

Copper Hills Grizzlies 2011 preview

Players are tired of losing seasons and ready for change

By Amy Donaldson
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The Grizzlies do not even try to sugarcoat it. They are tired of losing.

After one win in three seasons, this year's seniors are ready to change the expectations for Copper Hills football.

"We are ready to shock the state," said Daniel Olson, a senior tight end and defensive end. "I'd play any position they need me to, if it means the team wins."

And that willingness to sacrifice for each other is something head coach Kai Kapele has been trying to cultivate since he took over the program three years ago.

"I've just been trying to build the team concept," said head coach Kai Kapele. "I have kids this year that don't like losing and they're willing to do anything to win."

This year's team is led by 10 returning starters, but most importantly by a committed core of seniors. "These kids have been real fun to coach," he said. "They have good attitudes and the difference this year is that the whole team is that way, not just a few kids."

Creating an atmosphere



Copper Hills got big plays from **Tommy Ligman**, who said he needed help from his line.

of success takes time — and nothing helps that more than earning a few wins. This year, Kapele said the team is focusing on working hard for each other.

All of the players are excited about the new region — especially the West Jordan game. But Kapele admits the

Grizzlies need to win those pre-season games in order to build momentum going into a tough region schedule.

"But we'll take it one game at a time and hopefully we'll have some success," he

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ABOVE: Aaron Khan awaits the center snap.

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BELOW: Braxton Pickett fights a defender.

said. "That will build self-esteem to get them going in region play and steal some games."

All of the team's returning players say the energy of the team is different.

"We've got something to prove," said senior wide receiver Zach Smith. "We all want to show up for our school. Last year, it felt more like guys were playing for themselves. We have the heart this year; we're a family."

Senior offensive lineman Braxton Pickett said this year's seniors have waited patiently for their moment to lead.

"Now we're the top dogs," he said. "We want to show our school that we can do this."

Senior running back, linebacker and punter, Tommy Ligman said football teaches young men how to be better human beings because they have to work together in order to achieve any kind of success.

"I can't shine unless he does his job," he said pointing at one of his linemen. "It's a team sport and there is no other sport where you can get injured if people aren't doing their jobs. Everything we (offense) are able to do is because of (the line)."

And while Kapele wants them to learn all of the valuable lessons football teaches — discipline, hard work and team work - he also hopes they experience a level of success Copper Hills hasn't seen in quite a while.

"I want them to have fun, but I want them to believe that they can win," Kapele said.

Grizzlies at a glance

The Grizzlies have won one game in three seasons, so they're looking to change expectations for the program.

Kai Kapele is in his third year as head coach with a 1-18 record.

OFFENSE

(Six returning starters)

With fewer numbers, the Grizzlies success will depend on how well the team can weather the tough defenses in Region 3. A key leader is Tommy Ligman, who did it all for the Grizzlies last year. He is a running back, wide receiver, punter, kick returner and line backer. As a running back, he had 76 carries for 367 yards with a touchdown. He also had 12 receptions and two receiving touchdowns last season.

DEFENSE

(Five returning starters)

The Grizzlies have athletic players on defense. They do not have the depth that some of the other teams in Region 3 have, and conditioning, as well as the ability to stay healthy will play roles in the team's success. Linebacker Christian Rixe led the defense with 42 tackles, while linebacker Jeremiah Naea had 22 tackles and three sacks last season.



Three losing seasons in a row doesn't just demoralize a team, it takes a toll on the school and community support.

When the team suffered through loss after loss last year, some players walked away from the game.

But senior linebacker Christian Rixe said he was never tempted to give up.

"I stay here for my team," he said. "I love my team."

And these players have worked hard since last November hoping to achieve something special this season.

"Last year it felt so bad to lose every game," said Spencer Koehler, senior offensive tackle. "I just hope to make it a better season for everyone."

Adds Olson, "The losses were motivating. We all have so much school pride, team pride, we want to do everything we can to turn this thing around."