

## Lake Michigan conference

### 2004 Standings

	League		Overall	
	W	L	W	L
TCSF	7	0	8	2
Grayling	6	1	8	2
Charlevoix	5	2	5	4
Boyne City	4	3	7	4
East Jordan	3	4	4	5
Elk Rapids	2	5	4	5
Kalkaska	1	6	1	8
Harbor Spr.	0	7	0	9

### Coaches' Poll

No. 1 votes in parenthesis

Team	Points
1. TC St. Francis (7)	63
2. Grayling (1)	55
3. Boyne City	46
4. Charlevoix	41
5. East Jordan	34
6. Elk Rapids	20
7. Kalkaska	18
8. Harbor Springs	11

### Players to watch

Chad Biggar, TC St. Francis  
Patrick Rigan, TC St. Francis  
Bobby Starks, Grayling  
Joey Bancroft, Grayling  
Grant Ameel, Boyne City



Chad Biggar led the Gladiators in rushing a year ago, racking up 817 yards and averaging 7.4 yards per carry despite battling injuries. He sat out the final regular season game with a sore ankle, but still paced St. Francis with 14 touchdowns.

#### 1. TC ST. FRANCIS

**Coach:** Josh Sellers  
**2004:** 7-0 in the Lake Michigan, 8-2 overall

**Key Players Returning:** Chad Biggar, Patrick Rigan, Hunter Nostrant, Bill Auxier, Dane Moeggenberg, Egan Quinn, Jacob McManus

**Top Newcomers:** Ben Wheelock, Cory Murphy, Pat Deering

**Outlook:** See preview story.

#### 2. GRAYLING

**Coach:** Ben Brock  
**2004:** 6-1 in LMC, 8-2 overall

**Key Players Returning:** WR Eli Van Nuck (5-9, 165 Sr.), QB Bobby Starks (6-2, 210 Sr.), RB Joey Bancroft (5-9, 185 Sr.), DB/WR Zac Baker (5-11, 185 Sr.), DL/OL Matt Larson (6-2, 270 Sr.)

**Top Newcomers:** DB/WR Jeff Bancroft (Jr.)

**Outlook:** The Vikings are looking for more after last year's breakout season grabbed the attention of the community — and the Lake Michigan Conference — and ended in the Division 5 playoffs. There's plenty to be excited about again, with the return of three talented skill players — Van Nuck, Starks and Bancroft — all of whom were mentioned by league coaches as players to watch this season.

Van Nuck hauled in 35 passes for 700-plus yards and 15 touchdowns. Starks passed for 1,400 yards and 17 scores. And Bancroft rambled for 1,230 yards and 15 TDs. All three earned all-conference honors.

Starks will have to work behind an inexperienced line — the Vikings lost four of their five starting linemen — which Brock believes will increase Grayling's air time.

"We're looking to throw a lot," he said. "We'll have to."

Brock believes his team will be joined by Boyne City, Charlevoix and East Jordan in chasing St. Francis.

"We go out there to win every game," Brock said. "We'll try to dethrone (the Gladiators), but they're going to be tough. They have such a good program."

#### 3. BOYNE CITY

**Coach:** Dave Hills  
**2004:** 4-3 in LMC, 7-4 overall

**Key Players Returning:** FB/LB Will Brown (5-11, 205 Sr.), QB/DE Grant Ameel (6-1, 185), T Aaron Rostar (6-2, 260 Sr.), C Kevin Beaton (6-0, 210 Sr.), G/LB Sean Mills (5-9, 210 Sr.), TE/LB Tyler Kruzal (6-3, 200), DE Evan Conklin (6-3, 190 Sr.)

**Top Newcomers:** WR/FS Taylor Voice (6-0, 170 Jr.), G/LB Nick Simeri (5-10, 200 Soph.), DE Scott Morrow (6-0, 190 Sr.), SE/DB Robby Jensen (6-0, 165 Soph.)

**Outlook:** It was a good news-bad news season for the Ramblers. They made the playoffs and beat Pine River in their district opener, but they were eliminated by Suttons Bay in the Division 6 district title game — and they weren't as big of a factor in the Lake Michigan Conference that they had hoped to be. That could all

change this fall, when Boyne returns Brown and Ameel in the backfield and four starters on the line.

"It's always a good feeling going into the season with some knowns on both sides," Hills said.

Looking to the league race, Hills sees St. Francis and Grayling as the favorites, but likes the overall quality of the conference, which for the first time in years did not see any turnover in the coaching ranks.

"It's similar to last year in that there's balance to it," Hills said. "The top four or five teams are relatively close, and the whole league is improving overall."

"I think coaching stability has a lot to do with it. Programs are starting to establish themselves."

#### 4. CHARLEVOIX

**Coach:** Don Jess  
**2004:** 5-2 in LMC, 5-4 overall

**Key Players Returning:** LB/OT Jeff Golovich (6-3, 200 Sr.), WR/SS Eddie Waldron (6-3, 190 Sr.), RB/DE Russel Williams (5-10, 175 Sr.), C/NG Ray Jones (5-10, 240 Jr.)

**Top Newcomers:** QB/FS Matt Kantz (Jr.), WR Matt Kline (Jr.), CB Cliff Jones (Soph.), RB/OLB Kyle Jones (Soph.)

**Outlook:** Despite a 5-2 record in the league, good enough for third place, the Rayders failed to make the playoffs last season after losing their two non-conference games.

If that is going to change this fall, Golovich will have plenty to say about it. The two-year captain is entering his third season as a starting linebacker. He has 150 career tackles.

Offensively, Kantz has a couple of solid threats at his disposal. Waldron had 25 receptions a year ago, and Williams rushed for 600 yards. Both will have to turn it up a notch for Charlevoix to reach the playoffs.

Jones, the strongest player on the team, anchors the line.

#### 5. EAST JORDAN

**Coach:** Kris Ernst  
**2004:** 3-4 in LMC, 4-5 overall  
**Key Players Returning:** WR/DB Andrew Streufert (6-0, 175 Sr.), FB/LB Josh Cooper (5-9, 210 Sr.), WR Chad Kraemer (6-2, 185 Sr.)

**Top Newcomers:** TB David Marr (6-0, 170 Jr.)

**Outlook:** Looking for a dark horse in the Lake Michigan Conference? This could be the team. One league coach pointed to the strides that Ernst has made in his first two seasons at East Jordan and predicted that the Red Devils would become a factor in the league race this fall.

Ernst isn't ready to go out on a limb, but he likes what he sees.

"We have a senior-dominated group, and when this team was together on JV they were 6-1 before I pulled up the quarterback and full-back," he said. "They've been successful. They hope for it and expect it."

Newcomer Marr ran for 1,400 yards on junior varsity last year and could carry the rushing load this season.



Record-Eagle file photo/Douglas Tesner

**Elk Rapids vs. St. Francis in 2004. The teams face each other again Oct. 8.**

He'll be helped by an experienced line.

"We're experienced, but we're not big," Ernst said. "It will all come down to how well we open holes and protect the quarterback."

#### 6. ELK RAPIDS

**Coach:** Josh Merchant  
**2004:** 2-5 in LMC, 4-5 overall

**Key Players Returning:** DB/HB Charlie Smith (5-6, 150 Jr.), G/LB John Luckett (6-1, 225), G/LB Justin Webb (6-0, 210 Jr.)

**Top Newcomers:** HB/DB Cory William (6-0, 170 Sr.), SE/DE Nathan Yankee (6-2, 190 Sr.), G/LB Brandon Ishant (5-9, 165 Jr.)

**Outlook:** Merchant, entering his third season as head coach, has breathed life into the Elks' program. When he took over, Elk Rapids had 17 players — that's varsity and JV combined — and two Pop Warner youth teams. This fall, the varsity and JV squads each have 30 players and Pop Warner is so popular in Elk Rapids that the town has five teams to accommodate everyone.

"Expectations are rising," Merchant said. "Our four wins last year equaled our total since 2000."

"Our numbers are way up, and that's exciting."

#### 7. KALKASKA

**Coach:** Kevin Taylor  
**2004:** 1-6 in LMC, 1-8 overall

**Key Players Returning:** QB Aaron Swoverland (5-11, 160 Sr.), TE Tim Dixon (6-0, 200 Jr.), TE Andrew Vandergriff (6-0, 200 Sr.), T Nick Higgins (5-11, 230 Jr.), G Aaron McCullan (5-10, 210 Jr.), LB Zack Berthalot (5-10, 185 Sr.), DT Bill Smith (5-11, 190 Sr.), RB Justin Oliviria (5-8, 150 Sr.)

**Top Newcomers:** Wing-B Ryan Lietow (Jr.), DB Alex Swoverland (Jr.), RB/LB Jake Heller (Soph.), RB/LB Cory Wilson (Soph.)

**Outlook:** Taylor enters his 20th season as the Blazers' head coach with

one main goal — to be competitive.

"I think we can," Taylor said. "The first half of our schedule is pretty tough. We play non-conference games at Pine River and Roscommon, open the league at home against Harbor (Springs) then play at St. Francis and home against Grayling."

"If can get through that stretch healthy, I think we can finish strong."

Taylor has a number of returnees, plus he said his team's overall numbers and size are both up.

"We have eight or nine guys over 200 pounds," Taylor said. "By our standards, that's huge."

#### 8. HARBOR SPRINGS

**Coach:** Don Twiss  
**2004:** 0-7 in LMC, 0-9 overall

**Key Players Returning:** G Mitch Darnton (5-9, 170 Sr.), T Justin Foster (6-0, 185 Sr.), FB Josh Mallory (5-9, 195 Sr.)

**Top Newcomers:** HB Josh Vandermus (6-0, 180 Jr.), C Ron Shock (6-0, 295 Jr.)

**Outlook:** Times have been tough for Harbor Springs, but Jess hopes the football program may finally be turning.

"The program is really down. What I'm looking for is improvement," Jess said. "I'd like to see us be competitive."

"We're going to have to win some games to increase participation. Sure, it's fun to play, but you have to win to keep kids involved."

Foster has moved from tight end to tackle to help shore up the Rams' offensive line, but Harbor Springs' lack of experience — only three returning seniors — may be tough to overcome.

Shock will be a nice addition because of his size and agility. Twiss, who is in his 31st year of coaching (second at Harbor), calls Shock "the best big kid I've ever coached."

"His overall athleticism is better than most kids that size," Twiss said.