

Sabers' hopes still high in '04

Roster numbers low at Manistee Catholic

BY DENNIS CHASE

Record-Eagle sports editor

TRAVERSE CITY — Numbers are down, but hopes are high at **MANISTEE CATHOLIC CENTRAL**.

Although coach Dale Kowalkowski has only 18 players out — and no JV team — the Sabers return some key personnel off a 10-1 team and rate as the favorite in the North Division of the Mid-State Conference.

“We have some good, solid ballplayers,” Kowalkowski said. “I’m excited about what we’ve got. I just wish we had a few more (players).”

Catholic, which runs the wing-T offense, averaged nearly 38 points a game a year ago.

The Sabers had a potent ground game with Jordan Kowalkowski and Andy Kolanowski rushing for more than 3,200 yards.

Kowalkowski, who gained 1,800 yards, earned first-team All-State honors. Kolanowski, who picked up 1,400 yards, was honorable mention All-State as a linebacker.

“Those two are obviously keys on both sides of the ball,” Dale Kowalkowski said. “What they did on offense last year was pretty impressive.”

The Sabers also welcome back junior quarterback Braden Russell.

“He has a year under his belt,” Dale Kowalkowski said. “He went to some passing camps this summer and he’s throwing the ball well.”

Russell will be throwing to receivers Mike Pappas and Gabe Janowiak. Pappas is one of four players on the team from Freesoil, which co-ops with Catholic.

“He’s a good athlete ... and has a great set of hands,” Kowalkowski said.

Sophomore Rob Buss, another Freesoil student, will start at fullback.

2003 STANDINGS

	North Division Conference			Overall	
	W	L	GB	W	L
Manistee CC	4	0	-	10	1
Baldwin	3	1	1	3	6
Brethren	2	2	2	3	6
Onkama	1	3	3	3	6
Forest Area	0	4	4	0	9

The Sabers were hit hard by graduation on the line, but Kowalkowski is confident in that unit’s ability.

The line will be anchored by 230-pound center Zach Steinberg, who added some quickness by dropping 30 pounds. Dan Fischer and Jim Sonsmith will operate at guards while Doug Fischer — Dan’s twin — and Jonathan Blakeslee will start at tackles.

Defensively, Kowalkowski is concerned about stopping the run. He might move his son Jordan from linebacker to nose guard.

“He has good quickness and would give us a good rush up the middle,” Dale Kowalkowski said.

Kolanowski and Sonsmith are expected to be mainstays at linebackers.

“He (Kolanowski) runs like a deer,” Kowalkowski said.

A year ago, Catholic qualified for the playoffs for the third consecutive season and advanced to the Division 8 district finals before losing to Frankfort 46-26.

“Our goal is to get back to that game and take another shot at it,” Kowalkowski said.

Kowalkowski has beefed up the schedule this season to better prepare his team — if it makes the playoffs.

Of the 11 teams Catholic played last season, only four had winning records.

The Sabers have added St. Joseph Lake Michigan Catholic (9-1) and Vestaburg (7-3) and dropped Montabella (2-7) and Forest Area (0-9).

ONEKAMA is looking to improve on a 3-6 campaign. The Portagers were 1-3 in the

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