

## New look to local football

It's the dawn of a new high school football era in Niagara with the opening of the AAA/ AAAA football season at five locations Friday.

For the first time, all three football leagues in Niagara will play three-down football and the composition of the leagues will be based on the schools' population sizes.

Former Premier League teams Denis Morris, Blessed Trinity, Lakeshore Catholic, Notre Dame, St. Mike's and St. Paul will be joined by Stamford, three-time defending Varsity 1 champion Sir Winston Churchill, Westlane and A.N. Myer to create a 10-team loop. Westlane, with only 650 students, is playing up a level so it can keep its Niagara Falls' rivalries and A.N. Myer is seven students over the limit to be able to play in lower AA league. Churchill and Stamford are well above the population threshold of 900.

"This is exactly where we want to be; playing in the top tier in Niagara with the opportunity to move on," Churchill head coach Peter Partridge said.

Churchill opens its season at Notre Dame (3 p.m. start)

Grimsby Secondary School's population forces it to play in the AAA/AAAA loop, but, under new head coach Mark Gilbert, the school will spend the year playing four exhibition games against teams in the AA loop to ready itself for the big boys.

The AAA/AAAA teams will play an eight-game schedule over seven weeks with the top two teams playing a game to determine which squad advances out of the league to play in the Golden Horseshoe Bowl playdowns. The loser of that elimination game advances to the league final and the third-through sixth-placed teams will battle to see who joins that team in the league final.

Below are previews of the league's member teams:

### A.N. MYER

History lesson: Marauders went 3-3 in Varsity 1 regular season and lost 22-6 to Beamsville in quarter-finals.

Coaching staff : Dave Buchanan, Nico Marino, Kody Knox, Tony Lisi and Mike Halowski.

Expectations: "We want to try and compete. We know every game will be tough," new head coach Dave Buchanan said.

Scouting report: 20 returning players, including 10 starters.

Key players: QB Thomas Dyctiar; RBs John Vaantaga and Brody McCabe; LB Rob Adams; DE Rob Dalgleish; CB Jeremy Jeumund.

Teams to beat: "Everyone," Buchahan said.

Last five years: 32-12, .727 winning percentage.

#### BLESSED TRINITY

History lesson: Thunder went 4-1 in regular season and lost 7-3 to St. Mike's in semifinals.

Coaching staff : Brad Hubbard, Keith Bomberry, Jay Hendriks, Mike Martineau and Guitis Bieksa.

Expectations: "Just to be competitive. We had a lot of 12Bs that graduated," head coach Hubbard said.

Scouting report: nine returning players, including eight starters; average size and good speed; talented running back Josh Forester lost for season after tearing two knee ligaments in last game of Hamilton travel season.

Key players: RB Jason Baum; FB D.P. Mainse; TE Quinn Reilly; LBs Ben Courtney and Nick Bodden; DL Joel Willems.

Teams to beat: Lakeshore Catholic and everyone else.

Last five years: 10-23, .303 winning percentage.

#### DENIS MORRIS

History lesson: Redmen went 0-5 in regular season and lost 43-8 to St. Mike's in quarter-finals.

Coaching staff: Paolo Sirianni, Leo Moody, Josh Doan, Steve Roach and Roland Erman.

Expectations: "To look at each game and get better each game. My main focus is to bring the guys together as a unit," Sirianni said.

Scouting report: new head coach Sirianni joins Redmen after eight-year stint as highly regarded assistant coach with Rick Oreskovich at St. Paul.

"I learned a lot from Rick, but there's also stuff you pick up along the way from scouting other teams," Sirianni said.

Teams has good size, decent speed and 14 returning players, including eight starters.

Key players: DEs Kevin Denhollander and Aaron Dekker; QB Matt Furgiuele; RB T.J. Buck; slot Maj Hajeri; safety Matt Selby; DT Brendan Johnson.

Teams to beat: Lakeshore Catholic, Notre Dame and St. Paul.

Last five years: 12-24, .333 winning percentage.

#### LAKESHORE CATHOLIC

History lesson: Gators went 5-0 in regular season; defeated Notre Dame 49-21 in semifinals and St. Mike's 28-8 in finals; defeated St. Marcellinus 24-17 in Golden Horseshoe Bowl semifinals and lost 33-10 to Burlington Notre Dame in bowl final.

Coaching staff: Rocky DiPietro; Peter Burnett; Bernie Tessier; Terry Lehne; Joe Labenski.

Expectations: "We want to improve every game, as always, and look after ourselves in how we play. Hopefully, we're good enough to win some games," DiPietro said.

Scouting report: 15 returning players, including 10 starters; pretty good speed; decent size.

Key players: RB/LB Keaton Spratt; OG/DE Ian Marouf; WR Luca Schinkel; LB Kyle Gray; DB/ punt returner Nick Boulard.

Teams to beat: Notre Dame and Blessed Trinity. Not sure what to expect from incoming teams.

Last five years: 35-5, .875 winning percentage, excluding bowl playdowns

#### NOTRE DAME

History lesson: Fighting Irish went 1-4 in regular season, defeated St. Paul 38-24 in quarterfinals and lost to Lakeshore in semifinals.

Coaching staff: Tim Bisci, Chris Biggar, Wayne Nelson, Greg Valovich and Paul Ferracuti.

Expectations: "We hope to be more competitive than we've been the last couple of years," Bisci said.

Scouting report: decent size but not much depth; good speed; 18 returning players, including nine starters.

Key players: QB Jon Mataya; OL Jamie Dionne; WR Mike Prytula; DE Charles Raza; LB Josh Doucet; DL Wes McPherson.

Teams to beat: Lakeshore Catholic, Blessed Trinity and Sir Winston Churchill.

Last five years: 23-15, .605 winning percentage, excluding bowl playdowns

#### CHURCHILL

History lesson: Bulldogs had two wins taken away for using an ineligible player to finish 4-2 in Varsity 1 regular season, beat Westlane 33-6 in quarter-finals, blanked Holy Cross 35-0 in semifinals and out-slugged Stamford 49-22 in final.

Coaching staff: Peter Partridge, John Netherway, Steve Cook, Scott Hill, Jim Thibodeau, Bob Krzeczowski and James Wilson.

Expectations: "It's to certainly win more games than we lose. It will be a big adjustment to three-down (football), but we want to be competitive right up to the end," Partridge said.

Scouting report: 25 returning players, including 10 starters; young team; great speed and athleticism; lost three top lineman from last season and not as much size from previous seasons.

Key players: RB Alex Christie; QB Andrew Krzeczowski; WR Max Cameron; DT Jordan Winter; halfback Jacob Bromhall; LB Jarod Cardas.

Teams to beat: Lakeshore Catholic and Notre Dame.

Last five years: 30-13, .698 winning percentage.

#### STAMFORD

History lesson: Hornets went 5-1 in Varsity 1 regular season; beat Governor Simcoe 22-11 in quarter-finals; out-gunned Beamsville 47-40 in semifinals; and, lost to Churchill in final.

Coaching staff: Brad Martin, Matt West, Turi Pilli, Matt Garnett, Adam Grant, Gary MacDonald and Kitchener Howard.

Expectations: "We're looking to be competitive in every game this year," Martin said.

Scouting report: 20 returning players, including eight starters; average size; good speed and athleticism.

Key players: QB Connor Peach; RB Zack Allen; slotback Remi Moreau; 6-foot-7, 320-pound DL Hunter Bowman; CB Mike Reid; DE Ryan Fortin.

Teams to beat: Lakeshore Catholic, St. Paul. St. Mike's, Blessed Trinity and Churchill.

Last five years: 35-10-1, .772 winning percentage.

#### ST. MIKE'S

History lesson: Mustangs went 3-2 in regular season; pounded Denis Morris in quarter-finals; defeated Blessed Trinity in semifinals; and, lost to Lakeshore Catholic in final.

Coaching staff: Dominic Scozzafava, Ed Morecki, Giacomo Lupino, Jay Naphin and Joe Bruzzeze.

Expectations: "This is going to be a rebuilding season. For awhile, we didn't think we would have enough guys for a team," Scozzafava said.

Scouting report: eight returning players including four or five starters; small team, average to above-average speed.

Key players: QB Alex Nazartchuk; RB Jordan Provanzano; slotback/WR Nico Macri; DE Johnny Lapenna; LB John Rush.

Teams to beat: Lakeshore Catholic, Blessed Trinity, Notre Dame and St. Paul. Don't know enough about teams entering league.

Last five years: 21-18, .538 winning percentage.

#### ST. PAUL

History lesson: Patriots went 2-3 in regular season and lost to Notre Dame in quarter-finals.

Coaching staff: Rick and Joe Oreskovich, John Fisher, Brian Fortier and Joe Tropea.

Expectations: "If we play to our abilities, we will be in the middle of the pack," head coach Rick Oreskovich said.

Scouting report: 20 returning players, including five starters on offence and defence; average size; above average team speed.

Key players: QB Evan Murzda; tailback Ryan Niewesteeg; FB/LB Stephan Oreskovich; MLB Brad Golenia; safety/slotback Miklos McMaster; DT/OT Donnie Egerter

Teams to beat: Lakeshore Catholic, Notre Dame, Blessed Trinity and Churchill.

Last five years: 24-14, .632 winning percentage.

#### WESTLANE

History lesson: Spartans went 4-2 in Varsity 1 regular season and lost to Churchill in quarter-finals.

Coaching staff: Jason Babony, Jom Davis, Tim Hough, Gerard Landrum, Frank Tomczak, Jacob Birch and Scott Ellis.

Expectations: "We're really hoping to compete with the Niagara Falls teams. Whatever else happens with the other teams is a bonus," Babony said.

Scouting report: 10 returning players, including seven or eight starters; lacking in size; good quarterback and receivers.

Key players: RB Kadeem Allen; DB Chris Dalbianco; TE/DE Cory Kaine; QB Jordan Davey-Maxim; WR/LB Max Howard; WR Peter Nguyen.

Teams to beat: Lakeshore Catholic, A.N. Myer and Stamford.

Last five years: 15-21, .417 winning percentage.

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#### AAA/AAAA Power Poll

Following are rankings for the AAA/AAAA high school football teams based on comments from coaches in the league. Rating points are in brackets.

1. Lakeshore Catholic (3.31).

2. Notre Dame (2.1)
3. Blessed Trinity (1.76)
4. St. Paul (1).
4. Sir Winston Churchill (1).
6. Stamford (0.55)
7. A.N. Myer (0.44).
8. St. Mike's (0.422).
9. Denis Morris (0.22) 10 Westlane (0.22).