

Success breeding interest for Wolfpack

- Adam Carrington
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One of the challenges for Whitefield Academy this spring was identifying the replacement for Luke Persons.
Jon-Michael Sullivan

Whitefield Academy is stoked about football again.

Not many expected the Wolfpack to have a remarkable turnaround last fall after a three-win season in 2016. They posted their first winning season since 2012 with an 8-4 record and went to the Class A state playoffs for the first time since 2009. While there, they beat Walker in a first-round game.

The major difference was the offensive production. The Wolfpack averaged 19 points per game in 2017 after scoring just 10.4 point per game the previous season.

As this year's spring practice would indicate, the success sparked some excitement in the school.

There were 38 players on the roster when the 2017 season came to a close. When spring practice got underway, 56 players dressed out.

Of the 56 players that participated, only six were seniors.

“(Last season) has generated a lot of excitement,” said first-year coach Coleman Joiner, who was the co-offensive coordinator last season under former coach John Hunter. “We have a ton of athletes that came out from other sports, and they are ready to contribute. There is a ton of excitement around the campus, knowing what we were capable of last year.”

Whitefield is expected to be talented at the skill positions. The Wolfpack have plenty of receivers and running backs to work with.

Kaleb Brooks and Bryce Davis are returning players who had solid springs at receiver. Kyle Holt is back at tight end and rising junior newcomer Rees Pickell is challenging for a starting spot at receiver.

Whitefield graduated running back KJ Canion, who rushed for 800 yards and two touchdowns last season. Sophomore Eric Little and juniors Jaden Griffith and Devontae Watson are competing to replace him, and Joiner has been impressed with all three.

The bigger concern, however, is quarterback Luke Persons graduating. He threw for 1,024 yards and 11 touchdowns last year.

Junior David Eaton, sophomore Joel McKinney and freshman Cole Peterson have displayed both talent and work ethic, but there is still the inexperience factor, Joiner said.

“Replacing Luke Persons at quarterback is a big need,” Joiner said. “He’s a guy we’d love to have another year with.”

Defensively, Whitefield will also be young at linebacker juniors Jaquez Dew, Walker Smith and Griffith getting most of the repetitions.

Whitefield is expected to be experienced at the other defensive positions. Holt and junior Braeden Swilley are returning on the defensive line and Brooks is expected to lead a loaded secondary unit.

“We’re ahead of schedule with the success we had,” Joiner said. “This year, we are standing on the shoulders of the seniors who led us and we got the momentum moving forward.”