



WNY Athletics

HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL WEEKLY



Issue No. 14

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THIS WEEK

TRENCH TROPHY
AND CONNOLLY
CUP NOMINEES FOR
WEEK 1

I INSIDE

VARIOUS FEATURE
STORIES
SURROUNDING
SECTION VI AND
MMAA

ALSO

WEEK 1
LEADERBOARD
STATISTICS

**THE
"WILL" OF
WILLOUGHBY**

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CONTENTS

Trench Trophy Nominees: Page 2
Connolly Cup Nominees: Page 3
Meet the Crew: Page 3
Class AA Feature: Page 4-5
Class A Feature: Page 6-7
Class B Feature: Page 8-9
Class C Feature: Page 10-11
Class D/ 8-Man Feature: Page 12-13
MMAA Feature: Page 14-15
The "Will" of Willoughby: Page 16-17
The Wolf's Den: Page 18-19
Leaderboard: Page 20-21

WNY High School Football Weekly is brought to you by:



This Weeks Trench Trophy Nominees



WEEK 1 NOMINEES

TRENCH TROPHY

2023 SEASON
In Memory of Carl Kuras

SHELDON CUNNINGHAM | HEALTH SCIENCES
MARCUS HARRISON | ST. FRANCIS
CARL JONES | MCKINLEY
LUKE MATHEIS | PIONEER
ROOSEVELT MITCHELL | MEDINA
OWEN RUSH | FREDONIA

WESTERN NEW YORK LINEMAN OF THE YEAR AWARD

This Weeks Connolly Cup Nominees



The William R.
CONNOLLY CUP
Memorial

**WEEK 1
PLAYERS OF THE
WEEK**

Nate Blair (Iroquois)	Te'Shaun Mathews (Niagara Wheatfield)	Kaedon Holcomb (Portville)
Brandon Carroll (Health Sciences)	Nigel McDuffie (McKinley)	Layne Jaworowicz (Alden)
Tate Catanese (CSP)	James McNeil Jr. (Bishop Timon)	Marcus Johnson (Williamsville South)
Rob Gillette (Lake Shore)	Brayden Tryon (Maryvale)	Justus Kleitz (Iroquois)
Michael Hanlon (Dunkirk)	Davion White (Fredonia)	Jeff Long (Clarence)

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Bennett Not Going Anywhere

By Mike Pidanick @mkpidanick

The Bennett High School football team finally finished its climb last season, winning the first New York State championship in program history.

A number of big names from the last two seasons, which included back-to-back Class AA Section VI championships and state title game appearances, have moved on to the next level. But that doesn't mean the Tigers are going anywhere.

"Hey, we're going to be pretty good for a while," coach Steve McDuffie said after last year's Section VI title game win over Lancaster.

And as the 2023 season gets underway, the beat goes on for Bennett. With a reloaded roster, the Tigers used a balanced attack to open the season with a 28-6 road win over Lockport on Saturday afternoon.

E'Ryan Lawrence ran for 83 yards for the Tigers and had a touchdown both receiving and rushing in the win. Noah McDuffie and Ja'Meer Thomas also had rushing touchdowns for Bennett. Sherrard Bernard III completed 13 of 19 for 211 yards and a touchdown, much of that to Thomas who caught five passes for 112 yards.

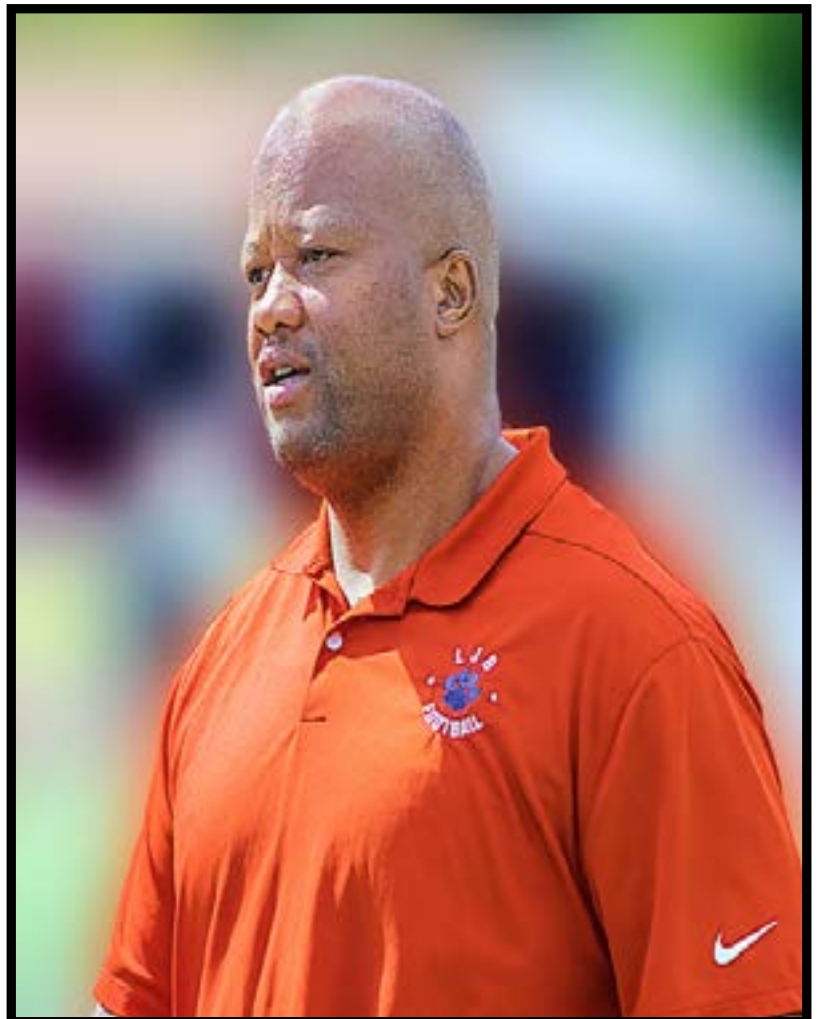


Photo by Shawn Turri



"Training the Heart of a Champion from the Inside Out"

Big 5 Award Character:

Athletes who Set the example in Speech • Conduct • Love • Faith • Integrity

Week 1 Winners

- | | |
|----------------|--------------------|
| Logan McClaine | Akron |
| John Mahar | Wilson |
| Dylan Cookfair | Maryvale |
| London Thomas | Cleve-Hill |
| Brayden Potter | Southwestern |
| Bryce Posker | CSP |
| Seth Krenning | Albion |
| Gavin Dundon | Iroquois |
| Khalil Golden | Newfane |
| Derek Zajak | Eden / N.C. |
| Perry Snyder | Cattaraugus / L.V. |
| Cody Barton | Portville |



Love Always: TRUSTS - HOPES - PROTECTS - PERSEVERES.

Defensively, Kahmari Cook led Bennett in tackles with 10. Delshon Taylor had three sacks and Jazier Fluker two more for the Tigers. McDuffie and Lawrence collected interceptions.

Bennett was officially 7-6 last year after Section VI forced the Tigers to forfeit its first six games. Rather than pout about it, Bennett won its final regular season games and then rolled through the Section VI tournament as the No. 3 seed.

The Tigers then finished the climb to the top with a 42-8 win over Newburgh Free Academy in the state title game. Other than a 20-14 come-from-behind win over McQuaid in the Far West Regionals, every official Bennett victory last season was by at least 27 points.

"These kids are resilient and they've proven it over and over again," McDuffie said. "When you have kids like that, it's just my honor and my privilege to coach."

The Tigers lost a bunch of key contributors to graduation, two to Division-I colleges in lineman Rashard Perry (Syracuse) and running back Jayden Lewis (Buffalo). But plenty of weapons remain and Bennett remains the team to beat in New York State.



5

Mercado provides the anchor Ken West

By Colton Pankiewicz @ColtonPankiewi7



The Kenmore West Blue Devils lost a heartbreaker in Week 1. After taking an early 12-0 lead in the first quarter, the Blue Devils fell 27-24 to Niagara-Wheatfield in Class A1 action Saturday.

Photo by Jennifer Friend Rumschik

This loss shouldn't be too much cause for concern as Kenmore West started 2022 0-1 before winning the next seven of eight games and clinching a playoff berth.

6 Plus, they still have one of the area's top big-men anchoring their offensive and defensive lines.



The importance of good linemen goes under the radar until there's a lack thereof, though, it's tough for a player like Hezekiah Mercado to go unnoticed.

The 6' 3", 300-lb senior is going into his fourth year on varsity, having totaled 92 tackles, and 10.5 sacks in his time there. Mercado had a breakout season just a year ago, notching a career-high 54 tackles, nine sacks, forcing four fumbles and taking one of those fumbles for a touchdown. Those stats are much more impressive when you put his position into perspective.

Kenmore West head coach John Haynes has been alongside Mercado for the past three years on varsity and now his fourth as he heads into his senior season.

"His versatility makes everyone's lives easier come gametime, he has a nose for the football and moves well for his size," Haynes said.

The versatile big man can line up anywhere on the line. On defense, Mercado will play anywhere from nose tackle to defensive end depending on the formation and on offense he plays center while in a spread formation, and tackle in the Blue Devils' power formation.

Looking past the physical aspects of football, Mercado brings a sense of leadership that's tough to come by. After being named a captain at the team banquet, the then-junior headed into his senior year as someone who became vocal during off-season workouts and training camp.

"When around it's like having another coach here, his teammates buy into him, he's a great leader and someone who's easily coachable," Haynes said.

NFHS NETWORK

WEEK 2

FOOTBALL BROADCAST SCHEDULE

WNY Athletics

Day	Time	Game
THURSDAY	6:30 PM	MARYVALE VS. LAKE SHORE
FRIDAY	7 PM	HEALTH SCIENCES VS. WEST SENECA EAST
FRIDAY	7 PM	FREDONIA VS. FALCONER
SATURDAY	2 PM	JAMESTOWN VS. NIAGARA FALLS
SATURDAY	2 PM	HAMBURG VS. SWEET HOME

PHOTO BY: CAL PHILLIPS

Record- Setting Barry Aiming for Loftier Goals

By Tony Fiorello @anthonyfiorello

The reigning Section VI Class B Iroquois got 2023 off to a strong start defeating Albion 51-6. Quarterback Justus Kleitz led Iroquois by passing for 318 yards and three touchdowns while also rushing for 34 yards and a score. Running back Colin Lee added 51 rushing yards and a touchdown. Wide receiver Nate Blair caught 8 passes for 130 yards and 2 touchdowns to pace the Iroquois receiving corp. Meanwhile, the Iroquois defense held Albion to just six points.



Photo by Shawn Turri

How does one follow up a season that resulted in just the second sectional title in his school's history, a Western New York record 43 rushing touchdowns and a Connolly Cup?

With more records and more wins.

That's how Trevor Barry, the reigning top player in Section VI, is looking at things going into his senior year. The 43 scores, plus over 2,300 rushing yards, 274 points scored (the second-most in area history) were

dazzling numbers for a running back-



and coach Robert Pitzonka credited Barry's success to his work ethic.

"Trevor has in his basement what would be equivalent to a World's Gym," Pitzonka said. "Before he got into middle school, he and his older brother Tyler really wanted a weight room and his dad kind of gave them an ultimatum of 'If you do this many pushups, sit ups and bodyweight squats consecutively for so many months, I'll build it for you.' And they both did it and Trevor has pretty much lived there.

Additionally, Barry is a very productive linebacker. 62 tackles, three sacks, two interceptions and two fumble recoveries on defense aren't numbers to sneeze at, and Pitzonka credits not just Barry's work ethic, but his coaching staff and Barry's wrestling background for his success in that arena.

"I think he's undervalued as a linebacker," Pitzonka said. "It's easy to look at the stats and look at the touchdowns and what he does offensively, but he is being heavily recruited as a linebacker right now – Michigan State is talking to him, for example. We're fortunate-



to have my brother Travis as our linebacker coach and co-defensive coordinator, and Travis played at the University of Buffalo under Lou Tepper as a linebacker. He and Trevor have a special relationship and they've put in a lot of work on his defensive play this summer.

“What you're seeing is the wrestler come out of him at linebacker – he finished third in the state last year at 215 pounds. His sophomore year he finished fifth in the state as a heavyweight and this year he's gunning to win the state championship as a wrestler at 215. So when you see him stunt and blitz and tackle you're seeing him use wrestler takedowns. I don't think there's many people that can get his way and stop him from getting to the ball carrier or quarterback.”

Barry is also a very good student whose GPA is in the mid-90s, and not only is he taking care of business on the field and in the classroom, but he's also grown as a leader for the Chiefs too.

“He's got very good grades,” Pitzonka said. “He's getting all this exposure and interest from colleges because it's great if you can do what you can on the field, but you've got to have the grades to match and he's fortunate enough to have that as well.

“He's also taken such a great stride forward in leadership this year. He's really taken care of not just his teammates on varsity, but even the younger guys on JV and really shown them the ropes of what our standard is at Iroquois. That to me was the last piece for him to really check off was that leadership piece and he's embraced it because we've lost some great leaders from last year and he stepped right into this role and the team's feeding off it.”

One would think that the success that has followed Barry around would go to his head. But it hasn't, according to Pitzonka, and Barry remains humble enough to not look ahead and to keep his focus on daily and weekly goals for him and his team.

“The thing about Trevor that makes him special is that he's a very grounded guy,” Pitzonka said. “Everybody knows his name in the Western New York community but he treats every teammate the same. And he's so focused on team goals.

“Last year he wanted a sectional championship so badly because as a freshman and sophomore, he came up short. As a freshman, we pulled him up to varsity and we lost to Maritime in double overtime. He saw his brother – who was a senior that year – come up short, and he remembered how much it hurt the seniors to come up short. Then the following year, he got hurt during our second outing against Maritime at Highmark Stadium and we got beat up by them. To Trevor, if we're winning as a team, all of the other things will take care of themselves.”

To Pitzonka, Barry is an extension of Iroquois' coaching staff and those traits will serve him well in his senior year.

“A couple of years ago, Trevor was my next quarterback in line after Trey Kleitz graduated. He was a gifted quarterback,” Pitzonka said. “We're lucky that Justus (Trey's brother) stepped up last year because it afforded us to use Trevor at what he's really good at – which is running the football and I think because he got those reps as a quarterback, it helps him out tremendously.

“We run a very college-style offense. I do a ton of work with other programs and colleges just to expand our offense and he sees the game like a coach or a quarterback. And that's dangerous for other teams – when you're a running back and he's helping the quarterback make adjustments at the line of scrimmage, he's able to digest what the other team's trying to do to us. So he always has us in the right position, and his smarts both on and off the field will be tremendous assets to him after he graduates.”

McKay's Effort Inspires Chautauqua Lake/ Westfield/ Brocton Football

By Dustyn Green

Throughout the offseason, Chautauqua Lake/Westfield/Brocton's varsity football team has learned many valuable lessons on the football field, but some of those lessons extend to life beyond the gridiron.

A few years ago, Hunter McKay, a sophomore Thunderbird with a disability struck up a friendship with Chautauqua Lake/Westfield/Brocton three-year starter and captain Mason Maring.

"When I first met him in eighth grade, I didn't really talk to him, but then we talked from time to time, Maring said. "Then, last school year he told me he wanted to play football and we started talking about that and playing on our PlayStations together, and ever since then we have been inseparable."

McKay joined the team all because Maring, McKay's "right-hand man" (as Gibbs describes him) was on the team, and was the only kid in the school that would talk to him.

"I wanted to play football because Mason played and he was my only friend," McKay told WNY Athletics.

After talking football and playing games together for a while, Maring, a Westfield junior, took it upon himself to reach out to his coach.

"When Mason reached out to ask if Hunter could join the team, I immediately said 'Absolutely, bring him out and we will get him involved,' but I didn't realize the kid would completely change everything," said Gibbs, who is entering his fourth season at the helm of the Thunderbirds.

According to Gibbs when his team, which was already close-knit, saw McKay on the field for the first time they immediately learned something new about the game they love.

"It is hard to put into words, but he really shows that football truly has a spot for everybody, and you don't need to fit into a mold to be a football player," Gibbs said.



Gibbs and his staff have always rewarded effort with playing time. But for Maring, McKay has redefined what “effort” means.

“Effort is not actually working so hard that you are getting as close to perfect as you can, but instead it is just giving your best attempt on and off the field every single day,” Maring said. Gibbs asks himself the same question every day when he steps on the football field.

“Whenever you look over at Hunter during practice he is smiling and going a hundred miles an hour, and you can’t help but ask yourself ‘If he’s out here grinding, why can’t I?’, Gibbs said.

“Here is a kid who is dealing with 100 different things most of us will never have a full grasp of, but he keeps busting his butt every single day.”

Ever since his best friend’s arrival on the gridiron, Maring has seen a new level of effort and intensity.

“Ever since (McKay) has joined the team, everybody seems to be working even harder, and Hunter is right there in the huddle getting after us if we start slacking. So the intensity never slows down,” Maring says. “If we keep working like this, we will get pretty deep into the season.”



Photo by Frank Wolf



Wolfpack Looking to Reclaim Class D Prominence

By Frank Wolf @wolf3328

After running through Southwest-ern this past Saturday afternoon in a Section VI non-league matchup 38-3, Clymer/Sherman/Panama find themselves in a position to reclaim Class D prominence. They have the back-to-back defending champion Randolph Cardinals (0-1) in their midst, a program that hasn't lost a sectional game to a Class D opponent the past two seasons.

The Wolfpack have much to be optimistic about heading into the much anticipated division game with the Cards. This past week, Bryce Hinsdale broke the program's all-time receptions record, previously held by Cam Barmore (114), now at D-II Mercyhurst.

57th career win (56 with CSP) on Saturday.

Perhaps the most surprising of all was the maturity in second-year quarterback Tate Catanese. The junior went 19-24 for 255 yards passing and threw for five touchdowns, tying a program record. Catanese completed passes to five different Wolfpack receivers against the Trojans, with classmate Carter Brink hauling in six for 111 yards and two scores. Hinsdale also caught a game-high seven balls and a score-

while Alex Barmore (Cam's younger brother) finished with three catches and a score.

Catanese's first big completion of the opening quarter was a bomb to Barmore, which set the tone for the rest of the afternoon and led to the first Wolfpack TD.



Photo by Alex Kolstee



On the flipside, the CSP defense was perhaps more impressive, which raises the level of optimism for Friday night and perhaps further down the road. The Wolfpack recorded a sack and 2-picks, giving up just over 100 total yards to the Trojan offense. Granted, Southwestern was down their starting QB, but the play of the defensive line is where the Wolfpack shined. Southwestern was held to under 40 yards rushing.

Randolph will present more of a challenge, in the sense that they are bigger up front, have a couple of studs that can run the ball and the simple fact that CSP hasn't beaten them since the '21 season.

"We need to be much more physical at the point of attack," Harper said. "The line play was solid (Saturday), but we need to get better every week and Randolph will be another good test."

The defending Section VI Class D champion Cardinals traveled to Fredonia for their first game where the Hillbillies won 41-21. Randolph ran the ball consistently against Fredonia, not showing much since it was a non-league game.

Maverick Adams and Tristen Farnham each had over 80 yards rushing and could be a lethal 1-2 punch out of the backfield for the Cards.

"We need to play gap sound, disciplined defense," Harper said in preparing for Randolph. "I think we're a lot more experienced than we were last year and much stronger physically."



Clark A Rising Star For Crusaders

By Tony Fiorello @anthonyfiorello



Photo by Andrew Miller

The Canisius Crusaders were ahead at half but came up just short falling 47-36 to Cathedral Prep Saturday. Senior QB Vincent Zimmerman was 12/15 for 152 yards and two TDs. Freshman Elijah Kimble had a strong debut running for 121 yards and a score. Junior extraordinaire Jayhden Clark, who was limited to 3 catches for 18 yards and a TD.

The Crusaders have been retooling a bit under coach Kraig Kurzanski, but the process of becoming a better football team should be sped up a bit in 2023.



Clark, who led the Crusaders in catches, yards, touchdowns, tackles, fumble recoveries and interceptions as a sophomore wide receiver and safety last year, is cause for a lot of excitement according to Kurzanski.

“Jayhden loves playing both ways and he’s a physical kid. I knew he was going to be special when I first met him before last season,” Kurzanski said. “He does everything well and he always practices hard – he cares about trying to do his best all the time.”

Clark’s versatility has raised eyebrows around Western New York, and Kurzanski knows that he’d be a fool not to take advantage of his talents.

“He plays wide receiver and safety for us, but he can play in the slot and on the outside and he can also play cornerback too,” Kurzanski said. “I think he’s an underrated defender and a terrific safety. But he’s also a really good wide receiver – he’s a very talented young guy, that’s for sure.

“We will certainly try to get him the ball a little bit more this year because he’s a top talent in New York State. Those numbers are against good opponents too, so we know he’s for real.”

On top of his talent, Clark is also a leader and someone who his teammates gravitate to.

“Jayhden’s one of the hardest working kids I’ve coached in regard to practice, preparation and taking care of his schoolwork,” Kurzanski said. “He’s such a talented kid and he’s one of the most competitive kids I’ve coached in 35 years.

“As a person he’s a good friend, a good teammate and he’s a great leader. He’s one of our captains and is a lead-by-example type and a very likable guy. I know we throw the word ‘love’ around a lot in society nowadays, but his teammates really do love being around him. In practice, he’ll coach up a young kid and he competes hard against the seniors every day.”

According to Kurzanski, Clark is starting to draw interest from multiple college programs. He has an offer from the University at Buffalo and has landed on the radar of schools like Syracuse, Rutgers and Virginia Tech. Villanova and Bucknell have also come knocking on his door.

Yet Clark knows he has another two years to go before he graduates from high school, and Kurzanski also acknowledges that kids like Clark don’t grow on trees.

“He’s a unique kid and we’re very blessed to have him here,” Kurzanski said. “I think the sky’s the limit for him.”

The ‘Will’ of Willoughby leading the Sparks

By Jerry Sullivan @ByJerrySullivan

Noah Willoughby was a pudgy kid when he began playing football. He played left tackle in Little League. But he was a natural athlete, one who understood the game at a higher level. He had loftier ambitions for himself.

“I got tired of blocking people,” Willoughby said after a recent South Park practice at Mulroy Park. “It was like a hitting dummy to me. Don’t get me wrong, I loved it. But I wanted to be more. I was such a vocal leader, I wanted to be more. I wanted the ball in my hands.”

So one morning about seven years ago, Noah woke up to an epiphany. He went to his grandfather and told him, ‘I want to play quarterback.’

Greg Willoughby, who has raised Noah from the age of six months, looked at his grandson and said, “Can you throw?”

“Yes,” Noah replied.

He could throw, all right. From the start, it was clear that Willoughby had a special talent for passing a football. He attracted the attention of some top Catholic programs. As a freshman, he briefly went to Canisius, but transferred to South Park High during the pandemic year of 2020-21.

Noah didn’t transfer in time to play in the abbreviated spring high school season in 2021, but he was able to throw some with the scout team for the Sparks.

“We had him come out and throw for us in practice,” said South Park head coach Tim Delaney. “We were going to play Jamestown in the sectional final and they threw the ball pretty well. We knew immediately how good of an arm talent he had.

Willoughby burst on the high school scene as a sophomore in 2021, shattering South Park’s single-season passing record with 2,644 yards and 26 touchdowns — including a record-setting 451 yards against Williamsville East.

But he wasn’t content. Unsatisfied with his season, he again wanted more. He didn’t want records, he longed to be a complete quarterback, a legitimate college prospect and a leader.

“I was around 230 pounds,” Willoughby recalled. “I’m like 5-11 (he’s now around 195 pounds). From my sophomore to junior year, I had to make a choice. I didn’t have a good sophomore year to me. We went 5-5. So I had to make a choice, to step up and be that guy, be the leader of the team.”

At that point, he was training with Joe Licata, the former UB quarterback who had his own camp, Joe Licata Football. Licata gave it to him straight.

“I had a very candid conversation with him and his grandfather,” said Licata, now head coach at his alma mater, Williamsville South. “It was like ‘Hey, this is what colleges are looking for; you have to change your body’.



The William R.
CONNOLLY CUP
Memorial

76

*Photo by Andrew
Miller*

“That’s what’s been great about our relationship. When I tell him stuff like that and when we have those tough conversations, he responds and respects it.”

Delaney had the same advice. He told Noah he needed to get serious with his off-season training, change his body, and get his grades up to make himself a more attractive college prospect. He says Willoughby took it all to heart and came back a different player as a junior.

Willoughby didn’t have quite the stats as his sophomore year. But he finished with 2,303 passing yards and 22 touchdowns. The number that mattered was the team’s record: South Park went 6-3, 6-0 in its division, and became sectional A-3 champions. He also raised his grades in summer school.

The off-season commitment continued over this past summer. Delaney said Noah has become a terrific leader, like a coach on the field.

“When you have a kid like Noah, who throws it really, really well, we’re able to do some things we either haven’t done or won’t do with other guys,” Delaney said. “I mean, he really understands coverage; he understands what the defenses are attempting to do with their coverage, and with their alignment.

“When we watch film, he can tell me who the best kid is, who the worst kid is, what kind of matchup he wants, and the things he wants to do.” Willoughby said he has a much greater command of the position at this point in his career. Licata says Noah has a “next-level mind”, that he understands quarterback concepts you’d see in college.

“I don’t make as many mental mistakes,” Willoughby said. “I’m calmer in the pocket. My pocket presence is a lot better. I used to be paranoid; I would run out of the pocket for no reason and try to make these acrobatic throws I wasn’t ready for. Now, I’m a lot calmer and I understand.

“I’m just growing as a player,” he said, “and I continue to grow every single day.” One day soon, he could own the Section VI career passing record. Willoughby, who passed for only 84 yards in South Park’s opening loss Saturday at powerhouse Syracuse CBA, is 1,640 yards shy of the record — held by none other than his friend and passing guru, Joe Licata.

South Park hosts Williamsville South on Sept. 22. The Sparks won at Will South last season. Noah says he and Licata are close, like family. They text all the time. But he had fun teasing Joe over the summer about breaking his record — maybe in the game at Will South, though that’s highly unlikely at this point.

“I said, ‘Look, you can beat this thing as much as you want’,” said Licata, who said his mission in life is helping young players ‘get to where I was and beyond.’ But don’t have a great day when we play’.

“Last year, he made a throw down the sideline, a deep comeback route, right in front of our bench. It was a college, NFL-type throw. And he just looked at me. Yeah, it was all in good fun and good spirits. I was like, Man!” Licata, who recruited during his time as an assistant at UB, has seen a lot of college prospects and says Willoughby’s arm talent rates with the top passers in the country. Delaney tells college recruiters the same thing.

“If he was a couple inches taller, people would be beating down the door,” said Delaney, who led South Park to a state title in 2015, the first-ever by a city public school. “They’ll say, well, he’s only 6-foot. But the dude who won the national championship last year was 6-foot. I don’t get it. I never, ever get it.” Willoughby has not been pursued by top Division I schools. He’s attracted interest from the likes of New Hampshire and Lafayette, both Division I FSC programs. Mercyhurst, a Division II program, is in the mix. He’s a preferred walk-on at UB, which Licata and Delaney expect to be his destination.

“He’ll go to UB and it’ll work out, or he’ll go to UB and he’ll decide after a couple of years, I’m not going to be the starter here and he’ll transfer,” Delaney said. “Then he’d go have two or three really good years at a different school, whether it’s a Division III school or II or whatever.” Willoughby says he’s not caught up in the level of competition. He’s confident he’ll succeed wherever he goes. He’s not concerned with passing records. He’s a 17-year-old kid, looking to help his teammates win a state title. The CBA loss was a blow, but the Sparks are in Class B this season, with high hopes. As for college, walking on at UB could be the plan. There’s some promising history of under-recruited local kids doing so and making out OK. His friend Sean Dolac walked on, became a starting linebacker for the Bulls, and last year finished second in the country in tackles.

“My guy Sean Dolac!” Willoughby said. “I played seven-on-seven with him when I was 13 in 18U. He’s kind of like my big brother. He took me under his wing and he showed me what a leader was. We still talk to this day.

“I just want an opportunity to play,” he said. “That’s what I want.”

All he needs is a chance. By now, everyone knows he has the arm.

Wolf's Den

By Frank Wolf @wolf3328

Photo by Andrew Miller



They're off. The start of the 2023 high school football season is off and running. One thing is for certain after the opening weekend, nobody has won anything just yet. There's a long season ahead of us. Most teams haven't played a division game yet either. So let's all hold our horses on who the best of the best are yet.

There are teams that went out and did what was expected and-

others that left people scratching their heads. It's all good, the contenders will separate from the pretenders soon enough.

I saw the Connolly Cup and Trench Trophy committee members were out in full force of course, covering a wide array of games and athletes. With that, emails and messages come flying in from all corners of the region wondering why "little Jimmy" wasn't recognized for his five touchdown performance against a team that hasn't won in four years. So I'd like to try and break it down for you on how it works.

First, as a former Connolly Cup committee member, I can tell you that unless a member is at the game to verify the performance or a coach fails to send in any nominations, the athlete will most likely will not see his name on the list. Of course, if the player had a heck of a game but was flagged for a personal foul or some other behavioral issue, he too could be left off for that week.

As far as the Trench Trophy goes, they only nominate seniors. That could be why a noteworthy player was left off.

With each passing week, players names are mentioned during meetings and the committee members will make it a point to go see them. Give it time, if a player is having a great season, they will eventually see their names.

I took in a few games this past Thursday and Friday. One team that stood out was Chautauqua Lake. Ryan Gibbs has that team dialed in. The Thunderbirds play a nasty brand of football on defense and their offense complemented their efforts nicely. I don't know how they will do overall, but you can tell vast improvements were made. I expect them to compete in each game they play. They are noticeably improved and that's all a coach can ask for year to year.

Photo by Shawn Turri



On Saturday, for me at least, the game of the day will be Pioneer (1-0) at South Park (0-1). Yea, the Sparks lost last week out at Brockport but that was not a good indication of what kind of team they will be this season. The Panthers took down South Park last year in a non-league matchup. Enter 2023, these two storied programs are both in Class B, and that's going to be good for football enthusiasts because long term, these two teams always seem to bring their "A" game and should be battling it out for the right to go to Highmark more often than not.



Photo by Cal Phillips

See you at the field.



I'm hearing that this Will South (1-0) vs Cheektowaga (0-1) game on Thursday is must-see TV, I'll certainly keep an eye on that, but also Maryvale (1-0) making the trip out to Lake Shore (1-0) could be a good one as well.

On Friday, West Seneca East (1-0) hosts Health Sciences (1-0), that'll be an interesting one. The Trojans are always a tough team to play, Health has so much speed, and now add in Tyrone Hughes (who is expected to make his debut in Week 3), tough to skip that one. The game a lot of people had circled was the McKinley (1-0) vs Bennett (1-0) game at All-High. It's a nonleague game but still offers a ton of talent on both sides. Definitely worth checking out if you're undecided.

Leaderboard Post Week 1

Passing Leaders

Name	TEAM	YARDS	TDS
Justus Kleitz	<u>Iroquois</u>	318	3
Mike Grady	<u>Starpoint</u>	304	3
Bryce Tubin	<u>Clarence</u>	279	2
Tate Catanese	<u>CSP</u>	255	5
Rocco Panepinto	<u>Sweet Home</u>	244	2
Alex Krupa	<u>Lancaster</u>	242	4

Rushing Leaders

Name	TEAM	YARDS	TDS
Marcus Johnson	<u>Williamsville South</u>	229	2
Nigel McDuffie	<u>McKinley</u>	202	2
Sam Atzrott	<u>Fredonia</u>	181	1
Davion White	<u>Fredonia</u>	169	1
Antwan Cearr	<u>Health Sciences/BASC/Charter</u>	157	2
Gregory Waters	<u>Frontier</u>	156	3

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Interceptions

Name	TEAM	INT
Carson Fairbank	<u>Chautauqua Lake/Westfield/Brocton</u>	2
Noah Cudzilo	<u>Medina</u>	2
Brandon Carroll	<u>Health Sciences/BASC/Charter</u>	2
Jacob Roth	<u>Falconer/CV/MG</u>	2
Mac Capen	<u>Newfane</u>	2

Receiving

Name	TEAM	CATCHES	YARDS	TDs
Brandon Carroll	<u>Health Sciences/BASC/Charter</u>	3	145	2
Evan Floss	<u>Starpoint</u>	8	132	1
Nate Blair	<u>Iroquois</u>	8	130	2
Patrick Wind	<u>Clarence</u>	8	122	0
Ja'Meer Thomas	<u>Bennett</u>	5	112	0
Josh Neeley	<u>Williamsville South</u>	5	111	1
Carter Brink	<u>CSP</u>	6	111	2

Field Goals

Name	TEAM	FG MADE	LONGEST FG
Nate Laurito	<u>Chautauqua Lake/Westfield/Brocton</u>	1	37
Ben Dickinson	<u>Newfane</u>	1	30
Cannon Converse	<u>Lancaster</u>	1	30
Bryce Hinsdale	<u>CSP</u>	1	24
Carson Fairbank	<u>Chautauqua Lake/Westfield/Brocton</u>	1	37
Neves Hoose	<u>Southwestern</u>	1	34
Jaiden Torress	<u>Depew</u>	1	30

WNY Athletics would like to dedicate this season to Joe Foyle, Roger Weiss and Carl Kuras.