

# Huskies Battle to Keep Up With the “SEC”

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Now that the 2009 football season is over for the Hillcrest Huskies, it's time to ponder the best memories. What will be the highlight of the season?

It will be more than the team record, which was 2-8 overall and 0-6 in Region 4. That put the Huskies in last place in the league, which was known in the media circles as the “SEC” (Southeastern Conference) because the competition was so difficult.

Instead, it will probably be for how hard the team battled against such difficult competition. Coach **Kirk Merhish** noted long before the season began that the Huskies might have trouble against the other region schools because their enrollment is much larger.

The Utah High School Activities Association revealed new regions in 2009, and placed Hillcrest with Alta, Brighton, Jordan, American Fork, Pleasant Grove and Lone Peak. Prior to the season, Hillcrest administrators discussed enrollment discrepancies



QB Tanner Kemp looks for a receiver while RB Trae Kranz awaits someone to block.

with the UHSAA, but to no avail.

Also, in 2009, many Region 4 teams at the top of their game in football and boast great facilities (Alta, Jordan and PG have artificial-surface fields). These days, when players can take advantage of open-enrollment, they can also attract athletes.

Hillcrest chose to make do with the talent it had, and there was plenty. The Huskies had one of their biggest offensive and defensive lines in years, but had just a 43-man varsity roster. Injuries

hurt the team. Still, most everyone got to play and make their mark.

“We played a lot of juniors,” said coach Merhish. “If you look at it that way, it was a building year. But a lot of teams in our region were having great years. We played hard, but it made for a difficult season.”

Coach Merhish said he hoped his team could win all four of its non-region games, and then hope for the best within Region 4.

Hillcrest finished 2-2 in non-region contests, beating

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## HILLCREST FOOTBALL: 2009 Season In Review

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neighborhood rival Murray 27-21, and then crushing Lehi 41-0. The Huskies dropped their opener to Olympus 10-7, and then lost a tough battle to Kearns, 14-7, in the homecoming game later in the year.

The region games didn't go as well. Ironically, the Huskies started against the toughest region teams, and struggled moving the ball. But the team showed improvement.

Against Brighton, quarterback **Tanner Kemp** hit **Matt Pecht** on an 80-yard touchdown pass to start the game. Kicker **Jeff Brown** added a field goal and the Huskies had a 10-0 lead.

Against American Fork, the Huskies' offense was unstoppable in the second quarter, scoring 22 points, but gave up two kickoff returns for touchdowns in a 51-35 loss.

"In those games, we were fired up," Merhish said. "The kids wanted to put on their best show. It was our last hurrah. There was a resurgence. We wanted to make plays."

By that time, however, Hillcrest's problem was that the team didn't resemble the one that started the season.

In the annual Green-White game, senior QB **Aaron Colborn** was injured, and that prevented him from actively competing against Kemp, a junior who started every game and showed promise for next year.

The team stayed mostly at full strength until taking on Lone Peak. There, season-ending injuries to WR **Danny Thompson**, LB **Nick Merhish** and Pecht proved costly.

"That took a huge toll on the team," said coach Merhish. "We lost our best performers. It gave the team a helpless feeling."

Thompson had been the team's leading receiver, and demanded attention from opponents whenever he was on the field. Merhish was the team's top tackler and Pecht



Jared Wetzel, left, and Nick Merhish were among Hillcrest players injured during the year.



Colborn



Pecht



Thompson

came back to be part of some big plays.

It took time for the team to adjust, but some good things happened.

**Liam Smith** took over for Merhish and joined **Dylan Ford** in making tackles all over the field. Their efforts gave coach Merhish high hopes for 2010 since all three players are underclassmen. Pecht and **Bridger Dallimore** became solid leaders, and punter **Connor Phelps** led the region in punting.

Overall, the team didn't reach its preseason goals (to improve on the previous year's 3-7 record, and didn't make the post-season), but it was a learning experience that still gave the players plenty of good memories.

And, for the players coming back next season, they know much they'll need to improve to make a difference in the "SEC."