

PICKENS CO



JASPER -- After five straight non-losing seasons, Pickens High football is coming off back-to-back 2-8 campaigns. Unfortunately, the Dragons also lost most of their starters from 2008 and coach Steve Sewell said a rebuilding process is still continuing.

“This has been a great group to coach and they are very close-knit,” Sewell said. “Hopefully we’ll be better this year, but we’re still young and inexperienced. It’s going to be a tough challenge for us again.”

OFFENSE: The Dragons return just two starters to their I-formation attack, both on the offensive line in junior center Trey Hampton and senior guard Louis Johnson. Aaron Lohman, Bo Champion, and Dakota Smith will complete the line, but Sewell said it will be the smallest Dragons team he’s seen in 25 years.

Junior Jordan Shaw will get the starting duties at quarterback, but sophomore Austin Murphy will see some action, Sewell said. Junior running back Dalton Reeves will get several carries in the backfield, with Michael Greenway and Dustin Nicholson sharing time at fullback. Wide receiver Ethan Banonister, sophomore tight end Matt Strakner, and slotback Cooper Shaw will give Shaw and Murphy plenty of targets.

DEFENSE: Pickens will play a 50 formation on defense but return just two starters on this side of the ball as well. Louis Johnson returns to anchor the line, and Dustin Nicholson will anchor the linebackers. Lohman, Hans Gaertner, and Brandon Cantrell will join Nicholson, with Jacob Byess, Chase McCowan, and Frankie Sparks joining Johnson on the line. Safeties Jordan Shaw and Reeves will combine with Austin Murphy and Cooper Shaw at cornerback in the Pickens secondary.

SPECIAL TEAMS: The Dragons, however, already have a solid kicking game, led by All-Region Honorable Mention place kicker Gonzalo Solorio, who hit a season-long 49-yard field goal last season. Brooks Godfrey also returns to handle the punting and kickoffs.

SCHEDULE: It figures to be another tough schedule for Pickens, as Region 7-AAA has gotten even stronger than last year. The Dragons do not have to face either Gainesville or Flowery Branch and they do get both North Hall and Creekview at home in back-to-back weeks in October. But half of the teams on their schedule finished with .500 or better records.

“We’re going to throw them in the fire and see what happens,” Sewell said. “If they keep up the work ethic they’ve shown, I think they can be competitive.”