

ORANGE COUNTY NEWS

# Crean Lutheran Kick-off 2017: Experienced team can control its own playoff destiny



Crean Lutheran's football players include (from left) George DeBorde, Ryan O'Keefe, Isaac Holbrook, Dane Schumacher and Christian Maurier Photo courtesy Kara Nomura

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*(First of a series previewing high school football teams in Irvine).*

Crean Lutheran's football team will look to an experienced group to lead the way for another successful season under Coach Matt Bowman, who is hoping to guide the Saints back into the CIF playoffs.

"We feel really good, we have really good seniors and we have 15 seniors which is more than we've ever had," said Coach Matt Bowman. "If you look at our record the last five or six years, our record at the end of the season has kind of correlated with the number of seniors we've had."

Crean Lutheran opens the season Saturday, Aug. 26, facing Calvary Chapel at 7 p.m. at Orange Coast College. The Saints will also have five home games at Irvine Stadium including the Thursday, Sept. 14 game with Beckman.

Crean Lutheran went 7-3 last year but was denied a trip to the CIF playoffs because no at-large berths were available in its playoff division. Crean did not have a league affiliation since there were only three teams from the Academy League after Sage Hill dropped its varsity 11-man program, switching to 8-man football.

This season, Crean will once again have a league affiliation.

Officials in the Academy League worked to return the league to a four school-structure after Brethren Christian dropped its varsity football program in July.

The league for football this year will include Crean Lutheran, St. Margaret's, St. Pius X-St. Matthias Academy and Orange Vista of Perris, giving the league two automatic CIF playoff berths. Crean Lutheran will be in Division 11.

"It really increases our playoff potential significantly," Bowman said. "Last year, I felt we were one of the better teams in our division; we just didn't get a chance to prove it.

"Now, we get to play like we are in control. We get to decide if we go to the playoffs, because if we beat the teams in our league, then we know we will get that opportunity.

"It feels good to be back in control of our own destiny. When we told them (his players) we added another team, they were really excited."

Crean Lutheran's offense will be led by senior wide receiver Patrick McNerney, who had 33 receptions for 662 yards and 11 touchdowns, earning all-city and all-league honors.

Senior Jack Elliot, a back-up to Gavin Folsom last year, will be the Saints' starting quarterback.

“He did a really good job backing Gavin up; he saw action in our first five games last year,” Bowman said.

The running backs will be seniors Anthony Cooper, Isaac Holbrook and Kyle Livermore and sophomore Tyler Buban.

“I’m pretty thankful to have such talented runners,” Bowman said.

The receivers will include McNerney, seniors Ryan O’Keefe and Gunnar Ashmon and junior David Jeong.

On the line, one player, senior Ben Beavers returns along with seniors George DeBorde and Christian Maurier, junior Max Bahou, senior Joseph Kelly, junior Thomas St. George and senior Dane Schumacher.

“We’ve got a pretty good group of linemen and I feel where we can rotate to keep guys fresh as needed,” Bowman said. “Those guys are all going to be important for us on the offensive line.”

The defense will be led by the defensive backs, who all started last year. Bowman has been impressed with the group.

“I feel really good about this group of defensive backs we have,” Bowman said.

Holbrook, junior Cole Harris, O’Keefe, Ashman and McNerney will lead the way.

The linebackers will be Cooper and seniors Dane Schumacher, Braeden Bailey and Kyle Livermore and sophomore Tyler Buban.

The defensive line is also expected to be strong.

“I feel really good about those guys,” Bowman said. “We replaced our whole defensive line, but all the guys coming back have some experience.”

The line will include DeBourde, Maurier, Kelly, St. George and Beavers, who are also on the offensive line, will lead the way.

On special teams, Schumacher will do the punting.

“He’s been punting the ball 45 to 50 yards in practice,” Bowman said.

McNerney can also punt effectively. Senior Andy Richardson, who has made 50-yard field goals in practice, will be coming into his fourth year as placekicker.

Bowman said his players have a goal of earning a CIF playoff berth. But other factors are important too.

“Regardless of the effort, we want to continue to give a Colossians 3:23 effort every single day because that is something that is going to take our kids a lot farther in life than how many football games they won,” Bowman said.