

Expectations growing as GCHS looks to build on successes of '17



Photo by Shelley Mitchell / Herald Contributor

Greene County High School head football coach Mike King is shown pumping up members of his offensive unit prior to last Friday's season opener at West Lauderdale. The Wildcats did not get the result they had hoped for in a 25-14 loss to the Knights, but expectations for the season are high as a large part of King's first team, which finished 11-2 in 2017, returns for this season.

Wildcats enter King's second season with enthusiasm

By RUSSELL TURNER
Herald Staff

Expectations were pretty high for Greene County High School football when the school announced last year that long-time Wildcat offensive coordinator Mike King was leaving his alma mater to return to High School Road and take over the program.

After years of success under legendary coach Johnny Ainsworth, the GCHS program had fallen on hard times and suffered through a couple of disappointing seasons. King seemed to be just what the doctor ordered and school administrators and the GCHS faithful were expecting good things. King and his Wildcats gave them 'great' instead.

GCHS pulled off a 12-0 win over West Lauderdale to start the King era on a solid note. The following week, the Wildcats claimed the Golden Bell trophy with a 14-13 victory over George County, the team King starred on as a player and a coach. That coveted win over the Rebels would have probably been good enough for many fans, but by the time region play rolled around, Cats were 6-0 and getting ready to play in the biggest game the program had seen since the 2012 State Championship Game.

GCHS suffered its first taste of defeat in a 54-36 slug fest with top-ranked Poplarville, but showed a lot of grit to bounce

back the following week and claim a 56-49 quadruple-over-time nailbiter over Purvis. The Wildcats would not lose again until their season ended in heart-breaking fashion at South Pike in the second round of the MHSAA 4A Playoffs.

King understands that getting 11 wins in his first year was a big deal for rekindling a floundering program. But, as tough as that last minute loss to South Pike was, it may prove to be one of the most important outcomes in terms of getting Greene County back to the pinnacle of 4A football in Mississippi.

"I think the way the season ended last year was somewhat indicative of the fact that our players were somewhat satisfied with the 11 wins they had reeled off up to that point," King said last week, a day before his second season as the top Wildcat got underway. "The previous three Wildcat teams had won a combined total of six games and a lot of our players were on those teams."

"That being said, The remaining players that experienced that (loss) still have a bitter taste in their mouths, because they believe we were the better

team, but didn't play like it that night and let one get away."

King said whether the stage was too big for his team that night, or the atmosphere too much or the road environment too hostile, one thing was crystal clear.

"Whatever the case, we learned a great deal about what it takes moving forward," King commented.

"We look at attitudes and effort over everything else because we believe if you handle those two things the other stuff falls into place."

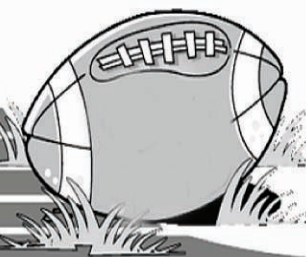
MIKE KING
Head Coach - GCHS

Good Luck
Wildcats!



Cary E. Williams

Certified Public Accountant



416 St. Francis St.
Leakesville, MS
394-5017

Coming into 2018, King and his team are dealing with a different set of circumstances and much higher expectations. Fans are talking, college coaches are sniffing around the field house once again and there is a sense of confidence surrounding the program. All that is just fine with King. He wants there to be high expectations, but also knows the pitfalls of folks around the program feeling they've 'arrived'.

"We don't want the kids to get too high or too low, so we work hard on trying to get them to be consistent in their approach and be level-headed and con-

trol the things they can control," King said. "We want to win every game, but our guys know we aren't going to judge them on wins and losses. We look at attitudes and effort over everything else because we believe if you handle those two things the other stuff falls into place."

"We (the coaching staff) don't necessarily feel added pressure (due to expectations) from outside the program. Expectations for GCHS football have been

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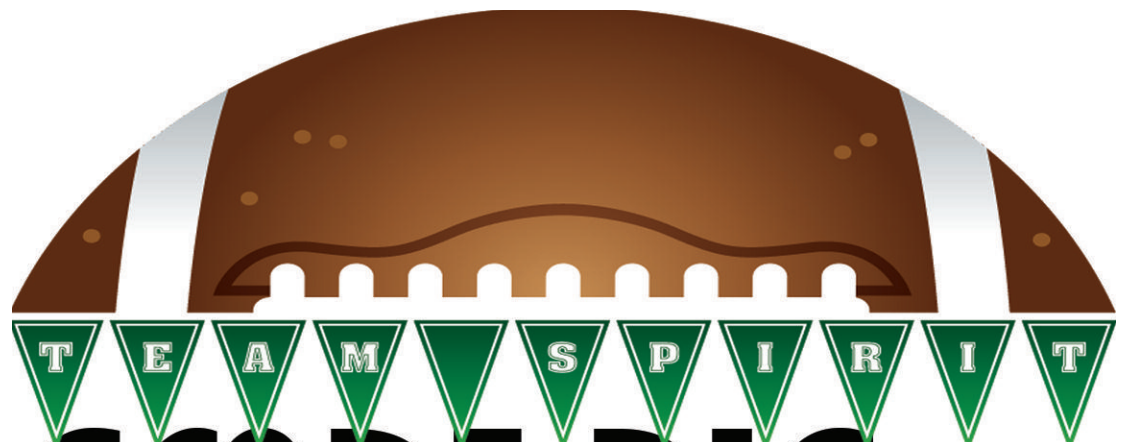
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