

CITRONELLE

CHS OFFENSE: Wildcats will stress ball control, fewer turnovers

FROM PAGE 9C

and defense. In 2017, Barnett noted that turnovers took the wind out of the sails for the Wildcats on more than one occasion, an issue he and the senior leadership on the team plan to address.

The second issue Barnett has stressed when asked of team issues continues to be depth. The growing number of players on the team is seen as a positive change for Barnett and his staff, but he also admits that levels of training go into creating depth at the various positions.

"I continue to tell people that our first 22 are as good as any of the teams that we face. The question comes in when we are looking at the second group of 22," Barnett said. "On the offensive side of the ball we have been plugging guys into the rotation, so that is going to help us this year. We have some younger guys that we have to start grooming for the future, so there will be a number of those guys who have to get in the game from time to time. I like what I have been seeing. Do I think we are where we need to be when it comes to depth? No, but we are making progress and productivity is a good thing."

One of the seniors for the Wildcat offense this season is running back Joe Jeffrey Hutcherson. At 6-foot-0, 215 pounds, Hutcherson plays with both power and speed, qualities Barnett says he doubts Hutcherson has fully tapped yet.

"He is as good of a football player as I have ever coached and I don't think he has any real idea about just how good he can be," Barnett said. "Last year he finished fifth in Alabama's (Class) 5A track and field competition in the shotput division. He is a 215-pound kid who was competing against much bigger guys, some of which were linemen. He held his own and finished as one of the top in the state of Alabama."

"What is even more surprising is that many of the guys he was competing against had been doing that for years. Joe Jeffrey just happened to be walking by our track and field practice one day and picked the shotput up and threw it. Then a few weeks later he is one of the state's best."

Hutcherson's speed was displayed over the summer when he answered an invitation to attend a camp at Auburn University. While participating, he was clocked as having a 4.5 time in the 40-yard dash. This performance, according to Barnett, not



Brandon Washington, junior running back

only caught the attention of the Auburn coaches but word has spread to other Division 1 schools.

Other returning starters on the offensive will be Justin Johnston, a 5-10 175-pound senior. Johnston first entered the rotation of the Wildcats' defense as a freshman and started as a sophomore. Last season he moved to the offensive side of the ball as a receiver. This season Barnett says Johnston will see playing time at multiple positions and added in the possibility of seeing him under center.

Quarterback competition

"Last season we used Carson Jarvis and Jamarcus Robinson at quarterback but neither of them came out in the spring so we worked Justin Johnston there and he is not bad. Is he a true quarterback? No, but can he play quarterback because he is good with the ball in his hands," Barnett said.

In addition to Jarvis, Robinson and Johnston, Barnett says he is grooming underclassman Michael Harvey to steer the Wildcats in the future.

"I am thinking that today, this group of guys are as good of a set of quarterbacks as we could ask for," Barnett said. "Michael Harvey is only a freshman and he is going to be a good player for us but he still has a lot of work to do and a lot of things to learn

but he could very well fill the slot of these seniors next year."

Although Hutcherson is known to be the premier running back of the Wildcats' stable, Barnett says there will be others in the rotation too. Among the backs to carry the ball will be Brandon Washington, a 5-10, 165-pound junior who is noted to have explosive speed.

"Brandon is going to see a lot of time in the backfield this season. He got a lot of time in the backfield last year and we have a lot of faith in him to have a good year for us," Barnett said. "Overall, I think Brandon is one of the best athletes we have on the team because he can play multiple positions and can play them well. He is a different style runner than Hutch is because Brandon relies on quickness and Hutch will run over you."

Relying on receivers

Receivers for the Wildcats will include many of the same guys who play in the defensive backfield including Daniel Manley, Coby Reed (6-2, 215), Aaron Belt (6-2, 215) and Aaron Peoples (6-1, 165).

"These are some of the guys we have come to rely on to be our eyes on the field. I don't think any of them have ever missed a practice and they have become coaches on the field," Barnett said. "Aaron Peoples and Aaron Belt are natural-born leaders and the kind of kids you love to be around and have playing for you. Both will give 100 percent and play like they are 6-6 and weigh 260 pounds."

"They all have a few things to work on to reach their full potential but we are getting there. When the college recruiters see Belt and Peoples they are taken on their size and basic playing ability. We have got to get both of them a little faster, but they are football players."

If there is a question on the Citronelle offense it would have to be with the guys on the line. Barnett admits he has some of the biggest and fastest offensive linemen to come through the program in several years, but most of them are unproven as Wildcats.

"We are still unsure about the ability of our guys right now. Most of them are kind of new to our program, but I have a good feeling about them," Barnett said. "At least two of the offensive linemen are transfers from other schools, so they have never worn the Wildcat uniform yet for us to

know what they can do on the field."

One of the guys who joined the Wildcats over the summer is senior Dawson Dykes (6-2, 245). Dykes is noted to have both strength and speed for a lineman and was actually named the offensive Most Valuable Player at Satsuma last year.

Excited about additions

In addition to Dykes, The Wildcats have Justin Reed (5-10, 225) who transferred in last year but wasn't eligible to play, although he went through practice with the other program. This year he will be on the field.

"We are thankful to have Dawson and Justin in our program because both of them bring something to the table for us. Dawson played against us last season so we know a little about what he can do. Justin looked really good in the spring and we like what we saw, so I am excited to see both guys in a Wildcat uniform," Barnett said.

Dawson Stringer (6-2, 220) is another senior who is expected to start on the line for the Wildcats. Stringer is no stranger to the program but has suffered multiple injuries through the years that have prevented him from being able to play. This season he has a clean bill of health.

According to Barnett, Jackson Delaney is expected to be the starting center. Coming to the front, Delaney is noted as being 5-10, 220 pounds and is one of the leaders on the offensive front.

"I am so proud of this group of players and what they have done and are doing to prepare for this year's season. But there is no one on our team that can outwork Jackson because he listens and wants to get better on every snap," Barnett said. "He follows direction well and is very detail oriented. He helps keep everyone else in position for us."

The youngest and biggest lineman starting for the Wildcats will be Harold Rocker, a sophomore, who stands 6-3 and weighs in at 280 pounds. From a physical standpoint, Barnett says Rocker is perfect, but because of his youth he has a lot to learn about the level of competition and how to play the game mentally.

Citronelle will open their regular season Aug. 24 with a trip to Chatom to face the Bulldogs. In 2017, the Wildcats defeated the Bulldogs in Citronelle 44-12 to close the season 5-5.

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