

## 'Turf War' trophy on the line for H-F, Marian



Louis Curry, Vincent Wysinger, La Rad Muhammad, Nelson Nwumeh (left to right) and the rest of the Homewood-Flossmoor High School varsity football team will be defending the Southtown-Star Rivals Trophy Friday night against Marian Catholic High School.  
(Art Vassy/Southtown-Star)

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One by one the Homewood-Flossmoor football players walked by after Tuesday's practice, each looking at the Southtown-Star's "Turf War" trophy that will be on the line when the Vikings open the high school football season tonight at Marian Catholic in Chicago Heights.

"Our kids understand the intense rivalry against Marian," H-F coach Kenneth Smith said. "Playing for the trophy gives us something to shoot for. Our games against Marian in a lot of sports have been exciting for the players and the fans. It's a great way to start the season."

The Vikings, who hold an 8-4 series lead in a rivalry that made its debut in 1964, have another neighborhood rivalry on tap in Week 2, hosting Hillcrest, before launching into the SouthWest Suburban Blue Conference wars starting Sept. 11 at Sandburg.

"We have a very difficult schedule," Smith said. "We have 75 players, many of whom are young and inexperienced. Yes, we have a lot of talent, but the key is how quickly they mature."

H-F is looking to rebound from a 4-5 2008 season, which came after Smith's first Vikings squad reached Class 8A semifinals in '07. On H-F's 75-man roster, there are 25 seniors, 43 juniors and seven sophomores.

One key player for H-F figures to be 6-foot-6, 195-pound sophomore quarterback Tim Williams.

"Tim has been running the plays in practice with confidence," Smith said, noting that Williams is working closely with offensive coordinator Quincy Woods, a former star quarterback at Rich East and Southern California.

Williams should be helped by an offensive line that includes returning senior starters Zach Fulton (6-5, 325 left guard) and Jon Thibideau (6-4, 310 center). Coaching the receivers will be Ryan Yarborough, a former Rich East and New York Jets star. Already benefiting from this experience are ends Steve Buchko (5-8, 165), Keaton Fisher (5-9, 165) and Gerald Butler (5-8, 165).

For new defensive coordinator Kevin Enright, H-F's returning starters are ends Michael Rouse (6-3, 315) and Erik Taylor (6-2, 205). Players to watch include linebackers Louis Curry (6-2, 225), Nelson Nwumeh (6-1, 220) and Denzel Wilkins (5-9, 175), and DBs Ivan Davis (5-6, 165), Derrick Caldwell (5-10, 185) and Kevin Karner (5-9, 160).

"Our speed and aggressiveness allow us to do different things on defense," Smith added.

On the Marian side, coach Dave Mattio is trying to get his program to rebound from last year's 1-8 showing.

"We have more size and speed, but we still have to take care of business," Mattio said. "Can our kids rise to the next level? Our first chance is Friday night."

Early leadership has been delivered by players such as linebacker Nolan Berens (6-3, 220), defensive back Danny Vargas (5-10, 165), and receiver Austin Guaccio (6-2, 195).

The key to success must come in the offensive line, where the Spartans return Alex Bell (6-1, 240), Jeff Bona (6-2, 265), Mike Foster (6-1, 235), James Jackson (6-foot, 260) and Brian Kelly (6-3, 210). Running backs Joe Hess (5-10, 165), Joe Sanfratello (5-10, 195), Joe Walker (5-10, 170) and Jesse Steward (5-6, 145) will be busy. Sophomore John Rhode (5-11, 175) will probably get early call at quarterback.

Returning defensive starters also include linebacker Daniel Schmidtke (6-foot, 200) and back Josh Mayers (5-10, 225).