

# Strength and numbers

## U.P.'s best (and lots of `em) gather at Superior Dome

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MARQUETTE - Many of the best football players from the Class of 2012 have converged on the Northern Michigan University campus, showing their strength in their numbers.

"The big thing that we talked about this week that we said would really win this, it's not going to be individual athletes that win this game, it's going to be a team that wins this game," Baraga coach Doug Hodges, the head coach of this year's West team said.

Hodges noted that the squad depth (the West, with 38 listed players, is the smaller of the two squads) is a little more than he's been accustomed to on the Class D level.

"You're used to going against garbage cans or on air, and now you have all these extra kids," he said.

And not only are there a lot of players, there are a lot of good players.

"It's a lot nicer, it gives you more of a realistic feel and when you're going against this level of players, it's great, you can't simulate that," Lake Linden-Hubbell's Shane Testini said.

As for the players themselves, getting back into the swing of things physically has been harder than returning to football mode mentally.

"It took me a good practice or two, that for sure. The first day, it's probably the sorest I've ever been," Testini said.

Testini is one of nine local players on the West roster, which includes Ontonagon's Dan Domitrovich, Tyler Roberts and Jake Yakyvich, Calumet's Tyler Froberg and Sam Lanctot, Hancock's Joel Maki, Baraga's Josh Turunen and L'Anse's Alex VanWagner.

There are a few WestPAC and GWC rivalries within the roster, or at least there were.

"The game is so far away from last season and you kind of forget about that stuff and the first day you forget about it, you're teammates," Lanctot said.

This is the fifth annual contest since the game's revival in 2008, with the West being on the losing side in each of the last three, including a 28-20 decision last year.

In an attempt to remedy the situation, Hodges said he's approaching the game with a different mentality than he might for a GWC showdown.

"I have tricks up both sleeves and a pant leg," he joked.

Those tricks didn't save him from a trip to Lake Superior (fully submerged) after his offense side lost in a drill during the week.

"Unfortunately, the offense lost and I had to take a little dip in the lake and I think the defensive guys really got a kick out of that," he said.

The players have been building camaraderie on and off the field with a variety of events, including a skills challenge, a trip to show the kids at Bay Cliff Health Camp in Big Bay a few moves and tonight's All-Star Banquet.

The game kicks off inside the Superior Dome at 3 p.m. Saturday. Tickets are \$6 at the door.

No matter which side ends up with the most points on the scoreboard, each side will have won something from the week.

"I just want to have fun, enjoying possibly my last football game, enjoying the relationship I've had with this team. My goal is just to play my part and do everything I can to help us succeed," Testini said.