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CLIMAX - When a high school football team wins a conference championship the year before, there are plenty of positives that can be drawn on from earning that accomplishment.

The returning players know exactly what it takes to earn that title and that can be passed on to younger classes in order to keep that momentum going. Over the years, that great year can turn into a great program.

The returning players at Providence Grove High School know what it takes to win a conference championship as the Patriots captured their first football league crown in school history last season, finishing undefeated in the Central Carolina Conference.



"I think now they have confidence, we know how to win and they know what it takes to win," second-year head coach Cody Moran said as his team prepares for Friday's home opener with Randleman. "I tell them all the time that last year was last year and every year has a one-year shelf life. Don't be one-hit wonders. There is going to be no sneaking up on anyone this year."

The Patriots were coming off a 3-7 year entering last season, Moran's first, who surrounded himself with a young, enthusiastic coaching staff, many of whom were former players at PG. PG started the season 2-2 last year before winning six in a row to capture the league title and with it, a first-round bye in the state playoffs. Then a disappointing 31-21 loss to West Davidson, a team the Patriots defeated 22-21 during the regular season, ended the campaign.

"We really haven't talked about what last year's team did," Moran said. "But we're still conference champions until someone knocks us off."

If PG is to defend that title, they will do so without the number of players it has been used to having over the years.

"The numbers aren't as good as last year, but we knew that coming in because we have a small freshmen class," said Moran, who has just seven seniors on the roster. "We don't have the same numbers, but a high percentage of kids have been working all summer, they haven't missed anything. Not a lot of numbers, but they all have been participating."

That's been important as the Patriots continue to get stronger with their work in the weight room.

"Two years ago, I would say we're the softest team in Randolph County and no one could argue that," Moran said. "Now when teams get off the bus, they know we are going to hit you. This group of players showed a very unique characteristic this past summer. After each workout, after each seven-on-seven competition, a number of them would gather at one house and watch hours of game film.

"We have as much of a buy-in now as last year, even with our spring practices," Moran said. "The young guys who have come up here are doing everything. We spent a lot of time on fundamentals in the spring, speed, agility. By the time of the first day of practice, we were ready to roll. We're in a better spot this year than we were last year at this point."

As important as it is for the players to have learned from last year, Moran said his coaching staff has learned just as much.

"As coaches, we knew what we needed to be doing and where we needed to be at a certain point in time. We're young and if we can figure it out, we can be good for an extended period." That means strong leadership on the field, and despite the loss of some very solid leaders due to graduation, there are a number of players ready to assume that leadership role. Nick Straughn, Hunter Norris, Connor Tozer, Chase Collins and Connor Haithcock along with some others, have stepped into that leadership role quite nicely this season.

The Patriots play Randleman, Eastern Randolph and Southwestern Randolph along with Morehead and Jordan-Matthews in the preseason. It won't take long to see if the Patriots do indeed have what it takes to earn the CCC league championship two years in a row.