

By Tim Linscott

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It is never too early to prepare for football season.

The 2014 football schedules have been released and Perkins County fans can take a bit more of an interest this season as it is the first in team history that the schedule will be played in Class D-1.

For the first game of the season for the Plainsmen Elm Creek will be making the trek to Grant on Sept. 5.

PCS will then go on a two-week road trip starting with a game against Hitchcock County in Trenton Sept. 12.

The second road trip will be on Sept. 19 and one of the longest of the season against Arapahoe. The travel time between Grant and Arapahoe is two hours, 25 minutes.

PCS will host Hemingford on Sept. 26, before heading to Creek Valley in Chappell.

Sutherland will make the short drive to Grant on Oct. 10 for the sixth game of the season while Dundy County-Stratton will be in Grant on Oct. 19.

The longest trip for PCS will be on Oct. 23, the final game of the season, on the road against Morrill, which is a two hour, 56 minute travel time one way.

Traveling a specific distance to a game doesn't bother PCS head football coach Carlie Wells. He understands that in this part of the state it is commonplace and when a team reaches the playoffs, traveling long distances becomes a necessity.

"You get used to it (traveling) and when you get into the playoffs you can wind up traveling halfway across the state," Wells said, adding that the first major jaunt traveling is east over two hours and the last road trip of the season is almost the same distance west.

Seeing different parts of the state in a wide variety of geographical locations will serve the team well in the long run, according to Wells. He explained that different regions play different styles of football and seeing those different styles and learning to adjust to all of those levels will make the Plainsmen a multi-versed squad able to play any style.

"I'm just excited to watch our kids grow," Wells said. "We want to continue to do what we are doing and see how much work they put in this summer. That is what is really special is seeing all that hard work put in over the summer and in practice pay off in the season."

In November the PCS board indicated to the Nebraska School Activities Association that it would play in Class D-1. PCS is eligible for D-1 and decided to not opt up to Class C-2, a class the Plainsmen have been playing for several seasons. It has been in Class C that PCS has won eight state football titles and appeared in the playoffs 17 times.

PCS will go from 11-man football to 8-man football for a minimum of two seasons.

The move to Class D will bring a variety of opponents, including Hemingford. The Bobcats lost the Class D1 state football championship last season 20-18 to Exeter-Milligan and went 9-0 in the regular season. Hemingford loses only three seniors this upcoming season.

Sutherland will lose eight seniors to graduation, including starting quarterback Tyler Fear, and made the playoffs last year in Class D, going 5-4 in the regular season.

Another playoff team facing PCS next year will be Arapahoe, which finished 6-3 last year and will lose eight seniors to graduation, including three tight-ends, one running back and a quarterback.

Hitchcock County made the playoffs in Class D-2 with a 6-3 overall record and will also lose

eight seniors off the roster.

Elm Creek went 9-2 last season and will graduate eight seniors including two offensive linemen, two tight-ends, a full-back and center.

On the other end of the spectrum, Dundy County went 1-7 last season with its only victory over PCS, 18-0, on Sept. 6, 2013, the second game of the season.

Morrill and Creek Valley were a combine 2-14 last season with Creek Valley going 0-8, including a 94-14 loss to Sandhills/Thedford and a 76-0 loss to Wallace.

Wells expects a young squad to start next year for PCS, made up mainly of freshmen and sophomores. He thinks there will be around eight juniors and seniors combined going out for football next season. This season, however, several underclassman had a chance to get extended varsity play and the move to Class D will provide a different experience for all players.

"Eight-man football is a lot faster. You have to be disciplined to stop the big play because you don't have those safeties over the top to help," Wells said, noting a blowout in 11-man football may be 35-7, as in 8-man could be 76-21.

PCS will be in District D1-10 and Wells feels that the schedule has its ups and downs, but, overall, will help the team become a well-rounded football squad.

"I think our schedule is all right. It will be tough to start but if we finish strong we have a chance to win a few ballgames and move forward," Wells said.