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Football Bearcats Open 2012 Season Tonight

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By Andrew Cato, ShowMe Times Sports Editor

Four returning starters.

Four returning starters are all the Dexter Bearcats will have on the football field during the annual preseason jamboree, held Friday (Aug. 17) night at East Prairie High School.

After posting a 9-2 record during the 2011 season, the 'Cats lost 18 seniors - 16 of which either started or saw extensive playing time - to graduation. Head coach Aaron Pixley noted the inexperience of his very young team.

"It's a very inexperienced football team, on a Friday-night level. These kids have played football their whole lives, but there are very few who have played any varsity football; it's very different, and they're finding that out. They found that out at the contact camp over the summer, and they'll find it out tomorrow at the jamboree," he said during Thursday afternoon's DHS Fall Media Day. "They work hard, they're just green; a lot of it is inexperience, and a lot of it is youth. There are going to be a lot of young kids out there. We've never asked kids to win here - we've asked them to work hard and be disciplined. If they do that, I'm sure they'll be successful."

The 'Cats are seeking their third consecutive Class 3, District 1 Championship this season, and Pixley noted that mental preparation would be key to his team's success on and off the

field.

"We're going into every game to win it, but most importantly, we need to go in to every game mentally prepared and ready to play hard," he said. "If they do that, not only will they be successful in the win-loss column, they will be successful in life; it teaches you to be prepared for life, it teaches you to work hard for something. Being a champion is hard to do, and you have to work your rear-end off for it."

Last season's backup quarterback,
D.J. Dowdy, will fill the role of



starting quarterback this season. Ryan Joyner, a standout linebacker for the 'Cats last season, will be filling in at tailback in 2012.

"D.J. has gotten better and better as we've gone on. He's really worked some mechanics out in his throwing motion, and he's throwing the ball really well right now because of it," Pixley said of his junior quarterback. "He's just as inexperienced as anyone else right now; he'll have some growing pains and he'll learn some hard lessons, but he's doing fine. Our backup quarterback [Ethan Stephens] will be a freshman, and it's only the second time I've had that happen."

"We're about three deep at tailback; one of those will also double as a fullback, and we also have a couple good fullbacks. Ryan Joyner has been 'waiting in the wings' for a chance; he's a solid tailback and he'll get a lot of reps. Brad Wick is another one; he's coming off an injury, we hope to keep him healthy because he can help us back there. We have a young kid in Dylan Bazarian that will be a good tailback one day," he continued. "Jonathan Foels and Brad Wick will be back at fullback; all five of those guys that we're rotating could play fullback as well. We have good young bodies in those positions; hopefully we can be good enough up front to get them some space, and they'll hit the right holes and run as hard as they can."



Joyner noted the rough transition in going from a

solely defensive player in 2011 to playing both ways in 2012.

"It has been; you have to switch gears and learn how to hold the ball. Holding the ball and running for touchdowns," he commented. "You have to be [a leader] as one of the few starters coming back; it's something that gets thrown on your shoulders, and you have to bear it."

Chase Young, the lone returning wide receiver, also went through a bit of a transition during the offseason; Young was typically the third option in the 2011 passing game, after Tyler Miller and Jake Lee, but now he's looking to get more passes his way.

"It's a lot more pressure on you," Young said of the change. "Everybody younger than you is looking up to you. You have to know your routes, run them hard."

Dylan Aaron, the only returning player on the offensive line, noted the work ethic of his teammates in learning their positions up front. Chase Noe, who played exclusively on the defensive side of the ball last season, is now filling in at center on the o-line.

"They don't have as much experience, but I think they  have the same work ethic that we had last year, which will help in the long run," Aaron said. "They'll turn out to be pretty good with some experience."

"I played a lot of snaps last year in scout team, I'm just working on refining it now," Noe said of the offensive line. "Defense, we're going to have to step up and be tough, we lost a lot of people last year. Offense is the same thing, we'll have to be strong. We only have two that played on Friday nights last year."

Pixley said that filling out the offensive and defensive lines has been one of the more difficult aspects of this off-season, and noted the progress that still needed to be made on both fronts.

"It's been hard; it's been very hard. It's gone from no shape to a better shape, but we're not there. We're a long way from it. This is one of the smallest teams I've had, especially on the line," he said. "The degree of explosion they have to have coming off in the running game, it's not there right now. Staying with your blocks until the whistle blows, that's something they're just not getting as a unit right now."

"Dylan Aaron is the only returning starter, and he was a great player for us last year. He's coming off a shoulder surgery; he looks fine, and we hope and pray he stays healthy," Pixley continued. "These other guys up front have to play up to the level he's played at. They're coming along; we've rotated some people in and out. The starting line you see tomorrow night might not be the one you see at the end of the year; we're going to find the best five, good or bad."

The Bearcats will take the field for the first time in 2012 on Friday (Aug. 17) night at the

Preseason Jamboree, held at East Prairie High School.

Kickoff is scheduled for 6:00 p.m.

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