

Pawnee Heights reigns as 6-man gridiron champion

BY MIKE GILMORE
 ROZEL – Entering the third year, The Pawnee Heights Tigers have established themselves as the central office for six-man football in Kansas. They've advanced to the association's championship game twice in the first two years, winning the trophy last year with an unblemished 9-0 record. PHHS athletic director Mark Pywell has taken the reins as the association's commissioner as it expands to 11 teams in two divisions in 2018.

As with any football power, however, the successful hunter usually becomes the target. "We are definitely the targeted team," noted Chambers, whose 16-member roster is the biggest the Tigers have had to date. "It will be someone else's job to take the state title away from Pawnee Heights. We do not want that to occur; we will be working harder in the weight room and on the field to be successful again."

With the 2017 Wild West Bowl trophy – which looks a lot like the NFL's highest yearly award with its big silver football – on display in its own window

in the school office, the Pawnee Heights football program is experiencing a welcome resurgence not felt for decades.

"We've got some good athletes right now, but the thing that's most helped us is I've got kids all the way down into the fourth grade that are saying: 'We can't wait to play Pawnee Heights football,'" Chambers said. "That's how you build a program."

The roster features five seniors who will be making an impact on both sides of the ball.

Senior Kade Scott (6-1, 190) returns as one of the state's leading rushers, with a total 4,300 yards and 81 touchdowns heading into his senior season. Earning Offensive Player of the Year honors following last year's 62-12 defeat of Bird City-Cheylin in the Wild West Bowl championship, Scott also was named to first team defense at line-backer, with 204 tackles and seven pass interceptions and eight returns for TDs. "Kade has really grown in the weight room since he was a sophomore," Chambers noted. "He's usually the first kid in the weight room and the last



HIGH HOPES – The Pawnee Heights Tigers are looking forward to their third season of six-man football, with Wild West Bowl championship games in the first two years and an unbeaten state title from last year. The Tigers are coached by Jeff Chambers and assisted by Dale Coverdale.

(photo by Mike Gilmore)

kid out. He has gained numerous strides in the things he does and how he prepares himself.

Senior Trace Baker (5-8, 170) returns at quarterback after earning honorable mention all-state honors last season. Baker completed 34 of 57 passes for 703 yards, including a season-high 190 passing yards in the title game. Heading into 2018, Baker brings 1,656 passing yards with 18 TDs. At de-

fensive safety, Baker is the team leader in tackles with 216 in two seasons.

Senior Dalton Hamby (5-10, 215) returns at full-back and all-state defensive lineman, with 188 total stops. Hamby is king of the Tigers' weight room, with a 360 bench; 500 squat; 385 clean for multiple school records.

Senior Logan Williams (6-4, 250) returns at offensive end and defensive

noseguard. Senior Carlos Cordero also joins the squad.

Juniors include Preston Stonebarger (6-2, 250) on the line and Shawn Peterson, who returns as split end; Jackson Henbest returns as tight end. Gage

Meyers is also a returning junior.

Sophomores are Junior Cordero, Fabian Flores, Eli Knauf, Cody Amspacker and Aden Gilliland. Freshmen are Russell Baier, Braden Colglazier, Adam Hands and AJ Dennett.

Chambers will again marshal the offense, while the defense will be in the hands of football veteran assistant Dale Coverdale.

This year, the Tigers will be looking at changeups and wrinkles to add to the offense. "Different situations that would allow us to be a little more spread and also to go three yards in a cloud of dust," Chambers noted. "We will have to be able to do both equally well to be successful."

"We feel confident in what we are doing, because I don't know that there's a team that can literally line up and outrun every one of us from sideline to sideline," Chambers said.

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6-man expands to two divisions for 2018 season

BY MIKE GILMORE
 A large silver-and-walnut trophy sits in the window at Pawnee Heights High School, for all who pass from the main entrance to check in at the office to see. The trophy – reminiscent of the Vince Lombardi prize awarded each successive NFL Super Bowl – proclaims the Tigers as state champions of the Second Annual Wild West Bowl in Dodge City in 2017, for six-man football.

In the trophy case, there are two plaques for sub-state titles, won last year on the road to the championship and the year before, when the Tigers finished runner-up in the inaugural state title game.

The trophy is hard-won, representing a long road to recovery of a classic fall sport for the small Kansas school and the communities of Rozel and Burdett. Now parents, grandparents and fans look forward to spending each Friday evening at the football field, instead of searching out a dishful of channels on the TV for something to watch.

"There's no question that a revival has taken place," notes PHHS athletic director Mark Pywell. "Like any small community, we're passionate about our sports programs and we're seeing that just about everybody turns out on Fridays to fill our stands."

"The success we've had is an additional by-product," he added. "We've got something going on that we can talk about – brag about – and get together and support."

Three years ago in their inaugural season, the Tigers sported brand-new uniforms and equipment.

Last year, they celebrated their first homecoming game in six years, complete with downtown parade; king, queen, attendants and the entire kindergarten class as crownbearers in a pregame crowning ceremony serenaded by the school band; flag-raising ceremony by the VFW and a sideline appearance by the Tiger mascot. The concession stand was cranked up with burgers and dogs served to spectators who had been gathering since 4 p.m. for the 7 p.m. kickoff.

The Tigers then thrashed their homecoming opponent Rexford-Golden Plains 54-6. Junior running back Kade Scott had 329 of the Tigers' 356 yards with five TDs.

After the game, somebody noticed that the mascot was looking a little threadbare. Apparently, five years in the closet didn't do much toward preservation of the three-decades-old costume. An off-season fundraiser was planned

and conducted for an updated Tiger, with eyes on this fall.

With football squarely in the picture, the Tigers are putting distance to the past. It's not that long ago – not really – but not fondly remembered.

Staying in the game – Before 2010, the Tigers worked hard to maintain an eight-man standing in the

Southern Plains-Iroquois Activities Association, compiling a win-loss record of 28-22 from 2004-09. In 2010, PHHS recruited Fort Hays graduate student Josiah Meeks to head the program, who went 2-6 with the Tigers. After one year, Meeks went on to other opportunities and is now the new head

coach at Moundridge.

For the 2010 season, Pawnee Heights looked east to Larned for a cooperative agreement that put a few Tigers in Indian uniforms on the field of

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"All our girls are hard workers that just need to realize what they are capable of," Hullman said.

On the boys' side, six of the top seven runners return. Top three runners include senior Andrew Cross (19:18 PR); junior Gabe Wolff (19:56 PR) and senior Jacob Suiter (19:58 PR) who cracked the 20-minute barrier for the first time last season. Number four runner junior Jesus Ibarra returns for his second season (20:02 PR). Senior Trey Britton (22:02 PR) and junior Harley Blaske (21:12 PR) adds depth to the squad.

"This will be a great nucleus of experienced runners to have back to work on setting new PR's," Hullman said. "We just missed out on qualifying for the state meet last season after a string of several straight seasons and we want to get back to that point again."

Four new runners join the Macksville boys' squad: senior Grant Frink, sophomore Kyler Evans back from injury; and freshmen Thoran Cross and Alex Mendez.

"Our runners are always willing to go out and challenge themselves, no matter if it is in a practice or a meet," Hullman noted. "They are highly competitive and will always help push each other to get better each and every day. The 2018 season should be fun for all of us."



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