

Graduation toll leaves Knights short on tested talent

By Richard A. Kiley

Who knows what kind of season lurks in wait for the football Knights of McQuaid this fall?

Not even head coach Tom Sprague knows for sure. Sprague, who is about to begin his fifth year as head coach after serving as assistant to Tom Seymour for eight seasons, goes as far as saying he could have anywhere from a mediocre .500 club to an overpowering unbeaten squad.

"There's no question we'll have a good, competitive team," said Sprague, who played high school football for Johnson City (Section IV) before playing four years as a defensive back for the recently revitalized football program at Ithaca College. "But we've got three or four teams on our schedule right now that are right with us, so we could be anywhere from 4-4 to 8-0."

Sprague freely admits that last year's successful campaign, which saw McQuaid reach the Section 5 AAA final game only to lose in overtime against Fairport, was somewhat of a surprise. The Knights survived a rocky early part of the season and then rolled into the sectional final, an accomplishment Sprague attributed to 14 savvy seniors.

"At this time last year, I had no idea things would go like they did. We were what I would call a 'patchwork' team; I had 14 guys who could fill in the holes on the team," Sprague said. "The 14 seniors I had were really 14 leader-type players, who had a tremendous attitude and good team rapport. They (the seniors) got us through the early part of the season, and once the juniors started to develop, things really came together. Nothing surprised me after that."

Those seniors are gone now, though.

And added to Sprague's uncertainty over the upcoming season is speculation as to how his offense (which has seldom failed to generate at least four touchdowns, on average, per game, during Sprague's tenure) will react to the graduation of key offensive players.

Sprague lost starting quarterback Chris Caruso (University of Rochester), who passed for 20 touchdowns last year, as well as fullback Dave Hodges, tight end Steve Hettrich (Cornell) and All-League center Dave Webster. Also gone from last year's Cinderella squad are All-League defensive back Dan Peacock (Holy Cross), Chris Hauber (Central Florida), Doug Nagel (RPI) and Charlie Malloy (Hobart).

With Caruso gone, Sprague will look to 6'3", 185-lb. senior quarterback Joe Williams, who, after replacing an ejected Caruso in last year's playoff loss to Fairport, promptly threw a 55-yard touchdown in the waning moments of the game to force overtime.

Also returning on offense are tackle Mike Baumer and senior fullback Dave Schroeder. Schroeder attained valuable playing experience when he saw action in both playoff games last year.

According to Sprague, however, the "cornerstone" of this year's team will be two-way guard Jason Jenkins — all 6'2", 260 lbs. of him.

"There's no question that he (Jenkins) is the guy we're building our team around," said Sprague of one of his team's captains. "He's very fast; he may be the best interior lineman in the section. And he's got a good chance to go to a Division I school."

Scott Hebert, a middle linebacker, "is about the only other returnee on defense," according to Sprague. Hebert is the other team captain.

Sprague's quandary as to what kind of club he has this year will be answered no later than that first game of the season, when the Knights do battle with Canandaigua.

"They (Canandaigua) will be going for their 30th in a row," said Sprague, who scheduled the out-of-league game when he discovered he had an open date. "They don't have a Billy Scharr (starting quarterback the past three sea-



McQuaid punter Steve Schott awaited the snap from center Tom Nientemp during special team drills at the Brighton high school last week.

sons) or eight or nine second-year starters they had last year, though. But win or lose, it will make us a better team."

He added that the 48-13 drubbing his squad absorbed last year — as well as the fact that Canandaigua's junior varsity steam-rolled over McQuaid's — should give his players even more incentive in ending its opponent's winning streak.

Ironically, the McQuaid mentor worked with Canandaigua head coach Mike Foster, whom Sprague called "one of the best coaches in the area," in the fourth annual Eddie Meath All-Star Game earlier this month.

"We tried not to show each other too much," Sprague joked.

The season does not get any easier after Canandaigua. Sprague doesn't figure games against Catholic rivals Bishop Kearney, Aquinas or Cardinal Mooney to be afternoon tea dances either.

And although he has enjoyed success against most city teams in the past, he is still leery of East and Franklin. The Quakers have proven to be real thorns in Sprague's side, upsetting his teams twice in four years, including last year's 8-2 "offensive showcase."

Sprague knows that if he wishes McQuaid to establish itself as one of the area's bona fide titans, the Knights will have to keep bad games to a minimum — if not eliminate them entirely.

"We stress the successes here; we don't look at the negative aspects," Sprague said. "This is a whole new team; last year is gone. We've got new challenges."

One of the primary challenges during the grueling double sessions thus far has been to improve the Knight defense.

"Our teams are generally more known for offense. We've always had big, skilled linemen



McQuaid head coach Tom Sprague offers insight on how his backfield could grind out more yardage during the second day of double sessions.

who are also very smart. They fit the prototype of what a good lineman should be," Sprague said.

He wants to develop a new kind of player at the Brighton high school.

"We've had a tough time filling defensive positions," Sprague said. "Like linebackers, we get a few but we get a lot more offensive-type players."

The emphasis on defense has carried over to the special teams, units that Sprague called the strongest McQuaid has ever had. According to Sprague, kicker Kevin Flanagan and punter Steve Schott should leave opposing offenses pinned deep in their own territory all

season.

Joe Marchese, assistant coach as well as assistant principal at McQuaid, has been concentrating on refining the kicking game as well as the linebacking crew.

Frank Noge, "a stabilizing force" at McQuaid for 27 years, according to Sprague, will focus on the linemen.

Overall, Sprague is content with where things stand right now, and is expecting thousands to show up at the Knights' opener against Canandaigua.

"I'd just as soon start with a real tough opening game," Sprague said.

They don't come any tougher, Coach.

Metropolitan Funeral Chapels, Inc.
(716) 436-7730
109 West Avenue
Rochester, New York 14611
(near St. Mary's Hospital)

Divorce Mediation
An alternative path
to a divorce settlement.
For further information call:
Tom Hanson
546-7220
Catholic Family Center
50 Chestnut Plaza
Rochester, New York 14604

CHANCE OF A LIFETIME

Telephone Catholics and give them the opportunity to have the Word of God in their homes as reflected in the pages of the #1 Catholic Family magazine, **St. Anthony Messenger**. A real Apostolate . . . Financially rewarding . . . work from home. For Details write: Fr. Peter, c/o The Franciscans, 1615 Republic Street, Cincinnati, Ohio 45210, or call: Mrs. Raymore. - 1-873-0393.

DiMaria Travel
1521 MONROE AVE. 271-0100

FOR THE BEST
IN TRAVEL
ALWAYS

**Every Pleasure on Earth...
Can be yours to enjoy at sea!**

Cruise the Caribbean on the magnificent new ms Noordam of the Holland America Line.

February 14-21st — Winter School Break

Includes Air/Sea from Rochester, visiting some of the Caribbean's most exciting ports. Experience gourmet meals, free nightly entertainment, and shop duty free aboard ship or in port. Try your luck in the ships casino!

Join our escorted group. Limited space available. For information call DiMaria Travel, 271-0100.