

2008 PIGSKIN PREVIEW



PEPPERELL

Dragons ID how to add to success

By Jim O'Hara
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There won't be any kind of identity crisis for the Pepperell High football team this year when it opens the 2008 season.

That problem, one the Dragons faced last year at this time with a new head coach and new faces in the lineup, was solved in remarkable fashion — a five-game win streak to end the 2007 schedule and a drive to the quarterfinals of the Class AA state playoffs.

Nope, identity isn't the issue this year for the Dragons, who are a strong favorite to make a run at the Region 7-AA championship and return to the postseason. Making sure that they get to the same point late in the season is.



Pepperell coach Jeff Shiflett took the Dragons to the state quarterfinals last season.

"Last year we tried to find an identity and it took a while," Jeff Shiflett, who enters his second season at the helm, said as the Dragons — they enter the new year ranked No. 7 in the Class AA state preseason poll — prepare for their season opener Friday night hosting Paulding County.

"But we're taking the same approach as we did last year, as we do every year," he said. "We'll take it one game at a time and go from there. You really can't afford to look too far ahead because too many things can happen."

"We've been trying to build on what we did last year, especially the second part of the season."

The foundation of that building is certainly there, with all but one starter from last year's offensive unit returning and seven starters on defense back.

Naturally, all eyes will be on the Dragons when they have the ball since every bit of the firepower they found in the latter half of the season of '08 is just as deadly with four players bringing back more than 3,000 yards of offense the team rolled up a year ago.

Senior Brandon Whitaker, a 2007 Rome News-Tribune All-Area selection, is the tip of the iceberg for the Dragons as the running back rushed for 1,576 yards and 20 touchdowns last fall.



File photo / Rome News-Tribune

Pepperell's Cameron Ball (from left), Brandon Whitaker and Jonathan Watters are part of a well-seasoned Dragons squad that could go a long way into the postseason again this year.

He is joined in the backfield by junior Marcus Jackson, who ran for more than 800 yards and 12 TDs, and fullback Logan Osborne, a hard-charger who hit as hard running the ball as he hits those carrying it as the Dragons' linebacker.

Back to press the fire button is junior quarterback Jonathan Watters, who by the end of the 2007 campaign became the main gun for the Dragons, throwing for nearly 700 yards and five touchdowns, two coming for the winning scores in Pepperell's 14-6 win over Rutland in the second round of the playoffs.

Kendric Cheeks and Rashan Smith give Pepperell two more starters at wide receiver, and Cameron Ball and Matt Kelley return as solid bookend tight ends up front.

Up front, however, is where Pepperell's heart and offensive soul is founded with five

veterans returning — 2007 All-Area and All-State pick Michael Ozment, Stephen Lewis, Zac Maddix, Jarvis Heath and Jesse Maynor.

Jonathan Shooks, who sat out last season after seeing action in 2006, adds potent depth in the backfield, Ben Lovingood, Blake Alvey and Gabriel Thomas are in the receiving corps picture, and Adam Green, Kyle Harris, Aaron Morgan and Adam Green should see snaps along the line.

"We have a very balanced offense," Shiflett said, "and we've got experience on the offensive line and at the skill positions. I feel we can be a very productive offense."

On the other side of the ball, Pepperell can produce the same kind of swarming defense that can keep teams in check and has three players who have proven it — Kelley, Osborne and Cheeks. All

were named All-Area performers last year.

Kelley returns as the lone starter to anchor the defensive front, with Lewis, Heath, Ozment and Jordan Ferguson expected to see action there as well.

Ball is back to start at one end, while Jacob Pledger and Austin Sanders are ready to step in at the other side of the line.

Osborne is joined by veteran teammate Aaron Nelson to back the line, and Shooks, Kelvin Harper and Derek Cook are in the linebacker picture as well.

The secondary is led by Cheeks, while Jackson, Lovingood, Alvey, Corbin Arnold, Tyren Weaver and Jordan Cook are ready to step into the defensive backfield.

"Running to the football — that's what we have to do to overcome our size difference," Shiflett said. "We play our techniques and run to the football."

And that, the coach keeps stressing, has to be one game at a time.

"We've got a very, very tough schedule," Shiflett said, "including three very tough opponents (Paulding County, Cedartown and Villa Rica) to open the season. The good thing is that we'll see a lot of different looks."

"You want to have high expectations," he added, "but at the same time you have to go day by day."

PLAYERS TO WATCH



Pepperell Dragons (from left) Matt Kelley, Logan Osborne, Michael Ozment and Brandon Whitaker

2008 SCHEDULE

Aug. 29	Paulding County
Sept. 5	at Cedartown
Sept. 12	Villa Rica
Sept. 19	Open
Sept. 26	at Gordon Central
Oct. 3	at Armuchee
Oct. 10	Temple
Oct. 17	Rockmart
Oct. 24	at Coosa
Oct. 31	at Model
Nov. 7	Region Playoff

2008 ROSTER

1	Ben Lovingood	So.
2	Kelvin Harper	Jr.
3	Caleb Freeman	So.
4	Gabriel Thomas	Sr.
5	Brandon Whitaker	Sr.
6	Corbin Arnold	So.
7	Rashan Smith	Sr.
8	Cameron Ball	Sr.
9	Kendric Cheeks	Sr.
10	Drew Hall	Fr.
11	Kyle Shiflett	Fr.
12	Jonathan Watters	Jr.
13	Jamarian Harper	Fr.
14	Favian Graham	Fr.
15	Nick Nelson	So.
16	Corey Ginn	Jr.
19	Jose Cruz	Sr.
20	Matthew Fuller	So.
21	Ryan Duncan	Fr.
22	Tyren Weaver	Jr.
23	Macon Huckaby	So.
24	Jonathan Shooks	Sr.
25	Marcus Jackson	Jr.
26	Anthony Dillard	So.
27	Dylan Wright	So.
28	Ben Hellriegel	So.
29	Jordan Cook	Sr.
30	Chris Wright	So.
32	Blake Alvey	Sr.
33	Logan Osborne	Sr.
34	Anthony Hancock	Fr.
35	Zach Gaylor	Fr.
36	Greg Smith	Fr.
37	Laderemy Fielder	Jr.
38	Levi Wood	Jr.
39	Mason Clark	Fr.
40	Nicky Borders	Fr.
41	Bryan Hancock	So.
42	Kolton Hennen	So.
43	Trey Jackson	Fr.
44	Dakota Ball	Fr.
45	Dillon Nails	Fr.
46	Cody Minter	So.
47	Derek Cook	Jr.
48	Cody Wheat	Fr.
49	Jacob Minter	Fr.
50	Jarvis Heath	So.
51	Mason Nelson	So.
52	Jacob Pledger	Sr.
53	Adam Green	So.
54	Aaron Nelson	Sr.
55	Tony Lane	Jr.
56	Logan Pruitt	So.
57	Jordan Ferguson	Sr.
58	Judson Whitfield	Jr.
59	Dylan Harmon	So.
60	Brenden Cash	So.
61	Zac Maddix	Jr.
62	Jesse Maynor	So.
63	Caleb Stutts	So.
64	Luke Tolbert	So.
65	Michael Ozment	Sr.
66	Shad Ferguson	Jr.
67	Corey Shiflett	Fr.
68	Aaron Morgan	Jr.
69	Dylan Ingle	Jr.
70	Kyle Harris	So.
71	Andrew Fednander	Fr.
72	B.J. Garrett	Fr.
73	R.J. Williams	Fr.
74	Hunter Parris	Fr.
75	Mikey Dowdy	So.
77	Jeremy Rittenhouse	Sr.
78	Brandon Treglow	Sr.
79	Stephen Lewis	Jr.
80	Luke Scoggins	Fr.
81	John Tucker	So.
82	Brad Boling	Fr.
83	Detrail North	Fr.
84	Zac Johnston	Sr.
85	Vorquis Williams	Fr.
86	Austin Sanders	Sr.
87	Chris Harris	Fr.
88	Zach Lampkin	Jr.
90	Matt Kelley	Sr.

2008 STATE HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL REGIONS

Class AAAAA Region 1-AAAAA Coffee Colquitt County Houston County Lowndes NS-Warner Robins Tift County Valdosta Warner Robins Region 2-AAAAA Douglas Greenbrier Luella M.L. King Newton Redan Stephenson Union Grove Region 3-AAAAA Beach Bradwell Institute Camden County Groves Jenkins Johnson, Savannah Savannah Windsor Forest **Sav. Arts Academy Region 4-AAAAA Chapel Hill Creekside East Coweta Lovejoy Morrow Mundy's Mill Newnan Pebblebrook Riverdale Westlake Region 5-AAAAA Cherokee East Paulding Etowah Harrison Kennesaw Mountain Marietta McEachern North Cobb South Cobb Woodstock Region 6-AAAAA Alpharetta Campbell Centennial Kell Lassiter Milton Pope Roswell Walton Wheeler Region 7-AAAAA Chattahoochee Collins Hill	Duluth Mill Creek Norcross North Forsyth North Gwinnett Northview Peachtree Ridge South Forsyth Region 8-AAAAA Berkmar Brookwood Central Gwinnett Dacula Grayson Meadowcreek Parkview Shiloh South Gwinnett Class AAAAA Region 1-AAAAA Americus-Sumter Bainbridge Hardaway Harris County Jones County Lee County Thomas Co. Central Upson-Lee Westside, Macon Region 2-AAAAA Brunswick Effingham County Glynn Academy South Effingham Statesboro Ware County Wayne County Region 3-AAAAA Butler Cross Creek Evans Glenn Hills Harlem Hephzibah Josey Lakeside, Evans Richmond Academy Westside, Augusta ** Davidson Fine Arts ** Johnson, Augusta Region 4-AAAAA Alcovy Dutchtown Forest Park Griffin Jonesboro Mt. Zion, Jonesboro North Clayton Ola Stockbridge Region 5-AAAAA A Subregion Fayette County McIntosh Northgate	Sandy Creek Starr's Mill Whitewater B Subregion Alexander Banneker Douglas County Lithia Springs Mays Tri-Cities Villa Rica Region 6-AAAA Chamblee Forsyth Central Lakeside, DeKalb Lithonia Marist Miller Grove North Springs Southwest DeKalb Stone Mountain Tucker Region 7-AAAA A Cass Dalton Murray County NWWhitfield Rome Sequoyah Woodland (Cart.) B Hillgrove Hiram North Paulding Osborne Paulding County South Paulding Sprayberry NR - Allatoona Region 8-AAAA Apalachee Cedar Shoals Clarke Central Habersham Central Heritage, Conyers Loganville Madison County Monroe Area Rockdale County Salem Winder-Barrow Class AAA Region 1-AAA Cairo Crisp County Dougherty Monroe, Albany Peach County Perry Westover Worth County Region 2-AAA Carver, Columbus Columbus	Kendrick LaGrange Northside, Columbus Shaw Troup Region 3-AAA Baldwin Burke County Liberty County Richmond Hill Thomson Washington County West Laurens Region 4-AAA Eagles Landing Jackson Mary Persons Rutland North Atlanta Southside Spalding Woodland (Stock) Woodward Academy Region 5-AAA A Subregion Cedar Grove Clarkston Columbia Druid Hills Dunwoody McNair Towers B Subregion Carver, Atlanta Grady North Atlanta Riverwood St. Pius Therrell Washington Region 6-AAA A Subregion Heritage, Catoosa Lafayette Lakeview, Ft. Ogle. Ridgeland Ringgold SE Whitfield B Subregion Cartersville Cedartown Central, Carroll Haralson County Region 7-AAA A Subregion Chestatee Creeksview Gilmer Lumpkin County North Hall Pickens White County	Manchester Pike County Spencer Region 6-AA Avondale Blessed Trinity Buford Cross Keys Decatur GACS Lovett Westminster Region 7-AA North Subregion Adairsville Calhoun Chattahoochee Co. Grenville Marion County Pacelli Schley County Stewart-Quitman Taylor County Webster County Region 5-A Eagles Landing Christ. Fellowship Christian Holy Innocents' Landmark Christian Mt. Pisgah Our Lady of Mercy Pace Academy SW Atlanta Christian Whitefield Academy NR - Mt. Paran Region 6-A Bowdon Bremen Darlington Gordon Lee Mt. Zion, Carroll Trion Walker NR - N. Cobb Chri. Region 7-A Aquinas Hancock Central Lincoln County Warren County Washington-Wilkes Wilkinson County NR - GMC NR - Glascock Co. Region 8-A Athens Academy Athens Christian Commerce Lakeview Academy Prince Ave. Christian Social Circle Wesleyan NR - Hebron Chri. NR - Towns County	Savannah Christian Sav. Country Day West Subregion Emanuel County Inst. Jenkins County Johnson County Metter Montgomery County Treulien Wheeler County Region 4-A Brookstone Central, Talbotton Chattahoochee Co. Greenville Marion County Pacelli Schley County Stewart-Quitman Taylor County Webster County Region 5-A Eagles Landing Christ. Fellowship Christian Holy Innocents' Landmark Christian Mt. Pisgah Our Lady of Mercy Pace Academy SW Atlanta Christian Whitefield Academy NR - Mt. Paran Region 6-A Bowdon Bremen Darlington Gordon Lee Mt. Zion, Carroll Trion Walker NR - N. Cobb Chri. Region 7-A Aquinas Hancock Central Lincoln County Warren County Washington-Wilkes Wilkinson County NR - GMC NR - Glascock Co. Region 8-A Athens Academy Athens Christian Commerce Lakeview Academy Prince Ave. Christian Social Circle Wesleyan NR - Hebron Chri. NR - Towns County
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Best Wishes & Good Luck To All Our Area Schools in the 2008 Season!

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www.NoPlanBMinistries.com
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NR - Indicates playing non-region schedule.
** Indicates team not playing varsity football.