

# Depth-thin Eagles must stay healthy, avoid turnovers

By Mike Lee  
Eagle Contributor

Short on numbers and experience, the Goldthwaite Eagles must stay healthy and take care of the football if they intend to extend their school-record streak of making the playoffs to 15 seasons.

The Eagles began this season with only eight lettermen – four starters on offense and four on defense – from last year's 4-7 team, which represented Goldthwaite's lowest win total since 2003.

In an attempt to remain healthy and avoid unfavorable physical matchups against teams with twice as many players, the Eagles tweaked their nondistrict schedule with opponents closer to their level. Gone are Mason, Jim Ned and Little River Academy. Added are Winters and Coleman, which along with Junction and Hamilton, should give Goldthwaite a chance for a decent start.

Changing the schedule doesn't guarantee fewer injuries and more wins, but it can't hurt.

The other key statistic to follow this season is the turnover margin. In 2014 and 2017 when Goldthwaite finished with losing records, the Eagles had minus-5 and minus-10 turnover margins, respectively. In 2016 when a 6-1 start faded to a 7-4 finish, the Eagles were minus-3 in turnovers. In 2015 when the Eagles won 10 games, they were plus-9 in turnovers.

"Turnovers will have a lot to say about how we do this year," said Greg Proffitt, Goldthwaite's fifth-year head coach. "On defense, we're working on creating more turnovers. On offense, we have to take care of the football."

The possible outcomes for Goldthwaite's 2018 season are wide and far. Stay healthy and avoid turnovers, and the Eagles figure to extend their playoff streak and notch a winning record. If injuries and turnovers become frequent, it's going to be a long season.

"I'm not a big fan of comparing teams from one year to the next, but we won four games last year and we're capable of doing that again," Proffitt said. "Everybody's goal is to make the playoffs. We're approaching the season as trying to get better every day."

"I feel like we're capable of competing with everybody in our district. We're not scared of anybody on our schedule."

Down the road in District 7-2A Division I, defending champion De Leon is the overwhelming favorite. Crawford lost its key playmakers from 2017, but the Pirates are picked second based on the stability of a program with 29 winning seasons out of the last 30.

That likely leaves Hico, Goldthwaite and San Saba vying for the final two play-



Eagles QB Drew Hermesmeyer in last year's Goldthwaite season opener.

off berths. The Eagles lost to Hico 16-3 last year, and San Saba is optimistic with players from last year's 9-0 JV arriving on the varsity.

Offensively, the Eagles' top returning scorers – quarterback Drew Hermesmeyer and receiver TJ Watson – each scored one touchdown last season. While that looks grim, Hermesmeyer is much more of a passing threat than a scoring threat. The 6-foot-3 senior threw for 1,440 yards and nine touchdowns last year.

The 6-3 Watson, who had 18 catches last year, leads a group of tall receiving targets. He'll be joined by newcomers Grayson Moore and Jaxon Wootton, who also stand 6-3. Freshmen Jackson Patrick and Dusty Partin, the two fastest players on the team, could also figure into the passing game – either as receivers or coming out of the backfield.

"We need to throw the ball. We've got a quarterback with experience and a solid group of receivers. We'll run enough to keep teams honest," Proffitt said.

"We're going to try to use the freshmen

wisely and not overuse them. We want to utilize their skill sets, but at the end of the day, we have to put our best 11 players on the field."

All the running backs are new, unless you count Josh Butterfras's one carry for 1 yard last year. The Eagles face the unenviable task of replacing four-year back Quaid Seward, who finished his career with 3,659 yards and 31 TDs rushing. The 190-pound Butterfras will be counted on heavily this year, along with senior Josue Sanchez, who played linebacker last year. Help should come from junior Nick Jones and the aforementioned Partin.

Goldthwaite lists three returning starters in the offensive line in seniors Zabreigh Odom (6-1, 205) and Devon Arndt (5-9, 210), along with junior Dalton Goodman (5-11, 250). Newcomers in the line include seniors Gonzalo Gallegos and Adrian Garcia (6-0, 200), sophomore Slade Sutherland (6-0, 180) and freshman Kody Roberts (5-9, 180).

"Our offensive goal of scoring 28 points per game has not changed," said Proffitt,

whose offense averaged 19 points last year. "If we can score 28 points, we'll have a good chance to win."

Defensively, the secondary figures to be the strength with Watson returning after logging 44 tackles and three interceptions last season. He'll be joined by Moore, Wootton, Jones and Patrick.

Butterfras returns at inside linebacker after getting 65 tackles and four sacks last year. Top candidates for the other inside linebacker spot are Hermesmeyer, Roberts, senior newcomer Ricky Keener and junior newcomer Daylin Wiedebusch.

Sanchez returns at outside linebacker after making 19 tackles last year. He'll be joined by junior Jaden Biehl and Partin.

The Eagles' three-man defensive front will include a rotation of Odom (22 tackles last year), Goodman, Garcia, Gallegos, Arndt and Sutherland.

Goldthwaite's defense allowed 299 yards and 28 points per game last season. The unit forced just 12 turnovers, an average of one per game. The goal is closer to three.