

NEW YEAR...NEW STORYLINES

2009 will give high school football fans a lot to look forward to

By Joshua Funk

For PA Football News

The start of the 2009 high school football season might not start for a few more months, but it's never too early to start thinking about what the upcoming season could offer. While 2009 probably won't bring another Zach Barket or Jeremiah Young, here's what the upcoming season could offer:

Pat Devlin's career passing yardage record could be in serious jeopardy. Lancaster Catholic blue-chip quarterback Kyle Smith is just 2,302 yards shy of the 8,109 yards the former Downingtown East star accumulated. Smith is also 25 touchdown passes shy of former Manheim Township field general Pat Bostick's career total of 94, also a state record. Smith is coming off of a 2008 season in which he threw for 3,192 yards and 42 touchdowns. The 3,192 yards is believed to be the fourth-best single season passing total in state history.

Keeping up with the Smith's, Wilson Area quarterback Tyler Smith is just 2,130 yards shy of 7,000 passing yards for his career. Smith replaced DJ Lenehan two seasons ago. Lenehan is the second-leading passer in state history, with 7,742 yards. No Pennsylvania school has ever had two quarterbacks pass for 7,000 career yards consecutively.

Liberty's Anthony Gonzalez, the top quarterback prospects in the state, could become the second quarterback in state history to rush and pass for 4,000 yards in his career. Terrelle Pryor is the only other quarterback to accomplish the feat.

There's no shortage of talent on the ground, either. The most notable returning running back belongs to traditional District 2 power Dunmore. Michael Perry enters 2009 with 4,832 career rushing yards and 62 touchdowns. Perry could become the 19th running back in state history to hit 6,000 rushing yards for his career, a mark he's just 1,168 yards from attaining.

Portage Area running backs Mike Sinosky & Tommy Burgan each have a chance to reach 4,000 rushing yards for their careers. It's a unique storyline because it's not known if a team ever had two running backs each surpass 4,000 rushing yards in the same season. Sinosky has run for 3,040 yards; Burgan has 2,121. The duo combined for 3,231 yards and 42 touchdowns last year.

Speaking of the ground attack, 18 different backfields had two running backs each surpass 1,000 rushing yards last year. At least one PIAA champion since 2003 has produced a duo of 1,000-yard rushers. Will that streak continue in 2009?

Clairton could make some history in terms of points scored in a season. The Bears scored 612 points last year. If Clairton hits the 600-point mark again in 2009, it will be just the

second team in state history to have consecutive seasons of 600 points or more. The only other team to do that was Southern Columbia in 2003 & 2004.

Sticking with the WPIAL, can Thomas Jefferson keep its dynasty going strong? How about Aliquippa – can the Quips win their 14th WPIAL football championship? And Hopewell's Rushel Shell (that is, if he stays at Hopewell, and isn't recruited somewhere else) has the potential to become one of the best running backs the WPIAL has *ever* seen.

Selinsgrove returns a 1,000-yard rusher, 2,000-yard passer, & 1,200-yard receiver, among others. Will 2009 be the first time the Seals play for a PIAA football championship? And could Southern Columbia really go a *third* year of not playing in Hershey?

Speaking of Southern, head coach Jim Roth is just three victories shy of 300 for his career, and Forest Hills' Don Bailey isn't far behind. Bailey is 10 wins shy of 300. The 300 club currently has seven members, with retired Selinsgrove head coach Bill Scott the most recent member.

2009 marks year number two of the Mark Soboleski regime at McDowell. Soboleski brought a high-powered triple-option offense to Millcreek Township last year, one which produced a school-record 453 points and two 1,000-yard rushers. How will McDowell fair with the graduation of its main offensive catalysts, AJ Fenton and Alex Schmude?

Also, Wilmington and Farrell are two very dominant programs in the southern part of District 10. Wilmington has won 11 championships between Districts 7 & 10; Farrell has won eight, six of which are WPIAL titles. Will the Greyhounds and Steelers continue their dominance?

District 9 has an exciting junior quarterback in Brockway's Derek Buganza. As a sophomore, he threw for 2,923 yards. Could he become District 9's all-time leading passer? The title currently belongs to former Clearfield quarterback Chad Kroell, who threw for 6,088 yards.

Brashear could win its third straight City League championship. The Bulls have never won more than two consecutive City League titles in its history. Langley's Joey Bell was a *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* Fabulous-22 selection.

Bayard Rustin enters its fourth year of existence, and the defending District 1 "AAA" champs. The Knights also boast a wickedly proficient Wing-T offense that produced a 2,000-yard rusher in Rondell White.

Bishop McDevitt is *loaded* with potential Division-1 prospects. There are eight D-1 prospects in the Class of 2010. Add in quarterback Matt Johnson and running back Jameel Poteat, both juniors, and the Crusaders will boast 10 D-1 prospects this season. Gateway, meanwhile, only has four D-1 prospects thus far in the 2010 class, according to *Rivals.com*.

Finally, will 2009 be the year that the Philadelphia Catholic League wins a PIAA football championship? Neither West Catholic or Archbishop Wood were successful in 2008. The early favorite from the PCL in '09 is LaSalle – the Explorers are loaded with talent at the skill positions, including two D-1 prospects.