

By Steve Williams  
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With a bevy of returning talent, another banner football season could be in the cards for the Reidsville Rams. But a lot depends on building some much needed depth, especially on the offensive line.

The season kicks off Friday night at 7 p.m. at Western Alamance, one of the feature games of a non-conference schedule that also includes perennially-solid football programs Greensboro Page and Eastern Alamance.

"Expectations at Reidsville are always pretty high," said veteran coach Jimmy Teague as he looked ahead to his 28th season as the Rams' head man. "Especially coming off last year with so many guys coming back. We definitely have the ability to make another run at this thing if we can stay healthy and get better every week."

Reidsville rolled along undefeated into the state quarterfinals a year ago before bumping into a star-studded Shelby team and being turned back 31-14. The Rams had won their first three playoff games by impressive margins: 49-7 over Randleman, 56-14 over Chase and 50-35 over Hendersonville, but were no match for Shelby, which claimed the state 2-A title a couple weeks later in a 55-34 romp over Wallace-Rose Hill.

Many high school prognosticators are already looking ahead to a Reidsville-Shelby rematch in this year's playoffs.

The Rams' spectacular passing attack was pretty much nullified by Shelby's defensive front that included a pair of stars that are now playing in the D-1 college ranks. So shoring up the line play is an objective for Teague and his staff.

The Rams were young on the offensive line a year ago, especially after Vince Widerman was injured in the Hendersonville game. There's more experience this year for sure.

Two veteran returnees are the key to the offensive line. Senior Nashaun Price (6-0, 275) is a three-year starter at right tackle and senior Nycer Kelly (6-2, 273) is back at left tackle.

Tyrese Turner (6-3, 245) moved into a starting role as a freshman at mid-season a year ago and also brings some experience to the trenches at left guard.

Junior Matthew Guill (6-2, 250) will man the center position and junior transfer Titus Burson (5-11, 215) will open at right guard. "The first guys across the board, we feel pretty good about," Teague said. "The biggest concern is getting some young guys ready to play. The thing we're trying to work hard to do is get some depth along the line."

Senior Keyshawn Hildebrand (6-0, 240) was a key reserve a year until an injury sidelined him. He's been limited in pre-season but hopes to return to full speed in a few more weeks.

Parker Strader, a junior playing for the first time, expects to get a lot of playing time.

Extra depth will come from Mario Whitsett, Noah Ware and John Flippen, a trio who will lead the junior varsity line.

The Rams are loaded with experience and speed at the skill positions.

Add size to the equation at quarterback where junior Al Lee (6-2, 210) and senior Landon Denny (6-4, 198) are both solid.

"We've probably got as quality at quarterbacks as we've had in a long time with Al and Landon," Teague said. "That's one position where it's hard to have a platoon."

Lee is the returning starter and Denny would be a starter most anywhere else.

"Landon's a really good football player. Between him and Al, we feel really good about that position."

In 2021, Lee completed 142 of 220 attempts for 3,057 yards and 39 touchdowns. He was intercepted only four times.

Denny saw limited time but was 12-of-22 for 128 yards.

There are some quality targets in the passing game, despite the graduation of Cam Peoples, who led the team with 61 receptions. Queshyne Flippen had a spectacular sophomore season, averaging 30.9 yards per catch. He snagged 49 balls and turned 25 of them into touchdowns while burning the turf for 1,515 yards.

"He probably had as good a sophomore season as anyone we've ever had and that's saying something because we've had a bunch of good ones," Teague said.

Senior Jaden McCain also returns after finishing third in receptions with 15. He averaged 24.8 per catch while finding the end zone four times.

Junior Aiden Mansfield, who had four catches for 66 yards a year ago, will also figure into the mix.

Tamir Johnson burst upon the varsity scene as a sophomore but missed his entire junior season following knee surgery. He's now back and will be another explosive target.

Lorenzo Mendoza is back for his senior season after making five receptions a year ago.

Two heralded freshmen figure to make an immediate impact.

Kendre Harrison will be an imposing target at 6-foot-5 and some tight end sets will be added to accommodate his potential.

Dionte Neal, the quarterback of the dominant middle school team, has made the transition to wide receiver and has tremendous upside.

Graduation took 1,000-yard rusher Shyheim Watlington but Teague is excited about potential at tailback offered by junior Jeremiah Redd, sophomore Jariel Cobb and senior Trey Poteat. Redd was second to Watlington on the rushing chart a year ago with 262 yards and two touchdowns. Cobb, a mainstay on defense, saw only 10 rushing attempts as a freshman but will play a much larger role this season.

"All three are really good players," Teague said. "They will all get some touches."

The A-back position will be led by juniors Paul Widerman and Devin Shryock and senior Grayson Blackwell.

As is customary for a 2-A size school, players are called on to play both ways and Reidsville is no exception.

The Rams have their four leading three tacklers back with Cobb, Shryock, Mendoza and McCain.

Cobb, who led the teams with 64 stops including 14 tackles for loss, will alternate on the line and linebacker.

Shryock had 52 tackles, including 10 TFLs, and he'll be back at defensive end. Bryson Blackstock, a junior who didn't play last

year, has looked good at defensive end and Harrison will be a factor there as well.

Price and Kelly lead the interior line with Turner and Burson in the rotation.

Cobb will be a force everywhere he plays.

"He plays a little bit everywhere — nose guard, defensive end and linebacker," Teague said of the super sophomore. "He's definitely a factor wherever he's playing."

Wideman and Mansfield are the starting inside linebackers with Johnson and Mendoza lining up on the outside.

Sophomore Bryson Miller will provide depth in addition to playing on Thursday nights.

McCain returns at free safety. In addition to ranking fourth on the team in tackles, he contributed two interceptions and a fumble recovery. Johnson can also play free safety in addition to his duties at outside linebacker.

Queshyne Flippen returns at cornerback after picking off four passes a year ago and Neal, the freshman, will be at the other corner.

Poteat and senior Kai Jordan will provide good depth in the secondary. Senior Jaylin Baggett could also help at corner, but he's currently nursing a knee problem.

A huge void is being felt in kicking game. It's been pretty much an automatic point after touchdown in recent seasons as Brad Green (beginning in 2013), Zach Baber and Anthony Franson combined to make 620 of 667 extra points (93 percent) over the past 10 seasons.

Franson was 225 of 242 in his three years and also served as the punter as a senior.

Teague isn't concerned about the punting as Shryock and Wideman have both looked good but there are still questions to answer for kickoffs and placekicks.

Senior Logan Hammock worked hard to become the kicker this year but he's currently out with an injury. Freshman Grady Barrett is another possibility.

"You might see a lot of two-point plays in the scheme of things this year," Teague said.

Teague said Friday's game at Western Alamance "will give us an idea of where we're at. It's a tough opener. Page (week two opponent) is improved too and are going to be tough."

Western finished 4-6-1 last season and 4-A Page was 4-7 but both teams were young and expect to be much improved.

The Rams' scheduled game with Eastern Alamance last fall was canceled due to Covid issues. Eastern was knocked out of the 3-A playoffs in a fourth-round overtime loss to Jacksonville and closed at 10-2.

"The non-conference schedule is going to be a good test for us and hopefully will get us ready for down the road," Teague added.

Teague's staff is intact from last season (and several prior seasons) and that's huge factor in Reidsville's continued success.

"I've said all along that the continuity of our staff is one of the biggest factors of why we've continued to be a solid football program," Teague said. "Not having turnover has been our biggest strength overall when you look at everything. We work well together. We know what to expect each day."

The staff includes Al Hendricks, Steve Knowles, Doug Marrs, Erik Teague, Justin Jackson, Eric Greer, Anthony Mansfield, Quan Graves, Ivan Courts and Jamie Jackson.

Several members of the staff were former Rams. Seth Jeffries, on the team at Guilford College, helped during the summer but has since returned to school.

### **SOME MORE NUMBERS:**

- Reidsville is ranked No. 3 in the pre-season Max Preps listing for West 2-A behind Shelby and Monroe.
- Reidsville ranks No. 1 in the state in a couple of consecutive game streaks: Games since last shutout (347 games) and scoring in double figures (87 games). The last shutout loss was to West Brunswick in the first round of the 1997 playoffs.
- Reidsville's last conference loss was in 2011 against Burlington Cummings. That's a streak of 51 straight wins in conference games and 10 undefeated seasons.
- Jimmy Teague's all-time record in 35 seasons is 366-109, including a 325-56 mark at Reidsville. His playoff record at RHS is 75-18 with state championships in 2002, 2003, 2007, 2008, 2016, 2018, 2019 and 2020-21.