

Indians face tough schedule in 2014

Written by Jim Ecker

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Tony Perkins has been a football coach for more than three decades and he's never seen a rugged schedule like the one Marion has this season.

"From top to bottom, I've never seen anything like it in 31 years," Marion's head coach said last week. "It's a nightmare schedule, and you're going to have to be ready for every game or you're going to get blown off the field."

The schedule got tougher this season when the Xavier Saints moved from Class 4A to 3A and were put in the same district with the Indians after playing for the Class 4A title.

Marion has a non-district game with the Washington Demons, who finished second in the Class 3A playoffs last year with a 12-2 record. And they have a district contest with Solon, which reached the Class 3A semifinals and finished 11-2.

Marion also will face Class 3A playoff teams in its own district with DeWitt Central, Western Dubuque and Maquoketa. There's also a district game against Dubuque Wahlert, which dropped from Class 4A to 3A this year, and non-district dates with Mount Vernon and Cascade.

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"Top to bottom in our district, any one of those teams could end up 1-and-5 or you could be 6-and-0," said Perkins. "Top to bottom, any one of those teams we're going to play is that good."

Perkins embraces the challenge, as always.

"We always shoot that we're going to win the district," he remarked. "We don't know what's going to happen, but that has to be their goal. They can't go in thinking they're going to be .500."

"Our goals are the same. We want to win the district and we want to make the playoffs."

Nick Kramer, a senior fullback, outside linebacker and safety, is looking forward to a stiff challenge every week.

"Obviously all of us have looked at the schedule, and we know each game can be a battle and each game is going to be hard," he said. "If we get knocked down one game, we just have to get right back up and keep going because the next game is going to be just as tough."

The Indians reached the Class 3A playoffs themselves last year, but they lost in the first round and finished with a 4-6 record.

Graduation claimed quarterback Trevor Hardman, who threw all 151 passes for Marion last year. Quinn Cannoy and Logan Fuller, who combined for 61 catches and 948 yards, are gone as well, leaving an inexperienced receiving corps.

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Perkins said 5-foot-10 senior Hayden Meister and 6-4 junior Gage Kray have looked good at quarterback. He said he'll use them both, but plans to put Meister in the starting lineup because he's older and was the No.2 QB last year.

"I'm not concerned about the quarterbacks," said Perkins. "I'm not concerned about any of our players right now. They've done such a good job adapting to their new roles. I'm very confident in what they can bring."

Meister said he learned some "good lessons" as the backup quarterback last year and is looking forward to getting on the field this season in a tag-team approach with Kray.

"It's good competition for both us," said Meister. "We bring out the best in each other."

Kory Walsh rushed for 448 yards and five touchdowns last year after being promoted to the varsity midway through the season. John Carstensen (226 yards and three TDs) and Kramer (99 yards and a good blocker) also will get the ball.

"The backfield will be by committee," said Perkins.

Perkins has 37 players on his roster, which pales in comparison to the 71-man squad at Xavier, but he likes the way his team is shaping up.

"We lost some good kids (to graduation), but we have some good kids coming up," he said. "This group that we have right now has worked to get better ever since June 11th, three days a week. They just have a passion and work ethic that I haven't seen in a long time."

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Kramer said there's good unity on the club.

"We're really close as a team," he remarked. "We work hard. This is the most energetic team I've been a part of throughout my years in high school."

Perkins likes the way his players move around the field.

"We have good speed, good strength," he said. "They've worked hard this summer. This group of linemen can run. Offensive line-wise, as long as we don't get anybody banged up I think we'll be very good."

"The only downfall we have right now is our depth," said Perkins. "With the whole schedule that we have, depth is going to come into play. You either stay healthy or you're not going to be successful."

2014 SCHEDULE

Friday, Aug. 29 - at Mount Vernon

Friday, Sept. 5 - Washington (Iowa)

Friday, Sept. 12 - at Cascade

* Friday, Sept. 19 - at Solon

* Friday, Sept. 26 - DeWitt Central

* Friday, Oct. 3 - at Maquoketa

* Friday, Oct. 10 - Western Dubuque

* Friday, Oct. 17 - Dubuque Wahlert

* Friday, Oct. 24 - at Xavier

* Class 3A District Game