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**NEWS RELEASE**

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**TUCSON EMPIRE STEPS UP TO BECOME CONTENDER IN 3A**

PHOENIX, AZ (Oct. 6, 2009) – Which high school has the most improved football program in Arizona?

It might just be Tucson Empire.

In just their third full year of varsity competition, the Ravens have worked their way into contention for the Class 3A South Region title. And in the playoffs, who knows? Almost anything can happen.

After a 55-14 win over visiting Whiteriver Alchesay on Oct. 2, Empire is 6-0 overall under coach and athletic director Jorge Mendivil as it prepares for a key region game on Friday (Oct. 9) at Coolidge.

“Our kids are really excited about our program,” Mendivil said. “They don’t just want to advance to the playoffs. They want to have a chance to play for a state championship.”

Empire opened in July of 2005 with freshmen and sophomores and played a freshman and junior-varsity schedule. In 2006, the Ravens played an independent varsity schedule and in 2007, they played their first season in the 3A South and finished 2-8.

In 2008, they finished 7-4, including a first-round playoff loss to Goodyear Estrella Foothills.

During the 2007, Empire faced perennial state title contender Coolidge.

“I think they (players) thought to themselves, “Wow, there’s some serious football being played here. We’re going to have to step up,’” Mendivil said. “They responded well and now they’re realizing what it takes to be successful on a consistent basis.”

Mendivil grew up in Benson and played at Benson High and later was coach at San Manuel High before going to Empire. He wants to create a family type atmosphere.

“We are close-knit. We all get along and have fun, and we take the time to work and get serious about what we are doing. We try to do everything together,” Mendivil said.

His leaders are two players who have started every game in their four years, running back-cornerback Cody Woody and two-way lineman Brendon Argenziano.

Woody, the leading rusher in the 3A South a year ago, began the game against Alchesay with a 65-yard scoring run on Empire’s first play from scrimmage. The defense also came up big in that game with three interceptions and three fumble recoveries.

After the Coolidge game, Empire has home games against Eloy Santa Cruz and Florence before wrapping up the regular season with a road game against Fountain Hills.

**Have a Story Idea:**

The AIA is looking for story ideas on member high schools, including its student-athlete, coaches and administrators. Have a story that you think should be shared with the AIA community? Email your idea to Don Ketchum at [dketchum@aiaonline.org](mailto:dketchum@aiaonline.org).