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High School Showcase Sure To Be Annual Classic

MARQUETTE -- Harry Truman was president, and the price of gas was 20 cents a gallon the last time a U.P. Football All-Star Game was played. It was 1951.

Fifty-seven years later, the game was reborn, and for the players, coaches, and more than 5,000 spectators in attendance, this one was special.

Todd Goldbeck and his wife Jodi worked for eight months to bring the game back to life. For the past three years, Goldbeck's Xcel Sports Training business has run a recruiting combine in the Superior Dome for underclassmen. The subject of reviving a U.P. Football All-Star Game was met with a great deal of enthusiasm by the athletes at the combine. Goldbeck felt he couldn't say no.

In the steamy Superior Dome on Saturday, the game felt more like a celebration. Forest Park's Bill Santilli, who headed up the West team remarked, "This game is great for high school football and the U.P. It's the best versus the best, and it's a chance to showcase all the talent in the Upper Peninsula. The whole U.P. can feel a sense of pride about its players and this game."

Besides practicing twice a day, Goldbeck had planned activities each day for the athletes.

Thursday night they heard former NFL head coach Steve Mariucci give an inspiring speech.

Don Sawaski, head coach of the Houghton Gremlins, said, "I've been around football for over 50 years, and it's the best speech I've heard from a coach."

Players began All-Star Week by holding a food drive and donating more than 500 pounds of food to the Beacon House food pantry.

Cody Kangas, quarterback of the East squad said, "A lot of bonding began to occur. Kids who were your opponents during the season are now your teammates. This whole week was the most fun we've had, all of us guys, in a long time."

As Goldbeck left the Super Dome on Saturday night, he stressed that with the success of this year's game, people in the U.P. won't have to wait another 57 years for another.

"We've already started planning for next year," he said. "See you June 27, 2009."