

## Boardman could be contender

Federal League coaches think the Spartans could be a force this year.

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CANTON — The annual Stark County football preview dinner at St. Haralombos Church follows the same script every year.

The coaches take turns stepping up to the mic and do three things: Bash their own teams, tell a joke and go on and on about how tough their league will be. Some of them are lying through their teeth.

But a few, including those from Federal League schools Canton McKinley, Perry, Jackson, Lake and North Canton, are dead serious. And while Boardman coach D.J. Ogilvie and new Fitch coach Phil Annarella did not attend Wednesday night's gathering, their counterparts were thinking about how they will factor into the 2007 football season.

"Oh, Boardman is going to be right there near the top," said Perry coach John "Spider" Miller. "They are going to be tougher than heck; they were last year. They really should have beaten some of us last year, but came up just short.

"D.J. [Ogilvie] is doing a great job over there and they are climbing up the charts. He'll have them playing more consistent this year and teach them how to finish games out. We play at their place, so it will be a tough one."

Former area contingent

Miller was joined by 14 other Stark County coaches at the event who spoke about their teams in front of over 300 guests. The contingent included former Warren G. Harding coach Thom McDaniels (Jackson), former Fitch player Ed Cybak (Fairless) and former Youngstown State player Tim Tyrrell (St. Thomas Aquinas).

Many of the same coaches were present at last week's Federal League Media Day at Lake High School. Ogilvie and Annarella were also there and took part in the annual preseason coaches' poll. Canton McKinley was projected as the league champion, just one point ahead of Miller's Panthers. North Canton was voted to finish third and Boardman finished fourth. Fitch tied with Jackson for sixth.

With so many games coming down to the fourth quarter in 2006, Ogilvie is hoping this year's squad will learn from those mistakes and finish strong.

"I thought last year we finally competed physically, which we did not my first year," he said at the Federal League event. "We have 14 guys back from last year and our coaching staff back, so we're further ahead than we were last year.

"We want to finish the job this year and be competitive every night in what is one of the toughest leagues in the state. We have 71 players, which is the biggest team we've had in four years."

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Also lauds Falcons

While Miller spent his time Wednesday complimenting Boardman, he didn't leave Fitch out. With a new coach in Annarella, Miller expects the Falcons to return to championship form after two subpar seasons.

"I really respect Phil," said Miller. "I know him from when I coached at McKinley and I know he'll bring that power game back to Fitch. One thing is for sure, he'll have his team well prepared and ready to play physical football."

Annarella is just honored to be coaching big school football in a league so respected around the state.

"One of the lures of the Fitch job was the Federal League itself," said Annarella. "It has some of the best players in the state and the best coaches in the state. It's the best Division I league in the state. There's a lot of parity in this league and you have to be ready to play every night. It's an exciting opportunity."