

Finals Flashbacks



1976

After a year of playing the inaugural MHSAA Football Finals outdoors at split locations, the Association moved inside to the Pontiac Silverdome, a site which would become its home until 2005. The format remained the same, as a total of 16 teams (four in each classification) advanced in the two-round postseason tournament. A total of 29,423 fans observed the championships at the Silverdome.

Scott Alexander racked up 169 yards and two touchdowns to lead the Chargers of Midland Dow to the **Class A** title with a 36-27 win over Farmington Hills Harrison. Running the wish-bone to near perfection, quarterback Kevin Northrup, halfbacks Scott Alexander and Dan Clark, and fullback Rick Renzi rushed for 333 yards and four scores. The senior signal caller also tossed a 37-yard scoring pass to Matt Rush.

Harrison cut a 16-point deficit to 29-21 late in the third quarter following a 9-yard scoring run by John Payne and a two-point conversion, but Dow took the ensuing kick 60 yards in eight plays to wrap up the win.

A traditional gridiron power in the days before the Playoffs, East Grand Rapids announced that little had changed by grabbing the first of six MHSAA crowns with a 26-7 win over Okemos in **Class B**. Okemos quarterback Kevin Bufe scored in the final minute of the opening quarter from 3 yards out to cap a 76-yard drive, but the Pioneers countered with their own 76-yard march, sealed with an 8-yard TD run by Andy Cole on the opening drive of the second frame. A two-point conversion by workhorse fullback Doug VerMeulen give East an 8-7 lead. The Pioneers busted things open in the fourth quarter with a fourth-down scoring pass from quarterback Greg Yeakey to VerMeulen, followed by a Yeakey 4-yard scamper to the end zone. Defensive end Mark Zabroska's 21-yard interception return for a TD ended the scoring.

Flat Rock ended a perfect 11-0 season with the **Class C** title, downing Onaway, 30-8. The Rams opened

up a quick 14-0 lead in the contest on a 2-yard Joe Mangin run and an Al Summers 51-yard scoring jaunt. Touchdowns by Gene Richards and Pat McEnhill sealed the first-ever MHSAA title in any sport for the Rams. Summers ended with 177 yard on 25 carries.

In a rematch of the 1975 title game, Crystal Falls Forest Park successfully defended the **Class D** crown with a 14-6 victory over Flint Holy Rosary. Late in the first quarter, Martin Ball raced 74-yards down the sideline untouched for the first score of the game. Less than two minutes later, Charles Davis picked up a Holy Rosary fumble and dashed 25 yards into the end zone for the score. He again added the conversion for a 14-0 lead. Holy Rosary scored on an 18-yard pass from Ron Fray to junior tight end Dan Lehoux just before the half.

1986

Muskegon coach Dave Taylor's emphasis on defense and discipline paid huge dividends as the Big Reds downed Sterling Heights Stevenson, 10-0, for the **Class A** crown in front of 13,319 fans at the Silverdome. The "Smurfs" – Taylor's nickname for his small, quick swarming defensive linemen – limited the Titans to 4 yards rushing and 73 yards of total offense, while scoring eight points in the contest.

After an interception by Joe Valeenza at the Stevenson 2-yard line ended a promising Muskegon drive, Big Red safety Reggie Moore blitzed and chased Stevenson quarterback Pat McAleer out of the back of the end zone for a 2-0 lead with 2:19 to play in the first half.

Stevenson managed to drive to the Muskegon 22 early in the fourth quarter, but a sack of McAleer by Ruben Townsend and Anthony Watkins pushed the Titans out of field goal range. Clinging to the narrow lead, Muskegon's Mario Hoffman iced the game with a 25-yard interception return for a touchdown with 6:34 remaining in the game. The offense



Douglas Ashley, Bloomfield Hills

The MHSAA Finals moved indoors to the Pontiac Silverdome in 1976, offering the setting for a high-scoring 36-27 Midland Dow win over Farmington Hills Harrison.



Gary Shook, Otsego

Saginaw Michigan Lutheran Seminary's Andy Mears gets set to haul in a pass beyond Fowler's Mike Armbrustmacher in the 1986 Class D Final. MLS riddled the Fowler defense in a 36-24 victory.

scored its only points on the day, with the two-point conversion on a run by quarterback Rodney Burks.

Marysville quarterback Randy Socha scored twice on runs of 9 and 7 yards, and passed for another as Coach Walt Braun's Vikings topped Grand Rapids South Christian, 38-15, in **Class B** play. Although the Vikings ran the Wing-T, Braun's squad mixed it up with a flea-flicker, a halfback pass to Socha and numerous bootlegs to keep South Christian off guard. Socha ended the day 11-of-17 through the air for 161 yards, including a 20-yard TD toss to Ross Pleiness. Tim Werkema thrilled fans with a beautiful 86-yard scoring run to open the scoring for South Christian.

In one of the most spectacular finishes in MHSAA Playoff history, Detroit Country Day pulled off a heart-stopping 18-14 win over Muskegon Catholic Central to earn **Class C** honors. Late in the fourth quarter, MCC capped a 74-yard, 14-play drive with a 6-yard touchdown pass from Brent McCarthy to Mark Martinez. Tom Walunas added the kick and the Crusaders were up by two, 14-12, with just over two-minutes to play.

Running a no-huddle offense, the Yellowjackets marched back. Starting at his own 34-yard line, quarterback Charlie Johnson completed passes to Steve Mann, Brian Stephens and Chris Glinski to quickly move the ball to the Crusader 38 with 45 seconds to play. A pass interference call followed by 6-yard run by Stephens gave Country Day the ball on the 17. Coach Joe D'Angelo's screams for a timeout to set up a field goal attempt went unheard by Johnson, who, on the final play of the game, hit Mann on a fade pattern at the back of the end zone for the game-winner. Johnson ended the day with 143 yard on 10-of-15 passing and two touchdowns.

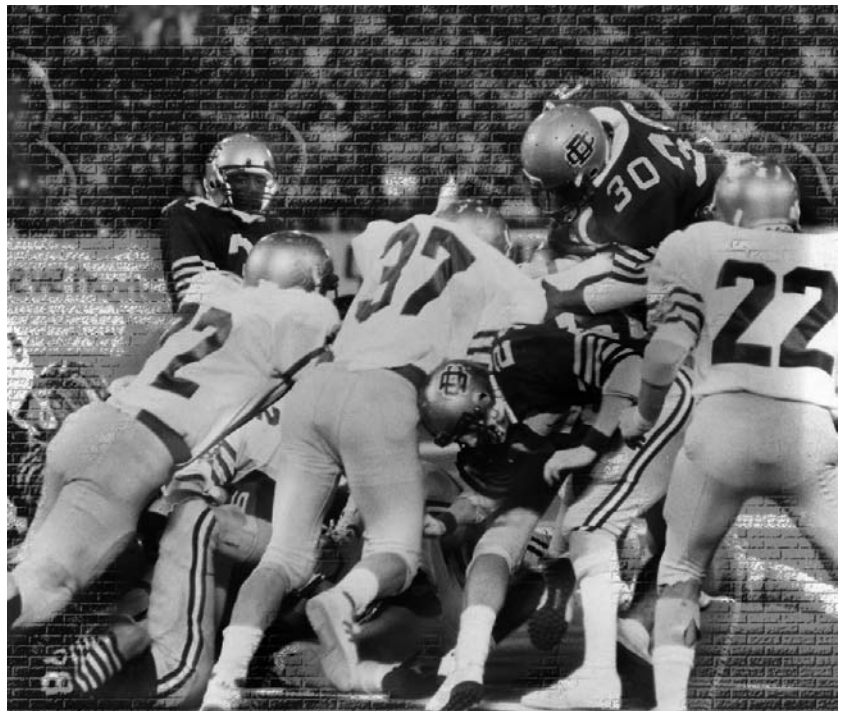
Fowler's vaunted defense, which had shut out its three previous playoff opponents and allowed only

40 points during the regular season, allowed 24 first-half points as Saginaw Michigan Lutheran Seminary rolled to a 36-24 win over the Eagles in **Class D**. Bill Wilson led the victorious Cardinals on the ground with 91 yards, while teammate Todd Dillon added two touchdowns including a 62-yard scoring run. Seminary quarterback Dave Toepel, who led his team defensively with a game-high 13 tackles and an interception, added a pair of short TD runs.

Fowler quarterback Matt Hufnagel scored twice for Fowler, including a TD run with 3:40 remaining in the game that helped pull the Eagles within striking distance, 30-24. Pinned deep in his own territory on the next series, Hufnagel's first-down pass was picked off at the 16 by the Cardinal's Rich Halverson and returned for a touchdown to shut down any hopes for a comeback.

1996

In **Class AA** action on Saturday, Walled Lake Western captured its first MHSAA football crown, defeating Sterling Heights Stevenson, 34-18, at the Pontiac Silverdome. Western quarterback Frank Stanford ran 12 times for 112 yards and two touchdowns, highlighted by a 50-yard ramble to open the scoring. The Warriors extended the lead to 14-3 when Jason Brewer scooped up a blocked punt with 27 seconds remaining in the half, and dashed 17 yards for the TD. Dave Johnson added a pair of scoring runs in the second stanza for the winners. Stevenson quarterback Pat Collins completed 11-of-26 passes for 164 yards and two TDs. His favorite target was Dan Valik, who finished with five receptions for 113 yards and a score.



Gary Shook, Otsego

Detroit Country Day's Brian Stephens dives over the goal line during the Yellowjackets' 1986 comeback win over Muskegon Catholic Central for the Class C title.

Grandville earned a stunning come-from-behind victory Farmington Hills Harrison, 24-17, in **Class A**. Harrison grabbed an early 14-0 lead in, but the Bulldogs bounced back to pull within four, 14-10 at the half. Grandville's defense then held the Hawks to three points with a stellar defense against the run, and Harrison's inability to stop the Bulldog ball carriers, especially fullback Chris Key, was the difference in the contest. Key rushed for 140 yards and a pair of touchdowns in 29 carries as Grandville ground out 303 rushing yards in 56 attempts. Facing fourth-and-inches at the goal line with just over six minutes to play in the game, Bulldog QB Dick Morton kept the ball on the sneak and plowed over for the game-winner. Harrison quarterback Kevin Bambenek racked up 282 yards through the air on 15 completions (both MHSAA records at the time), including four to speedy sophomore Ricky Bryant. Bryant ended the day with 106 yards receiving, 72 of which came on Harrison's second scoring strike.



Gary Shook, Otsego

Grandville's Chris Key ran over Farmington Hills Harrison in the 1996 Class A Final, churning out 140 yards on 29 workmanlike carries.

Trailing 13-7 with just over a minute to play in the **Class BB** Final, Marshall quarterback Ryan VanDyke slipped in from a yard out to knot the score at 13. Joe Cargo's point after conversion hit the cross bar, and fell over as the Redskins got past stingy Kingsford, 14-13. One of the state's top quarterbacks, VanDyke was held to five completions in 17 attempts for 37 yards, but racked up 98 yards on the ground against the Flivvers. The junior QB also scored Marshall's first touchdown following an 80-yard drive early in the second quarter.

Kingsford opened the scoring when Al Khoury recovered a Redskin fumble at the 4-yard line. On second down, running back Gary Rose scored the first of his two touchdowns from a yard out. Rose picked up his second TD on a 5-yard pass from quarterback Mike Anderson with 16 seconds to play in the first half.

Jackson Lumen Christi, returning to the Finals for the first time since 1979, knocked off Belding, 17-11, in the **Class B** game. The Titans finished the year 13-0, and scored 17 unanswered points before Brendan Albert scored a touchdown for Belding at the 4:32 mark of the fourth frame.

The Titan defense caught Redskin back Brent Cummings in the end zone for a safety to open the scoring. Brendon Kewin added a touchdown

total offense.

Nick Salazar scored three TDs as Pittsford pounded Maple City Glen Lake, 47-7, for the **Class DD** title. Salazar picked up 170 yards in 23 totes as the Wildcats led 33-0 at the half. Teammate Nick Grabowski collected a pair of touchdowns on scoring strikes of 56 and 29 yards from quarterback Rob Draper. Grabowski ended with 154 yards receiving, second at the time on the all-class playoff list. Jeff Mikowski scored the lone touchdown for Glen Lake.

Fowler picked up its third MHSAA title in four years with a 10-0 shutout of Lake Linden-Hubbell in **Class D**. The crown was the first for Coach Neal Hoffman, who replaced head coach Steve Spicer, whom he assisted for nine years. Spicer attended the game in a wheelchair, weakened from a lengthy bout with cancer.

Bernard Simon's 22-yard field goal midway through the first quarter was the highlight for three quarters of action. The Eagles defense, led by senior linebackers Andy Thelen and John Spicer, shut down Lakes' high-powered offense. Glenn Weber rushed for 148 yards and the game's only touchdown.



Gary Shook, Otsego

Frank Stanford led Walled Lake Western to its first MHSAA crown in the 1996 Class AA game.

—Ron Pesch
MHSAA Historian