



WINNERS: The Southwestern sixth-grade boys football team finishes season 9-0 again

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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BRIGHTON - Southwestern's sixth-grade football has never lost a football game in two seasons of play, winning **18** straight games.

The Junior Football League team recently defeated Carlinville 38-0 for its ninth consecutive win this fall with no losses. The Junior Birds scored 372 points this season and have only given up 46 points.

Many of the Junior Birds players have been with the team since they were in second grade as the Brighton Broncos.

The Junior Birds roster consisted of Alex Miranda, Blake Freytag, Dominic Corby, Samuel Robinson, Charlie Darr, Dylan Brown, Cole Lorsbach, Riley Tucker, Donny Klaas, Caleb Mary, Sam Harshbarger, Gavin Day, Ty Vaughn, Baylee Gonzalez, Bo Richey, CJ Taylor, Gary Walker III and Marcus Williamson.

Brian Mary is the head coach of the team and Chuck Darr and Chance Funk are the assistant coaches.

Brian Mary said it has been a joy to coach the boys since they were 7 years old. He said the team plays the same teams Southwestern High School plays in the South Central Conference from Carlinville, Litchfield, East Alton-Wood River, Roxana, Greenville, Staunton, Vandalia and Pana, so it is intense competition.

“They are a real good group of kids,” he said. “I teach them discipline, respect and teamwork. I haven’t been on the field like some of the coaches, I coach from the sidelines. I run receivers in with plays and do a no-huddle. That throws a lot of teams off. They are so used to drawing on a board then running the plays.

“I have 18 kids on the team and I have had 10 of them since the very beginning. I call them my corps group of kids.”

Gavin Day has been “a workhouse” in the backfield, Brian Mary said.

“Gavin is one of my five-year kids and he shows up to practice early every day and gives 150 percent effort,” Brian Mary said. “He also makes about a third of our tackles on defense.”

Dominic Corby started playing with the team at age 9, but didn’t play last year and is another talented player, Coach Mary said. “He is tall and lanky and runs like a gazelle. He is extremely fast.”



Quarterback Blake Freytag is one of the leaders on the field and he and Caleb Mary work in unison together as quite a solid tandem. The two sometimes stay with one another before games, taking snaps over and over on their own to make sure they have it down.

“They have probably only dropped five or six snaps a year during all their games,” he said. “I have used tackling dummies for Caleb to use to help his blocking. He is a great blocker and a defensive end.”

Alex Miranda was the other main running back this season for Southwestern and has been exceptional, the coach said.

“He is one of the greatest kids on the team,” the coach added.

Southwestern High School’s head coach Aaron Fricke has turned the high school program around, already winning three games this year and has the team still in contention for postseason playoffs. Coach Mary said several of the high school players have come out to their games.

Brian Mary said he dreads the day he has to hand the kids off, but knows once he stops coaching them they will be ready for the next level.

“We run the spread offense and no-huddle now,” he said. “I have a corporate job and I know working with these boys has brought a lot to my professional life, teaching me patience with coaching and added training opportunities.

“The kids make great tackles and hits. They are overall just great kids. The future is so bright for them.”

Shannon Mary, the mother Caleb Mary, of one of the boys on the team, penned these special words about the Southwestern Junior Birds sixth-grade team: “You can hear their chant every single game, “What are we – Family!” They have learned that football is more than just a game; it is dedication to their team both on and off the field. The sport has done so much for these boys.

“Seeing the points on the scoreboard is a great feeling, but they have learned it is not only about winning the game; it’s what the sport has done to them from the inside out. To watch the dedication and heart that they put into every practice and game is

amazing. It is hard to see the season coming to an end, but with two more years of JFL and then onto the Friday Night Lights, I cannot wait to see what becomes of these “Boys of Fall.” Congratulations boys on an awesome season!”



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