

GAME 1: Marian Catholic 20, Notre Dame 19

Kickoff: 7:30 p.m. Friday at Spartan Stadium.

Where: Joe Orr Road at Ashland, Chicago Heights.

2002 records: Notre Dame 7-6; Marian Catholic 7-5.

Last year: Notre Dame 17, Marian 14; Notre Dame 14, Marian 7 (Prep Bowl).

Week 2: Notre Dame vs. St. Patrick (Fri.); Marian at St. Joseph (Sat.).

The series: The Dons have captured four of the last six, but Marian holds a 6-4 series edge.

Notes: The Spartans have won six of their last seven on opening day. The ESCC will play a nine-game conference schedule this season with no nonconference games. Marian currently has one representative in the NFL in the New England Patriots' [Rodney Harrison](#). The Spartans' next home contest is Friday, Sept. 12, when they host top-ranked Carmel at 7:30 p.m. for [Decade of Champions](#).

Aug. 29	1	2	3	4	Total
NOTRE DAME DONS	7	6	6	0	-19
MARIAN CATH. SPARTANS	0	7	0	13	-20



Marian Catholic's Joe Grubisic tossed three touchdown passes, including the game-winner to Bryan Smith with 23 seconds to play, leading host Marian to a 20-19 comeback win over Notre Dame Friday.

Marian (1-0) stuns Notre Dame with late comeback

If 2003 turns out to be a magical season for Marian Catholic's football team, few will forget the fourth quarter of Friday's East Suburban Catholic Conference opener against visiting Notre Dame.

After the first three quarters brought back bad memories of two 2002 losses to the Dons, the host Spartans wrote a storybook finish with a pair of late touchdown passes to open the campaign with a 20-19 comeback victory.

When Bryan Smith reeled in a 31-yard touchdown toss from Joe Grubisic with 23 seconds to play to give Marian its first lead of the night, the Spartans inability to move the football for much of the first three quarters was a distant memory.

"I just thought to myself that I had to come down with the ball," explained Smith, who had six receptions for 105 yards. "It was the last seconds and do or die. We lost to them twice last year and the first half tonight was the same way, so we weren't going to let it happen again."

Rallying from a onetime 19-7 deficit, the Spartans took possession down five points with 55.5 on their brand new scoreboard. Grubisic hit Smith for 18 yards and following an incomplete pass, connected with Chris Rodriguez for 5 yards and scrambled for 3 more. A personal foul was tacked on to Grubisic's run to put Marian 36 yards away.

After another 5-yard pitch to Rodriguez, Grubisic fired a bomb to Smith in the right corner of the end zone. He eluded two defenders to emerge with the ball and give Marian its seventh opening day win in the last eight tries.

Marian managed just five first downs in the opening half, but Grubisic was brilliant in the late going. After connecting on just one of his first seven passes of the second half, the senior signal-caller found targets on 12 of his last 15 tries to finish 19 of 31 for 245 yards and three scores.

"I knew we were going to win," a confident Grubisic said. "We came out and did nothing early

and I was making a lot of bad calls. But a couple big plays got us rolling and I knew we were going to win it. It seems we just play better in the last couple minutes."

While the offense was in charge of heroics in the end, Marian couldn't have pulled it off without a couple huge defensive plays. With Notre Dame leading 19-7, Spartan Steve Adjinovich pounced on a third-quarter fumble when the Dons were just 2 yards from another score.

On Notre Dame's next to last possession, Marian lineman Brian Aldeza stuffed the Don's John Cullotta for a 3-yard loss on a 3rd-and-2 near midfield.

The Grubisic to Smith connection also played a major role in the score that brought Marian to within 19-14 midway through the final quarter. Smith pulled down a 24-yard toss to start the drive and a 22-yard connection for the duo brought Marian to the Don's 34. Six plays later, a 5-yard toss from Grubisic to Andy Lietz (five catches, 67 yards) pulled the Spartans to within one score.

Marian chipped away at its initial 13-0 deficit when Grubisic hit Rodriguez with a 34-yard bomb to pull the Spartans within 13-7 at the intermission.

While the Spartan offense sputtered for much of the night, an offensive line of Tim Kelly, Keith Clark, Jon Scudella, Dan Kwiatkowski and Stephen Peternell allowed only one sack for the contest. Meanwhile, the host team got sacks from Ajdinovich and Ian Turak.

"We really wanted this one to get off on the right foot," Grubisic said. "The beat us two times last year, so for now, we wanted this game more than anything else this season."

The Marian **SOPHOMORES** opened with a 26-20 victory over Notre Dame, as Zack Stevenson threw for three touchdowns and more than 150 yards. Nick Johnson rushed for in excess of 150 yards and two scores, Cameron Williams pulled in a pair of touchdown passes and Bryce Horath added 40 yards of rushing.

The Spartan **FRESHMEN** tripped Notre Dame, 18-12, in two overtimes, as Derek Middleton hit Kendall Green with a 20-yard touchdown pass and scored the game-winner on a 4-yard run. Marian also got a 3-yard touchdown run from NnaNna Alozie.

CATEGORY	Notre Dame	Marian
First downs	15	14
Rush attempts / yards	34-115	21-34
Passing yards	203	245
Pass completions	11	19
Pass attempts	21	32
Had intercepted	1	0
Fumbles / lost	1/1	1/0
Penalty yards	7-67	8-51
Next	ST. PATRICK	at St. Joseph

SCORING

ND- John Cullotta 2-yard run (Matt McAleer kick), 6:27 first.

ND- Ryan Corliss 14-yard run (kick failed), 11:16 second.

MC- Chris Rodriguez 34-yard pass from Joe Grubisic (Matt Harris kick), 2:50 second.

ND- Tom Cirone 57-yard pass from Corliss (pass failed), 9:23 third.

MC- Andy Lietz 5-yard pass from Grubisic (Harris kick), 8:23 fourth.

MC- Bryan Smith 31-yard pass from Grubisic (pass failed), 0:23 fourth.

INDIVIDUALS

Passing: ND- Corliss 11 of 21, 203 yards, 1 TD, 1 INT. MC- Grubisic 19 of 31, 245 yards, 3 TD, 0 INT; Mike Jedlicka 0 of 1.

Rushing: ND- Corliss 12-58 (TD), Cullotta 15-45 (TD), Frank Pucher 2-8, Dean Cadematori 2-4, Jason Infusino 2-0, Joe Giorango 1-0. MC- Grubisic 11-28, Travis Bushnell 10-6..

Receiving: ND- Cirone 6-135 (TD), Mike DiPiazza 3-60, Infusino 2-8. MC- Smith 6-105 (TD), Lietz 5-67 (TD), Rodriguez 6-61 (TD), Malcolm Parker 1-8, Bushnell 1-4.

Interceptions: Rodriguez (MC).