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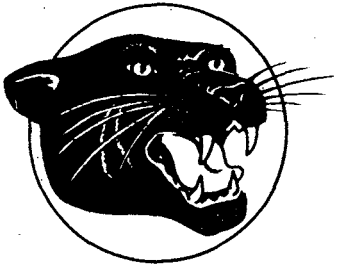
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Panther Sports News

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April 3, 1981
LS-AS-HT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CHARLESTON, IL--Eastern Illinois University will commence preparation for its first season of NCAA I-AA football with the start of spring drills Monday (April 6).

Coach Darrell Mudra will greet over 90 varsity candidates for the month long session which will conclude with the spring game at Paris High School on Saturday, May 2.

The Panthers will practice six days a week for the first two weeks, and then cutback to four days for the final two weeks. Scrimmages will be held each Saturday morning.

EIU, which finished 11-3 and second in the nation in Division II, moves up to I-AA classification this fall.

"It's going to be a much tougher schedule than last season," says Mudra, entering his fourth year as head coach, "so spring practice will be vitally important.

"We have some real talented people back but we also lost quite a few who helped us win 30 games these past three years . . . a real emphasis will be placed on quality teaching this spring.

"We have two new offensive coaches who have contributed a lot in our winter conditioning program . . . but they will benefit by continuing to acclimate themselves to our system this spring," Mudra said.

The Panthers have several holes to fill in the offensive line and lost two great receivers, Otis Grant and All-American Scott McGhee. They do have a solid QB back, Jeff Christensen (Gibson City), and a seasoned rusher in Kevin Staple (Markham-Thornwood). Tight end Rob Mehalic (Streator), the top returning pass catcher, is a legit All-American candidate.

Assistant Head Coach Chuck Dickerson says the defensive practices "will be vastly different than last year . . . particularly in the front four where Keith Wojnowski is

the only returning regular."

After three sensational seasons, the Panthers' All-American linemen, Pete Catan and Randy Melvin, graduated.

The lone returning All-American is free safety Kevin Gray (Chicago-Hyde Park/Kennedy-King), a Second Team Associated Press choice, who can turn a 4.5 time in the 40.

Gray was also tabbed the Mid-Continent Conference Defensive 'Back of the Year', and has attracted some early attention from pro scouts.

The linebacking is set with three returning starters, Bill Mines (Washington, D.C.-Woodson) in the middle and Tom Murray (Arlington Heights-St. Viator) and Ira Jefferson (Momence) on the outside.

Four year starter Wilbert James (Washington, D.C.-Woodson) is set at cornerback.

"We have a lot of youth on defense so it's important we develop proper techniqueswe'll be undersized in the defensive line so we need to emphasize quickness."