

SANDY



The Sandy Pioneers, who went to the state playoffs last season, will be running in a new league this year.

Sandy tests waters of new MHC

One concern in Sandy this fall isn't the prospects of the high school football team so much as it is the continued operation of the school itself.

Keeping the school open depends upon the public's vote on an operating levy Sept. 21.

If the "B" ballot is voted down, the athletic department faces about \$50,000 in cutbacks.

But despite the concern, the football program is gearing up. Coach Greg O'Meara's Pioneers will be shooting at a second straight trip to the state playoffs.

O'Meara lost his entire offensive line from last season to graduation but returning will be the entire defensive secondary, as well as an experienced running back.

The secondary is a close-knit group comprised of Russell Fork, Bill Bowman, Mike Marleau and Gordon Brinser.

"They did a pretty good job last year," says O'Meara. "Experience adds to it. They've got confidence in themselves."

Also returning is senior running back Chuck Kearney (5-11, 202). Kearney rushed for 780 yards on 198 carries last season, tops on the club.

Kearney, who plays tailback and fullback, could be joined by any number of players, including Bill Bowman, Brent Kearney (Chuck's brother), Ryan Coombs or Scott Skipper.

Skipper (6-2, 200) is a three-sport athlete who started at linebacker last season. O'Meara speaks highly of his abilities on both sides of the line.

The running back situation will make for some tough decisions for O'Meara, but they're the kind a coach likes to make.

"They're all working hard and being competitive, trying to get those spots," he says. "It'll end up making the ones who get there that much better."

Senior quarterback Gordon Brinser (6-2, 195) lacks varsity experience, but O'Meara is pleased with his progress. "Gordon, every day, is just getting better and better,"

O'Meara says. "He's throwing better, running the option better. He's a smart kid. He does a heck of a job."

Brinser knows O'Meara likes to be able to mix things up offensively, and is looking forward to the challenge.

"You need some leadership out there, and that's one of the spots you've got to get it from," Brinser said.

One of his targets will most likely be Todd Byron, a 6-foot and 195-pound senior tight end. Byron caught seven passes for 104 yards last season. Mark Tinjum, a wide receiver, is also expected to contribute, along with Steve Contreras and Fork.

The entire offensive line has to be replaced this season, and that includes several all-Timber Valley League first- and second-team players.

Senior Pat Baird (6-4, 200), a transfer from Gresham, and sophomore Bryan Zimmerman (6-3, 195) are among those expected to fill in.

Also expected to contribute will be seniors Joe Betschart (5-10, 175); Terry Lind (6-0, 180); and Marleau (6-0, 170).

On defense, Betschart and Bob Wantowski (5-11, 175) are battling it out for the other starting linebacker position.

"We're not real small but we're not the biggest team around," O'Meara said. "We have good speed. That's got to be a plus for us."

"I feel we're way ahead of last year. Most of the kids have been in the program for three years. A lot of them have been in it and know what's going on."

With the new Mt. Hood Conference to compete in and four first-year coaches in the league, O'Meara isn't sure what to expect from the competition, except that it won't be a cakewalk by any means.

"I don't think there's a team in the league you can take lightly," he said.

SCOTT NEWTON



Senior running back Chuck Kearney is back after rushing for 780 yards last season.