

Perkins hopes Indians are mentally ready

Written by Jim Ecker

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The Marion Indians say they are ready to face Western Dubuque in the Class 3A playoffs Wednesday night, but Coach Tony Perkins is not sure.

The Indians suffered a double-blow at DeWitt Central last Friday. They blew a 16-7 lead and lost, 17-16, dropping into a three-way tie for the district title. And they also lost two key players to injuries that night.

Perkins thinks the Indians have enough talent to survive the loss of Andrew Davis (broken leg) and Justin Dolley (torn MCL), but he's not sure they've had enough time to recover mentally and emotionally.

"In the past I've always said I love playing on Wednesday, but this seems so fast this year," he said Tuesday before practice. "It just seems like it's been one day since we played on Friday."

Perkins is not worried about his team's physical preparation for the game. He's worried about the mental aspect of the contest.

"Losing two good friends like they did, they were really down after Friday," he said. "The last couple of days have been getting them mentally stronger and ready to play."

"I think they're there," he said hopefully. "I think they understand they'll be letting those teammates down if they didn't come out and play hard."

Marion (7-2) is a district champion and No.1 seed in the playoffs. Western Dubuque (4-5) is a No. 4 seed from its district, making the Indians the odds-on favorites heading into the 7 p.m. kickoff at Thomas Park in Marion.

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Perkins thinks he has the depth to replace Davis and Dolley on the field. Tyler Gunderson will help replace Davis as a ballcarrier, while Kyle Grandon and John Gorman could help replace Dolley on the offensive and defensive lines.

"I think we have kids that can step up," Perkins said.

Gunderson was playing ahead of Davis earlier in the year, but suffered a concussion. That gave Davis a bigger opportunity, but now Gunderson needs to carry a bigger load again.

Grandon was starting at center before suffering an MCL injury of his own. Dolley switched to center against DeWitt Central before tearing his MCL, but Perkins thinks Grandon could be ready to return. Grandon's MCL injury was not as severe as Dolley's. Gorman could help replace Dolley on the defensive line.

Marion senior Ethan Herren said the Indians are ready to play ball.

"Everyone is mentally prepared and everybody has to step up and play. Next man in," he declared. "It's a playoff game, so it's a huge one to get. It's a new season now and we're ready."

The Indians were in a somber mood after losing to DeWitt Central and losing two teammates with injuries. Davis left the field on a stretcher and Dolley watched the end of the game on crutches.

The Indians clinched a No. 1 seed for the playoffs despite the loss, but were in no mood to celebrate. Perkins is proud of what his team has accomplished this year, but fears his players don't appreciate everything they've done so far.

"I don't think they do," he said. "They have a lot of goals. They want to be that team that moves on in the playoffs, they want to be that team that takes that next step. And that's what they've

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pushed for all year."

Marion scored to take a 16-7 lead at DeWitt Central in the second half, but the Sabers returned the ensuing kickoff for a touchdown to make it 16-14. Marion fumbled away the next kickoff and DeWitt kicked a field goal for a 17-16 lead.

It was a tough loss to swallow, compounded by the injuries.

"It was more of a shock than anything else," Perkins said. "I wish they would get to that anger point where they're mad at what happened, but right now they're sad for their teammates. We need to get over that."

Senior Trev Biery hated to see Davis and Dolley get hurt.

"The loss didn't really get us. It was tough losing those two teammates," he said. "That was the biggest loss.

"We're a close-knit group and everyone is just like a brother to us. The biggest loss to us was them."

Biery has rushed for 1,021 yards, but has been slowed the last two games with a foot injury.

"Getting better," he said Tuesday. "I'm good."

The Indians hope to be fighting mad Wednesday night.

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"It's all mental now," Herren said. "Hopefully the mindset is there."

If the Indians defeat Western Dubuque, they'll face West Delaware (7-2) or DeWitt Central (6-3) on Monday night.