

# Through the Years

*Year after year, communities are drawn to the local gridiron to renew acquaintances with one another. In some cases, the game itself outlives the citizens in those communities. Here are some of the state's longest running rivalries.*

**F**our touchdown runs by Lee Rankinen gave the Menominee Maroons a 29-14 win over long-time rival Marinette, Wis., this past Oct. 5, in what has been documented as the longest running interstate rivalry in America. This year's contest was the 96th clash between the two schools. While it is the longest interstate rivalry, it is not the longest running rivalry *within* the state of Michigan. The question of which schools share this honor is not a simple one to answer. Is it based on when it started? Or rather, is it determined based on total number of games played? What about continuous seasons facing each other?

Based on current research, it appears that the annual Battle Creek Central vs. Kalamazoo Central game is the oldest rivalry on record. The series began in 1893, when the teams squared off for a season-ending battle. While the game was called "foot ball," the match was closer to rugby. Entering the contest, Kalamazoo was 2-1 on the season, while the Battle Creek squad boasted a 5-0 mark, including a win over the Battle Creek Collegians. Played on Thanksgiving Day, the teams battled to a scoreless

tie on a snow-covered field that offered little opportunity for trick plays. The two squads met again in 1894, with the Kalamazoo 11 emerging victorious by a score of 24-6.

A game between the two schools was not scheduled again until 1900, when the teams met twice. Kalamazoo, often referred to as the Celery City at the time because of the large fields of the crop that grew in and

around the area, won both ball games. With the exception of the scoreless tie in that first game, Kalamazoo had dominated the series with six consecutive victories.

A special interurban train was contracted to shuttle fans to Kalamazoo for the 1906 meeting. The Battle Creek team had won four ball games, losing only to Lansing Central. Kalamazoo had won all three of its season-opening contests, including a solid 30-0 win over the Lansing team, and by

members, helped to ensure the survival of the annual game. Crowds of 10,000 or more gathered for the annual gridiron struggle, with some games played at Waldo Stadium on the campus of Western Michigan University.

In 1928, the Finley Trophy, donated by a Kalamazoo jeweler, was awarded to the winner. After six seasons, the prize was retired, and replaced by a brightly colored six-foot Indian Totem Pole. Carved by students from both schools, the award was stolen early in the 1950s. Today, a two-foot replica of the original continues to be passed between the schools to signify the winner of the annual matchup.

The series has included some thrilling contests over the years, including a 7-6 win by the Maroon Giants in 1967 that ended a 27-game regular-season winning streak by Battle Creek. With a 29-8 win by the Bearcats this year, Battle Creek now leads the 99-game series with 54 wins, 41 losses and 4 ties.

When it comes to total number of games played, the annual Saginaw vs. Saginaw Arthur Hill game shares the honor for the top spot. The 2002 edition of this battle marked the 106th meeting of east side versus west side. This clash for gridiron supremacy of Saginaw dates back to 1894, when the schools were, in

fact, referred to as East High and West High. In the 109 years since the first game was staged, the teams have missed only five encounters.

The west won the first meeting 18-0 as well as two games played during the 1895 season. The east picked up its first victory in the series in 1896, and then rolled to 13 consecutive wins before suffering defeat in

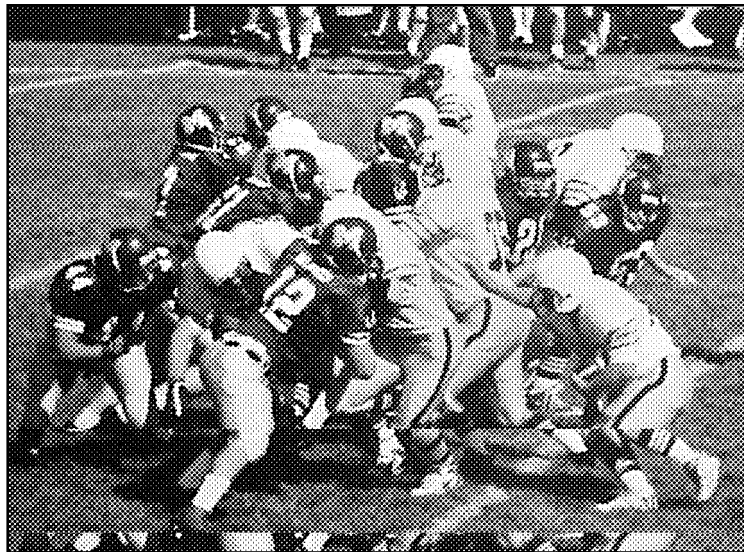


photo courtesy of Menominee High School

***Menominee's Lee Rankinen plows ahead into the Marinette (WI) defense earlier this year in the 96th meeting between the two schools. It is the longest running interstate rivalry on the high school gridiron scene.***

virtue of that game were considered the favorite. However, a single touchdown early in the showdown by Dey Wilcox was the only scoring, giving Battle Creek its first ever win in the series. The upset victory, which ended in a near riot by the fans, solidified a rivalry that continues today.

The formation of the old Five A conference in 1930, of which both schools were



artwork courtesy of competing schools

**The 1942 Homecoming program for the Kalamazoo Central-Battle Creek Central clash touted the final home game at Battle Creek Central's High School Athletic Field, while ticket and program sales were brisk for the 100th meeting between Saginaw and Saginaw Arthur Hill in 1994.**

1913. The intra-city showdown was played on Thanksgiving Day for the first time in 1909. The game was cancelled in 1910 due to a smallpox epidemic, but has been played every season since, making this the longest continuous series currently on record.

In 1948, the "Lettermen's Trophy" was first awarded to the winner of the annual Turkey Day game. The handsome prize featured the actual football used in the 1909 contest. The season-ending matchup continued to be played on Thanksgiving until 1954 when it was moved to the ninth Friday night of the prep season.

In 1971, Arthur Hill topped the Trojans, 21-0. It was the first of 24 straight victories over its archrivals. Saginaw finally rebounded with a win in 1994 in the Centennial football game. Today, the teams battle over a traveling trophy initiated by the Saginaw News in honor of that 100th year of the series. The Trojans have rolled to eight wins in the last nine games, including a 21-0 victory in the 2002 regular season finale.

The Escanaba vs. Menominee rivalry has spanned 106 years and 106 games, tying it for lead in total number of games

played, while making it the longest running show in the Upper Peninsula. The teams first met in 1897, the first year of football at Escanaba. Menominee, located on the far western edge of the Upper Peninsula, defeated the Esky squad, 46-0. The teams did not meet in 1898, but resumed play in 1899. Escanaba took an early lead in the series that season, with a pair of wins over the team that would evolve into its nemesis. The series continued with only two other interruptions.

In 1918, a flu epidemic swept across the nation, causing the Escanaba team to cancel the remainder of its season after only three games. In 1972, the annual contest was cancelled when the Maroons could not field a team following a failed school millage in Menominee.

In 1948, the Hinker Bell trophy was created as the prize for the winner of the annual contest. Featuring a 110-pound bronze bell that was pulled from an old logging locomotive and mounted on a rocker arm, the award was first presented to the Maroons, the winner of a thrilling 13-12 contest.

The trophy became part of the pageantry and color of the rivalry. Engraved with the results of past contests, the bell would be rung by the cheerleaders at the game. The winner of the confrontation was awarded possession of the trophy until the next game decided the trophy's fate. By 1958, the bell had all but taken residency in Menominee, as the Maroons owned a huge 11-game lead in the long-running series.

However, under the direction of coaches Al Sigman and Jerry Cvengros, the Eskymos rattled off 13 wins in 15 meetings, and by 1973, the series was evened at 37 victories apiece. Escanaba continued its dominance, and possessed a six game lead in the series following the 1981 game.

Menominee, guided by veteran coach Ken Hofer, battled back with five straight wins starting in 1982 to pull within a game of evening the series, and neither team has owned a margin larger than three games since. The rivalry was knotted for only the fourth time in history following the 2001 season. With this season's 27-7 regular

season win, the Maroons have regained control of the series with 52 wins, 51 losses and 3 ties.

Sadly, the Hinker Bell trophy is no longer awarded. It "vanished" sometime in the 1980s and its whereabouts remain a mystery.

Geography has allowed Menominee to lay claim to the nation's longest running interstate rivalry. The Maroons annual battle with the Mighty Marines of Marinette, Wis., dates to 1894, the first year of football at Menominee.

The schools first met on Thanksgiving Day as city of Menominee celebrated the opening of its new \$40,000 high school with a game against their neighbors from across the Menominee River. The Crimson, as they were called at the time, scored three TDs (each worth four points under the rules of the day) and added single conversion (then worth two) in a 14-4 win over Marinette. The game was scheduled again in 1895 and 1896, with Menominee victorious in both contests. No games were played 1897 or 1898. When the series resumed in 1899, Marinette won a pair scheduled confrontations.

In general, the "M & M Game" as it has come to be known, was the season-ending contest for both teams. Originally the schools played on Thanksgiving, and then moved the contest to Armistice Day from 1919 to 1947. In 1948, it was moved up a week, but remained the season finale. With the introduction of the MHSAA Playoffs in Michigan in 1975 and in Wisconsin in 1976, meeting in the final game became difficult and a handful of contests were cancelled. To ensure the continuation of the series, the game is now played earlier in the season. Despite a 58-54 shootout victory by Menominee in 2001 and this year's win, the Maroons still trail Marinette, 49-40-7, in the series.

Many other schools around the state have long-running rivalries. The Grand Haven versus Holland game dates to 1901 and includes 104 games. On a number of occasions in the early years, the teams met twice in the same season. Grand Haven leads the series, also known as "The Battle for the Wooden Shoes," with a 59-37-8 mark against the Dutchmen. The shoes, one painted red and white for Holland, the other blue and gold for Grand Haven, feature the scores of each game in the series.

Plainwell has faced Otsego 101 times on the gridiron since the first game in 1896. With this season's 33-7 win by Plainwell, they now lead the series with 54 victories, 41 losses and 6 ties.

The Adrian - Monroe rivalry also dates to 1896 and has spanned 101 games. Uninterrupted since 1919, the series was tied at 47 victories apiece and six deadlocks before Adrian's win this year.