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Published: August 28, 2009 02:20 pm

Roos open at The Colony with high hopes

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Spring drills are well behind, two-a-days are done, pictures have been taken, new equipment is in place and depth charts have been established. Time to don hard hats and get to it.

While the WHS JV and freshmen begin their respective tussles with the opposition Thursday, the Roos varsity main event kicks off Friday at The Colony's Tommy Briggs Stadium, at 7 p.m.

Weatherford head coach Kenny Wheaton and his staff have put in the hours to ready the Roos for their 2009 campaign and the kids have put in considerable hard work since the end of last season to prepare for this moment.

"We did football drills year-round," Wheaton said. "I'm always a bit leary of that because I don't want to burn the kids out, regardless of the sport. But I think it really is made a difference."

During the offseason of work, not a new experience in his 30 years of coaching, Wheaton did deal with a new occurrence, but survived, and feels good about the result.

"As a head coach I had never experienced any turnover of assistant coaches, so losing three felt huge," he said. Of course, the circumstances were understandable for all of those guys.

"But with the talent and experience we've brought in, I really feel like we've improved the staff, overall."

Those weren't the only changes for Weatherford in the offseason. The much-ballyhooed Roos Stadium renovation nears completion, as construction workers scramble to put final touches in place in time for the Roos first home game against Alledo.

"I'm so happy for these kids, getting the stadium improved over the past couple of years," he said. "They deserve to have as nice of a facility as the other schools around here."

"And it's not just the football players. It's about the band, the drill team, the cheerleaders and soccer, as well. We can have band competitions here and host playoff games. The special olympics will be a lot nicer, now. It's not about the winning and losing and being "deserving" of it. There are just a lot of good things to come out of the improvements."

As Wheaton enters his third campaign leading the Roos, with the influence of the football program filtering down to the lower grades, he has seen the progress returning in kind.

Weatherford's triple-option offense will feature flexibility in the backfield, as the Roos learn more than one position.

"We feel really good about our group coming in," Wheaton said, "and we cross-train two positions within the offense."

"[Senior Mitchael] Rucker still gets reps at fullback and is just great at quarterback. We have our quarterbacks lined up just like you need them ... senior, junior and sophomore. The other quarterbacks are also working at slotback, along with [Colton] Kamper."

Fronting the skill players, the head coach is optimistic about the group that will clear the way for the backs.

"We have a couple of returning starters on the line," he said, "but even the younger guys have some playing time, so we feel like we're better in the line. We are bigger than we've ever been."

Wheaton wants to go to the air more to keep opponebts from stacking against the run, and the Roos have worked toward that end.

"We still work hard at throwing the football and our returning receivers all started last year, he said. "Some of these newer kids coming from the basketball program will definitely help."



Photos



Weatherford head football coach Kenny Wheaton enters his third year at the helm of the Kangaroos, feeling better than ever about the prospects of the program hitting its stride to compete in District 3-5A. The Roos open regular-season play Friday, traveling to play The Colony Cougars. **GREG WEBB/DEMOCRAT SPORTS/** (Click for larger image)

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Defensively, the experience of returning players and a tweak in approach has Wheaton feeling better about the Roos ability to stay in ball games by yielding fewer points.

"Coach [Reid] Waller has been trying to adjust the defensive scheme to allow the kids to react more instead of having to think," Wheaton said. "We have three good defensive ends back with Gabe Garner, Tyler Weaver and Reese Wilhite. Our D-tackles are back, too. We moved Dakota [Abernathy] to safety and that should be a huge help. We just feel a lot better about that side of the ball."

Mistakes have been the bane of the Roos in the past couple of seasons. Looking for a solution, the staff has upped the level of discipline and repetition.

"We've been wearing out special teams to cut down on the mistakes we had last year," Wheaton said. "We have worked on deep snapping every day to try to avoid some of those mistakes that affected us at critical times last season."

Anticipating an improved showing from the kids, Wheaton is anxious to provide a better experience for the kids, the school and the fans, who have kept the stands topped off since his arrival in Weatherford.

"We really appreciate our fan support," he said. "I am really happy that since we've come here, I look up in the stands and they're full."

"And that's how it ought to be, win lose or draw. Players and coaches are doing their very best to put up a good showing, and I do know that Saturday morning is lot more fun after a win."



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