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ORGANIZATION MAN: Jenks 9th Grade Coach Brent Martins, center, keeps busy managing and coaching two Jenks teams. Jenks Gazette photo

Extra League Cuts Freshman Football Attrition Rate 9th Grade Football

By KEVIN DUKE
Contributing Writer

Brent Martins, in his second year as the Trojan freshman football head coach, doesn't mind the extra work created for him this Fall.

Before the start of the season, athletic directors from all the schools in Jenks' conference, including Union, Stillwater, Muskogee and others, got together to try to deal with the high numbers of freshman players who were quitting the teams each year.

Schools in the conference were losing approximately half the players off the freshman teams every year, mainly because with only one team, there was not enough game time to spread among the fifty or so players who typically came out for the freshman programs.

The athletic directors solution; create a second league so more kids could see actual game time through the course of the season.

"Yes, it created another game night for me and all my coaches," says Martins, "but it was great for the kids and kept them interested in playing football."

The plan created the American League for first stringers, with their games on Tuesday nights, and the National League for the second-string players, who played their games this season on Mondays.

For the Trojans the maroon team played in the American League and the white team played in the National League.

"At this level a lot of the guys are not physically mature yet," explains the coach, "for those kids especially, it gave them a chance to play."

"In the past, these kids would have been on the sidelines for 90 percent of the games."

When they did get in games in previous seasons, it was typically in mop up roles at the end of games that were blowouts.

"This gave them a great opportunity to see playing time that mattered, instead of just getting on the field in games that were already decided," says Martins.

Apparently, according to the coach, the creation of the second league did exactly what it was intended to do.

"In my previous two years, as an assistant coach and then last year as the head coach, we consistently lost 20 to 30 players from the freshman team throughout the season," says the coach.

"Who could blame them for quitting when all they did was work their tails off in practice, but never got to get in the games."

With nine extra games this season, the problem of no playing time was averted, and players who might have quit the team in year's past stayed with the coach for the entire season.

Success of both teams may have also contributed to kids staying on, as both played in their league championship games earlier this month.

"This year our attrition rate is almost zero," beams the coach.

CHAMPIONSHIP GAMES

In its first season as a split squad, the Jenks Trojan maroon and white freshman football teams both made it to their respective championship games earlier this month at Hunter-Dwelle Stadium, with identical 7-1 records.

The evening began successfully for head coach Brent Martins and his white squad, as they came back from a 14-6 deficit late in the third quarter with two brilliant bombs to win the game and the National League championship, 21-14.

"We ran two good routes there, and my quarterback (Justin Anderson) put the balls right where they had to be to complete them," says Martins.

Finishing the season at 8-1, quarterback Anderson was "a very heady player who doesn't get rattled and throws the ball very well."

Of course, he had plenty of help both offensively and defensively all season.

Tailback Kal-EI Miller, "ran extremely hard for us every time he touched the ball," says Martins.

Center Derek McCrory and tackle Patrick Benson opened many of the holes for Miller, while wide receiver Phillip Gorman "ran great routes and caught the ball well all year," according to the coach.

The white defense held teams to one score or shut them out completely in the majority of the teams' games throughout the season.

They were led by linebacker Marcel Davis, the teams' leading tackler, and in the secondary by safety Ryan Stephens and cornerback, Austin Laskey.

In the nights' second contest, the maroon team turned the ball over four times, and came up on the short end of a 21-6 tally.

Although it was their second loss to the Redskins this season, and they finished the year at 7-2, they still shared the American League championship with Union because the first loss did not count in the League standings.

"The turnovers just killed us," laments the coach.

The maroon offense was led by a dual-threat quarterback, Jason Turner, and four different tailbacks.

Jordan Towers, Earnest Colbert, Grant Goodwin and Gabe Lynn all saw significant playing time this season.

"We used multiple packages to get these guys into the games," says Martins, "and we didn't see any fall off in production with any of them in the game."

The defense, "kept us in a lot of games early in the season until the offense got rolling," says the coach.

They were led by standouts BJ Lyles and Gary McCullough on the line, and Preston Wilburn and Trumaine Thompson in the secondary