

MHSAA Football Playoffs: An Historical Review

Key Dates in the History of the MHSAA Football Playoffs:

1973 - Football Playoff Committee convened by MHSAA to review proposal of Michigan High School Football Coaches Association to conduct a post-season playoff.

1974 - With football playing schools approving by a five-to-one ratio, MHSAA Representative Council approves a "Paper Playoff," using the point formula developed by the Football Coaches Association. Paper playoff is conducted in the Fall. Using the two-week, 16-team format of the first year, the following teams would have qualified for the tournament:

Class A - Flint Southwestern, Ypsilanti, Plymouth Salem, Hazel Park

Class B - Muskegon Catholic Central, Riverview, East Grand Rapids, Saginaw Eisenhower

Class C - Comstock Park, Battle Creek St. Philip, Vassar, Onaway

Class D - North Adams, Flint Holy Rosary, North Muskegon, Bessemer

1975 - In a Winter survey of football-playing schools, 73 percent desire an actual playoff. MHSAA Representative Council approves playoff at March meeting. First playoff conducted. Top-ranked team based on playoff point average in each of four regions advances to two-week playoff. 16 teams participate. Outdoor venues are used - Perry Shorts (Now Kelly/Shorts) Stadium in Mt. Pleasant for Classes C and B, and Waldo Stadium in Kalamazoo for Classes D and A.

1976 - Finals move to the Pontiac Silverdome. Attendance for the four games was 29,234.

1977 - Playoff expands to three-week format, involving the top two teams in each region. 32 teams participate.

1985 - Playoff expands to four-week format, involving the top four teams in each region. 64 teams participate.

1989 - Just a few weeks after the Finals, at its annual Fall meeting in Detroit, the Representative Council of the MHSAA votes for playoff expansion effective the following Fall.

1990 - Playoff expands from four to eight classes, dividing each class (A-B-C-D) into upper and lower divisions for tournament play. Format is still four weeks long. 128 teams participate.

1998 - Responding to the desires of the membership for further playoff expansion, the MHSAA Representative Council votes at its Spring meeting to approve additional expansion. A staff-developed plan gains rapid popularity over the summer months. The Representative Council votes at its December meeting to approve the plan, effective the following Fall.

1999 - Playoff expands to five-week format. Classification for tournament into eight divisions is conducted after 256 qualifiers are determined. All teams winning 6 or more games playing an 9-game schedule, and teams winning 5 or more games playing an 8-or fewer game schedule qualify by win total. If additional teams are needed to fill out the field, those teams with 5-4, 4-4 or 4-3 records with the highest playoff averages are added proportionately from each class (A-B-C-D) until the field reaches 256 teams. If more than 256 schools qualify by win total, teams with the lowest playoff averages are removed proportionately from each class (D-C-B-A) until the field reaches 256 teams. Playoff average is used to determine home field for first three weeks of tournament.

2005 - Finals move to Ford Field.



Kelly/Shorts Stadium, CMU



Waldo Stadium, WMU



Pontiac Silverdome

Future Wolverine
Smith Romps

1978

1975

Mark Marana & Ishpeming
End "The Streak"

1981

One for the
Thumb

1987

A Kick,
A Title

30 Years of MHSAA Football Finals Memories

The 2004 season marked the 30th year of the MHSAA Football Playoffs. Here's a look back at some of the championship game highlights.

1975 — One week after establishing a national record of 72 consecutive varsity victories, a crowd of 7,000 watched as Ishpeming end Hudson High School's winning streak with a 38-22 win in the Class C title game at Central Michigan's Perry Shorts Stadium. Mark Marana sparked the Hematites with an early TD and Ishpeming bolted to a 30-8 lead that it never relinquished. The Class B game was also played at CMU, while the Class A and D title games were held at Western Michigan University.

1976 — The Pontiac Silverdome is christened as the new home of the football finals. After a single year of the split-location format, prep fans are able to watch the entire final round of the MHSAA tournament in a climate-controlled environment.

1977 — In a rematch of the 1975 and 1976 Class D Final, Flint Holy Rosary notched 21 second-quarter points, including a pair of touchdown passes from Ron Fray to his brother Jeff, en route to a thrilling 21-20 victory over heavily-favored Upper Peninsula powerhouse Crystal Falls Forest Park. Dan Lato, who notched his 33rd touchdown of the year in the contest, established a Finals record with 40 rushing attempts for previously unbeaten Crystal Falls. The Trojans defeated Rosary 50-0 in their first meeting and again in 1976, by a

14-6 margin. The 1977 season also marked the first expansion of the MHSAA Playoffs, doubling the number of qualifying teams from four to eight in each of the four classes.

1978 — Kerry Smith of Grand Rapids Forest Hills Northern set a new Playoff record for rushing yardage with 278 yards in an 18-16 triumph over Bad Axe in Class C. Smith's total withstood the test of time, holding for 13 years.

1979 — Jackson Lumen Christi QB Brian O'Dowd led the Titans to a 21-0 win over Grand Rapids West Catholic in Class B. Two years earlier, O'Dowd's brother, Tom, quarterbacked Christi to a come-from-behind victory in the 1977 Class B title game.

1980 — Coach Al Fracassa's Birmingham Brother Rice squad captured its second title with a 6-0 triumph over Dearborn Fordson in Class A. A 38-yard scoring pass from Dave Yarema to Paul Jokisch highlighted this defensive struggle. Yarema would later star at Michigan State University, while Jokisch carved out a fine career at the University of Michigan.

1981 — The Thumb Area took home its first MHSAA football crown, as Elkton-Pigeon-Bay Port slipped past North Muskegon, 15-6, in Class C.

1982 — Dearborn Fordson's Kevin Harris made a game-saving tackle of Farmington Hills Harrison tailback John Miller at the 2-yard line on the final play of

regulation to force overtime in this Class A classic. After each team scored in the first OT, Harrison kicker Dave Blackmer broke the tie with a 24-yard field goal to lift Harrison to its second consecutive title, 17-14, in the first double overtime contest in Final history.

1983 — In Class C, senior Keith Harris' spectacular diving catch in the left corner of the end zone with 1:07 remaining in regulation gave Detroit St. Martin de Porres and Coach Ron Thompson a 28-26 victory over Traverse City St. Francis and a second consecutive crown.

1984 — Tony Koshar's 96-yard touchdown pass to Jim Steinman was the first of three on the day as Gobles raced to a 28-0 lead, then held on to defeat top-ranked Crystal Falls Forest Park, 31-22.

1985 — Legendary coach Jim Ooley led his Traverse City Trojans to their second Class A title. Doug Lautner ran for two touchdowns in the first half as TC rolled to a 29-3 victory over Troy. Earlier in the year, the MHSAA added a pre-regional round to the playoffs, requiring four victories by a school for the championship.

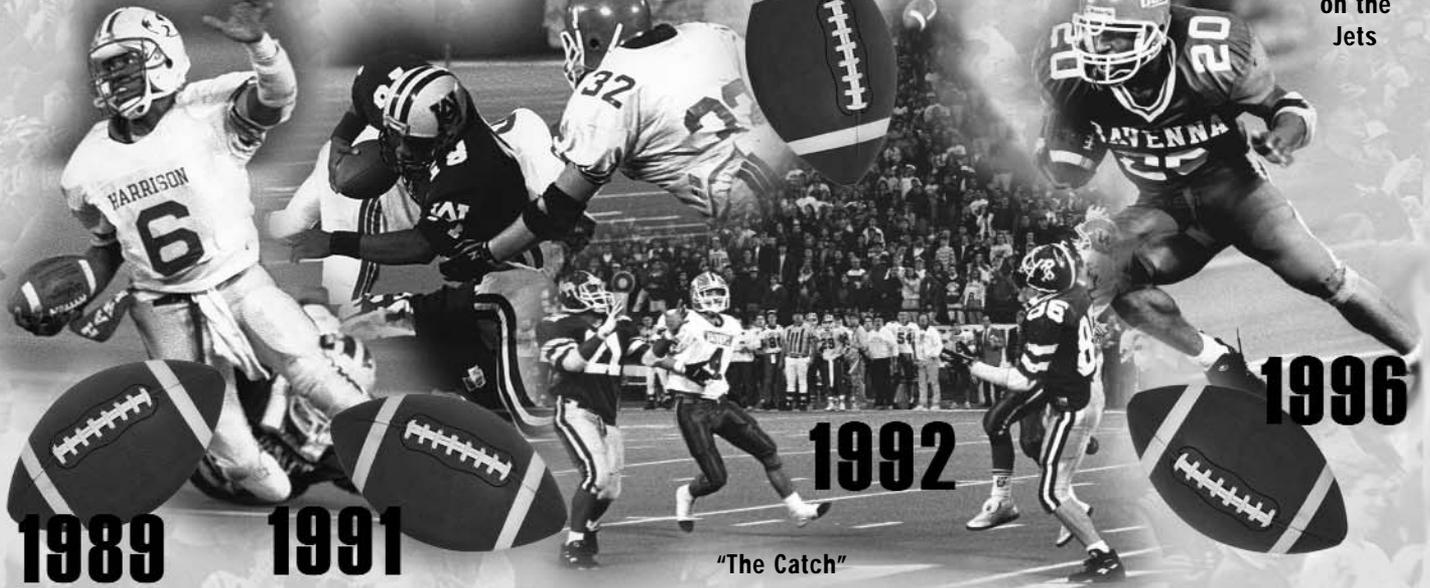
1986 — On the final play of the game, Detroit Country Day's Charlie Johnson hit Steve Mann in the back of the end zone to complete one of the most spectacular finishes in Finals history, the Yellowjackets escaped with an 18-14 victory over Muskegon Catholic Central in Class C.

1987 — Chris Moore's 35-yard field goal in the second quarter provided the

Mill
Thrills

Marvin's
Marvelous

Benny
Turns
on the
Jets



only points needed as Ann Arbor Pioneer grabbed its second title in four years, a 3-0 defeat of Detroit Catholic Central in the Class A finale. The game remains the lowest scoring contest in Final history.

1988 — In a year that saw repeat champions in three of the four classes — Traverse City in A, Farmington Hills Harrison in B, Detroit St. Martin dePorres in C — Class D saw Schoolcraft capture its lone gridiron crown with a dominating 42-7 win over Frankfort. The win was highlighted Brad Johnson's 87-yard punt return, a Final game mark that still stands.

1989 — A classic comeback engineered by quarterback Mill "The Thrill" Coleman in his final prep contest gave Farmington Hills Harrison the Class B crown over DeWitt, 28-27, in perhaps the greatest game in Final history.

Trailing, 27-21, with 2:12 remaining on the clock and the ball at the Harrison 33, Coleman went to work, completing three quick passes and then scrambling the last 17 yards himself to the end zone to tie the game in a drive which took just 38 seconds. Steve Hill added his fourth PAT of the game for the final margin, then secured the victory with an interception on the next series.

1990 The first year of the eight-class playoffs. On Friday in the Class C contest, Muskegon Catholic Central scored a 21-6 win over Galesburg-Augusta and Coach Bill Maskill — a sentimental favorite. The longtime mentor began his coaching career in 1951 and retired following the 1991 season. He remained the MHSAA leader in prep coaching victories until the fall of 1994. On Saturday, Marion snaked past Waterford Our Lady of the Lakes, 33-7, in Class DD. Ross Richards' four touchdowns — two run-

ning and two receiving — set a Final game record, while his 24 points matched Bill Santilli's mark set in 1975 for Crystal Falls Forest Park.

1991 — Despite frustrating the powerful Detroit Catholic Central defense all day long with its potent option offense, Saginaw Arthur Hill still required a dramatic 12-play, 72-yard drive in the closing minutes of the fourth quarter to earn a 13-12 victory in Class AA. With 1:43 remaining, quarterback "Marvelous" Marvin Wright faked the handoff and scored around right end for the lead. With 46 seconds to play in the game, Arthur Hill's Howard Foster picked off his second pass of the day to preserve the win.

1992 — "The Catch." Those two words became synonymous for Muskegon Reeths-Puffer's desperation play in the waning seconds of its Class A showdown with Walled Lake Western. Trailing 18-14, Puffer quarterback Geoff Zietlow pitched to DeMarkeo Hill, who handed the ball to Luke Bates on the reverse. Bates pitched back to Zietlow who lofted a pass down field. Tipped at the 10-yard line, the ball landed in the hands of Rocket Stacey Starr, who dashed into the end zone for the game-winning TD. Mark Naperala's extra point attempt cleared the uprights to give Reeths-Puffer a 21-18 victory in Class A, the school's first gridiron championship. With the win, Pete Kutches became the first to coach two different teams to MHSAA titles, as his 1980 and 1982 Muskegon Catholic Central squads also won titles.

1993 — Hartford's Dewey Sweat scored four touchdowns as the Indians downed Onsted, 43-14, for the Class CC title. Onsted quarterback John Hutchinson set championship game marks in the comeback attempt, passing for 257 yards and 15 completions, highlighted by a 49-

yard TD pass to Micah Wagner.

1994 — This year's finals produced a point-scoring carnival in the Class B tilt between Belding and Detroit Country Day. Belding, using its deceptive wing-T offense, overcame a 19-point halftime deficit to defeat Country Day, 50-41. Coach Irv Sigler's Redskins racked up 333 yards rushing, including 129 yards and four TDs by Thomas Smith. So potent was the Redskin running game, they did not attempt a pass until the fourth quarter. The combined total of 91 points scored in the game remains a Final game record.

1995 — In Class A, Lapeer West knocked off top-ranked South Lyon in double overtime, 24-21, on a 27-yard field goal by sophomore Jason Lehotan.

1996 — Ravena's Benny Clark carried a whopping 49 times for 207 yards and three touchdowns to lead Ravena to a 30-14 win over Morenci in Class C. The senior running back ended his prep career as the MHSAA's all-time rushing leader with 7,212 yards.

1997 — Ernie Diaz rushed for a dazzling 241 yards, including dashes of 56 and 47 yards, as Lawrence earned its first-ever MHSAA title in any sport with a 28-6 win over Mio in Class DD.

1998 — Chesaning and Belding combined for 883 yards in total offense and a crowd-pleasing 50 halftime points as Chesaning ended this crazy contest with a 41-38 win over the defending Class B champs. Running the 1930s-style single-wing offense, Menominee backs Drew Buyarski, Scott Ries, Josh Tarbox and Nick Thompson cofounded the Haslett defense as the Maroons posted a 42-6 Class BB victory. Veteran Menominee coach Ken Hofer joined his son, Chris, who won a title with Kingsford in 1993, to become the first



2000

"The Finish"

2003

Riding the Grady Train

2002

Cait-ch Him if You Can

2004

Schragg Rolls a 300

father-son coaching duo to win MHSAA gridiron titles.

1999 — This season, the MHSAA doubled team participation in the Playoffs. Teams with five victories in eight contests or six wins in nine games earned an automatic berth in the tournament, while 15 teams earned at-large spots to fill out the field of 256 teams. The first divisional champions were: Walled Lake Western in Division 1, Saginaw in 2, Farmington Hills Harrison in 3, Orchard Lake St. Mary's in 4, Detroit Country Day in 5, St. Charles in 6, Traverse City in 7, and Mendon in 8.

2000 In one of the Finals' fantastic finishes, Grand Ledge comes from behind in the final minutes with two TDs to defeat Utica Eisenhower, 19-14. Quarterback Matt Bohnet scored on a 5-yard run with 53 seconds left, but the two-point try which would have knotted the score failed. Grand Ledge recovered the ensuing onside kick, and two plays later, Bohnet connected on a 45-yard pass to Tim George for the winning score with 22 seconds remaining.

2001 - Matt Ferry returned a punt 66 yards for a touchdown with 1:39 to play to give Chesaning a 14-7 win over two-time defending champion Orchard Lake St. Mary's in the Division 4 title game. Farmington Hills Harrison made it three straight Division 3 titles with a 28-6 conquest of Fruitport; and Detroit Catholic Central won the first of three straight Division 1 crowns with a 24-21 decision over Utica Eisenhower.

2002 - Lowell quarterback Mark Caitlin ran for three touchdowns and returned a pass interception for a fourth score in a 31-

14 win over Birmingham Brother Rice in Division 2. Caitlin rushed for 259 yards in the game and passed for another 152 yards to produce a Finals game total offense record.

2003 - Kevin Grady Jr. scores three fourth quarter touchdowns to lead East Grand Rapids to a come-from-behind 28-15 victory over Allen Park in the Division 4 Final. Grady finished the game with 235 yards rushing on 39 attempts. Detroit St. Martin dePorres claimed its 11th championship with a 20-9 win over a gutsy Beal City team in Division 8. The Aggies took a 9-7 lead with 5:38 to play on a 17-yard run by Jordan Leasher, but the Eagles countered on the very next snap of the ball, with David Grimes getting behind the Beal City defense, taking a pass from Carlos Simpson 80 yards for the go-ahead score.

2004 - Jim Schragg sets a Finals record with 307 yards rushing on 26 attempts and two touchdowns, as Constantine claims the Division 6 championship with a 34-13 win over Suttons Bay. Suttons Bay makes Finals history as the first cooperative team to ever reach the title game – the team included 15 players from nearby Lake Leelanau St. Mary. A 29-year run at the Pontiac Silverdome ends with over 1.75 million fans attending the 204 championship games. The 29-year span is the second-longest continuous period of time any facility has hosted an MHSAA Final event.

This summary was compiled by MHSAA historian Ron Pesch of Muskegon, and MHSAA communications director John Johnson.

Yearly MHSAA Football Finals Attendance

1975	20,000 (est.)
1976	29,071+
1977	42,043
1978	37,198
1979	50,133
1980	45,122
1981	42,372
1982	38,857
1983	40,101
1984	34,981
1985	40,685
1986	53,501
1987	40,082
1988	42,037
1989	35,271
1990	55,027#
1991	57,835
1992	62,477
1993	63,749
1994	70,336
1995	71,156
1996	63,154
1997	68,637
1998	66,982
1999	67,401
2000	66,645
2001	65,356
2002	57,669
2003	68,046
2004	67,099

*1975 - Finals played at two outdoor sites, two games at each site
 +1976-89 - Finals played indoors, four games at one site on a single day
 #1990-04 Finals played indoors, eight games at one site over two days, four games each day