

Warriors look good with Snitker at helm

Written by Jim Ecker

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Reid Snitker reported for the first day of football practice at Washington High School last season and found out he wasn't going to be a receiver for the Warriors anymore.

Nope, he was going to become a full-time quarterback. And what's more, he was going to be the starting quarterback.

Right now. Today. This minute.

"It was pretty tough," Snitker says now, "but you have to adapt, I guess."

He adapted quite well, thank-you.

Snitker led Washington on a six-game winning streak with some amazing work, most notably when he passed for two touchdowns in the final 61 seconds in a miracle victory against Waterloo West and with an impeccable performance in a 26-10 stunner over top-ranked Xavier.

Now Snitker is an experienced quarterback with a full season - and just as importantly, a full off-season - as the No.1 guy.

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"It's definitely more relaxing, just knowing what position I'm going to play instead of being confused or not knowing what I was going to play," he said.

Snitker got thrust into the job when Rocky Lombardi, the presumptive starting QB, left town last August with his family and enrolled at West Des Moines Valley.

Paul James, who began his second stint as Washington's head coach last year, moved Snitker into the post and enjoyed the results. The Warriors lost their first three games, then found their legs and did not lose again until the Class 4A playoffs.

James was confident Snitker could handle the assignment last year. Now he's confident the hard-nosed competitor can elevate his game even further.

"He's got a lot more confidence," James observed. "It was the first practice last year when he found out he was going to be the quarterback. It's a lot different this year."

Snitker passed for 1,479 yards and 10 touchdowns last season, but suffered 14 interceptions. He ran the ball for 545 yards and 10 touchdowns, giving him 2,024 yards of total offense and 20 TDs in 10 games.



Those were good numbers for an emergency quarterback. Now he feels ready for the next step after a year of experience and physical maturity.

"I feel a lot faster and stronger," said Snitker. "I feel like my arm has gotten a lot stronger for the down-field game."

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Washington did not blow people away last year, but they learned how to win close games with team unity and clutch plays.

"We tended to come up with some last-minute heroics," James noted.

The Warriors trimmed Linn-Mar, 26-21, for their first victory last season after losing to Kennedy, Iowa City West and Cedar Falls to begin the year. Then came the 28-27 miracle against Waterloo West, when Snitker hit Isaiah Nimmers with two TD passes for the victory, followed by the conquest of Xavier at the Saints Field.

The Warriors had to learn some new technology after James, the school's athletic director, succeeded Tony Lombardi as head coach.

"One big thing was just their developing some confidence," said James. "They became more and more familiar (with the playbook), and I think their confidence started to grow."

Their confidence zoomed after beating Xavier, which went all the way to the Class 4A championship game last season.

"That was a huge thing," said Washington lineman Julian Good-Jones, who has committed to Iowa State. "It really boosted our confidence a lot and it just showed us how good we really were."

Good-Jones thinks the Warriors surprised a few people last year.

"People were kind of sleeping on us and didn't think we were that good," he said. "We wanted it a lot. Some of the wins weren't very pretty. We had to grind it out."

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The Warriors have two proven wide receivers now with Landen Akers and Nimmers, who combined for 63 catches and five touchdowns last season. Akers finished third in the 400-meter dash at the Class 4A state track meet in 48.91 seconds and can fly.

"One of our strengths will probably be speed and the ability to catch the ball," said James. "Landen Akers is an excellent receiver, great hands and tremendous speed."

James would like to improve the running game and thinks he will with Good-Jones and Royal Silver leading the offensive line. "Those two are really going to be key for us," he said of the 275-pound blockers.

The Warriors developed into a good defensive unit last season and return such notables as Connor Vincent, Sam Vincent, Silver, Akers, Nimmers, Johnny Dobbs and Snitker on that side of the ball.

2014 SCHEDULE

Friday, Aug. 29 - Jefferson

Thursday, Sept. 4 - Kennedy

Friday, Sept. 12 - Iowa City West

Friday, Sept. 19 - at Linn-Mar

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* Friday, Sept. 26 - Muscatine

* Friday, Oct. 3 - Ottumwa

* Friday, Oct. 10 - at Prairie

* Thursday, Oct. 16 - Iowa City High

* Friday, Oct. 24 - at Burlington