Wausau West assistant Josh Nowitzke gives the instructions for an agility drill. Warriors players wore mesh shirts that said “Iron River 2012”—Wausau West is a regular at the Iron County camp.

IRON RIVER—As hot as it’s been, summer is moving along. In just a few weeks, footballs will be flying through the air.

They were last week at West Iron County High School’s practice field, where 140 grid hopefuls honed their skills and fought off the heat during the annual Iron County Football Camp.

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The turnout was about 60 less than last year, with two teams deciding late not to make the trip. But the ratio of players to coaches was still strong.

“The kids got a lot of reps in on both offense and defense,” said West Iron Coach Mike Berutti, the camp director, “and were able to play three different schools each day in 7-on-7 competition.”

The grid campers coped with temperatures in the low 90s on the first day of camp, July 16. Between drills, players went to a table where personnel from NorthStar Health Systems had big tubs of bottled water plus apples. A nearby water station offered a cooling soak of the head before the next drill.

Forest Park Coach Bill Santilli noted that he didn’t use the umbrella he had at last year’s camp—but just in case, it was in his truck. A good reminder that it can be hot when practices start in early August.

The final two days were milder, with highs in the upper 70s. “One day, we can handle,” said Camp Director Mike Berutti. “Last year, three days in a row drained them. But one day was probably good for those kids to get out there and sweat like they did.”

There were no heat-related problems, and NorthStar’s people were ready with ice bags or tape when needed. “We’re very fortunate to have the local hospital take an interest in our athletic program,” Berutti said. ”Peg James did a great job of organizing this.”

Each day started with offensive practice. During the lunch break, players got a full meal at the Stambaugh Elementary cafeteria and then gathered in the gym to listen to a guest speaker.

This year’s speakers were Rob Boss, Northern Michigan’s offensive line coach, and Jerry Pangrazzi from the local area, former Marquette High School coach and athletic director. There

was no speaker on Wednesday, due to a shortened schedule.

Then, back to work. In the afternoon, they worked on defensive skills, followed by 7-on-7 passing drills.

The faculty featured several familiar faces, including renowned offensive line Coach Carl "Buck" Nystrom; Ken Klein, Lake Linden's new JV coach and former Michigan Tech assistant; and Joe Ballard, Northern Michigan running backs coach.

The entire West Iron staff was on hand along with Forest Park Coach Santilli, Iron Mountain Coach Robin Martilla, Andy Crouch of Lake Linden, plus Wausau West's Kevin Grundy all his assistants and a big contingent of Warrior players, wearing "Iron River 2012" mesh practice jerseys.

"Four of us have worked all 14 years," said Berutti. "It's amazing, when you're doing a camp like this, how little turnover we've had with the coaching staff."

Berutti said 35 Wykons (varsity plus JV) took part in the camp. Missing were some freshmen and others who had scheduling conflicts.

The Wykons coach said he saw improvement from those who were there. Each team had a chance to run plays among themselves—and that's a lot different from running wind sprints.

"Even though they were becoming sore," Berutti said, "they seemed to become more fluid in their movements." Suddenly, reads and responsibilities on different plays were foremost in their minds.

"Probably the biggest thing, I thought by Wednesday they finally were really turning it up a notch on their competitiveness. Early in the week, I didn't see as much of that."

They will be tuning it up all the more soon, as the start of practices and the new season are now just a few weeks away. A good time to start focusing on football.

"I've told everybody over the past several years," Santilli said, "that you can't compare that camp, for the cost, to any other that I know of. Very quality coaches. I challenge that for $50 for three days from anywhere in the nation.

"So my hat's off to Mike—he's built a reputation with this camp, the number of kids and the coaches who attend. And it runs very smoothly."