

2007 PIGSKIN PREVIEW



DARLINGTON

Double-trouble duo leads Tigers

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Most teams would love to have one high-quality full-back. But the Darlington Tigers? Their cup runneth over.

"We're blessed in that department," said Darlington coach Tommy Atha as a smile of satisfaction stretched across his face. "Very blessed."

Atha's grin was brought on by Derricus Ellis and Patrick Collier, who give the Tigers a 1-2 punch that few teams in the area — or in the state, for that matter — can match.

"Both are excellent running backs," said Atha. "We're excited about what they can do, and we're counting on both of them to carry a big load this season."

With their contrasting running styles, the twosome form a combo that could be called the "The Bruiser and The Burner."

Ellis, a senior who has verbally committed to Wake Forest, likes to run over defenders; Collier is more likely to run right past them.

"They each bring different things to the table," said Atha, "and we like that."

The twosome is also expected to make an impact on defense, with both serving as starting linebackers.

Ellis (6-foot-2, 230 pounds) came into his own last season. He rushed for almost 600 yards and 10 TDs for the Tigers, who went 7-3 and finished one subregion win shy of qualifying for the playoffs.

"It's been fun to watch him progress," said Atha of Ellis, a four-year varsity player. "He's really become a good football player, and he's a team-first guy all the way. He's a quiet, humble kid who does whatever we need him to do."

Like Ellis, Collier (5-11, 185) is vastly talented and often requires gang tackling to be brought down.

"Patrick can fly. He's the fastest kid on the football team," said Atha. "And pound-for-pound, he's probably the strongest kid on our football team, too."

The presence of Ellis and Collier in the backfield will be a plus for new quarterback Patrick Wilson, who moves into the starting role this season after seeing some snaps in a backup role last

season. "Patrick has been in our system for a long time, and he has prepared himself well for taking the next step (as the starter)," said Atha. "He's a tough kid, and he understands the offense extremely well."

Atha said Wilson's top attributes are his football smarts and his leadership abilities.

"He's a good decision maker, and he really knows the game," said Atha. "On any given play, he can tell you what every player is supposed to be doing, and where they're supposed to be."

Wilson will direct an offense that features six returning starters, and a bevy of talented up-and-comers.

The Tigers are especially deep at slot-back, where Collie Powers, Trey Payne, Will Orr and Dylan Baker will all see plenty of action.

"All four of those kids can catch the football," said Atha. "With our offense, we have to stretch the field, and each of those four players give us a chance to do that."

Split ends Tyson Betts and Ben Jackson, both seniors, will likewise be vital to the Tigers' success this season.

Also lining up at that position will be juniors Connor Somerville, Fred Johnson, Chris Lowe, Rick O'Neal, and sophomore A.J. White.

"Most of our skill position players) have experience, and we're excited about that," said Atha.

Though Wilson will have a talented cast surrounding him, he'll have an inexperienced group directly in front of him. The Tigers have just three returning starters on the offensive line.

"In order for us to be suc-



Ken Caruthers / Rome News-Tribune

Darlington senior Derricus Ellis, who has committed to Wake Forest, rushed for 547 yards and 10 touchdowns last year.

cessful, the offensive line is going to have to jell," said Atha.

Senior Andrew Green is the linchpin of the line, Atha said.

"He's our unofficial captain up there," said Atha. "He's shown a lot of leadership, and the kids look to him."

Also supplying muscle in the trenches will be junior center Cleve Jackson, junior guard Ethan Ray, senior tackle Garrett Henderson, junior guard Thomas Craton and sophomore guard Alex Sentell.

Thad Mathis, Greg Jackson and Zach Meltzer will provide depth, Atha said.

"I don't care what kind of

offense you run, you're only going to be as successful as your offensive line allows you to be," said Atha. "And that's the message we've been sending those guys."

On defense, the Tigers have just four returning starters, but have talent and speed to spare.

Henderson and Andrew Green will start at defensive back, with Ray, Mathis and Craton also seeing time.

Patrick Pierson is expected to shine at linebacker, and will be supported by Sentell, Powers and Hunter Brooks.

Orr and Jackson will be the defensive ends, and will be flanked by a strong secondary that features Payne at free safety and Betts at cornerback.

Baker, Somerville, White, William Waters and Will Jones will also see time in the secondary.

The Tigers' kicking duties will be divided between Ben Jackson, who has won the punting job, and Justin Smith, who will handle the place-kicking responsibilities.

Smith, a senior, is an established soccer player, but has never before played football. The Darlington coaching staff convinced Smith to try out last spring.

"We're delighted to have him," said Atha.



Darlington head coach Tommy Atha feels the Tigers have a balanced run game this fall.

'In order for us to be successful, the offensive line is going to have to jell.'

Tommy Atha
Darlington head coach

PLAYERS TO WATCH



Darlington Tigers (from left) Derricus Ellis, Patrick Collier, Patrick Wilson and Trey Payne.

2007 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Chattooga
Sept. 7	at Cedartown
Sept. 14	at Dade County
Sept. 21	Bremen
Sept. 28	at Temple
Oct. 5	Armuchee
Oct. 12	at Pepperell
Oct. 19	Open
Oct. 26	Coosa
Nov. 2	at Model
Nov. 9	Rockmart

2007 ROSTER

1	Tev'n Hamilton	Fr.
2	Will Jones	So.
3	Jay Stephens	Fr.
4	Trey Payne	Sr.
5	Ben Jackson	Sr.
7	Derricus Ellis	Sr.
8	Milton Hancock	Fr.
9	Patrick Baker	Sr.
10	Dylan Baker	Jr.
11	Lex Vick	Fr.
12	Jack Kelly	Fr.
15	Luke Cook	Fr.
16	Nash Nance	So.
17	Patrick Pierson	Jr.
18	Preston Cobb	Fr.
20	Tre' Langston	Fr.
21	Malcolm Long	Fr.
22	Chris Lowe	Jr.
23	Tyson Betts	Sr.
24	Fred Johnson	Jr.
25	Will Orr	Jr.
26	Nick Mullen	Fr.
27	Collie Powers	Jr.
30	Thomas Sipp	So.
32	Christopher Griffin	Fr.
33	William Waters	Fr.
34	Russ Arnold	So.
35	Hunter Brooks	So.
36	Derek Walters	Fr.
37	Patrick Collier	Sr.
41	Ryan Major	So.
42	Isaac Nichols	Fr.
43	Tyler Slaughter	So.
44	Clay Phillips	So.
45	Ben Davidson	Fr.
47	Mac McCann	So.
50	Alex Sentell	So.
51	Ethan Ray	Jr.
52	Cleve Jackson	Jr.
54	Thad Mathis	So.
56	Thomas Craton	Jr.
58	Quinn Simon	Fr.
60	Charlie Breen	So.
61	Greg Jackson	Jr.
62	Garrett Henderson	Sr.
63	B.J. Slaughter	So.
64	Josh Land	Jr.
65	Blake Huether	Fr.
66	Knox Strickland	So.
67	Andrew Green	Sr.
72	Zach Meltzer	Sr.
75	Henderson Stegall	Fr.
80	Connor Somerville	Jr.
83	A.J. White	So.
84	Rick O'Neal	Jr.
86	Wale Desalu	So.
88	William Gilbert	Fr.
89	Justin Smith	Sr.

ALL-TIME STATE PREP SINGLE-SEASON RUSHING LEADERS

Name	School	Year	Yards	G
1. Daccus Turman	Wash.-Wilkes	2000	3,172	NA
2. Herschel Walker	Johnson Co.	1979	3,167	15
3. Micah Andrews	GAC	2002	2,871	15
4. Bra. Andrews	Swainsboro	2000	2,814	15
5. Ben Logue	North Springs	1981	2,776	14
6. Caleb King	Parkview	2005	2,768	13
7. Darryl Ogletree	Greenville	1980	2,648	15
8. Sidney Ford	Pepperell	1998	2,595	14
9. Charles Grant	Miller County	1997	2,530	13
10. Runt Moon	Commerce	1973	2,501	13
11. Don Calloway	Miller County	1999	2,493	14
12. Greg Williams	Metter	1982	2,483	14
13. Rod Perrymond	Dunwoody	1993	2,467	15
14. Eddie Dixon	E.C.I.	1982	2,465	12
15. Robert Toomer	Worth County	1991	2,440	14
16. Cameron Smith	Brookwood	2005	2,434	15
17. Travis Evans	WS-Macon	2003	2,423	14
18. Michael Hicks	Robert E. Lee	1991	2,413	14
19. Rod Armstrong	Brown	1990	2,410	15
20. Darius Walker	Buford	2003	2,406	15
21. Jermaine Austin	Mcln. Acad.	2000	2,400	14
22. Justin Forte	Walton	2004	2,395	14
23. Michael Perry	Americus	2002	2,384	14
24. James Davis	Douglass	2004	2,380	12
25. Robert Toomer	Worth County	1989	2,370	15

ALL-TIME STATE PREP SINGLE-SEASON PASSING LEADERS

Name	School	Year	Yards	G
1. Jeremy Privett	Charlton Co.	2003	3,710	15
2. Bryan Ellis	Peach Co.	2006	3,648	15
3. Wesley Hill	Crisp Co.	2001	3,351	13
4. Robert Johnson	Americus	2000	3,279	15
5. Chad Bryant	Dooly Co.	2003	3,245	14
6. Fabian Walker	Americus	1998	3,187	12
7. Mashard McKnight	Ware Co.	1999	3,101	11
8. Dwight Dasher	Charlton Co.	2005	3,091	15
9. Al Pinkins	Mitc.-Baker	1989	3,090	15
10. Cedric Johnson	Americus	2003	3,077	12
11. Tony Palgman	Wesleyan	2005	3,061	11
12. Tyler Horne	Newnan	2003	3,057	14
13. Zach Stanford	Metter	2003	3,029	13
14. Bradd Schlosser	N. Gwinnett	2004	2,946	12
15. Matt Wyrick	Norcross	1991	2,913	13
16. David Rooks	Carrollton	1997	2,863	15
17. Stan Bounds	Valdosta	1971	2,785	13
18. Zach Stanford	Metter	2002	2,757	15
19. Fabian Walker	Americus	1996	2,697	15
20. Eric Jones	SW DeKalb	1983	2,671	14
21. Brad Schlosser	N. Gwinnett	2005	2,658	11
22. Cedric Johnson	Americus	2002	2,623	14
23. Alex Mortensen	L. Christian	2003	2,210	13
24. Bryan Gauthreaux	Lassiter	1999	2,600	11
25. Mike Brinkley	Druid Hills	1985	2,585	11
26. Mike Johnson	Carrollton	1998	2,570	15



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