

Comets Capture Football Crown

BY GEOFF HENSON

The 2007 season for the Olivet College football team was one of the most memorable in school history. The season was filled with a lot of emotion, with the most thrilling moment coming Nov. 10, when the Comets clinched the Michigan Intercollegiate Athletic Association (MIAA) championship for the first time since 1974 and received a bid to the NCAA Division III Playoffs for the first time in school history.

After opening the season with three consecutive non-conference losses, Olivet opened MIAA play with a 62-2 landslide win over Wisconsin Lutheran College. In the game, Olivet had a balanced offensive attack, gaining 258 yards on the ground and throwing for 251 yards. Individually, freshman Willie Jones, of River Rouge, rushed for four touchdowns and sophomore Pat Clasgens, of Livonia, had 143 rushing yards and three touchdowns.

The next week, the Comets traveled to play Adrian College. Trailing 13-7 midway through the fourth quarter, Olivet put together a 12-play, 82-yard drive to take a 14-13 lead with 1:51 left in the game. The drive was capped off by a 23-yard touchdown pass from senior Rob White, of Caledonia, to senior Chris Smith, of Dimondale, to tie the game. Junior Kyle Zabel, of Sturgis, made the PAT kick to provide the winning margin. Adrian's last chance to score was thwarted when sophomore Alex Hill, of Berrien Springs, intercepted a pass. Earlier in the game, Jones had an 86-yard kickoff return for a touchdown.

The Comets returned to the Cutler Athletic Complex for a game against Albion College and defeated the Britons, 24-6, to up its league record to a perfect 3-0. The only points for Albion were on a fourth quarter

touchdown when they had to go only five yards for a score.

Olivet celebrated Homecoming the next week and sent the fans home happy with a 21-14 win over Tri-State (Ind.) University. On a day where the Comet offense struggled in the first half, the Comet defense played a big role in deciding the game. Junior defensive back Michael Terranova, of Lansing, returned two first-half interceptions for touchdowns. Tri-State got on the scoreboard in the fourth quarter, but Olivet immediately answered with its own touchdown on a 69-yard run by Clasgens.

The Comets then suffered their first league loss, 38-25 at Alma, which caused them to slip into a tie for second-place in the MIAA standings with the Scots.

Olivet played its next game at first-place Hope College. The Dutchmen ▶

appeared to have control of the game, leading by a 25-13 score with 4:48 left in the game. Undaunted, the Comets rallied to score two touchdowns in 4:18 and take a 28-25 lead. The first score came when Smith hauled in a 40-yard pass from White. Senior Rod Sanders, of Detroit, caught a 17-yard pass from White for the go-ahead touchdown. Sanders was also on the receiving end of a successful two-point conversion attempt. With 30 seconds left on the clock, the Comets kicked the ball off to Hope. On the kickoff, junior Derek Stinchcomb, of Holly, knocked the ball out of the returner's hands and recovered the loose ball. Three kneel-downs ended the game and Olivet had one of the biggest comebacks in school history.

Entering the final Saturday of the regular season, Alma, Olivet and Hope were all tied for first-place in the MIAA standings. The final week of the regular season pitted Alma at Adrian, Kalamazoo at Olivet and Hope at Wisconsin Lutheran. There were several scenarios on the table to determine who would receive the league's automatic bid for the playoffs, but the simplest one to get the Comets in the playoffs was an Olivet win over Kalamazoo and Alma loss to Adrian.

After scoring just seven points in the first quarter, the Comets put 38 points on the scoreboard in the second quarter to take a 44-0 commanding halftime lead. There was an announcement made to the crowd during the game that Alma was leading 21-10 in the third quarter, and the Comets' playoff chances looked bleak.

Over in Adrian, the Bulldogs had rallied to score 20 unanswered points to defeat Alma, 30-21. Olivet scored its final touchdown in the fourth quarter to take a 51-0 lead. With the outcome of both games decided, an announcement

was made that the Comets could celebrate an MIAA championship and their first-ever berth to the playoffs.

The pairings for the NCAA Playoffs were announced the next day, and Olivet learned it would travel to play Central College in Pella, Iowa. The final result of the playoff game, a 38-17 loss, was not the perfect ending to the season; however, the Comets were able to experience something that had never been done before in school history.

For their efforts during the season, 12 Olivet players were recognized with All-MIAA honors. First-team selections were Clasgens; Terranova; senior offensive center James Boyd, of St. Charles, Ill.; senior defensive back Nate Hughes, of Marshall; senior defensive lineman Marc Miller, of Sunfield; freshman punter Ryan Patten, of Charlotte; senior linebacker DeRan Thomas, of Detroit; and sophomore linebacker Hakeem Yakubu, of Kalamazoo. Miller was also selected as the Defensive Co-MVP. Second-team All-MIAA selections included Hill, Jones, Sanders, Smith and junior offensive tackle Chris VanDalsen, of Jenison.

To access final team and individual statistics from the 2007 season, visit the Olivet College Web site at: <http://www.olivetcollege.edu/athletics/mfootball/stats.php>. ▲



2008 Football Schedule

Sept. 6	Wittenberg, Ohio 7 p.m.
SEPT. 13	ELMHURST, Ill. 1 P.M.
Sept. 20	Concordia, Ill. 1 p.m.
SEPT. 27	NORTH CENTRAL, Ill. 6 P.M.
OCT. 4	ALBION * 2 P.M. (Homecoming)
Oct. 11	Kalamazoo * 1 p.m.
Oct. 18	Trine, Ind. * 1 p.m.
OCT. 25	ALMA * 1 P.M.
Nov. 1	Hope * 1 p.m.
NOV. 15	ADRIAN * 6 P.M.

* MIAA game
CAPS denote home game
Starting times subject to change