

# NHS hopes weight work will have playoff payoff

Comets gear up for Friday game with Seattle Lutheran

By PATRICK WEBB  
For EO Media Group

NASELLE, Wash. — This week, the Comets' stellar football season reaches the sharp point.

Friday's home contest against Seattle Lutheran is loser-out.

Naselle takes a 7-2 record into the game, which begins the postseason path to the Washington Interscholastic Activities Association 1B state championships.

Comet fans dream of their boys playing for the top trophy in the Tacoma Dome Dec. 4.

But that's a long way away.

Head Coach Jeff Eaton said Naselle will be entering the 7 p.m. game as the underdog.

"They are going to be a good team," he said, as he prepared scouting reports. "It's going to be a really good challenge."

Naselle has been playing eight-man football for two years since dropping into the 1B classification. Three fewer players on the field opens up space for speedy running backs to do their jobs. Thanks to a motivated corps of Comet linemen, senior quarterback Hayden Gudmundsen has been successful getting the ball to junior Jacob Scrabbeck, who has scored 25 touchdowns in nine games. Another running back, Donny Edwards, has found gaps in recent contests, adding to Naselle's point tallies.

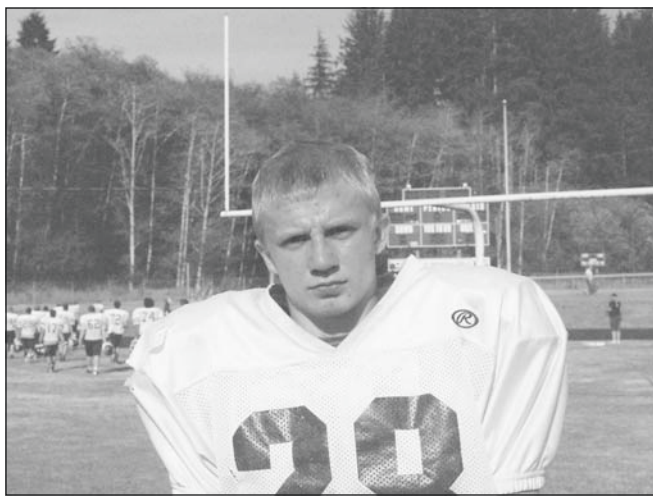
Eaton, who played lineman at Naselle and Western Washington University in his youth, knows exactly where football games are won and lost. He is aware that the Seattle team's linemen are solid, too. "They are stout and they have a fast running back," he said, referring to Brandon Lu-low, a 6-2 Seattle senior, who has caught the coaches' attention around the region.

The Saints also are 7-2, having won 52-12 last Friday against the Washington



Patrick Webb/EO Media Group

Part of the success of Naselle's football program is its strength, a product of the players' year-round work in the high school weight room. Here, lineman Cody Kirkman, left, stands close for safety as defensive leader Allyn Bauer uses the equipment. At right, doing sit-ups is Donny Edwards, watched by D.J. Wirkkala. The Comets host Seattle Lutheran 7 p.m. Friday in the state playoffs.



Patrick Webb/EO Media Group

Sophomore running back Donny Edwards has played a key role in Naselle's success. Head Coach Jeff Eaton said he brought speed to the team as a freshman, but his hard work in the high school weight room has built his strength this season. He has led or tied the tackle count in the last couple of games.

School for the Deaf. Earlier they defeated Naselle rivals Oakville and Mary M. Knight by large margins, and defeated Tulalip Heritage, one of two teams which beat the Comets this season. This Friday's winner will face Clallam Bay or Neah Bay; the latter has been 1B champion three of the past four years.

Naselle's successful runs in the post-season in 2007

and 2008 included first-round wins over the Saints. The Comets advanced to the semi-finals in 2008, and played in the Tacoma Dome. Last year in the district playoffs, the team took a ferry ride to Oak Harbor, Wash., and lost to Lopez. They last played Seattle Lutheran in the regular season in 2009, winning handsomely.

Naselle has won seven games this year, most by sig-



Patrick Webb/EO Media Group  
NHS football Head Coach  
Jeff Eaton

nificant margins, in part because of Scrabbeck's strength and speed.

Eaton's strong sense of fair play has meant once his team is well ahead he doesn't run up the score. Instead, he replaces Gudmundsen at quarterback with a promising freshman, Cole Dorman. The youngster has worked with Assistant Coach Pete Riley to develop his throwing arm, which is already strong from his springtime duties as a baseball pitcher. He's connected often this season with classmate Parker Dalton, a

**'They are going to be a good team ... they are stout and they have a fast running back.'**

— Jeff Eaton  
Head Coach

talented wide receiver, and in the Comets' last game Oct. 30 found another freshman, Jacob Eaton, with a spectacular pass high into the end zone that had the home crowd roaring with admiration.

## Weights help success

Other than the burly linemen, most of Naselle's players are small, but tough. Eaton and the other Naselle coaches attribute much of their success to a year-round weight room. It is especially important for football players who don't play winter bas-

ketball or compete in spring baseball or track.

During the season, Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday practices begin in the cramped concrete room tacked on to the gym.

The sound of metal clanging on metal and the scuff of athletic shoes on the floor is mixed with positive calls of encouragement as the teenage athletes encourage their teammates to stretch themselves.

Assistant Coach Matt Scrabbeck keeps a close safety watch throughout, and signals for them to rotate from bar bells to exercise equipment to weights so they work on different muscle groups.

The three offensive linemen, Cody Kirkman, Ramzi Estes and Carson Bergeson, and defensive leader Allyn Bauer outweigh everyone, and adjust the equipment to give them a maximum workout. But the smaller players exert themselves, too, and a recent session saw Edwards, Erik Lund and D.J. Wirkkala giving it all they had, while encouraging each other.

"We find that the younger kids, especially the freshmen, have not lifted much, if at all," said Eaton. "It helps with their core strength and makes them a little bit stronger — and they see themselves making gains."

The coach cited Edwards, an enthusiastic sophomore, as an example of a player who has benefited.

He joined the team a year ago with speed, but has added strength this season.

"I know it has helped him," said Eaton. "As a freshman, he was a little timid, though he was fast last year. Now he is way more confident tackling and playing defense. He likes to check his tackle count."

The philosophy produces measurable results. In addition to demonstrating his prowess as a running back carrying the ball, Edwards has led or tied the team-high tackle count in the last two games.

"I think it benefits all of them," said Eaton. "They are not going to be bench-pressing 300 pounds, but it helps them get confidence."

The Daily Astorian's Gary Henley contributed to this story

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