

Canton-Plymouth grid rivalry on tap

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The annual campus clash between Canton and Plymouth is earlier this season than in recent years, yet it looks to have added significance this time around.

That's because both KLASA South Division football rivals are off to slower starts than usual in 2016, and the outcome of Friday's 7 p.m. game (Plymouth-Canton Educational Park varsity turf field) could wind up key as to which team qualifies for the MHSAA playoffs.

Canton is 2-2 following a 34-21 victory over Livonia Franklin last week; Plymouth lost 54-28 to Livonia Churchill to fall to 1-3 on the season. With that loss, the Wildcats reached a bit of a crossroads if they are to notch the six wins required to reach the state playoffs.

"This is uncharted waters for me," Plymouth coach Mike Sawchuk said. "I don't think I've ever been 1-3. We just got to coach harder."

The Chiefs are bouncing back from an 0-2 start, and are primed to carry that positive momentum forward.

"It feels really good," said Canton defensive back Steven Walker, about the way the Chiefs rallied in the second half against the Patriots. "It means that once you get momentum, it's hard to stop."

Sawchuk lamented blown coverages against the skilled Chargers, and promised a week of tough preparations for the Chiefs. "It's time for them to take some ownership for themselves and let themselves get coached and take the coaching."

Last October, the Wildcats earned a 31-20 win over Canton — giving Plymouth a 3-4 record in the seven meetings beginning in 2009.

Most of those meetings took place in October, with both standout programs virtually guaranteed playoff berths.

In 2009 and '10, the Chiefs were dominant with 49-7 and 36-0 victories.

The Wildcats rebounded the subsequent two seasons, prevailing 31-30 in 2011 and 28-21 in 2012.

It was Canton's turn to win back-to-back meetings in 2013-14 (34-23, 30-20).

Should the win-two, lose-two trend continue Friday, Plymouth's playoff hopes will still be alive.