

# CITRONELLE

## WILDCATS: CHS schedule will be tough, with several major tests

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“All you have to do to see the level of talent that is in those two programs is to look at the players who have left there, played college ball and some are now in the pros,” Barnett said. “Their starters at both programs are as good as any team we will face this season and we are going to have to play good football to beat either of them.”

Week 3 will provide a break in the competition for the Wildcats as they are off that week for evaluation before starting region play against LeFlore on Sept. 14.

“Having a break on Week 3 may be good and it might be a bad thing; we are going to have to see,” Barnett said. “One thing that is for sure is that we will have to be ready for LeFlore because they are going to be loaded with talent.”

Sept. 21 pits the Wildcats against the Faith Academy Rams. Although Faith has struggled the past couple of years, most football experts agree bringing seasoned head coach Jack French in to take over the football program will likely put the Rams into a position to be one of the better teams in the area.

“Coach Jack French is one of the most respected coaches in this area. He will have that team ready to play every time they step onto the field,” Barnett said. “They will be prepared for us when we play and the edge we might have had in the past in the way of coaching may not be there this season because Coach French is there.”

### Reconnection with Vikings

For game six, the Wildcats will reconnect with competition against the Class 7A Mary G. Montgomery Vikings. The last time the two teams played was in 2011 when the Vikings shut out the Wildcats 28-0. The two teams have met 45 times since 1947 and MGM leads the series 23-22.

“We are looking forward to that game. They are a much larger program than we are but I think we are going to make a game out of it. I have talked with the coaches at MGM and we have all agreed to have a joint pep rally at some point before the game to introduce both teams,” Barnett said. “It is going to be a good game and a fun game. They have the ability to be a very good team and we see this as a midseason point and a good (game for) evaluation.”

The first Friday of October puts the Wildcats on the road facing the Satsuma Gators. The two rivals have met regularly for years but seldom have they been in the same region. This year that is the case and both teams will likely be looking for a victory to keep their playoff hopes alive. Barnett has coached against the Satsuma teams for three years and all three games were nail-biters that were decided in the final minutes of the game. Satsuma has won the past two years and Citronelle's last win came in 2015.

“This will be the first time that I know of that Satsuma has been in our region. For the last 30 years Citronelle has been the dominant winner, but that isn't always the case as we have seen the last couple of years,” Barnett said. “I think we have been equally matched the last few years and that makes me believe they are going to be good this year. Both teams lost some key players from last year and both teams have new coaches, so we should still be evenly matched.”

### Jackson always a challenge

For Week 8, the Wildcats face one of their toughest rival games of the season — the Jackson Aggies. Coached by one of the most successful high school coaches in the state in Danny Powell, the Aggies regularly make a run at the state championship. Barnett knows his team will be in a battle when they host the Aggies on Oct. 12.

“From the top of their roster to the bottom, they (Jackson) are the most talented team we are going to see all year,” Barnett said. “They have one of the best coaching staffs in the state. We will have to be at our best that night for sure. Do we have the talent to stay on the field with those guys? I think so, but that is why we play the game; we are going to be as prepared as we can be when we play them.”

Oct. 19 has the Wildcats matched with the Vigor Wolves. A team that has traditionally improved with time, meaning as the season moves along, the Wolves continue getting better week by week. By the time the Wildcats face the Wolves, they will be seasoned and sure to offer the Wildcats another strong test.

“What more can I say? They are Vigor. They have some of the best players in the county but they have a tradition of having a winning program,” Barnett said. “In the past we have been able to play with them and we will see if we can this season. This year we have them late in the season so I'm hoping we are a team that has also progressed as the season goes along.”

Oct. 26 has the Wildcats returning to Gatlin Field for their final home game of the regular season. They will face the Wilcox County Jaguars in their final region game of the year. The Cats and Jags have only played four times since 2004. Currently, the Wildcats hold the edge in the series at 3-1. The Jags defeated the Wildcats in 2005 by a score of 38-35. Last year, Citronelle defeated the Jags in Camden by a final of 43-6.

“The record at Wilcox is misleading about their talent. When you look at their kids you can see they have some athletes on their team and the minute you make a mistake on the field in coverage or a tackle, they will make you pay for it,” Barnett said. “Again, we don't take any game for granted and look forward to hosting them.”

The final game of the season will be another major test for the Wildcats and one Barnett and his staff will likely be forced to prepare for a team they have never competed against. On Thursday, Nov. 1, the Wildcats will travel to Mobile and face Mobile Christian. Through the years, Mobile Christian has been a powerful force in Class 2A and the Leopards are now a Class 3A program where their competitiveness has only intensified. It is Barnett's opinion that playing a team like Mobile Christian late in the season will help teams prepare for the postseason.

“M.C. is coached by Ronnie Cottrell. He is one of the best in the business and any team playing against a Cottrell team will have their hands full in preparing for them,” Barnett said. “With that in mind, I am looking forward to playing against them and I have no doubt playing against M.C. will help prepare us for the playoffs.”

Citronelle finished the 2017 season with an overall record of 5-5 and they finished fifth in region competition with a record of 3-3.

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Wishing the Citronelle Wildcats a safe and successful football season!

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