

Woodinville takes opponents to 'The Dark Side'

BY TODD MILLES
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WOODINVILLE

On a field in Kenmore in the mid-1980s, where kids his age could be spotted wearing Marcus Allen jerseys, Wayne Maxwell was asked by one of his Pop Warner coaches what position he would like to play.

Even at that young age, Maxwell was obsessed with taking away the football, not scoring with it.

"I told them anywhere on defense," Maxwell said.

To this day, it's still about the defense for the coach at Woodinville High School.

The Falcons very well could have the best defense in the state — surrendering just 8.9 points per game competing in the offense-friendly 4A KingCo. Including the playoffs, their first unit has given up just eight touchdowns in 13 games with one left to play — the 4A championship game at 7:30 p.m. Saturday vs. Richland in the Tacoma Dome.

For a unit used to turning the lights off on opposing



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Woodinville defenders converge on Graham-Kapowsin running back Santrel McCluskey on Nov. 18.

offenses, they have the perfect nickname: "The Dark Side."

"It is the real deal," said Falcons defensive end Jake Baillie, the 4A KingCo de-

fensive player of the year. "It is our mentality, to be the biggest, baddest guys on the field."

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Before any of this could hatch in Woodinville, Maxwell had to learn what "The Dark Side" was.

He was a cornerback out of Inglemoor High School who made a pit stop at Walla Walla Community College before landing in former coach Jeff Zenisek's program at Central Washington University.

Maxwell's defensive backs coach with the Wildcats was John Graham, who was part of the staff that created the "Dark Side" defense during NAIA championship season in 1995.

"We did the black shirts like Nebraska," Maxwell said. "It was about showing up with that lunch pail and getting after it on the field — playing physical."

In 2002, Maxwell became the defensive coordinator at Woodinville under Mark Leander. And one day, out of the blue, an older gentleman showed up to practice and asked if the Falcons needed a volunteer assistant.

It was Lindsay Hughes, who served as the defensive coaching guru for Jim Walden at Washington State University and Iowa State.

"I was able to really just

learn a lot about good, sound football," said Maxwell, who was hired as the school's coach two years later in 2004. "We dummed down our schemes, and just focused on the fundamentals and making it easy for the kids. We took the thinking out, and that enabled the kids to play fast."

If there are two things this Woodinville defense is known for, the Falcons are both fast and fundamentally-sound.

And they are talented in every level.

"They have no weakness," Richland coach Mike Neidhold said. "Their defense is fantastic. They run to the ball, they put three, four guys on the ball every time it's on the ground, every time we would run it, and they play great pass defense. And they're not gonna have two bad series of defense in a row."

If you ask opposing coaches what makes Woodinville's defense tick, many, including Graham-Kapowsin's Eric Kurlle and Sumner's Keith Ross, will point to its active and very athletic front four.

The Falcons have totaled

76 tackles for loss. They have 40 sacks, led by Baillie and defensive tackle Quinn Schreyer, who have team-leading 14 sacks apiece.

"They are not the biggest guys, but what makes them so effective is they get off blocks," Maxwell said.

In the secondary, Montana commit Nash Fouch is one of the best two-way players in the state at free safety and wide receiver, and Seth Pregler emerged as a shutdown cornerback.

Maxwell, 41, said the biggest question mark coming into the season was replacing 2016 league defensive player of the year Mack Minnehan at the pivotal nickel back spot, which the Falcons utilize more as an outside linebacker.

Senior Noah Taplett stepped into that role, and finished with a team-high four interceptions, earning all-4A KingCo first-team honors.

"He has done an outstanding job," Maxwell said.

The Falcons also had to fill both starting inside linebacker spots, and Miles Mustarde and Danny Metzger have been fantastic run stoppers.

"One, (Coach Maxwell) knows what he is doing with the way he communicates with us. He makes everything super clear for everybody on the defense," Fouch

said. "And everybody is always talking to everybody — linebackers are talking to the defensive linemen, and the defensive backs are talking to the linebackers. The flow of things goes super well for us."

Of course, Maxwell utilizes daily exercises in practice to reinforce "The Dark Side" concept.

The biggest one is a sudden-flip-in-field-position drill where the defense is suddenly backed up near its own goal-line.

"The Dark Side" leader — and in this case, Fouch — then yells, "What is your profession!"

His defensive mates respond with, "Woo ... Woo ... Woo!"

"For whatever reason, it gets us super hyped up," Fouch said.

And that attitude shows up in games.

"It scares teams," Fouch said. "If our defense can come out and stop those teams with high-powered offenses, it gets them trembling. (Scoring points) has been their stamp, and if they get scared knowing they can't do what they usually do, there is an intimidation factor that comes with that."

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Sports

HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL

Woodinville's 'Dark Side' defense turns the lights out on offenses

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VIDEO

Woodinville High free safety Nash Fouch explains the meaning behind the defense's "Dark Side" nickname.

thenewtribune.com/sports

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Woodinville defenders Joshua Spencer (32), Dylan Pelland (53) and Eric Kim (77) converge on Graham-Kapowsin running back Santrel McCluskey after a short gain during Woodinville's 49-17 win in the Class 4A quarterfinals.

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