



By Pastor Vince Carrig

Sports Writer

A Plainsmen team with experience and depth takes the field Friday night to begin its quest to repeat as district champions and take its best shot at some NSAA class C-2 powerhouses in the playoffs.

Perkins County returns eight starters on both sides of the ball from a team that went 7-1 in 2010 and earned and won a home playoff game. They kick off the 2011 season on Haenfler Field in Grant at 7 p.m. Friday, with the Dundy County-Stratton Tigers traveling north to oppose them.

Head Coach Chip Kay (79-43 career, 24-13 in four seasons with Perkins County) sees the latest edition as one stocked with ability: "Obviously we have some players who have experience, and they will do well and we expect them to [do well]. I think we will have a leading rusher every week, a different leading receiver every week, we could have a different leading tackler every week. [We will be] the epitome of why the concept of team is so important."

Coach Kay will enjoy the luxury of having two explosive running backs returning, with a couple of more who can do significant damage to opposing defenses.

Senior Brody Prante rushed for 609 yards in 10 games last year, at a 5.5 yards/carry rate. His quickness carries him through creases in the defense and his speed can get him in the open field. Prante can catch the ball out of the backfield as well, tacking on 63 receiving yards last year with the hope of increasing that number in 2011.

Junior Alex Johnston accompanies Prante behind quarterback Quinton Hite; Johnston covered 547 yards last year. Both backs showed up at two-a-days bigger and stronger this year and figure to anchor the offense. Johnston returns with the most touchdowns (seven) from last year. Both Prante and Johnston have the ability to make tacklers miss in the open field.

Coach Kay can mystify defenses with two other very-capable runners: sophomores Tim Johnson (who gained 146 yards in 14 carries and scored last year), and senior Justin Hatcher (157 yards on 31 carries).

Seniors Christian Miyamoto and Taylor Boldt return to provide Hite with receiving targets. The only returning receiver with a touchdown catch last year, the 6-foot-3 Boldt collected 130 receiving yards in 2010.

Third-year starter and junior Vinny Ross will anchor the offensive line that needs to blow open holes for runners and keep Hite upright with pass protection. Chad Fosbinder will center a unit laden with experience that moves quite well for its size.

Coach Kay views the secondary as the team's strongest defensive unit. Christian Miyamoto, Hite, Boldt, Trevor Lee and Garrett Toner roll up to seal off the edge and defend aerial threats

well. Christian Miyamoto and Hite vacuumed in three interceptions apiece on pass patrol last year.

The defensive line looks strong and stout, with more than a couple of interchangeable parts to help wear down opponents over four quarters. Ross, seniors Derek Brueggeman, Ethan Behrends and junior Ty Summers will anchor the front.

Ross returns with the most tackles-for-loss (a statistic which includes sacks) with 7.5 in 2010.

The defense will usually align in a three-four formation, with juniors Blake Poppe and Michael Dreiling ready to provide fresh energy and power. The three-four “allows for unpredictability [on our part],” Coach Kay believes.

“I would venture to guess that there are only a handful of people running the 3-4 in high school. It fits our players and allows us flexibility,” he said. As opposed to past years, offenses now show many different formations within a game and Coach Kay likes how the three-four enables the Plainsmen to handle them.

Behind the run-stuffers and pass rushers, the Plainsmen have mobile, athletic linebackers in Prante, Johnston, Elliot Carlson and Hatcher.

Quinton Hite will handle the punting duties again, as he did 29 times last year, backing opponents up 30 yards on average.

The Plainsmen tried to win their district in the offseason, increasing strength through time in the weight room and increasing skill at camps. An astounding 20 of 28 players joined the coveted “1000-pound” weightlifting club, with a few more just pounds shy. Players went to camps for linemen, speed, skill, and teams. Coach Kay reports that the Plainsmen did well against class A and class B schools at the team camp, even taking down a class A school in a game.

“I really appreciate the effort of the other coaches in the program. Ryan [Boldt], Jim [Korth] and Tim [Moore] put in as much effort as I do in the summer, and there’s no way we could have our players as prepared [as they are] without them,” Coach Kay said.

Of Perkins County’s opponents, Dundy County, Cambridge and Holyoke return the most starters from 2010. The Plainsmen, however, bring back as many or more starters than all of them. Highly-regarded college recruit Mike Shoff and his Cambridge Trojans visit Grant on Sept. 23 and give an opportunity for the Plainsmen to avenge their only regular-season loss from last year.

North Platte-St. Pat’s, Hastings-St. Cecilia and Hershey round out the group who will likely stand in Perkins County’s path toward a C2 championship.

Light travel characterizes the Plainsmen’s 2011 schedule, with three stops on the tour less than 50 miles away. Opponents will average bus rides of 121 miles to arrive in Perkins County, while the Plainsmen will go only half that distance.