

PREP FOOTBALL 2006 PREVIEW

Owl defensive line big on heart



Mark Weber/The Commercial Appeal

Buck Towner brings down Henry Harris of CBHS in a game last year. Towner returns to an MUS defense that allowed just 99 points last season.

Aggressive approach helps group make up for lack of size

NO. 1 MUS

By COLIN DONOHUE
Special to The Commercial Appeal

It doesn't resemble a typical defensive line. In terms of size — but probably not speed — it's more The Fun Bunch than the Hogs. But size doesn't always equate to effectiveness. Take Buck Towner, for example.

Towner, a defensive lineman for Memphis University School, stands at 5-foot-10 and weighs 180 pounds. His diminutive dimensions, as far as defensive linemen go, prompted linebacker John Stokes — the 6-5, 225-pound antithesis to his undersized linemates — to say Towner "does a lot with a little." Case in point: He started 12 games and recorded 41.5 tackles and 2 sacks last season.

In fact, of the Owls' 12 listed defensive line-

THE PRESEASON DANDY DOZEN

Team	Last Year
1. MUS	11-1
2. MELROSE	13-2
3. CHRISTIAN BROTHERS	10-2
4. RIDGEWAY	12-1
5. GERMANTOWN	10-3
6. OLIVE BRANCH	12-2
7. COVINGTON	11-3
8. EAST	10-2
9. WEST MEMPHIS	13-1
10. MILLINGTON	8-4
11. WOODDALE	6-5
12. ECS	10-2

strongest group. We certainly weren't the fastest group," said co-defensive coordinator Glenn Rogers Jr. "We knew we had to have 11 hats on the football."

It took a focused, 11-man effort from week to week to hold foes in check. Despite the size, strength and speed disadvantages, the Owls' early season defensive returns were more than encouraging. They held their first seven opponents to less than 10 points, while shutting out four.

"We had the attitude that we weren't going to let people get first downs on us," said Stokes, who had 62 tackles last season. "We made it happen on Friday nights and had a lot of fun doing it."

Two cogs off last year's unit — Mason George and Logan Welch — have graduated, and only four starters, including Stokes and Towner, return.

Rogers says growing pains should be expected, but they shouldn't endure.

"I think early on we're going to make some mistakes, and we're going to have to depend on our seniors a lot more," he said. "But I think as the season progresses, you're going to see a much tougher, much stingier MUS defense."

men, half are shorter than 6-feet tall. They may not cast long shadows, but they were a highly successful unit that proved an integral part of an Owls defense that allowed only 99 points in 12 games (8.2 per contest) last season en route to the Division 2-AAA title.

"We weren't the biggest group. We weren't the

QB has unfinished business

Madison benefited from seat on bench

NO. 2 MELROSE

By JASON SMITH
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As far as Melrose senior quarterback Courtney Madison is concerned, his benching last season by former Golden Wildcat head coach Chester Flowers Jr. only served to make him a better player.

Now, two years removed from leading the Golden Wildcats to the 2004 Class 4A state-title game, Madison is back under center, and he's more confident than ever.

"My senior year is here now, so I'm going to take care of my business," said Madison, who showed as much last Friday when he went 5-of-5 passing with two touchdowns in the Golden Wildcats' 14-3 MIAA Jamboree victory over Class 5A power Ridgeway.

"I thank coach Flowers for what he did. He made me a stronger player."

THIS WEEKEND'S GAMES

Today: 7 p.m. — Wooddale vs. Hillcrest at Oakhaven; ECS at Cordova; Washington vs. Carver at Whitehaven; Westwood vs. Mitchell at J.P. Freeman; Collierville vs. Hamilton at Fairgrounds; South Side at Munford; Kirby vs. Craigmont at Raleigh-Egypt; Westside at SBEC; Oakhaven at Brighton; Ridgeway at Henry Co.; Manassas at Haywood; Raleigh-Egypt at Covington; Millington at Bartlett; Arlington at TRA; Fayette Aca. at St. Benedict; Rossville Christian at St. George's. **7:30 p.m.** — Gibson Co. at Fayette-Ware.

Saturday: 2:30 p.m. — Briarcrest vs. White Station at Liberty Bowl. **5 p.m.** — Bolton vs. Christian Brothers at Liberty Bowl. **7 p.m.** — Fairley at Whitehaven; Sheffield at Hardin Co. **7:30 p.m.** — Melrose vs. MUS at Liberty Bowl.

While both the head coach and the quarterback have changed since last season, Madison said the goal remains the same for the Golden Wildcats, who, following

a 13-2 state-runnerup campaign last season, begin the year ranked No. 2 in The Commercial Appeal's Preseason Dandy Dozen.

"The goal at Melrose is always to win the whole thing," Madison said.

Armed with a new head coach in former NFL assistant Hubbard Alexander, Melrose opens its season in grand style Saturday night at 7:30 when it takes on No. 1 Memphis University School in the feature game of the Bridges Kickoff Classic at Liberty Bowl Memorial Stadium.

It won't get much easier for the Golden Wildcats over the next few weeks either, as Melrose takes on Whitehaven, No. 8 East and No. 3 Christian Brothers in the three weeks following Saturday's game.

"I'm just happy to see Courtney back because last year they didn't let him play," said Melrose senior receiver Anthony Kizer, who caught passes for both touchdowns from Madison last Friday.

"His 10th-grade year, he led us to state, and now he's back in action. ... He's got a God-given ability, so you've just got to let him do what he do."

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