

NO RESPECT, I TELL YA, I GET NO RESPECT....

Written by Mike Kelly
Saturday, 27 July 2013 11:59

The late Rodney Dangerfield made a career out of that line. And unfortunately, the Watauga High football team, much like the late comedian, aren't that well respected, either.

But it's a new year with a new head football coach (the ninth at the school since 1995), but it's the same old story---the Pioneers have been picked to finish near the bottom of the Northwestern 3A/4A Conference by the league coaches.

But the Pioneers, who were 5-7 last season under interim coach Tom Wright, might surprise some people this fall, especially with Ryan Habich taking over as head coach. Habich, who come over from Fuquay-Varina, inherits a team that has only produced five winning seasons since 1982. But Habich, who played at Mars Hills College, learned his trade from one of the best coaches in the business---David Riggs.

During his tenure at Fuquay-Varina, the Bengals knew nothing but success. The Bengals amassed 89 wins since 2005, which included six conference championships and two sectional final appearances. And, despite having only two starters back, Habich is more than anxious to get started.

"That's why it was so important for me to start in April (he officially started teaching at WHS on April 8)," he said. "We've gotten a lot accomplished the last couple of months. I've given the boys a little time off before practice officially begins (on August 1). It's a work in progress.

"We only have a few seniors on the team this season, but we have a lot of underclassmen, who have really bought into what we're trying to do here."

WHS' biggest asset this season will be rising sophomore quarterback Aaron Dobbins, who came in midway through last season. He completed 55% of his passes for 567 yards with four touchdown passes and four interceptions. He made his starting varsity debut against Hibriten on October 19.

South Caldwell was a narrow favorite to win the NW3A/4A title this season. The Spartans, led by Butch Carter, the dean of coaches in the NW3A/4A (13th year), have won the last two conference championships. And South Caldwell also features the best running back in the conference, rising senior Zac Pollard, who ran for nearly 3,000 yards last season. Pollard was named to the Class 4A NCPreps.com preseason all-state team.

Hibriten, which returns 17 starters, was picked to finish second and Freedom, which moves over from the Souther Mountain Athletic 2A/3A Conference, was picked to finish third. The Patriots, led by current Hickory coach Mike Helms, made it to the Class 3A Western Regional finals before they lost to Concord, 27-20. And Blair Hardin, who led Indian Trail-Porter Ridge to the state finals the last three years, takes over at Freedom this fall.

Hickory has been picked to finish fourth. One big change in the NW3A/4A this season will be the absence of Alexander Central. The Cougars, led by second-year coach Nick Bazzle, thanks to realignment, will join the newly-formed North Piedmont 3A/4A Conference this fall.

Ironically, the Pioneers will open the season at home against Alexander Central in a non-conference game on Friday, August 23.

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NORTHWESTERN 3A/4A CONFERENCE PRESEASON POLL

- 1.) SOUTH CALDWELL
- 2.) HIBRITEN
- 3.) FREEDOM
- 4.) HICKORY
- 5.) PATTON
- 6.) FRED T. FOARD
- 7.) WATAUGA**
- 8.) St. Stephens

NCPREPS.COM PRESEASON STATE RANKINGS

1A CLASS

1. Tarboro
2. Murphy
3. Albemarle
4. James Kenan
5. Wallace-Rose Hill
6. Starmount
7. Plymouth
8. Swain County
9. Mount Airy
10. West Montgomery
11. Manteo
12. Robbinsville
13. Louisburg
14. East Surry
15. Northampton
16. South Stanly
17. Riverside-Martin
18. Bishop McGuinness
19. Lakewood
20. Elkin

2A CLASS

1. East Lincoln
2. Southwest Onslow
3. Shelby
4. Reidsville

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5. Carrboro
6. Northside-Jacksonville
7. Northeastern
8. High Point Andrews
9. Kinston
10. Thomasville
11. South Columbus
12. Hendersonville
13. Salisbury
14. Madison
15. Newton-Conover
16. Holmes
17. Franklin
18. Monroe
19. East Bladen
20. Wilkes Central

3A CLASS

1. Havelock
2. Northern Guilford
3. South Point
4. Crest
5. West Rowan
6. Douglas Byrd
7. Statesville
8. Burns
9. Erwin
10. A.C. Reynolds
11. Cleveland
12. South Iredell
13. Cardinal Gibbons
14. Central Cabarrus
15. Western Alamance
16. Southern Nash
17. Concord
18. Southern Durham
19. Sun Valley
20. Jacksonville

4A CLASS

1. Mallard Creek
2. Butler

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3. New Bern
4. Scotland County
5. Richmond County
6. Jack Britt
7. Garner
8. Porter Ridge
9. Independence
10. Charlotte Catholic
11. Leesville Road
12. North Davidson
13. East Forsyth
14. Hillside
15. Hough
16. Mount Tabor
17. New Hanover
18. Middle Creek
19. Dudley
20. Hoggard