



By Pastor Vince Carrig

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The 2012 Plainsmen want to turn unknowns into victories and win a third consecutive NSAA C2 District 10 title.

With only three players with varsity starting experience, many others will feel the rigors of 25-30 game minutes for the first time. All will have to step up their play to equal 2011's 8-2 record that included a playoff win.

With the team playing only three other teams that have the same coach as last year, plenty of unknowns await Perkins County in terms of opponents and their schemes. The team travels to unfamiliar sites in Hershey and Oberlin, Kan. (to play Decatur Community High School), and hosts Kimball as an opponent. Only Cambridge, Bayard and Bridgeport faced the Plainsmen last year with the same head coach.

"After three weeks of practice, we're ready to hit somebody else," Head Coach Chip Kay, who begins his sixth year in Grant (29-14 with the Plainsmen, 85-43 career) said of Friday night's opener.

Senior Vinny Ross, strong enough to blow open holes in the middle of opposing defenses, will anchor the offensive line when the Plainsmen have the ball. At 6-foot-4 and 270 pounds, Ross switches from defensive tackle (where he led the team in tackles-for-loss with 7.5 last year) to inside linebacker when they go the other way. Ross' 33 tackles in 2011 leads all returning Plainsmen.

Ross won votes as a C2 All-State player from the Associated Press and Omaha World Herald after last season.

Another player with all-state mentions, senior Alex Johnston wants to improve on his team-leading 965 all-purpose yards in 2012. With second-level speed and some more meat on his six-foot frame, look for Johnston to increase last year's 6.6 yards-per-carry average.

Johnston remains part of the linebacking corps on defense in 2012, where he recorded 25.5

tackles last year.

Elliot Carlson slides forward from fullback to quarterback for his senior year. The 5-foot-11 powerhouse, who picked up almost as many yards catching the ball as running it last year (116 to 112), will now distribute to an offense that lines up eight new starters this season.

“We’ll probably show the strangest combination of spread, shotgun, and power football you’re ever going to get,” Coach Kay said of the 2012 edition of the Plainsmen offense.

“I think people will be pretty pleased with the [offense’s] results, because our offense has been pretty effective. We’re very capable of being diverse this year,” Coach Kay said.

Johnston and Johnson will baffle broadcasters as much as defenses, with junior back and receiver Tim Johnson possessing enough speed and athleticism to gain plenty more than last year’s 121 ground yards.

Johnson will split out wide and anchor a very inexperienced receivers group, with senior Austin Thelander and juniors Matt Sestak, Garrett Toner and Chase Miyamoto needing to master some skills to get the Plainsmen air attack off the ground. Sestak and Miyamoto grabbed a combined two passes for 50 yards last year.

Perkins County does not lack senior linemen weighing more than 200 pounds, with Cole Whalen, Ross, Blake Poppe, and Alex Malmkar ready to move the pile, and Colton White able to block and release for a pass at tight end.

Those senior linemen will turn around and stuff runners and rush passers on defense, with the exception of Malmkar, who joins the linebackers. Both Poppe and Malmkar registered nine tackles last year.

The receivers double as defensive backs, with Sestak, Toner and Johnson all having made varsity tackles in 2011.

The middle of the 2012 schedule appears to stack up as the toughest part of the season, if past performances give any indication of the future: the Plainsmen go to Hershey for their third game and host Cambridge and Kimball back-to-back after that game.

For various reasons, the NSAA peeled familiar opponents Chase County, Sutherland and Morrill off of Perkins County’s schedule this year.

Season Opener

The Plainsmen begin their quest to return to the playoffs on Friday night in Benkelman, lining up against the Dundy County-Stratton Tigers. The two previous Plainsmen squads have made games with the Tigers lopsided affairs, winning 35-0 last year. The Plainsmen have scored 84 unanswered points on the Tigers in their last two meetings.



