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Panther Sports News

Aug. 12, 1982
LS-AS-FB STATE

EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY, Charleston, IL 61920

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OFFENSIVE LINE (First in a Series)

CHARLESTON, IL--Moving from defense to offensive coordinator last spring, Eastern Illinois University assistant head coach Chuck Dickerson's major assignment is to turn a good offensive line into a great one.

With every starter returning and a five man front averaging 6-2, 250, as large as some pro teams, Dickerson has no worries about who will play, only how well.

"We want to establish some priorities with this group and No. 1 is to become more physical. We have great size and we come off the ball well so we won't be passive.

"Our second priority is to develop a sweep game. We have the guards who can pull and read the sweep," Dickerson explained, "and if we're to be successful we must be better running the ball."

Last year EIU averaged only 104 yards rushing compared to 258 passing, the poorest balance since Darrell Mudra resurrected the football program four years ago.

"This won't be a typical EIU team of the recent past . . . we want to maintain ball control and keep the defense off the field. We have good off-the-line blocking and some skilled running backs and we need to take advantage of these strengths."

If there is a stand out among a solid corps, it's 6-4, 265 senior right guard Bob Norris (Pittsfield), an AP Honorable Mention All-American who may be EIU's highest draft choice next spring.

Norris started as a frosh on the 1978 national championship team, dropped out of school, attended an Iowa JC and transferred back late last summer in time to regain a starting slot.

"Bob is coming off his finest semester in college," says Dickerson emphatically. "He's improved his 40 time, his body strength and his total environment in regards to athletics and academics.

"What's more he now knows he's a great player with a legitimate goal of becoming

an even greater player in his senior year."

Alvin McMurray (Chicago-Dunbar), 6-2, 260 junior who is Norris's mate at right tackle, won't take a backseat by much to Norris's abilities.

A two year letterman and second team All-Mid-Continent Conference choice, McMurray is "a coaches dream . . . a self motivated athlete who has made himself a great player," Dickerson says.

"He's the best pass protector on the team and the potential to become the best run blocker if he improves his body strength. Since our bread-and-butter play is the sweep, the tackles have a key block so Alvin is critical to our success."

The left side of the line will be handled by Brad Mars (Marshall), 6-2, 280 sophomore tackle, and Kent Lawrence (Coal Valley-Moline), 6-0, 230 junior guard.

Mars, who sat out his first year, started every game last season and is one of the nation's largest linemen. "He made a sharp improvement in his run blocking this past spring and his pass protection is coming around," Dickerson commented. "With his size, the only thing that will limit him is how far he determines he wants to go."

Lawrence moved into the starting lineup last season and improved both his pass protection and drive blocking in the spring, according to Dickerson.

"He's a highly emotional athlete who wants to achieve . . . he leads the sweep well and is an excellent trap blocker."

The center will be George Tuzil (Schaumburg), 6-3, 230 senior and four year letterman, who has started several games during his career but for the first time will enter fall camp as the starter.

Tuzil has backed up graduated All-American Scott Gilleland the past two years. When Gilleland was hurt he was the starter during the latter half of the 1980 campaign when the Panthers finished second in the NCAA tournament.

"George found himself in the spring . . . he decided he wanted to be a starting player and became a real technician. Most important he feels an integral part of the line and wants to play well. The center makes a lot of calls so it's important to have someone with George's intelligence in there," Dickerson said.

Mike Kuhn (Downers Grove-North), 6-1, 230 sophomore, who started some in '81, is tabbed the No. 6 lineman which means he's the first player off the bench. He could push Lawrence to start at left guard.

"We're bringing him into camp as an offensive guard but he's a swing player and may yet earn a starting spot. He's improved his upper body strength but still needs to bench 370."

Three other backups are Mark Zwilling (Olney-Illinois Valley CC), who was on defense last year, Del Pittman (Valparaiso, IN), another who played defense most of the spring but was shifted back to offense late, and junior Len Seward (Tolono-Unity), who has been the long snapper but will likely lineup at guard. Seward, however, enters camp injured.

Teddy Coopwood (Gary, IN-Calumet), another convert who was a fullback, has bulked up some and will be Tuzil's backup at center. "Teddy learned the position in leaps and bounds this spring . . . he's convinced he can beat out Tuzil," says Dickerson. "He needs to get stronger, particularly in his upper body, but does have great work habits."