

GOAL LINE

THE WEEKLY AREA HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL PREVIEW SECTION

McCOMB PRESENTS BIG CHALLENGE FOR INDIANS

By COLIN FOSTER
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FORT RECOVERY — It's been a special story written so far this season by the Fort Recovery football team.

The Indians want it to have a happy ending.

The story continues tonight as the eighth-ranked Indians play in their first-ever state semifinal game against fourth-ranked McComb at Spartan Stadium in Lima.

"We're just determined to continue to play better," Fort Recovery coach Brent Niekamp said. "I think the chips will fall where they fall. If we can keep getting better, keep playing better, then I think we give ourselves a really good chance."

Where there's a Will, there's been a way for Fort Recovery ... that's been the predominant storyline during the Indians' postseason run.

Sophomore running back Will Homan, taking the place of the injured All-District RB Kyle Schroer, has been electric in wins over Miami Valley Christian Academy, Lehman and MAC rival Minster. Homan has amassed 518 yards and seven touchdowns in that span. He enters this week on the heels of a 40-carry, 236-yard, two-touchdown night in a 33-21 victory against Minster.

"I was always very confident that Will could do the job," Niekamp said. "I think that shows in the fact that we split a lot of the carries between him and Kyle throughout the year. Did I think he'd go off for 240 last game? Not necessarily. But I've always been confident that Will could do the job. He's improved throughout the course of the year and he's shown that he can do it physically. It's really exciting to have a kid like that who's a sophomore."

No stage has been too big for the Indians in their second postseason appearance. The Indians rolled to season-highs offensively in a 62-34 victory over MVCA at home in Week 11. The defense led the way in a 20-3 victory over a much-improved Lehman Cavalier football team in Week 12.

Last week's effort against Minster was about as complete an effort as Niekamp has seen his football team put together this season. The Indians, who had been defeated by Minster 14-12 on Oct. 9, held

a potent Wildcat offense to just 261 yards of total offense. Junior QB Caleb Martin made big play after big play in and out of the pocket and senior WR Wes Wenning hauled in four catches for 102 yards as the Indians improved their overall postseason record to 4-1.

"I think that was the best game we've played so far," Niekamp said. "We felt like if we really played well, we could put a game like that together. For us, that wasn't necessarily a surprise. That's what we hoped to be able to do to them if we played well and we did. I think that's a game we can build on."

"As good as that game was, it could have been better. We dropped a few balls and those kinds of things. We're going to try to keep getting better and keep improving in those areas. If we are able to do that, we're going to have a good shot this week."

The Panthers ended Lucas' historic season last week with a 36-6 victory in the Region 24 final at Tiffin Columbian Stadium. They'll try to put an end to the Indians' historical season tonight.

McComb (12-1) is a very formidable opponent with a sizable and skillful line, speed on both sides and an exceptional defense. Marion Local can attest to that. The Flyers escaped McComb with a hard-fought 24-22 win in Week 1. Since then, the Panthers have won 12 straight games — the majority of them in dominating fashion. Eight out of 10 regular season games featured a running clock in the second half.

They posted three consecutive shut-outs after losing to the Flyers, one of those coming against Division VI regional finalist Van Buren. They allowed a total of 17 points in Week's 2-9 before Liberty-Benton posted 21 in Week 10.

The Blanchard Valley Conference champions survived a scare against 4-7 Crestview in Week 11, winning 27-26. Junior QB Malachi Abbott and Chas Roop hooked up for a 13-yard touchdown to supply the winning score late in the fourth quarter. McComb has looked much more like itself the last two weeks, posting easy wins over Leipsic and Lucas.

The Panthers roster features a long list of players who earned All-BVC and Northwest District honors. Abbott was named BVC Offensive Player of the Year and first team All-Northwest District after passing for 1,773 yards and 26 touchdowns during the regular season. Playoffs included, Abbott is 117-of-208 passing for 2,235 yards with a 28-to-9 touchdown-to-interception ratio. He has also rushed for 644 yards and five touchdowns.



Martin



Niekamp



Homan



Mark Pummell/The Daily Standard

Fort Recovery's Brandon Schoen makes a move up the field during a regional semifinal game with Lehman on Nov. 13 at Spartan Stadium in Lima. Schoen and the Indians return to Spartan Stadium tonight to take on McComb in the Division VII state semifinal at 7:30 p.m.

Three linemen on the team earned all district honors. Noah DeLacerda, a 5-11, 260-pounder, was named NW District Player of the Year and BVC Defensive Lineman of the Year. He totaled 51 tackles (27 for loss) and 15 sacks during the regular season. Six-foot-four, 280 pound twins Matt and Mike Cherry earned first team All-NW District honors.

Jake Crouse earned BVC Defensive Player of the Year and first team All-NW District honors at linebacker. The 6-0, 195-pound junior is also a stud offensively, going over the 1,000-yard mark in the regular season and scoring 14 TDs.

Niekamp said what stands out about

McComb is the personnel they have in the trenches. The Indians coach is, however, confident in his line group after last week's performance against Minster and thinks his team has the edge at the skill positions.

"I think if you look at the skill positions, I feel pretty good about how we match up," Niekamp said. "But we're going to have to play really well up front. I think we can because we're decent size up front also and we've been playing better, especially last week we had a great game. I do think that's going to be important."

This marks McComb's 16th trip to postseason and third state semifinal appearance.

The program won its lone state title in 1983. As for the Indians, they are the lone first-timer in the final four field and the lowest ranked at eighth.

Understanding how rare and special this moment is, Niekamp has encouraged his players to enjoy the experience while also staying focused on the task at hand.

"They understand how special this is for our community, to everybody who is involved and to everybody who has supported the program over the years," he said. "We're all really determined to try to do our best this week and try to advance one more step."

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Coldwater vs. Wheelersburg

Adams Stadium, Xenia, tonight. 7:30 p.m.

By GARY R. RASBERRY
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The last time Coldwater and Wheelersburg played in football was the second game for then-new Cavaliers coach John Reed.

The teams will face off again for the first time in 30 years, this time for a ticket to Ohio Stadium as the teams play in the Division V state semifinals at Doug Adams Stadium in Xenia.

The first meeting came in Week Two of the 1995 season along the Ohio River. The Cavaliers came away with a 23-14 win to go to 2-0 en route to the team's first-ever regional title and state semifinal appearance.

Both teams are 13-0 this season and are coming off convincing wins in their respective regional finals. The Pirates beat Zane Trace 31-0 in the Region 17 final and the Cavaliers beat Brookville 31-13 in Region 18.

"A good matchup. When you get to this point, they're all good," Coldwater coach Chip Otten said. "They've beat some good teams."

The Pirates run an unusual run-heavy spread offense formation featuring the quarterback and running backs protected behind a huge offensive line led by first team All-Southeast District pick Sam Hall, who steps in at 6-4 and 285 pounds.

"Offensively, they really like to spread you out, but they are primarily a run team," Otten said. "I think they're 70-80 percent run. Their offensive linemen are just huge guys that don't play both ways. That's a concern."

Kyle Davis has been the catalyst for the Pirates' offense this season, earning Offensive Player of the Year honors in the Southeast. Against Zane Trace, Davis carried the ball 13 times for 78 yards and two touchdowns and threw for another touchdown.

"(Davis) kind of reminds of CHCA's quarterback (Johnny Noyen)," Otten said. "He's kind of the guy you want to stop. They also have a couple nice running backs and receivers."

Jordan Howard is one of the featured backs. Howard had 88 yards and a touchdown against Zane Trace.

Defensively, Wheelersburg has a speedy lineup. Both Howard and teammate Jake Darnell were named as first team All-Southeast at defensive back. Linebacker Xander Carmichael was also a first-team pick.

Defensively, they're not nearly as big as they are on offense," Otten said. "They all move pretty good. They actually have



Nick Wenning/The Daily Standard

Coldwater's Jack Hemmelgarn will look to guide the Cavaliers to another playoff win tonight.

some undersized guys who can move around. They don't do a lot of fancy stuff. They just lock in and go to the ball. I'm impressed how aggressive they are running toward the ball. That will be a challenge."

One thing the Cavaliers hope for is to use their Cav-Gun offense, with multiple skill threats, to catch the Pirates off guard. Five different Cavaliers have at least 20 receptions this season, led by All-Northwest standout Aaron Harlamert's 50 catches for 935 yards. Running back Chris (Petey) Post has 948 yards rushing, 517 yards receiving and 24 total touchdowns.

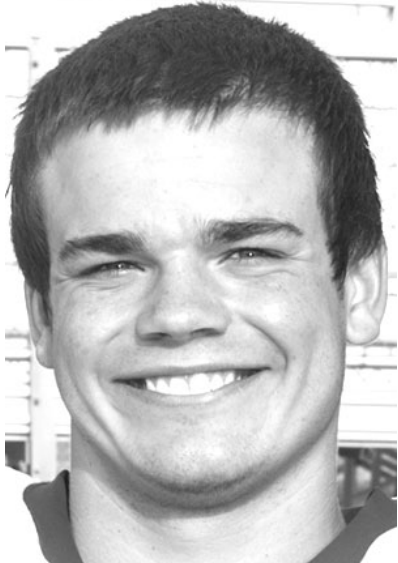
"I don't think they play a lot of teams who are spread and throw the ball like we can," Otten said. "Hopefully, we can find some holes and do some things they're not used to seeing."

As for keys to a victory on Friday night, and another trip to the state title game, Otten is preaching the same message he has all season.

"It's been the same thing for us. Defensively, it's not giving up big plays and making them work (for yards)," Otten said. "If we can do that and chunk away, eventually we make a big play and get them to do something they don't like to do."

"Offensively, we need to find the things that will work and find them early. We've been fortunate this season to score early, get leads and keep them. Find what works and spread the wealth."

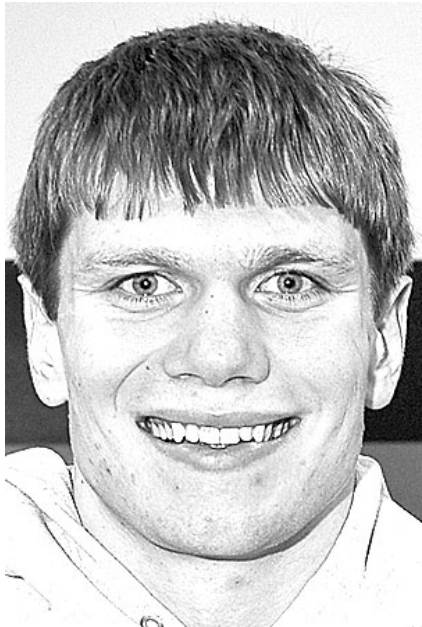
PLAYERS OF
THE WEEK
OFFENSE



Aaron Nietfeld, RB
Marion Local

32 carries for 206 yards in Flyers' 9-7 win over Mechanicsburg.

DEFENSE



Mitch Clune, DE
Coldwater

12 tackles, 1 sack in Cavaliers' 31-13 win over Brookville.

Marion Local vs. Tinora

Harmon Field, Wapakoneta, Saturday, 7 p.m.

By COLIN FOSTER
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Thanksgiving and football — that's what Marion Local does.

A day ago, players and coaches were feasting on turkey and stuffing at the Thanksgiving table. They are hoping to feast on the opposition from Tinora on Saturday night when the top-ranked Flyers (12-1) and fifth-ranked Rams (11-1) lock horns at 7 p.m. at Harmon Field in Wapakoneta with a berth in the state title game on the line.

Marion Local coach Tim Goodwin and company know it'll be another hard win to come by.

"Tinora is a very solid team who has a very good tradition," Goodwin said via email. "This year's team has a good blend of size, speed and athleticism."

"They have a very diverse offense and they can do some unique things on defense as well. It will be a big week in terms of preparation."

This marks the fifth consecutive season the Flyer football team is rolling along at Thanksgiving time. They are seeking a fifth straight state title and ninth in school history, which would tie them with Cincinnati Moeller for second on the all-time list.

"We have Marion Local kids," Goodwin said. "They work hard, take coaching, and do their best. And we are fortunate to have enough talent to work with."

Last Saturday, Marion Local dug deep to defeat a tough and talented group from Mechanicsburg 9-7 in the regional final at AcuSport Stadium in Bellefontaine. Derek Albers' 19-yard field goal with 4:53 left, a phenomenal effort by the defense and running back Aaron Nietfeld (32 carries for 206 yards) helped the Flyers knock off a team some considered having a realistic shot of ending Marion's quest for five in a row.

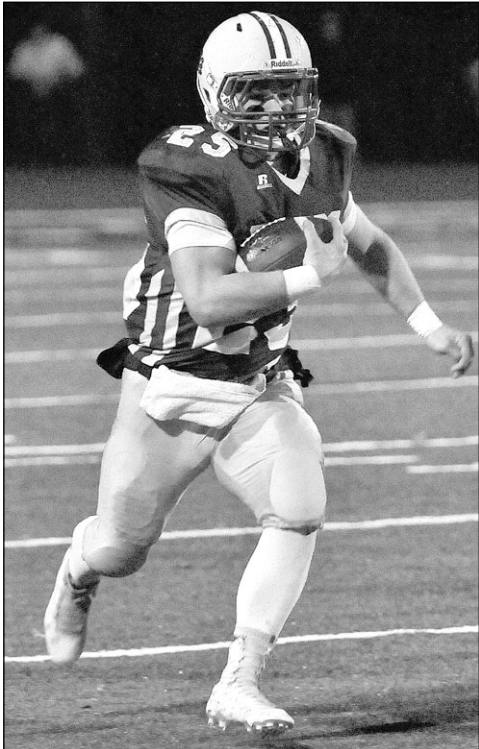
Harmon Field has been the site of so many playoff triumphs by the Blue and Gold during their previous four state title runs. The Flyers were just there a few short weeks ago when they cruised to a 34-0 win over West Liberty-Salem in the regional final.

As for the Rams, they walked off that same field last season in agony after a state semifinal loss to Minster. Tinora was unbeaten entering the game. Kicker Josh Camp — a first team All-Northwest District selection — had a chance at winning it with a 28-yard field goal but it sailed a yard left of the uprights, and Minster prevailed 14-13.

The Rams (11-1), champions of the Green Meadows Conference, have come back with a vengeance this season. They roll into this showdown with Marion winners in 10 straight games. They opened the post-season with a 48-6 win over Seneca East and then edged Colonel Crawford 28-23 in the regional semifinal. They started fast and capitalized on a few turnovers in last Saturday's 44-14 win over Van Buren (9-4) in the Region 20 final.

The Rams are sizable and physical like a lot of opponents the Flyers have faced throughout the season, Goodwin said. However, the Tinora's Wing-T offense is unlike anything Marion has seen to this point.

"The offense is very diverse," Goodwin said. "They do a lot of things well and they are also heavy on misdirection. We will need to be very sound and disciplined defensively."



Nick Wenning/The Daily Standard

Marion Local's Aaron Nietfeld will face a tough Tinora squad on Saturday in Wapakoneta.

Coach Kenny Krouse is 130-60 in 18 years at Tinora and has guided the Rams to the playoffs in three consecutive seasons. Krouse's Wing-T offense features two solid running backs and a quarterback capable of keeping opposing defenses honest in Brevin Renollet, who stands 6-foot-4 and weighs in at 185 pounds. Renollett has completed 76-of-133 passes for 1,464 yards and 14 touchdowns this season. A three-year starter, Renollet has lost just two regular season games during his career.

Halfback Riley Nagel, a 5-10, 175-pound senior, and fullback T.J. Gares, a 6-1, 175-pound senior, have been the backfield weapons for the Rams the last two seasons. Nagel has carried the ball 159 times for 1,112 yards and scored 21 touchdowns to go along with 20 catches for 343 yards. Gares has added 137 carries for 887 yards and 10 scores.

The Rams' lone loss was at the hands of Division IV playoff qualifier Wauseon. They are scoring 39.1 points per clip and giving up 11.1. Eight of 10 regular-season games Tinora played in featured running clocks.

The Flyers enter averaging 34.1 points and giving up 8.8. Eight of their 12 wins have come against opponents with winning records. Two of those wins were over teams making state semifinal appearances, Fort Recovery and McComb.

Nietfeld is the leading rusher with 1,121 yards and 14 touchdowns on 200 carries. Quarterbacks Cole Griesdorn and Duane Leugers have combined to throw for 1,523 yards and 23 touchdowns compared with five interceptions. Hunter Wilker and Matt Kahlig share the lead in reception touchdowns with eight apiece for the Flyers, who are seeking a 25th straight postseason win.

Goodwin said the biggest key on Saturday night will be whatever team can control the line of scrimmage.

"Both teams will try to establish the run game but both teams can do some things in the air as well. The line of scrimmage will be the key," Goodwin said.

STATE SEMIFINALS

Division I
Games at 7 p.m. Saturday

Region 1
Lakewood St. Edward (12-1) vs. Stow-Munroe Falls (12-0) at Parma

Region 2
Cincinnati Colerain (12-1) vs. Wayne (13-0) at Mason

Division II
Games at 7:30 p.m. Tonight

Massillon Perry (11-2) vs. Hudson (11-2) at Solon

Perrysburg (13-0) vs. La Salle (11-2) at Piqua

Division III
Games at 7:30 p.m. Tonight

Archbishop Hoban (12-1) vs. Zanesville (12-1) at Massillon

Toledo Central Catholic (11-2) vs. Trotwood-Madison (10-3) at Sidney

Division IV
Games at 7 p.m. Tonight

Steubenville (12-0) vs. Ursuline (8-5) at Boardman

Middletown Bishop Fenwick (13-0) vs. Columbus Bishop Hartley (9-3) at Wilmington Alumni Field

Division V
Games at 7:30 p.m. Tonight

Milan Edison (12-1) vs. Canton Central Catholic (9-3) at Wooster Triway Jack Miller Field

COLDWATER (13-0) VS. WHEELERSBURG (13-0) AT XENIA DOUG ADAMS STADIUM

Division VI
Games at 7 p.m. Saturday

Kirtland (12-1) vs. Grandview Heights (12-1) at Mansfield Madison Ram Field at StarTek Stadium

MARION LOCAL (12-1) VS. TINORA (11-1) AT WAPAKONETA HARMON FIELD

Division VII
Games at 7:30 p.m. Tonight

Danville (13-0) vs. Mogadore (12-1) at Orrville Red Rider Stadium

FORT RECOVERY (11-2) VS. MCCOMB (12-1) AT LIMA SENIOR SPARTAN STADIUM



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