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RAMSEUR - The bigger the challenge the greater the reward.

That is the philosophy veteran Eastern Randolph High School football coach Burton Cates has utilized throughout his coaching career. And with expectations at an all-time high this season, that isn't going to change.

The Wildcats, who have finished 24-0 during the past five conference seasons and 55-9 overall, will embark on a non-conference schedule against teams that were 41-17 a year ago. ER opens with Southern Alamance (8-4 a year ago), Randleman (7-4), Union Pines (11-2), Providence Grove (8-3) and Asheboro (7-4) to prepare for Four Rivers Conference action.

ER was 3-2 last year against the same teams in nonleague play before capturing seven straight wins and advancing to the fourth round of the NCHSAA 3-A playoffs, falling to Shelby 43-41. Shelby would go on to win the state championship.

"People ask 'Why do you schedule these people?' " Cates said. "We feel great competition will make us better. When you go through that type of competition, hopefully you are going to know your strengths and weaknesses."

The summer has been a busy one for the Wildcats, who had numerous 7-on-7 battles. The weight room sessions and workouts have been attended by a higher percentage of players than any other year in the past eight preseasons.

With eight starters back on offense, eight starters back on defense and a total of 24 seniors, the Wildcats are primed for another outstanding campaign.

"The thing is you take each year individually, but we will change up a few things and try to make us better," Cates said. "There's an old saying if you do the same things you're going to get the same results."

The Wildcats will be practicing in the morning this preseason and will put even more emphasis on the kicking game.



With incredible talent such as Kobe Walker, Cainin Glover, James Combs and quarterback Cade McCallum, who is battling a back injury but should be ready to go in a few weeks, and defensive lineman Trey Headen, who suffered a season-ending knee injury in the first half of last year's season opener.

With a strong freshman class coming in and a great senior group with plenty of experience, things are lining up for another great season for the Wildcats.