

# Expectations low for Paine football team in return to league play

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Tuesday, July 29, 2014

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At the Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference Media Day last week, Paine College coach Greg Ruffin expected low projections around the league for his football program.



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**Greg Ruffin: Paine head coach said he wasn't surprised his team was picked last in the SIAC poll.**

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The Lions, who will play their first season in NCAA Division II this fall, were picked to finish last in the the SIAC Coaches Preseason Poll. In addition, no Paine players were listed in any of the preseason all-conference teams. Ruffin's not surprised.

“They were supposed to pick us last,” he said. “We’re starting from the bottom, but that allows us to somewhat temper expectations from inside the program. We’ll see where we are 15 weeks from now.”

Last year, Ruffin planted the seeds for Paine football, which returned from a five-decade dormant period. The Lions went through a full fall season of regular practices and a handful of club games. The players gained experience, and Ruffin evaluated his program. As Paine prepares to enter SIAC play, Ruffin said not much has changed.

“It’s pretty much the same as last year. It’s all about preparation,” he said. “Getting that year in last year really helped us.”

The new season begins Aug. 7 when transfers and newcomers report to Paine. A day later, returners show up. Then, the school will hold physicals.

Paine will then begin its fall practice Aug. 11.

The first four days will be used to acclimate the players to the warm weather.

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this summer.

The Lions will bring 113 players into camp. When school starts Aug. 18, the team will add between 25-40 players, Ruffin said.

“We’re really going to strengthen our redshirt program,” he said. “Some of those kids are partial qualifiers. Maybe they had the GPA, but they just missed a test score or vice versa.”

When camp starts, Ruffin will try to solidify the quarterback position. Returner Loranzo Hammonds will battle for the starting nod with a pair of transfers from Louisville and Hampton; Ruffin said he can’t mention the names of the transfers yet.

“That position has to get better,” he said. “That has to be the strength of the football team.”

Led by tackle Henderson Ware, Paine’s defense is expected to be solid this season.

“We may have one of the better defensive football teams in this conference,” Ruffin said, “just on the

sheer depth we have at the defensive line and secondary.”