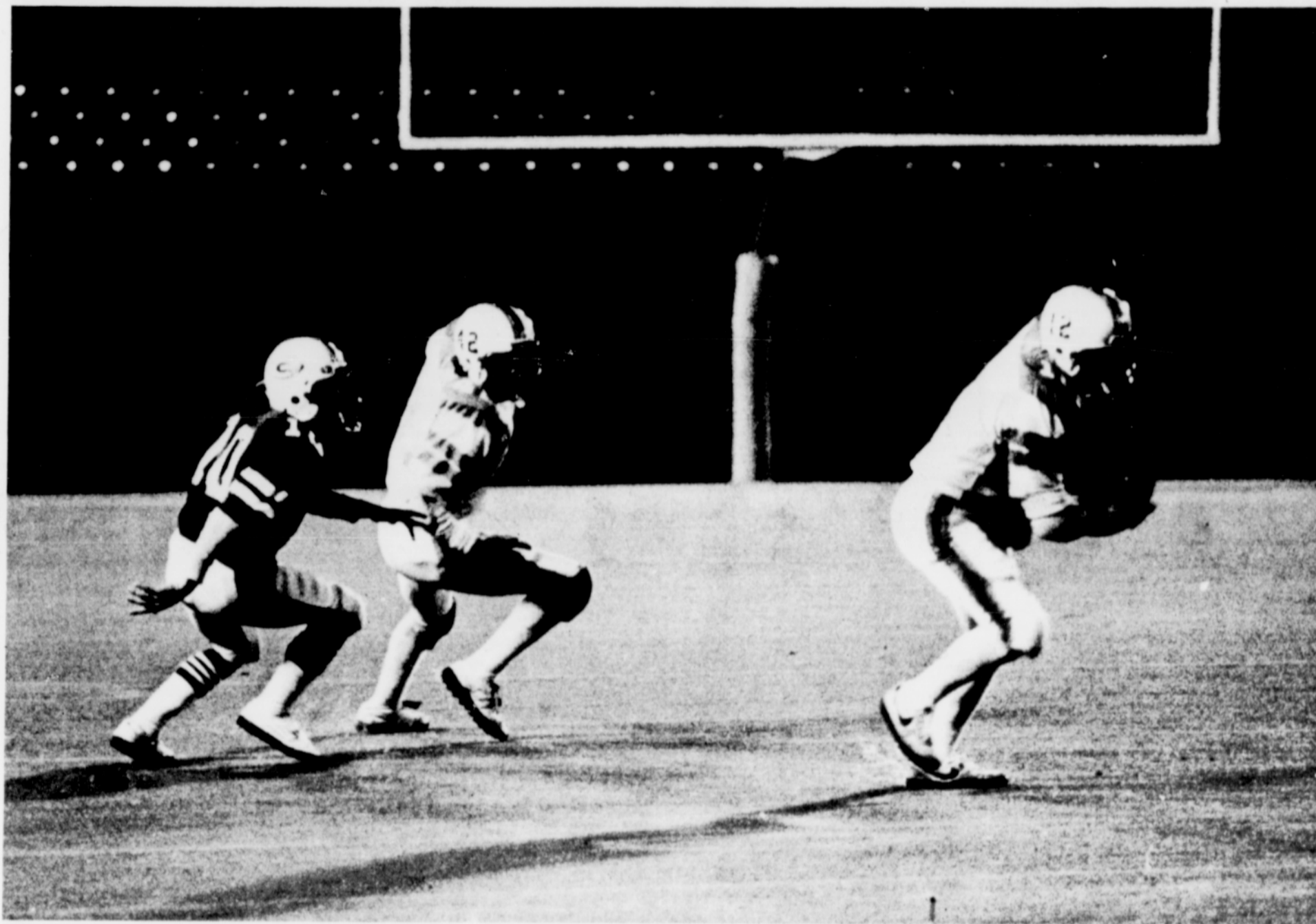


WILCO PREVIEW



If Gresham's quarterbacks can get the ball into the right hands, Gabe Gomez (far left) could provide some excitement this year.

3 Gophers go for Gresham QB job

There is good news and bad news for nine Wilco League football teams this year. The good news is, Gresham, 7-2 in the Wilco League and a state quarterfinalist last year, lost Terry Summerfield, perhaps the best quarterback in the Wilco last year, to graduation.

The bad news is, Gresham coach Dick Flood has three newcomers ready to step in. And he figures all three can get the job done for him.

So anyone who figured the quarterback situation was going to change always-tough Gresham into also-ran Gresham better look for another weak spot. And it may be hard to find.

Juniors Tom Eubanks, backup to Summerfield last season, and Todd Nagel, plus sophomore Mike Palmer all are vying for the vacant signal-caller position. One thing is for sure, they will have to win the job by outskilling, not outsmarting one another. Each is a four-point student.

"All three are intelligent," Flood says. "They're leaders of their classes. That's a neat thing to work with."

If anyone has the edge it might be Eubanks, simply because he already has logged time on the varsity, hence he is somewhat used to the Gresham system. At 6-3 Eubanks is the tallest of the three — also the skinniest. If he wasn't the quarterback, Flood might be tempted to attach notes to his leg and use him to carry in plays from the sidelines.

Nagel spent much of last year hurt on the junior varsity and Palmer, who should also give the Gophers a formidable punter, was on the frosh team.

"As far as playing experience goes, they are limited," Flood says. "I think they're all fine quarterbacks, they just need some time to prove themselves. That's going to take

awhile. All three can throw the ball. It's just a matter of them getting knocked down a couple of times, throwing a few incompletions to see how they respond."

Should they not respond — heaven forbid — they all know the value of the handoff, a valuable commodity, indeed, with a fellow like senior tailback Mike Austin in your backfield. Statistically, Austin is the top returning back in the league and, barring injury, should be up to the task of defending his reputation.

If he isn't — heaven forbid, again — there are plenty of other speedsters ready to give it a try, including Brian Hugg, Rob Schnackenberg, Scott Crook (who will be the Gophers' placekicker), Darren Humphreys (the third Humphreys brother Flood has coached) and Mike Bayer, also a starter in the defensive secondary.

In front of the tailback, Gresham expects Guy Normand to develop into one of the top fullbacks in the league. He already is a second-team all-Wilco linebacker. Brian Kato and Kevin Miller will back up there.

Flood has gradually opened up his wishbone-option-whatever offense over the past three years which has enticed some skilled athletes to try their hands at receiving. "Our receiving group is probably as good as we've had here," Flood says.

Junior Gabe Gomez, one of the best — and, at 5-7, one of the smallest — athletes on the team, is the top returnee at the split end position. Phil Tarleton, with sprinter's speed, and Tom Whipple are two more wide outs. Ed Parks, Steve Belmore and Paul Maddox will play tight end in the Gopher offense.

Graduation took most of the Gresham front line, but luck brought some of it back. Darryl Huffendick returns at quick tackle. On the other side of center Jim Pick will be the large Kirk Voss, who transferred over from Centennial. Flood expects big things from the 6-5 Voss. "He's a pleasant addition," he says. "Austin might not mind running behind him."

Other tackle candidates are Chris Korwin and Rich Hagerly.

Greg Nash and Kirk Wellnitz are returning lettermen at guard. Up from the JV are Pat Baird, Vic Rixe, Steve Mick and Jeff Winters.

The Gophers have more experience on defense. Both corners, Ben Williams and Mike Shiiki, are back. Normand and Marty Coomler will be back at linebacker provided the latter recovers from a vertebrate problem, and Kevin Docken returns at tackle.

Brian Baertlein backed up at nose guard last year. Andre Aker and Pat Williams are penciled in for duty at defensive end, and Mark Water and Dan Smith are primary secondary candidates in addition to Bayer.

Some of what the Gophers lack in experience this year will be made up by their size, both physical and in numbers. Gresham has a 45-member varsity and a 30-member sophomore squad. Plus, "We might have better team size than in the past," Flood says. "Maddox and Voss are 6-5, Eubanks is 6-3, Baird is 6-3 and weighs 190, Hagerly is 6-2 and 205, Mick is 6-2 and 200, Pat Williams is 6-2, 185."

It all adds up to what Flood hopes is another big season for Gresham.

DICK BALTUS