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Kickoff '24: First-time starters are key for Blue Devils

By Liam Dreesen MDJ Sports Writer
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Marietta enters the 2024 season with a few question marks.

The Blue Devils' offense lost eight of its top 10 most productive players from last season and the defense lost six of its top 10 tacklers.

In total, coach Richard Morgan said the team will be returning five starters, forcing them to find 17 new guys.

"The key right now is them competing against each other to bring out the best in each other," Morgan said. "It's all going to be brand new on Aug. 16 and for a lot of them that's going to be the challenge in the early part of the season."

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One of those 17 new starters will be at quarterback after the now-graduated Chase McCravy started the previous two seasons.

Morgan said the team had a competition over the summer to see who will get the starting job, but it had not been decided by press time.

“We (had) two guys competing, Carson Snipes and Jayden Whiteside,” Morgan said.

Snipes, a junior, and Whiteside, a sophomore, started for the Blue Devils JV and freshman teams respectively last season where Morgan said they found success. Snipes also got some valuable varsity experience late last season.

One position the Blue Devils don’t have to replace is defensive end. They’re led there by senior Anthony Kruah, a three-star recruit who also plays linebacker. Kruah is committed to North Carolina and a two-time all-region defender.

“He can rush the passer and give us more of a presence up there, because our sack numbers were not where they needed to be last year,” Morgan said. “So he gives us that dominant guy at the point of attack.”

Last season Kruah was the Blue Devils’ leading pass rusher with five sacks. He also finished second on the team in tackles and tackles for loss with 70 and 10.5 respectively.

Kruah will also be playing tight end and will possibly be in packages where they directly snap it to the 6-foot-2 senior.

“He’s gonna have an impact on a football game, he’s just got to get used to being able to play the entire game,” Morgan said. “But he’s a good athlete, and he’s got a chance to do some special things this year.”

Kruah and the Blue Devils are hoping to bounce back from last season, where they finished 3-8 and lost in the first round of the playoffs.

“We need to cut down on the turnovers, be a better tackling team, execute better in the red zone and be better on special teams,” Morgan said. “Those are all things that we felt like we let slip away last year.”

He also said getting all of their new players up to game speed by week one was going to be key for the team to find success early in the season.

In Week 1, the Blue Devils will match up against a Gainesville team that finished last season 12-1 with a region title.

“To me, that’s the most important game because we really get a chance to see where we’re at and all the work we have put in this offseason,” Morgan said.

He said if it can do well against Gainesville, the team will gain confidence and be set up for success the rest of the season.

The Blue Devils will try and make their eighth consecutive postseason, but will have to overcome a tough road to do so.

Their schedule is the hardest in all of Cobb County, with an average opponent winning percentage of 63%.

“Yeah, our region’s not easy,”

Morgan said. “But we make sure our non-region schedule is also difficult to prepare us for those region games, and ultimately the playoffs, because those are the type of teams you’re going to be facing at the end of the season when it really matters anyway.”

This upcoming season will also mark five seasons since Marietta won its last state championship.

Morgan said not much has changed within the program since that memorable season, other than the players on the field.

“The way we do things, the way we do business, the way we run our program and compete has never changed.”



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