



Otis-Bison junior Blake Bahr, seen here running the ball against Central Plains last season, rushed for nearly 700 yards a year ago. (photo by Mike Courson)

Cougars looking for playoff bid in 2017

By MIKE GILMORE
Otis-Bison was poised for an Eight-Man Division II playoff trip in 2016, but ran into a Hornets' nest.

The Cougars, ranked fifth in preseason last year, outscored opponents 412-212 and are now 14-5 in the last two seasons, looking to get back into the playoff picture in 2017.

Last year, O-B lost three games by narrow margins. At home in week three, O-B led Central Prairie League rival Central Plains 28-14 heading into the fourth quarter and lost, 40-28. At Wallace County in week five, the Cougars outgained WC 273-187 and had a 14-0 halftime lead, but had three costly interceptions and lost 28-20.

District control came down to week seven in Dighton, where the Cougars were poised to score the game-winner

from inside the 10, but an endzone interception turned into a Dighton TD for the win, 36-30.

Coach Travis Starr is hoping for a little more good fortune in 2017 in his 13th year at the helm.

"Our goal is to get back to the playoffs," said coach Starr. "In order to achieve this goal, we have to prepare and compete well against some of the very best teams in the state. Staying healthy will be key. We will have limited

depth, so we must be conditioned to play four quarters.

O-B will be looking to replace graduated QB Kade Urban and Brad Lightfoot, both four-year starters. A lone senior returns, Clade Anderson, a 220-pound TE/DL. They return junior Blake Bahr at running back; junior Anton Foust, 6-1, 180 at QB and junior Daniel Scott at RB/LB.

The Cougars open the season Friday in St. John.

La Crosse looking to improve each game

By MIKE GILMORE
As the only Central Prairie League team playing 11-man football, the La Crosse Leopards have to go far and wide to build a regular season schedule. That can produce a wide variety of opponents, testing defenses as well as offenses.

Thankfully, in 2017, however, most of those opponents will be playing in La Crosse. Beginning with a home game against Elkhart, the Leopards will travel to Colby in week two and then have four of their next five games at home. Ellis begins district play in La Crosse and then Oakley and Plainville are road games.

Be that as it may, the Leopards are used to playing a postgame schedule, missing the Class 2-1A dance for the first time since 2003 in 2015. They started last season 0-4, but beat Ellis 44-12 at the start of district and then posted a 48-10 win over Oakley. A 46-12 loss to Plainville had them entering the bracket as undercard, but they traveled west to Meade and came back with a 44-29 win – the most points the Buffaloes surrendered to an opponent in 11 years.

The next week put the Leopards back at home against Smith Center, who won the trench battle as the turnover bug came back to bite the host team. The Leopards were trailing 21-14 and were knocking on the door heading into the final 12 minutes, when senior quarterback Clayton Herdman lost the ball on an option scramble. Three plays later, Redmen junior Trace Haven

broke for an 85-yard TD that put the pendulum back on Smith Center's side. The Redmen held on to win 42-20.

Last season, the Leopards had 18 miscues, with three coming in the final game.

Herdman takes 1,144 yards passing and 1,096 yards rushing to Washburn this fall; senior running back Jacey Woods is taking 953 senior yards to Ottawa. Other key graduates from key positions have the Leopards looking to 16 returnees to fill holes.

"Our offensive line and defensive lines hold the keys to our

strength," noted La Crosse coach Jon Webster. "We have a goal to improve every day and be playing our best football in district and the playoffs. "We will need to stay healthy."

Senior Brett Herdman, at 6-2, 176, at wide receiver and cornerback, will be a key playmaker on both sides of the ball. Sophomore Hunter Morgan (5-10, 150) will be expected to take over at quarterback. Webster will also be relying on senior leadership in the trenches, with Jacob Showalter at 5-10, 215; Kadin Trower at 6-3, 225; and Kale Mongeau, 6-2, 240.

La Crosse football 2017

| | |
|----------|-----------------|
| Sept. 1 | ELKHART |
| Sept. 8 | @Colby |
| Sept. 15 | WASHINGTON CO. |
| Sept. 22 | ELLSWORTH |
| Sept. 29 | SUBLETTE |
| Oct. 6 | @Stanton County |
| Oct. 13 | ELLIS |
| Oct. 20 | @Oakley |
| Oct. 27 | @Plainville |

Otis-Bison football 2017

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| Sept. 1 | @St. John |
| Sept. 8 | ELLINWOOD |
| Sept. 15 | @Central Plains |
| Sept. 22 | VICTORIA |
| Sept. 29 | WALLACE CO. |
| Oct. 6 | @Greeley County |
| Oct. 13 | DIGHTON |
| Oct. 20 | @Triplains |
| Oct. 26 | HODGEMAN CO. |

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