

Published Sep 29, 2009

Published Tuesday September 29, 2009

## Field just a dream

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Omaha Christian practices on a plot of grass next to Emmanuel Fellowship Church at 84th and Crown Point Avenue, with no line markers or goal posts. "You don't know the exact width of a field," coach Tim Hamilton said. "Sometimes we don't set up exactly the way I'd like, but I don't blame the kids too much for that."

When Omaha Christian's players hear the sound of the band soaring across the street or glimpse at the Omaha Northwest football players drilling in 6,000-seat Kinnick Stadium, they sometimes wonder.

What would it be like to have your own stadium? Your own locker room? A practice field that really is a practice field?

Omaha Christian holds classes in a former office building off 103rd and Fort Streets, a facility the school recently purchased and renovated after renting three other buildings during the past 16 years.

But right now it's just classrooms. No locker room, no gymnasium, no football field and a minuscule weight room.

So the Eagles practice on a borrowed plot of grass next to Emmanuel Fellowship Church at 84th and Crown Point Avenue, right across from Northwest.

But they're not bitter, not with a 4-0 record and a chance to go to the Eight Man-1 playoffs for a third straight year.

"Not having a football field doesn't make football any less fun," Christian's Max Lewis said.

The senior fullback and linebacker and his teammates have learned to adjust to the limitations that go along with playing for a private school with an enrollment of 260 from kindergarten through high school.

So what if their cars are traveling locker rooms? Or if their practice field lacks line markers, goal posts and lights? Or if all of their games are away games, including the one at 7 p.m. Friday at Mead?

It just makes the Eagles tough, senior linebacker and tight end Jacob Richards said.

"I think we're one of a kind," he said. "No team I've heard of has to do what we have to do. We have to do more in order to be a good team."

Athletic Director Mike Thompson said the school would love to add a place for its teams to play someday, but nothing is in the works.

Thompson and football coach Tim Hamilton said the players have actually adjusted better than they have. Hamilton, who also teaches physical education, admits it can be frustrating.

It's hard to train in the offseason. Practice takes lots of planning, and not just over what drills to run. Because the field is five to 10 minutes away, every day the Eagles must load up water bottles and equipment. Younger players need to be transported, too, after dressing in a bathroom at school.

Older players drive themselves and dress outside their cars in the parking lot. They take their pads home every night and bring them back the next day, because there is no storage.

Richards said it's fostered more responsibility in everyone.

"If one person forgets something," he said, "the coaches aren't going to drive back and get it."

Practices have been tailored to fit the field. The Eagles use cones instead of line markers. They try to move around so they don't destroy the grass. And they practice field-goal kicking before games when they are at an actual stadium.

"It's a little confusing. You don't know the exact width of a field," Hamilton said. "Sometimes we don't set up exactly the way I'd like, but I don't blame the kids too much for that."

Hamilton has a group of seven seniors on his close-knit roster of 28, and the team has some speed. They've reached the playoffs six times since 2000 and have won the majority of their games.

And facilities or not, the coach gets a lot of fulfillment from watching his players succeed. Including son Titus, a starting running back and linebacker who has been knocked out for the season by shoulder surgery.

With four wins in four games, the Eagles are having too much fun to complain about facilities.

"If we play well on Friday," Richards said, "where we practice doesn't matter so much."

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