August 2020

A SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT TO

THE ST. CLAIR TIMES

Team Pre-Game Previews

**Football Team Photos** 

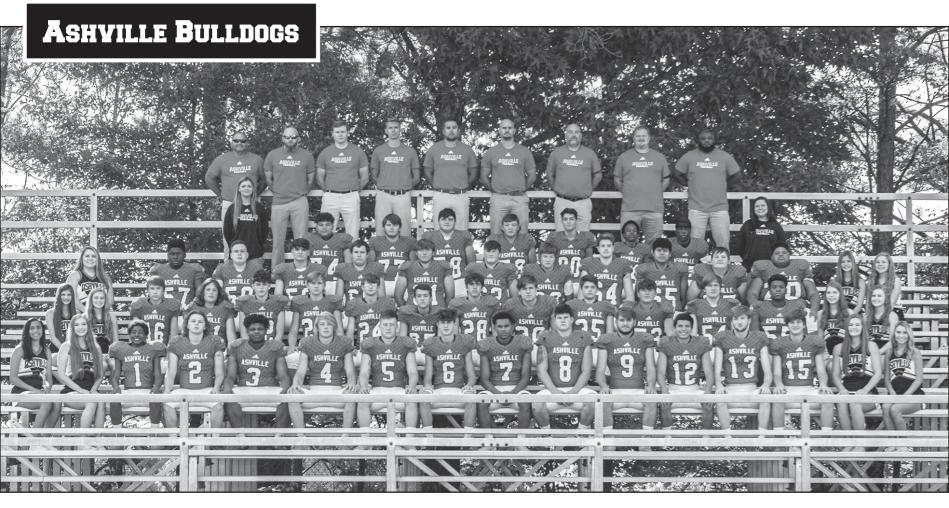


**HIGH SCHOOL BAND PHOTOS** 

GAME SCHEDULES

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## New coach hopes to build culture after 15 years of turnover at Ashville

#### FROM STAFF REPORTS

**ASHVILLE** – In the past two seasons, the Ashville Bulldogs have a 4-16 record, and the four wins have come against two teams – Ragland and Vincent.

With a new season on the horizon, the Bulldog nation is hoping a new head coach can bring about change and get the Bulldogs into the state playoffs.

#### Shea Monroe

After spending the past two seasons as offensive coordinator at Ashville, Shea Monroe is the new head football coach. Monroe, 32, is a 2007 graduate of Grayson High School in Loganville,

Georgia.

He attended Jacksonville State University for his undergraduate degree and earned a master's in special education from Ball State.

Monroe was head football coach at Westbrook Christian in 2017 for two games, and his record was 0-2.

#### COVID-19

With all of the uncertainties about the coronavirus, Monroe said the biggest thing COVID-19 has affected is the team's scheduling.

"Throughout the summer, we were not able to have any competitions," he said. "We have had multiple groups come into the weight room and do conditioning, which has been tough. We as coaches have been giving up a lot more of our time to ensure that all of our athletes were getting into the weight room. That was a challenge, but it has been good."

Monroe said dealing with the virus has been tough because no one saw this coming and no one knew how to handle it.

#### Team motto

Monroe said the Bulldogs have developed a team motto called "FUEL," which stands for Fight Until Excuses Leave.

"We need to quit having so many excuses about why we can't do things at Ashville and just start doing them,"

Monroe said. "When we started this summer, I told the guys before they start thinking about winning, they have to learn to play really hard, every game. I think if we can do that, and trust each other, then we will be fine and be successful."

#### Team strengths

Monroe said right now, it would be players at key skill positions and overall skill.

"Cole Hyatt (linebacker/running back) has had a phenomenal offseason," Monroe said. "He is not the flashiest guy,

See Bulldogs, Page 4





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#### Bulldogs

From Page 2

but he works hard. Hunter Pyle (defensive back), Hunter Brown (linebacker), Luke Harris (running back/linebacker), Adriane Hernandez will be important at our skill positions."

#### Team weaknesses

Monroe said depth at certain positions is definitely a weakness the Aggies will have to work on.

"We will be thin at some spots, but I really like where we are at as far as overall numbers," he said. "We have a young football team, which is a good thing. After losing 13 seniors last year, we only have seven seniors this year."

#### Class 4A, Region 6

The Bulldogs are in Class 4A, Region 6 with Dora, Etowah, Fultondale, Good Hope, Hanceville and Oneonta. Monroe said the team to beat in the region is definitely Etowah, who moved down from 5A.

"Our region, top to bottom, is very competitive," Monroe said. "Oneonta and Good Hope will be in the mix as well."

Team goals

#### **ASHVILLE**

8/21, Oak Grove 8/28, @ Southeastern 9/4, Good Hope 9/11, @ Oneonta 9/18, @ Etowah 9/25, St. Clair County 10/2, Open 10/9, @ Dora 10/16, Hanceville 10/23, Fultondale 10/30, @ Weaver

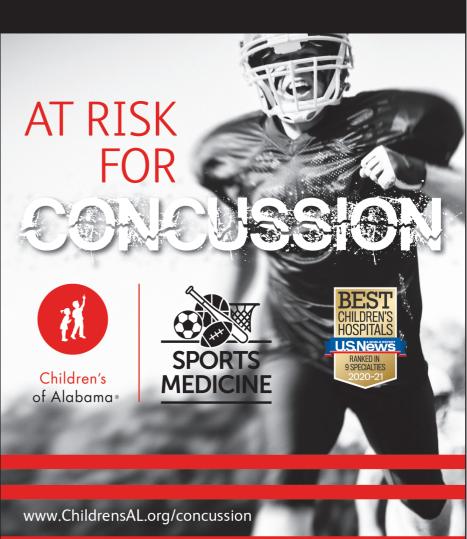
Monroe said the team goal is to play as hard as it can every game.

"We want to build a culture of love," he said. "We want unity in our program. Ashville has had so much turnover. I believe I am the seventh head football coach in the past 15 years. We want to make our community proud and play as hard as we can every Friday night."

#### Keys to a successful season

Monroe said in order to be successful this season, his guys have to stay healthy.

"That's the first thing," he said. "And then, we will have to have a little bit of luck and hope the ball bounces our way at times. ... We have to play hard every play in every game."



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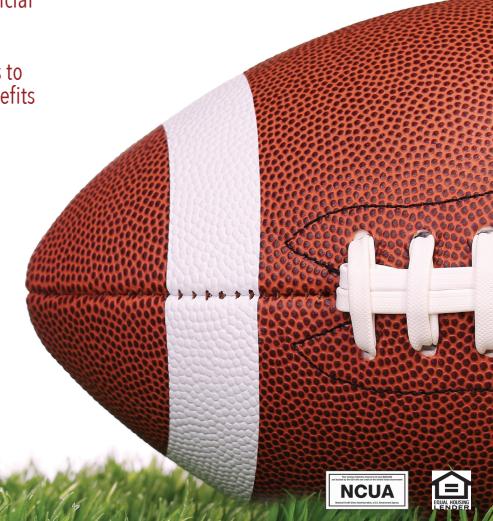
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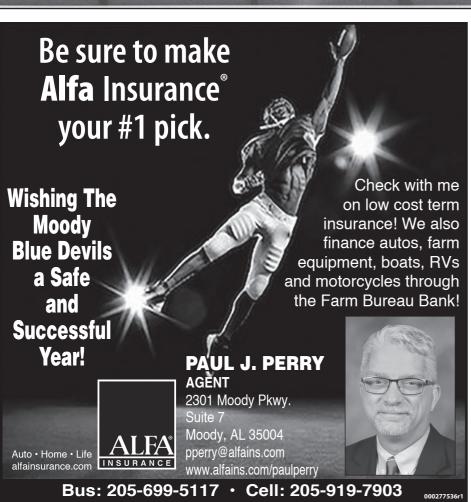
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#### Leeds primed to field much-improved team in 2020

BY JIMMY CREED Special to the St. Clair Times

Jerry Hood was loving life as an assistant coach at Briarwood Christian School in early June 2019 when one of the greatest coaching challenges of his career was presented to him.

After a period of dominance under Keith Etheridge that saw the Leeds Green Wave win four state championships in eight years, the program had fallen on hard times, and just three seasons after Etheridge's departure, Leeds was already looking for another new coach.

The school found its man in Hood, who turned Clay-Chalkville into a perennial championship contender in eight seasons as head coach before stepping away after the 2016 campaign.

"I was not looking to leave Briarwood," Hood said. "I was very, very happy with the situation there and I could see myself ending my career there as an assistant to coach Matthew Forester.

"Then this thing at Leeds came up,

and at the end of the day, I felt like it was going to be one of the better challenges I would ever have a chance to undertake. It was the same kind of thing that happened at Clay-Chalkville. They had fallen on a little bit of hard times, and we came in and started building and doing things a different way. We rallied the school community and the city together, and the same thing is happening at Leeds."

That could be bad news for the other seven teams that join Leeds in Class 5A, Region 6 this season even though the Green Wave stepped back up a level after the Alabama High School Athletic Association's most recent realignment.

Joining the Green Wave will be Alexandria, Center Point, Corner, Hayden, Lincoln, Moody and St. Clair County, and those new region mates shouldn't be too surprised if the Leeds team they face this season is light years better than the squads that went 2-8 last year and 3-7 in 2018. In fact, Hood guarantees this team will be much-improved whatever the season's final outcome

might be.

We tell the kids that if they have confidence and believe in doing the work, and if we're good enough on Friday night, then we will start winning ballgames," Hood said. "If we don't have confidence or don't believe in ourselves enough, then we won't win, but it will not be because we didn't do the work.

"The No. 1 thing I stress is that we will never lose a ballgame because we didn't work properly to win the ballgame, and that hard work in itself will make us

Hood has plenty of reasons to be excited about the prospects for this season because the timing of how things played out in 2019 meant a lot of talented players got to play at an early age.

When Hood met his team for the first time June 6, 2019, there were only 26 players on the roster, and though that number had risen to 48 by season's end, the Green Wave still lost only four seniors to graduation. So most of the starting spots went to underclassmen, including

a handful of eighth- and ninth-graders.

One of those was Jeremiah Hunter, who started at linebacker as a freshman last season and will now be asked to fill big brother Jakobi's shoes as the starting tailback. The 5-10, 195-pound sophomore is "going to be a really good running back for us," Hood said.

Hunter will team with 6-0, 175-pound junior Jamal Jordan, a talented athlete who played basketball previously but has come out for football for the first time. Together, the two will form what Hood believes will be a "very solid" tandem in the Green Wave backfield.

At quarterback, sophomore Jarod Latta returns for what will be the third season he has started at least some games at the position. Latta started three games as an eighth-grader then held down the spot full-time last season despite hitting some rough spots at times.

"He just wasn't ready to learn all that we needed to throw at him, but he

See Wave, Page 9







#### **David Miller**

Mayor of Leeds

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#### Wave

From Page 8

has dedicated himself and changed his body completely for this season and looks really good," Hood said. "He's throwing the ball better, he's a hundred times stronger than he was and he really understands our offense. So now we will be able to do just about whatever we want offensively."

Much of that could include throwing the ball a lot to a talented receiving corps that will feature returnees Tucker Jones at tight end and Brody Goodman at receiver, joined by newcomer Josh Ruff, who joins the Green Wave after previously playing at St. Clair County. Hood calls the 6-0 Ruff a difference maker and said he is impressed with the overall

pass-catching and running abilities of all three.

"We have one that runs exceptionally well and two that run really well," Hood said. "I hope that area will be a muchimproved part of our team this year."

Úp front, 5-10, 295pound DeAndre Oden is the anchor at left tackle, and he's joined by another returning starter at left guard in Jackson Bartee. Rounding out the offensive line is Aidan Howard at center, Alex Bradford, who started every game last season as a freshman, at right guard and a duo of Tyrone Townes and B.J. Davis, who are competing for the starting spot at right tackle.

On defense, the front line in Leeds' 4-3 scheme will be anchored by senior Cameron Vines, who is one of the leaders on the defense and the entire team. He'll be joined at

defensive tackle by 320-pound senior CJ Walton, who moves over from the offensive line. The defensive ends will be Kavion Henderson, who started as an eighth-grader in 2019, and Cam Dunklin, a player Hood calls "an unbelievable athlete," who started at several different positions last season.

At linebacker, the Green Wave has the experience of three senior starters -- Jacob Cain, Keylan Jones and Justus Pettus -- but will have to play a lot of younger kids there for depth and to get them experience when they will be called on to fill the gaps in 2021.

The secondary will have a completely different look with sophomore safety CJ Douglas being the unit's most experienced player and the one who makes all the on-field calls and adjustments. Another player who has

shown great promise at safety is 6-5 senior Mekhi Jones, who didn't join the team until the fifth game last season. Hood loves having his height and his leaping ability back deep.

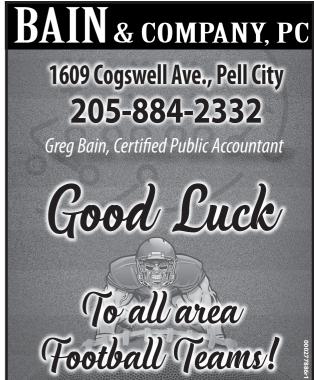
The cornerback spots will be manned by Tanner Chambers and Fredlando

"All these kids give us a shot to be good back there," Hood said. "We are definitely more athletic and way faster in the secondary than we were last year."

On special teams, Bartee will handle the place-kicking and kickoff duties, and Daniel Hood will be the punter.

"I am excited about these kids, and we will be better," Hood said. "Whether that means an unbelievably surprising record or whether we just show improvement, I don't know. But I do know I was not happy about last year and do not want to be 2-8 again, and I don't think our kids do, either. So I think when it's

all said and done this season, the Leeds folks will be very, very proud of this football team."





#### **LEEDS**

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10/23, Alexandria

10/30, Open



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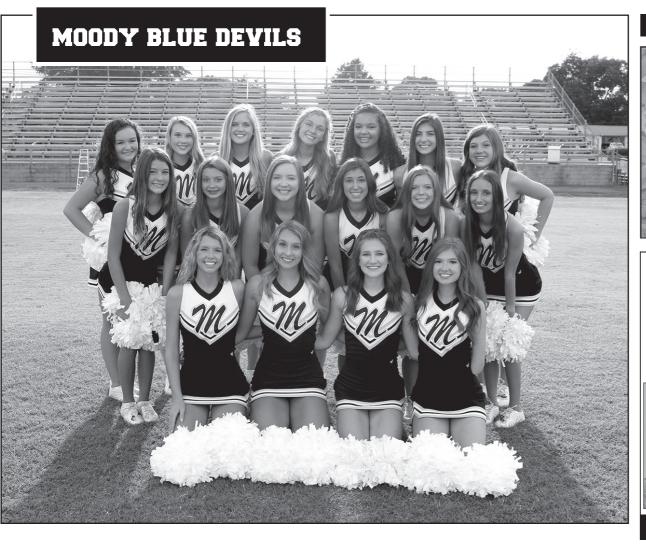


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#### Moody will take field for 2020 with 11 new faces on defense

BY JIMMY CREED Special to the St. Clair Times

As coach Adam Wallace sat at the Moody Blue Devils football banquet last spring and watched as 19 seniors were honored for their career contributions to the program, a startingly realization began to hit home.

As Wallace began to tick off the defensive starters from a squad that went 4-6 in 2019, he counted three, then five, then seven and kept going all the way to 11, and that's not a misprint folks. The third-year coach and his defensive staff find themselves in the unique situation of having to replace all 11 starters on

Even faced with what many might

consider one of the most daunting of football tasks, Wallace is still excited about the 2020 season.

"If you had asked me five months ago when we had just given away 19 jerseys to 19 seniors who had played a lot for us, especially on defense, I wouldn't have been so excited," Wallace said. "We were all just sitting there shaking our heads and saying, 'That's a lot to replace.' But just like every year, you have young kids that grow up, they work hard, they get stronger and they are able to slide into those spots. So as a coach, you're always excited about that."

One of those players is defensive end Chris Horne, a 5-10, 190pound senior who saw considerable action last season. He is one of the players Wallace and defensive coordinator Brandon Campbell expect to be one of their leaders on their revamped unit.

Two others who fall into that category are inside linebackers Taylor Rothe and John McDonald. Rothe is a senior, and McDonald a junior.

"Taylor is a really good player, but he's been sitting behind other really good players who were older than him," Wallace said. "So he's chomping at the bit to finally get his opportunity to get out there.

"Both of those guys are going to be good. Usually, success comes with hard work, and those two guys have worked as hard as any two we have

See Devils, Page 14

Go Blue Devils!





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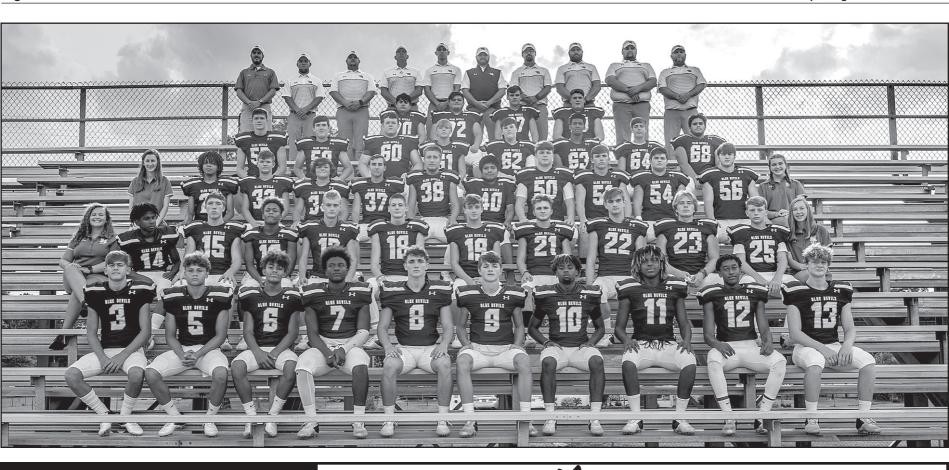


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#### **Devils**

From Page 12

out there this year."

In the secondary, one of the most unique additions to the team is 5-8, 145pound safety Parker Dodd, a three-time state qualifier in wrestling who is playing football for the first time as a senior. Wallace said Dodd has "fallen in love with" football as he's progressed this summer.

"I don't think he's missed a day of workouts. He's learning the position and he's breaking on the ball well," Wallace said. "He's a kid I'm looking to have a big year for us in the secondary."

Wallace describes Dodd as a tough kid who loves to hit people, and that's a huge plus considering the position he will play.

"A lot of times a safety is your last line of defense, and they've got to get somebody to the ground or else it's a touchdown," Wallace said. "With Parker's background in wrestling, I think we are good there."

On offense, another new starter with a familiar name will be counted on heavily to make the Blue Devil attack go. Sophomore AJ Wallace, the coach's son, will be under center and looking to build on the small amount of action he saw as a freshman

"He's got a great arm, he understands the game and he makes quick decisions," said Wallace, who points out AJ has really been preparing for this moment all his life. "He's heard me over the years coach and talk to kids. He's sat in quarterback meetings for years, so when I say something, he has heard it before and understands it.

"A 10th-grade quarter-

back will make some great plays, and he's going to have some plays he will wish he could have back. But he'll learn as he goes, and I think he will do a great job."

Another new starter in the backfield will be Nick Burrell, a 5-8, 155-pound junior who succeeds 1,000-yard rusher Terrence Moore at the running back spot.

"I look for Nick to have a big year for us," Wallace said. "He had a big JV season last year but didn't see much varsity action because he sat behind Terrence. We're excited about Nick, and he's excited for it to be his turn to take the ball and go make plays for us."

Another player expected to raise the excitement level is senior wide receiver Logan Cole, who will line up in just about every skill

position on the field at some point this season. The 6-1, 180-pound Cole is a strong, physical player whom Wallace said "dominates people when he blocks" and isn't afraid to go looking for a defensive end or linebacker to cut down on a play.

But where Cole will literally leap out as a player is with his ball-catching skills, Wallace said.

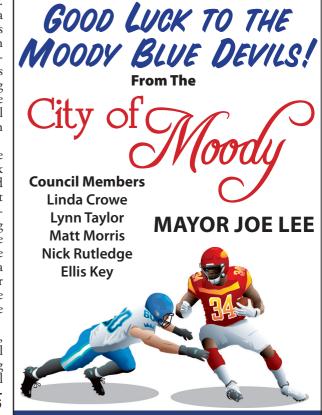
"He has done a great job this summer of going up and high-pointing balls and catching them over people," Wallace said. "He had a good junior year for us, and I believe he is going to follow that up with a great senior year."

Up front, Moody will rely on junior Logan Suggs, who moves from guard to center, and sophomore left tackle Mason Myers, who started nine games as a freshman last season to bring the unit together. At 6-4, 260, Myers is a three-sport athlete who has a bright future ahead in any of them, but particularly football, while Suggs is another with a wrestling background who has made himself a better football player by working hard in the weight room.

"I have been here three years and I don't think Logan Suggs has missed one workout, and that includes when he was wrestling and we were doing 6 a.m. workouts in the winter," Wallace said. "He has turned himself into a really good football player by getting stronger in the weight room and more explosive on the field."

On special teams, Christian Sierra will handle the place-kicking duties, Connor Speigel will

See Devils, Page 16





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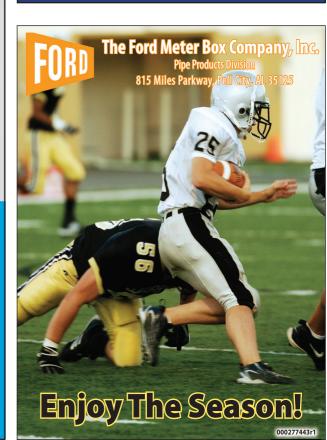
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#### **Devils**

From Page 14

kickoff and newcomer Landen Echols will

punt as well as play linebacker.

With Alabama High School Athletic Association realignment, Moody moves from super tough Class 5A, Region 5, which included two-time defending state champ Central of Clay County, Mortimer Jordan, Center Point and Sylacauga, into 5A, Region 6. While Center Point and St. Clair County moved with Moody into 5A-6, newcomers to the Blue Devils' region schedule will be Alexandria, Corner, Hayden, Leeds and Lincoln.

And even though his team will face this new challenge with newcomers in key positions on offense and an entirely new starting lineup on defense, Wallace is optimistic about the prospects.

#### MOODY

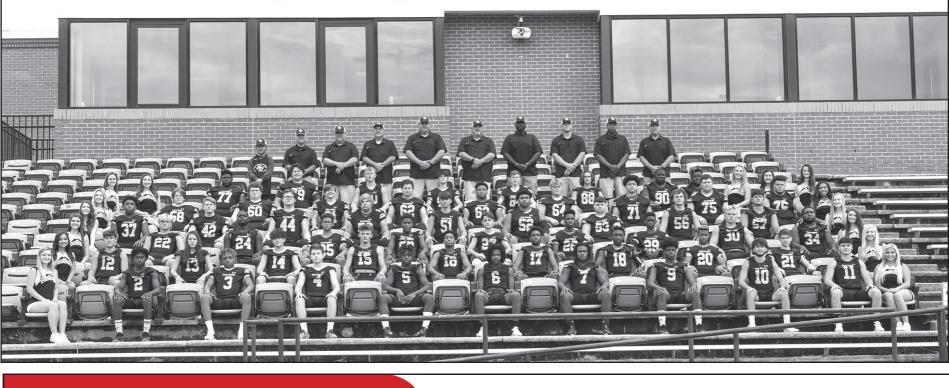
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"Those 11 seniors on defense and those 19 seniors overall left this program in much better shape than they got it," Wallace said. "We're going to miss those guys, but we have a lot of guys who are ready to step up to lead us to new heights as well."



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#### Special teams could be key in Pell City's quest for improvement

BY JIMMY CREED
Special to the St. Clair Times

If the Pell City Panthers rebound in 2020 from a tough 2-8 finish last season, it may be in large part because they get some really special play from their special teams.

That's the assessment of third-year head coach Wayne Lee, who has placed extra emphasis on the "other" part of the game as his Panthers prepare for their Aug. 28 season opener at Leeds.

"We always talk about it, but sometimes we don't do a real good job of coaching it, and it's real close to being a third of the game," Lee said. "This year, we've got some returners who can help us and some kickers who can help us, so we really want to pick up the pace there."

Lee is particularly excited about the kick returning duo of junior Kentrell Borden and senior Carson Walker, two starting receivers who will handle kickoff and punt return duties. Both players will be on the field for kickoff returns, and

Borden will be the No. 1 punt returner.

"They are both pretty fast, and we feel like we will have some chances to break some plays with those guys returning the ball," Lee said.

Lee is also excited about a threeway battle among Gannon Osborne, Jake Blackstone and Sailor Richard for the various kicking positions. All are experienced soccer players who have come out for the football team for the first time.

"A lot of times, you're hoping to find just one kicking prospect, and we've got three," Lee said. "We're probably going to use them all in some different ways, and that's really exciting, too."

Walker will also handle the punting duties, and senior Matt Frey will figure in the kickoff return rotation as well.

"If you can flip the field in a close game or get a return that gives you a shorter field, that enhances your chances of scoring," Lee said. "If you can kick the ball in the end zone consistently, the chances of them driving 80 yards gives the advantage to the defense. So it's an opportunity we hope to be able to take advantage of to help us win some more ballgames this year."

Wins were hard to come by last season, but it wasn't from lack of execution, Lee said. In fact, he had his coaching staff review the film from all 10 games last year, and that review convinced them their players did a lot of things right in 2019 and, there is plenty to build on in 2020.

"We realized that some of the stuff we did well you couldn't tell in the game against some of the people we played," Lee said. "We might not have run as fast or been as flashy as some of our opponents, but our kids were doing the right things. But one of our major downfalls last year was giving up too many big plays.

"Our coaches have really been preaching to the kids that when they have a chance to make a play, they have to make the play. If they've got a chance to catch a ball, they've got to catch it. If they've got a chance to make a tackle, they've got to

make it if we are going to win ballgames this season."

That chance for introspection and reflection, for that deep dive back into last season's action, has been one of the positives of the prolonged layoff brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic for Pell City.

Even though his team was unable to gather and work out in its usual offseason fashion, there was still work that could be done to improve, and the results really hit home with Lee and his staff.

"We were a little nervous about not having any 7-on-7 camps, but it's really been good," Lee said. "We've actually been able to spend more time working on us and fixing what we need to fix instead of trying to go and win a 7-on-7 game. That's good practice. But it's not the same as Friday night, and that's really what we need to be getting ready for."

The Panthers return six offensive starters and only three on defense, but there

See Panthers, Page 21





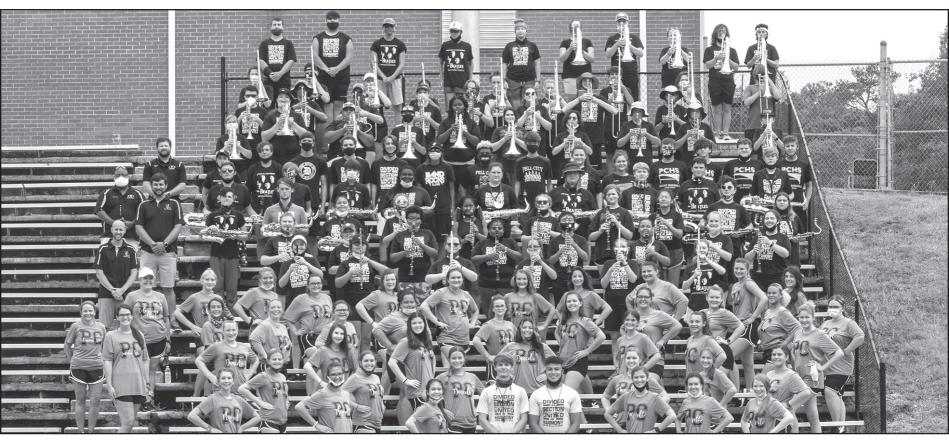
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#### **Panthers**

From Page 18

is still excitement across the board about the squads that will take the field on both sides of the ball this season, starting with a big, strong defensive front.

Anchoring the unit in the 3-4 scheme will be 310-pound nose tackle Jalen Gilbert, and he will be joined by 290-pound DeDrick Scott, 250-pound Brillance Swift, whom Lee calls "the strongest player I have ever coached," Ben Smith, Jameson Wood and Tyler McFadden.

At linebacker, Frey and Drew Sisson will hold down the inside spots, while two of the Panthers' better athletes, Brain Keller and Bryson Clough, will man the outside spots. The depth at the position will come in the form of several younger players, but Lee is happy to have it.

In the secondary, Walker and Harrison Fausnaugh are returning starters at cornerback, and back deep at the safety spots the Panthers will

rely on sophomores Jayden Coleman and Carlos Herring. Borden will play a lot in the secondary in

See Panthers, Page 22



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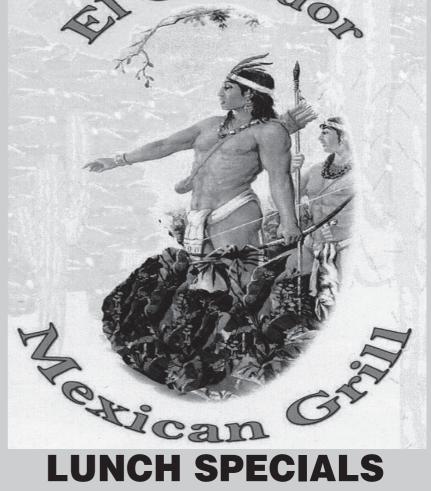
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#### **Panthers**

From Page 21

obvious passing situations as well.

"Most of the time, if I knew I was starting two sophomores at safety, I'd be like, 'Oh my goodness!'" Lee said. "But these are really smart kids that have put in the time watching film and learning what we are trying to do, and I'm really looking forward to some big things out of those guys."

On offense, the Panthers will have a new quarterback in 5-10, 175-pound junior Baylor Smith, who comes with something Lee particularly likes in his signal caller — strong decision-making

"A smart kid at quarterback is a plus, and I just really like the ability Baylor has as a decision maker," Lee said.

Running back is the deepest position the Panthers have going into the 2020 season, with returning starter and senior David Keith (5-9, 190) atop the depth chart in Pell City's one-back offensive scheme. Frey will play there, as will Keller and Markeis Bradford, and Panther fans should expect to see all four of them get carries on Friday night.

Up front, where only 6-3, 235-pound

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Sept. 4, @ Southside
Sept. 11, @ Talladega
Sept. 18, vs. Oxford
Sept. 25, @ Calera
Oct. 2, @ Arab,
Oct. 9, @ Springville
Oct. 16, vs. Fort Payne
Oct. 23, vs. Scottsboro
Oct. 30, vs. Mae Jemison

senior tackle Ryan Aldridge is a returning starter, there is some uncertainty, and the Panthers will bring Gilbert and Scott over from the defensive line to start on offense as well. Rounding out the unit will be Byron Moon and Lane Burns.

Still, with a combination of experienced starters, some talented younger players and newcomers added to the mix -- and those "special" special teams -- Lee believes this Panthers team will certainly improve on last year's mark.

"We have really worked on eliminating mistakes because I believe we are going to be in a lot of close football games this year, and if we can eliminate the mistakes and the turnovers, we will improve," Lee said. "That's what we plan on doing for sure."



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### **We Love Our** RAGLAND Purple Devils

#### Ragland coach **Derrick Sewell hopes** third year is the charm

BY GARY HANNER Special to the St. Clair Times

Derrick Sewell is beginning his third year as head football coach at Ragland.

After going 4-6 in 2018 and 2-8 last year, Sewell is hoping Year 3 will be the charm in getting the Purple Devils back in the state playoffs.

Sewell, 33, attended Fort Payne High School and then went to college at Kentucky Wesleyan. He earned a bachelor's degree in history and then went through the fifth-year program at Jacksonville State University to earn his master's degree in 2012.

Before becoming head coach, he spent the previous two years as defensive coordinator at Ragland under previous Purple Devils head coach Brian Alred.

COVID-19

Sewell said the coronavirus has definitely forced the Purple Devils to be more aware of surfaces, how close they are to each other and, basically, just the way they try to do things.

"It was a big shot to us not to have spring practice," Sewell said. "We were not going to do spring the traditional way to begin with. We were not going to play a spring game simply due to the fact that we are very young.

'We were going to take 10 days and just work on ourselves. It hurt, and we are trying to play catchup on that right now."

Sewell said the biggest thing right now is the fear the virus has brought.

We have some parents who do not feel comfortable sending their kids to

See Devils, Page 27



Coach Brian Alred

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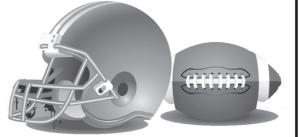


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Winterboro Sept. 11, vs.

Woodland

Sept. 25, vs. Gaston

Oct. 2, @ Donoho

Oct. 9, vs. Wadley Oct 16, @ TC

Central

Oct. 23, vs. Victory

Oct. 30, @ Asbury

#### **Devils**

From Page 23

practice, and I understand that," Sewell said. "I'm probably not as cautious in my daily life as I should be.

"We make sure no one gets in the weight room without first going through to be checked at our screening station set up in the front portion of the school. I make each player sanitize their hands in front of me. They get their temperature checked, and I ask them questions. If they can't answer 'no' to all of the questions, they are sent home and can't come back until they are symptom-free. Even if it's just allergies, or a sore throat, they are sent home.

"The hardest thing is keeping the players spaced out enough in the weight room where they do not need to keep their masks on while they are working out."

Sewell said when everyone is finished for the day, he comes back in with a backpack sprayer to clean and fog everything.

"There are habits we will continue to implement even when this pandemic is gone," he said. "It's the unknown right now with a possible update or guideline the next day. For a small school like us, it's tough because resources are not overflowing. I realized early in the summer that these kids had done nothing for three months. The first thing I needed to do was get them back in shape."

Class 1A, Region 5

The Purple Devils are in Class 1A, Region 5 with Donoho, Talladega County Central, Victory Christian, Wadley, Winterboro and Woodland.

According to Sewell, Winterboro is the team to beat in the region based on the players it has returning.

"They are the team we are all tracking down," he said.

#### Players lost from last year

Ragland lost 10 players from 2019 to graduation. Sewell noted the seniors led the way last year, but there were some situations and injuries they had to deal with.

"LaDarius Spikes was our leading rusher his junior year, but he transferred out before the season and went to Louisiana," Sewell said. "Brody Bice played both ways, and we lost him for the season in Week 2 due to an injury."

Sewell said the Purple Devils also lost their quarterback to injury in Week 2, and he was unable to play for three weeks.

"It forced us to play a younger guy, but it was a good thing as Owen Schall was able to learn on the fly," Sewell said. "It was better for him."

Sewell added Ragland also had a player who was its second-leading tackler the year before who decided not to play in 2019.

"If it could have gone wrong last year, it did," he said. "Now, we are a very young team and babies again. We have only six seniors this year, which means we will play a lot of young kids. You may see some freshmen on the field and maybe an eighthgrader or two."

#### Key players returning

Sewell mentioned Josh Phillips, Schall, Jakolbe Brewster and Jaxon Cox.

"We also have some new faces I believe will help us along the way," Sewell said.

#### Team strengths

Speed on the perimeter was the first thing Sewell said when discussing team strengths.

"We're not going to be very big up front, but I think we have some fast kids who can help us out defensively along the edge," Sewell said.

#### Team weaknesses

Youth and lack of depth is what Sewell described as team weaknesses for 2020.

"The desire to play football seems to be down a little bit everywhere," he said. "But when it goes down in a community like this and a school this size, it really reflects. Instead of getting off the bus with 35 freshmen to seniors, we will dress that number seventh grade to seniors. Our numbers are down and our society is changing. At one time, football built up small communities, but it is not that way anymore."

Team goals

Sewell said his team needs to get into the playoffs.

"Certainly, we would love to go 10-0," he said, "run the table and make it to the state championship game. But for us, our goals are to give ourselves a chance to win every Friday night and compete every week.

"Last year, I felt that at times, we were testing the water. If we didn't like how it felt, it affected our overall competitive nature.

"I want us to compete all four quarters and give ourselves a chance each week. Then, hopefully, get into the playoffs. I want this for our seniors. They have been with me for a long time. They have worked hard, and I would like to send them out that way."











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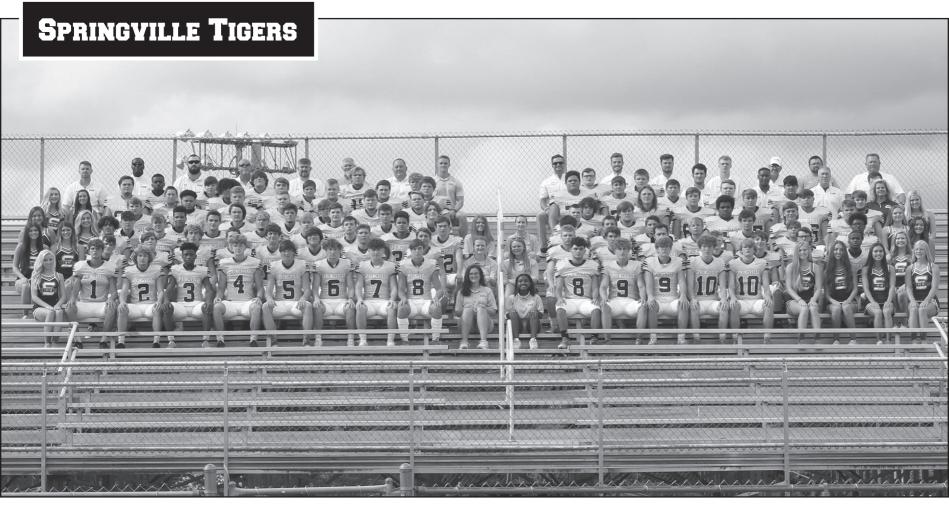
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## Springville eyes winning season, playoff berth in Year 3 of Graben era

BY GARY HANNER
Special to the St. Clair Times

After almost turning the corner in 2019, Springville head coach Michael Graben feels this can be the year the Tigers make the state playoffs.

Graben is starting his third year at Springville. The Tigers were 3-7 his first season and 4-6 last year.

#### Injuries last year

According to Graben, unforeseen injuries plagued Springville last year as Braden Hughes was hurt on the opening kickoff in Week 2 against Ashville.

"He was our best player who was a difference maker," Graben said. "He made 16 tackles in the win over Hayden in the season opener. Then he's lost for the rest of the season."

Graben said in the next game, the Tigers were trailing Sylacauga by three points late in the third quarter when a starting linebacker got a concussion and another linebacker tore his ACL.

"The next week against Clay-Central, another linebacker tears his ACL," Graben said. "We were down to playing 14-year-old kids. We still went 4-6 and had a call go against us that cost us a win. I felt like we could have gone 5-5 even with all of that happening."

#### Class 6A, Region 7

The Tigers made the move up from Class 5A and are in Region 7 along with Arab, Fort Payne, Oxford, Pell City, Scottsboro and Southside-Gadsden.

"We feel like we are on equal footing

because Scottsboro, Southside-Gadsden and Arab all moved up with us from Class 5A," Graben said. "Oxford is the defending state champs and definitely the team to beat. Fort Payne and Pell City will be pretty good."

#### Numbers are up

Graben said the Tigers lost 18 seniors to graduation, but there are 18 players returning who are seniors this year.

"We have 95 kids on our roster, ninth through 12th grade," Graben said. "Recruiting has been awesome, and it shows because our numbers are up."

#### COVID-19

Graben said the Tigers have a coronavirus plan that has been implemented.

"First of all, I'm not a doctor; I just do what I'm told," Graben said. "We take temps every day. Everyone has a mask, and we try to wear them whenever we can. If someone gets the virus, we have a plan.

"We spray everything down in our weight room. We clean when a new person gets on the bar. We've changed our workouts because of this. We do not allow the kids to hang out in the locker room. We enter rooms through one door and exit through another door. We make our players sanitize their hands as much as possible. Our scrimmage jerseys are washed every night. It's the little things that, hopefully, make a difference."





#### **Tigers**

From Page 30

#### Key players returning

Quarterback Pearson Baldwin leads the way for the Tigers.

"He was Player of the Year last year in the county," Graben said. "This year, he's bigger, faster and stronger. He is getting a few looks from colleges. He sets the tone for us. He is our best running back, plays quarterback and definitely our best defensive player."

Other key players Graben noted included CJ Williams, Ben Bianchi, Johnnie Wolf, Luke Richardson, Jamel Williams, Connor Land, Cody Abts and DJ Salas.

#### Team strengths

The younger players who saw playing time last year will help this year,

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8/28, @ St. Clair

9/4. @ Cherokee

9/11, @ Fort Payne 9/18, Scottsboro 9/25, Fultondale

10/2, @ Southern

10/9, Pell City 10/16, @ Oxford 10/23, Arab 10/30, Moody

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Gadsden

according to Graben.

"Our team chemistry and hard work ethic are a couple of more strengths," he said. "We have 14 kids coming back who had significant playing time last year. Quarterback play and our receivers will be strengths. Another strength is that these kids are in the same program for three years now."

#### Team weaknesses

The biggest issue Graben sees is in the offensive line after losing four seniors starters to graduation.

"I only have two seniors on the offensive line, and one of them played defense last year," Graben said. "We also don't have that one guy who is a burner – that has that breakaway speed."

#### Team goals

Graben was quick to say, "Win the state championship."

"Realistically, want to advance to the state playoffs," he said. "We want to do things that we haven't done at Springville in a long time: have a winning season, get in the state playoffs, host a playoff game. We've been building toward that. When our kids found out we moved to Class 6A, they were excited and not intimidated at all. They know they can play in Class 6A."

#### Key to successful season

Graben said it would be the same as last year – stay healthy.

"Had we not had all of those injuries last year, I do believe we could have been 7-3 and looking at a first-round playoff game," Graben said.

The Tigers open the season on the road in Odenville against the St. Clair County Saints on Aug. 28.

**Go Tigers!** 





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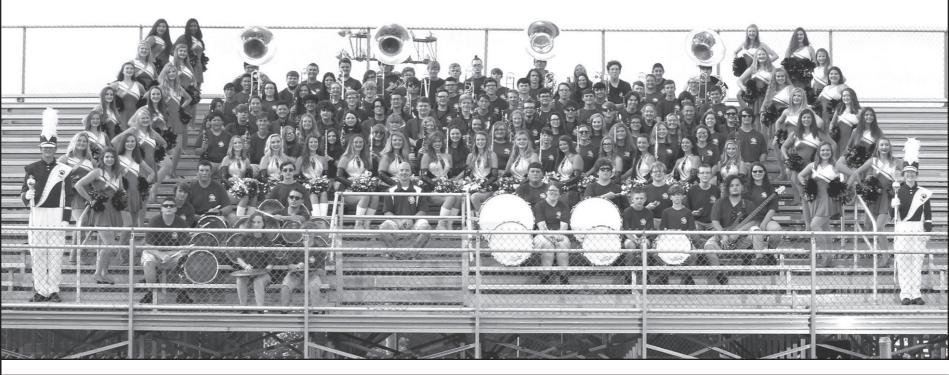
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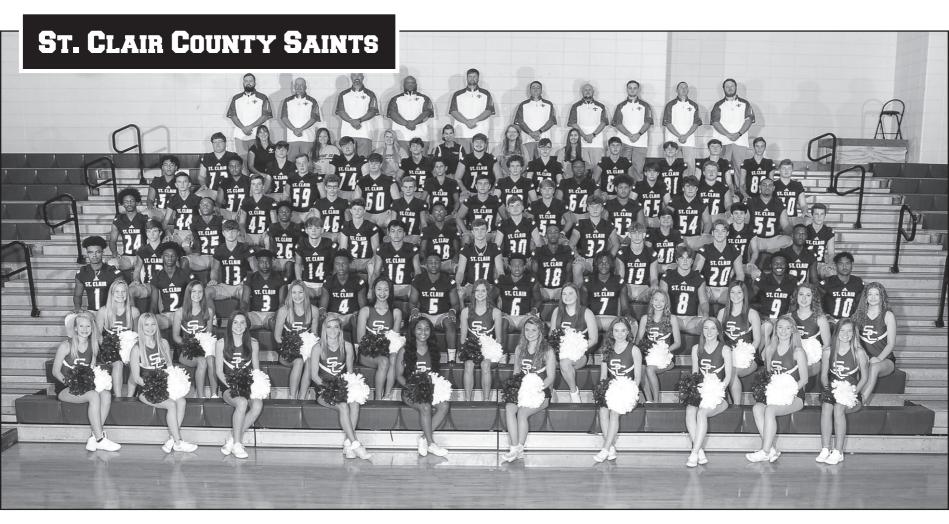
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## St. Clair County will attempt to rebound from 0-10 with more experience, better depth

BY JIMMY CREED
Special to the St. Clair Times

As loss after loss mounted en route to an 0-10 season for St. Clair County in 2019, Saints coach Brooks Dampeer was most struck by what he didn't see from

his players.

"When you go through a season and you're not winning the games you want to win, your character really shows," said Dampeer, who enters his second season in Odenville. "A lot of times those seasons will go sour, but that didn't happen with us. Our kids stayed positive and really didn't put their heads down. They played as hard as they could to the last second of the season."

It wasn't a lack of effort that hurt the Saints in 2019, Dampeer said, it was inexperience. This season, St. Clair County will still count on several younger players in key spots, but there is much more experience across the board and more depth as well.

With his roster count in the low 60s entering summer practice, Damper was particularly excited about how that added depth can help his football team improve.

"What it does is it helps us compete more at practice every day," Dampeer said. "If a player is out for some reason, if it's where they can't get their reps, somebody could be taking their job. There is no better motivation than when you have some depth. The attention to detail is so much greater when there is somebody behind you trying to take your spot."

One position where the Saints have

an experienced returning starter is at quarterback, where 5-8, 165-pound junior Josh Struggs returns for his second season under center. Dampeer praised Struggs for his maturity and for how well he has been throwing the ball in the early going.

"He is spinning the ball really well, and I'm proud of him for that," Dampeer said. "He was a first-year starter last year and learned a little bit about what he needed to do and did some good things for us. We feel like he is definitely the leader of the offense this year, and everything we do will go through him."

One of the players Struggs will count on heavily to help him is junior wide receiver Jackson Lindsey, who finished 2019 strong and will be used in multiple positions in St. Clair County's multiple offensive sets this season. Other contributors are expected to be junior Jacoby Blanks, sophomore Dewayne Logan, junior Kaven Johnson and senior Trace Turner.

Senior Dalton Birchfield will be the tight end -- or sniffer, as it's known in the Saints' offensive terminology -- and at running back, senior Deondre Scott and sophomore CJ Martin will carry the load.

The offensive line will be anchored by senior tackles and three-year starters Jason Thomas (LT) and Nathan Fuller (RT), and Jamison Reedy will man the center spot. The Saints are still trying to determine who will solidify the line at the guard spots, with one candidate being sophomore Will Keenum.





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#### Saints

From Page 34

On defense, Dampeer is particularly excited about the addition of former Corner head coach John Clements as his new coordinator, and Clements will have some experience and some depth to work with on his side of the ball.

Anchoring the Saints' 3-4 alignment are senior outside linebackers Turner and Jaquavian Woods. Inside linebackers will be senior TJ Knox and junior Ethan Jackson.

Along the defensive line, sophomore Dezmond Allen and senior Michael Moore will hold down the end and nose tackle spots, while Burchfield and sophomore Jordan Stephenson are expected to see action at the other end spot.

In the secondary, the Saints will go with a rotation of players, including seniors Jackson Bryant and Jonte Ware and junior Nick Brown at the cornerback spots and Lindsey, junior Garrett Whitehead and sophomore Jeremiah Struggs at the safety spots.

"Our strength on both sides of the ball is our team speed," Dampeer said. "We've got to get off blocks and make plays defensively. Offensively, we have got to capitalize on opportunities that present themselves."

On special teams, Lindsey will be the punter, and first-year player Ian McKinnon will be the place-kicker.

As a result of Alabama High School Athletic Association realignment, the Saints move along with Moody and Center Point from Class 5A, Region 5 to Class 5A, Region 6, joining Alexandria, Corner, Hayden, Leeds and Lincoln.

"The realignment allows us to play

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some more of our natural rivals, so that's exciting," Dampeer said. "There's Lincoln and Leeds that are close to us and that we will now play in our region, and those will be some good challenges

"The last two seasons the state champion has come from Region 5, and there were several other teams in there that could have been state champs. So that's been tough."

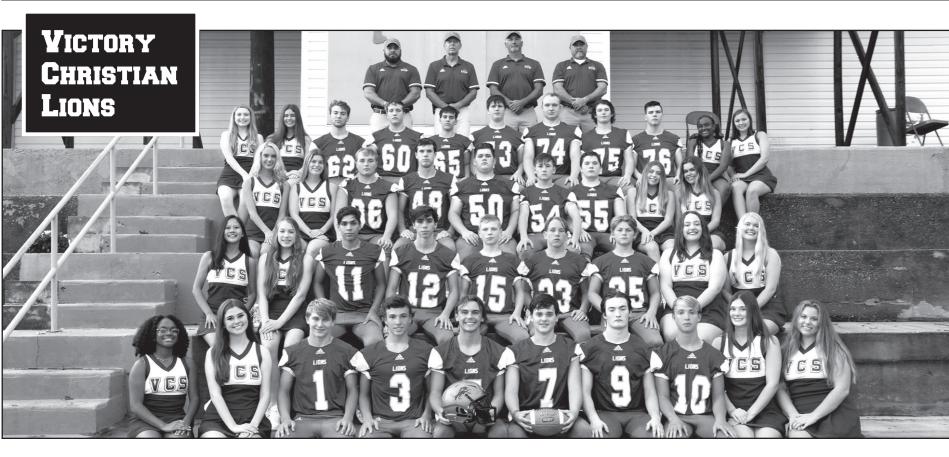
Nothing is as tough on a coach as winless season, however, and Dampeer admits there were times he did some soul searching. But he believes he came out of it stronger, just as his kids did.

"That was my first time to ever experience something like that, and it was tough," Dampeer said. "I think you just have to understand the big picture and understand that you've got to coach what you've got, and that the kids were giving it their all.

"They just had to grow up some and get a little bigger and faster, and that's what they did. I am very pleased with how they approached that situation and learned from it and how they are taking on the task of getting much better this year."







# Victory Christian returns plenty of experience for another playoff run

BY GARY HANNER
Special to the St. Clair Times

After advancing to the first round of the state playoffs last year, the Victory Christian Lions are looking to advance deeper into the postseason in 2020 under second-year head coach Bruce Breland.

Breland likes his chances of going back to the playoffs after losing only seven seniors from 2019.

"Many of the players who saw action last year are returning this year," Breland said. "The seven seniors are going to be hard to replace, but we have several guys with a lot of playing time from last year."

#### COVID-19

Breland said the virus has made himself and his coaching staff become more creative.

"That's not necessarily a bad thing

because you can find new ways to do things," Breland said. "We are doing some things that I've never done in 39 years. It forces us to go another route. We have made a lot of progress on the things way did."

Breland said the lack of contact, competition on the field and spring training, etc., weighs heavier on the minds of the players than it does the coaches

"It was more monotonous to them," Breland said. "The coaches have a little more anxiety, I guess. We've had to rethink some things on how to change some techniques."

#### Key players returning

Breland said even though the Lions lost seven seniors, he is excited about

See Lions, Page 40





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#### Lions

From Page 37

the experience many returning players have.

"Except for one player, our entire offensive line is back," he said. "Our players are a lot stronger, smarter and aggressive. Last year, we struggled the first half of the season."

According to Breland, key players returning include Dalton Lewellyn.

"Dalton did a great job at quarterback last year as a freshman," Breland said. "We're expecting a lot from him this year."

Other players Breland named were Billy Davenport, Creed Cline, Miles Martin, Justice Hurley, Isaac Warren, Cam Cheatwood and Riley Meadows.

#### Class 1A, Region 5

The Lions are in Class 1A, Region 5 along with Donoho, Ragland, Talladega County Central, Wadley, Winterboro and Woodland.

Breland said Woodland could be the team to beat in region play.

"Winterboro has some coaching changes, and they could start off slow," he said. "I definitely would like to catch them early." (Victory will host Winterboro in Week 8 of the season).

#### Team strengths

Breland said one thing is the leadership of the

players.

"Toward the end of the year last year, we became a pretty good football team," he said. "I think they felt like the lack of leadership during the first half of the season cost them a better seeding once we made it to the playoffs. We should have started the season off better."

According to Breland, the linemen are veterans and a good group of kids.

"Another team strength is the work ethic in the weight room," he said. "That's a tribute to the coaches, who are doing an outstanding job in the weight room. Our players have really bought in."

#### Successful season

Breland said success

depends on the production the Lions get from the running back spot. He said the linebackers are also critical.

"Our linebackers have to step up and play like veterans," Breland said. "They are experienced players, but they are not experienced linebackers."

#### Goals for the season

Breland said the goals are the same this year as last year – make it to the state playoffs.

"This year, they want more," he said. "They were not satisfied losing in the first round of the playoffs (31-14 to Pickens County). They want to advance deeper into the playoffs and make some noise."





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#### Good Luck All Area Teams!

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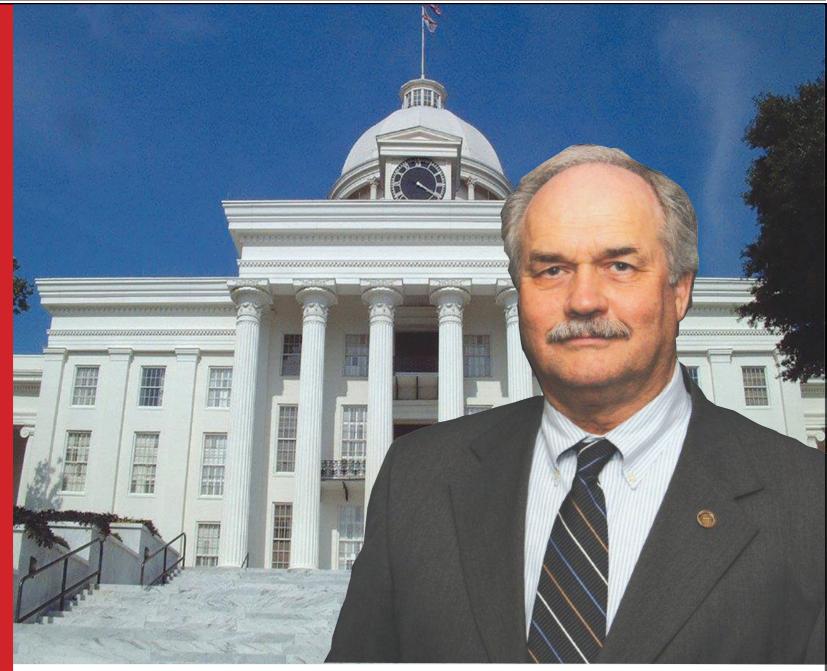


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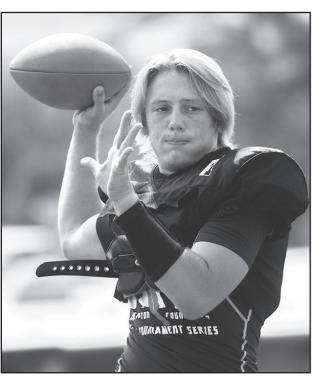
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## Scenes from Ashville fall football camp 2020





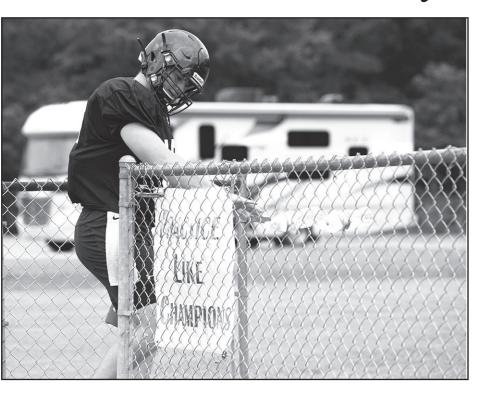


## Scenes from Leeds fall football camp 2020





## Scenes from Moody fall football camp 2020





# 

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GOOD LUCK TO ALL AREA HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL TEAMS!



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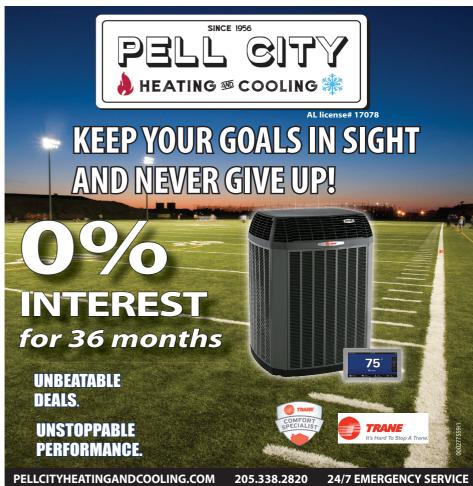
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BEST OF LUCK TO ALL AREA HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL TEAMS!









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## Scenes from Pell City fall football camp 2020





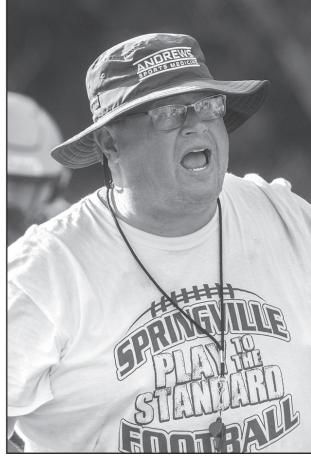
Scenes from Ragland fall football camp 2020





## Scenes from Springville fall football camp 2020







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Good Luck on a Winning Season to the Leeds Green Wave and all local Football Teams!



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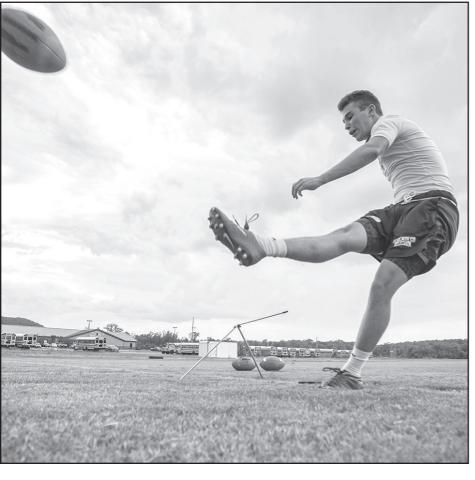
"Great accomplishments require great sacrifices."



We Hope All Area High School Football Teams Have A Good Football Season!

## Scenes from St. Clair County fall football camp 2020





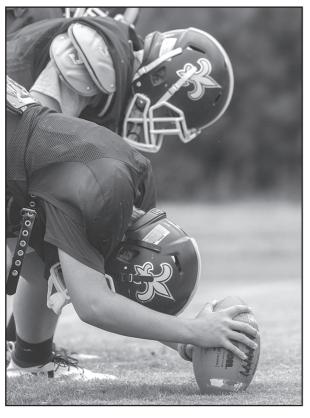


## We wish all area football teams a safe year!

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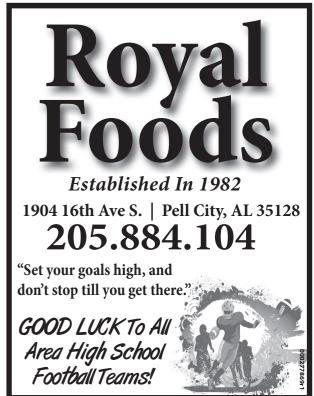
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WE SUPPORT ALL AREA TEAMS AND WISH YOU A SAFE AND SUCCESSFUL SEASON!



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## Scenes from Victory Christian fall football camp 2020











## GOOD LUCK ALL AREA TEAMS!

Strive Hard, **Give It Your Best** and Success Will Come!



## THE ROBINSON LAW FIRM, P.C.

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