

2024 HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL

Saturday, August 17, 2024

INSIDE:
**Teams optimistic for
season with hopes of
reaching higher goals**
**Team-by-team previews,
season schedules**





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FLORENCE FALCONS



Coach: Kenny Morson (third season at Florence, 14-8; sixth year overall, 48-12)

Region: 7A, Region 4
2023 record: 6-5 (5-2 7A, Region 4)
Last 5 years: 31-24 (4 playoff berths)

2024 schedule

Aug. 23 at Hillcrest-Tuscaloosa	Oct. 4
Aug. 30 at Muscle Shoals	Oct. 11
Sept. 6 Albertville	Oct. 18
Sept. 13 Austin	Oct. 25
Sept. 20 at Bob Jones	Nov. 1
Sept. 27 open	

James Clemens at Pinson Valley	L, 18-3
at Grissom	L, 9-0
Huntsville at Muscle Shoals	W, 28-6
at Albertville	W, 20-7
at Austin	L, 14-7
at Sparkman	W, 27-14
Oxford	
Minor	

2023 results

Bob Jones	L, 29-25
at Huntsville (2OT)	W, 23-20
at Grissom	W, 31-7
Sparkman	W, 36-17
at Thompson	L, 42-0

Returning starters

WR Jamarion Reeder	LB H.T. Blanke
HB Cooper Thomaston	LB Zo Martin
OL Kei'andre Reeder	DL Tayshawn Jones
S Janaris Young	S Walt Barrett
CB Jayshod Pearson	LB Logan White
CB Zy Boddie	DL Kamari Wise
DL Amadriq Tensley	

Making gains

Florence aims to 'finish the job'

By David Glovach
Sports Writer



Morson

Through one lens, Kenny Morson has seen the progress. Back-to-back winning seasons for Florence and two playoff appearances to go with them. A shot a third straight winning season for the first time since the program had four straight from 2011-14.

Through another, the coach sees there's still a few hurdles to clear. "We expect our guys to win a region championship," Morson said. "We expect our guys to win our rivalry game across the river (against Muscle Shoals). We expect our guys to win in the play-offs. Those are the standard and have been our standard from the beginning, but there's more of a sense of urgency. "It's time to finish the job." It's something that eluded the Falcons at times last season.

Florence went 1-3 in games decided by nine points or less with two of the losses against region opponents. The third loss was 9-0 to Muscle Shoals.



SEE FLORENCE, G18 Cade Davis, Tory Jones and Chandler Dixon believe Florence will be much better in close games than the Falcons were a year ago. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

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MUSCLE SHOALS TROJANS



Coach: Scott Basden (17th season at Muscle Shoals, 149-46; 25th year overall, 217-75)

Region: 6A, Region 7
2023 record: 11-1 (5-0 6A, Region 7)
Last 5 years: 49-11 (5 playoff berths)

2024 schedule

Aug. 22	at Gadsden City	Oct. 4
Aug. 30	Florence	Oct. 11
Sept. 6	Columbia	Oct. 18
Sept. 13	at Decatur	Oct. 25
Sept. 20	Cullman	Nov. 1
Sept. 27	open	

2023 results

Athens at Jasper	Bob Jones at Florence	W, 48-14	Decatur at Cullman	W, 56-3
open	Columbia	W, 9-0	at Sparkman	W, 34-14
Hartselle at Austin	Athens	W, 42-0	Pinson Valley	W, 48-7
	at James Clemens	W, 66-28	Fort Payne	W, 42-7
	at Hartselle (2OT)	W, 42-28	Clay-Chalkville	W, 41-10
		W, 55-49		L, 44-27

Returning starters

RB Jaquess Green	LB Patrick "Bo" Johnson
RB Natarruean Hampton	LB Carter Berryhill
WR Ezra Fowler	DE KaMhariyan Johnson
OL Eric Thirkill	DE Devin Smith
OL Dakota Muse	DL Sebastian Narmore
TE Anderson Flippo	CB Christian Pritchard

Next step?

Trojans keep plugging, look for playoff break

By A. Stacy Long
Sports Writer



Basden

Muscle Shoals' long string of success unfortunately includes one final common element.

The Trojans are still waiting to push things to another level.

They keep ending their seasons with a loss.

Muscle Shoals has enjoyed 15 straight winning seasons — the school had 14 total before that (and 23 playoff wins) — after just two in the school's first 47 years.

But the Trojans have never finished with a playoff win, which would mean a state championship.

"I'm pretty confident in what we can do this year," offensive lineman Eric Thirkill said. "We just have to work hard, like we do every year, and see what happens."

Isn't it about time for such a finale?

Can't the Trojans trade those mournful endings, at least just once, for some smiles and jubilation?

"I'm all down for it," linebacker Carter Berryhill said.

Muscle Shoals has flirted with such the last two years, losing in the quarterfinals last year and in the semifinals in 2022.

The Trojans hadn't gone so far in consecutive seasons since hitting the quarters three straight from 2011-13. The last year of that was Muscle Shoals' high-water mark — a championship loss to Spanish Fort.

"At the end of the day, once you make a run in the playoffs, everyone has players," tight end/quarterback Anderson Flippo said. "It comes down to who can execute the game plan the best.

"Some people say it takes luck to win championships. I think it's whoever can



Eric Thirkill, Anderson Flippo, Carter Berryhill and the Muscle Shoals Trojans are hoping this year will include even more postseason success. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

execute the best."

Can this year's team be the one that finally hits that end-of-season burst? Can this year's Trojans finally solidify football's spot in school hierarchy?

"I think we're a football school," Flippo said.

Muscle Shoals' state championships: four in boys tennis, girls golf and volleyball, and three in girls tennis and boys

golf. Football, gulp.

"You always talk about a state championship, but there are only going to be seven (teams) that win it," coach Scott Basden said. "You sell yourself short if you think it's a failure if you don't win it.

"We've been close, but I want us to be the best version of ourselves that we can be. If we can, I think they have an opportunity to have a great season."

If this is the year, it starts with 12 returning starters, including two high-profile running backs. But there's a new quarterback and a major departure at receiver.

Jaquess Green and Natarruean Hampton combined for over 2,300 yards and 34 touchdowns last year.



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FLORENCE FALCONS

2024 Football Schedule

Date	Opponent
Aug. 23	@ Hillcrest-Tuscaloosa
Aug. 30	@ Muscle Shoals
Sept. 6	Albertville
Sept. 13	Austin
Sept. 20	@ Bob Jones
Sept. 27	OPEN
Oct. 4	James Clemens
Oct. 11	@ Grissom
Oct. 18	Huntsville
Oct. 25	@ Sparkman
Nov. 1	Oxford

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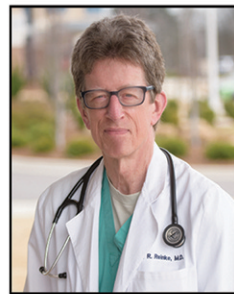
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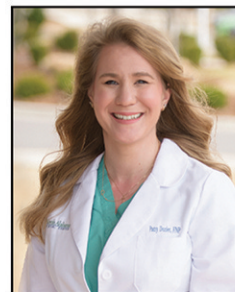
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Oluwole Adegala, MD
EP
Cardiology



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Amanda McCann, NP



Allison Haddock, NP

MUSCLE SHOALS

From Page G4

“I hope they both get about 3,000 yards apiece,” Basden said.

But the Trojans have to replace quarterback Cole Woods and receiver Jamir Goodloe. Kade Clemmons is expected to take the snaps, while Green will add receiver to his duties, and “hopefully that will give the defense some trouble,” Flippo said.

Hampton has now been in the program for a full year after transferring last summer from Colbert County.

“It’s really helped him from the standpoint of he has changed his body physically. He’s gotten faster, he’s gotten stronger,” Basden said. “I really think he’s had a great offseason, and he has a chance to be really special.”

Maybe, the Trojans hope, it all will mean a “really special” year.

“It definitely motivates the guys because we’ve been so close the last two years,” Flippo said. “Hopefully, we can get it done this year. I think we have a good group of guys, I think we all bond pretty good together.

“That will help us make a deep run in the playoffs.”



Jaquess Green and the Muscle Shoals Trojans are looking for another big year.

[PHOTOS BY DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]



Carter Berryhill and the Muscle Shoals defense allowed an average of 17 points per game last year and recorded two shutouts.

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MUSCLE SHOALS TROJANS

2024 Football Schedule

Date	Opponent
Aug. 22	@ Gadsden City (Thurs.)
Aug. 30	Florence
Sept. 6	Columbia
Sept. 13	@ Decatur
Sept. 20	Cullman
Sept. 27	OPEN
Oct. 4	Athens
Oct. 11	@ Jasper
Oct. 18	OPEN
Oct. 25	Hartselle
Nov. 1	@ Austin

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DESHLER TIGERS



Region: 4A, Region 7
2023 record: 8-4 (6-1 4A, Region 7)
Last 5 years: 38-21 (4 playoff berths)

Coach: Patrick Malone (third season at Deshler, 20-5; fifth year overall, 24-22)

2024 schedule

Aug. 23 at Russellville	Oct. 4
Aug. 30 at Hatton	Oct. 11
Sept. 6 at Danville	Oct. 18
Sept. 13 Wilson	Oct. 25
Sept. 20 open	Nov. 1
Sept. 27 Colbert Co.	

Central-Florence at Brooks	Madison Aca. at Russellville	L, 42-6
West Limestone at East Lawrence	West Limestone	L, 35-13
West Morgan	East Lawrence	W, 55-14
	Wilson	W, 69-18
	at Colbert Co.	W, 70-8
		W, 33-26

2023 results

at West Morgan	L, 56-35
at Central-Florence	W, 57-47
at Rogers	W, 28-19
Brooks	W, 56-28
Fultondale	W, 43-27
at Westminster-HSV	L, 39-35

Returning starters

QB Price Thornton	OL-DL Dylan Morgan
WB-DB Garrett Reid	DB Jovi Jackson
RB Q Harden	DB Earnest Smith
SE-DB Camden Fuller	DB Warner Johnson
SE Brady McKinney	DB Linkin Brown
TE-LB Ayden Noyola	LB Dayton Sanford
OL Jett Kerr	DL Phoenix Carpenter
OL Josh Smith	DL Calvin Hankins

Some quality time

Deshler used summer trip to grow closer

By David Glovach
Sports Writer



Malone

Jovi Jackson thought best on how to describe it, on what he had heard.

Sumatanga, a campground between Oneonta and Gallant, was the place Deshler was going to be spending some time

this summer — just players and coaches in the summer heat.

A movie, it turned out, sufficed. “Like ‘Remember the Titans,’” Jackson said with a grin.

You know the scenes. How the Titans arrive in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, with the goal to build camaraderie and turn themselves into a team. There’s plenty of bonding moments. There’s some football in there, too.

Deshler’s version had been the idea of Patrick Malone.

The Tigers coach went on similar trips when he was a player at the school — a yearly occurrence back then — and wanted to bring it back for his own players to experience something similar.

No phones, no interruptions, nothing extra.

“It’s hot, you’re practicing in a field, a pasture if you will, you’re meeting all the time, you’re on a strict schedule,” said Malone, who is entering his third season in charge. “There aren’t any distractions. It’s just you, your teammates and your coaches. You have no choice but to know each other.”

The hope is that extra quality time will lead to the Tigers’ fair share of positive scoreboard results.

Deshler is going for its third straight eight-win season, something the program hasn’t done since 2007-14 — a



Jovi Jackson, Joshua Smith and Jesse Jeffreys might have grown closer than the picture since taking a camping trip with the rest of Deshler’s team.

[DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

stretch of eight straight years. The Tigers went 8-4 last season, reaching the second round of the Class 4A playoffs. They went 12-1 in 2022, the loss

coming in the quarterfinals. This fall, Deshler will have a pair of new region opponents in Hatton, which moved up from 2A, and Danville.

“We did fine last season, but we want to go further (in the playoffs),” tight

DESHLER

From Page G10

end/linebacker Jesse Jeffreys said. "Our goals are a lot higher."

As Malone often points out, that is the Deshler way.

It is, after all, hard to miss. Each stage of the Tigers' success is out in the open, posted on a wall inside their stadium. There's a space for the teams that make the playoffs, another level for those that are region champs, the next for those that reach the state championship game and the last for the ones that win it.

"It's a big deal," center Joshua Smith said. "You always want to

join those other teams up there. You want to make sure you do your part."

And the start of that? Perhaps some time away at camp. No distractions.

"You got back and it was here you are and you're ready to go, and this is the group we're ready to go into Friday nights with," Malone said. "You developed that dependability and accountability with each other because you knew tough situations.

"And you knew when you came back, you were better."

That's the goal.

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



Deshler running back Q Harden and the Tigers are seeking a third straight eight-win season. [IVY ROSE BALL/TIMESDAILY]



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DESHLER TIGERS

2024 Football Schedule

Date	Opponent
Aug. 23	@ Russellville
Aug. 30	@ Hatton
Sept. 6	@ Danville
Sept. 13	Wilson
Sept. 20	OPEN
Sept. 27	Colbert Co.
Oct. 4	Central-Florence
Oct. 11	@ Brooks
Oct. 18	West Limestone
Oct. 25	@ East Lawrence
Nov. 1	West Morgan

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RUSSELLVILLE GOLDEN TIGERS



Coach: Dustin Goodwin (first season at Russellville; eighth year overall, 36-39)

Region: 5A, Region 7
2023 record: 9-3
 (6-0 5A, Region 8)
Last 5 years: 43-17
 (5 playoff berths)

2024 schedule

Aug. 23	Deshler	Oct. 4
Aug. 30	at Mars Hill Bible	Oct. 11
Sept. 6	at Lawrence Co.	Oct. 18
Sept. 13	at East Limestone	Oct. 25
Sept. 20	Ardmore	Nov. 1
Sept. 27	open	

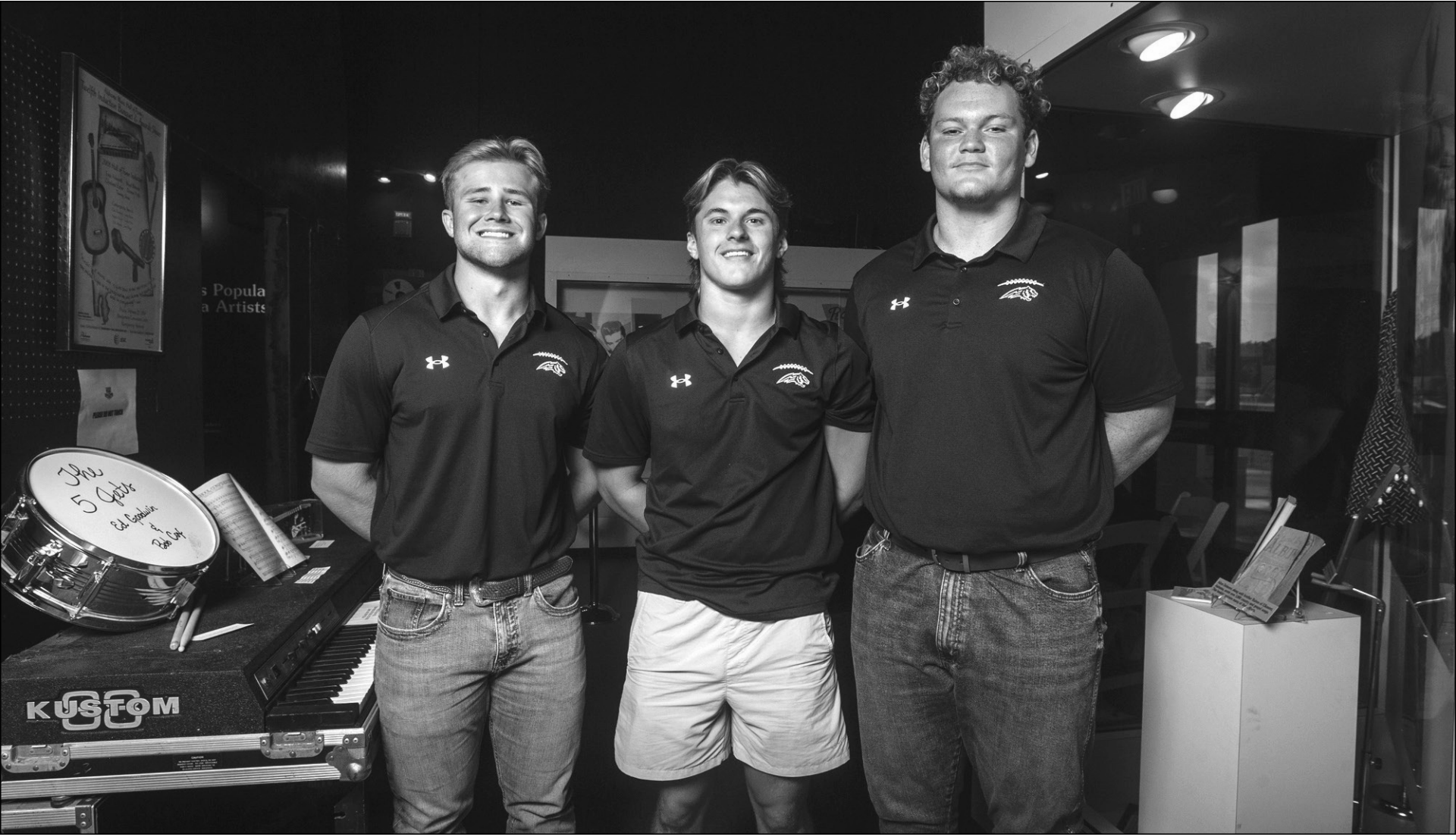
Fairview	Grissom	W, 35-12	at Brewer
Hatton	Deshler	W, 35-13	Ardmore
at West Point	at Lawrence Co. (Ala.)		Fairview
at Priceville		W, 37-7	at Athens
Athens	West Point	W, 48-14	Fairfield
	at East Limestone	W, 53-7	at Moody
	at Mars Hill Bible	L, 27-24	

2023 results

Returning starters

W, 56-19	DB Jah Williams	OL Neyland Baker
W, 56-0	LB Richard Scott	OL Eddie Velasquez
W, 31-14	LB Paxton Wray	RB Cam Phinizee
L, 41-14		
W, 38-21		
L, 42-21		

Same goals



Paxton Wray, Gunner Sappington and Neyland Baker are looking to continue Russellville's success under a new coach. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

With new coach at helm, Tigers still aim high

By A. Stacy Long
 Sports Writer

The adjustment has been an ongoing process, such as always when a new coach takes over. How different will the offense be? How



Goodwin

about the defense? What will be different about practices and procedures, and all other ancillary aspects? And, maybe biggest of all: How is the new coach? "I love it," Russellville offensive lineman Neyland Baker said of new coach Dustin Goodwin. Goodwin, a former Russellville

assistant, is back to lead the program, replacing John Ritter, who was hired away in the offseason by Decatur.

Goodwin was previously an assistant for two years at 7A powerhouse Thompson and, just prior to that, a head coach for three seasons at Chelsea. "It's been easy to adjust," new receiver Gunner Sappington said. "He came in and helped everybody. I played defense last year, and I'm a receiver this year.

It was an easy change, going over the schemes and routes we're going to run." Goodwin has not brought out any Thompson hardware to flaunt any past success and potentially inspire the Golden Tigers. His 7A championship ring from 2022, he admits, is so large it could cause him to have back issues.

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2024 Football Schedule

<u>Date</u>	<u>Opponent</u>
Aug. 23	Deshler
Aug. 30	@ Mars Hill Bible
Sept. 6	@ Lawrence Co. (Ala.)
Sept. 15	@ East Limestone
Sept. 20	Ardmore
Sept. 27	OPEN
Oct. 4	Fairview
Oct. 11	Hatton
Oct. 18	@ West Point
Oct. 25	@ Priceville
Nov. 1	Athens

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RUSSELLVILLE

From Page G12

“That one is so big, I think it would make me lean one way,” Goodwin said.

Not that the Golden Tigers are pushing for a show and tell.

“I don’t want to see it,” Baker said. “I want my own.”

But Russellville starts this season with more new faces than just at head coach. Many more.

Gone are 27 seniors. Back are just three starters on offense and defense.

“It will be tough for a lot of people,” linebacker Paxton Wray said. “But I think we’ll be good. If everybody comes together, I like what we have a chance to do.”

Of course, one of the returning starters on offense is a good place to start.

Running back Cam Phinizee, scorer of 40 touchdowns as a sophomore last year, won’t be a surprise to anyone this season.

“Cam is going to be a big part of the offense, and everybody knows that,” Sappington said. “Cam is one of the best running backs in the state. It’s always good to have him back there, give him the ball and see what plays he can make.”

Sappington, having moved to receiver

from defensive back, sees one benefit to his own move. He’ll no longer have to hit Phinizee in practice. Or, well, Sappington will no longer be taking such hits.

“I’m kind of happy about that,” Sappington said. “It wasn’t fun hitting him. I like being on offense, and I like being kind of one of the guys. If Cam needs a break, or if we need to throw the ball, I like being able to do that and contribute to our team.”

But can Phinizee pull off similar feats as last year?

He had no less than 112 yards in any game with three nights of at least 270 with a high of 326. There were five games with at least four touchdowns.

Phinizee’s final rushing totals: 266 carries, 2,389 yards and 40 touchdowns.

Russellville’s final totals: a fourth straight region championship and a 22nd winning season in 25 years.

“He can be as good as he wants to be, if he’ll work,” Baker said. “I’m sure the O-line will help him a lot this year, and we’ll see what happens.”

Baker and fellow lineman Eddie Velasquez are the only other returning starters on offense.

“Cam is a special talent. That is no secret,” Goodwin said. “But he’s going to have a target on his back this year. He



Jah Williams is one of six returning starters for Russellville this season. [PHOTOS BY DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

has to accept that challenge, and we have to help him.”

The Golden Tigers are again looking for a Cam-do attitude.

“It wouldn’t hurt my feelings one bit

if he scored 50 touchdowns,” Goodwin said. “He has the talent to do it. If he attacks every day like he’s supposed to and prepares, he’ll have a special season.”



Russellville running back Cam Phinizee, who rushed for 40 touchdowns last season, is now a junior.

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BROOKS LIONS



Region: 4A, Region 7
2023 record: 8-5 (5-2 4A, Region 7)
Last 5 years: 38-20 (4 playoff berths)

Coach: Tim Bowers (third season at Brooks, 14-9; fourth year as a high school coach, 21-13)

2024 schedule

Aug. 23	open	Oct. 4
Aug. 30	at West Morgan	Oct. 11
Sept. 6	at Hatton	Oct. 17
Sept. 13	at Central-Florence	Oct. 25
Sept. 20	at Wilson	Nov. 1
Sept. 26	at Lauderdale Co.	

Danville	Colbert Co.	W, 35-7	at Wilson
Deshler	at Mars Hill Bible	L, 49-31	at Deshler
Lexington	West Morgan	L, 83-53	Lauderdale Co.
West Limestone	at West Limestone	W, 32-17	at Oneonta
at East Lawrence	Central-Florence	W, 42-28	Priceville
	East Lawrence	W, 52-16	Westminster-HSV
	at Rogers	W, 28-14	

2023 results

W, 63-28	QB Garrett Burrough	DL Trystan Young
L, 56-28	OL Brycen Stephens	LB Braxton Johnston
L, 33-3	OL Silas McCarthy	LB Charlie Buttram
W, 56-42	OL Thomas Richardson	LB Lucas Oakley
W, 70-42	WR Slade Vandervelde	DB Saelor Pinegar
L, 48-27	DL Marquez Johnson	DB Brooks Moore
	DL Lucas Pinegar	DB Cooper Wood

Returning starters

Raring to go

Lions want more than quarterfinals this year

By A. Stacy Long
Sports Writer



Bowers

They huddled quickly after the end of the season.

Just a few days had passed before the Brooks Lions met, discussed their latest run to the state quarterfinals, hashed out the loss and, well, started thinking ahead.

Rather than commiserate over the circumstances of their season-ending loss, the Lions instead spoke of their surprising playoff run and yet another winning season.

Rather than ache over how everything ended, they spoke of their season and how it could be a springboard for 2024.

“As soon as we got into the locker room, the coaches talked to us about it,” linebacker Lucas Oakley said. “The next week, the Monday that we came in after that, we had a meeting and we talked about the season and what we were going to do the next year.”

“We wanted to move on and be better.”

The year may have hit a sudden end with a 48-27 quarterfinal loss to Westminster-Huntsville, but there were many other highlights.

Making the state quarterfinals for a second straight year was the primary one.

“I think the season was pretty solid overall,” quarterback Garrett Burrough said. “I think we definitely could have been better. The finish showed that. A lot of stupid decisions kind of lost us the year.”

“If we can get on top of those and make better decisions overall, I think we’ll have a pretty solid year. We’ll be good overall.”

The 8-5 record marked the Lions’ 25th



Garrett Burrough, Saelor Pinegar and Lucas Oakley seek a longer playoff run this year. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

straight non-losing season. In that time, Brooks has finished .500 just once and reached 10 wins nine times.

“It’s fun to be a part of winning,” receiver/defensive back Saelor Pinegar said. “It’s just expected. ‘We’re going to win’ is the thought we always have.”

Brooks’ last losing season was 1998.

“Oh,” Burrough said. “I didn’t even know that.”

So far, the Lions like what they see for this season, too. They say they won’t be so stunned if major success continues.

“This is the most energy I’ve ever seen out of the team,” Oakley said. “I would say this is the best defense I’ve been a part of, and I was part of the 12-0 team (in 2021).

“I think we’re going to be pretty solid.”

Burrough will be a key, which is a normal statement for a returning starting quarterback. Not to mention he’s a returning All-State player, too.

Even if second-team All-State wasn’t exactly to his teammates’ liking.

“He’s too humble to say it,” Oakley said, “but I say he’s the best quarterback



Brooks' Garrett Burrough totaled 3,500 yards and 39 touchdowns last season. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

BROOKS

From Page G16

in 4A from what I've seen the last few years."

Burrough ran for more than 1,600 yards, threw for almost 1,900 and accounted for 39 touchdowns last season.

"I tried my best," Burrough said. "If I didn't get first-team, that's OK. I have another shot at it this year. It's one of my goals to get there this year."

It will be Burrough's second year as a full-time starter. He split time at quarterback as a sophomore in 2022.

"I think he'll get first-team this year, especially with the weapons we've

added," Pinegar said. "He's already familiar with the offense. Nothing but up from here."

Brooks says it has improved on defense, too, an area that the Lions admit they've stewed over from last season.

Brooks gave up an average of 35.6 points per game, a number boosted by the 83 points surrendered to West Morgan. Yes, 83.

"We've been using it as motivation," Oakley said.

Some defensive improvement would be a quick step to bigger success.

"We're focused on this year now," Pinegar said. "We have to get over that. 'So what? Now what?' is what one of our coaches says.

"We have to get better."

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BROOKS LIONS

2024 Football Schedule

Date	Opponent
Aug. 23	OPEN
Aug. 30	@ West Morgan
Sept. 6	@ Hatton
Sept. 13	@ Central-Florence
Sept. 20	@ Wilson
Sept. 26	@ Lauderdale Co.
Oct. 4	Danville
Oct. 11	Deshler
Oct. 17	Lexington
Oct. 25	West Limestone
Nov. 1	@ East Lawrence

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

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Good Luck Lions!



Florence's Tory Jones and the Falcons lost three games by single digits last year, including 9-0 to Muscle Shoals. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]



Cade Davis will have all eyes on him as Florence's first-year starting quarterback this season. [IVY ROSE BALL/TIMESDAILY]

FLORENCE

From Page G3

The end result? A scramble trying to lock up a playoff spot, something the Falcons didn't do until their regular-season finale. It meant opening the postseason on the road. Thompson was the destination.

"We should have had that (playoff) spot earlier," said quarterback Cade Davis, who will be entering his first season as the starter. "We got into late periods in area games that we had to win and gave it away late. If we had, we would have secured those wins and really gritted it out, then we always have the playoffs secured early."

"There were two games, James Clemens and Bob Jones, that we were right there, especially Bob Jones, where we had the win with a minute left and threw it away. With that, we're in the playoffs."

Both were rather painful endings.

The James Clemens game came down to the final seconds before an errant pass into the end zone from the 24-yard line resulted in a 14-7 loss. The Jets had taken the lead with a little more than nine minutes left in the fourth quarter. A fourth-down facemask penalty had extended that drive.



Florence's Zy Boddie and the Falcons are seeking a third straight winning season. [IVY ROSE BALL/TIMESDAILY]

The Bob Jones matchup — a 29-25 loss — was the result of a final-minute nine-play, 80-yard drive from the Patriots. The Falcons had taken a three-point lead with 1:46 left only to see Bob Jones convert twice on fourth down and score on a 44-yard pass with 12 seconds remaining.

It was the first of two times Florence

had given up more than 20 points. (The 42 points to Thompson was the other.)

"This year, it's all about pushing past where we were at," kicker/punter Chandler Dixon said.

And that's the goal. It's about finishing the job.

"It's about doing the little things right, making sure we're doing



Florence junior Jayshod Pearson, who was first-team Class 7A All-State last year, will have his pads on when he makes tackles this season. [IVY ROSE BALL/TIMESDAILY]

everything we're supposed to do as a team," receiver Tory Jones said. "We want to win a region championship this year, bring it back home, bring it back to the right town and right community."

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

LAUDERDALE COUNTY TIGERS



Coach: Jeff Mason (ninth season, 63-31)

Region: 3A, Region 7
2023 record: 12-1 (6-0 3A, Region 8)
Last 5 years: 46-14 (5 playoff berths)

2024 schedule

Aug. 23	at Lexington	Oct. 4
Aug. 30	at Central-Florence	Oct. 11
Sept. 6	Elkmont	Oct. 18
Sept. 13	at Colbert Co.	Oct. 25
Sept. 20	Mars Hill Bible	Nov. 1
Sept. 26	Brooks	

Clements	Tanner	W, 27-21	at Mars Hill Bible	W, 20-14
at Sheffield	at Rogers	W, 26-13	Colbert Heights	W, 41-7
Rogers	at Clements	W, 59-9	at Brooks	W, 33-3
at Colbert Heights	Elkmont	W, 65-12	Fayette Co.	W, 35-14
open	at Colbert Co.	W, 42-0	at Piedmont	W, 35-30
	Lexington	W, 41-20	Geraldine	L, 55-20
	Phil Campbell	W, 46-0		

2023 results

Returning starters

TE-OLB Skylar Tucker	S-WR Hudson Lash
OL Maddox Llewellyn	LB Chase Belue
LB-RB Brodie Richardson	LB Jackson Hamm
CB-WR Xzavier Mason	DE-OL Will Brown

Do it again

Tigers eager for more than quarterfinals

By David Glovach
Sports Writer



Mason

Lauderdale County has had plenty of time to think about it.

About how last season unfolded. How the Tigers won all 10 of their regular-season games. How they won their first two playoff games, but didn't win the third when they hosted Geraldine in the Class 3A quarterfinals.

Instead, it ended up being a 55-20 exit. "It's definitely been a motivation," full-back/linebacker Brodie Richardson said.

Added offensive/defensive lineman Maddox Llewellyn: "It's something we've thought a lot about."

There wasn't really any other way to think about it.

After all, despite the untimely ending, there had been a lot for Lauderdale County to feel good about. Last year was the program's first undefeated regular season since 1972 and second one with double-digit wins since 2012. In the Tigers' 12 victories, only three – Tanner, Mars Hill and Piedmont – had been decided by fewer



Maddox Llewellyn, Chase Belue, Jackson Hamm and Brodie Richardson are hoping to build off the undefeated regular season Lauderdale County had last year. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

SEE LAUDERDALE CO., G32

LAUDERDALE COUNTY TIGERS

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LEXINGTON GOLDEN BEARS



Lexington, 7-5; fourth year overall, 17-16)

Region: 2A, Region 8

2023 record: 7-5 (5-1 2A, Region 8)

Last 5 years: 22-31 (2 playoff berths)

Coach: Blake Killen
(second season at

2024 schedule

Aug. 23	Lauderdale Co.	Oct. 4
Aug. 30	at Elkmont	Oct. 11
Sept. 6	at Decatur Heritage	Oct. 17
Sept. 13	Tanner	Oct. 25
Sept. 20	Red Bay	Oct. 31
Sept. 27	Wilson	

at Winston Co.
open
at Brooks
Tharptown
at Rogers

Colbert Heights
at Pisgah
Red Bay
at Tharptown
at Lauderdale Co.
at Falkville

2023 results

W, 42-25	Tanner
L, 42-27	at Hatton
W, 33-22	at Sheffield
W, 77-6	Rogers
L, 41-20	Aliceville
W, 31-12	at Fyffe

Returning starters

L, 64-34	QB Brody Killen
W, 28-26	WR-DB Noah LeMay
W, 64-12	WR Will White
L, 29-26	OL Trey Cole
W, 54-28	OL-DL Parker Cole
L, 57-24	OL Landon Ingram

DB Tate Gamble
DB Landon Carlock
LB Jake Lard
LB Tanner Nesbitt
DL Lane Matthews

Lofty goals

Golden Bears trying to take next step

By Shane Herrmann
For the TimesDaily



Killen

For some teams, reaching the postseason is a respectable goal.

Others strive to finally win a playoff game, while some focus on finishing above .500.

Some teams enter the season in search of their first victory in a long time while others simply have a goal of beating their rival.

In recent years, Lexington has accomplished all of those things, so what would be the next step for the Bears?

"I think we can compete for a region championship," senior Noah Lemay said.

The defensive back/wide receiver knows what it takes. He was on the team when Lexington won the title in 2022. Lexington has posted three straight winning seasons and has advanced to the second round of the Class 2A state playoffs in each of the last two.

Second-year coach Blake Killen said having depth and experience and certain positions will go a long way in determining if his team can make a deep playoff run. He also added having new players in other spots on the field could keep him awake at night.

"There is a good amount of returnees on the line of scrimmage on both sides of the ball," Killen said. "We have around 45 guys, which is really good for 2A. I like our depth at a few positions. Overall, we have a mixture of experience at some positions and youth at others. How well those new guys adapt to playing at the varsity level will be a key factor for us."

Following a 7-5 season that ended with a loss to eventual champion Fyffe in the



SEE LEXINGTON, G21

Noah Lemay, Brody Killen and Jake Lard have high goals this season for Lexington. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]



Lexington's Brody Killen and the Golden Bears take on Tharptown this week. [KEVIN TAYLOR/TIMESDAILY]

LEXINGTON

From Page G20

second round, Lexington returns six starters on offense and seven on defense.

After playing both ways for a large part of his career, senior Brody Killen will get the luxury of only worrying about offense this year as the starting quarterback.

"It's a change not playing defense," he



Lexington assistant coach Hunter Killen and the Golden Bears return 13 starters on offense and defense. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

said. "You definitely have more energy. I would love to go out and win a region championship as a senior."

Lemay, who was Class 2A All-State honorable mention last year, agreed.

"You always want to win as many games as possible," he said. "As a senior, you really want to lead the team by example."

While Brody Killen hopes to lead an improved passing game for the Bears,

Jake Lard could be the key to a stingier defense.

During the 2022 region championship, an injury to a senior opened the door for Lard to see playing time as a freshman. He became a full-time starter last year and enters his junior season with a lot of experience.

"I feel like I have adjusted and adapted to different situations and playing against a lot of different offenses," said Lard,

who also plays running back on offense. "It helps to be able to coach other players on defense when you have some experience like that and understand what you need to do against different looks."

Blake Killen also sees the advantages.

"Jake is a coaches' son and really does understand a lot of what we are trying to do," he said. "Sometimes it's like having a coach on the field and that is a huge benefit."

LEXINGTON GOLDEN BEARS

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Region: 3A, Region 7
2023 record: 4-6 (3-4 4A, Region 7)
Last 5 years: 24-30 (4 playoff berths)

Coach: Daniel Garrett (fourth season at Rogers, 16-16; fifth year overall, 22-20)

2024 schedule

Aug. 23	at Wilson	Oct. 4
Aug. 29	Lawrence Co. (Ala.)	Oct. 11
Sept. 6	Sheffield	Oct. 18
Sept. 13	at Clements	Oct. 25
Sept. 20	Colbert Co.	Oct. 31
Sept. 27	open	

at Mars Hill Bible	Haleyville	L, 21-20
Colbert Heights	Lauderdale Co.	L, 26-13
at Lauderdale Co.	at East Lawrence	W, 36-28
at Elkmont	at Wilson	W, 45-0
Lexington	West Morgan	L, 51-0
	at Central-Florence	L, 42-21

2023 results

Brooks	L, 28-14
Deshler	L, 28-19
at West Limestone	W, 28-7
at Lexington	W, 29-26

Returning starters

WR Trent Carter	WR Griffin Herston
LB Lee McCain	QB Ticer Wood
CB Cole Marks	WR Christian Hardnett
S-RB Nic Grigsby	OL Ethan Zahnd
LB Cody May	OL Easton Bradley
DL Colten Adomyetz	

Class adjustment

Rogers looking to thrive after 3A move

By Shane Herrmann
For the TimesDaily



Garrett

Rogers has not changed its mindset, despite going into a new class, a move that brings several new opponents to the schedule.

Following 12 years in Class 4A, the Pirates are

now 3A.

Fourth-year coach Daniel Garrett will still, however, approach each game the same way.

“We work a lot on getting better at the little things every day,” Garrett said. “When you do that, the big things seem to take care of themselves. I have been happy with the maturity of this team. We have come a long way from the end of last season. We have kind of an older group of guys playing now who have been in a lot of games and seen a lot of things, so they know how to handle different situations.”

While playing in Class 3A, Region 7 means a few less opportunities to face county rivals, the Pirates still have a schedule to get excited about. Power-house Mars Hill and defending region champion Lauderdale County are now region foes. Rogers will also host three teams from Colbert County while traveling to the likes of Clements and Elkmont.

Don’t worry. Wilson (Aug. 23) and Lexington (Oct. 31) are still on the schedule as well. (Rogers vs. Brooks is, however, a mere jamboree.)

“I admire that fact that this team is so competitive,” Garrett said. “They enjoy playing the county rivals, if it’s a region game or a jamboree. They want to win them all.”

Senior linebacker/tight end Lee McCain has his version of how he would



Lee McCain, Easton Bradley and Nic Grigsby look for Rogers to flourish in Class 3A. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

like to win every game. He said he would love to grind teams into submission.

“I catch the ball some, but I expect to do a lot of blocking this year,” McCain said. “I’d love to get 3, 4 or 5 yards on every play and just march down the field with a 12-play drive.”

Such a drive would require running back Nic Grigsby to get over 20 touches per game. That is something the junior

would be excited to do.

“I’ll do whatever it takes to help the team,” Grigsby said. “I remember looking up to older guys when I was young. Now you want to do the right thing because there are always younger guys looking up to you.”

A reminder of what it’s like to look up to someone on the team can be found on the Pirates coaching staff. Sam Batson

played as a senior for the Pirates in 2021 and now helps coach several of his former teammates.

“Sam was on the team when I was a freshman,” McCain said. “I remember looking up to him and that reminds me that younger guys might be looking up to me now.”



Nic Grigsby is expected to handle a big workload for the Pirates this season. [PHOTOS BY DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

ROGERS

From Page G22

Fellow senior Easton Bradley played next to Batson on the line when he was younger.

“He always set a good example and had a good time,” Bradley said. “I really enjoyed playing next to him and still love playing on the line today because you get to hit somebody every play.”

Overall, Garrett said experience and



Ticer Wood gives Rogers and coach Daniel Garrett starting experience at quarterback.

a large roster size could be advantages for his team this year. Typically, teams in Class 3A have smaller roster sizes than 4A.

“We have some decent experience and have been doing a lot of the same stuff for a few years now,” Garrett said. “We

are excited to be in a new classification and see some new opponents on the schedule. We felt like we had a decent roster size at the 4A level. I am hoping that that now our numbers will be higher than most teams we play and that would give us an advantage.”

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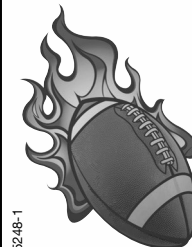
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WILSON WARRIORS



Coach: Trey Lane (second season, 1-9)

Region: 4A, Region 7

2023 record: 1-9 (0-7
4A, Region 7)

Last 5 years: 6-43 (no
playoff berths)

Aug. 23
Aug. 30
Sept. 6
Sept. 13
Sept. 20
Sept. 27

at Central-Florence
at Deshler
Brooks
at Lexington

2024 schedule

Oct. 4
Oct. 11
Oct. 18
Oct. 25
Nov. 1

open
at West Limestone
East Lawrence
at West Morgan
Hatton

Hatton
at Colbert Heights
at Central-Florence
Rogers
at Deshler
West Limestone

2023 results

L, 22-10
W, 34-14
L, 55-14
L, 45-0
L, 70-8
L, 27-6

East Lawrence
Brooks
at West Morgan
at Lawrence Co. (Ala.)

L, 34-28
L, 63-28
L, 62-0
L, 42-8

WR-DB Braxton Glaze
WR-LB Jordan Steele
OL-DL Cade Newell
OL-DL Carter Ramos
OL-DL Arch Robertson

Returning starters

WR-LB Brodie Pruitt
WR-DB Cole Miller
WR-DB Will Brooks
QB-DB Landon Smith

Looking for a boost

For Wilson, goal is a turnaround season

By Gregg Dewalt
For the TimesDaily



Lane

The Wilson Warriors are stuck in a rut.

Four straight one-win seasons. Only nine wins in the last six years. No playoff berths since a 10-2 run in 2017.

Now, second-year head coach Trey Lane hopes the groundwork laid in his initial season with the Warriors will pay off with more wins and a positive turn in direction.

“The biggest takeaway from last year is we needed to have a really good off-season,” Lane said. “Going into my first year, I wasn’t at the school full-time, so I was getting in there late every day to see the kids, but we didn’t get to really jump in on the offseason like I wanted. So, this year there’s been a huge emphasis put on the weight room and the offseason with our program.”

Accountability and changing the locker room culture has been high on the priority list as Lane tries to reverse the team’s recent fortunes.

“If you’re late, even a minute, if you’re right on time, you’re late, and you have to do 30 up/downs,” senior Cade Newell said. “It feels like he’s making things a priority, like making sure you make workouts.”

Carter Ramos said they tested the new coach early on and got a dose of reality about how things were going to change.

“At first, we did. We wanted to see what he felt and how he stood with some of this stuff and he came in with a hard hammer and told us how it’s going to go,” he said. “I remember one of our first weeks, he was immediately, ‘OK, clean out your lockers, clean this place up.’ He wants it brand new. We’re not going to stay on the same cycle.”



Carter Ramos, Cade Newell and Braxton Glaze will try to fuel Wilson to a turnaround season. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

But Ramos points out that it is not personal — Lane simply wants to set Wilson on a different path.

“We know it’s out of love and out of us being seniors and wanting to show the underclassmen how they should act and what they should do,” Ramos said.

“We’re no different than the underclassmen. If we are late, we’re still going to get punished. If we make a mistake, we’re still going to get the wrath.”

Lane said the team’s growth has been evident.

“I’ve seen a big difference,” he said.

“You don’t even have to say it anymore. A kid walks in late they are either going to start on their own for their punishment for being late or they’re going to be told very quickly by their teammates. This is

SEE WILSON, G25

WILSON

From Page G24

what is expected.”

Braxton Glaze said he has noticed significant improvement in numerous areas, including the team’s overall attitude.

“I feel like there is more of a brotherhood and a togetherness and that everybody wants to make a change,” he said.

Newell said the emphasis on weight and strength training has paid dividends.

“I was 190 pounds,” he said. “I’m about 250 now. A lot of us have gained a lot of weight and gained a lot of strength and muscle from coach putting a priority of working out.”

The question facing Lane and the Warriors is how the positive changes in the program will translate into on-the-field success. Lane won’t set a win total on what he deems will be a successful season.

“I’m not throwing a number on it,” he said. “Our goal coming into this year is to be the absolute best team we can be. And if that best team looks like 10 wins, great. If that best team looks like five wins and that’s the absolute best team we can be, we’re all here for it.

“But we just want to get the most out of every single person on this team and that’s how you go from where we’ve been to where we want to go. It’s not focusing on a number; it’s just trying to improve every day.”



Receiver/linebacker Jordan Steele is one of Wilson’s returning starters this season. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

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HATTON HORNETS



Coach: Denton Bowling (ninth season, 41-42)

Region: 4A, Region 7
2023 record: 7-3 (4-2 2A, Region 8)
Last 5 years: 29-24 (4 playoff berths)

2024 schedule	
Aug. 23	open
Aug. 30	Deshler
Sept. 6	Brooks
Sept. 13	East Lawrence
Sept. 20	at West Morgan
Sept. 26	at Westminster-HSV
Oct. 4	West Limestone
Oct. 11	at Russellville
Oct. 18	Danville
Oct. 25	at Central-Florence
Nov. 1	at Wilson
at Wilson	Columbia
at Tharptown	Falkville
at East Lawrence	Tanner

2023 results	
W, 22-10	at Sheffield
W, 26-7	Lexington
W, 56-0	at Red Bay
W, 28-14	Geraldine
W, 34-30	at Sulligent
L, 20-0	

Returning starters	
W, 54-26	WR Kenyon Suggs
L, 28-26	QB Tasean Love
W, 36-24	RB Karvion Black
L, 63-6	OL Nick Borden
L, 43-12	OL Levi Liles
	OL-DT Kole McMillan
	OL Layton Wilson
	WR Quenderius Bolding
	K Silas Alexander
	DE Trace Hill
	DE Pierce Wilson
	DB Taegen Burleson
	DB Wes Steadman
	CB Zairiyon Long
	FS Owen Brackin

Climb time

Hatton, after 2-class jump, makes 4A debut

By A. Stacy Long
Sports Writer



The thrill ride that started in December, leaving the Hatton Hornets excited, perplexed and maybe a little skittish, is finally about to reach its first crest.

Bowling

Hornets, keep your arms and legs inside the car at all times, because it's time to ride.

Hello, Class 4A.
 "We were a little nervous, but we'll be all right," defensive end Trace Hill said. "It's getting close to time for football."

Hatton knew its days as a 2A school were numbered as soon as R.A. Hubbard closed, but the Hornets were caught by surprise last December when they learned their new home.

Hatton took a two-class leap to 4A, registering as 4A's smallest school, a half-student ahead of 3A No. 1 Hanceville.

There may have been some moaning, some groaning and some gnashing of teeth, but no more.

"It's going to be a little different than 4A, but we played some 4A teams," lineman Kole McMillan said. "I don't think it's going to be as different as people thought it would be."

The Hornets retained just two foes from last year's schedule, and both are now region opponents — East Lawrence and Wilson. Otherwise, Hatton gets a gander at a new slate.

"If we do everything right and as long as everybody is on the same page, it won't be as bad," safety Owen Brackin said.

The Hornets admit some of their classmates left the hive after the reclassification pushed Hatton to 4A for the first time in school history.

"There were some people who moved," McMillan said. "They were scared of 4A."



Owen Brackin, Kole McMillan and Trace Hill hope to lead the Hatton Hornets to success in Class 4A. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

In all, Hatton is down about 35 students, coach Denton Bowling said, from when the count was made a year ago.

Too late now.

"Here we are, right?" Bowling said.

The Hornets, a year ago, started trying to adjust to playing in a bigger class, not using as many players on both sides of the ball as a 2A usually might.

"Now, we don't have those numbers," Bowling said. "We have to play

2A football in 4A."

Playing so many just one way was great, Bowling said, until injuries ravaged the roster. But Bowling said he would still have done things the same way.

But, for a first-round playoff loss at Sulligent, Hatton had 11 players on the sidelines watching and injured.

"It was rough," said Brackin, who was out with a midseason knee injury. "It was hard, not just the playoffs but every

game. I just wanted to be out there."

Hatton finished with its second straight seven-win season — and the Hornets haven't done that three straight years since 1989-91.

Hatton also has three players back who were 2A second-team All-State a year ago, including quarterback Tasean Love.

CENTRAL WILDCATS



Region: 4A, Region 7
2023 record: 6-5 (4-3 4A, Region 7)
Last 5 years: 30-25 (5 play-off berths)
Coach: Heath Wood (14th season, 77-65)

2024 schedule

Aug. 23	at Colbert Co.	Oct. 4
Aug. 30	Lauderdale Co.	Oct. 11
Sept. 6	Wilson	Oct. 18
Sept. 13	Brooks	Oct. 25
Sept. 20	at West Limestone	Nov. 1
Sept. 27	open	

at Deshler	East Limestone	W, 42-35
East Lawrence	Wilson	W, 55-14
at West Morgan	at West Morgan	L, 56-14
Hatton	at Brooks	L, 42-28
at Danville	at Westminster-HSV	L, 71-54
	Rogers	W, 42-21

2023 results

Deshler	L, 57-47
at West Limestone	W, 48-21
East Lawrence	W, 49-13
at Ardmore	W, 49-21
at Cherokee Co.	L, 56-28

Returning starters

QB-FS Jackson Brewer	WR Brody Cole
RB Hunter Palmer	TE Reed Bruce
FB-LB Bryant Hanback	OL Wyatt Davis
FB-LB Donevin Faires	OL Lane Lovelace
WB-LB Logan Galliano	

Finish with a flourish

Central seniors look to leave behind legacy

By Gregg Dewalt
 For the TimesDaily



Wood

Central's senior players have been looking to this season since they arrived on the varsity.

This is it. Senior season. Last go-round. One last time to play with their longtime friends. They also think it's their time to shine in a Central jersey.

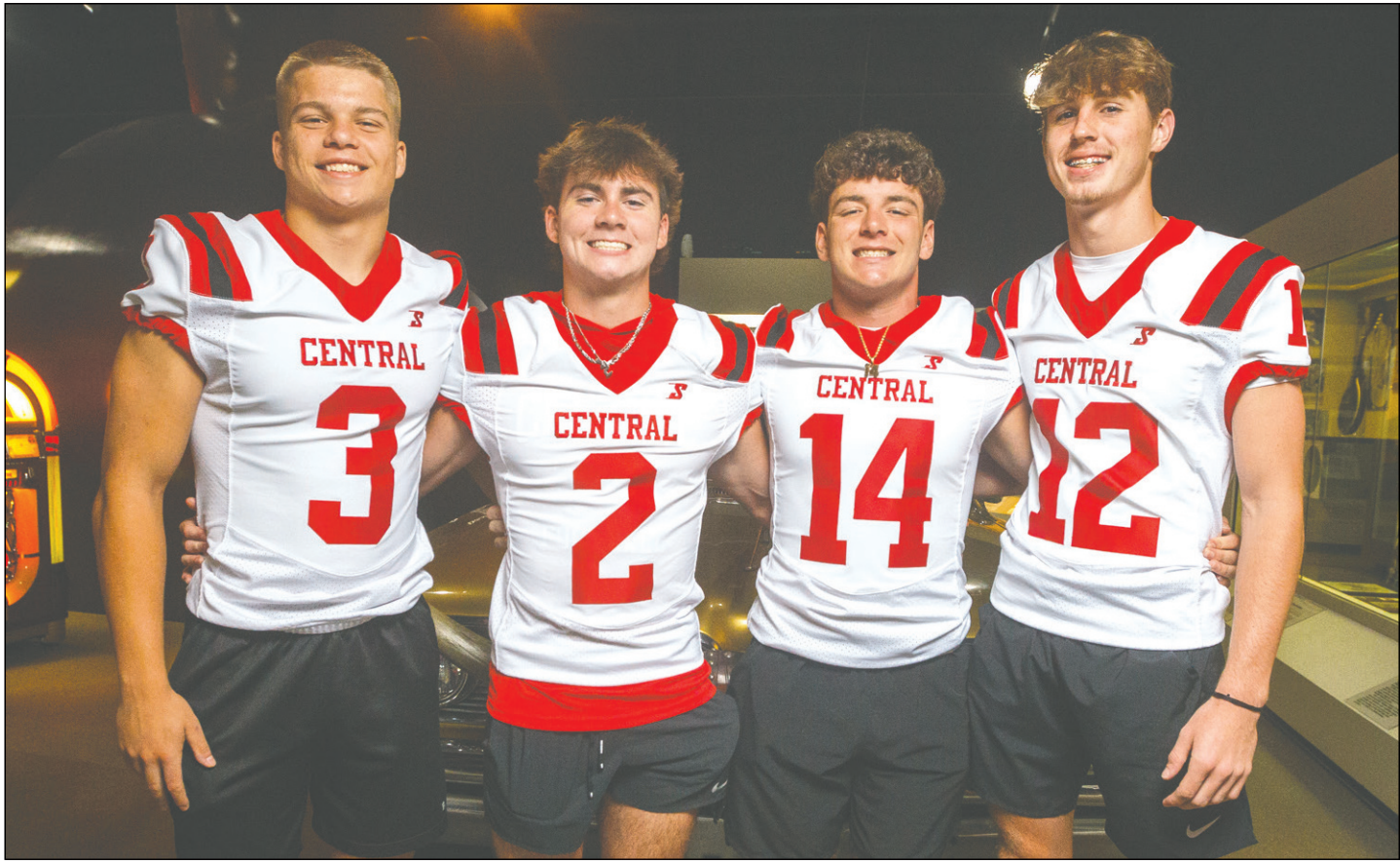
"We have put in so much work to get to this point," running back Hunter Palmer said.

"Most of the seniors now have been starting since we were in 10th grade, so it's been a long time coming," added middle linebacker Eli Wood.

The "it" Wood speaks of is a breakout season of sorts.

The Wildcats were 6-5 a year ago, including a first-round playoff loss at Cherokee County. This senior class expects Central to not only qualify for postseason play for the eighth straight year, but to perhaps snap a streak of seven straight playoff losses. The Wildcats haven't won a playoff game since 2013.

Under coach Heath Wood, the Wildcats have been a model of consistency. Now in his 14th year, Wood's 77-65



Eli Wood, Hunter Palmer, Bryant Hanback and Jackson Brewer hope to lead Central to a breakout season. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

record makes him the winningest coach in school history. Since he took over in 2011, there have been only three losing seasons and only twice have the Wildcats

failed to reach the playoffs. With a wide array of returning veteran talent, expectations are high. In addition to Palmer, quarterback Jackson Brewer

returns along with running back Bryant Hanback, who missed the final four

SEE CENTRAL, G34

CENTRAL WILDCATS

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WATERLOO COUGARS



(first season of current stint; seventh year overall, 27-36)

Region: 1A, Region 8
2023 record: 0-9 (0-7 1A, Region 8)
Last 5 years: 21-29 (1 playoff berth)
Coach: Brad Palmer

2024 schedule

Aug. 23	at Brilliant	Oct. 4
Aug. 30	at Tharptown	Oct. 11
Sept. 6	Cherokee	Oct. 18
Sept. 13	at Hackleburg	Oct. 25
Sept. 20	Meek	Nov. 1
Sept. 27	Sheffield	

Addison	at Brilliant
at Vina	at Cherokee
at Phillips	at Meek
Shoals Chr.	Addison
open	Sheffield

2023 results

L, 64-0	Hackleburg
L, 48-0	Phillips
L, 52-14	at Shoals Chr.
L, 51-20	Vina
L, 42-0	

L, 34-0	WR-LB Haden Price
L, 40-34	OL-DL David White
L, 68-0	OL-DL Nathan Farley
L, 42-32	RB-DE Kaden Benson

Returning starters

WR-DB Braylan McMullan
OL-DL Brycen Wilkerson
WR-DB Dane Morris
QB-DB Brocke Goacher

Hello, old friend

Back as coach, Palmer in familiar territory

By Shane Herrmann
 For the TimesDaily



Palmer

Brad Palmer finds himself in a familiar position at Waterloo. After coaching the Cougars for six seasons from 2014-19, Palmer will again take over the program in search of elusive victories.

Waterloo posted an 0-9 record last season but returned 10 starters, including Class 1A All-State honorable mention corner Braylan McMullan.

Last year was the first winless season for the Cougars since 2014, Palmer's first at the helm. Two seasons later, Waterloo was 5-5. In 2018 and 2019, the Cougars went 9-3 and 8-3 respectively.

"This is almost the same situation I came into last time," Palmer said. "The biggest challenge is getting the kids to buy in and to want to compete. You just have to have a short memory and learn from what you can correct. My goal is to get better each week."

Several players said they are eager after playing through the lean years.



SEE WATERLOO, G34 Brocke Goacher, Dane Morris and Nathan Farley are seeking to help Waterloo rebound from a winless season. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

WATERLOO COUGARS

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THARPTOWN WILDCATS



Coach: John Johnson (second season, 1-9)

Region: 2A, Region 8

2023 record: 1-9 (0-6 2A, Region 8)

Last 5 years: 13-36

(no playoff berths)

2024 schedule		
Aug. 23	at Danville	Oct. 4
Aug. 30	Waterloo	Oct. 10
Sept. 6	Belgreen	Oct. 18
Sept. 13	open	Oct. 25
Sept. 19	at Decatur Heritage	Nov. 1
Sept. 27	at Vina	

at Tanner	at Shoals Chr.
Red Bay	Phillips
Winston Co.	at Tanner
at Lexington	Hatton
at Phillips	Lexington

2023 results	
L, 56-7	Cherokee
W, 22-15	at Red Bay
L, 74-8	Sheffield
L, 56-0	Falkville
L, 77-6	at Whitesburg Chr.
L, 70-28	
L, 52-24	
L, 46-20	
L, 46-6	
L, 44-0	

Returning starters	
OL-LB Alex Moctezuma	RB-LB Cody McCluskey
RB-DB Joah Wilcoxson	OL-DL Angel Morales

Making strides

Tharptown has 'different perspective'

By Shane Herrmann

For the TimesDaily



Johnson

With the start of each season, coaches turn to their upperclassmen to set the tone for younger players and lead by example.

At Tharptown, that responsibility will fall to

four players.

The Wildcats will take the field with two seniors and two juniors on the roster. Head coach John Johnson, however, said it will be the team's commitment, not its numbers, that will decide if a successful season is on tap.

"We are pretty much starting over from scratch this year," Johnson said. "A lot of younger kids did get to play last season, but there are also a lot of new faces on the roster. The kids made the effort to show up to summer workouts. We are hoping that commitment translates to what you will see on the field."

Tharptown was 1-9 in 2023. With numbers proving to be a consistent obstacle, the Wildcats are looking to snap a streak of 10 straight seasons with a losing record. The program posted a 5-5 mark in 2013.

Johnson added that talking about change and actually committing to change are two very different things.

"We need to hold ourselves accountable, which I believe this team is in the process of doing," he said. "There is always a lot of talk about change, but talk is cheap. You have to be able to get out there and put in the work."

One senior on the roster believes a positive attitude is a solid start. Joah Wilcoxson, who plays running back and middle linebacker, said staying positive is a responsibility he has.



MARS HILL PANTHERS



Coach: Darrell Higgins (ninth season, 78-26)

Region: 3A, Region 8

2023 record: 10-2 (5-1 3A, Region 8)

Last 5 years: 57-11 (5 playoff berths)

2024 schedule	
Aug. 23	at Madison Aca.
Aug. 30	Russellville
Sept. 6	at Colbert Co.
Sept. 13	Sheffield
Sept. 20	at Lauderdale Co.
Sept. 27	open
Oct. 4	
Oct. 11	
Oct. 18	
Oct. 25	
Nov. 1	

Rogers	at Cullman
Elkmont	Brooks
at Colbert Heights	Colbert Heights
Clements	at Clements
Scottsboro	Elkmont
	Russellville

2023 results

W, 55-21	at Colbert Co.
W, 49-31	at Phil Campbell
W, 54-0	Lauderdale Co.
W, 61-3	at Scottsboro
W, 76-0	Oakman
W, 27-24	at Madison Aca.
W, 45-7	
W, 62-6	
L, 20-14	
W, 36-35	
W, 63-7	
L, 21-14	

Returning starters

WR-DB Tanner Caudle	RB Hudson Higgins
TE Cannon Pigg	LB Cam Isbell
OL Cord Pigg	DE Samuel Swinney
OL-LB William Embry	LB Caden Chandler
OL Gunnar Kirchharr	DB Jaxon Penn

Challenge accepted

Mars Hill tries to again find its groove

By A. Stacy Long
Sports Writer



Higgins

There were sickly sights all around, tears rolling as heavy as the rain did that night and the nagging pain that the season was over.

By then, there was nothing left to do.

The Panthers' 2023, with all its high hopes, met an untimely demise, just like in 2022.

And the trip home stood out for the anguish.

"It was sad," offensive lineman William Embry said. "It was not fun."

Nine months later, after the Panthers witnessed so much more success from so many other Mars Hill teams, the football players want to reclaim some of their past status.

Second-round playoff losses in consecutive years, after Mars Hill's massive football success in previous seasons, contrasted greatly with the rest of Mars Hill's major boys teams.

Those Panthers followed with a state championship (basketball) and two state runner-up finishes.

"I do get inspired," running back Caden Chandler said. "I just watch them win and think, 'It could have been us.'"

"We have to get back up. We have to keep working. That's all we can do."

The football guys yearn for similar results.

"Definitely a lot of motivation. It has to be," Embry said. "We just think about how good it felt for them to win, and how good it should have been for us."

From 2018-20, Mars Hill football also played for championships, winning two state titles. In 2021, the Panthers lost in the state semifinals.



William Embry, Caden Chandler and Gunnar Kirchharr are looking to help Mars Hill return to playoff prominence. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

Now, in 2022 and '23, they have just a second-round finish with which to reminisce.

"I think it got into our heads," lineman Gunnar Kirchharr said. "Now that we've been humbled a little bit we want to get back to those days."

Sure, the Panthers finished 10-2 to record their sixth straight season with double-digit wins. But ending with a loss taints such success.

"We don't like losing and never will," said coach Darrell Higgins, who still described last year as an "outstanding

season."

"We want to go as far as we can and win the last game."

Yes, the Panthers would like to again feast.

MARS HILL

From Page G30

But they will have to do so having lost two primary players from last year, along with several other major pieces.

Griffin Hanson, a five-year starter at quarterback, and two-way star Jay Dobbs, who played running back and linebacker, have departed.

Senior William Mann takes over at quarterback with Chandler at running back.

“William Mann, that’s our guy,” Chandler said. “William can definitely throw some good balls. We lost a lot with Griffin, but I feel William can step up and do his job pretty well.”

The Panthers have four starters back on the offensive line and, Higgins said, has a defense where five players have received Division I offers.

“We’ll be a different team,” Higgins said. “We’ll count on this offensive line to lead us, and our defense should be really fast.”

Mars Hill has a returning All-State player in the secondary. Might Tanner Caudle feel added pressure to measure up to that again?

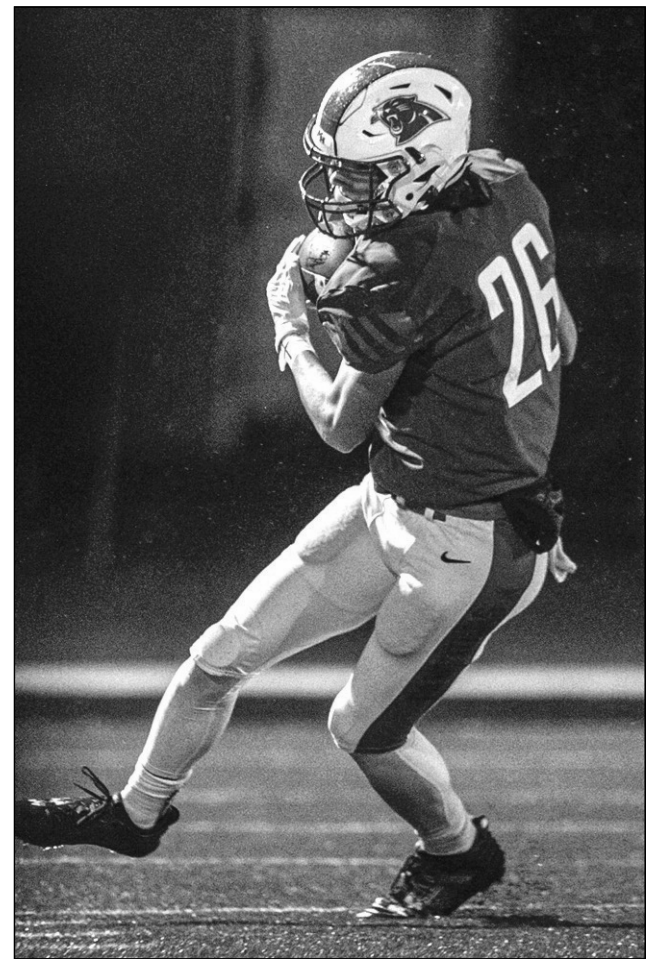
“He’s going to be really good for us,” Kirchharr said. “I don’t think he’s feeling any pressure. I don’t think he is at all.”

Or at least not more than his teammates.

“Everybody has pressure they put on themselves to do their best,” Higgins said. “It doesn’t bother him. He doesn’t act any different. He just goes out like everyone else and does his best.”



William Mann takes over as Mars Hill’s quarterback this season. [PHOTOS BY DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]



Tanner Caudle is a returning All-State player for Mars Hill.

In a twist, the Panthers will start this year against the team that ended last season. They roll down the same roads to Madison Academy for their season opener.

“It should be a fun one,” Kirchharr said. “It’s definitely motivation.”

They’ll draw on that pain again.

“It hurt a lot,” Chandler said. “It was definitely a war, and then they came

out on top. We didn’t play our best, and it hurts, but there’s nothing we can do about it now.

“We have to get rid of it, use it as motivation and keep going.”

MARS HILL PANTHERS

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GO PANTHERS!

LAUDERDALE CO.

From Page G19

than 13 points.

Lauderdale County would like an even better follow up.

"We have a lot of respect for what the 1972 team did," coach Jeff Mason said. "We're going to continue to honor that group. They're an important part of our history. At the same time, we're going to continue to move forward and build off what we did."

Over the last five seasons, the Tigers are 46-14. They have just one losing season since going 4-6 in 2009.

So, how does Lauderdale County build off that? That's what the offseason has been for. Some necessary quality time away from football through meals or even a couple of rounds on the golf course. (Llewellyn tends to shoot the lowest.) Trying to bring back team mustaches, however, is still a work in progress.

And, of course, there's been some spirited football workouts along the way, too.

"Last season really fueled us during the offseason," linebacker/receiver Chase

Belue said. "Whether we're lifting weight, conditioning or running through plays, we're making sure we go as hard as we can."

That's been good to hear. The Tigers will have to replace running backs Micah Christensen and Braxton Rose, linemen Hayden Davis and John David Mason, and quarterback Jaxson Lovelace among others.

Christensen and Rose combined for almost 2,700 rushing yards and 20 touchdowns.

"We did lose some important players," Mason said. "Guys who played a lot for us, guys who had experience and guys we could count on. But I think this group will surprise some people. They've put in the work."

There's been good reason for that.

Lauderdale County has had some time to think. Now, the Tigers are eager to do.

"We're excited for the season," running back/linebacker Jackson Hamm said. "We just have to show what we can do, and we're ready to do that."

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



Skylar Tucker was part of Lauderdale County Tigers' first undefeated regular season since 1972.

[DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]



Quarterback Tasean Love and running back Karvieon Black return this season for Hatton. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

HATTON

From Page G26

"It was Year 1 for him, but he learned a lot real quick," Brackin said. "I think he'll be all right."

The other two All-Staters are receiver Kenyon Suggs and defensive back Zairiyon Long. Long went down with his own

knee injury two weeks after Brackin.

Long is back and his offseason duels with Suggs, it is said, are feisty.

"Offensively, you have Suggs, but defensively it's Zairiyon," Hill said. "Every day, it's different. One day, one wins. The next day, it's different. It's whoever wants it more."

"There is a lot of good competition at practice."

THARPTOWN

From Page G29

"This is my third year to play, but there is a different perspective in attitude," Wilcoxson said. "You really have to stay positive as much as possible because other players are looking up to you. It's your responsibility as a leader to lift other people up."

If summer workouts have been any indications, Wilcoxson said the team is up for the challenge.

"Everyone made a commitment to show up at the end of last year and throughout the summer, people kept their word," he said. "Guys stayed in the weight room all summer."

Johnson said he expects anywhere from 25-31 players to suit up, which is about average for the Wildcats, and they'll have experience on the line on both sides of the ball.

"No matter what level of football you play, it all starts up front," Johnson said. "We have several linemen coming back that got playing time last year."

Sophomore Angel Morales has been playing varsity since he was in the eighth grade and is expected to see time at tackle on offense and nose guard on defense.

"Life on the line is fun," Morales

said. "I enjoy being right in the middle of everything. There is a lot of responsibility, especially on offense, making sure everyone is protected. I have a good feeling about the offensive line this season because we had a really good summer in the weight room."

Wilcoxson added that the summer commitment included getting more students to join the team.

"We just need bodies at this point," he said. "I have a bunch of buddies who have never played football before who have come out. It's hard to convince people because it is a lot of work. You have to have the right mentality and the rewards will be worth it in the long run."

Johnson said not all new players are familiar with football but can still contribute.

"On any given season, you could have some players who are extremely athletic but have never played football before," Johnson said. "Those kids can help us, it just depends on the commitment level."

Morales is one of the players who faced the early challenges and committed to staying.

"It was tough playing varsity as an eighth-grader," he said. "I feel like I have gotten used to it more now and am ready for the next set of challenges. I've been trying to get more kids to come out for several years."

SHOALS CHRISTIAN FLAME



Coach: Brett Vick (second season, 5-6)

Region: 1A, Region 7

2023 record: 5-6

(4-3 1A, Region 8)

Last 5 years: 14-36

(1 playoff berth)

Aug. 23

Aug. 30

Sept. 6

Sept. 13

Sept. 20

Sept. 27

2024 schedule

at Belgreen

Brilliant

at Addison

at Vina

Phillips

open

Oct. 4

Oct. 11

Oct. 18

Oct. 25

Nov. 1

at Meek

Cherokee

Hackleburg

at Waterloo

open

Tharptown

at Phillips

Vina

at Cherokee

at Cold Springs

Danville (OT)

2023 results

W, 56-7

W, 50-7

W, 40-0

W, 16-12

L, 44-12

L, 20-14

Meek

at Hackleburg

Waterloo

at Addison

at Lynn

L, 30-0

L, 46-7

W, 68-0

L, 44-6

L, 53-7

Returning starters

OL-DL Ashland Husainy

OL-DL Rob Hyde

OL-LB Noah Hyde

RB-LB Preston Nippers

RB-DB Rylan Pettus

Continued upswing

Flame tries to build on 2023 improvement

By A. Stacy Long
Sports Writer



Vick

Yes, it was a surprise. Both the five wins and the playoff berth were all unexpected last season at Shoals Christian, which hired a new coach in the middle of last summer and then

got to work.

By the end, the Flame found a new bar it will try to meet, one that many may consider low, but consider where the Flame has been.

"It was really cool. We did something," running back/defensive back Rylan Pettus said. "We made an impact on the school having a record that not a lot of previous teams had."

Shoals Christian reached five wins last season, a heady mark for a school that hadn't done such in over a decade. The Flame made the playoffs, a stirring feat for a team that last did it in 2016.



SEE SHOALS CHRISTIAN, G34 Preston Nippers, Rylan Pettus and the Shoals Christian Flame want to build on last year's surprising five-win season. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

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SHOALS CHRISTIAN

From Page G33

“We want to try to go 5-5 again, try to break even, maybe get a couple more,” linebacker/running back Preston Nippers said.

They’re hoping to build on the memories and experience of seeing the playoffs for the first time in so long.

Sure, the Flame’s first-round trip to Lynn ended in a large defeat, but the sights and sounds remain something the players savor.

“It took a lot to get there, and it was fun when we got there,” Nippers said. “I think it gives us a point as to where to get to this year, a step.

“We need to go as far or further.”

Shoals Christian will have one advantage over last year. Brett Vick, a sudden midsummer hire last year, has been there for a full year now.

The Flame no longer have to learn Vick or his system or his way of doing things.

“The first day I was here, he had us on the line running,” Nippers said before sarcastically describing that day’s experience. “It was wonderful. I had a great time.”

And they have their 2023 success to build on.

“It was a very positive sign,” Vick

said. “Looking at the recent history of the program, coming in, one of our goals was to have a winning season. We fell just short of that.”

Nippers and Pettus, Vick said, will be keys. Either could be the quarterback, but both will see massive playing time.

So will their teammates.

Shoals Christian, which played its final four games last year, including when it clinched a playoff berth, with 13 players, expects to have less than 20 in uniform this year.

“To play iron man football and have just 13 guys the last four weeks of the year, made it even a little bit sweeter,” Vick said. “I think the excitement was there. Getting to the postseason, getting another week was a big deal.”

Nippers ended up with another big goal for this season. He was honorable mention All-State a year ago, which makes him a candidate this year to be Shoals Christian’s first All-State player since 2010.

“I didn’t even know we were keeping stats, to be honest. I didn’t know anybody was keeping them,” said Nippers, whose 141 tackles included just 14 for loss and one paltry sack.

“I’m going to try to make some more tackles, make them in the backfield instead of down the field,” he said. “I want to get into more plays.”

“I feel like I have more of a leadership role,” Farley said. “We talk to other guys at school all the time trying to get people to come out. It’s fun. I’m small for a lineman so I like to be able to beat someone off the ball on offense and defense. It’s not all speed, I use my strength too.”

Dane Morris also tries to recruit classmates. The junior plays wide receiver on offense and plays in the secondary on defense.

“I’ve tried to recruit a few guys at school,” he said. “Sometimes they listen. It really is fun. I love to catch passes on offense. On defense, sometimes you are on an island. Sometimes you have help. It just depends on who we are playing and how they are lined up.”

Palmer said getting the program turned around means focusing on the little things more than wins and losses.

“Every game is different,” he said. “We can only control what we do. If we get better every week, everything else will work itself out.”



Central’s Hunter Palmer was a second-team Class 4A All-State player last year. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

CENTRAL

From Page G27

games of 2023 with an ACL injury.

Heath Wood has seen this group of seniors evolve since before they arrived in high school. Most have been playing together since long before that. And even as tight knit as they appear, he knows that it can fall apart quickly.

“It starts with practice and the senior leadership,” the coach said. “It doesn’t matter how many people you got back or you are supposed to be good. If you don’t have the mindset of staying hungry to be good, then it’s not going to matter. Sometimes people get caught up in that we’re supposed to be good and you forget what it takes to be good. And that’s going come down to leadership – the seniors. They seem like they’re eager.”

Central displayed a potent offense in 2023, averaging 41.5 points per game. Only once were the Wildcats held under 20 points and their other two low marks were 28-point efforts. With many of the skill position players back and the return of Hanback, Central should be able to put up similar type numbers of the offensive line, with three new starters, can hold up.

“We’ve got a bunch of young guys that

have put in a lot of work so we should be fine,” Palmer said.

It’s the defense that needs upgrading if the Wildcats are to make a deep playoff run. Central allowed 37 points per game, including an ugly 56-point average in its five losses.

“We had too many penalties and we gave up too many big plays,” Brewer said.

“We’d get to third down and give up a big play and they’d go on to score,” Eli Wood said.

Heath Wood said defense has been a point of emphasis after reviewing last season.

“You have to know what your strengths are and you got to know what you need to be working on as well and being real with yourself,” he said. “Bryant was a big loss toward the end of the season and he should be back 100%. We have some young guys who hopefully are going to step up and help us on that side of the ball, so we’ll see.”

Central loses county rival Rogers from the schedule and gains Hatton and Danville as Class 4A, Region 7 transitions to a nine-team league. Regardless, Central’s seniors are eager to see how it plays out – and to savor every moment.

“One hundred percent,” Hanback said.

WATERLOO

From Page G28

“I try to just follow the game plan,” said Brocke Goacher, a junior who enters his second season as the starting quarterback. “I just do whatever the coaches ask me to do. You always get a little nervous, but it is also exciting at the same time.”

Palmer added that while numbers are a battle Waterloo and several other small schools must face each year, the current group of players have been committed throughout the summer.

“We have had decent numbers because there was already a good base to come into this season,” he said. “We just need to build off of that and get the players to understand what it is going to take. We are going to have to rely on a lot of different kids.”

One of those kids is Nathan Farley. The senior who starts on the offensive and defensive lines often recruits other Waterloo students to play football.

SHEFFIELD BULLDOGS



stint at Sheffield; 14th season overall at Sheffield, 72-66; 29th year overall, 203-127)

Region: 3A, Region 7
2023 record: 3-7 (1-5 2A, Region 8)

Last 5 years: 19-32 (1 playoff berth)

Coach: Johnny Wright
 (first season of current

2024 schedule

Aug. 23	at Decatur Heritage	Oct. 4	Elkmont
Aug. 30	open	Oct. 11	Lauderdale Co. at Colbert Co.
Sept. 6	at Rogers	Oct. 18	at Clements
Sept. 13	at Mars Hill Bible	Oct. 25	Colbert Co. at Red Bay
Sept. 20	Colbert Heights	Nov. 1	open at Tanner
Sept. 27	at Waterloo		

2023 results

L, 30-29	at Waterloo
L, 49-28	Cherokee
L, 58-34	Hatton
L, 50-6	at Tharptown
L, 48-14	Lexington

Returning starters

W, 42-0	QB Bryant Doll	DL Demarius Beckwith
W, 27-8	OL Navi Dysart	DL James Drumgood
L, 54-26	OL Jon Will Hufstedler	LB David Foster
W, 46-20	OL Maddix Rupley	LB Connor Clark
L, 64-12	RB-LB Skyler Johnston	LB Jake McBride
	RB Jeremiah Fletcher	DB Cameron Keck

The Wright stuff

Former Bulldogs coach returns to the pound

By Gregg Dewalt
 For the TimesDaily



Wright

It only took a vacant job and a deep affection for both his hometown and its high school for Johnny Wright to climb out of his retirement recliner and get back on the sideline.

Wright, who spent 13 years previously coaching the Bulldogs while amassing an overall 203-win career, didn't expect to be lured back to the field. Instead, he decided to help return stability and, hopefully, success to a once-proud program that has had two coaches in the past three years and is just 13-27 in the past four seasons.

Wright, a Sheffield native, spent the recent portion of his retirement attending games and watching grandson Jon Will Hufstedler play for the Bulldogs. So, after Sheffield finished 3-7 and second-year coach Brian Dickerson resigned, when Wright was offered to take over as head coach, he accepted the challenge.

He's obviously older now — he'll be 70 in October — than during his previous stint where his 72-66 record ranks second only to legendary Walton Wright when it comes to wins at the school.

But he hasn't lost the passion to coach. "I don't lose my retirement, I don't lose my Social Security, and I still get a salary," he said. "I don't teach anything. They offered it to me and I decided to take it. I asked for a lot of things and they gave them to me."

Among his requests was the opportunity to hire a mostly new staff, including former Clements head coach Michael Parker. Previous head coach and current athletic director David Hufstedler was lured from his own coaching retirement



Sheffield is hoping the return of Johnny Wright can bring some stability — and wins — back to the program. [IVY ROSE BALL/TIMESDAILY]

to run the defense.

Hufstedler spent 10 years as Sheffield's head coach and is tied for third on the school's all-time wins list with 55. Wright called his staff "one of the best I have ever had from top to bottom."

Wright even played the family card to get Hufstedler on the sideline.

"I asked him how he could have a chance to coach his son, a senior, and not take it," Wright said.

With six offensive starters to work with, including quarterback Bryant

Doll and running backs Skyler Johnston and Jeremiah Fletcher, and seven more on defense, Wright isn't coming into a complete rebuilding situation in regard to players. His early focus was on fostering a family atmosphere which he said was lacking.

"You have to care about the guy next to you," he said. "You have to hang out together. You have to be able to go to war with each other, and we have come a long way with that. I'm excited about everything we have got going."

Wright said the team's strength will be on the offensive and defensive lines. Navi Dysart, Jon Will Hufstedler and Maddix Rupley return on the offensive line, while Demarius Beckwith and James Drummond head the defensive line.

"As good as I have ever had," he said. "And we're gonna be better than we were in the backfield. It's gonna be more of a team thing. You have to be on the same page."

SHEFFIELD

From Page G35

Four linebackers are returning starters — David Foster, Connor Clark, Jake McBride and Johnston. Cameron Keck is the lone returning player in the secondary.

Wright said his best players are going to be on the field much of the time, a departure from recent teams.

“To do that — I saw a lot of them having cramps playing on just one side of the ball last year — they are going to have to get in better condition,” he said. “They have bought into that.”

He’s been impressed with what he has seen so far.

“We’ve got good senior leadership,” he said. “I had probably 20 players who showed up every day since I have been back. We have to get them to believe us. If they see us fighting to win, I think they’ll jump in.”

Wright said he has been energized by what he has seen from his staff and the players. It’s why he is excited to show up every day to help turn the program around.

“I’ve been doing it a lot of years,” Wright said. “I thought I was retired but I love the game and the kids, and trying to make a difference. I’m not trying to be a hero. I’m trying to give a kid when he goes out of the field to feel like he can win and compete. I want them to have a chance to be successful.”



Bryant Doll will be back under center and leading the Sheffield offense this season. [IVY ROSE BALL/TIMESDAILY]

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Date	Opponent
Aug. 23	@ Decatur Heritage
Aug. 30	OPEN
Sept. 6	@ Rogers
Sept. 13	@ Mars Hill Bible
Sept. 20	Colbert Heights
Sept. 27	@ Waterloo
Oct. 4	Elkmont
Oct. 11	Lauderdale County
Oct. 18	@ Clements
Oct. 25	Colbert County
Nov. 1	Shoals Christian

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COLBERT HEIGHTS WILDCATS



Coach: Tyler Jeffreys (second season, 1-9)

Region: 3A, Region 7

2023 record: 1-9 (0-6 3A, Region 8)

Last 5 years: 21-32 (3 playoff berths)

Aug. 23
Aug. 30
Sept. 6
Sept. 13
Sept. 20
Sept. 27

2024 schedule

at Cherokee Oct. 4
Carbon Hill Oct. 11
at Clements Oct. 18
Elkmont Oct. 25
at Sheffield Nov. 1
at Falkville

2023 results

Colbert Co. at Lexington	L, 42-25	at Elkmont	L, 24-19
at Rogers Wilson	L, 34-14	Colbert Co.	L, 49-27
Mars Hill Bible at Mars Hill Bible	L, 54-0	Phil Campbell	L, 32-27
Lauderdale Co. Meek	W, 30-28	at Lauderdale Co.	L, 41-7
open Clements	L, 50-37	at Decatur Heritage	L, 21-20

Returning starters

LB-OL Cristian Gonzalez	DL Austin Daniels
OL Elijah Ratliff	DL Addison Myrick
CB Mason Bryant	DL Rivers Jones
TE-LB Jonah Hand	

Foundation set

Colbert Heights optimistic for improvement

By Gregg Dewalt
For the TimesDaily



Jeffreys

Last season's 1-9 record at Colbert Heights was somewhat of an anomaly for a program that celebrated its inaugural season in 1966.

While not the winningest program in the state, the Wildcats have been known to sprinkle in playoff seasons among mostly .500 records. It had been 26 years (1997) since the Wildcats won just once and 30 years since back-to-back one-win seasons.

Trying to avoid another one-win season and returning the program to playoff form, second-year coach Tyler Jeffreys is confident the Wildcats are on the right path.

The son of longtime coach Dale Jeffreys, Tyler was a strength coach with the Wildcats before being elevated to head coach when Taylor Leathers stepped down after the 2022 season. Leathers had a successful six-year run that included an 11-win season and five consecutive playoff appearances.

After a transitional year, Tyler Jeffreys is confident the groundwork has been laid for a return to respectability. And, despite the record, the Wildcats weren't that far from having a break-even record a year ago — three of the losses were by five points or less, and one was by 13 points.

"We laid down a really good foundation as far as young leadership goes to set us up for a really good season this year," junior wide receiver/free safety Owen Hood said.

The foundation is short on seniors — only four were listed on the preseason roster — but heavy on juniors (13). Seven starters return from 2023.

Jeffreys said he was pleased with how the team responded to a new, albeit familiar face as their head coach.

"I would say our younger guys probably bought in more and the culture has changed a little bit with those guys vs. the older ones," Jeffreys said "It's always tough with a first-year head coach coming in and they're a little unsure, but the young guys have definitely bought in. They've worked really hard to change the culture."

Jeffreys has created a leadership council that consists of players designed to bridge the gap between player and coaches and create peer accountability.

"You've got to hold the younger guys to the highest standard that you've been held to and it is got to continue," he said. "As long as you can continue to do that throughout a program's career, it's going to flourish. That's the thing we're trying



Mason Bryan, Eli Ratliff, Owen Hood and the Colbert Heights Wildcats are trying to bounce back from a one-win season. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

to get these guys to understand is hold yourself to a higher standard and hold your teammates to the same standard. And that's got to be a generational type thing. That's how programs are made."

Junior offensive and defensive lineman Eli Ratliff said leaders have emerged and created a positive atmosphere.

"We just have a bunch of leaders that encourage our young teammates," he said. "That helps them want to work hard and help us build our program."

Mason Bryant said that wasn't always the case last year, citing that some players had negative attitudes and seemed defeated even before games were played. He said attitudes have changed and that

the team has learned to fight through adversity.

As for Jeffreys, he enters his second season having learned some valuable lessons despite having been around successful coaches like his father in high school and Bobby Wallace at the University of North Alabama.

"It's a lot about hard work and consistency," he said. "We just have to keep preaching what we're doing and keep these guys buying in. There's a lot of things that you don't know until you get there. I was fortunate enough to know some of it just because I've been around it all my life. But I guess the biggest thing I learned is you can't short-cut anything."

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COLBERT COUNTY INDIANS



Coach: Scotty Hannah (third season at Colbert Co., 13-10; ninth year overall, 45-42)

Region: 3A, Region 7

2023 record: 6-5 (4-2 3A, Region 8)

Last 5 years: 32-24 (5 play-off berths)

Aug. 23
Aug. 30
Sept. 6
Sept. 13
Sept. 20
Sept. 27

2024 schedule

Central-Florence at Tanner
Mars Hill Bible
Lauderdale Co. at Rogers at Deshler
Oct. 4
Oct. 11
Oct. 18
Oct. 25
Nov. 1

Colbert Heights
Clements
Elkmont
at Sheffield
open
at Brooks
Sheffield
at Phil Campbell
Lauderdale Co.
Deshler
Mars Hill Bible

2023 results

L, 35-7
W, 49-28
W, 27-6
L, 42-0
L, 33-26
L, 45-7
at Colbert Heights
at Clements
Elkmont
at Sulligent
at Winfield

W, 49-27
W, 55-13
W, 49-0
W, 38-34
L, 43-21

Returning starters

C-DL Caiden Foust
OL-DL Wayne Little
OL Seth Johnson
TE-LB Cash Fuqua
RB-LB Frank Hayes

RB-DB BJ Thornton
LB Keshawn Jones
DB Shaun Samples
CB Coyron Campbell

'It's our turn'

Colbert County wants to take the next step

By Shane Herrmann
For the TimesDaily



Hannah

For many high school football programs, 12 consecutive winning seasons would be a sign of success.

Colbert County, however, has a tradition where winning is expected.

The Indians are seeking their 13th straight winning record this year and has made the playoffs 42 times in the previous 43 seasons, but they have not hosted a first-round playoff game or advanced past the second round since 2015.

Coach Scotty Hannah is ready for a return to the glory years.

"When you have a tradition like we do at Colbert County, you got to lean on it," Hannah said. "Sometimes, programs try to separate itself from the past. We embrace it."

The Indians are coming off a 6-5 campaign that featured a three-game losing streak and a four-game winning streak. With a solid senior class and some impressive newcomers, Hannah said the best thing for his team is to get on the field and play.

"Our team speed should be a plus for us," he said. "Experience and depth and different positions will be what we need to work on. We are going to really rely on some guys who have never been in game situations before. We will need them to give us some quality snaps, either as a starter or in a backup role."

One of the biggest changes will be B.J. Thornton. After moving from wide receiver to running back last year, the senior will now be the full-time starting quarterback.



Cash Fuqua, B.J. Thornton and Seth Johnson hope to live up to Colbert County's considerable tradition. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

"It has been a lot to take in," Thornton said. "I have an important role on the team this year and I need to step up and show the younger guys the way to do things. I'm looking forward to the

challenge."

Fellow senior Seth Johnson has not changed positions much throughout his career. The mainstay on the offensive and defensive lines said playing for

a program with so much tradition has prepared him for his final season.

"It has always been a big deal to be a

COLBERT CO.

From Page G38

part of Colbert County football,” said Johnson, who has played football every year since peewee. “The atmosphere is just unmatched. The community supports us so much and is always involved with the program. I am proud to be part of it.”

Cash Fuqua agrees. The senior will enter his final year starting at tight end on offense and middle linebacker on defense.

“It’s different being a senior because all of us have playing together since we were little,” he said. “Now we have a bigger role as leaders and a responsibility to the younger guys. In the past, the older guys did the same thing for us. Now it’s our turn.”

While Colbert County embraces its tradition, the team is fully aware that tradition alone does not win games.

“We feel like we have the speed to be able to get people out in space and take advantage of matchups,” Hannah said. “B.J. can run and throw the ball extremely well so that should be a big help. Defensively, we have to be able to stop the run.”

Thornton said he just wants to move the offense – by running or passing.

“I have been working on my passing game,” he said. “But if the option to throw the ball is not there, I’m looking forward to running and getting yards that way. I would like to host a first-round playoff game this year.”



B.J. Thornton, Frank Hayes and the Colbert County Indians hope to do more than just make the playoffs for the 43rd time in 43 seasons this year. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

COLBERT COUNTY INDIANS



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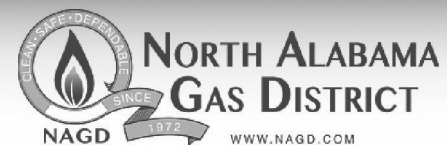
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CHEROKEE INDIANS



Region: 1A, Region 7
2023 record: 5-5 (3-4 1A, Region 8)
Last 5 years: 7-43 (no play-off berths)
Coach: Ben Floyd (fifth season, 7-33)

Aug. 23
 Aug. 30
 Sept. 6
 Sept. 13
 Sept. 20
 Sept. 27

2024 schedule

Colbert Heights	Oct. 4	Phillips-Bear Creek	at Brindlee Mtn.
Woodville	Oct. 11	at Shoals Chr.	Waterloo
at Waterloo	Oct. 18	at Meek	at Addison
Addison	Oct. 25	at Hackleburg	at Phillips Shoals Chr.
Vina	Nov. 1	open	
at Belgreen			

2023 results

W, 38-6	at Tharptown
W, 48-0	at Sheffield
L, 54-6	at Vina
W, 62-20	Meek
L, 16-12	Hackleburg

W, 70-28
L, 27-8
W, 46-0
L, 26-12
L, 41-6

QB-DB Jon Schleifer
RB-LB Nathan Trent
WR-DB Tay Hicks
WR-DB Mykel Goodloe
TE-LB Nic Curry

Returning starters

OL-DL Corey Tice
OL-DL Daniel Darling
DL Peyton Webster
DE Jacob Padron
DB Zavian Davis

On the rise?

After big leap, Cherokee thinks playoffs

By Shane Herrmann
 For the TimesDaily



Floyd

After winning only two games over a four-year stretch, last season's 5-5 record was considered a "breath of fresh air" at Cherokee.

And with nine starters back on offense and eight on defense, the Indians have the post-season in their sights.

Coach Ben Floyd remembers taking over the program in 2020 and having to use a lot of freshmen to fill out the starting lineup. The losses piled up and the young guys took their lumps.

"The guys we have now were babies who were playing varsity when I first took over," Floyd said. "They have fought some battles. We have overcome some things and made some changes. To be able to win five games last year was a breath of fresh air, but now the players are hungry for more."



SEE CHEROKEE, G51

Tay Hicks, Jon Schleifer and Nathan Trent are looking to help Cherokee grab a playoff berth this year. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

CHEROKEE INDIANS

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BELGREEN BULLDOGS



Not eligible for playoffs

2024: First-year varsity team.
2023: Played a JV-only schedule.
Coach: Jonathan Raper (first year)

2024 schedule

(only varsity games listed)		Sept. 20
Aug. 23	Shoals Chr.	Sept. 27
Aug. 30	at Sumiton Chr.	Oct. 25
Sept. 6	at Tharptown	Nov. 1

Tanner	2023 JAG*	0-10
Cherokee	2023 Julian*	5-5
at Victory Chr.	2022 University Charter	2-8
Vina	2020 Orange Beach	3-5
	2018 Elberta	2-5
	2018 Pike Road	6-5

AHSAA first-year teams

2017 Jasper*	3-7	2014 Mars Hill	1-9	2011 Sumter Central*	4-7
2017 St. Michael**	0-1	2014 Park Crossing	7-3	*School had opened under	
2016 Jemison-Huntsville*	6-5	2012 Central-Clay Co.*	10-2	a new name or following	
2015 St. John Paul II*	1-9	2012 James Clemens	0-10	a merger. **St. Michael	
2014 Chickasaw	4-7	2012 Ramsay	1-9	was 1-9 in 2018, its first full	
2014 Helena	5-6	2012 Southeastern-Blount	0-9	varsity year.	

Starting up

Belgreen excited for 1st varsity season

By A. Stacy Long
Sports Writer



Raper

BELGREEN — The field is a ripe green with blazing royal blue end zones, an artificial-surface jewel atop a hillside a short ride from Belgreen's campus.

Jonathan Raper, the coach of Belgreen's fledgling program, stands in a temporary shed, sifting through equipment to hand out to his Bulldogs.

Starting a football program is no easy task, but it's something both Raper and the Bulldogs are embracing with enthusiasm.

Sure, the field may glisten and entice over the touchdowns, big hits and big plays to come, but the stadium — two weeks before Belgreen's first home varsity game — remained a work in progress.

"It's all been pretty crazy, but now we get to play football," said quarterback/safety Landon Cox, who will be one of five seniors on Belgreen's first (known) varsity team in 90 years.

"We're all looking forward to it."

The Bulldogs, after an anonymous \$1.5 million donation two years ago specifically to start football, now have a field and a concession stand.

Stands, as of early August, still had to be delivered. A locker room, both for the Bulldogs and any visiting team, will have to wait at least a year.

Currently, Belgreen uses its gym and buses to practice.

"The football part is the fun part, the easy part," Raper said. "Not having everything yet is tough, but the kids are working hard to get better.

"Right now, we have to also handle the other stuff rather than just football, but that's part of it."

Belgreen played a five-game JV-only



Belgreen has a new artificial field for its new varsity football team. [PHOTOS BY DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

schedule last year, all away from home, and will have a hybrid schedule this season. The seven varsity games do count and make this Belgreen's "first" football year.

"It's definitely going to be tough, but it's varsity," senior running back/linebacker Gabe Wilson said. "Last year was just JV or junior high, but it prepared us. We got a lot of kinks worked out."

Belgreen officials, originally unsure if the school had ever had football before, have learned the school had one junior high team in the late 1970s. Wilson said his uncle, Ricky Gardner, was on the team. There was also a team in the 1930s that disbanded due to lack of funds



Gabe Wilson and Landon Cox are among the five seniors who will be part of Belgreen's first varsity team in 90 years.

SEE BELGREEN, G54

LAWRENCE COUNTY WILDCATS



Region: 5A, Region 5
2023 record: 4-6 (2-4 5A, Region 5)
Last 5 years: 23-26 (no play-off berths)
Coach: David Marston (22nd season, 96-123)

2024 schedule	
Aug. 23	at Summertown
Aug. 30	Loretto
Sept. 6	Lincoln Co.
Sept. 13	at Giles Co.
Sept. 20	at Columbia Central
Sept. 26	Spring Hill
Oct. 3	Tullahoma
Oct. 11	open
Oct. 18	at Shelbyville Central
Oct. 25	at Franklin Co.
Nov. 1	Cheatham Co. Central
Summertown	at Loretto
at Lincoln Co.	Giles Co.
Columbia	

2023 results	
W, 14-7	at Spring Hill
L, 24-20	at Tullahoma
W, 27-21	Shelbyville
L, 42-7	Franklin Co.
L, 31-0	at Cheatham Co.
W, 35-12	
L, 41-6	
L, 21-12	
L, 31-30	
W, 48-6	

Returning starters	
RB Ian Clayton	DE Jack Marston
OL Matthew Hagemann	LB Andrew Tupper
OL Max Taylor	DL Tayden Russell
OL Wyatt Roberson	

Airing it out?

Wildcats scrap longtime offense for a new one

By David Glovach
Sports Writer



It wasn't long after last season ended when David Marston and his coaching staff spent some time examining Lawrence County's roster.

Smaller, quicker running backs. A quarterback with the ability to throw the football as much as run it.

The staff knew there needed to be a change.

Goodbye, wing-T.
Hello, spread offense.

"I'm excited about it," Marston said. "The thing we've noticed is that we've got a better chance at getting the basketball and baseball players because if they come out and think we're just going to run the ball, it's hard to get a kid excited about playing receiver because they think all they're going to do is block.

"Plus, that's what they see on Saturdays. That's what everyone is running."

It'll certainly be different. Even the terminology is new. After all, the Wildcats had run some version of the wing-T the previous two decades.

It meant lots of studying for Daniel Beasley. The offensive coordinator spent time in the offseason emailing with various coaches who employ the spread offense as well as watching copious amounts of film.

During the winter break, Garrett Hughes, one of Marston's former players and head coach at Reed High School in Sparks, Nevada, was back in town. Hughes met with the Lawrence County staff to watch some film on how he runs his offense.

The Wildcats also attended a clinic run by North Alabama coach Brent Dearmon, someone Beasley studied quite a bit.



Matthew Hagemann and Ian Clayton feel confident in the spread offense Lawrence County will run this season. [DAVID GLOVACH/TIMESDAILY]

"It's been a change, but it's been a good change," Marston said.

Count offensive lineman Matthew Hagemann as a fan.

"I'm relatively new to the school, I got here last year," Hagemann said. "I moved from California, and we ran a spread offense there, so it hasn't been too hard for me to adjust to it. It's pretty similar.

"But I like this way better (than last year's offense). The whole blocking scheme is way easier."

The hope is it'll make games easier in a way.

Last season, Lawrence County scored 30 or more points just three times.

The one time they did so and lost — a 31-30 defeat at the hands of Franklin County in Week 9 — it cost the Wildcats a playoff berth. Lawrence County hasn't made it to the postseason since 2015.

"We felt like we needed something to get us over the hump," Marston said. "It's felt like the last few years, it's either come down to the last game or close to it just to get into the playoffs. We want to hopefully score more points. We looked at it and said we didn't score enough."

So, out with the old and in with the new.

Goodbye, wing-T.

"It's been a lot more stuff to learn," running back Ian Clayton said. "Entirely different from what we've done the past three years, but I'm enjoying it. Always something new, something interesting.

"And the offense as a whole feels more efficient."

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LORETTO MUSTANGS



Coach: Barry Daniel (fifth season at Loretto, 23-21; ninth year overall, 48-49)

Region: 2A, Region 5
2023 record: 10-1 (7-0 2A, Region 5)
Last 5 years: 26-28 (4 playoff berths)

2024 schedule	
Aug. 23	Collinwood
Aug. 30	at Lawrence Co.
Sept. 6	at Harpeth
Sept. 13	Summertown
Sept. 20	at Lewis Co.
Sept. 27	Hickman Co.
Oct. 4	at East Hickman
Oct. 11	open
Oct. 18	at Eagleville
Oct. 25	Waverly Central
Oct. 31	Mount Pleasant

2023 results	
W, 45-29	at Hickman Co.
W, 24-20	East Hickman
W, 47-13	Eagleville
W, 35-0	at Waverly Central
W, 24-21	at Mount Pleasant
W, 37-14	Peabody
W, 24-12	W, 24-12
W, 48-21	W, 48-21
W, 36-15	W, 36-15
W, 56-52	W, 56-52
L, 28-24	L, 28-24

Returning starters	
OL Harley McMasters	DB Jaxon Roberson
OL Colby Brown	LB Branton Snider
OL Braxton Long	LB-DB Andrew Riley
WR Corben Reynolds	LB Sam Creekmore
RB Nicholas McDow	LB Preston Way
WR Hunter Smith	DL David Burke
QB Mason Tidwell	DL Blaze Thomason

‘Lightning in a bottle’

Loretto hoping to enjoy even more success

By Gregg Dewalt
 For the TimesDaily



Daniel

For the first 10 games of 2023, Barry Daniel’s Loretto football team was perfect — all wins and no losses, its preseason goals met and the Mustangs were eyeing a deep playoff run.

And then in the first round of the postseason, Peabody spoiled the Mustangs’ fun with a 28-24 elimination-game win.

The defeat left the proverbial “bitter taste” in the mouths of the players, one they still haven’t completely shed.

Entering the 2024 season, it’s up to Daniel and his assistants to make sure that the disappointing ending doesn’t overshadow the success of what was only the second 10-win season in school history. They also are charged with building on last season’s success.

That success follows a pattern of what the school’s other teams have accomplished recently. The baseball team won a state title last season and three other programs (boys basketball, girls basketball, volleyball) have celebrated state titles since 2018.

With the arrival of Daniel in 2020, the Mustangs have not missed the playoffs.



Loretto’s Branton Snider, Jaxon Roberson and Nicholas McDow hope to build on the Mustangs’ success last season. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

But they also haven’t made it past the first round. Still, it’s suddenly cool to play football at Loretto after several down years ahead of Daniel’s tenure.

“Everything came together the right way — we sort of captured lightning in a bottle,” Daniel said. “We had a good group of seniors. We had a good group of

underclassmen, the right mix, demeanor, attitude — all those things with a really good work ethic and just a group of guys that were committed to each other and committed to going and being the very best they could be. It was a fun year as far as all that goes.”

Senior outside linebacker Branton Snider

said the Mustangs didn’t dwell on the disappointing ending. Instead, they went to work on 2024.

“We’ve been building on last year since two weeks after the season ended,” he said. “We’ve been hitting it hard in the weight

SEE LORETTO, G53

LORETTO MUSTANGS

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HALEYVILLE LIONS



Region: 4A, Region 5
2023 record: 8-4 (6-1 4A, Region 5)
Last 5 years: 24-29 (2 playoff berths)
Coach: Bo Culver (third season of current stint, 14-9; sixth season at Haleyville, 39-19; 13th year overall, 77-59)

2024 schedule

Aug. 23	at West Point	Oct. 4
Aug. 30	at Tarrant	Oct. 11
Sept. 6	Curry	Oct. 18
Sept. 13	Good Hope	Oct. 25
Sept. 20	at Fayette Co.	Nov. 1
Sept. 27	Lawrence Co.	

2023 results

Dora	at Rogers	W, 21-20
Fultondale	Winfield	L, 26-14
at Hamilton	at Cordova	W, 36-21
at Cordova	Dora	L, 42-20
open	Northside	W, 20-17
	at Oak Grove	W, 41-12

at Curry	W, 53-20
Hamilton	W, 46-21
Corner	W, 32-13
West Morgan	L, 42-12
North Jackson	W, 33-14
at Cherokee Co.	L, 49-14

Returning starters

OL Brock Rushing	WR Cooper McNutt
OL Landon Lovett	HB-LB Jacob Barnwell
OL Even Howard	WR-DB Eli Cagle
OL Mason Tidwell	TE Grayson Goddard
OL Titus Hood	LB Fisher McCombs
QB Evan Cagle	LB Austin Walker

Growing up

Haleyville looking to keep upward trend going

By David Glovach
Sports Writer



There isn't any hesitation.

In fact, it's the first thing that comes to mind when Haleyville talked about its summer workouts.

Culver
The Lions call it the tough mile.

"I can tell you, as a lineman, that's rough," Landon Lovett said.

It certainly sounded like it. Four laps around the school's track with trips up and down both the home and away bleachers each go-round. Oh, and it tended to happen after a leg workout. The coaches, who aren't shy about lifting with the players, notably, usually opt to sit this one out.

But then again, it wasn't necessarily meant to be easy.

"I think from a physical and mental standpoint, it might have been the toughest thing we had them do," coach Bo Culver said. "They're tired, but it helps teach you to push through some things."

Hey, whatever works. For Haleyville, it's all about finding different ways to continue to grow in Culver's second stint at the school. Namely, on the scoreboard and in the end-of-season record.

The Lions have undergone two-win improvements in each of the last two seasons, collecting six victories in 2022 and going 8-4 last year. Hitting 10 wins — something Haleyville hasn't done since 2014 when Culver was also the coach — would be a good way to continue that trend.

Those currently on the roster don't see any reason why that can't happen.



Cooper McNutt, Landon Lovett, Austin Walker and Jacob Barnwell are aiming for Haleyville to continue move up in the wins column. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

"There's a different vibe this year," said receiver/defensive back Cooper McNutt, who was the team's starting quarterback last season before needing offseason Tommy John surgery. Evan Cagle, who played receiver in 2023, will take over the starting duties as the team's signal caller.

"It's a different feeling whether that's workouts, the locker room or on the field."

In all, the Lions are returning 10 offensive starters, including all five members of their offensive line. They bring back

four starters on defense.

It's a group that scored 30 or more points in seven of its wins. It was also held to 14 or fewer points in three of its four losses, including in a Class 4A second-round loss at Cherokee County. Haleyville lost that game 49-14.

"I just feel like we have a lot of experience coming back," linebacker Jacob Barnwell said. "We're bringing back a lot of our key guys."

That definitely should help. "You can really see the growth," linebacker Austin Walker said, "and tell the

difference between from last year to this year."

That's the hope. It's what all that running is supposed to help.

"There's three championships you want to win each year — your region, the North and the state championship," Culver said. "Our goals are to win all three. I don't know how those cannot be your goals if you are going to compete."

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

HACKLEBURG PANTHERS



Coach: Rod Hudson (16th season, 120-56)

Region: 1A, Region 7
2023 record: 11-2 (7-0 1A, Region 8)
Last 5 years: 32-26 (5 playoff berths)

Aug. 23
 Aug. 30
 Sept. 6
 Sept. 13
 Sept. 20
 Sept. 27

2024 schedule

open	Oct. 4	at Vina	at Phil Campbell
Lynn	Oct. 11	at Phillips-Bear Creek	at Meek
Meek	Oct. 18	at Shoals Chr.	Addison
Waterloo	Oct. 25	Cherokee	Hubbertville
at Addison	Nov. 1	at Hubbertville	Red Bay
Phil Campbell			at Waterloo
			Phillips

2023 results

L, 22-20	Shoals Chr.
W, 24-8	Vina
W, 32-28	at Cherokee
W, 32-21	Marion Co.
W, 38-14	Valley Head
W, 34-0	at Coosa Chr.
W, 41-0	

Returning starters

W, 46-7	QB Blaise Vickery	OL Domyck Patterson
W, 43-6	TB Davin Dulaney	OL-DL Garrett Pennington
W, 41-6	WR-DB Jaquan Reeder	OL-DL Daniel Stidham
W, 47-8	WR-DB Cam Ingram	HB-LB Sawyer Johnson
W, 33-18	WR Daughtry Goban	LB Noah Tubb
L, 63-13	OL Blaine McDuffa	LB Ross Hudson
	OL Jacob Wiginton	LB Edge Weeks

Experience factor

Hackleburg hopes veterans will lead deep playoff run

By David Glovach
 Sports Writer



Hudson

The numbers have Rod Hudson excited and the Hackleburg coach is ready to share.

So, where to start? Might as well go with the starting lineups.

Of the Panthers' 22 starters from last season, 19 are returning.

How about the breakdown of the team's roster? That doesn't look too bad, either.

Hackleburg will have 12 seniors, seven juniors and eight sophomores for the upcoming season.

"I think experience is going to help us," Hudson said. "That's going to be one of our strengths. We're finally an older team. At Hackleburg, we don't get to say that a lot."

It's as good a time as any to start.

After all, it should only help a team that went 11-2 and reached the Class 1A quarterfinals. Both were program bests since 2009. That year, the Panthers went 14-1 and played for a state championship.

"I feel like we'll have a target on our back from what we did last year," quarterback Blaise Vickery said. "At the same time, that's last year. We have to do it again this year."



Jaquan Reeder and Blaise Vickery want to lead Hackleburg on another playoff run for their senior seasons. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

That's where that experience comes in. Among Hackleburg's returnees are Vickery, offensive/defensive athlete Jaquan Reeder and offensive/defensive lineman Garrett Pennington. All three are seniors.

Vickery completed 69% of his passes

for 1,336 yards and 20 touchdowns, while throwing just three interceptions. He also ran for 586 yards and 11 scores. He was a second-team All-State selection.

Reeder did a little bit of everything — literally.

He picked off four passes and made 45

tackles on defense. Offensively, he ran for 400 yards and five touchdowns, and caught 28 passes for 519 yards and five scores. Can't forget about special teams where he returned both a punt and kickoff for touchdowns. Oh, and he missed four games with a hamstring injury.

He ended up with first-team All-State honors.

"Oh, no. He'll be our top playmaker on offense. The No. 1 option," Hudson said when asked if Reeder would be limited to one side of the ball this season. "I can honestly say, and not taking anything away from any team we'll play, every night he'll be the best athlete on the field."

Pennington, meanwhile, totaled 71 tackles and two sacks. He also helped pave the way for Hackleburg to finish nine games with 30 or more points, including five with at least 40. He received All-State honorable mention.

And yet, it feels strange in a way.

"It feels like it flew by too fast," Reeder said. "So right now, just trying to push off the feeling that this is the last year of high school football."

So, they're hoping to make the most of it.

"We want an undefeated regular season," Vickery said. "We want to get to the playoffs and see what happens."

The numbers appear to support that.

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HACKLEBURG PANTHERS

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PHIL CAMPBELL BOBCATS



Region: 3A, Region 5
2023 record: 4-7 (2-4 3A, Region 8)
Last 5 years: 28-26 (4 playoff berths)
Coach: Jacob Hamilton (second season at Phil Campbell, 4-7; third year overall, 6-15)

2024 schedule

Aug. 23	open	Oct. 4
Aug. 30	Hamilton	Oct. 10
Sept. 6	Vinmont	Oct. 18
Sept. 13	at Oakman	Oct. 25
Sept. 20	Winfield	Nov. 1
Sept. 27	at Hackleburg	

2023 results

at Midfield	Hackleburg	W, 22-20	Mars Hill Bible	L, 62-6
Carbon Hill	at Lamar Co.	L, 42-6	at Colbert Heights	W, 32-27
at Gordo	at Elkmont	L, 44-22	Clements	W, 44-36
at Hanceville	Colbert Co.	L, 27-6	Red Bay	L, 52-20
at Red Bay	at Carbon Hill	W, 52-13	at Gordo	L, 56-6
	at Lauderdale Co.	L, 46-0		

Returning starters

QB-DB Hayston Scott	OL-DL Johan Vasquez
RB-DB Hayden Wingo	OL Logan Wright
RB-LB Braxton Mayfield	OL Kamron Thomas
RB-DB Noah Raper	OL Jon Isaac Wilson
WR-DB Hagen Raper	LB Mason Weeks
TE-DL Logan Cooper	LB Ethan Hallman
OL Westin Greenhill	

Clawing for more

Bobcats' expectations high in Hamilton's 2nd year

By David Glovach
Sports Writer



Hamilton

Jacob Hamilton and his players are in lockstep when it comes to Phil Campbell's goals for this season.

They aren't shying away from them, either.

"I want to be good," said Hamilton, the Bobcats' second-year coach. "I want 10 wins, plain and simple."

It's a lofty number, especially considering the season records the program has put up in the 21st century.

Only once has Phil Campbell reached the double-digit win plateau — when it went 11-2 in 2000. The Bobcats went 9-2 the next year before enduring 18 straight losing seasons. They did win seven games in both 2021 and 2022.

And last season? That presented its own challenges in what was more like a roller-coaster adventure. One win followed by three losses. Another win preceding two more losses. Two more victories and finally two more defeats.

The final result was a quick playoff



Noah Raper, Johan Vasquez, Hayden Wingo, Braxton Mayfield and Logan Wright are excited to see what Phil Campbell can do in coach Jacob Hamilton's second season in charge. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

SEE PHIL CAMPBELL, G53

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Good Luck Bobcats!

HAMILTON AGGIES



Coach: Evan Shipp (second season, 1-9)

Region: 4A, Region 5
2023 record: 1-9 (1-6 4A, Region 5)
Last 5 years: 19-34 (3 playoff berths)

Aug. 23
 Aug. 30
 Sept. 6
 Sept. 13
 Sept. 20
 Sept. 27

2024 schedule
 open Oct. 4
 Phil Campbell Oct. 11
 Cordova Oct. 18
 at Dora Oct. 25
 Curry Nov. 1
 Sulligent

at Fultondale
 at Good Hope
 Haleyville
 Fayette Co.
 at Tarrant
 Winfield

Red Bay
 at Corner
 Oak Grove
 at Cordova
 Winfield

2023 results
 L, 54-27 Curry
 L, 53-6 Dora
 L, 39-36 at Haleyville
 L, 42-28 at Northside
 L, 52-0 at Fayette Co.

W, 61-20
 L, 62-40
 L, 46-21
 L, 47-6
 L, 51-33

Returning starters
 QB Mason Holloway
 RB Eli Harris
 RB Blake Vaughn
 OL Sam Moore
 OL Dillon Humphries
 OL Jaxson Ledbetter
 WR-DB Coley Gilstrap

WR-DB Houston Tibbs
 DL Luke Johnson
 DL Conner Peoples
 DL Jase Taylor
 LB JJ Vassar
 LB Hayden Merchant
 DB Tripp Summers

Change in store

Adjustments have Aggies feeling confident

By Gregg Dewalt
 For the TimesDaily



Shipp

Back-to-back 1-9 seasons definitely aren't the standard for Hamilton football, but that's where the program has been for the past two seasons under two different coaches.

For second-year coach Evan Shipp, his inaugural run with the Aggies was more about setting the tone for the future.

Sure, he wanted a better win-loss record. The view from the ground floor at the end of the season, however, was better than when he walked in the door.

"We made a lot of changes," he said. "We had new coaches and we had a lot of philosophical changes to the offense, defense and in the weight room. It was good. We did see a lot of growth."

"We were young last year, had some injuries too on top of it, but we continued to get better every game last year, even though the outcome wasn't necessarily that different, but we did see some change with growth of getting better work ethic."

In the history of Hamilton football, the Aggies only once before had back-to-back one-win seasons, and that was in 1932-33. The team has never had three straight seasons of one win or less, so it enters this season trying to avoid that distinction.

Shipp, though, is confident Hamilton will be better — he played lots of underclassmen in 2023 and some players who did not buy into the new way of doing things at Hamilton have moved on.

More importantly, linemen Conner Peoples and Sam Moore said they still were able to have fun even though the



SEE HAMILTON, G53

Sam Moore, Conner Peoples and the Hamilton Aggies feel more comfortable going into coach Evan Shipp's second season. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

WAYNE COUNTY WILDCATS



Coach: Derek Willis (second season, 4-6)

Region: 1A, Region 5
2023 record: 4-6 (2-4 1A, Region 5)
Last 5 years: 17-34 (2 playoff berths)

2024 schedule

Aug. 23	at Mount Pleasant	Oct. 4	Huntland
Aug. 30	Summertown	Oct. 11	Cornersville
Sept. 6	Richland	Oct. 18	open
Sept. 13	at Moore Co.	Oct. 25	at Collinwood
Sept. 20	McEwen	Nov. 1	at Liberty Creek
Sept. 27	at Eagleville		

2023 results

L, 29-6	Eagleville
W, 40-14	at Huntland
L, 14-12	at Cornersville
L, 40-0	Collinwood
W, 37-14	Liberty Creek

2023 results

W, 30-22	QB-LB Drew Bevis
L, 29-16	WR-DB Saylor Skelton
L, 40-14	OL-DL Baker Bryant
W, 40-23	OL-DB Ben Thompson
L, 48-20	RB-LB Cayson Castleman

Returning starters

DL Brayden Littleton
WR-DB Will Robertson
TE-LB Dane Bryant
OL-DL Hayden Horner
WR-DB David Ullman

The small things

Wayne County looking for better consistency

By David Glovach
Sports Writer



Willis

Derek Willis didn't have last season's results in front of him.

The Wayne County coach didn't exactly need them either. Not when the difference between playing at least

one extra week and a frustrating ending came down to a minute amount of points.

"I think from totaling the games from last year, we finished 12 or 13 points from being second in our region and hosting a playoff game," Willis said of his first season in charge.

He was close. It was actually 15.

The Wildcats lost their third game 14-12 at Richland. They lost their seventh game 29-16 at Huntland.

Had Wayne County won both those games, it would have given the team a tiebreaker over Collinwood and that home playoff game as the No. 2 seed. Instead, the Wildcats placed fifth in their region. There were no playoffs.

It's why Willis, the coaching staff and the players have preached a similar message throughout the offseason — just be consistent and close out games.

"So far, I think the biggest thing with coach Willis is he's always given us his best effort," quarterback/linebacker Drew Bevis. "Last year, we had some kinks to figure out. We had a good team last year, but we didn't always show up to every game and that's on us, not him. I think this year, he's really motivated us to be the best we can be and I think that's going to contribute a lot."

It showed at times. During a six-week stretch, Wayne County alternated between a pair of losses and a pair of wins, and back again.



Ben Thompson and Drew Bevis would like to help Wayne County get back to the playoffs in their senior seasons. [DAVID GLOVACH/TIMESDAILY]

But Willis believes that can be a good learning experience for the players who were on the roster a year ago, something they can impart on those who are

younger.

And there are quite a few young players.

The Wildcats had fewer than 40

players in 2023. This season, the roster will feature 53 players — from a school

SEE WAYNE CO., G51

COLLINWOOD TROJANS



Region: 1A, Region 5
2023 record: 7-4 (4-2 1A, Region 5)
Last 5 years: 24-28 (3 play-off berths)

Coach: Boyce Dixon (third season of current stint, 9-12; eighth year overall, 44-32)

2024 schedule

Aug. 23	at Loretto	Oct. 4
Aug. 30	Franklin Chr.	Oct. 11
Sept. 6	Cornersville	Oct. 18
Sept. 13	at Eagleville	Oct. 25
Sept. 20	Hollow Rock-Bruceton	Nov. 1
Sept. 27	at Clarksville Aca.	

2023 results

Richland	Loretto	L, 45-29	at Richland	W, 20-13
at Moore Co.	at Cornersville	W, 12-0	Moore Co.	L, 35-6
open	Eagleville	W, 38-13	at Wayne Co.	L, 40-23
Wayne Co.	at Hollow Rock-Bruceton		Huntland	W, 18-0
at Huntland		W, 30-0	McEwen	W, 37-7
	Clarksville Aca.	W, 40-7	at McKenzie	L, 43-0

Returning starters

FB-LB Tyler Jackson	QB-DB Wyatt Smith
OL-DE Timmy Chapman	RB-DB Corbin Smith
OL-DE Drey Howe	DE-RB Brody Holt
RB-LB Harrison Rich	DB-WR Cole Risner

Progress is progress

Trojans want to make most of their strides

By David Glovach
 Sports Writer



Dixon

Things have been a little quieter around Collinwood. Well, smoother might be the more optimal term this offseason.

While most of the last two were spent learning – about the playbook, about technique and even a little about football – this summer has been more geared towards building upon that knowledge.

“We’re trying to fine-tune things,” said coach Boyce Dixon, who is entering the third year of his second stint at the school. “We were competitive last year, but to move to the next level, we’ve still got some things to do. I think we’re much better than we were a couple of years ago, we’re more knowledgeable. You can see that going out on the field.

“Like in the 7-on-7s, it was horrible two years ago. Now, they understand.” The records show as much.

After going 2-8 in 2022, the Trojans underwent a five-win improvement last year that also included a Class 1A play-off appearance before exiting courtesy



SEE COLLINWOOD, G54

Tyler Jackson, Drey Howe and Harrison Rich have seen plenty of growth from Collinwood since Boyce Dixon returned as coach. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

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RED BAY TIGERS



Coach: Heath Childers (fourth season at Red Bay, 14-17; 11th year overall, 40-61)

Region: 2A, Region 8
2023 record: 6-5 (3-3 2A, Region 8)
Last 5 years: 35-20 (4 playoff berths)

2024 schedule

Aug. 23	open	Oct. 4	open
Aug. 30	at Lamar Co.	Oct. 10	at Tharptown
Sept. 6	University Charter	Oct. 18	Decatur Heritage
Sept. 13	at Winston Co.	Oct. 25	Tanner
Sept. 20	at Lexington	Nov. 1	Phil Campbell
Sept. 27	at Belmont (Miss.)		at Hamilton

2023 results

W, 54-27	Falkville	W, 44-22	OL Rhett Lockhart
L, 33-22	at Tanner	L, 46-14	OL Reed Hamilton
W, 50-6	Hatton	L, 36-24	
W, 14-6	at Phil Campbell	W, 52-20	
L, 28-14	at Tuscaloosa Aca.	L, 35-16	
W, 52-24			

Returning starters

Wanting more

Red Bay seeks more than just winning season

By A. Stacy Long
Sports Writer



The final count at the end of the last two seasons reflect a winning season for Red Bay.

But the Tigers want more.

A 6-5 record counts as a winning year, and each included a postseason berth, but there remains a feeling that such is not enough.

“You always want more,” offensive lineman/defensive end Reed Hamilton said. “But you can’t really complain about making it to the playoffs.”

Now, faced with what virtually every team claims — lower expectations, they say — the Tigers hope that will be something to inspire them.

“A lot of people say we’re not going to be that good this year,” tight end/halfback/linebacker Jayden Smith said. “Maybe we can use that as motivation and prove people wrong and be a pretty good football team.”

Red Bay, coach Heath Childers says, has lots to do if it wants to reach that goal. The Tigers have a paucity of returning starters from last year’s team that lost in the first round of the Class 2A playoffs at Tuscaloosa Academy.

Last year, Red Bay had nine returning starters on both offense and defense before it matched 2022’s 6-5 finish. The team two years ago lost in the first round to eventual Class 2A champion Fyffe.

“Our goal each year is to be better than we were the year before,” Childers said. “Get a little better each day and be the best version of ourselves that we can be.”

But such efforts are not always



RED BAY

From Page G50

reflected in the win-loss record, he said.

"If that's six wins, that's six wins. If people don't like that, I'm sorry. I can't help it," Childers said. "But if we're the best version of ourselves and it's six wins, eight wins, 10 wins, 12 wins, as a coach, I can lay my head on the pillow at night and go to sleep.

"We want to be the best version of ourselves we can be."

One key returning starter is running back Jaxon Vinson, who posted impressive numbers last year as a sophomore.

He ran for almost 1,400 yards and 18 touchdowns.

"You kind of expect it a little bit, for him to get up there in the numbers,"

WAYNE CO.

From Page G48

that has an enrollment less than 300 — bolstered by a large freshman class. There's a significant sophomore group, too.

"Really, it's to keep everybody humble and in their place to make sure we're a team," offensive lineman Ben Thompson said of the responsibilities of being a veteran. "You don't want anyone just playing for themselves."

Consistency, after all, is the goal.

"I want to get back to hosting playoff games here," Willis said. "Throughout

Hamilton said. "It was pretty good what he did as a sophomore."

Vinson was stepping in last year for Brady Hardin, who ran for more than 1,900 yards and 26 touchdowns in 2022.

The Tigers, as a team, had more rushing yards than in 2022, Childers said. But Vinson set a strong precedent last year to try to meet this season.

"It's also going to depend on how he develops," Childers said. "Just because you're good as a sophomore, it doesn't mean you're going to be good as a junior. And if you're good as a junior, that doesn't mean you're going to be worth a crap as a senior."

"The offensive line is going to have to block for him. He's going to have to continue to develop and get better himself as a player. We'll wait and see how many yards he can get."

the years, we have some great coaches here, coaches I had the opportunity to play for. We've always had a tradition of being a playoff team and we've got to get back to that."

That's what the players want, too.

"Obviously we want to make the playoffs, and everyone wants to win a (championship), but I want us to make a deep run that really sets a good standard for the younger guys to follow," Bevis said. "That we are a playoff team and that's where we should be."

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CHEROKEE

From Page G40

How close were the Indians from turning a 1-9 campaign in 2022 into a playoff team a year ago?

One game.

Cherokee lost a 16-12 decision to Shoals Christian midway through the season. That loss ultimately kept the Indians out of the postseason.

The players remember that game too well.

"We were within reach of the playoffs last year," senior running back/linebacker Nathan Trent said. "We had some injuries and made a couple mistakes and it cost us against Shoals Christian."

Fellow seniors Jon Schleifer and Tay Hicks feel the same way.

"I feel like I personally made a lot of mistakes in the Shoals Christian game," added Schleifer, who plays quarterback and cornerback. "I'm looking forward to playing them again."

Hicks, who plays wide receiver and safety, bears a similar load.

"In that game, I made a huge mistake that I carry on my shoulders, so I am looking forward for another chance to play them," he said.

While the loss to the Flame kept Cherokee at home in November, Floyd said it did not take away from the program's turnaround.

"We have a lot of guys coming back who will definitely be motivated this season," Floyd said. "They are ready to

go out and prove a point that we have made a lot of progress. We are building something here and it is good to see a good product on the field after so many people put a lot of time and effort and hard work in.

"We have a good family atmosphere. These guys have not only been through the lean years, they have also taken the time with the younger guys, so that when they graduate, someone else can step up and take their place."

Trent said neither the lean years, nor last season's 5-5 mark, matter to him as a senior.

"To be honest, winning was kinda new to us last year," he said. "I was there for the lean years. Last year breathed a whole new life into the program. But now as a senior, it feels like do or die. I'm just looking forward to giving it everything I got and enjoying the ride."

Schleifer agreed.

"I just want to help the team the best way I can," Schleifer said. "I want us to get to the playoffs. I feel like having some success has pushed me to work harder this year."

Hicks also said his senior year is another chance to leave a positive mark on his career.

"Being a senior is not all that different to me," he said. "I just want to go out and keep doing the same things and try to get better every season. I always want the ball, but I'm also a team player. I want what's best for the team. When it's my turn to eat, I need to make it count."

RED BAY TIGERS

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VINA RED DEVILS



Coach: Cody Renfrow (second season, 1-8)

Region: 1A, Region 7

2023 record: 1-8 (1-6 1A, Region 8)

Last 5 years: 5-44 (1 playoff berth)

2024 schedule		
Aug. 23	open	Oct. 4
Aug. 30	Brindlee Mountain	Oct. 11
Sept. 6	at Phillips-Bear Creek	Oct. 18
Sept. 13	Shoals Chr.	Oct. 25
Sept. 20	at Cherokee	Nov. 1
Sept. 27	Tharptown	

2023 results		
Hackleburg	Addison	L, 50-0
Waterloo	at Shoals Chr.	L, 40-0
at Addison	Woodville	L, 51-16
Meek	at Curry	L, 61-14
at Belgreen	Phillips-Bear Creek	L, 14-0

Returning starters		
L, 46-0	QB-LB Christian McCarley	OL-DL Lane Easterling
L, 46-8	RB-DT Trevor Baker	OL-DL Zach Sparks
L, 43-6	RB-LB Cai Lawler	WR-CB Matthew Patterson
W, 42-32	WR-FS Manny Alitriste	TE-SS Tristen Farr
	OL-DL Buford Watson	TE-LB Bryson Finch
	OL-DL Andrew Shotts	

Red Devils sense determination, enthusiasm

By A. Stacy Long
Sports Writer

Vina coach Cody Renfrow looks at the Red Devils' long list of returning starters and sees potential.

Sure, Vina's recent years haven't yielded much success, but Renfrow — the team's second-year head coach — believes the program could be ready to take the next step.

"I see a ton of improvement," Renfrow said. "I'm looking forward to it and I know the kids are looking forward to it."

One positive thing for Vina is Renfrow being on the job for the entire offseason. He was promoted to head coach just as practice began last year.

"I've seen a lot of growth, based on this



Renfrow

point last season," Renfrow said.

He said he sees determination and grittiness from several players, but a few stand out.

There's Cai Lawler, a running back/linebacker who has led the Red Devils in tackles each of the last two seasons.

"He may weigh a buck-30," Renfrow said. "Soaking wet."

Lawler's campaigning efforts to Renfrow have paid off, too. Lawler was primarily a safety last year who also played some linebacker. This year, he need not worry about safety.

"He begged me all year to move him there last year," Renfrow said. "He may

be one of the smallest guys, but he gives the biggest effort."

Renfrow has laid out a goal for Lawler and, also, the rest of Vina's defense. Lawler, who made almost 90 tackles last year, can justify his linebacking position with an extra digit.

"I've challenged him to see if he can get 100," Renfrow said. "I challenged the rest of them to try to beat Cai."

Strong safety Tristen Farr just might give Lawler a proper race.

"He might be our next-best tackler on defense," Renfrow said. "He hadn't played much football until he came to Vina last year as a junior.

"Now, he's a lot stronger and faster, and he wants to be coached. He's someone who is really going to help us."

Running back Trevor Baker, who also plays defensive line, will also be a factor, Renfrow said.

"If you can keep him healthy and keep him in the game, our offense really runs through him," Renfrow said.

The Red Devils, who beat Waterloo in last year's season finale to snap a 30-game losing streak, have returning starters at 18 positions, including quarterback Christian McCarley. They also have desire, Renfrow said.

"I can't hardly get them out of the weight room," Renfrow said. "These guys have had a good attitude throughout the summer, and we've averaged 16 or 17 kids per workout.

"That may not seem like a lot, but when you have 25 on the team, that's big for us."

PHILLIPS BEARS



Region: 1A, Region 7

2023 record: 2-7 (2-5 1A, Region 8)

Last 5 years: 17-33 (2 playoff berths)

Coach: Adam Lawler (sixth season, 17-33)

2024 schedule		
Aug. 23	open	Oct. 4
Aug. 30	at Marion Co.	Oct. 11
Sept. 6	Vina	Oct. 18
Sept. 13	Meek	Oct. 25
Sept. 20	at Shoals Chr.	Nov. 1
Sept. 27	at Brilliant	

2023 results		
at Cherokee	at Tharptown	L, 22-15
Hackleburg	Shoals Chr.	L, 50-7
Waterloo	Cherokee	L, 62-20
at Addison	at Meek	L, 72-16
Tharptown	Brilliant	L, 40-6

Returning starters		
W, 14-0	OL-DT Brayden Jordan	HB-LB Hunter Scruggs
L, 41-0	ATH-LB Hayden Dees	CB Dorian Hernandez
W, 40-34	RB-LB Jayden Sanchez	LB Hayden Jordan
L, 54-0		

At Phillips, early success could fuel surge

By A. Stacy Long
Sports Writer

Phillips coach Adam Lawler sensed a change halfway through last season.

The Bears, despite an 0-5 start, found a bit of a groove, started playing with some spit and vigor, and showed improvement.

Phillips won two of its last four games — and the losses were to two of the strongest



Lawler

teams on its schedule — and Lawler saw promise for 2024.

"Last year wasn't exactly what we wanted ... but about midseason they started getting confident in their roles," Lawler said.

"Because of that, hopefully we can come out strong this year.

"It would be good to get a few wins early because football season can wear you down if you aren't winning."

The Bears don't return many starters, but they have several players who saw considerable time last year. By this time next season, they'll have even more experience.

Phillips has just two seniors on this year's roster: brothers Brayden and Hayden Jordan. Brayden is an offensive

lineman and defensive tackle. Hayden will be a full-time linebacker.

"Hayden probably started almost every game last year, but he was one of those guys who didn't have a set position," Lawler said.

Running back Jayden Sanchez, who impressed after he became a starter for the

SEE PHILLIPS, G53

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ENERGY STAR

HAMILTON

From Page G47

Aggies celebrated a victory only one time.

“Playing against our rivals is always fun,” Peoples said. “The weight room is always fun.”

“On offense, driving the ball for a touchdown and coming out and getting a stop on defense is fun,” Moore said. “In preseason practice, learning new plays and stuff is fun.”

After last year’s feeling out process between the new staff and players, Shipp said he is more comfortable going into his second season. The players said they are more comfortable as well.

“We got in a little late last year so just learning our personnel was big,” Shipp said. “We’re much more comfortable with our personnel knowing exactly where they need to be within our schemes. That definitely is going to help out and the players understanding our expectations as well.”

Moore said one difference last season was that there was “more fight last year that from the previous 1-9 team.”

“I think the new coaching staff was better and they were willing to fight for

us,” he said.

Shipp attributed the change in attitude among many of the players to setting expectations in the program.

“The expectation is a big thing we talk about and to get them to play to a standard,” he said. “Work ethic and discipline are all things that we’ve kind of tried to push with this new coaching staff and with these players.

“To me, that’s just having been part of winning programs in the past. That’s kind of the common theme with being at different places is the work ethic, discipline and just them knowing what the expectations are.”

Hamilton improved offensively in Shipp’s first season, nearly doubling its scoring average from 13.7 to 25.8. Defensively, the Aggies were worse statistically and held only one opponent under 39 points.

Shipp attributed that to playing numerous underclassmen.

“We were in most of the games at halftime and, as it got later in the game, you could start to see the physical maturity show up, and we just couldn’t hang in there as long as we wanted,” he said. “But I think with our offseason program getting stronger, I think that’s going to move toward being a positive for us.”

with him,” running back/linebacker Braxton Mayfield said. “We’ve gotten on the same page as him. We all have the same goals.”

What the Bobcats have returning should help, too.

Hamilton said Phil Campbell has all 11 offensive starters returning. Eight from the defense are back as well.

The best part? The Bobcats, even during those struggles last season, gained some valuable lessons.

“We were a younger team last year,” running back/safety Noah Raper said. “We’re more mature, we’re senior-heavy and we have game experience.”

Perhaps getting into the playoffs won’t be enough. It certainly doesn’t seem to be.

“The past four years, we’ve made the playoffs, but couldn’t get past the first round,” offensive/defensive lineman Johan Vasquez said. “We want to go further. We think we can. Once you get in, anything can happen.”

Goals, after all, are important. And the clearer they are, the better.

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LORETTO

From Page G43

room, getting faster and just playing as a team. We’re bringing the brotherhood we had from last year to this year and playing together like we did last year.”

The recent run of success had bred newfound confidence in the team. Instead of thinking they could win, players now believe they will win. It’s confidence that has been passed down from past players.

“We’re all just very confident in ourselves,” senior wide receiver/cornerback Jaxon Roberson said. “We all knew in the back of our mind it didn’t matter what team we were playing. We just knew we could beat ‘em not being cocky or anything, just like we can hang with any team out there.”

That was different from previous years, Snider said.

“I don’t feel like we had had that in years past,” he said. “We didn’t go into every game like, ‘Hey, we got this if we do our job.’ But last year, every game we played, we were very confident.”

That’s the attitude Daniel wants to see — not arrogance or cockiness, just quiet confidence. The fifth-year head coach also likes what has developed in the locker room.

“Most of the time everybody’s having a good time,” he said. “Football’s hard. All sports are hard, but you’re out in the heat, you’re getting beat on, you’re getting hit, you’re sore. The last thing they want to hear is somebody hollering and screaming and going nuts every five minutes. Not that there’s not days that doesn’t happen, but I try to keep that to a minimum. Be positive.”

PHILLIPS

From Page G52

final three games, is expected to have a big season.

“He flipped a switch and became our best runner,” Lawler said. “He’s not the fastest and he’s not the biggest, but he does a good job.

“I’m anxious to see what he does with a full season.”

Hayden Dees is another key player, Lawler said, though he wasn’t sure exactly where Dees will play. He’s listed as an “athlete.”

“I don’t know where he’ll fit in, but he’s going to be a big part of it,” Lawler said.

But the Bears are optimistic over their future. With just those two seniors this



Loretto’s Nicholas McDow says winning in the postseason motivates the Mustangs. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

Loretto faces some challenges in replacing five offensive and five defensive starters. But he’s confident the depth developed over the past few seasons will help.

Coming off that 10-win season, one of the only goals left for the Mustangs to mark off their checklist is to get past the first round of the playoffs.

“We’ve made the playoffs every year we’ve been at school, but we lost in the first round,” senior running back Nicholas McDow said. “Obviously a 10-0 season would be great to have again. But if we can’t win a playoff game ...”

Added Snider, “Winning our region, it starts with that. But yeah, playoffs are a big thing this year. You got to get a couple wins in the playoffs.”

year, they’ll have a lot in stock for 2025.

“It will be a blessing come next year,” Lawler said. “The young guys are going to get a ton of reps.”

Lawler raves about his assistants, too, specifically new defensive coordinator Destin Dye. The two used to work together at Haleyville.

Dye last coached at Haleyville in 2016, was in the Air Force for four years, was a Hamilton assistant in 2021 and has been a youth director the last two years.

“He’s doing a great job with them. He’s high energy and is a great motivator,” Lawler said. “He’ll have them flying to the ball.

“Ever since he quit coaching (at Haleyville), I’ve wanted to get him here. We were lucky enough to get him this year.”



Wyatt Smith is one of Collinwood's returning starters this year. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

COLLINWOOD

From Page G49

of McKenzie. They finished 7-4.

"We obviously want to be as good as we were last season," fullback/linebacker Tyler Jackson said. "We did lose a lot of talent, but I do think we're going to do just as good, if not better, this season. I think we'll be just fine."

That's where the fine-tuning comes in.

Along with the players looking more comfortable in the scheme, there was also some work done to the workout program.

The most notable? A circuit consisting of 300 push-ups, 400 sit-ups, 150 power cleans, 70 shoulder presses, 200-year kettlebell runs and 60-yard wheelbarrows. That came courtesy of defensive coordinator Jacob Davis.

Sounds pretty terrible.

"Yeah, it was bad," running back/linebacker Harrison Rich said. "Awful is a good word for that."

But the coaches made sure to join in, right? They didn't want the players to have all that fun by themselves?

"No," Rich said with a laugh. "There's no way."

That's OK. The belief is that all that extra fun will pay off this season.

So far, Collinwood has liked what it's seen — both from players, and especially from coaches. That belief is important.

"The mindset they have and the belief they have, there's something to be said about that," Dixon said. "There's something to be said about learning how to win. We've seen a lot of good things."

"Rewatching the spring game, it's the first time I didn't want to throw something at the TV. They're doing the things you want them to do."

And that's something the players understand. It is, after all, about building on what they already know.

"Honestly, we just want to keep winning," offensive/defensive lineman Drey Howe said. "And just keep going as far as we can. We think we can do that."

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The Belgreen Bulldogs have seven varsity games this season, including four at home. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

BELGREEN

From Page G41

during the Great Depression, according to Belgreen native Royce Massey.

Either way, this year's team is making history.

"It will be completely different from playing on Thursday or Tuesday night," Cox said. "Friday Night Lights just have that atmosphere."

Raper, while juggling the logistics of starting a team, says he's happy with the enthusiasm his players have shown.

In the preseason, his main question has been related to equipment: "Do we have enough?" The Bulldogs had one set of uniforms last year, and he's ordered two more.

Early in the preseason, he was preparing to order more kneepads.

"It's a slow process," he said. "Every day, it seems like I'm ordering something."

But Raper senses enthusiasm around the school and community.

"Everybody is always asking, 'How

are they looking? How are they doing?'" he said. "They're glad we have football."

Last year's JV-only season ended with a 3-2 record — with one senior.

"I wish I could be back one more year," said Will King, last year's senior who was helping coach the Bulldogs this month before leaving for college.

The season was promising enough that Belgreen initially declared to be eligible for the playoffs this season. However, the Bulldogs reconsidered when the AHSAA's reclassification pushed the school from 1A to 2A.

"We had a pretty successful season," Cox said. "I was happy we won some games. We didn't want to have a losing season."

Instead, the Bulldogs will begin with seven varsity games. Where the school's boys have for so long simply waited until basketball season, Belgreen now has football.

"Unless you win all your games, you want it to be better," Wilson said. "It's going to be longer but, hopefully, by the end of the year, we won't be run down."

"We hope it segues into other sports."

2024 SHOALS-AREA SCHEDULES

*—region game

Belgreen Bulldogs (only varsity games listed)

Aug. 23 Shoals Chr.
Aug. 30 at Sumiton Chr.
Sept. 6 at Tharptown
Sept. 13 open
Sept. 20 Tanner
Sept. 27 Cherokee
Oct. 4 open
Oct. 11 open
Oct. 18 open
Oct. 25 at Victory Chr.
Nov. 1 Vina

Collinwood Trojans

Aug. 23 at Loretto
Aug. 30 Franklin Chr.
Sept. 6 Cornersville*
Sept. 13 at Eagleville*
Sept. 20 Hollow Rock-Bruceton
Sept. 27 at Clarksville Aca.
Oct. 4 Richland*
Oct. 11 at Moore Co.*
Oct. 18 open
Oct. 25 Wayne Co.*
Nov. 1 at Huntland*

Brooks Lions

Aug. 23 open
Aug. 30 at West Morgan*
Sept. 6 at Hatton*
Sept. 13 at Central-Florence*
Sept. 20 at Wilson*
Sept. 26 at Lauderdale Co.
Oct. 4 Danville*
Oct. 11 Deshler*
Oct. 17 Lexington
Oct. 25 West Limestone*
Nov. 1 at East Lawrence*

Deshler Tigers

Aug. 23 at Russellville
Aug. 30 at Hatton*
Sept. 6 at Danville*
Sept. 13 Wilson*
Sept. 20 open
Sept. 27 Colbert Co.
Oct. 4 Central-Florence*
Oct. 11 at Brooks*
Oct. 18 West Limestone*
Oct. 25 at East Lawrence*
Nov. 1 West Morgan*

Central Wildcats

Aug. 23 at Colbert Co.
Aug. 30 Lauderdale Co.
Sept. 6 Wilson*
Sept. 13 Brooks*
Sept. 20 at W. Limestone*
Sept. 27 open
Oct. 4 at Deshler*
Oct. 11 East Lawrence*
Oct. 18 at West Morgan*
Oct. 25 Hatton*
Nov. 1 at Danville*

Florence Falcons

Aug. 23 at Hillcrest-Tusc.
Aug. 30 at Muscle Shoals
Sept. 6 Albertville*
Sept. 13 Austin*
Sept. 20 at Bob Jones*
Sept. 27 open
Oct. 4 James Clemens*
Oct. 11 at Grissom*
Oct. 18 Huntsville*
Oct. 25 at Sparkman*
Nov. 1 Oxford

Cherokee Indians

Aug. 23 Colbert Heights
Aug. 30 Woodville
Sept. 6 at Waterloo*
Sept. 13 Addison*
Sept. 20 Vina*
Sept. 27 at Belgreen
Oct. 4 Phillips*
Oct. 11 at Shoals Chr.*
Oct. 18 at Meek*
Oct. 25 at Hackleburg*
Nov. 1 open

Hackleburg Panthers

Aug. 23 open
Aug. 30 Lynn
Sept. 6 Meek*
Sept. 13 Waterloo*
Sept. 20 at Addison*
Sept. 27 Phil Campbell
Oct. 4 at Vina*
Oct. 11 at Phillips*
Oct. 18 at Shoals Chr.*
Oct. 25 Cherokee*
Nov. 1 at Hubbertville

Colbert County Indians

Aug. 23 Central-Florence
Aug. 30 at Tanner
Sept. 6 Mars Hill*
Sept. 13 Lauderdale Co.*
Sept. 20 at Rogers*
Sept. 27 at Deshler
Oct. 4 at Colbert Heights*
Oct. 11 Clements*
Oct. 18 Elkmont*
Oct. 25 at Sheffield*
Nov. 1 open

Haleyville Lions

Aug. 23 at West Point
Aug. 30 at Tarrant
Sept. 6 Curry*
Sept. 13 Good Hope*
Sept. 20 at Fayette Co.*
Sept. 27 Lawrence Co.
Oct. 4 Dora*
Oct. 11 Fultondale*
Oct. 18 at Hamilton*
Oct. 25 at Cordova*
Nov. 1 open

Colbert Heights Wildcats

Aug. 23 at Cherokee
Aug. 30 Carbon Hill
Sept. 6 at Clements*
Sept. 13 Elkmont*
Sept. 20 at Sheffield*
Sept. 27 at Falkville
Oct. 4 Colbert Co.*
Oct. 11 at Rogers*
Oct. 18 Mars Hill*
Oct. 25 Lauderdale Co.*
Nov. 1 open

Hamilton Aggies

Aug. 23 open
Aug. 30 at Phil Campbell
Sept. 6 Cordova*
Sept. 13 at Dora*
Sept. 20 Curry*
Sept. 27 Sulligent
Oct. 4 at Fultondale*
Oct. 11 at Good Hope*
Oct. 18 Haleyville*
Oct. 25 Fayette Co.*
Nov. 1 at Tarrant



Deshler quarterback Price Thornton and the Tigers begin their season at Russellville on Friday. [IVY ROSE BALL/TIMESDAILY]

Hatton Hornets

Aug. 23 open
Aug. 30 Deshler*
Sept. 6 Brooks*
Sept. 13 East Lawrence*
Sept. 20 at West Morgan*
Sept. 26 at Westminster-HSV
Oct. 4 West Limestone*
Oct. 11 at Russellville
Oct. 18 Danville*
Oct. 25 at Central-Florence*
Nov. 1 at Wilson*

Lincoln Co.

Sept. 6 Lincoln Co.*
Sept. 13 at Giles Co.
Sept. 20 at Columbia Central*
Sept. 26 Spring Hill*
Oct. 3 Tullahoma*
Oct. 11 open
Oct. 18 at Shelbyville Central*
Oct. 25 at Franklin Co.*
Nov. 1 Cheatham Co. Central

East Hickman

Oct. 4 at East Hickman*
Oct. 11 open
Oct. 18 at Eagleville
Oct. 25 Waverly Central*
Oct. 31 Mount Pleasant*

Mars Hill Panthers

Aug. 23 at Madison Aca.
Aug. 30 Russellville
Sept. 6 at Colbert Co.*
Sept. 13 Sheffield*
Sept. 20 at Lauderdale Co.*
Sept. 27 open
Oct. 4 Rogers*
Oct. 11 at Elkmont*
Oct. 18 at Colbert Heights*
Oct. 25 Clements*
Nov. 1 Scottsboro

Lexington Golden Bears

Aug. 23 Lauderdale Co.
Aug. 30 at Elkmont
Sept. 6 at Decatur Heritage*
Sept. 13 Tanner*
Sept. 20 Red Bay*
Sept. 27 Wilson
Oct. 4 at Winston Co.*
Oct. 11 open
Oct. 17 at Brooks
Oct. 25 Tharptown*
Oct. 31 at Rogers

Muscle Shoals Trojans

Aug. 22 at Gadsden City
Aug. 30 Florence
Sept. 6 Columbia*
Sept. 13 at Decatur*
Sept. 20 Cullman*
Sept. 27 open
Oct. 4 Athens*
Oct. 11 at Jasper*
Oct. 18 open
Oct. 25 Hartselle*
Nov. 1 at Austin

Loretto Mustangs

Aug. 23 Collinwood
Aug. 30 at Lawrence Co.
Sept. 6 at Harpeth*
Sept. 13 Summertown*
Sept. 20 at Lewis Co.*
Sept. 27 Hickman Co.*

Phil Campbell Bobcats

Aug. 23 open
Aug. 30 Hamilton
Sept. 6 Vinemont*
Sept. 13 at Oakman*
Sept. 20 Winfield*
Sept. 27 at Hackleburg
Oct. 4 at Midfield*
Oct. 10 Carbon Hill*
Oct. 18 at Gordo*
Oct. 25 at Hanceville*
Nov. 1 at Red Bay

Shoals Christian Flame

Aug. 23 at Belgreen
Aug. 30 Brilliant
Sept. 6 at Addison*
Sept. 13 at Vina*
Sept. 20 Phillips*
Sept. 27 open
Oct. 4 at Meek*
Oct. 11 Cherokee*
Oct. 18 Hackleburg*
Oct. 25 at Waterloo*
Nov. 1 Sheffield

Phillips Bears

Aug. 23 open
Aug. 30 at Marion Co.
Sept. 6 Vina*
Sept. 13 Meek*
Sept. 20 at Shoals Chr.*
Sept. 27 at Brilliant
Oct. 4 at Cherokee*
Oct. 11 Hackleburg*
Oct. 18 Waterloo*
Oct. 25 at Addison*
Nov. 1 Tharptown

Tharptown Wildcats

Aug. 23 at Danville
Aug. 30 Waterloo
Sept. 6 Belgreen
Sept. 13 open
Sept. 19 at Decatur Heritage*
Sept. 27 at Vina
Oct. 4 at Tanner*
Oct. 10 Red Bay*
Oct. 18 Winston Co.*
Oct. 25 at Lexington*
Nov. 1 at Phillips

Red Bay Tigers

Aug. 23 open
Aug. 30 at Lamar Co.
Sept. 6 University Charter
Sept. 13 at Winston Co.*
Sept. 20 at Lexington*
Sept. 27 at Belmont (Miss.)
Oct. 4 open
Oct. 10 at Tharptown*
Oct. 18 Decatur Heritage*
Oct. 25 Tanner*
Nov. 1 Phil Campbell

Vina Red Devils

Aug. 23 open
Aug. 30 Brindlee Mountain
Sept. 6 at Phillips*
Sept. 13 Shoals Chr.*
Sept. 20 at Cherokee*
Sept. 27 Tharptown
Oct. 4 Hackleburg*
Oct. 11 Waterloo*
Oct. 18 at Addison*
Oct. 25 Meek*
Nov. 1 at Belgreen

Rogers Pirates

Aug. 23 at Wilson
Aug. 29 Lawrence Co.
Sept. 6 Sheffield*
Sept. 13 at Clements*
Sept. 20 Colbert Co.*
Sept. 27 open
Oct. 4 at Mars Hill*
Oct. 11 Colbert Heights*
Oct. 18 at Lauderdale Co.*
Oct. 25 at Elkmont*
Oct. 31 Lexington

Waterloo Cougars

Aug. 23 open
Aug. 30 at Tharptown
Sept. 6 Cherokee*
Sept. 13 at Hackleburg*
Sept. 20 Meek*
Sept. 27 Sheffield
Oct. 4 Addison*
Oct. 11 at Vina*
Oct. 18 at Phillips*
Oct. 25 Shoals Chr.*
Nov. 1 open

Russellville Golden Tigers

Aug. 23 Deshler
Aug. 30 at Mars Hill
Sept. 6 at Lawrence Co.*
Sept. 13 at E. Limestone*
Sept. 20 Ardmore*
Sept. 27 open
Oct. 4 Fairview*
Oct. 11 Hatton
Oct. 18 at West Point*
Oct. 25 at Priceville*
Nov. 1 Athens

Wayne County Wildcats

Aug. 23 at Mount Pleasant
Aug. 30 Summertown
Sept. 6 Richland*
Sept. 13 at Moore Co.*
Sept. 20 McEwen
Sept. 27 at Eagleville*
Oct. 4 Huntland*
Oct. 11 Cornersville*
Oct. 18 open
Oct. 25 at Collinwood*
Nov. 1 at Liberty Creek

Sheffield Bulldogs

Aug. 23 at Decatur Heritage
Aug. 30 open
Sept. 6 at Rogers*
Sept. 13 at Mars Hill*
Sept. 20 Colbert Heights*
Sept. 27 at Waterloo
Oct. 4 Elkmont*
Oct. 11 Lauderdale Co.*
Oct. 18 at Clements*
Oct. 25 Colbert Co.*
Nov. 1 at Shoals Chr.

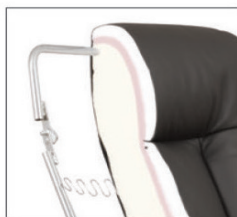
Wilson Warriors

Aug. 23 Rogers
Aug. 30 Danville*
Sept. 6 at Central-Florence*
Sept. 13 at Deshler*
Sept. 20 Brooks*
Sept. 27 at Lexington
Oct. 4 open
Oct. 11 at West Limestone*
Oct. 18 East Lawrence*
Oct. 25 at West Morgan*
Nov. 1 Hatton*

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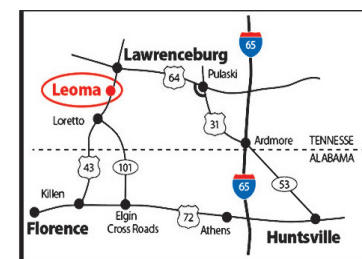
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