

2008 PIGSKIN PREVIEW



DARLINGTON

New class, region to test the Tigers

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Darlington football coach Tommy Atha is sounding the warning bell to those in Purple Tiger Nation.

Atha, entering his seventh season at the helm, is doing his best to dispel any notion that the Tigers will have an easy road this season just because they've dropped down one classification, from Class AA to A.

"I don't think the competition will be any less this year than we've been seeing," said Atha of the Tigers, who are joining Region 6-A after spending nearly a decade in the AA ranks. "Just look at the teams in our region. ... It's going to be tough."

To validate his stance on the topic, Atha points to last season's loss to Region 6-A member Bremen.

It was one of only three defeats suffered by the Tigers, who advanced to the second round of the AA playoffs before losing to eventual state champ Buford.

"You'd have to consider them (Bremen) to be the favorite in our region," said Atha. "Plus, you've got Gordon Lee, which has things going well, and Bowdon, which always has a good program."

"Then there's Trion, and they're going to get better and better under their new coaching staff, and Mt. Zion, which is going in the right direction, too. So, top to bottom, it's a good region."

Atha said his players are looking forward to the switch to 6-A.

"I think the thing they are most excited about is playing some new opponents and traveling to some different places," he said.

The Tigers will indeed be hitting some new spots on the map — and putting some extra miles on the team's bus. Simple cross-town trips will no longer be a weekly ritual, especially after region play begins.

But Atha said the longer-than-normal rides won't be a distraction.

"Yes, our travel (distances) will change a little bit," he said, "but I don't think it's that big of an issue. It's all about how you handle it, and our kids have been on long bus rides before."

Atha's team will wade into the waters of 6-A with just

nine returning starters from last year's team — four on offense and five on defense.

"We're going to be young," said Atha of the Tigers, who open the season with a non-region game at Chattooga, "and we'll have a lot of new guys on the field who haven't played much at the varsity level."

The Tigers will, however, have experience in the backfield, where quarterback Nash Nance and fullbacks Will Orr and Collie Powers form a dangerous trio.

Nance, a junior, got a couple of starters under his belt last season when former quarterback Patrick Wilson was injured.

In the past six months, Nance has come into his own, and is popping up on the radars of numerous college programs.

"Nash has had a tremendous summer, and we're certainly excited about his progress," said Atha. "We're counting on him to be a leader."

Orr and Powers, both seniors, were key contributors to Darlington's rushing game last year, and are expected to do the same this year while replacing Derricus Ellis (now at Wake Forest).

Orr and Powers will also be the Tigers' starting inside linebackers, which demonstrates the duo's grit.

"Will is a big, tough kid, and is one of the hardest workers on this football team," said Atha. "And Collie is a guy who does a lot for this football team. He will play slotback for us when he's not at fullback."

Dylan Baker will also get his share of touches from his slot-back position, as will Tylon Garrett and Tyler Slaughter.

At split end, A.J. White and



File photo / Rome News-Tribune

Darlington senior Collie Powers is one of several returning Tigers who will be counted upon on both sides of the ball.

Chris Lowe are slated to start, and will likely be Nance's go-to targets. Jay Stephens, Will Waters, and Rick O'Neal provide depth at that position.

The Tigers offensive line features Cleve Jackson at center, with Ethan Ray at right

guard and Alex Sentell at left guard. The starting tackles will be Greg Jackson and Thad Mathis.

Also seeing time up front will be Blake Huether, Arthur Pollard, Thomas Craton, Gavin Lawrence, and Will Lester.

The defensive line will feature Mathis, Cleve Jackson, Ray and Craton. Watch for Greg Jackson, Lawrence, Sentell and Pollard to play up front, too.

At linebacker, Orr and Powers will work the inside spots, with Baker and William Waters on the outside. Christopher Griffin, Russ Arnold, Slaughter and Garrett will likewise see minutes at linebacker.

The secondary will feature O'Neal and A.J. White at the corners, and freshman Shaquille Calhoun at safety. Stephens, Tev'n Hamilton, and Lee Couch will also see time at the cover positions for the Tigers.

Ben Davidson will be the punter, and might handle the placekicking duties, too. He and Connor McWhorter were battling for the kicking job in the preseason.

All told, the Tigers had 64 players on the active roster in early August, an increase of about 10 players from recent years.

"I think that says something about the excitement (surrounding) the program," said Atha.



Darlington coach Tommy Atha and the Tigers return to the Region 6-A ranks this year.

'I don't think the competition will be any less this year than we've been seeing.'

Tommy Atha
Darlington head coach

PLAYERS TO WATCH



Darlington Tigers (from left) Cleve Jackson, Nash Nance, Will Orr and Collie Powers.

ALL-TIME STATE PREP SINGLE SEASON RUSHING LEADERS

Name	School	Yr.	Yds.	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. Brandon Andrews	Swainsboro	2000	2,814	15
5. Ben Logue	N. 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 Co.	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	ECI	1982	2,465	12
15. Robert Toomer	Worth Co.	1991	2,440	14
16. Cameron Smith	Brookwood	2005	2,434	15
17. Travis Evans	WS-Macon	2003	2,423	14
18. Michael Hicks	R. 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	McIntosh Co.	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 Co.	1989	2,370	15

ALL-TIME STATE PREP SINGLE SEASON PASSING LEADERS

Name	School	Yr.	Yds.	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. Mas. McKnight	Ware Co.	1999	3,101	11
8. Dwight Dasher	Charlton Co.	2005	3,091	15
9. Al Pinkins	Mitch.-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 Mortenson	Landmark	2003	2,210	13
24. Bryan Gauthreaux	Lassiter	1999	2,600	11
25. Clyde Pellis	Americus	2001	2,589	15

2008 SCHEDULE

Aug. 29	at Chattooga
Sept. 5	Wesleyan
Sept. 12	at Ridgeland
Sept. 19	Murphy, N.C.
Sept. 26	at Bowdon
Oct. 3	Walker
Oct. 10	at Bremen
Oct. 17	Open
Oct. 24	Mt. Zion, Carroll
Oct. 31	at Gordon Lee
Nov. 7	Trion

2008 ROSTER

1	Tev'n Hamilton	So.
2	Will Jones	Jr.
3	Jay Stephens	So.
5	Malcolm Long	So.
7	Trey Langston	So.
8	Milton Hancock	So.
9	Shaquille Calhoun	Fr.
10	Dylan Baker	Sr.
11	Lex Vick	So.
12	Tylon Garrett	Jr.
14	Lee Couch	So.
15	Luke Cook	So.
16	Nash Nance	Jr.
18	Preston Cobb	So.
20	Cameron Gibson	Fr.
21	Jack Kelly	So.
22	Chris Lowe	Sr.
23	Jake Stevens	So.
24	Cedric Spivey	Fr.
25	Will Orr	Sr.
26	Nick Mullen	So.
27	Collie Powers	Sr.
28	Spencer Jones	Fr.
30	Ivy Duggan	Fr.
32	Christopher Griffin	So.
33	William Waters	Jr.
34	Hunter Brooks	Jr.
36	Derek Walters	So.
37	Russ Arnold	So.
42	Isaac Nichols	So.
43	Tyler Slaughter	Jr.
44	Clay Phillips	Jr.
47	Connor McWhorter	Sr.
50	Alex Sentell	Jr.
51	Ethan Ray	Sr.
52	Cleve Jackson	Sr.
53	Luke Maffett	Fr.
54	Thad Mathis	Jr.
55	John Cheung	So.
56	Thomas Craton	Sr.
57	Banks Mattingly	So.
58	Matt Goldin	Fr.
60	Charlie Breen	Jr.
61	Greg Jackson	Sr.
62	Arthur Pollard	So.
63	Gavin Lawrence	Fr.
64	Josh Land	Sr.
65	Blake Huether	So.
66	Knocks Strickland	Jr.
67	BJ Slaughter	So.
70	Michael Williams	Fr.
71	Quinn Simon	So.
75	Henderson Stegall	So.
77	Chase Tolbert	Fr.
78	David Stelly	So.
80	Richard Chang	Jr.
83	AJ White	Jr.
84	Rick O'Neal	Sr.
86	Xaiver Welch	Fr.
87	Ben Davidson	So.
88	William Gilbert	So.
89	Lucas Jennings	So.
90	Ryan Webster	So.

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