

RB taking game to next level

By **BERNIE PUCHALSKI, Standard Staff**

Last season, Sir Winston Churchill Bulldogs running back Alex Christie was pounded, thumped and pummelled as his team fought its way to a .500 record playing in the AAA/AAAA high school football senior loop.

"It was a big adjustment, losing all the big boys we had (on the line) and then going in with a small team," the second-year Grade 12 student said. "Quad A made it that much more difficult and I've never had competition like that.

"It gave us a great look at who the elite teams in Niagara are."

The 18-year-old fractured his hand in the fourth week of the season and played the rest of the campaign with a hand guard.

"It was whatever I could do to make us win," he said.

He's not expecting to take the same pounding he took last season.

"This year we have a different kind of offence, full of athletes. It should be a great year and the O line is looking better."

With the AAA and AAAA senior football teams divided into two leagues for 2011, Bulldogs head coach Peter Partridge has high expectations for Christie.

"Give him a little bit of a hole and we expect big things," he said. "He's a lot more solid and it's a function of his hard work in the summer."

Partridge likes everything about his 5-foot-9, 183-pound running back.

"He's a very coachable player. Despite a solidified starting position, he's still the hardest-working player as if there's players coming up to take his spot. He's a great leader and has tremendous football sense. I think he will be good asset at the next level for a university football program."

Playing at the Ontario university level is something Christie has been working towards since Grade 11.

"I really want to get there," he said.

He enters the high school year coming off a season with the Niagara Varsity Spears in which he was named the team's offensive MVP. He averaged 8.6 yards a carry and led the Ontario Varsity Football League in kick return yardage.

"It helps a lot," he said of playing with the Spears. "You usually had a six- to eight-month drought of no football. Taking off two weeks and then coming back for high school football is great."

Christie had worked hard this summer to get quicker and stronger.

"I've taken a lot of fat off because I've been training with Andrew Yap. I've cut off two or three pounds, but added a lot of leg muscle and a lot of speed."

He has noticed the difference.

"I feel much different. Running is much easier than it ever has been."

Christie has one main goal for this season.

"I'm hoping to go out as a champion with the team, but it's a competitive league. I'm sure we can get there though."

The AAA teams will play each other once in the regular season. The top two teams earn a bye into the semifinals and the remaining four teams play in the quarter-finals.

Below are capsules of the six teams in the league:

A.N. MYER

When we last cracked skulls: The Marauders went 0-8 in AAA/AAAA play last season and missed the playoffs.

Coaching staff: Dave Buchanan, Nico Marino, Nathan Cheney, Rob Colosimo, Tony Lisi.

Expectations: "Basically to compete, compared to last year," Buchanan said.

Scouting report: 13 returning players, including six starters; above average speed; more size than last year.

Key players: Running back Jake Douglas; quarterback Parker Seburn; fullback Cam Peacock; linebackers Rob Adams and Thomas Grcevic; defensive end Mitchell Gray.

Teams to beat: Everyone in the league.

Last five years: 24-20 (.545 winning percentage).

Last 10 years: 52-31 (.627 winning percentage).

GOVERNOR SIMCOE

When we last cracked skulls: The Redcoats went 3-3 in AA play last season, defeated Centennial 7-0 in a quarter-final and lost 30-14 to eventual champions Holy Cross in a semifinal.

Coaching staff: D'Arcy McCardle, Jamie Brophy, Cary Spiece, Andrew Watson and Trevor Hingley.

Expectations: "To compete in every game," McCardle said.

Scouting report: 10 returning starters, including seven starting linemen; workmanlike team has decent size and speed.

Key players: running back Jordan Clout; offensive linemen Amir Probic and Craig Giroux; safety Scott Hookings; linebackers Devon Wilkes and Paul Redman.

Teams to beat: St. Mike's and Churchill.

Last five years: 16-22-2 (.425 winning percentage).

Last 10 years: 41-35-3 (.538 winning percentage)

GRIMSBY

When we last cracked skulls: The Eagles didn't field a team last season, instead playing an exhibition schedule.

Coaching staff: Mark Gilbert, Martin Davies, Duane Cuvay and Jon Tenbrinke.

Expectations: "We're hoping to compete and stay alive for next year," Gilbert said.

Scouting report: 15 returning players, including 13 starters from last year's exhibition season; decent size; limited offensive ability.

Key players: offensive tackle Tom Dykstra; centre Andrew Hayes; offensive guard Jeff Librock; linebackers Connor Hickingbottom, Nathan Daulton and Finlay Blakelock.

Teams to beat: Churchill and St. Mike's.

Last five years prior to 2010: 4-29 (.121 winning percentage)

Last 10 years prior to 2010: 11-47-1 (.195 winning percentage)

SIR WINSTON CHURCHILL

When we last cracked skulls: The Bulldogs went 4-4 in the AAA/AAAA regular season and lost 45-7 to Blessed Trinity in a quarter-final.

Coaching staff: Peter Partridge, Bob Krzeczkowski, Jim Thibodeau and Scott Hill.

Expectations: "We will be competitive. We're young, fast, athletic and lacking in experience," Partridge said.

Scouting report: 14 returning players, including six starters; fullback Jurrell Gaddishaw suffered knee injury in final Spears game and his status is uncertain for season.

Key players: running back Alex Christie; quarterback Andrew Krzeczkowski; slotback Alex Coutu; defensive back/receiver Ryan Mattei; linebackers Josh Harris and Stephen Leach.

Teams to beat: St. Mike's, Stamford and Simcoe.

Last five years: 32-13 (.711 winning percentage)

Last 10 years: 54-28-1 (.657 winning percentage)

ST. MIKE'S

When we last cracked skulls: The Mustangs went 3-5 in the AAA/AAAA regular season and lost 38-14 to Notre Dame in a quarter-final.

Coaching staff: Dominic Scozzafava, Brian Carter, Dave Lavey, Nigel Corish and Randy Allen.

Expectations: "To compete. We only have 25 kids," Scozzafava said.

Scouting report: Five returning players, including three starters; inexperienced, squad with good athleticism, decent team speed; small team.

Key players: Quarterback Tanner Cranford; running back Jordan Provenzano; slotback/linebacker Adams Evans; linebacker Connor Haday; defensive tackle Josh Evans; halfback Zach Hildebrand.

Teams to beat: Every team in the league.

Last five years: 20-20 (.500 winning percentage).

Last 10 years: 48-34 (.585 winning percentage).

STAMFORD

When we last cracked skulls: The Hornets went 3-5 in the AAA/AAAA regular season and missed the playoffs.

Coaching staff: Brad Martin, Kitchener Howard and Leo Roberto.

Expectations: "It should be an interesting year. We lost a lot of seniors," Martin said.

Scouting report: 16 returning players, including eight starters; decent team speed; not overly big, but athletic.

Key players: quarterback Connor Peach; wide receivers Andrew Douglas and Mykal Reid; defensive end Jimmy Cunningham; defensive back Patrick Aimsbury; linebacker Curtis Sentineal.

Teams to beat: St. Mike's and Churchill.

Last five years: 30-13-1 (.693 winning percentage).

Last 10 years: 42-37-2 (.531 winning percentage).