

Northwest coaches come home, make playoffs

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having some success," said Wooper, in his fourth season as the head coach "In 2000, Joe and I were both lucky to have some athletes come through. You have some success and success breeds success. The younger kids see that and want to be like that."

"It started with just getting kids out," said Trudeau, who is in his fifth season as the head coach. "The first game I ever coached we had 13 kids dressed for the game; now we have 31. It's a lot easier to win with 31 than it is with 13."

"So the first thing we did as a program was try to get more kids and more athletes out. The other thing is that third year we went 8-1 — the second 8-1 year in school history. Having that success, the younger kids see the success of the varsity, it gets more kids interested in the program and it just feeds itself."

Kingsley, which went undefeated in the Northwest Conference, won four more games this season than in 2001. Wooper credits senior leadership with the turnaround this fall.

Wooper said that was especially evident after the Stags lost to McBain 38-8 in the eighth week of the regular season.

"We've had great leadership this year," he said. "Even after the loss to McBain, our kids knew they could play better. We had errors throughout the game and we didn't bring our 'A Game' by any means.



Record-Eagle/file photo

Kingsley's Dave Zenner (10) runs for yardage in the Stags' victory over Frankfort earlier this season. Converging on the ballcarrier is Steve Nerg (35) and Matt Lloyd (55).

"By no means are we intimidated by McBain. That game will make us better for the playoffs."

One thing Kingsley has at its disposal this season that it didn't before is a more prolific passing game, engineered by senior quarterback Dave Zenner.

"All season long, people have said this is a whole different team than what we've

had in the past," Wooper said. "Good playoff teams that make long runs are not one-dimensional. I think we have good backs in the backfield, and we can also put it up."

Suttons Bay came into the 2002 campaign with a lot of unproven players. So the goals at first were simple.

"We've been focused on getting better every week," Trudeau said. "We also

haven't put four good quarters of football together yet — four solid quarters. If we're going to win a playoff game, we're going to have to play four quarters, eliminate mistakes, eliminate missed assignments, eliminate penalties and all the things that have hurt us."

Trudeau said the Norse have improved as the season's gone on. Then the Norse took another step ahead when they faced off with Frankfort midway through the regular season.

"Something just clicked against Frankfort," Trudeau said. "We just started playing a lot better as a team and with a lot more emotion than we were the first part of the season."

Frankfort is another team that has grown this season. The Panthers came into the 2002 season with a big group of sophomores playing predominant roles.

Stapleton doesn't think his Panthers have reached the pinnacle of performance either.

"We haven't peaked yet," Stapleton said. "We have been real inconsistent as far as our play. We've won seven games and we're ecstatic about that. However, we have yet to really put together two games in a row."

"The good news is we haven't peaked yet, the bad news is we're running out of time. The last two weeks we've shown improvement — especially in the second half — so we're hoping that translates into a full game."

But if history is any indica-

Kingsley results

- Kingsley 50, Rudyard 12
- Kingsley 58, Elk Rapids 0
- Kingsley 54, Mesick 2
- Kingsley 36, Suttons Bay 22
- Kingsley 24, Manton 6
- Kingsley 34, Glen Lake 10
- Kingsley 34, Frankfort 20
- McBain 38, Kingsley 8
- Kingsley 42, Rogers City 0

Suttons Bay results

- Suttons Bay 55, Elk Rapids 0
- Suttons Bay 48, Marion 22
- Suttons Bay 27, Glen Lake 13
- Kingsley 36, Suttons Bay 22
- Suttons Bay 32, Mesick 0
- Suttons Bay 25, Frankfort 20
- Suttons Bay 34, Manton 16
- Suttons Bay 47, Evart 19
- Suttons Bay 41, Charlevoix 6

Frankfort results

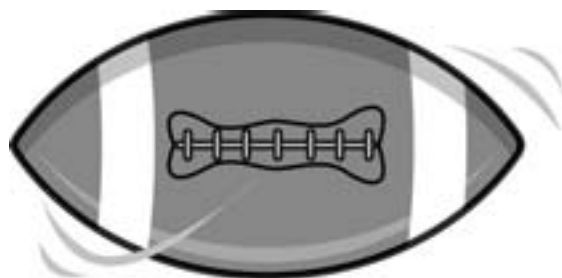
- Frankfort 22, Lake Linden 0
- Frankfort 36, White Cloud 22
- Frankfort 42, Manton 14
- Frankfort 53, Mesick
- Frankfort 14, Glen Lake 8
- Suttons Bay 25, Frankfort 20
- Kingsley 34, Frankfort 20
- Frankfort 28, Rudyard 16
- Frankfort 34, Onekama 0

tion, the Panthers may be in the playoffs for a while. Frankfort's only two losses this fall were to Kingsley and Suttons Bay in the conference.

In 2000, Frankfort also lost to the Stags and Norsemen and went all the way to the semifinals before bowing out.

"It's never good unless you win a conference title," Stapleton said. "But if you can't win the title, you might as well make a run at the big dance."

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