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Batavia, Geneva reloading O-lines

Coaches concentrate diligently on building their offensive lines even though the unit would seem to require little by way of strategy.

Be a behemoth and get in the other behemoth's way. Plain and simple.

The players looking to fill those roles at Batavia and Geneva, where graduation transformed the offensive fronts from lines to line segments, quickly have encountered the contrary. To be sure, there's nothing easy about being the proverbially big, dumb lineman.

"It's so much work," said Bulldogs junior Jake Tews, a solid candidate to start at center. "We all work together in the weight room in the offseason and stuff, we run, and we're all pretty, pretty tight even though there's so much competition going on."

Batavia coach Mike Gaspari apparently is comfortable with the number 11. He's evaluating that many starters on both sides of the ball while 11 prospective offensive linemen compete to fill five spots.

While Tews, a starter on the sophomore team last year, has emerged as the likely replacement for 6-foot-2, 260-pounder Alex Berg, the other spots remain up for grabs.

Tri-Cities rival Geneva also lost all five starters from its line, making the team's traditional Week 9 meeting one that could contest resilience above all else.

"Losing what we had last year is going to be very difficult to replace," Geneva coach Rob Wicinski said. "There's a lot of depth and a lot of talent, and those were good boys, too. But this is now their time. A new group comes in and has an opportunity to rebuild, and I'm excited for them."

Vikings senior right guard Justin Craig wouldn't mind having the team's old right tackle back for one more season. Anthony Miller, all 305 pounds of him, helped flatten opposing defensive lines as Geneva ran for 3,861 yards en route to a berth in the IHSA Class 7A championship game.

Short of adding another year of eligibility, remembering the work ethic and example of the ones who pancaked before them is a good place to start.

"We've got a lot of potential," Craig said as position battles opened in camp. "We're pretty quick, but we've got to play off the ball harder. We'll get our technique and get a lot better as we go."

Competitive offseason workouts and practices were common for Batavia and Geneva. While a few new faces showed up on the first day of practice Aug. 12, Gaspari and Wicinski said their prime line candidates had been competing since the summer camp season.

Of the 10 Bulldogs and Vikings who'll start on the line on a given Friday night this fall, Batavia's Brian Wilson projects as the most likely two-way contributor. Gaspari said he liked the junior's explosiveness and versatility on both sides of the ball as his team looks to rebuild "maybe the most important area there is."

"There's still a little bit of questioning left for who's going to play where and everything, but generally it looks like we're going to be pretty good up front," Wilson said.

Talking a good game is a start. The Bulldogs and Vikings know what comes next.

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