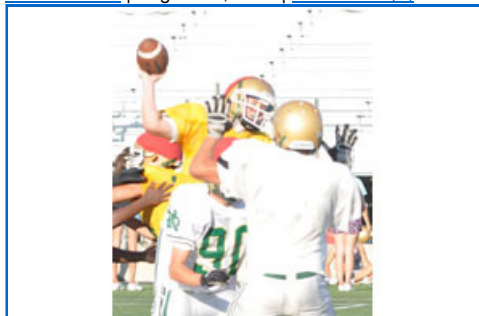


PONTIAC NOTRE DAME PREP PREVIEW: Senior-laden Irish to ride coat tails of last year's season-end win streak

[Dan Stickradt](#) | August 24, 2011 | [Comments \(0\)](#)



RISE ABOVE: At 6-foot-3, senior quarterback Dan Durkin can see over the line, which will help him become an effective passer in the CHSL AA Division this season. Staff Photo | Dan Stickradt

BY DAN STICKRADT

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PONTIAC — The start of the 2010 football season for Pontiac Notre Dame Prep was downright ugly. The Fighting Irish opened 0-5 and scored only three touchdowns and 21 total points in that stretch.

Instead of throwing in the towel, Notre Dame Prep rebounded to close the campaign with four straight wins, outscoring the opposition 117-19 with two shutouts down the stretch.

"It was a difficult start, but we lost to five pretty good teams," said Kyle Zimmerman, who is entering his third season with the Fighting Irish. "Through five weeks, those teams only had one loss between them and they all made the playoffs. They were a combined 24-1 (after five weeks). So it wasn't like we lost to bad teams. It just took us a while to get going. The only team that had a loss out of the group was (Dearborn) Divine Child, and they lost to (Novi Detroit Catholic Central). I don't even think that counts. CC is a huge school."

Coming off that 4-5 season, Zimmerman feels that better fortunes are in store for Notre Dame Prep, as long as the Irish can come out of the gate with more success. Only three of the schools that the Irish lost to last year are on the schedule this season, including Week 1 opponent St. Clair Shores Lakeview, who the Irish visit Aug. 26.

There are eight returning starters on both sides of the ball that should help Notre Dame Prep contend in the CHSL AA Division this season and return to the postseason for the eighth time. The Irish most recently reached the postseason in 2009.

"We have a lot of guys back. We have eight starters back on both sides of the ball, so that's 16 guys that have been here, many for three years now to try to help us turn it around," said Zimmerman. "This is the group of guys that we have focused on since we got here. We also have 16 seniors overall. Not all started last season but they all have been part of the program and know what we expect from them."

There are several key players back to lead the Irish, most importantly senior quarterback Dan Durkin (6-3, 185), who helped Notre Dame Prep outscore the opposition 198-142 last season. Seniors Shane Frakes (6-0, 195) and Jacob Romeo (6-0, 195) both saw plenty of carries in the backfield last season and senior Troy Sassack (6-4, 190) returns as the top wide receiver.

Romeo is being courted by Princeton, Penn, Wayne State and Hillsdale. Frakes is also on the radar at Penn, Wayne State, Vanderbilt and Grand Valley State, while Sassack, who Zimmerman feels "is the best wide-out I have ever coached," has gained plenty of interest from numerous schools in the MAC and GLIAC.



TUCK AND RUN: Senior Jacob Romeosould recieve his fair share of carries this season for Pontiac Notre Dame Prep. Staff Photo | Dan Stickradt

Senior Bobby Secord (6-2, 220) is the top returning offensive lineman and may see time on both sides of the ball.

Senior Max Spadafore (5-10, 185) is a hard-hitting linebacker who will play alongside sophomore Aiden Cullen (5-10, 180) and Frakes. Junior Conner Cervone (5-8, 150) plays much bigger than his size on the defensive line and Romeo is an athletic cornerback who reads opposing offenses well.

Several seniors will play elsewhere in the starting lineup.

"A lot of our losses last season, they were close entering the fourth quarter. It was like 12-0, 14-0, but we just couldn't catch a break," offered Zimmerman. "We lost our quarterback in Week 1 on the first play of the second half. We had some backups going up against some teams (that made the playoffs)."

Zimmerman hopes that his senior-laden group can learn from last year's misfortunes and build on its four-game win streak at the end of last year.

"This group has come up with us. A lot of these seniors played varsity as sophomores and juniors and we've watched them grow as a group."

Zimmerman also pointed out the coaching stability with the current staff.

"All but one of these guys has been here for three years," he said. "There has also been only one (head) coach that's seen a group of kids go all the way through here since Notre Dame Prep opened (in 1994). There have been a lot of head coaches. We hope to stick around awhile and build a solid program here."

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