

West Washington Head Coach Phillip Bowsman is both excited and optimistic about the upcoming football season for his Senators.

A few things feed into that optimism.

First is numbers. Bowsman said there are currently 49 players on the roster, the biggest group in more than a decade.

Of those 49 players, an average of 35 attended summer workouts on a nightly basis.

That attendance has led to what Bowsman called the strongest team he has seen at West Washington in his 12 years on staff, five as head coach.

"I've always been in the 40s," Bowsman said. "Having numbers really helps, especially with special teams. That allows us to get some of those athletic freshmen on the field to fly around and use their athleticism."

The teams core group are the seniors.

Chad Thompson, Jared Maudlin, Matt Brackney, Austin Green, Jake Howell and Robert Chandler are the team captains and have played all four-years.

They are joined by three additional seniors. Brad Zelivetz did not play as a junior and Trevor McDaniel is playing football for the first time.

Another player Cory Suddeth, who is a move-in from Charlestown could also see time.

"(Suddeth) looks athletic and looks like he could play defense," Bowsman said.

With 49 players and only nine seniors it's easy to see why so many Senator fans are talking about the future, but Bowsman said this year's team is different than last year's, but can be very good.

"We lost King and Trueblood, who both rushed for more than 1,000 yards each and that's tough to replace, but we are going to have to get it done in other ways," he said. "Those guys always gave us the big-play threat and this year we may have to move the ball a little more methodically."

Moving the ball shouldn't be an issue with the big boys up front.

"This is probably the best line we've had in the six years I've been head coach," he said. "Four out of the five have started prior to this year and three were starters last year. The other one is a freshman, Lane McPheeters, may start at guard for us."

Bowsman said the other guys playing on the line are Chandler, who will start at center, Howell, Austin Green and John Brennan will play a guard position.

"We are long, athletic and strong up front," Bowsman said. "We are excited about those guys. They are our core and we will build around them from there."

There is also depth among the linemen..

"We have more linemen than we do skill players," he said. "At guard we were looking at three kids and they all could get time. We got three guys who can play tackle. We got all position covered and are at least two deep at most positions."

Those guys should have fun blocking for the skill players Bowsman will entrust the ball to.

Sophomore Cody Maudlin will start at quarterback for the Senators.

"He is not built like a sophomore," Bowsman said. "He is 6'1" 180 pounds. He did a great job

in the 7-on-7 drills. Now that's just standing back and throwing with no one coming at you and we will see if he can carry that over into live action. He runs hard and is a great leader. I am excited about him and confident in him."

Chad Thompson, Tyler Holliday, Jared Maudlin and Matt Brackney will work as either slot or outside wide receivers.

"Are those guys as fast as Dakotah King? Probably not!" Bowsman said. "They do have speed and they run great routes and can break a big play any time they touch the ball."

Thompson will not be limited to receiver. Bowsman said the big-play threat will lineup all over the field.

"He will probably play every position at some point this year," Bowsman said.

So with an offense that should be able to move the ball, the teams defense will be a key in how well the Senators do.

And that unit, Bowsman said, is the strength of the team.

"Out of our entire team it's the defense that I am really excited about," he said.

Chandler and Green are the starting defensive tackles, both started last year.

Defensive End John Brennan, Keegan Hash and McPheeters will see time at the end position, as well. .

The linebacking corps is solid, with Sean Keller anchoring that unit.

Bowsman said Keller missed the game against Eastern last year, but after taking the field against Christian Academy Louisville, he was a force to be reckoned with for the remainder of the season.

Keller didn't rest on that success either, in fact Bowsman said he missed just one day of workouts all summer long.

Also playing linebacker for the Senators will be Jake Howell and Tyler Dunn.

If anyone has luck getting through the front seven, Bowsman and West Washington will rely on Thompson and junior Branson Smith to guard against the big play.

"We return the middle of our defense," he said. "We return seven or eight starters."

The only question mark on this year's team is the cornerback position, but Bowsman said there are plenty of athletes to fill those spots.

He said Brackney, Tyler Holliday, Jared Maudlin and Evan Woods will all see time at corner.

Brenden Grimes will handle the kickoff and PAT duties.

Bowsman said he isn't sure who will do the bulk of the punting, but he thinks several players will get a turn at that position.

The Senators were 5-5 last season and lost in the first round of sectional play.

The performance was off the heels of the 9-3 season in 2010.

Where this group fits in comparison to those two teams remains to be seen.

On paper, Bowsman said they have the potential to have a great season.

"We are really experienced," he said. "Our seniors have played in our system since seventh grade and there is less teaching. We may not be as fast as the year we went 9-3, but physically we are stronger than any team we've had in the 12 years I've been here.

"We're excited to get going and see where we are."

The Senators open the season with a county clash against the Musketeers of East Washington.

West Washington will be trying to avenge last year's 18-7 loss in Pekin. The Senators lead the series 4-1.

Kick-off Friday in Campbellsburg is set for 7 p.m.

