

Undefeated Wildcats, Beavers face off in rivalry game

By Korbyn Ryan

As game day draws ever closer, the anticipation of the Sept. 16 Durant-Wilton rivalry game builds. With both teams being undefeated at 3-0, this game will determine the tone for the rest of the season.

Head Coach Joel Diederichs believes that the rivalry game is and always will be a special game to both the team and the community.

“Both programs are doing an excellent job this season,” he said. “It should be a great atmosphere and an exciting game. This game is also the opening game of district play, so it should be a great test as both teams are 3-0.”

This season, the Durant Wildcats have worked themselves into the top 10 rankings at eighth, and many Durant families are expected to travel the short distance to Wilton to watch the game. However, Coach Diederichs hasn’t let that get to the team.

“The team prepares just like every week,” he said. “We have to play four quarters to the end and see how the chips fall.”

Thanks to Coach Diederichs, senior running back Nolan Delong hasn’t let that affect his time on the field.

“There is always pressure to win no matter if the eyes are on you or not,” Delong said. “But in my career, I’ve learned to channel that stress and anxiety into positive results on the field.”

However, that's not to say the season hasn't had a hiccup along the way. Last Friday, Durant played at Northeast. While Durant held the lead 15-6 by half time, Northeast quickly turned the tides, scoring 13 points in the third quarter to take a 22-15 lead.

Thankfully, the Wildcats managed to pull ahead in the fourth quarter on a DeLong rushing touchdown and two-point conversion. The Wildcat defense held their own in a final drive by the Rebels late in the fourth quarter to beat Northeast 23-22.

Coach Diederichs was proud of his team.

"We started out pretty well, then momentum swung in favor of Northeast, but our guys kept their heads in the game and kept grinding," said Coach Diederichs. "We were able to come back and gain the victory. I was very proud of their effort and willingness not to give in but persevere in the end."

Sophomore quarterback Isaac Nielsen, who stepped into the starting role after junior Charlie Huesmann suffered an injury in the second game against Cascade, believes the Rebels' rally in the second half was simply a fluke, and he has his eyes set on beating the arch-rival Beavers.

"My goals are just to lead my team," Nielsen said. "Be their leader and work together to win this Friday."

Huesmann fully believes in the team to lead the Wildcats into a memorable year.

"I honestly don't think the team will miss a beat while I'm gone," Huesmann said. "I have confidence that the team will help reach that goal."

DeLong believes that this team is particularly special this year. Speaking of special, in the first three games of the season, DeLong has rushed for 965 yards and carried the ball 95 times for a 10.2 yard average. He has scored nine touchdowns and surpassed the 5000-yard mark in career rushing against Northeast.

“It's a great group of seniors that know how to lead a team in a positive direction, and that's what winning comes down to,” DeLong said. “Leadership is everything when it comes to sports.”

All three starters believe that beating Wilton is always important to the team.

“It would mean the absolute most to me,” DeLong said. “It's always a great game when we play the rivals five miles down the road, so I'm expecting nothing less. This win would also give me a 3-1 record over the Beavers.”