

Putting on the pads

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After a summer filled with weight lifting, 7-on-7 games, and running through plays in street clothes, the Del Norte football pro-gram finally put on the pads this week as they prepare for their sea-son opener on Aug. 23. “When they aren’t wearing pads everybody is a little bit faster.

That is what we have been doing over the summer,” said Del Norte head coach Nick White. “So the fi rst day of pads the kids are a little bit slow with what they are doing — they have 10 pounds of gear on. That is expected, but Tuesday was defi - nitely better (than Monday) and we actually did some full contact on Tuesday, which gets everybody hyped up and going.”

Although the pads take some getting used to, they also add a little bit of energy as the practices become more physical. “Hitting is a lot more fun than coming out here without pads and going through walk-throughs and stuff,” said senior quarterback OJ Calleja. Through the fi rst few days of full practice, Calleja said the team’s identity is already starting to emerge. “We are going to be a physical team,” he said. “ We will be run-ning a lot more than passing be-cause we are a lot bigger, and we are strong. “We are physical, I feel like we are going to be good, and we are close as a team, too,” he said. Although it’s still early, White said on Tuesday

that he has been encouraged by what he has seen through the first couple days of mandatory practices. “It’s been great. The kids are working really hard,” he said. “We are doing a couple conditioning periods, so they are definitely getting their running in. As far as the foot-ball and the playbooks go, we are picking it up. Every day we seem to be getting better and better, and Warriors officially underway with practice starting up we will look to install more of what we are doing offensively and defensively.”

With longtime coordinator Derren LaFazio back in charge of the defense, Calleja said the Warriors already feel pretty comfortable on that side of the ball.

“Our defense is solid,” Calleja said. “Coming in we already knew what they were doing. They do have some new stuff as well, but they know it.”

The biggest change so far that White has brought to the team in his first season as the head coach has been on offense.

“We have a whole new offense,” said Calleja, who enters his second season as the Del Norte starting signal caller. “We are trying to learn new things because last year we ran a whole different offense. So it has been a lot harder as a team. We just have to keep getting better at it, and running through plays over and over again.”

Practice wrapped up on Friday with the varsity team holding practice at Mike Whalen Field, prior to the junior varsity participating in the Gatorade Scrimmage.

Conditioning and learning the basic playbook has been the main focus of football practice through the first week. White said next week the Warriors will start to take a look at their first opponent — Moreau Catholic.

“Next week we will implement more of our game plan for week one and we will get ready to get into the scrimmage part of it,” White said. “So we need to make sure we have the kids ready and they know what they are doing in each position. Honestly we are just trying to build day-to-day and week-to-week to that first game. That is our main focus.”

Next Friday Del Norte plans to be in Eureka for its first live scrimmaging against an opponent. The Warriors will take the field in a four-team jamboree which will give them some time to run plays, and defend against Eureka, Fortuna, and Fort Bragg.

“It is good competition to get there and go live,” White said. “Then we can watch film and correct what the kids have been doing, or show them when they are doing a good job at something. That is the really good part about the jamboree. But nobody wins the jamboree, so our eyes are on the prize with game one.”

After the jamboree the Warriors will head straight into their first game week of the season. Del Norte will be on the road in Hayward for the season opener against Moreau Catholic. Kickoff is scheduled for 7 p.m.

While the team focuses on X’s and O’s throughout the preseason, Calleja said the team chemistry off the field will also be important to develop. The Warriors have some big road trips coming up in the first month of the season with a road game in Petaluma, and one in Mazama, Oregon coming up after the season opener in Hayward.

“We do everything together,” Calleja said. “We are going to be traveling a lot this year so we are going to have to be a team, and we are going to have to like everyone — like a family.”