

Metro rivals become friends at Coe

Written by Jim Ecker

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Dalton Kuehl, Terrance Hall and Trevor Noble put their arms around each other and smiled like old friends Wednesday instead of snarling at each other like enemies.

They'll always be J-Hawks, Cougars and Lions, but now the former Metro football stars are united as freshmen at Coe College and all on the same team.

The Kohawks boast 15 Metro graduates on their roster with players from Jefferson, Kennedy, Linn-Mar, Xavier, Prairie and Marion (but none from Washington this year).

"I never knew I'd be friends with these guys, but I like them," laughed Noble, a wide receiver from Linn-Mar.

"It's kind of cool, getting to play with someone you've always gone against," said Kuehl, an offensive tackle from Jefferson. "We kind of hated Kennedy, and it's kind of weird having Drew (Heitland) right down the hall from me now. But it's fun."

Drew Heitland is a sophomore defensive end from Kennedy. His older brother, Trevor, is a wide receiver with the Kohawks. Andrew Johnson, another Kennedy grad, is one of Coe's defensive backs.

Hall is the fourth Kennedy grad on the club and feels right at home with all the other Metro and Mississippi Valley Conference products.

"It makes it an easy transition for us, because we've played against each other the last four

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years in high school," Hall said during Media Day activities at Clark Field. "We've been friends through the high school seasons in football, even though we were not friends on the field.

"When we're here it's one team, it's a great feeling. And it's an easy transition going into college when we know a lot of guys already. I feel good going into it."

Coe Coach Steve Staker likes having a strong nucleus of talented local players on his team.

"Number 1, I think from a fan's standpoint, they're very interested in them," said Staker. "They're going to read the papers, they're going to see their kid's name in there. From a fan base, we're going to get a lot of people here to come watch them play."

Coe has installed two additional sets of bleachers on the home side of Clark Field for additional seating this season as Phase I of a \$20 million renovation project to its athletic facilities, so there will be plenty of room for fans to find a good seat for the games.

Staker said the Metro friends "chip on each other" during practice, which is good for team morale.

"Those guys are kind of on each other at practice, but in a good way, just kind of ribbing," he said. "I think it brings us closer together.

"I have a sign up there that says 'Kohawk Football Is A Family.' I really think they've bought into that. They're going to rib into each other, but when it comes time for playing hard, they're all from the Cedar Rapids area and they want to do well."

The other Metro products on the club this year are Bryce Alberts of Prairie, Mark Atwater of Linn-Mar, Demetrius Harper of Prairie, Colton Storla of Marion, Ben Slezak of Xavier, Lotukalafi Ahomana of Linn-Mar, Andrew Netolicky of Praire, Tyler Gunderson of Marion and Daniel Vega of Xavier.

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There are only 79 players on Coe's roster this season, compared to 106 last year, so there could be more playing time for freshmen this fall. Kuehl (6-foot-6, 260) has been making a strong push in practice at right tackle.

"He's a big kid. He's got good technique," said Staker, who enters his eighth year with a 51-23 record. "He's been able to hold his own in there. He'd probably be the next-man-in right now if somebody went down."

Hall and Noble are also competing for playing time as they learn the system.

"Camp's not over. Everything is open," said Hall, a powerful linebacker at 215 pounds. "I'm just going to continue to work hard and we'll see where it gets me. If it's not my time this year, that's fine. I'll be ready to go next year."

Hall came to Coe to play football and study computer sciences.

"My mom told me to go with my gut feeling. Of all the schools, Coe was the one," he said. "When I came on campus, I felt like I was coming home. It's home away from home, even though I'm not too far away from home."

Kuehl, a star heavyweight wrestler at Jefferson, is not sure if he'll wrestle for the Kohawks or not. "I want to," he said, "but I don't know if I'll have enough time."

Kuehl is glad he moved across town for college.

"I just really like the people here, I like the coaching, I like the players," he said. "I like the small class sizes, the small campus. It feels like home."

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"I just like the family atmosphere. Everybody gets along," said Noble. "And I'm still in town, close to my family so I can see them all the time."

Coe finished with a 5-5 record last year. The Kohawks host No. 7 Wheaton in the season opener Sept. 5.

SCHEDULE

Sept. 5 - Wheaton, 1 p.m.

Sept. 12 - Cornell, 1 p.m.

Sept. 19 - at Wisconsin-Stevens Point, 2 p.m.

Oct. 3 - at Loras, 1 p.m.

Oct. 10 - at Wartburg, 1 p.m.

Oct. 17 - Simpson, 2 p.m.

Oct. 24 - at Central, 1 p.m.

Oct. 31 - Luther, 1 p.m.

Nov. 7 - Dubuque, 1 p.m.

Nov. 14 - at Buena Vista, 3 p.m.