



Marion Graham Falcons' quarterback Joe Devine, seen last November, led the league in passing last season with 148 yards per game.

Photograph by: Gord Waldner, The StarPhoenix, The StarPhoenix

In the past Joe Devine eschewed the traditional calm and stoic demeanour of a quarterback, and instead allowed his fervour to boil over.

But as the Saskatoon high school football season kicks off Thursday, the Marion Graham Falcons pivot is hoping to shed his ebullient skin for a more appropriate disposition.

"I played quarterback, but I probably acted like a linebacker," joked Devine, a Grade 12 student. "I had to realize that my passions somewhat outweighed the passions of other guys and I probably got a little more frustrated than I needed to.

"I just need to tone it down and realize that I can only control certain things so there's no sense fussing over what's out of my reach."

If the Falcons are to reclaim the 3A Division city title, they'll need their second-year starter as level-headed as possible. Devine may have led the league in passing last season with 148 yards per game, but now head coach Bill Eng wants his firecracker of a quarterback to lead the Falcons to championship pay dirt.

In just a few exhibition stints so far this month, Eng already sees a level of maturity not present in Devine this time last year. Before, Eng had to make a point of "holding (Devine) back emotionally," but now there's a measure of self-restraint.

"I'm really proud of him," said Eng. "He's certainly got the command of everybody in the huddle and I think the guys respect him.

"That's the main thing he's improved upon."

The physical tools have always been there. Devine started for two years on the school's junior football program, and was called up to the senior outfit each season when the junior campaign concluded. In the off-seasons he attended a deluge of football camps including the Manning Passing Academy in Louisiana after his Grade 10 and 11 seasons.

He failed to make the Saskatchewan under-18 Canada Cup squad this summer, but that didn't stop him from consuming all things football. He's spent time with former University of Saskatchewan Huskies quarterback Laurence Nixon, and even studied game film Eng provided on a USB stick.

"Football is a passion for me and I enjoy it more than anything - I don't really get tired of it," said Devine. "I feel there's always something new I can learn. It never really ends."

Said Eng: "To be successful at that position the key is how many reps you get in the off-season and how many opportunities you have to get better - he's definitely put his time in."

The Falcons have won three of the last four 3A city titles, but fell to the Bishop Mahoney Saints 21-6 in the championship final last season. The Saints graduated a chunk of that roster, meaning 2011 could be the Falcons year.

"It's anybody's league to lose - the first game hasn't been played yet," said Devine. "I'm just hoping to make plays that allow our team to win."

The Falcons begin their season Thursday against Bedford Road at 3 p.m. Walter Murray then meets Aden Bowman at 5: 15 p.m., followed by Tommy Douglas taking on Bishop Mahoney at 7: 30 p.m.

All games are at Gordie Howe Bowl.

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SEASON BEGINS

The high school football season kicks off Thursday, 3 p.m. at Gordie Howe Bowl
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