

Cougars feature spirited battle at QB

Written by Jim Ecker

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Derek Jacobus is healthy and ready to play quarterback for Kennedy High School this season after missing the entire 2012 campaign with a shoulder injury, but there's a minor glitch.

Sammy Lizarraga wants the job too, and they've been engaged in a friendly battle to see who starts the opener against Washington Aug. 30.

"There's some stuff that Derek does well, and there are some things that Sammy does well," Coach Tim Lewis said Wednesday. "They are pretty close right now."

Jacobus, a senior, is faster than Lizarraga and a state champion in the long jump. Lizarraga, a junior, is a few inches taller and appears to throw a prettier ball.

Lewis is not in favor of rotating quarterbacks or having two people share the job. "It's been done, and it's been done successfully," he said. "Right now I don't see it happening, but that could change."

Lewis figures it's a win-win situation, because he'll have a good man in the starting lineup and a good man in reserve, no matter who wins the position.

Jacobus was competing for the job in preseason camp last year until he hurt his shoulder. He's also battled ankle and foot injuries during his sports career at Kennedy and had a concussion when he was a freshman.

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"There's been a lot that's happened," he said. "It would be nice to be healthy the entire time. The first day of practice this summer I was like, 'Holy crap, I haven't been out here for almost two years.'"



Jacobus missed most of the 2012-13 basketball season while recovering from his shoulder injury, then suffered a foot injury shortly after he joined the cagers late in the year. He recovered and won the long jump at the state track meet in May, then had a few minor injuries during the baseball season but still did well.

"Injuries are awful, but they're part of the game," said Jacobus. "You have to deal with it, I guess. It was a tough year all-around, and then when track came around it was a good year. Hopefully I'll stay healthy the entire year."

Kennedy had a topsy-turvy season in 2012 that had the coaches shaking their heads. The Cougars lost the first five games of the season, then rallied and finished the regular season with four straight victories to make the playoffs.

Kennedy upset Muscatine, 20-17, in the first round of the Class 4A playoffs before losing to Cedar Falls in the Round of 16 to finish with a 5-6 mark.

The Cougars also got off to a slow start in 2011 before turning things around. Kennedy had approximately 70 players on the team in 2011 and 2012, but there are only 50 guys on the

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varsity this year and Lewis is anxious to see if that makes a difference.

When Kennedy had a bigger squad, the top players got fewer repetitions in practice. That's not the case this year.

"There are a lot of good things about having 70 players, but there are some bad things about having 70," he said. "If you're out for football, you deserve to get reps."

In any case, the Cougars are determined to avoid another slow start in 2013. The coaches have tweaked a few things to see if that makes a difference.

"We're constantly beating each other up, trying to eliminate that and trying to remedy that," said Lewis.



The Cougars lost a big chunk of their offense when all-state tailback Alex Hillyer graduated and left for college. He rushed for 1,662 yards and 20 touchdowns last season, leaving a big hole in the backfield that senior Miles Moa (238 yards in 2012) is trying to fill.

Kennedy figures to have a faster team this year. The Cougars finished fourth at the Class 4A state track meet this spring and many of those sprinters are playing football. Brian White, the track coach, is also a top assistant coach with the football team.

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"Brian has been telling me we're going to be fast, we're going to be faster than we've ever been," said Lewis.

Kennedy has some big guys up front, led by Austin Holzer, but one of the big guys isn't as big anymore. Drew Heitland has shed 50 pounds in the last six months, dropping from 275 pounds to a svelte 225, and he's ready for two-way action as a defensive end and tight end.

Heitland said he listened to what people told him about his body.

"Basically just listening to Coach Lewis and my parents and going on a diet. No breads and no eating after 8 o'clock (at night)," he said. "The coaches wanted me to drop about 20 pounds and get down to 255 or 245 so I wouldn't get tired and I could play both ways."

He saw no reason to stop at 245 and feels good at his new weight.

"I think 225 is going to be my playing weight," he said. "I'd like to lose some more body fat, but we'll see how that goes."