

Mixed results in fall campaigns at Notre Dame, DeSales

By Richard A. Kiley

With the fall seasons barely a month old, Notre Dame High School in Elmira is already playing the role of David against its Goliath-like competition. In the past, the Crusaders have been known to wreak havoc on the larger high schools in the Southern Tier, and this year has proved no different.

Although his sixth season as head coach of the Crusader football team began somewhat inauspiciously, Mike D'Aloisio appears to have Notre Dame football thriving again. After a season-opening loss to Sayre High School of Pennsylvania, D'Aloisio's squad has put together consecutive wins over Hornell and Corning East.

Sayre had already played two games before facing Notre Dame — the high school season begins earlier in the Keystone State — a key factor to its 19-7 win over the Crusaders, according to D'Aloisio. In addition to Sayre's having two games under its belt, D'Aloisio was starting the season with a team predominantly made up of underclassmen.

But D'Aloisio, who is in his 11th year with Notre Dame football, didn't let his team off that easily.

"The lights didn't cause the fumbles or the penalties though," he said. D'Aloisio was referring to Notre Dame's five turnovers as well as costly penalties which stalled numerous drives. "Sayre played well; they have experienced people in key places."

The Crusader offense compiled 350 yards in total offense for the night, but could only culminate one drive with a touchdown.

After the Sayre loss, D'Aloisio and his assistant coaches — Ron Norman and Dick Craft — decided to alter the game plan because the Crusaders lost their passing attack from last year's 6-4 team to graduation. Gone are Dan Gizzi and Jim Polcyn, who is third string quarterback at the University of Rochester, and set the Twin Tier passing record for his more than 1,000 yards in the air the last three years. Gizzi was Polcyn's favorite receiver, setting the career single-season record for receptions (92) at Notre Dame and in the section.

"We used to throw 35 to 40 times a game, and we threw for over 200 yards against Sayre," D'Aloisio said. "But in our last two games, we have rushed for over 230 yards."

And both games have been wins. J.P. Bernatavitz and Bob Grosvernor have been the war horses in the Crusader backfield, grinding out close to 600 yards between them the first three games.

The Crusaders now boast a two-dimensional offense with a good running game and Kevin Harney's passing. The junior, quarterback who filled in two games last year when Polcyn broke his wrist near the end of the season, has appeared more comfortable in the last two wins. "He's done an excellent job, and is showing a lot of leadership for a junior," his coach said.

"He picked up a complicated offensive system very quickly."

D'Aloisio called the 12-0 win over Hornell "nearly flawless." According to the sixth-year coach, it was the Crusaders' first shutout since 1982.

Notre Dame proved it could come from behind in its 12-7 defeat of Corning East. Down 7-0 early in the game, the offense reeled off 12 unanswered points to notch the win. The defense also played well, at one point stopping Corning East on fourth-and-one on the three yard line.

Overall D'Aloisio has been pleasantly surprised by the play of this year's Crusader squad.

"We didn't expect them to progress this rapidly," D'Aloisio said. "Things look like their coming together."

Close defeats

The varsity boys' soccer team is off to a 2-5-2 start, but the record is not a good indication of how Henry Ferguson's squad has played at times. Among the five losses are back-to-back 1-0 defeats to Corning and EFA, as well as 3-2 loss to Elkland, another one-goal loss to EFA and a 3-1 loss to Hornell. Ferguson's squad overwhelmed Williamson 6-2, and just last week upset a powerful Horseheads team, 1-0.

"We've been in every game and beat Horseheads for the first time in the program's history," said Ferguson, who is in his second year at Notre Dame. "The transition from defense to offense has been a little slow."

The team appears to have early-season jitters behind it as the second half of the schedule approaches.

"They appear to be gaining confidence with what they can do and what they will be able to do. We've also been getting more shots in recent games."

Ferguson attributed the upset of Horseheads to his team simply outlasting its opponent, and playing strong defense. "The defense really held up; they (Horseheads) had their opportunities."

Playing well defensively for Notre Dame thus far are sweeper James Smith and goalie Andy Garman. Smith was outstanding in the Horseheads game, and Garman has picked up from where he left off last year, when he recorded more than 300 saves tending the Crusader goal.

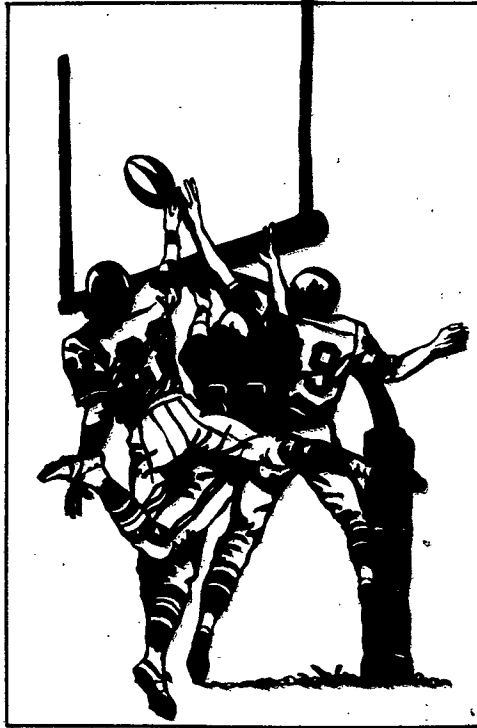
Offensively, Mark Donahue (4 goals, three assists), Jason Breeman (2 goals, five assists) and Mike Brabham (4 goals, one assist) have been setting the pace.

Ferguson hopes the win over an established team such as Horseheads will spur his team on during the second half of the schedule.

"I've been telling them that once they can beat a team like that (Horseheads), they will start putting it all together."

New program

This is the first year that the high school in



Elmira has fielded a girls' varsity soccer team, and already the Lady Crusaders have beaten Southside High School twice and Bath once. According to Head Coach Steve Weber, the team set a goal to win eight games in its inaugural season although "we weren't sure what the competition was like."

Despite its 3-6 start, Weber said the mood on the team is upbeat.

"They are aware of the record and understand that it's going to take time to get things going," Weber said. "They realize there are sectionals too."

Natalie Kozlowski is the leading scorer thus far, notching five goals and adding one assist. Defensively, sweeper Lisa Johnson and goaltender Tina Maloney are leading the effort to keep the net empty.

"There have been a lot of close games," said Weber, citing a 2-1 defeat to Addison — a team ranked in the state last year. His squad lost to Addison on a penalty kick.

With only four seniors among the starting 11 on this year's varsity, Weber knows a good core of players will be returning next year.

"Right now we're just looking to improve," Weber said. "We should improve more than any other team the second time around (the schedule). We're hoping to win more games the second time around too."

Saint football

Jim McNicholas has received a rude welcoming from league opponents since he took over for former head football coach Harry Furman at DeSales. McNicholas has yet to capture his first win as head coach, but he hasn't exactly had a full team.

Against Dundee, McNicholas looked on as his top two quarterbacks went down with injuries, and was already without the services of his third string thrower, who went down in practice. Dundee went on to trounce DeSales 49-7.

Last Saturday against Red Jacket, the Saints were victimized by turnovers in an 18-7 loss to Red Jacket. McNicholas said the team looked a lot more settled against Red Jacket, even though he would have liked to see a different outcome.

"I felt good about the game. We came out of it with no injuries so for the first time in a while we will be 100 percent," McNicholas said.

Despite being 0-3, McNicholas said the overall mood on the team is rather optimistic.

"They know they can win, we have five games left," McNicholas said. "They really think they'll pull it (a winning season) out. I think the guys are really pulling together."

McNicholas is perplexed by the rather slow start, but is not contemplating any rash changes.

"It's been a tough adjustment for me, more so than the players, he said. "I'm not really doing anything different. But it's different being the top man. But I wouldn't try anything they couldn't handle."

And McNicholas also hopes the rough start of the season has taught his players a valuable lesson.

"They've learned from the first two games not to take anybody lightly," he said. "But we're not dead yet. They have a lot of pride; they're not going to quit."

Upbeat attitude

The girls' varsity soccer team is 4-6 overall, and 4-3 in league play as of press time.

Head Coach Steve Weber said the team is looking forward to the remainder of the season.

"The common consensus of the defeat by Sodus is that it was our finest effort all year," said Spelley, who is in his 10th year with the program. "At this time last year, we had sort of a pitfall with our inexperience. But I feel confident; we should win the next four out of five. I anticipate we'll finish 8-7."

Spelley said his squad's record may be somewhat deceiving. Even in losing, the Lady Saints have dominated the some contests.

"The attitude on the team all year has been positive; even in defeat, it (the mood) is joy."

Spelley cited Kris Guinan, Babette DeVaney and Nelli Lynch for their offensive prowess thus far, and Jeanne Ann Guinan and Ann Sindoni on defense. The 10th year coach also commended goalie Kathleen Morgan for the job she's been doing.

DeSales' four wins have come against Dundee, South Seneca, Gananda and Romulus.

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