

# Southwestern's football team sports an abundance of talent, looks for good things this year

by Dan Brannan, Content Director  
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**PIASA** - Southwestern rebounded last year under coach **Aaron Fricke** to win some games and get the football program rolling in the right direction. Fricke appears to have the squad set for another repeat performance.

The Piasa Birds were 3-6 last year and appear to be poised to be strong this year with an abundance of talent and athleticism.

“I got lucky and have some extra kids that weren’t expected to go out,” he said. “We are lot bigger than last year and getting more organized. I probably have eight or nine kids I can rotate on the offensive line.”

**Caleb Robinson** will replace **Andrew Fry** at the quarterback position. Fry broke several passing records last season.

Fricke said Robinson is a “cerebral” type of quarterback with a great arm.

Ryan Taslay, who last year started as fullback, will be a pistol for Southwestern this season, Fricke predicts.

“He saw plenty of time last year,” he said. “He is being recruited by Division III and Division II schools. He will carry it the majority of the time.”

Senior Jacob Ritzhaupt is a tailback who is a fast kid who hasn’t played since he was a freshman, but should excel this season, Fricke said.

In the receiving corps, Southwestern should have blazing speed, perhaps the fastest of nearly any team in the region.

On one end will be Scott Kasting, a tall, 6-4, 180-pounder who has legitimately run 4.3 and 4.4 in the 40-yard dash, Fricke said. Fricke said he wanted people to know this wasn’t a mistake, that he has personally clocked him multiple times at those times. Kasting also has a 40-inch vertical leap.

“He has never played football in his life,” Fricke said. “He is one of the best baseball kids and he led them to a winning season last year. He will likely replace the passing threat of **Dakota Duvall**, who had catches for more than 1,000 yards last year.

On the other side will be another speedster, Michael Nolte, a 6-1, 175-pound junior who was a 4 x 200 and 4 x 400 relay team member for the Piasa Birds track team last year.

The Piasa Birds will have a big, strong line, led by Patrick Wieneke, who has good size at 6-5, 275 pounds, basketball feet, Fricke said.

Linemen Brad Spurling started as a sophomore and could potentially be the Piasa Birds best linemen, running a quick 4.8 40-yard dash. He is the “quarterback” of the offensive and defensive line, Fricke said.

Southwestern will employ the same offensive system again this year and will still spread it out a little and run the ball a lot more, the coach said.

“The awesome part of having great athletes is it makes everybody better,” he said.

When Fricke started with the program the year before it had 29 kids out and now the team is back up in the 60s.

“We were 3-6 last year, but I always tell people we lost three games by seven points or less,” he said. “We were as close to being 6-3 as 3-6. We had a very competitive season.”

Southwestern opens at Hillsboro tonight and week two returns home against Greenville.

“Roxana is the only one that brings back a big star player,” Fricke said of Southwestern’s conference. “Most of the teams have a lot of young, underclassmen.

“I just love the kids and love the community. We have good, hard working and hard-nosed kids. I am excited about the season.”

