

VIGOR WOLVES

Vigor plans to continue winning ways

BY DARRON PATTERSON
Call News Correspondent

Deric Scott can't seem to carry out a plan, even if it's his own.

Scott blew back into town as Vigor's head coach in 2015 after six years as Foley's defensive coordinator, armed with a solid timetable on when he thought the Wolves would get back on top of 5A, Region 1.

But, it didn't work out.

"I wanted to have a plan that by year three (of the program) we could compete for a region championship and a state championship," said the Monroeville native, who was previously Vigor's defensive coordinator for five years (2003-07).

"We got there a little bit earlier than expected," he said with a sly smile.

After finishing third in the region in Scott's first year, Vigor stormed back to take the division crown in dramatic fashion last year, losing their first two (non-region) games of the season, before running the table and winning the crown on a last-second field goal at St. Paul's.

They might've been flying a little too high after a 47-0 whitewash of Booker T. Washington in the first round of the playoffs and got their doors blown off, 48-20, by eventual state champ Beauregard the next week to end at 8-4.

"We were kind of up and down last year. We'd play decent in some games,

then some games we'd come out and didn't play up to our standard.

"We just didn't sustain leadership (roles), maintain focus, all those type things good teams have to have week in and week out.

Hopefully we're building those type attributes in our program.

"We're heading in the right direction. Last year we brought back a Region 1 championship for the first time in eight years. So from that standpoint, yeah, we're heading in the right direction."

Scott said it was his seniors that kept the ship from sinking last year when they started 0-2 after losing to Prichard city rival 6A Blount and 7A Baker.

One of those seniors, mercurial Charles Crawford, played quarterback, at times wide receiver, defensive back and returned kicks, too.

And it was Crawford, subbing for injured placekicker Eric Felts, Jr., who kicked a 27-yard field goal with one second left at St. Paul's to give Vigor a heart-



Deric Scott

stopping 38-35 win for the region title.

"He was a student of the game and loved everything about football," said Scott of Crawford, now at Jacksonville State. "His football IQ was tremendous.

"You really don't replace a Charles Crawford. And the reason I say that is not because we don't have some good athletes on our team who are at his caliber or at his ability level, but he was the type young man that he was one of the first at practice and one of the last to leave."

In Crawford-like fashion, Scott now has two "wild cards" this time around in juniors James Jackson (5-foot-10, 185 pounds) and Kyle Walker (6-2, 195), who both might just line up anywhere on the field, at any time, on either side of the ball.

In fact, Scott says Walker "is battling it out" with senior Jeffrey Thompson (6-3, 180) for the starting quarterback job.

But whoever wins, they'll operate behind an offensive line that could be one of Vigor's best in years.

Senior tackle Raheem McKinney (6-3, 277) leads the group which Scott describes with just one word: Physical.

Or as senior cornerback Felts Jr. says: "They're really very physical. Nobody works harder than this O-line," said the 5-11, 180-pound, two-year starter.

That line will be a key to the running game's success as Vigor returns a stable

of running backs that all saw significant playing time last year.

Defensively, they should be pretty good, too, with six returning starters, including an athletic trio of juniors in defensive end Desmond Little (6-5, 215) and tackles Fred Austin (6-0, 275) and Jamarcus Lewis (6-1, 280).

"Vigor defense has always been a trademark, we've always been very good defensively," said Scott.

"Last year's team was pretty good defensively as well, but we want to build on that this year with the experience we have on the defensive line and two experienced corners, with a returning linebacker and some experience at safety.

But last year, Vigor's special teams saved the season.

While Crawford's kick at St. Paul's sealed the deal, it was Felts' 27-yard field in Week 8 that gave the Wolves a 17-14 double-overtime win over Jackson to keep their region title hopes alive.

The fact that without a kicking game, there might've been no region title is not lost on Scott.

"We had (coach) Rob Miller work with our special teams last year. He's moved on, but we're really working to make sure our special teams are still a huge part of what we do."

Just one more plan Scott has to stay on track.

WILLIAMSON LIONS

Lions have experience for a breakthrough

BY LEEQUINTON BLACKMON
Call News Correspondent

The Williamson Lions haven't had a winning season since going 6-4 in 2008, but Lions' head coach Dedrick Sumpter is hopeful that all of that will change this season.

"I feel like we have something special," Sumpter optimistically said. "We have the right combination of players and coaches at the same time, and that's something we never had in the past. I can't put a number on it and tell you what our record will be and things like that, but I just know that sometimes the stars will line up perfectly for you, and they have for us."

One of the things that points to Sumpter's optimism is the fact he's returning 13 starters this year.

"This is my first time having all of my offensive lineman back," Sumpter said. "Four out of the five lineman have been starting for three years. That's exciting, because that's something that I've never had. Every year I used to have a new line, after new line, after new line. So, to have some consistency and veteran leadership up front is definitely going to help us."

Among the 13 starters that Williamson will have returning are star seniors Roger McCreary and Jamall Hickbottom. Both players are currently committed to South Alabama and will see time on both offense and defense for the Lions this year, with McCreary being a wide receiver and defensive back and Hickbottom playing middle linebacker and offensive guard.

Considering that Williamson is trying to put together its first winning season in almost a decade, Sumpter says he feels good about having two players of their caliber leading them.

"These are four-year starters," he said of the two South Alabama commits. "Between both of them, they've got like 22 offers, so that says a lot about the type of players they are right there. It's nothing

like having two of the best players in the state on your team. They're both outstanding players, but the problem I had in the past was they weren't vocal. But now, they're vocal. They understand that everybody has to be held accountable, so they're more vocal and they're talking and they're trying to hold everybody accountable."

For Sumpter, he says that this 2017 team will be the most unified group of players he's ever had, and a lot of the credit for that goes to new defensive coordinator and former Auburn University star Antonio Coleman.

"He brought consistency," Sumpter said of the latest addition to his coaching staff. "Over the years, that's what we've struggled with. First, he came on and got us started with the strength and conditioning, so he automatically improved us to a whole new level. We're going to be bigger, faster, and stronger. The kids are conditioned. They're running over 2,000 yards in conditioning drills, and there's no falling out and nobody

is getting winded. And by playing on such a high level, he truly understands the commitment to detail. I think that alone is going to make us better going forward."

Even though Sumpter is optimistic about this season and believes the stars are aligning for the Lions to get back to their glory days of winning, he's careful about making his expectations for the team too public.

"In years past, we got away from placing expectations and outcomes and results out there," Sumpter said. "We feel good about where we're at right now and we feel like we have something special in the making. I think that if we follow and truly implement this accountability process, it's no telling what we can do. We will have a great product of football on the field, that will be detailed, as well as disciplined. They got the potential to do some good things."



Dedrick Sumpter



File photo

The Mobile Christian football team takes the field for last year's 3A state championship game, in which the Leopards lost to Piedmont. The Leopards are expected to make another run at the title this season, as indicated by their No. 2 ranking in Class 3A in the Alabama Sports Writers Association preseason roll. Piedmont is ranked No. 1.

PREP PRESEASON POLL

STAFF REPORT
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Here is the complete Alabama Sports Writers Association 2017 preseason high school football poll (first-place votes are in parentheses):

Class 7A: 1. Hoover (29), 2. Central-Phe-nix City (1), 3. Thompson, 4. Hewitt-Trussville (1), 5. James Clemens, 6. McGill-Toolen, 7. Spain Park, 8. Bob Jones, 9. Auburn, 10. Enterprise. Also receiving votes: Gadsden City, Mountain Brook, Vestavia Hills, Lee-Montgomery, Murphy, Sparkman.

Class 6A: 1. Ramsay (18), 2. Hillcrest-Tuscaloosa (4), 3. Blount (1), 4. Austin (2), 5. Opelika, 6. Pinson Valley (5), 7. Oxford, 8. Daphne, 9. Muscle Shoals, 10. Park Crossing. Also receiving votes: Spanish Fort, Gardendale, Hazel Green, Jackson-Olin, Clay-Chalkville, Sidney Lanier, Wetumpka, Decatur, Saraland, McAdory, Pell City.

Class 5A: 1. Beauregard (26), 2. Briarwood Christian (3), 3. St. Paul's (2), 4. Vigor, T5. Alexandria, T5. Carroll, 7. Central-Clay County, 8. Wenonah, 9. Eufaula, 10. Brooks. Also receiving votes: Demopolis, Russellville, Jackson, Charles Henderson, Mortimer Jordan, Scottsboro, Etowah, Calera, Gunterville, Fairfield, Pleasant Grove, Moody.

Class 4A: 1. Handley (29), 2. Andalusia, 3. Madison Academy, 4. UMS-Wright (1), 5. Rogers, 6. Leeds, 7. St. James, 8. Hokes Bluff, 9. Cordova, 10. Fayette County. Also receiving votes: Tallassee, Cherokee County, Wilson, Madison County, Thomasville, Bibb

County, Dale County, North Jackson, Munford, West Blocton, Haleyville.

Class 3A: 1. Piedmont (27), 2. Mobile Christian (3), 3. Gordo (1), 4. Ohatchee, 5. Montevallo, 6. Opp, 7. Oakman, 8. Pike County, 9. Weaver, 10. Randolph County. Also receiving votes: Clarke County, Hillcrest-Evergreen, Lauderdale County, T.R. Miller, Fulton-dale, Bayside Academy, Plainview, Wicksburg, Lexington, Straughn.

Class 2A: 1. Fyffe (28), 2. Aliceville (1), 3. Lanett (1), 4. Elba, 5. G.W. Long, 6. Tanner, 7. LaFayette, 8. Leroy, 9. New Brockton, 10. Sand Rock. Also receiving votes: Reeltown, Sheffield, Goshen, Southern Choctaw, Cleveland, Washington County, Horseshoe Bend, Cold Springs, Westbrook Christian, Luverne, Red Bay.

Class 1A: 1. Maplesville (29), 2. Sweet Water, 3. Linden (2), 4. Pickens County, 5. Brantley, 6. Addison, 7. Cedar Bluff, 8. Spring Garden, 9. Marengo, 10. Notasulga. Also receiving votes: Hackleburg, Houston County, Loachapoka, Georgiana, Wadley, Decatur Heritage, Isabella, Ragland, Sumiton Christian, Hubbertville, South Lamar, Millry, Talladega County Central, Woodville.

AISA: 1. Autauga Academy (28), 2. Bessemer Academy (2), 3. Escambia Academy, 4. Monroe Academy, 5. Glenwood, 6. South Choctaw Academy, 7. Chambers Academy, 8. Abbeville Christian, 9. Pike Liberal Arts, 10. Lee-Scott. Also receiving votes: Clarke Prep, Patrician Academy, Cornerstone Christian, Marengo Academy, Southern Academy, Lake-side Academy, Lowndes Academy.

GOOD LUCK to all of our high school football teams, bands and cheerleaders for the coming season!