

# Big holes to fill, but Cats feel good about 2019 defense

Big group of returning starters gives GCHS confidence

By RUSSELL TURNER  
Herald Staff

Greene County's defense was pretty solid in 2018, holding opposing offenses to single-digit scoring in 7-of-13 games. That is the type of recipe that puts a team in a position to win games and was a big part of the Wildcats' success. But, four of the top producers are no longer in high school and players like Noah Mitchell, Blake Daughdrill, Alex McGee and Drake Walley left some big shoes to fill.

Nobody understands this better than Defensive Coordinator Jacob Aycock. But, as Aycock rolls into his third season leading the GCHS defense, he does so with one of the more experienced groups he has coached.

Aycock's depth chart boasts eight senior starters that all have a lot of experience under their belts. Leading the way will be linebackers Ladon Woullard and Jaheim Cooper. Woullard is an extremely active outside linebacker that makes plays all over the field and is the leading returning tackler with 125 stops to his credit, which put him as second on the team in that category as a junior. He was also a team leader with four forced fumbles.

Cooper will anchor the middle of the defense and enters the year as the second leading returning tackler after posting 78 as a junior. He also has a nose for the football and led the team with five recovered fumbles. "Ladon and Jaheim played very well against Biloxi, particularly in the first half," Aycock said. "They fly around the field and make plays for us. They really help set the tone for our defense."

Sophomores Kye Seymour, Keaton Hollinghead and Ethan Roberts all saw time on the field in the opener. Seymour saw the most playing time against the Indians and held his own even better than Aycock had expected.

Defensive ends Hunter McLeod and Josh Bolton are also back for their senior seasons. Each had breakout seasons as juniors and enter 2019 with high expectations. McLeod, who is listed at 6-1 on the roster, is noticeably bigger and stronger this season. That should allow him create a lot of havoc along the line this season and improve on his 56 tackles from a year ago.

Bolton's strength comes in his length and athleticism. Listed at 6-4, 233 pounds, Bolton harasses opposing offenses in the backfield which led him to six sacks last season. Aycock was pleased with Bolton's effort against the Indians, saying the senior "played hard every snap" as he finished the night with eight tackles, including several for losses.



Photo by Shelley Mitchell / Herald Contributor

Greene County Defensive Coordinator Jacob Aycock congratulates defensive players after the group forced a turnover in the season opener at Biloxi. The turnover led to one of the Wildcats' two touchdowns.

Chad Thomas, who has shown a lot of promise and is the first player to sub in at defensive end for Aycock, saw one defensive play against Biloxi after McLeod left the game in the first half with a hand injury. However, he needed attention from the training staff as well with a slight knee problem. It wasn't clear over the weekend how those injuries would impact the team moving forward, but Aycock is hopeful neither will miss much action.

Senior Keldrin Blackston at 6-2, 335 pounds is a real physical presence anchoring the interior defensive line. Sophomore Jeremiah Cochran has gotten a lot of playing time as well and earned praise from Aycock for his effort and multiple tackles for loss against Biloxi.

J.T. Dunnam, Anthony London and Joseph Dearman round out the defensive line depth chart. "We played a lot of guys against Biloxi on the line and were in a position where some of the younger guys played more than expected," Aycock said. "But, they

held their own and had some disruptive plays." "I expect you will see more playing time for those guys. I have a lot of optimism about our defensive line."

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““Our philosophy, defensively, is that we want to bring more energy than our opponents every snap. Our goal is to play smart, fast and physical every down.”

JAYCOB AYCOCK  
GCHS Defensive Coordinator

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