

HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL NOTEBOOK GW PONDERES HOME GAMES ON THE HILL

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George Washington came close to being king of the hill in Class AAA last year, losing in the state finals to South Charleston.

Now the Patriots have to decide if they'll be kings of their own Hill, and how many games they'll try to play at Steve Edwards Sr. Field on their South Hills campus.

For the second straight year, a GW parents group tried to drum up enough interest to install field turf on The Hill, but the project again failed to receive enough support to move forward for this season.

"We're not giving up on the idea," said Mike McClung, the school's freshman basketball coach and a member of the parents group. "We did pretty well, and we'll get another year under our belt before giving up. Hopefully, it's not dead in the water. In this economy, you do what you can do."

Now, GW must decide how many true home games it will play before the grass thins out at Edwards Field, and it returns to the field turf at Laidley Field. The Patriots' first three home dates are Sept. 4 (South Charleston), Sept. 18 (Spring Valley) and Sept. 25 (Princeton).

Coach Steve Edwards Jr. said the first two home dates would "definitely" be played in South Hills, and "for the others, we'll just see how the weather holds up."

"I would rather play them all here, and I think the kids would, too," Edwards Jr. said. "It just depends. If the weather holds up, we might be able to stretch it out more. My administration plays a big role in that. Eventually, we're going to play them all here. For now, we'll take what we can get, and be happy to get what we can."

Edwards was more optimistic that his school's field would soon get field turf.

"We're going to get it done," he said. "It's just a matter of time and getting everyone on board."

"We play our freshman schedule up there, our [junior varsity] schedule. You don't have any rainouts in football. It does take a beating, and we don't have any other place to play to give it a rest. I'd rather the elements not be a factor if it doesn't have to be. We do have the opportunity to have a facility like Laidley Field, and we could still play there."

Lou Ann Lanham-Henson, the manager of Laidley Field/University of Charleston Stadium, hopes GW makes up its mind about which games it wants to move so that Laidley might lure more neutral site contests. In past years, games like Bluefield-Scott, Magnolia-Tolsia and Point Pleasant-Midland Trail have been held at Laidley.

Lanham-Henson also thinks GW should reconsider its intent to hold the SC game at Edwards Field, which has limited parking and access roads.

"I would be very, very leery of playing the South Charleston-GW game on The Hill," she said, "just anticipating the kind of crowd they'll have. It's a rematch of the championship game, and there might still be some hard feelings. Crowd control alone would make it a tough situation."

Wildcat offense

First-year **Nitro** coach Bob Gobel doesn't want to tip his hand, but he's got some options with his offensive formations this season.

Nitro returns not one but two quarterbacks with a good deal of starting experience in Mark Chandler and Bodie Johnson.

Johnson started the first seven games last year and threw for 964 yards and five touchdowns, and Chandler, more of a run-pass threat, worked most of the last three games. Chandler threw for 503 yards and four scores and ran for 647 yards and seven TDs.

The aptly named Wildcat offense that's all the rage in football lately seems like a perfect fit.

"[Chandler's] a guy who can making things happen," Gobel said. "But we have Bodie, who played last year, and there could very well be formations where we use both of them. It's a good problem to have those two guys."

More work needed

In recent years, St. Albans treated preseason scrimmages the way some people shun poison ivy. Avoid at all costs.

The Red Dragons wouldn't schedule one during the first available slot, and in the mandated Mountain State Athletic Conference Grid-o-Rama, SA would usually rest most of its starters.

But that outlook has changed this year, as coach Derek Christian and his staff break in a lot of new

players. They want to get as many repetitions as they can before the season opens Sept. 4 at Riverside. (SA's bye comes on the season's first weekend.)

"We need all the work we can get," said Christian, who scheduled an opening scrimmage Aug. 15 against Hurricane. "We're going to use that [first week] as well. I hope people are patient with us."

Looking Sharp

Capital doesn't have to install the Wildcat offense. It already has a multi-dimensional back in junior Josh Sharp.

Sharp, who was inserted into the lineup at quarterback every couple series last year and also played some as a receiver, wound up third on the team in rushing (59 carries, 296 yards, one TD), completed 4-of-9 passes for 25 yards and a score, and even caught six passes for 27 yards.

"He's a guy you have to account for running the football, no doubt about it," said Capital coach Jack Woolwine, "and he can also hand it off and he can throw it."

Quick kick

n For years, Nitro's opening scrimmage had been against Bluefield, but that relationship ended this year. At the last minute, the Wildcats were able to schedule an Aug. 15 scrimmage against Sheldon Clark on that school's new field turf in Inez, Ky. Sheldon Clark will make the return trip next year. Gobel will miss this year's first scrimmage, though, as he's set to take his son to enroll at the University of Alabama.

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