

# Post-Ainsworth era off to hot start for GCHS



Photo by Russell Turner

A familiar face returns to the GCHS sidelines this fall. Mike King was hired to take over the reins at GCHS in the offseason after the retirement of longtime Wildcat skipper Johnny Ainsworth. The school also brought in new offensive and defensive coordinators to help round out a retooled Wildcat coaching staff for 2017. King (Center) and assistant coach Caleb Prentiss are shown talking to offensive players during a timeout against West Lauderdale.

*Optimism  
abounds as  
new look  
Wildcats try  
to get back  
to pinnacle  
of MHSAA  
football*

By RUSSELL TURNER  
Herald Staff

When longtime Greene County football coach Johnny Ainsworth announced back in March he was retiring after over two decades at the helm, school officials knew they had a daunting task in finding his replacement. After interviewing several candidates, former Wildcat offensive coordinator Mike King

was chosen for the task. At the time, the consensus among administrators was that King’s passion and energy level would be difference makers. Two games into King’s inaugural season that appears to be the case. The Wildcats defeated a good West Lauderdale team 12-0 in the season opener and claimed the Battle for the Bell last Friday with a thrilling 14-13 win over rival George County. The Cats are 2-0 for the first time since 2013 and the players (and the Wildcat faithful) appear “all-in” on the direction King and his coaching staff have the program headed. It is just the scenario GCHS Principal Scott Bray had hoped for when he recommended King for the job. “I told our school board back in March that Mike King was the right guy for Greene County High School,” GCHS Principal Scott Bray said. “I was 100 percent convinced at that time and he has done nothing but build on that confidence. I am excited about what our kids are experiencing with Mike as our coach and

the results so far speak for themselves.” “When you are faced with replacing someone like Johnny Ainsworth, you look for passion, energy and excitement and our coaching staff is bringing that to the table every day.” King was the offensive coordinator for Ainsworth and the Wildcats for four seasons (2010-2013) before going back to his hometown to take the same position with George County. He credits Ainsworth with helping him grow in his coaching career and said in March that it was an honor to “carry the torch” Ainsworth lit at GCHS. King hit the ground running in the spring, fulfilling his commitment at George County during school hours then making the daily trek up Hwy. 63 to work with his new team. The excitement and energy level was contagious from the beginning and continues to build. “It was clear from the beginning how hungry these players are,” King said. “It has been up to us to facilitate that and guide them in that direction.”

“We were pleased with the participation during summer workouts and the guys have continued to work hard every day since fall practice began. We value working hard and have been focused on creating a sense of urgency about the things we do each day. Character and team building are important to us. We don’t focus on the wins, don’t talk about wins, but they will come if we get the other things worked out.” The plan seems to have taken hold. GCHS has earned two hard-fought victories over solid, non-region opponents. King says he is not necessarily surprised his team is off to a good start, because he saw the work the players and coaches were putting in every day, and felt good about how the team

was buying into the plan. “It is cliché, but we are getting great leadership, particularly from our seniors, and it is as sincere as it can be,” King said. “From day one we’ve preached that we don’t want to show fear, fatigue or frustration and that is where the leadership is coming in. We’ve got guys that are stepping up and helping us reinforce those principals and helping pick up their teammates and push each other.” “We don’t really have that superstar type player, but we’ve been blessed with tough, hard-working Greene County boys that are giving us all they have to give.” While King said the wins have not come as a surprise, he can’t say the same about the manner in which his team has won. “You know, I’ve been an offensive guy from day one, but to see us winning with hawkish defense is great,” King said. “We’ve been consistent on defense through both of the first two games and are constantly improving and learning something new on offense.” “We have a lot of room to continue to grow, but I am pretty pleased with where we are at this point.” While inexperience is an issue all over the field for GCHS, the Wildcats have played with a lot of confidence. The week one win over West Lauderdale was by no

See WILDCATS

Page 11-B

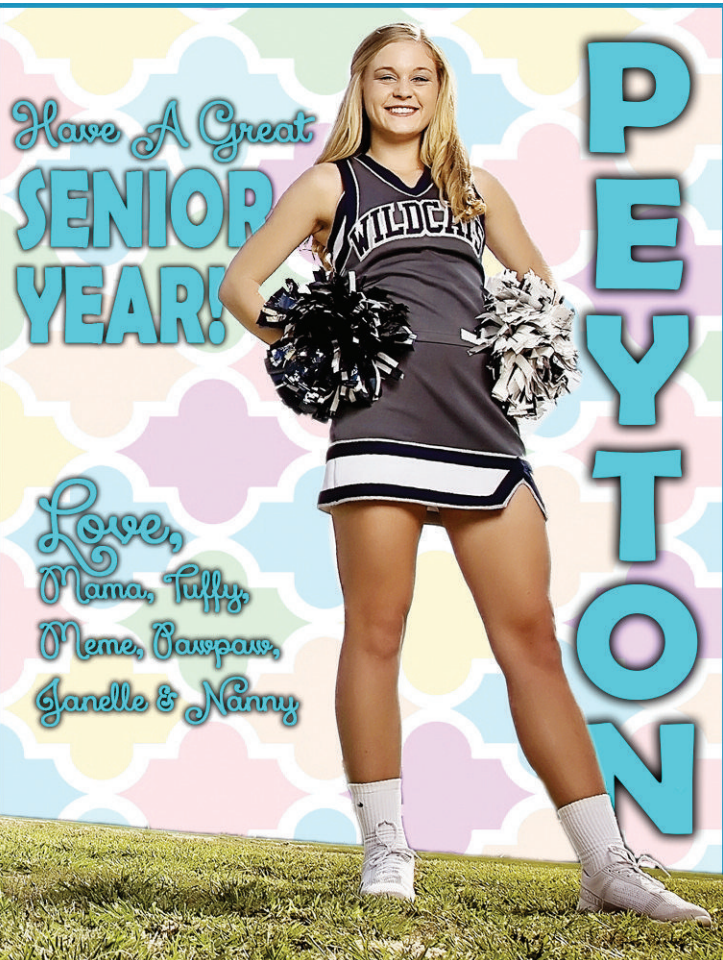


Photo by Russell Turner

Wildcat fans are feeling the excitement of an 0-2 start for their team. Shown here is part of the student section celebrating a Wildcat touchdown during the Battle for the Bell last Friday.

Never

STOP

Dancing!

TAYLOR

Enjoy Your Final  
Honey Bee  
Year!  
Love,  
Memaw  
& Papaw

When it comes to football ... our coach is KING!

But when it comes to PIZZA ...

**AJ's is KING.**

Not only are our Piccadilly Circus Pizzas made with the freshest ingredients for the best taste... they are also bigger. Compare **OUR 15" LARGE PIZZA** to the 12" version served up by most of our competitors.

Pizza photos are for illustration purposes only and are not meant to show exact scale.

THEIRS | OURS

**The HUNT is over...**

Find the Best Deal on Great Pizza at **AJ's**

Enjoy ANY **LARGE SINGLE TOPPING PIZZA** for only **\$9.99**

Offer Good Through Sept. 30, 2017

**Dine-In or Carry Out • (601) 947.4886**

**AJ's Quick Stop**

Mon - Sat 4 a.m. - 8 p.m. / Sunday 7 a.m. - 8 p.m. • (601) 947.4886

Located at the intersection of Old 63 N and Winborn Chapel Road

LET'S GO WILDCATS