

Otters excited for 2021

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Otter Valley football players run through a drill on the practice field at the high school.

Adam Aucoin / Staff Photo

The Otter Valley football team had big expectations for the 2020 season, when their 2019 campaign came to a close.

The Otters had just made it to the Division III semifinals, where they lost 20-6 to BFA-Fairfax/Lamoille in a game much closer than the score indicated.

“People don’t realize it was a four-point game with 22 seconds left. We were that close,” said Otter Valley coach Kipp Denis.

With some solid returning talent, the Otters could have been a series contender in D-III.

“Last year, we had a team we felt could probably win a state championship,” Denis said.

But a normal 2020 season wasn't to be had. COVID hit early in the year and Vermont football teams were left to play a 7-on-7 touch alternative come the fall.

Fast forward a year and teams across the state are back to the game they love, adorned with shoulder pads and all.

Otter Valley was out for its third day of practice on Wednesday and the team is excited to get back to normal.

"This is the way it should be. I pray that the state doesn't do something foolish," Denis said, looking out at his players Wednesday while they were going through stretching at the start of practice.

"These kids have been looking forward to this and we're ready to play some contact football this year, not tag. No tag, not a fan of tag, never will be."

Denis talked about the importance of football and high school athletics in general.

"These kids need to be out here doing this. All the kids, soccer, volleyball, rock climbing, I don't care what it is. They should be kids.

"That's what I'm happy about. The coaches are all excited. We're ready to go this year."

Similar to their Rutland County rival Fair Haven, Otter Valley will have some youth on its roster, having just four seniors. Youthful or experienced, Denis doesn't care. He just wants the effort from his team.

"They want to be here. They want to play. That's the big battle right there," Denis said.

Otter Valley graduated quarterback Alex Polli, but his younger brother Luca returns after getting some experience under center in 7-on-7. Caleb Whitney is another guy in the mix for the quarterback job.

"They're competing," Denis said.

"Caleb is a good athlete. His dad played at Middlebury and was a Shrine player, so he comes from good stock.

"Quarterback will be the biggest question for us."

Brady Diaz will be a target for whoever gets the quarterback reps. He was a good option for Alex Polli last fall.

Line play will be essential across the state given that it wasn't a factor in last year's touch, pass-only game.

"Once we start getting these lineman in check, we'll be alright. We have some decent-sized lineman," Denis said.

Tanner Brutkowski is a guy who didn't play last year in 7-on-7, but will be a big contributor on the line this year.

Otter Valley opens up at Missisquoi on Sept. 4.

"They have some big kids, so that's something we'll have to get ready for," Denis said.

Passmore at Norwich

Former Otter Valley football player Chance Passmore, from Mount St. Joseph Academy, will be playing for Norwich University this fall, according to Denis.

On Hudl, Passmore is listed as a cornerback for the Cadets.

Former teammate Alex Polli is also attending Norwich this fall.

Senior Four-Ball Elsewhere in Brandon, Neshobe Golf Club was hosting the Vermont Golf Association Senior Four-Ball tournament.

In the A Division, Jay Smith and Wayne Wright won at 7-under, in the B Division, Ricky Handy and Markus Sundin won at 4-under, and in the C Division, Craig White and Michael Marchand won at even-par.