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Grid players welcome warm weather

By Wade Holland News Editor

Mother Nature was very nice to the Nicholas County football Bluejackets this week. After battling cold rain and frigid temperatures the last few years, the Nicholas County football program opened its 2007 spring practice in shorts and tee-shirts Monday with the sun glaring brightly enough to warrant sun glasses by members of the coaching staff.

Working with only about half of his expected roster, head coach Robert Hopkins ran the Bluejackets through drills for nearly two hours before ending the day saying he was very pleased with the turnout and effort. Hopkins, who expects to have around 35 high school players on the varsity roster for the 2007 season, said Monday's workout was just a continuation of an impressive winter weightlifting program that exceeded even his own expectations.

"We had a very good winter workout," he said. "We had the most kids we've had in several years work out with us. They've bought into the system and they want to get better. So they spent a lot of time in the weight room this winter."

"And it's showing," he said. "We've beefed up. We're a lot stronger than we were last year. Only time will tell if that strength develops into speed and quickness, though." Nicholas County lost nine seniors from last year's squad, but have returning starters at 17 of 22 positions. Gone are four offensive linemen, including both tackle and guards.

"We're going to spend a lot of time this spring and summer working on blocking and the fundamentals of being a lineman," said Hopkins. "Some days we'll work on nothing but blocking." While noting that it will be difficult to replace his ex-

tensive offensive line, Hopkins pointed at the positives of the situation. "We're probably replacing them with better athletes," he said. "For their age, these guys are awful stout. But as sophomores and juniors who are not battle tested, there's no guarantee how well they will do."

From what little he's seen so far, Hopkins expects offense to be strength for the 2007 Bluejackets, with defense continuing to be a problem.

"It's still too early to be sure, but we should be better on offense," he said. "We return our quarterback who is a junior and has been a starter since he was a freshman. We return a running back that is a senior and has been a starter since he was a freshman."

"But defense is where we always struggle. We just don't seem to have that killer mentality that takes opponents attitude that we need to have." One of the youngest teams in the region a year ago, that won't change for Nicholas County in 2007 with nearly two thirds of the roster made up of sophomores and juniors. Hopkins expects around 10 juniors and 15 sophomores to be on the team this summer.

"We're very optimistic about next year," said Hopkins. "We feel we've got the nucleus to be a good team. Weather it happens early in the year or late in the year remains to be seen. But the guys really seem to work well together and support each other and want to win."

Following spring practice, Hopkins will work with the team during the summer before kicking off the 2007 season in August in the Ray Adams' Charger Classic at the University of Louisville's Papa John's Cardinal Stadium. Nicholas County will face the host team, the Class 5A Jeffersonville Chargers, in the opening game of the event.

"We know it's like David facing Goliath," said Hopkins. "But our kids look forward to the opportunity. To get to play in Louisville at Papa John's is an opportunity they may never have again, so it's a big game."

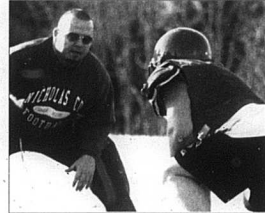
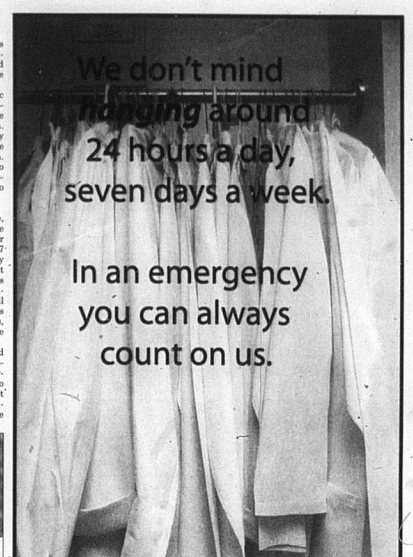


Photo by Wade Holland Nicholas County High School Head Football Coach Robert Hopkins gives some spring instructions to his players as the Blue Jackets emerge from winter weight lifting to get some time on the practice field.



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