

Football

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forgotten about. If it takes getting a successful football program put together so people notice the good things we are doing out here – then we need to do that.”

More Western Plains youth should be playing football, he said. One reason might be that they just don't understand the game.

In his letter, Ritchie wrote about the Monday flag football practices – an effort to teach fundamentals along with building a love of the game. Moreover, the lights would flicker on every Friday night with community flag football games through Oct. 21.

The first Friday night game was Sept. 23. The weekly event has been a success, said Ritchie.

“Usually there is at least one naysayer,” he said with a chuckle, but added he hasn't heard any negative comments about what he and the school are trying to accomplish. “Most importantly, the kids are excited. They ask me, ‘We get to do this every Friday night?’” I don't know how many times I've been asked that this week.”

“I think this will work,” he added. “The kids seem excited about it. The community is definitely excited about having football back – turn the lights and play on a Friday night whether it is flag football or not it's exciting.”

Retired jersey

James Rolo walks by No. 25 daily.

The old red jersey once had a more prominent display, but the Western Plains students have garnished a number of awards since consolidation 10 years ago that are taking over the trophy case. Right now, the jersey is tucked behind a plaque celebrating the undefeated 1971 Longhorn season and a signed football from the team.

Cromwell's No. 25 was permanently retired after he graduated.

“Every day I walk by where they hid his stuff behind the pictures,” said James, a junior from Bazine, adding he thinks, “Man, it would sure be nice to be in his shoes right now.”

James, who stands at 6 feet tall, just wants to play football. He lives in a household of Chiefs fans. He loves baseball, too, but Ransom doesn't have baseball. In junior high, along with other classmates, the school district bused him to Ness City to play football.

Ritchie had already talked to James about being the quarterback.

“He told me ‘Coach, this is going to be my breakout year,’” said Ritchie of Rolo's enthusiasm. “He will talk sports until he is blue in the face.”

James hopes he can play in pads under the lights his senior year. For now, during a Monday flag football practice, he threw passes to his peers as they practiced catching a football, then led one of the scrimmage teams as quarterback.

It's a different era than when he was growing up, Cromwell said. This is a community where three or four high schools in his day have combined into one. There wasn't the internet or hours watching television to battle. It would be tough for a



Above: Nestor Lopez, left, and James Rolo huddle up with their team while scrimmaging at flag football practice on Monday in Ransom.



Left: Nolan Cromwell's No. 25 high school football jersey has been permanently retired and is housed in a trophy case at the high school.

Photos by Lindsey Bauman / The Hutchinson News

kid from a small school to get noticed and go pro.

“I see what they are battling,” said Cromwell.

Not all James' classmates have heard of Cromwell. One junior high student sitting in Ritchie's classroom said he had never heard the name.

“And he has uncles who played with him,” said Ritchie.

James said one teacher who played with Cromwell tells them stories in class. Those tales get James excited about the future. He sees what his coach and the district are trying to do. He thinks the kids coming to Monday practices are getting excited about a future football program.

“Coach ain't out here to be our friend,” James said. “He's out here to be our mentor – coach us into young men. I think he has done a great job with me.”

Fourth down

It's supposed to be homecoming.

But that happened a few weeks ago during Ransom's Oktoberfest – the crowning date planned when school officials thought there wouldn't be any Friday night football.

However, on this Friday night, the lights are on at the Western Plains field. A string of cars and pickups pull in, parking along the field.

It's a sight that makes Ritchie happy.

“It's fall, we are supposed to be on the football field,” he said with optimism.

It's still quieter than most Friday nights. There are no cheerleaders. No pep band. No announcer. But in the stands sit supporters who

are cheering, including Denice Flax, who chats with Ritchie's wife, Tracy.

Denice and husband, Kenneth, have three children playing on this Friday: Darren, a seventh grader; and Jayme, an eighth grader. Their oldest, 26-year-old Jonathan, returned, too, clipping on red flags as a Western Plains alum.

More than two dozen students, alumni and community members came to play flag football. Even former player Daniel Hair – now a college freshman – said he left the milo field early to support his school.

“I think this is great,” Denice said. “The kids can learn from the alums. It shows them our community cares – wants them to succeed.”

Kenneth Flax said his older brothers played with Cromwell, including Eugene. Flax graduated in 1980 – the last year Ransom had 11-man football.

“Through my high school career, we had 40 out for football,” he said, recalling one Friday night game where they scraped the snow off the field so the team could play. “We put bread sacks over our socks then put our shoes on to keep our feet from getting wet.”

Maybe Jayme will get to play high school football next year, he said.

Bazine resident Connie Stieben came to support her grandson, James Rolo. It's great to see the crowd and the alumni support, she said. Yet, she admitted as she sat on the bleachers with her husband, Larry, it's not the same.

“It's sad,” she said. “We should be going to a ball game.”

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The maintenance men are only a call away!!!

Penny Ediger's first night in her new apartment at Pleasant View Estates was Halloween of 2015.

Penny's husband had recently passed away and she felt some lonesome and very quiet days on the farm south of Inman.

“I like the fact that my family does not have to worry about me. My boys ask ‘what are you up to today’. They say I am busier here than on the farm”

“I like that I can choose to participate or not with the activities that are offered. I really like my apartment and especially that if anything goes wrong the maintenance men are only a call away. The staff truly and sincerely care that I am comfortable. I have made some new friends and renewed friendships with some really great friends!”

Penny participates in Bingo and cards. She thinks Friday's are special with ice cream and visiting. She also enjoys breakfast together once a month and Wednesdays with games and snacks. Crafts are also a fun time to get together.

“It is great to know that if I need Home Health services there will be someone other than my family to help”

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