

# READY TO LAUNCH

Tim Smith, Michigan 5:41 p.m. EDT August 25, 2014



9 [CONNECT](#) [TWEET](#) [LINKEDIN](#) [COMMENT](#) [EMAIL](#) [MORE](#)

The more things change with the Canton Chiefs, the more they stay the same.

There is a potent offense featuring gifted players who can run, throw and catch the pigskin and plenty of hard-nosed competitors on both sides of the ball.

There also is head coach Tim Baechler, who tends to worry about some of the so-called “issues” that crop up every August, including whether inexperienced offensive linemen will be up to speed in time for the opening game (this year kicks off 7 p.m. Thursday at Holland West Ottawa).

Or whether the fact there are only four returning starters on defense will put a serious crimp in the Canton style — which in 2013 featured an 8-2 record and KLAA South Division championship.

“Athletically I think we’ve got a chance to be better defensively,” said Baechler, during a practice session last week. “We’ve just got to get those inexperienced guys experience in a hurry.”

The Chiefs still have a lot of pluses that should offset any minuses that go with youngsters learning the ropes early on.

He’s the man

For starters, senior quarterback Greg Williams is healthy after playing with a broken wrist the last two months of the 2013 season, unbeknownst to anyone. He found out about the injury following the season and missed most of the subsequent basketball season.

“It’s his third year running the offense, and he’s a great leader,” Baechler said. “When it’s crunch time I want him to have the ball.”

Canton’s vaunted offense also will once again feature a potent, triple-back set. Senior Chuck Turfe will be the go-to guy; he gained more than 1,100 yards on the ground in 2013 and also is a threat catching passes out of the backfield.

Junior Jakob Wickens and sophomore Marcus Sanders (5-6, 165) will also line up in the backfield, at least in the opener, Baechler said.

Asked whether Turfe would drive the bus on offense, Baechler nodded.

“Perhaps, but we’re a system offense,” he explained. “If they’re taking him away, something else is going to be there.

“That’s the thing. I’ve got our offensive linemen’s mentality. I don’t care who scores the touchdowns or gains the yards as long as we score points and win games. But he (Turfe) is definitely a key cog running the ball and catching the ball.”

The Chiefs also have seniors Jake Pagel, Brian Newton and Lavelle Steeple working for opportunities to help out the ground game.

On the offensive line, an injury to senior lineman Collin Caflisch is forcing Baechler to move pieces on his chess board. For the season opener, juniors Devin Obrec and Ben Phillips are vying to start at center.

Returning senior Christian Mayberry, who likely would have been the starting center, is filling in at a tackle spot until Caflisch returns from his injury.

Also returning are senior guard Darin Tuttle, senior tackle Adam Armesto (6-6, 240) and senior guard Scott Bazner — who is ready to roll after an injury-plagued junior year.

“He (Bazner) was going to be a great player last year but hurt his hip and couldn’t play at all,” Baechler said. “He’s back 100-percent healthy and he’s going to be a heckuva good player for us at guard.”

Baechler did say if a lineman was going to get injured, like Caflisch did, it was better that it happened with enough time for Obrec and Phillips to learn the ropes.

“We hope that (Caflisch) gets healthy quick and we get Mayberry moved back over to center,” Baechler continued. “If it doesn’t happen, the good thing is, the last week, those two young guys have been getting all the reps. They’re getting it.”

Aerial attack

Canton’s attack won’t just be about running the football.

Williams can look to connect with wide-outs and tight ends, speedy senior Robert Guajardo, seniors Nolan Gilo, Brett Lee, Nick Durocher and juniors Jared Stephens and Jalen Cochran.

“At tight end, we’ve got Nolan Gilo, who got a lot of reps last year,” Baechler said. “He’ll probably start at one of the tight ends. And we’ve got Brett Lee, who may start at outside linebacker and tight end. Jalen Cochran’s going to play tight end and we also got Nick Durocher at tight end, so we have a big group of tight ends and we like all of them right now.

“Receivers we’ve got Robert Guajardo, Brett Lee, Jared Stephens, who is also a safety. He’s a good athlete out there at a slot. Of course, we also spread Chuck Turfe out there to catch the ball too.”

When drives bog down, the Chiefs can look to senior kicker Andrew Loehnis to make field goals.

The Chiefs' defense will be led by a quartet of returning starters in Pagel at linebacker, Evan Piontek at nose guard, Cochran at outside linebacker and Victor Villarini at cornerback. All but Cochran are seniors.

"They look good, now we have to get everybody else going," the coach added.

Slated for work on the defensive line will be Tuttle, senior Richard Lenczewski and junior Thomas Evely with junior Jake Stephan, Durocher and senior Mike Loe in the mix for linebacker minutes.

Canton's secondary will be populated by a number of players with speed, skill and savvy. Turfe, Stephens, Sanders and junior Micah Rinke are slated for safety while Guajardo, senior Jacob Mallad and Newton are expected to handle cornerback duties.

"We've got some options," Baechler said. "But nobody's really separated themselves yet."

It shouldn't take too long before injured starters are back in the fold, not to mention players rising to the top of the depth chart.

Baechler might still worry after that, but he is cautiously optimistic about the 2014 season.

"We think we should be better than last year," Baechler stressed. "I don't know what that means in terms of win-loss record, but we think we'll be better than we were last year, which means, certainly we hope to win those close games... get ourselves in position to play for a league championship and get it this time.

"And we'd like to win a playoff game, it's been a couple year drought and we're not used to that."

[tsmith@hometownlife.com](mailto:tsmith@hometownlife.com)