

Playoffs feature 1,000-yard rushers

Written by Jim Ecker

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There are certain milestones in sports that elevate an athlete to elite heights, such as rushing for 1,000 yards during a football season.

The Metro area has three of them this year and they'll be on display when the Class 4A playoffs begin Wednesday night.

Two of the 1,000-yard runners - Miles Moa of Kennedy and Mitch Christensen of Prairie - will match skills when the Cougars (6-3) and Hawks (5-4) battle in the second game of a playoff twinbill at Kingston Stadium at approximately 8 p.m.

The third 1,000-yard runner - Brendan Miller of Xavier - will try to help the sixth-ranked Saints (8-1) take care of Clinton (4-5) in a Class 4A game at Xavier at 7 p.m.

All told, five Metro clubs will be in action when the playoffs begin Wednesday. Washington (6-3) faces Cedar Falls (6-3) in the first Class 4A game at Kingston at 5:30 p.m., and Marion (4-5) meets West Delaware (8-1) in a Class 3A opener in Manchester at 7 p.m.

Moa has a slight lead in the Metro rushing derby with 1,125 yards. Miller is next at 1,118 and Christensen is right behind at 1,111. Moa broke the Kennedy single-game record when he rambled for 300 yards last Friday against Iowa City High, and Miller snapped Xavier's single-game mark when he collected 268 against Linn-Mar.

It's been a good year for running backs in the Mississippi Valley Conference this year, with eight players cracking the 1,000-yard barrier compared to five last season. In most cases, the tailbacks have overshadowed the quarterbacks in 2013.

Many of the high school teams use new spread offenses, with four or five receivers all over the field, but Xavier Coach Duane Schulte said fans should not equate "spread" with "passing attacks."

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"Spread doesn't always mean throw," he said. "Spread just means spacing."

When players are spread all over the field, there's more room to run for some teams. Kennedy is an exception, normally employing a tight power formation, but the Cougars effectively run the ball from their Stack-I with three running backs in a straight line behind the quarterback.

It could be a wet night Wednesday, so whichever team has the most effective running game - and hangs onto the ball - could have an advantage.

The Cedar Falls Tigers have a 1,000-yard runner of their own to throw against the Washington Warriors in the first game at Kingston Stadium. Eli Berregaard has run for 1,277 yards for the Tigers, the second-best total in the Mississippi Valley Conference behind Xavier Washpun at Iowa City High (1,549 yards).

Washington and Kennedy both earned home games for the playoffs, which is why there's a doubleheader at Kingston.

"It's a pretty cool venue for the Cedar Rapids area. I think it's as good as it gets," said Prairie Coach Mike Morrissey. "If I were a spectator and a high school football fan, I'd love coming out at Kingston Wednesday night."

"It's pretty much a high school football fan's dream."