

►Offense

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against a much better George County defense.

Mitchell saw his first live action against the Rebels. He threw an interception on his first pass attempt, but the coaching staff still has confidence he can get the job done as he gets more experience.

Another young quarterback showing a lot of promise is sophomore Malachi Graham. The lefty isn't expected to see much varsity time, but will learn King's offense by leading the JV squad and making sure he is ready if his name is called. "Malachi is a really intelligent kid," King said. "He can run our offense the way we want it ran and can manage the game at quarterback."

Kyemonte Walker has emerged as the go-to guy at tailback, or featured back, in King's offense. Coaches brag on him for his attitude and work ethic, which helped him add weight and muscle in the offseason.

"The coaches tell me he's made the biggest leap from his freshman to senior year as anyone on the team. He has good speed, can catch the football out of the backfield and blocks very well."

"But, most importantly, is he is selfless and doesn't complain if he isn't getting the football in his hands. You don't see that very often in a tailback."

Well, getting enough touches has certainly not been an issue for Walker in the first two games. King repeatedly found ways to get the ball into his senior's hands in the season opener and the young man rewarded him for it, finishing with 207 all-purpose yards and a touchdown. He rushed 21 times for 111 yards and caught five passes for 96 yards against West Lauderdale.

He followed that up with his second 100-yard game of the season against George County last week. Finding running room against a stout Rebel offense was a much different challenge, but he still piled up 113 yards on 27 carries and had his second big rushing TD of the year called back on a holding penalty.

Santez Campbell is a junior that will see playing time at multiple positions. He is listed on the roster as a quarterback, but has also been getting work as a running back and a receiver. Campbell is a more physical, downhill runner than Walker and is also expected to push for playing time on the defensive side of the ball.

"Santez can play multiple positions, even on defense, so he will be on the field somewhere," King said.

There are also differences in styles at the H-back, or hybrid back, on King's depth chart. Senior Tagg Creech and junior Garrett West are quite different in both size and skill sets, but are the two guys the Wildcats are turning to at the position King says is one of the hardest to fill due to the range of things H-backs are asked to do within the scheme.

"For us it is the number three receiver, but can also be in the backfield like a fullback," King said. "Tagg and Garrett bring completely different things to the table. Tagg runs good routes and can catch, block and run after the catch. He's gotten a lot thicker and stronger in the offseason and is a physical presence."

"Garrett is more of a true tight end. Both of them play key roles in the offense."

Creech had two grabs for 24 yards against West Lauderdale and followed that up with three catches for 73 yards and a touchdown.

"Tagg played the best game of his career against George County," King said. "I think he showed just how good a player he can be."

Getting the starting nod at the slot back positions are junior Kevin Dortch and senior P.J. Grayson. King says Dortch

has great speed and good hands and is the closest thing his team has to a true deep threat that can stretch the field. Grayson is more of a running back at the slot position. He is a better rusher than receiver, but King says he has a lot of confidence when he gets the ball in his hands.

Grayson accounted for 32 yards on seven catches in the opener. Most of those catches were on short 'shovel' passes behind the line of scrimmage that turned into solid gains for the Wildcats. He added 13 yards rushing and 33 receiving against the Rebels.

Dortch broke out in the George County game, making a great move on the sideline to keep a drive alive for the Cats. He followed that up with a heads-up TD catch on a tipped pass that proved to be the difference in the game.

Rounding out the skilled positions will be football newcomers Larue Weaver and Deandre Grice. Both are unproven, but pass the eye test as wideouts. A standout on the GCHS basketball team, Weaver has good size and good hands and could grow to be a serious weapon for the Cats as he gets more experience and comfortable with his surroundings. He can be quite a load to try to tackle when King can get the ball in his hands.

Grice has shown a lot of promise thus far, but as an underclassman is a rarity among the Cats' backs and receivers.

"You know, I do feel good about the guys we have in the skilled positions," King said. "While they may be short on varsity experience, they are good athletes and are mature upperclassmen."

The hiring of assistant coach Rotch Dungan was a big plus for King and the Wildcats due, at least in part, to his reputation for developing offensive lineman. On paper, GCHS has a good looking group of linemen in the unit, and under Dungan's direction have lived up to expectations thus far.

The loss of senior Reese Green for the year due to a pre-season accident was a big blow. Adjusting to that reality was difficult, but Rotch and the Cats entered the season with a 6-man rotation they feel good about. The results have been encouraging to this point..

Seniors Jordan Chapman and Jay Hovatter anchor the line as the starting guard and tackle on the left side. Both have good size, but are athletic big men who excel in getting out in front of running backs. They were dominant in the season opener and held their own against an impressive defensive front from George County. The performance Chapman, a JCJC commit, put in against West Lauderdale was good enough to earn him the first Encore Rehab Offensive Player of the Week award of the season.

Holding down the right side of the line are senior Cameron Deakle and sophomore Eli Erkhart. Junior Hayden West is the starting center and junior Noah Bradley is the first sub in at tackle. Bradley is the only one of Dungan's linemen that doesn't play multiple positions. West and Deakle are comfortable at guard, tackle or center, while Erkhart, Hovatter and Chapman can each play guard or tackle. It isn't the ideal scenario in terms of depth, but it does have benefits.

"We've worked a lot on learning the different positions on the line and most of our guys are comfortable in multiple spots," Dungan said. "It is really hard to play the offensive line without knowing what the guy next to you is responsible for, so having guys that not only understand the different roles, but can also play those different positions when called on is a plus."

The scenario paid off in week one as West was sidelined mid-way through the game due to

leg cramps and Deakle stepped in to take over at center, while Erkhart moved to guard and Bradley came in at tackle. Still, building up the depth chart for the line is a top priority and Dungan said last week he anticipated bringing a few guys over from the defensive side of the ball starting this week just for that purpose.

The veteran coach added that he is also very excited about the young linemen he has coming along. Most of those guys aren't quite ready for the challenges of varsity play, but are getting a lot of work in practice and will get plenty of live snaps during the Cats' junior varsity schedule.

Through two games, King's offense isn't quite where he needs it to be, but does appear to be a little ahead of expectations. If the unit continues to improve and the playmakers continue to gain confidence, the Cats could be a real force to be reckoned with in Region 7-4A.



Photo by Russell Turner

Senior feature back Kyemonte Walker has been a workhorse for the Wildcats' offense for the first two weeks of the season. Walker leads the team in offensive opportunities and has cashed those in for back-to-back 100-yard rushing games - the first GCHS running back to accomplish that since Marko Franks. He is shown here running for part of his 207 all-purpose yards against West Lauderdale in week one of the season.

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