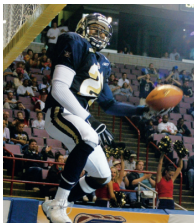


THE ALBANY CONQUEST: FOCUSED ON FOOTBALL, BUT THAT'S ONLY PART OF THE FUN IN THE 2004 SEASON

by Alan Shibley



Make no mistake about it.

The Albany Conquest plan to make a serious run at the 2004 arenafootball2 title.

The Conquest posted a 27-8 record and won the Northeast Division twice in their first two years of af2 competition. New General Manager Robert Zeig said he intends to build on that success by putting the best product possible on the field.

That's good news for the die-hard Conquest fans who have come out to support their hometown team during its first two seasons. There is also good news for the less rabid af2 fan in the Capital Region. This season, in addition to the quality football that fans have come to expect, the area in and around the Pepsi Arena will be bursting with entertainment before and after each of the team's eight regular season home games.

"We'll provide not just great football, said Zeig, "but great entertainment. We want to emphasize that Arena Football is

a lot more than the game."

That promise to the community is summed up in the Conquest slogan: **"This Team Puts on a Show."** There are thousands of fans in the area who live and die Conquest football, but Zeig contends that there are also thousands of casual fans out there and the Conquest organization wants to give them an evening of sports and entertainment that will keep them coming back. So expect to see and experience a great deal more than just good football when you attend



CONQUEST TOUCHDOWN AT THE PEPSI.

Conquest games this season.

The team drew an average of more than 5,500 people per game at Pepsi Arena last season, which puts them in the





CONQUEST PLAY MONSTER DEFENSE.

top third in average attendance in the league. That's good, according to Zeig, "but that means we have about 8,000 empty seats and we need to fill them." So to attract some of the casual football fans (among other groups of people) to downtown Albany, the Conquest has signed up some big-name acts like Blue Oyster Cult on June 18th, The Rembrandts as a "Farewell to Friends" event on April 24th. Other musical groups such as, Albany's favorite band, The Burner's UK - May 8th - and the Alabama Blue Brothers - June 25th are slated to appear as part of the Conquest concert series. The organization also generated plenty of excitement with its announcement in February that the Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders would perform at the Conquest's home opener April 16th, when they play against the

newly-established Manchester Wolves. The Albany Conquest Treasures Dance Team returns as an integral part of the experience at home games.

"Our aim is to provide the best sports entertainment in the Capital Region and the Albany Conquest Treasures Dance Team is part of that entertainment," said Zeig. *"We'll also have the best and biggest Block Parties outside Pepsi Arena before each game, with jugglers, face painting, music and great food."*

Oh yeah, then there's the football.

Zeig and first-year head coach Steve Matthews spent the off-season searching for top-notch talent to stock the Conquest roster for 2004. Coach Matthews was a quarterback for several NFL teams and helped win the NFL Europe title for the

"THE CONQUEST... THE BEST SPORTS ENTERTAINMENT IN THE CAPITAL REGION"

Scottish Claymores in 1996.

One of the key players signed over the winter was quarterback Gus Ornstein, back for a second season, after serving as backup to Ryan Vena last year. Vena was second in voting for af2's Offensive Player of the Year in 2003, and started this season with the AFL's Columbus Destroyers. Ornstein played in NFL Europe in 2001 after spending time in several NFL training camps.

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NON-STOP CONQUEST ARENA FOOTBALL ACTION.

In March, Matthews added former Chicago Bears defensive back Travis “T-Cole” Coleman to his 2004 roster. Coleman played in seven games for the Bears in 2002 starting on special teams in kick-off and punt-return coverage. Defensively, he played cornerback for the Bears.

Coach Matthews has assembled a talented mix of experienced af2 players and rookies for the 2004 title chase, such as Ornstein, veteran af2 Offensive/Defensive linemen (OL/DL) Dave Mahoney, Ljubomir Stamenich and Abdallah Wiggins. They have also been looking at wide receiver/defensive back (WR/DB) Jamie Ware and fullback/linebacker Ron Simone.

Mahoney is in his third af2 season. A local product from Columbia High School, he was a starter with the Conquest last season and registered 10.5 tackles. Stamenich was a defensive force with the Conquest last season finishing second on

the team in tackles and sacks. He also returned two fumbles for touchdowns.

Wiggins had 24 tackles and 5.5 sacks with the former af2 Greensboro Prowlers last season. Ware is in his third season with Albany and began the season as the franchise leader in interceptions (8) and added 18 touchdown receptions in his first two seasons. Simone scored one touchdown and recorded 16 tackles and 2.5 sacks for the Memphis Xplorers last season.

Mondeario Pickney, a first-year OL/DL from Delaware, and DeShon Hardy, a rookie WR/DB from Massachusetts, are expected to make an impact with Albany in 2004. Hardy is seventh in career receptions (94) and fourth in career punt return yardage (667) at UMass.

Two af2 veterans acquired from the Xplorers in a trade for Albany’s OL/DL Spencer Conley are key players in the Conquest’s system, according to Coach Matthews. Thomas Herron (OL/DL) had 21 tackles and 3.5 sacks last season, while kicker Steven Green scored 145 points in his 21-game career.

“We have a chance to win the league title,” said Zeig. “We finished last season with 21 players, and at least half of them were invited to AFL training camps. And again, we are committed to bringing in the best possible players for 2004.”

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