## Bell ready to lead Giants into football season

By Sean Douglas

With a new season comes a renewed sense of opti-

For the Giants, it also comes with a new head coach, one that is looking to lead the continued resurgence of Marion football.

After serving as the associate head coach over the last three years, James Bell was elevated to the head coaching position in early July, bringing with him a tremendous amount of football knowledge and experi-

Now at the helm of the Marion football program, and with an abundance of talent at his disposal, Bell is ready to lead the Giants to another successful season in

For all Grant County sports, this offseason has been both chaotic and turbulent. Everything shut down in March, and players were not able to reconvene in a team setting until early July.

However, Bell made sure his players had what they needed to make the best of a difficult situation. He encouraged his players to go to one of the many parks in town to take care of their conditioning. He supplied a plethora of drills and skill sets for players to work on so that his team would not be too far behind once team workouts began.

The upperclassmen really took Bell's words to heart, putting in the time on their own to become faster, stronger, and overall, better football players, and the results have been resoundingly positive.

"There is a lot of enthusiasm," Bell said. "As a matter of fact, our numbers increased this year when they were able to let us come back. We've been averaging about 47. Those are pretty good numbers for us, and that's an increase from the previous years I've been here."

The team has focused on three major areas – safety, conditioning, and recall. With football being the largest team sport on any high school campus, the odds of a COVID-19 outbreak are highly increased. Because of this, Bell implored them to be cautious and take the necessary precautions in order to keep one another safe.

"We talked to them about being safe. We told them to wear their masks and wear their gloves," Bell said. "We have just tried to continue to educate them on that. We want them to understand the



circumstances we are in right now and accept that this is our lifestyle right now. That's really what our focus has been on."

After that, the Giants worked on getting back into game shape, and finally, reimplementing the X's and O's on both sides of the football.

While the team is still a work in progress, Bell is pleased with the team's progression so far.

"We have to continue to expand their knowledge base, and we are getting to

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that point," Bell said. "I think it's a level playing field, and we shouldn't be too far behind. I feel confident that if we can stay the course, I think we will improve each week."

The Giants graduated several key players, including starting quarterback Keshaun Taylor (15 TDs), all-around star JK Thomas (64 carries, 687 yards, 11 touchdowns rushing, 18 receptions, 438 yards, eight touchdowns receiving), and plethora of defensive playmakers, including linebacker Juancarlos Ramirez (106 tackles), cornerback De'Angelo Jones (seven interceptions) and defensive end Brendon Martin (53 tackles).

However, despite these losses, the Giants head into

the 2020 season with many positions set in stone. The entire offensive line is back, minus one, including senior Johnny Davis, who excelled in the trenches a season ago.

"He is a leader by example," Bell said. "He is a hard worker. He is a man of few words, but he is a man of very many talents."

The Giants also return their leading receiver in Braxstin Delgado (27 receptions, 480 yards), together with budding star Khalid Stamps (202 carries, 1576 yards, 20 touchdowns) and blazing speedster Zaimar Burnett, who is 100 percent healthy after a nagging injury last fall.

At quarterback, Bell looks to use two players under center in senior Cain

Jones. Richardson, who saw time last year late in games, is a tremendous pocket passer who makes good decisions with the football, while Jones is another speed threat who excels with the RPO elements of the Marion offense.

Depending on what the defense gives them, Bell plans to use both in certain situations.

"With those two guys, it will be very hard for people to get a bead on what we might be doing, because they could be on the field at the same time," Bell said. "I really like having that option."

On defense, there are a few positions that still need to be worked out, but several players are already making

Richardson and junior Cubie their case for ample playing time. Burnett will serve as the team's starting safety, while Ty'von Coleman will man one of the cornerback spots. Devante Black and AJ Mitchener will anchor the defensive line, and at this time, the linebacker position is still being sorted out.

Marion will begin their season on Friday, August 21 against Eastbrook, and the Giants are itching to get started.

"The expectation is to build on what we have and try to get better each week," Bell said. "We are going to take and utilize what people give us. That's what we do. We are going to use our strengths [against] our opponents' strengths."

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