

THE MORNING JOURNAL

HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL PREVIEW

DAY 1 OF 2



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ON THE COVER

The Vermilion Sailors, from left to right Seth Lyons, Seth Hurd, Brock Nail and Caine Zannoni, have finally found a home in the Sandusky Bay Conference. Photo by Sports Editor Jon Behm

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OPINION

Start of the season always worth the wait

Coming up with a theme for these high school football preview sections is never an easy task.

I mean, yeah, it's easy to come up with some ideas and see what sticks, but you need to find one that works for multiple stories going on around the high school football community.

When one of my colleagues suggested the theme "Worth the wait," I was hesitant.

Was it too simple? Too easy? Too generic? Even after preview forms had been sent out and The Morning Journal staff was about to get things going, I still was unsure.

That is, until Aug. 6. On that night, I sat in the stands at Tom Benson Hall of Fame Stadium in Canton, watching some all-time greats take their place in football history.

The general theme of every speech? Worth the wait. That was when I knew the theme was right.

Why? Because the Hall of Fame is where any football player who takes the game seriously strives to end up.

In the words of Sandusky and Ohio State

Team by team schedules

- AMHERST**
Aug. 26: at Kenston (at Solon), 7
Sept. 2: at North Ridgeville, 7
Sept. 9: Midview, 7
Sept. 16: Berea-Midpark, 7
Sept. 23: at Olmsted Falls, 7
Sept. 30: Avon Lake, 7
Oct. 6: at North Olmsted (at North Ridgeville), 7
Oct. 14: Avon, 7
Oct. 21: at Westlake, 7
Oct. 28: Lakewood, 7
- AVON**
Aug. 26: Strongsville, 7
Sept. 2: at Avon Lake, 7
Sept. 9: North Olmsted, 7
Sept. 16: at Midview, 7
Sept. 23: Westlake, 7 (HC)
Sept. 30: at Lakewood, 7
Oct. 7: at North Ridgeville, 7
Oct. 14: at Amherst, 7
Oct. 21: Berea-Midpark, 7
Oct. 28: Olmsted Falls, 7
- AVON LAKE**
Aug. 26: at Elyria, 7
Sept. 2: Avon, 7
Sept. 9: at Westlake, 7
Sept. 16: Lakewood, 7
Sept. 23: North Ridgeville, 7
Sept. 30: at Amherst, 7
Oct. 7: Berea-Midpark, 7 (HC)
Oct. 14: at Olmsted Falls, 7
Oct. 21: at Midview, 7
Oct. 28: North Olmsted, 7
- BAY**
Aug. 26: Hubbard, 7
Sept. 2: University School, 7
Sept. 9: at Fairview, 7
Sept. 16: Holy Name, 7
Sept. 23: at Rocky River, 7
Sept. 30: at Normandy, 7

- Oct. 7: Elyria Catholic, 7
Oct. 14: Vermilion, 7
Oct. 21: at Valley Forge, 7
Oct. 27: at Parma, 7
- BROOKSIDE**
Aug. 26: Elyria Catholic, 7
Sept. 2: at Oberlin, 7
Sept. 9: Cleveland JFK, 7
Sept. 16: at Columbia, 7
Sept. 23: Lutheran West, 7
Sept. 30: Firelands, 7
Oct. 7: at Keystone, 7
Oct. 14: Black River, 7
Oct. 21: at Wellington, 7
Oct. 28: Buckeye, 7
- CLEARVIEW**
Aug. 26: Vermilion, 7
Sept. 2: Cleveland JFK, 7
Sept. 9: Dalton, 7:30
Sept. 16: Firelands, 7 (HC)
Sept. 23: at Buckeye, 7
Sept. 30: at Oberlin, 7
Oct. 7: Columbia, 7
Oct. 14: at Fairview, 7
Oct. 21: Lutheran West, 7
Oct. 28: at Brooklyn, 7
- ELYRIA**
Aug. 26: Avon Lake, 7
Sept. 3: Lorain, 2
Sept. 9: at Shaw, 7
Sept. 16: at Medina, 7
Sept. 23: Brunswick, 7
Oct. 1: at Shaker Heights, 1
Oct. 7: Euclid, 7 (HC)
Oct. 14: at Solon, 7
Oct. 21: Strongsville, 7
Oct. 28: at Mentor, 7
- ELYRIA CATHOLIC**
Aug. 26: at Brookside, 7
Sept. 2: VASJ, 7
Sept. 9: Cleveland Central Catholic, 7

- Sept. 16: Valley Forge, 7
Sept. 23: at Parma, 7
Sept. 30: Holy Name, 7 (HC)
Oct. 7: at Bay, 7
Oct. 14: at Normandy, 7
Oct. 21: Rocky River, 7
Oct. 29: at Gilmour, 2
- FAIRVIEW**
Aug. 26: Rocky River, 7
Sept. 2: at Vermilion, 7
Sept. 9: Bay, 7
Sept. 16: Buckeye, 7
Sept. 23: at Keystone, 7
Sept. 30: at Brooklyn, 7
Oct. 7: Oberlin, 7 (HC)
Oct. 14: Clearview, 7
Oct. 21: at Columbia, 7
Oct. 29: at Lutheran West, 7
- FIRELANDS**
Aug. 26: Edison, 7
Sept. 2: Brooklyn, 7
Sept. 9: at Vermilion, 7
Sept. 16: at Clearview, 7
Sept. 23: Oberlin, 7 (HC)
Sept. 30: at Brookside, 7
Oct. 7: Wellington, 7
Oct. 14: at Black River, 7
Oct. 21: at Keystone, 7
Oct. 28: at Bay, 7
- KEYSTONE**
Aug. 26: Cuyahoga Heights, 7
Sept. 2: at Cloverleaf, 7
Sept. 9: Galion, 7
Sept. 16: at Lutheran West, 7
Sept. 23: Fairview, 7
Sept. 30: at Black River, 7
Oct. 7: Brookside, 7
Oct. 14: at Wellington, 7
Oct. 21: at Buckeye, 7
Oct. 28: Firelands, 7
- LORAIN**

- Aug. 26: at Midview, 7
Sept. 3: at Elyria, 2
Sept. 9: Toledo Scott, 7
Sept. 16: Garfield Heights, 7
Sept. 23: at Warrensville Heights, 7
Sept. 30: Shaw, 7
Oct. 7: at Sandusky, 7
Oct. 14: at Maple Heights, 7
Oct. 21: Bedford, 7
Oct. 28: at Cleveland Heights, 7
- LUTHERAN WEST**
Aug. 26: at Wickliffe, 7
Sept. 2: Hawken, 7
Sept. 9: Independence, 7
Sept. 16: Keystone, 7
Sept. 23: at Brookside, 7
Sept. 30: at Columbia, 7
Oct. 7: Brooklyn, 7 (HC)
Oct. 14: at Oberlin (at Oberlin College), 7
Oct. 21: at Fairview, 7
Oct. 28: Fairview, 7
- MIDVIEW**
Aug. 26: Lorain, 7
Sept. 2: at North Olmsted (at Avon), 7
Sept. 9: at Amherst, 7
Sept. 16: Avon, 7
Sept. 23: Berea-Midpark, 7 (HC)
Sept. 30: at Westlake, 7
Oct. 7: at Olmsted Falls, 7
Oct. 14: Lakewood, 7
Oct. 21: Avon Lake, 7
Oct. 28: at North Ridgeville, 7
- NORTH OLMSTED**
Aug. 26: Valley Forge (at Avon), 7:30
Sept. 2: Midview (at Avon), 7
Sept. 9: at Avon, 7
Sept. 16: at Westlake, 7
Sept. 23: Lakewood (at North Ridgeville), 7
Sept. 30: at North Ridgeville, 7
Oct. 6: Amherst (at North Ridgeville), 7
Oct. 14: at Berea-Midpark, 7

- Oct. 21: Olmsted Falls (at North Ridgeville), 7
Oct. 28: at Avon Lake, 7
- NORTH RIDGEVILLE**
Aug. 26: at North Royalton, 7
Sept. 2: Amherst, 7
Sept. 9: at Berea-Midpark, 7
Sept. 16: Olmsted Falls, 7
Sept. 23: at Avon Lake, 7
Sept. 30: North Olmsted, 7
Oct. 7: Avon, 7
Oct. 14: at Westlake, 7
Oct. 21: at Lakewood, 7
Oct. 28: Midview, 7
- OBERLIN**
Aug. 26: at New London, 7
Sept. 2: Brookside, 7
Sept. 9: John Adams, 7
Sept. 16: Wellington, 7 (HC)
Sept. 23: at Firelands, 7
Sept. 30: Clearview, 7
Oct. 7: at Fairview, 7
Oct. 14: Lutheran West (at Oberlin College), 7
Oct. 21: Brooklyn, 7
Oct. 28: at Columbia, 7
- OLMSTED FALLS**
Aug. 26: Parma, 7
Sept. 2: Westlake, 7
Sept. 9: at Lakewood, 7
Sept. 16: at North Ridgeville, 7
Sept. 23: Amherst, 7
Sept. 30: at Berea-Midpark, 7
Oct. 7: Midview, 7 (HC)
Oct. 14: Avon Lake, 7
Oct. 21: at North Olmsted (at North Ridgeville), 7
Oct. 28: at Avon, 7
- OPEN DOOR**
Aug. 27: at Camden (Mich.), 3
Sept. 3: Lincoln West, 4

- Sept. 10: at Mayville (Mich.), 2
Sept. 17: Camden (Mich.), 3
Sept. 24: at Lawrence (Mich.), 1
Sept. 30: Michigan SD (Mich.), 7:30 (HC)
Oct. 8: at Covert (Mich.), 2
Oct. 15: Horizon Science Toledo, 4
Oct. 22: at North Huron (Mich.), 2
Oct. 29: Horizon Science Toledo, 4
- ROCKY RIVER**
Aug. 26: at Fairview, 7
Sept. 2: at Buckeye, 7
Sept. 9: Trinity, 7
Sept. 16: University School, 7
Sept. 23: Bay, 7
Sept. 29: at Valley Forge, 7
Oct. 7: Normandy, 7 (HC)
Oct. 14: at Parma, 7
Oct. 21: at Elyria Catholic, 7
Oct. 28: Holy Name, 7
- VERMILION**
Aug. 26: at Clearview, 7
Sept. 2: Fairview, 7
Sept. 9: Firelands, 7
Sept. 16: at Port Clinton, 7
Sept. 23: Edison, 7
Sept. 30: at Huron, 7
Oct. 7: Perkins, 7
Oct. 14: at Bay, 7
Oct. 21: Oak Harbor, 7
Oct. 28: Clyde, 7
- WESTLAKE**
Aug. 26: at North, 7
Sept. 2: at Olmsted Falls, 7
Sept. 9: Avon Lake, 7
Sept. 16: North Olmsted, 7
Sept. 23: at Avon, 7
Sept. 30: Midview, 7
Oct. 7: at Lakewood, 7
Oct. 14: North Ridgeville, 7
Oct. 21: Amherst, 7
Oct. 28: at Berea-Midpark, 7 (HC): Homecoming



ERIC BONZAR — THE MORNING JOURNAL

As much as players know that the start of high school football season is worth the wait, so do the fans.

great Orlando Pace during his enshrinement speech: "I am honored and humbled to stand here today, for along with my induction, this occasion marks a fulfillment of each and every goal I've established for myself since the age of 13."

So, basically, a local kid set the goal to make it to the Hall of Fame while playing for his high school

team. I bet he would tell you it was worth the wait. And if that can happen to a kid from Sandusky, who's to say it can't happen for a kid from Avon. Or Grafton. Or Lorain. Or Elyria. Or LaGrange. Or Bay. Or Rocky River. Or Fairview Park. I could go on, but I think you get the point. The road to a goal —

whether it be making it to the Hall of Fame, getting a Division I scholarship or simply making varsity — will always have its bumps and periods of waiting. But it's worth the wait if you are truly dedicated to your goal. Kickoff to the 2016 season is only days away. That excitement is back in the air. It's been a long time

coming, and it will be the start of some big things for area athletes. Whether your goals are lofty or simple, when kick-off rolls around each week there is one thing that is certain. It was worth the wait. Behm can be reached at JBehm@MorningJournal.com; @MJ_JBehm on Twitter

Broadcast schedules

- (Subject to change)
- TIME WARNER SPORTS CHANNEL**
*Times listed are broadcast times
Aug. 27: Solon vs. Aurora, 11:30
Sept. 1: Massillon Washington vs. Canton GlenOak, 7
Sept. 2: St. Edward vs. Hoban, 11:30
Sept. 3: Mentor vs. St. Ignatius, 7
Sept. 9: Stow vs. Solon, 11:30
Sept. 15: Mentor vs. Euclid, 7
Sept. 16: Akron SVSM vs. Cardinal Mooney, 11:30
Sept. 23: Berea-Midpark vs. Midview, 11:30
Sept. 24: St. Edward vs. Buchtel, 2

- Sept. 30: Stow vs. Twinsburg, 11:30
Oct. 6: Wadsworth vs. Twinsburg, 7
Oct. 7: Mentor vs. Medina, 11:30
Oct. 14: St. Ignatius vs. Moeller, 11:30
Oct. 21: TBA, 11:30
Oct. 22: St. Ignatius vs. St. Xavier, 2
Oct. 22: St. Edward vs. Moeller, 5
Oct. 28: TBA, 11:30
WKNR-AM 850
Aug. 26: Mayfield at Nordonia (at Brecksville-Broadview Heights)
Sept. 2: Brunswick at Brecksville-Broadview Heights
Sept. 16: Avon at Midview
Sept. 23: Bay at Rocky River

- Sept. 30: Highland at Aurora
Oct. 7: Stow at Hudson
Oct. 14: Madison at Mayfield
Oct. 21: Strongsville at Elyria
Oct. 28: TBA
WOBL-AM 1320
Aug. 26: Edison at Firelands, 7
Sept. 2: Amherst at North Ridgeville, 7
Sept. 3: Lorain at Elyria (on WDLW-AM 1380), 2
Sept. 9: Columbia at Northwestern, 7
Sept. 16: Avon at Midview, 7
Sept. 23-Oct. 28: TBA
WEOL-AM 930
Aug. 26: Lorain at Midview, 7
Sept. 2: Amherst at North Ridgeville, 7

- Sept. 9: Firelands at Vermilion, 7
Sept. 16: Avon at Midview, 7
Sept. 23: Brunswick at Elyria, 7
Sept. 30: Keystone at Black River, 7
Oct. 6: Amherst at North Olmsted, 7
Oct. 7: Lorain at Sandusky, 7
Oct. 13: Elyria Catholic at Normandy, 7
Oct. 14: Buckeye at Firelands, 7
Oct. 21: TBA
Oct. 28: TBA
Oct. 29: Elyria Catholic at Gilmour, 2
WCCR-AM 1260
Aug. 27: Youngstown Ursuline at Benedictine

- Sept. 2: St. Edward at Hoban
Sept. 3: Mentor at St. Ignatius
Sept. 9: Cleveland Central Catholic at Elyria Catholic
Sept. 10: Holy Name at Lake Catholic
Sept. 16: Gilmour at Trinity
Sept. 23: St. Ignatius at Walsh Jesuit
Sept. 30: Holy Name at Elyria Catholic
Oct. 7: VASJ at Trinity
Oct. 14: Benedictine at Padua Franciscan
Oct. 21: Fairview at Columbia
Oct. 28: Lutheran West at Fairview
Oct. 29: St. Edward at St. Ignatius

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HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL

Sandusky Bay bound

After years as an Independent, Vermilion finally has a conference home

By Marissa McNees

mmcnees@morningjournal.com
@MarissaNM on Twitter

Finally, the Sailors have a place to call home.

After years of playing as an independent following a conference transfer attempt that fell through, Vermilion will begin its first year as a member of the Sandusky Bay Conference after the SBC announced the expansion in December 2014.

"We're very excited to be a part of a conference and for the SBC to be our home," Vermilion football coach Rob Duray said. "We've been independent the last four years and I know heading into the SBC ... what a great conference. It's a conference rich in history and tradition and we're honored to be a part of that."

Once the joy of not having to drive hours on a Friday night — traveling across the state to face opponents anywhere Vermilion could find them had become a bit of the norm — and the excitement of finally rejoining a conference settles down, reality hit the Sailors. While they may indeed finally have a home, it's a tough home to be in.

The SBC is known for its stiff competition, particularly the Bay Division — four of the six SBC Bay Division teams made the postseason last year — and though the four Vermilion wins last season were the most for the Sailors in the past four seasons, 2016 brings a whole host of new challenges.

"It's not going to be easy for our football team," Duray said. "You know, our message is 'It's all about us.' It's the same message we've given them year in and year out. Our kids need to look themselves in the mirror, make sure they compete day in and day out, and we've done that thus far in every one of our practices."

"We're just happy to be in a conference and we're going to represent Vermilion in a positive way."

While this season could be a tough one for the Sailors, relief may only be a year away.

The SBC will go through another expansion after the 2016-17 school year, causing it to become a 21-team conference with three divisions. Vermilion will fall into the middle division, which will feature Edison, Shelby, Huron, Oak Harbor, Port Clinton and Willard.

"When that second expansion happens, we'll be in a better place," Duray said. "But that's next year. Like I said, we're happy to be in a conference and will do our best to represent Vermilion in this first year regardless of who we play."

For the players, especially the seniors, the tough competition isn't scary, but rather a factor that has them more focused than ever.

"I think it's motivating," senior offensive lineman Brock Naill said. "It makes you work harder, knowing that you're going to have better competition. You have to kick it up a notch."

"We just have to practice harder, stay focused. If we all just do our jobs, we should be just fine."



ERIC BONZAR - THE MORNING JOURNAL

Vermilion running back Caine Zannoni, pictured against Firelands last year, said that while he is glad there will be new rivalries now that the Sailors have joined the SBC, he is happy that local rival Firelands is still on the schedule.

MEMBERS OF THE SBC

BAY DIVISION

- Clyde Flyers
- Edison Chargers
- Huron Tigers
- Oak Harbor Rockets
- Perkins Pirates
- Port Clinton Redskins

Vermilion Sailors

RIVER DIVISION

- Tiffin Calvert Senecas
- Lakota Raiders
- Margaretta Polar Bears (In River for football and wrestling only)
- New Riegel Blue Jackets (non-football)
- Old Fort Stockaders (Non-football)
- St. Joseph Crimson Streaks
- St. Mary Panthers
- St. Wendelin Mohawks

Junior running back Caine Zannoni echoed Naill's sentiments.

"We do realize that it's going to be more difficult, but we're all seeing that as a positive thing and using it to push each other harder," Zannoni said. "We're going into every week and seeing that week as a new challenge, one team at a time."

If anything, the Sailors are thrilled to finally be able to establish some rivalries that were otherwise impossible while playing independently and excited to build traditions that come with playing in a storied conference.

"It's going to be cool seeing new teams grow along with us," Naill said. "It'll be more competitive because now we're facing the same kids throughout the four years that we're all here, so it should be interesting."

But that's not to say that the old rivalries are going to disappear.

"I'm glad the Firelands game is still on the schedule," Zannoni said. "It just



ERIC BONZAR - THE MORNING JOURNAL

Vermilion running back Eli Balek will team up once again with Caine Zannoni in the backfield this season. The duo hopes to be one of the factors that helps make the transition for Vermilion into the Sandusky Bay Conference a good one.

wouldn't be the same if it were not. Yeah, we're making some new rivalries, but that Firelands one is a game that we look forward to each year. Without it, it just wouldn't feel like the football season is complete."

Duray knows at the end of the day it's all about the team, but said he's happy his players can finally contend for a conference

championship or compete for conference awards.

"When you look at what we've done the last so many years, no matter what the records are, at the end of the year everything's about the team, but at the same time, you don't establish any rivalries with the schedules we've had the last couple years," Duray said. "Our kids can't even compete for conference

awards, so now we have that opportunity and that's definitely motivation for some of our athletes, but overall as a team, we're motivated to win a conference championship."

All in all, Vermilion's not trying to focus on how difficult the road ahead might be, but rather enjoying being at the start of what the team can only hope is a competitive, successful, even fun

journey in the SBC.

"I think it's going to go really well as long as we put the work in each week and stay focused," senior offensive lineman Seth Lyons said. "It's going to take a lot more work, a lot of dedication and effort."

"Besides records, wins and losses, we're just excited to be playing new teams," Zannoni said.



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Firelands » Falcons

Online: Larry Verhovec, Mike Whitacre, Nick Denney and Michael Bansek discuss the season in an interview at MorningJournal.com.

Conference: Patriot Athletic (Stars); **OHSAA:** Division IV, Region 13

Head coach: Mike Passerello, sixth year (27-25)

2015: 8-3; **Twitter:** @Teamfalcon14

Home field: Firelands Stadium

2016 schedule

Table with columns: Opponent, 2015 result. Rows include games from Aug. 26 to Oct. 28.

HC: Homecoming

Opponents' 2015 winning percentage: .467

Games against 2015 playoff qualifiers: 2

Game to watch: Firelands will continue its quest for a second Patriot Athletic Conference championship, and that road goes through Buckeye.

Outlook: offense

Expect a new-look offense for the Falcons this year. It has to happen when you graduate a talent like Brad Thrasher.

Outlook: defense

As the offense adjusts, the defense will be a crutch. The Falcons are up to the challenge. Linebacker Larry Verhovec believes that the 2016 Firelands defense could be better than the 2015 version.

Player to watch



Whitacre

Senior Mike Whitacre has the potential to be the breakout star of the 2016 season. He will see a maximized roll in the running game this year and has burst speed that may be the best in the Patriot Athletic Conference.

Underclassman to watch



Denney

Nick Denney is going to be the beneficiary of Mike Whitacre's spoils. The junior running back will split time with the senior, but defense is where he will shine.

— Jon Behm

Projected lineup

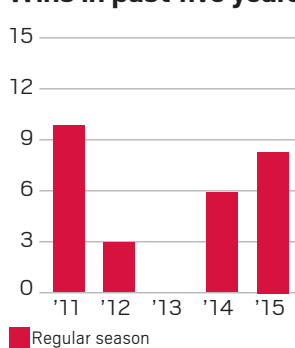
Projected lineup table for Firelands Falcons, listing OFFENSE and DEFENSE players with positions, names, years, heights, and weights.

Bold: returning starter; **Returning letterwinners:** 15. **Key reserves:** Patric Keown, Sr., 5-9, 175; Richard Maggard, Jr., 6-4, 180; Larry Verhovec, Sr., QB, 6-0, 200; Blake Ruffner, So., QB, 6-2, 182.

Team history

Playoff record: 0-2 in two appearances. **Best playoff finish:** 2011, 2015, Regional quarterfinal. **Most recent playoff appearance:** 2015. **School record for most wins in a season:** 10 in 1973, 2011.

Wins in past five years



Bottom line

IF: The Falcons can spread the ball offensively, **THEN:** Firelands will find itself pushing for another playoff berth.

Keystone » Wildcats

Online: Coach Rob Clarico, Kyle Vance and Bobby Weber discuss the season in an interview at MorningJournal.com.

Conference: Patriot Athletic (Stars); **OHSAA:** Division IV, Region 13

Head coach: Rob Clarico, 13th year (54-67)

2015: 3-7; **Twitter:** @KeystoneFB

Home field: Wildcat Stadium

2016 schedule

Table with columns: Opponent, 2015 result. Rows include games from Aug. 26 to Oct. 28.

Opponents' 2015 winning percentage: .466

Games against 2015 playoff qualifiers: 4

Game to watch: The Wildcats can use a Week 2 showdown at Cloverleaf — a narrow loss in 2015 — to determine just how far they have come during the offseason.

Outlook: offense

Keystone relied heavily on running back Austin Conrad last year, and with Conrad off to play for Frank Solich at Ohio University, the Wildcats will look to junior Bobby Weber to spread the ball around this season.

Outlook: defense

The Wildcats have a number of returning defensive linemen, and Coach Rob Clarico expects them to lead the way on defense. Additionally, Keystone will have seven seniors on the field who started last year.

Player to watch



Vance

Lineman Kyle Vance is going to be a key cog for the Wildcats as the offense tries to discover its rhythm. With a committee of runners, versatility will be key on the line and Coach Rob Clarico believes that Vance will help provide just that.

Underclassman to watch



Weber

After starting three games last season, junior Bobby Weber will step in at quarterback for the Wildcats. Coach Rob Clarico said Weber is a "big, strong, pocket passer" and will look to the 6-foot-3, 200-pound quarterback to spread the ball around and lead the offense in 2016.

— Marissa McNeese

Projected lineup

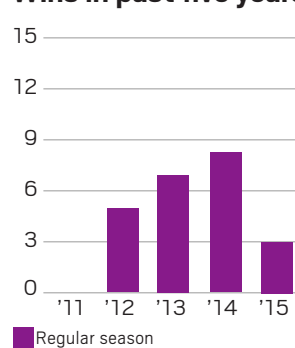
Projected lineup table for Keystone Wildcats, listing OFFENSE and DEFENSE players with positions, names, years, heights, and weights.

Bold: returning starter; **Returning letterwinners:** 12. **Key reserves:** Mitchell Coe, Sr., RB

Team history

Playoff record: 0-1 in one appearance. **Best playoff finish:** 2014, Regional quarterfinal. **Most recent playoff appearance:** 2014. **School record for most wins in a season:** 9 in 1971.

Wins in past five years



Bottom line

IF: Keystone can take advantage of its speed in the back field **THEN:** the Wildcats should be able to win the close games they couldn't quite close out last season.

Lutheran West » Longhorns

Online: Coach Frank Petroff and players Chris Dawson, Mike Felton and Logan Denn discuss the season in an interview at MorningJournal.com.

Conference: Patriot Athletic (Stripes); **OHSAA:** Division V, Region 17

Head coach: Frank Petroff, third year (8-12)

2015: 3-7; **Twitter:** @Longhornwest

Home field: Alumni Field

2016 schedule

Table with columns: Opponent, 2015 result. Rows include games from Aug. 26 to Oct. 28.

HC: Homecoming

Opponents' 2015 winning percentage: .441

Games against 2015 playoff qualifiers: 2

Game to watch: The Longhorns should use a Week 4 game against Keystone to see where they stand. Both teams are looking to regain traction in the Patriot Athletic Conference.

Outlook: offense

There will be plenty of youth on offense. However, that is not a negative. That's because in the case of the Longhorns, youth does not equal inexperience. The Longhorns had plenty of freshmen and sophomores who saw significant playing time in 2015.

Outlook: defense

Lutheran West will lean heavily on its linebacking corps to shut down run games as a young secondary develops. However, that doesn't mean the linebackers will be forced to remain at home, but should be OK to roam a bit as the Longhorns boast a strong defensive line that should be able to harass plenty of quarterbacks throughout the season.

Players to watch



Dawson

As was hinted in the defense section, the linebackers of Lutheran West will play an important roll this season. Senior captains Chris Dawson and Mike Felton aren't going to shy away from that challenge.

Underclassman to watch



Felton

Junior Owen Albers is getting thrust into the spotlight. With former running back Chris Jones out of the picture after a transfer to North Olmsted, Albers will fill the gap, something that Petroff said he is more than confident Albers can do for the Longhorns.

— Jon Behm

Projected lineup

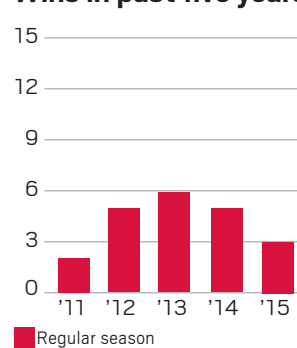
Projected lineup table for Lutheran West Longhorns, listing OFFENSE and DEFENSE players with positions, names, years, heights, and weights.

Seniors not already mentioned: Jacob Langner, Eric Bender, Brandon Naro, Spencer Ross, Braden Lau, Austin Schifano

Team history

Playoff record: 0-2 in two appearances. **Best playoff finish:** 2002, 2005 regional quarterfinals. **Most recent playoff appearance:** 2005

Wins in past five years



Bottom line

IF: Adjustments in the run game work, **THEN:** The Longhorns may surprise in the Patriot Athletic Conference.

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