

# JACKSON ACADEMY



The 2018 Jackson Academy Eagles

Photos submitted

## Will Eagles fly high in Class A?

*Coach Webb says team is 'excited for the challenge' of new schedule*

BY ARTHUR L. MACK  
alouismack@aol.com

Small in number, yet big in work ethic; that may well describe the 2018 edition of the Jackson Academy football team.

The Eagles, who lost by one point in the first round of the Alabama Independent School Association Class AA playoffs, are now in Class A, along with Wilcox Academy, Snook Christian, Crenshaw Christian, Sparta Academy and Abbeville Christian.

"The last two years we were in Class AA, and now we're back to A, which means that things are going to be different," said head coach Jason Webb. "It'll be some different teams and there'll be some really good teams in Class A, so we're excited for the challenge."

After a heartbreaking 35-34 loss to Lakeside Christian in the first round of last year's playoffs, Webb made it a mission to put the loss behind his team and focus on the future.

"Somebody has to come up short in the playoffs," he said. "Two straight years, we lost to Lakeside and it came down to the last play both years. We don't really talk about it, but we use it as fuel to get to the next level."

From all indications, things are looking up on the heels of last year's 7-4 season.

"It's been going well," said Webb. "We've been working pretty hard. We've got a lot of young kids still trying to fight for positions. We lost some seniors from last year's team, so positions are up for grabs and it intensifies things a little bit."

There are six returning starters on each side of the ball, but that is a bit misleading. With only about 25 players on the varsity roster, Jackson Academy has a lot of players going both ways.

"We dressed about that same number last year, but this year we're dressing a lot more younger guys," Webb said. "We had nine seniors last year, but we have only five seniors this year. We have some eighth-graders who are going to dress, but they're going to be pretty good ball players."

Among those on the roster are five seniors, five juniors, and 10 sophomores.

"We have a lot of players who are coming back who played a good bit for us last year," Webb said.

Among the returning starters are Micah Roberts, an all-state linebacker who will also play running back. Then, there's Kie Steed

"Kie has the edge at quarterback, but I'm not ready to name a

starter yet. He's also a good leader who will play on both sides of the ball."

Also expected to make a big impression is Deronte Dawson, an offensive/defensive lineman (6-foot-3, 290 pounds).

"He may be all-state this year," said Webb. "He's a real big, strong athletic kid who is so athletic that during 7-on-7s, he plays wide receiver. He's a kid who can move really, really well."

With such a small roster, Webb knows conditioning will be very important.

"You lose one guy, you're losing three guys — offense, defense and special teams," he said. "That's typical for our schools, and our guys don't come off the field much. When you lose them, you lose them on offense, defense and special teams. The big thing is preparation and they've done a good job of that."

"Our guys are in shape. We work them pretty hard. The other day, they ran about eight miles on top of what they normally do. We do some sprints and long-distance stuff, and our kids are going to be in shape, that's the one thing we can guarantee every year. They're going to be able to play for four quarters and as for as much overtime as anyone wants to play."

Webb added that despite the drop down to Class A, it doesn't necessarily mean the competition is easier.

"I really don't think the competition is different in Class AA than Class A," he said. "Class AA dresses 55-60 every night, and a lot of these teams dress anywhere from 30 to 40 (players). There's really good competition, so we're in a division where the competition is similar."

"Last year, we played a Class A team that dressed more players than we did. That doesn't bother us; we play 11 at a time."



Eagles head coach Jason Webb, left, and assistant John David Phillips

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