

Another talented year in Section 5

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While Section 5 is considered one of the best sections in all of New York state, it also gets consideration for having some of the most talented, and versatile football players.

This year should stay on par.

Defending sectional champions Rush Henrietta (Class AAA), Canandaigua (Class AA) and Aquinas (Class A) will all seek to repeat their championship season from a year ago.

While Canandaigua made the 'AA' state quarterfinals, Aquinas would go on and capture the 'A' state title.

The Little Irish dominated the rest of the state as they defeated Sweet Home (Sec. VI) 28-7 in the state quarterfinals before blanking Carthage (Sec. III) 17-0 in the state semifinals. They would go on to win the state crown with a convincing 34-12 victory over Lansinburgh (Sec. II).

It won't take long to figure out who is going to be the team to beat this year as several big games are on hand to open up the high school football season.

There are several big games on Friday, Sept. 5 including Marshall at Churchville-Chili and Webster Thomas at Gates-Chili.

The following day will feature Victor at Greece Athena, Wilson at Pittsford, Brockport at Rush-Henrietta and McQuaid at Canandaigua.

Other games to watch this season include: Rush-Henrietta at Hilton (Sept. 12); Gates-Chili at Fairport (Sept. 13); Churchville-Chili at Webster Thomas (Sept. 13); Rush-Henrietta at Gates-Chili (Sept. 19); Churchville-Chili at Webster Schroeder (Sept. 19); Spencerport at Brockport (Sept. 19); Greece Olympia at Victor (Sept. 19); Fairport vs. Pittsford at St. John Fisher (Sept. 20); Eastridge at Greece Athena (Sept. 20); Webster Thomas at Webster Schroeder (Sept. 26); Eastridge at Victor (Sept. 26); Marshall at East (Sept. 27); Fairport at Rush-Henrietta (Sept. 27); Greece Olympia at Greece Arcadia (Sept. 27); East at McQuaid (Oct. 3); Gates-Chili at Pittsford (Oct. 4); Brockport at Webster Thomas (Oct. 4); Marshall at McQuaid (Oct. 10); Hilton at Gates-Chili (Oct. 10); Eastridge at Irondequoit (Oct. 10); Victor at Churchville-Chili (Oct. 10); Pittsford at Rush-Henrietta (Oct. 11); Eastridge at Brighton (Oct. 17); Greece Athena at Irondequoit (Oct. 17); Churchville-Chili at East (Oct. 18); Gates-Chili at Marshall (Oct. 18); McQuaid at Aquinas (Oct. 18); and Webster Thomas at Fairport (Oct. 18).

Lets meet some of this year's top players, and leaders for their respective teams.

Rickey Stevens is the man!

Last year the Gates-Chili running back helped the Spartans make the Class AAA sectional finals by putting up 915 yards on the ground including earning seven yards a pop.

His speed comes in handy as he runs a legit 4.5, 40.

“He is the most explosive tailback I’ve seen in my 18 seasons at Gates Chili — and we’ve had some tailbacks,” said G-C head coach Jason Benham, whose team went 8-1 a year ago. “He has a talent for making the first guy miss and his speed takes care of the rest.”

A solid off-season in the weight room will also help this year’s cause.

“Rickey has put on 15 pounds since last year and he is much stronger,” said coach Benham. “He is a legit scholarship candidate.”

Stevens, who also plays defensive back, will be listed at 5-foot-8, 172 pounds this season.

The Spartans’ offense hit high gear a year ago as they outscored their opponents 278-104.

They return nine starters on both sides of the ball to this year’s team.

“Our team is senior-heavy,” said coach Benham. “We have experience at most positions. Our expectations are always high at Gates Chili and this, our 50th year of football, is no exception.”

Other skill players to watch this season for the Spartans include Chad Dillard (WR/DB), Nick DiMartino (RB/LB), Levester Tucker (TB/LB), Elijah Thomas (FB/LB) and Derek Rafter (WR/DB).

The Spartans’ offensive line consists of Joe Dentino (5-10, 200), Chris Steeves (6-2, 220), Cordell James (6-3, 245), Mike Macaluso (5-11, 200) and Henry Taylor (6-0, 240).

The Spartans’ top defenders include Elijah Thomas, Reggie Pressley, Chris Steeves and Derek Rafter.

Last year’s 38-35 loss to Rush Henrietta in the sectional finals was a tough pill to swallow for Stevens and his teammates.

“The pain I felt after that loss was something I don’t ever want to feel again,” said Stevens, who is looking at playing football at several local colleges including St. John Fisher. “They beat us in the last eight seconds and that last drive they had was painful to be a part of. Ending last year on a loss in the sectional finals was tough on everybody. We want redemption. There are a lot of seniors on this team that want to go out on top.”

Gates-Chili picked up a pair of tough non-league games as they will battle with Webster Thomas (Sept. 5) and Marshall (Oct. 18).

“We’ll be ready,” said Stevens. “I think this year’s team is more prepared.”

As for playing Rush Henrietta, a huge game that will be played the third week of the season at Gates, Stevens says that the contest can’t come soon enough for him and his teammates.

“We want them bad,” said Stevens. “We want them really bad.”

Ring the Bell

McQuaid’s Tomarris Bell is not only the best high jumper in the state, he’s got skills on the football field as well.

Last year’s 2007 City Catholic Player of the Year and second team AGR selection returns for head coach Tom Zaccardo’s McQuaid Knights, who finished a respectable 6-3 a year ago while falling by a 28-9 count to Hilton in the Class AA sectionals.

Zaccardo loves Bell’s game breaking ability.

“Tomarris is a legitimate threat to go the distance anytime he touches the ball,” said coach Zaccardo. “He’s a tremendous athlete.”

Last year Bell, who runs a rock-solid 4.40/40, did a little of everything.

He put up 705 yards rushing while scoring a team-best 13 touchdowns. He also had 128 yards receiving and 108 return yards. He came just 60 yards short of 1,000 all-purpose yards.

“His athleticism is as good as anyone’s in Section Five,” said coach Zaccardo. “He has the great ability to make tacklers miss. It’s a pleasure to coach someone of Tomarris’ ability. More importantly, he’s a great young man.”

Bell thinks this could be the year the Knights get to the top of the sectional mountain.

“We lost a lot of seniors from last year’s team but we are working 10 times harder because of it,” said Bell. “Nobody is slacking. Not in the weight room and not on the practice field. This group is working their tails off. It would be very nice to get McQuaid a sectional championship. There’s no reason why we can’t. Last year Aquinas won it and they only beat us by one point.”

Red Raiders counting on Geoff Soja

If Fairport intends to improve upon last year’s 3-6 record, they will need Geoff Soja to have a big year on both sides of the ball.

The 6-foot-1, 180-pound junior will be the quarterback for this year’s Red Raiders, who actually finished last season on a high note.

After going 0-6 in the regular season, Fairport earned three consecutive victories to end pool play as they downed Greece Arcadia 22-13 in the first game, defeated Franklin 42-14 in the second game and then romped past Irondequoit 42-6 in the third and final game.

Soja will be a third year varsity player this fall. He is a two-year starter at free safety and will enter his second year at the helm for the Red Raiders’ offensive attack.

“We like to spread our offense out and use the up-tempo style,” said Soja. “My job is to go out there and run the offense, whether we run it, or throw it. We need to keep the tempo where we like it.”

Soja isn't just an offensive leader either.

Last year on defense he posted 46 tackles with one fumble recovery and one interception for a TD.

In 2006 as a freshman, he led the Red Raiders with 60 tackles, earning All-County honors.

“He is a tough competitor who is a three sport athlete, playing basketball in the winter and baseball in the spring,” said Fairport coach Mike Ierlan. “He is everything that is right about the Fairport student-athlete.”

Soja feels this year the Red Raiders' players are very committed into turning the program back to the glory days.

“This year our players are buying into our new conditioning program,” said Soja. “They are buying into the fact that you need to work your tail off to be successful. I like where we're heading.”

Soja would like nothing more than to make a run at a sectional title this fall.

“It would be great to go out there and win one for the Fairport community,” said Soja. “But in the meantime, we are going to continue to work hard and represent our community well.”

Landry's geared up

The D-I phones have been ringing off the hook for Pittsford's Matt Landry.

The 6-foot-4, 235-pound two-way playing senior, has already been offered scholarships from the University of Buffalo and University of New Hampshire, and is also being closely watched by several others including Pitt, Michigan State, Purdue, UConn, Syracuse, Temple, Cornell, Princeton and Navy.

Landry plays tight end and defensive end for the Panthers.

Last year he helped Pittsford to a 6-3 record.

The Panthers entered the Section V Class AAA tournament as the No. 3 seed and after beating Spencerport 39-8 in the quarterfinals, they suffered a 24-14 loss to eventual champion Rush Henrietta in the semifinals.

Landry finished the season with 12 catches for 200 yards and five touchdowns. What was amazing about that was the fact that he did all that in just four games. Although he played the first five games on defense, he did not play any offense until the sixth game.

Last year Landry, who runs a 4.7, 40-yard dash, was a standout on defense as he led the Panthers with eight sacks, and despite seeing plenty of double teams on defense, he still managed 40 tackles.

He will be a three year starter on the defensive line this fall.

Landry is everything right about high school football says Pittsford head coach Keith Molinich.

“Matt’s a great kid,” said coach Molinich. “He has a 94 GPA, and is in all honors and AP courses. He is the captain of the team and is the All-American boy. He hangs out with all types of kids and truly loves people. He even volunteers for our youth flag football program. He’s a born teacher/coach and is the hardest worker that I have ever come across.”

He will definitely make an impact at the next level says Molinich.

“College coaches say that his ‘motor’ is one of the best that they have seen,” said Molinich.

But for now, college can wait for Landry, who, along with his Panther teammates, have one thing on their mind.

“Our ultimate goal is to win the sectional championship,” said Landry. “We need to take it one step at a time and concentrate on each and every opponent. That Rush Henrietta loss is still bitter for us. We haven’t forgotten about that one.”

Landry appreciates the respect that the Pittsford program has been getting.

“It is nice to be recognized as a respected program around Section Five,” said Landry. “Now we have to go out there and show people why they respect us.”

Duell jobs

Hilton junior quarterback Duell Smith is a three-headed monster on offense.

Not only can the quarterback throw the ball, but he can run it too, and he can kick it with the best of them.

Last year Duell led Hilton to the Class A sectional semifinals where the Smith and the Cadets’ offense put up 39 points but still lost, 56-39, to eventual champion Canandaigua.

Hilton would finish the season on a bright note however as they defeated Greece Athena 21-7 in Pool Play action.

Smith’s numbers were outstanding, especially since he was only a sophomore a year ago.

Through the air he was 80-for-134 passing for 1,115 yards and six touchdowns.

He also ran the ball 52 times for 333 yards (6.4 avg) and eight touchdowns.

Oh yeah, he was a perfect 29-of-29 on PAT kicks and a near-perfect 5-of-6 on field goals.

He was a first team All-County selection and a AGR honorable mention pick.

“Duell is an outstanding leader, even though he is only a junior,” said Hilton coach Rich Lipani. “We give him a lot of responsibility in running our offense. Last year he threw for over 1,000 yards and ran for over 300.”

What separates Duell from most talented players is his character says Lipani.

“Not only is Duell an outstanding football player, but he is an even better person — on and off the field,” said coach Lipani.

The versatile Stevens

Clay’s world

When Rush Henrietta head football coach Joe Montesano was looking for a reason why his Royal Comets won the Class AAA title a year ago, he didn’t have to look no further than Clay Harris, the then-sophomore running back/defensive back.

Harris, who was named MVP of the ‘AAA’ title game, rushed for a game-high 184 yards and three TD’s as Rush Henrietta defeated Gates-Chili 38-35.

He rushed for a game-high 154 yards and one touchdown in the Royal Comets’ 24-14 victory over Pittsford in the semifinals.

On the season, the versatile Harris rushed for 800 yards and 11 touchdowns in eight games. He led the Royal Comets with 29 receptions for 331 yards and five TD’s.

Montesano thinks this upcoming season could be a memorable one for Harris.

“Clay has the potential to be a special player,” said Montesano. “Clay is a very versatile player in our spread offense. He is a tremendous runner who can make people miss, runs very hard, and has great vision.”

The versatility Harris brings to the Royal Comets’ offense gives opposing defenses fits.

“Clay is a difficult match-up for linebackers and safeties when we put him in the slot position,” said Montesano. “He runs very good routes and catches the ball very well.”

Despite Harris only being a junior, Montesano’s expectations are very high.

“I expect big things from Clay this year,” said Montesano. “He has the work-ethic that you see from the great players, a passion to compete and the drive to get better each day.”

Arcuri leads Brighton

While last year’s 1-8 record might not get the college scouts out, Brighton coach Jason Wasserman thinks this year’s Barons could make some noise.

And so should senior quarterback Michael Arcuri.

“Michael is a quarterback with a rifle arm,” said Wasserman, a first year coach for the Barons. “He is a senior leader that takes control of the huddle and the entire offense. He also reads defenses very well.”

Arcuri is a two-dimensional quarterback says Wasserman.

“He is calm under pressure and is not afraid to pull it down and run with it if he has to,” said Wasserman.