

Instant replay

Benzie Central makes familiar dash to the postseason

By DENNIS CHASE
Record-Eagle sports editor

BENZONIA — After a tough start, Benzie Central is heading into the football playoffs under a full head of steam.

Sound familiar?

Two years ago, the Huskies started the season 0-2, then won eight straight before losing 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.

This season, coach Hal Holman's team dropped its season-opener to St. Francis,

then rattled off eight consecutive wins.

At 8-1, Benzie earned the No. 1 seed in its Division V district.

"We seem to be peaking," Holman said. "In the last three or four years, we've struggled early, but then we've got better week by week. That happened again this year.

"I don't know why we struggle early, but I'm glad we're peaking now."

The Huskies battle Kalkaska in a district opener Friday night. The two teams met less than a month ago with Benzie racing to a 56-20 win. In that game, halfback John Plumstead rushed for



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file photo

Ricky Worm (34) and the rest of the Huskies have won eight straight games after a season-opening loss.

222 yards and four touchdowns in 11 carries. Plumstead had scoring runs of 61, 61, 51 and 1 yards. He also tossed a 36-yard touchdown pass.

Plumstead rushed for nearly 1,600 yards this season — averaging over 13 yards per carry — and he has close to 4,600 yards in his career. He set the school career rushing record earlier this year — and he's just a junior.

"He's an outstanding back," Holman said. "I couldn't be happier for him."

But the Huskies have a couple other threats in the backfield, notably Ricky Worm and Craig Gillison. Gillison had an 80-yard kickoff return for a touchdown in the Kalkaska game.

The 5-foot-11, 215-pound Worm is a power runner and is Benzie's top defender. The senior linebacker has more than 100 tackles despite missing almost three games with an injured ankle.

"He's at full strength now," Holman said.

Brandon Scott, a linebacker, and Plumstead, a safety, are also stalwarts on defense.

Kalkaska, meanwhile, rebounded from that loss to win its final two games and make the playoffs for the first time in school history with a 6-3 record.

"We're excited to be a part of history," Blazers coach Kevin Taylor said. "We're finally going to experience the post-season."

Actually, Kalkaska has been in a playoff mode the last two weeks.

"We approached each of the last two games as playoff games," Taylor said. "We knew if we lost our season was over."

In last Friday's playoff-clinching 57-8 win over Harbor Springs, Drew Gillespie, Ty Leitow and Jamie Gilbert ran for two touchdowns apiece while Adam Jenkins connected with Zach Heller on two touchdown passes.

"Kalkaska has a nice football team," Holman said. "They have some good backs. I'm really impressed with Gillespie. They also have a good quarterback who can throw the ball. Defensively, they're very aggressive."

A year ago, Benzie lost to Boyne City in the second round and it's possible the two teams could meet again for the district title — this time at Benzie.

"That would be fun," Holman said.

Boyne City hosts Calumet on Saturday afternoon.

The Ramblers are 7-2 with their losses coming to St. Francis and St. Ignace. Calumet is 6-3.

In Division VI, McBain and Kingsley will square off in a rematch. The Ramblers beat the Stags 38-8 two weeks ago.

McBain went all the way to the Silverdome last fall, losing to Schoolcraft in the state title game. Although the Ramblers lost some talented players like Dan Bazuin, Andy Bronkema, Trent Mulder and Kyle Gilde, they went 8-1 and won another Highland Conference championship.

"The kids are excited," Ramblers coach Matt McDonald said. "That's what you work so hard for, to get to this position."

"I know a lot of people felt we were going to be down this year. The word was out that we were not going to be that good and some teams were going to get us this year. But these kids have responded."

The Ramblers completely rebuilt their offensive line. But that's nothing new for McDonald.

"In 2000, we lost four of our five linemen to graduation," he said. "Last year all five were seniors. This year, four of the five are seniors."

"We're fortunate in that we've been able to have experienced players up front. In high school, games are won and lost at the line of scrimmage."

Center Kevin Holmes is the

leader on the line. He makes all the line calls.

"He's a very intelligent player," McDonald said.

The lone underclassmen is an up-and-comer — 5-10, 230-pound freshman guard Alex Gilde, Kyle's brother.

"He already benches 300 and squats 400," McDonald said. "He's going to be awfully good in the future."

Three veteran backs run behind that line. Morgan Clairday, Troy Heuker and Andy Gilde are all over 700 yards rushing in McBain's balanced attack.

The 6-1, 220-pound Gilde is the leader defensively from his middle linebacking spot. He's often compared to Bazuin, now on scholarship at Central Michigan.

Junior linebacker Kevin Boven has enjoyed a stellar season, too.

Whittemore-Prescott and Lake City battle in the other district contest. Whittemore-Prescott is unbeaten and ranked No. 1 in the state.

"This has to be one of the toughest districts in the state," McDonald said.

Lake City, meanwhile, is one of the feel-good stories in the playoffs. The Trojans went from 1-8 last season to 7-2.

The difference? "Without a doubt, the kids," Lake City coach Tim Peterson said. "The kids worked hard and did everything we asked. Their work ethic has been incredible."

"And they have such great attitudes. Even during adversity they stuck together. That's been the secret to our success."

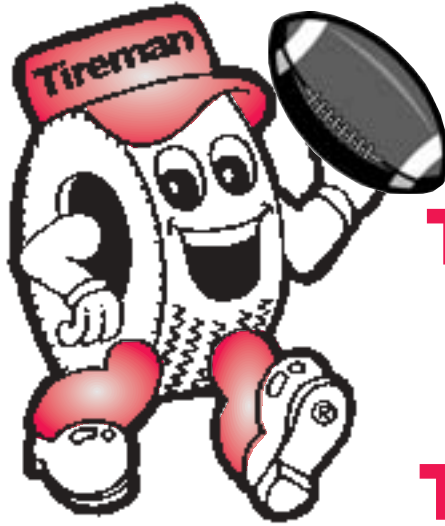
The Trojans are led by junior quarterback Dan Peffers. In last Friday's win over Montabella, he ran for 59 yards and two touchdowns and passed for 150 yards and three scores.

Chris and Steve Harrington are two of his favorite receivers.

Steve Harrington is also a threat running the ball.

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