U.P. All-Star Football Week Under Way

Mining Journal (www.miningjournal.net)
249 W. Washington, Marquette, MI 49855

By BILL HARRIS Journal Sports Editor

MARQUETTE - When it comes to the Third Annual Upper Peninsula All-Star football game, the actual game is just a small portion of what the athletes, coaches, volunteers, coordinators and everyone else involved do.

The game - which will be played between the East and West teams at 3 p.m. on Saturday - is the culmination of the week-long activities surrounding the best-of-the-best when it comes to U.P. football players.

Being that these players, many of which take part in other sports over the winter and spring, have not played football since the fall, Todd Goldbeck, Xcel owner and president and U.P. All-Star football game coordinator, said it presents a problem for some.

"Conditioning can be a factor, but they make it through it," Goldbeck said. However, this week it's not too hot, and we tell the players to hydrate, rest and eat well. It's also different for them, because most played both ways last year, whereas this week they'll only be playing one way. That way, it's not as physically demanding."

Having checked in yesterday, the players - all of whom were invited to partake in the week's events - are getting down to business. Each team will have its respective practice sessions at the Superior Dome in Marquette, and will also take part in a variety of other events over the course of the coming few days.

"It's a great atmosphere and things are going great," Goldbeck said. "It's exciting to see the kids come here and open their gear bags and look at their jerseys. We have players from all across the U.P in one place, and it's a lot of fun."

Goldbeck, who has organized the game and the week before, added that now in its third year, the planning and organizational side of the week has gotten easier. "After the first two years things have gotten quite a bit smoother."

Tonight, the players will have team and individual pictures taken, and will also engage in the media day from 7-8:30 p.m. at the Dome.

Wednesday, the players will compete in the Players Skills Challenge, where the fastest man, strongest man, best receiver, best quarterback, best kicker and best punter will be crowned. The coaches will compete in the East-West Coaches Golf Challenge on the Heritage course at the Marquette Golf Club.

There will be a youth football came for kids in grades 1-8 at the Dome on Thursday. The All-Star players, who will show the youth players' basic football skills, will instruct the camp. The players will block, catch, run and throw. No pre-registration in needed, the fee is a $10 donation and those interested can register Thursday at the Dome.

The All-Star banquet will be held on Friday. All the players will be introduced, some awards will be given out, and Mike Maslowski, former standout player for the Kansas City Chiefs will speak.

Saturday morning there will be an Underclassman Combine where players in grades 9-12 for the up coming school year will be physically tested in speed, strength and agility. The results will be sent to colleges around the country. The fee is $55, and registration is available online.

For 2010, the U.P. Football All-Star Game will be donating its proceeds to the Beacon House Food Pantry, as well as two U.P. schools, which will be announced on Friday. A lottery drawing will determine the schools, and each year different schools will be chosen until all U.P. schools have received benefits from the game.

A new sponsor has taken on the job of providing awards for 2010, as BK Enterprises, Your Local Engraving Place, has been named the official awards provider for the game on Saturday.

BK already provides many area schools with their awards including trophies, plaques and individual recognitions. BK will proved the All-Star Player, Coach and Sponsor plaques, the MVP plaque, and will sponsor the traveling Championship Trophy.

"BK has gone out of their way to support this game, as well as the players and coaches, and we are thankful for their generosity," Goldbeck said.

For 2010, Todd Kangas of Manistique High School, will have the East head-coaching job. Ed Marietti (Manistique), Joe Drouin and Don Ives (Bark River-Harris), Joe Noha (Menominee) and Josh Rader (Pickford) will be assisting.

Area players highlighting the East roster are: Jordan Adediran, Gwinn; Nathan Alexander, Cody Dagenais, Steve Ludlum and Tyler Nault Negaunee; Ryan Ball, Justin Farley, Ivan Niemi and Aaron Skrenes, Westwood, Anders Broullire, Kyle Edwards, Manistique; Brad Nault, Brett Nault and Damian Sarvello, Ishpeming, Brad Robinson, Munising and Steven Pinter and Gavin Puckett, Newberry.

Andy Crouch of Lake Linden-Hubbell will coach the West team. His assistants are: Jamie Koskela (LL-H), John Croze and Mike Ojala (Calumet), Scott Boddy (Iron Mountain), Brad Grayvold (Norway), and Mark Leaf (L'Anse).

Area players who highlight the West team include: Dennis Anderson and Parker Miller of L'Anse, and Kelly Shanahan and Matt Velmer of Baraga.

East won the 2009 contest, 21-6, while West won in 2008, 38-14. Both teams are 1-1 heading into the game's third year since being re-invented. The original U.P. All-Star football game ran from 1946-1951 in Negaunee.

Tickets for Saturday's game are available for $5 in advance, and $6 at the door.

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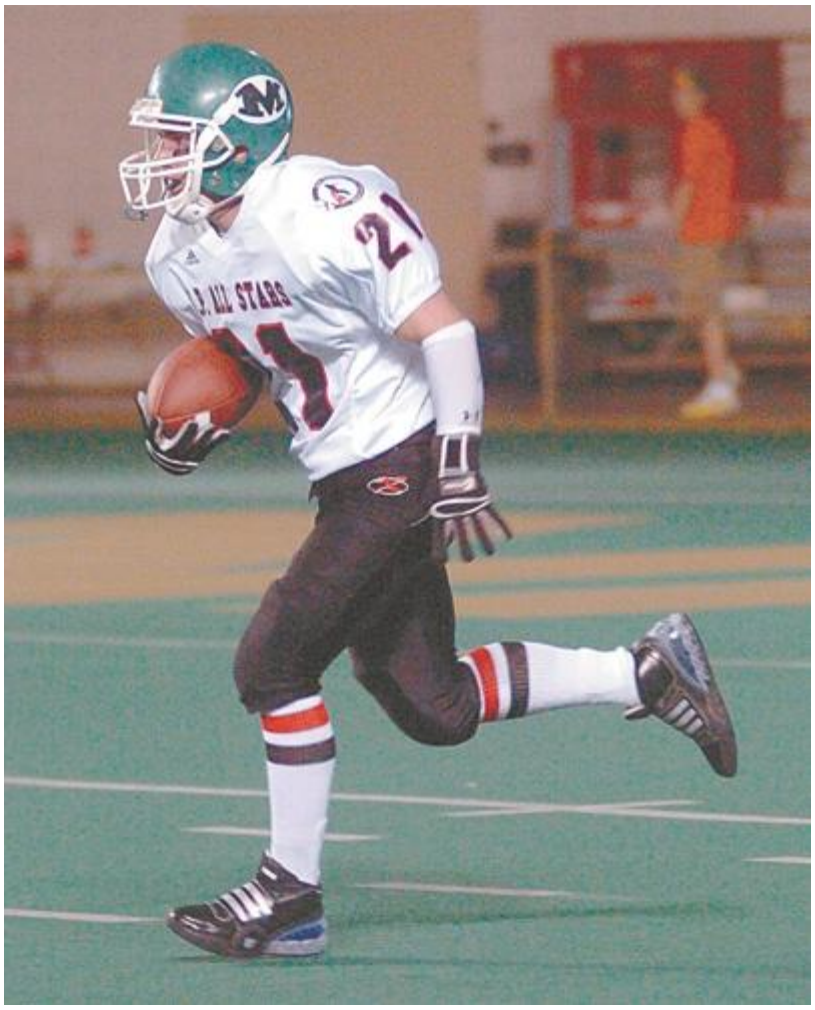

East Team's Dustin Demers, 21, of Manistique High School, runs during the 2009 U.P. Football All-Star Game. (Journal file photo)