

SATURDAY'S HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIPS

DIVISION 1		DIVISION 3		DIVISION 5		DIVISION 7	
Novi Detroit Catholic Cent.	31	East Grand Rapids	24	Jackson Lumen Christi	42	Traverse City St. Francis	42
Sterling Hts. Stevenson	21	Orchard Lake St. Mary's	21	Clare	7	Hudson	8

GOING OLD SCHOOL



Journal Register News Service/DAVID DALTON

Novi Detroit Catholic Central's Butch Herzog (42) and the No. 1-ranked Shamrocks celebrate Saturday's 31-21 win over Sterling Heights Stevenson. It's the 10th state title for the Shamrocks, but the first since moving to their new campus in Novi.

CC wins title No. 10

Grind-it-out offense, sterling defense allows Shamrocks to stifle Stevenson

By KEITH DUNLAP
Of The Oakland Press

DETROIT — A time machine wasn't necessary for Novi Detroit Catholic Central to turn back the clock in its Division 1 state football final against Sterling Heights Stevenson on Saturday.

Catholic Central's play was all that was needed to reverse time.

In an era where spread offenses and high-octane passing attacks are the fad in high school football, the Shamrocks used "old school" methods to win yet another state title.

Behind a dominant rushing attack and stellar defense,

the Shamrocks won their 10th state title with a 31-21 win over Stevenson, in the process turning the most highly-anticipated high school football game of the year into a mostly one-sided affair.

"That's the way we play football," Catholic Central head coach Tom Mach said. "They can have their spreads and do whatever they want. It was important for us to control the football because we can't score as fast as they can score, so we had to keep them off the field."

The Shamrocks did a masterful job of doing that thanks to their punishing ground game, which produced 360 yards on 63

carries, compared to a net loss of 5 yards on six attempts for pass-happy Stevenson.

Senior running back Anthony Capatina ran for 189 yards and two touchdowns on 20 carries, while senior fullback Niko Palazeti ran for 146 yards and two touchdowns on 34 carries.

Because of the way Catholic Central ran the ball, it possessed the football for 35:24 of the 48-minute game.

Defensively, Catholic Central did what no team around the state has been able to do the last two years.

PLEASE SEE SHAMROCKS/B-4

Shamrocks win well-deserved title

DETROIT

For Novi Detroit Catholic Central, each high school football season starts with an extraordinary expectation.

The Shamrocks have been so good for so long, each season pretty much begins not only with the thought of reaching the Division 1 state championship game, but winning it.

Catholic Central won its 10th state championship Saturday with a 31-21 victory over Sterling Heights Stevenson at Ford Field.

It hadn't been that long since the Shamrocks won their most recent state title — just 2003. Yet, by Catholic Central's lofty standards, it had been eons.

The Shamrocks did it by being a deep football team, not one necessarily loaded with Division I college prospects, but with one really good high school football player after another hitting Stevenson in waves.

Solid. Fundamental. Strong.



PAT CAPUTO

PLEASE SEE CAPUTO/B-4

HIGH SCHOOL HOCKEY/FOOTBALL FINALS

SHAMROCKS

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The Shamrocks made Stevenson senior quarterback Jason Fracassa, the state's all-time career passing leader, look confused and flustered. Fracassa threw for 293 yards and two touchdowns, but he only completed 15 of his 34 passes and threw two interceptions.

"Their secondary was faster than we thought," Stevenson head coach Rick Bye said. "No excuses. They beat us."

After Stevenson opened the scoring with 10:39 left in the first quarter on a 37-yard field goal by David Brown, Catholic Central scored 21 unanswered points to take a 21-3 half-time lead.

Following a 2-yard touchdown run by Capatina with 4:30 remaining in the first quarter, Palazeti then had a pair of 1-yard touchdown runs.

The first one came with 6:04 left in the second quarter, while the second came with 27 seconds remaining in the second.

Stevenson rallied in the third quarter, cutting the lead to 21-14 on a 20-yard field goal by David Brown and a 74-yard touchdown pass from Fracassa to senior wideout D.J. Mershman with 4:33 remaining in the period.

After the touchdown pass, Stevenson then completed a 2-point conversion pass.

Catholic Central regained the momentum on its next drive, marching 80 yards in 12 plays to take a 28-14 lead with 11:02 left in the game on a 9-yard touchdown run by Capatina.

The drive took 5:31 off of the clock.

The key play of the drive was a successful conversion on fourth-and-inches from just outside the Catholic Central 30.

Senior quarterback Sam Landry ran a sneak to pick up a yard and a critical first down for the Shamrocks.

Following an interception by Catholic Central junior Andrew Nelson on a long pass attempt on the first play of Stevenson's next drive, Catholic Central drove 69 yards in seven plays and grabbed a 31-14 lead with 6:55 to go on a 33-yard field goal by Justin D'Agostino.

Stevenson didn't go away quietly, cutting its deficit to 31-21 with 4:19 remaining on a 4-yard touchdown pass from Fracassa to Justice Wright.

But Catholic Central started its next possession on its own 20-yard line and burned 3:19 off of the clock,



Journal Register News Service/DAVID DALTON

Novi Detroit Catholic Central's Anthony Capatina (20) celebrates his second-quarter touchdown run with teammate George Darany in Saturday's Division 1 title game, a 31-21 win over Sterling Heights Stevenson.

forcing Stevenson to use all three of its timeouts before the Shamrocks punted the ball back to Stevenson with 1:06 remaining.

An interception by Catholic Central linebacker Michael Kinville with 20 seconds remaining ended any hopes for a Stevenson miracle and gave the Shamrocks their first state title since 2003.

It was also Catholic Central's first football title since moving to its new Novi campus in 2005.

"It's something you dream about," Palazeti said. "I was talking to a linebacker/fullback from the '98 team, and he just took me aside and told me that, to leave the playoffs with a win, only one team can do it. That's the greatest thing in the world. We all wanted to feel that. To actually feel that and accomplish it, it's a dream come true."

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CAPUTO

FROM PAGE B-1

Catholic Central has won its last eight state title game appearances. They are 8-3 overall in state championship games with Tom Mach as head coach.

It's a testament to the strength of the Catholic League. You know this much, if you see Catholic Central in the state title game, especially if they are unbeaten, the Shamrocks have been tested. Birmingham Brother Rice was 5-4 during the regular season — and advanced to the state semifinals in Division 2. Orchard Lake St. Mary's played in the Division 3 title game, but was shut out twice by the Shamrocks in Catholic League play.

Not that the Macomb Area Red Conference isn't formidable. Stevenson played many of the best football teams in the state during the regular season and playoffs.

"It was a fantastic year," Mach said.

There is no secret why Catholic Central was better this season than in the recent past. Its defense was excellent. Stevenson, and its terrific quarterback, Jason Fracassa, had its moments — but only moments. And Catholic Central featured a pounding running attack that kept Fracassa off the field.

"They don't have a passing game, but when they throw the ball, they complete their passes," Stevenson coach Rick Bye said of the Shamrocks.

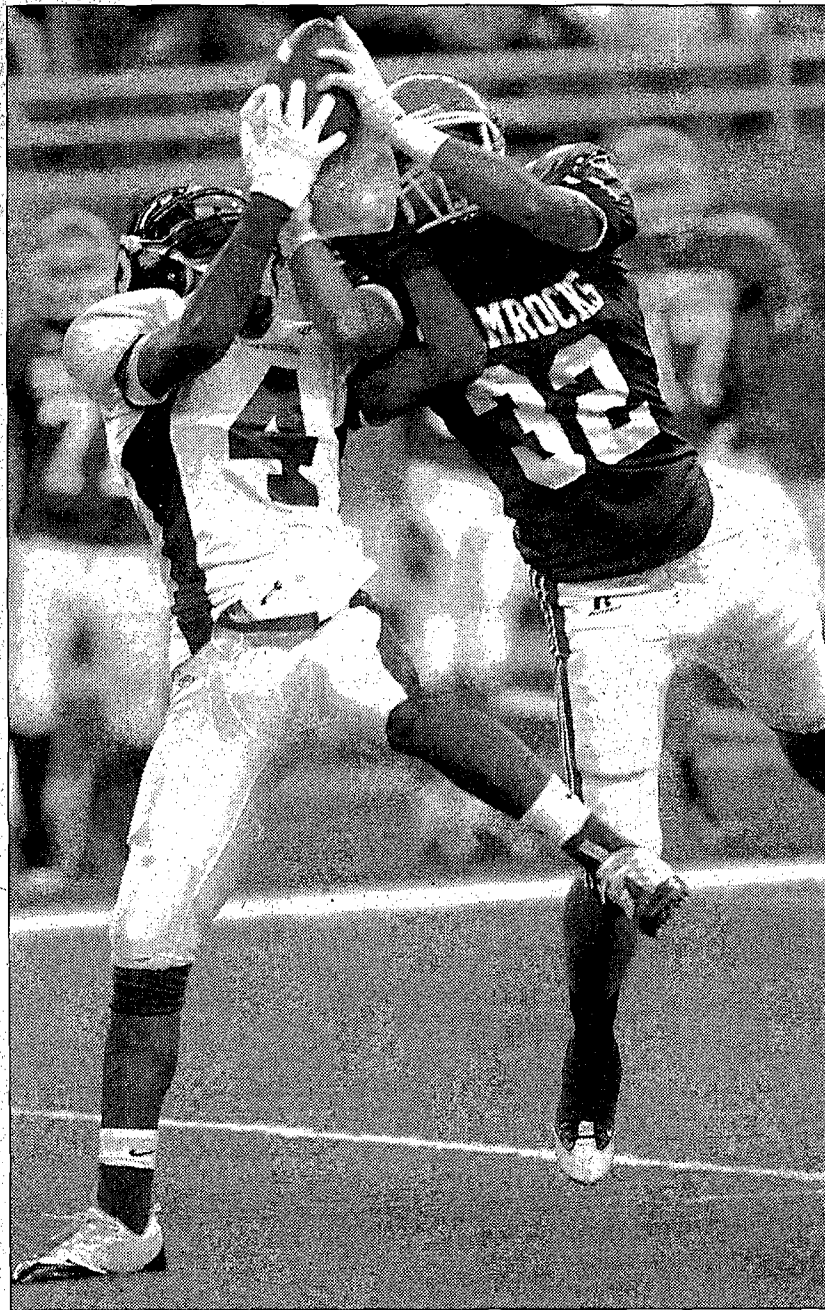
It was the first state championship for an Oakland County high school football team since Brother Rice won in Division 2 in 2005.

It was difficult to watch this game, though, and not wonder what it might have been like, had it been an all-Oakland County final between Catholic Central and Clarkston.

The Wolves lost a close game in the semifinals to Stevenson, and there were two disputed calls that went against Clarkston late in that game. There has been a lot of bitterness since from Clarkston's faithful. The Wolves' have never advanced to the state title game, despite fielding strong teams year after year under Kurt Richardson, who went to school there and is an outstanding coach.

It will always fall under the category of, "You'll never know for sure."

The fact it was a close semifinal game, and Stevenson a deserving participant in the finals in its own right, is of little consolation to Clarkston.



Journal Register News Service/DAVID DALTON

Novi Detroit Catholic Central defensive back Andrew Nelson (32) intercepts a pass intended for Sterling Heights Stevenson's Marcus Beurem (4) in Saturday's Division 1 state championship game.

There are, however, lessons that can be learned from the past. Look how persistent the basketball program has been under Dan Fife. Also, Stevenson bounced back and reached the championship game after dropping a heartbreaker to Lake Orion in the playoffs last season when Jeff Heath hit that amazing 49-yard field goal for the ages.

The sun will shine on Clarkston. The title game is in the Wolves' future. When it does arrive, it will only be that much sweeter because of what transpired this year.

In the end, what we do know is

that Catholic Central is a worthy state champion.

"Football is still football," Mach said. "Doesn't matter if you spread guys left or spread guys right. It still comes back to blocking and tackling."

No team did it better than the 2009 Novi Detroit Catholic Central Shamrocks.

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