

Marquette-CM clash, Southwestern-Roxana battle, highlights Week 1 of area football season

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
August 25 2017 11:39 AM



The excitement and promise of Week 1 of the Illinois high school football season is upon us, and area schools are full of optimism as the season gets under way tonight around the area.

Every school is in action this weekend, all but Edwardsville kicking off this evening; the Tigers will open their season at 3 p.m. Saturday at Tiger Stadium against Naperville North.

Here's capsule looks at the area's Week 1 Friday night games; all games kick off at 7 p.m. unless otherwise noted:

An area backyard rivalry highlights the schedule tonight as Marquette Catholic of the Prairie State Conference hosts Civic Memorial of the Mississippi Valley Conference at Public School Stadium in Alton. The Explorers finished last year 7-2 in the regular season, the Eagles 5-4 in the regular season; both teams reached last year's IHSA Class 4A playoffs, the Explorers being eliminated in the first round by Taylorville and the Eagles ousted in the opening round by Rochester. The Eagles won last year's opener against the Explorers 30-0; both teams are hoping to return to the postseason this year and feature good running games; tonight's game will be live-streamed on riverbender.com.

Both Roxana and Piasa Southwestern of the South Central Conference open their seasons at Roxana's Charlie Raich Field in an area rivalry to start the year. The Shells finished last year 2-7 while the Piasa Birds were 4-5, both missing out on the postseason. Roxana is aiming to get back to the playoffs this season, featuring a good number of seniors. The Piasa Birds won last year's season finale against the Shells 28-24, while this year's game has been moved up to open the season.

The MVC's Jersey and SWC's Granite City meet again in a season-opener as the two teams meet at Granite City's Memorial Stadium/Kevin Greene Field, with the Panthers edging out the Warriors in Jerseyville 39-35 last year thanks to a last-second score. The Panthers finished 2-7 last season, while the Warriors, thanks the efforts of freshman Freddie Edwards, improved to 4-5 in 2016. Edwards is back for the Warriors this season at quarterback, a position from which he became one of the SWC's two top young players last year (the other being Edwardsville's Dionte Rodgers). Reaching the playoffs for the first time since 2011 would certainly be a goal for the Warriors this season.

Alton of the SWC, coming off an 0-9 season last year, launches its quest to return to the postseason facing a Highland team on the road that got to the second round of the IHSA

Class 5A playoffs in 2016. The Redbirds have quite a number of players returning to the fold in 2017 and Redbird coach Eric Dickerson is optimistic that the Redbirds will be an improved team this year.

Bunker Hill of the PSC, which is entering a coop with Mount Olive this season, opens the year Trenton Wesclin. The Minutemen finished 3-6 last year and are hoping that the coop with the Wildcats will prove to be fruitful. In the WIVC South, Hardin-Calhoun made an unexpectedly deep run in the Class 1A playoffs, knocking off defending champion Arcola in the opening round before reaching the semifinal, where they were eliminated by Decatur St. Teresa to end a 9-4 season; the Warriors open against Camp Point Central at home at 7:30 p.m.; Camp Point themselves reached the opening round of the 1A postseason, where they were defeated by Carrollton.

The Hawks themselves got to the second round of the 1A tournament before being ousted by Tuscola to finish 7-4 on the year; Carrollton opens tonight at Concord Triopia, while North Greene hosts Jacksonville Routt in their opening game at 7:30 p.m. while Greenfield-Northwestern travels to Mendon Unity for their opener.

Triad opens their season against the Apollo Conference's Mattoon at home; the Knights finished 7-4 last year and reached the second round of the Class 5A playoffs, falling to Morris 14-7. The Knights are one of two Apollo teams they face this year; Mount Zion hosts the Knights in Week 9. East Alton-Wood River comes off a playoff season, where they were eliminated in the opening round by eventual Class 3A runner-up Carlinville to cap off a 6-4 season; the Oilers are at Breese Central to open this season up with a goal of getting to the postseason in back-to-back years.

A new era for Metro East Lutheran football gets under way in east-central Illinois tonight as the Knights head to Fisher to meet up with the Bunnies, one of three straight road games to open the year for MEL. Micah Pomerence takes over the Knight program for the departed Matt Tschudy, which is no longer cooping with Madison (the Trojans are re-starting their own program this year after having last played football by itself in 1992); the Knights will be playing as an independent this year, having left the PSC.