

# MVC picks up where it left off

Talk about ending the season with a bang.

If one play could define a year, it was the last offensive snap of the season for the Monte Vista Christian High School football team.

Trailing North Monterey County High School 22-17 with the ball on their own 10-yard line with about 90 seconds to play, Monte Vista quarterback Josh Blanton hooked up with Tim Andrade for a 90-yard touchdown pass to send the high-flying Mustangs dancing off the field to celebrate a 25-22 victory.

For a team that shattered the single-season record for passing yardage in the Monterey Bay League and set a Santa Cruz County record at the same time, the season could not have ended more appropriately.

That pass didn't put Monte Vista in the playoffs — the school hasn't been there since 1999 — but coach Andre Dobson is hopeful it can help pave the way to bigger and better things for a school that is

actively promoting its athletic program.

"We hope that play might have helped this program turn the corner," Dobson said.

"I think something like that can spark these guys and keep us going in the right direction."

In the past two years that direction has been up, up and away.

The Mustangs have passed for more than 2,000 yards each of the past two years.

Blanton flung the football for more than 2,600 yards last season.

## Eckert transfers from Aptos

"Our thing is that we're a small team and have found our success to be throwing," Dobson said.

"It's not that we don't want to run, but usually we can't match up."

If anything, the Mustangs' willingness to throw has caught the attention of Santa Cruz-area quarterbacks.

To replace Blanton, who graduated, in came Clark Eckert, a

## Mustangs schedule

Aug. 31: Mt. Miguel (Spring Valley) 53, Monte Vista Christian 9  
 Sept. 8: St. Francis of Watsonville, 2 p.m.  
 Sept. 15: At Stevenson, 2 p.m.  
 Sept. 22: Albany, 2 p.m.  
 Sept. 29: At Fremont (Sunnyvale), 2 p.m.  
 Oct. 5: Bye  
 Oct. 12: Monterey, 7:30 p.m.  
 Oct. 19: At Seaside, 7 p.m.  
 Oct. 26: At Pajaro Valley (at Watsonville High), 7:30 p.m.  
 Nov. 2: Watsonville, 7:30 p.m.  
 Nov. 10: At North County, 2 p.m.

6-2, 200-pound transfer from Aptos High School.

But before you start to get a little suspicious about that private-school-robbing-from-the-public-school stuff, consider this: Eckert's older brother attended Monte Vista, and his father teaches there.

One more thing: Aptos employs more of a fly offense, meaning a quarterback usually throws as a last resort.

"We're excited about what Clark can do," Dobson said. "He's just a junior, so we're going to have him for two

years."

And for one more year the Mustangs will have access to the top two leading receivers in the MBL.

Both Matthew Griffin and Colin Hogan return.

Griffin snared a tri-league-area high 64 catches for 1,117 yards and six touchdowns, while Hogan grabbed 42 tosses for 890 yards and nine touchdowns.

"We're definitely excited about what's going on here," Dobson said.

"We want to win as fast as we can, but you have to do it the right way. Our goal is to bring the level of all sports to a higher level."

## First night games played

The Mustangs celebrated last year by playing two games under the lights (portable lights were hauled in) for the first time in school history.

"It was unbelievable," Dobson said. "There was a total buzz in the air. We had the biggest crowds of the year for those games."

The Mustangs, meanwhile, have an offensive line revolving around 6-1, 195-pound Jason Santos; second-team all-leaguer Seth Mazrik, a 6-1, 265-pounder and 6-1, 205-pound Brian Vandenhuel.

Despite his love of the pass attack, Dobson will take charge of the defense, an area he is just as familiar with.

"A lot of my high school coaching was defense, but I was graduate assistant on offense," he said.

The Mustangs return five on defense, led by Vance Billings, a 6-1, 200-pounder who was one of the Salinas-area leaders in quarterback sacks with 12.

Just three years ago, the Mustangs were buried in an 18-game losing streak, but they're sniffing the playoffs now.

"I never want to put all my eggs in one basket," Dobson said.

"But we're excited about the future. If we do the things we're trained to do we'll be just fine."

# Watsonville faces obstacles head on

Winning and losing a football game may take on a whole new meaning this year at Watsonville High.

How the Wildcatz respond to either a win or lose will probably depend on how they cope with the tragic loss of one of their teammates, Jose Geovani, who died from injuries received in a car accident while on the way to a football camp in Santa Cruz on June 30.

"We lost a son, a player, a brother," said Watsonville coach Tom Sullivan said.

"He was so many things to so many people. From that, we have learned how to bond and trust each other. We know it's OK to hug and cry together."

Geovani will be remembered in a special tribute prior to Watsonville's home opener tonight.

He was one of five Watsonville players in a Toyota 4Runner involved in a two-car collision on Highway 1. One of

the other players received major injuries and won't play football this year.

The other three were able to rejoin the team.

The Wildcatz, meanwhile, continue to rebound from a winless 2004 season made even worse due to an off-field incident involving a few assistant coaches.

Sullivan not only had the task of starting the rebuilding process last year — his first as head coach — but did it during a realignment season that had the Wildcatz move from the Santa Cruz County Athletic League to the Monterey Bay League.

This year, he was able to load up his staff not only with additional help but also with on-campus coaches.

"We went from three coaches to seven and from no on-campus coaches to six," he said.

In addition, the school was close to completing nearly \$15

## Wildcatz schedule

Aug. 31: Soquel 28, Watsonville 13  
 Sept. 7: Santa Cruz, 7:30 p.m.  
 Sept. 14: Aptos, 7:30 p.m.  
 Sept. 22: At SLV, 2 p.m.  
 Sept. 29: Bye  
 Oct. 5: King City, 7:30 p.m.  
 Oct. 12: North County, 7:30 p.m.  
 Oct. 19: Monterey, 7:30 p.m.  
 Oct. 26: At Seaside, 7:30 p.m.  
 Nov. 3: At Monte Vista Christian, 2 p.m.  
 Nov. 9: Pajaro Valley, 7:30 p.m.

million worth of improvements to its athletic facility, including an artificial surface football field, an all-weather track and a three-court gymnasium.

"We enjoy what we have," Sullivan said. "We now have some of the best facilities around."

In an area where Watsonville competes with three neighboring schools for students, the extreme makeover of the athletic facilities could be the reason the school had one of its largest freshman

classes in years: about 600 students.

Given all that was happening at Watsonville High, the move to the MBL was the easy part.

"The MBL was great for us," Sullivan said. "We were able to rejuvenate some old rivalries and still play some SCCAL teams."

This year, as last year, Watsonville's four-game non-league schedule is packed with SCCAL schools.

Although the Wildcatz were given a good licking by the more established MBL teams last year, they may be ready for a little payback this season.

Their 2006 junior varsity team was league champion and the 18 juniors on the varsity squad last year all return.

Among those returning is Ryan Saucedo, last year's starting quarterback, who could play just about anywhere this year.

"He's such a good athlete, he could play several positions," Sullivan said.

Saucedo not only passed for 754 yards and seven touchdowns but rushed for 203 yards and five touchdowns.

Where he ends up will likely depend on how much of an impression last year's JV quarterback Ryan Paz makes.

Watsonville also has a backfield loaded with varsity experience in Bernie Gonzales, Javier Bugarin and Joey Ponzio.

The Wildcatz have plenty of size and weight on the line in 6-2, 270-pound Steven Medina; 6-3, 290-pound David Ortiz; 6-5, 300-pound Kristopher Arrerando and 5-11, 220-pound Nick Alvarez.

On defense, Watsonville returns two corners, a pair of starting linebackers and a couple of linemen.

"I like the energy this team brings to practice," Sullivan said.