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Players Practicing For Saturday's Tilt

MARQUETTE - At least one lesson was learned at the Upper Peninsula Football All-Star Game's media day Tuesday night at the Superior Dome.

High school football players really like to punt, whether they're good at it or not.

"It's up there," said Ishpeming's star tailback, Casey Hares, laughing after he attempted to catch one of the many footballs booted by the Upper Peninsula's top graduating seniors.

He and 85 fellow U.P. prep players chosen either by the coaches for All-Conference honors or by the Upper Peninsula Sportswriters and Sportcasters Association for All-U.P. laurels will play in the game, set for 3 p.m. Saturday at the Superior Dome in Marquette.

But planning for the event has been going on for quite awhile.

"There's been so much that's gone into it and so many people who have helped out along the way," said Todd Goldbeck, who helped organize the game. "It really has been about a seven or eight-month process."

Goldbeck owns Xcel Sports Training, which runs recruiting combines that puts prep athletes through a series of speed and agility drills like the NFL. Xcel then provides the results to college coaches to help in the recruiting process.

As a result, he has been in contact with a number of U.P. parents and athletes, all of whom were receptive to the idea of holding a U.P. Football All-Star Game for the first time since 1951.

"I brought it up to the parents who were at the combine and asked, 'If we went through with organizing the game, is it really a good idea that will be supported by the fans of U.P. football, or are you just saying it's a good idea because it will never happen?' They loved it, so we just moved forward from there."

While many of the participating players will continue their careers with college teams at the NCAA Division II or Division III level, many won't.

"That's what makes this game a good experience", Goldbeck said.

"The kids that aren't going to go on to college, this is their last high school experience," he said. "So they really get to feel like what it's to be an all-star throughout the week."

The two teams, divided roughly along geographical lines into East and West, will practice all week to be ready for the game.

Today, a skills competition will be held. Thursday, an All-Star Reception with Iron Mountain native and former Detroit Lions head coach Steve Mariucci scheduled to speak will be held.

"It's a great experience for the kids," said East head coach Jeff Olson, who normally can be found prowling the sidelines for Ishpeming High School. "These kids are being treated like kings here, and they're putting it all on the line for us."

Olson said he hopes this becomes an annual event.

"Hopefully, this really takes off and is supported well by the fans," he said. "For what it's given these kids and the coaches, it's a great experience. It's something that they're going to remember for the rest of their lives."

Marquette's Mike Potes said it's an interesting feeling playing alongside players from rival teams, such as Gladstone, Escanaba and Negaunee.

"I've just met these guys and we all have a good attitude and everything," Potes said.

"So it's pretty cool being on the same side of the ball with them."

Potes and fellow Redman and East all-star Kevin Nancarrow have signed to play football for Michigan Tech in the fall.

"It's been fun, messing around with kids from different schools," Negaunee's Chad DelAngelo said. "It's been real fun."

Fans may buy tickets at the door Saturday for \$5.

Proceeds will be donated to the U.P. Sports Hall of Fame and Marquette's Beacon House.