

Meeker, Beckman give Prairie big boost

Written by Jim Ecker

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Bryce Meeker has been a big boy for a long time.

He weighed 260 pounds when he began playing varsity football at Cedar Rapids Prairie as a precocious freshman in 2011, battling older guys and more than holding his own.

He's gained 10 or 15 pounds every year and is now an imposing physical specimen at 300 pounds, ready for his final campaign with the Hawks and a spot with the Iowa State Cyclones next year.

"I'm feeling good. I'm feeling really good," he said this week at practice.

"I'm just taking everything in. Going out and proving something," he said. "Not taking any reps off, not trying to be a kid who commits and then takes a season off.

"I want to go out and prove something. We're still a family and a team out here. Just trying to do everything I can."

Meeker, a stellar offensive lineman, was highly recruited before casting his lot with Iowa State, but that did not stop him from making the rounds of other Big Ten camps this summer in an effort to get better.

Meeker attended elite camps at Iowa and Nebraska, even though he had committed to ISU and the other schools knew it. He simply wanted more instruction from some of the best coaching staffs in the country.

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He also went to Iowa State's camp.

"Getting coaching from Coach Ferentz, Coach Pelini, Coach Rhoads. Everybody," he said. "I'm taking everything in this year. It's senior year. I'm just trying to get better."



The Hawks finished with a 5-5 record last season and reached the Class 4A playoffs, but they had some near-misses along the way with losses to Kennedy (28-24), Iowa City West (21-14) and Washington (21-14).

"We were so close," said quarterback Trey Beckman, who has committed to play baseball at Nebraska. "That's why this year we're not looking to be mediocre. We're looking to get over the hump and win those games."

"We're looking to make the playoffs and do some damage in the playoffs. We want that sense of pride back. We really want to make something out of this season."

Beckman gained experience with the varsity as a sophomore in 2012 as the No. 2 quarterback behind Jace Hanna. He passed for 1,150 yards and nine touchdowns last season and also ran for 354 yards and seven TDs.

Prairie Coach Mike Morrissey thinks Beckman is poised for a highly productive campaign as a senior.

"As far as our offense is concerned, I think he's got it down pat," said Morrissey. "He's gotten to

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that point where Jace Hanna was two years ago.

"He knows where guys are supposed to be, he knows where to get guys lined up. He understands all the responsibilities across the board. To have an experienced kid like that coming back is a major plus for us.

"I think his confidence is high," said Morrissey. "He's a better passer from what he was as far as understanding the concepts and the schemes and knowing where to put the ball. I think he's more comfortable with that now than he ever has been."

The Hawks have to replace bull-nosed tailback Mitch Christensen, who rushed for 1,174 yards and nine touchdowns last season. Morrissey thinks Keagan Pinter is ready to play a bigger role after running for 346 yards and four TDs as a junior.

Morrissey mentioned Jalen Rima, Connor Grade, Coen Brown and JoJo Simpson as some of the skill players who could help the Hawks on offense this season. Simpson is also a quality defensive end who is being recruited by Northern Iowa, Upper Iowa and other schools.

"Even though JoJo weighs 250, he still has the softest hands on our team," the coach said. "He's pretty incredible with the skill set that he has.

"He's rare, because you never get a kid who's that big and that fast. He's pretty special. A lot of people are high on him."

Ben Boldt, a talented linebacker, led the Hawks with 100 tackles in 10 games last year and is back for his senior campaign.

Prairie hosts Linn-Mar in the season-opener on Friday, Aug. 29.

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2014 SCHEDULE

Friday, Aug. 29 - Linn-Mar

Friday, Sept. 5 - at Jefferson

Friday, Sept. 12 - at Dubuque Senior

Friday, Sept. 19 - North Scott

* Friday, Sept. 26 - at Burlington

* Thursday, Oct. 2 - at Iowa City High

* Friday, Oct. 10 - Washington

* Friday, Oct. 17 - at Muscatine

* Friday, Oct. 24 - Ottumwa

* Class 4A District Games

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