

Milton by five is brave prediction

The Tier II junior football championship game is exactly how it should be. Number one and two going at it head-to-head to see who's the best. Winner take all. It'll be a classic.

The teams: the 8-0 Assumption Crusaders and the 7-1 Milton District Mustangs. Milton's only loss came when the two teams met in the regular season.

Assumption will go into the game as the favourite. This is basically because they only have given up 14 points in their eight games and also because of their 20-0 victory over Milton in their regular season.

It was a key match up that was not only for first place honours but it was to show how these two teams compared. It was a tough game between two good football teams, but Assumption was better because they capitalized on their breaks.

Anyone who saw the game would say that the score did not tell the real story, though. Milton had three golden opportunities to put points on the board but came away empty handed while Assumption managed to get into the end zone on all their chances. But the final score was 20-0 so the Mustangs will have to change something to put points on the board.

"For the offense, we'll pass a lot and sweep a lot," said Mustang head coach Keith Swarbrick, when asked what his offense would have to do differently. "We've got to try to find the mismatches in their defense."

This is a surprise. Although Glen McBryde is very patient for a junior quarterback, and will stay in the pocket when others would have fled, the Milton offensive scheme has usually been run now and pass later.

It has been the running backs that have been the key to the Mustang's success so far. The trio of Trevor Brandt, Alex Pyle and Bill King have given the Mustangs running yards when they've needed them. It has been Brandt on sweeps and Pyle and King up the middle or off-tackle. For Milton to win, the running backs are going to have to be at their best against a very good Crusader defense.

The Milton passing game has come through in the clutch but in high school football it's always risky to throw. Flankers Pat Henneberry and Corey Howitt have each scored eight touchdowns and have shone when McBryde has gone to the air. If Milton does pass a lot they will need to choose their plays carefully and not give Assumption excellent field possession thanks to interceptions.

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The Crusaders' offence is quick and powerful and will score when given the opportunity. It will be interesting to see how the defence is going to stop running backs Greg Kahnart and Joe Maher, both of whom piled up the yardage the last these two teams met.

Maher is also coming off a great day in last week's semi-finals as he scored all five touchdowns in the Crusader 34-0 win over Lester B. Pearson. He will be a player to look for.

In the flanker position, and the main deep threat in the air for the Crusaders, is J.J. Hope who scored two of the Crusaders touchdowns against Milton. One was on a 10-yard reverse and the other was an impressive 35-yard touchdown pass and run where he beat almost the entire Milton defensive backfield before diving into the end zone.

Crusader Head coach Bryan Bodden, doesn't think his team is going to walk away with the game though.

"I don't want our players to go into the game thinking it is going to be a cinch," he said. "I know if we are over-confident we lessen our chances to win. It hasn't been a problem so far but I am worried about it."

The Milton defence will have to worry about containing the explosive Crusader offense to keep the score low. One of the Milton defensive coaches, Greg McPherson, thinks that this can be done.

"I think we've seen almost all of the Assumption playbook and we know what to expect," he said. "We know which players to look for and what we can expect from them. We also have four defensive alignments to stop them."

This game will come down to three things. The better physically-prepared football team, the team who wants it more and whoever has the biggest heart will come out the winner.

"This team has a terrific attitude," Swarbrick said. "We have players that are pure athletes and we are very prepared for this football game."

For Assumption, Bodden is thinking along the same lines.

"We have a very experienced football team with many players who have played for minor football leagues and know what it takes to win. I don't think we will blow out these guys again, it should be a close game."

I agree it will be a close game and that neither team run away with it. It will probably be decided by five points or less and I have to take Milton (no surprise).

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