

Eagles to build on 2015 mojo

By Mike Lee
Eagle Contributor

The Goldthwaite Eagles didn't suffer through a transition season in 2015 despite installing a new offense with a new quarterback and a new defense with a new coordinator.

After a 2-2 start, Goldthwaite won eight straight games before falling to Crawford in the third round of the Class 2A Division I playoffs. The 10-3 finish represented the Eagles' first double-digit win total since 2010, when they played for the state championship.

New quarterback Hunter Parrish ran the new pistol offense effectively, amassing 3,223 yards and 39 touchdowns combined rushing and passing.

After allowing 44 points to Mason in Week 4, the Eagles' defense under new coordinator Andy Howard allowed 11 points per game during the eight-game win streak.

Now the job is to keep the momentum going and gain a 13th consecutive playoff berth. Parrish, the District 7-2A Division I MVP last year, was a senior. So was linebacker Jansen Head, the district's Defensive MVP.

"We lost some seniors that had played in a lot of games. A lot of guys are going to have to step into starting roles and fill the holes, but the cupboard is not bare," third-year head coach Greg Proffitt said. "More than anything, we've got to develop some leaders."

"We are farther ahead this year because the players are more familiar with the offense and defense."

A huge factor in Goldthwaite's success this year will be staying healthy. With only 22 players on the varsity and 13 or so on the JV, there is little depth at most positions.

Goldthwaite has several players returning from injuries last year. Junior tailback Quaid Seward missed most of last season with a broken leg, and senior fullback/H-back Kendel Hopper has missed the last two seasons with shoulder and knee injuries.

Defensive back Jacob Williams missed practically all of last season with a broken collarbone. Senior lineman Gus Perez missed last season with a back injury, and junior lineman Hagen Hohertz started the 2015 season late because of an injury.

"Last year we had 30 players just on the varsity. This year we're cutting it down to

22 in order to keep our JV team going. So there's not a lot of depth," Proffitt said. "If we stay healthy, we'll have a chance. We won't have to shuttle players around to different positions."

Another factor in the Eagles' success will be turnovers. A key reason the Eagles doubled their win total last year was a plus-9 turnover ratio. They had a minus-5 turnover ratio during a 5-6 finish in 2014.

Another significant improvement last year was Goldthwaite posting a much better record against playoff teams last year - 7-3 after going 1-6 against playoff teams in 2014.

Goldthwaite returns 13 starters from last year, but the Eagles again must find a new quarterback between junior Christian Valencia and senior Jaydan West. They were the top two receivers last year, combining for 63 catches and six touchdowns.

Another delicate position is running back since Seward missed significant time last year with the leg injury. The 170-pound junior ran for 448 yards and three TDs last year when healthy. Hopper, junior Leo Garcia, senior Aris Shelton and sophomore Trey Patterson are other running back candidates.

Whoever doesn't play quarterback between Christian Valencia and West will lead the receiving corps, along with 6-foot-1, 190-pound senior Zac Gaspar, who had 25 catches and five TDs last year. Varsity newcomers Kyle Schwartz, McKennon Jones (6-2, 180) and JP Gibbard (6-3, 185) are receiver prospects.

The offensive line returns veterans in Hohertz (5-11, 220), Henry Valencia (5-10, 220), Ryan Elderton (6-0, 195) and Trevor Horton (6-1, 250). Perez, a 220-pound senior, also returns after missing last season. Line depth, though, is a problem.

Goldthwaite averaged 32 points per game last season, including nine games with 28 or more points.

Defensively, linebacker West earned all-state mention last year after making 86 tackles, including 15 for losses, forcing four fumbles and intercepting two passes. Shelton, another veteran linebacker, logged 106 tackles and three fumble recoveries last year. Hopper and Patterson figure to step into the lineup at linebacker, with help from Gibbard.

The defensive line must be rebuilt

Continued Next Page

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