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Eagles Stick With `I'

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HARRISONBURG - In recent years, the Bridgewater College football team's offense has been, well, less than thrilling. While the Eagles scored points, averaging 31.1 per game last season, they often sputtered in key situations and have gone six years without a Division III playoff appearance after dominating the Old Dominion Athletic Conference from 2001-05.

After an ugly 19-0 loss to Hampden-Sydney in 2009, an H-SC defensive back even claimed the Tigers knew what BC was going to run half the time.

Things might not be so predictable in 2012.

Last month, the Eagles named 41-year-old J.D. Shaw their offensive coordinator, and when asked to describe his style, the first thing he said was "unpredictable."

Shaw has plenty of experience in Division III, having spent the past 10 seasons as Averett's offensive coordinator. Averett averaged 24 points a game during his stint, including 33 per game from 2004-06.

"I don't think I've ever been called conservative," said Shaw, the son of Bob Shaw, a former assistant coach at, among other schools, Cincinnati, Arkansas and West Virginia. "There's a time to be conservative. There's a time you want to be conservative, but I don't think anybody that's ever coached against me has classified me as a conservative guy when it comes to play-calling."

One thing that won't change at Bridgewater is the team's basic set. Shaw runs a pro-style, multiple-I offense that he said is about having a balanced attack.

The multiple-I is the same offense the Eagles ran under highly successful coordinator Bob Colbert, now the head coach at D-III Saint Vincent in Latrobe, Pa., and then Joe Soltis, who resigned in November after spending six playoff-less seasons as offensive coordinator.

Bridgewater coach Michael Clark's teams have run multiple-I offenses throughout his 17-year tenure - he's called himself a "multiple-I guy" - and he stressed in a recent interview that he didn't want to "reinvent the wheel."

Clark did say, though, that he thought a new set of eyes and new ideas would be beneficial for the Eagles, who went 6-4 last season.

"Our offense doesn't need an overhaul," said Clark, who played at Cincinnati in the late 1970s when Bob Shaw was the Bearcats' defensive coordinator.

Clark tried to hire the younger Shaw as a position coach in 2004, but Shaw opted to stay at Averett, even though Bridgewater is higher up on the D-III football food chain. Shaw said he didn't want to give up his coordinator's position and he felt the Cougars were turning a corner after going 7-11 in 2002 and 2003. From 2004-06, they went 20-10, winning a share of the USA South Athletic Conference title in 2006.

"His strength is just the vast knowledge he has of a lot of different systems," said Averett coach Mike Dunlevy, who also coached with Shaw at D-III Waynesburg (Pa.) in the late 1990s. "His dad was a coach and he's been in coaching forever."

Bob Shaw retired from WVU in 1993 (he now lives in Texas), and the younger Shaw was on the field for the 1989 Fiesta Bowl when Notre Dame beat West Virginia for the national title. J.D. Shaw, who graduated from WVU in 1993 and got his masters in 1994, said that spurred him into a coaching career.

"That was my first exposure to really seeing my dad work, and that's kind of when I decided that's what I wanted to do," said Shaw, who did not play football in college. "I wanted to have the kind of impact that he was having on

people."

Shaw said he chose a career in D-III over D-I because he wanted his family to have more stability after he went to four high schools and three elementary schools. At BC, Shaw inherits an offense that was able to score points - but not enough to win significantly. The Eagles went 0-2 against the ODAC's top teams, Hampden-Sydney and Washington & Lee.

BC returns its quarterback, senior Carlos Gonzalez, and a strong group of wide receivers, but it loses two standout tailbacks (Anthony Carter and Darrin McKenzie) and much of its offensive line.

Dunlevy said, though, that Shaw is adept at adapting to his personnel.

Next season, that could mean better tailoring BC's offense to Gonzalez, who had played in shotgun spread offenses his whole life before arriving at Bridgewater. BC usually has its QB under center.

Shaw said it's too early to say what the Eagles' offense would look like next year and what kind of changes he would make. In terms of what he looked for in a quarterback, however, Shaw said he could work with any style and that the first quality he looked for was intelligence.

"I don't know these young men yet," Shaw said. "I think this adjustment period of them getting to know me and me getting to know them and knowing what their strengths are will allow us to be able to build an offensive system that's going to be successful."

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