

GAME 8: Notre Dame 27, Marian Catholic 21

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

Where: Joe Orr Road, just west of Ashland Avenue, Chicago Heights.

Current overall records: Notre Dame 3-4; Marian Catholic 3-4.

ESCC records: Notre Dame 2-4; Marian Catholic 3-4.

Streaks: Dons- 1 loss; Spartans- 2 losses.

Week 7: Nazareth Academy 42, Notre Dame 13; Joliet Catholic 64, Marian Catholic 13.

Week 9: St. Patrick at Notre Dame (Fri, 7:30 p.m.); Bloom Township at Marian Catholic (Fri., 6 p.m.).

Last year: Marian Catholic 21, Notre Dame 20 (OT).

The series: Marian holds an overall 10-6 series edge dating back to 1992. Defensive battles have characterized the series, as the winner has scored more than 23 points only once. Eleven of the 16 games in the series have been decided by eight points or fewer.

Notes: The teams are in similar do-or-die playoff situations, as the loser on Friday will be knocked out of playoff contention... Marian seeks to pull to the .500 mark both overall and at home (1-2) this year... The Spartans topped the Dons last year with a blocked kick in overtime, but in the last two weeks have allowed three kick returns for scores and a safety on specials teams... Spartans Jeruel Taylor and Randall Wells are tied for fifth in ESCC scoring with nine touchdowns each... Both teams are 2-4 against common ESCC foes, as each captured a victory over Benet and St. Viator.

Oct. 14	1	2	3	4	Total
NOTRE DAME	7	7	7	6	-27
at MARIAN CATHOLIC	0	6	15	0	-21



The Marian offense tries to get something going on Friday in an ESCC meeting against visiting Notre Dame. The Spartans fell, 27-21.

Spartans (3-5) see playoff hopes dashed by Notre Dame

Marian Catholic saw its playoff hopes dashed on Friday night with a fifth season loss to Notre Dame, but it didn't happen without a valiant effort from its greatest warrior.

In a winner-take-all playoff survival battle, Notre Dame got the best of the host Spartans in a 27-21 ESCC decision. With a 3-5 record, the Spartans will be playing for pride next Friday when they host crosstown rival Bloom Township.

Friday's battle, however, almost saw Notre Dame have its playoff visions erased by Marian Catholic's Jeruel Taylor.

The Spartans do-it-all senior tailback got all three scores for Marian, giving the home team hopes of a comeback victory after being faced with a 21-6 deficit early in the third quarter.

In a drive the started on the Marian 16-yard line, the Spartans faced a fourth-and-5 at the Notre Dame 11-yard line. With quarterback Robbie Cifelli scrambling to his left, he eluded a handful of sackers and found Taylor near the pylon for the 11-yard score. When Taylor took a pitch for a two-point conversion run, the Spartans had pulled within 21-14 with 2:08 to play in the third quarter.

"I just wanted to do whatever it took to punch the ball in the end zone and give our team a chance," explained

Taylor, who finished with a punishing 201 rushing yards on 27 carries. "Great players find a way to make plays, so I just wanted to contribute. We just wanted to stay in the fight and give ourselves a shot."

Taylor also provided the next shot.

After David Sowell picked off a Notre Dame aerial, Marian took possession 58 yards away from a tying score after a clipping penalty- one of 10 flags thrown on the Spartans for the night. Three plays later, Taylor took a pitch and galloped 57 yards for a score. When Carlos Gallegos booted the conversion for his first varsity point, the Spartans had pulled even at 21-21.

After the teams exchanged punts, Notre Dame proved it was capable of keeping its one score per quarter pace. The Dons marched 62 yards in seven plays for the lead score with 5:58 to play.

However, Marian kept the door open when Patrick Swanson blocked the conversion kick to keep the Spartans in position for a winning score.

Ironically, Marian had defeated Notre Dame a year ago in overtime courtesy of a blocked conversion kick.

Marian still had time on its side on the next possession. However, a tipped interception of Cifelli put the pressure back on the Marian defense.

In a key series that included a sack by Jake Anderson, Marian forced a Notre Dame punt and one more chance when the hosts took possession at their own 17-yard line with 3:21 to play.

At first, the script was all falling into place.

Cifelli hit Matt Simmons for a first down at the Spartan 32-yard line. After a Simmons rush netted 8 yards, Taylor eclipsed the 200-yard mark for the third time this year (in addition to a 195-yard night) with a 4-yard burst and a first down at the Marian 44-yard line.

That's when things went south, literally toward the south end zone.

A pass behind the line of scrimmage resulted in a fumble that lost 10 yards. Then an illegal procedure penalty moved Marian 25 yards away from a first down. With long down-and-distance, Marian's greatest threat was erased and the Spartans were unable to find the same magic that netted the fourth-down touchdown.

With a third straight setback, Marian can finish 4-5 at best and will miss the IHSA playoffs for the first time in three years.

"In all my years at Marian, I never thought my senior year would turn out this way (missing the playoffs)," said a frustrated Taylor, who ran his season rushing total to 1,357 yards with another strong effort on Friday. "It's not because of the players or the coaches. We just have a lot of inexperienced guys in important positions. They will all get it someday and realize the potential by their senior years.

"I really don't care about the stats... it's kind of bittersweet," the classy Taylor concluded. "I just care about winning games for my team."

Taylor certainly did his part on Friday.

He also scored Marian's first touchdown, a 3-yard plunge in the second quarter that pulled the Spartans within 7-6.

Taylor accounted for more than half of the Spartans' offense, as Marian had another productive night on the ground and outgained an opponent in defeat for the third time this season.

With a big push up front from Michael Coda, Kevin Pawlak, Phil Faso, David Horton and Jesse Kilbourn, the Spartans rushed for more yards (339) than Notre Dame gained in total (320). Cifelli was elusive on the ground as well, gaining 112 yards on 23 totes.

Through the air, the senior quarterback was 7-for-11 for 65 yards. He hit five different receivers with Eric Hurley leading the way with two catches for 18 yards.

The battle for Chicago Heights vs. the Blazing Trojans will take place on Friday with an early 6 p.m. kickoff.

Sophomores: Despite a stellar defensive effort, the young Spartans (3-5) fell to the Dons, 7-0.

CATEGORY	Notre Dame	Marian Catholic
First downs	16	20
Rush attempts / yards	30-190	57-339
Passing yards	130	65
Pass completions	11	7
Pass attempts	23	11
Had intercepted	1	1
Fumbles / lost	2 / 1	4 / 1
Penalty yards	2-10	10-75
Next	ST. PATRICK	BLOOM TWP.

SCORING

ND- Connor Gavin 15-yard pass from Nick Pieruccini (Sam Retzky kick), 5:06 first.

MC- Jeruel Taylor 3-yard run (kick failed), 9:00 second.

ND- Pieruccini 55-yard run (Retzky kick), 6:17 second.

ND- Chris James 59-yard run (Retzky kick), 10:50 third.

MC- Taylor 11-yard pass from Robbie Cifelli (Taylor run), 5:44 third.

MC- Taylor 57-yard run (Carlos Gallegos kick), 2:08 third.
ND- Billy Hirsch 14-yard pass from Pieruccini (kick blocked), 5:58 fourth.

Rushing: ND- Pieruccini 15-100 (TD), James 12-80 (TD), Nick Lato 2-8, Dan Nagode 1-2. MC- Taylor 27-201 (2 TD), Cifelli 23-112, Eric Hurley 2-16, Matt Simmons 4-11, Lorenzo Aldridge 1-(minus 1).

Passing: ND- Pieruccini 11 of 23, 130 yards, 2 TD, 1 INT. MC- Cifelli 7 of 11, 65 yards, 1 TD, 1 INT.

Receiving: ND- Nagode 2-40, Gavin 2-26 (TD), Brian Regal 2-25, Hirsch 3-24 (TD), Joe Parrinello 1-15, Lato 1-0. MC- Hurley 2-18, Simmons 1-16, Dominic Pascale 2-14, Taylor 1-11 (TD), Aldridge 1-6.

Interceptions: Tom Simon (ND); David Sowell (MC).

