

Betsworth says Huskies headed in right direction

Written by Jim Ecker

Thursday, 16 August 2012 22:45 -

Ed Betsworth got excited a few weeks ago when a family from Wisconsin, pondering a possible move to Iowa, visited Cedar Valley Christian School to see if they might want to enroll their son in the private academy in Cedar Rapids.

Their son stood 6-foot-7 and weighed 230 pounds. Alas, nothing has come of it. Not yet, anyway.

"That would have been a nice addition," said Betsworth, who is the football coach for the fledgling 8-man team at Cedar Valley Christian.

The Huskies were supposed to have played a "Week Zero" game against Gilbertville Don Bosco Thursday night, but that was cancelled because too many of Cedar Valley's players were still on vacation and not available.

Instead, the Huskies held a normal practice at St. Joseph's School in Marion to get ready for their new opener at HLV of Victor next Friday night.

There were only nine players at practice Thursday and one of them is ineligible this season due to IHSA transfer rules. That would have left only eight players, the bare minimum for an 8-man game, and school officials decided it was too risky to face Don Bosco with a skeleton crew.

Betsworth anticipates having 14 eligible players on the team this season once everyone assembles.

"What hit us was the vacations," he said. "That was kind of a surprise to us, because we had warned them since February that we're going to play this other game (against Don Bosco). We're starting practice July 30th and your kids have to be there."

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The message apparently did not sink in. "That put us in jeopardy," he said.

Cedar Valley Christian put its new 8-man football program together last year and played four games to get started. The Huskies lost all four games by healthy margins, but Betsworth said they improved as the season went along and scored more points.

The Huskies listed 15 players on their roster in 2011. Betsworth was hoping for more players this year, but the number stayed about the same.

"Twenty would be a great situation," he said. "That would be really great."

Betsworth is looking and planning ahead. He began a feeder system this season and has 17 players in the 5th-6th grade program and 15 players in the 7th-8th grade program. Cedar Valley is sharing that youth program with Isaac Newton Christian Academy and Trinity Lutheran School, which are both K through 8 schools. If those kids want to play high school football at Cedar Valley, they'll have to enroll.

Nonetheless, those younger kids in the Cedar Valley school system are being taught to play the game before they get to high school. "It's baby steps," Betsworth said. "At least I've got the ball rolling where I want to go."

Only six players from last year's team reported for duty this season, several less than expected.

"I just don't think they had fun last year and we didn't win any games. I think that discouraged them," said Mike Nugent, a senior.

The six players who did return are excited and looking forward to the new campaign. "It's definitely a lot different than last year," Nugent said. "I think the morale has gotten a lot better with the team."

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"In the beginning, we were kind of walking around, sluggishly doing things. Now we actually feel like a team."

Nugent, who plans to enter the Army Reserves after high school, had a simple reason for returning to the team this year. "I like to hit people," he said with a smile.

The Huskies practiced for 90 minutes Thursday night, then stayed another 30 minutes for extra conditioning and weight training at the field.

"Everybody who is here looks like they want to play," said Spencer Zielke, a senior who played last year. "We've got enough and they've got the right attitude. We'll have a good time.

"Once you push through that fear of getting hit and all that, it's really fun. I'm here to have fun and play hard. And I think it's a good sport."

A new student just arrived from Africa and has joined the team. He practiced Thursday and seemed to be enjoying himself.

"His name is Danny. Don't ask me his last name," Betsworth said, not sure of the spelling. "He just came in this last week from the Congo."

Another family, which home-schools its children, has a 10th grader and an 8th grader that plan to join the football program. Now the Huskies need that 6-foot-7, 230-pound kid from Wisconsin to show up, too.

Overall, Betsworth thinks the program is headed in the right direction.

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"It's coming along a little bit better," he said. "The kids have been working hard.

"It's going to take awhile. It's going to be about a five or six-year plan before we're out there and we can hold our own against these other guys."

Meanwhile, their first game in a nine-week season is just a week away.

"I can't really predict how we're going to do in the first game, but we're going to make a game of it," Betsworth said.

SCHEDULE

Aug. 24 - at HLV, 7 pm

Aug. 31 - Valley, 7 pm

Sept. 7 - at Springville, 7 pm

Sept. 14 - at West Central, 7 pm

Sept. 21 - Lansing Kee, 7 pm

Sept. 28 - Midland, 7 pm

Oct. 5 - at Central City, 7 pm

Oct. 12 - Elkader Central, 7 pm

Oct. 19 - Preston, 7 pm