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West is Best

Bjorn, Shaver star in blowout win

MARQUETTE - On paper, the West was the best. On the field, even more so, thanks to two stars that will be playing at Michigan Tech.

Calumet's Emmett Bjorn was the West offensive MVP after throwing for 183 yards and two touchdowns, and Menominee's Ethan Shaver was his main beneficiary, hauling in four catches for 85 yards and a touchdown while adding another TD running as West won 38-14.

West led 31-0 at one point late in the game.

"We've got talented kids here," said West coach Bill Santilli, who won his first state championship as a coach last November with Forest Park. "We had some fun with them. They responded in such a positive way. They were having fun, not just today but all week."

Bjorn struggled under center for the Copper Kings last season, playing most of it with an injured throwing hand. Saturday he showed his junior-year form, the one that saw him named the All-U.P. Dream Team QB, completing 12 of 15 passes, throwing no interceptions and racking up 25 yards rushing.

"There's no weak spots anywhere," said Bjorn, who is heading to Michigan Tech to play. "It's easy, everyone does what they should do."

With Bjorn and Shaver along with Brent Parrett, West had the opportunity for trick plays. A double-pass in the first quarter had Shaver finding Parrett for 28 yards. Shaver had another pass fall incomplete. But when the big play was needed, Santilli turned to the Class ABC Offensive Player of the Year.

"We said any time we need a big play on offense, we're going to go quarterback to Shaver." Santilli said.

That was the early strategy. Shaver scored from four yards out on a sweep on the game's first series. Calumet's Nick Koskiniemi hit a 27-yard field goal at the end of the first quarter to make it 10-0.

Bjorn found Norway's Ryan Perocheschi from 11 yards out before throwing a 22-yard fade to Shaver - who will be playing receiver at Michigan Tech - with a minute left in the first half. It was 24-0 at halftime.

"He's a great athlete," Bjorn said of Shaver. "He'll be fun to see around."

Meanwhile, the East couldn't get anything going, gaining a hair more than 200 yards, most of that coming in the fourth quarter.

"We're looking at Cody Woods from Menominee, Chris Carlson from Kingsford and Matt Cowling from L'Anse," Santilli said about his defensive linemen. "Those three guys, we couldn't move them all week. So we said, there's our big guys up front. "

The domination up front didn't surprise Cowling, a MTU-bound defensive tackle who helped hold the East to 104 yards rushing, most of them in the fourth quarter.

"We knew it, man," Cowling said. "We were going so hard all week. Playing for Santilli, any day, I would say we're going to come out and win. That guy is awesome. All these coaches were just working us so hard all week."

After a scoreless third quarter, Wakefield-Marenisco's Marcus Dunbar plowed through the line for a 3-yard touchdown. Ishpeming's Casey Hares, who had more than 2,000 rushing yards last season, finally put the East on the board in the fourth quarter with a 1-yard plunge. Kingsford's Josh Droese took a fullback trap 68 yards to put the West up 38-7, while Sault Ste. Marie's Pete Formolo scored from one yard out in the last minutes to complete the scoring.

At some points, the game did have an exhibition feel to it, but at the beginning everyone was fired up.

"It was a big competitive game," said Baraga's Jordan Maki, who played linebacker. "Everyone's staying in the same place, talking to each other. Each team wanted this real bad."

The week was a good experience for all involved. The coaches said they were happy to take the time off of work for the experience. The players enjoyed the camaraderie of playing against the best of the best. The game was just the tip.

"It was the best week ever," Maki said. Winning just topped the whole week off."



West's Emmett Bjorn (Calumet) scrambles through the East defense on his way to a big gain during the third quarter of Saturday's U.P. Football All-Star Game. Bjorn threw for 133 yards and two touchdowns and was named West's offensive MVP in a 38-10 win. Peter Pietrangelo/Daily Mining Gazette