

Roxana Returns Good Young Core Of Players, Prepares For Fall Football Season On New Turf Field, Hopes To Surprise Observers

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August 27 2021 6:00 AM

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ROXANA - The Roxana High School football team is coming off a 2-4 season this past spring, with the season being pushed back due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, and is preparing for the fall season with a big change.

A new turf field has been installed at Charlie Raich Field after a successful fund-raising campaign, and it has the Shells players and coaching staff very excited as preseason practice began on Monday after the unusual spring season.

"The spring season was probably weirder than it feels right now; this feels normal," said Roxana head coach Wade DeVries during a recent interview. "I think we're excited to be back out here in the fall, and a normal full season. Still a little bit of restriction here and there, but overall, it's nothing that's going to impact us. We're going to be able to play, we're going to be able to practice, we're going to be able to do what we do. You're here, you can see the facility. If you're not excited to come out here and practice every day, then you'd better check your pulse, because there's a lot of good things going on here."

The Shells lost some key players in quarterback Gavin Huffman and wide receivers Parris White and Holden Jones to graduation, along with a very good senior class that helped the Shells qualify for the 2019 IHSA playoffs. Roxana does return a core group of young players that will help the Shells in the new season.

"A lot of people who follow us know that we lost the quarterback," DeVries said, "we lost our receiver, our all-time leading passer and receiver in Roxana football history. We lost multiple all-conference players, we lost multiple three-year starters. Our senior class had a lot of success; they were a big part of 2019 when we went to the playoffs. So we're going to miss those guys, but we've got a good young core that's coming in here, and I think it's a group we can be really excited about, really from our seniors down. We had a really good group of seniors; recruiting kids in the spring was actually harder than now. I think there's so much excitement now to being back to 'normal football' that I think that kids are ready to come back out, and I think our numbers will probably resemble more similar to what we expected in the spring than what we had actually gotten."

The Shells return several players on the defensive front, but will have to replace the deep backs, and also return a good group of running backs that will carry the ball well, along with some younger players who stepped up and filled in during the spring season.

"We return a lot defensively upfront," DeVries said. "We return pretty much most of the guys who played on the defensive line. We return a couple of linebackers that played for us, we replaced the whole secondary. We got our running backs back, so most people who played running back for us a year ago are back. We return a few offensive linemen, a couple of kids here and there, and some young kids who had to fill in in the spring. We started some freshmen, we started a lot of sophomores, and now, those kids are sophomores and juniors, and they're not terribly far removed from playing varsity football. And so, those are kids we're excited about."

The Shells are currently searching for an identity for the upcoming season, as DeVries is looking for a good mixture of both the running and passing game. A set of three quarterbacks are currently competing for the starting job, with all three bringing positives to the table.

"Right now, we're trying to identify kind of who we are, I guess," DeVries said. "We have had three kids going for the quarterback position; they all three look good, all three give us a pretty good chance to win. We've got a lot of competition this year, I think that's going to be one of the biggest things. We've got seven or eight kids that are running the football right now, and I feel like they could all give us reps. We've got probably four or five different kids who could start for us at offensive tackle, we've got a really solid rotation on the defensive line. There's a lot of competition in certain positions, so we've got to come out here every day and compete. And that's kind of the message we're sending is every day, you're competing to play on a Friday night."



"Right now, it's a lot of general intro," DeVries said. "Intro to things you're going to see. Traditional spread concepts and stuff like that you're going to see defensively. Offensively, we're so much different than most teams that we really don't know what we're going to see defensively any week. Teams that we see are in a three-four every week will come out in a six-two against us. So for us, we've got to be prepared for a little bit of everything when we're on the offensive side. Playing more of a tight end, two tight ends set is very different, especially with the three backs. It's very different than most teams we're going to play, so we've got to be prepared upfront, we've got to be prepared schematically to be able to adjust and to be able to understand what our responsibility is and be able to execute our play."

The opening game is set for Aug. 27 at home against Eureka, Ill, and the Shells leave the South Central Conference for the Mississippi Division of the Cahokia Conference, joining neighborhood rival East Alton-Wood River in the league, and will also play Breese Central, Salem, Columbia and Freeburg in conference games. The non-conference slate has games against Red Bud, Civic Memorial, and Sparta.

DeVries knows he has a good team, and hope to surprise a lot of observers this coming season.

"We've got kids who can play varsity football," DeVries said. "We're going to put a varsity football team on the 27th, and we're excited. I'm excited about this group. I think we're going to surprise some people. A lot of people see we've graduated a lot of three-year starters, record setters, and I think we're going to be able to prove to some people that we're more than just that."

