

NWC

Coaches: Panthers are the favorites

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I think that kind of describes us both offensively and defensively.

"We had a good JV team, but it's a matter of how fast they grow up because they have to."

SUTTONS BAY also has some growing up to do, particularly on defense. The Norsemen return just three starters on defense from a team that yielded just 44 points in the regular season.

"I'd say we've got a lot of work to do on defense," said Suttons Bay coach Joe Trudeau, whose team ran the table in the Northwest en route to the school's first-ever 9-0 regular season. "We have a lot of kids to train and a lot of kids to replace."

"That was probably the key to our success last year was having so much experience back on defense."

Last year we were real young on offense and experienced

on defense and this year it's kind of the other way around. Our defense really has to grow up quick, mature, play together and learn their assignments quickly."

Junior tackle Elliott Gallagher anchors the defensive line for Suttons Bay. Also back are senior cornerback Kyle Korson and senior Matt Schlueter, who will move from defensive end to safety.

Suttons Bay runs a 5-3 base defense, but loves to mix it up.

"We try to run every look in the book," Trudeau said. "We definitely like to confuse and attack on defense out of every set."

More starters return on offense including four of the five interior line positions with seniors Matt Hartman (center), Dalton Drow (guard), Scott Rees (tackle) and Andrew Krantz (tackle).

"We lost both our ends, which were probably the best combination of ends we've ever had," Trudeau said. "So we may need to rely on our running game more, so it's good to have our interior guys back."

Suttons Bay ran the ball by committee last season and three of those top five return. Senior J.C. Guillen led the Norsemen with 600 yards in 2003.

Also back to run the ball are seniors Korson and Jimmie Stewart. Schlueter will take over as quarterback for the Norse.

"Probably the one spot we have good depth is in the backfield," Trudeau said. "You have to have a couple threats back there."

Returning a bevy of experienced players on both sides of the ball is **GLEN LAKE**.

The Lakers are coming off a 5-4 campaign that would have been a playoff appearance with a season-ending victory over Mio.

"It's got real good team chemistry," coach Aaron Heming said of his squad. "The boys are really working hard. They have a desire to be better than they did last year. They want to win this league and get back to the playoffs."

Among the starters returning on offense for Glen Lake are senior fullback Nick Florip, senior halfback Alex Wiesen, senior tackles Brian and Glenn Reinerson, senior guard Andy Girrell and senior tight end Andrew Milliron.

Sophomore halfback Weston Buchan also started the final two games for the Lakers.

Junior Brooks Bunbury takes over as Glen Lake's starting quarterback, moving over from wide receiver.

Bunbury is also one of the top kickers in the area.

Florip, Wiesen, Milliron, Girrell and Reinerson twins also started on defense.

Heming said the linebackers — Florip, Brian Reinerson, Girrell and Buchan — should shine.

"Those linebackers are pretty good," he said. "That's the key to the defense, getting those guys moving."

MANTON also thinks it has its most athletic linebacking corps in senior Kyle Harmon, junior Blake Allen and junior Rusty Eadie.

"I think we're going to be OK defensively," Manton coach Jim Smart said. "We're going to be young, but we'll be more athletic than we have been the last couple of years."

Other returning defensive starters for the Rangers are senior end Alex Lutke, who was a linebacker last season, and senior tackles Joe Mendoza and Chad Weston.

Mendoza and Weston are also back as the starting right-side of the offensive line. They are also the lone offensive starters back for Manton, coming off a one-win season in 2003.

"We're going to be real young on the offensive side of the ball," Smart said.

Harmon and junior Joel

Stahl give Manton a pair of options at fullback. Allen and junior Tony Larr will either play quarterback or tailback.

Also coming off a 1-8 season is **MESICK**.

The Bulldogs also have a small roster with just 14 players.

"We're real thin, but it's looking up," Mesick coach Tom Lipke said. "Next year we'll have a pretty good turnout."

"The kids that are out want to play and that's half the battle."

Mesick returns six senior starters on offense in tackles Lee Kessler and Jessie Carlson, guard Tug Albertson, center Joe Grabowski and running backs Joey Bartlett and Steve Fuller.

New varsity seniors include quarterback Aaron Kearns, running back Pete Simerson and wide receiver Caleb Martin.

Mesick runs a veer attack on offense and plans to switch to a rare 3-5-3 set on defense.

"We have a lot of linebacker-type kids," Lipke said. "We're not real big, but we're quick and that seemed to fit the bill well."

"We'll have one, two or three linebackers blitz on every play. It's an attacking defense."

MSAC

Manistee Catholic in a numbers crunch

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North Division.

Coach Jim Hunter's offense will be directed by senior quarterback Dustin Thomas. A three-year starter, Thomas earned all-conference honors a year ago.

"If you're going to have experience, that's a nice place to have it," Hunter said. "Dustin had a solid junior year. He did a nice job running the team. Now he has a better grasp of our (veer) offense and we'll be able to do even more."

Senior Tom Gillespie is the top running back returning. He was Onekama's second leading

ground gainer in 2003, rushing for just under 500 yards.

Tackle Brandon Hilliard, guard John Yonker and center Brett Cronkite are veterans on the line.

Defensively, Yonker and Hilliard will lead the way up front with Cronkite returning at inside linebacker.

Hunter will be assisted by two veteran former head coaches — Jim Taylor and Tim Klein. Taylor, who started the football program at Onekama in the 1960s, will run the defense. Klein, who led Frankfort to two state titles, will coordinate the offense.

"Tim will help speed up our learning curve (running the veer)," Hunter said.

Hunter, who succeeded Taylor in 1989, said Manistee Catholic is the team to beat in the league.

"They have two great running backs, who both went over 1,000 yards as juniors," he

said. "That's scary."

The Portagers will play an eight-game schedule. They will be idle on the opening weekend. Hunter, who sticks to a one-a-day practices in the pre-season, said that gives his team more time to prepare.

"Under the old format we used to have four weeks (of preseason practice)," he said. "But when they (MHSAA) expanded the playoffs, it was cut to three. I just feel we'll be a lot better prepared (with four weeks)."

"I figure if you're good enough to win five games (and qualify for the playoffs), then you're going to get a ninth game."

BRETHREN finished third in the Mid-State last season. The Bobcats were 3-6 overall.

Third-year coach Jason Kemler is eager to kick off the 2004 campaign.

"Our expectations are high. Team morale is high," he said.



Record-Eagle file photo
Manistee Catholic's Andy Kolanowski (44) tries to find a way past Frankfort's Dane Colby when the team's met in last year's playoffs.

"We're anxious to get going."

The Bobcats return a cast that includes linemen Jon Peterson and Jason Dean, tight end-linebacker Alex Sexton, fullback-linebacker Aaron Momber and back Justin Verville. Sophomore Michael

Bennett takes over at quarterback.

Brethren has 23 players on varsity.

"We're young, but we have a lot of depth compared to previous years," Kemler said. "We have a lot to play with."