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2021

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Friday Night Football is back with four of six teams vying for playoffs

BY STEVE LEE
Sports Reporter

No team faced more adversity last season than Zephyrhills, which began the season late due to being hit with coronavirus cases and missed the first two games. No problem for the Bulldogs, who made it to the region semifinals, advancing further than any of the six high school football teams in our coverage area.

This fall, no less than four teams are viable playoff contenders. Zephyrhills Christian Academy, Wiregrass Ranch and resurgent Cypress Creek are the others. Meanwhile, Pasco and Wesley Chapel are on the right track, but still in the rebuilding mode nonetheless.

Unlike last season when preseason classics were cancelled by the Florida High School Athletic Association as the coronavirus pandemic

Right: Ethan Ayo closes in on the River Ridge quarterback during the Pirates' preseason game.

Below: Willie Queen ran back the opening kickoff for 57 yards, which led to an early field goal in Zephyrhills' 16-12 season-opening win over Lakeland Kathleen.

showed signs of waning, five of our six teams played preseason games. Zephyrhills, burdened by a player testing positive for the virus and having about a dozen players to quarantine, opted out of a three-way exhibition hosted by Zephyrhills Christian that included Gainesville Buchholz.

While folks at Zephyrhills and Zephyrhills Christian have been clamoring for a matchup in recent years, a game between those schools that might just kick off a city rivalry will have to wait for another year at least. As for the other schools, this marks the fourth straight year of *The Zephyrhills News* featuring six teams in our annual football preview tab.

Zephyrhills faced the toughest foe to kick off the season by traveling to Lakeland to take on perennial contender Kathleen. Regardless of that outcome, however, the Bulldogs are a solid pick to make the playoffs for the seventh time in eight years.

Coach Nick Carroll said the team's goal is to play in a region final, going one step further than last season. He might just

have enough talent and depth for the senior-laden Bulldogs to do just that.

Zephyrhills Christian has a fighting chance of keeping its winning tradition intact. Having won two state championships in six-man football, the Warriors should make it five consecutive postseason appearances as an 11-man team.

That is, of course, if the quarterback situation gets straightened out. Adrian Miller III, a transfer from Bishop McLaughlin, had to miss the preseason game after coach Mike Smith got a call from the FHSAA five hours before game time. If he cannot play, the Warriors might have to rely on an eighth-grader at quarterback, which might not bode well for extending that playoff streak.



Right: Demetri Whitehead takes down a Gainesville Buchholtz runner during the pre season.

Below: The Wesley Chapel Wildcats take the field for their road opener at Sunlake.



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Wiregrass Ranch routinely has the toughest schedule of any Pasco County team due to being classified in 7A with Hillsborough County foes. Still, the Bulls have five straight playoff berths and are balanced enough on offense and tough enough on defense to extend that mark to six.

Quarterback Rocco Becht, son of former Tampa Bay Buccaneer tight end Anthony Becht, and highly touted receiver Bryson Rodgers, along with running backs Kenny Walker and Corneil Mcrary, give the Bulls a multi-faceted offense. The defense is anchored by a solid secondary.

Cypress Creek could have its best season in school history. The fifth-year Coyotes, who won just three times last season, moved up to Class 5A and will be put to the test with tough opponents like Zephyrhills, Mitchell and Tampa Catholic.

The Coyotes have one of the area's best quarterbacks in Owen Walls. The second-year starter has three talented targets in Dernere Jones, Dontrell Clerkeley and Merrick Simmons, to go along with solid tight end Dylan Lolley.

As for our other two teams, Wesley Chapel, which has had back-to-back 5-5 seasons, is likely to be in the middle of the pack once again. While the Wildcats look to place more of an emphasis on running the ball this year, the defense should be improved thanks to talented linebacker Jordan McCaslin, a Division I prospect.

As for Pasco, the team that once made eight straight playoff appearances, has struggled in recent years. While not expected to be a playoff contender there could be some improvement. The first winning season since 2014 is not out of the question for the Pirates, led by third-year coach Jason Stokes. Sportswriters Steve Lee and Andy Warrener will cover these teams throughout the season.

Other contributions for this tab come from advertising sales manager Theresa LeBlanc, graphic designer Nancy King, accounting manager Cindy DeMatteo, receptionist Wendy McElroy, circulation manager James Bannon and, of course, owner/publisher Jan Linville.



Zephyrhills Bulldog varsity cheer team.



Wiregrass Ranch has four seniors on this year's cheerleading squad. They are Ella Peckham, Chloe Gilligan, Alexis Burns and Kelli Helton.

Zephyrhills Bulldog junior varsity cheer team.



Wesley Chapel Wildcat cheer team.



Zephyrhills Christian Academy varsity cheer team.



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2021 ZEPHYRHILLS BULLDOGS

Bulldogs have a habit of playing in the postseason and this year should be no different

By *STEVE LEE*
Sports Reporter

Fostering team camaraderie is something Zephyrhills football coach Nick Carroll is big on. Getting the community behind the Bulldogs, he reasons, are among several ways to fire up his players.

That's why Carroll got with former Zephyrhills standout Damien Pickett this summer to conduct a coaching session for the Zephyrhills Athletic League program run by Pickett. Togetherness like that also is why this year's team is confident about competing in the postseason for what would be the seventh time in the past eight years.

The Bulldogs have plenty of experience, talent and depth not only to make the playoffs, but to win at that level. Last season, they won a district championship and advanced to a Class 5A region semifinal, eventually losing to Orlando Jones in that round. That loss, coupled with many seniors recalling a non-playoff season when they were sophomores, provides the team with plenty of motivation for this year.

"The bar's set high. They're hungry," Carroll said. Moreover, the players are well aware of how important it is to have home playoff games. Last year's elimination loss came on the road.

"Now that they've been there, they understand about having to travel for a playoff game," the coach said. "Our goal is to get in a region final. We want to be district champions every year and give ourselves an opportunity to make a run."

To do so Zephyrhills aims to improve its passing game. Second year quarterback Jaxson Rivera, a senior who last year took

over early for T.J. Jackson, passed for 724 yards and 11 touchdowns.

"We want to throw the ball more this year," Carroll said. "Last year we ran the ball more because of the change of quarterbacks."

Rivera will have plenty of targets in Jackson, Maguire Neal, Ben Raines, Jacobe Campbell L.J. Graham and Maddox Rivera, Jaxson's brother.

"Any one of those kids are talented enough to make plays and give the quarterback an opportunity to put some numbers up."

Carroll liked what he saw in the passing game during this summer's 7-on-7 tournaments against various teams throughout the Tampa Bay area. He also liked the running game. Gone is Zyre Roundtree, who gained nearly 2,000 yards over the past two seasons. Sharing the load in the backfield this season will be Jaylin Thomas, Willie Queen and Nick Sheldon.

Carroll implied that the offense will mix it up with multiple formations. The skill players will be running and passing behind solid blockers Kamil Mehrab, Gabe Coveny and Damon McMullan. Add Nick Patrias, who moves over from guard to center, Blake Yearby, Xavier Salgado and Christian Velasquez to the mix.

While the Bulldogs propose to improve their passing game, they have a strong secondary to shut down opposing quarterbacks choosing to attack through the air. Sheldon and Tymar Mckever are solid safeties and the

top cornerbacks are Marcell Tucker, Jeremiah Bland and Campbell.

The linebacking corps is versatile enough to line up in several formations, equally adept at dropping back into pass coverage as they are coming up and joining the pass rush. Neal and Graham are strong on the outside with Theotis Smith manning the middle and directing traffic.

On the defensive line are Coveny, Mahrab Velasquez and, occasionally, Neal. Several offensive linemen are sure to switch over on defense to stave off runs and rush the passer as well.

In the kicking game, Jackson will handle the punting duties while Jaxson Rivera will kick extra points and field goals. Carroll is hopeful that Christian Clemens will be able to step up and contribute on extra points and field goals, which would give Rivera a break.

Zephyrhills missed its preseason scrimmage at Zephyrhills Christian Academy due to some players having to quarantine. The Bulldogs also got off to a delayed start last season, missing the first two games due to the coronavirus pandemic, but then won eight straight before the playoff loss in Orlando.

2021 ZEPHYRHILLS BULLDOGS



— schedule

Home games in CAPS. Start time is 7:30 p.m.

Last season: 9-3
District: Class 5A, District 9
Coach: Nick Carroll, sixth season.
Assistants: Raleigh Allen, Matt Jackson, Pat Fortunato, Tom McHugh

DATE	OPPONENT
Aug. 27	at Kathleen
Sept. 3	HERNANDO
Sept. 10	at Fivay
Sept. 17	at Wesley Chapel
Oct. 1	WEEKI WACHEE
Oct. 8	WIREGRASS RANCH
Oct. 15	at Cypress Creek
Oct. 22	at Nature Coast Tech
Oct. 29	HUDSON
Nov. 5	PASCO



The Zephyrhills wide receivers lined up for a group photo on media day.

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2021 ZEPHYRHILLS BULLDOGS

varsity roster



No.	Player	Position	Year
1	TJ Jackson	QB	12
2	Ben Raines	WR, S	11
3	Jaylin Thomas	RB, CB	12
5	Maddox Rivera	WB, S	11
6	Tymar Mckever	WR, FS	12
7	Jaxson Rivera	QB, K	12
8	Christian Clemens	K	11
8	Raleigh Allen	WR, QB	12
9	Jakobe Campbell		10
10	Theotis Smith	MLB, TE	12
11	Dalton King	WR, C	12
12	Rodney Smith	MLB, TB	10
13	Maquire Neal	DE, SB	12
14	Nick Sheldon	RB, SS	12
16	Willie Queen	TB	12
19	Xavier Garraway	WR	12
20	Marcell Tucker	CB, WR	11
21	Isiah Porter	CB	11
22	Lawrence Graham	LB, TE	11
26	Gabe Mathis	WR, CB	11

No.	Player	Position	Year
27	Levi Smith	LB, C	11
28	Teddy Sands	WR	10
28	Rashawn Searight		11
30	Donovan Couch	OLB	11
33	Davion Bartley		12
35	Vikai Dexter	DE, TE	10
42	Jeremiah Bland		11
45	Tynan Lacure		11
50	Blake Yearby	C, MLB	11
51	Nick Patrias	C, DL	12
61	Xavier Salgado	G	11
62	Logan Lagrone		10
64	Gabe Coveny	T, DT	11
66	Kamil Mehrab	T, DE	12
72	Christian Velasquez		10
75	Damon McMillian	G	10
76	Annaleese Thomas	T	12
77	Caleb Durham		11
80	Izaha Kyle		11



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Smothered in country sausage gravy, served with mashed potatoes and gravy, and your choice of one additional side. (serves 4-6)

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2021 PASCO PIRATES

Pirates possible playoff contenders in head coach Stokes' third season

By **ANDY WARRENER**
Sports Reporter

Head coach Jason Stokes took over a Pasco football program in 2019, after a disastrous denouement from the otherwise legendary career of Tom McHugh. While their 4-9 record in 2019 was a losing record, the 27-9 win at Zephyrhills was earth-shattering or at least east Pasco County shattering victory. Reality set in during the 2020 season. Injuries and COVID-19 challenged the Pirates in many ways. They managed to improve their record to 6-6 and even win a playoff game against Lecanto but the 9-Mile War turned against them as the Bulldogs thumped them 21-0.

The 2021 season is Stokes's third. Stokes is now the author of the Pasco Pirates with the previous coach's fingerprints all but wiped off of the current team. It's time for the Pirates to shine under Stokes. Will they?

Similar challenges

The 2021 Pirates will face the same challenges that last year's team did. The injury bug has already bitten the 2021 team. Jayvon Balmir was looking to be one of the Pirates's top threats in the backfield until a knee injury during 7-on-7 competition robbed him of the entirety of the Fall season.

"That was a big blow," Stokes said. "We were thinking we had a whole stable of runners in the backfield."

Also, the COVID-19 pandemic has rebounded with a new and highly contagious Delta variant. While the 2020 Pirates only lost players for limited bouts and only to contact tracing, the potential for players to miss time due to exposure and/or infection is a threat that hangs over them like a Sword of Damocles. Fortunately for the Pirates, they have yet to be affected by it in 2021. They are certainly taking precautions.

"We try to clean down the pads, the water bottles, we spray the lockers," Stokes said. "But asking teenage boys to be responsible 100 percent of the time is a tall order."

...And a cloud of dust

Even without Balmir, the Pirates are going to have a few threats coming out of the backfield and they make no illusions about what they are going to do on offense.

"We're still predominantly a run-first offense," Stokes said. "We've got good backs and a tough O-line that makes it easier."

The Pirates will hand off to senior EJ Redfield, who Stokes calls a "workhorse." Redfield was the second most used ball-carrier in 2020, behind graduated Malcom Gibbs. Redfield rushed for just shy of 400 yards on 80 carries, averaging 5 per carry and scored 5 rushing touchdowns. Watch for Redfield's carries to top 100 in 2021 as he emerges as the primary threat in the backfield. A complementary full back/tailback with a linebacker's body will be senior Ethan Ayo. Outside receivers Omarion Harrison, Angel Miles and Elijah Chibbert will try and divert attention away from the backfield.

"Without a doubt, the threat outside makes it easier to run the offense, otherwise the defense clamps down in the box," Stokes said.

The Pirates starting senior guards, Cody Tadlock and Corbin Smith are going to be the strongpoints on the offensive line. Tadlock goes 6-2, 250 and Smith 6-3, 280. It's likely these two will be pulling and leading run plays.

"Those two are leaders on the O-line," Stokes said. "They bring a toughness to the team that we need."

The Pirate offensive backfield will look a lot like their defensive backfield. Linebackers Redfield and Ayo are also key offensive players. Senior Javon Jeune will factor in as a linebacker, too. They'll be needed to step up because the Pirates graduated their top three tacklers from 2020.

The big question

The quarterback position was one of, if not the central issue in 2020. Senior quarterback Devin Jernigan melted down during the Zephyrhills game and did not return to the team. Then-freshman Jayvion Johnson took over and played the last five games of the season. It was a struggle, to say the least. Johnson completed just five passes for -2 yards and threw three interceptions in that span. He was thrown to the wolves or dogs, rather. 2021 could possibly be a different story. Johnson comes into this season as the starter and with a whole off and pre season of work as the starter. He's not going to throw a hundred passes this season but if he can be efficient and not turn the ball over, the Pirates could surprise people. Stokes likes what he sees so far out of the sophomore.

"He (Johnson) has matured, he shows good leadership, we're optimistic about it," Stokes said. "We also like his short memory; he makes a mistake and moves on."

Odds and ends

The Pirates traded coaches with Wesley Chapel. Former defensive coach Mark Barnes headed to the Wildcats and Rick Gavin came over to the Pirates. Gavin is the special teams coordinator and wide receivers coach.

The Pirates will use junior Bruno Ingalls as their kicker. The 5-10, 190 junior is a soccer player but he will also play on defense at strong safety.

Stokes picked some tough games on his non-district schedule in order to get a better rating in the new playoff points system. The Pirates open the season at a very tough but smaller school in Zephyrhills Christian Academy. The very next week, they host Nature Coast Tech. They play at Lake Gibson in October and come back for the 9-Mile War on Nov. 5 at Zephyrhills. That is a non-penic schedule.

"We are ready to get after it, ready to go," Stokes said.



Ethan Ayo (making the tackle) and Cody Juarez (#50) disrupt this option pass by River Ridge during the pre season.

2021 PASCO PIRATES



— schedule

Home games in CAPS. Start time is 7:30 p.m.

DATE	OPPONENT
Sept. 3	NATURE COAST TECH
Sept. 10	at Hernando
Sept. 17	SPRINGSTEAD
Sept. 23	at Zephyrhills Christian Academy
Oct. 1	at Vanguard
Oct. 8	at Lake Gibson
Oct. 15	at Belleview
Oct. 22	LAND O'LAKES
Oct. 29	LECANTO
Nov. 5	at Zephyrhills

Last season: 6-6.
District: Class 6A, District 5.
Coach Jason Stokes, third season.
Assistants: Rick Gavin, Allyn Williamson, Anthony Byerly

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varsity
PIRATES

2021 PASCO PIRATES

varsity roster		No.	Player	Position	Year	No.	Player	Position	Year
		1	Enrique Matos	ATH, ATH	11	33	Gavin Alexander	DE, FB	10
		3	Angel Miles		10	36	Tyreese Grose	DT, FB	10
		5	Eldrick Williams	RB	10	39	Ethan Ayo	ILB, RB	12
		6	EJ Redfield	DB, OLB, RB	12	44	Javon Jeune	OLB, DE	12
		7	Bradly Kenner	TE, DE	12	50	Cody Juarez		11
		8	Elijah Chilbert	WR	12	52	Cassidy Grubbs	DT	11
		9	Omarion Harrison	WR, FS	12	55	Allen Clark		10
		10	Nicolas Torres	WR, DB	10	58	Chris Jones	DL, OL	11
		11	Jayvion Johnson	QB	10	64	Cody Tadlock	G, DT	12
		13	Raphael Hernandez		12	65	Zachary Gude		11
		15	Anthony Cozzolino	LB, TE	10	66	Austin Beach	OC	10
		15	Johndreis Grant	FS, SS	11	67	Anthony Pratt	DT, OL	11
		21	Bruno Ingalls	LB, FB	11	72	Bradon Jones	OL, DL	11
		23	Jordan Gibbs	DE, OLB, LS	12	74	Corbin Smith	G, DT	12
		24	Ethan Humphries	LB	11				

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2021 ZEPHYRHILLS CHRISTIAN ACADEMY WARRIORS

Growth at Zephyrhills Christian Academy keeps raising the bar

By ANDY WARRENER
Sports Reporter

Zephyrhills Christian Academy head coach Mike Smith remembers starting the football program back in 1998. It was also the year the Tampa Bay Buccaneers moved from their old stadium, the Sombbrero, into their new digs at Raymond James. It was also the end of rookie running back Warrick Dunn's debut season and the first time the Buccaneers made the playoffs in 15 years. That same year, the Warriors played their debut season in a mud pit with industrial lighting and could only muster enough athletes for a 6-man team. The ZCA Warriors began to grow. They found success playing 6-man football. They quickly found themselves playing 7-man football. In 2016, they made the jump to 11-man, tackle football. Smith and the Warriors have not looked back.

"It's amazing to walk out here onto the field now, with what we have here" Smith said. "I'm humbled by it. Our family has bled for this place, the teachers, staff, families, coaches - it's been awesome to watch."

Walking out onto the artificial grass field with a handsome field house that still smells of sheet rock and wet paint, listening to a brand new PA system pumping Christian-themed trap music, lit by steel lighting poles with high-intensity bulbs - it's hard to imagine that the Warriors have come from such humble beginnings.

"I remember when we used two PVC pipes with a rope tied between them to kick field goals," Smith said. "I was in tears when we first got field goal posts."

Smith and the Warriors are used to taking advantage of what they have piggybacking on the success of their 6-man and 7-man teams, the Warriors have made the 11-man playoffs each of their first five years and they show no signs of letting up in 2021.

Stable of backs

Any football team, high school or otherwise, is looking for that confident signal-caller, that quarterback that's going to take the reins and lead the team to victory. It's the most important position on the field and one that's usually in high demand. The Warriors are in ample supply.

The Warriors have four quarterbacks that Smith has no qualms about playing. However, their top prospect is wrapped in a dose of controversy. "Senior" quarterback Adrian Miller III is a transfer from Bishop McLaughlin where he played what is listed as his junior year with the Hurricanes, amassing over 1,000 yards rushing and 768 yards passing, combining for 17 touchdowns. Miller was reported to the FHSAA as being a fifth-year senior, which would eliminate his eligibility to play in 2021. Miller is currently on the shelf as ZCA appeals the FHSAA ruling. The Warriors would love to deploy Miller's run option and experience but they have no qualms about looking to the next man up.

There are three options behind Miller. ZCA coaches are high on eighth-grader Jayce Nixon.

"He's a lefty with a heck of an arm and very heady for an eighth grader," Smith said. "But we are four deep at quarterback and all of them are game-ready."

Nixon actually started ZCA's pre season game against Gainesville Buchholtz and he's worked his way up to second string. Don't think of junior Caleb Gaskin and Jordy Barrios as third and fourth string, more like options "C" and "D." Both aforementioned quarterbacks played in the spring game and the 7-on-7 summer circuit.

The Warriors have a deep backfield beyond the quarterback position. Seniors Dontrevious Jackson and Andrew Felder, along with Donnie Lloyd and Demetri Wade round out a running back quartet that is as interchangeable as it is talented. With speedy outside receiving options in juniors Quavious Cook and EJ Allen, along with sophomore Hezekiah Langley, the Warriors will have no qualms about spreading the football around.

"We're deeper at wide receiver than we've ever been," Smith said.

The earth movers

The dynamic backs and receivers for ZCA won't be very effective unless the Warrior linemen can protect passes and clear lanes in the run game. Smith thinks he's got some guys that are up to the task.

"We've got a lot of the size we need up there and the depth helps us," Smith said.

The Warriors really like 6-4, 320-pound senior James Royal. Even at that size, Smith still dubs Royal, "an athlete that can move." Nearly matching Royal on the measurables is senior Austin Henderson, who goes 6-2, 285. Holding that offensive line glue together is junior Reggie Pry.

"He (Pry) is such a leader on offense," Smith said. "He may be undersized but he gets off the ball well and never quits."

Small school enrollment, big school turnout

Like any small, Class 2A school, the ZCA Warriors are going to ask their athletes to play both offense and defense. Football is a big deal at ZCA. The school only has 50 high school boys enrolled and yet there are 41 boys on the football team - even though that includes a handful of eighth graders. The Warriors have tried to stack their schedule in order to build up points in the new

playoff system. They host Class 6A Pasco in their first regular season game and they have Class 2A defending state finalist University Christian of Jacksonville in Week 2.

The school and the football program continue to grow. They just recently completed a second floor press-box area and have added bleachers. It's likely they will have to look into more creative options to bring in spectators as the football field is hemmed in by a housing development on the north side and the parking area fills up, even just for a pre season game. While football is king at ZCA, Smith and the Warriors don't take their eyes off of a higher power.

"We want to win but football is just a tool to get kids here and let them hear the Word of God and get an education," Smith said.

2021 ZEPHYRHILLS CHRISTIAN ACADEMY WARRIORS



— schedule

Start time is 7:00 p.m. - Except 8/31 & 9/14 at 7:30 p.m.

Last season: 8-3.
District: Class 2A, District 9.
Coach: Mike Smith, seventh season.
Assistants: Mike Smith II, Spence Jones, BJ Hall, Lane McLaughlin, Aubrey Javan Smith

DATE	OPPONENT
Sept. 3	UNIVERSITY CHRISTIAN
Sept. 10	KENNEDY CATHOLIC
Sept. 17	PALM BEACH CHRISTIAN PREP
Sept. 23	PASCO
Oct. 1	at St. Petersburg Catholic
Oct. 8	ZAREPHATH ACADEMY
Oct. 15	at North Florida Educational Institute
Oct. 22	at Bradenton Christian
Oct. 29	DISCOVERY
Nov. 5	ORLANDO CHRISTIAN PREP

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2021 ZEPHYRHILLS CHRISTIAN ACADEMY WARRIORS

varsity roster

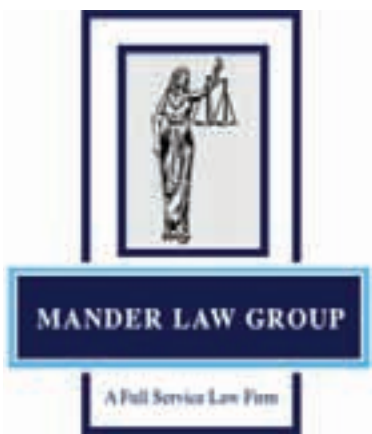


No.	Player	Position	Year	No.	Player	Position	Year
0	Dontrevius Jackson	RB, LB	12	22	Angel Rodriguez	QB, LB	10
1	Andrew Felder	RB, LB	12	23	Javier Lopez	RB, LB	9
2	Quavious Cook	SB, CB	11	24	Temori Windhamhill	DB, LB, WR	10
3	Demetri Whitehead	RB, SB, WR	12	25	Malachi Johnson	DB, WR	10
4	Fred Adams	FS, SS	10	26	Ashton Liddington	DE, WR	9
5	Ej Allen	WR, DB	11	28	Kennedy Gaston	DB, WR	9
6	Adrian Miller III	QB, S	12	40	Barron Barber	LB, TE	10
7	Caleb Gaskin	QB	11	41	Zyon Vaughn-Nobles	DT, TE	10
8	Kayleb Samuel	WR, MLB, OLB	10	44	Anthony Cribbs	DE, TE	
9	Antonio Hunt	RB, FB, MLB	11	50	Trace Williams	TE, DE	11
10	Jordiel Barrios	QB	10	52	Luis Soto	DT	12
11	Hezekiah Langley			53	Reggie Morgan	OG, DT	10
12	Jayce Nixon	QB	8	54	DJ Pope	DT, OL	10
13	Donnie Lloyd			55	Reggie Pry	DE, T	11
14	Prince Fankana	DB, WR	9	56	Elijah Austin	C	11
17	Vincent Elder	WR, CB	10	60	Austin Henderson	OG, NG	12
18	Joshua Casarez	FB, LB	10	65	Joel Thompson	OG, NG	9
19	CJ Shepherd	WR, DB	9	75	Jaylan Dorsett	OL, DL	10
20	David Dehart	WR, DE	9	76	James Royal	NG, OG	12
21	Brounzo Cooley	WR	12	78	Joel Robinson	OG, DT	12



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2021 WIREGRASS RANCH BULLS

Wiregrass Ranch plans to extend its current county-best playoff streak to five straight seasons

By STEVE LEE
Sports Reporter

Like every high school football team last season, Wiregrass Ranch qualified for the playoffs despite a 4-6 record. Due to a shortened season thanks to the coronavirus pandemic that adversely affected some teams more than others, the Florida High School Athletic Association opened the postseason for everyone in an unprecedented decision that likely will not occur again.

That means that the Bulls will have to earn a playoff spot this year. No problem, noted coach Mark Kantor, who has the only winning and playoff football seasons in school history.

"I think the kids understand that that's where we're at," said Kantor, who also has coached at Hudson and Gaither and is seven wins shy of 100 overall. "The players plan to continue to keep the streak on the straight and narrow. Some time it's going to end, but I just don't want it to end until I retire."

As the lone Pasco County team in Class 7A, District 10, Wiregrass Ranch has a tough schedule with perennial state contender Armwood the frontrunner as usual. Other division foes are Strawberry Crest, Tampa Bay Tech and Wharton.

"Our (classification) is the toughest in the state of Florida and it got even tougher this year," Kantor said. "As long as we stay injury-free I feel pretty good."

The Bulls could have the most explosive offense in school history thanks to the strong arm of Rocco Becht and two solid running backs to provide a balanced attack.

"I think we're going to be as close to 50-50 as we possibly can," Kantor said of the ratio of run to pass this year's offensive unit could produce.

Becht, an Iowa State commit who will be a senior, is coming off a season in which he threw for 1,550 yards and 18 touchdowns with seven interceptions. This marks his third straight season as the team's starter.

"I think he's done a fantastic job, just getting his mind and body ready to go," Kantor said of Becht, whose father Anthony Becht is a former National Football League tight end who played 10 seasons for five teams, including the Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

In the backfield are returning running backs Kenny Walker and Cornelius Mcrary. That duo combined for 980 rushing yards and nine touchdowns last year with Kantor expecting even greater production from them this season.

"We've got a two-headed monster back there," the coach said.

As for Becht's targets, the wide receivers are led by Bryson Rodgers. While powerhouse Alabama has made an offer to one of the most sought after high school prospects in the Tampa Bay area, other schools in the mix are Arkansas State, Florida International, Florida State, Georgia, Georgia Tech, Iowa State, Louisville, Maryland, Ole Miss, Penn State, Pittsburgh, Rutgers, South Florida, Virginia Tech and West Virginia.

"He's fantastic," Kantor said of Rodgers, who last season tallied 710 yards on 47 catches and scored 10 touchdowns. "Bryson has developed into an impact player for us. His work ethic matches Rocco's."

Other receivers include Isaiah Williams, Malachi McLaughlin and

Jared West.

As for keeping pressure off the skill players, the offensive line returns three of five starters in Logan Ridolph, Tucker Schwab and Cristian Loaiza.

"It's great," Kantor said. "The quarterback's not going to get hit a lot."

On defense, the team's strong suit is the secondary with Elijah Westbrook and McLaughlin manning the corners while Abram Beer and Julian Gilmore are the safeties.

As for the front seven, Nate Kidd, a second-year starter, Texas transfer Jaideen Barren and Ola Omoloye, a promising freshman, are the linebackers. What could be a formidable defensive line is anchored by nose guard Teeko Williamson and end Alex McGill.

Taking over punting and kicking duties this season is former junior varsity player Jeremy Caruso, who Kantor labels a top recruit.

2021 WIREGRASS RANCH BULLS



— schedule

Home games in CAPS. Start time is 7:30 p.m.

Last season: 7-4.
District: Class 7A, District 8

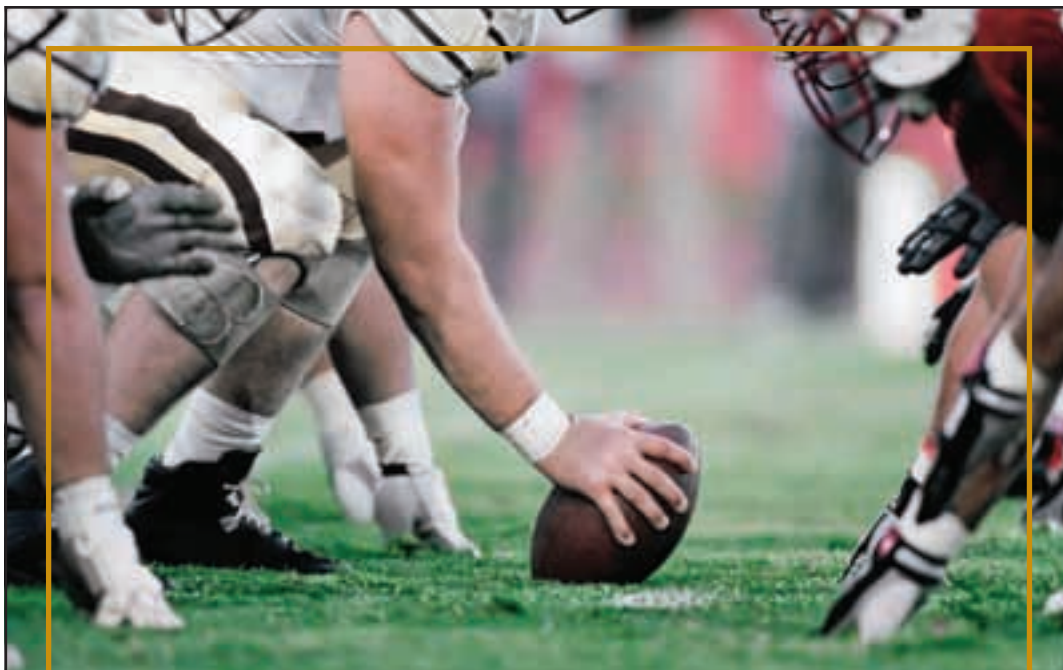
Coach Mark Kantor, seventh season.

Assistants:
John Grone
Brandon Tanner
Brian Surcy
Rey Urquiola
Quintin Smith
Anthony Becht
Lance Roberts
Jonas Rutledge
John Colella
Andrew Warner
Jorge Martinez
Ramon Rodriguez
Pat Jalmiste
Freddie Cruz
Ian Smart
Connor Sykes
Thomas Adams

DATE	OPPONENT
Aug. 27	at Hernando
Sept. 3	WESLEY CHAPEL
Sept. 10	MITCHELL
Sept. 17	WHARTON
Sept. 24	at River Ridge
Oct. 1	at Strawberry Crest
Oct. 8	at Zephyrhills
Oct. 15	TAMPA BAY TECH
Oct. 22	at Armwood
Oct. 29	THE VILLAGES CHARTER



Several of the Bulls' varsity coaches are shown during media day.



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varsity
BULLS

2021 WIREGRASS RANCH BULLS

varsity
roster



No.	Player	Position	Year	No.	Player	Position	Year
1	Bryson Rodgers	ATH	11	23	Aiden Perez	CB	10
2	Corneil McCrary	RB	12	24	Robert Williamson	TE, RB	12
3	Rocco Becht	QB	12	25	Jaiden Barron	RB, MLB	10
4	Tate Hayes	WR	11	26	Wyatt Chapman	CB	11
5	Malachi Mclaughlin	WR, CB	12	30	Alex McGill	DE	12
6	Abram Beer	OLB, SS	12	33	Logan Meade	WR, FS	12
7	Kenneth Walker	RB	11	50	Jaeden Ortiz	NG	10
8	Jared West	WR, CB	10	51	Tucker Schwab	OG	12
9	Noah Coates	WR, OLB	10	53	Kennedy Nguyen	OG	11
10	Davion Brown	RB	11	54	Christian Starkey	T, DE	
11	Izaiah Williams	WR, FS	10	55	Logan Ridolph	T	12
12	Elijah Brown	QB	10	61	Brett James	DT, T	11
14	Julian Gilmore	WR, FS	12	64	Baron Dhungana	C, OG	12
15	Jeremy Caruso	K, P	11	66	Devin Leathers	DE, LB	11
17	Nasir Martinez	MLB	11	72	Jacob Mascarelli	OL	11
19	Ola Omoloye	MLB	9	76	Cristian Loaiza	T	12
20	Isaiah Fitzpatrick	WR, CB	10	82	Moses Kebede	DE, TE	11
21	Nate Kidd	LB	12	99	Jonah Perez	G, DT	11
22	Elijah Westbrooks	CB, WR	11				



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2021 WESLEY CHAPEL WILDCATS

Wildcats hope veteran squad makes up for dearth of practices

By **ANDY WARRENER**
Sports Reporter

The struggle for the Wildcats in 2021 looks to be the lack of full practices. Like other teams in the county, illnesses, injuries and weather present challenges. The 2021 Wildcats have had a veritable perfect storm of delays and occurrences that have kept them off the practice fields.

"I think we've had no more than four or five practices to completion," Wildcat head coach Tony Egan said. "The wet bulb keeps us off the field until 2:30 or 3:30, then 10 minutes later a lightning delay takes us off the field."

The "wet bulb" is the weather device that measures temperature and humidity to generate a number that says whether or not and for how long high school football teams can practice outside. In an autumn of record-breaking heat, Aug. 18 broke a record high in the Tampa area, those "too hot" numbers come up frequently. This early in the season, the gym isn't available as the volleyball team is usually using it. The Wildcats are stuck in the weight room or doing "chalk talk."

Egan is struggling to get his team reps. His skill players had the summer 7-on-7 to hone their skills. Egan scheduled a jamboree-style scrimmage on Aug. 13 where his Wildcats played a half against Gulf. The Wildcats headed up to the Villages to play up for their pre season game.

"I wanted to give them a test by playing a tough opponent and we were outmatched," Egan said. "But I liked some things I saw. We showed some grit in the second quarter, stopping drives and tackling better."

Veteran squad

Two factors have broken Egan and the Wildcats's way. First, they'll have one of the most seasoned squads of Egan's tenure and second, they have their biggest offensive line. The veteran team is a huge asset. It could be what keeps the Wildcats from stumbling out of the gates.

"We only graduated four or five players off of last year's team and only two or three of them played very much," Egan said. "Everyone else is back. This is the deepest senior class, 16 or 17 players - more than half the team."

If a coach were ever doomed to start the year light on practice, it had better be with a veteran team. Egan is going to have that in 2021.

While not the full time starter in 2020, Ethan Harper is a senior veteran on the team. He did lead the Wildcats in passing, with just shy of 700 yards and seven touchdowns. Egan is excited to have Harper as the full time starter for 2021. He will have multiple and veteran targets to throw to.

Dylan Chana is a 6-3 senior returner at receiver. Sebastian Gutierrez is a smaller but speedy senior receiver and Ayden Roysden is a 6-1 target, also a returning senior, who will handle the punting duties. In the midst of all that veteran talent is senior star Nehemiah Morgan. Morgan's stock is going to rise in 2021 as he morphs into the Jelani Vassell of the Wildcats but with a larger frame. Morgan led the Wildcats in receiving last season with just under 400 yards. On defense he had just two interceptions but watch for both of those stats to jump this season. Jaylan Blake, the team's leading rusher (485 yards, 4 TDs) also returns for his senior season.

"The receivers all have good hands and speed, we just need to get them to run more crisp routes," Egan said. "They're even blocking pretty good."

The Wildcats also have one of the biggest offensive lines in the last several years. Junior Max Hambrecht tips the tape at 6-4, 330 pounds. 6-3, 270-pound Ryan Warren is a junior and probably the next biggest lineman. Senior Tony Salatino and senior transfer Josiah Park are both in the 235-250 pound range.

Wesley Chapel's Nehemiah Morgan battles for extra yards in the road opener for 2021.



Back to basics

The Wildcats, after having experimented with the pistol formation last year, are going back to the I-Formation. This brings the full back into play and comes back into the wheelhouse of Egan's run-first preference. 5-11, 210-pound junior Mason Quinn was tapped for the position but stepping in for Quinn during an injury has been former offensive lineman, senior William Kanani.

"(Kanani) ran a full back trap in the pre season game that broke for like 10 or 15 yards, he was so happy," Egan said. "It's fun to see things like that and now he (Kanani) is challenging Quinn for the spot."

The Wildcats can always go back to their spread formation if they need a big pass play but expect to see them running out of the "I" for most of their plays in close games. Egan and the Wildcats start the season with a tough trio of Sunlake, Wiregrass Ranch and Zephyrhills and cap the season against a perennially solid Mitchell team. If the Wildcats can avoid an 0-3 start to the season, they just might be able to make themselves relevant down the stretch.

2021 WESLEY CHAPEL WILDCATS



— schedule

Home games in CAPS. Start time is 7:30 p.m.

Last season: 5-5.
District: Class 5A, District 9.
Coach: Tony Egan, sixth season.
Assistants: Mark Barnes, Brian Colding, Brian Cullum, Chris Harper, Kenny Roberts, Matt Smith, Mark Stewart

DATE	OPPONENT
Aug. 27	at Sunlake
Sept. 3	at Wiregrass Ranch
Sept. 17	ZEPHYRHILLS
Sept. 24	FIVAY
Oct. 1	at Nature Coast Tech
Oct. 8	at River Ridge
Oct. 15	at Weeki Wachee
Oct. 22	HUDSON
Oct. 29	CYPRESS CREEK

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2021 WESLEY CHAPEL WILDCATS

varsity roster



No.	Player	Position	Year	No.	Player	Position	Year
1	Jaylan Blake	RB, DB	12	34	Malachi Miller		9
3	Sebastian Gutierrez	WR	12	40	Wesley Young		10
4	Ethan Harper	QB, DB	12	44	Brady Barowski		9
5	Tre Hill		9	45	Ricky Mingo		10
6	Mason Quinn	LB, FB	11	45	Kerel Joseph		9
7	Jalani Pilcher	CB	11	50	Josiah Park		12
8	Dylan McGinnis		11	52	Jason Brown		9
9	Jordan Mccaslin	MLB, RB	12	53	William Kanani	OL	12
10	Ethan Chana	LB, FB	11	54	Elijah Vega		9
11	Ayden Roysdon	WR, LB	12	56	Tony Salatino	OL, DL	12
12	Brad Ford	QB	9	58	Benjamin Stay	DL, OL	9
15	Dylan Chana	WR, DB	12	62	Evan Miller		10
17	Nehemiah Morgan	WR, FS	12	63	Briac Riles	OL, DL	12
18	Collin Opperman		10	70	Gabe Stewart	DL	11
20	Maurice Wilkinson	CB, QB, WR	10	71	Nicholas Jenkins		9
21	Jayden Ramos	WR	10	72	Billy Rodriguez		9
22	Braden Rice		9	74	Ryan Warren	G, T	11
23	Darius Pope-Bryant		12	75	Nolan Boyd	OL	12
25	Nathan Coleman	DB, WR	12	76	Max Hembrecht	OL, DL	11
26	Quel Moragne	LB	11	77	Levi Lopez		9
28	Yael Diaz	LB	10	80	Malik Burgos		9
30	Joshua Lindo	K	11	81	Gabe Ramirez		12
32	Josh Poleon	LB, FB	11	88	Connor Libby	DE, TE	9
33	Emmanuel Park		10				



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2021 CYPRESS CREEK COYOTES

Coyotes aim to open up passing game, attack more on defense in bid for first playoff win

By STEVE LEE
Sports Reporter

In just four seasons the Cypress Creek football team has made the playoffs twice. Two years ago marked the first winning season for the young Coyotes, who with a playoff loss still wound up at 6-5. Meanwhile, last year all Florida teams got in the playoffs, even Cypress Creek, which finished at 3-7.

This year, however, coach Mike Johnson, along with his coaching staff and players, firmly believe that not only is a postseason appearance feasible but a win in at least one round is as well.

"That's the standard. We've been there," he said of the playoffs. "We were on a steady rise until last year. I thought we had a lot better team than how we performed. Overall, I think we're in a good spot."

The Cypress Creek offense appears to be armed with more weapons than in recent years and are led by returning quarterback Owen Walls. Last year as a junior, he passed for 1,233 yards with 13 touchdowns and just three interceptions. Johnson envisions even better numbers this year.

"Owen's a special kid," Johnson said. "I don't know if I'll have another Owen in 25 years. He's the one that's going to drive it all. It's really neat to see because he's taken another step forward on just putting the offense in a position to be successful."

Walls has plenty of targets in a combination of running backs and receivers that include Andrew Burgess, Merrick Simmons, Dontrell Clerkley, Denere Jones, Tre Gibson and Ki-one Roberson, a transfer from Texas. Add sophomores Shawn Smith and Milton Garcia to that mix.

Plus, big things are expected from tight end Dylan Lolley. Johnson considers Lolley, a solid blocker and receiver with good hands, as "another heart and soul leader. He can do everything."

Between that core group of running backs and receivers is a solid offensive line that will allow the Coyotes to "have multi-formations. We'll spread it out, we'll have power," Johnson said.

While the coach is looking for five solid blockers up front, he expects seven of eight linemen to be interchanged during games. Not only will that keep them fresh, but it will allow for liberal substitutions on the defensive line as well.

That unit up front consists of K.J. Campbell, Jack Carbone, Josh Dimarco, Duncan McAllister, Ethan Smith, Trindon Symonds and Andrew Martinek.

"They have the desire to protect our end (in the passing game) and push guys around in the running game," Johnson said.

On the other side of the ball, Tico Hernandez, who last season helped out with the offense, takes over as defensive coordinator and he has a few changes in mind. That unit, led by a deep and talented secondary, is expected to be more aggressive than ever before.

"We're not worried about the pressure of making a mistake," he said. "We are going to attack. We're going to constantly apply pressure. These are kids who are very athletic

and they've got lots of experience."

The top foursome in the secondary is comprised of Simmons, Burgess, Gibson and Logan Falk. In front of them is a trio of solid linebackers in Nicko Huitz, David Willins and Smith. The defensive line features some of the aforementioned offensive linemen, as well as Vincent Tre, James Cleary, Jones and Lolley, who Hernandez describes as "a Division I prospect."

Overall, he predicted that the front seven combination of defensive linemen and linebackers "will do very well with tackles for a loss and sacks."

Like the offense, Hernandez aims to interchange his defenders in an all-out effort to be better prepared to go full-bore at the end of games when the outcome is on the line.

With much more depth and talent than in previous seasons, Johnson feels that he can have 22 starters (11 on offense and 11 on defense). Still, he noted, "I do want my 11 best out there."

2021 CYPRESS CREEK COYOTES



—schedule

Home games in CAPS. Start time is 7:30 p.m.

Last Season: 3-7.
District: Class 5A, District 9

Coach
Michael Johnson,
fifth season

Assistants:
Tico Hernandez
Angel Ramos
Jon Altonen
Darrell Davis
Will Fulmer
Seth Petty
Robb Sercu
Willie Thacker
Sam Mazzeo
Dave Dimarco
Aman Patel
Jeff Barnes
Gary Silcott
Nate Bailey

DATE	OPPONENT
Sept. 3	BONITA SPRINGS
Sept. 10	SUNLAKE
Sept. 17	NATURE COAST TECH
Sept. 24	SOUTH SUMTER
Oct. 1	at Hudson
Oct. 8	at Land O'Lakes
Oct. 15	ZEPHYRHILLS
Oct. 22	at Weeki Wachee
Oct. 29	at Wesley Chapel
Nov. 5	at Gulf



On media day, most of Cypress Creek's varsity and junior varsity football coaches got together for a group photo.

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varsity
COYOTES



2021 CYPRESS CREEK COYOTES

varsity
roster



No.	Player	Position	Year	No.	Player	Position	Year
1	Andrew Burgess	ATH	12	42	Jeremy McNamara	TE/DL	12
2	Merrick Simmons	WR/DB	12	44	Joshua Nickerson	TE/DE	10
3	Tre Gibson	ATH	11	50	Jack Carbone	OL/DL	11
4	Michael Marshall	RB/LB	12	51	Austin Slusher	OL/DL	10
5	Dontrell Clerkley	WR/CB	12	52	Vincent Tre	OL/DL	11
7	Kione Roberson	RB/DB	12	53	Coy Martin	OL/DL	10
10	Denere Jones	WR/CB	12	55	James Cleary	OL/DL	12
11	Owen Walls	QB/CB	12	60	Trindon Symonds	OL/DL	10
12	Logan Falk	RB/DB	10	61	Judson Findley	OL/DL	10
13	Shawn Smith	WR/DB	10	62	Dalton Gulley	OL/DL	11
14	Roman Sercu	QB/CB	9	64	Jason Cruz	OL/DL	11
15	Logan Lugo	WR/DB	11	65	Josh Dimarco	OL/DL	11
18	Austin Proffitt	WR/DB	12	66	Reagan Rivera	OL/DL	11
19	Jack Niemann	QB/CB	10	70	Reece Merrell	OL/DL	11
20	Alex Dulaski	FB/LB	11	71	Karl Campbell	OL/DL	12
22	Michael Mysholowsky	RB/LB	11	72	Duncan McAllister	OL/DL	10
23	Milton Gracia	WR/DB	10	75	Andrew Martinek	OL/DL	12
24	David Willins	RB/LB	12	80	Dominic Kruse	WR/DB	11
25	Nikco Huitz	RB/LB	12	81	Cristian Gregory	WR/DB	11
30	Kyson Dickerson	RB/DB	11	82	Nehemiah Ferrin	RB/DB	11
32	Colton Corrao	K/P	12	84	Jackson Zebra	WR/DB	9
33	Andrew Alvarez	OL/DL	10	85	Aman Patel	WR/DB	9
40	JT Agnes	TE/LB	11	88	Dylan Lolley	TE/DL	11
41	Hays Johnson	RB/LB	12	95	Andre Hall	OL/DL	11

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