

COTTAGE HILL

Warriors: 'Let's get it on'

CH players have bulked up and are ready to go even farther in playoffs this fall

BY DARRON PATTERSON
Sports Correspondent

It was somewhere around 8 o'clock Friday night, Nov. 16 of last year when Chris Brazell's Cottage Hill Christian Academy Warriors looked around the weight room at each other, trying to figure out how they'd fallen behind Arton 28-7 in the second round of the AHSAA Class 2A playoffs.

After all, the Region 1 champs came into the game 10-1 and had outscored 11 previous opponents 410-143 during a storybook season even they couldn't have dreamed of making a reality.

Suddenly, though, their worst nightmare, an abrupt end to the season, was very real.

"On film we knew they were going to run it right at us 60 times a game if they could," said Brazell, the effervescent second-year head coach in describing the Arton Purple Cats' game plan.

"Where they had put us to dress was in their weight room and you could see all their (lifting) numbers on the board and they kind of had numerous guys squatting over 500 pounds. I don't know if it necessarily got into our guys' heads, but I know when we went in trailing at halftime, we kind of looked at it and said, yeah we can see that they're using these 500-plus pound squats to move us around up front."

So what did Brazell, who has been at Cottage Hill for 19 years in other coaching and administrative capacities before being named head football coach last season, and his staff do when the clock struck all zeros in that 36-27 loss?

"As soon as we got on the bus our guys said we're going back to the weight room. We had success that got us to that point, but we had to get stronger," he said.

Fast forward to 2019 and the bulked-up Warriors are ready to "eat dinner as a team on Thanksgiving," said Brazell.

Translation: They would still be alive in the state playoffs on Turkey Day.

Sophomore QB Kyle Hipp (5-foot-11, 175 pounds), who was a backup last year, will pull the trigger at quarterback this season.



Linebackers, quarterbacks and cornerbacks for the 2019 Cottage Hill Warriors

Cottage Hill photos by John O'Dell/Call News

"He's further along than we projected," said Brazell. "He got playing time last season because of big leads we had in the second half of games. He's got a good knowledge of the playbook, the ability to get the ball out of his hands and has grown up a lot in a short amount of time."

"We had a quarterback battle in the spring, throughout the summer and into fall camp and Kyle has won the job. He'll be our guy starting out the season because of his work ethic, determination and desire to be the leader."

Senior left tackle Will Barbour (6-3, 230) leads an experienced line that includes juniors Heath Morley (5-11, 230) at one guard, Tim Wooten (6-3, 210) at the other guard, hefty Cole McDonald (5-11, 334) at center and sophomore Wes Bedsole (5-10, 175) at right tackle.

"Going into 2018, the biggest concern was we had all these great skill players that are now graduated, but we did not have anybody coming back up front that had taken any substantial snaps," said Brazell.

"But now they all have 13 games under

their belts, they are one whole year stronger and one whole year more experienced being in the system. We're going to hang our hats on them."

Elusive senior wide receiver Arrick Gibbs (5-10, 160), who Brazell says is a "legitimate 4.5, 40 guy," will also handle kick return duties, while fellow senior Ayden Lammons (5-10, 175) lines up at slot receiver in the Warriors' spread offense.

The key to Hipp getting those guys the ball in the air, though, lies with whether junior running back J.D. Pettaway (5-11, 175) can have enough success carrying that ball to make opposing safeties take a couple of pre-snap steps toward the line of scrimmage.

"He missed seven or eight games with an injury suffered in the (preseason) jamboree with Millry," said Brazell. "But he's a player. He had six interceptions as a ninth grader."

Senior linebacker Rasean Thomas (6-0, 200), who'll also get occasional carries at running back, is the leader of the defense, while returning starters sophomore Josh

Gifford (5-9, 180) and freshman Lamarr Nelson (5-9, 185, started as an eighth grader) are the other linebackers.

Senior Matthew Nicholas (5-11, 230) will settle in solely on the defensive line this season after going both ways in 2018, while junior Jacob Gifford (5-10, 285, older brother of Josh), returns at defensive tackle.

Gibbs will be one cornerback, with junior Avery Rodgers (5-9, 160) at the other and sophomore Timmy Scott (5-11, 190) at strong safety.

Brazell says, "Let's get it on."

"We've echoed to our guys that last year was last year," he said. "We were kind of able to fly under the radar."

"We kind of went hunting, but now we're the Region 1 champs and we're the hunted. The challenge now is to stay atop the league, and we knew to get to the next level we had to get in the weight room 365 days a year."

"We want to go one week further than last year and eat that Thanksgiving dinner together."



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