

# Seniors suit up for U.P. Football All-Star Game

## The best converge on the dome Saturday afternoon

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MARQUETTE - He was no doubt No. 1 in the hearts of many Marquette Senior High School football fans last season.

Saturday, Brian Meyers will be again be No. 1, at least with his East jersey number at the Upper Peninsula All-Star Football Game.

"(Game officials) just gave me that number," Meyers said with a shrug at Media Day festivities earlier this week.

A linebacker who earned All-U.P. Class ABC Defensive Team honors last season, Meyers will be one of 80-plus players expected to take part in the fifth edition of the game, hosted by Xcel Sports Training.

The contest will pit East vs. West at 3 p.m. at the Superior Dome in Marquette. Doors will open at 2 p.m.

"I was excited (about) getting an invitation to play," said Meyers, reportedly headed for the U.S. Marines. "I've watched a couple of the games and it featured the best players around."

The 6-foot, 200-pound Meyers, who made 21 solo tackles and 56 assists to go along with three sacks and one interception last season, said practices for the game have not been easy.

"They've been more intense than regular (MSHS) practices," he said. "I'm a little sore, but I should be in shape (for the game)."

Alex VanWagner, a cornerback from L'Anse High School who came up with 22 solo tackles, three interceptions and two fumble recoveries at safety last season for the Hornets, also found practices to be "intense."

"There have been different drills than I'm used to," he said. "They're definitely more specific. They're quicker paced and you definitely have to be on top of your game."

Headed for Michigan Tech University to study biomedical engineering, VanWagner is getting used to playing man defense at cornerback instead of safety in zone coverage.

"It's different to play man," said the LHS graduate, who'll play for the West Saturday. "It somewhat makes it easier in a man, as you have your guy (to cover) and your (specific) assignment."

Ishpeming High School senior linebacker Derek Slone, an All-Class selection last season and runner-up to Calumet defensive end Ben Storm in Big Five Defensive Player of the Year voting, found game practices to be "very helpful."

"There are a lot of coaches to help us and always have eyes on you," said Slone, planning to attend Northern Michigan University in the fall to study sports science.

"It has definitely been different with the size of the players here. It's tough to get around some of those big guys."

The unanimous Mid-Peninsula Conference Defensive Player of the Year watched last year's game - a 28-20 East win - and noticed all the participants were "smiling."

"It looked like a fun game," Slone said. "I just want to connect with people from other schools and have some fun."

Doug Hodges, 56-42 in 10 seasons as head coach of the Baraga Vikings, will guide the West. Joe Noha, 16 years as an assistant coach at Menominee, will lead the East.

Game participants are scheduled to attend an All-Star Banquet tonight, with former Detroit Lions and Atlanta Falcons player Eric Beverly as guest speaker.

Before Saturday's game, an Underclassmen Testing Combine will be held for players at the dome who will be in grades 9-12 this coming school year. Players will be tested for speed, strength and agility.

Superiorland players expected to take part in Saturday's game are:

West

Baraga: Josh Turunen; L'Anse: VanWagner

East

Marquette: Mitchel Crothers, Tanner Delpier, Jared Erickson, Kasaim Koonnala, Meyers and Garrett Pentecost; Negaunee: Tyler Beaumont and Zach Marshall; Newberry: Andrew Barley and Brett Rushford; Westwood: Nick Benda and Spencer Helgren; Ishpeming: Jacob Finegan, Mike Hill, Slone and Jordan Windahl; Munising: Andrew Kelto and Kenya Oas; Manistique: Kyle Tiglas; Superior Central: Bill Torongo; Gwinn: Jacob Wells.



U.P. All-Star Football Classic West team member Alex VanWagner, right, talks with longtime Mining Journal sports reporter Craig Remsburg during Media Day at the Superior Dome on Tuesday evening. (Journal photo by Matt Keiser)



BRIAN MEYERS  
Former Redmen really is No. 1