

SPORTS

Coach Rich: 'We must attack to win'

By STEPHEN SMITH
Sports Editor

Expectations for the 1990 Rams football team aren't any different this year than at any other time. But one thing that is different is the team itself.

With 40 new players on the team, three coaches gone along with at least nine quality starters (including C.I.A.A.

Offensive Player Of The Year Kenny Jones), the Rams of Winston-Salem State are indeed the "New" Rams.

Whenever you lose top notch players, it creates voids that must be filled. And when you add the loss of assistant coach David Corley and two line coaches — Sherman Simmons and John Patterson — it becomes natural to assume that problems will persist. Offensive line coach Gary Smith is the only coach who has been

named as a replacement.

The lack of personnel can only hinder a team and in this case Pete Richardson, WSSU's head coach. For example, the Rams lost seven defensive starters from last year's squad. Some to graduation — Donald Franks and Anthony McCord — others to injury.

"Playing experience has hindered our team tremendously" stated Richardson. How right he is.

Not one defensive player for WSSU has a full season of experience under his belt and it shows. In their first three games, the Rams have given up an average of 28 points per game — far more than in the opposition had in past seasons.

Offense is another story. The backfield has three seasoned veterans returning so they are solid. "We've got three of the best backs to come out of this state" said Richardson. The returnees are Rodney McKoy (averaged over seven ypc), Willie (Popcorn) Latta, and Ronald Beverly. The addition of Bobby Brown certainly hasn't hurt either.

The quarterback situation is different. Rovell McMillan and Mitch Nicholson have battled for the starting position. Both are talented, perform but will face tremendous pressure because of the various defenses they will face. For now, coach Richardson is going with Nicholson as his starting QB.

To take the pressure off Nicholson, the Rams offensive line will have to open some holes for the backfield and provide sufficient pass protection for Nicholson. Elry McKnight and James "Plug" Milton are two members who must get the job done. Coach Richardson says aggression is where it all starts.

"We know we must attack to win," the coach said. "To attack, our offensive line has to be aggressive". Production from the offensive line is vital for the Rams to establish a formidable running attack which will open things up for wide receiver Yancey Thigpen.

After enjoying a sensational season last year, Thigpen most certainly will see double and triple coverage all year. "If we run the ball effectively and limit our turnovers," Richardson explained, "things will open up for Yancey and everyone else".

Though the Rams have struggled at the beginning of the season, they are still a team to be reckoned with. With almost an entirely new team on the field, the Rams are still strong.

Nicholson is showing signs of leadership and the offense is playing effectively. At presstime, WSSU was third in the CIAA in total offense, averaging nearly 300 yards a game.

Perhaps the most telling statistic is the number of possessions. Other teams around the league have had 60 to 70 more possessions than the Rams. Furthermore, the Rams are averaging nearly seven turnovers a game. Yet WSSU is still averaging 23 points per game.

"It's got to come together sooner or later" coach Richardson said.

He should know.

Winning two C.I.A.A. championships in the past three years doesn't exactly make you an expert, but it sure reminds a coach and his players of their capabilities and the achievements of all those who played in the past.

The Rams have always possessed talent. Somehow you get the feeling that their time is coming, and hopefully so will the victories.

Only time will tell.



Photo by New Argus Sports

WSSU wide receiver Yancey Thigpen is one of the CIAA's most dangerous pass catching threats.