



OCVarsity Kickoff '15 preview: Crean Lutheran

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OCVarsity preview for the 2015 season:

CREAN LUTHERAN SAINTS

Coach: Brett Mertens

Last season: 6-5 overall, 2-2 league

Scouting report: The seasoned Saints return 13 seniors but will likely lean on a few inexperienced linemen for depth on the offensive line.

Coach **Brett Mertens** is keen on the physical play of his four returning linemen, who should create holes for senior running back **Tanner Atkinson** (492 yards, eight TDs last season). Two-way athletes **Garrett Cox** and **Nick Ellwein** also figure to get plenty of touches in the backfield. "As long as we can stay healthy, we should be able to pound it a little bit," Mertens said. "Last year we were probably 75 (percent) out of the (shot)gun with one back, so we can do that too." The Saints, searching for a standout playmaker on offense, will call on first-year starting quarterback **Gavin Folsom** to manage the field. The athletic junior, who gained some playoff experience last season, must limit turnovers. "Gavin has to step up," Mertens said. "He needs to lead the offense. Ball security is No. 1. I like to tell the quarterbacks they're responsible for every guy on the field. He needs to know what everyone is doing." On defense, the Saints will be powered by Cox at linebacker. They want to cut down on big plays, forcing teams to earn their points with long drives .

Bottom line: The Saints have a strong mix of experience and skills to make a move in league, but their health and defense must hold up if they're to march back to the playoffs.

Players to watch: **Daniel Albright**, WR/DE, Sr.; **Garrett Cox**, LB/RB, Sr.; **Nick Ellwein**, S/WR/RB, Sr.; **Andrew Ryan**, OL/DL, Sr.; **Luke Walcher**, OL/DL, Sr.

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