

Game 8: Joliet Catholic 28, Marian Catholic 06

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

Where: Joe Orr Road at Ashland Avenue, Chicago Heights.

Streaks: Hilltoppers- 1 win; Spartans- 1 loss.

ESCC records: Joliet Catholic 4-1; Marian Catholic 4-1.

Week 7: Joliet Catholic 43, Benet 6; St. Viator 25, Marian Catholic 0.

Week 9: Notre Dame at Joliet Catholic (Fri. 7:30 p.m.); Marian at Marist (Fri. 7:30 p.m.)

Last year: Joliet Catholic 16, Marian Catholic 7.

The series: With nine consecutive victories in the series, JCA has taken an overall command of 26-8-1. The Spartans' last win came with a 26-14 decision in 1994. Dating back to Illini-8 days, the Hilltoppers represent Marian's most longstanding rival.

Notes: While both teams have secured playoff berths, the battle is for first place in the ESCC (Carmel also owns a 4-1) mark. The Spartans are looking to improve to 5-0 this season at Spartan Stadium and are seeking their third victory over a team that currently owns a winning record... The Hillmen and Marian both have victories over ESCC co-leader Carmel, although JCA's was on the nonconference level... Last week's shutout of the Spartans was its first in 16 games, dating back to back-to-back blankings to conclude the 2007 season... The series also includes a tie, one overtime game, a Marian IHSA playoff win and a JCA Prep Bowl victory.

Sun-Times: [*"Marian Catholic back on track"*](#)

Oct. 16	1	2	3	4	Total
JOLIET CATHOLIC HILLMEN	7	7	7	7	-28
at MARIAN SPARTANS	6	0	0	0	-6



Marian's offense scored first on Friday, but visiting Joliet Catholic rallied for a 28-6 East Suburban Catholic Conference victory.

Five forced JCA turnovers can't produce Marian victory

Friday had to be one of those nights that Marian Catholic walked off the field after battling Joliet Catholic asking, "What if?"

What if the host Spartans had been able to add to a 6-0 lead after its first possession?

What if Marian had been able to capitalize on any of the five turnovers it forced against the Hilltoppers?

What if the Spartans knew prior to the game that sophomore quarterback John Rhode would pass for a season-high 173 yards.

Marian only knows the answer to the third question, as the Spartans were not opportunistic in falling to their second straight loss after a 6-0 start with a 28-6 setback to the Hillmen.

The Spartans (4-2 in the ESCC) recovered four fumbles and got an early interception from Wes Fleming. But the ability to convert the miscues was absent on Friday, as was head coach Dave Mattio (medical reasons), who missed his first game in 34 years.

"We really wanted to do this for him," explained senior wide receiver Austin Guaccio, who

hauled in eight passes for 153 yards. "We had good momentum tonight and we started with a quick score. But they're a very good team and they took the momentum back and we weren't able to answer."

The Spartans opened on Friday with some momentum that looked like it might spell the first victory over JCA (6-2, 5-1) since 1994.

Following the opening kickoff, Marian marched 85 yards in eight plays. Rhode (15 of 26, 173 yards) fired first down tosses to Guaccio on three occasions and Joe Hess moved the chains with a 16-yard rush, Marian's longest of the night.

Fittingly, Marian's standout for the night- Guaccio- scored the touchdown on a 31-yard circus catch in the right corner of the end zone. The conversion boot was blocked, but Marian held a 6-0 command with 7:52 to play in the opening quarter.

Then, the Marian defense did its best to keep momentum on the Spartans' side, as Fleming picked off a pass at the Spartan 24-yard line.

Marian quickly gained a pair of first downs, but the Spartans also turned the ball over on a fumble. The inability to convert off a Hillmen turnover would become a bad trend for Marian.

JCA did seize the chance, as the visitors marched 45 yards to the lead score at 7-6 on the final snap of the second quarter. The Hilltoppers made it scores on consecutive possession to take a 14-6 lead with 7:22 to play before the half.

However, Marian would eventually force four fumbles to give itself new life.

The first averted disaster as Joliet Catholic fumbled on the Spartan 1-yard line, where the ball was covered by Spartan linebacker Ryan Chambers.

Despite getting help with a first down via penalty, Marian was never able to advance across midfield.

The second half began with another opportunity, as Danny Vargas pounced on a JCA fumble at the Spartan 34-yard line. Once again, Marian moved the chains on an 8-yard rush by Jeruel Taylor (leading rusher with 37 yards on nine carries). However, the drive stalled at midfield and JCA again took advantage after blocking a punt.

Following a 59-yard drive, the Hillmen expanded the lead to 21-7 with 6:53 to play in the third quarter.

JCA continued to be generous, fumbling the ball away again at its own 17-yard line (Chambers recovery) and a last time at the Marian 25-yard line (Fleming). But Marian was 0-for-2 in the red zone Friday, ending the first chance with a fourth-down sack and the second concluded with one of six punts for the night.

"We never give up and we were still fighting to the end tonight," Guaccio assessed.

His word proved true, as Marian threatened late in the final quarter. Rhode connected with Guaccio on receptions of 37 and 28 yards to set up the Spartans at the JCA 9-yard line. However, three incomplete passes and a fourth-down fumble saw Marian surrender the ball at the JCA 11-yard line.

From there, the Hilltoppers added the icing score on an 89-yard jaunt by Josh Ferguson to account for the final score.

Ferguson accounted for more yards on the ground (234) than the entire Marian offense (224 yards). Malin Jones had a pair of scores and also rushed for 105 yards, as JCA churned out 390 yards on the ground. Meanwhile- courtesy of four sacks of Rhode- the Marian rushing game was shut down for a second straight time with just 51 yards on 28 attempts.

Classy as always, JCA head coach Dan Sharp sent along best wishes for Mattio, who should return to practice next week to prepare the Spartans for an ESCC visit to Marist and eventual playoff berth.

While JCA and Carmel now control their own destiny to the ESCC title, Marian can still storm into the playoffs on a high note with a victory against the RedHawks Friday at 7:30 p.m.

"We've gotta stay focused for Marist and finish strong," Guaccio said. "It's going to be another big game against a quality team."

Sophomores: The Spartans (7-1, 5-1) stayed on track for no worse than a share for the ESCC crown with a 29-19 victory over the Hilltoppers.

CATEGORY	Joliet Catholic	Marian Catholic
First downs	16	11
Rush attempts / yards	42-390	28-54
Passing yards	103	173
Pass completions	3	15
Pass attempts	7	26
Had intercepted	1	0

Fumbles / lost	4 / 4	2 / 1
Penalty yards	3-30	1-15
Next	NOTRE DAME	at Marist

SCORING

MC- Austin Guaccio 31-yard pass from John Rhode (kick blocked), 7:52 first.

JC- Zack Dolph 1-yard run (Rob Cranmer kick), 0:00 first.

JC- Malin Jones 40-yard run (Cranmer kick), 7:22 second.

JC- Jones 14-yard run (Cranmer kick), 6:53 third.

JC- Josh Ferguson 89-yard run (Cranmer kick), 1:46 fourth.

Rushing: JC- Ferguson 15-234 (TD), Jones 12-105 (2 TD), Jordan Miles 10-45, Ty Isaac 2-8, Zach Dolph 1-1 (TD), Anthony Maddie 2-(minus 3). MC- Jeruel Taylor 9-37, Joe Hess 5-29, Joey Walker 5-18, Trevor Woolfolk 1-2, Joe Sanfratello 1-2, Jesse Steward 1-0, John Rhode 6-(minus 34).

Passing: JC- Maddie 3 of 7, 103 yards, 0 TD, 1 INT. MC- Rhode 15 of 26, 173 yards, 1 TD, 0 INT.

Receiving: JC- Alex Kolodziej 2-79, Andrew Elliott 1-24. MC- Guaccio 8-153, Taylor 3-11, Walker 3-8, Hess 1-1.

Interceptions: Wes Fleming (MC).

