

PREP FOOTBALL PREVIEW

Dons want to take it higher

Prolific passing attack aims to continue resurgence

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Through decades of success, Santa Barbara High School built a football legacy of considerable stature that loomed large over the program. But after a disappointing string of seasons, the 2007 Dons were able to step out from under that considerable shadow. Santa Barbara resurrected the Golden Tornado with its first CIF Playoff berth in five years, as well as its first City Championship in that span.

That taste of gridiron success after a long drought has this year's Dons thirsting for more, which is just how head coach Will Gonzales would like it.

"We had 75 guys working out after last season was over. Our season in 2007 was forged by that kind of dedication in the offseason, and that really helps to set the tone for us," said Gonzales, entering his third year guiding the program. After starting 0-for-9, Gonzales' team won its final game in 2006, then finished 7-4 in 2007. After beating Dos Pueblos in a wild

35-32 shootout in the regular season finale to secure the Channel League's last CIF spot, the Dons were stung by a 34-14 loss to Newbury Park in the opening round of the CIF Northern Division playoffs.

Senior quarterback John Uribe earned first team All-Channel League honors in 2007 after completing over 50 percent of his passes for 2,148 yards and 22 touchdown passes. Gonzales noted that Uribe has performed extremely well during passing league play.

Eight of Uribe's scoring tosses a year ago went to top returning pass catcher tight end Bryson Lloyd, who had 46 receptions for 646 yards and was named the Channel League's receiver of the year. Roberto Nelson was the Dons' leader in receiving yards with 689 on only 27 catches (a 25.5-yard average). Additionally, the senior Nelson caught seven touchdowns, or just over one out of every four catches went for a score.

Lloyd and Nelson are also expected to start on defense, with Lloyd having led the Dons in fumble recoveries (3) and Nelson

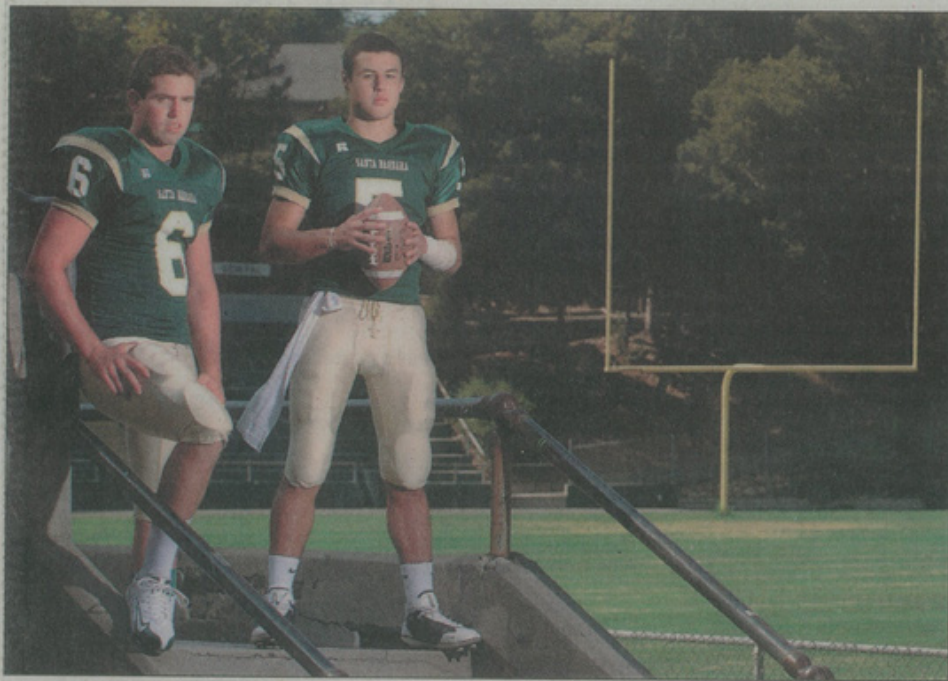
notching a team-high four interceptions (two of which he returned for touchdowns). Linebacker Ian Echernacht and lineman Lenny Vargas were both first team all-Channel Leaguers in 2007, and will return to their roles.

A couple of newcomers arrive with a good amount of experience. Freddy Maldonado, who earned All-Tri-Valley League and News-Press all-county recognition last season while at Carpinteria, has transferred in and will play wide receiver and defensive back for the Dons. Another addition to the roster is senior Kyle Leonard, who comes to the Dons from Nease High School in Ponte Vedra, Florida. The Panthers, who count last year's Heisman Trophy winner Tim Tebow as an alum, were Florida 4-A runners-up in 2006 and 2007.

Gonzales said that his team was still figuring out the right chemistry, but had high expectations for itself.

"Last year's team had a strong group of seniors, and so does this year's group. They know that this is the year they want to be remembered for," Gonzales said.

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MIKE ELIASON / NEWS-PRESS

Santa Barbara High's veteran lineup includes the pass-catch combination of tight end Bryson Lloyd, left, and quarterback John Uribe.