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Newark preview

Wildcats work diligently on fundamentals of game

BY JOSH HACHAT • SPORTS WRITER • AUGUST 20, 2008

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NEWARK -- A typical Newark practice includes eight tackling stations, an obvious example of coach Jeff Buchanan's strong belief in practicing perhaps the most fundamental part of the game.

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It's also an indication of what has needed the bulk of the attention this offseason.

"All summer we've been working on tackling," senior quarterback Rahlin Watson said. "Coach Buchanan takes a lot of pride in tackling, and that's something we'll build on throughout the season."

There's good reason for the endless work, too.

In 2007, Newark's defense was battered and beat up by more physical opponents and the end result was a second straight 4-6 season. A number of situations -- from players being forced to play out of position because of injury or lack of depth to relying on players who were a year away -- led to

the defense's demise, and it was a major struggle most of the season.

Opponents averaged 41 points in five of Newark's six losses, and in at least two of those games the scoring could have been more frequent had the game not already been out of hand.

But things appear to be changing. Buchanan's no-nonsense approach to defense and tackling has helped, along with a new mind-set the Wildcats hope to display throughout the season.



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Newark senior quarterback Rahl before Hilliard Davidson defensive Friday night's scrimmage. (Jerid

NEWARK AT A GLANCE

Coach: Jeff Buchanan (first year)

State classification: Division I,

League: Ohio Capital Conferenc

Last year: 4-6, 1-4

Offense: Multiple

Defense: 40

What to expect: Buchanan certainly turning around programs considered a job at Watkins Memorial. Newark's shambles, but some things need to be fixed in seasons. In 2007, there were significant defenses and opponents often rely on big gains. A strict attention to de

"We have to practice aggressive," Buchanan said. "The tackling stations are live and they are aggressive. The kids know how important that is to us.

"We have two coaches at every station and your technique had better be right -- and you're still a wonderful kid -- but you're not going to play."

Even players knew it was an aspect that needed work, but all have bought into Buchanan's style and methods. It served him well at Watkins Memorial and Newark Catholic, and senior Taylor Huffman said there's been an infusion of energy with Buchanan's arrival.

With that has come increased expectations for a defense that was much-maligned in 2007.

"We just really need teamwork," Huffman said. "We've got a lot of guys that get along."

Huffman will be one of the key players defensively, but there is talent around him, including a Division I prospect in lineman Dannell Smith. Other seniors who are expected to have strong seasons defensively include linebackers Ross Matheny, Josh Abshire, Tim Williams, Brach Polen; lineman Cody Kiger, Nic Barber and Spencer Satterfield; and Mat Ehrhardt in the secondary.

Buchanan sees the same potential in an offense that scored more than 14 points once in league play in 2007. Watson steps in at quarterback, and Buchanan is excited about his running and throwing capabilities.

Williams will see the bulk of the carries, and receiver Lavelle Spivey could have a breakout season.

"I've been very happy with Lavelle's play for us," Buchanan said. "Rahlin's thrown the ball very well and accepted that leadership role.

Newark will be tested early. It hosts rival Zanesville a year after the Blue Devils pounded the Wildcats 32-6, and a revamped Ohio Capital Conference-Ohio Division will include Pickerington Central, Lancaster, Gahanna and Groveport.

"We want to be on the attack on offense and on the attack on defense," Buchanan said.

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Wildcats thinking that will change physical in their last scrimmage. getting Division I looks, and the c with quarterback Rahlin Watson, and receiver Lavelle Spivey.

Buchanan says: "I've never gor or coach not thinking I was going arrogance, but if you have done better go in expecting to win."

GAMEBREAKER: RAHLIN WA

Year: Senior

Number: 7

Position: Quarterback

Statistics: In a multi-purpose ro receiving yards and three touch

Why he matters: Watson will be and coach Jeff Buchanan said a Watson has a strong throwing ar elusiveness make him a threat t

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