

# What's Up Front That Counts

## Hickory's 'Big Cat' line will move some people around

By GARY STEWART

The new Southwestern Foothills 3A Conference football championship could be decided as early as the first week of the conference season.

That's when perennial Western N.C. powers Crest and Hickory meet at the Chargers' Stadium in Boiling Springs.

Most football "guessperts" across the State say Crest will dominate the new league, with Hickory right on their heels.

While that remains to be seen, one must assume, because of past tradition and the amount of talent on this year's team, that the Red Tornadoes will indeed give the Chargers all the football they can handle.

Veteran Coach David Elder, whose Hickory eleven won the State 3A title in 1996, the same year Crest won the 4A

crown, has 17 starters back from last year's team which finished 7-4 overall.

Heading the list is one of the State's top line prospects, 6-5, 335-pound Richard "Big Cat" Parker, who has started since his sophomore year.

Gianni Miglio, a 6-5, 285-pound senior tackle, and Roddy Long, a 6-6, 215-pound tight end, will also move a lot of people around so the Hickory backs can pick up yardage.

The Hickory offense was dealt a severe blow in the off-season when their leading rusher, William Gibbs, transferred to West Caldwell. But their returning fullback, Craig Barnette, had over 1,000 yards total offense last year and should rank among the best in the conference.

Brian Parsons, a junior who was a part-time starter last year, is showing a lot of

promise and will probably step into Gibbs' position.

"Our team is going to be small as far as most teams are concerned, but we have pretty good quickness and we're hoping we can develop strength as we go along," Elder says. "We'll have to have kids going both ways because we don't have a lot of depth."

Junior All-Conference quarterback Cole Kineworthy threw for over 1,300 yards and 13 touchdowns last year, so it could be interesting when he and Crest QB Brandon Boone match up.

Elder figures if his team can be competitive with the Chargers, they'll have an excellent shot at the State playoffs.

"We have a good nucleus," he said. "We just can't have any injuries."

## This could be the year of the 'Dogs

By GARY STEWART

With 16 starters back from last year's team which finished fourth in the Southwestern 3A Conference, Burns should make a strong bid for a State playoff berth this fall.

Coach Ron Greene did not return repeated phone calls for an interview, but based on personnel returning from last year the 'Dogs should be right there battling cross-county rival Crest for the league championship.

The Bulldogs have one of the top linebackers in the State in Calvin Bostic, who has been starting since his freshman season. He made the All-Conference team last year.

They also have an experienced quarterback in junior Troy Goss, who passed for over 700 yards last year, and they have one of the conference's top running backs in junior Nelson Woods, who rushed for over 1,000 yards last year and also made the All-Conference team.

Another returning All-Conference star is defensive back Tjuan Griggs, who doubles as the team's top wide receiver.

Still another All-SWC returnee is offensive lineman Nathan Melton, a 6-0, 280-pound senior.

Some of the other returning starters are wide receiver/DB Marrio Clark, lineman Matt Goins, defensive end Randy Birch, and linebacker Travis Miller.

One of the team's top newcomers is 6-8, 341-pound sophomore tackle Alex Hemphill.

The Bulldogs play their first conference game October 5 at Kings Mountain, a team they upset last year en route to a 3-3 record in the SWC.

# Foard Ready For Test?

## Tigers hope to keep playoff tradition going

By GARY STEWART

Guarded optimism may be the best term to describe the atmosphere of Fred T. Foard football this fall.

The Tigers, a State playoff team for five of the past seven seasons, are working under a new head coach, Charles Lloyd, who turned out a number of successful teams at East Lincoln.

They lost a number of experienced seniors off last year's team, which finished 7-5 overall and lost to Kannapolis in the first round of the playoffs, but they also return 13 starters, including six on offense.

On the other hand, the folks who will be filling in for all those graduated seniors will be untested sophomores and juniors.

"They all have a new system to learn," says Lloyd, who runs a multiple offense which includes the Wing T, I-formation and shotgun. The Tigers will throw the ball about 40 percent of the time.

Lloyd is hoping his team will have the system down pat before they open Southwestern Foothills 3A play on September 28 at home against Kings Mountain.

"We have to learn to crawl before we walk, and walk before we run," says Lloyd. "But our goal is to get to the point that we're going to put ourselves into position to contend for that second playoff spot."

To do that, the Tigers must get a stellar performance every week from such veterans as All-Conference linemen Brent Reid, 6-1, 250-pound guard, and Bryan Matthews, 6-3, 282-pound tackle.

They'll also have to avoid injuries, because many of the players in the skill positions are inexperienced.

T.J. Safrit, a junior split end, is the leading receiver from last year and with his excellent speed he could be a game-breaker.

Keith Hawk, a starting tackle, last year, has been moved to fullback. At 6-3, 190, he

could develop into one of the league's top power runners.

The Tigers will have a new quarterback - either Danny Carr or Van Proctor - and Jeremy Ward, who started on defense last year, will move into the tailback slot.

Lloyd is high on 6-4 250-pound sophomore tackle Chris Sigmon, who was MVP on the JV team last year.

Heading the defense are Ian Martin and Steve White, both All-Conference linebackers.

"We're counting on a lot of people that played in back-up roles last year," says Lloyd. "They have to step up and be a force and we have five people that have to step up on both sides of the ball. The question is will they do it?"

"But we're optimistic about what the future brings. We're facing a tough challenge but we had a real good summer and we look forward to it."

## New R-S coach looks to future

By GARY STEWART

R-S Central's Hilltoppers lost most of the starters from last year's team, which finished only 4-6, but pulled a big upset in the Southwestern 3A Conference when they knocked perennial power Kings Mountain out of the playoff picture.

New coach Jim Keene, who was defensive coordinator the past two years under Mike Mabry, says this year the Hilltoppers aren't even in a rebuilding stage. They're in a building stage.

Keene is starting from the ground up in hopes of getting R-S Central back on the winning track after years of being a sub-.500 ball team.

"We have very few starters back," says Keene. "Our situation goes from bad to worse. We actually have only four returning starters."

Two of those returning players,

offensive/defensive lineman Lee Wiles and safety Wade Ogle, were All-Conference last year and they will be expected to provide leadership as Keene and staff try to establish a winning program.

"We've got a lot of new faces," Keene said. "We've got very small numbers. There's not that many people who are willing to pay the price. We're definitely in a building concept."

Keene said the Hilltoppers will continue to run a T-formation offense and 50 defense, and "just try to hang on."

"We just don't have a very strong tradition and that's what we're trying to build," he said. "We could be decent. It all depends on how the kids come together and bond as a unit. If they do we can be competitive; if not, it's going to be a long season."

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