

Hampton Makes Huskies Debut August 17

Written by Mike Kelly

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Michael Jordan once said, "Work hard at something and the results will eventually begin to show." A true statement from the greatest player basketball has ever seen. Which in a nutshell also describes Brian Hampton, the new football coach at Ashe County High. Hampton, an Ashe County native and a Beaver Creek High grad, has an impressive resume in such

a short time. He's been coaching football for 17 years, and he begins his fourth as head coach August 17 at West Caldwell.

Hampton turned North Surry's fortunes around in just three short years. Following a 1-10 start in 2009, the Greyhounds won 15 games the next two seasons and made the state playoffs both times.

"I just like making football fun for the kids," Hampton said in a modest tone. "I want the kids to play hard, but I also want them to enjoy themselves. Afterall, it's just a game. So, let's make it fun."

That strategy paid off in a huge way as North Surry's program had more than 100 players in the program when Hampton left.

"And that's what I want to do here," he said. "If you can get 100 kids out, you've got to be able to find 11 guys that can play football. And let me tell you, I've got 80-some kids out right now, and those guys are really busting their tails."

The Huskies are coming off a 6-6 season, and only 12 seniors return.

"We're very young and very inexperienced," he said. "But we've got kids that will get after it. And when you're looking to build a program, it starts with attitude. And our kids have great attitudes." The Huskies best players are seniors Carson Knight (6-foot, 255 pounds) and Dominic Maxwell (6-4, 265). They will be Ashe County's primary guys on the offensive and defensive lines.

"Those guys will definitely be going both ways," Hampton said. "They're very aggressive, they're physical, and they're very good athletes. "We had a scrimmage here last Saturday, and Knight was in the backfield constantly."

Another guy Hampton will be counting on is tight end/defensive end Cullen Ashley.

"He's our best receiver," Hampton said. "He's got size (6-2, 200), and he's the key to our offense. I like to use the tight end in a lot of different ways. He's got great hands, he runs good routes, and he blocks his butt off."

Justin Scarobough, a wrestler playing football for the first time, will be at inside linebacker; he's a 6-1, 190 pound senior, and very physical. Michael Elliott, a junior (5-10, 140), will man the secondary.

"And Michael is our coach on the field," Hampton said. "He's going to be a strong safety, but we'll move him around. He's definitely our brains in the secondary."

Kicker/punter Anthony Federico is another weapon the Huskies can rely on. Federico was the top kicker in the Mountain Valley 1A/2A Conference last fall.

"Anthony plays both football and soccer," Hampton said. "He's got a very strong leg, and that will help a lot with field position. He can also put points on the board. He's a valuable guy."

Offensively, the Huskies will boast a huge offensive line, which has been one of their fortes in recent years. Joining Maxwell and Knight on the offensive line will be two huge tackles---Jake Woods (6-3, 250, Sr.) and Avery Blevins (6-3, 225, Sr.). Eli Gambill will be the starting

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quarterback this season; Jonathan Cox, Colton Pilar and Dustin Gray will be the primary guys at running back. But Gray has been slowed by injuries in camp. He went through an injury-plagued season last fall.

"I can feel for Dustin," Hampton said. "He loves to play. We've got to get him healthy. But I have a lot of confidence in these guys and this team. Cox is a wide receiver, but we moved him to running back. He hits the hole hard. Pilar is very shifty and Eli is just a great athlete.

"And he's got a strong arm. But he has to improve his foot work. If he gets his feet set, he can really show off his arm and his accuracy."

And despite the odds facing him this year, Hampton loves the challenge. Basically, he loves football. He's been around it his entire life.

"I can still remember my dad (Steve, who was Watauga High's first Golden Helmet recipient in 1965) playing semi-pro football for the Caldwell (County) Bulldogs," Hampton said. "And I was around two-years-old. I wouldn't know what to do without football. It's a big part of my life.

"And I love being here, coaching this team. Look, we aren't going to be the fastest team in America, and 'how good are we going to be?,' I don't know. All I know is that we've had four kids come out in a two-day period. We've got around 80 kids in the program. And that's a positive sign. We (the coaching staff) may not be the smartest guys on earth, but we must be doing something right."

And doing something right has turned into quite a habit for Hampton.

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