

# MAC schools hope for turnarounds

(AP) — Michigan's three Mid-American Conference football programs — Eastern, Central and Western Michigan — all know two things.

One, they have a long way to go to reach the top of the conference.

Two, in order to get there, they will have to go through each other.

"To win the Western Division, we've got to be champions of the Michigan MAC first," Eastern Michigan coach **Jeff Genyk** .....

In recent years, the three-way rivalry has settled into a pattern.

From 1997-2003, Western finished atop the state standings, often well ahead of Central and Eastern. In 1999-2000, Western had a combined league mark of 13-3 while the other two went 11-20.

Things changed last year, though, when the Broncos went 0-8 — their first winless season in conference play since 1975 — and Central improved to 3-5 and Eastern (4-4) had its first .500 MAC season in five years.

Genyk, a rookie coach last season, is excited to again

make Eastern relevant in the state.

"To have rivalries, you have to be able to compete and that's what we are doing again," he said. "I'm happy to say that EMU-CMU and EMU-WMU are rivalries again."

Central coach **Brian Kelly**, .....

who was also in his first year last season, thinks the fact that the state teams played such exciting games a year ago adds to the intensity. Eastern beat Western 35-31, Central beat

Western 24-21 in overtime, and in one of the wildest games in conference history, Eastern beat Central 61-58 in a four-overtime game at Ford Field.

"I've always felt that rivalries are exciting when the games are close, and if you look at those games, it doesn't get much better," Kelly said. "It is special to have three Division I programs in the same state that all respect each other. Add in Michigan and Michigan State,

and it is a unique situation."

While Genyk and Kelly each have one year under their belts, Western's **Bill Cubit** .....

is in his first year with the school. But he is familiar with the Broncos' program, having served as offensive coordinator from 1997-99.

"I remember what this program was, so to see it come crashing down was hard for me," he said. "That shouldn't happen at a school with the history, enthusiasm and facilities of a school like Western."

Of course, Cubit's past with the school wasn't the only incentive to come back to Kalamazoo. Western's returning quarterback, senior Ryan Cubit, happens to be his son.

"I've played for him before and I've always enjoyed it," Ryan Cubit said. "This will just be my first time with him as my head coach."

The media picked Western to finish fifth in the six-team West, which surprised its coach, even though he sees some positive signs.

"I thought we would be sixth after last year," he said. "But

I've seen a transformation here. If we play the way we

are capable of playing, we'll win some games."

Central was selected fourth and Kelly said that is where his team should be.

"We'll compete every week, but we aren't balanced enough to be picked up there with Toledo and Northern Illinois," said Kelly, who led Grand Valley State to a pair of Division II national championships. "But you only play each of those teams once and we get to play both of them at home.

Eastern, whose unofficial state title last year was its first since 1989, is picked to finish third in the West. Like Kelly, Genyk has his eyes on the two division favorites.

"We only had half our offense and half our defense in place last year and we were competing with UT and NIU," he said. "Heck, we almost beat Toledo. If we can just reduce the number of big plays we allow by 20 or 30 percent, it will really change things for us."



## 2005 Mid-American Conference Schedules

### CENTRAL MICHIGAN

Date	Opponent	Time
Sept. 2	Indiana	7:30
Sept. 10	at Miami (Ohio)	2
Sept. 17	at Penn State	1:30
Sept. 24	Eastern Michigan	1
Oct. 1	at Akron	6
Oct. 8	at Army	TBA
Oct. 15	Ohio (hc)	1
Oct. 29	Toledo	1
Nov. 5	Northern Illinois	1
Nov. 12	at Western Mich.	2
Nov. 19	at Ball State	Noon

### EASTERN MICHIGAN

Date	Opponent	Time
Sept. 1	at Cincinnati	7
Sept. 10	La.-Lafayette	6
Sept. 17	at Michigan	Noon
Sept. 24	at Central Michigan	1
Oct. 1	Kent State (hc)	2
Oct. 8	at Toledo	7
Oct. 15	at Northern Illinois	3
Oct. 22	Miami (Ohio)	6
Nov. 5	Western Mich.	1
Nov. 12	Ball State	1
Nov. 19	at Buffalo	1:30

### WESTERN MICHIGAN

Date	Opponent	Time
Sept. 3	at Virginia	TBA
Sept. 10	at Toledo	7
Sept. 17	Southern Illinois	7
Sept. 24	at Temple	TBA
Oct. 1	Buffalo	7
Oct. 8	Ball State	7
Oct. 22	at Bowling Green	4
Oct. 29	Kent State (hc)	2
Nov. 5	Eastern Mich.	1
Nov. 12	Central Michigan	2
Nov. 23	at N. Illinois	6:30

## Michigan State

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who also plays on the basketball team, is perhaps the most physically gifted. He had 36 catches for 405 yards and two touchdowns last season.

Jerramy Scott led the Spartans with 39 catches and 444 receiving yards last season. Kyle Brown, Aaron Alexander and Terry Love all return with experience, and they may be pushed for playing time by freshman Diego Oquendo and junior college transfer Kerry Reed.

Agim Shabaj won't be back because he was declared academically ineligible.

Ryan Woods, Kellen Davis and Dwayne Holmes — a converted defensive end — are

competing at tight end. Smith is more excited about the offense than the defense, which has four starters back from last year's team, which allowed 27.2 points per game. That does not count cornerback Jaren Hayes, who has been indefinitely suspended for an undisclosed off-the-field incident.

"On the defensive side of the ball, we have to step up and stop people," Smith said.

Key losses to graduation include linemen Clifford Dukes and Kevin Vickerson, linebacker Ronald Stanley, and defensive backs Jason Harmon, Tyrell Dortch and Roderick Maples.

The returning defensive leader is strong safety Eric Smith, who collected 115 tackles last season despite injuries.

## U of M

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make up for losing Braylon, and we plan on doing that," said Avant, who caught a total of 85 passes — many on third down — as a junior and sophomore.

While few doubt Michigan will have trouble scoring, some think its defense won't be able to stop good teams from doing the same, especially if they have a mobile quarterback.

The Wolverines' inability to corral scrambling quarterbacks led to a 38-37 loss to Texas in the Rose Bowl, a 37-21 setback to Ohio State and a come-from-behind 45-37 win in triple overtime against Michigan State.

"Those games motivated us a lot as a defense," defen-

sive tackle Pat Massey said. "We got a lot of criticism, and we deserved it.

"When we watched tape in the offseason, we saw that it wasn't the schemes — it was us. We didn't get the job done as players because of bad fundamentals. We missed tackles, lost contain and took bad pursuit angles."

Michigan's front seven should be at least solid with Massey, Gabe Watson and LaMarr Woodley leading the way. Two stars have to be replaced in the secondary: cornerback Marlin Jackson and strong safety Ernest Shazor.

"It's obviously going to hurt you a little bit, but our guys will step up and get the job done," said free safety Ryan Mundy, a returning starter. "That's what

Michigan prides itself on — having guys who will step in and take their game to the next level. We should be just fine."

The Wolverines open with three straight games at Michigan Stadium, where they are 13-0 the past two seasons. Their second contest is a Sept. 10 matchup with Notre Dame.

Michigan starts the Big Ten season in hostile stadiums at Wisconsin and Michigan State. It plays at Iowa on Oct. 22 and wraps up the regular season at home against Ohio State, which has won three of four games under Jim Tressel in the storied rivalry.

"You come to Michigan to play in big games, and we have plenty this season," Massey said.