

Escanaba Daily Press
By: Dennis Grall
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West All-Stars Sparkle

MARQUETTE - All-Star games are no different than regular season games in how the winner is determined.

Turnovers set the stage and ball control sets the tempo.

The West capitalized on three turnovers Saturday and dominated the first half in a smashing 38-14 conquest of the East in the U.P. Football All-Star Game in the Superior Dome. It was the first game under that banner since 1951.

"They made plays like they had been doing their whole careers," said West coach Bill Santilli of Crystal Falls Forest Park. "Playmakers are great athletes and they are playmakers."

The West had a total of 11 players who were on state championship teams last year, six from two-time Division 5 winner Menominee and five from D-8 champ Forest Park.

"Player for player, the West team had probably played with a little more experience, especially in the postseason," said Santilli.

The West had an overwhelming 40-15 play advantage in building a 24-0 halftime lead. After the East finally found a little offensive rhythm in the third period (West had a 13-11 play edge), the bulge increased to 31-0 before the East had a pair of 1-yard touchdown plunges in the final six minutes.

"Right off the bat we came out and made some big plays," said Santilli. "Any time the defense gets turnovers resulting in points, it is a big hurdle to overcome."

The West turned a fumbled punt recovery on the game's fourth play into a touchdown five plays later and the rout had begun. Ethan Shaver of Menominee, who scored twice, produced the first score on a 5-yard run just 3:38 into the game.

After Calumet's Nick Koskiniemi hit a 26-yard field goal on the next possession, the West went on a 13-play march of 76 yards with Norway's Ryan Perocheschi hauling in an 11-yard TD pass from Calumet's Emmett Bjorn.

West then intercepted passes on East's next two possessions, by Kingsford's Dan Sjoquist and Iron Mountain's Ryan Pepin. The second pick resulted in Bjorn's 21-yard pinpoint TD pass to Shaver with a minute left in the half.

"They had great athletes. They had size, they had speed and they had athletic ability," said East coach Jeff Olson of Ishpeming. "They had too much for us.

"Give some talent like that so many chances and they are going to make plays. They did what they needed to do on those opportunities."

The East, aided by a rule allowing the scoring team to receive kickoffs when trailing by 12 points, held a 20-5 play advantage in the fourth quarter. Seven of East's eight first downs came in the final 10 minutes.

Casey Hares of Ishpeming, limited because of an ankle injury, and Pete Formolo of Sault Ste. Marie had one-yard TDs for East.

Those scores sandwiched the game's biggest play, a 68-yard scoring dash by Kingsford's Josh Droese of West.

"The East team had a good group of kids," said Santilli. "The third quarter they had something to prove. They banged heads and hung in there. They were playing for pride."

Manistique quarterback Cody Kangas, who will play at Northern Michigan University, was the East's offensive MVP. He ran for 44 yards, highlighted by a 19-yard scramble to set up the first TD, and passed for 73 yards.

"It was an honor to be around all these guys," said Kangas, who noted "I owe it (MVP) to everybody."

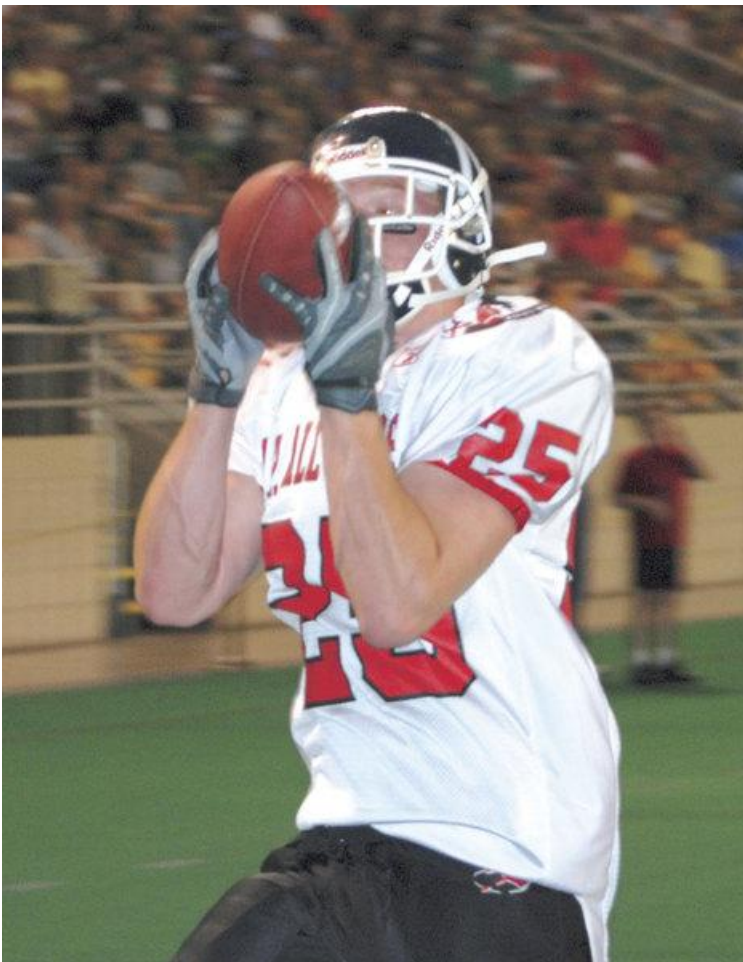
"I didn't know what to expect. It was just awesome. The whole team bonded. The bonding we had this week was great. Winning would have been great, but the best time of the week was hanging out with the guys and getting to know them."

Bjorn, who will play at Michigan Tech, was the West's offensive MVP. He hit 12-of-17 passes for 128 yards.

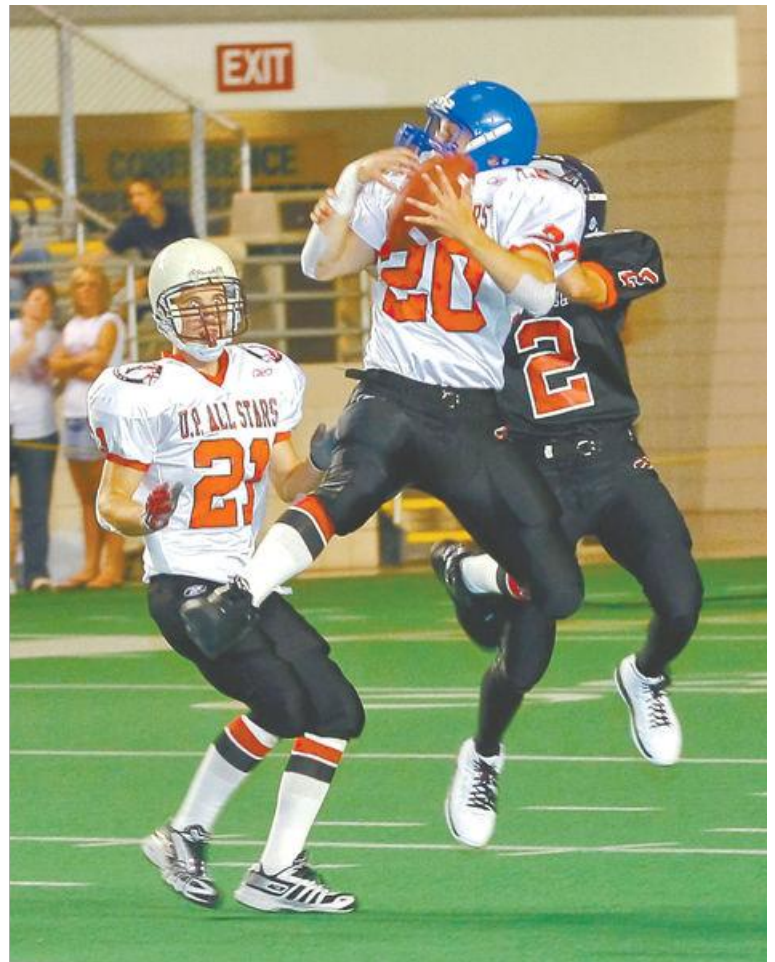
Kyle Zweifel of Norway (West) and Levi Jezek of Negaunee (East) were the defensive MVPs.



East quarterback Cody Kangas of Manistique tries to pull away from Norway safety Kyle Zweifel during the U.P. All-Star Football Game Saturday in Marquette. West won 38-14. Kangas was the East's offensive MVP while Zweifel was the West's defensive MVP. (Daily Press photo by Dennis Grall)



Ryan Peroceschi of Norway hauls in an 11-yard touchdown pass from Calumet's Emmett Bjorn in the second quarter for the West Saturday in the All-Star Football Game in Marquette. (Daily Press photo by Dennis Grall)



Kingsford's Dan Sjoquist intercepts a pass in front of West teammate David Oczus (21) of Menominee and the East's Mike Coyne of Gladstone in Saturday's U.P. Football All-Star Game at the Superior Dome. Ron Stickel Photo