

More previews

McBain
Coach: Paul Siembida
2004: 3-2 in the Highland Conference, 8-4 overall
Key Players Returning: L Alex Gilde (5-11, 275), L Steven Michalak (6-3, 220), L Ryan Eisenga (6-3, 335).
Key Newcomers: TE-LB Ryan Yonkman (6-2, 190), QB Justin Sluiter (6-0, 165).
Outlook: See page 11

Lake City
Coach: Tim Peterson
2004: 2-3 in the Highland, 4-5 overall
Key Players Returning: QB-DB Kevin Siler, L Kris Bilyea, RB-LB Lance Morris, L Kevin Hill, WR-DB James Bloomfield.
Key Newcomers: RB-DB Dean Wheeler, L-LB Abe VanDuinen, RB-LB CJ Durkie, L Ethan Brown.
Outlook: Coach Tim Peterson expects his team to rebound — the Trojans were a playoff team in 2003 — and contend in the Highland Conference.
“I’m excited about the season,” he said. “We’re young, but we’re athletic. If we can stay healthy, I think we can be competitive. And that’s our real goal — to be competitive each and every week.”
Peterson thinks McBain will be the team to beat.

“(McBain) lost some skill players, but they’re real good up front,” Peterson said. “When you have good linemen you can make average (skill) players look good.”
Lake City has a top lineman, too, in tackle Kris Bilyea.

Manistee Catholic
Coach: Dale Kowalkowski
2004: 3-0 in the Mid-State Conference, 8-3 overall
Key Players Returning: QB Braden Russell (5-11, 180), RB Robert Buss (5-11, 190), RB-E Gabe Janowiak (6-0, 175), T Ben Blakeslee (6-1, 195), T Josh Ludwig (6-2, 200).
Key Newcomers: E Dusty Claeys (5-10, 160), G Dave Kaminski (5-10, 165).
Outlook: Dale Kowalkowski has turned the Manistee Catholic program around (four consecutive play-off berths) but he enters the 2005 campaign without Jordan Kowalkowski — a two-time all-State back, who is now at the Air Force Academy — and Andy Kolanowski. Catholic will build around quarterback Braden Russell, a three-year starter, and running back Robert Buss.
The Sabers will dress 21 players, including nine freshmen, as they hope to repeat in the Mid-State Conference.
“The kids know they’ll have to work hard to make things happen,” Dale Kowalkowski said.

Onekama
Coach: Jim Hunter
2004: 2-1 in the Mid-State Conference, 2-6 overall
Key Players Returning: G John Yonkers (5-10, 165), G-LB Jordan Kozelka (5-10, 160), RB-DB Dave Gillespie (5-9, 155), RB-LB J.J. Randall (5-9, 160), WR-DB Anthony Reedy (6-3, 175).
Outlook: Coach Jim Hunter has some top individuals back. Offensively, junior Dave Gillespie rushed for more than 600 yards last season while sophomore Anthony Reedy was the team’s top receiver. Defensively, sophomore JJ Randall averaged 6.5 tackles per game.
“We’re looking to improve over last year,” Hunter said. “We were awful young last year. We played a lot of freshmen and sophomores.
“We only have two seniors on the team. We’re counting on our young guys to step up and continue to improve and I think they will.”
Onekama has experience in the skill positions. The Portagers return three of their top four running backs and three of their best receivers. Onekama also has three linebackers back.
“Defensively, we’re quick and I hope that quickness serves us well because we’re not terribly big,” Hunter said.

Benzie Central
Coach: Kevin Kennedy

2004: 7-3
Key Players Returning: QB Jay Teegardin, RB Sonny Spolyar, RB Brent Prielipp, T Jeremy Knapp.
Key Newcomers: RB Conner Nugent.
Outlook: Kevin Kennedy replaces Hal Holman at the helm. Holman, who turned Benzie into a perennial playoff contender, left to take the head coaching job at Muskegon Oakridge. Kennedy coached Benzie’s JV team for the last 10 seasons.
“I’m excited for the opportunity,” Kennedy said, “but I kind of had my varsity baptism in our scrimmage (last Friday). Things happen a lot faster at this level.”
Kennedy returns veteran leadership in the backfield with Brent Prielipp and Sonny Spolyar. Jay Teegardin will start at quarterback.
“We have a pretty good team, but we’re young,” he said. “Not playing in a conference, you’re kind of in the unknown. We have some work to do yet.”

Manistee
Coach: Gus Kapolka
2004: 4-5
Key Players Returning: TE-MLB Jaron Oleniczak (6-4, 205), FB-DB Kenny Kott (5-7, 160), QB-RB-LB Drew Czarnecki (6-1, 215), TE Ryan Erdman (6-4, 210).
Key Newcomers: RB-DB Dylan Tyron (5-9, 170), QB-DB Jake Kiss

(5-10, 175), T Andrew Tighe (6-4, 275).
Outlook: Manistee snapped a 33-game losing streak at mid-season, then nearly made the playoffs in coach Gus Kapolka’s first year at the helm.
“I was really proud of our kids,” Kapolka said. “Our seniors had never won a game before.”
Kapolka returns some talent, too. And he’s making a key switch by moving last year’s starting quarterback Drew Czarnecki to halfback.
“He’s a big, strong physical runner,” Kapolka said.
Czarnecki will be paired with Kenny Kott in the backfield. Kott rushed for 734 yards and six touchdowns last season.
Junior Jake Kiss takes over at quarterback. When he’s not handing the ball to Czarnecki, Kott and junior Dylan Tyron, he’ll look to pass to his two big tight ends — Jaron Oleniczak and Ryan Erdman.
Oleniczak spearheads the defense from his middle linebacking post.
“He has great range and good instincts,” Kapolka said. “He led us in tackles, interceptions, fumble recoveries and tackles for loss yardage.”
The Chippewas will play in the Western Waterways this season. They were an independent a year ago.

Ski Valley

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two years. But Neumann, who came out of retirement to resume coaching last fall, kept a strong JV team intact last year — and he should start to reap the rewards.
“We don’t have big numbers, but we do have some good athletes,” Neumann said. “We’re young. We only have eight seniors, but those seniors are stepping up. Maybe we’ll be better than I thought. We’re definitely going to be better than last year.”
Junior Zac Musselman has won the starting quarterback job. He’ll be joined in the backfield by Steve DenBoer, Matt DenBoer, Justin Allen and possibly Robert Gerring, who could also play end. Allen was the leading rusher on a good JV team. Steve DenBoer, though, is recovering from a broken leg and he may not be ready until the third week of the season.
The line will be anchored by Josh Ponder and Mike Bergeron, who are also developing into solid defenders on the defensive line.
“They’re looking pretty tough

(defensively),“ Neumann said. “That’s a real plus.”
Neumann said his squad will be more athletic this fall.
“We have some speed we didn’t have last year,” he said.
“Right now our weakness is our inexperience,” he added. “But that will come as the year goes on. Everyone realizes we had a good JV team and those kids are kind of the secret to our success. It depends on how fast they come.”

8. PELLSTON
Coach: Duane Taylor
2004: 2-6 in the Ski Valley, 3-6 overall.
Key Players Returning: L Dale Schmidt (5-10, 230), OE-DE Trevor Green (6-2, 200), FB-L Dan Sefton (5-7, 190), L Jeremy Tieke (6-0, 200), E Eric Teyson (6-3, 180), HB Marty Drier (5-9, 170), L Lewis McLouth (5-9, 195), FB Matt Mikus (5-7, 175), HB Tim Tebbe (5-7, 150).
Key Newcomers: QB Jake Schmalzried (5-7, 150), T Luke Schmalzried (6-0, 190), E Chris Gillette (5-9, 170), L Zack Ford (5-11, 200), E Jack Alexander (5-9, 140), C Clint Weatherwax (5-9, 200), L Vincent Hutto, L-LB Rob Keller (5-11, 190), C Jim Kinner (6-0, 155).

Outlook: Duane Taylor built a winner at Pellston in his first stint as coach. Now, he’s back to try it again.
Taylor coached the Hornets for four years in the late 1970s and early 1980s. His 1981 team went 6-2-1.
Taylor will be battling numbers this fall. He started practice in August with about 20 players.
“We went in and recruited to get more kids out, but it didn’t work out as well as we would have liked,” Taylor said.
In addition, lineman Dale Schmidt twisted a knee that could keep him sidelined for a couple of games early in the season. Schmidt had become a leader on the team.
“He’s an intense, hard working athlete,” Taylor said. “That’s a huge loss.”
Another veteran, Trevor Green, has also had knee problems, but “looks OK,” Taylor said.
Green will play end on offense and either defensive end or linebacker on defense.
“He can play anywhere,” Taylor said.
Taylor has a number of seniors to build around, including two from Mackinaw City — lineman Dan Sefton and end Eric Teyson.
“We have a good corp of returning seniors, and a good group of juniors

with varying talents,” Taylor said.
One junior, Jake Schmalzried, will most likely open at quarterback. Schmalzried’s father, Scott, played for Taylor in his first stint as coach.
Taylor calls it a “rebuilding” year, but he is still setting the bar high.
“We’re not without talent,” he said. “It will come down to how much we can improve and how we come together as a team.
“Our goal is for major improvement. We’d like to make (school) history and get into the playoffs. Some people might laugh and think that’s unrealistic, but it’s a worthy goal to shoot for.”

9. FOREST AREA
Coach: Jeremy Wilkinson
2004: 0-8 in the Ski Valley, 0-9 overall
Key Players Returning: FB-LB Ben Brown (5-10, 175), OL-LB Reese Send (6-1, 190), OL-DL Travis Park (6-1, 200),
Key Newcomers: RB-DB Justin Gordon (5-10, 150), TE-LB Tyler Denike (5-10, 160), RB-DB A.J. Freeman (5-10, 160), RB-LB Collin Park (6-0, 170).
Outlook: Forest Area is still looking for its win after three years of football.

Coach Jeremy Wilkinson will have a young team.
“There is some talent coming up, with some good numbers,” he said. “We lost some kids last year that will be hard to replace, but we are relying heavily on our returning players to step up and take charge of the team.
“We’ve made quite a few adjustments that should help our team out a lot this year as we will see a lot of improvement. In the last two games of the year we put up 80 points. We’re looking to keep the momentum going.”
Ben Brown, a team captain the last two years, returns. On offense, he rushed for 453 yards and caught seven passes for 105 yards. On defense, he registered 52 tackles, one for a safety. Brown was limited by an ankle injury that forced him to miss two games.
The Warriors also welcome back linemen Reese Send and Travis Park. Send had 36 tackles and two sacks a year ago. Park, a junior, has started since his freshman season. He had 25 tackles last season and will anchor the offensive line from his center position.
The team’s top newcomers are freshmen.