

CCHS reloads, gears for tough region battles



2007 CCHS WARRIORS. Pictured: Kirk Johnson (1), Matt McElroy (2), D.J. Fife (3), Gabriel Chambers (4), Keddrick Barrett (5), Heath Pollard (6), Cameron Dupree (7), Josh Day (8), Brian Roebuck (9), Brett Burgess (10), Coty Blanchard (11), Dustin Herring (12), Billy Wood (14), Nevin Nabors (15), Caleb Crane (16), Kenny Akins (17), Tony Wood (22), Steven Maxwell (23), Blake Whisehunt (28), Chase Weeks (32), Cole Sterling (33), Jon Honeycutt (40), Jesse Bellew (42), Josh Bannister (52), Matt Hill (54), Trei Stroud (55), Ty Stroud (56), Matt Carter (57), Jared Ramsey (61), Caleb Whorton (63), Daniel Miller (64), Seth Hill (65), Cody Hulet (66), Thad West (70), Adam Hundley (72), Will Bailey (73), Brantley Jones (74), Wesley Carter (75), Hudson Grimes (76), Nick Camp (77), Dustin Christopher (81), John West (82), Jake Sliger (84), Zach Bishop (88), head coach Tom Curry, assistant coaches Travis Barnes, Matt Williams, Will Wagnon, Jim Garmany, Shane Reid, Steve Glover and Nathan Wehunt.

By **CHRIS MCCARTHY**
Sports Editor

Cherokee County High's first year back in Class 4A after two dominating seasons in 3A certainly wasn't a wash with an 8-4 record and third straight playoff berth.

The Centre squad's quick first round exit, however, put a damper on Warriors' '06 campaign.

CCHS finished 6-1 after a 1-2 start, but a week 7 loss at Alexandria prevented the Warriors from winning their third straight region title.

Health, or lack thereof, was an issue for the '06 Warriors. Eight starters missed games for medical reasons, including the entire offensive backfield and receiver Keddrick Barrett.

According to head coach Tom Curry, a big factor in the Warriors' one-and-done performance on the postseason was a bit of a fade down the stretch.

"I felt that our kids were a little worn out over the last few games. We won the last couple of [regular season] games, but we really didn't get on a roll. You want to start to peak when you get to the sixth or seventh game, especially in our region. We stayed consistent, but a lot of kids were injured and we didn't peak out like we did the year before. We cut down on our passing camps this summer, and I think that will help us a lot in the last half of the season."

Holes must be filled, as Cherokee County must replace 13 seniors, 11 of which were starters.

"We lost a good bit, but I'm excited about the guys coming back," said Curry. "We're not big, but we're scrappy and we'll have more overall speed. We'll stay with the spread/no huddle on offense but we're changing some things around so we can get several different people the football. We didn't do enough of that last year. We changed up the way we call our offense a little bit to correct that. It's a little tough for us as coaches, but the kids have picked up on it real well so far. We have about five guys that we need to get several touches a game."

CCHS did go undefeated at home, extending the Warriors' streak at Bobby Joe Johnson Field to 14 games.

"We play pretty well at home, and a lot of that is of the great support from the community," said Curry. "The folks around here really love their football. It really means

a lot to the kids when we get a big turnout. Plus, a lot of people don't realize how much a band adds to the atmosphere, and ours does a great job of getting the crowd involved in the game."

Leaving a significant void in the offensive backfield were the graduations of quarterback Zach Morgan and running back Hershel Houston.

Morgan passed for 1,435 yards and 10 touchdowns, while Houston rushed for 1,047 yards and nine scores.

Taking Morgan's place is sophomore Coty Blanchard.

"I think that Coty will be one of the best quarterbacks to come out of this school if he stays healthy and continues to work hard," said Curry. "He's a winner who's got a good arm and good size. He's also very smart, and we're letting him do some things that we've never allowed before with a sophomore quarterback. It's always tough when you leave the quarterback job in the hands of a 15-year-old, but we feel very confident that Coty is capable of doing the job."

Joining Blanchard in the backfield is All-County senior halfback Matt McElroy, who last season rushed for 488 yards and seven touchdowns. He also caught 30 passes for 517 yards and

four touchdowns.

"Matt will be a huge part of our offense," said Curry. "He's a tough runner and we split him out a lot because he catches the ball so well. [Sophomore] D.J. Fife will also be in there. He's not too fast but he's very elusive."

A big loss at receiver is the Honorable Mention All-State tight end Chad Gossett, who led the team with 39 catches, but McElroy, senior Keddrick Barrett (32 catches, 445 yards, two touchdowns) and sophomore Gabriel Chambers are all solid targets.

Junior Josh Day is at tight end.

"Josh is a go-getter," said Curry. "He catches the ball well and runs good routes. He's a kid that will do whatever you tell him to do and do it right away."

"We won't have a traditional offense," Curry noted. "We'll have a wide-open sideline-to-sideline formations to get the ball to the kids quickly and let them make plays."

The line lost three starters from '06. Junior tackle Trei Stroud and senior guard Josh Bannister return. New to the front five is freshman center Caleb Whorton, sophomore guard Daniel Miller and junior tackle Thad West.

"The good thing about this year's line is that nobody

plays both ways, so they'll get a lot of work at one spot," said Curry. "They've had a lot of time to work together, and the most important thing about this group is they enjoy playing on the line, which a lot of kids don't like to do because it's hard work and you don't get much recognition. This group isn't big, strong or fast, but you can always win a fight on the line of scrimmage if you want it bad enough."

Curry and his staff made tweaking the defense a priority in the offseason.

"We have a better plan defensively," said Curry. "Last year we lost our focus a little. There's no way that you'll win games in this region giving up 39 or 37 points like we did. That's a result of not concentrating on defense, which is the most important part of a football team."

Returning on the line in the 3-4 formation are senior tackles Wesley Carter and Nick Camp and senior nose guard Steven Maxwell.

"Wesley's one of the best defensive linemen that we've had in a while, and Steven is like a stick of dynamite - full explosion off the snap, all the time," said Curry.

Sophomore Cole Sterling and junior Kirk Johnson are back at linebacker along with last year's nose guard

Tony Wood, a senior, and sophomore Caleb Crane.

The secondary returns all four starters.

Barrett (five interceptions last year) and McElroy return at cornerback, while Chambers and Fife are the safeties.

Junior Dustin Christopher and freshman Brett Burgess will also see some playing time.

Blanchard will be the punter. Chambers will handle kickoffs, while senior Will Bailey will be on the field for PAT's and field goals.

In addition to defending state champion Guntersville and perennial power Alexandria, Class 4A, Region 7 features Ashville, Saks, Boaz, Douglas and Jacksonville.

"You've got to think that Guntersville is the team to beat," said Curry. "Just like we found out last year, everyone will be gunning for you if you played in the [state] championship game. Alexandria should be very tough again, and Saks has some good athletes and could be a team to beat. Boaz lost a bit, but they always have the numbers. Every team in the region will be competitive."

Just like last year, CCHS opens the season against 6A Pell City.

"That game will be extremely tough," said Curry.

"It's hard to maintain and control four or five outstanding athletes on one team, and that's what those big 5A and 6A programs have."

Assistant coaches are Travis Barnes, Matt Williams, Will Wagnon, Jim Garmany, Shane Reid and Steve Glover.

"Overall, I think that we can be as good as the [3A state finalist] '05 team if everything falls into place," said Curry. "If everything does go our way, the group is talented enough to have a real good season."

Schedule

- Aug. 31 - Pell City
- Sept. 7 - @Douglas*
- Sept. 14 - Guntersville* (HC)
- Sept. 21 - @Ashville*
- Sept. 28 - @Clebunne Co.
- Oct. 5 - @Saks*
- Oct. 12 - Alexandria*
- Oct. 19 - @Jacksonville*
- Oct. 26 - Boaz*
- Nov. 2 - @Glencoe

- *region game
- 2006 results**
- Pell City 38, CCHS 9
 - CCHS 54, Douglas 13
 - Guntersville 39, CCHS 14
 - CCHS 35, Ashville 8
 - CCHS 15, Cleburne Co. 8
 - CCHS 29, Saks 6
 - Alexandria 37, CCHS 20
 - CCHS 29, Jacksonville 14
 - CCHS 28, Boaz 0
 - CCHS 24, Glencoe 21
 - East Limestone 6, CCHS 0



WARRIOR COACHING STAFF. Pictured, kneeling: head coach Tom Curry. Standing, from left: Steve Glover, Nathan Wehunt, Will Wagnon, Matt Williams, Jim Garmany, Shane Reid.

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Name	No.	Pos.	Grade
Kirk Johnson	1	RB	11
Matt McElroy	2	RB	12
D.J. Fife	3	WR	10
Gabr. Chambers	4	WR	10
Keddrick Barrett	5	WR	12
Heath Pollard	6	WR	11
Cameron Dupree	7	WR	10
Josh Day	8	TE	11
Brian Roebuck	9	RB	9
Brett Burgess	10	QB	9
Coty Blanchard	11	QB	10
Dustin Herring	12	WR	9
Billy Wood	14	RB	11
Nevin Nabors	15	WR	12
Caleb Crane	16	WR	10
Kenny Akins	17	RB	9
Dustin Herring	18	WR	9
Tony Wood	22	WR	12
Steven Maxwell	23	WR	12
Blake Whisehunt	28	WR	9
Chase Weeks	32	WR	10
Cole Sterling	33	RB	10
Jon Honeycutt	40	WR	10
Jesse Bellew	42	WR	10
Josh Bannister	52	OL	12
Matt Hill	54	OL	9
Trei Stroud	55	OL	11
Ty Stroud	56	OL	9
Matt Carter	57	OL	9
Jared Ramsey	61	OL	11
Caleb Whorton	63	OL	9
Daniel Miller	64	OL	10
Seth Hill	65	OL	10
Cody Hulet	66	OL	10
Thad West	70	OL	11
Adam Hundley	72	OL	10
Will Bailey	73	OL	12
Brantley Jones	74	OL	9
Wesley Carter	75	OL	12
Hudson Grimes	76	OL	9
Nick Camp	77	OL	12
Dust. Christopher	81	WR	11
John West	82	WR	10
Jake Sliger	84	WR	9
Zach Bishop	88	WR	9



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