

TC West

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job,” Prisk said. “The question is how good are our interior people. One of the reasons our linebackers were so good last year was the defensive tackles did a good job keeping people off them.

“They drew that double team. If they didn’t, they were in the backfield. Those are the kind of kids we’re looking for this year.”

The defensive backfield is anchored by returning senior starting cornerback Ben Sleder.

Sophomore Will Conklin will also play cornerback with senior Kyle Centilli and junior Seth Ankerson at the safeties.

Even though the Titans might not be as fast defensively as they were last season, West won’t be playing with concrete cleats either. The Titans allowed just 206 total yards a game last season, 184 in the regular season.

“We’ve always had kids on defense that could run,” Prisk said. “We’re similar. I wouldn’t say we’re as fast, but similar.”

Among the returning starters on offense is Thompson, who took over the reigns three games into his sophomore season. All he’s done is go undefeated in the regular season.

Thompson, who is just as dangerous — if not more so — running the ball, had an outstanding junior campaign.

He led the Titans in rushing with 1,118 yards on 159 carries with a team-high 15 touchdowns. Thompson hit on 47 of his 91 passes for 794 yards and five more scores.

While technically not a returning starter, Gordon saw a lot of action last season as a halfback. He finished behind Ben VanZale (918 yards) and Tony Gourlay (834) in yards, but led the running backs in yards per carry (10.2) while rushing for 452 yards and nine TDs.

Like Thompson, Gordon is also a three-year starter.

in spots, it’s good to have two pretty good athletes that are competitors,” Prisk said. “They know how to win and they have pretty good leadership skills.”

Gordon expects to see a bigger workload on offense this season with the graduation of VanZale and Gourlay.

“Last year we had Ben and Tony,” Gordon said. “Now, as a senior, I feel I’ll have a bigger role running the ball a lot more than I had last year.”

Sleder will also provide rushing yards for the Titans.

“You have 1,700 (yards) that’s not here, but 1,500 that’s back,” Prisk said. “For us, we have two big running threats in Tony and Eric and Ben looks pretty good early on running the football.

“But it’s the same as last year. In order for those guys to be true running threats, people have to honor us throwing the football.”

Centilli is back as a starting wide receiver for the Titans. He caught just four passes, but for 138 yards and two touchdowns.

Also playing receiver will be seniors C.J. Staley and Jake McCall, as well as junior twins Cody and Wes Sovis.

Root and Wehr will be the tight ends.

“A lot of the receivers that had yardage last year are back at receivers,” Thompson said. “Plus the



Record-Eagle file photo/Douglas Tesner

Traverse City West vs. Gaylord in 2004. The teams face each other again Sept. 23.

tight ends are real good. I have a lot of confidence in them.”

TC West returns two starting interior linemen in senior tackle Jake Stinson and senior guard Josh Haselton.

The other tackle spot is between senior Russ Carew, Braun and junior Sam Shipman. Stull is penciled into the other guard position with junior Bill Ankerson and

Shipman battling at center.

“Our two centers are solid, they’ve both played some,” Prisk said. “Haselton and Stinson are good offensive linemen and Stull is a good offensive lineman. The question is can we find a right tackle.”

Conklin, who played soccer as a freshman, is expected to handle the kicking and punting duties for the Titans.

“We inherited a gold

mine,” Prisk said. “He’s doing it all and he does it well.”

TC West just needs to get on the ship and sail off in the same direction. Sleder said that shouldn’t be a problem.

“We’re even tighter this year,” Sleder said. “We were tight last year, but this year there’s even a stronger bond between the juniors and seniors.”

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