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Roos, Bearcats set for Parker County clash

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Being neighborly takes on a different connotation when you are talking about butting heads on the gridiron. And being county co-residents, just a quick jaunt down the interstate from one another, can add just the right touch for a contentious night of Texas high school football. The Aledo Bearcats and Weatherford Kangaroos are not exactly separated by a rural road, but there remains a tinge of country flavor to the anticipation of meeting a county, rather than a city neighbor on the football field, as they prepare to meet, Friday at 7:30 p.m..

Though Weatherford (1-1) is yet looking for the game that will qualify the now-annual meeting as a rivalry, there is no lack of awareness in the minds of the kids about to take a 3-point stance across the line from each other.

"My job is to keep the kids grounded," said Weatherford head coach Kenny Wheaton, "and that's really my biggest challenge this week. There's enough excitement generated from just playing Aledo. I don't even want the kids to even think about that ... just play Weatherford football, concentrate on one play at a time and not worry about who [the opponent] is."

"We [the coaching staff] try to downplay any rivalry and not put any extra pressure on these kids, because there's plenty of others around town that will."

While the coaching staffs use task-oriented instruction to try to keep players focused on assignments and defensive schemes, there is also a realization that there is just so much you can do to make the opponents semi-anonymous.

"Oh yeah, I think it's a big game to our kids," said Aledo head coach Tim Buchanan. "Any time you play the next-door neighbor, it's [looked at as] a big game."

Another potential distraction for the Roos could be in the offing, as the Weatherford boys take their home field for the first time after a pretty significant face lift to Kangaroo Stadium. Coach Wheaton is much less concerned about the excitement the renovated stadium might invoke than he is about the Aledo offense coming to town.

"Aledo's running back [Johnathan Gray] is a very good back," said Wheaton. "He's very fast and if he breaks one he's going to be tough to catch."

"And we can't just key on him. Aledo throws the ball very well. I think they threw it 47 times the other night and with Gray sitting back there as a threat."

"That makes it tough to defend them because they're very well balanced offensively. We just have to play our assignments and try to keep them from breaking the big plays."

Sophomore Gray stung Grapevine for 255 yards last week in Aledo's 48-10 whipping of the Mustangs. Despite the spectre of facing Aledo's ground game, Wheaton is pleased with the performance of the Roos' defense after two weeks on display, despite the late-game miscues that saw Arlington Lamar score twice in the last two minutes of the game.

"Considering what the [Lamar back JeTerian] Douglas did to us last year, I felt like our defense did a good job holding him down last week," he said. "He's obviously a quality back and Lamar has a very good offensive line. There's no question that we're undersized and I'm proud of the way our defense has played in both games."

Buchanan and the Bearcats have to contend with an offense they don't see very often, in Weatherford's triple-option format. The infrequency presents a challenge in preparation, primarily because it's not easy to replicate.

"The biggest problem with preparing for this offense is trying to assimilate it with our kids," Buchanan said. "Defensively, it's no different than if you're up against a passing game ... everybody's got a responsibility on coverage and if you don't cover, they'll score."

"In a wishbone-type offense, somebody has dive [assignment],

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Photos



Weatherford's slotbacks, shown here as Trooper Reynolds (2) clears a path for Colton Kamper (6) in an earlier game against The Colony, hope to keep the ground game robust as the Roos match their triple-option against the Bearcats Friday, at Kangaroo Stadium. **KAY BIGGS/DEMOCRAT PHOTO/** (Click for larger image)

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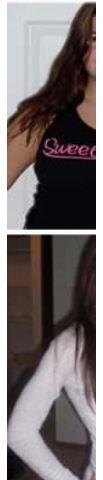
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somebody else has the quarterback and somebody's got the pitch man. If you don't cover it, they score on you."

Aledo's defense thus far in 2009 has picked up where it left off last year relative to being extremely stingy in ceding points. Grapevine's only touchdown came on a late-game kick-off return. Still Buchanan acknowledges some work left to do, as the Mustangs totaled nearly 350 yards in total offense, which means they sustained some drives, even though they could not score.

"I would liked to have gotten Grapevine's offense off the field a little quicker," Buchanan said. "But even though they ran for [nearly] 150 yards, we kept them out of the end zone. They only scored three points against our defense."

Both teams are relatively healthy, with the only question mark left unanswered being the Bearcats senior quarterback, Trey Ozee. Sophomore Matthew Bishop called the signals for Aledo against Grapevine, completing an efficient 9 for 14 in passing for more than 200 yards. Buchanan is happy about his backup stepping in, and up, to play so well.

"I thought Matthew did great for a sophomore quarterback," he said. "Trey turned his ankle against Stephenville, so we let Matthew play in this last game to try to get Ozee's ankle back to a hundred percent.

"We hope [Ozee] will be well enough to play by Friday. Other than that the rest of the team is well."

As of Tuesday, Buchanan estimated Ozee to be at about 70 percent readiness. Wheaton said that, other than normal post-game aches and pains, the Roos are healthy.

Weatherford's offense has been consistently running the ball well, the stock-in-trade of it's scheme. All four positions in the back field have produced good numbers, which has kept opposing defenses from keying on any single back.

Colton Kamper, Jaren Gentry, Trooper Reynolds and Mitchael Rucker all gained 60 yards and up against a talented Lamar defense in the previous week. But producing yards is not the Roos bane, thus far.

"Execution-wise, I think we're improving each week and moving the ball well for this early in the season," Wheaton said. "The turnovers are still killing us.

"Improve ball security and continue to move the ball well is what we need to do. Aledo is very good defensively. It will be a big challenge for us because last year we didn't move the ball well against them."

Aledo (2-0) won last year's meeting between the Parker County schools, 37-14. The Roos look to heighten the intensity of the annual meeting with a win against the ever-talented Bearcats, but Wheaton preaches early and often to the Weatherford boys that recognizing the real opponent is the first step to success.

"I always tell the kids that 'Our opponent is not sitting over there in the other dressing room, our opponent is sitting right in here.'" he said. "It's always about us. It's not who you play, but how you play."



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