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Sports

Vikings Staying Positive

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Even with just one victory in five games, Emerald High School's football team will enter its game this week with some confidence against its opponent's offense.

The Vikings' sole victory this season was a 22-16 win in Week 4 over Ware Shoals, which runs the Wing-T offense. Emerald faces a similar opponent when it takes on Pendleton at 7:30 p.m. Friday at Frank Hill Stadium in both teams' Region 1-AA opener.

Emerald is opening its league schedule in a new classification after leaving Region 3-AA following the 2007-08 school year.

The only other meeting between Emerald and Pendleton came in 1996 when the Bulldogs routed the Vikings 21-7.

At 4-1, Pendleton is one of several strong teams littering Emerald's schedule in hopes of boosting the Vikings' experience.

Last week, Emerald faced its second Class AAAA opponent of the season, falling to Boiling Springs at home 42-7 just one week after upsetting Ware Shoals. "I don't see it as a setback at all. You go back and watch the video from Boiling Springs, and I think there were a lot of positives," Emerald coach Mike Clowney said. "We could've played someone not as good as Boiling Springs and been fine, but I think playing good competition is going to help us as we're hitting our region schedule right now."

The Vikings gave up 292 rushing yards to Boiling Springs running back Josh Murph, but Clowney singled out the effort of Emerald's defensive line, which was integral in the team's win over Ware Shoals. "Our defensive line attacked and played pretty decent against a good offensive line," Clowney said. "I think each point to this point has been a stepping stone."

Facing another Wing-T offense is not something the Vikings will back down from, but Pendleton is unique beyond that system and has more variety in its offensive playbook than Ware Shoals, which was also without starting wingback Ladarius Hawthorne. "I think it is a little bit of a motivator for us from the fact that we have played against the Wing-T and played fairly decent," Clowney said. "Pendleton will do some things that will be a little bit different, as far as spreading things out and getting guys out of the box. "Overall, the biggest thing is going to be our attitude going into the football game."

The Bulldogs' offense is anchored by their two wingbacks, Ty Burke and Morris Williams, who have combined for 452 rushing yards and five touchdowns through five games. Pendleton is also capable of effectively passing the ball, as quarterback John Michael Gibson has thrown for 430 yards and six touchdowns. "They probably throw the ball out of it more than you would normally see people do with the Wing-T," Clowney said. "The biggest thing with them is that just athletically, they've got some pretty good guys that can make big plays for them."

Pendleton is entering its game against Emerald coming off its first loss of the season, a 35-7 loss to Class AAA Daniel. Two of Gibson's four interceptions this season came against the Lions, but head coach Paul Sutherland credited the team's collapse down field defensively as a back breaker. "That's just a mental breakdown, to give up big plays and touchdowns in the secondary," Sutherland said. "You can't do that against good teams, athletic teams, and we certainly consider Emerald in that boat."