

# King City hopes to thrive in adversity

The Grateful Dead said it best: "What a long, strange trip it's been."

Last year, at times, it got downright weird.

In fact, things couldn't have gotten much stranger for the King City football program if aliens had landed in War Memorial Stadium and come running out of their UFO waving pompons and singing the Mustang fight song.

Last season's rollercoaster ride began with King City losing its first four games while giving up an average of 48 points.

Twice in the first month of the season the Mustangs — who opened non-league against big-school powers Atascadero and Salinas high schools — allowed more than 60 points in a game.

But King City not only recovered, it retaliated.

The rampaging Mustangs completed the most dramatic turnaround in school history. They rebounded from their 0-4 start to win their last six regular-season games and reach the Central Coast Section playoffs for the first time since 1999.

Coach Norm Silva's reward for guiding the Mustangs to back-to-back winning seasons for the first time since 1998-99 was to be fired by the school principal.

Or at least threatened with dismissal.

He remained as coach, but



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King City's James Barbree hands off to a teammate during an offensive drill during practice last month.

only after as many as 60 parents attended a school board meeting in the spring to voice their support for Silva.

While he stayed on as coach, the principal left town.

But more trouble loomed when King City High lost its accreditation, placing diplomas for the class of 2008 and beyond in jeopardy and causing some student-athletes to enroll in other schools.

"I spoke to some of our student-athletes about it (accreditation)," Silva said. "Some kids are leaving, but I don't think it will be an issue. We'll have a roster in

the high 30s or low 40s."

Either way, King City faces a huge rebuilding task. The Mustangs have lost quarterback Aaron Gomez, running back Matt McCoy and receiver Gerardo Lopez, who accounted for 44 touchdowns and more than 3,600 yards of offense.

"But we have a good group of kids who can run and catch the ball," Silva said.

James Barbree did both for King City last year and will be counted on to do plenty of both again this year, mostly from his receiving position.

Barbree was a first-team, all-

league safety and tight end last year.

Roberto Guarduno is another returning receiver for a team that traditionally was one of the strongest rushing teams in the area to having one of the most prolific passing attacks last season.

Peter Giudici is the leading returning rusher (274 yards, 3 touchdowns) with the rest of the pack coming from the junior varsity team.

"We have four (running backs) from the JV's — they're not massive, but they're quick," Silva said.

Rory Johnson, last year's JV

## Mustangs schedule

Sept. 7: Pajaro Valley, 7:30 p.m.  
 Sept. 14: Salinas, 7:30 p.m.  
 Sept. 21: At Santa Maria, 7:30 p.m.  
 Sept. 28: Carmel, 7:30 p.m.  
 Oct. 5: At Watsonville, 7:30 p.m.  
 Oct. 12: Greenfield, 7:30 p.m.  
 Oct. 19: At Soledad, 7:30 p.m.  
 Oct. 27: At Stevenson, 2 p.m.  
 Nov. 2: Pacific Grove, 7:30 p.m.  
 Nov. 9: At Gonzales, 7:30 p.m.

quarterback, is a strong candidate to guide the varsity team this year, the coach said.

Whether King City decides to run or pass, it can take comfort in knowing it has a season-tested offensive line.

"We only had one senior on the offensive line last year," Silva said. "The ones we have this year either started or played a lot."

The list of returning linemen includes 5-11, 220-pound Martin Mendez; 6-3, 235-pound second-team all-leaguer Karse Giudici; and 6-3, 320-pound Porfirio Perez.

"The main thing for us is to have a line and to play consistently," Silva said.

Through all the ups and downs the community continues to stand by its football team.

"We get together with the volleyball and softball teams and raise about \$30,000," Silva said. "The community has always been very supportive."

# Stevenson heading in the right direction

The Stevenson School Pirates were rolling merrily along through their 2006 season, at least through their first six games.

A tie against Monte Vista Christian was the only blemish during a 5-0-1 start.

The Pirates gave every indication they might reach the playoffs for the first time since their unbeaten team of 2000.

But the last three games were a different story.

Stevenson lost by 24 points to Carmel, 37 points to Pacific Grove and 36 points to King City. The team finished a respectable 6-3-1 but missed the playoffs.

"Losing those game was discouraging, but the schedule was set up so that we played the best teams at the end," said Stevenson coach Germano Diniz, start-

ing his fifth year. "There's no shame in losing to Carmel, Pacific Grove and King City. We played those three games without some of our best defensive players (injuries). We were slightly undermanned, but the bottom line was we lost to those teams."

Nevertheless, Stevenson showed it was ready to join the playoff race again with its first winning season in six years.

"We're excited about the kids we have coming back," Diniz said. "Based on all the things we've done so far, we're looking pretty good."

The Pirates are one of six MTAL teams which return a starting quarterback.

Only King City is looking for someone new this year.

William Perocchi, a 6-1, 180-

## Pirates schedule

Sept. 8: Harbor at Soquel High, 2 p.m.  
 Sept. 15: Monte Vista Christian, 2 p.m.  
 Sept. 22: At St. Francis of Watsonville, 2 p.m.  
 Sept. 28: At Soledad, 7:30 p.m.  
 Oct. 6: Greenfield, 2 p.m.  
 Oct. 13: At Carmel, 2 p.m.  
 Oct. 20: Pacific Grove, 2 p.m.  
 Oct. 27: King City, 2 p.m.  
 Nov. 2: At Gonzales, 7:30 p.m.  
 Nov. 10: Moreau Catholic (Hayward), noon

pounder, tossed for nearly 900 yards and was third in the league in touchdown passes with 13 as a junior.

"This will be the first time in five years we've had a returning quarterback who played more than two or three games as a junior," Diniz said.

Perocchi split time at quarterback through the first three games before taking over the position full-time the rest of the way.

The offense, meanwhile, not only was given a boost with the return of running backs Logan Allen (313 yards) and Brian McKinney, but three of Perocchi's favorite receiver are also back.

Alex Carl (15 catches, 352 yards), Tyler Rosa (13-139) and Matt Packer (11-190) should enable the Pirates to attack by land or air.

The line includes 5-10, 200-pound second-team pick Danie Hyun; 6-0, 190-pound Chris Diesh; 5-11, 195-pound Ted Minnes and 5-11, 185-pound Charlie Moffett.

Brandon Cottle is an athletic 6-3, 200-pound tight end.

Nearly a half-dozen of the approximately 34 Pirate players can be expected to go both ways.

A junior varsity team that went 7-2 will send quarterback-defensive back Curtis Thayer and receiver-defensive back Adam Merry to the varsity.

Derek Hartford, a standout on the baseball team, will also play football this year as an outside linebacker.

Joining the Pirate coaching staff this year is Anthony Toney, the North Salinas High and Hartnell College graduate who went on to play five years for the Philadelphia Eagles.

Jeff Young, who coached the Pirates to their unbeaten season seven years ago and then resigned to focus on being the school's athletic director, also will be on the staff.