

2008 PIGSKIN PREVIEW



ROME

Seasoned Wolves seek pack leader

By David Dawson
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There is no doubt that Rome High running backs P.J. Green and Reggie Whatley — who combined for more than 2,400 rushing yards last season — will be getting the football with great regularity this season.

The big question is: Who is going to get the ball to them?

For the first time in three seasons, the Wolves reached the final stages of the preseason without a clear-cut starter at quarterback.

The Rome coaching staff spent much of the summer trying to choose between junior Malcolm Watkins and senior Jamalcolm Griffin, both of whom appear ready to step in and fill the void created by the graduation of Cory Thacker.

“We think we’ve got a couple of kids who are more than capable of driving our offense,” said head coach Sid Fritts, whose team starts the season ranked No. 5 in the Class AAAA preseason poll. “(But) we’d prefer not to go with two quarterbacks. Our plan is to settle on one guy.”

The Wolves, coming off a 10-2-1 season that ended with a loss to Northside-Warner Robins in the quarterfinals of the Class AAAA state playoffs, are not accustomed to having competition at quarterback.

Thacker had provided stability at the position since taking over as the starter at the midway point of the 2005 season.

“We got spoiled with Cory back there,” said Fritts of Thacker, who is now at Armstrong Atlantic on a baseball scholarship. “But it’s up to someone else now.”

Fritts said if Griffin wins the quarterback job, Watkins will be used at wide receiver — or vice versa. He also said both players had shining moments at QB in the preseason.

“One of them would look real good one week, and the other would look real good the next week,” he said.

Aside from the uncertainty at quarterback, the Wolves will have experienced players at most positions as they prepare for the rigors of the now-subdivided Region 7-

AAAA. They have 15 returning starters — nine on defense and six on offense — from last year’s team that finished second in 7-AAAA after winning region titles in each of the previous six seasons.

The list of returnees includes Green, Whatley and Van Calhoun, three of the most gifted players in the region.

Green, a senior fullback, rushed for 1,452 yards and scored more than 20 touchdowns last season.



Rome coach Sid Fritts has 15 starters back this season, but must fill a void at quarterback.

“P.J. is a guy who knows where to look for holes, and what to do when he sees them,” said Fritts. “We are very fortunate to have him.”

Whatley, a tailback, rushed for 980 yards despite missing one game with an injury. He is also among the most dangerous kick returners in the state.

And then there’s Calhoun, a ferocious player who has earned the nicknames “The Hammer” and “Vanimal.”

Although he will be used in some formations on offense, he is at his best on the other side of the ball.

“He is a defensive player,” said Fritts. “That’s what he loves to do. That’s his game.”

Calhoun, an All-Area selection last year, has endeared himself to Rome fans by playing with tremendous energy and delivering bone-rattling hits that get talked about for weeks.

“(Former NFL star) Lawrence Taylor used to say that he played linebacker like he was the only player on the field,” said Fritts. “Well, that describes Van.”

In addition to Whatley, Green and Calhoun, the Wolves will also count on Desmond Clark, Deonte Dennis, Stephen Washington (a transfer from Coosa) and Teddy Lawrence to share



File photo / Rome News-Tribune

Rome senior running back P.J. Green, who rushed for more than 1,400 yards last year, spearheads the Wolves’ offense.

the rushing load.

“We’ve got a stable of guys who can run to the ball,” said Fritts.

At wide receiver, the Wolves will be looking to replace Terrell Burley, who ranks second on the school’s all-time list in career receiving yards and career touchdowns, and also ranks second in single-season TDs and yards.

“Terrell did a lot of things for this football team,” said Fritts, “but we’ve got some guys who stepped forward this summer.”

The list includes Demonte Key, Stephen Gaylor and Josh Wells.

At tight end, the Wolves will turn to Drew Pearson, who previously played tackle, along with Jovon Jackson and David Creamer.

On the offensive line, the starters will likely be Trey Packard (guard), DeMarcus Dean (guard), Zac Jones (center) and Damien Goosby (tackle). Either Richard Booth or Brandon Glanton will take the other tackle position.

Also working the trenches will be Antonio Hall, John Seabolt, Jamarious Adams and Diamon Williams.

The defensive line will feature Creamer, Jackson, Adams, Goosby, along with Pearson, Hall, Caleb Morang, Williams and Zac Poole.

At linebacker, the returnees will be Calhoun, Dennis and Sean Barton. Also seeing time at linebacker will be Robbie Murdock, Talmadge Hodges, Washington, Lawrence, and possibly, Green.

In the secondary, the Wolves will mix and match with a group that includes Dennis, Griffin, Gaylor, Clark, Watkins, Wells, and Whatley.

Conor Young returns as the Wolves’ place-kicker.

“He got better and better each week last season,” said Fritts, “and has improved his leg strength even more this year.”

Either Young or Gaylor will likely take the punting responsibilities.

PLAYERS TO WATCH



Rome Wolves (from left) Sean Barton, Van Calhoun, P.J. Green and Reggie Whatley.

2008 SCHEDULE

Aug. 29	at East Paulding
Sept. 5	at Hillgrove
Sept. 12	Paulding County
Sept. 19	at Cass
Sept. 26	Sequoyah
Oct. 3	at Woodland
Oct. 10	Murray County
Oct. 17	at Northwest Whitfield
Oct. 24	Dalton
Oct. 31	Open
Nov. 7	Region Playoff

2008 ROSTER

1	Josh Wells	Jr.
2	Stephen Gaylor	Jr.
3	Drew Pearson	Jr.
4	Jamie Cooper	Fr.
5	Deonte Dennis	Jr.
6	Sean Barton	Sr.
7	Jamalcolm Griffin	Sr.
9	Van Calhoun	Sr.
10	Kenneth Hood	Fr.
11	John Latham	Sr.
12	Chad Barton	Fr.
13	Frank Rousso-Leasi	So.
15	Malcolm Watkins	Jr.
16	Desmond Clark	Sr.
17	T.J. Houston	So.
18	Tim Johnson	Fr.
19	Jamal Reynolds	Fr.
20	Demonte Key	Sr.
21	Teddy Lawrence	So.
22	Justin Beasley	So.
23	Jordan McClure	Fr.
24	Reggie Whatley	Jr.
25	Stephen Washington	Sr.
27	Fred Carmichael	Fr.
28	Stephen Mosley	Fr.
29	Desmond Dupree	Fr.
30	Conor Young	Sr.
31	Ladrell Cammon	Fr.
32	D.J. Milner	So.
33	John Allen	So.
36	P.J. Green	Sr.
38	Robbie Murdock	Sr.
39	Talmadge Hodges	So.
40	David Creamer	So.
43	Steven Walker	Fr.
44	C.J. Diamond	So.
45	Joe Claytor	Fr.
48	Dion Wade	Fr.
50	Taylor Williams	Fr.
51	Jamarious Adams	Jr.
52	Trey Packard	Sr.
54	David Holbrook	Fr.
56	DeMarcus Dean	Jr.
57	Dorsey Wyatt	Fr.
58	Devonte Jones	So.
60	Antonio Hall	Jr.
61	Darice Parks	So.
62	Jonathan Hull	So.
63	John Seabolt	Jr.
64	Zac Poole	So.
65	Dontre Johnson	So.
66	Cameron Richardson	Fr.
67	Caleb Morang	So.
68	Brandon Glanton	Jr.
69	Daimon Williams	Sr.
70	Zac Jones	Sr.
71	Damien Goosby	Sr.
73	Richard Booth	Sr.
74	Ant Reynolds	So.
80	David Sims	Fr.
81	Austin Butler	Fr.
84	Desmond Scott	Fr.
86	Parker Branton	Fr.
89	Jovon Jackson	Jr.

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ON THE COVER

Rome High coach Sid Fritts (from left), Calhoun coach Hal Lamb, Pepperell coach Jeff Shifflett and Darlington coach Tommy Atha hope their teams can make it to the state title game at the Georgia Dome this year.

Photo illustration by Ryan Smith and Lee Field

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Prep Central remains the home for all things high school sports for Northwest Georgia and Northeast Alabama.

The Web site, <http://www.prepcentralonline.com>, has coverage of all the teams covered by News Publishing Company papers.

It also serves as the home for Gridiron Central, the weekly vodcast covering all things high school football.

The site boasts stories, photos, slideshows, polls, forums, blogs, videos, calendars and more.

Fans can comment on stories, blogs and even post to forums.

Content is updated daily from the Rome News-Tribune, Walker County Messenger, Catoosa County News, Calhoun Times, Rockmart Journal, Cedartown Standard and Cherokee County Herald sports staffs.

Every sport and local team has its own dedicated page. Videos covering high school sports are produced throughout the week.

Gridiron Central highlights shows posts to Prep Central on Saturday afternoon, and the new Wednesday preview

show posts to Prep Central on Wednesday afternoon.

The shows feature highlights of games, commentary from sportswriters, band highlights, top plays and more each week.

Prep Central also plays host to two contests this season with a football pick-em contest and a Battle of the Bands contest.

The pick-em contest allows local fans to test their football prognosticating skills against NPCo sportswriters to see who truly knows their high school football.

The pick-em contest kicks off with the first week of regular season play on August 29.

The Battle of the Bands contest launches later this season with fans having the chance to vote on who they think is the best band in the coverage area.

Have a great season!

Unity National Bank wishes each of our local teams the very best for a successful 2008 season, and we applaud the efforts of players, coaches, band members, cheerleaders and more who make this a special time of year.

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