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By PETE GAUGHAN

The High School Charity Game is a monumental day not only for the players and coaches but for each of the four communities involved.

To be able to showcase their talents in one of the top NFL stadiums in America is something all the participants will remember for the rest of their lives. This is what football in northeast Ohio is all about; performing on a big stage and opening the season at Cleveland Browns Stadium in the Charity Game is as good as it gets.

No other school gets to open the season the way St. Edwards will, as the defending Division I State Champion. Last season the Eagles captured the school's first gridiron title. Don't think for a minute that third-year head coach Rick Finotti is going to rest on his laurels.

"Winning a state title proved that it can be done, but this is a new season with new players," said Finotti. "We have a great staff who are good football men. We lost 15 starters from that title team and we have high expectations for this team."

Finotti knows the deep history of the Charity Game, as his grandfather coached at Cathedral Latin.

"I inherited all of his coaching stuff and I read all about the Charity Game. I am honored to coach in this game especially against a team like Glenville (a team the Eagles beat in the second round of the playoffs last year)," said the head Eagle. "We must play tough and physical and we must run the football."

Ted Ginn, Glenville's boss, knows all about the Charity Game. "We never made it to the Charity Game when I was in high school (Glenville). We could never beat Collinwood," He said. "But I know about the tradition of the game and it means a lot to our young men and the community to be part of this event. We teach our team about the history of this game and to be in again is something special."

The Tarblooders lost 40 seniors from a team that went 11-1 in 2010 with that lone defeat coming against the Eagles in the state playoffs.

"We are a very young team that will rely on defense early in the season," said Ginn. "St. Ed's is a big challenge. They are a powerhouse in Ohio and the defending state champs. This is tough opening game for us."

The opening game on tap today features teams from the Northeast Ohio Conference. Although in different divisions, they have split a pair of games the past two seasons.

Mayfield head coach Larry Pinto said his team has been looking forward to the challenge as soon as they got word about the Charity Game.

"To play at Browns Stadium is a chance of a lifetime and a great challenge for our program," said the veteran boss of the Wildcats. "Our kids have been talking about this game for months and they are really excited about the opportunity at hand."

Mayfield will try and bounce back from a 6-4 season but it won't be easy. Their first four games are all against playoff teams from last season.

"Our goals are to win the opener, take the conference title and get back to the playoffs," said Pinto. "We have prided ourselves on defense and the kicking game in the past and it will be no different this year. We've been in some big games over the past few years and this will be right up there."

Ray Hradek started his 32-year coaching career at Mayfield but this will be his first game as the boss as Medina.

The transition has been very smooth since I took over here. I am having a ball. Plus the added excitement of playing the Charity Game and this becomes a very special opener," the Medina coach said. "The entire community can't wait for the opener against a very solid Mayfield football team. This first game can set the tone for the whole season."