

# Turnover makes for wide-open Northwest race

■ Only three players from 2001 all-league team return for this season

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TRAVERSE CITY — Looking at the 2001 all-Northwest Conference team, there is one certainty about the 2002 season. There is no certainty. With just three first team all-league players returning this fall, the Northwest Conference race — and even the players themselves — are up in the air.

"There's a lot of unknowns," Suttons Bay coach Joe Trudeau said. "There's a lot of kids that will surprise people that we haven't really heard of before."

What that should lead to is a very competitive conference slate.

"You have a lot of teams that could be contenders," Manton coach Jim Smart said. "There could be co-champions and they might have two losses." "Every week — for every team — is going to be a conference-deciding game," Frankfort coach Matt Stapleton said.

Continuing the trend of new faces in the conference is **GLEN LAKE**. Kris Herman is the new coach of the Lakers, taking over for veteran coach Bill Hollenbeck.

Herman coached the junior varsity the past three seasons and was a JV assistant at Glen Lake for another two, so it won't be a drastic change with the defending league champions.

"It's nice because the kids are familiar with me and I'm familiar with them," Herman said. "I've also worked with all these coaches."

Glen Lake returns just three starters on offense and four on defense from last year's 10-1 season.

Guard/linebacker Stu Cozzens and running back/strong safety Joey Vasquez are back on both sides of the ball for the Lakers. So is tight end Drew Hilton, defensive tackle Clint Ward and cornerback Joel Pierson.

"We're having good practices," Herman said. "The kids are sharp and the attitudes are great. But you never really know where you are until you go out and play."

Lining up under center for the Lakers is junior quarterback Andrew Kemp. A converted running back from middle school, Kemp started at QB for three games on JV before breaking his collarbone.

"But if you're going to deal with

## COACHES POLL

school (1st place votes)	PTS
Suttons Bay (4)	33
Glen Lake (2)	28.5
Frankfort	22
Kingsley	21.5
Manton	15
Mesick	6

## PLAYERS TO WATCH

Chris Smart, Manton
Jason Stewart, Suttons Bay
Al Olds, Kingsley
Andrew Kemp, Glen Lake
Drew Brockman, Suttons Bay

## 2001 STANDINGS

### NORTHWEST CONFERENCE

school	Conference			All	
	W	L	GB	W	L
Glen Lake	5	0	—	10	1
Frankfort	4	1	1	9	2
Suttons Bay	3	2	2	8	3
Manton	2	3	3	5	4
Kingsley	1	4	4	4	5
Mesick	0	5	5	1	8

a kid that doesn't have much experience, you're much better dealing with the kind of athlete that he is," Herman said.

Among those providing leadership for the Lakers will be Vasquez and Hilton. Glen Lake will also look to Cozzens.

"Stu is the best combination of the two," Herman said. "He probably works harder than anybody on the team. He's a good combination of vocal leadership and leadership by example."

**SUTTONS BAY** has an experienced backfield this season with running backs Jason Stewart and Drew Brockman. Luke Mason returns as a receiver while Keaton Smith takes over as the quarterback after serving as the backup in 2001.

The Norse, 8-3 last season, also have a lot of speed, which they will need to use since tackle Scott Ibbotson is the lone returning starter on the line.

The Norsemen have just two players over 200 pounds.

"That's been the same since I can remember," Trudeau said. "We don't have any size. We have some talented kids and we have some speed, but we'll never be bigger than probably everybody else."

The defensive side of the ball for the Norsemen is even more wide open as Brockman and Mason return at outside linebacker and cornerback. Smith started at safety, but might just be the quarterback.

"Everything's open, every spot is open," Trudeau said. "It's kind of a different feel. We're moving a lot of people, and to spots they didn't play before and are getting



Record-Eagle/file photo

Glen Lake's Joey Vasquez dives into the end zone against Frankfort in last year's Northwest Conference title showdown, won by the Lakers.

a feel for it.

"We're looking at all the possibilities."

There will be a dramatic shift at **FRANKFORT**, which will go from the power running game of Evan Colby and Jeff Walton to a more finesse style this season with players like Steve Nerg, Greg Walton and Brad Nostrandt.

"Our backfield size last year averaged 230 pounds and this year that will be right around 175," Stapleton said. "But what we lose in size we'll make up for in speed. That will give us an opportunity to do a few different things and give a few different looks."

With eight starters gone on offense and seven on defense, the Panthers, 9-2 in 2001, will look to get experience and leadership from Stephan Nelson, Kyle Gilbert, Shane Chatterton and Joel Joslin.

"That's the fun part, seeing who will step up and fill some of these shoes," Stapleton said. "The work ethic has been excellent, the attitudes have been great."

Frankfort also has an outstanding sophomore class that Kingsley coach Tim Wooer called "the best I've ever seen."

"There's not a lot of them, but the ones we have are coming along," Stapleton said of his sophomores. "But you put a 16-year-old up against an 18-year-old and you never know."

Also counting on its quickness is **MANTON**. The Rangers, 5-4 a year ago, also return a lot of starters on both sides of the ball.

All three linebackers return for Manton in Chris Smart, Derek Shepler and Joel Stockwell. Mitch Rosted and Jeremy Embrey are back as defensive ends as is Robbie Stahl and Carson Budde in the defensive backfield.

Manton has three starting

offensive lineman in Matt Swinehart, Ryan Musselman and Nick Harry. Budde is back at quarterback as is Smart at tight end.

"We graduated some big kids last year," Jim Smart said. "We lost three good offensive linemen and virtually our entire backfield, but I think we have some solid kids to step into their place."

"We're not as big as we were last year, but I think we're quicker."

Some people are picking Manton as the surprise team in the Northwest this season. That's just fine with Smart.

"We're excited; we're really looking forward to having a good year," he said. "The kids are working hard, they have a good attitude and they're having fun."

**KINGSLEY** may be the biggest team in the Northwest Conference, but the search is on for people to run the ball behind them.

Leading the Stags is 6-foot-3, 235-pound senior Al Olds, who was first team all-conference on both sides of the line.

Olds will be joined on the offensive line by Trav Aylsworth and Justin Hansen, who is moving from tight end to guard and is the third fastest Kingsley player.

They'll be blocking for fullback Adam Hurd among others in Kingsley's Wing-T attack.

"We're going to start from scratch there," Wooer said of his lack of experienced runners. "Our backfield has to come through and we have a few positions defensively that we have to find an answer for."

All Olds did on defense was average 16 tackles a game from his tackle position. He racked up 20 or more tackles against Glen Lake and Frankfort.

"Olds is a very, very good football player," Kingsley coach Tim

Wooer said. "He's a force."

Other key defensive players for the Stags this season will be outside linebacker Matt Mersino and defensive back Jon Walton.

After enjoying a 10-2 season and a second straight playoff berth in 2000, Kingsley slipped to 4-5 in 2001. Four of those losses last season came by a touchdown or less, but the Stags are hoping to get to the other side of .500.

"The nine seniors we have are very excited about football," Wooer said. "They're good leaders and they're really ready to get after it."

"Last year was very humbling, so we're trying to get back. The kids have worked very hard throughout the summer at improving their skills."

**MESICK**, which went 1-8 last season, returns just one player — senior receiver Cody Barnes — that scored a touchdown last season.

"We'll be a very young team; very inexperienced both ways," Mesick coach Anthony Pratley said. "We've got a lot of holes to fill."

Mesick's strength should be its offensive line with players like Ryan Lister, Matt Meiers, Brian DeYoung and Steve Fuller returning.

On defense, the only starters that return for the Bulldogs are linebackers Lister and Meiers.

The Bulldogs have 36 players out for varsity and JV this season, but about 10 of those have never played football before.

Mesick will have to replace two players that were a big part of the Bulldogs last season in Kirk Williams and Paul Austin.

"Those are some big shoes to fill right there," Pratley said. "We have a lot of young kids that have to step up. That's basically it."