

Ground offensive

Trojans pump up rushing attack

BY LANCE-MICHAEL CORREIA
Record-Eagle staff writer

TRAVERSE CITY — The TC Central football team will be on solid ground this year — at least 60 percent of the time, according to head coach Kelly Clark.

After utilizing a more wide-open passing assault in his first three seasons, Clark and his Trojans will run out of the pro-I set in 2003.

“We’ll still look at what the defense is giving us and go from there, but I see about a 60-40 run-pass split,” said Clark, who enters his fourth year at the helm after a trio of three-win campaigns.

Senior Mattias Johnson will start at quarterback after opening several games there as a junior.

“He’s smart, shows leadership and the other kids look up to him,” Clark said. “He’s good at managing the game, and we ask him to do a lot of things.”

“I like the new setup,” Johnson said. “There’s more protection, more time to get the ball away. Our offense has been a little more one-dimensional in the past a lot of times, and now we can better disguise our intentions.”

There are several potential beneficiaries of the revamped offensive philosophy, including junior tailback Greg Pinto, senior tailback Fred Shier and fullbacks Jeff Fancy (senior) and Ben Amon (sophomore). Senior Erik Burke, a converted wide receiver who is expected to see extensive action at halfback this year, might be the biggest inheritor of touches.

“He’s our first choice at tailback,” Clark said. “He’s such a talent. Ideally, we’d like him to touch the ball 30 times a game.”

Burke says he doesn’t mind a heavy workload.

“I’m ready for it,” he said.

“In the past two years it’s

2002 RESULTS

Escanaba 48, TC Central 20
Forest Hills No. 56, TC Central 21
TC Central 19, Petoskey 12
Sault Ste. Marie 18, TC Central 16
TC Central 38, Cadillac 19
TC Central 49, Cheboygan 22
Gaylord 37, TC Central 6
Alpena 10, TC Central 7
TC West 31, TC Central 0

2003 SCHEDULE

Fri. Aug. 29 vs. Escanaba
Sat. Sept. 6 at GR Union
Fri. Sept. 12 at Petoskey
Fri. Sept. 19 vs. Sault Ste. Marie
Fri. Sept. 26 vs. Cadillac
Fri. Oct. 3 at Cheboygan
Fri. Oct. 10 vs. Gaylord
Fri. Oct. 17 vs. Alpena
Fri. Oct. 24 at TC West

been 10-12 times a game. My first love has always been receiver, but I’ll do whatever is best for this team. I’m going to try to completely embody the running back.”

Burke is a track star with sprinter’s speed. He holds the school record in the 100-yard dash, and placed 12th in the same event at last year’s Division I state finals.

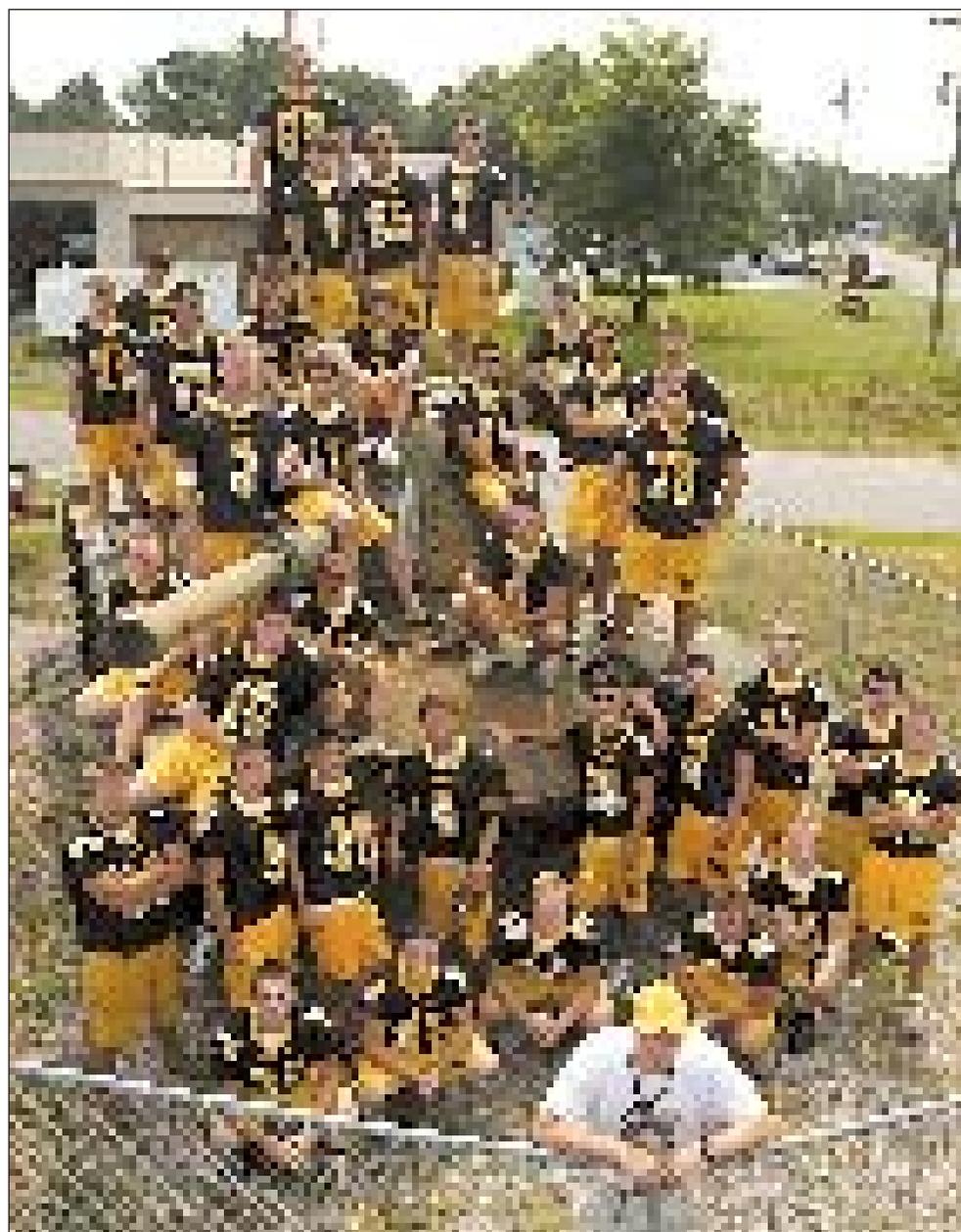
“I love the sweep plays,” he admitted. “I like to try to get around the end and turn it upfield if I can.”

On the offensive front, the Trojans have plenty of bulk and a good deal of depth.

Scheduled to start are junior Andrew Hannah (6-foot-4, 285 pounds) and senior Adam Valentino (6-2, 235) at tackles, seniors Zane Zebarth (5-8, 275) and Doug Edgecomb (6-1, 220) at guards with senior Kyle Kuler (6-2, 230) at center. Senior Aaron Mills (6-3, 21) slides into the starting tight end role after playing wide receiver in 2002.

Reserves who are “solid backups,” according to Clark, include seniors Joel Pier-Fitzgerald, Ryan Schecter, Jared Conaway and Dan Farrior.

The O-line also has a new leader in Bob Yauck, a long-



Record-Eagle/
Jim Bovin

Members of the TC Central varsity football team hope to roll over opponents like this tank once did, employing a revamped rushing game and pro-I set. Special thanks to the VFW in Traverse City.

time head coach with a state title on his resume from Dearborn Heights Robichaud.

“I was at church back in November and this lady came up to me and asked me to meet her husband,” Clark explained. “I met him, did a little background on him and found out that this was an accomplished coach.

“I’ve (coached) the offensive line in the past, but not having played the position, it’s hard. (Youck) has come in and done a great job with the line, and it’s good to have his eyes in the (coaches’) box, too.”

Valentino says Youck’s presence is commanding.

“He really brings energy and a smash-mouth style,” he said. “It’s a return to old ways — more intense.

“It’s going to help us win football games.”

Ed Beyne returns to the Trojans’ starting lineup at receiver, while fellow senior

Noah Morgan will slide into Burke’s spot opposite Beyne. Morgan is a transfer from Traverse City Christian who sat out last season under MHSAA transfer rules.

“Even though he knew he couldn’t play last year, he never once missed a practice,” Clark said. “That tells you something right there. He’s definitely earned the right to start.”

Junior Tony Carlisle, who Clark says has “great size, great speed and great hands,” will also see action at wideout for the Trojans.

Clark admits that his defense is “so green on that side of the ball,” but that the youngsters filling key roles “are very solid players.”

“We know we’re going to make mistakes from time-to-time, especially early on,” he added. “So the more we can control the ball when we’re on offense, the better.”

Up front, senior Pat Welton and Korey Reyelts are slated to start at the defensive tackle spots, while Amon and senior Billy Butler will share nose guard duty. Fancy, Edgecomb and junior David Carlisle will also see time.

Fancy, Shier and sophomore Vince Khoury comprise the Trojans’ top tier of linebackers, while senior Josh Snider and sophomore Rudy Prokes will play free and strong safety, respectively.

“I tell the kids that they have to play like upperclassmen,” Clark explained. “The strongest part of the defense is probably the defensive backs. We’re pretty consistent in our coverage.”

Pinto and Doug Garrow are scheduled to start at cornerback when the Trojans open against non-conference foe Escanaba.

“There are a lot of young