Young Swedes will battle opponents with speed, tenacity

The Gothenburg football team will hit the field with a new look this fall.

The uniforms are the same and the coaching staff hasn't changed but the Swedes will be unmistakably different.

"We are noticeably smaller," said Gothenburg coach Craig Haake.

Only 10 of the 50 players tip the scales over 200 pounds. Three of those 10 are returning letter winners.

But in this game where size often matters, Haake is confident his undersized squad won't play small.

"We relied heavily on our line last year," Haake said. "We don't have that size and experience coming back up front so we're going to take advantage of our speed."

The coach said he may have the fewest returning letter winners over the past decade but he doesn't question their athletic ability and talent.

"We're going to have a very strong backfield all the way around," he said. "We definitely have the capability to make some big plays that will hopefully wind up in the end zone."

All-district linebacker Logan Sheets, a senior, will lead the way for the Swedes. He finished his junior season with 79 tackles and 610 yards rushing on 117 carries.

“Logan is our most experienced player and he is showing a lot of leadership this fall,” Haake said.

GHS FOOTBALL

Aug. 24—at Ogallala, 7 p.m. MT
Aug. 31—at Mitchell, 6:30 p.m. MT
Sept. 7—BROKEN BOW, 7 p.m.
Sept. 21—at Minden, 7 p.m.
Sept. 28—CUZAD, 7 p.m.
Oct. 5—at Chase County, 6:30 p.m. MT
Oct. 12—ORD, 7 p.m.
Oct. 18—KEARNEY CATHOLIC, 7 p.m.

Junior Trent Long joins Sheets as a team leader on both sides of the ball.

Long ended his sophomore season with 43 total tackles as an all-district defensive back.

“He might also be the best kicker in the state,” Haake said. “I believe we’re in field goal range anywhere inside the 35 yard line. We’re planning to take advantage of that.”

Blake Ristine will be at the helm as the Swede quarterback, returning with some varsity experience.

“Blake is one of those kids who can make a play with his legs or his arm,” Haake said.

With only 18 upperclassmen on the team, Haake said there’s plenty of opportunity for younger players.

“We’re very young,” he said. “It will definitely be a level up for most of these kids but every year we have to put kids in a new role, a bigger role.”

So far, he said, they're embracing their responsibilities.

"The expectations of Gothenburg football haven't changed," the coach said. "We're still a hard-nosed football team that's built to run the ball. We stress going hard every second and finishing every play."

The Swedes will face a daunting opponent at Ogallala to open the season on Friday.

The Indians finished 2011 with a 9-1 record in the second round of the state playoffs, losing in four overtimes to the Swedes.

Ogallala garnered a No. 9 state pre-season ranking in Class C-1 by the Omaha World-Herald.

Gothenburg also faces stout opponents in a re-arranged C1-9 district that includes Chase County, Cozad, Minden and Kearney Catholic, which moves up from C-2 this year.

"I know Cozad thinks they'll be really good this year," Haake said. "Kearney Catholic is the returning state runner-up from C-2 last year and Minden was in the state semi-finals. It's a tough schedule with some long trips but there's nothing we can do about that."

Friday's game at Ogallala is set to begin at 7 p.m. MT.

Members of the 2012 Gothenburg football team are (*denotes letter winners):

Seniors—Eric Cole, Preston Franzen*, Dalton Goodwin*, Garett James*, Logan Koehler*, Jake Matthies*, Chase Ostergard, Logan Sheets*, Noah Tripp*.

Juniors— Chase Dachtler, Skyler Kottwitz*, Trent Long*, Terrance Murdock, Tyson Miller, Ross Ostendorf, Jake Peterson, Pete Peterson, Blake Ristine*, Colby Simants, Roy Slack*, Adam Speck*.

Sophomores—Mason Ackerman, Tyler Baker, Tanner Borchardt*, Jacob Clark, Dylan Folkers, Jordan Lauer, Justin Sabin, Connor Schwanz, Dalton Sylvan, Levi Tripp, Zach Wolf*.

FRESHMEN—Ethan Bihlmaier, Ziek Brian, Dade Brock, Braeden Brundage, Matthew Bruntz, Herschel Foster, Marcus Fritton, Alex Jorgenson, Zac Kolbo, Drake Langley, Riley Ostendorf, Patrick Messersmith, Jayden Miller, Tyler Miller, Ryan Rehbach, Caleb Rice, Chad Schmiett, Skyler Schwanz, Steven Wittrock.