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Rams look to tackle winning campaign this fall

By Eddie Garcia

July 07 , 2007

The following article is reprinted from the July/August issue of *85239 The Magazine*.

The Maricopa High School football team will look to make some noise this upcoming season when it moves up in division from 2A to 3A.

Head Coach Tyler Brandt was given the reins last August and led the team to a 5-6 record. It was a rough start for the Rams, but they turned it on in the second half of the season, which included a 28-27 win at 5A Boulder Creek. Brandt gave up his athletic director and assistant principal duties to focus on building a winning culture and a solid football program.

Even though they are moving up to 3A, the Rams are looking for bigger and better things this season. With a host of proven performers and promising newcomers on both offense and defense, all of the elements seem to be in place.

Brandt knows that winning football programs are made in the off-season, so he has encouraged weightlifting, plus implemented spring football conditioning and summer passing leagues. Expectations inside the Rams football program are high.

This season certainly will be a challenging one as Maricopa finds itself in the tough 3A South region with back-to-back state champion Coolidge, in addition to Empire, Florence, Fountain Hills, Globe, Safford and Santa Cruz. Four of the seven region games will be at home this season for the Rams.

85239.com sat down with senior quarterback Will Clemans and senior running back/linebacker Matt Fierros to discuss the past and present of Rams football. According to Clemans, "Since Brandt's arrival last fall the program has been overhauled for the better. Coach Brandt is more focused on discipline, mental toughness, physical strength, hard work, level of effort and fundamentals." All-region standout Fierros added, "Before Brandt got here practice was a joke; the team was not focused and didn't work



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hard. Brandt brings much needed discipline, focus and leadership to our program.”

THE OFFENSE

The Rams will look to Clemans to lead the offensive attack. Clemans, who saw significant time behind center last season as the backup quarterback, is working hard this off-season by hitting the weight room, attending football camps and working on timing patterns with offensive teammates. Brandt said he is confident in his quarterback’s ability to make quick and decisive decisions.

Clemans will have plenty of weapons to choose from, such as speedy senior wide receiver/tailback Justin Zabawa. Zabawa, who figures to play a big role in the offensive game plan this season, has great



hands and the ability to cut it up field at full speed. Brandt is looking to Zabawa to lead by example, noting, “Zabawa is a machine; the guy never gets tired.” The Rams will look to Fierros to carry the load up the middle. The two-way player led the team in both touchdowns and tackles last season. He has low center gravity and runs full speed between the tackles.

Sure-handed senior wide receiver Cody Seymore, who quietly makes big catches, will help stretch the field when the team goes to the air. Senior Tony Jones will line up opposite Seymore. The 6’2” Jones is a big target and gives the Rams a legitimate deep threat. The Rams could have a sleeper in senior tight end Josh Cruz. The 6’3” Cruz has good size and decent hands. Also, look for junior Blake Schwanbeck to be a factor. Last season, Schwanbeck played

fullback, tailback, wideout and center. He is an elusive runner in the backfield, has great hands and is especially effective when it comes to screen passes. Along with Cruz, Schwanbeck could be a solid tight end.

A year ago, offensive linemen were in short supply due to injuries, and players such as Schwanbeck had to step in to fill the void. This season’s line will be anchored by senior center Chris Wilson, along with junior lineman Jacob Dickerson. Wilson is coming off shoulder surgery, so he hopes to be at 100 percent at the beginning of the season. Eric Chavez, Alex Sesma, Philippe Palafox, Zach Davis and newcomer Mike Dapaz will compete for starting offensive line positions.

THE DEFENSE

The defense is going to a three-down-linemen, four-linebacker look led Fierros, last season’s 2A West all-region linebacker. Fierros is a big-time hitter and has a knack for finding the ball carrier play after play. Lining up next to Fierros will be senior Heath Bookman, a solid inside linebacker who can deliver big hits. Schwanbeck will play outside linebacker and his intensity should be contagious on the defensive side of the ball. Sean Carr and Josh Batista will compete for the final outside linebacker spot.

The secondary has two returning starters in Seymore and Zabawa. Newcomer Tony Jones, who has the speed to help shut down the deep threat, should get the nod at free or strong safety but is also being considered at outside linebacker due to his size and athletic ability. Vince Davis and Sebastian Ugarte will compete for the open corner or safety positions. Look for the defensive line to be anchored by Davis, Chavez, Santiago Castro, Sesma and Palafox.

Photo by Aaron Thacker

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