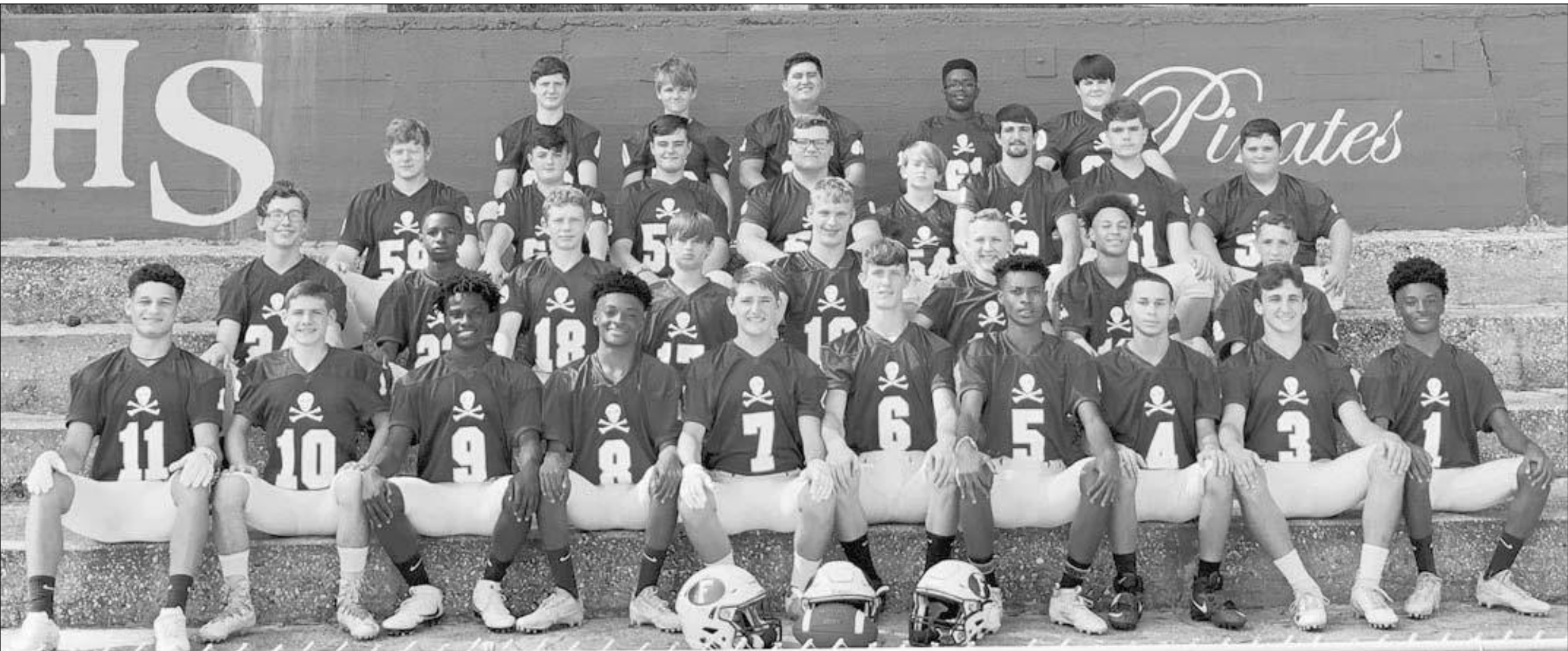


FRUITDALE



The 2019 Fruitdale High School Pirates

Team photo submitted; other Fruitdale photos by Jason Boothe/Washington County News

Pirates learning about unity

New coach Johnny Carpenter hopes team togetherness brings football success

BY DARRON PATTERSON
Sports Correspondent

The first thing one thinks of when talking to first-year Fruitdale head coach Johnny Carpenter is did this guy miss a psychiatrist's appointment.

He has no head coaching experience, is taking over a Class 1A, Region 1 program with just a single win the past two seasons, has only seven victories in four years, have only five seniors for leadership and will start a pair of ninth-grade cornerbacks.

Carpenter might have a better chance of survival jumping into a sea of sharks while wearing a meat vest, but there could be a method to his insanity.

"My first priority is to teach them togetherness and how to love each other," said the former Citronelle star lineman who played four years at Mississippi State.

"I've had the team over to the house a lot this off-season and we've grilled out or had pizza, just so they understand unity," he said, adding they were all attending church services together the following Sunday. "It's about togetherness."

This may be Carpenter's first job as the top man, but he was an assistant for three years in Jackson under legendary Danny Powell, before being off-

sive coordinator at fledgling Chickasaw last season.

"I was very impressed with their work ethic," he said about first thoughts of his team after landing the job. "I've got a lot of young guys who're going to play this year, so it's just a matter of getting them to understand things like what is Cover 3 and what does Cover 2 look like?"

"With my quarterback, getting him to understand stuff like, what are you looking at on this play versus Cover 2 and Cover 3?"

If Fruitdale is going to turn things around this year, the quarterback Carpenter referenced, junior Dalon Hill (6-foot-1, 177 pounds), will have to take the next step up in his development. As a sophomore he passed for 438 yards and four touchdowns with just four interceptions and ran for 739 yards and eight more TDs.

Senior Kyser Talbert (5-8, 165) headlines a stable of running backs the Pirates will rely on that also includes seniors D.J. Loper (6-1, 200) and Braden Hartley (6-1, 180), while senior Tony Johnston (6-1, 185) and freshman Keith James (6-0, 160) will be the wide receivers.

Carpenter said he knows any offensive success rests on the shoulders of his line-



Fruitdale coach Johnny Carpenter

men, though, which means seniors Landon Williams (5-10, 180) and Hunter Benton (6-1, 220), along with juniors Colton Snow (6-2, 210), Diego Franeisco (5-10, 230) and Ethan Fell (5-10, 250) will have to perform well, despite all likely also seeing action on the defensive line too.

As a matter of fact, Hill will also play some at linebacker ("Although I'm going to try to limit his time there," said Carpenter), as will Johnston in the secondary, with Kane and Loper seeing double duty at linebacker, along with

Caden Denmark (5-10, 160) as the other outside backer in the Pirates' base 3-4 set, with surprising freshmen Shervin and Sherwin Dean (both 5-9, 150) at the corners.

"They're going to be really good as they get older," said Carpenter of the identical Dean twins, whom he can only distinguish apart "by their haircuts."

His strategy for success is simple, but the player's executing that strategy is the key.

"We plan on stopping the run," said Carpenter. "So, if you're going to beat us this

year, you're going to have to pass on us. But I think I'm going to have four athletes back there who can stop the pass.

"I'm trying to get my guys to learn how to do the little things right," he said. "Without doing those little things right we can't be successful. I'm trying to take young boys and turn them into young, Godly men. That's my biggest

goal right now.

"I'm trying to take a kid, who somebody told they couldn't do something in life, and I'm trying to show them that they can do whatever they want to in life. Wins will take care of themselves, but I'm trying to teach them to be young men of character."

Suddenly, Carpenter doesn't sound too crazy, does he?

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Fruitdale players mix it up in a blocking drill during a recent workout at the school campus. The offensive line is led by seniors Landon Williams (5-10, 180) and Hunter Benton (6-1, 220), along with juniors Colton Snow (6-2, 210), Diego Franeisco (5-10, 230) and Ethan Fell (5-10, 250).

WISHING THE PIRATES A SAFE & SUCCESSFUL SEASON

FROM
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