

MONTEREY BAY LEAGUE

North County: Pressure on coach, captain, quarterback

How goes the quarterback, how goes North Monterey County. "Every year that we've been good we've had a good quarterback," North County coach Bobby Cobarruvas said.

The last year North County made the playoffs was 2003, and it was done with a 1,000-yard passer in Nick Liedel.

When the Condors reached the playoffs in 1999, they were led by

Mike Souza, another 1,000 yard-plus passer.

This year, it's Daniel O'Dell's turn to see if he can help the Condors to the longest yard — the one between the nose of the football and the end zone.

As a sophomore, the wiry 6-3 O'Dell, a left-hander, began the year as the backup quarterback but halfway through the season was promoted to the starter.

He threw for nearly 400 yards on the season.

The Condors went 2-3 with O'Dell as quarterback, and it could just as easily been 4-1.

They lost to Monterey by four points and Alisal by three.

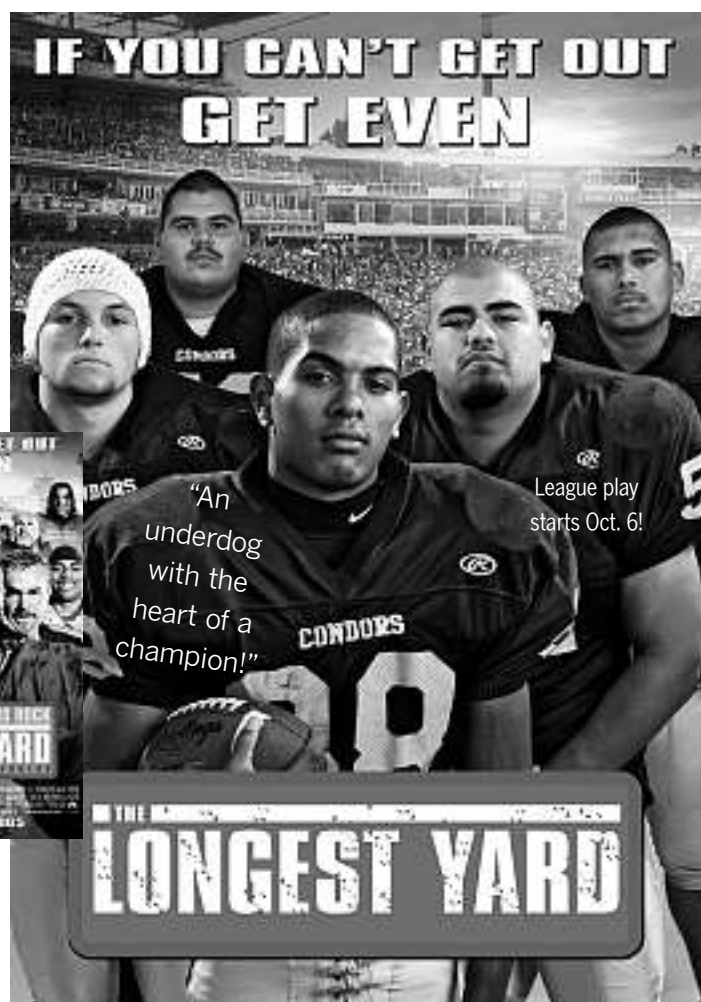
"He's put on a little weight, filled out a bit more and was in a few passing tournaments," Cobarruvas said.

However, North County is still far from a pass-happy team.

Reggie Topps, the fastest player at last summer's Herman Edwards football camp, could be one of the top running backs in the area.

He's on the short list of potential league MVPs.

A three-event state qualifier in track, Topps led North County in rushing



NORTH COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL FILM GROUP PRESENTS
A CONDORS PRODUCTIONS FILM
STARRING REGGIE TOPPS WITH MARK MENDOZA
DIRECTED BY BOBBY COBARRUVIAS

as a junior with 336 yards, averaging nearly six yards per carry.

Topps also led the Condors in catches with 17 in 2005.

"He should see the ball quite a bit this year," Cobarruvas said.

Topps will be flanked by returner Robbie Gilliam (6.6 yards per carry average) and 225-pound fullback Taylor Cutler.

North County also returns two of the best linemen in the MBL in Mark Mendoza and Frank De La Torre.

The 6-foot, 275-pound De La Torre was the league's Most Valuable Offensive Lineman, while the 6-foot, 230-pound Mendoza was a first-team linebacker.

They'll be joined by 6-1, 270-pound Phillip Flores; 6-0, 260-pound T.J. Borries; 6-4, 250-pound Jason Hansen and 6-1, 225-pound Riley Glenn along with Robin Patterson.

"We have three linemen who bench pressed more than 300 pounds," Cobarruvas, starting his ninth year as Condor coach, noted.

This is a year North County has been anxiously waiting.

Three years ago the Cobarruvas promoted seven sophomores to varsity and five are still here.

"Daniel's putting pressure on himself," Cobarruvas said. "But we have some good weapons around him and he likes his line."

A CONDORS PRODUCTION

WATKINS WRAP: North County has potential to reach the playoffs. ☆☆☆ 1/2

Selected showtimes

- Sept. 2: At Alvarez, 2
- Sept. 9: Alisal, 2
- Sept. 23: Evergreen Valley, 2
- Sept. 29: At Wilson Prep (Oakland), 7:30
- Oct. 7: Harbor, 2
- Oct. 14: Watsonville, 2
- Oct. 21: At Pajaro Valley (Watsonville High), 2
- Oct. 28: Monterey, 2
- Nov. 3: At Seaside, 7
- Nov. 11: Monte Vista Christian, 2

Pajaro Valley: In this first season, nothing to prove

Meet the new kid in town.

The name is Pajaro Valley Grizzlies of Watsonville.

The Grizzlies are not only the newest member of the MBL, but they're also gearing up for their first season of varsity football.

With no senior class.

Notre Dame had one Rudy. Pajaro Valley has an entire roster of Rudys.

"It's definitely going to be a challenge," Pajaro Valley coach Mike Palmer said. "We're not going to use the fact that we don't have a senior class as an excuse. The kids see this as a varsity football team."

But at some point you have to realize that you're gaining experience for next year. This is the third year of operation for Pajaro Valley and the football program has been there from the beginning.

The Grizzlies went 6-3 as freshmen and 2-4 last year as JVs.

Palmer, the team's offensive coordinator the first two years, said there will be about 30 players on the varsity roster.

"We're going to play to win," Palmer said. "It's not like we're going to win the Super Bowl. But we're going to try and win each game. One of our goals is to get better each day."

A GRIZZLIES PRODUCTION

WATKINS WRAP: Victories will be measured in inches. ☆☆☆

Selected showtimes

- Sept. 1: Burlingame, 7:30
- Sept. 8: At Woodside, 7:30
- Sept. 15: At Oak Grove (San Jose), 7:30
- Sept. 22: At Serra (San Mateo), 7:30
- Sept. 29: Salinas, 7:30
- Oct. 7: At Alvarez, 2
- Oct. 20: Alisal, 7:30
- Oct. 27: At Palma (Sports Complex), 7:30
- Nov. 3: At North Salinas (Sports Complex), 7:30
- Nov. 9: Hollister, 7:30

Kind of makes you feel like chanting "Rudy! Rudy! Rudy!"

Pajaro Valley will run the wing-T, meaning that 5-10, 180-pound fullback Eric Banuelos will be the featured back.

"He has good hands and decent speed," Palmer said.

Erick Whitman is expected to be the wingback with junior Richard Medina the quarterback. Medina has been in the program all three years.

The line will be led by 6-1, 275-pound Andrew Buchman and 5-11, 250-pound Ricky Lopez.

According to Palmer, Buchman is the strongest player on the team.

Lineman Daniel Hernandez and linebacker Oscar Torres (he carries a 3.8 GPA), are two more reasons why Palmer is optimistic about the future.

"Obviously, we're going to be at a disadvantage," Palmer said. "But I truly feel there are some teams out there we can beat."

While Pajaro Valley is new to the area, Palmer has been coaching football in the Watsonville and Santa Cruz area for 13 years.

This is his first head coaching job for a school that is projected to have an enrollment of about 2,400 by the start of next year.

For now, the team will play home games at Watsonville High, about a mile away.

"Rudy"

PAJARO VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL FILM GROUP PRESENTS
A GRIZZLIES PRODUCTIONS FILM
STARRING JUNIORS WITH SOPHOMORES
DIRECTED BY MIKE PALMER

AN S. SPARTANS PRODUCTION

WATKINS WRAP: A solid team capable of reaching the section finals once again. ☆☆☆☆☆

Selected showtimes

- Sept. 8: Independence (San Jose), 7:30
- Sept. 15: Sobrato, 7
- Sept. 22: At North Salinas (Sports Complex), 7:30
- Sept. 30: At San Lorenzo Valley, 2
- Oct. 7: At Novato, 2
- Oct. 13: Pajaro Valley, 7
- Oct. 21: At Monte Vista Christian, 2
- Oct. 27: At Watsonville, 7:30
- Nov. 3: North County, 7
- Nov. 10: Monterey, 2

Seaside: A fresh start focuses on commitment

Whatever fate has in store for the Seaside High football team this season one thing will never change — area football fans will remember the Spartans.

The only difference between the Titans and the Spartans was the ending.

Few teams have had such compelling seasons with heartbreaking endings as Seaside has during the last two years.

Either Seaside High has some unfinished business or winning a CCS title isn't meant to be.

How else to explain the fate of a team that has reached the CCS Small School title game two years in a row only to suffer crushing defeats in both games that went down to the final seconds?

"We were blessed to have the opportunity," Seaside coach Al Avila said. "I'd be lying if I said it didn't bother us a little — with a little luck we could be back-to-back CCS champions — but at the same time it catapulted us into an elite group of teams in the county."

Seaside has been one of the top teams in the area since 1998, having reached the playoffs five times since then.

The Spartans are two-time defending MBL champions and have had five winning seasons in the past six years.

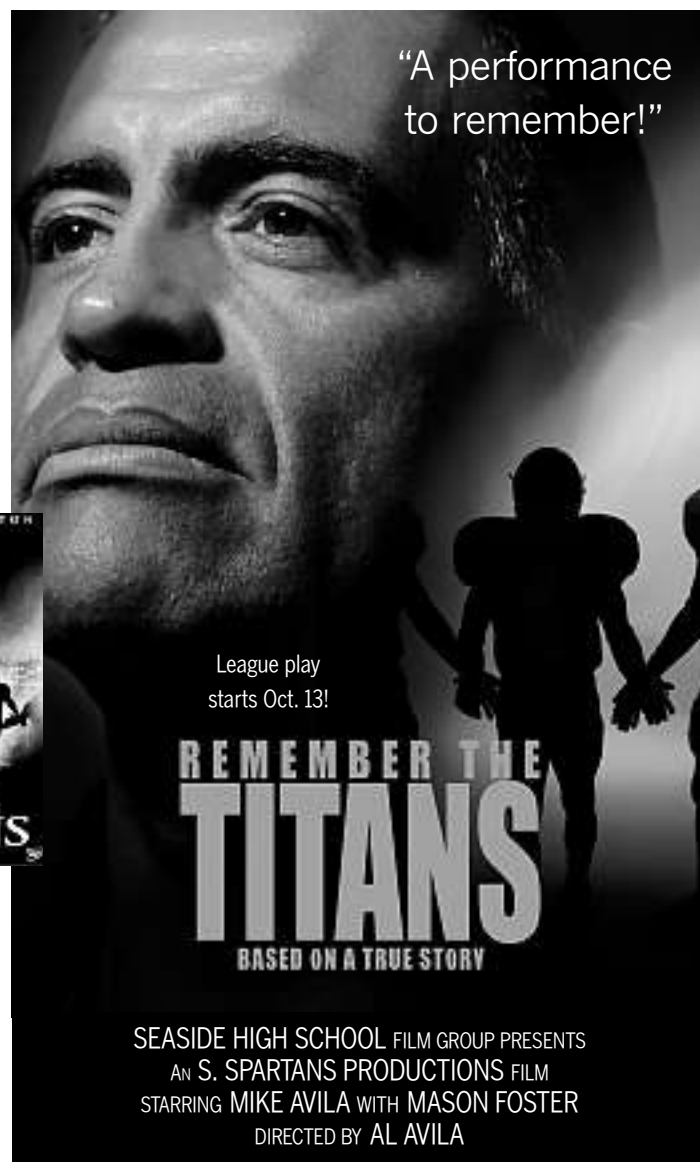
Avila, starting his 14th year as Seaside coach, has a career record of 64-71-2, but 55 of those victories have come in the last eight years.

Despite the loss of a key player, Seaside seems poised to make another run at a league and CCS title.

But they'll have to do it without big-game playmaker Michael Clemmons, an explosive running back and a top defensive performer as well.

Clemmons, Seaside's leading rushing last year with more than 800 yards, moved to Southern California during the summer.

Nevertheless, Seaside has two of the elite players in the county in versatile Michael Avila



"A performance to remember!"

League play starts Oct. 13!

— the coaches' son — and Mason Foster, a quarterback in a linebacker's body.

The 5-9, 160-pound Avila did just about everything a coach — and dad — could ask for last year on his way to earning MBL Most Valuable Player honors.

He rushed for 89 yards, led the county in receptions with 37 for 460 yards and was a second-team all-league defensive back.

"We're going to try and get him the ball as much as we can," Al Avila said.

After a monster year at linebacker last season where he was a first-team all-league and All-Salinas Californian pick, the 6-2, 195-pound Foster will move to quarterback where he will try to replace two-year standout Jermaine Carter.

Seaside lost most of its starting offensive line to graduation but retained 5-11, 215-pound center Dominic Henderson

and 6-2, 315-pound Poochie Lesu.

The Spartans won't have to search far for replacements. Their JV team won the league crown and brings plenty of reinforcements to the varsity level.

Among those are 6-foot Deonti Gordan, a running back and receiver who was promoted to varsity last year during the playoff run.

Seandell Byrd will take Clemmons spot on defense at safety.

"He's legit," Avila said. Linebacker Raul Gomez, a 6-foot, 195-pounder, along Terry Sharpe and Foster, provide Seaside with another imposing defense — typically one of the hardest hitting in the area.

"There's always something that drives this team," Avila said. "We never talk about winning CCS. But last year, just like the year before that, our weight room was packed on the Monday after the championship game."

www.mbayink.com



ink
Entertainment. Real People. Life.