

Sports

Wildcats

Wednesday, September 16, 2009

Bearcats

Thursday Night Light

Wildcats can't let telecast become Gateway team in WPIAL Qu

BY RANDY SKUBEK
Bulletin Sports Editor

Ray Reitz is used to this TV stuff.

In Reitz's four years at Jeannette, which played in the WPIAL and state Class AA championship games twice during that span, his teams appeared on television several times.

As for Greater Latrobe, this will be a first.

When Reitz takes the Wildcats (1-1) to Gateway (2-0) for Thursday's WPIAL Quad-A South Conference opener, they will be under the brightest lights and on the biggest stage they ever have been. The game at Gateway High School in Monroeville will be televised live by FSN Pittsburgh (Comcast Channel 32) with air time at 7 p.m.

"I was fortunate enough at Jeannette to have couple games like this. It was pretty nice," expressed Reitz, who's in his first season as Greater Latrobe's head coach.

"I think it's great for the community and for the kids to get some exposure.

"It's a nice thing for high school football. Some of these kids won't get the chance to go on and play college football, so this might be something they'll remember for the rest of their lives."

While that's all well and good, there is one potential

drawback.

That would be the other "D" word.

"Sure, it can be a distraction," Reitz acknowledged. "But it's only a distraction if you let it become that."

With that in mind, Greater Latrobe was to break out the cameras this week to, as Reitz put it, "see how well the kids concentrate in practice." It's a trick he used at Jeannette.

Because the last thing the Wildcats need is for it to be a distraction come game time. Having to go up against Gateway is enough.

"If we can go down there and play well, it's a chance to promote the program. That'll be a nice thing for our kids," Reitz continued.

"But," he was quick to add, "we're going against a formidable opponent. We have to be ready to compete."

Gateway is...well, Gateway. Forget that the Gators lost eight starters on offense and seven on defense, and that six are now playing NCAA Division I football — Dorian Bell and Corey Brown at Ohio State, Brian Williams at Navy, and Colin Rodkey at Indiana — while seven are with Division II or III programs.

It's never about rebuilding at Gateway. All the Gators ever do under Terry Smith is reload.

"They're very fast and quick. They're very good at the

skill positions, as they always are," Reitz noted.

"You've got to take the big play away from them. You have to make them drive the football.

"That's basically it. They're just a big-play team, very skilled and very well-coached."

And any number of players are capable of making those plays. That's what makes the Gators who they are.

There's Rob Kalkstein, a 5-foot-10, 165-pound senior who's in his fourth year as Gateway's starting quarterback. He threw for 1,713 yards and 21 touchdowns last season as a junior, and is coming off a 10-for-14 showing for 217 and two in the Gators' 43-7 win over Baldwin.

Running back Brandon Felder (6-0, 170, Sr.), a heralded transfer from Massachusetts, and wide receiver Dayonnye Nunley (5-8, 165, Sr.) each scored twice in that same game while running back Orne Bey (5-9, 175, Sr.) had 136 yards and two touchdowns on just 10



RAY

Trojans

Mounties

Rams

Centurions

Griffins

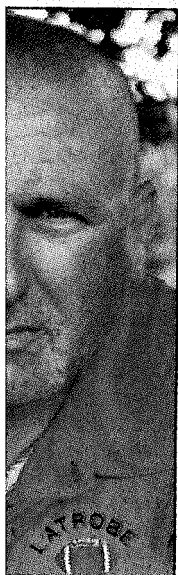
Wolfpack

Vikings

Bobcats

ts

distraction against another speedy road South Conference opener



REITZ

carries, and wide receiver Steve Vranka (5-10, 165, Sr.) five catches for 90 yards and a TD in Gateway's season-opening, 19-7 victory over Penn Hills, which boasts anywhere between four and six Division I recruits and came into the year as the favorite in WPIAL Quad-A.

"You can't simulate their speed in practice," Reitz said as a matter of fact. "The way you have to control it is to be fundamentally sound.

"Fundamentals can take care of speed. We just have to do what we do and play the way we play, and come up with a good game-plan."

Still, that's only half the battle. Greater Latrobe has to try and to it on a short week.

"That doesn't help, but they got a short week, too," Reitz pointed out. "We both have to do it.

"That's more like an excuse. We're not going to make excuses.

"They have to do it; we have

to do it. You just have to go play and see how it plays out."

Reitz felt his Wildcats did that last week against Fox Chapel despite coming out on the short end of a 14-7 score. Reitz felt his team did just about everything but win, the Foxes scoring the decisive touchdown with only 22 seconds left.

"I thought we out-hit them and had a chance to win the game, and that's all you can ask from the kids — get into the fourth quarter and have a chance to win," Reitz offered. "We just didn't finish the job.

"But that's a learned behavior, and that's what we're striving for right now. But I thought the kids played hard. That's what we're happy about.

"We're still having missed assignments and things like that, but that's what happens when you have a new system, but the kids played hard, and that's all we can ask them to do — give their all for 48 minutes. I thought they did that."

Directing Greater Latrobe's wing-T offense, quarterback Eric Shaffer (6-0, 195, Sr.) accounted for more than 100 yards against Fox Chapel — he was the team's top rusher with 96 on 20 carries and completed two of four passes for 19 — but the Wildcats could only get into the endzone once. In two games, Shaffer has run for 99 yards and a pair of touchdowns,

and — after passing for 1,579 and 12 last year — is just five of nine this season for 50 yards and one score.

Fullbacks Brad Burkley (6-0, 190, Sr.) and Steve Taylor (5-5, 175, Jr.) have combined for 141 yards — 90 and 51, respectively — on 38 attempts (3.7 average). Halfback Gavin Finley (5-7, 155, Jr.) was GL's second-leading rusher against Fox Chapel with 47 yards on six carries.

Reitz is also hoping to have Ryan Matsko (5-10, 175, Sr.), who was first on the depth chart at wide receiver entering the season only to sprain his ankle early in the Wildcats' 21-0 win over Derry Area to open the season, back this week. Other than that, Reitz said his starting lineups will remain the same against Gateway, which is ranked No. 2 in WPIAL Quad-A and No. 6 in the state.

"I think we have to make the game-plan simple so our kids don't have to think a lot," Reitz explained. "That's what's going on right now.

"Our kids are still thinking a little bit, so if we simplify what we're doing, we'll play faster. It might not be as fast as they are, but, again, that's where we have to compete."

In addition to the FSN Pittsburgh telecast, Thursday's game will be broadcast by the MSA Sports Network and WCNS-AM 1480 in Latrobe.