



August 2022

PIGSKIN PREVIEW

A SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT TO

THE ST. CLAIR TIMES

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PIGSKIN PREVIEW 2022

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Cover photos by
• Bob Crisp •
The Daily Home

Team profiles by
Tyler Waldrep



Special thanks to
Mark Edwards
Pam Isbell
Tyler Waldrep
Bob Crisp
Tucker Webb
Timothy Cash



Tucker Webb/The Daily Home

Ashville practices with a new confidence after the Bulldogs secured the program’s first winning season since 2005 last year.

Are you ready for some football?

W e’re still weeks away from feeling that comfortable shift in weather that marks the arrival of fall. Thankfully, football season doesn’t wait for the leaves to change colors to get started.

As always, locker rooms across the Times coverage area will be filled with optimism in the opening weeks as it’s finally time for the kids that spent the summer sweating to prove themselves under the lights.

There’s reason to believe many of them will enjoy successful seasons this year.

Under normal circumstances, first-year coaches often undergo something of a transition year, which should give fans pause. Both Moody and Pell City



Tyler Waldrep

hired new coaches in the offseason, yet it is possible, perhaps even likely, that those programs will buck the trend and take the leap this season.

The Blue Devils might have more athletes with Division I scholarship offers on their team than anyone else in the county. That should offset some of the learning curve.

Then there’s the Panthers. Pell City hired Steve Mask, who spent the last decade leading St. Paul’s to a 110-25 overall record, which included four state championships.

Still, it takes time for new schemes and coaching philosophies to take root. Springville’s Jon Clements and St. Clair County’s P.J. Wright are well aware

of this as they prepare their respective teams for the second season of their tenure.

With a full offseason under their belts, it’s possible both the Tigers and the Saints will find themselves better equipped to execute on the field this season.

There’s reason for optimism elsewhere in the Times coverage area as well.

Shepard Sargent is back under center for Victory Christian this season after he was thrown into the fire as a freshman last year.

Ashville’s entire team seems filled with a new confidence after the Bulldogs secured the program’s first winning season since 2005 last year.

Last year, Leeds managed to win at least 10 games for the first time since

Waldrep

From Page 2

2015. That was also the first time Leeds has secured back-to-back winning seasons since 2016-17, so it feels like things are rolling under coach Jerry Hood.

On a similar note, Ragland has somewhat quietly put together back-to-back nine-win seasons.

As is usually the case, things will likely unravel for a few teams along the way. It's impossible for everyone to win each week, but at this point, everything remains on the table for teams in the Times coverage area, and honestly, it's just nice to have football back in our lives.

A brief look at each team:

Ashville

The Bulldogs are looking to take the next step in coach Shea Monroe's third season, and there's reason to believe Ashville is a legitimate contender for a play-off spot this season. You can't coach size. It's a popular refrain among coaches, especially those who find themselves short-handed in the trenches.

Well, Ashville returns almost every starter on each line. The Bulldogs also return a 1,000-yard rusher in Jalen Williams. For a team that regularly runs behind two tackles in an unbalanced formation, that certainly sounds like a recipe for success.



Bob Crisp/The Daily Home

See **Waldrep**, Page 4

Leeds is looking to push for a spot into the second or even third round of the playoffs.



Tucker Webb/The Daily Home

Moody's 2023 class is almost guaranteed to shatter program records off the field on National Signing Day. Why can't they do the same on the field as well?

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Tucker Webb/The Daily Home

Three of Pell City’s region opponents have won state titles in the last five seasons. There is no reason the Panthers can’t join them on the mountain top in the coming years.

Waldrep

From Page 3

Leeds

On offense, the Greenwave return fifth-year starter Jarod Latta at quarterback. The defense is headlined by 2024, four-star defensive end Kavion Henderson who ranks 84th overall and No. 1 in the state, according to Rivals.

With plenty of experience around both those guys, it’s hard to imagine Leeds doesn’t push for a spot in the second or even third round of the playoffs.

Moody

The Blue Devils’ offense currently boasts a left tackle committed to Arkansas State and a wide receiver committed to Arkansas. Then there’s nickelback Amon Lane, a four-star prospect in the 2024 class that recently committed to Auburn.

First-year coach Jake Ganus believes there’s plenty of other players on his team that deserve to be household names before the season finishes, and considering four of them already have Division I offers, he might be right.

Moody has never had this much talent come together before. The 2023 class is almost guaranteed to shatter program records off the field on National


See **Waldrep**, Page 6

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Bob Crisp/The Daily Home

Ragland has been hitting the weight room.



Tucker Webb/The Daily Home

The Fighting Saitns could this be the most improved team in the county.

Waldrep

From Page 4

Signing Day. Why can't they do the same on the field as well?

Pell City

Whether he was taking the snaps or lined up at wide receiver, Pell City quarterback Caleb Groce was often the most dynamic player on the field.

Mask said he's proud of Groce's progression as a passer which can only mean good things for the Panther's offense even if Mask intends to keep things on the ground more this year than Pell City did in the past.

Three of Pell City's region opponents have won state titles in the last five seasons. Mask said there is no reason the Panthers can't join them on the mountain top in the coming years. If anyone can get Pell City there, it's probably someone who's been there a few times before.

Ragland

It sounds like half the roster, including star receiver Jordan Turner, put on at least

40 pounds this offseason.

When Wes Tidwell arrived last year, he said no player could squat 350 pounds. He now has 12 guys clearing 400. The Ragland coach credited defensive coordinator Adam Hay with the turnaround in the weight room.

Tidwell said this was the first time in over a decade that he let another coach be in charge of the offseason training program, and it sounds like Hay has produced some monsters.

St. Clair County

Injuries wrecked the first year of Wright's tenure. The Fighting Saints were forced to play four quarterbacks last season, at least one of whom was a receiver.

Even under those circumstances, Wright's group kept four opponents within two possessions last season.

Unlike last year, the Fighting Saints enter the season with a full offseason of work under their belts. The coaches and players aren't learning each other's names and skills on the fly.

See Waldrep, Page 7

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Waldrep

From Page 6

Could this be the most improved team in the county?

Springville

The Tigers will likely field the least experienced roster of anyone in the county this season. That fact has almost certainly cost the Springville coaching staff a few hours of sleep this offseason, but young players thrust into the spotlight this season will gain invaluable experience for future seasons.

Not that the Tigers are ready to give up on this season. The Tigers' head coach probably has more confidence in senior quarterback Asa Morrison than any other coach in the area has in his own signal caller.

Several players will have to grow up quickly this year, but if the Tigers can do that, then Springville has the tools to surprise everyone in Clements' second season.

Victory Christian

Victory Christian strung together a few wins early last season, but the Lions never truly ran out steam, as evidenced by one-possession losses to both Woodland and Ragland to close out the regular season.

It's also possible the best player on the Lions' offense never saw the field last season due to eligibility issues after transferring.

That didn't stop running back Kaden Dixon from producing jaw-dropping moments regularly in practice last year. He's finally able to take the field this fall, and his emergence along with Sargent's continued development at quarterback could help the Lions' offense take the next step this season.



Photos by Tucker Webb/The Daily Home

LEFT: Young Springville players thrust into the spotlight this season will gain invaluable experience for future seasons. **RIGHT:** The Lions' offense looks to take the next step this season.

**GOOD LUCK TO THE
MOODY BLUE DEVILS!**

From The

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Enjoy the Season!



Bulldogs look to build of winning season

By TYLER WALDREP
twaldrep@dailyhome.com

ASHVILLE — Ashville coach Shea Monroe asked the junior class to raise their hands if they'd ever experienced a losing season in high school.

"None of them raised their hand," Monroe said. "I said, 'So, what does that mean? That means we're ready to compete, that means we're ready to take the next step.'"

When Monroe took over in 2020, the Bulldogs hadn't finished with a winning record since 2005. In two years, he has guided Ashville to 5-5 and 6-4 finishes.

"Look, it is not like I sprinkled fairy dust on it, but sometimes guys catch teams at the right time, and I knew the talent that was here because I'd been on staff before," Monroe said.

That experience is especially evident in the trenches, where Ashville returns four offensive linemen and all three defensive linemen.

"Our team, the majority of them are offensive and defensive linemen, and it's something, I mean I've been coaching high school football 11 years now, and it is something I have never been a part of," Monroe said.

Ashton Mostella, a 6-foot-1 senior weighing 250 pounds, will start at nose tackle this season.

"Ashton is the strongest kid on our football team," Monroe said. "He is really powerful. ... he is a freak, he really is, in every sense of the good way."

He will be flanked on either side by fellow seniors Kain Head and Trevor Horsley. Head is 6-2 and 190 pounds, while Horsley, 5-11 weighing 210 pounds, is considered to be the line's anchor.

On the other side of the ball, Ashville makes use of an unbalanced line which lines two tackles on the right side of the line with a tight end lining up at the left tackle position.

Junior Rhett Bowlin is competing with senior Blake Jones for the starting tight end spot. The other newcomer up front, sophomore Mike Tindall, will line up at the opposite guard position on the right side.

The rest of the line includes four returners including left guard Ethan Turner, center Johnny Ramirez and senior tackles Jeremiah Monroe and Mason Wilson.

Wilson, a four-year starter weighing 290 pounds, has the most experience of



Tucker Webb/The Daily Home

In the last two seasons, Ashville has finished 5-5 and 6-4.

ASHVILLE

Aug. 18, vs. St. Clair County
Aug. 26, vs. Lincoln
Sept. 2, at Etowah
Sept. 9, vs. Hanceville
Sept. 16, OPEN
Sept. 23, at Hayden
Sept. 30, vs. Fultondale
Oct. 7, vs. Good Hope
Oct. 14, at Oneonta
Oct. 21, at Cherokee County
Oct. 28, at Munford

the group.

"Mason's skillset is he is a really strong kid, but he is a really deceptively good athlete, and I think people just look at him and how big he is, and I mean he's a state runner-up heavyweight wrestler," Monroe said. "I mean he is really good on his feet, he moves really well."

Monroe, a three-year starter weighing 380 pounds, also happens to be one of the team's most influential leaders.

"He is such a pleasant kid to be around," Monroe said. "But he is also that guy that if somebody needs to be gotten onto he is the one to do it. ... His leadership ability is just, what he's capable of bringing to our team from a leadership

See Ashville, Page 13

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Courtesy photos to The St. Clair Times

Ashville

From Page 8

capability is tremendous.”

Those guys will be responsible for protecting the new starting quarterback, junior Ryan Harris. At 5-foot-8 and 165 pounds, Harris is about five inches and 30 pounds smaller than his predecessor, so Monroe said the team has tweaked the offense a little bit to suit Harris’ running style.

Speaking of the ground game, three-year starter Jalen Williams returns in the backfield, fresh off a 2021 campaign that saw him finish with more than 1,000 yards on the ground.

“Jalen is a man of few words,” Monroe said. “He is more of a lead by example guy, so when he does say something, everybody listens.”

Monroe described Williams as a battering ram the Bulldogs can use to wear down the defense. He will be backed up by senior Travis Smith who Monroe said might just be the fastest player on the team.

Shuntear McCain and Eli Reeves are expected to see time at wingback

while 3-year starter Layden Olson moves to the blocking back position, which Monroe describes as arguably the most important position in Ashville’s offense.

Luckily for the Bulldogs, Olson is one of the smartest players Monroe has coached.

“Ask really good questions,” Monroe said. “Always wants to know why we are doing this, and I think a lot of people get frustrated with that, and I don’t at all. Cause that tells me the kid wants to understand the concept of why we are running this play.”

Monroe said the receivers are kind of the unsung heroes of the team since they aren’t asked to come up with big plays consistently, but he’s happy with the group he’s got out there, including Hunter Brown, Tyler Harris, Ethan Richardson and Greyson Simpson.

However, Simpson might make a bigger impact on special teams, where he will now take on punting to go along with his familiar place-

kicking duties.

“Man, you talk about a weapon. ... He is just a guy that anytime you need three (points) or you need to flip the field, you feel comfortable about him going out there,” Monroe said.

Monroe said he feels good sending Simpson out there to kick for attempts of as long as 45 yards out. The senior will also start on defense at safety while 3-year starter Hunter Pyle holds down one corner spot. The remaining corner will be JB Potter, Jaden Harris or Caleb Gargone.

The five starting linebackers will include three returners in Smith, Williams and senior Brennan Bullock. Senior Bryan Hampton will start outside along with Reeves.

Monroe said his players are more confident entering this season.

“We know our identity, so that is half the battle,” he said. “It is just getting better at executing those things that are going to take us to the next level.”



Tucker Webb/The Daily Home



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Green Wave rides experience

By TYLER WALDREP
twaldrep@dailyhome.com

There aren't many programs in the state that have as much experience at the quarterback position as Leeds does, thanks to the return of fifth-year starter Jarod Latta.

"He's progressed really nicely," Leeds coach Jerry Hood said. "He's a great leader, obviously knows our offense inside out. ... He has really progressed nicely into a solid quarterback. Even has the ability to run a little bit when he needs to. It is an important position, and we are happy to have somebody experienced back there."

When Latta looks to throw the ball this season, he will often be looking to fellow senior Damorian Keenan.

"We expect him to be kind of the leader of that group," Hood said. "We need a lot of production out of him to be successful."

Keenan will run routes alongside fellow starting receivers Jaylean Felder and Conner Nelson and tight end Rylan Rose. Zain Hood is another receiver expected to see work in the passing game this year.

"We will play him in a bunch of different places but he's a hard matchup as a receiver because he can do so many things," Hood said of Nelson. "He is a very physical kid. And like I said, he's tall, got really good speed. If you've got all those combinations, you know the receiver is pretty good. We're all hopeful that he will end up being our quarterback next year."

On the ground, Hood will turn to senior Jeremiah Hunter who spent last sea-



Bob Crisp/The Daily Home

Leeds has a very experienced quarterback thanks to the return of fifth-year starter Jarod Latta.

son at linebacker. Hood said Hunter had a great year at running back as a sophomore, but the team needed him at defense more last season.

He will be joined by fullback Grayson Ford while Myles Jones splits time between both running back and fullback.

"Jeremiah will be our kinda featured back this year, and I think Miles will be that for the next two

years. So they bring a lot of the same type qualities. Both can catch out the backfield, both can pass protect, of course, they both can run the ball with effectiveness."

Paving the way for both of them will be an offensive line that returns three starters, including Nick Bradford, Jakob Skinner and Taylor Pulliam. However, Bradford and Skinner, who have five

years of starting experience between them, are currently sidelined with injuries.

That has opened the door for other players, including Carlos Placensia, who Hood said has earned playing time with his performance in fall camp.

Placensia is also filling in at place-kicker for injured starter Jackson Arthur.

See Leeds, Page 19

LEEDS

Aug. 19, at Mortimer Jordan
Aug. 26, vs. Pell City
Sept. 2, vs. Springville
Sept. 9, at St. Clair County
Sept. 16, OPEN
Sept. 23, at Sylacauga
Sept. 30, vs. Southside-Gadsden
Oct. 7, at Alexandria
Oct. 14, at Moody
Oct. 21, vs. Lincoln
Oct. 28, vs. Center Point

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Courtesy photos to The St. Clair Times



Bob Crisp/The Daily Home

Leeds

From Page 14

Center Noah Davis and tackle Gavin Howard are the newcomers on the line expected to start this year.

Junior Kavion Henderson headlines the defensive line up front for Leeds. The 6-foot-3, 262-pound four-star prospect is currently ranked 84th overall, and No. 1 in the state, in his class by Rivals. He has offers from 42 schools.

"But the best thing about Kavion is he's our hardest worker," Hood said. "And brings the most energy. Just an outstanding kid on top of being a great, great, great athlete."

He will be joined on the line by returning starters Chris Burge, Tucker Summers and Joseph Stone while Nick Davis and Elijah Lewis will rotate in to spell guys.

While Hood likes what he's seen from the linebackers, there's no doubt that is the group with the least experience this season.

Alex Bradford didn't play football last season, but he's proven himself enough to take a starting spot inside. He will be joined by outside linebacker Josh Lee, a young player who has shown promise this offseason. Hunter will once again see time

at linebacker, although it sounds like his priority will be on offense which will open the door for Hunter Scott to see a larger role.

Senior C.J. Douglas is back to start for a fourth-consecutive season. Hood said they would move him all over the field this year.

Fellow senior Christian Simmons will battle with junior Tikeem Fitts for the remaining safety spot while junior Jeremiah Hall and sophomore Miles Ashford start at corner.

"Kind of a natural corner," Hood said of Ashford. "Can turn his hips really good, real instinctive."

When asked how he feels about the upcoming season, Hood said he doesn't discuss wins and losses with his players. He feels like the culture, health and physicalness of his players are in a good place.

"The only question mark with this team is just such a young team," Hood said. "But they can mature quickly. They might just be foolish enough to run a bunch of wins off. There could be some growing pains along the way, but we don't worry about that, we just worry about the next day."

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Moody packs lots of weapons on both sides of the ball

By TYLER WALDREP
twaldrep@dailyhome.com

MOODY — Opposing defenses will really have to pick their poison when it comes to stopping Moody this season, and first-year Blue Devils coach Jake Ganus is confident there won't be a right decision to make.

"Obviously, the first thing you're going to do is you're going to look up and see how a team is playing Davion (Dozier)," Ganus said. "Because if a team is just going to play Davion one-on-one ... (we will throw to him) just as many times as we can."

Dozier, a three-star 2023 prospect committed to Arkansas, is sure to be a focal point early on this season, but Ganus believes the team's biggest weapon might be junior running back Blaine Burke, who already has three DI offers of his own, including one from Louisville.

Ganus said he's confident teams will struggle to play man against Moody with Burke's skillset in the passing game.

"There's no linebacker in the state that is going to cover Blaine Burke," Ganus said. "I'm going to go ahead and say

MOODY

Aug. 19, at Pell City
Aug. 26, vs. Sylacauga
Sept. 2, vs. Alexandria
Sept. 9, vs. Cleburne County
Sept. 16, at Lincoln
Sept. 23, at Shelby County
Sept. 30, vs. Springville
Oct. 7, at St. Clair County
Oct. 14, vs. Leeds
Oct. 21, at Southside-Gadsden
Oct. 28, OPEN

that. ... There's a lot of DBs that would struggle to cover Blaine Burke."

Should teams manage to cover both Dozier and Burke, then Moody will still have capable weapons available in starting slot receivers Kolby Seymour and Aidan Robinson. Sophomores Braden Wright and Eric Vance are battling it out for the fourth spot.

If Dozier and Burke do their part, Ganus believes the middle of the field

See **Moody**, Page 24



Tucker Webb/The Daily Home

Opposing teams will really have to pick their poison when it comes to stopping Moody this season.

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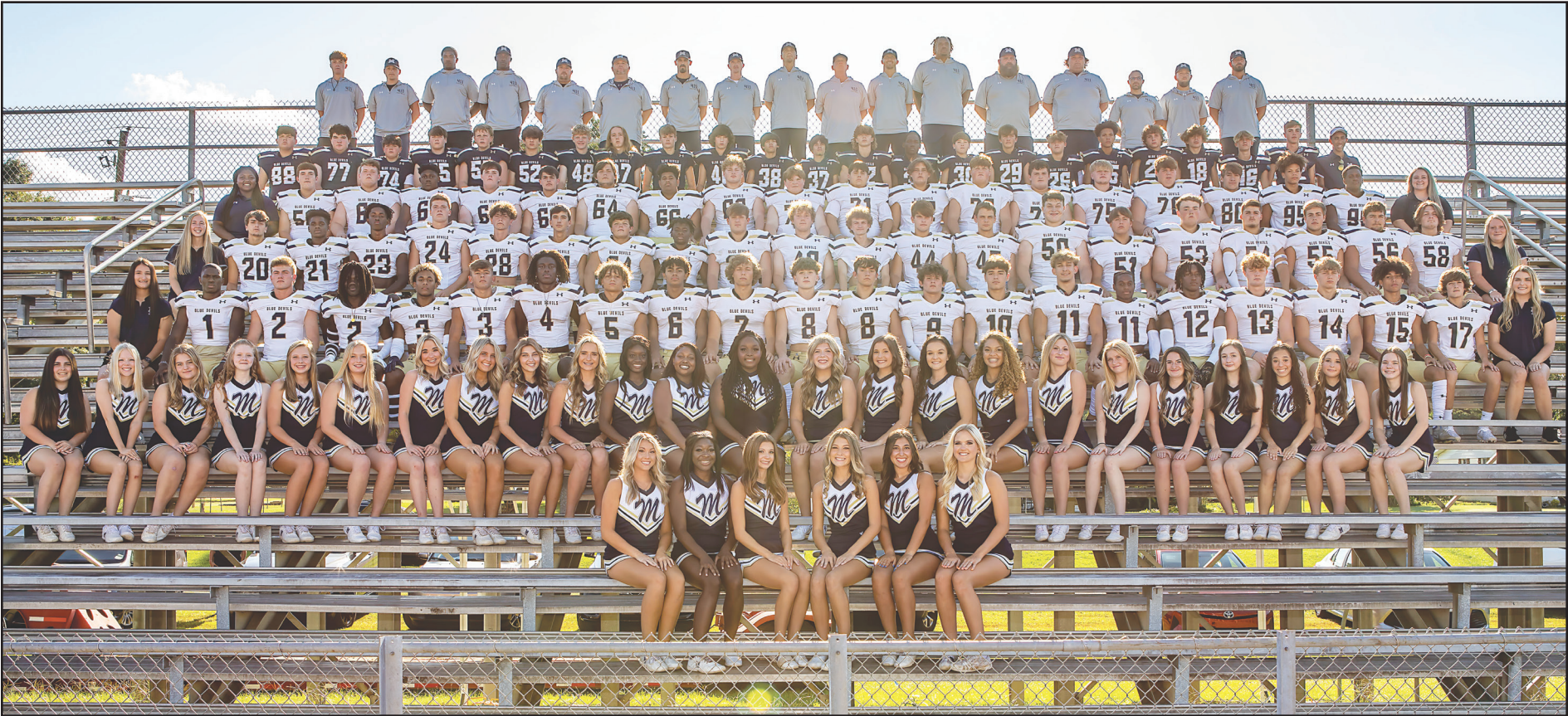
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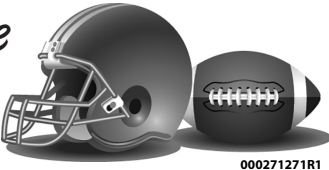


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Moody

From Page 20

will become easy pickings for his two slot receivers. However, that's not the only reason the first-year coach has high expectations of Seymour.

"Makes everyone better around him," Ganus said. "To me, that is how you judge a good football player and teammate — does he make the kids around him better? And, Kolby does."

Senior quarterback Cole McCarty will be responsible for getting the ball to Seymour and the rest of Moody's skill players.

"He can throw it, make any throw you can think of, and he's fast," Ganus said. "We've got a laser (timed) 4.48, so he can absolutely fly. He's the fastest on the team. And he's built like a quarterback. He's smart. He's tough. Everything you want in a quarterback."

When he takes off, McCarty will occasionally run behind first-string H-back Jon Cade Carroll. Then of course the quarterback will always have an offensive line that includes Arkansas State commit Mason Myers at left tackle. The other two returning starters on the line include right tackle Jackson Randall and center Ben Rothe.

"Super, super smart, gets a set, makes our checks, makes our calls," Ganus said of his center. "The thing I love about Ben is he has great snaps. That Joker's consistent. And that's the first thing, that is the first step of every offensive play is to get the ball from the center to the quarterback."

Jaxon Huckeba and Pete Johnson will serve as the starting guards.

The line could have had even more experience, but Ganus decided to move returning lineman Carson Dillashaw to the defensive line.

"You know, you don't want to just put all your dudes, like if you've got five dudes, that's great you better score every time," Ganus said. "Because you're leaving the D-line, you're leaving the cupboard bare. So I moved him over to kind of solidify some depth."

The senior will be joined on the line by Cameron Mallory, Caleb Griffin and Gavyn Baker, who fills more of a hybrid defensive end, outside linebacker role.

Eli Walker, Izaiah Hatch, Logan Chambers and Simon Molay will all see time on the defensive line in a reserve role,

but Ganus is especially proud of what he's seen from the 380-pound Chambers this offseason.

"Man that joker has worked his tail off," Ganus said. "They said he used to not be able to do certain conditioning days, but that dude does anything and everything."

At linebacker, the Moody head coach said senior transfer DeWayne Logan has emerged as a leader.

"He's done a really good job, and it's been fun to watch him grow off the field more than on the field because all of our kids have stuff they deal with," Ganus said. "You know, we tell our kids, 'you know, circumstances don't define you, you don't control that. You control your attitude and your effort.'"

He will be joined inside by Marshall Teofilo and Jacob Hardaway while Charlie Kitts and Brady Dodd split time outside with Baker.

Ganus brought his adopted son A'Mon Lane, a 2024 Auburn commitment currently ranked the sixth best prospect in Alabama by 247Sports in the 2024 class, with him from Thompson.

Lane started at corner last season, but he will line up at the Star position for Moody.

"Moved him to Star so he could be closer to the ball, because we feel like at corner, teams will just go put their worst receiver out there," Ganus said. "Yeah, we just feel like he's gonna be wasted out there."

Kaleb Goff and AJ Madison are currently the favorites to play safety while Kellen Talley lines up at corner. However, Ganus said all the defensive backs cross-train. So it's possible the exact lineup will shuffle a bit once he decides where to put Chase Jackson and first-year football player Sydney Walton.

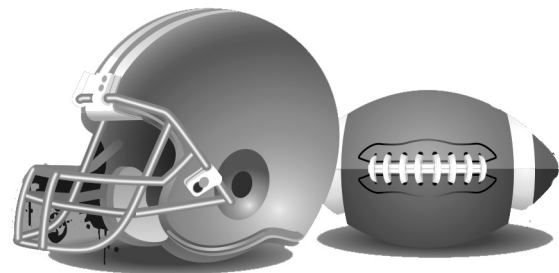
With the 2023 class set to tie or equal Moody's all-time four Division I signees in one fell swoop, it's easy to believe the Blue Devils are a program on the rise. In fact, Ganus said his team isn't looking for confidence. Moody already has it.

"We do," Ganus said. "And that was the deal for me — just like making these kids believe how good they can be. We don't need a rah-rah speech. We don't need a rah-rah game. ... It (already is) different everything, and kids believing and kids trusting me and our coaches, it's gonna be the difference."



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New coach, new mentality at Pell City

By TYLER WALDREP
twaldrep@dailyhome.com

PELL CITY — There's a lot that goes into taking over a new program. For starters, there's a lot of new names to be learned, not to mention the physical and mental skills which will help determine where each player fits best.

The first name that new Pell City head coach Steve Mask learned was Carlos Herring.

"He stood out early because of his athletic abilities and his leadership qualities. I think he has a chance to play at the next level," said Mask, who won 210 games in 25 years at Bradshaw, Buckhorn and St. Paul's, including four state titles.

Herring, a senior, is slated to start at nickel on defense, but he also will receive 10 to 12 snaps a game at running back as he backs up starter Markise Bedford.

Mask said Bedford used his vision and quickness to earn the starting position over some of the bigger backs on the team.

Those guys take their handoffs from a familiar face. Caleb Groce split time at quarterback last season with former Panther Baylor Smith, but this year the junior will take the lead while junior Jacob Tucker backs him up.

"He's got a great skill set," Mask said of Groce. "And so you know we're trying to build some things around him because of his leadership ability, and he throws the ball better than I thought he did. And I think that's one thing I've seen him improve from day one, that's his ability to throw the ball."

When the Panthers do look to the air, senior Colin Smith has already set himself apart from his peers. Ashton Harvell and Zack Duncan also figure to be heav-



Tucker Webb/The Daily Home

New Pell City head coach Steve Mask looks to continue his winning his winning ways with the Panthers.

See **Pell City**, Page 30

PELL CITY

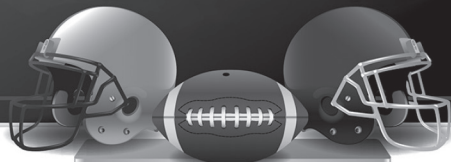
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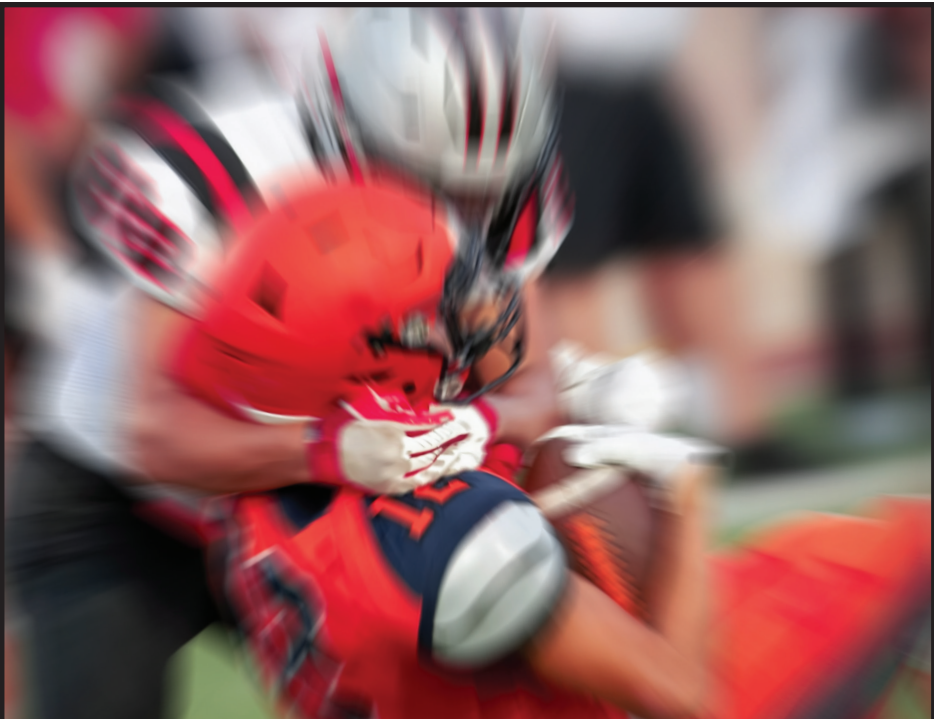


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Pell City

From Page 26

ily involved in the passing game, while junior L.J. Berry sees some time at slot.

Mask said he sees the tight end as a blocker first, but he's confident senior Grayson Lawrence will make his mark in the passing game as well.

Lawrence will be protecting the quarterbacks with help from an offensive line anchored by center Byron Moon. Juniors Michael Snow and Lance Sanderson have also proven themselves to be important pieces at left tackle and right guard, respectively.

Mask said he's particularly proud of how those three have handled the transition away from more of a pass-set mode into his new offense.

"A pass-set deal is just stay between him and the quarterback and this deal," Mask said. "You've actually got your hand in the dirt coming off the ball, and it's a little bit more power, power engaged. It all takes power, but a little bit more straight ahead blocking type deals."

Caden Aldrige, Dedrick Scott, Danny Barber and Riley Surlis will compete for the remaining two starting spots on the offensive line.

Junior Jake Blackstone will handle punting and kicking duties for the Panthers on special teams. On the defensive side of the ball, Mask said he feels the depth on the defensive line will prove to be the strength of the team.

Mask said defensive ends Hunter Otwell and Matthew Swain have emerged as leaders for that group.

"They've both got good get-off," Mask said. "They've got good

size, they are 245, 250, and they both have high motors. They go hard out all the time."

Mask isn't sure who the remaining starter will be, but he expects four other players to see plenty of time on the defensive line, including Jachian Dunnaville, Malik Watts, Jayden Elston and Branden Smith.

Senior Drew Sisson will start at linebacker and will help call the defense from the field. He, Zander Lackey and Landen Strong are the three linebackers slated to see significant time this season.

Herring is joined in the secondary by Tucker at free safety while Berry and Jaden Coleman start at corner.

Both Groce and Colin Smith also seemed poised to see time in the secondary this season.

"I'd rather not play anybody both ways, but as I've evolved as I've gotten a little older, you know, if you got a really good athlete, you don't really want to spend half the games over standing next to you," Mask said.

Mask said there's a huge challenge awaiting the Panthers this season as they attempt to change the culture at Pell City. While the task is huge, Mask said his players need to keep their focus on the little details. If they take care of that, the wins and losses will sort themselves out.

"We want to put a product on the field that the school and the community can be proud of," Mask said. "That's the end of the story. ... A team that plays hard and plays with great discipline and plays with great pride. I think the best compliment that a coach can ever get from another coach is, 'Your teams play hard.'"



Tucker Webb/The Daily Home

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Purple Devils looking for a deep playoff run

By TYLER WALDREP
twaldrep@dailyhome.com

RAGLAND — There's no question that receiver Jordan Turner makes Ragland's offense go. At least, his coach isn't shy about touting him.

"In my opinion, (he) is probably the best player in St. Clair County," Ragland coach Wes Tidwell said. "Jordan is a kid that looks completely different than he did last year. He was 175 last year, he is close to 200 pounds. He is running better, he is jumping better. ... A 50-50 ball is not a 50-50 ball to him. We feel like we can throw one up to him, and if it's one-one-one with him it's 80-20 us maybe more. I want to say he caught 17 or 18 touchdowns last year."

Other receivers set to see a large workload in the passing game this season include Ezra Hill.

Jagger Cox and Cade Mikler will also serve as top reserve options for receiver and tight end, respectively.

The Purple Devils have a guy under center tasked with getting the ball to those guys — or perhaps it is two new guys as sophomores Drake Kay and Antwan Byers find themselves in a position battle at quarterback.

Tidwell described Kay as a taller, longer kid capable of pushing the ball down the field.

"Antwan, on the other hand, doesn't really have the arm strength that Drake does, but as far as accuracy and getting you in the right spot, he does that thing," Tidwell said. "He does those kinds of things, he's a little bit more football knowledgeable than Drake."

Tidwell said he's in no hurry to force the issue, so it's possible, perhaps even likely, that this battle carries over



Bob Crisp/The Daily Home

Ragland was unable to make it past the second round last year, but few teams looked as dangerous as the Purple Devils did down the stretch. Head coach Wes Tidwell hopes a tough schedule can prepare his team for a similar run this year.

See **Ragland**, Page 37

RAGLAND

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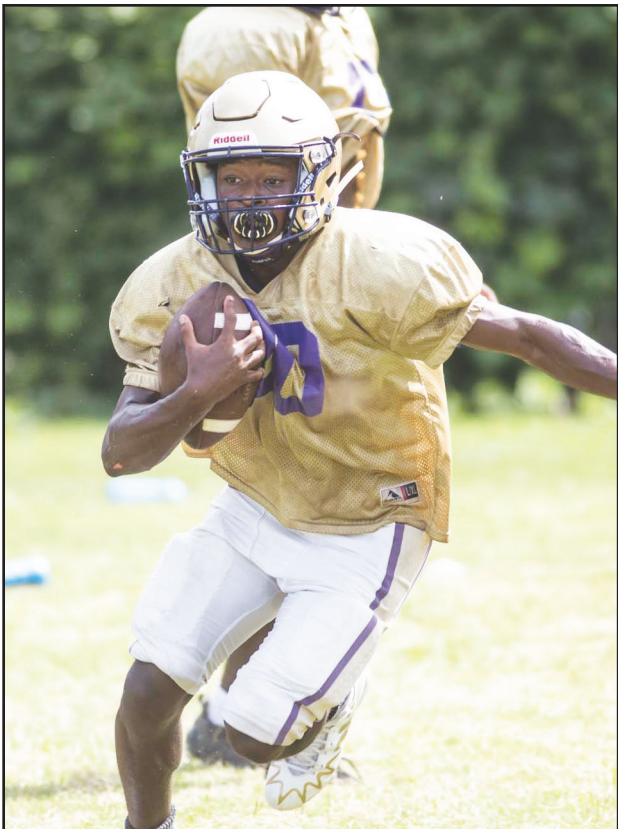
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Courtesy photos to The St. Clair Times

Ragland

From Page 32

into the season.

"Your quarterback has to be a guy the kids like," Tidwell said. "Has to be someone those guys will play for. ... Secondly, he has to be a kid that grasps what we want him to do because I let my guy make a lot of decisions. ... Thirdly, in that order of importance honestly, you have to have a kid that can physically do the things you need him to do."

Whoever wins the starting spot will share the backfield with A'Ron Lee, a 150-pound running back who proved himself as more of a 1B option late last season instead of a true backup. D.J. Turner, a 6-foot-2, 225-pound senior will run behind him as the No. 2 option when he's not playing tight end while Brett Sisson rounds out the trio.

They will run behind an offensive line that returns five guys that started or played significant reps last season, including Will Clark, Brandon Hill, Skylar Barber, Jaden Isbell and Tacorion Soles.

Of those five, Clark has separated himself as a leader.

"All I have to say is, 'Will this can't happen,' and he gets it fixed," Tidwell said. "He does it, and he does it right, and he holds kids accountable, and he does that whether he is in the classroom, the weight room, wherever. You watch him in the weight room, and there's been days we had to drag him out. He's been so worn down. That's the kid he is."

Cash Robinson and Kanyon Cox are also pushing for playing time on the line, so Tidwell believes Ragland's strength this season might lie in the trenches on both sides of the ball if the Purple Devils can remain healthy.

On fourth down, Ragland will turn to Kay to punt if the team is out of field goal range.

On the defensive side of the ball, the Purple Devils' defensive line is anchored by Clark, who Tidwell said is up to 230 pounds this season after playing at 180 last year.

He will be joined by Isbell and La'Darius Rembert who missed last season with an injury.

"He's been almost impossible to block for our guys this summer so I think he's going to have a great year for us," Tidwell said of Rembert.

Junior Ethan Courtney is back at middle linebacker after recording 126 tackles last season. He could be even better this year since the scale is reading 220 now instead of 180.

DJ Turner will play outside when he's not lining up as an edge rusher. The rest of the linebacker corps will include some combination of Mickler, Byers and perhaps others.

Turner will once again see time at safety. Jagger seems like a favorite to join him back there, but it's possible the team moves him to cornerback. Ezra Hill seems like the only other surefire starter in the secondary with Lee and Sisson among those battling it out for the remaining spots.

Ragland was unable to make it past the second round last year, but few teams looked as dangerous as the Purple Devils did down the stretch. Tidwell hopes a tough schedule can prepare his team for a similar run this year.

"Our non-region schedule is very, very tough," Tidwell said. "I told our kids all the time that I think we are going to trial by fire early, and if you don't pull your big boy britches on, you will be staring 0-4 in the face."

Healthy St. Clair County ready to roll

By TYLER WALDREP
twaldrep@dailyhome.com

ODENVILLE — St. Clair County coach P.J. Wright finds himself in the rare position of returning all four quarterbacks that started games last season for the injury-ravaged Saints.

However, after an off-season competition Wright is ready to once again turn things over to senior Nigel Dowdell who started the first game last season.

"Speed, he's reacting well with the ball when the ball is snapped, and when he runs, he can run off with it," Wright said. "He has the ability of elusive speed, making you miss in space. Decision-making has gotten better, still can improve, but it's gotten better."

Dowdell was one of many Saints starters who suffered serious injuries early last season. Wright said shoulder injuries were the most common. In an effort to reduce those going forward, Wright said the team focused on strengthening shoulder muscles and increasing upper body flexibility this offseason.

"You know, you got to teach tackling differently than what you've ever taught before," Wright said. "We're now taking our head out of the game we're roll tackling, we're trying to be safer, but what was happening to us is that we started grabbing more. As we grab, we're getting our shoulders ripped, and that's exactly what happened."

Speaking of the defense, Wright expects big things out of his linemen. Senior Dezmond Allen has solidified himself as a leader for that unit on and off the



Tucker Webb/The Daily Home

After the season, head coach P.J. Wright wants all of his offensive and defensive linemen to be wrestlers so they learn how to handle their bodies and handle their hands and learn leverage.

field. The Saints coach is also excited to watch freshman Jamarcus Hardy continue to develop.

"He's a freshman kid that I really think is gonna, you're gonna hear his name a lot over the next four years," Wright said. "I think he's gonna be a good one on the defensive front."

First-year football play-

er Preston Ragan is expected to win the last starting spot on the defensive line. Despite his inexperience on the football field, Wright is excited to see the senior wrestler show off his raw potential.

"As soon as football ends, I want all those offensive line, defensive line to be wrestlers," Wright said. "And learn

how to handle their bodies and handle their hands and learn leverage."

The linebacker corps includes Tyson Stein, C.J. Martin, Jaiden Badgett, and Ryan Parker. Landon Houts is also in the mix to see time inside.

Juniors Amir Gulley and Devin Tilley will pro-

See **SCCHS**, Page 43

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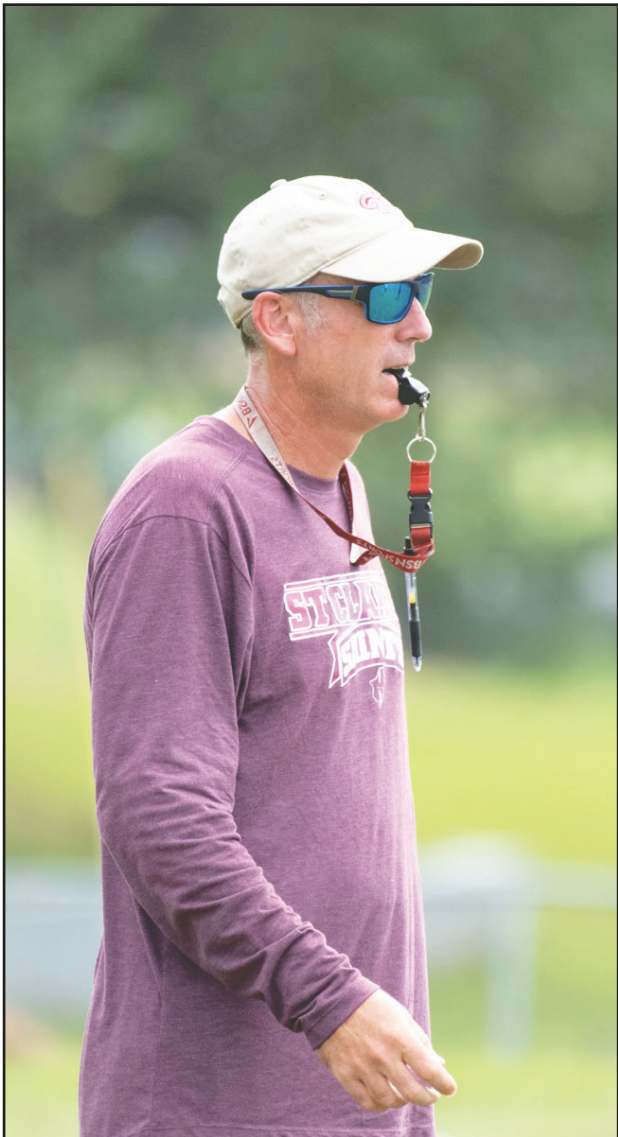


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SCCHS

From Page 38

vide back-end support from the safety positions while Jeremiah Thomas holds down one corner spot. AJ Huff and Jayden Cody are early favorites to land the other starting corner spot, but Wright said he wouldn't be surprised if someone else emerges to take on that role.

Both Cody and Thomas will also see plenty of time at receiver.

"The kid is just an athlete," Wright said of Thomas. "He's probably one of the better athletes we got. The best athlete we got. He's got a lot of potential out there."

On the ground, Wright will turn to Parker first and Martin second, although senior Gage Zuchelli will also be in the rotation at running back.

"Ryan and CJ are both three yards and a cloud of dust gas," Wright said. "They have the ability to make you miss, but they'd much rather put their head down and run through somebody. "Which sometimes I wish they would avoid that brick wall, but they're tough kids. Gage is a little more, he does a little more shiftiness, a little more looseness in the hole."

Paving the way for those guys will be an offensive line that includes four returning starters in Joseph Coker, Will Keenum, Lucas Mrachkovskiy and Gavin Smith.

The new face on the line is junior Bradley Smith who has no relation to Gavin.

"Anytime that you can return all of your starting offensive linemen or most of them, it's a plus," Wright said. "And they

are truly the leaders of the locker room. They understand what's going on. They lead by example."

While all five guys have proven to be shining examples of work ethic this off-season, center Coker has emerged as a leader within the group.

"And he's the one that that kind of pulls everybody along with him," Wright said. "Not so much of a point, point his finger in your face and say let's go. It's more of an example-type person."

Mrachkovskiy has also distinguished himself as a player with college potential, especially given his 6-foot-2, 261-pound frame.

"When you see us up front, you see our offensive line, he's the first person you go to and say wow, that's a specimen," Wright said.

Wright's first year leading the Saints ended with a winless season. He said last year's team was better than that, but a few early mistakes cost the team early on before injuries ravaged the team.

Wright said consistency would be key this year, although the future does look bright. Seventy-two seventh and eighth-graders showed up this summer to practice on the middle school team, which is an increase of at least 24 players.

"It's completely different than what it was this time last year, this time last year," Wright said.

"Like you said, (I was) still trying to learn the kids, (they were) still trying to learn the system. ... And we've got to do a better job of loading the program to get kids interested."



Photos by Tucker Webb/The Daily Home



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Reloaded Tigers ready to compete

By TYLER WALDREP
twaldrep@dailyhome.com

SPRINGVILLE

Senior quarterback Asa Morrison proved he could be quite dangerous with the ball in his hands last season, but this fall, the former long snapper is prepared to do the same with his foot.

Springville coach Jon Clements discovered Morrison has a hidden talent.

"I said, 'I didn't know you could kick,' and he said, 'Well, you've always made me snap it,'" Clements said.

Of course, to hear Clements tell it, there's not much Morrison can't do on the football field, basketball court or baseball diamond. The Springville coach described Morrison as a hyper-competitive individual, whether he's pitching coins in the hallways or stepping foot on the field under the Friday night lights.

"Probably the best athlete in the school," Clements said. "He has really, really matured in the last year. Asa is a team player, Asa doesn't talk a lot, Asa doesn't push the envelope a lot. He just shows up when it is time to go to work, does his job and goes home. He is very quiet and that is something that I probably like the most about him is he leads by what he does. He is a competitor."

"Everybody is better because he's on our team."

That includes returning starting receivers Noel Cox and Collin Lockhart. Clements said Cox, who will also return punts, is probably one of the most dynamic players on the team.

Cox should open things up for the 6-foot-3, 205-



Tucker Webb/The Daily Home

Springville is rebuilding after losing 10 seniors on last year's team.

pound Lockhart, or maybe it will be the other way around.

"He's got unbelievable ball skills, but this is his second year to play football," Clements said of Lockhart. "To me, the thing that separates the men from the boys is which receiver can get out there and be physical and let you know that I'm here, and I think we

saw flashes of that last year, not enough to say wow. ... I just want him to put it all together because when it happens, it is going to be special."

Junior Drake Digiacoia will start at the slot position, although fellow Jake Isbell will see time there as well. Freshman Brady Caldwell is currently fighting for time at receiver

behind those first four.

Things are thinner for the Tigers at running back after junior Mason Gore tore his ACL.

Junior Jamari Cash, along with the freshman duo of Levi Howard and Gavin Webber, will all see carries this season for the Tigers in Gore's absence.

See **Springville**, Page 48

SPRINGVILLE

Aug. 18, at Etowah
Aug. 26, vs. Mortimer Jordan
Sept. 2, at Leeds
Sept. 9, vs. Southside-Gadsden
Sept. 16, at Alexandria
Sept. 23, vs. Oneonta
Sept. 30, at Moody
Oct. 7, vs. Lincoln
Oct. 14, OPEN
Oct. 21, vs. St. Clair County
Oct. 28, at Pell City



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High School Football
Teams!*

Springville

From Page 44

Offensive linemen Nathan Baldwin and Chandler Chancellor return to pave the way for those three.

Baldwin, a sophomore, started at left tackle last season but will start at center this year.

"He is a very savvy kid," Clements said. "He understands football, he is also a very intelligent young man."

Baldwin is the only lineman that had a permanent position before the month of August. Although Chancellor, a senior that played right tackle last year, seems like an early favorite to start at left tackle.

"Chandler has become more of a leader for us lately," Clements said. "He was not that way last year, because we had so many seniors. He was kind of a follower, so he didn't have to be the guy, but now going into the starting role and being the dude. I'm really proud of him because he's come a long way since I got here. He was probably somebody I didn't even know was on our team, and now he's developed into playing for us."

Brodie Ginn and Brenden McCain will join those two on the offensive line while senior Matthew Cherry and freshman Wyatt Emmanuel battle it out for the fifth starting spot.

While the offense features a good mix of familiar faces, Clements is practically starting over on defense since sophomore safety Jake Conner is the only returning starter.

"We're having to replace 10 guys, and that is so tough, and it to me is not fair," Clements said. "But you had such a senior-heavy class, but all these guys have never had to play. Great JV players, but they haven't had to play on Friday night."

What comes as hard times can also be fun times."

Senior Tucker Cayse will also see time at safety this season, while junior Cody Ingram and sophomore Brady Seaman start at corner.

"Brady is a kid to me that you look at him and you say that kid is going to have a great future in football," Clements said. "He's long, he's a 6-1 kid who can run, but he can't drive yet."

Spencer Stewart, Alex Cox and Andrew Carroll will start on the defensive line with sophomore Landon McKendree first in line to spell them.

Junior Jackson Wildinger headlines a linebacker corps that also includes Cole Black, Cole Tittle and Parker McAdams.

"Jackson Wildinger is what I wish every kid was like," Clements said. "My daughter is three, but if she was 16 and she told me she was dating Jackson Wildinger, I'd be like that is okay. He is just a standup individual."

With so much inexperience on one side of the ball, Springville's head coach knows there will be a learning curve. Mistakes will be made, so Clements won't look for perfection, but he will look for the defense to limit the big plays given up.

It's sure to be quite a contrast from last year's group, which forced more turnovers than any team Clements ever coached before. In fact, the second-year Tigers coach said he probably didn't thank his first group at Springville enough last season.

"They set the standard of things that are going to change, and I appreciate that," Clements said. "I know sometimes I probably didn't give them as much credit as they needed. ... You can't replace those guys."



Photos by Tucker Webb/The Daily Home





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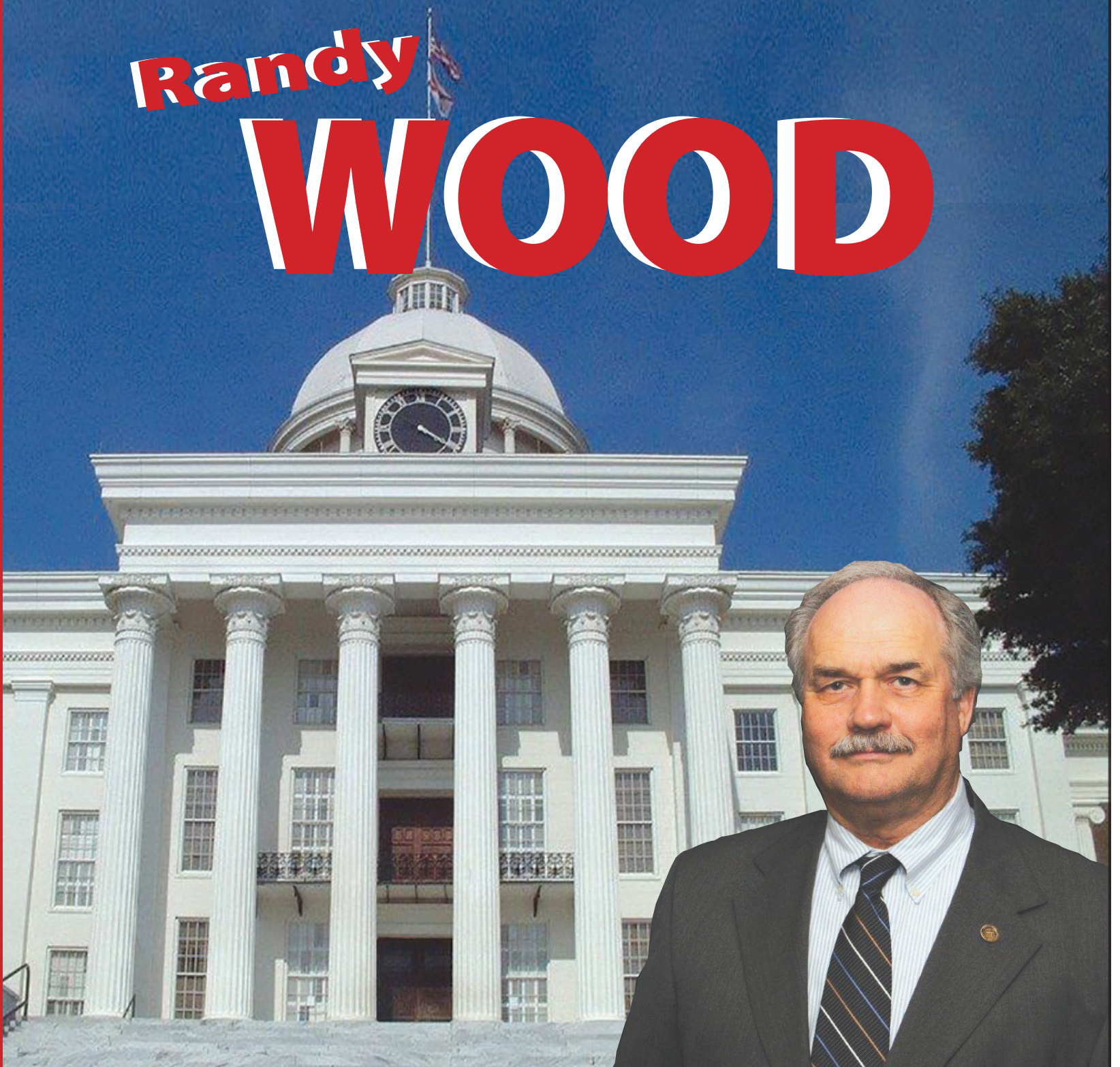
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Lions looking for new leaders to emerge

By TYLER WALDREP
twaldrep@dailyhome.com

PELL CITY — Victory Christian junior Kaden Dixon has been waiting a long time to prove himself on the football field.

After transferring to Victory Christian last fall, he was ineligible to play.

Not that Dixon ever let that adversity affect the way he practiced.

"He gave us looks with a good attitude every day," Victory Christian coach Bruce Breland said. "It was like, 'Good grief.' And he did it with such a positive way and was trying to help the team. ... He took a lot of abuse."

As the scout-team running back, Dixon took his fair share of lumps last season, but Breland said he also produced plenty of eyebrow-raising moments.

"I'm anxious to see when the lights come on on Friday night how he is going to react because we don't know," Breland said. "I know he gives everything he's got, whether it be practice, workouts, just setting up the field."

Dixon will start at both running back and strong safety for the Lions this season. He'll run behind a line that includes three newcomers.

Junior William Wilson-Hueter will get the start at right tackle. Breland describes him as a guy that has "college potential" based on his work ethic and size (about 6-foot-3 and 260 pounds).

Senior Dalton Rogers will start beside him at right guard. He will also see time at inside linebacker.

"Dalton doesn't know how good he can be," Breland said.

The last of the newcomers is Dylan Hollis, who will take over at center. Breland was particularly proud of Hollis after the junior volunteered to change positions when the Lions needed a new center during the second week of July.

See Ragland, Page 55

VICTORY CHRISTIAN

Aug. 19, vs. Woodland
Aug. 26, at Whitesburg Christian
Sept. 2, at Talladega County Central
Sept. 9, vs. Spring Garden
Sept. 16, at Donoho
Sept. 23, vs. Gaylesville
Sept. 30, vs. Ragland
Oct. 7, at Wadley
Oct. 14, OPEN
Oct. 21, vs. Winterboro
Oct. 28, at Coosa Christian



Tucker Webb/The Daily Home

Victory Christian's entire defense is learning new positions.



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Victory

From Page 50

Breland described senior left tackle Connor Denson, a returning starter, as one of the team's best technicians on the line. Fellow senior Drew Nibblet will start next to him at left guard.

"He is definitely the foundation up there," Breland said of Nibblet. "He plays with all his heart. He really does. ... The thing I like about him is his competitive spirit that he's got. He enjoys winning not only individually, but the team doing well. You see it in his body language and his actions."

Those five will be tasked with keeping quarterback Shepard Sargent upright this season. Sargent started last season as a freshman. With an almost completely new cast around the sophomore, Breland said the offense is still very much a work in progress. However, the coach does expect his quarterback to take a step forward this season.

"Imagine you're stepping into the huddle as a freshman, and there are all these seniors that have been through it, and you're trying to lead them," Breland said. "So you've got to sell yourself what you have quality wise that is character and football as well. So this year, he should be much more adapted to that."

Speaking of the new skill position players, wide receiver Brayden Holladay should be one of the team's top options in the passing game this season after he served in a backup capacity last season.

Fullback Cameron Cheatwood shouldn't touch the ball much this season,

but there's no doubting his place as the secret ingredient that keeps the Lions' offense moving.

"He is probably the foundation of our team," Breland said. "Great leader, he makes plays all over the field, and all the other players, whether it be in the weight room or whether it be on the field, all the other kids respect him a lot."

Cheatwood will also start at middle linebacker. Reed Martin didn't play last season, but he will also split time at fullback and inside linebacker.

Denson will once again start on the defensive line for the Lions however, Breland decided they need his size at defensive tackle, so he will move inside this year. Denson will also handle place-kicking duties this year.

Cayden Brunson, a former outside linebacker, will see time at defensive end.

Keeping up with the trend, Asa Warren, a former cornerback, will split time between safety and receiver this season.

With almost the entire defense learning new positions, Victory Christian still has a lot of growing up to do on both sides of the ball. Breland said the Lions would also need leaders to emerge if they are going to be successful.

"A lot of us are not used to playing that role, so we've got to quit worrying about ourselves and play for the guy next to us," Breland said. "That means to me, doing your homework and learning what we are trying to teach. That way, you know what your job is."



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