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Irish relish playoff possibilities

Pontiac Notre Dame Prep and playoff nemesis Cranbrook-Kingswood on opposite sides of draw

By Mike Moore
C & G Sports Writer

TROY — He can't help but laugh about it. Really, what else can he do, especially now?

Randy Campana is in his seventh season as the Pontiac Notre Dame Prep hockey coach. His first six seasons have all ended in the same fashion — a loss to Bloomfield Hills Cranbrook-Kingswood in the opening rounds of the Division 3 playoffs.



Photo by Tracy Dreslinski
Notre Dame Prep's Kevin Michelcavage has helped guide his squad to another successful regular season, but the senior remains confident and hopeful that the final game of the playoffs will include a date with Cranbrook-Kingswood.

“They’ve had our number,” Campana said last week before a game at the Troy Sports Center. “It’s been different every year, too. Sometimes, it’s been the first game, and we played like we didn’t have a chance. Other times, like last year, it was the regional final where we already had two wins. But they still found a way to get us.”

One thing is for sure this time, the two teams won’t see each other in the opening rounds. As a matter of fact, thanks to a realignment of regionals, the only way Prep could see the Cranes is in the final game, a scenario Campana and his squad openly welcome.

“To be the best, you have to beat the best, right?” Campana said. “Cranbrook is usually one of the best teams around. So whether it’s in the first round, the second or for a state final, that’s a team we’d love to beat.”

“Honestly, winning a state title without having to go through Cranbrook would seem a bit weird,” senior captain and Sterling Heights resident Kevin Michelcavage said. “We want to see them. We want to have a chance to play them again.”

Their desire to play the best teams around doesn’t mean the Fighting Irish are overconfident or cocky. But as Campana explained, his team — 12-7-2 at press time — simply believes in itself, this year more than any other.

“Since I first arrived here, the talent level has increased so much in the program,” Campana said. “I think it’s at a point now where we feel like we are good enough to compete with teams at a higher level. We’ve gotten some great senior leadership. The younger guys have bought into our system. Truthfully, this is probably the most complete team I have ever had here.”

“This is a group of good friends who get to play hockey together,” Michelcavage said. “We’ve all become pretty close over the years. We’ve formed that chemistry

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that leads to success. We understand our roles and what has to be done. More or less, we're having fun, and we're doing a good job on the ice."

The state playoffs officially begin March 2. The Fighting Irish, ranked No. 2 by the Michigan High School Hockey Coaches Association in Division 3, will travel to Goodrich for a 7 p.m. game against Ortonville-Brandon at the Polar Palace in a pre-regional.

Cranbrook, currently ranked No. 1 in D-3, opens the playoffs at Wallace Ice Arena against Beverly Hills Detroit Country Day at 5:15 p.m.

"I think there's a mental block we're going to have to get past if we do run into them," Michelcavage added. "Every year, they've found a way to beat us, and some of those games may have been over, in some ways, before they began. We feel confident we're past that. We will be confident. If we see them, it's a game we could win."

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