

GAME 1: Nazareth Academy 26, Marian Catholic 20

Kickoff: 1:30 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 27 at Nazareth Academy.

Where: 1209 W. Ogden Avenue, LaGrange Park.

2004 records: Marian Catholic 3-6; Nazareth 1-8.

Streaks: Spartans- 4 losses; Roadrunners- 3 losses.

Week 2: Marian at St. Viator Friday; Nazareth at Notre Dame Friday.

Last year: Marian Catholic 31, Nazareth Academy 27.

The series: The Spartans are 2-0 in the short series, including a 40-0 victory in 2003.

Notes: Marian has prevailed in seven of its last nine opening day contests. . . The Spartans will conclude three straight years of playing a nine-game ESCC schedule. . . Marian has prevailed in its last two daytime contests. . . The Spartans are 1-0 alltime playing at Nazareth Academy. . . The ESCC had five teams advance to the IHSA playoffs last fall. . . Marian is seeking its 22nd winning season in the last 25 years. . . Coach Dave Mattio begins his 30th campaign as head coach of his alma mater (1966).

Aug. 27	1	2	3	4	Total
MARIAN SPARTANS	0	0	12	8	-20
NAZARETH ROADRUNNERS	13	6	0	7	-26



Marian's Zack Stevenson threw a pair of touchdown passes, but a Marian comeback fell short Saturday in a 26-20 opening-game loss at Nazareth Academy.

Spartan comeback falls short at Nazareth in opener

Just as coaches and fans had hoped, visiting Marian Catholic came out like a different team in the second half Saturday after the Spartans spotted Nazareth Academy a 19-0 halftime lead in the teams' ESCC opener.

Derrick Middleton's second touchdown reception from Zack Stevenson with 1:53 remaining set the stage to complete a brilliant comeback.

However, back-to-back game-changing plays foiled the Spartans (0-1) in a 26-20 loss for their first setback in three all-time meetings with the Roadrunners.

Marian stunned the home Nazareth crowd when a well-executed onside kick resulted in Spartan Mike Woodward pouncing on the ball 48 yards away from a game-tying or winning score.

But Roadrunner Chris Beedle grabbed an interception on the next play, allowing Nazareth to equal its win total from last year on the opening day of the season.

The crucial turnover spoiled Marian's chances for a tremendous comeback, as well as big days for Middleton and tailback Clifton Gordon.

"We came out strong in the second half," explained Middleton, who finished with seven catches for 92 yards. "We weren't going to come all this way and come away with nothing. In the second half, we seemed to come out more prepared. I think we realized this isn't practice anymore; it's the real deal.

"We just came out after halftime and played as hard as we could."

Middleton, the arm of Stevenson and Gordon's rushing keyed the comeback effort.

Gordon finished with 165 yards on 18 totes, including an 80-yard touchdown jaunt that pulled the

Spartans within 19-12.

The first-half saw Nazareth score on its first two possessions, then add a score with just 12 ticks remaining on the first-half clock. Meanwhile, Marian managed just 86 total yards and four first downs.

The second half was different story, however.

Stevenson (14 of 27, 164 yards) set the tone by hitting Middleton on the fly for 38 yards on the initial play of the second half. When an 11-yard scoring strike to Middleton completed a four-play, 80-yard drive, the comeback was under way.

Two possessions later, the Spartans went 80 yards for a score again. This time, with an offensive line of Jon Jack, Jeremy Hess, Jason Bruno, Marc Novak and Ben McDonnell beginning to click, it took just one play on Gordon's 80-yard scamper.

Marian stalled on its next possession and Nazareth finally answered, as Steve Gray found the end zone on a 3-yarder for his third score and a 26-12 Roadrunner lead.

The Spartans weren't done, however.

Taking possession with 4:18 to play, Marian went 73 yards to get within striking distance, as an 18-yard rush from Gordon and Stevenson's 18-yard completion to Andrew Eagan set up the second touchdown by Middleton.

Marian's second interception and fourth turnover of the day stifled the comeback, however.

The Spartan defense became stingier as the game progressed, as two sacks by Justin Lynch and another by Bryce Horath limited the Roadrunners in the second half.

Penalties played a role in Marian's downfall. The Spartans committed just four fouls for 25 yards. However, a procedure call nullified another long completion early in the contest and a defensive holding call kept alive an eventual Nazareth scoring drive when a third-down pass appeared to fall to ground late in the opening quarter.

"We just have to come ready to practice on Monday," Middleton said of looking ahead to a Friday visit to St. Viator. "It's no more joking around. We've just gotta put this behind us and be ready to play next week."

Gordon also grabbed three passes for 36 yards and Mike Brooks pulled in two for 16 yards. After just four first downs in the opening half, Marian moved the chains on 12 occasions after the intermission.

Sophomores: The Spartans yielded just a late consolation score in a 24-8 victory over the Roadrunners.

Frosh A: Despite an early 13-6 lead on Dan Roque touchdown passes to Joe Swanson and Jacob Cohn, the Spartans fell to Nazareth, 14-13. Mario Earnest added an extra-point kick.

Frosh B: Nyko Palombi and Mac Stevenson rushed for scores and Jim Panozzo tossed a 16-yard touchdown pass to key a 20-0 victory over Bloom Township.

CATEGORY	Marian	Nazareth
First downs	16	16
Rush attempts / yards	26-207	36-116
Passing yards	164	192
Pass completions	14	12
Pass attempts	27	20
Had intercepted	2	0
Fumbles / lost	2-2	0-0
Penalty yards	4-25	6-60
Next	at St. Viator	at Notre Dame

SCORING

Nz- David Murphy 16-yard run (John Thunander kick), 7:49 first quarter.

Nz- Steve Gray 1-yard run (kick blocked), 2:48 first.

Nz- Gray 1-yard run (pass failed), 0:12 second.

MC- Derrick Middleton 11-yard pass from Zack Stevenson (kick failed), 10:20 third.

MC- Clifton Gordon 80-yard run (pass failed), 3:51 third.

Nz- Gray 3-yard run (Thunander kick), 9:36 fourth.

MC- Middleton 4-yard pass from Stevenson (Stevenson to Josh Howe), 1:53 fourth.

INDIVIDUALS

Passing: MC- Stevenson 14 fo 27, 164 yards, 2 TD, 2 INT; Naz- Dario Sierra 12 of 20, 192 yards.

Rushing: MC- Gordon 18-165 (TD), Stevenson 6-30, Middleton 2-12; Naz- Mike Voss 16-53, Chris Cannon 3-33, Murphy 2-18 (TD), Rodney Payton 3-17, Gray 5-6 (3 TD), Sierra 7-(minus 13).

Receiving: MC- Middleton 7-92 (2 TD), Gordon 3-36, Andrew Eagan 1-18, Mike Brooks 2-16, Josh Howe 1-2; Naz- Charlie Hayes 4-72, Voss 3-50, Brandon Keag 1-31, Murphy 1-25, Payton 3-14.

Interceptions: Hayes (Naz), Chris Beedle (Naz).