

Redbirds ready for return to football postseason

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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ALTON – For the first time since 2006, Alton's football team is heading to the postseason.

The Redbirds – who last had a playoff game in October 2006 when they were defeated by Lisle Benet Academy in the first round of the IHSA Class 7A tournament – head to Chicago to take on Lincoln Park at 6 p.m. Friday at Lane Stadium. The Redbirds enter the contest at 5-4 and coming off a 22-19 loss last week to East St. Louis on the road;

they have the No. 28 seed in the playoffs, while Lincoln Park heads into the game at 8-1 seeded fifth; the Lions of the Chicago Public League Big Shoulders Division on their division title for an automatic playoff bid and defeated Chicago Mather 31-8 last week; their only loss came in Week 1 to Geneseo.

The Redbirds went winless last season and had fallen on hard times when Eric Dickerson took over the program in 2015. “Our first goal this year was to get to the playoffs,” Dickerson said. “The kids have worked hard and now that we’re in, we want to keep playing as long as we can.”

The Lions will offer the Redbirds a stern challenge. “They’re 8-1 for a reason,” Dickerson said. “They have a very strong offensive line and they have a sound defense; their linebackers, defensive backs and receivers are strong; they like to mix it up on offense and we’ll have to read the keys well and be ready.

“We’ll go there and do what we’ve done best all season.”

Lion quarterback Jacob Dowell has thrown for 1,325 yards this season with 26 touchdowns; his top running back has been Tavares Bean, who has rushed for 1,039 yards on the year and nine TDs with a 222-yard game against North Lawndale in Week 7. Dane Romberger has been Dowell’s favorite target this year with 25 catches for 381 yards and five TDs, with Terrence Shannon hauling in 16 passes for 204 yards and nine scores on the year.

Andrew Jones has thrown for 812 yards on the year with three touchdowns; Alton’s top rusher has been Darrell Smith, who has 1,312 yards on the ground with 15 touchdowns with a long run of 86 yards last week against the Flyers; his biggest game of the year was a 263-yard, five-touchdown game in Week 8 against Granite City. Jones’ favorite targets have been Kevin Caldwell Jr. with 32 catches for 582 yards and eight TDs with a long of 80 yards and Jonathan Bumpers, who has 27 catches for 250 yards and five scores on the year.

Defensively, Almes Tricic lead the Lions with 39 tackles on the year (25 solo), with Romberger right behind with 36 tackles (27 solo) and Cedric Asiedu also contributing 36 tackles (27 solo); Angel Cortes leads the Lions with 2.5 sacks on the year with Asedu right behind with two sacks. For the Redbirds, Charles Miller leads the Alton defense with 97 tackles (62 solo) while Izeal Terrell is right behind with 95 tackles (67 solo) and Ju’Qui Womack has 33 tackles (27 solo); David Weaver has two sacks on the year to lead AHS in that department, with five others contributing a sack each.

“We’ve got a good senior class this year that’s worked hard and has experience; they trust in each other,” Dickerson said. “The kids aren’t satisfied just to make the playoffs;

they want to keep playing as long as they can. They've worked hard all season and kept getting better.”

The Redbirds had a send-off get-together in front of the school at 9 a.m. Friday, and it's something Dickerson thought was great.

“It's cool that we're going to have this,” Dickerson said. “We've told the kids to enjoy the moment and take it all in; it's been 11 years since we've had a feeling like this; it'll be a great experience for the school and the program.

“Everyone at the school is really excited about the game; they're all wishing us well. We've had a good week of practice and we'll be ready to go.”

The winner of Friday's game will get the Algonquin Jacobs-New Lenox Lincoln-Way East winner in the second round; that game takes place at 6 p.m. Saturday.