

Mariucci to speak at banquet

By DENNIS GRALL, Escanaba Daily Press, March 12, 2008

ESCANABA — June's scheduled Upper Peninsula all-star football game received a big shot in the arm Tuesday when it was announced Steve Mariucci will be the banquet guest speaker.

The former NFL head coach and current analyst for the NFL Network will speak June 26 at Northern Michigan University. The football game will be played June 28 at the Superior Dome.

Organizers are expecting 500 to 600 people at the banquet, with a meet and greet social hour set for 6 p.m. Proceeds from the banquet and game will go to the Beacon House and the U.P. Sports Hall of Fame.

"This is a natural fit," event organizer Todd Goldbeck of Xcel Sports Training told The Daily Press Monday. "He's probably the most prestigious U.P. guy to lend credibility to it. The one guy you would want for an inaugural event like this would be him."

The announcement was made Tuesday in an interview with WLUC-TV, one of the primary game sponsors.

"I think this just puts to rest any question of how great of an event this will be for the U.P. in general," Goldbeck said. "To have him that excited about it just solidifies the event. It's the cherry on top of everything."

Mariucci was the starting quarterback when NMU won the NCAA Division II championship in 1975.

He has coached at several locations, most notably as head coach of the NFL's San Francisco 49ers and Detroit Lions.

He was also Brett Favre's first quarterback coach with the Green Bay Packers.

Ninety U.P. spring graduates have agreed to play in the game. They report to NMU June 23, and part of the welcome will provide fans the opportunity to donate canned foods for Beacon House.

June 24 will be a media day, which will allow photos and interviews. A football camp for grades 6-and-under will highlight the June 27 schedule, with those participants working out with the all-stars that night.

A recruiting combine based on the NFL Combine in Indianapolis is 9 a.m. on June 28 for incoming high school current freshmen, sophomores and juniors, who will then be admitted free to the game at 3 p.m.

The players will hold two-a-day workouts under the direction of U.P. prep coaches during the week. Jeff Olson of Ishpeming High School is head coach for the East and Bill Santilli of 2007 Division 8 state champion Crystal Falls Forest Park is the West coach. They will be assisted by 11 U.P. coaches.

"It's been overwhelmingly positive," Goldbeck said of the response across the peninsula. "The kids are excited about participating in something their coaches and parents have talked about."

Goldbeck said the success of the U.P. Sports Hall of Fame's All-Star Classic basketball game has been beneficial.

"That has made it easier for football," he said, indicating some volleyball interests have now brought up prospects of an all-star event.

The 23rd Annual All-Star Classic basketball game will be held at Escanaba High School on June 21. Several players are likely to play in both games.

WLUC will telecast the football game live and Northern Star Broadcast Co. will provide live coverage on the Bear network.

This will be the first all-star football game in the U.P. since the demise of the original program that ran from 1946-51.

Goldbeck's father-in-law, the late Robert "Matt" Syrja of Gwinn, played in the 1949 event in Negaunee.

Discussions about that game at a family gathering and at the combines Xcel Sports ran at NMU prompted Goldbeck to inquire about the possible resumption of the event.