

John Dudley: Lustig pushes passion, improvement at Edinboro

By [John Dudley](#)
[814-870-1677](#)

Erie Times-News

EDINBORO -- Week 1 of the Justin Lustig era at Edinboro is in the books. It consisted of two days of spring football practice, a getting-to-know-you with the new coaching staff, and some early installs on offense, defense and special teams.

It also included some things that aren't in the playbook. It included a moment at the end of Thursday's workout at Sox Harrison Stadium during which Lustig talked to his players about posture and appearance.

He folded his arms across his chest, as if to seem aloof or disinterested, then told them he never wanted to see them doing that on the practice field.

"I think this is a game that the harder you try and the more passion you have, the better you do," he explained later. "I don't think there's a lot of sports like that. Basketball -- the harder I try to shoot a jump shot, there's nothing good that's going to happen. But the harder you try to run to the ball on defense, you're going to make some plays."

Lustig is trying to build something at Edinboro. Really, he's trying to rebuild it. A once-proud and successful program bottomed out last fall with an 0-11 record that cost Lustig's predecessor, Scott Browning, his job.

The rebuilding effort officially began Tuesday, with players rolling out of bed for 7 a.m. practice that moved at a pace and with an intensity unlike anything they had previously seen. Talk about a wake-up call.

Lustig got his players' collective attention long before this week, though.

"The very first meeting he came in and was yelling and screaming," said rising junior wide receiver Alex Caratelli, who caught 52 passes for 837 yards and eight touchdowns in 2015. "He's a very high-energy guy, a fast-paced guy. He had us sit up straight, look at him. It was just a lot different."

The message is simple -- "Rise Up." It's also the team's motto for 2016. No one knows how quickly that might happen. The PSAC West is relentless. It grinds middling teams into hamburger.

But the trigger for any positive change is believing it can happen. On that front, Lustig appears to have scored some early wins.

"Basically, we want to show people we're not a laughingstock," said rising senior defensive lineman Josh Kibbie, who had team highs of 74 tackles, 10 tackles for loss and 6 1/2 sacks in 2015. "Yeah, we were 0-11. But there's a lot of games that could have gone our way. If those games go our way, the season's different. People's attitudes change, because when you keep losing, everybody's head goes down."

Aside from changing attitudes, Lustig is looking for answers this spring. Some of the questions revolve around finding playmakers on offense.

One of them could be incumbent QB Jake Sisson, who threw for 1,960 yards with 16 touchdowns and 16 interceptions as a sophomore in 2015.

"Install is just starting, so we haven't put much in yet," Sisson said, "but we're going to get very good at what we run."

Practice moved quickly Thursday. Players charged to spots on the field as one period ended and another began to the blast of an air horn. Rock music thumped and hollered over the stadium's public address system, something else that's new.

The new coaches include former NFL assistant Bobby Babich, who most recently was with the Browns. He's the defensive coordinator. Chris Limbach, who arrives from Division III Centre College, is the offensive coordinator.

The staff is young. The players say the coaches are filled with energy and enthusiasm.

"They're all guys that love football and care about the kids," Lustig said. "They really love the game. They want to live in that (football) office, and they don't mind grinding."

As Lustig knows, the grind is just beginning.

JOHN DUDLEY can be reached at 870-1677 or by john.dudley@timesnews.com. Follow him on Twitter at twitter.com/ETNdudley.