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All the right steps

Avondale senior leads on and off the football field

By Christian Davis
 C & G Sports Writer

AUBURN HILLS — With a sophomore quarterback and five new offensive linemen, Auburn Hills Avondale coach Steve Deutsch knew senior running back Francois Mathews would be counted on to carry the load in more ways than one.

Mathews has been on varsity for four years, starting at safety for three and at running back for two.

“He’s a calming factor,” Deutsch said Sept. 23 during practice. “He makes sure everyone understands what their roles are and there’s no confusion in the huddle. He’s a huge leader on the field for us.”

Mathews’ leadership and play on the field has the Yellow Jackets at 4-1 overall and 3-0 in the Oakland Activities Association Blue Division.

With an injury earlier in the season, Mathews has played sparingly on the offensive side of the ball but has made the most of his opportunities.

At press time, he had over 300 yards rushing, including a 181-yard performance on nine carries to start the season against Bloomfield Hills Andover. He also has five touchdowns.

Mathews admits that he was a little nervous coming into the season with a brand-new line, but they’ve erased any doubts he may have had.

“At times, we get off the same page and you have to talk to them. But they’re doing a lot better than I thought they would do,” he said. “After the first two games, I knew the line was pretty good and we could make some noise this year.”

When Mathews does find some open space, Deutsch said his running back has the speed and strength to run away from or through defenders.

“The thing that I really think separates him is that his feet never stop moving,” the coach said. “He’s always churning his legs; he’s always moving. So when you think he’s down, he scoops out of it.”

Deutsch said Mathews’ impact is felt off the field, as well. The coach said Mathews volunteers his time with elementary kids in a reading program all the while carrying close to a 4.0 grade point average.

“Really, his off-the-field stuff showed me that he was going to be a leader for us



Photo by Tracy Dreslinski
 Auburn Hills Avondale senior running back Francois Mathews is in his fourth season with the varsity.

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more than his on-the-field stuff,” Deutsch said. “That’s what makes him special. He’s an example for everybody. If you work hard and do the right things, good things will happen, and it translates to the football field. Obviously, he’s a special football player, as well.”

With a handful of players back from last season’s playoff team, Mathews said he uses his past experiences to help his new teammates.

“At times, you have to talk to them and let them know that ‘you made a mistake, keep playing. There are a lot more games. It’s OK. Just let it go and play your game.’”

Playing more games in the postseason is the Yellow Jackets’ goal.

In each of Avondale’s last three playoff appearances (2008, 2005, 2004), the team’s been knocked out in the first round.

“That just gave us more of a kick to let us know that we need to make it further, and let people know that we’re not here just to make it to the playoffs. We’re here to make some noise.”

Catch the Yellow Jackets in a key OAA Blue showdown with Bloomfield Hills Lahser at 7 p.m. Oct. 2 at Lahser.

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