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On the front cover: Left to right, Jacob Beall (Hulbert),
Qua'shon Leathers (Tahlequah), and Tristan Howe (Keys).

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SUSPENDED: NSU will be without football in 2020



By **BYRON BEERS**
bbeers@tahlequahdailypress.com

Friday, Aug. 14 was a historic but harsh day for Northeastern State and its football program.

For the first time since 1945, NSU will not be playing football.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to alter the landscape in athletics.

The Mid-America Intercollegiate Athletics Association announced on Aug. 14 that it is suspending all fall sports for the remainder of the year with a possibility of playing a limited number of games in the spring of 2021.

“The health and well-being of MIAA student-athletes, coaches, administrators, and our communities continues to be the Association’s top priority,” stated President Steve Scott of Pittsburg State University, chairperson of the MIAA CEO Council. “The MIAA is taking these important actions today to help our athletic departments comply with these new NCAA membership requirements, and to assist our campuses as we continue to address this public health crisis.”

The decision, which comes a week after the NCAA announced the cancellation of all fall sports championships, will also impact the NSU soccer, golf and tennis programs.

In 1945, Northeastern State didn’t play a single game for a fourth straight year during the World War II years. The last time a pandemic interrupted an NSU season was 1918 during the Spanish Flu. NSU played just once, defeating Southwestern Oklahoma State, 101-0.

J.J. Eckert, who is entering his second season as head coach, wasn’t surprised when he first heard the announcement.

“I think obviously the writing was on the wall,” Eckert said. “When you watch what’s happened throughout college football in the last week with conferences shutting down for the season I think you knew it was going to happen, it was

just when. Even this morning with a 10 a.m. athletic director's meeting with Matt [Cochran], I was still optimistic that maybe we found a way, maybe we found an opportunity to somehow, some way make this work, but ultimately it didn't work out that way.

"I really appreciate everything that President [Steve] Turner and Matt Cochran have done in helping us through this process because obviously these last five months have really, really been challenging. To get here today and know the 2020 season has been canceled, I hate it because you know where you're at and you know that there was a chance, but I hate it for our student-athletes. Obviously the spring was what it was but then you turn around and here we are in the fall and we're doing the same things that took place back then. It's just a tough thing to have to swallow on Aug. 14 that this is where we're at."

It's been a whirlwind for NSU Athletics Director Matt Cochran, who was hired on June 24 after serving nearly five months as the interim AD. Cochran was put through the same situation when spring sports were shut down in March.

The first alteration for football came on July 20 when the MIAA postponed games over the first three weeks. The RiverHawks were originally scheduled to open their season on Sept. 12 against Missouri Western at Doc Wadley Stadium. In July, NSU's season opener was moved to Oct. 3 against Missouri Southern in Tahlequah.

"I've been a part of a task force in the MIAA since way back in March and we've been preparing all summer long to have competition," Cochran said. "The biggest thing is the testing piece. There's just requirements you have to meet if you're going to compete and it becomes hard for us to do on this level. The ADs met Wednesday evening and put together some recommendations and some concerns and then passed it onto the presidents. We were to the point where the main thing we wanted was to delay to a certain point potentially, but then they came back and said they wanted to postpone until Jan. 1.

"We have to figure out what we're going to do with our fall sports. Are we going to have any sort of meaningful competition in the spring? We'll do everything we can to make that happen, but I think ultimately in some shape or form or fashion it's going to be the coaches and the leagues decisions to decide exactly what they want to do."

Eckert reached out to some of his players prior to the MIAA's official announcement.

"We sent a text out prior to the MIAA releasing their statement at 11 a.m. to just try to be in front of it before our players saw it on social media or somewhere else," Eckert said. "We've got to get a team meeting lined up to be able to sit down and talk and kind of layout what the itinerary looks like now, what we're looking at as possibilities and so forth moving forward.

"I'm a firm believer and I preach it a bunch, it's not what happens to you, it's how you deal with it. I'm sure all of us are going to find a way to get a positive out of this somehow, some way and get ourselves going in the right direction. It's uncharted territory and none of us have ever been down it."



Tahlequah Football



2020 Schedule

Sept. 4	vs. Tulsa McLain	7 p.m.
Sept. 11	at Wagoner	7 p.m.
Sept. 18	vs. Sallisaw	7 p.m.
Sept. 25	at Pryor	7 p.m.
Oct. 2	vs. Tulsa Hale (Homecoming)	7 p.m.
Oct. 9	at Sapulpa	7 p.m.
Oct. 15	vs. Claremore	7 p.m.
Oct. 23	at Glenpool	7 p.m.
Oct. 30	vs. Tulsa Memorial	7 p.m.
Nov. 6	at Collinsville	7 p.m.

REBUILD OR RELOAD?

Tigers have both questions and answers going into 2020

By **BYRON BEERS**
bbeers@tahlequahdailypress.com

Brad Gilbert will be starting over in many ways in 2020.

Gilbert, who will be entering his ninth year as Tahlequah head coach, will have new faces at a number of positions following consecutive 9-2 seasons and a district championship.

He's replacing a valuable two-year starter at quarterback in Tate Christian, the program's all-time leading rusher in running back Dae Dae Leathers, the school's all-time leader in quarterback sacks in defensive end Blake Corn, leading tackler in linebacker Dylan Parish, and a fixture at receiver in Tristan King.

There are some big shoes to fill.

Leathers and Corn were Oklahoma Coaches Association All-State selections, while Corn was the District 5A-4 Player of the Year and Leathers the 5A-4 Offensive Player of the Year. Christian was the 5A-4 Co-Quarterback of the Year, and Parish was voted the 5A-4 Linebacker of the Year.

The offensive and defensive lines will also need to be retooled.

Gilbert faces question marks, but he's all about the day-to-day process of restructuring.

He's been in this position before, and he feels reenergized.

"I would say that I'm excited," Gilbert said. "When you have a group of players like we've had the last couple of years and then they move on, it re-energizes you because you're starting anew with a bunch of new faces. There's a lot of challenges that I think anybody that is faced with challenges, there's two reactions - you're either going to cower down towards them, or you're going to be excited and get after



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and go forward with it. I look at challenges as an opportunity and I think our staff would say the same. I think there's a lot of opportunity with this group in front of us."

Gilbert's track record is impressive. The Tigers haven't won less than eight games in a season since 2016. Under Gilbert, who was the District 5A-4 Coach of the Year last season, the Tigers have reached the playoffs over the last six years, they've won 41 games since 2015, and they locked up their first district title since 1991 in 2019.

The cupboard isn't completely bare going into 2020.

The Tigers return a talented trio in multi-dimensional receiver/running back/defensive back Kobey Baker, linebacker/fullback Angel Quazada and defensive back/receiver Qua'shon Leathers, who's been offered by the University of Central Oklahoma.

It's a good starting point and it mixes in with other returnees who played significant roles last year in linebackers Carson Ferguson and Shaw Thornton, offensive linemen Justin Hitchcock

and Tristan Walters, and currently injured receiver/defensive back Bradley Pruitt.

"If we can overcome some challenges, I think the sky's the limit with this group," Gilbert said. "We like this group, we really do. We might only win two games, but I know this...one thing that I have learned is there is a belief now with every group that comes into our program. There's a belief that we're going to win. That can't be something that's created fictitiously, it's created because it's been earned. I think our kids take being a Tahlequah Tiger and a football player in our program seriously."

OFFENSE

Tahlequah won't have the luxury of leaning on an experienced quarterback like it did last season.

Tate Christain, now at Northeastern State, provided stability and some spectacular moments in crucial times at the position over two seasons as the starter, and was picked District 5A-4 Co-Quarterback of the Year as a senior.

Christian threw for 1,169 yards, completing 56.8 percent of his passes, and had 19 touchdown passes in 10 games as a senior.

Also gone is back-up Simeon Armstrong, who started in Tahlequah's playoff loss to Coweta after Christian suffered a shoulder injury in the regular season finale against Claremore.

Junior Tyler Joice and senior Hunter Smith are the top candidates to replace Christian. In limited roles last year, they combined to complete 7 of 17 passes for 97 yards with one touchdown and one interception.

Gilbert plans on making a decision on a starter either between Tahlequah's two scrimmages or leading up the season opener against Tulsa McLain.

"We've been in this situation before," Gilbert said of the quarterback battle. "This is the fourth competition we've had since I've been here. One thing that I've always noticed, and what's always been very important to

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me, is how they've handled the competition. They understand it's a competition, but ultimately we've got to make the best decision that's best for our football team. Both of these guys have handled it very well, exactly as you would want them to handle it."

Dae Dae Leathers will be enormously missed at running back. The 2019 District 5A-4 Offensive Player of the Year and OCA All-State pick was legendary and set the program standard. The Tigers' biggest offensive threat over the last two seasons rushed for a school record 3,570 yards and 44 touchdowns, and averaged better than seven yards per carry. As a senior, he rushed for 1,568 yards and 22 touchdowns and on three occasions rushed for over 200 yards, including 258 to open the season against Fort Gibson.

There's several running backs in place to fill in for the departure of Leathers. Junior Malik McMurtrey rushed for 241 yards on 40 carries with four touchdowns last year. Baker, who will also be used as a receiver, rushed

for 60 yards with a pair of TDs, and Ferguson, who will also work as a slot receiver, added 22 yards with a score.

"Malik has some explosiveness to him and he's a physical style runner with very good speed," Gilbert said.

"If we can overcome some challenges, I think the sky's the limit with this group."

**BRAD GILBERT
TAHLEQUAH HEAD COACH**

"He's determined and he's a guy that people know. Kobey and Carson will be right there behind Malik and also carry a big load. Kobey's going to con-

tinue to be that slot guy predominantly, but he will provide a needed option at the tailback spot along with Carson."

Quezada and senior Brody Bouher will be the primary fullbacks.

Baker returns as the most experienced receiver. He led the team with 29 receptions as a junior and totaled 333 yards and two TDs.

Ferguson, Qua'shon Leathers, senior Tanner Christian, junior Jenks move-in Eli McWilliams, junior Parker Lane and sophomore Cale Matlock are other receivers expected to contribute.

"We feel comfortable with where we're at," Gilbert said of the receiving group. "We need to continue to get better. I don't know what kind of production we'll see, but I'm not hesitant to say that they're going to be able to produce at a high level to allow us to be successful."

The Tigers lose starters Kooper McAlvain, Hayden Napier, Corn and

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Brian Kester
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Tigers

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Joe Hendrix up front, but there's still experience returning.

Hitchcock will anchor the offensive line at right tackle. He started nine games as a junior. Walters, who also got a lot of snaps last year and spelled Corn often, will be at left tackle. Senior Lance Holcomb also has experience as a starter at guard.

Senior Rocky Hensley is working at left guard, senior Brandon Jackson will provide depth, and junior Louis Hernandez and senior Caleb Davis are working at the center spot.

"We have a good nucleus of guys," Gilbert said of the offensive line.

"There's others that we're working, but those are the guys that come to the forefront. We're also excited about the sophomore group that has a lot of size. We've got good numbers and it's a good group overall."

DEFENSE

Outside of the quarterback position, Tahlequah has its biggest questions on defense, but also its biggest answers.

The defensive line is being rebuilt, while the linebackers and defensive backs bring proven production.

Corn was one of the program's all-time greats as a defensive end. The

NSU signee was a 2019 OCA All-State selection, the District 5A-4 Player of the Year and the school's all-time sack leader. As a senior, he recorded nine sacks, 58 tackles and a team-high 15 tackles for losses.

The Tigers will also be without Travis Davis and Montana Wood up front, a duo that combined for 80 tackles, five of those for losses, four sacks.

In 2020, the Tigers will have names like Jonathan Davis, Caleb Davis, Aiden Glynn, Clay Hunter, Jon Lyman, Jackson, Walters and Hernandez in the

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rotation. Jackson and Jonathan Davis have experience at defensive end, and Glynn and Hernandez offer good size in the middle.

As a whole, it's a unit that's unproven and the most inexperienced in Gilbert's tenure as head coach.

"We've got a lot of bodies there on the defensive line, we just don't know what combination of guys," Gilbert said. "We usually play anywhere from seven to eight bodies on a Friday night on the defensive line. We think we're going to be able to find the seven or eight, we just don't know what three will be starters. What's important is

that these guys show everyday and are coachable so they can work and continue to improve. This is probably the first year we've ever been this inexperienced on the defensive line going into a season."

Tahlequah returns three of its four starting linebackers from last season, but will be missing a big piece in Parish. Parish, the 5A-4 Linebacker of the Year and a NSU signee, registered a team-high 103 tackles and collected nine tackles for losses in his final campaign.

Quezada will be the heart in the middle, much like Parish was in 2019.

Quezada was second on the team with 95 tackles last year. He also had six tackles for losses and two sacks and three quarterback hurries.

Lining up alongside Quezada will be either senior Brett Bolin, McWilliams or sophomore Josh Munoz.

Ferguson and Thornton return as starters on the outside. Ferguson finished with 47 tackles, 10 tackles for losses and had five quarterback sacks as a junior, while Thornton had 43 tackles, three for losses, and one quarterback hurry. Junior Khaidyn Spoon-

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more and Munoz will also factor in at the outside spots.

"We feel good with where we're at," Gilbert said of the linebackers. "Angel brings a wealth of experience, he's very smart and he's very active. We're excited about him and his leadership that he provides from that inside linebacker position. Ferguson and Thornton both started all 11 games last year and we feel very comfortable with both of them. Experience is a good thing, and we've got that at the linebacker positions."

The Tigers are also in good hands in the secondary, especially with returning safeties Qua'shon Leathers and Baker.

Leathers was third on the team with 78 tackles as a junior. He led with three interceptions, six passes defended and had one fumble recovery. Baker recorded 51 tackles, four tackles for losses, a pair of interceptions and three passes defended.

"Those guys have been leaders in our football program over the last couple of years," Gilbert said. "Kobey's

been a three-year starter for us, and Qua'shon's been a starter over the last three years as well. Both are very, very experienced football players, they're both very good leaders, and they both make a lot of plays for us."

Others who will play roles at the safety positions include sophomore Michael Seacrat, senior Matt Munoz and sophomore Coda Bunch.

Tahlequah will be without Riley Reed at cornerback due to an injury, and the other corner, senior Bradley Pruitt, is expected to miss the first four weeks with an injury.

Matt Munoz, Hunter Smith, Lane, McMurtrey and Dylan Leep will each get snaps at corner.

"We like the guys we have, we just don't have anybody with experience after the two injuries," Gilbert said of his corners. "We like their athleticism. We like all of them and they all bring something different to the table to a degree."

SCHEDULE

Tahlequah also faces new challenges

with its 2020 schedule.

There's two new non-district opponents in traditional Class 4A power Wagoner and Tulsa McLain, and new additions in District 5A-4 with Sapulpa, who moves down from 6A, Glenpool and Tulsa Hale.

Wagoner highlights the non-district portion of the schedule in week two and will give the Tigers an early-season test. The two schools haven't met since 1991. Wagoner, who went on a state record 48-game win streak that started in 2014 and ended in 2017, went 10-3 last season.

"It's always good to play somebody like that," Gilbert said in July. "We've been wanting to put them on the schedule for a while, and this year just that opportunity came up. I know [Wagoner head coach] Dale Condict really well and we're excited about playing them. They know how to win. They've won at a high level for a long period of time. We know that they're a big challenge but it's a great test for us

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to find out where we're at with a fairly young team early in the season."

Familiar opponents in Sallisaw (non-district), Collinsville, Claremore, Pryor and Tulsa Memorial remain on the 2020 slate.

The meeting with Tulsa McLain at Doc Wadley Stadium to start the season will be the first since 1991. The Tigers have won five of the last six matchups with Sallisaw in a series that will extend to 13 consecutive years.

In district games last year, Tahlequah defeated Collinsville, 35-28, in an overtime thriller, blasted Pryor, 58-13, hammered Tulsa Memorial, 54-8, on Halloween, and suffered its lone regular season loss to Claremore, 21-14.

The Tigers played Fort Gibson the previous 10 years in season openers. They went up against Coweta 15 times since the 2006 season, three of those matchups in the play-offs.

Gilbert expects Collinsville to be the preseason district favorite. The Cardinals have the most experience returning from a team that went 8-3 a year ago.

"Collinsville will more than likely be the favorite," he said. "It's not a knock on any other team but I think they return the most, and year in and year out, it seems like they're always up there atop the standings at either one or two. I wouldn't expect anything different from them."



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Sequoyah athletics will cease to exist for nine weeks

By **BYRON BEERS**
bbeers@tahlequahdailypress.com

A decision to shut down athletics at Sequoyah High School for the first nine weeks of the fall semester has brought turmoil.

Cherokee Nation Chief of Staff Todd Enlow knew it would be that way when he recommended to Principal Chief Chuck Hoskin, Jr. to put a hold on fall athletics.

The decision was officially announced on Wednesday, July 29 in a release by Cherokee Nation with continued COVID-19 concerns.

The nine week period, which will begin Aug. 17, will wipe out an entire season of fastpitch softball and volleyball and a large portion of the cross country and football schedules.

“Chief’s going to have the ultimate say on that, but it was my recommendation, a strong recommendation that we look at canceling athletics for a while,” Enlow said. “Cherokee Nation’s unique in the sense that we’re a government, we’re a healthcare system, we’re an education system, we’re a job placement system, we’re an international corporation, we’re a food security organization...we’ve got all of these skill sets and resources and people that can help us make decisions collectively. We keep track of everything and we run nine clinics in a hospital, and we understand how the virus

is moving in the communities, how people are getting and contracting the virus. We know what the effects of wearing a mask are, and social distancing.

“A rural school in Adair County or Mayes or Delaware doesn’t have access to all of those resources in the school system, so we utilize that and we try to make those decisions comprehensively, not just for Sequoyah, but child development centers and other places. We used all of that to form this decision. If you look at the State Board of Education’s recommendations, many of our counties around us are in orange level two, which means we shouldn’t be participating, based on the guidelines and the recommendations, we should not be participating in spectator sports.”

The decision has encountered resistance from coaches, student-athletes and the community. Pat Moore, hired in early June as the superintendent and boys’ basketball coach, resigned earlier this week.

“We’ve had some, some pretty outspoken,” Enlow said. “I’ve got friends that have kids that go to Sequoyah that have called me and were polite and respectful, but basically told me we didn’t care and we don’t know what we’re doing. It’s hard. Obviously there’s not an easy decision for any of us to make because we know what role sports plays in the commu-



nity. But as far as the priorities of protecting lives and trying to save as many as we can and not put people in jeopardy, that's ultimately why we make this decision."

Enlow said he's leaving the door open to resume sports if conditions allow.

"I would say the door's open," he said. "If our numbers are trending better we would go back and reeval-

uate. I'll tell you right now, we're still looking at ways to try and utilize resources we have to figure out ways to do sports. Just like the NBA, it's created a bubble. Is there a way for us to do that with our student athletes and create that environment? I don't know that we would do games against other teams, and I'm hopeful that other teams are gonna see the data and

look at what's out there and not feel comfortable."

Enlow admitted that he's concerned about what the long-term effects could have for athletics at Sequoyah.

"Yeah, I do, and that's why this was not an easy decision because Sequoyah's got a storied history in cross country, in basketball, in softball, in football, I mean all the sports and activities — drama club, band...we've got a pretty good extracurricular program," he said. "We've reached out to the OSSAA (Oklahoma Secondary School Activities Association) and asked them to consider the impacts of what the pandemic is having on the communities as a collective across the state and we've also talked to them about what eligibility looks like for...because

we don't want to get in the way of any of our students. I'm concerned if they want to go to another school and play, I'm concerned about their health. But we don't want to stand in their way and that's why we made the decision and made the announcement when we did because we wanted to be fair and upfront with those parents and with those students if they needed to make that tough decision to go to another school."

In fastpitch softball, the Lady Indians were scheduled to open their season on Aug. 10 at home against Salina. The volleyball team was slated to open its season against Chouteau on Aug. 13, cross country was scheduled to open in Stroud on Aug. 15, and football was to open at home against Muldrow on Sept. 4.

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Keys Football

2020 Schedule



Sept. 4	at Gore	7 p.m.
Sept. 11	at Wilburton	7 p.m.
Sept. 18	OPEN	
Sept. 25	vs. Vian	7 p.m.
Oct. 2	at Pocola	7 p.m.
Oct. 9	vs. Heavener (Homecoming)	7 p.m.
Oct. 15	at Roland	7 p.m.
Oct. 23	vs. Spiro	7 p.m.
Oct. 30	at Panama	7 p.m.
Nov. 6	vs. Cascia Hall	7 p.m.

Cougars will be led by fourth head coach in four years

By **RANDY WILLIAMS**

TDP Special Writer

Change from the top has been at a constant for the Keys football program.

The Cougars will be guided in 2020 by their fourth head coach in as many years after going 4-6 last season under head coach Mel Maxfield.

Keys hired head coach Adam Hass in March. Hass previously served as assistant head coach and offensive coordinator at Collinsville. The Cardinals went 20-4 the past two seasons with Hass under head coach Kevin Jones.

"We have certainly had an issue with stability, and Coach Hass has only worked in two school districts in his career and in both of those places his supervisors, peers and opponents all sung his praises," said Keys Athletic Director Steven Goss after the hire back in March.

The Cougars went 3-4 last season in District 2A-5. Their season did have an optimistic three-week stretch with a blowout win at Pocola, followed by shutout wins against Panama and Westville, respectively.

The Oklahoma Secondary Schools Activity Association made the decision to go forward with fall sports as planned earlier in August. The pandemic has affected Keys after Sequoyah made the decision to suspend fall sports. Sequoyah was slated to host Keys week four.

"We just want to be able to keep playing," Hass said on the uncertainty surrounding sports amid COVID-19.

There is reason to be enthusiastic about the Cougars upcoming season. They bring leadership

and experience on both sides of the ball. Most of the returning players have seen playing time as freshmen and sophomores.

"We want to set a culture consistent with winning," said Hass when asked what he would consider a successful season.

Keys has a history of running a wing-t style offense. Hass has brought a more modern offense with shotgun and three receiver sets.

"The strength of our team is in the trenches on both sides of the ball," said Hass. "They're big and strong and they're going to get after it."

Junior quarterback Lane Taylor will pilot the offense. The 6-foot, 160-pound Taylor started every game last season and also saw time as a freshman.

"Lane is a dynamic player. He can do almost anything from throwing to running to managing the game," said Hass.

Taylor will have senior wide receiver Jordan Andrews on the outside along with Cooper Hamilton and Garrett Glory. Colton Combs and Levi Troyer will compete for a spot at tight end. Bronc Quetone, Garren Barnes and Peyton Williams will also see action at receiver.

Sophomore Joel Scott will replace Bryce Sanders at tailback. Scott did see playing time last season as a freshman. Drew Morgan and Colby Nottingham will also compete with Scott at tailback.

Tristan Howe and Jeremiah Clinton will anchor the offensive line at the tackle spots. Aaron Murphy and Masen Manes

See **KEYS**, page 19

Tristan Howe gives Keys a constant presence

By **RANDY WILLIAMS**

TDP Special Writer

Keys senior Tristan Howe has been a constant presence for the Cougars since his freshman year.

Injuries forced Howe into early action and he has not looked back. The 6-foot-3, 270-pound lineman recorded nine sacks in his junior year.

Keys hired head coach Adam Hass in March, making him the fourth head coach Howe has played under in his high school career.

"The lack of stability has been hard, but Coach Hass knows football and I feel like he's going to bring out the best in me," said Howe.

Howe is used to playing defensive end but will make the transition to nose tackle in coach

Hass' odd-man defensive front.

The nose tackle position is not a glorious one. The nose tackle must demand a double team in order to make plays easier for linebackers, but Howe is anxious to take advantage of his new role. It is arguably the most important position in an odd-man front.

"I have always been quick for my size," Howe said. "I felt like there were a few more plays I could have made last year if I was a little bit faster though."

Howe worked all offseason in order to drop 30 pounds but maintain his strength. The combination of size and speed should be a nightmare for whoever lines up against him.

In addition to being a familiar face defensively, Howe will be asked to play both sides of the ball this season.

"Most likely I'll play tackle, but I may play some guard as well," he said.

He will be protecting returning junior quarterback Lane Taylor.

Howe is one of three seniors in the Cougar locker room, making him a leader to go along with his experience.

"I never really stop being a leader no matter what side of the ball I'm on," said Howe when asked about being a



leader on offense in his first year as a starter on that side.

Keys is looking to improve on their 4-6 record last season.

"I feel it's going to be a lot better season this year. Playoffs are definitely a possibility," Howe said. "I set my personal goals before the season but if I'm asked to do something different in order for us to win I'm fine with that."

Howe's football plans beyond high school are uncertain.

"I still need to take the ACT but I would love the opportunity to play for someone," he said.

The senior definitely has the size and ability to make an impact at the next level. Howe also has versatility that is rare among linemen. He can play multiple positions on both sides whether it be guard or tackle on offense or end and nose defensively. His size and speed allow him to clog

running lanes but also rush the passer. Offensively, he has the quickness to counter a speed rush from a defensive end but also has the strength to be effective as a run blocker.

Howe has next level size to go with an exceptional nose for the football. His play recognition is superb for a defensive lineman. He is a solid tackler that can play behind his pads. His jump off the snap is good but could be one area if he improves could take his game to the next level. He was named most improved camper at the Eastern Oklahoma Line Camp last summer.

Howe has been and will be asked to do a multitude of things in order for his team to be successful. His team-first attitude allows him to relish and dominate in any role he's asked to play.

Howe and the Cougars open up their season on the road against Gore on Sept. 4.

Keys

Continued from page 17

will battle for the center position. Parker Sinclair has been a mainstay on the offensive line. The 6-foot2, 270-pound junior started for the Cougars last season as a sophomore, along with seniors Zac Cessna and Drake Hathaway. Austin Davis will battle for the other guard position alongside Sinclair. Other offensive linemen competing will be Daniel Linville, Miles Ray and Stanley Adamson.

The Cougars will line up in an odd-front defensively. Howe was a starter at defensive end last season but will make the move to nose tackle. Howe is a 6-foot-3, 270-pound senior who has the size and ability to demand a double team. Junior Jeremiah Clinton started with Howe on the defensive line last season. The 6-foot-2, 275-pound Clinton looks to resume his role at defensive end.

Keys must replace two linebackers from last season. Aaron Smither and Shaymon O'Neal both graduated last year. They were joined by returning starter Colby Nottingham. Nottingham will join Howe and Clinton as returning starters for the Cougar front seven. Colton Combs and Drew Morgan will compete for linebacker spots along with Charles Williams, Austin Davis and Garren Barnes.

Cooper Hamilton, Joel Scott, Jordan Andrews and Zach Patterson will battle for playing time at corner. Bronc Quetone, Garrett Glory and Lane Taylor will see action at the safety spots.

Keys opens up its season on the road on Sept. 4 against Gore. The Cougars' home opener will not be until Sept. 25 when they host the state runner up Vian Wolverines.

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Hulbert Football



2020 Schedule

Sept. 4	at Caney Valley	7 p.m.
Sept. 10	vs. Westville	7 p.m.
Sept. 18	at Afton	7 p.m.
Sept. 25	at Canadian	7 p.m.
Oct. 2	vs. Talihina (Homecoming)	7 p.m.
Oct. 9	at Porter	7 p.m.
Oct. 16	at Colcord	7 p.m.
Oct. 23	vs. Gore	7 p.m.
Oct. 30	at Warner	7 p.m.
Nov. 6	vs. Central Sallisaw	7 p.m.

Riders are looking to bounce back

By **RANDY WILLIAMS**

TDP Special Writer

The Hulbert Riders will look to rebound from their 4-6 record last season under second-year head Coach Scott Sapulpa.

The Bruce family bloodline is officially gone from Hulbert. Jacob Bruce made a major impact by breaking the Oklahoma career rushing record while he was there. Younger brother James Bruce graduated last year.

Quarterback and running back Jonathan David Jones and nose tackle Cooper Kenyan graduated last year along with Bruce.

Bruce and Jones had a dominant performance last season against Tahina. The duo combined for 492 yards and six touchdowns in a 53-20 win that night. Jones earned co-defensive back honors for district A-8. Jones, Bruce, Hunter Thomas and Jacob Beall all captured all-district honors.

Sapulpa is eager to get a full off-season with his team in order to prepare. In two years, he has yet to get that opportunity.

"I was hired in May of last year so I missed all but a couple days of spring ball," said Sapulpa.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also affected the Riders' offseason preparations.

"We got about three weeks into summer pride and had to stop," Sapulpa said. "We were able to pick back up but it affected our attendance."

Kyle Deason, Josh McClure and Dylan Harmon have joined the Hulbert coaching staff.

"Last year we only had three coaches. This year we're able to have six," said Sapulpa.

Even with the uncertainty of the pandemic, Sapulpa expects to win.

"We expect to make the playoffs," he said when asked about his expectations. Hulbert missed the playoffs due to a heartbreaking 8-0 loss at Warner last year. That game happened to fall on the same day that Sapulpa's mother passed away.

"It was definitely hard, and practice leading up to the game was difficult because I was by her side," Sapulpa said. "Last year we averaged about 21 points per game and we scored zero."

As if Sapulpa's tenure hasn't been rough enough, the Riders don't expect to start practicing until a week before their opening scrimmage against Salina on August 27 due to COVID-19.

Depth across the board is an issue for Hulbert, but the expectations remain the same.

"Our offensive line will be solid and our tailback position will be solid," Sapulpa said. "The strength of our team will definitely be our running game."

The defensive front will also be a strength of the team. Jacob Beall looks to be the Rider workhorse this season. The 6-foot, 245 pounder played defensive line and linebacker last season but will be making the move to tailback as well.

"Jacob has a high football IQ and he works extremely hard," said Sapulpa.

Beall will be one of six seniors for the Hulbert squad. There will be a battle at quarterback with Daniel Hair. Hair is 6-foot-3 and saw a lot of playing time for the junior varsity squad last year.

"We hope to win our first several games so our lack of depth doesn't hurt us later in the season," said Sapulpa.

Hulbert opens up on the road against Caney Valley on Sept. 4. Caney Valley drops down to Class

See RIDERS, page 23

Jacob Beall gives Hulbert versatility

By **RANDY WILLIAMS**

TDP Special Writer

Hulbert senior Jacob Beall has been a familiar face on the field since his freshman year as a defensive lineman.

The 6'0" 245 pound Beall is a thorn in the side of every offense he lines up against. When you watch him play, you immediately notice his explosion off the line. He has the ability to put an offensive lineman on his heels as soon as the ball is snapped and find the football. Once Beall finds the ball, he doesn't end the play nicely. He has a stellar ability to split a double team on his pass rush. His 4.8 speed allows him to beat a pulling lineman to the point of attack. The lower body strength and destructive mentality he possesses makes ball carriers avoid him at all costs.

Beall possesses a unique type of versatility allowing his team to use him as a defensive lineman, offensive lineman, linebacker, fullback and even kicker. His Swiss Army knife skill set has already earned him two all-district honors and he was named as a freshman All-American in 2017.

"The personal achievements are already there. All-State would be nice but I just want to win," said Beall.

The Riders are coming off of a 4-6 season last year in head coach Scott Sapulpa's first season. COVID-19 has affected a multitude of schools and leagues at all levels and Hulbert is no different. Spring football was cut short along with summer pride workouts. None of this has stopped Beall or his teammates from trying to improve.

"I think this is the hardest our players have ever worked on their own so the dedication is there," Beall said. "Playoffs should be the goal and it's not at all unrealistic."

Sapulpa has made the decision to move Jacob to tailback this year. Carrying the ball for Hulbert has been a huge responsibility in recent years. Former Hulbert back Jacob Bruce broke the Oklahoma career rushing record in 2018 and his little brother James picked up where his brother left off last year.

"They're faster than me but I feel I can hit holes a little quicker and play behind my pads a lot easier than they could," said Beall when asked how he felt his running style compared. "I'm excited about the move to tailback but I have a lot to learn."

Jacob embraces being a student athlete, maintaining a 4.3 grade point average.

"He's one of the hardest workers I've ever been around," said Sapulpa.

Beall's attitude is one that athletes and people alike should strive for. All the accolades he has accomplished, Beall maintains a constant effort to perfect his craft while

See **HULBERT**, page 23



Riders

Continued from page 21

A after competing in 2A last season.

Afton and Colcord will replace Savanna and Ketchum on The Riders' district schedule. Two of their four wins last season came against Savanna and Ketchum.

Hulbert will only have four home games all season hosting Westville, Talihina, Gore and Central to close out the season. They open up District play Sept. 25 on the road against Canadian.

The Cougars make the move to eleven man after being a force in eight man. Canadian's only loss was a 50-48 heartbreaker against Cherokee in the state semifinals. The Concord Hornets ended last season with a 7-4 record losing to Pawnee in the first round 54-0.

"Warner is probably favored to win the district. They're big and solid," said Sapulpa.

The Riders travel to Warner on Oct. 30, hoping to avenge their 8-0 loss last season that cost them a trip to the playoffs. Gore, Porter and Central will also be formidable. Hulbert lost to all three schools last season by a combined score of 101-38. The Riders will close out the season with Gore, Warner and Central respectively with Warner being the only road game.

Hulbert's non-district schedule contains two winless teams from last season in Caney Valley and Westville. The last game before district play will be on the road against Afton, who posted a 4-7 record last season.

The Riders' district opponents had a combined record of 43-33 last season with Gore and Canadian making it to at least the second round of the state playoffs last season.

Hulbert

Continued from page 22

maintaining an admiring level of humbleness.

"I feel there's always room to improve," said Beall.

Beall attended football camps at Oklahoma Baptist University as well as camps in Iowa.

"I do for those that can't," he said. "I have the opportunity to play and possibly continue to play and I know there are people that don't get the opportunities I have or wish they had the opportunity I have."

Beall has received offers but is keeping his recruitment private until later this year.

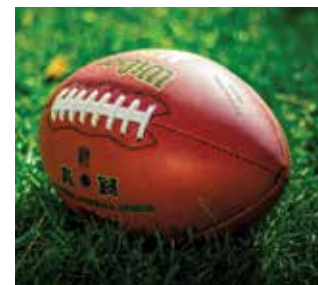
Beall and the Riders open up the season on the road against Caney Valley on Sept. 4. Caney Valley dropped down to Class A after going winless in 2A last season.

The matchup that Ja-

cob is looking forward to is with Central Sallisaw, which will close out the regular season.

"We beat them my freshman and sophomore year," he said. "Last year was the first year they beat us so it's a pretty good rivalry."

Hulbert lost to the Tigers 43-6 last season. Jacob is one of six seniors on the Rider football team. The dedication, work ethic and experience of the team brings optimism to the fan base.



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Athletes express desire to play

By **JASON ELMQUIST**
CNHI Sports Oklahoma

The biggest names in college football are using their platform on social media for a new movement.

This time, it's to get to play a fall season under the hashtag "We Want to Play" – which included the likes of Clemson quarterback Trevor Lawrence, who is expected to be the top pick in the 2021 NFL Draft, and Ohio State quarterback Justin Fields.

Oklahoma State's star running back Chuba Hubbard broke his social media silence Sunday evening to join the cause.

Reports claim that Hubbard was part of a group of high profile college football players who held an impromptu Zoom conference call to discuss the movement to play this fall, which included many athletes – including Hubbard

– tweeting out a graphic with desires to "establish universal mandated health and safety procedures and protocols to protect college-athletes against COVID-19 among all conferences throughout the NCAA" – among other things, such as opting out and eligibility effected by the upcoming season.

It's the latest use of social media by college athletes to push a cause, which has grown during the pandemic – including social justice reform across the country to calls.

"I think it's good that our players have a voice, I really do," OSU offensive coordinator Kasey Dunn said during a Zoom conference with the media last week. "I think it's important to get all angles and all perspectives to deal with what's going on in the future. So I definitely think that part is a good thing."

The "We Want to Play"

movement was sparked this weekend with reports from sources at the national level claiming the Big Ten and Pac-12 conferences were expected to cancel the fall football season – after the Mid-American Conference became the first FBS conference to make that decision official on Saturday.

During the same Zoom media conference last week, Tylan Wallace said with near certainty that it would be impossible to prevent the spread while playing football.

"I feel like it's gonna be really hard to," Wallace said. "I'm pretty sure we're gonna do the best that we can. But I think it's gonna be a really tough situation to play and not be able to spread it."

But despite his belief that the virus could spread while playing the contact sport, Wallace also sided with the desire of wanting to play instead of sitting out like over 30 FBS play-

ers have already announced plans to opt out this season.

"Obviously, I feel like we can do special things here in Oklahoma State," Wallace said. "I came back for a reason and I'm standing on that reason right now. It's a big thing for us, like we have a lot in store and I feel like we can do big things here, so I'm just here for the ride."

The former Biletnikoff Award finalist was also sympathetic to the decision made by those athletes who already declared they would skip out on a season if it were to be held.

"I've seen couple guys that have really good reasons, I mean they had family issues or some guys might even have kids, you know, and obviously don't want to take that home to kids or, you know, injury issues," Wallace said. "I completely understand from a player's standpoint, why they do and what they're doing."

Photo by Jason Elmquist | Stillwater News Press Oklahoma

State running back Chuba Hubbard broke his silence on social media over the weekend to join the surge of college football players pushing to be able to play this fall among reports of some conferences discussing canceling the fall season.





Bruce Waterfield/OSU Athletics

Oklahoma State receiver Tylan Wallace runs a drill at the Sherman E. Smith Training Center during the first day of fall camp Wednesday. Wallace worked with boxes of cat litter back home while rehabbing from an ACL injury before returning to campus in mid-June.



Bruce Waterfield/OSU Athletics

Oklahoma State linebacker Malcolm Rodriguez works out at the Sherman E. Smith Training Center during the open of fall camp Wednesday. Rodriguez is one of the known Cowboys to have tested positive for COVID-19 and was quarantined in an RV with his family in Wagoner.

Wallace, Rodriguez discuss life in a pandemic

By **JASON ELMQUIST**
CNHI Sports Oklahoma

In the height of the sports closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic, videos surfaced across the country of college football players finding unique ways to train away from their usual routine of the weight room with strength coaches.

Oklahoma State redshirt junior defensive end Brock Martin, for example, tweeted out a video of him jumping onto the flatbed of a farm work truck – simulating the training for athletes jumping onto boxes to work on vertical jumps.

But earlier this week, Tylan Wallace shared perhaps one of the most unique workout routines during quarantine.

Wallace, who spent most of his quarantine continuing to rehab from an ACL injury, found another use for a household product found in

the home of most pet owners.

“At home, I was trying to make work with whatever I had, so at one point, I was doing squats with a 40-pound box of cat litter,” said Wallace, who mentioned his brother has a cat. “So I was trying to do anything I could to make it work. I was working out at home in my living room, I was jogging around trails, you know, I was doing whatever I could to try and stay in shape. It was definitely tough, but it was definitely worth it now.”

While he may be able to use that story to land a sponsorship with a cat litter company when he heads to the NFL, he was happy to finally get to return to campus in mid-June to continue working on his right knee – which he is wearing a brace on during the first few practices this fall.

“Coming in and actually going into the training room, actually doing rehab stuff where

they have the right equipment and everything that I need was definitely a big boost from a cat litter box,” Wallace said. “But I think that definitely was a big help with me in my rehab process.”

It wasn't just training with the hopes of playing this fall – which has been trimmed down to 10 games from the regular 12 by the Big 12 Conference – that some players had to manage.

Malcolm Rodriguez was one of the first Oklahoma State athletes to acknowledge that he tested positive for the novel coronavirus – though he was asymptomatic – and had to quarantine for a specific amount of time.

“The medical staff allowed me to go home because I was so close to being home, so I went home. I was in a camper the whole time and I stayed away from the family,” the Wagoner product said. “My

mom had to bring me some food out on the step. And so that was just my whole day, just chilling in an RV by myself and just getting food brought to me, so I just stayed away from my family.”

With being asymptomatic, Rodriguez never felt the full brunt of the virus like those who have been hospitalized across the country.

“I never had symptoms, and that's why it was kind of scary and kind of shocked me when I first came down and they told me I was positive,” Rodriguez said.

He is back on the playing field, now, working out with the team during Wednesday's opening practice for fall camp.

“The medical staff here does a very good job of, you know, making sure that procedures are good, everything's tight and everything is sanitized, so I feel safe for sure,” the Cowboy linebacker said.

Big 12 moves forward with fall

By **JOE BUETTNER**
CNHI Sports Oklahoma

The Big 12 is moving forward with fall sports and has a new football schedule — for now.

The conference's Board of Directors agreed to proceed with fall athletic competition following a two-hour meeting with league presidents and medical professionals Tuesday evening. The conference joins the Atlantic Coast Conference and Southeastern Conference in pursuing fall sports, while the Big Ten and Pac-12 are opting for a 2021 return.

Big 12 commissioner Bob Bowlsby said the conference concluded after Tuesday's discussions it was OK to go on as planned. The league formally announced its intentions to play this fall, Wednesday morning, accompanied by the release of its revised football scheduling model.

"The biggest argument is that nobody has told us that it's poorly advised to go forward and do what we are doing," Bowlsby said during a teleconference Wednesday. "If we get to the place where our doctors and scientists say, 'You know what, you guys got two wheels off the tracks and you're headed for a train wreck,' we will pivot that day. And if it's during camp, it's during camp. If it's during October, it's during October. If it's the week before our championship game, that's when it is.

"Making adjustments on the fly are going to be part of this. But our medical professionals have said go forward, move slowly, make small adjustments, constantly be vigilant about changes in the environment. That's what

we're listening to. They have told us that it's safe to move forward on that basis. When they tell us otherwise, we will be listening to that as well."

The Big 12 hopes to navigate the pandemic by enhancing its COVID-19 testing policies for its member schools.

The Big 12 is committed to testing athletes three times per week in football, volleyball and soccer, which the league considers "high contact sports." An EKG, troponin blood test, echocardiogram and cardiac MRI will be included in the league's return-to-play protocol for each new positive case.

"The increased season modifications build on OU Athletics' already well-established set of protocols to protect its student-athletes," said OU Chief COVID Officer Dr. Dale Bratzler in a statement. "The results speak for themselves, with only one positive football case since the start of training earlier this summer. The enhanced practices coming out of the Big 12 will only add to the important policies already in place at OU."

The nonconference opponent on each Big 12 football's program schedule will have to adhere to the Big 12's testing standard the week of their game, the league announced. It will not have as much of an effect on the Big 12's volleyball or soccer teams, which will play a conference-only schedule starting in September.

The Big 12 plans to play football next month as well, beginning conference play on Sept. 26 and finishing the season with the Big 12 Championship Game on either Dec. 12 or 19.

OU is slated to face Mis-

souri State for its lone non-conference game on Sept. 12. It will then open league action against Kansas State on Sept. 26 in Norman.

Aside from playing only one nonconference game, the Big 12's football schedule isn't much different from other years. The ACC and SEC have expanded to 10 conference games, while the Big 12 will play its usual nine.

And no, the Big 12 does not intend to expand solely for the 2020 season, like the ACC temporarily taking in independent Notre Dame.

"It's not in any of our plans at the present time," Bowlsby said.

The Big 12 will leave stadium capacity decisions to

each university. OU has yet to release any firm plans for spectators this fall.

The Big 12, with guidance from its medical partners, will give the season a try. Bowlsby acknowledged it can all change tomorrow or months from now.

"It's an ever-evolving environment and we will find ourselves with bumpy spots during the fall," Bowlsby said. "There isn't any doubt about that. But I think we're very well prepared to deal with those things, and so, I feel good about the decision going forward. I believe our board feels good about it and, and I think most importantly, we have some clarity for our coaches and our student-athletes."



Kyle Phillips | CNHI

OU head coach Lincoln Riley celebrates a touchdown during the Sooners' game against Iowa State, Saturday, Nov. 9, 2019, at Oklahoma Memorial Stadium.



Kyle Phillips | CNHI

OU's Kennedy Brooks runs with the ball during the Sooners' game against LSU, Saturday, Dec. 28, 2019, during the Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl at Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta, Ga. (Kyle Phillips / The Transcript)

OU running back Kennedy Brooks opts out of 2020 season

By **JOE BUETTNER**
CNHI Sports Oklahoma

OU running back Kennedy Brooks will not participate in the Sooners' 2020 season, according to a report from The Athletic.

Brooks would be the first OU player to opt out from playing this year. His decision comes less than four weeks before OU's season opener against Missouri State on Sept. 12.

Brooks is eligible to enter the 2021 NFL Draft. Although, OU is allowing players to opt out during the COVID-19 pandemic without it impacting their team standing or athletic

financial aid.

Brooks was the Sooners' second-leading rusher behind quarterback Jalen Hurts last season. He's recorded 2,067 rushing yards and 18 rushing touchdowns since 2018.

OU's depth at running back already took a massive hit when Trey Sermon transferred to Ohio State over the offseason. It is also expected Rhamondre Stevenson will sit out a substantial part of the upcoming season because of a suspension from last year.

Stevenson, a senior, rushed for 515 yards and six touchdowns during his debut OU season in 2019. OU is still trying to determine

the duration of his suspension, coach Lincoln Riley confirmed Saturday.

"No clarification on that," Riley said. "It's being discussed. I understand why it's been on the back burner a little bit with trying to figure out how the season is going to unfold. It's being discussed because obviously that world has been changing and has changed in so many different ways. Really, kind of an archaic rule in college football.

"I know they're working on it. I also know the reduction of the schedule is also being discussed and how it pertains. But I don't have any answers for that right now."

OU's remaining scholar-

ship running backs include TJ Pledger, Marcus Major and Seth McGowan.

Pledger is the most experienced of the three. The Pacoima, California, native has played in 21 games, rushing for 244 yards and one touchdown over two seasons.

Major missed most of the 2019 season due to injury. The Oklahoma City native appeared in three games and will enter 2020 as a red-shirt freshman.

McGowan is a true freshman. He signed with the Sooners as a consensus four-star prospect out of Dallas Mesquite High School. He chose OU over offers from Alabama, Georgia and LSU, among others.

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