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2023 Football Preview

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Abingdon Falcons

Class 3D, Mtn 7 District

Schedule

Aug.	25 John Battle	H
Sept.	1 Christiansburg	H
Sept.	8 Gate City	A
Sept.	15 Richlands	A
Sept.	22 Tennessee High	A
Sept.	29 Wise County Central	H
Oct.	6 Marion	H
Oct.	20 Ridgeview	A
Oct.	27 Union	H
Nov.	3 Lee High	A

Falcons determined to rebound

The fun run for the Abingdon Falcons in football took a detour last season.

Saddled by youth and inexperience, AHS posted a 5-6 record after winning three Mountain 7 District titles in four years.

Just one season earlier, AHS reached the Class 3 semifinals with a 12-2 mark.

"We graduated a big group from that team. At times last season, we played seven sophomores and one freshman,"

AHS coach Garrett Amburgey said.

"Even though we were young, our standard is to compete for district and regional titles every year."

A total of 14 starters, including eight on offense,





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2023 Abingdon Falcons



return to a roster that includes just eight seniors.

"Our junior class is our biggest group with close to 20," Amburgey said. "We're looking for good things from those guys."

The marquee junior is Luke Honaker. Relying on speed and toughness, Honaker passed for 675 yards and ran

for 623 at quarterback and collected 34 tackles at outside linebacker.

"Luke is a dynamic athlete who has really grown as a leader," Amburgey said. "I'm anxious to see his growth from his sophomore year."

Powerful junior Alex Hawkins (six touchdowns) returns at running back along

"We've always prided ourselves here on being sound in every phase of the game. We want to be able to run the ball and take shots downfield on offense while playing fast and physical on defense."



with 6-foot-3 junior Owen Barr. Six-foot-five senior Lucas Brooks has experience at receiver, while 6-6, 260-pound sophomore Aidan Woods is the tight end.

"Aidan is already getting some Division I interest," Amburgey said.

Familiar faces on the offensive line include senior Noah Gilliam at center and junior Gage Crabtree at tackle.

Hawkins anchors the defense after recording 33 tackles and 42 assists as a sophomore middle linebacker.



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Senior Brayden Self is another leader at linebacker with Honaker.

“Brayden is a tremendous guy to have in a program. He’s always ready to work,” Amburgey said. “Alex made a lot of improvement over the course of last season, and junior Austin Lucas can play some middle linebacker.”

Austin is the younger brother or former AHS standout Dasean Lucas, who is now playing at West Virginia Wesleyan. Big brother Martin Lucas is a sophomore running back at William and Mary.

The secondary has experience with Barr and





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Falcons Roster

1 Owen Barr

2 Spencer Wellenhoffer

3 Lucas Honaker

4 Isaac Brooks

5 Brayden Self

6 Baylee Blevins

7 Caden Sheffield

8 Ethan Stanley

9 Max Ferguson

10 Alex Hawkins

11 Sully Perkins

12 Payton Molinary

15 Drew Baker

16 Daniel Blackmon

17 Lucas Brooks

18 Oliver Summitt

20 Griffin King

21 Zayne Bolen

22 Daigwan Hunter

24 Dylan Lee

25 Gage King

34 Christian Miller

35 Kieffer Widener

37 Skyler Bentley

38 L.J. Ratliff

41 Noah Miller

42 Tobias Reid

44 Isaac Doss

45 Kymani Johnson

46 Tykenevan Thompson

50 Austin Lucas

51 Gage Crabtree

52 Sage Blevins

54 Lucas Droguett

56 Alex Lucas

57 Noah Gilliam

63 Logan Brady

67 Creed Maness

68 Brogan Clay

69 Ayden May

70 Derek Penley

72 Turner Remine

73 Cole Remine

78 Landon Fuller

79 Bradley Lunsford

80 Troy Pennington

81 Davis Monge

83 Zach Stone

84 John Berry

85 Lincoln Baxter

87 Garrett McClure

88 Aidan Woods

junior Caden Sheffield.

Seniors Sage Blevins and Lucas Droguett also earned starts on the defensive line last season.

What is the key for finding more wins?

"The biggest thing for me is to see how hungry we are," Amburgey said. "Our off-

season and weight room work was positive and that has carried over to practice.

"We've always prided ourselves here on being sound in every phase of the game. We want to be able to run the ball and take shots downfield on offense while playing fast and physical on

defense."

AHS ended last season with a 35-7 loss to Christiansburg in the first round of the Region 3D playoffs.

Will a year of game experience help the Falcons mount another playoff run?

"There's no substitute for

experience on Friday night, so we're excited to see that growth," Amburgey said. "We were a very average team last year and our guys are hungry to get back to our standard." ★

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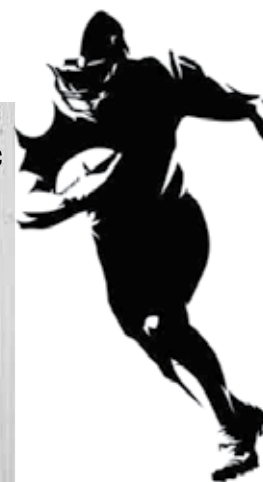
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Bubba Ball II



Young Blue Devils could pose problems

Now playing at Castlewood High School: Bubba Ball II, Electric Boogaloo.

Gregarious offensive guru Bubba Edwards is in his second season as Castlewood's head coach and will implement his pass-happy offense once again. The Blue Devils boast a quartet of game-changers in Brayden Houchins, Forrest McConnell, Kaleb Taylor and Jimmy Shouse.

"We're excited and feel like we had a good offseason," Edwards said. "We felt we made progress moving forward from last year."

Castlewood opened the 2022 season with a 49-20 win over North Greene, but lost its final nine games. The Blue Devils dropped three-point decisions to Honaker and Thomas Walker during the season-ending skid.

"It felt like we just couldn't catch the mojo of the first two games," Edwards said. "At the start of the year it's how few mistakes you make and at the end it is how many plays you make. We didn't make enough plays after the first two games. We had too many interceptions, too many fumbles and that really killed us. We put yards up, we just couldn't get in the end zone at times it felt like. ... We made a lot of mistakes and it kept

getting worse as the year went on."

Castlewood returned just one player who scored a touchdown last season (Shouse), lost guys who gained 992 of the Blue Devils' 1,173 rushing yards and dudes departed who accounted for 1,574 of the squad's 1,594 receiving yards.

Yet, Edwards is still confident that Castlewood can move the chains and make life hard on opposing defenses.

Houchins passed for 725 yards with four touchdowns and 12 interceptions last season after taking over at quarterback for McConnell, who was injured after amassing 869 yards through the air with nine TDs and 11 INTs.

McConnell will mainly be catching passes instead of throwing them this fall.

"We feel at this point with McConnell's athletic ability, we're better moving him to running back, receiver and different areas," Edwards said.

Edwards describes Houchins as a "100 percent pocket passer" and he has plenty of targets in Shouse, Xavier Sanders, Kaleb Taylor, Wes Harvey and Lucas Cress.

"Last year just gives me that past experience and better help in knowing what I'm doing," Houchins said. "I'm



Castlewood Blue Devils

**Class 1D,
Cumberland District**

Schedule

Aug. 25	North Greene (TN)	H
Sept. 1	Honaker	A
Sept. 8	Thomas Walker	H
Sept. 15	Lebanon	H
Sept. 22	Rye Cove	A
Sept. 29	Northwood	H
Oct. 6	Twin Springs	H
Oct. 20	J.I. Burton	A
Oct. 27	Hurley	A
Nov. 3	Eastside	A



2023 Castlewood Blue Devils



Blue Devils Roster

1 Jimmy Shouse
2 Jacob Farmer
3 Xavier Sanders
4 Lucas Cress
5 Sam Gibson
6 Seth Farmer

7 Kaleb Taylor
8 Brayden Houchins
10 Forrest McConnell
11 Ty Parks
12 Ely King
22 Seth Sifford
24 Dylan Godsey

33 Wes Harvey
50 Brunner Houchins
52 Jasper Salyers
53 Matthew Nickels
55 Nate Frye
56 Burton Casey
58 JC Dean

60 Eli Long
61 Mason Long
65 Jacob Young
77 Trey Hamm

learning some new stuff and can't wait to get on the field and show everybody."

Shouse had 84 rushing yards last season, while making 54 tackles and snagging five interceptions on defense.

"He's probably the most athletic kid we have," Edwards said. "We've just got to find a place to put him and let him go."

Seth Sifford (five carries, 82 yards) returns in the backfield and will get carries alongside John Battle transfer Seth Farmer.

Jasper Salyers, Jacob Young, Trey Hamm, Eli Long, Brunner Houchins, Mason Long and JC Dean will play up front on both sides of the ball. Salyers, a sophomore, is playing varsity football for the first time.

Junior linebacker Kaleb

Taylor (60 ½ tackles, two sacks) spearheads the defense and he played well during a preseason jamboree hosted by Twin Valley.

Sifford, Salyers, Cress, Harvey, Sanders and McConnell will also be counted on to make stops.

The Blue Devils had just three seniors on their 22-man preseason roster.

"The ones here are happy to be here, they are coachable and we'll live with it," Edwards said. "It is what it is around here." ★



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Nowhere But Up



Chilhowie Warriors

**Class 1D,
Hogohegee District**

Schedule

Aug. 25	Marion	H
Sept. 1	J.I. Burton	A
Sept. 8	Narrows	A
Sept. 15	Eastside	H
Sept. 22	Northwood	A
Sept. 29	Honaker	A
Oct. 13	Rural Retreat	H
Oct. 20	Rye Cove	H
Oct. 27	Patrick Henry	A
Nov. 3	Holston	H

New chief in charge at Chilhowie

Reid Sturgill is in his first season as the head football coach of the Chilhowie Warriors and the 28-year-old inherits a program that had lost 14 consecutive games entering the season and endured an 0-10 showing last fall.

"I don't want us to completely forget about that as much as learn from it," Sturgill said. "There was a lot of adversity last year and we've used that adversity to fuel a lot of our offseason progress and really motivate us coming into this year."

There is nowhere to go but up for Chilhowie and optimism abounds for a team that returns nine starters on defense and six on the offensive side of the ball.

They also have a new boss in Sturgill, who took over for Jeff Robinson in April after seven seasons as an assistant coach. He is a 2013 graduate of Chilhowie and his father, Mike, was the Warriors' head coach from 1993-2000.

"It's definitely been a learning experience," Reid Sturgill said. "You don't see too much of that side from the assistant role, but I feel like I've made a pretty good adjustment so far."

The defense figures to be a strength as four of the team's top five tacklers from a season ago are back in the fold.

Ezra Taylor (5-foot-9, 170-pounds, sr.) led the squad with 80 stops in 2022.

Meanwhile, middle linebacker Daniel Hutton (5-10, 175, sr.), defensive

end Conner Castle (6-2, 200, sr.) and defensive tackle Bransen Gwinn (6-1, 275, jr.) combined for 124 stops and six sacks. Castle had four sacks among his team-high 11 tackles for loss.

Defensive end Cayden Castle (6-1, 180, sr.), defensive tackle Greg Fullen (6-0, 245, sr.) and the defensive



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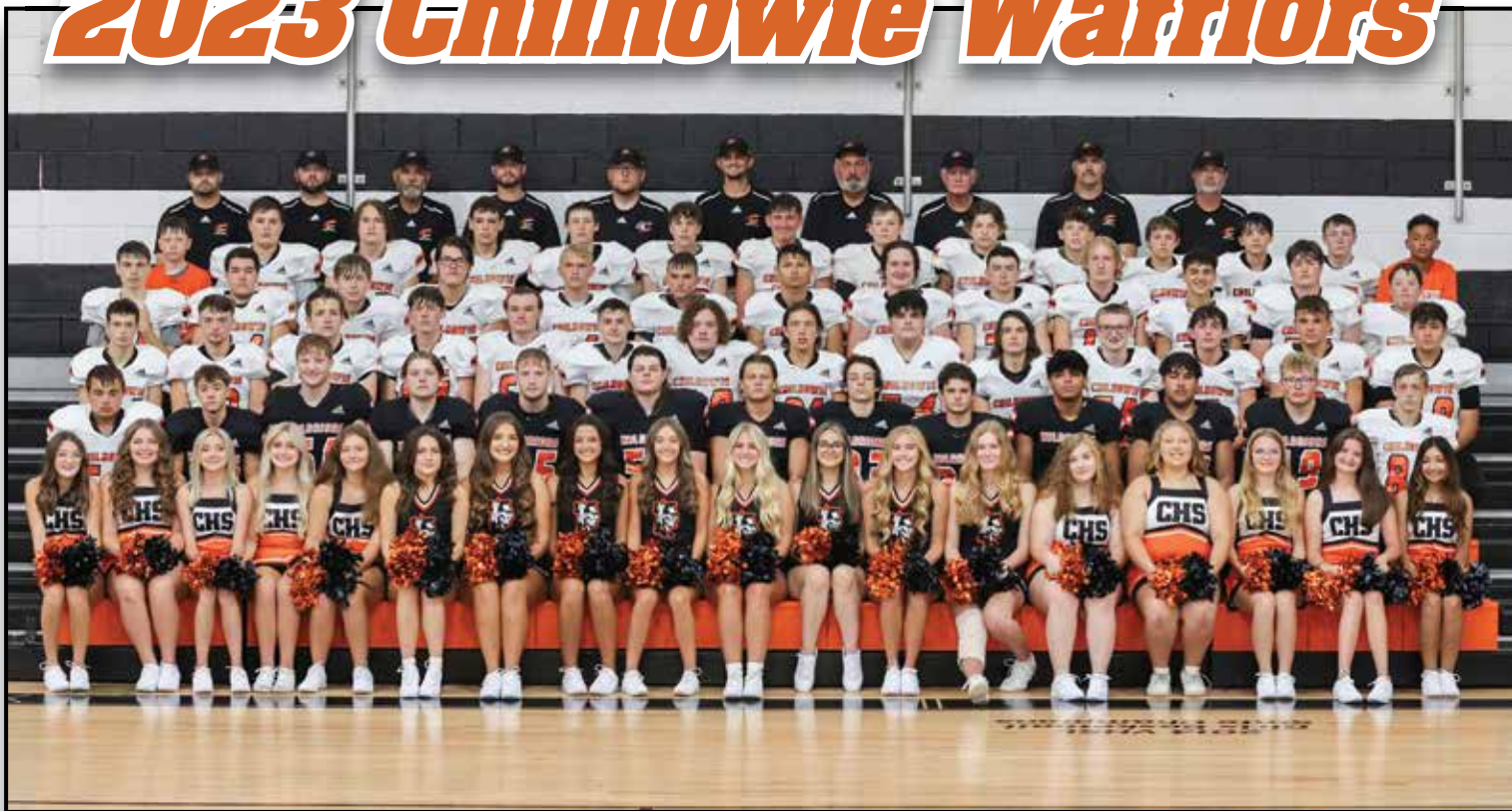


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2023 Chilhowie Warriors



Warriors Roster

1 Landon Hall
2 Noah Hill
3 Jake Russell
4 Justin Gonzalez
6 Rylan Williams
7 Ezra Taylor
9 Marcos Silverio
10 Asher Chapman
11 Nolan Blevins
12 Luke Millinax
13 Drake Grinstead
19 Daniel Hutton
20 James Nash

21 Brandon Miller
22 Ian Sturgill
23 Brax Lampkins
25 Blake Robinson
30 Garrett Dickison
31 Colton Gentry
32 Eliza Hall
33 Talan Poe
34 J.T. Moore
41 Kiptyn Davidson
42 Jordan Crisanto
44 Gavin Walker
52 Ryan Haynes
53 Kanian Biller

54 Nate Hahn
55 Cayden Castle
56 Conner Castle
57 Bryson Carter
58 Ethan Walling
59 Greg Fullen
60 Bransen Gwinn
61 Riley Perkins
62 Harold Roland
64 Luke Montgomery
65 Calvin Eller
66 Kylian Martin
68 Michael Price
70 Preston Gollehon

71 Marcus Conrath
74 Elgin Brooks
75 Aidan Broughman
77 Bodie Miller
79 Anthony Canales
80 Caleb Fuller
81 Martin Widener
83 Damien Dixon
84 Drew Mabe
86 Caden Schools
89 Greg Rouse

backfield trio of Ian Sturgill (5-7, 155, jr.), Rylan Williams (5-9, 150, jr.) and Noah Hill (6-1, 170, jr.) round out the list of returning starters.

Marcos Silverio, Drake Grinstead, Landon Hall, Blake Robinson and Brandon Miller will also see playing time on D.

Offensively, the Warriors return their top scorer and rusher, most productive wide

receiver and quarterback. The Warriors scored just 101 total points last season and scored multiple touchdowns in a game only four times.

Marcos Silverio rushed for 405 yards and four touchdowns last season, while Ian Sturgill caught 15 passes for 127 yards and a score.

Sophomore QB Asher Chapman (6-2, 175, soph.)

threw for 674 yards last season with five touchdowns and 17 interceptions. While he experienced some growing pains as a ninth-grader, he now knows what it's like to take snaps at the varsity level.

"I couldn't be more proud of Asher and the effort he's put in this summer," Sturgill said. "He spent a lot of time on that practice field working

with receivers, a lot of time watching film and really developing his game. I'm proud to see a sophomore step up like that."

Noah Hill, Rylan Williams, Silverio and Sturgill will be top targets for Chapman as the Warriors will use more spread sets offensively. Ezra Taylor, Justin Gonzalez (5-10, 190, soph.), Jake Russell (5-10, 150, jr.) and James



“Bubs” Nash (5-7, 140, sr.) should also get their share of touches.

Senior Greg Fullen (6-0, 245, sr.) is the leader of a much-improved offensive line from his spot at left tackle. Nate Hahn (5-11, 275, jr.), Aidan Braughman (6-1, 230, soph.), Brodie Miller (6-1, 190, soph.) and Bransen Gwinn will provide the blocking up front.

Sturgill’s tenure began with

a much-anticipated Week 1 clash with Marion in a Smyth County showdown, quite a way to enter a gig that he’s growing more comfortable with by the day.

“It’s definitely hit me,” Sturgill said. “This is a school and community I have so much love and passion for. We’re working on getting the right things done around here.” ★



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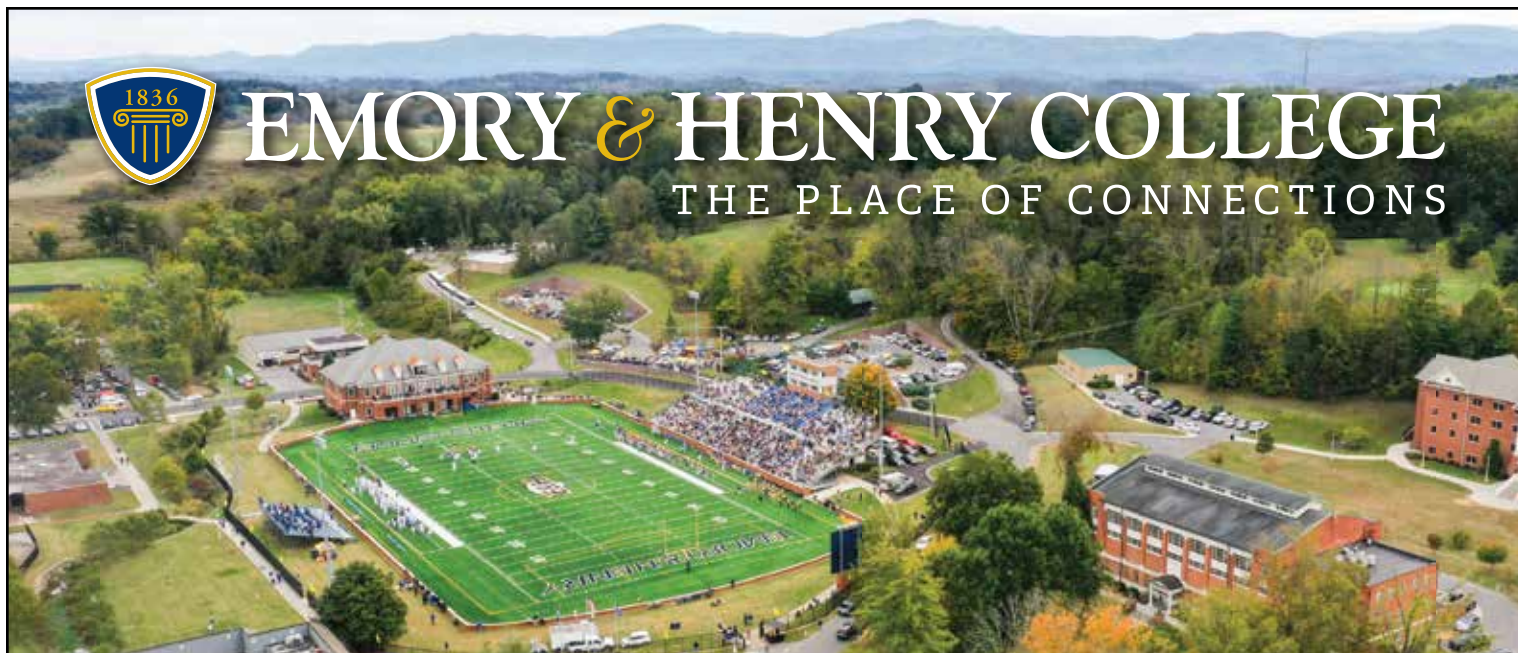
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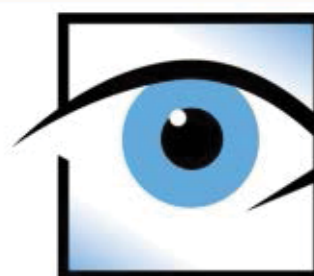
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Dobyns-Bennett Indians

**Class 6A, Big East
Conference**

Schedule

Aug. 18	Farragut	A
Aug. 25	Greeneville	H
Sept. 1	West Ridge	A
Sept. 8	Jefferson County	A
Sept. 15	Asheville (NC)	H
Sept. 22	Morristown East	H
Sept. 29	Elizabethton	H
Oct. 13	William Blount	A
Oct. 20	David Crockett	A
Oct. 27	Science Hill	H



Indians seek to dethrone 'Toppers

Few high school football stadiums have the college feel that J.Fred Johnson Stadium does.

It's up to Dobyns-Bennett to make that atmosphere a positive experience. Reclaiming the Big East Conference crown after a two-year run by Science Hill would certainly help with that situation.

Fifth-year head coach Joey Christian likes what he has to work with, even if there is a lack of experience in some areas.

"I like this bunch for sure... Some of [these seniors] played behind some guys that were talented last year for sure. We are looking for some of those guys to step up and play," Christian said. "We have got some that are very experienced. They have led us through the weight room and our offseason conditioning and all the stuff we have done all through the winter, spring and summer. I like this group. I like how we have worked, I like what we have done up to now. If

we can stay healthy and keep that kind of attitude and play through some adversity when we get it, we will be fine."

While the Indians return plenty of production, there are some missing faces, starting at quarterback, where four candidates are looking to replace dependable Jake Carson, who threw for 24 touchdowns and just five interceptions last season.

Will Hurd, who has been

in the program for four years, was in a preseason competition with Gib Maupin, Austin Sykes and Taylor Blankenship. All can throw the ball, but Christian said ball security was of the utmost importance.

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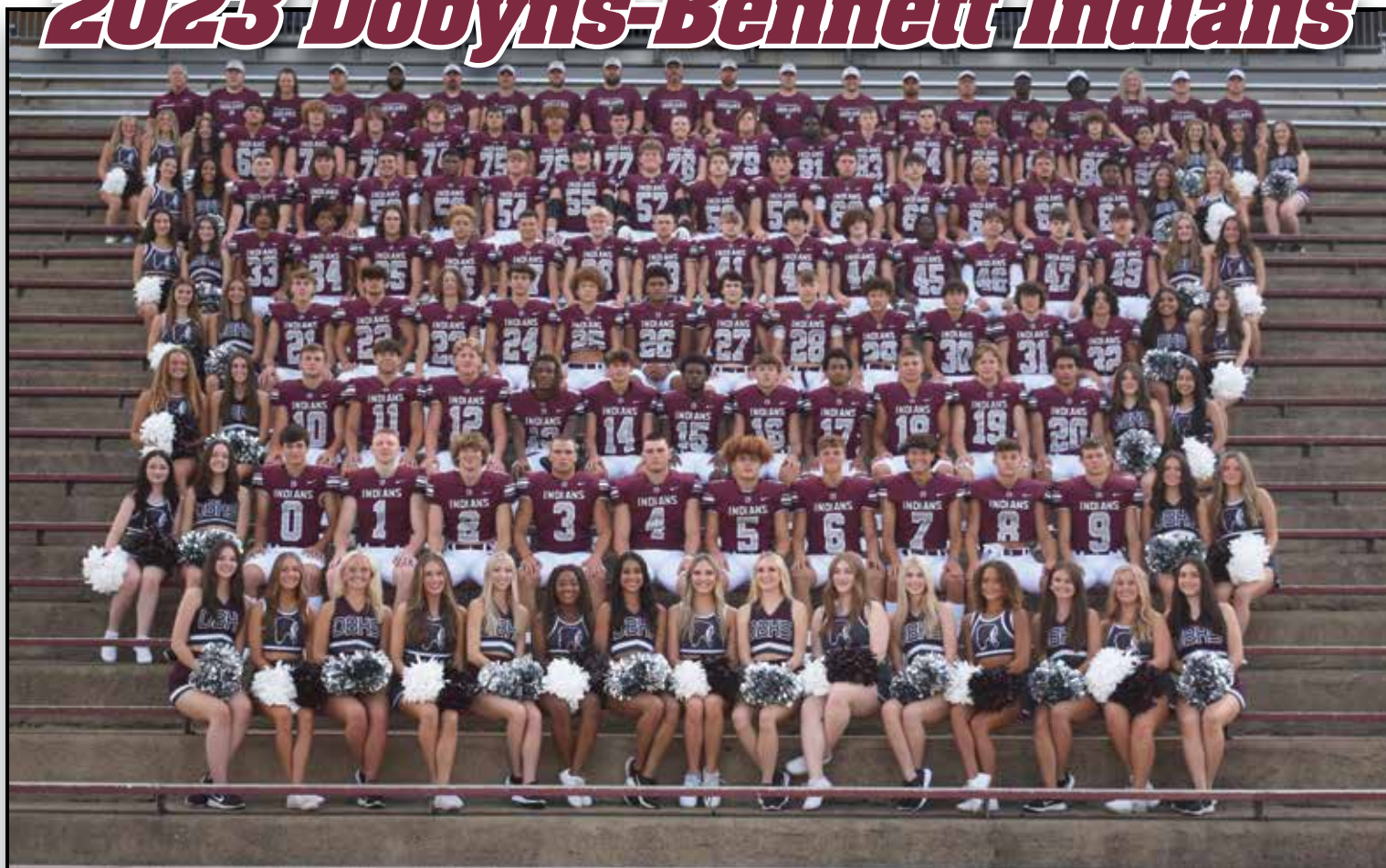
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2023 Dobyns-Bennett Indians



at the quarterback position you better have Brett Favre arm talent," Christian said. "He could get by with doing some stuff like that, but these guys ain't got that. We can't do that. Whoever that is that shows up and can win the team and display that we can trust them they will be the starter and we will roll with them. That may linger into the season, I don't know, but it may not."

Whoever the signal-caller is will have weapons to work with, including speedy backs Brayden Simpson, Peyton Franklin and Hayden Jobe. There are plethora of receivers that will be asked to replace the production of graduated Jonavan Gillespie and Hayden Russell, including Dustin Freeman, Rome Pruitt, Dacarri

Dixon, Tylen Taylor, Tegan Begley and Amari Maddux.

There are also replacements being sought on the offensive line. Will Ford and Gavin Cummerford are the lone returnees, but they are switching positions. Sophomore Tyler Grizzle (6'3, 292), who Christian calls one of the more physical players the program has seen, is in competition, along with Maliki Starnes, Jacob Isaacs and Baker Correll.

"I have always said 6A football is a line of scrimmage game. You better have eight



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2023 Dobyns-Bennett Indians

Indians Roster

0 Will Hurd	19 Cooper Reed	39 Aiden Rhoton	63 Luke Cox
1 Keldan Mullins	20 Nigel Vidale	41 Haden Burtleson	64 Braylon Fugate
2 Dusten Freeman	21 Tegan Begley	43 Luke Lundy	65 Sam Hyatt
3 Justin Hale	22 Peyton Franklin	44 Paker DeFord	68 Jack Pritchard
4 Branson Carswell	23 Dylan Murray	45 Corde Moore	70 Will Ford
5 Jai' Carnes	24 Hayden Jobe	46 Elii Weakley	72 Cooper Bellamy
6 Gib Maupin	25 Noah Raines	47 Jason Scheuch	74 Asher Elliott
7 Mason Kerkhoff	26 Amari Maddux	49 Stone Collier	75 Dylan Powell
8 Rome Pruitt	27 Weston Cordell	50 Jacob Isaacs	76 Zackhi Williams
9 Brayden Simpson	28 Gabe Marshall	51 Mason Price	77 David Kalil
10 Cooper Martin	29 Zabian Goodwin	52 Baker Correll	78 Caden Moody
11 Eli Wallace	30 Cooper McLain	53 Maliki Starnes	79 Eli Depew
12 Kaden Kulbacki	31 Talan Pauley	54 Maddex Artrip	81 Kosiiah Steele
13 Tylen Taylor	32 Aiden Villa	55 Gavin Commerford	83 Jessee Bledsoe
14 Taylor Blankenship	33 Abrahm Graves	57 Tyler Grizzle	84 Caleb Steach
15 Tray Windham	34 T-Joe Sage	58 Mitch Newhouse	85 Kevin Espinoza
16 Peyton Newman	35 Devin Murdock	59 Nikolas McVey	87 Ricky Garcia
17 Jaylen Thomas	36 Reid Riggins	60 Ryan Lovelace	88 Victor Kelly
18 Austin Sykes	37 Ethan Cline	61 Stephen Harris	89 Fabian Becerra
	38 Cade Holton	62 Javon Graves	

offensive linemen that you think you can win with," he said. "We are not there."

Defensively, the Indians are led by senior linebacker Branson Carswell, who is approaching Jacob Roller's school record for career tackles. He will be joined by defensive linemen Nick McVey, Justin Hale, Luke Cox and Cooper Martin.

"They are not the biggest guys ever, but it is high school football. This ain't the SEC, we are not playing in Neyland Stadium, we play in J Fred," Christian said. "A smaller guy that will just sit in there and will fight for three seconds

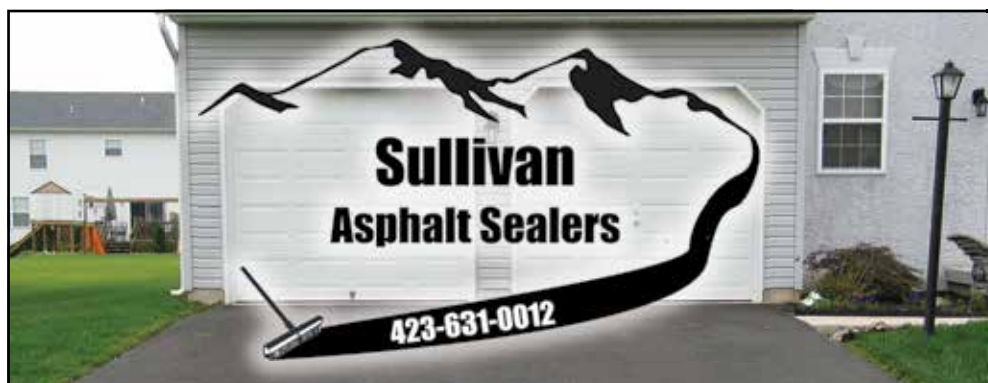
and run to the football, you can win in high school football with guys like that and those are the kind of guys we are going to run with."

Carswell could be joined at linebacker by Kaden Kulbacki and Devin Murdock, while the secondary will be led by three-starters Nigel Vitale, Zabian Goodwin, Jai' Carnes and Simpson. The biggest loss from last season may have been specialist Grayton Manning, leaving the Indians looking for answers in the kicking game.

Dobyns-Bennett, which has already faced off with Farragut and Greeneville,

will face its usual gauntlet of competition, including the finale with Science Hill, which could have Big East implications at the end.

"I love our schedule, a little tougher, but my thoughts on that was come playoff time maybe we will be a little bit battle tested and we will have a few more scars on our bodies," Christian said. "Those scars are going to make us tougher and a little bit hungrier and more mean come playoff time." ★



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Moving Forward



Eastside Spartans

**Class 1D,
Cumberland District**

Schedule

Aug. 25	Wise County Central	H
Sept. 1	Hurley	A
Sept. 8	River View (WV)	A
Sept. 15	Chilhowie	A
Sept. 29	J.I. Burton	A
Oct. 6	Rye Cove	H
Oct. 13	Twin Springs	A
Oct. 20	Thomas Walker	H
Oct. 27	Auburn	H
Nov. 3	Castlewood	H

Spartans focused on the present

The good news for the Eastside Spartans in 2022 was that they closed out the season with a 55-38 victory over archrival Castlewood.

The bad news for the Eastside Spartans is that triumph turned out to be their only win of the year.

"It was rough," said junior fullback/defensive tackle Dayton Stanley. "But we did everything we could to get our heads up. Coming into this year we don't speak about it much, you know. We've got to look forward and can't look back on that."

Eastside should be improved as the crew from Coeburn will rely on some battle-tested standouts and an influx of promising newcomers.

The 5-foot-10, 180-pound Stanley is among the former and he is a bruiser that can dole out hard hits on both sides of the ball. He was a second-team All-Cumberland District honoree as both a

fullback and on the D-Line in 2022.

"Dayton will try to run over you," said Eastside junior quarterback Payton Adkins. "Whether you're 6-10 or 5-8."

Adkins took over at quarterback in the fifth game of the season and seemed to get better each time out. He threw two touchdowns and also rushed for a score in that aforementioned season finale against Castlewood and in the contest before that racked up 207 yards through the air in a loss to Thomas Walker.

"He really takes care of the football and the thing I like about coaching Payton is he plays with his chest," said Eastside coach Mike Rhodes. "You're never going to question his heart. He gives anything and everything he's got and leaves it all out on the field."

Running back Luke Trent (6-0, 170, jr.) and wide receiver Gabe Raymond (6-1, 165, jr.) are also in the business of making big plays.



2023 Eastside Spartans



"Gabe Raymond did some good things last year," Rhodes said. "This summer he has hit another level."

Adkins should be able to spread the wealth.

"We've got some athletes this year," the signal-caller said.

Tackle Reagan Wood (6-3, 230, jr.), right guard Colton Yates (5-10, 200, sr.) and center Noah Morgan (5-10, 195, jr.) anchor the offensive line.

A lot of those same guys hold down spots on the defensive side of the ball, while Tanner Perry (6-0, 175, sr.) is back in the fold at cornerback.

Junior Yasir Hilton is a specimen at 6-foot-7 and 275-pounds and he spent time at offensive tackle, defensive tackle and tight end in the preseason.

"He's an athlete," Rhodes said. "He's got good feet and moves well."

There is also a youth movement

at Eastside as the 27-man preseason roster included 10 freshmen.

Ninth-graders such as offensive lineman/defensive tackle Landry Carrico (6-1, 250), tailback/linebacker Keldan Hamilton (6-1, 195), offensive lineman Tristan Fields (5-10, 220), linebacker Noah Hamilton (6-1, 190) and linebacker Dalton Yates (6-0, 180) figure to make an instant impact.

"We'll probably start five or six freshmen both ways," Rhodes said. "They are not your average freshmen. Their football IQ is extremely high. Once they catch up to the speed of the game in a couple of weeks they'll be ready to roll. The future looks good." ★



Spartans Roster

1 Tanner Perry

2 Payton Adkins

5 Braxton Freeman

6 Dayton Stanley

7 Noah Barnette

8 Dalton Yates

9 Gabe Raymond

10 Noah Hamilton

12 Keldan Hamilton

13 Jonathon Elliott

21 Chase Carico

22 Luke Trent

23/64 Yasir Hilton

25 Christian Slagle

27 Steven More

33 Wyatt Kennedy

50 Tristan Fields

51 Noah Morgan

53 Mason Blevins

55 Jayden Tedesco

56 Reagan Wood

58 Colton Yates

64 Yasir Hilton

72 Landry Carico

74 Tony Underwood

75 Christian Bolling

77 Luke Dutton

78 Bryson Collins



Tradition Returns



Gate City Blue Devils

Class 2D, Mtn 7 District



Schedule

Aug. 25	Richlands	A
Sept. 1	Middlesboro (Ky)	H
Sept. 8	Abingdon	H
Sept. 15	Marion	H
Sept. 22	Union	A
Sept. 29	Tennessee High	A
Oct. 13	Lee High	H
Oct. 20	John Battle	A
Oct. 27	Wise County Central	H
Nov. 3	Ridgeview	A

Blue Devils seek repeat performance

It was a year to remember for Gate City football fans in 2022.

Behind a crew of 14 seniors, the Blue Devils earned their first winning record since 2014 and posted their first playoff win in eight years.

"We had good senior leaders that the rest of our kids followed," GC head coach Jeremy Houseright said. "It turned into a special season with a lot of firsts."

GC finished with an 8-4 record, lost just one game in

the Mountain 7 District and defeated Union 21-14 in the first round of the Region 2D playoffs.

"Now the question is can we do it two years in a row," Houseright said.

The 2023 cast features 16 seniors and established talents such as senior quarterback Luke Bledsoe and sophomore linebacker Mason Hickman.

The production of running back Ethan Fleming (15 touchdowns) was vital last season, but Houseright said

there was no secret to the turnaround.

"It just came down to the hard work the kids put into the off-season," Houseright said. "We actually didn't start out too hot with a 0-2 record. But after the Radford game, the kids had a different mindset."

That Radford game was a demoralizing 62-12 setback.

GC responded with a seven-game win streak that began with a 24-7 victory against Abingdon.

A couple of GC players

credited those wins to a fiery halftime speech delivered by Houseright during the Radford loss.

"I didn't have anything to do with it," Houseright said. "The kids just came out and battled every day. We got a few breaks, created some momentum and things kept rolling."

GC rolled all the way to a showdown against Ridgeview for the Mountain 7 title. The



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2023 Gate City Blue Devils



Blue Devil Roster

2 Gabe Johnson
3 Eli McMurray
4 Elijah Hurd
6 Landen McDonald
7 Kaden Houseright
8 Luke Bledsoe
10 Walker Hillman
11 Layton Barnett
12 Jackson Jones
13 Bryson Smith
14 Tanner Fleming
15 Bryson Bailey
20 Blake Qualls

21 Eli Hicks
22 Keven Hall
23 Hayden Wilson
24 Garrett McClain
25 Dalton Browning
28 Keegan Light
30 Carter Derting
31 Connor Ritter
32 Ethan McConnell
33 Jude Crawford
34 Jerod Carter
35 Corey Byrd
40 Carter Howard
41 Mason Hickman

42 Keegan Bright
43 Zach Depriest
44 Trent Williams
45 Isaiah Falin
50 Nick Youmans
51 Bodie Morgan
52 Casen Harmon
53 Connor Darnell
55 Jacob Bowman
56 David Doran
58 Nathan Penley
59 Judd Kegley
62 Logan Cassidy
63 Caden Fields

64 Aiden Freeman
65 Nathaniel Gilliam
66 Domenic Collins
67 Riley Jones
68 Connor McDavid
69 Hayden Frazier
71 Payton Berry
72 Wyatt Hall
74 Nathaniel Wells
75 Kaidyn Brown
78 Nathaniel Sloan
84 Brenton Sloan
85 Ethan Ferguson

Blue Devils managed just 92 total yards in a 41-0 loss.

As usual, Houseright was reluctant to single out players on media day. But Bledsoe is the key leader here.

"Luke has done a lot for us since he came into our program as a freshman," Houseright said. "We also have some other skill kids that made plays for us last season."

Senior Eli McMurray and junior Gabe Johnson return at receiver.

"We've also got some younger kids who made an impact last year, especially as the year went on," Houseright said. "They will play a bigger role."

Hickman guides the

"We've also got some younger kids who made an impact last year, especially as the year went on," Houseright said. "They will play a bigger role."

defense after making 90 tackles and forcing five fumbles last season.

GC should also benefit from a group of physical athletes who were dominant at the middle school level.

"Things are coming together," Houseright said. "We hope to have more depth to keep our starters fresh."

Following the 2022 breakthrough, Houseright hopes to keep the good times

rolling at Legion Field.

"Our community is special," Houseright said. "Our fans and players have been hungry, and the support grew with each game last season."

"We're hoping to build off what we accomplished in 2022. We're still searching for some key pieces, but we've got the makings to have another successful year." ★





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George Wythe Maroons

**Class 1C, Mtn Empire
District**

Schedule

Aug. 25	Radford	A
Sept. 8	Graham	H
Sept. 15	Carroll County	H
Sept. 22	Rural Retreat	H
Sept. 29	Galax	A
Oct. 6	Giles	H
Oct. 13	J.I. Burton	A
Oct. 20	Fort Chiswell	A
Oct. 27	Grayson County	A
Nov. 3	Auburn	H

Maroons still hungry for more

When the George Wythe Maroons reconvened for offseason weightlifting sessions in early-January, they did so with renewed focus as they aim to once again be among the Virginia High School League's elite.

Coming off a season in which GW went 10-4, won the Region 1C championship and finished as VHSL Class 1 state runner-up, the Maroons have turned the page and hope to author another memorable chapter in one of the area's longest-running success stories.

The crew from Wytheville has not had a sub-.500 record since 1996 and the Maroons have made the playoffs every season since 2007.

This is a program that is used to winning and winning a lot.

"I was worried they might have the mentality of 'Oh, we did it' and kind of stick with that, but they haven't," said George Wythe coach Brandon Harner. "They want to get to that point again

instead of going the other way. They know what it takes to get there now and they've had great attitudes."

Two guys who played well in GW's 49-27 loss to Riverheads in the 2022 state finals are the cornerstones for the Maroons.

Tandon Smith took over as George Wythe's starting quarterback in the third game of the season due to an injury and had a stellar performance as a dual-threat signal-caller. He threw for 1,084 yards and nine touchdowns, while rushing for 912 yards and 14 scores. He threw a TD pass and also had a rushing touchdown in that aforementioned setback to Riverheads.

As an inside linebacker, Smith amassed 13 tackles for loss last fall.

"The main thing we took from last season was the positive energy," Smith said. "We hope to ramp it up again this year."

Tailback Laden Houston had a 90-yard kickoff return for a score and also had a

3-yard touchdown run against Riverheads. He finished the season with 560 receiving yards and 485 rushing yards.

As an outside linebacker, he had 13 tackles for loss as well.

The dude can do it all.

Brayden Rainey (6-2, 215, jr.), Trey Rainey (5-11, 175, jr.), Austin Repass (6-0, 170, sr.) and Caleb Campbell (6-0, 160, sr.) are playmakers as well. Shane Huff (5-11, 165, jr.) was a star on George

Hollis Rigney (5-10, 205, jr.) and Alex Murrell (5-10, 185, sr.) lead the way on the offensive line.

"With what we have coming back," Harner said. "I think offensively, I will be very disappointed if we're not hard to handle."

“ *They want to get to that point again instead of going the other way. They know what it takes to get there now and they've had great attitudes.”*

Wythe's state runner-up basketball team and has joined the gridiron squad.

Brock Ayers (6-1, 295, jr.),

The other side of the ball took a major hit as mainstays like Leyton Fowler, Colton Green, Ben Jollay and Luke



2023 George Wythe Maroons



Maroon Roster

1 Laden Houston
2 Shane Huff
3 Brayden Rainey
4 Trey Rainey
5 Holden Luttrell
6 Luke Clarke
7 Ethan Gates
8 Cade Bralley
9 Kaiden Irby
11 Austin Repass

12 Caleb Cmapbell
13 J'mere Rivens
14 Jeriah Cooper
15 Tandom Smith
16 Jessee Collins
17 Ashton Crigger
19 Isaiah Alford
21 Aaron Jackson
22 Luca Charles
23 Camden Skeens
24 Urijah Hunt-Diorio

25 Trenton Hall
50 Hollis Rigney
51 Gunner Gray
52 Kyle Stephens
53 Byron Haskins
54 William McCauley-Gray
55 Dylan Sisk
56 Trey Sparks
60 Isaiah Cook
65 Bryson Bard

69 Thomas Mitchell
70 Alex Murrell
74 Jared Carpenter
71 Brock Ayers
75 Isaac Cabell
76 Charles Aikens
77 Brett Smelser
Seth Ortiz



Jollay all graduated. Fowler was the Bristol Herald Courier's 2022 defensive player of the year and is now suiting up for the Bluefield University Rams.

"Defensively, I think it's going to be a work in progress because we had to plug in so many people," Harner said.

Many of those same standouts mentioned on offense will also be counted on defensively as George Wythe does not have much depth as is the case with most Class 1 squads.

"It feels a little different," Smith said. "The senior group left, but the new kids are getting after it."

George Wythe faces a

rigorous schedule once again that includes defending VHSL Class 2 state champ Graham and Class 3 Carroll County. Grayson County, Galax and Giles – along with the Maroons – give the Mountain Empire District plenty of regional title contenders.

"Our district's one of the toughest in the state for Single-A football," Harner said. "We're preparing for a playoff run."

Perhaps a deep run into December like a year ago.

"I'm very excited about this group of kids, because of the attitude, the work ethic that we've had from January 4 until now," Harner said. "The kids have really bought in and

the leadership's been there. The senior group [from 2022] kind of laid that foundation of what I wanted and this group's really took hold of that and continued that." ★





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Under the Lights | 31

Work Harder



**Grundy
Golden Wave**

**Class 1D, Black
Diamond District**

Schedule

Aug. 25	Carroll County	H
Sept. 1	Ridgeview	A
Sept. 15	Patrick Henry	H
Sept. 22	Honaker	A
Sept. 29	Tazewell	A
Oct. 6	Twin Valley	A
Oct. 13	Hurley	H
Oct. 20	Marion	A
Nov. 3	Wise County Central	H

Depleted Golden Wave still solid

If Grundy is to repeat as Region 1D champions, the Golden Wave will have to do so with plenty of new faces in new places.

Keegan Bartley has replaced Craig Plymal as head coach, defensive coordinator Travis Fiser stepped down, Ian Scammell departed as the school's all-time leading rusher, the entire starting offensive line graduated and dominant defensive end Wyatt Bush decided not to play this season.

Despite the turnover in personnel, Grundy should be solid.

"I think we're going to surprise a lot of people," said senior tight end/wide receiver/defensive end Jonah Looney. "We have toughness and we don't stop. ... The same traits as last year, really."

The preseason went well for the Wave.

"So far, it's been really good," Bartley said. "We're

excited, we're working hard and trying to get kids in shape. We've got a learning curve with a new offense and new defense, but they are picking things up pretty quick."

What is the new-look offense?

"A variation of the wishbone and flexbone," Bartley said. "We're going to scheme to give us the best opportunity. We're not going to stick with one thing; we'll throw different formations and different plays out there. New nuances every week."

The versatile and quick Logan Lester leads the way for the offense.

"He is by far one of the best players in the region as far as athleticism," Bartley said. "He can run it, throw it and catch it."

Ethan Roberts will be the featured back as he takes over in that role for the hard-charging Scammell, who is now playing at the University

of Virginia's College at Wise.

"He loves Ian Scammell, but he's always had to be behind Ian Scammell," Bartley said. "Now it's his time to shine running the ball. We'll see what Ethan can do."

Senior Tristian Ellis moved in from Maryland and has earned rave reviews as a playmaker, while Carson Griffey will get a bulk of the snaps at quarterback. Jonah Looney figures to be a top target at 6-foot-4 and 205-pounds.

"As tall as he is," Bartley said. "We have to take advantage of that."

Lucas Boyd (5-11, 230, jr.), Luke Shelton (5-10, 235, soph.), Brady Deel (5-10, 200, jr.), Talen Looney (6-1, 220, soph.) and Lucas Bandy (6-1, 265, jr.) are expected to step in and step up on the offensive line.

"It's definitely going to be



2023 Grundy Golden Wave



Golden Wave Roster

1 Logan Lester

2 Ethan Roberts

3 Tristian Ellis

5 Carson Griffey

8 Jonathan Thompson

10 Jacob Fields

11 Trey Taylor

12 Ayden Whited

19 Brody Coleman

20 Trenton Meadows

21 Jackson Deel

22 Shaiem Gordon

26 Teagan Abujayyab

32 Garon Marcum

40 Ryder Anderson

45 Parker Conaway

48 Carson Deel

50 Lucas Boyd

51 Andrew Scarberry

52 Brady Deel

55 Luke Shelton

60 Henry Brown

63 Talen Looney

64 Bradley Squire

66 Lucas Bandy

70 Lucas Mayhorn

71 Jaxson Ratliff

72 Thomas Estep

74 Triston Keene

75 Gabe Ratliff

76 Blake Childress

77 Brayden Ratliff

78 Dillian Justus

80 Lucas Vance

85 Will Vandyke

88 Jonah Looney

some growing pains, but you can see the potential with them," Bartley said. "They are five young guys, but five guys who know football. We'll make some tweaks here and there and try to find the consistency."

While Bush graduated,

Grundy's defense still features 5-10, 170-pound junior linebacker Carson Deel.

"I've always said that Carson Deel is the best defensive player to come through Grundy in about 20 years," Bartley said. "We're lucky to have him. ... We

should be pretty good on defense."

That defense will be tested by a tough schedule that includes four Class 2 opponents and Class 3 Carroll County.

"Our only off week is our actual off week," Bartley said.

"Every team is going to be a new challenge. No gimmes on our schedule. ... If we win on a Friday night, we're focused on the next week almost immediately with our schedule."

Grundy finished 8-5 last season in winning its first

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"The ones that were here with us last year, I think they got the taste of what the experience was like," Bartley said. "We're striving for that again. We're not going to say region championship or bust, but that's our goal to get back again. We don't want

to be one and done [in the playoffs]."

Bartley had been an assistant at Grundy, his alma mater, since 2012 prior to being elevated to head coach.

"It's been a really smooth transition," Jonah Looney said. "He's a great coach and a really good guy and all the players love him."

The feeling is mutual.

"I love their attitudes," Bartley said. "We set the motto as 'Work Harder' on Day 1 and the kids really bought in. They know they have to outwork everybody that we play. Their attitudes are great, they are having fun and that's all I can ask for." ★



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Winning Is Contagious



No slowdown at Holston

After winning back-to-back regional championships, some figured that the Holston Cavaliers would take a step back in 2022.

While they came up short in their quest for a three-peat, the dudes from Damascus still had a successful season in compiling an 8-4 record and rolled to a first-round playoff victory at Rye Cove.

"We had lost a majority of the team from the year before and a lot of people wondered how we'd carry on," said Holston coach Chris Akers. "A lot of our skill guys stepped up and played hard. We found out we had some guys who could help us."

More wins could follow this fall for the Cavs.

"This is a hard-working group," Akers said. "We have about 75 percent of our starters coming back on both sides of the football. We are missing some key seniors [from 2022], but we'll see who can fill those spots."

The headliner is 5-foot-11, 149-pound junior Noah Tweed.

The definition of a dual-threat quarterback, he piled up 1,007 rushing yards and 15 touchdowns, while throwing for 906 yards and seven scores in a breakout season.

In that aforementioned 31-8 playoff win over Rye Cove, Tweed tallied 174 yards and three TDs with his legs, while passing for 95 yards and hooking up with Merrick Kestner Buchanan on a scoring strike.

Tweed also holds down a spot in the defensive secondary.

"He's a good player," Akers said. "On both sides of the ball."

Tweed is surrounded by several good players as well.

Senior Merrick Kestner Buchanan (602 rushing yards, five TDs) and junior Luke Greene (541 rushing yards, six touchdowns) give the Cavaliers two quality running backs.

Senior Landon Sanders (12 catches, 263 yards) and junior Hayden Sinclair (nine receptions, 215 yards) are the top two returning pass-catchers.



Holston Cavaliers

**Class 1D,
Hogoheegee District**

Schedule

Aug. 25	Eastern Montgomery	H
Sept. 1	Narrows	H
Sept. 8	John Battle	A
Sept. 15	Honaker	A
Sept. 22	Hurley	H
Oct. 6	Patrick Henry	A
Oct. 13	Northwood	H
Oct. 20	Johnson County (TN)	A
Oct. 27	Rural Retreat	H
Nov. 3	Chilhowie	A



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2023 Holston Cavaliers



Cavaliers Roster

1 Luke Greene
2 Colton Hess
4 Collin Widener
5 Merrick Kestner Buchanan
7 Desmond Mickens

8 Ashton Widener
9 Noah Tweed
10 Eli Tweed
12 Landon Sanders
14 Brodie Richardson
15 Hayden Sinclair
50 Elijah Berryhill

51 Jacob Harris
52 Lance Thomas
53 Briar Thomas
54 Tristan Hess
55 Gabe Foster
58 Caleb Casey
60 Jo'Lon Norman

61 Levi Parks
62 Colt Thomas
65 Bryce Lane
66 Owen Rouse
70 Boone Thomas
72 Israel Parks

Meanwhile, four of the squad's five starting offensive linemen return.

Lance Thomas (6-3, 245, sr.) at center, Caleb Casey (5-11, 187, sr.) and Tristan Hess (6-0, 196, sr.) at guards and Boone Thomas (6-3, 258, sr.) at left tackle are proven in providing protection.

"They are small, but they are all pretty quick and move well," Akers said.

Holston must replace twin brothers and defensive game-changers Dillon Bott and Dustin Bott at inside linebacker, but the rest of the unit is back.

Gabe Foster, a 5-foot-11,

165-pound junior linebacker, is the top returning tackler as he made 41 stops, four tackles and one interception a season ago.

Merrick Kestner Buchanan made 40 tackles.

Lance Thomas (31 tackles), Tristan Hess (10 sacks) and Caleb Casey are strong up front on the D-Line.

Tweed, Greene, Colton Hess (6-1, 167, jr.) and Sanders will lock things down in the secondary. Hess made 28 stops, while Tweed snagged four interceptions.

"They are not selfish with anything," Akers said. "They play as a group and play as a

team."

Holston's preseason roster numbered 25 with six of those being seniors.

"We've got to stay healthy," Akers said. "We can't afford to get anybody hurt Monday

through Thursday. Another concern is our schedule has gotten tougher. We picked up Johnson County and Hurley and those two teams are better." ★

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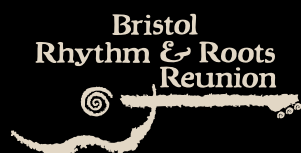
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New Home, Same Hope



Honaker Tigers

Class 1D, Hogoheegee District

Schedule

Aug. 24	Lebanon	A
Sept. 1	Castlewood	H
Sept. 8	Rye Cove	A
Sept. 15	Holston	H
Sept. 22	Grundy	H
Sept. 29	Chilhowie	H
Oct. 13	Narrows	A
Oct. 20	Patrick Henry	A
Oct. 27	Northwood	H
Nov. 3	Rural Retreat	A

Honaker joins Hogo as favorite in 1D

There are extremely high expectations for the high-scoring Honaker Tigers as they are predicted by most as the preseason pick to win the VHSL Region 1D championship.

"It's a good thing to be thought of as the favorites," second-year head coach Todd Tiller said. "In a way it means you have a talented team coming up and there

are a lot of expectations. We're taking it one day at a time and not thinking ahead. You can't get there at the end unless you take care of the little things up front, so we are attacking every day."

The Tigers averaged 33.6 points per game in finishing 7-4 last season and they should be even more explosive in 2023.

Senior Aidan Lowe is one

of the most dynamic players in Southwest Virginia and scored eight touchdowns last year in a win over Patrick Henry. He finished with 1,393 rushing yards, 445 receiving yards and 291 kick return yards.

Quarterback Peyton Musick (1,907 passing yards, 25 touchdowns), wide receiver Parker Bandy (40 catches,

732 yards, eight TDs) and tight end Malachi Lowe (21 catches, 275 yards) were also first-team All-Region 1D performers for the Tigers.

Sophomore Avery Musick, senior Tyler Stephens and senior Nick Ball should also catch passes from Peyton Musick. Junior Jaxon Dye will

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WAY TO GO TEAM

2023 Honaker Tigers



Tigers Roster

1 Peyton Musick
2 Brayden Musick
3 Avery Musick
4 Parker Bandy
5 Jaxon Dye
6 Austin Clayburne
7 Tyler Stephens
10 Nick Ball

12 Aidan Lowe
13 Kam Beavers
14 Levi Honaker
16 Braden Mabe
19 Isaac Johnson
21 Cage Castilon
26 Willie Rose
27 Gracie Cook
33 Eli McGlothlin

50 Maddox Sykes
52 Levi Johnson
53 Alex Honaker
54 Jacob Powers
55 Aiden Gilbert
59 Elijah Musick
60 Logan McGuire
62 Joshua Childress
63 Evan Kennedy

65 Peyton Whited
66 Max Tuggle
67 Blake Sheppard
70 Braxton McGlothlin
71 Tyler Cole
72 Travis Coleman
78 Ethan Hale
88 Malachi Lowe

get some carries.

"I would put this bunch against anybody in [Class] 1A and 2A as far as skill-wise goes," Tiller said.

Peyton Musick will air it out.

"Peyton made leaps last year and improved each week," Tiller said. "There was a three-game stretch where he threw 15 touchdowns

and no interceptions. He has a firm grasp of the offense and will be a benefit this year having him in the same offense."

Aidan Lowe suffered a leg injury in a season-ending loss to Grundy, but has made a full recovery.

"Aidan is all-purpose and can score from anywhere on

the field," Tiller said.

Meanwhile, the 6-foot-1, 180-pound Bandy has a penchant for being in the right place at the right time.

"He's savvy and has athleticism," Tiller said. "He always seems to be a step ahead. He finds the holes in the defense, has great hands and runs great routes."

Tiller has also liked what he's seen from his offensive line.

Tyler Cole (6-2, 275, sr.), Elijah Musick (6-2, 270, sr.), Maddox Sykes (6-0, 230, soph.), Aiden Gilbert (6-3, 280, jr.), Jacob Powers (6-0, 205, jr.), Peyton Whited (5-9, 180, sr.) and Blake Sheppard (6-3, 320, sr.) provide the beef



**Best
of luck
Tigers**



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in the trenches.

Cole is a transfer from Richlands and will also play middle linebacker.

"He's a man out there," Tiller said.

Elijah Musick, Gilbert, Sheppard and Sykes will anchor the D-Line.

Isaac Johnson, Whited and Austin Clayburne will see time at linebacker.

Bandy, Stephens, Avery Musick, Nick Ball and Jaxon Dye hold down the secondary. Bandy snagged six interceptions last season from is safety spot.

An erstwhile soccer standout, Dye will serve as the team's punter and kicker.

While Honaker is the favorite, the Tigers haven't won a playoff game since 2015.

"It's good to have that hunger and motivation for that," Tiller said. "They want to leave their own mark and legacy here at Honaker."

The team also rejoins the Hogoheegee District after competing in the Black Diamond District since 1988. The Tigers previously competed in the Hogo from the 1978-79 through 1987-88 school years.

This has all the makings of a special team and a special season.

"We are a very seasoned team and experience always helps," Aidan Lowe said. "Every game you play has changed you in some way and made you a better player." ★



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WAY TO GO TEAM

Rebuild in Norton



Raiders young, but working hard

The J.I. Burton Raiders closed out the 2022 season with a resounding 51-6 trouncing of Thomas Walker and in the process clinched a share of the Cumberland District championship.

Yet, the celebration was soon muted as Burton fell just shy of earning the eighth and final seed in the VHSL Region 1D playoffs.

"I hate that we barely missed it," said J.I. Burton coach Jacob Caudill. "I thought we were coming on there at the end of the season, but it is what it is."

The Raiders finished 5-5 and missed the postseason for the second straight year. Such a drought hadn't occurred for the tradition-rich program since the team from Norton failed to reach the playoffs from 1999-2001.

"I think we took some games for granted last year

and it cost us at the end," said junior running back/defensive back Ian Tate. "We expected to be a playoff team and wanted to compete for a region title. That's not how the ball rolled. We're excited to get out there and compete again."

It could be classified as a rebuilding year for the Raiders since they lost 10 seniors to graduation. In fact, 5-foot-10, 230-pound junior center Carter Stidham is the only returning starter on offense.

"We're going to be young, but have a good group of hard-working kids," Caudill said. "That's gonna hopefully get us over the edge."

There are only four seniors on the roster this time around.

The three most productive rushers, leading receiver and top eight tacklers all departed. To make matters worse, Drew

Culbertson (6-2, 190, jr.) was the projected starting quarterback, but he suffered a season-ending knee injury at a basketball camp in the summer.

“ *We expected to be a playoff team and wanted to compete for a region title. That's not how the ball rolled. We're excited to get out there and compete again.* **”**

Tate is the most proven player and perhaps the most versatile guy on the roster as he had nine carries for 86 yards and a touchdown, nine catches for 154 yards and two scores, 42 kick return yards, 16 ½ tackles and two interceptions a year ago.

Raiders to have scored a touchdown last season.

"I think I've improved everywhere," Tate said. "I got a lot stronger, faster and more athletic over the summer. We're hungry to get back out there."



J I Burton Raiders

***Class 1D,
Cumberland District***

Schedule

Aug. 25	Ridgeview	A
Sept. 1	Chilhowie	H
Sept. 8	Patrick Henry	H
Sept. 15	Twin Springs	A
Sept. 29	Eastside	H
Oct. 6	Lee High	A
Oct. 13	George Wythe	H
Oct. 20	Castlewood	H
Oct. 27	Rye Cove	A
Nov. 3	Thomas Walker	A

Tate and D.J. Buchanan (5-10, 200, sr.) were the only returning players for the

2023 J I Burton Raiders



Raiders Roster

1 Drew Culbertson
2 Dillan Rowe
3 Peyton Brummitte
4 Alex Colley
5 Brayden McCoy
6 Tyson Welch
8 Jayce Coleman
10 Brody Garrett
11 Colin Hart
21 Lukas Ball

22 Dru Peters
24 Ian Tate
25 Elijah Jones
26 Carter Sowden
30 Brayden McConnell
32 Lucas McClain
36 Holden Hutchinson
50 Hagan Ball
51 Ian Wells
52 Carter Stidham
53 Bryan Culbertson
54 Jake Reynolds

56 DJ Buchanan
60 Adrian Russell
62 Kyan Green
65 Brayden Broskey
56 Braxton Coffey
70 Mike Carver
74 Preston McNew
77 Kaenan Sturgill
78 Ethan Owens
79 Dave Sturgill

Union transfer Tyson Welch (6-2, 185, jr.) and Peyton Brummitte (5-9, 145, fr.) will take snaps at quarterback.

The likes of Buchanan, Mike Carver (5-3, 190, jr.), Adrian Russell (5-11, 200, soph.), Bryan Culbertson (5-8, 245, fr.), Kaenan Sturgill

(5-10, 180, soph.) and Union transfer Jake Reynolds (6-2, 255, jr.) will join Stidham on the offensive line.

Jayce Coleman (5-8, 135, fr.), Dru Peters (6-0, 185, fr.), Colin Hart (5-11, 165, jr.), Braylon McConnell (5-11, 165, jr.) and Alex Colley (5-9,

150, fr.) are a youthful group in the mix at the skill positions alongside Tate.

Braylon McConnell is the top returning tackler as he made 25 stops last season. Linebacker Holden Hutchinson (5-11, 155, sr.) made 21 stops and defensive

lineman D.J. Buchanan recorded 19 ½ tackles.

The defense should be tested against a tough schedule that includes three teams that were regional finalists last year: Ridgeview, Patrick Henry and George Wythe. ★



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John Battle Trojans

Class 2D, Mtn 7 District



Veteran roster bolsters Battle hope

The John Battle Trojans enter the season on a seven-game losing streak.

Now for the good news. With 16 seniors and a corps of returning starters, head coach Bradley Ricker is working with the most experienced roster during his five years on Battle Hill.

"We're absolutely pleased with that," Ricker said. "Our seniors gained game experience as sophomore and juniors, and we're excited to see what they can do with it." The only win for Battle last season was a 19-6 decision at Washington County rival Holston in week three where

the Trojans collected 251 total yards. That broke a 14-game losing skid.

Problems must be solved on defense. In addition to the 47-6 setback to Abingdon to open the 2022 season, the Trojans allowed at least 39 points in every loss.

"Our kids got in the weight room in the off-season, went to work and put on some weight," Ricker said. "We showed some good things in our first scrimmage, and we hope that carries over."

Senior receiver Broadie Bailey was the most productive payer on offense last year. With a blend of precise

routes, quickness and sure hands, Bailey scored over 10 touchdowns.

"Broadie is a lead-by-example guy in practices and games," Ricker said. Seniors Izaya Selz (six touchdowns), Brayden Emerson and Landon Odum also have experience at receiver. Brayden Emerson might also be used at running back. Braxton Emerson is due for some good luck at quarterback.

Schedule

Aug. 25	Abingdon	A
Sept. 1	Virginia High	H
Sept. 8	Holston	H
Sept. 22	Patrick Henry	A
Sept. 29	Lebanon	H
Oct. 6	Wise County Central	A
Oct. 13	Ridgeview	H
Oct. 20	Gate City	H
Oct. 27	Lee High	A
Nov. 3	Union	A



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Trojans Roster

1 Braxton Emerson
2 Brason Hayes
3 Drake Houser
4 Izaya Selz
5 Landon Odum
6 Caleb Lockhart
7 Braylin Moran
8 Brayden Emerson
9 Bryson Harris
10 Broadie Bailey
11 Ethan Dillard

12 Nick Freeman
13 Marty Rosenbalm
14 Arrow Brooks
15 Trey Robertson
17 Jacob France
18 Noah Sills
20 Tyler Rose
21 Gavin Chappell
22 Ryan Vanhoy
25 Izick Leab
26 Mikael Endres
28 Grady Hause

30 Bonham Bowman
32 Bradley Rosenbalm
33 Devonte Walling
42 Asher Livingston
44 Gaige Leab
50 J.J. Hampton
51 Riley Kiser
52 Grayson Keene
53 Hunter Reynolds
54 Brylee Lunsford
55 Arison Allison
56 Jayden Buffalow

57 Braedyn Bailey
58 Lucas Cox
60 Conner Horton
61 Ayden Scalf
61 Cole Smiley
66 Braison Brush
70 Charlie Mullins
71 Blake Blevins
72 Jessee Owens
73 Jayden Garrett
75 Dawson Aspiote
79 Colton Kestner

The 5-foot, 180-pound senior was sidelined basically all of last season due to a hip injury. Junior Brason Hayes and senior Noah Sills provide backup at quarterback. Sills passed for over 12 scores last season.

"We're pretty solid in our skill positions," Ricker said. Senior Gavin Chappell returns at tight end.

Ricker said the veterans on the offensive line include senior Braedyn Bailey at guard along with sophomore Braison Brush and J.J. Hampton at tackle.

The Emersons and Baileys are brothers.

Familiar faces on defense include senior Ethan Dillard and Braedyn Bailey at linebacker. Dillard suffered an injury mid-way through last season. Selz and Broadie Bailey return at cornerback, while Braxton Emerson, Odum, Brayden Emerson and senior Caleb



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2023 John Battle Trojans



Lockhart have starting experience in the secondary. Brush works on the defensive line with sophomores Hunter Reynolds and Jayden Garrett. At 6-3, Sills has the size and strength to be force at end. "We still had guys in the developmental stage last season," Ricker said. "We've got a few four-year regulars now and some great senior leaders who really fly to the ball. It's really great to have senior leadership." Ricker hopes that game-tested depth will erase the days of losing streaks and lopsided losses on Battle Hill. ★



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Return to Southwest



Lebanon Pioneers

**Class 1D,
Hogoheegee District**

Schedule

Aug. 24	Honaker	H
Sept. 1	Patrick Henry	A
Sept. 8	Marion	A
Sept. 15	Castlewood	A
Sept. 22	Richlands	H
Sept. 29	John Battle	A
Oct. 6	Rural Retreat	H
Oct. 13	Graham	A
Oct. 27	Virginia High	H
Nov. 3	Tazewell	A



Pioneers seek another playoff berth

The Lebanon Pioneers face a period of transition.

After winning seven games and advancing into the second round of the Region 1D playoffs last season,

Lebanon was placed back into the Class 2 Southwest District.

Following the loss of 15 seniors and 10 starters, 59-year-old head coach

Darrell Taylor must craft another winning combination on a team with just nine seniors.

"We should have overcome a few things better at mid-season, but overall I was pleased with last year," Taylor

said. "It had been a while since we we've been in the playoffs, and longer since we advanced. Making the playoffs is a goal every year."

To reach that goal in 2022,

the Pioneers need production from quarterback Michael Reece.

The 6-foot-3 sophomore passed for 2,302 yards and 32 scores last season while

“ Hopefully, the strength of this team will be the interior line on defense and that's where we have the most depth and experience,” Taylor said.



2023 Lebanon Pioneers



completing 54% of his throws.

"Michael is still improving," Taylor said. "The arm strength is evident, but he still needs to get better with his footwork."

Six-foot sophomore Toby Baker returns at receiver, while powerful senior Andrew Calhoun (5-9, 185) anchors the offensive line at center.

Sophomore Luke Garrett

also has experience at receiver.

The Pioneers must replace gritty Zach Hertig, who caught 30 passes for 656 yards and eight scores. Hertig also rushed for 339 yards.

The veterans on defense include senior Dustin Rose (6-1, 250) and junior Hunter Cox (6-3, 240) at tackle, along

with senior Carter Dillon (6-2, 165) at linebacker and Baker at defensive back.

Lebanon struggled to stop the run in the playoffs.

"Hopefully, the strength of this team will be the interior line on defense and that's where we have the most depth and experience," Taylor said. "Rose and Cox are our

two strongest guys in the weight room and they are still improving on technique."

The candidates at running back include Dillon, senior Jordan Johnson, junior Dalton Hess and senior Kalib Simmons. The 6-2 Simmons transferred from Richlands last year.

"Kalib was eligible to play



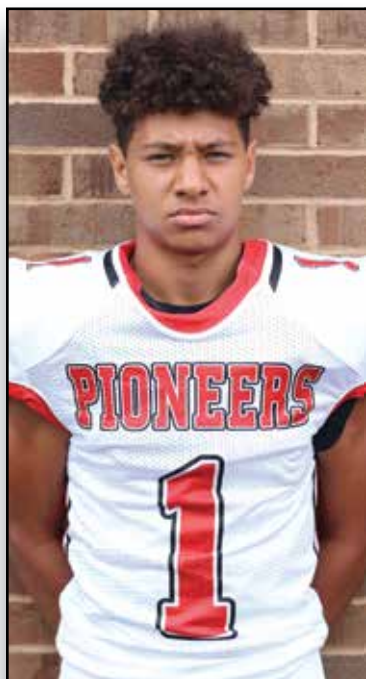
Pioneers Roster

1 Peyton Mabry
3 Brennan Hess
4 Maddox Nuckols
5 Cayden Monk
7 Dalton Long
8 Dalton Hess
9 Hunter Dunford
10 Mike Reece
11 Toby Baker
12 Ayden Stiltner
13 Eli Cook

14 Jordan Johnson
15 Francisco Hernandez
18 Kaden Miller
20 Kalib Simmons
23 Carter Dillon
24 Brayden Keen
28 Caleb Taylor
29 Dustin Rose
30 Ayden Domby
31 Ethan Wright
41 Jared Slate
44 Garrett Gragg

51 Conner Bowman
52 Andrew Calhoun
53 Max Boyd
54 Robert Stevenson
55 Luke Monk
61 Colten Watson
62 Cole Morrison
63 Kaiden Woodard
64 Kolby Frye
66 Alden Addington
68 Isaak Olvera
72 Antonio Boanno

73 Connor Griffith
74 Luca Peck
75 Giovanni Hernandez
78 Hunter Cox
79 Blain Frye
80 Kent Newberry
82 Luke Garrett
84 Brock Keen
88 Oliver Snowden
89 Joel Campbell



about half of last season and we're going to move him around to different places this year," Taylor said.

Lebanon opened the 2022 playoffs with a wild 51-49 defeat of Twin Springs before falling 32-0 to Grundy and powerful running back Ian Scammell.

"We got better as the season progressed," Taylor said. "Making the playoffs is the bottom line and I was pleased that we took

that step. We want to keep improving." ★



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Raising 'Canes



Marion Scarlet Hurricanes

**Class 2D,
Southwest District**

Schedule

Aug. 25	Chilhowie	A
Sept. 1	Wise County Central	H
Sept. 8	Lebanon	H
Sept. 15	Gate City	A
Sept. 29	Graham	A
Oct. 6	Abingdon	A
Oct. 13	Tazewell	H
Oct. 20	Grundy	H
Oct. 27	Richlands	H
Nov. 3	Virginia High	A

Marion eyes resurgence with veteran cast

Jack Ginn refers to the 2022 season as "year zero" in his job as the head football coach of the Marion Scarlet Hurricanes.

"I got here on June 16," Ginn said. "We had seven seniors and less than 20 upperclassmen."

Flash forward to this August.

"We have 11 seniors, 31 upperclassmen and 15 returning starters. We have an old team and that makes a big difference," Ginn said. "That's all good, so we will

see what happens when we start the season."

With more time to prepare, Ginn has been able to create a tighter team bond.

"We had a full 12 months of football, which is the way it should be," Ginn said. "We had a year together in the weight room, we went to a couple of seven-on-seven sessions, and I took some kids to one-day camps."

Marion opened the 2022 campaign in style by rushing for 219 yards en route to a 29-0 win over Smyth County

rival Chilhowie.

Nine straight losses followed.

"Our schedule was strange in that every team we played over the final seven weeks was better than the team we just played," Ginn said. "The schedule will be different this season with Graham in the middle. Hopefully we can create some momentum."

Before closing the regular season with a 47-13 setback against eventual Class 2 state

champion Graham, Marion showed progress against a pair of playoff teams in Tazewell and Virginia High before dropping 28-13 and 27-14 decisions.

"I felt like we were better at the end of the season," Ginn said. "And I know that this year's Marion team would beat last year's team."

**Good Luck
to the
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HURRICANES!**



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2023 Marion Scarlet Hurricanes



Hurricane Roster

1 JB Carroll
2 Colton Branson
3 Sean Stuart
4 Reid Osborne
5 Levi Testerman
6 Parker Wolfe
8 Daniel Lee
9 Brody Whitt
10 Ethan Campbell

11 Terrance Armstrong
13 Kendrick Smith
15 Dalton Hall
18 Brayden Bowman
22 Kevin Cale
23 Jalen Miller
24 Benjamin Garrison
30 Hunter Robinson
32 Ethan Hylton
34 Jordan Miller
40 Hughie Smith

41 Colton Ferland
44 Colby Heath
49 Preston Harrington
50 Cash Pruitt
52 Connor Henderson
53 Jack Pugh
54 Slate Parnell
55 Guage Allan
56 Peyton Ratcliffe
58 Spencer Shaffer
60 Anthony Pasinato

62 Kyle Mabe
63 Brent Tolbert
64 Konner Whitt
65 Zerrick Jarman
66 Ethan Whitt
70 Kade Terry
77 Ryan Mullins
78 Miles Harrington
84 Zeke Yarber
85 Austin Coe

The offense revolves senior quarterback Reid Osborne. A confident multi-sport athlete, Osborne has passed for 13 scores the past two years.

"Reid really made progress running the offense, and he did a good job punting," Ginn said.

Most of the running backs graduated. Those losses included Brody Taylor, who rushed for 171 yards and two scores in the Chilhowie victory.

"Except for Reid, we're unproven in the backfield but I like the kids we have," Ginn said.

Junior Jordan Miller has the most experience.

"Jordan played some for us at fullback and did a good job," Ginn said.

Senior J.B. Carroll returns at receiver, while Air Force Academy recruit Austin Coe (6-6, 265) is a big target at tight end.

Coe will also anchor the defense at end.

"Austin's future is on defense and we're counting on him to be our most productive defensive player," Ginn said.

Senior Hunter Robinson is steady at linebacker, while junior Brody Whitt is a proven talent in the secondary with six interceptions last season.

"We can rely on Hunter to

make plays," Ginn said.

Marion fans have endured five straight losing seasons, but Ginn sees reason for optimism.

"We don't have a ton of younger kids in the program and we will have to do something to correct that, but we've made gains overall and the current players are a little more bought into our system," Ginn said.

"We will just try to win the first game and then worry about everything else." ★



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Optimism Reigns



Maturing Panthers getting better

With a roster numbering 33 in the preseason, head coach Greg Prater is optimistic when it comes to the Northwood Panthers.

"If we can stay healthy, we'll be able to compete," Prater said. "This group is pretty special. They've been getting after it in practice and I like them a lot. Hustling, working hard in the weight room."

Northwood went 3-7 in 2022 and won the Smyth County championship with triumphs over archrivals Marion and Chilhowie. It was a season of ups and downs as the Panthers lost their first two games, won the next three and then ended the season with five straight defeats.

Yet, Prater felt his players matured from that experience.

"Their attitude has changed a lot," Prater said. "They're doing everything they need to do to get better."

Running back/defensive end Austin Graber, wide receiver/defensive back Kaleb Havens, running back/linebacker Brandon Woodward, wide receiver/defensive back Drake Maiden, two-way lineman Will Minton and two-way lineman Caleb Gobble are the seniors for the Panthers.

The 5-foot-11, 200-pound Woodward is a load and provides problems for would-be tacklers when he totes the pigskin.

"He got some carries last year and he's put on a few more pounds," Prater said. "If he stays healthy, he'll

contribute big for us."

Havens, Graber, Will Brown (6-0, 195, soph.), Brody Waddle (6-5, 225, fr.) and Dalton Gates (5-11, 170, soph.) should all get touches and 6-foot-5, 190-pound junior Eli Williams will be the quarterback getting them the ball.

"I've always played quarterback my entire life," Williams said. "So this is nothing new. I feel pretty comfortable back there."

Williams suffered a season-ending injury in the third game of the season.

"It was hard to watch without being able to play," Williams said. "But I was there to support



Northwood Panthers

**Class 1D,
Hogoheegee District**

Schedule

Aug. 25	Twin Springs	H
Sept. 1	Rye Cove	H
Sept. 8	Eastern Montgomery	A
Sept. 15	Twin Valley	H
Sept. 22	Chilhowie	H
Sept. 29	Castlewood	A
Oct. 13	Holston	A
Oct. 20	Rural Retreat	A
Oct. 27	Honaker	A
Nov. 3	Patrick Henry	H

them every single game."

He should be able to make things happen with his arms and his legs.



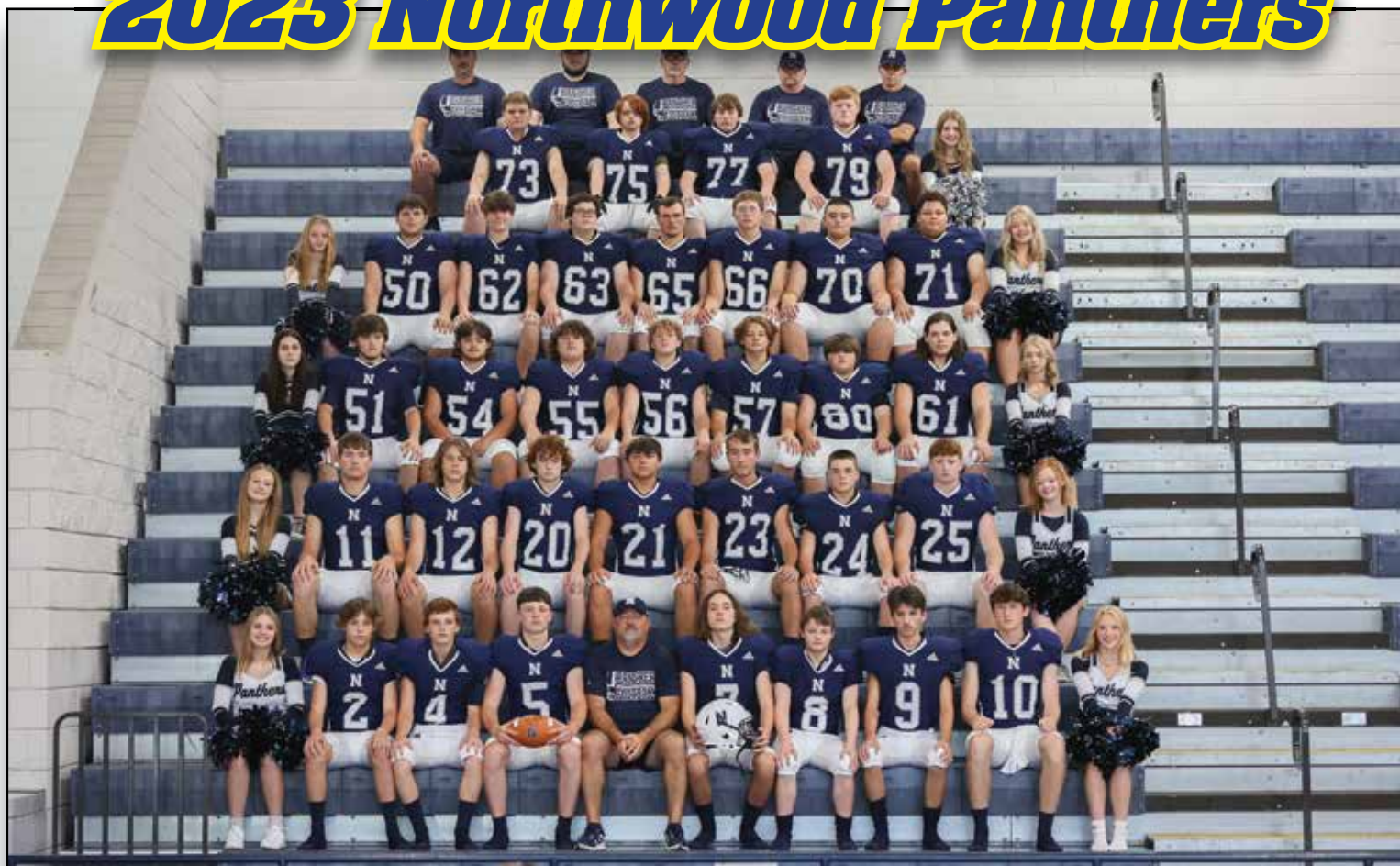
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2023 Northwood Panthers



Panthers Roster

2 Dominick Haynes
4 Waylon Nunley
5 Austin Graber
7 Dalton Gates
8 Randy Kestner
9 Xavier Stacey
10 Eli Williams

11 Brody Waddle
12 John Garner
20 Kaleb Havens
21 Brandon Woodward
23 Drake Maiden
24 Jason McCall
25 Will Brown
50 Gabe Frye
51 Carl Gates

52 Connor Anderson
54 Jake Barlow
55 Will Minton
56 Jeremiah Belcher
57 Brady Sanders
60 Brayden Havens
61 James Terry
62 Jessie Terry
63 Andrew Call

65 Snowden Hudgins
66 Prestyn Reynolds
70 Jackson Nutter
71 Shayne Ervin
73 Caleb Gobble
75 Tyler Burnette
77 Matthew McGlocklin
79 Tyler Gillespie

"He ran a 4.5-second, 40 at a camp this summer," Prater said.

Minton and Gabe Frye (5-9, 225, jr.) anchor the offensive and defensive lines. Jake Barlow (5-10, 205, jr.) also returns from an injury to battle in the trenches.

"We've got some depth on the line this year, so that's a big plus," Prater said. "Right now, I would say our defensive and offensive lines are improved."

The line has benefited from the addition of Aaron Lundy to the coaching staff. He

was a star at Chilhowie High School and played at Liberty University from 2008-2012, starting 21 games on the O-Line for the Flames.

“ *He got some carries last year and he's put on a few more pounds,” Prater said. “If he stays healthy, he'll contribute big for us.”*

Mark Palmer is also an assistant to Prater as he's a former head coach at four schools and most recently led the program at Anderson

County High School in Lawrenceburg, Kentucky.

"He's a great coach and I'm glad to have him," Prater said. "He's a heck of a guy

and a heck of a coach." "He's a smart guy. ... great to have on the staff. With all the experience he's got, it helps a lot."

Meanwhile, Graber is a force on defense and Dalton Gates (5-11, 170) led the team in interceptions last year as a freshman from his spot in the secondary.

Northwood should be improved overall.

How that translates to the ultra-competitive Hogoheegee District is yet to be seen.

"Our numbers are up and their confidence is high," Prater said. "They've set some goals and hopefully they can accomplish those goals." ★



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Building on Success



Patrick Henry Rebels

**Class 1D,
Hogoheegee District**



Schedule

Aug. 25	Virginia High	A
Sept. 1	Lebanon	H
Sept. 8	J.I. Burton	A
Sept. 15	Grundy	A
Sept. 22	John Battle	H
Sept. 29	Rural Retreat	H
Oct. 6	Holston	H
Oct. 20	Honaker	H
Oct. 27	Chilhowie	H
Nov. 3	Northwood	A

Rebels seek to finish in '23

They are constructing a new football fieldhouse at Patrick Henry High School and it will serve a program that has built quite the gridiron resume over the past decade.

The Rebels have reeled off nine consecutive winning seasons, nine straight playoff berths and have played in the Region 1D finals three of the last four seasons.

PH finished as regional runner-up to Holston in 2021 and were second to Grundy in 2022.

"We fell short the last two years and we want to finish," said Patrick Henry coach Seth Padgett. "Finishing is kind of what we've preached all summer. It's one thing to get there, it's another thing to actually win it. These guys

have been around this thing – some of them for three, four years – and know what it takes now."

The headliner for PH is 6-foot-3, 305-pound junior two-way lineman Tyler Barrett.

The reigning Region 1D defensive player of the year has offers from Virginia Tech and Norfolk State and has

attended prospect camps at Wake Forest and Notre Dame.

Barrett made 78 tackles last year, 20 of which resulted in a loss of yardage.

He is joined on the offensive line by experienced guys like Conrad Ellis (6-3, 235, jr.), Tyler Thayer (5-10, 184, jr.), Will Dunn (5-10, 280, sr.) and Tommy Hudson (5-11,




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260, sr.) in what will be the biggest strength for Patrick Henry.

"I'm ready to see what they can do," said senior running back Camron Goodspeed. "Even though I already know."

Sammy Mink (5-11, 215, sr.) and Eli Delp (6-1, 160, jr.) are the tight ends.

The aptly named Goodspeed will get the bulk of the carries, as will new quarterback Alex Brown.

Patrick Henry has had 2,000-yard rushers in Dakota Humphrey (2015), Zach Brown (2018), Connor Beeson (2021) and J-Kwon McFail (2022) over the previous eight seasons as Goodspeed will look to carry on that tradition. He gained more than 1K yards on the ground a season ago and had 220-yard, three-TD performance in an overtime win over Rural Retreat.

Alex Brown will be a run-first signal-caller for the Rebels.

"He's an athlete," Padgett said.

Just don't expect Patrick Henry to become the Air Rebels.

"In 13 games last year we threw it 53 times," Padgett said. "If we throw it 54 times this year we might be in trouble."

While the offense must

cope with some key graduation losses, the defense will be without reliable linebacker Bobby Cline. He had more than 400 career tackles as a four-year starter.

"He was a leader," Padgett said. "We're going to see who can play his spot and lead."

Hudson, Barrett, Dunn and Ellis will be on the D-Line; Michael Jenkins (5-10, 175, jr.), Landon Steele (5-10,



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Rebels Roster

1 Nicholas Hudson

2 Colton Frye

4 Mason Hutton

5 Eli Delp

6 Ryan Brown

7 Grant Buchanan

8 Camron Goodspeed

9 Michia Blazier

10 Frost Croson

11 Gaven Stanley

12 Jebediah Stewart

14 Kolby Hicks

15 Colton Ferguson

20 Joshua Johnson

22 Ayden Firestone

23 Draven Potter-Cole

27 Jacob Olinger

28 Dallas Harner

31 Irvin Jenkins

32 Landon Steele

33 Michael Jenkins

50 Logan Sheets

52 Kyler Thayer

55 Mason Blazier

56 Collin Orfield

57 Benjamin Cuddy

59 Robert Belcher

60 Hunter White

62 Thomas Hudson

64 Noah Reuleaux

66 Duncan Larkey

68 Aiden Crigger

71 Nolan Counts

74 Isaiah McFail

76 Conrad Ellis

77 William Dunn

78 Tyler Barrett

79 Hayden Casey

80 Whitten Puckett

82 Jacob Stilwell

84 Curtis Rapier

88 Samuel Mink

228, sr.) and Mink will be the linebackers. Goodspeed, Brown, Delp and Frost Croson will see time in the secondary.

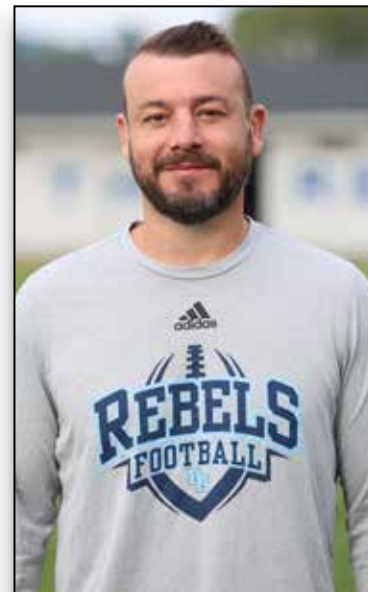
"We're gonna be young in spots, but we're going to be very athletic," Padgett said.

Patrick Henry plays a rigorous schedule as usual with four teams on the docket who won playoff games a year ago. Included is a rematch with the Grundy Golden Wave, who posted a 30-19 win over the Rebels in the regional title game.

"When we get to the end of the year we want to be battle-tested," Padgett said. "I think we are."

Plenty of playoff experience helps as well.

"For us, it's about staying healthy, finding those pieces and making those pieces fit," Padgett said. ★



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Filling Big Shoes



Richlands Blue Tornado

**Class 2D,
Southwest District**

Schedule

Aug. 25	Gate City	H
Sept. 1	Union	A
Sept. 8	Tazewell	A
Sept. 15	Abingdon	H
Sept. 22	Lebanon	A
Sept. 29	Ridgeview	H
Oct. 13	Virginia High	H
Oct. 20	Galax	A
Oct. 27	Marion	A
Nov. 3	Graham	H



Losing not normal at Richlands

Richlands football fans have reason to be down.

Their beloved Richlands Blue Tornado program has posted three straight losing records and is coming off its worst mark since 1999 at 2-8.

What's the vibe in camp this season with just six seniors?

"I can't remember the last time that's happened," Richlands coach Jeff Tarter said. "When you have a losing record, kids don't want to come out. But we're working on that every day."

There is good news in a total of 34 players among the sophomore and freshmen classes. Richlands has 48 players overall.

"That sophomore class is going to be pretty good," Tarter said.

Step one this fall will be compensating for the graduation of durable running back Dylan Brown, who opened last season by rushing for a school record

353 yards against Gate City.

"Dylan was the glue that held us together," Tarter said. "To be honest, we had to put too much on him."

Six starters return on offense, with four veterans on defense.

Senior Cole Vanover, a three-year regular, returns at receiver along with juniors Gavin Whited and 6-foot-2 Gage Lewis. Senior Kaden Dupree has experience at running back, while juniors Ryan Perkins (6-2, 262) and Ethan Smith (5-9, 242) anchor

the line.

Sophomore Andrew Boyd (5-10, 172) is the starter at quarterback, with 5-11 freshman left-hander Jamie Capshaw in the mix.

"Jamie is a really good athlete who can sling it," Tarter said. "If Boyd stays healthy,

we will use Jamie at receiver to gain experience."

Sophomore Collin Adkins is listed at five positions,



2023 Richlands Blue Tornado



including quarterback, running back and receiver.

"Collin is going to be doing a lot of stuff for us," Tarter said.

The returning starters on defense include senior Ethan Brown at defensive back and Dupree at linebacker, with Lewis and senior Vanover at defensive back.

According to Tarter, Richlands remains in a transition phase following the departure of longtime head coach Greg Mance in 2020.

"When Paul "Bear" Bryant went down at Alabama, it took a while to get everything back on track," Tarter said. "I tell Greg all the time that's it hard to follow in his footsteps. It's been very difficult because we went through COVID, we went through Coach (Thad) Wells leaving the program, and we went through me coming in."

There are plenty of new faces in the coaching staff, including former Richlands star Josh Compton at

Blue Tornado Roster

1 Dave Blankenship
2 Kaden Dupree
3 Gage Lewis
4 Gavin Whited
5 Cole Vanover
6 Brenden Phillips
7 Landon Absher
8 Keaton Smith
9 Treyton Kiser
11 Ethan Brown
12 Ean Horn
13 Braydon Jones
14 Andrew Boyd
15 Jamie Capshaw
16 Briley Bevins

17 Collin Adkins
21 Brian Hay
23 Gunner Collins
24 Logan Hubbard
25 Cole Paris
27 Drayton Smith
31 Craig Edwards
33 Micah Bailey
37 Logan Hurt
40 Devin Blankenship
42 Hunter Ratliff
45 Hunter Blankenship
50 Ezekiel Mullins
51 Rome Frye
52 Nehelam Clifford
54 Ethan Smith

55 Zach Elkins
56 Parker Spencer
58 Kaden Matney
59 Daniel Foland
61 Trevor Dupree
64 Caleb Mounts
67 Ryan Perkins
68 Kaden Anders
70 Tyler Shortt
72 Kalen Shreve
74 Caiden Stapleton
75 Colton Lawson
76 Timothy (TJ) Stiltner
81 Christian Green
85 Austin Cordle
88 Andrew Joyce

defensive coordinator.

"Our staff is almost completely different," Tarter said. "Having Josh in the program is huge. He brings a wealth of knowledge."

Tarter said the work never ends for the tradition-rich

Blues.

"Our fans know that we're working hard and doing all we can, but it's about encouraging the kids to get back out here and encouraging the parents to get involved," Tarter said.

"If those three parts don't work together it's awfully hard to keep things going in the right direction. All this transition has been frustrating. There are no quick fixes, but you have to put in the effort at all levels." ★

Reload in Rose Ridge



Ridgeview Wolfpack

Class 2D, Mtn 7 District

Schedule

Aug. 25	J.I. Burton	H
Sept. 1	Grundy	H
Sept. 8	Wise County Central A	
Sept. 15	Virginia High	A
Sept. 22	Lee High	H
Sept. 29	Richlands	A
Oct. 6	Union	A
Oct. 13	John Battle	A
Oct. 20	Abingdon	H
Nov. 3	Gate City	H



O'Quinn returns to guide Wolfpack

It's reload time at Ridgeview.

Following an 11-2 season, second-year Ridgeview Wolfpack coach Dewayne Stanley must replace most of the key elements from a squad that won the Mountain 7 District.

"Things are completely different," Stanley said. "Last season, we had a bunch of experienced players and expectations were sky-high. This is a new group, and I think these kids will take that as a challenge."

The only returning starters on defense are junior lineman Jonathan Salyers, junior middle linebacker Branson Honaker and sophomore end Kolter Scanlon.

Just Honaker and junior quarterback Ryan O'Quinn are back on offense.

And that's where this story gets interesting.

With a rapid-fire release and quick decision-making, the 6-foot-2, 200-pound O'Quinn has thrown for 4,774 yards and 53 touchdowns over the past two seasons from a spread offense.

According to Stanley, O'Quinn is still improving. "Oh yeah, Ryan is bigger, stronger and faster," Stanley said. "Ryan's understanding of the game has improved and he's making better reads. He's fun to watch."

The foursome of O'Quinn, running back Cannon Hill, and receivers Brandon Beavers and Koda Counts created all sorts of fun in 2022 as the Wolfpack advanced to the Class 2 quarterfinals before falling 56-35 at Graham.

Rugged senior Gabe

Hackney will handle the running back chores this season along with junior Chace Fuller.

"Those guys run hard and have skills so I think we will be okay there," Stanley said. "Gabe got injured in our opener last season and missed around seven games, but came back strong late in the season."

The key to success lies in

the new-look offensive line corps.

"We have hard-working kids, but they just need game-experience," Stanley said. "If you watch us from the first scrimmage to fifth game, I imagine that's where you'll see the biggest jump. If the kids progress like I think they are capable of, we will be okay."

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2023 Ridgeview Wolfpack



Wolfpack Roster

2 Logan Sutherland
3 Luke Collins
4 Dalton Mullins
5 Jaalan Deel
6 Bentley Brockhoff
8 Kolter Scanlon
9 Landon Mullins
10 Hayden Baker
11 Isaiah Colley
12 Ryan O'Quinn
15 Chace Fuller
16 Gabe Hackney
17 Branson Honaker
18 Tristan Stevens
19 Elijah Stallard
20 Blake Gayle
22 Brandt Mullins

24 Braylon Reed
25 Landon Shafer
27 Scott Deel
28 Elijah Abshire
32 Jacob Rasnick
33 Alan Mullins
34 Cainnan Peaks
48 Tanner Hill
50 Morgan Dye
51 Noah Rasnick
52 Jeremiah Johnson
53 Jacob Viers
54 Chris Hill
55 Waylon Perrigan
56 Brayden Cox
58 Cooper Powers
59 Austin Rose
60 Gunner McCoy

61 Connor Neece
62 Jonathan Salyers
63 Haddon Fleming
65 Jason Mullins
67 Jaeson Butts
68 Myles Phipps
70 Eli Mullins
71 Jayden Johnson
72 Eli Mullins
73 Isaiah Blankenship
75 Caden Younce
77 Mason Stallard
85 Conner Smith



unquestioned leader on defense after collecting 115 tackles last season, including 19 stops for loss.

"I think Branson is one of the best three or four linebackers in Southwest Virginia," Stanley said. "He's a very physical player who knows the game, plus he's added 15 pounds and improved his speed."

Hackney will join Scanlon at defensive end, with O'Quinn, junior Hayden Baker, sophomore Alan Mullins and junior Logan Sutherland in the secondary.

"I think we may be able to two-platoon on the defensive line. We've got some depth there," Stanley said.

Sophomore Connor Smith will handle the kicking and

punting duties.

"We're excited about Connor," Stanley said. "He's attended a lot of camps and he's got a chance to be recruited."

Beavers is now in the football program at Emory & Henry, while Counts is listed as a defensive back on the roster at Bluefield University.

Stanley said he relishes

the challenge of reloading in football-hungry Dickenson County.

"We had a lot of good players and those high expectations last season, but there were days where it was miserable," Stanley said. "We have a good group of kids this season who like each other and work hard. It's exciting."



Win the Close Ones



Rural Retreat Indians

**Class 1D,
Hogohegee District**

Schedule

Aug. 25	Fort Chiswell	H
Sept. 1	Eastern Montgomery	A
Sept. 8	Grayson County	H
Sept. 22	George Wythe	A
Sept. 29	Patrick Henry	H
Oct. 6	Lebanon	A
Oct. 13	Chilhowie	A
Oct. 20	Northwood	H
Oct. 27	Holston	A
Nov. 3	Honaker	H

Hughes using 'p' word to describe Indians

Perhaps this will be the season that Rural Retreat kicks that door down to the postseason.

"I feel like we are close, we have just got to break through and find a way to get over the hump," said Rural Retreat head coach Jamey Hughes, whose Indians narrowly missed ending a playoff drought last year that extends to 2017. "We are young in places, but at the same time, we are experienced in some places in key spots too. Hopefully our excitement and enthusiasm will get us over the hump this year."

Rural Retreat finished 4-5 last season, but four of those losses were by a combined 28 points and all five setbacks came to team that won playoff games, including George Wythe, which beat the Indians by just two points on its way to the Class 1 state

championship game.

Hughes uses the "p" word to describe the Indians.

"We are young and we have potential, but like I told our kids earlier in the summer, we can't rely on we have potential," he said. "There comes a time when you have to show it on the field. I think we are at that point. I feel like if we are over .500, I think we are in the playoffs just from our schedule."

Leading the Indians this season will be a solid collection of skill players, including senior quarterback Caleb Roberts. With talented running back Gatlin Hight having graduated, the Indians could put the ball in the air more this season, with Roberts able to connect with Tucker Fontaine, Trevor Shelton, Austin Umberger, Gunner Hagerman and Christopher Sapp. Hunter

Vaught and Anderson Newberry are among several candidates to fill Hight's role in the backfield.

"As a group our skill players, they are kind of the stronger guys," Hughes said.

can the ball to them and let them do their thing."

Hughes was still searching to fill the offensive line, but knows it will be anchored ably by center Jacob Dalton. That group will be challenged

“ *We have got our work cut out for us there, but hopefully we will take it one game as a time. The old cliché, but it is true, you have got to take one at a time and hope to get better each day.”*

"That is not a slap in the face to the O-line, but we have got some very gifted skill guys as far as strength goes. A couple of those guys can run and run and catch and hopefully we

by a testy schedule, which includes a three-week stretch with Grayson County, George Wythe and Patrick Henry, all of which are teams that Hughes think could be playing



2023 Rural Retreat Indians



Indians Roster

2 Caleb Roberts
3 Chaz Penwright
5 Jake Rollyson
6 Dawson Williams
7 Trevor Shelton
8 Warren Robinson
9 Justin Walker
10 Jay Snavelly
11 Christopher Sapp

12 Eli Atwell
14 Anderson Newberry
15 Austin Umberger
16 Tucker Fontaine
17 Tony Alcazar
20 Talan Hammack
22 Gunner Hagerman
23 Ely Newberry
24 Hunter Vaught
25 Tucker Hudson
26 Houston Bear

30 Ian Doss
31 Dakota Lemmon
33 Hunter Rollyson
40 Caleb Gibson
51 Carter Haga
52 Hunter Pennington
56 Dalton Ray
57 Scott Meredith
59 Jacob Dalton
61 Easton Burkentine
63 Grayson Irvin

64 Mason Fields
65 Gage Baker
70 Alijah Nunley
72 Brandon Smith
75 Lucas Shrader
76 Leland Seagle
77 Scottie Campbell
78 Eli Poole
88 Odell Stroupe

in Salem in December.

"We have got our work cut out for us there, but hopefully we will take it one game at a time. The old cliché, but it is true, you have got to take one at a time and hope to get better each day," he said. "Our goal is we have to be ready to play every week. No offense to anybody that we play, but I don't think there is anybody out there that we can't play with."

While the competition for spots on the defensive line went deep into preseason

preparations, the Indians can lean on Umberger and Shelton at linebackers, while Roberts, Fontaine and Sapp will man the secondary positions.

"I will say we feel good about our linebackers right now," Hughes said. "We were fast for us, we felt like we had a pretty fast defense last year and I think we are going to be faster this year."

Expect plenty of youngsters that played junior varsity last season to see plenty of the field for the Indians.

"They are excited with their opportunity as far as playing on Friday night and hopefully everything will translate to the field," Hughes said. "They put in the work. Those guys have worked hard in the weight room."

"We are not the biggest team, we are not the fastest team, but we do have some people that can do a little bit of everything and we have worked hard in the weight room. Hopefully that will pay off for us." ★





Holston Hills

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Speed To Burn



Science Hill Hilltoppers

Class 6A, Big East Conference

Schedule

Aug. 18	Elizabethton	H
Aug. 25	Anderson County	A
Sept. 1	Jefferson County	H
Sept. 8	Union (Va.)	A
Sept. 15	Maryville	A
Sept. 22	William Blount	A
Sept. 29	West Ridge	H
Oct. 6	Morristown East	A
Oct. 20	Daniel Boone	H
Oct. 27	Dobyns-Bennett	A



Weapons aplenty for Hilltoppers

There will be speed to burn for Science Hill on the gridiron this season.

The fastest of the Hilltoppers, senior receiver Emmett Watson, has a warning for all when quarterback Jaysahn Swartz throws the football.

"If he gets the ball to us it is going to be dangerous," said Watson, who ran a 47.8 400 meters to finish second in the Class AAA state track meet in May. "I can tell you that."

That is a good problem to have for Science Hill head coach Stacy Carter, whose Hilltoppers have won the last two Big East Conference championships, advancing last season to the third round

of the Class 6A playoffs.

"I think if we play well we could be right up at the top of the league for sure. I believe that we have got a lot of experience, especially on the defensive side. When we came in last year we were green in a lot of areas," Carter said. "Even though we only have 16 seniors we have a heck of a lot of people that played, which is really good."

"We have got seven or eight people that had starting time on offense last year and you have got about six to seven that seen starting time on the defense and a lot of those are really good players."

Swartz, whose nickname is

"Butter", is back for his second season as quarterback after replacing record-setting Jaxon Diamond at the position. Junior Spencer Taylor could also see some action behind center.

"Right now 'Butter' is the starter going into the season, but I think that is some time for Spencer to come in and do some things with different packages," Carter said. "I feel good because both

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2023 Science Hill Hilltoppers



Hilltoppers Roster

1 Emmett Watson
2 Steven Famoyin
3 Jaevon Emile
4 Rylan Jordan
5 Brayden Letcher
6 Baylor Necessary
7 Carter Nelson
8 Gaven Aldridge
9 Mathew Marsh
11 Jaysahn Swartz
12 Cole ReSue
14 Kyle Jennings
16 Spencer Taylor
17 Josiah McGann
18 John Giturwa
19 Davion Stewart
20 Ian Mathes

21 Zeph Fegyak
22 Zane Huff
23 Oliver Carver
24 Trevor Whitson
25 Wyatt Belanger
26 Tristan Arraujo
27 Brayden Austin
29 Aedan McGann
31 Harris Smith
33 Tyler Holder
34 Laden Durrence
37 Carter Lockman
39 Ahsan Ewing
41 Anthony Forney
42 Zayden Hale
43/53 Cole Fleeman
44 Carter Van Horn
45 Aadyn Williams

48 Brandon Horn
50 David Reed
51 Bryson Hill
52 Mario Sanchez-Gomez
54 Kayvon Thompson
55 Gavin Taylor
57 Tristan Smith
58 Trenton Hughes
59 Darius Dualugua
60 Peyton Noel
61 Gauge Stout
63 Elijah Seals
64 Nowlin Saylor
65 Tybre Faw
66 Seth Hicks
67 Arthur Johnson
68 Xander Whitlock
69 Bryson Shipley

70 Zaybbiur Hall
71 Rene Mijares
72 Hobie Merritt
73/95 Jacian Emile
74 Julian Emile
75 Brody Barnett
77 Aiden Taylor
78 J.B. Gentry
79 Nolyn Story
81 Keenan McInturff
82 Jackson Williams
83 Max Turan
85 Devin Tate
87 Kaenan Cline
80 Haiden Cox
94 Josh Bailey
96 Rylee Durrence

of those guys have gotten experience now and have been under fire so we are not coming in fresh like we did last year without a two-year starter and you are starting from scratch."

No matter who the signal-caller is, they'll have weapons to work with, including Watson, Steve Famoyin and Josiah McGann at receivers, while the backfield could include a combination of David Crockett transfer Jaevon Emile, Shane Huff, Ian Mathes and Zeph Fegyak. Much like Baylor Necessary, Huff and Mathes can also make plays in the passing game.

"They are real versatile. Both of them catch the ball real well and run the ball real well," Carter said. "You have got guys that can come out and you can run multiple formations with those guys so it is good to have those guys as receivers as well."

While Science Hill does have to replace four-year starting center Kellen Hensley, the offensive line does return the trio of Tristan Smith, Brody Barnett and Bryson Hill. There is plenty of competition for the other slots, including Nolyn Story, Jacian Emile and Julian Emile for the guard positions.

"We are pretty deep right there," said Carter, of his line, "We just have to see what they are going to do on the field."

Junior defensive back Carter Nelson is a leader for the Hilltoppers on defense, and will be joined in the secondary by Brayden Letcher, Rylan Jordan, Watson and Famoyin. Matthew Marsh, Trevor Whitson, Davion Stewart and Necessary will get time at linebacker, while the interior line will be anchored in the middle by Gavin "Bear" Taylor. "[Nelson] has a year of

experience and arguably we thought he was the best

"You have got guys that can come out and you can run multiple formations with those guys so it is good to have those guys as receivers as well."

defensive player in the league last year," Carter said. "He is talented. He is a very, very physical kid...Starting every game as a sophomore, he was tough, he was physical. He is bigger, he is stronger, he is faster so we expect a big year out of him."

Max Turan will do much of the kicking for the Hilltoppers, who have already played Elizabethton and defending 4A state champion Anderson County in the opening two weeks of the season. Science

Hill will also visit Big Stone Gap later this season to face

Union, with the Travis Turner-coached Bears traveling to Johnson City next season.

"He wanted to get a good crowd and a good rivalry game. We know the tradition, we just thought it was awesome just to do that," Carter said. "I want to go to Bullitt Park and see what it is all about. It is just a lot of stuff we want to see and they want to come here. I just think it is good for Virginia and good for Tennessee right there." ★



Air Raid City



Sullivan East Patriots

Class 4A, Northeastern Conference

Schedule

Aug. 18	Johnson County	A
Aug. 25	Tennessee High	H
Sept. 1	Volunteer	A
Sept. 8	Unicoi County	H
Sept. 15	Grainger	H
Sept. 22	Elizabethton	H
Sept. 29	Greeneville	A
Oct. 6	Cherokee	H
Oct. 20	West Greene	A
Oct. 27	Northview Academy	A

Fisher, Pats hooked on the Air Raid

JC Simmons has joked about changing the name of Bluff City to Air Raid City.

Drake Fisher and Sullivan East have certainly bought into the offense that was made popular by legendary college coach Hal Mumme. In fact, the Patriots' offensive coordinator is area resident Stan Bedwell, who is the Vice-President of Hal Mumme & Associates.

"I think they all have. We have made a real concerted effort to push this and what we are trying to do," said Simmons, in his fourth season as head coach of the Patriots. "I think for us it is about knowing what our identity is, what we are, what we are trying to do. We are not trying to come out each week and do something different, we want to be able to execute our stuff as fast and as well as we can regardless of what defense is out there."

Fisher, in his third season as the starting quarterback for the Patriots, is the trigger man for that offensive attack.

"He is looking good, feels good, he is really starting to be able to not just go through progressions, but also understands what we are doing," Simmons said. "He is starting to call the plays a little bit himself, which I am real excited about. When you have a guy back there that can run the offense for you, it works out great."

While the Patriots lost Masun Tate to graduation, Fisher still has plenty of weapons, including 6-foot-5 tight end Corbin Laisure, receivers Tyler Cross, Chase Bailey and Will Alley and running backs Kaden Roberts and Donovan Smith-Peters. The offensive line is led by Christian Blevins, Dylan Sams and Marshall Jones. Austin Brown and Carter Follis are

also candidates on the inside.

"On the offensive side we are feeling good," said Simmons, whose Patriots opened the season with Johnson County, followed by their first meeting with Tennessee High since 2010. "Of course, everybody has got to stay healthy and that kind of thing, but these guys have really bought in, they are sold out for what we are doing and they have been working their tails off all summer."

Scoring points hasn't been a problem for the Patriots, but stopping the other team has been. Leading the way on that side of the ball are Will Moss, Blevins and Jones on the inside, while the linebackers include Laisure - who led East in tackles last year - Smith-Peters and Brayden

Ringley, who is replacing the graduated Dalton Jones.

"From the mental side of the game, I think [Brayden]



2023 Sullivan East Patriots



Patriots Roster

1 Blue Proffitt
2 Peyton Lingerfelt
3 Andrew McDuffie
4 Gabe Johnson
5 Noah Ragan
6 Donovan Smith-Peters
7 Will Alley
8 Jose Valencia
9 Rylie Hewitt
10 Xavier Oliver
11 Bentley Key
12 Corbin Laisure
13 Elijah Briggs

14 Brayden Ringley
15 Haden Jones
16 Drake Fisher
19 Will Price
20 Kaden Roberts
21 Chase Bailey
22 James Roberts
24 Lukas Roberts
26 Kyler Kite
28 Trysten Walden
30 Tyler Cross
31 Cole Welty
32 Devin Bowman
33 Jacob Slone

34 Andrew Davison
35 Noah Slone
36 Noah Colley
40 Hunter Brock
44 Carston Tuell
51 Dakota Tanner
52 Will Maas
54 Lucas Roller
55 Dylan Sams
56 Shayne Hensdill
57 Alex Shaw
59 Max Shaw
65 Ryan Stiltner
66 Luke Tomlinson

70 Benjamin Childers
71 Kolton Smith
72 Marshall Jones
74 Austin Brown
75 Carter Follis
77 Hunter Hagaman
78 Christian Blevins
79 Trent Price
81 Ryley Neal
84 Isaac Stanley
87 Matt Geisinger
88 Joel Crawford
89 Austin Warren

is the one that things are really clicking through and that is what you want your Mike linebacker to be able to do," Simmons said. "He has got to be the quarterback of the defense and he has done a great job at that."

Roberts, Cross and Blue Proffitt could see action at safeties, while the cornerback candidates include Isaac Stanley, Bailey and Alley. Roberts is definitely the leader on the back end of the defense.

"It is similar to what [Roberts] has done the last couple of years, but he will be more focused on the run," Simmons said. "I think that will help because that kid will run through a wall."

"He is looking good, feels good, he is really starting to be able to not just go through progressions, but also understands what we are doing," Simmons said.

Matt Geisinger will be kicking for the Patriots, while Bailey is expected to punt, but just not very often.

"I have already told him I hope we don't have to do it much this year," Simmons said.

Simmons, who had a preseason roster of 58 - including 22 freshmen - credited the feeder program at Sullivan East Middle School, in addition to his

assistant coaches, for the Patriots being able to schedule a full junior varsity schedule for the first time in a while. Some of those players could work their way into the varsity rotation.

"I have always thought Sullivan East was the type of place that if you can get everybody in the school out to play you are going to have 70 or 80 kids and you are going to be really dangerous,"

Simmons said. "Those kind of lean years with about 30 kids on the team it becomes tough so I am excited about that for sure."

"It is a big deal. We haven't been able to have a full JV season in years so I am real excited about that chance."

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Tennessee High Vikings

Class 5A, Mountain Lakes Conference

Schedule

Aug. 18	Greeneville	H
Aug. 25	Sullivan East	A
Sept. 1	Morristown West	H
Sept. 15	Sevier County	A
Sept. 22	Abingdon	H
Sept. 29	Gate City	H
Oct. 6	David Crockett	H
Oct. 13	Cocke County	A
Oct. 20	West Ridge	A
Oct. 26	Daniel Boone	A

Vikings eyeing Mountain Lakes title

Josh Holt has been busy the last two seasons enhancing the tradition of Tennessee High football.

Now he wants to add some hardware, specifically the Mountain Lakes Conference championship for the first time since 2019. That is also the last time the Vikings hosted a Class 4A playoff game.

"We always want to challenge for that top spot,"

Holt said. "Our goal, we talked about it in the winter, was having a home playoff game. There is nothing better than having playoff games here in the Castle. That is a goal for us so you are going to have to finish 1 or 2 in the conference."

Don't count them out. David Crockett and Daniel Boone have won the last two full season championships,



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2023 Tennessee High Vikings



Holt continues to stress the pillars of the program that he played for and served as an assistant in the past.

"We have got to be disciplined, we have got to be simple, we have got to be consistent," said Holt, whose Vikings opened the season playing Greeneville, followed by Sullivan East for the first time since 2010. "Those are things that we preach every

"Our goal, we talked about it in the winter, was having a home playoff game. There is nothing better than having playoff games here in the Castle."

single day. In everything that we do we have got to be disciplined, simple and consistent. "We really feel like in all three phases of the game if we hit all those pillars we stand a chance being where we want to be come the end of October or first of November."

Leading the Vikings is second-year quarterback Jimmy Phipps, who is joined in the backfield by

returnees Josh Green, Josh Bell and Mason Elliott. Freshman Elijah Plumber showed a glimpse of the future with his performance in a recent scrimmage with Virginia High.

"We feel like we have a good slew of backs back there. It could be anybody," Holt said. "We feel really good about all those guys back there."

Micah Norton, Dorian Suggs and Preston Feagins will line up inside with Jose Gregori and Mason Campbell. Phipps' targets have changed, with the additions of Jacob Van Valkenburg, Barron Harkleroad and Josh Sizemore, along with Virginia High transfer Donnie Thomas.



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Vikings Roster

1 Donnie Thomas

2 Turner Elliott

3 Phillip Cox

4 Dane Musick

5 Cooper Booher

6 Jacob Van Valkenburg

7 Josh Bell

8 Zayden Poole

9 Mason Mays

10 Trent Dowdell

11 Griffen Smith

12 Kalel Honaker

13 Colson Mattox

14 Josh Sizemore

15 Carter Keesee

16 Jimmy Phipps

17 Riley Price

18 Jack Richardson

19 Barron Harkleroad

21 Ian Peake

22 Peyton Feagins

23 Owen Stallcup

24 Jashun Hernton

25 Braden Howard

26 Killian Lao

27 Josh Green

28 Jackson Norris

30 Knox Arrington

31 Jordan Bell

32 Cameron Kennedy

39 Isaac Stevens

47 Gavin Francis

50 Evan Smith

51 Mason Campbell

52 Ryan Mullins

53 Preston Feagins

55 Micah Norton

56 Kai Allison

57 Jordan Collins

59 Noah Johnson

60 Ryon Simora

61 Dorian Suggs

62 Josiah Beidleman

63 Grayson Swaggerty

65 Caden Lane

68 Erasmo Cobian

70 Kuan Reid

71 Kade Bible

72 Jacob Norris

73 Aydan Thompson

74 Isaiah Trinkle

75 Jacob Rhea

76 Jose Gregori

80 Mike Dean

81 Thatcher Hutton

n/a Nysim Hall

"We feel really good about Donnie," Holt said. "He has been a big pickup for us, great kid, works hard, strong, fast. He has caught on really quick so he has got it up top."

Thomas will also be in the secondary for Tennessee High with Peyton Feagins, Sizemore, Harkleroad and Van Valkenburg. Carter Keesee and Bell are returnees at linebacker, and could be joined by Elliott.

"Those are tough kids," Holt said. "They have played a lot of football for us so we are excited about that."

Norton will also play on the defensive line, joining a talented cast of characters that could also include Jashun Hernton, Jacob Ray, Evan Smith, Kade Bible and Cooper Booher.

"All those guys are really good up front," Holt said. "We feel like they are going to give us a pretty good chance to cause some havoc up front."

Special teams could also be a strength with Thatcher Hutton, who has attended numerous clinics and camps in his quest to improve.

"Thatcher has worked his tail off. He is constantly out here on the turf working, kicking, punting, doing



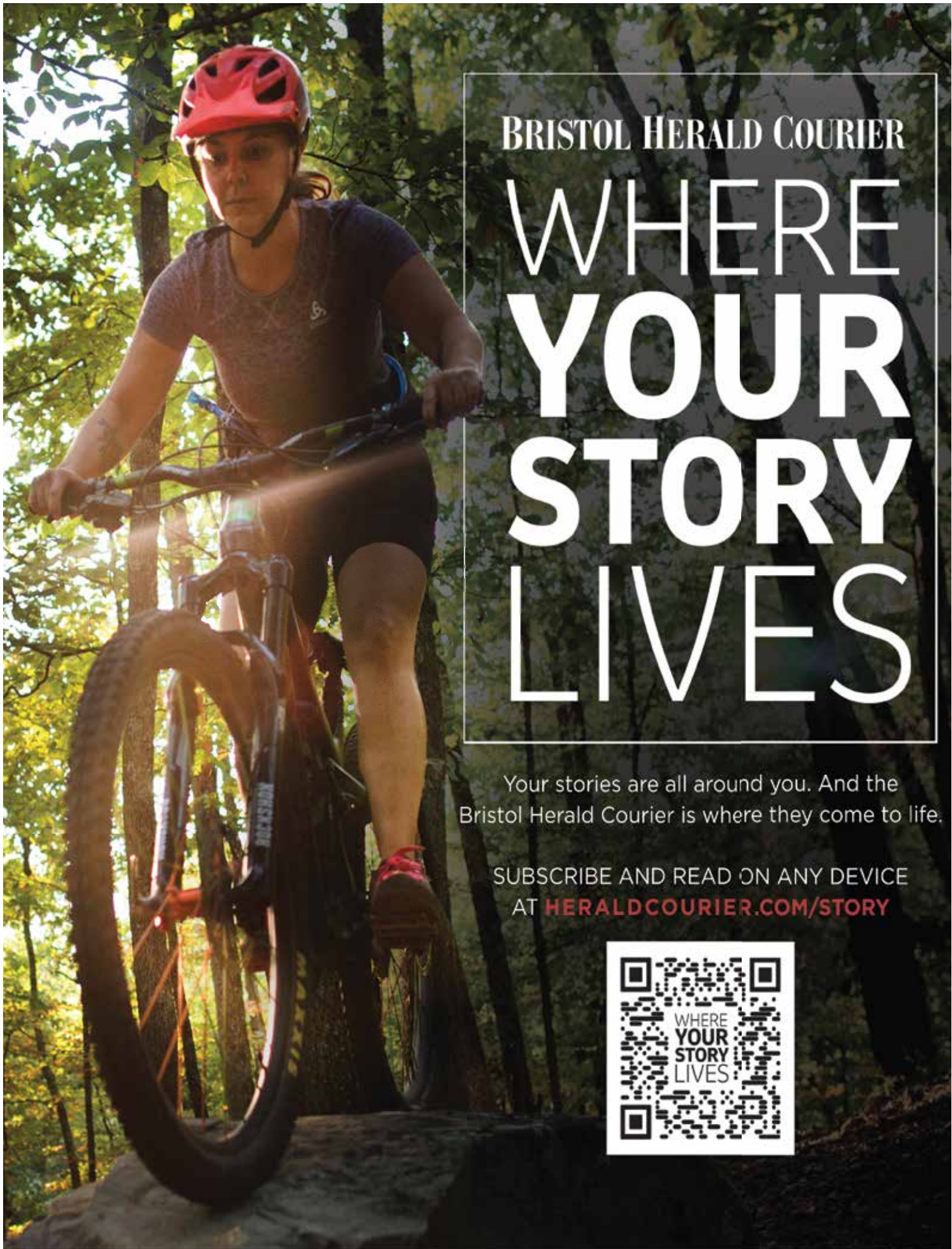
everything," Holt said. "He is truly our specialist. We feel pretty good about what he is going to offer us when it comes to special teams as far as kicking the football...He is really busting his tail."

Holt said there are also some freshmen who could contribute, adding that Jayson Arnold, the coach at Bristol Tennessee Middle School, has provided 30 first-year players in the last two seasons. He is also a fan of the school trainer, Kelly Flanary, and Mike Mays, the former Tennessee High

coach, who is now running the strength and conditioning program in the school system.

"I tell everybody we have three people anybody would kill to have," Holt said. "Number one is Jayson Arnold, No. 2 is Kelly Flanary, our trainer right here in the building, and No. 3 is Mike Mays in the weight room. You can't beat it, it is an amazing thing." ★





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Higher Goals



Union Bears **Class 2D, Mtn 7 District**

Schedule

Aug. 25	Lee High	A
Sept. 1	Richlands	H
Sept. 8	Science Hill	H
Sept. 15	Graham	A
Sept. 22	Gate City	H
Sept. 29	Twin Springs	A
Oct. 6	Ridgeview	H
Oct. 13	Wise County Central	A
Oct. 27	Abingdon	A
Nov. 3	John Battle	H

Union has standards to meet

Since Union High was formed in 2011, the Bears have never failed to earn a playoff bid in football.

Union posted a 7-4 record to continue that streak last season, but something was missing.

With a 21-14 loss to Mountain 7 District rival Gate City, Union failed to win a playoff game for the first time in program history. The Bears also dropped district games to Gate City and Ridgeview in the regular season.

"We won seven games, but that's not up to our standard," Union coach Travis Turner said. "We want to be competing for that district championship every year and we set that goal from day one."

"We played for the regional

title in two of the past three years, and we want to get back to that point."

The Bears graduated five starters on both sides of the ball, but 11 seniors return along with plenty of other familiar faces.

"That's especially the case at the skill positions," Turner said.

Senior quarterback Reyshawn Anderson is the pacesetter on offense after rushing for 1,255 yards with over 15 scores and BEARS passing for 590 yards last season from the spread formation.

"Reyshawn had a tremendous year, and he's getting better every day," Turner said. "The most important area Reyshawn has made improvement is in leadership." Senior Keyshawn Anderson,

Reyshawn's twin brother, returns at running back. Sophomore receivers Paul

Huff, Kam Bostic and Braxton Bunch have experience while senior William Lowery is in the backfield mix. "I think we rotated five running backs in games last season, and we want to keep the guys fresh as possible this season," Turner said. "We've also got two offensive linemen coming

back in sophomores Jacob Horton and A.J. Johnson." The veterans on defense



2023 Union Bears



Bears Roster

1 Keonte Orsby

2 Kam Bostic

3 Preston McCray

4 Paul Huff

5 William Lowery

7 Braxton Bunch

8 Camden Wharton

9 Braxton Collins

10 Reyshawn Anderson

11 Carlos Anderson

12 Abe Hall

13 Nick Burns

14 Cayden Phillips

15 Hunter Elliott

16 Keshawn Milbro

17 Keyshawn Anderson

18 Kam Stivers

20 Kamron Bishop

21 Lucas Callahan

24 Ben Herron

25 Jayden Ison

26 Ray Jones

27 Bayley Sturgill

28 Keith Chandler

30 Dylan Collins

31 Hayden Charron

32 Julian Tanner

33 Brayden Wharton

35 Evan Catron

40 Tony Taylor

42 Colton Kennedy

43 Elijah Anderson

44 Josh Guerrant

45 Brayden Mosier

49 Riley Orange

50 Izaak Keith

52 Landon Honeycutt

54 Noah Ingle

55 Colton Brown

56 Evan Roberts

58 Bryson Miller

59 Trinity Bishop

60 Jacob Horton

62 Brent Lovell

64 Aiden Kopepasah

65 Chandler Garrett

66 E.J. Hernandez

68 Jake Carpenter

70 Kaleb Stacy

71 Brayden Chandler

72 Aayden Johnson

74 Malaki Kennedy

75 Logan Moore

77 Chris Mays

81 Ethan Burke

83 Bryson Brock

85 Trayvion McCoo

88 Anthony Davis

include senior Izaak Keith at inside linebacker, Huff at defensive back and senior Brent Lovell at tackle. "Izaak was an all-district performer last year and he had a big summer of preparations. Huff was all-region at safety and Lovell had a great year," Turner said. Rugged sophomore Keith Chandler, who made 74 tackles last season, is an anchor at inside linebacker.

"We've had to limit Keith a little because of his injury in baseball, but he's a strong kid who worked all summer and we expect him to be 100%," Turner said.

Union fans have been raving about a versatile group of underclassmen who rolled past opponents at the middle school level.

"We have a great freshman class and a really good middle school program. I'm

excited to see those guys come up through the varsity," Turner said.

Turner said that at least seven underclassmen could start on both sides of the ball.

"We started five freshmen last year, and it's been a while since we've been this young," Turner said.

As usual, a large contingent of parents and fans attended the annual media day session at Bullitt Park. The names

change in the Union program, but the expectations remain the same.

Are the Bears ready for another playoff run?

"We've had great practices and the kids have dedicated themselves to the program," Turner said. "You have to be able to block and tackle here. If we can do that with the skill guys we have, we should be good to go on the season."





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Goals Never Change



Virginia High Bearcats

Class 2D, Southwest District

Schedule

Aug. 25	Patrick Henry	H
Sept. 1	John Battle	A
Sept. 8	Radford	H
Sept. 15	Ridgeview	H
Sept. 22	Graham	A
Oct. 6	Tazewell	H
Oct. 13	Richlands	A
Oct. 20	Jenkins (KY)	A
Oct. 27	Lebanon	A
Nov. 3	Marion	H



Bearcats carry on without departures

The Virginia High Bearcats earned two straight playoff berths behind the play of versatile quarterback Brody Jones.

With Jones now learning the outside linebacker spot at Virginia Tech, VHS head coach Derrick Patterson is working to assemble another winner. "We were pretty happy with last season," Patterson said. "We graduated some really good skill guys who accom-

plished a lot, but we've got all our linemen back along with a few guys that got gained some experience at the skill positions."

VHS (9-3) reached the nine-win mark for the first time in 25 years in 2022 as the 6-foot-3 Jones passed for 1,520 yards and 23 touchdowns while rushing for 10 scores.

Jones broke his fibula 25 seconds into the Region 2D

playoff game against Lee High but the Bearcats rallied to collect their first playoff victory since 2013.

"Brody brought the whole package," Patterson said. "He not only helped us with his athletic ability, but he set a great example with his work ethic, leadership and attitude." Patterson said he hopes future Bearcats will follow the example of Jones.

"Brody bought into the things we try to do with our program on and off the field," Patterson said. "He was dedicated in the weight room and classroom, and was always willing to put in the extra work to help himself and the team to improve. That's why he earned the opportunity to play at the college level." Patterson must replace nine

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2023 Virginia High Bearcats



other seniors, including proven talents like line-backer Conner Davidson (98 tackles) and speedster Patrick Poku (33 receptions, 578 yards) at receiver. Poku signed to play soccer at King University. The good new starts up front.

"We have all whole offensive line back," Patterson said.

The experienced cast features senior tight end Lewis Stuart (6-1, 180), senior center Cody Griffith (6-2, 215), senior guard Jason Plaster (5-11, 299), junior guard Carter McReynolds (5-10, 255), junior tackle Jaden King (6-1, 295) and 6-3, 285 senior guard Chandler Lowe. Senior tackle Mason Lail (6-3, 248) returns after suffering a broken foot last season. The other veterans on offense include junior running back Alijah Burks (6-0, 207), junior receiver Dexter Barrett (5-6, 143) and 5-9 junior receiver Keshawn Smith.

"Brody brought the whole package," Patterson said. "He not only helped us with his athletic ability, but he set a great example with his work ethic, leadership and attitude."

"We've got a couple other guys who started at times on offense," Patterson said.

That list includes quarterback Dashaun Taylor. The 5-foot-11, 186-pound senior led the Bearcats to that 37-20 playoff win against Lee High.

More experience comes from senior running back Trystin Denny and junior lineman Conner Watts (6-2, 193). Senior running back Quentyn Daggs is back in the program after a one-year layoff, while junior Logan Slagle (5-10, 158) is also in the backfield mix

"We've got a few different



Bearcats Roster

1 Keshawn Smith

2 Kayden Laws

3 Kegan Anderson

4 Dexter Barrett

5 Dashaun Taylor

6 Bryson Shepherd

7 Thomas Perry

8 Logan Slagle

9 Trystin Denny

10 Caden Wilson

11 Jamere Lawrence

12 Deion Graham

13 Jacob Roe

14 Jeremy Quinto

15 Lewis Stuart

18 Andrew Battel

20 Davy Woolen

21 Quentyn Daggs

22 Josh Williams

23 Ethan Rebentisch

24 Alijah Burks

28 Jarae Bryant

30 Eli Osborne

44 Jeremiah Daggs

52 Carter McReynolds

53 Peyton Sturgill

54 Aaron Joyce

57 Conner Watts

59 Chris King

60 Prince Washington

65 Jason Plaster

67 Chandler Lowe

70 Braylon Lester

71 Jaden King

72 Cody Griffith

74 Anthony Galbreth

77 Mason Lail

80 Jacob Kimberlin



guys than can carry the ball or catch the ball," Patterson said. The defense features three returning linemen in Stuart, Griffith and Lowe along with Burks and Keshawn Smith at linebacker.

"We're really young in the secondary, but we've got several guys that we can put back there," Patterson said. Jones also set a torrid pace at linebacker with 74 tackles, including 16 for loss. Can the Bearcats record a

playoff three-peat? "Everybody will look at all the skill guys we've lost over the past two years," Patterson said. "Our team looks a lot different now but we've still got the pieces to be successful. "Our goals remain intact.

We want to have a winning season, compete to win the district and fight to have a home playoff game. It's just going to be lot more challenging without all those explosive athletes we've had." ★

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WEST RIDGE

**West Ridge
Wolves**

**Class 6A, Big East
Conference**

Schedule

Aug. 18	Volunteer	A
Aug. 25	Daniel Boone	A
Sept. 1	Dobyns-Bennett	H
Sept. 8	Lakeway Christian	A
Sept. 15	William Blount	H
Sept. 22	David Crockett	H
Sept. 29	Science Hill	A
Oct. 6	Jefferson County	A
Oct. 20	Tennessee High	H
Oct. 27	Morristown East	A
Oct. 28	Jefferson County	A

Wolves hunting for victories

Year one was memorable for West Ridge. Year two, not so much.

What lies ahead in year three?

West Ridge head coach Justin Hilton was optimistic during the Wolves' media day in late July.

"You always feel like you don't have enough time to get things in, but I think the guys have worked hard, our conditioning should be something that is to our benefit," Hilton said. "We have got our quarterback coming back with a year's experience so that is going to be beneficial, but we are replacing people in the line of scrimmage.

"If we can shore up the line

of scrimmage and some of those leaders emerge, I think we will be OK."

West Ridge, which opened its season with Volunteer and Daniel Boone, finished 9-3 in 2021, led by 28 seniors that came together from Sullivan South, Sullivan Central and Sullivan North. The Wolves struggled to a 4-6 mark last year with an inexperienced cast including 20 rising seniors that have now played a year of 6A football.

"All those older guys played that first year so last year was a big transition and it was seniors coming in who hadn't played," Hilton said. "This year will be another growing experience, but we do have some young guys that I think

will develop and get better over the next two or three years and you will see that as we go throughout these next couple of years at West Ridge."

Leading the way for West Ridge is rising junior quarterback Trey Frazier, who will be joined in the backfield by sophomore running back Ethan Amyx. He has a solid collection of receivers that includes Sawyer Tate, Emilio Hogate, Dylan Fore and Bryson Horne.

"Offensively, we are looking to spread things out a little bit more and

throw the ball a little bit with our quarterback being a year older," Hilton said.

West Ridge does have talent on the offensive line,

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2023 West Ridge Wolves



led by senior center Josh Seto, and 6-foot-7 290-pound junior Trent Tatum, who could have a future on a college gridiron.

"He is two-hand dunking it in basketball, he can run a little bit. With big guys it is tough to get in shape and he has been battling trying to get himself in shape," Hilton said. "He has gotten stronger. He is going to be somebody that in the next couple of years you are going to hear a lot of people at the next level talking about him."

There is experience back on defense, led by leading tackler Dylan Joyner, one of the few seniors to see much action as a sophomore. Carter Sanders and Trey West will also make tackles, while Kaleb Mabb is expected to help returnees Hogate and Tate in the secondary.

"Carter is going to be a nice surprise. He is 6-4, 210, long, rangy defensive end, was playing tight end for us last year, moved down to offensive tackle," Hilton said. "He and Trey are really going to come along in the offensive line. In the skill positions, Kaleb is a young kid that I think is going to be very successful for us."

Hilton is especially excited about the kicking game, which will be manned by Hogate, an import from San Diego, who

Wolves Roster

1 Jesse Barnes	23 Drew Odham	56 Brady Osborne
2 Kaleb McClain	24 Gabe Musick	58 Fallon Waller
3 Trey Frazier	25 Austin Porter	59 Peyton Hamilton
4 Tate Sawyer	26 Dacoda Harkleroad	60 Josh Seto
5 Chase Gill	27 Gabe Young	62 Keanen Taylor
6 Levi Bachman	28 Cayden Coates	63 Dom Almarales
7 Carter Sanders	29 Jayden Ramsey	64 Mason Hunsucker
8 Adam Hunt	30 Sam Harmon	65 Dylan Wallen
9 Andrew Jones	32 Dom Ellis	66 Noah Tipton
10 Cale Bryant	33 Ryker Hann	67 Derrick Risner
11 Hunter Wexler	34 Dylan Joyner	70 Avery Waller
12 Bryson Horne	35 Braxton Hyder	71 Ashton Waller
13 Aiden Rhoton	36 Brayden Ray	72 Ty Christian
14 Dylan Fore	40 Connor Bowman	75 Trent Tatum
15 Kaiden Compton	42 Carter Osborne	77 Jeremiah Kirkpatrick
16 Kas Click	43 Arian Mauk	78 Bryson Crumbley
17 Elias Carter	44 Trey West	80 Hunter Hopkins
18 Reichen Gibson	45 Jesse Penland	84 Parker SESCO
20 Emilio Hogate	51 Brock Greer	85 Ben Quillen
21 Trent Moody	53 Jake McCamy	99 Jacob Cassell
22 Kayden Puck	54 Logan Pearce	
	55 Carson Abbott	

played for the Wolves last season.

"We are finally kicking that thing through the end zone. That is a big deal," Hilton said. "You ask teams to start at the 20 and go 80 yards, that is a hard thing to do. It is hard to be consistent without making a turnover in high school football so we think that will be another advantage for us. We are really pressing the kicking game. It is truly a third of the game and a lot of teams ignore that. We hope that can be an advantage for us."

West Ridge certainly doesn't have it easy, having to play 6A football, the highest level in Tennessee,

competing with fellow Big East Conference schools like Science Hill and Dobyns-Bennett. Just don't look for excuses, just hard work from the Wolves.

"Everybody wants to win every single game so you can find success in very different ways," Hilton said. "On one standpoint you want these guys to be better young men when they leave from here. Football-wise, we want them to grow up, mature, handle adversity well and the chips will fall where they may in the win-loss column."

"We want them to be able to handle adversity in a positive way and be leaders in the school to create the kind of

culture we can be proud of." ★



Every Play Counts



Wise County Central Warriors

Class 2D, Mtn 7 District

Schedule

Aug. 25	Eastside	A
Sept. 1	Marion	A
Sept. 8	Ridgeview	H
Sept. 15	Letcher County (Ky)	H
Sept. 29	Abingdon	A
Oct. 6	John Battle	H
Oct. 13	Union	H
Oct. 20	Lee High	H
Oct. 27	Gate City	A
Nov. 3	Grundy	A

Warriors growing through the pain

Nothing came easy for the Wise County Central football team last season.

Following a series of close losses, the Warriors finished with a 4-7 record and a setback at Graham in the first round of the Region 2D playoffs.

Wise Central head coach Jason Mullins hopes his players learned a lesson from the pain.

"We lost a handful of ball games by a handful of points," Mullins said. "I'm trying to teach the kids this year that every play counts. We can't preach that enough."

Those heartbreaking defeats

came against Virginia High (38-35), Abingdon (27-26), Union (28-21), Lee High (35-30) and Gate City by a 21-14 margin.

"Our season easily could have gone a different way with a touchdown here or there," Mullins said.

More challenges loom this season as the Warriors must replace 16 seniors.

"But only eight or nine of those guys really played," Mullins said. "We did lose a couple linemen who started since their freshman year along with a three-year starter at quarterback. There's no substitute for that kind of

experience."

There are just four seniors on the current roster.

"We do have a slew of ninth and eighth graders," Mullins said.

"That's a very good feeling."

The Warriors return three linemen on offense along with a part-time starter in the backfield, while the defense features eight players with starting experience.

"I think we've got five or six kids that can play on the offensive line, but an injury would be a big setback right now," Mullins said.

Quarterback Braden Church passed for 1,035 yards and nine scores last season while rushing for 631 yards and nine more scores.

Running back Alec Gent added 1,367 yards rushing and 18 scores.

"We've got a lot of unknowns this year, but we do have a lot of potential," Mullins said.

One of those unknowns is

senior quarterback Sincere Haggins, a transfer from Baltimore.

"Sincere is pretty athletic and



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2023 Wise Central Warriors



Warriors Roster

1 London Horne
2 Sincere Haggins
3 Nate West
4 Jackson Wiley
5 Gabe Thomason
6 Maddox Hafemeister
7 Zeke O'Quinn
8 Owen Amos
9 Talan Yates
10 Aaron Mullins
12 Jude Davis
13 Ethan Collins

14 Blake Brooks
15 Caden Isbell
16 Jayden Hill
18 Colton Asbury
20 Shawn Collier
21 Oluwatimileyin Babatunde
22 Caden Sexton
23 Mika Shortt
24 Jessee Greear
25 Lavant Calvent
30 Favian Onate
32 Alex Williams

33 Dalton Sturgill
35 Levi Cathell
43 Isaac Cowden
50 Noah Trent
51 Ford Riley
52 Hadley Martin
53 Cole Fleenor
54 Aiden Phillips
55 Parker Adkins
56 Branden Cretchfield
57 Rickey Kennedy
58 Austin Gilliam
59 Joshua Vaughan

60 Thomas Meade
61 Mark Miller
62 Adam Yeary
66 Marshal Dingus
69 Joseph Overden
70 Dustin Davidson
71 Aiden Osborne
72 Austin Clevinger
75 Bramble Stidham
78 McKinley Sluss

he can throw it," Mullins said. "I think he's going to be big help for us."

The standouts on defense include senior lineman Austin Clevinger (27 tackles, five sacks) and junior middle linebacker Jude Davis. After making 52 tackles last season at just 145 pounds, David added 40 pounds in the off-season.

"Jude really dedicated himself to lifting and becoming more physical," Mullins said. "I know Jude is a wrestler at heart, but those guys sometimes make pretty good football players. Jude works hard, is relentlessly tough and motivates everybody else." Davis will also see time at running back this season.

"I know what Jude can do on defense, and I look forward to seeing what he can do on offense," Mullins said.

"We don't have that premier running back right now, so we might do things by committee.

"We do have a freshman in London Horne who is probably as tough as Jude. We also have a speedster in freshman Blake Brooks and another fast kid in junior Jackson Wiley. I feel confident in the hands of all those guys."

The rugged Clevinger provides stability on the offensive line at guard, while junior Marshal Dingus (6-4, 270) returns at tackle along with junior Noah Trent at



guard.

Junior Nate West is in the mix at slot back, while juniors Owen Amos and Ethan Collins are big targets at receiver.

West and Amos also have experience in the secondary, while freshman Aaron Mullins is in line to start at cornerback.

Don't be surprised if the Warriors embark on an early youth movement.

"If I had to play seven or eight of these freshmen, I wouldn't care one bit because they are gamers who ready to go," Mullins said. "Of course we have to stay healthy and we need to win some of those close games." ★





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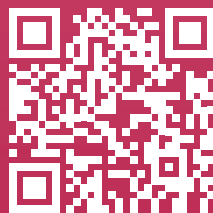
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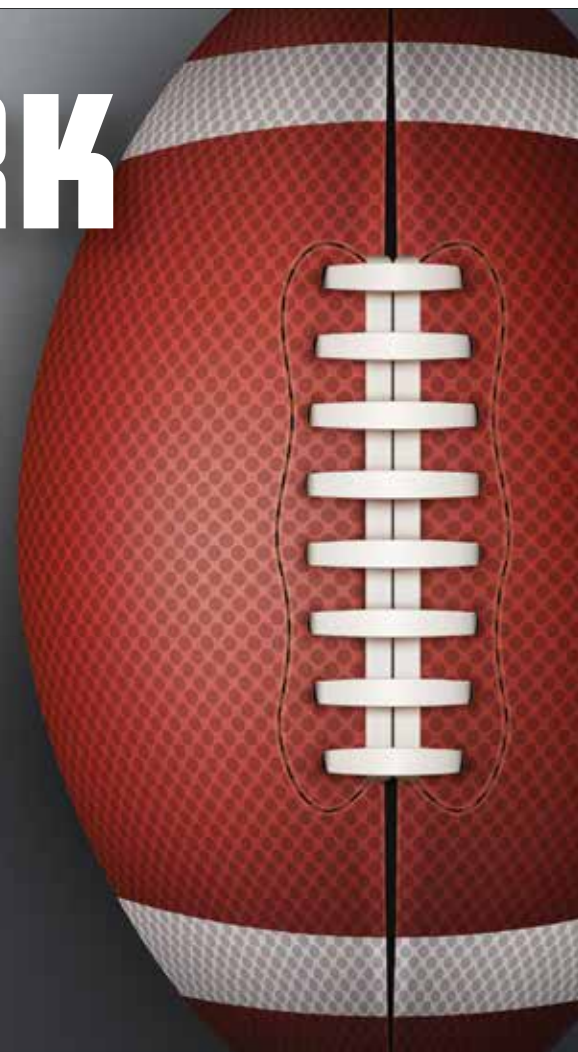


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