

Area football coaches discuss upcoming season at Touchdown Club get-together

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
August 23 2017 2:19 PM







ALTON – The 2017 area high school football season is about to kick off, and the expectations and hopes for the area's teams are high.

The Alton Knights of Columbus Hall was the site for Tuesday evening's annual Alton Touchdown Club's start-of-the-season get-together to celebrate the beginning of area football for the year and for the Riverbend area's coaches – Roxana's Pat Keith, Alton's Eric Dickerson, Civic Memorial's Mike Parmentier, Marquette Catholic's Darrell Angleton and East Alton-Wood River's Garry Herron – to talk about how their teams are looking on the eve of the season's kickoff.

“It's an honor for me to represent Roxana High School,” Keith said to the gathering. “The reason I say that is because, obviously, of the tradition there with coach (Bill) Smith and obviously Charlie Raich; I feel blessed to be able to be even a head coach at that school where Charlie Raich was there because I think Charlie Raich was the exemplified high school football coach, so I feel honored to be there as part of the program.”

The Shells open Friday night against Piasa Southwestern. “We have 14 seniors,” Keith said of the Shells. “They were juniors last year; we had guys coming in last year inexperienced. Some of those guys got experience last year, but we're still young.

“We have seven juniors, 12 sophomores and 18 freshmen – good numbers for us at Roxana. We've had some good practices – the detailed things make the difference in high school football. Our conference is a closed conference; we play the same nine teams every year. Our schedule has changed a little bit this year; we'll open up with Southwestern this year.

“Carlinville was a state runner-up last year and they're probably the favorite coming back; Vandalia has a solid team – I think the South Central (Conference) is a very good high school football conference.”

“There's only one way to go for us,” Dickerson said of the Redbirds, who finished winless in 2016. “We're going up; we had a great summer – we had a lot of kids show up. We had 60-65 show up in the weight room. The numbers (this season) are great – through our entire program, we're at 90-95 kids. We have a large senior class and we've got about 35-37 freshmen out right now – we're pretty excited.

“We've had success on the lower levels the past couple of years; we're hoping that translates into some victories for us on our varsity level. We were young last year – we graduated seven seniors, so we had a lot of juniors, sophomores and even a couple of freshmen step in for us last year; we're hoping that translates into success for us this year.

“We've got some very good athletes out there; we've got a lot of weapons out there, defensively, our goal is to be tough and physical; we've got a front seven, we're going to rely on them and we've got some athletes in the secondary. Once we get into (Southwestern) conference play; you know what the Southwestern Conference is like – there's no easy games. I'm expecting big things this year, and our kids are too.” The Redbirds open at Highland Friday night.



“It’s a brotherhood with our coaches,” Parmentier said of the area coaches. “We play Marquette, we play Wood River, but it’s a brotherhood – we’re all in it together,” before he began talking about the Eagles. “We had 20 seniors (last season); we were a pretty senior-laden group, obviously. We had a lot of linemen – with that being said, we had the Deckard (triplets, who have graduated) and we lost them, but we changed the culture; we’ve been more of a running program, last year especially, and we’ll continue to try to run the football again this year.

“The past 7-10 years at CM has been a lot of throwing the football, a lot of shotgun spread (offense), and I like to do that, but at the same time, I’m like if you can’t run the football, you’re going to have a rough time winning football games; what we’re hoping to do with our game plan – especially in the Mississippi Valley – we’ve got to ball-control people as best as we can.

“We had a pretty good summer – we averaged anywhere from 40-55 kids throughout the summer. I feel as it’s been a smoother transition for our kids, even though we have 10 seniors returning; we’ve got three guys back on offense and one guy back on defense, so we’re young to say the least. We’ve gotten a lot more physical in our practices and the kids know they’ve got to bring it every day.” The Eagles head to Alton Public School Stadium to meet Marquette in Friday’s season opener.

“We’re trying to help our boys do as much as we can,” Angleton said of helping players reach the next level following high school. “Last year, I had 11 seniors – out of those, five of our boys went to the next level for us – two are in (NCAA Division III) and two are in NAIA schools and one had a scholarship for (Division II); when we’re trying to find places to put kids, I think we’re making them successful when we’re looking at the D-II, NAIA, D-III level; if they want to go on, we’ll get a chance for them.”

As far as the Explorers go, “we’ve got 18 returning seniors,” Angleton said. “In a program of our size, we’re in the same boat as some of the smaller schools here managing injuries because I don’t have a large roster. Of the 18 seniors, I have eight returning on offense and seven returning on defense. We have a tough non-conference (outside the Prairie State Conference) this year; we picked up Taylorville.

“We get tested pretty early in the season. I think our strength is our running backs, we’ve got Treven Swingler and D’Avion Peebles – as good of running backs as you’ll see; they run hard, they run good in zone plays, they can both catch and they’re both 4.7 (40s) kind of guys.” Marquette opens Friday at home against Civic Memorial.

“I think our kids learned something in that loss (the Carlinville in the first round of last year’s IHSA playoffs),” Herron said. “I took a picture of the scoreboard when the game was over, and in our first team meeting this past spring, I put that picture up and showed them that score again to remind them of how that game went and what it took to get there; it’s not easy to make the playoffs – it’s really not easy when you get into the playoffs. That’s always what we strive for.

“We’ve got 12 seniors coming back; we only graduated seven seniors. We kept the kids busy in the summer; we started in June, lifted three times a week and had 7-on-7s. Our 12 seniors have been with me since I’ve been here; they’ve been the leaders of the team since I’ve been here – they were the first ones to really buy in and it’s going to be a really tough end-of-the-year speech to those kids.” The Oilers open at Breese Central Friday night.

The midseason Quarterback Club meeting is set for Sept. 26 at the K of C Hall.