

Lions have chip on their shoulder

Written by Jim Ecker

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The standard equipment for the Linn-Mar football team this year includes a helmet, shoulder pads and a chip on their shoulder.

The Lions finished with a 9-2 record last season and reached the second round of the Class 4A playoffs, but almost all of the starters graduated and there are few recognizable "names" on the squad this year.

The expectations for this year's club might be fairly modest, at least among some fans and the general public, but the "no-name" Lions are determined to make a name for themselves.

"They've got a little chip on their shoulder," Coach Bob Forsyth said Wednesday before practice. "I hope they're hungry to make a name for themselves. This is their football team now.

"There was a lot of talk about what a great senior class we had last year, which we did," he said. "But that grates on you a little bit. They want to prove themselves.

"That's how we're coaching them and they're really responding well. They're pretty smart kids. So we're going to try and figure out what we can do to win."

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Ryan Schmidt, Perrion Scott, Trevor Noble, Logan Nelson, Austin McCulloh and other notable players from last year's squad are gone but not forgotten. There's a new cast of characters, most of them relatively inexperienced but eager to prove themselves.

"We've got a lot of juniors who are looking good and will help us out this year," said speedy senior Daniel Gorsich, one of the few returning starters who scored three touchdowns last year and is a fine receiver and track star.

"The team is starting to come together," said fellow senior Shea Hartzler, a linebacker, fullback and tough-nosed wrestler. "We're all working really hard.

"We'll be disciplined and we'll be able to compete," he said. "Maybe we can catch a couple of teams off-guard that think they're going to beat us. We're going to give them a hard-fought battle every game."

Junior Reese Phillips and senior Nolan Hollinger have been battling for the No. 1 job at quarterback in training camp. Forsyth declined to name a starter on Wednesday and said there is good competition for spots all over the field.

"We've got a lot of hungry kids, a lot of kids who are really working hard," the coach said. "We're coming together as a team pretty well now. I'm encouraged by what I've seen this week."

The Lions have ridden a roller-coaster in recent years, with highs and lows. They had a strong club in 2011 that went undefeated during the regular season and finished 10-1, but they dipped to 3-6 in 2012 and 2-7

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in 2013 before bouncing back with the 9-2 mark in 2014.

Forsyth would love to remove the dips and have strong teams all the time, but there are no guarantees in high school sports.

"I wish I could look that up in the book somewhere," he said. "I think we've got to keep working. We have to keep working hard."

Forsyth thinks Gorsich, who stands 6-foot-3 and runs like a deer, could be a key piece of the puzzle this season. "He's a big, strong, fast athlete," said Forsyth. "He's a really good football player."

Hartzler ranks among the team leaders as well. "He's a tough kid," the coach remarked.

Just about everyone else on the club hopes to make a name for himself this season as well.

Linn-Mar hosts Prairie in the season opener next Friday night, Aug. 28.

SCHEDULE

Aug. 28 - Prairie
Sept. 4 - at Pleasant Valley
Sept. 11 - Clinton
Sept. 17 - at Washington
Sept. 25 - at Waterloo East
Oct. 2 - Kennedy
Oct. 9 - at Cedar Falls
Oct. 16 - Waterloo West
Oct. 22 - at Jefferson

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