



ARCOLA HIGH SCHOOL'S "Pride of the Purple Riders" marching band will perform at halftime during the home football games this year. They will kick off the season at the first game this Friday, Aug. 25, at Thomas-Bradford Field. First row (L-R): Jake Myers, Haydan Hershberger, Owen Clark, Jolena King, Julissa Galaviz, Olivia Gisinger, Rory Drake, Alex Hawn. Second row (L-R): Delia Leal, Bella Smith, Debanie Cruz, Keyla Hernandez, Anahi Campos, Lillian Hensley, Madalyn Lyons, River Wilcox-Rich, Emma Edwards, Stephanie Gonzalez. Third row (L-R): Ximena Vazquez, Carolina Torres, Emmalee Reel, Hailey Smith, Oliver Diaz, Josh Gaona, Gerardo Alanis, Damaris Silguero. Fourth row (L-R): Riley Vazquez, Mariana Jaramillo, Ryder Wilcox-Rich, Cooper Bruner, Aaron Gaona, Isabella Spracklen. Not pictured: Antonio De La Garza. Kevin Boyle is the band and chorus director at Arcola High School. Photo by Nancy Rairden.

SPORTS



THE ARCOLA FOOTBALL TEAM will play host to Nokomis in the first game of the 2023 season. Returning lettermen from last season are, from left, Anthony Garza, Orlando Marcos, Brok Morford, Ryan Lindstrom, Oden Barron, Braden Phillips, Raul Guerra, Caiden Helmuth and Tyson Lewis. The Purple Riders are coached by Steve Snider, who is in his first season. Photo by Mike Monahan.

Arcola to play host to Nokomis for first time Friday

By Mike Monahan

ARCOLA - Nokomis, who was once a Nokomis and Ramsey sports co-op, is playing at Thomas-Bradford Field at 7 p.m. in the season opener in Arcola. It is the first meeting between the two schools. Nokomis is in the Lincoln Prairie Conference in football only. The Redskins were an independent team the last two years after being in the Prairie State Conference until 2020.

"We found some stuff, but you never know," said Arcola coach Steve Snider. "They could be all right, we are revamping the whole offense. You never really know. You prepare for everything and make sure that we can make an adjustment to everything that they can possibly do. You can't put all of your eggs in one basket and week one even if you know the team. Obviously Arcola is not new to the conference, but they are probably thinking the same thing about me. The new guy is going to bring what he did before. What did he really do up there as it is so far away."

The lines appear to be the strength for Nokomis including seniors Jaxson Batty (5-10, 215) guard, defensive tackle and Lucas Stinson (5-9, 220 center, nose guard).

The Redskins have 16 lettermen back.

"We were very young last year and will still be a young team this coming season," said Nokomis coach Paul Watson. "We have a good group up front on both sides of the ball but they are young."

Brody Steels likely returns

as the starting quarterback. He was 18-of-48 for 273 yards and two touchdowns and eight interceptions. Brenton Lyons, last year's leading running back with outside linebacker with 129 for 764 and a team eight touchdowns is a senior. Lyons is also the top returning receiver. He caught eight passes for 179 yards and two touchdowns. Sophomore Riley Reynolds was the leading tackler last year. The 5-11, 200 pounder, had 41.5 tackles. The Redskin defense had just two interceptions and six fumble recoveries.

Watson said of Nokomis joining a conference, "It is a great feeling to have a full schedule and not worrying about trying to find teams to play. We are very excited about joining a conference with schools that are similar to our size of school."

As for scoring first in the first game, Snider said, "You always want to score first, but at the same time you still have to do it all. That 48 minute game is a long game and anything can happen at any given moment. I do always want to score first, but that is not always the case. You get a little bit of confidence especially going out there and on defense and if you get the ball first that would be nice. There are some guys on the team that I think would just like to get out there and get a nice big hit on the first one and get a stop. That might give you a little more confidence or you try and make something big happen on the kickoff or first play of the year especial-

ly when a team has an hour and a half drive. We have guys that are ready to play football. I think that is the most important thing. I think they will be ready to answer the bell no matter what happens and that is nice to have."

Watson, 46, was Nokomis' athletic director while also teaching health, drivers education and strength and conditioning when he took over at his alma mater as the head football coach in 2016. He's also assisted Steve Kimbro with the boys basketball team in recent years in the early 2010's.

Playing week one against a new team that has a new coach does have its struggles,' said Watson. "However we need to make sure we take care of what we can control and execute our offense and defense. Key to winning is going to be blocking and tackling."

If it comes down to kicking, Snider expects to kick extra points and field goals.

"I think that it is probably the first time in my 19 seasons where I am going to kick extra points. We have a guy (Gael Elizondo) that we know is capable and ready. So, that is a nice change of pace for me."

While temperatures were great for the first two weeks of practice Snider knows it is going to change this week (last Sunday).

"We have a plan for them (linemen) to make sure they can last throughout the whole game. I think they are already starting to take care of their bodies in a way that we are going to make sure that they can play the whole game too."

I know this week (Aug. 20-24) is supposed to be miserable weather wise, but the first two weeks of practice have been really, really nice which has given us that opportunity. Some years you look at you can't practice after school. You have to practice before school or wait until late at night. You

have to do the things you don't normally do just to get a practice in and we have not had to do that yet (as of last Friday). We got almost the entire playbook in so far and to not have to move practices around to keep that same routine has been very beneficial for us in learning our offense and defense. They know exactly what is expected and when it is expected. Practices have been pretty darn awesome this year."

Nokomis, a school with an enrollment of 273.5, has 24 players, including six seniors,

four juniors, eight sophomores and six freshmen. The Redskins are coached by Watson, who is in his eighth season with a 35-27 (.565) record, including playoff appearances in Class 2A in 2019 and Class 1A in 2021 and was 4-5 last season as an independent, but did not beat anybody that finished higher than 2-7. Lyons had 15 carries for 135 yards and three touchdowns in a 27-20 win over Oblong/Palestine-Hutsonville last year (85, 1 and 6 yards) and was named the Springfield State Journal Register Athlete of the Week.



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