

## McDonald is a big 'hit' for Marion Indians

Written by Jim Ecker

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Jake McDonald averaged 6.2 yards every time he carried the ball for the Marion Indians last year as the starting fullback, so he's a very capable member of the offensive backfield and a good weapon for Coach Tony Perkins.

But running with the football is not his first love. It's not what he wants to play in college next year, and it's not why Upper Iowa, Winona State and others are on his trail.

McDonald is an all-state linebacker. He loves to hit people on a football field. It makes him happy.

"Defense is my pride," he said with a smile.

McDonald made 96 solo tackles in 10 games last season. That ranked eighth among all players in the state, according to the IHSAA, and helped the Indians qualify for the Class 3A playoffs.

McDonald played very well, but Perkins thinks he can do even better this year.

"Last year he had an outstanding year the first five games. Then he started to get a little banged up and tailed off toward the end because of the injuries and overall soreness," Perkins said. "This year he really came out in the summer time and worked his body into better shape."

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Last year, McDonald benched 200 to 225 pounds. This year, he's benching 300 pounds and squatting 450.

"He worked hard in the weight room," Perkins said. "He was the first captain that we named this year. A great leader."

McDonald hopes to lead Marion into the playoffs again, but he hopes they go much farther this time after losing in the first round in 2010 and finishing 7-3.

"I just want to see us continually getting better as the season goes on, never taking a step backwards and continuing through the playoffs," he said. "Since I'm a captain, I feel I have a lot more leadership (duties). I just want to keep pushing the guys and getting the best out of everyone."

Marion has a small senior class with only a dozen 12th graders, and two of them have never played football before. Perkins said there were only 15 players in this class as freshmen.

"They're quality kids, there just weren't very many of them," he remarked.

McDonald and Colton Storla, Marion's star tailback, have been members of the starting lineup since they were sophomores in 2009. Cale Cannoy started last year in the defensive backfield as a junior and is now the starting quarterback as well.

The Indians have 34 juniors on the team, dwarfing the senior class in numbers. "We have to bring the juniors along with us," McDonald said. "This is our year, our senior year. There's a lot of emphasis on the juniors stepping up."

McDonald (FB/LB), Storla (TB/LB) and Cannoy (QB/DB) are listed as two-way starters for

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Friday night's opener at Mount Vernon. All told, the Indians have eight players who are ticketed to start on both sides of the ball and see plenty of action.

Perkins likes to reward his top players, especially the seniors.

"If they're in the top 11 on both sides of the ball and have been working the hardest in practice, we tell them they can start the first series both ways, and then we start platooning after that," he said.

The other two-way starters, according to the tentative lineup, are Tristan Beghtol (OG/DT), Justin Dolley (C/DT), Ethan Herren (TE/LB), Andrew Davis (RB/S) and Taylor Rogers (SE/DE). McDonald, Storla and Dolley are the captains.

Cannoy hurt his arm during the baseball season, but he's recovered and ready to play. Perkins didn't let him throw a lot in practice until this week as a precautionary measure, but he turned him loose Monday night in drills.

"Today was really the first day we took that 'franchise' tag off of him," Perkins said Monday. "We've only been letting him throw four to five times per practice. Today was the first day we opened him up and he threw the ball really well."

Perkins expects a stiff test at Mount Vernon Friday night.

"It's been made into a rivalry because of the proximity of the schools," he said. "They will be a very good first opponent, because they will be very aggressive."