

FOOTBALL

Five things to watch: Canton football team presents unique challenges for Saline in regionals matchup







The Saline Hornets prepare for the Game of the Week during practice at Saline High School on Thursday, Sept. 19, 2014. Saline will play Pioneer at Pioneer on Friday. Patrick Record | The Ann Arbor News
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Photo gallery: Saline football team heading into Division 1 regionals

By Michael Niziolek | mniziole@MLive.com on November 12, 2014 5:05 a.m.

SALINE -- **Saline's** magic number is down to three.

A **28-22 win over Southeastern Conference Red rival Monroe** Friday night gave the Hornets their second district title in three years.

1. Staying Home -- The road to Ford Field stays in Saline for a third straight week with the Hornets hosting **Canton** at 7 p.m. Friday. The programs have some recent postseason history against each other.

Saline lost to the Chiefs 56-36 in the 2006 regionals and 42-21 in the 2008 district finals. Will the third time be the charm for the Hornets? Or will Canton continue to be a championship-sized roadblock?

2. Old School -- Canton runs a Dead T formation on offense. The formation features three running backs lined up in the backfield behind the quarterback in the shape of a T as the name describes.

"It's a pretty unique offense," Palka said. "They run the Dead T with a lot of trap, and power. There's a lot of deception, so we will have to catch up to it never having faced it before."

Last week, Palka's defense faced a Monroe team that runs a Wing T, a modified version of the Straight T offense, and only attempted five passes.

"There is a lot of the same components," Palka said. "Canton will be a little different since our edge players, like the outside linebackers, will line up over the tight ends, and that's something they haven't done."

Palka couldn't help but be impressed with what he saw of Canton's offense on film. He received tape of the Chiefs' last two postseason games, and watched the offense put up 104 points, and rushed for more than 1000 yards in two lopsided wins.

Canton demolished a strong Livonia Churchill squad by scoring on its first eight possessions.

"They are a very sound fundamental team, and obviously playing pretty well right now," Palka said.

3. Loading up the line -- Canton's five-man front defense is as similarly old fashioned as its offense. The Chiefs will try to slow down Saline's variety of offensive weapons by lining up with five defensive lineman, and two linebackers.

"They have some big outside linebackers," Palka said. "I think if we are one dimensional we might get into trouble. We have to keep them honest by setting things up in the run game then pick our spots in the passing game."

4. After Further Review -- Saline's offense didn't quite match its 40-plus point per game average against Monroe. The Hornets actually tied their lowest point total of the season in the district finals (28), but the final score didn't tell the whole story.

"Monroe is a team that held Lansing Sexton to 18 points, and Dearborn Fordson to 17, so that's a pretty good defense," Palka said. "After looking at the tape, I think we realized we didn't play as bad as we thought we did. We had good balance, and I think we just need to clean a few things up."

Palka wants his offensive lineman to finish off blocks, and see better coordination between his quarterbacks and wide receivers.

5. Broken Record -- All that matters to Saline is getting the win, but a victory would likely mean a pair of new school records.

At 10-1, Saline has tied the school record in wins with the 2012 team. One more win would give them sole possession of the record.

The offense is also 12 points shy of tying the program's overall scoring record set at 448 points by the 2006 team. The Hornets set a regular season scoring record this year with 365 points.

After two playoff games, they have 434 points.

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