

WEST SALEM TITANS



Submitted

Even after losing some of the top talent in the state, the expectations for the 2019 West Salem football team haven't wavered.

West Salem set to replace much of their talent from last season

By **MATT RAWLINGS**
Of the Keizertimes

Some of the most talented football players the Valley has seen over the last decade have come from West Salem High School.

Last season was no different as quarterback Simon Thompson was named the Mountain Valley Conference offensive player of the year and linebacker Alex Hurlburt was the league's defensive player of the year — both are now playing big-time college football, with Thompson at Utah State University and Hurlburt at the University of Montana.

Even though the Titans lost a significant amount of talent from 2018, head coach Shawn Stanley plans for his team to reload this season.

"I love this group. I love the togetherness and depth of this group. The guys that we have are very balanced in their skill-sets. Everything has been super positive so far," Stanley said.

What usually comes with consistent success is high expectations from year-to-year. West Salem has gotten pretty accustomed to being considered a top-15 team for the last 10-plus years. However, the Titans feel like they might be getting overlooked as they prepare for the 2019 season.

"I'd rather be the underdog every time. We lost a lot of good players and we haven't proven anything yet," Stanley said.

There will be several players in particular that feel like they have something to prove in 2019, starting with the Titans' new quarterback.

Replacing Thompson under center this season will be 6-foot-3 junior Jackson Lowery, who was the Titans' JV signal-caller last season and also plays for West Salem's basketball and baseball teams.

Lowery differs from Thompson in that he's a more of a prototypical pocket passer — Thompson excelled out of the pocket last season and even rushed for 571 yards and five touchdowns.

While he has yet to perform on the big stage, Stanley has a lot of confidence in his starting quarterback.

"I believe that (Lowery) can be a college quarterback someday. I think people are going to be surprised by how talented he is. He hasn't done

it on a Friday night yet, but he can make all the throws. I have no doubt that he'll be able to take the next step," Stanley said.

West Salem will likely have the best offensive line in the league protecting their first-year quarterback.

Senior Andrew Shaw and junior Holden Whipple both earned second-team all-league recognition at offensive tackle last season — Shaw also received second-team honors on the defensive line as well.

2018 second-team all-leaguer Ethan Hoppe will return to his center position as a senior, and junior guard Connor Moore also comes back after an all-conference season last year.

"We always say in our program that the offensive line is the most important position group. If you have an offensive line, you can be average in other places. They set the tone for everything, and they are bigger, stronger and more confident," Stanley said.



Thompson and Hurlburt weren't the only big-time recruits on the Titans squad last season. Micah Pugh was one of the top tight ends in the state as a senior in 2018 and is now continuing his football career at the Air

Force Academy. However, Stanley didn't have to look far to find Pugh's replacement.

Anthony Pugh, Micah's younger brother, will play tight end this season after being a first-team all-

conference performer as a sophomore on the defensive line last season.

Stanley described Anthony Pugh as a "bigger version of his brother" and believes that he will be sought after by colleges in the near future.

Stanley also plans to move Pugh from the defensive line to linebacker — which is one of the Titans' weaker position groups.

West Salem also lost their best two receivers from 2018 in Anthony Gould and

SCHEDULE

ALL GAMES START AT 7 P.M.

- Sept. 6 vs. Lake Oswego
- Sept. 13 at Bend
- Sept. 20 vs. Grant
- Sept. 27 at Sheldon
- Oct. 4 vs. Beaverton*
- Oct. 10 at South Salem*
- Oct. 18 vs. Mountain View*
- Oct. 25 at McNary*
- Nov. 1 vs. Sprague

*game will start at 7:15 p.m.

Behind the wheel there is no such thing as a small distraction.

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