

TIMES TELEGRAM

AUG. 18 HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL: Oriskany, Pulaski switching from 11-man to eight

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ORISKANY, N.Y. — One of the area's smallest high schools still playing football will be playing eight-man football this season.

That was not the plan at Oriskany, but when only 18 players showed up Aug. 14 — six of them in street clothes — for the first day of preseason practice, head coach Jerry Tine said the district decided to join Section III's new eight-man league.

"We were hopeful we could do it. ... We thought we could at least be competitive," Oriskany coach Jerry Tine said. "But obviously, that didn't work out. A couple of families moved, a couple of kids decided not to come out, and the last couple of years our modified numbers had been dropping, too.

"Instead of trying to start the season with 18 kids and hope nobody gets hurt or misses a practice or two, we just thought this would be in our best interest. So this is where we're at."

Tine said there was some talk of some players from Oriskany possibly playing with longtime Cider Street rival Westmoreland — the schools already have joined forces in boys varsity soccer and modified football.

"But the kids said, 'We want to play football and we want to play together,'" Tine said.

Oriskany played in the National Football Foundation — a Section III league formed with hopes of breathing new life into struggling small-school programs — last season and finished 7-2 overall, including a loss in the NFF semifinals. There were six seniors, including school record-setting quarterback Ryan Enos, and a total of 27 players on the 2016 roster.

The state's game-day minimum is 16 players for 11-man football and 14 players for eight-man football, but Tine said that eight-man number might be lowered to 12.

"We thought we were going to have 22, maybe 24 kids this year," said Tine, who believes several other Section III schools have started the preseason with few than 25 players on this year's roster.

One of those, Class C Pulaski, also has decided to play eight-man football because of low numbers.

"We're not the only ones in that boat," Tine said. "Nobody wants to see anybody lose football. ... This is still football and the kids who are here are excited about it."

According to Tine, Section III will draw up a new schedule for an eight-man football league that now includes Oriskany, Pulaski, New York Mills, Cooperstown, South Lewis and Bishop Grimes of Syracuse. Practice begins Aug. 28 and the season opener is Sept. 23.

According to a report in the *Post-Standard*, Section III's eight-man coaches and athletic directors will meet Monday to decide on adding two teams and reworking the schedule. The four current teams have six- and seven-game schedules and would play each other two, and in some cases, three times.

Oriskany was scheduled to play in the Class D Central with Beaver River, Morrisville-Eaton, Waterville, Sauquoit Valley and Westmoreland, but now those five teams each have an open date that they will try to fill. Oriskany's season opener was originally scheduled for Friday, Sept. 1, at Waterville, and the Cider Street Trophy game — at home against Westmoreland — was supposed to be played Sept. 9 at Bernie Block Field.

Oriskany's schedule included games at Sauquoit Valley Sept. 15 and at home against Mt. Markham Oct. 14. One option to fill the holes on the schedule created by Oriskany and Pulaski switching to eight-man football would be for their scheduled 11-man opponents to play each other. For Sauquoit Valley, General Brown is the corresponding Pulaski opponent. For Mt. Markham, Altmar-Parish-Williamstown is the other team with a new date open on its schedule.

Section IV Greene has the same weekend open on its schedule as Mt. Markham, according to the New York State Sportswriters Association. Other teams with open dates corresponding with Sauquoit Valley's include Hoosic Valley in Section II, Rochester's Bishop Kearney in Section V, and Section IV's combined Harpursville/Afton squad.

Longtime Westmoreland coach Tim Gates, whose Bulldogs lost that Cider Street Trophy game last year for the first time since 1994, is confident his team's open date will be filled. "But losing that local rivalry, a game that's just down the road, that's what hurts the most," Gates said. "It's just unfortunate."

Hamilton's football program had been merged with Morrisville-Eaton in recent years; now Hamilton players are playing with Waterville, and Morrisville-Eaton is back to playing as the Warriors.

Times Telegram senior sports editor Jon Rathbun contributed to this report.