



Photo by Russell Turner / Herald Editor

With multiple lettermen returning, Greene County defensive line coach Caleb Prentiss has the most experienced unit on the field heading into this season. Prentiss is shown here going over positioning with several of the players during practice a couple weeks ago.

Experienced defense expected to be solid for Wildcats this season

Talented group features top producers and lots of upperclassmen

By **RUSSELL TURNER**
Herald Staff

Greene County's defense was dominant at times last season and was a huge part of the Cats' 11-2 run. With the majority of that unit coming back this season, the defense is expected to lead the way for the Wildcats in 2018.

Multiple starters are returning for defensive coordinator Jacob Aycock, including two seniors who are getting a lot of attention from college recruiters. But, according to one of those standouts, this year's unit feels like it still has something to prove.

"The key is that we don't lose focus," said senior linebacker Noah Mitchell, who has verbally committed to play at Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College next fall. "We had a good year last year, but that is in the past. We have to concentrate on doing our jobs one game at a time."

"I feel like we are confident, but not over-confident. Last year was a taste of what we can do defensively. We're younger but have lots of experience. I am excited about the season."

Mitchell is the defensive leader for the Wildcats and the top returning tackler from

2017 with 148 stops to his credit. Coach Aycock calls him a disruptive player with a great nose for the game.

"He's a physical player that runs well and makes tackles all over the field," Aycock said. "He's a leader on that side of the ball."

Another player facing high expectations is senior defensive lineman Blake Daughdrill. The 6-3, 275-pounder was second on the team with 99 tackles and four forced fumbles as a junior.

"Blake is the anchor and senior leader on the defensive line," Aycock says. "He has great size and strength, draws a lot of attention and beats double teams."

Daughdrill possesses the tools to continue his playing career after high school and has multiple collegiate offers on the table already and is currently committed to play for Coach Steve Buckley at JCJC next year. But, for now he says his focus on having a great senior season, and isn't letting the extra attention and expectations change his approach.

"I feel pretty loose," he said. "We put it all out in practice every day in practice and give it our all on Fridays."

"We have to continue to work hard and get reps for guys that need experience, but overall, I feel pretty good about where we are."

JAYCOB AYCOCK
GCHS Defensive Coordinator

"I think we are going to be pretty good on the defensive side of the ball. We go out and play hard like nobody can stop us."

Two other returning seniors expected to have solid seasons for the Cats are lineman Drake Walley, end and safety Alex 'A.J.' Magee. Walley had a breakout

junior season with 49 tackles and showed off his athleticism with a 48-yard interception return for a touchdown against Forrest County AHS. Magee was the fifth leading tackler on defense as a junior and will look to improve on creating turnovers after pulling down one interception last year.

"Drake is very consistent and an extremely smart player," Aycock said. "He has a solid build and is athletic and I really expect him to have a great year."

"A.J. is our quarterback on defense. He is a good cover guy, but an even better run support safety. Attitude and effort make him a great role model to our younger guys."

Rounding out the defensive front alongside Walley and Daughdrill will be juniors Hunter McLeod and Josh Bolton. McLeod was solid in his sophomore campaign with 41 tackles to his credit. Bolton saw action in every game in 2017 and recorded 35 tackles. Coaches say he had a great off-season and are expecting good things from him this year.

"Hunter is a smart player and does a good job of helping us get lined up correctly up front," Aycock said. "He's fast off the ball and gets in on a lot of plays."

"Josh has a good, long build and is hard to block. Mikael McLeod is just a sophomore, but has great size at 6-5, 285, and will be a

part of the rotation on the line. It will be exciting to see if he is ready to stack up against varsity competition."

Joining Mitchell at linebacker are Ladon Woullard and Jaheim Cooper. Woullard had a strong sophomore campaign and was third on the team with

86 tackles. Cooper is a versatile player that saw a lot of action as sophomore and is expected to play a bigger role in 2018.

"Ladon is a high energy player and exciting to watch," Aycock added. "He plays with a very high motor and is fast and hard to block."

"The other players call Jaheim 'Tank' for the way he plays. He can do multiple things for

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