

Press Clippings - 11/10/2023

- Chicago Tribune - Scouting Lake County quarterfinal playoff football games

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Lake Zurich's Lucas Lappin tries to get by Kaneland's Aric Johnson during the Bears' win last week in the second round of the Class 6A playoffs. (Mark Busch/Shaw Local News Network)



Lake Zurich's Coplan Oettinger intercepts a pass intended for Kaneland's Aric Johnson Saturday, Nov. 4, 2023, during their Class 6A second round playoff game at Kaneland High School in Maple Park.



Warren's X' Zavion Montgomery catches a pass for a touchdown ahead of South Elgin's Stewart Williams during the Blue Devils' win last week in the second round of the Class 8A playoffs. (Joe Lewnard | Staff Photographer)

Class 8A

Lincoln-Way East (11-0) at Warren (9-2)

When: Saturday, 7 p.m. (O'Plaine Campus)

Seeds: Lincoln-Way East is the No. 2 seed in the 32-team seed Class 8A bracket. Warren is the No. 10 seed.

Outlook: A heavyweight title fight here Saturday featuring last year's Class 8A state runnerup in Lincoln-Way East against North Suburban champion Warren. "Lincoln-Way East is annually one the best, if not the best, teams in the state," Warren coach Bryan McNulty said. "They are well-coached, disciplined and play on the edge with extreme effort. In order to be successful, we will have to establish what we do best on offense and win the ball in the air on defense. Their defense gets off blocks and runs to balls as well as anyone in the state. Their offense is efficient and well-coached, especially on the offensive line." Warren had great success once again running the ball in last week's Round 2 win over **South Elgin**. Sophomore Aaron Stewart ran 29 times for 242 yards and scored 4 touchdowns, while Donovan McNeal ran for 115 yards on 15 carries and scored a touchdown. Jack Wolf threw for 146 yards on 5 of 6 attempts and had 1 touchdown through the air. Stewart is now up to 1,688 yards rushing and 20 touchdowns on 230 carries over 11 games. McNulty said he's been thrilled with how his team has risen to the occasion in the playoffs. "In our last game, South Elgin scored late in the first half and with 14 seconds remaining we scored again." Sophomore linebacker Royce Lopez has drawn high praise for his run-stopping abilities. "Royce has become an excellent run-stopper for us," McNulty noted. Sophomore defensive back, wide receiver and kick returner X'Zayvion Montgomery gives the Blue Devils a weapon in all three phases, McNulty noted, while senior offensive lineman Jaivin Young continues to be a major asset with his leadership abilities. Lincoln-Way East hasn't allowed a point in a game since

Oct. 13 and has held eight of its opponents to 7 points or less. The closest anyone has come to the Griffins is Class 7A power Batavia. Lincoln-Way East won that game 14-13 on the road in Week 2. Up next: Winner gets No. 6 Maine South (10-1) or No. 3 Barrington (11-0) in the state semifinals next week.

Class 6A

Belvidere N. (9-2) at Lake Zurich (10-1)

When: Saturday, 1 p.m.

Seeds: Belvidere North is the No. 4 seed in the top half of the Class 6A bracket; Lake Zurich is the No. 1 seed.

Outlook: Belvidere North, out of the NIC-10 conference in the Rockford metro area, continues its tour through Lake County here. North defeated Wauconda last week 28-21 and now faces the top seed in the top portion of the Class 6A bracket. "Belvidere North is a consistent program that is always in the mix for their conference championship and are in the playoffs every year," Bears coach Ron Planz said. "They are very well-coached and have really good athletes. They are a hard-nosed run team and have a defense that pursues the ball well. We need to make sure that we tackle well on defense and not give up any big plays. Offensively, I hope we can control the line of scrimmage and hit some big plays of our own." Planz said despite being a young team, Lake Zurich is embracing the grind of playoff football and all the adversity that comes with it "pretty well," he noted. "Every week presents new challenges and we have had to have new players step up into new roles. I have been proud how we have done that." Lincoln Adams continues to be a defensive force for the Bears. "I didn't think Lincoln could do more for our team, but he has really raised his game and become the vocal leader of the team during our playoff run. When you have a player as good as him stepping up and becoming vocal, everyone, including the coaches, listen." Planz also had high praise for the efforts of Lucas Lappin and George DiCanio. "Lucas has attacked the process of preparation so far this postseason," he said. "He has been a true warrior. No one is 100 percent, but he shows up every day and practices really hard. Come game time, he plays smart and violent. It has been fun to watch. George has stepped up his play as well. He is bringing a very physical element to our offense and defense. He doesn't say much, but he has made his presence felt with some big-time hits on defense and punishing blocks on offense." Lake Zurich racked up 405 yards of total offense in last week's win over Kaneland, including 381 on the ground. The Bears also held a 20-12 advantage in first downs. Lucas Lappin scored 3 rushing touchdowns and Chris Pirrone had two more. Pirrone finished with 192 yards on 28 carries, while Lappin had 155 yards on 11 carries. Adams and Coplan Oettinger each had an interception and Oettinger added a tackle for loss. Each had 9 total tackles, while David Penaherrera had 7 assisted tackles. The Bears are plus-11 in the turnover category this season and have made nearly 42 percent of their third-down conversions compared to opponents'

29.3 percent. Pirrone is up to 1,100 rushing yards in 10 games and has 15 rushing touchdowns. Lappin has 10 rushing touchdowns. Adams has 112 total tackles to lead the defense. DiCanio is next with 60. Up next: Winner gets No. 7 Geneva (9-2) or No. 3 Cary-Grove (9-2) in the state semifinals next week.

Class 5A

Nazareth (6-5) at Carmel (10-1)

When: Saturday, 2 p.m.

Seeds: Naz is the No. 15 seed in the top half of the Class 5A bracket; Carmel is the No. 6 seed

Outlook: Carmel is in the quarterfinals for the first time since 2010 thanks to last week's 50-7 win over Antioch on the road. Donovan Dey ran for 243 yards on 16 carries and scored 3 touchdowns, while quarterback Johnny Weber threw 3 touchdown passes in the victory over the Northern Lake County Conference champions. On the opposing sideline, don't let that 6-5 record (4-5 when the playoffs started) record fool you. Nazareth Academy, out of LaGrange Park, has lost to teams with 11-0, 10-1, 8-3, 9-2 and 9-2 records, including a 7-point loss to unbeaten Kankakee, a 1-point loss to Montini and a 2-point loss to IC Catholic Prep. The Roadrunners defeated perennial state power Prairie Ridge in the first round and Glenbard South in the second round. "Carmel is solid in all three phases of the game," Nazareth coach Tim Racki said. "They are one of the most complete teams we will have faced to this point. They are big and strong up front and possess speed and athleticism at the skill positions. We must limit the big play ability they have and be creative up front to offset their size advantage." Naz is led by the likes of senior linebacker Brendan Flanagan (5-11, 205), junior defensive lineman Gabriel Kaminski (6-4, 250), junior defensive back Jimmy Penley (5-10, 175) and junior quarterback Logan Malachuk (5-11, 185). Kaminski has offers from every Big Ten school, as well as Notre Dame, while Flanagan has a preferred walk-on offer at Illinois State. Malachuk has thrown for 2,567 yards and 27 touchdowns (2 picks in 308 attempts), while Penley has caught 58 passes for 886 yards. Naz's defense has 39 quarterback sacks this season. "We started out 0-4 and lost close games to schools that are currently playing in the quarterfinals," Racki said. "The turnaround speaks to this team's ability to overcome obstacles and display incredible resilience and never wane in their confidence or abilities." Carmel's defense has allowed 21 points in the last four games, while the Corsairs have racked up 185 points in those same games, including 119 alone in the two playoff wins.

Up next: Winner gets No. 4 Chicago Morgan Park (10-1) or No. 8 Wheaton St. Francis (9-2) in the state semifinals next week.