**History of North Muskegon Football**

By Jim Moyes

NOTE: Conference games marked with \*

**1932– coach Lyle McNitt (0-1 overall; no conference)**

NM played but one game in 1932 as it was the first year that NM was officially a high school. The oldest players for the Norse in 1932 were only 10th graders as the first graduating class at NM was in 1935 (1934 for the football season in the Fall.) All four of Ravenna’s TDs were set up by costly NM interceptions, perhaps a harbinger of things to come under Lyle McNitt as his teams seldom passed in the years to follow. The first TD scored in NM history was by Joe Witham who scored from two yards out after McNiff recovered a fumble at the Ravenna two-yard line. Joe Witham would eventually be the proprietor of the Canary Inn, while his nephew Larry Witham would become the head coach for NM football in 2016. The following day after the varsity game with Ravenna, the NM Junior High team defeated Bunker Hr. High 7-0. Fred Schmid, with just 20 seconds remaining in the game, on a broken play, raced 80 yards for the winning TD. Lyle McNitt and Joe Witham have one thing in common, they each scored the first touchdowns in their school’s history. Lyle McNitt scored Ravenna’s first ever TD when he recovered a fumble in the end zone in a 1924 game vs. Coopersville.

Record Score Interesting Fact

0-1 Ravenna 26, NM 6 School’s 1st game, Joe Witham scored NM’s only TD after McNiff recovered fumble. NM 4 interceptions costly.

**1933- coach Lyle McNitt (1-4 overall; no conference)**

Starters in the first game for NM: LE E Cooper, LT Bill Hekkema, LG Charles Buys, C Adams, RG Norm Ferrill, RT Howard Speed, RE Ross Cooper, QB Jack Riordian, LH Joe Witham, RH Jack Jiroch, FB Fred Schmidt. The Norse dropped their opening game of the season at Montague with very little mentioned in the game story. It did point out in the 14-0 loss to Montague that the play of E. Cooper, Charles Buys, C. Adams and Fred Schmidt stood out.

NM just might have been looking at some ‘home cooking’ in their 7-6 loss to Ravenna. Rules of the time ruled pass interference to be ruled a completion as a long desperation pass gave Ravenna the ball at the NM two-yard line where they scored and then completed the extra point. The lone NM score was tallied by Fred Schmidt who climaxed a 60-yard NM TD march by scoring from the one-yard line. However, the attempt to complete the extra point failed when Jack Jiroch was stopped inches short of the goal line.

The Norse then won their first game in more than 90 years of NM football with a 19-7 ‘upset’ victory over Muskegon St. Joseph. Ironically, it would be the only game played between the two schools. Fred Schmidt scored the first NM TD that was set up by a Norse fumble recovery at the St. Joseph 35-yard line. Jack Jiroch played a major role in the final two NM tallies, rushing for one and throwing a 30-yard TD strike to Schmidt for the clinching touchdown.

The Norse scored first to take an early 6-0 lead on a pass from Jack Jiroch to Fred Schmidt, but it was all Shelby from that point on until the final scored saw Shelby come out on top 27-6 over the Norse.

The Norse then completed their schedule with a 7-0 loss to Grant. The Norse marched all the way to the Grant 3-yard line but couldn’t cross the Grant goal line. Grant then marched 97 yards for the game’s only touchdown to end the first season in NM history with one win against four defeats.

NM finished their first abbreviated five-game season with underclassmen only on their roster. With NM still a year away from having a senior on the team, your author is puzzled as to why Jack Riordan and Jack Jiroch didn’t play the following year. Unfortunately, my old NM friends who were in the know, have long since passed away

Record Score Interesting Fact

0-1 Montague 14, NM 0 Game played at Montague

0-2 Ravenna 7, NM 6 At Ravenna, a long pass resulted in NM interference with 5 seconds left. Ravenna then scored on next play. Fred Schmidt NM TD

1-2 NM 19, St. Joseph 7 Jack Jiroch scores a TD and throws TD pass of 30 yards to Schmidt, Schmidt scores first TD as NM wins its first ever game.

1-3 Shelby 27. NM 6 NM’s only TD on a 4th down pass from Jiroch to Schmidt.

1-4 Grant 7, NM 0 Grant marches 97 yards in the second quarter for game’s only score.

**1934 – coach Lyle McNitt (2-3-1 overall; no conference)**

Seven letter winners returned from the 1934 season which is confusing as everybody was back from the 1933 year as nobody was a senior. It must have been tough to earn a letter nearly 90 years ago. The letter winners were Joe Witham, Bill Sessions, Ross Cooper, Fred Schmid, Bill Hekkema, Raymond Woodhouse, and Charles Buys. Playing key roles for NM in addition to the returning letterman would be Fred’s brother Al Schmid, and Bob Raddatz. Norm Ferrill, Woodhouse, Witham and Andre, members of NM’s first graduating class played their final game for the Norse. Now an established 4-year school NM would no longer have to play a bigger school’s reserve team.

The Norse began the 1934 season, and the first as a 4-year school, by losing to Montague 13-0 on the NM gridiron. The only real highlight for the Norse was a booming 65-yard punt by Fred Schmidt. Long time Muskegon Chronicle Sports editor James F Henderson covered the game and gave high praise to NM’s end Bob Raddatz, 14-year-old guard Bill Sessions, The Schmidt brothers, Fred and Albert Schmidt, and tackle Bill Hekkema.

NM’s first win of the season, and their 2nd in school history completely reversed their 6-26 loss to Ravenna from the first ever varsity game played two years earlier. Fred Schmidt keyed the Norse win with his punting, running and pass defense. Schmidt scored the first NM tally from three yards out following one of his long punts that gave the Norsemen a short field. Joe Witham’s 6-yard TD gave the Norsemen a 13-0 lead at the halftime break. A third quarter Ravenna pass was intercepted by Schmid who returned the pigskin 78 yards for the third NM tally. Ross Cooper also picked off an errant Bulldog pass and returned it 38 yards for the final NM score. Although NM was credited with two wins for the year, only the Ravenna victory was against a varsity opponent.

Even though they were playing the Muskegon Heights 2nd team, the Heights were amid a winning streak that would consist of 31 consecutive wins without tasting defeat. Coach Oakie Johnson’s Tigers had so much firepower that even their second team would over-power the NM varsity 39-6. After a scoreless opening quarter, the Tigers scored four second quarter TDs to pull away from NM. Fred Schmidt was the lone bright spot for the home team as he scored the only NM TD from 17 yards out, also in the second quarter.

NM lost their first road contest of the season when they were shut out by Shelby 13-0. The Norse played the host Tigers even for the first half as neither team was able to punch across their opponent’s goal line. The Tigers had to go deep into their play book to earn their first touchdown. A play that included a pair of laterals worked for 18 yards and a TD. The second touchdown was set up on a bizarre play where a fumble recovery by a Shelby player at the NM 4-yard line saw the Tiger headed towards the wrong goal line before he was spun around by one of his teammates. The confused Tiger was able to reverse direction and was not brought down until he reached the NM four-yard line. The Tigers were able to score from there, converted the extra point to make the final score read Shelby 13, NM 0.

NM traveled to Grant and settled for a 13-13 tie. Only a pair of short paragraphs covered the game in the Muskegon paper. Fred Schmidt accounted for all the NM scoring with a pair of TDs and running for an extra point.

Although it goes down in the record books as a win, NM’s 69-0 rout of Fremont was accomplished against the Packer’s JV team. The game would be the first of 17 consecutive games played on the final day of each season during the rivalry. Fred Schmidt capped an outstanding season with four TDs. Joe Witham and Ross Cooper each added a pair of touchdowns in the rout. A highlight was Arlo Huntoon drop kicking for one of the extra points earned by NM. The 69 points would be the most points scored by a NM team until the undefeated 1970 powerhouse NM team also scored 69 in a romp over Mason County Central.

Record Score Interesting Fact

0-1 Montague 13, NM 0 The highlight for the Norse was a quick punt by Fred Schmid that was good for 65 yards. Game played at NM.

1-1 NM 26, Ravenna 6 Schmid returns interception 78 for one of his 2 TDs, Ross Cooper returns interception for 38-yard TD. Joe Witham from 6 yards for TD.

1-2 Muskegon Hts (2nds) 39, NM 6 Schmid’s 17 yards TD only NM score.

1-3 Shelby 12, NM 0 Shelby scored on a couple of bazaar plays, one when Shelby intercepted a pass and started running the wrong way before stopped.

1-3-1 NM 13, Grant 13 (tie) Played in Grant on a Wednesday afternoon, Fred Schmid scored both NM TDS and ran for one extra point.

2-3-1 NM 69, Fremont (2nds) 0 NM should have played the Fremont varsity. Fred Schmid 4, Witham 2, Cooper 2 TD and Arlo Huntoon drop-kicked for an extra point.

1935 – coach Lyle McNitt (4-1-2 Overall, no conference)

The Norse had only three scoreless ties in more than 90 years of football, and two of those came in the 1935 season, with scoreless ties against Montague and Grant. Although NM would not join the West Michigan Conference until 1936, the Norse can boast that they surely would have been the WMC Champs in ‘35’. Although they did not play Scottville, the Norse tied Montague in the season opener, defeated Hart 20-0 and shutout the 1935 WMC camps Shelby Tigers 14-0. Only a season ending 6-0 loss at Fremont on a ‘fluke’ cost NM an undefeated season. However, with several great athletes now enrolled at NMHS, it was clear NM was on the road to gridiron success. The 1935 season marked the great play of Bob Radatz, a sure handed end who would later have an illustrious career in the military. The Schmid brothers Fred ‘Feggy’ Schmid and his brother Al were the leading point producers. Fred Schmid, as the strategy as the game dictated during the pre-WWII days, often saw teams punting well before fourth down while Schmid often delivered some long punts. As well as leading the Norse in tackles from his linebacking position. Bill Hekkema, whose younger brother Al Hekkema (Class of 1947) would star on the hardwoods for the Norse and a fixture at many NM athletic events until his recent passing, did yeoman like work as a halfback and defensive stalwart. Walt Bergren, one of the top baseball players in NM annals, played well both as a runner and a passer out of the ‘Single Wing’ NM offense. NM had plenty of depth in the backfield as Ross Cooper played well. Phil Grimard was the defensive leader, and the Norse got fine line play from Bill Sessions and acting captain Charles Buys.

Record Score Interesting Fact

* + 1. NM 0, Montague 0 (tie) At Montague the tackling and punting of Fred Schmid kept Montague from crossing the NM goal line.
    2. NM 32, Ravenna 6 Only Ravenna score came on an interception and 70-yard return for TD by Merlin McNitt, Coach McNitt’s younger brother. Bob Emerson scores after recovering a blocked punt. Fred Schmid injured. Emerson 2 TD. Al Schmidt a 70-yard TD run and Bill Hekkema from 7. Walt Bergen passed and ran for a TD

2-0-1 NM 20, Newaygo 0 Al Schmid 2 TDS and Bill Hekkema a TD. Bob Radatz, Phil Grimard, Bill Sessions and Walt Bergren open big holes with their blocking.

3-0-1 NM 14, Shelby 0 Ross Cooper to Radatz for the first NM TD. Walt Bergen to Fred Schmid for a 45-yard TD. Phil Grimard starred on defense.

3-0-2 NM 0, Grant 0 Nothing decided in this contest as Grimard, Sessions, Charles Buys, Radatz and Bill Hekkema stood out for the NM defense.

4-0-2 NM 20, Hart 0 NM wins the first of many games between these 2 schools. Bob Radatz made some sensational catches including a TD reception. Al Schmid a TD

4-1-2 NM 0, Fremont 6 The first of 8 consecutive games contested on Armistice Day was played on a muddy Packer field. The game was decided with Fremont scoring with 2 minutes left in the game. The Packers scored when a pass batted away by a Norse defender went into the arms of Stroven who dashed 15 yards for the TD.

**1936 – coach Lyle McNitt (4-3, 2-2 in WMC- Shelby champs)**

NM begins a long journey as a member of the West Michigan Conference. Despite NM entering only its 3rd year as a full-time high school, only four lettermen returned from the previous season, Al Schmid and Bud Wiley in the backfield, lineman Bill Hoxie and end Bob Radatz. Bill Hoxie’s younger brother Bernie, more than a decade later, would be a star halfback for Paul Moyes’ Norsemen in the late 1940s and 1950. With no lights on the Norse field, as well at all the teams in the WMC, games on the Northside would start at 3:45 in the afternoon.

The opening game with Montague was the first game played at the current site that was installed as part of a WPA project during the summer. After Bob Radatz, who caught 5 passes, including a pair for TDs in the opening game played on the newly constructed NM field, the Norse lost to Scottville when a bad snap from center sailed over Walt Bergren’s head and was recovered in the endzone for a Scottville TD. The Norse would lose only once to Scottville over the next 20 games.

NM won 13-6 against Newaygo in a tale of two halves. With rain pounding down on the gridiron and a sea of mud, coach McNitt decided to punt early and often to force Newaygo errors. NM just played it straight in the second half and scored on a couple of 30-yard TD runs from Schmid and Bergren.

The Norse scored first but dropped a 14-7 game to 1936 WMC champ Shelby. NM then defeated an unbeaten Grant team and would win their final game of the season 11-6 over Hart. In more than 800 games of NM football, it was one of but 4 games when NM scored exactly 11 points. Walt Bergren kicked a 36-yard field goal, the first field goal in NM history. Harts only score was a TD pass caught by Hart and WMU legend Fred Stevens.

NM outplayed Fremont for three quarters but the Packers rallied to defeat the Norse as a crowd estimated at 3,000 were treated to a parade prior to the NM field dedication.

Record Score Interesting Fact

1-0 \*NM 18, Montague 0 Bob Radatz catches a pass from Walt Bergren for the first TD ever scored on the new NM field. Radatz 2 TDs, Harvey Speed 1 TD.

1-1 \*Scottville 7, NM 6 NM loses when snap from center goes over the head of punter Bergren & recovered by Scottville for the winning TD. Bergen pass to Bud Wiley for NM TD.

2-1 NM 13, Newaygo 6 Bergren and Schmid each tally 30-yard TDs in a game at Newaygo played in rain and mud. Newaygo’s only TD on the ‘sleeper’ play.

2-2 \*Shelby 14, NM 7 NM scores first against the 1936 WMC Champs on a Schmidt short TD but Shelby scores on a 25-yard 4th qtr. pass for win.

3-2 NM 20, Grant 13 NM defeats previously unbeaten Grant. Bergren to Radatz 25 yd TD, Schmid 17 yd TD, and 1-yard TD. Bergren kicked 2 extra points.

4-2 \*NM 11, Hart 6 A safety and field goal in the first quarter gives NM a 5-0 lead. Schmid’s 1-yard TD accounted for the rest of NM’s points.

4-3 Fremont 19, NM 8 NM leads 8-0 entering 4th quarter before Packer’s rally. Schmid TD and safety only NM scores.

**1937 – coach Lyle McNitt (6-1-1, 4-0-1 WMC Champs)**

11 lettermen returned for the Norse and their experience showed as they began a six-year run as WMC champs. Only a 6-6 tie with Hart denied the Norse a perfect WMC season. Along the front lines NM started Captain Bill Hoxie, along with Watson Buwalda, Wilson Grimard, Dick Hoeker, `Bill Peterson, Charles Moehlman and George Dillinger. Walt Bergen returned as a regular in the backfield and coach McNitt welcomed a young John Gwatkin to the squad. Edwin Cowles and Harvey Speed also produced some impressive stats.

NM got off to an explosive start by thrashing Scottville 41-7 in the season opener on the Northside. John Gwatkin gave a quick preview on what to expect from him as a Norsemen by scoring the first of his many touchdowns during his career.

The game at Newaygo depicted some of the farcical elements small town schools would often experience during the 1930s. The game with Newaygo was played on the same field used by the baseball team. The skin part of the infield bore no grass but when the action was on the outfield, the grass had not been mowed and it was higher than the players shoe tops according to the game story written by legendary Muskegon Chronicle Sports Editor James F Henderson. And ---- the game was played with only one official who according to Henderson did a very good job under the circumstances.

It should be noted for local historians that the Muskegon at Benton Harbor game was the first game played under the lights for an area football team. It was also the first game broadcast locally with Hall of Fame announcer Hilliard Gudelsky (shortened to Gates of Hoosiers fame) doing the play-by-play on WKBZ, Muskegon’s first radio station.

In front of a ‘homecoming’ crowd NM shut out Shelby 38-0 with Walt Bergren scoring a school record four touchdowns.

NM posted their third straight whitewash the following week with a 26-0 win over Grant as W. Bergren had an 85-yard TD run.

Only a 6-6 tie the following Wednesday afternoon at Hart denied NM of a perfect season. A late NM drive stalled at the Pirates 2-yard line, but NM did clinch their first of many WMC titles.

In the 40-0 shutout victory over St. Mary’s, there was one play that was indeed strange under today’s rules. John Gwatkin had his extra point attempt blocked. Nip Pender recovered the blocked kick and ran into the end zone for the extra point.

In a matchup of unbeaten teams, Fremont, who gave up but six points all season, downed the Norse 20-0 in the season finale. Following the completion of the 1937 season four Norsemen were voted to the first team all WMC-Conference team: Charles Moehlman was selected for the second straight year while Bill Hoxie, Harvey Speed and Walt Bergren were also picked. Second team All-WMC honors were bestowed on Wilson Grimard and Watson Bulwalda.

Record Score Interesting Fact

1-0 \*NM 41, Scottville 7 John Gwatkin scores 2 TD, one from 70. Walt Bergen 2 TD and 5 extra points, Harvey Speed passes to Bill Peterson for a TD. ‘Lunk’ Bergren a 16-yard TD.

2-0 \*NM 20, Montague 7 W. Bergren 2 TD and Speed one as NM wins their 2nd straight WMC contest in Montague,

3-0 NM 28, Newaygo 0 ‘Nip’ Pender, Speed, Gwatkin and Oliver Eyestone each score a TD in the non-conference clash at Newaygo.

4-0 \*NM 38, Shelby 0 NM clinches at least a tie in the WMC. W Bergren scores 4 TDs, Speed 2 on homecoming on the Northside field.

5-0 NM 26, Grant 0 W. Bergren 2 TDs with the longest from 85 yards, Edwin Cowles and Gwatkin each with a TD as NM post 4th straight shutout.

5-0-1 \*NM 6, Hart 6 NM stopped late in the game at Hart’s 2-yard line. Eyestone the NM TD as Bergren’s extra point attempt went wide.

6- 0-1 NM 40, St Marys 0 W Bergren, Speed and Eyestone each score 2 TDs in first ever meeting between the 2 locals.

6-1-1 Fremont 20, NM 0 In a battle of unbeatens host Fremont shut out the Norse 20-0

**1938 – coach Lyle McNitt (8-0, 4-0, WMC champs)**

The Norse entered the 1938 with high hopes as 13 lettermen returned. Pre-season optimism was tempered with a difficult schedule as the Class C Norse had five Class B teams on their schedule. The Norse featured a line that averaged a ‘hefty’ 171 pounds with tackle Dick Hoeker tipping the scales at 243 pounds. Seeing action in 1938 along the front lines included Melvin Berry, Bill Peterson, Watson Buwalda, Wilson Grimard, Herbert Cooper and Sheldon Thornton. Returning in the NM backfield included regulars from the previous season, Edwin Cowles, and Oliver Eyestone but the bread and butter back for 1938 would be John Gwatkin who would post numbers that are envied even today. George McNeil was slated to see a lot of action at quarterback with Elllis ‘Nip’ Pender also sure to see plenty of playing time.

It didn’t take long for Gwatkin to display his running abilities as he ran for more than 100 yards and scored 2 TDs in NM’s first two non-conference games against Class B foes Otsego and Manistee. NM combined the running ability of Gwatkin with a defense that only allowed 12 points all season.

NM played their first game under the lights at historic Houseman Field in Grand Rapids against Class B GR Lee. Gwatkin ran for 2 TDs as the Norse shutout Lee halfback and future Detroit Tiger pitching ace ‘Stubby’ Overmire.

The Norse were challenged by Shelby in their 2nd WMC contest of the season. After Shelby scored a TD in the second quarter and took the lead at 7-6, it was the only time the Norse trailed all season. NM quickly rebounded behind the great running once again of Gwatkin who rushed for 165 yards and a TD as NM pulled way in the second half. NM took the lead as Cowles scored on a short line plunge after Gwatkin brought the ball deep into Shelby territory on a long run. Stafford scored a couple of short-range TDs in the second half while Oliver Eyestone completed the scoring with a late TD.

Coach McNitt played his entire roster in NM’s easy 34-0 win over Scottville in a Wednesday afternoon game on the Northside. McNitt gave Gwatkin a breather and Arnie Stafford scored a couple of early TDs before giving way to Gwatkin as the featured running back.

Gwatkin, dubbed perhaps the most outstanding running back in Greater Muskegon according to Muskegon Chronicle Sports editor James Henderson, scored 2 quick TDs as NM clinched their 2nd straight WMC title with a 21-0 win over Hart.

An overflow crowd estimated at more than 3,000, some standing in place five and six deep saw John Gwatkin, Oliver Eyestone and Arnold Stafford lead NM to a 24-0 victory over Fremont, atoning for the Packers ending NM’s hopes for an undefeated season in 1937. The defense, that allowed but 12 points all season was led by Sheldon (Shad) Thornton, Herbert Cooper, Bill Peterson and Dick Hoeker. Watson Bulwalda and Wilson Grimard also opened holes for the NM running backs. Gwatkin and Eyestone each scored a TD while Stafford added 2, the latter TD going 80 yards. According to statistics supplied by Fred ‘Doc’ Jacks Gwatkin ran for 1358 yards in the season, averaging a whopping 11 yards per carry while scoring 11 touchdowns.

Although Gwatkin was their featured running back, no Norse fan should ever forget Oliver Eyestone. The leading hitter on the Norse baseball team in the Spring, Eyestone gave the supreme sacrifice in World War II. Eyestone gave his life for our country flying a B-24 mission over the Adriatic Sea on August 24, 1944.

The Norsemen dominated the WMC All-Conference team with five players accorded first team honors: William Peterson, Watson Buwalda, Dick Hoeker, John Gwatkin, and Ed Cowles. So deep were the Norse that another five were picked for the second team: Herbert Cooper, Wilson Grimard, Melvin Berry, Oliver Eyestone and Arnie Stafford.

Record Score Interesting Fact

1-0 NM 32 Otsego 6 In the only meeting of these 2 schools, NM held Otsego without a rushing first down. John Gwatkin 130 yds rushing & 2 TD, Olliver Eyestone 2 TD, Edwin Cowles 1 TD. Arnie Stafford made his first appearance as a Norseman and intercepted a pass and returned 55 yards for a TD.

2-0 NM 14 Manistee 0 Gwatkin starred by rushing for 125 yards and 2 TDS. Dick Hoeker a force on defense. NM forced a safety in front of the home folks on the Northside.

3-0 \*NM 20 Montague 0 Nip Pinder throws 2 TD passes and Arnie Staffford gets a crushing block from Wilson Grimard and runs 80 yards for TD.

4-0 NM 26 GR Lee 0 NM plays 1st night game in history at Housemen Field in GR. Gwatkin 2 TD, rushed for more than 200 yards. Stafford TD and Don McNeil TD pass reception.

5-0 \*NM 32, Shelby 6 NM trails for only time of the season but pulls away in the second half. Stafford 2 TD, Gwatkin, Eyestone & Cowles a TD each.

6-0 \*NM 34, Scottville 0 Stafford stars in convincing win. Scores 2 TD as did Gwatkin who came in as a sub as NM played mainly reserves. Eyestone also a TD.

7-0 \*NM 21 Hart 0 Gwatkin leads NM to victory by scoring all 3 NM TDs, his first 2 coming in the games’ first 5 minutes. (2, 45 & 15-yard TD dashes)

8-0 NM 24, Fremont 0 NM completes their first perfect season as Stafford scores 2 TD, Gwatkin and Cowles 1 each. NM only allows 12 points all season.

**1939 – coach Lyle McNitt (7-1 overall, 4-0 WMC champs)**

Three weeks after all hell broke out in Europe as WWII begins with the invasion of Poland by Germany, the Norse hosted Grand Rapids Lee in the 1939 season opener. Many lettermen returned from last year’s undefeated team. However, many were not starters but did garner much experience. Starters returning included Don McNeil, Herbert Cooper, and Wilson Grimard on the line while Arnie Stafford highlighted the returnees in the backfield. Ellis Pender saw considerable action in this his third season on the NM varsity. Russell Buys will add depth to the backfield while Lawrence ‘Lunk’ Bergren, a future baseball teammate of your author in baseball, will take over duties at center. Also projected to help on the line are tackles Beaver Semeyn and Bill Gates while Albert Mattison will fill in at one of the ends.

Stafford showed on the first NM drive of the season in their 27-6 victory over GR Lee that he was a more than capable replacement for Gwatkin. Stafford accounted for 76 rushing yards in the Norse first drive that ended with Arnie going over from the four-yard line.

The Norse spoiled Manistee’s first game on their new lighted field by crushing the hosts 38-6.

Game time strategy was much different decades ago as illustrated in NM’s 21-6 win over Montague. After NM marched down the field, with Arnold Stafford running on all the plays and scoring a TD, Montague received the Norse kickoff and elected to punt on ‘First Down,’ a common practice at football games of this era.

Coach McNitt used his reserves in many of the NM contests as Stafford wasn’t even mentioned in NM’s easy victory over a ‘thin’ Scottville team. “Pin ball” entrepreneur Marsh Gerling had a huge game for the Norse and scored 2 TDs.

The Norse shutout Shelby 21-0 even with star back Arnie Stafford sidelined with a leg injury. There was one TD pass from Ellis Pinder to Wilson Grimard that would be illegal today. Taking the direct snap from his ‘Single Wing’ position, Pinder ran to his right and then tossed left to Grimard, playing a guard for NM. Grimard then raced 32 yards for NM’s second touchdown in yet another shutout victory over a WMC opponent.

Long before soccer style kickers would dominate the kicking game, extra points from placement were never a sure thing. A sure thing did occur in the Shelby game as future career military man Pender was successful on all his 3 attempts from placement against Shelby.

In one of but two meetings in NM history, the Norse pummeled one of the most storied athletic programs in MHSAA history when they defeated East Grand Rapids 47-0 on the Norse gridiron.

The Norse made it 15 straight victories and 3rd straight WMC title with a 18-7 victory at Hart, setting up a big season ending battle at Fremont.

The Norsemen have played more than 800 games in more than 90 years of football. If one had to pick one of the top 10 games played in NM history than one surely couldn’t overlook the 1939 November 10 game on a very cold afternoon in Fremont. The game was billed as a battle between a pair of senior running backs, the Norsemen’s Arnold Stafford and Fremont’s Walter Derby. And the two stars didn’t disappoint. Ironically, neither Stafford nor Derby would score a touchdown in the 14-12 Fremont victory. The difference in winning and losing came off the toe of Derby, who was successful on both his extra point attempts. The Fremont contest would be the first game Stafford would see action since the Scottville game midway through the season where he had been sidelined with a leg infection. Interest was high for the contest as it drew front page coverage that included the first action shot pictures of NM football featured in the Muskegon Chronicle. Although neither Stafford nor Derby scored, it was their running that set up their team’s touchdowns. Derby not only used his legs and accurate toe, but he also used his arm as he passed for both Fremont TDs. The first was a 29-yard completion to Bob Burlin followed by a perfect kick from placement by Derby. The Norse countered with a couple of TDs to take a 12-7 lead at halftime. Following the Packer TD Stafford ran the ball on several carries from his own 32 down to the Packer 16-yard line. On fourth down Pinder fired a perfect pass to Don McNeil in the end zone. However, Pender’s attempt at placement was blocked leaving the Packers in front at 7-6. After a short punt NM had the ball at the Packer 41-yard line. Stafford was stopped after a couple of short gains before the Norse struck pay dirt. Dan Timmer galloped 38 yards while shaking off several tacklers to score to give the Norse a 12-7 lead. After a scoreless third period the Packers took over at their own 20-yard line. Derby raced 50 yards to the Norse 35 where the 1940 100 and 220-yard Class B state track champion was caught from behind by Stafford. Although NM did not field a track team at the time, Stafford surely passed his speed down to his son Don, who set a 220-yard dash record at NMHS that would last for more than three decades. Fremont than ran the ball down inside the Norse one-yard line where the Norse put on an epic stand. After the Packers lost yardage with a couple of running plays, Derby hit a wide-open Max Rose for what would prove to be the winning TD. Moments later a penalty perhaps cost the Norse a victory and a second perfect season. With the ball at the Packer 25-yard line, Wilson Grimard came out of the line on a guard around play. Grimard raced into the endzone, but the Norse were guilty of a motion penalty.

Record Score Interesting Fact

1-0 NM 27, GR Lee 6 Stafford runs wild in opener, 2 TDs and well over 100 tards rushing. Dan Timmer TD and Nip Pender catches a long TD pass from Gosselin.

2-0 NM 38, Manistee 6 The Norse put this game away early leading 25-0 at halftime. Stafford all 11 carries for 1st TD. Timmer 2 TD, Albert Mattison recovers punt in end zone. Pender 56 yd TD

3-0 \*NM 21, Montague 6 Stafford again had a monster game as he scorers 2 early TDs. Arnie then scored his 3rd TD by returning an interception 57 yds to paydirt.

4-0 \*NM 25, Scottville 0 Reserves played much of the game. ‘Goose’ Gosselin scores 1st TD, Pender the 2nd on a 52 yd run, Marshall Gerling the final 2 TDs.

5-0 \*NM 21, Shelby 0 Pender 2 TD passes, one to Don McNeil, the second to ‘guard’ Wilson Grimard. Bill Sikkenga races 76 yards for final Norse TD.

6-0 NM 47, East GR 0 Sikkenga 3 TDs (45, 51 & 2), Timmer 2 short TDs, Pender reverses field a number of times in exciting 78-yard TD gallop.

7-0 \*NM 18, Hart 7 NM wins WMC and posts 15 straight victory. Sikkenga the workhorse with 2 TDs, the latter from 73 yards. Dan Timmer 25-yard TD,

7-1 Fremont 14, NM 12 Fremont ends NM 15 game winning streak as Stafford and Fremont’s Walter Derby wage dual.

**1940 – coach Lyle McNitt (6-2 Overall 3-0 WMC champs)**

September of 1940 would see London battered daily by the German Luftwaffe as thousands of youngsters registered for the draft. The war had already begun to have an effect even for Norse football as Dan Timmer had joined the National Guard and his status was always questionable for games as well as practices. The Norse also received an early blow when Arnold Stafford suffered a cracked shoulder bone before the season even started and he was out indefinitely.

Stafford’s absence was missed immediately as the Norse were held scoreless by Grand Rapids Lee in their season opener. Bill Overmire, brother of future Detroit Tiger ace Frank ‘Stubby’ Overmire, led Lee to victory.

The Norse then played three straight games on the Norse home field, all Norse victories. After methodical wins over Manistee (14-0) and Montague (21-6), the Norse faced an undefeated Reed City team on Oct 11. Bill Sikkenga ran wild for the Norse with 3 TDs and the game featured the first appearance of one of the finest players to ever grace the Northside gridiron in Don Bowen. Replacing Sikkenga late in the game Bowen completed a TD pass to Art Gosselin.

There were plenty of mixed emotions following NM’s 40-0 victory over Shelby the following week. It would be the last game for 3-year regular running back Dan Timmer. No, Timmer wasn’t sidelined with an injury. Instead Timmer was leaving the Norse as a private in the Michigan National Guard. It was only fitting that Timmer would go out in a blaze of glory. Dan scored three touchdowns and kicked three extra points in the win over Shelby. Bill Sikkenga added 2 TDs for the Norse while sophomore Don Bowen entered late in the game to throw a TD pass to another sophomore, Frank Sodini. Earlier at a North Muskegon pep rally Timmer was honored by the student body and was presented a parting gift from his teammates.

The following Friday, Timmer and 100 members of Company G departed for a years’ training in Louisiana. A solemn crowd of 20,000 lined the streets of Muskegon to say goodbye.

While Timmer was on a train headed to Louisiana, the Norsemen were in East Grand Rapids to take on the Pioneers. This was a much stronger EGR team than the 1939 squad that was routed by the Norse 47-0. The good news for Norse fans was that Arnie Stafford, their ace running back from 1939 saw his first action following a pre-season injury. The loss to EGR would be the last time the Norse would taste defeat until 1943 and would be the last time the Norse would be scored upon for nearly the next two seasons.

Who could ever have envisioned that following NM’s 25-0 shutout of Hart that the Norsemen would post 15 consecutive games undefeated, untied and unscored upon? Hart would be the first to fall to the Norse during the streak that would firmly establish the Norse teams the next couple of years as the most decorated in school history. The victory over the Pirates on a sloppy NM field on 11/1 of 1940 would feature the young and the old. The old would be the pair of TDs scored by Bill Sikkenga, the young would see a pair of sophomores Don Postema and Don Bowen show their current and future talents. Postema scored on a short line plunge, but Bowen’s TD was anything but short; it was an 80 yards sprint to pay dirt!

The Norse defeated arch-rival Fremont 21-0 in their traditional season ending game played on Armistice Day. The game was played on a Monday afternoon with gale force winds that saw numerous ships sink in Lake Michigan at a cost of many lives. 2,000 brave fans saw a pair of NM seniors lead their team to victory as the Norse completed their season at 6-2, but undefeated in the WMC as they won their 4th straight conference title. Arnold Stafford, who suffered a broken shoulder before the season began, was only able to suit up for the final two games of the season. Inserted into the game in the third quarter, Stafford showed what Norse fans could only lament (what if) Stafford would have been healthy for the entire season? Arnie scored the final TD of the season for the Norse subbing for Bill Sikkenga, who closed out his outstanding NM career with 3 touchdowns. However, there was a younger Sikkenga on the sidelines who would more than capably fill his brother’s shoes over the next two seasons. The lone score in the game followed a blocked punt by Jack Goodzwaard at the Shelby 15-yard line. Phil Buys dashed for the game’s lone TD on the next play.

Record Score Interesting Fact

0-1 GR Lee 7, NM 0 Playing under the lights in Grand Rapids, NM twice moved inside the Lee 15-yard line but were unable to score.

1-1 NM 14, Manistee 0 After a scoreless first half NM scores on a safety. Dan Timmer rushes for 2 TDs, his 2nd coming following an interception. Bill Sikkenga the leading rusher for NM.

2-1 \*NM 20, Montague 6 Sikkenga, and Timmer with rushing touchdowns with Albert Mattison catching a TD pass from Sikkenga.

3-1 NM 27, Reed City 6 3 TDs by Sikkenga lead the Norse to victory. Sikkenga had TD runs of 35, 4, and 48. Soph Don Bowen passed to Art Gosselin for final TD.

4-1 \*NM 40, Shelby 0 Timmer scores 3 TD before leaving to serve in the military. Sikkenga also scores a pair of TDs in the Norse rout of the Tigers.

4-2 NM 0, East GR 12 Playing without Timmer, NM shut out by a powerful East GR team. One of EGR TD came when NM fumbled while punting and recovered for a EGR TD.

5-2 \*NM 25, Hart 0 Sikkenga scores a pair, Postema a short TD and Don Bowen sprints 80 yards for a TD as NM begins an unprecedented streak that has now survived more than 85 years.

6-2 NM 21, Fremont 0 NM scores 3 quick TDs in 1st quarter with Bill Sikkenga closing his career with 3 TDs. An injured Arnie Stafford also scores.

**1941 – coach Lyle McNitt (8-0 Overall 4-0 WMC champs)**

With Captain Jack Goudzwaard the only major letter winner returning, expectations were not that high on the Northside for the 1941 season. However, no one could possibly have forecast the success NM would have in football for the next two seasons. Coach McNitt would begin the 1941 season fielding a team that saw only a handful of players who had started a game. Most of the 1941 season would be composed of untested Juniors where only Don Bowen had seen major playing time in 1940. However, those untested but incredibly talented juniors, would soon be a part of MHSAA football program history.

High school football in 1941 was a welcome distraction as news reports were inundated with disturbing news of conflicts in Europe with the war having extended into Russia. As history has shown, it would only get worse.

The Norse began their 1941 schedule with a rare Saturday afternoon game on their home field and it didn’t take long for the Junior trio of Don Bowen, Moe Sikkenga and Don Postema to shine. Following a scoreless first half the Norse took advantage of a pair of Grand Rapids Lee turnovers to aid in their opening 12-0 victory. A Bowen pass to Ken Potter moved the ball to the seven with Bowen scoring on the very next play. Later in the third period Sikkenga intercepted a Lee pass and ran all the way down inside the one-yard line to set up Postema’s line plunge. The game ended with Lee advancing all the way to the six-yard line, insignificant at the time, but a Lee TD could have dampened what would turn into a historical season.

The Norse hit the road for the next three games and the NM ‘Road Warriors’ against pitched a trio of shutouts. The first was a 6-0 whitewash under the arcs at Manistee. The lone score of the game was a 57-yard tally by Don Postema. NM held the hosts to but three first downs the entire game as it quickly became apparent that defense was the number one strength of the Norsemen of 1941.

NM began defending their WMC Championship with a 18-0 shutout of Montague. Bowen scored 2 TDs for the Norse while reserve running back Phil Buys the other Norse TD. Two days later Norse fans and players would watch a rare Sunday afternoon game played on the Norse field between Muskegon St. Mary & Muskegon St. Joseph.

The Norse completed their three-game road trip with a 19-0 victory at Reed City. The ‘highlight’ for the Norse came after Don Bowen’s 83-yard TD run in the second quarter when Bowen’s extra point attempt from placement was good. So futile was the Norse kicking game, as they had not completed an extra point in their first three games, that Bowen’s first extra point attempt after his 12-yard TD pass to his uncle (yes, his uncle) Ken Potter was an attempted drop kick that fluttered off to the side.

The Norsemen survived their biggest scare from Shelby midway through the 1941 season. With less than two minutes to go in the game, and the Norse clinging to a 6-0 lead, Shelby back Joe Morse got behind the Norse defender after catching a pass. It appeared that Morse had clear sailing for a touchdown, but a streak of speed named Moe Sikkenga saved the day, the win, and the scoreless streak when he caught Morse from behind just 15 yards from the Norse goal line. Some 60 years later while serving a customer at the bar at the Bear Lake Tavern, it was Joe Morse who was telling me the story about his near TD back in 1941 when I said: “You have to meet Moe.” I called Moe Sikkenga, and he quickly came to the BLT and the two old foes became close friends recalling ‘the good old days.’

Most of the games during the season were surely not run-a-way victories for the Norse. Their widest margin of victory was their 27-0 conquest of Scottville, hardly a blow-out win. However, any NM score would prove to be enough for a win. Bowen tallied a pair of TDs; Sikkenga had a 10-yard gallop while a pair of sophomores turned in the final tally when Phil Buys threw a TD strike to Ken Tyler. The Norse may have finally found somebody who could kick extra points. After converting but one extra point in their first 5 games, Ken Tyler kicked 3 through the uprights against Scottville.

The Norse then added their seventh victim of the season as well as clinching their 5th straight WMC championship with a hard fought 13-0 victory over Hart. Jack Goodzwaard recovered a Hart fumble at the Pirate 26-yard line. Don Bowen, a few plays later, scored the only points needed on a run from seven yards out. Yet another NM TD in the fourth quarter was set up when a bad pass from center saw NM take over at the Pirate 28. Frank Sodini ran 19 yards to the nine-yard line. Three plays later Sikkenga crashed over from the one and the Norse were one victory away from a perfect season.

A sign of the times for this embattled era saw Ravenna’s season end abruptly. Ravenna’s head coach Roy Weaver was drafted into the army and the Bulldogs were left without a coach. When no replacement could be found the season was over for Ravenna.

Undefeated and unscored upon history was not on the side of the Norsemen as they prepared for their annual Armistice football game with Fremont. The Norse had met defeat at all previous 4 games played in Fremont, twice when they entered the season finale with a perfect record. Businesses in both towns were closed, a parade was held down the main street of Fremont with both high school bands leading the parade. As usual, an overflow crowd surrounded the muddy gridiron at Fremont. Although the final score showed the Norsemen on top 7-0, coach McNitt’s young squad totally dominated the game. The NM forward wall of Harold Adams Ken Potter, Jack Goodzwaard, Ted Vento, Jim Corradin, Bill Goldberg, and Bill Thompson dominated at the line of scrimmage. After a scoreless first half that saw NM stopped twice on downs deep in Packer territory, the big play of the game was an interception by Vento near midfield. Vento returned the ‘pick’ all the way to the Fremont 18-yard line. It was then time for one of NM’s all-time greats to take charge. Don Bowen carried the ball for the next seven carries before crossing the goal from one yard out.

With 8 starters returning, 1942 promised to be another great season for the Norse. Less than a month later the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor and now it truly was a World War.

Record Score Interesting Fact

1-0 NM 12, GR Lee 0 Bowen scores from seven for first NM TD. Don Postema scores from inside the one after a Moe Sikkenga interception and return.

2-0 NM 6, Manistee 0 Don Postema runs 57-yards for the game’s only score. NM defense limits Manistee to only three first downs,

3-0 \*NM 18, Montague 0 Bowen 2 TDs, and Phil Buys the other TD, Montague drive in first half stopped at 3-yard line.

4-0 NM 19, Reed City 0 Bowen passes to his uncle Ken Potter for 12-yard TD. Bowen an 83-yard TD and then kicks Extra point – first of the season. Postema 4-yard TD.

5-0 \*NM 6, Shelby 0 Moe Sikkenga saves the game for the Norse catching a Shelby runner from behind deep in NM territory. Phil Buys 15 yard run the only TD in the game.

6-0 \*NM 27, Scottville 0 Bowen 2 TDs, Sikkenga a 10-Yard TD with Phil Buys tossing a TD pass to Ken Tyler for the final tally. Ken Tyler kicks 3 extra points.

7-0 \*NM 13, Hart 0 Bowen scores first NM TD after a Goodzwaard fumble recovery. Sikkenga rams over from the 1 after Sodini’s 19-yard run sets up the score.

8-0 NM 7, Fremont 0 Ted Vento intercepts a pass at midfield and runs it back to the 18 to set up Bowen’s line plunge from the 1.



**1942 – coach Paul Moyes (8-0 Overall 4-0 WMC champs)**

The 1941 season was so successful that Lyle McNitt was enticed by Grand Rapids Junior College to replace George (Potsy) Clark as their head coach. Replacing McNitt was a 27-year-old former Michigan State grad who was the head coach at Haslett High near Lansing. Paul Moyes inherited a veteran team so talented that Coach Moyes would often modestly say to me: “My grandmother could coach that team.” What Moyes did was take a team that was dominant on defense and do some tweaking with an offense that scored but 108 points the previous season and turn them into an offensive juggernaut. The Norse would more than double their point production from 1941 and were never challenged. With their entire backfield returning from the previous season, the only gaps to fill were in the line. Don Jacobson and Don Gunn, a pair of junior newcomers won the start at the ends, Jim Corradin, and Ken Tyler returned as starters on the line and Ted Vento returned as the starting center. The other line spot was won by Virgil Wilkes.

A little ‘razzle dazzle’ was uncorked with the Norse offense in their 33-0 opening win at Grand Rapids Lee. The Norse unleashed some double reverses and other unique plays that gave the Norse their most lopsided win ever against Lee. Don Bowen scored twice, including a 93 yarder, while Moe Sikkenga added a pair of tallies, including one from 56 yards. Sikkenga even blocked a punt that rolled out of the end zone that resulted in a safety. Frank Sodini added the final Norse 6-pointer on a 20-yard off tackle smash. The score could even have been more lopsided, but a couple of Norse TD’s were called back due to penalties.

With war now raging all over the world, even high school football teams were now affected by the war. Transportation was becoming a real problem. Gas rationing was in effect where rationing coupons were good for a maximum of four gallons per week. Ravenna failed to field a football team in 1942 while many other schools were playing a shorter schedule. Even a major college such as Michigan State did not even field a football team in 1943.

No such problem arose at home for the Norse first home game for the 1942 season with Manistee. A bigger, but much slower Manistee eleven fell to the Norse as NM scored in three different ways. The first was scored by lineman Bill Goldberg, who blocked a punt and recovered it in the endzone for the first NM score to give the Norse a lead at halftime. NM scored the next TD on a pass from Bowen to his lifelong buddy Moe Sikkenga good for 27 yards. As usual during this historic NM run over the past couple of years, they failed to make the extra point. Displaying great depth in the backfield, reserve Phil Buys gave Bowen a rest and entered the game after NM intercepted a pass at the Manistee 30-yard line. Buys carried on all the next carries, with the final being from 6-yards out for the TD. Desperate to find somebody who could kick an extra point, Virgil Wilkes, the last surviving member of this amazing team, shocked the home folks when his extra point attempt was good.

While many of Greater Muskegon citizens were rounding up metal for a scrap drive, where even the school bell signaling the start of the school day at NM High was scrapped for the war effort, the Norse were preparing for their next game with Montague. The Norse were never challenged by the Wildcats as the wealth was spread among 4 different players, including the first TD as a Norseman by sophomore end Don Jacobson in a 26-0 Norse victory.

With so much attention on North Muskegon’s unscored upon streak, the most drama from the Norsemen’s 27-0 win over Reed City occurred in the games’ final moments when Reed City had a first down at NM’s 5-yard line. The hometown fans in attendance on the northside breathed a huge sigh of relief as the defense led by Corradin, Vento, and Goldberg dug in and pushed the Coyotes back to the 8-yard line where the Norse took over to preserve their unscored upon streak that now stood at 14. It was that tenacious defense that scored the first TD for the Norse. NM blocked a Reed City punt where it was scooped up by Ken Tyler who raced into the end zone. Tyler, who had won the job as the extra point kicker made it 7-0 with a rare made extra point. Bowen made it 13-0 when he had one of his patented Bowen runs for a touchdown followed by yet another perfect point after from Tyler. Bowen added a third tally while a pass from Phil Buys to Moe Sikkenga capped the scoring on a 15- yard pass play.

There were not any fourth quarter worries in NM’s next contest at Shelby as the host Tigers never got into Norse territory during the entire game as the Norse powerhouse breezed to an easy 32-0 win. After Don Bowen scored the first TD Norse fans had a brief scare as Bowen twisted an ankle and was sidelined for the rest of the half. Phil Buys, as he did throughout his career, was a pillar of strength in his reserve role and sparked the Norse to their second TD. A Buys pass to Don Postema was good for 25 yards and a NM TD. Captain Bowen did return for the start of the second half, and he quickly showed all was well as he raced 50 yards for the third NM TD. With a commanding lead Buys returned to the field and rushed for a fourth TD for the victors, Moe Sikkenga completed the scoring on what today would be known as ‘the hook and ladder’ play with Bowen firing a pass to Don Jacobson, who in turn lateraled to Sikkenga who raced 40 yards to pay dirt.

If ever there was a win that felt like a loss, the 6th game of the 1942 season with Scottville tops the list. The main storyline of this game surely wasn’t the Norsemen’s commanding victory and their 16th straight victory. Not at all. The main storyline was the fact that Scottville had scored! A third quarter run by Scottville’s Herb Spencer became the first score of any kind against NM in 16 games. The NM streak of 15 games undefeated, untied and unscored upon was over. And how significant is this achievement? As I write this story 83 years later, this record still stands in MHSAA history! The game was an away game for the Norse, but the game wasn’t played in Scottville, but in Ludington and under the lights on Wednesday Oct 21, 1942. The Norsemen had become a drawing card and one of the reasons for the change of venues from Scottville to Ludington was to give the people in Ludington a chance to see this great NM team in action. The headlines that graced the sports section in the Ludington Daily News spelled out in big bold letters: **SPARTAN AERIALS CRACK NORTH MUSKEGON’s 15-GAME UNSCORED UPON RECORD**. A lesser headline did type in: *Norse Power paves way for 16th straight win*. The beginning of the story written by long time Ludington Sports Editor Dick Derrick was all about Scottville’s drive to score the only touchdown given up by the Norse in 16 games, a streak that would shortly be expanded to 18. In a nutshell, Scottville mounted a 60-yard drive in the third quarter where they completed 4 of 5 passes with the big play a 15-yard pass from Herb Spencer to Ralph Backwick down to the 2-yard line. Two plays later Spencer scored from inside the two and although they lost the game 25-6, Derrick noted it was a ‘moral victory’ for Scottville. Far down into his story Derrick was very complimentary of this NM powerhouse. “*Winners of the West Michigan Conference for five years and holding a victory string that stretches to 16 games, the Norsemen exhibited to football fans Wednesday night what blocking means to football with a crushing attack, completely land-locked that rumbled through Spartan defenses*.” NM showed their superiority on their initial drive of the night. Taking over at their own 27-yard line all four NM backs took turns moving the ball downfield behind some great blocking up front to traverse 73 yards for a TD with Don Bowen on a short run going the final distance. The Norse completed the scoring in the first half with Moe Sikkenga racing 46 yards for a TD. NM then added a TD in their opening drive of the second half to take a commanding lead over the Spartans with Don Postema plunging over for the TD. It was on this drive where fate stepped in according to my conversation with an NM player years later that contributed to Scottville scoring against the Norse. Don Bowen, after picking up a first down following a 13-yard run, sustained an ankle injury and limped off the field. “With Don not in the secondary Scottville threw a number of passes where Don would have been defending,” said his buddy Moe Sikkenga. The Norse did tack on a final TD when Bowen’s replacement Phil Buys scored from inside the 10-yard line. The Norse had indeed won their 16th straight game but there was no celebration from the Norse players as they trudged off the Ludington field. “You would have thought we lost the game, if you watched our team walk off the field,” said revered NM teacher Homer VanHoesen to me many years later.

The Norse then headed to Hart to face a Pirate team that had this game on radar the entire season. The Norse scored TDs in the first and last quarter and had a couple of other drives stall out deep in Pirate territory. Although far less than 100 percent with an ankle injury, Don Bowen led the Norse to a TD on their first drive of the game. The Norse nearly added a second first half tally as they reached the Hart 3-yard line before time had expired. The Norse nearly added another 6 points to their total in the third quarter, but a clipping penalty halted a Norse drive that had reached the Pirate 10-yard line. NM did score the clinching TD with Don Postema scoring from 3-yards out. The Pirates did threaten late in the game as a pass from the twin towers of Walter ‘Stretch’ Hansen (who passed away in 2025 at 100 years young) to Stan Kapulak advanced the ball to the NM six-yard line as the game ended.

The Norse were top-heavy favorites to defeat a winless Fremont team in their annual Armistice game. Ten seniors who have played huge roles in the current NM streak would suit up for the last time in the blue & gold colors of the Norsemen. Only starting guard Ken Tyler and end Don Jacobson would return for the Norse. The Norsemen went out in a blaze of glory, and it was only fitting that the touchdown twins of Bowen & Sikkenga would each score 3 TDs in the 49-0 rout of the Packers. Bowen also threw a pair of TD passes to end Wayne Dulyea and Don Gunn. Only the Class A teams during this era were rated in the state high school polls. However, if a poll would have been in existence in 1942, there would be little doubt that this NM team would have topped all Class C lists.

Nearly 60 years after this historic run the Norsemen of 1941 & 1942 were inducted into the Greater Muskegon Hall of Fame, only the third team in Greater Muskegon history to be so honored. Twenty-five of the living Norsemen from those teams were in attendance while widows of five of the deceased members also were on hand for this moving induction. What a thrill it was for your author to serve as the emcee for this occasion. Sadly, as time moves on, none of those incredible men of ‘The Greatest Generation’ are with us as of this writing.

Record Score Interesting Fact

1-0 NM 33, GR Lee 0 Don Bowen 2 TDs, including a 93-yard run, Moe Sikkenga 2 TD’s and a blocked punt for a safety, Frank Sodini a 20-yard TD.

2-0 NM 19, Manistee 0 NM scores in 3-different ways. Bill Goldberg blocks a punt in the endzone, Bowen to Sikkenga a pass for 27 and Phil Buys 6-yard TD.

3-0 \*NM 26, Montague 0 4 different Norse score in win. Bowen from short yardage, Buys passes to Postema for 25, Bowen TD toss to Don Jacobson, Sodini scores from 25.

4-0 NM 27, Reed City 0 Tyler starts the NM scoring with a 15-yard TD from a blocked punt. Bowen has another 2 TD game with Sikkenga the final TD on a pass from Phil Buys.

5-0 \*NM 32, Shelby 0 Bowen 2 more TDs, Buys 1 TD pass to Postema and a rushing TD, Sikkenga scores on a trick play from 40.

6-0 \*NM 25, Scottville 6 Scottville scores to end streak, Bowen, Postema, Sikkenga and Buys each score TD. Bowen’s injury in third quarter costly.

7-0 \*NM 14, Hart 0 Hart gives NM stiffest test of the season. Bowen limps for one TD, Postema the other.

8-0 NM 49, Fremont 0 Bowen and Sikkenga end careers with 3 TDs each. Bowen also a pair of TD passes to Wayne Dulyea and Don Gunn.



**1943 – coach Paul Moyes (3-4-1 overall 2-1-1 in WMC, Montague champs)**

Injuries have always played a part in the game of football; but losing players to the draft or armed forces is unheard of in today’s era. Second year coach Paul Moyes was counting on Ken Tyler as one of his two regulars returning from last years’ powerhouse squad; however, 1943 captain elect Tyler had entered the service prior to the season opener. Two other starters were on the cusp of leaving for the service as running back Bob Fenner and lineman Bill Peterson had spent most of the week prior to the Norse opener with Grand Rapids Lee with draft duties in Detroit. All three would eventually miss all or most of the upcoming season and would leave for the service without earning their high school diploma. It would be many decades later during the Obama Administration when all three would deservedly receive their long overdue diplomas from NMHS. In a moving ceremony at a NM seniors award assembly in 2004, Ken Tyler received not only his long overdue diploma but was one of the recipients winning the Paul & Tom Moyes Sportsman Ship award.

The Norse fielded an injury riddled and inexperienced team in their home opener against Grand Rapids Lee. After a scoreless first half the Norse mounted a serious scoring drive but a fumble at The GR Lee 10-yard line halted their best scoring opportunity. The games only score came in the fourth quarter as Lee ended the Norse winning streak at 18 games with a 6-0 victory.

It was a long journey to Manistee for the second game of the 1943 season. There were no expressways in 1943, and the speed limit to save on gas as well as preserve tires for the war effort was set at a maximum of 35 mph. The return home was even longer as the Norse could not create any kind of offensive momentum against the heavier Manistee team and for the second straight week suffered a 6-0 loss. The injury problem for the Norse became even worse as starting halfback Dick Salmonson fractured a couple of ribs in the losing contest with Manistee.

After recently completing their still standing feat of holding their opponents scoreless through 15 straight games, the Norse began 1943 getting a dose of their own medicine. Montague, the 1943 WMC champs, scored in every quarter while holding NM scoreless. It was in this game that the Norse began playing perhaps the smallest and lightest gridder to ever don a Norseman uniform, 5’2, 105-pound sophomore Ken Kueny.

Although the Norse suffered their 4th straight defeat after another long journey to Reed City, the Norse made the game close and finally were able to produce their first TD of the season when reserve back Fred ‘Pinky’ Gerling completed a TD pass to the only returning regular from the 1942 season, Don Jacobson. The rest of the season appeared gloomy for NM but this plucky group of gridders would not taste defeat in the second half of the 1943 campaign.

The Norse were decided underdogs against Shelby but reports coming out of the northside were that the Norsemen would be at near full strength for the first time all season. Leonard Buys, the only returning backfield man with any experience from 1941, would be in the NM starting lineup. The Norse were finally able to have enough players to just have a scrimmage during the midweek practices and work on plays and defensive strategy for the game with Shelby. The Norse used an aerial attack to stun the favored and undefeated Shelby team 19-0 with Fred Gerling tossing three TD passes, two of those six-point strikes were caught by Don Jacobson. The Norse unleashed a ‘new’ formation for this game --- The T formation with Gerling the QB under center Tom Pinder.

It appeared the Norse were in for a long afternoon in their next game with Scottville. Utilizing the power of a pair of big 200-pound backs in Herb Spencer and Fred McGee, the visiting Spartans took the opening drive and scored an early TD against the much smaller band of NM defenders. They would never again cross the Norse goal line. NM nearly tied the game in the first half but a couple of passes at the Scottville goal line were dropped by Norse receivers. Using their newly formed T formation the Norse did mount a long drive in the third quarter led by the running of Tom Jackson and Lynn Felt with little Fred Gerling also contributing from his QB position. Felt plunged through for the TD but the extra point attempt by Marshall Strayer was just wide of the uprights. Playing his final game for the Norse was lineman Bill Peterson, who following the Wednesday afternoon 6-6 tie game with Scottville, would leave two days later for the armed services.

The Norse continued their climb down the comeback trail with a surprising 19-0 victory over a Hart team that was picked to give the Norse a tough game. The big play in the game was by the smallest player on the field. Ken Kueny, who tipped the scales at 105 pounds, intercepted a Pirate pass and scooted 46 yards for a TD. Lynn Felt would follow up later in the second half with a pair of TDs as the Norse secured their second victory of the season. If anybody is curious as to who was the first freshman to start a game for the Norse, the answer is Bob Pyle, who started the game at end for the Norse.

While the Norsemen had a few days off in preparation of their final regular season annual Armistice Day clash with Fremont it is noteworthy to point out the WMC conference championship game between Montague and Scottville. Montague was undefeated and unscored upon when they made the trip to Ludington to take on a Scottville team whose only blip of the season was a 6-6 tie with North Muskegon. Montague had little trouble in winning the game, but their season was very similar to North Muskegon’s undefeated feat of 1942. Montague had not given up a point up to their clash with Scottville but again it was the Spartans who would play the spoiler role in a defeat to thwart Montague’s quest for perfection. Ironically, it was Herb Spencer, who scored the only TD given up by the Norse in 16 games, who scored the lone TD for Scottville in a 26-7 final score, nearly identical. to NM’s 26-6 victory a year earlier.

The final game of the season was headlined by the work of little Ken Kueny. Playing on a field that had more mud than grass, Kueny led the Norse on an uninterrupted 74-yard TD drive. Kueny on the first play picked up 12 yards, a few plays later he picked up 18. The diminutive Kueny then picked up a first down to the Packer 28. On a key fourth down and five Kueny passed to freshman Bob Pyle to pick up the first down. After losing four yards, Kueny rushed for 12 yards. Covered in mud from head to toe, coach Moyes inserted Fred Gerling in to replace an exhausted Kueny. Gerling did the rest and scored from three yards’ out for the games only score. After a terrible start to the season the Norse rallied to save their season by going undefeated in their final four games. As 1943 came do a close, WWII was continuing to rage, many had given the supreme sacrifice, including 53 from the Muskegon area with another 21 missing in action. The good news --- The USA and their allies were winning the War.

Shortly after the conclusion of the 1943 season James F Henderson, veteran sports editor of the Muskegon Chronicle and my future boss picked his WMC All-Conference team. Henderson listed on his first team end Don Jacobson, tackle Bill ‘Tex’ Moore and guard Bill Drost while Center Tom Pinder and halfbacks Tom Jackson and Lynn Felt were listed on Henderson’s second team.

Record Score Interesting Fact

0-1 GR Lee 6, NM 0 NM winning streak ends at 18. NM fumbles at Lee 10 yard in their closest scoring threat.

0-2 Manistee 6, NM 0 NM offense struggles against Manistee. Fails to cross their own 40-yard line in the game.

0-3 \*Montague 25, NM 0 Montague scored in each period as the Norse are shutout for the 3rd straight game.

0-4 Reed City 13, NM 6 NM loses by a TD but score their 1st TD of the season on a pass from Fred Gerling to Don Jacobson.

1-4 \*NM 19, Shelby 0 NM unveils the ‘T’ formation with Gerling throwing 2 TD passes to Jacobson and one to Lynn Felt.

1-4-1 \*NM 6, Scottville 6 Scottville scores first but NM dominates the rest of the game. Lynn Felt the lone NM TD. Bill Peterson leaves for the service 2 days later.

2-4-1 \*NM 13, Hart 0 Lynn Felt 2 TDs, Ken Kueny returns intercepted pass 46 yards for TD

3-4-1 NM 6 Fremont 0 Armistice Game played in the mud. Kueny leads opening drive capped by a Fred Gerling TD.

**1944 – coach Earl Meyers (3-4-1 overall 2-1-1 in WMC, Montague champs)**

Seven NM players and one coach all had left their team before their senior year heading into the 1944 season. Lynn Felt, starting back on the 1943 team reported for induction just a few days before the Norse opener, and captain elect Louis Simonelli joined the Navy earlier in the summer. While virtually all the players were inducted into the armed forces, even their 30-year-old head coach joined his players in fighting the War against aggression. Although married, the father of two boys, and a schoolteacher/coach Paul Moyes enlisted as a Lieutenant in the US Navy in May of 1944. The new duties as the head coach for the Norsemen were entrusted to Earl S. Meyers.

The Norse made the jaunt to Grand Rapids for their traditional opener with Lee high and were no match for a Lee team that pre-season reports as being perhaps their best team in years. NM was only able to muster a pair of first downs while Lee was able to just pound the ball up the middle relentlessly against the smaller and young Norse defenders as NM fell 13-0.

The Norse bounced back nicely the following Friday with a convincing 25-0 victory over Reed City. The Norse scored first on a pass from a pair of returnees from the previous season, Ken Kueny to Don Jacobson to take a 6-0 lead at halftime. Early in the second half Tom Jackson broke loose on an 80-yard TD jaunt. Kueny then electrified the home crowd by fielding a punt at his own 34-‘s yard line and, with a lot of twisting and turning, ran 66 yards for a 3rd NM TD. Keuny then completed the scoring with a TD pass for 30 yards to Marshall Strayer.

Nothing was decided on the Northside gridiron as the Norse and Montague battled to a scoreless tie. The best chance for a score by either team came when Montague’s Wackernagle picked up a bad pass from center and

advanced the ball to the NM 2-yard line before swarmed under by the Norse. NM receivers dropped a pair of passes that could have resulted in TDs.

In the only game ever played between the two schools, Zeeland defeated the Norse 20-7. The Norse were only able to score late in the fourth quarter on a two-yard dive by Tom Jackson. Putting a huge damper on the contest was an accident that took the life of Don Brearley the day before the Zeeland contest. Brearley, a popular NM student who once served as a manager for NM football, was killed in a car accident just a block from the high school on his way to a pep rally on the eve of the game with Zeeland.

In a Wednesday afternoon game played on the Hart High School field, North Muskegon had their best offensive showing on the season with a 31-0 rout of Shelby. It was feared that Shelby wouldn’t even have a football team in 1944 as their football field was used as a camp for German Prisoners of War. All Shelby ‘home’ games during the season were played at nearby Hart. The Norse were only able to get a 4-yard TD run from Kueny in the first half, but they were working on all cylinders in the second half. A trio of Norsemen scored their first touchdowns wearing a Norse uniform: Frank Dzielski scored from 4-yards out on NM’s first possession of the second half, Bud Anderegg intercepted a pass and returned it for a TD while Sophomore Bob Pyle caught a TD pass from Tom Jackson. Marshall Stayer had the other TD on a short dive as NM won their 10th straight game over Shelby.

The Norse had visions of perhaps winning the WMC conference title heading into their game with Scottville as only a scoreless tie with Montague was a non-winning game in conference play. It was not to be although the Norse completely dominated play in their 7-6 loss on the Scottville gridiron. A Norse miscue created the only score for Scottville when a Norse pass was intercepted by Johnson of Scottville who returned it 50-yards for a TD. The all-important placekick was good, and the Norse trailed 7-0 at halftime. NM mounted their scoring drive midway into the third period and marched 60 yards to score on a Len Buys TD. However, a Norse weakness for several years again plagued NM as the extra point was wide. NM made a serious drive late in the game, but the final whistle blew with the Norse at the Scottville 5-yard line. NM had 13 first downs to Scottville’s four but 75 yards in penalties perhaps deprived NM of a win and at least a share of the WMC title.

NM kept their mastery of never having lost to Hart intact as they scored a couple of 2nd half touchdowns in a 13-0 win under the lights in Hart. On the last play of the third quarter Ken Kueny passed to Don Jacobson who quickly lateraled to Tom Jackson and the play was good for 68 yards and a Norse TD. Marshall Stayer completed a late march for NM with a short TD run.

Fremont scored their first touchdown against the Norse since 1939 and added two more to even the 10-game series between the two rivals at five games won by each team. The Norse had two scoring drives inside the Packer 20 but failed to score. For the second straight season NM would post an identical record of 3-4-1.

Record Score Interesting Fact

0-1 GR Lee 13, NM 0 Lee scores a TD in 2nd and 3rd quarters and lets their defense do the rest as Lee shuts out the Norse for the second straight year.

1-1 NM 25, Reed City 0 Kueny throws 2 TD passes, one each to Don Jacobson and Marshall Strayer and returns punt 66 yards. Tom Jackson 80-yard TD.

1-1-1 \*NM 0, Montague 0 NM and Montague play to scoreless tie. NM dominated game mostly played in Montague territory.

1-2-1 Zeeland 20, NM 7 NM held scoreless until Jackson scores on a short dive play with 4 minutes left.

2-2-1 \*NM 31, Shelby 0 5 Norse tally TD’s: Kueny, Dzielski, Anderegg, Pyle and Strayer as NM wins 10th straight over Shelby.

2-3-1 \*Scottville 7, NM 6 A pass intercepted and returned for a TD and made extra point the difference in tight loss. Buys scored NM TD, but extra point fails.

3-3-1 \*NM 13, Hart 0 A 68 yards pass, catch and lateral from Kueny to Jacobson to Jackson good for TD. Strayer scores final TD.

3-4-1 Fremont 19, NM 0 Fremont evens 10-games series at 5 games each.

**1945 – coach Earl Meyers (6-2 overall, 5-0 WMC Champs)**

The bitter war had mercifully come to an end right at the start of the 1945-46 school year. The USA suffered more than one million casualties with more than 260,00 paying the supreme sacrifice. Virtually all the former NM players from previous years entered the service, with two Norsemen football players lost during the War:

Oliver Eyestone lost his life on August 24, 1944, and less than three weeks later Wayne Stenberg was killed in action on September 12, 1944.

The Norse lost two games total in the 1945 season, their first and their last games played. In between those bookend defeats the Norse not only won six straight games in convincing fashion, but they did it without allowing a single point during the streak.

The first encounter was an historic one for Norse followers, as it was the first game played under the lights on the home field. Although it would still be several years before the field would see an electronic scoreboard, a PA system was installed with NM Superintendent of Schools Max Smith behind the microphone. The Norse ran into one of Grand Rapids Lee’s best teams in their school’s history and nipped the Norse 14-0. The defense, which was outstanding the entire season gave up but one touchdown as the other Lee score came on an interception returned 65 yards.

In the first game ever played between these pair of long-time rivals, the Norse shutout Whitehall 31-0. NM scores the first TD on a fake punt as Marshall Strayer goes 61 yards for the TD. Stayer tallies 3 TDs for the game, Ken Kueny scored one and George Felt the other TD for the victors.

Pint size Ken Kueny led the Norse to a Thursday evening game played under the NM lights to their second straight 31-0 victory, a non-conference game with Newaygo. The two teams would not meet again for the next 28 years. Kueny scored three TDs and set up one of his scores with a long punt return. Strayer had a 58-yard pass interception return for a TD while George Felt the final TD after the short drive was set up on a blocked punt by Bob Duplissis.

The Norse added their 3rd straight convincing victory with a 32-0 shutout of Scottville on dedication night for the newly lighted Norse field. Strayer raced for three TDs for NM while Kueny, who over the off-season had ‘bulked’ up from 105 pounds to 123, and George Felt punched in the other NM TDs.

The Norse went to the air to score three of their four TDs in their 4th straight victory, a 27-0 shutout at Montague. Norm David, the ace of the NM pitching staff in the spring, pitched a pair of TD strikes to Marshall Strayer, while Ken Kueny used the ‘jump pass’ to connect with Bob Pyle for the 3rd TD pass reception. George Felt had the only rushing TD on a short plunge shortly before half for the first NM score.

Shelby then gave the Norse a good battle for half the game but the Norse behinds the legs of Kueny and another long interception return by Strayer led to a 26-0 victory over Shelby. Kueny scored on 13 and 28-yard runs in the second half while Strayer’s pick was good for a 62-yard TD. NM scored late in the first half on a one-yard plunge by sophomore back Ken Baars.

Hart, boasting of an undefeated team, and the Norse would decide the WMC championship on November 2nd on the Norse field. Neither team had given up a point to another conference opponent and there could be little doubt that points would come at a premium. When the 1945 WMC conference season ended, both teams would give up but 6 points. Fortunately for Norse followers it would be the Norsemen who would score the six points and capture another WMC championship. It was only fitting that it was the defense that made the big play for the Norsemen. With Hart punter Mid Littlebrandt back to punt deep in his own territory, the Pirate punter bobbled the snap from center and a wave of NM jerseys led by Don Buehle brought him down on the Hart two-yard line. Bud Anderegg, making the switch from center to running back squeezed through the Hart line for the game’s only score.

Roles were reversed in the final game of the season as it was Fremont who scored the games’ only six points to defeat the Norse and end their season at 6-2. In a somewhat similar happenstance in the Norse win over Hart, it was a Norse mistake that brought victory for the Packers. Kueny was first tackled for a loss behind the line of scrimmage and when he attempted to toss a lateral to a teammate it was picked off by Roger Thayer who raced untouched into the end zone.

Record Score Interesting Fact

0-1 GR Lee 14, NM 0 Lee scores on a 65-yard interception return for TD. NM defense only allows 1 TD.

1-1 \*NM 31, Whitehall 0 Stayer scores 3 TDs, one TD on a fake punt good for 61 yards. Ken Kueny and George Felt TD each in first game ever with Whitehall.

2-1 NM 31, Newaygo 0 Kueny 3 TDs, including a long punt return, Strayer a long interception returned for six-points and Felt also scores.

3-1 \*NM 32, Scottville 0 Strayer leads the Norse with 3 TDs, Kueny and Felt also score in rout of Scottville on dedication night on the newly lighted Norse field.

4-1 \*NM 27, Montague 0 NM passes for 3 TDs, 2 from Norm David to Strayer, the other Kueny to Bob Pyle. Felt a rushing TD.

5-1 \*NM 26, Shelby 0 Kueny a pair of TDs (13 &28) Strayer another interception returned for a TD. Ken Baars scores his first TD as a Norsemen.

6-1 \*NM 6, Hart 0 NM edges undefeated Hart. Bud Anderegg scores after Hart punter dropped at the two-yard line. NM WMC champs!

6-2 Fremont 6, NM 0 Fremont intercepts NM lateral and scores games only TD to end the NM season at 6-2.

**1946 – coach Paul Moyes (4-3-1 overall, 3-1-1 in WMC, Hart Champs)**

Paul Moyes returned from serving in WWII to resume his coaching duties for the Norse. The Norse faced a tough task in their season opener against a veteran Grand Rapids Lee team that had 73 players on its roster. The Norse would open their reason with Dale Bos and Ken Cooper at the ends, Jack Mitchelson and Dale Pulsipher at the tackle spots, Roger Felt and Don Hulander were the starting guards while Al Covell occupied the center spot. Tom Jackson returned as the quarterback, Clifford Olsen and Dick Salmonson the halfbacks with stocky Lavern Nicholson the fullback. Lee defeated the Norse 6-0 in a defensive battle with the game’s only TD coming after an NM fumble at their own 15-yard line late in the opening quarter. It appeared the Norse had Lee stopped after three-line plunges produced little yardage. A fourth down pass was allowed for interference and Lee capitalized moments later for the game’s only touchdown, spoiling the return of Coach Moyes.

Whitehall scored two TDs in the final quarter to rally to a 12-6 victory over the Norse in game two of the 1946 campaign. A pass from Randy Lorenz to Viking end Lyle Peterson with 30 seconds remaining spelled defeat for the Norse. The Norse had a 6-0 lead until the game’s final stanza after Lavern Nicholson, on a fourth down-play, raced 23 yards for a NM TD midway through the second period.

The Norse welcomed back to their lineup from an ankle injury 6’5 220-pound senior tackle Bob Pyle for their next game against a Ludington eleven that were favored to hand NM their 3rd consecutive defeat. However, with Pyle providing big holes from his tackle spot, and plugging the line on defense, NM used three short TD bursts from Lavern Nicholson in the games’ first half in their 20-0 shutout of the Orioles. The loss would be one of but two-defeats on the season for Ludington, their other loss a tight 19-13 contest to Class A Grand Haven.

A new field equipped with lights was dedicated at Scottville, a field much needed according to Rex Funnell, a member of Whitehall’s football team of 1932. Funnell didn’t mince any words in an interview with this author in 2014. When asked the quality of the field Rex quickly replied: “Scottville just had a bad field.” Scottville proved to be the perfect host for the Norse as NM breezed to an easy 27-7 win in front of what was reported to be the largest crowd to see a Scottville football game. Four different NM backs scored with Bob Duplissis, Dick Salmonson, Jim Hubbell and Don ‘Doc’ Meisch all crossing the Spartan goal line. Meisch was a savior for the Norse in a most unusual way. Dale Pulsipher intercepted a Scottville pass on his own 40-yard line but started racing down the field… the wrong way. Meisch took off, and with a flying tackle, brought down his teammate just 10 yards shy of his own goal.

Newspaper headlines two days before NM’s next contest with Montague announced the hanging of 11 Nazi henchmen tried and convicted at the famed Nuremberg Trials. It was also a time when this country was going through a severe meat shortage. After weeks of empty shelves in local grocery stores, meat had finally become plentiful with prices for your favorite steak going for one dollar a pound.

The Norse captured their 3rd straight victory with a 20-0 victory over Montague as Nicholson again had a three TD performance. Two of those came on receiving end of passes, the first a 14-yard aerial from junior running back Ken Baars, the second receiving TD came with just 30 seconds left in the half on a 42 yarder from Clifford Olson. Sandwiched in between those receiving scores Nicholson added a rushing TD good for 49 yards.

The Norse then set up a possible chance for a WMC title game the following week with Hart by edging Shelby 13-7 on a Wednesday night. Nicholson churned up most of the yardage on NM’s initial scoring drive that was capped by his smash from inside the five-yard line. Ken Baars then provided the impetus for the final NM score by rushing for 50 yards to set up a Salmonson TD run from the four-yard line.

There was much hype for the NM contest with Hart that could have earned the Norsemen at least a tie for a conference championship. The game was one of futility on a wet Hart field as neither team was able to muster any offense with the game ending in a 0-0 tie. The one bright light for the Norse, other than their stingy defense, was the punting of Nicholson. Although Hart was still looking for their first win over the Norse, the Pirates were able to win the conference championship with their only conference blemish the scoreless tie with NM.

The Norse were decided underdogs to the once beaten Fremont team in the season’s finale. Among the Packers victims was WMC champion Hart, who fell to the Packers 51-0. No such rout occurred in this game as the Packers mounted but one scoring drive in the third period that stood as the only scoring for the contest as a valiant Norse team fell 6-0. Much credit for the outstanding defensive showing by the Norse was praise for the line play of Don Hulander, Don Miller, Bob Duplissis, Jim Brechlien and Bob Pyle.

Record Score Interesting Fact

0-1 GR Lee 6, NM 0 NM fumble and pass interference leads to games only score.

0-2 \*Whitehall 12, NM 6 White throws a pair of fourth quarter TD passes to rally and upset the Norse.

1-2 NM 20, Ludington 0 NM scores 3 first half TDs, all by Lavern Nicholson.

2-2 \*NM 27, Scottville 7 NM spoils new Scottville field dedication as 4 NM backs score a rushing TD.

3-2 \*NM 20, Montague 0 Nicholson 3 TDs, 2 on pass receptions and rushed 49 yards for a 3rd TD.

4-2 \*NM 13, Shelby 7 Nicholson and Baars pick up most of the night’s yardage in Wednesday night win at Shelby.

4-2-1 \*NM 0, Hart 0 (tie) Fumbles and a wet field prevented either team from a serious scoring chance.

4-3-2 Fremont 6, NM 0 Norse permits but one score to once beaten Fremont.

**1947 – coach Paul Moyes (6-2 overall, 5-0 WMC Champs)**

The 1947 season was a mirror of the 1945 campaign as the Norse went 6-2 while losing to the same two teams who defeated them in 1945, Grand Rapids Lee and Fremont. Sandwiched between those pair of bookend opponents the Norse went a perfect 6-0 to win another WMC championship while also disposing of Ludington.

The Norse did take the early lead in their traditional opener with Grand Rapids Lee with Bob Chaffee capping a long scoring drive by crashing over from the 2-yard line. After a Lee touchdown and a failed extra point, the Norse had a golden opportunity to take the lead in the third period but were stopped at the Lee one-foot line. Lee halfback Rolly Molenkamp would later race 50 yards for the game winning touchdown to give Lee their 5th straight opening game victory 13-6 over the Norse.

In nearly 60 games played between NM and Whitehall over the years, the Norse 50-0 romp over the Vikings would be their biggest margin of victory ever over their long-time rivals. The halfback duo of Ken Baars and Tom Mitchelson led the Norse rout by combining for 5 touchdowns. Baars totaled 170 yards on his TDs, one from 90 yards and the other from 80. The remaining NM tallies were from John Biddle, Bob Gundy and Jerry Raymond. Following the game, the entire Norse team of 45 gridders were treated to hamburgers and ice cream at Dyers Hillcrest Dairy, the current site of Ace Hardware at the corner of Ruddiman and Whitehall Road.

The Norse used a pair of defensive gems in their 13-7 victory in Ludington. With Ludington driving deep into NM territory, junior Tom Mitchelson intercepted a pass at his own 15-yard line and then raced untouched 85 yards for the score. With NM continuing their search for a competent place kicker, Ken Baars passed to Dale Bos for the extra point. Following a blocked punt at the Oriole 20-yard line, Mitchelson scored a few plays later from 6-yards out for the game’s final TD. The win was their second straight shutout over Ludington and was accomplished despite the Norse losing four fumbles on the night.

NM then made it a perfect two for two over a Mason County team when they defeated a previously undefeated Scottville eleven 18-6 on the Norse gridiron. After trailing 12-0 at halftime, the visitors moved to within six points of the Norse following a 55-yard TD pass, but the Norse put the game away when Dale Bos scored from 35 yards out on an end around reverse play late in the third period. Earlier the Norse scored a pair of first half TDs, both from Bob Chaffee, the first on a six-yard scamper and the second on a 70-yard dash following a Tom Mitchelson interception.

NM took over undisputed possession of first place following a 13-2 victory over Montague. Ken Baars and Tom Mitchelson each tallied TDs for the Norse while only giving up 2 points to the Wildcats. It appears that rules for a safety were different back in 1947. Bob Chaffee intercepted a Montague pass in his own end zone in the final period and was tackled in the end zone for a safety. Under today’s rules Chaffee’s pick would have been ruled a touchback and brought out to the 20-yard line.

The Norse then clinched the WMC title with a hard-earned 7-6 victory over Shelby the following Wednesday. NM had finally found their long sought-after kicker in junior Harry ‘Bud’ Matych whose successful point after from placement would prove to be the difference in the game. Matych made his game winning kick following a TD from fullback Jim Hubbell in front of 3000 fans at the Northside field. The Tigers threw a scare into the Norse when they capitalized on a Norse fumble in the final quarter and cashed in for a TD on a fourth down line plunge. The Norse stopped the Tigers extra point run to tie the game to move to a perfect 4-0 in WMC play. Ken Baars suffered a knee injury in this game, ending the co-captain’s season.

The Norse then scored almost at will in their final conference clash of the season in a 40-0 rout of the 1946 conference champs from Hart. ‘Doc’ Meisch and Bob Chaffee each scored a pair of TDs for the victors while Tom Mitchelson’s tally was a long distance 70 yards dash. Jim Scott, who would later become the long-time track coach at Whitehall, also joined the TD parade on a 10-yard run.

Once beaten Fremont ended the Norse season with a 14-0 shutout, the fourth straight year the Packers have won and held the Norse scoreless during the streak. The game was played in wretched conditions as rain and snow coupled with gusty winds contributed to a mistake plagued contest. The one shining moment for the Norse was a 70-yard run by Bob Chaffee but NM failed to score as their season ended at 6-2. At the season-ending football banquet the Norse players were awarded their letters and the WMC trophy presented. The guest speaker was future Detroit Lions head coach George Wilson, who spent his childhood years as a student and resident of North Muskegon.

Record Score Interesting Fact

0-1 GR Lee 13, NM 6 NM takes early lead on a Bob Chaffee TD, but Lee wins on a 50-yard TD run in second half.

1-1 \*NM 50, Whitehall 0 Tom Mitchelson 3 TDs, Ken Barrs runs for 90 & 80-yard TDs in largest win ever over Whitehall.

2-1 NM 13, Ludington 0 Mitchelson a 85-yard interception return for a TD and a 6-yard rushing TD.

3-1 \*NM 18, Scottville 6 Chaffee a pair of first half TDs, Dale Bos clinches game with 35-yard reverse play in third quarter.

4-1 \*NM 13, Montague 2 NM moves into first place in WMC. Mitchelson and Baars TD each for the Norse.

5-1 \*NM 7, Shelby 6 Bud Matych boots extra point following a Jim Hubbell TD as NM clinches conference championship.

6-1 \*NM 40, Hart 0 ‘Doc’ Meisch and Bob Chaffee a pair of TDs, Mitchelson runs from 70 yards for TD and Jim Scott 10.

6-2 Fremont 14, NM 0 Bob Chaffee 70-yard run but no TD.

**1948 – coach Paul Moyes (4-2-2 overall, 2-1-2 WMC, Hart WMC Champs)**

Other than their opening game thrashing at the hands of Grand Rapids Lee, the Norse came oh-so-close to running the table over their final seven games. However, a pair of tie games, along with a close loss to Montague left the Norse with a rare record of four wins and a pair of losses and ties. The opener at Lee in front of 2500 spectators went from bad to worse for the visiting Norsemen. Fumbles and interceptions plagued the Norse all night as a 18-0 deficit going into the final period turned worse as Lee scored three touchdowns, two of which were interceptions returned for TDs.

The Norse bounced back nicely in their home opener by shutting out Whitehall 14-0. Tom Mitchelson had a huge game for the winners with a pair of TDs from 30 yards and 12, with the latter TD set up on his own 55-yard scamper earlier in the drive. Bud Matych, with his younger brother Jim the holder, was perfect on both of his kicks from placement, a rarity up to this date in NM history.

The Norse 6-6 tie at Scottville in game 3 was about as painful as they come. It first appeared as the Norse would have an easy time with the host Spartans as they marched downfield for an early first quarter score with Tom Mitchelson scoring from 12 yards out. Earlier Mitchelson set up his TD run with a 31-yard run down to the 12. However, misfortune stepped in for the Norse. Bud Matych kicked the extra point, but the Norse were guilty of 12 men on the field when a replaced NM player was late getting off the field. Rules at the time met the point was nullified and no yardage was enforced leaving the score 6-0 with the Norse on top. It would only get worse. With little time left in the game (remember – no digital scoreboards at Scottville) Scottville went to the airways. A key pass completion from Slug Mavis to Lowell Hankwitz moved the ball down to the 6-yard line. Mavis then completed a TD pass to Bob Stakenes with just 5 seconds left in the game. The Norse did escape with a tie when a pass attempt to add the winning extra point failed.

Although it had promised to be a short series as plans had already been formulated for a new Catholic School to be erected at the Muskegon corner of Laketon & Barclay, interest was high for the first ever game played between the Norsemen and Muskegon St. Mary’s. Landscaping had begun for the new football field at what is now known as Kehren Stadium, and it would still be five years before students would enter Muskegon Catholic Central High School. The Norse would start the following players against St. Mary’s: Jerry Raymond and Don Miller at the ends; Roger Felt and Ted Vanderboll at tackles; Don Fitt and Bud Frutchey at guards; Bud Matych at center while the backfield would consist of Harold Dyer at QB, Tom Mitchelson and Bob Chaffee at halfbacks with Jack Krolczyk at fullback. And let us not forget the Norse ball boy--- your author, 7-year-old 2nd grader Jimmy Moyes. The game was as tense and close as advertised. Jack Krolczyk played a role in both of NM’s scores, one on offense, the other defense. Krolczyk completed a short 45-yard scoring drive in the second quarter by crashing over from the 4-yard line. Krolczyk then came up with what would prove to be the deciding play of the game early into the fourth quarter. Jack blocked an Irish punt that was recovered in the endzone by a St. Mary’s player for a safety. St. Mary’s would make it close with a late TD, but the extra point was blocked by Bud Matych as NM won 8-6. Oddly enough, Matych would have his own extra point attempt blocked after the Norse scored the games’ only TD in the first half. There was a sad moment during the contest when spectator Alexander Marema was stricken during the contest and later died that night at Hackley hospital.

Possibly suffering a mental letdown after their spirited victory over St. Mary’s, the Norse saw their chances as repeat champions in the WMC go down the drain as they were upset on their home field 13-6 by Montague. The Norse spotted the Wildcats 13 points before they were finally able to score in the final period on a 10-yard run by Tom Mitchelson. Coach Moyes played 26 players in the contest attempting to find a winning combination but to no avail.

NM journeyed to Shelby in hopes of keeping their very faint WMC title hopes alive and returned home with a resounding 35-14 victory. NM took little time to score as Tom Mitchelson took a double reverse and galloped 66 yards for a TD on their first play from scrimmage. Norse tackle Bud Frutchey grabbed a Shelby fumble out of the air and ran 35 yards for the second Norse score. Mitchelson bucked over for his second TD on the Wednesday evening contest while Bob Gundy from 4-yards out and Don Miller from 14, also scored for NM. Bud Matych was a perfect five for five on his extra points, easily the best performance up to that time in Norse history.

The Norse next traveled to Hart to face perhaps the best team in Hart history. The Pirates breezed through their first six games of the season not only undefeated, but unscored upon. The inspired Norse, having never lost to the Pirates in their previous meetings, became the only team to score on the Pirates in a game that ended in a 7-7 tie. The Norse dominated the first half and didn’t allow a Pirate first down for the entire first half. Jack Krolczyk capped a 50-yard Norse drive in the second quarter with a short TD plunge with Bud Matych kicking the all-important extra point. The Norse had threatened to score a couple of other times in the first half with the half ending with NM at the Hart eight-yard line. The half ended before NM could have possibly attempted a field goal as time was kept on the field by an official. The Pirates scored their only TD in the third quarter to pull within a point of the Norse. Once again, cloudy rules at the time hurt the Norsemen. A Hart pass to tie the game was incomplete but pass interference was called against NM and the extra point was allowed even though another play was not needed, and Hart had clinched the WMC title.

After losing four straight games to Fremont, all without the Norse scoring a single point, the shoe was on the other foot in the final game of the 1948 season as NM reversed the tables and shut out the Packers 21-0. After suffering through four long years without crossing the Fremont goal line, it took only 90 seconds to score in the 1948 contest with Tom Mitchelson going six yards to score. The Norse would have to wait until the second half to score their final pair of TDs with Bill Dyer scoring the first and Bob Chaffee the next on a drive that began from their two 2-yard line. Lauded for his outstanding line play was sophomore John Arntz who helped NM bring back the ‘tin cup’ symbol of the 13-year rivalry between the two schools. It would be the last game for 13 seniors, including lineman Ted Vanderboll who suffered a fractured left hip in the second half and was taken to a local hospital. Bud Matych can boast as the all-time best kicker in Norse annals for their first two decades of NM football as he was perfect on his last nine extra-point kicks.

Record Score Interesting Fact

0-1 GR Lee 37, NM 0 NM once again falls in opener with GR Lee as turnovers doom the Norse.

1-1 \*NM 14, Whitehall 0 Tom Mitchelson TD runs of 30 & 12 lead the Norse.

1-1-1 \*NM 6 Scottville 6 (tie) NM made extra point nullified by a penalty after Mitchelson 12-yard TD. Scottville scores TD with 5 seconds left for the tie.

2-1-1 NM 8, Musk. St. Mary’s 6 Jack Krolczyk scores TD and block a punt for a safety that leads to NM victory in first game between the two locals.

2-1-1 \*Montague 13, NM 6 Mitchelson the only NM TD as NM loses their only WMC contest

3-2-1 \*NM 35, Shelby 14 Mitchelson scores twice, with the longest from 6 yards,

3-2-2 \*NM 7, Hart 7 (tie) Underdog Norse score only TD (Krolczyk) given up by WMC champs Hart. Hart ties on pass interference call on their extra point.

4-2-2 NM 21, Fremont 0 Mitchelson caps stellar career with 2 TDs, the longest 66 yards. Bill Dyer and Bob Chaffee also run for a TD.



**1949 – coach Paul Moyes (3-4-1 overall, 2-3 WMC, Montague Champs)**

The Norse returned 14 lettermen from the 1948 season to begin the 1949 season. The bad news --- only co-captain Harold ‘Bill’ Dyer was a returning starter. The other lettermen included ends Jerry Raymond and Monte Hand, backs Jack Mustard, Don Fitt, Carlos Garber, Bernie Hoxie, tackles Russ DeYoung and John Arntz. Co-captain Jack Semelbauer would man one of the guard sports while all-around athlete Blll Duplissis would see action at quarterback and return as the Norse punter.

After losing six openers in a row to Grand Rapids Lee, the Norse did escape defeat but had to settle for a 14-14 tie in a game the Norse dominated statistically. The Norse had numerous chances to get on the board in the first half, but fumbles and penalties killed their drives including one that ended at the Lee two-yard line. Trailing 14-0 entering the final period, the Norse rallied for a pair of touchdowns. Just minutes into the final quarter NM, after fumbling away the ball deep in Lee territory, Lee returned the favor and fumbled twice, the second fumble recovery by Jerry Raymond would lead to the first NM score. Converted from a tackle to a fullback from 1948, Don Fitt scored the first NM tally on a 1-yard plunge. Shortly thereafter Jack Mustard set up the final NM score with an interception at the Norse 45. The Norse marched down to the Lee Rebel 5-yard line where Fitt scored to move the Norse within a point. Keeping the kicking game in the same family, Jim Matych replaced his brother Bud as the new NM kicking specialist and his two perfect placekicks gave the Norse the 14-14 tie.

Football was at a fever pitch locally in the late 1940s. Crowds of 12,000 or more were commonplace when Muskegon hosted games at Hackley stadium. Phillips Field was taxed to capacity as a record crowd of 9400 fans watched Muskegon Heights lose to Grand Rapids Catholic. Certainly, far less fans were on hand at old Funnell Field in Whitehall to watch the Vikings upset the Norsemen 6-0. The fans on hand saw Whitehall score with just two minutes gone in the game on a TD run by Ronnie Hoff. Few could have envisioned at that time that would be all the scoring in the game. The Vikings outplayed the favored Norse in all departments as the Norse never had any serious scoring opportunities deep in Viking territory.

After being shutout at Whitehall, the Norse returned home and revamped their offense and found a new offensive sparkplug. Junior Bernie Hoxie scored three touchdowns, including a 58-yard run and threw a touchdown pass to Jack Mustard to account for a fourth tally. John Biddle added a pair of rushing TDs while Mustard produced the last six-pointer with an interception and run for 50 yards. Limited to only kicking duties due to an ankle injury incurred against Whitehall, Jim Matych was able to convert on six of his seven extra-point kicks.

There was more than football to occupy NM student’s interest in the month of October. The old school that had served NM students from the beginning of the 19th century was demolished due to unsafe conditions. How well your author remembers as a kid sliding down the fire escape tube that gave many of us youngsters thrills during the early years.

NM scored early and late in front of 1500 spectators at historic Hackley Stadium as the Norse edged Muskegon St. Mary’s 13-7 to earn their second straight victory over the parochials. The early TD came in the first Norse possession as a 55-yard run by Jack Mustard set up Bernie Hoxie’s short run from inside the five-yard line for the games first score. The late score was the difference maker in the game with Hoxie passing from his halfback position to single wing quarterback Bill Dyer for a game-winning 15-yard pass completion. For the Norse to even get into position to score was due to the deadly right arm of Bill Duplissis. With the St. Mary’s defense shutting down the NM running game, coach Moyes inserted Duplissis into the game in hopes of igniting the passing game. And Duplissis delivered. Beginning their winning drive from their own 42-yard line, Duplissis went to the air and completed a pair of passes to Dyer down to the Irish 20-yard line. Two plays later a Hoxie to Dyer TD pass gave the Norse the victory. Perhaps an explanation should be given as to why Duplissis was even on the team. During the off-season Coach Moyes had to perform a selling job on Duplissis’s parents to even have Bill on the roster. Bill’s brother Bob was injured severely in the 1946 season giving great concerns to ‘Doc’ and Libby Duplissis to allow their youngest son Bill to even play the sport. Coach Moyes did a lot of pleading with the Duplissis parents and finally won out when he promised that he would only use their son as a passer and punter. Norse fans would have to wait 72 years before NM would play another football game at Hackley Stadium. By the time the 1949 season would end, St. Mary’s would move into their new digs off Laketon & Barclay for the final three games of the season.

Duplissis came off the bench late in the next NM game with Montague and nearly once again led NM to victory. After Montague scored with about a minute and a half left in the game Duplissis faded back to his own 40-yard line and shot a beautiful 50-yard heave down the middle to Monte Hand, who made a circus catch at the Montague four-yard line. Unfortunately, according to the official keeping the time on the field, he blew his whistle saying time had run out before the Norse could mount another play. Montague would win the game 6-0 and end the 1949 season as WMC champs.

The Norse took advantage of six Shelby fumbles in shutting out the Tigers 28-0 on one of those annual Wednesday night games from the 1940s and 50s. The Norse struck early when following s fumble recovery Kyran Mitchelson passed to Monte Hand in the end zone with sure-footed Jim Matych booting the first of his four extra points. Duplissis went to the airwaves in the second period with Hand catching his second TD pass. The busy Hand then recovered a fumble from his defensive end position to ignite another Norse TD drive. Duplissis once again showed his arm strength with a 40-yard aerial caught by Dyer. Bernard Hoxie then capped the drive by pitching a short pass to Mitchelson who in turn lateraled to Jack Dewald for six-points. Enjoying a comfortable 21-0 lead at half, the games only TD in the second half was a short run by Dyer following a Don Fitt recovering of a fumble deep in Shelby territory.

It took 15 long years before the Hart Pirates were able to earn a victory over the Norse with their 13-7 win on the Northside gridiron. All the scoring for the game was done in the first quarter. Speedy Gene Robinson raced 41 yards for a TD on the Pirates initial drive of the game. The Pirates than capitalized on a NM fumble to set up their second score just moments later on a Robinson TD pass completion to Jerry Schaner. The Norse roared back with Duplissis passing to Dyer for 13 yards and a Norse TD late in the quarter, but despite NM dominating offensively in the second half Hart was able to hold off the Norse for a rare series victory over NM.

It was a very cold evening for the final game of the 1949 season. Despite the cold that hovered near the freezing mark 2700 bundled up rabid football fans stood in line to gobble up the remaining tickets on sale for the annual season ending Muskegon-Muskegon Heights game. Many fans left empty handed after all 12,000 tickets were sold. Earlier that afternoon the Norse football field was in use as the Muskegon Little Reds defeated Kalamazoo Central’s 2nds 18-0 with Bob Fairfield, father of future Ravenna Hall of Fame coach Dusty Fairfield, running for a pair of long touchdowns.

Fremont denied the Norse a chance to finish with a winning season as the Packers edged the Norse 14-7. Freezing temps played a role in the game and contributed to the only NM score. The Norse drove deep into Packer territory on the opening drive of the game only to cough up the ball on a fumble at the Fremont four-yard line. However, the Packers in turn fumbled in their own end zone and the ball was recovered by Charlie Whiteman for a TD. The Packers then pulled within one on a long 72-yard run to cut the gap to one with the difference being a made Jim Matych extra point. A safety and an early touchdown made the score 14-7 before the Norse again had a late drive stopped deep into enemy territory as time ran out. The freezing weather did not stop the NM marching band from providing another impressive show at halftime. Dick Hester, arguably North Muskegon’s all-time greatest drum major, suffered a painful knee injury when he stepped in a gopher hole during the halftime show. Proving that the show must go on, the courageous Hester ignored the pain and continued his masterful performance while leading the Norse band.

Days following the end of the 1949 season MSC assistant coach Duffy Daugherty with his star player, former Muskegon Heights ace Sonny Grandelius, were the guest speakers at the season ending football banquet. Daugherty and Coach Moyes remained very close friends until Paul Moyes passed away in 1960.

Record Score Interesting Fact

0-0-1 NM 14, GR Lee 14 tie Norse rally in second half to tie Lee. Don Fitt scores both NM TDs.

0-1-1 \*Whitehall 6, NM 0 Norse upset by Whitehall as NM offense never threatens. Numerous injuries plague Norse.

1-1-1 \*NM 48, Scottville 14 Bernie Hoxie runs for 3 TDS and passes for another. Jack Mustard 50-yard interception return for TD, Biddle 2 TD rushes.

2-1-1 NM 12, Musk. St Mary’s 7 Game played at Hackley Stadium. Hoxie TD run and TD pass to Bill Dyer

2-2-1 \*Montague 6, NM 0 WMC champs Montague edges Norse. Final NM drive stopped at the 4-yard line as time runs out.

3-2-1 \*NM 28, Shelby 0 Monty Hand with a pair of TD receptions, Jack Dewald and Dyer also score. Matych perfect on 4 extra points.

3-3-1 \*Hart 13, NM 0 All scoring completed in first quarter as Hart wins first game over NM in 15 attempts. Duplissis passes to Dyer for only Norse TD.

3-4-1 Fremont 14, NM 7 NM’s only score was a fumble recovered in the end zone by Charlie Whiteman.

**1950 – coach Paul Moyes (5-3 overall, 4-1 WMC champs)**

Nineteen Hundred and Fifty would be the final season for Paul Moyes as the popular NM head coach. The players would reward coach Moyes with another WMC championship with only a controversial loss to Shelby the only blemish during the conference season. Unfortunately, the USA was embroiled in yet another war in Korea that kept our nation on pins and needles. The Norse were pre-season favorites to win the WMC championship and they would not disappoint. However, the Norse again began the season against an old nemesis who had dominated the series since the Hall of Fame Norsemen team of 1942 toppled Lee 33-0. The Norse did escape defeat in 1949 when the two teams tied 14-14. The Norse got off to an explosive start in the game played in the furniture city when Bernie Hoxie electrified the crowd with a dazzling 73 TD run down the sidelines. After Jim Matych missed a rare extra point, the lead was short-lived. The Rebels grabbed a lead they would not relinquish on a 57-yard pass play and a made extra point. Lee then iced the game on yet another long pass completion, good for 68 yards to make the final score read 14-6.

The 1950-51 school year was one of numerous changes to NM’s school properties. The old school building that was used since near the turn of the new century had been demolished and two new buildings were in the process of being built. School space had become extremely tight as the enrollment had expanded where NM was now a Class B school and would remain Class B into the middle 1960s. So desperate were the administration to find necessary space for all their students that the North Muskegon Community Church housed classes for elementary students as did the recently erected City Hall. It would not be until the second semester of 1951 that the students from K-4th grade would move into the new elementary school.

The Norse made amends for a previous year upset by Whitehall with a convincing 13-0 shutout of the Vikings. NM’s answer to Elroy ‘Crazy Legs’ Hirsh was their own version of Hirsh in Bernie Hoxie who scored both NM touchdowns on gallops of 17 and 25 yards.

Hoxie may have been even better on a sloppy field in Scottville the following Friday. After a listless first half where nothing was decided, NM came alive in the second half with Hoxie doing much of the damage with some help from running back Jack DeWald. Taking the kickoff at their own 35, DeWald and ‘swivel hips’ Hoxie turned on the power and marched 65 yards to score with Hoxie plowing over the one for the score. Early in the final period the Norse went on another 65-yard scoring drive with Hoxie scoring this time from the nine on a play in which he carried three Scottville tacklers with him into the end zone. It was the 5th touchdown of the season in the 14-0 victory for the Norse, all scored by Hoxie.

The Norse were no match for Muskegon St. Mary’s in the third meeting between the two local squads as the Irish were always in firm control in their 31-6 victory. A young sophomore back by the name of Jim Morse, ran wild on numerous occasions. Although the future Notre Dame captain scored but one of St. Mary’s touchdowns, he set up others with several long runs including dashes of 36, 18, 19 and other bursts that spelled trouble for NM. The Norse were only able to escape defeat when Hoxie tallied a TD late for the Norse. The game featured a pair of quarterbacks who lived just a few blocks from each other in North Muskegon. John Fredericks got the better of Bill Duplissis on this matchup as the duo would remain lifelong friends. For many years Muskegon Catholic fans would see Fredericks and Duplissis pair up as members of the Crusader chain gang on the sidelines at Kehren Stadium. The following morning the entire Norse football team boarded a NM school bus and traveled to East Lansing to watch the MSC-Maryland football game thanks to tickets supplied by Coach Moyes’ good friend Duffy Daugherty. The Spartans, like the Norse on the previous evening, fared poorly against the Terps as they were drubbed 34-7. It would be the last game MSC would taste defeat for the next 28 games.

NM bounced back nicely in their next encounter with Montague as Bernie Hoxie was again the game’s big story. Ole ‘swivel hips’ scored all 4 NM touchdowns, including a 20-yard pass reception that went from Bill Duplissis to Paul Bos who lateraled to Hoxie for the TD. Bernie scored on runs of 16, 5 & 35 and even had a 47-yard TD scamper called back due to a penalty in NM’s 28-7 home victory over Montague.

In one of the more frustrating defeats in NM annals, the Norse were upset by the Shelby Tigers 18-13 on Wednesday evening at Shelby’s Getty field that served as both a football and baseball field. Bernie Hoxie scored his 11th and 12th touchdowns of the season to account for 12 of NM’s 13 points. However, the Norse star was stopped just one-yard short of the goal line by a freshman defensive back named Dave Whitsell (future NFL all-Pro). The final Norse drive began, and the Norse trailing by five-points, with four-minutes left on the clock, according to the official keeping time on the field. Following Hoxie’s near TD run the timekeeper said time had expired much to the surprise of Norse coach Paul Moyes. As his son, and the ball-boy for the 1950 Norseman, I had never seen my father argue with an official –-- until that moment. His argument that there should be time left on the clock naturally fell on ‘deaf ears’, and Shelby’s unexpected victory was official. It was now certain that NM had no wiggle room if they were to win the WMC Conference title and a win over Hart in their final WMC contest was essential. Mission accomplished!

It wasn’t easy as the Norse needed somebody not named Bernie Hoxie to defeat Hart. After scoring all of NM’s touchdowns after six games were completed, it was Jerry Upman, Norse fullback who became the first Norse other than Hoxie to cross the goal line in the second quarter to give his team a 6-0 lead at halftime. The popular Upman would pass away just six years later in April of 1956. Trailing 7-6 in the fourth quarter, John Arntz blocked a Pirate punt, and the Norse took over at the Pirate 34-yard line. A pair of runs by Carl Thompson and Hoxie brought the ball down to the Hart six-yard line but a pair of 15 yard holding penalties moved the ball back to the 20. After three plays failed to produce the Norse were in a desperate hole with fourth down and goal at the 36-yard line. Bill Duplissis then hurled a perfect strike to Kyran Mitchelson who raced down the sidelines for the winning score and a WMC championship.

The final game against Fremont would mark the end of the line for 13 seniors: Kyran Mitchelson and Paul Bos, ends; John Arntz, Dick McEwen, Larry Garber and Everett Cilla tackles; Charlie Whiteman and Don Vento guards; Jim Matych center; and backs Bill Duplissis, Jerry Upman, Jack Striegle and Bernie Hoxie. Hoxie would complete his brilliant senior season with a pair of long touchdown gallops of 57 and 69 yards, giving him 14 touchdowns on the season good for 84 of NM’s season total of 131 scored over the eight-game season. Duplissis, who would set school scoring records in basketball and was one of the best baseball players in school history, tossed a pair of TD passes to Carl Thompson for 21 yards and Paul Bos for 15. Wayne Sheffler returned a punt all the way from 65 yards out for the final Norse score.

At the football banquet on December 13th, 1950, coach Moyes stunned many, especially this author and my brother Tom, when he announced his resignation as football coach at North Muskegon because of illness (multiple sclerosis) contacted during his services with the armed forced in WWII. “Coaching here at North Muskegon has been the happiest time of my life,” the retiring coach said. “I regret leaving but believe it to be my duty to the team and the school.” Paul Moyes would remain as a teacher until 1953 and in the spring of 1951 would coach NM to the WMC baseball championship. Paul Moyes passed away on Oct 1, 1960, at the age of 45.

Record Score Interesting Fact

0-1 GR Lee 14, NM 6 Hoxie scores only NM TD on a sensational 73-yard run. Lee used 2 long pass plays for the win.

1-1 \*NM 13, Whitehall 0 Hoxie again leads Norse with a pair of TDs, one from 17 & the other from 25. Bill Duplissis a pair of 45-yard punts.

2-1 \*NM 14, Scottville 0 After a scoreless first half the Norse come alive in the second half to score 2 TDs, both from Hoxie.

2-2 Musk. St Mary’s 31, NM 6 Norse outgunned by Jim Morse led St. Mary’s team. Hoxie scored lone NM TD.

3-2 \*NM 28, Montague 7 Hoxie runs wild, scores all 4 NM TD, 3 rushing, 1 receiving.

3-3 \*Shelby 18, NM 13 Clock runs out on NM at the Shelby 1-yard line. Hoxie with 2 TDs.

4-3 \*NM 13, Hart 7 Duplissis connects with TD pass to Kyran Mitchelson for winning TD to clinch WMC title.

5-3 NM 34, Fremont 0 Hoxie scores from 57 & 69 yards. Dupllissis 2 TD passes, one to Carl Thompson, the other to Paul Bos. Wayne Sheffler 65 yd TD punt return.

**1951 – coach Bob Bushong (5-3 overall, 4-1 WMC, Hart WMC Champs)**

Replacing Paul Moyes as the coach at North Muskegon was Bob Bushong. He would be assisted by Wes Bunks. It would be the second year on the staff for Bunks who assisted coach Moyes in 1950. Bunks would serve NM as a teacher, track coach and following retirement, would pull duty as a clock operator at NMHS for more than 40 years. Only five lettermen would return for the 1951 season (Norman Ferris, Jack Weerstra, Don Schuitema, Art Turner, and Jack DeWald) but only Schuiteman and DeWald saw extensive duty last season. Much of the roster would be filled with underclassmen with several talented sophomores joining the team. A slow start was expected and a slow start it was --- but the Norse would finish with a bang!

To no one’s surprised the Norse dropped their traditional season opener with Grand Rapids Lee 32-0 as coach Bushong’s inexperienced Norse had no answers for GR Lee’s veteran team. Don Schuiteman had numerous tackles for a Norse defense that was on the field for much of the game while sophomore end Tom Arntz looked sharp on pass receiving.

NM played host to Ludington in their first meeting since the Norse won over Ludington in 1947. For the second straight game the Norse were shut out as Ludington downed the Norse 19-0. The Norse did show much improvement from week one as they trailed only 7-0 after three quarters of play before Ludington put the game away with a pair of fourth period scores. Reports from this game had sophomore Jerry Westerfelder and Tom Arntz playing solid games for NM, while the Schuiteman brothers, senior Don and freshman Dick all performed well. Bands from each school performed at halftime for the 1,000 or so spectators on hand. It is rare in the current modern era when bands from both schools would follow their teams’ home and away, but it was a common occurrence during the 1940s and early 1950s.

Although it was just the 3rd game of the season and the first in WMC action, it was Hart’s 21-14 win over North Muskegon that would be the one game in conference play that would ultimately lead to the winner bringing home the trophy. It was loss number three on the season --- and their final loss in 1951 as it was clear that despite the loss there were signs that this very young and experienced team was about to turn their season around. Scoreless in their first two games, the Norse wasted no time in breaking that streak as Scott Moore, one of many sophomores playing for the Norse, raced 55 yards for a TD on their second play from scrimmage. Hart, who would finish the season a perfect 5-0 in winning the WMC title then scored 21 unanswered points. All three of Hart’s touchdowns came via the passing game, two from the arm of quarterback Bill Grady. The other TD was painful for the Norse as with just a mere five seconds left in the half Rich Eisenlohr connected on a short pass to Cart Robinson who then ran through the entire NM secondary to score. Moore scored his second touchdown after quarterback Art Turner shot a pass in the flat to sophomore Tom Arntz who lateraled to Moore who carried the ball the rest of the way for a 71-yard TD. When the season had ended the loss to the Pirates would to be the only defeat for NM in conference competition.

NM finally entered the victory column by posting a 20-0 victory at Whitehall. Scott Moore scored twice and Jack Dewald once to account for the NM touchdowns. The first Norse score was set up on a fumble recovery by sophomore Jerry Westerfelder in Viking territory. Runs by Earl Edwards and DeWald set up the first of Moore’s tallies. Norm Ferris broke through and blocked a Whitehall punt on the Whitehall 25. Two plays later Moore raced in from the 18 for his second TD to send the Norsemen into the halftime break with a 13-0 lead. Two sophomores and a freshman set up DeWald’s TD early into the third period. Freshman Dick Schuiteman hit Tom Arntz with a pass who lateraled to Moore who took it deep down inside Viking territory. Moore, who was now also handling the kicking duties, was two for three on extra point attempts. Lauded for their fine blocking up front were seniors Jack Weerstra and George Schalk, and sophomores Westernfelder and Walt Busker.

The first testing for RCA’s color TV sets were initiated just before NM took on Shelby at home on October 11th. The Norse routed an injury riddled Shelby team 53-6 to win the first of their four conference games. Although the score was decidedly lopsided in favor of the Norse it was Shelby who scored first. Don Schuiteman intercepted a Tiger pass but had the ball picked from his hand by Shelby’s Jimmy Alexander who raced untouched 78 yards for the TD. Two milestones, and to this day a school records was set. Freshman quarterback Dick Schuiteman became the first frosh in NM history to score a touchdown when he went off tackle to score NM’s second TD in the second quarter. The second half was when NM pulled away for the convincing win with three of those touchdowns coming from the defense. Tom Arntz intercepted two passes and returned both for touchdowns (a school record) while the final Norse score also came from an interception, this time from Harvey Fohlbrook, who returned his pick 75 yards. Earl Edwards got in on the scoring rampage by rushing for three touchdowns, the longest from 40 yards out as NM won their second straight WMC contest.

A sloppy field inundated with about two inches of rain could not stop Earl Edwards and the Norsemen in their 27-0 spanking of Fremont. On the first play from scrimmage Edwards raced 65 yards through the center of the Packer defense to score. After Dick Schuiteman tallied the second NM TD on a quarterback sneak, Edwards raced 66 more yards for his second-long TD of the game. Jack DeWald bucked over from the four-yard line to give the Norse their final TD just before the first half game to an end. With near impossible conditions on the rain drenched field in the second half, neither team was able to muster any serious scoring threats.

NM kept alive their very slim chances to at least garner a tie in the WMC when they hosted Montague in game number seven. The Norse scored on their opening drive when Earl Edwards broke away for a 40-yard TD gallop. Montague then took advantage by intercepting a Norse pass and took the lead when Sam Townsend connected on a 26-yard scoring strike to Tom Hissong. With NM missing on their first extra point try the same duo connected on a broken play on Montague’s extra point to give the Wildcats a 7-6 lead at halftime. Starting at their own 40 in the third period, the Norse marched 60 yards for what would prove to be the winning score when Tom Arntz, on an end-around play went nine yards for the TD. The Norse clinched the win when they went on a 78-yard drive with Edwards scoring from 15 yards out for the score. Scott Moore’s successful extra point made the final score read NM 20 Montague 7.

The beginning of November began a stretch of some of the coldest weather ever experienced for the month in Muskegon. By the time the Norse hosted Scottville on November 2nd, a couple inches of snow had fallen on the Norse gridiron as temperatures in some sectors of Michigan fell below zero. With one highly anticipated game remaining on the Norse schedule with Muskegon St. Mary’s, it would only get worse. Weather was a factor early into their home game as Scottville fumbled on their very first play near midfield. The Norse powered downfield with Jack DeWald piling over center for the games’ first score. With the weather hampering any kind of effective kicking game, Edwards went over tackle for the extra point. Scottville quieted the slim crowd who braved the elements as Dave Johnson returned Don Schuiteman’s short kickoff 75 yards for a TD. Scott Moore capped a 50-yard drive by scoring the first TD of the second half as he scored from the eight to extend the Norse lead to 12-6. Both teams combined for 14 fumbles during the game with the Norse taking advantage of those miscues in the final period. Edwards scored on an end sweep early into the period and Dick Schuiteman scored on a rare pass attempt when he was unable to find an open receiver. Instead, the freshman QB raced through the center of the line for a 15-yard TD run.

By the middle of the week of the NM-St. Mary’s season ending clash, a foot of snow had blanketed the Muskegon area and the Norse gridiron. Temperatures remained well below freezing for the entire week leaving the final game in jeopardy of being cancelled. As late as Thursday the game was still ‘on’ as the Muskegon Chronicle posted pictures and pre-game stories on the highly anticipated game. However, conditions had worsened. Two Shelby youths were killed in a car crash on icy roads near Shelby. Included in the tragic crash was Douglas Bearrs, president of his Senior Class at Shelby. With nearly 15 inches of snow having fallen in the Muskegon area, and still a half foot on the Norse field, the game was cancelled, much to the disappointment of many including this NM schoolboy. Many volunteers and the use of snowplows and even a huge road grader did clear the field at Hackley Stadium for the annual Muskegon-Muskegon Heights game scheduled for Saturday afternoon. Fortunately, skies had cleared, and temps ‘soared’ into the 40s at kickoff as Earl Morrall and the Muskegon Big Reds defeated the Heights and were deemed mythical state champions. The final score game was a Morrall pass to reserve back Harry Voss, who would become a teacher at North Muskegon beginning with the 1958-59 school year.

Record Score Interesting Fact

0-1 GR Lee 32, NM 0 A young NM team no match for GR Lee. NM starts many sophomores led by Tom Arntz.

0-2 Ludington 19, NM 0 NM absorbs second shutout but shows improvement.

0-3 \*Hart 21, NM 14 Hart throws 3 TD passes in game that decides WMC title. Soph Scott Moore 2 TDs, a run of 55, pass completion for 71.

1-3 \*NM 20, Whitehall 0 Moore 2 TDs, Jack DeWald one as NM wins first of 5 straight.

2-3 \*NM 53, Shelby 6 Records set with NM 3 interceptions for TD, 2 by Arntz. Dick Schuiteman becomes first freshman to score a TD in NM history.

3-3 NM 27, Fremont 0 Earl Edwards runs to a pair of long first half touchdowns (66 & 65) as NM shuts out Fremont in the rain.

4-3 +NM 20, Montague 7 A pair of touchdowns by Edwards and an end-around play by Arntz leads NM over Montague.

5-3 \*NM 26, Scottville 6 Cold & snow saw both teams combine for 14 fumbles. 4 Norse score TDs. DeWald, Moore, Edwards & Schuiteman.

NM – Musk. St Mary’s - cancelled Snow

**1952 – coach Dunc Lectka (7-2 overall, 5-0 WMC champs)**

A couple of major changes took place before the 1952 season would get underway. Bob Bushong, a member of the Naval Reserves was called to active duty, and the Norse had hired Duncan Lectka to take over as the NM football and baseball coach. The USA was still involved in the Korean conflict and as the 1952 football season was soon to start, nearly 19,000 Americans had already lost their lives in the Korean War. The Norse would play a nine-game schedule for the first time in school history. NM was slated to play nine games a year ago but their final game with Muskegon St. Mary’s was cancelled due to snow. Lectka would bring a combination offense of the traditional single Wing while also employing a t-formation that featured the belly play, an offense that would be a staple for many teams in Greater Muskegon into the next millennium. Lectka had been a head coach at Sparta but worked in 1951 as an assistant at East Lansing High while working on his Masters’ degree at Michigan State.

The Norsemen of 1951 went from being a very young team to an even younger team in 1952. In his first year as the Norse mentor coach Lectka’s Norsemen would be comprised almost entirely of juniors and some very talented sophomores. One of those sophomores would etch his name as arguably the greatest to ever don a NM uniform, 5’7 150-pound dynamo Stan Guy.

The Norse were more than eager to welcome Coopersville as their new opening game opponent. After all, NM had dropped 8 of the last nine game to Grand Rapids Lee with only a 14-14 tie back in 1949 preventing a complete sweep from Lee. The Norse would begin a series with Coopersville that would extend through the 1965 season where NM would win 7 of the 14 games played with 2 games resulting in a tie. It didn’t take Norse fans long to realize that they had something special to watch over the next three football seasons. Stan Guy, listed at 140 pounds scored twice on exciting 27-yard runs, while Scott Moore, who excelled from his linebacking post on defense added the third TD as the Norse won their first opening game since 1942, 21 -8 over the Broncos.

Still learning a new system implemented by coach Leckta the Norse were shutout for the second straight year by Ludington 32-0. It would be the largest margin of defeat during the Lectka era. The Norse were unable to get any running game established against the Oriole defense and were forced to go to the air to pick up most of their yardage. Leonard Green completed 7 of his 13 pass attempts with most of those going to Stan Guy. The loss to Ludington evened up the series over the years at 2 wins for each team. The coin would flip to the Norse’s favor the following season.

The Norse then handed coach Lectka his second win as the new NM head coach as they upset the defending WMC champs from Hart 20-13. Leonard Green and Tom Arntz connected on a pass covering 72 yards to set up the first Norse score, a one-yard sneak by Green. NM then took a 13-0 lead at halftime when Stan Guy raced 55 yards for the touchdown. The Pirates roared back in the second half for a pair of TDs, one an 85 kickoff return by Dale Kaufman. Scott Moore then iced the game for the Norse in the final quarter when the junior halfback sped 80-yards for the winning score.

Stan Guy led the Norse to their second consecutive win, and 2nd in the WMC, perhaps as much with his defensive play as his role on offense in a 27-12 win over Whitehall in front of 3,000 fans at Funnell Field. Guy did contribute to NM’s first score when he set up fellow sophomore Dick’s Schuiteman’s 36-yard TD with a long 49-yard run. Whitehall countered with their talented running back Osie Rostic, the Class C state champ in the 100-yard dash in 1952, who sped 57 yards for a TD. However, unlike the Norse’s Scott Moore, who was perfect on his extra point placement on the NM TD, Whitehall failed on their try and the Norse led 7-6 at halftime. Guy then made the first of his two big defensive plays when he recovered a Viking fumble to stop a Whitehall drive at the NM 34-yard line. The Norse would then mount a touchdown drive that culminated on a George Turner TD from four yards out. Guy then broke the Vikings’s hope for victory when he intercepted a Ron White pass and raced 52-yards for a clinching touchdown. Dick Schuiteman, who had had been converted by Lectka from a starting freshman quarterback in 1951 to a running back in 1952, then scored his second TD from 15 yards out for the final Norse points.

The Norse traveled up old highway 31 to Shelby and, although they spotted Shelby an early touchdown, had little trouble in stomping the hosts 41-13 with Stan Guy scoring three touchdowns on runs of 15, 26 & 39 yards. Guy also had another 39-yard dash that set up his first tally from the 15. Dick Schuiteman got into the scoring act with a long TD burst of his own, a 55-yard scamper for the Norse 2nd TD on the evening. Scott Moore had a 6-yard TD while Ron Simonelli became the second freshman in NM history (Dick Schuiteman the first in 1951) to score a TD when he bucked over from short yardage for the final NM score. The Norse defense did a good job of limiting Shelby’s future NFL star back Dave Whitsell to minimum yardage and one TD.

The Norse then won their third straight shutout victory over Fremont 38-0. During this streak the Norse outscored Fremont 99-0. Long-time Chronicle sports reporter Mart Tardani heaped great praise on the work of Stan Guy, not only for his running talents, but pointed out that time and again he broke though the Packer line to smear runners before they started to roll. Guy scored the first of NM’s six-touchdowns early into the contest when he scored from the 20-yard line. He added his second tally when he intercepted a Fremont pass in the 3rd quarter and returned it 25-yards for a touchdown. The Norse second touchdown during the romp was set up when the sophomore speedster returned a punt to the Packer 32. After a 15-yard gallop by Scott Moore moved the ball down to the three, Dennis ‘Red’ Emery, who shared the quarterback duties with Leonard Green, scored NM’s 2nd TD. Moore, on the first play from scrimmage to begin the second half broke through on a 68-yard TD jaunt. Just moments later Guy would tally on his TD interception. Dick Schuiteman would complete the Norse scoring with his seven-yard TD in the final period.

Two days after President Harry Truman arrived in Muskegon to speak in front of over 15,000 Muskegon residents at the C&O railroad station, The Norse handed visiting Montague a 26-9 defeat to clinch no worse than a tie for the WMC Championship. The Norse started slowly but needing a ‘spark’ they handed the ball off to Stan Guy who raced on one of his typical sprints for a 47-yard touchdown. Montague would take a short-lived lead when they caught the Norse off guard and scored on a ‘sleeper play’ which left Ron Erdman alone on the sideline. Before the Norse had spotted Erdman, he had caught the pass from Mel Weideman and left Norse pursuers behind on a play that went for a 70-yard TD. With the made extra point the Norse trailed 7-6 but they wouldn’t be on the short end of the score for long. Junior Jerry Westenfelder and freshman Ron Simonelli, only the third freshman to start a game for the Norsemen (Bob Pyle 1943, and Dick Schuiteman 1951 the others) both recovered Montague fumbles to set up NM scoring drives. Leonard Green’s pass to Scott Moore good for 45 yards set up one of the rare short TD runs of Stan Guy’s incredible career, from four yards out. The second fumble recovery by the Norse was tallied by Scott Moore from the 2-yard line after Guy had totaled 26 yards on a pair of runs. Schuiteman than completed the Norse scoring set up on a brilliant 49-yard run by Guy, with a short blast from the two.

It didn’t appear that Harry Truman’s speech three days earlier in Muskegon in support of Adlai Stevenson swayed enough votes as Dwight Eisenhower was easily elected to be our country’s next President.

North Muskegon needed a victory over second place Scottville to win the WMC title outright. That proved to be no problem as the Norse pummeled the host Spartans 34-0. The Norse took away any suspense in this game as they took a 27-0 lead at halftime as four Norse players scored touchdowns. Guy tallied the first on a 31-yard dash, Schuiteman added the second from four-yards out; Green’s pass to Tom Arntz added six more points for the Norsemen. Moore also joined the TD parade from four yards out. Guy added the final TD in the second half but his yardage on his TD was not reported in the game reports from Scottville. Next up was the BIG GAME!

Interest in the 1952 season finale was perhaps the most hyped contest in the 20 years of NM football dating back to 1932. Pre-crowd estimates had attendance to reach as many as 3500 to 4000 fans to watch a duo between two players who would go down in history as the two best to ever don their respective uniforms: Jim Morse for Muskegon St. Mary’s and sophomore Stan Guy. 70 years down the road in 2022 both Morse and Guy would be named 2 of the top 25 players in Greater Muskegon History.

St. Mary’s had played am extremely tough schedule with only a pair of tough losses putting a dent on the season. NM had an enviable 7-1 record against many Classes B & C opponents and would square off against a veteran St. Mary’s team that returned 13 lettermen from their 1951 season. The Norse had an enviable record despite the fact the 1952 team was the youngest in school history. Only lineman Jack Weerstra was a senior starter for the Norse. The

ends were junior Tom Arntz and sophomore Dave Bliss, each an outstanding athlete, who were also starters on the basketball and baseball teams. So talented was Arntz that going into his senior season he held the single game school record in basketball. A four-year starter in baseball, Arntz lettered in 4 sports his final two years as a Norsemen and was the WMC high jump winner in track. The tackles were juniors Walt Busker and Ed Stelle. Busker would play college football at Dartmouth while Steele took his talents to Albion where he was voted the most valuable freshman in his first year. Weerstra was teamed at one of the guard positions with junior Chuck Felt while junior Allan Engstrom performed the chores at center. Junior Scott Moore would team up with Guy during the 1952 and 1953 seasons to give the Norse their best backfield duo since Don Bowen and Moe Sikkenga led the Norsemen of the early 1940’s to 15-straight undefeated, as well as scoreless, games in a row. Sophomore Dick Schuiteman would be a Norse stalwart for four straight years while freshman Ron Simonelli would shore up the defense.

This game was a feature story in a 2-part series in the Muskegon Chronicle in the Fall of 2009. Here is part two penned by your author that describes in detail much of the story from this epic contest:

**Part 2: Jim Morse & Stan Guy**

**By Jim Moyes (**[**jimmoyes@aol.com**](mailto:jimmoyes@aol.com)**)**

Part one of our latest installment of Moyes’ memories set the stage for the only game played featuring two of this area’s finest all-time football players, Jim Morse and Stan Guy. To add additional appeal for our story, it would not only be the last game for Jim Morse, but also the last football game played by St. Mary’s High.

Although this match up would be the final game for Stan Guy and the North Muskegon Norsemen in 1952, the next two years would prove to be a very exciting era in northside football history.

And just how skillful were these two all-time greats? Jim Morse and Stan Guy put up numbers that today’s statisticians would fawn over. Let’s begin with Morse.

A letter winner for St. Mary’s High in his freshmen year back in 1949, Morse established records that have withstood the test of time at what is now Muskegon Catholic Central High School.

Morse would follow a sophomore season, where he tallied twelve touchdowns, by notching nineteen more TDs in each of his next two seasons for the Irish of St. Mary’s. Toss on an additional 43 points for his extra points kicked from placement and Morse would end his career with 343 points, tops in local parochial school history.

This feat was accomplished over a span of but 26 games, long before additional games were added during our current playoff era. And did Morse pad his touchdown totals with those short goal line plunges into the end zone? Check out these stats:

For his career Morse ‘averaged’ nearly 27 yards on each of his touchdown romps. In his junior year of 1951 Jim darted and weaved his way over 666 yards in scoring his 19 touchdowns, averaging an astounding 35 yards for each TD recorded. Included among his long touchdown jaunts was a 104-yard return of a pass interception vs. Bay City St. Joseph. Some 73 years later this remains today as the longest touchdown in Greater Muskegon football history.

Stan Guy’s totals for his career were nearly a carbon copy of the talented Morse. Guy too, found the opponent’s end zone a dozen times during his sophomore year, just a sample of the many exciting times that awaited Norsemen rooters.

After dashing through enemy defenses for 17 touchdowns in his junior year of 1953, Guy streaked for 25 more in his senior season. Stan’s 1954 totals were good for 150 points, tops in the entire state of Michigan. Even today’s computer equipped statisticians would be amazed at little Stan’s numbers.

The muscular built NM dynamo totaled nearly 1800 yards on his 54 career touchdowns, an amazing 33 yards average for each touchdown! Only three of his scores came from inside the fifteen-yard line!

Indian Summer gripped the Muskegon area on November 14, 1952, a stark contrast from the deplorable conditions from a year earlier. A brutal early winter snowstorm had forced the cancellation of the previous year’s season ending game.

Temperatures hovered in the middle fifties as St. Mary’s and North Muskegon awaited the eight o’clock kick off before the largest crowd in Norse history. Among the thousands of football fans in attendance, in addition to this old timer, was a young sixth grader at NMHS.

Nearly sixty years later Dave Taylor still remembers, not only the game, but also—THE SIGN. “I can still remember where I was when I first spotted the sign,” recalls the future Norsemen football star and Hall of Fame football coach for the Muskegon Big Reds. “I was sitting in the bleachers at the northwest end of the field when two guys approached my area holding up a sign. I couldn’t believe what that sign read: GUY WILL DIE!”

And did Stan Guy see that sign? When I asked Stan this question a few short days ago he replied in a very solemn tone: “I will never forget it.”

How fortunate I was to experience a recent afternoon lunch with Jim Morse and Stan Guy. It was amazing as we rehashed the game that took place nearly 57 years ago how clear they remembered that night, and how much praise and respect they had for one another.

Stan Guy was a nervous young sophomore, made decidedly more edgy after seeing the sign. “It wasn’t the wording of the sign that bothered me so much, but the picture of the coffin shook me up,” reminisced the former Norseman star.

“I was just a young sophomore, and I had never played against a team as big as St. Mary’s,” recalled Guy before placing his order for a perch sandwich. Although, thankfully, Guy didn’t die, that sign was somewhat prophetic as an injury did send the Norse superstar to the sidelines to stay early in the second half.

The game itself lived up to the hype and St. Mary’s superstar Jim Morse saved his best performance for his final act as a high school gridder. Morse did everything for the Irish on this perfect autumnal night for football except drive the team bus across the Causeway.

Morse had a hand in all the scoring for the Irish and they needed Jim at his best to defeat the pesky Norsemen. The talented NM defense keyed on containing Morse’s running game, but the future Notre Dame captain utilized all his assets to pin defeat on the hometown squad.

After three quarters had been played the Irish held a slim 14-13 lead over the hosts, the difference being a pair of made Jim Morse extra points coupled with a missed point after try by the Norse. The NM attempt was blocked by a young St. Mary’s freshman, Dick Seymour. Less than two years after this game Dick Seymour would see his sister, Leah Rae Seymour, exchange marital vows with his teammate Jim Morse.

For the record Morse passed to big Mike Kanitz for a pair of TD passes, ran for another score and put the final nail in that Norsemen coffin with a 55-yard punt return for the winning TD. According to my late colleague, Mart Tardani, who reported on this game for the Muskegon Chronicle, it was on this play that Guy, suffered his game, and season ending injury.

Just as North Muskegon was intent on stopping the running game of Jim Morse, St. Mary’s had a similar game plan to stop the diminutive Norsemen star Stan Guy. While Morse was more than a one-dimensional player, the same title could be applied to Guy. Stan set up the second Norse score with a long return of a Jim Morse punt.

With the locals leading 13 to 7 Guy intercepted a Morse pass and returned it deep into St. Mary’s territory. However, a Norse penalty on the play kept the ball in the possession of the Irish where, a few moments later, Morse delivered a TD pass to Kanitz to give St. Mary’s a lead they would never relinquish.

Morse ran, kicked, punted, passed (10-14 for 124 yards and 2 touchdowns) and delivered a big hit on Guy that was instrumental in making the final game in St. Mary’s history a 27-19 Irish victory. It would be the last high school game where Stan Guy would be on the losing end of a score, as the Norsemen would go undefeated over the next two years.

For second year head coach Harold Popp the victory was certainly bittersweet for the one-time graduate of Boys Town. Just a few days after coaching his Irish to perhaps their biggest win in school history, Popp was relieved of his duties as a St. Mary’s coach.

‘Rough Coaching’ was the reason given for Popp’s hasty dismissal, much to the surprise and disappointment of his star fullback Jim Morse. Morse strongly defended the coach at the team’s banquet. “Sure, Harold has been a rough coach, but football is a rough game. We wouldn’t have won half our games this season without him.”

Morse would go on to Notre Dame where he would have a fabulous career as a football star. Just days after Stan Guy capped his brilliant high school career (1954) with a win over Greenville; Morse took center stage on a much bigger platform as Notre Dame defeated USC 23-17. Morse ran for 179 yards, caught a pair of passes and scored 2 TDs.

In a 1955 game against the powerful USC Trojans Morse caught five passes from 1956 Heisman trophy winner Paul Hornung good for 208 yards. Morse’s per catch average of better than 41 yards per reception is still, to this day, an NCAA record.

While Morse was a standout athlete, excelling not only in football, but also basketball and baseball, Stan Guy was a one-man record board in track and field at North Muskegon,

In the spring of 1955 Guy broke a Greater Muskegon standard in the pole vault that lasted twenty-five years. Stan sailed over a cross bar set at twelve feet above ground, using a cumbersome steel pole, streaking down a cinder runway, before landing in a pit with only a pile of saw dust to cushion his fall.

Guy had a combination of speed and power in a body that would make an Olympic gymnast envious. At one time he was possessor of six school records in track and field at North Muskegon. For many years his name took up most of the space on NM’s record board. At one time he was the all-time Norse record holder in the pole vault, long jump, 100-yard dash, the low hurdles, a member of the 880-relay team and the shot put.

And who should one day break Guy’s shot-put record. None other than the youngster who first spotted the ‘Guy Will Die’ sign, future Muskegon head football coach Dave Taylor.

Football scouts from major colleges did make the trip to North Muskegon to lure Guy to their university. I asked Stan a question that I assumed I had the answer as to why Guy didn’t pursue his football career to the next level.

I awkwardly asked Guy if it was due to his dislike for the textbooks as well as the thought that he couldn’t bear being without his high school sweetheart, Janet Woodhouse.

A very humble Guy surprised this reporter, and his friend Jim Morse, with his response. “Yes, you’re right about the first two, but really, I was just too damm small to play big time football.”

Jim Morse and Stan Guy have enjoyed watching their children, and now their grandchildren, have much athletic success over the years. It is well known that Jim’s son, Bobby Morse, following a fantastic football career, joins his dad to make up the only father-son duo in the Muskegon Area Sports Hall of Fame. Stan’s daughters, Shelly & Cindy Guy, led North Muskegon’s girls track team to three state championships from 1977 thru 1980. Unlike their proud Papa, the gals can still see their records still unsurpassed at NMHS.

There are some obvious major disadvantages as us old-timers head into the ‘golden years.’ However, I am so grateful that I was able to watch such former great athletes such as Jim Morse and Stan Guy display their athletic brilliance while in their prime. But more importantly, I am even more proud of having them as dear friends.

The Norse had completed their season as WMC champs and an overall record of 7-2. It would only get better for the next two years.

Record Score Interesting Fact

1-0 NM 21, Coopersville 8 Stan Guy a pair of 27-yard TDs in his NM debut. Scott Moore stars in defense and scores a short TD.

1-1 Ludington 32. NM 0 Ludington stops NM running game. Leonard Green 7 of 13 pass completions.

2-1 \*NM 20, Hart 13 72-yard pass Leonard Green to Tom Arntz sets up Green 1-yard sneak. Guy 55, Moore 80-yard TDs.

3-1 \*NM 27, Whitehall 12 Dick Schuiteman 2 TDs (26 & 15, George Turner 4-yard TD, Guy 52-yd interception return for TD.

4-1 \*NM 41, Shelby 13 Guy 3 TDs on runs of 15, 26 & 39; Schuiteman 55 yd TD; Moore TD and freshman Ron Simonelli TD

5-1 NM 38, Fremont 0 2 more TDs for Guy, run of 20 & interception returned 25 for another, Red Emery TD, Moore 68, Schuiteman 7

6-1 \*NM 27, Montague 9 47-yard TD from Guy starts things off for NM; Guy from 4, Moore from 3 & Schuitemam from 2 cap NM scoring.

7-1 \*NM 34, Scottville 0 Guy a pair of TDs, Green pass to Arntz, Moore and Schuiteman each a TD.

7—2 Musk St Mary’s 27, NM 19 Future Notre Dame star Jim Morse figures in all the scoring for the winners. Guy injured in second half.

**1953 – coach Dunc Lectka (7-0-1 overall, 5-0 WMC champs)**

With just about the entire team returning from a successful 1952 season, expectations were high for the 1953 season. The players came back a year older, a little stronger, and more in tune with third year head coach Dunc Lectka’s offense and defense. Lectka kept himself busy playing baseball in the Greater Muskegon City League during the summer and the 31-year-old slugger led the entire league in hitting with a .431 average. Incidentally, one of his teammates on his Home Furnace team was the young football star from St. Mary’s who contributed to the Norse defeat in last year’s closing game of the season, Jim Morse. Morse, in addition to starring on the gridiron and leading St. Mary’s to a state runner up in basketball his senior year, hit over .300 for Home Furnace.

15 Lettermen return with the only position where a returning starter is missing is at one of the guard spots. Coach Lectka is grooming sophomore Ron Simonelli, who was a starter on defense last year to move from his fullback position to handle the guard duties. The only worry for Lectka heading into the season opener was he felt he was lacking depth as at least eight of the starting 11 are slated for two-way duty.

After a scoreless first half in their opener at Coopersville, the Norse used the big play to defeat the Broncos for the second straight year 26-0. Stan Guy returned the 2nd half kickoff 85 yards to get the Norse off and running. Pinned back at their own four-yard line and looking at a 3rd and long for a first down, Scott Moore got the handoff from quarterback Leonard Green and raced 96 yards for the TD, the second longest TD run in Norse history. Moore scampered on another long TD gallop of 55 yards early into the fourth quarter to crush whatever hopes the Broncos may have had in pulling off the victory. Dick Schuiteman added the final Norse tally later in the period. Worried in the pre-season by a possible lack of depth the Norse used 20 players, and they all performed well, including a smooth transition from fullback to guard by Ron Simonelli.

Stunned last year by Ludington who put a 32-0 whipping on the Norse for one of their two defeats, the Norse got three touchdown runs from Stan Guy (31, 11 and 56) and another 29-yard touchdown run by Scott Moore as the Norse defeated Ludington 25-7. Leonard Green threw for 99 yards passing with 66 of those coming on a pair of completions to Tom Arntz. Ludington’s lone score came a long punt return by Lee Snyder late in the game.

The Norse used good defense, exceptional special team play, and a finely tuned offense in routing Scottville 41-0. With Scott Moore on the sidelines for much of the game with a groin injury, Dick Schuiteman took on an added role as a running back and came through with touchdown runs of 3, 4, and 24 yards. Stan Guy, as usual, was terrific as he also tallied three TDs, with one going into the record books. The junior dynamo fielded a punt at his own nine-yard line early in the second period and raced through almost the entire team of Scottville for a 91-yard punt return TD, the longest punt return in Norse history. (Now 2nd to Ken Mack’s 93-yard return in 1965 vs. Manistee) Guy also raced for second half TDs of 11 and 30 yards as the Norse won their third straight game, outscoring their opponents 92 to 6. Praised for their line play that only allowed three Scottville first downs for the entire contest were Tom Arntz, Ed Stelle, Dick Montgomery, Ron Simonelli and Jerry Westerfelder. One of the three officials working the game was former UM great Jack Weisenburger, who also broadcast many games on local radio station WKBZ.

The Norse made Hart victim number four on the season with a 28-7 victory on the road. The Norse struck early as they marched 65 yards on only six plays with Stan Guy, Scott Moore, and Dick Schuiteman alternating on runs with Schuiteman going the final five yards for the score. Scott Moore was successful on the first of his four made extra points boots from placement. Hart mounted a long drive of their own but fumbled the ball deep in NM territory at the five. Guy then swept around end and sped away from the Hart secondary. No less than five Pirate defenders had Stan all but bottled up, but Guy kept his feet and pulled away for the long-distance TD. Guy would add another 35-yard TD to his credit while the passing combo of Leonard Green to Tom Arntz set up the final Norse TD with several long pass completions. Schuiteman would traverse the final three yards for the final Norse tally.

The Norse all but sewed up their second straight conference title following their 27-7 victory over Whitehall in front of a standing room only crowd on the Northside. Stan Guy again scored a couple of touchdowns from far out as the Norse made it a perfect 5-0 on the season. The Norse scored early after Scott Moore, one of many NM players who goes two-ways, recovered a fumble on Whitehall’s first play from scrimmage at the Viking four-yard line. Dick Schuiteman took it home from there and after Moore’s PAT the Norse led 7-0 before many of the fans found their seats --- or a place to stand. Whitehall quickly answered moments later and went on a 73-yard TD run to tie the game and give Whitehall hope. Whitehall smelled blood and was successful on an onside kick. However, that drive was thwarted when big Walt Busker intercepted a pass at the Norse 28. Two plays later Red Emery rifled a pass to Guy who outraced the secondary to complete a 67- yard TD pass play. A heavy fog enveloped the NM field as the second half began but Stan Guy sliced through the fog and scampered 45 yards to pay dirt. The last touchdown was scored by a now healthy Scott Moore who completed a 60-yard drive with a touchdown run from six-yards.

If one could go back in time and replay one game, surely the game with Kellogsville would be on this list. Easily playing their poorest game of the season in a game played in the rain, the road game with Kellogsville was the only time in NM’s long history of football these two schools would play one another. The visiting Norse did get off to a good start and it appeared the Norse would again be headed to an easy victory when they drove 80 yards in the opening quarter with Scott Moore and Stan Guy picking up most of the yardage with Guy romping 32 yards for the first score. A fortuitous block of a Dave Bliss punt late in the first half gave Kellogsville possession deep in NM territory that the hosts turned into a TD to tie the game at 6-6 at the break. NM took yet another lead in the second half with Dick Schuiteman traversing the final few yards but, again, on the sloppy field, NM missed the all -important extra point. The blockbuster moment came early into the fourth quarter when Jim Stewart dashed 68 yards against the normally solid NM defense to tie the game at 12-12 as Kellogsville also was unable to convert the extra point. The tie prevented the Norse from having their first perfect season since 1942. Their final two opponents would pay the price for an angry Norse team. It was not only a bad week for the Norse as the following day Purdue handed MSU their first loss after 28 consecutive games. The Spartans surely missed the presence of former Big Red Earl Morrall who did not make the trip due to an illness.

The Norse responded in a big way by clinching at least a tie in the WMC with a 47-7 thrashing of Shelby and their one-man gang of future NFL star Dave Whitsell. The Tigers just couldn’t find enough help (talent) for Whitsell as Stan Guy and company scored nearly at will against the visiting Tigers. Whitsell certainly did not have the line blocking the Norse backs received although Whitsell did pick up amazing yardage and was called ‘by far the best player we faced all year” by Norsemen coach Dunc Lectka. Stan Guy produced his ‘usual’ stellar game by scoring a pair of long-distance touchdowns and had one long 65-yard burst called back due to a Norse penalty. Reserve back Dave Couch had his best game as a Norsemen as he scored a pair of short-range TDs while Scott Moore, and Dick Schuiteman also scored with All WMC conference end Tom Arntz getting in on the act with a seven-yard end around TD to cap the scoring. Stats in the Muskegon Chronicle, (individual rushing stats were rarely published in the early years) did show Guy rushing for 167 yards from scrimmage to bring his total to 967 for the season, not counting his punt, pass receiving, and kickoff returns which were major.

The Norse for the most part had an injury free season and would go into their season finale with Montague needing a victory to win the WMC championship outright. The Norse would start their usual starting lineup for Montague with a pair of outstanding ends in Tom Arntz and Dave Bliss, Walt Busker and Ed Stelle at tackles, Ron Simonelli and either Tom Girocco or Tom Stribley at the guards and Al Engstrom at center. The same starting backfield from the previous season remained intact with Leonard Green, Stan Guy, Dick Schuiteman and Scott Moore. The Norse were top-heavy favorites for the game at Memorial Field in Montague and that was certainly the case as NM had little trouble with the Wildcats. Although NM tallied seven touchdowns, led by Stan Guy’s three tallies, the defense was just as impressive as they limited Montague to but two first downs and a minus 37 yards rushing. The one pass completion to big Jerry Brown of 44 yards to the NM 28 was the only pass completion on the evening for the ‘Cats’ and would be the deepest penetration into NM territory for the entire game. Guy’s three Touchdowns came from 25, 2, and a 35-yard punt return for another six-pointer. Scott Moore capped his outstanding NM career with a 34-yard TD and a short one-yard plunge. Dick Schuiteman plunged over for another tally while Tom Arntz capped his career with a 15-yard TD pass thrown by Red Emery.

Record Score Interesting Fact

1-0 NM 26, Coopersville 0 Scott Moore runs 96 and 55 yards for TDs. Stan Guy returns 2nd half Kickoff 85 yds for TD. Dick Schuiteman 4 yd TD.

2-0 NM 25, Ludington 7 Guy 3 TDs on runs of 31, 11, & 56. Moore29 td. Tom Arntz caught a pair of passes good for 30 & 36 yards to set up scores.

3-0 \*NM 41, Scottville 0 Schuiteman and Guy 3 TDs each with Guy returning a punt for 91 yards.

4-0 \*NM 28, Hart 7 Guy 95 and 35 TD runs. Schuiteman 2 (5 & 3 yards). Leonard Green several pass completions to Arntz

5-0 \*NM 27, Whitehall 7 Schuiteman and Moore 1 TD each; Guy 67 yd TD pass from Red Emery, 45 yd TD run.

5-0-1 NM 12, Kellogsville 12 (tie) Kellosgville spoils NM hopes for a perfect season on a final quarter long TD run. Guys scores from 32 and Schuiteman from short range for NM TDs.

6-0-1 \*NM 41, Shelby 7 Guy 2 more long run TDs (60,65) Dave Couch 2 TD, Schuiteman 1 and Arntz a 7-yard TD run

7-0-1 \*NM 47, Montague 0 Guy 3 more TD including his 2nd punt return for TD on the year. Moore 2 TD, Schuiteman 1 and Red Emery passes to Arntz for 15-yard TD.

**1954 – coach Dunc Lectka (8-0-1 overall, 5-0 WMC champs)**

Despite fielding one of the best teams in NM history in 1953, and a bevy of talented returnees, only 21 players showed up for opening practices on the northside. Those lettermen, who all saw extensive action a year ago, included all conference backfield performers Stan Guy and Dick Schuiteman and another all-conference returnee on the line in junior Ron Simonelli. Other lettermen returning, with all expected to join the starting lineup were Tracy Prins, Tony Nord, Tom Girroco, Dick Montgomery, Tom Stribley, Chuck Houts, and Dave Bliss. The biggest task for 3rd year coach Dunc Lectka was to find a quarterback as well as replace last years’ all-conference tackles Walt Busker and Ed Stelle.

The Norse lost the battle of the statistics but won their opening game 13-6 against a vastly improved Coopersville eleven. The visiting Broncos scored their first and only touchdown in the opening period, but the Norse rallied. Stan Guy showed early that he was in good form as he rattled off a typical Stan Guy long run good for 72 yards. Unfortunately, Norse fans groaned as the play was called back due to a NM penalty. After an exchange of punts, the Norse took over in excellent position at the Coopersville 38. In two plays Guy picked up all the yardage with his touchdown coming as he skirted around left end 10 yards for the score. Dick Schuiteman booted the extra point, and the Norse had a slim 7-6 lead at halftime. Ron Simonelli, who played on the line in the previous two years, made the transition from lineman to the backfield a smooth one as he led a third quarter Norse drive with several hard runs, culminating with the junior halfback scoring from the one for the game’s final score. The defense saved the day for the Norse in the games’ final minutes when the Broncos moved deep into NM territory. A fourth down pass near the Norse goal line was batted away by Dave Bliss and Guy to secure win number one for the Norse.

The Norsemen next journeyed to Ludington and although the final score was tight at 27-25, the Norse never trailed in the contest. The Norse took a lead that they never lost when Stan Guy raced 76 yards on the first play from scrimmage. After Ludington scored, but failed to convert the extra point, the Norse got a boost from reserve back Aron Wortham. Wortham electrified the crowd with an 81-yard touchdown gallop only to have it called back because of a holding penalty. Undaunted, Worthan later had a pair of 32 and 35-yard runs, the latter good for the second Norse TD and a 14-6 halftime lead after a successful PAT from Dick Schuiteman. The Norse then handed the Orioles a cheap touchdown when NM fumbled at their own 8-yard line and Ludington scored to close the gap to 14-13. It was Guy making a defensive play with a pass interception that set up a 79-yard scoring drive that only took five plays. The TD pass was tossed by fullback Schuiteman to Guy that went for 60-yards and a TD. Schuiteman then added his 3rd consecutive extra point from placement and the Norse led 21-13. Ludington took advantage of yet another costly Norse miscue and scored with 3:00 minutes left in the third period. Ron Simonelli then took on the bulk of the ball carrying chores on the final Norse drive on runs of 25, and 22 yards with Schuiteman scoring from the three-yard line for the final Norse score.

The Norse for the second straight week made the long jaunt to Mason County to battle Scottville in their first WMC game of the season. Stan Guy scored five touchdowns for the Norse, three coming in the first quarter as the Norse rolled over the host Spartans 48-6. So dominant was the 160-pound ball of fire that he had his first carry of 44 yards called back because of a clipping penalty. No problem. On the next play the tireless Guy raced 61 yards to pay dirt. Guy then capped the first period with touchdown runs of 15 and 28. The second half he scored on a pass from Schuiteman to Aron Wortham who lateraled to Guy who went the final 41 yards. Guy rushed for 181 yards on the night, that included his fifth touchdown from 38 yards. Schuiteman passed to Dave Bliss for a 15-yard touchdown and Ron Simonelli ran 50 yards, and just before crossing the goal line, lateraled to his teammate Schuiteman, trailing on the play, who took only a step to cross over the goal line.

The Norse unveiled a new starting quarterback in their 39-6 romp over Hart for game four of the 1954 season. Sophomore Pete Sheldon, a brilliant three-sport star during his career at NMHS, was moved into the QB position and made an already very good team even better. Sheldon made an immediate impact as his 33-yard pass play to Stan Guy set up Ron Simonelli’s first of his four TD runs from the three-yard line. Guy then broke the backs of the Pirates with a couple of second quarter TDs just moments apart. Guy broke away for a 48-yard TD burst and then on the next possession streaked in front of a Pirate receiver, intercepted a pass and dashed 57 yards for another Norse score that put them in a commanding 20-0 lead at halftime. Except for a Hart score in the second half that was started with a Norse fumble and aided by a couple of NM 15-yard penalties, the second half featured the running of Dick Schuiteman and Simonelli. With Sheldon at QB, Schuiteman would now take advantage of his skills and be used as a fullback out of the T-formation and a tailback out of the single wing. Schuiteman and Simonelli did much of the ball carrying to give Guy a much-needed breather with Simonelli scoring three second half TDS from 21, 16, and his final tally was a long 52-yard dash to pay dirt.

Whitehall was expected to give NM its toughest test if the Norse were going to win their third straight WMC title. The Vikings did indeed give the Norse a battle with Ron Simonelli’s TD capping a 69-yard drive that gave the Norse a narrow 7-0 lead at halftime. The Norse were denied a second score early into the second half when a Norse 60-yard drive, led by a 30-yard run by Stan Guy, was halted when the Norse failed to score on fourth down just inches from the Viking goal line. The Vikings fumbled at their own 13-yard line on the next series of downs setting up a second Simonelli plunge from the three. Guy had a 35-yard touchdown jaunt called back due to a penalty. Guy would later score when he caught a screen pass from Schuiteman and raced 70-yards for the TD as the Norse were now in firm control of another WMC title following their 20-0 victory over the Vikings.

There was no stopping Stan Guy in a mid-week Wednesday night WMC contest at Shelby as little Stan galloped for five of the six Norse touchdowns in their 40-7 win. Guys had TD runs of 30, 75, 52, 17, and 20 with the 52-yard TD coming on a completed pass from Pete Sheldon. The other Norse TD came when lineman Don Harris intercepted an intended pitch out, caught it in mid-stride and charged down the field 22 yards for the touchdown.

The following game would include a play that will long be remembered by Norse fans in attendance on the Norse gridiron in their Friday night battle with a very good Manistee team. It was the first meeting between the two teams since the 1943 season and would leave a lasting impression on your author as one of the most memorable in the many hundreds of games played in more than 90-years of NM football. It was a miserable night for football as the game was played in chilly temps in the 30s with rain mixed with snow that turned the NM gridiron into a mud bowl. Rain & snow didn’t stop Guy in the first half as he tallied on spectacular runs of 65 & 83 yards, but it was a 67-yard dash that didn’t count that will remain with this author forever. The Norse led at halftime on those two long Guy TDs only to have the bigger but slower Manistee team come back to tie the game in the second half. NM gambled on fourth down deep in their own territory, but it backfired as Manistee took over at the NM 28. The Chips barged over from the one, but the all-important extra point was stopped by Norse linemen Tom Stribley, Dave Bliss and Tom Girocco. NM was wide on the first of their two extra points while the second never got underway as the wet ball was fumbled while being placed down on the Tee. Manistee received their second fortuitous break when they blocked a Norse punt, and the ball rolled all the way to the Norse six which eventually turned into a Chippewa touchdown. This time the point from placement was blocked. With just two minutes’ remaining in the game the Norse had moved the ball to their own 32-yard line. There was time for only one play. Here is the incomparable wordage from Chronicle sportswriter, and later the editor of the Bay City Times, Tom Fallon who covered this game:

*“It was a spectacular thing as it unfolded… that final reverse, which saw Guy, the Norsemen’s pint-sized galloping ghost, wing over left tackle behind some sharp blocking by his teammates and streak down the west sidelines, dancing by the lone safetyman to score. Jubilant Norse cheers (and I was one) quieted seconds later however, as officials signaled no score and pointed up the field to a penalty flag on the ground. The final horn had sounded as Guy broke into the clear and there was no chance for another North Muskegon play. Paul Boyink, referee, said a Norse player had clipped in clearing the way for the payoff run. The officials immediately were surrounded by angry Norse fans, but left the field without a riot, despite the fever pitch of the excitement.”*

The game ended in a 12-12 tie and left many Norse fans and players who probably never accepted the final score, even though it remains official.

The next game was for all the marbles as far as the WMC was concerned. Both Montague and the Norse would go into the game undefeated in WMC competition. With this being the final WMC contest with only a road game against non-league Greenville left on the schedule, a win would ensure the Norse of winning their third straight league title while going undefeated in conference play during that period. It would also set the Norsemen undefeated streak over four years at 19 straight conquests of WMC foes. (Note: The Chronicle said 15 games, but they overlooked the four wins at the end of the 1951 season by the Norse).

The night would prove to be a memorable one for many, not only for the seniors playing their last game on the Northside field, but for me it was special as they honored the former Norse coaches over the years, including my father, Paul Moyes. The game was covered by two of my favorite reporters, both in the Muskegon Area Sports Hall of Fame: Mart Tardani who reported on the actual game coverage, while James F. Henderson wrote a column depicting many colorful little ‘nuggets’ on the game and other interesting tidbits. How memorable it was for yours truly when Diane Wilkie, Norse cheerleader who emceed the halftimes ceremonies, presented blankets to Lyle McNitt and my father Paul Moyes. How moved I was when Diane said: “To Paul Moyes, the most beloved of them all.” That blanket from many decades ago, is still used by his granddaughter to this day. Limited to a wheelchair in 1954, sadly, it was the last game due to illness Paul Moyes would see his beloved Norsemen play a game in person.

To say Stan Guy, playing his final game in front of the home folks, went out in a blaze of glory would be an understatement. Used as a ‘decoy’ in the first half Guy still raced for 258 yards rushing, scored four rushing touchdowns and added a fifth by intercepting a pass and returning it 30 yards for a TD. His first TD was that interception TD following a short NM drive of 36 yards with Dick Schuiteman scoring from the two-yard line. Schuiteman would then show the home folks that he had some speed and moves of his own as he had his longest TD of his career --- 86 yards, getting a key block from Dick Montgomery near midfield to shake him loose.

Always one who provided theatrics during his amazing NM career, on only his second carry of the half with just seconds remaining, Guy raced 85 yards for a TD that destroyed any hopes Montague had of upsetting the Norse. Guy put it into another gear in the second half. He set up his third TD by setting up his 4-yard tally by running 36 yards on the previous play down to the four. Guy on a later drive would dash 56 yards to the Wildcat 14. Again, on the very next play the amazing Guy found the endzone.

And then, again, it was time for more Guy theatrics. From a part of Mart Tardani’s game-coverage story: *“Time for one play, and fans screaming for one last chance for their idol. They watched Guy running as a man in motion to the left, snare a lateral pass from Ron Simonelli and thunder towards midfield before cutting to the west sidelines to outdistance the stunned Wildcat secondary for the 54-yard scoring play.*

James Henderson also showered praise on Guy in his story. *“We wanted to see Guy run. We watched Schuiteman turn in a great dash and Guy score from 30 yards out on an intercepted pass. But the half neared its end before we were satisfied. Then Guy broke loose for 85 yards. He made a believer of this writer. The youngster can ‘change horses in midstream,’ dodging and ducking without altering his stride, and it takes a real tackle to stop him. For our money the little fellow, 5-7 and 158 pounds, rates with the best backs in this or any state.”*

Time for one last game on the season and it would indeed be a stern task. The Norse would travel to Greenville to take on the champions of the Central Michigan Class B conference. The Norse were looking for their 17th game without a loss, with only ties with Kellogsville in 1953 and the controversial tie with Manistee earlier in this season preventing the Norse from outright victories. The Norse spotted the host Greenville squad a 6-0 lead early into the game and were threatening once again to score only to be stopped at the NM 9-yard line. Expecting a run, instead, halfback Ron Simonelli threw a long pass to Stan Guy near midfield and Guy did the rest and sped 91 yards for a TD, the longest TD pass at that time in Norse history. Gordon Obenauf’s blocked punt led to NM’s and Guy’s final career touchdown in the third quarter. NM took over at the five and it took Guy just one play for the score. Dick Schuiteman’s second perfect place kick gave the Norse a 14-6 lead. A punt return by the spectacular Stan Guy sets up NM’s final tally from the Greenville 20 to give the Norse a commanding 20-6 lead. Greenville scores with seconds left to make the score a little more respectable. Stan Guy would be selected to the All-State Dream Team – comprised of the top 11 players from all combined classes, the only North Muskegon player to be so honored. He would end the season with 25 touchdowns, good for 150 points which led all players in the State of Michigan in 1954. One of many remarkable achievements for Guy: In his three-year career he only failed to a score at least one touchdown in two games, both in his sophomore season.

Here are the 3-year career stats for arguably NM’s greatest player of all time--- Stan Guy.

What is remarkable about these totals is that North Muskegon didn’t run a formation where one back had most of the carries. NM used three running backs, and they all carried the ball evenly. For example, in the final game against Greenville. Ron Simonelli rushed for 60, Dick Schuiteman 46, and Guy 58. The difference was Guy’s long runs for TDs.

Career touchdowns: 55

Rushing touchdowns: 42

Pass receiving TDs: 7

Pass interception TDs: 3

Punt return TDs 2

Kickoff return TD 1

Average yardage on each TD Rushing: 36 yards

Average other: (int, punt, KOff): 57 yards

Average yardage for each TD: 42 yards

Notable records for Guy:

Longest punt return: (2nd) 91 yards (vs. Scottville 1953) – Record Ken Mack 1965

Longest pass reception (3rd) 91 yards (vs. Greenville 1954)

Longest rushing touchdown: 4th: 95 (vs Hart 1953) No. 1 Bill Young 1961

Career rushing totals: 2447 for two seasons.

Career passing yardage on just his touchdowns: 355 yards

Note: No stats compiled in 1952. On reported runs from TD and other in 1952 Guy had 414 yards.

Unofficially: Guy surely ran for 3000 or more yards rushing for his career.

Touchdowns called back due to penalties: 4 (218 yards total) 55-yard average.

Record Score Interesting Fact

1-0 NM 13, Coopersville 6 Norse lose battle of the stats but come away with victory. Stan Guy and Ron Simonelli with a TD each for NM.

2-0 NM 27, Ludington 25 Norse never trailed the Orioles. Guy 76 YD TD on fist play and later 60-yard pass from Schuiteman. Aron Wortham 35 and Dick Schuiteman each a TD.

3-0 \*NM 48 Scottville 6 Guy runs wild and scores 5 TDs, 4 rushing. Schuiteman passes to Bliss for 15 yd. TD, Schuiteman takes lateral from Simonelli and scores.

4-0 \*NM 39, Hart 6 Pete Sheldon starts at QB. Simonelli 4 TDs and Guy 2.

5-0 \*NM 20, Whitehall 0 Simonelli 2 TDs with Guy a pass reception from Schuiteman from 70 yards out.

6-0 \*NM 40, Shelby 7 Five TDs for Guy; 4 on rushes of 30,75,17, & 20 with the other a 52-yard pass from Sheldon. Don Harris returns a lateral pass 22 for a TD.

6-0-1 NM 12, Manistee 12 (tie) Guy TD runs of 65& 83. Winning TD of 68 called back due to a penalty.

7-0-1 \*NM 52, Montague 7 Guy rushed for 258 yards and five TDs, including an interception return for TD as NM clinches third WMC title.

8-0-1 NM 20, Greenville 13 NM defeats Central B conference champ Greenville. Simonelli to Guy for record 91-yard TD pass. Guy 2 TDs and Simonelli 1.

**1955 – coach Dunc Lectka (3-6 overall, 2-3 WMC, Montague Champs)**

Faced with the daunting task of replacing some of the finest players to ever put on a North Muskegon football jersey, including arguably the finest to wear the colors of the Blue & Gold in Stan Guy, coach Dunc Lectka did have at his disposal a handful of starters from the 1954 squad. Ron Simonelli, a four-year starter would return in the backfield along with juniors Pete Sheldon and Aron Wortham. Although not a returning starter Wortham did see extensive action for the 1954 Norsemen. All-WMC conference tackle Tony Nord returned but a pair of other junior starters from last season would not. All WMC guard Dick Montgomery moved with his family to East Lansing and would have an outstanding year for the Trojans as he was selected as a first team All-State lineman. Tom Girocco, another starter from last year counted on as a lineman was out with an injury. End Chuck Houts also returned for the Norse, but the numbers once again were down.

The 18-game winning streak enjoyed by the Norse over the last two years was quickly stopped in their road opener at Coopersville as they were defeated 19-6 by the Broncos. NM did get off to a good start as they took an early lead 6-0 as they scored in eight plays on a 64-yard drive with Aron Wortham and Ron Simonelli doing most of the work. Simonelli would score from 15 but that would be all the scoring for the Norse as Coopersville scored three unanswered touchdowns to pull away for the win.

Game number two found North Muskegon taking a rare beating at the hands of Ludington. The visiting Orioles totaled 194 yards rushing to but 19 for NM while the Orioles rolled up 13 first downs to but 2 for the Norse. The Orioles were led by future Central Michigan quarterback Wally Sadosty who ran and passed Ludington to victory. The lone NM score came in the final quarter when Pete Sheldon rifled a pass to Aron Wortham good for 39 yards and a touchdown.

NM got back to their winning ways with a 31-6 pounding of Scottville. So dominant was the Norse that they out rushed Scottville on the ground 329 yards to but 7. It was 31-0 before the visiting Spartans scored late in the game. Aron Wortham had a pair of tallies for the Norse, one from 23 yards out for the 1st NM score in the first quarter and it took Wortham only 1-yard to score his second, and the team’s 5th TD in the final period. Ron Simonelli had a big night for NM, scoring on a 65-yard punt return and 14-yard run, while junior quarterback Pere Sheldon added a three-yard TD in the 3rd quarter.

Hart handed NM its first loss in WMC competition in more than three years 12-6 in a game played at Hart on a soggy, rainswept field. Hart drew first blood when they scored midway in the opening period on a 74-yard drive with Lyle Gale going the final 36 for the TD. The Norse came right back with Ron Simonelli giving the Norse good field position on a long kickoff return where he was not stopped until he was downed in Pirate territory at the Hart 44. After a NM first down to the 34 Pete Sheldon on third down hurled a long forward pass intended for Simonelli. Interference was called on a Pirate defender to give the Norse a first down. From there Simonelli again did most of the work and would eventually score from two yards out to tie the score at 6-6. Sheldon’s extra point placement was blocked, and the score was all tied 6-6 at halftime. After a scoreless third period Hart scored what would prove to be the winning touchdown early into the final period when Jack Franklin scored on a 32-yard run.

According to sportswriter Tom Kampenga, who covered the Norsemen for the Muskegon Chronicle in 1955, Tom felt the Norsemen finally looked more like the Norse teams of the past few years following their 26-6 win over Whitehall. NM scored first when Fred Livingston, a sophomore newcomer bucked over from the five. That lead didn’t last long as Whitehall’s Kaj Sorenson galloped 66 yards for the tying marker. However, neither team was successful on their extra point attempts as the score remained 6-6 going into the second half. The second half belonged to four-year starter Ron Simonelli and the Norse. Simonelli returned a Whitehall punt 54 yards to pay dirt and then took things into his own hands by also running for the extra point. On their next possession the Norse moved 62 yards in seven plays with Simonelli going the final four yards on the first play of the fourth quarter. The Norse defense than produced the final points when lineman Ron Adema blocked a Viking punt. The ball rolled all the way back into the Whitehall end zone where it was recovered by Don Berry. Pete Sheldon’s extra point kick made the final score 26-6.

Frustration had to have set in following the Wednesday evening home 7-6 loss to Shelby. The Norse had clobbered the Tigers by a margin of 176-33 over their last four games, all huge Norse victories. The Norse dominated in all the stats except the one that counts the most --- the one on the scoreboard. NM made 15 first downs to three and outgained the Tigers 190-132 on the ground. In addition, the Norse had two touchdowns called back due to penalties, with the last taking place on the final play of the game. The Norse scored their only touchdown to take the lead midway through the second quarter. Chuck Houts, who was converted from a starting end to fullback, climaxed a 56-yard drive by plunging over from the two-yard line. After NM was assessed a five-yard penalty for delaying the game the Norse attempted a pass for the extra point, but the all-important point failed. On the next possession Shelby fooled the Norse when Larry Pranger on a reverse play traversed 54 yards for the touchdown. The pivotal extra point kick from Larry Smith would prove to be the winning point in the contest. The first touchdown called back by the Norse came early in the game when Ron Simonelli’s long punt return for 82 yards was called back due to a penalty. Twice in the final quarter it looked like NM was going to find a way to pull off the victory. The first drive went awry when the Norse fumbled at the Shelby six-yard line. Shelby took over with little time left on the clock and tried to run out the clock on quarterback sneaks. The last sneak on fourth down was stopped leaving NM with time for one last play. Chuck Houts would score from the two-yard line, but the Norse were offsides on the play and the game ended due to the rules from that era denying NM another play.

What a difference a year makes! Last year’s controversial game with Manistee resulted in a 12-12 tie, preventing NM from posting a perfect season. In 1955 the Norse managed to score one more point and then held off Manistee to earn a 13-12 victory that snapped their three-game losing streak. It appeared that NM had the game wrapped up with little time remaining in the game and NM leading 13-0. Manistee blazed 70 yards to score but Ron Adema broke through the Chippewa’s offensive line to block the extra point. Manistee then worked an on-side kick to perfection and took over at the Norse 49. There was only five-seconds left in the game when Ed Hansen completed a pass to Ed Anderson for a touchdown. It looked like the teams were again headed for another tie but the Norse defense, led by lineman Tony Nord, stopped Manistee’s try for the extra point and the Norse held on for a 13-12 win. Aron Wortham was the offensive sparkplug for the Norse scoring a pair of first half touchdowns. His first tally came on a 13-yard run around end. Ron Simonelli added what would prove to be the game winning point when he crashed through the line for the extra point. Wortham’s second TD was a dandy. The senior back raced 82 yards for the touchdown in the second quarter behind some excellent blocking up front.

For at least a half it looked like the Norse would be able to post an upset victory over Montague, but the eventual champs dominated the second half by scoring 26 unanswered points to win going away 28-6. The Norse led by a slim 6-0 margin at halftime on a Pete Sheldon 22-yard pass to Jim Olding. The big play in the long 94-yard drive was a 72-yard run by Aron Wortham. Montague scored four six-point TDs in the second half without having completed a pass in the entire game. The big gainer for the victors was an 82-yard punt return by Walter Anderson.

It was de ja vu for Norsemen football in their final game of the season as again they had a lead at halftime only to falter in the second half in their 33-21 loss to Greenville. It was the second, and last game of the two-game series between the two schools. Ron Simonelli had a fitting end to his brilliant career as a Norsemen. On the first play from the line of scrimmage Simonelli streaked 69 yards for a touchdown. Just moments later Aron Wortham took off on an even longer touchdown jaunt by going 76 yards for a score and the Norsemen were up 14-0 and it looked like it would be a good night for NM. Such was not to be, however. The Norse, already very thin in ranks, lost their star player Simonelli to an injury in the second quarter. NM was able to find a way to score on an 80-yard march with Simonelli on the bench with most of the yardage coming on pass completions from quarterback Pete Sheldon. Sheldon capped the drive with a 1-yard sneak and that would end all NM scoring. With Simonelli on the bench the Norse sputtered both on offense and defense as Greenville pulled away with Roger Knapp contributing to four of the winner’s TDs. The Norse would end their season with a 3-6 record, their first losing season under coach Dunc Lectka. After dominating the 11-man WMC all-Conference team in 1954, only Ron Simonelli was selected to the 1955 squad with lineman Tony Nord earning honors on the second team.

Record Score Interesting Fact

0-1 Coopersville 19, NM 6 Ron Simonelli 15-yard TD

0-2 Ludington 26. NM 7 Pete Sheldon to Aron Worthan 39-yard TD pass.

1-2 \*NM 31, Scpttville 6 Simonelli and Worthan 2 TDs, Sheldon 1.

1-3 \*Hart 12, NM 6 Simonelli 2-yard TD only NM score

2-3 \* NM 26, Whitehall 6 Simonelli 2 TDS, 54 yd Punt ret., Fred Livingston TD,Don Berry recovered fumble in end zone,

2-4 \* Shelby 7, NM 6 2 NM TDs called back by penalty, Chuck Houts NM TD.

3-4 NM 13, Manistee 12 Wortham 2 TDs,13 & 82) Simonelli extra point run wins.

3-5 \* Montague 26, NM 7 Sheldon to Jim Olding 32 yd TD pass only NM score

3-6 Greenville 33, NM 21 Simonelli (69) Wortham (76) TDS and Sheldon 1 yd sneak

**1956 – coach Dunc Lectka (5-4 overall, 3-2 WMC, Montague Champs)**

Things would look and even sound different in 1956 for Norsemen football. The new look would be a renovation of the football field with the home side now moving to the East side where new bleachers have been erected to replace the old rickety wood slats that have been the visitors’ seats for more than 20 years. The sound would be different as the Norse have a new fight sound, although the old school song played to the same tune as Notre Dame’s fight sound would still be a part of Norse athletics. Another new look would be the numbers out for football as 34 players were on hand to begin the Fall workouts. They even had a new ‘stringer’ to report games for the Muskegon Chronicle in 15-year-old Jim Moyes, who replaced his good friend Tom Kampenga who had graduated. The number one problem that 4th year coach Dunc Lectka felt was an issue for his 1956 team was a lack of speed. “We are so slow its, pitiful” said Lectka, “Pete Sheldon is our only really experienced back and we just don’t have a gamebreaker--- a Stan Guy type of fellow who can break up a game anytime he gets the ball.” When reminded that Stan Guys comes along about once in 25 years, Lectka said: “I know it, but we ought to have someone who can run the 100-yard dash in less than 15 or 20 seconds.”

Lectka’s fears proved prophetic as the Norsemen were shutout in their home opener by a very good Coopersville team 19-0. The Norse played the Broncos hard in the first half and even threatened to take the lead as they drove down to the Broncos nine-yard line before their drive was stopped. In the first half much of the yardage gained by the Norse was from sophomore running back Chuck Coverly. However, Coverly injured his ankle on their most serious drive and sat out the rest of the game with an injury. Fortunately, for Norse fans, Coverly would not miss another game in the 1956 season.

The Norse made the trip to Ludington and came home with a 12-7 win on a most memorable night for this very young cub reporter. Back in 1956 there were no press box for reporters to cover the game and in most instances, there were not even scoreboards. However, for me anyway--- Ludington was big time. They not only had a press box, but they had a veteran reporter who had been the Sports Editor for the Ludington Newspaper for years, Dick Derrick. I sat next to Mr. Derrick during the game, and he could not have been more courteous as well as giving me some helpful hints on reporting. It is now 2024 as I write this Norse history, and I wonder why those 68 years have passed by so fast. I will always remember how well I was received by Dick Derrick on September 21, 1956. Making it a perfect night for the young Norse reporter was a Norse 12-7 victory on the Ludington gridiron. The Norse had to come from behind and then hold off a last-ditch rally by the Orioles to preserve the victory. Ludington scored their first, and only touchdown late in the first quarter. The Norse game back to close the gap to a single point when two-way back Pete Sheldon intercepted a Wally Sadosty pass and returned it to the Norse 36. A quick pass from quarterback Sheldon to end Don Berry moved the ball to the Ludington 48. Junior halfback Bill McIntyre then slipped through the line and dashed 48 yards for the score. A missed PAT attempt left the Norse trailing by one, 7-6 at halftime. The Norse had their game winning drive early in the final quarter with a now healthy Chuck Coverly doing much of the running on power plays. The stocky sophomore then scored from the six-yard line and the 12-7 score would hold up. Ludington did mount a late drive that was stopped deep in NM territory at the six and the Norsemen had their first victory of the season. Putting a damper on the NM victory was an injury to popular NM end Larry ‘Lunk’ Johnson, who suffered a fractured ankle and would be lost for the 1956 season.

A couple of days before the Norse would begin their conference schedule at Whitehall, the sports world was saddened with the passing of Babe Dickinson Zaharias, the world’s greatest female athlete who succumbed to cancer at age 42. Whitehall would win their first game over North Muskegon since 1947 as they upended the Norse 20-7 at Funnell field in Whitehall. The Norse won the battle of the statistics, but penalties and fumbles hurt the visitors. One bright spot-on defense was the play of junior Jack Musselman who recovered a fumble and stopped another potential Whitehall scoring drive with an interception. Whitehall tallied first and led 7-0 but NM countered with a long 80-yard drive with Chuck Coverly leading the attack. Bill McIntyre skirted around left end for the touchdown with Coverly’s successful extra point run knotting up the game at 7-7. Whitehall added a second period touchdown and took advantage of a NM fumble at their own 3-yard to ice the game and make the final score read 20-7. Coverly was a workhorse for the Norse as he picked up 133 yards in 17 carries. One of the game officials was a young Dick Dolack, who served as a head linesman for Nelson Volz’s crew. Dolack would go on to be an official for many years in the NFL. Both Dolack and Volz are in the Muskegon Area Sports Hall of Fame.

If one would inquire as to who North Muskegon would consider as their number one rival during the early years, my guess it would have been Fremont. These two opponents faced each other every year from 1934-1952 with many of the games played on the final game of the season. After a three-year absence the series was resumed for the 1956 season with the Norsemen winning 21-14 over the Packers. The Packers tallied first, but the Norse came back to knot up the game on a Bill McIntyre eight-yard TD run with Chuck Coverly running for the extra point as the teams left the field at halftime tied at 7-7. Early into the third quarter the Norse marched 74 yards to take the lead on a Coverly six-yard dash to pay dirt and again Coverly ran for the extra point. The third NM touchdown was set up by a Jim Sibson interception, one of the junior lineman’s two interceptions during the game. Coverly then completed the short 35-yard drive on a 10-yard gallop with Fred Livingston adding the extra point on a run. Fremont scored late to make the score a little more respectable. Coverly again passed the century mark in yardage with 106 yards rushing while also catching three passes from quarterback Pete Sheldon for another 30 yards.

The Norse would begin their road game at Scottville with the following starting lineup: Tom Cousineau and Jack Musselman at the ends; Bob Prins and Bob Bond at tackles; Jim Sibson and Joe Sienkiewicz at guards; Francis Launstein at center, and the backfield would consist of Pete Sheldon, a 3-year starter at quarterback, Bill McIntyre and Chuck Coverly at the halfback posts, and Fred Livingston at fullback. Cousineau would be the fourth freshman in NM history to ever start a game for the Norsemen; preceded by Bob Pyle, Dick Schuiteman and Ron Simonelli from earlier years. The Norse compiled all their yardage in the contest on the ground as they edged the host Scottville eleven 21-6. NM only attempted two passes during the game as Coverly again surpassed 100 yards rushing with 107. McIntyre, Coverly and Sheldon scored the NM TDs.

The Norse made amends for their 7-6 upset from the previous season by walloping host Shelby 51-0 on a Wednesday night game on the Tigers field. After attempting but two passes in their previous win at Scottville, Pete Sheldon displayed his talents by completing nine passes out of 10 attempts, three for touchdowns, rushed for 68 yards and a TD, and even caught a couple of passes good for 50-yards. Sheldon caught his pair of passes after sophomore Jerry Johnson entered the game and played quarterback with Sheldon now a running back. Oh, the future Dartmouth College third baseman also intercepted the only pass attempted by Shelby in the entire game to set up one of many Norse TDs. Chuck Coverly had another exceptional game for the Norse by scoring four times, two running and two on passes from Sheldon. Tom Cousineau became the third Norsemen gridder in program history (Dick Schuiteman and Ron Simonelli) to score a TD as a Frosh when he hauled in a 15-yard TD strike from Sheldon. Bill McIntyre got in on the scoring parade with a 17-yard scamper while reserve sophomore lineman Bill Ginman pounced on a loose ball in the endzone after his teammate Bob Bond had blocked a punt for the final Norse tally.

Playing without the services of star sophomore running back Chuck Coverly who was out with an ankle injury, Norse coach Lectka inserted sophomore Jerry Johnson at quarterback and moved the versatile Pete Sheldon to a halfback to replace Coverly. The transition worked to perfection as Sheldon rushed for over 100 yards, highlighted by a long touchdown gallop of 62 yards as the Norse edged the Hart Pirates 13-6. Johnson had a fine game at quarterback as he completed five of six passes with one completion good for another Norse touchdown to halfback Bill McIntyre. The road victory over Hart was their fifth win of the season and insured that the Norsemen would once again have a winning season.

It looked like the Norsemen were headed for their fourth WMC victory on the season and a possible share of the WMC title when they took a 14-0 lead at halftime in their game with Montague. The Wildcats spoiled any Norsemen hopes for a WMC title share by coming out on fire in the second half and scored 28 unanswered points to defeat NM on the Northside field 28-14. The Norse received a crushing blow when star back Chuck Coverly, who had rushed for 56 yards and a TD, and on the receiving end of three passes and the second Norse TD, reinjured his ankle in the second period and would not see any action in the second half. After going through the previous four seasons pretty much injury free, Lady Luck had run out on the Norse as numerous injuries had now forced the Norse to only suit up 18 able body men for the game with Montague.

The Norsemen had the misfortune in their final game to run into one of the best teams in Manistee history. The visitors arrived at the Norse field looking to move their record to 8-1, the best record since Manistee went 7-0 back in 1919. The Norsemen played hard and gave the visitors a tougher game then the final score of 20-0 might indicate. The final Manistee TD game when a Norse fumble was scooped up and run into the end zone for a touchdown. The Norse were victimized by perhaps the smallest player on the field in 143-pound quarterback Carl Raatz. Scoring both Manistee touchdowns Raatz continually hurt the Norse with quarterback keeper plays that totaled 137 yards rushing. A very young NM team would lose but three starters to graduation for the following season: quarterback Pete Sheldon and linemen Bob Prins and Bob Bond. Bond and Coverly were selected to the first team All WMC conference team with Sheldon and Francis Launstein picked for the 2nd team.

Record Score Interesting Fact

0-1 Coopersville 19, NM 0 NM shutout in your authors 1st game as NM reporter

1-1 NM 12, Ludington 7 Bill McIntyre 48 yd TD, Chuck Coverly 6-yard TD run.

1-2 \*Whitehall 20, NM & McIntyre TD, Coverly rushes for 133 yards in loss.

2-2 NM 21, Fremont 14 Coverly 2 TDs (6 & 10 yds) Mcintyre 8-yard TD.

3-2 \* NM 21, Scottville 6 McIntyre, Sheldon and Coverly NM TDs.

4-2 \* NM 51, Shelby 0 Sheldon 3 TD pass for TD, 1 rush, interception, Jerry Johnson TD pass, Fr. Tom Cousineau TD rec, Mcintyre TD rec. Bill Ginman fum. Rec. for TD, Coverly 4 YDS.

5-2 \* NM 13, Hart 6 Sheldon 106 yd rushing, 6d yd TD, Johnson to McIntyre TD pass.

5-3 \* Montague 28, NM 14 Coverly 2 TD’s before sitting out 2nd half with injury.

5-4 Manistee 20, NM 0 Carl Raatz runs wild in NM loss.

**1957 – coach Dunc Lectka (3-6 overall, 3-2 WMC, Montague Champs)**

Although expectations were somewhat higher in 1957, the Norse were on the losing edge in too many close games and stumbled to an overall record of 3-6 with all their wins coming against WMC opponents. Perhaps an ominous warning was posted when in their pre-season scrimmage Friday before their regular season opener. A bank of lights went out and the scrimmage had to be called nearly a full quarter before the scheduled ending. Thirteen lettermen returned from last years’ 5-4 record including the entire backfield except for Pete Sheldon. Jerry Johnson saw extensive duty last year as Sheldon’s backstop while all-conference running back Chuck Coverly was expected to do the same to opponent’s defenses. The first game of the 1956 season was on September 21. My how times have changed with the adding of playoff competition beginning in 1975. To put things in perspective, the 2023 Norsemen football team are scheduled to play their **5th** game on September 22.

1957 would also be the first year that Reeths Puffer would field a true varsity football team. Many of the current seniors on the 1957 Norsemen football team resided in the Reeths Puffer School District. It would be the last year Reeths Puffer area students, except those currently residing in the Laketon Township district, would attend the North Muskegon school. The Rockets, who would field a squad composed entirely of 11th graders and younger would use the North Muskegon field as their home field while waiting for Gale Bolthouse Stadium to be erected.

The opener at Coopersville would epitomize the entire 1957 season. Twice the Norse had potential scoring drives stopped that could have been game winners inside the Broncos 1-yard line. The host Broncos scored first early into the contest and that TD would ultimately hold up for the victory. The first serious frustrating Norse drive ended on a fourth and goal play at the Bronco two. Chuck Coverly, who earlier had done much of the ball carrying on the drive and caught a pass from Jerry Johnson that covered 27 yards, was called on to power his way in from the two but seemingly the entire Bronco defense expected a Coverly carry and he was stopped at the one. Early into the fourth quarter the Norse began a long march that began back at their own 12-yard line. The Norse would then drive 87 and 9/10th yards only to again suffer more agony. An apparent Coverly touchdown run from the 3-yard line was called back due to a NM penalty. Coverly powered his way down to the one, but a fourth down sneak failed just inches from the goal line and a possible Norse victory went awry.

Injury woes were having a major impact as the Norse prepared for their home opener, a 20-14 loss to Ludington. Starting guard Jim Sibson incurred an elbow injury and was possibly ruled out for the season; Tom Cousineau, a sophomore who often started as a freshman, was out with a concussion; Fred Livingston would also miss the Oriole contest with a sprained ankle. The injury riddled Norse battled hard against the Orioles but again fell tantalizingly short of victory. Ludington scored late in the first period, but the Norse came back to even the game at 7-7 on a 17-yard TD pass from Jerry Johnson to Bill McIntyre and a successful Johnson PAT. Ludington would score late in the second period to lead 14-7 at halftime. Chuck Coverly started a NM tying drive by first intercepting an Oriole pass and then scored from five yards out to even the game at 14-14 after another perfect Johnson kick. The Orioles caught a big break on their winning TD. Ludington quarterback Gary Hackett hurled a pass downfield that bounced off Norse defender Dale Swanson into the hands of a surprised Oriole receiver who raced into the endzone. The Norse mounted a furious closing drive late in the contest down, but misfortune again hit the Norse as a penalty killed the drive after the Norse had reached the Orioles eight-yard line.

The injury and flu-ridden Norse team somehow found a way to defeat Whitehall 19-18 in a game that featured perhaps the most ‘bizarre’ play in NM’s long football history. The Norse spotted the Vikings an early first half lead at 12-0 with the second TD an exciting 58-yard dash by their outstanding running back Gordy McLouth. It looked like the Vikings were going to run away and hide from the Norse, but a Viking back was jarred loose of the football by NM’s defensive back Dale Swanson and the Norse took over at their own 9-yard line. It was on the next play when the game turned on a play that will long be remembered by those in attendance at the Northside field. NM back Bill McIntye busted through the line and suddenly there were no Viking defenders between McIntyre and the goal line 91 yards away. However, as McIntyre raced down the west sidelines an overeager Viking reserve, watching McIntyre head for an apparent touchdown, jumped onto the playing field and tackled the surprised NM ball carrier. The play was eerily like an incident that occurred in the 1954 Cotton Bowl when Alabama’s Tommy Lewis came off the bench to tackle Rice’s Dicky Maegle. Just as Maegle was awarded a touchdown, so was McIntyre on his dash against Whitehall. After Jerry Johnson kicked what would eventually prove to be the deciding winning point, the play rejuvenated the Norse’s spirits. After a scoreless third quarter, Johnson returned a Viking punt 34 yards down to the Whitehall 16-yard line. NM drove down to the one where McIntyre this time only had to go one yard, 90 less than his previous extraordinary TD in the first half and the Norse led for the first time in the game 13-12. The Vikings didn’t fold and would eventually score from one-yard out with the big play on the drive a McLouth 65-yard run. With little time remaining the Norse began their winning drive. Running backs Frank Moran, Swanson and McIntyre moved the ball down to the Whitehall 38. From there Johnson went to the air and hit end Jack Musselman with a couple of crucial completions, the first for big yardage down to the eight, the second on third down and eight where he hit Musselman in the corner of the endzone to make NM 19-18 winners.

The injury report would only get worse as the Norse prepared for their game with Fremont. Not only would four regulars miss the game with the Packers, but the Norse would be without the services of their All-Conference running back Chuck Coverly. Although the muscular and popular Coverly was hampered with nagging ankle injuries for the past two seasons, the real reason for Coverly’s departure was not due to injuries. Coverly was a good friend and classmate of your author who often confided with me that he just did not love the game of football. Fremont had extra incentive with their game against the Norse on their home field as the Packers, who would win the Ken-Ne-Wa conference championship in 1956, had lost their game at NM 21-14. And what a year 1957 would be for Fremont. The Packers would run the table and go 8-0 on the season, the last perfect season for Fremont for the next 66 years. The Norse were no match for one of the best teams in Packer history. NM had no answer for Carl DeKuiper, a 3-sport standout and one of the best all-around athletes in Fremont history, who passed and ran the host Packers to a 21-7 win over the Norse. The Norse didn’t score until the fourth period when they were already trailing 21-0. Jerry Johnson completed an 84-yard drive, aided by some fine running by Frank Moran and Dale Swanson, by sneaking over from the one-yard line to make the final score read 21-7.

In their first meeting since 1944, the Norse defeated a new, but brief member of the WMC, Reed City, 26-14 for their second win of the season. Frank Moran, some 50 pounds lighter than the player he replaced in the NM backfield, Chuck Coverly, ran for 159 yards and scored three touchdowns to lead the Norse to their road victory. Moran had one 38-yard touchdown run called back, but he was credited with TD gallops of nine and 59 yards while catching a pass from Jerry Johnson for 14 yards and his third TD. The Norse were never threatened and wrapped up their scoring on a short one-yard plunge from Fred Livingston.

North Muskegon kept their hopes alive for a WMC title with a closer than expected 20-13 victory over Shelby. Those hopes would turn into wishful thinking as the Norse would go winless over the season’s final three games. The NM ‘pony backfield’ of lightweights, Frank Moran, Bill McIntyre and Dale Swanson, along with the accurate passing arm of Jerry Johnson led the Norse to victory. Moran scored a pair of TDs and rushed for 90 yards while McIntyre caught a six-yard TD pass from Johnson and ran for an even 100 yards. Swanson was on the receiving end of many of Johnson’s six completions to set up NM drives. Shelby gave the Norse a brief scare in the second half when they pulled to within one point at 14-13 midway through the third period before NM put the game away on Moran’s four-yard dash into the end zone.

The big news in the State of Michigan on Friday, November 1, 1957, was the opening to the public of the Mighty Mac bridge far to the north of the clash that same evening between NM and Hart. NM gave the Pirates a battle but fell 19-12, despite leading in most of the statistical departments. However, much of the Norse yardage was gained between the 30-yard stripes. The big play of the game occurred just after NM had tied up the game at 6-6 following a Frank Moran TD scamper of six yards. Hart’s Terry ‘Turk’ Griffin received the following Norse kickoff and ran through the center of the Norse without a hand touching him for a quick Pirate score. The Norse would narrow the gap late in the second period on a 21-yard dash to pay dirt by Dale Swanson. Both tries from placement failed the Norse and Hart had a 13-12 lead. The final touchdown in the half, and the game, was a Griffin short yardage run with but 28 seconds showing on the scoreboard. Neither team put points on the board in the second half as the Norse hopes for a conference crown were doomed.

Old Man winter roared its head as the NM-Montague game was played in arguably the worse weather conditions in NM football history. Heavy snow and winds gusting at 50 mph caused thousands of dollars in damage to area properties --- but they raised them tough in the 1950s and the game was played. In fact, there were no reported games in the entire state cancelled due to the weather. A depleted Norse lineup handicapped with numerous injuries fought hard in the miserable conditions as this reporter tried to scribble down notes while following the action on the sidelines. It was not until the second half that the eventual 1957 WMC champs from Montague would take control of the game as the first half found the teams deadlocked at 7-7. After Montague scored first in the opening quarter the Norse countered with reserve back Ed Beagle plunging over from the one-foot line for the score. The key play in the NM scoring drive was a 36-yard run by Dale Swanson that set up Beagles’ score. With kicking for extra points out of the questions with the blizzard conditions, both teams were successful on their extra points via the run game. Montague salted away the game by scoring the first two touchdowns in the second half before the Norse made it closer following a Frank Moran TD from the two with Montague earning a 20-14 victory. The Norse did throw a scare into Montague as time ran out with the Norse at the Montague 25-yard line. Playing a stellar game for the Norse was junior lineman Dave Taylor, opening holes on offense from his tackle position and making key tackles from his linebacking post on defense.

Too say that the Norse non-conference schedule was difficult would be an understatement as two of their opponents would finish the season with undefeated records, Fremont and their final game opponent Manistee.

Nine seniors would suit up for their last game against undefeated Manistee, including starting ends Jack Musselman and Jim Pyle, tackle Francis Launstein and guard Joe Sienkiewicz. Both Bill McIntyre and Jim Sibson were starters for the Norse before sidelined with injuries. Joe Mierendorf was a senior Norse starter when NM was on defense. Due to injuries only junior quarterback Jerry Johnson was a starter in the backfield when the season got underway against Coopersville. Juniors Frank Moran and Dale Swanson were the chief running backs for much of the season with senior Eddie Beagle called upon late in the season to take over the fullback duties. It didn’t take junior tackle Dave Taylor long to crack the starting lineup where he did double duty as a tackle and linebacker. Bill Ginman, at just 145 pounds was a starting guard who would return the following season, as would junior center Bill Garber. Lost for the entire season with a concussion injury was their promising sophomore End Tom Cousineau, a starter as a freshman the previous season. The Norse threw a scare into Manistee on the Northside gridiron, and even took a brief lead in the second half. Once again, the Norse were victimized by little Carl Raatz, who burned the Norse the previous year but was even more dominant in this contest. Raatz, a stocky 5-foot, 4-inch pack of dynamite, carried the ball 18 times for 187 yards and three touchdowns. Showing his toughness Raatz was injured numerous times and once even had to be carried off the field on a stretcher. Both NM touchdowns gave NM brief leads. The first a 10-yard TD pass from Johnson to Musselman on a fourth and goal, the second on an eight-yard strike from Johnson to Musselman and again on a fourth and goal play. Trailing 14-12 Manistee then lived up to its billing and scored the games’ final three TDs to stay undefeated while the Norsemen finished 3-6.

Record Score Interesting Fact

0-1 Coopersville 6, NM 0 Twice NM was stopped inside the one-yard line.

0-2 Ludington 20, NM 14 Injuries hit NM. Ludington wins on a deflected pass for a late TD. Jerry Johnson passes tp McIntyre for TD, Chuck Coverly scores from 5

1-2 \*NM 19, Whitehall 18 McIntyre bizarre 91 yd TD when tackled by player off bench. McIntyre 1-yard TD; Johnson passes to Jack Musselman 8 yards for winning TD.

1-3 Fremont 20, NM 7 Fremont with their only perfect season in the last 66 years defeats NM. Johnson’s 1-yard sneak only NM TD.

2-3 \*NM 26, Reed City 14 Frank Moran 3 TDs on runs of 9 & 59 and a TD pass from Johnson for 14. Fred Livingston plunges over from the 1 for final NM tally.

3-3 \*NM 20 Shelby 13 Moran 2 TDs, McIntyre TD pass from Johnson as NM goes to 3-0 in WMC.

3-4 \*Hart 19, NM 12 Long kickoff return by Hart’s Turk Griffin key play in loss. Moran from six and Swanson from 21 Norse TDs.

3-5 \*Montague 20, NM 14 Montague wins in blizzard conditions. Ed Beagle a one-foot plunge and Moran from two NM ---TDs.

3-6 Manistee 30, NM 14 NM gets a pair of TD passes from Johnson to Musselman but could not contain Manistee’s Carl Raatz.

**1958 – coach Dick Dornbos (5-4 overall, 3-2 WMC, Montague Champs)**

The Norse would have a new coach for the 1958 season as Dunc Lectka, who posted a winning record of 33 wins and 18 losses, with three WMC titles, resigned from his teaching and coaching duties to move across the state to take over the football duties at Tecumseh. “Coach Lectka was the best coach I ever had,” said Norse football great Dave Taylor, one of but two NM male graduates enshrined in the Greater Muskegon Hall of Fame. After coaching at Tecumseh for three seasons Lectka joined the athletic department at Michigan State where he was the assistant ticket manager. Lectka then left MSU and became the head ticket manager for the Buffalo Bills. Dunc Lectka, who perfected the ‘belly plays’ out of the T-Formation that was a staple for Muskegon area teams for decades, passed away from a heart attack while exercising in Buffalo, NY in February of 1969 at just 47 years.

Replacing the highly popular Lectka was Dick Dornbos, a Muskegon native who prepped at Muskegon St. Joseph, a school that didn’t have a football team. Dornbos would be coming to NM after posting a perfect 8-0 record at St. Joseph Michigan Catholic. Interest was high at NM to begin the year as a total of 75 boys, including 11 lettermen reported for the opening practice session. However, 28 of those players were freshmen. Once again, a daunting opening schedule of four talented opponents would pose a difficult challenge to begin the 1958 season.

The Norse again would open with Coopersville, a team they hadn’t defeated in the last three meetings. Make that now four straight losses to the Broncos as the Norse couldn’t add to their 6-0 lead at halftime. It looked like it would be smooth sailing for NM as on their first possession they marched 65 yards for what would prove to be their only touchdown on the evening. Frank Moran ran 29 yards for the score but Jerry Johnson’s point after from placement hit the goal post. There were a couple of big plays in that scoring drive, both pass plays. One a pass from Johnson to Moran that picked up 18 yards and another completion for the same yardage was caught by Tom Cousineau. Coopersville completely controlled the game in the second half as the Norsemen had the ball for just 13 plays. The Broncos scored once in both quarters of the second half to again defeat the Norse by the same margin as last year – six points as the final scoreboard read Coopersville 12 and North Muskegon 6.

NM put together one of their best offensive showings on the season when they evened their record at 1-1 with a 32-14 road victory against Ludington. NM rolled up 278 yards rushing with Dale Swanson the leading ground gainer with 146 yards that included a long TD dash of 75 yards for NM’s second TD of the game. Earlier sophomore fullback Jeff Olds led off the NM touchdown parade with a 35-yard TD run in the first quarter. Swanson scored his second TD on a pass from Jerry Johnson good for a 25-yard tally. Ludington closed the gap to 19-14 in the third period but then the defense took charge for the Norse. Dick Hoover set up the next Norse TD with a fumble recovery that would lead to a Tom Cousineau end around TD. Linebacker Dave Taylor then intercepted an Oriole pass to set up Olds’ second 6-pointer from 24 yards that competed the Norse scoring.

Whitehall pounced on the Norse early as their 33-16 victory was settled in the first half when the Vikings took a commanding 26-0 halftime lead. The Norse were unable to stop Jim ‘Bull’ Jordan who time and time again ran like his nickname through frustrated Norse defenders. Jordan, who ran for 140 bruising yards, scored two first half TDs, one for 40 yards, and set up another short TD of teammate Spud Wolfe. The Norse did show some life early into the second half to cut the lead in half on a pair of TDs. The first, a Tom Cousineau end run from five yards out, the second, a 77-yard pass and run play from Jerry Johnson to Dale Swanson. One bright spot for the Norse was the all-around play of tackle and linebacker Dave Taylor, the only Norse player who could contain Bull Jordan. Taylor also averaged more than 40 yards per punt.

The Norse won a Dad’s Night thriller 20-19 against Fremont to even their record at 2-2. Jerry Johnson threw three TD passes with his third strike completed with just seconds remaining. One factor that has changed over the years has been the kicking game after extra points. Before soccer style kickers came on the scene to make a PAT almost a certainty, such was not the case in the pre-Pete Gogolak era. The difference in the NM-Fremont game was indeed the made, or not made, extra points. The Norse ran successfully on two of their attempts after TDs while Fremont made just one. In addition to the heroics of quarterback Johnson, Dave Taylor deserves equal billing as the future two-time Ferris State captain and team MVP blocked the first two extra points attempted by the Packers, the difference in winning or losing. Johnson’s first TD pass went to Dale Swanson from 15 yards out with just 16 seconds left in the opening quarter. Tom Cousineau on a reverse made the all-important extra point. Fremont would score to close the gap to 7-6 at halftime. The Norse scored first in the second half on Johnson’s second TD pass, this time to Frank Moran good for a 10-yard tally with Moran also scoring what would prove to be the huge extra point on a cross-buck. Fremont would then score twice but Taylor forced his way through the offensive line to again block the Packer’s extra point. Fremont appeared to score the game winner on a Bultman to Kingsford pass for 35 yards with four minutes remaining in the game. This time Bultman’s meaningless kick was good to give the Packer a 19-14 lead. The Norse then began a 64-yard drive with sophomore Jeff Olds doing much of the ball carrying. With just seconds remaining it was do or die time for Johnson and the Norse. Faced with a fourth and goal at the ten-yard line Johnson finished his heroics with a TD pass to a surprisingly wide-open Tom Cousineau in the endzone to pull off the thriller. Following the game co-captain Dave Taylor of the Norse was presented with the victory can award, a symbol of each Packer-Norse game that dated back to 1935.

The Norse made it two straight wins over Reed City by posting their only shutout of the season with their 13-0 victory on the Northside field. After a sluggish first half the Norse added a pair of second half TDs to move to 3-2 overall and 2-1 in the WMC. The first half presented the Norse with a sequence of plays that had frustration written all over the faces of Norse fans and players. Frank Moran took off on a 69-yard TD run only to have it called back on a penalty. Following the 5-yard walk off Dale Swanson electrified the crowd with a 74-yard scamper for a tally, only again to see the play called back due to a penalty. The Norse did score a couple of penalty free TDs in the second half, the first a six-yard TD run by Tom Cousineau, the second, an eight-yard TD run by Jeff Olds who led all Norse backs in rushing with 124 yards gained in 15 carries.

The Norse sputtered on occasion in their 20-12 homecoming victory over Shelby but still had enough fire power to pull off the victory. The only TD scored in the first half was set up by a Dave Taylor interception. Taylor ran 62 yards after his interception before he was gang tackled by three Shelby tacklers at the one-yard line. Jerry Johnson sneaked over from the one on the next play and passed to Dale Swanson for the extra point to give the Norse a 7-0 halftime lead. Early into the second half Swanson, who rushed for 124 yards in 13 carries, outraced the Tiger defenders to score the Norse second TD from 43 yards. Frank Moran added the clinching TD for the Norse from the one-yard line after Shelby had scored their first touchdown on the preceding series.

North Muskegon had little trouble at Hart as they moved to 3-1 in the WMC and their fourth straight victory with their 31-14 victory. The Norse led 31-0 before Hart tallied a couple of late TDs after the Norse brought in the reserves. Dale Swanson had another big game for NM by rushing for 150 yards in but 13 carries. With two of his carries going for five and 54-yard TDs. Dave Taylor’s interception set up a NM score with Jerry Johnson passing to Frank Moran for 17 yards, and the same duo later teamed up on a 59-yard scoring strike. Johnson sneaked over from the one shortly before halftime to give the Norse a commanding 25-0 lead at halftime.

A large crowd was on hand to witness Montague score the games’ final three touchdowns to pull away and defeat the Norse 33-13. The Norse could not contain the Montague duo of Glenn Anderson and Larry Jancek who scored all five Wildcats TDs. The win set up the Conference Championship game the following Friday between a pair of rivals undefeated in WMC play, Montague and Whitehall. A Frank Moran two-yard TD and a Moran extra point tied up the game in the third period, but it was all Montague the rest of the game. Earlier in the first half Jeff Olds scored the first NM TD with a 13-yard spurt over left tackle.

The Norse concluded their season at 5-4 with perhaps their poorest performance of the season as they were soundly defeated by Manistee 30-6 on a rain drenched field in Manistee. Jay Conover, subbing for an injured Dale Swanson, scored NM’s only touchdown on a one-yard plunge, but that was it for the NM offense. Earlier in the week Swanson was given an X-Ray on his injured shoulder that showed he had a small fracture that he had been playing with most of the season. Three times the Norse drove inside the Manistee 10-yard line only to come up empty on each occasion. One who didn’t play a poor game for the Norse was their one-man defensive gang in Dave Taylor. In addition to leading the Norse in tackles, Taylor also blocked a punt and extra point attempt. In addition to a pair of seniors, who sat out the game, Swanson and Roger Sipman, who had been out since suffering a fractured ankle earlier in the season, the Norse would lose eight senior starters to graduation: Linemen Tom Baker, John Armistead, Dick Neff, Bill Garber and Bill Ginman, and three starting backs in Jerry Johnson, Frank Moran and Swanson. Returning starters would include end Tom Cousineau, sophomore Jeff Olds and end Dick Overcamp. It should be noted that returning as a starter on defense would be freshman Benny Manning. For those who are keeping score, Manning would be the fifth freshman to start a game in NM history with Bob Pyle (1943), Dick Schuiteman (1951) Ron Simonelli (1952) and Cousineau (1956) the others. Post-season All-Conference honors would go to Swanson and Taylor, both named to the first team. Honorable Mentions picks went to Cousineau, Ginman, Garber and Johnson.

Record Score Interesting Fact

0-1 Coopersville 12, NM 6 NM loses 4th straight to Broncos: Frank Moran NM TD from 29

1-1 NM 32, Ludington 14 Swanson 146 yards rushing and 2 TDs; Jeff Olds 2 TD (35 &24), Tom Cousineau end around TD.

1-2 \*Whitehall 33, NM 13 Whitehall busts out to 26-0 halftime lead. Jerry Johnson 77-yard TD pass to Swanson. Cousineau a 5-yard TD run.

2-2 NM 20, Fremont 19 Johnson hits Cousineau for winning TD with second left. Johnson 3 TD passes, other other to Swanson for 15 and Moran for 10.

3-2 \*NM 13, Reed City 0 Norse post only shut out of season. Olds rushes for TD and 124 yards rushing. Cousineau a 6-yard TD run.

4-2 \*NM 20, Shelby 12 Dave Taylor long interception return sets up Johnson’s 1-yard sneak. Swanson scores from 43 and Moran from one.

5-2 \*NM 31, Hart 14 Swanson 2 TDs (5 & 54) Johnson to Moran 2 TD passing TDs (17 &59) Johnson 1-yard sneak TD.

5-3 \*Montague 33, NM 13 Tied 13 all in the 3rd period, Montague scores final 3 TDs. Moran 2-yard TD, Olds from 13 for the other Norse score.

5-4 Manistee 30, NM 6 Dave Taylor shined in a losing cause on defense. Jay Conover scores NM only TD.

**1959 – coach Dick Dornbos (4-3-2 overall, 3-2 WMC, Montague Champs)**

A sweet start to the 1959 season quickly turned sour as the Norse dropped their final three games of the season after going undefeated (tied twice) in their first six starts. It would be a short stay for head coach Dick Dornbos as he would leave the program at the end of the year. Only three starters returned for the Norse; ends Tom Cousineau and Dick Overkamp, and fullback Jeff Olds. Benny Manning surely could classify as a fourth starter as he started many games in 1958 on defense. NM was hoping to avert losing to the Coopersville Broncos for the fifth straight game. NM didn’t lose, but they also didn’t win as nothing was settled in a 7-7 tie. The Norse scored their only touchdown in the second quarter when Carl Rittman, a transfer from Traverse City, threw a 39-yard touchdown pass to Tom Cousineau. The pair also connected on the extra point. Coopersville blocked a NM punt in the same quarter and only had to travel 10-yards for their TD and they too scored on a pass play for the extra point to knot the game up at 7-7. The Norse received a big blow earlier in the week when Jeff Johnson, who had prepped at Culver Academy before moving back to his hometown, was ruled ineligible by the MHSAA due to a transfer ruling.

NM continued their winning ways against Ludington as the Norse won for the 7th time in 11 meetings 28-6 in their 1959 home opener against the Orioles. For Ludington, better known for their outstanding basketball program during this era, it was their 11th straight loss and had now gone 20 games without a victory. Either the Norse put up a good defense or Ludington was woeful when they had the ball, but the Orioles didn’t pick up a first down until midway through the third period. Sophomore speedster Dave Rose gave the Norse offense a big boost as he rushed for a team leading 127 yards and scored the first NM TD on a nine-yard run early in the first period. Junior fullback Jeff Olds scored a pair of TDs, the first on a one-yard plunge in the first quarter and the second touchdown came in the second period from eight-yards out to give the Norse a 21-0 lead at halftime. Oscar Manning closed out the scoring with the games only score in the second half on a three-yard TD with freshman Steve Harpold running for the extra point. Ludington scored late in the game on a pass of four yards from Bink Wallace to 6’10” end Harry Volkers.

Prior to hosting Whitehall, the Norse received a big break. Bull Jordan, who terrorized the Norse in Whitehall’s win over the Norse last season would sit out with an injury, as would Whitehall’s quarterback Jon Swenson, one of the area’s finest baseball players in the Spring. NM scored first as Dave Rose scored from 12, one play after Jeff Olds ran 43 yards to the Vikings 12. A pair of punts led to a pair of Norse TDs. The first was set up when NM blocked a Viking punt that quarterback Carl Rittman turned into six points when he was successful on the first of his two sneaks on the evening. The second was a NM punt that was inadvertently touched by the Viking return man deep in his own territory. The Norse again capitalized on the Viking miscue when Rittman found a wide-open Jay Conover in the end zone for their third TD of the first half. The Norse weren’t finished as Rittman’s second QB sneak gave the Norse a surprising 25-0 lead at halftime. The Vikings dominated in the second half, but those four NM TDs were too much for the Vikings to overcome.

In Fremont the following Friday it looked the Norse were doomed to defeat as they trailed 13-0 going into the final quarter. After having scored but 6 points in the second half over their last two games, it didn’t look good for the Blue & Gold. The tide changed for NM as they were able to score a pair of TDs over the game’s final 12 minutes and made one of two extra points to settle for a 13-13 tie with the Packers. Following a Packer TD at the end of the third period, NM began their comeback by first marching 76 yards for their first touchdown with Dave Rose going the final five yards for the TD. Without a kicker a Norse pass in the end zone was incomplete and NM now trailed 13-6. Fremont then marched to the NM 30-yard before they were forced to turn the ball over to the Norse on downs. Utilizing the pass and a few timely runs, Jeff Olds scored on a six-yard run. This time a pass from Carl Rittman to his favorite target Tom Cousineau was good and the Norse escaped with a 13-13 tie to stay undefeated at 2-0-2.

The Norse moved to 3-0-2 on the season after defeating Scottville 20-7. NM wasted little time to get on the board as Jeff Olds scored from 34-yards out to make the score 6-0, and the lead upped to 7-0 when Dave Rose ran for the extra point. Scottville threatened to score on their next possession, but the Norse held the host Spartans at the NM 10- yard line. The Norse then marched 90 yards to pay dirt with the TD coming on a 17-yard pass from Carl Rittman to Jay Conover. A Jeff Olds 34-yard touchdown carry iced the game in the second half as NM stayed undefeated in WMC competition. NM won their third game of the season despite fumbling five times and was only able to cover but one of their miscues.

On a rain-soaked Northside field Shelby and North Muskegon played scoreless ball for 47 minutes and 56 seconds. The Norse barely escaped with a 7-0 victory when quarterback Carl Rittman scored on a 1-yard sneak with just four seconds remaining in the game. The Norse were more than fortunate to come away winners as Shelby practically gift-wrapped the Norse victory. For the first three periods both squads played even with neither team dominating in statistics on the muddy gridiron. The breaks went the Norse’s way in the final five minutes. NM recovered a fumble on the Tiger 28 but lost the ball on downs on the seven-yard line. Once again Shelby fumbled the wet pigskin and NM recovered at the Shelby five. Rittman held on to the ball for dear life as he sneaked in for the TD to give NM their fourth win of the season and third in the WMC.

It was Halloween night on the Northside field, and it was the Norsemen who got ‘tricked.’ Playing without their two-year starter and leading rusher Jeff Olds, the Norse just didn’t have the firepower in their 19-13 loss to Hart. The loss was the first of the season and first in the WMC for the Norse and was the beginning of a three-game slide. With the injured Olds watching from the bench the Norse went to the air to take an early lead in the game. Rittman’s first pass to Conover was good for 11, and after a couple of running plays moved the ball to the 26, Rittman again connected to Conover for 26 yards and a TD. The point after attempt was a comedy of errors. Three plays were denied due to penalties, a pass play failed for NM and the 6-0 Norse lead would last until the second half. Dick Hasty scored three second half touchdowns to earn 18 unanswered points for the visiting Pirates. NM was able to close the gap to 19-13. With Dave Rose doing most of the work, the Norse marched 82 yards for the TD with Rose going the final three yards for the final Norse score.

Montague clinched their fifth straight WMC championship by edging the Norse 13-7 on the frozen turf at Montague’s Memorial field. Spotting the Wildcats two first half touchdowns proved too much for the Norse to overcome in a game played in frigid conditions. Injuries again plagued the Norse as two-year starter Benny Manning was lost for the second half due to a leg injury while end Bob Cihak was carted off the field on a stretcher. The Norse were once again without the services of top running back Jeff Olds. The Norse scored their only TD on a 20-yard run by quarterback Carl Rittman in the third period with Rittman passing to Jay Conover for the extra point. The Norse did threaten in the final quarter. A long pass from Rittman to Tom Cousineau was complete down to the Montague 20-yard line but was nullified due to offensive pass interference.

My how times have changed. There is little doubt if the weather would have been as bad in today’s era, as it was on the night of November 13, 1959, it is doubtful if any games would be played. Muskegon’s long time Sports editor James F Henderson the following day in his column: *The Press Box* ---recalled many other games played in similar conditions but the games always went on in football. All games were played on this date in 1959 despite freezing temps and heavy snow made for incredibly poor conditions. A bigger, deeper, and faster Manistee team survived the elements and shut out the Norsemen 12-0 as teams were limited to mainly just straight dive plays. There were 11 combined fumbles in the game and naturally they would play a huge part. Manistee recovered a fumble deep in NM territory and scored on a one-foot plunge. It would be all the scoring Manistee would need except Manistee halfback Terry Hansen suddenly found himself with clear sailing and raced to a 62-yard TD run in the second quarter. Those 62 yards were more yards than the entire NM team could muster the entire game. The loss was the third straight for the Norse after a great start and left them with a 4-3-2 record. It was also the last game for NM senior Tom Cousineau, one of the finest ends in Norse history. Also coming to an end was NM’s participation as a member of the West Michigan Conference as they would join the Seaway conference for the next six years. NM was not the only one leaving, as head coach Dick Dornbos would be leaving after just two years piloting the Norse. Also departing following graduation would be Carl Rittman and Dick Overkamp. Rittman was named first team all-conference as was Cousineau while Overkamp was honorable mention. In 1964 Tom Cousineau was named Hope College football player of the year. The former Norseman 3-sport star passed away in November of 2021.

Record Score Interesting Fact

0-0-1 NM 7, Coopersville 7 (tie) Only NM score comes on 49-yard TD pass from Carl Rittman to Tom Cousineau.

1-0-1 NM 28, Ludington 6 Jeff Olds scores a pair of TDs (1 & 8) while Dave Rose rushed for 127 yards and a 9-yard TD. Oscar Manning completes scoring with 3-yard TD.

2-0-1 \*NM 25, Whitehall 13 A pair of punts, one blocked, the other touched led to two NM TDS. Rittman a pair of QB sneaks, Rittman passes to Jay Conover 7 yd TD. Rose 12 yd tally.

2-0-2 NM 13, Fremont 13 (tie) NM rallies from trailing 13-0 after 3 quarters to escape with a tie. Dave Rose and 5-yard TD and Jeff Ollds from 6 NM TDs. Rittman to Cousineau for the extra point.

3-0-2 \*NM 20, Scottville 7 NM wins sloppy contest despite losing 4 fumbles. Jeff Olds two 34-yard TDs. Rittman to Conover for 17-yard passing TD.

4-0-2 \*NM 7, Shelby 0 NM take advantage of late Shelby fumbles as Rittman sneak from the one with four-seconds left in the game.

4-1-2 \*Hart 19, NM 13 Hart scored 3 unanswered 2nd half TDs. Rittman to Conover for 26-yard TD. Rose scored from three.

4-2-2 \*Montague 13, NM 7 Montague again WMC champs on frozen field. Rittman on NM TD on a 20-yard run.

4-3-2 Manistee 12, NM 0 Norse muster little yardage in game played in heavy snow.

**1960 – coach Lee David (1-8 overall, 0-4 Seaway)**

North Muskegon would have a new coach as well as a new conference, or do they? They know they have a new coach in former Muskegon Big Red star running back Lee David, who was on the same state championship 1951 Muskegon team quarterbacked by Earl Morrall. The schedule was a mixture of West Michigan opponents as well as four members in the Seaway. The confusion was: what conference is NM officially affiliated with --- WMC or Seaway? It surely didn’t have an impact for NM winning a conference championship as the Norse would experience one of their worse seasons in history, winning but one of their nine games. Only the winless 2011 team would fare worse than the 1960 squad. Finally, just a couple of days before the season opener WMC Superintendents made it official that both Whitehall and North Muskegon, who bolted to join the Seaway would no longer be eligible to compete for trophies in thee WMC.

Only four lettermen returned from the previous year; Steve Johnson, who only played defense in 1959 would now be the NM quarterback, junior halfback Dave Rose, senior tackle Bill Bissen and lineman Bennie Manning, still only a junior but a two-year starter. Coach David summed it up perfectly even before the season got underway: “We are large but slow.”

Coopersville once again served as the Norse opener, and for the sixth straight year the Norse were winless against the Broncos, losing 21-0. The very green Norse offense just couldn’t get anything rolling and totaled just 44 yards rushing on a perfect night for football. Desperate to find a spark coach David inserted sophomore Charlie Langeland in at QB in the second half. The deepest NM was able to penetrate Coopersville territory the entire game was only to the Bronco 28. Getting praised for their defensive work were linemen Bill Busker, Troy Lalone and Bennie Manning. Perhaps a hint that better things might be happening in the future was the Norse junior varsity winning handily over the Broncos JVs earlier in the day. It was not the perfect start to their initial appearance in the newly formed Seaway Conference.

It would only get worse. Ludington handed NM their worse defeat in the 12-game series between the two schools when they pummeled the Norse 33-0. So futile was the NM offense that they only picked up 34 yards in total yardage in the entire game, and none of those yards came by passing the football. Veteran Chronicle reporter Mart Tardani made the long journey north to cover the game and he did have some praise for a trio of Norsemen: Benny and Oscar Manning and sophomore Buddy Moran.

As the Norse approached their game with Whitehall, the first game played between the two long-time rivals as members of the Seaway Conference, the Norse were faced with the reality that they had but five first downs --- all season! Although they didn’t win, it was a complete reversal from their two earlier lopsided losses to begin the season. In fact, as heavy underdogs against Whitehall, the Norse were leading up until the games’ final stages 6-0. After being whitewashed in their first two games the Norse scored their first touchdown of the season on their first possession. Unfortunately, for Norse rooters, it would be their only score on the night. Short but stocky Bud Moran punched it over from the one to cap a 50-yard drive, but quarterback Charlie Langeland was stopped just inches shy on converting the all-important extra point. The 6-0 score stood up until the games’ final moments. The big play late was on a third and five play at midfield for the Vikings. Viking back Bill Darnell took a pass in the flat and out sped the Norse secondary until he was downed on the two-yard line. Future longtime Muskegon County Sheriff Bob Carter smashed through on the next play to make the score 6-6. Darnell than converted the game winning extra point on a dash around right end to make the final score read Whitehall 7, NM 6.

Fremont evened up the long time series between the two teams at 11 wins each (one tie) and they took home the ‘Victory Can’ with a 20-0 shutout of the Norse. Although the teams had played 23 games against one another in the past, it was the first game played as members of a conference. NM had their chances as they often drove into Packer territory only to have their drives stalled, but it still was unlikely they could overcome the stronger Packer team. For NM, it was the third time they failed to score over an opponents’ goal line in three games.

The only Norse win during the season came on Homecoming night on the Northside as the Norse scored in each quarter in defeating Scottville 25-0. The Norse were shorthanded as six players sat out the game for team rules infractions while end Don Nielsen was sidelined with a broken hand. NM without question had their best offensive showing of the season. Oscar Manning and Dave Rose were big ground gainers on the night while Charlie Langeland was effective in the passing game. NM tallied their first TD when Oscar Manning scored on a one-yard dive with Manning, Dave Rose and Langeland setting up Manning’s TD with gains of more than 15 yards during the drive. The Norse got some help on their second TD as Scottville butchered a punt attempt at their own 20 with less than a minute to go in the half. It took but two plays for Rose to go 20 yards into the end zone to give NM a cozy 12-0 lead at halftime. NM started the second half by marching 72 yards for their third TD with the big play a 37-yard pass to Joe Horvath. Rose than smashed over from the four and Dick Bultman’s kick for the extra point extended the lead to 19-0. Scottville had their most serious scoring opportunity in the fourth quarter when they advanced to the NM 5. Oscar Manning then intercepted a pass and galloped 96 yards for a TD. However, midway through his run clipping was detected and NM took over near midfield. Langeland then hit Joe Horvath on three completions, the latter good for eight yards and a TD to make the final score NM 25 Scottville 0. Prior to the opening kickoff there was a tribute to former head coach Paul Moyes who died the previous week after a long illness. A minute of silence was observed in memory of coach Moyes who fielded some of the finest grid teams in school history.

The Norsemen then had the misfortune of running into a Shelby team that was on its way to win their first WMC championship in 24 years. The Norse threw a scare into the host Tigers but fell to Art Willick and company 20-6. Shelby played like conference champs on their opening drive by marching 79 yards in 12 plays. Willick on this drive had runs of 15, 22 and 25 and capped the long march by catching on pass from Bill Knoth for a 20-yard TD. Dick Bultman blocked a Shelby punt at the Tiger 38-yard line midway into the second period to set up the only NM score. On the very next play Oscar Manning raced 38-yards for the TD but the extra point attempt failed. The visitors from NM nearly took the lead at halftime. After taking over at the Shelby 37 Charlie Langeland’s 28-yard pass to Dave Rose took it to the 13. Rose than got as far as the Tiger seven before time ran out with NM missing out on the chance to take the lead at halftime. Shelby iced the game with a couple of second half TDs to tag the very young Norse team with their fifth defeat of the year. Meanwhile history was begun at the LC Walker Arena when professional hockey returned to Muskegon with the Muskegon Zephyrs losing to Omaha 7-3.

What a week it was for the folks in the Greater Muskegon Area. On Thursday Vice-President Richard Nixon appeared in Muskegon just days before the 1960 Presidential election. If anybody ever asks what was the biggest crowd to ever appear at an event in the Walker Arena? It wasn’t for a hockey or basketball game, but it was when Richard Nixon spoke in front of 8,000 fans at the newly erected arena. The next day thousands of people lined up from Muskegon Heights all the way to Montague to welcome back to Muskegon the newly elected Miss America: Nancy Ann Fleming of Montague.

Later that day North Muskegon welcomed Hart for a game at the Northside field. Hart for the second straight year handed the Norse a defeat. These two teams have played 86 games going into the 2025 season. 1959 and 1960 would be the only period when Hart would win two straight games over the Norsemen. But the win surely didn’t come easy for the host Pirates. Trailing 18-0 late in the first half, Hart scored 19 unanswered in the second half to rally past the Norse 19-18. Oh, for a kicker! The Norsemen won in all the stat departments except for the final score. The first score for the fired-up Norse squad came from Oscar Manning when he scored from four-yards out in the opening period. The final two touchdowns occurred in the final four minutes of the half. Buddy Moran picked off a Pirate pass that the pint-sized back returned 55 yards for six points. Then Manning got into the interception act by picking off yet another poorly thrown Hart pass near midfield and sped all the way down to the six-yard line. Two plays later Charlie Langeland passed into the end zone to Bill Shackelford with little time left to push the lead to 18-0 --- but --- no extra point was successful on any of the three Norse TDs in the first half. Lady luck surely was not on the Norse side in this game. Hart returned the kickoff back to their own 43. Time for just one play before halftime. Dick Hasty tossed a screen pass to Walt Shogren who raced all the way into the endzone with no time left on the clock. Hasty then plunged over center for what would prove to be the winning point. An ill-timed penalty surely deprived the Norse of a golden opportunity to ice the game early into the third frame when Lakeland teamed up with Shackelford on a long pass play that netted 80 yards down to the Pirate’s two-yard line, only to be called back. Hart would then score two TDs in the second half to send the Norse to their sixth defeat on the season.

Tough luck, and missing a kicker rang true for the Norse in their second one-point loss, this time 7-6 at home to Montague. Montague was shooting for its sixth straight WMC Championship in 1960. That didn’t happen but the town of Montague got a huge ‘consolation’ prize with 1960 graduate Nancy Ann Fleming being crowned as Miss America in September. North Muskegon’s only score in the game came in the final period with only 45 seconds left on the clock. Quarterback Charlie Langeland scored on a sneak from the one, but to no one’s surprise who followed the Norse in 1960, a run for the extra point failed. Rain, buckets of it, played a factor in the low scoring game. NM had rushed for just 53 yards on the ground. Langeland and Joe Horvath did hook up on a key pass play good for 27 yards that set up the only NM score. Montague’s lone touchdown came in the third period on a pass from Bob Lloyd to end Dick Smith good for 13 yards and a TD. NM had a golden opportunity to score their second touchdown in the second half, but NM lost a fumble at the Wildcat 3-yard line.

Just days after John F Kennedy was elected President of the United States, two schools that until 1958, were one and the same before Reeths Puffer became a four-year school, met for the first time on the new Rocket football field. How well your author remembers a letter I received from President Kennedy in the summer of 1963: It began with “GREETINGS.” (One can guess the follow up story after the greetings.) The NM-RP rivalry would be a short one as the football teams would play one another only from 1960-65 when both schools were members of the Seaway Conference. The Rocket lineup would be filled with last names familiar to Norse fans, from the past as well as in the future. One the feature backs for the Gale Bolthouse Rockets team was Ron Guy, brother of former NM legend Stan Guy. Rocket linebacker Bob Buckmaster would be the father of Jeff Buckmaster, who years later would be a football star at North Muskegon. Rocket fullback Willie Bohach was the brother of former NM player John Bohach. John Bohach’s daughter, Annette Bohach, would be enshrined in the Muskegon Area Sports Hall of Fame after a great track career at NMHS and Indiana University. Even Rocket kicker Jim England had early connections with NMHS, as his sister Shirley was the Norse queen in 1953. The Norse scored their only touchdown midway through the third quarter on a pass play from Charlie Langeland to Bill Shackelford and, naturally, the Norse missed their extra point. Meanwhile the Rockets England, the only member of the England family of five who did not go to North Muskegon, kicked two straight extra points following the first two Rocket TDs. The Rockets would win 22-6 to complete their second season as a four-year school with a record of 6-1-1. The Norsemen season would mercifully come to an end with a record nearly the opposite of RP, at 1-8. Ten hardy seniors suited up for the final time for the Norse, including starters Bill Shackelford, Joe Horvath, Dick Bultman, Bill Busker, Oscar Manning and Bill Bissen, but plenty of talented underclassmen will return in hopes of flipping the coin in wins and losses the following year.

Record Score Interesting Fact

0-1 \*Coopersville 21, NM 0 NM only musters 44-yards rushing entire game. First game for NM in the Seaway conference.

0-2 Ludington 33, NM 0 Ludington totally dominates as again NM shows little offense --- Only 34 yards in offense.

0-3 \*Whitehall 7, NM 6 Whitehall scores late to ruin NM’s upset chances. Bud Moran scores first NM TD of season from the one.

0-4 \*Fremont 20, NM 0 NM again scoreless as three deep drives stall in Packer territory.

1-4 NM 25, Scottville 0 Rose scores a pair of TDs, Manning a td and an interception. Langeland connected often to Joe Horvath, including a 8-yard TD pass.

1-5 Shelby 20, NM 6 Oscar Manning scores NM’s only TD against the WMC champs on a 38-yard run.

1-6 Hart 19, NM 18 Norse sees lead of 18-0 go up in smoke. Manning and Moran both pass interception returns for TDs. Manning 2nd TD from 1.

1-7 Montague 7, NM 6 Norse score with less than a minute left on Langeland sneak but miss extra point.

1-8 \*Reeths Puffer 22, NM 6 Langeland to Shackelford for only Norse TD as season ends at 1-8

**1961 – coach Lee David (7-1 overall 5-0 Seaway Champs)**

What a difference a year makes! After winning but a single contest in 1960, the Norse completely turned the table around and went 7- and 1 in their second year in the Seaway Conference and were the Conference champions. A cast of veterans and a host of new faces gave hope to 2nd year coach Lee David that 1961 would be much different than 1960. After being soundly beaten by Ludington 33-0 in 1960 and held to but two first downs the entire game, the Norse battled hard in their home opener against Ludington only to fall 14-7. It would be the last time the Norse would be on the losing end the rest of the season. Ludington’s defense often bent but was rarely broken as four times the Norsemen advanced inside the 20-yard line before finally breaking the ice in the fourth period. Ludington struck first on a 43-yard pass from Manny Karosas to 6’6 end Van Tillotson, the first of two big pass receptions in the game for the rangy Tillotson. There was no further scoring until early in the fourth quarter when it would be the Norsemen who would finally find the end zone. The touchdown came on a 19-yard TD pass from returning starting quarter Charlie Langeland to first year newcomer Tom Moyes. A run for the extra point by Moyes tied the game at 7-7. However, Ludington came back to get the game winner. The big play was a pass to Tillotson that covered 45 yards before he was tackled at the NM four. From there Daryl Peterson scored, Mike Gebott was perfect on both of his extra points and Ludington had defeated a much-improved NM team 14-7.

In an old-time rivalry that goes back into the 1930s, the series with Fremont could not have been more even over the years as both teams had won 12 games out of 25 played with one game ending in a tie. NM had numerous injuries from their opener with Ludington with the most serious an ankle injury to returning starting halfback Bud Moran. Coach David unveiled a rising star in junior running back Bill Young who put up numbers in the Fremont contest not seen since the heyday of Stan Guy. Included in Young’s 265 total yard gains were a couple for the NM record books, a 97-yard TD run from scrimmage and an 85-yard kickoff return. Young’s first of three TDs gave the Norse an early 6-0 lead. The 97-yard TD gallop by Young remains to this day as the longest TD run in NM history. The lead went to 13-0 at the half thanks to an 18-yard TD pass from Charlie Langeland to Don Nielsen. And believe it or not, the Norse made an extra point via the old fashion way from a kick by Troy Lalone. Fremont, who shut out the Norse 20-0 in the previous season, took the lead into the fourth quarter on a pair of touchdowns by future Grand Haven head football coach Tom KeKuiper. That lead lasted only until the next kickoff was retuned 85 yards by Young. Young later than iced the game with his 97-yard TD run, breaking the record of 96 yards by Scott Moore in 1953.

Next up for the Norse would be the first meeting between NM and Ravenna since 1935, a series that would continue between the two schools every year apart from the 1967 & 1968 seasons. Bill Young had another sensational game, and for the second straight game had a run of 90 yards or more in a 26-6 victory. In all, Young ran for 158 yards in but 13 carries, an average of 12 yards per carry. The junior speedster once again scored three touchdowns with his first TD of 30 yards coming in the first quarter to begin the Norse scoring. Later in the opening quarter Young, on a simple dive play, shook loose from Ravenna defenders and raced 92 yards to pay dirt. Sophomore fullback Tom Holstrom capped a 46-yard drive in the second quarter with a three-yard plunge while the Bulldogs averted a shutout when they scored with 19 seconds left in the first half on an eight-yard run by Stan Jacobs. Young completed all the scoring in the contest with an eight-yard run and it appeared NM had finally found a kicker when Troy Lalone sent a couple of extra point kicks sailing through the uprights. Reserve quarterback Steve Crosby was pressed into service when starting quarterback Charlie Langeland missed the game due to a broken finger and did a fine job.

14 years had passed since North Muskegon had won a game by successfully kicking an extra point. After numerous games had passed when NM could have been on the winning side of games if only for a made extra point, NM finally emerged victorious when Troy Lalone kicked both of his extra point tries through the uprights in NM’s 14-13 victory over Montague. Not since Bud Matych made NM victors back in 1947 vs. Shelby would a made extra point from placement be the difference between winning or losing. Bill Young incurred a painful toe injury in practice and played only sparingly against Montague. Tom Holstrom filled in more than admirably for Young. The Norse had to make a second half comeback as they spotted Montague a pair of touchdowns in the first half to trail 13-0 at the break. With Holstrom carrying the ball on virtually every play NM drew within six points of the Wildcats in the third period after a Holmstrom one-yard plunge and a Lalone extra point. A Dave Hickman blocked punt then set up NM’s winning drive in the final period. A gimpy Bill Young then entered the game and combined with Holmstrom to move in for the score. However, the big play in the drive was a fourth down run by Ray Leonard that gave the Norse a much needed first down at the Wildcat 11. After three Holmstrom plunges up the middle, Young went over from the one. Lalone’s clutch extra point was good and the Norse came away with a 14-13 win over their rivals.

The Norse then made it two wins in a row over White Lake Area rivals when they spoiled Whitehall’s homecoming with a 20-6 win over the Vikings. It looked like it was going to be the Vikings night when they took the opening kickoff and drove 72 yards for the TD, the only points they would put on the board the rest of the way. In fact, the Norse defense would allow Whitehall a net gain of just one yard until the game’s end. Bill Young and the Norse wasted little time regaining a lead they would not relinquish when Young raced 46 yards for a Norse TD. In the second quarter Ken Pugh recovered a Whitehall fumble at the Vikings 23. On fourth down Steve Crosby chucked an 18-yard TD pass to Don Nielsen. The Norse in the third period went 75 yards for their final TD with Tom Moyes and Tom Holstrom doing much of the ball carrying. Holstrom plunged over for the score from the one, but the Norse missed all three of their extra points as the hero of last weeks’ game, Troy Lalone was on the sidelines with a twisted knee. The two points earned by the Norse came late on a safety when a bad snap from center went out of the end zone.

More than 3,000 fans were on hand on the Northside gridiron when Reeths Puffer visited North Muskegon for a game that would likely decide the Seaway Championship as both teams sported perfect 3-0 records in conference play. For more than three quarters nothing was decided as the game was deadlocked in a scoreless duel. Bennie Manning, a four-year starter for the Norse made a huge defensive play for the Norse when he broke through the Rocket’s offensive line and brought down RP’s punter before he had a chance to get the punt away. Three running plays and an illegal procedure penalty put the Norse in a precarious position. NM coach Lee David then called for a field goal. So rare was a field goal in NM history that one would have to go back in history to 1936 when NM not only made a field goal, but it had been 25 years since they even attempted a 3-pointer. Troy Lalone, whose kicks were the difference in the win earlier over Whitehall, became the first Norseman to kick a field goal since Walt Bergen in 1936 when he was perfect on his 30-yard field goal to give the Norse a 3-0 lead. The wind surely was knocked out of the sails of the Rockets. Shortly after Lalone’s 3-pointer the Norse took over at the RP 31-yard line after the Rockets gambled on a fourth down. Two plays later Tom Holstrom shook off several Rocket tacklers to go 35-yards for the game’s only touchdown. The Norse added another two points very late in the contest when Lalone added to his heroics by blocking a Rocket punt in the end zone. Lauded by Coach David for their defensive work in shutting out the Rockets were Bill Barger, Dave Hickman, Tom Moyes and Benny Manning. The Norse were now a perfect 4-0 and just one-win shy of a Seaway Conference Championship in their second year of the league.

The champs from the Seaway and the champs from the West Michigan Conference, Hart and North Muskegon, a pair of long-time rivals would face one another on the Northside field to settle bragging rights between the two conferences. It was the Norsemen who would come away with the win thanks to another super performance from halfback Bill Young. For the Pirates, although both North Muskegon and Whitehall were not a part of the WMC, 1961 would be their last outright conference title as of this writing in 2025. Racking up 4 touchdowns and running for 196 yards in 19 carries, Young scored on runs of 25, 52, 2 and 47 to lead NM to victory. The other NM TD in this game was a one-yard run by fullback Tom Holstrom. Scoring one of two Hart TDS on a 75-yard run was future Muskegon High School Varsity basketball coach Duane VandenHeuvel.

The Norse, although they hadn’t beaten Coopersville in seven-years, NM was still top-heavy favorites to defeat a winless Coopersville team and clinch the championship for the Seaway Conference in football for the 1961 Season. Fifteen seniors, many who contributed to the complete about face from the previous season’s one-win squad, would suit up for the Norse Road game at Coopersville. Among the starters were co-captains Benny Manning and Bill Barger, halfbacks Tom Moyes, Buddy Moran and Ray Leonard, quarterback Steve Crosby, linemen Dave Hickman, Jerry Joldersma, Bart Oliver, Sam Langeland, Ted Torgeson, Ken Pugh, George Powell and Jim Wheaton. Coach Lee David was wary of the Broncos: “We haven’t beaten them since 1954 and they could come up and beat us if we are not mentally prepared,” David said.

Not to worry. The Norse perhaps played their best game of the season in a 48-6 thrashing of the Broncos. Eight different players scored all NM touchdowns during the rout. Tom Moyes began the scoring with a 27-yard TD dash. Bennie Manning after four years as a starter, in his final game, intercepts a pass and returns it 72 yards for his only TD as a Norseman. Charlie Langeland hits his favorite receiver Don Nielsen for 36 and a third NM TD. Bill Young scored from 12, followed by a typical Tom Holstrom one-yard plunge. In the fourth quarter Ray Leonard, Bud Moran and Ray Schuiteman all scored, and the Norsemen were the Seaway champs. The Norsemen dominated the Seaway 11-man all-conference team with five players, Nielsen, Langeland, Manning, Holstrom and Young all being named to the first team while Bill Barger and Troy Lalone were tabbed for the second team.

Record Score Interesting Fact

0-1 Ludington 14, NM 7 Two long passes contribute to opening game defeat. Tom Moyes scores NM TD on a pass from Charlie Langeland and runs for extra point for the Norse.

1-1 \*NM 25, Fremont 14 Bill Young runs for school record 97-yard TD and equals record with 85-yard kickoff return. Young 3 TD, Langeland to Don Nielson 19 yards Passing TD.

2-1 \*NM 25, Ravenna 6 Another monster game for Young. 3 Yds (92, 30 & 8). Sophomore Tom Holstrom a 3-yard TD.

3-1 NM 14, Montague 13 Holmstrom was the workhorse in the win. The difference in the win was 2 made extra points from Troy Lalone. A gimpy Young 1-yard TD. Holmstrom TD.

4-1 \*NM 20, Whitehall 6 Young a 46-yard TD; Steve Crosby passes to Nielson for 18-yard TD. Holmstrom 1-yard TD.

5-1 \*NM 11, Reeths Puffer 0 Lalone makes first NM field goal in 25 years in 4th qtr. Holmstrom 35-yard TD run late and Lalone blocks RP punt for a safety.

6-1 NM 34, Hart 20 Young 4 TDS on runs of 25, 52, 2 & 47. Holstrom 1-yd TD.

7-1 \*NM 49, Coopersville 6 Eight players scored in the rout: Moyes, Nielsen, Manning, Young, Holstrom, Bud Moran, Ray Leonard, Bud Moran and Ray Schuiteman.

**1962 – coach Lee David (6-1 -1 overall 4-1 Seaway, Whitehall Champs)**

Just three points were the difference in 1962 from North Muskegon posting a perfect season. North Muskegon began the season by atoning for their only loss from 1961 in a big way as they blasted Ludington 30-0. Although the Norse lost 15 seniors thru graduation, a nice combination of returning starters and junior varsity performers showed early that this team was going to be no pushover. The Norse won handily despite the absence of their all-state running back Bill Young who was sidelined with a knee injury. A pair of returning all-conference members from 1962 got the ball rolling early against the host Orioles. Charlie Langeland set up the first TD with a long punt return and a 29-yard run to the three-yard line. From there bruising fullback Tom Holstrom then powered in for the first NM TD. The second touchdown was scored by Ray Schuiteman from 42 yards out to make it 12-0. With Young on the sidelines with an injury third year coach Lee David inserted Schuiteman at quarterback and moved the stocky Langeland to halfback. The moved worked smoothly as the duo were instrumental in the third NM TD when Schuiteman raced 38-yards on a bootleg play and Langeland went the final 20-yards to give the Norse a commanding 18-0 lead at halftime. Holstrom would run for 127 yards while Langeland also nearly hit the century mark for yardage with 88. The trio of Langeland, Schuiteman and Holstrom were well acquainted as they all resided within one block of one another. Next, it was All-Seaway end Don Nielson on the receiving end of a Schuiteman pass good for 18 yards that opened the second half. Holstrom added the final NM tally when he raced 57 yards. If not for a couple of long touchdowns called back by penalties, the score could have been much worse for the Orioles. Jim Schillaci had a 41-yard TD called back and reserve Tom Andrews also had a 50-yarder whistled back.

On a rain drenched field North Muskegon backs ran for nearly 400 yards in a 33-0 victory over arch-rival Fremont. Charlie Langeland had a huge game for the Norse with three touchdowns, including a long jaunt of 94 yards. Langeland ran for 187 yards while Tom Holstrom added 90. The Norse attempted only one pass, Ray Schuiteman to sophomore end John Hutson for 20 yards and a TD. Leading the defense were Dale Bates and Clay Bitzer as NM posted its second straight shutout.

North Muskegon would face Ravenna with the following starting lineup: Ends Don Nielsen and Dave Dewey; Tackles Clay Bitzer and Greg Young; Guards Rick DeBruyn and Dave Semelbauer; center Jerry Ray; Tom Andrews, Tom Holstrom, Ray Schuiteman and Charlie Langeland in the backfield. The Norse would earn their 3rd straight victory, all shutouts with a 20-0 win over the host Bulldogs. Charlie Langeland accounted for all three TD’s, his 6th in the last two games and 7th on the young season. Langeland scored his first TD on the team’s second possession to open the contest, capping a methodical 85-yard drive with a 14-yard end run. Ted Mauseth kicked the first of his two made extra point attempts and the Norse were off and running at 7-0. It took but four plays for the Norse to add their second TD in the second quarter with Langeland going the final 31 yards. The final Norse score was set up following an interception by lineman Clay Bitzer late in the contest with Langeland rushing for his final TD from eight yards out.

North Muskegon once again shut out their opponent for the fourth straight game but did not come up with a victory. The Norse and Montague played to a 0-0 tie in foggy conditions at the Northside Field that was filled to more than capacity. The Norse were even fortunate to come away with the deadlock as Montague moved deep into NM territory three times in the contest but came up empty on the scoreboard. The most serious threat came on the opening kickoff of the second half when the Cats Gary Quinn broke loose from his own ten yard for an apparent touchdown gallop. However, sophomore John Hutson caught Quinn with a desperation tackle at the NM ten-yard line. Marching three times inside of your opponent’s 20-yard line without putting points on the board would probably not have happened in today’s era of soccer style kickers. To add further woes to North Muskegon’s kicking game, Norse kicker Ted Mauseth fractured his knee in this game and would be lost for the season. The Norse had hopes going into the Montague game that their All-State running back Bill Young would be available but that was not the case as Young was still on the sidelines with a knee injury.

Whitehall had but one season in their school’s long history when they would go undefeated during a regular season. It was this season of 1962, but the Vikings had to rally for two touchdowns in the final ten minutes of the game to nip the Norse 21-19. The winning points can be attributed to the golden toe of Whitehall’s Bruce Finkbeiner, a top-flight baseball player in the spring who converted on all three of his extra point attempts. The Norse lost their kicker, Ted Mauseth, with an injury the previous week, and that proved costly to the Norse. The big play in the game, played before an overflow crowd on the Norse field, was an 80-yard punt return by Whitehall’s Jack Bellinger late in the game. The Norse trailed 7-6 at halftime with Tom Andrews capping a 74-yard drive with a touchdown from the three-yard line. The Norse scored a pair of TDs in the third quarter to apparently take command of the game. Both NM touchdowns were created from Viking fumbles. Tom Holstrom scored both NM TDs, the first from 26 yards out and the second from the two-yard line. The determined Vikings came charging back. After a pass play good for 33 yards, completed to another outstanding Whitehall baseball player, Jon Swenson, Bellinger scored the second of his three TDs on a short four-yard jaunt midway through the final period. After the Norse were forced to punt, Bellinger than fielded a NM punt at his own 20 and scored the game winner. The Norse hopes were buoyed with the return for the first time in the season with the return of Bill Young to the lineup. However, Young reinjured his knee early in the game and would be lost for the season.

After leading by two touchdowns the previous week at Whitehall and losing, the Norse did the opposite in their 25-19 win over Reeths Puffer. Spotting RP a couple of first quarter touchdowns to trail 13-0, it was the Norsemen’s turn to rally for a come from behind victory. For Reeths Puffer, it saw its unbeaten streak for the campaign come to an end. The game could easily have turned very ugly for the Norse after they fumbled the ensuing kickoff following the two Rocket TDS, but the Norse defense held. Al Dillar recovered a Rocket fumble on the Rocket 43 and the tide turned in favor of NM as they marched downfield to score in eight plays with Charlie Langeland going over from the 10-yard line. NM then took control in the second half with Langeland tossing a 28-yard TD pass to halfback Tom Andrews, but the Norse failed to tie the game as their kicking woes on extra points continued. Another Rocket fumble led to the Norse then taking a lead they would not relinquish. It took just six plays to cross the RP goal line with Ray Schuiteman hitting Rick Lange for 25 yards and a TD with 10:17 left. The Rockets gambled on a short yardage play at their own 33 but the Norse defense rose to the occasion. Langeland made the Rockets pay when he made a circus catch of a Ray Schuiteman pass to complete a seven-yard TD play. After missing three extra points on kicks, Langeland ran for the only extra point completed by the Norse in the game. The Rockets scored late to narrow the gap and the final score of 25-19. In addition to losing one All-Conference player in Bill Young, the Norse would also have to finish the season without yet another all-conference player from 1961 in end Don Nielsen. Langeland, Holstrom and Andrews, running behind a much-improved line, ran well for the winners. Holstroms’ total could have been more, but a 60-yard TD run in the first quarter was called back due to a penalty. In the absence of the injured Nielsen, NM got great end play from both Lange and sophomore John Hutson.

North Muskegon and Hart, a pair of long-time rivals met on a rare Saturday night game in Hart. Reports bemoaned the fact that this would be the last game played between the two schools as NM had joined the Seaway. However, history has shown that the separation would only be for three years before NM rejoined the WMC. Although this was a non-conference game there was much at stake. Hart needed a victory to stay undefeated. It was Hart who held Whitehall to a 6-6 tie, the only blemish on an otherwise perfect season for Whitehall. NM spoiled Hart’s hopes for a perfect season by edging the host Pirates 19-13. The Norse were the first to get on the board when Ray Schuiteman connected with halfback Tom Andrews for a 14-yard TD. Hart countered with a short drive following a Norse pass picked off and returned down to the NM 15. A screen pass from Jerry Brandel to Bud Tice went for 10 yards and a TD as Brandel kicked the extra point to give the Pirates a 7-6 lead. The defense midway through the third quarter gave the Norse the lead. Chased some 10 yards by a hoard of Norse defenders, the Pirate quarterback in his haste to get something on the play threw wildly. Tackle Greg Young gathered in the ball and raced untouched into the end zone. The Norse added an insurance touchdown when Ray Schuiteman connected with the second of two passes to his neighbor Charlie Langeland, good for a 45-yard TD pass. Hart closed the gap on a flea flicker play to make the final score NM 19, Hart 13. Much praise was bestowed on the Norse defense from veteran sportswriter Keith Dayharsh. He lauded the defensive work of Clay Bitzer, Tracy Hickman, Dave Semelbauer and Tom Johnson as the Norse won their 5th game on the 1962 season.

The Norse would make it six wins with a 52-12 blowout of winless Coopersville in the final game of the season. No longer would there be no name attached to the northside field. In a presentation prior to the game North Muskegon mayor, and long-time beloved teacher, John Hallmond, dedicated the field in memory of Dr. Fred H. Jacks, a former chiropractor who gave both physical and mental guidance to hundreds of youths of North Muskegon over the years --- all without a charge for his services. It was the Charlie Langeland show on Fred Jacks Field as the Norse earned a very respectable 2nd place finish in the Seaway. Langeland scored five touchdowns in a variety of ways. Two of his scores came on runs of 38 and 18 yards. He caught a pass from Schuiteman that was good for 26 yards and six points. He intercepted a pass and returned it 70 yards for another tally. And then he would score his 5th TD on a 65-yard return of a kickoff. Five TDs in four different ways. Langeland nearly had another TD when he was brought down on the Bronco five-yard line after he intercepted another pass. Langeland would finish the season with 15 touchdowns and 90 points, second only to the legendary Stan Guy from the 1950s. Also scoring touchdowns for the Norse were Tom Holstrom and Jim Shillaci, who tallied twice for the victors. Three Norsemen were accorded first team honors on the All-Seaway team. Langeland and Holstrom were the only two repeaters from the 1961 team while Clay Bitzer was the third Norse player on the first squad. Langleand would go on to have a stellar career at Hope College where he served as the Hope team captain in 1966. Second team honors went to Dale Bates and Jim Nielsen. Assisting coach David in his first year on the staff at North Muskegon was a man who would make a name for himself as a future Norse coach --- Tom Seroczynski.

Record Score Interesting Fact

1-0 NM 30, Ludington 0 Tom Holstrom 127 yards and 2 TD; Charley Langeland 20-yard TD; Ray Schuiteman 38 yd TD and TD pass to Don Nielsen for 18.

2-0 \*NM 33, Fremont 0 Langeland 187 yards & 3 TD, including one for 96. Schuiteman to John Hutson for 20-yard TD. Tom Andrews scores from seven.

3-0 \*NM 20, Ravenna 0 Another 3 TD game from Langeland on carries of 14, 31 and 8).

3-0-1 NM 0, Montague 0 (Tie) John Hutson saves the Norse from defeat with an open field tackle at the 10-yard line.

3-1-1 Whitehall 21, NM 19 80-yard punt return defeats NM. Holstrom 2 TDs (26 & 2) Andrews a 3-yard TD as Whitehall would have their only undefeated season in history.

4-1-1 \*NM 25, Reeths Puffer 19 NM spots Rockets 2 TDs but rallies. Langeland a running and receiving TD. Langeland TD pass to Andrews, Schuiteman to Rick Lange passing TD.

5-1-1 NM 19, Hart 13 Schuiteman 2 TD passes, one to Andrews for 14 and the other to Langeland for 45. Greg Young returns interception 25 yards.

6-1-1 \*NM 52, Coopeville 12 Langeland becomes 2nd player in NM history to score 5 touchdowns in a game. Jim Shillaci scores twice and Holstrom once.

**1963 – coach Lee David (4-2-2 overall 2-2-2 Seaway)**

Twos were wild for the 1963 season as the Norse had equal numbers of wins, losses, and ties in the Seaway conference. Fortunately, the two ties would be the last season that the Norse would be involved in a tie game. NM was able to post wins against both of their non-conference opponents with wins over Ludington and Montague. NM brushed up for their upcoming season with a scrimmage against Mona Shores, a new school that would be a year away from having a senior class. Ten lettermen returned for the 1963 season for head coach Lee David. Leading the returnees was two-time all -conference back Tom Holstrom. Another starter returning in the backfield is Tom Andrews, while Jim Shillaci also saw much action as a running back in 1962. Coach David was enthused with his returnees on the forward wall with a host of starters giving NM a great deal of experience up front. Jerry Cooper was back at center, Jerry Ray and Dave Semelbauer the guards, Al Diller and Greg Young at tackles with junior John Hutson and Dave Dewey at the ends. The big question -- who would run the offense at quarterback?

Clint Oliver won the starting job at QB for the Norse and set up the first of two NM TDs in their opening 12-6 win over Ludington with a 65-yard run. Jim Schillaci’s 12-yard sprint following Oliver’s long run came in the closing minutes of the first half. Tom Andrew’s 14-yard TD run in the third quarter proved to be the game winner. The drive to pay dirt started when Jerry Ray intercepted an Oriole pass. Although he failed to score, much of the credit for the Norse offense went to their two-time all-conference running back Tom Holmstrom who was credited with picking up seven first downs on his own. The Norse defense, led by tackle Greg Young, had to really dig down in the closing minutes of the game. Trailing by just six points Ludington moved to within six yards of the Norse goal line before the Norse held and took over on downs.

The Norse won their second scheduled game of the season and their first in the Seaway with a 25-6 win at Ravenna. The Norse defense held Ravenna to but 54 yards rushing as the Bulldogs were only able to move the ball through the air against the northside eleven. NM scored on their second drive of the game on a 15-yard scoring pass from Clint Oliver to Tom Andrews. Andrews added his second TD in the fourth quarter on a six-yard run. Tom Holstrom, whose 22-yard run set up Andrews fourth quarter TD, set up his own TD from three-yards out with a 20-yard power run in the second quarter. Jim Procter tallied his first TD in a Norse uniform late in the game on a 22-yard jaunt. Once again it appears the Norsemen were without a proven kicker as their only extra point make was on a run.

Both Fremont and North Muskegon looked to go 3-0 on the season but it was the Packers who came away undefeated with a last minute 13-7 victory over the Norsemen. With the score tied at 7-7 midway through the fourth quarter it looked like the Norsemen would take the lead following a long pass from Clint Oliver to Tom Austin all the way to the Packer nine-yard line. The Packers defense then dug in, and without a kicker, the Norse turned the ball over on downs. Fremont then went on a long and methodical drive that culminated with just 0:56 second left on the clock when Packer quarterback Gary Frens sneaked over for the winning score. Earlier Frens, an outstanding baseball pitcher in his day, had given Fremont a halftime 7-0 lead on a 5-yard rollout in the second quarter. The only Norse score on the night came in the third period following a very short Fremont punt downed at the Packer 38. Jim Schillaci, Oliver, and Tom Holstrom advanced the ball to the 15. With third and seven Oliver hit Austin in the right flat who raced in for the score. Holstrom then powered over for the extra point to tie the game at 7-7 that was followed late in the game by Fremont’s winning score.

In addition to Mona Shores being a new kid on the block, another school appeared on the East Side of Muskegon in Orchard View. The Cardinals in their second year as a varsity football team, would join the Seaway Conference for the 1963 season. Orchard View would be no pushover in the first ever meeting between the two schools as the Norsemen just edged the Cardinals 12-9. Although it was early in their program the Cardinals had visions of winning the Conference as they made the short trip across the Causeway to the play the Norse undefeated early into the season. While Greater Muskegon mourned the passing of L. C. Walker on this day, a packed house was on hand at Fred Jacks field to watch North Muskegon mount a late goal line stand to preserve their narrow victory. The hero on the night for the Norse was Norse defensive lineman Dave Dewey. It was Dewey, with help from Jerry Ray who spilled the OV quarterback for a loss when the Cardinal needed but 2-yards to score and win the game with less than a minute left. Earlier Dewey was instrumental in stopping a Cardinal drive in the second quarter and recovered a fumble in the opening period that set up a NM touchdown by Clint Oliver. Dewey had help from the rest of his colleagues on defense as four times the Norse stopped OV drives deep in NM territory. Dewey recovered 2 fumbles and John ‘Admiral’ Hutson another to aid in the NM victory. The Norse scored what would prove to be the winning tally when they executed a 51-yard second quarter drive. The Norse traversed the distance in nine plays with Jim Proctor going nine yards for the TD. Orchard View’s points were scored on a 62-yard pass play from Curt Gardenour to Ron Verdermolen and they earned two-points on a safety when a Norse punt was blocked out of the end zone for the only points earned by either team in the second half.

In a final score only a soccer fan would love, Reeths Puffer and North Muskegon played to a 0-0 tie in front of a large crowd at the Rocket Stadium, which in the future would be named after their coach in 1963, Gale Bolthouse. The Norse had a decided statistical edge over RP as they had a big advantage in first downs at 16-7 and they ground out a total of 224 yards as opposed to the Rockets 144. It was the Rockets however, who had a golden chance to score in the waning seconds of the game as they advanced as far as the NM five-yard line. The Norse held and evidently the Rockets had no better luck in finding a kicker then NM as their field goal try was missed. The Norse did score a touchdown, on a 20-yard run by Tom Holstrom, but it was wiped out due to a penalty. Holstrom had several runs for decent yardage for NM, including one for 15 yards to begin the third quarter. Tempers flared after he was stopped that drew an ejection from a pair of players. Following the ejections Holstrom ran for 13 yards, and it was on the next play that Holstrom’s apparent TD run was brought back. Standing out for the Norse other than Holstrom was Jerry Ray while two new defensive players showed up well, Steve Nelson and future long-time NM fire chief Jay Kersman.

North Muskegon experienced a rare easy victory over Montague as the Norse shutout the host Wildcats 27-0. The Norse had their running game clicking all throughout the game, highlighted by an 81-yard jaunt by Jimmy Proctor. The Norse accumulated all but 14 of their 284 yards on the ground. Tom Andrews had a pair of short touchdown runs of four and three yards, but he had several long gainers that set up his TDs. Future NM pole vault record holder Dennis Wilder scored his first NM TD when he sped 61 yards to pay dirt. Jerry Ray came close to adding his name to the NM record book when he intercepted a Montague pass and raced 98 yards for the score, only to have the ball brought back when a Norseman was guilty of clipping on his long journey. It was Ray’s interception which set up Wilder’s 61-yard sprint.

A year after North Muskegon had scored 101 points in two blow out victories over Coopersville, the Broncos held a highly favored Norse team to a 7-7 tie. It would be the last tie game in NM history. It was a frustrating night for the Norse as they were denied several times from crossing the Coopersville goal line. In the fourth quarter NM came within one foot from pay dirt, only to be repelled by the Broncos. Just moments later Tom Andrews returned a punt down to the seven, but again, no TD and no field goal kicker. It got even more frustrating for the Norse in the same final period when they moved down to the 10-yard line only to see the clock run out of time. In total for the game, five times NM was inside the Bronco 25 with no points scored. Both touchdowns scored in the game came within moments of one another in the third period. After the Broncos scored a TD and ran for the extra point the Norse scored their only TD on their first play from scrimmage as Dennis Wilder, as he did last week in the game against Montague, came off the bench and ran for 51 yards to score. Clint Oliver ran for the all-important extra point as the score remained at 7-7 the rest of the way. It was homecoming for North Muskegon and at halftime they honored Charles Woodruff and Lyle Moran for their many years they have spent with the North Muskegon midget football teams.

In a hotly contested season finale that was marred by a wild melee in the final seconds of the game, Whitehall, now guided by first year head coach Dave Cooke, earned a share of the Seaway conference with a hard earned 20-12 victory over the Norse. Viking speedster Don Witt, a state Class B champion in the hurdles in 1964, scored a pair of touchdowns and set up a third to lead the co-champs to victory. All the scoring for Whitehall came in the first half on a soggy NM gridiron. Whitehall took an early lead with a pair of TDs before the Norse could countered with a 29-yard TD run by Tom Andrews. Early in the third quarter Andrews, who in the not-too-distant future would become a successful lawyer, busted another long run of 41 yards to narrow the deficit down to 20-12. However, as often was the case in 1963, lack of a kicking came and failure to score deep in opponent’s territory were shortcomings all season for NM. Shortly after Andrews second TD run Kent Osborme picked off a Vikings pass but the Norse ran out of steam at the Vikings six. NM could not take advantage of yet another potential scoring threat following a fumble recovery by sophomore Randy Homan.

No one could fault NM’s defensive effort in 1963 as they were tops in the Seaway by holding their opponents to but 61 points for the entire season, an average of just over seven points per game. Following the completion of the season linemen Greg Young and Dave Dewey along with running back Tom Andrews earned first place honors on the Seaway All-Conference team

Record Score Interesting Fact

1-0 NM 12, Ludington 6 Norsemen hold Ludington late in the game to earn win. Jim Schillaci and Tom Andrews TDs for the Norse.

2-0 \*NM 25, Ravenna 6 Andrews 2 TDs, one rushing, one on a pass from Clint Oliver; Holstrom a 3-yard TD and Jim Proctor scores from 22 yards.

2-1 \*Fremont 13, NM 7 Fremont scores winning TD with less than a minute in game. Oliver to Tom Austin 15-yard pass only NM TD.

3-1 \*NM 12, Orchard View 9 Dave Dewey recovers 2 fumbles and makes a key 4th quarter stop. Oliver scores on a sneak and Proctor a nine-yard TD.

3-1-1 \*NM 0, Reeths Puffer 0 (tie) RP misses a field goal with second remaining to keep the game scoreless. Holstrom several good gains with a 20-yard TD nullified due to a penalty.

4-1-1 NM 27, Montague 0 Proctor races 81 yards for TD. Andrews a pair of TDs; Dennis Wilder sprints 61-yard for a score. Jerry Ray’s 98 interception return wiped out by penalty.

4-1-2 \*NM 7, Coopersville 7 (tie) NM fails to score five times while inside the Coopersville 25. Wilder NM TD on 51-yard gallop.

4-2-2 \*Whitehall 20, NM 12 Andrews, 39 and 41-yard TD runs as NM loses to Seaway co-champs.

**1964– coach Lee David (4-5 4-2 Seaway, Reeths Puffer Seaway Champs)**

Prospects for the 1964 season didn’t appear too promising after losing several starters and a 1963 winless junior varsity team. Ten lettermen return: including Tom Austin, Steve Peterson, Randy Homan, Jeff Peterson, Charlie Selander, Dennis Wilder, and Steve Nelson. Clint Oliver returns at quarterback while head coach Lee David, and assistants Tom Seroczynski and Ken Barnhill are pleased to have all-conference running back Jimmy Proctor returning for his senior season. David made a switch by moving two-year starting lineman John Hutson to fullback. Hutson, a future Admiral, who climbed all the way up to be adjutant general for our country, was just a ‘few’ paygrades ahead of your author, an E-4 in the Army in 1964-65.

1964 included teams that were in their infancy. Oakridge would have grades up to tenth grade while Mona Shores and the Norsemen’s final regular season opponent, Spring Lake, would each have teams competing with a senior class for the first time.

The Norse had an ominous opener for the 1964 season as they traveled to Ludington to take on an Orioles team loaded with 26 seniors, 18 of those seniors’ returning lettermen. Meanwhile, coach David had but 25 players on his entire roster. The Norse started strong but ran out of gas in the second half as Ludington rallied for a 20-6 victory. Dennis Wilder gave NM the early lead with a break away 48-yard TD scamper. That would be the only score until late in the third period when the bigger and deeper Orioles began to roll over the tiring Norse. Ludington scored three late TDs, one set up when the host Orioles got great field position after blocking a punt deep in NM territory. Much credit was given to a trio of Norse stalwarts following the game. Big Jim Mattson, 300-pound middle guard, was a force on defense while John Hutson was a Norse workhorse in short yardage situations. Wilder would race for a total of 68 yards in six carries.

NM spotted Ravenna an early TD but came back to earn a 19-12 victory over the visiting Ravenna Bulldogs in game number 2. Dennis Wilder scored a pair of TDs while Jim Proctor, who scored the first NM TD with a 31-yard run, adding the other. Wilder had runs of 30 and 18 yards go the distance with Wilder making a kick from placement following the first NM score.

NM made it 2-0 in Seaway competition with a 13-6 victory over last year’s co-champs from Fremont. Nothing was decided in the first half although NM had a 54-yard TD run by Dennis Wilder called back because of an inadvertent whistle. The second half was the Jim Proctor show, both on offense and defense. Proctor picked off a Packer pass on the 43-yard line, and with the aid of a great block from Tom Austin, raced 57 yards for the games first score. Fremont on their next possession lost the ball on a fumble. With the Norse facing third down and 17 yards to go for a first down quarterback Clint Oliver connected on a long pass to Proctor who traveled 44 yards for what would prove to be the deciding score. Wilder’s extra point made it 13-0. Game stats posted following the game showed that it was the only pass attempted by NM the entire game. Fremont closed the gap to score with seven minutes left. After turning the ball over on downs, the Packers had a pass intercepted by NM defensive back Ken Mack with just two minutes left and the Norse then ran out the clock to make their overall record 2-0 in the Seaway. Going both ways, Proctor was credited with 11 unassisted tackles while another 2-way performer, Clint Oliver had eight unassisted tackles.

Coach Jack VanSchelven’s Orchard View Cardinals snapped NM’s modest two-game win streak in the conference with a narrow 13-7 win over the Norse. For the second straight week the two teams failed to score in a very conservative first half dominated by the defenses. There were a combined ten punts from both teams until the third period, when instead of punts, each team turned the ball over on fumbles. The Cardinals recovered a NM bobble at the Norse 40 and ultimately cashed it in for six points on a 10-yard pass completion from Dave Workman to Ron Marek. The Norse scored following a Cardinal fumble and only had to move 30 yards for a TD. Jim Proctor powered over from inside the one and NM took a brief lead when Dennis Wilder’s PAT was perfect. The lead didn’t last long as the Cardinal started a game winning 70-yard drive that culminated with an eight-yard touchdown run from Mickey Six. The Norse, already with limited depth, were weakened with an injury to fullback and linebacker John Hutson, who has been out with injured ribs.

The Norsemen had no answer for Reeths Puffer and Rocket fullback Dick Barnhart as the Norse fell 33-13 in front of a standing room only crowd at Fred Jacks Field. Barnhart scored all five touchdowns for the winners while racking up 163 rushing yards. The Norse were never in contention in the game and didn’t score until the fourth quarter when already trailing 26-0, sophomore Bob Swanson threw a touchdown pass good for seven yards to Tom Austin. Later in the final quarter Jim Proctor made the scoreboard read 33-13 when he scored from six yards out. The Rockets would go on to post their first undefeated season in school history.

Even though North Muskegon has been a member of the Seaway Conference beginning with the 1960 football season, North Muskegon has continued to schedule Montague. The 1964 meeting with the Wildcats would be the 33rd straight year these two rivals have met on the gridiron. These two teams have now met every year since NM started football with their first team in 1933 and the 2024 meeting marked the 92ndconsecutive game. After being shut out by the Norse in 1963, Montague made amends in 1964 with a 26-14 victory over the men in Blue & Gold. The win spoiled a Norse homecoming as the Wildcats used a mixture of running and passing in the contest. Montague quarterback Bill Barber completed 7 of his 14 passes for 146 yards, a lofty stat in an era where the running game was emphasized more than the pass. NM did tie up the game early in the second quarter when Jim Proctor scored from the six-yard line and Dennis Wilder completed the extra point. Montague then pulled away by scoring the next two TDs to pull ahead 20-7. Bob Swanson had now taken over duties as the NM quarterback and the sophomore led the Norse on a 70-yard drive in but four plays with Proctor racing the final 17 yards into the end zone. Montague went to the airways and increased their lead by going 62 yards in two pass plays, the latter a 31-yard completion from Barber to Michael Stebens for the game’s final TD.

A record-setting 97-yard return of an intercepted pass by Dennis Wilder highlighted NM’s 18-6 victory at Coopersville. The Norsemen scored twice inside the last two minutes of the first half to stun the Broncos. The Norse executed a 70-yard drive that was set up on the first of a pair of interceptions by Wilder. Behind the strong running of backs John Hutson and Steve Nelson it was Wilder who scored the first of his three TDs. With only 10 seconds left in the half and Coopersville desperate to get on the scoreboard, Wilder intercepted a pass at his own three-yard line and then broke the backs of Coopersville with his record-setting 97-yard run to pay dirt. Coopersville showed some life early into the final period when they took advantage of a Norse fumble at the NM eight-yard line and scored with 10:35 left in the game. The Norse then executed a time consuming seven-minute drive to ice the contest. Nelson carried the ball on 10 of the 13 NM plays with Wilder going the final four yards to earn the Norse the victory and end their two-game losing streak. Neither team was able to convert on an extra point on their four touchdowns, not at all unusual in the pre-soccer style kicker era.

The Norse would then nip Whitehall the following week 13-8 to begin a ten-game winning streak against the Vikings. Six of those ten wins were decided by less than a touchdown. Three days after Lyndon Johnson retained his office as President of the United States the Norse again used the tail end of the second half to score a couple of quick touchdowns. Trailing 6-0 the Norse took the lead by going 61 yards in nine plays with Bob Swanson tossing a short four-yard TD pass to Jim Proctor. Dennis Wilder gave the Norse a 7-6 lead when his placement was good. Whitehall then quickly turned the ball over to the Norsemen as they fumbled the ensuing kickoff at their own 21-yard line. With 0:26 seconds left in the half Swanson connected on his second TD pass to Ken Mack good for 15 yards and six points. The Vikings blew a golden opportunity in the third period when they fumbled the ball inside the NM one-yard line. Whitehall was able to salvage two points as NM’s Steve Nelson was tackled in the end zone to narrow the lead to 13-8. The Norse then just hung on for the victory as the Vikings late in the game frittered away another scoring opportunity when the Norse recovered another Whitehall fumble at the NM 28-yard line.

In its first year as a four-year football program, Spring Lake defeated NM 19-0, a loss that denied NM of a winning record. The Lakers used a pounding ground game as all their 252 yards came via the rush. The Norse rushed for only 83 yards on the night and never seriously threatened to score. A brief fracas erupted with about five minutes to play but cooler heads prevailed, and the game was able to run to its conclusion after it was originally called by the game officials. The game would be the first of back-to-back games between the Lakers and the Norsemen, the only two games played between the teams in 92 years of NM football. Although there were no Norsemen selected to the All-Seaway conference offensive team, three were selected to the first team defensive team: Defensive tackle Tom Cribbs, linebacker Clint Oliver and defensive back Dennis Wilder.

Record Score Interesting Fact

0-1 Ludington 20, NM 6 Dennis Wilder has lone NM TD on 48-yard dash to pay dirt.

1-1 \*NM 19, Ravenna 12 Wilder a pair of TDs, 30 & 18 yards, Jim Proctor raced 31 yards for TD.

2-1 \*NM 13, Fremont 6 Proctor scores a TD on offense & defense. Returns interception 57 and a TD pass from Clint Oliver goes for 44.

2-2 \*Orchard View 13, NM 7 OV comes from behind in 4th quarter after trailing 7-6. Proctor scores only NM TD from inside the one.

2-3 \*Reeths Puffer 33, NM 13 Dick Barnhart scores all 5 RP Yds as Norse trailed at one point 26-0. Bob Swanson 7-yard pass to Tom Austin and Proctor from six NM TDs.

2-4 Montague 26, NM 14 Proctor tallies both NM TDs, 6 & 17 as NM drops homecoming game to Montague in the 33rd straight meeting between the two teams.

3-4 \*NM 18, Coopersville 6 Wilder’s record 97 yd pass interception the first of his 3 TDs. Also scored on 2 short runs

4-4 \*NM 13, Whitehall 8 NM scores TDS in less than two minutes late in first half. Bob Swanson TD passes of 4 Yds to Proctor, 15 to Ken Mack.

4-5 Spring Lake 19, NM 0 NM limited to but 83 yards rushing as NM shut out for the only time in 1964 season.

**1965– coach Tom Seroczynski (6-3 overall 4-3 Seaway)**

Well before NM began their final season in the Seaway Conference, NM administrators had already asked Superintendents in the West Michigan Conference for readmission to the West Michigan Conference. The 1965-66 school year would be the last year for the students residing in the fast-growing Laketon Township area who would attend North Muskegon Schools. Most of those Laketon Township students would be attending Reeths Puffer. Fruitport and Spring Lake were new additions to the Seaway Conference. After an absence of six years, the Norse would renew a contract with Manistee that would continue for another five seasons. The war in Vietnam had escalated in 1965 and would not come to a merciful end until 1973. Not even your ‘heroic’ author, who was sent with his Army unit to Vietnam in the summer of 1965 was able to win the war for the USA.

Taking over the head coaching duty for the Norse would be Tom Seroczynski, a former trainer with the Chicago Bears who had been assisting Lee David for the past three seasons. Coach ‘Sero’, with Don Walters as his assistant, would post an envious record during his tenure as the NM coach. Only seven lettermen returned from the previous 4-5 season, but one of those would include All Seaway Conference lineman Tom Cribbs. Randy Homan, a 215- pound converted fullback from a starting center returns as a three-year starter. Still only a junior, Bob Swanson moved into the starting quarterback position shortly after the start of last season and he’ll be joined in the backfield by speedster Ken Mack.

North Muskegon would begin the 1965 season with Manistee, who would briefly begin a short stint in the WMC. To show it’s sometimes called a small world, Manistee would be coached by Art Haage. A few years down the road Haage would replace former Muskegon St. Mary star Mike Kanitz as the football coach at Traverse City St. Francis. Moving into a new home from a rental in Traverse City, it was the Haage family who would move into the former rental home of the Moyes family. To add even more spice to the Haage story, it was Mike Kanitz who Haage replaced as coach at TCSF that was the number one reason why this author got back working in the media. Kanitz, a teammate of mine in a winter basketball league knew that I had once worked as a reporter for the Muskegon Chronicle. Big Mike recommended me to cover his Traverse City St. Francis team, and the rest is history --- from journalism to radio.

Ken Mack had an amazing day in NM’s 19-12 victory over Manistee as he returned a pair of punts for long distance TDs. One for 70 yards and the second a record 93 yards, 2-yards father than the legendary Stan Guy returned a punt against Scottville in 1953. Both of Mack’s exciting punt returns were needed as the only other NM touchdown came the conventional way late in the first period on a five-yard TD by Tim Thill. Mack’s first return of 70-yards gave the Norse a 13-0 lead with just under three-minutes to play in the first half. Manistee came right back before halftime to cut the NM lead to 13-6 on a 53-yard pass play. The winning TD run by Mack came midway through the third quarter to give the Norse a 19-6 lead. Dave Marchido made several big defensive plays on deep drives into NM territory throughout the fourth quarter. Manistee drove down to the four-yard before a Manistee fumble was recovered by Marchido. On the very next play the Norse fumbled the ball right back. Incredibly Manistee fumbled what must have been a very slippery pigskin and again it was Marchido on the recovery. The host Chippewas did manage to score with 5:48 left in the game to trail 19-12. With 55-seconds remaining Manistee was down to the Norse four-yard line and again they fumbled and again it was Marchido who recovered his third fumble of the game to preserve the 19-12 victory.

The Norse spotted Whitehall a 12-0 lead but came back to score three touchdowns in the second half to edge future long time NM coach Dave Cooke’s Whitehall squad 20-13. The Norse scored all their touchdowns in the final quarter with much of the credit going to the defense, particularly Steve Peterson. The son of Bill Peterson, a member of the 1942 NM Hall of Fame Team, had a school record three interception in the game, two in the final quarter. Trailing 13-0, Peterson picked off a Whitehall pass early into the fourth quarter to set up NM’s first TD. Starting at the Vikings 29 Ken Mack scored the first NM TD at 9:28 of the final quarter. Mack also ran for the extra point to cut the Whitehall lead to 13-7. After NM stopped Whitehall on downs the Norse marched 65 yards in 12 plays with Mack again running in for the TD from seven yards out and converting what would prove to be the winning points on another successful run for the extra point. Peterson set up the final Norse score to ice the game when he returned his interception 21 yards before he was downed on the four-yard line. From there Ted Slater took it in for the score to make the final score read NM 20, Whitehall 13.

An undefeated North Muskegon team traveled to Ravenna to play a winless Bulldog squad. Playing inspired football Ravenna upset the Norse to send NM from the ranks of the undefeated. After a scoreless first half the Bulldogs put together a pair of winning drives in the second half to take a 13-0 lead before the Norse could make a belated move. With Ravenna’s defense holding NM to under 95 yards rushing for the game, the Norse went to the airwaves in the final period. Bob Swanson completed a pass on a 67-yard drive to Ken Mack good for 29 yards and six points. Swanson’s sneak gave the Norsemen renewed life as they trailed only by six points, 13-7 with still four-minutes left. A fumble recovery by Roger Vanderlaan gave the Norse life with two minutes remaining but the Norse chances were dead after Ravenna intercepted a NM pass to kill the drive. The Norse were hurt with injuries to three of their regulars. All-Conference tackle Tom Cribbs and guard Cubby Closz were out with ankle injuries while three-year starter Randy Homan missed the second half.

Your author finds it hard to believe that NM’s 18-6 victory over Fremont would be the last game played between these two long-time rivals. Fremont and NM had played 29 games over the years and the series would end with NM holding a 16-12-1 record in the competitive series. With Fremont now a member of the WMC, it’s probably safe to say these two teams will meet once again on the gridiron. When it happens, it will be the first matchup in close to 60 years. Fremont would not be the only team on the 1965 schedule which would prove to be the last scheduled game between two schools. 1965 would also be the last time NM would play Reeth Puffer, Spring Lake, Coopersville and Fruitport.

With NM quarterback Bob Swanson handicapped with a dislocated finger the Norse and their innovated coach Tom Seroczynski did a little improvising and used a shotgun formation. After spotting the host Packers an early touchdown the Norse came back with a ‘razzle-dazzle’ pass from Ken Mack to Randy Homan that went the distance of 65 yards to tie the game at 6-6. The 6’2 200 lb. Homan was a workhorse on what would prove to be the winning drive early in the fourth quarter, an eight-yard march with Homan scoring his 2nd TD from 3 yards out. The final Norse tally came when Fremont was unsuccessful on a fake punt that gave NM excellent field position. Swanson went the last three yards on a keeper play with just two minutes left. With neither team able to add an extra point the entire game the final score in the final game between these two old rivals was NM 18, Fremont 6.

NM pulled a mild upset with a 7-0 victory in the second and final game of the brief two-game series between the Norsemen and Spring Lake. The only score was set up by an interception by Randy Homan at the Lakers 35-yard line just before halftime. Gutsy NM quarterback Bob Swanson, broken finger and all, scored from 11 yards out with under a minute to go in the half. Homan’s kick was true and although still an entire half to play, the 7-0 score would stand until the game’s end. The Lakers did mount one serious threat late in the contest but a fumble, recovered by future Orchard View head football coach Dave Janusiewicz, halted the march. Neither team was able to accumulate much offense in front of the standing room only crowd on the Northside. NM rushed for only 115 yards the entire game, all on the ground and the Norse were able to pull off the improbable victory without picking up a first down in the second half. The loss was the first setback of the season for Spring Lake and left the Norse just a half game out of first place behind league leader Reeths Puffer.

The Norse would make the short journey to Reeths Puffer with first place at stake in the Seaway Conference. With NM’s enrollment due to shrink with students from Laketon Township attending Reeths Puffer the following season, and the expected growth of RP, the battle with the Rockets would be the last football game between the two neighboring schools. The Norse battled hard against the Rockets but were unable to muster little offense against a stout Rocket defense. The Norse were limited to 70 total yards for the contest. With Bob Swanson limited with his broken finger NM was able to complete but one pass for nine yards. Top NM running back Randy Homan was playing injured as the Norse never seriously threatened all night. Running their streak to 15 games without losing a game, the Rockets had to work hard against a tough and determined NM Defense. It wasn’t until there was only 16 seconds left in the first half that RP was able to take the lead. The Rockets managed a second score in the second half and left it up to their defense to shut off the NM defense. NM only crossed the midfield stripe once in the final two quarters and totaled but 17 yards gained in the second half as RP won 14-0.

In the only meeting between the Norsemen and Fruitport in the 92 years of NM football, a fumble and a missed extra point were the difference in Fruitport’s 7-6 victory. The Norse also were helped with a fumble that led to their only score in the game. Roger Vanderlaan’s fumble recovery at the Trojan 44 set up the NM six-pointer. The Norse were aided by a pass interference call against Fruitport with Randy Homan eventually pounding over from the two-yard for the only score by either team in the first half. Homan’s extra point try was wide as the Norse clung to a narrow 6-0 lead at halftime. A NM fumble was recovered by Fruitport at the NM six-yard line midway through the final quarter with NM desperately hanging on to a slim 6-0 lead. Fruitport took advantage and would knot the game at 6-6 with a 10-yard pass completion from quarterback Hank Christiansen to Roger Cox. The game winning extra point by Cox sailed through the uprights and Fruitport had won the only game played to date between the two schools.

The Norse will end their time in the Seaway and their 14-game rivalry over the years with Coopersville on a winning note with an 16-6 victory over the Broncos. NM, who never scored more than three touchdowns in a game in 1965, scored on their opening drive. Randy Homan’s one-yard plunge was set up on a 35-yard pass completion from Bob Swanson to Ken Mack. NM’s next scoring play was a rarity in early Norse annals. Randy Homan kicked a 28-yard field goal, only the third made field goal in the previous 33 years of NM football to make the score 10-0 NM. The Norse made it 16-0 in the final quarter. Following a fumble recovery by Andy Dagen. Swanson, with his broken finger hopefully fully mended, hit Steve Peterson on a 6-yard scoring play to make it 16-0. However, following the contest Swanson did require medical attention for his left thumb following the game at Hackley Hospital. The Broncos averted a shutout midway through the final quarter to make the final score 16-6.

North Muskegon would complete their 1965 season against their oldest rival, Montague. The game would be the only battle between the two teams in the 92-year rivalry that would conclude the final game of a regular season. The highlight in NM’s victory was a record-breaking 92-yard kickoff return by Gary Mumford. The only score in the first half was set up by a blocked punt by Harold ‘Cubby’ Closz, future Greater Muskegon prosecutor. Ken Mack powered in from the one and NM led at halftime 6-0. It was the opening kickoff of the second half when Mumford raced 92 yards for his record run. Evidently, there was no such thing as a ‘Victory Formation’ back in 1965 as Randy Holman scored the final Norse TD from 5-yards out with only 0:16 second showing on the clock. The margin could have been much wider, but two td runs by Ken Mack were called back due to Norse penalties. NM’s season had ended, but for me the following Friday was a most memorable day for the ‘Ole Announcer’, as I was aboard a plane heading home from a tour of duty in Vietnam.

Tom Cribbs repeated his position once again on the All-Seaway team while Randy Homan was also accorded All-Conference first team honors.

1965 would be the year of The Lasts. It would be the last year in a brief tenure in the Seaway Conference and it would be the last games to date ever played between NM and Fremont, Spring Lake, Reeths Puffer, Fruitport and Coopersville. Head coach Tom Seroczyski’s coaching during the 1965-66 school year didn’t come to an end. Coach ‘Sero’ was asked to coach the NM basketball team due to the sudden resignation of Don Boyink and he quickly complied to help NM athletics as the basketball coach for two years.

Record Score Interesting Fact

1-0 NM 19, Manistee 12 Ken Mack returns 2 punts for TDs (93 & 70) Tim Thill scored from 4 yards. Dave Marchido 3 fumble recoveries.

2-0 \*NM 20, Whitehall 13 Steve Peterson school record 3 interceptions. Mack two TDs and Ted Slater one. NM intercepts 4 Whitehall passes.

2-1 \*Ravenna 13, NM 7 NM’s late rally falls short. Only NM TD a 29 -yard pass from Bob Swanson to Mack.

3-1 \*NM 18, Fremont 6 Mack to Homan on a 65-yard TD. Homan and Swanson both scores 3-yard TDS.

4-1 \*NM 7, Spring Lake 0 Swanson on a keeper play scores games only TD. Homan’s punts pinned the Lakers deep numerous times.

4-2 \*Reeths Puffer 14, NM 0 NM held to only 70 total yards in the game as Rockets win 15th game in a row without a loss.

4-3 \*Fruitport 7, NM 6 Fruitport recovers fumble deep in NM territory to rally for win. Homan only NM TD in first half from 3-yards out.

5-3 \*NM 16, Coopersville 6 Homan a TD and 28-yard field goal lead NM. Swanson to Peterson 6-yard TD pass.

6-3 NM 18, Montague 0 Gary Munford returns kick off a record 92 yards for TD. å

**1966– coach Tom Seroczynski (6-2 overall 4-2 WMC, Hart & Scottville tie WMC)**

North Muskegon was back in their comfort zone after a brief stint in the Seaway conference with their return to the West Michigan Conference. Expectations were high that the Norse could challenge for the WMC title as 13 lettermen return for 2nd year head coach Tom Seroczynski. Among the starters returning were tackles Andy Dagen and Roger Vanderlaan. Mark Erickson and defensive stalwart Dave Marchido will again man the end posts while Mike Walters will go at center.

Dave Jan (officially Janusiewicz) and Cubby Closz will also bring experience along the front lines. The quarterback duties will be in good hands as Bob Swanson returns as a three-year starter. Others to earn the NM monogram from 1965 in the backfield would be Randy Hutson, Ted Slater and Tim Thill while Ron Stafford earned a letter last year as a linebacker.

Defense took center stage in the Norse home opener in NM’s 12-0 victory over Manistee. NM defensive back Phil Mason was especially a thorn in the side of the Chips with a pair of interceptions, a fumble recovery and several fine tackles. The first defensive highlight for the Norse took place midway in the first period. Mark Erickson charging hard from his defensive end position deflected a Manistee pass that was snagged by his teammate Dave Marchido who carried the pigskin 30 yards for the game’s first score. Mason, with one of his two picks on the night, set up the other NM TD that ended with Bob Swanson sneaking over from the one for the second NM TD. That would be all the points needed as NM’s defense held the visiting Chippewas to less than 100 yards in total offense.

NM won their second game in a row in their return to the WMC as Shelby fell victim to the Norse 12-0. It was the second shutout by the same score as the NM defense was again up to the task. The only serious drive by Shelby on the Norse gridiron was advancing to the Norse 23 before a Dave Jan interception ended the Tiger’s best threat. Early in the game NM had their most impressive drive of the game with a 65-yard march to pay dirt. The touchdown coming on a 15-yard pass from Bob Swanson to Jim Osborne. Dave Marchido, who seems to make a habit of coming up with a big defensive play was chiefly responsible for NM’s 2nd and final touchdown when he recovered a Shelby fumble at the Tiger 5-yard line. Randy Hutson, who led the Norse in rushing in the contest with 94 yards in 23 carries, scored from the 4-yard line. The good news for the game was the Norse ‘D’ which held Shelby to a total of 44 yards. The bad news, once again NM failed to convert an extra point for the second straight week and were penalized a whopping 95 yards.

North Muskegon’s brief winning streak came to a crashing halt when they fell to the Hart Pirates in their first road game 25-0. In the 86-game series between the long- time rivals, it was the second most lopsided defeat Hart ever inflicted on the Norse (1993 – Hart 47, NM 13). Fielding one of their strongest teams in their program’s history, Hart was in total control the entire game. For the first time in NM annals the Norse were held to minus rushing yards (-23) and but three first downs. Perhaps the only time the Norse fans had a chance to cheer was an 85-yard kickoff return by Dave Marchido after the third TD of the Pirates. However, it was deemed by an eagle-eye official that Marchido had stepped out of bounds during his return. Other than Marchido’s near TD their best opportunity to get on the board was after Rick Homan blocked a Pirate punt at the Hart nine-yard line. The stingy Hart defense held, and the Norsemen would take the bus ride back to NM without putting any points on the board.

It would be another three years before Ravenna would bolt the Seaway to join the WMC. In a rare off date as the Norse could not find an opponent in week four, the well-rested Norse had a most-welcome bounce back 30-0 victory over Ravenna to jump back into the win column. Before an entertained Homecoming crowd the Norse wasted little time in getting on the board. Dave Marchido sprinted 52 yards for the first TD and would then set up the second NM tally with a 36-yard punt return. Two plays later Randy Hutson dashed 18 yards, and the Norse were now in firm control. Hutson would have a monster game with his second TD run of the opening quarter on a 48-yard dash. Hutson then scored on a defensive play by picking off a Ravenna pass and returning it 45 yards for his third TD of the game. Jim Osborne scored the final NM TD on a much more modest run, a one-yard plunge to make the final score 30-0. It bears mention that the Norse didn’t set the world on fire with their kicking game. After four games played and nine TDs, the Norse had not converted even one extra point.

The Norse spotted Montague a 7-0 lead early into the first quarter before taking control in their 25-7 WMC victory. It took a while for the Norse to show their might, however. The Norse mounted a 73-yard drive, but the drive ended at the Wildcat one-yard line. Undeterred, the Norse then finally scored with little time left in the half with Bobby Swanson sneaking over from the one. Ted Slater can now boast of being The First in a couple of departments. Slater would become the first ever to win the ‘National Championship’ in snurfing – later to be renamed snowboarding, but he would score the first extra point for the Norse in ten attempts. With the score all knotted up at 7-7, the second half was all Norsemen. Once again Dave Marchido went into his fumble recovering mode and recovered a Montague fumble deep in Wildcat territory. Two plays later, Dave’s cousin, sophomore Bill Marchido ran the last three yards to make it 13-7. Dave Marchido, a converted end from the 1965 season, fielded a punt and raced 73 yards to extend the lead to 19-7. Swanson completed the scoring when he connected on a 27- yard TD pass to Randy Hutson. Naturally, the extra point attempt was no good and the Norse were now 1-13 in extra point attempts.

The Norse would make the trek up US 31 to Scottville for their first game against a school that had changed their official name to Mason County Central. The 1966 Mason County Team might very well have been the best team in their school’s history. When the 1966 season had ended, there would be a tie as WMC champs: Mason County Central and Hart. Nearly 60 years have elapsed and 1966 would be the last year Mason County even held a share of the WMC Championship. It was the key game in the WMC. Although the name change had become official, it was difficult not to refer to the Spartans as Scottville. The contest was the key game in the WMC on this date as the winner would at least claim a tie at the top of the leaderboard. A win for the Spartans and they would hold first place all to their own. Scottville (Mason County Central) scored first in the first half as they took over at the NM 42-yard line after a short Norse punt. The host Scottville team would take a 7-0 lead at halftime following a Dan Kliese 11-yard run. It was the only bad punt on the evening for Norse punter Rick Homan who had a couple of his booming punts travel over 60 yards. NM was able to tie the game early into the third quarter with Bob Swanson capping a 70-yard drive with a nine-yard run. Surprisingly, the Norse converted the extra point, only their second made conversion of the season. Fumbles and injuries hurt the Norsemen. Halfback Randy Hutson was lost early in the game with a knee injury while his partner at halfback, Dave Marchido, was severely hampered with a back injury. The Norse fumbled four times in the game and lost all four. It wasn’t a fumble that contributed to what would prove to be the deciding score, however. It was a 51-yard TD pass from quarterback Tim Stephens to Dick Swinehart that capped their 87 yards drive. The final TD was set up by a Norse fumble at the NM 33 as Scottville, for one of their rare times in program history, were undefeated at 7-0 with the final score MCC 20 and NM 7. Only a loss in their final game of the season the following week to Hart would stop the Spartans from having their only perfect season.

In the very early years as a four-year school Oakridge was but a shell of itself from their dominating teams in years to come. NM won the first nine of 10 games between the two schools but just the opposite has occurred in the current era. The Eagles threw a brief scare into the Norse by scoring the games’ first TD. Dave Marchido then scored the first of his three TDs when he plunged over from the one-yard line on the very first play of the second quarter. A fumble recovery by Mike Walter set up Machido’s second TD, again a short plunge from the one to give the Norse a 14-6 lead at the break. NM broke open the game in the second half, first when Marchido ran for a seven-yard tally and the next, a TD pass from Bob Swanson to Jim Osborne good for 46 yards. Oakridge connected on a 70-yard TD aerial from Tom Kurtz to Ross Griswold before the Norse 27-12 lead increased to 33-12 after Swanson hit Mark Erickson with a 15-yard pass to complete NM’s scoring on the night. Oakridge scored on the final play of the game to make the final score read 33-19.

White Cloud was added to the NM schedule for the first of a two-year series with the Norse winning both meetings. 18 seniors wound up their prep careers and they went out in winning fashion with a 20-6 victory over White Cloud contested on a chilly Fred Jacks Field. Both teams exchanged TDs early in the contest with the first NM score an eight-yard pass from Bob Swanson to Rick Homan. After the visitors tied up the game on the first play of the second quarter, NM broke the tie when Jim Osborne capped a 60-yard drive on a short TD from the one. Dave Marchido’s run for the extra point sent the Norse into the second half leading 13-6. The final NM score on the game, and the season, was on a short run by Marchido that was set up on a 35-yard pass play from Swanson to Mark Erickson. Earlier a 57-yard TD pass from Swanson to Ted Slater was denied due to a penalty.

Honored as members of the WMC first team following the season were center Mike Walter and Dave Marchido on the offensive first 11, while Mark Erickson, Andy Dagen, Dave Janusiewicz and Randy Hutson were selected for their defensive work.

Record Score Interesting Fact

1-0 \*NM 12, Manistee 0 Phil Mason with 2 interceptions and a fumble recovery. Dave Marchido 30-yard pass interception returned for TD. Bob Swanson sneaks for 2nd NM TD.

2-0 \*NM 12, Shelby 0 Defense holds Shelby to 44 yards. Marchido fumble recovery sets up Randy Hutson’s 4-yd TD. Swanson 15 yd TD pass to Jim Osborne.

2-1 \*Hart 25, NM 0 NM held to minus rushing yardage by a strong Hart squad. Marchido’s 85-yard kickoff returned called back to the spot where he stepped out of bounds.

3-1 NM 30, Ravenna 0 Hutson 3 TDs, 2 on runs of 52 & 48, the other a 45-yard pass interception: Marchido scores from 45 and Osborne plunges from the one.

4-1 \*NM 25, Montague 7 Swanson sneaks for a TD, connects with Hutson for 27 passing TD. Marchido punt return of 73 yards. Bill Marchido 3 yd TD. Ted Slater makes first extra point.

4-2 \*Mason Co Cent.20, NM 7 Scottville would have their best record In history (7-1) after win. NM only score on 11-ard run by Swanson.

5-2 \*NM 33, Oakridge 19 Marchido 3 short TD runs. Swanson 2 TD passes, one to Osborne for 46, the second 15 yards to Mark Erickson.

6-2 NM 20, White Cloud 6 Swanson 8-yard TD pass to Rick Homan for 1st TD, Marchido and Osborne each a 1-yard TD.

**1967– coach Tom Seroczynski (8-1 overall 5-1 WMC tied for 1st with Manistee)**

Most football geeks had little confidence that NM would experience a breakout season in 1967, after losing 18 seniors and but eight lettermen returning with many of the returning lettermen being non-starters. But my how those Norsemen would surprise those soothsayers. The Norse would begin the 1967 season with a newcomer on the schedule in Kent City. The Norse would find Kent City easy pickings over the years as their opening 42-12 win over Kent City would begin the first of eight consecutive victories over the years without tasting defeat. Offensively the Norse would open the season with Jim VanderWier at center; Larry Young and Jerry Keene at the tackles; Junior Bill Marchido and Mike Peterson at guards; junior Chuck Woodruff and Rick Homan at the ends; Peter Spier will take over the signal calling duties at quarterback; Phil Mason and Mark Johnson at the halves with Ed Schmid at fullback.

The Norse showed Kent City early that it was going to be a long night for the visitors. It took NM but 21 seconds to score first. On the first play after Phil Mason returned the kickoff 68 yards to the KC 10, Kurt Boyd scored on the very next play. The Norse then scored the second of their three first quarter TDs with quarterback Pete Speier hitting Mason with an 11-yard scoring toss. Two plays later, Speier, going both ways intercepted an Eagle pass that he returned for a TD. It appears that NM also found a kicker as Speier converted two of his three PATs after TDs. Make that three out of four as Speier connected following a fourth TD in the first half as Mark Johnson raced 31 yards to give NM an insurmountable 27-0 lead at halftime. Each team would score a pair of second half touchdowns. After Kent City got on the board with a TD on their first possession of the second half, the Norse answered right back by marching 58 yards with Speier going the final 10. Speier then added his third TD and the team’s sixth with a 25-yard tally. Speier’s five extra points nearly matched NM’s total production on conversion attempts from the previous season.

The Norse were upended in their second game of the season, and first in WMC play, when they fell to Shelby 13-6. The Norse were ahead on statistics but not on the scoreboard as NM churned up much of their stats between the 30s. It looked like NM was going to cash in first when Ed Schmid sped 50 yards for an apparent TD in the second period only to have his effort go for naught due to an untimely penalty. The Tigers scored what would prove to be all the points they needed with only 39 seconds left in the first half. Quarterback Gene Gifford, the long-time and still current basketball coach at Muskegon Community College, connected on a 34-yard screen pass to fullback Brad Griffin for the games’ first score. Jim Tenbrink’s kick put the host Tigers up 7-0. Shelby put the game away early into the final period by driving 71-yards to pay dirt with Griffin rambling from 38 yards to give Shelby a 13-0 lead. It was too little and too late for the Norse on their best drive of the night, a 77-yard march that ended on an 18-yard TD run by quarterback Pete Speier. Only 2:37 was left in the game and the Tigers ran out the clock to hand the Norse their first loss. Only wishful thinking would it be for one to expect the Norse would go undefeated the rest of the way.

NM got back to their winning ways with a 13-2 hard fought victory over Hart on a wet North Muskegon field. A couple of Hart fumbles that turned into touchdown drives were instrumental in the Norse victory. A Norse fumble of a Hart punt provided the only two points earned by the visitors. The safety gave Hart two points and the early lead late in the opening quarter. The first of the vital fumbles was recovered by NM’s Conrad Swanson on the NM 48. Two long passes from Pete Speier moved the ball deep into Pirate territory where Mark Johnson darted over from the two-yard line. Speier’s extra point kick was perfect, and the Norse had moved in front for good as NM’s defense held the Pirates under 100 total yards for the game. The second pivotal fumble came later in the second period when Bill Marchido fell on a fumble near midfield. Four plays later Speier hit a short pass to Phil Mason good for 3-yards and the final NM TD as both teams failed to score in the second half.

In the first ever meeting between NM and Hamilton the Norse posted a commanding 25-6 road victory. Once again NM’s defense created havoc with an opponent’s offense. Hard hitting by Norse defenders Jerry Keene, Tom True, and Ed Schmid forced three Hamilton fumbles alone in the first half. It was a Schmid fumble recovery that led to the first scoring drive for the victors, a 60-yard march that ended with six points when Mark Johnson ran the final four yards. Later in the same second period the Norse took advantage of a short Hamilton punt to push across their second score, a 31-yard pass play from Pete Speier to Rick Homan. A fumble and an interception set up the final two NM scores. Schmid broke through to jar the ball loose from the Hamilton quarterback that the Norse recovered at the Hawkeye 26. It took but four plays to score with Speier running the final seven yards. Speier’s talents worked both ways in the passing game. He not only does a nice job of completing throws to a teammate, but also has a knack for intercepting passes from his opposing counterpart at quarterback. Speier’s pick late in the third period set up a successful Norse drive that ended with a Johnson six-yard TD. Hamilton averted a shutout in front of their home fans by scoring their TD with less than two minutes to be played to make the final score 26-6.

The Norse made the long journey to Manistee a productive jaunt as they upset the unbeaten Chippewas 27-6. NM’s Pete Speier led the Norsemen to victory in the bitterly fought contest that saw officials levy a whopping 215 yards in penalties that were equally distributed between the two teams. It was the Norse defense that made the first NM score possible when a bevy of Norse attackers blasted through to block a punt with the Norse taking over at the one-yard line. Sophomore back Kurt Boyd on the next play ripped across for the score. Speiers’ extra point put NM on top 7-0 and they were on their way to victory. Manistee did score on their drive following the NM score but missed the extra point with just six seconds left in the opening period. Manistee was assessed 40 yards in penalties on the next NM scoring drive with a Speier pass to Boyd for eight yards extending the NM lead to 14-6 after another good PAT from Speier. A 73-yard drive ended with another NM six points with Speier going over on a keeper midway through the third period. Speier completed the Norse victory with his second short rushing TD and added the extra point to make the final score NM 27, Manistee 6.

Talk about a log jam! NM’s win over Montague left the West Michigan Conference in a four-way tie for first. Fortunately, there were a few games left to straighten things out. The Norse moved into the battle for first with a 27-6 victory over the Cats in front of a homecoming crowd at Fred Jacks Field. Once again it was the fortuitous Norsemen taking advantage of opponents’ fumbles that contributed to their 4th straight victory. The first fumble recovery for the Norse took place on the very first play of the game when Montague coughed up the football on the opening kickoff at their own 24-yard line. Five plays later Ed Schmid powered over from the two, and after another perfect kick from Pete Speier, the Norse enjoyed a quick 7-0 lead. Opponents fumbling away the football seemingly has become habit forming as Montague only ran five plays before Larry Young recovered the second costly Montague fumble. It took eight plays for NM to score again with Kurt Boyd scurrying 17 yards as the Norse made it 14-0 in a hurry. The first quarter hadn’t even come to an end before NM took over at the Wildcat 44 after a fourth down gamble failed. Rick Homan made the big defensive play, and Pete Speier made the gamble hurt even more by running 30-yards for a TD and the Norse had pulled away to a 21-0 lead. Montague scored their only TD with about ten minutes left in the half, but NM wasn’t done scoring. Speier, who nearly averages a pick every game, set up the final Norse score with an interception on an Ed Schmid TD with just 11 seconds showing on the clock. A tired Speier missed his first extra point after three makes but the damage, and all the games scoring, was done in the first half.

To say that is a rare occasion when North Muskegon and Scottville would play for a WMC conference championship would be prophetic. Only the season before (1966) has Mason Co. Central (Scottville) even had a share of first place in the WMC when NM has been a member. Friday’s game at Fred Jacks field would be the first time in 90 years in WMC conference play when the two would meet in first place. And it was a dandy with NM prevailing 7-2. With more mud on the field than grass one knew this game was going to be a low-scoring affair. The only points in the first half came on a safety. Early in the second quarter a Scottville punt was downed deep in NM territory at the five-yard line. Norse fullback Ed Schmid was tackled in the end zone and that 2-0 Scottville lead just might hold up for the entire game. As usual, it was a fumble that led to the eventual winning, and only touchdown of the game. Tom True was the Norsemen who recovered a Scottville (I just can’t get used to calling the school Mason Co. Central) fumble at the visitors 4- yard line. Three plays later NM had moved to the 19 and on the first play of the fourth quarter Mark Johnson ran 19 yards for the TD. Pete Speier, playing despite a broken hand, kicked the extra point. The Spartans were not done yet. Late in the fourth quarter Scottville had started a drive after a Norse fumble on a punt near midfield. The Spartans pushed downfield as the time ticked away, and in eight plays they have moved to the NM 11-yard line. One fourth down on the three-yard line, Norse defensive lineman Larry Young stopped the Spartan back for no gain, and with 41 seconds left the Norse crowd went wild. Norse coach Seroczynski after the game gave much praise to his defense, headed by Bill Marchido, Jim VanderWier, Jerry Keene, Young and True. The Norse now needed a win next week against Oakridge to at least get a tie for the title in their second year back in the WMC.

NM got their much-needed win (20-0) over Oakridge as once again the Norse relied on turnovers by their opposition. The Norse wasted little time in getting on the board first as Phil Mason took the opening kickoff and raced all the way to the Oakridge 11. On the next play Mark Johnson found a huge hole through the middle to score. Pete Speier kicked the PAT, and the Norse had scored after only 25 seconds had elapsed in the contest. Each team traded pass interceptions in the second quarter, one by Jerry Keene of the Norse and one by Ron Ruel of Oakridge but that was about it for action as the score remained 7-0 at the half. The Norse once again used their outstanding defense to garner their next score when Conrad Swanson picked off an Oakridge pass around midfield and dashed 50-yards for the touchdown. Oakridge mounted their best scoring threat of the game on their next possession, but the drive was halted by another Conrad Swanson interception. Kevin McCrosky recovered an Oakridge fumble, one of six turnovers lost by the Eagles to set up the final NM score. On the first play after the fumble recovery Speier hit Mason with a 33-yard toss. Three plays later Speier completed the drive with a three-yard run to make the final score 20-0.

The Norse concluded their season, and their brief two-game series with White Cloud with their 2nd shutout of the season and the fourth game where their opponents did not cross their goal line with a 13-0 win at White Cloud. None of their opponents during the season scored more than two touchdowns on the NM defense, and none after the first two games of the season. NM would end their unexpectedly surprising successful season as co-champs with Manistee in the WMC, a team they soundly defeated earlier 27-6.

The win at White Cloud was played in a quagmire but the Norse clearly dominated play on the slippery field. And as been their custom all year, their defense clearly stifled White Cloud as the hosts only gained a total of 19 yards the entire game. Meanwhile, the Norse totaled more than 300 yards in offense but only were able to cross the goal line twice. As it’s been the norm all year the first NM drive was set up by a fumble recovery at the White Cloud 39. Eight plays later Pete Speier scored from the six-yard line and converted the extra point. NM had a couple of scoring chances go by the wayside before the first half ended. Ed Schmid had a 33-yard TD called back due to a holding penalty. Just before the first half ended Speier had a short two-yard TD run nullified by yet another penalty and the clock ran out with the Norse on the White Cloud two. The Norse added their final score on a five-yard tally by Phil Mason in the third period. Schmid would rush for 122 yards on the sloppy field while Speier added 77.

Four Norsemen were accorded first-team All-Conference honors. Quarterback Pete Speier, offensive guard Larry Young, defensive back Phil Mason while Rick Homan was selected to as an All-Conference offensive and defensive end. Speier would make a name for himself following his NM prep days as the starting quarterback for Northern Michigan University. There was much controversy at the superintendents meeting a few days following the end of the season as they voted 4-3 to award the championship trophy to North Muskegon. Manistee was to forfeit an earlier victory over Hart due to the use of an ineligible player but who did win the outright championship? Reports the following season still listed Manistee as co-champs. Manistee was none too happy with the edict and left the WMC after the 1968 season which opened the door for Ravenna to become a member. Bygones will be bygones has Manistee was invited back into the WMC 55 years later in time for the 2022-23 season.

Record Score Interesting Fact

1-0 NM 41, Kent City 12 Pete Speier scorer 23 points on 3 TDs and 5 extra points. Kurt Boyd a 10-yard TD and Mark Johnson scorer from 31. Phil Mason TD pass from Speier.

1-1 \*Shelby 13, NM 7 Shelby hands NM their only loss of season. Speier scores late from 18 yards for only NM score.

2-1 \*NM 13, Hart 2 Fumbles by Hart lead to NM touchdowns; Mark Johnson a 2-yard TD. Speier to Mason connect on 3-yard scoring pass play.

3-1 NM 26, Hamilton 6 Norse defense again strong in win. Johnson two TDs, Speier passes to Rick Homan for 31-yard tally: Speier 7 yd rushing TD.

4-1 \*NM 27, Manistee 6 Speier runs for two short TDs, passes to Boyd for another. Boyd powers over from the one for NM TD.

5-1 \*NM 26, Montague 6 Fumbles and an interception key NM win. Ed Schmid 2 TDs, Speier a 30-yd TD’ Boyd 17 yd tally.

6-1 \*NM 7, Mason Co. 2 Trailing 2-0 at the half, NM scores in a Mark Johnson 19-yard TD. NM makes goal line stand in final seconds for the win.

7-1 \*NM 20, Oakridge 0 NM earns tie in the WMC. Conrad Swanson 50-yard interception return for TD. Mark Johnson and Speier rushing TDs.

8-1 NM 13, White Cloud 0 NM limits White Cloud to 19 yards in offense. Speier 6-yard TD; Mason scores from five.

**1968– coach Tom Seroczynski (7-1 overall 5-1 WMC tied for 1st with Manistee)**

With NM enrollment the smallest in the WMC it was clear to NM head coach Tom Seroczynski and his assistant Dave Cooke, that many, if not most of his players are going to have to go both ways to avoid key injuries if the Norse had any hopes of repeating as conference champions in 1968. A huge void was at quarterback with the loss of Pete Speier, who would be the starting quarterback down the road at Northern Michigan University. Returning starters included All-Conference guard Larry Young and Bill Marchido up front and starting backs Mark Johnson and Kurt Boyd. NM received a huge boost from Bob Steele, a 185-pound backfield transfer to NM from Grand Rapids West Catholic. But who would play quarterback?

After their season opening 33-0 stomping of Kent City, it was quickly apparent that the Norse had found their quarterback and more. The Norse established that this team also had some speedy running backs as well as a solid quarterback in junior Jamie Woodruff. NM backs Kurt Boyd, Mark Johnson, Tim Johnson and Bob Steele, all had excellent games while Woodruff showed that he was going to be more than an adequate replacement for Speier at quarterback. Woodruff possessed the same traits as Speier did on defense as he intercepted a pair of Kent City passes, both picks setting up NM TDS. Steele, who rushed for 86 yards on the night in his Norse debut, got the Norse off to a good start with a TD run from nine yards out. Bill Marchido had replaced Speier as a kicker and his first PAT on the season was good to give NM an early 7-0 lead. With Woodruff directing the offense the Norse marched 92 yards in 14 plays with Mark Johnson racing 40 yards for the TD. With just seconds left in the half Woodruff intercepted the first of his two picks on the night. On the last play of the half Woodruff then hit Johnson with a perfect 42-yard strike to extend their lead to 19-0 at halftime. After a scoreless third quarter Woodruff picked off his second Kent City aerial and returned it to the KC 20. Then it was another Johnson, sophomore running back, Tim Johnson, who scored from eight yards out to pad the NM lead. Just moments later Kurt Boyd thrilled the Norse rooters when he fielded a punt at his own 38 and raced 62 yards to make the final score read NM 33, Kent City 0.

The Norsemen made amends for their only loss in 1967, but it wasn’t easy. NM was able to squeeze out a 13-7 victory over Shelby to extend their winning streak at Fred Jacks Field on the Northside to 15 straight victories. Both teams settled nothing in the first half although the host Norsemen came close. Early into the opening quarter Mark Johnson raced from his own 48 to the Shelby five where a touchdown saving tackle was made by the Tigers John Wyn. NM fumbled the ball away on their next snap from center to deny them a golden scoring opportunity. NM scored first in the second half when they came up with a big play as quarterback Jamie Woodruff hit Mark Johnson on a fourth and seven play to pick up a big first down at the Shelby 12. Two plays later Bob Steele powered his way into the end zone. The Tigers then fumbled the ensuing kickoff which Larry Young recovered at the Shelby 25. Woodruff then connected with Steele for a 15-yard TD pass to extend the lead to 13-0. Shelby did find the end zone to make the final score 13-7 but it was too little too late as the Norse were able to run out the clock.

It took a second half rally for NM to defeat Hart 19-6 after the Norse trailed 6-0 at halftime. Both teams had opportunities to score in the third period, NM advanced to the Pirate eight and Hart picked up a bobbled screen pass and drove to the NM 10 before Larry Young intercepted a pass to halt Hart’s drive. Jamie Woodruff came up with a huge play to get the Norse on the board, and in the lead. With the ball at the Hart 20 and NM facing fourth down, Woodruff scrambled on an attempted pass play and scooted down the sidelines to score. Bill Marchido’s extra point was good, and NM had a 7-6 lead. The opportunistic NM defense set up the second Norse TD just moments later. Marchido intercepted a Pirate pass at the Hart 22. Woodruff raced for his second TD on a keeper to give the Norse a little breathing room. NM put the game on ice late in the contest when Hart gambled on fourth down but failed to pick up the necessary yardage at their own 22. Bob Steele then put the game away with a three-yard rushing TD and the Norse had earned their third straight victory in the 1968 season.

In the second and last meeting in history between the two squads, North Muskegon defeated Hamilton 14-6 for their fourth straight victory to open the season and their 16th straight home victory. NM got on the board first and then had to hold on to take a lead at halftime. The NM score was set up by an interception by Mark Johnson who returned his pick down to the Hamilton six. Bob Steele put six points on the board with a one-yard plunge and Bill Marchido made it seven points with his PAT conversion. Hamilton came back to score on a pass play and then threw a scare into the Norse as they advanced inside the Norse five-yard line before time ran out in the half. The Norse had their best drive at the start of the third period. Topping the 71-yard drive was a 20-yard pass from Jamie Woodruff to his brother Chuck followed by another short one-yard plunge by the Norse fullback Steele. All of Steele’s yardage on the night weren’t just short dives plays as the fullback accrued 93 rushing yards for the game.

Manistee handed the Norse, not only their first loss of the season, but their first loss in front of the home folks in 16 games, as the visitors edged a banged-up Norse team 18-14. Playing with six of their regulars nursing injuries, the Norse battled the Chippewas on even terms throughout the contest. The Norse held a slight edge at halftime 14-12 but even though the Norse ran 45 plays in the second half to Manistee’s 21, it was the visitors who scored the only touchdown in the final 24 minutes. Manistee, who hadn’t penetrated past their own 45 in the half began their winning drive after a fourth down attempt by the Norse fell a foot short of a first down. Starting at their own 22 the visitors, aided by a 15-yard NM penalty, moved to their own 49 when Manistee quarterback Tom Walsh uncorked a 51-yard TD pass to his end for the winning touchdown with 6:05 remaining. Hindering their ability to score in the second half were the 80 yards in penalties that stopped Norse drives in the second half. Most of the game’s scoring took place in the first half with each team crossing their opponents goal line twice. The first NM score was on a 43 pass from Jamie Woodruff to Kurt Boyd. The second was a pass from Mark Johnson, who had received the handoff from his quarterback Jamie Woodruff---suddenly stopped and caught everybody by surprise by passing 13-yards into the end zone to Chuck Woodruff. The difference in the Norse leading at halftime were the two made conversion placekicks by Bill Marchido.

North Muskegon made the short jaunt up to Montague and with their 26-6 win over the Wildcats, thanks to a Hart upset over Manistee, the Norse moved into a three-way tie at the top of the heap with Manistee and Hart. NM scored first on a 20-yard pass from Jamie Woodruff to Kurt Boyd midway through the second quarter. Woodruff, who can catch an opponent’s pass as well as throw a completion on his own, intercepted a Montague pass two minutes later to set up his own TD on a quarterback sneak to give his team a 14-0 lead. Montague scored their only TD late in the second period, but the Norse put the game away in the second half. Mark Johnson ran the pigskin in from the 10 for the first NM TD in the second half and scored the final NM TD on a 14-yard screen pass from Woodruff. At the end of the season Montague head coach Jack Bendelow who won five WMC title in his 16 years at Montague, announced his retirement.

After Mark Johnson left the game with a leg injury just four plays into the game in Scottville, Coach Seroczynski put in another Johnson, Mark’s sophomore brother Tim Johnson, who did better than better and showed that he was going to be a thorn in NM opponent’s side for the next couple of years. Johnson scored on a pair of long runs to lead NM to a 19-7 victory over a stubborn Mason County Central team. All the scoring in the game was in the second half. Johnson scored his first TD in the final half when he outsprinted the Spartan defenders and raced 38 yards for a Norse TD. Just ten plays later Johnson showed his speed again and raced 33 yards for the second TD that proved to be the game winner. After Scottville scored quickly to get close to the Norse, Bob Steele than iced the game when he dashed 59 yards for the game’s final score.

Needing a win in their final game of the season to earn another co-championship in the WMC, thanks to the running of Bob Steele, the Norse accomplished their goal with a 20-7 win over Oakridge. Steele scored all three NM touchdowns with his first coming in the second quarter when he raced 67 yards to pay dirt with 7:46 left in the first half. After Oakridge was unable to move the ball in their possession, Steele struck again, this time from 37 yards, stiff arming his last tackler on his way to the goal line. Steele scored his final TD in the second half at a much shorter distance of 11 yards. Jamie Woodruff kept the Oakridge defense loose with a couple of key pass plays on the drive, including one to his favorite receiver on the season, Kurt Boyd. Norse coach Tom Seroczynski had special praise for his seniors, most of whom have helped NM win 14 of their last 15 games: Steele, Bill Marchido, Kevin McCroskey, Larry Young, Chuck Cousineau, and Chuck Woodruff following the win.

The Norse would share the title with Hart and Manistee, all with 5-1 conference records. For Hart, it’s been a long dry spell in winning WMC football championships. As of this writing in 2025, 57 years have passed, and Hart is still looking to win another WMC title. Manistee would leave the WMC after the 1968 season but are now back on board in the newly expanded West Michigan Conference beginning in 2022. The Norsemen dominated the All-Conference team with five players earning first team honors, with three selected on both offense and defense. Junior Jamie Woodruff was picked as the top quarterback and as a defensive back. Bill Marchido earned honors as a tackle on both sides of the ball, while Bob Steele also was selected as a two-way performer. Steel, who rushed for 780 yards in eight games was also the league’s leading scorer with 72 points. Larry Young was one of only two repeaters from the 1967 All-Conference team when he was once again selected as an offensive guard. And how proud could the Woodruff family have been in 1968? Joining Jamie on the All-Conference team was his older brother Chuck, who was picked as a defensive end.

Record Score Interesting Fact

1-0 NM 34, Kent City 0 Bob Steele makes his NM debut with 86 rushing yards and a TD. Mark Johnson a 40-yard rushing TD and 42 yd pass from Jamie Woodruff. Tim Johnson 8 yd tally.

2-0 \*NM 13, Shelby 7 Steele with a pair of TDs, one a short rushing tally, the second on a 15-yard pass from Woodruff.

3-0 \*NM 19, Hart 6 NM rallies for 3 TDs in the second half. Woodruff sprints for a pair of touchdown and Steele from 3-yards for final tally.

4-0 NM 14, Hamilton 6 Steele a pair of short 1-yard plunges for both NM TDs. Mark Johnson with an interception and return to set up first TD of Steele.

4-1 \*Manistee 18, NM 14 Manistee scores winning TD on long pass in 4th qtr.; Jamie Woodruff to Boyd 43 yd TD, and a halfback pass from Mark Johnson to Chuck Woodruff for 13-yd TD.

5-1 \*NM 26, Montague 6 NM moved into 1st place tie in WMC. Woodruff a pair of TD passes, one of 20 to Boyd, the other 14 to Johnson. Woodruff a QB sneak and Johnson 10-yard TD.

6-1 \*NM 19, Mason Co Cent 7 Sophomore Tim Johnson in for injured Mark Johnson 2 long TDs (38 & 33) Bob Steele 59 yd TD.

7-1 \*NM 20, Oakridge 7 Steele scores three TDS on runs of 67, 37, and 11 yards as NM ends as co-champs of WMC.

**1969– coach Tom Seroczynski (7-1 overall 6-0 WMC champs)**

The West Michigan Conference would add Ravenna as Manistee, still fuming over a possible forfeiture loss to Hart in 1967, dropped out. When Whitehall returned to the WMC in 1985 the venerable conference would remain intact until a monster change in 2022. The 1969 season would begin one of the best eras in NM football. NM, from the end of the 1968 season until early in 1972, would win 22 straight WMC Conference games. And--- mythical Class C State Champs in 1971!

A constant for NM football over the years has been their small number of varsity players once Reeths Puffer became a four-year school. Coach Tom Seroczynski may have bemoaned his lack of manpower to begin the 1969 season but what he lacked in quantity the team was loaded with quality---and speed! Two-way All-Conference performer Jamie Woodruff headlined the returnees from their fine 7-1 1968 team. The backfield would also return a pair of ‘burners’ in Kurt Boyd and Tim Johnson, North Muskegon’s only track athlete to win the 100-yard dash at the Greater Muskegon Track & Field Meet. Waiting in the wings were a couple of juniors who can also fly, Dennis Witham and Merle Swanson. Only one starter returned to the line, senior Doug MacDonald, but waiting in the wings were several promising underclassmen who would help NM become the dominant team the next three years in the WMC. Seroczynski will also have back as his assistant, future NM long time successful coach Dave Cooke.

Jamie Woodruff demonstrated in the season opener that he would be ranked with many great NM quarterbacks to call the signals for the Blue and Gold. The returning two-way All-Conference quarterback had a hand-in-all six North Muskegon tallies in a 40-20 opening game victory over Kent City. So dominant have the Norse been in their eight-game series over the years with Kent City that the final totals show NM scoring 305 points to Kent City’s 35. Woodruff drilled TD aerials of nine, 35, and 21 yards and in between he also had TD jaunts of seven, 17, and two yards. Dave Erickson was on the receiving end of Woodruff’s first TD strike of nine yards. The second TD pass went to his favorite receiver from the previous season Kurt Boyd good for 35 yards. It was on the next play that North Muskegon, with woeful kicking woes over the years, surely welcomed in the two-point conversion rule by run or pass instituted in time for the 1969 season. Woodruff connected with Boyd for the first two-pointer in NM history. In the meantime, Kent City had also scored a pair of touchdowns but thanks to the Boyd two-pointer the Norse led 14-12. Woodruff then hit junior speedster Merle Swanson with his 3rd TD pass good for 21-yards with just 30 seconds left in the half. Woodruff ran for the first of his three rushing touchdowns to up the Norse lead to 26-12 but Kent City wouldn’t fold as they closed the gap to 26-20. Woodruff then tallied on TD runs of 17 and two to make the final score read 40-20.

After giving up an uncustomary three touchdowns the previous week, the emphasis was on defense on the week of the Hart game. The work on improving the defense paid off as the Norse would not allow more than a touchdown in a single game the rest of the season until their final contest in 1969. The Norse scored in every quarter to earn a 27-6 road win in their conference opener with Hart. NM scored the game’s first three TDs before Hart could get on the board in the third period. Kurt Boyd plunged over from the one to score the first NM touchdown. Jamie Woodruff, an all- conference defensive back, set up his own eight-yard keeper sweep for the NM tally in the second quarter. Tim Johnson, who had dashed 47 yards on a running play in the first half, dashed 70-yards for the third quarter NM TD. After Merle Swanson intercepted a Hart pass in the fourth quarter Woodruff hit Boyd on an 18-yard aerial to complete the Norse scoring. NM rolled up 318 rushing yards in their 27-6 victory.

While your author was calling the Traverse City-Muskegon game at Hackley stadium, my alma mater was pasting Montague at Fred Jacks Field 39-0. The Norse again rushed for more than 300 yards in their shutout victory with little need to go to the air. One of the few aerials that NM quarterback Jamie Woodruff threw was an 18-yard TD pass to Kurt Boyd to begin the scoring. Woodruff tallied the next TD on a short three-yard scamper with Boyd adding the next six points on another three-yard trek into the end zone. Denny Witham scored his first touchdown in a Norse uniform with an 11-yard tally with junior Merle Swanson adding the final two TDs with runs of 11 and three yards.

With some sterner opposition from a Mason Co Central team the Norse mixed in the run with the pass in their hard-fought 20-6 victory in Scottville. Mason County out rushed NM slightly, 225-205, but the difference was the versatility of NM quarterback Jamie Woodruff. The senior signal caller threw for 158 yards that included a 51-yard scoring strike to Kurt Boyd for the first NM TD late in the first quarter. The Spartans were saved by the clock late in the first half as Woodruff, with 20 and 15 yards passes to Rod Raymour and Mike Patton, moved the ball to the Spartan four before time ran out in the half. Speedster Tim Johnson set up a pair of second half touchdown runs by Woodruff with near identical rushes of 44 and 45 yards. Woodruff followed each of Johnson’s runs with quarterback keeper runs from nine and 11 yards out to make it 4 and 0 to begin the 1969 season.

The Norse had their four-game winning streak come to a halt when Manistee shut out the Norse 15-0 in a game played on a muddy Fred Jacks Field on the Northside. The much larger Chippewa team dominated in all the stats. Fortunately, for the Norse rooters, Manistee was no longer a member of the West Michigan Conference, and the Norse would remain 3-0 in WMC action. The game marked the end of a hard-fought 16 game series between the two teams that first began back in the 1930s. NM would hold a slight 9 to 7 advantages in the series, with one very controversial tie in 1954 that kept NM from posting a perfect season. With Manistee back in the expanded WMC, but in a division opposite the Norse, it’s likely the two will meet again in the not-too-distant future.

In a series that was first dominated by the Norse but has clearly shifted the last few years to Oakridge, the Norse defeated Oakridge 47-8, the most points NM has ever tallied against the Eagles as well as their largest margin of victory over the years. NM’s seven TDs were distributed between five players. Jamie Woodruff and Kurt Boyd each scored a pair of touchdowns, Woodruff on two of his trademark QB sweeps from 7 and 41 yards with Kurt Boyd scoring on runs of 12 and two yards. Woodruff passed to Rod Raymour for a 57-yard TD strike while Tim Johnson showed his speed on a 41-yard dash to pay dirt. Denny Witham closed out the NM scoring with the day’s longest TD run of 78 yards.

The WMC title was on the line when NM traveled to Shelby for a game between the two unbeaten teams in conference play, both boasting perfect 4-0 records.

The Norse would be playing without their junior speedster running back Tim Johnson, out for the season following a knee injury. The Norse had more than a capable replacement in another junior swifty in Merle Swanson. The Norse had to rally to earn the 12-8 victory and at least clinch a tie in the WMC. Merle Swanson chipped in with a pair of key long runs to set up both NM TDs. Trailing 8-0 following a second period TD by Shelby, the Norse drove 57 yards with Swanson eating up 43 of those yards on one run, setting up Jamie Woodruff’s 2-yard run with just 1:19 left in the first half. Still trailing by two points after Shelby basketball star Kim Griffin ran for the two-point conversion after their first half TD, the Norse were still on the short end of the score with less than two-minutes remaining in the game. Starting at the Shelby 49 with but 1:49 left in the game NM began a final desperation drive to pull off the win. Swanson nearly scored on a 20-yard run but was stopped at the one-yard line. Woodruff then plunged over the goal line to give the Norse the win and clinched a tie for the conference championship.

Only a loss to Ravenna would deny NM the 1969 WMC championship. With NM boasting a perfect WMC 5-0 record, and the Bulldogs winless in conference play, it looked the Norsemen would be a shoo-in to come away with an easy victory. Ravenna, however had other ideas by unleashing a passing combination featuring quarterback Tony Krepps and wide receiver Paul Herremans. Krepps first found Stan Jansen on a 53-yard bomb to put the Bulldogs on the board with just five minutes gone in the opening quarter. Jamie Woodruff, who had an awesome final game for the Norse, put a stop to another Ravenna threat by intercepting a Krepps pass at the Ravenna 33. On the next play Woodruff went for the jugular and hit Merle Swanson good for a 33-yard TD. Tim Meade kicked the extra point to give NM their first lead at 7-6. Ravenna came right back with Krepps connecting with Herremans, a long-time baseball and football coach at Ravenna for a 26-yard TD. The Bulldogs made the two-point conversion to take a 14-7 lead. Woodruff dashed 51-yards for a NM TD but the point after missed and Ravenna, still smelling an upset, led 14-13. To add further laurels to Woodruff’s final game in a NM uniform, he also set a school record with four interceptions in the contest, giving him 22 ‘picks’ in his career. The Norse then took a lead they would not relinquish when Kurt Boyd, after Jim Dagen recovered a fumble, sped 25 yards for the TD and the Norse were now on top 21-14. Ravenna kept the pressure on when Krepps went to the air again, this time connecting with Dennis Patterson on a 35-yard scoring play. The point after missed and the Norse kept their narrow lead at 21-20. The thrills continued for the chilled fans at Fred Jacks Field on the northside when Woodruff again ran for a long TD, this from 53-yards out early into the fourth quarter. The Norse went for two points and a two-possession lead and Merle Swanson came through for the hosts by doing just that by racing into the endzone to stretch the lead to 29-20. The Norse enjoyed even more breathing room when Boyd added another six points on a run to go up 37-20. The Bulldogs would not roll over as Krepps threw his fourth TD pass of the game, this time a 73-yard bomb to Herremans to make the final score NM 37, Ravenna 28. The Norse were now on top of the WMC standings all alone with a perfect 6-0 record.

The Norsemen would finish in the top ten in the final Class C AP poll (9th) and once again dominated the All-Conference team. Jamie Woodruff once again was selected on both first teams, as quarterback and a defensive back. The senior finished his career at NMHS with 26 touchdowns, 14 rushing, 12 passing and 2193 yards in total offense. His 22 interceptions during his three-year career still stands as an all-time NM best. Woodruff would take his talents to Northern Colorado where he was a three-year starter for UNC. Junior Tim Johnson and Kurt Boyd both made the team as running backs while upfront linemen Doug McDonald and junior Tom Metzdorf made 1st team honors. Along with Woodruff on the defensive team were Linebacker Mike Patton and sophomore middle guard Jim Dagen. As good as NM was in 1969, it would only get better --- much better in 1970 & 71.

Record Score Interesting Fact

1-0 NM 40, Kent City 20 Jamie Woodruff take part in all six NM TDs --- 3 passing and 3 rushing.

2-0 \*NM 27, Hart 6 NM scores in every quarter. Woodruff a rushing TD and TD pass to Kurt Boyd. Boyd also a rushing TD and Tim Johnson goes 70 yards for TD.

3-0 \*NM 39, Montague 0 Merle Swanson a pair of TD runs (11 &3), Boyd a 18-yd pass & 3 yard run. Woodruff sweeps in from 3 and Denny Witham scorers from 11.

4-0 \*NM 20 Mason Co Cent 6 Woodruff to Boyd for 51-yards. Woodruff score from Nine & 11 after Tim Johnson sets up both tallies with runs of 44 & 45 yards.

4-1 Manistee 15, NM 0 Manistee dominates Norse on a muddy Fred Jacks Field in the last game played in the 16-game series.

5-1 \*NM 47, Oakridge 8 Wood rushed for 2 TDs and a 57-yard TD aerial to Rod Raymour. Boyd scores from 12 and 2 yards. Johnson 41-yard TD.

6-1 \*NM 12, Shelby 8 Swanson two long runs to set up a pair of Woodruff Tds; the winning TD coming with one-minute left in the game.

7-1 \*NM 37, Ravenna 28 Winless Ravenna throws scare into NM. Woodruff 2 long TD runs (51 & 53) also TD pass to Swanson & intercepted school record 4 passes, Boyd 2 TD runs.

**1970– coach Tom Seroczynski (8-0 overall 6-0 WMC champs, 2nd ranked in state)**

Three all-conference players were included among the nine lettermen returning for the 1970 season, while 13 members of the undefeated JV team would make this 1970 team one of the most powerful Norse teams in school history. Halfback Tim Johnson, tackle Tom Metzdorf and middle guard Jim Dagen all returned for the Norse with quarterback Rick Jones and end Jeff Chrystal set to give NM one of the most dynamic 1-2 punches in Norse history. It looked like NM was set to have a good season, but ‘good’ would be an understatement.

NM began their onslaught of their 1970 foes with a 43-0 shutout over Kent City.

The Norse wasted little time getting things started in the season opener when Art Hirsh recovered a Kent City fumble in Eagle territory. Tim Johnson then tallied from three yards in what would prove to be the winning touchdown. Kent City played NM tough in the first half as only a short 22-yard field goal by Jeff Chrystal and the first of three TD runs by Merle Swanson gave NM a 16-0 halftime lead. Following a scoreless third quarter the NM offense showed its might in the game’s final period. In what would prove to be the first of many, Rick Jones connected with Chrystal with a 10-yard TD pass. Jones then paired up with Swanson for a 25-yard strike to set up a Swanson seven-yard TD run. Jones later hit Mike Schalk from 15 yards out before Swanson completed the Norse scoring with a 33-yard sprint to paydirt.

It took NM’s imposing offense a little time to get in sync after a scoreless first quarter in game number two vs. Hart, a 40-0 NM shutout. A Tim Johnson 14-yard TD run early in the second quarter got the Norsemen rolling. Merle Swanson’s 3-yard TD moved the lead to 13-0 and then a 25-yard TD strike from Rick Jones to Dave Erickson gave the host Norse a 20-0 halftime lead. A Jones aerial to Tim Johnson good for 49 yards boosted the lead to 27-0. The defense got in on the act with John Closz returning an interception 67 yards before Swanson closed the scoring out with a 30-yard burst.

NM made their first road trip a success as they posted their third straight shut out to begin the season with a 41-0 whitewash at Montague. Highlighting the game was a 96-yard TD dash by speedy back Tim Johnson. Merle Swanson kept scoring TDs, one on a 38-yard TD pass from Jones and another on a six-yard run. Dennis Witham brought the Norse rooters to their feet with a 67-yard punt return for six points. The Norse did most of their work on the ground as they rushed for 260 yards. Jones, a prolific passer had but one TD pass, but he scored a couple of rushing TDs from short yardage.

The AP polls had the mighty Norsemen listed at number three in the Class C polls and that ranking surely was not going to tumble following a 69-0 pasting of Scottville, the most points scored in NM history vs. the Spartans. Rick Jones threw for a program record six touchdown passes. Jones connected on TD strikes to Dave Erickson twice (24 & 44), a 36-yard TD pass to Tim Johnson, a 29 yarder to Merle Swanson, Jones to Mike Schalk for 18 and his final TD toss went to Jeff Chrystal for 16. I’m not sure how well received that last TD was viewed by the Scottville fans with the Norse leading 62-0 at the time. Dennis Witham fielded the second half kickoff and raced 83 yards for a TD. Tim Johnson had a pair of TD runs to begin the rout (5 & 15) with Merle Swanson igniting the NM scoring parade with a 63-yard burst.

A new opponent appeared on the NM schedule in Grand Rapids East Christian, and they performed no better than NM’s WMC rivals as they became the Norsemen’s fifth straight shutout victim 34-0. NM’s defense held the visitors from the Furniture City to only 25 yards net gained on the night compared to NM’s total of 314. Jones again had a productive game passing for a pair of TD strikes, one of 25 yards to Dave Erickson, the other for 35 to Denny Witham. Merle Swanson continued his exceptional running with a pair of TDs (51 & 4). Noted for securing yet another shutout victory were Jeff Chrystal and John Closz. Chrystal was not only a sensational end on offense and a great defensive player, but the junior whiz also did the placekicking chores for his team.

With Norse fans possibly envisioning a possible perfect season of eight shutouts, Oakridge put a halt to that kind of wishful thinking as they scored 13 points, the only points allowed by the NM defense all season! However, NM countered with 43 to extend their record to a perfect 6-0. NM’s Tim Johnson, on the very first play from scrimmage sprinted 60 yards for a TD and it looked like NM was going to be in for another easy victory. However, Oakridge came back on their first possession and scored the first TD against the NM defense on the year on a John Scraver pass of seven yards to John Thompson. NM quickly regained the lead on the first of three TD passes on the evening from Rick Jones. Jones connected with running back Denny Witham for 67 yards, but Oakridge scored before half to cut the lead to 14-13. The second half was all NM as Jones threw TD strikes of 64 yards to Mike Schalk and 18 to Jeff Chrystal. Completing the NM scoring were TD runs of 38 by Johnson and 11 by Merle Swanson.

The WMC title was squarely on the lines as Shelby came to Fred Jacks field boasting of a perfect record. However, only NM would stay undefeated on the season with a convincing 42-0 pasting of the visiting Tigers. Rick Jones not only threw a pair of TD passes, both to Dave Erickson good for 14- & 26-yards strikes, but also intercepted two passes from his defensive backfield perch. Jones also tallied on a quarterback sneak for another tally while Johnson and Swanson also scored on a short one-yard plunges. One of the three NM interceptions on the evening was from Mike Schalk, who returned his pick into a 36-yard TD.

After getting a strong effort from Ravenna to close out the previous season, NM was looking for much of the same in the final game of the 1970 regular season. NM was up to the task and completed their first undefeated and untied season in 28 years with a 39-0 victory over Ravenna, their sevenths shutout in eight games. Rick Jones concluded his outstanding junior season with three TD passes, two of those to his favorite target for the upcoming 1971 season, junior end Jeff Chrystal. Dave Erickson also caught a TD strike from Jones, his seventh of the season as NM ended the eight-game schedule 8-0. Perhaps sometimes lost in the shuffle was NM’s defense who limited the host Bulldogs to 102 yards net gained for the entire contest. Denny Witham added a TD burst from 27 yards while Tim Johnson and Merle Swanson ended the season with a remarkable achievement: having scored a TD in every game on the eight-game schedule.

Playing their final game in a Norsemen uniform were such stalwarts as Dave Erickson, John Closz, Art Hirsh, Randy Rhoades as well the 1-2 backfield punch of Swanson and Johnson.

NM would conclude the season rated number 2 in the state in the AP polls, trailing only undefeated Galesburg-Augusta in the final Class C poll. NM obviously dominated the All WMC team with Juniors Jeff Chrystal, Rick Jones, Jim Dagen, and Mike Schalk all first team honorees. They were joined on the All-Star squad by senior running backs Merle Swanson and Tim Johnson and lineman Tom Metzdorp. Metzdorp and Johnson were returning all-conference selectees as was Dagen, who made the squad as a sophomore. With such domination of their WMC opponents it is likely there were other Norse deserving of All-conference honors, especially senior end Dave Erickson who caught seven TD passes on the season. Erickson did make honorable mention in the Free Press All State team while the junior combo of Rick Jones and Jeff Chrystal were accorded honors on the prestigious first team Class C All-State team. To finish number two in the state was most impressive, but could NM fare even better in 1971?

Record Score Interesting Fact

1-0 NM 43, Kent City 0 Merle Swanson 3 TDs, Jeff Chrystal TD and a field goal, Tim Johnson and Mike Schalk TD. Jones 2 TD passes

2-0 NM 40, Hart 0 Swanson 2 TD (3 & 30) Jones 2 TD passes, 25 pass to Erickson and 49 to Tim Johnson, Johnson 14-yard TD run, John Closz 67 int return for TD.

3-0 NM 41, Montague 0 Tim Johnson 96-yard TD, Swanson 2 TDs – 1 rushing ,1 receiving, Denny Witham 67-yard punt return for TD, Jones 2 rushing TDs.

4-0 NM 69, Mason Co 0 Jones a school record 6 TD Passes. Johnson 3 TDs, Swanson and Erickson 2, Witham 83-yard kickoff return.

5-0 NM 34, Grand Rapids E. C. 0 Swanson 2 TD (51 & 4), Jones 2 TD passes (Eirckson 25 & Witham 35, Johnson 2-yard TD run

(60 & 38) Swanson 11-yard TD run

6-0 NM 43, Oakridge 13 Jones 3 TD passes (Witham 67, Schalk 64, Chrystal 18) Johnson 2 TD runs of 60 and 38, Swanson 11-yard TD.

7-0 NM 42, Shelby 0 Jones 2 TD passes to Erickson 14 & 26) Schalk 35 yd int return for TD, Jones, Johnson, & Swanson 1-yard TDs.

8-0 NM 39, Ravenna 0 Jones 3 TD passes (Chrystal 2, 12 & 25 – Erickson 27), Witham 27 yard TD, Johnson 1 yd TD and Swanson 4 yd TD.

**1971– coach Tom Seroczynski (8-0 overall 6-0 WMC champs, 1st ranked in state)**

NM would lose the best running back combo since Don Bowen & Moe Sikkenga from the early 1940s in Tim Johnson and Merle Swanson, but NM returned a lot of talent to begin the 1971 season, including the passing duo of Rick Jones and Jeff Chrystal, both returning 1st string all-state performers. Jim Dagen, a two-time all-conference selectee would anchor the defensive line and would get plenty of help from the likes of players that included Tom Kesteloot and Jerry Whitman.

NM left little doubt that they would once again be a formidable opponent for all with an opening day 57-0 romp over an outmatched in all departments Kent City team. In the eight games played over the years between NM and Kent City this would be the most lopsided of all the games played, all won by North Muskegon.

Rick Jones began the season right where he left off from 1970 by throwing four TD passes before giving way early in the second half to reserve players. Jones found senior Mike Schalk twice for TD passes of 35 and 15 and the Kent City game began with Jeff Chrystal showing NM fans why he would go down in Norse lore as one of the best to suit up in a Blue & Gold uniform. Chrystal did it all in this game; catching a 23-yard aerial for a TD, intercepting a Kent City pass from his defensive position and returned it 35 yards for a TD and demonstrated his versatility by ending the first half with a 24-yard field goal. Jones accounted for five TD’s as he also scored on a 3-yard QB keeper. One of the recipients of a Jones TD pass was a pass to Jim Dagen good for 21 yards. Completing the scoring for the Norse were TD runs from Dale Mead (4 yards) and Bob Gilman.

NM began conference play with a road trip to Hart where the Pirates didn’t roll over and play dead against the heavily favored Norsemen. NM was ‘held’ to 26 points in the 26-14 victory over the Pirates, their lowest total points scored in two years. Rick Jones ran for one TD and threw a 31-yard pass to Jim Dagen to account for two of NM’s four TDs. Dale Mead crashed over from the one early in the game to give NM the early lead. Hart came back to tie the score, but NM responded with two TDs before halftime, the first, a TD pass to Dagen and the second was on a 34-yard TD run by Denny Witham. Jones 6-yard QB keeper in the third period ended all scoring in the game.

In a game marred by penalties, NM overcame more that 100 yards in penalties to post a 32-0 shutout over Montague. Jeff Chrystal had a pair of TDs, one a pass from Jones for 25 and the second on his second pick six on the season with a 40-yard return of a Montague pass. Dennis Witham a pair of short TDs and Dale Mead a one-yard plunge completed NM’s scoring. NM had a fine balance with the run and the pass as Jones passed for 191 yards while the NM running backs rolled up 183 yards.

When the polls came out in the following week’s newspapers, NM had moved into the top spot in the Class C polls, with perennial power Hudson High close behind in second place. The Norse did not roll up the score against Scottville as they did in their 69-0 victory from the previous season, but once again shut out the Spartans 34-0. Denny Witham rushed for 3 TDs as NM posted their third shutout in four games. Although he only threw for one TD, despite the rainy weather, Jones set up many of the NM TDs with his passing as he threw for 220 yards with his only TD strike a short five-yard toss to his favorite receiver Jeff Chrystal. Leading the defense in earning the shutout were Tom Kesteloot, Jerry Whitman and Jack Olson.

NM scored often and early in a 51-12 romp over Grand Rapids East Christian. It wasn’t until Norse coach Tom Seroczynski substituted freely in the second half before EGR Christian could find the end zone against the NM defense. East Christian would be in its last year as a school before being renamed Grand Rapids Christian. Rick Jones had another monster day passing as he threw for 190 yards with seven of his completions good for 100 yards and two touchdowns to Jeff Chrystal. Jim Dagen had one of the longest interception returns in NM history when he raced 86 yards after his interception in the second half.

Normally when a team loses five fumbles, three inside their opponent’s five-yard line and another from inside the 20, one shouldn’t expect to come out on top. However, the Norse overcame those miscues with a potent defense that only allowed Oakridge never to get closer than 48 yards from the Norse goal line as NM held off the Eagles 12 -0. It was the 6th consecutive win for the Norse over a school that was only in its seventh year as a 4-year school. The stout NM defense allowed the Eagles only 111 net yards in the contest. A Rick Jones to Mike Schalk pass for 37 yards would prove to be all the points needed but Dale Mead added an insurance touchdown run from four yards out to insure NM their 6th straight victory. The victory proved costly however, as two-time All-WMC performer Jim Dagen broke his collarbone and would be out for the rest of the season.

While much of the attention was riveted across the lake at Hackley Stadium where the top two rated teams in the state in Class A, Muskegon and Traverse City would decide the state title, WMC conference fans would be treated to another battle of the unbeatens when Shelby hosted NM. Shelby was the last WMC conference team to defeat NM back in 1967 and would be out to snap NM’s 17 game winning streak. Your author was back in his old hometown on this Friday night as I was at a packed Hackley Stadium doing the play-by-play as a radio announcer for Traverse City football. Although there were not the 11,000 fans at Shelby as there was at Hackley Stadium, those who were in Shelby saw NM survive their toughest test in two years. This was a banner era for Shelby Sports as the Tiger basketball team would win back-to-back state championships in basketball while their wrestling team would also capture a state title in the 1971-72 school year. NM prevailed 20-13 over a fine Shelby team with Dale Mead having a big day for NM with 120 rushing yards and two touchdowns. Shortly after Mead’s TD carry Dennis Witham returned a Shelby punt 70 yards for a TD. Mead’s second TD in the second period gave NM a 20-6 lead at halftime and then they had their defense go to work in the second half. Penalties were a hindrance to NM’s offense the entire game as they were assessed 120 yards in penalties. Jeff Chrystal, despite being doubled teamed the entire game caught passes for 55-yards, many on crucial third downplays. Credit surely should go to an inspired Shelby team as they stopped Rick Jones from throwing a TD pass for the first time in his career.

NM then closed out their historical season and two-year run with a 54-0 defeat over Ravenna, the most lopsided win over Ravenna in NM history. The potent 1-2 combination of Rick Jones to Jeff Chrystal ended in a blaze of glory. Chrystal, in addition to catching 6 passes for 108 yards, also intercepted a pass and returned it to paydirt from 20 yards out. Mike Schalk closed out his fine career with a pair of tallies, the first on a 45-yard pass interception to score NM’s first TD, the other a TD pass reception good for 30 yards. Limited to just kicking chores due to a broken collarbone Jim Dagen got in on the scoring act by converting six extra points from placement. One oddity in the game was that NM scored 54 points while also being assessed a whopping 139 yards in penalties. The final high school state poll saw both North Muskegon in Class C and Muskegon in Class A named state champs in their respective classes. Many NM fans could argue that the 1970 team, which put up even more impressive numbers than the 1971 Norse squad, also could have been voted as tops in their class. As one might expect NM again dominated the WMC All-Conference teams with nine making first team honors. Earning first team honors on offense were repeat winners Rick Jones and Jeff Chrystal with Denny Witham also on the first team. Jim Dagen, despite missing the last couple of games with an injury made the WMC first team for the third straight year on defense. Jeff Chrystal also made the first unit on defense while Mike Schalk was a repeat first team honoree on defense. Rounding out the NM All-Conference team was defensive lineman Tom Kesteloot. Jeff Chrystal, who would go on to have a great career as a starting end in the Big Ten for Illinois, was a no-brainer choice as a repeat first team All-State end.

Record Score Interesting Fact

1-0 NM 57, Kent City 0 Rick Jones 4 td passes (Mike Schalk 2, 35 & 15, Jeff Chrystal 15, Jim Dagen 21), Crystal int. return 36 for TD & 24 yd FG, Dale Mead 4 yd TD run, Bob Gillman 17 yd TD,

2-0 NM 26, Hart 14 Jones TD pass of 31 to Dagen and a 6-yard QB keeper, Dale Mean and Denny Witham 34 yd TD.

3-0 NM 32, Montague 0 Chrystal 2 TDs, one a 25 yd pass from Jones, a second on a 40 yd int. returned for TD. Mead 1 yd TD, Witham 2 TDs (8 & 1)

4-0 NM 34, Scottville 0. Witham 3 TDs from 5, 9 & 4. Mead 6 yd td run. Jones - Chrystal 5 yds

5-0 NM 51, GR East Ch. 12 Jones 4 TD passes (Chrystal 29 & 49, Dagen 12, Schalk 11) Dagen 86-yard int return for TD, Schalk 11-yard TD, Witham 5 yd TD.

6-0 NM 12, Oakridge 0 Jones to Schalk 37-yard TD, Mead 4 yd TD. NM five fumbles.

7-0 NM 20, Shelby 13 Mead 120 yards rushing & two TDs. Withham 70-yard punt return

8-0 NM 54, Ravenna 0 Chrystal 105 receiving 1 TD plus 20 yd int TD. Shalk 2 TDs, 45 yards int & pass from Jones for 30. Jones 2 TD passes plus 60-yard punt return for TD. Mead 2 TD (1 & 4)

**1972– coach Tom Seroczynski (5-3 overall Montague WMC champs)**

Coach Tom Seroczynski returns for his sixth year as the NM head coach with an incredible won loss record of 38-3. Unlike today’s era where there seemingly appears there are more coaches on the sidelines than players, Coach ‘Sero’ had but one assistant, Bruce Ford. NM was hurt heavily with graduation losses. NM returned 20 lettermen for the opening of the 1972 season, but only four were starters: tackle Jeff Olson, guard Jeff Scott, defensive end Bob Gilman and tight end David Moore. Seroczynski would have to replace his entire backfield, an ominous chore indeed.

NM opened against a Kent City team that they had pounded over the last two years an even 100 to 0. Kent City proved right away that this was not going to be another Norsemen trouncing as Kent City scored first and even led at halftime 6-0. NM regrouped at halftime and scored three unanswered TDs in the final half to win their 20th straight game 21-6. NM took the lead for the first time when Chris Laundra ran for a touchdown from six yards out and Jeff Kersh converted the first of his three made extra points. A Tom Achterhoff TD from five yards out gave NM some much needed breathing room while Laundra completed all the scoring in the final period with his second TD run from the one-yard line.

Tom Achterhoff scored a pair of short yardage TD runs and Chris Laundra’s interception and return of 30 yards provided all the points needed for NM to win their 21st straight game in a 19-6 victory over Hart. Setting up two of those touchdowns scored by NM were some long-range passing plays from NM quarterback Tom Thornton. Thornton hit on five of nine passes for 123 yards, including long yardage completions of 41 and 48 yards to set up both NM TDs. Jack Olson stopped one potential Hart scoring threat with a fumble recovery. Unlike the previous two season whereby NM had only a few minor injuries, early in this season NM had already loss the services of three starters.

As the story goes, all good things must come to an end. Dan Wackernagle returned a Norse punt 90 yard before five minutes had gone by in the game to give Montague a 6-0 lead. When the final horn sounded ending the contest that was all the scoring for the entire game on a rainy night in Montague. NM had a 137-96 edge in offense, but Montague defenders dumped NM running backs for a loss 11 times during the game. Two fumbles lost during the game and 80 yards in penalties did not help the Norse as Montague handed the Norse their first loss in WMC play since 1967 while also stopping NM’s winning streak at 21 games. When the 1972 season had ended it was no disgrace to lose to Montague by a single score as the Wildcats would post a perfect 9-0 season and would be ranked fourth in the final AP Class C poll.

Perhaps still smarting from a humiliating 69-0 loss to the Norse two years ago, Scottville pulled a stunner and edged NM 14-13. The Spartans scored with just 38 seconds left in the game, went for the two-pointer, and cashed it in for a stunning victory over the Norse. Scottville, now officially named Mason County Central, took a 6-0 lead at halftime. NM took the lead on a Chris Laundra short burst from the two to tie the game at 6-6. Jeff Kersh than gave NM the lead with his successful boot from placement. It appeared NM had clinched the game as they scored on a Tom Achterhoff 15-yard run with just 3:38 left to play. However, the Spartans got great field position on the following kickoff starting near mid-field. Quarterback John Urka connected with Terry Hankwitz for six points to draw MCC within two points. The same twosome teamed up with a pass play for the two-point conversion and the victory.

The first ever game played between NM and Manistee Catholic saw the Norse snap their rare two-game losing streak by defeating the visitors 20-6. The homecoming crowd at NM’s Fred Jack’s Field saw NM score two first half TDs, both scored by Tom Achterhoff. Manistee made it close as they scored on their opening drive of the second half. Deep in their own territory with just 3-minutes left in the game, NM’s Mike Staple caused a fumble that he recovered in the Manistee end zone for the game’s final TD.

It what would prove to be the first of many wins over the Norse over the years, it took Oakridge six years to earn their first win as they downed the Norsemen 20-12. Oakridge scored two touchdowns in the first half to take a 13-0 lead before the Norse could answer before halftime. NM rallied to score first on a fourth and 14 play when Tom Thornton connected on a screen pass to Tom Achterhoff that was good for 31 yards and a TD. NM then received the kickoff to begin the second half and marched 60 yards for the score with Achterhoff running the final 20 yards for the tally. Both extra point attempts failed, and Oakridge tacked on the winning drive in the second half to make the final score read 20-12 and sent NM to their third loss of the season.

NM played Shelby in their final home game of the 1972 season, and it was the passing of Tom Thornton that keyed the 21-0 shutout. Thornton hit Jim Duplissis for a pair of TDs, the first from 10 yards out and the second covered 30 yards midway through the third period. Tom Achterhoff was on the receiving end of the third TD pass with just two minutes left in the game. Contributing to the shutout was the fine defensive play from Dave Moore, Tom Closz and Jack Olsen.

NM again closed their regular season with Ravenna with Tom Thornton beating Ravenna not with his arm, but his legs. Thornton rushed for his only two TDs on the entire season, both long jaunts from 40 and 55 yards as NM rushed for 322 yards on the night. Kevin Boyd had a huge game for the Norse as he rushed for 144 yards in 22 tries as NM closed out the season with their second straight shutout.

Selected to the WMC All-Conference team following the season were three offensive players: Seniors Jim Duplissis and Tom Achterhoff while junior Jeff Scott was accorded first team honors for his play as an offensive lineman. Scott also made the first unit as a defensive linebacker while senior Mike Staple made the team as a defensive lineman. With only one underclassman selected to the WMC honor squad there certainly couldn’t have been a huge ray of optimism for the 1973 season. But the Norsemen would surprise!

Record Score Interesting Fact

1. NM 21, Kent City 6 Chris Laundra 2 TDS (6 & 1), Tom Achterhoff 6-yard TD
2. NM 19, Hart 6 Achterhoff 2 TDs (1 & 3) Laundraa 30 yd int. For TD.

2-1 NM 0, Montague 6 First loss in 21 games. 90 yd punt return winner for Cats.

2-2 NM 13, Scottville 14 Spartans score with 0:38 left. Laundra and Achterhoff NM TDs.

3-2 NM 20, Manistee CC 6 Achterhoff 2 TDS (7 & 15) Mike Staple recover fumble for TD.

3-3 NM 12, Oakridge 20 Thornton to Achterhoff 31 yd TD, Achterhoff 20 yd TD.

4-3 NM 21, Shelby 0 Thornton 3 TD passes: 2 to Jim Duplissis, & one to Achterhoff for 45 yards.

5-3 NM 14, Ravenna 0 Thornton 2 TD runs (55 & 40) Kevin Boyd 144 yards rushing.

**1973– coach Tom Seroczynski (9-0 overall NM WMC champs 2nd State Class D Polls)**

There could not have been a great amount of optimism for NM football fortunes in 1973 after NM posted a 5-3 record in 1972. In addition, enrollment at NMHS had dropped to where the Norsemen were now a Class D school playing a Class C & B schedule. However, the Norse would surprise perhaps even their closest followers as they posted an undefeated record. NM would strengthen their schedule by adding defending NCAA champ Newaygo to their schedule while adding, after an eight-year absence, Whitehall to their slate to give NM a ninth game. That game would prove to be a dandy. The Norse would return several key components from their previous season, including quarterback Tom Thornton and ace running back Tom Achterhoff, a first team running back on the WMC All-Conference team from 1972. Also returning as starters from 1972 were middle guard Tom Closz, Offensive guard, and defensive end Brent Holcomb, tackle Keith Fauble and tight end-defensive back Nick Nedeau. Several juniors would join those veterans in the starting lineup, and many would make huge contributions to the team’s success. Head coach Tom Seroczynski would also welcome a pair of newcomers to his coaching staff, Dave Warmack and Ed Zednick.

NM would kick off their 1973 schedule with Newaygo, a team NM hadn’t played since WWII ended in 1945. The Norsemen had little trouble defeating the defending NCAA champs with a decisive 41-6 victory. The Norsemen had a slim 13-6 lead at halftime before breaking the game wide-open in the second half.

NM then traveled to Hart for their first WMC Conference game and came away with a surprisingly easy 32-0 shutout victory over the Pirates. It was clear that the Norsemen had found an outstanding running back in Jim Pancy. Pancy had a pair of long TD runs, one of 80 and the other of 61. Tom Thornton connected with Tom Achterhoff from 35 yards out for a TD while Achterhoff also had a TD run of 20 yards. Reserve quarterback Bruce Bos finished NM’s scoring on the night with a 10-yard completion to Bruce Lindstrom. NM totaled more than 400 yards in total offense while the defense that shut out Hart was led by Don Stafford, Nick Nedeau and Brent Holcomb.

If NM’s 32-0 shutout of Hart the previous week wasn’t an eye-opener, then surely the Norsemen’s 33-12 conquest of defending WMC champ Montague served notice that NM was again a force to be reckoned with. The loss for Montague also snapped the Wildcat’s impressive 13 game winning streak. Special team play played a huge role in the Norse triumph. The defense sparkled as well as NM intercepted five Montague passes and swooped up two Wildcat fumbles. Tom Achterhoff’s 62 yards punt return before he was tackled at the Montague one-yard line set up NM’s first TD on a Tom Thornton QB sneak. Shortly after Montague had scored their second TD to take a 12-7 lead, Jim Pancy hauled in the very short kickoff and 12 seconds later was in the end zone on a 65-yard TD effort. Interceptions and fumble recoveries aided in NM’s other TDs, one a 20-yard pass from Thornton to Achterhoff and another setting up Thornton’s second QB sneak in the game. A Bob Thornton fumble recovery led to NM’s final TD, a 15-yard run from reserve back Lyle Atwood.

A NM road trip to Scottville ended up with NM stifling the host Spartans 20-0 as the NM defense completely shut down the hosts. Mason County Central was able to net but 61 yards against a Norse defense led by Don Stafford, Brent Holcomb and Bruce Bos. NM got all the scoring they needed in the first period with two TDs, the first a Tom Achterhoff 45-yard run, the second a Jim Pancy five-yard TD that was first initiated by a Pancy interception. The final NM tally came in the fourth period on a Jerry Crocker run from eight yards.

NM then made the long road trip to Manistee where NM played Manistee Catholic at one of my all-time favorite venues: Sabre Stadium in Manistee. As a young broadcaster in Traverse City, it was always a pleasure to call a game from the cozy confines of the Manistee CC facility; in an enclosed heated press box on a chilly fall evening, a rarity in comfort during the 1960s and 70s. The Sabres played many of their games on a Saturday night which allowed me to perform double duty as the play-by-play announcer for Traverse City High football on a Friday night and for Traverse City St. Francis as they played many games on Saturday while sharing the same football field with the Trojans. The Norse trailed the host Sabres at halftime 7-6 as their try for the extra point following a two-yard plunge by Jim Pancy failed. NM then took the lead for good in the second half. Again, it was a specialty team play by the Norse that gave NM the lead. Brent Holcomb broke through to block a Manistee CC punt that was recovered in the end zone by Don Stafford. This time NM went for the 2-point conversion and were successful as Tom Achterhoff ran it in for two points to give NM a 14-7 lead. NM then scored with less than a minute to play on a nine-yard TD scamper by Jim Pancy, his second TD of the game to make the final score NM 21-Manistee CC 7.

The opportunistic Norsemen won their sixth straight game on the season with a

26-15 win at home over Oakridge. Tom Achterhoff tied a NM school record with 3 interceptions and scored the final NM touchdown with his six-yard run. Jim Pancy had a spectacular 91-yard TD run called back on a Norse penalty, but NM was able to score on the drive to take a 14-7 lead. The drive ended in impressive fashion with Tom Thornton connecting on four pass plays to Achterhoff, the final completion good for 20-yards as the clock ran out to end the first half. Thornton added a 2-yard run for the third NM tally with Jim Pancy adding the final touches on NM’s night with a 6-yard TD. Nick Nedeau had a pair of interceptions to go along with Achterhoff’s three picks to put a stop to several potential Oakridge scoring drives.

The vaunted NM offensive trio of Tom Thornton, Tom Achterhoff, and Jim Pancy each scored a pair of touchdowns as NM kept their undefeated season intact with a 42-6 pasting of Shelby. In addition to scoring a pair of TDs, Acherhoff again was a force from his defensive backfield spot as he intercepted two passes, giving him a school record 11 picks during the season. Achterhoff also scored a pair of TDs running with the football, one from 20 and the second from two. Pancy had one long TD run of 60 and the speedster had a second from a more modest run of nine. Thornton scored twice on a pair of short runs.

With their 21-12 win over Ravenna, NM had now won the WMC football title in six of the last seven years. Highlighting NM scoring was a school record 99-yard kickoff return by speedster Jim Pancy. Pancy’s burst with 8:45 left in the game was the clincher as NM posted a perfect 7-0 record in the WMC and moved to 8-0 overall. Pancy earlier had a 15-yard TD that broke the scoring ice in the first quarter. Tom Thornton, who rushed for 106 yards from his quarterback post, scored a third NM TD on a 12-yard sprint. Two-way standout Tom Marchido was a force on defense as he was in on 18 tackles.

In what would prove to be the only game between two long-time rivals between 1965 and 1985 before Whitehall rejoined the WMC, NM capped their undefeated season in dramatic fashion as they scored with less than a minute left to edge the Vikings 22-20. Tom Thornton’s heroics led NM to victory using both his legs and arm. NM trailed 12-0 after the first half before rallying in the game’s final two periods. Running the option to perfection, Thornton picked up 50 of his 147 yards rushing on their first drive with his TD run of eight yards pulling the Norse within four points of the Vikings after a successful conversion run by Jim Pancy. Thornton then scored again from 15 yards to give NM a 16-12 lead after another two-point conversion run from Jerry Crocker. Whitehall took the lead with 4:23 left in the game before NM put on a game winning 60-yard drive. Thornton completed passes to Gary Heilman and Crocker deep into Whitehall territory with Jim Pancy running into the end zone from two yards out to cap NM’s perfect 9-0 season.

Despite Traverse City St. Francis losing their final regular season game to St. Ignace, NM with their perfect 9-0 record placed second in the polls to St Francis. NM trailed by just a single point in the polls to a TCSF team guided by former Muskegon Catholic Head Coach Waldo Keating. For the Norse, the future surely looked bright as several veterans would return and would receive help from a Junior Varsity team that also swept its nine-game schedule.

Seven of its regulars were picked for the All-Conference team with both Tom Marchido and Tom Achterhoff selected on both offense and defense. Jim Pancy and quarterback Tom Thornton also were selected giving NM three of the four backfield performers picked. Tackle Brent Holcomb made the top offensive eleven selected while junior Jerry Crocker and senior Nick Nedeau joined Marchido and Achterhoff on the defensive team. Pancy rushed for 950 yards on the season while Achterhoff netted 708 yards on the ground while catching 44 passes for 600 yards. Thornton scored 62 points and completed 51 of 94 passes for 999 yards. So deep were the Norsemen that nine other players were given honorable mention honors. With many lettermen returning and an undefeated junior varsity team all signs pointed for another great year for NM in 1974. Also returning was their head coach, Tom Sereczynski, who was named coach of the year by the Detroit Free Press.

Record Score Interesting Fact

1-0 NM 41, Newaygo 6 Jim Pancy 2 TDs, Tom Thornton to Tom Achterhoff TD.

2-0 NM 32, Hart 0 Pancy 2 TDs (80 & 61), Tom Thornton – Tom Achterhoff 20 yd pass, Achterhoff 20 yd run, Bruce Bos – Bruce Lindstrom 10 yd TS pass.

3-0 NM 33, Montague 12 NM 5 Int & 2 fumble rec. Thornton 2 QB sneaks, Pancy 65 yd kickoff return, Thornton – Achterhoff 5 yd TD pass.

4-0 NM 20, Mason Co. 0 NM defense allows but 61 yards. Achterhoff (45) Pancy (5) and Jerry Crocker (8) the Norse TDs.

5-0 NM 21, Manistee CC 7 Pancy 2 TDS (2 & 9) Don Stafford recovers fumble in end zone.

6-0 NM 26, Oakridge 15 Achterhoff 3 int. Thornton 2-yard TD and 20 yd TD pass to Acheterhooff. Pancy 6-yard TD.

7-0 NM 42, Shelby 6 Achterhoff,Pancy & Thornton 2 TDs each. Acheterhoff 2 int.

8-0 NM 21, Ravenna 12 Pancy a record 99-yard kickoff return, and 15-yard TD run. Thornton rushes for 106 yards and 12-yard TD.

9-0 NM 22, Whitehall 20 Thornton 2 TDs and 147 yds rushing. Pancy 2 yd TD with 0:30 left.

**1974– coach Tom Seroczynski (8-0 overall NM WMC champs 2nd State Class D)**

Although head coach Tom Sereoczynski had to replace several key players lost to graduation, the cupboard was hardly bare for the 1974 Norsemen. Speedy running back Jim Pancy, who rushed for nearly 1000 yards, returned along with several other lettermen, including all-conference performer Jerry Crocker. A promising group of newcomers elevated from the undefeated 1973 junior varsity team would prove to be an enormous help for the 1974 season. It was back to an eight-game schedule for NM as their ninth game opponent from 1973, Whitehall, was locked into the ninth date with another Seaway Conference team. With prospects of another banner season, it was difficult to find an opponent willing to schedule NM. Coach ‘Sero’ would have but one assistant, but it was more than just a good one in Dave Warmack.

NM got off to a productive start with an opening 24-0 victory over Newaygo for their 12th straight victory. NM totaled 400 yards in offense while the defense led by Lyle Atwood, Jerry Crocker, Mark Wolters, and Dan Hoople held Newaygo to but 13 yards rushing for the entire evening. The Norse scored in every period beginning with Jim Pancy’s 24-yard burst in the opening period. Jeff Guy, the son of Stan Guy, the GOAT (Greatest of All Time) in NM football lore set up his own touchdown with an interception. Bruce Bos, who succeeded Tom Thornton as the current NM quarterback, connected with Guy for a 27-yard scoring pass with just three seconds left in the first half. Reid Raymour added a 31-yard FG in the third while Bos ripped off a 40-yard TD in the final period to complete the scoring.

It was the Jim Pancy show in NM’s 31-13 victory over Hart. The senior running back rushed for a school record 307 yards while equaling another school record with five touchdowns in a game as he accounted for all the touchdowns scored by NM. Pancy’s TD runs were from 45, 35, 5, 70 and 25, as he put on a performance that was reminiscent of the great Stan Guy’s feats from the middle 1950s. And speaking of Guy, Stan’s son Jeff led the NM defense in their WMC conference victory over the Pirates with a team leading 14 tackles.

Jim Pancy came close to duplicating his five TD performance from the previous week as he scored four touchdowns in NM’s 54-0 trouncing of Montague. Pancy needed but nine carries to score his four TDs as he had plenty of help from his teammates. The Norse compiled 465 yards in total offense in the rout at Montague while the defense held the hosts to less than 100 yards total offense. Pancy’s TD runs were from 35, seven, eight, and 46 yards. NM’s defense also played a huge role in the victory by intercepting five Wildcats passes as well as a fumble recovery in front of a very quiet home crowd in Montague. Jeff Guy also had a big night for the Norse, on offense, defense and on the specialty team. Guy had a 59-yard punt return to set up his own 1-yd TD on the ensuing drive, had an interception that set up a Bruce Bos scoring toss of 35 yards to Scott WIckland, and had a second TD run of five-yards in the rout of the Wildcats. One of the five NM picks on the night was by Stan Andrie, who returned his interception 50 yards for the score.

A trio of Norse running backs each ran for over 100 yards as NM stomped Mason County Central 55-7 on the Norse gridiron. Jeff Guy had three TDs for the victors, two running (44 & 7) and his final TD was on a 52-yard interception return. Fullback Scott Wickland scored his first TD as a Norsemen from 17 yards out while Jim Pancy ‘only’ scored one TD, that a 23-yard scamper. NM signal caller Bruce Bos had a pair of short quarterback sneaks for TDs and rifled a 65-yard TD pass to John Duplissis. Praised by their defensive effort by coach Seroczynski was the play of linebacker Jerry Crocker and middle guard John Pavlik.

After a couple of routs of a pair of WMC opponents NM had a much tougher opponent in their next contest with Manistee Catholic. NM scored both of their touchdowns in the first half, both on passes from quarterback Bruce Bos, and then held on in the second half to keep their unbeaten streak alive with a 14-7 win over the host Sabres. NM’s offense sputtered most of the night as 100 yards in penalties stalled many of their drives. Bos’ first TD pass was a 30-yarder to Jeff Guy in the opening period while his second TD aerial was a 46-yard toss to John Duplissis. NM also coughed up two fumbles deep in NM territory in the second half, but NM’s stout defense held the host team to but one touchdown as NM improved to a perfect 5-0.

For the second straight year NM was chasing Traverse City St Francis for top honors in the Class D polls. The Norse kept their hopes alive to move to number one in the polls with a 34-12 victory over Oakridge. Once again, the NM defense rose to the occasion by creating five turnovers against the Eagles, four interceptions and a fumble recovery. Their fourth Int. of the game led to a 30-yard pick and TD by Dick Cunningham to sew up the 17th straight win for the Norse. Jim Pancy had a pair of touchdown runs for the Norse, the first a short run from the three, the second, a 30-yarder that gave NM a 21-6 lead at halftime. Jeff Guy’s lone TD on the night from the 12-yard line gave NM a 14-0 lead in the second quarter while Scott Wickland tallied a TD from 10-yards out in the second half. In addition to the Cunningham pick six, Guy, Wickland, and John Duplissis also had solo interceptions while NM defensive stalwart Jerry Crocker recovered a fumble.

NM had to rally to beat a fired-up Shelby Tiger team at Fred Jack’s field 21-15. Bruce Bos connected on a 10-yard TD pass to Scott Wickland with just 53 seconds left in the game to clinch the WMC title. Shelby had tied up the game at 15-15 with 5:31 left in the game before NM started their game winning drive. Jim Pancy’s kick-off return to near mid-field set up the winning TD, while a 19-yard aerial from Bos to WIckland was a key play in the winning drive. NM scored their first TD when they got a big break. Wickland, who also does the punting chores for the Norsemen, bobbled a snap from center and was forced to run and run he did. Wickland ran all the way to the Shelby 30-yard line where a few plays later Jim Pancy scored from the three. NM then scored midway through the second quarter with Jeff Guy scoring from the one. The big play in that drive was a 56-yard pass from Bos to Guy. Reid Raymour, the NM place-kicker received a high pass from center and ran in for a two pointer to give NM a 15-0 lead, later matched by Shelby in the second half.

Jim Pancy ended his brilliant NM career in a blaze of glory as he rushed for 161 yards and two TDs as NM completed their second consecutive year unbeaten with a hard-earned 12-3 win at Ravenna. Pancy’s touchdowns, both in the first half wiped out an early Ravenna 3-0 lead on a Brian Patterson field goal. Pancy nearly broke away for a 77-yard run only to fumble the ball with an open field ahead of him at the 50 as he eventually stepped out of bounds while bobbling the elusive pigskin. Jeff Guy joins his iconic father in the Norse record books when he intercepted one pass in the contest, giving him 11 interceptions on the season in just eight games, equaling the record set a year earlier by Tom Achterhoff. John Pavlik, who has the current multi-purpose locker room located outside the NM football field named after him following his death, led NM in tackles in the win over the Bulldogs with 19.

Once again NM was the bridesmaid in the final AP polls as for the second straight season, NM placed second in the Class D polls to Traverse City St. Francis. It would be the last year where polls would determine a state champion.

Ironically, if the parameters to determine winners in each playoff region were in effect for 1974, as they were in 1975, it would have been the Norsemen who would tally more playoff points then TCSF and would be one of four teams to qualify for the playoffs. NM once again dominated the WMC All-Conference team with nine players selected for first team honors. Jerry Crocker, who would go on to have a stellar college career at Northern Michigan University, was a repeat winner as he was selected at both offensive and defensive linebacker. Jeff Guy was also selected on both the offense and defensive first eleven while big Mark Wolters and Lyle Altwood joined Guy and Crocker on the defensive team. Reid Raymour was selected as the first team kicker while Bruce Bos the WMC punter. Bos was a more than competent quarterback as he passed for 52 of 78 passes for 883 yards and five TDS. Jim Pancy was a no-brainer choice as a running back on the all-conference team, but he also was honored as a first team All Stater in Class D. Pancy would rush for 956 yards in 115 carries, an astounding average of 8.3 yards per carry.

Record Score Interesting Fact

1-0 NM 24, Newaygo 0 Pancy 24 yd TD, Bruce Bos to Jeff Guy 27 yd TD, Bos 40 yd TD run.

2-0 NM 31, Hart 13 Pancy NM record 307 yds rushing, 5 TDs, (45,35,5,70,25)

3-0 NM 54, Montague 0 Pancy 4 TDs, Guys 2 TD, Stan Andrie 50 yd int. for TD.

4-0 NM 55, Mason Co. 7 Guy 3 TDs (2 rushing and 52-yd int), Bos 2 TD, Pancy 1, Scott Wickland 17-yd TD, Bos to John Duplissis 65-yard passing TD.

5-0 NM 14, Manistee CC 7 Bos 2 TD passes: 30-yards to Guy and 46 yards to Duplissis.

6-0 NM 34, Oakridge 12 Pancy two TDs (3 & 30), Guys 12 yd-TD, Wickland 10, Cunnigham a pick 6 from 30.

7-0NM 21 Shelby 15 Bos 10 yd TD pass to Wickland the winner. Guy & Pancy TD each.

8-0 NM 12, Ravenna 3 Pancy 2 TDS (22 &5) and rushed for 161 yards.

**1975– coach Dave Warmack (4-5 overall, NM tie for 3rd, Shelby WMC Champs)**

Norse followers were stunned with the resignation of Tom Seroczynski following the 1974 season. Coach ‘Sero’ during his 10 years guiding the Norsemen compiled an outstanding record of 72 wins, against only 11 losses, a winning percentage of 87 per cent that stands clearly at the top of the 14 head coaches who have guided the Norsemen as of this writing in 2025. During his tenure NM won four outright WMC championships, tied in two others, and were the mythical Class C state champs in 1971. Three other seasons NM would place second in the polls, 1970 in Class C and 1973 & 74 in Class D. Seroczynski would be replaced by a young Dave Warmack, who would also have outstanding success in his brief five years guiding the Norsemen.

1975 would begin a new and highly popular era for high school football in the state of Michigan as it marked the beginning of a state playoff to determine a true state champion. Unlike today when more than 100 teams qualified for the state playoffs, the first year of 1975 allowed but four teams in each class to qualify, one for each designated region. Several teams that posted unbeaten records were left out as one needed to complete a schedule filled with tough opponents with winning records to qualify as one of the four.

Two new opponents would appear on the NM schedule to fill out a nine-game schedule in Warmack’s opening year as the Norse head coach. Following a good start NM would not finish strong as they would post a losing record of 4-5, their first losing record in a decade. However, coach Warmack would leave NM in good stead following the 1979 season. Despite being the school in the WMC with the lowest enrollment, interest was high as 32 players were suited up on the varsity while another 40 youths were on the Junior Varsity team. A pair of returning all-conference players highlighted the returning Norsemen in two-way all-conference running back Jeff Guy, and defensive middle guard John Pavlik. Other starters from last year’s undefeated WMC champs included fullback-linebacker Scott Wickland, tackle Dan Hoople and two-way end Bill Muzzall.

The Norse opening opponent Watervliet was coming off a banner 1974 season where they won eight of nine games while returning several starters. In a game billed as a battle of two Class C football giants (NM had moved up in enrollment from D to C) the Norsemen won the battle before a capacity throng of 2500 fans on hand in Watervliet. Both NM TDs game on long plays, the first a 74-yard sprint by junior speedster Ron Steele. Watervliet tallied a TD next but their attempt for the two-point conversion was stopped by Jeff Guy. NM then took a 13-6 lead on a 42-yard run by Scott Wickland. The second half was a defensive struggle led by captains Jeff Guy, John Pavlik, and Dan Hoople. Also praised for his defensive work was Terry Warmack, the younger brother of the head coach.

NM did all their scoring in the first half but that would be enough as the Norse won at Hart 19-0. The Norse trio of running backs, Jeff Guy, Scott Wickland and Ron Steele each scored a touchdown as NM won their second straight game for their new head coach Dave Warmack. Steele scored the first TD from 3-yards out with the big play on the drive a 32-yard pass from quarterback Rob Hansen to Guy. Guy then scored on a 35-yard burst with still 3:45 left in the opening quarter. Wickland then powered over from the four early into the second quarter and the defense then did the rest for NM. The balanced running attack for the Blue & Gold showed Guy lugging the ball 10 times for 119 yards, Steele 17 carries for 83 while Wickland garnered 78 yards in 18 attempts.

Perhaps losing by an embarrassing 54-0 score was all the incentive needed for Montague to pay back that defeat to the Norse the previous year as Montague edged the Norse 18-14. It would be the second time in recent years whereby the Wildcats would snap a Norse winning streak. The current streak ended at 21 games while head coach Chuck Hulce’s 1972 team ended NM’s 25 game winning streak. The game started out as if was going to be yet another easy NM victory as the Norse scored the first two times they had the ball, the only scores for NM the rest of the game. Jeff Guy scored from the 3-yard line after just four minutes were gone in the opening quarter. Junior tackle Dave Bowen, who years later would be your author’s attorney, recovered a fumble to set up a 24-yard TD run by Scott Wickland. The rest of the game belonged to Montague and their defense as they limited the NM rushing game and shut down the NM passing game by allowing but 14 total yards.

NM then got back on the winning track with a win against their perennial patsy, Mason County Central. NM won for their 26th time over the years while losing but two following their 26-12 win over the Spartans from Scottville. Jeff Guy performed a feat that even his legendary father never accomplished at NMHS, returning two punts for a TD in a single game. Guy had returns of 59 and 64 to key the NM victory, all in the space of two minutes in the opening period. NM’s only offensive TD on the night was a short 3-yard TD run from Scott Wickland that capped a NM 91-yard drive. The other touchdown was created by the defense as Dave Piszcek intercepted a Spartan pass and returned it 34 yards for a TD.

A very good Manistee Catholic team then stunned the Norsemen, snapping a two-game losing streak to NM with a convincing 30-12 win. NM received one TD on a 90-yard kickoff return from Ron Steele that brought the Norse within a TD of the visiting Sabres. However, the rest of the game was dominated by the visitors from the North with the only other NM score coming on a 14-yard pass from Rob Hansen to Jeff Guy.

NM rebounded nicely following their lost to Manistee CC with a surprisingly easy 34-0 victory over Oakridge. Jeff Guy had a huge night on both sides of the ball in spearheading the Norse victory. Guy tallied the first of his three TDs the traditional way on a 17-yard run. Guy then had the first of his two interceptions on the night that set up a 44-yard TD run on the option play by QB Rob Hansen. Then another Guy pick set up his own touchdown, a 58-yard pass from Hansen. Not done yet, reserve quarterback Dennis DeKuiper, a transfer from Fremont that produced several great athletes with the last name of DeKuiper over the years, hit Guy for the final NM TD on a pass play that covered 31 yards. Earlier in the game Dave Pisczek ran a punt back 46 for six more Norse points.

Unfortunately for the Norsemen it was all downhill from there as they would drop their last three games.

NM was virtually punch less in the first of their three season ending losses at Shelby. A combination of a driving rain and a tenacious Shelby defense held NM to minus yards rushing in the game. Meanwhile the Tigers punched out over 200 yards on the ground with long time Shelby basketball coach Rick Zoulek scoring his team’s first touchdown as the Tigers rolled over the Norse 21-6. It was a banner year for Shelby as the Tigers posted their first unbeaten season since 1936. NM averted a shutout with Dave Pisczek passing six yards to Doug Dekuiper for the only NM TD late in the game.

Ravenna then snapped a seven-game losing streak to the Norse with a 24-18 victory. The first points of the game came from the toe of Ravenna’s Joe Coletta who booted a 25-yard field goal. Many years down the road Colleta would join my long-time partner Gene Young and your author in the radio booth calling many local football games. Scott Wickland ran for 121 yards and scored all three NM touchdowns in a losing effort. Wickland’s third touchdown run of 45 yards early in the fourth quarter gave NM the lead only to have the Bulldogs score late in the game after recovering a NM fumble at the Norse seven-yard line.

Battling numerous injuries as the season game to a close, the Norse capped their season with a rare Saturday afternoon contest in a first ever meeting with Allendale. Future NFL star Robert Jackson, only a junior ran for 190 yards – in the first half – as the Norse were over matched against Allendale and fell 60-13. The 60 points given up by the Norsemen were easily the most points allowed to an opponent up to that date. Jeff Guy scored both NM touchdowns. His first was a 12-yard run in the second quarter, the second came on a 49-yard pass play from sophomore quarterback Roger Crawford in the third period.

The WMC All Conference team was selected on an infamous night in Michigan History, the sinking of the Edmund Fitzgerald in Lake Superior. Jeff Guy repeated as a two-way player on both offense and defense. Also picked to the offensive first team was fullback Scott Wickland, guard John Peters and center Terry Warmack. Lineman John Pavlik was the only NM player selected to the All-Conference defensive team with his teammate Guy. It would get much better for Norse fans as Coach Warmack and the Norse would right the ship beginning with the 1976 season.

Record Score Interesting F

1-0 NM 13, Watervliet 6 Ron Steele 74-yard TD, Scott Wickland 42 yd TD.

2-0 NM 19, Hart 0 Steele, Wickland and Jeff Guy each a TD.

2-1 NM 14, Montague 18 Guy 3 yd TD, Wickland scored from 24. NM only 14 yds passing.

3-1 NM 26, Mason Co. 12 Guy 2 punt return TDs (59 & 64) Dave Pisczek 34 yd TD on Int. Wickland 3-yard TD.

3-2 NM 12, Manistee CC 30 Steele 90-yard kickoff return. Hansen to Guy 14-yard TD.

4-2 NM 34, Oakridge 0 Guy 3 TDs, Pisczek 56-yard punt return TD, Hansen 44 yd run TD.

4-3 NM 6, Shelby 21 NM minus yards rushing. Pisczek TD pass to Doug DeKuiper.

4-4 NM 18, Ravenna 24 Wickland 121 yards rushing and all 3 NM TDS (9, 5, & 45)

4-5 NM 13, Allendale 60 Guy 2 Tds, 12-yard run and 49-pass from Roger Crawford.

**1976– coach Dave Warmack (5-4 overall,2nd in WMC, Oakridge Champs)**

NM lost 18 seniors from the previous season as there would be a lot of new faces for 1976. Perhaps the most noted of the returnees from 1975 would be a player who was counted on to fill the important role of NM’s quarterback, but an injury in the opening game of the season ended 1975 all too soon for Randy Breen. Regulars returning for NM included speedster Ron Steele, a 9.9 sprinter who arguably was the fastest to don an NM uniform in school history. Starting tackles Dan Dekker, whose father Jerry Dekker was a fixture for many years working the chain gang crew for NMHS returned, as did Mike Hekkema and fullback Jeff Atwood.

It took only the opening game with Watervliet to show the importance of Breen as he led NM to their 12th consecutive opening game victory in a 26-22 victory over Watervliet. Breen tossed four touchdown passes with his last, a 31 yarder to Bill Sangster coming with just 38 seconds on the clock at Fred Jacks Field to give NM a come from behind 28-22 victory over the visitors from Watervliet. Breen hit Randy Swanson for a pair of TDs, one for 35 and an even longer connection of 60 yards with his first scoring strike a 9-yard pass to Jeff Atwood. In addition to the 169 yards passing in the game, NM rushed for 117 yards with Ron Steele lugging the pigskin for 60 of those yards.

Steele came back the following Friday to have a huge game in NM’s 20-7 victory over Hart by scoring all three Norse TD’s and rushing for 154 total yards. NM used the rushing game to earn the win as Breen only had to attempt three passes, but one of his two completions was a screen pass to Steele that went for 59 yards and a NM touchdown. NM’s defense, led by Jeff Storck, Mike Hekkema, Dave Bowen, and Dan Dekker limited Hart to 115 total yards for the game. Although Steele had several big gains over the course of the contest, both of his rushing TD’s game from short one and three yards away.

North Muskegon fleet running back Ron Steele sprinted 90 yards late in the game as NM rallied to upset Montague 14-12. Montague had taken the lead at 12-6 with just a little over three minutes to play in the game before Steele’s heroics. Following the Montague TD NM mishandled the kickoff and only advanced the ball to the 10-yard line. Expecting a pass late in the game, instead NM ran a sweep, and the speedy Steels outran Montague to tie the game at 12-12. Without a kicker, NM was forced to go for two. It was Breen to Breen, quarterback Randy Breen to his brother Tim Breen for the two-pointer and game winner as NM would win 14-12. Steele ran for 145 total yards on the night with most of those yards coming on his long TD run.

Ron Steele had another big night in NM’s fourth win to start the 1976 season, a 46-14 win over Mason County Central, but he had plenty of help from Tim Breen. Steele picked up 173 yards on 20 carries that included a short TD from two yards out and a 46-yard run. Breen caught a pair of TD passes from his brother Randy Breen and punctuated his night with an 86-yard kickoff return for six points. Randy Breen’s third TD pass on the evening was completed to Randy Swanson and went for 13 yards. The final two-points of the evening came on a pass from young freshman quarterback Larry Witham to Tim Breen.

The 1976 football season was the first year for this author as a play-by-play broadcaster in Muskegon. I had first begun as a broadcaster for high school football for Traverse City beginning with the 1968 season before moving back to my hometown of North Muskegon in 1976 when I purchased the Bear Lake Tavern. Although my main duty was to call the game of the week in the Muskegon Area, I must confess that I always made a point to include at least one game a year I would broadcast of my beloved alma mater. I well remember my first North Muskegon game broadcast. It was a Saturday night game NM played on October 16, 1976, at one of my favorite places to call a game, Sabre Stadium in Manistee. How well I remember the carpet covered floors and the heated private booth that I shared that evening with my broadcasting partner in 1976, longtime sportscaster Bill Trapp. I had little trouble convincing my boss at WTRU, Fred Tascone to put this game on our 1976 schedule as the Norsemen were a perfect 4-0 heading into the game with Manistee Catholic Central. Since it was a Saturday night game there was only a very small write-up for the game coverage in the following day’s Sunday morning edition of the Muskegon Chronicle. The bottom line – NM lost to Manistee in to be honest, a ho-hum game 13-6. NM’s only TD came in the third quarter on a 1-yard run by Jeff Atwood. Manistee CC had scored both of their TDs in the first half and NM was not able to catch up in the second half and had now lost their first game of the season. Manistee would reach the state playoffs in November before losing to the eventual state champs from Chrystal Falls Forest Park.

The loss to Manistee CC signaled a downturn the rest of the season for the Norsemen. NM took an early lead of 6-0 in their next game with Oakridge but, apart from a NM safety when Jim Wigren tackled the Eagles’ Calvin Johnson in the end zone late in the game for a safety, that would be all the scoring the rest of the evening for the Norse. The early NM TD came on a pass play from Randy Breen to wingback Tim Breen that covered 34 yards. Oakridge was led by Calvin Johnson, a recent inductee into the Muskegon Area Sports Hall of Fame who led the Eagles in rushing and scored a TD. The 20-8 win moved Oakridge into first place for their first time since joining the WMC. As history would dictate, it surely wouldn’t be their last.

It was a bitter pill to swallow in the next NM game as they lost a game to Shelby 14-8 that NM dominated for much of the game. NM had an 8-6 lead late in the game and were driving deep into Shelby territory. However, a fumble gave the ball to the Tigers who up until their final drive had only picked up two first downs the entire game. Aided by a costly personal foul call against NM Shelby trekked 83 yards in seven plays for the winning TD to hand NM their third straight loss. Playing without running back Ron Steele sidelined with a knee injury, the Norse were still able to rack up 183 total yards to Shelby’s 94. Bill Sangster took over much of the running duties with the absence of Steele and ran just short of 100 yards on 29 carries. Sangster added the two-point conversion following NM’s only TD of the game on a QB sneak from Randy Breen. Shelby got a fortuitous break late in the first half when they scored their first touchdown in the waning seconds of the first half after a mishandled snap on a punt.

NM scored on a 15-yard TD pass from Randy Breen to Randy Swanson in the first period, the first of two TD passes on the night between this combo. The two-point conversion gave NM an 8-6 lead they would not relinquish as NM prevailed 32-21 over Ravenna to clinch a winning season for the Norse with their fifth victory of the season. Although they lost two games in conference competition, the win clinched second place in the WMC for the Norsemen. Tim Breen intercepted a pass from my future colleague in the broadcasting booth Joe Coletta and returned it into a 28 yard-TD for NM.

Once again NM finished their season against Allendale and again, they were tortured with another great effort from Robert Jackson in a 42-18 loss to the visitors from Allendale. The future NFL star rolled up 207 yards rushing and four TDs to end the NM season with a 5-4 record. NM, trailing at the time 22-0, got on the board with a 31-yard TD pass from Randy Breen to his brother Tim. Breen later connected with Randy Swanson for a pair of TDs, one from 30 and the other good for 30 yards. The Norse landed six players on the WMC All-Conference team, end Randy Swanson, center Scott Garvey and back Ron Steele on offense. Lineman Jeff Storck, linebacker Mike Hekkema and defensive back Randy Breen were tabbed for the defensive eleven.

Record Score Interesting Fact

1-0 NM 26, Watervliet 22 Randy Breen 4 TD passes, 2 to Randy Swanson, & 1 to Jeff Atwood and Bill Sangster, the last to Sangster the game winner with 38 seconds left in the game.

2-0 NM 20, Hart 7 Ron Steele rushed for 154, 3 TDs, One a 59 pass from Breen.

3-0 NM 14, Montague 12 Steele 90-yard TD. QB Breen to Tim Breen 2-pointer the winner.

4-0 NM 46, Mason Co. 14 Steels 2 TDs (2 & 46) R. Breen to T. Breen 2 TDs. T Breen 86 yd Kickoff returns. R Breen to Ron Swanson for 13-yard TD.

4-1 NM 6, Manistee CC 13 NM losses 1st game of season. Jeff Atwood 1 -yd TD.

4-2 NM 8, Oakridge 20 R. Breen to T. Breen 34-yard TD. Jim Wigren safety.

4-3 NM 8, Shelby 14 R. Breen QB sneak, Bill Sangster rushed for 96 yards.

5-3 NM 32, Ravenna 21 R Breen 2 TD passes to R Swanson (15 & 35). T Breen 28 yd int TD.

5-4 NM 18, Allendale 42 R Breen 3 TD passes (T Breen 31, R Swanson (2) 30 & 11)

**1977– Coach Dave Warmack (7-2 overall,2nd in WMC, Shelby Champs)**

The fortunes for NM football continued heading in a positive direction for 3rd year head coach Dave Warmack. Grandville Calvin Christian would replace Manistee Catholic midway through the season while Reed City, an old foe of NM dating back to the 1940s would replace Allendale on the ninth date as once again NM was able to fill out a nine-game schedule. A few starters returned for the start of the 1977 season, and they were buoyed with six seniors who came out for football after choosing not to participate the previous season. Returning starters included an All WMC performer from his junior season in linebacker/lineman Jeff Storck. Others who started in ‘76’ were lineman Reed Minty. Tackle/guard Jim Wigren as well as backfield starters Tim Breen and Jeff Sangster. Warmack went into the season by expanding his coaching staff with assistance from Ed Zednik, Bob Gibbs and John Campione.

NM began the season with a road trip to Watervliet where a multitude of turnovers led to a 18-12 loss to Watervliet. NM outgained the hosts during the contests but were not able to overcome five turnovers committed in the second quarter. All three turnovers led to Watervliet touchdowns as NM trailed 18-6 at halftime. NM’s first half TD came on a four-yard run by Roger Crawford. Needing a spark in the second half coach Warmack inserted sophomore Larry Witham into the game at quarterback. The sophomore delivered three passes good for 76 yards and a 39-yard TD pass to Phil Andrie. The 18 points tallied by Watervliet would prove to be the most points scored all season by a much-improved NM defense.

NM then bounced back with a surprisingly easy 34-0 victory over Ravenna. A couple of ‘youngsters’ who in the future would have a huge impact on North Muskegon sports helped in the Norsemen victory. That combination now so familiar to current NM followers teamed up for one of the Norsemen touchdowns. Current NM head football coach (sophomore) Larry Witham connected on a 19-yard touchdown pass to long time NM basketball coach and AD (freshman) Jeff Cooke. The Norsemen dedicated the team to starting tackle Jim Wigren who suffered a season ending knee injury in the first game at Watervliet. Following a safety caused by defensive back Tim Breen, Bill Sangster’s one-yard run pushed the lead to 8-0. Phil Andrie then scored the first of his three touchdown on the night with a four-yard pass from Roger Crawford. Andrie also caught a seven-yard TD strike from Witham and then added the game’s final TD on a three-yard run.

Thinking that he might have to throw the ball to have a chance in defeating an unbeaten Montague team, Coach Warmack went with sophomore Larry Witham at quarterback. However, NM was having such surprising success running the ball he settled on Witham just handing the ball to Bill Sangster. Sangster rushed for 113 of the 114 yards gained by NM in the first half. Sangster scored a touchdown in each half and the defense did the rest as NM edged Montague 12-6. Freshman Jeff Cooke, playing safety for only his second time, equaled a NM record with three pass interceptions in the contest. Also, coming up with an interception apiece were Don Nelson and Mike Hogan.

Bill Sangster again rushed for more than 100 yards and tallied NM’s only TD as the Norsemen edged Mason County Central 7-0 to stay undefeated in the WMC with a perfect 3-0 record. Sangster’s touchdown came in the third quarter climaxing a 58-yard drive when he ran in from the eight-yard line to produce the game’s only score. Sangster finished the night with 140 yards in 22 carries while his running partner Phil Andrie added 40 yards on eight rushes. Jeff Storck led NM’s defense in posting the shutout while praise was also given by coach Warmack for the play of linebackers Don Nelson, John Nedeau and Andrie. The game was played in the rain in Scottville causing the Norsemen to fumble six times, losing the ball twice with Mason County losing the ball via three fumbles.

The Norse then traveled on a Saturday to Grandville to play for the first time in their program’s history, Calvin Christian. Once again NM was able to tally a single touchdown, but just like last week, that was enough as NM posted their second straight shutout with a 6-0 victory. Warmack had special praise for his offensive lineman Brad Miles, Pat Bowen, Reed Minty, and Jerry Wigren for opening holes in the second half for Bill Sangster who rushed 40 times in the game and gained 185 of the Norse’s 235 yards on offense. Sangster’s four-yard run in the second half was all the points needed as the defense did the rest for NM, holding Calvin Christian to but 10 yards in the second half.

Although each team scored a pair of touchdowns, that was misleading as NM’s 13-12 victory over Oakridge was a defensive battle for sure. For the most part it was special teams play and defensive highlights that dominated this WMC battle. Jeff Storck, with the Norse trailing 6-0, caught a short Oakridge punt and rambled 15 yards to the Eagle 12-yard line. Five plays later Don Nelson smashed over from the one-yard line to tie the game at 6-6 as both teams misfired on their extra point tries. NM then capitalized on another Eagle punting situation when a high snap from center to the Eagle punter sailed over his head and NM recovered at the Oakridge 14. Three plays later Bill Sangster scored on a five-yard sweep. Phil Andrie’s all-important extra point attempt was true as NM moved in front 13-6. It was following an Oakridge TD late in the game that set up a game saving play by NM’s Storck. Needing a victory to stay in contention for the WMC title, Oakridge head coach Calvin Fox went for the win. The Eagles went for a pass play that failed but a pass interference penalty against NM placed the ball at the one. A line plunge by Oakridge running back Andy Fairfield was met at the line of scrimmage by Storck who made the game saving tackle to earn NM their fifth straight victory on the season. NM’s defense held Oakridge to minus yards rushing for the game.

The NM victory over Oakridge set up a game with Shelby that would determine the WMC championship. Both teams possessed strong defenses and promised to be a defensive battle. A defensive battle might be an understatement. The hard-hitting Tiger defense caused eight NM fumbles, intercepted a Norse pass, and even blocked one NM punt as they defeated the Norse 10-0. Shelby took advantage of a Norse fumble on a punt to come away with a 21-yard field goal.

The blocked punt less than two minutes later turned into a Tiger TD as Marv DeWitt grabbed the loose ball at the six and waltzed into the end zone. The victory would lead to an undefeated season for Shelby and a berth into the MHSAA playoffs now in their third year. The Tigers can always boast that they were the first Greater Muskegon team to qualify for the playoffs. The playoffs became a little more liberal in 1977 when eight teams in each class, instead of just four in the two earlier seasons, qualified for a chance to win a state title.

North Muskegon then scored three touchdowns before Hart could get on the board as NM clinched second place in the WMC with a 21-6 victory at Hart. After NM scored a pair of first half TDs, the first on a Roger Crawford short run from the one, and a 16-yard scamper from Bill Sangster with just 20 seconds left in the half, Don Nelson put the game away for NM. Nelson gathered in the second half kickoff and rambled 70 yards for the score.

NM then closed out the season in style with a 20-14 win over Reed City in the first game played between the two squads in nearly 20 years. It was the seventh NM win in the eight games played in the series that was first contested back in 1940. “It was our best game of the season,’ said coach Warmack following the NM triumph over a Reed City team that finished their season at 6-3, with five of their opponents in Class B. NM was led by Bill Sangster and Roger Crawford. Sangster rushed for 134 yards and all three Norse touchdowns while Crawford picked up 65. Most of NM yardage came on the ground as they ran the ball 55 times for 272 yards. NM’s aroused defense, led by Don Nelson (11 tackles), Jeff Storck (10) while Crawford, Pat Bowen and Sangster also had several tackles. For the season NM only allowed 74 points for the entire season that computed to only eight points allowed per contest.

Jeff Storck won All-Conference honors both on offense and defense when the WMC announced the honorees from the 1977 season. Bill Sangster was picked as a first team running back while Roger Crawford and defensive back Brad Coon joined Storck on the defensive eleven. Storck was also honored on the Class C All State team by the Detroit Free Press.

Record Score Interesting Fact

0-1 NM 12, Watervliet 18 NM five turnovers costly. Roger Crawford 4 yd TD, Larry Witham 39 yd TD pass to Phil Andrie.

1-1 NM 34, Ravenna 0 Phil Andrie 3 TDs, Witham to Jeff Cooke 19-yard TD. Sangster 1 -yd TD.

2-1 NM 12, Montague 6 Sangster 2 TDs. Jeff Cooke ties single game record with 3 Int.

3-1 NM 7, Mason Co 0 Sangster 140 yards and 1 TD.

4-1 NM 6, Calvin Christ. 0 Sangster 185 rushing yards and 4-yard TD.

5-1 NM 13, Oakridge 12 Jeff Storck game saving tackle on extra point. Sangster 5-yard TD.

5-2 NM 0, Shelby 10 NM has 10 turnovers in loss to playoff bound Shelby.

6-2 NM 21, Hart 6 Don Nelson 70yd kickoff return, Crawford 1 yd & Sangster 16 yd TD.

7-2 NM 20, Reed City 14 Sangster all 3 NM TDs. Cooke 3 punts for an avg. of 43 per punt.

**1978– Coach Dave Warmack (8-1 overall, champs in WMC with Shelby)**

Coach Dave Warmack, back for his fourth season as the head mentor for the Norsemen was hopeful before the season began that his current group of gridders could match last season’s 7-2 record. However, his Norsemen did even better as they compiled an 8-1 record, with their only loss coming against another very good Shelby team. Although only seven seniors returned from the 7-2 team in ‘77’, Warmack would be thrilled with the help he received from last year’s junior varsity team that posted an undefeated record and would produce several star players for the next couple of seasons. In the ‘what if’ scenario, this author would always speculate as to how good NM football fortunes would have been if they had a healthy Jeff Cooke. A starter as a freshman, and one who showed his talents in basketball as the leading rebounder in the entire conference, Cooke incurred the first of his nasty knee injuries during the off-season that prevented him from playing football again at NMHS and was lost, for not only the entire season, but much of his prep career.

Although NM would lose one potential star, it quickly became evident in their opener that they had found another, junior running back Paul Andrie. In the Norsemen’s opening game 13-8 win over Watervliet, the Norsemen rushed for 159 yards with Andrie compiling 150 of those yards, including a 68-yard TD run in the opening quarter. The big play of the game, and what would prove to be the winning points came in the third period. A Watervliet running back was hit hard by a Norse tackler, fumbled the ball and it was scooped by an alert Bill Banner who raced 44 yards for the TD. Coach Warmack was especially pleased with the play of his juniors during the win. Andrie was not only the game’s leading rusher, but he also tied for game honors with Jerry Wigren for the most tackles with 12.

NM dominated in the statistical department, but they needed a ‘shaky’ 21-yard field goal from Scott Preston to earn a 3-0 victory over Ravenna. It was the first game in NM history where the Norse won a game 3-0 and would be the first of three games in more than 90 years of NM football with a 3-0 win for the Norsemen. (Holton 1987 & Oakridge 1989 the others) NM’s defense kept the Bulldogs in check the entire game as the host Bulldogs were never able to get any deeper than the Norse 25-yard line. Paul Andrie again was the workhorse for NM as he totaled 97 yards in 25 carries while NM’s defense held Ravenna to only 74 total yards the entire game. Warmack singled out Pat Bowen for coming up with numerous big plays on defense as NM made it a perfect 2-0 to start the 1978 season.

NM scored with 1:01 left in the game on a three-yard TD by Bob Pickel to nip Montague 12-6 to move to 3-0 on the season. It appeared that both teams were headed for an overtime with the score tied at 6-6 late in the game before the Norse mounted their only scoring drive of the game. NM’s earlier TD, and the game’s first score came on an interception and 30-yard return for a TD by Brock Berson. Paul Andrie was held in check by a tough Montague defense as he was limited to 32 yards on the ground. Brad Billinghurst led the Norse ground game with 50 yards in but five carries.

NM then combined a crushing defense with a newfound passing attack in a 34-0 victory over Mason County Central. NM combined for 300 total yards while Scottville had a minus 67 rushing yards and a mere seven yards passing. After a scoreless opening period, NM went to the air waves as Junior quarterback Steve Preston connected with Brad Billinghurst good for 36 yards. With pass plays giving NM excellent field position NM scored a 4-yard rushing touchdown from short range. Paul Andrie scored a pair from one and seven yards out, Preston sneaked one over the goal line from the one while Bob Pickle capped NM’s scoring on the evening from 11 yards out to keep the perfect season intact at 4-0.

NM posted their third shutout of the season with a dominating 35-0 victory in the second ever meeting with Grandville Calvin Christian. Paul Andrie rushed for 161 yards and totaled four touchdowns, three rushing, and ran an interception back from 45 yards for another. The junior tailbacks rushing TDs were from 49, and two more from six yards out. Steve Preston continued his fine passing as he connected with Bob Pickle for a 52-yard strike. Mike Hansen tallied his first TD in a Norse uniform from one yard out to complete the romp.

NM got a big boost in a 14-0 win over Oakridge from Craig Hairston, a transfer from Muskegon who was playing in his first game. Taking some of the pressure off Paul Andrie, Hairston carried the ball 16 times for 72 yards and scored the second NM touchdown in NM’s win over the Eagles. Andrie had his usual productive game as he finished the game with 122 yards on 23 rushes as NM controlled the ball most of the evening. The win, coupled with a Shelby loss left NM alone at the top of the WMC conference with a perfect 4-0 record in the WMC. Oakridge, who came into the game winless, gave NM all they wanted. Perhaps NM might have been caught looking ahead to their big clash with Shelby the following Friday. For NM, who had allowed but 14 points through their first fix games, it was their fourth shut out on the season and third straight whitewash over an opponent.

After posting four shutouts on the season, the tables were turned on NM by Shelby as the Tigers shut out the Norse for the second straight year. The Tigers ended the NM streak to start the season at six wins and moved into a tie for the WMC lead with NM. The Norsemen dominated the game early, but the NM inexperience showed according to coach Warmack. Shelby’s only touchdown came on an eighty-yard drive that chewed up eight minutes on the clock with their touchdown coming on a 2-yard run with a minute left in the half to give Shelby a 6-0 lead. NM had a good drive going to start the second half. Paul Andrie ripped off three first downs to move NM deep into Shelby territory. However, the Norse fumbled, and Shelby recovered to end NM’s best scoring opportunity. NM later fumbled a punt deep in their own territory that doomed any Norse chance to pull off the victory as the Tigers kicked a short field goal to give the Tigers the final score of 9-0.

It surely wasn’t easy for the Norsemen in their battle with Hart as NM needed a successful two-point conversion run by Paul Andrie to earn a narrow 14-13 victory over Hart and secure a share of the WMC title with Shelby. Andrie and Craig Hairston controlled the running game throughout the contest despite not scoring in the second half. Andrie totaled 143 yards on 26 rushes while Hairston netted 133 in 22 carries. Andrie carried the ball eight times in NM’s first scoring drive in the opening period with Larry Witham scoring the TD from the two. A key play in the scoring drive was a fourth down and ten play when Brad Coon kept the chains moving with a 16-yard reception. Hairston then scored from four-yards away followed by Andrie’s two-point conversion. Hart, trailing 14-7, had three attempts to tie the game and send it into overtime. Their first kick attempt was good but, the Pirates were called for illegal procedure. The next attempt was wide, but the Norsemen were offsides giving Hart a third opportunity. That kick too, was wide, and NM escaped with the victory. Penalties hurt many Norse drives in the game as they were assessed a whopping 143 yards in penalties.

Junior running back Paul Andrie rushed for 170 yards and four TDs as NM defeated Reed City 40-8 to complete their season with an impressive 8-1 record. It was the eighth win in nine games vs. Reed City and it would be another 38 years before they would again face each another. Andrie’s yardage pushed him over the 1000-yard mark on the season, the third back in NM history to rush for more than a thousand yards in a season. Andrie sat out the third quarter as his replacement Bob Pickle carried the pigskin 11 time for 82 yards and two TDs. All eyes were on the final playoff points totals to be announced early the following week.

NM finished just one spot from qualifying, but it was probably not a bad thing. Two Class C powerhouses in their region played the first game of the playoffs at Housemen field. Grand Rapids Forest Hills Northern defeated an injury riddled Muskegon Catholic team and would go on to win the Class C state championship. MCC was rated number one in ‘C’ all year with one of their wins during their 9-0 regular season run, a victory over Traverse City, the state champs later in the playoffs in Class A!

Five NM players made the WMC All-conference team with senior Pat Bowen selected to both the offensive and defensive team. Brad Coon was selected as a defensive back for the second straight year while three juniors from NM made the team. Paul Andrie and end Bob Pickel were selected for offense while John Arntz joined Coon and Bowen on the top defensive eleven. Bowen was picked as a first-string defensive player on the Free Press Class C All-State team. It was a great year for NM football in 1978. The 44 points allowed for the entire season has not been equaled by any future NM team through the 2024 season.

Record Score Interesting Facts

1-0 NM 13, Watervliet 8 Paul Andrie 68 yd TD, Bill Banner returns fumbler 44 yds for TD.

2-0 NM 3, Ravenna 0 Scott Preston a 21 yd FG for only score. Andrie 97 yards rushing.

3-0 NM 12, Montague 6 Bob Pickle 3-yard TD. Brock Berson 30 yd int for TD.

4-0 NM 34, Mason Co 0 Steve Preston to Brad Billinghurst 36 yd TD. Andrie 2 TD, Preston, and Bob Pickle a TD each.

5-0 NM 35 Calvin Christian 0 Andrie 4 TDs, 3 rushing 45 yd Int for TD, Pickle 11 yd TD, Preston to Pickle 52 yd TD.

6-0 NM 14, Oakridge 0 Craig Hairston 3 yd TD, Preston 1 yard sneak. Andrie 122 yds.

6-1 NM 0, Shelby 9 Loss moves Shelby into WMC tie with NM.

7-1 NM 14, Hart 13 Hairston & Larry Witham short TDs, Andrie 143 yds rush.

8-1 NM 40, Reed City 8 Andrie 170 yds & 4 TDs (2, 3,7 & 7) Pickle 2 TDs (11 & 4)

**1979– Coach Dave Warmack (10-1 overall, WMC champs, state semi-finalist)**

It promised to be an exciting season for North Muskegon football for 1979, and it was all that and more! Thirteen experienced lettermen returned from last season’s 8-1 team with a few other seniors who did not play football in 1978 adding to the mix. Best of all, Paul Andrie returned and added 20 muscular pounds to his frame. NM again boasted of a strong defense, but it was their offense that showed the greatest improvement from the previous season. NM scored only 143 points in winning eight games in 1978. They would nearly triple that amount with 398 points in 11 games in the 1979 season, a total that would not be surpassed until the 2023 squad scored 481 points in 13 games against much softer competition.

NM opened the season against a Class B Orchard View team that featured Curtis Adams, a future NFL running back. Adams had a fine game against the Norse rushing for 117 yards and his team’s only TD on a 45-yard run. Andrie however, ran for 204 yards behind some good blocking from his mates up front and tallied four TDs as NM won impressively 32-6 in the first game ever played between the two schools. Yet another Norse headed for future stardom for NM, sophomore Sam Parker, stripped the ball from an OV ball carrier leading to one of the four Andrie TD runs. Earlier in the game NM’s Tom Wright did the same, his fumble recovery setting up an Andrie TD from the three. The final NM tally on the night came from senior quarterback Larry Witham’s 20-yard pass to Brock Berson.

Ravenna did a good job of containing Paul Andrie as he was held to 70 yards on the night, but it was the Norse passing game that highlighted its 27-12 victory over Ravenna. It might have been hard to believe at the time, but NM’s 15-point margin of victory would be the closest one would come versus the Norse until the November playoffs. Using a two QB system, Steve Preston threw a pair of TD passes, the first to Brock Berson for 22 yards, his second, a screen pass to Andri that went for 35 yards. Larry Witham added the third NM TD via the passing route when he connected with Dave Billinghurst for 19 yards. Although checked to 70 yards rushing, Andrie was able to bust one open for a 24-yard TD, the first tally of the evening for NM.

Playing a near perfect ball game, the Norsemen netted 407 yards rushing, 270 accumulated by the legs of Paul Andrie led NM to a 48-6 rout of Montague. Warmack gave special praise to the blocking of his fullbacks, Mike Hansen and Bill Banner and linemen Clark Stevens and John Arntz to free Andrie for a pair of long TD runs of 70 and 65 yards. The other two Andrie tallies were from a more modest effort from five and one yards out. The two NM QBs each contributed a tally, Preston on a one-yard sneak and Witham a five-yard TD toss to Tom Wright.

NM again had little trouble in defeating Mason Co Central as Paul Andrie kept up his amazing season with his 3rd four TD game of the season while rolling up 170 yards in NM’s 41-0 shutout of the host Spartans. Once again Andrie was aided by some great blocking up front. Split end Dave Billinghurst sprung Andrie free twice on pitchout runs of 15 & 42 yards. Billinghurst also caught a 16-yard TD toss from Larry Witham. When the Norse wanted to power the ball inside, they ran behind the blocking of John Arntz and Scott Cooper. Warmack lauded the defensive play of linebacker Mike Hansen. “He must have had about 18 tackles,” said Warmack of Hansen. The final NM TD came on a 3-yard run by Steve Preston.

The victory over Mason County Central set up a huge clash with Detroit Lutheran West with the Norsemen traveling for the first time to the Motor City. Lutheran West was ranked fourth in the latest AP poll with the Norsemen right behind in fifth. If North Muskegon was to attain the needed points to get into the playoffs, then this was a must win for the Norse. And win they did! 37-20 as Paul Andrie did it again with four touchdowns, three rushing on 233 yards, and for good measure intercepted a pass and returned it 35 yards for another tally. NM scored first on a field goal from a transfer from the Dominican Republic, Mario Feretti, good from 26-yards. Bob Pickle then stunned the home folks in Detroit with a 40-yard punt return. Lutheran West knew they were in for a long night when Andrie scored the first of his four touchdowns from 4 yards out to give NM a 17-0 lead before the hosts could counter. Lutheran West was hopeful of a comeback when they closed the gap to 30-20 but were punched in the gut when Andrie spoiled those hopes with a 55-yard TD to seal the win for the Norse. When I looked at the defensive stats it became clear to me that NM had a ‘generous’ stat person who counted the defensive tackles. Scott Coopers was credited with 25 tackles, Bruce Jones 20, John Arntz 17 and Sam Parker 16, more tackles than carries by the Detroit team for the entire game.

The WMC Conference title was at stake when North Muskegon and Oakridge, both sporting a perfect 4-0 record in conference play, met the following Friday. Oakridge was playing its first season under a new coach, a young man by the name of Jack Schugars, a 1964 graduate from Muskegon High School. Schugars and his Eagles did a nice job of containing Paul Andrie as NM blanked the Eagles 22-0. For Andrie, who ran for him a modest 107 yards in 27 carries, the yardage attained pushed him over the 1000-yard mark after, but six games played. The future Yale running back scored two touchdowns giving him 20 on the young season as he closed in on Stan Guy’s school record of 25 attained in 1954. Although the calendar showed it was October the 12th, the game was played with snow in the air possibly limiting a lot of offensive fireworks. NM limited the Eagles to but three first downs in the entire game in posting their second shutout of the season.

Paul Andie then equaled a school record for five touchdowns in a single game, a record he shares with Charlie Langeland, Jim Pancy and Stan Guy as NM overwhelmed Shelby 42-11. He also equaled the school record for TDs in a single season with 25 held by Guy. The lone TD scored by a Norsemen not named Paul Andrie was an interception by Steve Preston he returned 29 yards. One of Andries TD was one of the longest in NM history, a 90-yard TD pass from Larry Witham.

Stan Guy was on the sidelines in Hart and handed the game ball to Paul Andrie after Paul scored an early touchdown to break Guy’s record of 25 TDs set in 1954. Andrie added yet another TD to make his record for TDs in a season move up to 27 as NM smashed Hart 53-0. Bob Pickle scored three TDs and Bill Banner two as NM improved to 8-0 and an unblemished record in the WMC. Pickle’s three TDs came from three different ways: A punt return, a run for a TD --on his only carry in the game-- and scored on a pass play. The defense was also stellar in posting their third shutout. NM’s ‘generous’ stat man had Scott Cooper and John Arntz with 19 tackles apiece. When the polls came out the following Tuesday NM was 3rd in the AP polls, trailing Grand Rapids Forest Hills Northern and Middleville. More importantly, NM was also third in their region to the above two teams in the computer playoff rankings with only the top two in each regional qualifying for the playoffs.

Prior to the final game of the regular season with Newaygo, much of the attention was focused on those computer rankings but after NM’s 48-0 thumping of Newaygo they received the good news that Forest Hills Northern had lost to Lowell to set up a playoff matchup with Middleville. Bob Pickle scored the first TD for NM, but it didn’t come until the second quarter before NM’s offense began rolling. Paul Andrie scored four touchdowns, three rushing and an 18-yard pass from Steve Preston to move his total for the season to 31 TDs, a Greater Muskegon Record at that time. Brock Berson also scored twice as NM limited a Newago team, who finished the season at 6-3, to only 66 rushing yards for the game.

In nearly 70 years of covering high school football, apart from the Muskegon-Traverse City game of 1971 when it featured No.1 vs. No 2, have I seen a bigger buildup for a high school game than the North Muskegon-Middleville game of November 9, 1979. Other than their 1981 state championship game at the Pontiac Silverdome, this game drew 8,000 fans to Grand Rapids’ Houseman Field on a night when the game was played in near sub-freezing temperatures, the most fans to attend a Norse football game. There were five radio stations tightly packed in our one radio booth covering this game, unheard of in the 1970s. Fortunately, my partner George Seymour and I were granted excellent seats in the front row of the two-tiered press box. Middleville had finished the season a perfect 9-0, just one poll point above the Norse as the top-rated team in the state. It was one vs two.

Crusty Middleville coach Bob White was bound and determined that he was going to stop NM’s one-man gang of Paul Andrie. However, NM had much more than Paul Andrie --- much more. NM quarterback Steve Preston had the game of his life, and so did many of his receivers as NM used their vastly underrated passing game to destroy top ranked Middleville 31-13. Preston, who became the starting quarterback in college for Northern Michigan University, passed for 218 yards and three touchdowns to shock coach White and the Middleville fans.

It didn’t look like at the game’s start it was going to be a walk in the park night for the Norse. A high snap on the light covering of snow on the artificial turf went over the NM punter’s head giving Middleville great field position on the Norse seven. Not letting adversity affect them, NM took the ensuing kickoff and tied up the game on a Paul Andrie 11-yard TD, his 32nd of the season and a successful PAT from Mario Ferretti. Middleville scored on a second quarter 66-yard run to extend their lead to 13-6 before NM then took control of the game. Steve Preston then connected for the first time all season to his brother Scott for 29 yards and a TD. Andrie who went both ways like many of the Norsemen, then intercepted a Middleville pass that set up a 15-yard pass from Steve Preston to Dave Billinghurst. Ferretti, who would take his kicking skills to Eastern Michigan University gave NM their first score of the second half with a 23-yard field goal, giving NM a two-score advantage at 24-13. The Preston-to-Preston combo then clicked for the game’s final score on a 33-yard pass play to make the final score read NM 31 and Middleville 13. NM not only dominated on the scoreboard but in the game stats as well. NM had 363 yards in total offense to Middleville’s 141 total yards. Defensively, veteran linebackers Scott Cooper and John Arntz stood out while sophomore middle linebacker Sam Parker was outstanding.

NM was now one win away from a visit to the Pontiac Silverdome to play for a Class C State championship. In the early days of the playoffs, you not only needed to win your games, but you needed to play a tough schedule to just qualify. NM’s opponent was battled tested Ishpeming from the state’s Upper Peninsula. It was Ishpeming in 1975 who defeated Hudson in the state final game played at Central Michigan University that snapped Hudson’s USA record winning streak.

Saturday, November 17th, 1979, was a beautiful day for a football game. The skies were blue and the temperature for the mid November day was an unseasonably toasty 50 plus degrees. However, both my partner for the broadcast that day, George Seymour, and I were shocked when we entered the stadium at Alma. The field was an ugly mess, mud completely covered the gridiron from the 40 to the 40. NM lost that day to Ishpeming, but NM’s classy coach Dave Warmack never once complained about the ugly playing surface. North Muskegon was held to 45 yards rushing on the day, with their terrific running back Paul Andrie limited to 25 yards on the slippery surface and no touchdowns, the only game all season that the Yale bound tailback failed to score a touchdown. Time and time again NM would drive deep into Ishpeming territory only to have potential scoring drives stalled on mistakes and turnovers. NM turned the ball over on turnovers an uncomprehensible seven times. The Norsemen with future NMU quarterback Steve Preston at the helm passed for 278 yards via the airwaves, but five passes were intercepted as NM receivers and running backs were slipping and sliding. Ishpeming got off to a startling beginning to the game by scoring the game’s first two TD’s, one of those TD’s set up on a Norse fumble at their 24-tard line. NM battled back and scored their only touchdown in the frustrating game on a 33-yard pass from Preston to Dave Billinghurst that capped an 85-yard NM drive. Billinghurst would have an exceptional receiving game on the afternoon by hauling in five passes good for 150 yards. NM had two promising drives die on interceptions at the Ishpeming nine and 19 late in the second quarter. NM’s frustrations would only get worse in the third period when NM had numerous chances to score and take command of the game. Paul Andrie was stopped just one yard short of the Ishpeming goal line that would have perhaps tied up the game. NM did get a pair of safeties to narrow the lead of the Hematites to 14-11. NM then mounted yet another drive that ended deep into Ishpeming territory at the 18-yard line. With their dobbers down, Ishpeming sewed up the game with a late TD to end NM’s magical season at 11-1. Ishpeming would advance to the state championship game where they would defeat Watervliet for the state Class C title, a team NM had defeated three of the last four years

Head coach Dave Warmack would be sought by many schools and he left NMHS to become a head coach first in Colorado. Warmack did get a state championship in 1988 while guiding Grand Junction Colorado to the 1988 state championship. Warmack returned to the state of Michigan where he became the head coach at Kalamazoo College. While battling cancer Warmack took a less stressful job as the head coach at Paw Paw High School. He mentored many players who would go on to play in college and even the NFL. Perhaps his most well-known player was Jason Babin who would go on to have an All-Pro career in the NFL as a defensive end. Babin currently lives in my hometown of Ponte Vedra, Florida where his two sons last year starred for the local football team. Dave Warmack passed away following his second bout with cancer in July of 2017 at 69 years of age.

As one might expect, NM dominated the 1979 WMC-All Conference team. Paul Andrie was an easy choice for the offensive eleven, but he was also tabbed as a defensive back as well. Bob Pickle made first team honors as an end, John Arntz at tackle while junior Mario Ferretti was the All-WMC kicker. Rich Holcomb made the defensive eleven with Andrie as a defensive back. Surprisingly, Andrie was not tabbed for first string honors on the Detroit Free Press All State team but linebacker Scott Cooper, who was just honorable mention in the WMC, was first string all-state in the Free Press.

Record Score Interesting Fact

1-0 NM 32, Orchard View 6 Paul Andrie 204 yd rushing & 4 TDs. Larry Witham to Brock Berson 20-yard passing TD

2-0 NM 27, Ravenna 12 Steve Preston 2 TD passes (Berson 20 & Andrie 35) Witham to Dave Billinghurst 19-yard TD.

3-0 NM 48, Montague 6 Andrie 270 yards and 4 Tds (70, 65, 5 & 1)

4-0 NM 41, Mason Co 0 Andrie 4 TDs, 170 yards, Witham – Billinghurst 16 YD pass.

5-0 NM 37, Detroit LW 20 Andrie 4 TDs (55, 4 & 1 risshing, 35-yard INT), Bob Pickle 40-yard punt return, Mario Feretti 26-yard FG)

6-0 NM 22, Oakridge 0 Two more TDs for Andrie (1& 10)), Preston 1 yd sneak.

7-0 NM 42, Shelby 11 Andrie’s 5 TD ties Stan Guys record of 25.

8-0 NM 53, Hart 0 Bob Pickle 3 TDs, Bill Banner and Andrie 2 each.

9-0 NM 48, Newaygo 0 Andrie 3 rush TDs (39, 44 & 2) pass TD 18,

10-0\* NM 37, Middleville 13 Steve Preston 3 TDs (2 to brother Scott 29 & 33, one to Billinghurst for 15, Andrie 11-yard TD run, Ferretti 23 yd FG.

10-1\*NM 20, Ishpeming 11 Preston to Billinghurst 33 yd TD. NM 2 safeties in the mud.

**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 playoff 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 Norsemen 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.

**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 Demeirjian 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.

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.

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.

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 fourth down plays 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 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 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.

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.

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