

Old Hawk/new coach is putting it all on the line

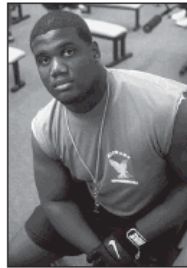
By Dan Cooley
Correspondent

HICKORY
Hickory High's new head football coach, Jupiter Wilson, is a little short on experience. This is his first job as a high school head football coach. But the Hickory hiring brass are banking on Wilson's strong legacy. Wilson, an offensive guard and defensive tackle in high school, may be one of the best football players to come out of Hickory High. The 1999 graduate went on to play Division I college football at the University of North Carolina.

Wilson started at offensive guard for three seasons in Chapel Hill. Wilson then played two years in the professional Arena Football League for the Georgia Force and the Macon Knights. Coaching wise, Wilson has served stints as offensive and defensive coordinator at Charlotte, N.C.'s Vance High. Last season, with Wilson as the defensive coordinator, Vance advanced to the Group 4A state semifinals. In addition, Wilson, the boys track coach, led the team to the 2010 state title. After former Hickory head coach Tim Sitterson re-



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V-P FILE

signed in December, Wilson was hired in February, but since he was still the track coach at Vance, he didn't arrive at Hickory until the middle of June. Wilson, who played on Hickory's first football team in 1996, said he has closely followed each of Hickory's seasons. The Hawks suffered three straight losing seasons but finished last year with a 6-4 mark. "The guys have to get into the mindset of having a winning team every season," Wilson said. "And so far, so good. The first thing I noticed when I got here was that guys were staying in shape and had definitely been hitting the weight room. And this summer, we've had 80 kids come out to conditioning workouts, so that's a great start." The Hawks return 12 of 22 starters, including most of the offensive line. But they must replace their quarterback, both running backs and three wide receivers. Wilson said he will serve as the offensive coordinator. He will also handle the offensive line, which he believes is the team's strength. "We should have one of the better offensive lines in the district, so we'll use that to our advantage," Wilson said. "We will be predominantly a run-oriented team." Another focus is improv-

ing the Hawks defense, which has struggled the last four seasons. "Lack of speed has always been an issue here on defense," Wilson said. "So we're going to start by keeping the defense simple, with the stability of doing the same things and making sure we do them well." Wilson has already hired most of his coaching staff and given them position assignments. Assistant coach Matt Moyer will handle the quarterback and wide receivers. Sitterson will stay on as an assistant, handling the running backs and defensive line. D.J. Alexander will take care of the defensive backs. And Ryan Slabaugh will be defensive coordinator and coach the linebackers.

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NOW AND THEN: Hickory High's new head football coach Jupiter Wilson (left) graduated from Hickory in 1999 (right) and went on to start for three years at UNC-Chapel Hill.

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