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Look Back in Amazement: Examining the Curley Wolves build-up to playoffs

By Jeff Smithpeters

This year's Prescott Curley Wolves are in the playoffs by virtue of an undefeated season in which the team was rarely threatened. Only the away game against the Homer Pelicans posed a serious challenge against a Prescott team whose offense often struck early and played whole second halves under the mercy rule. Whose defense was a turnover- and interception- eating menace and whose special teams often struck like lightning with long returns and recoveries of the football.

On this week before the team's first-round playoff game, it is high time for a look back at its performances during an astounding regular season. Below are summaries of the major events in each game, followed in a few cases of analysis by SWARK.Today's play-by-play man for our streaming

broadcasts of the games, Jim Honea.

August 23. Against Bismarck (0-0) in War Memorial Stadium; Little Rock. 47-28 Win. Appropriately, the first Prescott score of the season comes courtesy of Travion Dickens, who would go on to score so many TDs his initials would have to be judged as fitting. The Wolves built a 21-7 lead, and when it seemed, after a rare three-and out, that Bismarck had a chance to get within one score of catching his team, a Curley Wolf by the name of Talan Smith intercepted a pass from Bismarck at the Prescott 37. The next drive saw quarterback Carston Poole throw the first of many touchdown passes to Eric Grigsby to put the Wolves ahead 28-7. Bismarck would eventually score 28, but could not catch the Wolves, who scored 47, helped by three interceptions.

Jim Honea: The environment was rich with anticipation of a new season and the expectation of completing unfinished business. Prescott really felt like it was on track for a state championship last year, and it ended one half of a game short. Injuries to key players during the playoffs made a huge impact on the team, and during the first half of the championship game it seemed to have as much of a mental effect on them as it did physical. Returning to Little Rock with high energy and an old common opponent could have made for another mental opponent to have to face. The game started sluggish. The score was 15 to 7. Prescott had definitely had mental frustrations with penalties and stalled a couple of drives and stopped others. It was fourth and one on our own 29 yard line, and Eric Grigsby went



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hard into the line of scrimmage, got the first down, then busted loose for a 71-yard touchdown. A few series later, Prescott would score again, right before halftime to go up 28 to 7. That one play to me was a launching point for the season.

September 9. Against Fordyce (1-1) at Paul "Bear" Bryant Stadium; Fordyce. 42-14 Win. Despite a holding penalty (unfortunately a frequently occurring thing for the Wolves until the Horatio game), setting Prescott back at its own 30, Poole connected with Dickens for a 70-yard touchdown to start festivities in a game many thought might offer the Wolves a challenge because of Fordyce's superior size. But as happened in Prescott's first possession, speed repeatedly applied proved fatal for the Redbugs hopes. Two interceptions from Ra'shawn Bell and one from Decari Prater ensured that the characteristic early lead Prescott built up remained unthreatened. A P.J. Gulley score early in the second half made it 42-7 and the mercy rule was then invoked.

Jim Honea: This was Prescott's first visit back to Fordyce since the 2016 Quarter Final game that was a dog fight to the end. That year, both teams felt like they were the best in 3A Division. These two teams met a few years earlier when the senior classes were both freshmen at the end of the season, and that was a great game for junior high football. The atmosphere for this varsity game was great. We were sitting in the stands with the Fordyce crowd, and they were pumped up and expecting to knock Prescott down from that number one ranking. The score was 22 to 7 Prescott when Prescott got the ball back with a few minutes left in the first half. The first play backed the offense up 15 yards. There was also a bad snap on the drive that cost them 12 yards, but with :53 left in the half, Poole threw a beautiful 19-yard pass to the corner of the end zone and Grigsby made a great catch. The score moved to 29 to 7 at the half. The winning itch went out of the Redbugs. Prescott found another way to overcome those mistakes. Making

significant plays at just the right time was becoming a signature of this team.

September 16. Against Hope (0-2) in Hammons Stadium; Hope. 63-20 Win.

Prescott scored its high number of points for the season against a Hope team capable of offensive spurts but unable to cope with most offenses. As usual, the Wolves raced ahead 15-0. After they gave up a kickoff return for touchdown to the Bobcats' Kaleo Anderson, the Wolves collectively put their back paws into spin, running up 34 points unanswered until, finally, Hope's Tyler Patterson made a pass to Anderson for a dignity-restoring touchdown. Prescott would answer with nine offensive plays, ending in a 17-yard Poole run to the end zone. The entire second half was played with the clock ticking steadily down under the mercy rule.

September 23. Against Gurdon (4-0) at Go Devil Stadium; Gurdon. 42-7 Win. This clash of undefeateds was a close game through one quarter as Gurdon was able to keep Prescott to two futile possessions of

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only six plays with its running attack and an interception of Carston Poole. In the second quarter, Gurdon punched in a touchdown. But in the rest of the second quarter, starting at its 26-yard line, Prescott put up a flurry of points, starting its third drive with five more, this time productive, plays that led to a nine-yard Eric Grigsby run to pay dirt, tying the game 7-7. Poole, Grigsby, Dickens and Dwayne White would spend quality time in the end zone that evening.

September 30. Against Junction City (1-4) in Cummins Stadium; Prescott. 55-20 Win. In this one, Prescott scored on every possession in the first half, beginning with a spectacular P.J. Gulley kickoff return of 72 yards. The hapless Dragons then threw an interception to Ra'shawn Bell on their next possession, which was returned to their 44. In Prescott's second offensive series, a pass to Grigsby taken to the 23 and a Poole run from the 18 were the highlights of a touchdown drive ending in a short run by Dickens to put the Wolves up 14-0.

The Wolves did give up a touchdown on Junction City's second possession which was helped by a facemask penalty that took the Dragons from starting their drive at their 25 to starting at their 40. They'd score 13 more, but Prescott was up 49-7 after the first half and got a punt return from Decari Prater in the third quarter. The Wolves would finish with no turnovers and two returns for touchdowns.


October 7. Against Fouke (4-2) in Cummins Stadium; Prescott. 56-7 Win.

In its homecoming game, Prescott scored 56 points before Fouke finally answered in the last few minutes of the game with a scoring drive. Until that time, Prescott got its points from a Dickens 12-yard run, a Poole four-yard run, a Brenan Bradley run of 18 yards, a five-yard Grigsby run enabled by a Talan Smith fumble recovery and return to Fouke's five after a kickoff, a pass interception return for touchdown by Talan Smith, a 70-yard run by Dickens, a Grigsby 15-yard run and a Prater quarterback keeper for a 29-yard run.

The Prescott Curley Wolves did not punt until the fourth quarter, just before Fouke's last drive.

October 14. Against Homer (5-1) in Homer Stadium; Homer, Louisiana. 9-0 Win.

For the first time in 50 years, Prescott went out of state to play football. The Curley Wolves' most daunting regular-season test came against the defending Louisiana 1A Champions who lived up to their billing by keeping Prescott under 10 points and being able to run the football, just not into the end zone. In a heavily penalized game, Homer was pinned back to their own four-yard-line by a Jalen Jackson punt, then incurred a holding penalty that pinned them further back to the two. On a second and 12 play, Pelican running back Gregory Williams found himself confronted by a surge of Prescott players in his own endzone that pushed him out its back. This was good for two points for Prescott. It took until their third drive of the second half for Prescott to score again, capitalizing on another fumble generated by



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Talan Smith with a pass by Poole to Grigsby from the 35-yard line that Grigsby ran in for the touchdown. A Ra'shawn Bell interception let Prescott end what could have been a Pelicans scoring possession and work the time down to 1:08 remaining before a punt put Homer at their own 27. Three running plays by Homer could not move them to the end zone, and they ran out of time, handing Prescott their biggest non-conference win of the year.

Jim Honea: Once again it was an away game. This was a huge game that was able to be scheduled due to a conference game being cancelled. Both of these schools have tremendous tradition and both had great seasons last year. Prescott fans poured into northern Louisiana and football fans from all over traveled to watch these two teams clash. I think it was our largest number of views of the season. For me, it was an unexpected defensive battle, two teams that were high powered in their offensive prowess fought hard through three

quarters. Only Prescott's defense was able to put points on the board with a safety in the first quarter due to a great punt by Jaylen Johnson. Late in the fourth quarter, Prescott was able to jump on a fumble and get great field position. Prescott gained five yards on their first two plays, and then was backed up once again by a penalty. They only gained a couple of yards on third down, and it looked like another drive was going to be stopped by the tenacious defense of the Homer Pelicans. Poole dropped back to pass and threw a short pass to Grigsby,



who made several misses. He reached the first down marker, but wasn't done. He was able to reach the end zone for a 37- yard touchdown reception.

October 21. Against Smackover (5-2) in Cummins Stadium; Prescott. 47-20 Win.

Another highly penalized game. Though Smackover did lose by 27 and was light in number of players, their team showed considerable grit in responding to Prescott's early 28-0 scoring barrage. The Buckaroos intercepted Poole twice, once for an early second-half touchdown return. They also took advantage of a high snap by Prescott which went out of the Wolves' own end zone to collect two points for a safety. At one point the game was as close as 34-20. But Prescott simply pushed down a little more on the throttle, getting touchdowns from Dickens and Tiquan Box to effect a collapse of Smackover's hopes for a road win.

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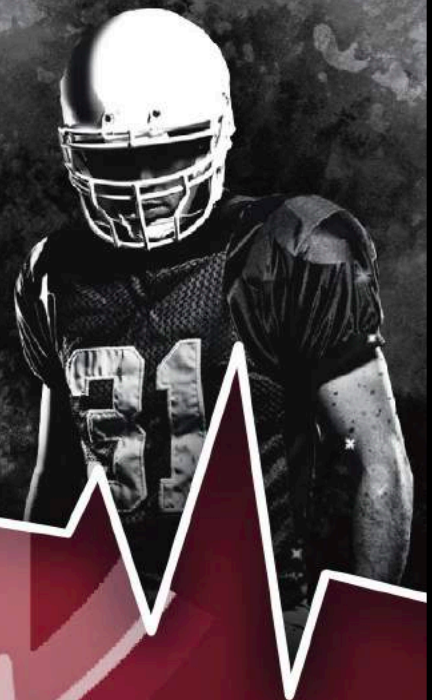
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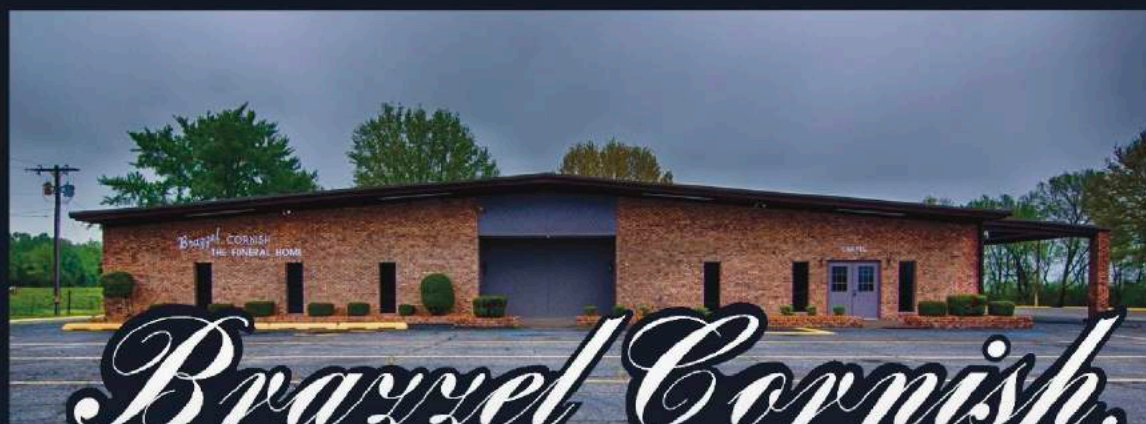


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Examining the Curley Wolves build-up to playoffs

(Continued from Page 6)

November 3 Against Horatio (1-8) in Lion Stadium; Horatio. 54-6 Win.

In this game, Prescott came as close as it did all season to a perfect game, with scores on every offensive possession and a start with a Jaylen Johnson kickoff return for a touchdown followed by two more Johnson touchdowns, the second of these a display of speed after receiving a tunnel screen pass, on the first two Wolf offensive drives. The next score came courtesy of a Jah'noah Harris run for three yards to the end zone. The Wolves got to 35 points, helped by a long run by Brenan Bradley to set up the punch-in for a score. The mercy rule would be in effect in the entire second half as Poole would pass for a Gulley touchdown reception and Harris would score again on a nine-yard run. One touchdown was allowed

to Smackover in the fourth quarter. But the Curley Wolves answered it, as if they needed to, in the next drive for the 54-6 win.

As the season progressed, Prescott's offense and defense picked up more and more strength, with the only vulnerability of the squad being a tendency toward offensive holding penalties. First the Gurdon game and then the Homer game were the most challenging contests. Both were against run-oriented ball control teams on the road and resulted in Prescott weathering Gurdon's first quarter burst of defensive energy to begin reeling off points as its offense got going, then the Prescott defense shutting Homer out but getting just enough scoring despite penalties and turnovers to win. In the 3A playoffs, the Curley Wolves have earned a home game. On November 11 at

7:15 p.m. Prescott will host the Drew Central Pirates (Monticello), who placed sixth in 3A Region six division with a 4-6 overall and 1-5 conference record and gave up, according to MaxPreps.com, 307 points, scoring 264. Prescott finished first in Region 5, gave up 122, scored 415. Should Prescott win, they would face the winner of a first round game between Salem (7-3, 4-2) and Walnut Ridge (7-3, 4-2).



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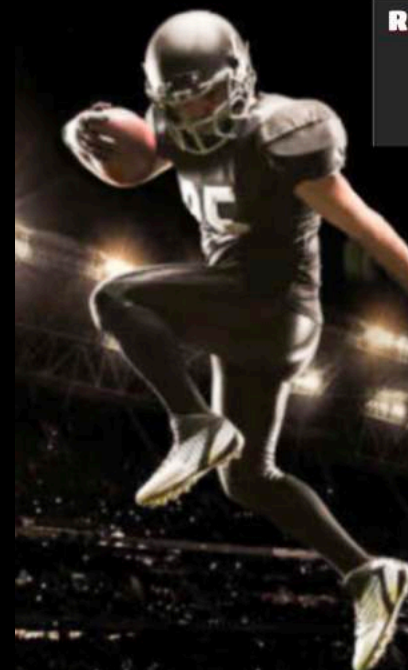
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Quotations from Prescott Curley Wolves in response to our questions

Now that the season is over, can you describe the experience?

It's definitely a way to go out on your last year.—Ra'shawn Bell

It honestly feels great to be a fundamental part of this season for the Wolves. I couldn't be prouder of the hard work and determination our team has shown since June.—Travion Dickens

Me and my teammates have had an extremely fun season so far and are proud to still be undefeated.—Carston Poole

It feels amazing to be a huge part in a monumental season. We're getting our names in the history books and we're not done yet.—Jamarion Burton

Feels great. DWTS 100 [Dancing With the Stars 100 percent]—D.Q. Hopper

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(Continued from Page 13)

With the playoffs starting Friday, what are your goals?

Everyone knows we want to right the ship of Harding Academy beating us last year. That dark cloud lingering out must come to an end.—Ra'shawn Bell

Going into the playoffs, there is only one goal on my mind, and that's winning the championship. There's no if, ands or buts about it.—Travion Dickens

Our goal this year is to just continue to work and get better. We would love to finish the season off where we started it. We have a great group of guys who loves to get after it. It's going to take more than what people think to beat us. We are a tough team who loves a challenge.—P.J. Gulley

My only goals for the playoffs are to win state, have fun with my teammates and give God the glory.—Carston Poole

My goals going into the playoffs are to continue to get better and continuing being a good leader. The ultimate goal is to finish what we started.—Jamarion Burton

Win a state championship!!!—D.Q. Hopper

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