

Stars stymied by out-of-tier Ticats

SHANE JONES

News Staff

Rob MacKenzie is going to wait a week before he passes any judgment on this year's edition of the Sherwood Park bantam Northstars.

After all, despite being in the lower division, he felt they were a bit unfairly over their heads in Week 1 of Capital District Minor Football Association play.

The Northstars, down in the Tier III/IV ranks in the Jackie Parker Division, due to having only six non-starter returnees this season after two years of returning the program to respectability in the Tier I ranks, faced a team that probably should have been placed a rung higher in the Leduc Ticats on Sunday in St. Albert, falling 48-12.

But despite being a rookie-laden squad against much bigger and older competition, MacKenzie felt his team gave Leduc a challenge, at least in the early running.

"We started off very well," said the Stars head coach. "It was only 22-12 for them at the half, so it wasn't like we were getting blown out at all. At halftime it was all very positive. I let them know how well they were doing against a much better team than they are likely to be facing most of the time. There were a lot of positives for our team to take out of it, for a first game at this level. We are going to improve. We have a lot to build on going forward. We'll get better."

Highlighting the Northstars' performance was running back Grady Forsberg, who scored both majors for his team, one a four-yard plunge and another a dramatic 75-yard TD up the gut.

But the Stars had difficulty containing Leduc's rushing attack as well.

"We had trouble containing them on the outside," MacKenzie said. "We didn't really have problems up the middle but they took us

down on the edges. Our kids gave a pretty credible effort, we just couldn't handle their speed on the edge. We're just not there yet to play against some stuff like that. I don't have a problem with the way we played. I thought given the circumstances, that we did fairly good. We just ran out of gas in the second half."

The circumstances alluded to are MacKenzie's belief that Leduc should not be down in the lower division, something he hopes is rectified when the league looks at restructuring the tiers following Week 3.

"I know they are down in our division right now but I don't know if they should be," he said. "They are a lot bigger and stronger than we are. For them to drop down to this division, I don't know. From the teams that I have seen so far I think we are a top four Tier III

team but Leduc is way better than that. They have a team that is mainly 14-year-olds. They are just a year older and bigger than most of our kids and the other teams at this level. It's not meant as sour grapes, I just don't think they are a Tier III/Tier IV team. I don't think they are a Tier I team either, but I do think they could compete up a division. They should walk through their first three games and from that I think they should probably move up."

The Northstars should have a more accurate test to measure themselves from this weekend when they face the Edmonton Mustangs on Saturday at noon at Confederation Park.

"I'm looking forward to that game," MacKenzie said.

"It's a lot more at the level we are at. That will be our first real challenge and indicator of where we are really at. We'll be missing a few kids but pretty much every team faces that challenge with the season starting in the summer now. It will be a good test."

The Mustangs defeated the Fort Saskatchewan Lightning 28-0 in their season opener.

shanej@sherwoodparknews.com

