



Schedule

Continued from Page 7B



Photo by Randy Whitley / Herald Contributor

Wildcat coaches feel good about the offensive line unit this year. GCHS hopes the size and athleticism in the trenches will help wear down opposing defenses and help boost the Cats' running game, particularly during region play and playoffs.

"Field position was key and we lost that battle all night long. That impacted a lot of things, including putting them in a position to take the lead. A big difference in the game came after they tied things up and we got an unfriendly spot on a run by Jacob where he ran out of bounds at what he thought was good enough for a first down. We had some bad breaks after that with untimely penalties and a couple of negative plays that killed drives."

Mitchell completed 16-of-21 passes on the night for 158 yards and a TD. Senior Drake Henderson caught nine of those passes for 115 yards. Dunnam, Roberts and freshman K.J. Miller had two receptions apiece.

Senior tailback Anthony Calhoun rushed 10 times for 51 yards. Roberts had three carries for 29 yards and a touchdown.

Defensively, GCHS played well most of the game, but was hurt by a handful of big plays. The Indians big offensive line and senior fullback Anthony Crause were able to wear down a depleted GCHS defense with a strong running game in the final quarter.

Still, defensive coordinator Jaycob Aycock said there were a lot of positive take-aways from the loss.

"I knew going in it would be a challenge," Aycock said Saturday. "They have four guys with Div. I offers and they are an extremely well-coached team."

"I was proud of the way our guys fought back after they hit us for an early score. We did have some injuries in the first quarter and had to piece some things together as the game went on. We ended up playing nine different players along the D-Line. After watching the film, I think we did a lot of good things and I am ready to get back to practice on Monday and build on what we learned."

Seniors Jaheim Cooper, Josh Bolton and Ladon Woullard led the way for the Wildcats on defense. Cooper was the leading tackler with nine, while Bolton and Woullard followed with eight apiece.

Moving forward

Dropping the season opener is not ideal, but GCHS dropped its first two games of the 2018 season before bouncing back and claiming the No. 2 seed for the playoffs.

Obviously, the Wildcats don't want to put themselves in a 0-2 hole to start this year, particularly since game two is the annual rivalry matchup with George County. The Rebels claimed an 11-7 victory on their home field last year thanks in large part to a botched play that led to a punt return TD late in the fourth quarter by the home team. Greene County hopes to avenge that loss this Friday, but King knows beating his alma mater will be a big task.

"Obviously, this is a big rivalry game, but we try not to let it get hyped so much that you worry about how it impacts the kids," King said. "We felt like we let last year's game slip through our fingers so we want to come out and play well this year."

"We know they are very strong on defense and have made some changes offensively. It will be a strong challenge for us, but our guys are looking forward to it."

George County dropped its opener to West Jones despite holding a 2-possession lead midway through the second quarter. A safety and two touchdown runs by junior quarterback Jalyn Scott (#4) put the Rebels in charge, but West Jones closed the gap to 16-7 by halftime and added 17 more unanswered points in the second half to claim a 24-16 win on their home field.

Coach Matt Caldwell has a

senior-laden team that includes one of the nation's most sought after recruits in defensive tackle McKinnley Jackson (#99, 6-3, 315).

George County did most of its damage versus the Mustangs in the passing game, with senior Johnathan Havard (#12) completing 15-of-24 passes for 119 yards. Havard connected with seven different receivers, but Scott and junior Marcus Davis (#11, 6-3, 185) were his favorite targets with four catches each. Scott had the two TD runs and led his team with 39 yards rushing on 17 carries.

After hosting George County, the Wildcats will hit the road for the next two weeks, renewing what could be a good rivalry with a trip to Citronelle to face those Wildcats on Sept. 6 and then heading up to Quitman on Sept. 13 to take on the always-talented Panthers in a Class 4A non-region battle. Citronelle clobbered Washington County (Ala.) by a 37-7 margin to win their opener. Quitman led Wayne County at halftime, but could not hold off the War Eagles and ended up dropping a 28-14 decision on Saturday to start their season at 0-1.

Another old foe returns to Wildcat Stadium on Sept. 20 when the Gators of Gautier come calling. Gautier, which competes in the rugged Region 5-4A, jumped out to a 35-0 halftime lead over Vanderve in week one and cruised to a 49-7

win. Gautier dropped its final two region games last season to finish just out of the playoffs for the first time since 2014. With 23 seniors on the roster, the Gators are looking to improve on their 6-5 mark from a year ago and make it back to the post-season.

An off-week follows as the Cats have an open date on Sept. 27. The break should give King and his team a chance to regroup prior to five straight region games, including three on the road.

After the off date, GCHS will host Sumrall in the region opener, which will also serve as Homecoming for GCHS. The Bobcats, who have a lot of returning seniors themselves, got their season off to a hot start with a 39-21 whipping of South Jones in week one.

A trip to Brooklyn to take on Forrest County AHS will follow on Oct. 11 and is the first of three straight road games for the Cats. The Aggies got things off to a hot start against Perry Central, whipping the Bulldogs by a 33-6 margin at New Augusta.

Next up will be Stone County, which presents the biggest unknown for the Wildcats this season. The Tomcats, who dropped down from Class 5A, dropped their season opener 48-13 to Gulfport, but are expected to be a tough draw for region teams this season.

GCHS will jump out of the frying pan into the fire the following week when they load up for a trip to Poplarville to take on the defending region champions. The Hornets look solid again this season and put up a good fight in week one despite dropping a 21-14 decision to Laurel.

The Wildcats return to the friendly confines of Johnny Ainsworth Field for the regular season finale on Nov. 1. That's when the Tornadoes of Purvis will make a visit and all things point to it being a key battle for the region standings, despite the Tornadoes taking a 34-0 loss at the hands of West Marion in their season opener at home.

"We aren't going to take anyone in our region lightly," King said. "Poplarville hasn't lost a region game in a few years so at this point they are still the team to beat."

"Stone County is a wild card,

because we don't know a lot about them, but we expect they will be strong in their first year down from 5A. Purvis, Sumrall

and Forrest County are all chasing Poplarville, but you can bet they will be ready to play when they face us."

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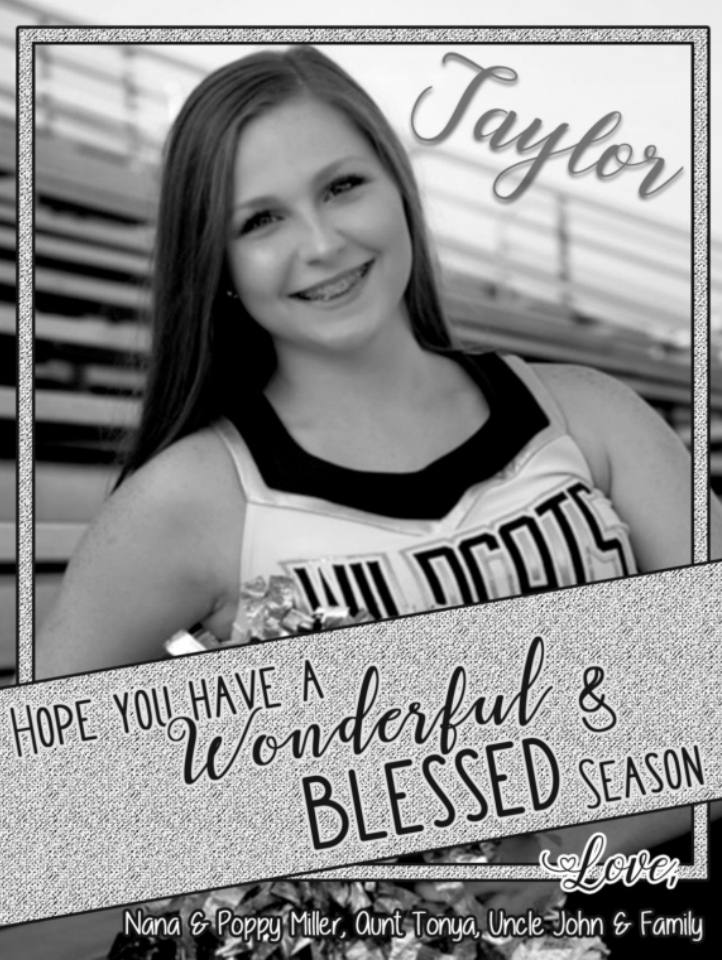
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