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# Falcons to rely on core for success

SPORTS

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2020 Minford Falcons varsity football team

MINFORD — For the Minford Falcons, it's a case of both good news and bad news — as their first full day of actual football contact took place the day prior to their annual media day AND only preseason scrimmage.

As a result, Minford is now playing an intense game of catch-up as well.

The good news is that, among other starters, the Falcons return two Division V all-Ohio performers from last season — second-team defensive back Matthew Risner and third-team quarterback Elijah Vogelsong-Lewis.

The bad news is that the Falcons, as the result of a positive confirmed coronavirus case within the program prior to the official opening of practice on Aug. 1— were forced to suspend workouts until Aug. 17.

Hence, their first full day of contact wasn't until Aug. 21 — with their one and only preseason scrimmage the following day.

That following day was Minford's media day, as fifth-year head coach Jesse Ruby spent the morning first discussing the two-week shutdown, then moved on to the Falcons' overall positive outlook.

The Falcons, which went 7-4 and were a Division V playoff qualifier for the first time since 2012, did graduate 16 "impactful" seniors — but do feature 50 players this season with nine seniors and multiple key returnees.

With the Ohio High School Athletic Association's decision to automatically enter all 2020 teams in the state playoffs —should they so choose —Minford will be making its second consecutive postseason trip.

But it only had — from its first day of practice until its first game — 11 days to prepare.

"We have some holes to fill with graduation losses to start with, and this off-season has been very challenging and difficult," said Ruby. "But I thought our kids have handled it really well. Even when we were shut down for 14 days until last Monday (Aug. 17), I felt like our kids came back and were ready to really get after it."

On the field, Minford made its mark last season with its spread offense, as four Falcons earned all-Southeast District Division V first team — Vogelsong-Lewis (5-10, 185, sr.), running back Ty Wiget, offensive lineman Levi Warren and wide receiver Drew Skaggs (5-10, 155, sr.).

Vogelsong-Lewis is an ideal athletic dual threat, as Skaggs and Risner (5-10, 170, sr.) return as the go-to targets.

Ruby said Risner, your prototypical all-purpose player, will line up wide — and in both backfields.

After all, Risner — who would have also made first team as either all-purpose or wide receiver — recorded 86 tackles, while making six interceptions with three pass break-ups and two forced fumbles.

"It always helps when your quarterback, a very good quarterback, is back. Elijah is just a great player and great leader," said Ruby. "And Matthew Risner outside and in the backfield and on defense. Both of them are great offensive and defensive players for us."

Ruby also mentioned fellow senior Tate Walker (5-8, 200) — in the multiple mold of Risner.

"We've played Tate on the line before, but he can play in the backfield or at tight end, and he is a very good linebacker for us on the defensive side." said the coach.

Ruby also mentioned several seniors who will play greater roles, including wide receiver Timmy Walk (6-3, 170) and offensive lineman Seth Simpson (6-2, 250).

Simpson, in fact, is the only returning lineman who started last season.

Other seniors stepping in up front are Ethan Felty (5-10, 220) and Ray Smith (6-4, 310).

"We have some senior offensive linemen who we want to see step up and grow some more, but Seth (Simpson) was thrown into the fire already as a junior," said Ruby. "He has really taken on a good leadership role for this group, and he is getting those linemen ready."

Those Falcons will do the same defensively, as Ruby said "based on who we have, we'll have quite a few two-way players".

Those include Walker at linebacker and Risner and Skaggs at the corners.

Adam Crank, a 5-10 and 165-pound sophomore, will be the club's kicker.

"Any time you are playing in our conference (SOC II), you have to have players at every level," Ruby said. "On the front line and on the back end. You have to be able to stop the run AND the pass. In our conference, we have very good offenses that we have to face and we have to be able to defend just about every inch of the field in every game."

For all of the Falcons' six regular-season games, with the exception of the non-league opener against visiting Washington Court House on Friday, they will only see those SOC squads.

While it aids with the core foursome returning which Ruby explained, perhaps when six-time defending division champion Wheelersburg welcomes Minford for the initial weekend of September, the Falcons will have conquered their catch-up game.

And, for Minford, hopefully it's all good news after that.