

# CLIPPER SPORTS

## Lavadier takes it snap by snap with Rifles

Football newcomer from Sagkeeng First Nation earns spot with Winnipeg junior club

By Tony Zerucha

Casius Lavadier has only been playing football for a relatively short while, but he's already making a big impact on the gridiron. Lavadier, a 6-1, 317-pound offensive lineman from Sagkeeng First Nation, is a rookie with the Winnipeg Rifles of the Canadian Junior Football League. He joins a Rifles

team that hopes to build on a playoff appearance in 2022.

Lavadier only began playing football in 2021. Friends first encouraged him to try out, but he stuck with it once he saw how much his family enjoyed watching him play. After two seasons with the St. Vital Mustangs, Lavadier is ready to jump to the junior ranks.

"I love the intensity and action in junior football," Lavadier said. "I tried out for the Rifles because I wanted to play more competitive football. I really enjoyed it in the MMJFL and wanted to try out for the CJFL."

The third-biggest player on the roster, Lavadier has a chance to grow into a multi-faceted lineman. Rifles' starting quarterback Thomas Hubbard loves to scramble and move around the backfield. The new running back, Kaiden Banfield, ran for 150 yards in his debut contest and looks to revive a running game that has been ineffective for the past few seasons.

Head coach Geordie Wilson, knowing that he has an explosive running game for the first time in his tenure, will look to free up receivers who were previously double-covered. These three factors will challenge Lavadier and his fellow linemen to excel in all aspects of the game.

That opportunity builds on Lavadier's existing motivation level, which was already high after a busy off-season.

"Recruiting was very nerve-wracking," he admitted. "Being a first-time rookie in such a big tryout camp was such a great experience. To make the team over all of those talented players was definitely motivating."

The Rifles' offensive line excelled in the season opener, winning 20-16 in Edmonton over the Wildcats. They faced a big challenge against the perennial powerhouse Saskatchewan Hilltops in their home opener on Aug. 20.

Whatever unfolds in 2023, Lavadier looks forward to learning as much as he can so he has even better years in the future.

"My goal for this year is to become better overall,"

Lavadier said. "I feel like I have so much room for improvement, and I'm going to keep going. I've never thought about my future football career, but I'm going to keep playing for as

long as I enjoy the sport." Lavadier and receiver Aiden Avanthay from Lac du Bonnet are the only two players from North Eastman on the Rifles squad this year.



Winnipeg Rifles

Rookie Casius Lavadier has only been playing football since 2021.



## Hole In One

Photo submitted

Black Bear Golf Club owner Allan Gould (right) congratulates Bert Berard on registering a hole in one on Aug. 9. Berard scored the ace on the fourth hole (135 yards) at Black Bear with an eight iron.



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