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2009 football season begins

Eleven new coaches join Section II football teams

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Tom Pallas has taught and coached football in Section II for 24 years. This morning, Pallas embarks on his first varsity football practice as head coach at Bishop Gibbons -- one of a record 62 teams beginning practices in preparation for the 2009 season.

"This really wasn't what I expected," said Pallas, who joined the staff at Bishop Gibbons in 2008 as defensive coordinator. "We have a lot of kids coming back, so let's see if we can continue the trend we had last year. Expectations are starting to creep in at BG."

The Knights finished 6-3 in 2008, the school's best record since 1972, and feature senior all-purpose standout Derrick Pitts.

As a junior in 2008, Pitts rushed for 1,705 yards -- the 22nd best single-season total in Section II history.

"We are hopeful and optimistic about this season," Pallas said. "Derrick will play at quarterback, running back and wide receiver. We want to find many different ways to get the ball into his hands."

Tim Stewart also will be conducting his first varsity practice today at Ichabod Crane, a school that has never had 11-man football. Kinderhook, which merged with Valatie to form Ichabod Crane, played eight-man football in 1951, 1952 and 1953.

"I think there is a lot of excitement, but there are still people in the community that don't know we are playing football," said Stewart, who previously served as an assistant coach at Hoosic Valley and Albany.

There are a total of 11 coaches who assume new coaching positions in 2009. A few, like Colonie's Mike Ambrosio and Whitehall's John Millett, return to schools where they previously coached for many years.

Millett, who ranks fourth all-time in Section II with 189 victories, last coached at Whitehall in 1999. His first varsity season came at Granville in 1957.

Joe Whipple (Bishop Gibbons to Schalmont) and Pete Porcelli (Lansingburgh to Albany) have shifted to different schools.

Joining Pallas and Stewart as new varsity coaches are Zach Gobel (Averill Park), Drew Romanowski (Columbia), Al McNall (Lansingburgh) and Jim Kramer (Schenectady). Carm Audino (Catholic Central), who once held the job at Bishop Gibbons, returns to the head coaching ranks after serving as an assistant at Christian Brothers Academy.

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New coaches

Here is the list for Section II:

Pete Porcelli (Albany)

Zach Gobel (Averill Park)

Tom Pallas (Bishop Gibbons)

Carm Audino (Catholic Central)

Mike Ambrosio (Colonie)

Drew Romanowski (Columbia)

Al McNall (Lansingburgh)

Tim Stewart (Ichabod Crane)

Joe Whipple (Schalmont)

Jim Kramer (Schenectady)

John Millett (Whitehall)

Coming Tuesday: The Times Union kicks off its daily coverage of high school football with a visit to Ichabod Crane.