

WILCO PREVIEW

Columbia

(Continued from Page 11)

of them want to play."

While the Charger defense will be carrying a big part of the load in the early season, Clark is hoping his offense can provide a little more punch than last year's team, which scored just 56 points in nine games.

Clark has a fair nucleus on his offensive line. Center Larry Parker is back, along with tackles Don Godier and Robin Rich. The guards are expected to be Greg Hibbs and Frank King.

"In terms of senior leadership, it's a good group," Clark

says.

Jim Chianello is the fifth Charger quarterback in as many seasons. Clark has high hopes for him.

Likewise the team's corps of running backs. In Craig Jenkins, Bobby Lewis and Shepherd, Columbia has experience while Mike Shearer, a sprinter off the Charger track team who logged the fastest 100 meter time in the Wilco League last spring, will try his hand at carrying the football.

The receiving spots are wide open, Clark says, with 10 players battling for the two starting slots. "The competition

is very keen," he says. "I've never seen a group be so competitive."

One thing that is not in Columbia's favor is its schedule. The Chargers face Reynolds, Gresham and Clackamas in the first three weeks. But as the team prepares for its opener Sept. 4 against Reynolds, things are looking up.

Around Chargerville, that's a good place to be.

JIM HAYS

Charger backs

(Continued from Page 11)

tailback, Kevin Pokorny, went down with an injury in preseason. Lewis got his first taste of varsity football.

"It was kind of a bummer," he says. "I really didn't expect to be starting against teams like The Dalles, Gresham and Reynolds. But I gained a lot of experience and that's really helped me this year."

Something else that has carried over for Lewis — as well as the rest of the team — is the lift Columbia gained by winning its last two games. "You look back on that and you really want to keep it going," Lewis says.

Lewis will be trying to keep his starting role against what he calls "the track guys" — Shepherd and Shearer.

Shepherd has already had one big moment in a Charger football uniform. Last year, as a junior, he took the second half kickoff against Barlow and ran it back all the way for a touchdown.

"The hole just opened and I ran through it," he recalls.

It's been a tough competition between the four backs, Shepherd says, because the Chargers feel they have the best team in their five-year history.

"I've never seen anybody work this hard

before at this school," he says, adding that the fact that Columbia's first opponent is Reynolds has nothing to do with it. "Sure people get pumped up for the Reynolds game, but mostly everybody is up because we have a much better team. Our coaches are doing a good job."

Shearer is a newcomer to the Columbia team, but is no stranger to East County track followers. Last spring, he was one of the top sprinters in the Wilco League until a deep muscle pull in his lower leg kept him from running in the district meet.

His speed is expected to be a big asset to the Charger backfield. "I think my speed is helping me out," says Shearer. "But everybody is pretty quick. I think we'll have a pretty good backfield. We've got a lot more quality. We don't have the numbers yet, but the quality of our players is a lot better."

Jenkins was a part-time starter in the Columbia backfield last season as well as being a full-time starter at defensive end. Teammate Shepherd calls him a "bulldozer" and with his size (6-2, 200), there seems little doubt that Jenkins will be the man the Chargers look to for power running.

"We really have a good deal in the backfield this year," Jenkins says. "We're deeper than we've ever been. Last year, when Pokorny was injured, nobody else had ever played tailback in a game before. That won't be the case this year."

Columbia has had some tough breaks in the last two years, but Jenkins feels the Chargers are about to turn the corner.

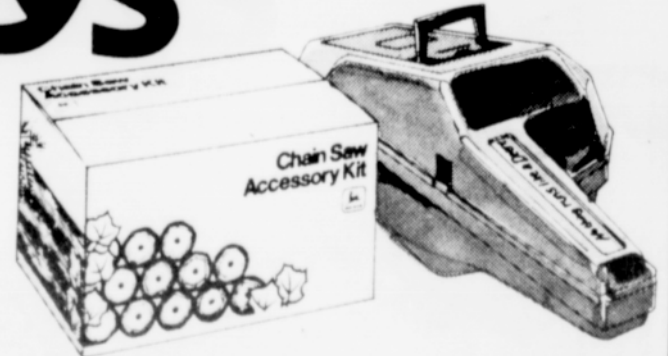
"We got a taste of winning last season," he says. "A 3-6 record isn't that good but it's the best we've ever done at Columbia. I think we can be better than .500 this year."

With Lewis, Jenkins, Shepherd and Shearer, the Chargers may have their best chance yet to reach that level.

JIM HAYS

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