

Dreads to Stress Finishing Games

By Don Richter, Sports Editor

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With 58 kids on its varsity roster this season, Dexter will be able to play two-platoon football, lining up fresh bodies on both sides of the ball after each change of possession.

Two-platoon football has been rare for Dreadnaught gridders in recent years.

"These kids blend real well together," said Dexter coach Tom Barbieri, beginning his eighth season on the Dreadnaught sideline. "They all work hard. There are no real superstars. We just have a lot of really good players."

Last year, Dexter finished 3-6 overall. The Dreadnaughts started the season 3-1 before dropping their final five games. Four of the five teams Dexter faced down the stretch ended up making the state playoffs. In the final five games, the Dreadnaughts were in it until the end, oftentimes losing by a touchdown or less.

This season, leading Dexter from the quarterback position will be senior Andy Whittaker (6-foot-1, 188 pounds).

"He's a good leader and he throws the ball well and runs well," Barbieri said.

Backing up Whittaker will be juniors Alex McMurray (6-2, 185) and Henry Haley (5-11, 180).

"We feel pretty good about our quarterback position," Barbieri said.

In the backfield, senior Mike McCarthy (5-11, 190) will see plenty of carries from his fullback position.

"He started a few games last year," Barbieri said. "He runs the ball hard."

Others expected to tote the pigskin this season for Dexter include sophomore Sequohay Burke-Combs (5-10, 175) and seniors Tate Sanders and Jason Lomax.

At wide receiver, Steve Muchmore (6-1, 180) and Steve Zalucha (6-2, 180) return to pace the Dreadnaughts.

Also lining up at the receiver spot for Dexter this year will be seniors Tommy Owens and Matt Klein (6-4, 180) and juniors Mike Kedrsoke and Waleed Mansour.

In the slot, senior Josh Abbott (5-10, 150) and juniors Alex Dobbs (5-11, 175) and Haley will see time.

Up front, Barbieri said he's excited about his offensive line.

"We think we're going to be okay," he said. "We have a lot of depth. We'll have a mix of experience and youth."

At center, junior Ryan Wesley (6-2, 265) will be one of the anchors. At guard will be returning starters seniors Ben Harris (6-0, 205) and captain Mike Szymusiak (6-1, 230). At tackle, senior Kyle Boren (6-1, 210) and sophomores Brandon Hart (6-1, 220) and Josh Cash (6-2, 240) will compete for playing time.

Others also lining up in the trenches for Dexter this season will be senior Nate Keepler (5-11, 235), senior Jack Coy (6-3, 225), junior Kyle Slavik (5-11, 185), junior Mike Ferguson (6-0, 200) and junior Chris Riecker (5-10, 210).

"Our O-line will keep getting better," Barbieri said. "They have the potential to be real good."

Defensively, the Dreadnaughts will be tough along the line of scrimmage. Pressuring quarterbacks and ball carriers all year will be senior returning starter defensive end and captain Mike Swantek (6-3, 210). Also plugging holes up front will be senior tackle Damon Henderson (6-0, 220), senior Tim Henes (5-9, 220), senior Jake Stacey (6-3, 210) and junior Alex Frost (6-1, 220).

Also making plays along the defensive line for Dexter this season will be seniors Hunter Briggs (5-11, 210), Huachi Zhong (5-11, 180) and Mohammed Alchurbaji (6-1, 225) and juniors Kyle Svhría (6-1, 185), Cody Read (6-0, 205), Mike Reardon (5-11, 200), Nate Wheeler (6-0, 180), Austin Green (6-1, 205) and Robert Tokarski (6-1, 212).

Creating havoc at linebacker for the Dreadnaughts this year will be senior captain Chris Kotsones (5-11, 210).

"He'll be a leader," Barbieri said. "He saw a lot of playing time last year."

Also lining up at linebacker for Dexter will be junior Mason Mabry (6-1, 190), junior Rob Mayrand (6-1, 215), junior Dillon Kipke (6-2, 185), junior Brent Pace (6-0, 180), junior Cole Burgess (5-11, 185) and senior Kyle Hamilton (5-10, 185).

Roaming the secondary for the Dreads will be senior captain Scott Crompton (5-9, 185), senior returning All-Southeastern Conference performer Travis Rize (6-1, 185), senior Nick Soos-Balas (5-10, 170), junior Dan Flowers (5-9, 160), junior John Chiado (5-10, 170) and senior Brandt Bowling (6-2, 180).

Others making plays from the defensive backfield this season for Dexter will be senior Jake LaRosa (5-11, 170), senior Connor Johnston (6-0, 175), senior Jake Gross (6-2, 170) and junior Aaron Schantz (6-0, 180).

Battling for the placekicking duties for the Dreadnaughts will be Crompton, Muchmore and Zalucha. Either Lomax, Gross or Mayrand will handle punting duties for Dexter.

Barbieri said the Dreadnaughts are dedicating this season to Tyler Steffey. Last winter, Steffey died in an automobile accident. An offensive tackle/defensive tackle, Steffey would have been a key component of this year's Dexter team.

"Emotionally we've had to ride a roller coaster," Barbieri said. "It's difficult losing a teammate. He was such a great kid."

Barbieri said Dreadnaught players will have Steffey's initials on their jersey's right shoulder this year.

"For home games, we'll wear black jerseys with maroon and gold trim," Barbieri said. "We'll also carry his travel bag and lay his jersey on the bench. His number was 64."

Since its inception more than 30 years ago, Dexter has never made the state football playoffs.

"That's a goal of ours," Barbieri said. "We want to make the playoffs and we want to win our league."

Barbieri said he has stressed two things this off-season.

"We've stressed conditioning," he said. "We want to be strong in the fourth quarter. Plus, we've stressed finishing games. We want to win the entire game. In our last five games last season, we lost by a TD or less. We want to play all four quarters."

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