

## Putting in the work: Part 2 -- Fog doesn't deter Warriors on opening day

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It looked more like a movie scene.

Rays of sunlight fought to poke through the thick fog and shrill whistles filled the air at Eastern Wayne's practice field Saturday morning. Players stepped on dew-covered and freshly-cut grass that will soon fade away from the wear and tear of cleats and sled work.

Football season is here.

The Warriors, along with several county teams, held their first official practice of 2015. They assembled at 6:30 a.m. and took the field at 7.

The only thing more palpable than the moisture in the air was the excitement of a new year.

"It feels pretty good to see all the kids that have been working throughout the summer get out here," first-year head coach Phil Gray said. "Everybody is together and ready to go."

Eastern Wayne enters the season on the heels of back-to-back 11-win seasons that included consecutive trips to the N.C. High School Athletic Association eastern regional 3-A championship game. The players understand the challenge to build upon that foundation and take the next step.

"There's a lot of pressure," senior quarterback KK Best said. "But I like the pressure. I know a lot of people who I grew up with playing that aren't playing anymore, so there's a lot of pressure on me. I just have to go get it."

Hours earlier, North Duplin rang in the season with its first-ever midnight madness in Calypso. The team ate a meal together before hitting the field for some positional work and ended its practice with 30 minutes of running the two-minute drill.

The session capped the team's preseason mini-camp.

North Duplin finished 5-8 last season and returns a young roster.

"It's been real, real good," North Duplin head coach Hugh Martin said. "The work the guys have been putting in has been super. We've got such small numbers that it seems like we always have a good amount of turnover.

"We have a lot of young guys who maybe played a little, but are now stepping into bigger roles. It can be tough on them physically when they're so young and having to go out there and play against older guys. By the time they're seniors though, they understand a lot of the things that we're doing."

Another team looking to rebound from a tough season with a lot of youth on the roster is Southern Wayne. The Saints took the practice field for the first time around 9:30 Saturday morning. Head coach David Lee brought the team together before workouts to give them a speech stressing the importance of intensity.

"We were young last year, and we're going to be young again this year," Lee said. "But we will have quite a few guys returning. Hopefully we'll be a little better than we were last year, and we're looking forward to it."

After finishing without a win in 2014, the Saints hope that the group of returning leaders learned from the experience and can turn that into some wins.

"There's no substitute for experience," Lee added. "A lot of the kids

have worked hard in the weight rooms, and we'll get them out here and coach them up to be aggressive. They've just got to learn to compete."

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