

American Football – Edinburgh Napier Knights 2014/15 Season Preview




With three consecutive wins to end last season, there is a positive atmosphere around the [Edinburgh Napier Knights American Football](#) team going into their first preseason training session on September 7th. This session will give Head Coach Pete Laird the opportunity to run the rule over his returning charges and layout his blueprint for the current campaign. The recruitment drive follows in the week after during the Napier Student Association Fresher's Week culminating in the Rookie Day on September 14th, an opportunity for potential new players to try their hand at American Football.

The first fixture of the new season against the UWS Pyros on the 8th of November may seem a long time away but there is a lot of crucial work that needs to take place on the practice field before then. With training sessions twice a week, a weekend training camp and a couple of scrimmages, the squad will be prepared to hit the ground running going into the first game of the new BUCS Border Conference.

A summer of league reconstruction will see the Knights travel to Newcastle, Sunderland and Glasgow to take on the Raiders, Spartans and Tigers, as well as welcoming the UWS Pyros, Teeside Cougars and Northumbria Mustangs to Sighthill over the course of the season.

The Knights have once again linked up with long term sponsor Student Recommend and The Three Sisters Bar, Cowgate, who will

also be supporting the Knights annual Varsity game against city rivals the Edinburgh Predators on Superbowl Sunday, February 1st.

Now entering its fourth year, the game which is traditionally hosted by the Knights at Boroughmuir's Meggetland Stadium will see a capacity crowd, the biggest for an American Football game in Scotland, gather for the clash with the Knights looking to avenge the narrow 9-0 defeat they suffered in the equivalent fixture in the last campaign. 

With eyes set on a playoff push, there have been a number of backroom changes over the summer. Second Year player Joe Walsh takes over Presidential duties from Rolfo Jesus Whitaker and there will be a new Offensive Coach Jamie Archibald set to be installed to complete the backroom staff along with Defensive Coach Scott Smith.

Head Coach Pete Laird said of the upcoming season: "The restructuring of the league has thrown up some new opponents for us this season which is an exciting prospect. There is great potential among the returning group of players and with a few additions and a lot of hard work there is a terrific opportunity to build on the results that we finished the last campaign with. As ever we look to improve year on year to get to the level we believe we are capable of competing."

Ones to Watch

Few people scored against the Defence of National Champions Stirling Clansman last season but second year **Michael Gunn** can proudly claim to be one of the few. Gunn's punt return against the Clansman in his second game for the Knights left the opposition scratching their heads at their first loss of points in the 2013/14 campaign. Playing wide receiver and second string quarterback last season, the departure of QB Michael Onufer has left the starting spot available, with Gunn one of the candidates to succeed the South Carolinian. Either

way Gunn will be a crucial offensive weapon in the Knight's arsenal.

The Knights Defensive lynch pin, linebacker **Ryan Strachan**, is back for his final season in a Knights jersey. The No.55 is a stalwart of the Knights defence, his ability on the pitch has made him a feared opponent for both club and country being one of the Knights Great Britain representatives. After a season where he was named in the Double Coverage team of the season, the new Napier Vice-President will be looking to carry on from where he left off.

Incoming Club President **Joe Walsh** is another defensive player looking to build on last season. Playing as a defensive tackle, Walsh could be found breaching the offensive line time after time. With a fantastic football head on his shoulders, Walsh has the capabilities to lead the team on the pitch as well as off it.

Finally, a second player returning for his final year as a Knight is **Rolfo Jesus Whitaker**. Last year Rolfo started out as QB and ended up winning the Defensive Hammer Award playing as a Safety. A fantastic all-rounder, Whitaker has had a summer of recuperation following a foot injury he picked up at the beginning of the post season. Everyone at the Knights is hoping that they can deliver a strong showing for Whitaker's swansong.

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