a 7-2 finish.

ONE SUBURBAN five-league association prohibited its teams from playing, and then SICA conference (which houses four divisions) also disallowed any of its squads to take part. The reason in both instances is that post-season play in each group is limited just to IHSA playoffs.

Candidates such as TF North, Thornridge, Oak Lawn and Rich South were then eliminated from consideration, and when the tourney match-ups were revealed Monday, the Spartans had been paired for an opening-round game with Holy Cross.

Therefore, Boylan will enjoy the opportunity to catch some extra passes, more interceptions might come Klupchak's way, and Ziltz could be opening up additional holes through the line when Marian travels to River Grove (just southeast of O'Hare airport) Saturday to help inaugurate the initial Chicago Area Prep Bowl playoff. Game time is 1 p.m.

To begin with, 12 teams were to be chosen, with first-round byes awarded to four schools, making for four-week elimination.

THE CURRENT status is that eight teams will comprise the field, paring down to four after this weekend, then two the following week, with the final to be held November 24 or 25. The winner of the Chicago Public League playoffs, now being held, tentatively slated to face the survivor of the new tournament December 1 in Chicago's Soldier Field.

Previously, the Chicago Catholic League and the Public League fought for the Prep Bowl Crown, so the change in format serves to extend the campaign for a pair of teams in two different leagues.

Four representatives are still from the Catholic League, St. Rita and Brother Rice (South Division) and Loyola Academy and Weber (North Division), Marian's I-8 rival Joliet Catholic battles St. Viator of the East Suburban Catholic Conference, the same conference the Spartan's opponent (Holy Cross) is from.

Whichever club can bounce back from last week's disappointment is likely to have the edge since Holy Cross is in much the same frame of mind as Marian.

THE CRUSADERS led their league chase and were looking for a Class 5A playoff spot until they lost their conference wind-up to Marist. A three-way tie did materialize in that instance, with Marist winning this tiebreaker. Coach Tim Feigh's aggregation is also 6-3, following a sub .500 (405) slate in 1978.

It might be asking too much of the Spartans to recover in time to fully enjoy the tourney, because their casualty list has increased dramatically. Long ago, Jimmy Dee, Brian Fordon and Tim McGugan were lost, and joining the injured ranks as a result of the Joliet West game are Rich Fordon, Mike Joyce and Ed Ziltz.

A number of players will be promoted from the sophomore team which completed an unblemished 9-0 campaign a week ago.

The newcomer most likely to see action is Dan Sheehan, who is expected to take over the kicking duties from Fordon.

"I think we all felt some pressure last week against West," Mattio pointed out, "now I hope to be able to give a lot of kids some playing time. Whoever we have that's still healthy will be the ones we'll put on the field."

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