

Lights, cameras, action on the bill in Grand Island



The Gene Masters Field at H. David Myers Athletic Complex will make its debut under the lights at Grand Island High School tonight. James P. McCoy/Buffalo News

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Let there be lights.

When Grand Island meets visiting Williamsville South at 7 tonight, it will mark the first time in more than a half-century of Vikings football that they'll play a home game at night.

There should be plenty of cameras on hand to document the historic event and action as the new Gene Masters Field at the H. David Myers Athletic Complex makes its football debut. Fans are encouraged to arrive early as a crowd of more than 2,000 is expected to attend the Class A North contest between the unbeaten Billies (2-0, 1-0) and GI (1-1, 1-0).

“I think for this community,” for the team to be able to play on Friday nights, “especially being on an island ... we’re a little secluded, I think it’ll be fantastic,” 14th-year Grand Island coach Dean Santorio said.

“It’s going to be a big difference but it’s really going to be exciting,” longtime Athletic Director Jon Roth said. “I think the Grand Island community will buy into it. I think our attendance will go up with Friday night games. ... I expect we’re going to get a lot more fans.”

Roth said he isn’t sure of the exact cost of the facility – which includes a new scoreboard, artificial turf and eight-lane track – because it was part of the school district’s \$51 million capital project, which included the addition of a technology wing, electrical upgrades to buildings and remodeling of three elementary schools.

What he does know is that Gene Masters Field will be rededicated during a halftime ceremony to the late coach who started the football program in 1964. That ceremony also includes the official naming of the athletic complex. Myers, now 94 and expected to be in attendance, was the first athletic director in Grand Island history and came up with the school’s nickname and logo.

Football alumni are invited to attend a pregame tent party, which starts at 5. Roth said former News Players of the Year and brothers Cliff and Anthony Scott are expected to be there, but Tennessee Titans punter Brett Kern, a 2004 graduate, will not be as he and his teammates prepare to play the Cincinnati Bengals on Sunday.

Grand Island and Williamsville South have a history of playing some competitive, highly entertaining games in recent years. If the Vikings want to send their fans home happy, they will need to do a better job of protecting the ball. They turned it over six times last week but still held on to win at Riverside, 22-18.

Grand Island did not punt in the game, but it will need to clean things up against a Billies crew that has won a pair of three-point games and is averaging 28 points.

GI’s defense has been its strength through two games, with the inside trio of tackles Nick Paolini (18 tackles, 1 sack) and Chris Aronica and inside linebacker TJ Morgan (17 tackles, two interceptions) leading the charge.

The Vikings’ “D” will be put to the test by an offense led by senior quarterback Sam Castranova, who is averaging 275 yards passing through two games. Castranova threw for 291 yards and four touchdowns in last week’s win over Starpoint.

“He’s a three-year starter, does a great job, very accurate, throws the deep ball well,” Santorio said. South’s offense has “a number of people they throw the football to who are all capable.”

Jarod Brandon leads the Vikings’ offense (170 yards rushing, two touchdowns). Grand Island quarterbacks went 7 for 10 passing for 77 yards in last week’s win – led by senior Guiseppe Campanella’s 5-for-7 day.

Another biggie under the lights in Class A North takes place at North Tonawanda, where the state's No. 15 team hosts a Sweet Home crew (1-1, 1-0) ranked fifth in the state.

At All High Stadium, Lewiston-Porter battles Burgard in a collision of Class B North unbeatens, while News No. 1 large school Canisius, ranked first in the state in Class AA, hits the road to take on Ohio power Walsh Jesuit. State No. 3 Jamestown, the defending sectional Class AA champion and current No. 2 large school, visits Lancaster.

On Saturday, unbeatens meet when Williamsville North visits Niagara Falls in a Class AA North clash. It will be the first varsity football game at the Niagara Falls High School Athletic and Recreation Complex.

St. Joe's hits the road, looking to see if it can become the second Monsignor Martin Association school in as many weeks to beat perennial state contender Aquinas of Rochester. The Little Irish are coming off a 34-0 loss at Canisius, a game in which they lost top Division I prospect and quarterback Jake Zembiec to a broken wrist, an injury suffered while being sacked on Aquinas' first offensive play. Zembiec won't need surgery and could return for the postseason.

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