

# NEW COACH TO LEAD GCA IN TOUGH REGION

By Charles Pulliam • Sports Editor

The top two football teams from the Division II-A Middle Region battled for the BlueCross Bowl state championship last season when Donelson Christian Academy blew past Nashville Christian for the program's fourth state title in Chattanooga.

Entering his first season leading a team in the same region as the defending champs and runners-up – let alone in Tennessee – first-year Grace Christian Academy coach Bobby Miller is simply focused on developing a camaraderie with his new school and community in what has quickly become “home” for his family.

“There’s just something different about GCA,” said Miller, who was hired in March and recently moved to the area from the Pacific Northwest with his wife, Lisa, two daughters and piano-playing dog, Otis. “Southern hospitality is very real down here ...

and this is quintessential small-town football. I cannot wait to watch my boys play.”

As for playing in the same region that supplied the top teams in the classification, Miller said: “I’m glad to be around the best.”

Miller played football at the University of Northwestern-St. Paul in Minnesota before getting into coaching. He was one of more than 70 applicants for the head coaching position and said it was “completely a God thing,” and “a beautiful match.”

Miller most recently coached at Life Christian Academy where he also served as Dean of Students in Tacoma, Washington.

He takes over for Rusty Smith, a former Tennessee Titans quarterback who guided the young GCA school to its first playoff appearances in 2017, 2020 and last season.

Smith coached seven seasons at GCA going 22-49 overall. He led the program in its first year of eligibility in 11-man football and also helped navigate the transition from Division I to Division II competition in 2020.

“Coach Smith did a phenomenal job developing the program and for me to come in and adopt this program, it’s just been amazing,” Miller said. “I know our kids are chomping at the bit and we’re all excited to get going.”

The Lions return nine starters led by senior quarterback Jackson Hiett, senior lineman George Steih – a Wake Forrest commit – along with senior Cooper Mason and junior running back Nathan Greene, among others.

“Cooper has a natural gift to find the football,” Miller said of the linebacker, who collected 57 tackles and five sacks.

Steih, a captain and leader in the trenches, paced the GCA defense with



PHOTO BY JOHN CROSS

Jackson Hiett is among the top returners for the GCA football team. The senior quarterback is among nine returning starters.

69 tackles, including 19 for loss, with 10.5 sacks and three forced fumbles.

Greene is the leading returning rusher after collecting 5.2 yards per carry and scoring six TDs in 2021, while under center, Hiett completed more than

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