

**Fall previews to continue**

With the 2008-09 school year finally underway, The Bee will continue publishing its previews for the fall sports season in next week's edition of the paper with previews of the soccer and volleyball teams. Previews for the other fall sports teams will follow in future editions. As is customary, full schedules will be published with each preview.

## Sweet Home football

### Loaded Panthers' roster ready to defend title

by **PATRICK J. NAGY**  
Reporter

Sweet Home was one of the best high school football teams in Section VI last fall. On paper, the 2008 installment looks just as good.

Panthers' coach John Faller returns eight starters on offense and seven on defense from last year's Section VI Class A championship team.

Sweet Home finished 10-1 last year and lost to eventual state champion, Aquinas Institute, 28-7, in the Class A Far West Regional.

"If I put my kids on paper against some other teams, we would probably come out on top in a lot of respects," said Faller. "I don't have a 6-3, 240-pound tight end. I don't have a tackle that weighs 290. What I do have is a bunch of kids who can run and are in good shape."

Leading the Panthers' offense is quarterback Casey Kacz. A returning All-Western New York third-team and Class A North first-team selection, the 6-foot-1 Kacz heads into his senior season second all-time in school history in touchdown passes (15) and sixth all-time in passing yards (1,333).

"He's got a lot of confidence," said Faller. "He's worked hard in the offseason. The kids follow him."

Kacz said every part of his game has improved since last season.

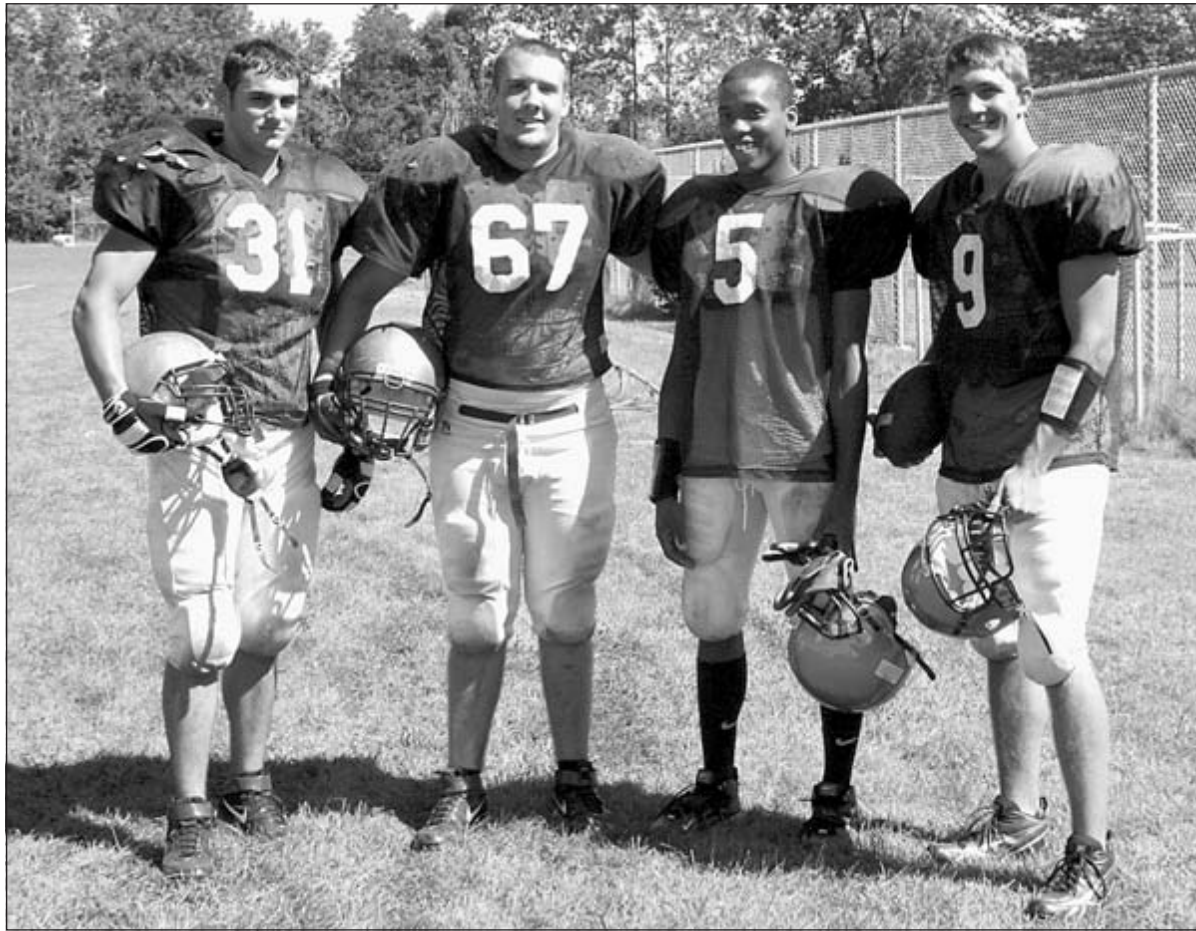
"My footwork is better and I can read different defenses more than I did last year," said Kacz.

Kacz will be backed up by 6-foot senior Mike Wolcott, who filled in well for an injured Kacz in the Panthers' 31-6 Section VI Class A championship victory over Cheektowaga last November.

"Casey and Mike know the offense backwards and forwards, all of the little nuances, so when they go out there, they have a good handle on it," said Faller. "That means everything in crucial situations, and both have showed they can make the right decisions."

Junior Pat McMahon is the third-string quarterback.

When he's not making plays in the air, Kacz will be handing off



**Steve Phillips**, far left, Ryan Wilson, Will Reese and Casey Kacz are the Sweet Home football team captains. The Panthers finished 10-1 last year and are the defending Section VI Class A champions.

Photo by Amy Krakowiak  
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the football to 6-0, 215-pound junior Deshanaro Morris or 5-11, 220-pound sophomore Mikal Coleman. Morris ran for six TDs in 2007.

"Both run hard and they're going to be bringing it this year," said Faller. "They're going to be a tough duo for a defense to stop. They're going to have to be gang-tackled."

Morris and Coleman are replacing Sweet Home's top running back last year, 2008 graduate Marcus Johnson, an All-WNY first-team pick and Class A North Offensive Player of the Year who ran for over 1,100 yards.

Senior Will Reese can also be used as a running back but will primarily be lined up as a slot receiver. Reese, a Class A North second-team selection in 2007, ran for 256 yards and three touchdowns and led Sweet Home with 28 receptions for 442 yards and three touchdowns.

Seniors Mike Scott and James Foye can also be used at running back.

Linemen who are working toward starting positions include returning seniors Ryan Wilson, Steve Phillips, Chris Akromas, Matt Zon, and Nick Terhaar.

Wilson is a returning Class A North first-team selection at center. Zon and Terhaar are guards. Phillips and Akromas are tackles. Phillips and Wilson are team captains, along with Kacz and Reese.

Despite the departure of Nick Christman, an All-Western New York first-team pick as well as 2007 Trench Trophy award winner and Class A North co-Defensive Player of the Year, and Andrew Hopkins, a Class A North first-team selection to graduation, Phillips is confident that the offensive line can get the job done.

"Nick and Andrew Hopkins

were good players and are big shoes to fill, but we feel like the line has really dedicated to improving in the offseason," said Phillips.

Wilson said having several returning familiar faces on the line makes it an easier transition heading into the season.

"There's no standing around," he said. "Everybody is focused. Now it's let's get up to the line and play football."

Other returning pieces to the Sweet Home offense are senior wide receivers Noah Nwachukwu (six touchdowns; Class A North second team), Emanuel Reed (Class A North honorable mention), Ryan Gutt, Josh Blango, Brandon Hudson and senior kicker Mike Lawandus (Class A North second team).

The defense also looks solid. Coleman and junior Ibrahim Ramadan (6-0, 220 pounds) return at defensive end. Akromas, Phillips, Wilson, seniors Joel Tillman and James Cornelius, and juniors Jamal Mustapha and Robert Barnes are among a slew of defensive tackles who will see playing time.

At linebacker, Faller has been working in Morris, Tillman, Zon, and senior Taylor Heald and juniors Gage Bateman, Levi Laws, Steve Spencer and McMahon.

Phillips and Morris are returning Class A North first-team defensive all-stars. Akromas, Tillman, Ramadan and Coleman earned second-team defensive honors.

Hudson, Nwachukwu, Blango, Scott, Foye and junior Nick Cuvillo are among players battling

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## New scheduling format benefits sport

by **PATRICK J. NAGY**  
Reporter

If you've seen a Section VI high school football schedule for this fall, you'll notice several changes.

Only seven regular season games — five league, two non-league — are listed on the schedule instead of the typical eight. Rivalry games, normally reserved for Week Eight, will be played in Week Seven. The only divisions where teams cannot play everyone in their division is Class B North and South and Class C South.

It's in Week Eight where it gets a little complicated. The top four teams in North and South from Class AA, A, B, C, and D will meet in Federation quarterfinal crossover games (1 vs. 4, 2 vs. 3).

The losers of each game would meet at dates to be determined in the Section VI Bowl semifinals and finals. The winners of the Federation quarterfinal games would play against each other in the semifinals in Week Nine (Oct. 31-Nov. 1) with the winners of those games facing off in championship games at Ralph Wilson Stadium in Week Ten (Nov. 7-8).

Normally the Federation playoffs are comprised of semifinal and final rounds.

In addition, the fifth and sixth and seventh and eighth-ranked teams in the North and South

would clash in crossover match-up games, including winner's and consolation games, to get in eighth and ninth games.

Each JV team will also play nine games.

The changes made to the schedule are designed to renew interest in the sport. Teams that lose more than one game will still have a chance to make the Federation playoffs. Plus, it generates revenue.

Sweet Home coach John Faller said every coach who spoke with Section VI President Chuck Funke has been in favor of it.

"We felt with this format it keeps encouragement up," said Faller. "Some people think it's too washed out but we do it in every other sport. We have an open tournament in basketball where the No. 1 plays the No. 18. With this format, you could lose two games and still make the playoffs where in years past, you might not get in."

"I've always been a fan of trying something to see if it works," he said. "If it doesn't, we'll go back to the other system."

"You're guaranteed nine football games and I think that's a huge step in the right direction when you're dealing with small conferences," said Amherst coach Patrick Murphy. "Last year, you'd lose your first two games and you were out. Now, you're in it until the end. That's huge a motivation factor for the players."

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### SWEET HOME

## SCHEDULE

| DATE  | SCHOOL                          | TIME      |
|-------|---------------------------------|-----------|
| 9-6   | West Seneca West                | 2 p.m.    |
| 9-13  | @ Grand Island                  | 2 p.m.    |
| 9-20  | Williamsville East (Homecoming) | 2 p.m.    |
| 9-26  | @ Williamsville South           | 7:30 p.m. |
| 10-4  | Starpoint                       | 2 p.m.    |
| 10-11 | @ Kenmore East                  | 2 p.m.    |
| 10-18 | @ Jamestown                     | 2 p.m.    |