

## Forsyth excited about his fast Lions

Written by Jim Ecker

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Put a fast team on a fast new field and you could have a dangerous football team.

Say hello to the speedy Linn-Mar Lions, who hope to christen their new field and new \$10 million stadium this year with a successful campaign.

"We really have kids who can run and we're excited about getting them the ball and the things we think we can do on defense," Coach Bob Forsyth said. "I think this is by far the fastest team we've ever had since I've been here."

This is Forsyth's fourth year with the Lions. He inherited a winless team in 2007, but quickly revived the program and led them to the playoffs in 2009 and 2010.

He's looking for another trip to the playoffs and likes what he sees heading into Thursday night's opener against Cedar Rapids Jefferson at Kingston Stadium.

"Things are moving along good," he said. "We're into game-week mode now."

Linn-Mar lost star tailback Jer Garman to graduation, but quarterback Mark Atwater returns after accounting for 2,349 yards and 29 touchdowns last season. Mitch Wantock and Brandon Ophoff have been battling to replace Garman and could share the load.

Garman lugged the ball 192 times for 1,601 yards last season and Atwater carried 115 times for 744 yards, so there weren't too many snaps for anyone else. Ophoff ranked third with 18 carries for 50 yards and Wantoff had 10 rushes for 89 yards.

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"We're going to plan on using both of them," Forsyth said. "Who goes out there first has yet to be determined."

Atwater passed for 1,605 yards and 20 TDs last season. The Lions will have a mostly new fleet of receivers this season, but Atwater is confident they'll do a good job.

Forsyth said the Lions are ready to play a game.

"We're extremely healthy, we have everybody ready to go," he remarked. "It's an old cliché, but we are tired of going against each other."

"You get to the point where you need to play a game, see where you're at, see what you're doing good, what you're not doing good and evaluate and go from there."

"That's what the first game is for," he said. "We're anxious to get there."

The Lions held a public scrimmage at their new stadium last Thursday. Forsyth said it was a special night.

"It was a neat feeling Thursday night. There were a lot of people here and it was as close to game-like as you can get it," he said. "It won't be repeated again, probably, because it will be kind of old hat being in here (in future years)."

"But for us - players and coaches - it was a heightened environment Thursday night, and that was great."

Linn-Mar will play its first game at the new stadium on Friday, Sept. 2 against Cedar Rapids Kennedy.

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Forsyth thought he'd have a good team when preseason practice began, but he sounds even more excited now.

"I really am," he said. "We had high expectations of where we thought we could be, but that's all just coffee talk.

"You get to practice and you start to find out. I'm probably more excited now after being around the kids and being in a practice environment about our chances than I was before."