

Snowbirds seek fourth in a row

By DENNIS CHASE

Record-Eagle sports editor

TRAVERSE CITY — The winning streak is at 22.

Not since Oct. 23, 1998, has **GAYLORD ST. MARY** tasted defeat in the Ski Valley Conference. The Snowbirds have won three successive league titles and are favored to extend it to four.

"I'm not sure if they're going to be as dominating as they have been in the past, but until someone knocks them off, they're still the team to beat," Bellaire coach Jeff Hebden said.

Inland Lakes coach Jack Rowan agreed.

"They're the gold medallion," he said. "They have set the standard of excellence in our league."

But not one coach is ready to concede the title to the Snowbirds.

"The league should be more balanced this season," Hebden said. "Three or four teams could challenge for the league title."

St. Mary, 10-2 last season, won its seven league games by an average score of 40-5. The Snowbirds had only one scare, a 21-20 win over Onaway.

Snowbirds coach Rod Bragg lost eight key seniors to graduation, but returns a solid nucleus — including all-state lineman Bill Mason. Plus, he inherits 12 juniors off a 9-0 JV team. "We lack experience at the skill positions, but the cupboard is not bare," Bragg said. "We have some tremendous talent back."

The Snowbirds attack will be built on speed. St. Mary has a couple flyers in the backfield in senior Andrew Dobrzelewski, a converted wide receiver, and junior Troy Blasius.

"Andrew is the fastest player on the team," Bragg said. "If he gets the edge, or if there's a missed tackle, I don't think anyone's going to run him down."

"Troy's not quite as fast as Andrew, but he has incredible quickness and instincts."

Adam Kerfoot gives the Snowbirds a big-play threat at wide receiver.

"He'll be our money receiver," Bragg said. "He really caught fire in the second half of the season last year. And he had a great summer in the 7-on-7 scrimmages. He lit some people up."

Pat Roach, who kicked seven field goals last season, teams with Kerfoot at wideout.

Junior Ray Burzynski, 12-1 as a starter at the JV level, is in line to quarterback the team.

"He has good size, speed and quickness," Bragg said. "His arm strength and accuracy were impressive this summer."

The 6-foot, 196-pound Mason and 6-3, 208-pound senior Eric Harding anchor the lines. Mason is a return-



SKI VALLEY
PREVIEW

COACHES POLL

school

1. Gaylord St. Mary
2. Johannesburg-Lewiston
3. Central Lake
4. Onaway
5. Inland Lakes
6. Bellaire
7. Pellston
8. Mancelona

PLAYERS TO WATCH

- Bill Mason, St. Mary
Kip Sundberg, Joburg
Jon Shooks, Central Lake
Eric Harding, St. Mary
Zach Galer, Onaway

2001 STANDINGS

SKI VALLEY CONFERENCE

school	Conference		All	
	W	L	GB	W L
Gaylord St. Mary	7	0	—	10 2
Bellaire	5	2	2	6 4
Onaway	5	2	2	5 4
Joburg	4	3	3	5 4
Central Lake	3	4	4	4 5
Pellston	3	4	4	4 5
Mancelona	1	6	6	1 8
Inland Lakes	0	7	7	0 8

ing all-stater.

"He's stronger and faster," Bragg said. "He did all the right things in the weight room (in off-season). He squats 455 and benches 250."

"Plus, he has good speed. He's on the 400-meter relay team that's made it to states. He's a Division II or Division III prospect. He's a man with goals."

Mason and Harding will also start on the defensive line. Dobrzelewski, Roach and Kerfoot give the Snowbirds a strong defensive backfield.

"Our defense will be fast and aggressive," Bragg said.

JOHANNESBURG-LEWISTON is looking to rebound from a 5-4 campaign. The Cardinals are traditionally in the thick of the league race, but finished three games behind St. Mary a year ago.

"We will definitely be in the running for a Ski Valley championship," Cardinals coach Fred Davis said. "We have improved in all aspects of the game. We should be back where we want to be in terms of competitiveness."

Depth, though, could be a problem.

"Our numbers are a bit low (20 players)," Davis said. "We normally carry between 24 and 29 kids. We had three no-shows who started for us in 2001. We have solid replacements for all three, but depth is a question mark. We need to stay healthy."

Johannesburg returns some "fine athletes," Davis said, including last year's MVP Kip Sundberg, a two-time all-conference player. Sundberg, the Cardinals quarterback, was the leading rusher a year ago with more than 500 yards. He's



Record-Eagle/file photo

Gaylord St. Mary hasn't lost a Ski Valley Conference game since Oct. 23, 1998.

moving to halfback this season, a spot he occupied as a sophomore when he rushed for more than 600 yards.

"Kip is very similar to Marcus Ewing (former all-state runner)," Davis said. "He is an outstanding athlete. He's very quick and he's a very intelligent runner."

Sundberg also had six interceptions from the free safety position.

Casey Glazier, who was moved up to varsity for the last three games and averaged more than 130 yards per game rushing, will start at fullback and linebacker.

"Casey is a tough kid," he said. "He is not scared to lower his shoulder and attack. We expect him to have a big year."

Lance Huff, who started at tight end and strong safety last season, takes over at quarterback.

"Lance missed his sophomore year and the beginning of last season with an injury," Davis said. "He is now healthy. He started at quarterback his freshman year and had a tremendous season. He's back, better than ever. He gives us a big, strong quarterback with a very good arm."

Tom Tatum, a two-year starter at center, and Tim Wells, an all-conference guard, anchor the line. Wells also plays linebacker.

"Tim was voted our best offensive lineman," Davis said. "He is an outstanding pulling guard."

Harold Grigsby, who started at linebacker and guard in 2001, has moved to tight end. He is one of the top sprinters in the Ski Valley.

"These players give us a solid core," Davis said. "With the addition of our other juniors we should be very tough offensively. We have real good speed. We will be much improved over last year. We are quicker and have good size. Our offensive backfield should be much improved. Defensively we should be able to fly to the ball and hit."

BELLAIRE is riding a wave of enthusiasm after qualifying for the playoffs last year.

"We're coming off a very successful 2001 season, having won six games, finishing second in the Ski Valley and making our first playoff appearance in nine years," Hebden said. "Despite losing 16 seniors from last year's team, the expectations remain high."

Sophomore Zach Lapointe will replace Sean Finnegan at quarterback. Finnegan, honorable mention all-state, is now at Michigan Tech.

"Zach was the quarterback on the JV team last year and once he got the hang of the offense, he did quite well," Hebden said. "He doesn't play like a sophomore. We expect Zach to develop into a fine player and leader for us."

Junior Sean Jody and seniors Dusty Arnsnoe and Bob Massey will be the prime ballcarriers.

"Jody is fun to watch," Hebden said. "He's quick and has outstanding moves."

Jacob Murray is a returning end while Jim Folker and Matt Smith spearhead the line.

Defensively, Arnsnoe was an all-conference honorable mention linebacker a year ago, registering 86 tackles and intercepting two passes.

"He's very aggressive," Hebden said.

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