

# CITRONELLE WILDCATS

## Citronelle faces challenging schedule

*Class 5A, Region 1 is difficult, as usual, and there are tough non-region foes*

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A successful 2016 season has the Citronelle Wildcats dreaming of bigger things in 2017. After making the state playoffs for the first time since 2008, the Wildcats are shooting for a repeat performance, with the hope of getting a playoff victory and moving deep into the playoffs.

In order to reach that goal Citronelle must qualify for the playoffs in the tough Class 5A, Region 1 competition. The Wildcats also hope to improve their won-lost record, and for that to happen they have to get past some competitive non-region opponents.

What it all comes down to is a challenging schedule for the Wildcats, who open the season Sept. 1 against Class 6A B.C. Rain, a team that is expected to be improved. That game is followed by a visit to Prichard Stadium to face Vigor, the 5A, Region 1 champ last season, with a trip to Leroy following the Vigor game. Other teams on the schedule include 4A Satsuma; Region 1 foes St. Paul's, Williamson and Jackson and Class 2A and rival Washington County.

"It's going to be challenging in the beginning," Wildcats' head coach Rusty Funk said of the schedule. "We start off with B.C. Rain. They came close to making the playoffs last year in 6A. It will be tight for us. There's a good possibility we'll be back in 6A (next year after reclassification), so we'll find out what that's like again by starting out with them.

"Then going after B.C. Rain against Vigor, which won our region last year, and I believe they are probably going to be

much improved. The thing is though we could have beat Vigor and probably should have beat Vigor last year and they probably overlooked us. I guarantee you they aren't going to overlook us this time."

Asked if any of Citronelle's opponents are likely to overlook the Wildcats this season, Funk said, "I wouldn't think so, no."

Rain holds an 11-9 advantage over Citronelle in the all-time series. The teams haven't played since 2007, with the Cats winning that one 28-0. The Red Raiders were 5-5 a year ago. Although losing to Vigor last year 20-17, the game was an indicator the Wildcats were going to be a competitive team in 2016. The Vigor victory ended a two-game losing skid for the Wolves and marked the first of seven consecutive wins. Citronelle has won only two of 16 previous meetings against Vigor.

Leroy and Citronelle hold a 15-15 all-time record against each other and the Cats won a 35-24 decision last season. The Bears were 8-4 last year and advanced to the second round of the 2A playoffs. Faith has a new head coach in Jeff Estes, who took over late in the summer when Lance Lawley stepped down after one season on the job. The Rams were 3-7 last year, including a 41-7 loss to the Cats. Satsuma knocked off Citronelle 33-27 on its way to the Class 4A playoffs, the Gators' first playoff appearance since 2006.

Wilcox Central was 3-7 a year ago and no match for the Wildcats, who won a 41-14 decision. This will be only the fourth time the teams have met. St. Paul's has enjoyed great success in recent seasons and is a Top 10 preseason pick again this year. They



Among the Citronelle running backs will be, from left, senior **Trent Brannan**, senior **Brandon Davis** and senior **Jonathan Orso**. All three will play defense, as well, with Brannan and Davis at linebacker and Orso at defensive end.

posted a 9-4 record, losing to Jackson in the 5A playoffs. They beat Citronelle 35-14 last season.

When the Cats played Williamson last year it was known the winner of that game would earn the fourth and final playoff spot from Region 1. Citronelle dominated the game, winning 50-26. This could be a key game again this season. The Jackson

game is always big for Citronelle, and not just because it's a region game. The Aggies won last year 27-10 en route to a strong run in the playoffs. They lead the all-time series 34-19. Washington County is the regular season finale in Citronelle. The Cats won 37-34 in the grudge match last year and own a 30-18-2 all-time record against the Bulldogs.

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