

# Are you ready for some football?: Edwardsville opens tonight at Quincy with high hopes

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**EDWARDSVILLE** - Expectations are always set high by **head coach Matt Martin** for his Edwardsville High School football team and this year is not any different.

The Tigers open the season at 7 tonight in Quincy with a long opening road trip. Edwardsville was 9-1 last year, falling in the playoffs to Aurora Waubonsie Valley, while Quincy was 6-4 and also made a playoff appearance.

Edwardsville has its quarterback – Brenden Dickmann – returning on offense and some others who saw considerable playing time last year and once again should have a strong defense with several key players returning. Leading the returnees is 6-5, 255-pound, defensive end A.J. Epenesa, an all-state selection last year and one of the top college football recruits in the country. He has made a verbal commitment to play next season at the University of Iowa.

Epenesa is also expected to have more impact on offense and should not only catch, but run the ball in the backfield this season, coach Martin said.

“A.J. will run the ball and we will use him more on offense,” Martin said. “He is a good athlete. He is tall and has a good catch radius.”

Epenesa is also a star of Edwardsville basketball and track teams. He was a state champion in the discus last spring and an All-State basketball player.

Coach Martin said Quincy should be a formidable opponent in Week 1 of the season.

“Quincy is a good team,” Martin said earlier this week. “They run a lot of quick running plays with a double tight end and three backs in the backfield. That can create a lot of gap issues on defense. If the defense does not carry out assignments they can run the ball. It is really about being physical and disciplined on defense this week.”

Martin said Quincy has a spread attack and a quarterback with a strong arm in senior Ben Schroeder. The Blue Devils’ fullback Deven Smith also returns after a 1,000-plus rushing yards season last year.

Edwardsville lost some exceptional players in the backfield in Jackson Morrissey and Kendell Davis, but as usual, some quickness replaces them. Senior quarterback Dickmann should stand above most in the area this season. He started much of last year after Riley Jones was injured. Dickmann has the ability to throw or run with the ball.

Epenesa, Chris McCartney, Dionte Rodgers and Cyress Ahart should see considerable time carrying the ball this season. Rodgers, a sophomore, is quick on the field and mature for only being a sophomore, Martin said.

Epenesa is a preseason high school All-American on defense and will be the anchor with linebacker Ahart, who led the team in tackles last season. Tate Rujawitz will also be an anchor on defense in the tackle position. He is a 6-3, 280 pounds with Nathan Kolsea at defensive end.

Travis Anderson, the state 110-meter hurdle champion for the Tigers, will be one of the keys in the secondary at safety. Justin White, also a top track and field athlete in the long jump and high jump, will be a key in the secondary, with Jason Queen and Rodney Smith.