

Metro East Lutheran-Madison has nearly 40 gridgers out, coach has solid expectations

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE – Things can be said to be looking up for **Metro East Lutheran-Madison's football team** going into the 2016 season.

Last season, MEL entered into a two-year coop arrangement with Madison that allowed MEL to continue its football program, which had to forfeit its final five games of the 2014 season after a drop in the number of participants left the school short of sufficient numbers to field a team at halftime of a game midway through that season. It also allowed Madison to bring back football after the Madison School District decided to drop the sport following the 1992 season.

The results of the first year of the coop were successful in every way, despite the Knights going 0-9 on the field. This year, the players on last year's roster returned to the team as preseason practice got under way Monday and the team saw an increase in participants as drills got started.

“We've got good numbers,” said **Knights coach Matt Tschudy**. “We're sitting just shy of 40 athletes. Last year, we had just over 20; all the guys who played last year are back and we've got some new faces from both schools.”

The coop arrangement has been a positive one, Tschudy believes. “It's been positive on both ends,” Tschudy said. “If it wasn't, I don't think you'd see the good numbers that we have today.”

Practices have been going well, Tschudy said. “The guys were working really hard during our summer practices. As a coaching staff, we compared the beginning of last year to this year, and we all feel that we are miles ahead of where we started last year,” Tschudy said. “The players know what to expect from the coaches now, the players are more familiar with the x's-and-o's.

“Today's a good example; it's a hot day. Last year at this time, we would have guys dropping out (of practice) and complaining about the heat; today, they (pressed on) and dealt with it. It's nice to see that football mentality. I'm very happy with how things are going. Our coaching staff this year, I think, is a fantastic coaching staff. In my 11 years of coaching, I think collectively, as a group, this is one of the best coaching staffs I've been a part of.”

The Knights have had a positive attitude, in Tschudy's eyes, going into the season, and that has stood out. “The positive attitude of the players, the positive attitude of the coaches, the willingness to work – that's always a big thing. You have to work hard. Football's not always x's-and-o's and it's not necessarily what you see (on the field). There's a lot of hard work (that goes into the making of a team) and these guys are putting in the effort.”

The Knights open their season with a non-conference game against Prairie State Conference rival **Bunker Hill** at home Aug. 26 and Tschudy is looking forward to the game. “We're going to be ready,” Tschudy said.

“We're going to be a well-balanced team; we've got decent size on the line. I would say we're going to be very aggressive on the line. We've got speed and we've got numbers. I've never coached a team with this many numbers before; this is fantastic.”

The Knights will play two games at Madison's Sam Dymas Memorial Field this season, against Kincaid South Fork on Sept. 10 (the PSC opener for the Knights) and Marquette Catholic Oct. 8. Games on the Edwardsville campus will feature the season-opener against the Minutemen and Sept. 2 dates against Barat Academy of St. Louis and a PSC contest against Mount Olive Sept. 30; MEL travels to Nokomis Sept. 16, East Alton-Wood River Sept. 23, Pawnee Oct. 14 and Bunker Hill for the league clash against the Minutemen to close out the season Oct. 21.

