

CITRONELLE

SCHEDULE: Lineup of football opponents for the Wildcats has a familiar feel

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bile Christian off the schedule at the end of the year."

That means there is familiarity with the opponents for the Wildcats, but that doesn't mean it will be a cake walk. The combined records of Citronelle's 2019 opponents for the 2018 season is 60-54. That includes Region 1 champ Vigor, which posted a 13-2 record and reached the Class 5A state championship game, losing by just one point, and Leroy, a Class 2A team that was 9-4 last year, advancing to the third round of the playoffs a season removed from the Bears reaching the 2A state title game in 2017.

The biggest change to this year's schedule is the lack of an open week; the Wildcats will play for 10 consecutive weeks. Last year, they had an open date after their first two games and just before their first region game.

Four of the nine opponents from Alabama on this year's earned a spot in their respective playoffs last season.

What Barnett knows is his team will have to be on its toes from start to finish, and if the Wildcats get off to a quick start this season it could pay big dividends. And by moving the final game of the season to the third game on the schedule, there is another plus for the Wildcats.

"If we somehow make our way into the playoffs, we will be off Week 10, preparing for the playoffs, which is kind of a nice thing," Barnett said. "But you've got to get in first, obviously (for that to be effective)."

The season starts Aug. 23 with a home game against Class 2A Washington County. The Bulldogs were 4-6 a year ago and Citronelle opened last season against them, taking a 44-6 victory. The all-time series between the teams shows Citronelle with a 32-8-2 advantage. The Wildcats hit the road on Aug. 30 to face another Class 2A team from Washington County by taking on Leroy. The Wildcats topped Leroy last year 34-7 but they enter this year's matchup dead even at 16-16 in their all-time series.

That sets up the change to this year's schedule, with Citronelle hosting Greene County on Sept. 6. Greene County produced a 9-4 record last season.

"Chatom (Washington County) is going to be improved," Barnett said. "Leroy is going to be improved. We don't know a lot about Greene County, but we have played them in JV (junior varsity) the last four or five years in a row. It's always been a competitive game between the two of us. Usually we win it by one point over here and they win it by one point over there; that kind of thing. I think it will be a competitive ball game."

That sets the stage for a home game on Sept. 13 against LeFlore, the first of six region games for the Wildcats. A trip to Faith Academy for another regional game is set for Sept. 20. Citronelle beat LeFlore, which was 3-7 a year ago, 28-20 last year but the Rattlers hold a 4-3 edge in the all-time series. The Cats beat Faith 40-14 last season, but the Rams finished 6-5 overall and 3-3 in the region to claim the final playoff spot out of Region 1. It marked the Rams' first-ever playoff appearance as an AHSAA team.

"Each week it just gets harder," Barnett said. "We open up region play against LeFlore. I don't know what LeFlore is going to have. Coach (Chris) Raymond is back and I don't know what that's going to mean to them. But I think they're going to be really good athletically. Then we have Faith on the road after that and again, Jack French has done a wonderful job at Faith and I think they're going to be a lot better than they



The Wildcats work on perfecting handoffs as they prepare for this Friday's season opener at home against WCHS.

were at this time last year.

"Those two games right there, LeFlore and Faith, will kind of tell where we are when the season comes down to the end," Barnett said, referencing the Wildcats' playoff chances. "If we can win those two ball games and then beat Wilcox at the end of the year then we're in the playoffs. That's kind of how it all works out. By Week 4 or 5 we kind of know where we are. It's a blessing and it's also a curse at the same time because if we're not winning at that point the wheels could kind of fall off in a hurry for us. It puts you behind the 8 ball if you don't win those games early."

A trip to Class 7A Mary G. Montgomery in Semmes is set for Sept. 27, followed by a home game against the Satsuma Gators on Oct. 4 in another region matchup. MGM beat the Wildcats 27-19 last year and leads the all-time series 23-19-1. Citronelle has lost the past three games to the Vikings, last winning 26-24 in 2009. As for Satsuma, the Gators have the rematch with Citronelle circled on their calendar. A year ago the Wildcats claimed a 34-31 double-overtime victory, a loss for Satsuma that contributed to the Gators failing to make the playoffs after a fast start to the season. Citronelle leads the all-time series 29-10-1.

"MGM is going to be vastly improved again and Satsuma, I think they may have the best quarterback in south Alabama in my opinion, and maybe in the whole state in the (Karson) Green kid," Barnett said. "If he can find some receivers to throw to and they can find a little bit of a running game, they're going to be pretty good, I think, by the time we get to them."

That leads to a pair of tough games, with Citronelle traveling to Jackson on Oct. 11 and returning home to face Vigor on Oct. 18. The season finale finds Citronelle traveling to take on Wilcox Central on Oct. 25. Jackson was 8-4 last season, reaching the second round of the 5A playoffs. The Aggies defeated Citronelle 15-6 a year ago and the Aggies have won the past six meetings. Vigor slammed the Cats 39-0 last season and has won 15 of the 18 all-time meetings between the schools.

"Jackson, who knows? They're athletic, just as athletic as anybody we've seen," Barnett said. "What is coach (Cody) Flournoy going to do with them now that he's there? And then there's Vigor; again, they're Vigor. They had to replace a lot of kids (from last year's team) but from what I saw of them last year, when we played them and they pulled the starters there at the end, I don't think they dropped up a whole heck of a lot."

"Then you finish up with Wilcox and

you never know what you're going to get with Wilcox. By the time we get to them, they'll either be really good or they may not have a team. If you don't prepare for them, they will beat you. We are definitely going to prepare for them."

Wilcox Central was 0-10 last season. Citronelle has won the past three meetings between the two teams, outscoring Wilcox in those games by a combined 120-20. The Wildcats own a 4-1 all-time series lead against Wilcox.

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