

# Greene Co. looks to new faces to make impact on offense this season



GCHS junior quarterback Johnathon Nicholson is shown making a big gain early in the scrimmage at Lucedale on Friday. Nicholson and freshman Keenan Franks lack varsity experience, but coaches believe both can carry the load as the Wildcats' signal caller this year.

*Wildcats hope talent, experience up front can lead young talent at skilled positions*

By **RUSSELL TURNER**  
*Herald Staff*

Offensively, the 2020 Wildcats are young everywhere but along the front line. From tackle-to-tackle, GCHS is big, athletic and experienced. They have three returning starters in the position group, which Rotch coaches directly, and the talent level is easily the team's most obvious strength going into the season. Leading the way for the offensive line are Caiden Keys, Brandon Sumrall and Mykal McLeod. Sumrall, at 6-3 and just under 300 pounds is the smaller of the three at left tackle. Caiden Keys, who lines up beside Sumrall at left guard, is 6-3, 320 pounds and is committed to Pearl River Community College. McLeod, who has offers from USM, Central Arkansas and several juco schools, will start at right tackle. "All three can play at the next level," Dungan said. "They have the size and ability. Brandon started the year a little behind because he couldn't make every summer workout. But, he made every one we had in the afternoons this summer and played really well in the scrimmage against George County." "We are expecting a lot from those guys this year." Along with the three big seniors, Rotch has two juniors in his starting group on the O-line and a host of players that can hold down a host of positions, adding depth to the talent pool. Juniors Matt McCoy and Frederick Johnson are among that group. McCoy seems to have the edge at center and is listed as the No. 2 left tackle. Junior Trevor Parker is also battling for time at center, but could see time at guard behind Johnson as well. Senior Logan Bufkin is the first sub in at left tackle, while junior Aiden Smith is the first sub at guard. Juniors Matt Crawford and Brice Walley

have been a little banged up, according to Dungan, but will see playing time and add depth when they are healthy. Sophomores Bubba Restor, Trey Snell and Levi Simonson round out the unit. "It is a good group," Dungan said of his linemen. "They've been working hard." First-year offensive coordinator Brance Crane hopes having a front five that boasts at least three guys who will have the opportunity to play at the next level can jumpstart an offense without a lot of experience elsewhere. "We have a sophomore and a few freshmen at quarterback and no seniors at all in the skilled positions, so we are very young in that area," Crane said. "We do have experience along the line, and we are expecting big things from them." Drake Henderson accounted for 1,620 yards and 23 touchdowns last year. But, Henderson is now at Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College preparing for his freshman season with the Bulldog baseball team. Slotted to replace him are sophomore Jonathan Nicholson and freshman Keenan Franks, "Both of those guys are battling for playing time," Crane said. "They are very coachable and they both throw the football well and are familiar with the offense." "Keenan is a little behind as a freshman, but he has done a really good job so far. He is definitely a playmaker and will be on the field somewhere, if he isn't lining up at quarterback." Nicholson came on strong in the offseason and put himself in a position to earn the starting role this year. He led the offense in all but the final possession of the two quarters of action in the jamboree. At times he looked like a seasoned veteran. At other times inexperience showed. "I thought Nicholson played well, managed the game well and made some good throws," Crane said. "Honestly, I was impressed with both considering the circumstances." "The goal for the jamboree was to find a starter for the Perry Central game and I think we found that, but there is still a lot of competition going on for playing time at quarterback." Dungan agreed and both coaches said they were pleased

with the toughness Nicholson showed running the ball hard between the tackles. And, they agreed that a lot of that grit he showed on Friday came from being pushed by Franks in a legitimate competition for playing time. "What we wanted from them was to limit the bad plays and keep us out of bad situations and for the most part I thought they both did that," Dungan said. "They both showed a lot of toughness running the football too." Franks turned heads at Leakesville Jr. High School last year. During the Bears undefeated run at the Singing River Conference Championship, Franks piled up 2,000 yards of total offense and 26 touchdowns (11 rushing and 15 passing). There is a big difference between junior high and varsity football, but Franks has stepped in and battled for a chance to lead the offense, which is the same style he ran at LJHS. He had a couple of nice plays on the final possession for the Wildcats in the varsity jamboree and gave a glimpse of

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