

NITRO LEARNS LESSONS IN LOSS TO RIPLEY

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Nitro High acting head Coach John Painter wasn't exactly happy with his team's performance in a 47-7 homecoming loss to visiting Ripley (5-0) last Friday evening.

But Painter did learn something important about his team.

He's not coaching quitters.

And to Painter, that says a lot about a team that's had a revolving roster, and a pair head of coaches at the season's midpoint.

"Anytime the game's going the way it was, and your kids don't quit, that's a positive," said Painter, who's filling in for injured first-year coach Bob Gobel. "In any coach's mind, when you've got kids that are 0-4, and they're going into a football game against a pretty good football team in Ripley, and they don't give up, that's all we can ask for.

"We've had some turnover in players this year, then our head coach goes down in really just a freak accident. It's kind of tough, it really is.

"But that transition hasn't been as tough as just the turnover in players. I told the kids tonight that I think we've now got a group of players that we can build with this last five weeks. What I ask of the players right now is don't give up, keep fighting, and we will get better.

"Tonight we did that and we're going to be able to build on that."

Nitro (0-5), which has now had four head coaches in the last three seasons, is in dire need of something to build on as it fights through the growing pains that come with playing with a youthful and inexperienced roster.

The Wildcats were coached by Scott Tinsley in 2007, John Sowards in 2008, and Gobel and Painter this season.

Gobel, a former head coach at WVU Tech and West Virginia State, was brought in to help stabilize the coaching staff but is out while recovering from knee surgery.

"We knew we were going to have growing pains as a coaching staff and as a team," said Painter, who's in his third season on the Wildcats' staff. "When we got our coaching staff together back in August, we knew we'd have some growing pains, too.

"We've got some experience out here and we knew we'd have to work through some differences. We've done that and now that we're all on the same page, it's just a matter of getting the players believe in what we're trying to do.

"We're just trying to move forward right now, but it's hard because we are just so young and inexperienced.

"We've got a few seniors, but a lot of the seniors we're playing haven't played a lot on Friday night."

Painter, along with Johnny Johnson, Jack Long and Derek Midkiff, are handling the coaching duties in Gobel's absence.

"The first thing we had to do was get the kids to buy into what we're trying to do," said Johnson, a second-year assistant. "I believe they've done that.

"All the coaches are on the same page now. It took us a while to come together. It's just like any other job. When people first come together, it takes a little while to learn each other. We've done that pretty well and we're all headed in the same direction.

"We realize this is a young team, but the kids we have are working hard everyday in practice and they do not quit. They didn't quit tonight, and they won't. It's going to take a little time to get the program back to what it was, but we'll get there.

BOB WOJCIESZAK/DAILY MAIL

Nitro ♦s Michael Hall, right, turns Ripley ♦s Ronnie Mullins (32) upside down in a tackle during the Vikings ♦ 47-7 win over the Wildcats on Friday in **Nitro**.

Nitro assistant Johnny Johnson, left, and acting head Coach John Painter talk to Zach Cloxton on Friday. Contact sportswriter Michael Dailey at mike.dailey@dailymail.com.