

# The line: 'You have to play as a unit and talk to each other'

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in the paper, you have to have a line."

The philosophy comes with a gilt-edged pedigree from the late John Didion, an Oregon State University legend from the 1960s who played six professional seasons in the National Football League. Many Long Beach (Wash.) Peninsula residents knew him from his career in law enforcement, culminating in six years as Pacific County Sheriff.

Didion was a high school running back in California, until his coach needed the next biggest boy to step up to the line. He retained the position at OSU before being drafted by the NFL. At 6-4 and 245 pounds, Didion served under Coach Vince Lombardi in Washington then enjoyed four years as center for the New Orleans Saints.

Didion coached at Naselle High School in the early 1980s, and again at Ilwaco when McNulty started working at the high school.

McNulty smiles as he remembers his high school practices more than 30 years ago. "When the head coach would talk about 'skill positions' — the quarterback, running backs and receivers — John would make a comment about the linemen being the 'skill positions,'" he said. "When John was offensive line coach, the entire team was forced to understand the blocking scheme. At that age, I don't know that I understood everything about what the line did, even though I heard John Didion tell us, I don't know that it resonated."

## 'Pretty solid'

At Ilwaco this season, two experienced returning linemen, senior Michael Aguayo and junior Kaaden Gehrke, have been joined by senior DeAntay Kellogg, junior Daylin Kemmer and sophomore Marcello Lazaro in

forming the line, with junior Kadance Visonhaler stepping in when needed.

Aguayo earned an honorable mention in the All-Pacific League selections last season, and qualified for the academic all-league team for having a 3.7 or higher GPA.

His size has meant he's been a lineman since grade school. "I think we are a pretty solid line," Aguayo said.

Doug Pellerin, a P.E. teacher at Hilltop School, coaches Ilwaco's offensive line.

"The success of most teams revolves around the way the line does its job," he said. "The running backs can't run if there are no holes. The quarterback does not have the time to throw if the line doesn't block. It all revolves around the line."

Pellerin and colleagues teach their linemen different types of blocks and angles of play, as well as reinforcing high school rules on blocking.

The line also has to be savvy to the different styles of defenses they face.

"They have to be 'unsung heroes,'" he said. "They have to take pride that two running backs rushed for 227 yards each last week."

## Satisfying

In Naselle, Cody Kirkman plays center, with fellow senior Ramzi Estes and enthusiastic sophomore Carson Bergeson as guards. Because the Comets play eight-man football, coach Eaton is required to do away with two players who would take the tackle positions in 11-man (and one back).

It means Kirkman must make a good snap then join Estes and Bergeson in blocking effectively to buy time for quarterback Hayden Gudmundsen to pass. To complicate matters, Bergeson enjoys occasionally switching to fullback in an offensive play the Comets call "jumbo." When that happens, defensive stalwart Allyn Bauer

ably fills his lineman position at guard.

For Bauer, the double duty is satisfying. "We feel pretty good just knowing that we are protecting the quarterback and backs most of the time," he said.

For Estes, good communication and keeping your stance low are keys. "You have to play as a unit and talk to each other," he said. "And you have to make sure you make your block."

Kirkman agrees, and says quick feet are important, too. He takes issue with the cliché that backs don't appreciate linemen. That's not true in Naselle, he said. "Once we are in the huddle, they tell us to keep up the good work."

Bergeson and Bauer both said the family atmosphere at Naselle creates camaraderie on the field. "It makes us play as a team," Bergeson said. "We don't snap at each other in the huddle, because once you start arguing you mess up."

Eaton, their coach, knows the importance of the line because he's been there. "If they can't block 'bright and tight,' the defense is going to get through," he said.

Although he has two skilled assistants in Matt Scrabbeck and Pete Riley, Eaton takes special pride in tutoring the linemen himself, teaching nuances of footwork and blocking. "We have a couple of kids from different schools and it takes them a while to get the footwork down," he said.

One key for linemen is not signaling anything to the defense by changing their stance, particularly their hands, in anticipation of either a running or passing play.

Even in the Comets' loss to Sunnyside Christian, the line performed well.

"Naselle has had good lines," Eaton said. "This is a really good one. I am happy about that. Even if we were playing 11-man, I think we would have a good line."

— Patrick Webb

# Seagulls: 'A long time coming'

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setting the pace," Branson said. "We knew he could contend at districts, and at state there was no reason for him not to be up there. He has run better races each week. Each week he's learned more and more about the art of racing."

Rzewnicki went out strong, and was either leading or running with the lead pack right from the start.

"At 1,000 meters, we were in superb position, with Bradley right there with the leaders," Branson said. "And he never fell back. He was always within a meter or two."

"Just after the two-mile mark, he was still right there, running smooth and looking good. And when he got on the track, he was not to be denied. He took off with about 400 meters left. He just pressed it when he got on the track, and worked that sucker. A heck of a kick."

Rounding out the points for Seaside was sophomore Colton Carter (31st, 17:39). Junior Juneau Meyer was 33rd (17:46), and senior Jack Whittle was 89th (19:06).

"The other boys were all in position at the 1,000-meter mark, and they held it," Branson said. "Hunter has some wheels, and he got within sniffing distance of the leaders; Jackson is just plain tough; and Rafi was spent after the race, but he recovered quickly."

"We told Colton and Juneau, 'You're not a fifth and sixth runner,'" Branson said. "They had to push each other and help each other out. And they did."

Watching Rzewnicki, he said, "was amazing. He takes his talents and maximizes it. That's what it's all about."

## Been there, done that

It was pretty much the same group of Seaside boys who won a state championship at the middle school level.

"They're so experienced," Branson said. "From the time Frank (Januik) worked with them as middle school kids, they have the hunger. They're just competitors, and that's a hard thing to coach and teach."



Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian

Seaside's Hunter Thompson runs the course during the 4A boys OSAA Cross Country State Championship.

Whittle, the lone senior, "has done a tremendous job of keeping those boys together. He's the glue that really kept this together, and provided great leadership. To see him be a member of a state championship team, that warms my heart."

## North Coast champs

The Seaside boys are the first from Clatsop County to win a cross country state championship since Carl Dominey's Astoria boys won a state title in 1992.

"A long time coming," Branson said. "This state championship is really a reflection of the district meet, and everybody showing courage. From the kids who had never competed in a 5K, to battling injuries, they all stepped up."

In the Class 4A girls' race, Seaside junior Josie Smith finished 16th out of 108 runners, in 20:42. Freshman teammate

Katie Zagata was 30th in 21:21.

"Josie was 17th her freshman and sophomore year, so she moved up a spot," Branson said. "This is her third year of being all-state, and that doesn't happen a lot."

## Next up, soccer

For Seaside runners Carter, Januik, Meyer, Sibony and Thompson, their fall sports season is not over. They will be on the soccer field Tuesday night, leading the Seaside boys against Junction City in a first round game of the Class 4A state playoffs, in which the Gulls are one of the top title contenders.

"There's just something innate in those boys in whatever they do," Branson said.

Whether it's in the swimming pool, on the track, the soccer pitch or the basketball court, he said, "it's overdrive with those kids, and they're going after it."

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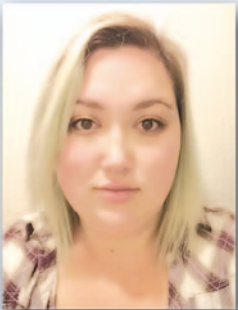
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