

WLUC TV 6

By Natalie Zimmermann

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All-Stars Get Ready To Go All Out

U.P. athletes prepare for the big game and give back to the community.

MARQUETTE -- Their high school careers may be behind them now, but a select group of Upper Peninsula athletes are going to get a chance to hit the field one more time together in the U.P. Football All-Star Game this weekend.

The players, who were hand-picked by coaches and sportswriters from across the U.P., have had to wait a long time to participate in an event like this. The last game held specifically for U.P. all-stars was in 1951. Statewide all-star competitions are still held, but that pits players from the Upper Peninsula against the more than 700 downstate schools, most of which have many more students and larger budgets.

"It's awesome," said Nathan Johnson, an offensive tackle from North Dickinson and member of the East all-star team, "because the U.P. kids--we never get recognition downstate, and no one ever thinks we're good enough."

The game is being put on by Xcel Sports Training, which also hosts a yearly football recruiting combine for prospective players. When the idea of an all-star football game for recent U.P. graduates was brought up at last year's combine, players and parents showed immediate enthusiasm.

"It's very exciting right now," stated Todd Goldbeck, owner and president of Xcel Sports Training. "We've got kids coming from all over the U.P. There are 37 out of the 40 high schools in the U.P. represented."

In addition to getting one last chance to strut their stuff on the field, participants in the game are also helping out a local charitable organization. Each player brought in non-perishable food items that will be donated to the Beacon House, a non-profit group that provides services to families of patients undergoing medical treatment in Marquette County. Proceeds from the all-star game will also be donated to the Beacon House, as well as the U.P. Sports Hall of Fame.

For the students who received invitations to play in the game, it's an honor to be able to participate in an event that will have players from the eastern U.P. matching skills with those from the west side of the peninsula.

"I've been playing football my whole life," said Mike Griffin, an all-star linebacker from L'Anse and member of the West team. "I actually did something right, and I get to play with the best of the best from around the U.P."

The week-long series of events kicked off Monday morning with player and coach registration and culminates in the all-star game itself, which will be held at the Superior Dome in Marquette on Saturday, June 28 at 3 p.m. General admission for all spectators is five dollars and tickets can be purchased at the door.