



NEWS RELEASE

PAYSON FOOTBALL OFFERS GREAT OPPORTUNITY FOR NEW COACH

PHOENIX, AZ (August 7, 2009) – This was no Cash for Clunkers deal for Matt Mayo.

For his first high school football head coaching job, the 29-year-old was handed the keys to Payson's unbeaten Class 3A state championship team from 2008.

"You don't typically come into a situation where a team has won 14 games," said Mayo, formerly an assistant at Goodyear Desert Edge and his alma mater, Chandler Seton Catholic.

After Josh Anderson departed to take the head-coaching job at Dakota State, Mayo applied for the Payson job, but a teaching position was not available. Others applied, some of them well-known, before a teaching job surfaced and Mayo accepted in June.

That doesn't leave a lot of time for a new coach and his players to get to know each other before fall practice starts, with the regular season right behind.

"There was a distinct football culture here," Mayo said. "I wasn't going to take away what they had – I wanted to blend the old with the new. Sure, the new coach will bring in some different things. The kids have been great, though."

When the Longhorns took the field for their first preseason practice on Aug. 3, Mayo was expecting between 90 and 100 players – including freshmen.

The players' response "has exceeded my expectations," Mayo said.

What are the expectations for Payson in 2009? The team lost several good players – four *Arizona Republic* Class 3A-1A All-State first-team selections and three from the second team.

He knows that Payson won't have an easy time of it – you never do in the 3A East Region, with teams such as Lakeside Blue Ridge, Eagar Round Valley, Show Low, Snowflake and Whiteriver Alcheyay. And his team opens the season on Aug. 28 on the road against two-time defending Class 2A champion St. Johns.

"We have the potential to be a great team," Mayo said.

As an assistant, Mayo worked largely on defense, but this year will concentrate more on the offensive side of the ball.

Payson employed a 4-3 defensive scheme last season and Mayo considered changing that, but after evaluating the returning group of players will maintain the status quo.

The Longhorns lost a number of big, strong players to graduation, especially on offense, but Mayo said the 2009 version likely will be quicker and more athletic.

The anchor of the offense will be senior Logan Garner, a first-team All-State center.

Other key players are seniors Branson Alexander (tailback), twins Nick and Max Johnson (fullback, tight end, linebacker), and lineman Mason Decaney.

Mayo is understandably excited about what this fall might bring.

“We are a target because of what happened last year, but it’s good that other teams take notice,” he said. “I couldn’t ask for a better place for my first job. There has already been great support from the school and the community. We’re not going to shy away from anybody. I think we’re going to be involved in a lot of great football games.”

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