

Frankfort hopes to end title drought

League coaches say Panthers team to beat

BY MARK URBAN

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TRAVERSE CITY — Every pre-season the Northwest

Conference coaches talk about how no team will go through the league campaign undefeated.

And for the fourth straight season, a team went through unscathed.

“Our conference is so tough and so balanced, every week will be a war,” Suttons Bay coach Joe Trudeau said. “But the last four years somebody has emerged early and ended up stronger than everybody else. But we’ll see.”

“There’s usually one team where the cream rises to the top,” Frankfort coach Matt Stapleton said. “Unfortunately for us, it hasn’t been us.”

According to a poll of the league coaches, this will be the year for **FRANKFORT** to take the Northwest.

The Panthers, coming off a 7-3 campaign, are looking for their first league title since 1998.

“That’s good for a lot of schools, but that was disappointing for us,” Stapleton said of the 2002 campaign. “That’s because we finished third in the league and had an early exit from the playoffs.”

For 2003, Frankfort returns six starters on each side of the ball. A lot of those are the same players as the Panthers have just 15 on the varsity and will likely suit up less than that for the opener, a rematch of the 1993 state final against Portland St. Patrick.

“They can all play,” Stapleton said. “You’ll never hear me whine about numbers. It’s not how many you’ve got, it’s how they play.”

On offense the Panthers return several of its skill positions in junior quarterback Brad Nostrandt, junior halfback Greg Walton and senior tight ends Stephan Nelson and Chad Marshall.

Walton rushed for about 1,400 yards last season and scored more than a dozen touchdowns.

Up front, Frankfort has returning starters in junior tackles

COACHES POLL

school (1st place votes)	Pts.
Frankfort (3)	32
Kingsley (2)	29
Suttons Bay (1)	24
Glen Lake	22
Manton	11
Mesick	8

Players to watch

Andrew Kemp, Glen Lake
Greg Walton, Frankfort
Brad Nostrandt, Frankfort
Adam Hurd, Kingsley
Rob Baker, Glen Lake

2002 STANDINGS

	Conference			Overall	
	W	L	GB	W	L
Kingsley	5	0	—	8	2
Suttons Bay	4	1	1	9	2
Frankfort	3	2	2	7	3
Glen Lake	2	3	3	3	6
Manton	1	4	4	2	7
Mesick	0	5	5	0	9

Kurt Gilbert and Dane Colby.

“We’re not going to be huge,” Stapleton said. “But we’ve got decent speed and our kids do things fast.

“We’re excited about the opportunity and our chances. Every year the conference championship is our goal and winning the state title. This year is no different.”

On defense the Panthers bring back senior Shane Chatterton and Gilbert on the line and three linebackers in Nelson, Walton and Colby. Nostrandt is also back as the safety.

A lot of the returning starters were sophomores a year ago. So even though experience is not a problem, youth still dominates the roster.

“We’re still pretty young,” Stapleton said. “I’ve heard everybody telling us we’ve got everybody back. We’ve got some decent horses, but we’re still pretty green.”

Specialization is the word at **KINGSLEY**. The Stags went 8-2 in 2002 and were a perfect 5-0 in the conference.

“Our strength right now is our numbers,” Kingsley coach Tim Wooer said. “We have about 37 kids out for varsity football and we’re close to a two-platoon format. We’re trying to make sure our kids are fundamentally sound.

“What we lose in size we’re trying to make up for in coaching



Record-Eagle/file photo

Frankfort quarterback Brad Nostrandt sets up to pass in game last season as Suttons Bay’s Mike Lingaur converges. Both players are back for their respective teams this season.

time and having kids perfect one position instead of two.”

Just three starters return on defense and two on offense for Kingsley.

Returning starters on defense include senior defensive tackle James Kautman, senior defensive end Ryan Zenner and senior inside linebacker Nick Pascoe. Back on offense are senior tackle Aaron Bott and senior halfback Adam Hurd.

Stepping to expanded roles in the offensive backfield are senior quarterback Kyle Benedict, junior halfback Luke McManus and sophomore fullback Drew Wise.

“With size (on the offensive line) being a factor, our techniques are going to have to be flawless,” Wooer said. “We’re going to have to have balance. We certainly aren’t going to have the type of football team that can pound it down the field without throwing the ball.

“All 11 positions will certainly have to work as one to keep the defense on their heels.”

One advantage the Stags will have is past success. Kingsley has won two of the last three league titles and went had a solid junior varsity record in 2002.

“Our kids do understand how to win,” Wooer said. “They’re starting to understand tradition a little bit. The kids were 7-2 on the JV and they’re starting to understand what it takes to be competitive in the Northwest Conference.”

SUTTONS BAY has placed no lower than third in the league the last three seasons, including two runner-up finishes. But the Norse graduated a big group of players from last season.

“When you lose 17 seniors, you know you’re going to be a little bit raw the next year,” Suttons Bay coach Joe Trudeau said. “That’s the biggest class we’ve ever had here.

“Obviously we started a lot of seniors last year and a lot of those skill positions were seniors. So we have a lot of holes to fill.”

On offense the Norsemen do return their two ends in seniors Mike Lingaur and Luke Hinzmann. Also back is senior guard T.J. Darga.

Several players saw significant action on offense last season and will have expanded roles in 2003 including junior tackle Andrew Krantz, senior guard Chris Gomery and senior halfback Adam Sohasky, the team’s fourth-leading rusher a season ago.

Six starters are back on defense for Suttons Bay including Lingaur, defensive tackle Gomery, senior Danny Stewart and Sohasky at linebacker along with senior Terry McGovern and Hinzmann in the secondary.

“Our defense has the potential to be good,” Trudeau said. “We lost some key people, of course, from last year.

“The way we play defense is very aggressive — a lot of different looks and a lot of different calls — so there’s a lot of learn-

ing yet to be done. Hopefully they’ll come along quickly and jell together.”

New coach Aaron Heming is looking to be healthy in 2003. **GLEN LAKE** was decimated by injuries and limped to a 3-6 mark last season.

“I think we had enough (injuries) to last 25 years down the road,” said Heming, an assistant for six seasons with Glen Lake. “I’ve never seen anything like that. It was tough.

“I think if you look at it, nobody was healthy every game last year. It was just a weird year.”

Quarterback Andrew Kemp may have been the biggest loss to injury for the Lakers last season. He played in just over two games for Glen Lake, but seems poised for a strong senior season.

Running the ball this season will be junior fullback Nick Florip and junior halfback Alex Wiesen. Anchoring the offensive line will be senior tackle Rob Baker and senior guard Josh Chandler.

The Lakers will continue to run the veer offense that has been in place for several seasons.

Four starters on defense return in senior defensive end Kory Shimek and three linebackers in Baker, Florip and Chandler, who will move from nose guard to the outside.

Heming said the whole team is motivated to make last season’s injury-riddled campaign a distant memory.

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