



2018 Courier H.S. Football Preview



SCOTT WINFREE / COURIER
MIKE DICKERSON
SCHS Owls head coach

By Terry Collins

Courier Sports
CARTHAGE — Smith Co. High Owls head football coach Mike Dickerson must exercise patience as he starts his sixth season at the helm of the gridiron program.

The 2017 season was one to remember for the Black-and-Gold as they garnered a Region 4-3A championship and went three rounds deep into the Class 3A playoffs (quarterfinals) which marked the best run by a Dickerson-led squad.

The Owls went 7-3 during the regular season as those three losses came by a total of nine points. With some help, however, in the last two weeks of the regular season, the Owls were able to snare the region crown.

Smith Co. has been to the playoffs in four of Dickerson's five seasons as he has amassed a record to 29-27.

Several huge holes will have to be filled for the Owls to defend their region title as three of the most prolific offensive weapons in school history have graduated.

Carson Hackett, the region co-mvp, threw for what was believed to be a school-record 2,464 yards last year that included 27 touchdowns and also led the team in rushing with 163 carries for 876 yards and 13 touchdowns.

Jaylon Shepperson is believed to have set school records with 89 catches for 1,066 yards and 13 touchdowns — with 15 grabs for 149 yards in a playoff win over Loudon.

Shamar King had 54 catches for 763 yards and 10 touchdowns and also added

Owls enter campaign with youth in skill positions

2018 Owls Football Schedule

DATE	OPPONENT	LOCATION	TIME
AUG. 17	MACON CO.	CARTHAGE	7:00
AUG. 24	GORDONSVILLE	CARTHAGE	7:00
AUG. 31	UPPERMAN	CARTHAGE	7:00
SEPT. 14	YORK	CARTHAGE	7:00
SEPT. 21	LIVINGSTON	LIVINGSTON	7:00
SEPT. 28	SEQUATCHIE CO.	DUNLAP	7:00
OCT. 5	DEKALB CO. (HC)	CARTHAGE	7:00
OCT. 12	CANNON CO.	WOODBURY	7:00
OCT. 19	WATERTOWN	WATERTOWN	7:00
OCT. 26	GRUNDY CO.	COALMONT	7:00

523 yards on 69 rushes. He was also a prolific kickoff and punt returner in his career.

The Owls' 13 seniors from a year ago accounted for nearly 95 percent of Smith Co.'s total offense which totaled the most points in school history in a season (422).

Two big holes to fill this season on the defensive side of the ball will be from the loss of Region 4-3A defensive mvp Bryant Goolsby who had 88 tackles, was the team's punter while also rushing for 672 yards.

The other key loss to graduation was Region 4-3A most outstanding defensive lineman Andrew Gibbs who led the team in sacks with 11.5 per outing while also amassing 17.5 tackles for loss.

The Owls averaged 32.5 points per game in 2017 and racked up 392 yards of total offense per outing.

Coach Dickerson must replace six starters on offense and six on defense as he is relying on his 15-member junior class to fill a lot of those roles.

Coach Dickerson had this to say about rebuilding this year's squad.

"Everyone knows that we lost a lot of people from a year ago with a lot of those seniors being three and four year starters," he said. "They were big-time playmakers and would make plays when it seemed that nothing was there. They had the athletic ability and speed to score from anywhere on the field which loosened up defenses and allowed us to get the ball to several different playmakers."

"We may not be as explosive as we have been in years past," noted Dickerson, "but we feel like we have enough athletes in the skill positions to get the job done. Although we are very inexperienced in a lot of those spots, I have to exercise patience and realize they are going to make mistakes because they are not a 2-or-3 year starter like we had there last year."

"It should help us that we have our first four games at home which is good for an inexperienced squad because they will be familiar with their surroundings," continued Dickerson. "We are hoping as the year goes along that we will gain that experience and we can be playing our best football by the end of the season. We do not have a lot of depth as we will have to rely on freshmen to start if we have certain players go down."

The following is a look at the Owls' 2018 schedule which features five home games in the first seven outings. Dickerson had comments about each of the season tests:

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2018 SMITH COUNTY HIGH QUARTERBACKS — From left: Cameron Spivey, Andrew Wheeley, Jaden Apple-Gibbs.



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2018 SMITH COUNTY HIGH PROJECTED STARTING OFFENSE — Front row from left: Isaac Dick, Jared Grisham, Ray Scurlock, Greg Bass, Austin Williams, Chris Ray, Jordan Tongate. Back row from left: Jaden Apple-Gibbs, John Ross Hord, Cameron Spivey, Tanner Marshall, Eli Martin.



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2018 SMITH COUNTY HIGH PROJECTED STARTING DEFENSE — Front row from left: Chris Allen, Austin Williams, Randall Ray, Jared Grisham, Jaden Apple-Gibbs. Middle row from left: Bo Broyles, Briston Bridges, Eli Martin, John Ross Hord, Tanner Marshall, Dante Mosley, Kobe Williams. Back: Cameron Spivey.



SHEA HAILE / COURIER
SCOTT CLEMONS
GHS Tigers head coach

By Shea Haile

Courier Sports
GORDONSVILLE — The 2018 high school football season will mark the beginning of a new era for the Gordonsville High School football program as the Tigers march forward with head coach Scott Clemons at the helm.

Clemons is definitely not a stranger to the "Big Blue" football program after serving as a Tiger football assistant coach for most of his 20-plus year career — he spent a short stint at Macon County.

It is evident talking to Clemons that he holds Gordonsville football in high regard and has a lot of respect for the program.

"This is my first year being head coach," said Clemons. "I have been here for 20-plus years. So, I have been around Gordonsville football a long time so it is an important part of my life. It was good to me when I went to school here. That was one of the reasons why I wanted to come back and be a part of it. I tell these kids every day to be thankful for the opportunity to be a part of a program like Gordonsville where the community supports you — and expects you to come out and play the way you are capable of playing. They want you to do the best that you can do."

Clemons leads a Tiger team into 2018 that has a lot of momentum. Gordonsville acclimated itself to the newly formed Region 4-A quickly — claiming the region title in its first year. Not only did they claim the 4-1A crown but they completed a perfect 6-0 region record.

While the Tigers did lose their three top linemen from a year ago along with some key pieces on defense, Clemons and his staff have reloaded with 15 seniors.

Senior big men Billy Bennett, J.B. Hughes, Jay Wills, Scott Pitman and Kodey Madell will try to replace All-Region talents in Hunter Vaught, Tristan Pope and Jayson West.

The junior class will also have an impact in the trenches as returning starters Tristin Corthell and Justin Hancock look to make an impact in 2018. A new addition to the

Experience key to success for Clemons in first season

2018 Tigers Football Schedule

DATE	OPPONENT	LOCATION	TIME
AUG. 17	WATERTOWN	GORDONSVILLE	7:00
AUG. 24	SMITH CO.	CARTHAGE	7:00
AUG. 31	RED BOILING SPR.	RED BOILING SPR.	7:00
SEPT. 7	TROUSDALE CO.	GORDONSVILLE	7:00
SEPT. 14	REPUBLIC (HC)	GORDONSVILLE	7:00
SEPT. 28	MONTEREY	MONTEREY	7:00
OCT. 5	PICKETT CO.	GORDONSVILLE	7:00
OCT. 12	JO BYRNS	CEDAR HILL	7:00
OCT. 19	JACKSON CO.	GAINESBORO	7:00
OCT. 26	CLAY CO.	GORDONSVILLE	7:00

junior class, Jason Salisbury, could also factor into Gordonsville's line play.

While the line will be shuffled, Gordonsville has several key skill position players returning.

Arguably, the most anticipated return is that of running back Braxton Givens who was named the Region 4-1A Most Valuable Player last season. The 2017 Class A Mr. Football semifinalist and All-State selection racked up 2,269 yards last season — a new GHS record. The 5'9", 185 pound senior also accounted for 23 touchdowns.

This fall could be a historic one for Givens who has a chance to break the career rushing yards record at Gordonsville — currently held by Tiger legend and 1984 state champion Brad Cowan.

The team's top receiver from 2017 Bill Washer could potentially be one of the top targets for the Tigers again this fall. Washer had 37 catches for 448 yards during his junior season and caught six touchdown passes. The All-Region selection has proved him self to be a valuable player for the

Big Blue contributing 62 tackles on defense — the fifth best on the team in 2017. Washer also handled kick return and punt return duties for Gordonsville last season.

The biggest change in the Tigers' offensive backfield this season is at the quarterback position where senior Taylor Thaxton takes the reigns of the offense.

Thaxton has spent the last few seasons as a backup option at quarterback but will step into the starting role this season. The new gunslinger has in-game experience and has played with the team's junior varsity squad. He has impressed with his quickness and toughness.

On the Tiger defense, three of the top five tacklers from last season have graduated. However, leading tackler Corthell returns as a key piece of the linebacker and defensive line corp. Matthew Thompson will also serve as a leader on the defensive side of the ball.

In the defensive backfield, graduation also took a toll on the Tigers with the departure

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2018 GORDONSVILLE HIGH QUARTERBACKS — Standing from left: Treyson Davis, Taylor Thaxton, Skyshn Washer.



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2018 GORDONSVILLE HIGH DEFENSIVE BACKS — Kneeling from left: Levi Halliburton, Chris Welsh, Treyson Davis, Samuel Burton, Josh Haire. Second row from left: Skyshn Washer, Adam Brinkley, Wyatt Pemberton, Bill Washer, Taylor Thaxton.



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2018 GORDONSVILLE HIGH OFFENSIVE LINEMEN — Kneeling from left: Levi Croslin, Justin Woods, Scott Pitman, James Pitman, Jordan Gentry, Jasper Tubbs. Second row from left: Peyton Cash, J.B. Hughes, Damion Franklin, Tristin Corthell, Jason Salisbury, Dylan Singer, Kodey Madell, Jay Wills. Third row from left: Colby Adams, Hunter Clemons, Billy Bennett, Lucas Carter, Justin Hancock.