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Sports 1

BETCHER CALLS MONTANA DEFENSIVE LINE "YOUNG, BUT EAGER"

This is the third in a series of articles on difference phases of the University of Montana football team. This article will be followed by discussions of the offensive backfield and offensive line.

MISSOULA-- When Bill Betcher joined the University of Montana football coaching staff July 1, he was assigned with the task of molding a defeinsive line, and he had only the two weeks of pre-season practice allowed to do so.

Betcher's main stumbling block thus far has been the overall youth and inexperience of his twelve defensive line candidates.

"Of these twelve men, seven are sophomores," Betcher said Monday. "So our defensive linemen are inexperienced, but they have shown steady improvement since practice started less than two weeks ago. They're aggressive and willing to learn, and the potential is good."

In the interior line, four of six prospects are sophomores. The biggest interior lineman is John Stedham, a 6-5, 240-pound sophomore from Chehalis, Washington, who transferred from Grays Harbor Junior College.

"John is coming along well," says Betcher, "and he will be an outstanding football player. He pursues well, is hitting harder, and is eager to learn."

Mike Nicosia, a 6-2, 225-pounder from Bakersfield JC, Calif., is another sophomore described by Betcher as quick, eager, aggressive and a good pursuer.

The other two sophomores in the interior line are Larry Stranahan, 6-0, 212 from Missoula, and Ole Hedstrom, 6-0, 209 from Laurel. Both played here as freshmen last fall.

"Ole is a good hitter, he's quick, and has great desire," Betcher says. "Stranahan is a good worker, and has great desire."

Fred Tubbs is a 6-2, 230-pounder from Honolulu, Hawaii, who does a good job inside.

(more)

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He has been slowed somewhat by a neck injury, but the bulky junior has shown much improvement since Aug. 31.

The old man in the interior line is senior Bob Graham, a 6-1, 225-pounder from San Mateo, Calif.

"Bob is a real good hitter, and we think he'll do an excellent job for us this year," Betcher commented.

The remaining six candidates are working at defensive end. One is a senior, two are juniors, and three are sophomores.

Leading this group is senior Larry Huggins, a 6-2, 190-pounder from Missoula, in his third year as a Grizzly. Last year, Huggins played in the defensive backfield as an invert.

"Larry is undoubtedly the best hitter in our defensive line," said Betcher. "He understands the game well, and should be outstanding for us."

Junior defensive ends are Gary Freshour, 6-0, 190 from McMinnville, Ore., and Bruce Nordstrom, 6-3, 230 from Vancouver, Wash.

"Gary's pursuit is tremendous, and he has a great desire to go for the ball," Betcher said. "Bruce will play a lot of ball for us, because he is big and has good secpierience."

The three sophomores at end are Ken Jernberg, 6-2, 215 from Sunnyside, Wash.; Mike McCann, 6-2, 212 from Renton, Wash., and Craig Wilson, 6-2, 205 from Missoula.

"Jernberg is showing a lot of improvement," Betcher commented. "He has good speed, and covers the outside well. McCann is aggressive, hard working, and a great pass rugher. Wilson is a hustler, and is showing good improvement."

This Saturday, when the Grizzlies open against North Dakota, the outcome could depend a great deal, according to Betcher, on the performance of his young, but eager, defensive linemen.