

Metro Detroit Game of the Week preview: Canton and Plymouth football used to meeting with plenty to play for



Plymouth running back Derrck Rossell will look to have another big game against Canton on Friday night in the Metro Detroit Game of the Week. (Jared Purcell | japurcell@mlive.com)

By Jared Purcell | japurcell@mlive.com
on October 10, 2013 11:43 a.m.

When people talk about the rivalry between the Canton and Plymouth football teams, proximity is always a topic that comes to mind.

After all, with the two schools' campuses bumping up against each other, along with Salem High School, it is quite a unique rivalry. It is not everyday that a student can call one of its top rivals a next-door neighbor.

"It is pretty cool that you can take kids from just this area and have two, I would say, elite teams in the state," Plymouth coach Mike Sawchuk said.

But since the formation of the Kensington Lakes Activities Association in 2008, it has not been just geography and simple bragging rights that have been on the line.

Whether battling for the top spot in the KLAA South Division or simply trying to keep a season going in the early round of the playoffs, the rivalry between Canton and Plymouth has been bolstered out of sheer drama.



Canton's offense is averaging 43.8 points a game so far this season. (Jared Purcell | japurcell@mlive.com)

"It's such a great rivalry," Canton coach Tim Baechler said. "It makes it better because it is always such an important game. Since 2008 and on, there have been big implications to the game."

When the two teams meet on Friday night at Plymouth-Canton Education Park football field, Canton will be looking to wrap up a KLAA South title while Plymouth will be playing for a share of it, as well as securing a spot in the Division 1 state playoffs.

"I think it is a pretty cool thing that two teams right on the same block compete for something meaningful," Sawchuk said. "In this case, it is the South Division title."

Baechler wouldn't want to have it any other way.

"Just focusing on on, 'Hey, we want to beat Plymouth because they are a rivalry' is typically not very good motivation," Baechler said. "You want to play for something bigger than that."

The fact that Plymouth and Canton have met for a second time in the playoffs each year since 2008 has not cheapened the regular season meeting between the two teams in any way.

"(The players) have to see each other everyday," Sawchuk said. "On Monday, our kids want to walk proud from school to school. They know that they are going to see their opponent, in lunch or maybe even in class. Both coaches have done a good job in building a lot of pride within their programs."

Both teams offer great rushing attacks, with Plymouth's being led by senior Derrick Rossell. Always a game breaker, Rossell has 730 rushing yards in six games this season.

"It doesn't really matter who we play," Sawchuk said. "Derrick is always fired up to play football. He's probably our most fired up kid. He's a great character kid. He fits our zone scheme so well and he knows how to read it. Defenses have a hard time stopping him, mainly because they can't see him."

Rossell stands just 5-feet-6, actually helping compliment his allusive running capabilities. Last year, when the two teams met in the opening round of the playoffs, Rossell ran all over Canton for 287 yards on just 18 carries.

"In the playoff game last year, that little guy destroyed us," Baechler said. "He's very elusive and very quick. He's a tough guy. You really have to put a *whack* on him to take him down even though he is not that big."

Sawchuk has been more than pleased with how the offensive line has been able to execute the zone-blocking scheme to give Rossell daylight.

"I feel like that offensive line is the most important part of your team," Sawchuck said. "That is why I have two offensive line coaches that are awesome. One is my brother, Terry Sawchuk, and the other is Ryan Bell, who has been with me since the school opened. Those two do a phenomenal job in coaching kids up in our zone scheme."

To counter, Canton boasts a defense that has given up an average of 14 points per game. A bit overshadowed by its own offense that averages 43.8 points per game, Baechler gives credit where credit is due.

"When your offense is scoring a lot of points, you're probably getting some turnovers (on defense) and getting some short fields to work with because of your defense," he said. "Or, we're

getting a lot of three-and-outs from the defense and still getting the ball in pretty good field position."

Canton is also coming off a game where it rushed for over 500 yards in a win against Livonia Franklin. Running backs Chuck Turfe and Weston Price combined for 426 yards, 245 of them coming from Turfe.

"They run hard and they run smart," Baechler said. "They've got very good vision and our guys have been blocking well."

On top of everything, the winner will play in the KLAA Kensington Conference championship game next week.

"We're hoping for an opportunity to play in the league championship next week," Baechler said. "We're really excited about it."

<http://highschoolsports.mlive.com/news/article/-2792459454045855559/metro-detroit-game-of-the-week-preview-canton-and-plymouth-football-used-to-meeting-with-plenty-to-play-for/>