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Hawks hope to win battle of birds

By Jack Martin MDJ Sports Correspondent
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Jaiden Moore will be among those leading Hillgrove into its regular-season finale at South Cobb on Thursday.
Special - Cecil Copeland

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Hillgrove will travel to Clay Stadium to face South Cobb on Thursday with the hopes of closing the regular season with the No. 3 seed from Region 3AAAAAA.

Meanwhile, South Cobb will look to finish the season strong to build momentum for 2026.

Both teams are coming off losses, as South Cobb (2-7, 0-6) fell to McEachern 56-18, while Hillgrove (7-2, 4-2) dropped its second in a row when it lost 30-23 to Harrison.

Despite the recent struggles, Hillgrove coach Justin DeShon said the team can learn from the losses and fix its weaknesses come playoff time.

“We played two really good opponents, so they’ve shown us some of our weaknesses and some things that we’ve been doing schematically — some self-scouting things that we’ve been relying on that people are defending,” DeShon said. “We have the opportunity to take a deep dive into ourselves.”

When asked about the magnitude of Thursday’s game for seeding, DeShon said nothing changes.

“Our guys are excited to play on Thursday, and to have an opportunity to right the ship a little bit from the last two weeks, where we’ve played really hard,” DeShon said. “We’ve been shown some things as coaches and we just have to make adjustments, and now is a

great time to be able to make some adjustments before going into the playoff bye week.”

South Cobb has made strides this season as coach Marcus Washington Sr. has begun to build a solid foundation. But before the Eagles can build on their improvements, Washington said they must have a next-play mentality.

“I want to come out and make sure that we, first of all, play fast, play hard and play until the clock hits zero and see where we are at,” Washington said. “I always preach to my guys about not worrying about the scoreboard and just having our next-play mentality? I want to see them execute and play with some intensity and, hopefully, some of that can carry into our offseason and, ultimately, next football season.”

Washington said it begins with the offense.

“Offensively, we’ve been able to be a lot more productive — putting points up, possessing the football, controlling the clock, being able to flip the field and not putting the defense in bad situations,” Washington said. “That’s one of the biggest things we’ve been able to do this year.”

South Cobb will be tasked with slowing down Hillgrove’s rushing attack, headlined by junior Jaiden Moore. Moore has averaged more than 92 yards per game and has nine touchdowns.

Washington said the Hawks have an efficient and effective running game.

“You have to — I don’t want to use the word ‘stop,’ more so ‘slow down’ their running game and put them in a position to pass the ball,” Washington said. “I think that’s kind of the formula for most high school football games. You have to stop the run if you want to earn the right to be in, compete or win a football game.”

Hillgrove will have to slow down South Cobb quarterback Freedom Jones. The junior has more than 1,500 yards from scrimmage and 20 touchdowns.

DeShon called South Cobb athletic, and there have been major improvements for the Eagles across the board.

“It’s going to be a heck of a challenge, especially on Thursday night, and we have to make sure that our mentality is in the right spot and we’re ready to go play football,” he said.

About the Game

Game: Hillgrove at South Cobb, 7 p.m. Thursday

Last year: Hillgrove 53, South Cobb 0

All-time series: Hillgrove leads 4-1

Prediction: Hillgrove 35, South Cobb 14