

August 5, 2009

A look at the running back and quarterbacks

Tanner, Dasher key to backfield

Athletic Communications

HEADLINES

Key Losses: QB Joe Craddock and RB [Desmond Gee](#) (who moved to wide receiver).

Key Returnees: RB [Phillip Tanner](#) and QB [Dwight Dasher](#). Tanner led the team in rushing with 714 yards to go with a team-best 15 rushing touchdowns a year ago while also adding 13 receptions for 135 yards and a touchdown. He played his best football the last three games of 2008, and the coaches hope he builds from those contests entering 2009. Dasher, who had an eye-opening freshman campaign, came back as a sophomore and did not have the year he had hoped playing behind Joe Craddock. It's now his team to run, and the coaches like what they have seen so far.

Battle to Watch: The most intriguing battle during fall camp will be who gets the backup job behind [Phillip Tanner](#). Will it be a much improved [D.D. Kyles](#) or steady [Marquise Branton](#)? Let's not forget about four very talented freshmen who have their sights set on playing time in 2009. All four newcomers are physically ready to play, and the only question will be how they handle the mental part of the game. No matter the outcome, the Blue Raider offense has to have two solid backs play consistently to be effective. It should be fun watching this competition in August.



Dwight Dasher will lead the Blue Raider offense in 2009. ()

Spring Standout: QB [Dwight Dasher](#) grew up a lot in the spring as he adapted well to Tony Franklin's offense. Always a threat with his feet, Dasher showed he will be a weapon in the passing game as well as he was very solid the last half of spring practice throwing the football. The coaches are excited about his potential running the Blue Raider offense.

Coach Franklin on the quarterbacks

"I think both guys did an excellent job of picking up the offense this spring. Dwight (Dasher) has great natural talent and a good feel as a runner and thrower with the potential to be dynamic. Dwight is still learning to be a leader but if he continues to improve he could be a special player. Brent is a well-coached kid and has a chance to be a really good pocket passer. He just needs to work on being more efficient as a passer and limit his mistakes. Brent has the intangibles to be good at this level."

Coach Simmons on the running backs

"All three guys ([Phillip Tanner](#), [D.D. Kyles](#), [Marquise Branton](#)) got better in the spring, and it will be up to them to make another step in the offseason. This offense is perceived as heavy on the pass, but the running back is a key ingredient because for us to be successful we have to run the football. Our backs have to be all-around players and excel in space and without the football. D.D. (Kyles) gave us some security coming out of the spring and Marquise showed some solid signs as well."

PLAYERS

Quarterbacks

DWIGHT DASHER (Junior) - Coming off a very good spring and is the starter entering fall camp ... Has a very strong arm and gets the ball out fast ... A dynamic runner with adequate speed ... Needs to work on consistency.

BRENT BURNETTE (r-Freshman) - Enjoyed a solid spring and nailed down the backup spot ... Has a live arm and is fairly accurate ... He possesses great feet in the pocket ... Needs to cut back on interceptions and fumbles in the pocket.

Running Backs

PHILLIP TANNER (Senior) - Tanner is as physically gifted as any back in the Sun Belt Conference and one of the most complete ... Has a nose for the endzone and excels in the passing game ... He needs to finish runs better and concentrate on having the proper pad level while also improving without the football.

D.D. KYLES (r-Sophomore) - As fast as any player on the roster with the ball in his hands ... Can be a game changer, and coaches want to find ways to put the ball in his hands ... Is still learning the position, especially without the ball ... Needs to improve leg strength.

MARQUISE BRANTON (r-Sophomore) - Fundamentally, he is the most natural back on the team ... Understands the position and is a smart player ... Not as talented as the guys ahead of him but makes up for it with good technique ... Should be a major contributor on special teams.

Returns

*[Zeke Anderson](#) (r-Fr., QB)
34 [Marquise Branton](#) (r-So., RB)
10 [Brent Burnette](#) (r-Fr., QB)
46 *[Nicholas Coleman](#) (r-Sr., QB)
*Barry Cunningham (r-So., QB)
9 [Dwight Dasher](#) (Jr., QB)
40 [Wesley Hale](#) (r-So., RB)
*[Craig Heyward](#) (r-Sr., RB)
23 [D.D. Kyles](#) (r-So., RB)
21 [Phillip Tanner](#) (Sr., RB)

Newcomers

26 [Benjamin Cunningham](#) (Fr., RB)
27 Tavares Jefferson (Fr., RB)
22 [David Jones](#) (Fr., RB)
29 [William Pratcher](#) (Fr., RB)
12 [Jamal Ramsey](#) (Fr., QB)
19 [Ryan Rosenvall](#) (So., QB)
*Non-scholarship

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