

Hungry like the Woodland Wolf Pack

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Minor league football team hopes to win over local fans

The Wolf Pack defeated the NorCal Wild Dogs 17-6 in a January scrimmage held in Napa. For sports fans football in February has usually meant the Super Bowl, the NFL combine, or the realization someone they know is enduring a serious case of pigskin withdrawal. For Ed Silva and Heath Nunes, football in February means the Woodland Wolf Pack. Who the Wolf Pack are is something everyone associated with the team hopes will be made clear over the next three months.

This February has marked preparations for the first Golden Coast Football League season ever for the Wolf Pack, a brand new minor league team of locally based athletes, many of them former high school and college players. The squad played its first exhibition game in January, participated in its first five-team scrimmage last weekend, and will kickoff its inaugural

The Wolf Pack will play five home games at Lee Middle School. (Memo Garcia/Courtesy)

10-game regular season on Saturday, March 15 against the West Sac Wolverines at Lee Middle School, the projected site of all five home games on the Wolf Pack's schedule.

Silva, a 37-year-old Sacramento resident, is the team's owner, Lincoln native Nunes its 31-year-old head coach/defensive coordinator. Both men see the Wolf Pack in particular and minor league football in general as a viable entertainment outlet for local sports fans exceeding any preconceived notions many might have about their

But entertainment isn't the main reason both are involved with the Wolf Pack.

"I want to get these young kids out and keep their careers going," Nunes said. "This is something that they love, and there's not really another arena for them.

"These guys go out there and - I don't want to say it's bloodlust, but you feel that first hit and you want to hit. You don't just turn it off."

"You're going to see real football. A lot of (the players) are trying to get in an Arena League," said Silva, who was a defensive lineman for the Twin City Cougars of the Northern California Amateur Football Federation until a rotator cuff injury ended his playing career last year.

"(The players) are trying to get whatever is out there, they're trying to get to the next level. It's not like the old days when you'd go to a semi-pro game and see a brawl in the middle of the field. All the teams are real family oriented. That's what we're striving for."

Like good businessmen in any endeavor, Silva and Nunes seek to distance the Wolf Pack from past negatives associated with their level of football. Nunes is even loathe to use the term semi-pro. "I like to use the term minor league football," he said, noting semi-pro football has long been, "hush-hush, not a lot of attention."

In cultivating the family atmosphere he hopes will create a buzz around the Wolf Pack, Silva said player contracts include conduct clauses which strongly discourage players from drinking anything stronger than root beer or smoking anything other than tobacco at game sites.

It should help matters on the field that the Wolf Pack roster is youthful. Nunes said players in the GCFL range from age 18 to 60, but the bulk of Woodland's roster is 18 to 28, all of whom shell out between \$600 and \$700 for uniforms and insurance before they can be cleared to play.

Nunes said the team will employ a balanced spread offense and what he called a bend-don't-break defense. The philosophy seemed to work fine when the Wolf Pack beat the NorCal Wild Dogs in a January exhibition in Napa, and in last weekend's jamboree in Roseville against GCFL foes the North Bay Rattlers, Twin City Cougars, Roseville Steelers and North Valley Lions.

Silva, who applied to the GCFL to own a new team in August and landed the Wolf Pack in September, also kept Woodland's two largest high schools in mind when considering some of the Wolf Pack's essentials.

"We ended up going with black and vegas gold," he said of the team colors, which are the same as both Pioneer High's and the Sacramento-based Capital City Fury youth team he owns.

"And we thought that the Wolves name had been around for a long time (in Woodland) but I didn't want to go with that exactly. So I said let's go with Wolf Pack."

In less than two weeks, and for a price of \$5 for adults, \$1 for children, the Woodland public can see for itself if the latest addition to its sports scene has the game to match its name.

