



**2013**

**LONG COUNTY**

**Blue Tide varsity football preview**



# 2013 BLUE TIDE COACHES



(L to R) Deshon Brock Jr., Wide Receivers/Defense Backs • Mitch Nobles, Defensive Coordinator/Defensive Line  
Evan Woodard, Linebackers • Ron Flott, Head Coach • Cedrick Johnson, Running Backs/Linebackers  
Paul Austin, Quarterbacks • Eric McNair, Offensive Coordinator/Offensive Line

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# Next step includes winning season, playoffs

BY MIKE RIDDLE

Coastal Courier correspondent

Last year was big for the Long County High School football program. By finishing with a 5-5 record, the Blue Tide ended the futility of 10 consecutive losing seasons.

So what is next for the Blue Tide? Can they continue to flourish under head coach Rob Flott, or was last year a fluke resulting from realignment and an easier schedule?

Flott said he believes the team will produce another winning record, and a trip to the playoffs is certainly realistic.

"Last year we had the best record in school history," he said. "We met some of our goals, but not all of them."

Flott said he has both long-term and short-term goals this season.

"(The) short-term goal is to win our first game against Lanier (County)," he said. "Our long-term goal is to make the playoffs. We'll do all we can to prepare the kids and see what happens, but if we play like we're capable of, I feel good that we'll be in the hunt at the end of the year."



Mike Riddle

**The Long County football team is led by seniors Vanda Vereen Jr. (3), Javier Pouncey (4), Nick Stock (17), Ramonie Farlow (22), Dorian Adkins (30), Randall Behrendt (51), Cody Smiley (55), Matt Holtz (66), Raymond Mesa (73), Evan Strickland (75) and Darius Francis (77).**

The coach said his team lost a lot of talent with graduation and that it won't be easy to replace players like Josh Berry, Jeffery Hall, Luke Golden and Jacob Turner. However, there are plenty of players who are ready to step up and fill their shoes.

"First of all, there's Vanda (Vereen Jr.). What can you say about him? He's just a good kid and

a natural athlete," Flott said. "Last year, he was all-region on defense, and he's going to do a good job leading our offense at quarterback.

"You don't replace a kid like Josh, but we got Brendan (Scott), who's going to carry the ball some, and we also got a couple more," the coach continued. "But on both sides of the ball, we got some good kids."

Flott said the summer program went great and that the players' eager participation foreshadowed their dedication and enthusiasm for the upcoming season.

"Man, our summer program went great, about as well as it could go," he said. "We averaged about 45 kids a day coming out, and they had a great work ethic."

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# Big offensive line to help wing-bone

BY MIKE RIDDLE  
Coastal Courier correspondent

The Blue Tide's wing-bone offense averaged 26 points per game in 2012, which was fourth best in Region 2-AA. Although it didn't match years past when Long County would score 40 points per night, the 2012 offense was good enough to keep the team competitive in all but two of its games. With the offense focusing on the run first, it also helped the Long County defense by keeping opposing offenses on the sideline for much of the game.

In the wing-bone offense, there are four potential runners in the backfield: two halfbacks, a fullback and the quarterback.

It's advantageous because it forces a defense to be disciplined in covering gap assignments. If one defensive lineman or linebacker is out of place, the running back can break into the secondary for a big gain. The wing-bone also can force a defense with a weaker front to pull its safeties and cornerbacks up closer to the line to stop the run, leaving the secondary more susceptible for a big pass.

However, for the wing-bone to work, the offensive line has to win the battle in the trenches. Each blocker needs to be able to drive, trap and cross-block, maintaining good footwork

and upper body movement.

This year's offensive line is the most talented one that head coach Ron Flott has had since arriving in Long County. Returning for their senior year are center Evan Strickland, tackle Cody Smiley and guard Randall Behrendt, all of whom made the all-region team in 2012.

This group has shown talent in the past and will need to continue to improve this year. If they play to their potential, the Blue Tide wing-bone offense should be effective.

A solid offensive line should also make it easier for the Blue Tide running attack to prosper. Leading the offense is quarterback Vanda Vereen Jr., who made the all-region first team as a defensive back last year. Although Vereen will see some time on the defensive side of the ball, his play on offense will make or break Long County in 2013. Vereen will run the ball himself much of the time, but he also will hand off to halfbacks Brendon Scott and Jaquarius Harrison or fullback Armando Toledo.

When Vereen needs to find an open man in the secondary, he will look for wideouts Javier Pouncey, Ramonie Farlow or Dorian Adkins.

"We're not going to do a lot different on the offense this year — just continue to build on what we have done over the last two years," Flott said.

# Defense looks to continue improving

BY MIKE RIDDLE  
Coastal Courier correspondent

When head coach Ron Flott took over the Long County High School football program two years ago, he inherited a team that four years in a row had given up more points than any other team in the 2-AA region.

The Blue Tide had managed a couple of 4-6 seasons over that period, but those wins had little to do with the defense.

When the final tick of the clock expired on most of those Friday night victories, the unusually high scores looked more like they belonged on a basketball scoreboard.

In 2011, Flott implemented what he called the wing-bone offense into the system, reasoning that if Long County could run the ball effectively, then it would keep the opposing offenses off the field, thereby improving his defense.

He also implemented the 50 defense as the primary set, using a nose guard, two defensive tackles and two defensive ends. The primary goal was to stop the run first, and it was dependent on the secondary playing smart.

In Flott's first season at Long County,

the defense gave up more points than any other team in the region, but it did show improvement.

Last year, however, the defense appeared to turn the corner and began to shut down some opponents.

At the end of last season, the defense finished sixth in the region in points allowed, giving up an average of 20 points per game. The team also recorded its first shutout, held three teams to a single touchdown and held a fourth team to 13 points. There were no comparisons to the 1985 Chicago Bears, but it was clear that the 50 defense was working and the Blue Tide team was improving.

Flott said he will continue to use the 50 defense and that he feels good about it continuing to improve this year.

The coach will depend on Raymond Mesa, Darius Francis and 2-AA all-region player Matt Hotz to anchor the defensive line. Just behind the line, he'll depend on Armando Toledo and Nick Stock — who also made the all-region team last year — to lead the linebacking corps.

Flott added that quarterback Vanda Vereen Jr. will see a lot of time on the other side of the ball at safety, where he, too, was a member of the all-region team.

# 6 seniors who need to play well for team to succeed

BY MIKE RIDDLE  
Coastal Courier correspondent

In years past, the Long County High School football team has been blessed primarily with skill-position players. The Blue Tide have had the occasional outstanding offensive or defensive lineman, but those players have been few and far between.

In 2013, it appears that the opposite may apply, with the team having more talent than ever on both the defensive and offensive lines. As a result, linemen dominate this year's list of seniors who need to play well for the Tide to be successful.

## Vanda Vereen Jr. (QB/DB)



Vereen

Vereen is a typical stud athlete; he has been so versatile that past rosters have listed his position as ATH.

Last year, he ran the ball in a supporting role to Josh Berry. He easily could have been the primary runner, but he was needed more on defense. He excelled in the secondary, resulting in a spot on the all-region team. This year he will see some action on defense, but if the Blue Tide is going to be successful in 2013, Vereen will have to shine at quarterback.

## Nick Stock (LB)



Stock

Stock was one of the key leaders on defense last year, and like Vereen, he made the all-region team as a starter. He has a nose for the ball and knows how to fill a gap. In addition to excelling at football, he also stands out in the weight room, evidenced when he won last year's all-around title in the Georgia Coaches Association state weightlifting meet. He keeps his head in the game and plays smart.

## Evan Strickland (C)

Strickland, a member of last sea-



Strickland

son's all-region team, is big, strong and hardworking. As the center, he will need to be proficient with his snaps, agile with his feet and quick to get in position to take on a charging nose guard or tackle.

## Cody Smiley (LT) and Randall Behrendt (LG)



Smiley

Both Smiley and Behrendt made the all-region team last season. With a younger backfield, the offensive line will need to get



Behrendt

back to the fundamentals and play smart. Smiley and Behrendt both have the capability of being better this year, and for the Tide to succeed, they need to do just that.

## Mathew Holtz (NG)



Holtz

It takes a special breed to play nose guard, and Holtz is that breed of player. Holtz will be the primary player responsible for stopping the run in the interior of the line.



# 2013 BLUE TIDE TEAM



## GO BLUE TIDE!

### FUEL YOUR PASSION!



# Breaking down Blue Tide's week-by-week schedule

Long Co. to play host to Jeff Davis for Oct. 25 homecoming game

BY MIKE RIDDLE  
Coastal Courier correspondent

## Week 1 at Lanier County (2-8 in 2012):

When Long County opens its season Aug. 30, it will face an old rival from when the Blue Tide first established a football program. But that was then and this is now. The Bulldogs are the Blue Tide's only non-region game of the year and their only single-A opponent. Last year, Long County clearly was the big dog on the field when it beat Lanier County, 30-6, in Ludowici. The Bulldogs are at home this year, but that shouldn't make a difference. The Tide should win this game easily, and they better, because their schedule only gets tougher after Week 1. Lanier leads the series, 2-1.

## Week 2 vs. Benedictine Cadets (8-4 in 2012, advanced to the second round of playoffs):

The Blue Tide will face one of their toughest opponents when they take on the Cadets. BC last year dropped down from the 3-A region into 2-AA, and with the move, the Cadets re-assumed their dominance on the football field. Coach Danny Britt has to feel good about his program after its successful 2012 campaign, and he will be expected to continue his winning ways. Last year, the Cadets beat the Blue Tide, 45-10, in Savannah. This year, Long County has the home-field advantage, and the Blue Tide will need to take advantage of that edge. Week

2 could be a statement game for Long County if it can beat Benedictine or at least keep the score close. If so, the rest of Region 2-AA will know that Long County is the team to be reckoned with in 2013. Benedictine leads the series, 3-0.

## Week 3 at Vidalia High School (11-1 in 2012, advanced to second round of playoffs):

The schedule gets tougher for the Blue Tide when they travel to Vidalia to take on the Indians. Last year in the 2-AA, Vidalia clearly was the cream of the crop, going undefeated in the region. It also had the most potent offense, averaging 32 points per game, and the stingiest defense, giving up 11 points per game. In 2011, the Indians beat the Tide, 39-7. Last year, it was more of the same during a 40-6 blowout. The Indians once again are expected to be one of the top teams in the region and a major playoff contender. For the Blue Tide to be competitive, their big offensive line will have to open up holes for their running backs. They need to move the chains and control the clock, keeping Vidalia's offense on the sidelines. Vidalia leads the series, 3-0.

## Week 4 vs. Atkinson County (0-10 in 2012):

The Rebels come to town Sept. 20, and after two tough games against BC and Vidalia, the Blue Tide may have a chance to catch their breath. Last year, Atkinson County moved out of Region 2-A up to the 2-AA. The move

wasn't a pretty one as the Rebels were waxed in seven of their 10 games. They played hard but could not match up physically with most of their opponents. Last year, Long County easily beat Atkinson, 47-6. So what does that mean for the Blue Tide? It means that in Week 4 they will be expected to win this game in front of the hometown fans. Atkinson leads the series, 2-1.

## Week 5 at Bryan County (3-7 in 2012):

In their past three matchups, Long County beat Bryan County, 20-13, in 2012; lost, 28-21, in 2011; and won, 20-7, in 2010. Of all the region opponents, the Blue Tide and Redskins have always appeared to be evenly matched. This year probably will be no different as their rivalry continues. Both teams are familiar with each other, and both will play hard. However, if there is one area where the Tide appear to have an edge over the Redskins, it's on the offensive and defensive lines. This will be a good game, like it always is, but when the game clock expires, Long County should be the victor. Bryan County leads the series, 5-4.

## Week 6 vs. Bacon County (6-5 in 2012, lost in first round of playoffs):

Long County will need to win at least one game that it's not supposed to win if the Blue Tide are going to make the playoffs. Bacon County is a team that Long County will be an underdog against but should be able to beat. Last year, the Red Raiders beat the Blue Tide, 34-13, in Alma. Long County could have won, but luck just fell Bacon County's

## 2013 VARSITY FOOTBALL SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	LOCATION
Aug. 30	Lanier County	Lakeland
Sept. 6	*Benedictine	Ludowici
Sept. 13	*Vidalia High	Vidalia
Sept. 20	*Atkinson County (RN)	Ludowici
Sept. 27	*Bryan County	Pembroke
Oct. 4	*Bacon County	Ludowici
Oct. 11	Open	
Oct. 18	*Toombs County	Lyons
Oct. 25	*Jeff Davis (HC)	Ludowici
Nov. 1	*McIntosh County	Darien
Nov. 8	*Metter High (SN)	Ludowici

**Note:** All games are scheduled to start at 7:30 p.m.

\* Designates region opponent

RN — Recreation Night

HC — Homecoming

SN — Senior Night

way. But as many coaches say, good teams make their own luck. This year, the Tide will have home-field advantage, and that might be the difference in what should be a very competitive game. Bacon County leads the series, 1-0.

## Week 7: Bye week

## Week 8 at Toombs County (7-3 in 2012):

If there was one team in the 2-AA that should have made the playoffs but didn't, it was Toombs County. The Bulldogs finished their season with the fourth-best overall record in the region and in a three-way tie for the fourth playoff spot. The Cadets and the Raiders made the playoffs, so that left Bulldogs waiting for 2013. Well, it's here, and this year they will be looking to do a little bit better and play some postseason ball. The Blue Tide played the Bulldogs hard last year but ultimately fell, 34-20. Toombs was a notch below the better teams in the

2-AA last year, but clearly the Bulldogs were a notch above everyone else. If this plays out again this season, the Bulldogs will enter this matchup as the favorites. Toombs County leads the series, 3-0.

## Week 9 vs. Jeff Davis (2-8 in 2012):

Oct. 25 is homecoming for Long County, and if schools could choose one game to win every year, most would pick their homecoming game. Last year when the two teams met in Hazlehurst, it was a long night for the Yellow Jackets as the Blue Tide easily won, 48-0. The one-sided thumping was unusual for the series because prior to it, most of their contests had been fairly competitive. This year, the Jackets will be looking for revenge and to ruin the night for Long County. But even though the game should be much closer than last year, it is a contest that Long County ought to win. Long County leads the se-

ries, 3-2.

## Week 10 at McIntosh County (9-3 in 2012, advanced to second round of playoffs):

When November rolls around, the Blue Tide will be facing an old foe that has dominated them for years. Last year, the Buccaneers bounced back from a 4-7 season in 2011 to advance to the second round of the playoffs before losing to Brooks County. Having gotten his team back on the winning track, head coach Keith Gosse will not want to fall off that course again. Last season, the Bucs beat the Blue Tide, 30-19. Even though Long County lost, it was clear that the gap was narrowing between the two teams. Week 10 will be crunch time for both high schools, and it will be interesting to see if the Blue Tide can end their losing streak against the red and gold. McIntosh County leads the series, 9-0.

## Week 11 vs. Metter High School (2-8 in 2012):

The Blue Tide wrap up their season Nov. 8, taking on the Tigers in Ludowici. Last year, Long County manhandled Metter in a 49-7 victory to end the Blue Tide's season at 5-5 and notch their first non-losing season. This year, the Blue Tide should win several of their games. If they can beat a team or two that they aren't supposed to beat, a victory against Metter could result in Long County posting its first winning season or even making the playoffs. But regardless of whether those factors come into play, the Blue Tide should be the favorite in this matchup. Long County leads the series, 1-0.



# A look at the supporting crew



Mike Riddle

The Long County football coaching staff, from left to right, includes Deshon Brock Jr., wide receivers/defense backs; Mitch Nobles, defensive coordinator/defensive line; Evan Woodard, linebackers; Ron Flott, head coach; Cedrick Johnson, running backs/linebackers; Paul Austin, quarterbacks; and Eric McNair, offensive coordinator/offensive line.



Photos by Mike Riddle

The Long County football team is supported by the band and the cheerleading squad. For more information on their upcoming competitions, go to [www.blue-tideband.com](http://www.blue-tideband.com) and [www.longcountyhs.com/AthleticDept2014.html](http://www.longcountyhs.com/AthleticDept2014.html).

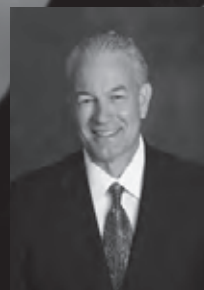


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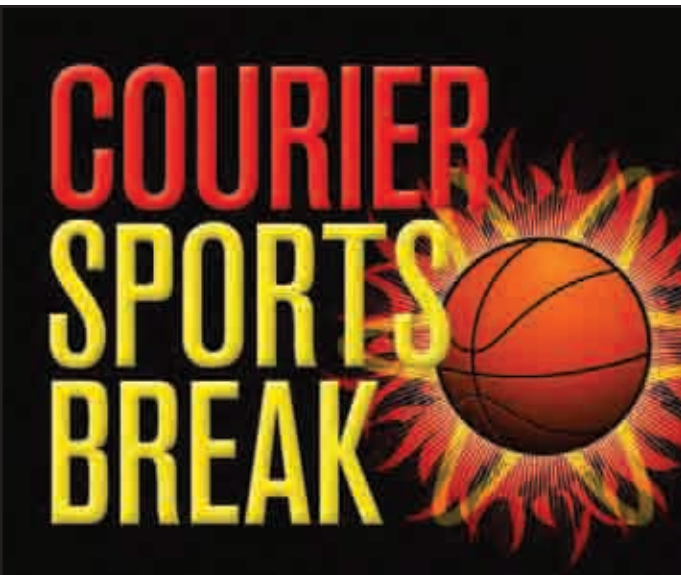


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