

Eagles Plan to Trump Aces Saturday

By Jon Spencer
Sports Editor

The right opportunity finally presented itself to Eagle quarterback John Caruso in last week's football encounter with Hillsdale.

Ever since engineering a 35-0 drubbing of host and then nationally-ranked Muskingum three weeks earlier, the transfer from Kent State had been understandably anxious to display his skills before an AC partisan crowd.

So much so, that preceding the subsequent home contest with Fairmont State, Caruso, in some pre-game anxiety, sustained an ankle injury. The untimely fate kept the junior signal caller on the sidelines throughout the ballgame.

Last Saturday, Caruso was once again on the bench when the Homecoming affair with Hillsdale opened. John had

suffered a slight concussion a week earlier against Slippery Rock and Eagle boss Fred Martinelli didn't want to use him unless he had to. Well, a 16-10 Hillsdale spread late in the fourth quarter necessitated the move, and when Martinelli summoned for Caruso's services, he was ready.

With less than five minutes to go, Caruso went to work through the airwaves. His first pass of the drive, intended for tight end Tom Massa, was broken up by Hillsdale's Dan Kelly, but interference on Kelly's part gave AC the ball at their own 49 yard line. After being sacked for a 10-yard loss, Caruso went right back over the top to Bob Spano. The senior flanker made a fine grab, pulling the ball away from a defender at the opponents' 39 for a gain of 22 yards. Tim Burns followed with a two-yard plunge, and then Caruso, rolling out to the right, hit a wide-open Massa down to the one.

From there, fullback Rich Skoczen slammed in for his second touchdown of the afternoon. Joe Yoder's conversion was good, and Ashland held on in the last four minutes to win 17-16.

"I wanted to do my very best because I felt some personal pride playing in front of friends," said a happy Caruso after the game. "The fans gave me an added incentive. I also felt I had something to prove, in the fact that a lot of people had never seen me play."

Coming off of the bench to commandeer a winning scoring drive in the waning minutes of a game was nothing new to the talented New York native. He turned the trick against Baldwin-Wallace in junior varsity action last year, and once in high school.

"I find it easier to come off the bench," revealed the Eagles field general. "It's like taking a test in school a day late. I've been watching the defense's reactions, whereas the starting quarterback doesn't have that chance. When I go in I kind of have a notebook on what they're going to do in certain situations."

Caruso's notebook against the Michigan school definitely received a "passing" grade, and because of his and the rest of the Eagles' heroics in the final minutes, Ashland will enter

Saturday's home finale with the University of Evansville at 5-3.

The Purple Aces from Indiana will journey into Community Stadium with only a 4-4 ledger, one of the losses coming to Franklin, the team AC defeated in the season opener. But their record could be somewhat deceiving, in that Evansville has won three of their last four skirmishes.

The school's biggest victory to date came just last weekend in the Indiana Collegiate Conference showdown with St. Joseph's. Both schools went into the battle undefeated in conference play, but only Evansville came out with an unblemished record still intact, conquering their Indiana rivals, 16-0. Thus, the Purple Aces will be riding high on the wave of a conference championship when they face off against Ashland.

"Evansville is very similar to Hillsdale in many ways," reflected the Eagle head. "The only thing is, over their past performance, their defense hasn't been as strong. Offensively, they'll show good balance. A good, sound running game has been the key to their offense."

Spearheading that "good, sound" ground attack will be sophomore tailback Jacques Williams. The gnat-like runner led the ICC in scoring last year, but a shoulder separation has slowed him down somewhat during the present campaign. Still, he's managed 322 stripes on 79 trips with the pigskin.

Williams will be taking handoffs from senior quarterback Ken Flaspoebler. The Evansville signal-caller was handed the helm duties outright three weeks ago when last year's sixth-best NCAA Division III passer, Mark Peters, broke a shoulder bone. All Flaspoebler has done in his place is take over the conference lead in total offense, while clicking on 43 of 84 passes for 594 yards and three touchdowns.

On the receiving end of most of his aerials has been sophomore split end Steve Smith. The speedster lays claim to the ICC lead in receiving with 28 snags for 515 stripes. Smith also doubles as the punter, owning a lofty 40.6 average on 32 boots.

Aiding the offensive cause, without the use of his hands, is kicking specialist Neil Saunders. Born in England, the soccer-style kicker has "lifted" the offense with 16 conversion kicks and a school record six field goals.

While the offense has racked up 22.5 points per outing, a porous defense has yielded 20 markers. Ends Esley McClung and Dave Howath have been the bright spots for eleven-year coach Jim Byers, recording 58 and 51 hits respectively.

On Saturday, the Eagles will be looking to avenge last year's one point loss in Indiana. The Big Gold held a 17-0 advantage in the first stanza, but watched the Purple Aces notch 32 points on the scoreboard over the remainder of the game.

Statistically, the Hillsdale Chargers outplayed the Eagles in all phases of the ballgame last weekend, only to have key mistakes and penalties squelch their chances to win. Ashland defenders also "lowered the boom" four times on freshman quarterback Mike Fisher, three of those sacks extinguishing drives in AC territory.

The Chargers most costly blunder occurred on their possession immediately following the Eagles go-ahead score. Fisher guided his team down to the host's 13, certainly in field goal range for Ted Pettibone, who already had split the uprights from 28, 37 and 30 yards out. But on the ensuing first down play, Eagle tackle Dale Sartor jarred fullback Steve Rodick, causing him to fumble the ball and game away.

"It was a real comeback victory for our kids and for our football team," said Coach Martinelli. "You know, we've struggled through a couple of ballgames here this year. We've lost a couple where the bounce and momentum sort of went the other way. It was good to come back on this one and to come back on the winning end."

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