Rebuilding Sabres move to 2-0

By Shane Jones, Sherwood Park News

Monday, September 17, 2012

Salisbury Sabres receiver Nick Taylor turns on the jets in a 40-0 win over the ABJ Scots in the season-opener. The Sabres improved to 2-0 with a 20-17 victory over the Austin O'Brien Crusaders on Friday at Clarke Park.

The young guns on the reloading Salisbury Sabres continue to look like hot shots.

With 28 graduating players to replace for this season, it would normally be considered a write-off year, but buoyed by what head coach Cam Fraser believes to be the best Bantam bunch he has seen come into his school as Grade 10s in the 17 years he has been with the Sabres, Sal looks to be well ahead of the learning curve.

After a 27-21 pre-season victory over Peace River, the Sabres rattled the rival Archbishop Jordan Scots 40-0 in their first regular-season match and proved that the good start wasn't a fluke on Friday at Clarke Stadium, as they improved to 2-0 with a 20-17 victory over the Austin O'Brien Crusaders.

Sal started the scoring with a solid drive on its first possession, capped off by an 11-yard touchdown run by Patrick Kuny.

The Crusaders responded with a field goal before the Sabres staked themselves to a 13-3 lead at the half, as quarterback Reggie Schoeppe passed for a 27-yard unconverted major to receiver Caleb Wilkens.

The Sabres forced a turnover in the AOB end early in the third, leading to Kuny's second TD of the game on a two-yard rushing play.

Sal was able to hang on from there — although it did get a bit too close for comfort.

The Crusaders scored on a pitch play with nine minutes left and then were able to block a Sabres field goal attempt to remain in the game at 20-10. They were then able to drive down the field and score with 30 seconds left to play on a third-and-15 gamble, but Sal recovered the on-side kick to burn out the clock for the win.

"Any time we win a ball game this year, be it by 40 points or by three, we are going to be happy with the result," Fraser said. "I thought our defence played exceptionally well. They were given the task of limiting Jonathan Muamba, who is one of the best athletes in our league, to minimum yardage, by his standards at least. He didn't score on us at all. I thought that was a great job by our front seven — especially our defensive line, who played just excellent all game long, led by Austin Patrie."

The main concern from the game came from a tapering off on offence as the match wore on.

"In the first half our offence was playing really well," Fraser said. "We moved the ball really well and rushed it very well. Patrick Kuby, our Grade 12 tailback, played exceptional. He was our best player on offence and rushed for more than 100 yards and two touchdowns. He led by example. But in the second half a lot of the positive momentum we had on offence started to go away and we started making mistakes and it snowballed a bit. We had some opportunities and then dropped some passes and missed some blocks and we need to shore that up as the season goes on."

Last week, it was many of the rookies on offence who really stood out. This week was more of a coming-out party for the young players on defence.

"Our defence really won the game for us," Fraser said. "Our front seven were exceptional. Our three linebackers, led by Grade 10 player Jacob Butler, were just phenomenal. They really executed well."

The Sabres have a bye this week before playing two games the following week.

"We originally did this because coach Blake Dermott is going into the University of Alberta Hall of Fame this week and we wanted to be there for him," Fraser said.

"We requested our bye so that we could attend that ceremony. I also thought it would be good to have a bye before the two games in a week that everyone has to go through to have every team play each other this season. We thought it would be good to have a rest before going through that."

When the Sabres return they will have a pair of games on the road, facing the Paul Kane Blues on Tuesday, Sept. 25 and St. Albert on Friday, Sept. 28.