

Unpredictability at midway point

By Jordan Hartshorn, Special to The StarPhoenix September 29, 2011

I don't get you, Saskatoon high school football league. What gives?

You're supposed to be predictable and easy to follow, but here you are being all erratic, lauding yourself for all that parity you possess. Good for you.

At the midway point in the 2011 season, I should be able to separate the contenders from the pretenders, the apples from oranges and the wheat from the chaff.

Instead, I'm just flat-out befuddled.

So let me get this straight.

Centennial entered the season as the pseudo favourite in the 4A league. They're the defending champions, have their stud quarterback back in the fold along with oodles of others. Makes sense.

But then they go and lose to Walter Murray 28-20 in the second week of the season. Murray, meanwhile, had began the season with a 15-0 loss to Aden Bowman Bears.

OK, so if Centennial is beatable, then surely this means Aden Bowman and Murray are in the mix at the top of the table, right? Well, just last week Murray went and played a tight 21-14 game with the 0-4 St Joseph Guardians - a team that was blown out by the Bears and the Holy Cross Crusaders.

Crap! That's right, the Crusaders. On the back of a passing attack led by quarterback Jordan Tarasoff and receiver Mitch Hillis, Holy Cross stormed out to a 3-0 start. They had swagger and panache.

But now they just lost 15-11 to the 3A Bishop Mahoney Saints last week? Ugh.

And that 3A is equally problematic.

Sure, Bishop Mahoney is atop the table at 4-0, but the 2-2 Marion Graham Falcons aren't exactly easy prey. The Falcons dropped a tight 20-17 decision to Centennial, and just last week they fell 27-13 to 3A upstarts Evan Hardy.

Cursed Souls, muddying the waters like that.

So, peering at the 4A standings, one sees the Bears and Prince Albert Carlton undefeated at the top, 4-0 and 3-0 respectively. But the Bears narrowly escaped the clutches of the 0-4 Tommy Douglas Tigers 14-9 last week, while Carlton has enjoyed perhaps the easiest schedule - not to belittle their tremendous start.

Cross and Centennial are just behind at 3-1 each, while Walter Murray is 2-1.

In 3A, the 4-0 Saints are followed by the 2-2 Evan Hardy Souls and Marion Graham Falcons.

Just to complicate things further, it should be noted that these standings do not decide playoff seedings, but instead operate as guidelines for a series of coaches' polls. These polls determine playoff qualification.

Good luck sorting those out, guys.

3A schools won't be pushed around

When the Saskatoon Secondary Schools Athletic Directorate (SSSAD) announced their crossover scheduling for this season, many 3A schools were champing at the bit to prove they could play with the 4A schools.

Last Friday, the Bishop Mahoney Saints netted the first decisive victory for the little guys.

Already boasting wins against 4A squads Tommy Douglas and St. Joseph, the Saints used a late 51yard punt return by quarterback/return man Reed Hnidy to get past the then undefeated Holy Cross Crusaders 15-11.

"I think it showed the 4A teams that the 3A schools can still play good football," said Hnidy. "We beat Holy Cross, a solid 4A team.

"It really boosts our teams confidence, and if we can beat a team like that, we can beat almost anyone."

Earlier in the season the Marion Graham Falcons nearly scored another big win for the 3A league, but came up just short in their 20-17 defeat to Centennial.

According to SSSAD athletics consultant Brad Smith, if a school has 251 male students from Grade 10 to 12, they are 4A. Any less and a school is classified as 3A.

Tigers in tough

According to the Tommy Douglas coaching staff, their football team is the best 0-4 team around.

They just may be on to something.

The Tigers have experienced one of the city's toughest schedules, losing their opening four games to teams with a combined 13-2 record. Minus a 48-0 drubbing at the hands of the Marion Graham Falcons, they've lost by no more than 10 points.

Just last week they nearly upset the Aden Bowman Bears. However, with less than a minute remaining, Tigers' quarterback Jordan Walls fumbled the snap at the one-yard line, allowing the Bears to escape with a 14-9 victory.

"I was definitely feeling a little nervous," said Walls, only in Grade 10. "Slowly, with every step I took towards the line, I was just shaking.

"As soon as the ball came I jolted my hands as if I had it, but the ball popped to the ground."

The Tigers' season gets no easier with a contest against Evan Hardy today.

"The energy around practice is still really good," said Walls. "The guys are still really supportive and we're sticking together."

Mustangs looking for first win

It's been tough slugging for the Mount Royal Mustangs this season, but they have something to play for this week.

Mired in a 0-3 campaign, having been outscored 134-14, the Mustangs get another shot at Rusholme Road rivals the Bedford Road Redmen today, 3 p.m. at Gordie Howe Bowl. The Redmen snuck past the Mustangs 13-7 earlier in the season.

"This is our week for the year," said Grade 12 Mustang Austin Gillis. "To know that we can hang with them for four quarters ... we're ready this week.

"Considering the rivalry we've had for years, everything just goes faster and it seems like guys hit each other three times as hard."

The double meeting between the two schools in 2011 is the result of a SSSAD initiative to have schools of a similar talent play each other more frequently. The goal is to avoid blowouts and keep students interested in the sport.

"It really keeps everybody's head up in the locker-room," said Gillis, a member of the Mustang's football squad since Grade 10. "I remember a couple years ago when we were playing Holy Cross and hardly anyone showed up to practice.

"It brings more motivation to everyone."

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