

Mansfield High in Ohio for clash with high-powered La Salle

By Nate Weitzer Globe Correspondent, September 12, 2019.



The Mansfield High football team takes a tour of Ohio State University.

The kickoff of the 2019 high school football season has brought its share of challenges. From the MIAA's switch to National Federation High School rules, to threats from the Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) virus, it's been far from business as usual for most programs.

Add in a calendar year that thrusts Labor Day into the preseason and adds another weekend to the fall season, forcing coaches to make tough decisions regarding their schedule.

Many programs pushed their season opener back to add a week of preparation, but Mansfield coach **Mike Redding** is taking a different approach.

After his Hornets handled BC High, 31-10, in their opener, Redding and his Division 2 South hopefuls headed to Ohio this weekend for a Friday night showdown against the La Salle Lancers (2-0), the No. 83 program in the country, per MaxPreps.

To prepare for the formidable challenge, Redding flew to Cincinnati, Ohio, on Saturday, Aug. 31 following Mansfield's scrimmage against Central Catholic to scout La Salle's opener against Lakota West.

The 31-year coach hopes this trip will also have a lasting impact for his players off the field; the 66 participating students will tour Ohio State, visit the National Underground Railroad Museum, and watch Notre Dame face New Mexico on Saturday afternoon before flying home. Then Mansfield will enjoy a bye week before opening league play as the defending Hockomock Kelley-Rex champions.

For Redding, preseason trips became obsolete three years ago when the MIAA restricted practice sessions. Mansfield's last team excursion came in 2016, so this trip fulfills Redding's unofficial goal to give each senior class one memorable experience out of the state.

“When the MIAA basically eliminated double sessions, we stopped going to preseason camps,” explained Redding. “We felt this trip would kind of replace that. We’ll get in an early-season game and be on charter buses together for hours. So you hope the benefit of all this is that you come home a closer, more tight-knit team.”

To fund the trip, Mansfield’s senior captains spearheaded a series of fundraisers, while the Gridiron Club of Mansfield contributed the other half of the budget.

One of those captains is **Mike DeBolt**, the Hornets’ prolific kicker and tailback, who happens to be engaged in his own season-long fundraising campaign to fight pediatric cancer. For the second season, DeBolt offers a page on Alexslemonade.org, in which supporters can make a flat-rate donation or pledge a donation for every point DeBolt scores.

With nearly 150 yards from scrimmage, two touchdowns, a 26-yard field goal, and four extra points last Friday night, DeBolt got off to a great start with 19 of Mansfield’s 31 points over BC High.

“It’s definitely in the back of my mind when I’m playing,” said DeBolt. “Every touchdown I’m thinking, that’s six more dollars, every extra point, that’s one more dollar.” While he was raised a University of Michigan fan, DeBolt said he’s excited to tour Ohio State, and even more eager for the senior-laden Hornets to test their mettle against one of the nation’s top programs.

DeBolt also hopes to earn a scholarship offer to kick at the collegiate level, so going head-to-head against La Salle kicker **Jake Seibert**, a Ohio State commit, could boost his individual stock.

“It’s going to be cool to showcase what Massachusetts football is really about. It should be a really cool team-bonding experience and we should benefit from it,” said DeBolt. “It’s also definitely motivating kicking against [Seibert] to show how I compare, and that even though I’m from Massachusetts, I can compete with everyone else in the country.”

After outlasting two-time defending Div. 2 state champion King Philip in the 2018 regular season, Mansfield was knocked out of the state tournament by KP for the second straight year.

However, DeBolt suffered a broken ankle in that playoff game, star linebacker **Vinnie Holmes** was inactive with mono, and tailback **Nick Marciano** was out for the season with a knee injury.

Redding hopes that his adjusted schedule will prime his players for success.

“It’s definitely the end goal to be battle-tested against high-level competition,” said Redding. “I felt a couple years ago we opened with a couple wins and one was easy, and all of a sudden we were playing KP, and it was a whole different level.”

“If we can stay healthy and play good competition, it definitely should help.”