

Uncharted territory

TC West gears up for school's first-ever playoff run

By **JEFF PEEK**
Record-Eagle staff writer

TRAVERSE CITY — It was a long time coming.

Too long, if you ask Traverse City West coach Matt Prisk.

So Prisk and Titans' defensive coordinator Jerry Angers didn't waste any time preparing for Friday's Division I football playoff game against Bay City Central — the first in TC West history.

Within an hour of Sunday's announcement that the Titans (8-1) would host the Wolves (7-2) at Thirlby Field, Prisk and Angers were on the road to meet Bay City Central's coaches and exchange game tapes.

Angers hooked up a television in his truck and another assistant drove home so Prisk and Angers could begin dissecting the Wolves immediately.

"It shouldn't have taken this long," Prisk said of the Titans' breakthrough season. "We've been right there knocking on the door and just haven't gotten in.

WHO: Bay City Central (7-2) vs. Traverse City West (8-1)

WHAT: Division I playoff opener

WHEN: Friday, 7:30 p.m.

WHERE: Thirlby Field, TC

RADIO: WTCM AM-580

UP NEXT: Winner of Rockford/Muskegon

TC West results

TC West 21, Grand Haven 6

TC West 27, Reeths Puffer 7

TC West 49, Cheboygan 7

TC West 46, Cadillac 0

TC West 36, Sault Ste. Marie 0

TC West 28, Petoskey 6

TC West 27, Alpena 7

Gaylord 21, TC West 14

TC West 31, TC Central 0

"You look back to our first year (1996) when we went 7-2," he said. "Our losses were to Lapeer West and Midland Dow. Both were close and both were controversial. If we'd have won either one of those games, we'd have qualified (and under the current playoff system they would have qualified automatically with their sixth victory).

"The next year we lost three close games and the last two

years we went 5-4. All you need is one, and we didn't get the one we needed.

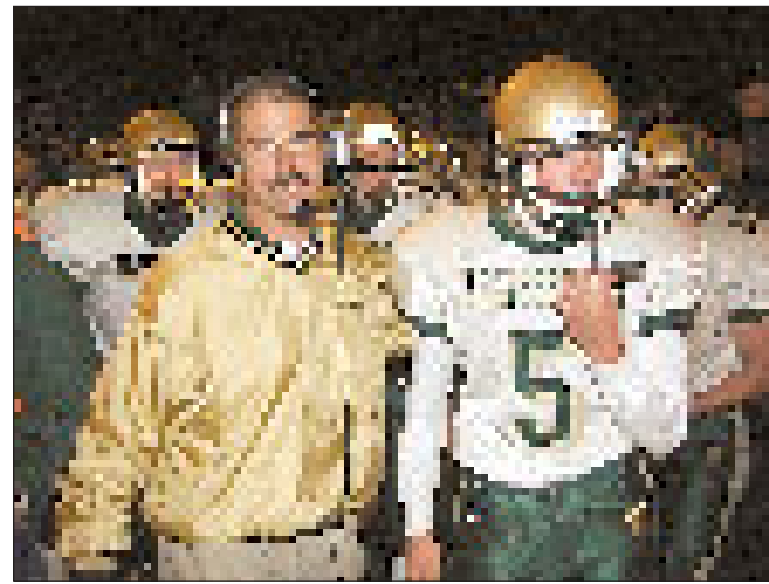
"I think everyone involved with this program believes we should have made the playoffs before this, but the fact is we didn't. We're in now, though, and we have to take advantage of the opportunity."

The last time a TC public school qualified for the MHSAA football playoffs was in 1991, five years before the split when TC Central was known simply as TC High School. That was the Trojans' final season under legendary coach Jim Ooley.

"I'm happy for West," Ooley said. "Making the playoffs is an exciting time.

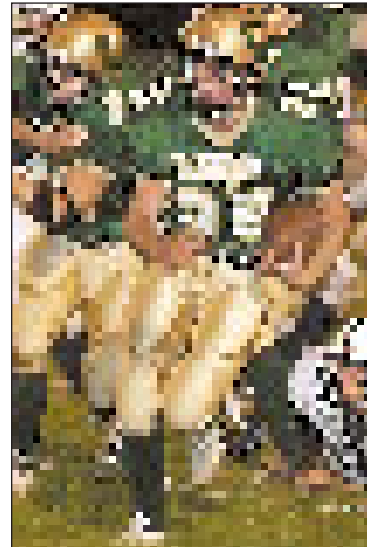
"I'm looking forward to the year when both (West and Central) make it. I sure hope to see that day."

Ooley, whose teams qualified for the playoffs seven times and won three titles in a 17-year span, said the old playoff system — which he helped create in 1975 — was more exclusive than the cur-



Record-Eagle/file photos

Above, Titans coach Matt Prisk works the sidelines during a recent game. At right, West RB John Schumacher (25) breaks the line of scrimmage against Sault Ste. Marie.



rent one. But it wasn't necessarily better.

"It's really changed," Ooley said. "Your chances are so much better now. You couldn't afford to lose a game when we first started.

"We tested the points system the season before the playoffs

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