

A new era kicked off Friday night in Independence, as first-season head coach Joe Wynn and the Pioneer football team headlined the new Pioneer Madness event at Simon Kenton. In limited scrimmage snaps, newcomers such as Bellevue Sr. transfer **Jordan Pendleton** showed off his speed at running back with multiple rushes over 10 yards each. Sr. **Caleb French** battled with So. **Grant Webb** as a competitive quarterback battle continues. Webb, coming off a freshman season as the backup for Brady Lee, saw very little time on the field last year, with Lee starting all 11 games as a Senior. Starting the first of a handful of drives, Webb went 2/5 on completions, as multiple targeted receivers found their way into congested traffic. However, his first pass, a screen to Senior receiver **Grayson Harris**, ended in a touchdown, as he did 13 times last season. Harris, who led the state in receiving yards per game, was asked postgame about his score, to which he praised his teammates for giving him a path to the endzone.

"It felt great. Colton (Farfaring), my buddy, made it very easy for me to score there. So I'm just very grateful for Colton, he's my guy." When asked about his importance to the team, Harris was highly complimentary of his team and voiced his desire to win.

"Makes me feel great. I just want to do the best I can to help this team win, and that's all that matters, is winning."

French, a senior and first-year player, showed off his mobility Friday night, rolling out on several plays, completing 7 of 9 passes. Although he showed confidence in the pocket, it did not come without growing pains, as multiple RPO (run-pass option) plays were negatively impacted by the new quarterback's hesitation on handoffs. In later drives, French tested his arm strength, targeting Grayson Harris on a deep pass, which was left short of the first-string receiver, guarded in double coverage. The battle for the starting spot at QB is still very much in the air, as several snaps went to both Grant Webb and Caleb French, with French gaining the edge at the end of the scrimmage. With just three weeks until the season opener against rival Dixie Heights, it is still undecided who will be at the helm come gameday.

As for the defensive side of the ball, the D-line, led by Seniors **Stuart Campbell** and **Paul Snyder**, proved to be a force, as Campbell made a physical tackle on running back Jordan Pendleton early on in the scrimmage. Junior linebacker Jack Giordano returned to the field Friday after missing the entire 2024 regular season due to a knee injury, as he combined for multiple tackles. Despite losing Senior starters and defensive anchors Aven Bohms and Jakson Kellerman, Head Coach Joe Wynn is motivated to develop his core to improve from last season's defensive struggles, giving up a staggering 41 PPG.

The first season of the Wynn era begins August 22nd, with the Pioneers opening up against Dixie Heights. In last year's matchup, Simon Kenton won a shootout on the road, outlasting the Colonels 50-35. Scheduled to play multiple teams with strong seasons in the prior year, it will be a test, week-in and week-out, for the new coach. The Pioneers face a tough schedule, as they are scheduled to take on 2024 6A State runner-ups, the Ryle Raiders, as well

as 2023 5A runner-ups, the Cooper Jaguars. It is clear that the Pioneers aren't shying away from a challenge; a new culture may soon set in Independence.