

Pigskin Preview: 15-5A coaches offer insights into 2006 season

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From left, the football coaches from The Woodlands (Mark Schmid), Lufkin (John Outlaw), Conroe (Roger Holtkamp), Oak Ridge (Bob Barrett), Magnolia (Ron Lynch) and College Park (Richard Carson) get together after the Conroe Lions Club's Pigskin Preview.

Football season is officially here.

The 31st Annual Buddy Moorhead 15-5A Pigskin Preview, sponsored by the Conroe Noon Lions Club, brought together the six varsity football coaches from the district on Wednesday at the Lone Star Convention Center.

Once again, there was plenty of information and misinformation, as the coaches from Conroe, The Woodlands, Oak Ridge, College Park, Magnolia and Lufkin patted their brethren on the backs, traded a few barbs and gave a little insight into offseason workouts and goals for the upcoming season.

"Sic'em Tigers," boomed Conroe High School graduate and Tiger head coach Roger Holtkamp. "It a fun time of the year. Kids are running around everywhere on our campus. Everyone, including the band and drill team, are working hard. I'm proud

to be the Conroe High School coach. There's a lot of tradition."

Holtkamp, whose Tigers are coming off back-to-back 5-5 marks, will look to lead his squad into the playoffs this season in the new six-team league, with four of the squads making the playoffs.

"We feel like it's our time," said Holtkamp. "We'll be really disappointed if we don't go to the playoffs. We want to be there and we're ready to go."

Conroe welcomes John McClean as its defensive coordinator. McClean, the former Oak Ridge head coach, was Holtkamp's defensive coordinator on the War Eagles' state semifinal team.

"We have some great coaches at Conroe," said Holtkamp.

Holtkamp welcomes back 50 seniors.

"We will have about 75 on varsity," said Holtkamp. "That's way up from where it's been at Conroe. We're excited about the numbers. It makes a difference. We're excited about the hard work the kids are putting in. We have 320 kids who have signed up for football."

Some of Conroe's top returners include 6-foot-6, 260-pound tight end Byron Mitchell and defensive back Ryan Thornton, who are both among the top 300 recruits in the state. Sophomore Lou Greenwood is a top newcomer, who Holtkamp praised for his leadership skills and his character.

The Woodlands head coach Mark Schmid, who played for the Highlanders in the late 1970s, was the opening speaker and praised the hard work of all the Highlander support groups.

"When I go to work in the morning the band is in the parking lot and the drill team is working out and the cheerleaders are painting signs," he said. "You can feel the electricity."

Schmid said the Highlanders have been working hard this summer.

"We've had 300 kids in our summer strength and conditioning program," he said. "They've been lifting and running and have made themselves and us better. We also had six 7-on-7 teams. We're very blessed to have the type of kids we have at The Woodlands. They're willing to sacrifice a good deal of their summer to make us successful."

Schmid said the Highlanders have 64 seniors, including 26 returning lettermen and return nine starters on defense and five on offense.

"We're very optimistic about what's going to happen this season," he said.

The entire secondary returns for TWHS, including Texas Tech early commit Taylor Charbonnet, Tyler Skaufel, Chris Lake and Zach Carpenter. Also, linebackers Raymond Cleboski, Kyle Bouthilet and Jake Beller are back, as well as linemen Matt Hinton and Herman Watson.

"Our defense (led by coordinator Paul Parsons) is going to be a big part of what happens with the Highlanders this season," said Schmid.

Offensively, quarterback Brett Parsons is back (son of the defensive coordinator). Parsons threw for 1,100 yards in 11 games last season. One of his favorite targets and also a teammate on the national champion Highlander baseball team is receiver Taylor Grote.

"They didn't go through spring training with us (playing baseball), but the experience they gained last year playing for us will carry over," said Schmid.

Schmid added that Ryan Costello is a returner who will lead the offensive line, with tight end Colton McKey, an early commitment to Purdue University, also a key returner.

The Highlanders open the season in the Texas Classic at the Alamodome in San Antonio against perennial state power Smithson Valley on Fox Sports Southwest and will also play Lufkin, on national TV, Oct. 26 on ESPN2.

"The kids are excited about the opportunity," he said.

Oak Ridge High School second-year head coach Bob Barrett is optimistic about his sophomore season.

"We were 1-9 last season and that's not where we want to be," he said. "The kids have great attitudes. They've been working their tails off. Going into the season our goal is to have a winning record. That would be a big accomplishment. The second goal is to make the playoffs. It will be a challenge with the tough teams in the district, but we're accepting the challenge."

Barrett said the War Eagles have been working hard in the offseason.

"Seventy-five percent of our kids have attended over 90 percent of the summer workout days," he said. "We have two kids who squat over 550 pounds, a school record. We also have a kid who bench presses 380 pounds and he weighs 190. We have two who power clean 300 pounds and that's No. 2 and No. 3 all-time in school history. We're proud of what the kids are doing. We have 32 seniors and they came up to me after summer workouts and asked if we could practice. I told them the coaches can't lead it because of UIL rules and they asked if they could hold one on their own. They called all the kids in our program and they came and worked out."

Oak Ridge returns eight on offense and seven on defense.

"We're much more experienced," he said. "We're a little thin in numbers, but if we stay healthy we can compete."

Magnolia first-year head coach Ron Lynch, who resurrected programs at Deer Park, Alvin and Westfield, taking Westfield to the state semifinals a few years after he came in following an 0-10 campaign, is excited about being a Bulldog.

"Lufkin is No. 1 the state and The Woodlands is No. 4," Lynch said. "Magnolia is No. 206. We have nowhere to go but up. We inherited a program that is 3-27 the last three years. That's fine. Deer Park only had two winning seasons in the previous 32 years and we went to the playoffs nine times in 12 years. At Alvin they hadn't won a district title in 36 years and we won one the first year we were there. This ain't our first rodeo. We've been there. We know the things we have to do. The kids have a great attitude. Despite what people think, we do have great athletes at Magnolia. We're not going to back down from anyone."

As he did in turning the program around at Westfield, Lynch is looking throughout the school for football players.

"Our starting safety is a 4-handicap golfer and has never played football," said Lynch, whose team returns three offensive and two defensive players from last season's 2-8 squad. "Another safety is off the basketball team. Our starting defensive tackle was on the powerlifting team and has never played. We moved the weights over from the high school to the middle school and the players had a hard time lifting the bars. The coaches did all the work. We're not very strong, but we have strong coaches. They're really 'swoll' as the kids say."

College Park head coach Richard Carson is excited about the program's first varsity season.

"I was on board for a full year before the school existed," he said. "It's like Thanksgiving here. Every time I've come to one of these luncheons, the other coaches have sat at one table and I've had to sit at the other table, like the kids table. This year I get to sit with them at the adult table."

"We have no returning starters on offense or defense, but we are undefeated in the history of the school. We're excited about what lies ahead. Last year we had kids who were from five states and from nine different schools. This year we have 25 seniors. I'm proud of that group. Most of them had the opportunity to choose where they would play and they chose us."

Carson is eyeing a playoff spot in the school's first season. The last time CISD had a new school, Caney Creek, the Panthers won district in their first season under Greg Poole.

"They're taking four teams to the playoffs," he said. "We want to be one of those four. All the coaches come from good programs and have all won before. It's all we know. We know people look at us like we're an expansion team, but we're not accepting mediocrity. I don't know how many games we'll win, but we'll show up every Friday or Saturday and put out a great effort."

Lufkin head coach John Outlaw, whose team returns nine on offense and six on defense from a 14-1 state semifinalist, was humble in talking about his top-ranked team.

"We're probably not as good as Dave Campbell's Texas Football magazine thinks we are," he said. "We do have athletes, yes. We have some good football players. If they get a lick of coaching, we have a chance."

Outlaw said he appreciated the rest of the district accepting his program despite the fact that its over a two-hour drive to play the Panthers and no more than 20 minutes for other teams in the league to play each other.

Outlaw said he's familiar with new Magnolia coach Lynch, whose Westfield team his Panther squad faced in the state semifinals a few years back.

"It took overtime to decide that game," he said.