

# WASHINGTON COUNTY

# Dawgs' confidence grows

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Washington County was a streaky team a year ago. The Bulldogs struggled out of the gate, losing their first five games of the season. But while losing they were also improving, which allowed them to string together four consecutive wins.

They headed into their final game of the season with a chance to earn a spot in the Class 2A playoffs, but they lost to Chickasaw and finished 4-6 and out of the playoffs. Still, the string of victories gave the players and coaches something they had been missing earlier in the year — confidence. And that has carried over as they prepare for the upcoming season.

Devin Roberts is entering his third season as the Bulldogs' head coach. He has a 7-12 overall record at WCHS, including last year's 4-6 mark. Both of his earlier teams were young and inexperienced, and while the roster is still youthful, the experience factor has grown a bit, many of those younger players being forced into starting or significant playing time roles by way of injury or need.

It is a factor that should serve this team well.

"We lost some key guys off last year's team that were important to us, but we feel like this group has the mentality and the ability to bounce back and replace them and get better," Roberts said.

That is the aim.



The 2019 Washington County High School Bulldogs

WCHS photos by Willie Gray/Washington County News

Toward that goal, the Bulldogs will shake things up a bit on offense, using multiple sets in an attempt to keep the opposing defense guessing as to how they may line up — shotgun or under center, spread or I formation. Junior Elijah Johnson is back at quarterback and will be the key to what the Bulldogs do. Newcomer Chad Carter, a senior, is expected to give WCHS some punch and speed at running back and there is an experienced line to protect them both, as well as a deep set of receivers.

"I feel like we can be a lot more multiple this year," Roberts said. "Chad Carter

is adding an element to the backfield and obviously Elijah Johnston is a year older and he's a little bigger, better and stronger and he may be able to run the ball more effectively inside. Last year he ended up running for 1,000 yards and throwing for 1,000 yards as a sophomore on a struggling team at the time.

"We've got some good wide receivers. We've got Britton Allen coming back; he's a sophomore. At flex tight end this year we've got Dakota Baxter, and he will become a factor. He got injured last year and at the time he got injured I believe he was our leading receiver.

So we're looking for big things out of him. And Jack Busby's going to be a guy, a senior who's been in the system for three years, who I feel like we can plug in anywhere and he can help. He can catch the ball and he can jump in the backfield if we need him."

The passing game should show improvement this season thanks to the depth and the fact Johnston has a year's experience as the starter.

"I feel like we've got some weapons to be able to throw the ball around a little bit as long as we're executing," Robert said. "We brought back four of our

five O-linemen and they've gotten a lot bigger and stronger in the offseason and they've matured some in knowing what to do and how to do it. John Crawford was a sophomore last year and he made huge strides up front. Austin Younge and Orlando Holcombe, they're going to be seniors this year and they're going to be huge parts in our improvement up front. They both looked really, really good in the spring and offseason.

Braden Ferguson, we actually moved him to tackle this year and I think he's going to do a great job. We've got a battle for a couple of spots but I think it's a good

thing. We don't have a bad option.

"It'll be multiple," he said in describing the offense. "I thought offensively for us last year to score the points that we did I think we were doing something right, so we'll do that. I do expect us to throw the ball a little bit more because I think we have a better threat of that this year with all those young receivers coming back and being in the system another year.

"I expect to be under center some and run the ball and I expect us to be in the gun and throwing and run-

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