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## Gobel likes what he sees at Nitro

By [Rick Ryan](#), Assistant Sports Editor



*Chris Dorst*  
Mark Chandler has been versatile and productive for Nitro.

A fresh coat of newness has been painted onto the football program at Nitro, and first-year coach Bob Gobel hopes the makeover continues all season.

The 53-year-old Gobel, who has worked at several stops in the Kanawha Valley, takes over for John Sowards, who went 3-7 in his only season as Wildcats coach.

Gobel has been greeted by 30-to-35 players for each of the team's summer practice workouts, and likes what he's seen.

"So far, I've been impressed with their attitude," Gobel said, "and how they're trying to learn new things. It's been a really great team outlook, and that makes our job easier.

"A lot of times [your progress] depends on the character of the kids you're coaching, and it's been a pleasant surprise at how well we're doing. I've got some kids coming out who played for me at [[Andrew Jackson Middle School](#)] who haven't played before [at Nitro], which is going to help us."

Gobel said he won't be afraid to put the ball in the hands of versatile Mark Chandler, who was the only player last year to rank among the Mountain State Athletic Conference leaders in rushing, passing, receiving and scoring.

Chandler, who alternated between quarterback and receiver, ran for 647 yards and seven touchdowns, completed 37-of-62 passes for 503 yards and four scores, caught 22 passes for 308 yards and a TD and tallied 10 touchdowns and three conversions for 66 points.

"Mark Chandler's kind of a Mr. Any Position guy," Gobel said. "He's doing a real good job. Bodie Johnson played quarterback some last year, too. If we can find a few people to catch, hopefully we'll be doing OK because we like to run the spread offense and throw the ball. We like to say we put the ball in the air and try to amass large amounts of real estate at a rapid rate."

Johnson, the starting quarterback the first half of the season, ended up with 964 yards and five TD tosses, but 433 yards and four TDs came in the opening-game 38-35 win against Poca.

"We're trying to get on track here and be successful with the kids we have now," Gobel said, "the older guys, the more experienced guys. We also want to build the program from the ground up with younger guys, too. Have them get into the weight room and get [junior varsity] experience.

"Like I told the parents, the most important thing here is the present and the future. It's a tribute to the kids we're working with. They can make it work for us, but who knows how long it's going to take."

The Wildcats continue their workouts with two 7-on-7 sessions this week - 5 p.m. Monday at Winfield and 4 p.m. Tuesday at [South Charleston High School](#).

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