

# Cats feel comfortable with special teams, but are hoping for some explosive plays too

*GCHS has known weapons in return game, but some questions linger in kicking game*

By **STAN CALDWELL**  
and **RUSSELL TURNER**

The Wildcats are a mixed bag on special teams with a ton of experience and ability in their kick and punt returners, but with some question marks elsewhere.

Overall, the kicking game does not appear to be a liability for the team, but whether it can become a strength remains to be seen.

Junior B.J. Johnson and senior Kaden Miller are expected to handle the bulk of the kick returns, with junior Keenan Franks seeing time back deep for GCHS as well. The trio gives the Cats a return game that poses a threat to score any time the ball is kicked their way.

“B.J. is our sure-handed return guy back there on punts, and we’re excited about K.J. returning kicks,” said King. “The last few years, we’ve had a good kick return game, where we’ve had some returned to midfield and even a few that we’ve taken the distance.”

In the kicking game, senior Luke Barfield will handle the kickoffs and Coby King will be the placekicker and punter. Barfield is a 3-sport athlete, who had a break-out season on the diamond last spring for the GCHS baseball team and is a 3-year starter at goalie for the

school’s soccer team. Along with his kickoff duties, he provides depth at punter.

“Luke has a strong leg, and we’re hoping he can be a weapon on kickoffs,” said King. “Coby will be our extra-point guy. He was good in that role for us last year. He’s not as good on field goals further out, but he’s really consistent on PATs.”

Having their quarterback as the punter gives the Wildcats an extra dimension to their offense, especially in short-yardage situations.

“If it’s fourth-and-manageable – fourth-and-1, fourth-and-2 – around midfield, we can keep our base offense on the field and keep defenses guessing, with a quarterback who can kick it, or if it opens up, he can run it,” said King. “And with teams having to stay in their defensive set, if he can kick it over the defense and let it roll, where we can down it deep, that’s a big plus for us.”

That last scenario was on display in the opener against Vancleave when a King quick-kick pinned Vancleave down inside their own 10-yard-line.

Senior offensive lineman Trey Snell will handle the long-snapping duties this season. On field goal and extra-point attempts, Snell will be snapping to junior Kade Howard, a sure-handed wide receiver who has earned the role of holder.

A variety of players will be involved in kick coverage and some will use the opportunity to not only contribute in that role, but potentially build a case for playing time on the offensive or defensive units.



Photo by **RUSSELL TURNER** / Herald Editor

Sophomore Coby King pulls a lot of double duty for GCHS. King, shown (Above) getting off a punt against Columbia last month, also handles extra-point and field goal kicking for the Cats, on top of being the starting quarterback. Also shown are (L-R) sophomore Cole Helton, junior Tate McLain and sophomore Tony McLeod providing a screen of blockers on the play.

instinct

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