

# FAITH ACADEMY RAMS

## Faith wants sports success to spread to football field

BY MARK R. KENT  
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MOBILE — Newly promoted head coach Jeff Estes has been at Faith Academy for about a year and a half and has seen the success of several of the school's other sports programs, particularly boys and girls basketball, baseball and softball.

Estes, who became head coach just recently after head coach Lance Lawley stepped down for medical reasons, would like to see the school's football program rise to that level of accomplishment.

This year's senior class of as many as 18 players, he said, will be key to getting the Rams into a Class 5A, Region 1 playoff spot.

To Estes, it would be a major accomplishment for the school as well as for him in his first head coaching job after decades of assistant coaching. Since the Rams moved over from AISA to the Alabama High School Athletic Association, the football team has never been in a playoff game.

And even with all the seniors on hand, there is no guarantee the Rams will be able to earn a playoff berth this year.

Region 1 in 5A is a seven-team region, and it is top-heavy with well-established programs. There is St. Paul's and Vigor, two programs that have produced state championship teams. Then there is Jackson, a perennial power that lasted until the state semifinals the past three seasons. Williamson has seen recent playoff action and the 2016 Citronelle Wildcats grabbed the fourth playoff spot and their first postseason appearance since 2008.

Might there be room, or at least an avenue, for Faith to get in this year? Estes says he plans to have the Rams ready to handle whoever comes along.

James Harris tops the list of prospective stars for this year's Rams. He's a solid two-way player at 6-foot-1 and 215 pounds as a middle linebacker on defense and a running back on offense.

Estes said so far Harris has been offered a scholarship by the U.S. Naval Academy, but he added there may be other Division 1 colleges lining up at Harris' door.

There once, a good while back, was a popular song called "The Three Bells," not a football song but a hit nonetheless. Estes can top that; he has four players with the last name Bell who he said will all contribute.

Braxton Bell will get the first looks at quarterback, while Jackson Bell is expected to play wide receiver and J.G. Bell, a sophomore, is also a wideout prospect. All three were major contributors to the Rams' state runner-up baseball team last spring.

The youngest of the four, Peyton Bell, had what Estes called an impressive spring, and he got extra reps in the spring game partly because the other three Bells were battling their way through the baseball playoffs at that time.

There's a familiar name from another state runner-up team, Kaleb Jackson (6-4, 229), who was a frontline player on the Rams' state runner-up basketball team the past two seasons.

As Estes is quick to praise many of his Rams for accomplishments at other sports, so is he also quick to recognize noteworthy off-the-field accomplishments.

Defensive end Jackson Overstreet is outstanding in the classroom, and Estes says the key to his success on the football field is for the 6-4, 200-pounder to get a little quicker on his feet.

Titus Cody, who didn't play last year but had a good sophomore season, is noted off the field as an outstanding singer.

Estes also pointed out offensive guard Jordan Jackson, defensive back Tim Cody (who he says also can be used as a running back), and defensive secondary prospects Jalen Holmes and Austin Elliott as people who can make big contributions this year as well.

Special teams, Estes said, will be more of a project. Last year, Estes said the team was hurt a number of times during the season when punts got blocked at key moments. That, he said, is going to change.

The top placekicking prospect is Bronson Watt, and it didn't take making varsity for Watt to realize

his a kicker can be a major hero.

Last year in a JV game, Estes said, Watt kicked a game-winning field goal against Satsuma. Field goals at JV level or younger are rare, and game-winners even rarer.

The punting situation is still up in the air and will take August completion to determine who boots it away when necessary.

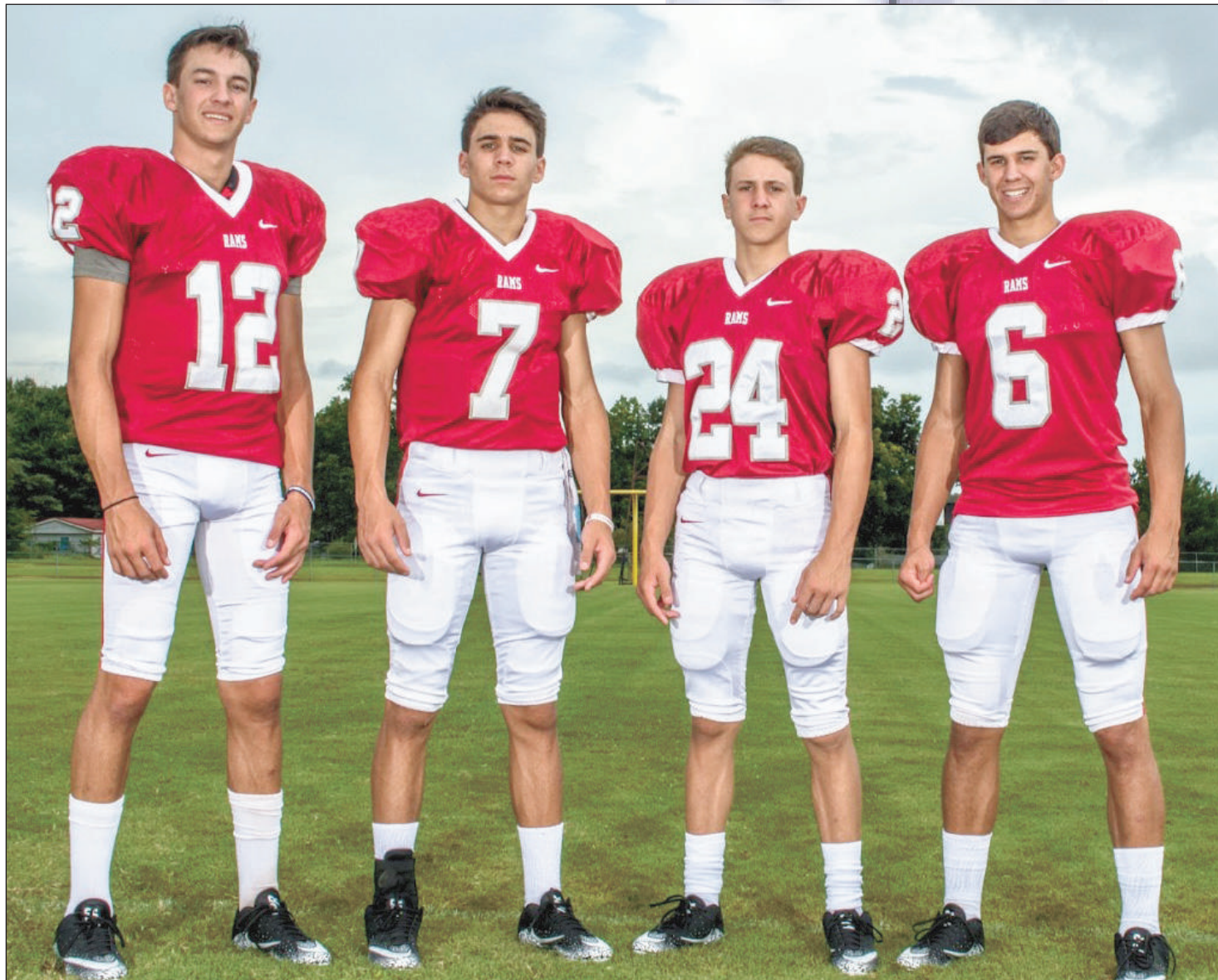
A year ago, in its 3-7 season, Faith got one victory each over a 4A, 5A and 6A team. The 21-14 win over Class 6A Gulf Shores broke a 15-game losing streak for the Rams, who also got a region road win over Wilcox Central (34-12) and a season-ending 44-28 road win at Escambia County.

The Rams open at home with an Aug. 24 exhibition game against Alma Bryant. There are home games against Jackson (Sept. 8), Vigor (Sept. 15), UMS-Wright (Sept. 29), Wilcox Central (Oct. 20) and Escambia County (Nov. 3)

Road games will be at Bayside Academy (Sept. 1), Citronelle (Sept. 22), Gulf Shores (Sept. 29), Williamson on a Thursday at Ladd-Peebles Stadium (Oct. 12) and St. Paul's (Oct. 27).



Faith standout James Harris is a linebacker on defense and a running back on offense.



Photos by John O'Dell/Call News

Faith Academy's football team has four players named Bell on this year's roster, and all of them are expected to be contributors for the Rams. From left are Braxton Bell, J.G. Bell, Peyton Bell and Jackson Bell. Braxton is the team's quarterback, Jackson and J.G. are receivers, and Peyton is the youngest of the group and already seeing playing time.

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