

# JACKSON ACADEMY

## Eagles young but talented

BY TOMMY HICKS

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If he can ever get the schedule finalized — there has been more movement on that front during fall drills than any other aspect of the team — Jackson Academy head coach Jacob Webb can then cast his full attention to his team and its first game of the season.

During the times he has been able to devote to his players and getting ready for what they hope is another Alabama Independent School Association Class A playoff run, Webb has seen a lot of good things from the Eagles. He has some talent returning from last year's team, some new players stepping forward to be counted this season and a surprise or two.

What has stood out most notably is the consistency of this year's team, a trait he said he hopes carries through the season, along with a wish his Eagles team is able to negotiate the season injury free.

The Eagles started with an 11-game schedule, but one school on its schedule closed its doors and two others decided to forego the upcoming season. Webb was able to find one other team looking to add another game, so just a few days before the season was to start, Jackson Academy had a nine-game schedule.

As of the deadline for this section, Jackson Academy was set to open the season — and its quest to chase the AISA Class A title — at home against Pickens Academy on Aug. 30.

Regardless of the number of games or when the season begins, Webb said the goals for the season will not change, nor will his expectations.

"I expect them to compete more than anything," Webb said. "That's No. 1. I don't want them to get caught up in the wins and losses, just play the best they can each week. We've got to work as hard as everybody else.

"I don't really know what to expect. We've still got a lot of young guys, and we had a lot of young guys grow up for us last year. I'm anxious to see, after a year, how much better they are. They're a lot more experienced."

A year ago Jackson Academy started the season by winning three of its first



The 2019 Jackson Academy Eagles

Photo courtesy of the South Alabamian

four games, but then came a three-game losing skid to put it at 3-4 on the season. The bounce-back was three straight wins to close out the regular season at 6-4 and claim a spot in the playoffs. But a 34-9 loss to Southern Academy on the road ended the season at 6-5 overall.

The ups and downs of the year provided the kind of experience that can benefit a team going forward and Webb said he hopes that's the case for this year's Eagles.

"We're bringing an all-state running back back. He (Micah Roberts) ran for 1,380 yards last year with 30 touchdowns. That doesn't hurt. He's our team captain, he's our leader. He competes on every down at practice and in games," Webb said.

"We've got another running back who is just as athletic and someone we think could be just as good in Blake McCaa. This will be his first year playing. He went to school here last year and transferred in, but he was ineligible last year. We think he can do a lot for us too. We think we're going to be able to run the football.

"The quarterback (Jack Fleming) has improved immensely this summer so I think we're going to be able to throw the ball some. Jack started late in the season after an injury to the starter. He's just gotten better and better. He's vastly improved. He'll do a good job. We feel confident we're going to throw the ball with more confidence than we did last year. We're not going to be throwing it 30 or 40 times a game, but we feel confident when we do throw the ball."

Webb said Fleming's experience from a year ago will be a big plus going forward.

"As a sophomore he's the backup quarterback and they always say, you're just a play away (from being the starter)," Webb said. "Jack came in and looked poised then and didn't get overwhelmed like you might expect a first-year quarterback to be. He took his lickings and played really well. He made some big-time throws for us last year.

"That experience helped. It kind of toughened him up a little bit. Coming into the spring knowing he was the starter, that

seemed to loosen him up a little bit. He basically said, 'This is my job now let me turn into a leader,' and he's done a good job."

Fleming has a good set of targets for his passes. "I like our group of receivers," Webb said. "We don't quite have burners like we've had in the past. But we've got a bunch of kids who can really catch the football and know how to run routes. And you can add McCaa and Roberts there. They'll play some at receiver too, one in backfield and the other split out, if they're not both in the backfield. We have some sure-handed receivers and some good possession receivers, maybe six to eight guys. They may not be the flashiest group but if the ball gets near their hands then it's caught."

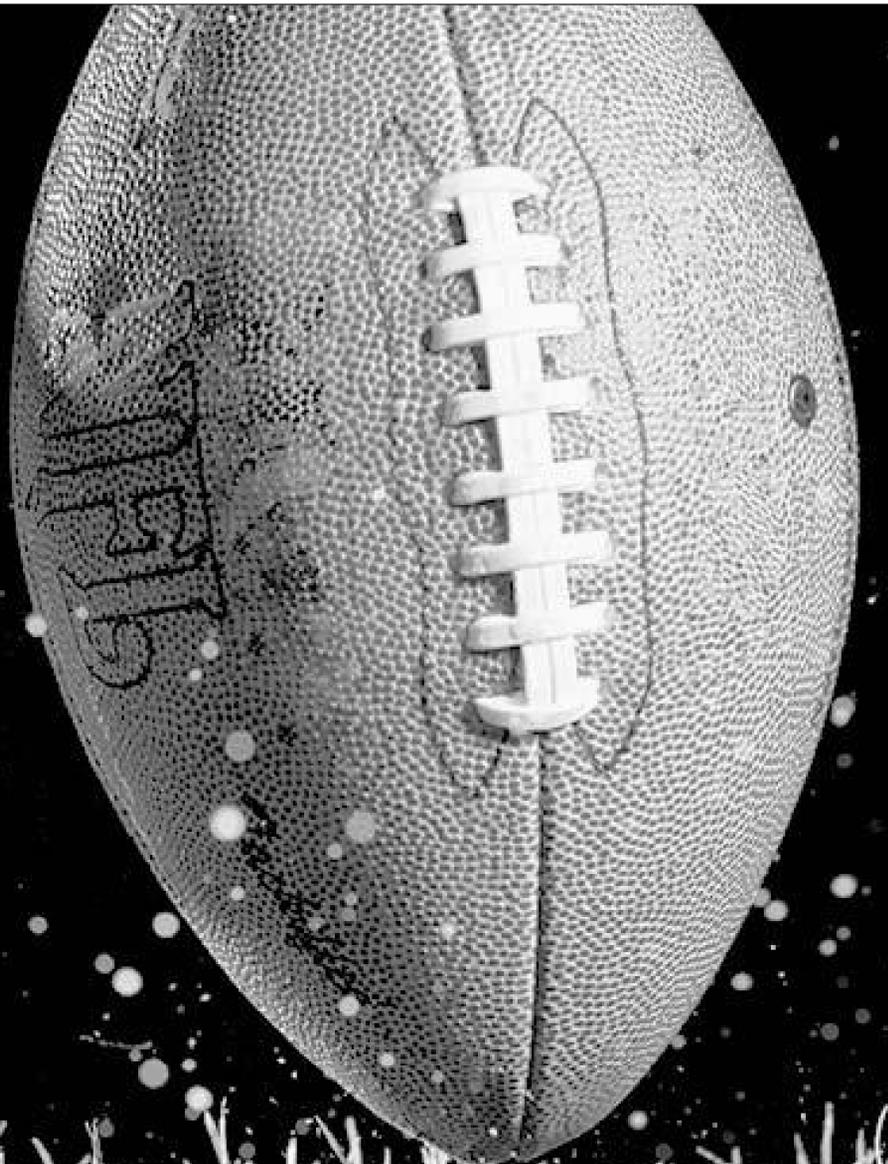
Up front there's one of the top players in the state in lineman Durante Johnson, an all-state selection last season. "I feel like this may be one of the best offensive lines that we've had," Webb said. "Durante Johnson is coming back as a junior. He domi-

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