

SATSUMA



The 2018 Satsuma High School Gators

Satsuma photos by John O'Dell/Call News

Outlook trending up for Gators

BY DARRON PATTERSON
Sports Correspondent

There is real reason for excitement in Satsuma as the 2018 season fast approaches. The Gators have a new head coach in the stoic Ray Nelson; a new division, as they move up a notch from Class 4A to Class 5A, Region 1; and they have seven starters back on defense and eight on offense.

Yeah, everything appears to be trending up for the Gators and their faithful as they try to erase the bad memory of last year's 4-6 season.

"We want to be a smart team, the smartest team on the field," said Nelson. "We feel very good about our offensive and defensive fronts. The guys up front, we understand they're going to win football games for us."

All of the Gators' skill position players are back, including game-changing wide receiver Deion Pickens (5-foot-7, 160 pounds). "He's dynamic," said Nelson, his voice kicking up an octave in talking about his

cat-quick senior. "I just think, you know, he's a couple of inches too short, but I think the pedigree, with his uncle being (ex-Auburn, now Houston Texans wide receiver) Sammie Coates, kind of helps him out as well.

"He played cornerback for us last year and played a little safety. We used him at running back as well, but this year we're going to focus on getting him the ball out in the slot (receiver position) and get him matched up with linebackers and safety type body types. He's real explosive, he runs great routes, is physical, blocks at the point of attack, is an aggressive runner.

"When you get him the ball on speed sweeps, reverses, quick screens, he can turn a 4-yard gain into a 15-yard carry for you. When Troy (University coaches) came by this spring they loved his explosiveness in the slot. They want to see more film of him getting the ball in the slot. We're going to showcase him. He led the region in interceptions. I think he was second in the state with six or seven picks last year. So, he's a playmaker. He's dynamite and when the ball is around

him he's going to make plays."

Senior receiver Hunter Jednat (5-7, 155) also returns, as does Evan Reed (5-8, 160) and Nick Abernathy (5-11, 170). Up front the Gators will depend on seniors Zack Brown (5-11, 260) and Shaun Whitaker (6-1, 240) to anchor a line that must keep heat off sophomore quarterback Karson Green (5-11, 182).

"Being a former quarterback and being around our skill guys, I think our offensive and defensive skills are really good," said Nelson. "I think they're comparable to 4A-5A teams in this particular

Satsuma quarterback Karson Green



See **GATORS**, 54C

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