

Sports

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GL's Reitz feels team can match Gateway's speed

In WPIAL Quad-A South opener

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Every time Ray Reitz talks about Gateway, he — at some point — says the same thing.

"Gateway's Gateway," the Greater Latrobe head coach reiterated.

But you know what? Everyone knows exactly what he means.

Now, what if Reitz were to tell you that his Wildcats — at least this year — are every bit as fast as the Gators?

Honest.

"I know no one believes that," Reitz was quick to add.

"They have a lot of speed, but I don't think they're faster than us," he insisted. "I think we have just as much speed as they do."

That's right. Reitz feels his team can match Gateway's speed, particularly on defense.

"I think we have enough strength up front that teams aren't just going to push us off the ball, and I think we have a lot of speed in the secondary that will create problems," he continued. "I guess we'll find out Friday night."

That's when Greater Latrobe (2-0) travels to Monroeville for its WPIAL Quad-A South Conference opener against Gateway (2-0).

In the past, Greater Latrobe has been no match — speed or otherwise — for the Gators. But after last week's game vs. Canon-McMillan, one in which they allowed less than 180 yards for the second straight time to begin the season, Reitz believes the Wildcats can get it done on the defensive side of the football.

"We feel we can be pretty good on defense," he suggested. "I thought we were more physical defensively last week, and if we can continue to play that way and use our speed, I think we can be hard to move the ball against."

Then there was the offense. GL didn't have that many more yards (184) — and none passing — than it gave up (176) to Canon-McMillan and committed 12 penalties for 85 yards, but still found a way to win (9-7).

"There were a lot of things that went against us. But even though we faced that adversity, I'm proud of the kids because they fought through it," Reitz qualified.

"The kids could've panicked or quit, but they didn't. They fought through it and won the game, and that's a credit to them."

However, Reitz knows that can't continue, especially against a team like Gateway — or any, for that matter.

"We have to eliminate the mistakes, and that goes for penalties and turnovers," Reitz stressed. "You can't do that in any game and expect to win. If you commit that many penalties and turnovers, you're not going to beat too many teams."

There's one more thing Reitz says the Wildcats must overcome. That would be the mental aspect of the game.

"First of all, you can't be beat just because they have Gateway on the front of their jerseys," he related. "If they're going to win, you got to make them beat you."

Gateway is certainly capable of doing that without any help. And the Gators, ranked in the top five in WPIAL Quad-A also have several key players back

from last year's team that was runner-up in the conference to McKeesport Area and advanced to the district quarterfinals.

Returning are quarterback Thomas Woodson (6-2, 200, Jr.), who threw for 1,362 yards and 12 touchdowns last year and has fully recovered after a shooting in North Carolina that killed a teammate (linebacker Darrell Turner) while heading to a football camp, and leading rusher Darin Franklin (5-19, 180, Jr.).

Woodson, who was shot in the leg back in June, ran for 106 yards (15 carries) in a 28-7 season-opening win over Class AAA power Bishop McDevitt and then passed for 106 (five of 11) in last week's 19-13 victory over Penn Hills. Franklin scored 10 touchdowns last year and rushed for three against McDevitt, and running back Patrick Livsey (5-10, 165, Sr.) had 96 yards vs. Penn Hills.

The line in front of them is solidified by tackle R.J. Hughes (6-4, 275, Jr.).

"They're doing things a little different in that they're using more shotgun and pistol formations, but they still try to utilize their speed. They like to spread you out and run the ball," Reitz indicated.

"Their coaches do a good job with them. They have a lot of speed and they get the most out of it."

"And they've got a proud tradition. When they step on the field, they expect to win."

"That's the difference right now. That's where we're trying to get to."

Greater Latrobe is also trying to get its offense untracked. The Wildcats have only four touchdowns — one of those was on a fumble recovery in the endzone in a 21-0 win over Derry Area — and 383 yards total in two games, and quarterback Logan Carns (6-3, 160, Soph.) did not complete a pass last week (zero for seven) and is just four for 20 for 60 yards.

"We did have some guys open last week. He just threw the ball long a couple of times," Reitz pointed out.

"He's played three varsity football games. Logan gets real pumped up, and that's a good thing."

"He gets a little excited, but he's a gamer. All he needs is to have one good game and he'll just get better and better."

"He's going to be a very good quarterback. He's a competitor and a very good athlete, and we like what we see in him."

All of the Wildcats' 184 yards against Canon-McMillan last week came on the ground with running backs Rob Vasinko (5-7, 165, Jr.) and Derrick Zavatsky (5-9, 165, Sr.), and fullback Scott Mohring (6-0, 200 Sr.) accounted for 147. In two games, Mohring is tops with 125 yards and two touchdowns followed by Vasinko (66 yards) and Zavatsky (60 yards) while Carns has rushed for GL's other score.

"No one has really stopped us offensively. We've stopped ourselves with penalties and fumbles (three) and things like that," Reitz offered.

"The key to the game is our offensive line against their front four and our defense against their offense," he concluded. "We have to tackle well and just be physical, and we have to move the football."