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Local Ties Run Deep On West Staff

Brandon Veale - DMG Sports Editor

HOUGHTON - The West team for this year's second annual U.P. Football All-Star Game will look familiar to Copper Country football fans, and not just because 17 players are from Houghton, Baraga or Ontonagon County.

Almost all of the coaching staff has connections to the area, starting with head coach Scott Boddy, who coached at Calumet High School from 1990-99 before moving on to Iron Mountain.

His successor and former assistant John Croze is an assistant coach for Saturday's game, as well as Croze's assistant and CHS principal George Twardzik. Also in the West's braintrust is Lake Linden-Hubbell boss Andy Crouch and former Houghton head coach Don Sawaski. The only West staff member without direct ties to the area is North Dickinson head coach Joe Reddinger.

Croze, Twardzik and Sawaski have been fine-tuning the West's defense. Croze has coached the Kings to a 52-37 record with four playoff wins since taking over for Boddy, but he's clearly happy to return to old times.

"It's great. It's a great friendship that was forged through football. We're best friends outside of football, and I sure enjoy the opportunity to coach with him again," he said.

Croze said it's a privilege to work with some of the U.P.'s finest players as they prepare for Saturday's game at the Superior Dome.

"There's just some great athletes out here, great kids, and I consider it a special week to have this opportunity," he said.

For coaches like Crouch who hail from smaller schools, the increase in quality is paired with an increase in quantity.

"The nice thing is that you have enough people that you're not fighting the numbers," he said.

The West roster has 45 players, but Crouch's Lakes are well-represented, with four players, more than any other area team. During the event, organized by Todd Goldbeck of Xcel Sports Training, a Wisconsin non-profit organization, players and coaches have spent the week training at Northern Michigan University and Crouch said they've been well taken care of.

"Todd and his company - everything was first class. They spared no expenses, they treat the kids and the coaches like royalty and they make it an experience people are going to remember for the rest of their lives," he said.

For Sawaski, this is one last game at the varsity level. After 11 years, he yielded the reins of Houghton's varsity program to Jack Kumpula after the 2008 season, though he will probably be contributing to HHS's sub-varsity teams.

"It's so awesome. I can't explain how much fun this all is," he said.

He said he was excited and honored to be asked by Boddy to participate in the All-Star festivities.

"It's kind of nice to sit back, and just go out in this manner," he said.

Coming Saturday: 17 area players put on the pads one more time.