

## Tennessee High School Football Preview



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**Sullivan  
East  
Patriots**



**Sullivan  
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# Northeast Tennessee Preview Capsules

## Class 5A - Mountain Lakes Conference



DAVID CRIGGER / BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

The 2020 Tennessee High Vikings wear masks and observe social distancing for a team picture last week at the Stone Castle.

### Cherokee

**Location:** Rogersville  
**Nickname:** Chiefs  
**Head coach:** Jason Lawson  
**2019 Record:** 6-5, 3-3, 1st round playoffs

**Key returnees:** QB Micah Jones; RB/LB Tyler Haun, Landon Jackson, Trent Price; WR/S Matt Newton, Will Price; TE/LB Brandon Ramsey.

**Coach comment:** "Stay healthy, continue to improve each week, developing team chemistry and staying focused with all the other distractions and changes surrounding COVID-19."

### Cocke County

**Location:** Newport  
**Nickname:** Fighting Cocks  
**Head coach:** Scotty Dykes  
**2019 record:** 1-9, 0-6

**Key returnees:** QB/DB Baylor Baxter; QB/WR Keyston Johnson; WR/DB Landon Lane, Cameron McClain, Jesse Sauceman, Tasean Simpson; RB/S John Norton; OL/DL Tabbien France, Jacob King, Landon Lane; LB Dalton Wilburn; RB/LB Roman Stewart; RB/DL

Ricky Valdez; DL Cole Gonzales.

**Coach comment:** "Going into my second season with still no spring practices during my tenure, we are still implementing offensive and defensive strategies, but the kids have picked up the bulk of it heading into the season. Without scrimmages, we hope it shows when we have the first game or two"... The Fighting Cocks have two Landon Lane's on the team.

### Daniel Boone

**Location:** Gray  
**Nickname:** Trailblazers  
**Head coach:** Jeremy Jenkins  
**2019 record:** 7-5, 5-1 round playoffs

**Key returnees:** RB Brennan Blair (all-MLC, 1,100 yards), OL Matt Masters (all-state), Jake Silos (all-MLC), Peyton Ford (all-MLC), Chandler Masters; QB Jackson Jenkins, Kaley Worley; WR Phillip Page; K Jacob Jenkins, Ben Shrewsbury; DL Aaron Ford, Will Hamlin; LB Hagen Edwards, Devon White; S Preston Miller.

**Coach comment:** "Keys will be how we develop as a de-

fense. Nine starters back on offense and that side may have to carry us early on. "...Jenkins enters his 16 season, the longest tenured head coach in 5A."

### David Crockett

**Location:** Jonesborough  
**Nickname:** Pioneers  
**Head coach:** Hayden Chandley  
**2019 record:** 7-4, 3-3 first round playoffs

**Key returnees:** RB/LB Prince Kollie (all-state, committed to Notre Dame); QB Mason Britton (caught 9 TD passes last season); OL/DL Tony Davis (all-MLC, multiple FCS offers); RB/DB Brenden Reid (tied for team lead in tackles last year); TE/LB Johnny Loyd (broke arm vs. Tennessee High in '19).

**Coach comments:** "We have to do the little things right. We aren't going to be the biggest, strongest or fastest, but mental toughness and grittiness will need to be our calling card. We have to use our athleticism and speed at certain positions to our advantage. We have six returners on defense with two other guys who started at least

one game and got significant minutes last season. Especially with a first-year quarterback, we will rely heavily on our defense to get stops and get our offense in the ball back in good situations."

### Morristown East

**Location:** Morristown  
**Nickname:** Hurricanes  
**Head coach:** Caleb Stover  
**2019 record:** 4-6, 3-3

**Key returnees:** QB Cole Hen-son, DE Daeshawn Harris, WR/DB Shaffer Harville, OL Raul Rangel, LB Isaac Long.

**Notes:** Morristown East's four-game win streak to end 2019 is second only to Knox Central for longest 4A win streak entering the season... The Hurricanes had 90 players at the start of practice, with nine offensive and six defensive starters back.....The 'Canes last reached the postseason in 2017., last winning record in '16

### Tennessee High

**Location:** Bristol  
**Nickname:** Vikings  
**Head coach:** Mike Mays

**2019 record:** 9-2, 6-0 1st round playoffs

**Key returnees:** WR/DB Jaden Keller, WR/DB Isaiah Smith, OL/DL Logan Booher, RB/LB Bryce Snyder, RB/LB Connor Bailey, K Jason Craft.

**Note:** Tennessee High captured the Mountain Lakes Conference championship last season...Jaden Keller is an NCAA Division I recruit, who is still exploring his options for a future college home.

### Volunteer

**Location:** Church Hill  
**Nickname:** Falcons  
**Head coach:** Jesse McMillian  
**2019 record:** 4-6, 1-5

**Key returnees:** RB/DB Cameron Johnson. QB Garrison Barrett.

**Notes:** McMillian is a first-year coach for the Falcons, who won their final two games to reach four wins in '19...Volunteer last finished with a winning record with a 6-5 mark in 2002. They have had three .500 seasons during that time span. ..The Falcons' opener was canceled due to a positive coronavirus test.



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# TENNESSEE HIGH VIKINGS

## Vikings thinking big, need help from bigs

BY BRIAN WOODSON  
BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

BRISTOL, Tenn. - The goals are set for Tennessee High.

The Vikings want to defend their Mountain Lakes Conference championship, but that is far from all.

The talent is there, but much depends on how the big guys come through.

"We want to win that again. We have got big goals," Tennessee High head coach Mike Mays said. "When you see our skills guys running around, we think we can be really good. It is just how good our line of scrimmage is going to be. It doesn't matter what kind of guys you got running around if you can't stop people up front and protect the

quarterback. We got to get the ball to those guys. If we can't get the ball to those guys to make plays, then it will be a long year."

Tennessee High certainly hopes it is a long season, only because the COVID-19 pandemic could put an end to it pretty quick. Mays said the Vikings are doing their part to follow the required protocols to play.

"Our kids understand that safety is first and we are doing everything we can outside of school. We really feel like the safest place the kids are right now is with us," Mays said. "We follow a lot of protocols and everybody has got their own masks. If they are standing around and not in a drill, they know they have to get that mask up and stay social

distanced the best we can. They understand what is at stake."

Tennessee High is coming off a stellar season, sandwiching nine straight wins between a pair of defeats. They return nine starters on defense and six on offense, with the Vikings' biggest question being on the interior lines.

"We lost some great defensive ends, guys that started for three years," said Mays, who has several sophomores competing for positions. "We have got bodies there, good bodies that are fighting for jobs. We are not trying to make something out of nothing. We have got some good looking kids that we feel like can play there.

"As far as skill [players], we are

pretty happy with skill, but we have got to find a couple of linemen and couple of defensive ends."

Leading what should be potent offense is junior quarterback Steven Johnson, who spent a pair of two-week stints with receiver Jaden Keller this summer in Texas, working with former NFL quarterback Jeff Blake.

"He has done a great job in the offseason of really working and improving," Mays said. "Steven was fortunate enough to be able to go down there and took Jaden with him. They stayed down there, lived in a hotel and trained every day. It just worked out where they were able to do that and Texas wasn't totally shut

See **BIG**, Page 7



### THE GAMES

Aug. 21	Dobyns-Bennett	H
Sept. 4	Daniel Boone	H
Sept. 18	Morristown East	H
Oct. 2	Volunteer	A
Oct. 9	Cocke County	A
Oct. 16	David Crockett	H
Oct. 23	Cherokee	A
Oct. 30	Sullivan South	A

\*Games with Virginia High and Abingdon were canceled due to the VHSL moving football to the spring.



DAVID CRIGGER / BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

Mike Mays



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# Big

From Page 6

down at the time like we were so they were able to do some things and fortunately they came back not sick."

The weapons around Johnson are plentiful, led by Keller, who is being recruited by numerous NCAA Division I schools. Add to him senior Mykal Jones, a former Bristol resident, who has returned after spending a few seasons playing at Baylor High School in Chattanooga.

"He is a special kid. He has got every bit of talent as anyone we have ever had here," Mays said. "He is great on both sides of the ball, smart kid, unselfish, understands what you want out of him. He is a 'yes, sir', 'no, sir' kid, so he has been a great pleasure to coach so far. I feel like he will have a big year, I feel like he is a special kid and he has got special abilities."

The 6-foot-5, 215-pound Keller will be a headliner at running back, receiver and safety.

"Jaden is a kid who is just a worker. He is going to do what it takes to be successful and we are going to use him in a number of different ways," Mays said. "He is just a guy who can make plays for you so as many times



DAVID CRIGGER / BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

**Developing on the offensive and defensive lines will be key to Tennessee High's success this season. The Vikings open with Dobyns-Bennett on Friday at the Stone Castle.**

as we can get the ball in his hands the better we are going to be."

Don't forget about Bryce Snyder and Connor Bailey, who not only carry the football, but are both all-conference linebackers. Isaiah Smith has similar abilities to Keller and Jones, talented, fast and able to play both sides of the ball. That trio, along with Nysaiah Foote will also be part of what should be a tough secondary to throw on.

"We are excited about Isaiah, he is a guy that touched the ball last year and it seems like every other time he was scoring touchdowns," Mays said. "He is one of those guys where it is like people are in slow motion when he

has the ball in his hands. He has got great vision and good speed and quickness."

There are several other candidates who will get the ball, including receivers CJ Henley, Davis Campbell and Gregory Harris, a speedy transfer from Science Hill, who might be the fastest player on the team.

There are certainly plenty of candidates for the all-important interior lines, but not a lot of experience, although Logan Booher was an all-conference defensive lineman last season. Other candidates on the offensive side of the ball include JT Pickett, Dawson Snapp, Justice Musser, Carson Mullins and Sam Wed-

dington.

Booher and Snapp will also be on the defensive line, as will Grant Ferrell and Jack Gainer at the nose tackle, with Cade Leonard and Austin DeGeare also in the rotation.

"We feel like those guys that are back really need to show some leadership because we have got some young sophomore linemen who are pretty big and have got some skill and ability," said Mays, who said none of the linemen got the usual weight training work in the off-season due to issues with the coronavirus. "They just have to learn how to be varsity players."

Other defensive players expected to contribute are Isaac Bell and Mar-

cus Phelps at linebackers, who will line up with Snyder and Bailey at times.

"Connor is more of the hitter and Bryce is more the heady, instinctive guy, which you need," Mays said. "You need a thumper inside and you need a smart guy inside. I am not saying Connor is not smart, he is, but he is one of those who will go get you."

Mays likes the back seven on defense, but still needs answers on the line.

"We really feel good about the back seven," Mays said. "You have got to be good up front to be good in the back because if you ain't good up front, those guys are going to have to come down and play the run and that puts a lot of pressure on the secondary guys to be able to cover and play run. We feel really good about the secondary."

Jason Craft returns for this third year as a kicker, while Luke Jenkins is the lone snapper. Keller, Smith, Jones and Harris should provide a solid return game for the Vikings.

Expect the Vikings to be fun to watch this season, especially if those linemen grow into their roles.

"I think stopping the run and being able to run the football is an emphasis for us," Mays said. "It is every year, for all teams it is in the emphasis, but

## THE VIKINGS

1. Nysaiah Foote	Jr.
2. Bryce Snyder	Sr.
3. Levon Montgomery	Jr.
4. Nick Osborne	So.
5. Gregory Harris	Jr.
6. Dominick Daggs	Sr.
7. Steven Johnson	Jr.
8. Jackson Elliott	So.
9. Mykal Jones	Sr.
10. Isaiah Smith	Sr.
12. Connor Bailey	Sr.
13. Davis Campbell	Jr.
15. Marquis Phelps	So.
17. Isaac Bell	Sr.
18. CJ Henley	Sr.
20. Micah Montgomery	So.
21. Evan Mutter	So.
22. Micah Kennedy	Jr.
23. Jacob Craft	Sr.
24. Jaden Keller	Sr.
25. Donovan Mumpower	Sr.
27. Ezekiel Johnson	Sr.
30. Cody Robinson	So.
31. Austin DeGeare	So.
32. Owen Brown	So.
34. Lance Tudor	So.
35. Aidan Dotson	So.
47. Cade Leonard	Sr.
51. Dawson Snapp	Jr.
52. Carson Mullins	Jr.
53. Daniel Chapdelaine	LB
56. Evan Bedwell	So.
57. Zach Carter	So.
58. Skyler Krajeck	Jr.
59. Desmond Lockett	So.
60. Luke Jenkins	Sr.
61. Blaine Bishop	Sr.
62. Justice Musser	Jr.
63. Sam Weddington	Jr.
64. Jack Gaynor	Jr.
65. Gabe Harris	Jr.
66. Ralph Balwin	So.
67. Hunter Hawthorne	Sr.
68. Cooper Conley	So.
70. Chris Wilson	Soph.
71. Devin Rosenbaum	So.
72. Trey Trivett	Sr.
73. JD Pickett	Sr.
74. Grant Ferrell	Jr.
76. Logan Booher	Sr.
80. Aaron Delp	Sr.

I really think it is more of an emphasis this year because I don't think anybody can throw on us, but if we can't stop the run, they can throw on us...

"That is the biggest emphasis on both sides of the football, the line of scrimmage, being able to stop the run and being able to run the football."

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# Northeast Tennessee Preview Capsules

## Class 4A - Northeastern Conference

### Elizabethton

**Location:** Elizabethton  
**Nickname:** Cyclones  
**Head coach:** Shawn Witten  
**2019 record:** 15-0, 6-0, 4A state champions

**Key returnees:** QB Bryson Rollins; RB Nate Stephens; WR Braden Holly, Parker Hughes, Jake Roberts; C Colby Garland; OG Wes Erwin, Owen Slagle; OT Connor Johnson, Cole Morganstern; LB LaDarian Avery, Deuce Morton (leading tackler), Blake Stewart; DL Trenton Taylor; S Parker Hughes, Cade Russell; CB Braden Holly, Jake Roberts, Nate Stephens.

**Coach comment:** "We have to manage expectations, going to get everyone's best shot. We have to stay healthy." ... Lost 11 seniors of state title team, have 15 seniors this season.

### Grainger

**Location:** Rutledge  
**Nickname:** Grizzlies  
**Head coach:** Chad Tate  
**2019 record:** 6-5, 3-3, 1st round of playoffs

**Key returnees:** QB Dawson Holt; ATH Hunter McBee, Ty Overbay; OL Bradley Greenlee, Cody Jeffers; DL Chance Tate; LB Sam Andrews, Reggie McBee, Aaron Roach; DB



DAVID CRIGGER / BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

### Sullivan East's Owen Laprade

Kaden Cardoza.

**Notes:** 12 starters return, 7 defense, 5 offense. Single wing, 3-4 defense. Strengths: Experience at skill position on offense and defense senior leadership. Weaknesses: Depth, replacing four starters on the offensive line, much replace kicker, punter and long snapper.

### Greeneville

**Location:** Greeneville  
**Nickname:** Greene Devils  
**Head coach:** Eddie Spradlen  
**2019 record:** 10-3, 5-1 3rd round of playoffs

**Key returnees:** WR/DB Nick Iezzi (preseason all-state); RB/DB Mason Gudget (preseason all-state); QB Drew Greg; RB/DB Isaac Brown; OL/DL Clay

Odom, Sam Allen, Terry Glover, Mikeal Pillar, Rashard Claridy; TE/DE Trey Mayes; WR/DB Jaden Stevenson.

**Coach comment:** Return 7 starters on offense, 6 on defense. Must stay healthy, coronavirus issues could sideline players two weeks at a time... Leadership is key, helped the Greene Devils win state titles in 2017-18...

"One of my main jobs right now is to make sure we are physically ready to compete in a game. We have a lot of young talent on this team that will have to play key roles on both sides of the ball early. I look forward to watch these guys compete for starting roles against each other. It will be an exciting year to stay the least. It will be interesting to see how it all falls together."

### Sullivan Central

**Location:** Blountville  
**Nickname:** Cougars  
**Head coach:** Chris Steger  
**2019 record:** 2-8, 1-5

**Key returnees:** QB Will Nottingham, RB/LB Nick Harrison, WR/DB Preston Staubus, WR/DB Connor Wilson, C/DL Benji Novak, OL/DL Grant Cornett.

**Preview:** The Cougars will



DAVID CRIGGER / BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

### Sullivan Central's Will Nottingham

play their final season, as the school will combine with Sullivan North and Sullivan South to create West Ridge... Sullivan Central hasn't had a winning season or made a playoff appearance since 2003.

### Sullivan East

**Location:** Bluff City  
**Nickname:** Patriots  
**Head coach:** JC Simmons  
**2019 record:** 1-9, 0-6  
**Key returnees:** WR/LB Clayton Ivester, OL/DL Dylan Lopez, RB/LB Hunter Brown, OL/DL Owen Laprade.

**Notes:** JC Simmons is the new head coach at Sullivan East... The Patriots had a three-year run of postseason appearances, winning 24 games over

three seasons from 2014-16.

### Sullivan South

**Location:** Kingsport  
**Nickname:** Rebels  
**Head coach:** Justin Hilton  
**2019 record:** 6-6, 4-2, 2nd round of playoffs

**Key returnees:** LB Eli Topping (preseason all-state, All-Three Rivers Conference); RB Eli Jennings, all-TRC); WR Isaac Haynie, Brody Ratliff (both 6'4); OL Fletcher Gibson (all-TRC).

**Coach comment:** "To be successful we will need to grow up in a hurry on the offensive line. We have quite a bit of experience running at skill positions on offense and defense."

### Union County

**Location:** Maynardville  
**Nickname:** Patriots  
**Head coach:** Josh Kerr  
**2019 record:** 4-6, 2-4  
**Key returnees:** QB/DB Dalton Bradshaw, RB/DB Carson Nicley, RB/LB Conner Nicley, WR/DB Peyton Ray,

**Notes:** The Patriots of Union County have defeated the Patriots of Sullivan East by a total of 17 points over the last two seasons... Union County lost 28 straight games from 2014 into 2017.

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# SULLIVAN EAST PATRIOTS

## Excitement builds as Simmons takes over at East

BY BRIAN WOODSON  
BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

BLUFF CITY, Tenn. – The philosophy of JC Simmons for football success isn't complicated.

"The main thing is we just want to be able to execute and get our kids in the best position to make plays and have the best opportunity to succeed," said Simmons, who replaced Mike Locke as Sullivan East's football coach in April.

Now comes the hard part: making it happen.

"There is a lot of excitement," said Simmons, who played at Emory & Henry College. "The whole goal is we have to constantly better our best and that is one of our messages that we have been going for.

"We have to get better from yesterday every day and that is what they are striving to do and we have seen strides every day. We are going to practice later on today and looking for some more strides."

Sullivan East plans to open its season on Friday against Johnson County, although the Long-horns had some positive coronavirus tests, but got word late last week they would be ready to play.

"From my experience with Johnson County, they are going to do everything they can to play. There are tough kids up



Clayton Ivester (81) and Seth Chafin (7) of Sullivan East bring down Sullivan Central's Joey Byrd during the 2019 season. The rivals will meet for the final time this season on Oct. 9 in Bluff City.

ANDRE TEAGUE / BRISTOL HERALD COURIER FILE PHOTO

there, I know the coaches and they are going to do everything they can to play," Simmons said. "If they get one day of practice in they will still come down here and play us so I just hope all those guys are healthy and safe and getting better. That is everybody's main goal is the health and safety of our players and our community.

"We are hoping for the best for Johnson County. Even if something happens and we don't get to play, as long as they are healthy and safe that is the goal."

Leading the Patriots will be a collection of seniors looking to

improve on a pair of consecutive one-win campaigns.

"I feel like myself, in my opinion, I think this team can go as far as we take ourselves," Sullivan East senior quarterback Seth Dalton said. "I feel like the work ethic is there, I feel like everybody wants to win and we haven't been doing much of that lately.

"I feel like we have what it takes to get where we want to be. Time will tell."

Dalton isn't the only quarterback looking for snaps. Ethan Bradford is also battling in hopes of replacing the departed Dylan White.

"Sometimes when you have two guys competing for a spot, you have a clear guy that emerges and right now those guys are duking it out, left and right, every time," Simmons said. "They are both just great competitors and I love everything that I have seen out of them. Even when there is adversity that hits, they battle back."

That is far from the only competition going on for positions. That was by design.

"I told the guys [last week] that nobody has earned a spot yet," Simmons said. "That is kind of one of the main things I have been trying to work on is if you are going to be part of the Sullivan East program, you are going to earn it. They have shown up every day to work and they have gotten better every single day."

Simmons knows what he would like to do on offense. They just have to get there.

"The base premise of the offense that we have going is we want to be able to execute and get our guys in the best position to succeed," he said. "We would like to work in some tempo as well, but it is hard to work in tempo if you don't know what you are doing. Making sure our guys can execute is the key."

There are plenty of candidates for spots, including returning

See **EXCITEMENT**, Page 10



### THE GAMES

Aug. 21	Johnson County	H
Aug. 28	Elizabethton	A
Sept. 11	Volunteer	H
Sept. 18	Union County	A
Sept. 25	Unicoi County	A
Oct. 2	Grainger	H
Oct. 9	Sullivan Central	A
Oct. 16	Sullivan South	H
Oct. 23	Sullivan North	A
Oct. 30	Greeneville	A

### THE PATRIOTS

2.	Ethan Bradford	Sr.
3.	Caleb Smith	Sr.
4.	Nate Brown	So.
5.	Seth Dalton	Sr.
6.	Donovan Smith-Peters	Fr.
7.	Seth Chafin	Sr.
8.	Jordan Robinette	So.
9.	Luke Hare	Jr.
10.	A.J. Torbett	Fr.
11.	Nick Gobble	Fr.
12.	Nolan Lunsford	So.
13.	Chet Bryant	Sr.
14.	Tanner McCracken	Sr.
15.	Hunter Brown	Jr.
16.	Drake Fisher	Fr.
20.	Kaden Roberts	Fr.
21.	Jayden Edwards	Fr.
22.	Eli Richardson	Jr.
24.	Emily Cross	Fr.
26.	Joe Nacos	Sr.
28.	Dominic Cross	Fr.
30.	Tyler Cross	Fr.
33.	Grant Giles	Fr.
34.	Thor Poe	Sr.
35.	Masun Tate	So.
40.	J.Mason Arrington	Sr.
52.	Peyton Miller	Jr.
54.	Joshua Ragan	So.
55.	Dylan Sams	Fr.
56.	Trent Gillium	Fr.
58.	Owen Laprade	Sr.
64.	Andrew Smith	Sr.
65.	Jack White	So.
66.	Damian Greenwell	So.
68.	Nick Sakellar	Jr.
71.	Kolton Smith	Fr.
72.	Hayden Finney	Fr.
74.	Dylan Lopez	Sr.
77.	William Whitehead	So.
78.	Christian Blevins	Fr.
79.	Heath Boling	Fr.
81.	Clayton Ivester	Sr.
82.	Will Alley	Fr.
84.	Isaac Stanley	Fr.
85.	Chase Bailey	Fr.
87.	Dawson Jones	So.
88.	Manny Milhorn	Jr.



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# Excitement

From Page 9

two-way starters Clayton Ivester - who starts at linebacker and receiver- and Dylan Lopez, who plays center and on the defensive line.

There are other options, including Hunter Brown, who is expected to contribute at running back, receiver and safety.

"We have got several other players that have been key for us," Simmons said. "A guy like Hunter, who is a returning starter on both sides of the ball. He is ready for this season. He has been following Clayton around a little bit, hitting that weight room too so we are excited about that because he is going to be a real player for us as well."

Simmons has also been especially impressed with the effort and attitude of linebacker and offensive lineman Owen Laprade.

"If everybody was around Owen Laprade every day you would never leave without a smile on your face," Simmons said. "He is a tough-nosed kid that will run in there and stick his face in there and get up smiling every time. I could have more Owen Laprade's, I'd love to."

Slowing down the opposition will be key for the Patriots, against what will be a testy schedule. Much will lie with Drew Nelson, who has replaced Simmons as defensive coordinator. Chris Colley is the offensive guru.

"Defensively, it is going to be similar, but with Coach Nelson taking over, he has made some changes as well and I think for the better," Simmons said. "One of our biggest problems was working on our communication from the sideline to the field and I think Coach has brought a bunch of great ideas for that, and same thing with Coach Colley on our offense. I

am pretty excited what we have got in store."

It won't be easy for the Patriots. After the opener with the Longhorns, all that awaits is a trip to 4A defending champion Elizabethton. The slate is scheduled to end at Greenville, which won the previous two 4A titles.

"You just take a look at our conference, you are in for a fight every game," he said. "It doesn't matter who you play on our schedule."

Among the numerous guidelines that must be followed to play football in the fall in Tennessee is not having scrimmages or jamborees to prepare for the physical nature of the sport.

"I think that is going to affect everybody. It is kind of a double-sided thing," Simmons said. "One, you don't have as much contact so you are going to limit some injuries and things like that, but at the same time it is really hard to prepare

for football without playing football.

"It is all about the safety of the kids. I think that is my main focus is trying to figure out what we can do without those scrimmages and just compete with each other to be ready for August 21st."

Another issue to be faced are the seating arrangements that will allow only around 600 spectators for games, all of whom will be required to wear masks and observe social distancing principles.

"It is definitely going to be different and that is OK because I know that Patriot Nation is going to be here to support us," Simmons said. "Their safety is just as important. We have been in meetings all week now about what exactly it is going to look like so hopefully it is going to still be a good, fun atmosphere and everybody can stay safe."

The Patriots are ready to play ball. No doubt, the Longhorns



DAVID CRIGGER / BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

JC Simmons

will too.

"They want to play, we want to play, everybody wants to play right now," Simmons said. "We are preparing, we are coming to work every day. August 21st is game one against Johnson County and we are going to do everything we can to be ready for the Longhorns."

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# Northeast Tennessee Preview Capsules

## Non-conference opponents playing local football teams

### Dobyns-Bennett

**Location:** Kingsport  
**Nickname:** Indians  
**Head coach:** Joey Christian  
**Division:** Region 1-6A  
**2019 record:** 10-3, 5-1, 3rd round playoffs

**Key returnees:** QB Zane Whitson (Region 1-6A MVP, 24 TD, 1 Int in '19); TE/LB Jackson Martin; Nate Whitley (two-year tackling leader); S/RET Issac Ratliff; WR/CB Trent Cody; RB/LB Phillip Armitage (900 rush yards in '19); RB/LB Tyler Tesnear (800 yards, split carries with Armitage); OL Caleb Bureson, Zach Ferguson, Caleb McNabb; WR Braden Marshall (missed last season with injury).

**Coach comment:** "Huge team, 99 players on grade 11-12 roster. 32 seniors. "Many of those seniors have given us experience over the years at sev-

eral different spots."

### Johnson County

**Location:** Mountain City  
**Nickname:** Longhorns  
**Head coach:** Don Kerley  
**Division:** Region 1-3A  
**2019 record:** 4-7, 3-2, 1st round playoffs

**Key returnees:** RB/LB Samuel Mann, Stacy Greer; WR/LB Aiden Walker; WR Tyler Wilson; OL/DL Ricky Fenner, Connor McNutt, Ryan Morefield; DL/LB Joe Gambrell; DB Ethan Bower, Javier Buenfield; K Jenna Horner, Nate Rice.

**Notes:** The Longhorns took two weeks off from practice due to the coronavirus, but have been given permission to open the season Friday at Sullivan East. "We normally get a spring practice, 7-on-7 games, scrimmages, and lots

of practice, but this is a different year. So conditioning limited full contact practices..will probably be a factor..."All our games with East could have gone either way so I am looking for a hard fought contest...If we are going to be successful it will depend on our the leadership of our seniors and how fast we can catch up for all the lost practice time."

### Pigeon Forge

**Location:** Pigeon Forge  
**Nickname:** Tigers  
**Head coach:** Scott Meadows  
**Division:** Region 1-3A  
**2019 record:** 1-9, 1-5

**Key returnees:** OL/DL Mustafa-Al-Garawi, OL/DL Arturo Jimenez-Celestino, WR Anakin Brown, WR Hussein Al-Sultani.

**Notes:** Scott Meadows replaced Adrian Watson, who

spent the last three years at Pigeon Forge, winning just seven games...The Tigers have had consecutive 1-9 campaigns, having last reached the post-season in 2016...Enters season with three-game losing streak.

### Sullivan North

**Location:** Kingsport  
**Nickname:** Raiders  
**Head coach:** Preston Patrick  
**Division:** Region 1-2A  
**2019 record:** 5-6, 2-2, first round playoffs

**Key returnees:** OL/DL Tyler Fugate, WR/DB Isaiah Pruitt, RB/DB Landon Roberts, TE/DE CJ Martis.

**Notes:** The Raiders were one of the first area teams to have a positive coronavirus test, but they recovered in time to open their season with Sullivan Central...Sullivan North, which is

playing its final season of football, started 3-0 last season and 4-0 in 2018.

### Unicoi County

**Location:** Erwin  
**Nickname:** Blue Devils  
**Head coach:** Drew Rice  
**Division:** Region 1-3A  
**2019 record:** 6-5, 4-1, 1st round playoffs

**Key returnees:** QB/FS Brock Thompson, WR/DB Evan Huff, WR/DB Tracy Vanover, OL/DL Rodrigo Castellon.

**Notes:** Unicoi County's Gentry Stadium recently underwent a \$3.2 million renovation that is expected to be ready for season opener on Friday with South Greene...Brock Thompson is a rare four-year starter at quarterback, having thrown for more than 3,400 yards in his career.



**Top:** Sullivan Central's Nick Harrison is brought down by a pair of Sullivan North defenders during the Cougars' 38-26 loss last season to the Raiders. **Bottom:** Isaiah Smith of Tennessee High looks to see his progress after being tackled during the Vikings' win last season over Daniel Boone.



Tennessee High's Jaden Keller is flipped but scores the opening touchdown in the Vikings' 35-0 win at Daniel Boone last season.

BRISTOL HERALD COURIER FILE PHOTOS

DAVID CRIGGER / BRISTOL HERALD COURIER FILE PHOTOS



# SULLIVAN CENTRAL COUGARS

## Cougars want to send school out as a winner

BY BRIAN WOODSON  
BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

BLOUNTVILLE, Tenn. – Expect offense to carry the Sullivan Central football team in the season ahead.

“That offense, I feel really good about it moving forward,” said sixth-year head coach Chris Steger. “We feel like we can put some points on the board and that is why we put an emphasis early on since we came back that we have got to tackle.”

That is the main concern for the Cougars. Points should be plentiful, stopping the other team is paramount to success.

“We have got to tackle,” said Steger, whose Cougars are behind like everyone else due to limited practices caused by the

coronavirus. “We have got to tackle and I think that will be the advantage early on, the teams that can rely on those fundamentals in these games.”

Sullivan Central will open its season on Aug. 21 by playing host to Sullivan North, the final meeting between the schools. They will join Sullivan South to create West Ridge High School in the fall of 2021.

“You want to finish this place out the right way,” Steger said.

Sullivan Central is coming off a 2-8 campaign, the most wins since the Cougars claimed three victories in 2014.

There is reason to believe better days are ahead for a club that has around 60 players on the roster, counting a large group of

freshmen, a big jump from the 35 or so who were on Steger’s first team in Blountville.

Many of them are seniors, and Steger said this group is special.

“We feel like we have a lot of people that want to be part of the program now,” Steger said. “It is something that people want to aspire to and these seniors especially, they have really raised that level around here.

“They [came in] my second year here and they have really worked hard, this group and it is a big group. We feel really good with where they are at and what they have been through and what they are going to bring to the table.”

Leading the Sullivan Central offense will be senior quarter-

back Will Nottingham, who set school records last season for touchdowns and completions in a season.

He has weapons too, including senior wide receivers Connor Wilson and Preston Staubus, along with quick running back Nick Harrison. Both Wilson and Staubus are also key defensive backs for the Cougars.

“My two guys on the outside have played a ton of football,” Steger said. “Connor, he is a complete package at receiver. He can run the shorter routes and attacks the football, does all those things. Preston is another one that plays both sides of the ball. He is another kid that has



### THE GAMES

Aug. 21	Sullivan North	A
Aug. 28	Volunteer	H
Sept. 11	Pigeon Forge	H
Sept. 18	Sullivan South	H
Sept. 25	David Crockett	A
Oct. 2	Greeneville	A
Oct. 9	Sullivan East	H
Oct. 16	Grainger	A
Oct. 23	Union County	H
Oct. 30	Elizabethton	A



BHC FILE PHOTO BY EARL NEIKIRK

Chris Steger

See **WINNER**, Page 14



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The Sullivan Central trio, from left, Preston Staubus, Will Nottingham and Connor Wilson will contribute to the Cougars' final season of football.



Hunter Brown runs for daylight during Sullivan East's 28-14 loss to Sullivan Central last season. Brown is expected to be a key contributor on both sides of the ball for the Patriots, who will start the 2020 season under new leadership with head coach JC Simmons.

ANDRE TEAGUE /  
BHC FILE PHOTO

# Winner

From Page 13

played a lot of football, you can count on him, great hands."

There is experience elsewhere as well.

"Nick Harrison, he has played. Those kids right there have played, even Will, as a sophomore started on defense," he said. "He is another one that, while he hasn't played three years at quarterback, he has played three years of varsity football."

What has Steger most excited is the biggest offensive line since he has been in Blountville, led by the guard duo of Grant Cornett and Zack Strouth, along with center Benji Novak.

"Our smallest guy up front this year is probably going to be about 220," Steger said. "We will have good size at center, the guards are really strong, two of the stronger guys on the teams are at guard. My center is coming back, this will be his second year playing center for us. He started as a sophomore, he has grown exponentially. We had some injuries early in the season last year and we just said you have got to go. He just went into that role."

Add Zach Wise and Jeremiah Kirkpatrick at tackles, along with Will Horne at tight end and H-back.

Defense will be the key. Tackling was an emphasis once contact drills were allowed since all teams will be learning on the go, having no scrimmages to prepare for live action.

"We didn't have spring to do any of that. Normally you have spring practice, you spend those weeks really doing that and get back out here within two months," Steger said. "These guys hadn't done any kind of contact since the end of October, early November."

Sullivan Central is slated to start on Friday against Sullivan North, which rallied from a big deficit to escape Blountville with the win last season. The Raiders have had issues with positive coronavirus tests, but are expected to be ready to play.

"That is a big game. All the Sullivan County games are big games. I think us and East are the only two that are playing all four," Steger said. "I think that is important playing teams in the county. Those kids have grown up playing each other so it is really bragging rights and it is something they have done. When we are doing schedules that is something we put a priority on."

Sullivan Central's 10-game schedule is set, but Steger knows anything could happen in a season that will largely depend on how the coronavirus



DAVID CRIGGER / BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

Sullivan Central will be looking for major contributions from its offensive line, the biggest unit the Cougars have had in some time.

reacts over the next weeks.

"You may wake up on Monday and it is South week and it may turn into we are going to Tennessee High," he said. "Nobody knows, you are just hoping you can get as many games as possible for your kids, however that shakes out."

Sullivan Central will host five home games at Bernie Webb Field, including three in a row early in the season. Steger figures the Sullivan Central faithful will be there too, especially for games with county schools South and East, but isn't sure yet how many spectators will be allowed through the gates.

"Those are really good atmo-

spheres," said Steger, who said the process is in motion to prepare for Friday nights in the COVID era. "We have talked about stadium capacity and you don't know what the stadium capacity is going to look like. You think you know what that number is going to look like up there, but you don't know until you see it."

Steger hasn't had to remind his team to enjoy the moment. They know this will be a season like no other.

"I think everybody understands. 'Hey, you may not get to play again.' For years you tell kids all the time, you never know when your last play is going to be, you never know," he

## THE COUGARS

1. Cale Bryant	So.
2. Tanner Scalf	Jr.
3. Braeden Smith	Jr.
4. Colin Dingus	Fr.
5. Nick Harrison	Sr.
6. Hunter Stanley	Jr.
7. Preston Staubus	Sr.
8. Gavin Buckley	Sr.
9. Bryson Horne	Fr.
12. Noah Beverly	Jr.
13. Peyton Greene	Jr.
15. Carter Sanders	Fr.
16. Will Nottingham	Sr.
17. Gabe Blessing	Sr.
18. Adam Hunt	So.
20. Jayden Ramsey	Fr.
22. Connor Wilson	Sr.
23. Drew Mullins	Sr.
24. Roy Moody	So.
25. Micah Turner	Sr.
28. Carson Tate	So.
30. Sam Harmon	So.
32. Landen Locklear	Sr.
34. Seth Burke	Jr.
35. Brayden Ray	Fr.
40. Jay Moody	Sr.
41. Carson Stanley	So.
45. Will Horne	Sr.
46. Jacob Risner	Jr.
52. Grant Cornett	Jr.
53. Benji Novak	Jr.
54. Logan Pearce	So.
56. Zack Strouth	Jr.
57. Ty Gebhardt	Jr.
60. Chase Porter	Sr.
62. Brayden Robinson	Fr.
63. Colton Ramey	Jr.
65. Clay Wampler	Sr.
66. Shane Hunsucker	Sr.
67. Maison Harvey	Fr.
68. Christian Coleman	Fr.
70. Jacob Wise	Sr.
72. Brayden Ramsey	Jr.
75. Jeremiah Kirkpatrick	So.
78. Isiah Kerr	So.
79. Javen Tanner	Fr.
80. Trey West	Fr.
81. Ethan Buckley	Fr.
82. Gabe Young	Fr.
83. Austin Porter	Fr.
85. Hunter Antonio	Sr.
86. Noah Sutherland	Sr.
88. Grayson Dugger	Jr.

said. "This is going to happen to everybody. I think it has kind of hit finally. 'Whoa, that is what they meant' so we just really try to come out here and enjoy it."

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