

Junior quarterback has many weapons

By Brian Manzullo | Senior Reporter

Junior quarterback Dan LeFevour has a lot going on around him when he's on the field running the offense.

His running backs — seniors Ontario Sneed and Justin Hoskins — are diversions, taking the pressure off of LeFevour as they run, jump and stiff-arm their way past defenders.

His wide receivers — junior Bryan Anderson and sophomore Antonio Brown, in particular — are like artists, painting pictures for LeFevour as they run their routes.

His offensive linemen, led by senior Andrew Hartline, are his enforcers, keeping hungry defensive ends and tackles away from the quarterback.

That six-man tandem — along with emerging sophomore tailback Carl Volny — are entering their second year together, hoping to light up scoreboards as the Mid-American Conference's premier offense one more time.

They get their first shot at 7 p.m. Thursday when they play Eastern Illinois under the lights of Kelly/Shorts Stadium.

"We've got a lot of guys back this year — that helps a lot," LeFevour said. "There's a lot more consistency and a lot more confidence heading into this year."

The team scored 34.8 points per game last year, tops in the Mid-American Conference, en route to its second consecutive MAC Championship. Every player atop the 2007 statistics sheet returns for another season.

Also helping the team is the return of the entire coaching staff, including second-year coach Butch Jones. Every assistant coach returns as well, the first time in 12 years in which there is no turnover.

The theme this year is, to put it simple, improvement.

"We can be as good as we want to be ... we have a lot of returning starters," Jones said. "But if those individuals aren't better than they were the previous season, they aren't helping the team win."

"Every individual has to improve in some way, shape or form and I think they have — from Dan with his throw-

ing mechanics and his feet, to Bryan (Anderson) with his releases."

THE ARTISTS

Among the players looking to improve is Brown, who entered last season as a relatively unknown walk-on and exited as a record-setting receiver (102 receptions for 1,003 yards). He also was a force as a kick returner, averaging 26.2 yards on kickoff returns with one touchdown.

Now that opposing teams know what he can do, Brown knows he has to continue getting better.

"I'm really working on my route-running," he said. "I'm just trying to elevate my game. I know teams are going to come after me, so every second I have to be working. I've got to be ready."

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With wideouts Justin Gardner graduating and Duane Brooks transferring to Stephen F. Austin, CMU is looking for bigger roles out of senior Joe Bockheim and sophomore Kito Poblak.

THE DIVERSIONS

Running back, like last year, is the most competitive position heading into the season-opener.

Seniors Justin Hoskins and Ontario Sneed shared time running the ball, but battled injuries throughout the offseason and face stiff competition from sophomore Carl Volny, who enters Thursday's game as the starting tailback.

"The biggest issue on the offense is finding a running back," Jones said. "We need individuals that are going to step up at that position."

Volny carried the ball 29 times last season for 100 yards. But it was his work throughout spring practice and summer camps that had Jones talking about him at both the MAC and CMU media days.

THE ENFORCERS

The offensive line, meanwhile, is gelling together and staying healthy thus far, Jones said.

Senior tackles Andrew Hartline and Greg Wojt lead a group that stays intact from last season with the exception of right guard Eric Tunney. Juniors Allen Ollenburger and Joe McMahon are the leading candidates to replace Tunney.

"That should be one of our strengths this year — we're very solid on the offensive line," LeFevour said. "They give me a lot of time to operate."

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