

Metamora Football – What will 2009 bring?

It may seem hard to believe but summer is over. Vacation time has come to a close, school has started and there's just a hint of fall in the air. But with the end of this season begins a new one, the 2009 Metamora football season. If you live in the Metamora area and haven't felt the excitement of approaching football season, you must be living in a bubble. The kickoff countdown has begun, the football signs are all around town, the parent meetings and fund raisers have all signaled the most favorite time of year in this football crazed town. And of course the big question around town, what will the Redbird's look like this year?

Metamora fans have much to be proud of with their football team. Since taking over the Metamora football program in 1990, head coach Pat Ryan has built a football dynasty in Central Illinois. Ryan has compiled a record of a 186 wins with just 41 defeats. He has taken the Redbirds to the state championship game six times and, in 2007, won it all. Ryan has surrounded himself with an outstanding coaching staff at all levels. Many of his assistants played for him. They understand Ryan's system, they know what it takes to compete at a high level and they know how to engage the players all year round.

2009 has brought some unique challenges to Ryan and his staff, in particular, equipment. Earlier workouts had approximately 150 young men in the program. That left the program so short on helmets they had to borrow from the JFL program until the additional equipment order arrives. Game jerseys for the sophomores were also an issue. The equipment shortage should be resolved by the first game according to sophomore coach Curt Ryan. One can't help but believe this is a good problem to have for any program. Statistically, the numbers are eye opening. Metamora has an enrollment of 985 students according to IHSA. Assuming half are male, over 30% of all the young men at Metamora Township High School participate in football - a true testament to Coach Ryan and his staff.

The 2009 Varsity Redbirds will see some major changes and the return of some familiar faces. Gone are the daunting linemen and linebackers of last year's state runner up team. Names like Kanga, Heinzmann, Thannum, Corwin, and Randolph are all now part of the Metamora history book. But the return of junior quarterback Michael Fay, senior running backs Aaron Peters and Dan Burk, all provide the offensive core to build on. Fay, a Journal Star All-Area recipient, returns to the helm with 14 games experience. That's more experience than most senior high school quarterbacks. Peters, also All-Area, will no doubt again contend for the conference rushing title while Burk will continue to provide excitement with his quickness. Kicker Brennen VanMieghem, also a junior, returns after being named to the Chicago Tribune All-State team last season and collecting a state record 82 extra points. Eyes will be watching senior captains Dane Kempf and Jesse Mischler to anchor the defense.

The biggest question seems to center around the offensive line. On paper, the 2009 linemen do not appear to possess the physical stature as last year's team. But as last year's state champs Wheaton-St. Francis team showed us, team speed, quickness and

execution can get you where you need to be. In his short tenure as offensive line coach, Ryan Otto has demonstrated the ability to assemble a cohesive group to get the job accomplished. There's little question this group needs to perform well for the Redbirds to be successful and Otto appears to be up to the challenge.

The junior class brings a wealth of football talent to this year's varsity team. Beau Geier should prove to be an excellent backup quarterback to Fay. Geier led last year's sophomores to another undefeated season under Coach Curt Ryan. Linemen Tyler Burch, who played with varsity all last season, will contribute once fully recovered from off-season ankle surgery. Linebackers Bryan Love, David Tracy and Tom Bieneman should see significant playing time. This class has not been defeated in their high school career, winning their freshmen and sophomore games by an average score of 46-10. Losing is not something this class is accustomed to.

The 2007 Redbirds won the state championship. In 2008, the question around the conference was "is Metamora rebuilding or reloading?". Was there any doubt they reloaded coming home from Champaign with the state runner up trophy? Coach Ryan has always emphasized each team develop their own identity, play the game with heart as a team and work hard to achieve your goals. Ryan will continue with this winning strategy in 2009 as the Birds reload yet again.

The Metamora Redbirds open the season with a non-conference home game against Riverside-Brookfield on Friday, August 28th at 7:00pm. Riverside-Brookfield has historically represented a unique challenge for the Redbirds. This year should be no different. The Birds open conference play on September 4th at archrival Washington. The Washington Panthers expectations are high and playing at home against the Redbirds will provide an emotional lift. This early season showdown could very well set the stage for the conference champion as the Panthers and Redbirds are pre-season picks for the top spots in the Mid-Illini.

So Metamora fans, dig out that red & black clothing, find your Redbird hat, gather up the cowbells and settle in for what should be another exciting season of high school football.