

By JOHN HENSON

Harlan County Sports.com

Every team at every level wants to start the season with a win, but the Harlan County Black Bears have proven in each of their first three years that it's more important how you finish.

Harlan County has played, and lost, three opening games.

But after winning eight games in each of their first two years and 11 last season, the Bears soon made everyone forget their slow starts.

That doesn't mean, however, that HCHS coach Tom Larkey wouldn't like to open with a win for the first time when the Bears go on the road Saturday to play Morristown (Tenn.) East in the third annual **Citizen Tribune** Kickoff Classic at 8 p.m.

"We told them the other day we can't rely on a weak team in week two to get us even," Larkey said. "We don't really have a weak team on our schedule. I don't feel we're jinxed or anything. I feel we went into those games possibly not prepared well enough, but we want to start off with a win.

Harlan County appeared to be very well prepared in a 35-12 rout of Corbin on Thursday in the Southeastern Kentucky Conference Gridorama. "I do feel better. I feel we're farther ahead than we have been in the past," Larkey said.

Senior quarterback Jordy Brewer passed for two touchdowns and ran for another in the win over Corbin. Senior tailback Marcus McMillian was on the receiving end of one of the touchdowns and added another TD on the ground. Sophomores Treyvon Long and Cory Chorak added one touchdowns each.

"I expect Harlan County to be a hard-nosed, physical football team," Morristown East coach Dwayne Hatcher said. "Coach Larkey is known for having those types of teams. I've coached kids out of that part of the country before and I know we'll get that type of game."

Morristown East finished 5-6 last season, scoring 21 points a game while giving up 27. The Hurricanes bring back six starters on offense and seven on defense and have high expectations that this could be their best team in several years.

Senior quarterback Cody "Tebow" Ricker (6-2, 215) leads the East offense, along with 6-foot-4, 320-pound senior center T.T. Garretson. Senior linebacker Nick Free leads the defense.

"They have a nice quarterback who can run and throw it. They run a 43 defense, and those kids have a lot of speed," Larkey said. "They are just as athletic and skilled as we are. It's hard to tell how physical they are by watching them on film. I'm hoping we can be stronger up front and sustain drives and move the chains.

"The other night we played pretty good as far as mistake-free football on offense, but we have to eliminate penalties and turnovers. Right now, we're not doing a good job punting the football. We don't want to get into fourth-down situations with this team right now."

Harlan County shut down the Corbin running game last week by continually penetrating in the backfield. Linemen Kainer Caudill, Coty Miracle, Chase Calton, Michael Smith and Chorak and ends Carson Whitehead and McMillian played well in the scrimmage.

Even though he's been the head coach for the past six years at Morristown East, Hatcher is familiar with eastern Kentucky football. He was on Tom Dowling's staff at Cumberland College from 1986 to 1988.

"We've got to protect the football and sustain drives," Hatcher said. "We also have to be physical on the line of scrimmage because I don't know that we'll face anybody that will be more physical than Harlan County. We'll have to respond to the physical style of play."

In the first game Saturday at Burke-Toney Stadium, Morristown (Tenn.) West will play Fulton (Tenn.) at 4:30 p.m.

For those traveling from Harlan, take U.S. 119 to Pineville, turn left onto U.S. 25E. Follow to Tazewell, Tenn., and turn left on to TN-32 S/US 25-E. Continue to follow US 25-E South. Take a slight right onto the US-11E S/Morris Blvd ramp to Morristown. Turn left onto US-11E S/E Morris Blvd. Turn left onto South James Street. Take the first left onto Hurricane Lane. Stadium is straight ahead. Allow approximately one hour and 48 minutes for travel.