



Jr. Bills hold high hopes for season after strong jamboree performance

BY BEN CROAT AND DANIEL TICE
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In 1916, Art Thomas became the first coach of SLUH football. 106 years later, Adam Cruz is the 17th. His goal will be to improve on the team's 7-4 record from last season, which ended at the hands of the Class 6 champion CBC Cadets in the District Finals. The Jr. Bills have a lot of good to build on as they return 11 starters from last year's playoff run. SLUH is ranked No. 7 in the area by both STL Today and GSV, but hope that the star-studded roster surrounding the first year coach will lead them to exceed expectations.

Leading the team will be Marco Sansone who, like Cruz, also has a new title: starting quarterback. The junior will replace Luke Johnston '22 and will hope to continue the legacy of the Sansone name in the program.

"I am excited to be able to work with Coach Cruz and throw to some really talented guys," said Sansone. "It should be fun."

Sansone will have a plethora of weapons at his disposal, most notably junior Ryan Wingo. The 6-foot-2 five-star wide receiver caught 32 passes for 632 yards and 10 touchdowns last season, and scored four more on the ground and one on a punt return. Wingo's sophomore season helped earn him 33 collegiate offers, and he is poised to have an even better year this time around.

With last season's top wideout Chris Brooks, '22, moving on to the University of Wisconsin, Wingo should see an increased target share and more volume. However,

he is more than just an offensive threat. Wingo will serve as the punter for the second straight year. He averaged 42 yards per punt as his athleticism makes him a threat on fourth downs.

The rest of the offensive weapons also cannot be overlooked. Tight end Zach Ortwerth committed to Iowa over the summer and looks forward to his potential larger role in the receiving game. His 6-5 basketball frame makes him an elite run blocker and the perfect safety blanket for any QB.

Sophomore Landon Pace will be behind Ortwerth in the depth chart, but also has the talent to be a starting caliber tight end most other years. The son of NFL Hall of Famer Orlando Pace, Landon has garnered much interest from college scouts, which has culminated in an offer from his father's alma mater, Ohio State.

Juniors Joe Harris and Nathan Gunn will complement Wingo in the receiving room and look to breakout in their expanded roles. Star cornerback Jacobi Oliphant will make the move to wide receiver this season, further boosting the aerial firepower of this years receiving threats.

"I am looking forward to the new season. Marco is looking good, and the rest of the offense has the talent to make an impact," said Ortwerth. "As a team we had a good summer, we built a lot of trust in each other working out and learning a new offense and defense. We will have some new guys that will step up and fill some roles. I'm excited for what we can do this season."

To the relief of Sansone, the offensive line should be

much improved from last year for one reason: experience. SLUH is returning four of the five starters from last season: senior Matthew Barnes at left tackle, junior Vince Chappius at center, senior Alex Fowler at right guard, and junior Gus Dames at right tackle. The left guard position has been a mix of junior Virshaun Mosely and



photo | Skye Kelly

senior Diego Torrez, who are battling for the starting job.

"We have been looking pretty good so far," said Barnes. "We have no first year varsity players starting for us and I think that our experience will help us work together as a unit."

Senior Kam Bailey will look to take over as the starting running back, and freshman Jordan Taylor is also expected to have a sizable role running the ball. They will look to replicate the work of last year's RB1 Derrick Baker, who accumulated 1,003 rushing yards.

On the defensive side of the ball the Jr. Bills return a number of starters, most notably junior defensive end Archie Carruthers, junior cornerback Jacobi Oliphant, and senior linebackers Lou-

is Kertz, Ryan Kellogg, and Dillon Ramella. The secondary will see the additions of senior Trey Smith, freshman Keenan Harris, and Ryan Wingo, who will play free safety for the Jr. Bills. The defensive line will add juniors William Sheffield and Oliver Barcizewski, senior Jaylen Morris, and sophomore Landon Pace.

"We have a very robust junior class, that's just a fact. We have two junior captains and a lot of our returning starters were sophomores that started last year," said Cruz. "But we still have a lot of great seniors that have been starters for the last three years. There's Zach (Ortwerth) who's committed to Iowa, Louis (Kertz) who was third last year in Class 6 in tackles, and many other guys who deserve praise."

"I think our team kind of got into the lexicon of thinking 'we're going to be really good next year.' I've really tried to keep us focused because this year is our year too," said Cruz. "I'm really excited for our seniors and I want to see those juniors develop. There's also a couple of sophomores and freshmen

that can take the next step; we made a lot of good strides last year."

The Jr. Bills' first test came last Friday where they took part in the Eureka Jamboree along with Rockwood Summit and Vianney. Their first scrimmage against Eureka saw the defense shut down Eureka's high powered rushing attack with key tackles made by senior linebackers Ramella, Kellogg, and Kertz. Once SLUH took possession they didn't let off the gas as Sansone led the way with touchdown passes to juniors Jacobi Oliphant and Joe Harris leading SLUH to victory 2-0.

Against lowly Vianney, the Jr. Bills pulled their starters in favor of giving some JV players some experience and still ended up shutting out the Griffins 2-0.

The Jr. Bills faced off against Rockwood Summit for the final game who, again, were left scoreless with key defensive plays by senior cornerback Tre Smith, junior cornerback Jacobi Oliphant, and freshman safety Keenan Harris. SLUH finished the deal with another touchdown from Sansone to Oliphant to end the game 1-0.

Looking forward, the Jr. Bills have quite a daunting path ahead of them as their schedule has them facing a series of challenging out of conference foes. These include St. Mary's (12-1 last season) in week one, who went undefeated in inner-state play last season, Timberland (7-4) in week two, Vashon (9-2) in week four, Jesuit cross-state rivals Rockhurst (4-6) in week 8, and Cardinal Ritter (7-7) in week nine.

"Our schedule is very

challenging and what's awesome about that is that we can never get tempted to look ahead because every week we have a really good team," said Cruz. "We can't get ahead of ourselves because there isn't a single game on our schedule that we can take lightly. Last year, it was hard to keep our minds set versus now we know every week we're going to have to be committed."

The Jr. Billikens' first showcase sees them face off this Friday night against last year's Missouri Class 3 Champions and inner-city rivals, St. Mary's High School. It's been six years since the Jr. Bills have won the opening home game of the football season, widely touted as the Running of the Bills, but this year's contest will come with a few challenges. While the Dragons lost star wideout Kevin Coleman, they come into the matchup led by a trio of highly recruited seniors: Chase Hendricks, a three-star wide receiver, Jamal Roberts, a three-star running back committed to Mizzou, and Donovan MacIntosh, a lengthy cornerback committed to Kansas State. St. Mary's is ranked at the top of every small-school ranking of the St. Louis area and will provide a well-welcomed challenge to the Jr. Bills. SLUH currently holds a considerable 21-3 matchup advantage all-time but fell short in their last meeting 40-24, making Friday night's matchup a must watch. To pull off a victory at the Running of the Bills, SLUH will need to shutdown Roberts in the trenches, prevent big plays through the air, and exploit their aerial advantage.

Cross country team showcases depth in workouts and Alumni Race

BY BRENDAN JONES AND LUCAS RAMMACHER
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After the Alumni Race and two weeks of training, the team has shown off its depth not just on the varsity level, but also on JV.

Throughout the summer, there were always strong showings across all grade levels at the optional daily runs. While at the Madonna Della Strada Retreat Center in Silex, Mo., leaders on the team set high goals for the season.

Two of the highlighted goals for this season were to play to the team's strength and depth with ten runners under the 17-minute mark and 25 runners under the

18-minute mark for 5Ks. This is a step up from last year's 23 under 18 despite the loss of seven sub-18 seniors.

Head coach Joe Porter thinks this goal is reachable as a pack of nine runners were under 10:30 in the two mile alumni race with a steady flow of finishers from the 10:30 mark to the 11 minute mark. Based on 5K conversion time from the alumni race, the team has around 13 runners that show potential to break 17 minutes early in the season.

"I think the team will drop some insane numbers this year," said captain Nolan Meara.

Not only with varsity runners did the team showcase

its depth, but in heats two and three of the alumni race, there was a lot of pack racing and competition between younger runners. For nearly 50 of the new runners, this was the first chance to have a racing experience and to find out what it's like to compete with their teammates.

"One challenge that comes with such a large group of new runners is making sure that guys understand the routines and expectations," said Porter as there are a mere six coaches for the 111 runners on the team.

Though the team has lost six of the seven runners who ran in the team's fourth-place effort at State last year, the senior and junior classes seem

poised to step up to the top seven. The loss of last year's strong senior class had resulted in a wide-open group of runners challenging for the seven varsity spots, with seniors Tim Greiner, Meara, Wyatt Seal, Carter Lowe, Brendan Jones, and Will Riggan, as well as juniors Mason Scargall, Charlie Gray, Charlie Murray, and Anthony Zangara all likely to feature at some point in the season.

Coming up for the younger runners on the team is the O'Fallon Futures Meet (Aug. 31 at O'Fallon Township (Ill.), where all freshman and sophomore runners will get a chance to compete not only against each other, but also against other schools.

"I'm really excited to get back out there," said sophomore Patrick Jones. "It's a pretty flat course and a three-miler which always adds up to quick times to start the season."

Jones's enthusiasm seems to be shared among the whole of the sophomore and freshman classes as athletes are getting ready to show off the fitness they acquired from a series of hard workouts and long runs.

Despite the excitement building for the first meet, there is the logistical issue of getting all 60-some runners there and getting the new runners through their first pre-race workout (which consists of a first and sec-

ond set of drills, a warmup, and a walk of the course to familiarize the team with the layout). To account for this, Porter is sending a group of more experienced runners to show the freshmen these drills and to cheer them on.

"I think having a group of varsity guys there to support the underclassmen through their first meet will really drive home the season goal of team camaraderie," said junior and recent athlete of the day Charlie Murray.

As the team quickly approaches the start to the season, team morale is high among all leading into the upcoming O'Fallon and Granite City meets.