

# Growing pains evident as Cats drop opener to Vancleave

Despite loss to Bulldogs, GCHS remains locked in on 2022 goals

By STAN CALDWELL and RUSSELL TURNER

The Greene County Wildcats kicked off their 2022 campaign with a loss to Vancleave on Friday.

The 49-20 setback at the hands of the Bulldogs was not the result on the scoreboard the Wildcats had hoped for, but it is part of a process GCHS Head Coach Mike King hopes will pay dividends later in the season.

“It wasn’t the result on the scoreboard we were wanting, but we learned a lot about our team and got better and that is something we can build on,” King said. “We tip our hats to Vancleave. That’s a talented team with 14 senior banners hanging on the fence and they came out and played well to earn the win.”

“There were some things we are going to have to continue to work to correct, but there were also a lot of bright spots and some lessons learned that only come from playing a game like that.”

The Wildcats found themselves in an early hole en route to a 49-20 loss to the Bulldogs. Vancleave has a big, strong roster and a solid team, but much like the jamboree, penalties and unforced errors were the Wildcats’ Achilles heel this past Friday. An apparent 50-yard TD run by junior Keenan Franks on the second play of the game is a perfect case in point. Instead of having an early lead and

lots of momentum, a holding penalty negated the play, leading to a punt by the Cats and a momentum shift in favor of the home team.

“We did commit some penalties that had a definite impact on the game,” King said. “Some of those were effort plays that were flagged that you can’t really be mad about. You still have to work to correct them, but you appreciate the effort that went along with it.”

“There were also some bad penalties, mental mistakes, that we have to find a way to eliminate.”

A long drive on their first offensive possession gave the Bulldogs a 7-0 lead. A fumble by GCHS on the first play after the kickoff gave Vancleave the ball again at midfield and led to their second TD. A short offensive possession put the Wildcat defense right back out on the field and the Bulldog offense took advantage, marching 80 yards to take a 21-0 lead.

“We made it tough on ourselves early on and put our defense, which was already shorthanded, in a tough spot,” King noted. “To Vancleave’s credit, they took advantage and put us in a bad hole early.”

“But, I was proud of the way our kids continued to battle.”

The Wildcats defense was able to get a stop on Vancleave’s next possession and that seemed to give a spark to the offensive unit as well. A 30-yard scamper by Keenan Franks was the big play on a 70-yard drive that put the Wildcats on the board. Franks earned the TD on a 2-yard run in a formation that saw him take a direct snap from center. The PAT failed, but GCHS had closed the gap to 21-6.

A fumble on the ensuing kickoff was recovered by freshman Bryson Spivery, putting Franks and company right back in business at the Bulldog 20-yard-line. Two plays later, GCHS was back in the endzone on an 8-yard run by Franks. He



Photo by SHAE ROGERS / Herald Contributor

The 2022 GCHS Wildcats will feature a ton of young talent on the field this season. There are also a couple of seniors on the roster who will be making their first varsity starts this season. Senior Zane Denson (17) was a big part of the GCHS basketball team last season and has impressed the coaching staff in his first season with the football team. He is shown here in action at Columbia. Also shown is freshman Bryson Spivery (10).

added the 2-point-conversion run, and just like that, GCHS was within a touchdown at 21-14.

Unfortunately for the Cats, that momentum slipped away when a mixup on defense allowed the Bulldogs to break off a big, 50-yard run to set up their fourth TD. But, the offense was starting to show some confidence and marched downfield just before halftime. The Wildcats had a great opportunity to cut the lead to single digits, but sophomore quarterback Coby King was brought down right at the goal line with roughly four seconds left in the second quarter. Coach Mike King was desperately trying to get a timeout called as the play was ending, but the officials said he didn’t get it done in time. Despite objections from the GCHS sideline, the two teams went to the locker room with Vancleave leading 28-14.

“That was a huge play right there,” GCHS assistant coach Kaelin Moore said. “We thought we had the timeout called, but didn’t get it. We were in great shape to push the score to 28-21 and go into halftime with momentum.”

A bold move on the second half kickoff appeared to pay off as the Cats recovered

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Heat and humidity early in the season is tough on football players going full speed in game action. Greene County suffered with that issue last Friday in the season opener at Vancleave. Athletice trainer David Freeman (Left) and assistant coach Cameron Dunnam are shown helping a couple of Greene County linemen avoid cramps by stretching their hamstring muscles on the sideline during the loss to the Bulldogs.

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