

2023

HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL

Saturday, August 19, 2023

INSIDE:

**Teams revving up
for season, look
to reach high gear**

**Team-by-team previews,
season schedules**

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this season, visit:

https://www.timesdaily.com/sports/high_school/

Time to tee it up



Teams will soon move away from the blocking sleds and don game uniforms to start the 2023 season. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

Teams face big questions in 2023

By A. Stacy Long
Sports Writer

It's that time of year again when every team spouts how it has been working hard, how it's improved and how it's going to claim more respect this season.

It won't take long before reality sets in for many.

Not everyone can find major success — but everyone can still savor the experience of high school football — whether that's in a uniform or in the stands.

Everyone, let's enjoy ourselves out there.

As the season gets started, questions are plentiful for every team. Below are a few to ponder before the first kickoff sails into the air, before the first hotdog is eaten and before the first penalty flag is thrown.

What impact will Thompson have at Rogers?

Damian Thompson, the two-time TimesDaily All-Area small school player of the year, won't make it three.

Put that down in Sharpie. It's a guarantee.

Why so certain? Well, he has transferred from 3A Mars Hill to 4A Rogers, so the receiver won't be eligible for the small school award.

Thompson gives Rogers a game-breaking element and could turn the Pirates — who haven't hosted a playoff game or won one since 2017 — into a region contender.

Will Trojans again flex their Muscle?

Muscle Shoals, after floundering in the playoffs the previous two years, found some postseason success a year ago.

The Trojans made it to the semifinals for just the fourth time in school history.

Muscle Shoals has a lot of skill players returning but has lost a lot up front. Will the new linemen go meekly into the night? If not, the Trojans could mark another long playoff trail again this year.

Oh, brother: How about Coleman?

Haleyville receiver Brett Coleman had a breakout season last year.

His heady numbers — 66 catches for 1,083 yards and 11 touchdowns — came with his brother Matthew at quarterback. But Matthew is now off at Mississippi College.

Can Brett do it again?

Will Mars Hill get early start on hoops?

Mars Hill football stumbled mightily last year, falling in the second round of the playoffs to set up another successful basketball season.

The Panthers made the state semifinals in boys hoops and won a state championship in girls, both feats Mars Hill once considered an annual football occurrence.

Ah, the memories.

Mars Hill, due to its previous success, jumped to 3A last year. It needs to make this year's championship game to get another push to 4A in 2024.

Or maybe 3A is already enough.

FLORENCE FALCONS



Coach: Kenny Morson (second season at Florence, 8-3; fifth season overall, 42-7)

Region: 7A, Region 4
2022 record: 8-3
 (6-1 7A, Region 4)
Last 5 years: 30-25
 (4 playoff berths)

2023 schedule

Aug. 25	at Pinson Valley	Oct. 6
Sept. 1	Muscle Shoals	Oct. 13
Sept. 8	at Albertville	Oct. 20
Sept. 15	at Austin	Oct. 27
Sept. 22	James Clemens	Nov. 3
Sept. 29	Minor	

2022 results

Bob Jones	Pinson Valley	W, forfeit	Huntsville	W, 27-7
at Huntsville	at Muscle Shoals	L, 44-28	Grissom	W, 42-6
at Grissom	Albertville	W, 49-7	at Sparkman	W, 21-0
Sparkman	Austin	L, 26-14	Hewitt-Trussville	L, 38-20
open	at James Clemens	W, 38-20		
	Minor	W, 35-16		
	at Bob Jones	W, 38-35		

(Pinson Valley forfeited a 34-14 victory due to an ineligible player.)

Returning starters

QB Leo Glover	LB Xavier Garner
TE Dan Eckl	DL Kamari Wise
RG Qua Davis	DL Amadriq Tensley
LG Nate Graves	DL KJ Freeman
WR Kedrick Triplett	DB Zy Boddie
WR Taryan Cunningham	DB Janaris Young
SB Jamarion Reeder	OLB HT Blank
RB Demarion Vaughn	LB Logan White

Flying higher



Florence's Taryan Cunningham, Leo Glover and Qua Davis hope the Falcons build on last year's success. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

Falcons eager to build off 1st season under Morson

By David Glovach
Sports Writer

There weren't any collective sighs this year.



Morson

bit of a different feel for Florence. It's been relatively calm.

Those were replaced by some smiles, a few laughs and even a couple of jokes.

The offseason has had a little

Well, except for what's been called "Wonderful Wednesday."

"Terrible," offensive lineman Qua Davis said.

That's taken some time getting used to.

While other days were filled with weightlifting, the middle of the week belonged to a

circuit filled with different agility drills "meant to push you to your limit." The heat didn't help. Neither did the required up-downs at the end.

But if that was the worst part of the offseason, Florence will certainly take it.

The biggest reason? There was no new head coach to hire.

For the first time in four years, the Falcons will have some continuity as they get ready for their second season under Kenny Morson.

"It really does suck," quarterback Leo Glover said of the previous coaching carousel.



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FLORENCE FALCONS

2023 Football Schedule

Date	Opponent
Aug. 25	@ Pinson Valley
Sept. 1	Muscle Shoals
Sept. 8	@ Albertville
Sept. 15	@ Austin
Sept. 22	James Clemens
Sept. 29	Minor
Oct. 6	Bob Jones
Oct. 13	@ Huntsville
Oct. 20	@ Grissom
Oct. 27	Sparkman
Nov. 3	OPEN

Check local high schools for any updates/or changes.



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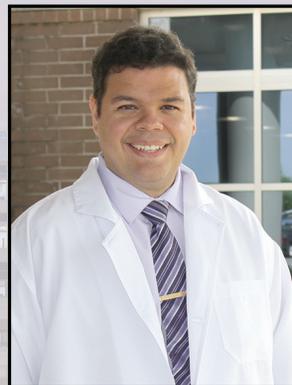
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MUSCLE SHOALS TROJANS



Coach: Scott Basden (16th season at Muscle Shoals, 138-45; 24th year overall, 206-74)

Region: 6A, Region 7
2022 record: 11-2 (4-1 6A, Region 7)
Last 5 years: 47-13 (5 playoff berths)

Aug. 24
 Sept. 1
 Sept. 8
 Sept. 15
 Sept. 22
 Sept. 29

at James Clemens

2023 schedule

Oct. 6 Bob Jones
 Oct. 13 at Florence
 Oct. 20 Columbia
 Oct. 27 Athens
 Nov. 3 open

at Hartselle
 Decatur
 at Cullman
 open
 at Sparkman

at Bob Jones
 Florence
 Columbia
 at Athens
 James Clemens
 Hartselle
 at Decatur

2022 results

W, 31-7
 W, 44-28
 W, 68-0
 W, 28-20
 W, 38-10
 L, 29-26
 W, 42-28

Cullman
 Sparkman
 Hazel Green
 at Parker
 at Gardendale
 Mountain Brook

W, 23-16
 W, 31-21
 W, 58-7
 W, 31-6
 W, 38-7
 L, 28-7

QB Cole Woods
 WR Jamir Goodloe
 WR Isaac Fowler
 TE Hadden Vance
 OL Eric Thirkill

Returning starters

DL Walker McCannon
 LB Braylen Jones
 FS Uzziah Johnson
 CB Taven Scott
 CB Xavier Johnson

Green with envy



Taven Scott, Ellis Underwood, Cole Woods and the Muscle Shoals Trojans want more this year. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

Muscle Shoals yearns to take next playoff step

By A. Stacy Long
 Sports Writer

Maybe it tormented them through the offseason.

A green flash in the corner of their



Basden

eye. A golden globe hovering through a dream, signaling that it was a nightmare.

A quick recollection of the anguish the Muscle Shoals Trojans felt walking off the field for the last time, staring at a scoreboard that amplified the pain.

Eight months later — my, how time flies — the Trojans can work on easing the pain of last year's state semifinal loss.

"I feel like there was a lot in that game we could have done, but it's in the past," cornerback Taven Scott said. "There's nothing we can do now."

Mountain Brook's 28-7 win at Muscle Shoals sent the Trojans into another winter of discontent. True satisfaction

would have required a win that November night and another a week later with a championship ring in hand and on their fingers.

"It motivated us a lot," quarterback Cole Woods said. "We definitely should have won that game. It definitely motivated us."

SEE MUSCLE SHOALS, G15

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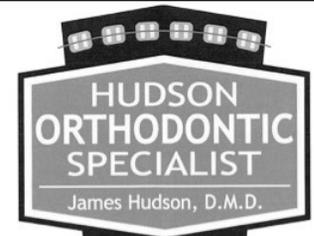
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MUSCLE SHOALS TROJANS

2023 Football Schedule

Date	Opponent
Aug. 24	Bob Jones -- Thursday
Sept. 1	@ Florence
Sept. 8	Columbia
Sept. 15	Athens
Sept. 22	OPEN
Sept. 29	@ James Clemens
Oct. 6	@ Hartselle
Oct. 13	Decatur
Oct. 20	@ Cullman
Oct. 27	OPEN
Nov. 3	@ Sparkman

Check local high schools for any updates/or changes.

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DESHLER TIGERS



Region: 4A, Region 7
2022 record: 12-1 (7-0 4A, Region 7)
Last 5 years: 39-23 (4 playoff berths)

Coach: Patrick Malone (second season at Deshler, 12-1; fourth year overall, 16-18)

2023 schedule

Aug. 25	Madison Aca.	Oct. 6	at West Morgan
Sept. 1	at Russellville	Oct. 13	at Central
Sept. 8	West Limestone	Oct. 20	at Rogers
Sept. 15	East Lawrence	Oct. 27	Brooks
Sept. 22	Wilson	Nov. 3	open
Sept. 29	at Colbert Co.		

2022 results

at Madison Aca.	W, 42-35	Central-Florence	W, 45-21
Russellville	W, 14-7	Rogers	W, 35-13
at W. Limestone	W, 50-17	at Brooks	W, 48-32
at East Lawrence	W, 70-13	Madison Co.	W, 68-34
at Wilson	W, 55-13	Etowah	W, 36-33
Colbert Co.	W, 36-33	at Oneonta	L, 62-20
West Morgan	W, 21-6		

Returning starters

OL Josh Smith	FB Q Harden
OL Jamarian Acklin	DL D'Angelo Williams
QB Price Thornton	LB Tae Fuqua

Eye of the Tigers



Deshler's Tae Fuqua, D'Angelo Williams and Q Harden want the Tigers to exceed last year's success. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

Deshler eager to show last year was no fluke

By David Glovach
Sports Writer

It might have been a Monday morning, but one thing became clear rather quickly when members of the Deshler football team took a seat.



Malone

When not going through conditioning drills, lifting sessions or practice, it's not all that uncommon for the Tigers to show

Good moods won't be hard to come by.

"We love to have fun," running back Tae Fuqua said. "When it's time to be serious, we lock in. But we know when to have a little fun, too."

off some dance moves. The source? With TikTok, naturally, providing a routine or two.

And while Fuqua dubbed himself the best dancer of the bunch, no one was quite willing to sell out those whose skills are in need of a little work.

"I'm not going to say any names," running back Q Harden said with a smirk.

Probably best to keep those in-house. But perhaps the biggest question is

whether the players have been able to sway second-year coach Patrick Malone to join in?

"No chance," Malone said matter of factly. "Not gonna happen."

Something to possibly work towards. At the same time, Malone's players cautioned to not let all "that seriousness fool you."

DESHLER

From Page G10

"He does know when to laugh and have fun," defensive tackle D'Angelo Williams said. "But when it's time for business, it's time for business and you don't want to get on his bad side.

"He coaches us to be great players and better men. The best way I can describe him is if he wasn't my coach, he'd be one of my really good friends."

Some high praise. But Malone and the coaching staff is one of the reasons this group of players isn't lacking any confidence heading into the season opener against Madison Academy.

That's despite losing 16 starters from

last season's Class 4A quarterfinals run. Those Tigers finished with a 12-1 record, with the loss coming to Oneonta. Malone still has a picture of the scoreboard from that night, a 62-20 rout, saved as the background on his phone. He watched the game film soon after getting off the bus.

"Anytime you lose the group that we lost and not necessarily the amount, they were just a great group, you're definitely concerned and worried, but you put a lot of faith in the fact that you have a great group coming up," Malone said. "The expectations were set. The blueprint was set. The mold is there. Now, it's up to this group to hold up their end. Football is important at Deshler and I think this group can win."

The players certainly believe that's possible. Anything less would be a bit of a disappointment. After all, might as well aim high.

"My expectations are just to win," Fuqua said. "We're looking to make another deep run in the playoffs. We just have to be coachable. We have great coaches."

So any other goals?

"I just want people to talk about this team," Williams said. "Not just this year, but 10 years, 20 years down the road."

Maybe even play back a dance move or two.

David Glovach can be reached at david.glovach@timesdaily.com or on Twitter @DavidGlovach



Deshler's Tae Fuqua and the Tigers hope to find the right moves again this year. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]



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DESHLER TIGERS**2023 Football Schedule**

Date	Opponent
Aug. 25	Madison Aca.
Sept. 1	@ Russellville
Sept. 8	West Limestone
Sept. 15	East Lawrence
Sept. 22	Wilson
Sept. 29	@ Colbert Co.
Oct. 6	@ West Morgan
Oct. 13	@ Central-Florence
Oct. 20	@ Rogers
Oct. 27	Brooks
Nov. 3	OPEN

* Check local high schools for any updates/or changes.

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RUSSELLVILLE GOLDEN TIGERS



Coach: John Ritter (sixth season at Russellville, 43-16; 11th year overall, 76-39)

Region: 5A, Region 8
2022 record: 7-5
(6-0 5A, Region 8)
Last 5 years: 43-16
(5 playoff berths)

2023 schedule

Aug. 25	Grissom	Oct. 6
Sept. 1	Deshler	Oct. 13
Sept. 8	at Lawrence Co.	Oct. 20
Sept. 15	West Point	Oct. 27
Sept. 22	at East Limestone	Nov. 3
Sept. 29	at Mars Hill Bible	

at Brewer	at Grissom
open	at Deshler
Ardmore	Lawrence Co.
Fairview	at West Point
at Athens	East Limestone
	Mars Hill

2022 results

L, 34-21	Brewer	W, 58-0
L, 14-7	at Ardmore	W, 49-7
W, 49-0	at Fairview	W, 41-14
W, 27-0	Athens	L, 32-31
W, 52-7	Boaz	W, 63-10
L, 31-30	Pleasant Grove	L, 37-14

Returning starters

QB Harrison Burch	ILB Devin Green
WR Bralynn Vincent	ILB Martin Tomas
OL Weston Jackson	OLB Nicklaus Pounders
OL Neyland Baker	OLB Malachi Duncan
OL Logan Lindsey	S Jah Williams
DL Junior Baltazar	CB Richard Scott
DL JT Hill	K Manny Martinez
DL Matthew James	

Getting the prize



Martin Tomas, Matthew James, Devin Green, Nicklaus Pounders and Harrison Burch say Russellville's time this summer at the team's "county fair" was grueling. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

Golden Tigers hope offseason leads to rebound

By David Glovach
Sports Writer

There was no debating or arguing among the Russellville players. The answer was swift and decisive.

The county fair — set aside for one summer day — had not been a fun experience. And this county fair did not include



Ritter

cotton candy or Ferris wheels.

Nothing about conditioning drills is ever pleasant. Let alone one that is an hour-and-a-half five-circuit affair that was capped by a number of hill runs.

"And if we didn't clap together at the end, we had to do it again," defensive lineman Matthew James said.

"They hadn't ever been to the fair," coach John Ritter said with a laugh.

So, Ritter believed it was time to share that experience. He had done it while playing for his father, Ronnie, at Lauderdale County in the early 1990s.

"It's really a total-body experience to see what you're going to do when it gets hot and it hurts," Ritter said. "And it's not designed to kill 'em. It's designed to push your boundaries and if your comfort level is a six (out of 10), it's now a

seven.

"It was fun. It was fun for me to watch."

As for if the coach has inkling of giving it another go himself, that was met with another decisive answer. Thanks, but no thanks. It's more or less designed for a younger crowd.

But it's been part of an offseason with a bit of a rebound in mind.

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RUSSELLVILLE GOLDEN TIGERS

2023 Football Schedule

Date	Opponent
Aug. 25	Grissom
Sept. 1	Deshler
Sept. 8	@ Lawrence Co. (Ala.)
Sept. 15	West Point
Sept. 22	@ East Limestone
Sept. 29	@ Mars Hill Bible
Oct. 6	@ Brewer
Oct. 13	OPEN
Oct. 20	Ardmore
Oct. 27	Fairview
Nov. 3	@ Athens

Check local high schools for any updates/or changes.

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FALCONS

From Page G4

“It’s hard like you wouldn’t believe to have your third coach coming in (last year) and you’re like, ‘Dang. I have to learn a new offense again.’ It just takes a lot of time and you just have to grind it out.

“Now knowing that he’s going to be here with us again, and he’s a great coach, it feels like we’re ready and we know what we got, and what he brings to the table.”

And the first-year results were promising.

The Falcons finished with a 8-3 record, their best mark since going 11-3 in 2014. It included a six-game winning streak to end the regular season. It was also just the fifth time the program managed to win at least eight games since its first year in 2004. They scored fewer than 21 points three times.

“He always told us to buy in and that’s what we did,” receiver Taryan Cummingham said. “He’s a great coach and he knows what he’s talking about.”

Not too bad for a coach the players describe as “old school. Real old school.”

Now, it’s just a matter of building off those results. Florence has only had back-to-back eight-plus wins seasons once.

“I thought last year ended up better than how we started,” Morson said. “We started with a little bit of a rough patch and some of that was players learning to trust the new coaching staff and trusting me as a new head coach.

“Just for those guys to get some stability and see that the head coach is going to be here, wants to be here, is a local guy and that I can relate to those guys, and that I’m going to be there for them. The biggest thing that we’ve been preaching to our guys is to work on ourselves.”

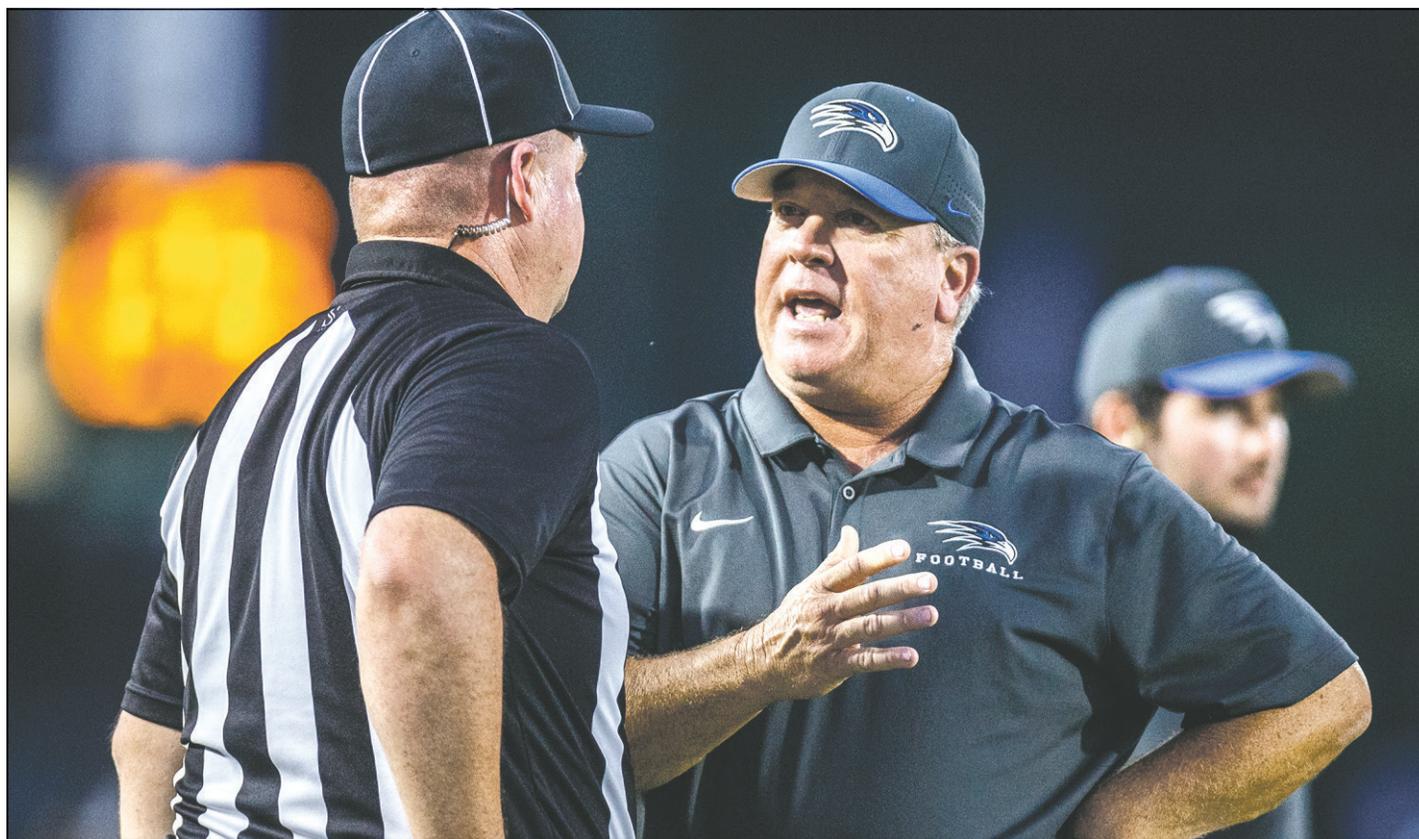
So, are there more wins on the horizon for Florence? The players certainly believe so.

“When we’re all on the same page, I feel like it’s going to be hard to stop us,” Glover said.

Some continuity always helps. Perhaps some Wonderful Wednesdays, too.

“Last season had a big impact on us,” Davis said. “We have to live up to that 8-3 and make it better.”

David Glovach can be reached at david.glovach@timesdaily.com or on Twitter @DavidGlovach



Kenny Morson enters his second season as Florence's head coach. [PHOTOS BY DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]



Quarterback Leo Glover, now a senior, helped Florence win eight games last year.

MUSCLE SHOALS

From Page G8

Mountain Brook left the Trojans with plenty to mull over a cold winter.

Muscle Shoals' seven points were its fewest in three years — since a 2020 play-off loss at, ironically, Mountain Brook. Mountain Brook's Cole Gamble played the Trojans to the tune of 186 yards and three touchdowns on 24 carries.

Gloom, despair, agony on me.

"I didn't like the loss," Scott said. "I feel that we could have won."

All the Trojans can do at this point is draw on it for inspiration to, they hope, avoid such pitfalls this year.

While Muscle Shoals nurses its less-experienced offensive and defensive lines, the Trojans will depend on their returning skill players.

Woods is a big part of that.

He played quarterback for the first time last year and was part of a regular rotation. He also missed much of the Mountain Brook game with an injury.

"Cole can do anything," coach Scott Basden said. "He can go out there and be one of the best receivers, he could



Cole Woods was an effective dual-purpose quarterback last year for Muscle Shoals. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

be a really good DB, he could be a slot receiver, a quarterback. He has a unique skill set that you can do anything with him.

"Playing last year and getting that

under his belt, he was a whole different quarterback in the spring than he was last fall. He has more confidence than he had."

But he'll play behind an offensive line

that lost four starters to graduation. However, at least two of the "new" guys have starting experience, Basden said.

"We brought back a lot of people as far as skill, but basically on the O-line and D-line, we have to reload," said center Ellis Underwood, one of the new starters.

"We're a lot faster than last year's O-line," he said. "That's one thing we've gotten better at, but as far as size, we're not as big. We're faster."

The Trojans can still throw the ball to Jamir Goodloe, who had 49 catches for 711 yards and nine touchdowns last season.

"He doesn't burn me, but he's gotten better," Scott said. "His route running is better and his speed is increased. I can see him doing really good this year."

Foes, however, will have to throw against either Xavier Johnson, who had six interceptions and returned two for touchdowns, or Scott. Take your pick.

"It's going to really help to have all our skill guys back," Basden said. "We'll be able to do some things to help that offensive line. With our back end and our secondary and our linebackers, I think we can help the defensive line until they sort it out."

RUSSELLVILLE

From Page G12

While the Golden Tigers are seeking their sixth straight winning season, the program is coming off its fewest wins (7-5) since 2017 (3-7). Russellville was 0-4 in games in 2022 decided by 13 points or less, including two by one point. It lost in the second round of the 5A playoffs to Pleasant Grove.

"We're trying to be like a spear," said quarterback Harrison Burch, who will be working without his top two receivers and running back from a year ago. "Last year, we were kind of broken up, but this year, we feel like we're pushing towards that one goal, and that's to win. We don't really care about the stat line or who scores. The only thing we need to care about is being up on the scoreboard."

Another lesson?

It's best for the coaching staff not to have to do everything, especially when it comes to things outside gameplanning. Ritter made it a point to note that he's not out on the field to throw — it didn't work out well for the coach last time he tried — catch passes or make tackles.

"We need player leaders, not coach leaders," linebacker Devin Green said.



Harrison Burch and the Russellville Golden Tigers look to get their hands on a sixth straight winning season. [KEVIN TAYLOR/TIMESDAILY]

"That was probably the biggest coaching point we needed to take away from last year. When things went wrong, there was a lot of blaming each other."

Hence being on the wrong side of some close games.

"I don't want to say we have a chip

on our shoulders, but there's definitely games we're looking forward to," tight end Nicklaus Pounders said.

Perhaps they'll find out if the trip to the county fair paid off.

"I really enjoy being around this group," Ritter said. "Whether that's

in the weight room, at practice or after practice because of the way they've handled themselves."

David Glovach can be reached at david.glovach@timesdaily.com or on Twitter @DavidGlovach

BROOKS LIONS



Coach: Tim Bowens (second season at Brooks, 6-4; third overall as a high school coach, 13-8)

Region: 4A, Region 7
2022 record: 6-4 (4-3 4A, Region 7)
Last 5 years: 38-18 (4 playoff berths)

2023 schedule

Aug. 24	Colbert Co.	Oct. 6	East Lawrence	at Colbert Co.	W, 48-21
Sept. 1	at Mars Hill Bible	Oct. 13	at Rogers	Mars Hill Bible	L, 64-35
Sept. 8	West Morgan	Oct. 20	at Wilson	at West Morgan	L, 53-7
Sept. 15	at West Limestone	Oct. 27	at Deshler	West Limestone	W, 64-28
Sept. 22	Central-Florence	Nov. 2	Lauderdale Co.	at Central	L, 35-28
Sept. 29	open				

2022 results

at East Lawrence	W, 59-14
Rogers	W, 24-21
Wilson	W, 38-13
Deshler	L, 48-32
at Lauderdale Co.	W, 28-7

Returning starters

OL-DL Carson Wheeler	WR-DB Noah Gregg
OL Brodie Glass	DL Silas McCarthy
TE Charlie Buttram	OLB Omar Joiner
RB Seth Walton	K Charlie Bottoms

Left behind



Seth Walton, Carson Wheeler, Noah Gregg and the Brooks Lions hope to bounce back from missing the playoffs last year. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

Brooks motivated after last year's playoff miss

By A. Stacy Long
Sports Writer



Bowens

"It wasn't a good feeling that our hopes for the playoffs rested on another team," lineman Carson Wheeler said. "I hope we control our own fate this year."

Entering the final week, the Lions needed four games to go a specific way, including their own.

They won. Two others went Brooks' way as well.

The Lions turned out en masse for Lexington at Rogers, needing Lexington to win for Brooks to make the playoffs. Rogers delivered the 35-18 final blow.

"My hopes went through the roof, and then Rogers won," running back Seth Walton said. "It was disappointing. Disappointing that we had to hope for another team to get us in."

A week later, most of the Lions moped while so many went through the playoffs.

"I did not watch football," receiver/defensive back Noah Gregg said. "I didn't even want to think about it. I couldn't. I just wished I was playing."

Finding inspiration for this year was not difficult.

Last season's 2-3 start left Brooks with a deficit it could not erase. In a cruel twist, at least to the Lions, Rogers made the playoffs despite losing to Brooks.

"It was hard watching teams we know we were better than make it, and we didn't," Gregg said. "We thought we were hitting our stride and getting better as the season went on."

But finding areas where the Lions need improvement isn't difficult. Brooks surrendered 30 points per game, including three times where the Lions were

scorched for at least 48.

"We gave up a lot of points," Wheeler said. "It definitely wasn't fun."

But the Lions say last year's experience, which included a new coaching staff, will help this year.

Instead of adjusting to head coach Tim Bowens, they are already quite familiar and comfortable with him and his offense. Defensive coordinator Gavin Wilson, who was hired a week before school started last year, and the Lions are more settled, too.

"It wasn't even a week," Bowens said of Wilson's start date. "It was four days before school. Hopefully, we've gained a little bit in knowing how to do it."

The Lions, Bowens said, are still light on upperclassmen — they have just nine

BROOKS

From Page G16

seniors – but so many younger players gained experience last season.

“This year, for example, we have a sophomore who has as much experience as a junior,” Wheeler said. “We have depth, and we know what we’re doing.

“I would consider last year a rebuilding year. Everybody had to struggle through it and learn the new system. It was almost like a practice year for this year.”

They have big hopes for quarterback Garrett Burrough, though Burrough was recovering from a shoulder injury this summer. He was due to be cleared before the season opener.

Burrough and Hunter Himer split time at quarterback last year with Himer seeing most the time. But the Lions are comfortable with Burrough.

“We’re looking forward to getting him back,” Bowens said. “He was doing a really good job for us and was really operating the offense.”

It’s all geared toward making the play-offs again. Sitting at home, the Lions say, is unacceptable.

“Nobody on the team ever wants to go through that feeling again,” Walton said. “I know everybody is giving all they have so we don’t have that same outcome this year.”

Said Gregg: “We’re going to make the playoffs for sure, and we’re going to give a lot more effort.”



Seth Walton says last year’s no-playoff finish was a disappointment. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

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BROOKS LIONS

2023 Football Schedule

Date	Opponent
Aug. 24	Colbert Co. - Thursday
Sept. 1	@ Mars Hill Bible
Sept. 8	West Morgan
Sept. 15	@ West Limestone
Sept. 22	Central-Florence
Sept. 29	OPEN
Oct. 6	East Lawrence
Oct. 13	@ Rogers
Oct. 20	@ Wilson
Oct. 27	@ Deshler
Nov. 2	Lauderdale Co. - Thursday

* Check local high schools for any updates/or changes.

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HAMILTON AGGIES



Coach: Evan Shipp (first year)

Region: 4A, Region 5
2022 record: 1-9 (1-6 4A, Region 5)
Last 5 years: 22-31 (3 playoff berths)

Aug. 25
 Sept. 1
 Sept. 8
 Sept. 15
 Sept. 22
 Sept. 29

2023 schedule

Red Bay Oct. 6
 open Oct. 13
 at Corner Oct. 20
 Oak Grove Oct. 27
 at Cordova Nov. 3
 Winfield

Curry at Red Bay
 Dora Corner
 at Haleyville vs. Oak Grove
 at Northside Cordova
 at Fayette Co. at Winfield
 at Curry

2022 results

L, 22-20 at Dora
 L, 52-14 Haleyville
 L, 27-14 Northside
 L, 41-21 Fayette Co.
 L, 52-0 (Oak Grove game played at Gardendale.)
 W, 40-24

L, 40-8
 L, 52-12
 L, 48-0
 L, 28-8

DL Conner Peoples
 QB Mason Holloway
 DB Ty Wallace
 LB-RB Kevin McBride
 DB Elijah Dollar
 LB Ty Kerr
 OL Raden Jones

Returning starters

OL-DL Jase Taylor
 OL-DL Brodie Moody
 OL-DL Jackson Emerson
 DB Colie Gilstrap
 LB Hayden Ables
 OL Braeden Wesson
 OL Sam Moore

Seeking a spark

Shipp hopes to energize Hamilton program

By Greg Dewalt
 For the TimesDaily

The Hamilton Aggies have a new coach this season, and he came from an unlikely, yet familiar place.



Shipp

was an assistant coach.

“It was a little bit of a surprise, but at the same time I feel like he has been good for us,” linebacker/tight end Ty Kerr said of Shipp’s hiring. “The mindset he brings in is the one we need to have when we are in the weight room and working out and whatnot. He’s been very good for all of us.”

Shipp replaces Peoples, who finished a three-year tenure with a 10-21 record. The Aggies were 1-9 a year ago and have lost 16 of 17. The team hasn’t advanced past the first round of the playoffs since 2015 when it bowed out in the quarterfinals.

Kerr, a senior, said there was a bit of uncertainty heading into his final season and undergoing a coaching change.

“There was, but at the same time I knew they would hire the best person available and that they definitely had the players in mind when they were hiring,” Kerr said. “We lucked out with coach Shipp.”

Although Shipp coached at Hamilton’s rival, Kerr said the fact that his new head coach isn’t from Winfield helped dissuade any doubts he might have had.

“He probably bought into the rivalry, but he’s not really from there so he doesn’t have the same ties as some of the other coaches there do,” he said. “It was a little easier to be like, ‘Hey, he was at Winfield, but now he’s here.’”

Evan Shipp takes over from Barry Peoples, hoping to return Hamilton to the success it once enjoyed. Shipp comes to Hamilton from Winfield, the Aggies’ nearest and fiercest rival, where he



Braeden Wesson, Kevin McBride and Ty Kerr say new Hamilton coach Evan Shipp has impressed them. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

This is Shipp’s first head coaching job, but he’s not coming in blind to the job. It’s something he has been preparing for throughout his career. His father is a former head coach and several friends are also head coaches. Also, he credits Winfield head coach David McKinney for providing guidance.

“I’ve been gathering information for a while, so that had definitely helped make the transition a little smoother,” Shipp said.

Familiarity with Hamilton’s program from a distance also helped Shipp decide that the Aggies would be a good spot to start his head coaching career.

“In the years I have been at Winfield, Hamilton has always had a big line, some skill people with some speed mixed in,” he said. “The familiarity where the program was from an opponent’s viewpoint

really kind of helped me feel a little more comfortable in what I was applying for.”

Shipp said at his first team meeting, there were a lot of “wide eyes.”

“I don’t really remember what I said, but I just kind of laid out what the expectation was going to be and how I want to get back to the winning tradition. I didn’t lay it all out there on how we were going to do that, but I gave them some information on what the plan was.”

Kevin McBride, a senior running back/linebacker, loves the way Shipp pushed the Aggies in summer workouts.

“He’s only been here a short time and we’ve already learned a lot about hard work and what it takes to be a winner,” McBride said. “He has more experience winning than I do, so he knows what he is talking about.”

McBride pinpoints Hamilton’s

downturn as “having lost sight of success.”

“I think we got too busy focusing on personal stats and we lost that hard work and drive that it takes to win,” he said.

Shipp said support from the administration down made Hamilton the right situation for him.

“It’s been a couple of rough years, so I just want to bring in a few new ideas and new blood and hopefully we can get things back headed in the right direction,” Shipp said.

Braeden Wesson, a senior offensive lineman, said it is important for this year’s team to set the tone for the future.

“Anything is better than 1-9,” he said. “I think we are going to do pretty good this year. That way the our underclassmen will know how they need to work to keep the program successful.”

LAUDERDALE COUNTY TIGERS



Coach: Jeff Mason (eighth season, 51-30)

Region: 3A, Region 8
2022 record: 7-5 (5-1 3A, Region 8)
Last 5 years: 38-20 (5 playoff berths)

Aug. 24
Aug. 31
Sept. 8
Sept. 15
Sept. 22
Sept. 29

2023 schedule

Tanner Oct. 6
at Rogers Oct. 13
at Clements Oct. 20
Elkmont Oct. 27
at Colbert Co. Nov. 2
Lexington

Phil Campbell at Tanner
open Rogers
at Mars Hill Bible Clements
Colbert Heights at Elkmont
at Brooks Colbert Co.
at Lexington

2022 results

W, 54-30 at Phil Campbell
L, 24-13 Mars Hill Bible
W, 49-6 at Colbert Hts.
W, 58-0 Brooks
W, 29-0 Vinemont
L, 14-13 at Gordo

W, 36-12
L, 38-0
W, 34-0
L, 28-7
W, 41-7
L, 44-14

Skylar Tucker
Hudson Lash
Jaxson Lovelace
Jackson Hamm
Braxton Rose
Tuck Green

Returning starters

Micah Christensen
Chase Belue
John David Mason
Hayden Davis
Will Brown
Brodie Rose

Let's get physical

Tigers embrace tradition of toughness

By Gregg Dewalt
For the TimesDaily

A survey of what defines Lauderdale County football probably would reveal a two-word response: toughness and physicality.



Mason

Sure, lots of teams try to make that claim, but fall short when it gets down to the nitty-gritty. The Tigers embrace their toughness and physicality. There's not a lot of trickery in their offense

— their goal is to move the defense off the ball and get the tough yards when needed. Defensively, they want to overpower the opposing offense.

It's been that way for several generations of players at Lauderdale County, dating to the days of Earl Grisham and before. You might say it is in their genes.

"They believe in what we are doing," coach Jeff Mason, himself a throwback to old-school football, said. "A lot of their parents played at Lauderdale County. A lot of them grew up watching football at Lauderdale County and saw the success



Braxton Rose, Jaxson Lovelace, Micah Christensen and John David Mason expect a 14th straight playoff appearance for Lauderdale County. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

other teams have had doing that.

"It's sort of a badge of honor for these guys," Mason said. "We don't even have to talk about it a lot. They just take that

mentality and have pride in being physical and being able to run the ball when we want to. And they take pride in defense and get just as excited over a big tackle

or a big block."

John David Mason, the coach's son and

SEE TIGERS, G31

LAUDERDALE COUNTY TIGERS

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LEXINGTON GOLDEN BEARS



Lexington; third year overall, 10-11)

Region: 2A, Region 8
2022 record: 9-3 (6-0
2A, Region 8)
Last 5 years: 22-31 (2
playoff berths)
Coach: Blake Killen
(first season at

2023 schedule
Aug. 25 Colbert Heights
Sept. 1 at Pisgah
Sept. 8 at Red Bay
Sept. 15 open
Sept. 22 at Tharptown
Sept. 29 at Lauderdale Co.
Oct. 6
Oct. 13
Oct. 20
Oct. 27
Nov. 3

2022 results
at Falkville
at Tanner
at Hatton
at Sheffield
Rogers
at Colbert Hts.
Pisgah
at Red Bay
Tharptown
Lauderdale Co.
Falkville
W, 34-0
L, 29-28
W, 40-14
W, 53-18
W, 14-13
W, 40-33
at Tanner
Hatton
Sheffield
at Rogers
N. Sand Mtn.
Tuscaloosa Aca.
W, 52-20
W, 48-14
W, 75-27
L, 35-18
W, 49-14
L, 23-20

Returning starters
TE-LB Sean Starkey
DL Trey Cole
DL Parker Cole
LB Jake Lard
S Braden Allen
OL Walker Doss
OL Luke Brannon
OL Mick Underwood
SB-CB Wyatt Prado
RB Byron Lane
WR-S Noah Lemay

Golden opportunity



Lexington's Braden Allen, Wyatt Prado and Luke Brannon say the Golden Bears have high expectations, even with a new coach. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

Even with new coach, expectations high for Lexington

By David Glovach
Sports Writer



Killen

sions with the Golden Bears.

Blake Killen. You're up.

"I'm walking into a great situation,"

little different. It will likely sound a little different, too.

Gone is Jason Lard, his boisterous personality and array of quotes after he decided to retire in April following 13 sea-

said Killen, who like Lard is a Lexington graduate. "... I think our guys expect to win. I expect to win. Winning is always better than losing. ... We've got guys who have been in the battles. We've got a lot of returning starters. We have a lot of returning touchdowns and production. So, for me, I feel really good about it. We have a chance to be good.

"From my point of view, expectations are high and our team's expectations

are high."

Perhaps rightfully so.

The Golden Bears' nine wins last season were the program's most since 2009 (10-2). They won their first region title also since 2009. They won their first playoff game since 2016. Their three losses? By one, 17 and three points.

The Lexington sideline will look a

SEE LEXINGTON, G21

LEXINGTON

From Page G20

There's also the matter of having seven starters coming back on both offense and defense, even while having a new starting quarterback.

"I think with the players we're bringing back, I think the expectations are that we're going to be pretty successful," receiver and defensive back Wyatt Prado said. "Even with a new coach, we're going to be running a similar offense and defense which should help us out."

Another region title was thrown out for what the minimum should be.

Still, there is still the matter of a new coach and learning how he operates both during practices and games. And so far, so good.

"I think it's been great," offensive lineman and linebacker Luke Brannon said. "I think it's been really positive and really impactful. Coach Killen is a little more laid back. But he's done a great job of just rallying us up."

It's been part of Killen's plan to try to get to know a little more about his players outside of what they're able to do on the football field. Open communication being one of the important factors to help Lexington get to where it wants to go.

"I've watched a lot of film on them, so I knew what they can do football-wise and how they fit there," Killen said. "But it's about learning about them as people and what their interests are and



Braden Allen is expected to be Lexington's starting quarterback this year. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

how you can coach them. There's some that you can coach hard and others you can't. And then I've been open about my coaching background and what my expectations are."

Now, it's just time to see what the

Golden Bears can do when it comes time for the opening kickoff.

It will certainly be a little different. "We're pretty confident," Prado said. "But I feel like if you're not nervous for the beginning of any season,



Wyatt Prado and Lexington hope to haul in a second straight region championship this year. [KEVIN TAYLOR/TIMESDAILY]

there's probably something wrong."

David Glovach can be reached at david.glovach@timesdaily.com or on Twitter @DavidGlovach

LEXINGTON GOLDEN BEARS

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ROGERS PIRATES



Region: 4A, Region 7
2022 record: 7-4 (4-3 4A, Region 7)
Last 5 years: 24-30 (4 playoff berths)

Coach: Daniel Garrett (third season at Rogers, 12-10; fourth year overall, 18-14)

2023 schedule

Aug. 25
 Aug. 31
 Sept. 8
 Sept. 15
 Sept. 22
 Sept. 29

Haleyville
 Lauderdale Co.
 at East Lawrence
 at Wilson
 West Morgan
 open

Oct. 6
 Oct. 13
 Oct. 20
 Oct. 27
 Nov. 3

at Central
 Brooks
 Deshler
 at West Limestone
 at Lexington

at Haleyville (or)
 at Lauderdale Co.
 East Lawrence
 Wilson
 at West Morgan
 Central

2022 results

W, 16-10
 W, 24-13
 W, 42-7
 W, 62-20
 L, 35-16
 W, 41-21

at Brooks
 at Deshler
 West Limestone
 Lexington
 at Randolph

L, 24-21
 L, 35-13
 W, 49-28
 W, 35-18
 L, 54-15

Returning starters

WR Lincoln Peoples
 OL Hunter Fish
 OL Ethan Zahnd
 OL Easton Bradley

LB Quint Smith
 LB Lee McCain
 DB Brodie Chandler
 DL Carter Burgess

Keeping track



Lee McCain, Tyson Wood and Hunter Fish hope Rogers can improve on last year's seven-win season. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

Innovative Pirates follow Garrett's lead

By Gregg Dewalt
 For the TimesDaily



Garrett

Rogers coach Daniel Garrett is not a big fan of the phrase "because that's the way

it has always been done." "I think that's the dumbest thing ever," Rogers' third-year coach said.

The phrase came up while Garrett was detailing a new app the Pirates coaches have been using to monitor their players' habits — from sleep, weight

and nutrition to how they are feeling on a given day. It's an effort, Garrett said, that helps Rogers coaches do a better job.

"We've invested in a lot of technology to find out that information where they sign in every day and they tell how they feel, how many hours of sleep they got or if something is going on in their life," Garrett explained. "And if they got a low feeling on that, then we know

immediately we need to check on them. And we need to make sure everything's OK."

That information, Garrett said, is paramount to their approach to coaching individual players.

"If they screw up on something and we just sit there and blast them, well, we

PIRATES

From Page G22

don't really know what's going on in their life," he said. "By using this technology, it can help with that. We're always trying to invest and find ways to be better, the ways of doing it just because that's the way it's always been done. I hate that saying. We're always trying to evolve and use whatever resources we can find to help us be better."

Offensive lineman Hunter Fish said he didn't view the app as being intrusive.

"It's just something you're supposed to do," he said. "Coach said it is something to help us and to help him coach us better."

Players said using the app is not a time-consuming ordeal. They enter certain information — like how many hours of sleep they got, how they slept, how much they weigh, etc. It then produces a report.

"It's perfectly fine with me," linebacker Lee McCain said. "It only takes a minute to scan the code and do it. It's probably best for me anyway, like how I slept and how long I slept. If my weight is below what it should be, it lets me know what I need to do. I thought it was a pretty good idea."

McCain said by monitoring his sleep habits, he has gotten into a better routine — sleeping, staying hydrated. And, he understands that his information helps Garrett coach him better.

"A hundred percent," McCain said. "It's like if he says if I go to sleep at 9



Daniel Garrett enters his third season as head coach at Rogers. [KEVIN TAYLOR/TIMESDAILY]

o'clock and then wake up at 8, that's well rested. But if I'm going to bed at 1 and waking up at 6, then they can know I'm not sleeping good. So, if I'm messing up, they need to try to find a way to get me to stay focused for the amount of time we're here.

Sophomore Tyson Wood, who takes over at quarterback for Brock Killen, said he was skeptical of the app at first, but then settled into the routine.

"It's helped a lot," he said. "It just lets you know when you need to go to sleep and if your sleep schedule is bad, it lets you know. Stuff like that."

Garrett has settled in nicely as he begins his third year. The Pirates, 7-4 last season, have been to the playoffs in

both his seasons, and although he has to replace seven starters on offense and defense, he is confident he has players to do that with little or no dropoff.

"The biggest growth we have had since I have been here is our belief," he said. "We're still working on that every day because that is something that could disappear in the snap of a finger. We are constantly finding ways to create that belief."

Garrett likes the team dynamic, noting that the roster includes a variety of personalities, backgrounds and talent. The Pirates also got a boost from an addition. Damien Thompson, who was an All-State player the last two seasons at Mars Hill, joined the team in late July.

"Even though we're younger, we have a very unique dynamic in our locker room that might not have ever been this way before at Rogers," he said. "To me, that makes things fun."

"I'm very excited to see what we can accomplish because like I said, we're young, but we are talented. And it's just a daily process of showing up and commit to do what I need to do, do my job, and try to find joy in that process to where we can get better at it every day."

McCain said Garrett has reinvigorated the program since his arrival.

"He's brought energy into the program," McCain said. "Now, people want to be here. He cares about us more than anything."

ROGERS PIRATES

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WILSON WARRIORS



Coach: Trey Lane (first year)

Region: 4A, Region 7
2022 record: 1-9 (1-6
4A, Region 7)
Last 5 years: 8-40 (no
playoff berths)

Aug. 25
Sept. 1
Sept. 8
Sept. 15
Sept. 22
Sept. 29

at Colbert Heights
at Central
at Rogers
at Deshler
open

2023 schedule

Oct. 6
Oct. 13
Oct. 20
Oct. 27
Nov. 3

West Limestone
East Lawrence
Brooks
at West Morgan
at Lawrence Co.

at Hatton
Colbert Heights
Central
at Rogers
Deshler

2022 results

L, 30-19
L, 19-18
L, 45-14
L, 62-20
L, 55-13

at W. Limestone
at E. Lawrence
at Brooks
West Morgan
Lawrence Co.

L, 34-26
W, 33-21
L, 38-13
L, 61-0
L, 28-27

DB Isaac Ray
WR Reth Jones
DB Jordan Steele
WR Braxton Glaze
LB Preston Nippers

Returning starters

LB Dawson Wills
OL Carter Daugherty
OL Tripp Stevens
DB Everett Roberson

Hitting reset



Everett Roberson, Gage Wilson, Reth Jones and Clifford Stevens say new Wilson coach Trey Lane quickly fit in with the Warriors. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

Warriors getting fresh perspective with new coach

By David Glovach
Sports Writer

The Wilson football team had already left the Florence Sportsplex, its day at North Alabama's 7-on-7 tournament



Lane

few months at his new job had been going.

done.

Trey Lane, the Warriors' first-year coach, hung back for a minute to catch up with Kenny Morson, his former boss at Florence. Morson asked how Lane's first

And then, as if right on cue, one of Florence's players stuck his head out the bus window, caught sight of Lane. A yell of excitement followed and he motioned for Lane to come over and say hi.

It's the kind of thing Lane is now trying to build at his first head coaching job.

"I think it's a good fit," Wilson

receiver Reth Jones said. "It's really great how well he gets his message across. It's a fresh new start. It's very refreshing."

It might be what the Warriors need for a program that has struggled to find much success in recent seasons.

Wilson enters 2023 coming off of

SEE WARRIORS, G25

WARRIORS

From Page G24

three straight 1-9 campaigns. The last time the Warriors finished with a winning record was 2017 when they went 10-2. That's the last time they made the playoffs. It's also more wins than they've managed the last five years combined — an 8-40 mark, overall.

It's certainly a tall task. So, any apprehension?

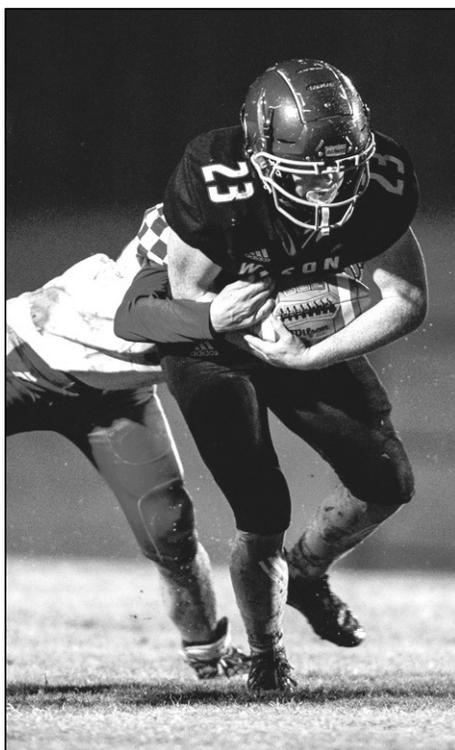
"There's not," Lane said. "I was a volunteer coach there early in my career when I first started out. It's a fantastic community. It's got really good people. It's got kids there who are good enough to win football games. I don't think that's going to be an issue.

"Scott Brown was successful there. Chris Balentine had some success, all the way back to David Winborn. It is possible to be successful there. It just has to be done the right way and it has to be done in a specific way, a physical brand of football."

And that started early with some spring practice, where there was an emphasis put on not only a new offensive and defensive scheme, but on some different techniques, too.

A premium was also put on conditioning. That was probably the roughest part in the beginning.

"Our practices were 90 minutes non-stop," offensive lineman Clifford Stevens said. "So, it was preparing us to get our bodies up to speed to be able



Gage Wilson says the Wilson Warriors are "looking at things in a new light and a new perspective." [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

to run play after play after play and not have to worry about getting winded or anything. That was rough for the first few days."

But it's things Wilson believes will help lead to a better outcome than what the program has become accustomed to.

"I think it'll be different," safety Everett Roberson said. "We're merging



Isaac Ray and the Wilson Warriors are optimistic under new coach Trey Lane.

pretty good right now and we have a pretty good connection between the different pieces. We know we have one job to do and we just have to focus on that."

Sometimes a new start can make all the difference. The Warriors will soon find out if that's the case.

"I think we're encouraged,"

quarterback Gage Wilson said. "I think with coach Lane coming in, team chemistry changing, we're looking at things in a new light and a new perspective."

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CENTRAL
WILDCATS

Region: 4A, Region 7
2022 record: 6-5 (4-3 4A, Region 7)
Last 5 years: 29-26 (5 playoff berths)
Coach: Heath Wood (13th season, 71-60)

2023 schedule

Aug. 25	open	Oct. 6	Rogers
Sept. 1	East Limestone	Oct. 13	at Deshler
Sept. 8	Wilson	Oct. 20	at West Limestone
Sept. 15	at West Morgan	Oct. 27	East Lawrence
Sept. 22	at Brooks	Nov. 3	at Ardmore
Sept. 29	at Westminster-Hsv.		

2022 results

at East Limestone	L, 35-32	at Deshler	L, 45-21
at Wilson	W, 45-14	West Limestone	W, 35-28
West Morgan	L, 42-0	at East Lawrence	W, 49-6
Brooks	W, 35-28	Ardmore	W, 49-41
Westminster-Hsv.	W, 70-69	at Priceville	L, 49-28
at Rogers	L, 41-21		

Returning starters

RB Hunter Palmer	DT Wyatt Davis
RB Bryant Hanback	OL John Hulsizer
QB Jackson Brewer	

Wing-T, prayer

Central hopes to continue its past success

By Shane Herrmann
For the TimesDaily

For many programs, losing 16 starters, including 14 seniors from a playoff team, would cause a coach to try something new.

Not at Central.

Now entering his 13th season as head coach, Heath Wood has seen a lot of teams run a lot of different offensive schemes over the years.



Wood

The Wildcats, however, will be running the Wing-T, something with which they are quite familiar.

"We are a Wing-T team," Wood said. "That is our identity and what we will continue to do."

It's hard to argue with the strategy. Central is seeking a fourth straight winning season and a sixth straight trip to the playoffs.

Running back Hunter Palmer, who rushed for more than 1,300 yards and 17 touchdowns a year ago, said having so many new starters is not such a big deal since certain foundations have been in place for so long.

"It's just second nature at this point," the junior said. "We have all played Wing-T since we were little so we know and understand what we are trying to do. Everyone has their favorite plays. I like running the



Hunter Palmer, Jackson Brewer and Bryant Hanback hope to lead Central to a fourth straight winning season. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

buck."

Wood said the team as a whole has bought in to the system, which has created opportunities to be successful.

"Hunter had a great season last year," Wood said. "He has a lot of ability but he will also be the first guy to give credit to the offensive line and be thankful

for the work that they put in."

"Putting in the work" is something Wood said the entire team has done during the offseason.

"We graduated a lot of guys so we know we have a lot of holes to fill," he said. "The players have been working really hard in the offseason and I feel like we have some guys who are ready

to step up and full those holes."

Central returns just two full-time starters on defense and four on offense. Junior Bryant Hanback is one of those returnees who believes in the "next man up" attitude.

"We've all been playing since we were little," the linebacker/fullback said. "When you are a

freshman, you might be more of a role player. Now you are expected to play a bigger role as a leader."

Quarterback Jackson Brewer credits the past Central teams for setting a standard for current and future Central teams.



Central quarterback Jackson Brewer says previous teams set high expectations for the Wildcats. [PHOTOS BY DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

CENTRAL

From Page G26

"I think the teams in the past have just set a good example to follow," Brewer said. "It's just what is expected of us. When I was younger, I looked up to the seniors and I wanted to be like them. Now here I am. I want to do whatever it takes for the team to win."

Brewer added that while current upperclassmen have taken over leadership roles, several newcomers are also doing their part.

"We have some new wide receivers coming in who will help us a lot," he said. "I like plays where I have different options as a quarterback. I can read the defense and try to take what it gives us."

Having a senior-heavy team may have contributed to Central winning a lot of close games last year. Palmer added that showing up in the weight



Central's Hunter Palmer ran for over 1,300 yards and 17 touchdowns last season.

room was also a huge factor. The Wildcats went 3-1 in games decided by seven points or less.

"We are in good shape, which really pays off in the fourth quarter," Palmer said. "A lot of teams would get tired late in games and we were able to make plays down the stretch."

Wood agreed and added that this

summer was no different when it came time for his team to hit the weights.

"We were able to win a lot of close games because of our conditioning but I think this year's group is very similar," said Wood. "They have stepped up and have done a great job in the weight room and have done everything that they have needed to do. They are hungry. It

is there time and they know it."

Wood said expectations remain high at Central.

"Every year is different," he said. "Last year is last year. We are all about focusing on this season and what we need to do in order to be successful. Our goal every year is to try to get into the playoffs. That has not changed."

CENTRAL WILDCATS

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**WATERLOO
COUGARS**

Stricklin (second season, 4-5)

Region: 1A, Region 8**2022 record:** 4-5 (3-4
1A, Region 8)**Last 5 years:** 30-23 (3

playoff berths)

Coach: JeremiahAug. 25
Sept. 1
Sept. 8
Sept. 15
Sept. 22
Sept. 29**2023 schedule**at Brilliant
at Cherokee
at Meek
open
at Addison
SheffieldOct. 6
Oct. 13
Oct. 20
Oct. 27
Nov. 3Hackleburg
open
Phillips
at Shoals Chr.
VinaBrilliant
Cherokee
Meek
at Addison
at Sheffield**2022 results**W, 53-8
W, 60-14
L, 38-12
L, 69-0
L, 43-14at Hackleburg
at Phillips
Shoals Chr.
at VinaL, 46-16
L, 56-26
W, 38-6
W, 46-8**Returning starters**RB-LB Corbyn Gallagher
TE-LB Nickolas Kavich
C-DE Brycen WilkersonFB-DE Kaden Benson
WR-S Braylan McMullen
CB Draven Holcombe

On the hunt

Cougars have sights set on reaching playoffs

By David Glovach
Sports Writer

The Waterloo contingent looks up and down its upcoming schedule and then turns its attention to last year's.

**Stricklin**

This season, they believe, can be a little bit different.

"I don't see why we can't have a winning record and make the playoffs," linebacker and running back Corbyn Gallagher said.

The Cougars will see if they can make that happen in Jeremiah Stricklin's second year in charge. The program has only had four winning seasons since being reestablished in 2006. Three of those happened in 2018-20. The other in 2007.

First, it's about making sure Waterloo finds a little more balance — on the scoreboard.

In the Cougars' five losses, they lost each game by at least three touchdowns. In their four wins, they won by at least three touchdowns.

It doesn't take long for the players assembled to start nitpicking different games, particularly the five straight losses book-ended by two two-game win streaks.

**Waterloo's Nickolas Kavich, Corbyn Gallagher and Kaden Benson have optimism entering this season. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]**

"(Stricklin) definitely hates to lose a lot more than other coaches," tight end and defensive end Nickolas Kavich said. "He's definitely straightforward and will tell you what you're doing wrong."

The key to avoiding that if you're Waterloo? Make sure one is well versed

on his assignments on both sides of the ball.

"The chances of only playing one spot are very little," Kavich said. "There are some games where you might come off for special teams."

Added running back and linebacker

Kaden Benson: "We're only coming out if we're winning or losing pretty bad."

Being well conditioned helps as well. That's taken care of through various workouts — "constantly running"

SEE COUGARS, G53

WATERLOO COUGARS

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HALEYVILLE LIONS



season of current stint, 6-5; fifth season at Haleyville, 31-15; 12th year overall, 69-55)

Region: 4A, Region 5

2022 record: 6-5 (6-1 4A, Region 5)

Last 5 years: 24-29 (2 playoff appearances)

Coach: Bo Culver (second

Aug. 25
Sept. 1
Sept. 8
Sept. 15
Sept. 22
Sept. 29

2023 schedule

Oct. 6
Oct. 13
Oct. 20
Oct. 27
Nov. 3

at Rogers
at Winfield
at Cordova
at Dora
Northside
open

2022 results

(OT) L, 16-10
L, 28-19
W, 45-41
L, 21-12
W, 35-27
W, 60-29

Curry
at Hamilton
at Corner (OT)
at West Morgan
Oneonta

W, 46-6
W, 52-12
W, 49-42
L, 55-38
L, 56-14

WR Brett Coleman
WR Evan Cagle
WR Cooper McNutt
OL Brock Rushing
OL Landon Lovett
OL Brock Yeager
OL Mason Tidwell
OL-TE Grayson Goddard

Returning starters

DL Andrew Barton
DL Wilson Frazier
DL Blade McDonald
LB Clay Price
LB Jackson Kutis
LB Fisher McCombs
DB Reece McNutt
DB Haydyn Ramos

New connection

Coleman, Lions hunting for even bigger year

By A. Stacy Long
Sports Writer

The phrase both made him smile and ticked him off.



Brett Coleman drew a small sense of pride and a major sense of disrespect.

Sure, it was an accolade — but a small one compared to what Coleman wanted.

Culver

It drove him through the winter, into the spring and down through the summer, looking to erase two words from the honor he had as a junior.

The Haleyville receiver, rather than be All-State honorable mention, wants to be simply All-State.

“I’m shooting to be even better,” Coleman said. “It was still an accomplishment instead of being just all-region, but I want to get to All-State.

“Honorable mention isn’t good enough.”

Coleman takes to heart the definition of “honorable mention.” It means he fell short of All-State. It means he wasn’t good enough.

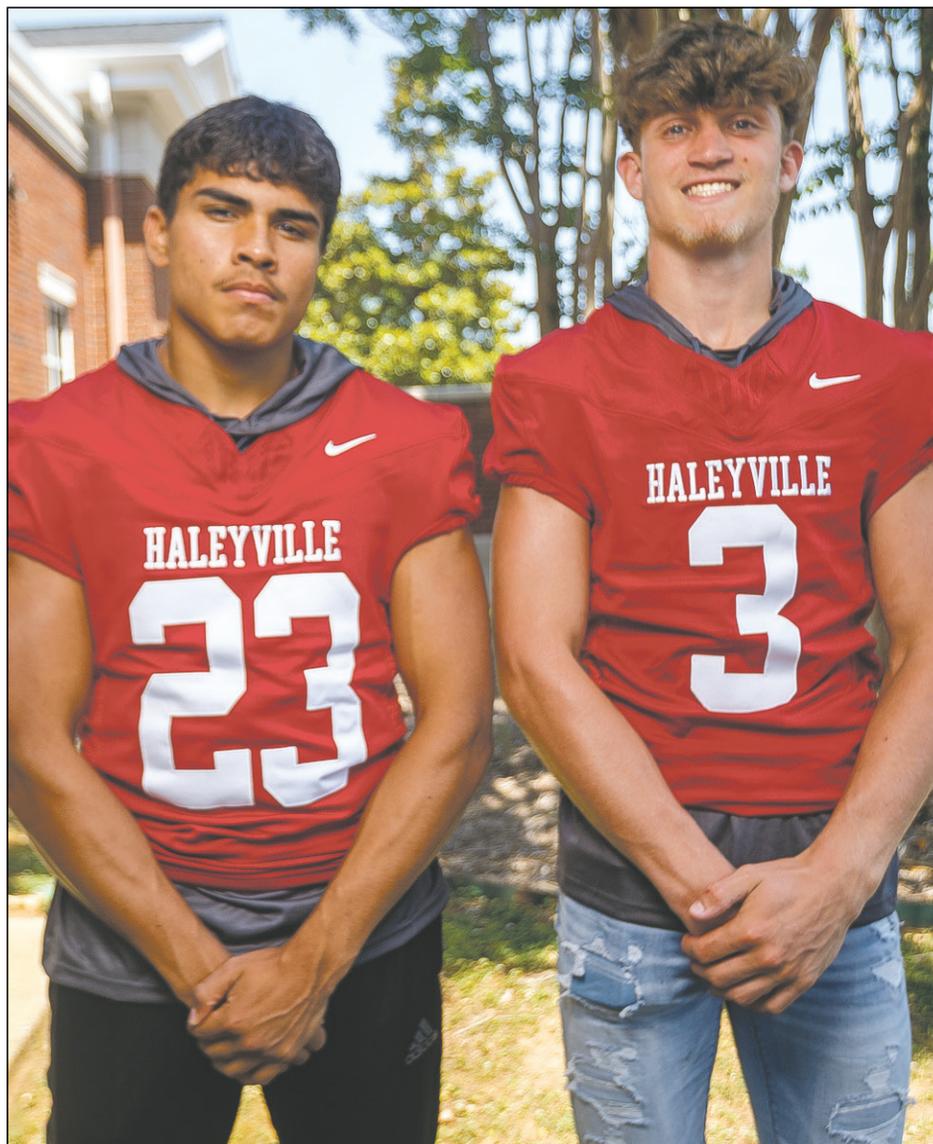
Despite 66 catches for 1,083 yards and 11 touchdowns as a junior, Coleman wants more as a senior. And to do more than just be honorably mentioned.

“I want to get 2,000 yards, close to 2,000,” Coleman said. “Maybe 1,500.”

It’s a heady goal, but the Lions say it’s not a pie-in-the-sky dream.

Coleman’s breakout season led to some intense work over the offseason, which led to a few extra pounds, a few more moves and a bit more speed.

More than just his personal stats,



Haleyville running back Haydyn Ramos (left) says he expects a big season from receiver Brett Coleman (right) and all of the Lions. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

Coleman and the Lions want more wins, too.

“We were happy for him to be honorable mention,” running back Haydyn Ramos said. “But I know he wants more. We all want more, and the team doing well is all that matters.”

Haleyville is coming off a 6-5 season

in coach Bo Culver’s “debut” season. Culver, a previous Haleyville coach, returned to the Lions a year ago.

A new offense led to Coleman’s big season.

More run-oriented before, Haleyville moved to a fast-paced well-rounded attack. A year later, the Lions have a

year’s experience with it.

“Switching from a Wing-T and a bang-bang-bang Wing-T, to what we do is a big difference,” Culver said. “With all our kids, the second year in the system is typically a solid year. Everybody knows what’s going on.”

So, the potential is there for Coleman, though he’ll have a new guy throwing him the ball.

“I think he can be really stinking good,” Culver said. “He’s gained 20 pounds, and it’s not 20 pounds of bad weight. It’s really good weight. He’s worked really, really hard.

“For a kid who was already tall, fast and could jump, he is faster, taller and can jump higher.”

Coleman is 6-3 right now. Still growing? “Yes, but I’m starting to level out,” he said.

But this year’s quarterback won’t have as close of a tie with Coleman.

Matthew Coleman is now at Mississippi College. Junior Evan Cagle, who started at receiver last year, takes over.

“It will be a big change, because Evan is not as (quick) on his feet as my brother,” Brett Coleman said. “My brother could run and pass. Evan is more of a passer, not runner.”

But the Lions have confidence in Cagle, and Culver said Cagle will grow into the job.

“Big brother is not playing quarterback,” Culver said. “At the same time, the kid who is playing quarterback for us was with us last year.”

The Lions will have Ramos, who is drawing rave reviews from Culver, and all of last year’s offensive line back.

“I don’t know if, in one year, I’ve seen a kid make as much physical development as he has,” Culver said of Ramos.

Haleyville hopes the returning experience allows the Lions to avoid last year’s slow start. Haleyville opened 1-3 before winning five straight.

“We got a streak going,” Ramos said. “We lost it at the end, but maybe we can get it going again.”

MARS HILL PANTHERS



Coach: Darrell Higgins (eighth season, 68-24)

Region: 3A, Region 8
2022 record: 10-2 (6-0 3A, Region 8)
Last 5 years: 61-10 (5 playoff berths)

Aug. 24
Sept. 1
Sept. 8
Sept. 15
Sept. 22
Sept. 29

2023 schedule
at Cullman Brooks
Colbert Heights at Clements Elkmont
Russellville

Oct. 6
Oct. 13
Oct. 20
Oct. 27
Nov. 3

at Colbert Co.
at Phil Campbell
Lauderdale Co.
at Scottsboro
open

Cullman
at Brooks
at Colbert Hts.
Clements
at Elkmont
at Russellville

2022 results

L, 13-10
W, 64-35
W, 56-6
W, 52-8
W, 69-8
W, 31-30

Colbert Co.
Phil Campbell
at Lauderdale Co.
Linden
Danville
at Geraldine

W, 35-0
W, 56-0
W, 38-0
W, 35-6
W, 62-7
L, 17-14

OL Gunnar Kirchharr
OL Jackson Lowery
OL Jack Irby
TE Cannon Pigg
WB Hudson Higgins
FB-LB Jay Dobbs
RB-OLB JO Owens

Returning starters

QB-DB Griffin Hanson
WR-DB Tanner Caudle
LB Cam Isbell
DB Aiden Kennedy
DE Jay Grant
DE Skyler Sterling
P Aiden Kennedy

Goal in mind



Griffin Hanson, JO Owens and Jay Dobbs are looking to help Mars Hill rediscover football playoff success. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

Panthers seeking return of long playoff run

By David Glovach
Sports Writer

Griffin Hanson, Jay Dobbs and JO Owens looked at one another for a

moment, each waiting for the others to speak first.

The question had been pondering amongst the Mars Hill football team throughout the offseason.

The goal? Pretty simple, they said.

"I think we all know what our goal is



Higgins

and that's a state championship," said Hanson, the team's quarterback. "I don't think we have a number (of wins) in mind, it's just to be our best each week and see what happens."

Such is the case for a program used to winning as of late.

The Panthers are seeking their sixth straight 10-win season. They compiled

18 playoff wins the last four years. They were ranked No. 1 in Class 3A — their first year in the classification — for most of last season. With enough success, they will soon find themselves bumped up to 4A.

And yet, Mars Hill is seeking to get back to its first title game after a two-year

SEE PANTHERS, G32

TIGERS

From Page G19

a linebacker/lineman, said physical play is a source of pride among the players.

“Our toughness is what makes Lauderdale County football special,” he said. “I think we are one of the only teams around here that hits in full pads every day. That toughness is what pays off on Friday night when we are able to play four quarters.”

It helps that the Tigers traditionally have had success using that formula. Lauderdale County has made 13 straight playoff appearances dating to 2010 and has been to the postseason 19 of the past 23 seasons. A Mason-coached team is

7-for-7 in qualifying for the playoffs.

“They are tough, physical, hard-nosed kids,” Jeff Mason said. “They love Lauderdale County and the town. They take pride in playing football there. You see that every day.”

Senior running back Braxton Rose might be the poster child for Lauderdale County’s toughness. He tore his ACL before last season, but returned in time to play in the last few games. The average recovery time from ACL surgery is 8-10 months.

“I came back in three months and 10 (days) after surgery,” he said. “Pretty crazy.”

Missing being on the field with his teammates likely speeded up Rose’s recovery time. He was back in the lineup

for the eighth game.

“When you are out there and watching everybody, you just miss it so much,” Rose said. “People tell you that after you graduate and it’s gone, you are going to miss it so much. I got that sense from watching on the sideline.”

Rose said the upside of watching the game from the sideline is that he sees the game differently and expects it to help him now that he is fully recovered from his knee injury.

“Everything happens so fast when you are out there running the ball,” Rose said. “Watching other people do it, you see how the line moves and it creates a totally different vision.”

Senior running back Micah Christensen said there’s a reason the Tigers

are known for their toughness.

“We just work harder than everyone else,” he said. “We are known for how physical we play and how hard we work. How tough we are. That’s just what the County’s known for.”

And while Mason and the Tigers hang their hats on the run game, quarterback Jaxson Lovelace expects to throw a little more than in the past. He’s spent time in the offseason bonding with his new receivers.

“It’s important because you can read them a little better when you get in the games,” he said. “You just get a better feel for what they are going to do.”

“I think we threw for 1,100 or 1,200 yards last year,” Mason said. “We’ll throw it when we can.”



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2023 Football Schedule

Date	Opponent
Aug. 24	@ Cullman -- Thursday
Sept. 1	Brooks
Sept. 8	Colbert Heights
Sept. 15	@ Clements
Sept. 22	Elkmont
Sept. 29	Russellville
Oct. 6	@ Colbert Co.
Oct. 13	@ Phil Campbell
Oct. 20	Lauderdale Co.
Oct. 27	@ Scottsboro
Nov. 3	OPEN

* Check local high schools for any updates/or changes.

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PANTHERS

From Page G30

absence, something that hasn't been looked fondly upon. The Panthers made three straight from 2018-20, including driving back to Florence with the blue map trophy two of those years. Last season, Mars Hill suffered a second-round playoff exit with a 17-14 loss to Geraldine.

"We spend a large part of the year ranked No. 1 in the state and that means absolutely nothing and, for us, it's about what we do in the postseason," coach Darrell Higgins said. "We're not at all satisfied with the way we finished up last year. Hopefully, we've done a lot of things to improve and be better than that."

"We've needed to get tougher. Not just physically, but mentally tougher. Ultimately, the reason we got beat was not a talent problem. The team that beat us was tougher than us."

That's been a focus during summer workouts, made up of various circuits to put the players in some uncomfortable situations to see how they'll react.

The worst?

"Probably sled pushes," Owens, a running back and linebacker, said with a grin. "It's always towards the end (of the day) when it gets hot."

But the belief is it will help lead to the results the Panthers want. After all, they know they're the team everyone on their schedule wants to beat. It does come with the territory.

"I think in Lauderdale County, there's been two state champions since 1973 and both have been Mars Hill," Higgins said. "And so, that puts a target on you. Everyone wants to go out and beat you. We've had Power Five kids, Division I kids, a lot of college players and it's a good opportunity for these other players to see how they match up."

"It brings a lot of excitement when we play someone."

It's a welcome challenge. And while those games are fun, the players said, the goal still remains to be one of the teams playing the final week of the season.

"You have to do the things that it takes to be a state champion," said Dobbs, a fullback and linebacker. "That's what we're trying to do."

Pretty simple.

David Glovach can be reached at david.glovach@timesdaily.com or on Twitter @DavidGlovach



JO Owens helped Mars Hill average 43.5 points per game last year. [PHOTOS BY DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]



Jay Dobbs and the Mars Hill Panthers lost just twice last year, both times by three points.

**SHOALS
CHRISTIAN
FLAME**



Coach: Brett Vick (first year)

Region: 1A, Region 8
2022 record: 2-7
 (2-5 1A, Region 8)
Last 5 years: 11-38
 (no playoff berths)

Aug. 25
 Sept. 1
 Sept. 8
 Sept. 15
 Sept. 22
 Sept. 29

2023 schedule
 Tharptown open
 at Phillips Vina
 at Cherokee
 at Cold Springs

Oct. 6
 Oct. 13
 Oct. 20
 Oct. 27
 Nov. 3

Danville at Tharptown
 Meek Phillips
 at Hackleburg at Vina
 Waterloo Cherokee
 at Addison Cold Springs

2022 results
 L, 28-14 at Meek
 L, 41-6 Hackleburg
 W, 44-16 at Waterloo
 W, 59-6 Addison
 L, 48-20

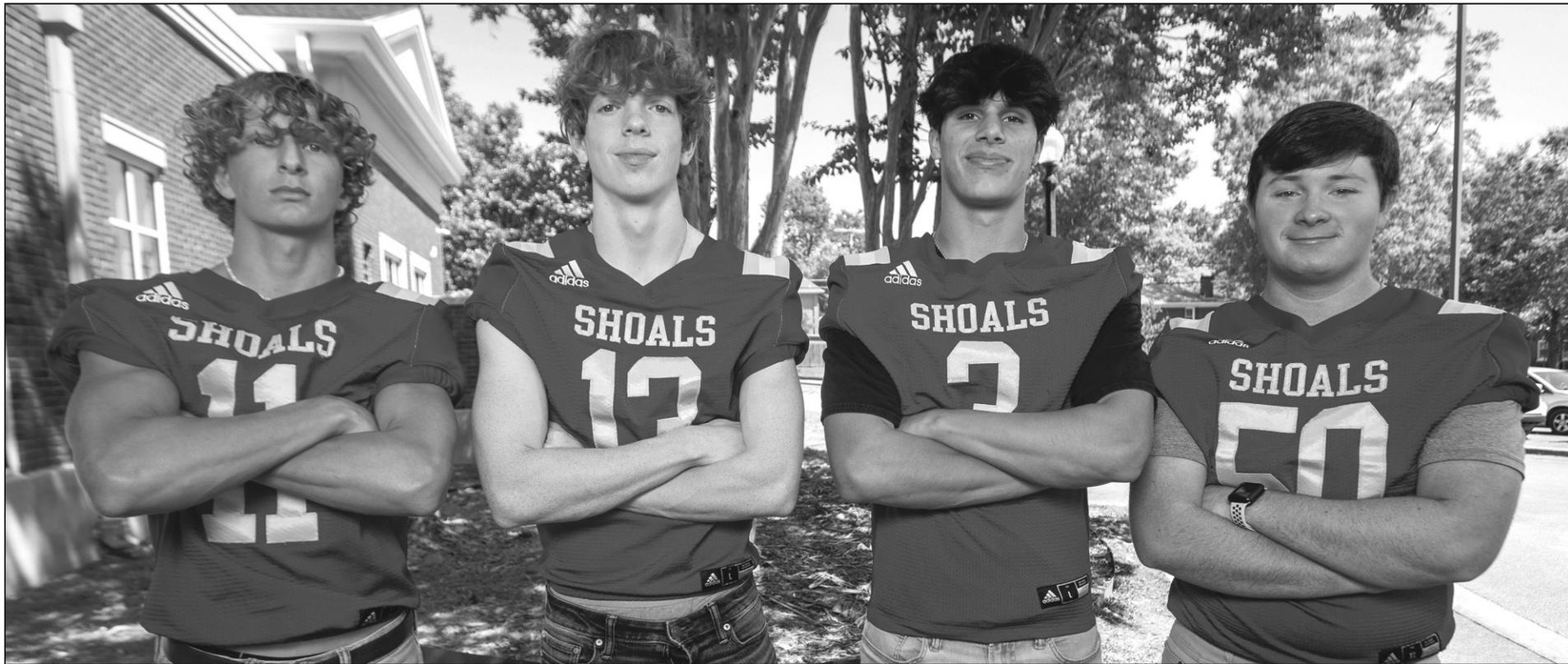
L, 63-0
 L, 50-20
 L, 38-6
 L, 56-0

Returning starters

QB-DB JD Bacher
 WR-DB Sam Storie
 TE-DL Tyler Soria
 RB-DB DJ Shanes
 OL-DL Alex Richards
 OL-DL Rob Hyde

OL-DL Ashland Husainy
 OL-DL Samuel Camp
 DB-WR Terin Harris
 LB-WR Noah Aday
 OL-DL Zeke Waide

Hunting a turnaround



Terin Harris, Sam Storie, Tyler Soria and Samuel Camp hope to help Shoals Christian take the next step. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

Under new coach, Flame seeks fuel for success

By Shane Herrmann
 For the TimesDaily

The seniors at Shoals Christian were

fifth-graders the last time the Flame went to the playoffs.

A winning record? The current group of seniors were in first grade.

It has been a long time since Shoals Christian has made any noise at the Class 1A level. With a

larger-than-normal senior class leading the 2023 team, the Flame is more than ready to take the next step.

"It's definitely different being the leaders of the team this year," senior Terin Harris said.

The wide receiver/defensive back

knows the younger players on the roster have never known a Shoals Christian team with a winning record.

"We have taken more of an initiative to teach the younger kids what we

SEE FLAME, G52

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SHEFFIELD
BULLDOGS

Region: 2A, Region 8
2022 record: 5-5 (2-4 2A, Region 8)
Last 5 years: 22-30 (2 playoff berths)
Coach: Brian Dickerson (second season, 5-5)

Aug. 24
 Sept. 1
 Sept. 8
 Sept. 15
 Sept. 22
 Sept. 29

2023 schedule

Elkmont Oct. 6
 at Colbert Co. Oct. 13
 Falkville Oct. 20
 at Red Bay Oct. 27
 at Tanner Nov. 3
 at Waterloo

Cherokee at Elkmont
 Hatton Colbert Co.
 at Tharptown at Falkville
 Lexington Red Bay
 open Tanner

2022 results

W, 47-20 Waterloo
 L, 51-20 at Cherokee
 L, 32-7 at Hatton
 L, 50-39 Tharptown
 W, 48-47 at Lexington

W, 43-14
 W, 54-6
 L, 60-34
 W, 63-14
 L, 75-27

Demarius Beckwith
 Maddix Rupley
 Navi Dysart
 James Drumgood
 Reeve Holcomb
 Germain Vinson
 Bryant Doll

Returning starters

Austin Stults
 Christian Steele
 David Foster
 Jake McBride
 Matyler Long
 Skylar Johnston
 Gary Little

Looking for a leap



Austin Stults, Demarius Beckwith and Christian Steele said Sheffield has made strides under second-year coach Brian Dickerson. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

A year later, Bulldogs following Dickerson's lead

By Gregg Dewalt
 For the TimesDaily

Brian Dickerson tried to lay the groundwork for what his vision is for Sheffield football last season.

A year later, the second-year coach



Dickerson

expects the Bulldogs to take another step in his vision of where the program can go. It's all part of his plan to restore Sheffield's tradition.

"The first year they were trying to figure out what was expected," Dickerson said. "Now, they know what's expected. Now they have to learn how to do it at a consistent level. That's from the coaching staff to the players to everybody that's involved in our program."

"There's a standard to how we do everything and there's no fluctuation on those things. We want to make sure it's done that way every time because your habits are what you have to lean on regardless of what situation."

Dickerson took over the program in 2022 after David Wisdom's one season with the team. He saw tangible results — Sheffield finished 5-5 but missed the playoffs for a third consecutive season. Even when the Bulldogs have made the playoffs, it's been one-and-done lately — 2016 is the last time they have made

it past the first round.

In Dickerson's world, you have to walk before you run, and the Bulldogs are still learning to walk.

"Our goal is to do what's never been done and do it better than it's ever been done at Sheffield," he said. "But that starts with consistency. There hasn't been a lot of consistency inside our program in a lot of areas. So that's what we're trying to create in year two."

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BULLDOGS

From Page G34

with a staff that stayed mostly intact. Another part of gaining consistency is that the team has been in Dickerson's system for one full season and an off-season. That's important, he said.

"Everybody understands we're doing offensively, defensively, on special teams, in the weight room and study hall. That structure is built," Dickerson said. "Now, they have embraced the challenges to be excellent every day. We're going to always talk about the things that have nothing to do with talent. Can you be on time? Can you do your best? Can you hold others

accountable?"

"If we do those things, the big picture take care of itself because talented teams don't win. Great teams win."

In Dickerson's first year, Sheffield matched its win total from the previous two years combined. The Bulldogs didn't have any trouble offensively, scoring 20 or more points in nine games. However, six opponents scored over 32 points against them.

Demarius Beckwith, who plays on the offensive and defensive lines, said the Bulldogs are more comfortable with Dickerson heading into his second season.

"We've gotten to know each other and he is a positive coach," Beckwith said. "He gets everybody up and going. He

holds us accountable."

Austin Stults is a senior receiver who didn't play his sophomore year. He decided to give football another chance, mostly because of Dickerson.

"He made me fall back in love with the game," Stults said. "It's a whole lot different than it used to be. Effort and discipline are the two things he preaches on a lot. He changed the culture a lot."

Some of that culture change has come with Dickerson having the team get more involved in the community. He said the team has been involved in cleanup days around town, running kids camps and is planning to work shifts at the local food pantry and at the local park.

"We want to care about the people

who care about us," Dickerson said. "We're such a small community, so let's make sure we take care of each other. Support the community and the community will support us. It goes hand in hand."

Said Stutts: "We can go out and help somebody in the community and they'll come out and support us on Friday nights. Running kids camps brings them up wanting to play football. It just changes the culture."

Said Dickerson: "Let's learn what success looks like. There's still a lot of building blocks that have to take place to get where we want to go. But excitement is coming. Find the small wins and the small wins will add up and will be big wins."



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SHEFFIELD BULLDOGS

2023 Football Schedule

Date	Opponent
Aug. 24	Elkmont
Sept. 1	@ Colbert Co.
Sept. 8	Falkville
Sept. 15	@ Red Bay
Sept. 22	@ Tanner
Sept. 29	@ Waterloo
Oct. 6	Cherokee
Oct. 13	Hatton
Oct. 20	@ Tharptown
Oct. 27	Lexington
Nov. 3	OPEN

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COLBERT HEIGHTS WILDCATS



Coach: Tyler Jeffreys (first year)

Region: 3A, Region 8
2022 record: 4-6 (2-4 3A, Region 8)
Last 5 years: 26-28 (4 playoff berths)

2023 schedule	
Aug. 25	at Lexington
Sept. 1	Wilson
Sept. 8	at Mars Hill Bible
Sept. 15	Meek
Sept. 22	Clements
Sept. 29	open
Oct. 6	at Elkmont
Oct. 13	Colbert Co.
Oct. 20	Phil Campbell
Oct. 27	at Lauderdale Co.
Nov. 2	at Decatur Heritage
Lexington	at Wilson
Mars Hill Bible	at Meek
at Clements	

2022 results	
L, 34-0	Elkmont
W, 19-18	at Colbert Co.
L, 56-6	at Phil Campbell
L, 24-17	Lauderdale Co.
W, 52-38	Dec. Heritage
W, 28-8	L, 28-12
L, 36-0	L, 34-0
W, 20-13	

Returning starters	
QB-OLB Dakota Vaughn	TE-DE Abe Henson
WR-SS Austyn Williams	FB-ILB Elijah Hand
RB-LB Steven Wilbanks Jr.	OL-DL Tristan McCormick
WR-S Ethan Kimbrough	OL-DL Peyton Patrick
WR-CB Eli Cartee	OL-ILB Connor Triplett
RB-CB Gianni Weddle	OL-DL Enoch McGee

Successful campaign

Wildcats touted Jeffreys, now look to land wins

By A. Stacy Long
 Sports Writer

The smiles and glances start quickly. The Colbert Heights Wildcats, with a new head coach, have a debate on their hands.

Between new coach Tyler Jeffreys and senior defensive end Peyton Patrick, the Wildcats can line up and state their choice. Decision 2023 will not involve secret ballots or heightened debate, but only one party decides playing time.

Between these two candidates, which has the better beard?

"Coach Jeffreys," receiver Austyn Williams says. "I like the little mustache thing he has going."

Maybe this crew, at least in Jeffreys' presence, isn't the most even-handed.

"He doesn't have as good a beard as me, but he's trying," Patrick says in his defense. "He's trying."

It's a lighthearted moment, an area where the Wildcats can tease their first-year head coach. They campaigned to school administrators over the winter for Jeffreys to be promoted after Taylor Leathers was promoted to



Austyn Williams, Peyton Patrick and Ethan Kimbrough helped campaign for Colbert Heights to promote Tyler Jeffreys to head coach. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

an assistant superintendent's position.

They pestered him with questions about his status while the decision was still unknown. They rejoiced when he

got the job.

"They wanted to know," Jeffreys said. "I didn't have a lot of information to give them until the day it happened.

I knew they were helping me out, and I appreciate them doing that."

SEE COLBERT HEIGHTS, G39

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COLBERT COUNTY INDIANS



Region: 3A, Region 8
2022 record: 7-5 (4-2 3A, Region 8)
Last 5 years: 34-23 (5 play-off berths)

Coach: Scotty Hannah (second year at Colbert Co., 7-5; eighth overall, 39-37)

2023 schedule

Aug. 24	at Brooks	Oct. 6	Mars Hill Bible
Sept. 1	Sheffield	Oct. 13	at Colbert Heights
Sept. 8	open	Oct. 20	at Clements
Sept. 15	at Phil Campbell	Oct. 27	Elkmont
Sept. 22	Lauderdale Co.	Nov. 3	at Sulligent
Sept. 29	Deshler		at Deshler
			at Mars Hill Bible

2022 results

Brooks	L, 48-21	Colbert Heights	W, 28-12	OL Dylan Matlock
at Sheffield	W, 51-20	Clements	W, 75-38	OL Seth Johnson
Phil Campbell	W, 25-22	at Elkmont	W, 51-0	OL Austin Smallwood
at Lauderdale Co.	L, 29-0	Sulligent	W, 31-28	OL Caiden Foust
at Deshler	L, 36-33	at J.B. Pennington	W, 57-28	WR B.J. Thornton
at Mars Hill Bible	L, 35-0	Piedmont	L, 42-20	TE-LB Cash Fuqua

Returning starters

DL Wayne Little
 DL Trey Davis
 LB Keadre Garner
 LB Frank Hayes
 CB Micah McCoy

'Not good enough'



Colbert County's Wayne Little and Austin Smallwood say the Indians want more this year. [PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

Colbert County wants more than middling mark

By A. Stacy Long
 Sports Writer

They carefully walked into the field house, unsure what mystical figure had haunted their space with such taunting words.



Hannah

Was it a sign that the Colbert County Indians were haunted?

The message screamed at them from their lockers, every bulletin board, the doors leading outside and even — the chief instigator admits — maybe a few bathroom stalls.

It was short, pithy and, for the Indians, memorable: "7-5. Not good enough."

"No, never," offensive lineman Austin Smallwood said, describing his reaction to those numbers, which reflected Colbert County's final record from a year ago.

"Why be satisfied with the second round when you can have a chance to win the ship, the blue map?"

The 7-5 was a one-win improvement from a year earlier, extended Colbert County's streak of winning seasons and included a decent-sized winning streak in

coach Scotty Hannah's first season.

Except, as Hannah wrote so many times and posted in so many places, it was not good enough.

"Coach Hannah put it in our face, on every board," defensive lineman Wayne Little said. "That 7-5, he didn't like that."

"We're trying to get a whole lot better this year."

COLBERT COUNTY

From Page G38

That 7-5 mark was a recurring theme through the offseason, hitting the Indians almost as quickly as the next Marvel movie. Without positive reviews.

"They know I'm never satisfied," Hannah said. "When we can do better, we want to do better. We got better the whole year last year, and we played the team that played for the state championship and played them hard.

"But, this year, we want more."

The Indians felt, at least in midsummer, that there were signs of improvement. They said their conditioning was already at the level they didn't hit until midseason last year.

Trying to run from that 7-5 has its benefits.

"We're in better shape now, a lot better shape, than we were at this point last year," Hannah said. "We want to be in better shape than the other team. I think we have the luxury this year to play more players than we did last year."

There are 16 starters returning, but some of those are just sophomores who were pushed into the lineup as freshmen last year.

"We're going to try to be good either way," Little said.

One glaring gap is at quarterback after Cannon Berryman graduated. Hannah wouldn't commit to who will start — does any coach ever do so this early? — but senior Caleb Stafford is a possibility.

"He's been waiting for this," Smallwood

said. "He's been behind Cannon his whole career. It's his senior year, and he's been waiting for this opportunity. He's like my best friend, and he's been telling me all the time that he can't wait."

Stafford, the Indians said, has a different style than Berryman and is more of a dropback passer. Berryman had more ability to run.

"We have four or five guys we're working there," Hannah said. "They all have different skillsets. We'll have some options, but Caleb is doing a good job.

"His decision-making is getting better every day, but we have a couple other guys that haven't been back there and are eager to learn."

The Indians took last year's season-ending loss as a lesson. They entered on a five-game winning streak and scored on their first offensive play. Piedmont rallied for a 42-20 win and advanced to the state final.

"I feel we could have had a chance to beat them," Little said. "We started off strong, but I guess we started slowing down."

The Indians finished with their 11th straight winning season — a streak that includes three six-win and two seven-win years.

"It's good in the fact that they know how to win," Hannah said. "A winning season is good, but we want to go deep in the playoffs."

In other words: Not good enough.

"It's not horrible, but we want to do better," Smallwood said. "There's always room for improvement, and that's what we're striving for."

COLBERT HEIGHTS

From Page G37

The 25-year-old, who was hired in May, isn't far removed from being a quarterback himself at Colbert County and the University of North Alabama.

Jeffreys has shown he retains certain quarterback skills to his players without need of a word.

"We all learned that one, as soon as he got here, like Day 1," receiver Ethan Kimbrough said. "That first day he came out to practice, he was throwing to the receivers and we thought, 'Where did this guy come from?'"

A little Google search here and some TimesDaily.com there, the Wildcats found solid proof of what their hands already told them.

"He has a heck of an arm," Williams said. "He throws to us, and it hurts your hands when you catch it. It hurts my fingertips."

Even if he was a star for rival Colbert County, the Wildcats are happy to have him.

"We'll play around with him about that," Patrick said. "We're glad he's here coaching us. We kind of helped him come to the good side."

With a 11 seniors and 12 returning starters, the Wildcats hope to make Jeffreys' first season memorable.

Colbert Heights hopes to end a streak of three straight losing seasons. The Wildcats have exceeded six wins just once in the last decade.

"We all want to be better than last

year. A lot better," Williams said. "We actually want to make the playoffs this year. It's our senior year, and we want to make a point before we leave."

Dakota Vaughn, who first became the starting quarterback as a sophomore, is now a senior and has improved. However, Jeffreys said before official practices began that he wasn't sure if Vaughn or freshman Brycen Williams would start.

"I don't know who it's going to be, but both of them have gotten a lot better," Jeffreys said. "I think the only way to get the most out of both is to make them compete.

"We'll see, but I think that's the best way to handle this situation. Let them compete and see who wins."

Jeffreys did turn in a non-surprising direction for some help on his coaching staff.

Dale Jeffreys, his dad and a 160-game winner in 20 seasons as a head coach, is in charge of the offensive line. He's drawing positive reviews.

"We have a new coach and a new energy," Patrick said. "The players have more energy. Summer workouts have been better. Everybody is ready to show up and compete."

To the surprise of some, Patrick doesn't count as a coach. Blame the beard, which he hasn't fully shaved in three years.

"I just trim it. I can't shave it. I'd look like a baby," Patrick said. "I look like a man to some people. They ask, 'Who is that coach?' I'm just a player."

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CHEROKEE INDIANS



Region: 1A, Region 8
2022 record: 1-9 (1-6 1A, Region 8)
Last 5 years: 6-45 (1 play-off berth)
Coach: Ben Floyd (fourth season, 2-28)

2023 schedule
 Aug. 25 at Brindlee Mtn. Oct. 6
 Sept. 1 Waterloo Oct. 12
 Sept. 8 at Addison Oct. 20
 Sept. 15 at Phillips Oct. 27
 Sept. 22 Shoals Chr. Nov. 2
 Sept. 29 at Tharptown

2022 results
 L, 26-20 Tharptown
 L, 60-14 Sheffield
 L, 72-0 Vina
 L, 50-14 at Meek
 L, 59-6 at Hackleburg
 at Sheffield at Vina open Meek Hackleburg
 Brindlee Mtn. at Waterloo Addison Phillips at Shoals Chr.

Returning starters
 QB-DB Jon Schleifer
 WR-LB Nik Curry
 OL-DL Daniel Darling
 OL Corey Tice
 LB Nathan Trent
 LB Juan Cabrera
 DB Javarian Davis

Big appetite

Cherokee yearning for turnaround season

By Shane Herrmann
 For the TimesDaily

Ben Floyd was an assistant coach at Cherokee in 2017 when the team advanced to the Class 1A playoff quarterfinals.

He remembered very vividly thinking that season would be the first of many deep postseason runs for the Indians. It was not.

Cherokee went 4-7 the following year that included a first-round defeat. The next two seasons produced identical 0-10 records and the following two years yielded just two total wins.

The Indians lost games that were close and games that were not. Players transferred away or simply gave up football to concentrate on other things. A small core group of players, however, remained. That group enters the 2023 season as juniors, and Floyd will begin his fourth season as head coach.

With a few more players on the roster than in the past, a little more experience and a lot more team speed, Floyd believes this could be a breakthrough year.

"This might be the most-talented



Jon Schleifer, Tae Hicks, Daniel Darling and Nathan Trent hope to lead Cherokee to a turnaround season. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

team we have had since 2017," Floyd said. "That team was loaded with talent before a lot of kids transferred out or graduated, and we have been fighting a numbers battle ever since. Our team this year will have the most athleticism since

that season and that is what we have been missing."

Cherokee will return eight starters on each side of the ball. The bulk of those players will come from a junior class that is hungry for the Indians to return

to their winning ways.

"Our junior class is the biggest class," Floyd said. "They have all been playing football since they were seventh-graders.

SEE CHEROKEE, G53

CHEROKEE INDIANS



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Good Luck Indians!

THARPTOWN WILDCATS



Coach: John Johnson (first year)

Region: 2A, Region 8
2022 record: 2-8 (0-6
2A, Region 8)
Last 5 years: 14-34
(no playoff berths)

Aug. 25
Sept. 1
Sept. 8
Sept. 15
Sept. 22
Sept. 29

2023 schedule

at Shoals Chr.
Phillips
at Tanner
Hatton
Lexington
Cherokee

Oct. 6
Oct. 13
Oct. 20
Oct. 27
Nov. 3

at Red Bay
open
Sheffield
Falkville
at Whitesburg Chr.

Shoals Chr.
at Phillips
Tanner
at Hatton
at Lexington

2022 results

W, 28-14
L, 37-22
L, 63-0
L, 52-0
L, 53-18

at Cherokee
Red Bay
at Sheffield
at Falkville
Whitesburg Chr.

W, 48-22
L, 54-14
L, 63-14
L, 55-14
L, 49-7

Returning starters

OL Noah Capelton
OL-DL Dylan Dolley
QB-OLB Hunter Reynolds
RB-DB Dawson Higgins

TE-LB Jackson Clement
WR-DB Joah Wilcoxson
WR-DB Malachi Minor
DL Luis Dirico

Making adjustments

Wildcats, new coach looking to build program

By A. Stacy Long
Sports Writer

One group of players is lifting weights while another lines up for equipment.

New Tharptown coach John Johnson doles out items, carefully marking each with each player's initials and preparing for a season that is almost here.



Johnson

Johnson is a new arrival, hired just last month when the Wildcats previous coach took another job, and is trying to get everything organized for the games and beyond.

"Everything is hectic," said Johnson, a 42-year-old who is a head football coach for the first time.

"Football season is always hectic, but it's even more hectic coming in late," he said. "But when you're dreaming of being a head coach, you always have a plan in place, an emergency action plan, I guess.

"I kind of had an idea of what needed to be done."

The players say they are excited about what Johnson brings.

He has told them that Friday nights in the fall are up to them. It's his job to get them ready for those Friday nights.

They've noticed differences in workouts and what's expected of them. They've noticed differences in how they practice. The list goes on.

"Every coach expects something different, like a different offense or scheme or whatever, and we have to adjust to it," running back/defensive back Dawson Higgins said. "One thing with him is he holds us more accountable."

Johnson will be Tharptown's third head coach in three years. Jacob Hamilton was last year's coach — after being hired in the middle of last summer — and is now the head coach at Phil Campbell.

Johnson, already set to be on Tharptown's staff this year, moved to head



Hunter Reynolds and Dawson Higgins say Tharptown is working through the transition to new coach John Johnson. [STACY LONG/TIMESDAILY]

coach.

"The transition was pretty tough because everything is different," quarterback/linebacker Hunter Reynolds said. "But everybody is putting in the work."

The Wildcats are also trying to reach out to the community to both build enthusiasm and more than just teammates to hold them accountable.

Tharptown held a Football 101 for moms this month and 40 signed up to attend. There was a community event, too — complete with Cornhole tournament — scheduled as well.

"The more the better," Higgins said.

"If we see people buying into what we're doing, we want to represent them the best we can. It can only help."

Enthusiasm outside of the team, the players say, will spark more effort on the field.

"It helps us know the community wants to buy in to our program," Reynolds said. "It makes us want to work that much harder."

"Last year, we didn't feel as many people cared. This year, I feel like I want to show everyone what we can do."

Johnson, who was the offensive coordinator at Danville last year, said he could see the enthusiasm from the Wildcats in

his first two weeks after being hired.

"The core group that's been here has been into it," he said. "I know it's coach speak, but it's a process. You have to start at the bottom and work your way up."

Tharptown was scheduled to have 18 returning starters from last year's 2-8 team, including Reynolds and Higgins. The Wildcats, who first fielded a varsity team in 2006, have just one winning season in their history.

"People are showing up and putting in the hard work," Higgins said. "We want to put in 110% every practice and every play."

**PHILLIPS
BEARS**



Region: 1A, Region 8
2022 record: 6-4 (4-3 1A, Region 8)
Last 5 years: 19-33 (3 playoff berths)
Coach: Adam Lawler (fifth season, 15-26)

Aug. 25
Sept. 1
Sept. 8
Sept. 15
Sept. 22
Sept. 29

2023 schedule
open Oct. 6
at Tharptown Oct. 13
Shoals Chr. Oct. 20
Cherokee Oct. 27
at Meek Nov. 3
Brilliant

at Vina Tharptown
at Hackleburg at Shoals Chr.
at Waterloo at Cherokee
Addison Meek
open at Brilliant

2022 results
W, 37-22 Vina
W, 41-6 Hackleburg
W, 50-14 Waterloo
L, 40-6 at Addison
W, 53-0 at Valley Head

W, 46-0
L, 50-34
W, 56-26
L, 45-12
L, 61-20

Returning starters
WR-DB Brayden Ricketts
LB Hayden Dees
OL-DE Hunter Lawrence
OL-DL Brayden Jordan

OL-DL Aaron Grammer
OL Cayden Gallardo
OL Jake McGough

Warm front

Phillips sees experienced line as key to success

By **Shane Herrmann**
For the TimesDaily

It didn't take Phillips coach Adam Lawler long to answer when asked what he expects the strength of his 2023 team to be.

"All five starting offensive linemen are returning so that is going to be the strength of our program," he said.

A year ago, a balanced attack helped Phillips secure its first winning record since 2017. The 6-4 record also included a trip the playoffs.



This season, the Bears must replace a 1,000-yard rusher, a 2,500-yard passer and a 1,000-yard receiver.

"We will be replacing a ton of skill positions on offense," Lawler said. "With the majority of our strength coming back this year being on the offensive line, we will probably rely more on the run game this year."

The same dilemma exists for the Bears on defense. Phillips will return its entire defensive line, plus a linebacker.

One way Lawler addressed the lack of experience at skill positions was to take the team to a 7-on-7 camp over the summer. After admittedly having not the highest of expectations, Lawler said he was pleasantly surprised.

"Because of coaching changes and the COVID year, our guys had never been to a 7-on-7 camp before," Lawler said. "We had to teach them how to play in those tournaments. Some of the guys really impressed me. I was just hoping we would go there and get better ... which we did."

With a large senior class graduating this spring, getting more players on the roster was a challenge that the current coaches and players faced during the offseason.

"You try to talk to a lot of guys in the



Cayden Gallardo, Brayden Ricketts and Hunter Lawrence hope Phillips can develop more depth this season. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

offseason and try to get them to come out," said Hunter Lawrence, a senior who starts on the offensive and defensive lines.

Lawler added that last season's momentum helped that cause. "Having a winning record last helped a lot with this year's numbers," he said. "We had a lot of guys come out who haven't played the last few seasons."

Cayden Gallardo, another two-way starter on the line, was one of those who returned after a short break.

"I started playing as an eighth-grader so it's a different feeling to finally be a senior," the senior said. "I missed two years after getting hurt, so it's really good to get back and play now."

Lawler added that both of the senior linemen have proven to be leaders both on and off the field.

"Hunter and Cayden are both leaders for us in different ways," Lawler said. "Hunter is more of a vocal leader while Cayden tends to lead by example. In the weight room, at practice or during the

games, those guys really get after it, and that is why I feel like we have a chance to have as good or maybe even a better season as last year."

More players on the roster means more depth. Lawler said many of the team's double-digit losses from a year ago were close games throughout the first half.

"We were able to hang with some teams early last season, but we just wore down in the second half," he said. "Hopefully, with the work we have put in, that is something we have corrected."

LORETTO MUSTANGS



Coach: Barry Daniel (fourth season at Loretto, 13-20; ninth year overall, 38-48)

Region: 2A, Region 5
2022 record: 4-7 (3-2 2A, Region 5)
Last 5 years: 20-33 (3 playoff berths)

2023 schedule

Aug. 18	at Collinwood	Sept. 29	East Hickman
Aug. 25	Lawrence Co.	Oct. 6	open
Sept. 1	Harpeth	Oct. 13	Eagleville
Sept. 8	at Summertown	Oct. 20	at Waverly Central
Sept. 15	Lewis Co.	Oct. 27	at Mount Pleasant
Sept. 22	at Hickman Co.		

2022 results

W, 49-25	Summertown	W, 35-0	QB Carter Daniel
L, 48-42	Moore Co.	L, 62-42	WR-LB-P Jack Welch
W, 44-28	at Cascade	W, 23-13	WR Clint Seymore
L, 33-23	at Richland	L, 41-40	DB-WR Jackson Traglia
L, 32-21	at Decatur Co.	Riverside	OL-DL Eric Rosson
L, 28-17	Lewis Co.	L, 56-31	OL-DL Connor Pope
			K Patton Simbeck

Returning starters

DB-WR Branton Snider
 DB-WR Jaxson Roberson
 WR-DB Corben Reynolds
 LB-QB Mason Tidwell
 OL-DL Colby Brown
 LB-RB Andrew Riley
 DL Blaze Thomason

For Mustangs, D is key

High-powered Loretto looks to shore up defense

By Gregg Dewalt
 For the TimesDaily

Loretto's games last season often resembled something straight out of Madden NFL video game series.

That is, defense often took the night off. Consider the Mustangs, who finished 4-7 in 2022, had games in which they scored 42, 42, 40 and 31 points and lost each of them.

So, a year after simplifying things on offense that produced those eye-popping numbers and finished the season averaging 33.3 points per game, fourth-year coach Barry Daniel will try a similar approach this season — keeping it simple so his defense can react instead of having to think about assignments.

Also, as much as Daniel likes to see his offense score points, some extended scoring drives would be nice so that his defense can get some rest.

"Fundamentals on defense is our No. 1 deal," Daniel said. "We've got to tackle better. It's not a situation where we were misaligned or didn't understand what to do, we were just poor tacklers last year. Last preseason we said we were going to be ridiculously simple on offense. That's



Jackson Traglia, Jack Welch, Carter Daniel and Connor Pope agree Loretto needs to show improvement on defense. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

kind of the theme we are going to turn into our defense — to be ridiculously simple with the scheme and get the fundamentals better."

To help improve that aspect of the defense, Daniel said the Mustangs will be a little bit more physical in practice.

"We practiced a lot of tackling last year but we were always in shells," he said.

"We'll be a little bit more in full gear. We don't want to beat guys up and take them to the ground like in the 1970s, but we have to get a little tougher and do a little bit more old school things. I made the decision we're just going to pad up and go after it."

Daniel said tackling was an emphasis during spring practice. They also

watched a good bit of film.

"I put it on and told them not to worry about how we aligned or anything like that, just count the missed tackles," Daniel said. "On one drive, the team we were playing didn't score but we had 11 missed tackles. I think that was an

SEE MUSTANGS, G53

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HATTON HORNETS



Coach: Denton Bowling (eighth season, 34-38)

Region: 2A, Region 8
2022 record: 7-3 (4-2 2A, Region 8)
Last 5 years: 28-24 (3 playoff berths)

2023 schedule

Aug. 25	at Wilson	Oct. 6
Sept. 1	Columbia	Oct. 13
Sept. 8	open	Oct. 20
Sept. 15	at Tharptown	Oct. 27
Sept. 22	Falkville	Nov. 2
Sept. 29	at East Lawrence	

2022 results

Tanner	Wilson	W, 30-19	at Tanner
at Sheffield	at Columbia	W, 54-14	Sheffield
Lexington	Tharptown	W, 52-0	at Lexington
at Red Bay	at Falkville	L, 21-6	Red Bay
Geraldine	East Lawrence	W, 50-7	at Pisgah

Returning starters

W, 50-13	DL Weston Burney	DB Owen Brackin
W, 60-34	DB Parker Huff	OL Layton Wilson
L, 48-14	DB Alex Brackin	DL Trace Hill
W, 38-22	DL Tayden Montgomery	OL Kole McMillan
L, 40-20	RB KD Porter	WR Kenyon Suggs
	LB Garson Pierce	QB Tasean Love
	CB Cole Borden	

Proper exit?

Before class change, Hornets want major success

By **A. Stacy Long**
Sports Writer

The move is in the distance, a looming change that will be felt throughout Hatton sports with a special emphasis on football.



The Hornets, long settled into Class 2A, are in for a final chapter as a 2A team.

By the end of the year, no matter how many wins and how much success Hatton enjoys this season, the Hornets can get ready for a jump.

How's Class 3A sound? Maybe even Class 4A?

"It's a lot bigger school than it has been in the past," linebacker Alex Brackin said. "I hope they can compete, whatever class they're in. They say it's going to be a big 3A or small 4A. It's going to be a big change either way."

But it won't affect Brackin. He's a senior, so he'll pick up his diploma before Hatton first plays in another class.

"I'll be gone," he said.

So the Hornets are hoping to bid adieu to Class 2A in style.

A year after the merger with R.A. Hubbard that swelled Hatton's enrollment well past normal 2A numbers, the Hornets get a last trip through 2A.

"End of an era," defensive lineman/tight end Weston Burney said. "It may be better whether we're in 3A or 4A. It may be easier some games than in 2A because 2A is pretty hard."

The AHSAA is due to announce its biennial reclassification this fall. Normally, the new numbers are released just after Thanksgiving.

"It's exciting," coach Denton Bowling



Alex Brackin, Weston Burney and Parker Huff say Hatton's success last year built momentum for this season. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

said. "It's kind of an interesting dilemma we're in. We know what's around the corner, but we have to figure out what we need to do to prepare this program to be able to make the jump up while at the same time being able to compete at a high level in 2A."

The Hornets navigated last year's merger well enough.

With so many R.A. Hubbard Chiefs joining in, Hatton now has 90 players in its football program, a staggering total

for a 2A team. (A 3A or 4A team, as well.)

"It took a little getting used to with so many people coming in, but it wasn't bad," quarterback/cornerback Parker Huff said. "I don't think it was ever really a problem. I think we merged pretty good."

"I think everybody knows everybody now, so that will be good."

There were introductions to be made last year. The players may have known each other a little before the merger — or

at least knew someone's face — but they became teammates.

And then they started winning.

"We grew 100%," Huff said. "Everybody started working more together and things went smoother, on offense and defense."

The Hornets reached seven wins for the first time since 2004. Now, they're thinking nine wins (2002), 10 (1993) or

**HACKLEBURG
PANTHERS**

Coach: Rod Hudson (15th season, 109-54)

Region: 1A, Region 8
2022 record: 6-5 (5-2
1A, Region 8)
Last 5 years: 24-31 (4
playoff berths)Aug. 25
Sept. 1
Sept. 8
Sept. 15
Sept. 22
Sept. 29**2023 schedule**
at Phil Campbell
at Meek
open
Addison
Hubbertville
Red Bay
Oct. 6
Oct. 13
Oct. 20
Oct. 27
Nov. 2at Waterloo
Phillips
Shoals Chr.
Vina
at Cherokee
Phil Campbell
Meek
at Addison
at Red Bay
at Hubbertville
Waterloo**2022 results**
L, 36-8
L, 34-14
L, 26-14
L, 58-24
W, 34-28
W, 46-16
at Phillips
at Shoals Chr.
at Vina
Cherokee
at Coosa Chr.W, 50-34
W, 50-20
W, 44-6
W, 50-8
L, 51-8**Returning starters**
WR Cam Ingram, WR-DB
Jaquan Reeder, QB
Blaise Vickery, RB Davin
Dulaney, DB Gavin Heggy
LB: Ross Hudson, Carson
Swinney, Noah Tubb,
Garrett PenningtonOL: Garrett Pennington,
Daniel Stidham, Gavin
Pennington, Blaine
McDuffa
DL: Trent Hanner, Tristin
Riley, Jacob Russell,
Dominyek Patterson

Clawing & scratching

30 years later, Hudson still going strong with Panthers

By Gregg Dewalt
For the TimesDaily

As he enters his 30th year in coaching, including starting his 15th as head coach at Hackleburg, Rod Hudson said there's too much he would miss to give it up now.

**Hudson**

"I tell my wife it's just being part of a team. I would miss that," Hudson said. "I would miss being in the dressing room and in the field house and on bus rides. I just like being around. I like to see kids

when they succeed. I like to see the reactions, the look on their faces and just to try to be a positive influence in any way I can to help any kid that goes through our program."

Hudson has been around so long that he is now coaching the children of former players. One of those is quarterback Blaise Vickery, whose father played on an undefeated regular-season team when Hudson was an assistant.

Vickery said his father hasn't dished any dirt on Hudson, but noted that, "Coach Hudson was a lot younger when he helped coach my dad, so he probably has changed a little bit."

It's no wonder that Hudson now is coaching his players' sons. Coaching changes come infrequently at Hackleburg



Blaise Vickery, Jaquan Reeder and the Hackleburg Panthers expect big things in 2023. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

— Hudson is only the third head football coach since 1978 when Bill Smith arrived. John Hardin followed Smith and stayed for 19 seasons before turning things over to Hudson. During that time, there have been only 14 losing seasons. Under

Hudson, the Panthers have had only three losing seasons.

Coming off a 6-5 season in which the Panthers lost their first four games to Phil Campbell, Red Bay, Meek and Addison, Hudson is optimistic that a strong 6-1

finish in 2022 and a plethora of returning starters that are now upperclassmen signal good times ahead.

Hackleburg snapped its four-game losing streak last season with a 34-28 win over Hubbertville, a game Vickery said turned the season around.

"That really helped us find our game," he said. "The start of our schedule was so tough, so when we looked at the rest of our schedule we knew we could win out."

Vickery and wide receiver Jaquan Reeder are just two in a long line of standout skill players the Panthers always seem to have. They will again be the focal point of an offense that scored 44 points or more in five games.

When he's not playing NBA 2K, Reeder said he has been preparing for the season by running routes with Vickery throwing to him.

"You build a bond when you throw to your guys," Vickery said. "You know what the other person's going to do and when you get in a certain situation in the middle of the game, you don't have to say anything, you just kind of know what he is going to do."

"We improvise a lot on routes," Reeder said.

With a good nucleus of returning starters, including excellent skill position players, and depth along the offensive and defensive lines, Hackleburg has the potential to have a memorable season.

"I hope so," Reeder said. "We're working for it."

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PHIL CAMPBELL BOBCATS



Region: 3A, Region 8
2022 record: 7-4 (3-3 3A, Region 8)
Last 5 years: 26-27 (3 playoff berths)
Coach: Jacob Hamilton (first season at Phil Campbell; second year overall, 2-8)

2023 schedule

Aug. 25	Hackleburg	Oct. 6	at Lauderdale Co.
Sept. 1	at Lamar Co.	Oct. 13	Mars Hill Bible
Sept. 8	at Elkmont	Oct. 20	at Colbert Heights
Sept. 15	Colbert Co.	Oct. 27	Clements
Sept. 22	open	Nov. 3	Red Bay
Sept. 29	at Carbon Hill		

2022 results

W, 36-8	at Mars Hill Bible L, 56-0
W, 30-24	Colbert Heights W, 36-0
W, 58-20	at Clements W, 44-32
L, 25-22	at Red Bay (20T) W, 30-24
W, 28-0	at Madison Aca. L, 49-28
L, 36-12	

Returning starters

RB-S Noah Raper	RB-DE Gage Baker
C Jackson Clark	FB Braxton Mayfield
RG Johan Vasquez	LB Mason Weeks

Familiar-ish face

Bobcats look to keep winning with new coach

By David Glovach
Sports Writer

Jackson Clark opted to go past 10. Quite a bit, actually.



Hamilton

“Probably 40,” the Phil Campbell center said of his excitement for the upcoming season. “I’ll say 50, instead. That’s my number and the best number on the field.”

Number jokes — or perhaps he was being serious — aside, the Bobcats appear to have some budding confidence heading into the new season.

Phil Campbell is coming off consecutive seven-win seasons, making it the program’s two-year run since 2000-01 when it went 11-2 and 9-2, respectively. The Bobcats are also seeking their fourth straight winning season, something that hasn’t happened in at least 50 years.

“I think we have a lot to look forward to,” running back and defensive back Isac Hill said. “I think we’re going to have fun this season, for sure.”

But Phil Campbell will have to do so with a little bit of a twist after head coach Kevin Barnwell opted to take an



Isac Hill and Jackson Clark look to help Phil Campbell to a fourth straight winning season. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

assistant position at Haleyville at the beginning of July. Barnwell coached the Bobcats for five seasons and finished

with a 26-27 record.

Instead, that responsibility will now go to Jacob Hamilton, a former Phil

Campbell player and assistant, who spent last season leading Tharptown. It was his first head coaching job. The Wildcats went 2-8.

“We’re excited to hit the ground running,” said Hamilton, who after initially being brought on to be Barnwell’s assistant was officially hired to be his successor July 18. “... But the kids already know me. The kids who are juniors and seniors already know me. They were in eighth and ninth grade the last time I was there.

“They already know the kind of standards I set, the kind of workouts I do, how we run things.”

Still, there will likely be a little bit of an adjustment for everyone.

Hamilton has certainly been kept busy the last couple of offseasons between getting hired at Tharptown to getting married to now taking the job at Phil Campbell.

“Luckily, there’s no life-changing events other than the job this time around,” Hamilton said. “We’re a little bit crushed for time on everything, but we’re ready to get started. My wife has been very supportive and happy for me that I got this job.”

How it all shakes out once the season kicks off remains to be seen. But those on the roster don’t see a reason this group should suffer any kind of falloff.

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LAWRENCE COUNTY WILDCATS



Region: 5A, Region 5
2022 record: 6-4 (4-4 4A, Region 5)
Last 5 years: 21-28 (no playoff berths)
Coach: David Marston (21st season, 92-117)

Aug. 18
 Aug. 25
 Sept. 1
 Sept. 8
 Sept. 15
 Sept. 22

2023 schedule
 Summertown at Loretto
 at Lincoln Co.
 Giles Co.
 Columbia at Spring Hill
 Sept. 29
 Oct. 6
 Oct. 13
 Oct. 20
 Oct. 27

at Tullahoma open
 Shelbyville
 Franklin Co.
 at Cheatham Co.

at Summertown Loretto
 at Mont. Central
 at Greenbrier
 Pearl-Cohn

2022 results

W, 50-7
 W, 48-42
 W, 35-0
 L, 22-0
 L, 55-7

Glenciff Marshall Co.
 at Tullahoma at Hillwood
 Creek Wood

W, 44-0
 L, 32-0
 W, 14-10
 W, 49-14
 L, 36-0

Returning starters

QB Andrew Daniel
 WB Isaiah Bentley
 WB Ian Clayton
 FB-ILB Letavion Everly
 SE-DB Jakabri Stevenson
 OT Evan Coultas
 OG Max Taylor

OL Jacob Birdyshaw
 TE-OLB Drayke Osborn
 DE Cade Brown
 DT Tayden Russell
 DB Skyler Mumie
 DB Kaleb Smith-Wiley

Ring the bell

Wildcats looking forward to new class, region

By David Glovach
 Sports Writer

It sits on display 20 miles away, its absence from Lawrence County has become noteworthy.

The cowbell, the winner's trophy, remains at Giles County.

It arrived in 2018 and has yet to find its way back to Lawrenceburg. The cowbell stuck in a kind of limbo.

Perhaps it will this year. After a four-year hiatus,

Lawrence County and Giles County get the chance to rekindle their once-annual rivalry, one that dates to the 1940s. To the victor goes the spoils of the result etched on the bell and the bragging rights that go along with it.

"We went to those games when we were kids," offensive lineman Jacob Birdyshaw said. "But we've never got to play in one."

It's one of the notable differences awaiting the Wildcats this season. A return to some more familiar opponents and local rivalries.

"It's a big deal," receiver and corner-back Jakabri Stevenson said. "It's a big deal for Lawrenceburg."

It won't be the only difference.

Lawrence County also finds itself in a new region after being bumped up to Class 5A, something the Wildcats are hoping lends itself to some better results and some momentum.

Lawrence County went 6-4 in 2022, including 4-4 in region play. It was the program's first winning record since 2014 when it finished 8-3.

But the Wildcats often found themselves in lopsided games — both for good and bad. Only two were determined by single digits — a 48-42 win over Loretto in Week 2 and a 14-10 win over Tullahoma in Week 9. The rest were each decided by



Jakabri Stevenson and Jacob Birdyshaw are hoping to help Lawrence County end its playoff drought. (DAVID GLOVACH/TIMESDAILY)

at least three touchdowns.

In the end, Lawrence County missed the playoffs, a drought that has persisted since 2015.

"I think it's a more competitive region than what we've been in," coach David Marston said. "The last two years, our region has produced a state champion and a state runner-up."

The change of scenery could do the Wildcats some good. It doesn't hurt either that Lawrence County is returning 19 of 22 starters, something that has the team confident and eager to see what it can do.

"We're going to go out there and play our hearts out, and give it everything we've got," Stevenson said. "I feel like people expect us to do a little bit this season, with the talent we've got and the seniors we've got."

"Honestly, as a group, I feel like we're all pretty confident and we all have the same mindset. We want to win and that's going to play a big role, us being connected and being on the same page."

No arguments there.

"I'm confident in all the guys," Birdyshaw said. "I'm confident that we're

going to do what we're supposed to do. We're focusing on the positives and what we can do."

So, what exactly can this group accomplish?

"We don't want to just make the playoffs," Marston said. "We want to host a playoff game, so that's our expectations."

Getting a trophy along the way would be nice, too.

David Glovach can be reached at david.glovach@timesdaily.com or on Twitter @DavidGlovach

WAYNE COUNTY WILDCATS



Coach: Derek Willis (first year)

Region: 1A, Region 5
2022 record: 5-6 (2-4 1A, Region 5)
Last 5 years: 20-33 (3 playoff berths)

2023 schedule

Aug. 18	Mount Pleasant	Sept. 29	at Huntland
Aug. 25	at Summertown	Oct. 6	at Cornersville
Sept. 1	at Richland	Oct. 13	open
Sept. 8	Moore Co.	Oct. 20	Collinwood
Sept. 15	at McEwen	Oct. 27	at Huntland
Sept. 22	Eagleville		Moore Co.

2022 results

W, 30-13	at Eagleville	L, 14-12	OL-DL Aaron Martin
W, 14-7	at Cornersville	W, 28-12	RB-LB Drew Bevis
L, 56-12	at M. Tenn. Chr.	L, 30-12	TE-DL Talan Keeton
W, 33-23	Collinwood	L, 35-8	OL-DL Jaxon Pope
W, 40-14	at McKenzie	L, 63-0	RB-LB Ryder Butler
L, 34-25			WR-DB Saylor Skelton
			OL-DL Baker Bryant

Returning starters

OL-DL Aaron Martin	OL-DL Ben Thompson
RB-LB Drew Bevis	RB-LB Jakob Nienast
TE-DL Talan Keeton	RB-LB Cayson Castleman
OL-DL Jaxon Pope	TE-LB David Grant Dixon
RB-LB Ryder Butler	DL Brayden Littleton
WR-DB Saylor Skelton	TE-LB Dane Bryant
OL-DL Baker Bryant	

Thinking big

Willis wants to continue Wayne County's tradition

By Shane Herrmann
 For the TimesDaily

Wayne County will start the season with a head coach not named Rick Rice or Cary Crews for the first time in 30 years.



Willis

The Wildcats, however, didn't have to look far to find someone familiar with the program. After coaching the junior high team for 11 years and serving as a varsity assistant the last

three seasons, Derek Willis takes over a team he has literally watched grow before his eyes.

"This group of seniors that I have now, they were the last group I had in junior high," Willis said. "It's a neat experience, having them from when they were little and watch them come up through the varsity ranks. I watched them grow and mature and develop into men."

Willis, who will call plays when the season begins, inherits a team that returns six starters on offense and seven on defense after posting a 5-6 record that included a trip to the state playoffs.

"I'm excited to continue the winning tradition," he said. "There have been a lot of great coaches before me that have built a great program. I just want to keep that tradition going."

A big portion of the Wildcats' returning players can be found in the trenches. With three starters back on the offensive line and the entire defensive line back, Wayne County will be looking to control the line of scrimmage on both sides.

One of those returnees is senior Aaron Martin, who plays defensive tackle and offensive guard.

"It's been an easy transition with coach Willis," Martin said. "We already



Ryder Butler, Aaron Martin and Jakob Nienast say it was an easy transition to new coach Derek Willis. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

have the sense of familiarity with him. We have been strong up front and can do a good job against the run. We also want to be able to put pressure on other teams when they try to throw on us."

Willis said Martin is a returning defensive starter who will also step in to fill one of the vacant spots on the offensive line.

"I wish every kid we have had a motor like him," Willis said. "He never stops. That's what you want in a lineman."

While Wayne County will be more of a run-first team, the Wildcats do have a quarterback who can get the job done.

Drew Bevis is expected to start under center.

"Drew can throw it good enough to keep teams honest but we do not want to throw it 50 times a game," Willis said. "He has always had a good work ethic and the team has always looked to him to be a leader."

Two of the players expected to get many of the rushing attempts this year are seniors Jakob Nienast and Ryder Butler. Both have taken over roles as leaders both on and off the field.

"Ryder Butler is one of the guys who comes running out of the locker room on

to the practice field," Willis said. "He's always one of the first one's out there and last one to leave. You also couldn't ask for a kid with a better attitude than Jake. He is always going to put in the work. Both of those guys have really stepped up for us."

Nienast agreed that Willis was the best choice for the head coaching job.

"Nothing has really changed," he said. "We have played for coach (Willis) for a long time. I would like to restore the winning ways that the school has had in the past. I want everyone to know that the Wildcats are back."

COLLINWOOD TROJANS



Region: 1A, Region 5
2022 record: 2-8 (1-5 1A, Region 5)
Last 5 years: 22-30 (3 play-off berths)

Coach: Boyce Dixon (second season of current stint, 2-8; seventh overall, 37-28)

Aug. 18
 Aug. 25
 Sept. 1
 Sept. 8
 Sept. 15

2023 schedule
 Loretto open
 at Cornersville
 Eagleville
 at Hollow Rock-Bruceton
 Sept. 22
 Sept. 29
 Oct. 6
 Oct. 13
 Oct. 20
 Oct. 26

Clarksville Aca.
 at Richland Moore Co.
 at Potts Camp (Miss.)
 at Wayne Co. Huntland

at Loretto
 at Grace Chr. Summertown
 Cornersville
 Fayetteville

2022 results
 L, 49-25
 L, 21-14
 L, 3-0
 L, 20-14
 L, 59-7
 at Huntland
 Richland Moore Co.
 at Eagleville
 at Wayne Co.

W, 22-20
 W, 33-28
 L, 42-0
 L, 35-6
 L, 35-8

QB-LB Fletcher Thompson
 RB-LB Blake Whitten
 FB-DE Tyler Jackson
 OL-DL Robby Faulds
 OL-DL Drey Howe

Returning starters
 OL-DL Timmie Chapman
 WR-DB Alex Daniel
 WR-DB Nick Sanderson
 TE Thayer Brewer

Less stress



Collinwood's Fletcher Thompson, Tyler Jackson, Blake Whitten, Thayer Brewer and Robby Faulds hope the Trojans can be more consistent. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

Continuity for Trojans building confidence

By David Glovach
 Sports Writer

A look of mild shock started to creep across Robby Faulds' face.



Dixon

The ringtone emanating from his pocket had caught him a little off guard.

"Who has a ringtone on?" said Collinwood quarterback Fletcher Thompson, Faulds' teammate. "That's crazy."

The scene drew a few more snickers

from some other teammates, while someone else wondered out loud if the caller had been Boyce Dixon.

"It was coach Dixon," Faulds said, looking at his phone and finally managing to silence the phone. "You gotta be kidding me."

Dixon, it turns out, was off to the side chuckling to himself.

It was an entertaining scene, but also

one that showcased a more-relaxed Trojans group willing to go with the flow of things. Things around the program are a little bit calmer and a little lighter. There's finally some continuity Collinwood — and the players — can rely on.

For the first time in their high school careers, the upperclassmen didn't have

SEE TROJANS, G53

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RED BAY TIGERS



Coach: Heath Childers (third season at Red Bay, 8-12; 10th year overall, 34-56)

Region: 2A, Region 8
2022 record: 6-5 (3-3 2A, Region 8)
Last 5 years: 38-18 (4 playoff berths)

2023 schedule

Aug. 25	at Hamilton	Oct. 6	Tharptown
Sept. 1	open	Oct. 13	Falkville
Sept. 8	at Lexington	Oct. 20	at Tanner
Sept. 15	Sheffield	Oct. 27	Hatton
Sept. 22	Belmont (Miss.)	Nov. 3	at Phil Campbell
Sept. 29	at Hackleburg		

2022 results

W, 22-20	at Falkville	L, 28-6	QB Gage Edgmon
L, 40-14	Tanner	W, 54-14	C-LB Jack West
W, 50-39	at Hatton	L, 38-22	RB-LB Will West
W, 58-24	Phil Campbell (2021)	L, 30-24	RT Rhett Lockhart
W, 16-0	at Fyffe	L, 55-8	TE-LB Kyler Watson
W, 54-14			LG Kaiden Blansett
			LT Reed Hamilton
			WB-S Brady Bolton

Returning starters

WR-DB Cody Carnes
FB Keeton Lanphear
WR-CB Holden Inmon
DL Andrew Massey
DE Wes Mauldin
DE Jaden Smith
LB Eli Ferris
S Aiden Pruitt

Stepping out

After big jump, Red Bay looks to continue surge

By Shane Herrmann

For the TimesDaily

Red Bay head coach Heath Childers can list a lot of positives heading into the season that he did not have the previous year.



Childers

One thing, however, that he will not have will be the element of surprise. A winning record, complete with a trip to the playoffs in 2022 may have surprised a lot of people last season.

The Tigers were coming off a 2-8 season, their lowest win total since 1996. A season-opening win over Hamilton jumpstarted a 6-4 campaign that included a first-round matchup against eventual Class 2A state champion Fyffe.

“Outside of the locker room and coaches’ offices, there was not a lot of expectations last year,” said Childers, who enters his third season at Red Bay. “A lot of people were expecting us to win two or three games. We won six and very easily could have won eight.”

Childers’ third season will feature nine returning starters on each side of the ball. Don’t expect, however, Red Bay to come out and do the exact same things on the field as last year.

“Schemes are constantly evolving,” Childers said. “You have to change with your personnel. If you do something well all season long, other teams are going to figure out ways to stop you during the offseason so you have to be able change things up and stay ahead of the curve.”

A return to winning ways has resulted in more excitement surrounding the program. More kids have tried out for football, which is always good. Childers, however, said the experience



Jack West, Kyler Watson and Cody Carnes are looking for Red Bay to improve again this season. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

of the returning players will play a larger factor this year.

“You don’t have to have 80 kids if you have the 20 right kids,” he said. “Our numbers have increased this year, but we still have a lot of work to do. We can be a real good football team but we are not there yet.”

Cody Carnes agrees. The senior slot-back/cornerback has watched the team take giant steps from his sophomore season.

“When coach Childers first got here,

we really didn’t know what to expect,” Carnes said. “That first year we went 2-8 but that really wasn’t a reflection of how hard we worked. We busted out tails every day and it was just a learning curve that started to pay off a little the next season. This year we are hoping to take it a step further.”

Another key returner for the Tigers is Kyler Watson. The senior is overcoming an injury he suffered in Week 7 last year. He finished the season and had surgery. He didn’t compete in

the spring and has been limited this summer.

“Kyler has stepped into a leadership role for us,” Childers said. “He was an all-area selection for us as an offensive lineman, but he is actually a tight end. He is dominant at the point of attack in blocking and does a great job at inside linebacker for us on defense.”

Watson said motivation has not been a problem for the Tigers.



Red Bay's Holden Inmon finished with six interceptions last year. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

RED BAY

From Page G50

"We were not happy with the 2-8 record from the previous year, so we really put in the work over the off-season," he said. "We were proud of the 6-4 record but there was room to improve. We worked even harder this summer, so I feel pretty good about the season."

On defense, Watson plays middle linebacker. In the secondary, Carnes will be joined by all-area pick Holden Inmon, who intercepted six passes last year.

"Holden has had 14 interceptions over the past two years," Childers said. "He has good ball skills and has a knack for being in the right place at the right time."

Jack West, another senior who plays center and outside linebacker, said it's good to have more players on the roster, but that will not be a substitute for work.

"It's exciting to be a senior this year with higher expectations," West said. "As leaders, we try to set examples in practice, coming out in good spirits ready to get things done. It helps set the tone. You don't just show up and play, you have to come to work hard. Numbers don't mean anything if you don't have a team that is willing to work for it."

Carnes added, "The coaches lean on us as seniors a little more now to set the right examples. The more we



Quarterback Gage Edgmon is one of Red Bay's many returning starters this year. [KEVIN TAYLOR/TIMESDAILY]

do stuff like that, the less they have to do. I think we have built that trust with them."

Childers said he is proud of the approach this team is taking.

"It was good for us to get to see a team like Fyffe up close," he said. "They are the standard and we can see where we need to be. We talk a lot about being a good teammate. If you can't be a good teammate then you are of no use to the team."

RED BAY TIGERS

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VINA RED DEVILS



Coach: Cody Renfrow (first year)

Region: 1A, Region 8
2022 record: 0-9 (0-7
1A, Region 8)
Last 5 years: 4-46 (1
playoff berth)

Aug. 25
Sept. 1
Sept. 8
Sept. 15
Sept. 22
Sept. 29

2023 schedule

open Oct. 6
Addison Oct. 12
open Oct. 20
at Shoals Chr. Oct. 27
Woodville Nov. 3
at Curry

2022 results

Phillips at Addison
Cherokee at Shoals Chr.
at Meek at Woodville
at Hackleburg Curry
at Waterloo at Phillips
L, 69-0 at Cherokee
L, 44-16 Meek
L, 58-26 Hackleburg
L, 66-22 Waterloo
L, 46-0

Returning starters

L, 34-8 RB-LB Trevor Baker
L, 54-0 QB-DB Christian Purser
L, 44-6 WR-S Cai Lawler
L, 46-8 OL-DL Lane Easterling
OL-LB Bryson Finch
OL-DE Alex Hargett
WR-CB Manny Alariste
WR-CB Matthew Patterson
OL-DL Trey Ashley
C-DL Andrew Shotts
OL-DL Zach Sparks

With new coach, Vina seeks turnaround year

By Shane Herrmann

For the TimesDaily

Despite low numbers and a midsummer coaching change, excitement and hope are two prevailing factors surrounding the Vina football program.



Renfrow

Following consecutive winless campaigns in 2021 and 2022, the Red Devils got a late start to the summer workout program after Cody Renfrow was named head coach in mid-July.

Renfrow, who has also served as head baseball coach at the school since the 2021-22 season, also played multiple sports at Vina and is very aware of the

challenges the small Franklin County school faces.

"As one of the smaller teams in the state, numbers can be very challenging," he said. "We will be low in numbers, but I believe we have a good group of young men that truly enjoy the game. We are taking pride in the process of doing what it takes to be successful. As a team, we are embracing the challenge of turning our football program around."

Renfrow said he expects between 16-22 kids on the roster when the season starts. That's after the current players do a little recruiting at the school once classes begin. "We expect more kids to come out once school starts," he said. "Some are still on the

fence."

A few things the Red Devils do not have to worry about are leadership and experience. Vina only lost two seniors from last season and will take the field this year with several players who have played varsity since they were in eighth grade.

"We should return the majority of our starters on both sides of the ball," Renfrow said. "We are breaking in a new quarterback in Christian Purser. He is a rising junior. Although he is inexperienced at the position, he has all the intangibles a coach looks for in a quarterback."

Purser, who has also played at Vina his whole life, said he is just looking for positive attitudes.

"I'd like to be able to win some games and get hope back to this program," said Purser, who will also see action at linebacker and in the secondary on defense. "It's never fun when there is a lot of negativity going into a season. People should want to play football and want to come out and watch us play."

Since Renfrow was hired just a few weeks ago, Vina had a late jump on pre-season practice. The coach said being familiar with the program has been an advantage.

"I was already on staff for a total of six years," he said. "The relationships I have built have made it a smooth transition. We have been improving each day."

FLAME

From Page G33

didn't know when we were their age," he said. "Things like running the right routes, ways to help memorize plays and how to be productive in the weight room."

Senior leadership, as well as talent, is something head coach Brett Vick noticed when he took over the program in July.

"I was very surprised with the talent level, especially the seniors on the roster," said Vick, who spent the last nine years at Mars Hill. "Overall, we have eight or nine guys who have really stepped into a leadership role. They



Vick

have all done a really good job of buying in to what we are trying to do. We have been challenging them pretty hard and they have responded. They want to come to work."

Vick said he has seen first-hand what it takes to win at the Class 1A level, and he believes Shoals Christian has the roster to take the next step.

"We are going to stick with the blueprint that I know, and that is the Wing-T," he said. "I learned early on that the Wing-T is a prolific and balanced offense. I feel great about running it with the players we have on this team. We a lot of versatile guys

who can do different things for us on the football field."

Defensively, Vick also believes the Flame has enough athletes to get stops.

"What I like to do fits our personnel very well," Vick said. "I'm excited to see what it looks like on Friday nights."

Senior Sam Storie also letters on the Shoals Christian boys basketball team. He has already witnessed one turnaround season and is ready for another.

"We were recently pretty bad in basketball and were able to turn that around and have a great season," the wide receiver and defensive back said. "That gave us a lot of hope for us to be

able to do the same in football. A few years ago we didn't win a game, then last year we were in the Elite 8."

Seniors Tyler Soria and Samuel Camp are recent additions to the program. Last year was the first season for Soria, who transferred from Brooks. Camp starting playing football in the 10th grade.

"To be around my friends more is really nice," Soria said. "It's a bigger group of seniors and a bigger group of friends so it's a lot easier to stay focused and keep the morale up and talk about what we know we are capable of doing. We all want to take the next step and be able to beat some of the team we haven't been able to compete with in several years."

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COUGARS

From Page G28

was a popular way to describe it — and practices throughout the spring and summer.

There's only one simple rule that has to be followed. Or at least something that's best be avoided.

"He hates when someone taps the top of their helmet," Gallagher said.

And yet, this current group of Cougars appears to be fairly confident with the season opener against Brilliant quickly approaching.

Any particular reason?

"We didn't lose too many people and a lot of us have already played together," Kavich said.

CHEROKEE

From Page G40

Most of those years have been on varsity so they have taken some licks. They are ready to get out there and show what they can do."

One of those juniors is Daniel Darling. The lineman who starts on offense and defense said the entire team has been working on recruiting new guys within the school as well as developing chemistry with the players already on the roster.

"I started playing varsity when I was in eighth grade," Darling said. "We've really been working on getting faster. We have also been trying to get more guys to come out and play. Our numbers are up this year and that helps us with depth."

Jon Schleifer agreed. The fellow junior who plays quarterback and cornerback said recruiting classmates is just part of being a leader. "It's always a challenge to get more guys to come out," he said. "I would talk to guys every day in class

There's also been a little bit of a reshuffling, so to speak, with the offensive line. Some players moved to other spots and others have moved in.

"Last year, our line struggled," Gallagher said. "We averaged like 160 (pounds). Our line is going to be bigger and better this year. They're stronger."

The hope is Waterloo is stronger across the board. The Cougars will soon find out if that's the case.

A winning record and a playoff appearance — those are the goals they'd like to reach.

"That's definitely what we're expecting," Benson said.

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trying to increase our numbers."

Another junior said the team is starting to set higher goals.

"If feels like a bigger responsibility to be a leader," said Nathan Trent, who plays running back and middle linebacker. "A winning record and a trip to the playoffs is our goal. We need to continue to work hard, get stronger and get our football IQ up. We need to develop good chemistry in the team and get everyone on the same page."

The Indians will have six seniors and 10 juniors on the roster. That group is a mixture of veterans, newcomers to the area and some who have been at Cherokee a long team but are just now coming out for football.

Tae Hicks, a junior who transferred from Enterprise, said he is impressed with the team's family atmosphere.

"I just moved here and it's been a good experience," the cornerback and wide receiver said. "As soon as I got here, I felt welcomed by everyone. I can't wait for the season to start."

on defense. We have to improve."

As good as the Mustangs were offensively in 2022 — they scored more than 40 points five times — quarterback Carter Daniel said they can be even better in 2023.

"We thought we were really good last season but then we would self-scout and we would see that we had a hole and we wouldn't hit it or I would drop back and there would be something there and I would try to make something else happen," he said. "We can be more efficient and that would make us even more explosive on offense."

HORNETS

From Page G44

hopefully even more (never).

"Even though we lost some players, I think this group is hungry," Bowling said. "We've established that making the playoffs is no longer a dream. It should be an expectation. Now, what can we do to get to that next level?"

They'll try to do it this year with a new quarterback after four-year starter Briley Kerby graduated.

Who will replace him? Bowling said in the summer that he was unsure, though Huff and sophomore Tasean Love are the prime candidates.

"They haven't come out and said it yet, but it's been hinted to me," Huff said.

Love, however, will be a major factor in Hatton's offense, no matter where.

BOBCATS

From Page G46

"I'm confident. By the time we get into the season, we'll figure it out and it'll go smoothly for us." Hill said. "We just really need our team to be a unit. We need to be cohesive."

Sounds like that could be a winning

"If he's not the quarterback, he'll be slot/back/DB/move him around," Bowling said. "If he's the guy, he's going to have to be the guy. We'll see how that goes early on and finagle it from there."

On defense, Hatton lost both its inside linebackers, so Brackin is expected to move there from outside. Hatton's lush depth, however, will benefit Brackin.

He won't be used as much on offense.

"It will feel pretty good," Brackin said. "I didn't play much offense last year, anyway, but they want me to focus on defense this year. It will take a little bit of a load off me."

The Hornets want him delivering that load to opposing runners.

"He's started for three years for us defensively and filled in offensively because we didn't have a choice," Bowling said. "Now, with depth, we can have him focus in and really be the alpha on that side of the ball."

formula. It might even lead to a playoff win or two.

And that for Phil Campbell would certainly be nice.

"If we can get over that hump," Clark said, "who knows what can happen."

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TROJANS

From Page G49

to spend the summer figuring out a new head coach or learning a new playbook. Not with Dixon coming back for his second season. By the time the 2022 slate began, he had been the Trojans' third different coach in three years.

"It's just nice knowing what you're doing," tight end Thayer Brewer said of the benefits to having the same coach for a change. "Knowing the plays means a lot. It's stressful having to change everything every year."

Not surprisingly, it tended to show up on the scoreboard.

Collinwood opened last season with a five-game losing streak and proceeded to end on a three-game slide. Three of those early losses were by seven points or less, including a 3-0 defeat courtesy of Summertown. A possible difference between a losing and non-losing record.

"A year can make a big difference," Dixon said. "I'm excited to see the improvements that we've made of just

doing what you're supposed to do. You want to see more positives than negatives when you watch film is what I'm a believer in. I'm not accustomed to going 2-8, so we want to change that. The last time I was here, we went 13-1.

"I've always been a firm believer that if you know what you're doing or where you're going, you can get there in a hurry. If you're confused, you're just going to be dancing out there, not doing anything. That's what we're trying to do is to make things as familiar and easy as possible. The quickest way from Point A to Point B is a straight line."

The question remains if Collinwood will be breaking out some more dance moves this season or if it will get to where it wants to go quickly?

Count the Trojans in for the second choice.

"We're feeling pretty confident," running back Blake Whitten said. "We feel like we're closing the gap."

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MUSTANGS

From Page G43

eye-opening moment for them."

Senior Jack Welch, the team's leading tackler from a year ago who is coming back from a broken femur in November, said it was disheartening that the defense couldn't get off the field at times.

"We'd hold them and then they would end up getting a first down and we ended up playing so many snaps," he said. "We'd score in three or four plays and then we'd have to be right back out there

2023 SHOALS-AREA SCHEDULES

*—region game

Brooks Lions

Aug. 24 Colbert Co.
 Sept. 1 at Mars Hill Bible
 Sept. 8 West Morgan*
 Sept. 15 at W. Limestone*
 Sept. 22 Central*
 Sept. 29 open
 Oct. 6 East Lawrence*
 Oct. 13 at Rogers*
 Oct. 20 at Wilson*
 Oct. 27 at Deshler*
 Nov. 2 Lauderdale Co.

Deshler Tigers

Aug. 25 Madison Aca.
 Sept. 1 at Russellville
 Sept. 8 West Limestone*
 Sept. 15 East Lawrence*
 Sept. 22 Wilson*
 Sept. 29 at Colbert Co.
 Oct. 6 at West Morgan*
 Oct. 13 at Central*
 Oct. 20 at Rogers*
 Oct. 27 Brooks*
 Nov. 3 open

Central Wildcats

Aug. 25 open
 Sept. 1 East Limestone
 Sept. 8 Wilson*
 Sept. 15 at West Morgan*
 Sept. 22 at Brooks*
 Sept. 29 at WestminsterHSV
 Oct. 6 Rogers*
 Oct. 13 Deshler*
 Oct. 20 at W. Limestone*
 Oct. 27 East Lawrence
 Nov. 3 at Ardmore

Florence Falcons

Aug. 25 at Pinson Valley
 Sept. 1 Muscle Shoals
 Sept. 8 at Albertville*
 Sept. 15 at Austin*
 Sept. 22 James Clemens*
 Sept. 29 Minor
 Oct. 6 Bob Jones*
 Oct. 13 at Huntsville*
 Oct. 20 at Grissom*
 Oct. 27 Sparkman*
 Nov. 3 open

Cherokee Indians

Aug. 25 at Brindlee Mtn.
 Sept. 1 Waterloo*
 Sept. 8 at Addison*
 Sept. 15 at Phillips*
 Sept. 22 Shoals Chr.*
 Sept. 29 at Tharptown
 Oct. 6 at Sheffield
 Oct. 12 at Vina*
 Oct. 20 open
 Oct. 27 Meek*
 Nov. 2 Hackleburg*

Hackleburg Panthers

Aug. 25 at Phil Campbell
 Sept. 1 at Meek*
 Sept. 8 open
 Sept. 15 Addison*
 Sept. 22 Hubbertville
 Sept. 29 Red Bay
 Oct. 6 at Waterloo*
 Oct. 13 Phillips*
 Oct. 20 Shoals Chr.*
 Oct. 27 Vina*
 Nov. 2 at Cherokee*

Colbert County Indians

Aug. 24 at Brooks
 Sept. 1 Sheffield
 Sept. 8 open
 Sept. 15 at Phil Campbell*
 Sept. 22 Lauderdale Co.*
 Sept. 29 Deshler
 Oct. 6 Mars Hill Bible*
 Oct. 13 at Colbert Heights*
 Oct. 20 at Clements*
 Oct. 27 Elkmont*
 Nov. 3 at Sulligent

Haleyville Lions

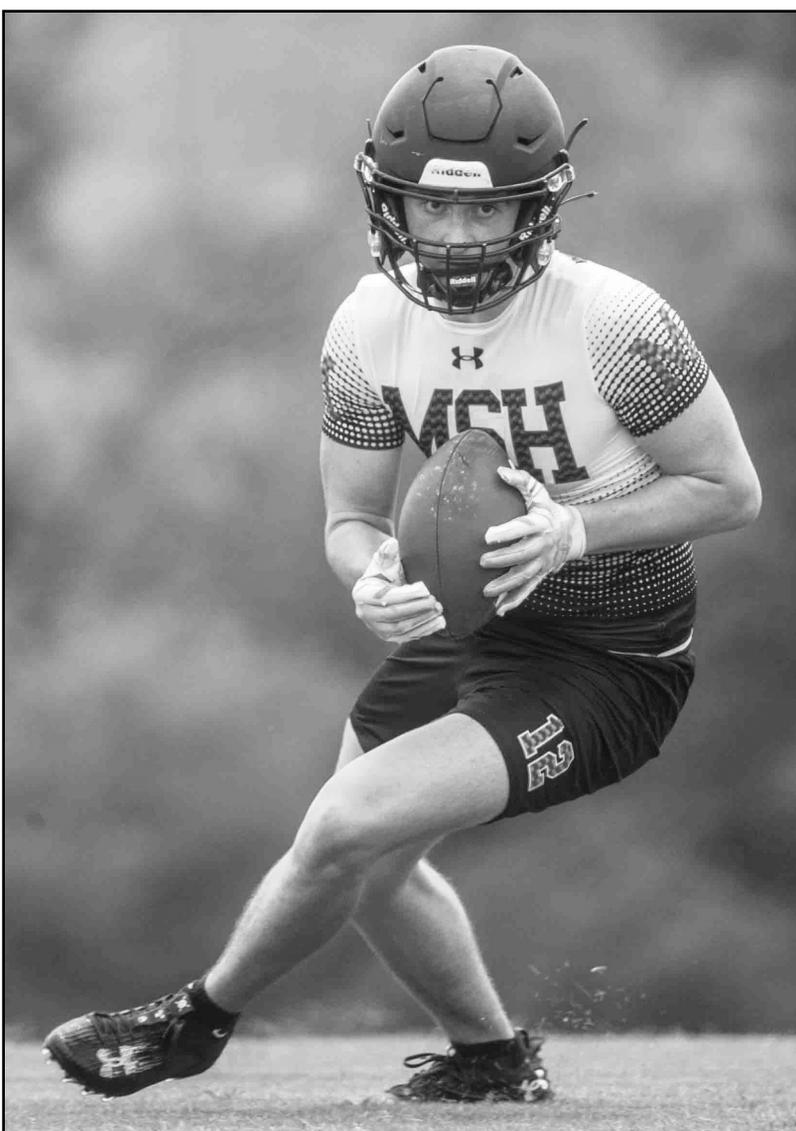
Aug. 25 at Rogers
 Sept. 1 Winfield
 Sept. 8 at Cordova*
 Sept. 15 at Dora*
 Sept. 22 Northside*
 Sept. 29 open
 Oct. 6 at Oak Grove*
 Oct. 13 at Curry*
 Oct. 20 Hamilton*
 Oct. 27 Corner*
 Nov. 3 West Morgan

Colbert Heights Wildcats

Aug. 25 at Lexington
 Sept. 1 Wilson
 Sept. 8 at Mars Hill Bible*
 Sept. 15 Meek
 Sept. 22 Clements*
 Sept. 29 open
 Oct. 6 at Elkmont*
 Oct. 13 Colbert Co.*
 Oct. 20 Phil Campbell*
 Oct. 27 at Lauderdale Co.*
 Nov. 2 at Decatur Heritage

Hamilton Aggies

Aug. 25 Red Bay
 Sept. 1 open
 Sept. 8 at Corner*
 Sept. 15 Oak Grove*
 Sept. 22 at Cordova*
 Sept. 29 Winfield
 Oct. 6 Curry*
 Oct. 13 Dora*
 Oct. 20 at Haleyville*
 Oct. 27 at Northside*
 Nov. 3 at Fayette Co.



Senior Luke Mosley and the Muscle Shoals Trojans begin their season Thursday at home against the Bob Jones Patriots. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

Lauderdale County Tigers

Aug. 24 Tanner
 Aug. 31 at Rogers
 Sept. 8 at Clements*
 Sept. 15 Elkmont*
 Sept. 22 at Colbert Co.*
 Sept. 29 Lexington
 Oct. 6 Phil Campbell*
 Oct. 13 open
 Oct. 20 at Mars Hill Bible*
 Oct. 27 Colbert Heights*
 Nov. 2 at Brooks

Lexington Golden Bears

Aug. 25 Colbert Heights
 Sept. 1 at Pisgah
 Sept. 8 Red Bay*
 Sept. 15 open
 Sept. 22 at Tharptown*
 Sept. 29 at Lauderdale Co.
 Oct. 6 at Falkville*
 Oct. 13 Tanner*
 Oct. 20 at Hatton*
 Oct. 27 at Sheffield*
 Nov. 3 Rogers

Mars Hill Bible Panthers

Aug. 24 at Cullman
 Sept. 1 Brooks
 Sept. 8 Colbert Heights*
 Sept. 15 at Clements*
 Sept. 22 Elkmont*
 Sept. 29 Russellville
 Oct. 6 at Colbert Co.*
 Oct. 13 at Phil Campbell*
 Oct. 20 Lauderdale Co.*
 Oct. 27 at Scottsboro
 Nov. 3 open

Russellville Golden Tigers

Aug. 25 Grissom
 Sept. 1 Deshler
 Sept. 8 at Lawrence Co. (Ala.)*
 Sept. 15 West Point*
 Sept. 22 at E. Limestone*
 Sept. 29 at Mars Hill Bible
 Oct. 6 at Brewer*
 Oct. 13 open
 Oct. 20 Ardmore*
 Oct. 27 Fairview*
 Nov. 3 at Athens

Wayne County Wildcats

Aug. 25 Mount Pleasant
 Aug. 28 at Summertown
 Sept. 1 at Richland*
 Sept. 8 Moore Co.*
 Sept. 15 at McEwen
 Sept. 22 Eagleville*
 Sept. 29 at Huntland*
 Oct. 6 at Cornersville*
 Oct. 13 open
 Oct. 20 Collinwood*
 Oct. 27 Liberty Creek

Collinwood Trojans

Aug. 18 Loretto
 Aug. 25 open
 Sept. 1 at Cornersville*
 Sept. 8 Eagleville*
 Sept. 15 at Bruceton
 Sept. 22 Clarksville Aca.
 Sept. 29 at Richland*
 Oct. 6 Moore Co.*
 Oct. 13 at Potts Camp (Miss.)
 Oct. 20 at Wayne Co.*
 Oct. 26 Huntland*

Hatton Hornets

Aug. 25 at Wilson
 Sept. 1 Columbia
 Sept. 8 open
 Sept. 15 at Tharptown*
 Sept. 22 Falkville*
 Sept. 29 at East Lawrence
 Oct. 6 Tanner*
 Oct. 13 at Sheffield*
 Oct. 20 Lexington*
 Oct. 27 at Red Bay*
 Nov. 2 Geraldine

Lawrence County (Tenn.) Wildcats

Aug. 18 Summertown
 Aug. 25 at Loretto
 Sept. 1 at Lincoln Co.*
 Sept. 8 Giles Co.
 Sept. 15 Columbia*
 Sept. 22 at Spring Hill*
 Sept. 29 at Tullahoma*
 Oct. 6 open
 Oct. 13 Shelbyville*
 Oct. 20 Franklin Co.*
 Oct. 27 at Cheatham Co.

Loretto Mustangs

Aug. 18 at Collinwood
 Aug. 25 Lawrence Co. (Tenn.)
 Sept. 1 Harpeth*
 Sept. 8 at Summertown*
 Sept. 15 Lewis Co.*
 Sept. 22 at Hickman Co.*
 Sept. 29 East Hickman*
 Oct. 6 open
 Oct. 13 Eagleville
 Oct. 20 at Waverly Central*
 Oct. 27 at Mount Pleasant*

Muscle Shoals Trojans

Aug. 24 Bob Jones
 Sept. 1 at Florence
 Sept. 8 Columbia*
 Sept. 15 Athens*
 Sept. 22 open
 Sept. 29 at James Clemens
 Oct. 6 at Hartselle*
 Oct. 13 Decatur*
 Oct. 20 at Cullman*
 Oct. 27 open
 Nov. 3 at Sparkman

Sheffield Bulldogs

Aug. 24 Elkmont
 Sept. 1 at Colbert Co.
 Sept. 8 Falkville*
 Sept. 15 at Red Bay*
 Sept. 22 at Tanner*
 Sept. 29 at Waterloo
 Oct. 6 Cherokee
 Oct. 13 Hatton*
 Oct. 20 at Tharptown*
 Oct. 27 Lexington*
 Nov. 3 open

Wilson Warriors

Aug. 25 Hatton
 Sept. 1 at Colbert Heights
 Sept. 8 at Central*
 Sept. 15 Rogers*
 Sept. 22 at Deshler*
 Sept. 29 open
 Oct. 6 West Limestone*
 Oct. 13 East Lawrence*
 Oct. 20 Brooks*
 Oct. 27 at West Morgan*
 Nov. 3 at Lawrence Co. (Ala.)

Phil Campbell Bobcats

Aug. 25 Hackleburg
 Sept. 1 at Lamar Co.
 Sept. 8 at Elkmont*
 Sept. 15 Colbert Co.*
 Sept. 22 open
 Sept. 29 at Carbon Hill
 Oct. 6 at Lauderdale Co.*
 Oct. 13 Mars Hill Bible*
 Oct. 20 at Colbert Heights*
 Oct. 27 Clements*
 Nov. 3 Red Bay

Shoals Christian Flame

Aug. 25 Tharptown
 Sept. 1 open
 Sept. 8 at Phillips*
 Sept. 15 Vina*
 Sept. 22 at Cherokee*
 Sept. 29 at Cold Springs
 Oct. 6 Danville
 Oct. 13 Meek*
 Oct. 20 at Hackleburg*
 Oct. 27 Waterloo*
 Nov. 3 at Addison*

Phillips Bears

Aug. 25 open
 Sept. 1 at Tharptown
 Sept. 8 Shoals Chr.*
 Sept. 15 Cherokee*
 Sept. 22 at Meek*
 Sept. 29 Brilliant
 Oct. 6 at Vina*
 Oct. 13 at Hackleburg*
 Oct. 20 at Waterloo*
 Oct. 27 Addison*
 Nov. 3 open

Tharptown Wildcats

Aug. 25 at Shoals Chr.
 Sept. 1 Phillips
 Sept. 8 at Tanner*
 Sept. 15 Hatton*
 Sept. 22 Lexington*
 Sept. 29 Cherokee
 Oct. 6 at Red Bay*
 Oct. 13 open
 Oct. 20 Sheffield*
 Oct. 27 Falkville*
 Nov. 3 at Whitesburg Chr.

Red Bay Tigers

Aug. 25 at Hamilton
 Sept. 1 open
 Sept. 8 at Lexington*
 Sept. 15 Sheffield*
 Sept. 22 Belmont (Miss.)
 Sept. 29 at Hackleburg
 Oct. 6 Tharptown*
 Oct. 13 Falkville*
 Oct. 20 at Tanner*
 Oct. 27 Hatton*
 Nov. 3 at Phil Campbell

Vina Red Devils

Aug. 25 open
 Sept. 1 Addison*
 Sept. 8 open
 Sept. 15 at Shoals Chr.*
 Sept. 22 Woodville
 Sept. 29 at Curry
 Oct. 6 Phillips*
 Oct. 12 Cherokee*
 Oct. 20 at Meek*
 Oct. 27 at Hackleburg*
 Nov. 3 at Waterloo*

Rogers Pirates

Aug. 25 Haleyville
 Aug. 31 Lauderdale Co.
 Sept. 8 at East Lawrence*
 Sept. 15 at Wilson*
 Sept. 22 West Morgan*
 Sept. 29 open
 Oct. 6 at Central*
 Oct. 13 Brooks*
 Oct. 20 Deshler*
 Oct. 27 at W. Limestone*
 Nov. 3 at Lexington

Waterloo Cougars

Aug. 25 at Brilliant
 Sept. 1 at Cherokee*
 Sept. 8 at Meek*
 Sept. 15 open
 Sept. 22 Addison*
 Sept. 29 Sheffield
 Oct. 6 Hackleburg*
 Oct. 13 open
 Oct. 20 Phillips*
 Oct. 27 at Shoals Chr.*
 Nov. 3 Vina*

TIME

From Page G3

Can Russellville rise again?

Russellville may have won a third straight region title last year, but the Golden Tigers finished with five losses.

Egads.

That was just the third time in 20 years that Russellville larded up the loss column so well.

Losing to Grissom in last year's season opener was an ominous sign. (Grissom finished 3-8, also beating one-win Albertville and three-win Buckhorn.)

Maybe the Golden Tigers can avoid such a pitfall this time.

Can Deshler take another jump?

Deshler, at the end of last year's regular season, was one of five teams in the state to show a seven-win improvement over 2021.

The Tigers were 3-7 in 2021 and entered last year's playoffs at 10-0.

But Deshler faltered in the playoff quarterfinals — Oneonta's Fluff Bothwell strolled through the Tigers for 322 yards rushing and four touchdowns.

If those numbers don't still sting, the 62-20 final score will.

Which new coach will have the most success?

There are nine new coaches among the area's 30 teams this year.

Just two of those schools finished last year with winning records.

Both Lexington and Phil Campbell made the playoffs with Lexington winning its first region championship since 2009.

Defense, anyone?

A few teams, based on last year's scores, started track and field season a little early.

Maybe Loretto and Brooks and Central and (fill in the blank) will improve at stopping foes.

Loretto gave up a 33.3-point average last year, a number boosted by one shut-out. Just one other time did the Mustangs surrender less than 25.

Brooks had a 33-point average against, helped by a season-ending 28-7 win over Lauderdale County. The Lions gave up less than 21 points two other times — to teams that finished a combined 1-19.

Those same two teams marked Central's top scoring defense nights. Otherwise, the Wildcats gave up at least 28 every game. Foes averaged 36.2 points.

Give a chef's kiss to the game where Central gave up 69. And won. In regulation.



Damian Thompson may grab some attention at Rogers this year, just like he did the last two seasons at Mars Hill. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]



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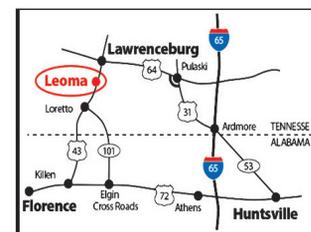
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