

Canton gridgers stick to basics, eye Big House

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Canton varsity football players begin to ratchet up their practice intensity in advance of the season opener against Muskegon Mona Shoes

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Drink plenty of water, keep your head up and make sure you bring red socks to The Big House. Those were three takeaways for Canton varsity football players Thursday, as they begin to ratchet up their practice intensity in advance of the season opener against Muskegon Mona Shoes — 1 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 26, in the annual Battle of the Big House.

“I’m a Michigan fan, so I always wanted to play in the Big House,” said co-captain Noah Brown, a linebacker/tight end entering his senior season. “Just think of it as another game.

“It doesn’t matter where we’re playing, we have the same goal, to



come out with a 'W.'"

With over two weeks before the season opener, the Chiefs ran routes and drills wearing just helmets and shoulder pads Thursday.

Veteran head coach Tim Baechler implored players following the practice to stay hydrated and be prepared for the first day of full pads Friday.

That's when the rubber starts to hit the road after weeks and months of weightlifting and non-football workouts.

"It's like starting over," Baechler said. "It's frustrating, when you get at the end of the year last year, you see how fast and how well you're playing and the kids know it.

"And then you start out the first week again, it literally is starting over again. ... We get impatient because we know what it's supposed to look like. But it's always a slow process, getting them used to it. Football is not a natural thing to do."

Another thing Baechler stressed to players was the importance of doing things the right way. He talked about all players wearing identical uniforms, right down to the socks.

"The team's our motto, nobody's special," said senior co-captain Lou Baechler, another linebacker and tight end returning from last year's KLAS South Division champions. "Just like on the field, everyone does their one 11th, does their one job and that's how we're successful. We don't have a lot of talent, just play as a team."

About uniformity being important, Brown smiled.

"Everybody better have their red socks," Brown said. "(Coach Baechler) wants us all to look the same out there. No one guy's more important than anybody else. That's something that we really stress."

With full contact about to commence, players also are constantly reminded about proper technique for hitting and tackling — largely to protect themselves against concussions.

"We teach face-up tackling and hitting with the shoulder and our face mask, keeping that neck bowed so no concussions happen," Lou Baechler said. "And hitting on that back hip, keep the head out of the tackle."

Brown chimed in that Canton players "really focus for tackling drills on keeping our heads out of the play and not going across the body. So we're not turning our necks or anything like that. And just keeping your head up is just what the coaches have been teaching us this year."

According to Tim Baechler, football numbers are down "in most

communities,” and fallout to the 2015 movie "Concussion" is one factor. This season, Canton has 54 varsity players and another 56 for the freshman and junior varsity squads combined.

“It’s not enrollment, it’s less kids grow up playing football, less kids wanting to commit to a solid, hard-working program,” Baechler said. “I think the concussion thing is scaring a lot of parents away and it shouldn’t be. Numbers are dropping, especially in our community, for sure.”



This Canton varsity football player runs a route during Thursday's



Thursday's Canton varsity football practice comes to a close. (Photo: TIM SMITH)