

By JOHN HENSON

Harlan County Sports.com

After starting the season 0-3, the Whitley County Colonels knew they would have to grow up fast to compete in District 8 of Class 5A.

Whitley showed signs of improvement with wins over Clay County, Lynn Camp and Somerset and then pushed favored Perry Central to the final seconds in a 41-40 loss last week in the district opener for both teams.

"They play a lot of good competition early, and they have improved a lot," Harlan County coach Tom Larkey said.

The Colonels opened the season with losses to Russell County (30-0), Rockcastle County (36-3) and Bell County (33-10). All three teams are competing for district championships and have a combined record of 19-2.

"In some areas we've gotten a lot better. In some areas we still have a long way to go," Whitley County coach Jim Black said. "We still need to get better at fundamentals."

Playing with visiting Harlan County on Friday in a 7:30 game in Williamsburg will be a challenge as the 3-4 Colonels prefer a ground attack based on power football. Harlan County (7-0 overall, 1-0 district) is traditionally at its best against teams that like to run between the tackles.

"Nobody has moved it on them except George Rogers Clark, and that's probably because they have more athletes than anybody else," Black said. "Defensively, they are very good. Offensively, they run the ball down your throat and make you like it. It's been that way for two years now. You have to man up and stop it. That's what we're looking at."

Junior fullback Boston Bryant has handled the bulk of the carries for the Colonels and leads the team with 1,050 yards and eight touchdowns on 151 carries. He's also the team leader in tackles with 70 from his linebacker position.

"They moved a tight end to fullback. He's about 240, and he's a hulk to try to bring down," Larkey said of Bryant. "If you don't stop him at the line of scrimmage then you may have to jump on his back and ride him for 50 yards to get him down. You can't arm tackle him. We have to play great defense. We have to concentrate on him, but they also have the rocket sweep and their option. Our defense has been working hard this week trying to focus in and concentrate on their assignments." Freshman Austin Ysidro has also provided a lift for the Colonels in his first season as a starter and ranks second in rushing yards with 325 on 45 carries.

"They run the option really well with the freshman quarterback," Larkey said.

"He's improved every game, as all the players have," Black said. "The question is are we at the level of Harlan. No, we're not there yet. All you can ask them to do is go out and work hard every week, and they've done that."

Harlan County also features a ground-oriented attack with senior Marcus McMillian rushing for 1,142 yards and 18 touchdowns and junior Jake Middleton adding 909 yards and eight touchdowns. Senior quarterback Jordy Brewer has 325 yards and six touchdowns on the ground and has completed 28 of 43 passes for 548 yards with six touchdowns and two interceptions.

Middleton leads the team in tackles with 63. Sophomore linebacker Carson Whitehead has 58 tackles. Junior nose guard Kainer Caudill has 55 tackles.

With an 0-1 district record, Whitley could stay in the hunt for the top seed in District 8 by knocking off the Bears. If they lose, the Colonels will be playing for the third seed next week at home against Letcher Central.