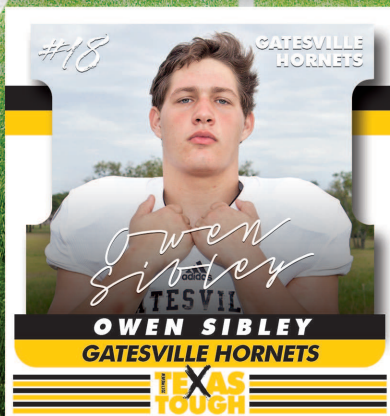
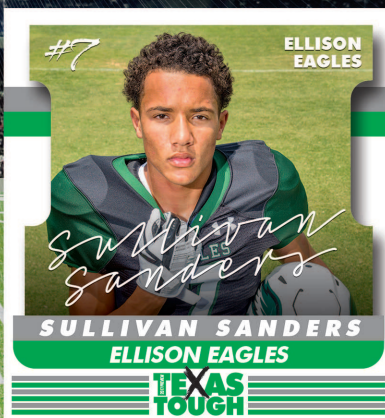
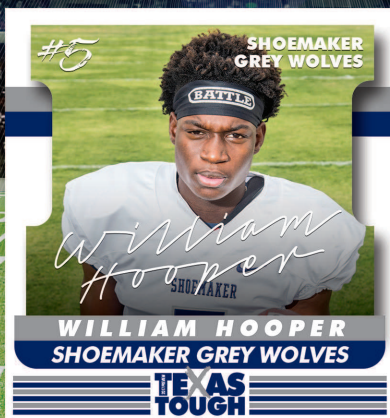
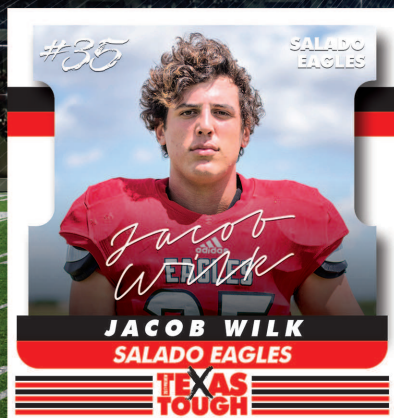
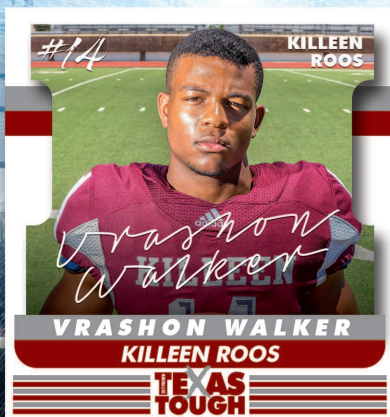


2017 PREVIEW

KDHNEWS.COM

# TEXAS TOUGH



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# TEXAS TOUGH

## 2017 PREVIEW

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Back row: Managing Editor Rose Fitzpatrick, Photo Editor Eric J. Shelton, Copperas Cove Editor Jeff Steers, Reporter Clay Whittington, Design Desk Manager Brad Kester. Team member and reporter Quinton Lilley is not shown.

## FROM THE EDITOR

As we anticipate football season, we see the hard work that goes into players' conditioning and skills. We see the bands in the fields and parking lots practicing complex musical pieces and the steps to go with them. We see the cheerleaders and spirit and dance teams drilling to perfect their movements and timing.

We see the parents helping students get to practice, the booster clubs raising money for teams, the coaches and band and spirit directors preparing for the big moments.

We also see the community support. Soon the gates will burst open and you all will continue the tradition and create memories for another generation.

Our reporters and photographers will be on the sidelines and our production and web crews will be putting your teams' photos and stories in the paper and online.

We join you in celebrating football season.

# ALL FOOTBALL. ALL SEASON LONG. ALL IN ONE PLACE.



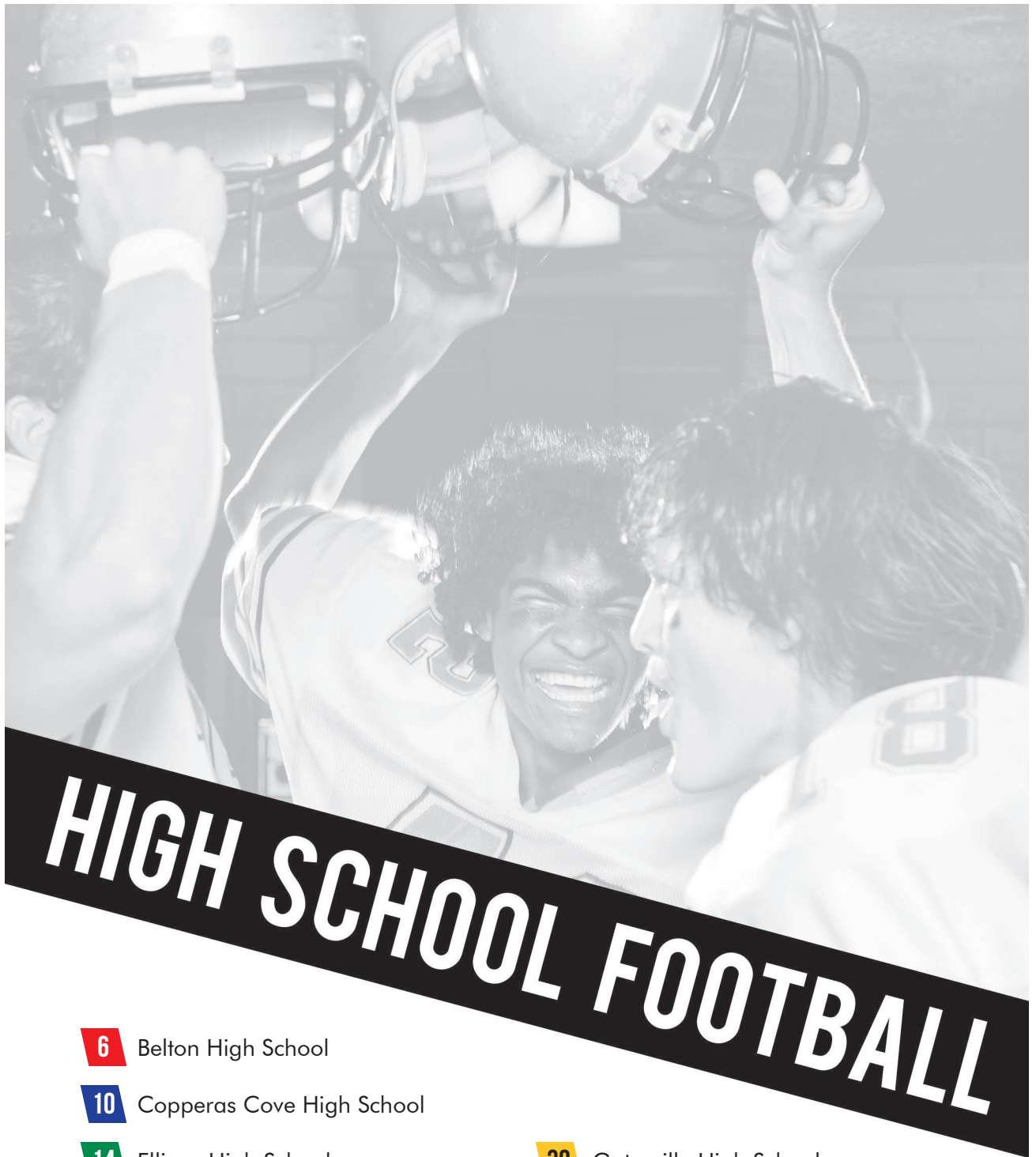
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### WEEKLY COVERAGE OF ALL AREA SCHOOLS

STATS & RANKINGS • PLAYER AND COACH INTERVIEWS  
PLAYERS OF THE WEEK • GAME SCHEDULES AND SCORES  
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# HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL

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Gatesville High School

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Lampasas High School

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Salado High School

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Florence High School



# BUUCK HAS HELP DEFENSIVELY AT BELTON HIGH SCHOOL

by Jeff Steers

Belton High School football player Justin Buuck would like to be a nurse some day.

That goal might not be apparent in his work precision as an outside linebacker for the Tigers.

Buuck will be a key player on a defense with a number of star players, but without a lot of depth. The senior linebacker is known for his ferocious tackling style.

"I guess I am pretty good at taking on linemen and tackling pretty aggressively," Buuck said. "It is a case of being powerful and exploding into the ball carrier."

The senior would like to study nursing in college because of his experience with his grandparents. He used to help take care of his grandparents, sometimes being up at 1 a.m. for assistance.

He would like to help the Tigers finish more games this season. Belton lost a number of games in the fourth quarter a year ago.

"We have to get past that," Buuck said. "All of the games we lost, we didn't finish."

Buuck said spring workouts went pretty well, and he looks forward to the season starting Sept. 1.

"I love our stadium and fans," Buuck said. "The student section is loud, the band is playing, and it is one of the loudest stadiums in the area."

Buuck will be sandwiched between two University of Houston commits. Defensive end Logan Hall has committed to the Cougars as has safety Garrison Vaughn. Vaughn set a school record last year with four interceptions in one game, turning two of them into touchdowns.

Clayton Blank gives Belton a formidable

front line as a defensive end on the opposite side of Logan.

"It is tough year-to-year, but guys have to step up

and fill leadership roles," Belton coach Sam Skidmore said. "Our goal is to advance further in the playoffs."



**JUSTIN BUUCK**

ERIC J. SHELTON | HERALD



## BELTON TIGERS

## DISTRICT 8-6A

### 2017 SCHEDULE

### RECORDS

9/1	at Temple	7:30	10/6	Killeen	7:30	2016	8-4
9/8	Hendrickson	7:30	10/20	at Midway	7:30	2015	5-6
9/15	at Stony Point	7:00	10/27	Shoemaker	7:30	2014	6-6
9/22	Round Rock	7:30	11/2	at Ellison	7:00	2013	2-8
9/28	at Harker Heights	7:00	11/10	Copperas Cove	7:30	2012	6-4

# KRUEGER TO LEAD OFFENSE FROM CENTER POSITION

by Jeff Steers

Belton High School football player Aaron Krueger said he likes to know more about his opponents than they know about themselves.

He has the video to prove it. Krueger is entering his second year as the starting center for the Tigers. The offense scored more than 40

everything in."

It shows as Krueger makes all of the offensive line calls for the offense and keeps everyone on the same page.

"We tell our linemen, 'If you are confused, Aaron will get us all on the same page,'" head coach Sam Skidmore said. "He gives us a chance to succeed."

Krueger has succeeded in baseball at Belton. He was 3-1 on the mound last season and hit over .300. He would love to play football in college, but baseball may be his calling. Krueger spent the summer working at both sports.

"I would get up at 6, lift weights until 8 a.m., go to work until the afternoon and then practice baseball," Krueger said. "It is a lot of work."

Krueger also excels in the classroom, although he is frustrated about not being in the top 10 percent of his class with a 3.98 grade point average. But he has a plan — as he normally does.

"I am going to pass a lot of people in the senior class who are taking the year off," Krueger said with a smile.

The center will have plenty of help from his offensive teammates.

Miguel Torres and Jacob Lovell return as linemen for the Tigers.

Bryce Julian and Darren Rector are expected to carry the load at running back. Marshall Fish, Chandler Vela and Riley Brown are three receivers who have experience from last year. Fish was an all-district player for

the Tigers last year.

Cameron Davis is expected to be the starting quarterback for Belton.

"We were really close last year, but it showed us we could play with the top teams in the state," Skidmore said. "Our next step is to make a further run in the playoffs."



**AARON KRUEGER**

JEFF STEERS | HERALD

points a game in eight of 12 contests a year ago with quarterback Peyton Mansell at the helm.

Mansell is gone, but Krueger and a number of starters remain.

Krueger spends nearly two hours each day watching film of opponents, studying formations, blitz situations and other nuances on the other side of the football.

"I try to know the opponents better than they know themselves," Krueger said. "I have been around football (in Belton) since I was young, just taking



**CHANDLER VELA**

Belton's Chandler Vela (6) takes the ball in for a touchdown against Copperas Cove during a game at Bulldawg Stadium in 2016.

ERIC J. SHELTON | HERALD



# BELTON TIGERS

## VARSITY CHEER



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# BELTON TIGERS



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**JV MAGIC BELLES**

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# COPPERAS COVE BULLDAWGS

## COVE HAS EXPERIENCE RETURNING ON DEFENSE

by Jeff Steers



Copperas Cove High School football player Jack Shumaker is expected to be one of the top defensive players for the Bulldawgs this season.

JEFF STEERS | HERALD

Copperas Cove High School defensive lineman Juan Jimenez said he would like to someday play in the National Football League.

Or become an engineer.

The senior may want to help re-engineer a defensive comeback for the Bulldawgs this season. Three times

last season, CCHS gave up 48 or more points.

Copperas Cove finished 4-5 a year ago, missing the UIL playoffs.

"We are a little short in height on defense ... but we are going to be pretty salty," head coach Jack Welch said. Jimenez and the other defensive players are a little peppered over the ending to last season.

"It was devastating the way last year ended ... it was a blow to us," Jimenez said. "That was a lesson for us juniors to bring back the legacy of Copperas Cove football."

With 16 NFL players coming from Copperas Cove, Jimenez said it is important for younger players to learn about

that legacy.

"It is very special to us Bulldawgs," Jimenez said. "I think that every incoming freshman needs to learn about the legacy at Cove and the pride that we have."

Joining Jimenez on the defensive side of the ball are linebacker Jack Shumaker and defensive end Brandon Simmons. Shumaker moved up to the varsity level as a sophomore and started the last three games of the season.

"Going from freshman football to the varsity level was intense," Shumaker said.

Shumaker said there was something different at the

summer workouts at Copperas Cove.

"The workout program was the same, but there was an intensity there," Shumaker said. "A couple of times our intensity level (during games) was not where I thought it should be."

"We have to live up to the legacy at Cove."

Floyd Connell moved into the secondary during the season and intercepted three passes, returning one for a touchdown. Connell also averaged 22.8 yards per kickoff return and 7.7 yards on punt returns.

He earned all-district honors for his efforts.



FLOYD CONNELL

Copperas Cove wide receiver and defensive back Floyd Connell catches a pass during morning practice in April at the Copperas Cove practice field.

GABE WOLF | HERALD



## COPPERAS COVE BULLDAWGS

### DISTRICT 8-6A

### 2017 SCHEDULE

9/1	at A&M Consolidated	7:30	10/6	at Shoemaker	7:30
9/8	UANL	7:30	10/13	Ellison	7:30
9/15	E.P. Franklin (at Andrews)	7:00	10/26	at Harker Heights	7:00
9/22	Sachse	7:30	11/3	Killeen	7:30
9/29	Midway	7:30	11/10	at Belton	7:30

### RECORDS

2016	4-5
2015	3-8
2014	7-4
2013	6-5
2012	7-4

## COVE EXPECTS TO BOUNCE BACK FROM SUBPAR SEASON

by Jeff Steers

Copperas Cove High School football player Jaylen Smith grew up idolizing Heisman Trophy winner Robert Griffin III, a graduate of the school district and an NFL free agent.

He saw him on the football field, at the track and at church.



JEFF STEERS | HERALD

Smith can create his own legacy at CCHS this season as he will be the starting quarterback for the Bulldogs.

CCHS finished the season 4-5 a year ago and missed the UIL playoffs. Smith said walking off the field last November was sad.

"That was a devastating moment ... Cove has always gone to the playoffs," Smith said. "We are bouncing back and it pushed everyone this summer in the weight room to get stronger and faster.

"We spent extra time working on the passing game after workouts."

The southpaw would like to play football and base-

ball in college. His nearly 90-mph fastball has him tabbed as a baseball player at the collegiate level.

"Playing baseball in college would be great ... but I would love to be able to play both sports," Smith said.

The Bulldogs are picked to finish fifth in District 8-6A by a number of experts.

Smith disagrees with that assessment.

"That motivates us to get better," Smith said. "We will let everyone else do the talking ... we will do it on the field."

Smith will be helped by a trio of running backs — Myles Alexander, Tim Edwards and Shontez Simmons. Edwards finished with five touchdowns and more than 250 rushing yards, and Alexander scored in his

second varsity game.

"We talk about last year every day and have a chip on our shoulder," Alexander said. "We made sure this season almost everyone was at workouts."

Floyd Connell is a two-way player for the Bulldogs who caught 24 passes and finished with nearly 800 all-purpose yards in 2016.

Coach Jack Welch said the Bulldogs will have to use a ball-control offense, giving the defense time to recover.

"We have to control the clock and give our defense a better opportunity," Welch said. "We are not oversized (defensively)."



TIM EDWARDS

Copperas Cove running back Tim Edwards carries the ball during morning workouts at Copperas Cove.



# COPPERAS COVE BULLDOGS

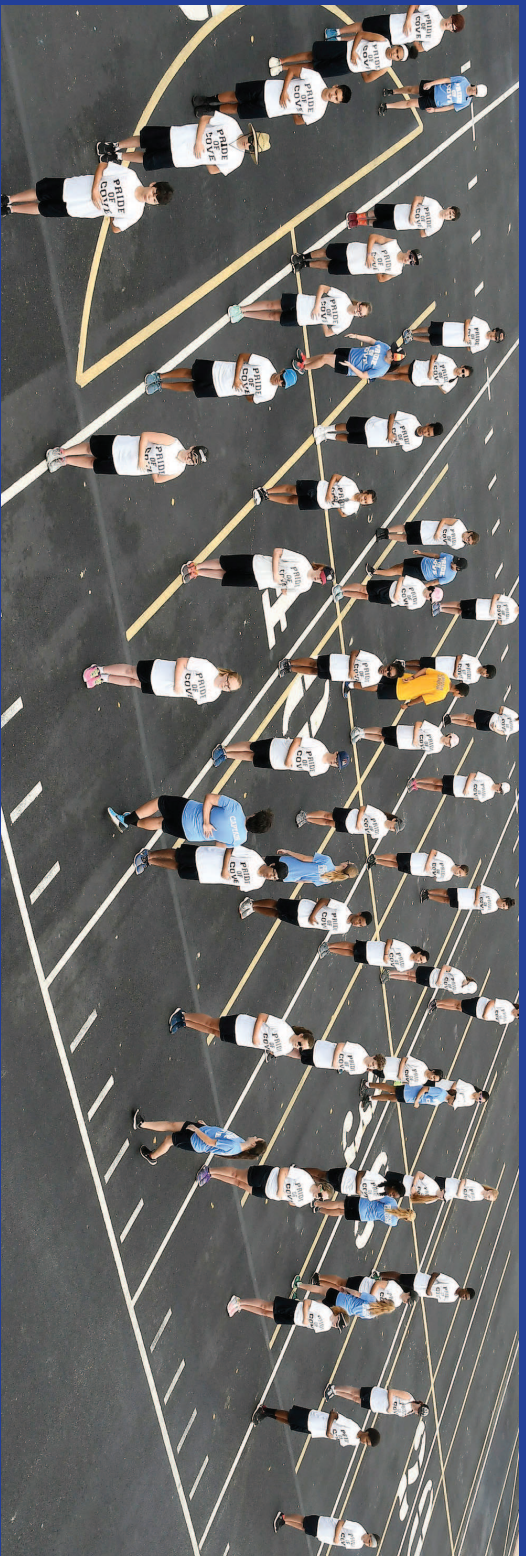
## FLAG CORPS



Members of the Copperas Cove High School color guard use some footwork during practice Aug. 3.

JEFF STEERS | HERALD

## MARCHING BAND



Members of the Copperas Cove High School marching band practice Aug. 3 in the high school parking lot.

JEFF STEERS | HERALD



# COPPERAS COVE BULLDOGS

## CHEERLEADERS



HERALD | FILE

## COPPERETTES



The Copperas Cove High School Copperettes perform their annual show for the public, giving a sneak peek of upcoming performances that will be on display at sporting and community events.

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## CREATING TURNOVERS TO BE A KEY FOR EAGLES DEFENSE

by Quinton Lilley

An aggressive, attacking defense is what head coach Trent Gregory expects from his defense this season as the Eagles look to take the next step in the program's progression.

Last season the Eagles started off hot, winning six of their first seven games. However, the defense allowed at least 21 points in every game last season.

"In order for us to win, we have to work harder than every team we play against," Gregory said.

Two key returners to the Ellison defense this year will be senior cornerback Kipshawn Washington — whom Gregory says will see some time at running back, and senior safety Sullivan Sanders. Both players will look to help the Eagles defense improve this season in



**KIPSHAWN WASHINGTON**

Ellison's Kipshawn Washington takes the kickoff against Round Rock Stony Point last season at Leo Buckley Stadium.

DENNIS KNOWLTON | HERALD

pass coverage.

"Kip is a great kid, very smart, very coachable, and most of all he demands a lot out of himself. I think he will have a great season for us," Gregory said.

Sanders said he believes the defense is prepared to be better this year, and while his new role as a starter and leader on the team comes with more pressure, he believes he's ready for the job.

"We have a really

strong defensive backfield this year, and pass coverage overall is about trust. These are my brothers; I trust them to do their job, and they trust me as a safety to help them out when they make a mistake," Sanders said.

Sanders said as a leader on the defense and the last line of defense, his vocal communication with the other players will be key if the defense wants to succeed this year.

"I'm doing better studying

coverages on film, being more physical and being more competitive with my teammates at practice. The more we push each other in practice, the better prepared we will be for the games," Sanders said.

The key for the Eagles will be not to peak too soon, as they did in 2016. If they can finish the season like they started 2016, look for them to be back in the playoffs for the first time in Gregory's tenure.



**SULLIVAN SANDERS**

ERIC. J. SHELTON | HERALD



## ELLISON EAGLES

### DISTRICT 8-6A

### 2017 SCHEDULE

### RECORDS

8/31	at Leander	7:00	10/13	at Copperas Cove	7:30	2016	6-4
9/8	at Stony Point	7:00	10/20	Harker Heights	7:30	2015	6-4
9/15	at Montgomery	7:30	10/27	at Killeen	7:30	2014	2-8
9/22	Waco University	7:30	11/2	Belton	7:00	2013	0-10
9/29	Shoemaker	7:30	11/9	at Waco Midway	7:00	2012	0-10

## EAGLES OFFENSE LOOKS TO CONTINUE FLYING HIGH

by Quinton Lilley

The Ellison Eagles were arguably one of the most potent offenses in the district last season, and will look to continue their offensive tear in 2017.

While the Eagles will have a number of weapons at receiver with Tavon Gwynn and Jyair Shorter returning for their senior years, the biggest question to be answered will be if newly-named starting quarterback Breezion Spiller can fill the void left by last year's starter Carl Robinson III, who graduated.

Head coach Trent Gregory said he believes the team has done a great job adjusting and making things easier for Spiller in his first year as the starter.

"We had a really good spring game, and we have a lot of good, hard-working kids on our team, and they've all embraced Breezion as our starting quarterback."

According to Gregory, the team used the spring as a time to improve its strength, speed and agility.

"Last year, I didn't think we got as good of push in the run game and had to rely on the passing game a little too much. I think this year we will be a more balanced ball club and give maximum effort all of the time," Gregory said.

also see some time as quarterback, where last season he completed two passes for 124 yards and a touchdown.

"As a team this year, we will need to show confidence in each other, play fast, and trust one another," Gwynn said.

Gwynn said one thing he wanted to work on this

to lift everyone else up is something that will help the morale of the team again this year.

"Coach Gregory has been like a father figure to me, and I really appreciate everything he's done for me these past four years," Gwynn said.

Gregory said he wants all of his coaches and players



**TAVON GWYNN • RIAN MCKINLEY**

Tavon Gwynn (18) scores on a 36-yard pass as Rian Mckinley pursues him into the end zone during Ellison's spring game. The offense outscored the Eagles defense 63-32.

ANDY ZAVOINA | HERALD

The Eagles got off to a hot start in 2016, going 6-1 though their first seven games before dropping their last three district games, narrowly missing the playoffs.

"I just don't think we did a good job finishing some of those games late in the season. Our motto this year is '4th and inches,' we want to treat every day we come to work like its fourth-and-inches to make each drill, hour and opportunity count," Gregory said.

One of the team's offensive leaders will be Gwynn. The wide receiver had 48 receptions for 712 yards and seven touchdowns a season ago. Gwynn may

offseason was to become a better blocker on run plays.

"This spring I worked on my blocking, making sure I give 100 percent on every play even if the ball isn't coming my way on the play," Gwynn said.

Being humble, not overlooking an opponent, and better communication are also things Gwynn believes will help the team to be better this season.

Gwynn said coach Gregory's mindset at practice and ability

to be energy givers not energy takers.

"It's not about me, it's about all of us reaching our goals together, we can most definitely make the playoffs," Gwynn said.



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# HARKER HEIGHTS KNIGHTS

## NEW KNIGHTS TO DEFEND THE SHIELD

by Quinton Lilley

If the Harker Heights offensive motto is to 'honor the shield' then the Knights defense will be tasked with defending it.

The defense will see plenty of new players as 10 of the team's 11 starters did not start last season.

And while many people might question how much talent the defense will have this year, the lone returning starter might be one of the district's best defensive ends — Joseph Evans.

"Joseph is just a big, tall, fast, track athlete who plays football really well," coach Jerry Edwards said.

Evans was such an effective pass rusher off the edge that he led the team in sacks in 2016.

Edwards has been instrumental in the improvements made to the defense during spring ball. He has implored the unit to give better effort, tackle with better technique,



**JOSEPH EVANS • COACH RANDY CULP**

Defensive end Joseph Evans runs through drills during spring practice as coach Randy Culp looks on at the Harker Heights practice field.

GABE WOLF | HERALD

and know its defensive assignments.

"With my defensive background, I've definitely been heavily involved with the development of our team defense. If we can't play defense, we can't win games," Edwards said.

Edwards credited the defense for how well

it played in the spring game and at practices, saying the team's overall effort has been much better and the team has consistently swarmed to the ball.

Evans said he believes fans will see an improved team this season, especially on defense where players seem more hungry and

focused on the task at hand.

"Our secondary has really stepped up this spring, our linebackers have done a better job covering the running lanes, and our defensive line is steadily improving," Evans said.

The Knights defense worked on being more disciplined, limiting penalties and focusing more on defensive assignments.

"Last year, we let a lot of short plays turn into long plays, and we can't do that

this year if we want to win. The better our communication is, the better we will be," Evans said.

If the Knights defense can limit the opportunities of its opponents and combine it with a strong running game, Heights could be the surprise team in the district.



## HARKER HEIGHTS KNIGHTS

### DISTRICT 8-6A

#### 2017 SCHEDULE

9/1	at Elgin	7:30	10/6	at Waco Midway	7:30
9/7	Round Rock McNeil	7:00	10/13	Shoemaker	7:30
9/15	Waco	7:30	10/20	at Ellison	7:30
9/22	at Austin Vandergrift	7:30	10/26	Copperas Cove	7:00
9/28	Belton	7:00	11/10	at Killeen	7:30

#### RECORDS

2016	6-5
2015	2-8
2014	5-5
2013	2-8
2012	4-7

# HARKER HEIGHTS KNIGHTS

## PHYSICAL LINE PLAY TO BE A KEY IN KNIGHTS' SUCCESS

by Quinton Lilley

Head coach Jerry Edwards is a no-nonsense, hard-nosed coach whose personality has immersed itself into his teams' DNA.

He boasts one of the top offensive lines in Central Texas, paired with some of the area's best running backs.

Sophomore quarterback Stacy Brown will be looking to replace the senior leadership of Robert Gray and Daniel Cole to build on the success of last season.

Running back Jameel Hodges, who ran for over 1,000 yards as a junior, is expected to be one of the offensive leaders.

"We have a lot of great weapons on offense, but Jameel has really stepped it up this year. He's been at every practice and every meeting the last two years. He's been a great example of how hard you have to work in order to be a great leader," Edwards said.

Edwards said he's seen Hodges fully commit to the team, and as a result, others have followed him as well.

"I want to become the best all-around player I can be. This spring and summer I've been doing a lot more in the weight room trying to improve my strength so I can break through arm tackles better," Hodges said.

Hodges, who was argu-

ably one of the best running backs in the district last year, said he also wants to become a great receiving threat out of the backfield as well as the slot.

"We have a lot of guys who can do a lot of things on offense and if we can get all our weapons on the field at once, that will give us a better chance to win games," Hodges said.

Another player expected to assume a leadership role this year is senior offensive lineman Taunty Motu. Starting at right guard, Motu will look to lead running lanes for Hodges.

Motu said he believes the experience of last year will help the team perform better in key moments this year.

"Last year, we made the



**TAUNTY MOTU**

ERIC. J. SHELTON | HERALD



**JAMEEL HODGES**

Harker Heights' Jameel Hodges (20) tries to escape a Waco tackler during a 2016 game.

ANDY ZAVOINA | HERALD

mistake of not taking every team seriously and lost some games we shouldn't have, especially after we had a good start to the season," Motu said.

As an individual, Motu said, he worked on his technique and lower body strength to hold off pass rushers more effectively this season.

"The coaches have really been working with me on improving my technique, doing lots of squats and deadlifts so bull rushes won't work on me this season," Motu said.

Last season, the Knights got off to a tremendous start, going 4-1 through the first five weeks. However the

Knights seemed to peak too early as they went on to lose four of their final six games, ending the season with a respectable 6-5 record.

The Knights believe they've learned from the mistakes they made last season and expect to not only make the playoffs this season but win games once they get there.

"As an offense, we need to continue to put the pressure on teams, never let up and score points every quarter," Hodges said.

"If we always respect our opponents and remain humble, we have a great shot at winning multiple championships," Hodges said.



# HARKER HEIGHTS KNIGHTS

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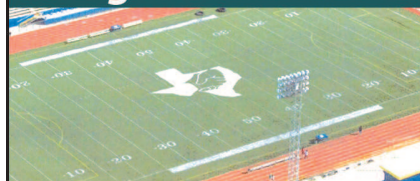
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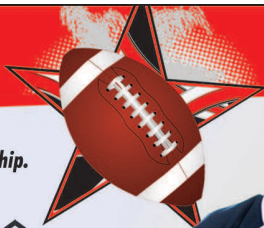
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# KILLEEN KANGAROOS

## KANGAROO DEFENSE LOOKS TO IMPROVE THE 'NO-FLY ZONE'

by Quinton Lilley

If the Kangaroos want to make a deep run into the playoffs, a needed area of improvement is the team's passing defense.

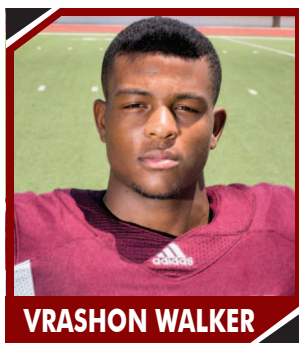
In 2016, the team started a myriad of young players head coach Neil Searcy hopes will learn from their experiences.

"Our defense started three underclassmen last year and seven of our starters return this year. The defense will need to grow from their experiences last year if we are going to have a chance to win big this year," Searcy said.

Last season, the defense was led by junior outside linebacker Vrashon Walker, who suffered a broken leg in a non-district game early last season. Known as a great athlete, Walker still had 31 tackles and two

fumble recoveries before his injury halfway through the season.

The defense's best unit may be its linebacking corps, which returns juniors Tula Lefotu (55 tackles) and Chris Ingram (70 tackles). Both Ingram and Lefotu were major contributors as sophomores and are expected to start alongside Walker this season.



**VRASHON WALKER**

ERIC J. SHELTON | HERALD

Walker also said the defense needs to make things harder on its opponents' passing attack as the

team repeatedly gave up big plays through the air last year.

"If we want to win, we have to create that 'no-fly zone' where offenses know they can't pass against us," Walker said.

Sophomore safety Willie McGee — who had a

game-winning interception against Harker Heights last season — will look to lead the defensive backfield.

If the Kangaroo defense can create some more turnovers and limit the big plays of opposing teams' offenses, the Kangaroos should have a chance to beat the best in the playoffs.

"This is my last year playing here, I just want to win," Walker said.

If the Kangaroos are successful at creating the 'no fly zone' this season, expect for them to make their way back in to the playoffs in 2017.



**MONTEGO MUCKELVANEY • TALUAI HISTAKE**

Montego Muckelvaney, left, of the Maroon team, is brought down by Taluai Histake of the White team during Killeen High School's spring game at Leo Buckley Stadium.

HERALD | FILE



## KILLEEN KANGAROOS

### DISTRICT 8-6A

### 2017 SCHEDULE

### RECORDS

9/1	Round Rock Stony Point	7:30	10/12	Waco Midway	7:00	2016	5-6
9/8	at Waco	7:30	10/19	at Shoemaker	7:00	2015	2-8
9/14	Austin Vandegrift	7:00	10/27	Ellison	7:30	2014	4-6
9/22	at Round Rock McNeil	7:00	11/3	at Copperas Cove	7:30	2013	3-7
10/6	at Belton	7:30	11/10	Harker Heights	7:30	2012	8-3

# KILLEEN KANGAROOS

## KANGAROOS LOOK TO TAKE THE NEXT STEP ON OFFENSE

by Quinton Lilley

After a slow start to the 2016 season when the Killeen Kangaroos football team went 1-5 through their first six games, the team bounced back to win its last four District 8-6A games.

Third-year head coach Neil Searcy said he believes the sky is the limit for his team in 2017 as it looks to use its 4-1 end to last year's season as a momentum-building springboard into the upcoming campaign.

"We have a lot of key returners, including Marcellus (Johnson), Montego (Muckelvaney) and Vrashon (Walker), who will need to step up in a big way for us to win this year," Searcy said in July.



**MARCELLUS JOHNSON**

ERIC J. SHELTON | HERALD

The key mantra the Kangaroos are using this year is GRIT — Greatness, Relentless, Investment, Toughness.

"We want to be known as the most gritty team in the state, a team whose discipline limits our turnovers and penalties. If we can

do those things, I like our chances against anybody," Searcy said.

The Killeen offense begins with senior starting quarterback Johnson. As a junior, Johnson showed off his speed as a runner, as well as his ability to throw the ball down the field for explosive plays in the passing game.

"For our team to prosper, Marcellus has to be the 'guy.' As a senior, we need him to be a leader on the field who keeps us on an even keel throughout the season. I expect him to build on a good junior season and be even better this year," Searcy said.

The 6-foot-4-inch quarterback threw for 1,385 yards and 10 touchdowns in 2016. Johnson also proved he was a viable running threat, rushing for 694 yards and five touchdowns.

"My main goal this spring and summer was to become a better leader overall, to lead vocally and by example," Johnson said.

Johnson also said he recalls in games last year against Belton, Waco Midway and DeSoto, that he occasionally had his head down and became frustrated when things weren't going well for the team.

"As the leader, I can't hold my head down. I have to remain positive, and be more vocal with my teammates, especially when things get tough," Johnson said.

According to Johnson, the offense struggled at times early in the season to stay on the field, causing multiple three-and-out possessions.

"In order for our offense to be successful, I know I have to keep our offense on schedule, be patient with my decision-making and keep the chains moving," Johnson said.

One of the biggest areas of improvement according to Johnson was his pocket passing. Johnson worked throughout the spring and summer with his main target, 6-4 receiver Muckelvaney, who is also coming off a big junior season in which he had 53 catches for 877 yards and eight touchdowns.

Muckelvaney said the offense hasn't changed much from a season ago, but the team has worked hard to perfect all of its play calls.

"I think, for us, the biggest thing is being consistent. All of us, as a team, being committed to giving 100 percent effort every play," Muckelvaney said.

Muckelvaney, on a number of occasions last season, proved to be a deep threat. The wideout showed an adept ability to win 50/50 balls against smaller defenders, which led to



**DEMARIONTAE MOORE**

Demariontae Moore runs for a gain for the Maroon squad against the White team during the 2017 spring game at Leo Buckley Stadium.

HERALD | FILE

many big plays. However, Muckelvaney said he's not satisfied with his performance last year and has been working to improve as an all-around receiver, not just a deep threat.

"I've really worked hard to improve my speed, change of direction, and my route running overall," Muckelvaney said.

If both Muckelvaney and Johnson can be on the same page all season, they could create one of the district's top passing tandems.

"We both want to score every time, and we both want to win state. We can be that dynamic duo. We just have to make it happen," Muckelvaney said.

If the Kangaroos get off to a better start in 2017 than they did in 2016, Muckelvaney may be right.



# KILLEEN KANGAROOS

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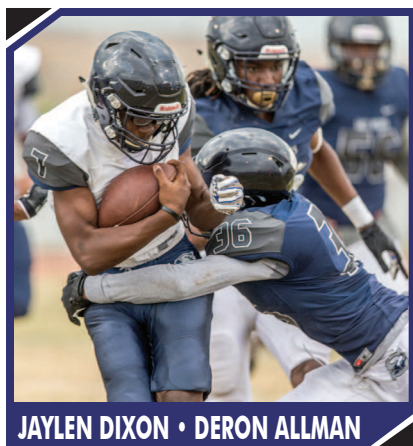
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# SHOEMAKER GREY WOLVES

## IMPROVED PASS COVERAGE TO HELP GREY WOLVES DEFENSE

by Quinton Lilley



JAYLEN DIXON • DERON ALLMAN

White team quarterback Jaylen Dixon is hit by Blue's Deron Allman during the Shoemaker Blue & White spring game earlier in the year.

HERALD | FILE

While the Grey Wolves were unable to win a game last season, one of the team's bright spots was the defense's play. Seen as one of the fastest teams in the

district, Shoemaker boasted a number of athletes on defense who made plays to keep the Grey Wolves in ball-games.

However, new head coach Toby Foreman believes his defense can take its play to a new level this year.

"Having team speed on defense is great, but if you don't use that speed to go in the right direction, it's useless. We've worked with our

guys this year on knowing their assignments better and being more prepared to defend," Foreman said.

The team has specifically been working on pass coverage, hoping to limit the amount of deep passing plays.

A key to executing

the team's pass coverage will be senior cornerback William Hooper.

Hooper — who was a starting corner last year — said the team has worked to improve its pass coverage and pass rushing this spring.

"We have a lot of speed on defense, and if we can work together, we can be a great defense this year," Hooper said.

Hooper also said he's tried to become a better leader for the team as a senior.



WILLIAM HOOPER

HERALD | FILE

"With this being my last year, a lot of younger guys look to me to know what we have to be doing out there, so I've tried to be more vocal on the field and help the other guys out more," Hooper said.

A key for the Shoemaker defense will giving consistent, maximum effort for all four quarters, as the defense occasionally struggled late in games with miscommunication.

Defensive line play will also be a key factor in the defense's effectiveness. Senior defensive lineman Nathalohn Nanai is expected to lead the group of pass rushers and run stoppers.

"We have to create turnovers, fly around the ball and make sure everyone is sticking to their assignments. If we do that, we should be fine," Nanai said.

Both Hooper and Nanai also said they believe the defense is more unified and is showing signs of being a more cohesive unit this year.

"We are playing for each other, and when you know someone has your back, it helps you go that much harder," Nanai said.



## SHOEMAKER GREY WOLVES

### DISTRICT 8-6A

### 2017 SCHEDULE

9/2	Nuevo Leon	6:00	10/6	Copperas Cove	7:30
9/8	College Station	7:30	10/13	at Harker Heights	7:30
9/14	at Round Rock Cedar Ridge	7:00	10/19	Killeen	7:00
9/21	San Angelo Central	7:00	10/27	at Belton	7:30
9/29	at Ellison	7:30	11/3	Waco Midway	7:30

### RECORDS

2016	0-10
2015	9-3
2014	6-5
2013	7-4
2012	2-8

# SHOEMAKER GREY WOLVES

## GREY WOLVES LOOKING FOR REDEMPTION IN 2017

by Quinton Lilley

Heading into the 2016 season, many locals believed the Grey Wolves were primed for a deep playoff run just as the team had done in 2015. However, the Grey Wolves were unable to win a game last season and will look to bounce back as a district power this season with new head coach Toby Foreman at the helm.

Foreman spent the previous four years as head football coach and athletic coordinator at Class 5A Beaumont Central, where he led the Jaguars to a 21-7 district record, four playoff appearances and a league title in 2014.

Foreman also had stops as an assistant at La Marque; Texarkana, Texas; West Orange-Stark; and Baytown Lee.

Foreman said he has already been hard at work to change the culture of the program back into a winning one.

"I believe our team is extremely hungry for success, and I have high expectations for them," Foreman said.

One of the main ways Foreman has tried to change the culture has been through emphasizing the importance of creating a family atmosphere.

"As a football team, we always end our workouts and practices with a break on 'family,' you have to be willing to fight for your brother beside

you at all costs if you want to win," Foreman said.

Foreman also said he believes in promoting his team and players as much as possible.

"We may be the only team in the area that has five former college coaches on our staff, and that will pay dividends in getting these kids to play on the next level," Foreman said.

On offense, Foreman expects to run the ball effectively, but to do so he will need improvement from his offensive line and better leadership from starting running back Cameron Bausley.

"I've really improved my work ethic

this spring and summer to be a better leader for the other guys on the team. We are more of a collective unit and the o-line has been working hard too," Bausley said.

The nearly 240-pound Bausley said that while his strength will continue to be his main weapon of choice, he's also worked on his agility and speed this offseason as well.

"As a team we've been more focused this offseason, and I've been working on becoming a better back overall. Coach Foreman has been a role model for all of us to follow," Bausley said.

Under Foreman's tutelage, Bausley could become a Jerome Bettis type of back who can change a game simply because defenders won't want to tackle him.

"There aren't many great things about losing every game, but when you go winless the only thing you can do is get better," Foreman said.



**CAMERON BAUSLEY • JONATHAN MEDLOCK • MAURICE TAYLOR**

Cameron Bausley, center in white, is met by Blue team defenders Jonathan Medlock (32) and Maurice Taylor (31) at the Shoemaker Blue & White spring game at Shoemaker High School.



# SHOEMAKER GREY WOLVES

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## CHEMISTRY MAY BE BEST SUBJECT FOR GATESVILLE DEFENSE

by Clay Whittington

Zach Mueller believes teams are not made on the field. They merely play there.

Coming off an impressive sophomore season, Gatesville's safety enters 2017 with the hopes of helping the Hornets return to the playoffs after failing to qualify last year.

To do so, however, he knows the defense cannot afford to repeat its performance from 2016.

Gatesville allowed 39.3 points per game, including being outscored 227-119 in the third and fourth quarters, and forced just 11 turnovers, culminating with a four-game losing skid to end the campaign.

Mueller is convinced the defense will be improved this season, and while the Hornets spent all offseason attempting to become bigger, stronger, faster and more familiar with their duties, he feels something else will be responsible for any potential success.

"We have amazing team chemistry," Mueller said.

"We don't just have it at the field house. It's there outside of school and practice, because we are all really good friends and really tight-knit.

"Just knowing that we will all have each others' backs before, during and after the games is the best feeling in the world."

In addition to possessing an intangible camaraderie, Gatesville has plenty of talent as well.

The Hornets return defensive starters all over the field, including a pair of tackles, linebackers and safeties.

Owen Sibley and Cairi Chansler will anchor the defensive line during their senior seasons after combining to record 122 tackles, including 13 for a loss, and breaking up 13 passes a year ago.

Mueller, who posted 46 solo tackles and assisted on 30 more last year, returns as Gatesville's top tackler following the graduation of standout linebacker Sam Jackson. Will Carroll, a senior, joins Mueller as the other starting safety after a 68-tackle season in 2016.

Additionally, linebackers T.J. Miller and Austin Bayer are each set to become second-year starters for the Hornets. Last year, each averaged more than six tackles per game.

Junior cornerback Jalun Taylor rounds out the group of defensive returners after tallying 54 tackles and scoring Gatesville's only defensive touchdown last season.

"We just have a host of kids who have been there and done that," Gatesville coach Kyle Cooper said, "and we feel like we have some really good ones stepping up to fill the other roles."

Part of the Hornets' fortune will be determined by how quickly the defensive newcomers become accli-



**ZACH MUELLER**

Gatesville's Zach Mueller runs toward the end zone against Waco Connally last season in Waco.

ERIC J. SHELTON | HERALD

mated with the system and its nuances.

Despite being just a junior, Mueller is more than willing to do his part to accelerate the process.

"I've been on varsity for two years now," he said, "and I've learned there are

things you can get away with in practice that you can't in a game, so it's important to do every drill and all the little things right.

"I feel like I have the authority, like a coach would, to tell someone to pick it up if they are slacking."

# GATESVILLE HORNETS

## IN JETT WE TRUSS MAY BE GATESVILLE'S BATTLE CRY

by Clay Whittington

Jett Truss' lofty standards are set.

Gatesville's second-year starting quarterback is entering his senior season with high expectations for the offense. With a majority of the playmakers returning from 2016, Truss feels the Hornets are poised to be one of the area's most explosive squads.

And he does not mind admitting it.

"I believe if we don't score 40 points each game," Truss said, "then we're not doing enough."

"The rest of the guys are all kind of on the same page. Nobody thinks it is out of reach, and it is all about just going out and doing it."

To reach the 40-point plateau, however, Gatesville must improve on last

year's performance, when it averaged 31.4 points with a cast of juniors at critical positions, including Truss and leading running back Alex Thompson.

While the large group of returners shares a collective understanding of the offensive system and their individual roles within it, Hornets head coach Kyle Cooper believes statistics are inconsequential.

"To say we have a goal as a coaching staff to go and score 40 points or whatever amount per game is not what it's about," he said.

"The only goal is to win."

"But can we be explosive this year? Yes, I believe we can, and that is exciting."

A majority of the team's confidence stems from its offensive line, with three returning starters in center Kipp Gellasch, guard Eladio Cedillo and tackle Austin Lee, and senior Scott Black is expected to make a smooth transition into

the group after playing tight end last year.

Wyatt Tackett, a junior, Jim Hitchcock and Connor Barrows, who returns to the team after living elsewhere in 2016, are competing for the final spot.

With each standing at or above 6 feet tall and weighing nearly 280 pounds, the unit should prove challenging for opposing defenses, giving Gatesville the opportunity to be multidimensional on the field.

"I've been here 11 years," Cooper said, "and we've never had a set of big boys like we have now. So, we're just really excited about what those guys bring to the table."

Joining dual-threat Truss, who accounted for more than 2,000 total yards and 27 touch-

downs last season, and Thompson (1,747 yards, 10 touchdowns) as offensive playmakers will be receivers Zach Mueller and Derrick Bayer among others.

Mueller is the team's top returning receiver with 20 catches for 188 yards last year, while Bayer is considered an explosive threat after missing all of 2016 with an ACL injury. Both were on varsity during the Hornets' last playoff run two seasons ago, when they reached the third round.

"We have the ability to be more balanced this year," Truss said. "Last year, we were really run heavy, and we were really good at it, but this year, we are explosive both on the ground and through the air."



**JETT TRUSS**

Gatesville quarterback Jett Truss keeps the ball for a 6-yard touchdown run against China Spring last season in Gatesville.

GABE WOLF | HERALD



## GATESVILLE HORNETS

### DISTRICT 13-4A, D1

### 2017 SCHEDULE

### RECORDS

9/1	Waco Connally	7:30	10/13	at Lampasas	7:30	2016	4-6
9/8	at Cameron Yoe	7:30	10/20	Burnet	7:30	2015	6-7
9/15	Waco University	7:30	10/27	at China Spring	7:30	2014	4-7
9/22	at Hillsboro	7:30	11/3	at La Vega	7:30	2013	3-7
9/29	Robinson	7:30	11/10	Liberty Hill	7:30	2012	13-1



# GATESVILLE HORNETS

## CHEERLEADERS



DENNIS KNOWLTON | HERALD

## DANCE TEAM



DENNIS KNOWLTON | HERALD



# LAMPASAS BADGERS

## HARD-HITTING DEFENSE LOOKS TO MAKE STRIDES IN 2017

by Clay Whittington

Levi Rainwater's job is to tackle people, but it is really more of a passion.

After an entire offseason away from the intensity of the sport he loves, the Lampasas defensive end is anxiously anticipating the season opener, waiting for the moment he can once again create havoc on the field.



LEVI RAINWATER

SERGIO FLORES | HERALD

And he is not alone.

"All of us on the defense are physical people," Rainwater said. "We love hitting people."

"That's everything in defense. There are some really physical guys on this team, and I know for a fact our front seven is definitely out to hit."

Doing so could be crucial to the Badgers' season.

Lampasas allowed more points than any of its District 13-4A, Division I opponents in 2016, giving up 208 points during its five district games and 405 for the season.

Ending the trend might be difficult considering the Badgers lost almost half their starters to graduation, but Lampasas second-year head coach Troy Rogers feels the potential to become a solid defense is evident.

"We're going to be young," he said, "but we've got some pieces back that played a lot of football

for us last year.

"Then, of course, just by knowing the scheme better and understanding where they fit more and all those things will make us much improved defensively."

The Badgers must find a way to account for losing standout defensive back Logan Bender, who led the team total tackles, solo tackles and interceptions. Other key losses include linebackers Santos Vega, Billy West and Jace Hankins and linemen Eric Yescas and Brandon Crutchfield.

But Lampasas is not devoid of talent.

Along with Rainwater, fellow defensive back Daunte Cuffie is set to return after an impressive debut, recording 51 tackles and breaking up 11 passes as a freshman. Additionally, senior linebacker Michael Nguyen produced 69 tackles last season.

Competing in a district with several high-scoring

teams — including defending district champion and 2015 state champion La Vega and last year's state semifinalist China Spring — getting stops will be critical to the Badgers' hopes of returning to the

playoffs for the first time since 2011.

"In this district," Rogers said, "if you can get a team to punt three or four times, you're doing well. Nobody punts the ball, because the offenses are so explosive."

"We have to generate stops, and we have to win the field-position battle, which means also having a good kicking game."

The Badgers must also find a replacement for all-district punter Harrison Gillespie.

In the end, however, defensive success this season will not hinge on any one player, according to Rainwater.

"We definitely have to all do our jobs," he said. "If one of us messes up, it can mess up the whole defense, leaving holes and seams open for guys to go through."

"That could easily be a touchdown if any of us screw up."



## LAMPASAS BADGERS

### DISTRICT 13-4A, D1

#### 2017 SCHEDULE

9/1	at Fredericksburg	7:30	10/13	Gatesville	7:30
9/8	at Robinson	7:30	10/20	at Liberty Hill	7:30
9/15	at Wimberley	7:30	10/27	La Vega	7:30
9/22	at Lorena	7:30	11/3	Burnet	7:30
9/29	Canyon Lake	7:30	11/10	at China Spring	7:30

#### RECORDS

2016	1-9
2015	2-8
2014	5-5
2013	3-7
2012	1-9



## LAMPASAS' DRILLS PREPARE IT FOR 2ND YEAR WITH COACH

by Clay Whittington

Everything feels easier to Sean Williams.

Lampasas experienced a lot of change last season, ushering in a new head coach Troy Rogers, who immediately began expanding the Badgers' traditionally run-based offense to include more passing plays.

While the philosophical change resulted in Lampasas averaging 28.8 points per game, it also resulted in a measure of confusion at times.

This season, however, the Badgers senior running back does not foresee any such issues.

"Things are already going so much better than last year," Williams said. "During practice, everybody is able to grasp the drills, and everything is running smooth.

"We know what coach expects us to do, and now, we can just do it."

Rogers agreed.

"Just from a knowledge standpoint and after being in the system for a year," he said, "things are a lot better at this point now than last year, because they've retained so much."

Despite taking steps forward as a program, Lampasas' offense lost several key pieces, including three-year starting quarterback Cohen Cockburn and backup Harrison Gillespie, who started several games in 2016.

With the duo's high school careers complete, the



**COACH JOHN ROGERS • COACH TROY ROGERS • COACH PAUL WEINHEIMER**

Lampasas coach John Rogers, head coach Troy Rogers and coach Paul Weinheimer signal plays from the sideline against Liberty Hill during a 2016 contest.

GABE WOLF | HERALD

Badgers are searching for a new face to engineer the offense. Luckily, they have several to choose from.

Mason Steele, a junior, and freshmen Cameron Everts and Ethan Rascoe are all contenders for the starting job.

Along with the void at quarterback, Lampasas must rebuild its offensive line with guard Paul Peralta, a senior, and junior left tackle Rudy Esparza serving as the lone returning starters and adjust for the departure of tight end Jason Murphy, who accounted for 575 receiving yards and

nine touchdowns.

One area Rogers is not concerned with, though, is his running backs.

"Williams was just shy of 1,000 yards last year," he said. "He's going to bring a punch, and (sophomore) Daunte Cuffie is going to be in the backfield quite a bit, and those are two pretty dynamic runners."

The Badgers are also bringing back receiver Brandon Pierino, who recorded multiple 100-yard games as a junior last season.

Regardless of who is on the field, Lampasas must take better care of the ball

after finishing 2016 with 11 more turnovers than takeaways.

"We have to protect the ball better," Rogers said. "That is a glaring weakness, and so that is our focus."

Lampasas is also searching for a kicker to take the spot of Jared Salazar, and Williams hopes to find a reliable one, because he predicts the replacement could be very busy this season.

"We have to make sure we end every drive with a kick," Williams said, "whether it is a punt, a field goal or an extra point."



# LAMPASAS BADGERS

## MARCHING BAND



ERIC J. SHELTON | HERALD

## DANCE TEAM



DENNIS KNOWLTON | HERALD



# LAMPASAS BADGERS

## JV CHEERLEADERS



GABE WOLF | HERALD

## VARSITY CHEERLEADERS



GABE WOLF | HERALD

## EXPERIENCED, TOP-RATED DEFENSE LEADS EAGLES INTO NEW SEASON

by Clay Whittington

Without even stepping on the field, Jacob Wilk knew Salado's defense improved.

On the heels of the program's most successful season since reaching the Class 2A, Division I state semifinals in 2007, the Eagles are hoping to build on the momentum generated by last year's campaign.

With the defense limiting opponents to 21 points or fewer on seven occasions under first-year head coach Alan Haire, Salado will look to replicate the feat en route to another winning season after going 7-5 and reaching the second round of the playoffs in 2016.

While it is a difficult task, the Eagles senior linebacker knows his teammates are ready for the challenge.

"All the guys came into two-a-days ready," Wilk

said, "and that just shows you how much they care. When people want to do the little things like put on weight, work out daily, eat right, sleep right and just do anything they can to better themselves and the team.

"I can see everything these guys have done during the offseason, and it makes me proud to be part of this team."

The Eagles return a wealth of experience as nine defensive players return with significant playing time logged on the field.

Along with Wilk, linebackers Mac Miller and Wyatt Bagely are embarking on their senior seasons. Additionally, cornerbacks Quade Brown and Kaden Smien, safeties Cutter Hudgens and Holden Ford and defensive linemen Zach Adams and Andrew Sniggs are also returning.

"We've got a good core coming back," Haire said.

"It's a good group with

some experience, so the key is going to be staying healthy and getting better each week."

In 2016, Salado proved to be the best defense in District 9-4A, Division II throughout the season, allowing 269 points — at least 87 fewer than three other teams.

Now, however, the Eagles are without standouts like linebacker Tate Hill, who was the team's lone senior to land on the all-district first team defense.

Nevertheless, producing a similar effort this year against high-powered district opponents, including Robinson, Lorena and Waco Connally, will be critical to Salado's success.

While Wilk is confident the Eagles' defense is prepared, he also feels Salado has another weapon capable of slowing down its rivals.

"We're fortunate enough to have a solid offense that holds the ball for a long



JACOB WILK

HERALD | FILE

time and puts points on the board," Wilk said. "I trust our offense a lot, and I know if we don't get a stop, they're going to come back out and score. It's just a team effort.

"Having a good defense is great, but things are a lot easier for us when the offense is clicking."



## SALADO EAGLES

### DISTRICT 9-4A, D2

#### 2017 SCHEDULE

9/1	at Troy	7:30	10/13	Fairfield	7:30
9/8	Comfort	7:30	10/20	at Lorena	7:30
9/15	at Hyde Park	7:00	10/27	Mexia	7:30
9/22	Florence	7:00	11/3	Robinson	7:30
9/29	at Leander Glenn	7:30	11/10	at Connally	7:30

#### RECORDS

2016	7-5
2015	1-10
2014	0-10
2013	1-9
2012	2-8



## SALADO HOPES TO SCORE A HAIRE MORE POINTS

by Clay Whittington

Hayden Haire is obsessed with offense.

Since 2011, the Salado football team has struggled to score, topping the 200-point plateau for the season just twice and suffering through a two-year stretch with 14 single-digit outings, including four shutouts.

Last season, however, things changed.

With new head coach Alan Haire taking over the program, the Eagles experienced an offensive resurgence, averaging 25.75 points and scoring at least 33 points on six occasions with three 40-point outbursts.

Now, Salado is addicted, according to its starting quarterback.

"We just want to score a lot of points," senior Hayden Haire said. "Every time we go out on the field, our goal is to score."

"It doesn't matter if it's a long drive or a short drive, we just want to put the ball in the end zone. It can be from a throw or a run or whatever else as long as we score and win."

Alan Haire and Hayden Haire are father and son.

Victories also eluded the Eagles in recent history with the team producing a 2-29 record during the seven seasons prior to last year, when they advanced to the second round of the playoffs.

Although Salado must account for losing several

pieces, including 1,000-yard rusher Jake Harvey, Alan Haire has no doubt his players are already more prepared to produce than at this time last year.

"It's not our first year together anymore," he said, "so we are well ahead of the game, because all of the expectations have been set."

"The kids had a year to get use to me and a year within this system, so it's not like we're starting from scratch again."

The Eagles return six starters on offense, including Hayden Haire and 9-4A, Division II All-District

First-Team selections Trey Sheppard, a fullback, and center Willy Whigham. Additionally, running back Aaron Torczynski, lineman Robert Soto and tight ends Wade Woods and Ryan Kyburz, who split time at the position, are back for their senior seasons.

Relying on a slot-T scheme to generate a majority of its offense on the ground, one of Salado's primary concerns entering the season is solidifying its offensive line with only Whigham and Soto retuning.

Hayden Haire is confident the unit will be ready after

everything he observed during the offseason.

"It's going to be really important for them to be on the same page," Hayden Haire said, "but they did a great job during two-a-days."

"They're leading the way, being positive leaders, and it is just a great situation."

While the Eagles hope their offense can help guide them into the playoffs for a third consecutive season, Alan Haire is not allowing his players to look ahead or behind.

"We're not talking about the past," he said. "There's no reason to bring it up, because there's nothing we can do about it anyway."

"The main thing we need to do is just come in each day and work hard, and if we do that, good things might happen."



**HAYDEN HAIRE**

Salado quarterback Hayden Haire throws a pass against Waco Connally on Nov. 5 in Salado.

DENNIS KNOWLTON | HERALD



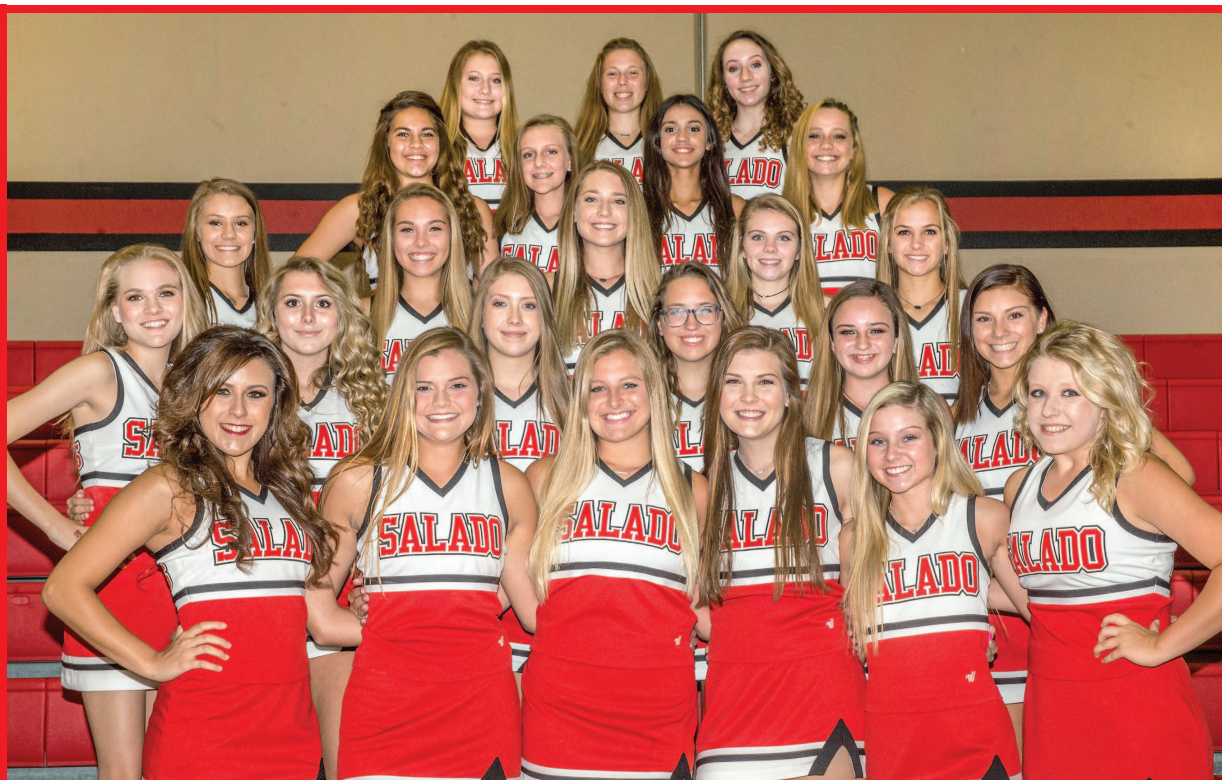
# SALADO EAGLES

## MARCHING BAND



ERIC J. SHELTON | HERALD

## CHEERLEADERS



ERIC J. SHELTON | HERALD



# FLORENCE BUFFALOES

## FAMILY ATMOSPHERE LEADS TO SUCCESS AT FLORENCE

by Jeff Steers

When a member of the Florence High School football team slips up in class or around the school, there are nine other "family members" putting the player back on track.

It is a family within a team.

Leaders of the Buffaloes believe it creates team unity.

Outside linebacker Justin Trussell is one of those senior leaders.



JUSTIN TRUSSELL

JEFF STEERS | HERALD

"If one kid gets into trouble in school, the family group needs to take care of it," Trussell said. "Everyone has to work it out."

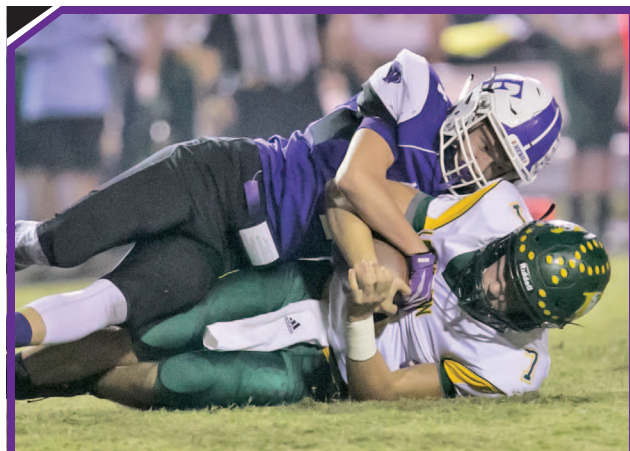
"I think it makes us trust one another more as a team and helps you get through the hard times."

Trussell and Florence made the playoffs for the first time in 16 years with a 5-5 regular-season record. The Buffaloes finished 3-2 in District 13-3A Division II play.

Trussell is beginning his second year on the varsity squad. He played outside linebacker a year ago, but is also going to play receiver for the Buffaloes.

"I played receiver in middle school, but have concentrated on defense the last couple of seasons," Trussell said. He plans to join the ROTC program next year and would like to fly helicopters and airplanes.

"All of my family has been in the military," Trussell said. "It is



LANDON BYRNE

Florence linebacker Landon Byrne, top, sacks Lexington quarterback Walker Hess for a 6-yard loss during a game last fall.

HERALD | FILE

something that I want to do."

Most of the players on Florence will play both ways. Senior Alexis Palacios, and juniors Brandon Vazquez, Colton Regier and Adrian Spencer are expected to be key linemen on defense for Florence. Others who will make an impact defensively

are Alex Gamboa, Ramiro Gomez, Kelby Vaughan, Peyton Wood, Landon Byrne and Jacob Cox.

"Lexington is going to be the class of the district," head coach Zane Bode said. "All of the other five teams are going to be similar. It is going to be a dogfight every Friday night."



## FLORENCE BUFFALOES

### DISTRICT 13-3A, D2

#### 2017 SCHEDULE

9/1	Rosebud-Lott	7:30	10/13	Johnson City	7:30
9/8	at Jarrell	7:30	10/20	Blanco	7:30
9/15	Holland	7:30	10/27	at Comfort	7:30
9/22	at Salado	7:30	11/3	Rogers	7:30
9/29	at Marion	7:30	11/10	at Lexington	7:30

#### RECORDS

2016	5-6
2015	4-6
2014	3-7
2013	1-9
2012	4-6

# FLORENCE BUFFALOES

## GIDDENS TO LEAD FLORENCE FOR THIRD CONSECUTIVE SEASON

by Jeff Steers



**C.J. GIDDENS**

Florence's C.J. Giddens tries to elude Tidehaven's Jacob Galvan (2) on November 11 during their Division II-3A playoff game in Giddings.

ERIC J. SHELTON | HERALD

Florence High School quarterback C.J. Giddens is not a big fan of losing.

He has a lot of experience competing as a Buffalo in a variety of sports.

Giddens is beginning his third season as the Buffaloes' starting quarterback.

But that is just the beginning for the senior. He also competes in basketball, track, baseball, tennis and this year is expected to participate in powerlifting.

Barring injuries, he will finish with 18 varsity letters.

"I am just athletic, and it fuels me to compete in everything," Giddens said. "I have the ability to adapt to every sport I play."

Football appears to be his best option for playing college sports.

"I have been attending a number of camps and getting my name out there," Giddens said. "I am planning to play sports in college."

Giddens said playing so many sports has taught him a few things along the way.

"Sports teaches you heart and discipline," Giddens said. "When the game is on the line, you have to put everything behind you and concentrate on the job at hand."

The Buffaloes made the playoffs for the first time in 16 years a year ago. Florence was 3-2 in district play, which

earned the team a second-place finish. The Buffaloes' overall record was 5-6.

Offensively, a solid group of juniors and seniors will lead the Buffaloes this season. Linemen Alexis Palacios, Brandon Vazquez, Colton Regier and Adrian Spencer hope to control the line of scrimmage for Florence. Landon Byrne and Cameron Naumann are battling for the top running back spot. Justin Pilla, Justin Trussell and Ronnie Zuniga will be the receiving corps for Florence this season.

"It is tough to get into the UIL playoffs," head coach Zane Bode said. "It is not enough anymore just to get there, you want to make a deep run."



# FLORENCE BUFFALOES

## MARCHING BAND



ERIC J. SHELTON | HERALD

## VARSITY CHEERLEADERS



JEFF STEERS | HERALD



# COLLEGE FOOTBALL

**45** Mary Hardin-Baylor

**47** Baylor University

**48** University of Texas

**49** Texas A&M University

**50** University of North Texas

**51** Texas Christian University

**52** University of Houston

**53** Texas Tech

**54** Big 12 Preview

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**57** CenTex Exes





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# UMHB CRUSADERS

## CRUSADERS LOOK TO DEFEND NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP IN 2017

by Quinton Lilley

After 19 seasons, the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor received the greatest name in sports — champion.

It's been nearly eight months since the Crusaders won the 2016 Division III national championship, and the team has been hard at work preparing to defend that walnut and bronze trophy this year.

The Crusaders will look to their returning junior class to replace the leadership roles that were vacated when the 13 seniors from last season graduated in May.

One of the biggest holes to fill will be the one left by former starting quarterback Blake Jackson, who threw for over 3,000 yards and 35 touchdowns. Jackson proved to be the perfect fit in the Crusaders offense last year as he consistently showed his ability to run as well as pass. Jackson also ran for over 900 yards and 11 touchdowns.

The 2017 senior class is nearly double what it was last year, with around 20 seniors expected to suit up for the team this season.

The team will also need to replace receiver Wykeyhe Walker, who caught 42 passes for just over 550 yards last year with seven receiving touchdowns.

Last season, the Crusaders used a potent offensive attack, scoring 46.8 points per game while gaining 473.2 yards per game, well over 100 yards more on average than their opponents.

The Crusaders were also efficient on third down last year, converting on 48 percent of the team's third-down opportunities.

Two key returners are junior running back Markeith Miller, who ran for

1,483 yards and 20 touchdowns, and junior receiver T.J. Josey, who caught 52 passes for 1,063 yards and eight touchdowns.

Both players will be counted on to take on increased leadership roles. Their production this year will play a major role in whether the Crusaders

will defend their crown.

Their season opener is Sept. 9 at 6 p.m. in Crusader Stadium against Sul Ross State.

The Crusaders will be looking to duplicate their performance from last season against the Lobos when they won 59-10.



**MARKEITH MILLER**

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# 2017

DATE	OPPONENT	PLACE	TIME
9/9*	SUL ROSS STATE UNIV.	BELTON, TX	6:00PM
9/16	LINFIELD COLLEGE	MCMINNVILLE, OR	1:30PM
9/23*	TEXAS LUTHERAN UNIV.	BELTON, TX	6:00PM
9/30*	SOUTHWESTERN UNIV.	GEORGETOWN, TX	6:00PM
10/7*	HARDIN-SIMMONS UNIV.	ABILENE, TX	1:00PM
10/14*	HOWARD PAYNE UNIV.	BELTON, TX	1:00PM
10/21*	BELHAVEN UNIV.	BELTON, TX	1:00PM
10/28*	MCMURRY UNIV.	ABILENE, TX	2:00PM
11/4*	LOUISIANA COLLEGE	PINEVILLE, LA	1:00PM
11/11*	EAST TEXAS BAPTIST UNIV.	BELTON, TX	1:00PM

\*American southwest conference games | schedule is tentative and subject to change

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# BAYLOR BEARS

## BAYLOR LOOKS TO BOUNCE BACK FROM UP-AND-DOWN SEASON

by Jeff Steers



### COACH MATT RHULE

Baylor head football coach Matt Rhule, center, gathers his team in the center of the field July 27 following the first day of practice in Waco.

ROD AYDELOTTE | WACO TRIBUNE-HERALD VIA AP

After a tough off-season with sexual assault allegations, Baylor University started the 2016 season with six consecutive wins. Unfortunately the Bears followed that with six consecutive Big 12 losses.

The Bears won the Cactus Bowl to finish 7-6 overall, 3-6 in the Big 12.

Baylor finished tied for sixth in the Big 12 and returns 15 starters from the 2016 season.

"I'm really proud of what we've accomplished so far this winter," head coach Matt Rhule said during the spring meet-the-press event. "We've had tremen-

dous gains in the weight room and off the field. We're at 400 coming in on 500 hours of community service right now.

"These kids have volunteered their time to better the lives of some of the kids in the area to give back, and I'm proud of a lot of things we've done this winter."

On the field, grad transfer Anu Solomon from Arizona was brought in to compete for the quarterback job. Sophomore Zach Smith has the stronger arm and is expected to be the starting quarterback.

Wide outs Blake Lynch,

Chris Platt and Pooh Stricklin are the most experienced players returning for the Bears, but sophomore Denzel Mims could be the next in a lineage of talented Baylor receivers.

A power back who also has breakaway speed, Terence Williams gave Baylor a 1,000-yard rusher last season, racking up 1,048 yards and 11 touchdowns. With sophomore JaMycal Hasty, the Bears have one of the best 1-2 combinations in the Big 12.

Three starters return up front, with Blake Blackmar and Ishmael Wilson at the guards and Patrick Law-

rence at right tackle.

Greg Roberts, Cactus Bowl defensive MVP Tyrone Hunt and four other returners have made starts on the defensive line. They are joined by former high school All-American Brian Nance, who sat out 2016.

Drew Galitz handled the punting (41.6-yard average) and kickoff duties last year.

Local players Tyler Jaynes of Gatesville High School and Ashton Logan of Temple High School are listed on the Bears' roster. Jaynes is a senior wide receiver and Logan is a freshman linebacker.



# LONGHORNS EXPECTATIONS HIGH FOR HERMAN

by Clay Whittington

One experiment is finished, and another is beginning.

After three subpar seasons in the wake of coaching legend Mack Brown, the Texas Longhorns parted ways with Charlie Strong following a 16-21 showing.

Although Strong's tenure failed to produce the results hoped, it did not take long for the Longhorns to find another potential candidate to resurrect the program.

Coming off two impressive seasons at Houston, including the Cougars' first conference championship in nine years and an upset of then-No. 9 Florida State in the 2015 Peach Bowl, Tom Herman was hired to fill the vacancy with similar expectations.

While the goal is to return the Longhorns to their previous glory, Herman admits the transformation is still in its infancy.

"I don't know about 'championship' (caliber)," he said during media availability. "I think we're getting there. I think it's probably premature to use that word in anything we do right now, but I think we definitely understand the value of hard work and hard practice, full speed and emptying your tank."

"And we're doing that for the most part."

Despite losing key players like running back D'Onta Foreman, quarterback Tyrone Swoopes and safety Dylan Haines, the Longhorns still possess plenty of playmakers.

Offensively, Shane Buechele returns as the team's leading passer from a year ago, while Chris Warren III will look to help fill the void left by Foreman, and Texas' top two receivers in 2016 — Armanti Forman and Devin Duvernay — will be back on the field.

Additionally, the Longhorns' top eight tacklers last season, including leaders Anthony Wheeler and Breckyn Hager, remain on the roster.

Several area products will also be a part of Texas' new beginning.

Former Harker Heights standout Naashon Hughes, a linebacker, started in seven games and recorded 24 tackles, including 18 solo, as a junior in 2016, and Zach Shackelford, of Belton, received All-Big 12 honorable mention recognition as a freshman and is named to the 2017 Rimington

Trophy watch list for the award given to college football's best center each year.

J.P. Urquidez, a freshman offensive lineman from Copperas Cove, will look for his first action as a Longhorn after being redshirted last season.

Urquidez had requested release from his Baylor commitment after learning of the program's sexual assault scandal.

While Herman is unsure exactly how the experiment will go in his first season with the Longhorns, he is confident in certain factors.

"I don't know about

expectations," Herman said, "but I know these guys are going to be trained as well as anyone in the country, and we're going to play to our maximum potential. What that is, I don't know right now, but I feel good that these guys are willing to do whatever we ask them to."

"Coming off the three-year stretch this program has had, they don't want that to be their legacy. They want to be remembered as the team and group that turned this thing around, and I think we are well on our way."



COACH TOM HERMAN

RICARDO B. BRAZZIELL | THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

## PRESSURE IS ON FOR AGGIES

by Clay Whittington

Myles Garrett is gone, and Kevin Sumlin might be next.

Coming off an impressive junior campaign, Garrett, a defensive end at Texas A&M, entered his name into the 2017 NFL Draft, and in late April, he became the first Aggie to be selected first overall.

Although it is a huge accomplishment for the program, Garrett's departure leaves a void for the Aggies, who struggled to produce an 8-5 record last year after losing five of their final seven games, including a 33-28 defeat to Kansas State in the Texas Bowl.

And the mediocrity is wearing thin.

After going 11-2 in his first year at A&M, Sumlin has been unable to reproduce the magic of 2012, tallying just 33 wins in the four years since, including three consecutive 8-5 seasons with the last two ending in bowl game defeats.

"We've had a heck of a spring," A&M athletic director Scott Woodward said, "and recruiting continues to go well, but coach knows he has to win, and he has to win this year, and we have to do better than we've done in the past."

Accomplishing the goal might be difficult, though.

Residing in the SEC West, the Aggies must still contend with division rivals Alabama, Auburn and LSU after each enters the season ranked in the top 13 of the preseason coaches poll.

Along with a difficult

schedule, especially in conference, A&M must deal with personnel issues, including the loss of Garrett.

The Aggies also lost defensive lineman Daeshon Hall and linebacker Shaan Washington, who led the team with 104 tackles.

Offensively, A&M lost three of its top four receivers and must find a new quarterback to replace Trevor Knight. Senior Jake Hubanek, redshirt freshman Nick Starkel and true freshman Kellen Mond are all in contention for the starting quarterback role.

Regardless of who emerges to engineer the offense, Sumlin is pleased with their progression.

"Those three guys have done a phenomenal job in the offseason at getting together," he said at SEC Media Days, "organizing 7-on-7s, improving the team, being leaders and enjoying each other's company."

"But we'll see in the fall. We'll see which direction we're going."

In the end, however, the Aggies' success and Sumlin's job security will be

determined with how the team finishes the year.

During the past three seasons, A&M opened with at least five consecutive victories, including last season's 7-1 start.

Sumlin is not concerned with the talk surrounding his team or his job, though.

"We're here to compete for championships," he said. "How we do that, when we do that, basically the why, what and how — that remains internal, but that's my job."

"The pressure for that never changes."



**COACH KEVIN SUMLIN**

BRYNN ANDERSON | THE ASSOCIATED PRESS



## MEAN GREEN SECONDARY TO BE KEY

by Quinton Lilley

The North Texas Mean Green finished with a 5-8 record while going 3-5 in Conference USA last season.

The Mean Green are expected to rely on their defense, specifically the secondary, to help the team improve its record this year.

The Mean Green were third in C-USA in pass coverage and three of the four starters in the defensive backfield were named C-USA Defensive Player of the week last season.

In a recent Conference USA pre-season poll, the top four Mean Green picks for preseason all-conference honors were all from the defensive side of the ball. They were junior defensive back Nate Brooks, sophomore defensive linemen LaDarius Hamilton, senior defensive back Eric Jenkins and senior safety Kishawn McClain.

The team made its first bowl appearance in four years when it faced Army in the 2016 Heart of Dallas Bowl. North Texas finished with a four-game improvement in the first year under head coach Seth Littrell, who will look to continue that improvement this year.

On offense, is Mean Green return senior running back Jeffery Wilson, who despite missing two games to injury, led the Mean Green with 936 rushing yards and 15 total touchdowns. His 14 rushing touchdowns in 2016 ranked fourth in single-season school history, according to Conference USA records.

The Mean Green also return 15 starters, eight on defense and seven on offense. The Mean Green will have one nationally televised game this year when they travel to Iowa City to take on the Hawkeyes on Sept. 16 at 2:30 p.m.

During the team's spring game, four players saw decent action at quarterback, and collectively they

completed 15 of their first 17 passes.

The four quarterbacks were sophomore Mason Fine (Locust Grove, Oklahoma), who began the day, while Quinn Shanbour also saw a lot of action. Freshman Cade Pearson (Texarkana) and redshirt junior Devlin Isadore (Houston) also took snaps. Only one offensive turnover was forced during the spring game.



**ERIC JENKINS**

MANNY FLORES | RICK YEATTS PHOTOGRAPHY

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# TCU HORNED FROGS

## TCU HAS HIGH HOPES IN BIG 12 WITH 17 RETURNEES

With 17 returning starters, Texas Christian University has high hopes to ride to the top of the Big 12 once again.

And the writers seem to think so, too.

Four TCU players have been selected by the media to the preseason All-Big 12 football team as voted on by writers covering the conference.

Receiving honors were linebacker Travin Howard, safety Nick Orr, center Austin Schlottmann and return specialist KaVontae Turpin.

Howard, a first-team All-Big 12 selection last season, led the conference and was ninth nationally with 130 tackles. Howard, a senior from Longview, became just the second Horned Frog in 16 years under Patterson to have back-to-back campaigns with at least 100 tackles (Martin Patterson in 2003-04).

A second-team All-Big 12 pick in 2016 and senior from DeSoto, Orr has started all 26 games the last two seasons. He had a team-high four interceptions, with 86 tackles last year.

Schlottmann earned second-team All-Big 12 honors last season. The senior from Brenham did not allow a sack and surrendered just one quarterback pressure in 752 snaps.

Turpin was a two-time Big 12 special teams player of the week in 2016. He averaged 28.4 yards per kickoff



**TRAVIN HOWARD**

TONY GUTIERREZ | THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

return and 12.5 on punt returns. The junior from Monroe, La., was leading the nation in all-purpose yards per game last season before being sidelined by injury. He had a career-high 295 all-purpose yards against Arkansas and averaged 14.9 yards per touch a year ago.

TCU head coach Gary Patterson assured the media during Big 12 media days that the talented receiver and returner Turpin will be ready to go for the start of the season. He also noted that one of the larger issues for Turpin was his early success.

"One of the worst things

that happens in this day and age is a young player is great as a freshman, because I think it's really hard with the media and everything else for them to handle being invisible," Patterson said. "One of the biggest problems we've had is when we've had great freshmen that have played early and got a lot of notoriety."

TCU finished the season at 6-7 overall a year ago, 4-5 in the Big 12.

Returning quarterback Kenny Hill will need to have a big season for the Horned Frogs.

"We've got to give him (Kenny Hill) help," Gary Pat-

erson said. "We've got to catch the ball better. I think we're going to be better up front offensive line-wise."

The Horned Frogs are tied for second nationally with 17 returning players (10 on offense and seven on defense). They open the season Sept. 2 at home versus Jackson State with a 7 p.m. kickoff on Fox Sports Southwest.

Patterson begins his 17th season as a head coach at TCU.

There are no local players on the current TCU football roster.

*Information courtesy of Texas Christian University*



# COUGARS HOPE TO REMAIN IN NATIONAL CONVERSATION

by Quinton Lilley

With the departure of former head coach Tom Herman to the University of Texas, the University of Houston chose to hire Texas alum and former assistant coach of the Longhorns, Major Applewhite, in December.

Applewhite's appointment was effective immediately. He served as Houston's head coach for the Dec. 17 Las Vegas Bowl loss to San Diego State, 34-10.

Applewhite spent the last two seasons as Herman's offensive coordinator, and will look to continue the high-octane spread offense the Cougars have put together over the past few seasons.

In a release immediately after Applewhite's hiring, Houston confirmed its confidence about the hire.

"When we set out on our search for the new leader of our football program, we wanted a coach with great integrity who believed in our mission and truly believed in our student-athlete experience," Houston Vice President for Athletics Hunter Yurachek said in December. "We had our sights set on a focused competitor who has demonstrated success and possesses a deep connection to college and high school football in the great state of Texas. As this process was completed, it was clearly evident the only individual to offer our position to was Major Applewhite and he was indeed the right man to



**COACH MAJOR APPLEWHITE**

DAVID BECKER | THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

lead our program."

Applewhite, who's originally from Louisiana, has spent most of his coaching years in the state of Texas and is expected to have no trouble recruiting from the bevy of talent throughout the state.

"My family and I are excited and honored to have the opportunity to lead such a tradition-rich program and continue our lives in one of the greatest cities in the nation, a city we love," said Applewhite. "The student-athletes truly are the backbone of every great program and as they've demonstrated over the past few years, we have an exceptional group

of young men in our program, and we'll continue to add men with great character and a competitive drive in our recruiting."

Applewhite spent seven years as an offensive coordinator beginning in 2006 at Rice, where he was the youngest coordinator on the FBS level at the time. Applewhite will now be faced with a challenging task of replacing All-American Athletic Conference quarterback Greg Ward Jr.

According to [uhcougars.com](http://uhcougars.com), Ward was the only college football player to throw for over 300 yards per game and average 45 yards rushing per game last

season.

However, Applewhite has found a way to create high-powered offenses everywhere he's been. In his last two seasons at Houston, Applewhite's offenses have eclipsed the 500-yard mark in 11 games and the 600-yard mark in four games. Scoring-wise, Applewhite's offenses has eclipsed the 40-point mark 12 times and the 50-point mark on five occasions.

The team also averaged over 150 rushing yards per game as well. If the Cougars can replicate Ward's production at quarterback, they will be one of the top teams again in the AAC.

# TEXAS TECH RAIDERS

## COUTEE TO LEAD HIGH-POWERED TEXAS TECH OFFENSE

Texas Tech University junior wide receiver Keke Coutee and junior kicker Clayton Hatfield were named to the all-Big 12 preseason team earlier in the summer in a vote by media members who cover the conference.

This is the second-consecutive season the media has selected Hatfield to the preseason team. Coutee, meanwhile, was honored for the first time in his career.

Both were recognized on various all-Big 12 teams following the 2016 campaign, with Hatfield earning second-team honors from ESPN while Coutee was an honorable mention selection by the league coaches.

Texas Tech finished 5-7 overall in 2016, 3-6 in the Big 12 — good for sixth place. They are predicted to finish eighth in the Big 12 this season.

The Red Raiders have been known for their offensive prowess the last few seasons. Defensively, they have struggled at times. Head coach Kliff Kingsbury said consistency will pay off for Texas Tech.

"I think going into year three, we have the same defensive coordinator for the first time at Texas Tech in a long time," Kingsbury said during Big 12 media days. "He's (defensive coordinator Dave Gibbs) been able to bring in players that fit his scheme. He's been able to

bring in coaches that he's comfortable with. So I expect to see us be improved.

"I like what I saw this spring. We played a lot of young players on defense last year, and I'm hoping those snaps pay dividends going into this year."

Offensively, Coutee was the Big 12's second-leading receiver during conference play last season after averaging 95.7 yards per game. Coutee finished his sophomore season with 890 receiving yards, seven touchdowns on 55 receptions. He also rushed for one more touchdown and saw action on special teams.

Coutee, who caught two touchdowns in the win over the Bears, also posted 130 receiving yards at Kansas State, 172 against Oklahoma and then 115 at Iowa State.

Hatfield has converted 90 percent of his field goal attempts (27 for 30) over his career, which ranks fourth among active kickers heading into the 2017 season.

The Boerne native is closing in on Tech's all-time record book. He needs one more field goal to tie Brian



**KEKE COUTEE**

CHARLIE NEIBERGALL | THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Hall (1974-77) for 10th all-time on Tech's career field goal list. Hatfield already ranks fourth all-time at Tech with 118 career extra point attempts.

Oklahoma senior quarterback Baker Mayfield and Kansas junior defensive end Dorance Armstrong Jr. were named the preseason Big 12 players of the year.

Payne Sullins of Gates-

ville, who starred at Reicher Catholic High School in Waco, is listed as a junior quarterback on the Red Raider roster. Sullins was listed as the second or third quarterback on the depth chart following the spring football game.

*Information courtesy of Texas Tech University website*





## BIG 12 CONFERENCE

# OKLAHOMA PICKED AS TOP BIG 12 TEAM BY MEDIA

The University of Oklahoma has been chosen to finish at the top of the standings for the second consecutive year in the Big 12 football preseason poll, voted on by media representatives.

It marks the fifth time since 2011 in which the Sooners lead the preseason rankings. They have captured a Big 12-record 10 league titles, including the last two.

The Sooners welcome back 16 starters from offense and defense, including senior quarterback Baker Mayfield, a 2016 Heisman Trophy finalist. Mayfield repeated as the conference's preseason offensive Player of the Year.

New coach Lincoln Riley said the transition to head coach should be easy since he has been on staff for two years. "Normally, when there's a change in the head coaching position, so much else has changed as well as far as bringing in a new staff a lot of times, getting to know players, starting to develop those relationships," Riley said

in July at a Big 12 media event. "What made this so unique, I think, was the continuity that was kept with the decision. It's made it definitely a lot easier on me when I think about all I've done in the last month. But not having to hire 10 new coaches, not having to get to know new players and develop those relationships, people within the program, support staff, we felt like there was so much good going on with Oklahoma football."

Riley is 33 and the youngest head coach in the five power conferences.

Oklahoma garnered 19 of 32 first-place votes and tallied 303 points to edge out Bedlam rival Oklahoma State. The Cowboys nabbed 12 first-place votes and totaled 294 points while Kansas State picked up the final first-place nod. Texas and TCU rounded out the top five followed by West

Virginia, Baylor, Texas Tech, Iowa State and Kansas.

The Big 12 Championship Game resumes in 2017 after a six-year absence, and will feature the top two finishers in the final league standings.

Kansas State finished with 231 points, Texas was fourth with 213, TCU is fifth with 202, West Virginia finished sixth with 183, Baylor was seventh (129), Texas Tech placed eighth (85), Iowa State finished with 83

points, and Kansas was 10th with 37.

Oklahoma won the Big 12 in 2016 with a perfect 9-0 record. Oklahoma State finished tied for second with West Virginia at 7-2 and Kansas State finished 6-3.

Texas Christian University was fifth (4-5), Texas Tech tied for sixth place with Texas (3-6).

*Information courtesy Big 12 Conference*

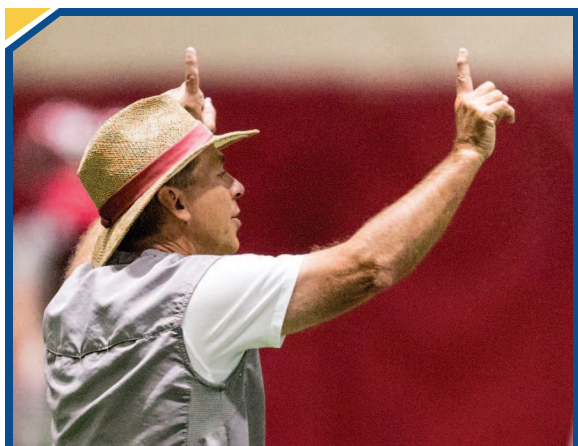


**COACH LINCOLN RILEY**

# ALABAMA HEAVY FAVORITE IN SEC WEST

by Clay Whittington

## SEC WEST (PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH)



COACH NICK SABAN

VASHA HUNT | AL.COM

1

### ALABAMA

Since 2007, when Nick Saban became head coach of the Crimson Tide, Alabama has been among the nation's best, and this season will be no different. The Crimson Tide is a heavy favorite to win the SEC championship and potentially Alabama's fifth national title in eight seasons.

2

### AUBURN

Sophomore quarterback Jarrett Stidham, a transfer from Baylor, could be the missing piece the Tigers need to compete with Alabama. The Tigers host the Crimson Tide on the last day of the regular season and should be well tested by that point with road contests against Clemson, LSU and Texas A&M.

5

### ARKANSAS

Following a 3-0 start to the season, the Razorbacks never won consecutive games for the duration of the season. The sporadic showing led to a 7-6 overall record, but it also gave a glimpse of Arkansas' potential as it beat ranked opponents in TCU, Ole Miss and Florida.

3

### LSU

After finishing tied with Auburn in the SEC standings last year, LSU is evenly matched with its rival once again as the two teams of Tigers look to claim the title of second best in the SEC West. Derrius Guice, who ran for 1,387 yards and 15 touchdowns as a sophomore, will be the focal point of the offense, and LSU's defense will be solid across the field.

6

### OLE MISS

Everything points to another down season for the Rebels, but sophomore quarterback Shea Patterson is a nice replacement for the departed Chad Kelly, who now plays for the Denver Broncos. Still, without hope of qualifying for a bowl game due to a self-imposed ban this season stemming from multiple NCAA violations, Ole Miss is simply playing for pride.

4

### TEXAS A&M

The Aggies lost five players to the NFL Draft, including the top overall pick in defensive end Myles Garrett, but A&M makes up for the talent turnover with a favorable schedule, playing seven of its first 10 games at home before concluding with contests at Ole Miss and LSU.

7

### MISSISSIPPI STATE

After losing quarterback Dak Prescott to the NFL, the Bulldogs found an extremely suitable replacement in playmaker Nick Fitzgerald, but improving a defense that allowed a conference-high 413 points last season is a top priority.



# GEORGIA POISED TO TAKE SEC EAST TITLE

by Clay Whittington

## SEC EAST (PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH)



1

### GEORGIA

With 11 starters on defense and NFL-caliber running back Nick Chubb set to return, the Bulldogs are poised to wrestle the division title away from Florida. Additionally, head coach Kirby Smart and the players should have an even better understanding of each other after a year together under their belts.



NICK CHUBB

JOSHUA L. JONES | THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

2

### FLORIDA

The two-time defending SEC East champions can make a compelling case for a third consecutive title despite taking significant hits defensively. On offense, however, the Gators add former Notre Dame quarterback Malik Zaire to an elite receiving corps and talented junior running back Jordan Scarlett.

3

### TENNESSEE

The Volunteers lost a lot of talent, making it hard to know exactly what to expect from them this season, but it is clear the SEC East is weak, and Tennessee should capitalize against the mediocrity at the bottom of the division.

4

### SOUTH CAROLINA

In Will Muschamp's first year as head coach of the Gamecocks, the team exceeded expectations and brings lots of momentum and young talent into the 2017 season. Sophomore quarterback Jake Bentley is evolving into a top talent and has plenty of capable receivers to choose from, making South Carolina a team on the verge of breaking out.

5

### KENTUCKY

The Wildcats looked pretty impressive during their upset of then-No. 11 Louisville on the last day of the 2016 regular season, but in the TaxSlayer Bowl, Georgia Tech handed Kentucky a sound 33-18 defeat. Expect to see more of the postseason Wildcats in 2017.

6

### VANDERBILT

After winning just six games last season, the Commodores will be tested to meet that mark this season, especially early on. With a four-game stretch against preseason No. 19 Kansas State, No. 1 Alabama, No. 16 Florida and No. 15 Georgia, Vanderbilt's confidence could be severely rattled by early October.

7

### MISSOURI

The Tigers avoid playing Alabama and LSU, but Missouri still has a tough road to travel with key games against Kentucky and Vanderbilt played away from home. Even in Columbia, though, the Tigers are just a pedestrian 7-6 during the last two seasons.

# CENTEX EXES

## AREA ATHLETES PLAYING COLLEGE AND PRO FOOTBALL

Compiled by Mark W. Miller, Killeen Daily Herald

NAME	YR.	POS.	SCHOOL	HIGH SCHOOL	NOTEWORTHY
Sean Adams	Fr.	OL	New Mexico St.	C. Cove	Ex-Dawg takes his long-snapping skills to Las Cruces
Lamont Alexander	Jr.	DT	S.F. Austin	Killeen	Started 8 games, had 30 total tackles
Marcus Anderson II	Jr.	RB	SW Okla. St.	Harker Hts	Transferred from Navarro College
Jeff Banks	Sr.	DE	Texas State	Killeen	Moved back to DE in spring, caught 1 pass as TE in 2016
Marin Biletic	Sr.	DL	So. Nazarene	Ellison	Started all 11 games after injury-shortened 2015
Jacob Bonner	So.	OL	Howard Payne	C. Cove	Earned THSCA academic all-state honorable mention
Josh Boyce	3Y	WR	Browns (NFL)	C. Cove	Signed reserve/future contract with Browns on Jan. 2
Trent Canion	So.	RB	W. Texas A&M	C. Cove	386 all-purpose yds as backup RB and KR as frosh
Diamon Cannon	So.	LB	Tulsa	Shoemaker	Played in 7 games, mostly on special teams in 2016
Isaiah Cowan	Sr.	S	UTSA	Ellison	Walk-on transfer from West Texas A&M
Ishmael Davis	Jr.	DE	Texas State	Ellison	Former walk-on blocked 2 kicks, had 42 tackles in 2016
Cooper Edmiston	So.	LB	Tulsa	Gatesville	Played in all 13 games with 1 start as true frosh
Manny Harris	Fr.	QB	UTSA	C. Cove	Did not play as redshirt freshman last season
John Harvey	Fr.	LB	Colo. School of Mines	Belton	First-team all-district last season
Ra'Shaun Henry	Fr.	WR	St. Francis	C. Cove	Redshirted last season
Chris Hughes	Fr.	OL	Kansas	Harker Hts	Redshirted last season
Naashon Hughes	Sr.	LB/DE	Texas	Harker Hts	5th-year player has already started 26 games at UT
Breyon Jackson	Jr.	DB	So. Nazarene	C. Cove	Started all 11 games, with 67 tackles as soph.
Sam Jackson	Fr.	LB	Tarleton St.	Gatesville	127 tackles, 5 TFL, 2 sacks as Hornet senior.
Darius James	Sr.	OL	Auburn	Harker Hts	Started last 8 games of 2016 at LT for Tigers
Tyler Jaynes	Sr.	WR	Baylor	Gatesville	Former walk-on DB moved to WR in spring
Kendell Jones	Fr.	DL	Copiah-Lincoln (MS) JC	Shoemaker	Did not play after failing to qualify at Alabama



# CENTEX EXES

NAME	YR.	POS.	SCHOOL	HIGH SCHOOL	NOTEWORTHY
Chris Jones	So.	LB	UMHB	Belton	Could start next to his older brother Tevin
Tevin Jones	Jr.	LB	UMHB	Belton	Expected to start at Will LB spot for Div. 3 champs
Tyler Kanaly	FR.	OL	NW Okla. St.	Killeen	All-district second team as senior Roo
Antonio Lealiiee	Fr.	RB	Texas A&M Commerce	C. Cove	Redshirted last season
Shamad Lomax	So.	DB	New Mexico St.	C. Cove	66 tackles (36 solo) and team-high-tying 2 INTs as frosh
Remington Lutz	Fr.	TE	Abilene Christian	Belton	6-foot-6 target will be easy to spot for ACU QBs
Zach Mack	Fr.	OL	S.F. Austin	Gatesville	Redshirted last season
Peyton Mansell	Fr.	QB	Iowa	Belton	Dual-threat earned HM all-state honors as prep senior
Jalil Maxwell	So.	LB	So. Nazarene	Harker Hts	Did not see action as freshman
Daniel McCants	So.	RB	Tarleton St.	Killeen	Did not play in 2016, average 6.4 ypc in 2015
Roy Miller	9Y	DT	Chiefs (NFL)	Shoemaker	Limited to 6 starts in 2016, signed with KC on Aug. 2
Nathaniel Nanai	So.	OL	W. Texas A&M	Shoemaker	Second-team all-district in final prep season
Bobby Joe Nielsen	Sr.	OL	Midwestern St.	Lampasas	All-LSC honorable mention long-snapper again
Jakob Popple	Sr.	OL	Panhandle St.	Salado	One of four returning offensive starters for the Aggies
Peyton Searcy	Jr.	DL	Texas A&M Commerce	Killeen	21 tackles, 2 TFL, a sack and 2 QB hits in 2016
Zach Shackelford	So.	OL	Texas	Belton	True soph. already on Rimington Trophy Watch List
Jameille Showers	1Y	FS	Cowboys (NFL)	Shoemaker	Listed as 3rd-string free safety on depth chart
Michael Smith	Fr.	OL	LSU	Ellison	Redshirted last season
Durham Smythe	Sr.	TE	Notre Dame	Belton	5th-year senior graduate caught 9 balls in 2016 (4 for TDs)
Rayshun Spearman Jr.	Jr.	WR	UTSA	Shoemaker	Former Oregon St. signee and Alabama walk-on
Anthony Stephens II	So.	DB	So. Nazarene	Harker Hts	44 tackles, with 3 starts as freshman
Payne Sullins	Jr.	QB	Texas Tech	Waco Reicher	Gatesville native saw action in 2016 season opener
Olajuwon Taylor	So.	WR	W. Texas A&M	Belton	Saw action in five games as freshman
Duke Thomas	1Y	CB	Cowboys (NFL)	C. Cove	Signed reserve/future contract with Dallas in January
Tyrell Thompson	Jr.	DL	Tarleton St	C. Cove	Transfer from Trinity Valley, ranked 4th best JC player in state
Ray Thornton	Fr.	LB	LSU	Shoemaker	Redshirted last season, was ESPN's No. 61 prospect
JP Urquidez	Fr.	OL	Texas	C. Cove	Redshirted last season
Jaylen Waters	So.	LB	Minnesota	C. Cove	7 tackles, 1 PBU in 13 games as true frosh
Remington Weis	So.	OL	W. Texas A&M	C. Cove	Did not see action last season
Dwayne Williams	Jr.	CB	Oregon State	Shoemaker	Became starter, but limited to 5 games (injuries)
Corey Wilson	Fr.	LB	W. Texas A&M	Shoemaker	Redshirted last season
Laquavious Works	So.	LB	Sul Ross St.	Harker Hts	Earned letter last season

NOTE: This is not a comprehensive list. Some college rosters were unavailable at press time.

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## **WEEKLY COVERAGE OF ALL AREA SCHOOLS**

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