

# Chiefs eye quick start

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Veteran Canton varsity football coach Tim Baechler gives instructions about a practice drill to players last week. He expects the Chiefs to continue as a contender.

Written by

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## fast facts

School: Canton.

Head coach: Tim Baechler, 15th season.

2011 record: 8-3 (including 1-1 in playoffs), 3-2 in KLAA South Division.

Notable losses to graduation: Kevin Buford, Kyle Adams, Ryan Jones, Zac Merillat, Zachary Smilo, Evan Rinke.

Top returnees: Kendall Scott, Sr. RB-DB; Malcolm Hollingsworth, Sr. FB-DB; Connor Shennan, Sr. K; Michael Ditzler, Sr. OL-LB; Dan DeRoso, Sr. OL-DL; Cameron Dillard, Sr. OL-DL.

Others to watch: Matt McKoy, Sr. TE-DB; Greg Williams, Soph. QB; Jake Boucher, Jr. TE-LB; Westen Price, Jr. RB-DB; Colby Morris, Sr. RB-DB; Nate Bartos, Sr. LB; Charlie Turfe, Soph. FB-LB; Scott Gring, Sr. TE; Olaniyi Owagbemi, Sr. DL; Ken (K.J.) Wooley, Jr. OL.

Baechler says: "We plan on winning every game. Whether that happens or not, that's just our mindset."

Schedule: (all 7 p.m. except as noted) Thursday vs. Midland; Thursday, Aug. 30 vs. Brighton (JV Field, 6:30 p.m.); Friday, Sept. 7, vs. Wayne Memorial; Friday, Sept. 14, at Westland John Glenn; Friday, Sept. 21, vs. Livonia Churchill (homecoming); Friday, Sept. 28, at Livonia Franklin; Friday, Oct. 5, vs. Plymouth; Friday, Oct. 12, at KLAA crossover; Friday, Oct. 19, at Salem.

You won't catch Canton varsity head coach Tim Baechler looking back or looking too far ahead when it comes to gearing up for the 2012 football season.

For sure, Baechler's Chiefs weren't happy about losing to Novi-Detroit Catholic Central in last year's playoffs — the second time in three years Canton's title hopes were dashed by the Shamrocks.

But as the new season kicks off, it will be about beating every opponent on the schedule, beginning with Thursday's opener against Midland (7 p.m. at Plymouth-Canton Educational Park).

"It's not who you lose to, it's when you lose your last game you're not happy," said Baechler, beginning his 15th season at the Canton helm. "Even though you lose to a good team it doesn't matter, it still doesn't feel good.

"Believe me that's not the motivation (for 2012). The motivation is to win every game you play."

Midland went 9-2 last season, so the Chiefs' first-ever tilt against the Chemics will provide stiff competition.

"It's good to come in and you know you're playing a very good team and we've got to be ready to go," Baechler added.

Another tough game follows (against Brighton) before the Chiefs go to work against KLAA South Division opponents.

Planning to win

"We're going to be able to compete," said Baechler, asked about whether he thought his team had the right stuff to win the division. "We plan on winning every game. Whether that happens or not, that's just our mindset."

You won't find Baechler lamenting losing a boatload of top performers to graduation, either. Gone from 2011's roster are quarterback Kyle Adams, running backs Kevin Buford, Zac Merillat and Ryan Jones.

So are Zach Smilo and Evan Rinke, two mainstays on a defense that held four teams to 14-or-fewer points last fall.

Instead, it's merely time to reload.

At the top of the list is promising sophomore quarterback Greg Williams, who plays more like a junior or senior.

"He's got a good head on his shoulders," said Baechler, noting that Williams was a starter for the Canton varsity boys basketball team as a freshman. "He wants the ball in his hands, he wants to make plays in crunch time.

"He's not a great runner yet, but he's getting there. He's a good decision maker with the ball and he's got a good arm. He'll make all the throws."

Williams will have time to throw, with senior tackle and third-year starter Cameron Dillard (6-4, 290, verbally committed to Florida) keeping rushers at bay.

Others who will be tough on the offensive front include returnees Mike Ditzler (senior guard, 6-2, 240), senior guard Danny DeRoso (6-5, 240), Ken "K.J." Wooley (junior center, 6-0, 230) and junior guard Nate Michalik (5-11, 210).

"That's one thing we're pretty solid at is the O-line," Baechler said. "I feel pretty good about it."

Business as usual

Buford, Merillat and Jones might be gone, but the vaunted triple-back set will return.

Senior halfback and co-captain Kendall Scott heads the backfield lineup.

"He (Scott) played a lot last year when Kevin (Buford) was banged up and we didn't skip a beat with him," Baechler said. "He can run, he can catch, he can block. He's a tough player."

Junior halfback Westen Price and senior fullback Malcolm Hollingsworth likely will be lining up with Scott more often than not.

“I consider him (Hollingsworth) a starter he played so much (in 2011),” Baechler noted. “He understands the fullback trapping game, he hits it well, he reads it well. I'm expecting big things out of him.”

The trio gives the Chiefs players who can break free for long gainers or chip in with catches out of the backfield as needed.

Also part of the backfield rotation will be junior Rob Daoud and sophomore Chuck Turfe.

Scott and Price also will flank out and be wide receivers at times, while senior Matt McKoy is penciled in at tight end (with senior Scott Gring and junior Jake Boucher providing solid depth at the position).

“We got a lot of speed, guys who can catch,” he said.

If Canton defenders are as strong as Baechler expects, the offense will get plenty of reps and chances to tack points onto the scoreboard.

Both Dillard and DeRoso are slated for duty on both sides of the line, providing Baechler with a strong base.

Returning to start at left tackle will be 5-11, 250-pound senior Olaniyi Owagbemi. Other players who will be counted on include senior Austin Lynn (6-3, 225), junior Daniel Tidwell (6-0, 190) and senior Jack McAllister (5-11, 200).

“A good D-line controls the line of scrimmage,” Baechler stressed. “Yes, we're going to be very capable of controlling the line of scrimmage and that means stopping the run and putting a pass rush on.”

#### Rounding out the D

One area in flux is linebacker, where coaches are evaluating players and determining their best options.

“It's up for grabs right now,” Baechler said.

Candidates for middle linebacker include seniors Matt Suppelsa, Wally Turner, Darian Evans and Turfe.

Players who are fighting for outside linebacker spots are seniors Ben Slater, Nate Bartos and Boucher.

Meanwhile, opposing quarterbacks figure to have headaches throwing deep.

In the corners will be Scott, Price and diminutive senior Colby Morris with McKoy and junior James Hall likely at safety.

“We've got a lot of speed,” Baechler said.

The Chiefs also will have a solid kicking game, led by senior Connor Shennan, starting his fourth season with the team.

Shennan is at the top of the depth chart for kickoffs, field goals, extra points and punts although senior Scott Piwovar is also capable of booting the pigskin through the uprights and stepped in at times last season.

Another bonus is having Williams available to punt if needed.

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