

8-23-1983

08/23/1983 - Offensive Line

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Recommended Citation

University Marketing and Communications, "08/23/1983 - Offensive Line" (1983). 1983. 539.
http://thekeep.eiu.edu/press_releases_1983/539

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Panther Sports News

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Aug., 1983
LS-AS-FB STATE-Hts

SIXTH IN A SERIES
(Offensive Line)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CHARLESTON, IL-- At the end of spring football practice Eastern Illinois University's new offensive line coach Bill Bye didn't know who'd be lining up this fall at the five interior spots.

Two vacancies existed due to graduation at center and guard, and no suitable backups had any experience. Then on the first day of spring drills the best remaining lineman, Alvin McMurray (Chicago-Dunbar), went out with a severely broken ankle.

Bye's breathing a bit easier, though, this fall as a spring patchwork lineup has ultimately strengthened this unit, particularly with McMurray's healthy return.

"We're much better off than in the spring," says Bye. "We had no depth then and now our backups are better. There's still a marked difference between our starters and No. 2 people but the gap isn't as wide as in the spring, and if someone goes down now we can move someone in without having to do a lot of juggling."

McMurray, a three year letterman, is almost 100% healthy as he continues to rehabilitate his ankle. The 6-2 all-conference right tackle also reported at 260 lbs., down 20 from last year's playing weight.

"It hasn't hurt him and, in fact, was probably good to lose some so that he didn't have that extra weight to carry while rehabilitating the ankle," Bye said.

"Alvin's outstanding on pass protection, and with his experience could be a pro prospect."

Steve Martin (Schaumburg), 6-2, 220, senior, proved his worth at right guard last year subbing for All-American Bob Norris, and has more than adequately stepped in to the starting lineup this fall.

Martin filled in for an ailing Norris in the Indiana State game last year and earned conference 'offensive player of the week' honors with his lead blocking in the Panthers

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rushing attack. He is the first offensive lineman in the five year history of the MCC to receive those honors, usually reserved for a skill position player.

Brad Mars (Marshall), the left tackle, has consistently topped 300 lbs. and came into camp at 314. Only a junior he is already a veteran having started the previous two years.

"Brad is very maneuverable for his size," says Bye, "and can really dominate a defensive line. He can be as good as he wants to be with the potential to attract pro attention if he keeps improving."

Steady Kent Lawrence (Coal Valley-Moline), another three year letterman, is back at left guard after earning second team all-MCC honors, and starting for the past two years.

"Kent pulls well, blocks well on the edge and has a good idea of what we're trying to accomplish with our sweeps," says Bye.

Teddy Coopwood (Gary, IN-Calumet), who has earned two letters as a reserve running back and lineman, is the No. 1 center. He has put on 10 lbs. and is up to 220, still somewhat light for that position.

"Teddy has good quickness and runs well but lacks the experience. Because he can pull we've got the flexibility to play him at guard if needed."

Del Pittman (Valparaiso), a 6-3, 280, junior, inherits the distinction of being the second largest lineman behind Mars, therefore the coaches would like to get him in there somewhere.

Currently working primarily as a backup tackle he recently has taken some turns behind Coopwood at center. "With McMurray hurt last spring, Del got an opportunity to show his stuff and consequently both his confidence and play improved. Someday he'll be a great one . . . we're hoping it's this fall."

Three other backups are junior two-year letterman Mike Kuhn (Downers Grove-North), sophomore Bob Benning (Streator) and transfer Luke Jones (San Francisco/Galileo), 6-0, 300 from Santa Rosa JC.

"All three are running about even but if I had to pick today I suppose Kuhn would play more because he's had the most experience."