

Eyes on the prize

Titans aim for postseason encore

BY MARK URBAN

Record-Eagle staff writer

TRAVERSE CITY — So, Traverse City West, you're coming off the first playoff appearance in school history. Now what do you do for an encore?

Do it again.

"We just have to go one step further," TC West coach Matt Prisk said. "We want to win a game in the playoffs. The goal is to go 9-0 and then go 10-0 and win a game in the playoffs."

"We're looking to win the conference," said West senior Tyler Perkette, who will start at quarterback in addition to returning as the top free safety. "We have a lot of high goals. We also want to make a run to the playoffs — turn some heads."

The Titans turned some heads and opened some eyes with an 8-1 campaign in 2002. That season sent the Titans to the playoffs for the first time in the school's history.

But the postseason stay was a brief one for the Titans, dropping a 32-21 decision to Bay City Central in front of the home fans at Thirlby Field.

So if the returning West players needed an extra motivation for this fall, that all-too-short playoff appearance may be all they need.

"Now we go further in the playoffs," West junior full-back/inside linebacker Ben Van Zale said. "We can only get better and improve."

It's like the coaches say — '8-2 was good last year, 9-0 would be good this year.'

There's also the matter of the Big North Conference title that has slipped through West's grasp the last few seasons. A 21-14 loss to Gaylord was the only blemish of the 2002 league campaign.

"We just want to get better," senior tackle Andrew Griffin said. "We want to get back to the playoffs, of course, and get better."

2002 RESULTS

TC West 21, Grand Haven 6
TC West 27, Reeths-Puffer 7
TC West 49, Cheboygan 7
TC West 46, Cadillac 0
TC West 36, Sault Ste. Marie 0
TC West 28, Petoskey 6
TC West 27, Alpena 7
Gaylord 21, TC West 14
TC West 31, TC Central 0
Bay City Central 32, TC West 21

2003 SCHEDULE

Fri. Aug. 29 at Grand Haven
Fri. Sept. 5 vs. Jackson
Fri. Sept. 12 vs. Cheboygan
Fri. Sept. 19 at Cadillac
Fri. Sept. 26 at Sault Ste. Marie
Fri. Oct. 3 vs. Petoskey (HC)
Fri. Oct. 10 at Alpena
Fri. Oct. 17 at Gaylord
Fri. Oct. 24 vs. TC Central

TC West will have a lot of work to do to better last season's defensive effort. The Titans surrendered just 54 points in nine regular season contests. Three of West's nine foes failed to score a point against them and the league-champion Blue Devils were the only opponent to score more than a touchdown.

"We just have to work as one unit," Perkette said of the defensive side of the ball. "Come together as a unit and cover all the leaks."

"Up on the defensive line and with the linebackers we have a lot of experience back. In the secondary we have to work some things out, but I think we'll be as good as last year ... maybe better."

"Three of our four linebackers are back from last year," Prisk said. "We also have some big people up front that can keep them off the linebackers and let them do their jobs."

Among the returning starters in the linebacking corps for the Titans are senior Carter Kiogima (6-foot-1, 215 pounds) and Van Zale (6-0, 240) on the inside and junior Tony Gourlay (6-3, 195) on the outside. At the other outside line-



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John L. Russell

TC West coach Matt Prisk and eight returning starters have their eyes on a return trip to the playoffs in 2003.

backer spot is junior Daryl Martin (5-9, 165).

Van Zale led the Titans a season ago with 116 tackles and five tackles for losses. Gourlay made 65 stops and Kiogima 33 with each registering four tackles for losses.

Up front at the defensive tackles are senior Travis Rindlisbacher (5-10, 280) and juniors Tom DeGroot (6-4, 320) and Joe Stump (5-9, 185).

At the defensive ends are senior Mitch Fisher (6-0, 185), junior Kris Wood (5-11, 195) and senior Josh Lambert (6-2, 200).

Senior Alex Schumacher returns to his starting cornerback spot where he will be joined this season by junior Matt O'Connell. Perkette is also back as the starting free safety.

On offense the Titans bring back just four starters, but several others saw significant playing time.

All four of the full-time starters that are back are on the offensive line, with junior center Mike Lemcool (5-9, 200), guard Kiogima, junior Steve Sattler (5-11, 210) at one tackle and Griffin (5-10, 230) at the other. Rounding out the starting interior offensive line is expected to be junior guard Steve Meteer (5-9, 205).

"We're not big by any means," Prisk said. "We have a small offensive line but they're doing a great job. They know what they're doing up there and they're quick off the ball."

"We're quick up there and we're also very strong. Strength is one of our strong points. The kids spent a

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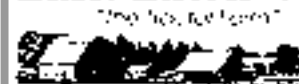
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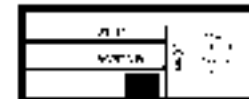
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