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East Drops West

MARQUETTE - Inside the Superior Dome in Marquette for the U.P. Football All-Star Game on Saturday was the atmosphere of a Friday night in the fall.

Negaunee public address announcer Sean O'Donnell's voice was heard over the loudspeakers, Miners head football coach Paul Jacobson stalked one sideline while Iron Mountain's Scott Boddy prowled the other.

As for the players, the jumping up and down and knocking of helmets before player introductions made it clear they all wanted one thing: the win.

Though Jacobson's Miners lost to Boddy's Mountaineers last football season, and the East fell to the West in last year's inaugural All-Star Game, Negaunee's head coach - and more so the East team - got redemption Saturday when the East defeated the West, 21-6.

In the first quarter, as Jacobson ran the sidelines following East quarterback Kyle Jensen (Gladstone) into the end zone to put the East up 7-0, it was clear the game was enjoyable for the East Team head coach.

"For me, it's just a privilege working with these fine young men on the Eastern U.P. All-Star Team. It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and I'm just very grateful to be a part of it," Jacobson said.

In the second quarter, after the West Team's Jake Meneghini (Norway) scored the team's only points on a 17-yard hook-and-ladder play, it seemed apparent those in the stands enjoyed the game as well.

But, maybe the biggest cheers of the day came when 5-foot-8 cornerback Dustin Demers of Manistique bolted into the West backfield and took down a far bigger West player.

"Every time I made a tackle, my teammates would come up and congratulate me, 'that was a big play, big play.' They were all surprised," Demers said. "It was just the most excitement I've ever had in a football game."

Demers admits he isn't shy about whether he enjoyed himself Saturday.

"Best week all summer. I guarantee it," he said.

Demers was named the East Team's Defensive MVP after posting a game-high 10 tackles.

East teammate Dan Menze (Marquette) made only one tackle Saturday, but it was memorable: After Menze booted a long punt, the senior noticed the East punt coverage breaking down and looked to help.

He made his way past the West blockers and made a touchdown-saving hit that helped keep the East Team on top.

"I took off and made good contact," Menze said. "So it felt like a good hit."

Jon Schinella (Ishpeming) added five tackles- one for a loss - and a sack to the East's defensive effort. East teammate Mike McBride (Negaunee) recorded four tackles and a fumble recovery.

Offensively, Jensen led the East with 149 yards rushing on 10 attempts to go along with a 22-yard touchdown strike to Justin Salzman (Menominee) in the third quarter.

Jensen was named the East's Offensive MVP; Salzman was presented the Character Award.

The final scoring for the East team came in the fourth quarter as quarterback Josh Mickelson and wideout Garde Kangas - both from Manistique - hooked up one last time as Mickelson passed to Kangas for a 54-yard score.

Mickelson said the East team had practiced that play - a three-step drop and throw to Kangas on a fly route - over and over in the week leading up to Saturday's game, as well as the years Kangas and Mickelson played football together at Manistique.

"We've done it so many times. It's crazy to think how many times," he said. "But that one was the last time."

To be able to make that play against some of the best players in the U.P., Kangas said it had a lot to do with the throw.

"It's just so natural to have him throw it to me," Kangas said, "and every time, he's right on the money."

Manistique head coach Todd Kangas, who served as an assistant to Jacobson Saturday, said he was happy to have picked up the win.

"All week long, there was always a sense of 'we're here, we're going to have fun, we're going to work hard.'

"But from the first time we met on Monday until the last thing we said going out of the locker room was that the whole objective of being here was to win the game," Kangas said.

"It was a real good week, and we said coming in, it'll make it a GREAT week if we win. That's what we worked for."