

“I Want To Win the Riverbend” - Roxana Football Sets Higher Goals For 2023 Season

by Nathan Tucker, Sports Reporter
August 16 2023 10:49 AM



ROXANA - As practices ramp up ahead of the 2023 high school football season, so does the anticipation of what a new year could bring. For the Roxana Shells, hopes and expectations are high following a 2022 that saw them play two postseason games, reaching a record of 7-4.

“The talent is there but nothing is guaranteed... We won seven games last year, but we’ve still won zero this year,” said Shells head coach Wade DeVries following a recent practice. “I think this year our goals are loftier, and we have to practice at a higher level from day one.”

That energy that DeVries demands in practice was noticeable in a visit to Shells practice last Friday night. High-intensity, station-to-station drills dictated a muggy early-August evening in the shadow of the Phillips 66 refinery in Roxana.

While full-contact practices have only been going on for a short while, DeVries noted that the season doesn’t just start when pads come on.

“This is what you train for all year, right?” said DeVries. “We train for nine months to play football for three months. And if you’re really good at it, do your job, train hard enough, practice hard enough, and do the right things, you get to play for four months.”

That mindset has turned Roxana into a football team to be reckoned with in the Riverbend. It’s been a steady march of improvement since DeVries took the Roxana head coach job in 2018.

IHSA Class 3A postseason play in 2022 was the high water mark of Wade DeVries’ time in charge in Roxana. They defeated Hillsboro 13-7 in the first round, and fell to Fairbury Prairie Central 41-20 in the second round at home.

It’s a Shells football team that’s aiming even higher this year. Those “loftier goals” DeVries mentioned are attainable largely because of the group coming back.

Over a dozen starters across both sides of the football return, and the Shells will have a number of seniors providing leadership to their younger talents as well.

“We’ve got a great group of leaders,” said DeVries. “Some of them stepped into that role almost two years ago, when many were sophomores. Now we have a lot of seniors who are ready to fill that role. We don’t have just one leader or two leaders or even a set amount of leaders, we have guys leading drills, we have guys demanding the best out of everyone on the team.

“I think that’s what sets our floor as a football team, our leaders, and the level of intensity and effort we’re able to practice with. It’s not just about how many guys can run fast and bench press a lot.”

This season is likely Roxana's best chance at capturing the top spot in the Cahokia - Mississippi Conference, but DeVries and company are aware that it doesn't come easy with some of the teams in the small conference.

"We've got to take those games against Columbia, Breese (Central), we've got to win those games," DeVries noted. "And that comes with winning the others along the way. It's not going to be easy.

"Today had to be our best day, and when we come back tomorrow, tomorrow's got to be our best day. Every day the goal is just to get better and better and better, that's all we can do."

While not in conference play, an old rivalry is renewed in Roxana on opening night next week as the Shells travel to play Jersey Panthers. It's the first meeting of the two local programs since 1996.

"The conference championship is great, but I want to win the Riverbend just as much," DeVries said, setting a marker for his program. "If we can beat Jerseyville, CM, and Wood River, that means something is going well for our program and it gives us an opportunity to turn around and be able to beat the Columbias and Breese Centrals and Freeburgs and those teams."



