By Pastor Vince Carrig
Sports Writer

The 2009 Plainsmen expect that experience, confidence, depth and strength will propel them to a successful year.

The team hopes to rebound from a 3-5 2008 season in which it lost at least two games late in the fourth quarter.

“This year we definitely have more experience and confidence,” said quarterback Michael York of a team that returns 17 starters in 22 positions from the previous year.

York himself has done nothing but grow in skill and command since taking his first snap as a starter last September, throwing for 622 yards and running for 268 more, including five touchdowns. He looked pretty elusive running the quarterback option in Friday’s scrimmage.

Head Coach Chip Kay (66-36 overall, 10-7 in two seasons with the Plainsmen) feels extremely proud of the hard work his team put in during the off-season.

“We’ve had a great summer. We averaged close to 30 players a day in the weight room and had 31 go to a team camp where we were very successful in scrimmages.”

Asked what kind of defense opponents will see from Perkins County, senior linebacker Max Jones said, “I think we will be a lot more physical. We have a very good [defensive] line and Vinny’s gonna step up.”

Jones refers to freshman Vinny Ross, who joins Tyler Brott as a defensive lineman well north of 6-foot-2 and 200 pounds.

Coach Kay will arrange Perkins County’s defense in a 3-5 again, relying on the quickness and strength of five linebackers.

Jones, Erik Hagan, Nick Turner, and Riley Kosmicki return to staff the middle of that formation, and possess the speed to make it work. Kyle Schulze and Mitchell Cornelius will hang out on the corners, and York will patrol the back as the defense’s safety.

The Plainsmen plan to line up frequently in a one-back offense, with Nick Turner as that back. The senior starter will look to equal or improve his 2008 performance of 744 yards and eight touchdowns.

“We just take one game at a time,” Turner said of the upcoming season. “Right now, [we’re focused on] the first one.” He still flashes plenty of speed to hit the holes and dash up the hashes for long gains.

Turner shows admirable restraint in considering a schedule that features opportunities to avenge some tough-to-swallow losses for last year’s team. Both Bayard and Chase County need to come to Grant this year.

Senior defensive end and wide receiver Kye Kurkowski says, “We worked a lot harder to prepare for this year, and it was a team effort.”

A key player on both sides of the ball, Kurkowski would like to see the team’s season end in a trip to Lincoln. “He has worked on his ‘hands’ a lot this year,” quarterback York says of his receiver’s pass catching.

In Friday night's scrimmage, Kurkowski showed the ability to catch the deep ball and wrap around a defender and vacuum in a ball as well.

Jeremy Hagan will help improve Perkins County's vertical attack, either lined up in the backfield or in the slot.

This year's Plainsmen will take the field in Benkelman against the Dundy County-Stratton Tigers on Friday with much more depth in personnel than last year.

Coaches Kay, Ryan Boldt, Tim Moore and Jim Korth have 34 players from whom to choose this year, plenty more than last year's 22 in uniform.

That depth will come into play quickly, as Chad Fosbinder and freshman Blake Poppe might have to plug an offensive line gap left by an injury to Kosmicki; speedy Alex Johnston might have to take some carries while Christian Miyamoto mends. Both Kosmicki and Miyamoto hope to see action before October.

According to Turner, the team worked the entire offseason so "we won't get tired deep into the game." Ending Monday's practice with 100-yard sprints proved that.

"You look at our weight room [attendance], how our leaders set the example and the younger players were willing to follow–physically this should make a huge difference," Coach Kay said.

"Because of our conditioning and desire, we're not gonna get beat by teams athletically equal to us."

The hard knocks and disappointments the Plainsmen suffered last year should definitely provide a springboard to a winning 2009 season.