

Christensen carries big load for Prairie

Written by Jim Ecker

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Mitch Christensen lugged the ball 33 times for 161 yards last Friday night when Prairie upset Cedar Falls, 10-7, at the UNI-Dome in Cedar Falls.

He has the scars to prove it.

"I've got some turf burns and stuff," he said Wednesday before practice, displaying nasty looking spots on his arms. "That's OK. I played fullback before. I know what it feels like to get hit a lot."

Christensen has delivered his share of punishment as well. He's carried the ball 131 times for 758 yards and five touchdowns this season, making him the leading rusher in the Metro.

He does not shy away from contact.

"Mitch has been incredible," said Prairie Coach Mike Morrissey. "He's done everything we've asked of him, picking up those tough yards."

"He's a straight-ahead guy. And I think he's added a little bit more speed to what he was last year."

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Christensen, a 6-foot, 195-pound senior, was a blocking back for about half the season last year, but the two leading tailbacks got hurt and he got his chance to carry the ball.

"We were pretty short, so they decided to put me in and that's what happened," he said.

Christensen rushed 151 times for 661 yards and eight touchdowns last year. He gave the Hawks a solid running game, complementing a potent passing attack.

"Honestly, I feel like I snuck under the radar last year, because of all the passing," he said. "Teams were not prepared for the run game."

Quarterback Jace Hanna and his two favorite targets, Jarred Edmonds and Demetrius Harper, graduated after the Hawks reached the quarterfinals of the Class 4A playoffs and finished with an 8-4 record. This year's team has stuck more to the ground.

"I think we always had in mind that our offensive line was going to be our strength this year, our run game was going to be a little bit more effective than our passing game," said Morrissey.

Trey Beckman is developing as the new quarterback, and Morrissey is looking forward to the game when the running attack and passing attack click at the same time.

Prairie squared its record at 3-3 with Friday's victory at Cedar Falls. It avenged a tough 41-30 loss to Cedar Falls last year when the Hawks squandered a 28-7 halftime lead on homecoming. It also pushed the Hawks a step closer to the playoffs.

Christensen said last year's loss to Cedar Falls "tugged on the heartstrings" and was foremost in their minds in the UNI-Dome, making the victory even sweeter. "It felt pretty good," he said.

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A loss to Cedar Falls would have left the Hawks with a 2-4 record with three games left in the regular season and would have put a playoff berth in serious jeopardy.

"It was a good one, it was a big one," said Morrissey. "We needed it."

Prairie won five straight games after losing to Cedar Falls last year. The Hawks hope to go another winning streak this season, but know they'll have a tough test with Linn-Mar (2-4) Friday night at home.

Christensen was surprised to hear that he's the leading rusher in the Metro this year.

"I feel pretty modest and humble about it," he said. "It feels nice, but it's not like I'm going to let it go to my head."