

SACHEMS LOOKING TO BE CONTENDERS IN DIVISION II

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Head Coach Craig Kozens was glad to be back on the Laconia High School gridiron yesterday for practice at the start of the new school year. (Alan MacRae/for The Laconia Daily Sun)

By ROGER AMSDEN, LACONIA DAILY SUN

LACONIA — With a core group of veteran players returning, the Laconia Sachems are looking to be a contender in the always tough Division II North football this season.

Head Coach Craig Kozens, in his 17th year, said that there are a lot of good football teams in the division, which saw Plymouth defeat Bow 27-24 in last year's championship game. Both teams play in the North Division but the Sachems will only play one of them in the regular season this year, the defending champion Bobcats in their third game of the season.

The Sachems began their practices last week and this week will get their first taste of live action Friday at 10 a.m. when they host Division I Concord in a scrimmage at Jim Fitzgerald Field at Laconia High School. The scrimmage was originally planned for Concord but was moved to Laconia's turf field at Bank of New Hampshire Stadium due to the threat of rain.

The Sachems will also host a jamboree of local high school teams next Tuesday with Inter-Lakes/Moultonborough, Franklin, Gilford-Belmont and Somersworth taking part.

Kozens is pleased with the work being put in by his players so far in practice and is counting on the team's five captains – Ben Belliveau, Brandon Weeks, Riley Roy, Drew Muzzey and Ryan McCrea – to provide leadership for the team, which went 5-4 last year.

He said that the team lost 17 seniors to graduation but he has “a good crew of kids who are returning” and thinks that they are poised to make a playoff run.

Senior quarterback Riley Roy, now in his third year of directing the offense, has running back Drew Muzzey and fullback Bradley Weeks in the backfield with him.

He will be operating behind an offensive line which includes Belliveau, Steven Towers, McCrea and Caleb Hounsell.

“It's a good core of players with good experience who have already played a lot of games together. We need to stay healthy and produce out on the field,” said Kozens.

The Sachems open their season at Hanover on Sept. 1 and host Kingswood the following week before taking on the defending champions in Plymouth.

They play at Pembroke on Sept. 22 before closing out September by hosting John Stark, a team which beat them 28-14 last year.

October sees them playing at Lebanon before hosting Kennett. They close out the season by hosting Gilford-Belmont on Oct. 27.

They have already lost one opponent from their schedule, Trinity of Manchester, whom they were scheduled to play on Oct. 21.

Trinity announced this week that it is dropping varsity football this fall and hopes to field a team at the junior varsity level this year and drop down to Division III at the varsity level next year.

Kozens said that the Trinity decision is fully understandable. “It's really a tough situation. They only had three seniors turn out, two of whom have never played football before and one who had had issues with concussions. There was just one junior and 12 sophomores and 10 freshmen.”

He said that for Trinity it was as much a safety issue as anything else, as having inexperienced and undersize players competing at a high level is not a choice any coach wants to make.

Trinity dropped out of Division I in the 2007 season due to low numbers but played in Division V in 2008 when it got 60 players to take part in its program, It went on to win a Division V title in 2009 and moved to Division IV where it played in three straight title games.

Last year they went 1-9 and had 17 seniors from that team graduate.

Kozens said that like Trinity, Laconia has had a drop off in participation with the numbers for the total program down from 44 last year to 39 this year with only six freshmen turning out.

But he regards that as just a temporary blip on the radar screen as participation in football at the middle school and youth levels has increased.

“We'll have to weather a few thin years, but things should be fine after that,” said Kozens.

He said that one thing which has had a major impact on Sachem football in recent years has been the drop in high school enrollment from 800 to 500 over the last 10-15 years.



Head coach Craig Kozens runs the Laconia High School Sachems football team through their paces during practice yesterday. (Alan MacRae/for The Laconia Daily Sun)