

Lombardi eyes another winner at Wash

Written by Jim Ecker

Friday, 17 August 2012 22:17 -

The Washington Warriors sent 10 of their best football players to college programs this year and their new starting quarterback has not played the position since he was a freshman in 2009, so why is Coach Tony Lombardi smiling?

"I believe in my kids, I believe in my staff," Lombardi said Friday after the Warriors held an intrasquad scrimmage at Kingston Stadium. "I think we can have a winning season, I think we can have a little bit of a run in the playoffs.

"That would be a great goal for this group of kids, because we're very young."

The Warriors finished 8-4 last season, upset two No. 2 teams and reached the quarterfinals of the Class 4A playoffs, but many of the stars of that club are now college kids and college football players.

Flynn Heald, Will Griffin, David Tann, Braedon Tovey, Michael Daughtery, Ryan Cain, Paul Nash, McCauley Todd, Sean Bredl, Walter Short and Storhm "Hurricane" Henry graduated, stripping the Warriors of some outstanding talent and leadership.

The cupboard is not bare, however.

Mitch Blades, the second-leading receiver a year ago, is the new starting quarterback and appears to be a dual threat with his passing and running, even though he hasn't played the position since he was in the ninth grade.

Mitch Bredeson is back at tailback after rushing for 896 yards and nine touchdowns, Jason Oney appears ready to blossom as a sure-handed receiver and Zac Gillis anchors an offensive line that lost all the other starters.

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"Mitch Blades is a returning starter, an impact player, somebody we think we can hang our hat on," Lombardi said. "And then, how do we complement him?"

"We've got a great running back coming back in Mitch Bredeson, so how do we get the ball in his hands 20 or 25 times?"

Blades caught 17 passes for 234 yards and two touchdowns last season, but now he's throwing the ball, not catching it. Blades would have happily stayed at wide receiver, but Lombardi needed a new passer.

"He didn't really have to talk me into it," Blades said. "But I didn't necessarily want to (switch positions). I like playing receiver."

He'll have some toys to play with at quarterback, however. "Oh yeah, definitely," he said. "We do have some weapons."

JoJo McBride gives Washington another speedy tailback in the backfield with Bredeson, Noah Dostal has good hands at receiver and Robert Miley is a strong fullback.

Lombardi said he might start two or three sophomores on the offensive line, which was decimated by graduation after being a strength in 2011. Gillis is back at 6-foot-2 and 280 pounds.

"I have a little more pressure than last year, because last year I was the only non-senior and now I'm the only returning person," Gillis said. "I just have to step up and tell everyone what to do and be a leader."

Gillis likes what he's seen so far in training camp.

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"Our line is young, but they're coming together pretty good," he said. "We have a good quarterback and I think we'll be able to run the ball with the line we have. And I think our defense is going to be a strong point this year.

"I'm pretty optimistic about the season," he said. "I think we'll do well and I hope we make a good run in the playoffs."

Washington opens the season next Friday against Kennedy at Kingston Stadium. The Cougars beat the Warriors last year, 41-28. "That's going to be a nerve-wracker," Lombardi said.

"We've got a long way to go," he said. "How do we find a way to score some points and how do we find a way to stop some people? We're kind of figuring that out right now."

Lombardi, entering his seventh year at Washington, has produced a winning team each season. He thinks Washington has a chance for another winner this year.

"I hope so. That's always the goal," he said. "Since I've been here at Wash, we've never had a losing season. So I certainly don't want to start that now."

Lombardi said he has "good workers" on the team.

"They really want to be successful. They want to carry on the tradition," he said. "So I'm hopeful that we'll be able to do that."

2012 SCHEDULE

Aug. 24 - Kennedy

Aug. 31 - at Iowa City West

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Sept. 7 - Cedar Falls

Sept. 14 - at Linn-Mar

Sept. 21 - at Waterloo West

Sept. 28 - Xavier

Oct. 5 - at Jefferson

Oct. 12 - Prairie

Oct. 19 - at Dubuque Wahlert