

Bulldogs return with experience in secondary

Hermiston will have three returning starters in defensive backfield

By **MATT ENTRUP**
Staff Writer

When Hermiston senior Vaemu Ena grew two inches between his sophomore and junior seasons, Bulldogs coaches took a look at the 6-foot-2, 175-pound athlete and figured a move up to the defensive line was in order.

That's where he was listed on the team's initial roster, but it wouldn't be where he finished.

With three senior returners already on the line and another junior in front of Ena, the athletic former linebacker was moved to safety, where he quickly made the position his own. By the end of the season he had earned honorable mention all-state and first-team All-Columbia River Conference honors and was one of the defense's most productive players with 40 tackles, five interceptions and a whopping 158 return yards, and three pass break-ups in just eight games.

He's one, but not the only, reason Hermiston coach David Faeteete is hoping the defensive backfield can be one of the team's top units in 2016.

"I think our secondary is going to be pretty tough this year," he said. "We've got a lot of returners back there. I think everybody's back in the secondary."

Well, yes and no.

Junior cornerback Tyler Rohr-



STAFF PHOTO BY MATT ENTRUP

Hermiston's Tyler Rohrman (16) goes up against Tucker Salinas during a drill at a recent football practice at Kennison Field. Rohrman, a junior, is one of three returning starters to the Bulldogs secondary.

man, senior safety Joey Gutierrez and junior cornerback Dayshawn Neal round out the starting unit. Rohrman was a second-team All-CRC corner last season and had 21 tackles and three pass breakups in six games.

Gutierrez is a converted All-CRC second-team linebacker who had 42 tackles, one interception, two pass breakups and one fumble forced as a junior, and Neal started at quarterback last season before an injury ended his season after five games.

That's still a well-seasoned group, and Ena said it feels like the unit is ahead of pace in his second year in the backfield.

"Last year it was my first year at safety and these guys (Rohrman and Gutierrez) were just barely coming up, so I feel a lot better this year," he said. "I feel like we can live up to (Faeteete's expectations) because we have been doing good lately and we have been working hard together."

With Ena and Gutierrez (5-10, 165) giving the unit plenty of pop on the back end while Rohrman



STAFF PHOTO BY MATT ENTRUP

Hermiston safety Vaemu Ena catches the ball during a drill at football practice at Kennison Field. Ena, a senior, was an all-state honorable mention selection last season and is one of three returning starters to the secondary.

(6-0, 170) and Neal (6-1, 170) give the Bulldogs size and speed on the outside.

All of them also start on offense.

But it's not the unit's great measurables that gives it confidence going into the season.

"I think it's going to be solid. We've been working together all summer in camps, playing together in 7-on-7, we just click," Gutierrez said. "It's like a family. We feel each other on the field, so we've kind of got a feeling and we know and rely on each other. If they've got to be there they're going to be there, that's what type of bond we have."

The Bulldogs will face some pretty tough passers in Special District 1 this season. Summit returns 5A Player of the Year John Bledsoe and Redmond brings back second-team All-Intermountain Conference senior Bunker Parrish.

As a team the Bulldogs snagged 10 interceptions in 2015, but Rohrman said they're not going into this season with any type of benchmarks in mind.



STAFF PHOTO BY MATT ENTRUP

Hermiston cornerback Dayshawn Neal, right, presses a wide receiver during a drill during football practice at Kennison Field. Neal, a junior, is the only newcomer to the starting lineup in the Bulldogs secondary this season.

"I don't think we have any specific goals," he said. "We just want to go out there everyday and make things easier for everybody around us, getting the ball back for the offense or whatever we have to do to help the team win."

They'll get their first chance to do that when Union (Washington) comes to Kennison Field to open the season at 7 p.m. on Friday, Sept. 2. It just so turns out, Union was one of those teams the Bulldogs clicked against at the Lakeview 7-on-7 camp.

"We got the look, but I feel like we locked them up a little bit," Neal said.

Rohrman said they expect Union to give them a new look come September, but it was good to at least see how they matched up physically.

While the unit has the potential to be one of the best in their league, none of the players expects it to come easily.

"We've just got to keep working hard, keep grinding together," Neal said. "We'll make mistakes and pick each other up."

IN BRIEF

Colleges scrimmage Thursday at Kennison Field

Hermiston School District will host a football scrimmage between Linfield College and the College of Idaho at 3 p.m. Thursday, August 25, at Kennison Field.

"We are very excited to have the opportunity to provide a venue for two quality football programs to scrimmage," said Mike Kay, executive director of operations for Hermiston School District.

"With former bulldog athletes Dylan Caldwell attending Linfield, and Landon Clark Gammell and Keegan Crafton, at the College of Idaho, it will be great to welcome these former students back to Kennison Field," Kay said.

No admission will be charged to watch the scrimmage.

Fall classes set for dance, gymnastics

Dance classes and gymnastics sessions are available beginning in September, October and November through Hermiston Parks & Recreation.

Participants can register for one or multiple months. Most of the classes take place on Thursdays at the Hermiston Conference Center, 415 S. Highway 395. Sessions are available for different age groups.

The dance classes are \$30 for residents and \$38 for non-residents. The gymnastics sessions range from \$18 to \$24 for residents and \$22.50 to \$30 for non-residents.

For additional details or to register, visit https://apm.activecommunities.com/hermiston/Activity_Search. For more information, call 541-667-5018 or stop by the recreation office, 180 N.E. Second St., Hermiston.

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