The Watauga High football team looks like a mash unit right now. The latest casualty among the walking wounded is senior quarterback Tripp Taylor, who suffered a broken jaw during the third quarter of last Friday night's game against

Alexander Central. Taylor, who will have surgery, is supposedly out for the season. But he showed up for workouts Monday.

"I would say Tripp's done for the season," said WHS coach Tom Wright. "But he's a tough kid. He's got a big heart. But with a broken jaw, I would say he's probably done for the year."

And that means junior Jay Harrill will make his second varsity start Friday night against South Caldwell on Homecoming. Harrill, who is playing football for the first time, has looked pretty good in his last two outings. He was 6-7 for 58 yards in a mop-up role against Elizabethon two weeks ago, and he was 7-13 for 81 yards last Friday night against the Cougars.

Not bad for a guy that was primarily a basketball player until this year.

"I ate lunch with a lot of the football players last year, and I heard them talking about how much fun it was to play football," Harrill said. "That really perked my interest, and I told them I was coming out for the team this season. Coach (Tim) Pruitt (now an assistant coach at Cherryville) spoke with me a week later and gave me a play book. I showed up to workouts, and I liked it."

But Harrill admits, playing football has been a challenge, especially the physical aspect of the game. Afterall, he's the quarterback, and unfortunately, he's also the guy everyone on the other team is dying to get their hands on.

"My dad was a little worried when I told him I was going to play football," Harrill said. "And, yes, I was a little worried about getting hit myself. We had a scrimmage against Johnson County, TN., when fall workouts began, and I got hit a couple of times. But I felt fine. Then we had another scrimmage, and I got sacked six times (he said with smile), but I got through it. It's a tough game, but it's my job to make the right decisions, no matter what happens out there."

And Harrill will make his second varsity start against South Caldwell, arguably, the best team in the league Friday night. The Spartans (8-0 overall; 4-0 in the Northwestern 3A/4A Conference) feature a stout defense and a stingy secondary that only allowed 76 passing yards a game and six touchdowns all of last season.

"I've just got to go out there and do my job," Harrill said. "I can't worry about who were playing against. I'm suppose to be a leader out there. And thanks to guys like Tripp and coach (Marshall) Thomas (WHS' quarterback coach), they've really brought me along and taught me a lot. They never criticize me. Instead, they explain what I did wrong, and what I need to do to correct it. They've been really helpful."

But losing Taylor is a huge blow for a team that's mired in a season-long, three-game losing streak. And Harrill says losing Taylor goes beyond the playing field.

"He's a great kid and a great leader," Harrill said. "Tripp was very supportive of me. We worked well together. We were always helping each other. He's a great teammate and a tough competitor. A guy like that will be tough to replace."

But Harrill did a nice job in a starting role last week, when he stepped in for Taylor, who sat out the first half for violating team rules. And he had the Pioneers in contention before the Cougars broke the game open with 14-unanswered points in the fourth quarter.

"The coaching staff told me I was going to start last Monday," Harrill said. "I was nervous, but when we got the ball first, it gave me a chance to get on the field right away, and I settled down. It was a physical game, and I took a pretty good shot in the ribs. But I'm all right. I survived. Look, I'm still new at this, my fundamentals still aren't that sharp, and I have still have a lot to learn. But I like playing football and I'm happy I decided to play. I have the support of my teammates, my coaches and my parents, and that's all that matters."

The Pioneers might get their top player, Collin Augustine, back Friday night. The senior running back/linebacker, who broke his collarbone against Avery on August 31, will be a game-time decision. And if he returns, Augustine will be a welcome sight for a running game that has really struggled the last three weeks. Coverage begins at 6:30 p.m. Friday night on Oldies 100.7 FM.