

ST. PAUL'S

SAINTS: Mask says new schedule brings 'a lot of unknowns,' but that's exciting

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to do, they try every day to get better and better and I think they are excited about playing a different schedule.

"We are playing a completely different schedule than we did last year with the exception of UMS and St. Stanislaus, so there's a lot of unknowns and new venues to go to, so there's some excitement here."

St. Stanislaus, Miss., is a well-respected program and the two teams have played each other the past couple of seasons. The UMS-Wright game has long been a big one on the St. Paul's schedule — and for the Bulldogs too — and is billed as the "Battle of Old Shell Road," as the two schools are located about a Tiger Woods 8-iron from each other. The rivalry game has usually been late in the season, but this year it has been moved to the season-opener for both teams.

"We are sort of approaching this as we've never done it this way ever, I don't think," Mask said. "But we're looking at it like an Alabama-Texas, first game of the year kind of game. That's the way we're approaching it. The rivalry is what it is so I think this (season-opener) adds a bit more excitement to that and some more nerves to that because you're playing your biggest rival right off the bat. I think it's going to be exciting."

Likewise, Mask said he believes this year's Saints team will be exciting to watch. He noted he has been happy with the leadership of his returning starters and the progress being made by those who haven't started in the past but will be required to make big contributions this season.

"My biggest thing is that we're so inexperienced up front (on offense); we've got only one returning starter on the offensive line and that's a tight end," Mask said. "We've got some capable bodies up there, but they're just inexperienced. We have a new quarterback that's inexperienced in J Greene, but I think he is going to have a good year."

"We've got two really good running backs coming back with AJ Finley and Jordon Ingram, so we feel good about both of those and we feel good about our wide receivers, so we feel pretty good there, they just need to play."

Greene takes over for Swift Lyle, who had the starting quarterback job last season.

"He was here last year, he was just ineligible, so he's been around the system for a year," Mask said of Greene. "It's not like he just transferred in and he's as green as he can be. But it is a change. Swift started right after we had Miller (Mosely) start for three years and we've had a lot of experience there. But I feel real good about J, I do."

Mask also has a good feeling about the talent and overall play he will receive from his defensive unit this season against some tough competition.

"I'm excited about us defensively," he said. "Our secondary is good. Zack Gray is back, he'd been hurt, and safety-wise Yates Grehan and Reggie



Photo by Mike Kittrell/Call News

St. Paul's head coach Steve Mask explains the fine points of a blocking drill to his players during a recent workout at the school in Mobile.



J Greene is confident as he takes over the quarterbacking duties from Swift Lyle, the standout who graduated last year. Coach Steve Mask says: "I feel real good about J, I do."

Photo by Todd Stacey/Call News



AJ Finley



Yates Grehan



Jordon Ingram



Reggie Bracy

Bracy are back and they both started last year and they are two really, really good players. The defensive line, I believe, is going to be as good or better than it was last year. At linebacker, we've got a couple of players back there — the (Lance) Chavers kid, who is a kid who played well last year. I like our defensive guys."

There is a player who will be missing this season, having graduated last year, who played a key role on the Saints' team and who, Mask noted, should receive some recognition for what he meant to the team for several seasons.

"The other thing people don't realize, we lost a

great kicker too," Mask said. "Wilson Beaverstock was an outstanding kicker and 85 percent of his kicks went into the end zone. But we've got a kid out of soccer, Jackson Fowler, who has impressed me in practice, but he's inexperienced, that's all."

While many expect the same ole Saints in that St. Paul's will be a team with talent and success, despite moving up a classification, they also expect this to be a big season of change for a team that has become accustomed to making deep runs in the postseason, usually ended up on the top of the heap and holding on to the Blue Map trophy.

Good Luck Saints. May you have a successful season.

Senator Jack Williams, District 34

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