

North County giving off good vibes

North Monterey County High is still regarded as a "football school" to many, mostly due to its overwhelming success during the 1980s, when it won eight Santa Cruz Coast Athletic League titles in a nine-year period.

But facts are facts, and since 1994 — one year after moving to the Monterey Bay League — North County has had only two winning league seasons in the past 13 years.

At times, they've been close to grabbing a little blast from the past, having gone 2-3 in the MBL for the last three consecutive years.

Last season was particularly painful for the Condors, who started strong with a 5-2 record.

Only blowing a 16-0 fourth-quarter lead against Evergreen of San Jose prevented North County from being 6-1.

But with the playoffs within reach, North County suffered back-to-back blowouts to Monterey and Seaside, then closed the season with a disheartening loss to Monte Vista Christian, allowing a 90-yard touchdown pass with 1:39 to play.

It was a bitter end to a season North County had high hopes



THE SALINAS CALIFORNIAN/SCOTT MACDONALD

North Monterey County coach Bobby Cobarruvias instructs his team during practice last month.

for, based on all the talent it had on the field.

The Condors may not start the season with as many stars this year as they had last season, but in an odd way, coach Bobby Cobarruvias thinks that may make for a better team.

"This is more of a blue-collar team," Cobarruvias said. "There are no superstars. But

it's a close-knit team. Everyone plays together, talks together. I know this team is going to be more responsive."

He's banking on a one-for-all, all-for-one attitude.

"There's a feeling of not wanting to let your buddy down," he said. "Sometimes stuff like that doesn't happen until around the sixth game of the season.

Condors schedule

- Sept. 1: North County 16, Alvarez 0
- Sept. 7: At Alisal, 7:30 p.m.
- Sept. 15: Carlmont, 2 p.m.
- Sept. 21: At Evergreen Valley (San Jose), 7 p.m.
- Sept. 29: Wilson Prep, 2 p.m.
- Oct. 6: Bye
- Oct. 12: At Watsonville, 7:30 p.m.
- Oct. 20: Pajaro Valley, 2 p.m.
- Oct. 26: At Monterey, 7:30 p.m.
- Nov. 3: Seaside, 2 p.m.
- Nov. 10: At Monte Vista Christian, 2 p.m.

This is one of those good feelings."

The good vibes begin with a turnout of 58 players for the varsity, the largest number in the 10 years Cobarruvias has coached.

Several of those players were part of last year's 8-2 junior varsity team.

North County has a history of fielding great running backs, and if the tradition is to continue, it may be left to Matt Garnett and Reuben Damasco to crank out the yards.

Garnett averaged nearly eight yards per carry last year, while rushing for about 400.

Damasco, a senior, hasn't played football since his freshman year. However, he has been a standout at whatever

sport he's played, earning first-team all-league honors in basketball and honorable mention in baseball. He was also one of the top running backs on the freshman team three years ago.

Daniel O'dell, a 6-4 senior left-hander who struggled at times last year, seems to have the potential to be a force on the field. He'll have plenty of competition for the starting quarterback job.

Kevin Todd, a backup to O'dell last year, along with junior varsity graduate Dillon Todd and senior Alex Aguillon, all figure to have a chance at the glamour position.

North County also graduated all its top receivers, leaving Dustin O'dell and Garrett Murphy with plenty of opportunities.

The Condors return Riley Glen at center along with 6-1, 300-pound lineman Timmy Borries.

North County has six players on defense back who played full or part-time, including 6-3, 235-pound linebacker David McClair and 275-pound nose guard John DeWitt.

"A lot will depend on our senior leadership," Cobarruvias

Monterey has playoffs on its mind again

We won't say how long Pete Noble has been coaching, but the year he started was the same year Jim Plunkett won the Heisman Trophy Award, John Brodie and George Blanda were chosen NFL Most Valuable Players, and the Beatles disbanded.

If you guessed 1970, you've just won a pair of bell-bottom pants and platform shoes.

Noble begins his 36th year as coach this fall — his 15th at Monterey High.

It all began at Encinal High in Alameda, a place Noble and the Toreadores will visit for a Sept. 21 contest.

Noble recorded the first of his 153 wins (94 coming at Monterey High) on Willie Stargell field at Encinal High.

His recipe for coaching longevity?

"A good administration, a good wife, and you have to really like the kids," Noble said. He arrived at Monterey High

from Encinal in 1985 (3-7 his first year) and stayed until 1994.

He spent time coaching the lower levels at Everett Alvarez High in Salinas, won a league title with Gonzales in 2002 the year after it went 3-7, and returned in 2003 to work his magic on a Monterey program in 2003 that was coming off back-to-back winless seasons.

Noble has had only one losing season in his past 13 years as head coach.

His teams have reached the playoffs eight times in the past nine years, including the last three in a row.

Can he make it four straight?

For a team that plays old-school football — Monterey has been one of the few teams in the county to stick with the run — it looks like a typical season.

Which, given the Toreadores playoffs history, ain't half bad.

Monterey, which passed for barely 400 yards last year, aired

Toreadores schedule

- Sept. 7: Aptos, at MPC, 7:30 p.m.
- Sept. 14: Half Moon Bay, at MPC, 6:30 p.m.
- Sept. 21: At Encinal, 6:30 p.m.
- Sept. 28: Santa Cruz, at MPC, 7:30 p.m.
- Oct. 5: Calvary Temple, at MPC, 6:30 p.m.
- Oct. 12: At Monte Vista Christian, 7:30 p.m.
- Oct. 19: At Watsonville, 7:30 p.m.
- Oct. 26: North County, at MPC, 7:30 p.m.
- Nov. 2: Pajaro Valley, at MPC, 7:30 p.m.
- Nov. 9: Seaside, at MPC, 7:30 p.m.

it out for 480 the year before that and hasn't had a 1,000-yard thrower in seven years, has a solid group of proven running backs returning once again.

The Toreadores like to spread the ball around. For all the running around they do, they've had only two 1,000-yard rushers in the last eight years. And they'll have plenty of options this year.

Jeremy Wright (495 yards last year), Markeen Williams (327) and Aaron Freeman all return, as does leading receiver Anderson Locklar (11 catches, 164 yards).

The quarterback spot will be filled by either JV call-up Ritchie Havens or last year's varsity backup, Anthony Lopez.

Michael Olivio is a returning three-year starter at center who sometimes is putting his teammates through drills before the coaching staff arrives.

Monterey's defense was one of the stingiest in the MBL last year — it allowed one touchdown or less in six of its last seven regular-season games — and it could be even more impressive this year.

The entire defensive secondary is back, led by three-year starter Wesley Tucker and second-team all-leaguer Anthony Lopez.

Juan Silva is a returning second-team all-MBL linebacker.

Along the defensive line is 5-11, 170-pound Larry Sumnars and 6-foot Jordan Spadlin.

Again, Monterey will play its home games at Monterey Peninsula College. But at least this year, construction on the Lobo field is complete.

Practice sessions are another matter.

The Toreadores' on-campus practice field has all the charm of a vacant lot.

"They've skinned the field, removed the sprinkler heads, it's uneven and full of gopher holes," Noble said. "I've already blown my knee out once."

Monterey is still in the process of raising money to build a new stadium on campus, but it may not reach its goal any time soon.

It's nearly \$250,000 short. "That's okay, the Astro dirt (nickname of the practice field) makes us a little tougher," Noble said.