

# MILLRY WILDCATS



The 2017 Millry High School Wildcats

Millry photos by Willie Gray/Call News

## Young Wildcats eager to improve

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Whether it's sports or real life, any successful team always has to have a strong, capable leader to keep things in line.

Millry better be glad Greg Crager is walking the sidelines.

While his Class 1A, Region 1 Wildcats are poised like race horses, ready to charge out of the starting gate and avenge some losses they think should've been wins last season, second-year head coach Crager is the voice of reason for his team.

Quite frankly, he knows the rabbit doesn't always win the race.

"We want to get off to a good start, of course we do," said the former Spanish Fort and Thompson High assistant.

"Sure, they want to start better than last year. They have a lot of pride, but we need to get better as the season progresses. That's our goal."

Like his players, Crager's focus is definitely on improving a disappointing 4-7 record, which included a 28-6 loss to Georgianna in the first round of the state playoffs.

But he knows full well that you can only win one game at a time.

"When the cool (fall) weather hits, we want to be playing our best ball," he said.

If they're going to turn things around from what was a disastrous opening month of September in 2016, Crager's young team, with four seniors on the roster, will have to have short memories.

After getting whitewashed 35-0 against hated rival Washington County on opening night in Chatom, they were on the wrong end of a 47-14 beat-down the next week at Marengo County.

The Wildcats rebounded to crush outmanned J.F. Shields, 73-0, in the home opener, but were shut out 54-0 at Linden and got ripped, 41-6, at Southern

Choctaw.

Crager thought his guys definitely had a chance to come out of that Marengo game better than they did.

Until, that is, misfortune found its way to the Wildcats' sideline.

"We wish we had that game back," he said.

"We were competitive up until our quarterback (Michael Manuel) got hurt, then

we just had to throw something together to get through the game."

With 'Mr. Everything' Manuel gone on to West Alabama, Crager will rely on the two-headed sophomore duo of Tate Warr (6-3, 185) and Brandon Holston (5-10, 160) to keep his offense on the rails.

"They both do some things well,"

he said of his talented, but young quarterback tandem.

"Tate is the runner. He started at wide receiver and linebacker as a freshman. And Brandon backed up Manuel last year ... he's the thrower."

Crager will also look to Riley Hall (5-foot-11, 175 pounds), one of that senior quartet, to anchor the line at center and open holes for ball carriers like fullback Peyton Sikes (5-10, 190).

"He gets everything straight up front," said Crager of Hall. "He'll make sure everybody knows what to do."

But if Millry's dreams of erasing the 2016 disaster are to come true, the defense will have to play lights out.

Crager is confident they can.

"The defense will be a lot better," he

said. "I think the work ethic we've shown (this offseason) and the mentality we developed from things learned last season will help us in close games."

"It matters to them (to have a better season). They have confidence."

Solidifying things defensively will fall into the capable laps of senior inside linebackers Mason Holston (6-0, 225) and Garrett Norton (5-11, 200), who'll also start

on the O-line at guard.

Crager has to even catch himself when thinking about what could've been last season.

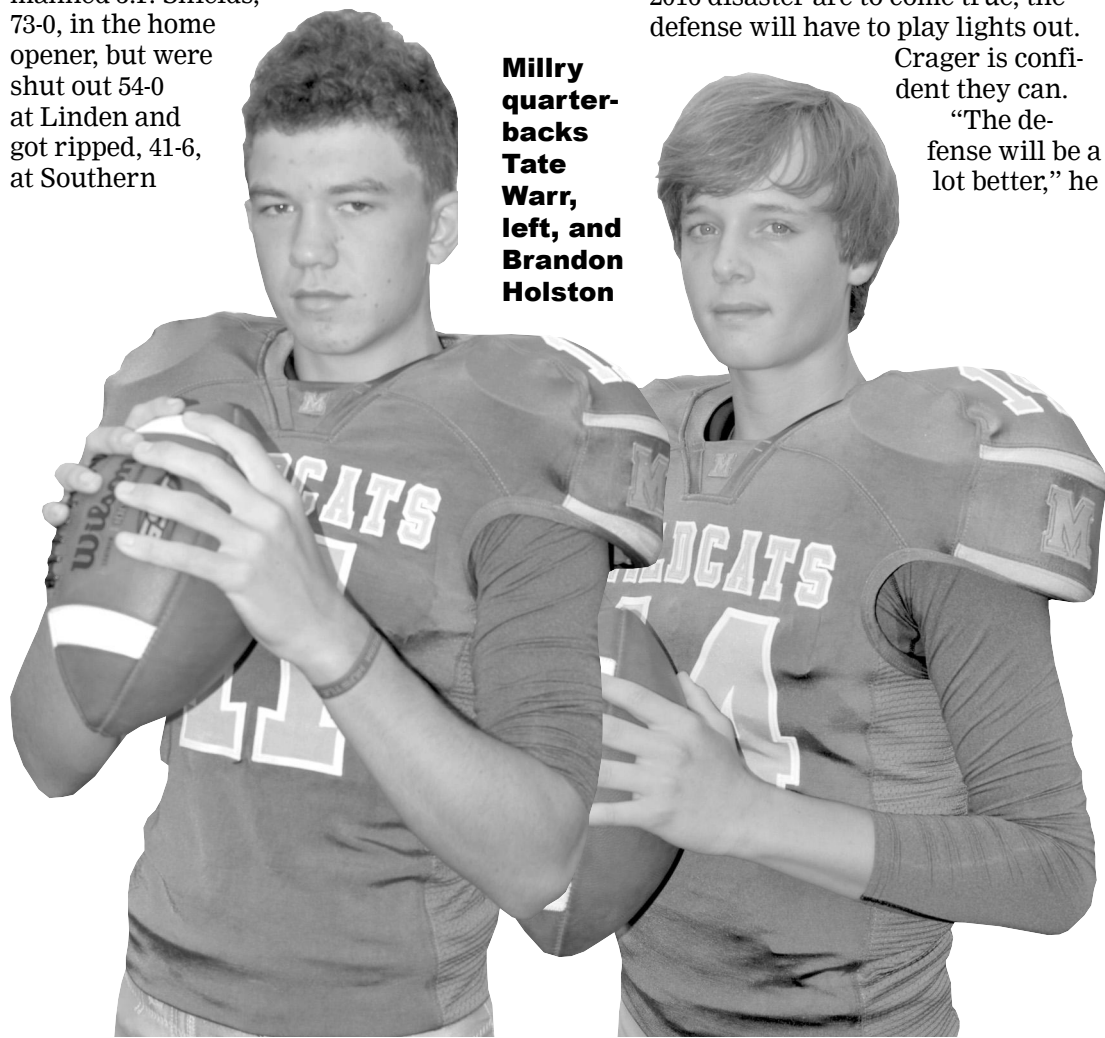
"Yeah, we had some really disappointing games that we thought we could've played better in to have given ourselves a chance ... including the playoffs," he said.

"But it's a new season. We're ready to get after it."



Greg Crager

Millry quarterbacks Tate Warr, left, and Brandon Holston



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