

Spartan gridgers have a ‘New Attitude’

All of Michigan State University's football returnees are sick as the Spartans and head coach John L. Smith couldn't feel better as the Spartans open fall football practice.

"We're all," sick of losing," said junior running back, Jehuu Caulcrick, "and we're determined to prove we're better than that."

"Every year there's talk about a different attitude," Caulcrick said, "This time I can really see a difference. It started right after the Penn State game and continued all through summer."

"All of the guys really worked hard. We ran seven on seven drills in the afternoon, and guys would stay after watching film and doing everything they can to get better."



Jehuu Caulcrick

It's that new attitude, that determination and focus on work that has Smith beaming. Smith, starting his fourth season at the Spartan helm, feels that MSU is in its best position since he's been here to win big.

"I'm excited," Smith said. "I'm

ready to go. "The guys all showed up."

Smith and the Spartans are eager to start the season and are looking forward to the chance to erase the taste of last season's disappointing showing.

MSU started 4-0 last year before nose-diving to a 5-6 mark.

"We want to get rid of that stench," Smith said.

MSU opens the at home against Idaho, September 2, then hosts Eastern Michigan, September 9, and travels to Pittsburgh, September 16. Notre Dame comes to town September 23.

The Spartans will not face Wisconsin and Iowa this year, a fact that also boosts Spartan hopes this year.

Smith is pinning his hopes on what appears to be a

improved more aggressive defense and a veteran-studded offense that boasts as good a group of skill players as there is in the country.

MSU averaged 33.8 points per game and ranked in the top 20 in all four offensive categories: (20) rushing offense, 201.8 yards per game; (11) passing offense, 295.5 ypg; and (5) total offense, 497.3 ypg.

Although most observers are taking a wait and see attitude regarding the MSU defense, Smith was impressed with the progress made during the spring and expects continued progress during the season. Defensive coordinator, Chris Smeland shares the optimism. Smeland points to senior leadership, always a key factor in success at the major college level.

The Spartans have five senior starters who are expected to provide leadership and make plays.

Tackles Clifton Ryan and David Stanton anchor the defensive line, David Heron Jr., heads the linebacker corps, and Greg Cooper and Demond Williams hold down the corners in the defensive backfield.

Ryan, 6-2 302-pounds, is the only returning starter on the defensive line, and he is moving inside after three seasons at end.

He had 22 solo tackles last season, four for losses. In two seasons as a starter he has 75 stops, 14 for losses.

Stanton started three games last season and totaled 13 tackles, two for losses. At 6-3 290, he has the bulk and

quickness to hold down the spot.

He's getting lots of competition from junior college transfer, Ogemdi Nwagbue who impressed the coaching staff during spring drills.

Herron, 6-1, 245-pounds, has All-America potential. He was MSU's second leading tackler with 65, four for losses.

Cooper is making the switch from free safety to corner this season to take advantage of his athleticism and competitiveness.

He recorded 48 tackles, three for losses last season.

"Corner is his natural position," Smeland said.

"I played corner four years in high school," Cooper said. "I like it at corner the best."

Kaleb Thornhill is ready to "get down"

Impact player hopes to play without pain

By Ernie Boone

Kaleb Thornhill hope's to play without pain this season - for the first time since his senior season in high school. The former Eastern High School standout is set to start his junior season at MSU after what has been his most productive summer of conditioning ever.

Thornhill has been plagued by injuries since graduating from Eastern. He injured his right knee prior to the start of his freshman year. It was not apparent that his patellar (the ligament that connects the knee cap to the tibia bone) was torn, and rehabilitation work made it worse.

He sat out his first season as a red shirt, but was named Scouting Team Defensive Player of the Week twice for his work in practice.

When the tear was diagnosed, following the red shirt season, he underwent surgery.

Although he played the next two seasons, appearing in 12 games (starting four) as a freshman and starting 10 of 11 as a sophomore, the knee has never been quite right.

Last season he was also slowed by a shoulder injury.

It didn't keep him from appearing in every game and recording 63 tackles, four for losses from his middle linebacker position.

In January Thornhill traveled to Pennsylvania for surgery and had scar tissue removed from the knee.

Thornhill said that the doctor was really thorough, even putting his finger in to make certain that all of the scar tissue had been removed.

The result is that the knee is responding better than at anytime since the injury.

"Because of my knee, I haven't been able to run much during the summers," Thornhill said. I've always had to ride the (stationary) bike a lot.

"This summer was the least I've ridden the bike since I started here. It's the first time I've been able to run with the guys and do all the things they do."

And he's been doing it relatively pain free. For the first time he's been able to work out more than four weeks without having to take a break to relieve the pain and swelling.

That lack of pain has everyone in the MSU camp excited.

"Kaleb is having his best summer," Smith said. "He's

smiling coming off the practice field. I'm looking for Kaleb to have his best year."

But no one is more optimistic the Thornhill.

"The shoulder is fine," he said. He's bench pressing 430 pounds.

And so far, so good with the knee. It held up well under the summer running and seven on seven drills the players organized.

He's anxious to see how it holds up when the Spartans put on the pads and start hitting.

"The real test is when we start contact work," he said.

His improved physical condition has enabled Thornhill to speak up and play a more active leadership role.

He feels more comfortable speaking out when he knows

that he's all the work his teammates are doing.

It's certain teammates will listen. The words will be coming from a third year

starter who is also a two-time All-Big 10 Academic Team selection for his work in the classroom.



Kaleb Thornhill (43) helps make stop in MSU's 61-14 victory over Illinois last year



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