

## **Prairie starts new era against Warriors**

Written by Jim Ecker

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The Cedar Rapids Prairie football team has a vibrant new coach, a gorgeous new field and a new lease on life.

Cedar Rapids Washington could be walking into a trap.

The Prairie Hawks host the Warriors at refurbished John Wall Field Friday night in the first game for new coach Mike Morrissey, who was hired to breathe new life into the Hawks.

The initial results will be known by around 10 o'clock Friday night.

"They're going to come out sky-high, well prepared, excited to be there," predicted Washington Coach Tony Lombardi, who is taking a weakened team into battle.

Washington quarterback A.J. Puk quit the team, tailback Will Griffin had ankle surgery, several players are academically ineligible and several others are hurt.

Nonetheless, Morrissey expects to face a dangerous opponent.

"Knowing them and their program, traditionally they've had guys who can jump right in," he said. "They're going to have some athletic guys out there and they're going to be an athletic team."

Morrissey, 28, was the head coach for one year at Thornridge High School in Dolton, Ill., before being hired to succeed Craig Jelinek at Prairie. He's anxious to lead his new team onto the field for its first game of the 2011 campaign.

"Gosh, I think it's going to be a lot of excitement," he said. "For me especially, I might have to

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calm some nerves a little bit. I don't like to admit that sometimes, but that's kind of the way it is."

Morrissey, who prepped at Pleasant Valley, comes from a football family and played quarterback at Upper Iowa University. It sounds like the Hawks might fill the air with footballs this season.

"I feel with the kids we have here, we're going to be able to spread it out and do some different things to get different guys the ball," he said.

Prairie will line up with Jace Hanna at quarterback, Zach Witte at tailback and Demetrius Harper as the featured receiver.

Washington had a tumultuous preseason camp. Puk quit to play baseball, Griffin hurt his ankle, Ryan Cain broke his collarbone, Noah Dostal hurt his ankle and several other potential starters have not been cleared to play.

"We have some issues," Washington Coach Tony Lombardi said. "We have several injuries, a couple of eligibility issues, but that's life in the big city."

Lombardi said he's missing seven or eight starters. "That's concerning," he said.

Braedon Tovey has replaced Puk as the starting quarterback. JoJo McBride, Walter Short and Mitch Bredeson will share tailback duties.

"Actually, I'm very excited to watch them play," Lombardi remarked. "Some kids are going to get an opportunity to play who would not have. So I'm eagerly anticipating how they'll play and hopefully they'll do a great job for us."

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The Warriors have a big, experienced offensive line that could make life easier for the new guys in the backfield. "We've just been kind of blessed up front for a while," Lombardi said.

The Warriors also will feature Flynn Heald at wide receiver and David Tann at linebacker.

Lombardi said Griffin has his injured foot in a walking boot and could be six or seven weeks away from playing.

"He'll play this year at some point," Lombardi said. "The sooner the better, obviously, but we want to make sure he's healthy."

Griffin was the No.2 tailback behind Alex Carr last year and appeared on the verge of becoming Washington's next star tailback, a rare combination of speed and power.

Prairie High School installed a new artificial playing surface this season, added more bleachers, expanded the concession areas, improved the restrooms and made other improvements.

The Hawks have a new coach, a new field and new life.

"We're excited," Morrissey said. "I think all of us are excited. There's kind of a buzz going around the school."