West Is Again Underdog in Football

When the West beat the East in last year's VHSL All-Star football game, 16-15, it was labeled an upset by most people. This year, the West will probably go into the contest again as the underdog. However, one would never realize it by talking to the West coaching staff.

"The practices have been good and we've got some real good athletes who will help us a lot," said Alger Pugh, offensive coach and head coach at George Washington of Danville. "All of them are coming right along. They're kind of tired after only two days, but things will get better as we move along."

The West's head coach, Ralph Cummins of state Group A champion Clintwood shares Pugh's optimism of the practice sessions thus far.

"We're really pleased at this stage," said Cummins. "We're still evaluating players and a lot of positions are still open, but they are all pretty good football players.

"Actually, we're further along now than we were at this time last year," Cummins was an assistant coach for 1974's West squad. "The players are in good physical condition. We're smaller than the East, but we've got some pretty good-sized boys, too."

Defensive coach Tom Berry of Amherst, whose own quarterback, Russell Henderson, decided not to come, is pleased with all the players, especially his defense.

"I'd almost have to name all the players as far as putting out is concerned," Berry said. "You've got to have good defense and we've got some fine defensive ballplayers.

"The atmosphere here has been better than I anticipated. Even practicing twice a day as hot as it's been hasn't bothered the kids. There haven't been any complaints. It's been a real treat to work with the kids."

The offensive team has looked devastating at times and ragged at others but Pugh attributes that to the fact that the players are a little sore and haven't had any contact all summer.

Pugh has plenty of depth in the backfield. There are nine backs all together—two quarterbacks and seven running backs. Galaxy's Don LaRue, who was named Timesland's first-team quarterback last fall, is the probable starter. Vance Price of Glenvar is a capable backup. Both are quick, but LaRue's passing arm will be tough to stop.

The West squad had a plethora of good runners. There's Ray Friday of JEB Stuart (6-1, 190), Jimmy Ferguson of Brookville, who gained over 1,000 yards his last two years, Gail Livingston of J.I. Burton, small Dexter Green of Gar-Field (5-10, 165), Larry Fallen of GW, Yogi Arnold of R. B. Worthy and Walter Davis of James Wood.

Arnold has been a pleasant surprise. After Saltville's playoff victory over Parry McCluer last year, many claimed Arnold was too slow to play halfback in college and he wasn't recruited very heavily.

"I tell you, if he's slow I'll take them all like he is," Pugh said. "Arnold has been real impressive this week. He's not slow. He's got good movement and good feet. When you carry for 2,000 yards in one season, you have got to be good. I'm highly impressed with him."

Arnold, who also pleased head coach Cummins with his size and quickness, isn't the only surprise. Dwaine Board of Franklin County has done well. "Board has done a fine job and is a real good ballplayer," said Cummins.

"We've been very pleased with Board's play so far," Pugh added. "Board has done a fine job and is a real good ballplayer."

Ken Sheets, who will play for North Carolina this fall, is being tried at tight end. His usual position is defensive end. These are the only major switches to this point.

The West won't have the edge in size over the East, but Cummins doesn't think it will make much difference.

"We're plenty big enough," he said. "Size doesn't matter that much. We've got a lot of quickness and that's very important."

Berry feels the same way. "It would be foolish not to consider size as a factor. With the good, big ones going against the good, little ones we'll have to try to compensate for it. We have to be more motivated and quicker."

The offense is working out of the pro-set in practice, but will try other formations, too. William Fleming's Tom Brown, who will attend Tennessee State this fall, is listed as a tight end and wide receiver. Livingston, Fallen and Green will see action at flanker in addition to their accustomed running back spots.

Despite the overall lack of depth, the West team has been effective in its practice sessions so far and should improve as the week passes on. Berry believes defensive back Eddie Reed's assessment of the game is "a pretty good philosophy."

"I think if everybody works hard, it will come down to the team that wants to win the game the most," Reed said. "It'll come down to the team that uses their heads and puts out 100 per cent all of the time. That's all there is to it."