



Offense

Continued from Page 3B

used in a variety of packages, as King says he runs great routes and is difficult to bring down in the open field.

"Que is very versatile and will be used in the run and passing game," King said. "He is hard to tackle and routinely makes the first defender miss."

Also getting time at slot back will be junior Peyton Roberts and senior Darby Ledet. King says both are versatile athletes and will line up in multiple positions this season.

Speaking of versatility, senior Garrett West is the poster child in that regard for GCHS. Listed as the starting tight end, West lines up in more spots on the field than any other player on the team.

"He's got good size at 6-3, blocks well and is a solid receiver," King said. "He's really a hybrid type player and will line up in the backfield, at tight end and as a wide receiver."

"He is very important to our offensive attack."

That became clear in the opener against West Lauderdale. With West on the field, the GCHS offense seemed to click and was multi-dimensional. When he went out with a leg injury in the first quarter, the offense had an entirely different look. And, the results were different.

The extent of West's injury was unclear at press time, but it is a safe bet the Wildcats will be without him for a while. Sophomore Austin Turner and junior Malachi Graham provide depth at tight end, but it will be hard for GCHS to replace the skill set and leadership West was expected to provide.

"We knew Garrett was a valuable part of our offensive scheme going into week one, but really got to see the impact he makes when suddenly he wasn't out there," King said. "I thought we were in control of the game when he went down, but that got us away from what we wanted to do and made us more one dimensional."

"We've got capable players, but not really a single guy we can put in that can replace all the different things Garrett can do for us. The challenge now is trying to find the personnel combinations that allow us to get back to being multi-dimensional and get those guys ready to contribute."

One thing is for certain, West's absence will require other players to step up to fill the void and much of that will have to come from the receiving corps.

Junior Drake Henderson drew a lot of praise from coaches in the pre-season and had a big game at West Lauderdale in the opener.

"Drake has really come on strong and looked good so far," King said. "He bought in during the offseason and worked

very hard to improve and have a starting role on the team."

"He catches the ball at the high point, using his size and athleticism, and can be a matchup problem for opposing defenses."

He was a regular target against the Knights, finishing with eight catches for 55 yards and a touchdown. But, one of the most impressive plays came when he didn't have the ball in his hands.

"Drake made a great block on the opening touchdown run," King said. "He did it exactly how he was supposed to and saw what the result was because of it. I think he was excited about that block as anything he did all night and we are going to need to see a lot more of that from him."

Senior Kevin Dortch is another strong weapon for the Cats. Dortch had a big year as a junior and is the top returning receiver after posting 491 receiving yards and six touchdown catches as a junior.

"Kevin has good speed, but even better quickness," King said. "He is elusive and hard to tackle in the open field."

Sophomore Dre Grice was expected to play a big role prior to game one, but will almost certainly see that role expanded.

"Dre is a key player on defense, but could be a starter in the receiving corps too," King said. "He will get time at receiver and provide depth at the position."

While the skilled positions get most of the attention, nothing will work for the GCHS offense if the guys in the trenches don't do their jobs. With the loss of several linemen to graduation, including current Jones County Junior College freshman Jordan Chapman, it was unclear what the Cats' O-line unit would look like this season. While, there is nobody expected to completely fill Chapman's shoes, offensive coordinator Rotch Dungan says he has a lot of solid players on his unit and good depth.

"We have multiple guys still battling for opportunities to creep up the depth chart," Dungan said last week. "It worries me that we have three guys on the starting unit that have never taken a varsity snap, but I still feel good about what this group can be."

Senior Hayden West and junior Eli Erkhart are the lone returning lettermen for Dungan. West will hold down the center position, while Erkhart is making the move from tackle to right guard this season.

Senior Jo'Vontre Higgins is the left guard. Junior Noah Bradley is the starting right tackle, while sophomore Kaiden Keys topped the depth chart for week one at left tackle. Weston McLeod is a first year player that will provide

depth at both tackle spots. Junior Cameron Dunnam will share time at the guard spots and is the backup to West at Center.

"Hayden added a lot of strength in the offseason and he and Eli have done a good job for us so far," Dungan said last week. "Jo (Higgins) has had a really good pre-season. He has great footwork and moves well."

"We've had a lot of competition among the offensive line and we have seven kids we feel we can play with on Fridays and win. We just need to get experience and I believe we will get better each week."

Hayden West agrees. "Some of the younger linemen have stepped up and challenged some other guys for positions, so the last couple of weeks has seen a lot of good competition," Hayden said. "I think we measure up pretty good."

"We understand there will be people lined up across from us that may be better, but Coach Dungan has done a great job teaching us and showing us ways to be the best players we can be."



Photos by Russell Turner / Shelley Mitchell

The GCHS coaching staff is expecting a lot from senior running backs Que Washam and Santez Campbell this season. Both had big moments in the season opener at Collinsville, with the biggest coming on the first play from scrimmage. Campbell is shown (Above) on that play, breaking free for a 61-yard TD run with Washam (#1) looking for a block downfield.

Shown (Inset) is senior Garrett West picking up a big gain during a recent practice. West went down with a knee injury against West Lauderdale and it is unclear when or if he will be available to return to action.

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