



Western Sun conference is rising

Conference boasts impressive record heading into its second season

By Kevin Schmit and Chris Walker | Daily Herald Staff

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Ask for opinions regarding the top football conferences in the state and you'll likely hear about the DuPage Valley or the Chicago Catholic Blue.

The Western Sun Conference made its own strong case last season.

Four of the eight teams made the playoffs including three qualifiers -- Batavia, Geneva and Kaneland -- that combined for a 34-6 record as tri-champions. All three reached the state semifinals, with Batavia playing in the Class 6A title game.

Not bad for the debut season of the conference.

"The Western Sun opened some eyes as a real good football conference," said Glenbard South coach Dan Starkey.

Kaneland coach Tom Fedderly will experience the Western Sun for the first time this year as a head coach.

"We look at it this way -- if we don't bring our 'A' game on Friday night, we're going to lose no matter who it is and we respect everyone in conference," said Fedderly, an assistant at Kaneland for 15 years. "If we don't bring each time we're going to lose."

Kaneland's key returnees include Jody Henningson, who is moving from wide receiver to quarterback, running back Jamie Snyder and linebacker T.J. Weiss.

Last year Batavia junior quarterback Jordan Coffey, replacing injured starter Alex Schroeder, threw for 215 yards and a pair of touchdowns in the Bulldogs' title game loss to Normal.

Wide receiver Ryan Webb caught one of those touchdown passes. Webb is just one of the threats on Batavia's offense that also includes running backs J.R. Kabba and Brian Krolikowski, wide receiver Eric Zeddies and tight end Jordan Church.

Other than the senior Church, all those starters for Batavia are only juniors.

Geneva, which fell to Batavia in the 6A semifinals, returns standout running back Michael Ratay after he missed the bulk of last season due to injury. Junior linebacker Brennan Quinn returns to anchor the defense, but overall Geneva will turn to a lot of new players up and down its starting lineup.

The Vikings should be in good hands at quarterback, where senior Mike Mayszak moves from his wide receiver position last year.

That's the same transition Henningson is making at Kaneland, the third of last year's tri-champions whose biggest loss from last season may be retired Hall of Fame coach Joe Thorgesen.

"Since I've been here the conference title has always gone through Batavia and Geneva," Starkey said. "And then with Rochelle and Kaneland, you really have to respect the teams in this conference."

Unfortunately for the Raiders they suffered at the other end of the Western Sun's success. After falling to Batavia and Geneva to start the conference slate, they struggled to recover.

With what it hopes will be an electric offense led by third-year starter Will Hill, Glenbard South plans to bounce back this season. Expect Hill to get the ball in frequent situations and from several positions.

Ten total starters return including a linebacker corps anchored by returning starters Mike Oratowski and Greg Calabrese.

Yorkville and Sycamore will try to improve, but it won't be easy. This is a conference that if you are in the bottom half, it is hard to move up with so many heavyweights.

"I think somebody could win with two losses this season," Geneva coach Rob Wicinski said. "I think it's gotten to that level.

"Yorkville is quietly getting better and better. Sycamore looked really good last year before some injuries but they've got a lot coming back. Glenbard South's seniors and juniors won conference as sophomores so they're taking it to a different level. Kaneland and Batavia are still the workhorses and Rochelle, I don't know if others talk about them, but their guy (coach Kevin Crandall) doesn't win 80 or 90 percent of his games if he (doesn't know what he's doing)."