

2008-09 Eagles in Review



The Eagles' football team reacts to their first round CIF playoff win.

By Gregg McMullin

With the graduation of the 2009 class, it closes the books on another school year and the end of the first decade of the millennium. It's also the time of the year that we look back at how the El Segundo Eagles did. Pioneer League titles were few, but the Eagles played deep into the CIF playoffs and a couple of teams even played for a title. There were dramatic, triumphant moments we'll never forget. There were also moments that we'll let escape us through the pain in defeat, but overall it was another memorable year for the Eagles.

With limited resources, the El Segundo Eagles have overachieved for decades, and one reason is the coaching staff's insistence for working hard and preparing their teams. As we look back on another year filled with wins, losses, heartbreaks and comebacks, the athletes themselves can be proud of their accomplishments.

Football

The 2008 football team was full of talented players, and for a number of seniors it marked the third straight year playing together on the varsity. Though the Eagles haven't been known for their football prowess, they have been competitive throughout the years. The Eagles were coming of a 5-5 year in 2007 and missed the playoffs after making it the year before with this year's seniors as sophomores. This year turned out to be one of the best years in the school's history as the Eagles went 10-3 and were a catch away from playing in the CIF Northwest Division finals.

Expectations were running high for this team, especially since junior quarterback Mike Bundy led his team to the Stanford Passing Tournament last June. Bundy had a crop of talented receivers to throw to, including seniors Joey Schaffhauser, Kevin Post and junior Jimmy Quinones. But the Eagles weren't an all-passing team, and coupled with Gage Mortesen and Kyle Yatabe running the ball effectively, the Eagles averaged 30 points a game.

Defensively the Eagles weren't real deep, but the linebackers, including Mortesen, Yatabe and junior Nick Kessler, stopped the run. Jimmy Quinones, along with sophomores Grant Palmer and Nigel Nootbaar, stopped the opposition's passing attack as the Eagles held five teams to seven points or less.

El Segundo opened the season with West Torrance, and after getting hammered the two previous years by scores of 60-0 and 30-0, the Eagles put together a defensive effort to remember. Alex Merced's 36-yard field goal to make it 3-0 in the first quarter was the only score of the night. The defense, led by Yatabe, held the Warriors on fourth and inches at the Eagles' 11-yard line in the closing moments of the game to preserve

the shutout.

The Eagles lost to highly regarded Cathedral in the second game and then proceeded to rattle off five straight wins by an average score of 38-15. Bundy and company were on a roll until the 6-1 Eagles met up with the 7-0 North Torrance Saxons. The game was marred by injuries, turnovers and terrible officiating, as the Eagles gave up a late TD and were defeated 21-17. The Eagles finished out their Pioneer League schedule with big wins over Lawndale, 42-6, and South Torrance, 28-7, to finish second behind North Torrance in the standings.

The Eagles were rewarded with a tough Santa Clara (Oxnard) team in the first round of the CIF playoffs, and had to face All-American tailback Cierre Wood. But Mortesen gained 160 yards on the ground and scored three times, while the defense shut out the high-octane Saints 42-0. It was the first playoff win since 2002 for the Eagles. The Eagles then beat third-seeded St. Joseph (11-1 coming into the game) 24-20 in the quarterfinals.

The win set up just the second time in El Segundo High School history that the football team had reached the CIF semifinals (the 1987 was the last team to do it). To get a ticket to the finals, the Eagles would need to defeat second-ranked Serra (13-0). The Eagles dominated the speedy Cavaliers for most of the first half, and Schaffhauser's 43-yard catch and run for a TD put the Eagles on top 21-14 with 53 seconds left in the half. On the last play of the first half, the Cavaliers completed a tipped pass that went 45 yards for a game-tying touchdown. The momentum the Eagles had in the first half disappeared in the second half and Serra held on for a 35-28 win.

Girls' Volleyball

The Lady Eagles finished second in the Pioneer League and returned to the playoffs after falling out of the playoff picture in 2007. The team was full of juniors and sophomores and the lone senior was Missy Schaefer on a team that went 10-9. Danielle Ragan led the team with 17 aces while sophomore outside hitters Antoine Alugbue and Shawna Lum led the team in kills.

Water Polo

The boys' water polo team continued their tradition of going to the playoffs even with the absence of Matt Kubeck, the all-time CIF saves leader, who graduated. The ninth-ranked Eagles took apart Sonora in the first round of the playoffs, but couldn't get past fifth-rated Palm Desert, losing 16-11 in the quarterfinals.

For the first time in five years, the girls' team didn't win the Pioneer League title and had to settle for second place. Led by Haley Cox in goal, the Eagles advanced to the playoffs but were defeated in the first round in a close 6-5 loss to Sonora. Cox, who was

selected to the All-Ocean League, All-South Bay and All-CIF teams, became the all-time CIF leader in saves.

Basketball

Rick Sabosky returned to direct the Eagles as head coach after taking a year off for personal reasons. He returned to lead a young Eagles team that played 22 games against playoff teams to a sub-.500 record; it was the first time the Eagles hadn't finished with a winning record in 15 years.

The experience this group gained should pay off for the 2009/10 year though especially with players like juniors John Ryan, Hunter Hovland, Tyler Hagan and sophomore Brandon Jawato returning.

Like their counterparts, the girls' team was youthful but did have three-year starter Samantha Heyman's leadership. Heyman and junior guard Erin Sato led the Eagles and helped mentor freshmen Lauren Sato and Lauren Villanueva and sophomore Mika Hong for the future. The Lady Eagles did sneak into the postseason, but played top-seeded Lutheran in the first round and exited the playoffs with the loss.

The Eagles didn't win any league titles in the first half of the year but each of the boys' and girls' sports teams qualified for the playoffs. That in itself was the goal. There weren't any championship banners, but they all played like champions. Next week: A look at spring sports as well as soccer and how El Segundo fared.

Lakers from page 10

Not to diminish what Jackson has accomplished. Remember that before he came West after fleeing a crumbling team in Chicago, the Lakers were floundering. At least for a team with yearly championship aspirations, the pre-Jackson Lakers were underachievers. Didn't win an NBA title from 1988 to 1999, even though the late '90s rosters featured Shaq O'Neal and Kobe Bryant.

Jackson, his triangle offense and mystical Zen-like sayings rode into town, and voila!--the Lakers were back in the 2000 championship series, which they captured over Reggie Miller and the Indiana Pacers.

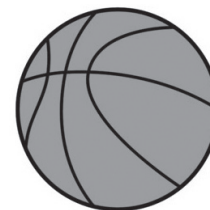
Two more titles immediately followed, so this Jackson guy had it going pretty well, I'd say. But a shocking loss to the Detroit Pistons in the 2004 finals marked the end of the Lakers championship run, and also the end of the Jackson tenure in L.A. Or so it seemed.

So life without Phil began again in L.A. with the mercurial coach taking a sabbatical to complete a book about his Laker team that ruffled a few feathers. Rudy Tomjanovich was brought in to coach the team, the triangle offense was dumped, and all was again well in La La Land.

Not really. The Tomjanovich-led Lakers tanked, and Rudy quit mid-season. The Lakers finished the season 34 and 48, missing the playoffs. An SOS was put out to locate Jackson, who was brought back into the fold as coach again at the start of the 05/06 season.

Expect the 63-year-old Jackson to return to the bench this fall, if his health allows.

But will key free agents Lamar Odom, Trevor Ariza and Shannon Brown return to the Staples hardwood? We'll delve into that issue down the road.



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