

## Coach Justin Kammrad has A.L. football on solid ground



Jeff Beiermann/World-Herald News Service Justin Kammrad's football team is undefeated this season, following a big win last week over 12-time state champion Harlan.

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As a star tailback at Thomas Jefferson High School and the University of Nebraska at Omaha, Justin Kammrad was tough to stop on the football field.

Prep teams in Iowa are finding out that hasn't changed now that he's a head coach.

Kammrad, who still holds the one-game and single-season rushing records at UNO, is making headlines with his third team at Abraham Lincoln. The 29-year-old's Lynx are off to a 3-0 start following Friday's 49-34 win over 12-time state champion Harlan at C.B. Stadium.

The victory was monumental for a program that hasn't won a conference title or postseason game. It gave credibility to the growing belief that the Lynx are in the midst of a history-making run.

"We're in uncharted territory," Kammrad said. "For A.L. to be 3-0 right now — to beat Johnston, who I think is a good football team, and to beat Harlan, who was ranked No. 1 — is awesome."

Winning football seasons have been rare for Abraham Lincoln. The Lynx had two winless seasons in the 1990s and two one-win seasons this decade. The two years prior to Kammrad's arrival, they went 5-13.

But they made the postseason in his first two years, losing each time in the first round of substate. Many players on this year's squad were regulars on those teams.

"It's been a process of three years with them," Kammrad said. "When they were sophomores, I took a lot of heat for playing them. ... But I knew in the back of my mind that, to build a program, I was going to have to start where I thought the best players were and continue to get them experience."

A.L. is reaping the benefits. And assistant coach Chris Moore isn't surprised.

Since he was 11 years old, he's been a firsthand witness to Kammrad's dedication to football.

The 1999 T.J. graduates began playing youth football together in 1992 and were teammates in junior high, high school, college and with the professional Iowa Blackhawks. They were assistant coaches at their former high school until Kammrad landed the head position at A.L. in 2008. Moore joined the staff of his longtime friend before that fall.

"We're still T.J. guys," he said, "but we want to see this A.L. program flourish now."

In recent years, 1-A St. Albert has carried the football banner for the city, winning four championships in six years.

"I really can't compare this to St. Albert winning state titles," Moore said. "But, shoot, this is as close as we've gotten, beating the defending 3-A state champions. I've never been around a caliber of team like this. It ranks right up there with the best I've seen in the city."

The Lynx have another assistant, however, who can identify with the current success. Walt Olsen won a pair of state championships in Nebraska at Hastings High School prior to moving to Council Bluffs.

Olsen was A.L.'s head coach for five years before stepping away from football. He joined Kammrad's first staff when his son Alex, the team's quarterback, was a sophomore. And he's been impressed.

"I've enjoyed working with Justin. He's a great young coach," Olsen said. "He's a student of the game, and he has a pretty good rapport with all our kids. Kids nowadays — I don't care what anybody says — are different. He has a unique way of being able to handle that difference in kids."

Kammrad credits his comfort level as a head coach to the two years he spent as an assistant with the Blackhawks, when he dealt with players who in some cases were older than him.

Blackhawks coach Mike Wolff persuaded his tailback to become an offensive coordinator after a knee injury ended his playing career. Kammrad called the plays during the team's championship run in 2009.

"He took what I had as a base offense and expanded that to where our play sets, formations and plays were limitless," Wolff said. "There was no end to his imagination. He was more or less the architect of the offense that was the highest scoring in Blackhawks history."

Kammrad is now doing the same thing at A.L., which is averaging nearly 51 points per game entering Friday night's contest at Des Moines North. He's taken a power game from the I-formation, mixed in double-wing looks he borrowed from Iowa powerhouse Solon and added a passing attack from a former colleague of Olsen's from California.

"I wouldn't want to be a team to watch our film and try to figure out how many formations we have. We have so many different things," Kammrad said. "Everything looks good on paper, but you've still got to have the athletes to run it."

This season, A.L. does. With 17 starters back from last season, it is looking to make history.

"We want to be that first team from a Council Bluffs public school to host a home (postseason) game, get a high seed and try to advance as far as we can," Kammrad said. "We feel that if we try to improve each week, we think we have a pretty good shot."