

Football - The Whole Package: 2012 Lacey Preview

Written by Bob Badders - Senior Staff Writer Monday, 27 August 2012 13:57



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No matter how consistent the program, sometimes the numbers game simply catches up. After a perfect 2010 season, Lacey returned just two starters, and the result was an uncharacteristic 4-6 season.

A closer look at the statistics shows the Lions had a 1,200-yard rusher in Kyle Spatz and a stingy defense that allowed just 15 points per game. The problem was the passing game, or the lack of one, to be exact. Sophomore Tommy Kelly, who was a linebacker up until eighth grade, was thrown right into the fire. Lacey went from a team that could beat you with multiple players to a one-dimensional offense without the ability to stretch a defense.

"Our passing game was so suspect it made it difficult to run the ball," said Lacey head coach Lou Vircillo. "Teams like Barnegat and Brick screwed their safeties down on us. Last year we had to be able to keep people honest with our passing game, and if we could have done that we beat those teams and win a (division) championship."

There looks to be plenty of solutions to the problems of last year. Kelly is a year more experienced, the receiving corps is deep and former Howell head coach Cory Davies is now the passing coordinator. Add in a returning 1,000-yard rusher and a shutdown defense and Lacey could be right back among the elite teams in the Shore Conference.

"Here at Lacey anything short of a winning season isn't good enough," said senior offensive lineman Joe Elefante. "That's what the bar always is. We have to live up to our tradition after that down year, and we're ready to come back."

After going back to a multiple-I offense last season the Lions will return to a shotgun, spread scheme in 2012. Expect a true multiple offense from Lacey with Davies' quick-hitting, underneath passing game, a play-action game and traditional Lacey power running. Kelly is the quarterback while Spatz, a senior, returns as the starting running back. The fullback is sophomore Issiah Brown with highly-regarded freshman Jacob Post a possibility to see time as the season progresses.

The receiving corps features senior Brandon Boos, a versatile player who can also line up at tight end or H-back, junior Chris Tutela, senior R.J. Kurtz and senior Billy Belford. The staff and players alike are excited by the return of Belford, who missed the last two seasons after injuring his spleen as a sophomore. Belford could be the best pure pass catcher on the roster.

"Our receiver group is the best I've ever played with," Tutela said. "Getting Belford back was big. He's a good player, and he was able to come in and start right away."

Senior Ryan Sullivan will be the tight end.

The offensive line returns two starters in center Tyler Walsh and Elefante at tackle. Junior Chris D'Addario saw time last year and will be the other tackle. Junior Matt McGovern and senior Frank Cimirro step into starting roles as the guards. Junior David Bruchell is also in the mix as a player who could see time along the offensive line.

"We won the Shore Conference 7-on-7 so we know the skill guys can do it," Elefante said. "It's all about the line. We have to step up and carry the team."

Lacey's 3-4 defense features senior Tim Grochowski at nose guard with Sullivan and Bruchell as the defensive ends. Freshman Tarique Smith has also been seeing time along the defensive line. At inside linebacker will be senior Casey Sirotniak, a returning starter who led the team in tackles last season, and senior Liam Dolly, also a returning starter. The outside linebackers are seniors Jose Ortiz and Kevin Leahy, with sophomore Lucas Sirotniak also working in. The secondary returns three of four starters with Spatz being the lone newcomer after playing strictly on offense last season. He'll be one of the cornerbacks along with junior Chris Jensen. Tutela is the strong safety and Boos is the free safety.

The kicker is Dolly and the punter is Tutela, who looks to be one of the top punters in the Shore this season. Tutela, who only began punting last season, has honed his craft to the point where he goes to punting camps and leaves as the No. 1 player. Add his leg to the list of Lacey's weapons.

"Last year was my first time punting and I saw myself getting better and better and it kept going from there," Tutela said. "Now I practice a few times a week and here with the team every morning. It can definitely be a game-changer."



Lacey senior running back Kyle Spatz returns after rushing for over 1,200 yards last season. *(Photo credit: Bill Normile)*

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Head coach: Lou Virillo, 32nd season (36th overall)

Career record: 248-112-3

The Lions still have quite a few juniors in the mix, but that is welcome since they are an experienced bunch. It certainly looks like Lacey is ready to jump back into the upper reaches of the top 10. Time will tell, and they now have to contend with a tougher schedule in Class A South, but it's rare to see two down seasons in a row from Lacey.

"We were a young team last year, that's what killed us," Spatz said. "But this year we have a lot of returners plus a little more, and hopefully that's going to be the difference."

"We played on the 2010 team so we saw what it was like to win," Boos said. "We want that feeling."

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Coaching staff: Joe Tobin (WR/DB); Al Hagofsky (RB/LB); Shane Allen (DL/ST); Cory Davies (QB/pass coordinator); John Tierney (OL); Sam Iacobone (LB); Danny Fornoff, Tom Falkner, Watson Heilala (freshman); Lee Emery (athletic trainer).

2011 record: 4-6 (3-2)

Random fact: Head coach Lou Vircillo needs two wins to reach 250 for his career. He would be just the third Shore Conference coach to reach that number, joining the late Vic Kubu and Warren Wolf.

BIG SHOES TO FILL: This doesn't fall on one particular player but the defensive line has to replace the graduated Jordan Powell and Tyrell Smith, two powerful defenders.

X-FACTOR: Melding the new offense with the old. This seems more like a "when" than "if," but learning a new passing system doesn't happen overnight. Once the Lions start clicking, look out.

IMPACT NEWCOMER: Jose Ortiz, Sr., LB. Ortiz will step in as a starting linebacker, which is always an impact position at Lacey.

PIVOTAL GAME: October 13 at Southern. The Rams and Lions haven't played each other in many years, and this meeting will certainly be a big one.