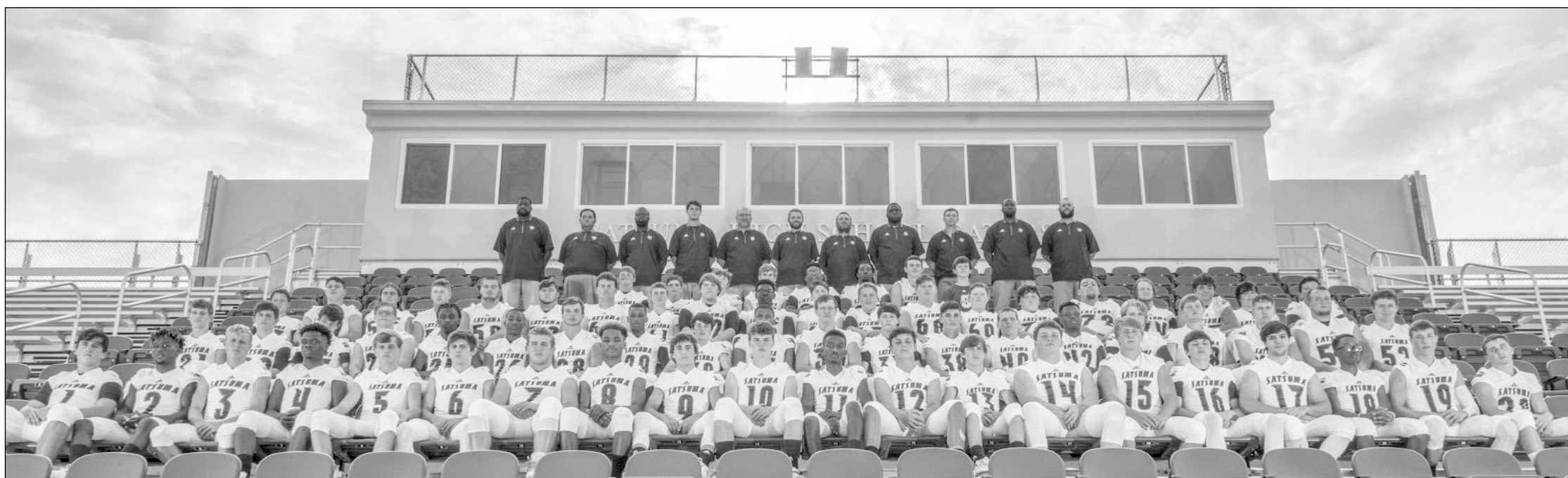


SATSUMA GATORS

Gators know expectations



The 2017 Satsuma High School Gators

Satsuma photos by John O'Dell/Call News

Young team wants to win even more for its football-loving community

BY DARRON PATTERSON
Call News Correspondent

Sometimes, youth has its advantages. You're simply too young to know what you *don't* know.

But that's not the case with Satsuma's youthful Gators this season, because they know exactly what's at stake in 2017.

"We're young at certain positions, but experienced at others," said third-year head coach Justin Thomas of his team's makeup.

"They understand the community's expectations. The first year we came in we kind of shook it up and told them this is the way it's going to be."

Despite a 49-21 Class 4A first-round playoff loss to St. James, Satsuma's first postseason appearance in 10 years, Thomas has his team poised to build on the success of a 6-5 overall record (3-3 in Region 1).

"The seniors that graduated were with us the first two years and they really understood the expectations and the culture we were trying to build, and they never wavered," he said.

Gone is steady quarterback Andrew Barfoot and in steps junior Nick Abernathy to run the offense.

"He's a kid you could put out at receiver and could very well be your best

receiver," said Thomas of the 6-foot-1, 175-pound Abernathy, who quarterbacked the JV team for two years.

"He's just a good, athletic kid; he played basketball and decided not to play last year to concentrate on being the quarterback.

"He's young, and we've got to do a good job as coaches to put him in good situations. We threw a lot at him this summer just to see what stuck and what he was capable of."

One good situation that will definitely help Abernathy might be the Gators' running game.

"We'll be able to run the football.

That's who we are," said Thomas. "We've got three running backs that we rotate in. We might look a little different (from last year), but we're still going to be a run-first football team.

Physical blockers

"We're going to be physical up front. We feel really good about our offensive line."

With three-year starting guard Chandler Knapp (6-1, 310) switching over to the defensive line, senior guard Hunter Odom (5-10, 240) and junior guard Zack

See **GATORS**, 45C

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Some of the defensive backs for the Satsuma Gators.



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