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Focus is key for Runnin' Bulldogs heading into season opener



By: Jared McMurry

Gardner-Webb football coach **Carroll McCray** is entering his third year as coach of the Runnin' Bulldogs and turning the reigns over to a new leader in the backfield for the first time. Sophomore **Tyrell Maxwell**, who took several snaps at quarterback last year, will be running the show this year for Gardner-Webb.

Coming off a 4-8 season, McCray is looking for his squad to return to being a dominant defensive force while bringing a new offensive game plan to the table. Maxwell will be guiding more of a run-heavy spread offense this season, but coach McCray is just hoping his defense can keep them in the game this week against the University of South Alabama.

Members of the Sun-Belt Conference, South Alabama appeared in a bowl game a year ago. Although many pieces of that team have departed, the Jaguars have acquired several players from the discontinued program of University of Alabama at Birmingham, including their starting quarterback. Cody Clements will be guiding



Tyrell Maxwell

Photo courtesy of gwusports.com

the fast-paced offense that McCray knows will certainly give his defense headaches.

"We will need to remain very focused defensively, especially early on," he said.

McCray also noted that it will be imperative for his defense to step up early in order to allow for the offense to settle down and make adjustments.

"We will be tested quick, and I think the game will come down to who adjusts the quickest," he said.

Carrying the ball for Gardner-Webb will be a trio of running backs, spear headed by redshirt senior **Bobby Clark**. **Kerry Bernard** and **Khalil Lewis** will both see time in the backfield this Saturday.

"We are going to play a 10-yard ball game," he said. "A first down is a win for us."

While South Alabama will dress 105 players, Gardner-Webb will only travel with 65–21 of who are freshmen. Several freshmen will see the field and be used in key situations right out of the gate according to coach McCray.

South Alabama will sport a lot of speed on both sides of the ball, so McCray is looking for their young talent to make plays. The freshmen class is the second signing class for McCray and has the speed and talent to step right into the ring according to coach McCray.

"We are really starting to see a family oriented atmosphere for the first time, and I'm really looking forward to watching our team, both the veterans and new guys," he said.

You can watch the Runnin' Bulldogs on ESPN3 at 6 pm on Saturday, as they take on South Alabama in Mobile, AL to open the 2015 season.



Carroll McCray

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