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Arrows offense looks to reload

By Danny C. Davis

After the loss of Cam Akers, the most prolific player in Arrow football history, one might expect the Clinton Arrows offense to have a down year.

But, after spring and summer workouts, Arrows coaches feel very confident about this year's offensive attack.

A veteran returning offensive line, as well as two experienced quarterbacks and a strong core of receivers, gives the Arrows hope for optimism.

Senior tight end Des Baker and junior wide receiver Christian Johnson return after stellar seasons in Clinton's record-setting offense last year.

"This is a new season," said Baker. "We're looking forward to getting back to where we were in the championship again."

"Last year, we depended heavily on Cam Akers to carry the offense," said Johnson. "This year, we are focusing on more of what we are supposed to do, like quarterback reads."

"Last year, those two guys, Christian and Des, were role players for our offense," said Clinton offensive coordinator Black Pennock. "Now, they are the guys this year."

But the strongest point on the team this year is considered the offensive line. Three on the line that started fifteen games return from last year. Cody Harrigil, Jimmy Bennett and Travis Williams are all big and experienced. KaDarius Burton and Justin Kelly saw a lot of playing time a year ago. Also vying for a start up front are sophomores Adrien Dennis and Jakobe McLaurin, who will both see playing time on the front line.

"If we click on all cylinders on offense this season, I think we can be a dangerous unit," said Burton. "We're a tight group on the offensive line."

The biggest question for the offense in the offseason is who will replace Cam Akers, who started four years at quarterback for CHS.

Senior Walker Burchfield has gotten a lot of snaps over the past two years and is vying for a start with Madison Ridgeland Academy transfer junior Hunter Hulsey. Burchfield is a proven runner, and Hulsey is considered a good pure pocket passer.

"Running the ball in Class 6A is my favorite thing," said Burchfield. "We're excited about our offense this year. We have some new faces in the backfield, but we are going to be solid on offense."

"I am excited about being here," said Hulsey. "Mississippi Class 6A is as good as it gets to play in. Week in and week out, you play against some of the best players in the state. Clinton is a great place to be."

"Competition has been real good at quarterback," said Pennock. "We

haven't decided on a starter. Hunter brings something to the table that Walker doesn't bring, and Walker brings something to the table that Hunter doesn't bring. They equal each other out. Hunter is a good passer and an effective passer. Walker is throwing the ball real well. So we feel real good with either one in there."

Freshman Caleb Miller will move up and be the third quarterback and be a deep snapper.

Probably the second biggest question is who will replace Darius Mayberry, a three-year starter at running back. The answer is the trio of senior Tommy Garner, junior Ryan Banks and senior Trey Banks.

"We have a three-headed monster back there," said Pennock. "Tommy Garner has been running with the first team offense. He has good vision and a catchall back that can catch a pass out of the backfield or run outside the tackles. He is an effective runner."

Ryan Davis is a big 215-pound back that made the switch from linebacker in the spring and gives the Arrows a power back option.

"When Ryan gets hit, he is going to get another four extra yards," said Pennock, describing him as a capable back with some speed that had never played running back.

"Akers and Mayberry set the bar here at Clinton in the backfield," said new running backs coach Lavandius Lyles. "They successfully challenged our running backs this year to perform at a high level."

Trey Banks also made the switch from defense and has a lot of speed and is expected to contribute a lot to the rushing game.

New wide receiver coach Lee Martin, who joined the staff this year after being the head coach at Lake, is excited about his core of receivers. Joining veterans Johnson and Baker are senior T. J. Newell, who made the switch from defensive back, but will play both ways, along with junior Greg Evans.

"We are expecting a lot from T.J., and we need Greg to really step up for us," said Martin.

Senior Haven Barnes, a starter at linebacker, will also play on offense at tight end when the Arrows go with a two tight end set.

"This offense has so much flexibility that we can feature certain things more than others," said Pennock.

"Last year, we were top-heavy, with our best players on offense. This year, our defense is much better, and that will allow us to be a more balanced team. We can be a twelve- or thirteen-drive team on offense this year; but, to do that, we will have to eliminate the penalties and protect the football," said Pennock.



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