

MCGILL-TOOLEN

Skill stars lead McGill machine

BY DARRON PATTERSON
Sports Correspondent

We interrupt this special football section for a warning to all opponents of McGill-Toolen's Yellow Jackets: Don't get too happy about this seemingly being a rebuilding year for them.

Repeat: Be careful, so you won't get ... well, stung.

"We lost eight guys on offense and seven guys on defense, but our motto here is next man up," said head coach Earnest Hill, entering his third year as the boss at McGill in brutal Class 7A, Region 1.

"It just gives these guys a chance, and some of them have waited their turn. Of course, if they're good enough they're going to play early, if not the person in front of them who's probably a little bit better will play."

The Jackets have missed the playoffs only once in 20 years (2014), making it to at least the second round each of the past seven seasons, playing for the state title in three of the past four seasons, winning the crown in 2015.

"One thing I always tell them is that in the past we've been winning here, but McGill is on everybody's calendar," he said.

Junior Spencer Arceneaux (6-foot-2, 165 pounds) looks to be the man who'll pull the trigger for Hill's offense, but senior Dallas Daffin (5-11, 170), who starts at wide receiver, is ready to take snaps if need be.

"Both are doing a good job," said Hill. "We're asking Spencer to step in (to the starting job) after he played four games for us last year and went 3-1. Right now he's doing a good job, but Dallas is getting some work in there too at practice and is also doing an excellent job at wide receiver."



Wide receivers Dallas Daffin, left, and Kendal White

Photo by Mike Kittrell/Call News

As a matter of fact, the receiving corps features all experienced seniors, headlined by Tennessee commit Jordan Mosley (5-11, 175), and including Kendal White (5-8, 150), Jordan Drake (5-10, 150) and Jamaal Kidd (6-1, 165).

"We have quite a bit (of experience) and I'm very pleased with our skills on the offensive side of the ball," Hill said. "A few of them played last year and we've got to

replace some guys, but they're doing a great job. I'm very pleased."

Senior running back C.J. Evans (5-9, 175) and sophomore Braylon McReynolds (5-7, 170) are set to share most of the carries, but lightning-fast senior Trey Betts (6-0, 170) has emerged in early drills as a home run hitter.

"We're going to have to find him a spot out there somewhere," Hill said of Betts.

"We'll need to try and get him the ball in space. It's all going to depend on the guys up front," Hill noted, adding that he's turned the offensive line coaching duties over to Jeff Williams, who comes in from Auburn High. Williams inherits a unit that has only one returning starter, senior tackle Conner Belcher (6-3, 280).

"We've got some new guys that I think we're going to be happy with and Jeff is doing a good job with them," Hill said.

A trio of senior linebackers will anchor the Yellow Jackets' base 3-4 defense. Inside linebacker Wells Keaton (6-1, 205) is the ringleader, with Ashir Hogue (5-11, 225) right next to him, while Jacob Huff (6-1, 180) will be one outside backer.

"I'm very happy with those guys. They played a lot last year," said Hill. "But we're still searching for another outside linebacker."

Senior nose tackle Liston Richardson (5-9, 250) is the only returning defensive lineman, while three-year defensive back starter Korian Wilson (5-11, 180), junior Jaden Mosley (6-1, 180, no relation to Jordan) bring experience on the back end.

Senior Xavier Mitchell (5-10, 170) moves over from cornerback to safety and sophomore newcomer Braden Turner (5-11, 160) round out the secondary.

So, now begs the question of Hill: Do all the new guys know teams usually circle McGill-Toolen on the schedule?

"People want to beat us," he said. "And they know if they do they've got a chance to make runs to the playoffs. So, we've got to continue to work and not try to live on the past. These guys have to leave their own legacy."

MURPHY

Panthers are hungry for winning revival

BY ARTHUR L. MACK
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New Murphy head coach Rico Jackson hopes to bring the Panthers back to their glory days. Jackson, who served as head coach for Class 4A Escambia County for two years, takes over a Murphy team that went 3-7 last season, scoring only 107 points all year. In those seven losses, the Panthers scored seven points or less.

In fact, Murphy had back-to-back 3-7 seasons under previous head coach Muskingum Barnes, prompting the coaching change.

Jackson has plenty of head coaching experience, including Class 5A Fairfield for three seasons. In addition, he served as an assistant in Class 6A in the Mobile area when there wasn't a Class 7A division.

"To me, classification is just a number," he said. "At the end of the day, it's still football. We want to bring a work-first mentality and we want our kids to compete in everything that we do, whether it's in the weight room, the classroom, the practice field and ultimately, the game."

Coming off a strong spring, Jackson said he hopes the momentum will continue into the summer and the regular season.

"One thing that I noticed (during the spring) was that our kids bought into what we were teaching quickly," he said. "They were hungry to be successful and one thing that we also noticed was that the kids were physical, and that's one thing we pride ourselves on. We want to be a physical football team, a disciplined football team. It was also a chance to get all of our coaches on the same page and going forward."

Jackson has surrounded himself with some coaches who had experience in the head coaching ranks, including former Satsuma head coach Justin Thomas and former B.C. Rain head coach Tellis Stone.

"When I got here, the first thing I had was a good staff around me," he said. "Our principal (Joseph Toomey) has done a good job of allowing me to go out and recruit some of the best coaches that I feel like that are not only in Mobile, but in this state. I went out and got a bunch of good assistants that I know are all on the same page, so that made my job easier and transition easier to go forward."

The Panthers played a spring game and Jackson said there were several positives coming out of that experience.

"Offensively, I feel like we're going to be able to run the ball and I feel like we're going to be able to throw it as well," he said. "But we're going to run the football, we're going to play real good defense and we're going to protect the football. That's kind of the philosophy on offense. On defense, we



Photo by Mike Kittrell/Call News

Coach Rico Jackson

want to run to the football, we want to be disciplined, be where we're supposed to be and to do your job."

Jackson singled out junior running back Theris Wheeler, wide receivers Tanaka Scott (6-foot-3, 165 pounds) and Adrian Milton (6-2, 190), along with senior offensive lineman Carlos Wheat (6-4, 260), with having strong spring performances. Scott, a junior, has offers from South Alabama and UAB.

Defensively, ends Jaylin Williams and Jamari Butler (6-5, 220) stood out during spring practice as well. Butler has an offer from Southeastern Louisiana. Another defensive lineman, JaBryon Nettles (6-3, 280), has offers from South Alabama, UAB, Tulane and Jacksonville State and some other mid-majors.

"We have a bunch of kids that are new, and that's good, because we can mold them into what we like," Jackson said. "I thought those guys came out and did well. To me, honestly, if Tanaka can continue to develop, he's going to be an SEC-type kid. Of course, he has to put the work in and put the time in, which I believe he will do."

As for special teams, Jackson said it was too early to tell who will be the front-runners for punting and placekicking.

Like the rest of the schools in southwest Alabama, Murphy is in a tough region. The Panthers have a tough non-region season opener against Baldwin County on Aug. 23, and then face arch-rival Class 7A foe McGill-Toolen the following week.

"To be honest with you, all of the teams in our region are pretty good," Jackson said. "It's a really tough division, so what do we do? We focus on us. Now don't get me wrong, we break down film on other teams and we compare other teams, but we focus on Murphy. We control what we control, and we treat every game like the Super Bowl. It doesn't matter if they're 10-0 or 0-10, so we're going to go as if it's the game we have to win."

WILLIAMSON

Lions pleased with big surge in players

BY DARRON PATTERSON
Sports Correspondent

Please excuse Dedrick Sumpter if he sounds like a kid who just got exactly what he wanted for Christmas.

Last year, his Williamson Lions saw what was a promising season in Class 4A, Region 1 (they were 4-1 after five games) come crashing down in a hail of injuries, forcing his already youthful team to try and salvage the year with players going both ways.

It didn't go well. But what a difference a year makes. "That's the beauty of it now — we've

got no two-way players," said Sumpter, sounding like a proud new daddy. "We've got 50 guys out and have had them out for a while."

Sophomore Daniel Miller (6-foot-2, 205 pounds) was supposed to be last year's starter after finishing up middle school at Pillans. But discrepancies over his residency requirements forced him to sit out the entire season.

He's back now and ready to battle senior Cedric Andrews (6-0, 175), who quarterbacked the youthful Lions into the playoffs, losing by a point at American Christian, 15-14.

"It's a good battle," said Sumpter. "But regardless of the outcome, Andrews will still be on the field as one of our starting safeties."

He'll be joined in that defensive backfield by LeFlore transfer JaAllen Gray (5-10, 165) at one corner and senior Ladarius Brown (6-0, 165), another Lion who sat out 2018 with transfer issues.

"He's an extraordinary athlete," said Sumpter of Brown, who already has offers on the table from Arkansas-Pine Bluff and Florida A&M. "He's a 4.4 (40-yard dash) guy and just an outstanding player."

Senior linebackers Herbert Langster (6-2, 180) and Jamarcus Grayson (6-1, 180) will be counted on as experienced anchors to the defense, but the unquestioned star will be sophomore linebacker Robert Woodyard (6-1, 215), a phenom as a ninth-grader last season, who'll also see time as a short-yardage back.

"Every school in the SEC with the exception of Florida has offered him (a scholarship)," said Sumpter of Woodyard. "Alabama wants him as a running back, although everybody else wants him at linebacker."

But, it's the offense that will line up around either Andrews or Miller that'll be the key to Williamson's season. The entire offensive line returns as does 1,000-yard senior running back Jahquinton Shaw (5-7, 165).

Providing running room for him will be tackles Warren Hawkins (6-1, 215, junior) and Jarrius Bonner (6-5, 270,

senior) and sophomore guards Eric Lane (6-2, 260) and Laderrick Lane (no relation, 6-0, 240).

Center Kenneth Sewell (5-9, 240) rounds out the group that will also get help from massive sophomore Reginald Banks (6-4-270), who started the remainder of the season at guard after Eric Lane went down with a broken leg in the third game.

Seniors wide receivers Devonte Scott (6-0, 175) and highly recruited Nehemiah Richardson (6-3, 175) are sure to put pressure on opposing defenses.

Sumpter knows Williamson's one Achilles heel could be the kicking game and the Lions have been working on that phase all spring and into the summer. Although, Sumpter says: "Last year we had one of the best punt teams around."

Still, he knows despite the talent on paper, it's between his guys' ears where many games will be won or lost.

"We've been working hard on character education," said Sumpter, acknowledging many of his players come from a community where football takes a back seat to everyday survival. "This is why we talk life with them, and they come in at 7 (in the morning) for running and yoga and learn nutrition and (muscle) recovery."

"We've taken them to feed the homeless so that they understand gratitude and appreciation."

With all that said, Sumpter's master plan is quite simple.

"There is no reason we can't be successful," he said.



Coach Dedrick Sumpter