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After 4 wins to close out 2001, Golden Rams primed for 2002

Brandon Neely, Jason Cserpnyak will serve as team captains

The off-season never seemed so long for the West Chester University football team. Once the final whistle sounded in the Golden Rams' season ending victory over Clarion last November, everyone from head coach Rick Daniels right on down began anticipating the start of the 2002 campaign.

The excitement in Golden Ram country is at a fevered pitch. Much of it is due to the brand of football WCU played from mid-October on in 2001. After starting last season with a 1-4 mark, Daniels' bunch stormed to four consecutive victories to close out the year with an overall record of 5-4 and a 3-3 mark in the Pennsylvania State Athletic Conference Eastern Division.

With a solid core of the offense returning and a blend of veterans and newcomers on the defensive side of the ball, there is good reason to believe WCU's winning ways will carry over into 2002.

No player had more to do with the Golden Rams' turnaround last year than sophomore quarterback **Bob Findora (Coatesville/Coatesville)**. The southpaw signal-caller compiled a perfect 5-0 mark as a starter after earning the job in mid-season. Findora's performance as a freshman did not go unnoticed, as he was named the 2001 PSAC Eastern Division Rookie of the Year as well as the ECAC II South Rookie of the Year.

Findora brings a winning attitude and a never-say-die approach to the Golden Rams, as evidenced by his late-game heroics in a comeback win at Edinboro last season in which he threw for a career-best 321 yards and three scores. More big things are expected from him again this year in his first full season at the helm of the WCU offense.

Lining up behind Findora in the Golden Ram backfield will be junior tailback **Mike Eckmeyer (Glendora, NJ/Triton)**. Eckmeyer is coming off a break-out season in 2001, going from third-string to All-PSAC East Second Team. His rare blend of speed and power produced a running style that garnered him nearly 1000 yards a year ago and an average per carry of over seven yards. Eckmeyer's numbers should only

increase in 2002 as he carries the ball more as the featured back in the WCU offense.

Eckmeyer will benefit from the blocking of senior full-back **Joe Shay (Lancaster/Lebanon Catholic)**. After missing a good part of last season with a knee injury, Shay is expected to make a healthy return in 2002. His pass-catching skills and lead-blocking make Shay a critical part of the Golden Ram attack.

Findora's favorite target returns in the form of senior split end **Brian Bradley (Philadelphia/South Philadelphia)**. After switching back and forth from tailback to wideout early in his career, Bradley finally found a home last season at split end. He led the team with 529 receiving yards and five touchdowns. Bradley's coming out party came against Edinboro when he caught six passes for 201 yards and three TDs. He was recognized for his solid season by being selected to the All-PSAC East Second Team.

Sophomore **Cory DeForrest (Wycombe/Council Rock)** is slated as WCU's starting flanker entering the 2002 campaign. DeForrest showed flashes of brilliance as a rookie before being sidelined with a shoulder injury midway through the season.

Sophomore split ends **Omar Harris (West Chester/Henderson)** and **Elzar Camper (Plymouth Meeting/Plymouth Whitemarsh)** both will see plenty of playing time this fall as well. Junior **Matt Chambers (Pennsauken, NJ/Holy Cross)** and sophomore **Mike Todd (Pottstown/St. Pius X)** also hope to see action split out wide.

The Golden Rams have loads of talent at the tight end slot with sophomore **Joe Bernatowicz (Langhorne/Neshaminy)** returning along with senior **Ryan Koch (Muncy/Muncy)**. Bernatowicz filled in admirably after Koch suffered a season-ending injury in the third game of 2001. Both players have good size and dependable hands that should make them a lethal 1-2 punch in the passing game.

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The offensive line, headed by senior co-captain and PSAC East First Team performer **Jason Cserpnyak** (*Bethlehem/Southern Lehigh*) at left guard, will be an area of strength for the Golden Rams. Sophomore **Dan Tygh** (*Philadelphia/Central*) has the edge for the starting center spot, while junior **Chris Strezelecki** (*Allentown/Parkland*) and junior defensive line convert **Joe Manley** (*Wilmington, DE/Salesianum*) will compete at right guard.

Senior **John Flanigan** (*Ambler/Wissahickon*) and junior **Jack Orwig** (*Wyomissing/Wyomissing*) will start at left and right tackle, respectively. Senior **Steve O'Neil** (*Reading/Wyomissing*) and sophomore **Chris Young** (*Warrington/Central Bucks East*) will serve as backups at the tackle positions.

The Golden Ram defense lost some key components to graduation, but a cast of talented veterans and promising newcomers should maintain the high standard of last year's group.

The unit will be anchored by senior middle linebacker and co-captain **Brandon Neely** (*Willow Grove/Upper Mereland*). Neely finished second on the club in tackles last season while earning PSAC East Second Team honors. Neely demonstrates a tough and aggressive style of play and will provide leadership for WCU both on the field and in the locker room.

Junior weakside linebacker **Scott Linus** (*New Castle, DE/William Penn*) enters his first season as a starter, while junior **Tim Garman** (*Leola/Conestoga Valley*) and sophomore **Marc Statler** (*Downingtown/Downingtown*) will vie for the strongside linebacker position. Junior **Andrew Storck** (*Allentown/Dieruff*) will also see action at linebacker for WCU.

The defensive line will be an experienced and hard-nosed group, with seniors **Cliff Orwick** (*Dallastown/Dallastown*) and **Jim Dempsey** (*Columbia, MD/Fort Wilde*) handling the tackle slots. Sophomore **Eric Maynard** (*Camp Hill/East Pennsboro*) and red-shirt freshman **Gary Whitehead** (*Boothwyn/Garnet Valley*) will also see playing time in the trenches this season.

Sophomore **Graham Eggleston** (*Mechanicsburg/Mechanicsburg*) and junior **Jake Walker** (*Doylestown/Central Bucks East*) will man the defensive end spots. Both are coming off productive seasons a year ago and will be counted on to make more big plays in 2002. Senior **Matheu Eggleston** (*Mechanicsburg/Mechanicsburg*) and sophomore **James Brazill** (*Coatesville/Coatesville*) provide valuable depth at the end position.

The secondary may be the strongest area of the WCU defense. Junior free safety **Jim McCullough** (*Laurel Springs, NJ/Triton*) is an athletic player with a nose for the ball and a knack for making plays. Junior weakside cornerback **Calvin Braxton** (*Philadelphia/Central*) returns after turning in a fine 2001 season. Braxton is a physical corner, as his 54 tackles last year attest.

Senior **Donovan Reifinger** (*Germansville/Northwest Lehigh*) moves from strong safety to strongside cornerback this season. Reifinger brings outstanding size and athleticism to the strongside corner position. Sophomores **Chad Weaver** (*Mechanicsburg/Red Land*) and **Joe Brooks** (*Clarks Summit/Abington Heights*) will battle to replace Reifinger at strong safety.

Sophomore **Dan Wilbourne** (*Chalfont/Central Bucks East*) returns as the Golden Rams' placekicker and will also assume punting responsibilities this fall. Wilbourne proved to be a dependable field goal and extra point man last season.

Senior **Greg Van Alstine** (*Trappe/Perkiomen*) and sophomore **Nate Lombardo** (*New Cumberland/Cedar Cliff*) will again share kick return duties, while Harris is the leading candidate to handle punt returns.

- Sean Kane, SID Student Assistant and voice of Golden Rams Football