

Sports

High hopes for another new season

Friday, September 4, 2009

By Don Seeley, dseeley@pottsmmerc.com

Here we go again ... another new high school football season, the area's 123rd, believe it or not, when remembering The Hill School kicked it all off first in this area way, way back in 1887.

Things have certainly changed since then – like the actual size and look of the football (it's no longer the bladder); the equipment (helmets have replaced the shaggy haircuts and cleats are certainly safer than nails nowadays); scoring (touchdowns have gone from four to six points); and umpteen rules (like no forearms to the face, thank you).

Yes, a new season.

Get ready for a whole bunch of new names, a handful or two of familiar stars to go along with a slew of new stars, all determined to produce some new records.

There's energy.

"You go through two weeks of practices, most in all that heat and humidity, and two scrimmages," said OJR head coach Tom Barr. "The kids want to get out there and play for real now."

There's excitement.

"This is our best opportunity to compete in the (Pioneer Athletic Conference) in some time," said St. Pius X head coach George Parkinson.

And there are those high expectations.

"We're aware that a lot of people think we're going to be a very good football team this year," said Pottsgrove head coach Rick Pennypacker. "But we've reminded our kids going into (tonight's game) we haven't won anything yet."

After the opening-night jitters subside, the butterflies that flutter through the first couple of series are gone, and the obvious miscommunications and misunderstandings are out of the way – and the adrenalin subsides just a wee bit – coaches will get a more realistic feel, or an up-close look at what needs to be tweaked before Week Two, and what needs to be twisted or turned completely around before heading into the league portion of their regular-season schedules.

There will be no shortage of stars likely shining this weekend.

Daniel Boone quarterback Jon Monteiro, who kept a nagging leg injury all to himself last season and broke virtually every Berks County and Mercury-area passing record, is back. So are Methacton's James McHugh and Phoenixville's Tom Romano, both of whom debuted by throwing for over 1,000 yards a year ago. And some newcomers – like Boyertown's Dylan Pasik, Owen J. Roberts' Nate Walters and Upper Perkiomen's Casey Perlstein, to name a few – could be throwing for a grand or more in their first full-season debuts this fall.

Then there's Pottsgrove's Terrell Chestnut – The Mercury's Player of the Year and unquestionably one of the most talented two-way players in the entire state – who could go over that 1,000-yard mark throwing the football as well as carrying it. And who knows, St. Pius' very athletic Cole Parkinson, given the time to throw and the room to run, could very well duplicate those rare numbers.

Don't think there's any shortage of good running backs returning for the show this season, either. Boyertown has Logan Herb and Ryan Schwager; Owen J. Roberts has junior Ryan Brumfield, who piled up over 2,000 yards last season and could very well scoot past every rushing and total offense record there is by the time he's done; Pottsgrove has Maika Polamalu and his 1,000-yards back; and Pottstown has transfer David Tyler and his 2,000-plus yards in the backfield.

If you're looking for those spectacular catches (or just the routine receptions on a consistent basis), keep an eye on, among others, Daniel Boone's Kelly Saylor, Methacton's Patrick McMichael, OJR's Kohl Batdorf, Perkiomen Valley's Ben Carbutt, Spring-Ford's Andy Ellison, and Upper Perkiomen's Ronnie Gillespie.

And if it's the beef you like, there's plenty of it. Boyertown, Daniel Boone, Owen J. Roberts, Phoenixville, Pottstown and Upper Perkiomen could easily break the offensive and defensive line scales ... and there are some very big fellas on the other area teams.

For those who dare carry the football, the big guys can squash them, and those hard-hitting linebackers – lik

Boyertown's Jared Giles, Methacton's Michael He, Owen J. Roberts' Sam Funk and Rich Zazo, Pottsgrove's Preston Hamlette, Pottstown's Tommy Santos, Spring-Ford's James Hoff, and Upper Perkiomen's Fleming – who can thump them. And don't think those corners and safeties are any lightweights, either, at least not Daniel Boone's Saylor, Perkiomen Valley's Carbutt, Pottsgrove's Chestnut, Pius' Parkinson, or Upper Perkiomen's Andrew Orlick and Shawn Wenhold.

Come to think of it, five of the area's best kickers from a year ago – Daniel Boone's Bernie Roell, Perkiomen Valley's Justin Morgan, OJR's Zach Lepore, Phoenixville's John Mcnally and Boyertown's Aaron Sassaman – are back to foot their share of the bill, too.

Not enough? Add in all those quarterbacks, running backs, receivers, linemen, linebackers, corners and safeties who most of us never heard of going into tonight's openers, but who will be quite familiar to all of us in a week or two, and definitely by the end of the season.

Let the games begin.

BEARING DOWN

Boyertown travels to Allentown Allen tonight, and don't think head coach Mark Scisley hasn't reminded the Bears of one very strange (and perhaps embarrassing) statistic.

No Boyertown team has beaten a non-league opponent in five years, or since a 22-13 decision of Abington two weeks before Thanksgiving in 2004. Since then, the Bears have lost 11 straight – four games to Muhlenberg; two to Downingtown West; and one each to Abington, Governor Mifflin, Great Valley, Hatboro-Horsham, Middletown,

Needless to say, Scisly has a little motivational tool for tonight's game against the Canaries – who, incidentally, haven't won a game since their season finale in 2006 and were just 1-29 the last three years.

NO PUFF SCHEDULE

Of the area's 11 schools kicking off the season this weekend, only Daniel Boone and St. Pius X will be facing non-league opponents who have a combined losing record from a year ago. The Blazers' three opponents (Donegal, Susquehannock and Columbia) were a combined 7-24 last year, while the Lions' three (Simon Gratz, Jenkintown and Kennedy-Kenrick) were 16-17.

Based on last year's records, Upper Perkiomen has the most difficult schedule this time around facing opponents with a combined 25-9 mark. Others worth mentioning are Perkiomen Valley (15-5), Spring-Ford (16-8), and Phoenixville (14-8).

SELECT COMPANY

Pottsgrove has an opportunity to do something this year no area program has achieved before – post its third straight season of 10 or more wins. Four schools have won 10 or more in successive years a combined six times before, but never three years in a row.

Pottstown was the first to do it (1970-71), then Owen J. Roberts matched it (1983-84). Spring-Ford managed to string together back-to-back, 10-plus wins seasons twice

(1986-87 and 1994-95), as has Pottsgrove (2000-01 and 2007-08).

GOLDEN YEAR

St. Pius X, which is playing at Mich Stadium for the final time this season, will be wearing gold jerseys and blue pants for all varsity and junior varsity games this fall. And, as they have for more eight years now, the Lions will slip into their gold jerseys and gold pants one last time on Thanksgiving in honor of the late Ron Reed – a former standout at Pius, All-American at Kutztown, and assistant coach as well as supporter of all Pius activities before his death. His son, Scott Reed, is the head coach at Perkiomen Valley.

*Don Seeley is the sports editor of The Mercury. His high school football column appears Tuesdays and Fridays throughout Thanksgiving. Read more of his columns on his blog, **Talking Sports**.*

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