

# McBain poised to repeat in Highland

From staff reports

TRAVERSE CITY — The well has not run dry at **MCBAIN**.

Despite losing players like Dan Bazuin, Andy Bronkema, Trent Mulder and Kyle Gilde — who led the Ramblers to the Division VI state finals last season — McBain appears headed for another banner season.

The Ramblers, who went 5-0 in the Highland Conference and 12-2 overall last season, return a solid nucleus of players, including three outstanding running backs.

Coach Matt McDonald's offense will revolve around fullback Troy Heuker and halfbacks Andy Gilde and Morgan Clairday. Heuker rushed for more than 1,600 yards, Clairday for more than 1,000 and Gilde for more than 900.

"Those are three good backs and they're all three-year starters," McDonald said.

And if it's a Matt McDonald-coached team that could only mean one thing — there will be a Bronkema at quarterback.

This year, Luke Bronkema takes over, succeeding his older brother Andy, who accepted a basketball scholarship to Cornerstone.

"I've coached seven years here and this will be the seventh year I've had a Bronkema at quarterback," McDonald said.

Chad Bronkema was the first in the string of quarterbacks. Andy, Chad's cousin, followed. Now the torch has been passed to Luke.

"Luke and Andy are pretty similar," McDonald said. "Luke, obviously, doesn't have the experience, but athletically he's right in the ballpark with Andy."

Bronkema and his backfield mates will operate behind one of the biggest lines in the state. The line includes guard Mike DeKam (6-4, 235), tackles Eric Lindsey (6-2, 250) and Seth Vanderlaan (6-2, 375) and center Kevin Holmes (6-0, 200).

"With that kind of size, we'll run a power, ball-control offense," McDonald said.

Defensively, Gilde is a top-drawer linebacker. He stepped in when Bazuin was injured last season and never relinquished the job. Kevin Boven is an able linebacker, too. Heuker stars at defensive end while Bronkema and Blake Wiltzer are keys in the secondary.

The Ramblers had a smaller turnout this season. McDonald is carrying 23 players on varsity.

"But it's a committed 23," he said. "Hopefully, we can stay healthy. Last year when we had someone get hurt, we could put a sub in and keep on rolling. This year, I think injuries could play a role. We don't have the numbers or the depth we had last year."

McBain has a tough opener. The Ramblers travel to Muskegon Catholic on Friday. Muskegon Catholic, a

Division VII state finalist, beat McBain a year ago.

While McBain was on top in the Highland Conference, **LAKE CITY** was on the bottom. The Trojans finished 0-5 in the league and 1-8 overall.

But coach Tim Peterson believes better days are ahead.

Lake City returns several starters from a year ago on both sides of the ball.

On offense, quarterback Dan Peffers is back. The junior threw for 509 yards and rushed for additional 323 a year ago. Seniors Steve Harrington and Bryan Houle rushed for 489 and 234 yards, respectively, last season. John Coaster and Owen Hose anchor the line.

On defense, Harrington registered 55 tackles and Peffers 48 from their secondary positions. Houle intercepted four passes. Paul Vanderveen will be a key at linebacker.

**BENZIE CENTRAL**, an independent, appears primed for another successful season, although coach Hal Holman would like to see his team get off to a better start.

Two years ago, the Huskies started 0-2, then won eight straight before bowing in the second round of the playoffs. Last year, Benzie started 1-2, then reeled off seven wins in a row before falling in the second round of the playoffs again.

"That's just the way it's been," Holman said. "Fortunately, as those seasons progressed we kept getting better and better ... and that's what you want to do. But this year I'd like to get out of the gate a little quicker."

The Huskies return a wealth of experience — and talent — in the backfield. Junior John Plumstead (see cover story) has already rushed for nearly 3,000 yards in two varsity seasons.

"He's the real deal," Holman said of his 5-10, 185-pound star.

Fullback Ricky Worm went over 1,000 yards last season. He's a load between the tackles.

"He's a big, strong kid," Holman said. "He's tough to bring down. He runs hard."

Brandon Scott, a 5-10, 180-pound junior, gets overshadowed, but he's a legitimate threat, too.

Those three will run behind a line that includes tight end Alex Forrest, guard Grant Cole and center Randy Evans.

Defensively, Worm is a standout at linebacker. He led the Huskies in tackles last season.

"As good as he is on offense, he's even better on defense," Holman.

Scott also plays linebacker while Plumstead and Craig Gillison are prime time players in the secondary.

After reaching the playoffs last season, **MANISTEE CATHOLIC** welcomes back a wealth of starters in 2002. The Sabers return nine starters on each side of the ball from a 7-3 season, which ended with a loss to Frankfort in the opening round of the playoffs. Catholic was second to Mount Pleasant Sacred Heart in the Mid-State Conference.



Record-Eagle/file photo

## Benzie Central junior John Plumstead hopes to lead the Huskies back into the playoffs.

The one key player lost to graduation is fullback Matt Riggs.

"I think we have a chance to do what we did last year," Manistee Catholic coach Dale Kowalkowski said. "The thing we're working on this year is leadership.

"Our seniors have to step up and be leaders. We lost a lot of that when we lost Matt Riggs to graduation."

With so many starters returning, Kowalkowski said the Sabers may have also lost the element of surprise.

"I think maybe we snuck up on some people last year," Kowalkowski said. "Maybe some people thought we weren't ready to play at that level.

"This year we have a big bull's eye on our back. But I think we'll be ready."

Back to lead the offense for Manistee Catholic is senior quarterback Jonas Berlin. Also back at the offensive skill positions is senior end Dan Gutowski, senior running back Eric Vasquez, senior end Jordan Riffle and sophomore running back Jordan Kowalkowski.

Up front Manistee Catholic welcomes back senior center Brad Kolk, senior guard Mike Linke, junior guard Kyle Riggs and junior tackle Lance Miller.

Junior David Drew will take over at the other tackle spot while junior Dan Kosteci moves into Riggs' spot in the backfield.

On defense the same people return along with junior defensive end Tyler Swidorski.

"The pressure is on us to perform at the level that we did last year," Kowalkowski said.

Manistee Catholic has 30 players out for the program, including 18 on varsity. For the first time in several years, the Sabers will field a junior varsity squad.

"It's a little tough to practice," Kowalkowski said. "We have to practice together as a team. But we have to get the JV going of we're never going to develop these young guys."

**ONEKAMA** went 4-2 in the Mid-State and 4-5 overall a year ago. Coach Jim Hunter welcomes back several key returnees including quarterback David Kehrer, running backs

Tim Brandt and Evan Jach, tight end Kevin Mattson, linemen Patrick Stedman and Jon Sievert and linebacker Keith Zielinski.

"We're putting in new formations on offense and defense," Hunter said. "Our success will depend on how quickly we pick up the new offense.

"We hope to get enough wins to get in the playoffs and be competitive in the conference."

There's a new coach at **BRETHREN** as Jason Kemler takes over after coaching the Mason County Central JVs for one season.

Kemler played two years in college at Albion after a successful career at Dansville High School.

On offense, the Bobcats will install a modified wishbone. Kemler said it's the same offense he ran in high school. It's not a complicated attack, but Kemler said the simplicity can be a tremendous weapon.

"It's more power football, strap it up and go after it," Kemler said. "I've found that it's the easiest way for the kids to learn the offense and to learn the blocking assignments. If you try to confuse the other team, you usually end up confusing yourselves."

Key players in the new Brethren offense will be senior halfback Devon O'Shay and junior fullback Tony Edmondson. Senior Matt Miller will quarterback the squad.

The offensive line is young, with mostly juniors occupying the down positions for Brethren.

On defense, the Bobcats plan to line up a lot of players in the box and utilize a stunting, 4-3 alignment.

Anchoring the Brethren defense will be senior middle linebacker Andrew Shackelford.

"It stops the run and it's tough to pass against, too," Kemler said. "Our safeties have to be real tough along with our corners because they get hung out there."

As far as the season outlook, Kemler said the Bobcats might open a few eyes in 2002.

"We're going to surprise some people," he said. "I'm not going to say we're going all the way to the Dome. But we're going to give a lot of teams a run for their money."

"Hopefully we can put Brethren football back on the map."

**FOREST AREA** is not only a newcomer in the Mid-State, it's a newcomer to football. The school put together a team last year that scrimmaged three area teams. Now, the Warriors are playing for real.

"The kids are sky high," Warriors coach Everett Barlund said. "They've been waiting a long time for this."

Forest Area will play two years in the Mid-State, then switch to the Ski Valley — the league it's affiliated with in all other sports.

Senior quarterback Eric Helsel, senior lineman Robert Morgan and junior running back Adam Seiting will serve as tri-captains.

"The kids are excited to get started," Barlund said. "For some of them, this is the first time they've put a helmet on. I don't know what to expect."

"But this is not only new to the players, it's new to the coaches as well. None of us have coached at the high school level before."

As far as retirement goes, Roger Smith hasn't has much time for hunting, fishing and golf.

The former head coach at Mendon goes into his 25th year in football as the new head coach at **MANISTEE**.

"I came up here to fish, hunt and play golf," said Smith, who retired from teaching in 1994. "I've been coaching ever since."

Smith, who helped coach the Onekama JV team in 1994, takes over a team that has gone 1-17 in the last two seasons. The Chippewas didn't win a game in 2001 — at varsity, JV or junior high — and finished last in the Western Waterways Activities West Division.

"My goal when I took the job was to at least make an improvement," said Smith, who was the head coach at Mendon for nine seasons and won a state title in 1982. "We've been trying real hard."

The Chippewas have 19 players on the varsity squad, which includes just seniors and juniors.

The problem is Manistee faces seven teams that made the playoffs