

Eagles seek to atone for playoff shortcomings

By Mike Lee
Eagle Contributor

The Goldthwaite Eagles are seeking motivation beyond the sour taste the finish to their 2016 football season left.

The Eagles hope to atone for their shortcomings in all the boys' team sports during the 2016-17 school year. For the first time since it restarted baseball in 2007, the Eagles didn't win a playoff game or series in football, basketball or baseball.

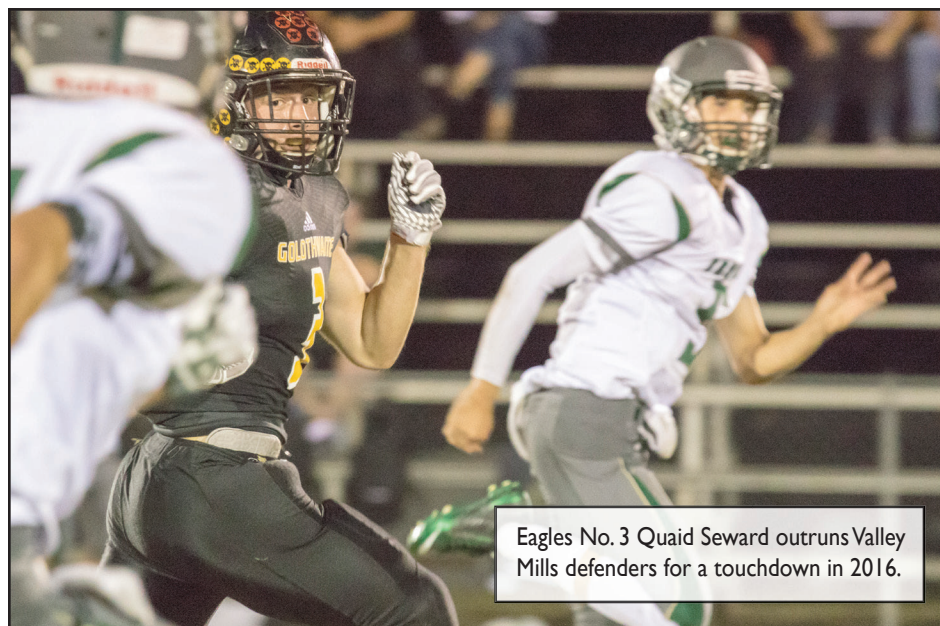
The 2016 football team started 6-1, but faded to a 7-4 finish. The Eagles lost three of their final four games, including a 25-point District 7-2A Division I loss to Crawford and a 30-point bidistrict loss to Bosqueville. The other loss – a 38-35 district decision to De Leon on a field goal on the game's final play – was the most costly because it left Goldthwaite with a much tougher bidistrict draw.

"Most of our kids play all the team sports so we are motivated by our lack of playoff success last year," fourth-year Goldthwaite head coach Greg Proffitt said. "We want to play with a chip on our shoulder this year. We realize nothing's going to be given to us, especially in this district."

"We have a big senior class with 10 kids. They've played in a lot of big games in every sport."

Proffitt's preseason questionnaire raised eyebrows because he listed the wishbone as Goldthwaite's base offense. The Eagles used the wishbone from 1980-2014, but switched the shotgun pistol offense in 2015, even though they still used the wishbone in short-yardage situations.

"All of our plays from the pistol use our wishbone philosophies, especially the blocking schemes. We have a bunch of skill players, but not much depth in the



Eagles No. 3 Quaid Seward outruns Valley Mills defenders for a touchdown in 2016.

line. We might use our skill kids to help block more this year," Proffitt said of his team's offense.

The Eagles – who have made the playoffs 13 consecutive years – return their top rusher, top passer and receiving yardage leader from last year. Quaid Seward rushed for 1,489 yards and 11 touchdowns, even with two gimpy shoulders. He had both shoulders surgically repaired during the offseason.

Quarterback Christian Valencia passed for 1,378 yards and nine TDs last year while Kyle Schwartz had 438 yards and three TDs receiving.

"We don't want to overuse Quaid in the games that don't matter as much (non-district), but he is a senior and this is it for him. He's one of our better players and we've got to get him the ball," Proffitt said.

Skill-position depth will come from running back Leo Garcia, H-back Trey

Patterson and receivers McKennan Jones and JP Gibbard, who stands 6-foot-3. Also, 6-1 senior receiver Darren Massey returned to football this year after a two-year layoff.

The offensive skill positions also will be helped by varsity newcomers, including quarterback Drew Hermesmeier, running back Isaac Chavez and receiver TJ Watson.

The offensive line returns two decorated senior blockers in 270-pound Trevor Horton and 250-pound Hagen Hohertz, but there's virtually no varsity experience behind them. Senior Dylan Norton (6-3, 260) has played on defense, but will also play in the offensive line this year.

Varsity newcomers in the line include juniors Decklyn Oliver (5-10, 200) and Zabreigh Odom (5-10, 190), along with sophomores Josh Butterfras (6-0, 180) and Dalton Goodman (5-10, 220).

A key statistic for the offense will be its turnover ratio. The Eagles were minus-3 last year and minus-5 in 2014 and lost in bidistrict both years. In 2015 when they had a plus-9 turnover ratio, the Eagles won two playoff games.

On defense Patterson, the 2016 District 7-2A Newcomer of the Year, made 71 tackles last year as a sophomore inside linebacker. Gibbard, an outside linebacker, made 46 stops last year. Valencia has moved from the secondary to outside linebacker. Other inside linebacker candidates include Butterfras, Massey and Hermesmeier.

Goldthwaite returns its entire secondary, including all-district performers Seward and Garcia, who combined for 102 tackles last year. Also returning are Schwartz and Jones, who led the 2016 team with three interceptions.

Like with the offense, though, defensive line depth is an issue.

"The linemen are going to have to play both ways, there's no way around it. They're going to have to be in good physical shape," Proffitt said.

The Eagles' defense put up respectable stats last year, allowing 18 points and 271 yards per game. However, Goldthwaite allowed 34 points to Crawford, 38 to De Leon and 42 to Bosqueville late in the season.

Goldthwaite returns both its kicking specialists in Jones at punter and Garcia at kicker.

The Eagles are picked to finish third in district in most preseason polls behind defending state runner-up Crawford and state quarterfinalist De Leon. Hico is picked to finish fourth and claim the other playoff spot. Hico, Valley Mills and San Saba have new head coaches this season.

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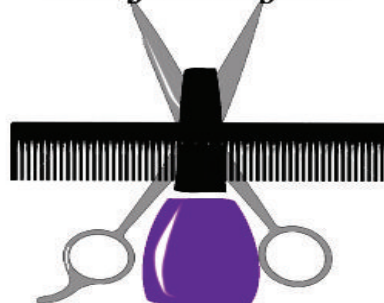
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