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Rochester Adams

League: OAA White

Last season: 11-2, lost in Division 2 semifinals

Offense

Key player: Cody Wilson, senior, slot back.

Replacing Josh Renel, the school's record-holder for touchdowns, isn't going to be easy, but coach Tony Patritto believes he has another electric back in Wilson.

"He's such a big-play guy for us. He's going to be involved in very play," Patritto said. "He's a great route runner, he's a good runner and he's really strong as a blocker. He does everything well."

The Highlanders have six returning starters to an offense that averaged over 38 points per game last season.

"It's still early, but the kids have worked hard and it's all coming together," Patritto said of the squad.

Defense

Key player: Mike Sirosky, senior, defensive end.

The Highlanders have five guys back on defense after letting up just over 10 points per contest last season.

Adams hopes for more of the same this time around with Sirosky anchoring a defensive line.

"He's a three-year starter and done a great job versus the run and the pass," Patritto said. "He's very intense and a passionate player."

Adding depth to the line is three-year starter junior Jordan Sanders.

Special teams

Key player: Christian Babini, senior, long snapper

Patritto knows he needs a guy he can trust at long snapper, and he has one in Babini.

"It's just a key point in every field goal, extra point and punt," Patritto said. "It's a big play for your team."

Coach's outlook

The Highlanders have advanced to the semifinals four of the past five years and won the state championship in 2003. Patritto hopes to repeat that feat.



Photo by Patricia O'Blenes
Rochester Adams sophomore Andrew Hammett fights for extra yards against Clinton Township Chippewa Valley Aug. 21 in a scrimmage.

Photo by Tracy Dreslinski
Rochester Hills Stoney Creek junior Trent Drummheller hauls in a pass Aug. 20 at practice.



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“Our first goal is to beat Clarkston. That’s our first game, and it’s a benchmark game,” he said. “Ultimately, our largest goal is to make it to Ford Field and win the state championship.”

Rochester Hills Stoney Creek

League: OAA White

Last season: 8-2, lost in Division 2 pre-district

Offense

Key player: Eric Fisher, senior, tackle.

The Cougars bring their balanced attack to the White after lighting up the Blue Division the last two seasons, averaging 26.4 points per game. Leading the way on a young offensive line is Fisher, a three-year varsity member who has made a verbal commit Central Michigan University.

“We are very young offensively with only three returning starters,” coach Calvin Gross said. “Our young players will need to pick up the speed quickly for us to be effective with our veer offense.”

In the backfield, running back Marco Santi is the only returnee after rushing for 675 yards last season.

Defense

Key player: Stephan Miller, senior, defensive back.

Stoney Creek’s defense has been stingy the last two seasons, giving up just over 14 points per game. The Cougars return four starters, but Gross said many of the new starters saw valuable time last season.

“Our strength should be with the defensive line and inside linebacker play,” the coach said. “Stephan Miller is a very solid safety and should be a good leader on the field.”

Special teams

Key player: To be determined

“We have been working on them and still have a ways to go,” said Gross.

Coach’s outlook

Gross knows challenges lie ahead in the new division, but he sees the move as part of the process of building his seven-year-old program.

“This next step into a tougher division will help strengthen our program so that we can compete with the better teams in the state of Michigan,” he said. “I am looking forward to coaching them and taking them into battle on Friday nights.”

Rochester High

League: OAA White

Last season: 4-5

Offense

Key player: Ziar Hill, senior, running back.

Coach Drew Kisabeth has added a wrinkle to his spread offense, incorporating an option look.

“It gives us multiple dimensions,” Kisabeth said. “It kind of gives us some balance.”

When the Falcons do run the ball, it’ll be senior Ziair Hill with most of the carries.

“He’s put on about 20 pounds; he grew up from last year,” the coach said of the three-year starter. “He looks good and he’s running the ball well.”

Ziair joins five other returning starters for the Falcons.

Defense

Key player: Zach Abbate, senior, defensive tackle.

Rochester has seven starters back on defense, with Abbate leading the charge.

“He’s gotten a lot faster this year and stronger,” Kisabeth said of the 6-foot-2, 250-pounder. “He hasn’t missed a workout since November.”

Special teams

Key player: Jairus Saunders, senior, kick returner.

Saunders, a senior, owns the school record of 10.7 seconds in the 100-meter dash.

Kisabeth expects the senior to be doing a few more similar-length dashes on the kick return team.

“He can fly,” the coach said. “Give him a seam, that’s all he needs.”

Coach’s outlook

After earning the most wins last season since 1999, Kisabeth expects his team to continue its upward trend.

“We don’t have a whole lot of depth, but I like our team,” he said. “We have quality kids. I think we’re going to surprise some people.”

Auburn Hills Avondale

League: OAA Blue

Last season: 0-9

Offense

Key player: Tom Domenick, senior, center.

With seven total returning starters, five of them on the offensive line, coach Steve Deutsch knows he has a good thing going up front.

An experienced line, led by Domenick, is especially important because the Yellow Jackets run a shotgun-spread offense.

“He’s been in the weight room, he’s real positive with other players, and he’s put in his time and done the dirty work,” Deutsch said.

Defense

Key player: To be determined.

The Yellow Jackets return six starters to their defense. Deutsch said he expects the entire squad to deliver a stingy effort this year.

“It’s by committee,” he said of impact players. “We have five spots that were played by sophomores last year. Having that year of experience is huge.”

Special teams

Key player: Steve Bohne, senior, kicker.

This is Bohne’s third year kicking and punting for the Yellow Jackets, and Deutsch said it’s a luxury to have someone that he can count on.

“Every year in high school you win or lose a game because of special teams. So having that solid kicker is a big part of the game,” the coach said.

Coach’s outlook

Deutsch said last year’s winless campaign and growing pains have been motivating factors for his squad.

“No question they have that in the back of their minds — that there is something to prove — and they’ve worked for it all summer,” he said. “Your goal is to get six (wins), and we’ll be disappointed if we don’t get it with this group of kids, as hard as they have worked and the dedication that they have for each other.”

Lake Orion High

League: OAA Red

Last season: 8-4; lost in Division 1 regional final

Offense

Key player: Tyler Benson, senior, center.

Coach Chris Bell returns three starters from the team that gave eventual Division 1 state champion Macomb Dakota all it could handle in the regional final last year.

Leading the group is senior Tyler Benson at center.

"He's the leader of our line," Bell said. "He's one of our captains, and he's been in the trenches before."

The Dragons have two juniors and two other seniors joining Benson on the line.

Defense

Key player: A.J. Gill, senior, linebacker.

While the offense is young and inexperienced, the defense has eight guys back, including last year's team MVP A.J. Gill.

The defense should prove to be the Dragons' strength in the early part of the season.

"We're pretty banged up, but if we can stay healthy, I think they can be very good," Bell said.

Special teams

Key player: Jeff Heath, senior, kicker/punter.

Heath is a busy guy. Along with his kicking duties, he's also a starting receiver and defensive back.

No matter how much he takes on, Bell said he's confident Heath can deliver.

"He's very reliable and good under pressure," the coach said. "He's good from 40 and in, easy."

Coach's outlook

Bell said he's proud of what he's seen so far out of his team, but there is still a ways to go.

"If we get better every week, we expect to contend for the league championship and a spot in the playoffs," he said, as the Lakers open with Rockford High at 5 p.m. Aug. 29 at Eastern Michigan University.

"We're going to see real quick where we are, and our league is as tough as nails," the coach added.

Pontiac Notre Dame Prep

League: CHSL Intersectional 1

Last season: 8-2, lost in Division 4 pre-district

Offense

Key player: Branch Kampe, sophomore, wingback.

While running the option this season, first-year coach Greg Ganfield said Kampe is going to see the ball a lot.

"He's a very good athlete who's really going to help us," Ganfield said.

Ganfield said his squad's athleticism on offense is going to make most defenses respect their running game.

"And if we have to, we'll throw it over the top," he added.

Defense

Key player: Chad Powers, junior, linebacker.

Ganfield wasn't afraid to admit what he considers the one obstacle his defense will face.

"We're going to be undersized compared to most teams."

But with players like Powers — who Ganfield said has great instincts and a nose for the ball — roaming around, lack of size may not be a big issue.

We're going to take advantage of our quickness," Ganfield added. "It's going to be a group effort. As long as we're flying around, we'll be fine."

Special teams

Key player: Thomas Constand, sophomore, kicker.

Ganfield's key player on special teams is a football player for the first time in his career.

"He's never played before, but I knew he had a good leg, so we kind of recruited him to come out for the team," the coach said of Constand. "He's going to have a lot of pressure on him to perform."

Coach's outlook

In looking at the upcoming season, Ganfield placed a majority of the importance on the early stages.

"We're a very young team, and I think the early part of the season is going to be very key for us," Ganfield said. "After we scrimmaged, I think some guys kind of had their eyes opened to what varsity football really is. We'll see how things go once we get rolling."

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