

# Baechler likes Canton's smarts as practice opens



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**Canton** — Tim Baechler sat in his office, relaxed and optimistic after watching his Canton football team practice for the first time Monday, finishing just minutes before an afternoon downpour.

Baechler, starting his 18th year at Canton, has reason to be excited with five starters returning on each side of the ball from a 9-3 team which won a Division 1 district championship before taking state runner-up Saline to the limit in a regional, falling 42-35.

"We have good numbers (62) and we're not big, but we're smart and that's the big thing that jumped off today ... we got a lot of kids who kind of get it which is always nice," said Baechler who is 145-44 at Canton and 180-64 during his career as a head coach, including a stop at Hudson. "You want your linebackers and DBs to be smart, otherwise it's very tough with the things you can defensively so I like what's going on there. Offensive-line wise, those guys are picking things up quickly, too."

very good that the offensive linemen are picking things up, especially with a new quarterback coming in to replace Greg Williams who holds multiple school passing records and a player Baechler called "the best leader we have ever had."

Canton does have multiple offensive linemen returning to open up holes for junior fullback Marcus Sanders who rushed for 2,000 yards, including 184 on 20 carries against Saline, during his first year on varsity.

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"This year I'm just really focused on trying to stay healthy," Sanders said. "It's a whole new environment out there since the seniors are gone. I have to adapt to what I have and try to make it a better season, especially since I was just three yards away from the school record."

"We're going to look for more of the same type offense and that's tough, running the ball down our opponent's throats."

Baechler is thrilled to have Sanders back, along with standout defensive players in linebacker Jalen Cochran and safety Jared Stephens who could play quarterback in emergency situations.

"He's a Canton fullback," said Baechler of the 5-foot-7, 170-pound Sanders who has 4.68 speed. "Does that mean he's a college running back? No, but he's (darn) good and his vision, balance and quickness is awesome. He has great vision and is hard to tackle. Really, he's a perfect Canton fullback."

Canton will open the season Aug. 28 against Dearborn Fordson at Wayne State.

*david.goricki@detroitnews.com*

*twitter.com/DavidGoricki*