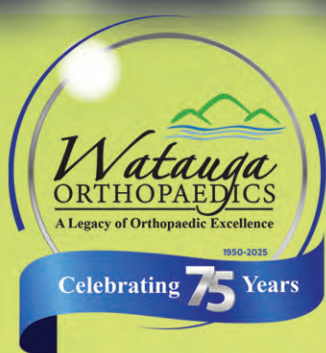




2025 HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL PREVIEW



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HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL 2025 • LOOKING BACK



J.D. VAUGHN/SIX RIVERS MEDIA

Rye Cove's Luke Jessee (far right) celebrates with teammates after catching the game winning touchdown pass from Landon Lane against Eastside.

10 best games of the 2024 high school football season

By J.D. VAUGHN
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As we take this next week to catch our breath during the high school dead period, what better time to take one last look at the best games of 2024?

Come Monday, July 7, high school football season will be on everyone's mind as teams return to their respective campuses. From there, it'll just be roughly a month and a half until opening night on Friday, Aug. 22.

But now that we have some time to reflect, here's a list of the top 10 games from the 2024 high school football season.

It should be noted the 10 games below aren't ranked in any particular order, except the date they happened. Several factors were considered, including team success and the impact of each particular game. Naturally, there's more at stake later in the season, which is why you'll find several games from October and November.

SEPT. 13 HAPPY VALLEY 19, HAMPTON 12

ELIZABETHTON — Gabe McDougald scored two touchdowns and blocked a punt, as Happy Valley outscored the visitors 13-0 in the second half to end a four-game

skid in the rivalry. Tyler Berry scored the Warriors' first TD, and McDougald ran for 92 yards as the Warriors didn't attempt any passes. Dominique Burleson led Hampton with 96 yards and two touchdowns.

WEST RIDGE 22, LAKEWAY CHRISTIAN 16

BLOUNTVILLE — Ethan Amyx ran for a 3-yard touchdown and 2-point conversion with two minutes left,

rallying West Ridge to victory and a 3-1 start. Amyx ran for 54 yards and two touchdowns. Trey Frazier led the Wolves with 116 yards rushing and 130 yards passing, including his 15-yard scoring toss to Trent Tatum (3 catches for 48 yards, 1 sack, blocked PAT).

SEPT. 20 DAVID CROCKETT 41, COCKE COUNTY 38

NEWPORT — Zeke Slone scored the game-winning touchdown on a 2-yard run, his third TD of the night, and the Pioneers held on against their conference rivals when the Fighting Cocks missed a 42-yard field goal on the final play. A.J. Wynn connected with Lamarkus Dunn on passes of 42 and 47 yards to set up Slone's touchdown runs of 2 and 6 yards. Wynn also ran for touchdowns of 21 yards and 1 yard

out. The other touchdown was a 32-yard throw from Wynn to Dunn.

CHEROKEE 28, NORTHVIEW ACADEMY 21

KODAK — Hayden Hook rushed for 78 yards, and his second 2-yard touchdown came with 1:44 remaining to help the Chiefs improve their playoff positioning. Hunter Larmer's interception moments later sealed it. Landon Jeffers threw for 147 yards and ran for 134, firing a 28-yard scoring toss to Lofton Hayes and scoring on a 32-yard run. Mason Phillips' 30-yard TD pass to Calvin Ferguson gave the Cougars a 21-14 lead with 9:12 left, before the Chiefs answered.

OCT. 18 GATE CITY 42, LEE HIGH 39

BEN HUR — Zayne Reed fired three touchdown passes, the last covering 95 yards to Corey Byrd for a 42-13 lead in the third quarter. Brynнен Pendergraft rallied the Generals with a 26-point fourth quarter. He threw six touchdowns in the game, four of them going to brother Carder Pendergraft. Walker Hillman (3-run, 14-run), Kaden Houseright (17-pass from Reed), Ethan Ferguson (34-pass from Reed) and Gabe Johnson (45-fumble return)

scored to give the Blue Devils a 35-7 halftime lead. Johnson recovered two fumbles and intercepted a pass while stopping a pair of 2-point tries and blocking a PAT.

NOV. 1 DOBYNS-BENNETT 18, SCIENCE HILL 12

JOHNSON CITY — Tegan Begley ran for 72 yards and two touchdowns, helping Dobyns-Bennett end a five-game skid against its arch-rival and win its first Region 1-6A crown in four years. His 4-yard TD with 11:04 left eventually lifted D-B to victory. Austin Sykes hit 11-of-22 passes for 102 yards, and his 11-yard completion to Peyton Franklin sealed the outcome. Cooper McLain's field goal gave D-B a 10-6 halftime lead. Aiden Perry ran for 161 yards, and his 3-yard TD gave Science Hill a 12-10 lead. Spencer Taylor threw for 128 yards with a TD to Zane Huff, but Science Hill had 106 penalty yards and came up short twice on fourth down.

UNICOI COUNTY 10, JOHNSON COUNTY 7

ERWIN — Emilio Soto kicked a 30-yard field goal with 2:53 left, breaking a 7-7 tie and lifting the Blue Devils to their second Region 1-3A championship in four years in the wake of Hurricane Helene. Bransan Salts (74 yards)

scored on a 3-yard run for Unicoi County, before Jace Stout's 19-yard TD pass to Jack Csillag pulled the Longhorns even. Koda Cutlip's interception and return to Johnson County's 19 set up the go-ahead field goal.

NOV. 8 (TSSAA PLAYOFFS) SCIENCE HILL 30, CLEVELAND 28

JOHNSON CITY — Easton Miller's first career field goal attempt kept Science Hill's season alive. Miller drilled a 28-yard field goal with three seconds left to send the Hilltoppers into the second round. Baylor Necessary ran for a 1-yard touchdown and hit Zane Huff for another TD, with Spencer Taylor hitting Steven Famoyin and Huff for scores. Sam Sartin's 1-yard TD and Kason McGowan's ensuing 2-point conversion gave Cleveland a 28-27 lead with 4:17 remaining. Elijah Belnavis recovered a fumble in the final minute to set up Miller's winning field goal.

ELIZABETHTON 14, FULTON 13

ELIZABETHTON — Justius Wallin ran for two touchdowns, seven and 13 yards, to rally the Cyclones from a 13-0 deficit. Will Bowers made both extra points

to send Elizabethton to the second round. Wallin ran for 110 yards on 17 carries, while Jaiden "J-Bird" Wallin gained 68 yards. Albert Johnson ran for 111 yards and a TD to lead Fulton, which took a 13-0 lead when Travis Ballinger caught a 35-yard score from Derrick Smith after a lateral. Elizabethton kept the ball on the ground to drain the last seven minutes of the clock.

NOV. 29 RYE COVE 26, EASTSIDE 20 (REGION 1D CHAMPIONSHIP)

CLINCHPORT — Luke Jessee caught a 20-yard touchdown pass from Landon Lane with 25 seconds left, lifting Rye Cove to its second region championship in school history (first since 2000). The game featured three lead changes in the final 2:54, starting when Cole Barnette's 2-yard run made it 18-14 War Eagles. Luke Trent's 66-yard TD catch from Landon Pannell put the Spartans ahead 20-18 with 1:28 remaining. Blake Goins (82-kickoff return, 5-run) scored the first two TDs for Rye Cove, while Landon Lane hit 8-of-11 passes for 104 yards and rushed for 37. Keldan Hamilton ran for 176 yards and a TD to lead Eastside, which nearly avenged a 40-8 defeat from the regular season.

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HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL 2025 • CHEROKEE



JEFF BIRCHFIELD / SIX RIVERS MEDIA

Expectations are high for the Chiefs this season. Experience is on its side with a big senior class led by quarterback Landon Jeffers. Jeffers passed for 1,516 yards and 16 touchdowns last season.

Cherokee has big goals with big senior class

By JEFF BIRCHFIELD
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Cherokee has experience on its side this season with a big senior class led by quarterback Landon Jeffers.

A star for the Chiefs on the football field and basketball court, Jeffers passed for 1,516 yards and 16 touchdowns last season. He's thrown for over 1,000 yards the three previous seasons. He can also do damage with his legs, rushing for over 700 yards last season.

Cherokee coach Josh Hensley again describes the running back position by committee. The group is led by Jayden Weston, although Jayden Gonzalez and Tyler Wolf add more speed to the equation.

Garrett Lawson returns as starting H-Back with leading receivers Lofton Hayes and Rowe Fletcher back. Gonzalez will also line up some at receiver, just as he's done in the past.

“Garrett has been a really key piece for our offense the past three years, so we’re excited about him going through his senior year,” Hensley said. “Then at wide out, both of our guys are back from last season with Lofton and Fletcher. Jayden Gonzalez will be out wide a little, but another cat who has emerged this offseason is Ezra Garrett.”

There has been a good position battle for starting center

throughout the summer with Hayden Good leading the charge. Cooper Bledsoe will be a four-year starter at guard and Hensley calls him one of the better linemen in East Tennessee. Kenner Jarnigan, who started eight games at center last season, will move to guard. Nathan Collins and Chance Lewis are starting tackles.

"We have a lot of experience there," Hensley said about the offensive line. "I'm really proud of them for their development, and the selflessness that they have up front."

Turning to the other side of the ball, Dawson Fobber has emerged as a big force to be reckoned with at defensive tackle. Hensley describes him as “flat out strong.” Damien Ellis is another one that really came on this off season. Peyton Garland, Riley Johnson and Ethan Hahn are others who should contribute heavily.

Matt Carpenter has moved from tackle to a more natural spot at defensive end, along with Markus Baugh, a starter last season. Grayson Fields and Sawyer Jenkins are also getting tons of reps.

Fletcher and Jeffers are corners, while a big addition is Brayden Horn, who comes from the basketball team and is a very physical safety. Jack Bailey will be back as well in the defensive



JEFF BIRCHFIELD / SIX RIVERS MEDIA

Cherokee Chiefs head coach Josh Hensley says the running back position will be filled by committee.

backfield.

The Chiefs' have a foreign exchange student as kicker second straight year. This time, it's Frederico Guijarro De Orueta from Spain. Collin Fugate is also been working at that position as well as punting duties.

“We’ve got a lot of really good kids, not the headaches I’ve had to deal with in the past just because of our senior leadership,” Hensley said. “There are so many guys with a lot of experience. We’re going to focus on what’s right in front of us, and see how the chips fall at the end of the day.”



JEFF BIRCHFIELD / SIX RIVERS MEDIA

Senior guard Cooper Bledsoe is a four-year starter on the offensive line.



JEFF BIRCHFIELD / SIX RIVERS MEDIA

Senior quarterback Landon Jeffers has passed for over 1,000 yards each of his first three seasons.

CHEROKEE ROSTER

No.	Name	Pos.	Class	19	Noah Lawson	WR/DB	So.	51	Gabe Chandler	OL/DL	So.	74	Bryson Calhoun	OL/DL	Sr.
1	Landon Jeffers	QB/DB	Sr.	21	Braydon Haun	WR/DB	Jr.	53	Gaige Brock	OL/DL	Fr.	75	Tyler White	OL/DL	So.
2	Jayden Weston	RB/DB	Jr.	23	Tye Roberts	RB/DB	Jr.	54	Aaron Cooke	OL/DL	So.	77	Mason McAnally	OL/DL	Fr.
3	Jaydan Gonzalez	RB/DB	Sr.	24	Xavier Robinson	RB/LB	So.	55	Nathan Collins	OL/DL	Sr.	79	Peyton Garland	OL/DL	Jr.
4	Eli Gonzalez	WR/DB	Fr.	27	Haden Jones	HB/DL	Sr.	56	Cooper Bledsoe	OL/DL	Sr.	80	Tristan Baker	WR/DB	So.
6	Markus Baugh	HB/DL	Sr.	30	Luke Elkins	WR/DB	Fr.	57	Riley Johnson	OL/DL	Jr.	81	Trinity Thacker	WR/DB	Fr.
7	Matt Carpenter	HB/DL	Sr.	32	Tyler Wolfe	RB/LB	Sr.	58	Tucker Turnmire	OL/DL	Jr.	82	Eli Herron	HB/LB	Fr.
8	Cade Putnal	QB/DB	Fr.	33	Sawyer Jenkins	HB/DL	Jr.	59	Collin Fugate	OL/DL	Sr.	83	Grayson Fields	HB/DL	Jr.
9	Jake Elliott	RB/DB	Sr.	34	Landree Helton	HB/LB	Jr.	60	Jacob Browning	OL/DL	Fr.	85	Colton Williams	WR/DB	Fr.
10	Rowe Fletcher	WR/DB	Sr.	37	Alex Barnett	HB/LB	Fr.	61	Kenner Jarnigan	OL/DL	Jr.	86	Blake Wolfe	WR/DB	Fr.
11	Lofton Hayes	WR/DB	Sr.	39	Federico De Orueta	K	Jr.	62	Xavier Ferrell	OL/DL	Jr.	88	Desmond Potter	RB/DB	So.
12	Eli Boyd	QB/LB	Jr.	40	Eli Price	WR/DB	So.	63	Ethan Haun	OL/DL	Jr.	Head Coach: Josh Hensley Assistant Coaches: Mylan Brewer, Jerry Fletcher, Reed Fletcher, Tyler Hensley, Wayne Herron, Matthew Myers, Jonathan Palmer, Matthew Seals, Jacob Watson, Gareath Weston.			
13	Cole Davis	RB/LB	Sr.	41	Keaton Rimer	HB/DL	Jr.	66	Brodie Jarnigan	OL/DL	Sr.				
14	Carson Rimer	WR/DB	Sr.	42	Hayden Warren	WR/DB	Fr.	67	Aiden Hall	OL/DL	Fr.				
15	Noah Redding	HB/LS	Sr.	44	Garrett Lawson	HB/LB	Sr.	68	Hayden Good	OL/DL	Jr.				
16	Ezra Garrett	WR/DB	Jr.	45	Griffin Penny	OL/DL	So.	71	Kenlee Morrison	OL/DL	Fr.				
17	Landon Rimer	WR/DB	So.	47	Anthony Diaz	OL/DL	Jr.	72	Chance Lewis	OL/DL	Sr.				
18	Brady Light	HB/LB	Fr.	50	Dawson Fobber	OL/DL	So.	73	Damien Alvis	OL/DL	Sr.				

High School Football 2025 • Cloudland



ANDREW SMITH/SIX RIVERS MEDIA

The Cloudland football team and cheerleaders pose for a photo during 2025 media day. The Highlanders will be looking to bounce back after a 4-5 record and first-round playoff loss in 2024.

Cloudland leaning on trademarked physicality in 2025

By **ANDREW SMITH**
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ROAN MOUNTAIN — Last November was an unusually quiet one on top of Roan Mountain for the Cloudland Highlanders.

For the first time since 2011, Cloudland football did not host at least one postseason game in 2024. The Highlanders instead traveled to Oliver Springs for their first-round matchup and saw their season come to an end after a 4-5 campaign.

In order to see playoff football return to Orr Field, ‘Landers head coach Zac Benfield said the biggest key is in the trenches.

“We can’t have penalties,” Benfield said. “We had so many self-inflicted penalties last year, it was embarrassing. That starts with me, starts with the staff. We’ve got to really stick it into their brains that we’re a good football team. But you can’t beat good football teams when you hurt yourself consistently. So we have to work on not beating ourselves, penalty-wise. And on being disciplined and doing the little things right all the time, not just sometimes.”

If the line is able to create the adequate room to work, Cloudland returns one of the area’s top rushers in junior running back Grayson Cole.

Cole broke on to the map as a freshman, racking up four touchdowns in a win against Unaka. Then last season, the Highlander runner accounted for 1,104 rushing yards and 17 touchdowns, both in the top-five of all of Northeast Tennessee.

“If you look at his lower body, you look at his legs, you look at

this upper body, he’s built good,” Benfield said. “He’s strong, he’s durable. But more than anything, he’s a good leader.”

Benfield added that, while Cole may be the headliner, junior Landon Barnette and sophomore Gavyn Shell will need to play in big roles for the Highlander rushing attack to flourish.

“Having Landon and Gavyn, I think will benefit Grayson because defenses aren’t going to be able to key on Grayson,” he said. “If they do, then hopefully Landon and Gavyn can run for 200-plus (yards).”

With the Highlanders in Region 1-1A, the expectation for most everyone in the league is to be able to run the ball, and to be able to stop the run on defense.

Overall, Cloudland had success on that side of the football, allowing just 123 total points in 2024. It’s a mark that put them fourth in the area, trailing just South Greene, Greeneville, and Happy Valley.

Once again, success will come up front, led by one of the team’s seniors.

“We’ve gotten stronger,” Benfield said. “Tristen Hoss is coming off an ACL injury. He got hurt against Johnson County last year. We had struggled before then, but he hadn’t struggled at all. He was a stud. He’s came back and been deliberate and intentional in his rehabilitation process.”

Cloudland will spend the first half of the season on the road, and for good reason.

Orr Field will become an artificial playing surface for the Highlanders, going from grass to



MATT LAWS

Cloudland running back Grayson Cole (0) takes the handoff from quarterback Bryce Birchfield (2) during a win last season at West Greene. Cole ran for four touchdowns in the win. Cole will be one of the area’s top returning running backs.

‘We can’t have penalties. We had so many self-inflicted penalties last year, it was embarrassing. That starts with me, starts with the staff. We’ve got to really stick it into their brains that we’re a good football team. But you can’t beat good football teams when you hurt yourself consistently. So we have to work on not beating ourselves, penalty-wise. And on being disciplined and doing the little things right all the time, not just sometimes.’

Head coach Zac Benfield

turf. All four Carter County Schools will see turf go into their football fields, with Happy Valley also undergoing the transformation ahead of 2025.

“I didn’t think we’d see artificial turf from here all the way until you got past Greene County, as far

as county schools,” Benfield said. “As long as it benefits the kids, that’s what we’re after.”

The Highlanders open the season on Aug. 22 at Midway before starting league play on Sept. 12, when they travel to Hancock County.

The game most

CLOUDLAND ROSTER		
No.	Name	Class
15	Landon Street	Fr.
60	Brendon Polechio	Fr.
75	Elijah Jordan	Fr.
75	Mason Johnson	Fr.
44	Wyatt Dellinger	Fr.
24	Austin Simerly	So.
11	Gavyn Shell	So.
5	William Polechio	So.
57	Larry Hernandez	So.
74	Gabe Barnett	So.
71	Jacob Withee	Jr.
0	Grayson Cole	Jr.
8	Landon Barnette	Jr.
67	Dominick Banner	Jr.
69	Ethan McCracken	Jr.
56	Bryson Peppers	Sr.
72	Caleb Ledford	Sr.
33	Tyler Jordan	Sr.
55	Tristen Hoss	Sr.
1	Walker Gouge	Sr.
2	Bryce Birchfield	Sr.
13	Colin Davis	Sr.
Head coach: Zac Benfield		

Carter County natives will have circled will come on Halloween, when Cloudland plays host to Hampton. The Bulldogs have won the last seven meetings, but for the first time in over a decade, it will be a region game.

“Whenever I was in high school, it was

always us and Hampton playing for the conference championship, week 10, late October,” Benfield said. “I think it’s a good thing. Having those rivalries, just like in college, benefits everybody. I think that’s what makes sports, sports.”

WISHING ALL THE PLAYERS A SUCCESSFUL 2025 SEASON!



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HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL 2025 • DANIEL BOONE



J.D. VAUGHN/SIX RIVERS MEDIA

The Daniel Boone Trailblazers look to get back to the playoffs while seeking their first win since mid-2023. The Trailblazers have been through the rebuilding cycle before and look to do it again.

Trailblazers focused on being ‘1-0 in everything’ after winless 2024

By J.D. VAUGHN
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This isn’t the first time Daniel Boone coach Jeremy Jenkins has gone through a rebuilding cycle. If it goes like the previous one, look out.

A decade after posting a 1-9 mark, and then winning the program’s first-ever conference title two years later, the Trailblazers aim to accomplish the feat even faster.

But first, Boone needs to end a 14-game losing streak. And that goes hand-in-hand with the Trailblazers’ mindset for 2025 — be 1-0 in everything, on and off the field.

“The kids are probably like the coaching staff, just chomping at the bit to get back out there,” Jenkins said. “Anytime you go through something like that, the good Lord puts you in stuff you have to go through, and you have to come out of it. Our kids have taken the challenge, as it’s our decision. Nobody’s going to feel sorry for anybody who’s won two of the last four championships, undefeated three years ago. Nobody’s going to feel sorry for you. What we’ve really tried to emphasize is you do your job, don’t worry about doing somebody else’s, take care of your box. Everybody takes care of their own box and we don’t have to worry about it.”

Daniel Boone’s top rusher and tackler is back for his junior year.

Dru Fleming rushed for 605 yards and three touchdowns as a sophomore, while making 62 tackles and intercepting a pass. In fact, Fleming made such an impact he was chosen as a team captain as an underclassman.

Fleming gained roughly 20 pounds over the offseason, so he’s expected to be the bell cow for Boone’s backfield. He might even take some direct snaps in the wildcat formation.

“Great work ethic, great leadership, you don’t know too many people who are selected captain their sophomore year,” Jenkins said. “Just a great team person, in the classroom and out in the community. Kids really look up to him, and I think he’s made that step forward of being a little more physical.”

STARTS UP FRONT

Daniel Boone’s offensive line might be one of the more experience in the Tri-Cities area, especially seniors like Sam Al-Salim and Micah Martin returning. Al-Salim is a three-year starter for the ‘Blazers, and Martin two. Jenkins also described junior right guard Dayton Myers (6-6, 315) as “one of the top linemen in the area.” Senior Chase Foster, along with juniors Hunter McElwain and Hunter Gallo and sophomore Xander Richards, will all see time in the trenches.

“We’re anxious to see how physical we can be,”



DAKOTA HAMILTON

Boone’s Dru Fleming finds running room against Campbell County.

Jenkins said. “It’s still a line of scrimmage game. Everybody likes four and five wide, throwing it all over the field. But you’ve got to win up front. Each play takes about six seconds, so you have to try and dominate those six seconds.”

It’ll mark the second straight year the Trailblazers start as sophomore at quarterback, with Ry Stone getting the nod this time. Stone saw some varsity action last fall while guiding the JV squad.

Tight end Logan Wheatley and fellow senior Dillon Murphy give Stone two reliable and experienced options in the passing game, and sophomore speedster Mykah Lucas is expected to start both at receiver and at corner.

Walker Barton, who also handles kick returns, will likely line up in the slot with fellow junior Judah Jackson wide.

EXPERIENCED DEFENSE

Three-year starter Drake Walton will anchor Daniel Boone’s

front seven on defense, returning at defensive end for his senior year. He could even drop back to linebacker depending on the situation.

In fact, Boone’s other defensive end and nose tackle are seniors too — Caleb Smith and Joe Robinson.

Wheatley and senior Gunner Kirk anchor the Trailblazers’ linebacking corps with Caleb Smith, Reed McNeely, Chevy Shipley and Austin Hughes also in the rotation.

Fleming and Barton are projected to lineup at safety, with Murphy and Lucas at corner.

“If we stay healthy, I really like our chances against anybody we play,” Jenkins said.

Wheatley and Walton tied for the team high in tackles for loss in 2024 with five. Murphy and Barton matched Fleming with one interception each.

Jackson will handle punts and kickoffs. But there’s a tight competition between him and Trey Lovelace for PAT kicks and field goals.

DANIEL BOONE ROSTER

No.	Name	Pos.	Class
1	Dillon Murphy	WR/DB	Sr.
2	Mykah Lucas	RB/DB	So.
3	Tyler Morgan	RB/DB	So.
4	Nykoli Harris	RB/DB	Fr.
5	Gunner Kirk	HB/LB	Sr.
6	Trey Carpenter	WR/DB	Fr.
7	Rowan Puckett	WR/DB	Sr.
8	Ry Stone	QB/DB	So.
9	Drake Walton	TE/DE	Sr.
10	Reid McNeely	RB/LB	So.
11	Noah Sheets	WR/DB	So.
12	Kayden Kimes	WR/DB	So.
13	Walker Barton	WR/DB	Jr.
14	Cameron Hughes	QB/DB	Fr.
15	Nathaniel France	WR/DB	Jr.
16	Nathan Greenwood	RB/SS	Fr.
20	Dru Fleming	RB/LB	Jr.
21	Dawson Daniel	RB/DL	Sr.
23	Brayden Hawkins	RB/DB	Fr.
24	Brady Starnes	RB/DL	Sr.
25	Tristan Kirkland	OL/DL	Jr.
27	Bryce Hubbard	WR/DB	Fr.
29	Ian Adams	RB/DB	So.
30	Chevy Shipley	TE/LB	So.
32	Jordan York	RB/LB	Fr.
33	Dominic Adams	RB/LB	Sr.
35	Zion Whiteside	RB/LB	Fr.
38	Lucas King	WR/DB	So.
40	Trevor Jennings	TE/DL	Fr.
44	Kamden Smith	RB/LB	So.
45	Logan Wheatley	RB/LB	Sr.
47	Trey Lovelace	K	Sr.
51	Eli Mannering	OL/DL	So.
53	Chase Foster	OL/DL	Sr.
54	Sam Al-Salim	OL/DL	Sr.
55	Hunter Gallo	OL/DL	Jr.
56	Caleb Smith	DL	Sr.
57	Micah Martin	OL/DE	Sr.
58	Aiden Allen	OL/DL	Fr.
60	Hunter McElwain	OL/DL	Jr.
63	Daniel Pollock	OL/DL	Fr.
65	Kayden Larkins	OL/DL	Sr.
66	Leo Fontana-Henley	OL/DL	So.
70	Dayton Myers	OL/DL	Jr.
71	Jaxson Isham	OL/DL	Fr.
72	Jaden Tucker	OL/DL	Fr.
77	Quin Clark	OL/DL	Fr.
78	Jamison Aldridge	OL/DL	Fr.
79	Xander Richards	OL/DL	So.
80	Jace Bulis	TE/DE	Fr.
85	Kaiden Hyatt	WR/LB	Fr.
86	Connor Chitwood	TE/DE	So.
88	Judah Jackson	WR/DB	Jr.
92	Austin Hughes	OL/DL	Jr.
94	Joe Robinson	DL	Sr.

Head coach: Jeremy Jenkins.
Assistant coaches: Ethan Good, Eddie Good, Chris Steger, Logan Rivers, Don Kerley, Peyton Ford, Kent Green.

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Wayne Hughes
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DAKOTA HAMILTON

Daniel Boone’s Logan Wheatley gets ready to make contact with Campbell County linebacker Jordan Perkins.

HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL 2025 • REGION 1-6A



J.D. VAUGHN/SIX RIVERS MEDIA

Dobyns-Bennett's Tegan Begley looks for the end zone during 7-on-7 play against Science Hill. Since 2017, the Region 1-6A champion has been either Science Hill or Dobyns-Bennett six of the eight years.

Region 1-6A glance: Four of five teams breaking in new QBs

By J.D. VAUGHN
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Will this year's Week 11 tilt between Science Hill and Dobyns-Bennett determine the Region 1-6A champion again? The contest certainly hasn't disappointed the last two times a conference title was on the line.

Jaysahn Swartz's 91-yard drive and touchdown, not to mention his miraculous 2-point conversion after a botched snap with 16 seconds remaining, lifted Science Hill to the Big East Conference title in 2022 with a 34-32 triumph.

Tyree Thomas and the Dobyns-Bennett defense clamped down in last year's meeting, lifting D-B to an 18-12 victory at ETSU. It marked the Indians' first conference title since 2020, first win over the Hilltoppers since 2018 and the first time D-B had accomplished both in the same season since 2012.

D-B running back Tegan Begley rushed for 1,161 yards and 13 touchdowns, despite missing two games, in 2024, while Aiden Perry led Science Hill with 967 yards and 11 TDs. Both are back for their senior years this fall with their respective teams breaking in new quarterbacks — the frontrunners being Lane Clement for Science Hill and Levi Chappell for D-B.

Since 2017, the Region 1-6A champion



J.D. VAUGHN/SIX RIVERS MEDIA

Dobyns-Bennett's Jaylen Thomas (17) goes airborne to catch a pass during 7-on-7 play against Unicoi County.

has been either Science Hill or Dobyns-Bennett six of the eight years, with Farragut winning it in 2018 before Jefferson County's 2023 title.

WHAT ABOUT THE WOLVES?

For the first time in three years, West Ridge has a battle for the starting quarterback job following the graduation of Trey Frazier.

The three-year signal caller was also the Wolves' top rusher in 2024, edging Ethan Amyx by four yards. Amyx is back after rushing for 581 yards and seven touchdowns, as is leading receiver Kaleb Mabb (497 yards and 7 TDs on 25 receptions).

West Ridge earned a home playoff game in its inaugural season, posting a 9-3 record and reaching the

second round in 2021. But losses to William Blount, which has since dropped down to Class 5A, and Jefferson County kept the Wolves out of the 2024 postseason.

OTHER CONTENDERS?

Jefferson County — Among the Patriots' losses to graduation are 2,000-yard rusher Skylar Thomas, the program's all-time single season rushing

leader, and lineman Nic Moore. Third-year starting quarterback Mason Henderson will be looking for a new top receiver once more with Dakota Haun having played his last down in Dumplin Valley. After losing 18 straight games at one point, Jefferson County has enjoyed five straight winning seasons including a 10-2 mark in 2023. Not since the 1980s had the

Patriots finished above .500 five consecutive years, so don't count JeffCo out.

Morristown East — After a winless 2023, the Hurricanes started Year 2 of the Dallas Kuykendall era with a 26-14 upset of Morristown West.

But after a 2-0 start came the heartbreak, as in back-to-back one-point losses to conference rivals. Like Jefferson County, MoEast must replace several of its top contributors from 2024, including quarterback Caleb Billings, receiver Austin Brannan and running back Jason West.

TRIVIA TIME

Q: Dobyns-Bennett, Science Hill and Jefferson County have all won conference titles in the past decade. West Ridge is still chasing its inaugural conference crown, although Sullivan North (2017) and Sullivan South (2014) had both recently won their respective conferences before consolidating. When did Morristown East last win its conference?

A: 1997. Coach Walt Bragg's Hurricanes won Region 1-4A, finishing 8-4 and defeating Sullivan South 20-7 to reach the second round of the playoffs, where Elizabethton prevailed 12-7 after TDs by Jason Witten (32-pass from Shawn Witten) and Demetrius Turner (49-run). Turner's TD came with 2:59 left.

HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL 2025 • DAVID CROCKETT



JEFF BIRCHFIELD / SIX RIVERS MEDIA

David Crockett looks to navigate through a tough schedule for the 2025 season. The Pioneers will face Unicoi County, West Ridge, Morristown East, Morristown West and Sevier County.

David Crockett hopes rest heavily on Wynn, Slone

By JEFF BIRCHFIELD
jbirchfield@sixriversmedia.com

Many of David Crockett’s hopes for the 2025 season rest on the No. 4 and No. 5 players.

Junior quarterback A.J. Wynn wears the No. 4 jersey, while all-around athlete Zeke Slone sports the No. 5. Crockett head coach Hayden Chandley makes no bones how important the duo are to the Pioneers’ success.

“We will go as far as four and five will take us,” Chandley said. “Zeke’s played the most football of anybody on our roster, and we’re going to be counting on him quite a bit.”

They’re not the only ones with experience. In fact, the Pioneers have more guys on the offensive line with guys who have been under the Friday night lights than any time in the past.

“The first time in my career, every one of our starting offensive linemen have starting experience,” Chandley said. “I’ve never had that before. Now, the downside to that is you lose four of those after this year, but we’ve got a lot of experience up front. You got a quarterback with a year plus under his belt, Zeke is back, which is a lot of our production last year.”

Wynn is the starter at quarterback with Brady Hendrix and Slone listed as backups. Sam Casey is the starting H-back on the depth chart with Ezra Hoss his backup.

Chace Taylor and Jaxon Overstreet are starting receivers with Markcis Carrier and Shawn Summers their backups. Colton Mullis is listed at tight end.

“We’ve got some new faces at receiver, but we feel really good about the guys that are coming back,” Chandley. “Quite a



DAKOTA HAMILTON

Crockett’s Zeke Slone breaks free of a tackle against Boone.



TODD BRASE

Quarterback A.J. Wynn is back to lead the Pioneers.

bit of a good mix of experience in youth. So hopefully we’re going to be able to rely on those old guys up front, control the line of scrimmage and make defenses pay when they stack the box on us.”

Isaiah Garland is the starting center with Ethan Perry and Tyler Ball at guards. Keegan Stonesifer and Devon Sanders are tackles with some of the reserves Mike White and Conner Cowan.

Most of the players are two-way with Mullis and Perry ends in the 3-4 defense and Devon Sanders at nose tackle. Slone and Hoss are inside linebackers, while Casey and Carson Blackburn on the outside.

Christian Brady and Overstreet are corners with Carrier and Summers at safeties. Overstreet, the son of former Crockett great Josh Overstreet, is one whom the Pioneers feel could be a breakout season.

“Jaxon battled some injuries and different things, but he had a tremendous off season, put on 10 or 15 pounds,” Chandley said. “Probably our most electric guy with the ball in his hands, as far as speed goes, big play capability. So we’re going to move him all over the field. Got a real nose for the football on defense, and we’re excited to see him have a breakout junior campaign.”

While the team has talent, it’s a brutal first-half of the season with Unicoi County, West Ridge, Morristown East, Morristown West and Sevier County.

“We start with the defending Region 1-3A champions, and then back-to-back 6-A schools with West Ridge and Morristown East,” Chandley said. “That leads you right into Morristown West so there’s no room to slack at the beginning of the year.”

DAVID CROCKETT ROSTER

No.	Name	Pos.	Class
1	Chace Taylor	WR/DB	Jr.
2	Marckis Carrier	WR/DB	Jr.
3	Adryan Story	RB/LB	So.
4	A.J. Wynn	QB	Jr.
5	Zeke Slone	ATH/LB	Sr.
6	Christian Brady	WR/DB	Jr.
7	Sam Casey	RB/LB	Sr.
8	Aaron Allen	WR/DB	So.
9	Carson Bradburn	RB/LB	So.
10	Brayden Feltner	WR/DB	So.
11	Ezra Hoss	HB/LB	Jr.
12	Shawn Summers	WR/DB	Sr.
13	Ayden Stanton	TE/LB	So.
14	Jacob Jenkins	WR/DB	So.
15	Brady Hendrix	QB	Fr.
17	Henry Cocke	RB/LB	So.
18	Brady Tapp	WR/DB	Fr.
19	Colton Mullis	TE/LB	Jr.
20	Seth Baldridge	WR/DB	So.
22	Jon Hall	RB/LB	Jr.
23	Jaxon Overstreet	WR/DB	Jr.
24	Jasiyah Antone	RB/LB	Fr.
25	Andy Roberts	WR/DB	Fr.
26	Aiden Simons	WR/DB	Fr.
27	Braydon Britt	WR/DB	So.
28	Malachi Curtis	K/DB	Sr.
29	Trentin Estep	TE/LB	Fr.
30	Luke Edens	HB/LB	Fr.
31	Kaleb Callahan	RB/LB	Fr.
32	Landon Amtmann	RB/LB	So.
33	Elijah Conley	K/P	So.
34	Garrett Allen	RB/LB	Fr.
39	Jayden Zuehlke	RB/LB	So.
45	Calvin Dennis	K/P	So.
50	Jacob Fannon	OL/DL	Fr.
51	Ruben Ibarra-Flores	K/P	Jr.
52	Isaiah Garland	OL/DL	Jr.
53	Bentley Perry	OL/DL	Fr.
54	Ethan Perry	OL/DL	Sr.



JEFF BIRCHFIELD / SIX RIVERS MEDIA

David Crockett coach Hayden Chandley hopes the Pioneers can get off to a strong start.

56	Devon Sanders	OL/DL	Sr.
57	Chase Perry	OL/DL	Fr.
58	Devilyn Laws	OL/DL	Fr.
59	Mike White	OL/LB	Jr.
61	Luke Wilson	OL/DL	Jr.
62	Tyler Ball	OL/DL	Sr.
71	Keegan Stonesifer	OL/DL	Sr.
73	Parker Buchanan	OL/DL	Fr.
74	Connor Cowan	OL/DL	So.
75	Aiden Willingham	OL/DL	So.
82	Gavin Stockstill	WR/DB	Fr.
88	Jordan Millhollin	WR/DB	So.

Head coach/DBs: Hayden Chandley.

Assistant coaches:

Ryan Burger (OC/QBs), Ron Sillmon (ILBs/RBs), James White (DL), Greg McCloud (OL), Eric Day (WR), Levi Summers (OLBs), Herby Campbell (Specialist).

Sideline assistant: Bobby Chandley.

Media assistant: Hunter Chandley.

Trainer: Bryon Grant.

Managers: Summer Deloach, Savannah Florell, Kayleigh Doner, Gabe Jackson.



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HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL 2025 • DOBYNS-BENNETT



J.D. VAUGHN/SIX RIVERS MEDIA

The Dobyns-Bennett Indians, who return several skill players, aim to defend their Region 1-6A crown. Head coach Joey Christian says he can't recall returning this much experience.

Skill position players to lead way for defending Big East champion D-B Indians in 2025

By J.D. VAUGHN
jvaughn@sixriversmedia.com

Don't expect any jitters from Dobyns-Bennett's returning players this fall, certainly not from the skill positions.

In eight years as a head coach, Joey Christian can't recall the last time he returned this much experience there — experience from a Region 1-6A championship run, no less.

"We want to build on that," Christian said after the Indians posted a 9-3 mark in 2024. "We have 20 seniors. ... When you look at our corners, our safeties, really the whole back end, we've got a lot of guys who've played a lot of football back there. A lot of them play on offense as well. They shouldn't be big-eyed on Friday nights."

Senior running back Tegan Begley certainly won't be. He missed two games last fall but still accumulated 1,161 yards and 13 touchdowns on the ground, not to mention his impact in the kick return game.

Begley has since committed to further his baseball career at Army, and he'll lead a noticeably deeper backfield this fall. Luke Lundy was projected to start at running back last year before a preseason injury ended his junior year prematurely.

Lundy will complement Begley in the backfield this fall as will junior Emmitt Starnes, who found the end zone twice and averaged 7.6 yards a



TODD BRASE

Dobyns-Bennett's Jaylen Thomas (17) dives in for a touchdown against David Crockett in 2024. Thomas had 288 yards and three touchdowns last season.

carry in 2024, and explosive sophomore Kedrick Harris.

THOMAS TERRIFIC

As many receivers as D-B graduated, one of the most busiest of the group is back for his senior year. Slot receiver Jaylen Thomas, who returned kicks and broke up three passes with one interception last fall, had 288 yards and three touchdowns on 17 receptions in 2024.

"We looked at it on film, and the first guy never tackles Jaylen, and that's against some good teams," Christian said. "We

track the guys with GPS on practices, and in a typical practice, Jaylen will run over 5,000 yards. We're talking over three miles of running. That's a lot."

Jaylen's brother, junior Tyree Thomas (6-2, 221) could also contribute to the passing game at tight end.

Former running back Corde Moore is projected to start at tight end for his senior year, a transition Moore embraced according to his coach.

After a breakout junior year, Zayden Hayes returns at wide

receiver alongside fellow senior Zabian Goodwin and junior Jackson Sensabaugh. Senior Noah Raines and junior Aiden Villa, along with 6-3 sophomore Admire Fikes, give the Tribe plenty of depth at receiver.

LINE REBUILDING

D-B's skill positions return as much experience as the Indians' offensive line doesn't. Senior left tackle Baker Correll is the only returnee from last year's squad, as fellow senior Tyler Grizzle suffered an injury during spring

See **D-B**, Page E10



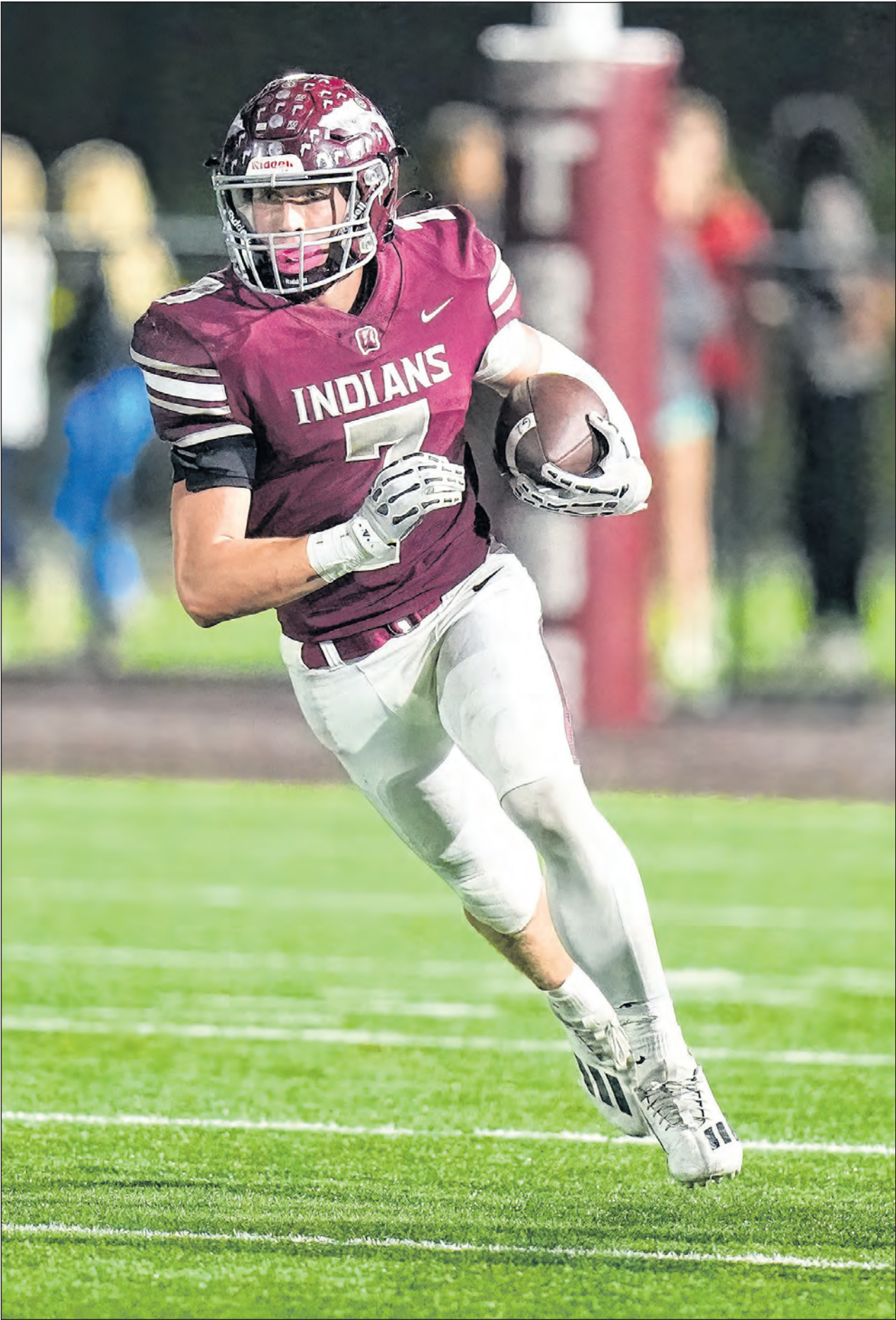
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TODD BRASE

Dobyns-Bennett's Tegan Begley (7) carries the ball against Farragut at J. Fred Johnson Stadium on Nov. 8, 2024.

D-B:

From Page E9

practice. Christian didn’t rule out a late-season return for Grizzle, but it’ll depend on the recovery time.

“If I told you we had four seniors and a junior on the offensive line, you’d think that was pretty good (for experience),” Christian said. “(Correll) is one of the better ones we’ve had, and he’s going to have an opportunity to play on Saturdays.”

Still, Christian has an idea of who will round out his O-line this fall, with senior Zackhi Williams anchoring the center position. Seniors Mitch Newhouse and Cooper Bellamy will man the right tackle and right guard positions respectively, with junior Ezra Renderos at left guard. Zane Carpenter, another junior, is also expected to see time.

DEEP ON DEFENSE

Tyree Thomas will once again anchor D-B’s defensive line after leading the Tribe with 11

sacks, including six in one game against Farragut. Braylon Fugate is also expected to “play every play” his senior year after significant action in 2023 and 2024. Senior Maddex Artrip and sophomore Weston Grizzle are expected to compete with Williams, Correll and Renderos for the other D-line spots.

Juniors Isaiah Bolden and Luke Brandon, along with Starnes and Raines have stood out the most of late at inside linebacker. Begley, Lundy and Harris are the frontrunners to fill the outside linebacker slots.

Jackson Sensabaugh and Jaylen Thomas both return at corner, with Hayes and Goodwin projected to start at safety. But Christian advised spectators to be on the lookout for sophomores Brayden Blakley, Isaiah Coclough and Julian Sensabaugh to make an impact.

And while he’s currently recovering from an injury, senior Cooper McLain returns to handle kickoff and field goal duties. McLain made his lone field goal attempt last year and went 22-of-23 on extra points. Sophomore Lofton Fuller could potentially step in as well, with Begley also capable of punting.

DOBYNS-BENNETT ROSTER

No.	Name	Pos.	Class
0	Zabian Goodwin	WR/DB	Sr.
1	Tyree Thomas	TE/DL	Jr.
2	Zayden Hayes	WR/DB	Sr.
3	Jackson Sensabaugh	WR/DB	Jr.
4	Corde Moore	TE/DL	Sr.
5	Noah Raines	WR/LB	Sr.
6	Hudson Clabaugh	WR/DB	Jr.
7	Tegan Begley	RB/DB	Sr.
8	Emmitt Starnes	RB/LB	Jr.
9	Aiden Villa	WR/DB	Sr.
10	Levi Chappell	QB	Jr.
11	Isaiah Bolden	TE/LB	Jr.
12	Tate Wernke	QB	So.
13	Kedrick Harris	RB/DB	So.
14	Luke Brandon	TE/LB	Jr.
15	Jordan Reed	QB	So.
16	Cooper McLain	P/K	Sr.
17	Jaylen Thomas	WR/DB	Sr.
18	Kaelon Hernandez	WR/DB	So.
19	Kenyan Maxwell	TE/DL	Jr.
20	Alex Vasquez-Lopez	WR/DB	Jr.
21	Peyton Ferguson	QB	So.
22	Santiago Cerna	RB/DB	Jr.
23	Isaiah Coclough	WR/DB	So.
24	Julian Sensabaugh	WR/DB	So.
25	Jayden Voelker	RB/DL	Jr.
26	Braydn Davis	WR/DB	Jr.
27	Jack Tremaine	RB/LB	So.
28	Jason Scheuch	WR/DB	Sr.
29	Ty Allen	WR/DB	Jr.
30	Brayden Blakley	WR/DB	So.
31	Brody Rollins	WR/DB	So.
32	Damian Perez	RB/LB	So.
33	Cade Holton	TE/LB	Sr.
36	Jael Aroche	RB/LB	So.
37	Gabe Edwards	WR/DB	So.
38	Cale Bass	WR/DB	So.
39	Benji Brown	RB/LB	So.
41	Grayson Owen	RB/DB	So.
43	Luke Lundy	RB/DB	Sr.
44	Gus Adams	TE/RB	So.
45	Lofton Fuller	P/K	So.
46	Pablo Rutledge	TE/DL	So.
48	Brandt Holton	RBLB	So.
50	Zackhi Williams	OL/DL	Sr.
52	Baker Correll	OL/DL	Sr.
54	Maddex Artrip	OL/DL	Sr.
56	Zane Carpenter	OL/DL	Jr.
57	Tyler Grizzle	OL/DL	Sr.
58	Dakota Josjor	OL/DL	So.
59	Mitch Newhouse	OL/DL	Sr.
60	Braeden Sons	OL/DL	Jr.
61	Stephen Harris	OL/DL	Sr.
62	Brady Griffith	OL/DL	So.
64	Braylon Fugate	OL/DL	Sr.
65	Jaidun Maxwell	OL/DL	So.
66	Colin Taylor	OL/DL	So.
67	Aiden Green	OL/DL	So.
68	Elliott Tate	OL/DL	Jr.
69	Ryder Vaiese	OL/DL	So.
70	D’Angelo Ewing	OL/DL	So.
72	Cooper Bellamy	OL/DL	Sr.
73	Ezra Renderos	OL/DL	Jr.
74	Isaac Tate	OL/DL	Jr.
75	Weston Grizzle	OL/DL	So.
76	Zymari Jones	OL/DL	So.
77	David Kalil	OL/DL	Sr.
81	Brayden Gay	WR/DB	So.
86	Colton Houchins	TE/DL	So.
87	Cooper Lockhart	TE/DL	So.
88	Admire Fikes	WR/DB	So.

Head coach: Joey Christian.
Assistant coaches: John Ellis Davis (Co-DC/Safeties), Trey Trammell (Co-DC/LBs), Chris Thacker (OC), Jesse McMillan (Associate HC/TEs), Walker Throp (WRs), Carter Everett (QBs), Ty Hayworth (OL/Beef Boys), Lendon Redwin (Slots), Jake Mullins (DL/OLBs), Dustin Gaines (CBs), Rocky Jones (DL), Sam Barton (OLBs).
Head athletic trainer: Kevin Trivette.
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Best of luck this season!

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HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL 2025 • ELIZABETHTON



ANDREW SMITH/SIX RIVERS MEDIA

After finishing second in Region 1-4A in 2024, the Cyclones continued a ten-season long streak of at least one post- season game being played at Citizens Bank Stadium.

Elizabethton brings back experience in drives at skill positions

By ANDREW SMITH
asmith@sixriversmedia.com

ELIZABETHTON — Hosting playoff games has become the standard for the Elizabethton Cyclones. After finishing second in Region 1-4A in 2024, the Cyclones continued a ten-season long streak of at least one post-season game being played at Citizens Bank Stadium. Last year, Betsy defeated Fulton in a thriller before falling to Anderson County in the second round. Leading the charge then as he is this year is quarterback Rhett Slagle. Holding a 16-6 record as the Cyclones’ starter, Slagle completed 67.6 percent of his passes as a junior. He tossed for 1,120 yards, 15 touchdowns, and seven interceptions. Slagle also rushed for 244 yards and seven touchdowns in the regular season. Elizabethton head coach Shawn Witten said the veteran presence allows the team to have a level of comfortability heading into the season. “It just makes things a lot easier,” Witten said. “He’s been through the fire. Expect Rhett to do things a lot better than he did sophomore and junior year. That’s why it’s all great to have experience. On top of that, he’s got a



Elizabethton’s Rhett Slagle (8) takes off running against Dobyns-Bennett on Oct. 4.

great group around him.” It’s a group that features the team’s leading rusher from a year ago as well as each of the top four receivers for the Cyclones a year ago. Jaiden “J-Bird” Wallin is set to lead the rushing attack again. He tied for the team lead with seven rushing touchdowns. Jack Blevins, Justin Whitehead, Zack Wallin, and Justius Wallin led Elizabethton in receiving yards from Slagle, and all are back

to catch passes from the senior this season. Being able to hit the ground running with the veteran core is a blessing for the coaching staff, according to Witten. “It’s just not because of the work standpoint, but the mental standpoint,” he said. “The ability to retain the information. To expand the playbook. To try and get more plays so they can go out there and show off their athleticism and things on top of that. It’s our job to put them in position to make the plays and we’re going to rely on those guys heavily throughout the season.” Defensively, the Cyclones come into the season after being in the top half of the area in points allowed. In the regular season, they only allowed 149 total points, which was good for eighth in Northeast Tennessee. One of the unit’s key pieces was in Kyron Smalls, who recorded six sacks a year ago, but has graduated. In order to have success on that side of the ball again, Witten says Betsy will need to mix up its looks. “We’ve got to be versatile,” he said. “We’re

not as deep or as big in the trenches on both sides. The linebackers and skill positions, we return our defensive ends and defensive tackles. But we’ve got to keep those guys fresh. Keep them going. We’re going to have to play a little more aggressive style than we’ve been. Try to get after people. That’s the challenge.” Elizabethton will once again open up the season with historical rival Science Hill on Aug. 22, with this year’s game taking place in Johnson City. The last four meetings have all been won by the visiting team. They will then start league play in Region 1-4A at Volunteer on Sept. 12. The annual clash with fellow region giant Greeneville is set for Oct. 30 on the road. It continues a theme for the Cyclones, where they’ll play four home games to six road contests. “Just have to earn the opportunity to get another one here,” Witten said. “The more we win, the more we get to play here. More emphasis on the regular season so we can get home-field advantage. That’s been key for us.”

ELIZABETHTON ROSTER			
No.	Name	Pos.	Class
4	C.J. Mathes	RB/LB	Jr.
6	Braylon Britt	WR/DB	Jr.
7	William McDuffie	RB/DB	Jr.
8	Rhett Slagle	QB	Sr.
9	Legend Pate	RB/LB	Fr.
11	Sammy Orsburn	OLB	Jr.
12	Lucas Dugger	OLB	Fr.
13	Callen Reed	RB/DB	Fr.
14	Max Fields	WR/DB	Fr.
15	Anthony Orton	WR/DB	Fr.
16	Brycen Blevins	QB	Fr.
17	Justin Whitehead	WR/DB	Sr.
18	Ryan Jones	WR/DB	So.
19	Zach Wallin	WR/DB	Sr.
20	Aiden Cole	WR/DB	Jr.
21	Tucker Taylor	WR/DB	Sr.
23	Jack Blevins	WR/DB	Sr.
24	Connor Cook	HB/LB	Fr.
25	William Bowers	PK	Jr.
26	Bryson Lloyd	OLB	Sr.
27	David Wright	LB	So.
28	Justius Wallin	RB/LB	Sr.
29	Brody Thompson	LB	So.
30	Jeremiah Williams	WR/DB	Fr.
31	Ryan Riberio	OLB	Fr.
32	Eli Whitaker	WR/DB	Fr.
33	Malic Silvers	RB/DB	Fr.
34	Landon Sisanachanden	WR/DB	Fr.
35	Josiah Byrd	DL	Sr.
36	Chase Gilbert	WR/LB	Fr.
39	Riley Smith	WR/DB	Fr.
40	Jaiden Wallin	RB/LB	Sr.
41	Jayce McElroy	RB/LB	Fr.
44	Landon Reedy	HB/DE	Fr.
46	Daniel Overby	LB	So.
47	Cooper Green	HB/LB	So.
48	Nathan Garland	HB/DE	Fr.
50	Kyler McGovern	OL/DL	Sr.
51	Ryan Greene	OL/DL	So.
52	Isaiah Nutter	OL/DL	Fr.
55	Lennox Loveday	OL/DL	So.
57	Dillon Heading	OL/DL	Fr.
58	Elijah Robinette	OL/DL	Fr.
59	Braydon Rainwater	OL/DL	Sr.
60	Cooper Adkins	OL/DL	Sr.
62	John Hornyak	OL/DL	Jr.
63	Rylan Taylor	OL/DL	Fr.
66	Connor Kent	OL/DL	Fr.
68	Brock Mosely	OL/DL	Fr.
70	Lincoln Hornyak	OL/DL	Fr.
71	Brendon Orellana	OL/DL	So.
72	Riley Greer	OL/DL	So.
73	Austin Haskel	OL/DL	Fr.
74	Nolan Loveday	OL/DL	So.
77	Geroge McKintrick	OL/DL	Fr.
79	Stokes Powers	OL/DL	Fr.
81	Riley Jones	TE/DE	Sr.
82	Josh Mann	WR/DB	Sr.
84	Carson Thompson	TE/DE	Fr.
85	Dagan Walker	TE/LB	So.
86	Brian Caster	DE	Sr.
88	Rylan Peters	HB/DE	Fr.
89	Eli Phillips	WR/DB	Fr.
92	Calyx Dougherty	TE/DE	So.

Head coach: Shawn Witten.
Assistant coaches: Jordy Harrison, Devin Whitehead, Forrest Holt, Travis Hurley, Terrence Turner, Brian Jenkins, Corey Russell, Connor Johnson, Ryan Witten.
Support staff: Tony Briggs, Howell Woods, Rick Walters.
Athletic trainer: Amethyst Crawford.
Team Physicians: Dr. Justin Smith, Dr. Erin Contreras.

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HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL 2025 • REGION 1-5A



Positioned between Aiden Carpenter (58) and Zeke Slone, Pioneers quarterback A.J. Wynn handles a high snap. The Pioneers will be returning much of their offensive firepower from last season.

Region 1-5A: Pioneers, ‘Blazers, Vikings trying to return to upper echelon

By J.D. VAUGHN
jvaughn@sixriversmedia.com

Evidently, the TSSAA listened. The annual Musket Bowl between David Crockett and Daniel Boone is back in October where it belongs.

This year, the contest happens on Oct. 24. By then, the Class 5A playoff picture will be taking shape. And it’s usually a safe bet the game will have post-season ramifications.

In fact, the game literally determined the final playoff spot from Region 1-5A in 2023 with Boone getting the nod. David Crockett flipped the script in last year’s contest, winning 35-7 in Jonesborough and starting the year 4-1.

Crockett returned to the playoffs but ended the year on a five-game slide, scoring just one touchdown in each of its last four games. But the Pioneers return a significant portion of their



Boone’s Dru Fleming finds running room against Campbell County. Boone will be looking to end a 14-game losing streak.

offensive firepower, including junior quarterback A.J. Wynn. It’ll be Wynn’s third season, and second full year, in the starting role.

The main question

involves who replaces Lamarkus Dunn, who accounted for 830 of Crockett’s 1,388 receiving yards in 2024. Nine of Crockett’s 13 passing touchdowns went to

Dunn, the other four going to rising senior Zeke Slone — who led Crockett in rushing TDs with seven.

Wynn, who threw for 1,317 yards and 11 scores his sophomore year, was Crockett’s second leading rusher with 517 yards and five scores, finishing second to Jon Hall in rushing yardage (606).

Boone, meanwhile, looks to end a 14-game losing streak, during which the Trailblazers have scored double digit points only three times. Ry Stone gets the call at quarterback this year. And he’ll have help with Dru Fleming, Boone’s leading rusher and tackler from 2024, back in the lineup along with two-way standouts Logan Wheatley, Dillon Murphy and Walker Barton.

TENNESSEE TOUGH

Only a 20-14 loss at Morristown West stood between the Vikings and a home playoff game in 2024. Tennessee High ended the regular season on a six-game winning streak before falling at Powell in the 5A playoffs.

Tennessee High will need to replace Trent Dowdell, Northeast Tennessee’s second-leading rusher in 2024. But the other half of the Vikings’ rushing attack, Elijah Plumber, is back for his junior year after running for 855 yards and six touchdowns last fall. Rising senior Jack Richardson split time at quarterback last season, throwing for a team-high 320 yards and six touchdowns. The Vikings seek their first conference crown since 2019, one year before Crockett’s most recent Region 1-5A championship.

OTHER CONTENDERS?

Sevier County — Region 1-5A teams aren’t alone in their pursuit of Sevier County. The rest of the state is trying to catch the defending 5A champion Smoky Bears. Not until the playoffs did anyone come within three touchdowns of Sevier County, Powell and Knox West playing the Smoky Bears to 25-24 and 24-17 games. A 27-20 victory over Page capped the winningest season in

program history at 15-0. Cooper Newman is back for his junior year after throwing for 3,488 yards and 45 touchdowns as a sophomore ... with just one interception. One. Plus, only two of Sevier County’s seven receivers with more than 100 receiving yards graduated. Morristown West — The Trojans have finished runner-up in Region 1-5A for three straight years, posting a 4-6 mark with a first-round playoff exit against Knoxville Halls. T.J. Walthall and Riley McClellan split time at quarterback last season. But their receiving corps will have several new faces after losing the top four to graduation. Malachi Monroe, the team’s second leading rusher, returns for his senior year.

Cocke County — The Fighting Cocks sniffed the playoffs last year. A 41-38 home defeat against David Crockett was all that stood in the way. Spencer Moore threw for 814 yards and six touchdowns his sophomore year, with then-juniors Eli Roberts and Daniel Price leading the receiving corps. Cocke County is seeking its first playoff berth since 2018, the program’s lone winning season since 1996.

TRIVIA TIME

Q: Other than Sevier County’s 2015 and 2024 runs to the state championship game, who was the last team in the current Region 1-5A to make it past the state quarter-final round?

A: Morristown West in 2006. The Trojans posted their second straight 13-1 campaign, reaching the Class 4A semifinals and coming up short against state champion Maryville. The 2004 Tennessee High Vikings (13-1) did likewise, and Sullivan South (11-3) made the semifinals in 2009, its first year in 5A.

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HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL 2025 • HAMPTON



ANDREW SMITH/SIX RIVERS MEDIA

While Hampton won’t be able to play on campus in 2025, instead playing home games at Happy Valley, they have returned to their home practice facility ahead of the season.

Hampton finding new normal in return to Region 1-1A

By **ANDREW SMITH**
asmith@sixriversmedia.com

HAMPTON — The past 12 months have been filled with various changes around the Hampton program.

In late September, Hampton High School suffered flood damage as a result of Helene, causing students to be relocated for the remainder of the school year and even into the 2025-26 academic calendar.

On the football side of things, the damage forced the Bulldogs to both practice and play the remainder of their season away from J.C. Campbell Stadium. The team had its struggles, going 3-7 and losing in the first round of the postseason.

While Hampton won’t be able to play on campus in 2025, instead playing home games at Happy Valley, they have returned to their home practice facility ahead of the season.

Head coach Michael Lunsford said that even though they won’t have true home games, staying in Hampton most of game week will help greatly.

“That’s definitely an obstacle,” Lunsford said. “It’s a piece of adversity that we’ll have to overcome. At least getting our practice field back so we can practice at Hampton. That’s four days a week and that makes it a lot easier on us than going to Happy Valley. Sharing the field with them, trying to share their equipment, things of that nature.”

On top of the change of home venue for the Bulldogs, the schedule looks much different than the 2024 schedule. With the TSSAA entering a new classification cycle, Hampton dropped down to



MATT LAWS

Hampton running back Peyton Townsend (2) heads up the field in a game at Unaka last season. Townsend is expected to be part of a backfield committee.

Class 1A.

It won’t be the ‘Dogs’ first stint in 1A, as they last played in Region 1-1A in 2014. They will be back in the same conference as county foes Unaka and Cloudland, as well as the likes of North Greene, Cosby, and Jellico.

Despite having plenty of success in the league before, Lunsford believes the change will provide a challenge for his squad.

“We’re not going to come down to the 1A conference and think that this is going to be an easy road or anything like that,” he said. “There’s good football teams in 1A, 2A, it doesn’t matter what classification you’re playing in. If you’re not a good team, you’re not going to go far in the playoffs.”

In terms of the on-field product for Hampton, one key cog from the 2024 campaign graduated:

Dominique Burleson. The rushing king in all of Northeast Tennessee a year ago, Burleson ran for 1,449 yards and 17 touchdowns.

It will likely be more of a committee in the backfield to help replace that production, led by the likes of Peyton Townsend, Isaiah Belcher, and Brock Shelby leading the way.

“That’s one thing that I think is a little bit better about this team,” Lunsford said. “Last year, it was Dom or it wasn’t happening. This year, we’ve got several pieces in several places that we can hit you with. We’re going to have a lot of people that touch the football this year.”

Hampton also returns a familiar face to the quarterback position in Connor McKinney. McKinney began his high school career as a Bulldog in his freshman

season, then transferred to Unaka as a sophomore. He spent two years on Stoney Creek and did a little bit of everything as a junior in 2024. He eclipsed 1,000 yards passing, 300 yards rushing, and 300 yards receiving for the Rangers.

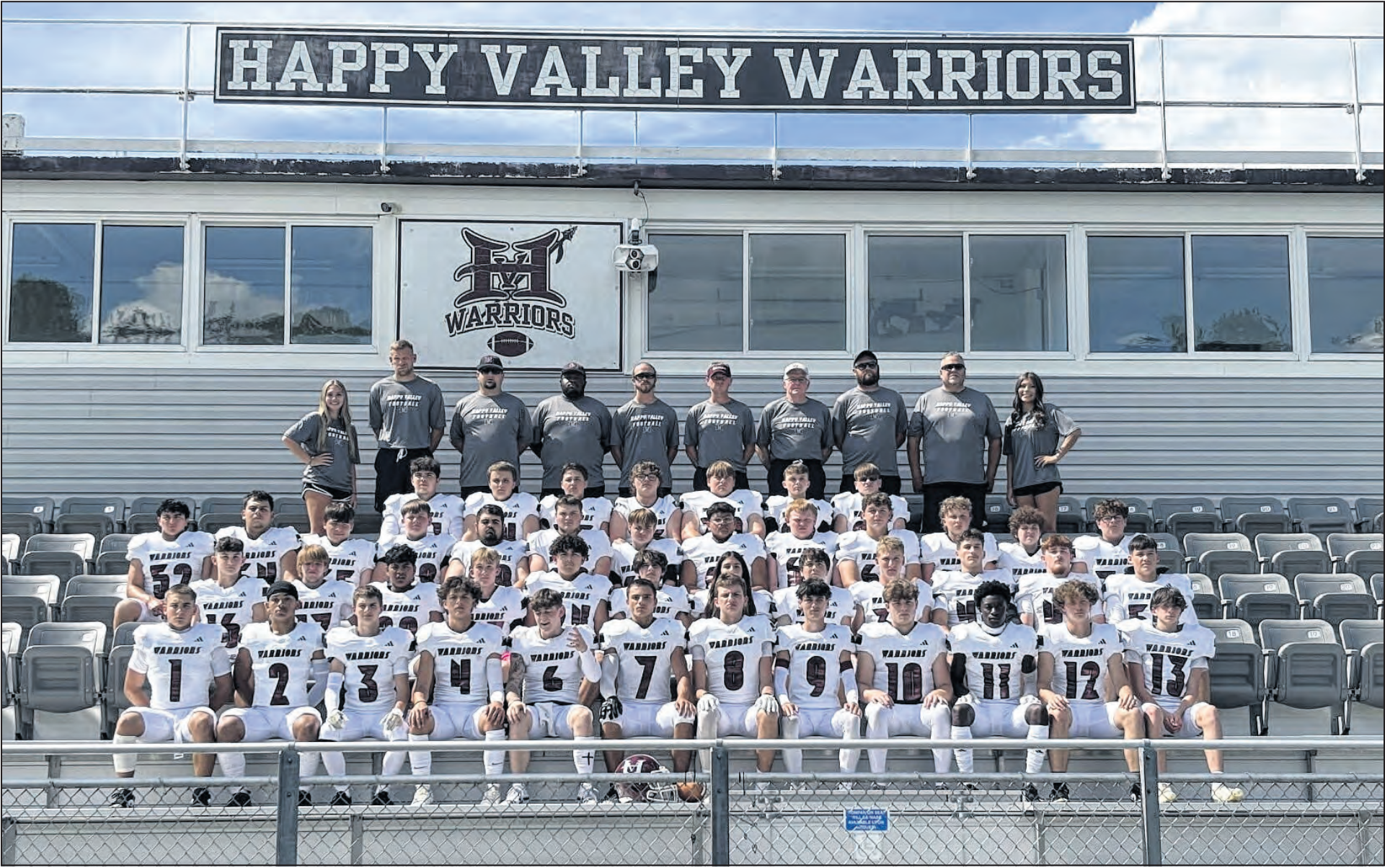
Now a senior, Lunsford says McKinney hasn’t skipped a beat in his return to Hampton.

“Hated to lose him when we lost him but tickled to death to get him back,” he said. “He had retained a bunch of stuff from when he was a freshman, so the install was much easier with him because he knew what was going on.”

The Bulldogs will open the season on Aug. 22 against Avery County, N.C. at Happy Valley. They start region play on Sept. 5 at fellow 1-1A newcomer Sunbright.

HAMPTON ROSTER			
No.	Name	Pos.	Class
1	Kaden Jones	WR/CB	So.
2	Peyton Townsend	RB/CB	Sr.
3	Kaiden Nichols	WR/CB	So.
4	Preston Birchfield	FB/LB	Fr.
5	Tuff Parlier	WR/CB	Fr.
6	Jaden Allara	DE/FB	Sr.
7	Connor McKinney	QB/FB	Sr.
9	Draedyn Freeman	WR/SS	Jr.
10	Landon Buchanan	WR/LB	Jr.
11	Isaiah Tilson	WR/CB	Jr.
13	Maddux Wilson	QB/FS	Sr.
15	Isaiah Belcher	WR/LB	Sr.
16	Eland Henson	WR/CB	Fr.
18	Edward Page	WR/FS	So.
20	Brock Shelby	WR/CB	Sr.
21	Brody Lambert	WR/CB	Jr.
22	Sage Milhorn	RB/LB	Fr.
23	Mitchell Sexton	WR/CB	So.
24	Kayden Stout	FB/LB	So.
25	Logan Bardo	WR/CB	Fr.
33	Jaylen Burleson	TE/DE	Sr.
34	Eli Henson	WR/CB	Sr.
40	Jayden Kuhn	FB/LB	Sr.
44	J.J. Cable	WR/FS	Sr.
53	Jacob Pierson	TE/FB	So.
57	Trevor McCloud	OT/DT	Fr.
60	Madden Camarda	TE/LB	Sr.
61	Kayden Stout	FB/LB	So.
63	Savanna Dejoode	OG/DE	Jr.
64	Jamie Turbyfill	C/OT/DT	Sr.
65	River Gill	OT/DT	So.
67	Dylan Lamb	OT/DT	Fr.
68	Ethan Heaton	OG/DT	Jr.
72	Braxton Arnold	OG/DE	Jr.
78	Dylan Campbell	OT/DT	Jr.
82	Dalton Hudson	WR/FS	So.
Head coach: Michael Lunsford.			

HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL 2025 • HAPPY VALLEY



ANDREW SMITH/SIX RIVERS MEDIA

Happy Valley will be looking to continue the momentum from last season, going 7-1 in the regular season to finish second in Region 1-2A. Defense was the key to last year's success.

Happy Valley looking to take next step in Region 1-2A

By ANDREW SMITH
asmith@sixriversmedia.com

ELIZABETHTON — The past three seasons on Warrior Hill have seen Happy Valley football continue to make jumps in the growth of the program. After a two-win campaign in 2022, the Warriors ripped off a seven-game winning streak on their way to hosting a first-round playoff game in 2023. The momentum continued last year, going 7-1 in the regular season to finish second in Region 1-2A. However, they fell heart-breakingly short of advancing in the postseason, losing by one point to Polk County. Warriors head coach Jason Jarrett said the defeat has been a motivator for him and his 13 seniors.

“We’ve got to find a way to get that extra win,” Jarrett said. “To get that conference championship that we’ve been so close to getting again last year. Find that extra point that we needed in the playoffs to move on down the road.”

Defense was the key to Happy Valley’s success last year and will likely be the case again in 2025. The Warriors allowed just 58 total points in 2024, the top mark by a wide margin in all of Northeast Tennessee. The next-best total came from Greeneville, who allowed 80 points in the regular season. It was a group led by its defensive front, as both Jayden Walls and Mason Norman tied for the area lead with nine sacks each. While Walls has graduated, Norman is back to lead the Happy Valley defense rich in tradition.



MATT LAWS

Happy Valley’s Gabe McDougald and his Warrior teammates head to Unaka on Aug. 22 in the season opener.

“We’ve played great defense up here for as long as I can remember,” Jarrett said. “I started here back in ‘97, Coach (Greg) Hyder was our defensive coordinator my freshman year, which was his first year of coaching football as a full-time gig. So he’s instilled that here since the late ‘90s. It’s kind of continued to build and develop. As a defensive coordinator, he’s one of the best I’ve ever been around.” On the offensive side of the ball, expect Happy Valley to lean on its run game, just as it had last season. All four of its running backs averaged at least 5.3 yards per carry,

and three of them return. Who will get them the football remains a question. Both seniors Aiden Paul and Gabe McDougald have had reps at the starting quarterback spot in camp. Paul went into 2024 as the starter, but suffered an injury. McDougald then stepped into the role and led the Happy Valley offense. Whoever is taking the first snap will be asked to keep things on schedule and allow for playmakers to make plays. “Our system, again, offense, defense, special teams, we try to keep things very simple,” Jarrett said.

“We’re not thinking while we’re out on the field, we’re reacting. We’ve got some good athletes up here and we don’t want those guys thinking so much. We just want them playing fast.” Happy Valley’s schedule is one of the more unique ones in the area, as they are just one of four teams in Region 1-2A, along with South Greene, West Greene, and Cumberland Gap. While that means the Warriors are guaranteed a postseason spot, Jarrett said he still wants his team to feel like they earned their standing in early November. “We obviously know we’re

going to play an 11th game in the playoffs,” he said. “You’ve got to find ways to get those guys to stay motivated to go try and find ways to win that. Being able to go play playoff football has always been a reward in my eyes. It’s something that’s special. These guys know that and know they’re already in. But, if they want to accomplish some things that we have the potential to do, then we don’t look past that.” The Warriors open up the season on Aug. 22 at Unaka before debuting their turf field to their home fans on Aug. 28 against Cloudland.

HAPPY VALLEY ROSTER

No.	Name	Class	17	Zachary Dykes	So.	55	Bentley Bowden	So.	74	Elijah Guy	Fr.
1	Lane Parker	Jr.	20	Javier Carrillo	Fr.	58	Korbyn Davis	So.	75	Ashton Miller	Fr.
2	Keelin Releford	Sr.	23	Jonathan “John John” Williams	Jr.	59	Lakota Malone	Sr.	76	Josiah “Jethro” Carver	Jr.
3	Jayden “J.P.” Powell	So.	24	Jeremiah Capps	Fr.	60	Andrew Ellis	Sr.	79	Jayden Wilson	Fr.
4	Mason Belt	Sr.	30	Ashton Guinn	So.	61	Kendrick “Kenney” Releford	Fr.	80	Aiden Williams	So.
6	Gabe McDougald	Sr.	32	A.J. Rangel	Fr.	62	Jace Dunn	So.	88	Isaac Scott	Fr.
7	Tyler Bailey	So.	33	Eli Archer	Fr.	63	Mario Alberto	Jr.			
8	Ethan Honeycutt	Sr.	34	Tony Gibbons	So.	65	Dalton Pate	Jr.			
9	Landon Keller	Sr.	43/51	Mason Norman	Jr.	66	Kameron Holder	So.			
10	Aiden “A.P.” Paul	Jr.	44	Tyler Berry	Jr.	67	Bryson Killen	Fr.			
11	Artee Bahn	Sr.	50	Jordan Collins	Jr.	68	Gabe Worley	Fr.			
12	Ron Paul Parker	Fr.	52	Jameson Reece	Sr.	70	Gabe Coram	Fr.			
13	Kayden Esterline	Fr.	54	Carlos Lopez	Sr.	71	Nic Primeau	Sr.			
16	Greyson Ensor										

Head coach: Jason Jarrett.
Assistant head coach: Greg Hyder.
Assistant coaches: Eli Ayers, Randy Ferrell, Austin Hicks, Brandon Mottern, Bryton Westmoreland.
Managers: Adrienne Lopez, Kaylyn Simply, Bailee Jarrett.

High School Football 2025 • Providence Academy



JEFF BIRCHFIELD / SIX RIVERS MEDIA

The Providence Academy Knights football team is in its third season of existence. The Knights will be under former two-time Super Bowl participant Daniel Kilgore as head coach.

Providence Academy making big strides in third season

By JEFF BIRCHFIELD
jbirchfield@sixriversmedia.com

Providence Academy is no longer the start-up football program.

The Knights have 34 players on their roster, an offseason weight training and conditioning program and a full coaching staff. There’s an actual stadium which they play, although there is more to be done.

Now is the time for the Knights to shine in their third season under former two-time Super Bowl participant Daniel Kilgore as head coach.

“The numbers have grown and so have I as a coach,” Kilgore said. “It’s learning what works for this crew and what doesn’t, growing a culture. Everybody talks about culture and every school around here has a football tradition. Here we’re trying to grow a player-led culture.”

Sophomore Hunt Simpson will lead the Knights at quarterback with freshman Cam Blanton as his backup. That opening happened as last year’s starter Jacoby Puhr has transitioned to running back. Gabe Pennington, another senior, will also share in the rushing duties.

The Knights are deep at receiver, led by junior Nash Martinez, a star on the baseball team that has made back-to-back state tournament appearances. Other key receivers include Braden Miller, Cole Blanton and Carter Larson. Junior Roman Damron takes over at tight end.

Kilgore, an offensive lineman with a decade of NFL experience, is most concerned about a lack of experience in some spots. Still, the Knights are bigger, stronger and with better footwork than ever before.

Junior Juan Vides and freshman John Poole are battling for starting center. Senior



JEFF BIRCHFIELD / SIX RIVERS MEDIA

Jacoby Puhr has switched from quarterback to running back.

Alexander Manning and Oliver Evans are guards, although Vides could shift over there. There’s plenty of depth at tackle with Fischer Dean, Hudson Harwood, Chase Ballard and Tristan Dennis.

Same as most small schools, many players go both ways with a 3-4 defense. Puhr can line up at either defensive end or outside line-backer, while Dean also will line up at end. Tackles include Vides and Manning, a senior who transferred from Cedar View Christian which does not offer football. However, Manning gets a passing grade as he played as a freshman at Dobyns-Bennett.

Harwood, Ballard and Damron are other line-backers, while freshman Noah Collinger should see plenty of playing time.

In the backfield, Miller and Larson are listed at corners. Marcus Stine is at safety, while Cole Blanton brings the versatility to play either corner or safety. Kilgore raves about freshman safety Stinson Ellis.

“He has the raw talent, a rare player at



JEFF BIRCHFIELD / SIX RIVERS MEDIA

Cole Blanton will serve in a variety of roles for Providence Academy.

this level,” Kilgore said. “He’s a well-rounded freshman with great instincts, grit and knowledge. He has great footwork and a nose for the ball.”

Puhr showcases his all-around talent, also the team’s kicker. Same with Cole Blanton, a three-sport athlete whom Kilgore said has made the biggest jump of any player. Blanton has grown in height, put on weight and gained confidence.

Miller and Martinez are the primary kick

and punt returners, although freshman Kahler Oggero could make an impact on special teams.

Providence faces a challenging schedule against Division II schools. They open with out-of-state visitor Asheville Christian at home. Their next three games are on the road, culminating with West Greene. The Knights will even play one game at Middle Tennessee State when they face Providence Christian.

PROVIDENCE ACADEMY ROSTER



JEFF BIRCHFIELD / SIX RIVERS MEDIA

Former San Francisco 49ers center Daniel Kilgore serves as Providence Academy head coach.

No.	Name	Class
1	Cam Blanton	Fr.
2	Hunt Simpson	So.
3	Nash Martinez	Jr.
5	Dietrich Guldseth	So.
6	Cole Blanton	Sr.
7	Ty Puhr	Fr.
8	Kahler Oggero	Fr.
11	Marcus Stine	Jr.
13	Carter Larson	So.
15	Chris Carroll	Jr.
16	Charlie Walker	Sr.
17	Stinson Ellis	Fr.
20	Noah Collinger	Fr.
22	Case Freeman	Jr.
23	Braden Miller	Jr.
24	Jacoby Puhr	Sr.
29	Easton Evans	Fr.
37	Will Hallam	Fr.
38	Miles Iqbal	Fr.
40	Gabe Pennington	Sr.
50	Ford Bowman	So.
51	Matthew Carroll	Fr.
52	Tristan Dennis	Jr.
53	Chase Ballard	Sr.
55	Hudson Harwood	So.
56	Everett Collins	So.
58	John Poole	Fr.
64	Juan Vides	Jr.
65	Everett Leek	So.
68	Fischer Dean	Sr.
70	Oliver Evans	So.
73	Alexander Manning	Sr.
80	Caedmon Nidiffer	Sr.
82	Roman Damron	Jr.

Head coach: Daniel Kilgore.



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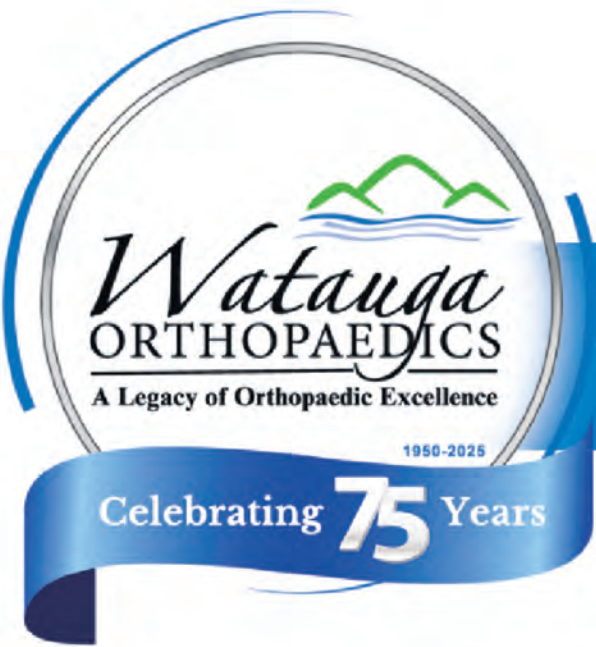
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HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL 2025 • SCIENCE HILL



J.D. VAUGHN / SIX RIVERS MEDIA

Science Hill is looking to have another big season under veteran coach Stacy Carter. The Hilltoppers bring back a talented backfield and transfer quarterback, but there are new faces on the line.

Science Hill talented, but young at some positions

By JEFF BIRCHFIELD
jbirchfield@sixriversmedia.com

Can youth and talent overcome a lack of experience at some positions?

That’s the question Science Hill football coach Stacy Carter has about the 2025 team.

The Hilltoppers bring back a talented backfield of Aiden Perry, Ian Mathes and Nalique Anderson. There’s also much ballyhooed transfer quarterback Lane Clement. But, there are a lot of new faces on the offensive line.

“Well, we’re young. We got to figure out our identity and figure out things, and we don’t have much time to do it,” Carter said. “We want to keep things simple and try to figure out an offense, a defense. The offensive linemen, some talent, but they’re new. They’re bigger at some spots, but they’re not as experienced.”

Clement, the son of former University of Miami quarterback Ryan Clement, has raised expectations for many Hilltopper fans. He’s a 6-foot-4 senior quarterback that the coaches say can make all the throws.

Perry was around the 1,000-yard rushing mark last season, while Mathes started a couple of games. Anderson was explosive in spots and the 6-1 junior will be a starting wide receiver in addition to the rushing. Sophomore Kiantai Harris rounds out the quartet.

Pearson Harrison, a 6-1 sophomore, is listed as Clement’s backup at the quarterback position.

Anderson, Darian Jackson and Jabriel Fain are speedsters at wide receiver. Branson Newberry, Keenan McInturff and Marcus Jones are backups.

The tight end and H-Back positions are held by Jacob Horne and Darren Hill with Hayden Smith and Brayden Austin their backups.

Sawyer Necessary returns to the line at right tackle. He’s the younger brother of last season’s Elite 11 Player of the Year Baylor Necessary. Other spots include Parke Walters at right guard, Mason Whitehead at center, Trenton Hughes at left guard and Tybre Faw at left tackle.

Science Hill is strong on the defensive line with seniors Haiden Cox and Darius Dualuqua at ends and Necessary at nose tackle. Horne and Walters are primary backups.

Linebacker is the other position which Carter is most looking to. Anderson is the most experienced on the outside, while Austin on the other side. There’s plenty of athleticism with Hill and Smith at middle linebackers. But, there’s inexperience behind them with Ronan Bishop, Elijah Diaz, Macky Keramidas and Ahsan Ewing.

“We’ve some good players there, but not super deep,” Carter said. “They’re not experienced so it’s going to take time. We might have to make sure



JEFF BIRCHFIELD / SIX RIVERS MEDIA

Science Hill’s leading rusher from a year ago, Aiden Perry, is back for his senior season.



DAVID CRIGGER

Science Hill’s Haiden Cox (90) and Nalique Anderson (24) combine on a tackle against Cleveland.

things are simple, because the bright light hits and somebody forgets what he’s doing.”

Josihea Battle and Harris are starting corners with Tyler Holder and Mathes at safety. Jackson and Newberry are backups at corners with Tyler Holder and Perry listed as backup safeties.

Carter Lockman brings experience at kicker and Knox Arrington is the punter. They

are backups at each other’s positions.

It’s certainly a challenging schedule, opening with the traditional rivalry game with Elizabethton.

“It’s tough right off the bat. We’ve got Maryville back on the schedule, along with some new ones,” Carter said. “We’ve got Bristol, Morristown West, Cocke County and Bearden. We changed it up a bit.”

SCIENCE HILL ROSTER			
No.	Name	Pos.	Class
1	Ian Mathes	RB/DB	Sr.
2	Branson Newberry	WR/DB	Jr.
3	Brayden Austin	TE/OLB	Sr.
4	Tyler Holder	TE/DB	Sr.
5	Keenan McInturff	WR/DB	Sr.
6	Ahsan Ewing	RB/MLB	Sr.
7	Jabriel Fain	WR/DB	Sr.
8	Aiden Perry	RB/DB	Sr.
9	Hayden Smith	RB/LB	Jr.
12	Josihea Battle	WR/DB	Sr.
14	Levi Torbett	QB	Sr.
15	Darian Jackson	WR/DB	Jr.
16	Lane Clement	QB	Sr.
17	Marcus Jones	WR/DB	So.
18	Harrison Pearson	QB	So.
19	Darren Hill Jr.	RB/MLB	Jr.
20	Daniel Ringersma	RB/DB	Jr.
21	Augustine Piccirillo	DB/LB	Jr.
22	Harris Smith Jr.	RB/LB	Sr.
23	Kiantai Harris	DB/RB	So.
24	Nalique Anderson	RB/OLB	Jr.
25	Elijah Diaz	WR/OLB	So.
26	Knox Arrington	P/K	Sr.
27	Tyler McInturff	WR/DB	So.
29	Davis Crowe	WR/DB	So.
31	Nicholas Famoyin	WR/DB	So.
33	Taylor May	WR/DB	Jr.
34	Benjamin Hull	WR/DB	So.
35	Luke Vannoy	RB/LB	Jr.
36	Easton Lowe	WR/DB	So.
37	Carter Lockman	Kr	Sr.
40	Macky Keramidas	TE/LB	So.
41	Anthony Forney	LB	Sr.
45	Kellen Fischer	WR/OLB	So.
46	Daniel Davis	WR/DB	So.
47	Ronan Bishop	MLB	Jr.
48	Maddox Rodriguez	LB	So.
49	Jonathan Garza	WR/DB	So.
50	Delorean Daniel	OL/DL	So.
51	Joshua Garza	OL/DL	So.
52	Zyair Garcia	OL/DL	Jr.
53	Sawyer Necessary	OL/DL	Jr.
55	Daniel Nem	LB	So.
56	Ethan Ledford	OL/DL	So.
57	Hayden Andies	OL/DL	Jr.
58	Trenton Hughes	OL/DL	Sr.
59	Darius Dualuqua	OLDL	Sr.
62	Adrian Lopez	OL/DL	So.
64	Jesse Lejeune	OL/DL	So.
65	Tybre Faw	OL/DL	Sr.
70	Enricque Chagala	OL/DL	So.
71	Mason Whitehead	OL/DL	Jr.
73	Caleb Parsons-Lott	OL/DL	So.
74	Parke Walters	OL/DL	So.
76	Jacob Carden	OL/DL	Jr.
77	Aidan Taylor	OL/DL	Sr.
78	J.B. Gentry	OL/DL	Sr.
79	Nathan Story	OL/DL	So.
80	Chance Reed	WR/RB	So.
82	Cameron Bradley	WR/DB	So.
83	Brayden McIntosh	TE/OLB	So.
86	Maxwell Zahner	K	So.
87/75	Jacob Horne	OL/DL	Jr.
88	Shamote Mims	DL	Jr.
89	Ayden Ewing	WR/DB	Sr.
90	Haiden Cox	DL	Sr.
92	Shia Delargy	DE	So.
93	Bryson Phillips	K	So.
94	Elijah Quintero	WR/DB	So.
96	Geovanni Young	WR/DB	So.
98	Tristan Hocevar	WR/DB	Jr.
Head coach/offensive coordinator: Stacy Carter. Assistant coaches: Ralph Nelson (defensive coordinator), Paul Overbay (DBs), Broderick Gillespie (LBs), Scott Nelson (outside LBs), Sam Hayne (DL), Elijah Mathes (junior varsity DC/DBs), Matt Eads (WRs/assistant OC), Wes Jones (RBs/TEs/special teams coordinator), Malik McGue (QB/JV head coach), Andrew Beck (OL), Reece Fain (junior varsity OL/DL), Bill Snyder (kickers/punters). Director of football operations: Benny Tolley.			

HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL 2025 • REGION 1-4A



DYLAN YOUNG/SIX RIVERS MEDIA

Peyton Lingerfelt tosses a ball while scrambling against Volunteer in 2024. Elizabethton, Volunteer, Sullivan East, Cherokee and Greeneville all return their starting quarterbacks this season.

It’s the year of the QB for Region 1-4A football

By J.D. VAUGHN
jvaughn@sixriversmedia.com

What do Northeast Tennessee teams

Elizabethton, Volunteer, Sullivan East, Cherokee

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and Greeneville have in common — besides their Region 1-4A affiliation? All of them return their starting quarterbacks.

The Tri-Cities’ passing yardage champion still has two years remaining in his career, too. Peyton Lingerfelt threw for 2,001 yards his sophomore year at Sullivan East.

Lingerfelt’s top three receiving targets — senior Blue Proffitt along with juniors Haden Jones and Devin Bowman — are likewise back in the lineup for the Patriots, who look to build on a 1-9 campaign after reaching the 4A playoffs in 2023.

Landon Jeffers took Cherokee back to the playoffs after a four-year absence his junior year. He threw for 1,637 yards and 17 touchdowns while rushing for 717 as the Chiefs (7-3) finished third in Region 1-4A, enjoying their first winning season since 2019. Like Lingerfelt, Jeffers returns his top targets in fellow seniors Lofton Hayes and Rowe Fletcher.

And from the looks of it, Volunteer quarterback Jameson Mowell was easily on his way to a 1,000-yard passing season when an injury cut his sophomore year short. Through four games, Mowell had 559 yards through the air and had the Falcons within three points of victory twice.

Volunteer, which has lost 24 straight games, has won just once since reaching the playoffs in 2021.

ANY CHANGES AT THE TOP?

Three guesses which two teams will be favored to contend for the Region 1-4A title this year. Here’s a hint: it’s the same two teams which have won the region every year dating

back to 2015. Greeneville has won it eight times including the last four, and Elizabethton twice during its 2019-20 state championship runs after moving up to 4A in 2017. And the Cyclones avenged a regular-season loss to Greeneville in 2021 en route to another BlueCross Bowl appearance.

Rhett Slagle aims to return Elizabethton to those glory days his senior year, his third season as the Cyclones’ starting quarterback.

And with the graduation of Vanderbilt baseball signee Carson Quillen, senior dual-threat quarterback Caden Baugh is Greeneville’s top returning rusher. He threw for 1,437 yards and 18 touchdowns while rushing for 974 yards and 12 more TDs, leading Greeneville to its eighth straight quarterfinal trip.

OTHER CONTENDERS

Grainger — Having gone 5-5 and missing the playoffs by one spot in 2024, Grainger must replace quarterback Ashton Taylor. The Grizzlies return two-way threat Aidan Dalton at running back and line-backer, seeking their first playoff appearance since 2022.

Northview Academy — Among the Cougars’ losses to graduation are quarterback Mason Phillips, who threw for 1,340 yards to lead NVA (5-6) to its second straight playoff berth. Calvin Ferguson and Jaylen Stolz are back for their senior years after leading Northview in receiving, with fellow senior Aiden Metcalf the team’s top returning rusher at 391 last year (6.4 per carry).

Seymour — The Eagles, 2-8 last fall, are

trying to return to the postseason after missing the previous two years. Several of their key skill players are back, including senior quarterback Madden Guffey (1,232 yards and 14 TDs passing). Ryan Gibson returns for his senior year after rushing for 1,554 yards, a Seymour single-season record in 2024. Guffey’s top targets, Connor Ogle and Mason Brown, will suit up again.

STORM WATCHING

Anderson County won’t be the only obstacle awaiting Region 1 teams in the playoffs. Alcoa, coming off 10 consecutive state championships in Class 3A, moved up to 4A this off-season. The Tornadoes joined Anderson County, Carter, Fulton, Gibbs, Heritage, South-Doyle and Union County in Region 2-4A.

TRIVIA TIME

Q: When was the last time a team other than Elizabethton or Greeneville represented Region 1-4A in the TSSAA state championship game?

A: Morristown West in 2003. After years of frustration, the Trojans broke through and defeated Maryville 17-14 in overtime for a BlueCross Bowl bid. Hillsboro defeated MoWest 21-0 for the 4A state title.

Q: How many teams in the current Region 1-4A have made the TSSAA state semifinals in their history?

A: Four. Elizabethton 10 times (1938, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2019, 2020 and 2021), Greeneville eight times (2000, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2017, 2018 and 2023), Seymour three times (1980, 1999 and 2000) and Cherokee once (1994).

HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL 2025 • SULLIVAN EAST



BRIAN WOODSON/SIX RIVERS MEDIA

Expectations are higher for the Sullivan East Patriots this fall after a rebuilding campaign last season. After snapping a playoff drought in 2023, the Patriots hope to get back once again.

Sullivan East expect better results from ‘Raid ‘n Shoot’

By **BRIAN WODSON**
bwoodson@sixriversmedia.com

BLUFF CITY — The Air Raid was nullified for the most part last season at Sullivan East. One season after Drake Fisher, Corbin Laisure and others left the program, the Patriots struggled to a 1-9 campaign, earning a win over Volunteer, while reaching double digits in points just twice.

“Last year expectation was to get better every week,” said Sullivan East offensive coordinator and Air Raid proponent Stan Bedwell, who has tweaked the offense to the “Raid ‘n Shoot”, a mixture of Air Raid and Run-n- Shoot principles. “There was never a talk about winning a game and we honestly didn’t know if we were going to win a game last year. The fact that we got one, we were okay with that.”

Expectations are higher this season, with Bedwell even talking playoffs.

“I feel really optimistic about what has been going on,” Sullivan East head coach J.C. Simmons said. “You go through a season like last year, you either pack up and leave or you show up ready to fight and these guys have been really working at it.”

Leading the Patriots will be junior quarterback Peyton Lingerfelt, who replaced the record-setting Fisher and threw for 2,001 yards while learning under the tutelage of “Air Raid” innovator Hal Mumme, who will spend this fall coaching the offense at Centenary in Louisiana instead of Bluff City.

Lingerfelt has plenty of targets, led by Blue Proffitt, who had more than 700 yards receiving, along with



BRIAN WOODSON/SIX RIVERS MEDIA

Sullivan East senior Blue Proffitt will lead a talented group of receivers for the Patriots’ “Air Raid” offense this season.

Devin Bowman and Haden Jones. Bentley Key, who missed most of last season with injury, will provide the run threat the Patriots need.

“We have the ability to speed it up or slow it down or whatever the game calls for,” Simmons said. “Really, it is finding that rhythm and not having those plays where we try to take a huge shot when we have a wide-open check down and just complete the passes and taking the runs when we have them and moving the ball.”

Simmons is looking for a new attitude from an offensive line that includes center Ben

Childers, guards Ryan Stiltner and Luke Thomas, while the tackle positions could be manned by brothers Jacob and Noah Slone. Hunter Hagaman will also see plenty of the field.

“The word that I have been using is ‘nasty’. I want to be nasty, I want contact and I think we have been missing that for the last couple of years,” Simmons said. “That is where games are won or lost, it doesn’t matter what offense or defense you run so we put a big emphasis on that. I feel really good about our core guys there.”

Slowing down the opposition will be key,

after opponents scored anywhere from 36 to 73 points in nine losses last season. Proffitt, Jones and Bowman return in the secondary, while Simmons likes the development of Andrew Davison, Karston Tuell and the Slone brothers on that side of the ball.

“We know that every night is going to be a fistfight, rather it is in our region or the non-conference games,” said Simmons, whose Patriots play in Region 1-4A, which includes heavyweights Elizabethton and Greeneville. “It is that whole thing of taking it one game at a time, one play at a time, but the

main thing we have been working on with our defense right now is our pursuit, 11 is one.

“I felt like we were really lacking there in our pursuit, not just our angles, but just the full team running until you hear the whistle and just bringing that aggression when we get there playing between whistles.”

Sullivan East snapped a seven-year playoff

drought in 2023 with Fisher, Laisure and the rest, and there is hope getting back once again.

“This group has been eerierly similar to a couple of years ago,” Simmons said. “They all started out as sophomores and having to get thrown in the fire. They are progressing into that junior and senior season and ready to compete.”

SULLIVAN EAST ROSTER

No.	Name	Pos.	Class
1	Blue Proffitt	WR/CB	Sr.
2	Peyton Lingerfelt	QB/S	Jr.
3	Andrew McDuffie	WR/LB	Sr.
4	Gabe Johnson	WR/CB	Sr.
5	Haden Jones	WR/DB	Jr.
6	Andrew Davison	WR/LB	Jr.
7	Austin Warren	WR/DB	Jr.
8	Jose Valencia	WR/S	Jr.
9	Connor Moody	RB/DB	Sr.
10	Devin Bowman	WR/DB	Jr.
11	Bentley Key	RB/LB	Sr.
12	Ryley Neal	WR/DB	Jr.
13	Will Joyner	WR/DB	Jr.
14	Bently McKay	WR/DB	Fr.
15	Grady Burke	QB/DB	Fr.
17	William Bates	WR/DB	Fr.
19	Nathan Hodge	WR/DB	Fr.
20	Gavin Malone	RB/LB	So.
21	Donnie Holman	WR/DB	Fr.
22	Jack Ostrander	WR/LB	Sr.
24	Bentley McKay	WR/DB	Fr.
28	Zack Pierson	WR/LB	So.
30	Gavin Brown	WR/DB	Fr.
33	Carter Hawk	K	Sr.
44	Karston Tuell	WR/CB	Jr.
45	Nathan Wee	OL/DL	So.
46	Ashby Snyder	RB/LB	Fr.
50	Skyler Cox	OL/DL	So.
51	Andrew Sproles	OL/DL	Jr.
53	Randall Meadows	OL/DL	Fr.
54	Jacob Slone	OL/CB	Jr.
55	Noah Slone	OL/LB	Jr.
56	Justin Crabtree	OL/DL	Fr.
57	Jacob Cate	OL/DL	Jr.
58	Brendon Roberts	OL/DL	Jr.
62	D’Shawn Thomas	OL/DL	So.
65	Jacob Koch	OL/DL	Fr.
66	Luke Tomlinson	OL/DL	Jr.
68	Jackson Nelson	OL/DL	Fr.
70	Benjamin Childers	OL/DL	Sr.
72	Hunter Hagaman	OL/DL	Jr.
74	Brayden Metcalf	OL/DL	Fr.
77	Ryan Stiltner	OL/DL	Jr.
79	Trent Price	OL/DL	Jr.
87	Colton Leisure	WR/LB	Fr.
89	Issac Neal	WR/DB	Fr.

Head coach: J.C. Simmons
Assistants: Stan Bedwell, Jamie Gray, Hunter Brown, Cornelius Barber, Ben Botts.

HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL 2025 • CLASS 3A



Unicoi County snaps the ball to quarterback Kolby Jones during the 2024 season.

EARL NEIKIRK

Class 3A: Unicoi aims to defend region title; Alcoa gone, G-P remains

By J.D. VAUGHN
jvaughn@sixriversmedia.com

The football teams at Unicoi County, Johnson County and Gatlinburg-Pittman couldn't have been much more even than they were last season.

Johnson County's 14-7 victory over G-P changed the course of the 2024 campaign for all three teams — the Longhorns lost star running back Juan Mejia to a season-ending injury, Unicoi County's ensuing 10-7 win over Johnson County gave the Blue Devils their second region title in four years and G-P ended up falling to the No. 3 seed for the playoffs.

But when the state quarterfinals arrived, the Highlanders were once again the final team standing, having won their first two playoff games at Kingston and Unicoi County. Once again, Alcoa stood in the way and eliminated the Highlanders with a 52-7 quarterfinal decision. This year, there's no Alcoa on the other side, as the Tornadoes moved up to 4A. But that doesn't mean it'll be a cakewalk to the BlueCross Bowl. Teams like Austin-East and Kingston — along with Region 2-3A rivals McMinn Central, Meigs County, Scott and Sweetwater — lie in wait for the postseason. With Unicoi County returning star quarterback Kolby Jones and

Johnson County bringing back Mejia one more time, both teams are once again favored to challenge G-P for region superiority.

The Highlanders return junior quarterback John Keohane after he completed 69% of his throws for 1,187 yards and 10 touchdowns with five interceptions as a sophomore. All-State running back and fellow junior Brayden Maples is also back, having scored 20 touchdowns with 1,271 yards rushing. Senior running back Cecilio Rodriguez ran for 713 yards last season. G-P did graduate two of its top receivers, with senior Elijah Spence the top returnee.

OTHER CONTENDERS?
Chuckey-Doak — The Black Knights enter 2025 on an eight-game slide after opening coach Billy Kaylor's second season with a 71-46 win at Unaka. Chuckey-Doak scored 74 points the rest of the year after that game, their closest game a 27-13 defeat against West Greene. But the Knights are just three years removed from winning their second region title in a four-year stretch and starting the 2023 season 6-1.
Pigeon Forge — Veteran coach Heath Woods will lead the Tigers this season, following the retirement of another veteran leader in Scott Meadows. Woods had previous

coached at Knoxville Carter and Northview Academy before joining Meadows' Pigeon Forge staff.

The Tigers tripled their 2023 win total last fall, going 6-5 with a first-round playoff loss at Alcoa. They lost 1,000-yard rusher Wyatt Howard to graduation but return senior Ayden Hood to the backfield. Junior quarterback Andrew Lewis threw for 703 yards with 695 yards on the ground last season, accounting for 15 touchdowns.

Claiborne — The conference losing streak is over, but the playoff drought isn't. Led by new head coach Dalton Lee, a former offensive coordinator at Cumberland Gap, the Bulldogs seek their first postseason berth since winning Region 1-3A in 2020.

TRIVIA TIME
Q: As a member of Class 3A, Elizabethton most recently represented Region 1 in the state semifinals in 2009, 2010 and 2012. Who was the last team from Region 1-3A prior to that to reach the semifinal round?
A: You have to go back a quarter century for this one. As a member of Region 1-3A, Seymour made back-to-back semifinal runs in 1999 and 2000, finishing 12-2 and 13-1 respectively. Both times, the Eagles fell to Portland.

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BRIAN WOODSON/SIX RIVERS MEDIA

After slow starts have been an issue for Tennessee High in recent seasons, the Vikings will be looking for better success to start this year.

Tennessee High focused on faster start to season

By **BRIAN WOODSON**
bwoodson@sixriversmedia.com

BRISTOL, Tenn. — Slow starts have been an issue for Tennessee High in recent seasons. The Vikings have started with a 1-3 record in three of the last four years, although last year the use of ineligible player resulted in Tennessee High being awarded a season-opening forfeit win over Greeneville. In reality, the Vikings haven’t won a season opener since 2018.

While Tennessee High played Knox Central, Dobyns-Bennett and Greeneville to start those campaigns, it doesn’t get much easier for the Vikings, which travels to West Ridge to open the season on Aug. 22. That will be followed by home games with Class 6A Science Hill and Class 4A Elizabethton.

“That is a big goal for us to kind of take care of business early on,” said Tennessee High head coach Josh Holt, whose Vikings will also renew its rivalry with Virginia High for the first time since 2019. “Our goal, even through spring ball was to prepare to come out of the gates a little bit quicker.”

Tennessee High has played well down the stretch, winning six straight games prior to the postseason in each of the last two seasons. That could get more challenging this season with the Vikings facing Mountain Lakes Conference favorites Morristown West and defending Class 5A state champion Sevier County in consecutive weeks with hopes of winning at least one of those to earn a home playoff game for the first time since 2020.

“Their first goal was



BRIAN WOODSON/SIX RIVERS MEDIA

Senior Jack Richardson, left, and sophomore Knox Keesee are slated to share quarterback duties this season at Tennessee High.

to host,” said Holt, whose Vikings have lost six straight playoff games. “We told them if we are going to host that means we have got to plus-1 our conference wins from last year. I don’t want to limit it to plus-1, but that is our goal and we have to take care of business in conference.”

There are no secrets to what Tennessee High is trying to do on the football field.

“We are going to run the ball, that is what we do, that is how we live,” Holt said. “It is physical football, that is what we are going to do. Defensively, we are going to try to get after people, but the two marry up. Your offense and your defense are going to marry and mirror each other when you are physical.”

While workhorse back Trent Dowdell is now playing at Emory & Henry, the Vikings have options, led by

oft-injured senior Elijah Plumbar, Kael Honaker, Cooper Booher and Carter Smith. Senior track star Jack Richardson and sophomore Knox Keesee will share duties at quarterback, while Barron Harkleroad, Riley Price, Preston Feagins, Ian Peake and Dayne Musick are targets in the passing game.

“We have certain formations when Knox is the quarterback and certain formations for Jack at quarterback,” Holt said. “That is out of total preparation from top down to make sure we are as ready as we can be each week.”

While four-year starter Micah Norton is missing off the offensive line, there are returnees, led by Erasmo Cobain, Kai Allison and Ryon Simora.

“I think is the biggest we have been up front in a long time. It is also

probably the youngest we have been up front in a long time,” Holt said. “It is really going to come down to how quick they can really all come together and get on the same page.”

Defensively, the Vikings will be led by the linebacker trio of Feagins, Booher and Honaker, along with an experienced secondary that includes Musick, Harkleroad and Price. Talented kicker Knox Arrington transferred to Science Hill, but Holt does like the potential of Dexter Dishner and Jackson Ferrell on special teams.

“We are really excited. There is a lot of youth, some green spots we have got to fill in, especially up front, but we are really excited about what we have seen so far since June,” Holt said. “We have had great attendance in the weight room, great attendance at practice.”

TENNESSEE HIGH ROSTER			
No.	Name	Pos.	Class
1	Elijah Plumbar	RB/DB	Jr.
2	Kael Honaker	RB/LB	Sr.
3	Brenton Baker	WR/DB	So.
4	Dayne Musick	WR/DB	Sr.
5	Cooper Booher	RB/LB	Sr.
6	Carter Smith	RB/DB	So.
7	Heath Swaggerty	—	Jr.
8	Ben Stokes	—	So.
9	Cannon Stalker	—	So.
10	Liam Holt	—	Fr.
11	Bo Utsman	WR/DB	So.
12	Dexter Dishner	—	Jr.
13	Alex Carey	—	So.
14	Gannon Meyer	—	Fr.
15	Maxwell Holt	—	Jr.
16	Knox Keesee	QB/DB	So.
17	Riley Price	WR/DB	Sr.
18	Jack Richardson	QB/DB	Sr.
19	Barron Harkleroad	WR/DB	Sr.
21	Ian Peake	WR/DB	Sr.
22	Rhett Miller	—	Fr.
23	Lucas Shaffer	—	So.
24	Graham Bailey	—	Jr.
25	Isaac Stevens	—	Sr.
26	Gavin Francis	—	Sr.
27	Jackson Reed	—	Jr.
28	Peyton Walker	—	Fr.
29	Ayden Darby	—	Fr.
30	Eric Whale	—	Fr.
31	Braylen Colley	—	Fr.
32	Tristian Head	—	Fr.
33	Zen Call	—	Fr.
40	Ty’Shawn Gammon	—	Fr.
42	Conan O’Dell	—	Fr.
43	Kaden Vancouver	—	Fr.
44	Preston Feagins	TE/LB	Sr.
45	Joseph Ferrell	—	Fr.
47	Kainan Waldron	—	Fr.
50	Gavin Dickson	OL/DL	Jr.
52	Kaiden Johanan	OL/DL	So.
53	Christian Anderson	OL/DL	Jr.
55	Erasmo Cobian	OL/DL	Sr.
56	Kai Allison	OL/DL	Sr.
57	Spencer Miller	OL/DL	Jr.
58	Josh Amos	OL/DL	Fr.
59	Caden Drabczyk	OL/DL	Fr.
60	Ryan Simora	OL/DL	Sr.
61	Malakiah Shipley	OL/DL	So.
62	Josiah Beidleman	OL/DL	Sr.
65	Jackson Roberts	OL/DL	So.
66	Tristan Mancera	OL/DL	So.
68	Anatolii Moha	OL/DL	Fr.
70	Peyton Lomans	OL/DL	Jr.
71	Grayson Cooper	OL/DL	So.
72	Victor Melendez	OL/DL	Fr.
73	Mayson Roberts	OL/DL	Fr.
74	Aiden Garcia	OL/DL	So.
75	Braxton Howard	OL/DL	Jr.
76	Kaiden Dean	OL/DL	Jr.
80	Ayden Moore	TE/DL	So.
81	Rodney Slider	TE/DL	So.
Head coach: Josh Holt			
Assistants: Jesse Taylor, Matt Chandler, Derek Dowdell, Daryl Shanks, Christian Gibson, Jordan Bryant, Addison Powers, Cody Snyder.			

HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL 2025 • TRI-CITIES CHRISTIAN



BRIAN WOODSON/SIX RIVERS MEDIA

The Eagles began the 2025 campaign on Aug. 8, defeating Pleasant View Christian, an 8-man football opponent near Nashville, 32-0.

Tri-Cities begins Norris-era by striving to have fun

By **BRIAN WOODSON**
bwoodson@sixriversmedia.com

BLOUNTVILLE — It was an early start to the season for Tri-Cities Christian.

The Eagles began the 2025 campaign on Aug. 8, defeating Pleasant View Christian, an 8-man football opponent near Nashville, 32-0. That followed what was supposed to be have an 11-man season-opener a week earlier that was canceled by Hancock County, resulting in a forfeit win for TCA.

There are times when TCA, which will play eight 8-man games, when the Eagles will be in a mismatch in terms of numbers, with many of those contests against opponents in the vicinity of Nashville.

“We try to sit down and start as many as we can one way, especially on the offensive and defensive lines,” said first-year head coach Robbie Norris, a former head coach at Sullivan North, who spent the three previous seasons as an offensive assistant at Rye Cove. “It is a little bit tough when you are limited in numbers.”

“When we play on Friday nights, some of those teams we play in Nashville, honestly, I don’t know why they play 8-man, they have like 50-some kids. It is a lot bigger thing down in that area.”

It didn’t matter in that opener for the Eagles, which finished 8-2 and made the playoffs last season under head coach Jeremy Bosken. TCA has 11 games scheduled for this season, including eight 8-man, and have two 11-man contests remaining this season at Hurley and Twin Valley in Southwest Virginia. The Eagles played host to South

‘We are trying to build the right way, from the bottom up.’

Robbie Norris,
Tri-Cities Christian coach

Haven Christian in an 8-man contest last Friday.

Norris has been busy since arriving in Blountville. He has 20 varsity players who have chosen to play for TCA, while also starting a middle school team, the first in the four-year history of the program.

“We are trying to build the right way, from the bottom up,” Norris said.

TCA has three seniors, including veterans Levi Furrow and Slade Blevins, along with newcomer Emmett Kelly. In all, the Eagles have varsity players that range in grade from seniors down to seventh grade.

“Our first official workout we had three guys so we have made a lot progress in trying to get the kids out and we have great kids. A lot of them haven’t play football before and that is OK,” Norris said. “We have got a great culture. The kids, you can tell, they really like each other and that is important in high school football. It is not the pros, you need to like your teammates. We are excited.”

Among the youngsters is eight grade quarterback Coen Kestner, who is directing what Norris calls a modified Air Raid system, and talented freshman playmaker Josiah Williams as the Eagles depend on athletes choosing to attend TCA instead of a public school.



CONTRIBUTED

Tri-Cities Christian quarterback Coen Kestner avoids a tackle during the Eagles' win at Pleasant View Christian near Nashville on Aug. 8.



BRIAN WOODSON/SIX RIVERS MEDIA

Slade Blevins, Levi Furrow and Emmett Kelly led Tri-Cities Christian into its season opener on Friday at Pleasant View Christian near Nashville. The Eagles are led this year by first year head coach Robbie Norris.

“We can’t recruit, hopefully the mission itself sells itself, being a Christian school,” said Norris, who is also the athletic director at TCA. “Our kids really want to play and we want to be Christ-centered. We are trying to have fun.”

TCA, which was scheduled to move from its current Blountville location

into a new facility in Colonial Heights last week, hopes to eventually play only 11-man games, but Norris said the school was wise to stick with 8-man in the first years of the program.

“The administration made the decision to play 8-man and it was a good decision,” he said. “The plan is to add more 11-man games every year so

TRI-CITIES CHRISTIAN FOOTBALL ROSTER			
No.	Name	Pos.	Class
2	Gabe Tyson	QB/DB	7th
4	Emmett Kelly	LB/WR	Sr.
5	Jubal Gilliam	OL/LB	So.
7	Carsten Estep	WR/DB	Sr.
9	Cale Tyson	TE/LB	8th
11	Josiah Williams	RB/DB	Fr.
12	Matthew Strickler	RB/LB	Fr.
13	Coen Kestner	QB/DB	8th
15	Calvin McIntosh	WR/LB	Fr.
16	Levi Farrow	WR/LB	Sr.
17	David Mejia	OL/DL	Jr.
21	Ean Kelly	WR/DB	So.
22	John Mark Dixon	WR/DB	Fr.
34	Jude Martin	OL/DL	So.
44	Slade Blevins	TE/DL	Sr.
50	Vincent Williams	OL/DL	7th
75	Isaiah Gardner	OL/DL	8th
77	Jason Williams	OL/DL	8th
Head Coach: Robbie Norris Assistants: Scott Allgood, Peyton Robinson, Mike Wallace, Josh Anderson, Sterling Throp, Ethan Bergeron, Austin Riner, Clint Myers, Ray Sybert, Jacob King.			

eventually we are playing all 11.”

For now, the Eagles will continue to compete, no matter how many players are on the field.

“We are really trying to be Christ-centered and trying to have fun. The score

will take care of itself. Don’t get me wrong, we want to compete and we want to win,” Norris said.

“If they have a good time and it is a positive experience you will be surprised how the numbers grow.”

HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL 2025 • UNICOI COUNTY



JEFF BIRCHFIELD / SIX RIVERS MEDIA

Unicoi County won its second region championship in four years last season. Unicoi County finished 10-2 after advancing to the second round of the playoffs.

Unicoi County football looks to maintain championship level

By **JEFF BIRCHFIELD**
jbirchfield@sixriversmedia.com

Drew Rice has taken the Unicoi County football program to a new level over his decade as head coach.

The Blue Devils won their second Region 1-3A championship in four years last season. Unicoi County finished 10-2 after advancing to the second round of the playoffs.

While they’ve lost a pair of standout receivers and top running backs, the best news for the Blue Devils is the return of star quarterback Kolby Jones.

Jones led Northeast Tennessee with 1,911 passing yards and 22 touchdowns last season. He also rushed for 504 yards and 13 touchdowns.

“He’s the total package — great young man, great leader and great competitor,” Rice said. “We’re obviously excited to have him one more year with all that he brings. He’s a football guy that all the team looks to with respect.”

So is the respect for backup quarterback Gunner Peterson, who completed 14 of 17 passes for 216 yards and four touchdowns in a 56-16 playoff victory over Union County when Jones was injured last season.

The Blue Devils have speed at running back with the appropriately named Blaze Rice and Nehemiah Campbell. Daven Thompson and Isaac Acevedo should also get carries.

While the Blue Devils lost a pair of big-play receivers, they bring back juniors Aidyn Evely and Avery Hatcher, who have quite a bit of varsity experience.

“Those guys started for us last year. Avery stepped in when Garrett (Sellars) got hurt and had an awesome sophomore season,” Rice said.



EARL NEIKIRK

Unicoi County quarterback Kolby Jones goes back to pass against Northview Academy.

“Aidyn is just a super smart, tough football kid with great instincts.”

Brady Simmons and Isaac Harris are H-backs.

Dalton Cerezo, whom Rice refers to as a rock-solid anchor, is on the offensive line at the center position. Dillon Sifford and Jaxson Treadway are starting guards with Carter Simmons and Karson Buchanan a pair of tackles whom Rice is complimentary of the way they use their feet and hands.

Going over to the other side in the 4-3 defense, Carter Simmons is versatile. Sifford, Treadway and Buchanan are other starters. There is depth with Hudson Stockfelt, Cole English and Carter Miller also expected to see time. Jack Swinehart, while 6-2 and 160, is a great pass rusher at defensive end.

Brady Simmons, Harris and Campbell lead the linebacking corps. Douglas Mathis and Rice should also play prominently in the Blue Devils’ plans.



EARL NEIKIRK

Unicoi County wide receiver Aidyn Evely looks to escape the grasp of a Claiborne defender.

They’re also deep at defensive back with Alex Laningham, Hatcher, Evely and Broox Bennett listed as starters. Brock Peterson, Cade Peterson and Thompson are others

on the back end of the defense.

Harris could take care of kicking and punting duties. Acevado, Hatcher, Evely and Thompson all give breakaway threats as kick and

UNICOI COUNTY ROSTER

No.	Name	Pos.	Class
1	Kolby Jones	QB/DB	Sr.
2	Avery Hatcher	WR/DB	Jr.
3	Nehemiah Campbell	RB/LB	Jr.
4	Broox Bennett	WR/DB	Jr.
5	Gunner Peterson	QB/LB	Jr.
6	Brock Peterson	WR/DB	Sr.
7	Cade Peterson	WR/DB	Sr.
8	Daven Thompson	RB/LB	Jr.
9	Blaze Rice	RB/LB	Jr.
10	Aidyn Evely	WR/DB	Jr.
11	Jack Swinehart	QB/DB	So.
12	Zach Jenkins	WR/DB	Fr.
13	Mason Wright	WR/DB	Fr.
14	Spencer Boings	WR/DB	Jr.
15	Charlie Hughes	WR/DB	Fr.
16	Sylis Arambula	WR/DB	Fr.
18	Jaxson Pugh	WR/DB	Fr.
20	Jacob Tipton	RB/DB	Fr.
21	Isaac Harris	TE/LB	Sr.
22	Will Smith	WR/DB	So.
23	Isaac Acevedo	RB/DB	So.
24	Alex Laningham	WR/DE	Jr.
27	Ashton Effler	WR/DB	So.
28	Myka Tipton	WR/DB	So.
33	Michael Hampton	TE/LB	So.
35	Blake Schwenke	RB/LB	So.
40	Colton Hulin	RB/LB	Jr.
42	Douglas Mathis	FB/LB	Sr.
44	Brady Simmons	RB/LB	Sr.
50	Drew Tapp	OL/DL	So.
51	Eli Woodby	OL/DL	Sr.
53	Corian Lopez-Jones	OL/DL	Fr.
54	Will Sommer	OL/LB	Fr.
55	Karson Buchanan	OL/DL	Sr.
56	Tristan Duncan	OL/LB	Jr.
57	Isaac Nuckols	OL/LB	Sr.
58	Carter Simmons	OL/DL	Jr.
59	Hudson Stockfelt	OL/DL	Sr.
60	Dawson Pickard	OL/DL	So.
61	Dillon Sifford	OL/DL	Sr.
62	Nick Foster	OL/DL	Fr.
63	Chance Harris	OL/DL	Fr.
65	Brian Sullivan	OL/DL	Jr.
65	Zachary Whaley	OL/DL	Fr.
66	Lincoln Hodges	OL/DL	So.
68	Aiden Ponce	OL/DL	Sr.
68	Mason Blackburn	OL/DL	Fr.
69	Isaac Smith	OL/DL	Jr.
70	Jonah Buchanan	OLD/DL	Jr.
72	Jake Buchanan	OL/DL	Jr.
73	Brennan Hollenbeck	OL/DL	Fr.
74	Carter Miller	OL/DL	Sr.
75	Dalton Cerezo	OL/DL	Sr.
76	Logan Tilson	OL/DL	So.
77	Elijah Terry	OL/DL	So.
78	Jaxson Treadway	OL/DL	Sr.
78	Chandon Dean	OL/DL	Fr.
80	Cole English	TE/DE	Sr.
80	Emmanuel Reynoso	WR/DB	Fr.
81	Marquise Lane	WR/DB	So.
82	Isaiah Ebernicketel	TE/DE	Jr.
84	Karson Bell	WR/DB	So.
88	Benny Acevedo	TE/DE	Fr.
88	Evan Willis	WR/DE	Fr.
90	Gabe Patten	WR/DB	Fr.

HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL 2025 • VOLUNTEER



J.D. VAUGHN/SIX RIVERS MEDIA

The Volunteer Falcons, playing for their third head coach in as many years, are ready to taste victory for the first time since 2022. Jeremy Wagner is the third head coach in as many seasons.

Wagner, Falcons look to silence critics this season

By J.D. VAUGHN
jvaughn@sixriversmedia.com

Jeremy Wagner welcomes the task of building Volunteer’s football program from the ground up. Hard to faze a guy who spent 5 1/2 years in the U.S. Army and fought in Afghanistan. Being the Falcons’ third head coach in as many seasons and overseeing a program which has lost 24 straight games, Wagner knew there would be doubters. But that’s nothing new for him. And given his background, he’s hoping to lead a culture change by example.

“I had a lot of people doubting on me when I graduated (Volunteer) too. I was told I’d flip burgers for a living, I was told I was not going to graduate,” recalled Wagner, who most recently served as an assistant coach under Spencer Riley at Jefferson County. “What it did was it motivated me, growing up from the circumstances I came from in a home with no power and a single parent household and living with my grandparents here in Hawkins County. I went through what a lot of these kids are going through, so I relate to them. And think honestly the relationships are more important than the Xs and Os.”

Since taking the reins of his alma mater, Wagner has not only implemented an overhaul of Volunteer’s



CHERYL GRAY

Volunteer’s Jameson Mowell (8) fires a pass during the 2024 season.



DAKOTA HAMILTON

Volunteer tight end Isaiah Ward (11) runs after catching a pass.

weight program. But he’s quickly gotten to know his football players on a first-name basis. “These kids here have grown to love one another. The doubters will always doubt, and the believers will always believe,” Wagner said, while emphasizing his three biggest principles — discipline, grit and sacrifice. “Without disciplineships in our lives, we are nobody. We are

always one. And we’re always under the microscope. “Hawkins County has always had rural people. I love rural people, and these rural people know how to work. They find a way. Hawkins County is a special place because of that. And sacrifice, it takes what it takes. These kids have sacrificed quite a bit this summer, two to three hours a day. That’s what I stand on.”

MORE OF MOWELL

Junior quarterback Jameson Mowell enters his third year behind center for the Falcons. An injury cut his sophomore year short, after he’d thrown for 559 yards and four touchdowns through four games, while rushing for 25 yards and two more scores. While Wagner officially left the quarterback competition open, Mowell is naturally the frontrunner given his experience. “The most important thing to me is their leadership capability, if you can lead from the front with the offensive line,” Wagner said. “Jameson shows that. He has a good arm and he does

things well. It’s about leadership.”

MULTIPLE ON OFFENSE

Wagner indicated Volunteer will show multiple looks on both sides of the ball, sticking with whichever approach gives the Falcons the best chance to win. Volunteer returns its top receiver from 2024 in senior Nate Simpson, who had 373 yards and three touchdowns on 24 receptions. Fellow senior Owen Fleenor and sophomore Amarion Graves, a transfer from Dobyns-Bennett, give Mowell other reliable options. Fleenor is also the Falcons’ top returning rusher, having gained 201 yards on 34 carries last year while catching 13 passes for 125 yards and three TDs. Several backs are likely to tote the ball at some point, sophomore Bryson Christian standing out to Wagner in the preseason. “Kid is lightning in a bottle,” Wagner said. “He’s a special kid. I absolutely love that kid. He puts his head down and has a blue collar mentality. The kids love blocking for him, and he’s a very physical running back. He’s a punisher.”

Bryton Landry, John Hale and Coltin Kochensparger are all expected to share the load in the running game.

TWO-WAY THREATS

As for Volunteer’s offensive line, Wagner noted Jaylynn Livesay, Davis Murphy and Elijah Housewright are the most likely to start at this point. Juniors Jacoby Hyatt and

VOLUNTEER ROSTER

No.	Name	Pos.	Class
0	Bryton Landry	WR/DB	Jr.
1	Nathan Simpson	WR/DB	Sr.
2	Colton Huff	WR/DB	So.
3	Dakota Ragle	WR/OLB	Jr.
4	Raymond Landry	WR/DB	Sr.
5	Evan Wilder	K	Sr.
6	Kaiden Barker	WR/DB	Jr.
7	Amarion Graves	WR/DB	So.
8	Jameson Vowell	QB/DB	Jr.
9	Brody Patterson	TE/LB	Jr.
10	Hayden Grigsby	WR/OLB	Fr.
11	Isaiah Ward	TE/LB	Sr.
12	Brandon Begley	WR/DB	Sr.
13	Lincoln Wilson	QB/DB	So.
14	Cayden Checa	WR/DB	Fr.
15	Dallas Honeycutt	TE/LB	Fr.
16	Aiden Reece	QB/OLB	Fr.
17	Dace Rodefer	WR/DB	Fr.
18	Owen Fleenor	RB/OLB	Jr.
19	John Hale	RB/DB	So.
20	Lucas Smith	WR/DB	Fr.
21	Bryson Christian	RB/DB	So.
22	Connor Begley	TE/OLB	Fr.
24	Connor Greenwell	RB/DB	Fr.
25	Justin Jesse	RB/OLB	Fr.
26	Bryson Fugate	WR/DB	Fr.
27	Ashton Parks	WR/DB	Fr.
29	Tommy Sadler	WR/DB	So.
32	Connor Williams	QB/DB	So.
33	Jesse Peters	WR/DB	Fr.
35	Skyler Trivette	RB/DB	Fr.
36	Coltin Kochensparger	RB/OLB	Sr.
40	Christian Bullock	TE/LB	Sr.
41	Gavin Roop	TE/OLB	Sr.
42	Eli Franklin	RB/LB	Fr.
44	Christian Wilson	DL	Sr.
45	Ossie Franklin	TE/LB	Sr.
50	Jaxon Frost	OL/DL	Fr.
51	Spencer Crigger	OL/DL	Jr.
52	Davis Murphy	OL/DL	Sr.
55	Sebastian Memis	OL/DL	Jr.
56	Carson Griffith	L/DL	Fr.
57	Brayden Cheek	OL/LB	Sr.
58	Mathias Reeves	OL/LB	So.
60	Jacoby Hyatt	OL/DL	Jr.
62	Wyatt Franklin	OL/DL	Fr.
63	Matthew McBee	OL/DL	So.
64	Elijah Housewright	OL/DL	Sr.
65	Blaine Griffith	OL/DL	Sr.
67	A.J. Puckett	OL/DL	Fr.
68	Jon Mullins	OL/DL	Fr.
69	Jason Harrell	OL/DL	So.
72	Ryder Hicks	OL/DL	So.
74	Aiden Weatherly	OL/DL	So.
75	Channing Cradic	OL/DL	Fr.
77	Jaylynn Livesay	OL/DL	Sr.
78	Gavin Stout	OL/DL	Jr.

Head coach: Jeremy Wagner.
Assistant coaches: Mike Castle, Jeremy Sommers, Garrison Barrett, Josh Swayer, Braden Allen, Ken Stepp, Patrick Wilson, Austin Linton, Andy Franklin, Matt Smith.

Sebastian Memis along with freshman Carson Griffith are likely to see time in the trenches both offensively and defensively. Isaiah Ward, who had 22 catches for 306 yards and three scores on offense in 2024, is now projected to lead Volunteer’s linebacking corps along with Fleenor. Seniors Brayden Cheek, Brandon Begley and Ossie

Franklin have all battled for minutes at linebacker along with Fleenor and freshman Eli Franklin. Senior, Raymond Landry, Bryton Landry, Mowell, Christian and Simpson are currently the frontrunners to start in Volunteer’s secondary. Evan Wilder, a standout soccer player for Volunteer’s historic Region 1-AA tournament run this past spring, will handle kicking duties.



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High School Football 2025 • West Ridge



CHERYL GRAY

The West Ridge Wolves eye a playoff return and their first winning record since 2021 this fall. West Ridge may be relying on a two-quarterback system this fall.

West Ridge looking for consistency, return trip to playoffs

By J.D. VAUGHN
jvaughn@sixriversmedia.com

It’s been a while, but coach Justin Hilton might be relying on a two-quarterback system this fall.

Of course, the last time his team took that approach, West Ridge went 9-3 and advanced to the second round of the 6A play-offs.

But after three years of directing the West Ridge offense, Trey Frazier has graduated and taken his talents to Tusculum’s football program.

Isaac McGee backed up Frazier a year ago, attempting just five passes but rushing for two touchdowns. Now a junior, McGee and sophomore Justice Hilton take center stage in Blountville — Hilton having one rushing touchdown to his name last year. It’s far from the first time they’ve been in competition with each other, even dating back to middle school and junior varsity, but there’s no tension between the two.

“Both of them know they’re going to play somewhere whether they’re at quarterback or not, so we’ll have to get them on the field,” Justin Hilton said. “But they’ve approached it as trying to help each other push each other. When the decision is made, I know they’ll support each other.”

RELIABLE OPTIONS

Whoever is at quarterback, West Ridge returns its top receiver and second-leading rusher behind Frazier for the 2025 season — seniors Kaleb Mabb and Ethan Amyx.

Mabb tallied seven touchdowns and 497 yards on 25 catches last fall, Amyx rushing for 581 yards and seven touchdowns on 103 attempts while never fumbling.

“Feels like (Amyx) has been here forever, doesn’t it,” Coach Hilton said. “Ethan benches 340, squats a ton, you look at him and he fits the bill.

“He needs to be the first once off the bus. He’s been carrying since was a sophomore.”

Junior running back Brody Fields averaged 4.2 yards per carry in 2024 while rushing for two scores of his own.

Aside from Mabb, juniors Jackson Price and Braelyn Vance return to the Wolves’ receiving corps alongside sophomore Braiden Lawson. Price caught nine passes for 138 yards and two TDs last year.

TWO-WAY CONTRIBUTORS

Mabb contributed in every phase of the game as a junior, intercepting two passes and recovering a fumble while



CHERYL GRAY

West Ridge’s Kaleb Mabb returns a kickoff 92 yards for a touchdown.



CHERYL GRAY

Ethan Amyx scoots around the left end against Lakeway Christian in 2024.

making 22 tackles from his safety position, not to mention the two kickoffs he returned for touchdowns. Orlando Mack, a 6-3, 185-pound sophomore is projected to man West Ridge’s other safety slot.

“Kaleb’s not a heavy set kid but he can run a little bit,” Hilton said. “He’s got the skill set you need to get the ball in space.”

On the contrary, it’ll be cornerback by committee for the wolves. Jackson Walsh and Fields are currently the front-runners with Dayton Brown, Price and Lawson also in the mix.

All-Conference linebacker Sam Perry, who recorded a team-high 88 tackles with eight for loss and a sack, is back for his senior year. Hayden Musick and Nathan Arnold will line up at outside linebacker, Musick having led West Ridge with his 15 TFL and three sacks while totaling 69 stops. Arnold made seven stops behind the line himself. Ronnie Smith and Cal Tatum are also expected to contribute, as is sophomore and

former long snapper Jace Arwood.

LINE GROWING UP FAST

While the Wolves did graduate former All-State lineman Trent Tatum, three of the starters around him last fall were underclassmen. Seniors Ethan Iacino, Morgan Thornton and Tanner Mims will help anchor West Ridge’s front this year, aided by juniors Cal Tatum and Kingston McConnell. Thornton and Iacino are expected to line up at tackle, with Tatum and Mims at guard next to McConnell at center.

Mims is the most likely to contribute on the defensive line as well, with Cayden Duke and Leron Smith also in the mix.

On special teams, Hilton has never encountered his current situation — a different player to punt, kick off and kick field goals. Vance is expected to punt, with Evan Maness handling kickoff duties. Samuel Burruss, a senior with previous soccer experience in Barcelona, will serve as the Wolves’ field goal kicker for 2025.

WEST RIDGE ROSTER			
No.	Name	Pos.	Class
0	Orlando Mack	RB/DB	So.
1	Ethan Amyx	RB/LB	Sr.
2	Justice Hilton	QB/DB	So.
3	Jackson Walsh	WR/DB	Jr.
4	Brody Fields	RB/LB	Jr.
5	Jackson Price	WR/DB	Jr.
6	Isaac McGee	QB/DB	Jr.
7	Zach Morelock	QB/DB	Fr.
8	Braiden Lawson	WR/DB	So.
9	Braelyn Vance	QB/DB	Jr.
10	Kaleb Mabb	QB/DB	Sr.
11	Jace Arwood	WR/LB	So.
12	Goliath Arp	WR/DB	Sr.
13	Dayton Brown	WR/DB	Jr.
14	Connor Jones	WR/DB	Jr.
15	Jacob Bledsoe	RB/LB	Sr.
16	Braylen Funderburg	WR/DB	Sr.
17	Jax Brown	RB/LB	Jr.
18	Logan Thompson	RB/LB	Jr.
20	Grayson Ferguson	RB/LB	Jr.
21	Malik Mack	WR/DB	So.
22	Landon Parker	RB/LB	Fr.
23	Riner Hayes	RB/LB	Fr.
24	Cayden Hensley	WR/DB	So.
25	Carter Hobbs	K	Sr.
26	Maddox Harris	WR/DB	Fr.
27	Jackson Kelley	WR/DB	Fr.
28	Jolan Harvey	QB/DB	Fr.
29	Samuel Burruss	K	Sr.
30	Logan Grimm	WR/DB	Fr.
31	Sam Bittinger	WR/LB	Jr.
32	Geminiah Algarin	RB/DB	Fr.
33	Nash Dishner	RB/LB	Fr.
34	Maddox Johnson	RB/LB	Fr.
35	Luke Moody	RB/LB	So.
36	Riley Quiggle	WR/DE	Fr.
37	Nate Rhoton	WR/LB	So.
38	Chris Baldwin	RB/LB	Fr.
40	Cameron Owens	RB/LB	Fr.
41	Jackson Sauls	WR/LB	Fr.
42	Evan Maness	WR/DB	Sr.
43	Hayden Musick	TE/DE	Jr.
44	John Doc Thornton	RB/DE	Fr.
45	Sam Perry	RB/LB	Sr.
48	Ethan Page	OL/DL	Fr.
50	Cal Tatum	OL/DL	Jr.
51	Peyton Martinez	OL/DL	Jr.
52	Tanner Mims	OL/DL	Sr.
53	Tyson Jones	OL/DL	So.
54	Cole Denton	OL/DL	So.
55	Nathan Arnold	TE/DE	Sr.
56	Keithen Ashworth	OL/DL	Jr.
57	Steve Winegar	OL/DL	So.
59	Aaron Stanley	OL/DL	So.
60	Ethan Iacino	OL/DL	Sr.
61	Alex VanSant	OL/DL	Fr.
62	Ethan Hicks	OL/DL	So.
63	Kingston McConnell	OL/DL	Jr.
64	Kallon McConnell	OL/DL	So.
65	Bo Painter	OL/DL	Fr.
66	Bentley Wells	OL/DL	Fr.
67	Tanner Hobbs	OL/DL	Fr.
68	Dalton Clark	OL/DL	So.
69	Jeremiah King	OL/DL	Fr.
70	Rylen Williams	OL/DL	So.
71	Morgan Thornton	OL/DL	Sr.
72	Victor Hite	OL/DL	Fr.
73	Charlie Barger	OL/DL	Sr.
74	Austin Fritz	OL/DL	Fr.
75	Cooper Nelson	OL/DE	Fr.
76	Trevor Frost	OL/LB	Fr.
77	Cayden Duke	OL/DL	Sr.
78	Hayden Cox	OL/DE	So.
80	Brennen Egan	WR/DB	Jr.
81	Wyatt Lawson	WR/DB	Fr.
82	Josiah Johnson	WR/DB	Sr.
84	Nathan Nelms	RB/DB	Fr.
85	Caiden Brickey	RB/DB	Fr.
86	Laron Smith	OL/DL	Sr.
87	Tyler Shaffer	RB/DB	Fr.
88	Braxton Hutchins	WR/DB	So.
90	Matthew Hurd	DL	Fr.
Head Coach: Justin Hilton			
Assistant Coaches: Nick Copas, Andrew Murray, Chase Arnold, Brian Barbour, Ryan Collier, Connor Copas, Mike Copas, Grant Cornett, Steve Dixon, Bryant Hill, Preston Partick, Mike Wampler, Greg Williams.			

HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL 2025 • REGION 1-2A



The Warriors' Gabe McDougald bulls for yardage as teammate Lane Parker (1) tries to help him along. Happy Valley is aiming for its first conference title since 2016.

MATT LAWS

Region 1-2A: Happy Valley a favorite, but chasing South Greene

By J.D. VAUGHN
jvaughn@sixriversmedia.com

Happy Valley's football team started the 2023 season with three straight losses. The Warriors have gone 14-3 since. For two straight years, the Warriors have finished runner-up in Region 1-2A to earn a home playoff game. Two of Happy Valley's losses have come in the first round of the

2A playoffs, last year a 14-13 heart-breaker against Polk County. There hasn't been much of anything flashy about the Warriors' approach, at least from a statistical standpoint. Distributing the ball between four running backs last fall — all of them averaging at least 5.3 yards per carry — Happy Valley returns three of them. Tyler Berry and Lane Parker return to the backfield, gaining 430

and 286 yards respectively during the 2024 regular season. Quarterback Gabe McDougald, who ran for 370, attempted just 20 passes in nine regular season games, hitting 10 of them for 178 yards and three touchdowns. Ron Paul Parker caught two of them. Defensively, Happy Valley was equally balanced, Tyler Bailey and Mason Norman leading the way in tackles with 62 and 61. Norman and Jayden Walls posted nine sacks each, while Walls and Lane Parker both had seven TFL. Simple, yet effective, as Happy Valley aims for its first conference title since 2016.

RUNNING DOWN THE REBELS
South Greene has secured the No. 1 playoff seed four times since 2018 and shared another conference championship on top of that. The other three championships from Region 1-2A during that stretch went to Hampton, which has since relocated to Region 1-1A. The Rebels handed Happy Valley its only regular season loss last fall, a 21-6 decision which decided the region champion. That win avenged the Warriors' 26-20 overtime win on Rebel Hill in 2023, where Happy Valley ended up with the No. 2 seed while South Greene traveled for the first round. Three-year starting quarterback Jacob Susong graduated, but star running back Nash Rader returns for his senior year with the Rebels. South Greene won eight straight games to end the 2024 regular season before falling to Tellico Plains in the 2A playoffs. It's a pretty safe bet both teams have Oct. 30 circled on their calen-

dars, a regular season finale which could end up deciding the conference champion. At the very least, the game is all but guaranteed to shape up the playoff picture.

REST OF THE LEAGUE
West Greene — Led by third-year coach Evan Monroe, the Buffaloes will go back to the postseason after a two-year absence. The Buffaloes return quarterback Austin Brown but lost leading rusher and receiver Austin Franklin to graduation. West Greene scored just one touchdown in its last four games after defeating Cumberland Gap 40-0 on the road. Cumberland Gap — The Panthers have likewise missed the postseason two straight years, having lost 25 of their last 26 games. Not since 2021 has Cumberland Gap won a district game, with 14 straight losses against region foes since. With just four teams in the league after Hampton and Eagleton Academy departed, all of them are guaranteed a spot in the Class 2A playoffs. Eagleton awaits one of the four teams in the playoffs, though, having relocated to Region 2-2A to join Oneida, Polk County and Tellico Plains.

TRIVIA TIME
Q: Other than Hampton in 2021, who was the last team from Region 1-2A to reach the state championship game?
A: Never. The '21 Bulldogs are in a class by themselves there. South Greene and Happy Valley have both reached the state quarterfinals in their history, while West Greene and Cumberland Gap have made the Round of 16.

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High School Football 2025 • Gate City



Brian Woodson/Six Rivers Media

The Gate City Blue Devils will rely on depth and experience to make a deeper postseason run. After last year’s 6-5 campaign, the Blue Devils are looking to challenge for the top of the Mountain 7 District.

Experienced Blue Devils optimistic about season ahead

By **Brian Woodson**
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GATE CITY — There is experience all over the field for Gate City this season.

“They have worked hard. Our big thing is hopefully that hard work will pay off,” Gate City head coach Jeremy Houseright said. “We are not focused on wins and losses, what we are focused on is getting better every day in some aspect. We are just laying it on the line every day, we are out here not taking anything for granted and just trying to make this school and this community and this town as proud as we can of this group of guys.”

There is plenty of talent included in that experience. Walker Hillman, who ran for more than 1,300 yards last season, is back, but the Blue Devils might be alleviate some of his extensive workload in the year ahead. Sophomore Zayne Reed is back for his second year at quarterback, with plenty of skilled athletes to serve as targets in Kaden Houseright, Corey Byrd, Parker Jenkins and more.

The offensive line is also deep, led by 6-foot-5 senior Nick Youmans, along with Nathaniel Sloan, Nathaniel Gilliam, Eli Minor and more for the Blue Devils, who open the season next Thursday at Richlands, followed the next Friday by a visit to Dobyns-Bennett in Kingsport.

“Everybody knows that Gate City likes to pound the football first. If we can do that we are going to continue to try it the whole game, but hopefully this year we can mix it up a little,” Houseright said. “We have got a handful of kids that can make some plays. I think they will be able to make plays, they have pro-



Tanner Cook

Gate City’s Walker Hillman (10) is pursued by Middlesboro’s Kordell Partin (8) last season.

vided it in the past so hopefully we can continue to get better, especially offensively and maybe we can put a few more points in the board than we did last year.”

Mason Hickman, a rare four-year starter at middle linebacker for the Blue Devils, will lead what should also be an improved defensive unit, which also includes three-year starters in Keegan Light and Bryson Smith.

“We have got a bunch of guys, this will be their fourth year starting. They are good kids, good leaders, a bunch of these kids are starting their third year, some of them are starting for their second year,” Houseright said. “Usually when you come into something like that that is good to have and you are

hoping that experience with some of that helps take over with the leadership role.

“You hope they pull these young kids with them and teach them what they know and let them kind of feel their way around here and help them out while they are doing that. We are fortunate, this is a great group of guys that I think they care about each other a whole lot.”

After last year’s 6-5 campaign that included a low-scoring 12-0 playoff loss at Union, the Blue Devils are back, and looking to challenge for the top of the Mountain 7 District, a league that has been controlled in recent years by those same Bulldogs.

“The Mountain 7, in my opinion, is the best district in the state of Virginia,” Houseright said. “Week in and

week out, if you are not ready to go you are going to get knocked off and you are going to get knocked off hard. It don’t matter who you are playing in the Mountain 7, you had better be ready to go to give yourself a chance.”

That has been the plan long before practice began in Gate City. “We are striving to get better every day, not only up front, but we are trying to get better at the quarterback position, at wide receiver, running back and everything,” Houseright said. “These guys understand it don’t matter what they have done in the past couple of years, this year is all that matters now. Right now they are working tough and they are pushing each other and that is all you can ask right now this early in the season.”

GATE CITY ROSTER			
No.	Name	Pos.	Class
2	Parker Jenkins	WR/DB	So.
3	Zayne Reed	QB/DB	So.
4	Brennon McDonald	RB/LB	So.
6	Keegan Light	TE/LB	Sr.
7	Kaden Houseright	WR/DB	Jr.
8	Corey Byrd	WR/DB	Sr.
10	Walker Hillman	RB/LB	Sr.
11	Garrett McLain	WR/DB	Jr.
12	Hayden Photon	WR/DB	Fr.
13	Bryson Smith	TE/LB	Sr.
14	Jerod Brown-Carter	WR/DB	Jr.
15	Hayden Wilson	TE/LB	Jr.
20	Cade McConnell	TE/LB	Fr.
21	Tyler Williams	WR/DB	So.
22	Brayden Smith	WR/LB	Fr.
23	Landen Smith	WR/DB	Fr.
25	Dalton Browning	WR/DB	Jr.
31	Joe Morris	WR/DE	Fr.
33	Eli Parson	RB/DB	So.
41	Mason Hickman	RB/LB	Sr.
50	Nick Youmans	OL/DL	Sr.
52	Casen Harmon	OL/DL	Jr.
53	Evan Shortt	OL/DL	So.
54	Josh Sandidge	OL/DL	Jr.
55	Eli Minor	OL/DL	So.
56	Taylor Sturgill	OL/DL	So.
57	Zach France	OL/DE	So.
58	Jacob Austin	OL/DL	Sr.
59	Judd Kegley	OL/DE	Jr.
64	Elijah Keene	OL/DL	So.
65	Nathaniel Gilliam	OL/DL	Sr.
66	Nathan Penley	OL/DL	Jr.
68	Connor McDavid	OL/DL	Sr.
69	Hayden Frazier	OL/DE	Sr.
72	Josiah Hurd	OL/DE	So.
73	Walker McMurray	OL/DL	Fr.
74	Cole Jones	OL/DE	Fr.
75	Kaidyn Brown	OL/DL	Sr.
76	Cole Diets	OL/DL	So.
77	Peyton Berry	OL/DL	Jr.
78	Nathaniel Sloan	OL/DL	Sr.
86	Branson Dockery	WR/DB	So.
Head Coach: Jeremy Houseright			
Assistants: Hunter Jones, Aaron Daugherty, Brent Tipton, Benny Wolfe, Zach Jones, Chris Carter, Matt Clabaugh, Mark Thompson, Steve Shockley.			



Tanner Cook

Gate City quarterback Zayne Reed (3) is pressured by Tennessee High's Landon Graham (5) last season.

HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL 2025 • REGION 1-1A



Cloudland’s Grayson Cole protects the football during a 2024 home game.

MATT LAWS

Region 1-1A loaded with contenders from Carter County

By J.D. VAUGHN
jvaughn@sixriversmedia.com

Cloudland and Hampton might not be known for an air raid offense, but both teams are known to routinely compete for conference championships.

But unlike recent years, both teams are battling each other and Carter County rival Unaka for the same conference title — otherwise known as Region 1-1A. The Watauga Lakes Conference is packed this year, with Sunbright and Hampton both joining the chat to make an eight-team field.

For Hampton, the biggest question mark has been who will replace Northeast Tennessee’s rushing champion. Dominique Burleson ran for 1,449 yards and earned All-State honors while helping Hampton navigate through the devastation of Hurricane Helene. Peyton Townsend, Isaiah Belcher and Brock Shelby are currently the frontrunners in the Bulldog backfield.

The quarterback position, however, is a lot more settled with the return of Connor McKinney — who eclipsed 1,000 yards passing, 300 yards rushing and 300 yards receiving at Unaka his junior year.

Speaking of Unaka, the Rangers had made the playoffs five straight years prior to last year’s 1-9 campaign, including the program’s first-ever playoff win in 2022.

Whether it’s Ben

Shutko or T.J. Parenteau calling signals for the Rangers this year, they’ll have a reliable target in sophomore Ashton Fuller. As a freshman, Fuller had six receiving touchdowns and over 500 yards.

As for Cloudland, the Highlanders’ conference winning streak which dated back to 2015 finally ended last fall at 35 games. In fact, Cloudland’s two conference losses to North Greene and Cosby came by a combined three points.

Junior running back Grayson Cole had 1,104 yards and 17 touchdowns as a sophomore despite missing two games. Fellow junior Landon Barnette and sophomore Gavyn Shell are both expected to complement Cole in the Highlander backfield.

REST OF THE LEAGUE

North Greene — The Huskies have climbed a long way under coach Eric Tilson, having equaled their all-time most wins last year while finishing region runner-up to Cosby after a 26-14 loss. The program’s all-time leading rusher Yeshua Vaught graduated as did top receiver Jake Duffy. But quarterback Thomas Darnell returns with two-way standout Brandon Weems also back.

Cosby — Coach Levi Cooper’s club won the school’s first-ever outright conference title in 2024. Quarterback Matthew McMahan threw for 1,908 yards and 25 touchdowns while

David Baker ran for 924 yards and 10 TDs as sophomores. If there’s a concern, it’s that the Eagles lost their top two receivers to graduation including Devonte Wigfall, who grabbed 47 passes for 921 yards and 12 scores.

Jellico — Other than a winless 2022 campaign, the Blue Devils have reached the TSSAA playoffs every year since 2017. Jellico finished region runner-up in 2023 before last year’s 3-7 mark.

Hancock County — The Indians are seeking their first playoff berth, and their second win, since restarting its varsity football program in 2023. Only once did Hancock County score more than eight points last year, a 36-18 loss to Unaka.

Sunbright — The Tigers have lost 25 straight games and haven’t enjoyed a multi-win season since 2020, or a playoff berth since 2014.

TRIVIA TIME

Q: Cloudland and Hampton have both finished state runner-up once, Cloudland in 2001 (Class 1A) and Hampton in 2021 (Class 2A). What’s the deepest playoff run by any of the other six Region 1-1A teams?

A: The round of 16. Unaka advanced in 2022, and Sunbright has been twice (2009 and 2014). Cosby, North Greene, Jellico and Hancock County are all seeking their first playoff victories this fall.



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HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL 2025 • RYE COVE



BRIAN WOODSON/SIX RIVERS MEDIA

Despite key losses to graduation, the Rye Cove War Eagles still have their goals set on a state title. The Eagles have increased their win totals each of the last three seasons under Gary Collier.

Playing for state title still the goal for Rye Cove

By BRIAN WOODSON
bwoodson@sixriversmedia.com

CLINCHPORT — From seven to 11 to 13 wins, Rye Cove has continued to get better since Gary Collier arrived as head coach in 2022, one season after the program was shut down at halftime of a game due to the lack of healthy players.

If it happens this season, the Eagles will be in rare air, playing for the Class 1 state championship, a goal that eluded them last year when Rye Cove lost a 15-point fourth quarter lead against Grayson County.

“We talk about trying to get better each year and we have up to this point,” Collier said. “That is one of our goals. If we succeed in that goal, we are playing for a state championship.”

Rye Cove, which has won 31 games over the last three seasons, lost several talented seniors, including Class 1 offensive player of the year Lamdon Lane, but, there is still plenty of talent on board.

“Good things are happening, good things are here. We have come a long way from day one,” said Collier, who no longer has a shortage of numbers, with 48 on his current roster. “The turnout with kids, the numbers are great. The kids are working hard so we have got goals. We are at a place in this program where we want to be and there are some growing pains with that, like trying to find somebody to play us.”

That issue led to Rye Cove opening the season on Saturday against Class 3 Lord Botetourt at Emory & Henry University. The Eagles will also face Grundy, Honaker and Chilhowie in the non-conference slate, while the Eagles will have to fight off Eastside and others in hopes of claiming a fourth straight Cumberland District title.

It took a late touch-



J.D. VAUGHN/SIX RIVERS MEDIA

Rye Cove's Will Rollins (4) brings down Grundy quarterback Logan Lester (1) in the backfield during the Region 1D semifinals last season.



J.D. VAUGHN/SIX RIVERS MEDIA

Rye Cove's Carter Roach-Hodge looks for running room in a game last season for the Eagles.

down for Rye Cove to earn the Region 1D title last year against the Spartans, and there is little doubt they will remember. So will the Eagles, who are 5-0 over the last three seasons against them.

“I know there is a lot of buzz about Eastside. They are going to be good, they have got a good group,” Collier said. “We will worry about Eastside down the road. Everybody knows who they are and

knows the rivalry that has been created there and is in the back of everybody's head...We will deal with that when it gets here. We know what is coming. We will be ready, we always are.”

While the Eagles will lean on senior Jacob Jessee or junior Tyler Shupe to replace Lane at quarterback, the cupboard is far from bare, from senior leaders Carter Roach-Hodge and Will Rollins to

speedsters like Blake Goins, Cole Barnette and Zach Lane, along with a strong offensive line led by Ethan Lawson, an NCAA Division 1 offensive line prospect.

Collier also thinks the defense could be better than it was last year, touting the addition of Moe Hayes to coach the secondary, a unit that struggled in that fourth quarter loss to Grayson County that kept the Eagles from playing for

the state title.

“These kids are working hard. We have 12 seniors on the roster and there is good leadership. Things are going good right now as long as we can stay healthy,” Collier said. “We are not as deep in places as we were last year, but it is who we are and what we are going to strive for is win them all. Take them one at a time and try to win the first one and go on from there.”

Rye Cove was given permission by the Virginia High School League to play a week

earlier than most state schools, but didn't get an extra week of practice heading into Saturday's unique opener with Lord Botetourt, which also suffered its own heart-break last seasons, falling in the Region 3D championship game in two overtimes, also on their home turf.

Expect the Eagles to be ready for the challenge.

“It is going to be fun,” Lawson said. “We are going to have fun, we are going to do what we do.”

RYE COVE ROSTER

No.	Name	Pos.	Class
1	Gage Walde	QB/DB	Fr.
2	Jacob Jessee	QB/DB	Sr.
3	Ezra Berry	TE/DE	Fr.
4	Will Rollins	FB/LB	Sr.
5	Zach Lane	RB/DB	Sr.
6	Ryan Bowen	OT/DT	Sr.
7	Blake Goins	RB/LB	Sr.
8	Ben McElroy	TE/DE	Jr.
9	Carter Roach-Hodge	RB/LB	Sr.
10	Tyler Shupe	QB/LB	Jr.
11	Connor Stem	RB/DB	Jr.
12	Maverick Cress	RB/DB/K	Fr.
14	Luke Jessee	TE/LB	Sr.
15	Peyton Fonseca	WR/DB	Jr.
16	Jordan Martin	RB/LB	So.
18	Eli Head	QB/D	Fr.
20	Cole Barnette	RB/LB	Jr.
21	Aiden Rose	RB/DB	Fr.
22	Jake McDavid	TE/DE	Fr.
23	Brayden Light	RB/DB	Fr.
24	Cole Williams	RB/DB	Jr.
25	Will Darnell	RB/LB	Fr.
29	Hunter Young	RB/DB	Jr.
30	Jariah Harless	RB/DB	Fr.
31	Brian Hall	QB/DB	Sr.
32	Drayden Upchurch	RB/DB	Fr.
34	Hagan Rhoton	FB/LB	Sr.
35	Blake Cordle	RB/DB	So.
42	Gage Hiter	RB/DB	So.
44	Bryson Lamb	WR/DB	Jr.
51	Will Poff	OT/DT	So.
52	Clifton Bishop	G/LB	Jr.
53	Carter Austin	C/DE	Sr.
55	Lucas Roberts	OT/DT	Fr.
57	Benji Mullins	LM	Fr.
58	Cameron Santos	OT/DT	Fr.
61	Jacob Owens	OG/DT	So.
63	Steven Mullins	OT/DT	Jr.
64	Nathan Williams	OT/DT	So.
66	Nathaniel Dockery	OT/DT	So.
68	Caden Bishop	OT/DT	Jr.
69	Gabe Ramsey	C/DT	Jr.
70	Shaun Edwards	OT/DT	Sr.
71	Harper Holmes	OT/DT	Jr.
72	Thomas Willis	OT/DT	Fr.
73	Ethan Lawson	OT/DT	Jr.
75	Cooper Bowen	C/OT	Sr.
82	Avery Rose	RB/DB	So.

Head Coach: Gary Collier
Assistants: B.I. Salyers, Chris Rollins, Moe Hayes, Mark Rollins, Brad Bowen, Shawn Lawson, Gary Shupe, Jon Howell, Landon Lane.

HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL 2025 • TWIN SPRINGS



J.D. VAUGHN/SIX RIVERS MEDIA

The Twin Springs Titans, decimated by injuries in 2024, enter this season healthy and hungry. While their string of consecutive playoff berths ended at three, coach Keith Warner admired their grit.



ANDREW SMITH/SIX RIVERS MEDIA

Twin Springs quarterback Clay Ross (9) keeps the ball on an option play against Unaka in 2024.

TWIN SPRINGS ROSTER

No.	Name	Pos.	Class
1	Ryan Perry	WR/DB	So.
2	Bryce Parks	RB/LB	So.
3	Ethan Lane	WR/DB	Jr.
4	Graham Steffey	WR/LB	Sr.
5	Isaac Horne	QB/WR	Fr.
7	Matthew Parks	WR/DB	So.
8	Seth Pendergrass	WR/DB	Sr.
9	Clay Ross	QB/DB	Sr.
12	Julian Pascual	RB/OLB	Sr.
15	Brennon Weddle	WR/DB	Sr.
20	Isaiah Kiser	RB/LB	Fr.
23	Gian Reina	RB/OLB	Jr.
24	Hayden Parks	WR/DB	Fr.
28	Koda Greear	WR/DB	Fr.
29	Bruno Danree	WR/DB/K	Fr.
32	Brady Quillen	WR/LB	So.
38	Michael Greear	WR/DB	Sr.
44	Jake Compton	RB/LB	Fr.
50	Jacob Finch	OL/DL	So.
53	Luke Kern	OL/DL	Fr.
55	Kalub Mullins	OL/DL	Sr.
56	Clayton Powers	OT/DE	So.
65	Peyton Broadwater	OL/DL	Sr.
66	Zach Sykes	OL/DL	Sr.
67	Jet Renshaw	OL/DL	Jr.
70	Colton Fields	OL/DL	Fr.
72	Landon Statzer	OG/DT	So.
76	Hunter Kern	OL/DL	Jr.
79	Connor Elliott	OL/DL	Fr.

Head coach: Keith Warner.
Assistant coaches: Matt Bays, Keener Burke, Charles Quillen, Scott Burke, Eric Ross, Abel Dingus, Andrew Salyer, Tom Jordan, Rob Tiller.

Twin Springs deeper, more experienced after injury-plagued '24

By J.D. VAUGHN
jvaughn@sixriversmedia.com

Call it tough luck or whatever you will, but Twin Springs couldn't seem to escape the bad breaks in 2024. Yet, the Titans kept fighting to the finish.

The youth movement wasn't really a choice. With injuries decimating the roster, it was more a necessity.

The good news, it shouldn't get much, if any, tougher than that for Twin Springs' returning players. While the Titans' string of consecutive playoff berths ended at three, head coach Keith Warner admired last season's squad as much as any for their determination.

"They got plenty of valuable reps on Friday nights last year. I say that light-heartedly but it's the truth," Warner said. "It's something I'd never seen in 15 years. But it was a blessing in disguise ... we tried to take a positive from it every week. That's what I want my kids to be accustomed to is overcoming adversity whether it's football or in life. They finished the season with their heads held high. And I told them I was as proud of them as any group I've ever coached."

One of the Titans' biggest casualties was quarterback Clay Ross. He ran for 267 yards and four touchdowns in a Week 2 victory over Unaka. But a broken collarbone ended his season there.

The 6-3, 205-pound senior is



J.D. VAUGHN/SIX RIVERS MEDIA

Twin Springs senior Brennon Weddle is ready to shine at wide receiver after shifting to quarterback in 2024.

calling signals once again for Twin Springs this fall.

"He's one of the best kids I've ever coached," Warner said. "Not talking about just athletically. I'm talking on the field, off the field, within the community, these kids at little league, he does the right things. I think that transfers over to the playing field for him. I think he's one of the best athletes in Southwest Virginia in any classification."

SKILL PLAYERS STEPPED UP

Brennon Weddle, who filled in at quarterback the rest of last season, returns to



FILE PHOTO

Twin Springs senior Clay Ross is expected to start at QB and safety for the Titans in the upcoming season.

lead Twin Springs' receiving corps for his senior year. Graham Steffey, a 6-1, 205-pound senior who started last year playing center, will give the Titans' passing game some much-welcome verticality.

Speaking of youth, sophomore Bryce Parks returns to the backfield after stepping into the starting role as a freshman. And he didn't waste any time getting acclimated to the sudden change. In fact, Parks' efforts earned him second-team All-District honors as a freshman.

"Bryce was our workhorse last year, carried 25 or more

times a game," Warner recalled. "I wish I could've given him more breaks."

Isaiah Kiser, himself a freshman at 5-10 and 180 pounds, is currently slated to complement Parks in the backfield.

Naturally, all of these aforementioned players will start on the defensive side too — Parks and Kiser both projected to start at line-backer.

Apart from Weddle at cornerback and Ross at safety, two other spots in the secondary are up for grabs. Senior Michael Greear and junior Ethan Lane, along

with freshmen Hayden Parks and Isaac Horne are vying for time in the defensive backfield with another freshman Jake Compton potentially coming in at line-backer.

VETERAN LINE

In what Warner described as his most experienced offensive line in at least three seasons, the Titans are at least six deep in the trenches entering the 2025 season.

Three of them are seniors — Kalub Mullins, Zach Sykes and Peyton Broadwater. Juniors Hunter Kern and Jet Renshaw, along with sophomore Jacob Finch are all projected to either start or see significant time up front.

"They're back a year older, and they're doing things at the line of scrimmage right now that they couldn't do last year," Warner said. "It's really important for those linemen that we can rotate them out and not miss a beat. I'm really hard on them and Coach (Scott) Burke does a great job with our line play ... I put a lot of pressure on them because I'm a believer that you're only as good as you are up front. I tell them we're going to be as good as they make us."

Mullins, Steffey and Finch are the frontrunners to start at defensive end with Sykes, Renshaw and Broadwater vying for time at tackle.

Mullins is also expected to handle kicking duties, although Gian Reina could potentially contribute at some point.

HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL 2025 • UNAKA



ANDREW SMITH/SIX RIVERS MEDIA

Unaka went 1-9 last season with a win over Hancock County, but head coach O’Brien Bennett believes the team was able to get better over the course of the year.

Unaka to be anchored by seniors in the trenches

By **ANDREW SMITH**
asmith@sixriversmedia.com

ELIZABETH TON — A youth movement that began in the 2024 season is expected to continue this fall on Stoney Creek.

The Unaka Rangers last year had to lean on inexperience to get through the season, and it showed in their record. They went 1-9 with a win over Hancock County, but head coach O’Brien Bennett believes the team was able to get better over the course of the year.

He especially commends his group for getting through the year after Helene, where his team played five games in 14 days.

“We had a lot of young kids put in a situation that was really unprecedented and they stepped up and they really grew from it,” Bennett said. “That was our goal last year. We understood where we were in terms of experience. As the season went by, I thought we were playing our best ball at the end of the year. Was it great football? No, not yet. But, it was much better than where we were at the beginning of the season.”

One of the biggest young contributors to the Unaka offense was freshman wide receiver Ashton Fuller.

The team’s leading receiver in his first season, Fuller had over 500 yards receiving and six touchdowns in the Rangers’ 10-game season. Now a sophomore, Bennett said the returning wideout can expect to get the ball in a multitude of ways.

“I told Ashton that if we can’t throw it to him, we’ll toss it to him,” he said. “If we can’t toss it to him, we’re going to hand it to him. And if we can’t



ANDREW SMITH/SIX RIVERS MEDIA

Unaka center Chris Good poses in his stance during Thursday morning’s media day.

hand it to him, we’re going to snap it to him. The football is going to be in his hands, some way, some how. He’s too dynamic of a football player.”

Unaka’s head coach also compared Fuller to a former standout freshman at Unaka in Devin Ramsey. Ramsey went on to have a strong career for the Rangers, including a stellar senior season in 2021.

He was named a member of the Elite 11 Team that year. Ramsey caught 85 passes for 1,485 yards and 18 total touchdowns, on top of a strong defensive campaign.

The offense for the Rangers in 2025 will look a bit different than the past few years.

Unaka is likely to lean less on the straight dropback passing game, due to its quarterback situation. On top of potentially seeing Fuller take snaps, both Ben Shutko and T.J. Parenteau have been getting reps under center.

“We put a lot on the quarterback in our offense,” Bennett said. “So those guys are going to have to grow and learn. As they grow and learn – the offensive line accelerates the process – we’ll be able to expand the playbook.”

That offensive line will be led by three seniors. Chris Good will hold down the center position while he’ll be joined in the trenches by Nathan Bailey and

Cristobal Estrada-Lopez.

Having a veteran-an-laden group will allow for the younger skill position group to settle in quicker, as well as for the offense to get into the best play call.

“I can’t call a perfect play,” Bennett said. “But Chris can get us up there, and if we’ve got a play call, they’re in a front that gives that trouble, he can get us up there and he can check us.”

“That’s where experience comes in,” he added. “That’s stuff that we didn’t necessarily have last year up front.”

The Rangers will open up the 2025 campaign at home against Happy Valley on Aug. 22. They open Region

1-1A play at Cosby on Sept. 12, the first of seven conference games

with the region expanded to eight teams.

UNAKA ROSTER			
No.	Name	Pos.	Class
1	Brayden Otey	RB/LB	So.
2	Ashton Fuller	QB/WR/DB	So.
5	Levi Fisher	RB/LB	So.
8	Dylan Davidson	WR/DB	Jr.
11	Ben Shutko	QB/RB/DB	So.
14	Asher Dunn	WR/DB	So.
21	Nick Britt	RB/LB	Jr.
22	Colby Hamm	RB/LB	Fr.
23	Maddox Pickel	WR/DB	Fr.
25	Jacob Shaffer	WR/DB	Fr.
15	T.J. Parenteau	QB/DB	Jr.
50	Brayden Hardin	OL/DL	Fr.
51	Kaden Candelaria	OL/LB	So.
62	John Mendez	OL/DL/K	Jr.
63	Oden Parlier	OL/DL	Fr.
64	Ayden Turner	OL/DL	Jr.
66	Nathan Bailey	OL/DL	Sr.
70	Cristobal Estrada-Lopez	OL/DL	Sr.
71	Chris Good	OL/DL	Sr.
Head coach: O’Brien Bennett.			



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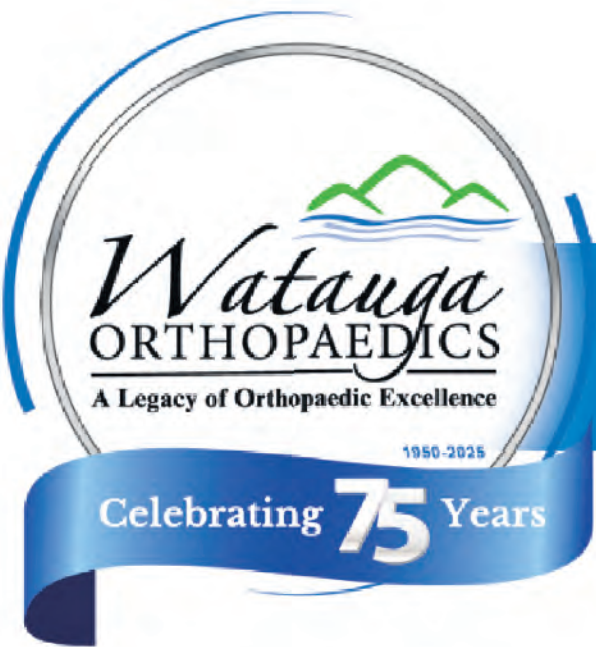
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