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Photo by Patricia O'Blenes
 Members of the Bishop Foley football team come together after a recent practice. After going 3-6 last season, Foley and coach Paul Stanton feel a better season is in store in 2008.

Rollover photo by Tracy Dreslinski
 Hazel Park High senior quarterback looks downfield during practice Aug. 15 as coach Scott Guthrie looks on. The Vikings are young, but ready to work, according to their coach.

Madison Heights Madison

League: MAC Silver
 Last season: 12-1, lost in Division 5 state semifinals



Offense

Key player: Becari Allen, junior, running back.

With the departure of Deandre Johnson, there's little question why first-year coach Drake Wilkins mentioned a running back as one of his key players. While Wilkins said there's no way to replace Johnson, Allen will shoulder some of the load.

"He's looked very solid so far," Wilkins said of Allen. "I'm not sure how the offense is going to go, especially in the early part of the season. They graduated a lot of talent. Now it's my job to help restore and rebuild that confidence."

Defense

Key player: Mike Brehmer, senior, linebacker.

Wilkins admitted his defense won't be the biggest or strongest in the division, but said he still expects a good deal of success. That success should begin with the team's overall speed.

"Mike (Brehmer) is the kind of guy who will knock some heads around; we're going to need him to do that," Wilkins said. "Overall, though, we're going to have to rely a great deal on the speed we have."

Special teams

Key player: Becari Allen, junior, returner.

Allen will have to provide the spark in returning kicks and punts for the Eagles'

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special teams.

“A lot of work has to be done with our special teams,” the coach explained. “We have a lot of growing to do. We’re going to rely on Becari in the beginning.”

Coach’s outlook

When asked about the coming season and what he expects from his squad, Wilkins couldn’t help but let out a sarcastic laugh.

“Well, from what I’ve heard from people outside the program, if we win four games or so, that will be a great year,” he quipped. “That’s not how I see it. That’s not how my guys see it. We’re planning on going into every game with the expectation of winning.”

Hazel Park High

League: OAA Blue

Last season: 2-7

Offense

Key player: Chris Bible, senior, fullback.

The Vikings return two starters on offense, including Bible. The fullback stands 6 feet 2 inches and is 230 pounds. He is perfect for this offense, which coach Scott Guthrie said will revolve around a power running game.

“He’s a big, strong kid,” he said. “He sets the tone and grinds out the yards, and hopefully, grinds out the defense.”

Defense

Key player: Charles Hill, senior, defensive back.

Hill leads a group of three returning starters. Guthrie said he expects the senior to be a major contributor from his position in the secondary.

“He’s athletic and instinctive,” the coach said. “He has a knack for the ball and decent coverage.”

Special teams

Key player: yet to be determined.

Without any returning starters in the kicking game, Guthrie said the roles of kicker and punter are still up in the air.

“That’s still a question mark,” he said. “I think we have a few kids that’ll be all right.”

Coach’s outlook

Guthrie said he may not have any stars on his team, but he does have a group of guys that are working hard together.

“I’m pretty optimistic,” he said. “But again, we’re dealing with kids that don’t have varsity experience.”

Guthrie added that he hopes the group coming up after a successful JV season will contribute this year.

“It was a good core group of guys,” Guthrie of last year’s JV. “If they can step in right away, we’ll be good. If not, it could be a long year.”

Madison Heights Bishop Foley

League: CHSL Intersectional 1

Last season: 3-6

Offense:

Key player: Josh Blakeslee, junior, quarterback.

The strength the Ventures will have in 2008 on the offensive side of the ball comes mainly from experience, as eight starters are back.

“We’re pretty excited about the balance we’re going to be able to play with,” coach

Paul Stanton said.

The one position that won't have much experience is quarterback. With the graduation of Chris Sinagoga, Blakeslee takes over the reigns.

"He started for us on defense last season," Stanton said of the Royal Oak resident. "He's going to have to be strong for us on offense now."

Defense

Key player: Brad Bochniak, senior, linebacker.

As experienced as the offense is, the defense can one-up it as nine returning starters, including Bochniak, a Troy resident and three-year starting linebacker, are back in uniform.

"Not only do we have all those guys coming back, but the whole mentality of the group has changed," Stanton said. "The guys really committed themselves in the offseason. They are bigger, stronger and faster, not to mention more experienced."

Special teams

Key player: Matt Morrow, junior, kicker.

Experience may not necessarily be a factor on special teams, however, depth certainly will.

"We're going to have a lot of balance on special teams, a lot of guys that will focus solely on this part of the game," Stanton said. "We have a lot of guys on special teams who may not be starting on offense or defense. They're going to contribute a lot to this."

Coach's outlook

When asked about the season as a whole, Stanton quickly spoke of staying healthy and learning from the past.

"Last year, we got bit by the injury bug," the coach said. "If we can stay healthy, we're going to be very competitive. ... At the same time, we have to learn from a lot of what happened late in games last year. Of our six losses, four came in the fourth quarter of close games. We can't let that happen again."

Madison Heights Lamphere

League: MAC Bronze

Last season: 4-5

Offense

Key player: David Shoebottom, senior, running back.

Lamphere coach Jason Charron wasted little time in talking about his key guy on offense, quickly pointing to Shoebottom, the group's lone senior starter and a player who is going to get the ball a ton this season.

"He's been the true leader for our program since last season ended," Charron said. "He's very motivated to play college ball, and in doing so has pushed himself, and pushed our team, with his leadership."

Charron said he plans to keep a balanced attack of rushing and passing, stressing how important his offensive line will be.

Defense

Key player: Derek McCoy, senior, linebacker

With a young offense needing some time to find itself, Charron said his defensive unit will be the strength of his team.

"They are going to have to keep us together for a few weeks while the offense gets going," Charron said.

McCoy, according to the coach, is the glue that will hold the defense together. A three-year starter at linebacker, Charron called the senior a, "great leader," adding that his teammates, "really look up to him."

Special teams

Key Player: Mitch Kozlowski, sophomore, return man.

When asked about his special teams, Charron said that department is what hurt his 2007 squad.

“Last year, we really lacked an explosive return man who could swing the field in our favor,” he said.

This year, however, Charron hopes Kozlowski can be that man.

“Mitch has great speed,” Charron said. “He’ll give us a chance to start with the ball in pretty good position.”

Coach’s outlook

With a developing offense, a strong defense and an unproven group on special teams, Charron didn’t want to set any specific numbers as far as wins are concerned. At the same time, he expects his kids to compete every week.

“I think we will be a team that develops as the season progresses,” he said. “We will promote the team concept, and I think we have a group here that can compete in every single game we play. We’ll see what happens.”

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