



Rossville's Horak joins older brothers as state champ, eager to deliver another

By Brent Maycock
KSHSAA Covered

Torrey Horak had heard plenty from older brothers Thatcher and Tucker about winning a state football championship.

But not necessarily in the way one might expect a younger brother would hear about it from his older siblings after each helped lead Rossville to state championships – Thatcher a senior on the Bulldawgs' 2014 Class 3A state title squad and Tucker a two-time All-State quarterback for the 2014 and 2015 title teams.

Given their resumes, it might have been natural for Thatcher and Tucker to play the bragging rights card with their younger brother as he began his prep career. Instead, Torrey said, it's been just the opposite.

"They just told me it was one of the best things they've ever done in their lives, sharing it together and with their buddies," Torrey Horak said. "They told me I'd never understood

what it would feel like until I did it and they just always told me what a special moment it was for them.”

Torrey now knows the feeling. Last season, it was his turn to experience winning a state championship as he led Rossville back to the top. With Horak under center, the Bulldawgs captured their fourth state championship in the past six seasons, taking the Class 2A state crown with a 27-20 win over Hoisington in the championship game in Salina.

The win capped a 13-0 season and allowed Torrey to truly join his brothers’ fraternity of Rossville champions. And immediately, he knew who he needed to share the excitement with.

“Right after the clock ran out, Thatcher was the first person I found and Tucker was the second,” Torrey said. “With Thatcher coaching and Tucker down at Pitt (Pittsburg State), I’m always talking to them and then my parents give me nothing but support. This family loves football.”



Rossville quarterback Torrey Horak (6) carved his own place in his family's championship history, leading the Bulldawgs to the Class 2A state title last season. He returns to go after another title this year. (Photo courtesy Rex Wolf)

While having a Horak under center doesn’t necessarily guarantee a state championship in Rossville, it sure doesn’t hurt. Three of the four titles won under ninth-year head coach Derick Hammes have been Horak-led teams.

Which could bode well for this season as well. After crafting an All-State season a year ago, Horak is back to try and duplicate Tucker’s back-to-back championship resume.

“They’re not only great athletes and a great family, but there’s been buy-in,” Hammes said of the Horaks. “But there’s buy-in from everybody in town. We ask a great deal of these kids and if it wasn’t for willing parents like the Horaks and so many others, I don’t think we would be as successful as we’ve been.”

Success for Rossville this year could largely depend on how the pieces fall into place around Horak, who as a junior last year finished with 1,629 yards and 30 touchdowns rushing and another 1,447 yards and 25 touchdowns passing. In amassing those gaudy totals he was flanked not only by a strong cast of skill players, but also ones who created big-time mismatches for opposing defenses – whether it was Bo Reeves’ 6-foot-5 frame at receiver or the blinding speed of backs Woodrow Rezac and Tyree Sowers.

Those guys are gone, leaving Corey Catron as the lone returning skill player who played a significant role (672 yards, 12 TDs rushing).

“We did have mismatches and those led to big plays,” Hammes said. “So where this may be different is we’re going to have to be a team that executes much better and instead of two or three plays and then a big play, we might have to have more consistent drives. We might have to do things a little differently to be successful and that’s part of putting all this together and seeing if we can figure it out.”

That cause will be helped by an offensive line that returns three starters, including two-way starters Brody Lietz, Raphael Cooney and Jacob Carver. There’s enough depth up front that Hammes has pulled from that position to help fill voids at the skill spots.

“We’ve created some depth and competition up there and hopefully that helps us out in the long haul,” Hammes said.

Rossville will find out quickly just how well the pieces have come together in the preseason. There’s no easing into the schedule as the Bulldawgs open Friday against Class 1A No. 4 Centralia.

A 42-6 win in last year’s opener jump-started Rossville’s championship season and Hammes said the matchup is one he eagerly looks forward to every season.

“It’s an attention-getter for our kids,” Hammes said. “We totally respect what they do over there and prepare hard because we know it’s a challenge.”

The challenge to get back to Salina won’t be any easier. In the KSHSAA Covered preseason rankings, the top three teams in Class 2A all reside in the east and are no strangers to Rossville. At No. 2 is Mid-East League and arch-rival Silver Lake, which returns a bulk of last year’s 6-2 squad that lost only to Rossville and Nemaha Central.

The Thunder come in at No. 3 after going 8-3 last year and losing to Rossville in the state semifinals. Nemaha Central has a new coach in Michael Glatczak, but returns senior quarterback Zac Kramer.

Other challengers on the east include Maur Hill, Pittsburg Colgan and Osage City.

Hoisington enjoyed the best season in school history in reaching last year’s championship game, suffering its only loss in a 12-1 season to the Bulldawgs. The Cardinals were hit hard by graduation, but have showed staying power for much of the last decade under Zach Baird and are hungry to complete their quest of bringing home the program’s first state championship.

Beloit, Cimarron, Garden Plain, Hillsboro and TMP-Marian headline a deep cast of other contenders trying to unseat Hoisington as the top team in the west bracket.

Whatever the path may be, Rossville is ready.

“There’s a lot of excitement,” Horak said. “We’ve been ready to strap on the pads and get after it. There’s nothing like winning a state title. It’s unmatched.”