

New Twinsburg football coach Schiavone a real winner

By STEVE KING - SportsInk.com

TWINSBURG, Ohio - Whether it be as an assistant coach or as a player, Joe Schiavone has always seemed to be part of winning football teams.

Now, as a first-time head coach - and an excited one at that who is grateful for the opportunity -- he gets to see what he can do with a Twinsburg program that long ago established itself as a winner and now is hungry to move its way up the postseason ladder even further.

Schiavone, 35, who did a fine job as the defensive coordinator of the Tigers the last three years, takes over for Mark Solis, whose coaching contract was non-renewed after last season in a move charged with emotion and controversy. Solis, the husband of Julie Solis, the coach of the Division I state champion Twinsburg girls basketball team, has since been hired as the coach at Lorain High School.

Schiavone inherits a team that, at least at this time, includes 27 seniors - "We may get down to 23 by the time it's all said and done," he says - and returns five starters on both sides of the ball.

"We're very heavy with our senior class, so we're excited," he said.

Things have been exciting at Twinsburg for a while. The Tigers have made the Division I state playoffs three years in a row and are coming off a 2010 season in which they advanced to the regional semifinals before losing to Toledo Whitmer and finishing 10-2.

"As a coach and player, you always have your eye on the big prize, and that is to win the state championship. So that's our goal," Schiavone said. "But in terms of a more immediate goal, the kids want to get past the second round of the playoffs."

But as Schiavone freely admits, it will be harder for the Tigers this year since they have been moved from the Northeast Ohio Conference's River Division, where they shared the championship with Hudson last year with a 4-1 mark, to the Valley Division, considered to be the league's toughest division for football. In it, the Tigers will be competing with Medina, Brunswick, Solon, Strongsville and incoming league member Mentor - a meat-grinder of a group, to be sure.

"Our caliber of competition has improved tremendously," Schiavone said. "But the kids are excited. They want to see how they stack up against those teams."

The Tigers will be helped greatly by the fact the "new" coach was already on the staff, so Schiavone and his assistants, the majority of whom return from a year ago, know the players and the players know them.

The players also are well aware of what is expected of them on the field - the offensive and defensive schemes will be basically the same, because they've produced a lot of success the last three years -- and off it as well.

"So we've been able to hit the ground running," said Schiavone, who will continue to serve as defensive coordinator in addition to handling his head coaching duties. "If I got the defensive players and took them out in the hall right now and asked them to line up in this defense or that one, they'd be able to do it."

"What happened with the change in coaches in the offseason was definitely a learning experience for everybody in the program. But the kids have made it easier for me with the way they've conducted themselves. They just want to play football, and they want someone to lead them."

That will be Schiavone, who lives in Garfield Heights with his wife of 10 years, Megan, and their two boys, Vinnie, who will turn 7 in August, and Dominic, who will celebrate his third birthday on Saturday. He is a 1994 graduate of Twinsburg's longtime arch rival in every sport, Nordon, where he wrestled, played baseball and was an All-Ohio honorable mention nose guard/center in football.

Schiavone went on to play football at Mount Union, where he was a backup defensive tackle and full-time special teamer for three years and was part of back-to-back NCAA Division III national championship squads in 1996 and '97.

"Playing at Mount Union was a great experience," he said. "There's hardly a day that goes by that I don't think about it and wish I could go back and re-live it. It's where I learned most of my football."

"The thing I learned most there was how to do things the right way, to understand all the time and work it takes to be good and to be efficient at using that time. At Mount Union, they're very good at organizing things. They don't go out and do football drills just to do them. There's a method to their madness. There's a reason for everything they do."

He then went from one winning team to another. Upon graduation, he was hired by Cleveland Benedictine as a teacher and coach, and assisted on teams that went to three straight Division III state title games from 2002-04, winning the championship the last two years.

"I also learned a lot of football during that time at Benedictine," Schiavone said. "When you're talking about going to three state championship games, that means you're playing 45 games in three years. All those extra games and practices really benefit your program and you as a coach."

And from Benedictine he went to Twinsburg and was involved in still more winning.

"You win with great players, and I've been very fortunate to have been with great players - great kids - the two places where I've been. It's been a lot of fun," he said.

"Here at Twinsburg, we've had some very good athletes and we've had a great run. These kids are committed to playing football. They work hard, and they're good at listening."

The Tigers open their season at Aurora and in, fact, play their first four games on the road, including a Week 2 date at Schiavone's old stomping grounds, Nordonia.

"Sure, there will be a little nostalgia in going back to Nordonia for the first time as a coach, but when you're coaching, wherever it is, you're there for your kids," he said.

In what should say volumes about the breadth of the road trip of all road trips to begin the year, when the Tigers finally have their home opener, in Week 5, it will also be their homecoming.

A homecoming of sorts for everyone -- the students, the players, the assistant coaches and the head coach, Joe Schiavone, who, in being around so many winners over the years, certainly knows what it takes to get a good team over the hump and turn it into a champion.

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Spring Football Preview: New Coach, New Division for Twinsburg Football

Joe Schiavone seeks to continue winning tradition as Tigers move up to NOC Valley Division

By Barry Goodrich ~ [Twinsburg Patch](#), May 16, 2011

Taking it to the next level is one of football's oldest cliches. The Twinsburg football team is taking it literally this season.

The Tigers are moving up to the top tier of the Northeast Ohio Conference - the Valley Division. The switch in divisions means an even tougher schedule but brings with it the opportunity for more computer points and a shot at home field in the playoffs. Twinsburg remains in Division I, Region 2 this season and new head coach Joe Schiavone knows he has his work cut out for him.

Schiavone previously served as the Tigers' defensive coordinator and Twinsburg's defensive play was a key factor during the past three playoff seasons. Last year's club allowed just 7.7 points per game as the Tigers went 9-1 in the regular season before falling to Toledo Whitmer in the regional semifinals.

Defense is in Schiavone's blood. He was an All-Ohio performer at Nordonia High School and then went on to play at defensive tackle for Mount Union teams that won National Championships in 1996 and 1997. He began his coaching career at Benedictine, where he went to three straight state title games, the Bengals finishing second in 2002 before winning back-to-back titles in 2003-2004.

Schiavone takes over the top spot for a team that will now play such division powers as Solon, Strongsville, Brunswick and Mentor in what is easily one of the strongest leagues in all of Ohio football.

"We're excited about it," said Schiavone. "Our players want to face that kind of competition. We know that wins will be at a premium this season. There's nobody to look past on our schedule."

There will be little problem motivating the Tigers for their week eight opponent, Solon. Twinsburg has not defeated its crosstown rival for the past 18 years.

With high school football now virtually a year-round endeavor, Schiavone has his team in the weight room with a full summer of action lined up prior to the first session of two-a-days in August.

"You really have to do your homework and be prepared to play high school football in Northeast Ohio," he said. "It's non-stop, you're always trying to figure out something. The quality of football in this area is at such a high level."

Like many teams, Twinsburg is currently spending three sessions in the weight room each week. In addition, the players came up with their own suggestion this season -- speed schools involving footwork and sprints at 5:25 a.m.

With the exception of the upcoming end of the school year when the players concentrate on academics and the week of July 4, the players and coaches will be busy in the off-season. A minicamp will be held at Heidelberg College in July and practices for the regular season commence Aug. 1.

"We're already chomping at the bit," said Schiavone. "It's already been a real productive off-season. Everybody has their own philosophy on how to do things and we know what we want to do as a coaching staff. It's been a smooth transition and the kids are comfortable with what we've been doing the past three years."

The Tigers will once again play Schiavone's 4-2-5 defense and operate out of the spread offense. Quarterback Aaron Macer has moved on to Ohio University but Jalen Washington saw significant time as a sophomore signal caller last year.

For now, the task is to build up strength and speed. "We're probably the strongest and fastest we've been since I've been here," said Schiavone. "We have 11 guys in our 1,000-pound club (weight lifting) and 20 more in the 800- and 900-pound clubs."

Twinsburg will need all the advantages it can get this season. The team scrimmages perennial state powers St. Ignatius and Avon Lake before opening the season against small school power Aurora.

"Our guys love scrimmaging those two teams," said Schiavone. "Avon Lake is now in our region and they're like us, a small Division I team."

The off-season is a time to prepare to succeed. And Schiavone knows that hard work now usually pays off later.

"We've been fortunate here the past few years," he says. "Winning breeds success and these players know what it takes. We have great kids and a great community that supports them."

The Tigers have built a winning program. By August, they will see if that program keeps winning against some stiff competition.

Tigers Remain in Division I; Region II

The Tigers will remain in Division I, Region II for the next two seasons. Check out the divisional breakdowns [here](#).

Summer Letter

Dear Football Parents,

I hope this letter finds you and your family well. The end of the 2011 academic year is upon us and before you know it, we will be kicking off versus Aurora on August 26th! As many of you know, we have moved into the top tier of our conference. All of the coaches and players are excited to play top-notch competition as our schedule will be one of the toughest in the state! Heading into the 2011 season, there are many important dates that will help us prepare for our upcoming season. Please remember that prior to official practice on August 1st, a physical and E.M.A. MUST be on file for your son. Your son will not be able to participate until his paperwork is finalized.

Leading up to our kick off versus Aurora on August 26th, here are some important dates to remember.

- Weight Lifting Days: Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday of each week from 7:00am-9:00am
- Physicals: Monday, May 23rd, By appointment only, done through Trainer Mike
- Dog Soldier Days: June 6th, 7th, & 8th , 6:00am - 8:00am
- No Activities during July 4th Week (July 4th - July 8th)
- THS Combine for all Players 9-12: July 15th at 10am
- Parent Meeting (Mandatory for all football parents/guardians): July 15th, THS Auditorium at 6:00pm
- Mini Camp: July 18th - July 22nd (See Calendar for Times)
- 7-on-7, Saturday, July 23rd (10th-12th)

- Heidelberg Team Camp: July 25th, 26th, & 27th (Cost is \$120.00 per player, open to 9th-12th)
- 1st Day of Official Practice (Two-a-Days): August 1st , 7:00am - 1:00pm
- Scrimmage @ St. Ignatius: August 12th (Time: TBD)
- Scrimmage @ Avon Lake: August 19th (JV: 5:00pm, Var. 6:30pm)
- 1st Day of School: August 17th
- 1st Game @ Aurora: August 26, 7:00pm

As we look forward to the 2011 season, our goals are very high for our program. These goals can only be accomplished by the cooperation and sacrifices made by each player and his family. Football is the ultimate team sport and we need everyone, including, coaches, players, and families to be on the same page. For everyone involved, we want to make the 2011 season a memorable one. Please continue to check our football website for updated information, www.twinsburg.k12.oh.us/football. If there are any concerns about the upcoming events, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Go Tigers!!!

Joe Schiavone
Head Football Coach
Twinsburg High School