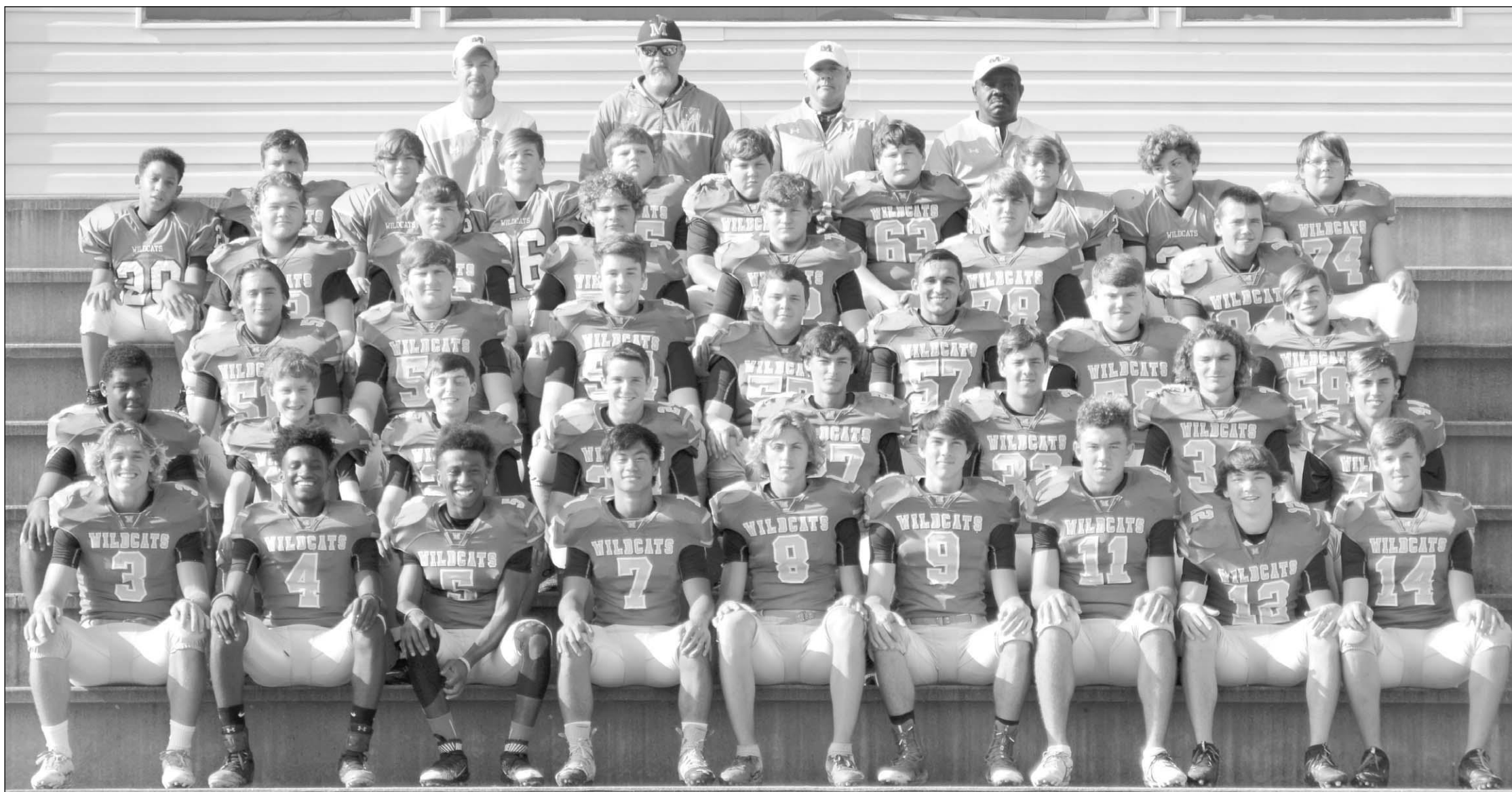


MILLRY



The 2019 Millry High School Wildcats

Millry photos by William Gray/Call News

Year of the Wildcats?

Expectations high for senior-laden squad that has reached playoffs for past three years

BY TOMMY HICKS
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Three seasons ago, Millry's Greg Crager could see a glimpse of what was ahead. He had just taken over the Wildcats' program, his first head coaching job, and after recognizing he had a roster dominated by younger players, what he saw was potential. Each week and each season, the youthfulness has lessened and the experience has increased.

As the 2019 season approaches, the freshmen on that team are now seniors, players who have learned under fire, and they are ready to make their mark. Millry made the playoffs the past three seasons, but was eliminated in the first round each time. Also, the Class of 2019 is also seeking its first winning season.

And yet the Wildcats are being mentioned, in preseason talk, along with the likes of Sweet Water, Marengo and St. Luke's, as a team to watch in the Class 1A, Region 1 title race. Is this, as some are predicting, the Year of the Wildcats?

"We've got a bunch of players who have been starting a while; we've got three guys who have been starting for four years and we've got others who are on their third year of starting," Crager said. "A few years ago we had to play a bunch of younger players and now they're older and so they are experienced and they've been around."

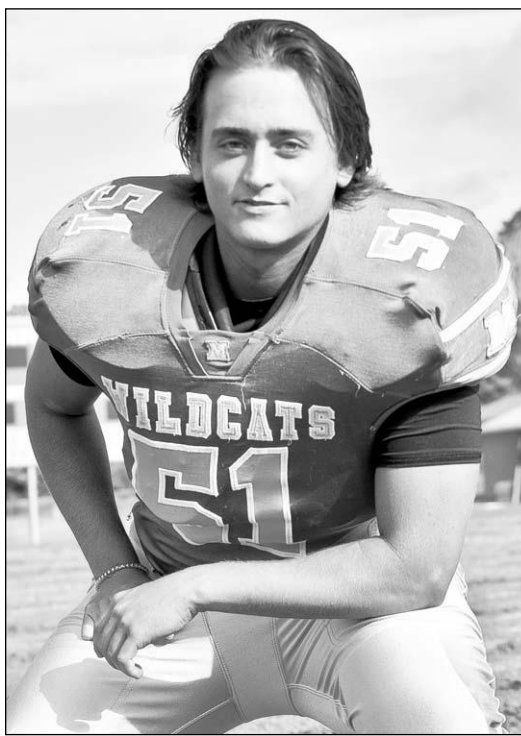
"People recognize that we do have some good players and most everybody back. When you return 10 or 11 starters from a competitive team that naturally catches people's attention. That's the reason (for the expectations)."

"There's a lot of enthusiasm. From a coaching staff standpoint we have high expectations every year, certain ones that don't change and others that do. This is a team that has embraced the expectations and the enthusiasm as well."

One of the reasons for the high expectations is based on the talent and experience of the offense. Quarterback Tate Warr returns along with all five offensive linemen and wide receiver Trey Lewis. And they are not alone.

"We return all five offensive linemen; actually, we only lost our running back (Emmanuel Mitchell)," Crager said. "He was a good player for us and had been for several years. But we're plugged in rock hard at running back and we'll fill that hole."

"There's one guy that will be a new starter and he's a younger guy. As far as players we're counting on obviously there's Tate Warr at quarterback and Trey Lewis at wide receiver. Those two guys, they play



Millry's veteran guard Ethan Wright

every sport at the school and are really good athletes. We'll count on them a lot for leadership and for their playmaking skills. They have strong play-making skills."

Mitchell's running back spot will be filled by Ben Lockhart, a player Crager says should do well there.

"With Ben Lockhart at running back, there were games when he caught people's attention and there were games when he wasn't quite as consistent (last year)," he said. "This year he's going to develop into that every-game

playmaker role. He's a really good athlete and he's going to make a lot of plays for us as well."

"And then Zeke Turner at slot receiver. He is really going to help us. He played two years ago and then didn't play last year. He's coming back and he's a really fast athlete and another big playmaker. Those four guys are going to help us be explosive and we'll put the ball in their hands a good bit."

The skill position players will be pro-

tected by the experienced guys in the trenches — center Laney Cooley, guards Ethan Wright and Nathan Hutchinson and tackles Mallie Gardner and Ethan Frost. "They've been together a while," Crager said. "Offensive line is such a mental position — knowing who to block, what step to take, what timing to use, keeping up with all these different formations."

"That first year as a starter is big, so when you can return all five starters and they can communicate and play well together, that's a big deal. Last year our offensive line wasn't dominant by any means. They won some battles and they lost some battles. They were pretty steady all year, which is what they are, and this year they've worked really, really hard so I'm excited to have all five back."

At tight end, Preston Minus, a 6-foot-2, 195-pound freshman, will be the starter. "He's got a really good frame. He's a little young ... and obviously he'll have to learn some things and he's young and he'll grow, but I'm excited about his future and his potential," Crager said.

At wide receiver, the other starter is Brandon Holston who has "done a really good job for us and has caught a lot of balls though he's not quite as explosive as the others. He's just steady and does his job," Crager noted.

Two others who will come off the bench at wide receiver include Elliot Whigham, who has good speed, and Braedon Waite, who started last year. This year Waite is

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