

Shrine Bowl is 'bittersweet' for Hanna

Written by Jim Ecker

Saturday, 20 July 2013 18:15 -

Jace Hanna is excited about playing in the 41st Annual Shrine Bowl on July 27, but it's also tinged with a little sadness.

The Shrine Bowl will be the last organized football game of Hanna's career, unless he changes his mind and decides to try football in college at some point.

As it stands now, Hanna will report to Upper Iowa University in August to begin classes and become a member of the UIU basketball team.

His football days will be done after he plays quarterback for the South squad in the Shrine game.

"It's kind of crazy to think about it," he said before reporting for Shrine Bowl practices in Cedar Falls Saturday. "I've been playing football my whole life and this will be the last game I ever play. It's a bittersweet moment."

Hanna passed for 2,555 yards and 28 touchdowns last season and led Prairie to the quarterfinals of the Class 4A playoffs. He averaged 13.2 points for Prairie's basketball team and elected to pursue the roundball sport in college.

Prairie football coach Mike Morrissey, a former Upper Iowa quarterback himself, gently tried to convince Hanna to play both sports for the Peacocks.

"I thought about it," said Hanna. "Maybe in the future if I have an opportunity, maybe I'll think about it."

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Hanna's future was altered a little this past week when Upper Iowa basketball coach Brian Dolan left the Peacocks to become the new head coach at Wayne State in Nebraska. Upper Iowa has not named Dolan's successor, so at this point Hanna does not know who he'll play for in college.

Hanna loves basketball and played in the Prime Time League this summer against college players, including many members of the Iowa Hawkeyes. He said he enjoyed the experience.

"It's been very good," he said. "It's such a difference from high school, playing with some of those college guys, just the speed of the game and the physicality. It's helped me a lot.

"It's opened my eyes for what I have to do to get better to be able to play in college."

Five players from the Metro area will play in the Shrine Bowl. Hanna will be joined by Xavier quarterback Reggie Schulte, Kennedy tailback Alex Hillyer, Marion tight end/defensive end Ethan Herren and Linn-Mar lineman Justin Green.

Highway 30 is the dividing line for the North and South teams, so Hanna will play for the South and the other Metro athletes will play for the North.

There are only two quarterbacks per team, so at times Hanna will be directing the South squad while Schulte will be running the North, renewing their rivalry from the Mississippi Valley Conference and the playoffs.

Schulte passed for 2,501 yards and 37 touchdowns last season and will be joining the University of Northern Iowa football program. He led the Saints to the championship game of the Class 4A playoffs in the UNI-Dome last fall.

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Hillyer rushed for 1,662 yards and 20 touchdowns last season. He will play at Iowa Western Community College, which won the national junior college title last fall.

Herren caught 15 passes for 187 yards and one touchdown for Marion in 2012. He also made 80 tackles and is headed to Iowa Central Community College to play football.

Green, an all-state lineman at Linn-Mar, does not plan to play football in college.

The Iowa Shrine Bowl has raised more than \$2.2 million for Shriners Hospitals over the years. All of the players will visit a Shriners Hospital in Minneapolis next Friday to spend time with the young patients who are receiving treatments.

Hanna knows the Shrine Bowl is for a worthy cause. He views the game as an opportunity to give something back to the community and help the children.

"I feel very honored to be chosen," he said. "A lot of great kids are coming from across the state to play in it. It's going to be fun."

The 41st Annual Iowa Shrine Bowl is scheduled for 4 p.m. in the UNI-Dome in Cedar Falls next Saturday, July 27. Tickets will be available at the gate.