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# TCHS has dominated series against Hillcrest

*By Anthony Johnson Special to The Tuscaloosa News  
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NORTHPORT | The rivalry started Sept. 20, 1996, when Tuscaloosa County shut out the Hillcrest Patriots, 22-0.

The two teams have met on Friday nights for 12 consecutive years since then, but not much has changed.

Hillcrest has walked away victorious only once, claiming a 28-7 win in 2003. TCHS is 12-1 all-time against Hillcrest, outscoring the Patriots 377-157, holding an average margin of victory of 18 points per game.

"We have had their number for the last few years, but our guys are well aware that could all change (tonight)," TCHS head coach Lee Gibson said.

The two schools are separated by only 15 miles, making it harder to escape after a loss and adding even more incentive to come away with a year's worth of bragging rights.

"We not only see these guys on the field, but we see them at the barbershop," Gibson said.

"That definitely adds to the atmosphere of the game."

Senior linebacker Tanner Goode said it's no secret this will be one of the most significant games the Wildcats will play all season.

"You can feel it in the air," he said. "Everyone is talking about it at school and everyone is excited. It's intense. The students all say they are going to be painted up and ready to go."

Gibson said despite the significant advantage the Wildcats hold in the series, there is no danger in TCHS overlooking the Patriots.

"These guys don't need me to talk them up for Hillcrest," Gibson said. "They know it's a rivalry and what it means to the school."



TCHS running back Damian Minor has 627 yards of total offense and five touchdowns through three games.

Gibson said he has gotten a good feel for the Patriots through game film and has been impressed with what he has seen this season.

"They have an outstanding team," the coach said. "That No. 20 (Lance Wilson) is a true playmaker. He's one of the best route runners I have seen all year.

"They have a veteran quarterback in Jared Pratt, and I have been very impressed with their running back, Jaabir Stephens. Everybody talked about them losing Ellis Hill (to graduation), but I think the running back they have now is going to be tremendous."

Senior running back Damion Minor said he has been scouting the Patriots' defense and realizes the challenge that lies ahead.

"They have a great defense," he said. "No. 21 (Dedrick Williams) is fast and he's a great player and makes a lot of athletic plays. Their safety is a great player, too."

Gibson said the key to victory for the Wildcats will be 48 minutes of execution.

"We rededicated ourselves this week," Gibson said. "Our guys have a standard they want to live up to, and they realize they didn't reach that standard last week so they know what they need to do on Friday in order to fix that."

For Goode, this game is all about the seniors finishing what they started three years ago.

"We prepare every year for this," he said. "We work hard, but we know they are going to come out just as hard as we will.

"It would make their year if they beat us, but we know we can't be the senior class that lost to Hillcrest."

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