

A triple crown for Mid-Continent League

A look back at that special football season of 1985

By THE HDN SPORTS STAFF

November 30, 1985.
The weather was snowy and icy, certainly not the kind of day you would expect anything really special could happen on the football field.

But special is exactly the word Mid-Continent League fans think of when talking about that cold state championship day 10 years ago.

The MCL had three teams in state title games that day, with Norton playing in the Class 4A finale in Lawrence and Plainville (3A) and Victoria (2-1A) playing in Manhattan.

About the time Norton was shutting out Overland Park's St. Thomas Aquinas 14-0, Plainville was beating Wellsville by the same score.

Then it was up to Victoria to pull off the triple crown.

The Knights survived a defensive battle on the snow-covered field to beat Centralia 8-6 and make it 3-for-3 for the MCL.

Following is a look back at those teams' road to the title.

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The unquestionable king of the 10-team league that year was Norton.

The Bluejays shut out eight opponents and allowed just 41 points all season. The closest anyone got to Norton was 14 points.

Even more amazing, the Bluejays never gave up a rushing touchdown even though the second team saw a lot of play in time.

Norton cruised past No. 2-ranked Mulvane 33-8 in the state semifinals to set up its date with St. Thomas Aquinas in Lawrence.

The win over Aquinas helped the Bluejays complete a perfect 13-0 season.

"We knew we had a good team, but 13-0 is not something you plan on," said Coach Neil Melillo, then the Bluejays' coach who now coaches in Texas.

"I think we knew we had a good team, but they also knew the only way to be successful was to work for it. They got better as the year went on."

■ ■ ■
Larry Friend, then the Plainville coach who also had guided the Cardinals to a 3A state title in 1980, said the Norton-Aquinas score was announced in Manhattan during Plainville's 3A title game against Wellsville.

"It gave us an uplift," Friend said. "It seemed like everybody (in the MCL) was pulling for everybody else."

The Cardinals had needed an uplift

about midway through the season. After losing 14-0 to Norton in the season opener, Plainville won its next four games. Two days after shutting out Victoria 22-0 for their fourth straight win, Friend's son, Joey, a senior running back, was injured in an automobile accident.

Three other players also missed Plainville's next game, vs. Phillipsburg, after being suspended for violating team rules.

Despite those setbacks, the Cardinals kept on winning. They beat Phillipsburg without those four players to finish the regular portion of the MCL schedule 5-1.

The rest, as they say, is history as the Cardinals won their next seven games to finish the season on a 12-game winning streak. ■ ■ ■
To look at Victoria's record after six games, the Knights (then 2-4) seemed an unlikely team to win a state championship.

But while playing the regular season in the MCL is tough, especially for a 2A school, it has its advantages come postseason.

"The competition was so good, it was easy to get discouraged," said Doug Moeckel, who was in his third year as Victoria's coach in '85.

Getting out of the blocks in district play that year also proved difficult for the Knights. Victoria barely beat Stockton, which was 1-8 in 1985, and the Knights had to rally to beat Osborne 16-7 in the district championship game.

"That was when we realized we were capable of doing some good things," said Moeckel, who coached the Knights to another state title — in 1988 — before moving to Chapman in '91.

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Norton and two other teams nearly pulled it off again in 1986.

Norton repeated in 4A, while Smith Center swept through the year undefeated — en route to the 3A title. But Stockton came up a little short in the 2-1A finale, losing 17-8 to St. Paul.

While its league opponents were enjoying so much success in '85, Stockton was mired in a 1-8 season. Not for long.

Beginning the next season, the Tigers advanced to state title games five of the next nine years, winning three of those. Now, Stockton, which also won the 1971 state title in 2A, leads the MCL with most state football titles (four).

MCL STATE FINALISTS

(Since 1980)

The Mid-Continent League has placed 16 teams in the state football championship games the last 15 years, winning 13 titles. On only three occasions during that period — in 1984, 1990 and 1991 — did an MCL team fail to reach the state championship game. Stockton is the only MCL school before 1980 to win a state title, winning Class 2A in 1971.

- Class 3A — Plainville 36, Silver Lake 28 1981
- Class 2A — Victoria 21, Frontenac 15 1982
- Class 3A — Smith Center 6, Wellsville 0 1983
- Class 2A — Osborne 12, St. Marys 6 (CT) 1985
- Class 4A — Norton 14, St. Thomas Aquinas 0 1985
- Class 3A — Plainville 14, Wellsville 0 1986
- Class 2-1A — Victoria 8, Centralia 6 1986
- Class 4A — Norton 41, Baxter Springs 20 1987
- Class 3A — Smith Center 20, Sabetha 6 1987
- Class 2-1A — St. Paul 17, Stockton 8 1987
- Class 2-1A — Stockton 54, Frontenac 28 1988
- Class 2-1A — Victoria 30, Riley County 6 1989
- Class 4A — Atchison 40, Norton 15 1992
- Class 2-1A — Stockton 28, Frontenac 10 1993
- Class 2-1A — Stockton 30, Riley County 22 1994
- Class 2-1A — Frontenac 13, Stockton 12 1994



1985 — YEAR OF THE TRIPLE CROWN

CLASS 4A NORTON (13-0)

W — Plainville	14-0
W — Ellis	33-0
W — Osborne	47-0
W — Victoria	33-6
W — Smith Center	36-0
W — Hill City	48-0
W — Hays/TMP-Marian	16-0
W — Russell	72-18
W — Phillipsburg	46-0
W — Goodland	26-3
W — Larned	35-6
W — Mulvane	33-8
W — Overland Park-St. Thomas Aquinas	14-0

CLASS 3A PLAINVILLE (12-1)

L — Norton	14-0
W — Stockton	32-0
W — WaKeeney-Trego	20-14
W — Osborne	28-0
W — Victoria	22-0
W — Phillipsburg	14-6
W — Smith Center	24-6
W — Ellis	42-0
W — Hill City	52-12
W — WaKeeney-Trego	29-6
W — Lyons	35-7
W — Clifton-Clyde	34-12
W — Wellsville	14-0

CLASS 2-1A VICTORIA (9-4)

W — Ellis	20-6
L — WaKeeney-Trego	9-6
W — Hill City	19-14
L — Norton	33-6
L — Plainville	22-0
L — Smith Center	40-6
W — Stockton	19-18
W — LaCrosse	28-14
W — Osborne	16-7
W — Dighton	35-12
W — Johnson-Stanton County	38-12
W — Caldwell	8-6
W — Centralia	8-6

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Zeigler returns to coach Quinter for the third time in his career