

Football is 'fun' again for Southwestern and first-year coach Fricke

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Southwestern's Tristan Scott, No. 44, applies pressure for the ball Friday night at Staunton. Other Southwestern players involved are No. 66 J.J. Hewitt and No. 7 Jesse Arnold.

It is not easy to take a football team from the losing to winning side, especially after 14 consecutive defeats over a two-year period.

However, Southwestern coach Aaron Fricke and his team have made the transition this season, winning three of the first six games.

On Friday night at Staunton, the Piasa Birds lost to the Bulldogs in a close battle 12-6.

Fricke hopes to have his team back on their winning ways in a home game at 1 p.m. against Vandalia on Saturday, Oct. 11.

Fricke said the key to turning his team around was getting the kids to believe in themselves and love the game of high school football once again.

“I wanted to instill that same love of the game in them,” he said. “When a team loses constantly, it becomes difficult to keep a consistent amount of players out for football.”

The ultimate goal for the coach and his players is to make the playoffs. Even in the loss Friday, the Piasa Birds never quit and kept fighting for a victory until the final horn sounded, ending the game.

As Fricke walked through the Southwestern hallways, he knew there was a lot athletic talent and knew many of the youth were not coming out for football.

The team lost all nine games last year. The losing streak started in 2012 with five consecutive losses at the end of the season. Some of the Southwestern boys had never witnessed a victory, let alone a playoff bid until this year.

“I started talking to kids about coming out and we had five or six kids that were out before and didn’t play last year,” he said.

Quarterback Andrew Fry was one of the players he conversed with about leading the team. Fry and others were talking about not coming back out for football prior to the season, but Fricke changed their minds. Fry and receiver Dakota Duvall have become an almost unstoppable combination. After five games, Fry completed 58 of 101 pass attempts for 1,175 yards and 14 touchdowns and averaged 129.4 yards rushing per game. Duvall had 23 catches for 653 yards and 11 touchdowns before Friday. He was averaged 28.4 yards per catch.

On Friday, Staunton kicked a field goal in the second quarter and scored again in the fourth quarter, but near the end of the game, Southwestern scored to make the final margin 12-6. Fry only had 48 yards passing against Staunton, a season low, but that pushes him over 1,200 yards for the season. He ran for more than 100 yards Friday.

Aaron Fricke's father, Mark, has joined him on the sidelines this season and that is something he dreamed about.

"My dad has coached everything from football, basketball and track for 30 years," he said. "He was at Petersburg Porta the last eight years and before at Lincoln High School. I am having a blast working with him. He also is inspiring the kids."

Aaron's father works for the United States Department of Agriculture but he still makes some practices and always the games, even though he is an hour and half away.

Aaron Fricke said again he thinks the key for Southwestern's football team being successful is he tries to make each day enjoyable.

"We do something fun every day that brings out the competition in the kids," he said. "We don't go full pads and bang heads every single day. When things start clicking, some of the kids point out things watching film like coaches. We are immersing them in football and finding ways to bring out fun and the best in kids."