

Sweatin' it out ...

The football Wildcats are not the only GCHS students that go through tough, hot workouts before the school year starts. Fall band camp for the Marching Pride can be rugged, but that's what it takes to be ready for the halftime shows and the band competition season. Members of the band are shown here prepping for the year on the practice field across from the school early this month.



a junior college transfer who redshirted last season. By DAVID BRANDT

AP Sports Writer

outhern Mississippi re-

program history with back-to-

back winning seasons in 2015

Now second-year coach Jay

Hopson is out to prove the

Golden Eagles will continue

Southern Miss will have to

maintain its momentum with a

new quarterback. Four-year

starter Nick Mullens is now

gone and there's a preseason

battle under center between

sophomore Keon Howard and

Hopson expects the competi-

tion between Howard and

Griggs to last all the way

through training camp and

possibly into the regular sea-

son. Howard was Mullens

backup last season, complet-

ing 22 of 50 passes (44 per-

cent) for one touchdown and

junior Kwadra Griggs.

their winning ways.

bounded from one of the

most dismal periods in

"They've been back and forth — that's the reality of it," Hop-

Hopson hopes that whoever wins the job will be helped by several veterans around him. Ito Smith led the Golden Eagles with 1,459 yards rushing last season and 17 touchdowns. Six of the team's top seven receivers return, including Allenzae Staggers, who caught 63 passes for 1,165 yards and seven touchdowns.

Southern Miss will be much less experienced on defense. The Golden Eagles will be replacing four of the team's top six tacklers from last season. They do have some experience in the secondary — Picasso Nelson, Cornell Armstrong and

Curtis Mikell are all seniors. "We need to stay healthy at some spots, but that's just the reality of football," Hopson said. "You cut us open and

Here are a few things to watch for the Golden Eagles this season:

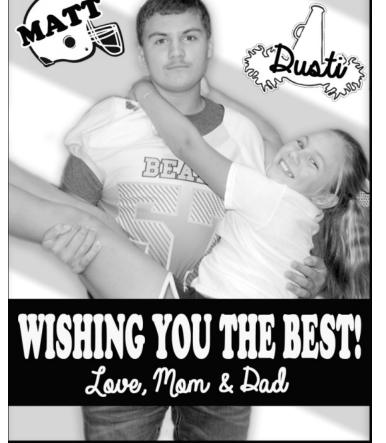
KEY GAMES: Sept. 2 vs. Kentucky; Oct. 21 at Louisiana Tech; Nov. 4 at Tennessee

WHAT A BIG TURN-**AROUND:** Southern Miss was one of the nation's worst programs just a few years. The Golden Eagles went 0-12 in '12, 1-11 in '13 and 3-9 in '14 before former coach Todd Monken led Southern Miss to a 9-5 season in '15. Monken left to become the offensive coordinator with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and Hopson took over, taking the Golden Eagles to another bowl game in his first season.

POCKET ROCKET: Southern Miss RB Ito Smith isn't a big guy at 5-foot-9 and 193 pounds, but he's had a hugely productive career for the Golden Eagles, rushing for more than 3,000 yards over his first three seasons. He's got a shot to become one of the we're bigger and faster, but school's all-time leading rushers, though it's unlikely he'll catch Damion Fletcher — who ran for 5,302 yards from 2006 to '09 — at the No. 1 spot.

SEASON OPENER: Southern Miss gets to host a Southeastern Conference opponent in the season opener when Kentucky comes to town on Sept. 2.

It's fairly rare for the Golden Eagles to host an SEC opponent, though Mississippi State came to M.M. Roberts Stadium in 2015. Southern Miss beat Kentucky 44-35 last season in Lexington.



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