

Canton gridders won't skip a beat

Aug. 20, 2013 |
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On this play from last season, Canton quarterback Greg Williams (No. 7) tries to elude a Plymouth defender. Williams is looking to take things up a notch in 2013, both for himself and the Chiefs.



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FAST FACTS

School: Canton.

Head coach: Tim Baechler (16th year).

League affiliation: KLAA Kensington Conference (South Division).

2012 record: 6-4.

Notable losses to graduation: Cameron Dillard, OT; Dan DeRoso, OT; Mike Ditzler, G; Malcolm Hollingsworth, FB; Matt McKoy, TE-DB.

Key returns: Greg Williams, Jr. QB; Jake Boucher, Sr. LB-TE; Chuck Turfe, Jr. RB-LB; KJ Wooley, Sr. C; Nathan Michalik, Sr. G; Steve Lyle, Sr. G; Robert Daoud, Sr. RB; Weston Price, Sr. DB; Daniel Kilgore, Sr. DB; James Hall, Sr. DB.

Baechler outlook: "We play in a very competitive division and our three non-league opponents are traditionally very good. We will be extremely competitive."

2013 schedule (all games 7 p.m.): Aug. 29, West Ottawa; Sept. 6, Brighton; Sept. 13 at Wayne Memorial; Sept. 20 Westland John Glenn; Sept. 27, at Livonia Churchill; Oct. 4, Livonia Franklin; Oct. 11 at Plymouth; Oct. 18, KLAA [crossover](#); Oct. 25, at Ann Arbor Pioneer.

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The more things change with Canton [Football](#), the more things stay the same and that's a good thing.

When the Chiefs square off on Thursday, Aug. 29 against West Ottawa, standout lineman Cameron Dillard won't be there — as he is starting his college [career](#) at Division I Florida. Also having graduated are spectacular running back Malcolm Hollingsworth, sturdy tight end and free safety Matt McKoy and linesmen Dan DeRoso and Mike Ditzler.

"When you lose an offensive lineman as great as he (Dillard) was, he's still one guy and he can only block one guy," veteran Canton head coach Tim Baechler said. "That's not as concerning as maybe losing your starting [quarterback](#) or your leading rusher."

Still, all signs point to another big season for the Chiefs, a pre-season pick of Kensington Lakes Activities Association coaches to top the Kensington Conference.

“Offensively, we lost some playmakers, but I think we got some guys back who are very capable of making plays,” Baechler said. “They just need to be consistent. We’ve got three experienced offensive linemen back (KJ Wooley, Stephen Lyle, Nathan Michalik) and we really just need to find a tackle and a couple tight ends.

“But I think we got the guys. I think our depth on both sides of the ball, on the line, is much improved, better than it’s been for a couple years. I’m excited about this group.”

Leading the charge

Canton, finishing with a 6-4 record in 2012, will bank on junior quarterback Greg Williams spearheading the offense and senior linebacker Jake Boucher being the defensive catalyst.

Baechler noted that Williams is “a year smarter, more experienced. He’s faster and stronger, he’s going to be more assertive when he runs the ball. I think he’s going to be excellent.”

Early projections are for junior Chuck Turfe and senior Robert Daoud to be the go-to runners with Boucher a prime target out of the backfield.

Baechler said one challenge is finding “some more guys who catch the ball and make big plays on the other end,” but he is confident that the Chiefs’ offense will put plenty of points on the scoreboard.

“Obviously, we’re Canton, so we’re going to be running the ball with power, using the play action,” Williams explained. “But Jake (Boucher) can go out there and be a wide-out and catch the ball. We got some other guys that possibly could do that. I think we can spread it out a little bit.”

Williams added that he will be on a mission to “step up and make more plays. ... Be more of an effective player, not just to throw the ball and hand it off, but to be like a dual-threat quarterback. But I’m excited for the season.”

One challenge will be to find a kicker to take over from graduated Connor Shennan and pin opponents inside their own 20-yard line thanks to through-the-end-zone kickoffs.

Make things happen

And then, the defense will go to work on forcing as many turnovers as possible to help set up the offense.

“We must create more turnovers, tackle better and eliminate the big play defensively,” Baechler noted.

Boucher will be gearing up to do just that, with considerable help from senior defensive backs Weston Price, James Hall and Daniel Kilgore and junior d-back Turfe.

“Hopefully, our defense comes through this year with bigger plays and holding our opponents to less points,” Boucher said. “We really need to work on every angle of defense. I wouldn’t say it was terrible last year, but it definitely wasn’t Canton defense, where we want it to be.”

When asked for a definition of Canton defense, he called it “nose on the ball, hitting people hard, just not letting them get past the line of scrimmage.”