

Football team strives to build leadership, confidence

By Alexander Agadjanian

Following the most successful season in Tempe Prep football history, the 2013 campaign was bound to present its difficulties. The Knights have to make up for the departure of nine prominent players, a group which totaled nearly 90 percent of the team's offensive production from last year. Yet despite the importance of finding a new quarterback and filling holes in the running game, the true emphasis is on replacing senior leadership, and integrating new faces.

TPA head football coach Mr. Brittain stressed the need for leadership going into this season, and its effect on other intangible aspects of the game. "The kids need to develop confidence in order to play well, and without leadership, confidence is much more difficult to attain."

Senior linebacker/offensive lineman and Knights captain Ryan Whalen echoed his coach's sentiments. Whalen noted that the team has "lots of guys that haven't seen much varsity experience," but believes that "as the season progresses all the pieces will fall into place."

In Tempe Prep's first contest against Yuma Catholic, a game featuring 2012 playoff semifinalists, the scoreboard did not accurately tell the story. The Knights moved the ball downfield by relying heavily on their efficient rushing attack, once again the staple of the offense, led by Alex Akiu's 93-yard effort. While TPA entered the red zone on three separate occasions and gained more offensive yards than their opponents, the offense could not manufacture any points, as the team lost 24-0.

The next matchup on the schedule proved much more problematic for the Knights. In facing the Show Low Cougars — a Division IV favorite returning most of its key players from 2012 — the Knights were forced to try to slow down a potent offense, while attempting to navigate through an opportunistic defense. Tempe Prep ended up suffering its worst defeat since 2011, getting shut out 38-0.

To top off the grueling opening set of contests, TPA took on a familiar face in Northwest Christian for their annual homecoming game. The two teams were locked in a defensive battle in the early stages of the game, as both had trouble stringing together first downs on offensive drives. But mental miscues by the Knights consequently led to harmful penalties, and along with the gradual development of passing fluidity by Northwest Christian, Tempe Prep fell once again, 28-0.

But these early-season struggles are understandable, as first-year starter Jesse Brittain is still in the midst of getting acclimated in the Knights offense, and taking charge of the team in the role of quarterback. Coach Brittain believes that his signal-caller brings a valuable talent in throwing the deep-ball, which could promote balance in the offense. Regarding the quarterback, Coach Brittain says he feels "very confident we've picked the right guy for the job, and we're going to be patient with him as he learns the ropes."

So despite emerging from the team's toughest games winless, the Knights still remain positive and maintain their composure. "Regarding our early struggles, we've known all along that our first few weeks would be challenging," Whalen said. "We're a physical team that will improve greatly as our young players continue to grasp what it means to play on varsity."



Quarterback Jesse Brittain prepares to pass during Friday night's homecoming game against Northwest Christian.

Photo by Jim Willittes/PhoenixSportsPhotography.com

Professional photographer Jim Willittes will be taking photos at many of Tempe Prep's varsity games and meets throughout the year. Some will appear in *De Equitibus* and the yearbook, and all his TPA sports photos may be viewed and purchased at PhoenixSportsPhotography.com. "Thank you for the opportunity to be part of the Tempe Prep sports community," says Mr. Willittes.



Head coach Mr. Brittain works with the offensive line during a practice.

De Equitibus photo