

## **NO APOLOGIES**

**Marian Catholic head coach Stan Dakosty: “Our school doesn’t apologize for football”**

**By Joshua Funk  
For PA Football News**

In case there was any question whether or not football in Pennsylvania’s coal regions was still a hot ticket, the following example from Stan Dakosty proves that to be an emphatic, “Yes!”

“We played Panther Valley last season,” Dakosty said, “and we’re a small town, with 320 kids in our school, and they’re a small “AA” school, and there were 4,000 people in the stands. So a Friday night in the coal regions is still a real special situation.”

One of the books that Dakosty owns at his home is a book called *The Breaker Boy*, and in it, he paraphrased a quote that went something like this: “There’s professional football, college football, and coal region football.”

“Our kids take a great deal of pride in that, and I know the area does, too,” Dakosty said. “I know many times a college recruiter will say to me, ‘I know the film is from the coal regions because there are so many people in the stands.’”

“For coal region kids,” Dakosty continued, “football’s still a means to an end.”

But ultimately, when discussing or closely examining the 33-year coaching career of Stan Dakosty, it doesn’t come down to the number of fans in the bleachers or the number of championships or victories he’s accumulated. Like a lot of coaches out there, he’s not a numbers guy, and will tell you so himself.

What it’s important to first start with is the way he’d like to be remembered, what his “legacy” would be, if you will.

“I hope they remember me, #1, as a good family man because my family is my number one thing in my life,” Dakosty said. “From a football standpoint, I’d like to be known as a guy that cared – cared about the kids, cared about the game, a guy that respected the game.”

“When I got inducted into the (PSFCA) Hall of Fame a couple of years ago, the last words of my speech were, ‘If someone told me about all the trials and troubles and tribulations that go along with coaching, would I still do it?’ My answer would be, ‘Show me the way,’” Dakosty continued. “That’s how I feel about the game of football.”

Dakosty’s desire and drive, coupled with a tough brand of high school football players that are the prototypical makeup of a “coal region” style football team, has helped make

him one of District 11's winningest coaches and Marian Catholic one of District 11's most consistent small school football programs.

The Colts, based in Tamaqua in central Schuylkill County, have fluctuated between the "A" and "AA" classifications, but regardless of classification, the results are the same. Marian is a seven-time District 11 champion (5 titles in "A", 2 in "AA"), which is a tie for second place all-time in District 11 with Allentown Central Catholic, and one shy of tying Bethlehem Catholic, which leads all teams in the district with eight titles.

The Colts have made appearances in four PIAA semifinals (1990, 1993, 1998, and 2000), defeating Canton Area 34-14 in 1990, and falling to South Williamsport in '93, and Mount Carmel in '98 and '00. Marian's only state championship appearance came against Farrell in 1990, and the Colts, who were told not to even bother showing up for the game, defeated the highly-touted Steelers 21-13.

"That was one of the greatest games I've been around," Dakosty said.

"I can still remember it," he continued. "We were in the gym on a Monday, and it was raining or something, and I recall someone coming in to tell me, 'Did you hear what they said?' The atmosphere that week was amazing, from the pep rally to the welcome home party. People still talk about it to this day. Catching lightning in a bottle like that was really neat."

Marian's run to the state title was also unique in the fact that the Colts suffered their only loss of the season in the playoffs – the Eastern Conference championship game. By today's rules, Marian's loss would have ended their hopes of a deeper playoff run. But their opponent, Hanover Area was a "AA" school, Marian's season was allowed to continue. Hanover, meanwhile, continued rolling along, all the way to the "AA" state title over Canevin Catholic.

"It was very unusual," Dakosty said.

Even before the era of the PIAA playoffs, which began in 1988, Marian Catholic had some very good football teams. The Colts, at one point during the 1980s, boasted a 13-0 team and an impressive 25-game winning streak, which is believed to be the longest winning streak in school history. Marian won Eastern Conference championships in 1980, 1981, and 1986 by a combined margin of 95-41.

"We had some teams that I feel would have been worthy state playoff contenders had the state playoffs been in effect," Dakosty said.

Even though most of the PIAA's geographic districts had begun some form of a playoff system in the 1980s, playing in and winning the Eastern Conference playoffs was really a big deal.

“That was exciting,” Dakosty said. “That was the pinnacle for a coal region team to win the EC title.”

That particular weekend in 1980 was special for two reasons. It was special from a football standpoint because Marian running back Mike Tracy set the state rushing record. But it was also special from a family standpoint as well. Dakosty celebrated the birth of his first child before Marian destroyed Mahanoy Area 35-8.

“That’s a weekend our family will never forget,” he said.

The Colts successfully defended their EC title the following season, defeating Wilkes-Barre Meyers 31-26. After narrowly being eliminated from the EC playoffs in 1982 by Scranton Prep, Marian had to wait four more years before it vanquished Central Columbia 29-7 in 1986.

All of Marian’s tradition, though, might not have come to fruition if it weren’t for a landmark victory against Hazleton Area a couple of years into Dakosty’s tenure at Marian. After that upset, he said, players and parents jumped on board with his philosophy, and the rest, as they say, is history.

“We talk about our tradition all the time,” Dakosty said. “We try to sell them (our kids) our tradition and that, but tradition doesn’t get you a first down. You’ve got to realize the caliber of kids that we have – good, hardworking kids that play the game with passion. Plus, there’s stability with my coaching staff. Some of my assistants have been with me longer than I’ve been with my wife.

“Football’s very important at our school. Our school doesn’t apologize for football. It’s very important and beneficial to us in so many ways.”