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Young Lions have a tough act to follow

Many changes for last year's top-ranked team

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Lacey quarterback Brandon Boos hands the ball off to Christian Tutela (13) during a summer practice. / TIM MCCARTHY/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

The torch has been passed on to a new generation at Lacey.

Twenty-one players, including five All-Shore first team players, graduated from a team that went 12-0, won every game by at least 20 points, won the NJSIAA South Group III championship and finished No. 1 in the Asbury Park Press Top 10. It was the first time in Lacey's 30-year history it was ranked No. 1 to end a season.

Also not returning is assistant coach Craig Cicardo, the Lions' offensive coordinator the last six seasons and the father of the graduated Craig Cicardo, the Lions' All-Shore first team quarterback last season. Cicardo is now the quarterbacks coach at The College of New Jersey.

Just four starters, all seniors, return.

“It puts a lot of responsibility on the returning seniors,” said senior center/defensive lineman Lex Knapp, who was an All-Shore first-team selection last year. It also makes the young kids step up and become more mature. The leadership isn’t exactly the same, but we definitely have the leadership we need and the hard work and dedication.”

Cicardo Jr., who threw for 1,173 yards and 16 TDs and ran for 606 yards and 18 TDs while running the University of Florida-type spread offense to perfection last season, provided the Lions with offensive leadership for three seasons. He will be difficult to replace.

Lou Vircillo, who is in his 31st season as the only coach Lacey has ever had, said without Cicardo Jr. he will incorporate Lacey’s old I-formation set to complement the spread look.

“The jayvees really did not run the same offense (last year),” Vircillo said. “To expect them to do what it took three years to build is just not going to happen.”

Junior Brandon Boos and sophomore Tom Kelly were competing to be the starting quarterback early in the preseason. Boos was the QB for a 9-0 junior varsity team and Kelly the QB for an 8-1 freshman team last season.

Junior Kyle Spatz and sophomore Chris Jensen figured to take the place of the graduated Jarrod Molzon and Jake Dabal as the running backs.

The line, led by the 6-foot-1, 230-pound Knapp; 6-foot-5, 298-pound senior tackle Tyrell Smith, who Vircillo said has scholarship offers from Tulane and Marshall; senior Jake Fernandez, a 5-foot-10, 230-pound guard and 6-foot-3, 225-pound tight end Jordan Powell, a Division I-AA recruit, should be a strength.

Powell, a linebacker, is the only returning defensive full-time starter. Smith, a tackle, and Fernandez, an end, saw extensive action on defense last year. Knapp will see more action on defense this year.

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