

Speed to Burn: The region's top backs are off and running

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-one."

Urban was able to break into the lineup without teams keying on him last season because of the Rayders' strong passing attack. But quarterback Nathan Teuscher is injured and wide receiver Ryan Rafacz graduated.

"I'm sure he'll be the focus (of opposing defenses) now," Klinger said.

St. Francis' Quinn has clocked a 4.7 in the 40 at a summer camp and also claimed a regional title in the 110-meter hurdles during last track season.

His times have dropped since he began working with Gladiators track coach Chris Ludka.

"Chris knows so much about running and the proper form," Quinn said. "The feet position, the knee drive — he brought my speed way up."

That has translated to success on the gridiron for Quinn and several members of the crowded St. Francis offensive backfield.

"Everything is based on speed," Quinn said. "If you're slow through the hole, you get pasted, it doesn't matter how shifty you are. It's an invaluable part of the game."

"We just happen to have five or six guys who can really move that play running back. John (Bourdon) is a track standout and he's really quick to the outside, and Mac and Sam (Schilling) are pretty fast two. And Travis Sivek is just as fast as I am, but he's around 25 pounds heavier."

Quinn is also big enough (190 pounds) to punish would-be tacklers, says Gladiators coach Larry Sellers.

"He brings speed and power," Sellers said. "He's physically tough, and doesn't want to be brought down. He can run around people, or he can flat-out run through people."

Sellers says Quinn's linebacking acumen is equal to or greater than his ball-carrying prowess.

"He's an excellent linebacker, too," he said. "He gets his shoulders square and gets through the line. He has a real nose for the ball and even has a little mean streak out there."

And, according to backfield mate and longtime chum Mac Schilling, Quinn is as good off the field as he is between the lines.

"I've grown up with him since preschool," said Schilling, also a senior. "And he's a great friend. He's a leader on and off the field. It's really great to be able to line up and play football next to him."

Pinto may be the fastest of the lot, and he doesn't even run track. The TC Central senior leaves his running for the fall and hits the baseball diamond in the spring.

Not that the lack of hitting the track has hurt his wheels. Pinto improved to a 4.5 this season after running a high 4.7 last year.

"I've improved in speed, just from a lot of the stuff coach (Doug) Glee has us do," Pinto said. "We do a lot of drills like speed hops and form running."

Trojans coach Kelly Clark said Pinto, who rushed for 963 yards and caught passes for 562 more, is much more than speed though.



Record-Eagle/Elizabeth Conley

(L to R): Nick Pinto, TC Central; John Plumstead, Benzie; Jason Stewart, Suttons Bay; Colin Quinn, TC St. Francis.

"He's bigger, faster and stronger than he was last year without having lost any of the speed," Clark said. "He's probably the most natural runner I've ever seen as far as seeing the hole, setting up his blocks and hitting the hole."

"It's a joy to watch him run the ball."

As Pinto has improved his wheels, he's hoping the Trojans can also improve after four straight 3-6 seasons.

"I'm expecting a better year this year," Pinto said. "I want to improve. I just want the team to be better."

"We've all improved our speed and getting better. We've all done a good job getting a little bit better."

While Pinto doesn't run track, Stewart certainly does. He's the reigning Northwest Conference and Division III regional champion. Stewart is also a two-time state long jump champ.

"He's a gifted athlete," Trudeau said. "He's got the potential to be a 1,000-yard rusher again. He had 800 yards as a sophomore, 1,000 yards as a junior. He's certainly got the potential to get 1,000 again — and then some."

But Trudeau also knows that Stewart will be a marked man as a senior.

"The thing that's different for him this year is everybody knows about him," Trudeau said. "They're going to be gunning for him. Any offense that has just one weapon makes it really tough because you have to be real creative to get them open."

"You need two threats, three threats, four threats or whatever you can manage."

Stewart also has a long history with running fast.

"My mom used to chase me around and try to spank me because I was a bad kid," Stewart said with a laugh. "I'd always run from here. She always jokes, 'That's where you get your speed from is running away from me.'"

However he got it, Stewart is certainly hooked on getting from Point A to Point B as quickly as possible.

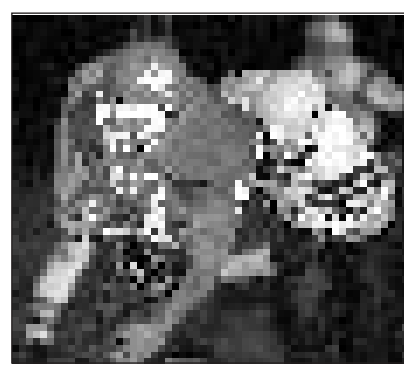
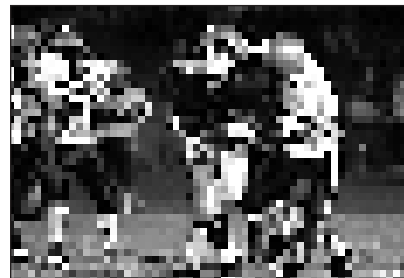
"I'm kind of a speed addict," Stewart said. "I work on my car (a Dodge Intrepid) a lot. It even has racing stripes on it."

"I kind of have a need for speed, I guess you could say."

OTHER TOP BACKS

Record-Eagle/file photos

Keep an eye on several of the region's other top running backs (clockwise from top left): Gaylord's Tom Pratt (21), Morgan Clairday of McBain, Glen Lake's Joey Vasquez, Cheboygan's Adam Blaskowski and Benzie's Ricky Worm.



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