

GAME 1: Notre Dame 21, Marian Catholic 7

Kickoff: 7:30 p.m. Friday at Notre Dame High School.

Where: 7655 Dempster Street, Niles.

2003 records: Marian Catholic 7-3; Notre Dame 5-5.

Streaks: Spartans- 1 loss; Dons- 1 loss.

Week 2 (Fri.): St. Joseph at Marian, 7:30; Notre Dame at St. Patrick (Hanson), 7:30.

Last year: Marian Catholic 20, Notre Dame 19.

The series: The Spartans used a last-second touchdown last year to avenge two 2002 losses and increase their overall series lead to 7-4.

Notes: The Spartans are seeking their third straight opening day victory and have prevailed in seven of their last eight openers... Both teams will play full nine-game ESCC schedules this season... The last four meetings between the teams have been decided by seven points or fewer... Marian has dropped two of its last three home contests, both to 2003 state champions (Carmel, Joliet Catholic).

Oct. 27	1	2	3	4	Total
MARIAN SPARTANS	0	0	0	7	-7
NOTRE DAME DONS	7	7	0	7	-21



Marian linebackers Jack McCormick and Jack Zsuppon turned in solid efforts, but the visiting Spartans dropped their opener at Notre Dame, 21-7.

Notre Dame capitalizes, topples Spartans in opener

With the breaks and opportunities available during Friday's East Suburban Catholic Conference opener in Niles, the contest easily could have been a 28-0 final.

In favor of either Marian Catholic or Notre Dame.

However, it was the host Dons that did a better job in capitalizing, as a slightly more experience Notre Dame squad turned just 109 yards of total offense into a 21-7 season-opening victory.

A Marian squad that had a 10-7 advantage in first downs found itself in a quick 14-0 hole and couldn't pull off the comeback when the opportunity arised in the second half.

The Spartans outgained Notre in total yardage, 131 to 109.

The Spartans picked off the first two interceptions of the contest.

The Spartans limited Notre Dame to two first downs in the second half.

However. . .

Notre Dame took advantage of field position for an early score.

Notre Dame drove 7 yards following a blocked punt for a 14-0 halftime command.

Notre Dame capitalized on Marian's lone turnover for a 27-yard scoring drive.

End result? Marian saw a very sound defensive effort and positives from two big question marks on offense turn into an 0-1 start to the campaign.

"We came back together and then we just broke down again," said Marian senior linebacker Mike Izguerra, who had a sack and another pair of key tackles behind the line of scrimmage. "It was just a case of bad breaks. We just didn't make the plays when we needed to."

Fourth-quarter events typified the evening for Marian.

The Spartans finally broke the ice with 9:14 to play in the fourth quarter when Zach Denny hit

Sean Whitfield with a screen pass, the latter dragging five defenders into the end zone for a 7-yard score. Noe Arroyo's conversion kick pulled Marian within 14-7.

It took just two plays for the Marian defense to respond, as Tony Feminis picked off a pass near midfield and raced down to the Notre Dame 5-yard line. However, a clipping penalty ultimately started the Spartans 60 yards from the end zone.

"We played some good defense in the second and third quarters to get us back in the game- in fact we played great for awhile," Izguerra assessed. "Then we got the ball back and were on a big roll. But then we hit another downfall."

The downfall was Marian's lone turnover of the night.

Denny responded to one of 10 sacks Marian quarterbacks sustained by hitting Malcolm Parker for 16 yards and a first down at the Notre Dame 45. But two plays later, Denny's pass was tipped at the line of scrimmage and Don lineman Andrew Beil intercepted the ball and pranced 23 yards to the Spartan 27.

Two snaps later, Notre Dame had its third touchdown pass of the night. The Dons connected on just two passes of more than 14 yards for the night, but both went for touchdowns.

Despite just the one score, Marian witnessed positives on offense. Parker finished with eight catches for 103 yards and Whitfield pulled in six aerials for 28 yards. Rookie quarterback Denny did what he had to in order to give Marian a chance to win, connecting on 17 of 32 passes for 137 yards.

However, the 10 sacks helped add up to minus-6 yards on the ground for Marian.

Izguerra was not the only Spartan standout on defense. With solid efforts up front from Arroyo, Robert Johnson, Ian Turak, Jake Zsuppon, Jack McCormick and Andrew Eagan, Marian limited the Dons to just 21 yards on the ground. Only one of four Notre Dame ballcarriers netted positive yardage.

Michael Buxbaum also added an interception for the Spartans.

In the air, Notre Dame amassed 88 yards and three scores. However, the clinching 27-yard touchdown was the lone completion allowed after halftime.

Marian will try to turn things around next Friday in its home opener, as the Spartans host St. Joseph.

"It's only one game and that's the way we have to look at it," Izguerra explained. "We didn't get it done tonight, but St. Joseph is next and our goal is to be 1-1."

CATEGORY	Marian	Notre Dame
First downs	10	7
Rush attempts / yards	25-(minus 6)	20-21
Passing yards	150	88
Pass completions	18	12
Pass attempts	35	23
Had intercepted	1	2
Fumbles / lost	1-0	1-0
Penalty yards	6-48	6-42
Next	ST. JOSEPH	at St. Patrick

SCORING

ND- Joe Leyhane 16-yard pass from Kevin Mitchell (Connor Flahive kick), 4:59 first.

ND- Jovaghn Mixon 7-yard pass from Mitchell (Flahive kick), 9:05 second.

MC- Sean Whitfield 7-yard pass from Zach Denny (Noe Arroyo kick), 9:14 fourth.

ND- Dan O'Leary 27-yard pass from Mitchell (Flahive kick), 5:47 fourth.

INDIVIDUALS

Passing: MC- Denny 17 of 32, 137 yards, 1 TD, 1 INT; Zack Stevenson 1 of 3, 13 yards. ND- Mitchell 12 of 23, 88 yards, 3 TD, 2 INT.

Rushing: MC- Whitfield 9-29, Clifton Gordon 1-1, Stevenson 3-(minus 11); Denny 12-(minus 25). ND- Mixon 5-34, Matt Wietlispach 1-(minus 1); Mitchell 7-(minus 5); Kevin Coleman 7-(minus 7).

Receiving: MC- Malcolm Parker 8-103, Whitfield 6-28 (TD), Gordon 2-12, Walter Fisher 2-5. ND- O'Leary 2-31 (TD), Mixon 2-15 (TD), Leyhane 1-16 (TD), Frank Pucher 1-14, Rick Podkowa 1-9, Brian Dahm 1-3, Coleman 4-0.

Interceptions: Tony Feminis, Michael Buxbaum (MC); Andrew Beil (ND).