

BRYANT

Hurricanes moving in right direction

BY ROBERT LADNIER
Sports Correspondent

Heading into 2018, Alma Bryant head football coach Doug Hoehn is looking to build upon some of the positive things he saw from his team in a 3-7 campaign this past season.

"We improved," Hoehn said. "The best thing was the mental effort. The kids played hard every down, regardless of the score. They bought in, and eventually when you do that good things begin to happen."

According to Hoehn, the work continues.

"We still need to improve, but we made some great strides," Hoehn explained. "We hurt ourselves a lot with penalties and turnovers at the worst possible times. You can't dig yourself into a hole and you cannot afford to give things away."

The Hurricanes return four starters on offense, seven on de-

fense and five on special teams.

Offensively, Bryant scored 21 or more points in four games, the most since the season of its last playoff appearance in 2013.

"We averaged seven to eight more points per game than previously," Hoehn said. "The numbers were not where we needed to be, but the kids played hard on offense and weren't shut out at all. I like the direction we are moving."

Senior guard Greg Dixon will help anchor the front line, while senior quarterback Rajai Bowie and junior tailback Ced Johnson bring experience to the backfield.

"Our goals on offense are no penalties, no turnovers and no negative plays," Hoehn insisted.

Defensively, the Canes must improve from a unit that surrendered 31 points or more in six contests.

"To the kids' credit, we gave up 14 points less than the year before



Doug Hoehn

Photo by Mike Kittrell/Call News

so we have a ways to go," Hoehn said. "We preach playing hard on every play to give ourselves a chance."

Four seniors are expected to lead the defensive effort, including tackle Tyler Nelson, line-

backer Dylan James, cornerback James Miller and safety Jaylon Dixon.

"Our run defense improved as the season progressed last year," Hoehn said. "Some of our goals on defense this year are no penalties

and no giving up big plays."

When Hoehn came aboard last season, he became the ninth head football coach at Bryant in 20 years.

"That's hard on a program in terms of building consistency," Hoehn admitted. "We have a great administration at Bryant and we have the support of the school, the community and the fans."

"We are not going to have more athletes than other teams, but we do have good kids. If we stay with what we are doing, we will improve."

Hoehn is proud that eight of his players this past season have moved on to play college ball and that the school has invested in team assets this year.

"We had our indoor practice facility renovated and we will have new uniforms," Hoehn said. "We must stay focused on our philosophy and we need to achieve a level of success."

COTTAGE HILL

New coach excited about the Warriors

BY TOMMY HICKS
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Cottage Hill Christian has a new head football coach, but he's not really new to the program, just new to his current job. When David Peebles decided to leave the program after two seasons as the Warriors' head coach, head of school Jimmy Messer didn't have to look far to find the person he wanted to lead the Cottage Hill team.

Truth is, he went down the hallway, selecting long-time assistant Chris Brazzell to take on the job. It is Brazzell's first head coaching opportunity.

"I love it. I tell my wife that all the time, and thankfully I've got a great wife and great administration. I haven't been this excited since my first year in coaching," Brazzell said of taking over the Warriors' football fortunes. "It renewed my own personal faith, but it also gave me a shot in the arm. The kids buying in to everything that we have asked them to do has helped. We want it for Cottage Hill. We want to be successful."

"Our goals are real simple: win more games than we ever have (as a member of AHSAA), which would be seven; then make the playoffs and host a playoff game. I've been kidding around with them about eating fried turkey. If we're eating fried turkey at the stadium that means we're making a long playoff run. That's ultimately our goals. Now we have to remember where we came from — in the last seven years we've only won 11 games, so we've got to play and keep them grounded and humble. We're not looking in the rearview mirror because we're going forward. We're taking all the positive things from the past and moving forward and forgetting all the negative things."

Brazzell says he and his coaching staff and the players are ready to go.

"We've been real pleased with the guys coming in and buying into the things the new coaching staff has asked them to do," he said. "We made some big hires in the offseason. Bobby Parrish, the former long-time assistant at Theodore and head coach at Williamson, is going to be running our defense and to be honest with you defense is probably going to be the strength of our team because we're returning eight starters there."

The leader on defense will be senior linebacker Tony Pope who had 114 tackles a year ago, as well as Rasean Thomas, who added 100 stops last season. Caleb Gartman is a senior who is also expected to have a good season, along with senior strong safety Mario Rembert. Sophomore JD Pettway also returns. He had six interceptions last year.

Offense is a different story. "We're not returning a single guy up front with any playing time; we lost all five linemen from

last year on offense," Brazzell said, but he added, "We do have a plethora of skill guys back, led by in my opinion the most underrated player in Coastal Alabama — Samario 'Flip' Rudolph. He's a phenomenal athlete. Aside from playing wide receiver and returning kicks for us he also will play defensive back. In his two-year career on varsity he's had 26 total touchdowns and he's had 1,656 yards receiving on 91 catches. He's also got 11 interceptions on defense. We're real, real pleased with him."

Cory Alexander takes over at quarterback. "Cory showed signs of growth this summer in our 7-on-7s," Brazzell said. "He threw seven touchdowns and just one interception and he had a 58 percent completion rate (last year). He only threw two picks this summer in 7-on-7 play; we

went 12-5 this summer and basically all of our losses came on the last possession and two of them came in the final few seconds. What sets Cory apart is at the 7-on-7 at (McGill-Toolen) he ran a 4.5 40 so he's the definition of a dual-threat quarterback."

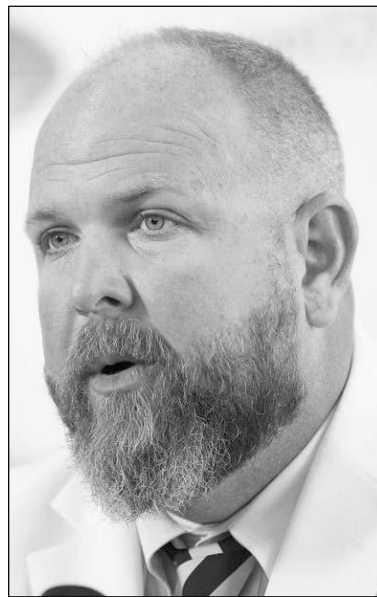
Running back Reggie Rayford graduated, so in his place will be senior Grant Woodruff. "He's a Warrior at heart, for sure," Brazzell said.

"Defensively, I'd say we're going to be a little bit more multiple. Last year we were based out of the 3-4 but this

year we're going to be able to give more looks because we feel like those guys have advanced over the last two years and with eight starters back we feel like we can throw more at them. ... Offensively, it's going to be little bit different. The surprise for people is going to be that even though we're returning just three starters I'm real pleased with what we have been doing. ... We're going to be a tempo-based offense, that's how I would best sum it up. As fast as we can go, that's how fast we want to go."

The drop from Class 3A to Class 2A better suits the enrollment numbers for Cottage Hill, Brazzell said, but it's not a guarantee of wins. "Without a doubt the last few years we've been unfortunate to be, in my opinion, one of the toughest regions in the state in 3A, Region 1. You go back and look, somebody in our region played for the state championship from Bayside (Academy) to Mobile Christian and even Hillcrest-Evergreen winning it last year."

"Now we're where we need to be; 2A, Region 1 is where we need to be with our (enrollment) numbers. ... Day in and day out we've still got to do what we need to do to win football games on Friday night and just going down to 2A is not automatically going to translate into getting victories. We still have to do what we need to do."



Chris Brazzell

DAVIDSON

Backfield standouts lead DHS offense

(EDITOR'S NOTE: At press time for this special publication, Davidson head coach Fred Riley had been placed on administrative leave by the Mobile County Public School System in the midst of an investigation into pending lawsuits filed against Riley, MCPSS, former Superintendent Martha Peek, Davidson assistant coaches and the Davidson players accused of injuring a teammate. Riley was the team's head coach of record at the time of the interview.)

BY ARTHUR L. MACK
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If anyone thought Davidson head coach Fred Riley was going to elaborate on a hazing incident during the spring that left freshman quarterback Rodney Kim Jr. with a broken arm and resulting in eight players being accused of assault, they were sorely disappointed.

"I can't tell you about that," he told one reporter. "All I can tell you is that we had a solid summer and we had a good practice today."

And that's how Riley opened his comments at the recent Mobile County Football Media Days event at Ladd-Peebles Stadium.

When asked if retirement was on his mind, Riley said, "I'm not going to retire before Terry (Curtis, UMS-Wright coach), and I'm not going to do a Jack (French, Faith Academy coach), retire and come back. When I do retire, I'm going to work on my handicap and play some golf."

"I'm 58 and I've got my years in (the state system). But I enjoy what I'm doing and as long as Mrs. Riley lets me keep coaching, I'm going to keep coaching."

When asked if the incident brought the team closer or if it jelled, Riley said, "We've always had a close football team. We enjoy playing football together and it has nothing to do with any outside influence or anything else that we might consider a factor. I cannot discuss anything connected with the incident."

Last season, Davidson went 7-4, losing 23-7 to Auburn in the first round of the Class 7A playoffs.

"We would have to have played just about perfect to have won that football game, almost to perfection," Riley said. "And we really for about 20 minutes (were in the game). We were in a fist fight and they get a touchdown right before the half. I don't think we could have scored 21 points all night, they were that good defensively."

"The lesson that you learn is that no matter how hard you work, there's going to be somebody that's a little bit better than you, and if they get a break, they're probably going to beat you."

Davidson will have a rigorous schedule, with its first game on the road against

Meridian, Miss., and a contest against Lee-Montgomery on Oct. 26 in the next-to-last regular season game. The Warriors have an open date on Sept. 28.

"We love the bye week in the middle," Riley said. "When we talked about creating 11 (weeks) and playing 10 and having an open date, that was one of the things we were talking about doing to keep that date open and allow yourself to heal a little bit. The first year we had a bye week, it was against Mary G. Montgomery and Bryan Seymore two years ago when they were doing some crazy things offensively and driving everybody nuts, including us, so it gave us two weeks to prepare for him."

Speaking of offense, Davidson's offense will be led by quarterback Tim Johnson and running back Kolbe Blunt. Riley said having Blunt, who had more than 300 carries despite being 5-foot-10 and weighing just 165 pounds, is a big asset, showing leadership and durability.

"He looks like a trained killer," Riley said. "He's just tough, physical and holds on to the football. He has a knack for falling forward. Some guys always fall forward and you never get clean shots on them, but he never gets hit hard. He's one of those guys who can get skinny in the hole and skinny at contact."

Johnson started last year slow but showed steady improvement as the season progressed.

"As the season went on, we went from protecting him to gradually turning him loose decision-making-wise and giving him the opportunity to make plays,"

said Riley. "He's one of the obvious leaders of the team. The days that he missed work-outs, he was gone to football camps."

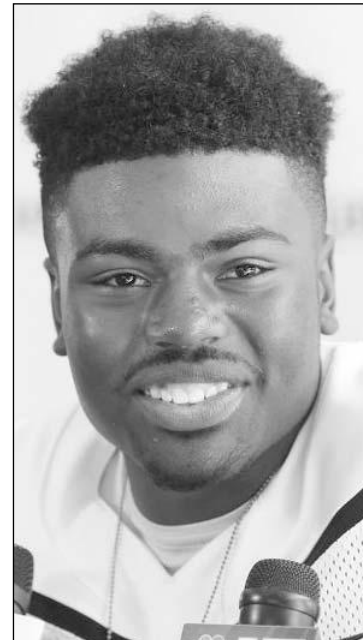
Joe Montano, who also plays on the soccer team, has missed only one field goal in his career — a 47-yard attempt into the wind against Auburn last year.

"We've always had good kickers," Riley said. "Kevin Longo and Chris Agee (our kicking coach), find those couple of guys that are in soccer and have that football mentality. We've been fortunate, we've always had quality kickers."

Defensively, the Warriors lost some key players and Riley said for some reason the defensive side of the ball could never match the experience of the offense.

"We rebuilt defensively last year," Riley said. "That was the group that suffered the year before (2016) because they were young then. We had the loaded offensive team and then the defense gave up 49 points against Jackson. We haven't been able to have two veteran groups (offense and defense) at the same time and we're sort of in that same place; the offense has the veterans this year and we're still retooling the defense again."

This year, Davidson has 75 players, up from 62 from last year. There are 22 seniors.



Kolbe Blunt