

THEODORE

Bobcats look to seasoned defense

BY MARK R. KENT
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THEODORE — Last year's Theodore Bobcats' team made quite a run through Class 7A, Region 1, going 8-3 overall, never losing by more than six points and lasting a round into the state playoffs before Robert E. Lee visited town and ended their season in a 13-7 decision.

So what, you might ask, can the Bobcats do for an encore in 2019?

"You have to play physical in this region; if you don't play physical you're not going to win," Bobcats head coach Eric Collier said. "Class 7A ball is really good; everybody's got players and Division 1 players. It's a matter of who's going to get the most out of the middle of the crop as to who'll be successful.

"We've got some offensive skill kids we've got to fill some holes for, but we're pretty seasoned on the defensive side. We feel pretty good about it; we've had a really good spring, and the offseason's going well and the summer's going well. So now it's really a matter of developing the culture of our team and getting the kids to buy into what we're trying to get done."

The 2019 Theodore team brings back 12 returning starters, seven on defense and five on offense, including a quarterback who cut his teeth under pressure late in the season after last year's starter, Tyler Underwood, exited with an injury in Week

7 of the regular season.

Collier got two good starts out of Gavin Moore in the last two regular-season games before the team exited in the playoff game against Lee. Collier said Moore has a "good arm," something Bobcat fans have seen plenty of in the past.

Moore will have three good choices for the two running back positions in Tevaris Davis, Kiersten Rogers and T.J. Richardson and Billy Flannagan will spend most of the downs as a blocking fullback, spelled by Chandler Randall.

Where the experience on offense comes is along the offensive line, which returns four interior men — Kevin Dennis, Desmond Ford, Kole Payne and Robert Kyles. The other interior line position will be a competition between Mike Payton and Caden Johnson.

Collier in the past has featured offenses that did not necessarily have a tight end, but he said when one is necessary, look for Corbin Johnston.

Where there is a wealth of new talent hoping to impress is the five-man competi-

tion for wide receiver downs. Demetrice Bowie, Jamarius Brown, DeChristian Porter, Kwenten Robinson and Malik Kennedy are all waiting for a chance to make a mark.

Defense will feature a 3-4 look on some downs and a 3-3 look with an extra defensive back on others. Jayden McCants returns with impressive stats over two years — 22 sacks. Ephram Johnson and Tyree Pharr are expected to be the other main DLs, with Willie Palmore hoping to get enough reps to make an impression.

Outside linebacker Demouy Kennedy, an Alabama commit, takes up one spot, while Michael Tims and Reggie Maloney are two more key linebackers. There is still some heavy competition going on for the fourth linebacker spot.

Three-year starter Treyvion Pines is expected to star in the secondary and Collier said he has an asset that should make him a fine pick by a smaller program. "Besides being a good player, he's a really good student," Collier said.

Jameel Richardson, another secondary standout, has had Tennessee, Troy and

South Alabama looking at him, although he had a short season last year after a knee injury.

Others vying for secondary positions are Kena Stevens, Keon Marion, Nijal Jones, Keyland Lyles and Treyvon Tate.

Special teams will be important. Darrel Farish is penned in as placekicker, with Flannagan the snapper and Moore the holder. Chandler Randall is being looked at for punter, but Jadius Curry is also getting a look. Flannagan again will be the long snapper and Richardson will be the primary return man.

This year there will be six home games, with non-region opposition Daphne and Enterprise coming in, along with Baker, Fairhope, Murphy and Davidson.

Road games will include Mary G. Montgomery, Foley, Bryant and McGill-Toolen. No one would like a piece of the Bobcats more than McGill, which came into Theodore late in the 2018 season and lost a 15-3 country-hardball cruncher. Bryant is always a south Mobile County rivalry regardless of record.

"Our schedule's in our favor; I like the kids we've got coming back. Now it's a matter of playing clean and playing fast, not making mistakes or getting behind the chains. If we can do those type of things, like we did last year, we'll be all right," Collier said.

ALMA BRYANT

For Hurricanes, wins depend on consistency

BY ARTHUR L. MACK
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For Alma Bryant's football team, the only way to go is up after a disastrous and often frustrating 2018 season. The Hurricanes went 0-10 last year, being outscored 305-109 and on the losing end of several lopsided games.

On the other hand, they were competitive in several games, notably against Davidson, Mary G. Montgomery, Murphy and Fairhope.

But finishing a season without tasting victory stings quite a bit.

"Last year was a tough year for us and we just couldn't get anything to go our way," said third-year head coach Doug Hoehn. "Whether it would be turnovers or penalties or dropped balls or injuries, we just couldn't get the ball to bounce our way. So we're hoping that this year will be a little different."

Ironically, despite a winless 2018, Hoehn said there was some progress made from his first season (2017).

"I felt we made some gains my first season there (at Bryant)," he said. "We were more competitive in our games last year than we were in my first year, even though we didn't win any games. There were a couple of games where we felt that we had a shot (at winning)

and we certainly had a chance in more games last year than in my first year."

Hoehn said consistency will be the key to Alma Bryant picking up some wins and being more competitive in an always tough Class 7A, Region 1.

"We're going to have to be more consistent," he said. "We play in a tough league and it is what it is, with a lot of good athletes and a lot of good coaching. We're not to a point where we have as much depth and as many athletes to overcome mistakes. We're going to have to play clean (mistake-free) football games on a consistent basis.

"We would play a consistent second half, but a lousy first half. We would play a good defensive game, but a lousy offensive game. For us to compete in the league that we're in, we're going to have to show up on Friday nights and play solid offense, defense and special teams. We've got to do a better job with penalties and turnovers. We can't afford to give anyone anything. If we do that, we put ourselves in a hole."

Hoehn said during the spring the Hurricanes showed some improvements in spring games against B.C. Rain and Pascagoula, playing halves against each team

and winning both contests.

"We had very few penalties out of both games and we had zero turnovers," he said. "That definitely helped us. Our kids played hard (in both games)."

Offensively, Hoehn said senior Ced Johnson (5-foot-7, 165 pounds), who is a three-year starter at running back, had a strong spring, and has worked hard during the summer. He's the only experienced skill player returning.

"Last year, we had a lot of skill guys, but a young offensive line," Hoehn said. "This year, we have an experienced offensive line, but not a lot of experience among the skill players. A lot of the running backs, wide receivers and quar-

terbacks will be starting their first varsity games."

In fact, two sophomores — Justin Green and Tanner Ewing — will be battling for the starting quarterback position. "Both of them competed neck and neck during the spring and both will be competing neck and neck during the summer," Hoehn said. "I'm not sure right now I can tell you who is going to be the starter."

Defensively, Hoehn said senior defensive end Franklin Nou (6-2, 210), a three-year starter, will be a player to watch. Nou already has scholarship offers from several schools but

is leaning toward the U.S. Naval Academy. Linebacker Tyler Womack, who like Nou is a senior, also had a good spring. Hoehn is also excited about Aydan Adams (5-9, 140), a junior cornerback who will also see some time on offense.

"He (Adams) started the last two years at corner but he's also going to get some reps at running back and wide receiver," Hoehn said.

Special teams, especially with punting and placekicking, are up in the air. Hoehn said there were several kids working out at those areas.

As with the rest of the local Class 7A schools, the scheduling is very tough. Alma Bryant's season opener is against Davidson on Aug. 30 and there are two tough non-region games between Eufaula and Blount.

"We're playing against region teams and that's pretty tough," Hoehn said. "We have two out-of-region games against two of the toughest 6A teams in the state. It's a tough schedule, but the kids have been working hard over the summer. We've already had three OTAs, and we'll have some more, but so far, they're competing hard."



Running back Ced Johnson



Linebacker Demouy Kennedy

BAKER

Hornets' QB returns to head young team

BY DARRON PATTERSON
Sports Correspondent

One good thing going for Baker's Steve Normand is he finally gets to put his own stamp on the program as he plunges into his first full season as a head coach in ridiculously tough Class 7A, Region 1.

The major problem, though, is that he's got to find nearly 21 new starters by opening night at Theodore, a meat-grinder of a place to play even for veteran teams.

"We lost virtually everybody from the defense," said Normand, who took over for the ousted Danny Smith after Baker's 34-0 loss to Carver-Montgomery in the third game last season. "There's 10 kids gone that played on Friday night. And from an offensive perspective, three out of the 11 are coming back, but those returning back didn't play a whole lot.

"The biggest thing we have to do as a team is re-evaluate ourselves and figure out where we are as a unit."

But, isn't there at least one kid who helps you sleep better at night, coach?

"No!" he says emphatically and with a loud laugh. "I mean, we have a couple of kids that are really doing a good job. And our quarterback Nick Summerlin (6-foot-2, 180-pound senior) is coming back and he's doing a good job."

Normand said Summerlin has some untapped qualities.

"He makes really good decisions and throws the ball well, so we're extremely happy about him," he said. "But he has something that's kind of hidden that we really want to exploit a lot more this year, and that's his ability to run.

"He can take off and run a lot better than people think because he's always been used as kind of a prototypical pocket passer. But we're probably going to try and do some different things with him."

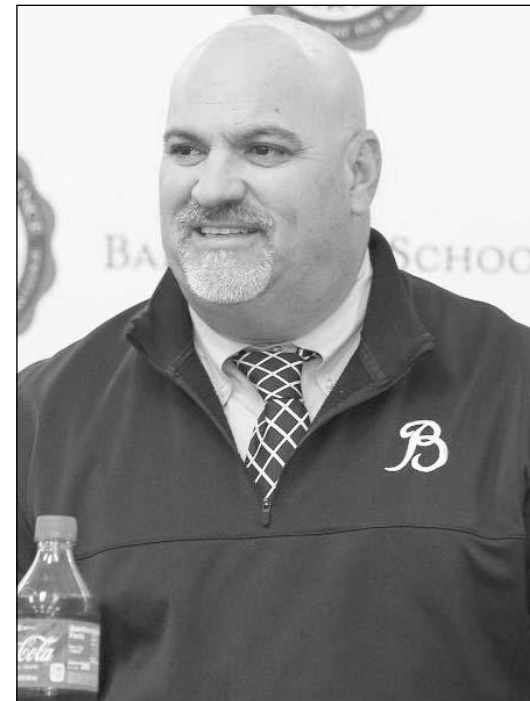
Summerlin will have a nice group of receivers to throw to, including senior Leo Richards (6-2, 200), whom Normand said is a "good athlete," but didn't play last year while using the year to focus on grades after transferring in from Davidson.

His presence can only strengthen a unit that includes senior wide receivers Isiah Dixon (6-0, 160) and Trey Daughtry (6-2, 190), who both saw extensive playing time last season.

If senior tight end Cade Collier (6-7, 220) comes back to perform well after suffering a broken collarbone in spring practice, Summerlin will have a huge red-zone target added to the receiving mix.

"We're waiting to see what's going to happen with him," said Normand. "He's a basketball player that was new to football last year. But he did well and was even our long snapper."

He says some guys will be "moved around" to shore up the running back situation, including bruising seniors Alvin Askew (5-11, 220) and Watson McAdams (5-10, 200), while Derrick Nobles (5-9, 190) will split time with senior starter D'Marquez



Coach Steve Normand

Williams (5-9, 175) "who can fly," said Normand.

Finding the people up front to block for Summerlin and make holes for the runners is the issue, though.

"That's my biggest concern going into the year," he said. "We lost the whole offensive front."

Of the group of offensive linemen he has to count on, 6-3, 290-pound tackle Ben Lang is the lone senior.

"Everybody else is going to be brand new and that worries me tremendously going into the year. Playing in our region is extremely tough and not having an experienced offensive line poses a lot of problems."

And that means the untested defense is going to have to step up while the young linemen grow up.

"We're replacing 10 kids there, too," said Normand. "We've got a kid, Jadon Jackson (5-10, 180, senior), who played for us a lot last year at corner and Jaden Blackmon (5-10, 195 senior) is an inside linebacker who got spot play here and there.

"The kids that we'll have out there didn't start, for the most part, and had very limited playing time. So it's good and bad. You have an opportunity to take a bunch of kids who haven't been out there a whole lot ... they're excited to get things going.

"But by the same token, I've got to go play (region foes) Theodore, Davidson, Murphy, McGill-Toolen and everybody else, and I've got sophomores and juniors out there on the field. That's tough.

"So we have some kids that we've got to really find out where they are and whether or not we can take a group of kids and let them be able to mature as they learn how to play as a unit and as team. That's what it was during spring, and that's what it is right now — trying to find where these guys are as team."

He'll know soon enough.