

GAME 9: Marian Catholic 21, St. Patrick 17

Kickoff: 8 p.m. Friday at Hanson Stadium.

Where: Fullerton and Central Avenues, Chicago.

ESCC records: Marian Catholic 6-2; St. Patrick 4-4.

Streaks: Spartans- 2 wins; Shamrocks- 1 win.

Last week: Marian Catholic 20, Benet 19 (ot); St. Patrick 33, Nazareth Academy 6.

Week 10: Marian in Class 6A or 7A playoffs; St. Patrick TBA.

Last year: Marian Catholic 35, St. Patrick 0.

The series: The Spartans have won two of three meetings in the last three years and own an overall series command of 8-4.

Notes: The Shamrocks are fighting for their playoff lives, needing a victory to improve to 5-4 and be eligible for post-season play... Marian will put its perfect 4-0 record on the line; the Spartans have won all of their road games by at least 18 points... the Spartans have tallied a passing touchdown in all eight games this season and have rushed for a score in seven contests... Joliet Catholic (8-0) visits Carmel (8-0) to determine the ESCC crown on Friday, while Marian can secure sole possession of third place with a victory... Marian grad [Rodney Harrison](#) had 12 total tackles Sunday to help lead the NFL's New England Patriots to a 19-13 overtime upset of the Miami Dolphins. He leads the Pats in total tackles (58).

Oct. 24	1	2	3	4	Total
MARIAN SPARTANS	0	7	0	14	-21
ST. PATRICK SHAMROCKS	7	0	0	10	-17



Marian's Chris Rodriguez caught three touchdown passes, including the game-winner with 1:29 to play, leading the Spartans to a 21-17 comeback ESCC win at St. Patrick Friday.

Marian (7-2) uses late comeback to foil St. Patrick

Just like many fans traveling from Chicago Heights, the Marian Catholic offense appeared stuck in traffic for three-plus quarters Friday when the Spartans concluded their ESCC and regular season with a visit to Hanson Stadium to battle St. Patrick.

But faced with a 10-point deficit and less than six minutes to play, the Spartans moved to the fast lane with the combination of Joe Grubisic to Chris Rodriguez.

With a pair of drives stretching more than 70 yards in the game's final minutes, Marian (7-2) overcame a late 17-7 deficit to charge into a home IHSA playoff contest next weekend with a 21-17 comeback thriller over the Shamrocks.

Using the same combo- and essentially the same play- that had erased an early 7-0 deficit, Grubisic set up one final drive and delivered the winner with 1:29 to play by hitting a streaking Rodriguez down the left sideline on a long bomb.

"That's just leadership- we have a great core of seniors," Rodriguez said of the valiant comeback. "We just never gave up. We had a lot of faith in our defense tonight. We did the job at the end, but the defense kept us in the game. The defense held them off and eventually it enabled us to win the game."

Rodriguez clearly placed credit where it was due.

Although the Marian defense allowed a 20-yard drive the put St. Patrick (4-5) ahead, 17-7, it also forced a field goal when the Shamrocks were set up with a first-and-goal at the 5. And was the Spartan defense under pressure most of the night?

It took a brilliant effort on defense, as St. Patrick stymied a Marian offense most of the game to the tune of eight sacks, three forced fumbles, one interception and six forced punts.

Despite the pressure, a Marian secondary of Collin McKillip (interception, blocked field goal), Zack LoMonaco, Daniel Johnson, Joe Siegert and Mike Buxbaum did damage control all night. While Shamrock 1,000-yard rusher Jeremy Stephen finished with 138 yards, the Marian defensive held down St. Patrick in the air and aided three coverage sacks by Tim Kelly, Ryan Vaughan and Jacob Zsuppon.

In spite of the great defensive work, Marian still faced a 17-7 deficit after St. Patrick turned the Spartans' fourth turnover into an 8-yard touchdown run by Mark Dietz.

Marian saw less than a minute elapse on the clock, as Grubisic fired four straight times to Rodriguez on the ensuing drive. After an incomplete pass, the duo connected for 9 yards, then the 52-yard bomb that set up Rodriguez' 11-yard touchdown catch.

The second of three conversion kicks by Matt Harris pulled the Spartans to within 17-14 with 4:52 to play.

Sure enough, the Marian defense forced a three-and-out that led to a punt that set up Marian 75 yards away from the end zone. Grubisic hit Mike Jedlicka and Bryan Smith with passes that positioned the Spartans at their own 40-yard line.

Third time a charm? Why not. Marian used the carbon copy of its first touchdown and the play the set up the second score, as Grubisic hit Rodriguez down the left sideline and the fleet senior outraced the defense for the winning 60-yard score.

"We set up trips (three receivers) on the right and I was man-to-man on the left," explained Rodriguez, who also caught a 68-yard TD pass to get Marian on the board in the opening half. "I knew I was man-to-man and just beat him. One time I had to outwrestle him for the ball, but I knew the game was on the line and had to do what we needed to win. In the end, the offensive line also came through when it counted."

Rodriguez finished with seven catches for 214 yards. Just seven days after setting a school all-time rushing record for longest run from scrimmage (93 yards), he set the all-time mark for receiving yardage in a single game.

Rodriguez also added 61 rushing yards, while Grubisic finished 14 of 25 for 259 yards.

The Spartans will now await a likely call for the Class 6A playoffs and open the post season next weekend at home.

Ironically, Marian was a perfect 5-0 this season in ESCC road contests en route to a third-place finish in the league.

FRESHMEN: Marian completed a perfect season and undisputed ESCC crown with a 21-14 win over St. Patrick. After a 0-0 halftime stalemate, Marian took the second-half kickoff and in 10 plays marched to a 3-yard touchdown run by Clifton Gordon. The Spartans also scored on a punt return from Aaron Evans and a 30-yard run by Derrick Middleton. Matt Dee added a conversion pass to Jim Lundstrom and Jack McCormick kicked an extra point.

CATEGORY	Marian	St. Patrick
First downs	11	15
Rush attempts / yards	29-25	41-170
Passing yards	259	111
Pass completions	14	11
Pass attempts	25	22
Had intercepted	1	1
Fumbles / lost	3 / 3	2 / 2
Penalty yards	6-50	5-50
Next	6A/7A playoffs	season over

SCORING

SP- Jeremy Stephen 66-yard run (Mark Dietz kick), 3:38 first.

MC- Chris Rodriguez 68-yard pass from Joe Grubisic (Matt Harris kick), 8:40 second.

SP- Dietz 20-yard field goal, 8:16 fourth.

SP- Dietz 8-yard run (Dietz kick), 5:44 fourth.

MC- Rodriguez 11-yard pass from Grubisic (Harris kick), 4:52 fourth.

MC- Rodriguez 60-yard pass from Grubisic (Harris kick), 1:29 fourth.

INDIVIDUALS

Passing: MC- Grubisic 14 of 25, 259 yards, 3 TD, 1 INT. SP- Tom Barrett 6 of 10, 39 yards; Keith Yopchick 5 of 12, 72 yards, 1 INT.

Rushing: MC- Rodriguez 14-16, Grubisic 15-(minus 36). SP- Stephen 26-138 (TD), Dietz 4-29 (TD), Kevin Golden 6-17, Yopchick 2-(minus 6), Barrett 3-(minus 8).

Receiving: MC- Rodriguez 7-214 (3 TD), Andy Lietz 3-22, Mike Jedlicka 2-18, Bryan Smith 2-6. SP- John Leonard 3-43, Daniel Bolger 3-34, George Hickey 2-27, Jason Genova 1-15, Golden 1-3, Stephen 1-(minus 3).

Interceptions: Collin McKillip (MC); Genova (SP).