

## Mustang football looks to build on 2022 success

By: Deven Whitfield • Perry County Times • August 17, 2023

One year ago, the West Perry football team took the Mid Penn by storm, becoming the feel-good story across the Midstate.

A mere six years after a program worst 26-game losing streak, the Bob Boden-led Mustangs dominated all but two opponents on their way to a record breaking 11-2 season that ended with silver medals in the District III championship game.

Although the Mustangs will be tasked with replacing some crucial starters from last season, there are discussions of greatness occurring within the returners.

For good reason, too.

Starting at the top, West Perry returns two of its most dynamic players of all-time in quarterback Marcus Quaker and his top receiving target, Ian Goodling. Both players will be entering their fourth year as starters and are poised to grab headlines.

Quaker, a dual-threat QB who can beat opponents with his arm or his legs, needs just 678 yards to become the record holder in career passing yards and already ranks ninth in career rushing yards (the most ever by a full-time quarterback).

Goodling, meanwhile, enters the season with his name beside 12 school records, not just for catching the ball but also as the team's kicker. Goodling has connected on 103 of his 107 extra point attempts in his career and is one of the most reliable kickers in the conference.

Beyond those two, West Perry certainly has its fair share of questions, but there are several answers ready to set up to the plate.

At tailback, junior Brad Hockenberry will take over as the workhorse. Hockenberry's 125 rushing yards and three touchdowns in the District semifinals after

both Trent Herrera and Derek Snook suffered injuries offered a brief glimpse into the strong but quick running back's potential.

Caleb Gutshall, a converted lineman, will likely get the nod at fullback but juniors Noland Rathfon, Jenson Hockenberry-Folk, and Grady Reisinger are also pushing for first team reps.

At receiver, no player other than Goodling enters the year with more than 72 career receiving yards. For Quaker to have the season he's capable of, other key players will need to step up as Goodling receives extra attention from defenses.

Bryce Smith, a senior who has started off-and-on at defensive back his first three years, now becomes a key offensive weapon. Other players like Cody Erno, T.J. Hoffman and backup quarterback Cole Brown will be targets in the passing game.

On the offensive line, despite losing two key starters and Gutshall's move to fullback, the Mustangs' will return junior Quade Boden and senior Kaleb Cordell from last year's squad.

Coach Boden, a lineman himself, mentioned several other players but also voiced concerns over depth. He noted that, currently, Conner Fleisher, Foster Meek and Nick Oerman seem to be penciled in with the first team. Beyond that, "depth is certainly a concern, and it's where my job is important: getting the younger guys up to speed and ready to play when needed," Boden said.

Most of those guys – along with Rathfon and Gutshall – will also play on the defensive line.

On defense, the strength of Boden-led teams has always seemed to be quick, strong and sure-tackling linebackers.

Goodling (a team-best 76 tackles last year) and Hockenberry (69 tackles) return as starters. Hockenberry-Folk, who continually moved his way up the depth chart last year, will also be a starter while Boden also mentioned, “we moved Cordell to linebacker late last year and then Erno is going to be our ‘Swiss Army knife’; he’s played a lot of DB, but is also working with the linebackers and can kind of play anywhere. Plus, Grady Reisinger is another quick kid that is adding depth at outside backer.”

If Erno is not a starting in the secondary, it’s likely that Brown will control the safety position while some combination of Smith, Quaker, Hoffman and Blaine Puchalsky will claim cornerback positions.

Boden also said, “There’s quite a few guys that we’ll need to step up this year. There’s a lot of guys that got some time last year as backups. It’s high school football and we’re always going to be a lot of replacing each year.”

West Perry will open its season in pursuit of the second annual Perry County Championship by hosting Susquenita at the refurbished West Perry Stadium on Aug. 25 then traveling to Newport on Sept. 1. Juniata (Sept. 8) and James Buchanan (Sept. 22) are the Mustangs’ other non-league opponents.

In the Capital division, West Perry will certainly need to knock off defending District champions Trinity (Sept. 15) and Steel-High (Oct. 27) to have any shot at the program’s first league title since 1991, but Boiling Springs, Big Spring, Camp Hill and Middletown (returning from its one-year self-imposed suspension) will all have a say in the final outcome.