



Olpe looks to build on historic season in quest for Class 1A repeat

By Brent Maycock
KSHSAA Covered

In coming up with a motto for his Olpe football team to take to heart this season, Eagle coach Chris Schmidt went simple.

“We started it in camp, and it was very simple: ‘Be Better,’” Schmidt said. “We have to be better this year than we were last year. We cannot be complacent and we talk about that a lot. We have to push each other every day in getting better and not thinking we’re OK.

“That’s how we’re approaching things. That will be our challenge.”

And quite a challenge it may be.

As simple as that motto may sound, however, it’s not a stretch to pose this question: How much better can Olpe be than it was a year ago? As football seasons go, few in the state have enjoyed more dominating seasons than the one the Eagles did in capturing the second state championship in program history.

Not only did Olpe go undefeated for the first time in program history during the playoff era (the last undefeated season coming in 1965), the Eagles did so in suffocating fashion. The Eagles allowed just 35 points all season with the first-string defense giving up just three touchdowns.

Olpe capped its first state title since 2014 with a 14-0 win over Oakley in the Class 1A state championship game, the Eagles' seventh shutout of the season.

"We felt like that group had an opportunity to do some good things," Schmidt said. "Any time you can make a run like that, you've got to have parts, you've got to stay injury-free and last year, stay COVID-free.

That was a huge thing. ... As far as our kids, the hard work, the time and effort they put in, it's nice to see them have a special year like that – and not just in football but winning state in basketball, too.

"It's one I'm never going to forget and I don't think these kids will either."

Coming off back-to-back one-loss seasons that ended with losses to state champions – Smith Center in the 2018 state championship game and eventual state champion Centralia in the 2019 state quarterfinals, Olpe had been on the brink of adding another state title to its resume. So expectations were high going into the 2020 season.

But not even Schmidt could have imagined how last season played out. Olpe only had three games decided by less than 35 points with two of those against Lyndon.

The Eagles used a pair of Damon Redeker touchdowns to claim a 13-7 win over the Tigers in the regular season. When they met again in the playoffs, the defense came to the rescue, making a big goal-line stand in the first half and stuffing a potential game-tying two-point conversion and denying a game-winning field goal late in the fourth quarter to secure a 14-12 victory.

"Lyndon was a team that we battled in the regular season and again in sub-state and it could have gone either way," Schmidt said. "They were a really, really good team and we just made a few more plays."

Olpe only graduated five seniors off last year's title team, but returns a big senior class of nine – a group that's played extensively since their sophomore season. It's also a



Olpe quarterback Damon Redeker helped lead the Eagles to an undefeated season and Class 1A state championship. (Jeff Jacobsen/KSHSAA Covered)

group that Schmidt envisioned having success well before they stepped on the varsity field.

“I remember we were at state basketball in Manhattan and I was walking down the steps and this group, they were in fifth grade and there were five or six of them all in a bunch,” Schmidt said. “I said, ‘Fellas, look down on that court and take all this in today because I really truly believe if you work at it, you guys can be in this situation when you’re in high school.’ Now that was basketball, but this group just had the makings of being able to make things happen.

“And Damon reminds me of that all the time and I just tell them continue doing things you’ve done.”

Redeker is a two-time All-Class 1A selection and is joined in this year’s senior class by returning All-1A linebacker Ted Skalsky, who started as a freshman and doubles as the Eagles’ top offensive lineman. Fellow seniors Derek Hoelting (running back/defensive back) and Brayden Weiss (lineman) have also been fixtures and the Eagles also have a strong junior class to complement their seniors led by lineman Garrett Cole.



Olpe's defense was stifling last year, allowing just 35 points all season as the Eagles captured their second Class 1A state championship. (Jeff Jacobsen/KSHSAA Covered)

“A lot of times you’ll have a class, especially at our level where you don’t have big classes to start with, and you’ll have more skill kids and no linemen or all linemen and no skill kids. We’ve got a great mixture and when you have that in one class, it tends to make things happen. And they’re good leaders and approach things the right way.

“And to go along with it we’ve got five or six junior kids who are pretty talented as well. When you get two classes together like that, it can be pretty special at a small school.”

As the preseason No. 1 in Class 1A, expectations remain high at Olpe. Then again, they always are.

And this year’s team would like to make some history of its own. No Olpe football team has ever won back-to-back state championships.

“I think they understand that they have an opportunity to do something that’s never been done at Olpe,” Schmidt said. “To go back-to-back. We know we’ll have to go through some good competition, but they’re smart enough to know what’s at stake. We’ll take the challenge on and see what we can do and make some history.”

The path back to a state title won't be any easier. Centralia and Olpe have gone back and forth over the past several years in some classic contests, trading supremacy on the east side of the state. The Panthers are ranked No. 4 in 1A to start the season and return enough pieces for veteran coach Larry Glatczak to challenge Olpe.

Lyndon graduated a large and talented senior class from its semifinal team but returns senior quarterback Darian Massey, while Valley Heights should be hungry after seeing last season end prematurely when COVID-19 hit the program right before the playoffs, forcing the Mustangs to shut down the season.

In the west, Oakley lost standout back Ethan Abell and a strong senior class of last year's runner-up team but should still be in the hunt. Smith Center was upset by Oakley in the playoffs after winning their regular-season matchup and begins the year ranked No. 2 behind Olpe.

Inman returns the bulk of last year's squad that enjoyed a breakthrough season and reached the state semifinals while Sedgwick returns senior quarterback Lance Hoffsommer, who has topped 2,000 yards passing each of the past two seasons.