



Sharon Tungji El Estoque Illustration

33

OUT OF THEIR LEAGUE

Football team finds difficulty in a new league

34-35

ORGANIZED CHAOS

Athletic trainer Marie Gishifu treats injuries across all sports

36-37

TAKING A BREAK

ACL tears shorten athletes' seasons

OUT OF THEIR LEAGUE

Higher division increases football injuries

BY NATHAN DESAI



Five.

Last year the varsity football team had an undefeated record of 5-0 in league games, ending the regular season on a six game winning streak. The Matadors never lost at home, had an average margin of victory of 26 points and only allowed 17.1 points per game.

But things are different this year. As of Nov. 6, the team is 0-5, currently on a seven game losing streak despite winning their opening game at Alameda High School. They have yet to win at home, have lost their games by an average of 27.9 points and have only scored 18.3 points per game.

The clear difference between last year and this year is their league. Champions of the El Camino League in 2013, MVHS was promoted to the more competitive De Anza League this season.

Despite being promoted for their success last season, MVHS has had difficulty this year. It's clear that the team lost some key players after graduation, including class of 2014 alumnus Justin Cena, with the school record for rushing yards in a season with 1,550 in 2013. It is also inevitable that the league is more difficult and the team is unfamiliar with the competition.

"Last year we won a lot more and this year we're not winning as much because we're playing [much] better teams," senior Sam Nastari said.

However, the problem may cut much deeper than that. It's an ailment that not only causes the team to struggle, but is also a byproduct of the Matadors' struggles in its new league: injuries.

MVHS has dealt with an extraordinary amount of football injuries this season. Although none have been particularly major, these injuries have thinned an already bare-bones roster, keeping some key players out of important games.

"I think [against] Saratoga [High School]

WHEN IT'S A SERIOUS HEALTH CONCERN, THAT'S WHEN CHANGES NEED TO BE APPLIED. *senior Sam Nastari*

— a team we easily could have beaten if we had our full team — we had 11 players injured and I believe seven of those were starters," Nastari said. "It hurts you mentally because you know you could be beating that team."

It is clear that the injuries keep MVHS from reaching their potential in the De Anza league, as they have to play games without a considerable portion of their roster. However, the tougher league also contributes to the team's struggles as the Matadors often find themselves outmatched, which can lead to injuries.

"Size alone causes that problem," head

coach Jeff Mueller said. "The fact [is] that the kids we are playing are a lot bigger than us."

MVHS has nine players that weigh at least 200 pounds, with the heaviest weighing 265. Wilcox High School has 15 players that weigh at least 200 pounds, four of which weigh at least 265 pounds.

Obviously MVHS' injuries are a major health concern and the Santa Clara Valley Athletic League — which oversees the De Anza League and El Camino League — has adapted the bylaws to prevent these kinds of problems from occurring in future seasons.

According to Mueller, league realignment will now depend on conditions such as how many players are graduating in addition to a team's overall performance.

Though the changes are to be implemented now, Nastari believes that they should have been instituted before.

"I have nothing against good competition," he said. "I love facing really good competition. It's fun to be challenged and it's good to face losing sometimes. But when it's a serious health concern, that's when changes need to be applied and that's something that should have happened."

In spite of the new bylaws, MVHS' problems this season have them in dead last in the De Anza League and Mueller foresees a regulation awaiting the Matadors at the end of the season.

"I would expect us to be back in the El Camino [League next year]," Mueller said.

n.desai@elestoque.org