



Photo by Randy Whitley / for the Greene County Herald

Senior left-handed pitcher Malachi Graham is part of a deep pitching rotation for GCHS this season. Graham came on strong for the Wildcats in the playoffs a year ago and is expected to be a key part of any success the Wildcats enjoy this season. He is shown here delivering a pitch on opening day.

# Pitching and defense should be strong suit for Cats this year

Experience abounds for Wildcats on the mound and in the field

By RUSSELL TURNER  
Herald Staff

When it comes to pitching and defense in high school baseball, skill and athleticism are a plus, but experience tends to be the separating factor. If that idiom holds true, the GCHS Wildcats should be in pretty good shape for 2020. Coach Nick Chatham returns all but one member of his core pitching staff from a year and all but three lettermen in the field. Add to that a handful of up-and-comers in key spots and it isn't hard to see why Chatham feels confident about his ability to limit runs by opponents.

"I feel really good about the defense we can field," Chatham said recently. "We are really counting on our returning guys to produce, that will be a big key, but I have confidence in the guys that are getting their first real taste of varsity action."

"Our infield is set. We feel good about it with returners everywhere, but at shortstop. We have several guys competing for spots in the outfield and feel good about those options as well."

Of course, the Cats' results will rely heavily on production from the mound. And, that area don't look to shabby either with senior MGCCC commit Drake Henderson, crafty lefty Malachi Graham and rising sophomore Conner West set to lead the way.

Henderson is the staff ace after throwing nearly a third of the Cats' innings a year ago. He finished last season with a solid 6-2 record with a team-leading 1.27 ERA and is

off to a hot start this year as well. With 98 strikeouts as a junior Henderson fanned one of every three batters he faced. Henderson struck out six in two innings of work against Laurel on opening day and shutout Petal last Friday at Pearl River Community College, striking out nine over six-and-a-third innings in the Cats' 2-0 win over the Panthers. He's also a solid defender in right field when not toeing the rubber for GCHS.

"Drake has four years of varsity experience and really came on for us last year as a dominant type pitcher," Chatham said. "And we are expecting the same from him this year on the mound."

Senior Malachi Graham emerged as a starter for the Wildcats last season. The lefty finished the year with a 2-3 record and 3.34 ERA, but really came on strong for Chatham, particularly down the stretch. Graham pitched

two solid innings in the opener against Richton, striking out three along the way. When not on the mound, Graham is the team's starting center fielder, and has Chatham's confidence in both spots.

Sophomore Conner West was a 4-game winner for GCHS last year and is showing no signs of a sophomore slump on the horizon. Chatham can use him as a starter or as a late inning reliever, an area he showed a lot of promise in last year as he earned two saves. He struck out four in two innings against Laurel and finished out the Cats' win over Petal, getting two outs on seven pitches, including a strikeout to end the game. West could also see time defensively in both the infield and outfield for GCHS this year.

"Malachi came on strong last year as a valuable option for us and had some tremendous starts on the mound in some big games in the playoffs," Chatham said. "As a matter of fact, he won two game three scenarios in the playoffs and those big innings from last year are what makes me confident in him this year. Malachi also plays great in the outfield for us and gets good jumps on the ball and is a good thinker."

"Conner has a very lively arm and a great demeanor on the mound. He is a competitor out there which is why we were able to use him a lot last year on the mound. We threw him into some really tough situations last year as a freshman and he never blinked. We are looking for great things on the mound for Conner this year."

Senior Kade Kittrell and sophomore Brayden Brewer are also expected to contribute heavily in the rotation for the Cats. Both saw varsity action last year and got an inning of work apiece against Richton on opening day.

Brewer was particularly sharp against Richton with seven of the nine pitches he threw in the inning being strikes and leading to two strikeouts. He followed

that with three innings of work against Columbia, scattering six hits, notching two more strikeouts, while allowing one run.

Kittrell's second outing was one of his best to date as he threw a 5-inning complete game in the Cats' win over Natchez without allowing an earned run. He threw a lot of

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Have A Great Season Wildcats!

Photo by Randy Whitley / for the Greene County Herald

The Wildcats feel good about their defensive lineup this season. Henderson is the staff ace after throwing nearly a third of the Cats' innings a year ago. He finished last season with a solid 6-2 record with a team-leading 1.27 ERA and is

Baleigh Keys

Let the field be joyful, and all that is therein: then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice Psalm 96:12

Good Luck this season!

We Love You. Dad, Mom, Grant & Kyleigh

Good Luck WILDCATS #16

Have A Great Season TAYLOR BREWER

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