

# Benzie Central reloads, retools

*New coach will try to turn fortunes around at Manistee*

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TRAVERSE CITY — The John Plumstead Era is over at **BENZIE CENTRAL**.

But don't feel sorry for coach Hal Holman and his Huskies.

"We think we'll be pretty good," Holman said.

"Obviously, you don't lose a player like Plumstead and get better. But I think we have a good team. How good? I don't know yet."

Benzie returns five offensive and six defensive starters off a team that went 10-2. The Huskies actually had to play most of the season without Plumstead, who was on his way to becoming one of Michigan's top three all-time leading rushers before he broke a bone in his foot early in the season.

The Huskies return a 1,000-yard rusher in Preston Bellows.

"He'll be the guy we look to," Holman said of the 6-2, 210-pound senior.

Brent Prielipp, who rushed for 1,500 yards on the JV team, gives Holman another option.

In addition, senior quarterback Jake Wamsley is also back.

"We've been primarily a running team and we'll probably be much the same this season," Holman said. "We don't have a super back like we've had in the past, like a Plumstead or (Craig) Gillison, so we may not be as explosive. You don't lose kids like that and replace them easily. Plumstead was a once in a lifetime player. But we should be able to grind it out."

The Huskies will be led up front by 6-2, 300-pound tackle Lee Witkop, 5-11, 225-pound guard Derek Councilor and 6-3, 210-pound tight end Aaron Waara.

Defensively, Holman expects the Huskies to be as good if not better than a year ago.



Record-Eagle file photo

**Benzie Central's Preston Bellows heads around the end for a big gain against Grayling during the 2003 playoffs.**

Benzie will be strong at line-backer with Bellows and Councilor. Waara and Wamsley give the Huskies physical defensive ends.

Jeremy Knapp, a 6-2, 270-pound junior, will plug the middle at tackle. Jermaine Shelton spearheads the secondary.

Benzie has 25 players out. The current seniors were 8-0-1 as JVs, the juniors were 8-1.

"It's a quality 25," Holman said.

Benzie does not play traditional rival St. Francis this season. Instead, the Huskies will open with a new school, Grand Rapids Forest Hills Eastern.

Meanwhile, first-year coach Gus Kapolka will try to revive the program at **MANISTEE**. The Chippewas have not won a game in more than three years. They surrendered 40 or more points in five games last fall.

"There's no direction to go but up," said Kapolka, the defensive coordinator at Boyne City the last five seasons.

The Chippewas will build around running back/safety Brent Solberg, quarterback/linebacker Drew Czarnecki, center/linebacker Frank Baker and end/defensive back Jordan Curtin.

Solberg, a 6-1, 195-pound senior, was the starting quarterback a year ago when the Chippewas ran a spread offense.

"He's one kid, who when you looked at the film from last year, stood out," Kapolka said. "He made plays.

"He has good wheels, he's athletic and he's a 4.0 student. He's the type of player we're going to build a foundation around."

Czarnecki was going to be the JV quarterback last season, but broke an ankle right before the campaign was to start. That injury was minor to what he dealt with previously. Czarnecki is a brain cancer survivor.

"Absolutely nothing fazes this kid," Kapolka said.

Despite opening at quarterback, Czarnecki will play defense, too.

"I'm just trying to put the 11 best players on the field," Kapolka said.

Kapolka likes Baker's work ethic and Curtin's size, speed and athletic ability. Curtin was a state qualifier in the 400 in track and placed in the regional in the shot put, Kapolka said.

The Chippewas, who have about 25 players on the varsity roster and 34 on JV, will play as an independent this season.

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Tim Peterson, Lake City coach

The schedule has been completely revamped and includes dates with area teams like Glen Lake, Kingsley and Benzie.

Kapolka has some built-in positives that should help him in building the program — new school facilities, including a "great" weight room.

In the Highland Conference, **LAKE CITY** expects to be a contender again.

Coach Tim Peterson's team went 7-3 a year ago, reaching the playoffs. The Trojans were third in the league.

"I think we've turned the corner," Peterson said. "We have high expectations. We now expect to compete for the league title and a playoff berth every year."

Peterson has seven starters back on offense. The list includes running back Chris Harrington, tight ends Brandon McGiness and Jordan Pierson, center Roddie Helsel and tackle Kris Bilyea. Harrington rushed for 700 yards in 2003.

Sophomore Kevin Siler takes over at quarterback in the veer offense.

"He's an outstanding athlete," Peterson said. "And he's quick."

Defensively, McGiness, Pierson, Bilyea and Jason Miller will comprise the line. Helsel, Harrington and Ryan Carrigan will be at the linebackers. The Trojans will be young in the secondary.

Peterson is excited about the physical strength of his team — and the chemistry.

Peterson said defending champion Beal City is the team to beat in the Highland. But, he added, McBain has good athletes and could throw a monkeywrench into the race.

**MCBAIN** will be trying to bounce back from an injury-plagued 6-4 campaign.

The Ramblers were second to Beal City a year ago.

Numbers are down — there are 21 players on the roster — but coach Paul Siembida has talent, particularly on the line.

The Ramblers return one of the top linemen in the north in Alex Gilde, a 5-11, 265-pound junior.

"He's the man," Siembida said. "He's an unbelievable athlete. He has outstanding technique."

Gilde will be joined on the offensive line by tackles Steve Michalak and Ryan Eisenga, guard Brandon Miller and center J.D. VanderVlucht. All weigh 210 pounds or more except VanderVlucht, but don't be misled by VanderVlucht's 175-pound frame.

"He's a bull," Siembida said. "He's a strong kid."

Tailback Eric Westdorp, who rushed for more than 1,000 yards in 2003, is back. Kyle Smith will direct the attack at quarterback.

Defensively, Miller, Gilde and Eisenga will anchor the line. Chris Morrow, Travis Brandt, Josh VanderVlucht and Trent Kirt will be at the linebacking slots. Westdorp and Smith will play the corners with Ryan Kamphouse at safety.

Siembida said he does not want to use injuries as an excuse for last season, but he wants his team to be more physical this season.

McBain opens with perennial power Whittemore-Prescott, a team it beat in the final seconds a year ago. The Ramblers face Beal City in their league opener.

"We're going to be thrown into the fire the first three weeks, but that's the way I'd like it," Siembida said. "We're going to see what we're made of."