

Missouri Class 2A - Tri-Rivers Conference

# Clark County INDIANS

The Burden Of An Encore



**Colors:** Red and Gray  
**Head Coach:** Matt Smith  
**Years at School:** 9  
**Record at School:** 69-20  
**Overall Record:** 79-50  
**Offensive Starters Returning:** 3  
**Defensive Starters Returning:** 2  
**Total Returning Letterman:** 15  
**2008 Overall Record:** 15-0

The biggest of celebrations are often accompanied by the biggest of hangovers.

In the wake of a season for the ages, Clark County fans are just now waking up to the sobering realization the Indians will be shy seventeen starters, six All Staters, and a consensus Player of the Year pick in defense of their 2008 State Championship.

Bleak as that picture may seem, the Indians do still return their most important setpiece: Matt Smith.

Entering his ninth year in Kahoka, the Clark County skipper has fashioned a stunning 69-20 record on the sidelines, winning 77% of his games. And this is not the first time Smith and his gifted staff has had to recover from "catastrophic" graduation losses.

Left for dead in 2006 with just two veteran starters back in the wake of the Drew Huckey/Adam Huckey/Josh Roberts Senior Class, Smith retooled on the fly with a bunch of "no names" and fashioned a 10-2 record.

And truth be told, on paper, the Indians appear to have more talent in 2009 than they did in 2006. The latest incarnation of Indian Football, however, also has the burden of wearing a far bigger target. So it probably helps that there will be plenty of quality big guys to help fight the battle.

Even with the loss of All Stater selections Cori Seth and Michael Brennan, Offensive Line appears to be a long suit for Clark County going forward. The Indians have two very solid starters back from a unit that produced 35 points and 400 yards of offense a game in 2008, including the centerpiece. While he was obscured a bit by his bigger name line-mates, Neal Moon was a model of consistency in the middle as a blocker. And more germane to Clark's high octane spread offense, I am not sure I have ever seen a center more perfect in executing the shotgun snap. Point blank, the kid might be the most under-appreciated asset in Northeast Missouri Football. The Indians will be able to bookend Moon with a pair of 300 pound Offensive Tackles. Like Moon, Zach Nixon has a State Championship Game start on his pedigree and showed good combo ability as a run and pass blocker. He is a smart, engaging kid who

probably better than anyone on Clark's line last year understood the value of using his body to protect the guys in his backfield. Sophomore Tanner Ramsey will likely slot into the other tackle spot in place of Seth, a 6'4" 295 prospect who showed great potential at the lower levels. Plug in a couple of guards (Sean Gray, Derek Ryan maybe) and the Indians should be good to go on the line.

Replacing the likes of Javis Vineyard, Ethan Allen, Bryan Plenge and Matt Morrow in the skill position slots may ultimately prove more troublesome for a coach who loves to spread the field and score points in bunches.

The only known commodity in play for 2009 is wide receiver Mason Owen, who enjoyed a breakout junior season while emerging from the considerable shadows of Plenge and Morrow. Blessed with good separation ability, Owen caught 20 passes and six touchdowns as the teams "number three" option and produced a very impressive 25 yards per catch average. Truth is, by the end of last year, Owen was a legitimate number one receiver masquerading as a three guy. See also his second team All State nod. Or perhaps his 80 yard slant and go touchdown in the playoffs against no less a foe than Blair Oaks. As building blocks go, Mason is a dandy and a kid who gives the Indians a bona fide home run threat. He will likely be joined by junior Zach Alderton on the edge.

The man with the keys to the offense will most likely be senior Justin Oilar, who enjoyed a very productive run on the Clark County Basketball team as a forward this past season. Clearly, he will have huge shoes to fill but Matt Smith has had a tremendous amount of success in getting production from his quarterbacks over the years and Oilar seems to be a smart, tough kid who can manage a game. The unfortunate news for Oilar, however, is that Javis Vineyard 2.0 isn't waiting in the wings to help keep Defenses honest. You simply don't replace 2500 rushing yards and 42 touchdowns with any one player. That established, Clark does have an heir apparent at tailback waiting in the wings in Justin Alderton, a slashing, tough runner more out of the Sean Kite mold. Alderton did get 69 carries as a sophomore, including a pivotal first down run against Blair Oaks in the post season, scored five touchdowns, and rolled up just a shade under 400 rushing yards. What we are talking about is a kid who clearly just needs an opportunity, because all the early indicators suggest he is going to be a very credible franchise back. And just for fun, the kid who has everyone buzzing in Clark County is speedster Ryan Whiston, a triple threat kid with great speed and the ability to throw the football. Expect to see Matt Smith put his guru cap back on to find ways to use this unique weapon.

**And while we are on the subject of gurus.....**

The biggest part of Clark County's rebuild belongs to Defensive Coordinator Quentin Hamner, who must replace nine starters from a squad that gave up just four and half points per game on average last season. The holdovers are a pair of run and hit linebackers in Justin and Nathan Alderton, who aren't bad places to start. Quietly, Nathan amassed 99 total tackles and 3 quarterback sacks as a junior and he's got a real knack for getting in the middle of the action. Can these guys be as effective without All Stater Kolt Kiger around? That remains to be seen. But the coaching staff is high on the potential of youngster Jacob McAfee stepping in.

The Indians benchmark secondary and defensive lines will be almost totally rebuilt. The back end of the Defense will likely feature Owen, Whiston, and Oilar in some combination. The Defensive Line losses its transcendent bookend pass rushers in Michael Brennan and Lynn Williams, with Derek Ryan likely to man one of those spots. The middle of the defensive line will rely on big the progress of Neal Moon and 250 pound Sean Gray, who looks straight out of central casting.

**THE DUERR DIAGNOSIS:**

Probably way too much to expect a return trip to the TWA Dome in November of 2009. By the same token, it is equally foolish to dismiss any Matt Smith team out of hand. You can't name a better, more successful area coach over the last five years. While it is hard not to get caught up in the staggering toll that graduation took on this team, don't equate that loss to erosion. There are still a lot of really good athletes on this team including a kid in Owen who might be the area benchmark at his position and potential emerging weapons in Justin Alderton and Ryan Whiston who are destined for future stardom. Remember this team is also built from the inside out, with a really good line ready to ease the transition. I will take Clark County to compete nose-to-nose with Brookfield for another Tri-Rivers Conference title and if all trends right, win a District and maybe sectional game. There is too much success and pride engrained in this program to expect anything less.

2009 SCHEDULE		
8/28	Milan	7pm
9/4	@ Scotland	7pm
9/11	@ Putnam	7pm
9/18	@ Palmyra	7pm
9/25	Knox County	7pm
10/2	@ Schuyler County	7pm
10/9	North Shelby	7pm
10/16	Macon	7pm
10/23	Highland	7pm
10/30	@ Brookfield	7pm



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Mrs. Alicia Creech  
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