



Photo by Craig T. Greenlee

Running back Tyree Massey (5) scored six touchdowns and averaged 5.4 yards per carry last season.

2015 WSSU football schedule

- Sept. 3 - @ UNC Pembroke
- Sept. 12 - Valdosta State (@ Powder Springs, Ga.)
- Sept. 19 - @ Tuskegee (Ala.)
- Sept. 26 - Elizabeth City State (@ Rocky Mount)
- Oct. 3 - Chowan University
- Oct. 10 - Johnson C. Smith
- Oct. 17 - @ St. Augustine's
- Oct. 24 - @ Livingstone
- Oct. 31 - Shaw University (Homecoming)
- Nov. 7 - Open date
- Nov. 14 - Fayetteville State



Rams

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The following week, the Rams play Valdosta State (Ga.), which has a good number of returnees from last year's squad that lost in the quarterfinals of the national playoffs. The Blazers (10-3) were ranked 15th in the D2football.com national rankings.

WSSU's early-season road sojourn continues with a trip to Tuskegee (Ala.), a team that's expected to advance to the Division II playoffs for the third year in a row. The Golden Tigers barely missed making the Top 25 in last year's end-of-season poll.

The month of September closes out with a CIAA opener against Elizabeth City State in the Down East Viking Football Classic played at Rocky Mount. In last year's game, the Vikings stayed in a contention and trailed 14-7 at intermission. The Rams blew the game open with three second-half touchdowns and cruised to a 35-7 victory.

"Those early games will serve as a good measuring stick," said Boulware, who will be entering his second season as the Rams head coach. "We'll be going up against some teams that made the playoffs last year. I wouldn't be surprised to see Valdosta State and Tuskegee in the pre-season national rankings. We'll be in good shape if we can enter our first home game with a 4-0 mark."

Over the past five years, Winston-Salem State has had eight or

more wins each season. Although the team lost a good share of top-flight performers on both sides of the ball, the Rams are expected to win the CIAA and reach the playoffs. That didn't happen last year. It was the first time since 2010 that WSSU was absent from postseason play.

Unlike last year when Rudy Johnson and Philip Sims split time at quarterback, there will be no suspense as to who gets the starting call for 2015. Boulware makes it clear that the job belongs to Justin Johnson, who missed spring practice as a result of being ruled academically ineligible.

Johnson, a redshirt sophomore from High Point, has overcome his academic shortcomings and is ready to step in and produce. Boulware's choice to go with Johnson over spring QBs Demetrius Lewis and Rod Tinsley Jr. - both freshmen - is based on Johnson's familiarity with the multiple offense that the Rams will once again embrace after switching to the Pistol formation last season.

"Of the three quarterbacks, Justin has the most experience with the system, so he's our starter," said Boulware. "Justin puts pressure on defenses with his ability to run and throw."

On the offensive

front, the Rams have three anchors in Jac'que Polite, Isaiah Towns and Josh Wormley. Polite and Towns were starters on a line that paved the way for 35.7 points and 442.9 total yards per game a year ago.

Boulware expects the Rams to show enough offensive balance to keep opponents from stacking the line of scrimmage to stop bruising running back Tyree Massey (5.4 yards per carry and 6 touchdowns). Johnson will look to connect often with a pair of receivers who have the same last name but are not related.

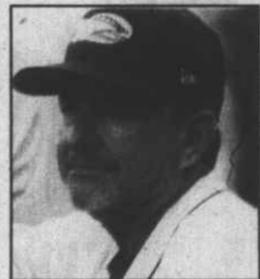
Eric Williams had 37 catches for 583 yards and 9 touchdowns a season ago. Transfer Rashan Williams gives Johnson another reliable target to throw to.

Defensively, the Rams figure to have their share of new faces. When pre-season practice begins in August, Boulware hopes to establish sufficient depth on the line which will enable WSSU to go two-deep at each line position. The key leaders up front are Michael Bloomfield (8 sacks, 4 QB hurries, 9 1/2 tackles for losses) and Michael Douglas.

"Overall, we're young, talented and athletic," said Boulware in assessing what he observed during spring practice. "Now it's all a matter of building team chemistry and getting better at what we do each day."



Boulware



Esmay

having (reliever) Brad Goldberg evolve, along with the continued development of Wheeler, Michael Ynoa and Jefferson Olacio."

The month of May wasn't very kind for the Dash, who lost seven straight series over a 25-day period. Since then, the offense has shown some spark. During a three-week stretch leading up to the All-Star break, Winston-Salem won four of the seven series it played. It remains to be seen if this team can establish offensive continuity during the second half of the season.

"With only eight teams (in our league), everybody is going to know each other by the time the season is over," he said. "So, as a player, you have to figure out what changes to make in order to make sure that you're still successful. I think our guys are beginning to do that a little bit

now." With the three-day All-Star break officially over today (Thursday), Esmay turns his attention to the second half of the season. In the Carolina League, the season is divided into halves. The Dash finished last in the CL's Southern Division in the first half, but that doesn't mean the team is doomed to remain at the bottom of the league standings.

The slate is wiped clean for the second half and all teams have a new beginning. So, if the Dash wins the division in the second half, it will earn a spot in the league playoffs.

"We're excited about the second half," said Esmay. "It's nice to be able to get a fresh start again. What I like most about this club is that no matter who we have, they all like to work. They like to come out early. They love being in the club house."

"For us to have a really great second half, our non-starting pitchers have to have a much better understanding of what their roles are. If we can stay with that as far as keeping this group together, I feel like we'll be in a better situation because they'll have a better idea of how we're going to use them."

Mustangs

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the state and national levels.

The Mustangs served notice at the nationals that they aren't likely to disappear as genuine contenders. In the process, they surprised themselves by delivering a bronze-medal finish in the 1,000-meter Sprint Medley Relay. This event, also known as the Swedish Relay, is popular in Europe and incorporates all the metric sprint distances (100, 200, 300 and 400).

Parkland's runners viewed themselves as unknowns in this event. Two of its runners are relative newcomers who had little or no prior experience running on the Mustangs "A" level relays. Jahnae Bowman and Zjinaiya Francis joined veterans Erin Morrison and McKinley McNeill to cover the distance in 2 minutes, 10.93 seconds. By placing among the top six, the quartet earned All-America honors. Union Catholic Track Club (N.J.) won in a meet-record time of 2:08.88.

McNeill, a rising senior and Class 4-A state champ in the 400, put Parkland in position to challenge, thanks to her blistering quarter on the anchor leg. For most of the race, the Mustangs appeared to be destined for fifth place. McNeill, however, had other ideas. Coming down the stretch, she went into overdrive to assure of her team of a third-place finish.

"I think we did amazing," said McNeill, who ran a personal-best split of 53 seconds. "I was kind of nervous because we didn't have all of our main competitors like we've had these last few years. Words can't explain how proud I am of the team I have now."

"They proved to me and everybody on a national stage that they can do just as well as the girls who came before them. Parkland still has it. We'll keep working hard and you'll see us at nationals every year. While it's true that I've become a team leader, this is not my team. It's our team because all of us put in the effort to make the best of it."

McNeill turned in Parkland's best individual performance of the weekend. In the open 400 last Sunday, she won handily in a relatively slow heat. In the process, she produced

her fastest clocking of the season at 53.40 seconds - a time that surpassed her previous best by nearly a full second. As a result, McNeill closed out the high school outdoor season as No. 5 in the nation.

"McKinley has worked hard all year long, so she's very deserving," said Coach Antwan Hughes of Parkland. "And she'll only continue to get better and better. Next season, I'm looking for her to run 52."

Had Morrison's season gone as planned, it's very likely that she would've ended her high school career after the state championships. Morrison, one

Bowman, a rising senior. "We're not that far off. Plus, everybody continues to get better."

Francis, a rising junior who has trained with Sherman and Williams, will never forget her debut on Parkland's "A" team. She admits feeling the pressure of competing against some of the nation's premier high-school sprinters. "I was terrified and shaking from the start," she said. "When I got it (baton), I kept thinking that I needed to make a name for myself."

"I got out, but then I got blocked in, but was still able to run well. I picked up my speed by training with Katlin and Eb, but I also learned about courage and motivation. Everything went great in the sprint medley, but it could've been better."

Hughes and his assistants never doubted that Parkland would more than hold its own in the Swedish Relay. In the weeks of training leading up to the nationals, Hughes was more convinced than ever that the Mustangs would meet the challenge.

"The girls were surprised," he said. "They weren't sure what they were capable of. But as coaches, we evaluated everybody and realized that finishing in the top three was an achievable goal with this group."

Although Parkland's runners exceeded their own expectations in the sprint medley, the same did not happen the next day in the 4x200. Newness among members of relay teams breeds unfamiliarity, which in turn, produces growing pains.

Parkland won this event a year ago (outdoor nationals) and again last March at the indoor nationals. A botched exchange between McNeill (second leg) and Bowman (third leg), resulted in a dropped baton and precious seconds of lost time. The Mustangs finished 24th with a sub-par clocking of 1:44.11

"It all came down to lack of experience in working with one another (in the 4x200)," said Hughes. "When the baton hit the ground, we knew the race was over. Before that bad handoff, we were in the race all the way. As coaches, we felt like we gave away the silver medal. Based on relay splits, we probably run around 1:37, which would've put us in the No. 2 spot."

Bowman is confident that the Mustangs will continue to build on their winning legacy: "We have some people who have run times that are close to what the older girls ran," said

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-McKinley McNeill

of Parkland's six graduating seniors, opted to make the best of a less-than-ideal situation by choosing to run in the New Balance meet.

At the start of this year, Morrison had an Achilles injury, which put her on the sidelines for two months. The missed time in training proved to be a setback that she never fully recovered from. So, she decided to continue training and compete on Parkland's relay teams (Swedish, 4x200, 4x400) for the nationals.

"Because of all the time I missed during the winter, things didn't go so well outdoors," said Morrison, who will run track at Hampton University. "I knew I could do better, so I never stopped training and I decided to help out the team in any way I could. I was very surprised that we did as well as we did (in the sprint medley)."

"Some times, younger runners get a bad case of nerves, so you never know what might happen. As for me, I can't complain - I'm able to run and I'm not hurt. So, I'm satisfied and feel like I'll be ready for college."

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Erin Morrison

Photo by Craig T. Greenlee

Mustangs' notebook

Here's a summary of how Parkland athletes (in bold type) fared in other events at the New Balance nationals held last weekend at the Irwin Belk Track on the campus of N.C. A&T:

The qualifying heats of the championship girls' 100-meter dash held last Saturday proved to be disastrous for the top Class 4-A sprinters in North Carolina. The top three finishers at the state meet in May failed to advance. The eight fastest times qualified, so it really didn't matter who won the individual heats.

Two-time state 100 champ **Katlin Sherman** (12.04 seconds) came up empty with the 12th-fastest time in prelims. State runner-up **Tamara Clark** of High Point Central ran 12.0 for 11th, and bronze medalist **Sydney Murphy** of Apex was 10th at 11.95. Sherman has signed to run track at UNC Chapel Hill.

In the girls' Emerging Elites 400, Parkland graduate **Erin Morrison** placed 15th with time of 57.29. At last month's state championships, Morrison was third in the open 400. She was the state outdoor runner-up as a junior in 2014.

The Mustangs 4x400 (championship division) came up short in its quest to finish among the nation's top six for All-America honors. **Morrison, Shanone Cannon, Kimani Davis** and **McKinley McNeill** clocked 3:53.02 to post a 15th place finish.

Nateja Hale had trouble generating consistency in the Emerging Elites triple jump. As things turned out, her first attempt (35-feet, 8 3/4 inches) proved to be her only legal jump. She fouled on her second and third tries and ended up 25th overall. Hale will attend UNC Asheville on a track scholarship.

Dash

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intriguing prospect, though, might be lefty reliever **Andre Wheeler** (2-2, 3.86 ERA), an outfielder who became a full-time pitcher during his sophomore season at Texas Tech.

"Andre has been thrown into a lot of different mixes this season," said Esmay. "We've used him as a spot starter. And at one point, he was a one-inning reliever and now he's a two-inning reliever. I'm excited to see how he's developing. Andre has that really good arm, but he's also starting to develop those other pitches he needs to have as he progresses in his career."

As for the rest of the starting staff, **Dykstra** and **Heidenreich** are the established anchors, but those two can't be expected to shoulder the entire pitching load. They'll need help from **Jake Cose**, **Brandon Brennan** (recently returned from disabled list), **Brian Clark** and newly-acquired **Jordan Guerrero** from Kannapolis.

"It hurt us that we lost (left-hander) **Jace Fry** to Tommy John surgery," he said. "Our starters are going to get their innings. What will really help is