

Brighton Bengals 2012 preview

Team plans to ride talented offensive line in difficult Region 3

By James Edward
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There's a saying in football: If you have a good offensive line, you'll have a good football team. That bodes well for the Brighton Bengals in 2012.

Injuries decimated the Bengals' offensive line a season ago, but they plugged those holes throughout the year and still finished in a second-place tie in Region 3. Of the five linemen who started in Brighton's playoff loss to Fremont, all five are back this year.

"We have our whole offensive line coming back. We're excited about that. That will definitely be the strength of our team," said coach Ryan Bullett.

The five linemen who are projected to start at Davis in the first game on Aug. 17 are J. J. Mahe, Nick Giles, Ethan Finlinson, Jackson Barton and Josh Menna. Tyson Aldridge also returns with some experience filling in last year.

Barton was the only player to start all 10 games last year, and the junior is a beast at 6-foot-6, 290 pounds. He's already verbally committed to the University of Utah.

The experienced line has made a big difference for



Seniors **Stephen Young, Tyson Reid** and **Kekoa Kane** lead the Bengals onto the field.

Brighton during summer workouts.

"Right now just by chalk talk, we're so far ahead of where we were a year ago at the same time with the linemen 'cause they've all played. They've all run the offense for a year," said Bullett.

As important as returning experience is, so is leadership, and that's the biggest void on this Brighton

team now.

"We lost a great senior class last year — the best leadership we've had here in a long time. I'm looking for some of these kids who were in the mix last year and played quite a bit to step up and fill some of those leadership roles," said Bullett.

In his time at Brighton as

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Uaea Masina was counted on heavily on both offense and defense for the Bengals.

Brighton at a glance

COACH: Ryan Bullett is entering his seventh year as head coach at Brighton. He's amassed a 25-36 record during that stretch. He's a graduate of Hillcrest High School.

OFFENSE

(3 returning starters)

Brighton doesn't return many players who started early last season, but all five offensive linemen who started in the playoffs are back. That's a great foundation to build on. The experience will help immensely with inexperience at just about every other position but running back. Isaiah Kaufusi will start at receiver, a player the coaching staff is hoping has a solid season in his first year at receiver. At the end of the day, the questions with this team are all about how the offense will do.

DEFENSE

(2 returning starters)

Brighton was a pretty good defensive team last year, but 2012 will definitely be a transition year with an entirely new collection of

linebackers. The secondary will be very good with Uaea Masina and Kaufusi back starting in the secondary, as well the emergence of Alec McArdle at corner. Just a junior, he was outstanding at the Ute Shoot even though teams continued to throw his way. Coach Bullett really likes his hip turn and foot work. JayJay Mahe will help anchor down the defensive line.

COACHES PRESEASON REGION 3

STRAW POLL: Fourth

DESERET NEWS REGION 3

PREDICTION: Fourth

BOTTOM LINE: Brighton was right in the thick of the Region 3 race last year finishing in a three-way tie for second. In the playoffs though, the offense wasn't good enough to keep up with Fremont, and question marks at quarterback make that a concern again this year. Realistically though, the offensive line is one of the most experienced groups in 5A and that should help Brighton be a factor in a very tough region.

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an assistant and head coach, Bullett said leadership is very underrated. Some of his most talented teams didn't make the playoffs, whereas lesser-talented teams with great leadership often went much deeper in the playoffs.

"Some of it is toughness in kids not being afraid to get after their teammates," said Bullett.

That toughness translates onto the field, and Bullett said last year's team was tough, too.

One player in particular the coaching staff is counting on to emerge as a leader this year is Uaea Masina. A star on the offensive and defensive side of the ball, the senior is being recruited as a linebacker by numerous colleges. He'll start at safety for the Bengals though.

"We need to rely on him heavily (at running back too). We can't afford for him to get nicked up. We're not going to let linemen hit on him. We'll keep him out in space and let him use his athletic ability to run stuff down. He's pretty good in the open field," said Bullett.

That athleticism will help offensively as well. With the quarterback position up in the air — and a freshman in the mix to win the job — Brighton will need to rely on Masina's running ability even more early on. A year ago he carried the ball 100 times for 511 yards and six TDs.

He should easily eclipse that total with the experience in front of him.

"We have a lot of big returning linemen, offensively and defensively. They're going to be our foundation for everything," said Masina.

Eventually though, Brighton's run-first mentality will need balance from the passing game. For starters, it might be the only way it can keep up with the juggernaut offenses in Region 3. But secondly, Masina isn't going to have much success running with nine guys in the box either.

"At some point we're going to have to throw the ball a little bit," said Bullett.

With a new quarterback and new receivers, that won't be an easy task.