

Diocesan grid teams looking to end drought

By Richard A. Kiley
Staff writer

Could this be the year a diocesan high school football team wins a sectional title?

Although several teams came close, no Catholic high school football team put together a championship season in the 1980s. Aquinas Institute (Class AAA) and Geneva DeSales (Class C) were the last teams to win grid titles, as both took home championships in 1979. McQuaid Jesuit (Class AAA) won it all in 1978.

Those three schools, along with Bishop Kearney and Notre Dame, will all be looking to end the decade on a positive note with championship seasons this fall.



Courier File Photo

Kearney coach Nick Teta and his Kings will compete independent of a league this fall.

Bishop Kearney knows full well what it's like to come up just a bit short in a bid for a sectional grid title. The Kings (6-2-1 in 1988) lost to defending Class AA champion Greece Arcadia, 3-0, in last year's semifinals after falling to Canandaigua in the championship game two years ago.

Fifth-year coach Nick Teta lost an abundance of key players from last year's Class AA semifinalist, including quarterback Craig Chodak (University of Rochester), guard Jeff Failing (U of R), running back Tim Dieter (Albany State) and tight end Wendell Spiva (Jackson State). Running back Steve Smith and guard/linebacker Bill Oberlies (Villanova) have also departed.

But Teta does have arguably one of the best backfields in the area with the return of juniors Lamin Massaquoia and Rene Ingoglia, a transfer from Eastridge.

Craig Mikell will look to soften the blow of losing Dieter. The senior running back/defensive back stands 6-2 and weighs 175 pounds.

Another Eastridge transfer, senior Bert Richardson, should help the Kings. Seniors Marty Alexander (defensive halfback), David Bell (tackle) and Ryan Kennerson (tackle) provide Teta with experience in the backfield and on the line.

Senior David Armanini, a tri-star athlete at BK and a back-up to Chodak last fall, will play quarterback. Armanini, a point guard in basketball, is no stranger to running a team's offense.

"We'll throw enough to keep the other teams honest," said Teta, who has coached the Kings to a 13-5-1 record the past two seasons.

The Kings, who have dropped out of the City-Catholic League, will compete as an independent this fall. Teta and his players may soon feel like they're on an "I Love New York" tour with away games at Batavia, Gloversville (near Albany), Midlakes and Canisius (in Buffalo).

"The kids like to travel," Teta said. "We don't feel (that) the traveling is going to hurt us."

Kearney, which opened up with four consecutive away games last season, plays four of its first five out of town this fall. BK opens the season at Batavia Sept. 9. After hosting Ithaca on Sept. 16, the Kings don't play at home again until Oct. 13 against Palmyra-Macedon.

With an open date on Oct. 21, the Kings are only scheduled to play seven games, but Teta is confident he will find an opponent soon.

Aquinas lost quarterback Jim Schrader to graduation along with several other key players from last year's 4-3-2 team, but any team with a player like Alcindor Coleman isn't hurting too much.

New Aquinas coach Bob D'Ettore, who takes over for Chris Battaglia (18-14-2 in four seasons), has the most sought-after player in the Rochester-area with Coleman. The Little Irish senior, who stands 6-4 and weighs 319 pounds, will move around a lot this fall, playing nose guard, defensive tackle and offensive tackle.

Coleman was a one-man wrecking machine for AQ in 1988, registering 81 tackles and 10 sacks. He also recovered five fumbles and made two interceptions.

Senior running back Alva Royston is back, as are senior fullback Don Schwab and junior running back Kareem Patterson. The quarterback for the Little Irish will be senior Heath Rist, who reached the Section 5 Class AAA semis in 1987.

The first two weeks of the season will be tough for Aquinas with games at Canandaigua (Sept. 9) and East (Sept. 16). The first home game for the Little Irish is against Franklin on Sept. 23.

AQ did not play East or Franklin in 1988.

After enduring a Jekyll-and-Hyde season in 1988, McQuaid coach Tom Sprague is hoping his Knights can achieve some consistency this fall.

The Knights finished a respectable 6-3 last season (5-2 against the City-Catholic League) but their offense sputtered in crucial games with one notable exception: McQuaid was the only team to beat Section 5 Class AAA champion East.

Sprague does have some experience with the return of senior linebackers Todd Dorschel (6-0, 215 lb.) and Sam Owens (5-11, 230 lb.), and senior defensive ends, Scott Cottier (6-0, 188 lb.) and Jason Henderson (6-0, 180 lb.).

As has been the trademark of Sprague's teams in the past, the kicking game looks to be strong with the return of senior kicker Jim Flanagan.

The key to the Knights' season will be the ability of a young offensive line to open holes for senior tailback Jamal Dunbar, who should shine in his final season.

McQuaid looks as strong as anybody in the quest for a City-Catholic League title, but will also face tough non-league competition against Webster and Buffalo St. Joe's. Webster embarrassed Aquinas in the season finale for both teams last November.



Courier File Photo

DeSales running back Chris Ike returns for his senior season.

DeSales turned things around last season after finishing 0-8 in 1987. Last year's Saints finished 6-2 overall and had a chance for a sectional bid until back-to-back losses to defending Finger Lakes West and Class C champion Romulus and Batavia (in which a missed conversion attempt proved costly as the Saints fell, 15-14) near the end of the season.

Unfortunately for second-year head coach Bob Taney, the Saints will not be loaded with experienced players this year as they were last fall. Included in the mass exodus were tackles Pedro Rojas (Buffalo State) and Peter Parshall (U of R) as well as quarterback Ron Cecere, fullbacks Steve Vedora (Buffalo State), Larry Guerri and slot man Dean Askin.

Taney does have some fine talent returning in All-Conference halfback Chris Ike as well as such other key offensive players as Jeff Taney, Joe Vedora and Jim Vedora.

Senior linebackers Dave Barnard and Frank Caravita give Taney experience on defense.

Junior Frank Pane, who is coming off a spectacular baseball season in which he went 9-0 for the Class D champion Saints, will step in for Cecere. Pane was the back-up to Cecere last year and should perform admirably as the season progresses.

Taney said that Clyde-Savannah — which moves over to the west from the Finger Lakes Central League — is the overwhelming favorite to win the league title. Clyde-Savannah, the defending Class B champion, won five consecutive Class C titles from 1983-87.

The Saints don't have to play C-S until the fifth week of the season, giving them some time to prepare for what will be the toughest task of the year. DeSales begins the season with two consecutive home

games against Mynderse and Dundee, two opponents the Saints narrowly got by in 1988.

Taney does have 39 players trying out for the varsity this year compared to just 24 last fall. "We'll be able to have a modified team this year so the kids can get some experience," Taney said. "We've got a lot of underclassmen going out this year."

1989 will mark the return of "Air D'Aloisio" at Elmira Notre Dame. Ninth-year coach Mike D'Aloisio lost two of the best backs to ever come out of the Catholic school in Bob Grosvenor (778 yards in 4 games in '88, 2,657 career yards and 28 rushing touchdowns) and Mike Bernatavitz (865 yards and 10 TDs), but he returns his quarterback and a slew of excellent receivers.

QB Mike Bennett returns for his junior season after guiding the Crusaders to a 7-2 record on the gridiron last fall. (ND's record in the books is technically 6-3 after the Crusaders had to forfeit a 38-0 win over Dryden for using two ineligible players.)

Bennett played a key role for the Crusaders last season, especially after Grosvenor went down with an injury in the second game of the season against Chenango Forks. Bennett's best game of the season came in a losing cause against league-champion Windsor when he passed for 260 yards.

"He (Bennett) is very confident in his ability; he knows what he's capable of," D'Aloisio said. "Having Micheal on the field is like having another coach out there."

The junior quarterback will have plenty of good hands to throw to this fall with the return of wide receiver/running back Geoff Woodworth, flanker Brian Sheehan and backs Mike Mustico and Blake Pierce.

Receivers Anthony Wisniewski (the top 400-meter runner in Section 4 last year) and Jeff Williams as well as tight end Lee Hayward give D'Aloisio plenty of good receivers on the roster.

"On paper, this is probably the most talented team we've ever had," D'Aloisio said. "This is the first time I can remember having a veteran team coming back."

But the ND coach knows that games are won on the field and not on paper. The Crusaders have yet another grueling schedule this fall with key divisional games against Windsor and Waverly — who along with ND should contend for the Division IV title — and non-league battles with Chenango Valley, Southside and Watkins Glen (season opener Sept. 8).

The closest Notre Dame has come to a sectional title was in 1986, when the Crusaders fell to Newark Valley, 2-0, in the classic "Mud Bowl."

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We received 5 correct entries identifying the 7, 8, and 9 irons as the short irons in golf. The winner was Mike Coleman of S.S. Peter and Paul, Auburn.

SPORTS TRIVIA

This week's question:
Where are "baseballers" if they say they're playing in the horse-and- buggy league?

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