

State of the Program: Tenafly football hopes to continue building interest through winning

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Tenafly continues to spread the good word of football inside the high school and around the town.

The Tigers actively promote the sport to grammar school and middle school students, one year after enjoying their most successful season in decades.

Coaches and players build relationships by attending flag football and youth clinics. They point to their 8-0 record and winning the title in the Super Football Conference's inaugural Ivy Division.

"We've been doing everything we can to tackle this from a community aspect here," said Peter Toale, in his fifth season as coach.

The Ivy League debuted last year to create better competition among teams struggling with participation. Tenafly's roster has been in the 30s despite being a mid-size school.



So Tenaflly needs pre-teens to maintain interest, and its unbeaten slate during a pandemic-shortened 2020 season is a selling point. Toale said Tenaflly's middle school team has increased its roster to about two dozen players.

“It opened eyes,” Toale said. “It definitely got people in the lower grades interested in thinking about playing football and coming out for football. And in terms of my team, it let them know that we're capable of doing this, regardless of what our roster size is, regardless of what our physical size is.”

The tradition

Tenaflly does not have much tradition. The Tigers have not won a title since the NJSIAA introduced sectional playoffs in 1974.

During the previous decade, the program had a combined record of 29-70. During Toale's first four seasons, the team was 16-21.

The challenge

The Wing-T attack has to excel. Senior Kenny Uchida, a running back and track standout, ran for more than 900 yards last season and leads an offense that also returns junior fullback Will Zinna and three senior linemen: Jonghun Jeong, Barrett Abramowitz and Evan Armas.

Junior Emmet Goldberg is the new quarterback, after seeing considerable action last season as the backup. Junior David Levine will see more time at running back, and sophomore Cole Mogensen is among the new linemen.

“We need to go out there and be extremely disciplined and execute exactly what our assignments are, and that’s a large reason why we had a lot of success,” Toale said.

Expectations

Tenaflly is capable of repeating as Ivy Division champion. Last year, the Tigers outscored opponents, 273-58, and won the title with a 48-6 home win over Memorial of West New York.

Four starters return to a 4-4 defense that sometimes could be overmatched: Jeong and senior Ian Kim are the linebackers, and Uchida and junior Sam Powell return to the secondary.

Abramowitz and Armas will anchor the line. Sophomore Jordan Twiss steps in at linebacker, and junior Marc Berschadsky joins the secondary.

Ultimately, Tenaflly wants to increase its numbers and ascend from the Ivy into another SFC division. The Ivy Division provides a two-year schedule, so the Tigers could move up after this season.

“My hope is that we build ourselves back to where we need to be, that we get a sustainable and thriving junior program that continues to feed the high school program,” Toale said. “That our numbers continue to increase at the junior recreational and the high school levels, and that we can get ourselves back into a league like we used to be in.”

2021 schedule

Sept. 11: at Snyder

Sept. 17: vs. Dickinson

Sept. 25: at Cliffside Park/Ridgefield

Oct. 1: at Memorial

Oct. 8: vs. Ferris

Oct. 15: vs. Fair Lawn

Oct. 22: vs. Bergen Tech

Nov. 25: at Dumont

Greg Mattura is a sports reporter for NorthJersey.com. For full access to live scores, breaking news and analysis from our Varsity Aces team, subscribe today. To get breaking news directly to your phone, [sign up for our newsletter](#) and [download our app](#).

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