

## Wellsville Eagles Favored to Win Pioneer League

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Mark Luedtke was hired two years ago to turn around a downtrodden Wellsville football program that was mired with off-the-field disciplinary issues, including several player suspensions, and struggled to produce in the win column.



Brandon Oakes turns the corner on a run to the outside for the Osawatomie High School Trojans.

The Eagles appear to be turning the tide, though.

Instead of having to worry about player conduct, the Eagles now have something else to worry about: living up to the hype of being the preseason favorite to win the Pioneer League, according to a preseason coaches poll.

Luedtke said he was flattered by receiving that high of a ranking, but his squad, which went 4-5 in 2009, also has a bigger goal in mind: advancing to the playoffs. The Eagles don't want just to advance to the postseason, they have plans of making a deep run.

Wellsville has plenty of experience to lean on, with nine starters returning on offense and eight on defense.

Brandon Ebeck is back to guide the offense as Wellsville's quarterback. He'll have

plenty of weapons around him to work with, including running backs Dalton Hughes and Jesse LeMay, fullback Jesse Campbell and wide receiver Zach Hoehn. Logan O'Dea will anchor the offensive line. On defense, Campbell figures to be among the top playmakers in the league at linebacker.

Osawatomie and Anderson County figure to challenge the Eagles for the league crown.

Osawatomie enjoyed plenty of success a year ago, finishing 7-2 overall to win the league title. Their experience was a big reason why, with much of their senior class having at least two or three years of playing time under their belts. In order to repeat as league champions, the Trojans will have to fill several holes after losing seven starters on each side of the ball to graduation.

Quarterback Seth Jones, a senior, and wide receiver Brandon Oakes, a junior, made for quite a lethal combination in the passing game a year ago. Jones made big strides, passing for more than 1,000 yards with 19 touchdowns and just eight interceptions to earn first-team league honors. Oakes took advantage of his blazing speed and to register 23 catches for eight touchdowns. He also saw time as the team's running back.

Brant Johnson, also a senior, will carry the load at running back after sharing duties with 1,000-yard rusher and recent graduate Jameson Greenwood last season. Alex Stookey and Kody Medina, both seniors, will anchor the offensive line.

Anderson County will look to build off its 7-3 record last season in which it advanced to the Class 4A playoffs, but in order to do that, coach Don Hilliard will be counting on some inexperienced players to fill the shoes of seven starters on each side of the ball who were lost to graduation.

Central Heights will look to advance to the playoffs for the fourth straight season, but in order to accomplish that, second-year coach Mike Swendson said his squad needs to cut down on turnovers and do a better job of getting more three-and-outs on defense.

Dalton Schwab, a junior, returns at running back. He showed some flashes of

brilliance last season, including a 230-yard performance against Prairie View. Max Wiederholt, a senior, will be counted on to deliver at tight end, as will Jimmy Hoskins, a junior, at wide receiver and cornerback.

The Vikings will also have to replace the talents of offensive and defensive linemen Cody Hoskins and Russell Hampton.

Prairie View, meanwhile, will undergo some changes with first-year coach Doug Whitcraft. For starters, the Buffaloes are switching from a power-I to a wishbone offense. He said the goal is to create less confusion among the players.

The strength of the squad will be in its offensive line, with Brandon Milliron, Tanner Stanage and Billy Teters leading the way.

Jayhawk-Linn will look to build off its playoff appearance. Even with the Jayhawks moving down from Class 3A to 2-1A, they will be in perhaps the toughest district in their classification, as all six teams advanced to the postseason last season.

Cody Sunderland, a junior, and Taylor Kellerman, a senior, will provide experience at wide receiver. Austin Billingsley, a senior, and Jake Rowe, a junior, have been battling it out at quarterback.