**History of NM football 1980-Current**

**1980– Coach Dave Cooke (9-1 overall, WMC champs, state qualifier)**

Dave Cooke would begin a long and successful tenure as NM’s football coach when he took over the duties from Dave Warmack. Football during this era at NM was King with 43 players suiting up as varsity players on Friday nights. Another good turnout for the JV team had 30 underclassmen on their roster. With only an average of perhaps 40 boys per class, that computes to more than half of their male athletes playing football at NM. NM lost several quality players from their exceptional 1979 team, but the current team shows potential with some outstanding returnees as well as a 1979 undefeated JV class. The biggest challenge will be finding players to replace the explosive NM backfield from the previous season. Dave Billinghurst, who capped his junior season by catching five passes for 150 yards in NM’s semifinal loss to Ishpeming returns while plenty of firepower returns to the offensive line. Clark Stevens returns on the line along with two-way standout Sam Parker. A pair of newcomers who did not play for the Norse in 1979 will be sure to supply much needed help. Jim Mylenek, a starting tackle in his sophomore season will boost the NM line while Brad Pflaum, a star on the basketball court will also take his talents to the gridiron.

Pflaum quickly made his presence known in the season opener vs. Orchard View, a 23-19 NM victory. After future CMU and NFL star Curtis Adams burned the Norse with a 96-yard kickoff return to begin the game, Pflaum tallied a TD from 10-yards out for the Norsemen’s first score. NM would score 20 unanswered points; short TD runs from Jerome Eck and Dan Brondyk to give NM a 20-7 lead at halftime. NM then exposed a weapon that would surely help keep their winning mode intact for the season, the kicking of Mario Ferretti. The future Eastern Michigan University kicker accounted for NM’s only points in the second half when he booted a 42-yard field goal, easily the longest field goal in Norse history at the time. OV scored a couple of TDs in the second half to close the gap, with the Cardinal’s final TD coming with only 1:19 to play.

NM didn’t have to wait long to realize the importance of Mario Ferretti’s kicking abilities as it was his soccer style kicking that was the difference in the outcome in NM’s 17-12 victory over Ravenna. Ferretti was successful on a pair of extra points after each NM touchdown and booted a 37-yard field goal. Both NM touchdowns came on big plays; the first a 48-yd scamper by Brad Pflaum, the second an 86-yard kickoff return by Jerome Eck.

NM showed that they would again be a force to be reckoned with in the WMC following their 27-7 win over Montague. For the second straight week NM received some big plays in their win, including their second TD return on a kickoff in two weeks, a 90-yard return from Dave Billinghurst. Junior running back Greg Cooke helped his father win his third game as the Norse head coach with TD bursts from 54 & 84 yards.

NM won their ninth straight game with Mason County and improved to 4-0 with yet another 62-14 romp over the Spartans. The Norse were expecting a close game after Mason Co upset Ravenna the previous week but that surely was not the case. Eight different Norsemen scored TDs on the night with Brad Pflaum the only multi-TD player with two. For the third consecutive game, NM returned a kickoff for a TD with Dave Billinghurst bringing one back for the second straight week from 80 yards. Also scoring for NM were Greg Cooke (5), a Chip Jordan to Mike Tjarksen pass (13), Jerome Eck (42), Dan Brondk 2, and Dave Maier (36).

In the only game played between the two schools, the Norsemen made it five in a row on the season with a 33-0 win over Sanford-Meridian. The Norse entered the game rated number three in the polls and looked every bit the part in the shutout over the Mustangs. The Norse defense held future CMU starting quarterback Ron Filmore to only 82 yards passing with one of Filmore’s passes intercepted and returned 35 yards for a TD by Jerome Eck. All the Norse yardage during the game came on runs, with 130 yards of their 252 rushing yards coming on two touchdown runs. Brad Pflaum dashed for a TD from 70 yards while Dave Maier scampered 60 for another six points. Eck tallied another TD and accounted for the game’s first on a short one-yard plunge, while Mike Tjarkesen also ran for a TD from 3-yards away.

The WMC Conference title was on the line in game six as both NM and Oakridge came into the game with a conference and season perfect record. Just as Norse head coach Dave Cooke projected prior to the beginning of the season: ‘that a big part of their team’s success would come from the foot of Mario Ferretti;’ Cooke’s words rang true as Ferretti booted a 26-yard field goal with: 0:06 on the clock to give NM a thrilling 10-7 win over Oakridge. The winning drive began back at the NM 20 as it appeared this game was headed for overtime in a battle dominated by both team’s defense. Using sweeps from backs Greg Cooke and Brad Pflaum, and excellent blocking up from Ken Stevens, Ken Postema and Greg Gust, NM chewed up the clock and marched deep into Eagle territory to set up Ferretti’s game winning boot. The stats were virtually even between the two evenly matched teams. NM rushed for 207 yards, just 3 more than Oakridge. NM passed for only 30 yards on the night but 20 of those yards was a completion from Chip Jordan to Dave Billinghurst that set up NM’s only TD, a 3-yard TD from Brad Pflaum shortly before halftime.

With six games completed it was time to look at those computer rankings to see where each team fit in their quest to make the playoffs. Could NM and Middleville be headed for a repeat matchup in Class C? NM and Middleville were ranked 1 & 2 prior to week seven.

NM kept their playoff hopes alive with a 27-14 win over an always tough Shelby team. The game was played on the muddy NM gridiron with conditions making the passing game virtually non-existent for both teams. NM rushed for 329 yards during the game, Greg Cooke rushing for 132 with Brad Pflaum nearly the same total with 125. Pflaum had 55 of those yards on one TD romp and scored his second TD from the one. Cooke scored on a one-yard plunge while future Yale football star Mike Tjarksen scored from 22 on a wingback reverse.

Needing a win over Hart to give the Norse their second straight WMC title, NM was up to the task as they shutout the Pirates 34-0. It was another game contested on a sloppy surface as the homecoming crowd at NM watched the game in a pouring rain. The Norse scored 20 first half points as they dominated action throughout the contest on both offense and defense. Jerome Eck had a standout game for the victors. Eck recovered a fumble, blocked a punt, and caught a 12-yard pass from Chip Jordan. Dave Billinghurst scored twice for NM, the first on an 18-yard pass from Jordan and the second a 20-yard run. Sam Parker, a two-way starter as a lineman and linebacker, got in on the fun with a 38-yard TD run as a running back. Greg Cooke scored NM’s first TD on a 36-yard run while Mike Tjarksen caught one of the two passes completed all night for the Norse on a 12-yard completion from Chip Jordan.

For the second straight year the Norse needed a win and some help to qualify for the playoffs. Entering their final regular season contest vs. a 5-2 Newaygo team, the Norse were in third place, behind Middleville and Saginaw Carrollton in the computer rankings, with only the top two in each regional qualifying. NM took care of business with a 42-8 spanking of Newaygo. Again, NM got a boost when Carrollton was defeated setting up a rematch with Middleville. After depending on their running game for most of their wins, NM went to the air waves as Newaygo tried to prevent the NM running game with seven down linemen. That set up the passing game for NM as Chip Jordan found Dave Billinghurst early for a pair of long TD passes while Billlinghurst also had a punt returned for six points. Tom Monroe ran a pass interception back 50 yards for another Norse tally while Chip Jordan ran the option 35 yards for a TD. Mario Ferretti was perfect on all six of his extra points.

A fourth quarter TD by Middleville broke a defensive standoff as NM bowed out of the playoffs with a 6-0 loss to Middleville. 6,000 fans were at Housemen Field in Grand Rapids to witness the first-round action between the same two teams from the 1979 season. Unlike 1979 when the two teams combined for 50 points, that was not the case in 1980. Middleville’s Brian Oosterhouse scored on a reverse from 34-yards for the games only score midway through the final period. Stats were about even for the night with Middleville having 194 yards in total offense with the Norsemen right behind with 183. Turnovers by both teams hurt numerous drives. NM had three turnovers in the game and had a field goal blocked.

Six Norsemen were placed on the WMC All-Conference team. Sam Parker, who will go down in Norse annals as one of the best to ever suit up for the Blue & Gold, was picked for both the offense and defensive elevens. Still only a junior, Parker would be joined on the offensive team by running back Brad Pflaum and senior tackle Ken Postema. Mario Ferretti was an easy choice as the kicker for the WMC team while Brian Shirley and another junior, Greg Cooke, would be tabbed for spots on the defensive team with Parker.

With NM fielding several juniors could they possibly make the playoffs for the third consecutive year in 1981?

Record Score Interesting Fact

1-0 NM 23, Orchard View 19 Brad Pflaum, Jerome Eck, Dan Brondyk TDs,

2-0 NM 17, Ravenna 12 Pflaum 48 yd TD, Eck 86 yd kickoff return. Ferretti FG.

3-0 NM 27, Montague 7 Dave Billighurst 90 yd Koff ret, Greg Cooke 54 & 84 yd TDs.

4-0 NM 62, Mason Co 14 Eight NM players score TDs, Pflaum 2 (15 & 21)

5-0 NM 33, Sanford Meridian 0 Jerome Eck 2 TDs (1 & 36 yd int) Pflaum 70 & Dave Meier 60.

6-0 NM 10, Oakridge 7 Mario Ferretti GW FG with :06 left. Pflaum 3 yd TD.

7-0 NM 27, Shelby 14 Pflaum 2 TDs (55 & 1) Mike Tjarksen (22) Cooke 1-yd TD.

8-0 NM 34, Hart 0 Billinghurst 2 TDs (18 pass, 20 yd run) Sam Parker 38 Yd TD.

9-0 NM 42, Newaygo 8 Billinghurst 3 TDs, Tom Monroe 50 yd int YD. Jordan 35 TD.

9-1\*NM 0, Middleville 6 Turnovers plague NM. Pflaum 50 yds rushing, Cooke 41.

**1981– Coach Dave Cooke (11-1 overall, WMC champs, state finalist)**

With six returning starters on offense and five on defense, expectations were high at the start of the 1981 season. The Norsemen were on an amazing run; 20 regular season wins in a row and back-to-back WMC titles. Headlining the list of returnees would be three-year starter Sam Parker. An all-conference performer for the past two years, Parker would do everything for NM in 1981 except drive the team bus to their away games. With a year at quarterback, Chip Jordan will have plenty of choices for receivers, including Yale bound Mike Tjarksen and Greg Cooke. Joining Parker as returnees on the line included tight end Tom Seroczynski and Bob Vershaw while many who saw action in 1980 will also help upfront. Returning on defense were All-WMC picks Cooke as a defensive back and Parker at linebacker. Among the number of Norse who went both ways for the Norse were defensive backs Tkarksen and Jerome Eck. John Stricker also returns from his linebacker spot as once again NM will play a schedule against formidable opponents, a must back in the early days of MHSAA football when only two teams from each regional qualified for the playoffs.

Once again NM would start their season against a very good Class B opponent, Orchard View. When the final horn had sounded at the end of this game, Orchard View would have given the Norse their narrowest win for the entire season. The Cardinals held the Norse scoreless for 48 minutes. Fortunately for the Norse followers, NM defense likewise held the Cardinals off the scoreboard setting up an overtime, the first in NM history. OV had the ball first, but the Norse defense once again was solid in OT. If Mario Ferretti still had another year of eligibility than NM Head Coach Dave Cooke would perhaps have just sent in his kicker to win the game. Instead with the ball at the six-yard line and OV again expecting NM to attempt to power their running backs into the line, Chip Jordan threw a quick out pass to Tom Serocynski who pranced into the end zone for the game winning score. Until the playoffs got underway no other team on NM’s regular season schedule would come less than 20 points from defeating NM.

An opponent surely had trouble trying to figure out where Sam Parker might play. Would Sam play on the line, linebacker, or would he also play in the backfield? In the second game on the 1981 season Sam played everywhere but it was his 53-yard touchdown run in the first quarter that got the Norse started in the right direction in this 34-7 victory over Ravenna. That TD led to three more NM TDs in the second quarter as the Norse took a commanding 28-0 lead at halftime. NM led 34-0 before the Bulldogs would score late in the final period for their only score on the night. Chip Jordan threw a pair of TD passes, a six-yarder to Mike Tkarksen and 12-yard pass to Brad Kinning and Jordan had a short two-yard TD run to account for three of NM’s tallies. Greg Cooke’s plunge from the one in the second quarter completed the NM scoring.

Greg Cooke surely made his father proud as the NM senior running back scored three touchdowns, including a TD on a 75-yard punt return to lead his father’s Norsemen team in a 35-0 shutout victory over Montague. Cooke also rushed for a game leading 129 yards and a pair of rushing touchdowns from eight and 10 yards. Mike Tjarksen ran for a 3-yard TD, Sam Parker bulled over from the four and added a game high 13 tackles.

NM took over undisputed possession of first place with a commanding 49-6 victory over Mason County Central. NM rolled up 334 rushing yards and 120 more real estate in passing as NM won for the eight straight time over the Spartans. Greg Cooke and Mike Tjarksen each scored on a pair of TD passes while Chip Jordan hurled a pair of aerials for six points. And, it looks like NM has found a replacement for Mario Ferretti in the kicking game as Sam Parker was a perfect 7-7 on his extra points.

For the only time in 90 years of NM football, NM traveled to Phillips Field to play Muskegon Heights in football. This was an era when the Tigers were a Class B force in football and were expected to give NM all they wanted and more. However, NM played a flawless game and won the contest by a surprising 32-6 margin over the Tigers for their 25th straight regular season win in a row. Greg Cooke, Chip Jordan, and Mike Tjarksen all had big offensive games for NM. Cooke tallied one short TD but set up others by rushing for 132 yards in 22 carries. Jordan passed for three TDs, two of those going to Tjarksen on tosses of 10 and 15 yards. Jordan’s other TD strike went to his tight end Tom Seroczynski from seven. Jerome Eck set up the first NM TD with an interception in the opening period and then was rewarded by getting the call from the one-yard line to score the first NM TD.

Oakridge’s Hall of Fame coach Jack Schugars, now in his third year as head coach of the Eagles was still looking for his first ever win over NM following his 21-0 loss to NM. However, as history will show, that percentage would change big-time. Greg Cooke scored two TDs, Chip Jordan completed a 65-yard TD pass to Jerome Eck, all coming in the second quarter as NM’s defense led by Sam Parker held Oakridge to only 39 yards of total offense in the entire game. NM got off to a rocky start. On the first play of the game Chip Jordan on a plain old quarterback sneak raced 68 yards for a TD only to have the play nullified by a NM penalty. Parker, a two-way starter had a monster game on defense with 18 tackles.

Greg Cooke ran for 309 yards and two TDs as NM improved to a perfect 7-0 on the season with a 33-6 victory at Shelby. Cooke had TD runs of one and 35 yards while Mike Tjarksen broke loose for long TD runs of 51 and 24. Sam Parker completed NM scoring on the night with a 28-yard tally. On the NM kickoff following the Parker TD, Shelby’s Rick Gowell ran the kickoff back 85 yards to account for Shelby’s lone score. NM rushed for more than 400 yards to clinch yet another WMC title.

NM certainly made a believer out of Hart coach John Shepich. “We didn’t give it away at all. It’s just that they’re the best (NM) team I’ve seen in the eight years I’ve been at Hart.” Said Shepich following NMs 26-6 victory over his Pirates. The win marked the 15th straight NM win over the Pirates. Greg Cooke ran for 147 yards and a TD; Chip Jordan had a pair of TD passes to Jerome Eck (27) and David Fenwick (16) and Mike Tjarksen got things started for NM with a 13-yard TD on NM’s first offensive series of the game. The win made it three straight years in the WMC without a loss.

Mike Tjarksen had a night to remember in NM’s 29th regular season victory in a row, a 41-6 pasting of Newaygo. Tjarksen scored four touchdowns, two on runs of 15 and eight yards and caught a pair of TD passes from Chip Jordan that went for 23 and 16 yards. For the season Tjarksen had totaled 14 touchdowns. “Fourteen touchdowns aren’t bad for a guy that doesn’t carry the ball that much,” said Coach Cooke after the game. Greg Cooke, before he and the rest of the regulars headed to the bench for much of the second half, ran for 90 yards. Jerome Eck added a TD from 13 yards out and it appeared that Coach Cooke had an Ace in the Hole with Sam Parker. Parker, who on defense helped NM hold Newaygo to rush for minus 47 yards, carried the ball five times as a fullback and rushed for 53 yards.

NM, for the third straight season qualified for the playoffs, a testament to not only their abilities, but also to their strength of schedule as it was not unusual before the playoffs expanded to eight classes/divisions beginning in 1990 that a perfect 9-0 season did not guarantee one getting into the hunt.

Montrose was NM’s first round opponent and again the Norse were headed to Grand Rapids’ Houseman Field while the ‘ole announcer’ once again took his spot up in the comfy press box to call the action for my alma mater. And what a night it was for Sam Parker! On his 18th birthday Parker had one of the best games any NM player has accomplished on the gridiron as we near the 100th year of NM football. Parker was devastating from the opening minute of the game when he made the game’s first four tackles. On defense he would finish the game with 23 stops, including two sacks of the quarterback as Montrose was only able to gain 35 yards on the ground for the entire game. On offense he kicked two field goals and concluded his incredible night with a 50-yard TD run. “That was a pretty good birthday present, wasn’t it,” said his coach Dave Cooke to my good friend and Muskegon Chronicle Sportswriter Mart Tardani following the game. “Sam has been our team leader all season and has done so many things for us. He’s all over the field defensively, and we run his hole on offense.” NM shut out a good Montrose team 25-0 to set up a semifinal clash with the state’s top-rated team in the Class C polls, Iron Mountain. NM’s starting backfield of Chip Jordan, Greg Cooke, Mike Tjarksen, and Jerome Eck accomplished a feat that had to be a rarity for any team. They each had an interception on defense! The win didn’t come without one casualty however as Jerome Eck suffered an injury late in the victory and was lost for the rest of the playoffs.

The state semi-final game with Iron Mountain was played on the artificial surface at Flint’s historic Atwood Stadium that might have been better suited for ice skating then a football game. As good a game as Sam Parker had in NM’s win over Montrose, his performance the following week in NM’s 9-7 victory over Iron Mountain might have been even better. In more than 90 years of NM football this was the school’s biggest victory all time. Iron Mountain’s main strength was in their defense, featuring a couple of D1 tackles who would start in college at a pair of Power Five universities. The Mountaineers for the entire regular season had given up but two touchdowns. It took but one quarter for NM to score a touchdown against the Iron Mountain vaunted defense, a 62-yard run by Parker on the last play of the first quarter. With players slipping and sliding all afternoon on the slippery sleet covered turf, NM turned to their power back Parker most of the afternoon where he churned out 109 rushing yards. However, the big play in the game, other than Parker’s closing kick, came on a long pass play, not a run. Iron Mountain had taken a 7-6 lead with eight minutes to play and with the Mountaineer defense, it appeared NM was headed for their second semi-final defeat in three years to an UP squad. After the Norse were unable to sustain a drive Iron Mountain took over and were marching deep into NM territory. A fourth down pass was batted down at the NM two-yard line by, who else, Parker, to give NM life with 3:45 to go in the game. Faced with fourth down still deep in their own territory a Chip Jordan scramble left him about a yard short of the first down marker. However, Jordan fumbled the ball forward and with the rule at the time, his fumble went forward and out of bounds giving NM a new set of downs and new life. Jordan then completed, and Tjarksen caught, the biggest pass of their NM careers, a 42-yard completion to the Iron Mountain 30. Jordan then rolled out around left end for nine yards and an Iron Mountain penalty on the play advanced it to the seven. There were only 20 seconds left to play, and it was decision time for the NM coach. Dave Cooke mentioned in the post-game that he would have preferred to run a play to improve their field position as the ball was spotted at the far hash mark on the left side of the field. However, NM was out of time outs and Cooke had Parker try a field goal for the game winner. If I live to be a hundred (and as of this writing that’s not too far away) I’ll never forget Parker’s kick. From my broadcasting perch I had a perfect view of the kick. All I could think (to myself) was how are we going to mess up this play --- bad snap – bad kick --- anything. But the snap was perfect, the hold was perfect, and so was Parker’s kick. I believe for a moment I was speechless (honest), and all I could think to myself was that my beloved North Muskegon High School was going to play for a State Championship. Many WMC teams in the ensuing years would play in the state finals, and many would win, but it was North Muskegon High of 1981 who would be the first from their venerable conference to ever play for a state title.

As my good friend and longtime NM baseball coach Walt Gawkowski would often say: “You never know,” certainly could be applicable to the Norsemen winning a State Class C Championship before more than 20,000 fans at the Pontiac Silverdome. ‘You never know’ but it’s quite possible the NM game was lost at a stop on the long bus ride from Muskegon to Pontiac. Shortly after consuming a meal Sam Parker was stricken with a case of food poisoning which left him sick and weakened as the kickoff arrived in Pontiac. NM fell to Elkton-Pigeon-Bayport 15-6, but the game was much closer than the final score. NM had their chances but fell just short to bring the state title back to NMHS. Trailing 8-0 midway through the fourth quarter NM scored on an electrifying 48-yard punt return from Mr. TD for NM, Mike Tjarksen. However, the point after to tie the game on the two-point attempt failed as they fumbled the pitchout, and the ball sailed out of bounds. Earlier in the quarter on a fourth down and goal play Chip Jordan completed a pass to Corky Gust, but Gust was stopped at the one-yard line of Elkton-Pigeon-Bayport. Following Tjarksen’s TD run NM attempted an onside kick, but the ball didn’t go the necessary 10 yards and E-P-B took over in great field position. The Lakers drove deep into NM territory and the Norse appeared to get a break when they recovered a fumble at the two-yard line. However, on the first play after the turnover the ball was jarred loose from the Norse running back and was recovered in the end zone to put all hopes for a late comeback to bed. And how much was Parker missed in this game? He carried the ball only 5 times for a net of 17 yards. Parker due to his illness played little in the game. “When you take him out of the middle, that really opens things up for them,” said Dave Cooke following the game. “On their touchdown drive, he wasn’t in there at all. My 1981 North Muskegon team will always be special in my heart.” Said Cooke to Mart Tardani in a special profile on Cooke in the Muskegon Chronicle on September 4, 1986.

Greg Cooke’s 1439 yards rushing during the season made Greg the fourth Norse running back to surpass the 1,000-yard mark, and his total ranks third for a single season. NM has made several playoffs runs over the next five decades, but only the 1981 team played for a state title. Post season honors saw several NM players earn honors. Mike Tjarksen, Chip Jordan, Greg Cooke John Stricker and, of course, Sam Parker made the WMC first team All-Conference Team. Those four, as well as Larry Tyler all made the All-Area team, while Parker and Greg Cooke made the prestigious first team All-State team.

Record Score Interesting Fact

1-0 NM 6, Orchard View 0 (ot) Chip Jordan 6 yd pass to Tom Seroczynski in OT wins.

2-0 NM 34, Ravenna 7 Jordan 2 TD passes & a run, Sam Parker 56-yard TD

3-0 NM 35, Montague 0 Cooke 3 TDs, 75 yd punt ret., Parker & Tjarksen TDs.

4-0 NM 49, Mason Co 6 Cooke & Tkarksen 2 TDs, Jordan 2 TD passes

5-0 NM 32, Muskegon Hts 6 Jordan 3 TD passes, 2 to Tjarksen, Cooke 139 yds & TD.

6-0 NM 21, Oakridge 0 Cooke 2 TDs, Eck 65 yards TD pass from Jordan.

7-0 NM 33, Shelby 6 Coole 309 rushing yds, 2 TDs. Tjarksen 51 & 24, Parker 28.

8-0 NM 26, Hart 6 Jordan 2 TD passes (Eck 27 & David Fenwick 16)

9-0 NM 41, Newaygo 8 Tjarksen 4 TDs (runs of 15 & 6, 2 passes 23 & 16)

10-0\* NM 25, Montrose 0 Parker 2 FG, 50-yd TD run, 23 Tkls, Cooke, Tjarksen TDs

11-0\*NM 9, Iron Mountain 7 Parker winning FG, also 60-yd TD 109 rushing yds.

11-1\* NM 6, Elkton-Pigeon 15 Tjarksen 48 yd Punt return for TD.

**1982– Coach Dave Cooke (2-7 overall, Oakridge WMC Champs)**

It would be almost a complete about face for the 1982 Norsemen as they would fall to 2-7 on the season. However, this would be a short blip for the Blue & Gold as they more than righted the ship the following year. You talk about a rebuild ----The Norse would return just one starter from their 1981 state finalist, tight end Tom Seroczynski. And he would be first moved to quarterback to take advantage of his talent and experience. Eight others who saw at least partial action in the 1981 state championship game would return. Although the Norse would post a somewhat dismal record, NM was close to turning several of those losses into victories. The young 1982 team would adsorb this experience and turn it around in just one short season.

A record that still stands today, 29 straight regular season wins without a loss came to an end in the very first contest as Orchard View edged the Norse 8-3. One certainly cannot fault the defense for the loss. NM took the lead with but 10 second left in the half on a 26-yard field from the last of the four Andrie brothers to play for NM, John Andrie. The game deciding score came from the OV defense when Steve Wilkinson intercepted a Norse pass and returned it 55 yards for the score. Wilkinson also ran in for the extra points, all the points Orchard View needed in this defensive standoff. Tom Seroczynski not only played quarterback, but he also played linebacker and led the Norse defense with 12 tackles while Chuck Miller had eight. Andrie rushed for half of NM’s total 120 yards gained on the ground.

It took not only 48 minutes to decide the winner in NM’s next game at Ravenna, but it also took three overtime periods before either team was able to score. The game was played in a continuous downpour the whole night as fumbles and miscues on the rain drenched field led to the scoreless duel. It was such a defensive struggle that there were only a handful of scoring chances during regulation. Ravenna’s only threat in regulation came after the Bulldogs intercepted a pass deep in in NM territory at the 11. That was quickly repulsed by the stout NM defense. Ravenna advanced the ball to the one in the first overtime but NM’s alert Gregg Zack, whose father Denny was a star for Ravenna in the late 1950s, recovered a fumble. NM had their chances in the overtime periods but came up empty both times. NM lost the ball on a fumble in the first OT and in the second had a 27-yard field goal blocked. Ravenna had the first possession in the third OT and connected on a TD pass and kicked the extra point. NM finally was able to cross the Ravenna goal line, and it came on a pass from Tom Seroczynski to Dave Fenwick, the only pass completed all night for NM. The placement failed and NM went down to their first defeat in a WMC conference game since 1978, 7-6.

Coach Dave Cooke shuffled his offense for NM’s next game at Montague. He moved Tom Seroczynski from quarterback to fullback so the Norse could capitalize on Seroczynski’s blocking abilities. The move paid off as his blocking created room for John Andrie to gain 149 yards in 28 carries in NM’s narrow 10-7 victory over Montague. Jeff Jordan, the younger brother of NM’s Chip Jordan, the Norse QB the previous two years, took over the quarterback duties and hit Virgil Vasquez with a 52-yard pass play for NM’s only TD in the game. In what proved to be the winning points, Andrie connected on a 35-yard field goal in the second quarter and then the Norse defense did the rest. Montague’s only TD came on a freak play. NM intercepted a pass in the third period, but the ball was knocked loose, and Mike Horn recovered in the end zone to earn Montague’s only points on the evening.

Mason County won their first game over the Norse in the last 10 years 22-6 as turnovers and penalties hurt the young Norsemen. The game was tied at halftime 6-6 thanks to a Jeff Jordan 15-yard pass to Greg Zack. Earlier in the second quarter NM was on a drive down to the Spartan 10-yard line only to lose the ball on a fumble. Mason County then took advantage of a fumble in the third quarter to score the winning touchdown. John Andrie picked up 92 yards in 25 tries for NM.

In their first meeting in 18 years the Norsemen and Ludington met in a football game. The Norsemen suffered their third agonizing loss on the season 12-7 at Ludington as penalties and fumbles led to yet another tough loss. Ludington scored their first touchdown on a Norse miscue in the first period when NM fumbled, and the Orioles Chris Castellani picked up the loose pigskin and traveled 60-yards for a TD. NM took a 7-6 lead on Jeff Jordan’s 16-yard scoring strike to Greg Zack, but Ludington scored from 10 yards out late in the game to hand NM their third close defeat of the season. Future NM fire Chief Steve Lague led the Norsemen in rushing with 65 yards. NM totaled 100 more total yards than Ludington, but mistakes doomed the Norse.

After losing three consecutive years to the Norsemen Jack Schugars finally attained a victory over NM but they had to come from behind to down the Norsemen 27-14. NM led at halftime 8-7 as they turned a bad snap from center into a two-point conversion pass from Jeff Jordan to Virgil Vasquez. This followed their only TD drive of the first half that culminated in a John Andrie dive from the one. NM received a bad break as a roughing the punter call against NM kept an Oakridge drive alive in the second half that ended with an Eagle touchdown that gave Oakridge the lead. An interception of a Norse pass set up another TD as NM fell to a very uncharacteristic 1-4 in the WMC and 1-5 overall.

Shelby’s 28-0 victory over North Muskegon the following week would be the only game in NM’s losing season where NM was badly outplayed. “They just beat us in all phases of the game” said NM coach Dave Cooke following the game. John Andrie carried 18 times for 69 yards while Tom Seroczynski led the Norse defense with 12 tackles.

It was the ‘Same O – Same O - for the Norse as fumbles and penalties contributed to their 7th loss of the season in the 9-6 loss to Hart. NM fumbled 6 times in the contest while losing the ball on three of those occasions. NM won the battle of the stats as they outrushed Hart by more than 100 yards. A 31-yard field goal in the third quarter proved to be the winning points for the Pirates. A fourth quarter 16-yard pass play from Jeff Jordan to John Andrie drew the Norse within three points of the Pirates but a 15-yard penalty late in the game stopped a potential game winning NM drive.

It could have been easy for the Norsemen to just throw in the towel and wait for the 1983 season to begin, but that was not the case as NM’s defense played hard to lead NM to their second win of the season 14-6 over Newaygo. Tom Seroczynski’s 21 tackles and the punting of Troy Scott gave NM excellent field position as John Andrie scored both NM TDs and once again led the Norse in rushing with 89 yards on 25 carries. While his brother Paul was tearing up the Ivy League as the league’s leading rusher while playing for Yale, his younger brother John was the only Norsemen to receive all WMC honors on the All-Conference Offensive team. Tom Seroczynski was the only NM player selected to the WMC All Defensive team. That would certainly change in 1983.

Record Score Interesting Fact

0-1 NM 3- Orchard View 8 John Andrie 26-yard field goal.

0-2 NM 6, Ravenna 7 NM losses in 3 OT game. Seroczynski to Dave Fenwick TD pass

1-2 NM 10, Montague 7 Jeff Jordan to Virgil Vasquez 52-yd TD pass. Andrie 35 yd FG.

1-3 NM 6, Mason Co 22 Jordan to Greg Zack 15-yd TD pass. Andrie 92 yds rushing.

1-4 NM 7, Ludington 12 Jordan to Zack 16-yd TD. Steve Lague 65 yards rushing.

1-5 NM 14, Oakridge 27 Andrie 2 short 1-yd TDs and 149 yards rushing.

1-6 NM 0, Shelby 28 Andrie 69 yards rishing, Tom Seroczynski 12 tackles.

1-7 NM 6, Hart 9 Jordan to Andrie 26-yard TD pass all the Norse scoring.

2–7 NM 14, Newaygo 6 Andrie 2 TD: s (6 & 2), Seroczynski 21 tackles.

**1983– Coach Dave Cooke (9-1 overall, WMC champs, state qualifier)**

NM Head Coach Dave Cooke was cautiously optimistic for his 1983 team that was coming off a losing 2-7 record from 1982. “I look for us to come back. We’re shooting for .500 or better.” Well, they did better than .500, how about 1.000 for the regular season! NM took those close games they lost with their young team a year ago and completely turned their season around. So dominant was the Norse during the regular season that nobody came within 14 points of the 1983 Norsemen. Seven starters returned on offense including John Andrie who rushed for more than 800 yards in his junior year. Even more starters returned on defense, eight in all with several other lettermen as well as several juniors from the JV team who would contribute heavily to NM’s success. Last year’s starting quarterback Jeff Jordan would be moved to fullback to make room for promising junior quarterback Mike Sekulich.

Unlike the previous season, when fumbles and penalties hurt the inexperienced Norsemen, that was not the case in the opening 17-0 win over Orchard View. NM only fumbled once, but recovered, and had only a handful of penalties in a surprisingly convincing win over the host Cardinals. John Andrie scored two short TDs on runs of 3 & 4 yards while his 20-yard field goal was the only scoring in the first half. So dominant was NM’s defense that OV was limited to but 80 total yards for the entire game.

The Norse had their best offensive output in two years as they totaled nearly 400 yards in offense in a 35-7 rout of Ravenna. NM dominated on both sides of the ball as the defense held Ravenna to just 20 yards in the first half. Mike Sekulich showed he was going to be another good find in the line of NM quarterback as he played a part in three of NM five touchdowns. The junior southpaw throwing QB threw for a pair of TDs, the first to Mark Cooke, the second to Greg Zack and ran for a short TD himself. John Andrie scored the first NM TD from 5 yards out while the final NM tally came when reserve quarterback Sean Duer hit Mike Poulin with a TD strike.

It was another good night for Mike Sekulich, backup tailback Trevor Leutscher, and the North Muskegon defense as NM shut out Montague 30-0. Filling in for the injured John Andrie, Leutscher ran for 143 yards rushing and scored NM’s final touchdown with a 25-yard run. Sekulich tossed for three TD passes, both to brothers of former NM standouts. Sekulich connected with Mike Seroczynski on TD passes from 18 & 24 while the left-handed throwing Sekulich also threw a TD strike to Mark Cooke, the fourth of coach Cooke’s sons to play for NM. Andrie did play some on defense and chipped in with a 30-yard field goal.

Mike Sekulich and Trevor Leutscher again had big games as NM breezed past Mason County Central 35-7. Sekulich had TD passes of five yards to future Muskegon County Sheriff Mike Poulin and a 44-yard completion to Mark Cooke. Leutscher rushed for TDs from 11 and 15 yards as NM rushed for 326 yards. Last year’s quarterback Jeff Jordan, who had muscled up to 200 pounds, accounted for the other NM tally on a 4-yard run from his fullback position.

A healthy John Andrie paced the Norse in a 31-14 victory over Ludington with his play both on offense and defense. Andrie again returned as the NM workhorse of a running back as he carried 20 times for 127 yards and four touchdowns. He also added a pair of interceptions on defense and caused a fumble on a pitchout as the Norsemen improved their record to a surprising 5-0. Trevor Leutscher scored the other NM TD on a short 2-yard run. NM’s pass defense was so solid that they only allowed eight passing yards for the entire game.

Oakridge Hall of Fame Coach Jack Schugars absorbed his largest margin of defeat to NM when his Eagles were shut out 35-0 by the Norsemen. However, over his long and prosperous career, Schugars would accumulate an impressive 19 WMC titles and 262 wins. Special mention should go to NM’s defense that has limited their opponents to only 4 touchdowns all year, with two of those TD’s coming late in the game against the NM reserves. Among those who handled the bulwark of the defensive work were linebackers Craig Stevens and Jeff Jordan, and the front defensive core of Dennis Flynn, Tim Strait, Ben Scheerer and ends Vance Achterhoff and Mike Poulin. And let’s not forget the defensive secondary that was led by John Andrie. The youngest of the four Andrie brothers to play for the Norsemen, John followed his brother Paul to Yale where he became a regular in the Yale secondary. Andrie was a thorn in the side to Oakridge from his defensive back position all night as he intercepted a pair of passes, his fourth interception in the past two games. This marked the first time all season that coach Cooke employed both Trevor Leutscher and Andrie in the backfield at the same time. Leutscher scored a pair of TDs and carried the ball on eight carries for 93 yards against a good Oakridge defense. Although he didn’t catch a TD pass from Mike Sekulich, Mike Seroczynski hauled in three passes for 121 yards with the longest netting 52 yards. Sekulich connected with Mark Cooke for a 9-yard TD pass and sneaked over from the one for the final Norse score. The win over Oakridge put NM in the driver’s seat to return to the top of the pedestal in the WMC as Oakridge fell a game back of the Norse at 4-1 in the league.

The Norse had moved up to sixth in the latest poll prior to a trip to Shelby. NM used the running of John Andrie and a tight defense to shut out Shelby 14-0 to improve to a perfect, and unexpected, 7-0 on the season. Andrie scored one TD, ran for a two-point conversion, and kept the ball away from Shelby through most of the night with a game high 151 yards rushing. Scoring the other NM TD was his running mate in the Norse backfield, Trevor Leutscher, who bulled over from the one in the second half to secure the victory.

NM clinched the WMC title with their second straight 14-0 win in two weeks in Oceana County with their third straight shutout in defeating Hart. The host Pirates outgained NM as the host Pirates ran for 199 yards to NM’s 107. The difference, however, was the Norse passing game as Mike Sekulich threw for 107 yards while Hart only netted a slim five yards. With the Norse leading 7-0 Sekulich connected on a couple of long passes to Greg Zack for 90 yards, the second good for 25 yards and a TD. John Andrie was held below his season average for yardage, but he did manage to gain 82 yards on 18 carries.

North Muskegon then completed their regular season with their fourth straight shutout, and their 11th straight win in 11 games in a 34-0 win over Newaygo. Newaygo didn’t do themselves any favors in their quest to upset the Norse as they lost the ball on fumbles and interceptions seven times. Mike Serocznski had two interceptions and caught one of the three touchdown passes thrown during the game from Mike Sekulich. Greg Zack scored the first two touchdowns on passes from Sekulich. The second of those TDs came in the final minute of the first half on a flea-flicker play. Sekulich hit tight end Mike Poulin on a pass in the flat who in turn lateraled to Zack who sprinted into the end zone from 14-yards out. Tim Straight and reserve Tim Curow scored their only touchdowns of the year late to end the Norse scoring. Again, as they had to wait in the three earlier seasons beginning in 1979, NM had to sweat out the computer rankings to see if they had qualified for the playoffs for the fourth time in five years.

It would be another two years before Whitehall would return to the WMC after more than 20 years being a member of the Seaway. Who knows who would have won if the two long-time rivals would have played one another in 1983? If the two teams had met and Whitehall would have won, then it would have been Whitehall that would qualify for the playoffs, and not NM. However, due to their strength of schedule NM squeaked into the playoffs and they would once again head to Houseman Field to play an undefeated Comstock Park team coached by a young John Shillito.

After giving up but 28 points during the regular season, Comstock Park nearly matched the Norse season total for points allowed as they shut out the Norse 26-0. One of the spectators at Housemen Field was former North Muskegon three-sport star Tom Stribley, the athletic director at the time at Orchard View. So impressed was Stribley with Comstock Park and their coach John Shillito, that Stribley coaxed Shillito to come to Orchard View a couple of years later to guide the Cardinals. Comstock Park’s quarterback Jack Houghton was the star of the evening with two TD runs and two TD passes as Comstock Park ended NM’s season at nine wins against the single loss. It also was the first time in 54 games dating back to 1978 when NM was shut out in a game. The Norsemen can take pride that in a county where football reigns supreme, they were the only football team from the area that qualified for the 1983 playoffs.

NM dominated the WMC All-Conference team like never before as they landed eight starters on the All-Area team with seven on the offensive unit. Making the grade were center Frank Cobb, end Mark Cooke, tackle Theron Hines, Guard Craig Stevens, quarterback Mike Sekulich, back Trevor Leutscher and kicker John Andrie. Surprisingly, the Norse only had one tabbed to the defensive team despite shutting out four of their conference opponents and allowing but 14 points, defensive end Mike Poulin. What’s further puzzling is that although he didn’t make the first team all WMC-defensive team, John Andrie made first team All-State as a defensive back. Craig Stevens, rated tops in his class academically, also made first team All-State as an offensive lineman.

Record Score Interesting Fact

1. NM 17, Orchard View 0 John Andrie 2 TDs (3 & 4 yds) 20-yard field goal. OV only 80 yds.
2. NM 35, Ravenna 7 Mike Sekulish 2 TD passes (Mark Cooke & Greg Zack) 2 yd run.
3. NM 30, Montague 0 Sekulich 3 TD passes (2 to Mike Sereczynski, 1 to Mark Cooke) Trevor Leutscher 25 yd TD and 143 rushing yards.
4. NM 35, Mason Co 7 Leutscher 2 TDs (11 & 14) Sekulich TD passes to Cooke and Poulin.
5. NM 31, Ludington 14 Andrie 4 TDs, 127 yds rushing & 2 int, Leutscher 2-yd TD
6. NM 35, Oakridge 0 Leutscher 2 TDs (11 & 15), Andrie TD & 2 Int. Cooke 9 yd. TD rec.
7. NM 14, Shelby 0 Andrie TD and 151 yds rushing. Leutscher one-yard TD.
8. NM 14, Hart 0 Sekulich to Zack 25-yard TD, Sekulich 1-yard sneak for TC.
9. NM 34, Newaygo 0 Sekluch 3 TD passes, 2 to Zack, 1 to Serocynski.

9-1 NM 0, Comstock Park 26 NM shut out by Comstock Park and coach John Shillito.

**1984– Coach Dave Cooke (5-4 overall, 3rd IN WMC - Montague champs)**

Although expectations to have another perfect season were not met, NM posted a winning record for the 1984 season as they once again played a tough schedule. NM’s enrollment had now dipped where they moved down from Class C to D with two of their non-conference opponents on their schedule competing in Class B. Ed Zednick once again joined Dave Cooke as his varsity assistant with veteran John Campione returning as the head JV coach. Campione would have as his assistant a youngster just five years removed from graduating from NM, Larry Witham. Leading the Norse returnees were All-WMC honorees from the previous season, quarterback Mike Sekulich, running back Trevor Leutscher and end Mark Cooke. The big problem Cooke would face to begin the season was who would be a part of his offensive line as only Mark Cooke returns from his front seven from 1983. One of the players counted on to ignite the Norse offense would be junior Tom Dana, who rushed for over 1500 yards on the junior varsity team.

The traditional opener with Orchard View appeared to be heading for their second overtime game in the past three years but the Cardinals had better ideas. With the clock winding down late in the contest OV’s Bob Larabee galloped 53 yards down to the NM 12. Three plays later Larabee was in the end zone, and the Cardinals were 6-0 winners over the Norse, reversing the 0-6 loss to the Norse in 1981. Stats were nearly even for this defensive battle. Catching a pair of passes for OV for 30 yards was John Jancek. Jancek would later have a stellar career as a defensive coordinator for such college powerhouses as Tennessee, Georgia and currently as of this writing, LSU. Junior Tom Dana had a modest 62 yards on 14 carries for the Norse.

The Norse finally, for one game at least, had their offense clicking in a 41-13 victory over Ravenna. Tom Dana had a pair of touchdowns and 10 tackles on defense to lead the Norsemen. NM tallied three TDs in the second quarter to pull away from the Bulldogs. NM’s early lead following a Dana one yard one TD was short-lived as the Bulldogs Bill White returned the NM kickoff back for a TD. Touchdown runs in the second period by Tom Dana (30), Mike Sekulich (6) and Trevor Leutscher turned the game in NM’s favor at halftime. Dana rushed for 120 yards on 11 carries while Sekulich ran for an additional 64 for the victors as NM evened their season record at 1-1.

Montague won their third game vs North Muskegon in a 20-year span, and they did it in convincing fashion with a 22-0 whitewash of the Norse. Montague, who would be the WMC champs in 1984, had all three of their touchdowns scored by Steve Jancek. The Norse rushing attack was led by Tom Dana with 60 yards as Montague limited NM’s passing game to but five yards. The final Montague touchdown came following a quarterback sack and subsequent fumble returned to the NM 3-yard line with Jancek running for the score on the next play.

NM’s first four games were like a roller coaster ride with their ups and downs. Shut out in the first game, scoring 41 in the second, back to zero points in the third and then another 40-point game in the fourth contest following a 43-7 win over Mason County Central. It didn’t at first appear that it was going to a Norse runaway at the onset of the game as Mason County scored first just before the end of the first period. NM then scored 43 unanswered points to pull away from the Spartans to even their record at 2-2. The Norse went ahead on a pass from end Mark Cooke to Sean Deur (that’s what the Chronicle wrote). Deur scored the first NM TD on a 14- yard run. Deur was very active for the Norse as he scored the first of three NM TDs in the third period on a 42-yard pass from Mike Sekulich. Tom Dana scored a pair of TDs for NM and led the Norse rushing attack with 117 yards and ran for a two-pointer. NM tackled a Mason Co runner in their end zone for a safety and on the following Spartan kick off Dana scored his second and the game’s final TD on a 55-yard kickoff return.

The Norsemen made the long trek up US 31 to play Ludington for the second straight year. They were victorious again, but it was not as easy as the previous season. Trailing 7-0 in the fourth quarter NM scored on a 59-yard run by Tom Dana. Coach Dave Cooke rolled the dice and decided to go for two and the win. Good decision. Mike Sekulich ran the option and escaped several Oriole tacklers to cross the goal line for the game winning two-pointer.

It took two overtimes for the Norse to earn a hard-earned 16-13 victory over Oakridge. NM seemingly had the game wrapped up leading 10-0 in the final period. But Oakridge fought back with a TD to bring the Eagles within two. With three minutes left in regulation Bill Riegler broke through the NM line and blocked a Tom Dana punt deep in Norse territory. The Eagles couldn’t score the go-ahead TD but called on Mike Latsch for a field goal to tie the game. The field goal just made it over the cross bar, and the two evenly matched teams were headed for overtime tied at 10-10. NM scored first on a 26-yard field goal by Mark Flynn to give NM a 3-0 lead at halftime. NM took advantage of an Oakridge fumble in the second half and scored their only TD in regulation on a 28-yard pass from Mike Sekulich to Orin Bush. Neither team was able to score in the first overtime. Oakridge settled for a second field goal by Latsch to give the Eagles a 13-10 lead. The Norse then scored when Mike Sekulich squeezed into the end zone from one yard out to give NM the win.

NM scored a touchdown in every quarter as they shut out Shelby 28-0 to improve to 5-2 on the season. Tom Dana scored on short TD runs of 7,11 and 2 while the other NM TD came on a 10-yard pass from Mike Sekulich to Scott Robarge. Sekulich was an accurate 8 of 10 in passes for 104 yards while the Norse rushed for 247 yards, with Dana topping the century mark with 114 yards.

NM would drop their final two games of the 1984 season as their offense failed to find the end zone in either contest. NM was first shut out by Hart 7-0 as they failed on a couple of scoring opportunities. A 23-yard attempted field goal was blocked in the second quarter, and a second golden opportunity went awry as the Norse fumbled at the Pirate 5-yard line with less than six minutes remaining in the game. Tom Dana failed to score after his 3-TD performance in last week’s win over Shelby but did lead NM with 76 yards in 19 carries.

After dropping their first 11 games to the Norsemen in a series that dated all the way back to 1935, Newaygo finally got on the winning side with a 22-0 shutout of the Norsemen. It was too much Dan Webber as the Lion running back gained 171 yards while scoring all three TDs to end the Norse season with a 5-4 record. Newaygo would end their season with an 8-1 season but would not qualify for the playoffs. The same was for the undefeated Montague Wildcats who ended their season with a perfect 9-0 record which exemplifies how difficult it was before the playoffs expanded to even make the post season.

Pickings were slim for NM as far as All-WMC-Conference honors were concerned. For the first time in memory, NM failed to place a single player on the All-Defensive team but did manage to have three offensive players tabbed to the All- Offensive team: Quarterback Mike Sekulich, running back Tom Dana, and center Dennis Flynn. After qualifying for the Playoffs in four of the last four years, there would be no playoff games for the Norse following the 1984 season.

Record Score Interesting Fact

0-1 NM 0, Orchard View 6 OV scores in 4th quarter for the win. Tom Dana 62 rushing yds.

1-1 NM 41, Ravenna 13 Dana 2 TDs and 120 yds rush. Sekulich TD run and TD pass to Cooke.

1-2 NM 0, Montague 22 WMC champs Montague shuts out Norse. Dana 60 yds rushing.

2-2 NM 43, Mason Co 7 Deur passes and receives TD pass. Dana two TDs, 8 yd run, 55-KO ret.

3-2 NM 8, Ludington 7 Dana 59 yd run for only NM TD. Sekulich runs for GW 2-points.

4-2 NM 16, Oakridge 13 Sekulich 1 yd TD in 2nd ot for win. Sekulich to Orin Bush 26 TD pass.

5-2 NM 28, Shelby 0 Dana 3 TDs (7, 11 & 2) Sekulich to Scott Robarge 10 yd TD pass.

5-3 NM 0, Hart 7 NM had FG blocked and fumbled deep in Hart territory.

5-4 NM 0, Newaygo 22 8-1 Newago limits NM to under 100 yards in total offense.

**1985– Coach Dave Cooke (5-4 overall, Oakridge Champs)**

Now a Class D school with the loss the previous year of a few Duck Creek students who previously elected to attend NMHS as their school of choice, the 1985 Norsemen will have a few proven players, but with diminishing numbers, depth will pose a problem, especially in case of injuries. Added to the NMHS coaching staff was former Reeths Puffer Head Coach Ed Shroeder, who also was Cooke’s trusted assistant when Cooke was the head coach at Reeths Puffer. Ready to start again for the Norse are tailback-cornerback Tom Dana, an All-Conference first team selectee from 1984, two-way end Jeff Diller, fullback linebacker Mark Flynn and split end-safety Scott Robarge. Cooke’s biggest need would be to find offensive lineman to block for Dana and his mates. Cooke would inherit a group of talented juniors and sophomores who would play significant roles in any Norse success. The Norse would repeat their 5-4 season, but the experience gained from their underclassmen would lead to a huge run in 1986.

The season didn’t begin well for the Norsemen as they were defeated by Orchard View 19-3. NM did get on board first with a 19-yard field goal but the rest of the game it was all Orchard View. One of three Orchard View touchdowns was scored by quarterback Rob Wortelboer on a 17-yard run. Wortelboer and your author would become acquainted when we both were residents in Ponte Beach Florida. Rob’s son was an outstanding lineman for a Ponte Vedra team that played in the state championship game in 2016 at the Citrus Bowl in Orlando.

The Norsemen found a running back to complement Tom Dana in junior Donte Hutcherson in NM’s last minute come from behind 20-16 victory over Ravenna. Trailing 16-14 the Norse mounted a 70-yard drive with little time remaining. A successful 26-yard pass play moved NM to the Bulldog four whereby Hutchinson scored his second TD of the game from 4-yards out to give the Norsemen a 20-16 win. Earlier in the game Hutchinson scored the first of his two TDs by gathering in a screen pass and racing 33 yards for a tally. Each team received fortuitous TDs at the expense of one another. First, NM’s Brian Diller scooped up a Ravenna fumble and rushed 16 yards into the end zone. The Norse then reciprocated as Ravenna’s Dave Wilburn then scooped up a NM fumble and breezed into the end zone for the Bulldogs first score. With less than two minutes to go in the game Tim Hahn scored on a four-yard sweep. A two-point conversion gave Ravenna a two-point lead at 16-14 before NM mounted their comeback. Tom Dana and Hutcherson gave NM a nice 1-2 combo as Dana rushed for 97 yards while Hutcherson gained 68 yards in the Norse win.

How do you lose a game 31-0 while compiling more total yards and holding your opponent to minus 19 yards offense and no first downs in the first half? Yet, that was the fate of North Muskegon in their game with Montague. There was no scoring in the first half as the Norse were inside Montague’s 15-yard line three times but failed to score. However, sometimes stats do lie as Montague scored 31 unanswered points in the second half to stun the Norsemen. NM even had more first downs then the winners, but three fumbles contributed to the defeat.

Dante Hutcherson and Tim Dana accounted for all the scoring in NM’s 27-6 victory over Mason County. Hutcherson capped a long NM drive with a four-yard burst for the first Norse score with Tom Dana following that TD with a seven-yard scamper. Hutcherson then salted this game away with a 52-yard punt return. After the host Spartans scored their only TD in the second half, Dana then broke through a big hole in the line of scrimmage and raced 79 long yards for the final Norse score to even their season’s record at 2-2.

NM and Whitehall then met for only the second time in 20 years as Whitehall had returned to the WMC after a long stint in the Seaway Conference. NM Coach Dave Cooke best summed up what had transpired in NM’s 31-26 win over the Vikings: “It was a see-saw battle,’ said the Norse mentor. And that it was. The first three NM touchdowns would be followed by a Viking TD before NM broke the skein with two consecutive tallies late. NM quarterback Orin Bush only threw for 89 yards on the night but three of his completions went for six points. Bush’s first TD toss went for 33-yards to Jeff Diller, but Whitehall quickly responded with a TD of their own. A second Bush 14-yard TD pass to Mark Flynn was answered with a long 57-yard pass by Whitehall from Randy Lorenz to speedy Jeff Cox. NM rushed for 289 yards on the night with 60 of those yards coming on the third NM TD by Tom Dana. Again, Whitehall scored to take a 20-19 lead over NM. The Norse then finally broke ‘we-score-you score’ trend by scoring the next two TDs, the first on a Dante Hutcherson 33-yard scamper, the second on Bush’s 10-yard pass to Dana. Whitehall closed out the scoring in exciting fashion as Lorenz teamed up with Cox on a long 96-yd TD reception to make the final score 31-26.

North Muskegon’s Fred Jacks field hadn’t been kind to Jack Shugars and his Oakridge Eagles. The Norse had outscored Schugars on the Northside field in their three home wins 73-0. Oakridge didn’t score much in their fourth trip to NM under Schugar’s leadership. However, the one TD on a 45-run run by tailback Fred Stewart was all the points needed in Oakridge’s 8-0 win over NM. It was the 6th straight win for the Eagles who would run the table and qualify for the first of many trips to the playoffs under the long and successful leadership from Schugars. It was a night where defenses ruled on a sloppy NM field. The stats slightly favored the Norse, and they had a couple of golden opportunities, but the Eagle defense led by Chad Brandow stymied Norsemen drives deep in Eagle territory. The NM duo of Dante Hutcherson and Tom Dana combined for 140 yards, but neither was able to cross the Oakridge goal line.

It was total domination by the NM defense and the running of Dante Hutcherson that propelled NM to a 34-0 shutout over Shelby. Hutcherson ran for three TDs on runs of 4, 1, and 33 and totaled 123 rushing yards for the game. Tom Dana contributed 70 yards rushing and a nine-yard TD as NM amassed 334 yards for the game while the defense limited the Tigers to only 30 yards. Reserve running back Ted Jahanshahi got in on the scoring with a late eight-yard TD.

The stats were even but the final score showed Hart edging the Norse 12-7 as the Norse were now at .500 on the season at 4-4. Hart scored the first two TDs before Dante Hutcherson scored a late TD from four yards out in the final quarter for the only NM score on the night. NM would need a final game victory over Newaygo to have a winning season and get some much-needed momentum heading into 1986.

It wasn’t easy but the Norse did just that. In fact, NM had to use an overtime session to earn the 20-19 victory and even that was done in dramatic fashion. Both teams were tied at 13 all at the end of regulation. Newaygo got the ball first and scored on one of Dan Webbers three TDs on the night. Newaygo faked the extra point kick to surprise the Norse, but NM intercepted the ball in the end zone to keep the Newaygo lead at 19-13. After three plays and a fumble recovery the Norse were faced with 4th & goal at the eight. Orin Bush hit Dante Hutcherson with a screen pass, and the junior speedster did the rest as he sped into the end zone. Mark Flynn then booted the game winning extra point and the Norse had a winning season at 5-4. Hutcherson rushed for 165 yards on the night that included a long 69 yd TD gallop.

Hutcherson would make the UPI first team All-State team following the season. Dante was a multi-purpose performer for the Norsemen; running for 857 yards, catching 23 passes for 290 yards and made a couple of key interceptions. Best of all for Norse fans, he would return in 1986. His running mate Tom Dana would be accorded honorable mention all-state honors as well as Jeff Diller while Mark Flynn, Diller, Tom Dana, and Hutchinson would make the WMC honor squad along with tackle Mark Johnson.

Record Score Interesting Fact

0-1 NM 3, Orchard View 19 NM only a 19-yd FG.

1-1 NM 20, Ravenna 16 Donte Hutcherson 2 TDs, 33 Pass rec, & 4 yd run. Diller 16 yds on a fumble recovery and run.

1-2 NM 0, Montague 31 NM holds Montague to minus yardage in first half but loses.

2-2 NM 27, Mason Co 6 Hutcherson 2 TDs (4 and 52 punt ret, Dana 7- & 79-yard runs.

3-2 NM 31, Whitehall 26 Bush 3 TD passes, Dana & Hutcherson 2 TDs.

3-3 NM 0, Oakridge 8 2nd qtr. 45-yd run dooms NM. Hutcherson & Dane 140 yds.

4-3 NM 34, Shelby 0 Hutcherson 3 TDS (4, 1 & 33) Dana 9 yd TD. Ted Jahanshihi TD.

4-4 NM 7, Hart 12 Hutcherson only NM

5-4 NM 20, Newaygo 19 Mark Flynn’s Extra point in OT the winner. Hutcherson 2 TDs.

**1986– Coach Dave Cooke (11-1 overall, State semi-finalist, WMC Champs)**

What a year it was for North Muskegon and for Greater Muskegon football! The Norsemen came one TD away from going to the state finals to join Muskegon and Muskegon Catholic at the Pontiac Silverdome. One must remember it was twice as difficult to make the playoffs through 1989 as there were only four divisions/classes who would qualify. Muskegon would lay claim as the state’s number one team as they won the Class A state title in front of the largest single day attendance crowd in state finals history. And who was the head coach for Muskegon? None other than former North Muskegon standout and three-sport athlete Dave Taylor, NM Class of 1959.

NM, a Class D school, once again opened their 1986 schedule against Class B opponent Orchard View. This was the first game that OV would play under their young 29-year-old coach John Shillito. Fast forward to 2024 and Shillito would win 340 games and five state titles before announcing his retirement. However, Shillito would have to wait to earn his first win as the mentor of OV as the Norsemen won 22-12. The final score might lead one to believe it was an easy win for NM but that surely was not the case. NM trailed 12-9 heading into the final quarter and did not take the lead until Mark Maynard hurled a 30-yard TD pass to Brian Diller. With time running out Dante Hutcherson iced the game with a 34-yard TD run. Diller was on the receiving end of a pair of TD passes, the first a 39-yard toss from Hutcherson and caught six passes on the night for 158 yards. Kyle Stevens, who led Norse tacklers with 11, scored the first three points for the Norse with a 25-yard field goal. Hutcherson, an all-state running back last season for NM showed he hasn’t lost his touch as he rushed for 169 yards and completed six passes for 119 more yards.

In a game where it appeared --whoever has the ball last would be the winner-- was certainly the case in NM’s wild 27-20 victory over Ravenna. Before the game winning touchdown on a pass from Mark Maynard to Joe Flynn, each of NM’s three touchdowns would be followed by a Bulldog TD. Dante Hutcherson was again the ‘Man of the Hour’ as he scored three of the four NM TDs and rushed for 145 yards. Ted Johanshahi added 70 yards as NM totaled 286 rushing yards in the victory.

With Montague limiting Dante Hutcherson’s ability to run from his quarterback position, coach Dave Cooke inserted Mark Maynard in at QB and moved Hutcherson to tailback. The move paid off as Hutcherson then rolled for 175 yards and two TDs as NM defeated Montague 28-6. Cooke made his switch late in the second quarter and it paid quick dividends as Hutcherson ripped off runs of 19 and 43 yards to set up a two-yard TD by Wes Phillips. The NM defense, led by linebackers Kyle Stevens and Scott Mahoney limited Montague to only 32 rushing yards during the game while NM totaled 278.

The Muskegon area in September of 1986 was attempting to dry out after torrential rains brought as much as 12 inches of rain over a two-day period. Fortunately for area football fans Friday night was dry and perfect for football. Mason County gave NM a brief scare as NM had to mount a rally and survive a controversial non-touchdown in the first half by MCC. At first a Mason Co TD on a fourth downplay was called a TD but an alert Coach Dave Cooke protested that the receiver was an ineligible receiver. Cooke’s protest was correct, and the teams remained scoreless at halftime. MCC scored first before NM rallied to score two second half TDs for the win. On NM’s drive following the MCC TD the Norse, with the big play a 43-yard dash by Dante Hutcherson, scored on Dante’s one-yard run. Ted Jahanshahi applied a big hit on a Spartan runner to cause a fumble on a loose ball at the Spartan 17 to set up the game winner. Hutcherson then scored once again from the one to give NM a perfect 4-0 record.

NM won a thriller when Kyle Stevens, who missed an earlier extra point, didn’t miss when it counted the most as his 18-yard field goal with only nine seconds left in the game gave NM a 22-20 win over host Whitehall. Trailing 20-13 Whitehall scored early in the fourth quarter to move within one of the Norse. Rather than a potential game tying extra point head coach John Huizenga gambled and went for two. The conversion pass from Joe Burmeister to end Scott Lamiman was good and the Vikings had a one-point lead. NM began their winning drive on its own 47-yard line with time running out. The big play in the drive was a screen pass on third and four from Dante Hutcherson to Scott Mahoney that went for 16 yards and a first down at the Whitehall two-yard line. NM was out of timeouts and rather than risk a run that might come up short, Coach Dave Cooke sent in Kyle Stevens who drilled the chip shot field goal through the uprights to give the Norse a 22-20 victory. Dante Hutcherson once again did the bulk of the running for NM with 173 yards rushing and one TD. Brian Diller accounted for the first NM tally on an 8-yard pass from Mark Maynard, Ted Jahanshahi the other on a one-yard plunge.

For the second straight week the Norse ‘cardiac kids’ pulled another victory out of their hat with a 16-14 victory over Oakridge. It wasn’t a game winning kick as it was last week in the final seconds against Whitehall, but when the final horn had sounded a Kyle Stevens 27-yard field goal was the difference in the game. Oakridge got on the board first on the first of Mike Postema’s long TDs, the first from 656 yards, the second a 57-yard dash to the end zone. Sandwiched in between Postema’s TD gallops was the Stevens field goal that had Oakridge leading 14-3 at halftime. The Norse received the second half kickoff but quickly fumbled the ball away. Not to be deterred NM mounted a long 87-yard drive with fullback Scott Mahoney plowing in from the seven. NM failed on their two-point attempt as the score stood at 14-9. With 4:48 left in the game NM’s Ted Jahanshahi recovered an Oakridge fumble on the Norse 35. Two runs of 22 and 28 by Mahoney gave the Norse first and goal from the 10. Two plays later Dante Hutcherson scored from eight yards out to give the Norse their first lead of the night. Stevens extra point kick gave NM the lead and the win at 16-14 to send 3,000 Oakridge homecoming fans home disappointed. Hutcherson had another good game on the ground with 133 yards while Mahoney bulldozed his way for 95.

Dante Hutcherson gained 200 yards on the ground while scoring all four NM touchdowns as NM improved to a perfect 7-0 on the season and 6-0 in the WMC following their 27-6 victory over Shelby. Hutcherson’s last TD was one for the books. Faced with a near hopeless third and 37 from their own 19-yard line, Hutcherson broke loose and galloped 81 yards to paydirt. Hutcherson scored a touchdown in each quarter from 1, 33, and 20 before his longest TD run of the night and of his career. The Norse garnered all 287 of their total yards for the game on the ground as NM’s front line was creating holes for the NM backs. Coach Cooke gave special praise for the win to his front five of center Steve Hoffman, guards Kyle Stevens and Troy DeMint, and tackles Mike Shaver and Chip Vanderwier. Ryan McGee had a special night on defense for the Norse as he was credited with 19 tackles.

NM then made it a clean sweep of the WMC with a 28-8 victory over Hart. The NM ground game was again working to perfection as they pounded out 322 rushing yards with 158 of those credited to Dante Hutcherson. Scott Mahoney rolled up 87 while Ted Johanshasi added 42 more yards to the Norse total. Hutchinson added three more TDs to his already impressive season total while NM even found their passing game. Mark Maynard connected on a 9-yard TD pass to Brian Diller for one of four NM tallies on the night.

With only one regular season game remaining it was time to check the computer playoff rankings to see where the Norse stood in their quest to return once again to post-season action. Playing virtually and All Class C schedule, with Orchard View a Class B opponent, the Norse were assured of advancing with a win or a loss to Newaygo. Playoff restrictions had eased the last couple of years as now four teams from each region would advance, instead of two in the early years of the playoffs.

NM ended an eight-year series with Newaygo that began in 1979 with a 25-0 shutout over the Lions. Since the rivalry began back in 1935 it was a series dominated by NM as they had won 15 of the 16 games. It would be another 30 years before the two teams would again collide in a playoff game. The Norse struggled with the Lions at the onset of the regular season finale, so much so that Coach Cooke, needing a spark, moved Dante Hutcherson to quarterback. On its third possession Dante guided the Norse on a 12-play 81-yard drive that was culminated by sophomore Scott Mahoney’s 5-yard run. Then it was TD time for Hutcherson as he scored the final three TDs for the Norsemen to bring his season total up to 20 as NM completed their fourth undefeated regular season schedule in just the seventh year for Dave Cooke as the NM coach.

No longer would first round playoff games be played at a neutral site as the MHSAA allowed all opening round games to be played at the home of the team with the higher computer points. Thus, Norse fans enjoyed the home opener as NM hosted Reading High who had to make the 175-mile journey to North Muskegon. NM was one of three Muskegon teams to qualify for the playoffs in 1986 as Muskegon and Muskegon Catholic also qualified. With the NM-Reading game played on a Friday night, and with the Big Reds and Crusaders playing their openers the following afternoon, I was excited to work NM’s game for WKBZ on the radio. With a night off, my halftime guest was Muskegon coach and former Norseman Dave Taylor, who was able to watch his alma mater defeat Reading 19-0. NM scored a pair of fourth quarter touchdowns to give the Norse some breathing room as Reading was only one score away from pulling off an upset before Dante Hutcherson raced 59 yards to give NM a two-score lead. Two-way starter sophomore Scott Mahoney then sealed the victory with a 20-yard interception of a Reading pass. NM scored the only touchdown in the first half when the do-it-all Hutcherson returned a Reading punt 48 yards for six points.

NM would head to Battle Creek to battle a Schoolcraft team coached by Larry Ledlow. If you investigate the MHSAA record book, you will find Ledlow with the highest winning percentage all time for all who coached in the many years of high school football in the State of Michigan. However, NM didn’t contribute to Ledlow’s winning percentage as NM pulled off a dramatic 10-7 overtime victory over Schoolcraft. Kyle Stevens 28-yard field goal in OT would prove to be the difference but the kick was not a walk-off winner. No, NM fans would have to sweat out four downs of a Schoolcraft possession as the Eagles won the toss and elected to go on defense in the overtime. After gaining no yards on their first two possessions starting at the NM ten-yard line, coach Ledlow elected to attempt a pair of passes to earn the win. Dante Hutcherson has been the catalyst for numerous Norse victories on the season for his outstanding offensive work, but it was his defense that saved the day for his Norsemen. Dante broke up both pass plays to send NM into the semifinals a week later against Fowler. Schoolcraft, who had just a short journey to nearby CW Post stadium in Battle Creek, took a halftime lead over the Norse by rushing for a TD on their first possession of the game. Hutcherson, now playing quarterback for NM, ran the option play 34 yards in the third period for NM’s only TD of the game and Hutcherson’s 23rd TD of the season. Stevens kick was good that set up the game’s histrionics in overtime.

NM had won six games during the season by coming from behind in the second half but that was not the case in their 6-0 loss to Fowler in the state semi-final game played again at CW Post stadium in Battle Creek. However, it was in the first half when NM failed to score deep in Fowler territory that contributed to their only defeat in 1986. NM on their very first possession had first and goal at the Fowler nine but failed to score. On their very next possession NM marched to the Fowler 24 before being stopped on downs. On the next possession Fowler scored the only touchdown in the entire game, a 61-yard option run in the second quarter. As of this date (2025) it was the only game played between the two schools. A win would have given the Muskegon area three teams in the state championship game as eventual state Class A champ Muskegon and Muskegon Catholic won.

Nineteen Eighty-Six was the beginning of a long run where the Muskegon Area could boast of being King football in the state of Michigan. As one might expect following the great season of 1986 many of the Norsemen were accorded post-season honors. None more so than Dante Hutcherson. An easy choice for all-area, all-conference, and

Dante set a NM season rushing record with 1759 rushing yards. In his two years as a Norsemen gridder his 2616 career rushing yards were third behind two NM legends, Stan Guy, and Paul Andrie. Also picked for post-season honors were end Byron Diller, tackle Chip Vanderwier, guard Troy DeMint and kicker Kyle Stevens on offense. Stevens and Hutcherson were also picked on defense, along with lineman Ryan McGee.

Record Score Interesting Fact

1. NM 22, Orchard View 12 Brian Diller 2 TD rec, Dante Hutcherson 39 yd TD
2. NM 27, Ravenna 20 Hutcherson 145 yds & 3 TDs. .

3-0 NM 28, Montague 6 Hutcherson 2 TDs & 175 rushing yds. Wes Phillips & Johanshihi TDs.

1. NM 13, Mason Co 7 Hutcherson 2 TDs as NM rallies for win.
2. NM 23, Whitehall 21 Kyle Stevens FG the winner. Hutcherson TD & 173 yds. Diller TD.
3. NM 16, Oakridge 14 Hutcherson’s 8-yard TD late the winner. Mahoney 7 yd TD.
4. NM 27, Shelby 6 Hutcherson 4 YTDs, (1,33,20 & 81) and 200 yds rushing.
5. NM 28, Hart 8 Hutcherson 3 TDs 158 rush yd. Maynard to Dillard 9 yd TD pass.
6. NM 25, Newaygo 0 Hutcherson 3 TDs 149 rush yd. Scott Mahoney 5-yd TD.

10-0\* NM 19, Reading 0 Hutcherson 2 TDs, 59 yd run 48 punt ret. Mahoney 20 yd int TD.

11-0\* NM 10, Schoolcraft 7 Stevens FG in OT wins, Hutcherson 34 yd TD & 2 pass breakups.

11-1\* NM 0, Fowler 6 NM ends magical season.

**1987– Coach Dave Cooke (7-3 overall playoff qualifier Oakridge/Shelby, co-WMC Champs)**

NM had their work cut out for them if they were to again make the playoffs in 1987. If they were going to accomplish that goal, then they would need help from a group of returning regulars from 1986. Coach Dave Cooke would be counting heavily on end Brian Diller, bruising fullback/linebacker Scott Mahoney, wingback/cornerback Joe Flynn, two-way tackle Mike Shaver, and two-way back Wes Phillips. The bad news: They’re all area kicker Kyle Stevens moved to Manistee with his family creating a big hole. However, the Norse would find that they had a very good replacement as one would see very early into the season.

North Muskegon’s 1987 opener with Holton would be the first of 29 games to date played between the two local schools. Although NM has dominated the series over the years, winning 23 of the 29 games played, it took a field goal by the new NM kicker Karl Nicles to not only win the game, but his short 21-yard field goal would be the only points put on the scoreboard. NM had scoring chances throughout the game, but they were wasted.” It was simply a case where we got something going and ended taking a penalty or fumbling,” offered Coach Dave Cooke following the tight victory. The winning drive coming late in the fourth quarter consumed 74 yards before Nicles converted on his field goal to earn NM a narrow 3-0 win over the upstart Holton team.

NM posted their second straight shutout and put three touchdowns from three different ball carriers on the board in a 21-0 win over Montague. Jerry Root scored in the first quarter from 8-yards out while Wes Phillips scored from the nine in the second quarter to give NM a 14-0 lead at halftime. Fullback Scott Mahoney, who led all rushers with 91 yards and all tacklers with nine, bulled over from the 2 in the final quarter to end the scoring. NM hindered the Wildcat quarterback all night with Joey Bush credited for two QB sacks and defensive back Tim Dana with two interceptions. Mahoney had 91 yards rushing with Phillips close behind with 84.

The NM defense and their special teams scored all the points the Norse needed in a tight 10-8 victory over Mason County Central. For the second time in three games, it was a Karl Nicles field goal from 37-yards out that proved to be the game winner for the Norse. Trailing 8-7 in the third period Nicles nailed his field goal to overcome a Spartan lead in the second quarter on a Mike Lynn 32-yard scoring strike to Dave Cox. Lynn then tossed for the two-pointer to give the Spartans a brief lead heading into the second half. NM’s defense shut down Mason County’s running game to less than ten yards on the night. NM’s only TD came in the first quarter when NM’s Brian Diller picked up a Spartan fumble and raced 15 yards into the end zone.

Once again NM left it up to Karl Nicles to put NM into the victory column as he kicked the winning field goal with just 0:28 left in the game as NM eked out at 24-21 victory over Whitehall. NM squandered a 21-7 lead in the second half as two fumbles were turned into Viking TDs to tie up the game at 21-21 before Nicles stopped the bleeding with his third game winning field goal in the four Norse victories. NM got TDs from three different backs. Jerry Root scored the first on a 13-yard run. Joe Flynn added a second on a 23-yard score while Wes Phillips added the third on a 10-yard run to give NM their 21-7 lead.

Oakridge then snapped NM’s winning streak at four to begin the season with a 14-0 shutout of NM. This game was decided early, very early. Oakridge struck quickly on a long 74-yard TD gallop by the previous week’s Oakridge Homecoming King Mike Postema. “That first touchdown happened so fast that we didn’t know what the breakdown was,” Norsemen defensive coach Ed Schroeder said following the game. The second Oakridge TD came in a bizarre way. NM’s quarterback Mike Delong was hit hard, and the ball popped straight up in the air and landed in the hands of the Eagles TJ Reterstoff. Fifty-two yards later Reterstoff was celebrating in the end zone with the 2nd Oakridge TD of the quarter and the last score of the game.

Shelby played their best defensive game of the year with a complete domination of the running game. In the 12-0 blanking by Shelby the Norse were held to a season low 59 rushing yards while Shelby, led by the Muskegon Area’s all-time leader in the shot put, Aaron Gowell, rushed for 108 of the Shelby yardages. It was the second straight game in which the Norse failed to score a point, and they now were in a perilous position if they were again to qualify for the playoffs.

Winless Hart was a welcome opponent from their tough schedule in the 1987 season. NM scored all their touchdowns in the first half in their 19-0 victory to improve to 5-2 and keep up their slim hopes for a playoff run. Just as they have all season NM used a trio of players to score a TD in a game. Jerry Root scored first on a 13-yard run followed by a Joe Flynn dash for 23 yards. Mike Delong then tossed his first TD pass of the season when he teamed up with Brian Diller from 25 yards. Root had 84 rushing yards for the Norsemen on offense while junior linebacker Scott Mahoney had eight tackles as NM posted their third shutout of the season.

As if Karl Nicles hadn’t already done enough for NM’s quest to again make the playoffs, he came through again as his kicking was the difference in NM’s 10-6 victory over an up-and-coming Ravenna team that’s just beginning to jell under the leadership of their new head coach, Dusty Fairfield. Ravenna, with a team that’s loaded with several promising underclassmen, scored first when their junior tailback Jeff Heiss scored on a 17-yard run in the third quarter. The Bulldogs mishandled the snap on their extra point try that left the door open for a NM rally. NM began their drive on the next series of downs with runs by Wes Phillips (13 yards) and Chad Puthoff (11 yards) picking up valuable yardage on the ground. Another key play in their scoring drive was a 16-yard pass from Mike DeLong to Scott Mahoney. It was Mahoney who traversed the final 3 yards to tie the game at 6-6. In stepped Nicles, who became the Norse kicker at the beginning of the season when last year’s kicker, junior Kyle Stevens, moved with his family to Manistee. His extra point was perfect and so was a 24-yard field goal late in the game that gave NM three more insurance points.

Although they had two losses on the season, NM, a Class D school playing a Class C schedule was in the fourth and final position in the computer rankings. NM’s final opponent was a newcomer to their schedule replacing Newaygo, Kent City. NM had it their own way against Kent City in a dominating 36-0 rout of the winless Eagles. Scott Mahoney rushed for a pair of short TD runs while Mike DeLong had a big day for the Norsemen. The NM quarterback tossed a 12-yard TD pass to Brian Diller in the second quarter and shortly after halftime broke through on a 46-yard gallop for six points. Wes Phillips dashed for 33 yards for a first quarter touchdown while steady Karl Nicles kicked four extra points and, for good measure, booted yet another field goal. Matt Steketee led the NM defense in posting their fourth shut out on the season with two interceptions while Tim Dana had eight tackles.

North Muskegon would make the playoffs for the sixth time, five under the coaching of Dave Cooke. That number equals the mark of perennial power Muskegon Catholic who joined NM as the only playoff qualifiers in 1987. It would be a daunting task for the Norsemen as they would have to go on the road and play, not only the top-rated team in the computer rankings, but an undefeated Schoolcraft team that was ranked number one in the state in the final AP poll. Thirsting for revenge after being ousted by NM in the second round of the playoffs the previous season, Schoolcraft had to sweat out a last-minute drive from NM to defeat NM 7-2. Trailing 7-0 NM started an 80-yard drive that was stopped by an interception on a 3rd and goal play at the five. Schoolcraft then took an intentional safety to give them better field position on a fourth downplay. NM had time for one Hail Mary, but a penalty stopped the play, and NM ended their season at 7-3.

NM built their season not with a bunch of superstars but just gritty players as post season honors went to just a handful of Norsemen. Junior Karl Nicles was an easy choice as the All-Area kicker while tackle Mike Shaver made the first team all-area as a lineman. The lone Norsemen on the All-Area defensive team was linebacker Tim Dana. Nicles also made first team All-State honors as a kicker.

Record Score Interesting Fact

1. NM 3, Holton 0 NM wins on 21-FG by Karl Nicles. Scott Mahoney 59 yds rushing.
2. NM 21, Montague 0 Mahoney, Jerry Root and Wes Phillips NM TDs. Tim Dana 2 int.
3. NM 10, Mason Co 8 Brian Diller picks up fumble for 15-yd. TD. Nicles winning 37-yd FG.
4. NM 24, Whitehall 21 Nicles 38-yd FG wins another. Root, Phillips & Joe Flynn NM TDs.

4-1 NM 0, Oakridge 14 NM gives up two big plays to the Eagles.

* 1. NM 0, Shelby 12 NM held to season low 59 yards rushing.

5-2 NM 19, Hart 0 Root, Flynn TDS, Mike Delong to Diller 25 yd TD pass

6-2 NM 10, Ravenna 6 Mahoney only NM TD. Nicles extra point and field goal the winner.

7-2 NM 36, Kent City 0 Delong TD pass to Diller & 46 yd td. Mahoney 2 TDs, Phillips 1

7-3\* NM 2, Schoolcraft 7 NM at Schoolcraft 5 yd line before interception stops drive.

**1988– Coach Dave Cooke (8-2 overall, playoff qualifier, Ravenna WMC champ)**

NM began the season as if they would challenge the 1941 team for an unbeaten, untied, and unscored upon season as they posted five straight shutout wins. NM would carry a 7-0 record into their 9th game of the season before tasting their first defeat at the hands of a great Ravenna team. NM would again make the playoffs, for the seventh time. Many would find it hard to believe but by qualifying for number seven, the Norse through the 1988 season had made the playoffs more than any other team in the Greater Muskegon area. Much of the optimism for NM football in 1988 was centered on their defense with a pair of stalwart linebackers in three-year starter Scott Mahoney and Tim Dana. Five other defensive starters also returned including Joey Bush, Joe Flynn, Boyd Freeman, Brian Strabel and Roy Zimmerman.

The Norse needed a good defense against a strong Holton team as the Norse had trouble moving the ball against the pesky Red Devils in their 14-0 victory. This was a Holton team that would win the rest of their regular season games and qualify for the playoffs. The defense scored a touchdown for NM when Roy Zimmerman recovered a blocked punt in the end zone for one of the two NM tallies. Veteran Scott Mahoney scored the first NM score and was the leading rusher on the night for the Norse with 64 tough yards. Joe Bush had 10 tackles for the Norse while the two veteran linebackers, Tim Dana, and Mahoney each contributed nine.

There were no long TD runs that harkened back to the days of Stan Guy as all five NM touchdown came inside the five-yard line as NM shut out Montague 34-0. Scott Mahoney rushed for a pair of short yardages touchdowns and had his best day as a running back with 149 total yards in 23 carries. Joe Mylenik is giving NM a nice 1-2 combo as he ran for 97 yards on but 10 attempts as NM had their offense in gear after a sputtering start in week one. Just as they did in their week one victory over Holton, the Norse defense was stellar as they held the host Wildcats to but 18 rushing yards for the entire game.

North Muskegon combined the run with the pass as the Norse used a balanced attack to subdue Mason County Central 46-0. Returning starting quarterback from 1987, Mike Delong threw a pair of touchdown passes, one to Haley Potts for 40 and his other TD aerial was to Brian Strabel good for 17 yards. Scott Mahoney scored three touchdowns in the rout, (10,9 & 5) while Potts also had an 11-yard scamper for his second TD. Joe Mylenek scored the first NM TD from 10 yards out in a commanding performance by both the offense and defense.

NM posted their fourth consecutive victory and fourth straight shutout with a 34-0 victory over a Whitehall team that is still looking for its first victory. Scott Mahoney rumbled for three short yardage touchdowns (2,3 & 4 yds) with Haley Potts having the night’s longest run, a 60-yard sprint to the goal line. Potts also had a two-yard tally as the Norse rushed for an even 300 yards for the game. Mahoney had 97 of the 300 yards while Potts was close behind with 87 yards on only 6 carries. Once again, the NM defense was dominant as they allowed Whitehall but 83 total yards for the entire game.

Returning for his second season was NM’s all-state kicker, Karl Nicles. However, due to field position and NM’s abilities to score touchdowns his kicking hadn’t been needed – until now. For the second time in eight years, Hall of Fame coach Jack Schugars lost to NM by a field goal as Nicles winning field goal in overtime was the only score in the 3-0 defensive slugfest at Oakridge. Currently a noted pediatrician in the Muskegon area, Dr. Karl Nicles was called upon in overtime after Oakridge denied the Norsemen an opportunity to score the traditional way with a TD. His 19-yarder was perfect, and NM had their fifth win in a row and an amazing five consecutive shutouts. The team’s played 48 minutes with nothing decided in regulation. Neither team had a serious scoring opportunity during regulation as the deepest penetration either team got to the opponent’s goal was a Norse drive to the Eagles 27. However, a Nicles field goal was blocked by the Eagles’ Larry Pierce. Oakridge featured a sophomore running back who dashed 47 yards to the NM 33 in the third quarter before NM’s defense held. The sophomore, Dave Nelson, was the leading rusher at the time in the WMC and would go on to have a stellar high school and college career. Oddly enough, Nelson in later life would move to North Muskegon where he became a valued police officer serving NM. Losing by a field goal would be doubly painful for Coach Schugars as his Eagles would lose to Ravenna by a field goal the following Friday.

Unrealistic thoughts of going the entire season without an opponent crossing their goal line ended, but the winning streak continued in NM’s 24-15 victory over a Shelby team that shut NM out the previous season. NM bolted out to an early 14-0 lead on short TD runs from Joe Mylenek (5) and Haley Potts (1). The shutout streak came to an end when Shelby scored with just eight seconds left in the half and with a successful two-pointer, closed the gap to 14-8. NM scored on their first possession of the second half on a Mylenek 4-yard run. Shelby responded to move to within one score of NM but NM’s ‘ole reliable’ kicker, Karl Nicles, put the game away with a 38-yard field goal to put the game on ice.

North Muskegon and Hart have faced one another 86 times as of this date. NM’s 61-0 rout of Hart in 1988 would be the widest margin of victory in a rivalry that’s been dominated by NM. It was 40-0 at the half as Scott Mahoney scored four TDs in three difference ways. Two TDs came on short runs; one came when he recovered a fumble in Hart’s end zone, while another came on a 48-yd pass from Mike DeLong. Haley Potts had a pair of TDs (21 & 9), with the other NM tallies coming from runs from Joe Flynn (29) Tim Dana (1) and Scott Chappel (14).

The stage was now set for the biggest game of the year and to make it even more dramatic it would be coach vs. pupil. Second year coach Dusty Fairfield was the Reeths Puffer quarterback for the Seaway co-champs in 1976. And who was his coach? Yup --- Dave Cooke. It would be No. 1 in the AP polls in Class D North Muskegon against No. 6 in Class C Ravenna. Fairfield had already performed miracles at Ravenna. So dismal was Ravenna football in the past that already the 7-0 record for Ravenna going into the NM game were the most wins in the school’s history! Cars were parked down the road seemingly forever as it was easily the biggest game to date to be played at Ravenna’s Citizen’s field. My partner Gene Young and I were as excited as well to call the game on WKBZ. After a scoreless first quarter Ravenna then did the unthinkable against a NM defense that had given up but 15 points the entire season. Ravenna scored four touchdowns – in the second quarter - all the points scored in the Bulldogs 26-0 victory to clinch their first ever WMC championship. Fairfield showed his masterful coaching genius that would lead him to four state championships during his brilliant coaching career. He surprised the Norse by flipping his all-everything quarterback Mark Jacobs to a wideout receiver and inserted his normal wideout Rod Place at quarterback. Place threw a pair of touchdown passes to Jacobs while tailback Jeff Heiss did the rest to nail down the biggest victory in Ravenna history as of that date. The Bulldogs would advance to the state finals at the Pontiac Silverdome where they gave Detroit DePorres a battle before losing a tight ball game.

Although they had suffered a crushing defeat the previous Friday at Ravenna and were already virtually assured of a playoff berth due to their strength of schedule, the Norse bounced back with an easy 33-0 conquest of Kent City in the final game of the 1988 regular season to clinch yet another playoff berth. NM got off to a sluggish start before finding their rhythm in the second quarter to post their 8th victory and seventh shutout of the season. Highlighting the victory was a long 82-yard sprint for a TD by Joe Mylenek. Scott Mahoney added a pair of TDs, one on a 5-yard run, the other on a 33-yard pass from Mike DeLong. Joe Flynn added to the total with a 23-yard run while Karl Nicles would cap his outstanding high school career with his final field goal in a Norse uniform.

From 1986 through the 1989 season, when there were only four Classes/Divisions, NM had the misfortune to always be placed in what would prove to be the roughest regional in the state. The Norse were in the same region with both Schoolcraft and Mendon who would go on to win two state title during that period. NM’s first round opponent would be Mendon, whose only loss in the season was a one-point loss to Schoolcraft, who would go on to be the eventual state champs.

The playoff game against a strong Mendon team was played in the rain at Fred Jack Fields. Mendon scored both of their touchdowns on long plays. On their second possession of the opening quarter Clint Wagner sprinted 71 yards for a touchdown. Lightning struck twice for Mendon as their second tally in the third quarterback was an even longer 80-yard run by Joe White. “We didn’t play well at all, Said NM Coach Dave Cooke, “We made mistakes, particularly in the first half. Every team in the playoffs is good, and you just can’t make the kind of mistakes that we made. This was like out game against Ravenna, which was also played in a downpour. I guess we just don’t play well in the rain.” Added the coach following the 13-0 loss to Mendon.

Post season honors mainly focused on the NM defense, and why not since they posted seven shutouts in the nine games played. Tim Dana was selected to the all-area defensive team along with Joey Bush. Oddly enough, although Scott Mahoney was selected all-area first string on offense, he made 1st string defense on the All-State team pegged by the Detroit Free Press. Although not needed as much as he was in his junior year Kyle Nicles was honored as the top all-area kicker for the second straight year.

Record Score Interesting Fact

1-0 NM 14, Holton 0 Scott Mahoney TD from the 1. Roy Zimmerman block punt for TD.

2-0 NM 34, Montague 0 Mahoney 2 TDs, Joe Mylenic, Joe Flynn, Tim Dana each a TD.

3-0 NM 47, Mason Co 0 Mahoney 3 TDs, Mike DeLong TD passes to Potts and Stabel.

4-0 NM 34, Whitehall 0 Mahoney 3 TDs, Potts a 60-yard TD and another from 2 yards.

5-0 NM 3, Oakridge 0 Nicles 19-yd FG the winner.

6-0 NM 24, Shelby 15 Mylenek 2 TDs (5 & 4) Potts 1-yd TD, Nicles 38 yd field goal.

7-0 NM 61, Hart 0 Mahoney 4 TDs, Potts 2, Joe Flynn, Tim Dana and Scott Chappel TD.

7-1 NM 0, Ravenna 26 Record Ravenna crowd as Bulldogs score 4 TDs in second quarter.

8-1 NM 33, Kent City 0 Mylenek 82-yard TD, Mahoney 2 TDs, Flynn 23-yard TD run.

8-2 NM 0, Mendon 13 Mendon uses two long TD runs to end Norse season.

A group of football players

AI-generated content may be incorrect.

**The 1988 NORSEMEN**

**1989– Coach Dave Cooke (8-2 overall, playoff qualifier, Oakridge WMC champ)**

Nineteen Eighty-Nine would be the last year whereby only four teams would play for a state title. Expectations could not have been high at NMHS as the total enrollment at the school was less 200 students. There was only a total of 35 boys in the junior and senior classes and as the practices began at the outset there were only 17 players on Coach Dave Cooke’s varsity. However, Cooke did return a handful of quality players from the 1988 team. Starters back included defensive backs Tom Gebuhr and two-way starter Joe Mylenek. Two-way performer Scott Smith and Defensive tackle Ron Hillman also retuned but it was unrealistic to believe NM could possibly match last year’s outstanding record. Somehow, again, NM would qualify for the playoffs for the eighth year and ninth overall, the most of any team in the Greater Muskegon Area.

NM did come up with a hidden gem with a transfer from Mona Shores, Rondell Hutcherson, the younger brother of Dante Hutcherson. And what an addition Rondell was to the NM team! In his first game in a Norse uniform ‘all’ Rondell did was score the first three Norse touchdowns on runs of 65, 23 & 3 to help NM defeat Holton 39-6 in their season opener. All three Hutcherson TDs came in the opening quarter! In the second half it was veteran Joe Mylenek who also scored a trio of touchdowns, two short plunges from the one and his final TD from 6-yards.

Rondell Hutcherson then scored five touchdowns, to share the record with five other Norsemen (Stan Guy, Charley Langeland, Jim Pancy, Paul Andrie, Chandler Edwards) in a 47-0 pounding of Mason County Central. Hutcherson had runs of 40, 12, 2, 3, and 4 yards as NM put this game away early with 27 first quarter points. Joe Melenek gave NM a nice 1-2 punch with Hutcherson as he scored two TDs. The Norse rushers accounted for 394 yards in the game with Hutcherson grinding out 189 yards and Mylenek 125.

For the eight straight encounter between rivals North Muskegon and Whitehall it was the Norsemen who would again come out on top with a 21-6 victory. Rondell Hutcherson ran for 146 yards on 18 carries and received some great blocking from his running mate Joe Mylenek. It was a Mylenek interception who set up the first of Hutcherson’s two TDs. NM built up their lead over the Vikings to 21-0 before Whitehall could score late.

A powerful Oakridge team would hand NM what would prove to be their only regular season loss in 1989, 33-14. Oakridge used the big play to bolt out to a 19-0 lead with the first of their long TD’s a 35-yard run by future North Muskegon police officer David Nelson. There was no quit in the Norsemen as they closed the gap to 19-14. Their first TD came with coach Cooke making a gamble that paid off. With no time outs and time for only one play, Tom Gebuhr teamed up on an eight-yard TD pass to Scott Chappell to cut the lead to 19-7 at halftime. The Norse later marched 67 yards on 11 plays with Rondell Hutcherson churning up 25 yards on the drive. Hutcherson than scored the TD on a fourth and goal from the one to leave the Norse just five points shy at 19-14. However, the stronger Oakridge team powered their way to a couple of second half touchdowns to pull away for the win.

The Norse defense, especially the secondary paved the way for NM’s 16-8 win over Shelby. Both of NM’s TDs came on interceptions as the Norse offense failed to record a first down in the second half against a stout Tiger defense. Ty Zednik picked off a Shelby pass and returned it 32 yards for a TD. Brad Demirjian then gave the Norse some breathing room with a 25-yard field goal with 12 seconds left in the first half. Shelby’s Troy Gowell scored in the fourth quarter to narrow the NM lead to 10-8. With time running out and Shelby in desperation mode, Joe Mylenek intercepted a pass deep in Shelby territory and returned it 15 yards for the insurance touchdown with just 16 seconds left.

NM didn’t wait long to score their first touchdown in a 46-0 rout of Hart. Rondell Hutcherson took the opening kickoff and sped 98 yards for the first of seven Norse TDs on the night. Hutcherson later added TDs from 48 and 28 as NM had now outscored Hart 126-0 over their last three games. Sophomore Dan DeLong hurled a pair of TD passes, the first for 28 yards to Joe Mylenek, the second to Tom Gebuhr for 17. In addition to his two TD strikes, DeLong also ran 14 yards for six-points. Reserve Steve Huff scored the final touchdown on a 3-yard run late in the contest as NM improved to 5-1 on the season.

For the fourth straight season North Muskegon would win a game with a field goal in their 10-7 win over last year’s WMC Champs from Ravenna. Tom Gebuhr set up the game winner with an interception, the second of Bulldogs turnovers that aided in the Norse win. It was then up to Brad Demirjian to attempt the game winner from 39. The kick crept over the crossbar with perhaps an inch to spare to give NM a come from behind victory. Following a scoreless first half Ravenna scored first on a pass from Steve Crowley to Jerry Young from 8-yards out. A Randy McGee fumble recovery at the Ravenna 9-yard line led to an NM touchdown from Gebuhr on a quarterback carry.

No such game winning field goal was needed in the next Norse contest. NM handed Montague their worse beating ever in over 90 contests between the two rivals, 56-0. Rondell Hutcherson ran for 4 touchdowns with 261 yards rushing and even threw a TD pass to Joe Mylenek that went for 31 yards. Hutcherson’s TD sprints were from 49, 22, 14, & 35. Vince Panucci recovered a fumble in the end zone for his lone career TD while Scott Smith added a tally on a 4-yard pass from Tom Gebuhr.

In the only game ever played between the two schools, and the only Class D school on their schedule, NM overwhelmed Baldwin 47-0 in the final game of the regular season. The Norse scored four touchdowns in the first quarter to remove any doubts that NM was again headed into the playoffs. The game was played at Baldwin as NM had to scramble to even find an opponent willing to play the Norse in the final game of the season. Reports on this game from the Muskegon Chronicle were skimpy at best as the only Norse scores reported were Rondell Hutcherson scoring on a long run on the first possession and on a punt return of 60 yards.

The Norsemen had the misfortune of going on the road for their playoff game. To compound their ill-fated luck of the draw their opponent would be not only the number one team in the computer rankings, but the number one team in the polls, the Mendon Hornets. I think there is little doubt that the state champion for the 1989 season in Class D was decided in Mendon. History would show that Mendon, after their 7-0 defeat in overtime would demolish the rest of their opponents on their way to the state championship. Mendon was so dominate during the season that they outscored their opponents 443-31 and only North Muskegon came within 20 points of the Hornets during the season. NM had utilized their kicking game to pull out several wins over the past few years but a 33-yard field goal attempt that perhaps would have won the game fell agonizingly inches short of a NM victory. NM’s defense was never threatened during the first 48 minutes of the contest as the host Hornet’s never got inside the NM 25. Twice NM came up with key interceptions to thwart Mendon drives. Misfortune for NM took place on the very first play in overtime when a mix-up in coverage on a first downplay left a Mendon receiver wide open in the end zone. The pass on first down caught NM by surprise and the 10-yard TD pass would end the Norse season at 8-2.

The 1989 NM season was a masterful coaching job by coach Cooke and his staff. NM opened the season with only 17 players due to their school’s tiny enrollment. Many players were lost from the previous year’s team and the JV team from 1988 was a woeful 1-8. How Cooke and his Norsemen compiled an 8-2 record and lost in the playoffs in overtime to the eventual state champs was amazing! NM had their share of players selected for the All-Area C/D team but in this authors opinion, there was one glaring oversite. I love Jack Schugars and all that he has done for high school football. Schugars is a Hall of Fame coach and would go one to win many ‘coach of the year’ honors but with what Dave Cooke had to work with, Dave would have been my choice as coach of the year.

Rondell Hutcherson was a no-brainer pick for all-area. Hutcherson was also tabbed as a first team running back on the ‘D’ All-State team. His 1189 rushing yards made him the sixth back in Norse history to rush for more than 1000 yards in a season. Doing the blocking up front to create the holes for Hutcherson were lineman Tyson Zednek and Vince Pannuci who were picked for the all-area first team. Once again NM had the all-area kicker in Brad Demerjian. Two-way NM stalwart Joe Mylenek, whose 115 tackles in the season were second in the WMC. To have the remarkable season NM achieved with but 17 ‘ironmen’ players was remarkable.

A group of football players

AI-generated content may be incorrect.

**1989 Norsemen**

Record Score Interesting Fact

1-0 NM 39, Holton 6 Rondell Hutcherson 3 TDs (65,23 & 3) Joe Mylenek 3 Tds (1,1, & 6)

2-0 NM 47, Mason Co 0 Hutcherson 5 TDs (40, 12, 2,3, & 4), Mylenek 2 (32 pass, 1 yd run

3-0 NM 21- Whitehall 6 Hutcherson TD runs from 2 & 3. Gebuhr WB sneak from 1.

3-1 NM 14, Oakridge 33 Gebuhr pass to Scott Chappell 8-yd TD. Hutcherson 1 yard TD.

4-1 NM 16, Shelby 8 Ty Zednik 32-yard int. Ret, TD,Mylenek 15-yd int. ret for TD.

5-1 NM 46, Hart 0 Hutcherson 3 TDs, 98 yrd. koff ret. Dan Delong 2 TD passes, TD-run.

6–1 NM 10, Ravenna 7 Brad Demirjians 39 yd. FG wins. Gebuhr 1 yd. Run.

7-1 NM 56, Montague 0 Hutcherson 4 TDs, pass to Mylenek for TD, Smith & Pannuci TDs.

8-1 NM 47, Baldwin 0 Hutcherson 60-yard punt return and long TD run.

8-1 NM 0, Mendon 7 NM loses in overtime to state champs

**1990– Coach Dave Cooke (3-6 overall, 4th in WMC, Oakridge WMC champ)**

Low numbers and a young and inexperienced team will finally catch up to the Norsemen after a run that had them in the playoffs seven years during the 1980s, the most of any Greater Muskegon team. A couple of all-area performers returned from the outstanding 1989 squad, lineman Ty Zednek and Vince Pannucci, but the entire backfield would have a new look. One addition to the team was a welcome back from big offensive lineman Matt Steigelman, who left with his family for Georgia following his freshman season but returned to North Muskegon for the start of his junior year. The 1990 team would have several juniors spliced in with a smattering of sophomores that would be comprised of but 21 players. Somehow Coach Cooke and his trusted assistants, Ed Zednik and Ed Schroeder would again keep the Norse more than competitive, but 1990 would be a learning curve for all.

It took but the first game for Norse followers to suspect that this was not going to be a typical NM playoff team as Holton surprised the Norse 22-6. After being shutout in their two previous meetings with NM, the Red Devils spotted the Norse a 6-0 lead but then scored the last three TDS of the game. Carl Murat rushed for 186 yards for the winners while Chris Serene, who led Norse runners with 98 yards, scored the first and only TD for NM.

At first glance when one looks at the final score of North Muskegon 2 and Mason County Central 0, a possible forfeit might have been the reason for the final score. That was not the case as junior Nate Gates sacked the Mason County quarterback in the end zone for what would prove to be the only score in the game. Tyson Zednek, who was switched from a lineman to a fullback from the previous season, led the Norse both on offense and defense as he led all rushers with 125 yards and 11 tackles on defense.

Whitehall played their first game on their renovated field, but all did not go well for the Vikings. It might have been a bad omen when a malfunction with the scoreboard left the fans in the dark as to the time and score, reminiscent of the 1940s for games played in the WMC. NM would win for the ninth consecutive time against the Vikings 14-6. After scoring but eight points combined in their first two games, the Norse got a boost when sophomore Randy Lindstrom got his first start on the varsity and responded with 68 yards and the second Norse TD in the fourth quarter on a 13-yard run. NM scored the only TD in the second quarter on Tysen Zednik’s 2-yard run after the drive was set up on a Scott Smith fumble recovery at the Whitehall 20. Zednik again led NM rushers with 98 yards and had 14 tackles, the same number as did another two-way performer, Scott Smith.

In the first of the many great teams produced over the years by Oakridge coach Jack Schugars, the 1990 squad was his first team to make it to the state championship game. The Eagles showed their might as they downed the Norse 41-13. Leading the way for Oakridge was a player who would make North Muskegon his home as a well-respected officer on the North Muskegon Police Force, David Nelson. On the Norsemen’s first possession Nelson picked off a tipped pass thrown by NM’s sophomore quarterback Cam Balash and returned it 58 yards for the touchdown. Nelson would score two more TDs and led all rushers with 176 yards. Dave Cooke gave all the credit to Oakridge. “We never recovered from the first score. They beat us in every phase of the game. It was just a good ole’ thumping,” said the obliging Norse head coach. Junior Dan Delong connected with Zac Bauer for a 14-yard NM TD just before half while Andy Crays closed out the scoring as he carried the ball from three yards out to make the final score 41-13.

The Norse had won many games in recent years with their kicking game, but that didn’t happen in Shelby’s 7-6 win over NM. Shelby scored first on a Troy Gowell 3-yard run in the second quarter and the Tigers made the kick to go up 7-0. NM also scored in the second quarter on a 17-yard TD pass from Dan Delong to Zac Bauer. However, Shelby’s Gowell broke through the line and blocked the NM extra point attempt, and that 7-6 score would hold up as neither team scored in the second half. NM’s defense held Shelby to only one first down in the second half, but NM likewise had trouble moving the ball. Sophomore Randy Lindstrom rushed 19 times for 101 tough yards while Tysen Zednick had 18 tackles.

What a turnaround for Hart! After being clobbered their last three games by a combined 126-0 to the Norsemen, Hart flipped the switch and downed the Norse 30-7. Statistics sometimes lie as turnovers can easily override stats. Such was the case in Hart’s case as Hart gave up 245 yards to the Norse to but 145 for the victorious Pirates. A blocked punt led to a 35- return for one Hart score while another Pirate TD came on a fumble recovery and run for 58 yards. NM trailed only 10-7 at the half with Tysen Zednick scoring the Norse TD before Hart pulled away in the second half thanks in part to Norse miscues.

Ravenna’s 34-7 victory over NM was a tale of two halves. Ravenna moved to 6-1 on the season enroute to a playoff berth but needed a good second half as NM led 7-6 at the half. They got more than a good second half. They had a great final two periods as they scored all 28 points to turn a close game into a runaway. NM tallied on a 13-yard pass from Dan Delong to Chris Serene to take a 7-6 lead on the made extra points but missed on two other attempts. Two Norsemen turnovers in the fourth quarter made the final score more lopsided.

It would be another two years before Montague would make it all the way to the state championship game, but that was probably wishful thinking for Montague fans in 1990 as the Wildcats would fall to 1-7 after a NM 34-9 victory. NM rolled over the Wildcats 34-7 as they racked up 333 yards on total offense while allowing the host Wildcats but 109. Den Delong threw for a pair of TD passes and 130 yards while Andy Crays and Chris Serene each scored on runs as NM ended their four-game skid.

In recent years NM would totally dominate Hesperia in football but that didn’t happen in their first ever meeting in 1990. The Norse now know how it feels to get burned on a last second’s field goal. Hesperia kicks a field goal with just four ticks left on the clock to edge the Norse 9-7. The Norse twice moved inside the Hesperia 10-yard line only to come up empty, including a missed short field goal. NM took an early 7-0 lead on a Randy Lindstrom run and made the extra point to give the Norse a 7-6 lead. Hesperia scored on a 17-yard TD pass but missed the extra point. As fate would have it Hesperia missed their first attempt on the last moment field goal but got a reprieve when a roughing-the-kicker penalty gave Hesperia kicker Steve Thomas another chance.

Only Tysen Zednick was selected to the All-Area team as the Norse failed to make the playoffs for the first time in four years. Zednick did even one better as he was selected to the Detroit Free Press first team. With several juniors and sophomores returning for the 1991 season the Norsemen would change that scenario.

Record Score Interesting Fact

0-1 NM 6, Holton 22 Chris Serene YD run while Tyson Zednik had 11 tackles

1-1 NM 2 Mason Co 0 Nate Gates sacks MCC QB for safety. Zednik 125 yards.

2-1 NM 14, Whitehall 6 Zednik 95 yds & 2-yd TD, Randy Lindstrom 68 yds 13 yd TD.

2-2 NM 13, Oakridge 41 Dan Delong to Zac Bauer 14, Andy Crays 3-yard TD.

2-3 NM 6, Shelby 7 Delong to Bauer 17 yd TD pass. Zednik 18 tackles.

2-4 NM 7, Hart 30 NM total 245 yards to 145 but fall short. Zednik NM TD.

2-5 NM 7, Ravenna 34 Delong to Serene 13-yard TD pass. NM led 7-6 at halftime.

3-5 NM 34, Montague 9 Delong 2 TD passes, Serene and Crays TD runs.

3-6 NM 7, Hesperia 9 Hesperia FG with no time left the winner. Lindstrom 6-yd TD.

**1991– Coach Dave Cooke (9-2 overall, Tied for 1st WMC – playoff qualifier)**

NM would return once again to the promise land as they would end up in a three-way tie with Whitehall and Oakridge, all with identical 6-1 WMC records. Oddly enough, it would be the first share of the crown for Whitehall while for NM it would be their last under the old format before the conference was ‘watered’ down with several team schools joining the WMC beginning in 2022. From 1992 forward the WMC could proudly boast as being one of the strongest Class C/B conferences in the state as the trio of Oakridge, Ravenna and Montague would earn many state championships over the next 30 years.

It took but the first game to determine thar the strength of the 1991 Norsemen would be their defense. The first of their seven shutouts on the season was their opening 10-0 victory over Holton. So dominant was the NM defense that they limited Holton to 19 rushing yards in 32 attempts. The Red Devils didn’t even fare that well in the passing game as they finished with only one completion good for eight yards. Leading the defense were returning linebackers Nate Gates and Randy Lindstrom while up from forming the impenetrable line of defense were Bob Walters, Damien Smith, and Matt Steigelman. Dan Delong, the NM returning starter at quarterback, would have a great year also as a defender. On his way to becoming a first team all-state defender Delong was credited with eight tackles. Holton was likewise stingy on defense as the Norse were only able to put three points on the board in the opening half on a 21-yard field goal from Chris Roberts. Chris Benedict ran for the game’s only touchdown in the second half, running for 43 of his game leading 123 yards.

Who knew at the early stage of the season that NM’s 23-14 win over Whitehall would go a long way in determining the 1991 WMC championship. NM scored all 23 of their points in one quarter and then held off Whitehall to make it 10 straight triumphs over the Vikings. Although there was a total of 37 points scored, defenses nevertheless ruled in this contest. In fact, NM had only three first downs in the entire game while Whitehall had but four. Big plays in the second quarter led to the Norse victory. Junior linebacker Randy Lindstrom scored the first touchdown on a 15-yard interception. The second TD was a bit of a razzle-dazzle play with NM completing a double pass from Dan Delong to Cam Balash who in turn passed to a wide-open Joe Grimm in the end zone to complete the 24-yard play. Chris Benedict who totaled 98 rushing yards for the game, garnered 60 of those yards on a second quarter touchdown run. A bad snap that sailed over the Whitehall punter’s head resulted in a safety and NM’s final points in the quarter and the game.

NM would drop their only game of the regular season 12-0 to Oakridge as Oakridge limited the Norse to less than 100 total offensive yards for the game. The Norse were hurt with several dropped passes and their two lost fumbles in the contest surely didn’t help their chances. The Norse were playing without starting linebacker and fullback Randy Lindstrom as the normally stingy NM defense could not contain Oakridge running back Tom Carpenter who rushed for one TD and 142 yards. When one looks at the disparity in student enrollment with Oakridge having more than twice the students as NM, the Norse accounted for themselves very well.

After playing a pair of heavyweights for the past two games, NM got well with a 40-0 rout of winless Shelby. After totaling just 78 yards in their loss to Oakridge, the Norse rolled up 415 total yards while shutting out the Tigers. Dan Delong had a good game for NM with a rushing touchdown as well as a passing TD.

The following week was when Mother Nature raised havoc with Friday night football. Nearly all the games scheduled for Friday night experienced heavy rains coupled with lightning that forced the postponements of nearly all area games. The one exception was the game I was working between Muskegon and Saginaw Arthur Hill. In a game that lasted well past midnight with officials ignoring lightning clearly visible in the sky, Muskegon won 12-0. It would be the last loss for Arthur Hill as they would go on to win the state AA championship. Like most of the games, North Muskegon and Hart would play their game the following Saturday afternoon. The Pirates would score first in NM’s 35-6 conquest of Hart. Following that score, the Norse defense would not allow another score until the second round of the playoffs, a span of five games. Following the Pirate TD, Dan Delong sparked the NM offense with a pair of TD passes to Pat Kitchka for 18-yards and another to Zack Bauer for 31. DeLong scored the first NM TD on a quarterback keeper while Joe Grimm and Randy Lindstrom closed out the Norse scoring with a TD each.

NM’s 27-0 victory over Ravenna would have to be savored for several years. After NM dominated the rivalry by winning 26 of their previous 33 games vs. the Bulldogs, Ravenna would win 13 of the next 14 games. Dan Delong led the win over Ravenna by playing a part in three of NM’s 4 touchdowns. Delong ran for a pair of TDs (4 & 28) and teamed up with Pat Kitchka for a TD strike good for 39 yards. The first Norse TD proved to be one for the record books. NM partially blocked a Ravenna field goal attempt. Chris Benedict scooped up the pigskin at his own five-yard line and dashed 95 yards to give the Norse their first score.

Going into their next game with Montague, there was a 4-way long jam at first place in the WMC with Oakridge, Whitehall, Montague, and NM all sporting a 4-1 record. Make that a 3-way tie after the Norse shut out Montague 29-0. Recent rains had inundated area fields and Fred Jacks Field was no exception as again games in the area were played in the rain. North Muskegon used a ground attack against the Wildcats as they rushed for 300 yards with Chris Benedict and Randy Lindstrom each rushing for more than 100 yards. Lindstrom earned 52 of his 127 yards on a 52-yard TD burst. Benedict added a pair of tallies from seven and 10 yards with Lindstrom completing NM’s scoring with a one-yard plunge.

NM’s third consecutive shutout, a 42-0 win at Mason County Central, clinched a 3-way tie in the WMC with Oakridge and Whitehall. The Norse churned out 453 yards in offense while holding the host Spartans to only 41-rushing yards. For the second straight week Chris Bendict and Randy Lindstrom each scored a pair of TDs in the Norse romp. Benedict scored the first two Norse tallies on runs of 12 and one, with Lindstrom the next two TDs on runs of seven and 47. Dan Delong contributed for the 5th NM TD as he connected with Cam Balash from 29 yards out with Joe Grimm rushing from 4-yards out to complete the Norse scoring.

For a brief period, the WMC and the NCAA teams would complete their regular season with crossover games. Although there was a 3-way tie for first place in the WMC, the Norse were tabbed to play their crossover game against the NCAA champs from Hesperia in the first year of this endeavor. The game was played on a very cold and blustery Saturday afternoon in Hesperia. It was so blustery that prior to the game the wind blew out the window in our radio booth sending glass flying. Fortunately, my partner Gene Young and I were in another section of the press box at the time. NM’s defense, led by bruising tackle Matt Steigelman, was so effective that Hesperia managed just three yards in offense for the first half as NM jumped out to a commanding first half lead. The Norse utilized all three of their running backs in the victory. Tailback Chris Benedict rushed for 83 yards, fullback Randy Lindstrom 68 and wingback Joe Grimm 58. Grimm rambled 37 yards on a counter play for NM’s first score. Chris Roberts booted a field goal with the 35-mph wind at his back to give the Norse a 10-0 lead. That would prove to be more than the Norse would need, but the Norse added two insurance TDs from Lindstrom on fullback dives to make the final score 24-0.

With an enrollment of less than 200 student the Norse were listed in the bottom rung of high school teams. The number of classes invited to vie for a state title had now doubled from four to eight classes. The good news, NM was a clear number one in their computer region with a schedule competing against all Class C & B opponents. The bad news, also in their region were the defending state champions from Frankfort.

The Norse had little trouble in disposing of an outmanned Atlanta team as NM raced to their 9th win and fifth consecutive shutout with a 27-0 win over Atlanta in their only meeting in NM football history. Coming into the game Atlanta was aware of NM’s defense against the run. Atlanta coach Rod Marlatt’s game plan was to attempt to win the game with their passing game. That didn’t work as the Norse intercepted a whopping eight passes, three each from Norse defensive backs Chris Benedict and Pat Kitchka. Chris Benedict accounted for three of the Norse scores, two on runs of 12 and one, the other on a 22-yard pass from Dan Delong. Joe Grimm capped the Norse victory with a four-yard TD.

Just as North Muskegon had to be placed in the same regional in recent years with a powerful Mendon squad, it had to face another powerhouse in their same region in 1991 in Frankfort. Frankfort was in the middle of six incredible seasons as they made it to the championship game at the Pontiac Silverdome in five of six years beginning in 1988. Frankfort was at their best in 1990 and 1991, and they would go undefeated in both years. NM would face a Frankfort team that outscored their opponents 385 to 14 with only one of their opponents able to cross their goal line before traveling to NM to take on the Norsemen. Frankfort was ranked No. 1 all season while the Norsemen sat at number 2. It was likely the state champion for 1991 would be decided at NM’s Fred Jack Field on a sunny November afternoon. Although the final score looked like a lopsided victory, this game turned on Norsemen mistakes in the first half. NM in their opening series marched to the Frankfort 22-yard line before fate befell the Norse. A NM fumbled was scooped up by the Panther’s Derek Klein who raced 70 yards down to the NM 11 to set up Frankfort’s first score. NM then had a golden opportunity to tie the score or take the lead before the turning point of the game. NM had first and goal at the five but on the next play NM fumbled at the one-yard line. “Had we punched it in on the first drive it would have set the tone for the ball game, and it would have been different,” NM coach Dave Cooke said. “You get down there and have another score taken away with a fumble in the end zone --- that takes the wind out your sails. Momentum turned for them and we never got it back,” added Cooke. All momentum then went totally away for the Norsemen on the opening kickoff in the second half when Klein returned the second half kickoff 87 yards before tackled at the 8-yard line. Another promising season ended with a loss to Frankfort.

Until NM received more students through the school of choice edict, tiny numbers would contribute to some lean years for NM football as Montague, Ravenna, and Oakridge would begin a long domination of WMC football.

Dan Delong and Matt Steigelman made the Free Press All State team for their defensive work while DeLong also was accorded all Area honors as the top C-D quarterback. Zac Bauer was named to the all-area first team with 17 catches for 353 yards. Once again, overlooked was NM Coach Cooke who had to settle for second place as the top area coach. Pegged for second team honors on the all-area team were Chris Benedick. Damien Smith and kicker Chris Roberts on offense while Tom Sprague and Randy Lindstrom were picked for defense.

A group of football players in a photo frame

AI-generated content may be incorrect.

**1991 NORSEMEN**

Record Score Interesting Fact

1. NM 10, Holton 0 Christ Benedict 43 yd YTD. NM defense limits Holton to 27 total yds.
2. NM 23, Whitehall 14 Randy Lindstrom 15-yd int, Benedict 60 YD TD. Pass -Grimm 24 ydTD.

2-1 NM 0, Oakridge 12 NM only 78 total yards. Nate Gates 13 tackles, Matt Steigelman 9.

3-1 NM 40, Shelby 0 Benedict 3 TDs (34, 20 & 5) Delong ran & passed for TD.

4-1 NM 35, Hart 6 DeLong 2 TD passes & run. Grimm 13 yd TD & Lindstrom 1 yd TD.

5-1 NM 27, Ravenna 0 Delong 2 TD runs (4 & 28) TD 39 yds to Kitchka. Benedict 95 yd ret.

6-1 NM 29, Montague 0 Benedict (7 & 10) and Lindstrom (52 & 1) NM TDs. Chris Roberts FG

7-1 NM 42-, Mason Co 0 Benedict (12 & 1) & Lindstrom (7 & 46) TDs. Cam Balash 29 pass TD.

8-1 NM 24, Hesperia 0 Grimm 37 YD td. Lindstrom 2 TDs from the 1. Roberts field goal.

9-1 NM 27, Atlanta 0 Benedict TD runs of 12 & 1, pass for 22. Grimm 4-yard TD run.

9-2 NM 0, Frankfort 25 Turnovers plague Norse as NM loses to 2-time state champs.

**1992– Coach Dave Cooke (4-5 overall, Montague WMC Champs)**

Never since enrollment numbers from the 1930s to the present day have student numbers been lower that the 160 students enrolled from grades 9-12 at NMHS in 1992. That equates to an average class size of only 40 pupils. Somehow NM has stayed competitive over the years in football, with much of the success credited to head coach Dave Cooke, beginning his 31st year in coaching in 1992. The Norse dropped below .500, but barely, with a 4-5 record, and only in their losses to eventual state finalist Montague and a defeat by Whitehall were they soundly defeated. The pre-season team photo showed only 17 players dressed for the varsity but three of those 17 were starters in the backfield. Cooke returns Chris Benedict who ran for over 1000 yards (exact number not known), fullback Randy Lindstrom and wingback Joe Grimm. The bad news: who was going to block for those returning vets as graduation took a big toll? One of the two starters returning on the line would be sophomore Jeff Buckmaster, a starter as a freshman. Scott Wynsma was projected to start at tackle with Buckmaster while the guards were projected to be manned by David Hauxwell and future TV celebrity with CNN, Dan Cevallos. Bob Walters was the other starter back from 1991 and he would move from guard to center. With 17 players, many would be expected to go both ways with any Norse lost to an injury would be a bad sign for the success of this team. As it was true for many of his years as the head coach at NMHS, Cooke would have Ed Schroeder as his trusted assistant.

The Norse got off to a promising start to the season with a 29-8 victory over Holton. NM found a replacement for all-area quarterback Dan Delong as Cam Balash passed for two touchdowns and ran for another. Balash first connected on a six-yard TD pass to Pat Kitchka, and next teamed up on a 42-yard toss that accounted for six points. Balash scrambled for six more points from four yards away while a halfback passes from Pat Kitchka to John McLaughlin caught Holton off guard and went for 44 yards and a TD. NM appears to have found yet another solid kicker as sophomore Mike Boyle nailed a 29-yard field goal.

Whitehall ended their ten-game losing streak to NM in a big way as they crushed the Norse 41-13. The offensive line of the Vikings overpowered the Norsemen creating huge holes for their all-area back Jeff Stark to run for 221 yards and 3 touchdowns. It was 41-0 before the Norse were able to put points on the board in the final quarter. Cam Balash connected with Joe Grimm on a long 75-yard pass and run while Grimm rushed from 3 yards out for NM’s and the game’s final TD. NM played their 2nd straight game without their 1000-yard rusher Chris Benedict, out with a knee injury, but even with Benedict in the lineup Whitehall was the superior team.

NM received a most welcome return to the lineup in Chris Benedict as the Norse enjoyed a 10-7 short-lived lead over host Oakridge at halftime. But the Eagles would wear down the Norse in the second half to defeat NM 19-10. NM took the early lead 3-0 on a 35-yard field goal from Mike Boyle and had an upset in the making when Christ Benedict capped a 59-yard drive with a 3-yard TD. Oakridge scored with one minute left in the first half on a 23-yard TD run from Charlie Randall. The second half all belonged to the Eagles as the Norse fell to 1-2 on the season.

NM evened their record at 2-2 with a 34-6 conquest of Shelby. It was the first time all season that a pair of healthy veteran backs scored for the Norse. Randy Lindstrom tallied his first TDs of the season on runs of 37 and one while Chris Benedict added a short TD to his credit. The Norse spotted Shelby an early touchdown but scored the last five TDs to pull away from the Tigers. Joe Grimm gave NM the lead after scoring from 12 yards out in the opening quarter. The final tally for the victors came on a Cam Balash pass to Pat Kitchka for 31 yards. NM’s defense, led by Bryan Taylor and Grimm with nine tackles, did not allow Shelby a first down for the entire second half.

The Norse let a 9-0 lead get away from them as Hart rallied to nip the Norse 20-17. Jason Gale broke away on a 75-yard TD gallop in the final quarter to hand the Norse their third defeat of the season and remove any chances for a repeat of their WMC championship. NM took the early lead, first on a Cam Balash two-yard QB keeper, and then a 28-yard field goal by Mike Boyle. After Hart took the lead in the third quarter 14-9, NM scored on a Randy Lindstrom 10-yard run and a made two-pointer to retake the lead before Gale’s long TD run dropped the Norse to 2-3 on the season.

NM and Ravenna battled for more than three quarters with nothing to show for it on the scoreboard. The Bulldogs then scored 14 unanswered points against the thin Norsemen team to earn a 14-0 victory. The Bulldogs returned just one starter from their 1991 team and were two years away from putting on the field (in this author’s opinion) the top team in WMC history in 1994. The backbreaker for NM came when sophomore QB Matt Crowley sprinted 59 yards for a TD with nine minutes left in the game. NM was plagued with dropped passes according to head coach Dave Cooke as NM fell to 2-4 on the season. It wouldn’t get any better in their next game.

Perhaps still smarting from losing to the Norse 56-0 and being shut out in their last five games to NM, Montague showed no mercy for the Norsemen as they handed NM their worse defeat in school history, 63-0. Montague would advance for the first time in their school’s history to the state finals before losing to perennial power Detroit DePorres in the championship game. The Wildcats rolled up 581 yards in total offense while the Norsemen felt hopeless to slow down the Montague express. Leading the Wildcats to victory was their quarterback Pat Collins, who returned to his alma mater to lead them to three state championships as their head coach.

NM didn’t hang their heads followed their defeat at Montague as they bounced back to win their first game in four starts with a 28-6 victory over Mason County Central. Three-sport NM standout Cam Balash ran for one TD and intercepted a pass that he returned 52 yards for another score. Chris Benedict propelled the Norse to a good start with a pair of short TD runs from one and four yards out. The Norse scored all 28 of their points in the 28-6 victory over the visiting Spartans in the first half.

The WMC and NCAA continued their brief cross-over series and as luck would have it, NM was paired up with Holton, a team they opened with to start the season. The results were nearly the same as NM overwhelmed the Red Devils 34-6. Chris Benedict capped his fine NM career in style by rushing for 222 yards and three TDs. Benedict began the scoring with a 26-yard TD run in the first quarter and then capped all scoring with an 85-yard kickoff return following Holton’s only TD in the second half. Randy Lindstrom scored a TD on both offense and defense. Lindstrom ran for one TD, and he not only led all tacklers on defense with 14 tackles, but the senior linebacker also recovered a Holton fumble in the end zone for a TD. Cam Balash tossed to Pat Kitchka for 9-yards and a TD as NM completed the season at 4-5.

Despite their 4-5 losing record, the Norse, due to their strength of schedule as a ‘D’ team playing a ‘C’ schedule, came one spot away from again qualifying for the playoffs. Three-year starter Randy Lindstrom topped post season honors for NM. Lindstrom was selected to the first team All-State team as a linebacker and was the only Norsemen selected to the all-area first team. Sophomore Jeff Buckmaster was selected to the second squad all area team as was Chris Benedict as a defensive back.

A group of football players

AI-generated content may be incorrect.

**1992 NORSEMEN**

Record Score Interesting Fact

1-0 NM 29, Holton 8 Cam Balash 2 TD passes, 1 run. Pat Kitchka -John McLaughlin 42 TD.

1-1 NM 13, Whitehall 41 Balash to Grimm 75 yards TD pass. Grimm 3-yard TD.

1-2 NM 10, Oakridge 19 Chris Benedict returns to lineup. Scored 3 Yd TD. Mike Boyle FG.

2-2 NM 34. Shelby 6 Randy Lindstrom 2 TDs (37 & 1), Grimm 12 yd TD, Kitchka 32 pass.

2-3 NM 17, Hart 20 Balash 2 yd and Lindstrom 10-yd TD, Boyle 28-yd FG.

2-4 NM 0, Ravenna 14 Benedict 72 yds on 9 carries. NM only 3/16 in passing.

2-5 NM 0, Montague 63 Montague hands NM worse loss ever.

3-5 NM 28, Mason Co 6 Balash 52 yd int. return for TD & 1 yd run. Benedict 2 short TDs.

4-5 NM 34, Holton 6 Benedict 222 yd rushing including 85 yd Koff ret. Lindstrom 2 TDs.

**1993– Coach Dave Cooke (2-7 overall, Montague, Oakridge, Whitehall co-champs)**

Small numbers would handicap the Norse throughout the 1993 season. The young Norsemen would take their lumps as they would only win two games, but the experience gained would pay dividends the following year. Only four starters would return for 1993, with only five seniors on the 1993 roster as juniors would comprise 11 of their team’s small squad of 18 players. Starters returning included running back Joe Grimm, end Nick Bolema, and linemen Jeff Buckmaster and Scott Wynsma. Mike Boyle, who saw action in 1992 mainly as the kicker would now take charge of the quarterback position.

NM would again get off to a nice start as they breezed to a 48-0 win over Holton. Joe Grimm had a career day for himself for the Norsemen with four touchdowns while running for 167 yards. Sophomore Bo Thrasher, future owner of Hobo’s Tavern in NM, added a ten-yard TD run and added 115 of NM’s total 414 rushing yards. Grimms TD came on runs from 28, 3, 2, and 24. Junior quarterback Mike Boyle tossed his first TD pass of his career with a 30-yard toss to Leigh Kakaty, currently the lead senior of a hard rock band called the Pop Evils. Fullback Erick Peterson finished the Norse rout with a six-yard TD.

It would now be back to the grind against teams in the tough WMC conference. As usual, Oakridge would have another potent team as they handed the Norse their first loss of the season. 33-17. NM made Oakridge fret somewhat as a two-yard run by Joe Grimm closed the gap at halftime to 12-7. Grimm was injured on the play and was feared lost for the season, dropping their numbers down from 18 to 17 players. Cooke then moved Mike Boyle from quarterback to Grimm’s spot as a tailback and inserted sophomore Justin Visconti at quarterback. Visconti, who would become one of NM’s top baseball players of all time, connected with Leigh Kakaty on a 30-yard scoring pass. Visconti then set up a Boyle field goal with 6:41 remaining before Oakridge scored an insurance touchdown to insure an Oakridge victory.

The Norse then saw a 20-6 first half lead quickly dissipates as Shelby came from behind to hand NM their second loss on the season 28 to 23. Mike Mumper’s 45-yard TD in the fourth quarter was the winner for the Tigers. Offense was not a problem for the Norse as Justin Visconti completed 11 of 19 passes for 259 yards, three of those completions went to Bo Thrasher for 199 yards. After Shelby scored first, NM came back to take the lead following a Mike Boyle field goal on a two-yard plunge from Jeff Buckmaster. Visconti’s then tossed a 25-yard TD pass to Leigh Kakaty followed by a 1-yard run by Boyle to make the score 23-6 before Shelby’s Mumper scored a pair of TDs to nip the Norse.

NM’s second straight journey to Oceana County didn’t fare any better than their first trip to Shelby. Hart scored 47 points in their 47-13 win over the Norse, the only time in the NM-Hart rivalry where the Pirates scored more than 30 points against the Blue & Gold. Jon Gale scored five touchdowns, including an 82-yard kickoff return to lead the Pirates to victory. Justin Visconti tossed a 19-yard TD pass to Nick Bolema while Erik Peterson, who led the Norse defense with 16 tackles, scored the only rushing TD for the Norsemen on a one-yard plunge.

One year away from their dominating 1994 team, the young Bulldogs had more than enough firepower to defeat NM 32-13 as NM was still looking for their first WMC victory on the season. Back at quarterback where he started the season, Mike Boyle threw a pair of 13-yard TD passes, one to Leigh Kakaty and the other to Nick Bolema to account for the NM touchdowns. Bulldog coach Dusty Fairfield unveiled a young freshman into the Bulldog lineup. Benny Clark, who would become this area’s all-time rushing leader, added a pair of long scoring runs from his wingback position for Ravenna.

The woes continued in the WMC as NM dropped their 5th WMC contest to Montague 28-16. The Norse were on the losing side of the ledger, but it was a far cry from the previous year’s 63-0 wallop by Montague. The visiting Wildcats jumped out to a 14-0 lead before the Norse battled back to play even with Montague the rest of the game. NM scored two touchdowns and a field goal in the final quarter to throw a brief scare at the Wildcats. A freshman callup from the JV team, Andrew Hager, scored two short TDs as the Norse battled injuries. The other points earned by NM came on a 35- yard field goal from Mike Boyle.

Although they came away with a 10-7 victory over Mason County Central, NM still took an uncharacteristic trip to the WMC cellar with their win over Mason County Central. Shelby, NM, and Mason County all would tie for the bottom spot in the WMC with 1-6 records. The Norse ‘safety’ won the hard-fought game against the host Spartans. The Spartans scored early to take a 7-0 lead. The all-important safety resulted following a NM punt that was downed on the one-foot line. On the next play the Spartan back was tackled in the end zone as the lead for Scottville was 7-2 at halftime. A fumble recovery by NM at midfield set up the winning touchdown in the second quarter on a 4-yard run by Mike Boyle. The Norse then hung on for their first WMC victory on the season.

Whitehall clinched a tie with Oakridge and Montague with their 20-0 shutout over the Norse in the final conference game of the season. The Vikings shut down the NM running game to a measly four yards rushing for the entire game. Mike Boyle at quarterback provided some offense for the Norse by completing four passes for 74 yards.

The final game for NM probably couldn’t have come too soon for NM as a multitude of turnovers led to a season ending 16-14 loss to Hesperia in a WMC-NCAA crossover game. NM lost three fumbles and had two interceptions in an error plagued game. Junior quarterback Mike Boyle was 6 of 17 passing and scored a TD for a NM team was that had become decimated with injuries in their backfield. Erik Peterson also scored a touchdown for NM as the 1994 season couldn’t come soon enough for the Norsemen.

The 1993 season wasn’t just a bad year for North Muskegon, but it was a rare year when the Muskegon Area didn’t have at least one representative playing for a state title at the Pontiac Silverdome. The Muskegon area had been represented in a state championship game every year since 1988. King Football would return to normal in 1994. One NM player from 1993 was lauded for his play. Junior Jeff Buckmaster not only made the all-area team but was also made the 1st team all-state team as a lineman.

Record Score Interesting Fact

1. NM 48, Holton 0 Joe Grimm 4 TDs (26, 3,2, 24), Mike Boyle – Leigh Kakaty TD.

1-1 NM 17, Oakridge 33 Justin Visconti – Kakaty 30 TD TD. Grimm 2-yd TD.

1-2 NM 23, Shelby 28 Visconti 259 pass yds & TD to Kakaty, Jeff Buckmaster 2-yd TD.

* 1. NM 13, Hart 47 Visconti to Nick Bolema 19-yard TD, Erik Peterson 1 yard TD run.
  2. NM 13, Ravenna 32 Boyle 13-yard TD passes to Kakaty and Bolema.
  3. NM 16, Montague 28 Andy Hager two one-yard TDs. Boyle 35 yd FG.

2-5 NM 10, Mason Co 7 NM safety the difference. Boyle 40-yard rushing TD.

2-6 NM 0, Whitehall 20 Whitehall holds NM to only 4 rushing yards.

2-7 NM 14, Hesperia 16 Boyle TD run, Erik Peterson 2-yard TD

**1994– Coach Dave Cooke (7-4 overall, Playoff qualifier- Ravenna WMC Champs)**

The Norse bounced back to qualify for the playoffs once again. NM seems to have a penchant for drawing teams early in the playoffs that advance to win the state championship and that held true to form once again. Numbers were again low for the football team as Coach Dave Cooke, now in his 33rd year of coaching had but 18 players to work with and any injury would be a huge detriment such as it was in 1993. Although the Norsemen were short on quantity, they did possess some quality. Returning for his fourth season as a starter was Jeff Buckmaster, a 6-3 260 two-way starter who made the all-state team in his junior season. The future Hillsdale College football star would be joined by returning regulars in linemen Mike Farmer, Scott Wynsma and tackle Dan Wegner. Mike Boyle returns as the starting quarterback and will once again handle the kicking duties. Many of the players will go both ways and the defense will be aided by Scott Dubrish, a transfer student who was a two-way starter for Reeths Puffer. Cooke had a few returning players to pick from to round out his backfield, including 1993 starting fullback Erik Peterson.

For the seventh straight year the Norse would open their season with Holton, a tradition that would continue for twenty years. It was sevens across the board as the Norse scored a TD in each quarter and Mike Boyle would kick each point after in NM’s 28-0 shutout victory over Holton. NM set the tone early as all-state lineman Jeff Buckmaster scooped up a Red Devil fumble and rambled into the end zone from 15 yards out to begin the Norse scoring. Mike Boyle then connected with future restaurant entrepreneur Bo Thrasher for a scoring strike of 53 yards in the second quarter. Andrew Hager had TD runs in each quarter of the second half, the first from 13 yards and the final tally in the fourth quarter from three yards.

NM snapped a five-game losing streak to Oakridge with a 22-12 victory. Three big plays, two of those coming on long touchdown passes from Mike Boyle to Leigh Kakaty paved the way for the Norse. NM got on the board first as sophomore Matt Gongalski, behind key blocks from Dan Wegner and Jeff Buckmaster, sprinted 55-yards for the TD. NM made it 14-0 at halftime when the first of the two TD passes to Kakaty went for 34 yards. “It’s important for us not to have to come from behind, with only 18 players” said North Muskegon assistant coach Ed Schroeder. “We kind of must score points and then hold on. We were really tired in the fourth quarter”. Oakridge did score both their TDs in the fourth quarter as the Norse held on. It was a victory NM would savor as it would be a dozen years before NM would again defeat Oakridge.

NM used a powerful running game to post a 35-0 victory over Shelby. Erick Peterson and Bo Thrasher each contributed a pair of rushing touchdowns as NM totaled 275 yards in rushing. Matt Gongalski, who led all Norse rushers with 110 yards, scored the final TD as NM won their third straight victory on the season. Although he didn’t tally a TD, Andrew Hager added 84 yards on 14 carries.

For the second straight week NM scored an identical 35-0 win over an Oceana County foe, this week it was Hart falling to the Norsemen. A combination of a solid running game coupled with a defense that held Hart to only 43 yards in total offense and forced three turnovers gave NM their fourth straight victory and third shutout in four games. Andrew Hager got the ball rolling for NM with the first of four first half touchdowns on a 23-yard run. Matt Gongalski scored a pair of rushing TDs, the first from nine while he raced 51 yards for the second. Bo Thrasher then made it 28-0 at halftime with an 8-yard rush. NM scored their final TD in the second half when reserve quarterback George Keefe combined with Thrasher on a 33-yard pass play. NM was now sitting pretty with a 4-0 record, but the competition would now get much stronger.

When one can look back well after the season played out, North Muskegon’s 18-7 loss to Ravenna could be construed as a ‘moral victory.’ Your author has maintained over the years that the 1994 Ravenna Bulldog team was the best WMC team I’ve seen since watching WMC football since the 1940s. The Bulldogs had it all: A great quarterback in Ken Nichols; a division 1 running back in Benny Clark; a bruising fullback/tight end in Brandon Kantola and an offensive line that was big and strong. 6’6 300-pound Charley Knapp would excel at WMU; Mike Anthony at 6’4 and 270 was a monster on both sides of the ball. Only an injury in his senior year denied him a chance to play at the D1 level. In addition, in Gary Johnson, the Bulldogs had a nose guard on defense who couldn’t be blocked. When all was said and done this Bulldog team captured the state championship with a rout of Schoolcraft. In my only trip ever to Marquette to broadcast a game, I was led to believe by my colleagues in the media (UP media) that Iron Mountain was unbeatable. After I listened to their gloating the praises of their Iron Mountain team I only replied: “They had better be good as I know Ravenna can play.” When the final horn sounded the Bulldogs had handed Iron Mountain a 34-12 beating, and it really wasn’t even that close.

The Norsemen’s 1984 game was played in the rain in Ravenna, and the Norsemen gave the Bulldogs one of their toughest of very few challenges in the entire season. The Norse were trailing only 12-7 with less than a minute remaining. However, the Norsemen were pinned back deep in their own territory. A screen pass was intercepted by Brandon Kantola and returned 15 yards to clinch the victory for the Bulldogs. Kantola’s mother was a North Muskegon grad whose brother Dick Schuiteman was a 4-year starter for NM back in the glory years of the 1950s. The Norse certainly had their chances to pull off the stunner, but a wet ball and dropped passes contributed to their defeat. Following a long punt return by Leigh Kakata deep into Bulldog territory in the final quarter, a field goal try was blocked. On their next possession NM was able to sustain a drive and with five minutes left trailed 12-7 after Matt Gongalski scored from the two-yard line. The Bulldogs Kantola then ended any NM hopes for victory with his interception and TD.

Perhaps still smarting from their effort the previous week against Ravenna, the Norse were stunned by Montague 43-20. Brian Swisher rushed for 197 yards and four touchdowns for the Wildcats. NM was far off its game as they were only able to complete 3 of 16 passes. One of those passes went for six points as Mike Boyle and Bo Thrasher combined for a 51-yard effort just before the first half ended with NM trailing Montague 22-14. The Wildcats dominated the second half with NM’s Andrew Hager scoring late in the game to make the final score 43-20.

Matt Gongalski rambled for 183 yards and scored four touchdowns to help power the Norse to a 49-0 romp over Mason County Central. Gogalski scored on runs of 1, 22, and 45 yards and caught a 7-yard TD strike from George Keefe. Andrew Hager scored a pair of TDs from nine and three-yard runs while Bo Thrasher scored from the 11. NM finished with 350 yards in total offense while defensively NM held the Spartans to only 75 total yards with Scott Dubrish leading the way with 12 tackles.

NM let a game get away from them in their 36-26 loss at Whitehall. NM enjoyed a 21-8 lead after scoring three touchdowns in the space of three minutes in the second period. Aided by a disputed roughing the kicker penalty and an ensuing unsportsmanlike penalty, Whitehall was able to complete a long 80-yard drive before halftime to move within one score of the Norse. Neither team scored in the third quarter, but the final 12 minutes produced plenty of action. NM had a chance to go up two scores, but Whitehall intercepted a NM pass at the Whitehall three-yard line that was returned to the 20. On the next play Cliff Foster broke through the line and raced 80-yards for the TD. A made two-point conversion gave Whitehall the lead at 22-21. NM regained the lead with a 69-yard drive and scored on a three-yard run by Andy Hager to move in front 30-27. That lead lasted for all but a few seconds as Nate Baker returned the kickoff 88 yards. Whitehall then put the nail in NM’s coffin with a late touchdown.

For the second time in three years NM was paired up in the WMC/NCAA crossover with Holton, necessitating their second game on the season with the Red Devils. The second meeting was nearly the same as the first contest between the two as the Norsemen won 31-0. The win propelled NM back into the playoffs after a two-year hiatus and set up a first-round matchup with Mount Pleasant Sacred Heart. The Norse settled their win over Holton early by racing out to a 28-0 halftime lead. Matt Gongalski scored two TDs in the first 24 minutes on runs from 8 and 3 yards. Mike Boyle had a hand in the other three NM scores. The senior quarterback scored the game’s first TD on a QB sneak. He then teamed up with his favorite receiver Leigh Kakaty for a 25-yard TD pass. The only scoring in the second half was a 36-yard field goal by Boyle.

Mount Pleasant Sacred Heart was no match for the Norse in the opening playoff game as NM rolled to an easy 59-6 victory. Mike Boyle got the Norse a jump start with a 19-yard TD sprint. Matt Gongalski then scored the first of his three touchdowns on a 60-yard run. He later added touchdown runs from three and 12 yards. Lineman Mike Farmer scooped up a MPSH fumble and rambled 35 yards for a NM TD as the rout was on. It was 35-0 at halftime and a running clock made for a quick second half. NM was able to score twice in the second half. The first was a run of three yards by Andrew Hager, the second was a two-yard scamper by freshman Jamie Keene. Sacred Heart finished with minus -5 yards rushing compared to the Norse total of 338 yards.

NM, as well as this broadcaster, drove to the quaint little town of Beal City to play the undefeated Aggies. It looked like the entire town, plus more, packed the home stands and they were not disappointed. The Aggies ‘politely’ stunned the bigger Norsemen as they scored on their first four possessions enroute to a 34-0 shutout of the Norsemen. Initially, things started out OK for the Norse as they took the opening kickoff and marched all the way to the Beal City one. However the Norse running back fumbled into the end zone, Beal City recovered, and it was all Beal City after that turnover. NM’s sophomore running back Matt Gongalski, who rushed for over 1000 yards during the season finished with 68 hard-earned yards in 21 carries. Scott Dubrish led NM’s defense with 14 tackles as the Norse season ended while Beal City would go on to capture the state Class D championship.

Jeff Buckmaster was a repeat first team member of the all-state team and was joined by his teammate Mike Boyle who was bestowed first team all-state, not only for his kicking, but also his punting. In 1998 Buckmaster would be selected by Hillsdale College as their most outstanding offensive lineman. Scott Dubrish would join Buckmaster and Boyle on the prestigious Class C/D all area team. Second team all-area honors went to Boyle at quarterback, and end Leigh Kakaty. Making second team all-area on defense were lineman Scott Wynsma and defensive back George Keefe.

Record Score Interesting Fact

1. NM 28. Holton 0 Jeff Buckmaster 15 yd fumble rec. TD. Andrew Hager 2 TDs, Mike Boyle to Bo Thrasher 53-yard TD pass.

2-0 NM 22, Oakridge 12 Boyle 2 TD passes to Leigh Kakaty (34 & 48) Matt Gongalski 55 yd TD and 90 rushing yards.

1. NM 35, Shelby 0 Erick Peterson, Thrasher each 2 TDs, Gongalwski TD & 110 yards.

4-0 NM 35, Hart Gongalski 2 TDs, Hager 23 yd TD. Thraser 9 yd run & 33 pass from George Keefe.

4-1 NM 7, Ravenna 18 NM gives state champs a scare. Gongalski 2 yd TD.

* 1. NM 20, Montague 43 Hager 1 & 15 yd TD, Boyle to Thraser for 51 yds.

5-2 NM 49, Mason Co 0 Gongalski 4 TDs, Hager 2 and Thasher 1.

5-3 NM 26, Whitehall 36 Gongalski, Hager, Boyle rushing TDs. Kevin Robertson 24 fumble ret.

6-3 NM 31, Holton 0 Gongalski 2 TDs, Boyle TD run, Pass to Kakaty 25 yds, 36 yd FG

7-3\* NM 49, MP Sacred H 6 Gongalski 3 TDs, Mike Farmer 35 yd fumb. TD, Jamie Keene TD

7-4\* NM 0, Beal City 34 Beal City shuts out NM and wins Class D title.

**1995 Coach Dave Cooke (5-5 overall, Playoff qualifier- Ravenna WMC Champs)**

The deeper I dig into research to cover the history of football at NMHS the more I am awed by the success NM had under the mentorship of Dave Cooke. By far the smallest school in the WMC conference, how NM stayed competitive during his tenure is a mystery to me. Cooke was handed an assignment for the 1995 season whereby he would only have but 17 players. Cooke lost several players from last year’s 7-4 team that lost in the playoffs to the state champions from Beal City. Only Dan Wegner would return as the lone returning starter as a lineman. The backfield, however, will have several returning players who played prominent roles in last year’s successful season. Matt Gongalski and Andrew Hager, still only juniors return. George Keefe, an all-area second team performer in the defensive backfield will take over at quarterback. Bo Thrasher, a three -year starter also is back while Jay Kakaty will replace his brother Leigh at wingback.

North Muskegon would open their 1995 season again with Holton, a team NM had beaten in nine of their ten meetings. However, Holton threw the Norse a surprise and surprised them early --- like on the first play. Four-year Holton running back Mike Nichols shocked the Norse by running 87 yards to give Holton a 7-0 lead. North Muskegon answered with a long drive in the second quarter with Matt Gongalski going over from the one. George Keefe then passed to Bo Thrasher for the extra points as NM took an 8-7 lead. Holton would capitalize on a NM fumble at the Norse 35 later in the second quarter and scored their second, and the games last touchdown on a Nichols four-yard run. NM controlled the ball for much of the second half but couldn’t score as Holton held off the Norse to earn a 13-8 victory.

North Muskegon got back on track by defeating Shelby 29-6. Bo Thrasher ran for a couple of early touchdowns to lead the Norsemen to victory. Thrasher scored on runs of two and a 69-yard burst. NM added a pair of TDs in the second half on a 12-yard run by Matt Gongalski and a near school record 95-yard interception return for a touchdown by Todd Riegler.

Matt Gongalski ran wild at Hart as the junior running back scored four touchdowns and piled up 179 yards as NM defeated the Pirates 35-12. Gongalski TD runs were from 9, 3, 79 and 23. Bo Thrasher also ran well as he accounted for 114 of the 430 yards that included a 49-yard touchdown scamper.

The Norsemen gave the defending state champs from Ravenna a battle but fell short 18-6. The Norse trailed 12-6 at the half as NM scored their game’s only TD on a 22-yard scoring strike from George Keefe to Marcus Norman. The one-two punch of Kevin Wilburn and Benny Clark proved too much for NM as Wilburn scored two TDs, and Clark, who ran for 200 yards added the insurance touchdown in the second half for Ravenna. For Ravenna, it was their 17th straight victory over two seasons.

The Norsemen rallied to edge Montague 21-20 in a critical game for Norsemen hopes of again making the playoffs. Bo Thrasher scored the game’s first touchdown but the Wildcats, using the wing T offense scored the next three touchdowns to lead 20-7. NM then used the running of Matt Gongalski and nine men on the line of scrimmage on defense to stop the Wildcats. Gongalski had touchdown runs of 11 and nine yards to tie the game at 20-20. Just as they have accomplished often in the past, the difference in the game was in their kicking game as sophomore Jamie Keene’s successful extra point made the difference in a win or a loss. Montague attempted a late field goal that could have been the winner. Attempting a 25-yard field goal the Cats were guilty of illegal motion and penalized five yards. That penalty cost the Cats dearly as the try from 30-yards fell just short.

NM then improved to 4-2 on the season with a 28-6 victory over Mason County Central. Bo Thrasher got the Norsemen off to a nice start with a 20-yard scamper for a TD, but the ensuing kickoff was returned 90-yards for a Spartan touchdown. NM retained the lead as the extra point failed. From that point on it was all North Muskegon. Dan Wegner made a big play for the Norse as he blocked a Spartan punt that was picked up by Brian Ware who waltzed into the end zone to give the Norse a 14-6 lead. Matt Gongalski then did the rest of the damage with a pair of long TD runs of 54 & 52 yards to secure the win. Gongalski would finish with 158 yards rushing while Andrew Hager led the defense with 13 tackles.

For the second straight game NM rallied from behind to take down a White Lake area team with a come-from-behind 21-14 victory over Whitehall. The victory probably clinched another date in the playoffs for the Class D Norsemen. Trailing 14-7 at halftime, the Norsemen got a third quarter boost when junior Brandon Byers blocked a Whitehall punt. Teammate Kevin Robertson picked up the football and raced 10 yards for the tying touchdown. Matt Gongalski, who rushed 14 times for 172 yards, busted loose in the third quarter with a 61-yard TD to give NM a lead they would not relinquish. Earlier Gongalski scored the first NM TD on a 54-yard scamper.

After winning two of their last three wins in comeback fashion, the trend was reversed with Oakridge coming from behind to score all 16 of their points in a 16-6 win over the Norsemen. Although NM dominated the first half, they had to settle for a pair of field goals from Jamie Keene. The score remained 6-0 NM until midway in the final quarter. The Big play for Oakridge came on a 9-yard swing pass on fourth and eight. As fate would have it for the Norse it was the only pass completed on the rainy night by Oakridge, but it kept the drive going and ended on a six-tard TD run by Jason Korson. Korson ran for the two-point conversion to make it 8-6 Oakridge. NM was on a drive when misfortune struck for the Norse. A George Keefe passed was intercepted by David Randall who returned it 60 yards for the touchdown that clinched the win for the Eagles.

NM once again would begin and end their regular season with Holton. However, unlike last year when NM won both games it was Holton who flipped the script and won the pair in 1995. The Holton win would be the only game won by an NCAA school in their annual crossover contests to close out the regular season. After NM scored following an early Holton TD, Holton took a lead they would not give up shortly before halftime on a 48-yard touchdown pass. George Keefe kept NM close with a pair of identical 65-yard touchdown passes, one to Bo Thrasher and the second to Matt Gongalski. The loss to Holton was not the momentum the Norse were seeking heading into the playoffs.

NM lost a heart-wrenching 15-12 thriller to Portland St. Patrick, coming perhaps less than a foot away from victory. The big play of the game took place when NM was facing a fourth and goal from the Portland one-yard line with 4:11 remaining in the game. Fullback Andy Hager took the handoff after a quick count and tried to burrow in between guard and tackle. Hager was met almost immediately by linebacker Brian Kriger and was ruled downed at the one-foot line. NM quarterback George Keefe finished his day, and career, by completing nine of 12 passes for 251 yards, 143 of those yards completed to Bo Thrasher. Two of the completions to Thrasher resulted in the NM touchdowns, the first from 60-yards and the second that gave NM a 12-7 lead was good for 39 yards. Portland took the lead for good on a 14-yard scamper by Mark Meyers before NM mounted their ill-fated 54 yards and two-third foot drive. NM could once again look back at what if --- if they would have scored at the goal line. The following week Portland St. Patrick did lose a tight game to Fowler 6-0. Fowler would then breeze to the state championship.

The most decorated Norseman during the postseason was lineman Dan Wegner, selected not only to the All-Area Class C/D team but won honors on the Class D all-state team. George Keefe repeated on the all-area defensive first unit while running back Matt Gongalski and kicker Jamie Keene made second team all- area. Linebacker Andrew Hager also was honored with 2nd team all-area.

Record Score Interesting Fact

0-1 NM 8, Holton 13 Matt Gongalski 1-yd TD and 67 yards rushing.

1-1 NM 29, Shelby 6 Todd Riegler 95 yd int TD. Bo Thrasher 2 TDs, Gongalski one TD.

2-1 NM 35, Hart 12 Gongalski 4 TDs, 179 yds. Thrasher 49 yd TD run.

2-2 NM 6, Ravenna 18 NM scores on 22-yd pass George Keefe to Marcus Norman.

3-2 NM 21, Montague 20 Thrasher TD, Gongalski 2TDs, Jamie Keene’s extra point wins.

4-2 NM 28, Mason Co 6 Gongalski 2 TDs, Thrasher 1, Dan Wegner blk punt. leads to TD.

5-2 NM 21, Whitehall 14 Byers blocked punt keys win. Gongalski 54 & 61 yd TD runs.

5-3 NM 6, Oakridge 16 Keene’s 2 field goals only NM points.

5-4 NM 20, Holton 32 Keefe 65 yd TD passes to Thrasher & Gongalski.

5-5\*NM 12, Portland SP 15 Keefe 2 long TD passes to Thrasher (60 & 39)

**1996 Coach Dave Cooke (4-5 overall, - Oakridge WMC Champs)**

Before the 1996-97 school year even got underway Coach Dave Cooke and the Norsemen received some disturbing news. Their two-year returning running back who rushed for more than 1,000 yards in 1995 would not be returning to North Muskegon High. Instead, Matt Gongalski had transferred to nearby Whitehall leaving a huge hole in the NM offense. “It hurts us a lot, said coach Cooke about the loss of Gongalski. “We planned to build a lot of our offense around him. Matt was a legitimate breakaway threat. I’m not sure we’ll

have that now,” lamented Cooke. NM would return three-year player Andrew Hager while Cooke is hopeful that junior Jamie Keene would fill the open space created with the loss of Gongalski. Only center Matt Wikander returns as a starter on the offensive line while four starters from 1995 return on the defensive side of the ball. Linebacker Brandon Byers and tackle Brian Ware would join Wikander and Hager as starters. There was a bit of good news when fall practice opened for the Norse, Cooke now had 21 players to work with instead of the norm of 17 the past five years.

For roughly 2/3 of the opener against Holton it appeared that the Red Devils would win their third straight game over the Norse after winning both encounters in 1995. However, the Norse came from behind and scored the game’s final 19 unanswered points to win the season opener 25-12. With Andy Hager churning out most of the yardage, Jason Bogue capped a 78-yard drive with a four-yard plunge to tie the game at 12-12. Although the Norse scored their first six points on a pair of Jamie Keene field goals, the extra point was missed creating the tie. Jamie Keene scored the go-ahead touchdown on a 30-yard run. Jeremy Wegner then iced the game with an 8-yard scamper for the final score. Keene was a workhorse back for NM as he carried the ball 26 times for 167 yards.

NM made it two for two to begin the season with a 24-6 conquest of Shelby. Jamie Keene opened the NM scoring with his third field goal in two games. Keene later added a short one-yard TD for a score as he would total 161 more rushing yards in a busy 29 carries. Jeremy Wegner returned a Tiger punt 47 yards for a score while the defense created six points when Tommy Farmer recovered a Shelby fumble in the end zone. Shelby averted a shutout when they scored late in the contest.

NM made it 3-0 to begin the season by defeating Hart 27-12. Quarterback Jay Kakaty threw a pair of touchdown passes that complemented their grinding rushing attack against the Pirates. Kakaty threw his first touchdown pass of his career to Jeremy Wegner in the first half (47 yards) and came back later in the half to team up with Andrew Hager for 11 yards and a TD. NM then turned to their durable tailback Jamie Keene in the second half. Keene, who carried 29 times for 177 yards, scored a pair of short TD plunges from one and two yards to turn a 13-12 NM halftime edge into a final victory of 27-12.

NM then gave the soon to be 1996 State Class C champs from Ravenna a real scare in their 7-6 loss to the Bulldogs. Nary a point was scored by either team in the first three quarters although the Norse had their chances. NM missed on a 36-yard field goal in the first half that sailed just wide left that perhaps could have met a Norse victory. The Bulldogs Benny Clark scored from 17 yards out in the final quarter to give the host Bulldogs a 7-0 lead. NM then scored on its last possession of the game on an 11-play, 57-yard drive that was culminated with Jay Kakaty diving over from the one. NM’s kick for the extra point to tie the game was blocked by Danny Marshall.

Although they came close in many of their final five games of the season, the Norse would only win one of their remaining games against tough competition. Montague turned three NM turnovers into points as the host Wildcats downed the Norse 30-20. NM took a 14-12 lead late in the second quarter before Montague came up with the game’s biggest play. Brian Balon broke loose for a 91-yard TD that sapped NM’s spirit as the Norse would go into halftime not with a lead, but a deficit from which they would never recover. Jamie Keene and Jay Kakaty each had TD runs in the first half from inside the ten. NM scored their only touchdown in the second half on a fourth quarter 8-yard TD pass from Kakaty to Jeremy Wegner.

Jamie Keene rushed for 261 yards and four touchdowns as NM defeated Mason County 27-6. The rushing yardage by Keene put the junior running backs season’s total to 1061 yards. Keene accounted for all 27 NM points as he also handles all the kicking duties. The Spartan’s lone score came on a 73-yard fumble return on the first play of the second half.

A win over Class B Whitehall would insure the Class D NM team of a berth once again into the playoffs. It was not to be however, as the Norse fell just short in a 20-17 loss to Whitehall. Once again NM failed to capitalize on some ideal scoring chances. A first quarter field goal attempt hit the cross bar and bounced back, and a first and goal at the Viking eight went for naught with an interception in the end zone. NM failed to stop Whitehall on their opening drive as the Vikings twice picked up first downs on a fourth down play in their own end of the field. After Whitehall scored on their opening drive NM answered when Jamie Keene capped a 68-yard drive with a score from the two-yard line. Whitehall then scored the next two touchdowns; the latter scored on a 31-yard pass play to former NM player Matt Gongalski. Trailing 20-7 at the half NM closed the gap to 20-14 on a 25-yard pass from Jay Kakaty to Tommy Farmer. With 6:49 remaining, and trailing by six points, NM’s Keene kicked a 25-yard field goal to move the Norse within three. NM got the ball back with a little more than three minutes remaining but turned the ball over on downs. Jamie Keene was again the tireless running back for NM as he gained 141 rushing yards on 30 carries.

The Norsemen’s next game with Oakridge was over in a matter of a couple of minutes. Looking to go a perfect 8-0 Oakridge stunned the Norse on the very first play from scrimmage when David Randall sprinted 65 yards for a TD. After NM went three and out, a high snap over Norsemen punter Jeremy Wegner was recovered at the NM 18-yard line. Three plays later Oakridge scored again, and the Norsemen were reeling the rest of the night. The 45-0 loss meant their next game with Grant would be a must win for NM if they were to have any chance at the playoffs.

It was not to be as NM gave up too many big plays in the first meeting between the two teams in 61 years. Just as they gave up a big play on the first play from scrimmage last week against Oakridge, Grant scored even quicker as John Swanson took the opening kickoff and sped 96 yards for the touchdown. NM answered with an Andrew Hager 4-yard run for six points. Grant then reciprocated with their ‘shortest’ TD of their 5 touchdowns, a 47-yard run. A Jamie Keene one yard run, a Jay Kakaty pass to Andrew Hager for 35, and a Keene 25-yard field goal tied the game at 22-22 at halftime. Grant then ripped off touchdown gallops of 70 and 74 yards to end the Norsemen’s season at 4-5.

Junior Jamie Keene joined the 1,000-yard club for NM runners with 1275 yards rushing on the season. Keene was also tabbed for first team all-state in Class D as the kicker. Competition was so fierce with talented running backs that despite 1275 yards gained, Keene had to settle for second team all-area honors. Jamie was the only Norse represented on a first team, either offense or defense. Defensive back Tommy Farmer and linebacker Brandon Byers were named to the second team Class C/D all area team.

Record Score Interesting Fact

1. NM 25, Holton 12 Jamie Keene 2 FG & TD, Jason Bogue & Jeremy Wagner each a TD.
2. NM 24, Shelby 6 Wegner 47 yd punt return, Tommy Farmer rec. fumble for TD.
3. NM 27, Hart 12 Jay Kakaty 2 TD passes (47 to Wegner, 11 to Hager) Keene 2 TDs.

3-1 NM 6, Ravenna 7 Kakaty one yard TD, Extra point block vs. 1996 Class S state champs.

* 1. NM 20, Montague 30 Keene 9 yd TD, Kakaty 7 yd run TD, pass of 8 to Wegner for TD.

4-2 NM 27, Mason Co 6 Keene 4 TDs (10, 3, 10 and 3) and 261 yards.

4-3 NM 17, Whitehall 20 Keene 2 yd TD, 25- yd FG, Kakaty to Farmer 25-yd pass TD.

4-4 NM 0, Oakridge 45 NM gives up two quick scores as Oakridge clinches WMC.

4-5 NM 22, Grant 34 NM gives up 5 lg. TD runs. Keene TD & FG. Kakaty – Hager TD pass.

**1997 Coach Dave Cooke (8-3 overall, - Playoff qualifier, Oakridge WMC Champs)**

What a strange year it would prove to be for the Norsemen in 1997. In a conference that produced two state champions in Oakridge in CC and Ravenna in C, NM would defeat state Class C champ Ravenna and lose to state CC Oakridge by a 6-0 score. NM would win eight games on the season yet none of their wins, or losses were lopsided. Expectations were higher for 1997 with a solid group of returnees, most notably on offense. The most notable returning starter would be senior Jamie Keene, who rushed for more than 1200 yards last season and was honored as the Class D first team all-state kicker. Jeremy Wegner also returns as a regular while much of the offensive line is welcomed back by coach Dave Cooke, ready to begin his 27th year as a head coach.

NM used primarily their rushing game to defeat Holton 13-6 to begin the 1997 season. Jeremy Wegner and Jason Bogue did much of the work for the Norsemen. Wegner led the Norse with 109 yards rushing while Bogue, who chipped in with 41 yards rushing, was also a force on defense with 10 tackles. Holton took advantage of a Norse miscue when the snap from center went over punter Jeremy Wegner’s head and was recovered at the NM 4-yard line. That led to an opening touchdown for the visiting Red Devils, but that would be all the scoring the rest of the way for Holton. It was NM who then took advantage of a Holton fumble at Holton’s 22-yard line to produce their first score, a one-yard quarterback sneak by their new quarterback T.J Schumacher. Schumacher then added the second, and last score of the game with a seven-yard quarterback keeper. NM received a jolt early into the fourth quarter when Jason Bogue went down with a possible season ending knee injury.

NM was without the services of Jason Bogue but did welcome the return to action of Jamie Keene, who sat out the Norse opener. Keene was at his 1996 self as he rushed for 168 yards in 22 carries and two rushing Touchdowns. Keene also added a TD from his defensive post as he intercepted a Pirate pass and returned it 33 yards. TJ Schumacher was getting better and better in his first year as the NM quarterback as he rushed for a couple of TDs for their second straight victory to start the 1997 season.

The Norse showed they were for real in 1997 as they played an inspired defensive game to edge Ravenna 10-6. Jamie Keene rushed for 171 against a tough Bulldog defense and accounted for nine of the 10 NM points. Keene gave the Norse an early lead, and the first half’s only scoring when he booted a short 20-yard field goal. Keene then added the clincher when on a third and three he broke free and raced 45 yards for a touchdown. Ravenna than mounted their only scoring drive on the game with Neil Sladick scoring to close the gap to 10-6. Ravenna then was successful on the onside kick, but NM forced a four and out to run out the clock and take what would prove to be their biggest win of 1997. Feared lost for the season following an injury in the NM opener, the Norse were more than happy to see the return of Jason Bogue who had eight tackles for the winners.

The Norsemen then pulled off one of their biggest comeback victories in more than 90 years of NM football as they scored 17 unanswered points in the game’s final ten minutes to stun Montague 17-14. Trailing 14-0 with less than ten minutes remaining in the game, NM’s Nick Mosher picked up a fumble in Montague’s backfield and raced 20 yards for a touchdown with 9:23 showing on the clock. Fueled by a now energized offensive line --- Eric Klopp, B.J. Vanderwater, Adam Petersen, Nate Bolema, Matt Porritt, Peter Haak, and Mosher at tight end --- the Norsemen then put together a 10-play 74-yard scoring drive. Jamie Keene covered the final 18 yards for the TD and kicked the extra point to knot the game up at 14-14. Montague then got the ball back, but disaster struck once again for the stunned Wildcats. Jeremy Wegner recovered a fumble on Montague’s 29-yard line. Six plays later Keene, the all-state kicker from 1996, calmly kicked a 23-yard field goal for the game winner against the undefeated Wildcats. Sophomore Rick Martin was all over the field on defense with his 15 tackles.

Surely a letdown would be understandable following two very emotional victories over two of the top competitors in the WMC. But what a letdown! The Norse had defeated Mason County Central 24 out of their last 25 games, including the last 14 in a row. The Spartans pulled off the stunning upset on their homecoming night in Scottville with a 16-12 win over the punch less Norsemen. NM was held to just over 100 yards rushing the entire night, including holding NM’s Jamie Keene to his lowest rushing yardage in two years as he netted but 23 yards running the football. The difference in the game was in the extra points. After MCC scored first they completed a pass for two points. After TJ Schumacher teamed up with Nick Mosher for a 33-yard scoring strike the Norsemen were forced to go for two and failed. NM led 12-8 going into the fourth quarter following an eight run TD by Jason Bogue but again failed on the two-pointer. Mason County scored the winning touchdown in the fourth quarter on a one-yard run by quarterback Jason Bacon.

What a difference a week makes! After struggling against a Mason County team that would win only two games all year, the Norsemen showed their might with a convincing 49-20 victory over Class B Whitehall. Jamie Keene scored 37 of NM’s 49 points with five touchdowns, 3 extra points and a 31- yard field goal. Keene scored four rushing TDs on runs of 10, 10, 1 & 2 and caught a TD pass from TJ Schumacher from nine yards out for his fifth TD. At one point in the third quarter NM had built up a surprising 36-6 lead over the Vikings. Whitehall tallied the final touchdown on a 42-yard run by sophomore quarterback Nate McLouth, an athlete renowned for being a ‘fairly good’ baseball player. Also getting into the scoring column were Jon Grimm and Nick Thrasher. Grimm on a 14-yard pass from Schumacher while Thrasher tallied on a nine-yard run.

Facing the top ranked team, and the eventual state champ in Class CC would present an ominous task for any team, certainly a public-school Class D team such as North Muskegon. Oakridge with an enrollment more than twice the size of NMHS (482-201) just nipped the Norsemen 6-0. The win clinched the WMC title for Oakridge who would go on to post an 11-1 record with their only defeat coming the following week in a two-point loss to the Class C state champs from Ravenna. NM stood toe-to-toe with the Eagles, but a pair of lost fumbles and an interception stopped potential NM scoring drives. NM drove deep into Oakridge territory in the fourth quarter before turning over the ball on an interception by the Eagles Jeff Bowen. Oakridge took advantage of a short NM punt in the third quarter to score the game’s only touchdown.

Jamie Keene booted a school record three field goals in a game in North Muskegon’s 22-13 win over Shelby. Keene also scored a pair of rushing touchdowns to account for all of NM’s 22 points as NM improved to 6-2 on the season. Keene had another 100-yard rushing game, the 12th time surpassing the century mark in two years, with 134 yards. Jason Bogue was a force on defense in the Norse win with a game high 12 tackles.

Although they had already clinched a berth in the playoffs with a 6-2 record against Class B & C competition, the Norse wanted to make amends for being knocked out of the playoffs the previous year by Grant. This year it was NM who knocked Grant out of the playoffs as they were battling Orchard View for a spot in the playoffs. It took an overtime period for NM to pull out the victory and it was Jamie Keene who rose to the occasion as NM edged Grant 27-24. After Grant failed to score in their possession in the overtime, NM head coach Dave Cooke called on his reliable kicker to bring home the victory. A perfect seven of seven in field goal tries during the season, Keene made it eight for eight to give NM the victory that insured them of homefield advantage in the upcoming playoffs. Keene rushed for 121 yards and one touchdown and kicked a pair of field goals to lead the Norse. Derrick Smith scored NM’s first TD in the second quarter when he returned an interception 56 yards to give the Norse a 10-6 lead. For the second straight year Grant returned a kickoff back for a touchdown to give Grant the lead at halftime. Grant went up 18-10 on a Scott VanSingel 39-yard TD run. The Norse then tied up the score on a Keene 21-yard dash and an all-important two-pointer on a TJ Schumacher run. With just 1:18 remaining in the game Grant tied the game at 24-24 on a TD pass. It was then that Grant head coach Dave Eichberg made a decision that he will rue forever. Instead of kicking the extra point, Eichberg due to his long snapper being injured, went for the two-pointer that was stopped by NM and forced overtime.

The Norse almost let one get away as a pass happy Mount Pleasant Sacred Heart team scored two fourth quarter touchdowns but failed on two-pointers following each of their touchdowns as NM prevailed 21-19. Jamie Keene again had a monster game for the Norse. Keene ran for 221 yards on a school record (perhaps) 39 carries and scored two touchdowns. While NM garnered most of their yards on the ground (279 of 300 total yards), Mount Pleasant Sacred Heart took to the air to move the ball against the Norse as they attempted a whopping 36 passes while completing 17 for 160 yards. Keene’s perfect 3-3 on extra-point kicks would prove to be the difference. Jeremy Wegner may have saved the day for the Norse as he batted a pass away in the end zone as MPSH attempted a two-pointer that would have tied in the game late in the fourth quarter.

NM’s season game to an agonizing close as a Bay City All Saints touchdown in the fourth quarter ended the NM season with an 8-3 record. The Norse were leading 7-6 before the visitors from Bay City scored the winning touchdown in the final quarter. However, it was perhaps in the first half when NM lost this game. With just 20 seconds left in the first half All Saints quarterback Nick Grange hooked up on a 41-yard pass play to his favorite received Craig Francis. With NM’s top defender Derrick Smith on the sidelines with an early injury, Grange completed two more passes to Francis, the final pass was good for a nine-yard completion and with just nine seconds left in the half All-Saints trailed by only a point after their extra point attempt was blocked by Jon Grimm. But instead of the shutout, All Saints turned NM’s game back around in a matter of seconds. “We should have gone in at halftime up 10-0, or maybe 17-0.” Said NM coach Cooke. “In a close ball game against a good club, you can’t make those kinds of mistakes.” All Saints began their winning drive after intercepting a Norse pass with 6:18 to go in the game. A 14-yard pass play, and a 30-yard run set up the All Saints 3-yard TD run that finished off the Norse season.

Finally--- Dave Cooke was selected as the Area Coach of the Year by leading his 19 player NM team to an 8-3 record. Cooke was given the honor even though two other schools, Oakridge and Ravenna won state titles. Cooke was joined on all area team by Jamie Keene and tackle Nate Bolema on offense while Eric Klop and Derrick Smith were accorded honors on the first team all-area defensive team. Keene was also chosen again as the all-area kicker. Keene and Smith were also picked as first team all staters by both the Detroit Free Press as well as the AP vote selected by the state media.

Record Score Interesting Fact

1-0 NM 13, Holton 6 TJ Schumacher 2 TDs (1 & 7) Jeremy Wegner 109 yards rushing.

2-0 NM 35, Hart 12 Jamie Keene 168 yds, 3 TDS, Schumacher 2 TDs.

1. NM 10, Ravenna 6 Keene 171 yds, 45-yard TD and 20-yard field goal.

4-0 NM 17, Montague 14 NM scores last 17 points. Nick Moser 20 yd fumble recovery, Keene 18 yd TD, winning 23- yard field goal.

4-1 NM 12, Mason Co 16 Schumacher to Moser 33 yd TD pass. Bogue 8-yard TD.

5-1 NM 49, Whitehall 20 Keene 5 TDs, 4 rush and pass from Schmacher.

5-2 NM 0, Oakridge6 Keene 72 yards as NM holds state champs to 6-0 margin.

6-2 NM 22, Shelby 13 Keene 3 field goals and 2 TDs.

7-2 NM 27, Grant 24 Keene’s FG in OT the winner. Keene 2 FG & TD. Derrick Smith 56 yd interception return for TD. Schumacher one-yard TD and big two-point run.

8-2\* NM 21, MPSH 19 Keene 2 TDs, Schumacher 1 Wegner batted away 2-pointer for tie.

7-3\* NM 7, Bay City AS 14 Keene TD. All Saints scores with :08 before half and late TD.

**1998 Coach Dave Cooke (3-6 overall, Whitehall WMC Champs)**

It would be a couple of lean years for NM football as the Norsemen would only win four games until they entered the next century. There would also be a new look for NM football beginning with the 1998 season, a co-op partner with West Michigan Christian. The good news for this new idea, NM would get additional players, the bad news the Norse would move up to Class CC as they had to use the combined enrollment of the two schools. Over the years that this co-op took place, WMC generally supplied 2-4 four players a year with only a handful making notable contributions. Even with the addition of the WMC players, none of whom had any playing experience, the Norse numbers would still be small as head coach Dave Cooke’s NM team would only field 20 players, four of whom would be sophomores. NM would field four starters back on offense and only three on defense, not a recipe for success.

It didn’t take but their season opener to note that this might be a tough year for Norsemen football. Holton would hand NM their most decisive defeat in a series that has been dominated by the Norse, 33-6 in the season opener. NM could never find any kind of rhythm in the game as they fumbled three times in the first half. NM’s only score came in the third quarter when returning starting quarterback TJ Schumacher scored on a 12-yard keeper. One bright spot for the Norsemen was the play of linebacker Rick Martin who made 11 tackles.

NM then recorded one of their two wins on the season with a 13-6 victory over Hart. It was the 61st meeting between the two rivals with Hart winning only five of the past meetings between the two long-time foes. Just as they have often done in the past NM used their kicking game to procure the victory. Replacing two-time all-state kicker Jamie Keene in 1998 would be Karl DePoy. It was two made field goals by DePoy from 25- and 26-yards yards that would prove to be the difference in the 13-6 Norse victory. Returning three-year starter Jason Bogue was the top performer on defense as Bogue had nine tackles, a blocked punt, and an interception. The only touchdown scored by the Norse was a one-yard plunge by Rick Martin in the second half. TJ Schumaker had a productive passing game by connecting on 10 of 14 for 110 yards.

The Norse were no match in their next contest with the defending Class C state champs as Ravenna used several big plays to stampede the Norsemen 38-7. Ravenna scored on long runs from 49, 84, 46, 75, and a more modest scamper from 10 to bury the Norse and partially make amends for NM’s 10-6 upset of the Bulldogs last season. Ravenna junior Kent Keresbury kept up the tradition of yardage chomping Bulldogs tailbacks of late as he rushed for 317 yards against the NM defense. NM’s lone score came in the third period as quarterback T J Schumacher found junior Justin Wikander all alone to complete a 46-yard TD pass. A bright spot for NM on defense was the recorded 16 tackles by Anthony Visconti.

NM’s offensive woes continued as Montague shutout the Norse 26 to 0 as the Wildcat defense held NM to minus -7 yards rushing and under 100 yards in total offense. All of Montague’s offense came on 289 rushing yards as Montague never was forced to pass. All NM’s yardage came via the airwaves as TJ Schumacher was 7-of-12 passing for 99 yards. Anthony Visconti with 14 and Jason Bogue with 12 tackles were the stalwarts on defense for the Norsemen.

The offense remained stagnant, but the defense came up with some big plays to lead the Norse to their second, and last victory on the season with a 21-14 win over Mason County Central. Justin Visconti’s fumble recovery on the Spartan’s one and Ricky Martin’s blocked punt contributed to the NM win. TJ Schumacher scored one play after Visconti’s recovery while Nick Thasher followed Martin’s block with a nine-yard touchdown to give NM a 14-6 lead. The Spartans rallied to tie the game at the halftime break at 14-14. NM scored on the game winning, and only TD in the second half as they took the opening kickoff to begin the third quarter and marched 65 yards in 15 plays with the winning play a 7-yard pass from Shumacher to Justin Visconti.

Whitehall’s first game in the WMC was back in 1932. They would have to wait 66 years before the Vikings would win an outright WMC championship. Whitehall made sure that North Muskegon was not going to be an obstacle to obtain their goal as they rolled over the Norse 50-7, Whitehall’s widest margin of victory all time over NM. Whitehall totaled 515 total yards with Jason Johnson rushing for 245 yards and four touchdowns as the Vikings posted their first undefeated and untied regular season in their school’s history. A 22-7 halftime lead turned into a blowout as Whitehall scored 28 unanswered points after halftime. NM’s only score game on a 74-yard scamper by Nick Thrasher.

Two early fumbles that led to Oakridge fumbles took the energy out of the

Norsemen as they fell to Oakridge 32-0. NM couldn’t get anything mounted on offense as Oakridge stuffed the Norsemen, allowing just 68 total yards for the entire game.

NM unveiled a sophomore quarterback in their game against Shelby and Nick Marietti didn’t waste any time to show what he could do with the pigskin. Marietti connected on TD strikes of 35 yards to Jon Grimm and 4-yards to Rick Martin in the first quarter enroute to a 17-6 win. Martin set up his touchdown reception by blocking a punt. Shelby closed the gap to 14-6 but Kyle DePoy sewed the game up in the fourth quarter by knocking through the uprights a 28-yard field goal. Marietti completed 6 of 12 passes for 81 yards ensuring that the Norsemen would be in good hands at quarterback for the next couple of seasons. Nick Thasher topped the century mark in rushing with 114 yards in 30 carries.

North Muskegon didn’t go out and schedule a ‘puppy’ to play in their last game of the 1998 season. The Norse added Fulton-Middleton to their schedule and were soundly beaten by the Lansing Area School 42-14. ‘All’ Fulton-Middleton would do was go on and win the Class DD state championship. F-M had the total offensive package against the Norsemen as they rushed for 349 yards and passed for 167. Nick Thrasher scored both of NM’s TDs against the state champs of ‘98’ on runs of three and 28. Jason Bogue left everything he had out on the field as he had 21 tackles.

For the first time in several years the Norsemen were left without an all-state player. Anthony Visconti was tabbed for first team honors on the all-area team while Jason Bogue, and lineman Jason Scott were picked for the second team on defense. Kyle DePoy was picked for the second team all-area C/D kicker.

Record Score Interesting Fact

0-1 NM 6, Holton 33 TJ Schumacher scores on NM TD on a 12-yard keeper.

1-1 NM 13, Hart 6 Karl DePoy 2 field goals, Rick Martin 1 yd TD run.

1-2 NM 7, Ravenna 38 Schumacher 46-yard TD pass to Justin Wikander only NM score.

1-3 NM 0, Montague 26 Schumacker 7 of 12 passing for 99 yards. NM -7 yards rushing.

2-3 NM 21, Mason Co 14 2 MCC TO’s’s lead to NM scores. Schumacher – Wikander 7 yds TD.

2-4 NM 7, Whitehall 50 Nick Thrasher 74-yard TD. Anthony Visconti 12 tackles.

2-5 NM 0, Oakridge 32 NM only 68 total yards as turnovers lead to 2 quick Oakridge

3-5 NM 17, Shelby 6 NickMarietti TD passes of 35 & 4 to Jon Grimm and Martin.

3-6 NM 14, Middleton-F 42 Thrasher 3 and 28 yd TDs. Jason Bogue 21 tackles.

**1999 Coach Dave Cooke (1-8 overall, Whitehall WMC Champs)**

The playoffs have changed immeasurably over the years since they began in 1975. For the first few years there were teams with perfect 9-0 records who wouldn’t qualify for the playoffs. Until 1989 there were only four state champs, and it was still not a walk-in-the-park to qualify when state champs were doubled beginning in 1990. However, beginning with the 1999 season another week was added to the schedule that now doubled the number of teams that could qualify for the playoffs. One simply had to win six, games, or five if one played an eight-game schedule and you are in. 1999 would be a down year for the Norsemen and they wouldn’t come close to qualifying as they were only able to procure but one win. Fortunately, it would only be a blip for one year. There was good news and bad news for the 1999 Norsemen. The first good news is the return for his 29th year of coaching Dave Cooke. The bad news for Cooke: he will be coaching from a cart or on crutches after a hip replacement during the summer. The other good news: there were 26 players suited up for the varsity, a boost from prior years when as few as 17 would be suited up in their blue and gold uniforms. The bad news: Only one starter on offense and three on defense return from 1998. Only six seniors would be on the NM roster with the remaining consisting of underclassmen. The co-op with WMC would bring a pair of underclassmen who would help the Norse in running back Marlin James and linebacker Michael Klobucher.

With the necessity of an extra game to accommodate all the teams who would qualify during the regular season to enter the playoffs, the Norsemen would play their first game in history during the month of August. It was not a pretty opener for the Norse at Fred Jacks Field as they lost to Holton 27-19 in the first game ever played in August by a NM team. It took only the first play from scrimmage that signs pointed to a possible bad omen for NM as they fumbled on their very first play. Holton turned the miscue into a touchdown, and it wouldn’t be the last NM turnover. After NM took the lead on a pair of TDs, the first a one-yard run by fullback Rick Martin, and the second a 60-yard sprint by freshman Jeremy Scott, disaster again fell upon the Norse. Holton fell upon another Norse fumble with two minutes left in the half and they scored the go-ahead touchdown and held on to defeat NM 27-19. Junior quarterback Nick Marietti teamed up with Justin Wickander from 29 yards out to close the gap to less than one score. NM was doomed when yet another fumble late in the game was recovered by Holton in the end zone for the game’s final score. It was no disgrace to lose to Holton as this was one of the strongest teams in Holton history as the Red Devils went 7-1 in the regular season, won a playoff game before losing to eventual state finalist in Hopkins.

Ravenna pushed across two third quarter touchdowns to hand the Norse their second defeat to start the 1999 season. Using their traditional power I offense with their tailback getting most the carries, Ravenna tailback Kenny Cook rushed for 267 yards on 42 carries and scored both Bulldog TDs. The Norse were only 5-19 in the passing department for 38 yards while freshman running back Jeremy Scott was limited to 58 rushing yards as Ravenna’s defense dominated the game.

North Muskegon would win their only game of the season as they defeated their oldest rival, the Montague Wildcats 32-8 to complete their first three home games of the season. Rod Melton returned Montague’s very short kick off to begin the game 55 yards to give the Norse a 6-0 lead. Montague then regained the lead at 8-6 in the second quarter before NM regained the lead for keeps as Melton scored his second TD, a 21-yard pass from Nick Marietti. NM then improved on their 12-8 halftime lead with three short TD runs in the second half: Jeremy Scott and Mike Wasiura from one and Marlin James from two yards out.

For the first time in the 56 years since NM played Scottville, the Spartans shut out the Norsemen 21-0. NM didn’t help their cause as they committed four turnovers while also having a pair of miscues from their punting team. NM was held to only 70 yards of total offense, 42 of those yards picked up on the ground by running back Marlin James.

For the second straight week NM failed to score a point as the WMC 1999 champs from Whitehall shutout the Norse 25-0. Whitehall back Jason Johnson again had a field day against the Norse with 244 of Whitehall’s 274 rushing yards earned during the game. Johnson even hurt the NM bid to score a touchdown in the first half. With the Norse trailing 6-0, Spencer Suchy intercepted a Nate McLouth pass and was headed for the goal before he was caught from behind by Bryce Smith. Suchy fumbled and the ball was recovered at the NM ten by Johnson. Future MLB all-star outfielder Nate McLouth was 9-17 passing for Whitehall while his counterpart Nick Marietti finished at 6-18. Both McLouth and Marietti were shortstops on their school’s baseball teams in the spring. Nick Martin was a force for NM on defense as the Norse linebacker had 16 tackles in the loss.

NM led heavily favored Oakridge through three quarters of play before the Eagles scored a pair of fourth quarter TDs to edge the Norse 22-15. NM enjoyed a halftime lead over the Eagles when Rick Martin punched it in from seven yards out and Karl DePoy converted on the extra point. Oakridge took the lead on the first of Mike Rhanor’s two TDS in the fourth quarter. A bad snap from center set up Rhanor’s second score. NM scored late on a Nick Marietti 20-yard TD pass to Spencer Suchy and a two-point conversion made it 22-15. The Eagles were then able to run out the clock to deprive NM of a possible upset. Marietti was 9-14 for 147 yards in the loss.

After playing an always tough Oakridge team close the previous week, NM suffered a letdown and were soundly defeated by Shelby 34-8. Shelby used a potent passing attack in their convincing win as the combo of QB jim Gice and Josh Ford teamed up for three TD passes. Shelby was never threatened as they took a 34-0 halftime lead over the Norsemen. NM earned their only touchdown in the game on a fourth quarter 39-yard run by West Michigan Christian student Marlin James.

NM edged Hart in total yards 240-203 but three interceptions aided Hart to a 28-15 victory over the Norse. One of the interception’s took place in the Hart end zone to thwart a possible NM score while another led to a Pirate TD as the Norse fell to 1-7 on the season. Mike Wasiura caught a 20-yd TD pass from Nick Marietti for the first of two NM TDs on the night. Rick Martin added the second in the third period on a short 3-yard run.

NM ended their season with the long road trip to Fulton (or was the game in Middleton?) as they lost their final game to the defending Class DD state champs 34-14. Rick Martin was able to rush for 135 yards, including a 48-yard run to lead the Norse. Nick Marietti ran for the other NM score as the young Norse ended a rare losing season at 1-8. The experience gained in 1999 would pay off better dividends the following season.

As one might expect when a team finished 1-8 on the season that there would not be a slew of NM players selected for post-season honors. However, junior tackle Kirk Long was picked for the first team all-area defensive squad while linebacker Rick Martin made 2nd team as a linebacker. There was quality on the 1999-all area team as two of the all-area picks, Muskegon Catholic’s Ruvell Martin and Ravenna’s Todd Herremans would have productive careers in the NFL, and both would be selected to the Muskegon Area Sports Hall of Fame. Yet another first team pick in Class A & B was Whitehall’s Nate McLouth, a future MLB all-star who joins both Martin and Herremans in the MASHOF.

Record Score Interesting Fact

0-1 NM 19, Holton 27 Jeremy Scott 60-yd TD, Rick Martin TD, Nick Marietti – Justin Visconti 39-yard TD pass.

0-2 NM 0, Ravenna 12 NM only 5-19 passing, Scott 58-yard srushing.

1-2 NM 32, Montague 8 Rod Melton 2 TDs, Scott, Marlin James, Mike Wasirua TDs.

1-3 NM 0, Mason Co 21 Four turnovers mar Norse cause. James 42 rushing yds.

1-4 NM 0, Whitehall 25 Future MLB all-star Nate McLouth leads Vikings to win.

1-5 NM 15, Oakridge 22 Martin 7 Yd. TD. Marietti to Specer Suchy 20-yd TD pass.

1-6 NM 8, Shelby 34 James 39-yd TD & late safety all points earned by NM.

1-7 NM 15, Hart 28 Marietti to Wasiura 20-yd TD. Martin 3-yard TD.

1-8 NM 14, Mid-Fult 34 Martin 48-yard TD run, Marietti TD.

**2000 Coach Dave Cooke (7-3 overall, Playoff qualifier, Oakridge WMC Champs)**

NM rebounded from their 1-8 season to nearly flip the script as they begin the 21st century. John Slucum and Larry Witham would be head coach Dave Cooke’s assistants as Cooke would be without, for the first time in many years, his loyal assistant Ed Schroeder. Thanks to the co-op program with West Michigan Christian, 28 gridders would be on the 2000 roster, with 10 of those players coming from WMC. The co-op program, beginning its second season did come with a big change if they were to qualify for the playoffs. For playoff purposes, NM would have to use the combined enrollment of the two schools, pushing NM up to the CC level. Six starters from the previous season would return from 1999, including quarterback Nick Marietti and their lone all-area first team selectee lineman Kirk Long. Seven players would return on defense, but the return of numerous starters would have its drawbacks as a possible nine players would go both ways, leaving late game fatigue perhaps an issue. A new football building named after the late John Pavlich would be completed during the season, a welcome addition for Norse football.

Once again Holton, a team coming off their best season in their school’s history would be NM’s opponent to begin the season. The Norse broke the Red Devil’s modest two-game winning streak over the Norse, but not my much, as NM edged Holton 8-7. It didn’t take long for NM to utilize one of those ten players from West Michigan Christian that led the Norse to their victory. Holton jumped out in front with an early first quarter touchdown and kicked the extra point to lead NM 7-0. Norse quarterback Nick Marietti threw a swing pass to Rod Melton in the second quarter that Melton took 44 yards for a touchdown to cut the lead to 7-6. Coach Cooke made the decision to go for two points and Marietti connected with WMC student Ryan Portenga for a two-pointer for what would prove to be the winning point as neither team scored in the second half.

Ravenna tailback Kenny Cook burned the Norse for the second straight year as he again grounded out more than 200 yards as Ravenna scored three unanswered touchdowns to defeat NM 28-6. Running behind the blocking of future NFL lineman Todd Herremans, Cook scored a pair of TDs, including a 29-yard tally. NM had tied the game at 6-6 late in the first quarter with what would prove to be their only score in the game, a 58-yard run by Rod Melton. The Bulldogs defense then allowed NM only 71 rushing yards for the rest of the game. The Bulldogs secondary rose to the occasion as well, as they intercepted three NM passes. “I don’t think we showed what we are capable of as a team tonight,” said NM coach Cooke, “Ravenna is a very sound team fundamentally and you can’t make mistakes like we made tonight and expect to win.” Cooke’s prophecy was right as NM would win six of their next seven contests.

North Muskegon rallied from a 15-6 deficit to score two touchdowns in the game’s final five minutes to escape with a 22-15 victory over Montague. Nick Marietti tossed a six-yard touchdown pass to Rod Melton with 4:56 left in the game to cut the deficit to one point after their successful two-point conversion. The Norse recovered the onside kick to get the ball back and mounted their game winning drive that was capped by a Jeremy Scott 3-yard TD run with 2:09 left. Montague advanced to the NM 20-yard line before Melton picked off a Montague pass to stop the drive and give the Norse the win. NM had to savor the victory over the Wildcats as Montague would win an unprecedented 15 straight victories over the ensuing years over the Norse.

NM again pulled out a late come from behind victory as they scored the winning points with only 1:32 left to play after trailing by four to lift the Norse to a 19-16 victory over Mason County Central. Nick Marietti and Rod Melton, who also served as the backcourt pair on NM’s basketball team, teamed up on a 16-yard TD pass for the win. Melton, for the second straight week, intercepted a pass from Mason County on their last possession to halt a last-minute Spartan drive. Mason County led 10-6 at halftime before NM regained the lead on a short 3-yard run by Mike Waisura. MCC then countered with a fourth quarter tally to set up NM’s final heroics. Marlin James scored the initial NM TD from three yards for the only Norse score in the first half. James would rush for 74 yards while Marietti was 8-13 passing with Melton catching five of those passes for 79 yards, including the game winner.

There was no need for any last-minute comeback’s needed as NM scored all 21 points in the first three quarters to shut out Whitehall 21-0. The game was played in the rain as NM used their ground game to down the Vikings as three different Norse backs scored. Jeremy Scott scored the first touchdown on a short two-yard run and Rod Melton added the second on a 41-yard dash. NM took advantage of one of Whitehall’s four turnovers in the third quarter to notch their final TD. A Whitehall fumble at the Viking 15-yard line led to a 1-yard dive into the end zone from Marlin James to complete the scoring. After having their first two extra points from placement blocked in games one and two, the Norse shored up their blocking giving kicker Nick Marietti time to get away his kicks where he was a perfect 3-3.

North Muskegon threw a real scare into Oakridge as the Eagles needed a late touchdown to hold off the resurging Norsemen 22-14. With the aid of costly major penalties that totaled 45 yards, Oakridge was able to go 59 yards, with the winning tally a 11-yard TD by Jeff Williamson. Oakridge started the game as if they were going to breeze to an easy victory over the Norse as they took a 14-0 lead on two short TD runs by Ray Stover. The tide turned in the second half as NM scored a pair of TDs to tie the game at 14-14. The first NM TD came on a whacky play. Nick Marietti tossed a short pass to tight end Kirk Long who after making the catch fumbled the ball. Rod Melton picked up the loose ball and ran 20 yards before fumbling near the goal line only to have Melton jump on his own fumble in the end zone for a crazy NM TD. NM then tied the game on a 70-yard drive that culminated when Marietti connected with Marlin James on a screen pass that went 13 yards and a TD. NM had a chance to perhaps tie the game as a pass to a wide-open Norse receiver that had touchdown written all over it was dropped.

NM scored the first 31 points and received a great boost from a pair of West Michigan Christian student athletes in their 31-7 win over Shelby. Marlin James had a career best 199 rushing yards and a pair of TDs while Ryan Portenga scored on a TD on a pass from Nick Marietti as the Norse improved to 5-2, just one win shy of qualifying for the playoffs. Mike Wasiura finished with 80 rushing yards that included NM’s final TD on his 37-yard run. NM got on the scoreboard first with the team’s first field goal of the season, a 28-yard boot by Marietti.

The Norse were back again in the playoffs after soundly defeating Hart 33-6. The combo of Nick Marietti to Rod Melton worked their magic seven times good for 117 yard and three touchdowns as NM mixed the run game with their passing to subdue the Pirates. The Norse had long scoring drives of 80, 92, 61 and 56 to the delight of the home fans in attendance at Fred Jack Field. Marlin James scored two touchdowns and rushed for 90 of their 174 yards on the ground. Marietti was 12 of 17 passing for 192 yards with passing TDs to Melton from 6, 12, and 37 yards. Junior Mike Klobucher led the NM defense with 17 tackles.

On a perfect Indian Summer Saturday afternoon at Fred Jacks Field North Muskegon closed their regular season with a 38-17 victory over Fulton-Middleton. Nick Marietti threw four touchdown passes and kicked a field goal to lead NM to victory. Marietti first found his favorite receiver Rod Melton for a 35-yard hookup. The Norse QB’s other scoring tosses went to West Michigan Christian students Marlin James and Ryan Portenga. With the score knotted up at 17-17 in the third quarter the Norse exploded for 21 unanswered points. Marietti connected with Portenga twice for touchdowns. The first good for 34 and the second for 18. Jeremy Scott closed out the scoring with a short TD run as NM won their first game against Fulton Middleton in the third of four contests between the two schools in a four-game series that would end in 2001.

NM would qualify for the playoffs, and they would again travel to Oakridge to play the Eagles for the second time in the season. NM lost by a touchdown in their first meeting, it would come even closer in the second matchup. NM got off to a great start against the Eagles as they jumped out to a 13-0 halftime lead. NM totally outplayed Oakridge in the first half as they had a 156-47 total yardage advantage. It could have--and should have been --an even bigger Norse lead at the conclusion of the first two quarters. “We had them on the run in the first half,” said NM coach Dave Cooke. But so many times we were our worse enemy. We had two interceptions, two fumbles and penalties in key situations. We haven’t had those in the last three, four weeks. You can’t make those turnovers against a good ball club.” NM regrouped after all those early miscues and scored first on a 24-yard scoring pass from Nick Marietti to Rod Melton. NM did get a break on the last play before halftime as the Norse were attempting a field goal. The kicker Marietti picked up the ball after a bad snap from center and lofted a 14-yard TD pass to Matt Geyer. Coming off the bench and setting up their second TD was a sophomore from the JV team, 6’10 basketball star Drew Naymick. The future Michigan State starting center set up the TD with a huge 20-yard competition on a fourth downplay. For the third time this season Marietti had what would prove to be critical extra point attempt blocked. The Eagles scored a TD in the third and fourth quarter and made both extra points to take a 14-13 lead. With still half of the fourth quarter remaining the Norse had their chances. The first drive to retake the lead ended after a costly fourth-and-one penalty forced NM to punt. Oakridge then punted and the ball was downed at the one-yard line. Faced with a dilemma of traversing 99 yards with no time outs, NM picked up two first downs but ran out of time in a valiant effort against the 2000 West Michigan Conference champs, ending their season with a very good 7-3 record.

The Norsemen fared very well as far as post season accolades on the C/D All-Area team. Nick Marietti was the C/D quarterback picked. The No. 1 ranked student academically in his class completed 82-of 169 passes for 1169 yards and 16 touchdowns. Also picked on the first team was his favorite receiver, Rod Melton who caught 37 of Marietti’s passes for 599 yards and 10 TDs. Kirk Long, not only made the all-area team as a tight end, tackle fullback, or wherever needed, Long also made the prestigious Detroit Free Press All-State team. Running back Marlon James made the second team all-area team while Josh Dagen, Mike Wasiura, and a pair of Western Michigan students playing for the Norsemen, Mike Klobucher and future Mona Shores Athletic Director Ryan Portenga were honored on the second team all-area defensive team. It would be 23 years before NM would have another first team pick on the Detroit Free Press All State team: TJ Byard in 2023.

Record Score Interesting Fact

1-0 NM 8, Holton 7 Nick Marietti to Rod Melton 44 yd TD. NM pass to Ryan Portenga PAT for the game winning TD. Jeremy Scott 81 rushing yards, Marietti 8-17, 87 passing yds.

1-1 NM 6, Ravenna 28 Melton 55-yard TD run for NM’s only score.

2-1 NM 22, Montague 15 Marietti to Melton 2 TDs, Scott the game winning TD.

3-1 NM 19, Mason Co 16 Marietti – Melton TD for win, Marlin James, Mike Wasiura TDs.

4-1 NM 21, Whitehall 0 Scott (2 yds), Melton (41) and James (1) score NM TDs.

4-2 NM 14, Oakridge 22 Melton TD on a fumble. Marietti to James 13 yd TD pass.

5-2 NM 31, Shelby 7 James 2 Yds, 199 yds rushing. Portenga & Wasiura TDs.

6-2 NM 33, Hart 6 Marietti to Melton 3 TDs (6, 12 & 17) James 2 TDs.

7-2 NM 38. Mid-Fult. 17 Marietti 4 TD passes (2 to Portenga, 1 to James & Melton)

7-3\* NM 13, Oakridge 14 Marietti to Melton 24 pass TD, Marietti to Matt Geyer 14 yds.

**2001 Coach Dave Cooke (2-7 overall, Oakridge-Montague-Ravenna WMC Champs)**

An era would come to an end as the 2001 season would be the 22nd and final season for Dave Cooke as the head coach. Cooke would win 130 games during his tenure, easily the most wins by a NM coach over the 91 years of Norse football that won 495 games as of the beginning of the 2024 season. NM made the playoffs 13 times under Cooke’s leadership, second in Greater Muskegon to only Muskegon Catholic. What makes his record so notable was that North Muskegon was always the smallest school in enrollment in the WMC, and the area, throughout his 22 years. Most of his playoff teams came well before the MHSAA added an extra week that doubled teams eligible to qualify for the playoffs. Cooke’s 1981 team was the first team from the powerful West Michigan Conference to play for a state championship. Following his retirement from NM Cooke for many years would serve as a TV commentator with his friend John Arter, following his high school alma mater at Muskegon High. A very young Norse team would take their lumps in 2001 and although their 2-7 record was not up to their usual standards under Cooke’s 22 years at the helm, NM was competitive in each game.

The 2001 season got off to a promising start with a 35-12 victory over Holton. Tony Shyne accounted for 239 all-purpose yards, including second half TDs on a 42-yard run and a 72-yard kickoff return. West Michigan Christian student Jake Kelly would take over the signal calling duties at quarterback in 2001 and threw for two scores, a 31-yard pass to Sean Scott and a 22-yarder to Geoff Dean. Sean’s brother Jeremy Scott rushed for 91 yards and added a 2-yard TD for the Norse. Mike Klobucher, a two-year starter for NM, who would go down in Norse annals that would compare with the likes of Dave Taylor and Sam Parker as a top linebacker, had 15 tackles to lead the Norse.

NM came within one point of tying Montague early into the second half before Montague scored three unanswered touchdowns to pull away from the Norse in their 43-21 victory. A new precedent had been set in 2021 with teams now beginning play before Labor Day. Many schools had now opted to play games on Thursday of the Holiday weekend and 2021 would be the first game NM would play on a Thursday night. NM scored first against Montague on a 57-yard TD pass from Jake Kelly to Nick Haines. Kelly kept the Norsemen close with a second quarter pass good for six points to Jeremy Scott. Fullback Mike Klobucher drew NM within one at 22-21 when he muscled over from the nine-yard line, but Norse miscues led to Montague touchdowns as four turnovers doomed any Norse chances of pulling off the win.

Scottville (Mason County Central) and North Muskegon have played 81 games over the years. Scottville has posted just one lone shutout against the Norse, the 2001 9-0 victory at Scottville. As it turned out all the scoring the Spartans needed came on a field goal in the first half. They then clinched the contest as they returned the opening kickoff of the second half 94 yards. Mike Klobucher was the story for the Norse on defense as the NM linebacker had 12 tackles. NM’s offense was virtually non-existent as they totaled only 18 yards for the game.

Whitehall began a six-game winning streak against the Norse with a 24-14 victory. The game was played just days after the infamous attack of September 11, 2001, and was a welcome diversion for high school football fans across the nation. The game with Whitehall was a tale of two halves. NM scored two second quarter touchdowns to take a 14-7 lead at halftime. Nick Haines completed a NM drive with a 4-yard run and shortly before half, Tony Shyne electrified the Norse crowd with a 58-yard TD run. However, the second half all belonged to Whitehall, especially the third period. The Vikings amassed 127 yards while the Norse were in the negative column with a minus -8 total yards. Mike Klobuchar had another monster game defensively for the Norse with 21 tackles.

Oakridge totaled 500 yards opposed to NM’s 90 as the Eagles downed the Norsemen 38-6. North Muskegon’s only touchdown came on defense on a 60-yard interception return from Geoff Dean. The less said about this game, the better.

NM scored first, gave up 15 unanswered points to Shelby, and nearly scored a TD at the end but it wasn’t to be for the Norse who lost 15-7 to the Tigers. Mike Klobuchor’s nine-yard YD run gave NM a 7-0 lead at the end of the first quarter but that was it for the Norse. Shelby tallied touchdowns in the second and third quarter before the Norse made a last-ditch rally. With just five second left in the game and NM at the Shelby 7-yard line, the West Michigan Christian Co-op of Jake Kelly and Klobuchor tried to connect on a pass in the end zone, but the pass fell incomplete as time expired.

Tony Shyne and Mike Klobuchor had huge games as NM finally put their offense together in a 48-7 rout of Hart. Klobuchor scored 4 touchdowns, three coming on short runs of 9, 8 & 2 and added a fourth TD when he caught a pass from Jake Kelly that totaled 24 yards. Shyne had a career day in rushing as he ran for 215 yards in but 10 carries. His two TD runs were long distance journeys: the first a sprint from 72 yards and the second a 95-yard scamper, the fourth longest TD run in Norse history. Klobucher also led NM with a game high 14 tackles.

The Norsemen had no answer for Ravenna’s Roger Plont as the Bulldogs clinched a three-way tie in the WMC with Montague and Oakridge. Plont had a hand in all Ravenna’s points as he threw for three touchdowns and ran for another as well as completing two 2-point conversions. Ravenna led 28-0 before NM was able to score with three minutes remaining on a 2-yard TD run by Mike Klobucher. The future star player for Ferris State, as usual, led all tacklers with 16.

NM closed out their season on Saturday afternoon, October 20, 2001, the earliest date to close a season in their history. One surely couldn’t blame Mike Klobuchar for their season ending 33-6 loss to Fulton-Middleton. The two-way tireless Klobuchar finished the day, and his prep career, with 109 yards rushing and a 3-yard TD. The never say quit Klobucher was a one-man wrecking crew on defense with 18 tackles.

NM had only one player named to the all-area team and that was a no-brainer. Mike Klobucher was an easy choice as a first team linebacker, but no other NM player was even picked as an honorable mention selectee, demonstrating that NM was lacking quality football players in Dave Cooke’s last season at NM, ending 40 memorable years as a high school coach. Klobucher was easily the best player that NM received during the years they had a Co-op with West Michigan Christian. It did mention that Klobucher set a school record with 182 tackles, a possible record to be sure, but it should be mentioned that tackles were rarely, if ever, tabulated in previous seasons. Klobucher was not only an outstanding football player but one who excelled in academics. He finished with the top-grade point average at WMC while maintaining a perfect 4.0 grade point average as well as performing yeoman like duties for the Ferris State football team.

Record Score Interesting Fact

1-0 NM 35, Holton 12 Tony Shyne 239 yds, 2 TDs, Jake Kelly 2 TD passes, J. Scott 91 yds.

* 1. NM 21, Montague 43 Kelly TD passes to Nick Haines & Scott. Mike Klobucher 9-yd TD run.
  2. NM 0, Mason Co 9 Only shutout by Scottville in 80-year series. Klobucher 12 tackles.
  3. NM 14, Whitehall 24 Haines 4 yd run, Shyne 58 yd TD. Klobucher 21 tackles.
  4. NM 6, Oakridge 38 Goeff Dean;s 60-yd interception return the only NM score.
  5. NM 7, Shelby 15 Klobucher 9-yard run for only NM TD.
  6. NM 48, Hart 7 Shyne 72- & 95-yard YD runs, Klobucher 4 TDs and 14 tackles.

2-6 NM 6, Ravenna 28 Klobucher 2-yard TD and 16 tackles.

2-7 NM 6, Mid-Fult.33 Klobucher 109 rishing yards, 3-yard TD and 18 tackles.

**2002 Coach Al Karaba (4-5 overall, Oakridge WMC Champs)**

There would be a new look for North Muskegon football as Al Karaba, a former Muskegon Catholic football star and track standout would replace Dave Cooke as the head coach of the Norsemen, the 11th head coach in NM history. Cooke served 22 years as the Norse mentor and coached for forty years, including stays at Whitehall and Reeths Puffer. Karaba also served as the head track coach at NMHS with Doug Clark. Karaba was no stranger to NMHS football as he served as the Norse JV coach for the past 11 years and would only make modest adjustments to Cooke’s I-formation attack. NM would continue working in students from West Michigan Christian into the Norse football program. However, of the 10 players with WMC ties, only one would play on the Norse varsity.

In addition to a new coach there were a few new faces for the young Norsemen in 2002. NM made their new head coach Al Karaba’s debut as the new mentor for the Norsemen a success as they had little trouble in defeating Holton 34 to 8. The Norse jumped off to an early 21-0 halftime lead over the Red Devils on a pair of touchdown runs from Gage Hyrns (14 & 2) and another by Marty Holmes. Geoff Dean had a 38-yard scoring run in the second half while Aaron Sanders crashed over from the one. Holmes led NM rushers with 106 yards while Bill Muscat led the NM defense with 11 tackles.

The jittery Norsemen fumbled four times in the first half at Montague as the Wildcats took advantage of the Norse miscues to post an insurmountable 33-0 halftime lead. Tony Shyne was one bright spot for the Norse as he broke loose for several long runs in the second half to lead NM rushers with 129 yards. Sophomore Mike Dean saved NM from being shutout with a late 3-yard TD run to make the final score 39-6. Justin Derks made 10 tackles, while Geoff Dean and Marty Holmes had seven stops of the Norse.

Tony Shyne scored on a pair of long TD runs to lead NM to a 21-13 victory over Mason County Central. Shyne’s first TD traversed 28 yards while his second TD in the second quarter was a longer dash of 65 yards. NM secured the victory in the second half as quarterback Tom Gebuhr completed his first career TD pass with a 15-yard hookup with Gage Hyrns. Shyne would finish with 110 yards on 18 carries as NM totaled 273 yards to the Spartans 151.

NM was charged with nine penalties, many of those in the second half as Whitehall came from behind to edge the Norse 19-14. NM and Whitehall each traded TDs in the first half to make it 7-7 at halftime. NM took the lead after Tony Shynes second TD of the game tied the contest at 13-13. Brody Seyferth’s PAT gave NM a 14-13 lead heading into the final period. There were a couple of fourth and one plays that changed the complexion of this game. The first occurred with less than 10 minutes to play in the game. On a fourth and one Whitehall’s Julius Foreman, not only picked up the first down, but went all 40 yards for the winning TD. NM shortly thereafter had a fourth and one to pick up a first down in Whitehall territory but were stopped short of moving the chains as Whitehall then ran out the clock.

The Norse were no match for an Oakridge team that would race through the 2002 season with a spotless record before losing in the regional finals. Oakridge handed NM their worse defeat of the 2002 season with a 52-7 thumping over the outmanned Norse. NM was limited to 125 yards, 56 of those earned by Norse running back Tony Shyne. NM was able to avert the shutout on a late 14-yard scamper by Shyne in the fourth quarter.

NM enjoyed a 14-17 lead on Tony Shyne TD runs of 55 and 30 yards only to see Shelby rally in the second half to hand the Norse their fourth loss on the season 28 to 14. Shyne finished with 161 yards on a workmanlike 24 carries while Tim Gebuhr completed 8-of-14 passes for 73 yards. Four of his completed passes went to Sean Scott. Justin Derks had 10 tackles to pace the Norse defense.

NM got back into the victory column with a 29-14 win over winless Hart as the Dean brothers led the way for the Norse. Sophomore Mike Dean scored both NM touchdowns in the second half on runs of 12 and 15 yards. Senior Geoff Dean didn’t score but netted 94 rushing yards on 18 carries. Mike Dean led Norse ball carriers with 132 yards on eight carries. In the first half NM had tallies from Marty Holmes, who scored the first NM TD on a six-yard run, while Gage Hyrns scored from 14 yards out as NM’s record stood at 3-4 on the season.

NM held the highly favored Ravenna Bulldogs to zero points in the first half, but that scenario changed quickly in the second half. On the first play from scrimmage in the third quarter Ravenna’s Roman Starr raced 65-yards to paydirt, the first of three third quarter touchdowns by Ravenna in their 18-7 win over the Norse. NM’s only touchdown came on a 14-yard pass from Tim Gebuhr to Brody Seyferth.

NM concluded their 2002 season on a winning note with a 20-8 victory over Covert in the only meeting between the two schools in NM football history. NM took advantage of four Covert turnovers to complete their season with a 4-5 record. NM received a pair of short one-yard TDs from Marty Holmes and Geoff Dean while they added their third on a 14-yard halfback pass from Gage Hyrns to Sean Scott. NM finished with 163 of their 216 yards on the ground with Geoff Dean rushing for 85 yards. Hyrns also had an interception on defense while Drew Barker recovered a pair of fumbles for the victors.

2002 was the leanest season in memory as far as post season honors were concerned. No Norsemen were selected to the first team all-area team although Brodie Seyferth was picked as the second team kicker. Only senior linebacker Justin Derks received even an honorable mention for the all-area squads. All was not lost for NM athletics, as the Norsemen 2002-03 basketball team, arguably the best team in school history, led by future MSU star Drew Naymick, would be regional champions and would suffer but two defeats for the entire season.

Record Score Interesting Fact

1-0 NM 34, Holton 8 Gage Hyrns 2 TD, 1 TD Marty Holmes, Geoff Dean & Aaron Saunders.

1-1 NM 6, Montague 39 Tony Shyne 129 yards rushing. Mike Dean 3-yard TD run.

2-1 NM 21, Mason Co 13 Shyne YD runs of 28 & 65. Tim Gebuhr to Holmes 15-yard TD pass.

2-2 NM 14, Whitehall 19 Shyne 9 and 3-yard TDs. NM assessed 9 penalties for 100 yards.

2-3 NM 7, Oakridge 52 Shyne 14 yd TD and 56 rushing yards.

2-4 NM 14, Shelby 28 Shyne 2 TDs of 55 & 30 yards. Shyne 161 rushing yards.

3-4 NM 29, Hart 14 Mike Dean 2 TDS (12 & 15) Holes 6 yd TD, Hyrns 14-yard TD.

3-5 NM 7, Ravenna 18 Gebuhr to Brody Seyferth 14-yard TD pass.

4-5 NM 20, Covert 8 Holmes, Geoff Dean 1 -yd TDs, Hyrns to Sean Scott 14-yd TD pass.

**2003 Coach Al Karaba (1-8 overall, Oakridge WMC Champs)**

The Norse would not have a pretty season in 2003. Their 1-8 record would match the record for futility with the 1960 Norsemen. It’s tough to win with underclassmen comprising most of your roster, and it’s even tougher when your entire seven-man offensive line is void of seniors. The Norse would win their opener but then suffer through eight consecutive losses. However, NM was playing in arguably the toughest Class C league in the state as two of their West Michigan Conference rivals, would play at the Pontiac Silverdome in late November for state titles, with Ravenna winning it all in Class C.

Thank goodness for Holton being on the NM schedule. NM began the season with a 21-0 shutout of the Red Devils. NM would win nine of their next ten meetings with Holton, but no other team would fall to NM the rest of the 2003 season. Aaron Sanders rebounded from a dreadful first half where he fumbled twice inside the Holton five-yard line to bounce back to rush for 204 yards and a touchdown. After a scoreless first half NM scored on its first two possessions of the second half. Mike Dean capped an 11-play, 63-yard drive with an 8-yard run for the first NM score. NM then capitalized on a Holton fumble at their 30-yard line as Sanders rumbled 16-yards for a touchdown and a 14-0 NM lead. Playing with only 18 players, the young Holton coach Shane Fairfield had eight players going both ways in the August heat. “We learned we have some work to do. We’ll be all right, said Fairfield to Muskegon Chronicle reporter Tom Kendra following the game.” As history will show Fairfield did more than all right, leading Muskegon to many state championship games over the years after replacing Tony Annese as the Big Red head coach in 2009.

NM was limited to but 69 total yards as they lost the first of what would be eight consecutive losses the rest of the 2003 season 27 to 7 at Mason County Central. NM did tie the game in the second quarter on a one-yard quarterback sneak by Dave Treder before Mason Co dominated the test of the game.

Perhaps the only consolation prize in Whitehall’s 42-7 victory over NM was the fact that North Muskegon scored first. Mike Verschuren intercepted a Viking pass and returned it 60 yards for a Norsemen touchdown. That would be the only bad throw on the part of Whitehall QB Pat Welsch as he threw four touchdown passes in Whitehall’s rout of the Norse. Aaron Sanders led NM rushers with 93 rushing yards.

It wouldn’t get any better for the Norsemen in their fourth game of the season as they were shut out by Oakridge 48-0. The eventual 2003 WMC champs set the tempo early as they blocked two NM punts in the second quarter to set up touchdown runs.

In a game played with “buckets of rain’ falling in Shelby, NM fell to the cellar of the West Michigan Conference with a 13-12 loss to Shelby in overtime. It’s doubtful if NM ever had a game where they committed more turnovers than in this game with Shelby as they committed eight turnovers, four on fumbles and four on interceptions. NM’s only touchdown in regulation also came on a turnover, one of five turnovers in the game by the host Tigers. Ben McPherson intercepted a Tiger pass and returned it 20 yards for the score, but the PAT attempt failed. The game was tied at 6-6 after 48 minutes of play forcing overtime. Freshman Troy Forton, a future star on the NM baseball field, completed his only pass of the night through the raindrops with a 11-yard pass to Dave Treder. Over the years NM has traditionally boasted of a good kicking game, but the kicking game failed the Norse in this contest as they missed both PAT attempts. Shelby didn’t miss after they scored in overtime sending NM to their fourth straight loss in WMC action.

The Norse came close to their record of futility from the previous week’s loss to Shelby as they committed six more turnovers in a 20-7 loss to Hart. One could say they had seven turnovers as the Pirates blocked an NM punt in the fourth quarter to set up their final touchdown. NM scored their first offensive touchdown in regulation since their second game of the season when Aaron Sanders scored on a 2-yard run just before halftime. For Hart, they would only win one more game against the Norsemen in their next 18 contests.

Ravenna, in their 52-0 rout of the Norsemen, showed why they had the team that would go on to win the Class C state championship. Not only did the Ravenna display their might on offense, but their defense held the Norse to but 40 total yards for the entire game, and only four yards gained on the ground. Aaron Sanders had eight tackles for NM in the loss.

NM had to wait until the game’s final moments before they were able to get on the board in their 47-7 loss to Montague. It was victory number 100 for Montague head coach Ken Diamond as the second half was played with a running clock. NM’s offense, that created only six touchdowns in their eight consecutive defeats, scored late in the game on a pass from Troy Forton to Mike Dean, both outstanding baseball players during the spring baseball season.

North Muskegon’s final game, as well as their season, was as gloomy as the rainy weather as the NM season came to a merciful close in a season ending 21-0 loss to Suttons Bay. This was no ‘cupcake’ opponent for the Norse as Suttons Bay was a perfect 8-0 heading into their game with NM. In the battle of the ‘Norsemen’ NM twice got inside the heavily favored Suttons Bay 20-yard line in the first half but failed to score.

It was a frustrating season for the Norse as they would only score 61 points, the lowest points scored in 70 years, and the second lowest point total in 92 years of NM football. Once again, the Norse were limited in their post season individual honors. Aaron Sanders was picked for the second team all-area team as a running back while center Brian Corcoran was accorded honorable mention on an all-area team that was dominated by Ravenna and Oakridge, both reaching the state title game with Ravenna upsetting Saginaw Nouvel to win at all in Class C.

Record Score Interesting Fact

1-0 NM 21, Holton 0 Aaron Sanders TD & 204 yds. Mike Dean & Drew Barker TDs.

* 1. NM 7, Mason Co 27 Dave Treder one yard QB sneak. NM only 69 total yards.
  2. NM 7 Whitehall 42 Mike Vershuren 6-yd interception return for TD. Sanders 93 yds.
  3. NM 0, Oakridge 48 NM has 2 punts blocked to set up Oakridge TDs.
  4. NM 12, Shelby 13 Ben McPherson 30-yd int. Ret. for TD. Troy 11 pass to Treder for TD.
  5. NM 7, Hart 20 NM 6 turnovers & a blocked punt in loss. Sanders 2-yard TD.
  6. NM 0, Ravenna 52 NM only 40 total yards & 4 yards rushing vs. the ‘C’ state champs.
  7. NM 7, Montague 47 Troy Forton to Mike Dean TD pass NM’s only TD.
  8. NM 0, Suttons Bay 21 Suttons Bay 1st undefeated season in school history defeats NM.

**2004 Coach Al Karaba (3-6 overall, Montague WMC Champs)**

The Norse would show some improvement by adding a couple of wins over their 2003 1-8 record. Most importantly, NM would be competitive in nearly all their games with only a 28-0 loss to the WMC champs from Montague the only exception. Over the years the schedule maker for NM football rarely added a ‘puppy’ for a season ending game. The final game of the 2004 campaign was with a Suttons Bay team who would advance to the state championship game at the Pontiac Silverdome. The Norse would add a little more ‘pop’ in their offense as they would return all seven of their offensive linemen from the previous year.

A Norsemen with a last name closely attached to NM history scored a pair of touchdowns to lead the Norsemen to a 28-14 victory over Holton. Nick Cooke, the son of Greg Cooke, an all-stater on the 1981 state finalist team, and the grandson of long time NM football coach Dave Cooke, scored a pair of TDs in their traditional season opener with the Red Devils. Cooke scored on a one-yard TD plunge and caught a pass from Troy Forton for 16 yards, one of three TDs scored by the Norse in the second quarter. John Fahnenstiel scored NM’s first of three second quarter tallies as NM took a 22-14 lead at halftime. Mike Dean wrapped up the scoring, and iced the game, when he raced 61 yards on a 3rd-and-18 with less than four minutes to go in the game. Unfortunately for NM, their penchant for fumbles and penalties from the previous season didn’t go away. The Norse overcame three fumbles, one of which was picked up and returned for a Holton touchdown and were penalized 18 times for 160 yards while somehow still picking up the victory.

Mason County won back-to-back games against NM for the only time in the 81 games played between the two schools with a 48-20 victory over the Norse. Once again Nick Cooke had a pair of touchdowns but that wasn’t nearly enough as Mason County overcame an early 14-12 Norse lead to swamp NM 48-20. The 48 points earned by MCC would prove to be the most points the Spartans ever scored against NM. Cooke had a pair of short TD runs of seven and four yards before MCC scored four unanswered touchdowns to pull away from the Norse. Troy Forton scored the final NM TD on a 2-yard run.

A loss is a loss is a loss but the final score of 13-4 is one for the books. In the entire modern world of football as there ever been a game that ended with a total of four points? North Muskegon had their four points tallied because of a pair of safeties, both on high snaps from the Whitehall center that sailed over the punters head and into the endzone. North Muskegon’s defense kept NM in the game as well as their ball control offense. NM had a drive that consumed the entire third quarter before stalling at the Whitehall 20-yard line. Whitehall’s James Cannon sealed the win for the Vikings with a long 85-TD run in the fourth quarter.

Oakridge was one year shy of winning a state championship but after losing their first three games of the season, the future didn’t look that bright for the Eagles. The Eagles won their first game of the season at the expense of the Norse with a hard fought 12-0 shutout. Oakridge had to go to the air against NM as their quarterback DJ Ritz was 7-0f-10 for 207 yards. NM threatened to tie the game in the third quarter after trailing 6-0 at halftime when they drove inside the Oakridge 5-yard line. The Eagles stuffed three straight NM runs and a fourth downplay resulted in an Eagle sack. NM totaled 200 yards, including 165 on the ground with Nick Cooke picking up 77 of those yards.

The proud Norse finally won their first WMC victory in two years with a 21-7 win over Shelby that pulled NM out of the basement of the West Michigan Conference. Mike Dean helped set up his first of two touchdowns as he blocked a Shelby punt at the Tiger 25, and he would eventually score from the two-yard line to give NM a 14-0 halftime lead. NM’s Troy Forton passed to Greg Brooks in the first quarter from eight yards to give NM a 7-0 lead. Dean would score his second and NM’s third TD in the third period to give the Norse a commanding 21-0 lead before Shelby could crack the NM defense late in the game for their only score.

NM overcame four turnovers in the first half to edge Hart 7-6 on homecoming night at Fred Jacks field. Hart was only able to take advantage of one of the Norse miscues and scored with less than a minute remaining in the first half to take a 6-0 lead at halftime. Hart went for the two-point conversion following the TD but failed on a pass play. NM then put together their best drive of the game to start the second half. NM marched 75 yards in 12 plays before Mike Dean ran two yards up the middle for the TD. David Lenore then kicked what would prove to be the winning point to even the Norse record at 3-3. Seniors Ben McPherson and Greg Brooks led the stingy Norse defense with 13 and nine stops respectively.

Yet another oddity occurred in NM’s 27-2 loss to Ravenna. For the second time during the season the only Norse points came on a safety. The Norse averted a shutout to the Bulldogs when a Ravenna ball carrier fumbled the ball out of the end zone in the fourth quarter. The winners enjoyed great field position against NM. On their first eight possessions, four Bulldog drives started inside the NM 40.

Montague wrapped up the conference championship with a 28-0 victory over the Norsemen. First year coach Pat Collins, the quarterback on the 1992 state finalist Montague team, also took home the coach of the year honors on the post-season all-area team. Mason County Central, who has never won the WMC championships outright, had a chance to share the title with Montague but lost in overtime to Ravenna. Once again turnovers plagued the Norse as they lost the ball on five occasions to the Wildcats. Mike Dean had 70 of NM’s total of 160 yards while Nick Cooke had 12 tackles in a losing cause.

There was no way that the Norsemen were just going to ‘mail in’ the 2004 season despite having to end their season against a Suttons Bay team that would have their school’s best team in history. The ‘Norsemen’ to the North would give up 20 points to the Norsemen to the South in a 34-20 win, the most points Suttons Bay would have scored upon them until the state championship game. Suttons Bay finally took the lead on NM with just four minutes left in the game on a 34-yard screen pass. The winners sealed the win with a minute left in the game as they took advantage of a NM fumble to make the final score 34-20. Troy Forton and Mike Dean combined for two NM TDs on pass plays of 16 and nine yards. NM’s other touchdown came on a blocked punt that was run into the end zone from 23 yards by Nick Cooke.

Defensive lineman Jerad Derks was selected to both the C/D all area team and the WMC first unit for his play on defense. Derks led all Norse tacklers with 57 to go along with a fumble recovery. Lineman Chris Wendt was selected to the all-area offense second team while lineman Greg Brooks and Nick Cooke were on the all-area defense second team.

The 2004 season marked the end for state final games played at the Pontiac Silverdome. The 2004 finals were played inside but the heat had been turned off and the seats dusty as the demolition crew was ready to tear down the structure that had played host to the state finals for nearly 30 years. Muskegon teams played their final games on a successful note as Muskegon and Orchard View retuned back to the Port City bringing home the championship trophy.

Record Score Interesting Fact

1-0 NM 28, Holton 14 Nick Cooke 2 TDs, John Fahnenstiel TD, Mike Dean 61-yard TD run.

1-1 NM 20, Mason Co 48 Cooke 2 TDs, Troy Forton 1.

1-2 NM 4, Whitehall 13 NM’s only points coming on a pair of safeties.

1-3 NM 0, Oakridge 12 Cooke 77 of NM’s 165 rushing yards.

2-3 NM 21, Shelby 7 Dean 2 TDs, Trou Forton to Greg Brooks 8-yard TD pass.

3-3 NM 7, Hart 6 NM 75-yard scoring drive ends on Dean 2-yard TD.

3-4 NM 2, Ravenna 27 NM scores when Ravenna fumbles through the end z

3-5 NM 0, Montague 28 NM turns the ball over five times in loss to WMC champs.

3-6 NM 20, Suttons Bay 34 S.Bay scored 2 late TDs in NM loss. Dean 2 TD passes from Forton.

**2005 Coach Al Karaba (5-4 overall, Oakridge WMC & State Champs)**

Fourth year head coach Al Karaba was looking forward to having a winning record for the first time as head coach of the Norsemen and he would succeed. Although NM returned only four starters from the 2004 season, NM would return many of their backfield regulars from the previous season as the Norse would have several games where they put up mega points on the board. Nick Cooke returned as a two-way starter and Troy Forton, would begin his third year as the Norse signal caller at quarterback. Forton began his career as a co-op student from West Michigan Christian but began the 2005-06 school year as a full-time Norsemen student where he also excelled in baseball.

NM quickly showed that they would be able to put points on the board in their opening game, a 28-6 win over Holton. Nick Fahnenstein scored a pair of second half touchdown runs of 12 and 47 yards and Nick Cooke closed out the game with a 14-yard scamper. The only score in the first half came on a Troy Forton to Chris Scheldt pass good for 16 yards and a TD. Fahnenstiel would cap his evening with 140 rushing yards on 20 carries. Forton displayed his passing prowess by completing 8 of 13 passes for 148 yards. Sheldt, one of many Norsemen to go both ways, led NM in tackling with 11 tackles.

NM trailed by only 6 points heading into the final quarter before the Vikings added an insurance touchdown to defeat NM 12-7. In the scoreless first half NM had more scoring opportunities than Whitehall, advancing into Whitehall territory on four of five drives but coming up empty on the scoreboard. On one series of downs, NM was at the Vikings five-yard line with fourth and inches for a first down. The Norse tried to surprise the Vikings with a pass, but Whitehall’s defensive back Mark Boulet wasn’t fooled and batted down the intended pass in the end zone. Whitehall’s second touchdown, that iced the game for the Vikings, came with 3:38 left to play. NM did come fighting back by scoring a minute later on a 22-yard pass from Troy Forton to Nick Cooke to make the final score 12-7.

An Oakridge team that was destined to win the state championship later in November in the first year the finals were held at Ford Field in Detroit, proved too much of a foe in their 41-14 win over NM. The Norse did have 259 yards in the loss to the powerful Eagles and a pair of touchdowns. Matt Purtee cut a big Oakridge lead down to 28-14 in the third quarter while the first NM TD came in the first half on a pass from sophomore Kyle Cooke to Chris Scheldt. Kyle’s brother Nick Cooke was a force on defense with 15 tackles.

John Fahnenstiel had a night to remember in NM’s 56-21 victory over Shelby. And not far behind Fahnenstiel was Matt Partee. Each scored four touchdowns, the first time in NM history where two NM players each scored four TDs in a game. Fahnenstiel would finish with 242 yards rushing and returned a kick-off back 85 yards. Fahnenstiel’s TD runs would have brought a smile to the face of NM’s legendary Stan Guy as the TD runs were from 41, 64 & 68 yards. Partee also had three long TD runs of 33, 70, and 40 while adding his fourth TD on a 11-yard pass from Troy Forton. The 56 points scored by NM were the most tallied in a single game in 16 years.

The 16-year distance for the most points scored in a game would last but one week as NM scored 58 points in a 58-19 rampage vs. Hart. Once again John Fahnenstiel and Matt Purtee would have huge games. Fahnenstiel would score three TDs, two on long gallops from 40 and 54 yards as well as returning a kickoff back for the second straight week, a 74-yard dash for a touchdown. Purtee tallied twice, a run of 55-yards in the first quarter that began the barrage of Norse points, and the latter was one for the record books: a 75-yard return of a Pirate fumble. Three other Norsemen joined in on the parade of touchdowns. Nick Cooke traversed 21 yards for six points; Chris Scheldt received a pass good for 40 yards from Troy Forton while Forton made it a clean sweep for backfield starters by keeping the pigskin and dashing 15 yards for another Norse TD.

Ravenna stormed out to a commanding 26-0 lead at halftime over North Muskegon in their next game but there was no quit in the Norsemen. NM scored 21 unanswered points to throw a scare into first year Ravenna head coach Scott McFarrren, as Hall of Fame former Bulldog coach Dusty Fairfield took three years off from his coaching duties. John Fahensteil, playing at less than 100% physically due to a bruised lung sustained in last week’s game, ran for 122 second half yards and two TDs to give NM a chance for a comeback. Troy Forton put NM on the board first in the second half by connecting on a 10-yard TD pass to Nick Cooke. Fahensteil’s second TD came with less than two minutes remaining in the contest as Ravenna recovered the NM onside kick to run out the clock and preserve a 26-21 victory.

Perhaps the only bright spot in NM’s 45-6 loss to Montague was Matt Purtee returning a Montague kickoff back 95 yards for the only score for NM in the game. Purtee’s 95-yard return was the third longest return for six points in NM history. Montague took advantage of four Norse turnovers and scored 33 second quarter points. Unlike last week’s second half comeback, that wouldn’t happen against a stout Montague defense that limited NM to but 64 yards on the ground and 86 through the air. Nick Cooke was a force on defense for NM with 13 tackles.

Matt Purtee broke up a 6-6 tie with another one of his patented long TD runs, this from 55 yards to lead NM to a 13-6 win over Mason County Central. Purtee’s winning dash came with under three minutes left in the game to even NM’s record at 4-4 on the season. Purtee had 55 of his team leading 82 yards on the one TD carry. John Fahnenstiel had a second quarter TD run from six yards to tie the game at 6-6 before Purtee’s dash was the game winner.

NM insured that the second half was going to go quickly as the Norse jumped out to a 42-6 lead enroute to a 49-6 rout in the first game ever played between NM and Morley-Stanwood. Playing with a running clock the entire second half, NM was limited to but one second half TD on a John Fahnenstiel 14-yard run. Fahnenstiel helped push NM to their first winning record in four years with a pair of TDs and 135 rushing yards. Troy Forton had a pair of TD passes, one to Nick Cooke for eight yards and another to Chris Scheldt for 12. Mark Picard recorded his first ever NM TD when he returned an interception 22 yards. Cooke also had a rushing TD from 12 and Matt Purtee got the scoring started with a one-yard TD.

Nick Cooke was selected as the MVP for Norse football in 2005 and was a first team pick on the all-area team as a linebacker. Cooke was the area’s leading tackler with 101 tackles and had a pair of interceptions and a fumble recovery. Troy Forton was a do-everything performer for NM. Forton was selected as the first team area punter, was second team as a defensive end while performing duties all season as the NM quarterback. Matt Purtee did not go unnoticed by his West Michigan Conference foes as he was selected to the first team All-WMC team. It was a winning season for NM but 2006 would look even more promising with Forton, Fahnenstiel and Purtee returning in the backfield.

Record Score Interesting Fact

1-0 NM 28, Holton 6 John Fahnenstiel 2 TDs (12 & 47), Troy Forton to Chris Sheldt TD.

1-1 NM 7, Whitehall 12 Forton to Nick Cooke 22-yard TD pass.

1-2 NM 14, Oakridge 41 Matt Purtee 80-yd TD run, Kyle Cooke to Scheldt TD pass.

* 1. NM 56, Shelby 21 Fahensteil 4 TDs, 242 yds + 85 kickoff TD. Purtee 4 TDs.

3-2 NM 58 Hart 19 Fahnenstiel 3 TDs, Purtee 2 TDs, a record 75-yard fumble return.

3-3 NM 21, Ravenna 26 Forton to Cooke 1-yd TD pass. Fahnenstiel 2 TDs.

3-4 NM 6, Montague 45 Purtee 95-yard kickoff return for TD. Cooke 13 tackles.

4-4 NM 13, Mason Co 6 Purtee 55-yard TD the winner. Fahnenstiel 6-yd tf

5-4 NM 49, Morley Stan. 6 Fahnesteil & Cooke 2 TDs, Forton 2 TD passes. Mark Piccard int TD.

**2006 Coach Al Karaba (8-4 overall, regional finalist) Oakridge WMC Champs)**

NM posted one of their biggest upsets in school history when they upset perennial power Oakridge to capture the district championship. The 2006 season would be the farthest NM would advance in the playoffs until 2023. NM had three talented backs returning for 2006. John Fahnenstiel, who rushed for more than 1000 yards in his junior season, and Matt Purtee, who gave NM a potent 1-2 rushing combo in 2005, as well as quarterback Troy Forton, the four-year starting quarterback for the Norsemen. Forton’s favorite receiver from 2005, Chris Scheldt also returns. Ball hawking defensive back Matt Mills, who intercepted seven passes in 2005 will lead the Norse secondary, while baseball standout Ryan Buter will lead the defensive lineman.

Holton would unveil the first field turf stadium in the Greater Muskegon Area when they hosted NM in their traditional season opener. The NM backs fell right at home with the pristine all-weather surface as they rolled up 43 first half points in a 50-26 romp over the Red Devils. Trivia fans should know that the first touchdown scored at the new field was scored by the Red Devils Chase Francis on a 55-yard run. NM, taking full advantage of Holton turnovers, then scored the next five touchdowns. Holton outgained NM in yardage 402-364. “Take the turnovers away and I thought we played very well,” said Holton coach and future Muskegon head coach Shane Fairfield. Matt Purtee got the Norse started with a 47-yard TD run and NM led 14-7 after the first quarter on Alex Jones’ 60-yard fumble recovery. NM then built a 43-14 lead at halftime with a John Fahnenstiel 75-yard TD, followed by a 63-yard scoring strike from Troy Forton to Jones. Matt Mills returned a Holton punt 67 yards, and Troy Forton connected with Chris Scheldt with an 8-yard scoring pass to give NM a 43-14 lead at halftime. Fahnenstiel ran a TD in from the 2-yard line to complete the NM scoring. Holton made the final score a little more respectable with a couple of late TDs.

NM then dropped their next game to Whitehall 21-13 as the Vikings prevented NM’s speedy running backs from any rushing touchdowns. NM’s only TDs came on a pair of TD passes from Troy Forton, both to Matt Purtee. After Whitehall took the opening kickoff and marched 80 yards for the first half’s only score, NM drove deep into Viking territory three times in the first half but never scored. Whitehall scored on the first drive of the second half to put the Norse behind the eight ball at 14-0. NM took advantage of a Whitehall fumble on the Vikings ten-yard line when a Troy Forton pass to Matt Purtee cut the score down to 14-7. However, Whitehall marched 73 yards on their next possession to ice the game. NM scored its second TD on a Forton 3-yard pass to Purtee to give NM some hope. After stopping the Vikings NM got the ball back with 1:51 left but failed to pick up a first down.

In a game delayed nearly two hours midway between the first and second quarter due to a thunderstorm Oakridge running back T.J. Patton rushed for 328 yards and a school record seven touchdown as Oakridge pounded the Norse 55-14. The Eagles ground out 575 yards, all on the ground as they were on their way to another WMC Championship and a playoff berth. NM scored first in the rout on a 69-yard pass play from Troy Forton to John Fahnenstiel. The other highlight for NM fans was a 92 yards kickoff return for a TD by Matt Purtee, just three yards shy of his 95-yard return from 2005. The two teams would meet again to play for a district championship. Based on the 55-14 whipping of the Norsemen, there could be little hope for a NM victory. Stay tuned.

John Fahnenstiel and Matt Purtee, running behind the blocking of transplanted tight end to tackle Chris Scheldt, each ran for 135 yards in NM’s 34-7 win over Shelby. The Norse defensive line controlled the line of scrimmage by coming up with eight sacks as Sheldt moved from his former linebacker spot to a defensive tackle. Purtee scored on runs of 50 and 1 yards in the first half while Fahnenstiel got things started offensively for the Norse on a 2-yard TD run. Jordan Carr became the third Norsemen to kick two or more field goals in a game when he nailed a couple of kicks good for 30 yards. Troy Forton also tallied a TD with a quarterback sneak from the one-yard line as NM evened their season record at 2-2.

Matt Purtee had a spectacular game in three phases of the game to lead NM to a 41-6 thumping of Hart. Purtee had TD runs of 47 and 53 yards and two receptions for 165 yards, both scoring plays. The first pass from Troy Forton went 75 yards while his second went for 90 yards, equaling the 4th longest TD pass in Norse history. Purtee was also a force on defense with 12 tackles. The Norse totaled 539 yards on the evening with Forton 7-13 for 274 passing yards. John Fahnenstiel bagged a TD from 14 yards while Noah VanBergen completed the Norse barrage of points with a TD gallop of 40 yards.

After losing their last eight games to Ravenna, a win by any margin over the Bulldogs has been rare. To defeat Ravenna 49-0 was indeed a huge surprise to area football fans as NM improved to 4-2 on the season. The Norse shocked the home folks at Ravenna as they led by a lopsided score of 42-0 at halftime prompting a running clock for the entire second half. Matt Purtee amassed 203 rushing yards and scored on runs of 12 and 62. Troy Forton pitched a pair of TD passes, the first to John Fahnenstiel for 33 yards, the second to Noah VanBergen for 25. VanBergen also ran for a first half TD that totaled 23 yards while Forton and Fahensteil also had short TD runs to complete the Norse scoring.

It took the first play of the game to send a notice to the Norsemen that this was going to a long night in Montague. The Wildcats scored on a 75-yard run by Riley Hughes and the Cats never looked back in a surprisingly easy 45-22 victory over NM. Hughes would score five times for Montague to override the second consecutive 200-yard rushing game for NM’s Matt Purtee. It was 24-0 before NM was able to score on a 33-yard pass from Troy Forton to John Fahnenstiel. It didn’t take long for Montague to answer as Montague’s Shaun Hladki returned the ensuing NM kickoff 79 yards to set up a Hughes TD just before half. It was 45-7 before NM scored the game’s final two TDs, a 3-yard run by Fahensteil followed by a 62-yard dash by Purtee.

On a cold and blustery night at Fred Jacks Field, the Norsemen were one win away from clinching a playoff bid following a 23-0 victory over Mason County Central. John Fahensteil scored all three Norsemen touchdowns as he rushed for 119 yards in 13 carries. Troy Forton, on a night where passing a football was treacherous, teamed up with Fahnenstiel for a 26-yard TD strike shortly before halftime. Despite the elements Forton completed 6 of 8 passes for 85 yards. Fahnenstiel, after Jordan Carr’s field goal gave NM a two-score lead, wrapped up the scoring in the fourth quarter with TDs from 43 and 16 yards.

While across town Muskegon was taking care of business in a 56-22 victory over Holland Christian and there soon to be famous (and very rich) quarterback Kirk Cousins, NM also took care of business and clinched a playoff berth with a solid 46-6 licking of Morley Stanwood. Matt Purtee and John Fahnenstiel made their usual yeoman like contributions each with a pair of TDs. NM quarterback Troy Forton threw a TD pass to Brett Westra and Forton was on the receiving end of a short TD pass thrown by Kyle Cooke. Cooke, with reserves playing much of the second half, tossed a strike to Alex Jones that totaled 70 yards and a TD.

The Norsemen made their first trip to the playoffs in five years a successful one as they defeated Newaygo 46-21. The Norse led 26-0 at halftime before Newaygo made a brief run by scoring the first two touchdowns of the second half. Matt Purtee scored from the one-yard line to give NM a three-touchdown advantage. The ensuing kickoff was returned 80 yards by Newaygo for a TD before NM once again gained control of the game on a pair of short TDs from John Fahensteil and Troy Forton. Fahensteil totaled three TDs for the game as he also scored a pair of NM tallies in the first half. Alex Jones intercepted a Newaygo pass and pranced 60 yards for a TD while Noah VanBergen also scored in the first half from 22 yards. NM received outstanding balance from its backfield. Purtee rushed for 120 yards, Fahnenstiel gained 87 while Noah VanBergen added 86. Troy Forton was near perfect in the passing department by completing 11-of-12 passes for 171 yards.

The win advanced NM to the district championship where they would travel to Oakridge, the WMC champs who pummeled the Norse 55-14 in their regular season matchup.

The Norse were looking at an ominous task when they made the short jaunt to Oakridge to vie for the district championship. Not only were the Eagles the WMC champs for the fifth straight season, but they were the defending State Champions! It had been 13 years since NM posted a victory over the Eagles and based on an earlier 55-14 pasting from Oakridge, a victory seemed dubious at best. However, the Norse shocked the Eagles early as they jumped out to an early 21-0 first half lead and held off an Oakridge charge in the second half to post a 21-14 upset victory. John Fahnenstiel had a monster first half for the inspired Norsemen. Fahnenstiel scored all three NM touchdowns in three different ways. Fahnesteil scored the game’s first TD on a brilliant 70-yard run.

With a little more than two minutes left in the first half Fahnenstiel leaped over an Oakridge defender at the goal line to haul in a 33-yard TD pass from Troy Forton. Moments later he stepped in front of an Eagle receiver and dashed 52 yards to paydirt as the hometown Oakridge faithful were stunned. After giving up nearly 600 yards on the ground in their first meeting, NM outgained the Eagles 200-79 in the first half. The Eagles fought back as the Norsemen gamely hung on as Oakridge narrowed the gap to 21-14 with still 11 minutes remaining in the contest. The NM defense stood tall, led by tackle Jordan Carr’s 10 stops to pull off perhaps the biggest upset in NM history. One of the members of NM’s coaching staff surely must have had mixed emotions. David Nelson, a former star at Oakridge was on the sidelines, this time as a NM assistant to Al Karaba. Eighteen years as now passed since that epic battle in 2006, and NM is still looking for their next win over Oakridge.

The improbable NM season came to a crushing end on an improbable play as NM lost to an undefeated Swan Valley team 9-7 in a game played in a torrential rainstorm. The play that ended the NM season as fate would have it was a 95-yard punt return by Brandon Hayes, the longest punt return for a touchdown by a NM opponent in more nearly 90 years of NM football. It was the only touchdown scored on the night by Swan Valley, but it would be the play that broke the back of the Norsemen. “I was hoping he would pick it up because it looked like we’d have them pinned deep,” said NM coach Al Karaba. “Then the kid made a whale of a play and just broke out backs,” lamented the Norse head coach. Trailing 9-0, after Swan Valley kicked a field goal in the opening half, NM broke through the stingy Swan Valley defense to score on a 26-yard pass play from Troy Forton to Kyle Cooke.

Post-Season honors were plentiful for the 2006 Norsemen. Running backs Matt Purtee and John Fahensteil, who both rushed for more than 1000 yards on the season, the only 1-2 combo in NM history to accomplish this fact, were honored on the first team all-area squad. (Although no stats were posted in 1942, it’s possible that Don Bowen and Moe Sikkenga also accomplished the same) Center Ryan Corgan also was tabbed for the first team while NM’s Troy Forton, a four-year starter at quarterback at NM, made the team as a defensive lineman. Coach of the Year honors went to long time NM coach Al Karaba. It was a fitting end for Karaba who chose to retire from his time-consuming job as head coach and gave way to John Slocum who took over the head coaching duties in 2007. Punching out holes for the all-area running backs, in addition to Corgan, was Chris Scheldt, the leading receiver as an end in 2005 who made the unselfish move to tackle in his senior year, was picked for the 2nd team all-area as a lineman.

Record Score Interesting Fact

1-0 NM 50, Holton 26 NM take 43-14 lead at half. 5 Norsemen score TDs.

1-1 NM 13, Whitehall 21 Troy Forton 2 TD passes to Matt Purtee.

1-2 NM 14, Oakridge 55 Purtee 92 yards kickoff return.

2-2 NM 34, Shelby 7 Purtee 2 TDs, Fahnenstiel & Forton 1 TD each. Jordan Carr 2 FG.

3-2 NM 41, Hart 6 Purtee 4 TDs, 47 & 53 run, 75 & 90 pass from Forton.

4-2 NM 49, Ravenna 0 Purtee 2 Tds, 208-yard rush., Forton TD passes to VanBergen & Fahnenstiel.

4-3 NM 22, Montague 45 Purtee 200 yds rush & TD. Forton to Fahensteil 33 TD pass.

5-3 NM 23, Mason Co 0 Fahensteil 3 TDs, 2 rushing (43 & 16) and 26-yd pass from Forton.

6-3 NM 48, Morley Stan. 6 Purtee and Fahnenstiel each a pair of TDs. Forton TS pass & TD reception. Kyle Cooke to Alex Jones for 70 yards and a TD.

7-3\*NM 46, Newaygo 21 Fahensteil 3 TDs, Jones 60 yd. int ret., VanBergen & Purtee TD each.

8-3\* NM 21, Oakridge 14 Fahnenstiel 3 TDs, 70 yd run, 33 pass from Forton, 52 yd. int. TD.

8-4\* NM 7, Swan Valley 9 Forton to Cooke 26-yard TD. Swan Valley 95 yd. punt return TD.

**2007 Coach John Slocum (4-5 overall, Oakridge WMC Champs)**

The 2007 season was filled with tight games decided by less than a touchdown. Unfortunately, the Norse were on the wrong side in five of those contests. First year head coach John Slocum must have felt snake bitten by the end of the 2007 season. Although NM had dropped their co-op program with West Michigan Christian, 26 players, including 15 seniors reported for early workouts, including five starters on both sides of the ball. NM would finish with a losing record, where just one more win would have qualified them for the playoffs due to their strength of schedule and dropping down in Class.

With prospects bright NM got a rude awakening with a rare 22-12 loss to Holton to begin the season. This would ultimately be the largest margin of defeat for the unlucky Norsemen the entire season. NM trailed by only a point late in the game and looking to take the lead. But an interception stopped the drive, and a long 47-yard TD run closed out the scoring. Holton scored first and converted on their 2-pointer to quickly take an 8-0 lead. NM countered with a 9-yard touchdown pass from new quarterback Kyle Cooke to Matt Mills, but the PAT failed. After Holton went up 15-6, NM countered on a 2-yard run by Noah Vanbergen and a safety to pull within one. The interception and long run late by Holton’s Esmond Castrejon ended any chance for a comeback victory.

The visiting Oakridge Eagles, still smarting from their playoff loss to NM in 2006, scored on their opening possession of the game and that would be all the scoring for the next 40 plus minutes as Oakridge would win 7-0. The big play in their drive was the opening kickoff return of 48-yards by Kyle Huck. Oakridge needed a pass play from the two-yard line to advance into Norse paydirt. Although the final score was close, the stats were one-sided in favor of Oakridge. The Eagles outgained the Norse 256-105 and had a 16-6 advantage in first downs. The Norse defense gave up yards, but no touchdowns, after the opening TD by Oakridge. Eric Fahnenstiel led the Norse defense with 16 tackles.

NM suffered what would prove to be the first of agonizing one-point losses in a 22-21 setback to Shelby. A couple of long touchdown passes from Tiger quarterback Kurt Burmeister to Lorenzo Rodriguez, the first good for 35 yards and the second for 69 yards were all the scoring attained by Shelby as both teams were tied 14-14 as regulation play ended. NM scored their first touchdown on a 1-yard run by quarterback Kyle Cooke, and the second TD was a Kyle Cooke pass to Matt Mills for 14 yards. Following the coin flip NM had first crack on offense and scored on a 12-yard pass from Cooke to Alex Jones. Fred Hill, who was perfect on all three PATs gave NM a 21-14 lead. After Jared Jenkins scored from 5-yards out to draw Shelby within one, Shelby head coach Lorenzo Rodriguez rolled the dice and went for the two-point conversion and the win. It looked like NM had stopped Tiger QB Burmeister on an option play but as he was going to the ground Burmeister pitched the ball to Omar Rodriquez who scampered into the endzone for the 2-pointer and the win.

Alec Jones scored four touchdowns, two on defense and two on offense, and Kyle Cooke threw three touchdown passes as NM finally moved into the victory column with a 44-13 win over Hart. Cooke connected with Jones with TD passes of 23 and 18. Playing on both sides of the ball Jones scored his first TD when he picked up a Pirate fumble and scooted 23 yards into the end zone. Early in the second half Jones picked up a blocked punt and returned it 19 yards for his fourth and final touchdown. NM scored in a variety of ways. Their first TD came on a 63-yard punt return by Matt Mills. Mills also scored on a TD on one of Cooke’s three TD passes, a 14-yard tally in the second half. The final Norse touchdown came the old-fashion way: a 23-yard run by running back Cole Orrison.

Dusty Fairfield returned as the Ravenna head coach after a brief hiatus. Perhaps one of his reasons to return as the Bulldogs head coach came after seeing Ravenna losing to NM 49-0 in 2006. Renowned in the past for producing outstanding kickers, a failed extra point after NM’s last touchdown prevented at least a tie as Ravenna hung on to edge NM 34-33. The Norse had opportunities late in the game, but the Bulldog’s defense stopped NM short of a first down at the Ravenna 21-yard on a 4th-and-1 play. Kyle Cooke filled the air with footballs with 10 of his 32 passes completed for a whopping 356 yards. NM scored the game’s first touchdown on a conventional 4-yard run by Noah VanBergen. Their final four TDs came on long pass plays, three caught by Alex Jones that went for 67, 42 and 80 yards. A Ravenna touchdown early in the fourth quarter gave Ravenna a 34-27 lead. On their next play from scrimmage, after taking over at the 16-yard line following a Bulldog kickoff, Cooke connected with Matt Mills for a pass play that went for 84 yards. However, the extra point attempt failed, and the Norsemen suffer their fourth defeat of the season, two of those losses by just one point.

Kyle Cooke had his second consecutive four TD pass night, but it wasn’t enough as Montague edged the Norse 35-38. Also, for the second straight week the Norse had a final scoring drive stopped deep in their opponent’s territory. NM had a first and goal at the Wildcat five-yard line with less than two minutes remaining in the game, but a run and three failed pass plays doomed the Norse to another aggravating defeat. NM won the battle of the stats but not the score. NM totaled 327 yards during the game, with Cooke’s passing counting for 222 of those yards by completing 13 of his 27 passes. Alex Jones was on the receiving end of two of Cooke’s TD strikes, the first for 7-yards and his second from 18 yards drew the Norsemen to the final 38-25 score.

The Norse would win their final three games of the season with the first of those three a convincing 45-14 drubbing of Mason County Central. Kyle Cooke completed only four passes on the night, but three of those completions went the distance with TD strikes of 50 and 66 yards to Alex Jones and the other a 35-yard aerial to Matt Mills. After spotting the hosts from Scottville a first quarter TD, NM put this game quickly away with 33 second quarter points. Noah VanBergen scored on runs of 51 & 45 yards; Cooke added another rushing TD from 11 while Cole Orrison capped the scoring with a 15-yard run. VanBergen joined the 200-yard rushing club with his 17 carries while Orrison chipped in with 87 yards as NM finished with 485 total yards.

NM snapped a six-game losing streak at the hands of Whitehall with their 25-13 victory over the Vikings. After throwing for 11 TD passes in his previous three games Cooke used his legs to top Whitehall. With the scored tied in the second half Cooke capped a Norse 80-yard drive with a 3-yard run. NM then forced a Vikings punt with the big play being a 12-yard sack by Ryan Buter. A couple of plays after NM took possession Cooke ripped off a 51-yard TD up the middle to give NM a two-score lead and the final score of 25-13. Buter, the career home run hitter for North Muskegon Baseball, scored the second NM TD on the night when he picked up a fumble and rambled 40 yards for a TD. Earlier Noah VanBergen had scored for the Norsemen on a 32-yard run. Cooke finished with 110 rushing yards on the night while Erick Fahnenstiel was the mainstay of the NM defense with 13 tackles.

NM closed out their season thinking back to a bunch of ‘What Ifs.’ None of NM’s five losses on the season were double digit defeats, with 2 of those setbacks by only one point. NM made it three straight wins to close out the season on a winning note with a commanding 34-8 win at Morley Stanwood. Unfortunately, no mention of this game was in the Muskegon Chronicle.

The Norsemen could have used a bona fide public relations consultant as this team had scant representation for post-season honors. Alex Jones, who caught at least 10 TD passes (no stats for the final game) during the season wasn’t even tabbed for honorable mention on the C/D all area team. His co-receiver Matt Mills did make the second team while Ryan Buter was also picked for second team on the All-Area team. Kyle Cooke was the only Norsemen to even receive honorable mention honors. NM did finish the season with a losing record against a tough schedule, but they were only a play or two from advancing into the playoffs where they would have been a tough out for any opponent playing at the Class D level. Montague, a 35-28 winner over NM, came four points away from advancing to the state championship, a perfect example of what could have been for the Norsemen of 2007.

Record Score Interesting Fact

0-1 NM 14, Holton 22 Kyle Cooke to Matt Mills 8 yd TD pass, Noah VanBergen 2-yard run.

0-2 NM 0, Oakridge 7 Eric Fahnenstiel 16 tackles, Kyle Cooke & Aaron Duplissis 8 apiece.

0-3 NM 21, Shelby 22 NM lost in OT. Cooke 1 yd TD and passes of 12 & 14 to Mills & Jones.

1-3 NM 44, Hart 13 Jones 4 TDs, Kyle Cooke 3 TD passes. Mills 2 TD, Cole Orrison TD run.

1-4 NM 33, Ravenna 34 Cooke 4 TD passes & 356 yds. Jones 3 TDs, Mills 84 yd pass for TD.

1-5 NM 28, Montague 35 Cooke 4 TD passes, Jones 2 Yds. VanBergen, Travis Falkowski TD.

2-5 NM 45, Mason Co 14 VanBergen 2 TDs & 200 yds. Cooke 3 TD passes, 2 to Jones, Mills

3-5 NM 25, Whitehall 13 Cooke 110 rushing yds, 2 TDS. Buter 40 yd fumble return.

4-5 NM 34, Morley Stan 8 No report in MC.

**2008 Coach John Slocum (1-8 overall, Oakridge WMC Champs)**

The 2008 football season would forever be known as the most successful season in Greater Muskegon History. Muskegon County teams would win four state championships, and the Norsemen would play three of the four champs. NM would only win one game as they were beginning a tough stretch in Norse football history before finally turning football fortunes around in 2012. Likeable Norse coach John Slocum would endure some tough sledding during his 5 years at NMHS as the head mentor, but he was not given a lot of top-notch horses to ride during his tenure. Only 20 players were on the 2008 roster with skill players such as Kyle Cooke, Alex Jones, Matt Mills, and Ryan Buter lost to graduation. It would be a long season.

The Norsemen would have a new opener for the first time in many years with Newaygo replacing Holton on its schedule. NM had played Holton for 20 consecutive years with NM dominating the series up to that point with 18 wins in 24 meetings. The rivalry with Newaygo went all the way back to their first matchup back in 1935. NM had won 14 of their previous 15 encounters with the Lions with Newaygo’s only win coming in 1984. Make that two wins for Newaygo as the Norse fans sensed this would be a tough year for the Blue & Gold after suffering a 45-3 pounding at the hands of the Lions. If the first game was any indication, it could be a long season for the NM running game as they finished with minus-36 yards rushing. There was yet another Cooke to surface at NM as Drake Cooke provided much of NM’s offense with a 15-22 passing night for 145 yards, seven of those completions going to Aaron Jones. NM led in this rout 3-0 on a 32-yard field goal by Dominick Nattle, but the Newaygo team dominated the rest of the game.

The Norse were no match for the 2008 Division 5 state champions. It’s doubtful if any team scored more points in the first half in the proud history of NM football than the 49 points scored by Oakridge in their 56-6 defeat of our Norsemen. In the blink of an eye Oakridge scored two touchdowns in the game’s first 20 seconds, a 59-yard run and then a 75-yard interception, both by Matt Eacher, two of his five touchdowns in the game. Devin Hekkema scored the only NM TD on a five-yard TD pass from Drake Cooke as the second half went by quickly with a running clock.

Perhaps the lone positive moment for NM fans in the 27-7 loss to Shelby came on the opening kickoff in the second half when Aaron Jones raced 85-yards for a TD, the only touchdown scored by the Norsemen in the loss. The TD momentarily gave NM some life as they trailed early in the third quarter by only six points at 13-7. Shelby’s defense created three turnovers, an interception, a fumble recovery, and a blocked punt. Levi Tull ran for 214 yards for the winning Tigers as the Norsemen fell to 0-3.

The Norsemen would win their only game of the season 48-12 against Hart, a program that was still looking for its first winning season in more than 20 years.

NM took advantage of a jittery Hart team as they forced four first quarter turnovers. NM scored three touchdowns and kicked a field goal from those four turnovers to take a commanding 24-0 lead. Devin Hekkema and Cole Orrison each scored a pair of TDs, Hekkema a 12-yard fumble recovery and return, and a five-yard TD pass from Drake Cooke, while Orison had TD runs from 48 and five yards. Dominck Nettle kicked a pair of field goals while Drake Cooke ran for a TD and threw for 2 TDs. Aaron Jones was on the receiving end of one of Cooke’s TD passes. With the way that NM dominated the Pirates it looked like more wins were sure to come, but that did not happen.

A Drake Cooke 47-yard touchdown pass to A J Benedict in the second quarter drew North Muskegon within seven points at 14-7 before Ravenna displayed their superiority and scored three unanswered touchdowns to down the Norse 34-7. Drake Cooke was the top Norsemen as he rushed for 91 yards on 17 carries and threw for 148 yards in a losing effort. Aaron Jones was Cooke’s top target with three receptions for 46 yards.

Unlike 1992 when Montague rolled up the score in a 63-0 thumping of the Norsemen, the 2008 Montague coach Pat Collins, the quarterback of the 1992 Wildcats, was much kinder to NM as he did not pad the lead in the second half. Montague, with current Reeths Puffer head coach Cody Kater leading the way, led NM 42-0 at halftime forcing a running clock – mercifully – in the second half. Playing against Montague reserves NM back Cole Orrison broke loose on a 65-yard TD run for the only NM score of the game against the 2008 Division 6 state champs.

NM had their second highest point production of the season, but unfortunately, they gave up 49 points in a 49-30 loss to Mason County Central. Drake Cooke passed for 293 yards and three touchdowns as NM, trailing 41-14 at halftime, scored the final two touchdowns of the game to make the score look a little more respectable. Aaron Jones had six receptions for 123 yards, including a long 83-yard TD pass from Cooke. Devin Hekkema added four catches for 48 yards and a TD while Cole Orbison ran for 55 yards that included a 25-yard TD.

When you’ve only won a single game all season, why not go for two late in the game when your trailing 21-20 against Whitehall? The Norse rolled the dice but came up empty after Cole Orrison scored late in the game to pull NM within one. The Norse attempted a running play to take the lead but failed as their record fell to 1-7 and they dropped to the cellar of the West Michigan Conference. Whitehall jumped in front early to take a 14-0 lead, but the Norsemen would rally. Drake Cooke, who connected on 14-of-25 passes for 146 yards closed out the first quarter on a 2-yard run to close the gap to 14-7. The first of Orrison’s two TDs tied the score at 14. A Viking TD in the fourth quarter, plus a successful conversion, provided what would prove to be the winning point before Orrison’s TD with one minute remaining gave NM faint hopes.

Nobody can accuse North Muskegon of scheduling a cupcake opponent to fill out their nine-game schedule from 1998-2008. Two of their opponents in game nine would advance to the state championship during this era, but none would come close to being as strong of a ninth date foe than the Muskegon Catholic team of 2008. Many would say the Crusader team of 2008, that buried all their opponents enroute to easily winning the Division 8 state title, might have been the best of all the many great Crusader teams since becoming a four-year school in the Fall of 1953. Players from former great MCC teams from 1959, 1974, and the 1980-82 trio may differ, but the 2008 team was indeed a powerhouse squad. So powerful was the 2008 MCC team that they had to scramble to find teams to fill out a schedule. Twice in 2008 MCC played teams in Wisconsin, including a Lacrosse, Wisconsin team located near the Minnesota border. MCC Hall of Fame coach Mike Holmes was merciful on the Norsemen. After taking a 31-0 lead at halftime, the Crusaders failed to score against an outmanned but determined NM team in the second half. NM was held to but 102 total against an impregnable Crusader defense. Devin Hekkema contributed 11 tackles to lead the Norse defense.

With three of the area teams winning state championship in Division 5-8, there was little room for post-season honors for an NM team with an 1-8 record. Eric Fahnenstiel was accorded 2nd team honors for his play as a linebacker while sophomore Aaron Jones was given honorable mention honors for his play as an offensive end.

Record Score Interesting Fact

0-1 NM 3, Newaygo 45 Dominick Nattle FG, Drake Cooke 15-22 145 yards passing.

0-2 NM 6, Oakridge 56 Cooke to Devin Heekkema 50-yard TD pass. Eric Fahnenstiel 10 tkls.

0-3 NM 7, Shelby 27 Aaron Jones 85-yard kickoff return for TD.

1-3 NM 48, Hart 12 Hekkema and Cole Orrison 2 TDS, Cooke 2 TD passes, and TD run.

1-4 NM 7, Ravenna 34 Drake Cooke to A J Benedict for 47 yards the only NM TD.

1-5 NM 7, Montague 42 Cole Orrison 65-yard TD run in second half only NM TD.

1-6 NM 30, Mason Co 49 Cooke 3 TD passes for 293 yds. Jones 123 yds receiving & TD.

1-7 NM 20, Whitehall 21 Orrison 2 TDs, Cooke a rushing TD and 146 passing yards.

1-8 NM 0, Musk CC 31 NM 102 total yards against the 2008 D8 undefeated state champs.

**2009 Coach John Slocum (5-5 overall, playoff qualifier, Montague WMC Champs)**

The on again – off again – co-op with West Michigan Christian was back on after a two-year hiatus. Seven WMC students would now suit up in a Norse uniform and they made an immediate impact. NM got off to a great start to the 2009 season, winning five of their first six games before taking a turn in the opposite direction. The sophomores who comprised much of the lineup at the skill positions were now juniors, including quarterback Drake Cooke and his favorite receiver Aaron Jones.

NM did a complete 180 from their opening game with Newaygo the previous season. After getting drubbed by the Lions in 2008, NM won convincingly in the 2009 opener with Newaygo 34-6. A trio of WMC co-op students got off to a strong start for the Norsemen as Damario Harris, London Burris and Omari Lewis all scored a touchdown in the victory. Harris got the Norse started on the right foot with a 25-yard dash to give NM an early lead. Following a Newaygo touchdown NM then would score the next four TDs to pull away to an easy victory. Junior quarterback Drake Cooke connected with Lewis for a TD pass good for 34 yards to give NM a 12-6 halftime lead. After a Cooke one-yard TD QB sneak, Burris caught a seven-yard TD pass from Cooke to score the fourth NM TD of the game. Aaron Jones then completed the scoring for the host Norsemen with a six-yard run.

Even in a losing cause NM showed they were vastly improved from their previous season in their 57-28 loss to Montague. NM led late in the first half 28-27 in an explosive half that saw the two teams combine for 63 points in an entertaining first half. The fireworks started early as Montague’s Drew Pineda returned the opening kickoff 95 yards for a TD. The Wildcats added another TD before the Norsemen bounced back primarily on the arm of Drake Cooke and the receiving of London and Jeff Burris. Cooke would take part in all the Norsemen scoring with four TD passes, three to London Burris on TD catches of 37, 30, and eight yards and a fourth to Jeff Burris from three yards out. Montague would go on to not only win the competitive WMC conference but would win their second straight Division 6 state championship. Montague’s state championship victory over Monroe St. Mary Catholic in late November at Ford Field in Detroit was the final game your author would broadcast in Muskegon after 34 years behind the mic. It was time to follow the family to the Sunshine State.

NM’s 15-13 victory over Shelby surely was one of the most bizarre and improbable wins in NM’s long history. Trailing 13-9 with just 13 second left on the clock, NM forced a Shelby punt. Waiting on the Tiger punt and standing at his own 22-yard line was Jeff Burris. The fleet footed Burris then brought joy to NM followers while stunning the Shelby faithful who thought victory was theirs as Burris sped 78 yards for the winning touchdown as the clock ran out. At the time it was the third longest punt return in NM history and the only punt return for a game winning touchdown. Earlier in the second half London Burris ran 66-yards for a NM TD to draw NM within 4 points of the Tigers at 13-9. Brian Kelly had kicked a 37-yard field goal in the first half that ultimately would be the difference in the scoring.

NM would use the momentum from their shocking victory over Shelby to score 67 points, the 4th highest point total in NM history with a 67-22 rout of Hart. For the second straight game Jeff Burris returned a punt for a TD. His 75-yard return nearly matched his game winning 78 game winner last week against Shelby. Burris added two more TDs, an 11-yard TD pass from Drake Cooke and a 6-yard run. Taylor Mills pitched in with a couple of long-distance tallies, a 74-yard run and a 30-yard interception brought back to paydirt. Demario Harris returned a kickoff back 90 long yards for six points while Drake Cooke, in addition to tossing a pair of TD strikes, with one of his aerials going to Omari Lewis for 16 yards, also ran 7 yards for a score. The other NM touchdown came from their defense when Aaron Jones intercepted a Pirate pass and raced 20-yards for a TD.

NM continued to rack up points, and they also gave up a bunch, but their 48 points was enough to hold off an onrushing Mason County Central team that scored 42, 21 of the Spartan points coming in a belated fourth quarter rally. Drake Cooke connected with Aaron Jones three times on TD passes of 4, 37, and 76 yards and rushed 27 for another NM tally. London Burris scored on rushes from 59 and seven yards to give NM a 48-21 lead before Mason County rallied for 21 fourth quarter points. The host Spartans recovered one onside kick and appeared to recover another late in the game only to have the second recovery nullified on a penalty. Cooke was 7-10 passing for 182 with Jones catching 4-of-the-10 for 76 yards and 3 TDs. Demario Harris led NM rushers with 147 yards with London Burris close behind with 136.

After averaging nearly 40 points per game in their first five games, the Norse needed a big effort from their defense in their 14-7 win over Whitehall. In a game played in wet and sloppy conditions the Norse ‘D’ stopped Whitehall drives four times inside its own 30-yard line. NM scored the game’s first TD on a Drake Cooke to Aaron Jones TD pass that connected for 29 yards. NM missed the extra point that led to Whitehall taking the lead after their only TD of the game and made PAT in the third quarter. NM marched 65 yards for the winning drive with the big play a 30-yard Cooke to London Burris pass play that moved the ball to the one. Taylor Mills then crashed over from the one and Cooke hit Jones for the two-point conversion to make the final score 14-7. With a 5-1 record it looked like NM was headed for a solid finish. However, their final three regular season opponents were blue bloods who had several state championship trophies in their trophy cases.

NM scored 27 points against the 2008 state champs from Oakridge, the most points the Norsemen would score against the Eagles through the 2021 season. However, the Eagles scored 38 to hand NM their second loss of the season. In a game played on a muddy Fred Jacks field, Oakridge used primarily their running attack in their 38-27 win over the Norsemen. Oakridge rushed for 417 yards while for NM most of their yards were gained through the air as Drake Cooke completed 8-of-15 passes for 225 yards and one touchdown. That touchdown was a 79-yard strike to Jeff Burris. The two teams were tied 21-21 at halftime, as London Burris and Taylor Mills matched the Eagle three touchdowns. Oakridge dominated the second half by outscoring NM 17-6 with the Norse TD coming on a fourth quarter touchdown from London Burris.

Just a little more than a year after Oakridge scored 49 points in a half, Ravenna also scored 49 points in a resounding 69-7 rout of the Norsemen. The 69 points scored by the unmerciful Bulldogs are the most points given up by a Norse team in program history. The Bulldogs put 21 points on the board before the Norsemen even ran an offensive play. Running back Jamohn Martin ran wild against NM with six touchdowns while NM’s only score came in the first half on a 9-yard touchdown pass from Drake Cooke to Jeff Burris.

A banged-up NM team was no match for Muskegon Catholic in dropping their regular season finale 47-0 to the Crusaders. The only good news for NM was after going 5-4 during the season against a flock of tough competitors, they would make the playoffs with a 5-4 record. The bad news, NM was hurting with injuries and would be sub-par for their playoff opener. MCC had a 391-129 advantage in offense as NM played their first game ever at MCC’s Kehren Stadium.

After defeating Morley Stanwood by a combined score of 133-20 in the three games played to close out the 2005-07 seasons, one would think it would be another walk in the park for NM. This, however, was not the Morley-Stanwood teams NM played in the past but a team that would be 10-0 after a 38-7 romp over the Norsemen in the opening round of the playoffs. The hosts from M-S didn’t have a Tyler Hanks in their initial three meetings. Hanks was too much for the NM defense as the 2009 Hanks ran for 270 yards and 3 touchdowns. Playing in the wind and the rain NM would end their season at 5-5. NM’s only points scored came on a 29-yard touchdown pass from Drake Cooke to London Burris.

London Burris was accorded honors as a 2nd team running back on the C-D all-area team. The only other Norsemen to get a sniff of attention was sophomore defensive lineman Jonathon Ackley. One stat the alumnae from the team of 2009 would not be proud of; the 335 points they gave up to their opponents was the most against NM in program history.

Record Score Interesting Fact

1-0 NM 34, Newaygo 6 Drake Cooke 2 TD passes & run (L Burris, Demario Harris, Omario Lewis & Aaron Jones TDs.

1-1 NM 28, Montague 57 Cooke 4 TD passes, 3 to London Burris, one to Jeff Burris.

2-1 NM 15, Shelby 13 J. Burris 78 Yd Punt return wins. L Burris 66 TD run, Brian Kelly FG.

3-1 NM 67. Hart 22 J. Burris 3 TDs, Cooke 2 pass TD & run, Harris 90 yd Kick off TD.

4-1 NM 48, Mason Co 42 Cooke to Jones TD passes of 4, 37 & 76. Burris 59 & 7 yd TD.

5-1 NM 14, Whitehall 7 Cooke to Jones 29 yds TD, Taylor Mills 1 yd TD.

5-2 NM 27, Oakridge 38 L. Burris 2 TDs – R Burris 79 yd pass from Cooke, Mills TD.

5-3 NM 7, Ravenna 69 Most points scored against NM – Cooke to J Burris 9 YD TD pass.

5-4 NM 0, Musk CC 47 London Burris 62 rushing yards leads crippled Norse team.

5-5\* NM 7, Morley Stan. 38 Cooke to L. Burris for 29 yards only NM TD.

**2010 Coach John Slocum (4-5 overall, Oakridge & Shelby tie WMC Champs)**

You talk about tough luck! NM began the 2010 season by losing their first three games, all by a single point! NM would finish with a losing record of 4-5, but that could easily have been a 7-2 record with a few breaks going their way. NM returned their three-year starter at quarterback in Drake Cooke and 2nd team all-area running back London Burris. NM would receive another boost in their offense with the addition of John Waller, a speedy co-op student from West Michigan Christian. Three-year starting receiver Aaron Jones would return to give Drake Cooke a nice option when he went to the air. The defense should show improvement as six starters from 2009 return including big tackle Jonathon Ackley and linebacker Jesse Tromp. Although their record may not show a winning season, the 2010 Norse were a much better team than their final 4-5 record.

NM would renew a series with Grandville Calvin Christian and would drop the first of their first three one-point defeats 21-20. It didn’t take but the opening quarter for John Waller to show his speed as he raced 56 yards for a touchdown. London Burris took up where he left off in 2009 as he blazed into the secondary and sped 69 yards for a second NM TD. NM led 14-0 as Burris ran in a two-point conversion after NM misfired on their first PAT from placement. Grandville CC did not go away and answered with three unanswered touchdowns and three made extra points. Drake Cooke then connected with Burris from 49 yards out to bring the Norse within a point of tying the game. However, the extra point attempt was blocked, a play that spelled doom for NM. Walker finished with 89 yards on nine carries and Burris had 64 yards in six rushes. Aaron Jones had four catches for 64 yards.

The defending two-time state champs from Montague, possessing a 23-game winning streak, needed a 16-yard TD pass from Travis Cockerill to Steve Murdoch with only 16 seconds left on the clock to hand NM their second straight one-point defeat 14-13. John Waller, for the second straight week, scored the game’s first touchdown on a 19-yard run but the extra point attempt failed. Montague took the lead in the third quarter on an 8-yard run and a successful extra point to take a 7-6 lead. NM regained the lead with 10:24 left in the game on a 40-yard TD pass from Drake Cooke to Carter Gust. It’s easy to second guess many years after the fact, but NM went for the one pointer on the extra point from placement to lead 13-7. After their last seconds TD, Montague then kicked the extra point to hand NM their second tough loss in a row.

They say bad things sometimes come in threes and that was the case again for the Norse in their 21-20 loss to Shelby. And just maybe it was Shelby’s turn to win a game in the game’s final moments as NM did a year ago when Jeff Burris returned a punt for a TD as the clock expired. This time it was Shelby who scored with less than 30 seconds to go in the game to send the game into overtime where they handed NM their third one-point defeat in a row. To make things even more miserable for the Norsemen, Shelby converted on their game tying march on a 4th and 18 play to keep the drive alive. Shelby scored first to take a 7-0 lead at halftime. John Waller than broke loose on NM’s first drive of the second half and bolted through the left side and raced 89 yards for a TD. Again, NM failed on their PAT attempt. Prior to Shelby’s game tying drive Jesse Tromp scored on a three-yard run and NM tied the score on Waller’s two-point conversion run. Shelby took over first in OT and scored and made their extra point. Drake Cooke dove in from one yard out to bring NM within a point of sending the game into a second overtime period. The snake-bitten Norse could not handle the snap from center, and they dropped to 0-3 on the season. Three losses by three lousy points.

With their extra point woes contributing to their three earlier defeats NM Coach John Slocum must have had kicking tryouts during the week. NM had prided themselves over the years with their kicking game. As the ball boy for NM in the late 1940s I well remember the Matych brothers, first Bud and later Jim winning games with their kicking. Many years later NM would boast of such great kickers as Mario Ferretti, Sam Parker, Dr. Carl Nicles and Jamie Keane. Coach Slocum chose Aaron Jones to handle the kicking chores and, although his kicking was in no means the difference in NM’s 55-0 drubbing of Hart, Jones was 7 of 8 in PAT attempts in the Norse romp of the lowly Pirates. Jones also caught a TD pass from Drake Cooke and returned a punt back for another tally. John Waller had a huge game for the winners as he scored on long TD runs of 51, 55, and 54. London Burris added to the Norse onslaught with scampers for six points from 54 and 34 and NM had a 48-0 lead at halftime.

NM again showed their potential as they again exploded in the first half by scoring 47 points to force a running clock in the second half for the second straight week in their 56-6 win over Mason County Central. John Waller, (3 & 11), London Burris (4, 15 & 30) and Aaron Jones (21 & 54 Yard TD passes from Drake Cooke), combined for 7 of the 8 NM touchdowns in their hammering of the Spartans. Carter Gust had the other touchdown on a 56-yard pass interception returned for six points.

The Norsemen would move to 3-3 on the season with another good offensive showing in their 46-10 stomping of Whitehall. London Burris only needed 7 rushes to total 172 yards and John Waller finished with 115 yards on 11 carries. Drake Cooke was efficient in the passing department by clicking on 10 of his 12 attempts for 210 yards and three touchdowns. Five of Cooke’s completions went to Aaron Jones who recorded five catches for 135 yards and a 55-yard TD gallop. Waller scored on a pair of long 70-yard runs in accumulating most of his 172 rushing yards. NM, after those three early one-point losses, would need to win at least two of their next three games to make the playoffs. However, looming ahead were Oakridge, Ravenna and Muskegon Catholic, winners of many state championships.

NM lost to Oakridge 31-14, putting NM’s chances in peril for qualifying for the playoffs. Oakridge jumped out to an early 14-0 lead before NM would counter on a 25-yard scoring pass from Drake Cooke to Aaron Jones. NM came close to sending the game into the second half tied at 14-14 but Oakridge’s 3-sport All-Star Jamie Potts knocked down a pass in the end zone to kill the Norse chances. The Eagles then scored the first 10 points of the second half to pull away from NM. John Waller provided the second NM TD on the game with a six-yard run in the second half. Oakridge did a good job of shutting down the NM running game as Drake Cooke was forced to go to the air. Cooke was an impressive 18-34 for 321 yards for NM. Jones hauled in eight catches for 139 yards while London Burris also had eight receptions for 145 yards.

Ravenna removed all doubts for a Norsemen playoff berth with a 35-14 victory over the Norse. It was Ravenna who earned their sixth win of the season who qualified for the post-season, while NM was eliminated with their fifth defeat of the season. Ravenna turned a tight game into a 28-7 halftime lead after the Norse trailed 14-7 following a Drake Cooke one yard run in the opening half. The Bulldogs then pushed their lead to 35-7 before NM added the game’s last touchdown on a 9-yard pass play from Drake Cooke to London Burris. With their final hopes for a playoff berth dashed, would NM just mail it in against always powerful Muskegon Catholic in the regular season finale?

After losing their first three games of the season by failed extra points, NM got a well-deserved victory by finally winning a game with their own one-point 28-27 squeaker over Muskegon Catholic. The winning points came after Drake Cooke hit Aaron Jones with a six-yard scoring pass. Instead of going for the one-point conversion with the now reliable Jones, coach John Slocum went for two and were successful on a conversion pass from Cooke to Carter Gust. MCC tallied in the fourth quarter and went for the win with a two-pointer of their own but were stopped by the NM defense. Senior quarterback Drake Jones finished his NM career in style by throwing four touchdown passes, three to London Burris (61, 14 & 6) and the final one to Jones. NM and MCC would both end their 2010 season with identical 4-5 records.

Although it would be considered ‘faint praise,’ the 2010 Norsemen could boast of perhaps being the best 4-5 team in the more than 90 years of NM football. If NM could have just turned around one of those first three losses into the winning column they surely would have advanced to the playoffs with their strength of schedule. The only Norseman selected to the first team all-area team was their outstanding three-year starter at receiver, Aaron Jones. Jones was not selected as a receiver however, but as the all-area punter with a 38.2 average per punt. Jones was selected as a 2nd team receiver as were John Waller and Drake Cooke. Despite a losing record of 4-5, that record would look very good after the 2011 season.

Record Score Interesting Fact

0-1 NM 20, Cavin Christ. 21 London Burris 2 TDS, 69 run, 46 pass from Cooke, John Waller TD.

0-2 NM 13, Montague 14 Waller 19 TD run, Drake Cooke to Carter Gust 40-yd TD pass.

0-3 NM 20, Shelby 21 Waller 89 yd TD, Jesse Tromp 3-yd and Cooke 1 yd TD.

1-3 NM 55, Hart 0 Waller 3 TDS (51, 55 & 54) Burris 54 & 34, Aaron Jones 2 TD.

2-3 NM 54, Mason Co 6 Burris 3 TDs, Waller, and Jones 2. Gust 56 yd interception TD.

3-3 NM 46, Whitehall 10 Waller 2 long TDs & 172 yards. Cooke 210 yds pass. Jones TD.

3-4 NM 14, Oakridge 31 Cooke 321 yards passing. Jones 25 yd rec TD. Waller 6-yd TD.

3-5 NM 14, Ravenna 35 Cooke 1-yard TD run, Cooke to Burris 9 yard passing TD.

4-5 NM 28, Musk CC 27 Cooke 4 TD passes, 3 to Burris, 1 to Jones. Cooke-Gust 2 pt. wins.

**2011 Coach John Slocum (0-9 overall, Oakridge & Shelby again tie WMC Champs)**

The 2011 season would be one to forget, if possible. It was the only winless season in more than 90 years of NM football as they experienced an 0-9 record. In five of their losses NM failed to score. NM did return several linemen, but they were severely hurt with graduation at several key skilled offensive positions, notably quarterback Drake Cooke, running back London Burris and wide receiver Aaron Jones. With the loss of major 2010 offensive stalwarts to graduation, putting points on the board would pose a major problem for fifth year coach John Slocum.

The one running back returning who made major contributions in 2010 was John Waller, one of six West Michigan Christian students playing football for NM in their co-op program. Waller scored a touchdown in the 2011 opener but that was all the scoring as NM lost their opener once again to Grandville Calvin Christian 14-7. It became apparent as early as their first game that NM was going to have trouble scoring points. Waller was the leading rusher with a modest 65 yards on 19 carries while the Norsemen only completed 2-of-6 passes for 14 yards.

NM did better in yards gained in their second game of the season but still found points hard to come by as they were shutout by Shelby 12-0. Both Shelby touchdowns came in the opening quarter, the first coming following an 80-yard march, the second touchdown took place shortly thereafter when NM fumbled the ensuing kickoff. Shelby scored three plays later with 1:00 remaining in the opening quarter. The Norse garnered 267 yards of total offense, including 144 yards rushing, but couldn’t score. NM quarterback Rocco Muzio went 10-21 through the air for 112 yards while Jaylin Gordon led all rushers with 79 yards on 11 carries.

Following Harts 21-20 win over North Muskegon all signs pointed to a lean year for Norse football. It would be the only win Hart would post over NM in 19 of 20 seasons, and the last Hart victory over NM through the 2023 season. Through the rest of the 2011 campaign NM would not come closer than 14 points of their remaining opponents. The win was Hart’s first in 21 games against WMC competition. NM’s Chuck Clanton gave NM a 20-14 lead early in the final quarter, but the all-important extra point attempt failed. Hart’s Lucas Romback scored on a 53-yard run with 4:30 left, the PAT was good, and NM would incur their 3rd straight defeat. Adrian Anderson on a two-yard run and Rocco Muzio scored from 27 for the other NM TDs.

NM suffered their fourth straight defeat and the second of what would be five games they would be held scoreless in a 37-0 whipping by Whitehall. NM was never in the game as they trailed 24-0 at halftime. John Waller was a NM workhorse in the loss as he carried 19 times to earn his 74 yards.

NM would score 28 points in their 42-28 loss at Mason County Central. Unfortunately for the Norse faithful, NM would only score 14 points in their final four games of the season. It appears that the media had suddenly lost interest in Norse football as there was scant reporting of this game. The only writeup did mention that the Norsemen did lead at one point in the game 21-0 before Mason County stormed back but there was no mention on how either team scored their touchdowns. Perhaps one of the reasons for the lack of reporting on this game is that both teams entered the game with 0-4 records.

Oakridge, who would again share the West Michigan Conference title with Shelby for the second straight year, downed the Norsemen at Fred Jacks Field 39-0. So dominant was the Eagle defense that NM only picked up three first downs and totaled but 39 yards of total offense.

John Waller would score two touchdowns for the Norse, their last two TDs of the season as NM dropped their game to Ravenna 37-14. I am curious as what was the actual score in this game. One source has Ravenna winning 35-7 while the Muskegon Chronicle posts the final as 37-14. I had moved to the Sunshine State of Florida by 2011, and I am in the dark. The MC did mention in their very skimpy report of the game (one paragraph) that John Waller scored 2 TDs for the Norse. Let’s give Waller the benefit of the doubt and credit him with two tallies as the Norsemen were scoreless in their final two games.

Once again coverage was limited to but one paragraph in reports from Montague’s 19-0 win over NM, and perhaps that is best has NM is one week removed from their poorest season in their proud football history. NM showed fighting spirit in this game as they trailed the heavily favored Wildcats only 6-0 at halftime.

It would prove to be a daunting task in NM’s final game if they were going to evade their first, and only, winless season in their final game. Perennial power Muskegon Catholic, with a record of 7-1 would be their final hope for victory. The season would come to a merciful close as MCC shutout the Norsemen 35-0. MCC scored in every quarter as they rushed for 337 yards as NM’s season ended at 0-9.

John Slocum would be replaced as the Norse mentor for the 2012 season. Named to replace Slocum was longtime NM assistant Mike Belmonte. The 2011 season was not only one to forget for NM followers as, for the second straight season, the Muskegon area had no teams playing for a state championship, a rarity for a proud football area that had seen so much success over the years. Thankfully, not only Muskegon area teams, but in a lesser but positive way, NM would again produce winning teams. One Norse player did receive special attention. Jon Ackley, who would make the first team all-MIAA team while playing at Albion College, was picked as a first team all-area lineman.

Record Score Interesting Fact

0-1 NM7, Calvin Christ. 14 NM limited to less that 100 yards in offense. John Waller 1 yd TD.

0-2 NM 0, Shelby 12 Shelby posts 1st of five shutouts suffered by NM during season.

0-3 NM 20, Hart 21 Chuck Clanton 40-yd TD, Adrian Anderson, Rocco Muzio TD each.

0-4 NM 0, Whitehall 37 John Waller 74 yards in 19 carries.

0-5 NM 28, Mason Co 42 No writeup in Muskegon Chronicle.

0-6 NM 0, Oakridge 39 NM only 39 yards of total offense and 3 first downs.

0-7 NM 14, Ravenna 35 John Waller two touchdowns. (maybe)

0-8 NM 0, Montague 19 NM trailed 6-0 at halftime to stay close to the Wildcats.

0-9 NM 0, Musk CC 35 NM ends only winless season in more than 90 years of NM football.

**2012 Coach Mike Belmonte (5-4 overall, Oakridge WMC Champs)**

The 2012 season, although surely not the strongest team fielded in Norse history, was a vast improvement from the winless 0-9 team of 2011. So improved was the team that they managed to post a winning record with a mark of 5-4. There was not only a shakeup with NM playing under a new coach in Mike Belmonte but there was a marked turnover with the area media. No longer would the Muskegon Chronicle have multiple sports writers with talents the likes of Cindy Fairfield, Mike Mattson, and more recently Sports Editor Tom Kendra, retiring. The shakedown at the Chronicle left the newspaper with a skeleton crew where Mark Offerman had the ‘impossible task’ of being a one-man crew covering Muskegon Area Sports. Fortunately for local sports fans a new digital media publication was founded that did an outstanding job: *The Local Sports Journal*.

NM would again kick off their season against a very good Grandville Christian team, coming off an impressive 8-2 record from 2011. NM began their 2012 season much like they left off from 2011, with a 34-13 loss at Grandville. A pair of touchdowns three minutes apart in the third quarter was too much for the Norse to overcome. Making his debut at quarterback for NM was Adrian Anderson who struggled with 7-of-20 passing for just 27 yards and three interceptions. “You have to remember that it was Adrian’s first game ever playing quarterback,” said coach Belmonte following the game. Anderson did kick two short field goals to account for six of NM’s points with a 3-yard TD run from Holden Vanderweele completed the Norse scoring.

Shelby, the two-time WMC champion showed they have another good team as they handed NM their second loss of the season and school record 11th straight defeat with a 28-15 win over the Norsemen. NM was hurt in the first half with a pair of costly turnovers and two penalties. NM did cut the lead to 21-7 on Adrian Anderson’s 20-yard touchdown run and completed their scoring on an Anderson 25 scoring pass to Sam Powell.

It was back to normal in NM’s next game with Hart – A NM win. After losing their only game with Hart in twenty years, NM saw six players score rushing touchdowns in NM’s 52-0 thrashing of Hart. Logan Waller led the way for the Norse with a pair of touchdowns and 115 rushing yards. Nick Duplissis added 54 yards on nine carries while Christian Ramirez and Holden Vanderweele each scored rushing touchdowns. Quarterback Adrian Anderson rushed for a TD and was 2-3 passing for 59 yards. Ryan Gannon with six tackles helped NM hold Hart to but 100 yards of total offense.

The Norsemen used the arm of quarterback Adrian Anderson and the hands of his favorite receiver Sam Powell in their 25-21 win over Whitehall. Anderson was 8 of 17 passing for 126 yards and three touchdowns, all caught by Powell who finished with 76 receiving yards. The big TD was a 17-yard pass to Powell with but two seconds remaining in the first half. Nick Duplissis gave the Norsemen their first lead of the game with a 19-yard TD run in the third quarter. NM rallied from a 14-0 first quarter deficit to pull off the win. Ryan Gannon and Christian Brower finished with 10 and nine tackles respectively to lead the Norse defense.

NM’s 48-20 victory over Mason County made it three straight wins in a row, a modest achievement but a huge improvement from last year’s winless season. For the second straight week Sam Powell caught three touchdown passes with grabs of 27, 42 and 59 yards all thrown from Adrian Anderson. Holden Vanderweele carried 10 times for 64 yards with touchdown runs of 1 and 29 yards. Logan Waller chipped in for 69 yards and an 11-yard score while Logan Ramirez joined the scoring parade with a 11-yard TD.

Oakridge clinched a playoff berth and with their 27-6 win over the Norse and were on their way to an outright WMC championship. NM kept it close with the WMC champs trailing 13-0 at halftime. NM played the Eagles even in the second half but still came up short. Adrian Anderson scored the NM TD on a 1-yard QB carry and rushed for 60 yards. Nick Duplissis rushed for 63.

The Norse then snapped a five-game losing streak to Ravenna with a 27-8 victory to improve to a winning record of 4-3. Logan Waller ran for a 56-yard touchdown in the first quarter and finished with 89 rushing yards on 10 carries. Mitchell Edick ran for a 41-yard touchdown and finished with 73 yards while Christian Ramirez added a 35-yard TD run. Nick Duplissis tacked on a 5-yard TD run for the Norsemen while Jack Gautraud was a force on defense for the Norse with two interceptions and seven tackles.

Montague, leading 14-6 with just a little more than five minutes to play in the first half, exploded for 23 points to pull away to an 37-6 halftime lead. The Cats would end up winning 44-14 as the second half was played evenly. The Wildcats were honoring at halftime of this game their 1992 state runner-up players whose quarterback that season was the current Montague head coach, Pat Collins. Holden Vanderweele scored NM’s first touchdown from one yard out and the second came late in the game from the three-yard line. Adrian Anderson completed 7 of 17 passes for 94 yards.

With a 4-4 record going into their final game of the regular season, the Norsemen once again would be paired in their final game with a tough opponent. Maple City Glen Lake would face the Norse for the first time in school history and would travel to NM boasting of a perfect 8-0 record. The Norsemen shocked the undefeated Glen Lake team 22-14 with the big play a 64-yards touchdown pass from Adrian Anderson to Mitch Edick early in the fourth quarter to break a 14-14 tie. Earlier the NM touchdowns were scored by Nick Duplissis and Logan Waller.

NM head coach Mike Belmonte was hopeful that NM with their 5-4 record with all four losses coming against playoff teams would advance NM to the playoffs, but they just missed.

Record Score Interesting Fact

0-1 NM 13, Calvin Christ. 34 Adrian Anderson 2 FG, Holden Vanderweele 3-yd TD.

0-2 NM 15, Shelby 28 Anderson 20-yard run and 25-TD pass to Sam Powell.

1-2 NM 52, Hart 0 Logan Waller 2 TDs & 114 yards. 5 NM backs score TD.

2-2 NM 25, Whitehall 21 Adrian Anderson 3 TD passes, all to Sam Powell for 17, 18 & 32)

3-2 NM 48, Mason Co 20 Sam Powell 3 TD receptions (27, 42 & 59) lead NM win.

3-3 NM 6 Oakridge 27 Anderson 1 yd TD and 60 yds rushing, Nick Duplissis 63 yds.

4-3 NM 27 Ravenna 8 Waller 56 yd TD, Mitchell Edick, Duplissis & Christian Ramirez TD.

4-4 NM 14, Montague 44 Montague scorers 23 points in 5 minutes to blow game open.

5-4 NM 22, Glen Lake 14 Anderson to Edick winning 63 yd TD pass. Walller, Dupllissis TD.

**2013 Coach Mike Belmonte (5-4 overall, Shelby WMC Champs)**

The Norse got off to a blazing start to begin the 2013 season in their second year under head coach Mike Belmonte. NM won their first three, and five of their first six, before dropping their last three and missing out on a playoff berth. It would be the last hurrah for Shelby as they would not only beat the Norsemen, but the Tigers would also win the WMC Championship. Not only have the Tigers not won a WMC title since 2013, but they have also likewise failed to beat a NM team over the next decade.

It looks like NM had found themselves another in their long time run of producing outstanding quarterbacks in Brody Scott. Scott rushed for 114 yards in but five attempts and 2 touchdowns that included a long 70-yard dash for six points, completed 5/6 passes and on the other side of the ball intercepted a pass and returned the pigskin 44 yards for another TD. The win ended a three-game losing streak to Grandville Calvin Christian as NM won handedly 39-21. NM led 28-0 before the Squires could counter. Logan Walled chipped in with a TD and Aaron Rahrig kicked a field goal as the Norse won their first opener in four years.

The Norsemen followed their 52-0 whipping of Hart in 2012 with a near identical trouncing in 2013 with a 49-0 shutout of the Pirates. NM totaled more than 400 total yards in their rout of Hart. Brody Scott had another big day for the winners as he threw a 21-yard TD pass to Andrew Shafer and ran 10 yards for another touchdown. Vernell Smith had 101 yards rushing including a long TD dash of 77 yards.

The Norse scored all their points in the first half in a 28-7 win over Whitehall. Brody Smith completed 7-of-11 passes for 111 yards and one touchdown and Holden Vanderweele rushed for 56 yards and one TD. Logan Waller had a pair of touchdowns and rushed for 106 yards for the victorious Norsemen. The first came from 10 yards out for a first quarter score and then a 19-yard pass from Scott in the second quarter. The final NM TD in the opening half was a halfback pass to Mitchel Edicks for 19 yards. It was a balanced attack for the Norse as they gained 146 yards running and 148 yards passing. NM was now a perfect 3-0 on the season but some tough opponents loom ahead.

NM has their three-game winning streak come to a crashing end as they fell 43-7 to the number one ranked Division 5 team in the state, the Oakridge Eagles. The Norse trailed only 7-0 in the first quarter before Oakridge pulled away with three touchdowns in the second quarter. Logan Waller kept NM from averting a shutout with a six-yard TD run in the second quarter. Waller led NM rushers with 92 yards. The loss was the first loss of the season for the Norsemen and their first loss in the WMC.

North Muskegon scored two second quarter touchdowns and they made it stand up as they defeated Mason County Central 14-0. Riley Fairfield opened the scoring with a 22-yard touchdown pass from Brody Scott. Later in the quarter Mitch Edick added a 5-yard touchdown run. “Brody Scott played a solid game for us at quarterback,’ said NM coach Mike Belmonte following the game. “He took care of the football, made some good reads and ran tough,” added Belmonte. The Norse improved to 3-1 in WMC conference action with a big game looming the following week with an always tough Ravenna team.

Aaron Rahrig kicked a 27-yard field goal with 1:55 remaining as NM edged the visiting Ravenna Bulldogs 29-27 in a thriller at Fred Jacks Field. Holden Vanderweele had earlier given the Norsemen a 27-21 lead earlier in the fourth quarter on a 68-yard run. Ravenna rallied to take a 28-27 lead to set up Rahrig’s heroics. Brody Scott completed 5 of 9 passes for 80 yards, including a 42-yd TD pass to Riley Fairfield. Logan Waller was a workhorse for NM as he rushed for 142 yards and two touchdowns with his longest TD a 61-yarder. The win moved the surprising Norsemen to 5-1 on the season, just one win away from an automatic playoff berth.

A Montague interception deep in their own territory stopped a potential tying or game winning drive for North Muskegon in Montague’s 35-38 win over NM. Montague’s sophomore quarterback Jacob Buchberger played a part in all five Wildcats touchdowns that left both teams with a 5-2 record. Buchberger did have one his passes intercepted by NM freshman Cameron Waller who returned it 35 yards for a Norse touchdown in the second quarter. Logan Waller was all over the field for the Norsemen as he rushed for 72 yards, scored on three short TD runs, caught six passes for 73 yards and had seven tackles on defense. The loss to Montague was their 13th straight defeat at the hands of the Wildcats.

NM was hoping not only to play the role of a spoiler to Shelby’s perfect 7-0 season but also qualify for the playoffs with a win. Neither happened as Shelby clinched what would prove to be their last, as of this writing, championship in the West Michigan Conference. Winning their first outright title since 1977, Shelby would experience their last hurrah in football for many more years. The Tigers led 28-14 at halftime, added ten more points in the second half to move to a perfect 8-0. NM, who got touchdowns from Andrew Shafer on a 24-yard run and on a Brody Scott to Riley Fairfield 16-yd pass, would now need to beat a once beaten Glen Lake team in next week’s long road up North to qualify for the playoffs.

Glen Lake was undefeated when NM upset the Lakers the previous season. Glen Lake had won seven straight games in this 2013 season before they were edged in their eighth game by perennial football power Traverse City St. Francis 28-21. The Norse needed to ‘upset’ Glen Lake once again to keep their season extended and qualify for the MHSAA playoffs. The Norsemen gave Glen Lake all they wanted and more. The big play that cost NM a 17-14 loss was an 88-yard TD run by Trevor Apsey in the fourth quarter that proved to be the game breaker and end NM’s 2013 season. Vernell Smith led North Muskegon with 60 yards and a 33-yard touchdown while Brody Scott had a 6-yard TD.

Record Score Interesting Fact

1-0 NM 39, Calvin Christ. 21 Brody Scott 114 yds rushing & 2 TDs. One of his TDS 70 yards

2-0 NM 49, Hart 0 Vernell Smith 101 yds rushing, 77 yd TD. Scott TD pass & run.

3-0 NM 28, Whitehall 7 Waller 2 TDs, Scott 7-11 one TD passing, Holden Vanderweele TD.

3-1 NM 7, Oakridge 43 No. 1 Oakridge downs Norse. Waller 6-yd TD and 94 yds.

4-1 NM 14, Mason Co 0 Scott to Riley Fairfield 22-yd TD pass. Mitch Edick 5-yd TD run.

5-1 NM 29, Ravenna 27 Aaron Rahrig’s 27 yd FG the winner. Vanderweele 68 yd TD run.

5-2 NM 28, Montague 35 Logan Waller 3 TDs, Cameron Waller 35-yard interception TD.

5-3 NM 14, Shelby 38 Andrew Shafer 24-yd TD run, Scott to Fairfield 16 yd TD pass.

5-4 NM 14, Glen Lake 17 NM loses on 88 yd TD run. Smith 23 yd TD, Scott 6 yd TD.

**2014 Coach Mike Belmonte (5-4 overall, Oakridge WMC Champs)**

After a hiatus of seven years, Holton would once again be NM’s opening opponent to begin the 2014 season. Vernell Smith had a huge game in NM’s 42-7 victory over the Red Devils as he scored three TDs on runs of 74, 48 and six yards. Logan Waller got NM started in the right directions with an interception early in the game at Holton’s 35-yard line. He then capped the drive by diving in from three yards out on a fourth downplay for the first of NM’s TDs. Waller later added a 65-yard TD run. Making his debut as the NM starting quarterback was Eric Bleakley. The future Navy Midshipman had a modest start, but he would take his place down the road as one of NM’s finest all-around athletes.

NM opened their conference season with a 49-22 win over Hart. The win would be the third in a row over the Pirates, who as of this writing are still looking for their first victory over NM since 2011. The game was well over by halftime as NM enjoyed a 49-8 lead at the break. Vernonell Smith started the rout with a 3-yard run followed by a 1-yard sneak by Erick Bleakley. Ben Gautraud returned an interception for a TD followed by a Logan Waller TD for 92 yards after catching a screen pass from Bleakley. That pass and run was a Norse record, breaking by a single yard a 91-yard pass and catch from Ron Simonelli to Stan Guy in 1954. (That record would be broken in 2018 on a 94-yard TD pass from Mack Young to TJ Mckenzie) Other NM TDs against the outmanned Pirates was a 58-yard Bleakley to Riley Fairfield TD pass and runs for six points by Anthony Oveido and Leguan Hooper.

Whitehall won their third straight game of their season with a 14-7 win over the Norse, the first 3-0 start for the Vikings in eight years. The game was tied at 7-7 before Whitehall scored with 2:58 left in the third quarter on a Zarren Aylor 10-yard run. That TD was set up by an interception by Whitehall’s Nolan Throne. That would prove to be the game winner as NM’s only score came on a 21-yard pass from Erick Bleakley to Riley Fairfield. The game was played in a steady rain that contributed to a sloppy contest.

Oakridge would number North Muskegon as one of their victims as they posted a 27-0 victory on their way to winning the West Michigan Conference Championship. There was no mention of this game in the Muskegon Chronicle, only the final score. However, a few days later there was an incident that took place in the game that influenced the balance of the season. NM quarterback Erick Bleakley was hit with a blindside hit that fractured his clavicle and ended the season for the promising junior QB. “The best you can say about it, it was uncalled for and overaggressive,” said NM head coach Mike Belmonte. Sophomore Riley Fairfield will move from end to quarterback for NM’s next game with Mason County Central.

It took overtime but NM was able to defeat Mason County Central 21-14 to move to 3-2 on the season. Mitchell Edick caught a 10-yard pass from Riley Fairfield in the OT period to score first. NM then recovered a Spartan fumble on the Spartan’s ensuing possession to escape with the win. Edict also led NM in rushing with 114 yards on 11 carries that included a 32-yard TD dash, The other NM score during regulation came on a 1-yard sneak by Riley Fairfield, now taking over the quarterback duties after the season ending injury to Erick Bleakley.

NM trailed Ravenna 35-0 at halftime forcing a running clock in the second half. The Bulldogs with a 5-1 record would be one win away from a playoff berth while NM needed to win all three of their remaining games. NM would come close. NM was held on the rainy night to but 56 rushing yards with their only touchdown a 1-yard plunge by Logan Waller just before halftime.

Montague made it 14 wins in a row over the Norsemen with a 34-17 victory. Andrew Shafer scored a couple of short yardage TDs for the Norse and Logan Waller, a running back who moved to quarterback to replace an injured Erick Bleakley, passed for 105 yards for NM as their hopes for a playoff berth were dashed.

Riley Fairfield had a big day in NM’s 41-7 win over Shelby. Fairfield caught a couple of TD passes from Logan Waller and ran a fumble recovery 64 yards for a score. NM would snap a four-game losing streak vs. Shelby as the Tigers are still looking for their next win against the Norse as of the 2024 season. Vernonell Smith ran for 125 yards on 13 carries and scored a pair of TDs, one on a 22-yard run and another on a 36-yard touchdown pass from Fairfield.

NM resumed a short rivalry in 2014 with Hesperia and responded with a season ending 42-25 win to finish for the third consecutive year with a 5-4 record. Logan Waller had a huge game in the win as he accounted for four touchdowns and added eight tackles on defense. Waller was six of eight passing and ran 21 times for 161 yards and three rushing touchdowns. Waller’s TD pass of 28 yards was hauled in by Mitchell Edick. Vernonell Smith rushed for 99 yards and on defense intercepted a pass that he returned 25 yards for a score. Riley Fairfield caught two passes for 54 yards as NM could only wait to see if their 5-4 record would make the playoffs. They didn’t and it was wait until next year.

NM fans can look back on the 2014 season and wonder how different this season might have been for the Norsemen if not for the controversial blind side hit that cost NM quarterback Erick Bleakley missing the final five games of the season.

Record Score Interesting Fact

1. NM 42, Holton 7 Vernell Smith 3 TDs (74, 48 & 6). Logan Waller int. & 2 TD.
2. NM 49, Hart 22 Erick Bleakley to Logan Waller school record 92 yd TD pass.

2-1 NM 7, Whitehall 14 Bleakley to Riley Fairfield 21-yard pass only NM TD.

2-2 NM 0, Oakridge 27 Bleakely inj., out for the season. Thomas Montgomers 11 tackles.

3-2 NM 21, Mason Co 14 Fairfield TD pass to Mitch Edict wins in overtime.

3-3 NM 6, Ravenna 49 Ravenna bolts out to 35-0 lead. Waller 1-yd TD.

3-4 NM 17, Montague 34 Shafer 2 TDS, Waller 105 yards passing.

4-4 NM 41, Shelby 7 Fairfield 3 TDs including 74 yd fbl. return, Vernonell Smith 2 Yds.

5-4 NM 42, Hesperia 25 Waller 3 rush TDs, 1 passing. Edict 28-yard TD pass.

**2015 Coach Mike Belmonte (3-6 overall, Montague WMC Champs)**

The Norsemen would finish the season with their only sub .500 record under head Coach Mike Belmonte who would finish his final season as the Norse football mentor following a four-year stint. NM had a decent year scoring points, but their defense had too many holes. The 325 points allowed by the Norsemen were the second most points scored by their opponents in program history. Teams in the West Michigan Conference would have to scramble to find an opponent as Hart did not field a varsity football team. A familiar face in North Muskegon would make the daily journey to Hart to guide the Hart JV team in hopes that varsity football at Hart would resume in 2016. That coach was Larry Witham, who thankfully for NM fans would return to his hometown the following year to take over the head coach duties at North Muskegon.

The Norsemen welcomed back to the field a couple of players who missed much of the previous season with injuries, and both made a difference in NM’s season opening 35-14 win over Holton. Erick Bleakley had four touchdowns, three on the ground (2,14 & 17) and one in the air on a 54-yard pass to Ben Garcia. Vernonell Smith in his first game back since a season ending injury from 2014 broke loose for a 31-yard TD run.

Following the opening win over Holton, the Norsemen went into a tailspin and dropped their next five games. NM was no match for Whitehall as the Vikings pounded out a 54-13 victory over the Norsemen. NM’s two touchdowns came on pass plays (30 & 15 yards) from Erick Bleakley to Riley Fairfield. Fairfield finished with five receptions for 111 yards while Bleakley completed nine of 19 passes for 157 yards and added 54 yards on the ground.

My, how coverage of our local teams by our once great local newspaper spiraled downward since the advent of digital news. Where for many decades high school football coverage by our local teams was always front-page news in our sport sections, the September 13, edition of the Muskegon Chronicle relegated coverage to page 11 of the SUNDAY (not Saturday) sports section. There was zero coverage of the game with Oakridge which may not have been a bad thing. NM’s defense again surrendered more than 50 points in their 53-27 loss to Oakridge. With the sad status of the MC, thankfully coverage of local sports has been picked up by a couple of outstanding new digital publications, The Local Sports Journal and Catchmark Sports.

For the third straight game, all NM losses, the Norse defense gave up more than 50 points in a 63-40 loss to Ravenna. The combined 103 points was easily the most points scored in the long rivalry between the two teams that dates to 1932. Ravenna’s 21-0 start was too much for NM to overcome. Even though there was a running clock in the third quarter after Ravenna went up 56-20 over the Norsemen, the offenses were so primed that four more TDs were scored before the clock ran out to end the game. Vernonell Smith had 3 TDs for NM that included a long 93-yard kickoff return. Erick Bleakey and Riley Fairfield paired up for a couple of TD passes. Bleakley was 17-28 for 188 yards while Fairfield caught eight passes for 121 yards and his two TDs.

NM suffered their fourth straight defeat in WMC action with a 40-14 drubbing at the hands of Mason Co Central.

NM stayed winless as they lost a tight contest to Montague 27-26. It was a cruel way to lose as Montague’s Jacob Buchberger raced 85 yards for the game winning touchdown with 4:31 left in the game. Erick Bleakley completed 13 of 21 passes for 199 yards that included a touchdown pass of 43 yards to Ben Garcia. Vernonell Smith was a workhorse for the Norse with 138 yards on 27 carries and three NM TDs. Smith TDs were from I, 19 and 23 yards.

NM defeated Shelby in their next contest 32-30 to avoid going winless in the WMC. Your author is still looking for scoring plays from this game.

With Hart not fielding a varsity football team NM’s veteran Athletic Director Jeff Cooke was able to find an opponent in Manton. Better known for providing some outstanding basketball teams, the Rangers were no match for the Norse as NM would win their third, and final victory of the season 33-6 over Manton.

Normally a team can just check off a win when Hesperia is on your schedule. But that certainly wasn’t applicable with the 2015 Hesperia Panthers. After going 1-8 in 2014 Hesperia would experience their best season in program history by going a perfect 9-0, their only undefeated regular season record in their school’s history. The ninth victim was North Muskegon, and they pummeled the Norsemen 56-6. It was not the way that head coach Denny Belmonte wanted to go out as the NM head coach. NM had to play their last two games without quarterback Erick Bleakley who suffered a concussion in game 7. Belmonte had to use his third string quarterback, and his top rusher Vernonell Smith at QB. Smith did compete a 23-yard TD pass to Ben Garcia to pull the Norse with within 14-6, but the Panthers ran at will over the NM defense the rest of the game as NM finished with a disappointing 3-6 record.

Record Score Interesting Fact

* 1. NM 35, Holton 14 Erick Bleakley 4 TDs, 3 on the ground, Vernonell Smith TD.
  2. NM 13, Whitehall 54 Bleakley two TD passes to Riley Fairfield accounts for NM TDs.
  3. NM 27, Oakridge 53 No coverage given of this game in MC.
  4. NM 40, Ravenna 63 Smith 93 yd Koff TD & 3 TDs, Bleakley to Fairfield 2 TD passes.
  5. NM 14, Mason Co 40 No report of this game.
  6. NM 26, Montague 27 Smith 3 rushing TDs, Bleakley 199 passing yds & TD.

2-5 NM 32, Shelby 20 No coverage

3-5 NM 33, Manton 6 No coverage

3-6 NM 6, Hesperia 56 Smith 23 yd TD pass to Ben Garcia avoids a shutout.

**2016 Coach Larry Witham (5-4 overall, Oakridge WMC Champs)**

North Muskegon welcomed back with open arms a long time NM fixture in athletics, Larry Witham to take over as head coach to begin the 2016 season. A football ‘junkie’, Witham played his high school football at NMHS in the late 1970s and assisted the NM coaching staff for many years. Witham even coached the NM girls’ softball team and was instrumental in grooming the pristine home softball field on the shores of Muskegon Lake. Witham was generous with his time in 2015 by traveling daily to Hart to attempt to resurrect a football program at Hart by serving as the Junior varsity coach. Hart did not field a varsity team in 2015 but with Witham creating interest Hart would again resume varsity competition in 2016. It was a tale of two halves before the Norsemen would begin to jell under Witham’s guidance. NM dropped their first four games of the season but made a serious turnaround by winning their final five games to again post a winning record.

In a short-term rivalry that consisted of 10 games dating back to 1940, the Norsemen played Reed City for the first time since 1978 and came away with an opening game loss to Reed City 32-9. Justice Sikkenga booted a 31-yard field goal for NM’s first three points. NM later tallied on a 10-yard pass from Jesse Cooke to Lequan Cooper. Coach Larry Witham would use a pair of quarterbacks, much like his high school head coach Dave Warmack did in his prep days at NM when Witham would alternate at QB with Steve Preston. Cooke was 9-13 for 124 yards while Mack Young was 9-11 for 102 yards. Each of the young QBs would suffer an interception. It was the first win by Reed City over the Norse since 1943 as NM had won eight of the previous nine encounters.

NM led Whitehall 7-0 at halftime, but the Vikings regrouped at halftime and outpointed the Norse 35-7 in the second half to pull away to a 35-14 win. The turnaround for Whitehall began as early as the first play of the second half as Whitehall’s Joe Dowdell picked off a pass that was returned 42 yards for a touchdown. NM did counter by completing an 80-yard drive capped by a Thomas Montgomery TD catch from 11-yards, but it was all Whitehall the rest of the game. Vernonell Smith scored from two yards out to give NM the lead at halftime. Not to be deterred, first year head coach Larry Witham remained optimistic following the game. “We didn’t protect the ball very well and probably didn’t manage the clock as well as we should, but we’ll regroup,” said Witham. “We’ve got a pretty good football team we think and we’re pretty talented.” It would take a few more games but the 2016 Norsemen would back up Witham’s optimism.

Oakridge held NM scoreless until the fourth quarter in a 29-14 victory over NM to send the Norsemen to their third straight loss on the season. NM had two long drives for their TDs, the first went 99 yards that culminated in a 19-yard TD pass from Jessee Cooke to Thomas Montgomery. The second NM TD came when they drove 63 yards in four plays with Cooke scoring on a 2-yard run.

NM continued to show improvement as they gave Ravenna a battle before losing 28-20. Vernonell Smith scored a pair of touchdowns for the Norse, the first a burst of 59 yards, the second a nine-yard dash. Sandwiched between Smith two tallies was a 16-yard TD pass from Jesse Cooke to TJ McKenzie. It was the fourth straight loss for NM against four proven football teams. The final five football games of the season would show a Norse resurgence.

Head coach Larry Witham acquired the first, of what would prove to be many wins as the Norse mentor, as NM put together a solid showing in a 28-6 win over Mason County Central. Vernonell Smith got the Norse on the board first with a 35-yard interception return for a touchdown, one of two TDs created by the Norse defense. Cameron Waller picked up a fumble and returned it 20 yards for six NM points. Smith, who finished with 89 yards, also scored on a 7-yard run in the second half. Chandler Edwards scored on a 12-yard carry while Witham gave credit following the game to his sophomore quarterback, Mack Young.

It had been 15 long years since NM had defeated Montague and with the Cats entering the game with the Norse sporting a perfect 5-0 record, including a 3-touchdown walloping of rival Whitehall the previous week, the Norsemen would go into the game as decided underdogs. The Norse pulled off a shocking 14-6 win over the state ranked Wildcats. “It was a great win for our kids,” said first year coach Larry Witham. “We were presented with a lot of adversity at 0-4, and it would have been easy to give up and stop playing,” added Witham. Montague scored first but NM took the lead in the first half on a two-yard run by Vernonell Smith and added an insurance touchdown in the second half on a 15-yard pass from sophomore quarterback Jesse Cooke, son of athletic director Jeff Cooke and grandson of longtime NM coach Dave Cooke, to senior tight end Cam Waller. Smith finished with 135 rushing yards on 25 carries. “We told them at the beginning of the game we were going to shock the world and the kids executed everything to perfection,” said an ebullient Witham.

The next three games would find the Norsemen outscoring their three opponent 170-7. The first of their runaway victories was a 49-7 shellacking of Shelby. Chandler Edwards scored three touchdowns (8, 9 & 1) and Vernonell Smith two tallies (4 & 2) as both backs rushed for more than 100 yards in the win. Mack Young tossed a pass to Riley Fairfield good for a 41-yard touchdown while Caleb Hulka closed out the Norse scoring with a nine-yard effort.

NM took advantage of a Hart team that was still a few years away from turning their program around as they downed the Pirates 49-0. The Norse forced a running clock in the second half with a 35-0 halftime lead. Mack Young and Jesse Cooke each threw for a Norse touchdown while Vernonell Smith needed only four carries to net 89 yards. Chandler Edwards needed but 4 carries to net 104 yards.

It was a record setting finish to the NM season as they scored the most points against an opponent in program history with a 73-0 whitewash of Holton. It was 52-0 at halftime and NM still was able to score three more TDs in the second half with a running clock in effect. Thomas Montgomery had a couple of touchdown runs while sophomore Chandler Edwards was NM’s leading rusher with a modest 68 yards in four carries as eight different Norsemen found the end zone. Scoring TDs for NM were Montgomery (2), Vernonell Smith, Cameron Waller, Riley Fairfield, Chase Edwards, Stephan Smith, John Hayhurst, and De’Shary Warren. One individual school record was set in the rout, a 48-yard field goal by Justice Sikkenga.

Head coach Larry Witham was hopeful that somehow his Norsemen could ‘sneak’ into the playoffs with a 5-4 record but that wasn’t in the cards as NM failed to have the number of playoff points to qualify. Fortunately for NM fans under Witham’s leadership, his first year as the NM coach would be as of this writing the last year NM would not qualify for the playoffs.

Record Score Interesting Fact

* 1. NM 9, Reed City 32 Jesse Cooke to Laquan Cooper 10-yd TD pass. Justice Sikkenga FG.
  2. NM 14, Whitehall 35 Thomas Montgomery 11-yard TD catch. Vernonell Smith 2-yd TD.
  3. NM 14, Oakridge 29 Cooke to Thomas Montgomery 19-yd TD pass. Cooke 2-yard TD run.
  4. NM 20, Ravenna 28 Smith 59 & 9 yd TD runs, Cooke to TJ McKenzie 16 yd TD pass

1-4 NM 28, Mason Co 6 Smith 2 TDS, 7-yard runs and 35-yd interception, Cam Waller 20 yd fumble ret TD. Chandler Edwards 12-yd TD and 69 yards rushing.

2-4 NM 14, Montague 6 Smith 2 yd TD. Jesse Cooke 15-yard TD pass to Waller.

3-4 NM 49, Shelby 7 Edwards 106 yds, 3 TDS, Smith 122 yards 2 TDs.

4-4 NM 49, Hart 0 Edwards 104 yd, Smith 89, Cooke & Mack Young TD pass.

5-4 NM 73, Holton 0 Eight NM players score TDs, Sikkenga record 48-yard field goal.

**2017 Coach Larry Witham (6-3 overall, Playoff qualifier, Montague WMC Champ)**

After losing to Hesperia by 50 points in 2015, NM nipped the Panthers 28-27 in overtime to open the 2017 season. Hesperia bolted out to a 14-0 lead at halftime before the Norse could get on the board. It took an interception by Brennan Moat that he returned 80 yards for a touchdown to close the gap to 14-7. Head coach Larry Witham went with a two-quarterback system, and it worked to perfection. Mack Young and Jesse Cooke combined to pass for 262 of the 267 yards of total offense as Witham was employing his ‘Air Witham’ offense. Cooke completed a second half TD pass of 57-yards to Chandler Edwards for a TD. It was a Mack Young hookup with TJ McKenzie that went for 12 yards and a NM tally that forced overtime. Young then hit De’Shary Warren on a cross pattern to start the overtime period and NM led 28-21 following Dylan Hoffman’s 4th straight made extra point. Hesperia scored on their first play and elected to go for two points and the win, but the run was stuffed by the NM defense.

Oakridge continued their dominance over the Norse as NM would incur their first of two defeats on the season vs. the Eagles in their 42-14 loss. NM did give the Eagles a brief scare as Christian Brooks scored a pair of third quarter touchdowns to give the Norse a brief 14-13 lead. Oakridge then used a punishing ground attack in their win over NM by rushing for 405 yards. Brooks also was a star for NM on defense as he was credited with 17 tackles. The Eagles big sophomore running back Leroy Quinn rushed for 229 yards on 27 carries and three touchdowns.

NM notched a big win over an always tough Ravenna team 28-7. With both teams scoreless just before the end of the first half Chandler Edwards slipped through the Bulldog line to block a punt. The ball was scooped up by Christian Brooks who jogged into the endzone to put the Norse ahead going into the half. Brooks used that momentum to bust free for a 55-yard run in NM’s first drive of the second half. Edwards then broke the game wide open with a couple of long TD runs in the second half, the first a 62-yard score, the second a 53-yard gallop that gave NM an insurmountable 28-0 lead before Raveena could score late. Edwards would finish with 164 total rushing yards and the 6’2 215 pounds Brooks 89.

In was almost a moral victory in NM’s 48-7 loss to a powerful Montague squad. In previous weeks the Wildcats totaled 76 and 65 points in back-to-back victories over Shelby and Mason County Central. Norse fans would have something to cheer for in the second half as Chandler Edwards returned a kickoff 75 yards for the only Norse score in the game.

Following their loss to Montague NM would go on a three-game winning streak, outscoring their three opponents 120-6. In their 45-0 win over Mason County Central Chandler Edwards had a big game, rushing for 179 yards and three touchdowns on runs of 46, 4 & 66). Christian Brooks added a pair of short TDs while Jesse Cooke had a hand in the final two Norse tallies, a 56-yard pass play to Brennan Moat and a 4-yard quarterback keeper. The Norsemen had their best offensive game to date as they rolled up nearly 500 yards in the shutout.

Christian Brooks was then the man of the hour for NM in their 49-6 whipping of Shelby. Brooks scored on runs of 5, 63, and 20 and finished with 217 yards on 16 carries. Brooks also excelled on defense with five tackles and an interception. Mack Young and TJ McKenzie paired up for a couple of TD passes, one covering six yards and the other a 30-yard connection. Chandler Evans chipped in with 111 yards and two touchdowns.

In their next game it was Chandler Edwards who returned to the starring role for NM in a 26-0 shutout of Hart. Edwards rushed for 211 yards and a rushing touchdown as NM moved one win away from clinching a playoff position. Edwards rushing TD was a 54-yard scamper while he also scored on a pass from Mack Young that totaled 32 yards. Alex Wolski tackled a Pirate in the end zone for a safety. Christian Brooks scored the first Norse TD on an eight-yard run while the only points for NM in the second half came on a 34-yard field goal by Dylan Hoffman.

The Norsemen would have to wait another week to claim a playoff berth as Whitehall downed the Norse 25-14. The tone was set on the game’s opening kickoff as Whitehall’s Terrell Harris returned the kick 95 yards. Whitehall was the better team on this October night as they had a dominating 265-21 edge in total offense over NM. Both NM touchdowns were on pass plays from Jesse Cooke to De’Shary Warren, one from 22 yards and the second from 20 yards.

It was a must win scenario for North Muskegon in the final game of the regular season. NM would resume a series against Orchard View that began in 1963, as the last game played between the two teams went back nearly 20 years. NM came through against an Orchard View program that was a much-feared team during the John Shillito era as NM won 36-12. The Norsemen got another big night from Chandler Edwards as he broke loose for five touchdowns, four in the second half as NM pulled away in the final two quarters after trailing 12-7. Edwards finished with 321 total yards, the most yards rushing in a game by a Norsemen in program history. His TD runs were from 33, 57, 45, 5 & 5 yards.

The Norsemen had the misfortune to play a very good Oakridge team as their first-round opponent. Just as in their first meeting Oakridge used their ground attack in defeating the Norse 38-7. Oakridge enjoyed a commanding 421-129 edge in total offense to eliminate the Norsemen. The Norse were limited to but 35 rushing yards and 94 through the air with Jesse Cooke and Mark Young each completing three passes. NM’s only TD came on a shovel pass from Jesse Cooke to De'shary Warren for 30 yards that gave NM a brief 7-0 lead. NM would end their season at 6-4 and would now enjoy a nice run of winning football during the Larry Witham era.

Record Score Interesting Fact

1-0 NM 28, Hesperia 27 Mack Young 2 TD passes, Jesse Cooke 1, Brenden Moat int. TD.

1-1 NM 14, Oakridge 42 Brooks TD runs of 64 & 4 yards and 17 tackles.

2-1 NM 28, Ravenna 7 Edwards blocked punt and 2 long TDs, Brooks 2 TDs.

2-2 NM 7, Montague 48 Edwards 75-yard kickoff return only NM score.

* 1. NM 45, Mason Co 0 Chandler Edwards 170 yards and 3 TDs. NM 500 yards offense.

4-2 NM 49, Shelby 6 Brooks TD runs of 5, 63 & 20 and a defensive interception.

5-2 NM 26, Hart 0 Edwards 211 rushing yards and 2 TDs. Brooks 8-yd TD run.

5-3 NM 14, Whitehall 25 Both NM TDs passes from Cooke to Warren.

6-3 NM 36, Orchard V 12 Edwards school record 321 yards & 5 TDs.

6-4\* NM 7, Oakridge 38 Cooke and Mark Young 3 completions each.

**2018 Coach Larry Witham (5-5 overall, Playoff qualifier, Montague WMC Champ)**

Head coach Larry Witham abandoned his duo quarterback concept in 2018 but instead took advantage of their best talents. Mack Young would take over as the top signal caller and one of his favorite receivers was his co-partner at QB in 2015, Jesse Cooke. Cooke, with his 6’6 frame would receive plenty of aerials in 2018 from Young. Due to their strength of schedule NM would again qualify for the playoffs with a 5-4 record.

You want to talk about efficiency? Chandler Edwards carried the ball only four times in NM’s 41-6 opening game victory over Hesperia, but three of his carries went for six points and a TD! Edwards compiled 140 yards on those four rushes as the Norsemen opened their season 1-0. Edwards first of three TDs went for 13 yards and was set up on a nice punt return from TJ McKenzie. The next time Chandler touched the ball he traversed 65 yards for six points. In the only carry that didn’t go the distance he ripped off a 55-yard dash that was followed on the next play by a Stephen Smith 25-yard run for a score. Edwards would go into the locker room at halftime with three carries for 136 yards and two scores. Edwards didn’t waste any time in the second half as he returned the second half kickoff 70 yards for his third TD. Just a few moments later Edwards would score his fourth TD on a more modest four-yard run. NM tallied its final TD on a one-yard touchdown pass from Mack Young to Jesse Cooke.

Playing against the crème of the crop of the WMC in their next three games, the Norsemen were able to put points on the boards but were unable to slow down their opponents. NM gave up 175 points in their three losses to Oakridge, Ravenna, and Montague before doing a complete 180 on defense by posting three consecutive shutouts. It was de ja vu once again in Oakridge’s 61-27 romp over the Norsemen. The Eagles once again used a dominant running game that the Norsemen were nearly helpless in defending as Oakridge rushed for 492 yards while holding NM to a minus -38. The Norse did all their work in the passing game as Mack Young finished 17-24 for a school record 395 yards and three TDs in the losing cause. The bad news for Young, he was sacked eight times. TJ McKenzie hauled in eight of those completions for 211 yards and two scores. Jesse Cooke snatched three catches for 91 yards and a TD. The Eagles were keying on Norse running back Chandler Edwards and held the senior running back to 24 yards in 11 carries.

The Norse were able to score four touchdowns but were unable to slow down Ravenna in a 53-26 loss. All NM points came in the first half as the Bulldogs forced NM to go to the air. Mack Young had a huge night once again for the Norsemen as he completed 25 of 42 passes for 390 yards and four touchdowns. Jesse Cooke was on the receiving end of seven of Young’s passes with two TDs (6 & 13 yards). The other TD passes from Cook went to De’Shary Warren (36) and TJ Mckenzie for 26. For the second straight week NM was held to negative rushing yards as Ravenna totaled 239 yards while holding NM to minus -9.

The Norsemen next task was to try to stop a Montague juggernaut that would advance all the way to the state championship game. NM was no match with this Montague powerhouse team as they were walloped 62-20. It took little time for the Wildcats to jump out in front 19-0. NM’s TJ McKenzie then returned the kickoff following Montague’s 3rd TD 94 yards for a touchdown, the fourth longest return of a kickoff in NM annals and the 22nd all time since the 1932 season. NM’s other TDs came from the arm of Mack Young who connected with a 28-yarder with McKenzie and a 21 yarder to Chandler Edwards.

After giving up 175 points to their last three opponents, the inconceivable happened. NM than shut out their next three opponents! Was it NM making a drastic improvement on defense, or were their opponents less than stellar? Probably both.

The Norsemen began their three-game shutout streak with a 35-0 win over Mason County Central. John Hayhurst filled in for an injured Mack Young at quarterback and threw for four touchdowns and 161 yards. Ironically Hayhurst only completed 4-of his 6 pass attempts but all four of his completions went the distance. Three of Hayhurst TD passes went to De’Shary Warren. Chandler Edwards had another huge game as he rushed for 151 yards and a touchdown.

The Norsemen would continue to pad their stats with a 49-0 drubbing of Shelby. John Hayhurst continued his job as a suburb ‘relief pitcher’ passing for 244 yards on 8-of-15 attempts. Three of his tosses went for TDs, two to Jesse Cooke for 24 and 35, and one to TJ McKenzie for 71. The Norse had a couple more long six-pointers, a 66-yard punt return by McKenzie and a 92-yard TD run by Cooke late in the fourth quarter. Not to be left out of the fun, Chandler Edwards started the rout with a 35-yard touchdown in the game’s opening minutes. Hayhurst also crossed the Shelby goal line when he scrambled 22 yards for a second half TD.

NM completed their three-game sweep of the bottom feeders in the WMC with a 48-0 pasting of Hart. Mack Young returned to the lineup, and he had another productive passing night with 244 passing yards and three touchdowns to three different receivers. Young connected with TJ McKenzie for 23, Chandler Edwards for 44 and his understudy at QB, John Hayhurst for 16. De’Shary Warren returned an interception 41 yards for yet another NM TD, while John Smith closed out the shutout with a short one-yard run.

An opportunistic Whitehall team toppled the Norse 47-21. The Vikings stunned the Norse after a pair of TD passes from Mack Young to Jesse Cooke tied the game at 14-14. On the next kickoff Whitehall’s Terrell Harris returned the Norse kick 85 yards for a TD and then they really hurt the Norse with a TD just 16 seconds before halftime to go into the second half with all the momentum. TJ McKenzie then gave NM a brief hope when he returned his second TD of the season 90 yards for the final NM TD. Whitehall then scored a couple of quick TDs to salt the win away and make NM’s next game with Orchard View a must win game to have any hopes of advancing to the postseason MHSAA playoffs.

For the second straight year NM would close their regular season against Orchard View needing a victory to have any hopes of playing another week. Again, NM came through with a 47-22 victory and would find out on Sunday that with their strength of schedule they would advance to the playoffs. The Norse did their damage both passing and running the football. Chandler Evans ran for four touchdowns on long runs of 33 and 18, as well as a pair of shorter runs in leading Norse rushers with 161 yards. Mack Young connected with TJ Mckenzie on two long pass plays, one for 28 and another that went for 94 yards, the longest TD pass play in NM history. De’Shary Warren ended the Norse scoring with a pick six late in the game.

With a 5-4 record NM had to go on the road and their opponent was an undefeated Lake City team with a 9-0 record. The difference in the game happened to be the two point safety by Lake City early in the game. That safety was all important as the final score was 30-28. Lake City moved to a 16-0 lead before Norse speedster TJ McKenzie revved up his explosiveness. McKenzie took the kickoff after a Lake City score and raced 90 yards for a TD. Later in the game McKenzie would again follow a Lake City TD with an 85-yard kickoff return. It was the only time in NM history where a Norsemen returned two kickoffs for a TD in a game. McKenzie would total four kickoff return TDs on the season, another NM best. McKenzie would also be on the receiving end of a Mack Young TD pass good for 13 yards. Young earlier connected with De’Shary Warren for 23 yards and a TD. The 2-point conversion brought NM to within 1 point at 16-15.

The Norsemen had plenty of offensive firepower in 2018. Five players on the offensive side of the ball would be college bound the following Fall. Quarterback Mack Young, wide receiver TJ McKenzie and tight end Jesse Cooke would suit up for Hope. Chandler Edwards would don a Wayne State uniform while wide receiver De’Shary Warren was headed for Alma College.

Record Score Interesting Fact

1. NM 41, Hesperia 6 Chandler Edwards 4 TDS & 140 yards.

1-1 NM 27, Oakridge 61 Mack Young school record 395 passing. TJ McKenzie 211 rec. yds.

1-2 NM 26, Ravenna 53 Young 4 TDs passes and 390 yards.

1-3 NM 20, Montague 62 McKenzie 94 yd Koff ret TD.

2-3 NM 35, Mason Co 0 John Hayhurst 4 TD passes, 3 to De’Shary Warren. Edwards TD.

2-4 NM 49, Shelby 0 Hayhurst 4 TD s, Cooke 2 TDs, one a 92-yd run. McKenzie 2 TDs.

3-4 NM 48, Hart 0 Young 3 TD passes, Warren 41 interception return for TD.

4-4 NM 21, Whitehall 47 Young 19-43 245 & 2 TDS.McKenszie 90 yd KOff YD.

5-4 NM 47, Orchard V 22 Young to Cooke record 94 yd TD pass. Edwards 4 TDs.

5-5\* NM 28, Lake City 30 McKenzie two kickoff returns for TD, 90 & 85.

**2019 Coach Larry Witham (5-5 overall, Playoff qualifier, Oakridge WMC Champ)**

Always optimistic, head coach Larry Witham would have high hopes that his 2019 Norsemen would have a winning season and make the playoffs once again.

Senior John Hayhurst, who filled in more than admirably during a couple of games the previous season when Mack Young was injured, would now be the quarterback in 2019. Four of his five starters who created some big holes for NM backs would return, including 6’7 240 Noah Stewart who would eventually play for the University of Michigan’s 2023-24 National Champions. Witham was hoping with several players returning on defense that they would solve many of their defensive woes from the previous season when in their four conference losses they allowed 223 points. As always, NM would be the smallest school in enrollment in the WMC. NM will begin the season without any co-op players from West Michigan Christian which places them at a Class D level.

NM showed they could once again put points on the board as seven different players scored touchdowns, including two punt returns for TDs. Amongst those who scored in NM’s 56-12 thumping of Hesperia included Stephan Smith, who rushed for 93 yards. John Hayhurst threw for 60 yards and a touchdown and ran in for a score as well. Collins Schotts rushed for 56 yards and two touchdowns, including once on a punt return as NM had a most successful season opener.

Instead of an offensive show as anticipated when NM and Ravenna squared off in game two on the season, it was a defensive battle with Ravenna nipping the Norsemen 14-13. After a scoreless first period where NM controlled the ball for all but three offensive plays, NM scored on the 2nd play of the 2nd quarter with Collin Schotts scoring on a six-yard run to give NM a 7-0 lead. Ravenna battled back to score with 1:29 to play in the first half and then went for two points. The made two-pointer proved to be essential in the outcome of this game as it then forced NM to go for two points following Schotts short TD run early in the fourth quarter. A two-point conversion catch was ruled incomplete when the Norse receiver caught the ball out of bounds. Ravenna scored with 6:34 left to go up 14-13 and then held off the Norse for the victory. John Hayhurst was 8-for-16 passing for 126 yards.

NM dropped their 17th game in their last 18 clashes with Montague 28-24 when the Wildcats rallied in the final quarter to overtake the Norsemen. NM took an early 10-0 lead on a John Hayhurst run from two yards out and a 29-yard field goal by Gabe Rahrig. After Montague cut the lead to 10-7 Collin Schotts broke loose for a 55-yard TD with just 43 second left in the first half to give NM a 17-7 lead. However, on the ensuing kickoff Dylan Everett returned the kickoff 87 yards to the house to flip the momentum as Montague pulled within 17-14 at the half.

Both teams exchanged TDs in the second half with NM’s touchdown a 1-yard run by Hayhurst. Montague scored with five minutes left to end the scoring.

NM then whipped Shelby 56-0 to even their season record at 2-2. The Norse took full advantage of Shelby fumbles to take an overwhelming 49-0 lead at halftime. Running back Stephen Smith had a huge second quarter for NM by rushing for three touchdowns on runs of 55, 43 and two yards. John Hayhurst threw for a couple of TD passes in the first quarter, a 41-yard strike to Eric Rypstra and a nine-yard score to Joe Tarrant. Tarrant also had a short 1-yard TD and was a force on defense with two interceptions. Baseball star Alec Cutter added the other TD on a fumble return shortly before halftime.

NM again made short work of both of their Oceana County WMC foes with yet another shutout in a 49-0 thumping of Hart. It was their 7th straight conquest of the Pirates, and their 13th win in their last 15 meetings. Stephan Smith scored three of NM’s tallies on runs of 6, 27 and 2 yards. NM also got TD runs from Collins Shotts (33 and 38 yards) and Joe Tarrant raced 62 for yet another NM tally. The other NM score came on a John Hayhurst pass of 15-yards to Brian Pannucci as NM improved to 3-2 on the season.

After giving up a near record total points in 2018 NM received a monstrous game from their defense in a 17-7 win over Whitehall. The win snapped a five-game losing streak to the Vikings. John Hayhurst had a strong game for the victors throwing for 204 yards that included a three-yard TD pass to Eric Rypstra while also rushing for NM’s finals score. Gabe Rahrig kicked a 20-yard field goal to give NM some breathing room against the Vikings. Future U-M gridder Noah Stewart led the strong NM defense with seven tackles and a sack.

Division 7 NM was no match for the top Division 5 ranked team in the state in the Oakridge Eagles. Oakridge brought the Norse back to reality with a convincing 34-7 victory over NM, their 14th straight win over the Norse since NM’s 21-14 upset playoff victory over the Eagles in 2006. Oakridge outgained the Norse 248 to 17 in the first half and led 22-0 at the break. “We’ve got to bounce back, we’ve still got playoff aspirations ahead of us, that’s for sure,” said NM head coach Larry Witham following the game. “We know were a good football team.” NM’s only score against the WMC champs was a 2-yard run from Stephen Smith. Brenden Moat shined as both a receiver and a punter for NM. Moat caught 3 passes from quarterback John Hayhurst for 76 yards and punted four times for an average of 49 yards per punt.

NM was surely a good football team in their ‘must’ 54-16 win over Mason County to give them five wins and visions of a playoff berth. After a slow start NM poured on the gas pedal to score 51 points in the final three periods in an easy win over the Spartans. John Hayhurst led the Norse with 184 yards passing and two touchdowns, while adding two more touchdowns on the ground. Joe Tarrant rushed for 101 yards that included a 66-yard TD dash. Stephan Smith had a 41-yard scoring run and chipped in with 94 rushing yards. Hayhurst’s TD pass was to Smith for six yards. Dale Towner scampered in from 43 yards to cap the Norse scoring.

The Norse would again go into their final game with Orchard View needing a win to get an automatic berth in the playoffs. But this wasn’t the 3-6 or 2-7 OV team NM faced in the previous two years. This was an 8-0 Orchard View team playing their best brand of football in 14 years. OV would have a perfect 9-0 season following a 33-20 win over the Norsemen. NM was generous in the first half with three turnovers that resulted in Cardinal points put on the board. OV led 24-0 before NM could get it together and score on a QB sneak by John Hayhurst shortly before half. NM went to their passing game to move the ball against the Cardinals and narrowed the gap on the final play of the third quarter on a 4-yard keeper from Hayhurst. OV countered with a TD and a 2-point conversion to put the game out of reach. NM scored the game’s final touchdown on a 48-yard completion to Brenden Moat. Moat had a tremendous game in the losing cause as he caught 12 passes for 173 yards.

When the playoff field was announced on TV the following day, despite the loss to undefeated Orchard View, NM had qualified in Division 7. The bad news, for the second straight week they would be facing another undefeated team in Pewamo-Westphalia. This was a P-W team so loaded on defense that they had only given up three touchdowns the entire season. Not only was P-W’s defense sharp, but likewise for their offense as they put up 35 points in a 35-0 victory over NM.

One of the highlights of the past NM season was the kicking of Gabe Rahrig. The school record holder in made field goals in 2018 as a sophomore, Rahrig hit three of four field goals in 2019 and was a perfect 37-for-37 on extra point attempts.

Record Score Interesting Fact

1-0 NM 56, Hesperia 12 Seven players score TDs for NM.

1-1 NM 13, Ravenna 14 Collin Schotts 2 TDs, Ravenna wins on made 2-point conversion.

1-2 NM 24, Montague 28 John Hayhhurst 2 short TDs, Shott 6-yd TD.

2-2 NM 56, Shelby 0 Stephan Smith 3 TDs, Joe Tarrant 2, Hurst 2 YD passes for TDs.

3-2 NM 49, Hart 0 Smith 3 TDs, Schotts 2, and Tarrant 1. Pannucci 15 yd TD pass.

4-2 NM 17, Whitehall 7 Hayhurst 204 passing yards, 15 TD pass to Eric Rypstra.

4-3 NM 7, Oakridge 34 Smith 2-yd TD. Brenden Moat 3 receptions &49 avg. per reception

5-3 NM 54, Mason Co 16 Hayhurst 2 TDs, 1 passing, 2 rushing. Dale Towner 43 yd TD.

5-4 NM 20, Orchard V 32 Moat 12 catches for 173 yds & TD. Hayhurst 2 TDs.

5-5\*NM 0, Pewamo-West.35 NM loses to state finalist Pewamo-Westphalia.

**2020 Coach Larry Witham (4-4 overall, Playoff qualifier, Montague WMC Champ)**

The 2020 football season was without question the most bizarre, not only for North Muskegon, but for the entire State of Michigan and much of the USA. Covid 19 had emerged in March and cancelled late winter and all spring sports for much of the nation. The state of Michigan was one of the last states to allow high schools sports to resume as Governor Gretchen Whitmer’s edict forced cancellation of the first three games of the football season. Whitmer initially struck a dagger in all Michigan High School players when she announced in August that there would be no football played in 2020. Fortunately, she changed her tune and permitted football to resume in Mid-September but playing a limited six game schedule. When play was resumed fan participation was limited as only a handful of fans, mostly parents were in attendance. It was so disconcerting in Michigan that the final games of the playoffs were played in January.

With all fans in the stands wearing masks and widely spaced apart, NM opened their season in mid-September with a 42-0 shutout of Shelby. Brennan Pannucci was the 2020 NM quarterback, and he connected early in the contest with Amarion Dickerson for a 25-yard TD. Following a Collin Schotts 2-yard TD, Pannucci connected again for six points, this time a 10-yard flip to Joe Dupplissis. NM took a 21-0 lead at halftime and didn’t waste any time to move out in front 28-0 as Dickerson returned the second half kickoff 88 yards. Schotts scored his second TD in the second half on a 15-yard run while Nick Dana capped the Norse romp with a 3-yard TD. Taking up right where left off last season, Gabe Rahrig, who was 37-for-37 last year, was 6 for 6 in the opener with Shelby.

NM continued their complete domination over Hart with a 41-16 victory to go 2-0 to start the season. The big news was that Gabe Rahrig finally missed an extra point after making well over 40 straight over the last two seasons. Collin Schotts scored a pair of 5-yard rushing TDs for NM. Pannucci connected with Amarion Dickerson with a 12-yard TD pass and Joe Duplissis and Denny Belmonte also scored on short TD runs. Pannucci finished with 111 yards passing and added a one-yard TD run.

A Whitehall team that returned nearly all their starters from 2019 were too much for NM as Whitehall moved to 3-0 with a 41-3 win. The only NM score was in the second period. Amarion Dickerson had a long kickoff return before he was finally stopped at the Whitehall 23-yard line. NM couldn’t move the chains and then had to settle for a 30-yard field goal by Gabe Rahrig. That made the score 14-3 and it was all Whitehall the rest of the contest. The Norse rushing offense was completely stymied by Whitehall as the final stats showed NM with negative 38 yards.

Oakridge came up with several long yardage TDs to humble the Norsemen 42-0. Collin Schotts led the Norse with 73 yards on 15 carries as NM dropped to 2-2 on the season. Fortunately for NM, Mason County Central is their next opponent, an opponent who has fared poorly over the years against the Blue & Gold.

NM had no trouble once again with Mason County Central as NM scored early and often to take a 28-0 lead at halftime in their 42-0 win over MCC. Brennen Pannucci had three short TD runs to lead the Norse. All six NM touchdowns were on the ground as Alec Cutter, Collin Schotts and Jackson Oliphant all crossed the Spartans goal line. Pannucci did his best Tim Tebow impersonation as the big Norse quarterback ran for 154 yards to improve NM’s record to 3-2 with one game remaining in the regular season against an undefeated Montague team.

And how good was Montague in 2020? The Wildcats were good enough to not only defeat NM 41-13, but they absolutely crushed all their opponents in the playoffs to win the state championship. After all playoff games were halted after November 13th, Montague had to wait until January 8th before playing a regional championship game against Montrose. Their final 3 wins in January were 41-16 against Montrose, 49-14 against Graying to reach the finals and then they were rewarded with a state finals game in the indoor comforts of Ford Field where they destroyed Clinton 40-14. When one looks back in retrospect NM had no reason to feel ashamed to lose 41-13 to a Montague team that would be playing its final season under their coach Pat Collins. Brennen Panucci took part in both of NM’s touchdowns, one on a 12-yard TD pass and the second on a one-yard run.

With a six-game regular season schedule the MHSAA in this extraordinary 2020 season did the same for football as they have done every year for basketball, let every team advance to the playoffs. NM’s first opponent was Grand Rapids North Pointe Christian. NM defeated the furniture city team 26-0. Gabe Rahrig gave NM all the points they would need when he started NM off on the right foot with a 31-yard field goal. Brennen Pannucci then tossed touchdown strikes to Amarion Dickerson, the first went for 35 yards and the second was good from 47 yards out to give NM a 17-0 lead at halftime. A blocked punt resulted in a safety while Collin Schotts dived in from one yard out to make the final score read NM 26, North Pointe Christian 0.

Next up in the playoffs NM had to travel to Pewamo-Westphalia to play the top ranked team in the state. After losing to the Pirates 35-0 the previous year, NM was given little chance of earning the W. Your author was taking full advantage of today’s magic world of technology as I was sitting on the edge of my chair in faraway, but sunny and warm Ponte Vedra, Florida watching this thriller. The underdog Norse jumped out to a 10-6 at half and enjoyed a 17-12 lead heading into the final quarter. Gabe Rahrig got NM started with a 34-yard field goal and Brennen Panucci followed with a 30-yard TD pass to give NM a quick 10-0 lead. After a P-W touchdown NM answered with a Pannucci TD pass of 14 yards to Collin Schotts. P-W rallied to take a 18-17 lead, but NM fought back. The Norsemen moved to the Pewamo-Westphalia 20-yard line late in the game and were faced with a 4th down with nine yards to go. Rather than go for the field goal to take the lead and perhaps the win, NM decided to attempt a pass rather than risk a kick into the teeth of a strong wind. As the home crowd, who were no longer obeying the unwritten rule of creating space between their seats, the pass for a first down, and perhaps a TD, fell incomplete in the end zone. NM’s Covid 19 season had come to an end. Ironically, despite winning the game, the season was also over for the Pirates. Covid had spiked in the rural area, and the Pirates had to forfeit their next game to Ithaca. Pewamo-Westphalia would bounce back however and win the Division 7 state title in 2021.

Record Score Interesting Fact

1-0 NM 42, Shelby 0 Amarion Dickerson 88 yd. KO TD. Brennan Pannucci 2 TD passes.

2-0 NM 41, Hart 16 Colllin Schotts 2 TDs, Denny Belmonte, Joe Duplissis, Panunucci TD.

2-1 NM 3, Whitehall 41 Gabe Rahrig 30-yard field goal only NM score.

2-2 NM 0, Oakridge 42 Collin Schotts 73 rushing yards on 15 carries.

3-2 NM 42, Mason Co 0 Pannucci 3 TDs, Schotts, Alec Cutler & Jackson Oliphant TDs.

3-3 NM 13, Montague 41 Pannuccis passing TD and rushing TD as NM loses to state champs.

4-3\*NM 26, N.Pointe Ch. 0 Rahrig FG, Pannucci 2 TD passes to Dickerson, Schotts 1-yard run.

4-4\*NM 17, P-W 18 Pannucci 2 TD passes, 35 & 47 to Dickerson. Rahrig 31 yd fg.

**2021 Coach Larry Witham (4-6 overall, Playoff qual., Montague- Oakridge WMC Champ)**

The Norse would begin the year with a promising freshman signal caller at quarterback in James Young. The first opponent for NM to begin the season was perennial power Muskegon Catholic Central, the first meeting between the two locals in football since the 2011 season. MCC would win the fifth game in the series 27-13 but Young would make his presence known early as he rifled a 31-yard TD pass to Bo Nedeau. With Gabe Rahrig no longer kicking for the Norse, the extra point failed. MCC would take the lead at 7-6 before NM would retake the lead on a 29-yard touchdown pass from Young to Landon Christensen. It would be the last time NM would cross the Crusader’s goal line against MCC in 2021 but the duo of Young to Christensen would have their day in the sun in 2023.

Montague then dropped NM to an 0-2 record to start the 2021 season. It would mark the 5th straight win for the Cats against the Norse and their 19th win in their last 20 meetings. Despite the recent surge by Montague NM still leads overall after 89 games had been played in this long series with 45 wins to Montague 41 victories. Three of the games from yesteryear ended in a tie game. Montague shut out the Norse 35-0 with freshman James Young only earning 75 yards on 28 of his pass attempts. Denny Belmonte was the leading rusher for the Norse in this game with 51 yards on 16 rushes.

After going 48 minutes scoreless the previous week against Montague, it took NM only 8 seconds to score their first of many touchdowns in their 67-0 rout of hapless Shelby. James Young on the first play from the line of scrimmage connected with Matt Colbert for 49 yards. By the time 12 minutes had gone by to signify the end of the first quarter the Norse had a 34-0 lead. Five different backs scored on the night against Shelby. Sophomore Ben Meyers tallied two TDs as did Nick Dana. James Young threw for 131 yards on six of seven passing with four of his six completions going for touchdowns. NM had more than 500 total yards on offense with 350 of those on the ground.

NM would then move to .500 on the season with a 37-0 victory over Hart. So dominant has NM been against Hart and Shelby that their overall record for the last six season shows NM outscoring the two Oceana County neighbors 562-13!

NM dominated the Pirates, but NM head coach Larry Witham said there is light at the end of the tunnel for the Pirates. “We knew they were a much-improved club, and we prepared as such,” added Witham following the game. NM began the game with three first quarter touchdowns and rolled into halftime with a 28-0 lead after a second quarter tally. James Young threw three TD passes, two to Matt Colbert and another to Nick Dana. Denny Belmonte had a rushing touchdown for the Norse. NM added another touchdown on a fumble recovery in the end zone.

Whitehall would post a 33-0 shutout over NM in what would prove to be the last game played between the two teams after the two schools had met in 59 previous meetings. With the WMC expanding to add six more schools beginning the next school year, the two long-time rivals would not be on each other’s schedule as of the 2024 season. Even though Whitehall shut out the Norse, NM still leads in the series that began back in 1945 with 31 wins to Whitehall’s 28. Whitehall posted their third straight shutout as they held NM to only 70 total yards and six first downs. With minus rushing yards for the game NM’s best offense was the 88 yards accrued by James Young on 13-of-23 passes.

After a poor performance against Whitehall, it looked like NM would have little chance against a once beaten Oakridge team. NM gave the Eagles a battle but fell just short in a 32-27 loss to the Eagles. NM almost pulled off the upset when late in the game and NM at the Eagle’s 15-yard line, a James Young pass in the end zone was intercepted by Corey Vanderputte to seal the deal for Oakridge. It was a back-and-forth game for much of the contest. NM took the lead at 7-6 on the first of 3 TD passes from James Young, a 37-yard toss to Brandon Rypstra. After Oakridge took the lead Denny Belmonte’s two-yard run switched the lead back to the Norse. Again, it was back and forth with Oakridge first scoring, but NM again answered on a Young to Carson Moat strike for 26 yards. In a game that resembled a tennis match NM again followed an Eagle score with Young’s third TD pass of 62 yards to Matt Colbert giving NM a 27-26 lead heading into the fourth quarter. A Vanderputte TD, his fourth of the game gave the lead to Oakridge at 11:43 of the fourth quarter, a lead that would stand until the clock ran out.

NM then lost more than just a game in their 17-6 loss to Ravenna; they also lost their quarterback. James Young was injured early in the contest with a broken clavicle that would sideline him for the rest of the season. Young was replaced by their ace running back Denny Belmonte at QB. Belmonte did run for a first half score but that would be all the scoring NM could muster against a strong Ravenna defense. Belmonte in a relief role would complete 12 of his 21 passes for 73 yards, with Matt Colbert catching eight of Belmonte’s passes for 57 yards.

Quarterback woes continued for NM as second-string quarterback, and first team running back Denny Belmonte separated his shoulder early in the game. NM was now needing another QB. In stepped sophomore Ben Meyers and he quickly showed his all-around athletic ability by leading NM to a 35-0 victory over Mason County Central. One of the best baseball players in NM history, Meyers would run for a TD and pass for three more in his reserve role. Two of his TD passes went to WMC first team All-Conference end Matt Colbert on 50- and 15-yard strikes, the third was a 22-yarder to Kyle Huff. Colbert caught another TD pass, but this was thrown by the Mason County quarterback that Colbert returned for a touchdown. Meyers would finish with 7-of-11 passing for 147 yards. Colbert had six receptions for 132 yards as NM improved to 3-5 with one regular season game remaining.

NM would win four games on the season, two against Oceana County Schools and two against Mason County squads after NM ended their regular season with a 25-0 victory over Ludington. It was the first meeting between the two schools in 17 years and with the win NM has now won 12 of the 20 games played between the two schools since their first meeting back in 1946. Third string quarterback Ben Meyers again put his athletic ability on display against the Orioles by rushing for three touchdowns on a pair of six-yard runs and a 45-yard burst. Meyers would rush for 110-yards from his quarterback position while Nick Dana added 57 yards to the Norse offensive total. Bo Nedeau added the fourth NM TD on a short two-yard run.

The rules for advancing to the playoffs received an additional tweak before the start of the 2021 season with the primary emphasis being on the strength of schedule for each team. With that edict in place NM was able to advance into the playoffs, but without two of their most important players, James Young and Denny Belmonte. NM was matched up for the second time of the season with the Ravenna Bulldogs and were nipped by Ravenna 7-6. It would seem inconceivable at the time, but this game was decided in the first minute of the 48 minutes played in the game. Ravenna’s Thomas McCullough ran 48 yards for a touchdown and Hunter Hogan’s made extra point gave Ravenna a 7-0 lead with just over a minute played. With 1:04 left in the game NM capped a long drive to score on a six-yard slant pass from Ben Meyers to Landon Christensen to make the score 7-6. It was then decision time for head coach Larry Witham who was coaching the game from the press box recuperating from a recent heart surgery. After a timeout and a huddle NM decided to roll the dice and go for the win. The two-point conversion failed, and the Bulldogs hung on for the win.

With the 2021 NM team loaded with talented underclassmen, the future looked good for NM football, and the Norsemen of the next two seasons would more than equal those promising expectations.

Record Score Interesting Fact

0-1 NM 13, Musk CC 27 Young 2 TD passes,32 yd to Bo Nedeau & 29 to Landon Christensen.

0-2 NM 0, Montague 35 Montague wins their 19th of the last 20 games between the teams.

1-2 NM 67, Shelby 0 James Young 4 TD passes, Ben Meyers & Nick Dana 2 TDs.

2-2 NM 37, Hart 0 Young 3 TD passes, Matt Colbert 2 TDs, Belmonte & Dana 1.

2-3 NM 0, Whitehall 33 NM minus yards rushing, Young 88 yards passing.

2-4 NM 27, Oakridge 32 Young 3 TD passes, Belmonte 2-yd TD and 17 tackles.

* 1. NM 6, Ravenna 17 Young injured, Belmonte at QB 12-21 passing and rushing TD.

3-4 NM 35, Mason Co 0 Ben Meyers 4 TDs, 3 passing 1 rushing. Colbert 3 TDs.

4-5 NM 25, Ludington 0 Meyers 110 yd rushing & 3 TDs, Bo Nedeau TD.

4-6\* NM 6, Ravenna 7 Meyers to Christensen 6 yd TD pass. 2-pointer for win fails.

**2022 Coach Larry Witham 8-2 overall, Playoff qualifier, NM Rivers WMC Champs**

After 90 years without any drastic changes, the administrators of the West Michigan Conference went overboard by admitting six new schools into perhaps the most stable conference in the State of Michigan. With the addition of Hesperia, Holton, Orchard View, Manistee, Ludington and Fremont, the league was divided into two separate divisions called the Rivers and the Lakes divisions. NM, with their small enrollment would be paired in the Rivers division that was composed of Hesperia, Holton, Shelby, Mason County Central, NM, and Ravenna. Only Ravenna had a proven football program which opened the door for NM to easily win their division. Not on the 2022 schedule were former rivals Oakridge and Whitehall. NM had played Oakridge for 55 consecutive years totaling 59 games. Likewise, NM had faced Whitehall 59 times in their program’s history, but neither would be on NM’s 2022 schedule. With those two schools off their schedule, it certainly improved NM chances to improve on their won-loss record and that would prove true in 2022.

NM would open their season at a neutral site against perennial power Muskegon Catholic. It would be NM’s first game played at historic Hackley Stadium in 73 years, a 13-7 victory over Muskegon St. Mary’s in 1949 with your author amongst those in attendance. MCC spoiled NM’s vision of a perfect regular season sweep with a come from behind 24-22 victory over the Norsemen. Sophomore slinger James Young started the scoring with a 57-yard bomb to Carson Moat. MCC battled back to score but missed the extra point to keep the score at 7--6 NM. Young, who was 25 of 35 on the afternoon (the game started at 4:00 PM) for 278 yards and two TDs, completed a second TD toss of 20-yards to Ben Meyers to make it 14-6. MCC scored later in the half to make the scoreboard at Hackley Stadium show NM 14-MCC 12. NM extended their lead to 22-12 on a Young 2-yard run but the rest of the game belonged to the Crusaders. MCC’s David Hill raced 68 yards for a TD, and the Crusaders made it all way back to stun the Norse on a short one-yard TD run.

A once proud Orchard View team who were dominant during the John Shillito era, were now just a shell of themselves in 2022 as NM crushed OV 54-0. Sophomore QB James Young was again on target as he completed 15 of 23 passes for five touchdowns, second only to Rick Jones’ six TD passes in 1970. Fellow sophomore TJ Byard caught four passes for 89 yards and two touchdowns. Ben Meyers(twice) and Carsen Moat also were on the receiving end of Young’s TD aerials. Meyers also ran for a TD while August Gerardi came off the bench to score twice to complete the scoring.

NM jumped out to a 34-0 halftime lead in a 41-6 win over Mason County Central at Fred Jacks Field. Denny Belmonte had a huge game for NM by rushing for 134 yards in but 10 carries with 2 TDs to lead the Norse attack. James Young connected with TJ Byard from 7-yards out to get the Norse offense rolling. The Young to Byard combo teamed up from 55-yards to give NM a 12-0 lead with two minutes left in the opening period. By the time the clock ran out at the end of the second quarter NM was in command 34-0. Belmonte caught a pass from Young from 13 yards for a TD, followed by a Belmonte 15-yard run and Young’s fourth TD pass of the opening half, a 54-yard catch and run to Alex Newville. Belmonte’s 65-yard TD run in the second half closed out the Norse scoring.

Once again NM scored 34 points in the opening half to earn a convincing 50-0 shutout of Hesperia. James Young had another monster game for the Norse, throwing for 311 yards and five touchdowns. TJ Byard was again Young’s favorite target as the sophomore wideout caught three passes for 136 yards and two TDs. Carson Moat hauled in a pair of TD passes with Talon Thompson grabbing two of Young’s pin-point passes, the longest 54 yards good for a TD. Sam Gallo forced a fumble that Drew Bartos returned for a TD while the lone rushing touchdown during the game was a dash of 24 yards by Denny Belmonte. Jake Erne got in on the fun with a 42-yard field goal, the second longest in NM history.

NM again made short work of an improving Hart team to post a 55-14 win over the Pirates. NM piled up a quick 21 first quarter points as NM had a nice passing and running balance. James Young was near perfect by completing 17-of-19 passes for 275 yards and two touchdowns. Young also rushed for a touchdown while Denny Belmonte ran for three TDs. On the receiving end of Youngs TD passes were TJ Byard and Carson Moat. Freshman Bryce Colbert saw action late and he tossed his first TD pass as a Norsemen. August Geradi also visited the Hart end zone with a TD. The Norse were now 4-1 on the season but just ahead was a Montague team NM hadn’t beaten in five years and only once in the last 20 years.

At long last NM was able to defeat their longest rival and recent nemesis Montague 27-7. James Young threw for 263 yards on 24-of-31 passing and one touchdown in the rare win in the 90th meeting between the two schools. NM had 379 total yards to the Wildcat’s 278 to improve their record to 5-1 on the season. Young got the scoring started with a 5-yard run that was followed by a Denny Belmonte dash from eight yards out as NM jumped out to a 14-0 first quarter lead. Montague narrowed the gap to 14-7 at halftime but NM countered with two third quarter touchdowns, the first on a 12-yard pass play to TJ Byard, the second on a 10-yard run by Ben Meyers. NM coach Witham lauded great praise on his defense following the victory. “Great team victory against a very formidable opponent in Montague,” said Witham, “Our defense really set the tone, though in the second half,” added Witham. Denny Belmonte and Sam Gallo led the stout NM defense with seven tackle each.

Fred Jacks Fields was near capacity when the Ravenna Bulldogs came to North Muskegon for game seven on the season. I was fortunate to watch the game with the GOAT in Norsemen football, Stan Guy and my classmate and dear friend for many years Dale Swanson, a former star NM player from the 1950s. I was honored to be a guest on my old radio station at halftime with my good friend Tom Kendra. It was a beautiful night for football and yours truly and the thousands gathered were treated to an entertaining game. NM won the game 28-7 but perhaps overlooked in the game was an injury to Denny Belmonte on just the second play of the game. Head coach Larry Witham was hopeful that Belmonte would be OK “because he is the heart and soul of this team,’ said the concerned coach following the game. Unfortunately, Belmonte was not OK and the two-way standout for the Norsemen had his season come to an end. The versatile Ben Meyers stepped up to become the primary running back for NM and it was no surprise that Ben performed well. Early in the contest the NM defense came through as Kyle Huff forced a fumble that was scooped up by Brandon Rypstra who took the pigskin 70 yards for the game’s first score. There was no further scoring until just seconds before halftime when James Young connected with TJ Byard for a 34-yard TD pass. The combo of Young to Byard then teamed up for a 31-yard TD in the third quarter. A long 80-yard catch and run gave the Bulldogs some life as they cut the lead down to 21-7 but Young’s third TD pass of the game, a six-yard pass to tight end Kyle Huff put the game on ice for the Norse.

North Muskegon as of this writing (2024) has played 816 games, but only one time did NM get credited for a win due to a forfeit. NM was scheduled to play Holton in game eight of the 2023 season, but Holton had to forfeit because they couldn’t field enough healthy players to face the Norse. I’m curious if the administrators who allowed Holton to compete in the WMC were now having second thoughts.

Holton wasn’t the only team facing hard times in 2022. As recent as 2013 Shelby was the WMC champ but the talent has gone dry in recent seasons. NM cruised to an easy 42-6 win to give NM a WMC title in the newly created, but much weaker Rivers, division. It had been more than 20 years (1991) since NM could claim a WMC title in football. James Young compiled 197 passing yards that included three TD passes, one each to TJ Byard, Drew Bartos, and Landon Christensen. Young also ran for a 1-yard score while Ben Meyers ran for TDs from six and seven yards.

With the win over Shelby NM had won their first WMC title since they tied in 1991 and the first outright title since 1986. Ravenna was second in the Rivers Division with one loss in the division – to North Muskegon. Ravenna will make amends for that defeat with a stunning 10-7 upset victory in the first game of the MHSAA playoffs. After coughing up the football five times in their first meeting with NM, the Bulldogs had zero turnovers in the all-important playoff game. NM had no answer for Ravenna’s Hunter Hogan. In today’s day & age a three-sport star is rare, but Hogan played five sports in his high school career at Ravenna, winning an unheard of 15 varsity letters, two more than NM’s all time letter winner Tom Arntz from 1951-54. Hogan never left the field in this game as he rushed for 123 yards and a touchdown and completed 6-of-12 passes for 90 more yards while playing stellar defense and special team play. Hogan’s 23-yard field goal with 1:08 remaining in the first half proved to be the difference in the game. Ravenna’s secondary held NM’s James Young to his season low in passing with 9 of his caught 18 passes totaling but 101 yards. NM’s only score was on a 12-yard run by Ben Meyers in the second quarter.

Record Score Interesting Fact

0-1 NM 22, Musk CC 24 James Young 278 yds pass & 2 TDs, Young also a TD run.

1-1 NM 55, Orchard V 0 Young 5 TD pass, 2 each to TJ Byard & Ben Meyers, Carsen Moat 1.

2-1 NM 41, Mason Co 6 Young 4 TD pass, 2 to Byard, Belmonte 134 yds & 2 TDs.

3-1 NM 50, Hesperia 0 Young 5 TD passes and 311 yds, Byard & Moat 2 TDs, Thompson 1

4-1 NM 55, Hart 14 Belmonte 3 TDs, Young 3 TD, 2 passing &275 yards.

5-1 NM 27, Montague 7 Young 263 yards pass, rush TD, Young -Byard TD, Belmonte. Meyers TD.

6–1 NM 28, Ravenna 7 Brandon Rypstra 70 yd fum. Ret. For TD, Young 3 TD passes.

7-1 NM 2, Holton 0 F Holton forfeits, only forfeit win in NM history.

8-1 NM 42, Shelby 6 Young 3 TD passes & 1 rushing, Meyers TD runs of 6 & 7 yds.

8-2\*NM 7, Ravenna 10 Meyers 12-yard TD only NM points in upset by Ravenna.

**2023 Coach Larry Witham 12-1 overall, Playoff qualifier, NM Rivers WMC Champs**

The Norse began their 2023 season against Pewamo Westphalia, a perennial power in football. The visiting Pirates invaded North Muskegon having won three Division 7 state championships since 2016. Two of their playoff victims during their run were playoff victories over the Norsemen. NM needed a 23-yard field goal from Junior Owen Booth with just five seconds left to earn their first victory over the Pirates. The Norse began the contest on a promising note with a methodical 15-play scoring drive that was culminated on a 3-yard TD pass from James Young to Ben Meyers. The visiting Pirates proved they would be no pushover as they scored with four minutes left in the second quarter, but their extra point try from placement was wide to make the score NM 7 PW 6 at the halftime break. The Norse then took the lead in the fourth quarter on a 37-yard TD pass from Young to Landon Christensen. Booth’s kick gave NM a 14-6 lead, but PW were not to be denied as they scored with less than two minutes remaining and then converted on a two-point conversion to knot the game at 14-14. Alec Newville returned the ensuing kickoff to the PW 45-yard line to give NM excellent field position. Young connected with TJ Byard on a 28-yard pass play to the 17. Young then scrambled for nine and five yards to set up Booth’s game-winner.

In game two the Norse atoned for a heartbreaking 24-22 loss to Muskegon Catholic the previous season by romping to a convincing 41-21 victory. The Norse were in command the entire game and at one point enjoyed a 35-7 lead over the host Crusaders in the second half. Ben Meyers began the Norse scoring parade with a one-yard TD score. From that point on James Young and Landon Christensen put on a record-breaking show. Young hit Christensen on four TD passes good for 260 yards, including a 78-yard TD strike for the Norsemen’s final score. Young also connected with TJ Byard for six receptions good for 64 yards. Young’s final passing yardage totaled 398 yards, an all-time NM record for a single game. A late MCC TD made the final score read NM 41-MCC 21, only the second victory over the Crusaders in their seven-game series.

NM had little trouble in their opening West Michigan Conference game by rolling to a decisive 49-12 victory over Mason County Central. The Norsemen won the game, but they lost a WARRIOR! In one of the game’s first plays three-year starter and two-way performer Ben Meyers went down with an injury, a small fracture in his tibia. Meyers gamely attempted to return to the lineup later in the playoff game with Pewamo-Westphalia, but he again was reinjured in the same area. Meyers, who surely would have been a leading candidate for the Greater Muskegon Athlete of the Year, also had to sit out the entire basketball season where he was a returning starter and a defensive lockdown specialist. James Young was 10 of 16 in the passing department with four TD passes split among four different receivers. With an abundance of talented receivers to choose from, Alec Newville was the primary recipient as he caught five passes good for 157 yards and one TD. Landon Christensen caught a pair of Young’s flings for 40 yards and a TD while TJ Byard and freshman Cullen Bartos also caught TD strikes from Young. Bartos and Newville each had a rushing touchdown as the Norse made it a perfect 3-0 on the season.

A downtrodden Hesperia team was no match for the Norsemen in game four of the 2023 season. So dominant was the Norsemen that they never even experienced a third down situation in the contest. Alec Newville returned the game’s opening kickoff to the Hesperia 26 and just two plays later junior Tristan Thomas scampered 28 yards for a TD and the rout was on. Three minutes later James Young threw a perfect strike to Landon Christensen who streaked 75 yards for a TD. A short field, thanks to a 40-yard punt return by Talan Thompson set up Thomas’s second TD run from 10 yards out. Before the first quarter had come to an end Young found TJ Byard for a 51-yard tally. Newville made it 35-0 with a 59-yard TD gallop, freshman Cullen Bartos scored from 17 yards out while Thomas made the scoreboard read 49-0 at halftime after a 9- yard TD. With a running clock in the entire second half the Norse still managed to add on three more tallies, the first a one- yard plunge by Chuck Meyers. A pair of players from the JV team culminated the rout with Hunter Wilder racing 49 yards for one score while Adam Dugener scored from 20 yards out to make the final score 69-7. Owen Booth was perfect on all his PAT attempts as the Norse made it a perfect 4-0 to begin the season.

For only the third time in 85 meetings have the Norsemen and Hart met with both team undefeated going into a game, the last dating back to 1967 when both teams started a modest 2-0. After many years posting losing seasons, Hart had finally reversed direction the past couple of seasons and entered the fray boasting of a perfect 4-0 season, their best start since the 1961 season. The Pirates started the game with a perfectly executed on side kick attempt, but the Norse defense stopped Hart on downs. NM then executed a perfect 90-yard drive with the final 24 yards coming on a pass from James Young to Alec Newville. Owen Booths PAT gave the Norse a 7-0 lead. NM then reciprocated and tried an on-side kick. The Norse recovered but were guilty of an illegal push and Hart retained possession on the Norsemen side of the midfield stripe. Running out of a version of the single wing formation that emphasized the running game, the Pirate offense received a break when facing a fourth & seven at the NM 30-yard line, a desperation pass from Hart quarterback/tailback Connor Edwards was caught on a jump ball situation near the NM goal line by Eman Hertzler who then backtracked into the endzone for the TD. The Pirate two-point conversion attempt was stuffed by the Norse and NM still enjoyed a 7-6 lead early into the second quarter. Hart failed to stop NM on the ensuing drive that was capped by a 6-yard TD run by junior running back Tristan Thomas. The Norse continued dominating the Pirates the rest of the game using a solid ball control offense where they mixed up the running and passing game while limiting Hart’s running game to limited yardage. A 1-yard plunge by Young padded the NM lead to 21-7 lead at halftime. Hart tried to surprise the Norse on their opening possession of the 3rd quarter with a fake punt that was stopped by the Norse. Taking advantage of excellent field position the Norse marched a short 32 yards that was capped by a two-yard TD from freshman running back Cullen Bartos. Hart then attempted to make a comeback, scoring late in the third period to cut the NM lead to 27-14. The game breaker for the Norse came on the next possession. Faced with a fourth down and 12 yards to go at the Pirate 18-yard line, Young found a wide open Bartos at about the 10-yard line and the young freshman jogged untouched into the end zone to make the final score read NM 34-Hart 14.

The Norse made it six-straight wins on the season with a convincing 34-7 victory in the 91st meeting between Montague and North Muskegon on the gridiron. The Norse made an early statement by taking the opening kickoff and marching 59 yards in just five plays with Tristan Thomas covering the final 6 yards for the touchdown. The Norse added a pair of TDs in the second quarter, the first set up following an interception by AJ Larkin. Thomas scored his second tally from 11 yards out and a long bomb from James Young to TJ Byard made it NM 21 Montague 0 at halftime. Montague came out determined to begin the second half and used up nearly the entire third quarter before Ryver Jarka crashed over from the one-yard line with nearly ten minutes run off the clock. Montague threw a brief scare at the Norse by stopping NM deep in their own territory. Starting a drive that could turn the game into a one-score NM lead the drive fizzled when on a fourth & five play the Wildcat quarterback was sacked on a huge loss in Montague territory. Facing a daunting third and goal to go from the Cat’s 29-yard line Young scrambled for 23 yards down to the six. On fourth down Young connected on a six-yard strike to Landon Christensen that pretty much insured a Norse victory. Owen Booth missed his only extra point attempt in the game, but the Norse were firmly in command 27-7. Freshman Cullen Bartos made the final score read 34-7 with a 10-yard run late in the game.

In a game played during a monsoon, the Norse had to rely on their run game and a stout defense to earn a hard-fought 18-7 victory over Ravenna. The series between these two opponents that dates back into the 1930s finds each team with 33 wins in the 66-game series. The NM vaunted aerial game was nearly completely shut down as the Norse were only able to attempt six passes during the driving rain, completing three for just 22 yards and one interception. However, the defense stood out in the victory by blocking a punt, three interceptions, multiple sacks and put an exclamation point on the evening by forcing a Ravenna safety and holding the host Bulldogs to but one touchdown. The Ravenna TD came early in the contest that would prove to be a short-lived lead for the upset minded Bulldogs, the only time during the regular season when the Norse trailed in any game. A long run of 60 yards set up the lone scoring play for Ravenna, a 5-yard TD pass from Blake Homaly to Chase Thomas. The Norse quickly countered less than a minute later to take back the lead they would never relinquish on a 34-yard TD dash from James Young. Earlier in the game Owen Booth nailed a 24-yard field goal through the raindrops to give NM a 3-0 lead. The other Norse scores came on a safety when the Ravenna punter was tackled short of getting out of his own end zone with Young’s one-yard TD burst sealing the coffin for the Bulldogs. Freshman Cullen Bartos likely became the first freshman in 90-years of NM football to rush for more than 100 yards when he plowed through the rain 23 times for a total of 101 yards. Junior Chuck Meyers was a standout on defense with 12 tackles and two tackles for a loss while Layne Brady, Ace Anderson, Tristan Thomas, Jack McNally, Talan Thompson, AJ Larkin and Carter Muzzy all posted impressive defensive numbers as the Norse moved to a perfect 7-0.

With a berth in the playoffs locked up, as well as a possible home-field advantage, the Norse decided to protect the pristine NM playing field by moving their scheduled home game to Holton’s all turf field. Winless over the last two seasons, the Norse romped over perhaps the poorest Holton team in their school’s history 64-0 as the NM JVs played nearly all the second half. Alec Newville got the ball rolling with a 30-yard TD jaunt, the first of four first quarter NM tallies. Freshman Cullen Bartos breezed around left end from six yards out for the 2nd NM score. James Young connected with TJ Byard on a 52-yard TD toss and Newville completed the 1st quarter onslaught with his second TD of the quarter from 27 yards. With many of the starters already taking a seat on the bench, JV quarterback Bryce Colbert made it 35-0 on a quarterback keeper from nine yards out. Freshman JV Jourdon Ealom got into the scoring act with a nine-yard run and then Hunter Wilder, yet another Frosh performer, lived up his name by running ‘wild’ throughout the rest of the game. Wilder’s first TD gallop was a 70-yard streak to the end zone, followed by a 62-yard TD. On the final play of the game, he raced 47 yards for his third TD. Showing that the Norse are secure in the future with a bevy of young running backs, Ealom also added his second TD from 15 yards.

The Norse then capped their first undefeated regular season in 37 years with a convincing 52-14 rout of Shelby. To be candid, NM did compete in a very weak “Rivers” Division of the West Michigan Conference and did not have to face either Whitehall or Oakridge, a pair of teams that have dominated the Norse over the last decade. NM marched a very quick 90 yards for their first of eight touchdowns on the night, with Tristan Thomas only having to go from one yard for the first score. James Young than connected on the first of his five TD passes with a 32-yard strike to a wide-open Chuck Meyers. Young than teamed up with TJ Byard from seven yards out on the final play of the quarter to make the scoreboard read NM 18 Shelby 0. In the second quarter the Norse added a pair of tallies to improve their margin to 30-0. The first was a short 4-yard TD completion to Alec Newville, the second a 20-yard toss to Landon Christensen. The one drawback for the Norse in the first half was that they had failed to convert on any of their five first half touchdowns. The Norse were playing without their number one kicker Owen Booth who was nursing a hip pointer. Shelby gave their slim visiting crowd finally something to cheer as they executed a ‘Hail Mary’ pass for a TD on the last play of the half. Before NM would get their hands on the ball on offense to begin the second half Shelby then connected on yet another desperation long heave on a fourth and long play to narrow the gap to 30-14--- but the rest of the game was all Norsemen. Tristan Thomas burst through from 13 yards followed by NM’s only successful 2-point conversion, a pass from Young to Byard. Young’s day was then done after he threw his 5th TD pass to Byard from 14 yards out that was followed by a 2-point conversion run by Thomas. The final NM tally came on a 40-yard TD pass from back-up QB Bryce Colbert to Logan Dawson to make the final score of the 2023 regular season read: NM 52 Shelby 14.

NM moved to a perfect 10-0 with a 27-14 first round playoff victory over Union City. The Norse wasted no time as they scored on their first play from scrimmage on a 62 yards pass play from James Young to Alec Newville. Unfortunately, Newville was injured on the play and sat out the rest of the game. A powerful front line from Union City carved out a huge hole for Riley Leonard who raced virtually untouched on a 42-yard TD run. NM bounced back on their next offensive series as Young found freshman Cullen Bartos wide open on a wheel route for a 21-yard TD completion. NM was forced to go for two as their kicker Owen Booth reinjured his hip following his made extra point after the NM TD and the play failed. NM beat the clock at the end of the halftime and tallied a much-needed insurance touchdown on a 3-yard touchdown run from Tristan Thomas. The 2-point conversion again failed as the Norse took a 19-6 lead into the half. Neither team was able to put points on the board until NM scored with 5:12 left in the game on a 2-yard burst. The final NM points game on a 2-point conversion pass from Young to Chuck Meyers. Union City never gave up and was able to narrow the gap on a 9-yard TD run from Landyn Crance with 3:36 remaining.

With a record-breaking snowfall that raised havoc with not only the North Muskegon football field, but the entire town as trees and broken limbs littered the community. The second-round playoff game was moved to Oakridge high school where the district championship game was played on the immaculate Oakridge all turf complex. Facing a powerful squad from Lawton High the Norse staged a come from behind victory behind a stellar performance from their quarterback James Young. Young ran, passed, and even punted the Norse to their 11th straight victory with his 39-yard TD run late in the final period the clincher for NM. Young had a hand in all four scores, his first coming following a 91-yard drive that began when NM stopped Lawton an inch shy of a first down. Young completed the drive when the junior QB plowed over from the one. After Lawton tied the score at 7-7 Young tossed a perfect strike to Landon Christenson that was good for 57 yards and a TD. With their regular kicker on the sidelines with a hip injury, the extra point attempt failed. Lawton then scored the next two touchdowns to give the visiting Blue Devils a 21-13 lead at halftime. Lawton then made it a two-score advantage when they kicked a 41-yard field goal midway through the third quarter to improve their lead to 24-13. From that point on, Young and the Norse defense took command. A long NM 80-yard drive was capped with a 23-yard TD pass from Young to TJ Byard. A 2-point conversion pass from Young to Alex Newville narrowed the lead to 24-21. Lawton then drove all the way down inside the Norse 10, but the Norse stopped the Blue Devils one yard short of a first down at the NM seven. It took NM but sevens plays, with Young mixing up the running of freshman Cullen Bartos and his pinpoint passing to move into Lawton territory for the winning TD, a 39-yard quarterback keeper from Young that completed the 93-yard drive. After the Norse forced a four and out for Lawton the Norse were looking at fourth down inside three minutes to play and a punt was in order. Young could not have punted better. His 44-yard punt was downed at the Lawton 1-yard line with 2:28 remaining in the game. NM forced yet another four and out and the Norse had clinched their first district championship in twenty years.

One would be hard pressed to believe the second rematch between NM and Pewamo-Westphalia could be any tighter than the season opener between the squads. It took another fourth quarter rally for the Norse to edge PW 28-27 in a regional championship game held once again on the Oakridge All-Turf Field. The Norse started the contest with a scoring drive to take an early 7-0 lead. Young threw for 57 yards on the march, with all three completions going to the Bartos brothers, with the scoring play a 28-yard screen pass to freshman Cullen Bartos. The visiting Pirates, whose only defeats during the season were to NM, bounced back to tie the game at seven apiece early into the second quarter. NM quickly retook the lead on a short two-yard pass from Young to Drew Bartos. With the scoring drive aided by a couple of 20 yards pass plays to Chuck Meyers and TJ Byard, the last to Byard was good for 23 yards down to the two. Ben Meyers, seeing his first action since an injury very early into the 2023 season, recovered a PW fumble at the visitors 23-yard line. Two plays later Young found Alec Newville in the end zone for the TD and the Norse took a 21-7 lead at halftime. The Pirates took the opening kickoff in the second half and marched 58 yards to narrow the gap to 21-13. The two-point conversion attempt was stuffed by Chuck Meyers. Pewamo-Westphalia then capitalized on a rare James Young interception in NM territory to tie the contest at 21 all after they converted the two-point play. Early into the final stanza PW marched all on the ground to take their first lead of the game at 27-21. However, the point after from placement was wide right and the Norse still had life. NM marched all the way down the field to the Pewamo two-yard yard but were unable to score. With little time remaining the Norse needed a stop and indeed they did. On a third down-play Drew Bartos dropped the PW ball carrier for a loss at the two-yard line. The ensuing short punt saw the Norse take over at the Pirate 31-yard line. Young connected with Chuck Meyers to the 16. Three plays later the Norse were faced with a 4 & 5 at the Pirate eleven-yard line with the ball game squarely on the line. Young then did his best Fran Tarkenton impersonation (for our younger crowd – perhaps Patrick Mahones) when he scrambled for seemingly an eternity before he unleashed a clutch throw that was caught in the end zone by Landon Christenson. It was then left up to a player who was not even on the roster until the previous day when an emergency kicking audition was held by NM coach Larry Witham. The winner of that audition was Drew Gabriel who booted the extra point through the uprights for the winning point. With still about a minute and a half remaining in the game NM needed a pair of great defensive tackles from Henry Husman and Drew McNally, as well as a final Hail Mary pass deep in NM territory that was broken up by Talen Thompson, AJ Larkin and Chuck Meyers. The win moved the Norse to a perfect 12-0, the most wins in a single season for the Blue & Gold.

The magical season came to an end as the Norse fell to a perennially potent Menominee team 32-21 in the state semifinals. The Norse got off to an awful start as they were outscored 20-0 after the first two quarters of play. Poor field position played a huge part in their abnormal first half as the NM offense was only able to muster 20 first half yards, with only one short pass completion of but four yards all the Blue & Gold were able to muster after the first 24 minutes were in the books. However, the Norse showed their true colors in the second half as James Young passed for more than 160 yards and two TD’s while rushing for a third. NM took the opening kickoff in the second half and marched all the way to pay dirt to close the deficit to 20-7. Menominee’s first possession of the second half came to an abrupt halt as Alec Newville intercepted a Maroon pass and the Norse were back on the attack. Young finished the NM drive with a one-yard keeper and Drew Gabiel’s PAT gave NM life as they were down just 20-14. NM’s defense dug in and held Menominee to a three and out forcing a Menominee punt. NM brought their huge following who made the long jaunt to Gaylord to their feet when they executed a fake punt to give the Norse a first down. However, the drive stalled and forced a Norse punt. Perhaps the big play of the game occurred early into the fourth quarter. Menominee threw a long pass that somehow escaped the clutches of a pair of Norse defenders that moved the Maroons deep into NM territory. Menominee was able to complete the scoring drive to give the UP squad a two-score advantage. A bad break spelled doom for the Norse on their next possession as a James Young pass glanced off a Menominee helmet into the hands of one of his teammates who raced 40 yards into the end zone for the game breaking TD. Showing the mettle that they displayed throughout the 2023 season NM never gave up and, on their final offensive play of their historical season, scored their final of many touchdowns on the season on a 10 yards pass from Young to Drew Bartos.

Record Score Interesting Fact

1-0 NM 17, Pewamo-West. 14 Owen Booth kicks a 23-yard FG field goal with 5 seconds left for win. James Young TD passes to Ben Meyers and Landon Christensen.

2-0 NM 41- Musk. Cath 21 Young throws for school record 398 yards. Christen school record 4 TDs and 260 receiving yards. Meyers and Tristan Thomas rushing TDs.

3-0 \*NM 49 Mason Co Cent 12 Young 4 TD passes. Alec Newville 175 receiving yds and 2 TD; Cullen Bartos, TJ Byard and Christensen TD receptions; Newville TD run.

4-0 \*NM 69 Hesperia 7 Thomas 3 TDS, Young 2 TD pass (Christenen & Byard); Newville 59-yd TD; Bartos 17-yd TD, Hunter Wilder from 49 & Adam Dugener from 20, Chuck Meyers TD

5-0 \*NM 34 Hart 14 Young to Newville 24 TD pass; Thomas 6-yard TD; Young 1-yard QB run; Bartos 2-yard TD run and 18 yd TD pass from Young.

6-0 NM 34, Montague 7 Thomas 2 TDs (6 & 11); Young TD passes to Byard and Christensen; Bartos 10-yard TD.

7-0 \*NM18 Ravenna 7 Young only attempts 6 passes but scores both NM TDs from 34 & 1. Bartos field score and NM scores 2 points on a safety,

8-0 \*NM 64 Holton 0 JV’s play much of the game; Wilder 2 TD (70,62 &47); Ealom 2 td (2 & 15) Colbert 9 yd TD; Newville 2 (30 & 27) Bartos 6 yd TD; Young to Byard 52 pass TD

9-0 \*NM 52 Shelby 14 Young 5 TD passes (Byard 2, Christensen, Chuck Meyers, Newville 1 each), Thomas 2 rushing TD (1 & 9); Colbert to Logan Dawson 40 YD pass TD.

10-0 NM 27 Union City 14 NM scores on 1st play from scrimmage, Young 62 yd pass to Newville: Thomas 2 short rushing TDs and Cullen Bartos 21-yard TD pass from Young.

11-0 NM 27 Lawton 24 Young pass for 256 yards and accounts for all 4 NM TDs. Christenson and Byard TD receptions of 57 and 23. Young TD runs, including the winner from 39.

12-0 NM 28, Pewamo-West.27 NM rallies in final two minutes. Young 4 TD passes (C. Bartos, Newville, D. Bartos, Chistensen). 12 wins the most in NM history.

12-1 NM 21 Menominee 32 After shutout in the first half NM scores 3 TDs in the second half. Young TD passes to Byard and Drew Bartos and a one yard Young run.

**2024 Coach Larry Witham 11-2 overall, Playoff qualifier, State semi-finalist, NM Rivers WMC Champs**

With many regulars returning from the 2023 season, including a record setting quarterback who would be starting an unprecedented fourth year as the Norse signal caller, the ceiling was sky high for the upcoming NM season. However, shortly after NM’s basketball season came to an end James Young stunned his coaches and teammates by transferring to Muskegon High School. The QB chores then fell on a slight junior from the 2023 JV team by the name of Bryce Colbert. Surely no one could have expected what Colbert contributed to NM’s second consecutive run to the final four. The junior southpaw threw for 2216 yards good for 23 touchdowns with only two of his passes intercepted by his opponents. Colbert, who nearly matched the production of the departed Young spread the wealth as his four most targeted players were TJ Byard, Drew Bartos, Landen Grimm, and Chuck Meyers. Junior Hunter Wilder caught but two passes, but one of those receptions went for 69 yards and a TD against Millington. Wilder and sophomore Cullen Bartos each rushed for more than 500 yards on the season giving head coach Larry Witham hope for more success in 2025. Henry Hussman had 124 tackles to lead the NM defense, but three other Norse had more than 90 tackles as Chuck Meyers & safety Cullen Bartos had 95 and Drew Bartos 90. The Norse again reached the final four and were champs of the Rivers Division of the West Michigan Conference for the third straight season.

In what has recently could only be described as an intense rivalry, North Muskegon and Pewamo-Westphalia may be nearly 100 miles apart from one-another, but that hasn’t deterred these two schools from facing each other in the past few seasons in epic contests, both in football and basketball. Twice Pewamo has gotten the best of NMHS in basketball the last two seasons while NM returned the favor last year in football by defeating P-W twice, including a hard-fought battle to win a come-from-behind contest to cop the 2023 regional title 28-27. These two teams met in the 2023 opener with NM winning another thriller 17-14 on a game-winning field goal from Owen Booth. It was more of the same to begin the 2024 season with the host Pirates scoring a late TD and a successful 2-point conversion to nip the Norse 8-7. The Norse dominated the first half with the big scoring play a 35-yard end around from senior back Drew Bartos. Booth’s PAT gave NM a 7-0 lead that would stand until late in the game when Pewamo-Westphalia capped a long scoring drive with a touchdown to trail 7-6. While the Pirates were lining up to kick the extra point to tie up the game and send it into overtime, an over-eager Norsemen jumped offside. The penalty changed the decision by the Pirates to go for two and the victory which they accomplished on a short plunge from inside the two-yard line for the 8-7 win. NM started a new quarterback to begin the season as their three-year starting quarterback James Young transferred to Muskegon High School. Junior Bryce Colbert took over the NM QB duties for NM and did a nice job as he completed 8 of his 21 attempts for 77 yards to five different receivers. Leading NM in rushing was Drew Bartos with 67 yards while his younger brother, sophomore Cullen Bartos rushed for 36 yards.

The Norsemen quickly got back on the winning track with a 43-7 conquest of Shelby. NM broke out of the gates quickly as they score 21 points in the opening quarter. NM wasted no time getting on the board as they marched 80 yards in six plays, all on the ground. The big play on the drive was a 39-yard run by sophomore Cullen Bartos that set up his own TD on a short one-yard plunge. NM then took it to the house, this time a 9-yard drive that was helped by a Shelby penalty for jumping offsides when NM was punting from their own 17-yard line That kept the drive alive and ended a few plays later when junior running back Hunter Wilder raced 57 yards for the second Norse TD. The Norse then made it 21-0 after a Jaxon Bean fumbled recovery gave NM the ball at the Shelby 44. Junior quarterback Bryce Colbert then completed his first TD pass in a Norse uniform when he connected with Chuck Meyers from 40-yards out. With just seconds left in the first half Tristan Thomas galloped 32 yards for a tally to make it 27-0. On a broken play Cullen Bartos scrambled to get enough time to get off a pass that Landen Grimm caught in the end zone for a 2-point conversion to send NM into the halftime break with a commanding 29-0 lead. NM then extended their lead to 36-0 early into the third quarter on a 13-yard pass from Colbert to TJ Byard. The Tigers averted a shutout with a fourth quarter TD That NM quickly answered with a 50-yard dash to paydirt from Tristan Thomas. Owen Booth, who was perfect on all his PAT attempts, made the final score NM 43 Shelby 7. Colbert was 10 of 16 for 140 yards and two TDs while the rushing attack was evenly distributed between Tristan Thomas (92 yards and 2 TDS on but 5 carries), Hunter Wilder (79 yards on 3 carries, 1 TD) and Cullen Bartos (72 yards in 6 carries and a TD)

The Norsemen then won 36-20 over a much-improved Mason County Central squad that traveled to NM with a perfect 2-0 record. NM got on board first with a Bryce Colbert to TJ Byard TD connection good for 37 yards with less than five minutes having gone off the clock. A blocked punt by Brennen Allen in the closing moments of the first quarter set up NM’s second score. Taking over at the Spartan 21-yard line it took the Norsemen only three plays to add their second touchdown early into the second quarter on a short 1-yard run by Hunter Wilder to give the Norsemen 13-0 lead. NM then surprised the Spartans with a successful 2-point conversion on a toss from Colbert to Ace Anderson that gave NM a 15-0 lead. The Spartans then went on a time-consuming drive of nearly nine minutes for their first score of the game to close the gap to 15-6 at the halftime break. It took NM less than 15 seconds to score the first touchdown of the second half. A short Spartan kickoff gave NM excellent field position at their own 47 yard-line. On the first play Colbert connected on a short pass to wide receiver Drew Bartos who broke a couple of Spartan tackles to race 53 yards to paydirt. Owen Booth’s PAT from conversion gave NM a 22-6 lead. The Spartans gambled on fourth down in their own territory, but Drew Bartos brought down a Spartan runner well short of the first down marker that turned the ball over to the Norsemen at the MCC 39-yard line. Three plays later Colvert hit Byard on a post pattern from 24 yards out to give NM a commanding 29-6 lead. The Spartans battled back to score a pair of touchdowns to bring life back to the visitors from Scottville. A 12-yard TD pass on the final play of the third quarter made it 29-14 NM and the Spartans made it 29-20 after another time consuming 90-yard drive but their 2-point attempt to make it a one score lead failed with 2:01 left in the contest. An onside kick saw their kick somehow spin backward and NM took over at the Spartan 37-yard line. On the next play Landen Grimm raced 37 yards on an end-around play to make the finals score read NM 36, Mason County Central 20.

Hesperia was no match for the Norsemen as the Blue & Gold cruised to a 42-7 win over the host Panthers with big plays playing a major part in the victory. NM received huge plays from junior Hunter Wilder and Landen Grimm as NM improved to 3-1 on the season. Wilder touched the ball three times on offense and all three of his carries resulted in touchdowns, including a pair of long distance runs from 86 and 27. Wilder nearly added another as he was tackled at the one-yard line after returning a Panther punt 49 yards. Wilder’s 86-yard burst was the 14th longest TD run in NM history and was the 27th TD run by a Norsemen running back over 80 yards dating back to 1932. Grimm’s trio of TDs including a 90-yard return of a kickoff just moments after Hesperia scored their only touchdown of the game in the second quarter. It was the eighth longest kickoff return for six points in NM history and the 27th time in program annals when a Norsemen returned a kickoff for a TD. Grimm scored the first NM TD early in the game when he found himself wide open in the end zone and caught the TD pass from Bryce Colbert. NM Mixed up the run with the pass as Colbert threw for 152 yards passing to six difference receivers while six NM running backs totaled 250 yards on the ground led by Wilders three rushes for 114 yards.

Two plays and two touchdowns. That’s how quick the potent NM offense operated in their 42-6 conquest of Hart to post their fourth straight victory, all against their Rivers opponents in the West Michigan Conference. On their first play from scrimmage junior quarterback Bryce Colbert connected with senior wide receiver Drew Bartos for a 57-yard TD strike. After NM forced a Pirate’s punt NM again needed but one play, this time a 52-yard TD toss from Colbert to senior end Chuck Meyers. Colbert was an efficient 15 of 18 passes on the night good for 305 yards and four touchdowns. Four receivers caught multiple passes from Colbert with TJ Byard grabbing seven of Colbert’s aerials good for 123 yards and two touchdowns. Hunter Wilder, who led the stout NM defense with seven solo tackles, scored a rushing TD as did Tristan Thomas as the Norse improve to 4-1 on the season. In addition to the 305 yards the Norse accumulated in the passing game, six NM rushers ran for 167 yards as NM totaled nearly 500 total yards in their conquest of Hart, their 12th straight victory over the Pirates, and their 19th victory in their last 20 meetings with their longtime rival. The win was the 499th in NM football history, one away from a milestone 500th triumph.

The 500 milestone was accomplished, and it was fitting that this historic win came against their oldest foe. The Norsemen defeated Montague 36-8 in the 92nd consecutive meeting between the long-time rivals who have met every year since 1933. NM used a ‘bend- but do not break’ defense, coupled with a big strike offense to move to 5-1 on the season. Twice the Norsemen stopped the Wildcats at the NM one-yard line in the first half and held the ‘Cats’ out of the endzone until the waning minutes of the contest when the winner had long been decided. NM took the opening kickoff and marched 61 yards in 11 plays, culminated with a 1-yard plunge by Hunter Wilder. The big play on the drive was a 30-yard pass from Bryce Colbert to TJ Byard that moved NM deep into Montague territory. The Cats got on the board with a safety two plays after NM stuffed a potential Montague scoring drive at the one-yard line. Midway through the second quarter NM scored on a perfectly executed screen pass from Colbert to sophomore running back Cullen Bartos that was good for 56 yards that gave the Norse a 14-2 lead at halftime. NM padded their lead on a perfectly thrown pass from Colbert to Byard good for 14 yards and a TD. Cullen Bartos then took the snap from center on the extra points and ran to the corner of the endzone to extend NM’s lead to 22-2. Wilder, who had been held in check to but nine yards in six carries, exploded on a sweep 52 yards for a Norse TD that led to a 29-2 Norse advantage. On the first play from scrimmage following Wilder’s run, Ace Anderson’s interception set up NM’s final score, a 32-yard TD pass from Colbert to Drew Bartos. Owen Booth kicked the extra point, his 26th conversion on the season without a miss for NM’s final points, Montague scored late in the contest to make the final score read 36-8 as NM notched their fifth straight victory after their opening one-point defeat to begin the season.

NM spread the wealth around as six different Norsemen crossed the goal line as NM handed Ravenna a decisive 40-0 loss on the historic NM gridiron. Bryce Colbert tossed three touchdown passes to three receivers as the junior quarterback totaled 240 passing yards. The strong trio of NM backs, Hunter Wilder (1) Cullen Bartos (22) and Tristan Thomas (19) each tallied rushing TDs as NM posted their most lopsided win over a traditionally strong Ravenna team since 2006. Colberts scoring tosses went first to Drew Bartos for 19, followed by a pass, catch and nifty 60-yard connection with Landen Grimm, capped by a Colbert scramble and toss to Chuck Meyers for 12 yards. NM put this game away early as they raced to an early 33-0 halftime lead over a stunned Bulldog eleven. NM then took the opening kickoff to begin the second half and moved steadily downfield to set up a 19-yard TD run by Tristan Thomas to make the scoreboard read NM 40, Ravenna 0 and forced a running clock the rest of the game. Double-teamed all game long, TJ Byard was kept out of the end zone but his 34-yard reception amongst heavy traffic set up NM’s first TD on a one-yard plunge by Hunter Wilder. A blocked punt by Henry Hussman late in the first half set up a Colbert TD pass to Meyers.

You know it’s going to be a good season when the Norse can defeat Oakridge. NM’s 34-17 conquest of the visiting Eagles snapped a 16-game losing streak and was only the second Norse victory over the visitors in 30 games. NM won by 17 points, but that differential is deceiving as NM needed a second half rally to pull off the win. NM trailed Oakridge with only 1:40 left in the third quarter 17-14 before the Norse game up with the biggest play of the game. The Norse were a big strike team in 2024 and that was put on display on the very next play after the Eagles took the lead on a field goal. Senior defensive back Jaden Villapando fielded the Oakridge kickoff on his own six yard and sped through the entire Oakridge defense 94 yards to give NM the lead they would not relinquish. A fired-up Norse defense then forced a three and out for the Eagles that set up a 48-yard scoring drive. Lining up to kick a field goal NM either scored a TD on a broken play or on a well-conceived play as holder Cullen Bartos caught the errant (or planned) snap from center and hit a wide open Villapando in the endzone for six points instead of three to make it a two-score lead for the host Norsemen. NM then put the icing on the cake following an interception and 46-yard return by TJ Byard. Bryce Colbert set up his 1-yard quarterback keeper on a nifty 15 yards run that set up NM’s final TD to make the final score read 34-17. Oakridge got on the board first late in the first quarter, but NM responded quickly with a 71 TD pass from Colbert to Byard. A second hookup from Colbert to Byard for 14 yards gave NM a 14-7 that Oakridge equaled with a TD with two minutes remaining to send both teams into halftime tied at 14-14.

NM, with an 8-1 record, would enter the playoffs as the top seed in their district with their first-round opponent Evart. In the first meeting between the two schools in any sport NM had little trouble with the visitors as they romped over Evart 56-0. It could have been worse as the Norse forced a running clock for the entire second half after they exploded to a 49-0 halftime lead. The Norse excelled both with the pass and the run as they rushed for 271 yards and passed for 213 with junior quarterback Bryce Colbert a perfect 8-8 with three of his tosses going for touchdowns. Two of Colbert’s aerials TDs went to TJ Byard, one for 55 and another for 50. Colbert went to the air early and connected from 33 yards out with Drew Bartos to give NM an early 7-0 and the rout was on. Junior running back Hunter Wilder scored a pair of TDs, including an 88-yard gallop on the last play of the first half. Landen Grimm tallied on a 36-yard burst while sophomore Keefe Kersman scored his first TD in a Norse uniform with a 20-yard TD in the second half.

For the second straight week NM would face an opponent for the first time in program history and again came away with a victory as NM defeated McBain 27-7 to earn their second consecutive district title. The bend, but do not break defense held the Ramblers, who came into the game averaging a whopping 42 points per game, to but seven points with Cullen Bartos with 14 tackles and Henry Hussman with 11 stops leading the NM defense. Cullen Bartos also rushed for three touchdowns on runs of 12, 6, & 3) while his brother Drew Bartos tallied NM’s other six-pointer on a 23-yard scoring toss from Bryce Colbert. Colbert was again efficient with his passing as the junior quarterback connected on 10 of his 13 passes for 161 yards. Bartos led Norse rushers with 77 yards while Hunter Wilder notched 60 yards on nine carries. Drew Bartos was the favorite target for Colbert with a season high 122 yards on five receptions. The victory sets up a rematch with Menomonee in the regional final with the Norse traveling nearly 500 miles for their first ever journey to the UP, more than double their previous longest road trip from 1979 when they traveled to Detroit to play Detroit Lutheran West.

NM was now faced with an ominous task. Not only would they have to play a heavily favored Menominee team who ended the Norse run the previous season, but they would have to make a 450 mile, eight-hour trip to Menominee. It would be the first trip a NM team would make to the UP in any sport but my how the Norse responded! NM dominated the Maroons with a 23-0 shutout win using a trio of methods: a running attack where the duo of Hunter Wilder and Cullen Bartos would rush for 165 yards, a passing attack led by Bruce Colbert that added 125 yards, and a stonewall defense that forced several Menominee turnovers. NM took a 7-0 lead on a 21-yard run by Wilder and added there more points early in the second half on a Owen Booth field goal. TD runs by Bartos and Wilder capped the NM win to bring the regional trophy back to an already bulging NM trophy case. The long journey to the UP did not deter the Norsemen from enjoying a huge turnout from their loyal followers.: “When we came onto the field just before the start, I couldn’t believe the amount of people wearing the blue and gold and the noise they made. It sounded like it was a home game,” said NM coach Larry Witham.

It was on to Lansing as the Norsemen would make at all the way to the final four for the second straight year. Their opponent was a very strong Millington team that was also appearing in the state semis once again. The game perhaps was won by Millington on a trick hook & ladder play with just seconds left in the first half and Millington out of time outs. A pass from Truk Terburk to Bryce Martin was executed perfectly as Millington jumped ahead of NM 21-14 at the halftime break. Millington scored first but NM quickly followed up with a 69-yard pass play from Bryce Colbert to Hunter Wilder, only the second pass completed to Wilder during the 2024 season. A second Millington touchdown was matched with 5:33 left in the half as sophomore Cullen Bartos scored the first of his three one-yard touchdowns to knot the game at 14 all. There was 0:17 showing on the clock when Martin crossed the NM goal line to give Millington the momentum while sending a stunned NM team to the locker room down 21-14. Poor field position throughout the third quarter thwarted any attempts for NM to operate as Millington scored a pair of TDs and a safety to give the Cardinals from the thumb area of Michigan a seemingly safe 35-14 lead with only nine minutes to play. When NM fumbled the ensuing kickoff to give the ball back to Millington it appeared even more gloomy for the Norsemen. However, NM forced a quick three and out and quickly marched 78 yards for a TD capped by a Cullen Bartos 1-yard TD. NM then recovered a Millington fumble and suddenly there was life for the Norse. On a fourth downplay Bryce Colbert then connected on a 38-yard pass to Drew Bartos that took the ball to the Cardinal five-yard line. Two plays later Cullen Bartos was in the end zone and NM trailed 35-28. A perfectly executed on side kick was first believed to have been recovered by the Norse but when they finally untangled the pile it was a Millington player who was on the bottom with the football. Millington then ran out the clock with a pair of first downs to clinch the win and end NM’s improbable season at 11-2.

As fate would have it, it was likely the state championship was decided in Lansing between the Norse and Millington as the Cardinals of Millington breezed to the state D7 championship the following weekend with a 24-0 shutout of Monroe St Mary Catholic. Post season honors were plentiful for several of the Norsemen. On defense linebacker Henry Hussman was declared the defensive player of the year for the entire Muskegon area that included all schools. Also tabbed for first string defensive honors were Hussman’s co-linebackers Chuck Meyers and Drew Bartos while sophomore defensive back Cullen Bartos was also selected for first team honors. Too have four players tabbed for first team honors is quite a feat for the area’s smallest school.

Record Score Interesting Fact

0-1 NM 7, Pewamo-West. 8 Pewamo scores late and made 2 ptr. To nip NM. Drew Bartos NM TD on 35 yd end around.

1-1 NM 43- Shelby 7 NM 21 1st qtr points. Bryce Colbert 2 TD passes; Tristan Thomas 2 TDs; TJ Byard & Cuck Meyers TD receptions, Hunter Wilder & Drew Bartos TD runs.

2-1 \*NM 36 Mason Co Cent 20 Colbert 3 TDS passes (2 to Byard 1 to D Bartos), Landen Grimm 37-yard TD runs, Wilder 1 yard TD.

3-1 \*NM 42 Hesperia 7 Wilder 3 TDS (86, 27 & 1); Landen Grimm 3 tds (90 yards kickoff, 35 pass from Colbert. 24 yd run

4-1 \*NM 42 Hart 6 Colbert 4 TDS passes good for 305 yards. Byard 2 TDs and 7 receptions for 123 yards. Meyers, D. Bartos, Thomas & Wilder TDs.

5-1 NM 36, Montague 8 Colbert 3 TD passes (Byard (14), C Bartos (56) D Bartos (32), Hunter 2 TD’s (1 & 52).

6-1 NM 40 Ravenna 0 Colbert 240 yards and 3 TD passes (D Bartos 19, Grimm 60, Meyers 12, C Bartos (22) Thomas 19 and Wilder 1 yd TDs.

7-1 NM 2 Holton 0 Once again NM earns a forfeit victory over Holton.

8-1 NM 34 Oakridge 17 Jaden Villpapando 94 Koff TD, 8 yd pass from Bartos, Byard 71 & 14 YD pass from Colbert, Colbert 1 yard run

9-1 NM 56, Evart 7 NM runs for 271 and passes for 213. Byard 2 TD pass, D Bartos 33 TD pass, Wilder 2 TDS (5 & 88) Keefe Kersman 20 yd TD

10-1 NM 27 McBain 7 Bartos brothers all 4 NM TDs, C. Bartos runs of 12,6 & 3) D Bartos 23 pass from Colbert.

11-1 NM 23 Menominee 0 NM avenges loss from previous season. Wilder & C Bartos rush for 165 yards. Colbert 125 yards passing.

11-2 NM 28 Millington 35 Cullen Bartos three 1-yd TDs, Colbert to Wilder 69 yards TD. D Bartos 11 tackles and 68 receiving yards.

**2025 Coach Larry Witham (Season in progress)**

Pewamo-Westphalia showed the Norsemen what a perennial power looks like in a convincing 35-6 victory in the Norse home opener. Winners of 4 four state championships and six state final appearances since 2013, the Pirates had too much firepower and too many Thelens for a NM team that is trying to fill the vacated holes from many of their star players who have moved on after getting their diplomas.

Although the margin of defeat appears lopsided, the young Norsemen did show some promise for the long season that looms ahead. It was a scoreless first quarter between the two recent rivals that features two former Norse football players in their administration, former NM quarterback and now P-W athletic Troy Forton, and current principle for the Pirates, former NM wide received Ryan Portenga.

The biggest thorn in the side for the Norsemen was senior Pirate quarterback Ty Thelen, who rushed for 137 yards and three TDs while throwing for an addition tally. One of six Thelens on the Pirate roster, the two-way standout for P-W also had one of the three passes picked off by the Pirate’s defense and several times broke away for key first down pickups that kept the ball away from the NM offense.

Although the stats will show the NM quarterback had a mediocre day, his receivers didn’t do Colbert too many favors as many of his passes were dropped. A testament to Colbert’s scrambling abilities was Bryce was not sacked all night by P-W’s aggressive defense. Colbert did throw for 128 yards on the evening, including the lone NM score on the evening, a short TD toss to Cullen Bartos.

It was in the rushing department where the Norsemen fell short as they were only able to ground out 48 yards against a stout Pewamo defense. The Norse hold off the Pirates until midway through the second quarter when it took nine plays for the Pirates would score the game’s first TD. A quick three and out forced a Norse punt that would lead to the second Pirate score shortly before halftime. The big play on the drive was a dazzling 21-yard run by Thelen on a third and long play where he eluded several Norse tacklers. On the next play Thelen hit Cody Pohl on a 20-yard pass play to give the Pirates a 14-0 lead at intermission. A last-ditch halftime drive by the Norse fell short with one of the three interceptions by P-W in the game.

A pass interception led to a 21-0 lead early into the third quarter that iced the contest for P-W. The Norse followed with their only TD drive of the game. Aided by a couple of long pass plays from Colbert to Beckett Hoppa and Bartos, the Norse got on the board when Bartos caught a Colbert aerial in heavy traffic from four-yard outs for the lone Norse tally in the game.

The Norse won their 12th consecutive game over the Shelby Tigers, but this was not your Shelby team that the Norsemen used as whipping boys during this stretch. The Norse had to go all out to nip the Tigers 33-30 as they evened their season record at 1-1.

The Tigers even had a chance to pull off a stunning upset late in the game. After Hunter Wilder broke through left tackle for a 24-yard TD to put the Norsemen up 27-16, the Tigers wasted little time to answer when they mounted a six-play drive that closed the Norse lead to 27-24.

The Tigers than executed what appeared to be a successful onside kick but an unfortunate penalty for being offsides negated the play and the very fortunate Norsemen and their fans breathed a sigh of relief. After being bottled earlier up by a staunch Tiger defense where he was limited to but 44 rushing yards in 10 attempts, Wilder raced around left end to score from 46 yards out to make it a two score Norse lead at 33-24 following a Gunner Schmitt made extra point. Two plays earlier Wilder had a 48-yard dash to paydirt called back by a NM penalty on a very similar play but Wilder’s second back breaking play against the Tigers saw no flags.

Not to say die the Tigers did score a last second TD to make the final score 33-30.

Coach Phil Fortier’s Tigers, who have not experienced a winning season since 2013, showed early into the contest that Shelby was not going to be any pushover as they answered an early NM TD with a QB scamper by Isaac Garcia and a two-point conversion to take a 8-7 lead over the Norsemen.

The Norse then took a lead they would never relinquish on a very fortuitous TD aerial that was deflected into the hands of Beckett Hoppa that resulted in a 39-yard TD pass from Bryce Colbert. NM then padded their lead to 19-8 shortly before halftime on a nine-yard run by Cullen Bartos.

The score remained unchanged until Shelby took advantage early into the fourth quarter of a muffed NM punt they turned into eight points to set up the game’s final exciting moments.

After a slow start Wilder would finish the game with 115 rushing yards, 71 of those yards coming on his final two carries of the game. Colbert would complete 12 of his 19 passes for 185 yards with Hoppa on the receiving end of three of those completions for 120 yards and a TD. Hoppa was also a force on defense with 10 tackles, that was also equaled by NM’s defensive all state candidate Cullen Bartos.

North Muskegon mixed in the run with the pass to overwhelm Mason County Central in a Rivers Conference game held in Scottville. Highlighting the Norse victory was a record setting touchdown run of 99 yards by junior Cullen Bartos, eclipsing the previous record set in 1961 of 97 yards by Bill Young.

With Mason County on a drive deep in NM territory late in the third period, a defensive hit by Bartos created a fumble that was recovered by a Norsemen at their own one yard-line. Running out of the Wildcat formation Bartos broke through a big hole created by the Norsemen offensive line and raced 99 yards for the record-breaking TD. The Bartos long scamper pushed the NM lead to 35-13. In the fourth quarter Norse quarterback Bryce Colbert, on his only carry of the game ran 26 yards on a designed quarterback keeper for the final NM touchdown to make the final score 42-13.

Colbert had a big game on the day by throwing for 301 yards and four touchdowns. Catching TD passes for the Norsemen were Beckett Hoppa with two six-pointers, with Braylen Burrel and Cullen also each grabbing a Colbert aerial for TDs. Gunner Schmitt was perfect on all seven of his extra point attempts.

The Norse were also productive in the rushing department led by Bartos with 158 total yards with Hunter Wilder adding 82 as the Norse totaled 567 yards in the victory, the 10th straight conquest over the years against the Spartans.

On a picturesque early Fall evening with the Maple trees surrounding the outer perimeter of Fred Jacks Field displaying an early change of colors, the Norsemen rushed for a season high 421 yards to pound Hesperia 54-21 to move to 3-1 on the season. Cullen Bartos tallied 173 yards and three touchdowns in but six carries with Hunter Wilder racing 148 yards in seven attempts and two TDs to highlight NM’s rushing game. Senior quarterback Bruce Colbert only passed eight times in the contest, all in the first half for 106 yards and two TD strikes but ran for 69 yards in four carries as NM posted their third straight victory after their opening game loss to powerful Pewamo-Westphalia.

Bartos wasted no time to make known this was going to be a productive night on the ground for the host Norsemen as he took the first offensive carry of the game on a direct snap from center and raced untouched 60 yards for the first of the eight NM TDs accrued on the evening.

Hesperia quickly showed they were not going to be a pushover for NM as they took the ensuing kickoff and drove deep into NM territory before the drive was halted on a Carlton Williams interception in the end zone. NM then had an efficient 80-yard march capped by a short three-yard toss from Colbert to Drew Gabriel to improve their lead to 14-0. The score went to 21-0 early in the second quarter when Colbert teamed up with Becca Hoppa from 19 yards out.

The Panthers, aided by a key fourth down pickup crossed the NM goal line on a quarterback sneak to close the gap to 21-7. Bryce Colbert than showed he is more than just a passing quarterback as he keyed the next NM tally by rushing on two quarterback keeper plays that totaled 49 yards that set up a short Bartos score to make it 28-7. Hesperia then capitalized on a Colbert interception to set up a late second quarter TD that sent the two rivers conference teams into halftime with NM on top 28-14.

The visitors then took the second half kickoff and drove deep into NM territory before Eli Gomez forced a Panther fumbled recovered by the Norsemen’s Jace Thompson. That would be the last serious threat by Hesperia the rest of the game as the Norse rushing game dominated the game’s final minutes. It took NM just two plays to go 88 yards as Bartos dashed 52 yards to stretch the Norse lead to 34-14. A perfectly executed option play from Colbert to Hunter Wilder was good for 32 yards and another Norse TD.

NM closed out their scoring on a 25-yard burst by Wilder while sophomore Gavin Quarry got in on the act by carrying on eight straight rushes before scoring from four yards out for the final NM points. Hesperia scored on a late TD passing bomb to make the final score read 54-21.

The Norsemen defeated a well-drilled Hart eleven 29-18 in a game whereby the statistics of time of possession played fool’s gold on the Hart gridiron. The win was the 13th straight NM win over Hart and the 20th victory in the last 21 meetings between the two old-time rivals, but the win was not your traditional walk in the park conquest as in the past. Pirate head coach Joe Tanis has groomed a formidable team built around a unique offense that closely resembles the old single wing used during your ‘ole announcers’ childhood.

Although I don’t have the actual time of possession stat at my disposal, it was clear after watching the film of this contest from my home far to the south in the Sunshine State, that it looked like Hart had the ball forever. But veteran Norse head coach Larry Witham, who once was the JV coach at Hart and helped turn the Hart football program into a competitive unit, used his ‘bend but do not break’ defense to pull off the victory.

The Pirates wasted no time in showing the Norsemen that they came to play as they picked off a rare Bryce Colbert pass on NM’s first possession in NM territory. After several running plays, that churned up time as well as first downs, Pirate quarterback – err tailback – Kolt Rockwell surprised the Norse defense geared up to stop the run, with a pass in the endzone to a wide-open Logan Jorrisen. Surprisingly, in today’s era of a soccer style kickers Hart went for the two-point conversion that was stopped by the Norse.

The Norse took the lead after the Pirate score on an 18-yard sweep of right end by Hunter Wilder. Drew Gabriel than kicked the extra point to give the Norse a slim 7-6 lead. The big play on the drive was a 42-yard pass play to Cullen Bartos.

The Pirates than mounted a 90-yard drive that ate up the remaining minutes of the opening quarter and well into the second before Kyle Greener powered in from five yards out to give the lead back to the Pirates at 12-7.

After it appeared that Hart had forced NM to punt on fourth and long, the Pirates were penalized on Bryce Colbert’s punt that kept the drive alive. Colbert than connected on a 45-yard bomb to Drew Gabriel that set up a Wilder run off tackle as the Norsemen regained the lead at 14-12. Hart drove deep into NM territory but with time running out in the first half NM defensive back Becca Hoppa came up with a key interception that preserved NM’s ever slight advantage at halftime.

The Pirates received the second half kickoff and chewed up half of the clock in the third quarter before scoring on a well-designed pass play to regain the lead at 18-14. Fortunately, for the many Norse fans who journeyed to Hart, it would be the last points earned by the pesky Pirates.

When times are at their toughest the Norse can always turn to their brilliant versatile all state candidate Cullen Bartos. The top NM defensive player, Bartos is no slouch on offense. A short pass in the flat to Bartos became a long 32-yard pickup setting up the touchdown that would give NM the lead they would not relinquish. The TD did not come easy for the visiting Norsemen as they scored on a fourth and 10 play on a well-executed pass from Colbert to Becca Hoppa. On a busted play for the extra point Bartos took the mishandled snap from center and connected with Hoppa for the two-pointer to make the scoreboard in Hart read: NM 22-Hart 18.

Until the Norse scored their final touchdown on a 37-yard burst up the middle by Bartos to give NM the lead at 29-18, the difference in the game was the difference in extra points.

With the victory NM will return to Fred Jacks field next Friday to host Montague in the 93rd meeting between the long-time rivals who have met every year since their initial matchup in 1933.

Montague spoiled Homecoming for the Norsemen as they used a relentless ground attack to defeat the Norse 39-26. The loss by the Norse was their first in the West Michigan Conference in three years although their record in the newly formed Rivers Division remains spotless as the Wildcats are in the Lakes Division.

Penalties and failure to slow up the double wing offense by the Wildcats contributed to the Norse defeat. The first penalty cost the Norsemen six points as a 45-yard TD run by NM quarterback Bryce Colbert was denied due to a penalty. After the Norsemen then had to punt the ball, it took Montague just one play to show it was going to be a long night for the NM defense. On their first play from the line of scrimmage Devlin Dean raced 91 yards for the score and gave Montague a lead they would never relinquish.

Dean’s long gallop would be the first of nearly 500 yards the Wildcats would total during the game. The Montague trio of backs comprised of Dean, Cole Moss and Eli Peterson would each run for more than 100 yards in their balanced attack. Meanwhile, the Norse had to mostly go to their passing game to churn out yardage as the Montague defense limited Norse running backs to but 77 yards on the ground.

Bryce Colbert tossed for 285 yards, but he needed what may have been a school record 44 attempts to post that yardage. Ironically, Colbert’s lone TD pass on the evening came on his 44th and last throw in the game, a 10-yard completion to Becca Hoppa.

After Montague pulled in front 12-0 NM capped a long drive with a Colbert keeper to narrow the gap to 12-6. However, Montague, who never had to punt the entire game, took the ensuing kickoff and drove relentlessly down the field with Dean scoring his second TD to give the visitors a 19-6 lead at halftime.

The Cats then delivered the possible knockout blow to begin the second half when Cole Moss broke a pair of tackles and sprinted 54 yards to paydirt to extend their lead to 26-6. The Norse than showed some offensive spark as they scored just a little more than a minute later on a four-yard run from Hunter Wilder. NM fans suddenly had their hopes raised for a possible Norse comeback when Drew Gabriel scooped up a Wildcat fumble and raced 55 yards for a TD. For the third straight time, NM was unsuccessful with an extra point attempt but were down by only one score 26-18.

But it was not to be as the NM defense was not able to contain Montague’s rushing attack, and the Wildcats tallied a pair of TDs to pull away from the host Norsemen. A Colbert TD pass to Hoppa followed by a two-point conversion pass to Cullen Bartos made the final score 39-26.

NM did receive a consolation prize when word was received of a Hart win over Mason County Central that clinched the Rivers Division championship for the Norse, their fourth straight title in the newly formed West Michigan Conference.

Record Score Interesting Fact

0-1 NM 6, Pewamo West 35 Veteran P-W team overwhelms NM. Bryce Colbert to Cullen Bartos 4 yd TD 1-1 NM 33, Shelby 30 Wilder 2 long TD runs, Colbert 12/19, Beckett Hoppa 120 yds rec. TD 2-1 NM 49, Mason Co. 21 Bartos record 99 yd TD run, Colbert 4 TD passes, Hoppa 2 TDs

3-1 NM 54, Hesperia 21 NM rushes for more than 400 yards; Bartos 3 TD 173 yds, Wilder 148 yds

4-1 NM 29, Hart 18 Wilder 2 TDs (18&8), Colberrt to Hoppa TD, Bartos 37 yd TD

4-2 NM 26, Montague 39 Colbert 285 passing yds, Hoppa 6/137 TD, Gabriel 55 Fumble for TD.