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(Neb.)- Eagles Begin Practice With Optimism, Big Numbers

By: Jeremy Anderson Posted at: 08/13/2019 10:16 AM

(Story Courtesy: Con Marhsall)

(Chadron)- With optimism in the air, football practice got underway at Chadron State College late last week.

There's no shortage of players. More than 150 are on the roster, believed to be the most in CSC history. About 60 of them are freshmen. Something like 45 of them saw action on last year's 7-3 team that shared third place in the Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference standings.

"I believe in giving everyone a chance if they want it," said Jay Long, now in his eighth year as the Eagles' head coach. "Chadron State gave me a chance to play college ball when not many others did. We give them the opportunity and it's up to them to seize it."

Long said a bulk of the players reported in good condition. "That's particularly true of the guys we're really counting on," he added.

The coach said the early practices have gone well. They are taking place from 9:30 a.m. to noon each day until classes begin on Monday.

The Eagles will be allowed to wear full pads for the first time on Tuesday.

"We want the veterans to set the example by playing with 'Eagle effort,' by going all out and playing hard all the time," the coach said. "We hope the freshmen and the transfers will take the cue and do the same. That helped us hang on and win several games last fall."

From an X's and O's standpoint, Long said the base schemes are being stressed this week.

"It's a review for the veterans. It gives them a chance to clean up and perfect their techniques while they're being introduced to the new guys," Long added. "It's the first step to getting them ready to play. Our goal is to get better with every practice so we'll be ready to play our best both physically and mentally every Saturday."

The Eagles will open the season on Saturday, Sept. 7, at Black Hills State in Spearfish and then host Colorado State-Pueblo the following Saturday. Both will be night games. The remaining nine contests will be played in the afternoon.

From a personnel standpoint, there are at least two highlights. Both tight end Colt Foster and running back Priest Jennings appear to be fully recovered from knee injuries that kept them from playing last fall.

The coaches also believe they've added a pair of transfers who will be able to help in areas where there are question marks.

One is senior Ju'Wan Murphy, a cornerback who joined the Eagles after Humboldt State in California dropped football at the end of last season. He played in all 10 of Humboldt's games last fall, took part in 36

tackles, intercepted two passes, broke up four more and defended six.

The other is Justin Calderon, a junior who earned all-star honors while playing offensive left tackle at Nassau Community College in New York last season. He's 6-foot-4, 285 pounds.

Offensive coordinator Logan Masters said with senior Jared Maciejczak the only returning starter available from last year's offensive line, it's good to have another candidate with experience to help fill the vacancies.

Masters also noted that since Long, who is in charge of offensive front, insists that all of his linemen learn to play each of the five spots, it allows the Eagles to have some choices when the starters are selected.

"That way we can pick the best five," Masters noted. He added that while several of the line candidates are young and lack experience, he's certain there will be strong competition for the eight slots that generally are available for offensive linemen on the travel squad.