

# WILCO PREVIEW



## A new flight plan Playoffs are on Eagles' minds

Centennial football coach Gary Walls isn't giving up on the 1981 season when he says his team looks pretty good for next year.

It's just that Walls knows the value of experience in his players aren't particularly strong in that department. The Eagles are talented, but largely untested. Of the 35 players out for the squad, only nine are seniors.

"We have a lot of young kids," Walls says. "Right now they're learning everything we do."

Centennial knows about frustration, too. The Eagles were a far better team than their record showed in 1980. The defense gave up just 74 points in nine games but the team finished only 4-5, the first sub-500 season since Walls took over the program in 1977. Among the setbacks were 6-0 losses to both Gresham and Reynolds, a 10-7 setback at the hands of Barlow and a last-second 13-7 loss to Milwaukie that saw the Eagles on the 1-yard line when time ran out.

Now the Eagles are in the position of rebuilding their fortunes. That's not to say Centennial isn't strong in some areas, however. Take the running back situation, for instance. Both 1980 starters, Craig Gilson and Bill Bateman, are back plus the Eagles have Charlie Craig, who was a starter last year until a knee injury knocked him out for the year.

"The situation with our running backs is the best we've had since Mark Watts played for us," Walls says. "Gilson is really a hard runner, a tough fullback-type of kid. Bateman is just a gamer. When the game starts, he's ready to go."

The Eagles aren't hurting at quarterback, either. Mark James and Mark Robison are both in the running for the job. Robison, a senior, served as backup to Scott Kai last season while James, a junior, is also a

capable signal-caller.

"It's really a dogfight between those two," says Walls. "They're fairly equal, so that position will be a strength for us."

At the receiving spots, Ron Popiel figures to be the leading candidate. A senior, Popiel was a key figure on last year's 4-5 team. Mark Brandt was another and should be again. Jason Lehman and Matt Fisher give the Eagles depth at those positions.

Guards Duane Bishop and Brian McDevitt and center Rob Guillory provide the nucleus of returnees in the offensive line. Steve Robards is another candidate for a line position.

Most of the offense will be staying on the field when it relinquishes the ball. Walls says many of his offensive starters will go both ways including one or both quarterbacks.

If Centennial doesn't make the playoffs this year, it won't be entirely inexperience that kept the Eagles out. "The competition this year is much stiffer," Walls says. "The caliber of play in the Wilco League is the best I've seen in five years. Reynolds and Clackamas have probably their best teams this year and although Gresham might not have their best team, they're still going to be very good."

Walls also figures it may take a while for his team to get it together. "We have a lot of young kids who are very enthusiastic," he says. "We have the potential to become a very good football team but it will take us a while to get meshed as a unit. I think we'll start faster next year than this year."

The bottom line for this season is how fast the Eagles can put it together. Experience sometimes makes the difference, but youth must be served.



JIM HAYS Eagle opponents will see a lot of Bill Bateman.



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