

Sports



Senior Victor Gomez embraces senior Charlie Wethington after beating Summerville.

Kat Kollegger // photo



Senior Miller Whitten breaks down on the ground in happiness after the win over Summerville.

Kat Kollegger // photo



Coach Dustin Williams watches the end of the intense home game unfold as Wando gets the win in overtime.

Kat Kollegger // photo



The varsity football players celebrate their victory over Summerville after five overtimes last home game on Nov. 4. The Warriors won 51-43.

Mackenzie Ivey // photo

The road to playoffs

Successful season sets high hopes for playoffs

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staff writer

There's been more this year. More to see, more to experience, more excitement, more promises. And the fans can sense it.

"During the game you can look out over the student section and see kids locked in, watching the game, and it's the coolest thing," said senior Miller Whitten, a linebacker and one of four senior captains.

With an 8-2 record and a second place finish in Region 7-AAAA, the team is set for the first round of playoffs on Nov. 18. They will be hosting a home playoff game at the Wando Stadium for only the third time in Wando history.

The excitement of the season can be summed up with the Summerville game on Nov. 4. After five overtimes, the Warriors came out on top, winning 51-43.

Five overtimes. A screaming crowd. Football players crying.

"The atmosphere and everybody wanting to be together and really wanting to have a really good record... I guess it just pushed everybody..." senior running back Dakariee Alston said. "Especially on senior night, I think that was very exhilarating. It was very passionate... Coming out like that and winning the game after five overtimes, it was great."

Summerville dominated most of the second half, taking a 10 point lead far into the fourth quarter before Wando rallied to score a touchdown and recovered an onside kick.

Now, the team is in preparation mode. This week, a "bye week" will allow everyone to reset. Head Coach Jimmy Noonan focuses on just that.

"We'll piece together our game plan and we'll really hit the ground running come Monday. But, our goal this week is to heal and get our feet back underneath us, take a deep breath -- so to speak," Noonan said.

Their opponent will be White Knoll of Lexington. Beating White Knoll and advancing to the next round, would be particularly meaningful to the large senior class.

"It would mean a lot [to advance]. Some of the most talented teams to come through Wando have not advanced past the first round. It would be a great feeling to leave knowing this group accomplished that," said Joe Lassiter, tight end and a senior captain.

A major focus of this season has been the size of the senior class, especially as compared to previous years. Many believe it has played a large part in securing victories. Lassiter agrees.

"Experience wise I think it has been huge," Lassiter said. "Many of the seniors this year have a lot of varsity experience and know how to handle the adversity a season brings."

For captains like Lassiter and Whitten, the experienced, well-seasoned senior class has made their roles simpler, and more fun. A number of seniors have been playing beside them for many years.

"Having so many seniors makes it easier to lead the team, because everyone knows what the coaches are expecting," Whitten said. "We all know this is our last year to do something special. The team chemistry is very strong, most of us have played together since middle school and now have friendships that will last a lifetime."

Indeed, the amount of seniors allowed for better chemistry and strong leadership. They also seemed to really help underclassmen, like junior quarterback Cale Lewis, feel welcome and comfortable as they found their place on the team.

"Last year when I transferred in, this group of seniors took me in and I have gotten to know them a lot better this year. They are a great group of guys," Lewis said.

The drive to do so came, for many, from last year's difficult season.

"I think having the experience most of us had last year lit a fire in all of us and made us all want to do better," Whitten said. "We all came together back in December and knew we were gonna give it our all and make our community and school proud of the football team."

Noonan certainly has noticed the team's hard work.

"It's a good season, our guys are really pulling themselves into each other, into what the coaches are asking of them... we're proud of them," he said.

Noonan doesn't attempt to predict the outcome of Nov. 18's game. He does, however, know what his team is capable of.

"I know one thing," Noonan said. "I would never underestimate this group."