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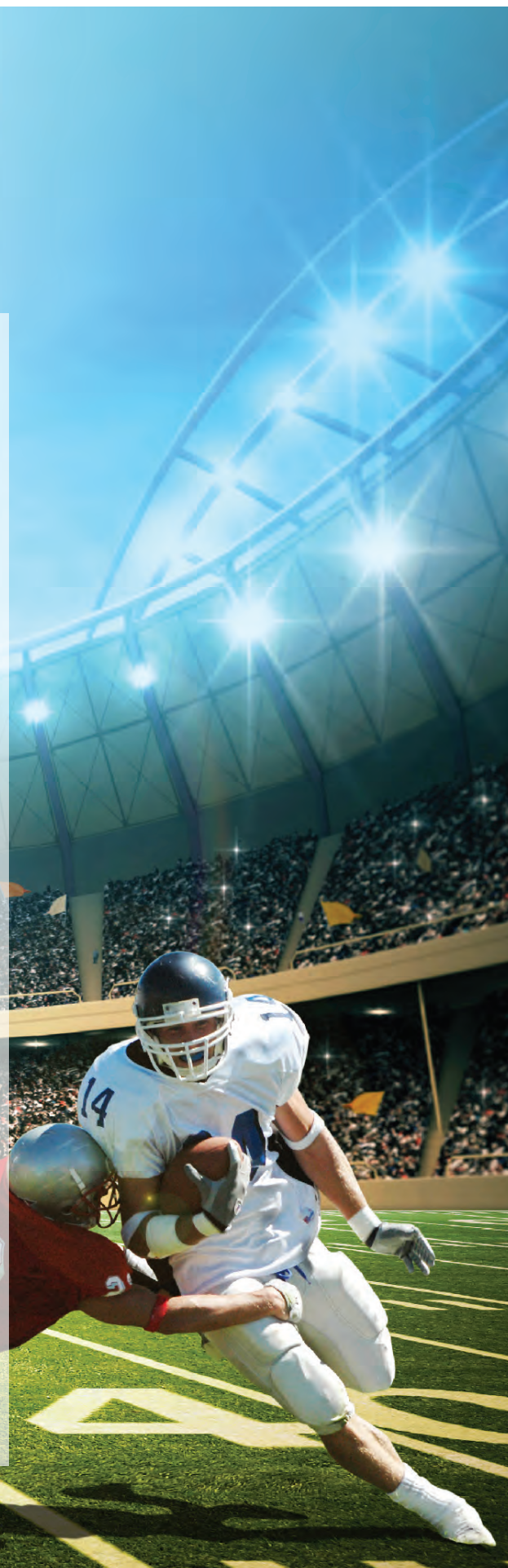
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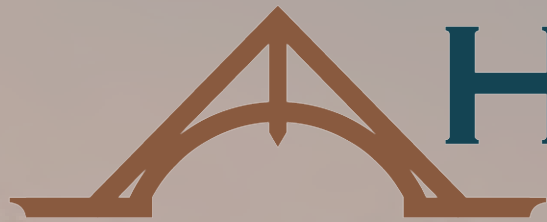
# FOOTBALL KICKOFF 2025

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# Berkeley Springs looks to gain momentum

Core group is returning

BY TOM MARKLAND

tmarkland@journal-news.net

BERKELEY SPRINGS — After showing sparks of improvement last fall, the Berkeley Springs Indians are preparing for Year 3 under head coach Wes Eddy with renewed purpose and the goal of building on their three-win season in 2024.

Last season, the Indians put up a 3-7 overall record, with an 0-3 record in region play. Still, a three-win improvement over a one-win 2023 season and a winless 2022 season was a step forward that Eddy hopes will prove foundational.

This is the third year that the team's core has taken the field together. That continuity, he believes, is setting the stage for improvement.

"This is the third year of having everybody together," Eddy said. "So, everybody has a much better grasp on what should be done and how things should operate. We're expecting to take another step forward this year."

Eddy's definition of success for the coming season goes beyond the scoreboard. It starts with the work put in before Friday night.

"Success looks like learning that you have to beat people on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday at practice to be able to have a chance to do it on Friday night," he said. "If we do that, then the wins and losses part will take care of itself."

To that end, one of the biggest lessons from recent seasons has been the importance of maximizing practice time. Eddy said the team is pushing the tempo in workouts to increase the number of quality repetitions.

"We've learned that reps matter



Journal photo by Tom Markland

**Berkeley Springs' football team is looking to improve on previous performances.**

most," he said. "If we push the tempo up, and we get more reps, then that is considered a good practice. Instead of maybe one rep a minute, let's go get three reps a minute and really make it hard on ourselves in practice so that Friday night things will be easy."

On offense, Berkeley Springs will be powered by an experienced line.

"We have three guys returning who have played offensive line for us," Eddy said. "They have a lot of snaps under their belt, and we have two new guys. So, we're expecting to

have a really good offensive line this year that has experience and should be able to take over. We should be able to hopefully stalemate or win the line of scrimmage."

The defense, meanwhile, will feature several new starters, but Eddy is encouraged by the combination of speed and strength.

"We have some great speed," he said. "We have some really good defensive linemen that should really help us stop opponents' rushing attack, and we've got the speed that we

need to be able to play pass coverage."

Eddy also highlighted a number of returning standouts for fans to watch, including all-conference players Kyle Moore and Brian Ailor, senior Adam Rippeon, upperclassman Jake Aulbaugh and two players competing for the starting quarterback job — Jalen Miller and Saul Williams.

With experienced linemen, proven skill players, and a faster pace in practice, the Indians will look to turn those advantages into wins this fall.



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# Rippeon anchors Berkeley Springs' offense with versatility, playoff mindset

**BY TOM MARKLAND**  
tmarkland@journal-news.net

**BERKELEY SPRINGS —** For senior tight end Adam Rippeon, the 2025 football season at Berkeley Springs High School is about more than personal performance — it's about leading the Indians toward the postseason and showing the state what they can do.

"I think the expectations for the season are high, especially with the schedule we have," Rippeon said. "We've been working our butts off during the offseason and I feel like you can accomplish some good things if you stick to it and continue to do what we've been doing."

Rippeon's football journey spans nearly his entire life, accumulating 14 years of playing time, with most of that spent at tight end and receiver. While there were brief stints on the offensive line, he's always gravitated toward the position that lets him do a bit of everything.

"Tight end, it's a fun position," he said. "You get a little bit of blocking, you get a little bit of catching, hitting people, running them over when you catch that ball."

That blend of skills is exactly what Berkeley Springs hopes to leverage this fall as it tries to improve on recent seasons. Rippeon said practice this year has been more intense than ever, with a focus on speed, strength and conditioning.

"Practices have been a lot better this year," he said. "We've been practicing faster, we've been lifting weights more, we've gotten stronger, stretching, getting our muscles right and just getting ready for the first game here in a couple weeks."

In recent seasons, Rippeon has quietly emerged as a key offensive contributor for Berkeley Springs, consistently delivering reliable performances in a rebuilding program. In the Indians' November 2024 win over Braxton County, Rippeon hauled in four passes for 63 yards, including a touchdown that helped spark a 35-29 victory.

For Rippeon and his teammates, success will be determined by whether they make playoffs this year or not.

"Playoffs is the big expectation this year," he said. "We don't want anything less. Playoffs is the only thing on our mind right now. We hope to show everyone in the state what we're made of."

While Rippeon knows his role on the field will be crucial, he also sees his responsibility as a senior leader. That means pushing the team to maintain its elevated practice intensity and keeping focus locked on the ultimate goal.

While he knows there are challenges ahead, Rippeon embraces the opportunity to be part of a group determined to change the narrative for Berkeley Springs football.

"Keep Berkeley Springs on the radar," he said.



Journal photo by Tom Markland

Adam Rippeon

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# Hedgesville young, but experienced, for 2025 season

BY ERIC JONES

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HEDGESVILLE — Looking up and down Hedgesville's roster, you'll see what seems to be a pretty young roster.

The roster is a bit deceiving, though, as, many of those younger players saw important time in 2024, in many cases out of necessity.

"This is a young group. We've got nine seniors total," Hedgesville coach Matt Faircloth said. "For us, it's a lot of youth, but they had a lot of experience last year."

Offensively, the Eagles' experience begins at the quarterback position, with junior Chaz Milburn back as the team's signal-caller. Milburn has been starting since his freshman season and with a full healthy shoulder, should be in for a strong season.

"I think the biggest thing for him, was freshman year, he was starting for us and got injured — a shoulder injury at Hampshire that he had to have surgery on. So, last year, it was getting back into the throwing mechanics and working on getting stronger again, because he had lost so much with the time off," Faircloth said. "I think this year, more for him, it's going out and being the guy he is."

"Right now, I think he's sitting at 6-2, and he's put on some size, so for us, it's just going out and doing what he does."

Milburn has plenty of

weapons around him, beginning at the running back spot, where Chris Williams will get a majority of the carries this year.

Last year, (Chris) didn't get a ton of carries just because Dalton Harper was our workhorse last year. He finished the season, on minimal carries, and he had 400-hundred some yards rushing. He's got a ton of potential, and he doesn't have a lot of workload on his body. He's big, strong, and he's fresh, which is the big thing, having fresh bodies back there."

Joining Williams in the backfield will be Micah Priller and Luke Byrd.

"It's a three-headed monster back there," Faircloth said.

At wide receiver, Hedgesville also has some experience back in the form of Noah Ferrell, Woody Smith, Jordan Lewis and Aubree Burrell. Lewis and Burrell, according to Faircloth, are listed at 6 feet, 5 inches, giving Milburn a few big targets at which to throw.

"Noah, last year, I think he was our third highest in yards. Woody, last year, he had a couple touchdowns,

“

Realistically, I don't ever try to pick what we'll be. We play a tough schedule. We start off with Nitro, which is now, I guess, the super squad down in southern West Virginia. We've got Morgantown on the schedule, which is going to be a buzzsaw, Martinsburg always, Jefferson always, and Spring Mills, coming off last year, I think they're going to be probably around the same. It doesn't get any easier.

■ Hedgesville Coach  
Matt Faircloth

and I think he finished with 200 or 300 yards. Jordan Lewis, he's a 6-5 receiver on the outside. Aubree Burrell, he's also our backup quarterback, but he's 6-5 — long and athletic," Faircloth said.

Up front, the Eagles return several players who either started or saw significant time a year ago. Among that group is starting center Brody Faircloth.

"Across the front, Brody's our returner at center.

As a freshman last year, he anchored the middle for us on the offensive line," Faircloth said. "Liam Foote's back. He

played guard for us last year. Michael Markley's back at guard, and Aidan McDowell started for us at tackle. The one spot we're working in someone new is going to be on that right side at offensive tackle."

On the defensive side of the ball, Hedgesville is probably the most experienced, with several starters returning, including Evan Nichols and Zavaan Rush on the line.

"We're four deep on the defensive line, so we're going to be rotating a lot of bodies there," Faircloth said. "We've got three linemen back — two of them were starters. We lost Levi (Faircloth), who was our mic, but we have a young kid who's stepped in this year, and those three guys don't play offense, so they're going to be fresh every single snap."

At linebacker and in the secondary, Faircloth is excited about what his team has, returning starting linebackers Cam Webb and Aden Morris, starting cornerback

Smith and safeties Ferrell, Williams and Dominick Shaffer. The secondary, in particular, could be the strongest part of the defense.

"We're two deep at the linebacker spot, and on the back end, with our defensive backs and our corners and safeties, we've got two seniors starting in our secondary, and the rest of them are either sophomores or juniors," Faircloth said. "We've got a ton of athleticism on the back end."

Hedgesville will navigate through a tough schedule this season, including games against Nitro and Morgantown, besides the tough competition of the Eastern Panhandle Athletic Conference. Faircloth will find out quickly where his team is at.

"Realistically, I don't ever try to pick what we'll be. We play a tough schedule. We start off with Nitro, which is now, I guess, the super squad down in southern West Virginia," he said. "We've got Morgantown on the schedule, which is going to be a buzzsaw, Martinsburg always, Jefferson always, and Spring Mills, coming off last year, I think they're going to be probably around the same. It doesn't get any easier."

"For us, the expectation is each game, get better and find what we're going to be. I think, in the long run, we'll return nine starters on defense next year and nine starters on offense next year, so it's just building, making sure we're right."

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# Milburn hoping to lead Eagles to big season

BY ERIC JONES

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HEDGESVILLE — After injuring his shoulder two years ago as a freshman, Chaz Milburn spent his sophomore season as Hedgesville's starting quarterback trying to get back to full strength.

Heading into the 2025 season, the Eagles' junior signal caller is feeling great and ready to lead his team to a successful year. He's already ahead of the game with a full offseason of work.

"I didn't have much of an offseason, so I didn't really get better. I got stronger, but I didn't get better," Milburn said of last season. "This offseason, I've had a really great offseason."

Milburn has received much hype over the past few years, being ranked as the top quarterback in the state in his class, according to Hedgesville coach Matt Faircloth.

"Chaz is pretty good. There's a reason he's ranked No. 1 in his class in the position in the state" Faircloth said.

All that hype doesn't mean much to Milburn, who's focused on being the best quarterback possible.

"I just play," he said.

With that said, Milburn is still expecting big things from himself, improving his game in all aspects.

"My completion percentage was pretty good, but I want more yards, want more touchdowns and less interceptions," he said.

Milburn understands the importance and pressure of the quarterback position. When things are going well, the quarterback is praised. When things aren't go well, it's all on the quarterback. It's a challenge that he accepts.

"It's a very challenging, but when you're successful at, it's the best feeling. There's nothing better," he said. "All eyes are on you. It's make or break — you make that mistake, you get yelled at; you make a good play, you get praise for it."

Milburn is part of a junior class that will be expected to produce in a big way for Hedgesville this season. He thinks they are more than capable of doing it.



Journal photo by Eric Jones

Chaz Milburn has received much hype over the past few years, being ranked as the top quarterback in the state in his class, according to Hedgesville coach Matt Faircloth.

"We're getting doubted for sure, but I think we're going to be a lot better than people think. Our junior class is very hungry, and we've been improving as a team, for sure," he said.

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# Jefferson looking to make deeper playoff run in 2025

BY TOM MARKLAND

tmarkland@journal-news.net

**SHENANDOAH JUNCTION** — For Jefferson football coach Craig Hunter, the goal for the 2025 season is clear: bring the team further than years past.

In recent years, the Cougars have been consistent playoff contenders, advancing as far as the quarterfinals. However, the semifinals and a shot at a state championship game have remained just out of reach. Hunter wants that to change this fall.

“Expectations is for us to do better than we’ve done the year before,” Hunter said. “Let’s continue to win, get to the playoffs and get to the semifinals.”

The formula for getting there, Hunter believes, starts up front. Jefferson returns four starters on the offensive line, giving the Cougars one of the most experienced units in the Eastern Panhandle Athletic Conference.

“I think those guys have done a good job last year,” Hunter said. “They’ll continue to do a great job this year with the group we have returning. They’ll lead the way for us early in the season and keep things going in the later part of the season down when it gets cold.”

That veteran presence will be felt on both sides of the ball. Several linemen are also veterans of the team themselves, bolstering the defensive front. Hunter also likes what he sees in his returning secondary and linebacker, which return plenty of game experience despite some holes to fill.

“I feel that we have a pretty easy secondary coming back and linebacker,” he said. “We should be able to fill in and continue a good run here to stop people defensively.”

Hunter listed several players ex-



Photo by David Pennock

**Jefferson’s Jackson Rockwell waits on a pass during the Cougars’ win against Hedgesville High School.**

pected to play key roles this season, including wide receiver/defensive back Tony Allen, receiver Jackson Rockwell, linebacker Leeland Benner, linemen Kirk Waldeck and Silas Speet and running back Trey Ledbetter.

“We’re going to lean on these guys a lot to get some things done for us so we can hopefully win games and get to the semifinals,” Hunter said.

While Hunter isn’t circling any

particular date on the schedule, he said every game looks to be a good game that the Cougars are looking forward to playing, taking this year’s season one week at a time.

What fans can expect, he said, is an exciting brand of football from a team that blends veteran leadership with fresh energy.

“We’re just looking for it to be an exciting game where they’re going to

see good football,” Hunter said.

With a veteran offensive line, returning talent on defense and a handful of versatile playmakers, Jefferson enters 2025 with both the tools and the hunger to finally break through to the state semifinals.

For Hunter and his players, it’s a simple equation: stay focused, execute and let experience carry them through the toughest moments of the season.

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# Allen wants to help Cougars ‘win a lot’ this season

BY TOM MARKLAND

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**SHENANDOAH JUNCTION —** For Jefferson High School’s Tony Allen, stepping onto the field this fall means more than just catching passes — it’s about setting the tone for a winning season.

The Cougars’ wide receiver has been playing football all his life, making his way through the youth leagues. Though he spent much of that time as a running back, Allen said his move to wide receiver in high school has been a natural fit.

“I just like going and catching the ball,” said Allen, who also plays defensive back. “I’ve been playing running back like all my life, but when I came to high school, I transitioned to wide receiver.”

Allen, who also plays defensive back, heads into his senior year looking to build on a 2024 campaign, where he was named a Class AAAA second-team all-state selection at wide receiver and a first-team all-Eastern Panhandle selection on both the offensive and defensive side of the ball.

Allen’s goals for the upcoming season are simple but ambitious.

“I’m trying to win,” he said. “I just want to win a lot.”

With the season fast approaching, Allen said the team’s preparation is right where it needs to be. He described practices as focused and deliberate, building toward what the Cougars hope will be a strong start.

“Practice is smooth,” he said. “We just go out here, do what we got to do 100%, and then, we just do more.”

Allen kept details about Jefferson’s game plan under wraps but hinted at some excitement from the offense that fans can look forward to seeing on Friday nights.

“We got a couple new things, but



Journal photo by Tom Markland

**Jefferson Cougars wide receiver Tony Allen, poses for a photo with other seniors on his team.**

I’m not going to say, of course,” he said.

The Cougars will be looking to improve on last year’s record in a competitive Eastern Panhandle Athletic Conference. Allen’s versatility, honed from years at running back before his switch to receiver, gives Jefferson a player who can adjust to multiple roles depending on the matchup.

This year’s the team is hoping to make a deeper run in playoffs than

it has in previous years, having been stopped in quarterfinals this past season.

He credits his lifelong connection to the game with fueling his drive to succeed.

“I’ve been playing since Little League,” Allen said. “So, football’s just part of me.”

Whether lining up wide or taking on a leadership role in the huddle, Allen said his mindset remains the same:

give his best effort and keep the focus on team success.

“I just want to win,” he said. “That’s it.”

For Jefferson fans eager to see what the new season brings, Allen’s combination of experience, work ethic and competitive fire could be one of the keys to the Cougars’ success in 2025 in his senior year. For Allen, the opportunity to help lead his team is a challenge he’s ready to meet head on.

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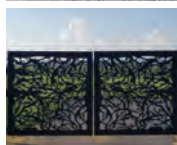
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# Bulldogs look to continue domination with third straight state championship

**BY ELLE COLBERT**  
For The Journal

MARTINSBURG — The kings of West Virginia high school football are far from done.

The Martinsburg Bulldogs enter the 2025 season on the hunt for a third straight state title — a feat that would further cement their dynasty status and add yet another piece of hardware to one of the most decorated trophy cases in state history.

Last fall, Martinsburg steamrolled through the competition, finishing undefeated on the field, with its only technical loss coming from a forfeited game due to an ineligible player.

Led by a senior-heavy roster that included Kennedy Award winner Koi Fagan and Sam Huff Award/Howley Award winner Ace Flores, the Bulldogs were untouchable when it mattered most.

However, 2025 is a new season, and the Bulldogs are focused on what's ahead.

"I think our guys have done a really good job in the offseason, continue to grow and try to get better. Our guys take what they do very serious, and I think that's a direct correlation with the success that we have," Martinsburg coach David Walker said. "We don't talk a whole lot about winning or championships. I think it's just kind of an after effect of the work they put in."

The scariest part of last year's title run? Many of the Bulldogs' future stars were only getting warmed up.

Martinsburg regularly turned to its younger talent in second halves of regular season games, giving valuable reps to the next wave of Bulldog standouts. Now, battle-tested with experience under their belts, those underclassmen are ready to take center stage.

At the helm offensively will be quarterbacks Brian Dick and Ty Ricketts, who will be used together, as both bring different styles to the position.

"I like the things both of them are doing," Walker said. "I feel very comfortable with both of them. Whoever's in there, I have the utmost confidence in."

Dick has the advantage right now, having gotten



Journal photo by Elle Colbert

**A trio of Martinsburg Bulldogs tackle Parkersburg's punter during the first round of the last year's Class AAAA playoffs.**

more playing time last year. In 2024, he ran for 776 yards and 12 touchdowns, good for second on the team in both categories.

Fellow rising junior Boston Todd also flashed elite-level potential and is considered one of the top receivers in the state heading into the season after a 2024 season in which he had 30 catches for 542 yards and nine touchdowns.

Leadership and grit won't be in short supply either, thanks to senior veterans Jordan Kovacs (offensive/defensive line), Kane Whipp (offensive/defensive line), Terrell Cofield (linebacker) and Michael Dillard (linebacker), among others — all expected

to be tone-setters for another deep playoff push.

The road to Martinsburg's three-peat begins Aug. 29, when the Bulldogs host Camden, New Jersey, in what promises to be an exciting opener. A major test follows on Sept. 5, with a must-watch matchup at Huntington, which will be an early-season showdown that could have postseason implications.

"I think we can beat everybody on our schedule. I think just about everybody on our schedule probably could beat us if we don't perform," Walker said. "I do predict that our guys will play hard."

Martinsburg isn't just aiming to win. It's aiming to dominate — again.




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# Bulldogs' Dillard ready to make big impact in senior season

BY ERIC JONES  
ejones@journal-news.net

MARTINSBURG — Michael Dillard is well aware of what it means to play for the Martinsburg High football team.

He's been aware of it since he was a young kid.

In fact, it was while Dillard was attending South Middle School that he began learning more about the program and starting learning the system.

"When I first started, my coach, Scott, he had me learn the whole system really quick. I grew up in this whole system, since like seventh grade, so I've always been involved,



Michael Dillard

so it's been a continual progression of everything more and more," Dillard said.

Dillard remembers what it was like when he first put on the Martinsburg uniform and hit the field.

"At first, you're nervous, trying to impress everybody and then you get to know everybody, work with everybody, get to know everything year by year, and it's fun," he said.

Dillard, a senior linebacker who coach David Walker called an "unsung hero," will be an intricate part of the Bulldogs' defense this season, both with his play and as a leader. A year ago, Martinsburg had one of the top defenses in the state, allowing just 11.2 points a game and posted three shutouts. He's hoping to help his team be that dominant again this year and be an impactful player.

"I'm trying to improve everything

in my game, improve the whole team, just doing my job, getting people to do their job — pass coverage, stopping the run, chasing the quarterback, and hopefully, it leads to a three-peat," he said.

The Bulldogs have won two straight state championships, including the first Class AAAA state title last year after finishing with a perfect 14-0 record. As usual, there are high expectations for Martinsburg heading into the season, and Dillard said it won't be easy, just like every other year.

"It's challenging. People think it's just given to us. We work hard for it. We work every day. The scheme is amazing, and we work together like a family," he said.

Journal photo by Eric Jones

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# Musselman looks to rebound from one-win season

BY ERIC JONES

ejones@journal-news.net

INWOOD — On paper, Musselman's 2024 season would be considered a disappointment by most, with the Applemen winning just one game.

That's not exactly how coach Brian Thomas sees it, considering the circumstances surrounding last season.

"Obviously, you don't want to win one game. That's nobody's goal," Thomas said. "Having said that, at the same time, we lost a lot of players, had a lot of kids transfer out. That's not secret to anybody. A lot of that was depth and a lot of that was older kids."

"I think we competed, and I think the kids played hard. You look at the win-loss record, and you want to say disappointed or what-not, I was not disappointed, because I saw a lot of growth and saw a lot of kids learning and a lot of kids getting better. That's projected us into this year, which I think, in the long run, will help us."

There's much more optimism for Musselman's 2025 season, with a number of players who gained valuable experience last season back and a few new additions joining the team.

The Applemen's offense will be headlined by a trio of players — Zach Miller, Colton Shelton and Nate Lasure. Miller and Shelton will be interchangeable at the "quarterback" and running back positions, mostly, while Lasure will be the go-to player at running back.

"Zach's not going to come off the field for us offensively, and he's going to be able to play all three of those positions. Colton's going to do the exact same thing, so you might see Colton line up at quarterback sometimes and Zach be a receiver, or Zach might be the quarterback, and Colton might be a running back, so we're going to take those two and kind of use them to help each other out a little bit,



Photo by Robert Niedzwiecki/For The Journal

**Musselman's Nate Lasure had a team-high 58 rushing yards on 13 carries in the Applemen's game against Handley, Virginia, last year. He'll be the team's go-to running back this season.**

so it's a good problem to have.

"(Nate's) kind of our workhorse, our go-to guy. He's the guy I think everybody will have to gear up to stop. Rushing for 1,000 yards last year, he's going to come in with a target on his back this year. So, the three of those kids together are kind of like your three-headed monster a little bit," Thomas added.

At the receiver spot, Musselman has plenty of options, including Jaden Rhyne, Greg Mathes, both returners, along with Devin Lewis and Kordae Bunny, Leighton Barr, Tristan Burleson. Barr and Burleson were part of the school's record-setting 4x400-meter relay team during track season.

"We have a lot of speed and a lot of depth at receiver, where we can take those skill kids and kind of mix them and match them in a lot of different ways," Thomas said.

Josh Armentrout will line up at tight end and be another key cog for the Applemen, who have some depth at the position with the addition of Ethan

Amankrah. Deshawn Lewis will be at fullback.

Along the offensive line, Owen Boyce, Evan Clark, Deacon Nguyen and Maddox Canfield are back, while several players, including Chris Barrick, Shane Woodling and Ryker Stotler, will be vying for a spot up front.

On the defensive side of the ball, the biggest acquisition, in Thomas' mind, is the return of Wes Smith as defensive coordinator.

"The biggest thing defensively is our defensive coach Wes Smith. Wes was our defensive coordinator for years and years here when we had a lot of success. We got coach Smith back, and he's one of the best coaches you'll see anymore," Thomas said. "That helps our IQ, that helps our organization, that helps our kids know what's going on. That coaching change is huge for us. He's implemented a system that we're going to be fast, we're going to

be aggressive."

A lot of the players from the offense will be key contributors on defense, as well, beginning with defensive line, where Armentrout will be the anchor and be joined by a number of players in the mix, including Amankrah, Demari Pearson, Brandon Leonard, Nguyen and Canfield.

The linebacker corps, which Thomas describes as "really strong," will include Shelton, a first-team all-EPAC selection two years ago, Deshawn Lewis, Eli and Nate Lasure and Miller.

Bunny, Devin Lewis, Barr and Burleson will be in the secondary, along with Rhyne, a three-year starter, Logan Henderson, Aiden Cornell and Hunter James.

"We're going to play the best 11, no matter who your are," Thomas said.

Musselman had another tough schedule this season, starting off with home contest against University on Aug. 29.

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# Armentrout ready to help Applemen on both sides of the ball

BY ERIC JONES

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INWOOD — Josh Armentrout has been playing football since about the age of 10.

Over that time, the Musselman senior tight end/defensive end has developed a love for the game, so much so that football itself has become sort of therapy for him.

“Ever since I stepped on the field, it was kind of like, I just had a true love for the game, and as I’ve gotten older, it’s been a way to express myself, because I don’t like to talk a lot about my feelings outside of the field,” he said. “I feel like this is a place for me to escape and stuff like that.”

This season, opponents will be trying to escape Armentrout’s reach when he’s playing defensive, and Armentrout will be trying to escape, as well as helping his teammates escape, opposing defenses while playing tight end. No matter what side of the ball he’s on, though, his goal is to have an impactful final season for the Applemen.

“I feel like I’m more of an offensive-minded player, but a lot of people think I’m better at defense, so it’s really whatever the coaches want me to play. I’m just happy to be playing the field at all,” he said.

Armentrout admits that he doesn’t necessarily have the “killer instinct” that many defensive players have. He approaches the position with a more of a technical mindset.

“I feel like on the defensive side of the ball, you really have to have that football killer mindset, and I just don’t feel like that’s something that I have,” he said. “I really just like the defen-



Journal photo by Eric Jones

Josh Armentrout

sive end position, for me, because it’s either a tackle in the backfield, sack. I love getting sacks, just hitting the quarterback. It’s a really fun position to do, and it’s really technical, and that’s what I feel like I excel in on the defensive side of the ball.”

At tight end, it’s about helping the team however he can.

“Offensively, I always like touching the ball and helping my teammates go score,” Armentrout said.

Armentrout has big goals for himself and the team this season — being an all-conference player and helping

his team get to the playoffs.

“I want to be an all-EPAC player this year on both sides of the ball, if I can, and I want to make it to the playoffs and get a deep run with this team,” he said. “I think we have great potential, and like one of our coaches said last week, it’s really about how good do we want to be. We have the potential to be an eight-, nine- or 10-win team, but we also have the potential to be a 2-8 team. It just depends on how we come in every single day and if we want to win — how good do we want to be as a team.”

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# Cardinals poised for another deep playoff run

BY ELLE COLBERT

For The Journal

SPRING MILLS — The 2024 season was nothing short of a roller-coaster for the Spring Mills Cardinals.

From the tragic loss of beloved linebacker Nico Loeber, whose memory still fuels this team's fire, to a heated legal battle over four forfeited wins, the Cardinals faced more adversity than most programs see in a decade.

Through it all, they stood tall, storming their way to the Class AAAA Championship game for the first time in school history, falling just short to county rival Martinsburg.

Spring Mills was a force to be reckoned with last fall, racking up an enormous 549 points while surrendering just 61 over 14 games. It finished with a stellar 12-2 record, with its only blemishes coming at the hands of the Bulldogs.

The Cardinals are looking to get better and make another run at the state title.

"I think, most importantly, we've got to better ourselves. You know, its one of the things we kind of came into the season ... you know, each and every day, we want to stride ourselves to having that perfect practice," Spring Mills coach Marcus Law said.

Gone is star quarterback Max Anderson, now suiting up for the West Virginia Mountaineers, but the Cardinals aren't rebuilding, they're re-loading.

Returning to lead the charge in 2025 is a stacked core of explosive playmakers and seasoned veterans. Among them is University of Cincinnati tight end commit Xavier Anderson, dynamic running back Blake



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**Spring Mills football players huddle in their end zone during the Cardinals state quarterfinal matchup with Morgantown in 2024.**

Sanders and hard-hitting defensive back Hope Bokwe.

Transfers Javon Jones (wide receiver/defensive back) and Tavon Jones (running back, defensive back), came over from Washington and will be impactful players on both sides of the ball.

Stepping under center is rising talent Rylan Swartz, a name Cardinal fans should get used to hearing early and often. Law has like what he's seen in the offseason and during practice

from Swartz.

"I've been happy. Every single day, we sit there, we break it down," Law said. "When it comes down to it, he is my eyes, my ears, my voice on that football field, so right now, it's getting him and I on the same exact page, finding out the schemes and things that he likes, what he doesn't like. Ultimately, my goal is to make sure he's comfortable."

The 2025 schedule promises fireworks. Spring Mills will split its 10-

game regular season evenly, with five games at home and five on the road. The Cardinals kick things off on Aug. 29 at Jefferson, but all eyes are on the Oct. 24 clash at Martinsburg — a rematch that could decide more than just pride.

The Cardinals aren't just looking to compete this season. They're coming for redemption. They're chasing greatness. They're ready to prove that last year's run was only the beginning.



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# Anderson looking forward to ‘chasing the ball’ this season

BY ERIC JONES

[ejones@journal-news.net](mailto:ejones@journal-news.net)

SPRING MILLS — At 6 feet, 6 inches, Xavier Anderson is an imposing figure.

Spring Mills’ senior tight end/defensive lineman hopes to impose his will on opposing teams this season, as the Cardinals look to make another run at a Class AAAA state championship.

A year ago, the Cardinals fell in state championship game to Martinsburg, and Anderson, for one, is going to do his best to make sure they get back there.

“It was a great experience — just going down there and playing with all of our seniors last year. We didn’t finish out the way that we wanted to, so it gave us a chip on shoulder this year,” he said.

Anderson, a University of Cincinnati commit, will shoulder a lot of the responsibility on the defensive line, in particular, not just because he’s a senior but also because he’s coming off an exceptional season in which he was named a Class AAAA first-team all-state selection on defense, as well as named first-team all-Eastern Panhandle Athletic Conference on offense and second-team all-EPAC on defense.

“Last year wasn’t really my leader year, so this year is going to be stepping up and leading my team. So, I think playing both sides of the ball is going to be pretty fun,” he said.

Anderson definitely has fun playing both positions, making the most out of his time on the field. On the defensive line, it’s all about “chasing the ball” for him.

“I’m chasing the ball, no matter what. If the ball’s six yards ahead, I’m chasing it,” he said. “Honestly, when I’m lining up, I’m usually getting ready to key-read the lineman in front of me. If he down-blocks, I’m squeezing, and if he tries to lock



Journal photo by Eric Jones

## Xavier Anderson

on me, I’m getting on the outside.”

Then, there’s the tight end position, one in which Anderson can be just as dominant — not just catching the ball but also blocking. He enjoys both aspects of playing tight end.

“Me being able to go up and get a ball whenever I can, and just help my team block — block for my running backs, Bradley Butts and Blake Sanders. It’s going to be a crazy year for both of them,” Anderson said.

He stressed the importance of blocking, putting

it on the same level, or even higher, than catching the ball.

“Blocking is probably more important than catching the ball for me,” he said.

With the season approaching, Anderson is ready for a dominant senior year. Ultimately, though, more than the individual accolades, it’s about the team chasing down a title.

“I’m just going after the ball this year. It’s ball season. I’ve going for it all. It’s going to be a big season. I’m ready,” he said.

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# Washington seeks repeat of playoff trip from 2024

**BY BOB MADISON**  
For The Journal

CHARLES TOWN — Washington had a taste of the playoffs in 2024, but despite drawing Parkersburg South and finding themselves once even at 14-14 in that game, it couldn't get the win and fell, 27-14.

The Patriots finished with a 6-4 regular season record.

"It's my third year here so we've been trying to build tradition for the football program," Washington coach Terry Rea said. "We're looking to take the next step. We won six games last year. We want to win six or seven, maybe eight games this year and make the playoffs. That's our goal."

The team will be showcasing a new starting quarterback in senior Kyle Athey and groups of first-year starters on both sides of the ball. However, there are still a number of returning starters and a serviceable corps of playmakers around again.

Among the top returners on defense are Allen Casey, who had 98 tackles and five sacks a year ago, and Chase Weaver, who recorded 22 tackles and two sacks. Camren Togans, who had 33 tackles a year ago, is also expected to have a big impact on defense.

Running backs Casey and Adrian Lopez are two more experienced returning contributors. Casey, who scored a touchdown in the playoff loss to Parkersburg South, rushed for 654 yards and six touchdowns in 2024, while Lopez ran for 308 yards and three touchdowns.

This year's offensive line will be mostly inexperienced and has to become effective in the early season, because the first game comes in Beckley on Aug. 29 against Woodrow Wilson.

"I'm very excited to see what our offensive line does," Rea said. "We graduated most of our offensive line last year, so we got a bunch of guys that are stepping up from the JV level this year. We're only going to be as good as we are in front. I'm waiting to see how they take the game experience and improve as the season goes on."

Outside the corps of every year opponents from Jefferson and Berkeley counties, the Patriots will



Journal file photo by Elle Colbert

## Washington players celebrate a touchdown in the air during a matchup with Musselman.

play Woodrow Wilson; Liberty, from Sykesville, Maryland; Bishop O'Connell, from Washington, D.C. Catholic League; Southern, from Harwood, Maryland; and Hampshire.

The team's seven returning defensive starters give it realistic reasons to believe early-season teams will have to struggle against that unit.

Washington is a Class AAAA team. There will be 20 schools in the Class AAAA ranks this season.

Jefferson and Berkeley counties provide five opponents as they do on a yearly basis. Defending big-

school state champion Martinsburg will again be the most "challenging" team on the 10-game schedule. Spring Mills had its best team in 2024 since the school was opened in 2013. Jefferson was a 2024 playoff team. Musselman and Hedgesville are annual opponents.

If the Patriots can get solid play from the key positions, their chances are helped immediately. As always, any injury to a key player is magnified because finding a quality replacement is difficult.



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Wes Eddy is back for his third season with the Berkeley Springs football team.

The Indians had a two-game improvement in 2024 than the previous season, finished with a 3-7 record, and there is excitement within the program, as they have a few key players back this year that could help the team make a playoff run.



**MATT FAIRCLOTH**  
HEDGESVILLE

Matt Faircloth enters his sixth season as the Hedgesville Eagles' head football coach, looking to improve on a two-win season in 2024. Faircloth has a young team, with just nine seniors, but many of his younger players got valuable playing time a year ago, which certainly help Hedgesville as it maneuvers through a tough schedule, including its fellow Eastern Panhandle Athletic Conference teams. Faircloth is confident that the Eagles will improve in the win column this season.



**CRAIG HUNTER**  
JEFFERSON

Craig Hunter enters his 12th season as the head football coach at Jefferson High School, his alma mater. A year ago, Hunter led the Cougars to another postseason appearance, where they won their first round game against Cabell Midland before falling to Hurricane in the second round. In the last four seasons, Jefferson has won at least eight games, including a 10-win season in 2021. The Cougars are looking to get back to the postseason and make a long run in Class AAAA playoffs.



**DAVID WALKER**  
MARTINSBURG

David Walker keeps adding to his legacy as head football coach of the Martinsburg football team. Already the winningest coach in high school football in West Virginia, Walker led the Bulldogs to a Class AAAA state title last season, their first in Quad-A and the 11th since 2010. Martinsburg finished a perfect 14-0. Since Walker's return to Martinsburg from Concord University, the Bulldogs have won back-to-back state titles. His team is poised to contend for another title this year and will likely be the favorites in Class AAAA.

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## COACHES' CORNER



**BRIAN THOMAS**  
MUSSELMAN

Brian Thomas and the Musselman Applemen are looking to rebound this season after winning just one game a year ago. Musselman reached the playoffs in 2024 for the eighth time under Thomas, who took over as coach in 2012. Thomas is confident that the Applemen will be much improved this season, with a number of experienced players back from last year and some first-time players who will have an impact on both sides of the ball.



**MARCUS LAW**  
SPRING MILLS

Marcus Law has taken Spring Mills to new heights in his first two seasons as head coach.

That includes a 2024 season, his first as full-time head coach, in which the Cardinals had their best season in school history, reaching the Class AAAA state championship and finishing as state runner-up. Spring Mills finished the season with 12 wins, and with the momentum from last season, Law's team is poised to be title contender again this year.



**TERRY REA**  
WASHINGTON

Terry Rea enters his third season as Washington football coach, with a strong roster that could push the Patriots into an even better 2025 season.

Washington finished with a 6-5 record, falling in the first round of the playoffs. It was a three-win improvement from the previous year, and the Patriots are hoping to improve that win total again this season.



**ERNIE MCCOOK**  
SHEPHERD

Ernie McCook is set for his eighth season at the helm of the Shepherd football team, after taking over in 2018.

A former conference and regional coach of the year in 2022, McCook is looking to lead the Rams back to the playoffs after a 6-5 season a year ago. Under his leadership last year, eleven players earned all-PSAC East honors last year, including seven first-team selections.



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# HIGH SCHOOL SCHEDULES

## WEST VIRGINIA BERKELEY SPRINGS

Aug. 29	@ Petersburg	7 pm
Sept. 5	HANCOCK	7 pm
Sept. 12	CLEAR SPRING	7 pm
Sept. 19	@ Smithsburg	7 pm
Sept. 26	@ Grafton	7 pm
Oct. 3	@ Southern Garrett	7 pm
Oct. 17	HAMPSHIRE	7 pm
Oct. 24	@ Shady Spring	7 pm
Oct. 31	LEWIS COUNTY	7 pm
Nov. 7	MOOREFIELD	7 pm

## EAST HARDY

Aug. 29	@ Wahama	7 pm
Sept 5	@ Pendleton County	7 pm
Sept. 12	TUCKER COUNTY	7 pm
Sept. 26	SOUTHERN GARRETT	7 pm
Oct. 3	@ Summers County	7 pm
Oct. 10	TYGARTS VALLEY	7 pm
Oct. 17	MOOREFIELD	7 pm
Oct. 24	POCAHONTAS COUNTY	7 pm
Oct. 31	CAMERON	7 pm
Nov. 7	@ Petersburg	7 pm

## FRANKFORT

Aug. 29	@ Moorefield	7 pm
Sept. 5	HAMPSHIRE	7 pm
Sept. 12	ALLEGANY	7 pm
Sept. 19	TUCKER COUNTY	7 pm
Sept. 26	@ Northern Garrett	7 pm
Oct. 3	MOUNTAIN RIDGE	7 pm
Oct. 10	@ Brooke	7 pm
Oct. 17	@ Petersburg	7 pm
Oct. 24	HERBERT HOOVER	7 pm
Nov. 7	@ Keyser	7 pm

## HAMPSHIRE

Aug. 29	PRESTON	7 pm
Sept. 5	@ Frankfort	7 pm
Sept. 12	@ Moorefield	7 pm
Sept. 19	GRAFTON	7 pm
Sept. 26	KEYSER	7 pm
Oct. 3	@ Northern Garrett	7 pm
Oct. 10	ROCK RIDGE	7 pm
Oct. 17	@ Berkeley Springs	7 pm
Oct. 24	WASHINGTON	7 pm
Nov. 7	@ Tucker County	7 pm

## HEDGESVILLE

Aug. 29	@ Nitro	7 pm
Sept. 5	@ Washington	7 pm
Sept. 12	@ Morgantown	7 pm
Sept. 19	MARTINSBURG	7 pm
Oct. 3	@ Jefferson	7 pm
Oct. 10	@ Albert Gallatin	7 pm
Oct. 17	MUSSELMAN	7 pm
Oct. 24	PARK VIEW	7 pm

Oct. 31	DOMINION	7 pm
Nov. 7	@ Spring Mills	7 pm

## JEFFERSON

Aug. 29	SPRING MILLS	7 pm
Sept. 5	MORGANTOWN	7 pm
Sept. 12	@ Sherando	7 pm
Sept. 26	@ Martinsburg	7 pm
Oct. 3	HEDGESVILLE	7 pm
Oct. 11	@ George Washington	4 pm
Oct. 17	LOUDOUN COUNTY	7 pm
Oct. 24	MUSSELMAN	7 pm
Oct. 31	JOHN CHAMPE	7 pm
Nov. 7	@ Washington	7 pm

## KEYSER

Aug. 29	@ Pendleton County	7 pm
Sept. 5	LEWIS COUNTY	7 pm
Sept. 12	ROBERT C. BYRD	7 pm
Sept. 26	@ Hampshire	7 pm
Oct. 3	@ Weir	7 pm
Oct. 10	JOHN MARSHALL	7 pm
Oct. 18	@ Allegany	1 pm
Oct. 24	MOOREFIELD	7 pm
Oct. 31	@ Mountain Ridge	6:30 pm

## MARTINSBURG

Aug. 29	CAMDEN	7 pm
Sept. 5	@ Huntington	7 pm
Sept. 12	H.D. WOODSON	7 pm
Sept. 19	@ Hedgesville	7 pm
Sept. 26	JEFFERSON	7 pm
Oct. 3	@ Musselman	7 pm
Oct. 10	MORGANTOWN	7 pm
Oct. 17	WASHINGTON	7 PM
Oct. 24	SPRING MILLS	7 pm
Nov. 7	HURRICANE	7 pm

## MOOREFIELD

Aug. 29	FRANKFORT	7 pm
Sept. 5	@ Elkins	7 pm
Sept. 12	HAMPSHIRE	7 pm
Sept. 26	@ Petersburg	7 pm
Oct. 10	TuCKER COUNTY	7 pm
Oct. 17	@ East Hardy	7 pm
Oct. 24	@ Keyser	7 pm
Oct. 31	PENDLETON COUNTY	7 pm
Nov. 7	@ Berkeley Springs	7 pm

## MUSSELMAN

Aug. 29	UNIVERSITY	7 pm
Sept. 5	LOUDOUN VALLEY	7 pm
Sept. 12	@ Wheeling Park	7 pm
Sept. 19	SPRING MILLS	7 pm
Oct. 3	MARTINSBURG	7 pm
Oct. 10	BOONSBORO	7 pm
Oct. 17	@ Hedgesville	7 pm

Oct. 24	@ Jefferson	7 pm
Oct. 31	@ Washington	7 pm
Nov. 7	MORGANTOWN	7 pm

## PETERSBURG

Aug. 29	BERKELEY SPRINGS	7 pm
Sept. 5	WYOMING EAST	7 pm
Sept. 12	@ Pendleton County	7 pm
Sept. 19	@ Tyler Consolidated	7 pm
Sept. 26	MOOREFIELD	7 pm
Oct. 3	DODDRIDGE COUNTY	7 pm
Oct. 10	@ Philip Barbour	7 pm
Oct. 17	Frankfort	7 pm
Oct. 31	@ Tucker County	7 pm
Nov. 7	EAST HARDY	7 pm

## SPRING MILLS

Aug. 29	@ Jefferson	7 pm
Sept. 5	WHEELING PARK	7 pm
Sept. 12	CONNELLSVILLE	7 pm
Sept. 19	@ Musselman	7 pm
Sept. 26	MORGANTOWN	7 pm
Oct. 3	WASHINGTON	7 pm
Oct. 17	@ University	7 pm
Oct. 24	@ Martinsburg	7 pm
Oct. 31	@ Parkersburg South	7 pm
Nov. 7	HEDGESVILLE	7 pm

## WASHINGTON

Aug. 29	@ Woodrow Wilson	7 pm
Sept. 5	HEDGESVILLE	7 pm
Sept. 12	LIBERTY Md.	7 pm
Sept. 19	BISHOP O' CONNELL	7 pm
Oct. 3	@ Spring Mills	7 pm
Oct. 10	SOUTHERN Md.	7 pm
Oct. 17	@ Martinsburg	7 pm
Oct. 24	@ Hampshire	7 pm
Oct. 31	MUSSELMAN	7 pm
Nov. 7	JEFFERSON	7 pm

## MARYLAND BOONSBORO

Sept. 5	@ Middletown	6:30 pm
Sept. 12	MOUNTAIN RIDGE	7 pm
Sept. 19	BRUNSWICK	7 pm
Sept. 26	@ Catoctin	6:30 pm
Oct. 3	WILLIAMSPORT	7 pm
Oct. 10	@ Musselman	7 pm
Oct. 16	@ SEED	4 pm
Oct. 24	NORTH HAGERSTOWN	7 pm
Oct. 31	SMITHSBURG	7 pm

## BRUNSWICK

Sept. 5	WILLIAMSPORT	7 pm
Sept. 12	TUSCARORA	6:30 pm

Sept. 19	@ Boonsboro	7 pm
Sept. 26	SMITHSBURG	6:30 pm
Oct. 2	@ St. James	4 pm
Oct. 10	MIDDLETOWN	6:30 pm
Oct. 17	@ South Carroll	6:30 pm
Oct. 24	WALKERSVILLE	6:30 pm
Oct. 31	@ Catoctin	6:30 pm

## CLEAR SPRING

Sept. 5	GREEN STREET ACADEMY	6 pm
Sept. 12	@ Berkeley Springs	7 pm
Sept. 19	@ Everett	7 pm
Sept. 26	@ Mountain Ridge	6:30 pm
Oct. 3	ALBERT GALLATIN	7 pm
Oct. 10	@ Smithsburg	6 pm
Oct. 17	TUSSEY MOUNTAIN	7 pm
Oct. 24	@ Hancock	7 pm

## HANCOCK

Sept. 5	@ Berkeley Springs	7 pm
Sept. 12	SOUTHERN GARRETT	7 pm
Sept. 19	@ Northern Garrett	7 pm
Sept. 26	@ Bath County	7 pm
Oct. 3	@ North Star	7 pm
Oct. 10	STONEWALL JACKSON	7 pm
Oct. 16	MADONNA	7 pm
Oct. 24	EXPRESSION PREP ACADEMY	7 pm
Oct. 31	CLEAR SPRING	7 pm

## NORTH HAGERSTOWN

Sept. 5	@ Tuscarora	7 pm
Sept. 12	MANCHESTER VALLEY	7 pm
Sept. 19	@ Thomas Johnson	7 pm
Sept. 26	CENTRAL	7 pm
Oct. 3	@ Century	7 pm
Oct. 10	WILLIAMSPORT	7 pm
Oct. 17	@ Fort Hill	7 pm
Oct. 24	@Boonsboro	7 pm
Oct. 31	SOUTH HAGERSTOWN	6 pm

## SAINT JAMES

Aug. 30	ARCHBISHOP CURLEY	1 pm
Sept. 5	@ St. Paul VI Catholic	7 pm
Sept. 13	@ Kiski School	1 pm
Sept. 19	@ St. Stephens & St. Agnes	7 pm
Sept. 27	WYOMING SEMINARY COLLEGE PREP	2 pm
Oct. 2	BRUNSWICK	4 pm
Oct. 11	MARET	1 pm
Oct. 25	Potomac School	1 pm
Nov. 1	@ Flint Hill	2 pm

## SMITHSBURG

Sept. 5	FRANCIS SCOTT KEY	7 pm
Sept. 12	@ Williamsport	6 pm
Sept. 19	BERKELEY SPRINGS	7 pm
Sept. 26	@ Brunswick	6:30 pm
Oct. 3	@ Poolesville	6:45 pm
Oct. 10	CLEAR SPRING	6 pm
Oct. 17	CATOCTIN	6 pm
Oct. 24	@ Fort Hill	6:30 pm
Oct. 31	@ Boonsboro	7 pm

## SOUTH HAGERSTOWN

Sept. 5	CENTURY	6 pm
Sept. 12	@ Francis Scott Key	6:30 pm
Sept. 19	FREDERICK	6 pm
Sept. 25	@ Thomas Johnson	6:30 pm
Oct. 3	@ Catoctin	6:30 pm
Oct. 17	@ Williamsport	7 pm
Oct. 24	LIBERTY	6 pm
Oct. 31 -	@ North Hagerstown	6 pm

## WILLIAMSPORT

Sept. 5	@ Brunswick	7 pm
Sept. 12	SMITHSBURG	6 pm
Sept. 19	CATOCTIN	6 pm
Sept. 26	NORTHEAST	6 pm
Oct. 3	@ Boonsboro	7 pm
Oct. 10	@ North Hagerstown	7 pm
Oct. 17	South HAGERSTOWN	7 pm
Oct. 24	@ Mountain Ridge	7 pm
Oct. 31	WATKINS MILLS	6:30 pm

## VIRGINIA

### CLARKE COUNTY

Aug. 29	JAMES WOOD	7 pm
Sept. 5	FORT DEFIANCE	7 pm
Sept. 12	CATOCTIN	7 pm
Oct. 3	@ Central Lunenburg	7 pm
Oct. 10	CENTRAL WOODSTOCK	7 pm
Oct. 17	PAGE COUNTY	7 pm
Oct. 24	@ Strasburg	7 pm
Oct. 31	@ Luray	7 pm
Nov. 6	MADISON COUNTY	7 pm

## HANDLEY

Aug. 29	@ Eastern View	7 pm
Sept. 5	@ Liberty	7 pm
Sept. 13	BRENTSVILLE DISTRICT	1 pm
Sept. 19	@ Skyline	7 pm
Sept. 27	WESTMORELAND	1 pm
Oct. 11	KETTLE RUN	1 pm
Oct. 18	MANASSAS PARK	1 pm
Oct. 24	@ Sherando	7 pm

Oct. 31	@ James Wood	7 pm
Nov. 8	MILLBROOK	1 pm

## JAMES WOOD

Aug. 29	@ Clarke County	7 pm
Sept. 5	DOMINION	7 pm
Sept. 12	CULPEPER COUNTY	7 pm
Sept. 19	SHERANDO	7 pm
Sept. 26	WARREN COUNTY	7 pm
Oct. 3	@ Meridian	7 pm
Oct. 10	MILLBROOK	7 pm
Oct. 1	@ Liberty	7 pm
Oct. 31	HANDLEY	7 pm
Nov. 7	@ Fauquier	7 pm

## LOUDOUN VALLEY

Aug. 28	MILLBROOK	8 pm
Sept. 5	@ Musselman	7 pm
Sept. 12	HERITAGE	7 pm
Sept. 19	@ Dominion	7 pm
Sept. 26	@ Potomac Falls	7 pm
Oct. 10	@ Loudoun County	7 pm
Oct. 17	BROAD RUN	7 pm
Oct. 24	@ Rock Ridge	7 pm
Oct. 31	TUSCARORA	7 pm
Nov. 7	WOODGROVE	7 pm

## MILLBROOK

Aug. 28	@ Loudoun Valley	8 pm
Sept. 5	@ Heritage	7 pm
Sept. 19	MERIDIAN	7 pm
Sept. 26	@ Kettle Run	7 pm
Oct. 3	SHERANDO	7 pm
Oct. 10	@ James Wood	7 pm
Oct. 17	SKYLINE	7 pm
Oct. 30	LIBERTY	7 pm
Nov. 8	@ Handley	1 pm

## SHERANDO

Aug. 28	AMHERST COUNTY	7 pm
Sept. 5	@ Loudoun County	7 pm
Sept. 12	JEFFERSON	7 pm
Sept. 19	@ James Wood	7 pm
Sept. 26	BRENTSVILLE DISTRICT	7 pm
Oct. 3	@ Millbrook	7 pm
Oct. 17	@ Kettle Run	7 pm
Oct. 24	HANDLEY	7 pm
Oct. 31	@ Fauquier	7 pm
Nov. 7	LIBERTY	7 pm

## WOODGROVE

Aug. 28	@ Independence	7 pm
Sept. 5	JOHN CHAMPE	7 pm
Sept. 12	EASTERN VIEW	7 pm
Sept. 19	TUSCARORA	7 pm
Sept. 26	@ Stone Bridge	7 pm
Oct. 3	PARK VIEW	7 pm
Oct. 10	@ Heritage	7 pm





# Scenes from the 2024 season



@MOBPhotos on X

Spring Mills defensive end Xavier Anderson tackles Washington running back Tavon Jones in a regular season football matchup at Washington High School last year.



Journal photo by Elle Colbert

The Jefferson High School football team takes the field for a matchup with Washington on November 8.



Journal photo by Elle Colbert

Martinsburg players Michael Dillard (18) and Kailaokala Villa (19) celebrate after blocking a punt and returning the ball for a touchdown during the first quarter of the Bulldogs' WVSSAC football playoff matchup with Parkersburg last year.



Photo by Robert Niedzwiecki/The Winchester Star

Musselman quarterback Zach Miller looks to pass as Chris Schlack (8) blocks in the first half of the Applemen's game against Handley, Virginia, last year.



# 2024 in review

## Martinsburg captures 11th state championship since 2010

The Eastern Panhandle was the epicenter of Class AAAA football in 2024, as Martinsburg and Spring Mills landed in the state championship game in Charleston.

As it had been several times before, the Bulldogs were the last ones standing, as they captured their 11th state title since 2010, all under coach David Walker, the state's winningest high school football coach. It was the first Quad-A title for the Martinsburg, which finished with a 14-0 record, including wins over Parkersburg (77-7), Parkersburg South (56-14), Huntington (35-34) and the Cardinals (24-17) in the playoffs.

Spring Mills had its best season in school history, finishing as state runner-up with a 12-2 mark under Marcus Law, who was in his first season as full-time head coach after shedding the interim tag from 2023.

The Cardinals' only two losses came to the Bulldogs — the first in the regular season and in the second in the state championship — and both were by single digits as they held their own against the state's top program.

Elsewhere around the Panhandle, the remaining Class AAAA schools — Hedgesville, Jefferson,



WVSSAC photo

### Martinsburg quarterback Koi Fagan (3) charges down the field during the Class AAAA state championship game at Laidley Field.

Musselman and Washington — also made appearances in the playoffs.

The Cougars, who finished 8-4, won their playoff opener against Cabell Midland before falling to Hurricane in the second round. The Eagles lost in the first round to Spring Mills, while the Patriots fell in the first round, as well, against Parkersburg South.

Berkeley Springs finished the season with a 3-7 record, picking up wins against Trinity Christian, Oak Glen and Braxton County. It had two honorable mention all-state selections in Aiden Cain and Kyle Moore.

Last season was also a success for several of the Eastern Panhandle's players, as 31 were selected to

the Class AAAA all-state football team.

Koi Fagan, winner of the Kennedy Award as the state's top player and West Virginia Gatorade Player of the Year, led Martinsburg's group of all-staters as captain of the first-team offense at the quarterback position. He was joined on the first team by two teammates — wide receiver Kyree Bunny and offensive lineman Peyton Kaufman.

Other first-team offense selections were Spring Mills' Prophet Guillaume (offensive line) and Max Anderson (Utility) and Jefferson's Tay' Shaun Roper (running back).

The Cougars led the area with two second-team offense selections — Dylan Harich at quarterback and Tony Allen at wide receiver. The remaining second-team selections included Martinsburg's Brady Breeden (offensive line), the Eagles' Levi Faircloth (offensive line) and the Cardinals' Blake Sanders (running back).

The Bulldogs also led the area with two first-team defense selections, which included linebacker Ace Flores, captain of the team, who also won the Huff Award as the state's top defensive player and the Howley Award as the state's top linebacker. He was joined by his teammate, linebacker Nick Busky. Spring Mills' Xavier Anderson (defensive line) and Washington's Isaiah Osafo-Mensah (defensive line) were also first-team picks.

On second-team defense were Martinsburg's Xavier Pollard (defensive line), the Patriots' Kyree Brooks (linebacker), the Cardinals' Isaiah Wang, Jefferson's Demarius Wallace (utility), who was named captain, and Musselman's Nate Lasure (utility).



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# Marshall an enigma as transfer portal takes its toll

BY BOB MADISON  
For The Journal

It was keen to be green in 2024, when Marshall thundered through the Sun Belt Conference with a 10-3 record and excited people rolling through the gates at Joan C. Edwards Stadium.

Fast forward to August of 2025, and the differences in Huntington are almost too numerous to count.

Coach Charles Huff hustled off to Hattiesburg and Southern Mississippi. The newest collegiate monster, the transfer portal, saw no less than 25 members of last year's cheers-riding team leave for other places. State-native Tony Gibson came in from an assistant's post at North Carolina State to become a head coach for the first time in his long career.

An almost complete overhaul of the Thundering Herd depth chart is at hand.

Marshall not only will it be a work in progress, it will probably be that way until the season closes in the late fall.

The Herd scored a rat-a-tat 31.8 points per game and limited its oft-beaten opponents to 23.1 points a game.

The 2024 season closed with a 31-3 wipeout of Louisiana on the road.

Then, The Herd made nearly as much news in the off season as it had in rollicking through the regular season.

Gibson had been with Wolfpack for the last six seasons. Before that, the Van, West Virginia, native had two lengthy stints at WVU and stays at Arizona, Michigan and Pitt. He was an assistant working for Rich Rodriguez at WVU, Michigan and Arizona.

Now, he's a full member of the "We Are Marshall" crowd.



Associated Press

Marshall's Toby Payne (81) in action against Ohio State during a game in 2024 in Columbus, Ohio.

Marshall and Gibson have filled the 2025 roster with transfers from literally all over the map and some valued freshmen. One of those freshmen is quarterback Koi Fagan, who piloted Martinsburg to still another high school state championship in 2024. Fagan accounted for 4,100 yards of total offense and was in on 61 touchdowns as the Bulldogs were crowned state champions.

Gibson faces a monumental task when he was handed a schedule that has Georgia in Athens' Sanford Stadium as his season opener.

The first home game is against Missouri State.

Huff took his 32-20 record at Marshall to Southern Mississippi. He left



holes all across the board. Questions abound. Can The Herd successfully run the ball? If it can't, clouds will not only gather, they'll dump rain, sleet and snow on the heads of all the new faces.

Wholesale losses appear everywhere from the defensive line, linebacker corps, offensive line and defensive secondary.

Probably the most talented two-some of the players returning are tight end Toby Payne, who led the team with six touchdowns a year ago, and offensive lineman Jalen Slappy, who started all 13 games a season ago.

Expected to be some of the players Herd fans will learn early in the new season are quarterbacks Carlos Del Rio-Wilson and Zion Turner, running backs Tony Mathis Jr. and Michael

Allen, wide receiver Jakolbe Baldwin, offensive lineman Evan Ferguson, safety Boogie Trotter, center Eric Meeks, defensive back Louikenzy Jules, running back Jo'Shon Barbie and linebacker Javae Gilmore.

Marshall has three transfers from North Carolina State, three from Mississippi State, three from Jacksonville State, two from WVU, two from Middle Tennessee, two from Jackson State, two from Campbell and two from Western Michigan in addition to 37 other colleges.

The uniforms will still favor green and white. The home games will still be played at Joan C. Edwards and the city of Huntington will still be ripe with excitement on game days. However, seemingly everything else will be new and now awaited.

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Associated Press

Syracuse quarterback Carlos Del Rio-Wilson (16) in the second half during an NCAA college football game against UNLV in October 2024 in Las Vegas. Del Rio-Wilson is one of many players who transferred to Marshall for the 2025 season.

RIGHT: James Madison running back George Pettaway (6) gets wrapped up by Marshall defensive lineman Braydin Ward (58) during the first half of an NCAA college football game in Harrisonburg in November 2024.



Photo by Daniel Lin/DN-R

# Good Luck

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# Rams find themselves in a different role this season

**BY BOB MADISON**  
For The Journal

SHEPHERDSTOWN — “Let’s Go Rams” has a different connotation this football season.

Instead of a longtime Shepherd fan voicing his approval of the team, “Let’s Go Rams” will be describing the early-season schedule that has the team hitting the road for three consecutive games — at Frostburg, at Slippery Rock and at Clarian.

It won’t be until Sept. 27 that the Rams see Shepherdstown for a game. Then, it’ll be Kutztown, the bully of the East Division in the Pennsylvania State Athletic Conference, which was picked to finish first in the preseason poll.

When the road-tested team finally shows the home crowd its merits and shortcomings, it will be ready for more than just home cooking and some verbal help from the crowd.

This team seems full of question marks and sideline conjecture.

The 2024 season saw the Rams fall out of the conference race for any championship honors. It took a season-closing, 13-10 win over Bloomsburg just to claim a 6-5 record.

Kutztown and East Stroudsburg ruled the East Division. Slippery Rock, Indiana and California were the best of the West.

Just after the 2024 season ended, the transfer portal became the focus of attention.

Meaningful starters departed for Division I schools. Others seeking more playing time left for what they believed to be greener pastures.

The Shepherd roster was in flux. Just naming the players available for



Journal photo by Elle Colbert

**The Shepherd University Rams celebrate a touchdown in a victory over Lock Haven during the 2024 season.**

2025 was going to be a test to anybody’s memory.

Speculation is rife.

There is no speculation about the public’s and the conference’s expectations about where Shepherd will finish in the standings — not ahead of Kutztown and not ahead of East Stroudsburg.

Gone in all directions from the 2024 team are Harold O’Neal, Barry Hill, Lek Powell, Jeremiah Taylor,

Jack Brutus, Matt Bednarski, Dustin Fisher, Wyatt Pellicano, Jack Rosnage and punter Ryan Barrick. Some of them graduated and some found those greener pastures elsewhere.

The pre-season roster lists six quarterbacks, including four incoming freshmen and Ezra Bagent and transfer Michael Hardyway.

Jordan Barnett and Grant Swinehart return at running back. Wide receivers Malakai Brown and Kordell

Batten are back.

Offensive linemen Brian Jester, Ty Lucas, Brandon Carr, Caleb Herb and Josh Crummit are the most experienced faces on the interior. Carr was recently named 2025 D2Football.com Preseason Elite 100 Watch List as a second team selection and is coming off a solid 2024 season, in which he was named first team All-PSAC East and a second-team

The defense shows Joseph Groves, Klayton Batten and Jack Baxter, and Nathan Muhle returns after playing a season at Harding.

Has the group of teams that Shepherd annually tamed found enough ways to be more competitive with the traveling Rams? Will the passing game allow the Rams to score enough points to grind out another winning season? Could the special teams hold the outcomes of several games in their opportunistic hands?

Will the greener pastures in Shepherdstown be verdant enough for those escaping from other colleges to finally prosper?

The “hit the road Rams” will soon find out.

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# Shepherd football fourth in PSAC East preseason poll

LOCK HAVEN, Pa. – Shepherd University has been picked to finish fourth in the 2025 PSAC East preseason football poll.

For the second consecutive year, the Kutztown Golden Bears were selected No. 1 in the Pennsylvania State Athletic Conference's Eastern Division football preseason poll, as voted on by the conference's head coaches. Slippery Rock was picked as the favorite in the PSAC West.

## Eastern Division

In 2025, Kutztown earned the maximum seven first-place votes and is the two-time defending PSAC champion. The Golden Bears return seven starters from a defense that led NCAA Division II by allowing just 10.2 points per game in 2024.

East Stroudsburg, voted No. 2 in the East, led the PSAC in scoring at 33.6 points per, overall offense with 419.3 yards per game and only allowed 15.9 points per game to opponents (third best in the conference.)

The No. 3 team in the poll is West Chester, which won four of its last six contests and returns QB Cooper Jordan for his fourth and final season under center. On defense, seven starters are back – in addition to linebacker Connor Noble, who recorded 117 tackles last fall.

Shepherd earned the No. 4 spot in this year's poll after finishing with a 6-5 overall

record in 2024. The Rams return multiple all-PSAC East honorees on offense, including Malakai Brown and Jordan Barnett and offensive linemen Brandon Carr and Ty Lucas.

Bloomsburg was voted No. 5 in the 2025 poll after improving to a 6-5 overall record last fall. The Huskies will feature a pair of returning offensive standouts in wide receiver Jerry Griffen-Batchler and quarterback KJ Riley, while linebacker Brady Thompson (85 tackles, 9.0 TFL, 2.5 sacks) is back to help lead the defense.

Lock Haven, ranked No. 6 in this year's poll, welcomes Joe Battaglia as its new head coach. The Bald Eagles had the No. 1-ranked passing offense in 2024, averaged 389.7 yards per game (second-most in the PSAC) and return quarterback Jackson Ostrowsky.

Shippensburg comes in at No. 7 in this year's poll. The Raiders return six starters on offense and seven on defense. In 2024, the SU defense was tied for the best in the PSAC in fourth-down situations, allowing just a 36.4 percent conversion rate.

Millersville ranks No. 8 and returns quarterback Ryan Zelitt, who started seven of the final eight games in 2024, ranking fourth in the PSAC in completion percentage (64.8). The Marauders return just four starters on defense, but they include top tacklers, linebacker Bryce Beutler (72) and safety Nick Romano (61).



Journal photo by Elle Colbert

Shepherd football players surround and embrace running back Malakai Brown (4) after he scored a touchdown in the Rams' matchup with Millersville on October 19, 2024.



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# Deja vu brings together naysayers and optimists at WVU

**BY BOB MADISON**  
For The Journal

Much of the controversy concerning Rich Rodriguez and his departure for Michigan remains.

It's been years since Rodriguez left for Michigan (where his three teams had a combined record of 15-22). However, the rancid taste left in so many mouths remains.

Nowadays, optimists may outnumber the pessimists, realists and those just waiting to see what concerns WVU football.

Rodriguez may be back on the sideline, but it will be the players who decide whether the Mountaineers can fool the many pundits who don't see an explosion of Mountaineer wins this season.

West Virginia was 6-7 a year ago when it fired Neal Brown and lost in the Scooter's Coffee Frisco Bowl to Memphis.

In his previous run of seven seasons at WVU, Rodriguez went 60-26, but the ever-lasting stigma of losing to Pitt in his final days in Morgantown and then moving on to Michigan still taints his legacy with so many.

After being fired at Michigan, Rodriguez eventually resurfaced at Arizona before being let go there. His next head coaching job was at Jacksonville State in Alabama, and now, the 61-year old has returned to Morgantown.

He has hustled and hustled through the transfer portal and could have as many as seven defensive starters from there this season.

His most productive returning player is running back Jahiem White (845 rushing yards), but the Mountaineers lost quarterback Garrett Greene (751 rushing yards, as well as 2,000 passing yards and 12 TD passes) and halfback C.J. Donaldson, Jr. (734 rushing yards).

The oft-predicted defensive starters from the transfer portal are Jimmori Robinson (UT San Antonio), Braden Siders (Wyoming), Chase Wilson (Colorado State), Michael Coats, Jr. (Ne-



Photo by David Pennock

**West Virginia quarterback Nicco Marchiol throws a pass during the Mountaineer game against Kansas State last season.**

vada), Darrian Lewis (Akron), Jason Chambers (Appalachian State) and Fred Perry (Jacksonville State).

Rodriguez brought a number of players with him from Jacksonville State.

The newly formed WVU offense has wide receivers Cam Vaughn, Jaden Bray and Rodney Gallagher III. Line-men Kimo Makene'ole, Grayson Barnes, Walter Young Bear and Ty'Kieast Crawford also came via the transfer portal.


Rodriguez is valued as an offensive innovator. His teams generally pour out the points.

The Mountaineer schedule starts gently enough with Robert Morris. Ohio had an 11-3 record last season but didn't play any Ohio States, Georgias, Michigans or Texasas. The third game of the season is against Pitt in Morgantown. Thousands of people will form an opinion of the "new version" of Rodriguez off this game.

There are nine games against conference opponents. A winning conference record would open wide eyes and dispel the doomsday predictions that are floating all over college football about the Mountaineers.

This isn't a honeymoon season, but it is one where the football played on the field is so much more important than the conjecture and the soap opera intrigue being talked about, written about and mumbled about.



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# Cornerbacks coach Rod West teaches playing violent to WVU secondary in early stages

BY SPENCER RIPCHIK  
For The Journal

West Virginia coach Rich Rodriguez said every position was up for grabs, even the running back position, which Jahiem White was thought to have locked up. There was a lot of change from last season, new coach, new staff and a lot of new players. There are some returners, but not a lot.

The Mountaineers' secondary was filled with leaders last season, like leading tackler safety Anthony Wilson Jr. and pass breakup leader corner Garnett Hollis Jr. Now, the secondary is made up of multiple transfers and

some young players from last season, who decided to stay after Neal Brown was fired. There's no secure spot.

Cornerbacks coach Rod West is in charge of picking the corners for the secondary, looking to improve the poor pass defense from last season.

Through three practices, West believes his corners and the rest of the secondary retained most of the information learned this spring, and in the first couple of practices, most of the time spent is getting the new transfers acclimated.

"For the new guys just trying to create a spirit of competition in that room," West said. "I think so far, they've done a good job of translating what we talked

about in the main room to the field. I say every day, just making progress, trying to be more consistent as a whole."

West tried to make learning the playbook as simple as possible for the new transfers. He made the playbook so that when a player masters seven plays, those plays are used in variations for new ones. West wants the learning curve to be less steep.

The secondary needs to learn quickly and adapt on the fly. Every day at practice, West's corners face off against Rich Rodriguez's relentless tempo offense, so there's not a lot of time to think between plays. But, it's helped because most offenses in col-

lege football run tempo now, so it's just a preview of what a game will be like, and arguably it'll be easier during the game because the tempo won't be as fast as Rodriguez's.

"There's gonna be some learning curves," West said. "And the offensive staff, coach Rodriguez, coach Trickett and all those guys, they do a great job. We have some talented guys on offense, and they put them in good places, and they create some stressful situations for our guys. We welcome that stress. It makes us better. So it's kind of iron sharpening iron."

See **WEST**, Page 34



Journal photo by David Pennock

West Virginia wide receiver Preston Fox runs after making a catch during last year's game against Baylor.

## WVU wide receiver Preston Fox couldn't go without football, giving it his all in final year

BY SPENCER RIPCHIK  
For The Journal

Wide receiver Preston Fox was in the gym just a couple of weeks after announcing he is retiring from football.

Fox dealt with a calf injury, lower back, a concussion and the trauma of a disappointing season under Neal Brown. Retiring sounded like a relief.

"It was really taxing on my mental and physical (health), so it was pretty rough last year," Fox said.

But, it wasn't.

Fox sat in the gym, and all he could think about was football and how he missed the grind, despite all the injuries.

"I started to miss the game," Fox said. I was going day in and day out, going to the gym, just thinking about football."

His father, Tom, also had big WVU tailgates before the games and was pushing him to return, along with his other teammates, like receiver Jaden Bray.

Fox realized he had to get back into football. He wanted to come back to West Virginia.

Fox texted Rich Rodriguez and asked if he could come back, because a return wasn't a sure thing under a new coach.

See **FOX**, Page 34




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# Gov. Morrisey sets goals for athletic dominance to WVU football team

**BY SPENCER RIPCHIK**  
For The Journal

MORGANTOWN — West Virginia Governor Patrick Morrisey walked side by side with WVU football coach Rich Rodriguez through the hall of the Puskar Center, leading up to the team's meeting room, or what Rodriguez calls the "truth room."

The two exchanged formalities, and Rodriguez asked Morrisey how long he was staying for, but nothing crazy. Morrisey, guided by his crew, was walking swiftly, with a purpose.

He entered the team room, just behind Rodriguez. Rodriguez talked to the team quickly, going over the rest of the day, and then introduced Morrisey.

Morrisey took the stage in the meeting room and got to work.

He echoed Rodriguez's sentiment on the hard edge and told the team about the West Virginia roots. How West Virginians work hard, without a lot of respect. In some ways, the WVU 2025 team is similar. The Mountaineers are picked last in most Big 12 preseason polls and have some of the worst odds to win the conference.

Rodriguez dismissed the polls earlier in camp and said they won't matter when it's the fourth quarter. You won't be thinking about where you're ranked. But, Rodriguez did say he thought WVU was ranked a little low.

Morrisey wasn't afraid to use the polls as motivation in his speech.

"A lot of people count you out," Morrisey said. "The beautiful thing is, you get to do it out on the field. You don't have to worry about what people are writing about. You get to every single day, bring it, and show people every day what it's all about. Action, not words. That's a pretty damn good thing."



Photo by Ron Rittenhouse/The Dominion Post

## West Virginia Gov. Patrick Morrisey chats with WVU football coach Rich Rodriguez.

Morrisey's motivation had purpose. After firing up the team, he made it clear his goal for the 2025 season. Regional athletic dominance. It starts with the Week 2 skirmish with Ohio on Sept. 6.

"At Ohio, that matters to me," Morrisey said. "We need to kick Ohio's ass."

"Are you with me?" Morrisey raised his voice.

The team answered back, "Yes sir."

But then it was onto his biggest game for regional dominance: the Backyard Brawl in Week 3 against Pitt. Morrisey is set to be the honorary coin flipper for the game, and Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro will also be down on the field for the coin flip.

Morrisey, a known Republican, wants to win the athletic war against the Democrat, Shapiro. Morrisey

already started the trash-talking and took a dig at Shapiro in his speech.

"We are both going to be there," Morrisey said. "We are both going to be jaw boning. I want to make sure WVU is on the map. That guy's thinking of running for president. That's not part of my plans."

"I want them to know when the Pennsylvania Governor comes by to gritty West Virginia, we're not going to tolerate any of these Pitt Panthers coming into our house and winning, are we?" Morrisey raised his voice to almost a yell.

The team responded, "No, sir."

After laying out his intentions for WVU this fall, Morrisey talked about how, along with the rest of the West Virginia people, he fully supports Rodriguez and the team. But Morrisey made it clear there are no participation trophies, and he's about winning.

"I love you guys," Morrisey said. "The state bleeds for you, and we are going to root for you the whole way. I know the coach is bringing that hard edge every single day to your practices. Every day when you're tired, just know that you not only have the support of your AD, your coach, all the people here, but the support of the entire people of West Virginia."

Morrisey got off the stage and shook Rodriguez's hand. He started toward the door, and Rodriguez turned and joked with the team that hopefully, Morrisey could give the team some money for NIL and general funding.

The speech lasted no more than a couple of minutes, but Morrisey made it clear what he wants WVU to be in 2025.

As Morrisey was headed to the door, WVU broke the meeting down by telling what Pitt should eat, and Morrisey turned around.

"I like that."

## West FROM PAGE 33

During the first couple of practices, West is doing a lot of evaluating, and spending afternoons and nights, breaking down practice film to see who separates themselves from the rest. While watching film, West is watching who is consistently making plays. Right now, there's no one who's stood out, and like Rodriguez with his quarterbacks, he's not opposed to rotating all his players if they all are consistent.

"If we have 13 guys that're consistently making plays, so we'll grade every day, and grade production," West said. "If you're going to be top of the board production-wise, then we have to find different ways to get you on the football field."

The other important detail West is looking for in the secondary is to hit the turnover quota. Defensive coordinator Zac Alley and the rest of the defensive staff want to change WVU's history of a lack of turnovers, so they've set a standard of three-plus turnovers per practice leading up to the first game. In the first two practices, they've hit that quota.

West has focused on teaching fundamentals for creating turnovers.

"If he's just trying to catch ball, being violent through it, through his arms, maybe

that leads to deflection and great pursuit on the backside, getting guys to the ball," West said. "We are always preaching, if I'm the second man in, I'm trying to punch, break the ball out. No. 1, it's going to take pursuit and great effort to get to the ball. Great things happen when you run to the football. No. 2, just violence at the point of contact."

West talked about wanting his defensive backs to be violent a couple of times. Rodriguez didn't talk about violence, but it fits under the umbrella of playing with a hard edge. Violence isn't usually associated with defensive backs. Usually, that comes from the trenches or the linebackers, but it makes sense on a Rodriguez squad.

The secondary is just getting started, but West is instilling early a sense of urgency when his squad takes the field. He wants spectators to see his group play hard.

"We're gonna be extremely aggressive," West said. "We're going to play fast. We're going to play physical. Every play when people watch our film, they are gonna say we have 11 guys running to the football like their hair on fire. Want to play violent, and want to be smart and optimistic at the same time."

## Fox FROM PAGE 33

"He welcomed my back with open arms," Fox said.

After learning he could come back, Fox didn't tell his teammates and just walked into the locker room, like he'd been there the whole time. His teammates obviously noticed and were excited for his return.

Fox's return is big for WVU because he's an experienced voice in the locker room, and made the most of his time on the field when he wasn't injured. However, it's a bit harder to be a leader on this team, since he's still learning the offense and coaching staff as much as the younger players.

"I'm always like a leader," Fox said. "But being a new team, you kind of got to set a standard and be a leader and find a way to get in there."

Rodriguez's offense has taken some getting used to. It was hard at first getting back in shape, and in tempo shape. Rodriguez and all the position coaches have made the offense simple. Once

one route concept is learned, that same concept is used in multiple different formations.

"Just the speed and learning the offense that was the biggest adjustment for me," Fox said. "Just because I had this whole different offense over here, right? And then having to learn a whole new one in a short amount of time. It was hard for me."

Fox is getting a grasp on the new scheme.

Just a few weeks before the first game, Fox realized this was his final year. There's no coming back. He could get injured again, but he's not worried about that. Fox is just making sure he doesn't have any regrets when he leaves this time around.

"I'm like, excited for the next part of my journey, but I'm also trying to leave everything out there on the field and just give it my all each and every day," Fox said. "If things go wrong, they go wrong. If I get hurt, it happens. It's God's plan. But I'm just trying to give it my all every single day."





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# Shenandoah looking to overcome heavy graduation losses

**BY ROBERT NIEDZWIECKI**  
For The Journal

WINCHESTER — After recording one of the best seasons in program history in 2024, the Shenandoah University football team will have to count on a lot of different faces to keep the Hornets at a high level in 2025.

Last year, SU tied a program record for wins previously set in 2003 and 2022 in an 8-3 season. The Hornets went 5-2 to take second in the ODAC, SU's best finish in the league since joining it in 2012. SU also competed in a postseason game for the first time 2004, losing 35-14 to Moravian in the Cape Charles Bowl.

That team was led by a group of 34 players who were seniors, fifth-year players or graduate students, and 15 of those players were starters. Most of them won't be back this season.

For the first time since the spring season of 2021, the Hornets won't have Steven Hugney as their starting quarterback. Last year, he was the ODAC's Offensive Player of the Year. Whoever replaces him at quarterback will be throwing to an inexperienced receiving corps. Of the seven players who had at least 100 receiving yards last year, only sophomore Roge't Walker (10 catches, 134 yards) is back.

SU does return its top two running



SHENANDOAH UNIVERSITY PHOTO

**Shenandoah linebacker Matt Conroy had three interceptions and 107 tackles last year.**

backs and three starting offensive linemen.

Senior running back Jalen Redfearn earned first-team all-ODAC honors after recording 862 rushing yards (fourth in the ODAC) and 13 rushing TDs (first in the league) on 146 carries (5.9 average). Redfearn was second in the ODAC in yards per carry to teammate Bryce Buchanan. The junior ranked

sixth in the ODAC in rushing (602 yards on 74 carries) and had eight TDs on the ground.

On the line, SU brings back junior left tackle Evan Brown, senior left guard Andy Anderson and senior center Mitchell Pfeiffer. They helped the Hornets average an ODAC-best 412.9 yards per game and 34 points per game (second in the ODAC).

On defense, SU lost seven of its top eight tacklers, but it does return its best tackler. Senior linebacker Matt Conroy earned first-team all-ODAC honors after ranking second in the ODAC with 107 tackles (52 solo, seven for a loss). Conroy also had three interceptions and two forced fumbles.

Other returning starters for SU are senior linebacker Jake Jack (26 tackles, 11 solo, two sacks, two forced fumbles) and junior defensive back Tayton Smaldone (22 tackles, 13 solo, one interception). SU also brings back five other players who made at least 12 tackles and played in more than half of the team's games, with junior linebacker Gabriel Sanchez recording 20 tackles.

The Hornets' schedule will look different this year. Ferrum College is no longer in the ODAC after moving to Division II. ODAC teams will play eight conference games instead of seven this with the addition of Galaudet to the conference and Roanoke playing a varsity schedule for the first time.

SU's two-game non-conference schedule features a first-ever matchup with Geneva of Pennsylvania on the road on Sept. 13. The Hornets open the season one week earlier at home at Shentel Stadium against non-conference foe Methodist.

## James Madison a favorite to win Sun Belt as chaos reigns in the conference

**BY MAURA CAREY**  
Associated Press

The Sun Belt has created a bit of a reputation for chaos. The days of single-team dominance have been replaced by fast risers, rapid turnover, unpredictable outcomes and fierce competition.

Defending champion Marshall lost coach Charles Huff and a significant portion of the roster to conference foe Southern Miss. The West Division has its own intrigue with Louisiana-Lafayette and Texas State splitting opinion on which will be on top this season.

JMU was the clear favorite in the Sun Belt preseason coaches poll, earning a league-high 11 first-place votes.

### James Madison the consensus favorite

James Madison is in its fourth year in the conference and the Football Bowl Subdivision and has 28 wins to show for it, a steady performance that followed a run near the top of the FCS.

The Dukes finished 9-4 overall and third in the East Division with a 4-4 conference record in coach Bob Chesney's first year at the helm. Quarterback Alonza Barnett III completed 60% of his passes for 2,598 yards, 26 touchdowns and four interceptions while rushing for 442 yards and seven TDs. A leg injury cut Barnett's season short, sidelining the sophomore from the Boca Raton Bowl.

The Dukes brought in other op-

tions at signal-caller, including Matt Sluka, who played for Chesney at Holy Cross and left UNLV over a contract dispute. Georgia Southern was picked to finish second in the East.

None of the Sun Belt Conference teams made the AP Top 25 preseason poll, but JMU (9) and Louisiana-Lafayette (1) got votes — and both are the coaches' picks to reach the title game.

### Are the Golden Eagles the new Thundering Herd?

Under Huff, Marshall went 10-3 last season, including 7-1 in play, and beat the Ragin' Cajuns 31-3 in the league title game. Huff left for South-

ern Miss soon after and the Herd had to pull out of the Independence Bowl because more than 30 players jumped into the transfer portal, pushing the team below the necessary roster minimum.

Several of those players followed Huff, including quarterback Braylon Braxton, the preseason Sun Belt offensive player of the year. Braxton completed 124 of 206 passes for 1,624 yards, 19 touchdowns and two interceptions while tacking on 610 rushing yards and four rushing touchdowns in 2024 — all career highs.

Redshirt sophomore return specialist Ian Foster and redshirt senior defensive back Josh Moten also followed Huff and were 2025 preseason all-Sun Belt selections.



# Big 12 football race seems wide open as many teams have realistic chance to rule

BY BOB MADISON  
For The Journal

Where does WVU stand in the Big 12 Conference? And where does the Big 12 stand in the pecking order of the country's foremost leagues?

West Virginia's place this season might just be determined by injuries, close games and the progress and development of a group of players new to the coaching staff.

The Big 12 and its 16 teams don't scare the SEC nor the Big 10. And the Atlantic Coast Conference would put its Clemson into the ring against any team the Big 12 could offer.

The season-ending battle royal for national honors won't revolve around the Big 12. Georgia, Florida, Texas and a few others from the SEC will use the regular season to position themselves for a determined run at the national championship. Ohio State, Michigan and Penn State will adequately represent the Big 10.



Nobody outside the commissioner of the Big 12 actually believes that conference will play a significant role in what happens in games that move toward crowning a national champ.

Arizona State defeated Iowa State in the Big 12 championship game in 2024.

West Virginia completed a 6-7 overall record . . . and then fired its head coach in the aftermath of that disappointing ending.

Of the 16 teams the league has to offer, some could offer good skiing, a pleasurable vacationing destination with soft winter temperatures, championship caliber men's basketball, a coach whose health even makes headlines and a Texas hideaway for rest and relaxation.

But this is football and there are

more "have nots" than "have's" in this league.

With the equality prevailing, there are at least seven teams that could use a season of luck, close wins and a mostly injury-free season to coast home with a title.

Arizona State could repeat, but then Baylor, Utah, Kansas State, Texas Tech, Texas Christian or Iowa State might catch lightning in a battle.

West Virginia probably won't be celebrating a league title and neither will Arizona, Central Florida, Oklahoma State, Cincinnati or Houston.

The conference had eight teams extend their respective seasons into bowl games last year. None of the major bowls called Big 12 teams. There were no representatives in the Orange, Sugar, Cotton, Fiesta, Gator or Rose Bowls.

Teams that pulled off winning seasons were Arizona State, Iowa State, Baylor, Brigham Young, Colorado, Kansas State, Texas Tech and Texas Christian.

Those who limped home with the sad faces of losers were Utah, Central Florida, Arizona, West Virginia, Houston, Cincinnati and Kansas.

Some of these schools having sprawling campus populations — Arizona State with 79,593, Central Florida with 69,233, Arizona with 53,001, Houston with 46,676, Cincinnati with 43,338 Colorado with 41,432 and Texas Tech with 40,773. The smallest is at Texas Christian with only 12,785. Kansas State shows a school population of 19,745 and West Virginia has 24,200 students.

This conference doesn't produce many first-team All Americans. And none of its head coaches are among the highest salaried in the land.

What it has is equality — from Salt Lake City to Orlando to Waco to Ames to Tempe to Manhattan to Lubbock to inland Morgantown.

And equality makes naming a conference champion wait until the last two Saturdays of the season.



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# BIG 12 2025 TEAM SCHEDULES

<b>Arizona</b> 08/30 – vs. Hawaii 09/06 – vs. Weber State 09/13 – vs. Kansas State (non-conference) 09/20 – OFF 09/27 – at Iowa State 10/04 – vs. Oklahoma State 10/11 – vs. BYU 10/18 – at Houston 10/25 – OFF 11/01 – at Colorado 11/08 – vs. Kansas 11/15 – at Cincinnati 11/22 – vs. Baylor 11/29 – at Arizona State(Fri–Sat)	<b>Baylor</b> 08/30 – vs. Auburn 09/06 – at SMU 09/13 – vs. Samford 09/20 – vs. Arizona State 09/27 – at Oklahoma State 10/04 – vs. Kansas State 10/11 – OFF 10/18 – at TCU 10/25 – at Cincinnati 11/01 – vs. UCF 11/08 – OFF 11/15 – vs. Utah 11/22 – at Arizona 11/29 – vs. Houston BYU 08/30 – vs. Portland State 09/06 – vs. Stanford 09/13 – OFF 09/20 – at East Carolina 09/27 – at Colorado 10/03 – vs. West Virginia 10/11 – at Arizona 10/18 – vs. Utah 10/25 – at Iowa State 11/01 – OFF 11/08 – at Texas Tech 11/15 – vs. TCU	<b>Cincinnati</b> 11/22 – at Cincinnati 11/29 – vs. UCF  <b>Cincinnati</b> 08/28 – vs. Nebraska (Kansas City, MO) 09/06 – vs. Bowling Green 09/13 – vs. Northwestern State 09/20 – OFF 09/27 – at Kansas 10/04 – vs. Iowa State 10/11 – vs. UCF 10/18 – at Oklahoma State 10/25 – vs. Baylor 11/01 – at Utah 11/08 – OFF 11/15 – vs. Arizona 11/22 – vs. BYU 11/29 – at TCU  <b>Colorado</b> 08/30 – vs. Georgia Tech 09/06 – vs. Delaware 09/13 – at Houston 09/20 – vs. Wyoming 09/27 – vs. BYU 10/04 – at TCU 10/11 – vs. Iowa State 10/18 – OFF 10/25 – at Utah	<b>Houston</b> 11/01 – vs. Arizona 11/08 – at West Virginia 11/15 – OFF 11/22 – vs. Arizona State 11/29 – at Kansas State  <b>Houston</b> 08/30 – vs. Stephen F. Austin 09/06 – at Rice 09/13 – vs. Colorado 09/20 – OFF 09/27 – at Oregon State 10/04 – vs. Texas Tech 10/11 – at Oklahoma State 10/18 – vs. Arizona 10/25 – at Arizona State 11/01 – vs. West Virginia 11/08 – at UCF 11/15 – OFF 11/22 – vs. TCU 11/29 – at Baylor  <b>Iowa State</b> 08/23 – vs. Kansas State(Dublin, Ireland) 08/30 – vs. South Dakota 09/06 – vs. Iowa 09/13 – at Arkansas State 09/20 – OFF 09/27 – vs. Arizona 10/04 – at Cincinnati	<b>Kansas</b> 10/11 – at Colorado 10/18 – OFF 10/25 – vs. BYU 11/01 – vs. Arizona State 11/08 – at TCU 11/15 – OFF 11/22 – vs. Kansas 11/29 – at Oklahoma State  <b>Kansas</b> 08/23 – vs. Fresno State 08/30 – vs. Wagner 09/06 – at Missouri 09/13 – OFF 09/20 – vs. West Virginia 09/27 – vs. Cincinnati 10/04 – at UCF 10/11 – at Texas Tech 10/18 – OFF 10/25 – vs. Kansas State 11/01 – vs. Oklahoma State 11/08 – vs. Arizona 11/15 – OFF 11/22 – at Iowa State  <b>Kansas State</b> 08/23 – at Iowa State(Dublin, Ireland)  See <b>BIG 12</b> , Page 39
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## FULL CONFERENCE SCHEDULE BY TEAM: EAST DIVISION

<b>Appalachian State</b> 8/29 vs. Charlotte 9/6 vs. Lindenwood 9/13 at Southern Miss 9/27 at Boise State 10/4 vs. Oregon State 10/11 at Georgia State 10/18 vs. Coastal Carolina 10/25 at Old Dominion 11/6 vs. Georgia Southern 11/15 at James Madison 11/22 vs. Marshall 11/29 vs. Arkansas State	<b>Georgia Southern</b> 11/15 at Georgia Southern 11/22 at South Carolina 11/29 vs. James Madison  <b>Georgia Southern</b> 8/30 at Fresno State 9/6 at USC 9/13 vs. Jacksonville State 9/20 vs. Maine 9/27 at James Madison 10/9 vs. Southern Miss 10/18 vs. Georgia State 10/25 at Arkansas State 11/6 at App State 11/15 vs. Coastal Carolina 11/22 vs. Old Dominion 11/29 at Marshall	<b>James Madison</b> 10/18 at Georgia Southern 10/23 vs. South Alabama 11/8 at Coastal Carolina 11/15 vs. Marshall 11/22 at Troy 11/29 at Old Dominion  <b>James Madison</b> 8/30 vs. Weber State 9/6 at Louisville 9/20 at Liberty 9/27 vs. Georgia Southern 10/4 at Georgia State 10/11 vs. Louisiana 10/18 vs. Old Dominion 10/28 at Texas State 11/8 at Marshall 11/15 vs. App State 11/22 vs. Washington State 11/29 at Coastal Carolina	<b>Old Dominion</b> 9/20 at Middle Tennessee 9/27 at Louisiana 10/11 vs. Old Dominion 10/18 vs. Texas State 10/30 at Coastal Carolina 11/8 vs. James Madison 11/15 at Georgia State 11/22 at App State 11/29 at Georgia Southern  <b>Old Dominion</b> 8/30 at Indiana 9/6 vs. North Carolina Central 9/13 at Virginia Tech 9/27 vs. Liberty 10/4 vs. Coastal Carolina 10/11 at Marshall 10/18 at James Madison 10/25 vs. App State 11/1 at ULM 11/13 vs. Troy 11/22 at Georgia Southern 11/29 vs. Georgia State
<b>Coastal Carolina</b> 8/30 at Virginia 9/6 vs. Charleston Southern 9/13 vs. East Carolina 9/20 at South Alabama 10/4 at Old Dominion 10/11 vs. ULM 10/18 at App State 10/30 vs. Marshall 11/8 vs. Georgia State	<b>Georgia State</b> 8/30 at Ole Miss 9/6 vs. Memphis 9/13 vs. Murray State 9/20 at Vanderbilt 10/4 vs. James Madison 10/11 vs. App State	<b>Marshall</b> 8/30 at Georgia 9/6 vs. Missouri State 9/13 vs. Eastern Kentucky	



08/30 – vs. North Dakota  
 09/06 – vs. Army  
 09/13 – at Arizona  
 09/20 – OFF  
 09/27 – vs. UCF  
 10/04 – at Baylor  
 10/11 – vs. TCU  
 10/18 – OFF  
 10/25 – at Kansas  
 11/01 – vs. Texas Tech  
 11/08 – OFF  
 11/15 – at Oklahoma State  
 11/22 – at Utah  
 11/29 – vs. Colorado

## Oklahoma State

08/30 – vs. UT Martin  
 09/06 – at Oregon  
 09/13 – OFF  
 09/20 – vs. Tulsa  
 09/27 – at Baylor  
 10/04 – at Arizona  
 10/11 – vs. Houston  
 10/18 – vs. Cincinnati  
 10/25 – at Texas Tech  
 11/01 – at Kansas  
 11/08 – OFF  
 11/15 – vs. Kansas State

11/22 – at UCF  
 11/29 – vs. Iowa State

## TCU

08/30 – at North Carolina  
 09/06 – OFF  
 09/13 – vs. Abilene Christian  
 09/20 – vs. SMU  
 09/27 – at Arizona State  
 10/04 – vs. Colorado  
 10/11 – at Kansas State  
 10/18 – vs. Baylor  
 10/25 – at West Virginia  
 11/01 – OFF  
 11/08 – vs. Iowa State  
 11/15 – at BYU  
 11/22 – at Houston  
 11/29 – vs. Cincinnati

## Texas Tech

08/30 – vs. Arkansas-Pine Bluff  
 09/06 – vs. Kent State  
 09/13 – vs. Oregon State  
 09/20 – at Utah  
 09/27 – OFF  
 10/04 – at Houston  
 10/11 – vs. Kansas

10/18 – at Arizona State  
 10/25 – vs. Oklahoma State  
 11/01 – at Kansas State  
 11/08 – vs. BYU  
 11/15 – vs. UCF  
 11/22 – OFF  
 11/29 – at West Virginia

## UCF

08/28 – vs. Jacksonville State  
 09/06 – vs. North Carolina A&T  
 09/13 – OFF  
 09/20 – vs. North Carolina  
 09/27 – at Kansas State  
 10/04 – vs. Kansas  
 10/11 – at Cincinnati  
 10/18 – vs. West Virginia  
 10/25 – OFF  
 11/01 – at Baylor  
 11/08 – vs. Houston  
 11/15 – at Texas Tech  
 11/22 – vs. Oklahoma State  
 11/29 – at BYU

## Utah

08/30 – at UCLA  
 09/06 – vs. Cal Poly

09/13 – at Wyoming  
 09/20 – vs. Texas Tech  
 09/27 – at West Virginia  
 10/04 – OFF  
 10/11 – vs. Arizona State  
 10/18 – at BYU  
 10/25 – vs. Colorado  
 11/01 – at Cincinnati  
 11/08 – OFF  
 11/15 – at Baylor  
 11/22 – vs. Kansas State  
 11/29 – at Kansas(Fri-Sat)

## West Virginia

08/30 – vs. Robert Morris  
 09/06 – at Ohio  
 09/13 – vs. Pitt  
 09/20 – at Kansas  
 09/27 – vs. Utah  
 10/03 – at BYU  
 10/11 – OFF  
 10/18 – at UCF  
 10/25 – vs. TCU  
 11/01 – at Houston  
 11/08 – vs. Colorado  
 11/15 – at Arizona State  
 11/22 – OFF  
 11/29 – vs. Texas Tech

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# No. 4 Clemson's experience makes the Tigers the ACC favorite. Can anyone challenge them?

**BY AARON BEARD**  
Associated Press

No. 4 Clemson won so much over more than a decade that it felt like a step back when the Tigers didn't reach 10 wins two years ago in the first of back-to-back four-loss seasons.

Still, the Tigers are the reigning Atlantic Coast Conference champions and coming off a trip to the College Football Playoff. Experience from that run is part of why the Tigers are the runaway preseason pick to finish atop the ACC again.

"Experience, as they say, doesn't come at a discount," coach Dabo Swinney said.

Clemson won at least 10 games from 2011-2022, including two national championships and eight ACC titles, before a nine-win year in 2023. The Tigers (10-4) beat SMU for last year's title.

"I think our mentality is, man, we're keeping our head down, just kind of keeping it low," said quarterback Cade Klubnik, the preseason ACC player of the year.

Clemson returns four Associated Press All-ACC picks from last year, including first-team offensive lineman



AP photo by Jacob Kupferman

**Clemson head coach Dabo Swinney, with ACC commissioner Atlantic Coast Conference Commissioner Jim Phillips by his sides, looks on after winning the ACC championship NCAA college football game between Clemson and SMU, Saturday, Dec. 7, 2024, in Charlotte, N.C.**

Blake Miller and two defensive linemen (Peter Woods and T.J. Parker) ranked in the top three among returners at their position nationally by Pro Football Focus.

Overall, Clemson held 11 of 27 spots on the preseason all-ACC team.

No other team held more than three.

## If not Clemson, then who?

The ACC has two other teams ranked in the preseason AP Top 25

with No. 10 Miami and No. 16 SMU.

The Hurricanes were the league's highest-ranked team much of last year, though they missed the ACC title game after losing at Syracuse. They brought in Georgia transfer quarterback Carson Beck as the successor to No. 1 overall NFL draft pick Cam Ward.

The Mustangs have back-to-back 11-win seasons under Rhett Lashlee, who led SMU to an 8-0 record in its first league season. SMU returns quarterback Kevin Jennings (28 total touchdowns last year), and AP all-ACC picks in offensive lineman Logan Parr, safety Isaiah Nwokobia and kicker Collin Rogers.

## Seminoles' response

Florida State entered last season as the reigning ACC champion and preseason favorite, then went 2-10. Coach Mike Norvell's offseason included hiring two coordinators, notably former Auburn and UCF head coach Gus Malzahn for the offense.

"When you come to Florida State, you'd better embrace the highest of expectations, because it's what I have, it's what our program has," Norvell said.

# No. 2 Penn State primed to make run at first Big Ten title since 2016; Ohio St, Oregon in hunt again

**BY ERIC OLSON**  
AP College Football Writer

The stage is set for Penn State, and now the question is whether the second-ranked Nittany Lions will capitalize.

While defending national champion Ohio State, defending Big Ten champ Oregon and heavyweight Michigan are breaking in new quarterbacks, Penn State goes into the season with a three-year starter in Drew Allar, a pair of 1,000-yard rushers and a top-10 defense with first-year coordinator Jim Knowles.

"I think when you look at all of our personnel, not just the players, but the staff and players, it's the best combination that we've had in my

12 years here," coach James Franklin said. "The depth, the experience, the talent is impressive."

The Nittany Lions have won at least 10 games three straight years, and last season they made the College Football Playoff for the first time and beat overmatched opponents SMU and Boise State before a 27-24 loss to Notre Dame in the semifinal at the Orange Bowl.

The knock against Franklin and the Lions is that they win the games they are supposed to but not the ones when the lights are the brightest.

"We were a drive away from playing for the national championship last year, and 99% of the programs in the country would be jacked about that season and how it went, and I don't know if that was necessarily the case

here, right?" Franklin said.

Except for a Sept. 27 home game against No. 7 Oregon, the Nittany Lions probably won't be tested until the back end of their schedule. They'll be trying for their first conference championship since 2016 and the automatic CFP bid that goes with it.

## If not Penn State, who?

No. 3 Ohio State and No. 7 Oregon are poised to return to the playoff if their new quarterbacks keep the offenses on the rails.

Buckeyes coach Ryan Day is still deciding between Julian Sayin and Lincoln Kienholz. Ohio State is going for its first Big Ten title since 2020 along with a repeat national cham-

pionship. With so many elite players spread across the field, both are possible.

Former UCLA five-star QB Dante Moore takes over for Dillon Gabriel at Oregon, which went 13-0 with a win over Penn State in the conference championship game to earn the CFP top seed before losing to Ohio State in the quarterfinals. Much is expected of Dakorien Moore, the top-rated receiver in the 2025 recruiting class.

No. 14 Michigan landed the nation's No. 1 recruit in quarterback Bryce Underwood.

The Wolverines didn't win the Big Ten last year, but they did beat Ohio State a fourth straight time. Underwood and a new group of receivers should improve the Big Ten's worst passing game.



# Athey aims to lead Patriots to the playoffs

BY AINSLEY HALL  
ahall@journal-news.net

CHARLES TOWN — Washington High School senior quarterback Kyle Athey is looking to hit big this year as the team prepares for the upcoming season.

After the team won six games last year, Athey hopes to build on that success and lead the Patriots to the playoffs.

Athey started playing football when he was only 6 years old. Even as a kid, he was eager to try new things and get active. Football was the perfect fit.

“I think it was just the way I was as a kid,” Athey said. “I always wanted to do everything and try new things, and I think football just caught my eye at a young age, to the point that I wanted to play my whole life.”

He started playing for the Spartans and has played on several travel teams, including the Cougars, the Vipers and the Outlaws. He also played in middle school, representing Wildwood Middle. With every game he played, Athey’s passion for football continued to grow.

“It makes me feel good and gives me a clear head,” Athey said. “I love the feeling going into a game. The relationships I have with my teammates are amazing, too. I love the friendships football creates.”

Going into the new season, Athey is looking forward to developing his leadership skills, making sure he throws the ball the right way and practicing how he moves in the pocket. He wants to make sure he executes his assignment efficiently and run the offensive line the way its supposed to be run.

Athey’s most important goal this year, however, is to keep a winning record for the team and hopefully make it to the playoffs. Athey and his teammates are excited for the upcoming season and look forward to showing their skills in future games as they wear the blue and red jersey.

“Just be ready,” Athey said. “We’re going to prove a lot of people wrong. We’re going to show them how good we really are. I think a lot of people are doubting us, so we have a lot of people to prove wrong. We’re going to give 100% every game.”



Journal photo by Ainsley Hall

Washington High School senior quarterback Kyle Athey hopes to build on the success last season and lead the Patriots to the playoffs.



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# 'It's legendary' — AP All-America honor resonates for some of college football's all-time greats

**BY LARRY LAGE**  
Associated Press

Desmond Howard walked up a ramp in Schembechler Hall, looking at black-and-white pictures hanging on a white wall where Michigan honors its All-America football players.

The 1991 Heisman Trophy winner stopped to point out the image of two-time AP All-America receiver Anthony Carter, who starred for the program several seasons before Howard crossed the Ohio border to become a Wolverine.

Howard grinned after taking a few more steps and seeing his high-top fade hairstyle captured in a photo that cemented his legacy for the college football program with the most wins.

"You're remembered as one of the greats, that's for sure," Howard told the AP. "You put on the V-neck sweater with the maize block 'M,' and you take your picture and you know that you're in a special group."

With the 2025 season here, the AP named an all-time All-America team to mark the 100th anniversary of the first team from the early days of the sport. Many outlets have named All-America teams over the decades, but only a few such as AP have stuck around. A number of player spoke with AP about what the honor meant:

## Hugh Green, Pittsburgh

When the three-time All-America defensive end is asked who was the most influential people in his life, he says Bob Hope.

Hope's annual Christmas specials featured AP All-Americans from 1971 to 1994 and Green recalled the late comedian pulling him aside during commercial breaks to rave about his play in games that were not on TV.

"Kids today might take it a bit different, but we should always have a person that has his credentials to do the AP All-American show every year," Green said. "That was something very special and unique."

## Herschel Walker, Georgia

Walker won a national championship as a freshman with the Bulldogs and said he got too much credit over teammates like the offensive linemen who paved the way for his success. The three-time All-America running back is proud, though, to have shown that someone from Wrightsville, Georgia, with a population of about 3,000 people, could make it big.

"I wanted to inspire people from my little hometown — or kids from small towns around this country — to let them know you can do it too," he said.

## Anthony Carter, Michigan

The late Bo Schembechler was known for a run-heavy offense at Michigan, but that didn't stop a 155-pound freshman from becoming a big-play threat right away and eventually a two-time AP All-America.



Desmond Howard, an AP All-America receiver and Heisman Trophy winner at Michigan, points at a portrait of Michigan's Anthony Carter at Schembechler Hall in Ann Arbor, Mich., on Aug. 6.

Larry Lage/  
Associated Press

"No one thought I would last in the Big Ten," Carter said. "To be an All-American means a lot, coming out of Michigan because we didn't throw the ball a lot. I wouldn't have achieved what I did without a lot of great teammates."

## Orlando Pace, Ohio State

Buckeye Grove is a small patch of land with a sea of trees a few steps south of Ohio Stadium, a place where Ohio State honors its All-America football players with a buckeye tree and a plaque.

"When you get older, you kind of appreciate those things," said Pace, a two-time All-America offensive tackle. "I have kids that go to Ohio State, and I always tell them to go by and check out my tree."

## Greg Jones, Michigan State

He played in 20 games, including the playoffs, as a rookie linebacker for the New York Giants when they won the Super Bowl in 2012. His NFL career ended after a six-game stint the next season in Jacksonville. His back-to-back All-America honors, however, still shine as accomplishments.

"It's etched in history," Jones said, holding one of the plaques with his All-America certificate. "Obviously, you can get cut from an NFL team, you can lose your job, but that can stay forever."

## Braylon Edwards, Michigan

The Wolverines' all-time leader in receptions, yards receiving and touchdown catches was aware two decades ago that there were a lot of college football All-America teams, but recalled one being the most coveted.

"The AP was the one I that cared about," Edwards said. "The writers telling me that I was the player that deserved to be All-American, that was the one that I was waiting for."

## James Laurinaitis, Ohio State

When the three-time All-America linebacker takes recruits on tours as an assistant coach, Buckeye Grove is always a stop on the visit.

"It's pretty cool to kind of honor that tradition," he said.

## Ndamukong Suh, Nebraska

He is the only Associated Press College Football Player of the Year to exclusively play defense, but still laments that he finished fourth in Heisman Trophy voting. He was an AP All-America in 2009.

"The Associated Press saw something special in me that the Heisman didn't," Suh said. "I am all 10 toes down with The Associated Press."

## Aidan Hutchinson, Michigan

As the son of second-team AP All-America defensive tackle Chris Hutchinson, earning a spot on the All-America wall alongside his father was a goal for Aidan Hutchinson during his senior year four years ago.

"There's a lot of All-American teams, but AP is different," he said. "It's legendary."

## Terrion Arnold, Alabama

The Crimson Tide recognizes its All-America players on a wall in their training facility, intentionally putting the displays in a room recruits visit on campus, and at various locations at Bryant-Denny Stadium.

"Just walking in there and being a little kid and just thinking, one day that would be me, and then just going out there and fulfilling that dream," Arnold said. "It's also one of those things when I take my future family to Alabama, and look at it, 'Son, this is what your dad was like.'"



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# From quirks to legends: The evolution of AP All-America college football teams over 100 years

BY MICHAELA HERBST  
AND ERIC OLSON

Associated Press

A century of Associated Press All-America college football teams features plenty of great teams, great players and a host of head-scratching quirks, reflecting how the game itself has evolved over 100 years.

Let's start with the most important position: quarterback.

In 1925, when the first AP All-America team was named, the quarterback position did not loom nearly as large. The forward pass had only been legal since 1906 and the required number of yards for a first down had changed from 5 to 10 yards in 1912. The notion of throwing the ball was still in its infancy.

Of the 11 men on the 1925 team, three were listed as "backs" and one as a "running back." It's not clear why Stanford's Ernie Nevers was labeled a running back.

For the first 45 years, with two exceptions, quarterbacks were simply listed among the backs. For reasons unknown, Northwestern's Otto Graham (1943) and Michigan's Bob Timberlake (1964) were called QBs but Heisman Trophy winners Roger Staubach of Navy (1963) and Steve Spurrier of Florida (1966) were not. Quarterbacks have been specifically designated as such every year since Notre Dame's Joe Theismann in 1970.

Through 1949, the All-America team was made up of 11 players (there were 12 in 1948). A short-lived move to two-platoon football began in 1945 with players no longer required play both offense and defense. The AP began naming 22 All-Americans in 1950.

But in 1953, when one-platoon football returned, it was back to 11 All-Americans. In 1964, there were 22 men on the team even though unlimited substitution didn't return until 1965.

Position titles were kept general into the 1970s, a holdover from those one-platoon days. Backs could be running backs and quarterbacks but also linebackers and defensive backs. Linemen were just linemen. Ends were positioned at the end of the offensive line and were blockers and receivers, or they could be defensive ends.

Specialists weren't recognized until kickers and punters were first hon-

See **TIDBITS**, Page N45



Associated Press

Navy quarterback Roger Staubach stretches with the rest of the football team in Baltimore, Md., Oct. 22, 1963.



Army backs Glenn Davis (41) and Felix "Doc" Blanchard (35) pose in New York City in 1946, after they are named to the Associated Press 1946 All-American eleven for their third consecutive time.

Associated Press



ored in 1981, and the first all-purpose player wasn't named until 1991.

## Notre Dame is leader

Since 1925, there have been 1,952 players named to the AP All-America first team. Notre Dame has had the most with 85, followed by Alabama with 83, Ohio State with 79, Southern California with 77 and Oklahoma with 75.

This year's AP All-America team will be released in December.

## Where they're from

The state of Texas has produced a nation-leading 255 AP first-team All-Americans through 2024.

The Lone Star State is followed by California with 170, Ohio with 138, Florida with 133 and Pennsylvania with 111.

Houston (33) ranks as the No. 1 hometown for first-team picks followed by Dallas (30), Los Angeles (27), Chicago (26) and Miami (25).

## 3-time All-Americans

Twelve players earned AP All-America first-team honors three times, a truly elite group that represents fewer than 1% of the 1,949 All-Americans so far. Five played primarily offense and the other seven were on defense:

RBs Felix "Doc" Blanchard and Glenn Davis of Army, 1944-46; B Doak Walker, TCU, 1947-49; LB Richard Wood, Southern California, 1972-74; LB Jerry Robinson, UCLA, 1976-78; DB Kenny Easley, UCLA, 1978-80; DL Hugh Green, Pittsburgh, 1978-80; WR Anthony Carter, Michigan, 1980-82; RB Herschel Walker, Georgia, 1980-82; OL Bill Fralic, Pittsburgh, 1982-84; RB Marshall



Wally Fong/Associated Press

**Heisman Trophy winner Marcus Allen, left, and Heisman runner-up Herschel Walker ham it up with Bob Hope, center, during a break in the taping of Hopes Annual Christmas Special at the NBC Studios on Dec. 8, 1981, in Burbank, Calif.**

Faulk, San Diego State, 1991-93; LB James Laurinaitis, Ohio State, 2006-08.

## Notable position leaders last 50 years

Over the past half-century (1974-2024), some notable bragging rights:

- BYU leads the nation with four AP first-team All-America quarterbacks honored a total of five times: Marc Wilson (1979), Jim McMahon (1981), Steve Young (1983) and Ty Detmer (1990-91).

- Southern California has the most AP All-America running backs with five players honored seven times: Anthony Davis (1974), Ricky Bell (1975-76), Charles White (1978-79), Marcus Allen (1981) and Reggie Bush (2005).

Keith McCants (1989), DeMeco Ryans (2005), Rolando McClain (2009), Dont'a Hightower (2011), Mark Barron (2011), C.J. Mosley (2012-13), Reggie Ragland (2015), Reuben Foster (2016), Will Anderson Jr. (2021-22) and Dallas Turner (2023).

- Alabama also has the most AP All-America defensive backs with 11 players honored 12 times: Tommy Wilcox (1981), Antonio Langham (1993), Kevin Jackson (1996), Javier Arenas (2009), DeMarcus "Dee" Milliner (2012), Landon Collins (2014), Minkah Fitzpatrick (2016-17), Deionte Thompson (2018), Patrick Surtain II (2020), Kool-Aid McKinstry (2023) and Terrion Arnold (2023).

- Colorado has the most All-America punters with four players honored five times: Barry Helton (1985-86), Keith English (1988), Tom Rouen (1989) and Mark Mariscal (2002).

- UCLA has the most All-America kickers with four players honored five times: John Lee (1984-85), Bjorn Merten (1993), Justin Medlock (2006) and Ka'imi Fairbairn (2015).

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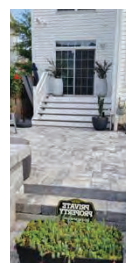
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