

Manistee Catholic Central enjoys gridiron resurgence

BY DENNIS CHASE

Record-Eagle sports editor

TRAVERSE CITY — Manistee Catholic has enjoyed a resurgence under coach Dale Kowalkowski, qualifying for the playoffs two years in a row.

The goal is to stretch that streak to three.

“We’re excited,” Kowalkowski said. “This is going to be a challenging year for us. We have some new kids in new places. Now we have to see if they can carry the ball and keep it going.”

MANISTEE CATHOLIC went 9-2 last season, reaching the Division VIII district finals. The Sabers returns 20 players

2002 STANDINGS

	Conference			Overall		
	W	L	GB	W	L	
Manistee CC	4	0	—	9	2	
Onkama	3	1	1	4	5	
Baldwin	2	2	2	2	7	
Brethren	1	3	3	3	6	
Forest Area	0	4	4	0	9	

off the squad and is the odds-on favorite to win the Mid-State Conference North Division. The North Division features Catholic, Onkama, Brethren, Forest Area and Baldwin.

Kowalkowski has a veteran line that includes guards David Drew and Kyle Riggs and tackle Lance Miller. The Sabers need to replace some

talented skill players, however.

Sophomore Braden Russell steps in at quarterback, taking over for three-year starter Jonas Berlin.

“He’s a good quarterback,” Kowalkowski said. “He moves well. He throws well.”

Eric Vasquez, who rushed for more than 1,000 yards, also graduated. Picking up the slack will be junior Jordan Kowalkowski, who rushed for 875 yards, and junior Andy Kolanowski, who played mostly on defense last year.

The Sabers will also need to replace All-State end Dan Gutowski. Drawing the assignment will be Danny Kostecki.

“He might not be as smooth (as Gutowski), but he has good hands,” Kowalkowski said.

Miller will anchor the defense from his tackle position. Jeremy Heisey and Tyler Swidorski are also expected to be mainstays on the line. Riggs, Kowalkowski and Kolanowski will back up the line from their linebacking spots.

ONEKAMA went 4-5 in the Mid-State in 2002 — 3-1 against teams in the North Division — and coach Jim Hunter returns eight starters on offense and nine on defense.

“We have a lot of experience, but we had a mediocre season (in 2002),” Hunter said.

“So the question is: How much can we improve?”

Hunter has 19 players on varsity. The offense will be led by quarterback Dustin Thomas, a 6-foot-2, 185-pound junior.

“We switched to the veer last year and had some growing pains with it,” Hunter said.

“That (offense) puts a lot of responsibility on the quarterback. Dustin improved quite a bit during the season. He’s a good athlete. He can make things happen.”

Senior John Revolt (5-8, 160) is the leading rusher returning. He gained over 700 yards last season.

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Benzie Central poised for another run

Huskies reached semifinals in '02

BY MARK URBAN

Record-Eagle staff writer

BENZONIA — The season didn’t start — or end — with a victory.

But it was still a rousing success.

After reaching the semifinals in 2002, **BENZIE CENTRAL** will look to build on that success in 2003.

“We lost the first one and the last one, but a lot of wins in between,” Benzie coach Hal Holman said of the Huskies’ 11-2 mark. “We think that we can use the momentum from last year and carry it over into this year.

“Last season was great; now it’s a whole new year. So we start all over.”

The good news for Benzie is the Huskies aren’t starting completely from scratch. Six starters return on offense and eight on defense — including two-way standout John Plumstead. The senior rushed for more than 2,000 yards in 2002 and with the postseason, intercepted more than 10 passes as a free safety.

Look for Plumstead to carry the offense — and the ball — this season.

“It doesn’t take a coaching genius to know to give the ball to Plumstead,” Holman said. “He’ll get the ball 20-25 times a game.

“It’s no secret. Everyone in northern Michigan knows it. We’re not trying to fool anybody.”

Benzie also has a 1,000-yard rusher to compliment Plumstead in senior Craig Gillison. Taking over at quarterback for Benzie will be senior Kyle McManus.

The Huskies have an experienced line led by senior tackle Mike Eggleston, senior tight end Brandon Scott and senior guards Kile Gray and Jay Lira.

“We’re pretty excited about that,” Holman said of the front seven. “Most of those kids have been doing it a while so they understand the offense, understand our system and they’re a good group of kids.

“That should work well for our offense; we’re pretty experienced up front and they’re athletic.”

Athleticism should be a strong suit for the Huskies this season.

“That’s the theme for us this year,” Holman said. “We have a lot of athletic guys and a lot of guys that can run.”

Among the returning starters on defense for Benzie are senior nose guard Chad Knapp, senior defensive tackle Ryan

Stroup, senior defensive end Brent Strom, linebackers Preston Bellows and Scott, Plumstead and Gillison at safety and senior cornerback Ty Ullom.

The one big loss for the Huskies was linebacker Ricky Worm, who graduated.

“Worm is the key,” Holman said. “I don’t think we’ll find anyone to replace him so we’ve got to play more of a total team concept a little more instead of relying on that one stud that we did last year.

“Worm is as good a linebacker as we’ve ever had here so saying one person can replace him is like saying one person can replace Plumstead next year.

“We do have a lot of returning starters, a lot of experience, a lot of athleticism and guys that can fly to the ball. We’re pretty excited about our defense.”

After qualifying for the playoffs for the second time in school history, **LAKE CITY** is ready for the 2003 campaign after going 7-3 and finishing third in the Highland Conference in 2002.

The Trojans return nine starters on offense and eight on defense.

“We’ve got a lot of kids returning,” third-year Lake City coach Tim Peterson said. “We have some high expectations.

Success breeds success and what we try to do is build that

into our offseason training program and we’ve already seen that.

“We’re much more physical and a lot stronger than we have been.”

Leading the offensive returnees is senior Dan Peffers, a three-year starter at quarterback who passed for 1,000 yards and rushed for 500 more.

Joining Peffers in the backfield will be senior Dennis Lizotte and junior Chris Harrington. Junior tight end Brandon McGiness returns as does his brother, senior wide receiver Thad McGiness.

Starters returning on the offensive line include senior left tackle Troy Hill, sophomore right tackle Kris Bilyea, junior center Roddie Helsel and senior right guard Owen Hose.

Among the returning defensive starters are linebackers Hose and Harrington and cornerbacks Lizotte and Peffers. On the defensive line are senior nose Matt Wade, senior end Paul Vanderveen, Bilyea and Brandon McGiness.

“With a little luck we can have a good season,” Peterson said. “We have to stay healthy, like every other team, and we have to get a lucky bounce a few times, like every other team. We’re cautiously optimistic.”

After winning the Highland Conference a year ago, **McBAIN** has new coach for the 2003 sea-

son. Paul Siembida, a defensive back at Grand Valley State University for four years, takes the reins.

McBain returns just a handful of starters on both sides of the ball from last season’s 9-2 team.

“My expectation is that they play hard and work hard,” said Siembida, the defensive coordinator at St. Joseph last season. “As we get battled-tested, everything else should fall into place.”

Senior quarterback Luke Bronkema, senior fullback Kevin Boven, senior tight end Chad Nederhood and sophomore guard Alex Gilde lead the offense.

On defense, senior Nathan Farr and Boven return as linebackers with Gilde on the line. Senior Shaun Mulder and Bronkema return to the defensive backfield.

“The senior class has been great leaders,” Siembida said. “They’ve bought into the new system and the rest have followed.

“Hopefully we’re playing our best football in week 7-8-9 and have a chance at the playoffs.”

MANISTEE is trying to overcome back-to-back winless seasons. The Chippewas will need to get their offense going in the Western Waterways.

Manistee scored more than one touchdown in just two of its nine contests last season.