

# FOOTBALL PLAYOFFS: Canton hits road for first test

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Canton junior quarterback Greg Williams (No. 7) gets ready for the next snap during a recent game. Williams brings talent and savvy into his team's biggest contest of the season Friday at Walled Lake Western. / ANN ESPINOZA

A lot of high school football enthusiasts will be focused on Friday's playoff showdown between Novi-Detroit Catholic Central and Northville.

But there will be another barnburner taking place a few miles to the north when Canton visits Walled Lake Western in a matchup of two 8-1 teams with prolific offenses.

The Division 1 pre-district tilt features two teams that won their respective Kensington Lakes Activities Association divisions while averaging nearly 40 points per contest and being defensively stout.

Canton tallied 352 points over the nine-week schedule while giving up just 156 — including 42 to the Mustangs in the recent Kensington Conference championship game.

Western, meanwhile, outscored rivals by a 352-199 count while taking the KLAA Lakes Conference title.

Longtime Chiefs head coach Tim Baechler is eagerly awaiting the playoff matchup against Warriors coach Mike Zdebski and his squad.

Baechler, in a Tuesday e-mail to the Observer, said his team will be up for the challenge of playing a road game.

In the case of the Chiefs and Warriors, the teams were mere points apart in the “weight of schedule” system used by the MHSAA to parcel out playoff matchups on Selection Sunday.

Because Western had an edge of 101.222-to-98.556, the Warriors get to host the contest.

“In the big picture it doesn't really matter that we are on the road just a little surprising to be 8-1 and still be a No. 3 seed,” Baechler noted. “The state uses geographic location when choosing the regions and then the districts.

“There are a lot of good teams around metro Detroit, so it's not surprising that we are in a tough district once again.”

Two outstanding offenses will hit the field, and something will have to give.

### **Young vet**

Perhaps key to the outcome will be who plays better at quarterback. The Chiefs have junior Greg Williams going up against Western senior Kyle Bambard, who is a finalist for Player of the Year by MLive.

Baechler likes his team’s chances with Williams leading the way. Williams already is a battle-tested varsity athlete, in his third season with the football Chiefs in addition to already having two years as a backcourt mainstay on the varsity boys’ basketball team.



Sprinting down the sidelines toward a touchdown against Northville is Canton senior Westen Price (No. 22). He is another key to the Chiefs' chances in the playoff opener. / ANN ESPINOZA

“Greg Williams has been outstanding for us as a passer, rusher, and a leader,” Baechler said. “When we give him time, he is a playmaker. That's why I really like multi-sport athletes especially at the quarterback position.

“He is used to having the ball in his hands when the game is on the line, but more importantly, he wants the ball whether it be in football or basketball.”

Another key for the Chiefs against Western is having his offensive and defensive lines at full strength. Baechler said some starting linemen are ready to return after missing time due to injuries.

Those linemen will be called upon to protect Williams and Canton's other offensive playmakers such as senior running back Westen Price, who always is a threat to take it “to the house.”

Another senior running back with speed is Josh Winningham, while senior James Hall and junior Charles Turfe also are big-play threats.

Williams likely will look to throw to any of those runners when the situation calls for it. Add to the mix capable tight ends such as senior Jake Boucher among others.

If the Chiefs are able to move the chains, and take time off the clock, they should be in the ballgame right until its conclusion.

## **PLAYOFF PRIMER**

**What:** First-round high school football matchup between Canton and Walled Lake Western.

**When:** 7 p.m. Friday at Walled Lake Western.

**Who:** The Chiefs bring an 8-1 record into the matchup, having captured the KLAA South Division. Western also is 8-1 and are champs of the North Division and Lakes Conference.

**Keep an eye on them:** Canton junior quarterback Greg Williams and Western senior quarterback/kicker Kyle Bamard will look to lead their high-powered offenses. Canton outscored opponents 362-156 this season while the Warriors enjoyed a 352-199 points edge.