

Praying to stay injury-free

Hopper, Seward would give just about anything for an injury-free season.

**By Mike Lee
Eagle Contributor**

Kendel Hopper wants to play football so badly this season that he offered to play in the line – if that’s where the team needed him.

Never mind that Hopper, a Goldthwaite High School senior, has played running back, receiver, linebacker and cornerback – everywhere but the line – over the last five years.

“I just want to find a way to get on the field. I haven’t been able to play a full season since my freshman year,” said Hopper, who suffered a season-ending knee injury in 2014 and a season-ending left shoulder injury before ever playing a game last season.

Hopper also missed most of his eighth-grade season with a torn ligament in his right shoulder.

If there’s a teammate who knows how Hopper feels, it’s Quaid Seward, a junior running back and safety. Seward suffered a season-ending broken leg in the third game last season. As an eighth-grader in 2013, he missed half the season with shoulder and back injuries.

Asking what these Goldthwaite teammates would give for an injury-free season will produce short, strong answers.

“I’d go through another summer offseason workout program right now if it would strengthen my shoulder,” Hopper said. “It’s my senior year, and I just want to be a part of Goldthwaite football.”

Seward said, “I’d give anything, really. I’ve had some good games, but I want to make it all the way through one season.”

Hopper began having shoulder problems dating back to youth football in the sixth grade. He tried to play through the injury to his left shoulder last year, but was forced out after losing feeling in his fingers during the season opener against Mart.

He ended up needing shoulder replacement surgery. Hopper spent last season signaling dummy plays in from the sideline. “I just wanted to contribute in some way,” he said.

So with two repaired shoulders and one repaired knee, Hopper is ready to give high school football one last go-round.

“Everything is good right now,” he said after the first week of preseason practices. “I haven’t had two healthy shoulders since before the sixth grade.”

Seward burst on the scene as a star running back in the seventh grade in 2012, but has spent much of his career since battling injuries. His shoulders are not repairable. When they temporarily come out of place, Seward has to leave the game for a few plays.

“They pop back in place on their own,” he said. “It doesn’t happen in every game.



Some games are no trouble at all. Then against Alvord last year, they came out of place twice. I’ve learned not to worry about it and just go play football.”

After the shoulders pop out of socket, Seward feels the pain for the next four or five days.

Seward appeared ready for a big season at running back last year after gaining 157 yards on 29 carries in Week 2 against Jim Ned. But on his first carry the following week against Bangs, Seward suffered a broken fibula – the smaller bone in the lower leg.

He missed the final seven regular-season games before returning for Goldthwaite’s three playoff games. Seward finished last season with 448 yards and three touchdowns rushing. He also was slated to start at safety, but hardly played there after the broken leg.

“My leg is good so far. I’ve had no trouble with it,” he said after the first week of practice.

Hopper said he’s so focused on playing his senior year, he doesn’t think about being injured again while on the field.

“I think about what my responsibility is on the field on every play. Everything else

is blocked out,” he said. “It’s my last year. If anything happens this year, I’m going to patch it up and go.”

Seward can’t help but think about his injuries because one of his shoulders might pop out at any time.

“No matter what, it’s always in the back of my mind,” he said. “A broken leg is a pretty big deal that you just don’t forget about. But this is football. I’ve got to go all out and not worry about it.”

Both players are optimistic about their contributions to Goldthwaite having another successful season. The Eagles finished 10-3 and advanced to the regional round of the Class 2A Division I playoffs last year.

The coaches haven’t taken Hopper up on his offer to play in the line. Instead, he’ll play outside linebacker for the first time in his career. On offense, he’s working at running back and slotback.

“I like outside linebacker,” the 6-foot, 185-pound Hopper said. “Sometimes I get to rush the quarterback. Sometimes I drop back in pass coverage. It’s the best of both worlds.”

Seward is back at running back, where he started out when the 2015 season began. A compact runner at 5-6 and 170 pounds, he has rushed for 799 yards and six touchdowns in limited time the last two years.

He also is set to start at safety, where he started for the entire 2014 season as a freshman and made 69 tackles.


“I really feel good,” Seward said. “I gained a lot of confidence during the offseason workouts in the spring and summer.”

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