

It's anyone's game in the MAC White

Eisenhower tabbed as favorite

By Fred Costello

Special to The Macomb Daily

Year in and year out, boys hockey in the Macomb Area Conference White Division is a hotly contested race. Case in point: a different team has won the title in all five seasons of varsity play. Last year, the top three teams were separated by a mere three points. Here's a look at what's in store for the division:

Eisenhower

The Eagles enter the season as a favorite to win the White Division. Coach Bob Hall has an experienced group that figures to be very strong defensively. Of the team's 18 players, 16 are seniors. Eisenhower finished last season with the best goals against average in the county and tied for second in goals scored. Still, Hall knows there are no guarantees when it comes to the MAC's most unpredictable division.

"We've got our work cut out for us this year," Hall said. "We have something to prove. We're trying to put Ike hockey back on the map. The hardest part is making sure the boys are humble in their approach to the game and not be overconfident."

The coach considers his defense to be among the best units in school history.

Senior all-MAC selection Adam Nimtz returns to pace a blue line that includes Ryan Chovich, James Czarnik, Mike Walter, Matt Rodgers and Jeff Morey.

Up front, senior all-state honorable mention pick Ryan Maloney returns. Brad Bird, Justin Whitson and, once he returns from injury, Ryan Kalinowski all will be significant contributors.

Goaltending duties will be shared by junior returnee Everett Bommarito and sophomore Erik Rodak.

"This group really wants to succeed," Hall said. "But, I expect all the teams in the White to

MAC White Division Hockey Preview

be very competitive."

L'Anse Creuse

Last season was surely a forgettable one for L'Anse Creuse and coach Bob Kotowski. The Lancers did not win a game in the division and finished in last place. This time around, however, there are signs that the team is trending up.

"Last year was a really tough year and I don't think they boys want to go back to that," Kotowski said. "I think this year there's a lot more leadership, practice is more intense and the attitude in the locker room is positive."

The coach considers his defense to be the team's biggest asset. Leading the group are senior co-captain Dan Terenzi and junior Ryan Detloff. Joining the team for his senior year, Luke Anders also is expected to make his mark along the blue line.

Up front, the Lancers again will be led by Tyler Spezia. The only L'Anse Creuse player to be named all-MAC White last year, the junior will shoulder the bulk of the scoring. Tyler Velger, Sean Maxwell and Jack Thomas all will play significant roles.

A pair of netminders will compete for the starting job. Sophomore Brett Blum and junior Juli-an Vanbiesbrouck, a former in-line player, will battle for playing time.

Kotowski believes that the White will not be decided until late in the season.

"I think all six teams in the division have a great opportunity," he said. "It's going to come down to who wants it the most. I think all the teams have gotten stronger."

L'Anse Creuse North

The 2009 season was a high water mark for the L'Anse Creuse North program. A pair of overtime playoff wins put the Crusaders in the regional final, where they lost to De La Salle. The team captured a county-

We've got our work cut out for us this year. We have something to prove.

— Bob Hall
Eisenhower hockey coach

high 18 wins en route to its first MAC White title. Though several top scorers were lost to graduation, head coach Chris Rojem is very confident in the group's ability to have continued success.

"We've got a good mix of senior leadership and sophomore speed," Rojem said. "I think we have enough talent to win the division. Our netminding is strong and all the boys have bought into the system. Anything less than a White title will be disappointing."

Standout junior Alex Sypniewski returns between the pipes. He's joined by sophomore Brian Ellis, who earned significant time last year as a ninth grader.

Up front, senior forwards Brandon Rentz, Nate Prytula and Adam Ficorelli will be counted on for their scoring abilities.

Seniors Matt Orlando and Jaymie Jones will pace the defense. The key to the team's success, in Rojem's opinion, is its depth. "Last year we had two good forward lines and this year we have three balanced lines," he said. "I think that will really help us."

Romeo

After a few years as an assistant coach, John Minjoe will take over the Romeo program. The biggest change he's trying to implement: speed.

"We're trying to be a quicker transition team," Minjoe said. "We're altering our systems to be quicker in the neutral zone. I think we'll be improved this year because we've got more upperclassmen than normal and a lot of kids that have been in the program three or four years."

The loss to travel hockey of all-state honorable mention for-

ward Zack Soulliere will mean more pressure on the Bulldogs forwards. Luckily for Romeo, dynamic senior forward Brad Rice returns, as does fellow co-captain John Tiseo. A lot will be expected of senior Tyler Underhill, along with juniors Garrett Hansen and Alex Finazzo.

Senior defenseman Scott Lansky will patrol the blue line, along with freshman standout Kyle Nedval.

In goal, sophomore starter Anthony Griska returns. He'll compete with senior Zach Thom and junior Zach Comeau. Minjoe hopes his offense can carry the load while his young defense gets up to speed. He'd like to see Romeo improve on its fourth-place finish a year ago.

"Our goal is to be more consistent and compete harder than we have in the past," Minjoe said.

Stevenson

After losing 13 seniors to graduation, Stevenson coach Al Korolewicz has a lot of teaching to do.

"We have almost an entirely new team," Korolewicz said. "We have a lot of kids from a lot of different teams that haven't played together. Actually, they're doing quite well picking up the new system."

The Titans were the only county team to go undefeated in division play. Their 5-0-5 record was good enough for second place, however, as LCN finished with two more points. Stevenson seems to have enough depth to again compete for the title.

Senior forwards Justin Zyvon and Drew DeMarti are key returnees up front. DeMarti, an all-MAC White selection, has led the team in scoring each of the past two seasons. That duo will be joined by classmate Taylor Weiss and junior Tyler

Barnes. Newcomer Mitch Brinker is expected to make a large impact as well in his senior year.

On defense, junior Jason Zyvon will head up the group.

Another newcomer, senior Mason Henige, will likely see significant time between the pipes. He'll be joined by junior Brad Collier.

Korolewicz and his staff have set their sights on again challenging for the White title.

"I think Eisenhower looks like the team to beat, but they won't run away with it," Korolewicz said. "It certainly won't be easy, but by the end of the season I think you should see us near the top."

Warren-Sterling United

Though they were the defending White champions, the Thunder struggled to a fifth-place finish in the division last season. New coach Rob Pomaville, who previously served as the junior varsity coach, is focusing on discipline as the key to his team's turnaround. The Thunder boast two of the best defensemen in the division, seniors Kyle Kozey and Anthony Di-Marco. Pomaville stressed that he needs the duo to be in the game, not in the penalty box.

"Our defense is going to fall on those two guys," Pomaville said. "They have a history of taking penalties, but we need them to stay on the ice this year."

Up front, senior forwards David Pomaville, Mike Merola and Marty Case will handle the bulk of the scoring. Newcomers Mike Perini, a senior forward, and junior forward Nick Logie also will add depth.

In goal, junior Jake DeWalt will battle senior Zach Nagi for starts. Nagi is new to the team, but the combination in net has Pomaville excited.

"We should be a pretty good offensive team with very solid goaltending," Pomaville said. "We're trying to be very disciplined this year and we'd like to have a more cohesive group than in years past."

DLS: Ball-control offense could be the key for Pilots vs. Inkster

Continued from Page 1C

offense but how well the Pilots' offense can play keep away from Gardner and the Vikings.

"Our offense has to slow them down," Verska said. "We have to keep them off the field."

Thus far, De La Salle has succeeded in playing ball-control offense in the playoffs. But dominating time of possession becomes more critical against Inkster and Gardner, one of the top recruits in the nation.

Gardner, who has made a verbal commitment to Michigan, passed for 163 yards and two touchdowns and rushed for 104 yards in the Vikings' 35-7 victory over Southgate Anderson last week.

The 6-foot-4, 195-pound senior accounted for five touchdowns in Inkster's 50-28 victory over Redford Thurston two weeks ago, and Gardner rallied Inkster to a 36-29 triumph over Steubenville (Ohio) with a 63-yard touchdown pass with 39 seconds remaining.

"He's big, he's strong, he's fast," Verska said. "He throws the heck out of the ball. ... He



Macomb Daily staff photo by Ray J. Skowronek

Domonic Brugnoli and the De La Salle defense have kept opponents under wraps in the playoffs, allowing 13 points in three games.

doesn't have much downside."

Gardner has plenty of help on offense from wide receiver Deon Butler, running back DaShawn Bell and kick returner Terrance Stevens.

"Their skill kids are what you have to worry about," Verska said. "Their skill kids are so good that they make you miss tackles."

For that reason, Verska feels that De La Salle must continue to

run the ball effectively, as it did in the first three playoff games.

With running backs De'Angelo Parris and Steve O'Shell running behind offensive linemen Joe Biernat, Matt Privett, Nick Shaum, Cody Silk and Mike Silk, the Pilots piled up more than 300 rushing yards in last week's 27-6 victory over Southfield and more than 200 yards in a triumph over Grosse Pointe North two weeks ago.

"The thing I like the best is it's a different player each week making a big play," Verska said. "It's been a different kid every week. It's a total team effort."

De La Salle will need another complete effort against Inkster, which competed as an independent this season after spending

"Our offensive line has done a great job," Verska said.

The running game has helped ease the load for freshman quarterback Shane Morris, who replaced injured senior Steve Laudicina and has guided the Pilots to all three playoff victories.

"I think he's done a great job," Verska said. "The seniors and the other players have rallied around him."

Defensively, De La Salle has proved just as tough in the playoffs as in the regular season. The Pilots have posted five shutouts, and they have allowed 8.0 points per game.

De La Salle has picked up the pace recently. Dating to the last game of the regular season, the Pilots have won four straight games by a combined total of 116-13.

"The thing I like the best is it's a different player each week making a big play," Verska said. "It's been a different kid every week. It's a total team effort."

De La Salle will need another complete effort against Inkster, which competed as an independent this season after spending

the past 12 years in the Mega Conference.

The Vikings played an eight-game regular season that included three games against teams from Ohio. Inkster went 2-1 against teams from the Buckeye state, with its only loss coming against nationally ranked Cleveland St. Ignatius.

"I thought they played some really great opponents," Verska said.

The winner of the De La Salle-Inkster game will advance to the state finals for the third time in four years.

Inkster lost to Saginaw Nouvel 28-14 in the 2006 Division 6 state championship, and the Vikings fell to 43-24 to East Grand Rapids in the 2008 Division 3 finals.

De La Salle lost to Muskegon 32-30 in the 2006 Division 2 state title game, and the Pilots again fell to Muskegon 34-14 in 2008.

"We're still excited to be playing and to represent Macomb County," Verska said. "Hopefully we can get a chance to go to Ford Field again."

Send comments to john.hetzler@macombdaily.com.

STEVENSON: Titans battle undefeated Clarkston in semifinals

Continued from Page 1C

Those words seem to carry more weight this week for quarterback Fracassa, receivers Mershman and Beurem, and the rest of the Titans. To get to Ford Field for the state championship game, Stevenson must first defeat Clarkston, a team with title aspirations of its own.

The Wolves claimed the OAA Red Division crown, have tied a school record with 12 victories and have won their last nine games by double-digit margins.

Clarkston has done it with balance, boasting an offense that scores 30.6 points per game and a defense that allows only 10.8 points per game.

"Their running back, quarterback and receiver are very talented," Bye said. "I think they

may be the best offense we've seen this year."

Tyler Scarlett provides the Wolves with a dual threat at quarterback. In Clarkston's 38-14 victory over Dakota last week, Scarlett rushed for 225 yards and two touchdowns and passed for 151 yards and a TD.

"The quarterback is a player with a good arm and an accurate passer," Bye said. "He's got great feet, and he's not afraid to tuck it and run."

Scarlett has plenty of help from running back Dakota Bender, who doubles as a receiving threat out of the backfield, and receiver Dustin Gamble.

"You have to try to play them really well on first down so you can put them in a predictable situation on second and third downs," Bye said.

Gamble also plays defensive back, and he heads up an opportunistic defense. Gamble recovered a fumble and intercepted a pass in the Wolves' district championship game triumph over Romeo two weeks ago.

"Their defense is very aggressive," Bye said of Clarkston's 4-3 scheme. "They're coming after you all the time."

Stevenson faced heat from Detroit Southeastern — a team that included Michigan State recruit William Gholston — last week, and the Titans passed that test.

The offensive line did not allow a sack, allowing Fracassa — the MHSAA's all-time leader in passing yardage — to throw for 488 yards and four touchdowns.

Mershman caught three of those TDs, and he finished with

12 catches for 282 yards. Beurem, who has made a verbal commitment to Bowling Green, hauled in a 22-yard scoring pass as the aerial game has helped make up for a ground game slowed by season-ending injuries to senior running back Justice Wright and junior Mike Kirksey.

"My concerns heading into the Stevenson game is containing (the Titans') passing game and our ability to control the ball to eat up the clock," Clarkston coach Kurt Richardson said. "Stevenson's offense is very good with a very diverse passing game and they get most of the ink but their defense is very, very good."

While the offense has clicked, the defense — including linebackers Jon Sulek and Charlie Walker and linemen Carl Davis and

Corey Stone — also has done its part in the Titans' postseason run.

"Our defense has played well in the playoffs," Bye said. "We've been able to tighten up and stop people's running games."

Stevenson will compete in the state semifinals for the ninth time, and the Titans advanced to the state finals in 1986, 1996 and 2004.

Clarkston, meanwhile, will play in its third semifinal. The Wolves are looking for their first state championship game berth after losing in the semis in 1999 (to Eisenhower) and 2000.

There's only one more step to get to Ford Field.

But only one team will get to take it.

Send comments to john.hetzler@macombdaily.com.

Volleyball

FINALS

(At Kellogg Arena, Battle Creek)

Saturday, Nov. 21

Class D — Battle Creek St. Philip (62-7-3) vs. Pellston (49-7-8), 10 a.m.
Class C — Ravenna (31-13-0) vs. Bronson (61-9-1), Noon
Class A — Marian (76-2-0) vs. Portage Central (59-7-1), 2 p.m.
Class B — North Branch (75-5-2) vs. Delton Kellogg (59-6-2), 4 p.m.

STATE SEMIFINALS

(At Kellogg Arena, Battle Creek)

Thursday, Nov. 19

Class D
Battle Creek St. Philip d. Beal City, 21-25, 25-18, 25-15, 25-13
Pellston d. Oakland Christian, 25-21, 25-23, 25-17
Class A
Marian d. Mercy, 25-13, 25-22, 25-23
Portage Central d. Livonia Churchill, 25-18, 20-25, 25-19, 25-23

Friday, Nov. 20

Class C
Ravenna d. Marlette, 25-13, 25-11, 25-7
Bronson d. McBain, 25-12, 25-16, 25-19
Class B
North Branch def. Cadillac 25-14, 24-26, 25-16, 25-19
Delton Kellogg def. Ladywood 25-10, 25-17, 25-18

QUARTERFINALS

CLASS A

(1-Host Muskegon-Reeths-Puffer)
Portage Central d. Rockford, 12-25, 25-11, 25-22, 25-14

(2-Host Fenton)

Mercy d. Lapeer East, 25-14, 25-23, 23-25, 25-13
(3-Host Brownstown-Woodhaven)
Livonia Churchill d. Carleton Airport, 25-22, 26-24, 25-18

(4-Host L'Anse Creuse)

Marian d. Eisenhower, 25-7, 25-13, 25-22

CLASS B

(5-Host Vicksburg)
Delton Kellogg d. Holland Christian, 25-14, 25-13, 25-19

(6-Host Williamston)

Ladywood d. DeWitt, 25-23, 25-16, 25-18
(7-Host Notre Dame Prep)
North Branch d. Maysville, 25-21, 25-17, 25-22
(8-Host Cadillac)
Cadillac d. Fruitport, 25-18, 25-19, 25-20

CLASS C

(9-Host Bronson)
Bronson d. Schoolcraft, 25-21, 25-22, 25-20
(10-Host Notre Dame Prep)
Marlette d. Allen Park Cabrini, 25-17, 27-25, 25-15

(11-Host Saranac)

Ravenna d. Byron, 25-15, 22-25, 25-16, 25-18
(12-Host Newberry)
McBain d. Calumet 25-21, 26-24, 21-25, 25-16

CLASS D

(13-Host Kalamazoo-Loy Norrix)
Battle Creek St. Philip d. Hillsdale Academy 25-11, 24-26, 25-12, 25-14

(14-Host Fenton)

Oakland Christian d. Deckerville, 25-14, 25-22, 26-24

(15-Host Big Rapids)

Beal City d. Leland, 25-15, 25-15, 25-9
(16-Host St. Ignace-La Salle)
Pellston d. Hancock, 25-14, 18-25, 25-23, 25-29

Football

STATE SEMIFINALS

All games today

DIVISION 1

(At Lansing Everett)

Holt vs. Detroit Catholic Central, 1 p.m.
(At Troy Athens)
Clarkston vs. Stevenson, 7 p.m.

REGIONAL FINALS

R1: Holt 27, Rockford 13
R2: Detroit Catholic Central 31, Canton 24 (10T)
R3: Clarkston 38, Dakota 14
R4: Stevenson 38, Detroit Southeastern 32

DISTRICT FINALS

R1-D1: Rockford 14, Grand Haven 7
R1-D2: Holt 34, Howell 0
R2-D1: Canton 60, Ann Arbor Pioneer 24
R2-D2: Detroit Catholic Central 38, Livonia Stevenson 0

R3-D1: Clarkston 21, Romeo 3
R3-D2: Dakota 28, Eisenhower 10
R4-D1: Detroit Southeastern 41, Detroit Cass Tech 0
R4-D2: Stevenson 35, Warren-Mott 21

PRE-DISTRICTS

R1-D2: Holt 13, Brighton 10
R2-D2: Detroit Catholic Central 42, Livonia Franklin 7
R3-D1: Clarkston 17, Lake Orion 7
R4-D2: Stevenson 35, Roseville 0

DIVISION 2

(At Howell)

Lowell vs. Brother Rice, 1 p.m.
(At Ferndale)
De La Salle vs. Inkster, 1 p.m.

REGIONAL FINALS

R1: Lowell 35, Portage Central 14
R2: Brother Rice 49, Midland 27
R3: De La Salle 27, Southfield 6
R4: Inkster 35, Southgate Anderson 7

DISTRICT FINALS

R1-D1: Lowell 26, Muskegon 19
R1-D2: Portage Central 27, Caledonia 14
R2-D1: Midland 26, Lapeer West 20
R2-D2: Brother Rice 24, Rochester Adams 7
R3-D1: Southfield 20, Farmington Hills Harrison 14
R3-D2: De La Salle 21, Grosse Pointe North 7
R4-D1: Inkster 50, Redford Thurston 28
R4-D2: Southgate Anderson 21, Brownstown Woodhaven 6

PRE-DISTRICTS

R1-D1: Lowell 42, St. Johns 3
R2-D2: Brother Rice 35, Walled Lake Central 7
R3-D2: De La Salle 20, Grosse Pointe South 0
R4-D1: Inkster 51, Dearborn Edsel Ford 19

DIVISION 3

(At Central Michigan University)

Ogemaw Heights vs. East Grand Rapids, 7 p.m.
(At Fenton)
DeWitt vs. Orchard Lake St. Mary's, 1 p.m.

DIVISION 4

(At East Kentwood)

Saginaw Swan Valley vs. Three Rivers, 1 p.m.
(At Williamston)
Marshall vs. Marine City, 1 p.m.

DIVISION 5

(At Midland)

Clare vs. Millington, 1 p.m.
(At Otsego)
Muskegon Heights vs. Jackson Lumen Christi, 1 p.m.

DIVISION 6

(At Jenison)

Mont