

Far from an ordinary football team

Written by Deb Egenberger

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Swedes hope to leave opponents in the dust.

When Gothenburg football coach Craig Haake sends his offense onto the field Friday night, fans had better be watching closely. Things will happen fast.

Of the first-string Swedes in the skilled positions, the slowest 40-yard dash time is 4.74 seconds.

“That’s smokin’,” Haake says.

Players have become progressively faster over the past two or three years.

A summer weight room program that allows lifters to track their progress is getting much of the praise.

“Of course it helps that we started with great stock,” the coach says.

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Haake calls this year's squad the fastest he's ever coached.

"We're going to have the capability to score with a number of people from a long ways away," he said.

That is true on the ground as well as for the passing game.

"I suspect we may see a few big plays," Haake said.

And because of the team speed, opponents won't be able to spread the field like they have attempted in the past.

"I don't see that working against us at all," Haake said.

But at the same time, Haake sees size as a concern for the Swedes against opponents who run right at them.

"Physically, we are not real big," he said.

That means taking advantage of every offensive opportunity, especially early in the game, will be a priority.

Two players with Gothenburg all-time Top 10 positions return to the field.

Senior Landen Haake tied the No. 1 spot last year in interceptions in a season with eight. Haake also earned 1,084 yards rushing as a junior and already has 1,733 career rushing yards for fifth

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in both categories.

“Landen is looking really good,” his coach and dad said.

Nebraska’s two statewide newspapers think so, too. Landen is listed as a Class C-1 player to watch this fall by both the Lincoln Journal Star and the Omaha World-Herald.

Junior Tannor Mroczek, a two-time state track qualifier in the sprints, has the No. 2 all-time spot for punt return average and No. 5 position for kickoff returns.

Surround those two with fellow returning letter winners who are driven to succeed and the coach believes he’s got the recipe for an extraordinary team.

Mark Hilderbrand returns at quarterback, a position where he began earning varsity experience as a freshman.

Derek Franzen, Tre Ostergard, Joel Teahon, Doran Johnson and Brady Preitauer bring a lot of fire to the field.

Haake said it may take a win or two before the team acquires the swagger of confidence but he’s certain it will appear before too long.

Gothenburg opens the season Friday night at home against Wood River.

The Swedes defeated the Eagles on the road last year 25-7 but Wood River finished the campaign with a 6-3 record and a Class C-1 playoff berth.

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“I expect them to be improved,” Haake said.

Minden will be the other non-district opponent that the coach predicts will be a challenge.

“They are loaded,” Haake said. “They are huge and they’re going to be that team that powers at us.”

The Swedes play at Minden on Sept. 18 in the final game of the non-district schedule.

Ainsworth, Broken Bow, Cozad and Valentine are Gothenburg’s District 9 opponents.

Haake anticipates Broken Bow will be the toughest battle with Valentine close behind.

“I really think we’ll be right there in the mix,” he said.

Following a 9-2 season that took the Swedes deep into the playoffs will be interesting, he said, but it’s a whole new year.

“Even though we have a lot of kids back, they’re now in new roles—leadership roles,” he said. “They’ve matured mentally and physically and we have some pretty high goals. It will be interesting to see how the season plays out.”

Both the Journal Star and the World-Herald believe Gothenburg is one of Class C-1’s top 10 in the state.

The Journal Star ranks the Swedes No. 8 and predicts the team will win District 9 while the

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World-Herald lists Gothenburg at No. 9.

Members of the 2009 Gothenburg football team are (*denotes letter winners):

Seniors—Levi Bahe*, Tommy France*, Derek Franzen*, Landen Haake*, Mark Hilderbrand*, Doran Johnson*, Austin Kucera, Brady Preitauer*, Patrick Reeves*, Tyler Sheets*, Jeron Siemer*, Scott Speck, Joel Teahon*, Nolan Wilson*.

Juniors— Alex Ballmer, Kyle Demoret, Jack Dudley, Trent Good, Andrew Kennedy, Kyle Kleinknecht, Aaron Lauer, Branndon McMichael*, Dillon McMichael, Tannor Mroczek*, Andrew Ostendorf, Cody Ostergard, Tre Ostergard*, Alex Schultz, Tanner Schwanz, Dane Wilson.

Sophomores— Tyler Aden, Dane Ehlers, Cameron Frazho, Ernie Galvan, Paxton Gruber, Jackson Graham, Patric Jobman, Kerry McPheeters, Dillon Linegar, Jeffery Rodriguez, Jeramie VanAcker, Levi Walker.

FRESHMEN—Kolton Barnes, Tyler Block, Ty Brock, Eric Cole, Aaron Collins, Cody Cooper, Dillon Gartner, Caleb Geiger, Garrett James, Logan Koehler, Kyle Maline, Jake Matthies, Chase Ostergard, Logan Sheets, Ben Tiedeman, Noah Tripp.