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C.B.ers earn gridiron glory

STEVE SIGAFOOSE, Staff Writer

For years, Council Bluffs football teams crossed the Missouri River only to come back with little success against Nebraska teams.

Now a bunch of C.B.ers have not only enjoyed success on a Nebraska gridiron, they've come home with a championship.

Meet the River City Redemption, champions of the Nebraska Indoor Football League. In winning 10 of 11 games this spring, the Redemption defeated all Nebraska teams with a roster featuring 17 of 25 players that graduated from Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln or Lewis Central.

"This is our fourth year in the league," explained Jake Hiffernan (Abraham Lincoln, Class of 1993), who functions as the Redemption's general manager. "We got this opportunity before the 2000 season. This was a chance to play tackle football again. We just got on the phone and made a lot of calls to build the team."

The biggest calls were for sponsors. The Redemption have two. One is the Redemption Recording Company of Los Angeles, which is owned by Lewis Central graduate Ryan Cooper. The other is General Grease of Treynor, which is owned by John Hiffernan.

The Redemption had some success from the get-go, an 8-1 mark and a second-place finish in 2002 and a 6-2 mark and a third-place finish in 2001. But the squad slipped to 5-4 in 2002 and a first-round loss in the playoffs.

"We had only 17 players on our roster in 2002," explained Hiffernan.

For 2003, "we added to our roster, especially our offensive line and things just clicked."

On the Redemption from Lewis Central is Eric Thompson (1999). From Thomas Jefferson are Luke Bose (2000), Cory Damgaard (1992), Jason Spencer (1992), Jason McIntosh (1997), Kent Brockman (1992), Mike Wolff (1983) and Doug King (1996). From Abraham Lincoln are Frank Ferguson (1993), Hiffernan, Chad Hathaway (1990), Travis Kleinbeck (1999), Chad Nelson (1994), Adam Nelson (1998), Kurt Ferguson (1997), Scott Helm (1993) and David Sigafoose (1996). Brett Ryan (Underwood, 1989) adds a touch of southwest Iowa to the squad.

While the league is called indoor, the Redemption played real live outdoor football. Games were played in Malcolm Neb. on an 80-yard, eight-man field. The basic rules are high school, but the games use 15-minute quarters.

The games were played on Saturdays. The team practiced once a week, then twice a week during the playoffs.

"It's not bad," said Hiffernan, "but the bumps and bruises don't go away as quickly as they did in high school."

THE RIVER CITY REDEMPTION FOOTBALL TEAM IS OWNED BY JAKE HIFFERNAN. CONTACT: JAKE.HIFFERNAN@RCRFB.COM

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The Redemption's opponents featured players with a lot of small college (NCAA Division III and NAIA) experience. One player had a fling with a NFL Europe team.

The Redemption opened its season March 22 with a 26-20 overtime decision over the Omaha Extreme. Next came a 13-8 squeaker over the Lincoln Cougars. Then the Redemption started rolling, 41-12 over the Midwest Outlaws, 41-0 over the Lincoln Pirates, 19-0 over the Lincoln Chillers, 27-12 over the Lincoln Crush. The Nebraska Wildcats must have seen what was coming and didn't show, giving the Redemption a forfeit.

But on the final week of the regular season, in a battle for first place, the Seward Gladiators pinned a 28-6 loss on the Redemption.

Seeded second in the playoffs, the Redemption cruised past the Pirates 32-6 and the Crush 40-6 to set up a rematch with Seward for the league title. This time, the result was much more to the Redemption's liking, a 22-20 win for the league championship.

As a result of their title run, the Redemption drew an invitation to play a real indoor football game.

The Kansas Koyotes, which play in an indoor football league that's a step below the Omaha Beef's indoor league, extended the invitation.

"Kansas had a team in its league fold," explained Jake Hiffernan, "and that left an open date to fill. This will give us a chance to play indoors on the turf. We're looking forward to it."

The game is Saturday, June 28, at 7:05 p.m. at the Kansas Expo Center.

The Koyotes' roster has a lot of former Kansas University players, which means the Redemption will be facing NCAA Division I caliber competition instead of the D-III that they were finding in the NIFL.

That will be a challenge, but, then again, champions like that.

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