2006 Season Preview

A s the Ferris State University football program enters its 12th year under the direction of head coach Jeff Pierce, a new sense of purpose and excitement abound within in the program.

One can witness the sense of urgency and commitment as more than 50 players decided to stay on campus this summer and voluntarily attend the daily rigorous workouts both in the weight room and on the field.

There’s no question in Pierce’s mind the 2006 Bulldogs will be improved. How that translates into wins and losses remains to be seen.

“I believe we will be a much-improved football team come this fall,” said Pierce, the school’s all-time winningest coach. “We went through some tough stretches last season and it’s frustrating to fall short of those high expectations. I’m excited about this upcoming season and anxious to see how our team responds to the challenges which await us.”

A season ago, the Bulldogs struggled out of the gate by dropping their first four contests before winning the next two. Ferris State claimed a victory only once in its last five outings en route to a 3-8 overall record and an eighth-place tying 3-7 mark in the highly-competitive Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (GLIAC) football league.

Despite the record, Pierce was able to take a number of positives from the challenging gridiron campaign.

“These guys stayed together last year and fought through some tough times which will only strengthen our resolve,” said Pierce. “We also had to endure a number of injuries and depth problems last season. However, a number of our younger players were forced to step up which allowed them to improve and mature.”

A significant improvement by Pierce within the last season is upgrading the Bulldogs’ depth through an increase in scholarship funding.

“I sincerely appreciate the generosity of our football alumni and thankful for their contributions,” said Pierce. “Competing in the nation’s top Division II football conference each team must have quality depth in order to be successful.”

The go out and make a difference approach is one Pierce and the coaching staff is instilling in its players.

“Our commitment has been exceptional, the best I can remember in a long time,” Pierce said. “Their mindset is all business like. These men are locked in to achieving a highly-successful season.”

OFFENSE

Quarterback – Returning for his fifth season at Ferris, senior Ryan Kaul (6-0, 205) is the incumbent at the Bulldogs’ starter. Kaul, who ranks sixth among the school’s all-time passing leaders with 3,484 yards and 21 touchdowns, threw for 209 yards and a touchdown in his initial five before suffering a season-ending injury to place fourth with 77 team tackles.

Linebackers – This area has been a staple of the Bulldog defense throughout the years and the most recent noteworthy performer is senior middle linebacker Mike Klobucher (6-2, 248), a 2006 Football Gazette preseason All-American. The 2005 FSVI MVP and Most Valuable Defensive Skill Player lead the team in tackles for the year with 109 stops en route to becoming a repeat All-GLIAC Honorable Mention selection. Sophomore Jeff Hollandsworth (6-0, 225), junior Nick Maeder (5-10, 210), and junior Jordan Moore (6-0, 225) will vie for the two starting outside linebacker jobs.

H-Backs – With its various formations, John Vanbergend is slated to be the regular as a result of his blocking and pass-catching skills. He’s a valuable asset who can dominate at a number of positions.

DEFENSE

Defensive Line – As a unit, this may be the most talented and deepest group on this side of the ball. With all four starters and quality depth, Ferris has the luxury of considerable flexibility and options. Everything up front begins with left tackle Jake Visser (6-2, 265), who earned all-league honorable mention and team Most Valuable Defensive Player kudos in 2005 after posting a team second-place leading 63 tackles, including four sacks. The junior has been named a 2006 preseason All-American by Hansen’s Football Gazette. Senior Jerold Sawyer (6-1, 278) returns at right tackle after recording a career-high 43 stops last season. Junior Erik Schumacher (6-4, 270), senior Dan Boulter (6-3, 328) and sophomore Kyle Walker (6-1, 250), FSU’s Most Outstanding Defensive Rookie last year, each appeared in all 11 outings a season ago.

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