

Chiefs, 'Cats await football district openers

Tim Smith 3:48 p.m. EDT October 27, 2015



(Photo: JOHN KEMSKI | EXPRESS PHOTO)

It's a case of deja vu for the Canton and Plymouth varsity boys football teams.

Just two weeks after meeting in KLAA crossover tilts, the 7-2 Chiefs will host 6-3 Livonia Stevenson 7 p.m. Friday in a Division 1 pre-district contest. On Oct. 16, Canton routed the Spartans by a 49-7 score.

Also renewing acquaintances from a Week 8 matchup are the 6-3 Wildcats and undefeated Northville, with the host Mustangs.

Friday's district contest follows the Oct. 16 game, when Northville rode a strong performance from quarterback Justin Zimbo to derail Plymouth 23-20 in the Kensington Conference title game.

Of course, both Chiefs head coach Tim Baechler and Plymouth's Mike Sawchuk aren't putting too much stock in those earlier results when it comes to preparing for the start of the second season — when anything can happen.

"The key factors are what will they do differently on defense the second time around," Baechler said. "But we have seen and practiced against pretty much every thing underneath the sun.

"We will adjust if needed, but it still comes down to pad level and leg drive and finishing blocks."

Baechler — who said his team's 450-mile trek to Galesburg, Ill. for the regular season finale (a 35-14 win) brought the team "together even more" — expects the Spartans coaching staff to come up with some new wrinkles in trying for a more-competitive outcome.

"My gut says they will throw more especially the short stuff," Baechler noted. "Hitches, slants, and the screen game. We are working hard at recognizing those things and getting our guys exactly where they need to be.

"I also think they will try to run outside more than they did last time. But again, it really comes down to getting off blocks, tackling, and making plays when the ball is thrown deep."

The Wildcats, meanwhile, remember how the Mustangs walked into Plymouth-Canton Educational Park and walked out with the Kensington Conference trophy.

A touchdown run by Zimbo with 1:11 to play cost Plymouth the title. Last week, with a lineup depleted by injuries, the Wildcats were handily defeated by host Waterford Mott.

"Hopefully, we get some kids back from injury this week," Sawchuk said.

"We will need to be at full strength to compete."

Sawchuk acknowledged that Zimbo is a player to be reckoned with.



One of Plymouth's key players entering Friday's pre-district contest is senior running back Cameron Stella (No. 32). *(Photo: MICHAEL VASILNEK)*

"Northville's offense runs through their QB," Sawchuk said. "He's a good player. We have to limit big plays by not getting outflanked or letting a receiver run free in the secondary."

He added that Plymouth's offensive line "needs to step up and be a force this week in order to win. It should be a fun game to watch."

Meanwhile, Baechler said the Chiefs "match up very well" on the line of scrimmage against Stevenson.

"They (Spartans) are big up front on offense, but our quickness should help us," Baechler emphasized. "At least it did in the first game. They are not that big up front on defense, but again, it's about us not our opponents."