

Finals Flashbacks



1974 The Michigan High School Athletic Association announced plans to introduce a two-round playoff system, extending the season into a 10th and 11th week beginning with the 1975 season. To test the concept, a paper playoff system was devised to prove the viability of the mathematical system. The state's four classes – A, B, C and D – were broken down into geographic regions. Teams that submitted schedules to the MHSAA were then ranked on a point system based on wins, ties and strength of schedule. Victories against schools of equal or larger size meant more points than wins against smaller schools. Victories or ties by teams beaten by a school added bonus points to a school's total.

On Oct. 31, the Association announced its first rankings. A final list of the top five teams in each region appeared two weeks later. The organization compared the list to media polls and determined that concept had been a success. A March 1975 survey of the state's principals and superintendents found 73 percent in favor of postseason play. Based on the approval rate, the Association announced plans for a playoff in the fall of 1975.

According to the paper playoff system, Flint Southwestern, Ypsilanti, Plymouth Salem and Hazel Park would have played in the postseason in Class A in 1974. Muskegon Catholic Central, Riverview, East Grand Rapids and Saginaw Eisenhower qualified under the system in Class B; Comstock Park, Battle Creek St. Philip, Vassar and Onaway were eligible in Class C, and North Adams, Flint Holy Rosary, North Muskegon and Bessemer would have represented Class D.



Gary Shook, Osego

Jim Steinman grabs one of his three touchdown receptions during Gobles' 31-22 victory over Crystal Falls Forest Park in the 1984 Class D Final.

1984 Ann Arbor Pioneer scored 24 unanswered points in the final six minutes of the first half, including a **Class A** Final record 62-yard punt return for a touchdown by Cedric Gordon, as the Pioneers posted a 38-12 victory over Dearborn Fordson. Pioneer quarterback Ed Hesseltine ended the day with three touchdown tosses, while the Ann Arbor defense intercepted four passes by Fordson QB Mike Iaquaniello. Jeff Fisher's 42-yard field established a Class A record, later topped by Josh Wuerfel in 1988.

Leading 21-0 midway through the second quarter, the Wyoming Park Vikings watched as Monroe Catholic Central pulled within six points, 27-21, with five minutes remaining in the **Class B** title contest. Quarterback Dan Host's 27-yard scoring run with less than 1:30 remaining sealed the victory for the Vikings, 33-21.

Detroit St. Martin dePorres freshman Rodney Culver carried 10 times for 91 yards and a pair of touchdowns as the Eagles won their fourth consecutive MHSAA title, a 38-26 victory over Grand Rapids South Christian in **Class C**.

In **Class D**, the Tigers of Gobles raced to a 28-0 lead then held on for a 31-22 win over top-rated Crystal Falls Forest Park. Tony Koshar's pass to Jim Steinman ended in a 96-yard touchdown for the Tigers and established a playoff record that still stands today. The TD pass was the first of three on the day to Steinman.



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Rodney Culver of Detroit St. Martin dePorres carries for some of his 91 yards in the Eagles' 38-26 win over Grand Rapids South Christian in the 1984 Class C Final.

1994

Substitute Tarron Adams scored on runs of 23 and 30 yards in the final frame to lead Troy to a 17-0 win over Bay City Central in the **Class AA** title game. Adams, replacing an injured Jared Toffer, netted 64 yards on eight carries, while Toffer also finished with 64 yards on 11 attempts.

Grand Rapids Forest Hills Central dominated possession time and ended with more total offense, but lost the battle of big plays as Farmington Hills Harrison took the **Class A** title, 17-13. A 90-yard touchdown run by Nick Williams, an 80-yard scoring dash by Jason Granger, and a 77-yard kick return by Granger that set up a 28-yard field goal by Kyle Vessell gave the Hawks a 17-7 lead with 6:27 left to play. The Rangers pulled within four, 17-13, following a Greg Wood-to-Mike Miller scoring pass, then recovered the ensuing onside kick. But Harrison's Kevin Bryant intercepted a pass at the Hawks' 7-yard line with 1:44 remaining to preserve the victory.

Trailing 19-12 with 1:46 to play, Dylan Karczewski scored from 6 yards out to cap a nine-play, 81-yard drive by East Grand Rapids. But Monroe Jefferson's Dennis Bowdler broke up a pass attempt for the two-point conversion, allowing the Bears to escape with a 19-18 victory over East Grand Rapids in **Class BB**. The loss was the first in 26-games for the defending champs. Karczewski ended with 120 yards to lead the Pioneers while Jeff Kenney tallied 83 yards and two 1-yard TDs for Jefferson.

Belding and its deceptive wing-T offense overcame a 19-point halftime deficit to defeat Detroit Country Day, 50-41, in one of the all-time classic contests in the MHSAA Football Playoffs. Coach Irv Sigler's Redskins racked up 333 yards rushing in the **Class B** contest, including 129 yards by Thomas Smith. Country Day quarterback Matt Kives turned in a stellar performance, as the Yellowjackets jumped out to an early 17-0 lead and a 33-14 half-time margin. Kives finished with 16-25 for 182 yards and two TDs. Belding bounced back, scoring on every possession of the second half. A 70-yard run by Joe Gavitt set up the second of four TDs by Smith to start things off. The Redskins pulled within three on another Smith run, then grabbed a 38-33 lead after the defense



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Ravenna's Benny Clark ran for four touchdowns and 187 yards vs. Schoolcraft in the 1994 Class C title game.

held Country Day on the next two possessions. Belding's Matt Hansen later rambled 22 yards for another score, but Country Day wasn't done. Trailing 44-33, Kives drove the Yellowjackets 60 yards in 14 plays, capped with a 1-yard pass to Brian Rubin for the touchdown and a two-point conversion pass to Dan Russo for 4:02 remaining to pull the Yellowjackets within three, 44-41, but Belding answered with a score of its own. The combined 91 points remains an MHSAA Final record.

Orchard Lake St. Mary's DiAllo Johnson completed 9-of-12 passes for 203 yards, as the Eaglets defeated Constantine, 35-7, in **Class CC**. Johnson rushed for a touchdown and finished with two scoring strikes, a 50-yard completion to David Bowens two minutes into the game and a 5-yard pass to Darryl Adams following a 23-yard fumble return by Bowens in the second quarter. Jeff Moe connected on a 27-yard pass to Josh Hardman for the Falcons lone TD. It was the second MHSAA gridiron championship for St. Mary's, the first coming in 1977.

Sophomore Benny Clark rambled for 187 yards on 32 carries and scored four touchdowns as Ravenna trounced Schoolcraft, 43-7, for the **Class C** crown. Bulldog quarterback Kent Nichols, who completed all five of his first quarter passes for 154 yards, finished the day with two TD completions and 183 yards through the air. Schoolcraft QB Aaron Ledlow ended with 113 yards, including a 50-yard screen pass to Josh Tremblay for a touchdown.

Jamie Mazurek's one-handed grab from 5 yards out gave Maple City Glen Lake a 20-10 victory over Waterford Our Lady of the Lakes in **Class DD**. Mazurek's catch with 3:44 remaining was his second touchdown reception on the day from quarterback Greg Aylsworth. Glen Lake running back Ryan Norkoli racked up 173 yards rushing on 29 attempts.

Beal City built a 28-0 lead at the half, then coasted to 35-14 win over Litchfield in **Class D**. Junior Wes Wilson racked up 110 yards rushing and scored three times, including two on passes from quarterback Brad Gross to lead the Aggies. Brian Bohner finished with 11 tackles and two sacks for Litchfield. The senior co-captain also scored the Terriers final touchdown.

— Ron Pesch

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Jamie Mazurek's one-handed TD catch late in the game helped Maple City Glen Lake to the 1994 Class DD crown.