

Michigan-born Nick Winkler 'ready to go'

Last season, by all accounts, was a nightmare for Gallup High School football. Although there was a 33-0 home opening win against Bernalillo (3-7, 2-4) in August, the next nine games were a disaster.

The Bengals dropped relatively close games to Thoreau (5-5, 1-2) and Shiprock (8-3, 3-0), but went on a seven-game losing streak in which the team's offense couldn't put up points. Each of those games was a blowout loss, with a 54-0 home loss to crosstown 5A rival Miyamura (9-3, 3-2) in October a tell-tale sign for what was to come for Bengals' fans. Within the losing streak, Gallup (1-9, 0-5) recorded losses by an average of about 49 points per game.

Nick Winkler, who played football at Saginaw Valley State University in Michigan, was hired in January to get the Gallup program back on track.

"The past season was the past season," Winkler said. Winkler teaches physical education at Gallup High and previously coached at Diamond High School in Anchorage, Alaska. He played offensive line while at SVSU. "We have to change the mindset. We have good guys, some real good athletes. But we can't dwell on the past."

What's Expected?

The Bengals lost about a dozen players from last year, but bring back 18 seniors, some of whom are on the school's track and field team this spring. Winkler wouldn't drop names, but said he'll carry upwards of 50 players on the 2018 squad, saying the offensive approach by the Bengals will be with making sure players are playing to their strengths, not only on offense, defense as well.

"As players, we want to be fast when we need to be," Winkler commented. "As coaches, we want to teach fundamentals, sportsmanship and strategy."

Winkler said one of the reasons he took the Gallup job was to be close to family in southern New Mexico and Texas. He said he knows that family support is just as important when it comes to players.

"Family support is very important no matter what you do," Winkler said. "I am a big proponent of family and what family stands for."

The Bengals start spring practice in a few weeks. Winkler said there will be a lot of 7-on-7 drills. He said he doesn't rule out a scrimmage with Miyamura, which lost coach Wes Shank this month to Valencia.

"We're ready to go. We will make conditioning a priority and be ready when the fall comes around. It's not about what has happened in the past, but what will happen in the future."

James Malcolm, athletic director at Gallup High, said the team will benefit from Winkler's experience on and off the field. He said about a dozen candidates interviewed late last year for the head coaching job.

"He's played the game and he knows what to do when it comes game-time," Malcolm said. "We are very happy that he's here."

The Bengals open the 2018 football season Aug. 31 against 5A foe Grants (3-7, 1-3) at Angelo DiPaolo Stadium in Gallup.

By Bernie Dotson
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