

J-Hawks looking to take next step

Written by Jim Ecker

Friday, 21 August 2015 19:18 - Last Updated Friday, 21 August 2015 19:57



The Jefferson J-Hawks took a big step forward last season when they won four games and reached the Class 4A playoffs after years of futility.

Now they want to take the next step in their development with a winning record and deeper run in the playoffs.

"I think it's very important, just to keep the tide going. We are definitely wanting to do that," said quarterback Jared Eivins, who missed the 2014 campaign with a shoulder injury. "We just have to give it our full effort."

The J-Hawks came close to having a winning record last season, but were foiled in near-misses against Prairie (17-14) and Waterloo West (23-17). They muffed golden opportunities to win those games with big mistakes at the wrong time.

The four victories and trip to the playoffs were a nice reward for all their hard work, but Coach Brian Webb thinks they could have accomplished a lot more.

"It was a step in the right direction, but there was a lot of unfulfilled expectations of what we wanted," he said. "We lost a couple of games on the 1-yard line that killed us."

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The J-Hawks have worked on finishing drills and finishing assignments, so when they reach the 1-yard line they can finish the drive in the end zone instead of coming up short.

"The next step is smelling blood and going after teams when we've got them down a little. Having that killer instinct," Webb remarked. "We're trying hard to develop that."



Jefferson suffered through an 0-9 campaign in 2011. Webb took over the program and had 1-8 records in 2012 and 2013 before finishing 4-6 last season, giving him a 6-22 mark entering his fourth year.

"The next step? It's super important," said tailback Tavian Rashed, who rushed for 660 yards and 11 touchdowns last year. "I'd say we've changed the program around and we're taking it in the right direction. We can't hold back now. We've got to keep pushing and getting better."

Eivins dislocated his left shoulder when he dove for a ball during the 2014 baseball season against Iowa City West. He also suffered a torn labrum and rotator cuff problems in the mishap, which kept him sidelined for the entire 2014 football season.

"It was good watching them succeed," he said. "It kind of sucked being on the sideline and watching and you couldn't do anything about it, but it's nice seeing Jefferson football being back to the way it used to be."

Eivins played baseball for the J-Hawks this season and said he's fully recovered from the shoulder injury. "I'd say 110 percent," he remarked.

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Jefferson caught a break last year when Jesse Furrow, a polished quarterback, moved here from Indiana for his senior year in high school.

Furrow did a good job of leading the J-Hawks in his only campaign.

"I learned a lot from him," said Eivins. "He taught us a bunch of stuff. He was a great leader. I feel very confident taking over the team this year."

Webb said he'll have about 45 players on the varsity, which is a big jump from his first few years with the J-Hawks. "At the skill positions we're as deep as we've ever been," he said. "We're more athletic than we've ever been."

His biggest concern is depth on the offensive line.

"They're tough kids, they're just a little under-sized," he remarked. "We've got to improve and we've got to continue to eat a lot of steaks and potatoes."

Jefferson hosts Washington in the season opener next Friday night at Kingston Stadium.

SCHEDULE

Aug. 28 - Washington

Sept. 4 - at Prairie

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Sept. 10 - Davenport North

Sept. 18 - Davenport West

Sept. 25 - at Kennedy

Oct. 2 - Cedar Falls

Oct. 9 - at Waterloo West

Oct. 16 - at Waterloo East

Oct. 22 - Linn-Mar