

FOOTBALL from page 1B

late July, if not early August.

“One of the Siuslaw traditions has been that we outwork everybody in the offseason, because everybody else is playing baseball or playing basketball. For us, it’s time to get back to football, which allows us to be in better shape and know our systems even better, which we struggled with last year just because there was no offseason.”

Lacking an offseason was an issue for many teams last year, but with Siuslaw’s offseason being such a major part of their program, the team definitely felt the strains of not having that extra time.

“It leveled the playing field in that way, because everybody got the same offseason amount of time, which was two weeks,” said Johnson. “But for us to be able to get to where we want to go, we want to have four months to be able to do that.”

The level of dedication Johnson and all those involved in the Vikings’ football program demonstrate has indeed been a long-standing tradition over the years. It’s a work ethic that was ingrained in the coach by his predecessors, and one that he continuously aims to instill in his players.

“I think it’s a very old school way of doing things, just because that’s what Len Lutero did, and that’s what Tim Dodson did,” said Johnson. “I ran the same systems when I was playing [as I do] now that I’m coaching, and it takes a long time [to learn].”

For example, “We run a split-back veer, and it’s pretty simple to understand for the most part for our kids, but [we need the practice] to get live reps against each other,” he said. “We don’t put our five best kids on the offensive line; we put five kids that have chemistry together who can communicate. So, we try to feel out who we can plug in and where all the way throughout the summer.”

With extra preparation time, the team truly gels. Additionally, the hard work as a unit brings the students closer together, making them better connected as a group.

“More than anything, we want to make sure our kids bond in a brotherhood and [feel like], ‘Hey, I actually love these guys next to me,’” said Johnson. “It’s not just showing up to play football. It’s showing up with their best friends and brothers to accomplish one common goal. Our kids have really bought into that, so that’s been really nice for me.”

This sentiment is echoed by his players, who are quick to acknowledge the fact that having Johnson around after two years of such irregularity within the program has been vital to their success and their bond.

“It means the world to me when they say stuff like that,” Johnson said. “I don’t think I’m the second coming of Jesus Christ in being a football coach, but my best friends my entire life have always been the 40 kids I grew up with, and that’s been one of my main goals [with my players]. Jake Thompson called me the other day, and I’ve talked with all of the kids that I grew up with within the last two weeks, and I want my kids [in the program] to have those kinds of relationships for the rest of their lives with the kids they grew up with.”

This year’s squad will be particularly strong, as over 75 percent of the team is made up of upperclassmen, many of whom were starters last year.

“We have 21 juniors and seniors on our roster right now, which is pretty unique, especially [because we have] basically all the same kids that have started for the last two years,” said Johnson.

The Viks have six team captains this year; all are seniors, several were captains last year and many are multi-athletes. In addition to wide receivers Braydon Thornton and Isaac Garza as captains, the Vikings have Camp Lacouture leading as running back.

Lacouture is a shining example of one of Johnson’s hardest working players, who understands the importance of both the cohesiveness of their unit as well as the effort that must be put in to win.

“It’s going to be a fun year,” Lacouture said. “We have been really blessed to have been able to play football together for as long as I can remember. This year’s seniors have always been a group of athletes that people talked about, but we have nothing to show. The main goal would be [to earn] some sort of accolade for our hard work, and I’m pretty sure we wouldn’t be satisfied with a league title.”

In addition to Lacouture, Garza and Thornton, Johnson has high hopes for his offensive line.

“The two kids that I would say are our strongest and kind of hold down the offensive line for us would be Henry Rankin and Avery Hart,” said Johnson.

Finally, with big shoes to fill, but every capability to handle it, is captain Beau Erickson coming on as quarterback.

“Beau is taking over for Elijah Blankenship at quarterback,” said Johnson. “All summer, he’s kind of torched everybody we’ve played, and I think Elijah taught him a ton of stuff.



So, being able to learn from him for two years, Beau is definitely ready to take the reins of Siuslaw football, which will be really helpful for me.”

One more major goal for Johnson and the team this season will be to requalify for the 4A division after having been bumped down to 3A a couple of years ago.

“We thought we could possibly jump back up to the 4A division after my first year here, and it was just one of those weird things where technically we didn’t have enough wins because the year before I got here, they didn’t win any games,” explained Johnson. “For us to jump up, we would have had to basically win a state championship, so we entered back into a two-year contract with 3A, and this would be year two of that contract.”

The Viks have a very competitive game schedule this season, which aims to accomplish that goal, and the school rivalries promise to be fierce.

“I think we have those rivalries with teams, and we teach our kids not to shy away from those,” admitted

Johnson, “but I genuinely think our kids are really excited for every game.”

Some of those games will start the season.

“We open up the year at home against the top 10 team in the state, South Umpqua, and then we do two back-to-back trips that are four-hour drives to get to our destinations with Brookings and Sisters, and both of those teams are going to be really well-coached,” he said. “They’re not necessarily perennial powerhouses right now, but those two teams are really dangerous to play against just because to travel to Brookings, it’s like you’re playing in the Twilight Zone. So, for our kids to be able to understand that and prepare for that is really important.”

The season will continue with additional travel.

“Then, week four is probably the one I think our kids are looking for-

ward to the most. We’re going to Portland, so it’s the third eight-hour round trip in a row, and we’re playing Gladstone, who’s a top-10 team in the state in any division. They’re going to be big, physical and fast, and they’re the team that I lost to my senior year in the quarterfinals. We know what we’re getting ourselves into; they’re a division above us and they’re I think number three in the state at the 4A level,” said Johnson.

“So, it’ll be a really good matchup, and I think our

kids are looking forward to it, just because it’s that’s the division we want to be in,” he said. “We want to be a 4A school, so we’ll see if we can we match up with the best of the best in 4A, and if we can, we’ll be in good shape. If we can’t, then we’ll have to regroup, and we have a bye week the following week.”

All in all, it promises to be an exciting season for Vikings football.

Siuslaw’s first game of the season is at home on Friday, Sept. 3, against South Umpqua starting at 7 pm.

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