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Amherst youngsters get football program

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AMHERST — Alex Wideman has plenty on his mind when he gets on the football practice field behind Amherst High School.

Lining up at right tackle while running plays in shorts and a helmet with the rest of his team, 8-year-old Wideman was looking forward to eventually putting on pads and getting down to some hitting.

During breaks in the action at Wednesday's practice, Wideman also pondered what other positions he would like to try.

"I want to do something on defense because I like to tackle people," Wideman said. "I would like to try quarterback too."

A chance to be out on the field and get started on those kind of dreams didn't happen for kids like Wideman in Amherst before this year, as organized tackle football started in seventh grade.

But times have changed this fall, as members of the Falcon Football Parents Club got the ball rolling for Pop Warner football, and this fall Amherst will support three teams — two 8-10 teams and a 10-12 team — in the Mid-State League.

The teams will play against squads from Weyauwega, Wild Rose, Tri-County, Iola, Manawa, Berlin and Quad Cities.

Nick Trzebiatowski is the league representative for the program and a former school board member in Amherst. He left his position in part to help get the program underway.

"I guess it has been thought about for a number of years, but nothing really happened," Trzebiatowski said. "(Varsity football coach) Brian Toelle kind of put the idea out there, and I decided to get involved. We approached the league, and they graciously let us in."

Trzebiatowski added there was immediate interest in the program once they secured a spot in the league, and now have 64 players out (boys and girls) as well as a cheerleading squad of eight.

The program will have a budget of about \$20,000 this year, coming from \$75 players fees and corporate donations.

"These teams are made up from grades 3-6, and we were hoping to get about half the boys in those grades to come out. We ended up getting a little more than that, so we're very pleased," Trzebiatowski said. "We'll see what the results of this in a couple of years."

Trzebiatowski was referring to the varsity program, which under the direction of second-year coach Toelle is trying to rebound after an 8-28 record over the past four seasons since reaching the playoffs in 2001.

With high school practice set to begin next Tuesday, Toelle and his assistants were available to

come out this week and get some time with the young players whom they hope will be future Falcons.

"This is going to be a big thing because it gives them a foundation," Toelle said. "Getting them here now helps us give them the basics like getting to practice, working hard and being positive."