

Matadors looking to get past ‘bad ending’

By Phil Terrigno

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Jaleen Tennison begins his third season as Estacado's starting quarterback. (Zach Long)

Jalen McQueen doesn't remember the game as just a loss.

The Matadors were “embarrassed” by Graham, “smashed” to the tune of a 42-6 drubbing in the 3A DII regional semifinals last season.

It was a poor end that, in McQueen's eyes, diminished an otherwise strong season that yielded playoff wins against Perryton and Snyder. Why such hard feelings about the end of a competitive year that saw Estacado's athletes shine and second-year quarterback Jaleen Tennison cement his status as a dual-threat?

“I feel like some of our players from last year showed up like they didn't want to play the game,” McQueen said.

That's a bold, candid admission from the senior right tackle and defensive end about a lack of focus. It was echoed by senior wide receiver and safety Carl Willard.

“Everybody wants to win state, but not everybody had the same goals,” Willard said. “Not all players were committed. This year, our team, not to single anyone out (from past teams), but we're more committed this year. We are trying to improve and show all the hype and talk about us is just what they think (it is).”

So where does that leave the current state of Estacado football just five days removed from its home opener against Hereford?

In strong condition, thanks to its 20 seniors.

“As a group last year, we didn’t have as many seniors as we did underclassmen,” Estacado coach Danny Servance said. “Usually when that happens, the team takes on the personality of the majority. They had Robert Johnson, one of the guys that was a leader. I believe in senior leadership. Usually when you have a senior-laden team, you have more leadership.”

Johnson is gone — ending an outstanding career that saw him tally 1,500 yards and 17 touchdowns in the first six games of last year — but Tennison returns and will command a pistol offense after passing for 1,085 yards and scoring 17 combined touchdowns last season.

In a preseason intrasquad scrimmage, Tennison ran the new scheme, forcing the defense to defend the pitch, keep, pass and reverse.

Willard said the secondary, which also includes six-foot-two, 180-pound Kenaris Jackson and six-foot-one, 170-pound Jevon Bascus at cornerback, was forced to pay attention to the play action.

“The offensive line did really good,” Willard said. “Last year we didn’t have good coverage. They looked good. They contained. They listened.”

Slaton transfer Ave’On Williams, Tennison’s brother, will compete for one of the starting running back slots with Ukedrian Anderson, Craig Busby and David Smith.

It’s a trio along with Tennison that will be led on either side of the offensive line by tackles Kendrick Quigley (six-foot-three, 295 pounds) and McQueen (six-foot-four, 285 pounds).

In talking about the intrasquad scrimmage, Willard admitted one of the Mustangs’ old hindrances reappeared, even if for a moment: some of his teammates were losing focus on the sideline.

“We have to get better at that,” Willard said.