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Falcons Fly High



Abingdon Falcons

Class 3A, Mtn 7 District

Schedule

Aug. 29	John Battle	H
Sept. 5	Christiansburg	H
Sept. 12	Gate City	A
Sept. 19	Richlands	A
Sept. 26	Tennessee High	A
Oct. 3	Johnson County, Tn.	H
Oct. 17	Wise Central	H
Oct. 24	Ridgeview	A
Oct. 31	Union	H
Nov. 7	Lee High	A

All photos by Emily Ball/BHC

Woods, Dillow among top returnees for Amburgey's squad

The 2004 season was one to remember for Abingdon head coach Garrett Amburgey.

Abingdon posted a 10-2 record en route to the Mountain 7 District title and Amburgey set the school all-time wins record.

There is a common thread to this story.

"We talk a lot about our standard," Amburgey said. "The guys played up to that standard last season, and we're currently practicing with the same standard."

Following the graduation of 19 seniors, the immediate goal is to reassemble a regular cast among a 62-man roster that has 13 seniors.

Just two starters return on offense, while the defense has five veterans.

"The biggest thing we need is game

experience, especially on the varsity level," Amburgey said. "That's what we're trying to develop."

Versatile lineman Aidan Woods is the headliner.

A 6-foot-5 and 280-pound senior with a 4.2 grade point average, Woods has committed to play at the University of North Carolina under legendary coach Bill Belichick.

"Aidan is a great player and we're very proud about his success," Amburgey said.

"Aidan has put in the work to play at the next level. He accomplished big

things for us last year and we expect the same this season."

The list of proven talents on offense includes junior Judge Dillow and senior Oliver Summitt at receiver.

"Both of those guys run great routes and catch the ball well,"

Abingdon faces a challenge in



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2025 Abingdon Falcons



replacing running back Owen Barr.

A master at making quick cuts and busting off long runs up the middle, Barr accounted for 23 touchdowns last season and well over 2,000 total rushing yards the past two years. He is now on the roster at Emory & Henry.

Senior Tykenevan Thompson is the new featured back.

"Tykenevan has paid his dues and learned from Owen," Amburgey said. "Tykenevan runs hard and he pops right up when he gets tackled. We love that

approach and we're anxious to see him roll."

Amburgey also praised the leadership of senior defensive back Griffin King.

"We have some very high character seniors who have put in extra work the past four years to improve and be part of what our program is all about," Amburgey said.

Junior baseball standout Hayden Reed and sophomore Isaiah Draper are also in the mix at receiver.

"Isaiah can be electric," Amburgey said.

Senior John Berry and



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Falcons Roster

1 Garrett McClure
2 Spencer Wellenhoffer
3 Judge Dillow
4 John Berry
5 Eli Brooks
6 Isaiah Draper
7 Josh Brodie
9 Bentley Kendrick
10 Hayden Reed
11 Knox Wright
12 Payton Molinary
13 Andrew Davis
14 Cole Camper

15 Drew Baker
16 Leighton Ramirez
17 Skyler Bentley
18 Oliver Summitt
19 Leroy Scott-Pellman
20 Griffin King
21 Hunter Crider
22 Jeremiah Adams
23 Makhi Fowler
24 Dylan Lee
25 Rudy Firtz
26 Jacob NeSmith
27 Trenton Dewar
28 Maddox Hayes
32 Sawyer McPherson

33 Kymani Johnson
35 Kieffer Widener
36 Brendon Green
38 Christian Miller
40 Drew Blake
41 Carson McClanahan
42 Mason Sollien
44 Nick Phillips
46 Tykenevan Thompson
48 Dante Ruggieri
50 Kayden Crabtree
51 Knox Woolwine
53 Daniel Blackmon
54 John Chapman
55 Ethan Nunley

59 Israel Moore
61 Eliot Mattox
62 Dax Bailey
65 Trevor Weller
68 Brogan Clay
69 Cutler Steffey
70 Landon King
71 Macks Cleek
73 Jeff Taylor
79 Braiden Smith
81 Glennel Lyman
82 Aiden Justice
84 Jonathan Hurd
87 Dylan Gilbert
88 Aidan Woods

junior Kymani Johnson provide depth in the offensive backfield.

Sophomore left-hander Eli Brooks is the new face at quarterback.

"Eli is going to be a dandy," Amburgey said. "He throws a great ball and is ready to compete."

Six-foot-five Isaac Brooks passed for 12 scores last season, while fellow senior Lucas Honaker contributed 14 touchdowns.

"We've got some guys in new roles on offense, but they are athletic and capable of making explosive plays," Amburgey said.

Along with Woods, the leaders on the offensive line are junior Daniel Blackmon and sophomore Ethan Nunley.

"Ethan is one of the biggest and strongest guys



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on our team," Amburgey said.

Junior Kieffer Widener returns at middle linebacker.

"Kieffer did a tremendous job last season. I feel good about linebacker corps," Amburgey said.

Senior Mason Sollien also figures to play a key role after contributing three field goals and 40 extra points as junior.

"Last season was fun, and we like this year's group. The guys know what we expect and they



have worked really hard in practice to keep things

moving to our standard,"

Amburgey said. ★





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Next Step



Emily Ball/BHC

Chisom's Devils try to get more wins

The leading men for the Castlewood Blue Devils in 2025 will be those big boys battling in the trenches each week.

"Our line's looking very great I feel like," said Castlewood senior Jasper Salyers. "We have four seniors and one junior [starting]. ... Our key will be up front and running it."

A 255-pound senior, Salyers was an honorable mention All-Cumberland District pick at guard last season and will help pave the way for the relentless rushing attack.

Brunner Houchins, a 265-pound junior, was an honorable mention all-district selection at offensive tackle and much is expected of him this fall.

Center Burton Casey (275), guard Trey Hamm (285) and tackle Jacob Young (315) join Salyers as seniors on the offensive line.

Junior Brayden Rose (205) and freshman Brady Hall (165) are penciled in at tight end.

On the other side of the ball, Salyers, Young, Houchins, Casey, Hamm and senior Dakota Lambert (295) hold down the D-Line.

"You can have big seniors who can't move, but that's not the case for us,"

said second-year Castlewood boss Shon Chisom. "We're up big up front and we can move."

Castlewood hopes to make another move in the right direction in the coming months.

The Blue Devils went 2-8 last season after winning just two games combined during the 2022 and 2023 seasons.

"We definitely doubled our winning percentage and made improvements," Chisom said. "Now, it's about leaping further than that and maybe doubling from that. I got to understand the personnel we've got last year and understanding my kids."

Last season marked Chisom's first head-coaching job.

After starting the season with six straight losses, the Blue Devils split their final four games with wins over Twin Springs and Hurley.

"I feel much better than last year to be honest with you," Chisom said. "Last year, the kids were learning a new



Castlewood Blue Devils

**Class 1D,
Cumberland District**

Schedule

Aug. 29	Twin Valley	H
Sept. 4	Phelps (Ky)	H
Sept. 19	Auburn	A
Sept. 26	Rye Cove	A
Oct. 3	Northwood	H
Oct. 10	Twin Springs	H
Oct. 17	Thomas Walker	H
Oct. 24	J.I. Burton	A
Oct. 31	Hurley	A
Nov. 7	Eastside	A



Emily Ball/BHC



2025 Castlewood Blue Devils



Anthony Stevens

Blue Devils Roster

0 Jacob Farmer

1 Wes Harvey

2 Matthew Nickles

3, Brayden Stone

4 Dalten Keith

5 Eli Long

6 Hunter Hileman

7 Hank Glover

9 Dalton Phillips

10 Isac Cooper

11 Lucas Steffey

12 Ely King

20 Rylee Phillips

21 Mason Mullins

22 Brady Hall

26 Logan Frye

30 Austin Burke

44 Nathan Frye

50 Jasper Salyers

52 Haydon Henry

53 Brayden Rose

56 Burton Casey

59 Grayson Gomez

60 Dakota Lambert

61 Marcus Hileman

62 Brunner Houchins

65 Jacob Young

75 Austin Hayes

77 Trey Hamm

79 Tavi Gomez

system and terminology. This year we've been much better with understanding as far as where we need to be. Our kids understand the offense better and the defense better. We've taken a bigger leap."

The comfort level is mutual.

"He's a smart guy," said Castlewood senior wingback/safety Wes Harvey said of Chisom. "He expects a lot out of us, and we do our best to make him happy with us."

Harvey, Dalton Phillips and Jacob Farmer will get the bulk of the carries with senior Matthew Nickles taking over at quarterback.

Nickles, Harvey, Farmer, Ely King and Dalten Keith lead the way for a talented defensive secondary. Harvey was a first-team All-Cumberland District pick as a defensive back

in 2024, while King earned honorable-mention status as a DB.

Phillips and Rose lead the way at linebacker with the former being a second-team

all-district selection last year. Castlewood allowed 34.4 points per game a season ago and must improve in that area.

"They understand what the expectation is," Chisom said. "This year should be a better year for us."

If things do turn out better, the linemen will likely deserve much of the credit.

"Dude, I'm excited," Harvey said. "The line's gotten way better. We're looking to run the ball more this year and probably won't pass as much because we're looking solid up front. The line's impressed so much this offseason. They've probably been here working out more than the other kids." ★



Anthony Stevens



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Winning Warriors



Chilhowie Warriors

**Class 1D,
Hogohegee District**

Schedule

Aug. 29	Marion	H
Sept. 5	J.I. Burton	A
Sept. 12	Narrows	A
Sept. 19	Eastside	H
Sept. 26	Northwood	A
Oct. 3	Honaker	A
Oct. 17	Rural Retreat	H
Oct. 24	Rye Cove	H
Oct. 31	Patrick Henry	A
Nov. 7	Holston	H

All photos by Emily Ball/BHC

Chilhowie looks to return to Region 1D playoffs

The Chilhowie Warriors are coming off a season in which they went 3-7 and missed the VHSL Region 1D playoffs. That's just part of the story, however, because if a few bounces here or there had gone Chilhowie's way the Warriors would have had a winning record and been bound for the postseason. Despite the final record, the team had a plus-six point differential. A 19-14 loss to Rural Retreat, a 40-39 setback to eventual regional champ Rye Cove and a season-ending 21-14 defeat at the hands of Holston were gut-wrenching and have not been forgotten by the 11 seniors on the roster entering the 2025 season. "We're hungry," said Chilhowie senior tight end/linebacker Blake Robinson.

"It's our last year and we want to go out with a bang. We want to do whatever it takes to win and finish in the key moments. The last few years we haven't been finishing in the key moments." Chilhowie returns eight starters on each side of the ball and the defense is particularly experienced. Five of the team's top seven tacklers from 2024 return with Robinson (78 tackles),

junior middle linebacker Gavin Walker (73 tackles), junior outside linebacker Garrett Dickison (64 tackles), senior defensive end Landon Hall (57 tackles, three sacks) and sophomore strong safety Luke Mullinax (40 ½ tackles)

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2025 Chilhowie Warriors



Warriors Roster

1 Landon Hall
2 Gabe Rouse
3 Tyler Gonzalez
4 Justin Gonzalez
6 Mason West
7 Garrett Dickison
9 Caden Schools
10 Asher Chapman
11 Dylan Martin
12 Luke Mullinax
13 Hudson Sturgill
19 Bryce Robinson

21 Hunter Jones
20 Camden Ward
22 Gavin Walker
23 Isaiah Blevins
25 Blake Robinson
27 Landon Deskins
30 Chance Hill
31 Colton Gentry
32 Kainan Biller
33 Jesse Ruoff
34 Caleb Cook
42 Colton Pruitt
44 Gunnar Milhorne

52 Ryan Haynes
54 Hunter Shelton
55 Braeden Hall
56 Maddox Tolbert
57 Elias Hall
59 Kaiden Wood
61 Santiago Mendoza
62 Landon Harris
65 Calvin Eller
66 Isaac McNew
68 Christian Ford
70 Preston Gollehon
74 Elgin Brooks

75 Aidan Broughman
77 Bodie Miller
79 Anthony Canales
80 Rylee Greer
81 Tyler Rose
83 Tyson Milhorne
84 Andy Tilson
86 Easton Owens
88 Jamison Slack-Valentino
89 Rilly Perkins

leading that unit.

"We have a ferocious defense," Robinson said. "All 11 guys to the football is what we preach, and our guys really take that to heart."

Defensive tackles Aidan Broughman (6-foot-1, 250-pounds) and Bodie Miller (6-2, 235) and cornerback Gabe Rouse (6-3, 195) are also back. Defensive end Colton Gentry, freshman safety Dylan Martin and cornerback Asher Chapman will also be counted on. Preston Gollehon, Anthony Canales, Christian Ford and freshmen Tyler Gonzalez and Gunnar Milhorne will contribute as

well.

"Defensively, I think this is gonna be one of the better defenses we've had at Chilhowie in a few years," said Chilhowie coach Reid Sturgill.

Dickison is a leader of that defensive crew. He is the team's punter as well. "Garrett is a guy who can play a lot of positions defensively," Sturgill said. "He can line up in the box, play in the defensive backfield and bring the pressure too. He's very hard-nosed and likes contact." Offensively, the top returnee is senior quarterback Asher Chapman. Chapman passed for 1,567





yards with 16 touchdowns and eight interceptions a year ago. "Experience is a factor that is hard to make up in certain areas," Sturgill said. "Asher's started a lot of games and played a lot of football and

Wide receivers Gabe Rouse and Luke Mullinax (82 carries, 316 yards; 10 catches, 86 yards) and Robinson at tight end will catch passes. Dickison, wide receiver Dylan Martin, tight end/running back

competitors," Sturgill said. "They've gotten better all spring, all summer and really put in the work so far in preseason camp. I'm really excited for this team to get on the field." Chilhowie will once again be tested by a rigorous schedule. Rye Cove and

Eastside – last year's Region 1D finalists – are on the non-district docket for the Warriors. "We can't afford to have a bad Friday night of football," Sturgill said. "We have to bring our A-game every Friday night." ★

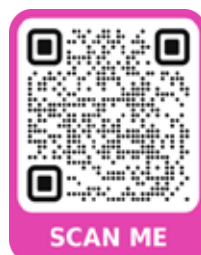
“Garrett is a guy who can play a lot of positions defensively,” Sturgill said. “He can line up in the box, play in the defensive backfield and bring the pressure too.”

each year he's progressed and gotten better and better. I think his best is yet to come his senior year and he's been sharp this summer and during fall camp." Senior running back Justin Gonzalez is back after missing most of last season with an injury and he is also one of the area's better kickers.

Gavin Walker and promising ninth-grade running back Gunnar Milhorne will also get touches. Broughman at right guard, Bodie Miller at right tackle and Preston Gollehon at left tackle anchor the O-Line and will battle up front along with Anthony Canales and center Colton Gentry. "This group is a bunch of



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Seeking State Gold



photo by Emily Ball/BHC



**Eastside
Spartans**

**Class 1D,
Cumberland District**

Schedule

Aug. 28	Wise County Central	H
Sept. 5	Hurley	H
Sept. 12	Rural Retreat	A
Sept. 19	Chilhowie	A
Sept. 26	Bland County	H
Oct. 3	J.I. Burton	A
Oct. 10	Rye Cove	H
Oct. 17	Twin Springs	A
Oct. 24	Thomas Walker	H
Nov. 7	Castlewood	H

With plethora of returnees, Eastside could make run

The Eastside High School Spartans were mere seconds away from winning the VHSL Region 1D football championship last November.

However, Rye Cove scored with 25 seconds remaining on a touchdown pass to take a 26-20 victory over the Spartans as Eastside's season ended with an 11-2 record.

That setback provided a painful memory and plenty of incentive for 2025.

"Those are pretty bad feelings," said junior running back/linebacker Keldan Hamilton. "It sucked; I'm not going to lie. But it happens, it's the game of football and we're using it as motivation."

A 2,000-yard rusher, a 1,000-yard passer as well as nine defensive starters are back in the fold for the crew from Coeburn and many preseason prognosticators have predicted the Spartans will make a trip to the state finals in Salem come December.

"It's hard not to hear all the chatter," said Eastside coach Mike Rhodes. "It's cliché now, but we're playing one game at a time. I know every coach says that,

but if you start looking forward you miss what's in front of you and we don't want to have any false steps in front of us."

Hamilton was a step above other rushers in the Cumberland District last season as he gained 2,077 yards and scored 25 touchdowns on the ground.

"It's a lot of just grit and heart," Rhodes said. "He just refuses to go down and is that kind of football player. He'll do whatever he has to do to lay it on the line and win the football game."

Sophomore Rocky Bond (352 rushing yards, four TDs; 34 receiving yards, one touchdown) holds the distinction of being both the strongest and fastest player on the squad according to Rhodes. Just 5-foot-8 and 165 -pounds he can bench press well over 300 pounds. Freshman Isaiah Barnette (6-foot, 175-pounds) steps in at fullback.

They'll be running behind an offensive line anchored by guards Tristan Fields (5-foot-11, 230 pounds, jr.) and Landry Carico (6-1, 250, jr.).

Wide receiver Chase Williams (11 catches, 86 yards, two touchdowns) and tight end Noah Hamilton (12 catches,





photo by Stephen King

224 yards, four TDs) are the top targets for sophomore quarterback Landon Pannell.

Pressed into starting duty last season due to an injury, all Pannell did was throw for 1,292 yards with 19 touchdowns and just four interceptions.

"Landon was thrown in there and never wavered," Rhodes said. "He just got better and better."

Pannell has improved as that jump from freshman to sophomore is among the biggest at the prep level.

"Mostly just my reads and watching film," Pannell said. "I've been working on that a lot this offseason and got really stronger and bigger as well."

The reviews have been positive. Expect Pannell to run the ball more often.

"I talk very highly of him," Hamilton said. "He stepped in and just did his job and dominated. He's a stud."

Defensively, Hamilton (108 tackles) was the Spartans' top tackler last season at linebacker while Chase Williams snagged a team-high three INTs.

Braxton Freeman (90 tackles), Noah Hamilton (59 tackles) and Dalton Yates (51 tackles) are stalwarts for a unit that allowed just 11.2 points per game.

The Spartans do not have a single senior on their roster. They do have 14 juniors.

"These juniors have started as freshmen, so they've got a lot of experience and provide a lot of leadership so we're not missing that element," Rhodes said. "That's a good problem to have." ★



Spartans Roster

- 0 Malik Daniels
- 1 Chase Williams
- 3 Ben Blevins
- 4 Andrew Bell
- 5 Braxton Freeman
- 6 Isaiah Barnette
- 7 Mason Cooke

- 8 Dalton Yates
- 10 Rocky Bond
- 11 Landon Pannell
- 12 Keldan Hamilton
- 13 Noah Hamilton
- 14 Mason Blevins
- 15 Dru Peters
- 16 Isaiah Adkins
- 20 Jourdain Fannon

- 24 Tyrique Hill
- 30 Carter Jones
- 50 Tristan Fields
- 52 Carter Jackson
- 54 Isaac Dingus
- 55 Jayden Tedesco
- 59 Glayden Castle
- 60 Morgan Salyers
- 64 Cayden Steele

- 66 Gabe Blevins
- 67 Michael Osborne
- 72 Landry Carico
- 76 Aedan Harvey
- 77 Luke Dutton
- 78 Bryson Collins
- 99 Josh Mabe



Gold Standard



George Wythe Maroons

**Class 1C, Mtn Empire
District**

Schedule

Aug. 29	Radford	A
Sept. 5	Fort Chiswell	H
Sept. 12	Virginia High	A
Sept. 19	Patrick Henry	H
Sept. 26	Rural Retreat	H
Oct. 3	Bluefield (W.Va.)	H
Oct. 10	Grayson County	A
Oct. 17	Auburn	A
Oct. 24	Galax	H
Nov. 6	Giles	A



Maroons seek to continue winning ways

All photos by Emily Ball/BHC

There will be plenty of new faces in important places for the George Wythe Maroons this season, but with such uncertainty comes opportunity.

Who will step up and deliver for the program that has been Southwest Virginia's most consistent winner on the gridiron over the past 25 years?

There are plenty of youngsters who fit the bill.

"I can't complain a bit," said GW coach Brandon Harner. "These young kids have been tremendous and are really hard-working kids. During the offseason they never missed the weight room, they don't miss practice and try to do everything you tell them to do. There are going to be some growing pains. ... As the year goes on we'll get better and if we stay healthy, I think we'll be OK."

There will be some big cleats to fill for some newcomers.

After rushing for 1,677 yards and scoring a total of 30 touchdowns, running back Trey Rainey is now on the roster at Roanoke College.

Quarterback Shane Huff graduated after amassing 1,580 yards and 14 touchdowns through the air. Defensive back Holden Luttrell (54 solo tackles) also departed.

However, two of the top linebackers in the VHSL's smallest classification return in 6-foot-2, 225-pound senior Camden Skeens and 6-foot, 185-pound junior Cade Bralley.

"He and I balance each other and I feel we are like brothers," Skeens said. "We have played ball together a long time."

Skeens made 96 solo tackles last year with three sacks, while Bralley collected 94 solo stops and intercepted three passes.

"I think they are two of the best linebackers in

Southwest Virginia if they really play to their potential and we'll have to have them play well again," Harner said.



2025 George Wythe Maroons



Maroon Roster

1 J'Mere Rivens
2 Ryan Fowler
3 Douglas Wells
4 Caden Golliher
5 Trenton Hall
6 Isaac Smith
7 Ethan Gates
8 Cade Bralley

9 Kaiden Irby
10 Skyler McBride
11 Ashton Crigger
12 Kolby Ross
13 Quorion Logan
14 Maddox Shiver
15 Jeremiah Wheeler
16 Ethan Bement
17 Lucas Mabry
18 Sean Clarke

19 Paxton Rigney
20 Keaton Taylor
21 Ryan Haywood
22 Nick Delp
23 Camden Skeens
28 Braydin Gregory
51 Gunner Gray
52 Wyatt Midkiff
53 Beach Molinary
54 Dylan Rowe

55 Cody Sisk
56 Trey Sparks
57 Jaxson Moore
58 Bryson Williams-Leggett
59 Keynain Hutchens
61 Eli Esqueff
66 Coy Francis
75 Kavion Brown
77 Alan Cabal-Gonzalez

"We're going to use their abilities to our advantage. Cade's a really, really good athlete and Cam's a thumper. Both are students of the game and do a great job."

Ashton Crigger (6-foot-3, 185-pounds, sr.) and Trenton

Hall (6-1, 185, sr.) are also at linebacker. Kavion Brown (5-11, 275, jr.), Trey Sparks (6-0, 220, sr.) and Gunner Gray (6-2, 230, sr.) hold down the defensive line, while J'mere Rivens, Kaden Irby, Ryan Fowler and Skyler McBride are in the defensive

secondary.

Bralley and 6-foot-5, 180-pound sophomore Isaac Smith took the majority of the snaps at quarterback during the preseason.

Senior Kaiden Irby and sophomore Caden Golliher will get most of the carries.

"Kaiden has really developed and gotten stronger and runs the ball extremely hard," Harner said. "Caden Golliher is another hard runner. We feel very confident with those guys."

Skeens and Trenton Hall





will see time at tight end.

Rivens, Fowler and McBride reside at the top of the depth chart at wide receiver.

Gray, Sparks, Brown, Cody Sisk (6-0, 195, soph.) and Mason Kennedy (6-1, 230, fr.) will pave the way as members of the offensive

line.

George Wythe has not had a sub-.500 record since 1996 and the Maroons have made the playoffs every season since 2007. There is a standard of excellence those who put on the uniform of the Maroons know they have to live up to.

"Absolutely," Harner said.

"That's instilled in them when they start playing rec. league ball. If you don't have any pressure on yourself, you'll not be very good. ... They know what's at stake."

Shane Allen and Jack Ginn are assistant coaches at GW this year.

Allen previously was at the helm of Galax and led the Maroon Tide to a state title in 2023. Ginn was most recently the head coach at Marion and also had a stint as the gridiron boss at North Carolina Wesleyan. ★

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Emily Ball/BHC



**Graham
G-Men**

**Class 1C, Mtn Empire
District**

Schedule

Aug. 29	Bluefield	A
Sept. 5	Galax	A
Sept. 11	Union	H
Sept. 26	Princeton	A
Oct. 4	Marion	H
Oct. 10	Pulaski County	A
Oct. 18	Virginia High	H
Oct. 25	Lebanon	H
Oct. 31	Tazewell	H
Nov. 7	Richlands	A

G-Men going for back-to-back state titles

Moments after storming to another Class 2 state football championship last winter in Salem, Graham head coach Tony Palmer and his staff began discussing the outlook for the 2025 season.

"That's the way we've rolled since I've been here," Palmer said. "We enjoy the wins for a while, and then we get back to work."

Once again, Graham is favored to win the Southwest District title behind a blend of size, speed and experience.

Along with seven seniors, the 2025 roster includes seven returning starters on offense and eight on defense.

"It's always nice to veteran guys who have been in our system," Palmer said.

The fun begins with the massive offensive line corps.

"We return four starters there, so we hope that will be our strength," Palmer said.

Kaeden Groseclose is one of several monster mashers to watch. The 6-foot-6 and 275-pound senior tackle with a 3.8 grade point average

has drawn praise for his footwork and intelligence.

"Kaaden will definitely be one of senior leaders," Palmer said.

Senior Jermonte Hendricks and juniors Aidan Bailey and Xavier Kennard

also have size and big-game experience.

Six-foot senior quarterback Dalton Roberts, who passed for over 16 scores last season, is another



2025 Graham G-Men



Graham Roster

1 Gabe Lilly

2 A.J. Bradshaw

3 Douglas Palmer

4 Jordan Kegley

5 Cambel Fix

6 Deion Cooper

7 Ethan Horn

8 Kaden Banks

9 Malachi Elick

10 Dalton Roberts

11 Gage Palmer

12 Je'Von Lane

14 Jeremiah Quick

15 Bralyzx Isabelle

17 Hawken Nelson

19 Cameron Graves

24 Cecil Calloway

29 Tristan Shupe

32 Chaun Dowell

33 Jysir Williamson

50 Jullian Johnson

52 Hunter Rose

53 Kolt Simon

54 Bryson Walker

55 Noah Smith

57 Christian Holt

62 Kaeden Groseclose

64 Jermonte Hendricks

71 Austin Brewster

74 Aidan Bailey

75 Xavier Kennard

77 Aidex Hudson

81 Lucas Nash

proven leader.

A three-year starter, Roberts has only lost two games.

"Dalton has a chance to be among the among the successful quarterbacks in school history in terms of wins," Palmer said.

The list of proven talents on offense also includes versatile senior Gabe Lilly (19 touchchdowns), senior receiver Malachi Elick (6-3, 200) and 6-3, 225-pound junior running back Gage Palmer.

A pair of all-state picks in Lilly (6-1, 212) and junior lineman Jysir Williamson (6-2,250) are anchors on defense.

"Jysir is strong and smart, and he has an unbelievable motor. We're excited about his future," Palmer said.

Fearless junior Cambel Fix is a play maker at defensive back and receiver.

The G-Men recorded six shutouts last senior en route to a 15-0 record and the third state crown in seven years.

Two-time Bristol Herald Courier defensive player of the year Omarri Hill is now playing football at NCAA Division II Emory & Henry. Receiver Chris Edwards is in the roster at Morehead State, while linebacker Yubrenal Isabelle is at Ferrum.

Graham must also replace Dylan Nash, who connected on five field goals and over 60 extra points in 2024.

The most dramatic change for Graham fans this season involves the home field.

Instead of playing at historic 10,000-seat Mitchell Stadium, the G-Men will host three games on a turf field located at the high school.

"We're excited to have a place with that G Star at the 50-yard line that represents our program, school and community. Hopefully, that that will help us play even harder," Palmer said.

The Class 2D regional rematch against Union will be held at Tazewell, while

the scheduled home game against Tazewell has been moved to Richlands.

There is no permanent seating at the new home for Graham football, which has long served as the practice facility for the G-Men.

Palmer is hopeful that additions will gradually follow.

"That's the goal," Palmer said.

As usual, Palmer takes a cautious big-picture of his squad.

"I think we have a good team. We just have to put in the work," Palmer said. ★





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The Last Wave



Emily Ball/BHC



**Grundy
Golden Wave**

**Class 1D, Black
Diamond District**

Schedule

Aug. 29	Ridgeview	A
Sept. 5	Rye Cove	H
Sept. 12	Giles	H
Sept. 19	Twin Valley	A
Sept. 26	Honaker	A
Oct. 3	Richlands	A
Oct. 10	Tazewell	H
Oct. 17	Hurley	H
Oct. 24	River View (W.Va.)	A

Grundy wants to go out a winner

Ten games – possibly more if a playoff berth materializes – is all that remains for the Grundy Golden Wave.

The tradition-rich program is playing its final football season this fall as Grundy will combine with Hurley and Twin Valley to form the Southern Gap High School Eagles in the fall of 2026.

So, there will be one last hurrah for the Golden Wave.

Will it be a victory lap?

"We're still going about it as business as usual, but yes, that is a motivational factor," said Grundy coach Keegan Bartley. "This is it. There is no more Grundy football for these guys after this season and we ask them what they want to accomplish in that last year. It's always in the back of my head to make sure we can be as successful as possible. ... It's still football season, the best time of the

year."

Grundy is the defending Black Diamond District champions but must replace several starters who departed. The Golden Wave have won four regional titles in program history and produced several alumni who excelled at the collegiate level.

This season the past will meet the present more than ever before.

"It does mean a lot," said Golden Wave senior lineman Luke "Quake" Shelton. "Grundy has a good football history and we want to go out with a big bang."

It will be quality over quantity for the Golden Wave with a preseason roster numbering just 22.

"The numbers are obviously lower, but the core is good," Bartley said. "I do like the kids who have been showing up. They've been a part of this team and the

difference now is those kids are going to step into spots that they haven't had to previously play."

Only four full-time starters return on offense with Shelton on the line, Trey Taylor at running back,

Jackson Deel at wide receiver and Garon Marcum at receiver.

Taylor rushed for more than 1,000 yards last season



Photo by Emily Ball/BHC



Photo by Chad Cooper

2025 Grundy Golden Wave



Photo by Chad Cooper

Golden Wave Roster

2 Garon Marcum
3 Gavin Mays
5 Ayden Whited
8 Jackson Deel
9 Jack Campbell

10 Blake Payne
11 Trey Taylor
12 Codie Houk
19 Dalton Hurley
20 R.J. Rowe
21 Holden Lester

51 Braxton Helton
52 Owen Wallace
55 Luke "Quake" Shelton
60 Henry Brown
63 Colton Vance
64 Bradley Squire

70 Matthew Thompson
72 Rylan Blankenship
76 Blake Childress
78 Brayden Ratliff
85 Lukas Mayhorn

and was a first-team All-Region 1D selection.

Shelton, center Blake Childress, Braxton Helton and Henry Brown will be battling in the trenches, while Ayden Whited takes over at quarterback.

Whited previously played wide receiver but was limited last season after breaking his collarbone not once, but twice. He scored Grundy's only touchdown in

a scrimmage session with Chilhowie and John Battle on Aug. 14.

Sophomore wide receiver/defensive back Gavin Mays also has big play capabilities.

All of those guys previously mentioned will also play key roles on the defensive side of the ball. This will be Iron Man Football.

"Some guys will never leave the field and have to

be in shape," Bartley said. "We can't really afford to take an injury. That can derail everything."

Such stalwarts as Logan Lester, Carson Deel, Shaeim Gordon, Brady Deel and Brody Coleman graduated.

"It's going to take some getting used to without their energy and their faces," Bartley said.

Lester, a dual threat in every sense of the word at

quarterback, is now playing at Bluefield University.

"It's weird not seeing Logan standing around somewhere," Bartley said.

The current edition of the Golden Wave will look to write a successful final chapter.

"We're not going to be the biggest team," Shelton said. "But we'll be a tough team."



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Go Golden Wave

GO WAVES!

Cavs Keep Winning



All photos by Emily Ball/BHC



Holston Cavaliers

**Class 1D,
Hogoheegee District**

Schedule

Aug. 29	Eastern Montgomery	H
Sept 5	Narrows	H
Sept. 11	John Battle	A
Sept. 19	Honaker	A
Sept. 26	Hurley	H
Oct. 3	Fort Chiswell	A
Oct. 10	Patrick Henry	A
Oct. 17	Northwood	H
Oct. 31	Rural Retreat	H
Nov. 7	Chilhowie	A

Can Holston continue winning ways in 2025?

The Holston Cavaliers have won 35 of their 47 games since Chris Akers took over as head coach in the fall of 2021.

It's been an impressive run of success, but the 2025 season will likely mean a rebuilding process as several key players graduated and the roster features just three seniors.

That doesn't mean the dudes from Damascus will be pushovers, however.

"It motivates me as more of a leader to teach and encourage these younger guys," said senior fullback/linebacker Collin Widener. "We have a lot of roles to fill and have got a lot of guys working hard in the weight room. They're really working hard to take over these roles, not just finding anybody to put there. We're working hard at putting people in there."

Four starters return on defense and three are back on offense for Holston.

Widener rushed for 225 yards and scored three touchdowns during the regular season, as well as amassing 63 tackles.

Eli Tweed (152 receiving yards, 92 rushing yards during the 2024 regular season) will shift to wingback. Brodie

Richardson and Desmond Mickens were both competing for the starting quarterback job in the preseason, but they will contribute at other spots if they don't get the role.

Mickens is experienced as a kickoff and punt returner.

"I think we'll move the ball pretty well this year," Widener said. "As long as our line holds up and I think it will, I think we'll be good. We have a lot of

people back in the backfield."

Jo'Lon Norman returns at the guard position and will anchor the offensive line. He also starts at defensive end.

"We've got a bunch of speed and we're quick off the ball," Norman said.



2025 Holston Cavaliers



Cavaliers Roster

1 Liam Maness

2 Brady Owens

4 Collin Widener

6 Aaron Smith

7 Desmond Mickens

8 Logan Griffin

9 Dayton Parris

10 Eli Tweed

12 Jackson Roberts

13 Owen Rouse

14 Brodie Richardson

15 James McCune

16 Issac Widener

20 James Arnold

50 Brandon Pennington

51 Jacob Harris

52 Cameron Keen

54 Jacob Hurley

55 Creed Maness

58 Levi Parks

59 Cristofer Lopez

60 Jo'Lon Norman

62 Colt Thomas

72 Cody Cordle

Creed Maness is the only other senior on the squad alongside Widener and Norman.

Holston has a special player on special teams.

Junior kicker Aaron Smith was a first-team all-state selection last season in Class 1.

He made a 20-yard field goal with 41 seconds remaining to give the Cavaliers a 29-27 win at Rural Retreat.

He finished 3-for-5 on field

goal attempts and 39-for-41 on extra points.

"It's always nice when you have a kicker who just keeps working hard and getting better," Akers said.

Sophomore inside linebacker/tight end Brady Owens also emerged as a standout last season for the Cavaliers.

There are plenty of other new faces in new places.

"We lost a lot to graduation," Akers said. "We have a lot of holes to fill."

The team does have 11 juniors on the team. Isaac Widener, Owen Rouse, James Arnold, Jacob Harris, Levi Parks, Christofer Lopez and Colt Thomas are the other members of that class along with Smith, Mickens, Tweed and Richardson.

Only three players on the preseason roster weighed more than 200 pounds so there isn't much size.

"I just like the fact they work hard and had a good offseason," Akers said. "Just

a hard-working group."

As usual, Holston has to avoid injuries.

"Always," Akers said. "We have to stay healthy and be very careful with the way we practice and keep people as fresh as we can for Friday nights."

Norman and Widener are looking to lead the way.

"That experience helps me a lot with my focus," Norman said. ★

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Talented Tigers



All photos by Emily Ball/



Honaker Tigers

Class 1D, Hogoheegee District

Schedule

Aug. 28	Lebanon	A
Sept. 5	Ridgeview	H
Sept. 12	Rye Cove	A
Sept. 19	Holston	H
Sept. 26	Grundy	H
Oct. 3	Chilhowie	H
Oct. 17	Narrows	A
Oct. 24	Patrick Henry	A
Oct. 31	Northwood	H
Nov. 7	Rural Retreat	A

Honaker riding high

Parker Lowe is Honaker High School's starting quarterback and he happens to be a freshman.

The newcomer will wear No. 1 just as his predecessor, Peyton Musick, did over the previous three seasons when he rewrote the Tigers' record book.

"You lose a guy like Peyton Musick, who threw for over 100 touchdowns and over 8,000 yards in three seasons; anytime a program loses a guy like that, it's pretty tough. Parker understands the situation," said Honaker coach Aaron Lowe, who is also Parker's father. "He's just a freshman but he's been playing quarterback a long time,

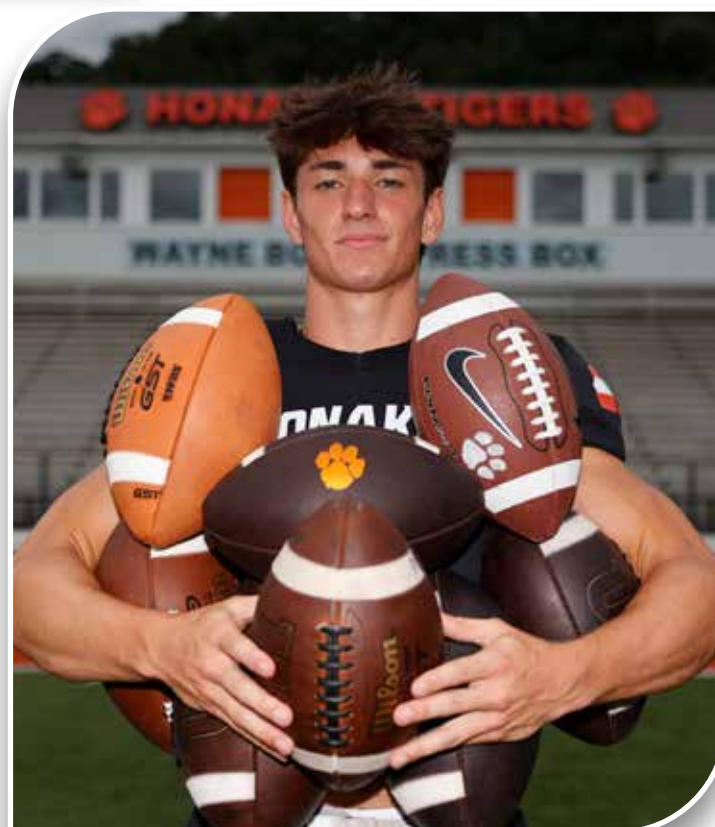
he's been in this offense for a long time and knows it well. He knows he's got big shoes to fill, but he also knows he has to be calm and collected."

Helping ease those nerves is the fact that Parker Lowe will be throwing the ball to one of Southwest Virginia's top playmakers and a bonafide college prospect.

Avery Musick, a 6-foot-3, 195-pound senior wide receiver, had 69 catches for 1,352 yards and scored 19 touchdowns a season ago.

The dude has size, speed and sure hands.

"Avery's a special talent," Aaron Lowe said. "He put up monster numbers last year. ... He's just one of



2025 Honaker Tigers



Tigers Roster

1 Parker Lowe
2 Kameron Keen
3 Avery Musick
4 Levi Honaker
5 Tyler Hubbard
6 Malachi Gilbert
7 Jeremiah Rose
10 Bryadon Justice
12 Joe Stump

13 Kamden Beavers
14 Zach Fields
16 Cameron Houston
18 Brayden Hart
19 Cole Morrison
20 Keaton Smith
21 Blair Clark
23 Noah Schoonover
31 Grant Wright
32 Kam Robinson

33 Eli McGlothlin
34 Kole Reynolds
39 Andrew Richardson
50 Maddox Sykes
52 Levi Johnson
54 Rylee Clevinger
55 Keaton Stilwell
56 Jakobi Nunley
57 Trey Hill
58 Haiden Miller

59 Jayden Whitt
60 Logan McGuire
61 Jonah Gilbert
62 Peyton Duty
70 Hunter Vance
72 Hayden Robinson
73 Korbyn Dye
74 Zaylin Purcell
88 Ray Kiser

those guys where it doesn't matter who's back there playing quarterback, they'd be tickled to have No. 3 split out there."

Avery Musick – Peyton Musick's younger brother – has formed a nice rapport with his new signal-caller and praised Parker Lowe in the preseason.

"Oh, he's great," Avery Musick said. "He can read the defense well, he throws a beautiful ball and overall, he's going to be a great quarterback."

How quickly Parker Lowe – and many of his young teammates – mature will be a key development this season. The roster features 18 freshmen and many of

them will see significant playing time.

"We had a great summer," Aaron Lowe said. "The kids worked hard and got in the weight room and that's always extremely important to start with. They're an eager and hungry bunch. It definitely has me excited."

Honaker went 7-4 last season and repeated as Hogoheegee District champions. Aaron Lowe took over as interim head coach for the final three games of 2024 after rookie boss Shane Wicks unexpectedly resigned.

That interim tag was removed from his name shortly after the season ended and it's been





business as usual for the Tigers.

"It's just a testament to our kids," Aaron Lowe said. "Some of the seniors have had three head coaches since they've been here. That makes it tough. We could have lost a lot of numbers or struggled to field a team with all the drama, but these kids put all that behind them and focused on what they needed to be. They're eager to win."

The Tigers should be able to put up some points with Parker Lowe as the trigger man of that high-scoring offense.

Levi Honaker (6-foot-1, 187-pounds, junior), Kam Beavers (6-4, 180, jr.), Tyler Hubbard (5-7, 155, fr.), Jeremiah Rose (6-4, 187, fr.), Blair Clark (5-9, 165, soph.) and Kameron Keen (6-3, 158, fr.) are also expected to catch passes in Honaker's Air Raid offense.

That will allow Musick to be even more impactful.

"[Opposing defenses] can double me," Avery Musick said. "But we're always going to have somebody

else open."

The Tigers can also run the ball if need be with Cole Morrison (5-9, 205, jr.), Noah Schoonover (5-7, 104, sr.), Malachi Gilbert (5-7, 175, soph.), Eli McGlothlin (5-6, 175, sr.) and Keaton Smith (5-8, 195, jr.) providing depth in the backfield.

Maddox Sykes (5-10, 270, sr.), Logan McGuire (5-8, 330, sr.), Keaton Stilwell (5-9, 270, fr.), Peyton Duty (6-0, 300, fr.) and Haiden Miller (5-9, 290, fr.) anchor a large offensive line.

Defensively, Musick in the secondary (69 tackles) and Sykes on the line (45 tackles) lead the way for a unit that must improve on last year's effort when the Tigers allowed 32.3 points per game.

Grundy rolled up 572 rushing yards in a 66-30 victory over Honaker in the first round of last year's Region 1D playoffs.

Defensive lineman Jakobi Nunley (5-9, 220, sr.) and outside linebacker Brayden Hart (5-8, 166, soph.) will also contribute in a big way on defense along with Smith,

Levi Honaker, Morrison, Johnson and Hubbard.

The new QB is confident with the mix of promising newcomers and varsity veterans.

"The [upperclassmen] have really stepped up as leaders and are helping me get better," Parker Lowe said. "Even though we're going to be young, I think we can make a good run." ★



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Go Tigers!



Rocking Raiders



All photos by Emily Ball/BHC

Burton has plenty of reason for optimism

As the sun beating down on the turf at Carl Smith Stadium on the campus of the University of Virginia's College at Wise during a four-team scrimmage on Aug. 16, J.I. Burton coach Jacob Caudill liked how his team responded.

"I feel like our conditioning was miles ahead of where it was last year and that's on me for not having us in better shape last year," Caudill said. "It allows us to be more physical throughout the game."

Of course, he never has to worry about the energy level of junior Alex Colley.

"He could probably eat at McDonald's every day and still be in good shape," Caudill said. "Alex is a tough kid and hard-nosed."

Colley rushed for 67 yards, hauled in a 20-

yard touchdown toss from Peyton Brummitte and also intercepted a pass against Northwood in that aforementioned scrimmage. He also reached the end zone against North Greene.

The fearless 5-foot-9, 165-pound speedster gained more than 1,000 rushing yards last fall and looks to feast on opposing defenses again.

"Alex had good season last year as a sophomore," Caudill said. "He's just a hard-nosed kid. He's a little undersized but it doesn't faze him when he gets hit by linebackers and safeties. I wish we had a hundred of him and we're looking forward to seeing him run the football."

Colley knows that he will be on the scouting report of every team the Raiders play

this season and welcomes that challenge of being the main man.

"I like it," Colley said. "Whatever I can do to help this team. If they want to put the target on me, I'm still going to run my play, do whatever it takes and I know my linemen got me."

Colley didn't let his summer go to waste.

"Overall, I just wanted to get better at everything," he said. "I worked on my vision a lot, hit the weight room a bunch, got a lot stronger, a lot



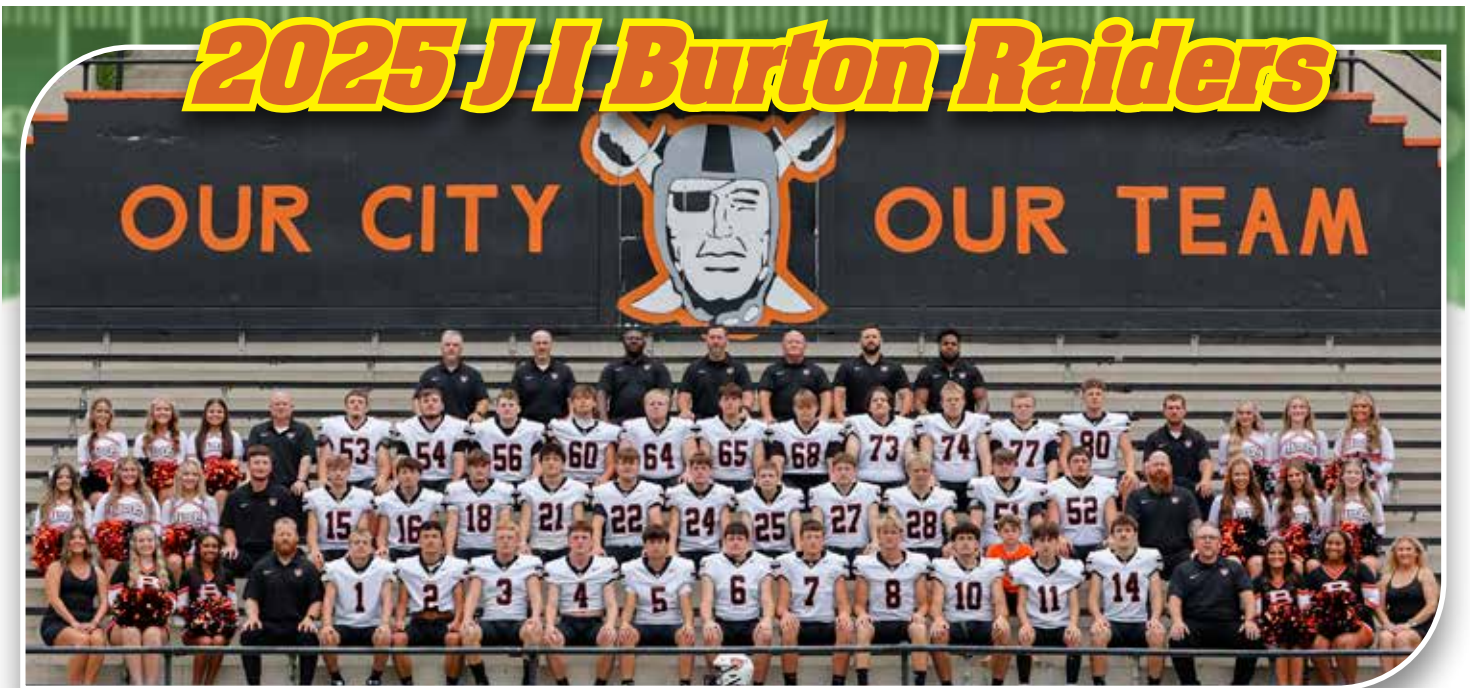
J I Burton Raiders

**Class 1D,
Cumberland District**

Schedule

Aug. 29	Unaka	A
Sept. 5	Chilhowie	H
Sept. 12	Patrick Henry	H
Sept. 19	Twin Springs	A
Oct. 3	Eastside	H
Oct. 10	Hurley	H
Oct. 17	Bland County	A
Oct. 24	Castlewood	H
Oct. 31	Rye Cove	A
Nov. 7	Thomas Walker	A





Raiders Roster

1 Anthony Green
2 Nico Niece
3 Peyton Brummitte
4 Alex Colley
5 Brayden McCoy
6 Colt Addison
7 Brayden Hess

8 Landon Fleming
9 Jayce Coleman
10 Mark Miller
11 Graeson Hunnell
14 Kaenan Sturgill
15 Keegan Williams
16 Mikey Taylor
18 Ayden Ryan
21 Nathaniel Wallen

22 Max Garnder
24 Connor Dorton
25 Elijah Jones
27 Bryson Potter
28 Abe Branham
51 Dalton Sturgill
52 Brayden Hamilton
53 Bryan Culbertson
54 Braedyn Hobbs

56 Bryson Miller
60 Adrian Russell
64 Ben Bolling
65 Brayden Broskey
68 Cameron Wampler
73 Jesse Hamilton
74 Preston McNew
77 Zack Baber
80 Avery Fields

quicker and I probably went to a dozen football camps this summer.”

Colley isn’t the only reason why Burton has good vibes.

With eight starters back on offense and seven returning on the defensive side of the ball, the Raiders should be improved as they aim for their first playoff bid since the spring season of 2021.

Mark Miller started all 10 games at linebacker as a freshman in 2024, while 5-foot-9, 225-pound Bryan Culbertson will anchor both sides of the line.

Quarterback Peyton Brummitte, linebacker Adrian Russell, running back/defensive back Landon Fleming, two-way lineman Brayden Hamilton (6-3, 220), defensive end

Brayden Broskey (6-3, 220), defensive back Nico Niece, linebacker Kaenan Sturgill, tight end/linebacker Avery Fields and lineman Braedyn Hobbs (5-8, 210) also stood out in the preseason for the Raiders.

Having gone just 3-17 the past two years, Burton is hungry to reinstate its stats as a contender.

“We’re starting to get back there,” Caudill said. “We started playing good defense as the season went on last year and offensively, we picked it up a little bit. We played hard, but we got outmatched in a couple of games. We’re looking to win a little more this year.” ★



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Battle Tested



John Battle Trojans

Class 2D, Mtn 7 District

Schedule

Aug. 29	Abingdon	A
Sept. 5	Virginia High	H
Sept. 11	Holston	H
Sept. 19	Wise Central	A
Sept. 26	Patrick Henry	A
Oct. 3	Lebanon	H
Oct. 10	Gate City	H
Oct. 17	Ridgeview	H
Oct. 31	Lee High	A
Nov. 7	Union	A

All photos by Emily Ball/BHC

Trojans try to snap lengthy losing skid

There is good news and bad news for John Battle football fans.

The bad involves the 8-47 overall record since 2018, including a 0-10 mark in 2024.

The good involves the experience level on the 2025 roster.

Second-year head coach Jake Hess is working with 14 seniors and 12 returning starters.

"Everything is pretty solid," Hess said. Battle allowed 45 points per game last season, while averaging 9.4 points on offense.

The closest margin was a 34-8 decision against Mountain 7 District rival Lee High.

"It was tough, but we learned from each week," Hess said. Hess is not a fan of the media day process, but he did

confirm that senior Caden Sturgill has returned at quarterback.

"Every other position is pretty much the same," Hess

said. With four touchdowns last season, Sturgill tied for the team lead



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2025 John Battle Trojans



Trojans Roster

1 Caden Sturgill
2 Alex Deel
4 Hunter Gillespie
5 Jay-J Hampton
6 Nolan Singleton
7 Braylin Moran
8 Kaidden Dean
9 Jacob France
10 Carter Hayes

11 Gabe Shipley
12 Bonham Bowman
13 Marshall Green
14 Daylen Gonzalez
15 Colt Mullins
16 Devin Rasnick
17 Tucker St. Clair
18 Jaxson Cunningham
21 Mykeal Endres
24 Ryan VanHoy
25 Drew Eades

32 Jaxx Whitlatch
33 Xzavier Helling
41 Brylee Lunsford
44 Asher Livingston
50 Blayton Hess
51 Sergio Acevedo
52 Nathan Martinez
53 Hunter Reynolds
54 Channing Canter
55 Kyran Rock
58 Lucas Cox

60 Connor Horton
61 Ryland Shauburger
64 Bryson Worley
66 Braison Brush
70 Isaiah Mitchell
71 Colton Kestner
72 Tyler Harrington
73 Wyatt Napier
75 Austin Whitehead
85 Laken Keen

in touchdowns with fear-
less running back Marshall
Green.
"Marshall is a tough kid who

runs hard," Hess said.
Big senior Braison Brush is
a familiar name on the of-
fensive line.

Unity is the key word for the
defense.
"We've got 11 guys there
and everybody knows their

job," Hess said. "We roll with
that and hold each other ac-
countable."
Judging by the interest

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among younger players, the future appears promising for Battle fans.

"Our youth league is doing great with around 60 to 70 kids," Hess said. "And our middle school team has good numbers."

Hess is optimistic about the overall direction of his program.

"We've definitely seen progress," Hess said. "And it always helps to have seniors and guys who have played

together."

Battle opens the season at Washington County rival Abingdon.

"Practice has gone well," Hess said. "Our guys are ready to see a team in a different color. We will evaluate things week by week."

Despite the 2024 record, Hess he's enjoying his time on Battle Hill.

"I love it," Hess said. "I couldn't ask for anything better." ★



Kelleys Four

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Kelley McLaughlin
KW4581@icloud.com

GOOD LUCK TROJANS!



A football player in a white jersey with "PIONEERS" and the number 44 is running with the ball, being tackled by several players in orange jerseys. The scene is a night game on a grass field.



***Class 2D,
Southwest District***

Schedule

Aug. 28	Honaker	H
Sept. 5	Patrick Henry	A
Sept. 12	Marion	A
Sept. 19	Rural Retreat	H
Sept. 26	Richlands	H
Oct. 3	John Battle	A
Oct. 17	Union	A
Oct. 25	Graham	A
Oct. 31	Virginia High	H
Nov. 7	Tazewell	H

 **QB Mike Reece is one of area's premier talents**

"We had a good turnout that night and our crowds grew every game after that," Norris said.





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2025 Lebanon Pioneers



The second act of Lebanon's breakthrough was not so grand, as the Pioneers dropped their last four games.

"We made some noise early and did what we thought we could, but we fell short at the end," Norris said. "We've talked about finishing over the entire

include senior quarterback Michael Reece, senior receiver Toby Baker and sophomore running Layne Jessee.

The 6-foot-4 Reece has been a passing machine as a four-year starter. After throwing for 35 scores last season, Reece recently committed to play at UVA

“ Coach Hunnell has really helped me with our strength and conditioning program,” Norris said. “We want to get bigger, faster and stronger, and we’ve seen a total change in those areas from last season.”

off-season and during fall camp.”

With 16 seniors and several proven stars, the building blocks are in place for more headlines.

“That’s a really good number of seniors for us,” Norris said. “Those guys have played together for a long time and have really good chemistry.”

Leaders on offense

Wise.

A textbook route-runner, Baker (6-0, 185) caught 14 TD passes in 2024.

At 6-foot-2 and 220 pounds, Jessee has attracted interest from major colleges after rushing for over 1,000 yards with 20 scores in his varsity debut.

“I feel like our rushing attack will be a bigger asset for us this season,” Norris



Pioneers Roster

1 Luke Spencer
3 Brennan Hess
4 Will Jessee
5 Brody Boothe
7 Ayden Cook
8 Brayden Hill
9 Blake Chafin
10 Michael Reece
11 Toby Baker
12 Clayton Brown
13 Kaimen Casey

14 Levi Hughes
15 Francisco Hernandez
18 Liam Spencer
20 Brayden Keen
21 Rylen Brown
24 Josh Blevins
30 Grayson Brammer
31 Ethan Wright
32 Easton Taylor
41 Kolby Frye
44 Layne Jessee
51 Colby Johnson

52 Ayden Dye
53 Josh Riley
54 Kaiden Woodward
55 Luke Monk
61 Levi Tiller
62 Jordan Keith
63 Lucas Statzer
64 Trenton Their
66 Connor Griffith
68 Wesley Alexander
70 Kannan Hess
72 Ethan Thomas

73 Dylan Clark
74 Lucas Peck
75 Landon Ray
78 Caden Humphries
79 Haiden Sears
82 Luke Garrett
84 Brock Keen
89 Daniel Six

said. "When I got this job, the run game was a little behind the pass game.

"We want to keep defenses guessing on whether we will run it or throw it. And I think we can do that."

According to Norris, a vital part of the balanced attack can be traced to the work of offensive line coach Harry Hunnell.

"Coach Hunnell has really helped me with our strength and conditioning program," Norris said. "We want to get bigger, faster and stronger, and we've seen a total change in those areas from last season."

A total of 16 seniors graduated, including three linemen and two receivers on offense.

Norris must replace seven starters on defense.

"We have a lot of guys on both sides of the ball who saw playing time last year, and they have done a fantastic job of stepping up during summer workouts," Norris said.

In his second season as boss of the Pioneers, the 29-year-old Norris has set



a clear goal.

"Everything has gone smoother this year, and the kids know our expectations," Norris said. "From drills

and sprints to workouts and meetings, the emphasis has been on finishing."

The standards remain high in Pioneer country.

"People in this community love football and they want to see us have a successful program. That's what we're trying to give them." ★



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Raising 'Canes



Marion Scarlet Hurricanes

**Class 2D,
Southwest District**

Schedule

Aug. 29	Chilhowie	A
Sept. 5	Wise Central	H
Sept. 12	Lebanon	H
Sept. 19	Gate City	A
Oct. 4	Graham	A
Oct. 10	Lee High	A
Oct. 16	Tazewell	H
Oct. 24	Fort Chiswell	H
Oct. 31	Richlands	H
Nov. 7	Virginia High	A

All photos by Allen Gregory

Testerman takes over at helm of Marion

Billy Testerman is a master of defense.

His resume includes a standout run as a linebacker at Chilhowie followed by successful stints as the defensive coordinator for Chilhowie and Patrick Henry.

Testerman, 37, faces a new test this season.

He is the boss for a Marion

program which is coming off its first winless season since 1954.

"I've been around several successful coaches and I've learned from all of them," Testerman said. "That background will help in this job."

One lesson from former Chilhowie head coach Jeff

Robinson stands out.

"Coach Robinson told me to keep a notebook handy at all times. I've definitely been following that advice in recent weeks," Testerman said.

The Scarlet Hurricanes posted a 6-25 record under former coach Jack Ginn the

past three seasons with one playoff appearance. That mark includes 11 straight losses.

"The culture has to change when a team goes on 0-10, and we've been working on that in practice," Testerman said. "We're trying to set a foundation that we can build

Good Luck
to the
MARION
HURRICANES!



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2025 Marion Scarlet Hurricanes



Hurricane Roster

0 Brayden Bowman
1 Landon Harmon
2 Zack Pilkins
3 Caleb Mercer
4 Cole Fedorchuk
5 Breckan White
6 Ethan Hylton
7 Colby Davis
8 Daniel Lee
9 Nathaniel Edwards
12 Tyler Pierce
13 Taelyn Parrish

14 Ryan Orvik
15 Colton Jesse
22 Jesse Hunt
23 Andrew Owens
24 Aryus Meckley
25 Bryson Severt
30 Colton Ferland
33 Caedon Reece
34 Andrew Morales
36 Darius Robinson
40 Victor Reinoso
41 Nathan LeSueur
42 Kaden Shaffer

44 Hughie Smith
45 Dylan Collier
49 Preston Harrington
51 Connor Jackson
52 Devon Cantu
53 Bentley Atkins
56 Peyton Ratcliffe
58 Spencer Shaffer
62 Carter Edge
63 Keaton Jones
65 Zerrick Jarman
66 Konner Whitt
68 Dayton Jones

70 Brent Tolbert
72 Cooper Hall
76 Charlie Umbarger
79 Lance Tilson
84 Jaden Billings
99 Ethan Sage



around.”

Marion graduated 15 seniors, including a pair of playmakers in twins Jalen and Jordan Miller.

Daniel Lee and Tyler

Pierce are the only two seniors on the 2025 roster.

Lee returns to a starting position at outside linebacker, while Pierce will see time at tight end,

receiver and defensive back.

“The Miller twins were good on offense and defense, so those are two big losses,” Testerman said. “It’s hard to tell how many

returning starters we have overall because we have different schematics and guys stepping into new roles.”

Ginn favored the run-



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oriented Flexbone offense, but Testerman is taking a different path.

backfield,” Testerman said. “Daniel has a mix of power and speed, and Ethan is a

Peyton Ratcliffe.

Junior Hughie Smith is the tight end.

“We have decent size on the line,” Testerman said.

The headliners on defense include Lee and Hylton at linebacker, with Whitt on the line and Pierce in the secondary.

Testerman has been pleased by the early results of his ambitious project.

“It will be a building process, but we had a great response to our summer workouts and the community support has been tremendous,” Testerman said.

As for his coaching style, Testerman favors an upbeat approach patterned after longtime NFL head coach Pete Carroll. He still talks to former Patrick Henry head coach and new Tazewell

boss Seth Padgett on a daily basis.

“I’ve been having a blast,” Testerman said. “We’ve been focusing on work in the weight room and developing a team-first approach. Our goal is to win small battles each day.” ★

“Coach Robinson told me to keep a notebook handy at all times. I’ve definitely been following that advice in recent weeks,” Testerman said.

“I want to kind of go back to my roots at Chilhowie and have a lot more balance,” Testerman said. “We will run the ball and have play-action passes based off that.”

Sophomore Bryson Severt and Darius Robinson along with juniors Colton Ferland and Ethan Hylton are also in the mix at running back.

“I pretty good with our

threat as a runner and pass-catcher.”

Junior Brayden Bowman and sophomore Colton Jessee are vying for the starting quarterback role.

The offensive line features junior center Spencer Shaffer along with junior Konner Whitt, sophomore Charlie Umbarger, junior Brent Tolbert and junior



All Grown Up



All photos by Emily Ball/BHC

Northwood has a veteran team for once

The Northwood Panthers are all grown up.

The formerly youthful squad from Saltville had six seniors and 12 juniors on its 31-man preseason roster and should be much improved from last year's 3-7 showing.

In total, nine starters return on each side of the ball.

"That experience helps," said Northwood coach Greg Prater. "A lot of these kids played a lot of quarters last year. They're a year older and they know what we expect and they put in the effort all the time at practice. I can't ask for anything else. Just a great group of kids."

Northwood's last winning season occurred in 2015, which was also the most recent year the Panthers qualified for the playoffs.

They could end that decade-long drought this fall with a balanced offense and

upgraded defense.

The main man on both sides of the ball is 6-foot-5, 225-pound junior running back/linebacker Brody Waddle. He gained more than 1,000 yards on the ground last season and is a load to bring down.

"He's a workhorse," Prater said. "We go as he goes."

Waddle rushed for 221 yards on 20 carries in a win over Castlewood last season, while he had a 152-yard, three-touchdown effort in a triumph over Twin Valley.

He might be even better this year.

"I was in the gym all summer lifting weights," Waddle said. "In the lab working."

Waddle is not just a one-man wrecking crew, however.

"I feel like we've got some good weapons this year," he said. "It's going to be more

than me."

For instance, there's 6-foot-3, 195-pound senior tight end/linebacker John Garner.

"John's put on some muscle in the weight room this year and has gotten better and gotten quicker," Prater said. "He has real good hands and can catch about anything thrown to him."

You can't forget Waylon Nunley (5-8, 135, sr.) who is pound-for-pound one of the toughest



Northwood Panthers Class 1D, Hogoheegee District

Schedule

Aug. 29	Twin Springs	H
Sept. 12	Eastern Montgomery	A
Sept. 19	Bland County	H
Sept. 26	Chilhowie	H
Oct. 3	Castlewood	A
Oct. 10	Auburn	H
Oct. 17	Holston	A
Oct. 24	Rural Retreat	A
Oct. 31	Honaker	A
Nov. 7	Patrick Henry	H



2025 Northwood Panthers



Panthers Roster

2 Dominick Haynes
4 Waylon Nunley
5 Skylar Boardwine
7 Dalton Gates
8 Randy Kestner
9 Will Terry
10 Dawson Prater

11 Brody Waddle
12 John Garner
20 Michael Blevins
21 Duke Colley
23 Brett Garner
24 Syllas Taylor
25 Cameron Sheppard
31/51 Brady Sanders
32 Jacob Cannon

33 Dominic Aker
40 Tyler Burnett
44 Malikye Frye
45 Darin Hayes
50 Skylar Matney
52 Skylar Griffey
54 Brayden Havens
55 James Belcher
56 Jeremiah Belcher

61 Dagan Trail
63 Andrew Call
70 Jackson Nutter
77 Quan Griffin
79 Tyler Gillespie
80 Jonathon Campbell-Huffman

athletes in the Hogoheegee District.

"The kid goes 100 miles-per-hour on every play," Prater said.

Quarterback/defensive back Dalton Gates (6-2, 170, sr.), two-way lineman Jackson Nutter (6-0, 300, sr.), wide receiver/defensive back Duke Colley (6-3, 175, jr.), running back/defensive back/kicker Dawson Prater (5-7, 135, jr.), two-way lineman Tyler Gillespie (6-3, 255, jr.), Patrick Henry transfer Jeremiah Belcher (5-

11, 210, jr.) up front, lineman Brayden Havens (5-6, 230, jr.) and linebacker/offensive lineman Skylar Griffey (5-10, 210, fr.) are other names to remember for the Panthers.

Gates has improved immensely and threw a 39-yard touchdown pass to Garner during a scrimmage against J.I. Burton on Aug. 16. Hampden-Sydney College is among the schools recruiting him as he's one of the best athletes at Northwood.

"Having more options in

the backfield helps us and gives us some more options on what to do," Prater said.

The time could be now for Northwood.

"This has been a really good hardworking bunch," Prater said. "During the offseason we had a lot of numbers in our weightlifting and summer workouts. I'm excited to see them get started." ★



Rebel Regiment



Patrick Henry Rebels **Class 1D, Hogoheegee District**

Schedule

Aug. 29	Virginia High	A
Sept. 5	Lebanon	H
Sept. 12	J.I. Burton	A
Sept. 19	George Wythe	A
Sept. 26	John Battle	H
Oct. 3	Rural Retreat	A
Oct. 10	Holston	H
Oct. 24	Honaker	H
Oct. 31	Chilhowie	H
Nov. 7	Northwood	A

All photos by Emily Ball/BHC

Austin Cooper takes over as PH's head coach

When football practice began for the 2025 season at Patrick Henry, senior Preston Reynolds couldn't help but notice some familiar faces weren't around.

His fellow offensive linemen – Tyler Barrett, Conrad Ellis, Kyler Thayer and Isaiah McFail – departed

with Barrett now playing at Georgetown University.

Austin Cooper was elevated from assistant to head coach after former PH boss Seth Padgett left after five seasons to take the top job at Tazewell.

Quarterback Alex Brown, defensive stalwart Eli Delp,

rugged fullback Mikey Jenkins and highly-touted kicker Grant Buchanan are also gone.

On top of that, Reynolds is the only senior on the team.

"It kind of feels weird not having people I played with when I was younger," Reynolds said. "But I trust

everyone. I know great things are going to happen, it just takes time. I believe in the people we have."

It's not hard to believe that the workhorse for the Rebels will be junior running back Jeb Stewart, the most notable returnee.

Stewart missed seven



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2025 Patrick Henry Rebels



games last season with an ankle injury but produced when he was on the field.

He rushed for 214 yards on 38 carries and scored four touchdowns in a 35-7 hammering of Holston in

Jeb in the right spots to be successful, and he obviously makes everybody around him better, so that's a plus."

Cooper previously was the head coach at Hurley and will adopt the Wing-T offense

“ *It kind of feels weird not having people I played with when I was younger,” Reynolds said. “But I trust everyone. I know great things are going to happen, it just takes time. I believe in the people we have.”*

the first round of the VHSL Region 1D playoffs. He also snagged two interceptions in that game.

“Anytime you’ve got a Jeb Stewart on your team, you’re lucky, right?” Cooper said. “We look to definitely put

that he ran during his tenure there.

“I think the Wing-T, when you have plenty of weapons in the backfield you can spread the ball around and it gives you more than just one option,” Cooper said. “You’re



Rebels Roster

1 Bishop Ratliff
2 Colton Frye
4 Mason Hutton
5 Lane Benton
6 Breyden Hafer
7 Zayne Bolen
8 Michia Blazier

10 Dallas Harner
11 Gaven Stanley
12 Jeb Stewart
14 Kallum Gobble
15 Tyler Yeatts
22 Kolton Hutton
31 Aiden Johnson
33 Hunter White

45 Jordan Stewart
50 Draven Potter-Cole
52 Aiden Crigger
55 Hunter Jones
56 Landen Shadley
57 Ben Cuddy
59 Mason Blazier
60 Jackson Wilcox

62 Colton Smythe
64 Jaxson Williams
66 Preston Reynolds
72 Carter Jenkins
74 Brenden Tressler
76 Eli Ellis
77 Jacob Hill
79 Richard Darnell

not just one dimensional. We can hit you from left, right, middle. It gives you everything you need."

PH does have plenty of options at the skill positions.

Abingdon transfer Zayne Bolen impressed in preseason camp at quarterback. Fullback Colton Frye and wingbacks Dallas Harner, Gaven Stanley, Jordan Stewart and Michia Blazier have experience and are fast.

"All those guys can step in and make an impact," Cooper said.

The big question mark will be how those linemen come along.

Carter Jenkins, Mason Blazier, Draven Potter-Cole and Ben Cuddy will be expected to step in and step up alongside Reynolds.

"I think they'll be fine," Cooper said. "It's just getting reps and understanding this new offense we're putting in."

Frye, Bolen, Jeb Stewart, Jordan Stewart and Hunter White will be cornerstones on the defensive side.

"Defensively, we've looked a little better than our offense at this point," Cooper said on Aug. 11. "We have guys in positions they've played before just not first string on Friday nights."

Patrick Henry has reached the playoffs for 11 straight seasons and has advanced



to at least the second round the previous four years. The Rebels will look to continue their run of postseason success with a new coach.

"I think the expectations were already there," Cooper said. "We didn't change a lot from the staff we had last year, so everybody is understanding what's going on. It's always a

change going from assistant to head coach and bringing in your system and things you want to do differently. The kids are adjusting well to it." ★

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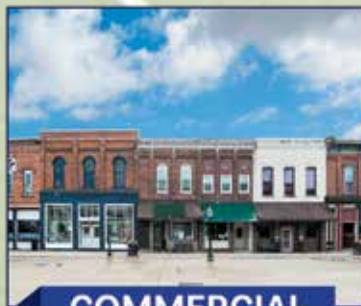
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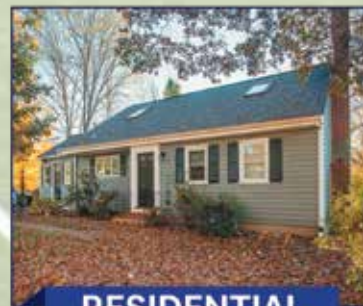
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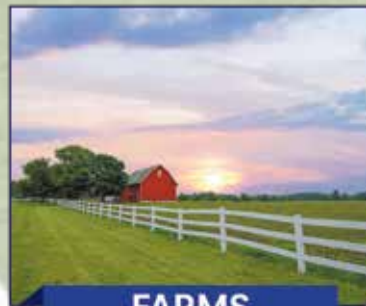
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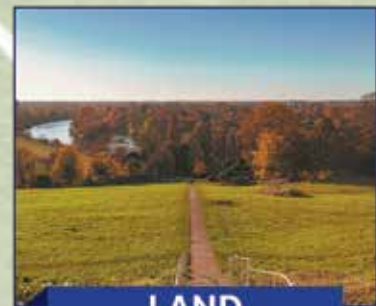
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Blue Tornado Time



Richlands Blue Tornado

**Class 2D,
Southwest District**



All photos by Emily Ball/BHC

Richlands should be improved

Richlands High School football fans have endured five straight losing seasons.

Now for the good news.

The 2025 roster for the Blue Tornado features 21 seniors and nine returning starters.

"Richlands is a football community," Richlands head coach Ronnie Davis said. "Our supporters want us to win, and we want to win for them and our school."

A 19-game losing streak was ended in week eight last year with a victory over winless Galax. The Blues won again the following week over winless Marion.

"We were sort of undermanned against some teams last season, but we made progress," Davis said. "Winning two of our last three games made things a lot easier going into the off-season program."

Senior quarterback Andrew

Boyd (5-9, 177) tops the list of veterans after throwing for five scores in 2024.

"Andrew had an issue with his shoulder at the beginning of last season, so we didn't put him into the fire right away," Davis said. "We gradually brought Andrew along, and he did a great job over the second half of the season."

Davis thinks his quarterback has all the essentials for a breakout year.

"Andrew is a tough kid who can throw and run. I wouldn't be surprised if he gets over 1,000 yards in the air and in the ground," Davis said.

Former Graham quarterback Bill Dudley now serves as the mentor for Boyd. Dudley recently helped to develop record-setting quarterback Carter Creasy at Tazewell.

"Andrew and Coach Dudley meshed quickly and they are

Schedule

Aug. 21	Virginia High	H
Aug 28	Gate City	H
Sept.12	Lee High	A
Sept. 19	Abingdon	H
Sept. 26	Lebanon	A
Oct. 3	Grundy	H
Oct. 10	Wise Central	A
Oct. 24	Tazewell	A
Oct. 31	Marion	A
Nov. 7	Graham	H



2025 Richlands Blue Tornado



together at every practice," Davis said. "Having Coach Dudley is a huge boost."

The other headliner on offense is Collin Adkins. A six-foot and 195-pound senior, Adkins is of the most versatile talents in the Southwest District.

"We can play Collin at tight end, slot receiver, H-back or running back," Davis said. "Collin has done a great job the past couple years, and he's bigger and faster now."

Another player to watch in the backfield is T.J. Lawson. The 5-9, 200-pound sophomore scored twice against Galax and added 96 yards rushing in the victory of Marion.

"T.J. had to miss several games due to a hand injury in our first game against Gate City, but he came back and played well," Davis said.

Junior Jamie Capshaw (6-1, 175) will also get his share of carries.

Senior Riley Perkins (5-7, 131) is a playmaker at receiver.

Davis hopes to build off a busy summer that was highlighted by several impressive performances in

Blue Tornado Roster

1 Landon Absher
2 Andrew Boyd
5 Drayton Smith
7 Jamie Capshaw
8 Ethan Cordle
9 Leyland Dye
9 Treyton Kiser
10 Connor Hess
11 Riley Perkins

13 Braydon Jones
15 Keegan McGee
17 Collin Adkins
20 Bryan Hay
23 Xavier Lester
34 T.J. Lawson
37 Logan Hurt
40 Brayden Davis
42 Hunter Blankenship
43 Hunter Ratliff

44 Matthew Edwards
58 Kaden Matney
64 Calbe Mounts
65 Issac Shortt
70 Ryder Perkins
71 Carter Shreve
72 Kalen Shreve
76 T.J. Stiltner
78 Hunter Davis

7-on-7 passing competitions.

"We competed well against some really good competition in those sessions," Davis said. "We had fans coming out to watch, and I heard I heard the comment that we didn't look like a junior varsity team any longer."

Two long-time Richlands assistants have returned to the coaching staff.

Mike Davis is serving as the offensive coordinator, while Jeff Tarter is directing the special teams.

Adkins, who led the team in tackles last season, anchors the defense at safety.

Other defenders to watch include junior Hunter Ratliff at end, junior Matthew

Edwards at inside linebacker and Capshaw at linebacker.

"Richlands has always been known as a physical team, and we're slowly getting back to that," Davis said.

The roster includes a pair of big freshmen in Hunter Davis (6-3, 280) and Ryder Perkins (6-2, 300) on the line corps.

With the large senior class, Davis sees reasons for hope.

"It always helps to have experience," Davis said. "We're bigger, stronger and faster, and there is a new feel among our fans."

"We just have to be more consistent and learn how to win again. And we're working on that."

As for the Southwest District title race, Davis said there is little suspense.

"I think you could put every team in Southwest Virginia together and Graham would still win. That team is just loaded, and their coaches do a great job." ★



Pack Attack



Emily Ball/BHC



Ridgeview Wolfpack

Class 2D, Mtn 7 District

Schedule

Aug. 29	Grundy	H
Sept. 5	Honaker	A
Sept. 12	Wise Co. Central	A
Sept. 26	Lee	H
Oct. 2	Paintsville, Ky.	A
Oct. 9	Union	A
Oct. 17	John Battle	A
Oct. 24	Abingdon	H
Oct. 31	Perry Central, Ky.	H
Nov. 7	Gate City	H

Kent Grant takes over as Ridgeview's head coach

Kent Grant is not new to Ridgeview football.

Grant has been either defensive or offensive coordinator for the Wolfpack since the school opened in 2015.

The coach is, however, new to his new role as head coach of the Pack.

Grant takes over the Ridgeview program following DeWayne Stanley's resignation last year.

Grant is also the school's athletic director and was a very successful head coach for other sports at Ridgeview, including the Wolfpack's softball program. But, he readily admits that stepping into the head coaching role

for the football program has been an adjustment.

"Really, at the end of the day, it's all on you," Grant said. "A lot of people don't realize the behind the scenes work that a head coach has to do. A lot of it is those behind-the-scenes things. The organization of everything."

The coach said he's looking forward to the challenges that being a head coach brings with it.

The biggest challenge on the field for Grant is replacing a four-year starting quarterback. Ryan O'Quinn ran the show for the Wolfpack for four years and he did well. During his

tenure, O'Quinn threw for 8,200 yards and 95 touchdowns.

O'Quinn's replacement at the signal-caller position will most likely come from senior Bentley Brockhoff or sophomore Braxton Deel. Both saw limited playing time last season.

"They've had some reps, but nothing prepares you for when it's on your shoulders and things are



2025 Ridgeview Wolfpack



Photo by Roddy Addington

flying at you," Grant said.

With a new quarterback, Grant expects his team will shift some from a pass-happy type of offense to a more balanced attack when the Pack has the ball.

Jaalan Deel looks to carry the load when it comes to the rushing game.

Deel had over 800 yards in his sophomore season and accumulated 1,077 yards and 13 touchdowns on the ground in his junior season last year.

Up front for the Pack, three linemen return in center Noah Rasnick, sophomore Logan Justice and Gunner McCoy. Grant said senior Kolter Scanlon is likely to move up front to the offensive line.

Defensively Scanlon and senior Austin Rose will bookend the line. Both return for their third year as a starter on the defensive front. The interior line will primarily be a rotation of offensive starting linemen.

Justice moves from the defensive line to linebacker this season, while Xander Wallace, Jacob Rasnick and Kaleb Wagner will likely see time at linebacker.

There is plenty of experience in the defensive secondary with Alex Grant, Collin Hill and senior and three-year starter Alan Hill all back.

Ridgeview also has the advantage in the kicking game with Arkansas signee Conner Smith handling kickoffs and punts.

Smith averaged 42 yards per punt last season, while 75 percent of his kickoffs were touchbacks. He also had 51 PAT kicks and three field goals. ★



Wolfpack Roster

1 Xander Wallace
2 Brandon Deel
5 Jalaan Deel
6 Bentley Brockhoff
7 Landon Yates
9 Tanner Hackney
10 Brenton Cantrell
12 Kyler McFall
13 Colin Hill
14 Aiden Messer
15 Trace Marshall
17 Donovan Stevens
19 Elijah Stallard
20 Kaleb Wagner

21 Austin Rose
22 Bentley Fields
23 Braylon Moore
24 Daniel Rose
25 Alex Grant
31 Ethan Stanley
32 Jacob Rasnick
33 Alan Mullins
34 Trevor Sluss
44 Brantley Mullins
50 Cecil Blevins
51 Noah Rasnick
54 Logan Justice
55 Aiden Clough
56 Josh Goodman

57 Maddox Boggs
58 Blake Gayle
59 Aiden Clough
60 Gunner McCoy
61 Ryder Wright
63 Haddon Fleming
64 Jaxton Willis
65 Ethan Hibbits
68 Kolter Scanlon
70 Elijah Mullins
75 Eli Mullins
77 Israel Collins
85 Conner Smith



Q Ball Rolling



Rural Retreat Indians Class 1D, Hogoheegee District

Schedule

Aug. 29	Fort Chiswell	H
Sept. 5	Eastern Montgomery	A
Sept. 12	Eastside	H
Sept. 19	Lebanon	A
Sept. 26	George Wythe	A
Oct. 3	Patrick Henry	H
Oct. 17	Chilhowie	A
Oct. 24	Northwood	H
Oct. 31	Holston	A
Nov. 7	Rural Retreat	H

All photos by Emily Ball/BHC

Quinton Hensley returns as boss of Indians

Q Ball is back on the table at Rural Retreat High School and that begs the question: Will the Indians get on a roll?

Quinton Hensley began his second stint as head coach at the Wythe County school after previously helming the program successfully from 2004-2009.

The 61-year-old Hensley was most recently the offensive coordinator at George Wythe but spent the 2024 season out of coaching.

"I thought I was done," Hensley said. "One thing led to another and the more I thought about it, I felt this was something I wanted to do. So here I am."

A 1982 graduate of T.C. Roberson High School in Asheville, North Carolina,

who later attended Virginia Tech, Hensley arrived at Rural Retreat for his first tour of duty in 1988 and remained at the Wythe County school for more than 20 years. Hensley also spent time as the head coach of the boys basketball, girls basketball and track and field teams at Rural Retreat.

He was on the Indians' coaching staff when they won four regional football championships under the direction of popular head coach Dean Rhea. He eventually became Rhea's right-hand man and when his mentor retired became his successor in the fall of 2004.

The Indians play on Dean Rhea Field.

"I've got a lot of pride in the stadium name," Hensley

said. "Dean was my mentor when I was a young coach and we won a lot of games together. I'm excited to be back on this field."

Hensley captured three Region C, Division 1 championships in his first three years as the gridiron boss at Rural Retreat and finished with a 40-32 record in his first go-round.

Rural Retreat hasn't been to the state semifinals since 2006 and since Hensley's departure the Indians have had four head coaches and won two playoff



2025 Rural Retreat Indians



Indians Roster

2 Chaz Penwright
3 Brody Allen
5 James Snavelly
6 Atticus King
7 Trever Shelton
8 Justin Walker
9 Dawson Williams
11 Brody Atwell

14 Caleb Johnson
15 Peyton Newberry
17 Tanner Robinson
19 Ian Doss
20 Trenton Davis
22 Jacob Rollyson
23 Luke Houseman
25 Wyatt Vainwright
26 Houston Bear
33 Hunter Rollyson

40 Caleb Gibson
44 William Rose
51 Jameson Tibbs
52 Hunter Pennington
56 Dalton Ray
57 James Jones
58 Ian Bear
59 Nathan Lowder
61 Easton Burkentine
64 Mason Fields

65 Wyatt Ray
66 Kolton Baker
67 Jake Reardon
68 Dominic Lees
76 Griffin Ketner
77 Scotti Campbell
78 Eli Poole
79 Jacob Gray

games, the last coming with Chris Akers calling the shots in 2015.

Hensley takes over for Jamey Hughes, who went 31-37 in seven seasons.

The Indians were 5-6 each of the past two years, losing in the first round of the Region 1D playoffs both seasons.

"This team has been real close the last couple of years," Hensley said. "Just had some tight losses, bad luck and injuries. There is talent here. And I think we can be a pretty good team if the guys will buy into what I

am selling."

They are considered a darkhorse in the Region 1D playoff race this fall as they return eight starters on offense and seven on defense. The roster features 12 seniors.

"It's pretty amazing coming back here and meeting with the kids because it seemed I had either coached or taught at least one of their parents or relatives," Hensley said. "So, I had that connection. These are still the same hardworking kids that I remember from when I was here before. They work so hard and have good

attitudes."

Defensive back/wide receiver/kick returner Jake Rollyson, defensive back Chaz Penwright and running back Trever Shelton earned All-Hogoheegee District honors last season and return.

Penwright is back at quarterback and will be the trigger man for the spread offense Hensley hopes to implement.

Hunter Rollyson can play tight end or tailback, while the versatile Shelton figures to get plenty of touches as well. Shelton rushed for 224 yards and three touchdowns

in a win over Patrick Henry last season.

James Snavelly and Jake Rollyson are other proven playmakers.

Veteran center Easton Burkentine anchors the offensive line.

Jake Rollyson, Hunter Rollyson, Shelton, Snavelly, Penwright, Eli Poole and Scottie Campbell will be names to remember on the defensive side of the ball.

"I'm pretty confident that we can be a pretty good team by the end of the year," Hensley said. ★



Set for Takeoff



Sullivan East Patriots

Class 4A, Northeastern Conference

Schedule

Aug. 22	Johnson County	A
Aug. 29	Chuckey-Doak	H
Sept. 5	Cherokee	A
Sept. 12	Eagleton Academy	H
Sept. 19	Greeneville	H
Sept. 26	Grainger	A
Oct. 3	Seymour	H
Oct. 17	Elizabethton	A
Oct. 24	Northview Academy	H
Oct. 30	Volunteer	H



All photos by Emily Ball/BHC

Air Raid offense looks to produce points, wins

Sullivan East's Air Raid offense was grounded for most of the 2024 season as the Patriots averaged just 8.8 points per game cracked double digits just twice during a season in which they won just one game.

Meanwhile, the defense struggled in its own right as that unit surrendered 46.4 points per game over the course of the one-win campaign.

With most of their roster intact, the Patriots are improved on both sides of the ball and they proved it on Aug. 22 in a 26-21 season-opening loss at Johnson County.

That's the same Longhorns squad that put a 53-7 beatdown on East the year before.

"Any time you play here, you know it's going to be a fight. And man, what an

effort our guys gave tonight," Sullivan East coach J.C. Simmons said after the game.

Peyton Lingerfelt is back at quarterback as he threw for 2,001 yards with seven touchdowns and 17 interceptions last season. Look for the TDs to go up and the INTs to go down as he has more confidence and a better grasp of the offensive scheme.

He threw for 297 yards and two TDs in that season-opening setback.

Six guys who caught passes last year return with Blue Proffitt (55 catches, 720 yards, three touchdowns) leading the way.

Haden Jones (38 catches, 391 yards), Gabe Johnson, Devin Bowman and Ryley Neal also have a good hands and freshman Issac Deel has shown promise.

Proffitt had a 26-yard TD reception and Jones hauled in a 69-yard scoring strike in Week 1.

Proffitt is one of the most explosive players in Northeast Tennessee.

"Blue has become a great leader for us and is working his tail off to the best player and teammate he can be," Simmons said. "I'm proud of him and all our guys for the work they have put in so far."

Proffitt said he probably caught a thousand passes from East quarterback Peyton Lingerfelt over the course of the offseason. Lingerfelt estimated the number of throws as too many to count.

"It's a good relationship," Proffitt said. "He's been my best friend since middle



2025 Sullivan East Patriots



Patriots Roster

1 Blue Proffitt

2 Peyton Lingerfelt

3 Andrew McDuffie

4 Gabe Johnson

5 Haden Jones

6 William Bates

7 Austin Warren

8 Jose Valencia

9 Connor Moody

10 Devin Bowman

11 Bentley Key

12 Ryley Neal

13 Will Joyner

14 Bently McKay

16 Grady Burke

19 Nathan Hodge

20 Gavin Malone

21 Donnie Holman

22 Jack Ostrander

24 Bentley McKay

28 Zack Pierson

30 Gavin Brown

33 Carter Hawk

34 Andrew Davison

44 Karston Tuell

45 Naten Wee

46 Ashby Snyder

50 Skyler Cox

51 Andrew Sproles

53 Randall Meadows

54 Jacob Slone

55 Noah Slone

56 Justin Crabtree

57 Jacob Cate

58 Brendon Roberts

62 Deshawn Thomas

65 Jacob Koch

66 Luke Tomlinson

68 Jackson Nelson

70 Benjamin Childers

72 Hunter Hagaman

74 Brayden Metcalf

77 Ryan Stiltner

79 Trent Price

87 Colton Laisure

88 Issac Deel

school and we've always had that connection."

Lingerfelt knows he can throw it up and Proffitt can go get it.

"The best catch I've ever seen him have is the one from the Greenville game last year over like three defenders," Lingerfelt said

Bentley Key leads the rushing attack as the hard-nosed ballcarrier's season was cut short a year ago.

The offensive line is mostly intact as well with twin brothers Jacob Slone and Noah Slone holding down the tackle spots. Center Ben Childers and guards Ryan Stiltner and

Luke Tomlinson are back as well.

"With these guys the words I've been using is nasty," Simmons said. "I want them to be nasty on contact and I think we've been missing that the last couple of years. We're starting to understand out protection and our scheme."

Andrew McDuffie, Andrew Davison, Austin Warren, Hunter Hagaman and Karston Tuell are among the defensive leaders.

"Eleven is one has been a real conversation for us and bringing that aggression of playing until the whistle," Simmons said.

East will once again be tested by a tough schedule.

Elizabethton and Greeneville reside in Region 1-4A and are perennially two of the top teams in the state.

"I've never had anybody say they'd change places with me," Simmons said "As far as our guys, we know every night is going to be a fistfight whether it's in our region or the non-conference games on the schedule. ... It's the whole thing of taking it one game at a time."

The Air Raid offense is cleared for takeoff.

"I feel really optimistic about what's been going on," Simmons said. "I've said

before, and we talk about it with the guys all the time, you go through a season like last year you either pack up and leave or you show up and fight and these guys have been really working at it." ★

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Big Dawgs



Photo by Allen Gregory/BHC

Tazewell has new coach, large line

Tazewell Bulldogs football coach Seth Padgett had a favorable first impression of the program after being hired six months ago.

"I was amazed," Padgett said. "I knew about the \$4 million fieldhouse, but I didn't know about the turf field and the other additions."

"This is a football hungry community and that support shows."

Following a successful five-year run at Patrick Henry in the Class 1 Hogoheegee District, Padgett moved to the Class 2 Southwest District.

Former head coach J'me Harris stepped down after guiding the Bulldogs to six playoff berths in his eight years.

The task for Padgett is to remold a team that

graduated 17 seniors.

"Coach Harris did a great job here and we're just trying to build off what he accomplished," Padgett said.

Tazewell posted a 5-6 record in 2024 as quarterback Carter Creasy capped a record-setting four-year stint at quarterback.

Does Padgett plan to continue the pass-happy days in Bulldog country?

"We want to be more balanced between the run and the pass," Padgett said.

The offensive line corps will set the tone for the new-look offense.

"We will average about 300 pounds across the front," Padgett said. "This group reminds of my 2022 Patrick Henry team which had some really big linemen along with some skill guys

who could run."

Four of the six returning starters on offense are linemen.

The biggest man in the Padgett plan is Jashon Taylor. A 6-foot-3 and 330-pound senior, Taylor can frustrate defenders with his nifty footwork and overpower them with his strength.

"Jashon squatted 580 pounds before I told him to stop, and he can move," Padgett said. "I look for Jashon to have



Tazewell Bulldogs

Class 2D, Southwest District

Schedule

Sept. 5	Pulaski County	H
Sept. 12	Grayson County	H
Sept. 19	Union	H
Sept. 26	Giles	H
Oct. 3	Virginia High	A
Oct. 10	Grundy	A
Oct. 17	Marion	A
Oct. 24	Richlands	H
Oct. 31	Graham	A
Nov. 7	Lebanon	A



Photo by Allen Gregory/BHC

2025 Tazewell Bulldogs



Photo by Jim Talbert

Bulldogs Roster

0 Gunner Stiltner
2 Chase McDonald
3 Dajaun Viney
4 Caden Williamson
5 Emory Hull
6 Stephen Turner
7 Walker Patterson
8 Jayson Hancock
10 Cole Price
13 Ty Whitaker

14 Ellis Day
15 Robbie Galloway
16 Kaden Peery
17 Javon Jordan
18 Isaac Stafford
19 Trey Putnam
21 Austin Graham
22 Brandon Hamilton
23 Cade Vass
24 Jaden Johnson
25 Braden Hinkle

26 Braxton Sparks
27 Darian Bibey
28 Case Vilacha
30 Landon Killian
31 Branson Nguyen
33 Isaac Muncey
34 Kelley Earls
35 Jessie McGraw
42 Brancyn Davis
50 Chase Reedy
52 Jashon Taylor

53 Malakhi Sessoms
54 Jakeim Beavers
55 Connor Patrick
60 Landon Thompson
63 Ashton Tolbert
64 Atlas Lindeman
67 Jaxon Ledesma
73 James Etter
75 Zane Settle
76 Liam Harris
77 Gabe Beavers

a big year because he wants to go somewhere and play football in college."

Sophomore Jakeim Beavers (6-2, 300) is another force on both sides of the line.

"Jakeim is a stud," Padgett said.

Senior Walker Patterson (5-11, 180) is the new quarterback, while senior Cole Price (6-0, 170) is a playmaker.

"Walker is the total package with his leadership ability and quickness," Padgett said.

"Cole is a speedster, and we're going to get him the ball in different situations."

Five starters return on defense.

Throw in 13 seniors overall, and Padgett has reason to be upbeat.

"Our seniors are tight-knit and dedicated, and our middle school and freshmen classes are pretty strong. I think the future is bright here," Harris said.

Nearly all of the assistant coaches who worked under Harris returned.

"Coach Harris has been a big help, and the past six months have gone smooth," Padgett said.

Padgett didn't follow Tazewell's football fortunes in the past, but he's happy with current view.

"When this job was posted, I heard good things from people I called," Patterson said.

"Our non-district schedule is tough, but this program has everything a coach would need." ★



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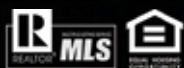
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Viking Pride



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Tennessee High Vikings

Class 5A, Mountain Lakes Conference

Schedule

Aug. 22	West Ridge	A
Aug. 29	Elizabethton	H
Sept. 5	Science Hill	H
Sept. 12	Cocke County	A
Sept. 19	Virginia High	A
Sept. 26	Abingdon	H
Oct. 3	David Crockett	H
Oct. 10	Morristown West	H
Oct. 17	Sevier County	A
Oct. 31	Daniel Boone	A



THS will showcase hard-nosed mentality

The Tennessee High Vikings will once again play a big-boy brand of football with the dudes up front paving the way for a relentless rushing attack on offense, while making opponents earn every yard the hard way on the defensive side.

This is a blue-collar approach that has helped THS achieve success. The team went 8-3 last season.

"We're going to run the ball," said Tennessee High coach Josh Holt. "That's what we do, that's how we live. That's physical football and that's what we want to do. Defensively, we're going to try to get after people. The

offense and defense marry and mirror each other when you're physical."

Kai Allison, Ryan Simora, Erasmo Cobian, Spencer Miller, Peyton Lomans, Gavin Dickson, Alex Carey, Kalel Honaker, Isaac Stevens and Josiah Beidleman are among those players battling in the trenches. The Vikings have depth on both sides of the line.

"We've got a whole section in the locker room we call Fat Alley," Holt said. "That's where the linemen live and they embrace. Coach [Josh] Pendleton, Coach [T.J.] McMurray and Coach [Jesse] Taylor do a good job

of making sure those guys understand how important they are to what we do here."

Benefitting from that line play on offense will be running back Elijah Plumber, who rushed for 855 yards last season and also had 130 receiving yards. He began the current campaign sidelined by an injury and did not play in the team's 30-13 season-opening loss at West Ridge.

While Trent Dowdell (now on the roster at Emory & Henry University) was the workhorse last year, THS will look to be more balanced on offense this year.

"I don't think we'll have another 180-carry back

but we have a great stable of backs from seniors on down," Holt said. "We feel good about our guys."

Carter Smith, Cooper Booher, Cannon Stalnaker, and Kalel Honaker will also get carries. Riley Price (15 catches, 132 yards) and

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2025 Tennessee High Vikings



Barron Harkleroad (12 catches, 177 yards) are the top returning receivers.

Jack Richardson and Knox Kessee will both see time at quarterback. Richardson threw for 320 yards with six touchdowns and four interceptions last season.

"This day and age you have to have both of those guys ready to play at all times," Holt said.

Richardson connected on 10 of his 13 pass attempts for 110 yards in that season-opening loss to West Ridge as Harkleroad (six catches, 87 yards) was his top target.

Linebacker Preston Feagins leads the way for the defense, which allowed less than 100 rushing yards per game last season.

He amassed 50 solo tackles, recorded seven sacks and recovered two fumbles last season, all of which led Tennessee High.

"He's kind of the epitome of what we want," Holt said. "Tough, hard-nosed, competitive, works hard in the classroom, works hard in the weight room, goes hard in practice and it all shows on Friday night."



Feagins has left a trail of battered running backs and quarterbacks in his wake.

"He's a thumper," Holt said. "If he latches on to you, you're going down and going to be tackled."

Cooper Booher, Frank Reed and those aforementioned defensive linemen will be disrupters as well. Booher returned a

fumble 66 yards for a score for Tennessee High's first touchdown of 2025.

Dayne Musick is the dominator in the defensive secondary as he snagged three interceptions a

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Vikings Roster

1 Elijah Plumber
2 Kalel Honaker
3 Brenton Baker
4 Dayne Musick
5 Cooper Booher
6 Carter Smith
7 Heath Swaggerty
8 Ben Stokes
9 Cannon Stalnaker
10 Liam Holt
11 Bo Utsman
12 Dexter Dishner
13 Alex Carey
14 Gannon Meyer
15 Maxwell Holt
16 Knox Keese

17 Riley Price
18 Jack Richardson
19 Barron Harkleroad
21 Ian Peake
22 Rhett Miller
23 Lucas Shaffer
24 Graham Bailey
25 Isaac Stevens
26 Gavin Francis
27 Jackson Reed
28 Peyton Walker
29 Ayden Darby
30 Eric Whaley
31 Braylen Colley
32 Tristan Mead
34 Zen Call
35 Jackson Smith

36 Dylan Jenkins
37 Bentley Carroll
38 Michael Bowers
39 Jackson Walden
40 Tyshawn Gammon
42 Conan O'Dell
43 Kaden Vanover
44 Preston Feagins
45 Joseph Ferrell
47 Kainan Waldron
50 Gavin Dickson
52 Kaiden Johanan
53 Christian Anderosn
55 Erasmo Cobian
56 Kai Allison
57 Spencer Miller
58 Josh Amos

59 Caden Drabczyk
60 Ryan Simora
61 Malakiah Shipley
62 Josiah Biedleman
65 Jackson Roberts
66 Tristan Mancer
68 Anatolii Moha
70 Peyton Lomans
71 Garyson Cooper
72 Victor Melendez
73 Mayson Roberts
74 Aiden Garcia
75 Braxon Howard
76 Kaiden Dean
80 Ayden Moore
81 Rodney Slider

season ago.

"Our defensive coaches, all the way around, are hard on us and that's what makes us good ballplayers," Feagins said. "They always make sure we do the little things right, so when we get on the field it's all habit."

Tennessee High struggled in its opener, getting outgained 284-158 in the loss to West Ridge.

"We had some highs and we had some lows," Holt told reporters afterward. "We handled the highs just fine, but we didn't handle the lows well."

The Vikings' goals are still within reach despite a slow start and something they would like to achieve is the right to host a first-round playoff game.

The Bristolians play a tough schedule and Region 1-5A features defending state champion Sevier County, led by NCAA Division I recruit Cooper Newman at quarterback.

"Our conference is so widespread and there's a lot of talent," Holt said. "The further you go towards Knoxville the more talent



you start to see. ... Our conference top to bottom is pretty solid." ★





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Good Luck

TO ALL THE TEAMS
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Unionized



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Union Bears Class 2D, Mtn 7 District

Schedule

Aug. 29	Lee High	A
Sept. 5	Daniel Boone	H
Sept. 11	Graham	A
Sept. 19	Tazewell	A
Sept. 26	Wise Central	A
Oct. 3	Gate City	H
Oct. 9	Ridgeview	H
Oct. 17	Lebanon	H
Oct. 31	Abingdon	A
Nov. 7	John Battle	H

Bears have pieces to make a run

There was the usual large crowd at Bullitt Park in early August for the Union football team media day.

For good reasons, the vibe among the parents and supporters of the Bears was downright giddy.

"Our kids have a chance do something special for our school, program and community," head coach Travis Turner said.

One year after advancing to the Region 2D title game for the second straight year, the Bears feature 16 returning starters and 11 seniors. Several of those seniors, such as running back Keith Chandler and versatile Kam Bostic, have become household names across the region over the past three years.

"We're very fortunate to have a really good group of seniors who have a lot of experience," Turner said.

"Several of those guys have played together since age eight, and they have started on the varsity since their freshman years."

For fans who favor the hardcore version of far Southwest Virginia football, Chandler (5-10, 215) is a favorite with his coal truck running style.

"Keith does a great job of running between the tackles, and he does a lot of other things right," Turner said. "Keith does a great blocking on run plays, providing pass protection and catching the ball."

The gritty work of Chandler opens operating room for Bostic. The 6-foot senior quarterback accounted for 26 scores last season and nearly 3,000 total yards. "Kam is a true dual threat," Turner said. "He can throw it, and he can make things happen with his legs if a play

breaks down."

Senior Braxton Bunch (6-0, 185)

is the primary receiving target after snaring

eight touchdown receptions



2025 Union Bears



Bears Roster

0 Rayvon Jones
1 Keshawn Milbro
2 Kam Bostic
3 Elijah Lomax
4 Camden Maddux
5 Kaden Dillman
7 Braxton Bunch
8 Trayvion McCoo
9 Deegan Tavernier
10 Camden Wharton
11 Carlos Anderson
12 Abe Hall

13 Aiden Bowman
14 Ethan Burke
15 Colton McKinney
16 Hunter Russell
17 Brodie Collins
19 Bayley Sturgill
20 Kamron Bishop
21 Kaiden Keith
23 Nolan Swinney
24 Josh Guerrant
25 Zachary Bouton
26 Kylan Long
27 Kayden Owens
28 Keith Chandler

31 Spencer Quesenberry
32 Abe Potter
33 Cooper Bullock
35 Evan Catron
40 Brennen Fairhurst
45 Matty Polier
46 Devin Mooneyhan
50 Wyatt Sturgill
51 Braydon Hensley
52 Phillip Barnett
53 Jeramy Gibson
54 Noah Ingle
55 Talen Wharton
56 Eli Schlobohm

57 Kolton Stidham
58 James Morlock
60 Jacob Horton
62 Evan Roberts
63 Mancyn Sizemore
69 Kaleb Collins
70 Kaleb Stacy
71 Brayden Chandler
72 Talon Stacy
75 Brayden Craft
77 Chris May
80 Grier Curry
85 Nick Lantman
88 Evan Piccione

last season.

"Braxton is a multi-talented guy who can run the ball and catch it, so we're able to move him around," Turner said.

The headliner among the line corps is another four-year starter in 6-foot-3 and 335-pound tackle Jacob Horton.

Senior Brayden Chandler (6-2, 230) and Chris May (6-3, 340) return to starting positions on the line, while junior Kaleb Stacy (6-2, 275) sophomore center Talen Wharton (6-1, 240) and junior Evan Roberts (5-9, 225) are also in the mix. "We have the capability

to open things up and be different on offense this season," Turner said.

The offense features a total of nine returning starters, while seven veterans return on defense.

Keith Chandler is a pounder at linebacker.

Senior Carlos Anderson (6-3, 200) is a three-year starter at end, Bostic recorded eight interceptions last season at safety, and senior Camden Wharton (6-2, 210) emerged as an all-state performer at linebacker.

According to Turner, Wharton approaches the linebacker position in the

same cerebral fashion that former Union standout Tanner Kennedy played with.

"Camden comes from an athletic family and he really knows the game," Turner said.

Bunch has experience at free safety, while juniors Abe Hall (6-0, 180), Rayvon Jones (5-9, 150) and Keshawn Milbro provide depth in the secondary. Sophomore end Matty Polier (6-3, 215) and sophomore linebacker Kaden Dillman (5-9, 215) are rising stars. Dillman, who runs with a mix of power and quickness, might also see time at running back.

Entering his 15th year as the boss of the Bears, Turner realizes the expectations are high among the avid Union fans.

"This senior class has won some big ball games and lost some tough ones," Turner said. "We had a very successful season in 2024 against a tough schedule. "Ever since our kids walked off the field at Graham in that regional championship loss, they have put in the work and set their minds on getting back to that point." ★



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VHS Victories



All photos by Emily Ball/BHC



Virginia High Bearcats

Class 2D, Southwest District

Schedule

Aug. 21	Richlands	A
Aug. 29	Patrick Henry	H
Sept. 5	John Battle	A
Sept. 12	George Wythe	H
Sept. 19	Tennessee High	H
Sept. 26	Grayson County	A
Oct. 3	Tazewell	H
Oct. 18	Graham	A
Oct. 31	Lebanon	A
Nov. 7	Marion	H

Bearcats will field strong team again

The Virginia High Bearcats have earned four straight Region 2D postseason berths and are coming off a home playoff victory. Head coach Derrick Patterson is hungry for another chapter.

"Our coaching staff feels good about where our program is, but we're not satisfied," Patterson said. "We want more and our players want more."

VHS must replace eight seniors, including several athletes who started both ways.

The key loss among seven

starters was Keshawn Smith, a masterful playmaker who scored 19 touchdowns.

"Keshawn had a phenomenal year," Patterson said. "He's a physical and gifted athlete, and he helped us on offense, defense and special teams."

Smith generated 230 all-purpose yards and four scores as the Bearcats posted a 49-32 victory against Lebanon in the Region 2D playoff opener at Gene Malcolm Stadium.

Powerful Alijah Burks added 123 yards rushing.

"I was really proud of what our entire senior class was able to accomplish," Patterson said.

The 2025 Bearcats can rely on an expanded roster that includes nine seniors and nine returning starters.

"We will have about 50 players. That's 12 more than last year and the past several years," Patterson said.

"I really like this group. We have

a mix of experience and youth, and all our guys are close."

The headliner is quarterback Deion Graham. A poised 5-foot-11 junior, Graham



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2025 Virginia High Bearcats



saw significant playing time as a freshman and threw for 14 scores last season.

"Deion has always been very mature for his age," Patterson said. "He works hard at his craft, keeps his grades up and leads by example."

Senior linemen Anthony Galbreth (6-3, 273) and Braylon Lester (6-3, 312) provide a comfort zone for Graham and his supporting cast.

According to Patterson, junior Kayden Laws (6-1, 165) has the potential to become the latest breakout athlete for the Bearcats. "Kayden is a phenomenal young man and I'm really proud

of his progress," Patterson said. "Kayden is one of the fastest guys on our team and he's strong for his size. If Kayden stays healthy, he's going to be something

special."

Junior Jarae Bryant (5-11, 152) and senior Joel Edwards (5-8, 145) are also in the backfield mix, while senior Jacob Roe (6-0, 173)

is a threat at receiver.

The defense features three returning starters on the line in juniors Jeremiah Daggs (6-0, 192), Aaron Joyce (5-10, 172) and Jeremy Quinto



Bearcats Roster

0 Camren Hurt

1 Jacob Roe

2 Kayden Laws

3 Grayson Dingus

4 Owen Dean

5 Davy Woolen

6 Nixon Nowiski

7 Chance Wellington

8 Jarae Bryant

9 Joel Edwards

10 Deshaun Carter

11 Bryson Poole

12 Deion Graham

13 Isaiah Jones

14 Jeremy Quinto

15 Leelynn McDavid

18 Bryson Lester

20 Zion Jemes

21 Jeremiah Daggs

22 Dez Almany

23 Charles Burns

24 Connor Presley

25 Carter Gemmell

26 Ryan Scott

27 Ramauris Cuffey

28 Porter Jones

30 Eli Osborne

31 Dontae Daggs

32 Braxton Moore

35 Jaurell Hale

36 Ryland Dillman

53 Peyton Sturgill

54 Aaron Joyce

55 Chris King

56 Jacob Burks

57 Caden Alvis

59 Jayden Linder

60 Isaiah Johnson

65 Noah Raines

66 Jaxson Slone

69 Clayton Tedder

70 Braylon Lester

71 Edward Harvey

72 Ethan Tedder

74 Anthony Galbreth

75 Conner Knight

76 Quentavious Outlaw

77 Chase Mullins

80 Alex Campbell

(6-3, 226).

Edwards and junior Davy Woolen (6-2, 182) are veterans at linebacker, while Roe returns at cornerback.

Patterson pointed to another basic reason why he's so upbeat about the season.

"I really like how this group cares about each other, and that chemistry helps when adversity hits," Patterson said. "Our seniors have shown leadership and they hold themselves accountable."

While other programs across Southwest Virginia are facing issues with numbers, the Bearcats have managed to grow.

"The biggest reason for that is our freshmen classes," Patterson said. "We have 15 freshmen this year, and I think we had 14 last year. That makes a difference."

The push for more conquests rolls on at VHS.

"We're trying to find ways to be more consistent and to take the next step," Patterson said.

"If we're good enough to compete with the top teams in our district, then we're good enough to compete with the top teams in the region and state." ★



Packing a Punch



WEST RIDGE
**West Ridge
Wolves**

**Class 6A, Big East
Conference**

Schedule

Aug. 22	Tennessee High	H
Aug. 29	David Crockett	A
Sept. 5	Elizabethton	A
Sept. 12	Hardin Valley	H
Sept. 19	Daniel Boone	A
Sept. 26	Dobyns-Bennett	H
Oct. 2	Morristown West	A
Oct. 17	Morristown East	H
Oct. 24	Science Hill	A
Oct. 30	Jefferson County	A



All photos by Emily Ball/BHC

Wolves have relentless rushing attack

As West Ridge's football team went through the traditional paces that comprise media day on July 24, a bystander asked head coach Justin Hilton about senior running back Ethan Amyx.

"Look at him," Hilton remarked. "He fits the bill in a uniform. He needs to be the first one off the bus when we play on the road."

Amyx figuratively drove the bus as West Ridge opened the season with a 30-13 thumping of Tennessee High on Aug. 22.

He amassed 158 yards on 27 carries with two touchdowns, including motoring to the end zone for a jaunt that covered 48 yards in the third quarter.

Fittingly sporting jersey No. 1, the 6-foot-1, 195-pound Amyx will be the first option for West Ridge's offense this season. He has put on about 20 pounds thanks to rigorous work in the weight room and can now bench press 340 pounds.

The 2025 season will be his third toting the rock for the Wolves.

"It feels like he's been here forever doesn't it?" Hilton said.

Opponents are probably saying the Amyx rushed for 581 yards on 103 attempts last season with seven touchdowns.

"Amyx is a hard-nosed north-south runner," Hilton said. "He is a very good blocker as well."

West Ridge lost four of its last six games last season in missing out on the playoffs and that has provided plenty of incentive in his final go-round.

"It's my last year, so hopefully I can go out with a bang," Amyx said. "We were disappointed with how last season ended." Amyx will be running behind an experienced offensive line featuring the



2025 West Ridge Wolves



likes of Morgan Thornton (6-foot-1, 300 pounds, senior), Cal Tatum (6-3, 220, jr.), Kingston McConell (5-8, 285, jr.), Ethan Iacino (6-0, 250, sr.) and Nathan Arnold (6-2, 225, sr.). The bunch from Blountville hope to finish strong this fall. The Wolves got off to a 3-1 start last season, but it was all downhill from there as they missed the playoffs. "[A] 5-5 [record] isn't what anybody wants," Hilton

said. "But I think there's been a refocus on discipline and a refocus on family. Our seniors met with us in November and set some goals and they're posted on the wall in there. A lot of it is centered around being team first." Quarterback Trey Frazier and tight end Trent Tatum are now on the roster at Tusculum University and while their absence will be felt, West Ridge likes what



Wolves Roster

0 Orlando Mack
1 Ethan Amyx
2 Justice Hilton
3 Jackson Walsh
4 Brody Fields
5 Jackson Price
6 Isaac McGee
7 Zack Morelock
8 Braiden Lawson
9 Braelyn Vance
10 Kaleb Mabb
11 Jace Arwood
12 Goliath Arp
13 Dayton Brown
14 Connor Jones
15 Jacob Bledsoe
16 Braylen Funderburg
17 Jax Brown
18 Logan Thompson
20 Grayson Ferguson
21 Malik Mack

22 Landon Parker
23 Riner Hayes
24 Cayden Hensley
25 Carter Hobbs
26 Maddox Harris
27 Jackson Kelley
28 John Harvey
29 Samuel Burress
30 Billy Hawkins
31 Sam Bittinger
32 Geminiah Algarin
33 Nash Dishner
34 Maddox Johnson
35 Luke Moody
36 Riley Quiggle
37 Nate Rhoton
38 Chris Baldwin
40 Cameron Owens
41 Jackson Sauls
42 Evan Maness
43 Hayden Musick
44 John Doc Thornton

45 Sam Perry
48 Ethan Page
50 Cal Tatum
51 Peyton Martinez
52 Tanner Mims
53 Tyson Jones
54 Cole Denton
55 Nathan Arnold
56 Keithen Ashworth
57 Steve Winegar
58 David Byington
59 Aaron Stanley
60 Ethan Iacino
61 Alex VanSant
62 Ethan Hicks
63 Kingston McConnell
64 Kallon McConnell
65 Bo Painter
66 Bentley Wells
67 Tanner Hobbs
68 Dalton Clark
69 Jeremiah King

70 Rylen Williams
71 Morgan Thornton
72 Victor Hite
73 Charlie Barger
74 Austin Fritz
75 Cooper Nelson
76 Trevor Frost
77 Cayden Duke
78 Hayden Cox
79 Samuel Price
80 Brennen Egan
81 Wyatt Lawson
82 Josiah Johnson
83 Jonas Widen
84 Nathan Nelms
85 Caiden Brickey
86 Laron Smith
87 Tyler Shaffer
88 Braxton Hutchins
90 Mathew Hurd
99 Logan Grimm

they have back and rightfully so. Sophomore Justice Hilton won the preseason quarterback competition and will be guiding the offense. The son of the head coach looked good with the controls in that season-opening thumping of THS. "There's a lot of pressure on him being the kid of the head coach," Justin Hilton told reporters after that first win. "He's going to get too much credit and too much blame, but I'm proud of him."

All-conference linebacker Sam Perry is the cornerstone of the defense. Nathan Arnold, Orlando Mack and Hayden Musick join Perry to comprise a formidable crew of linebackers.



Senior defensive end Tanner Mims is also a force to be reckoned with as is nose guard Cayden Duke. Kaleb Mabb is both the top receiver for the Wolves and a fine player at free safety. Jackson Walsh, Braelyn

Vance and Dayton Brown also hold down spots in the secondary. A return to the playoffs is not out of the question for the Wolves. "Our line's looking great," Amyx said. "Every single



one of them has grown and gotten better." So has Amyx. "He's a crazy athlete," said teammate Kaleb Mabb "He's one of the best in the area, for sure." ★

Warrior Mentality



Wise County Central Warriors

Class 2D, Mtn 7 District

Schedule

Aug. 28	Eastside	A
Sept. 5	Marion	A
Sept. 12	Ridgeview	H
Sept. 19	John Battle	H
Sept. 26	Union	H
Oct. 10	Richlands	H
Oct. 17	Abingdon	A
Oct. 24	Lee High	H
Oct. 31	Gate City	A
Nov. 7	Grundy	A



Allen Gregory/BHC

Central must mature quickly

The 2024 football season for Wise County Central with a 2-8 record and four-game losing streak, but second-year head coach Josh Spurlock has a renewal plan for the Warriors.

"There's never really an excuse, but that group of kids had been though a lot of head coaches and coordinators," Spurlock said. "We had to iron things out, and our process is in place now."

The building blocks include 12 returning starters, six seniors and a proven playmaker in sophomore running back Colton Elkins. "Colton is right at 200 pounds and extremely talented. He's a great leader and competitor who carried

the ball a ton last year," Spurlock said.

Elkins led the team with eight touchdowns.

"We have a young but strong backfield overall," Spurlock said.

The running back mix also includes junior Aiden Phillips at H-back and sophomore Aiden French at fullback.

"There's hasn't been a lot of talk about French, but I think he will make some noise," Spurlock said.

Sophomore basketball standouts London Horne and Ean Hayes are not on the roster after combining for 14 scores last season. Hayes passed for eight touchdowns at quarterback. The new quarterback is senior Zeke O'Quinn.

"Zeke played quarterback as a sophomore when I joined the staff," Spurlock said. "We actually had a change at offensive coordinator during that season, and Zeke had a difficult year."

According to the 36-year-old Spurlock, O'Quinn has a passion for the sport that pays dividends in several ways.

"Zeke is hard-nosed, he will the football down your throat, and he is a good leader who is very smart," Spurlock said. "Zeke knows how to command an offense, and I'm excited to have him at quarterback."

Spurlock said the key to progress on offense and defense is continued

progress among the line corps.

"We had a lot on young guys up front last season and they



2025 Wise Central Warriors



Photo by Roddy Addington

Warriors Roster

2 Ryder Mullins
3 Gabe Lassiter
6 Shawn Collier
7 Zeke O'Quinn
8 Colton Elkins
9 Aiden French
10 Bryson Honaker
11 Keagan Baker
12 Aiden Phillips
13 Brayden Horne

14 Hunter McGraw
18 Thomas Jessee
19 Weston Amburgey
20 Cameron Mullins
21 Princeton Willis
22 Eli Martin
23 Josh Carroll
24 Jayden Bradley
32 Brandon Crutchfield
33 Grant Pilkenton
35 Levi Cathell

50 Hadley Martin
51 Isaac Cowden
52 Brayden Fox
53 Harper Mabe
55 Braylan Honaker
57 Camron Vance
58 Andrew Castle
60 Landon TO
62 Adam Yeary
63 Brady Church
65 Hudson Hubbard

67 Cole Fleenor
69 Hobie Rasnake
70 Caden Hopkins
72 Landon Davis
73 Hunter Miller
75 Bramble Stidham
78 Micheal Pilkenton
85 Kaedan Carter
89 Braxton Mister

are learning new schemes," Spurlock said. "If our linemen can understand what we're trying to achieve on offense, I think we can move the ball with our running backs." The leaders on defense include the linebacker cast of Elkins, Phillips and French. "And I think sophomore Braylan Honaker will be a head-turner on defense. He has put up huge numbers in the weight room and he has good size at 6-2 and 230 pounds," Spurlock said. Wise Central graduated eight seniors, but Spurlock expects to have a roster of

45 by the Aug. 29 season opener at Eastside. "If we can make a statement against a very good Eastside team, it will be a momentum builder for the rest of the season," Spurlock said. As his renewal plan takes effect, Spurlock is focused on the big picture. "I'm 100 percent committed to Central, the weight room and everything else that encompasses this program," Spurlock said. "We're playing now with mostly juniors, sophomores and freshmen, so we're looking forward to the day

when we can play mostly juniors and seniors." Spurlock hopes his players can benefit from the harsh learning lessons of the 2024 season. "We had some really high expectations. The season obviously didn't mirror what we wanted. But I think these kids believe in what we're doing."



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