

2018 PREVIEW

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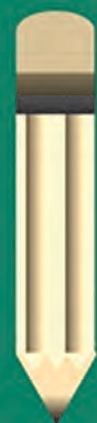
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From left, Sports Design Editor Mark W. Miller, Assistant Sports Editor Clay Whittington and Reporter Felisa Cardenas.

FROM THE EDITOR

Football season is here. Once again it is time to take in the incredible athleticism and intense competition, but football season brings much more. Along with the game, this time of year provides a sense of community as cheerleaders, dance teams, bands, family and friends bond around the players. At the Killeen Daily Herald, we are proud to be part of this experience, providing readers with a preview of the season thanks to contributions from Assistant Sports Editor Clay Whittington, who compiled the coverage for this magazine, Sports Design Editor Mark W. Miller, who laid out the pages, and staff writer Felisa Cardenas as a reporter. Football season is here. Enjoy everything it brings.

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On the cover: (From left) Harker Height’s Dorian Black, Ellison’s Isiah Brown, Shoemaker’s Claude Williams, Killeen’s D.J. Dormeus and Copperas Cove’s Robert Troy.

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Tigers get boost from state 7-on-7

BY FELISA CARDENAS

The Belton Tigers have most of their receivers returning for the 2018 season, and head coach Sam Skidmore spent the spring watching his players compete for two available starting positions on the offensive line.

“We lost both our running backs last year,” Skidmore said. “But for the most part the offense had a good spring, a good 7-on-7.”

Belton advanced to state in 7-on-7 this summer before losing in the first round of the championship bracket.

BELTON OFFENSE

“Making it to state in 7-on-7 was big for us,” added Skidmore.

With both running backs graduating last year, the second-year head coach noticed a few athletes step up to compete for the starting jobs.

“We’re just trying to feel that out and see who wins what spots,” he said. “But you never know until you put those pads on and get ready to go.”

Returning varsity running back Dean Blondmonville has made his presence known off the field this spring.

And close behind are Marcus Aguilar and Demante Smith. Both played on the junior varsity Red team last season and spent the spring putting in work to get their names in the mix.

The Tigers have senior Connor Carothers back at quarterback along with returning wide receivers Anthony Brown (515 yards, 7 TDs) and Anthony Fairbanks (398 yards, 7 TDs).

Skidmore may have an impressive group of returning athletes, but he’s learned to be prepared for any



HERALD | FILE

Belton wide receiver Anthony Fairbanks hauls in a 7-yard touchdown pass against Harker Heights on Sept. 28, 2017, at Leo Buckley Stadium. Fairbanks finished the season with 398 yard receiving and seven TD catches.

‘Making it to state in 7-on-7 was big for us.’

Sam Skidmore
Belton head coach

situation.

“You have to always plan for the unexpected,” he said. “When you play this caliber football, and at this level, you’re going to need some depth.”

BELTON TIGERS

LAST FIVE SEASONS

2017: 6-5
2016: 8-4
2015: 5-6
2014: 6-6
2013: 2-8

2018 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Austin Westlake	7:30
Sept. 6	at Round Rock	7:00
Sept. 14	Copperas Cove	7:30
Sept. 21	at Harker Heights	7:30
Sept. 28	Shoemaker	7:30
Oct. 5	at Temple	7:30
Oct. 19	Killeen	7:30
Oct. 26	at Ellison	7:30
Nov. 2	Waco	7:30
Nov. 9	Waco Midway	7:30



HERALD | FILE

Belton safety Jason Stephens (15) tackles Ellison's Gregory Cooke on Nov. 2, 2017, at Leo Buckley Stadium. Stephens was the District 8-6A Newcomer of the Year last season.

Martinez headlines experienced unit

BY FELISA CARDENAS

Belton's defense might just be a force to be reckoned with behind senior defensive end Devin Martinez.

Martinez recorded 20 tackles last season with four tackles for losses.

"He's had a great spring," head coach Sam Skidmore said of Martinez. "He actually got his first offer from Texas State."

Martinez verbally committed to the Bobcats on July 29.

Returning linebacker Carson Harris was a contributor last season, but with an impressive spring per-

BELTON DEFENSE

formance, he might have an even bigger role this season.

"I expect great things from him," Skidmore said.

Junior Jason Stephens, who recorded 43 tackles and five interceptions, returns at safety after being named District 8-6A's Newcomer of the Year last year.

The Tigers have five returning players on the defensive line, and both cornerbacks are back, making Skidmore's only obstacle replacing safety Garrison Vaughn,

now playing for the University of Houston.

"Garrison is hard to replace," Skidmore noted, "but I feel very confident where we're at defensively."

Belton's special teams head into the season in pretty good shape as well.

"For the first time in a long time we've got a returning kicker," Skidmore said. "So we're very excited about him."

"We always try to pride ourselves on special teams and get some guys some roles on there, but I think we're going to be very solid."

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The 2018 Belton Tigers varsity football team.



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Play calling remains family affair in Cove

BY GARRETT ROSS

Copperas Cove might be a “New Jack City,” but the offensive play calls will still remain a family affair.

New Bulldawgs head coach Jack Alvarez appointed his son Brandon Alvarez as the new offensive coordinator for the team, which is the same role he held in Ennis.

“Brandon has been working with me since the 2014 season,” said Jack Alvarez. “You know some days we’re related, it just depends how mad he makes me. He might wish he wasn’t related to me sometimes, but he’s my son.”

Unfamiliarity with the program means there isn’t a set idea on how the new offense will look.

During his years running the offense at Ennis, the Lions leaned more toward the running game than an air attack.

Last season, Ennis averaged 280 yards rushing per game and 118 yards passing.

The Lions had two running backs carry the ball for over 1,000 yards each, and it’s very likely that the Copperas Cove offense will take the same approach.

“I have a hard time giving guys that want to be quarterback or running back the true nod without being familiar with them yet,” said Jack Alvarez. “I do recognize some athletic ability, and I’ve learned some names here, but everyone will have something to prove during two-a-days.”

The Bulldawgs players were put behind the eight ball when their spring practices were canceled due to the coaching change.

The players were left without guidance, and their character and determination were challenged.

Jack Alvarez will have to implement his own culture and identity



GABE WOLF | HERALD

Copperas Cove head coach Jack Alvarez signals to his players during an intrasquad scrimmage Aug. 11 at Bulldawg Stadium in Copperas Cove.

COPPERAS COVE OFFENSE

into the program throughout the season, but he has a good idea how that will look.

“I have an acronym that our program will be built around and that is E.A.T.; effort, attitude and toughness,” said Jack Alvarez. “When you see blue and gold on the field for Copperas Cove, that’s what I want that brand to be.”

Playing in a nine-team district and only having two nondistrict games will be difficult, but it’s not unfamiliar territory for Jack Alvarez.

“I’ve done it before and it’s brutal,” he said. “Our bye week falls on Week 8, so hopefully that gives us the time to rest up and get prepared for the playoffs.”

Last season, the Bulldawgs finished the season 5-6 and were 3-3 in district before falling in the bi-district round to Desoto 44-10.

The addition of Temple and Waco will make the push for the playoffs

COPPERAS COVE BULLDAWGS

LAST FIVE SEASONS

2017: 5-6
2016: 4-5
2015: 3-8
2014: 7-4
2013: 6-5

2018 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	UANL	7:00
Sept. 7	at Manor	7:30
Sept. 14	at Belton	7:30
Sept. 21	Killeen	7:30
Sept. 27	at Ellison	7:00
Oct. 5	Waco	7:30
Oct. 12	at Waco Midway	7:30
Oct. 26	Harker Heights	7:30
Nov. 1	at Shoemaker	7:00
Nov. 9	Temple	7:30

more difficult for the Bulldawgs, but it’s nothing they feel they can’t handle.

McCauley takes charge of Bulldawg defense

BY GARRETT ROSS

The 2018 season will be a learn-as-you-go situation for Copperas Cove's new coaching staff, but they expect the community to be fully supportive.

"The transition has been good and very positive. Everyone in the community has been very nice," new Bulldawgs head coach Jack Alvarez said. "This town will support the kids no matter who the coaches are, because they support all of our kids."

Last season, the Copperas Cove defense allowed an average of 29.9 points per game and made vast improvements from the previous year.

This year, the Bulldawgs defense will be led by new defensive coordinator Cody McCauley.

McCauley comes to Copperas Cove from Katy Taylor, and he has also coached at La Grange.

McCauley's defense at Taylor gave up an average of 24 points per game, but with opponents like Katy, Cinco Ranch and Houston Strake Jesuit, that's not too bad.

The Bulldawgs return two defensive linemen from last year's squad in Zach Hoyle and Joey Harrison as well as defensive back Tommy Connell.

Copperas Cove will need to find a way to get off the field on third down this season.

During their 2017 season finale against DeSoto, the Dawgs defense gave up 498 total yards and 30 first downs.

The run defense is another area of improvement that McCauley will need to address.

During multiple district games last season, the Bulldawgs gave up over 200 yards per game, including against Belton, Ellison and Waco Midway.



DENNIS KNOWLTON | HERALD

Defensive back Tommy Connell is one of Copperas Cove's returning starters on defense.

Defense is supposed to win championships and Alvarez knows a thing or two about those.

Alvarez coached in three state championship games, and his 2014 Ennis team defeated Cedar Park 38-35 to give him his first title.

Getting the pieces put in place with no spring practice and just two nondistrict games will be tough, but the task doesn't overwhelm Alvarez.

"We have been working really hard since we got on campus in order to make sure we deliver a precise straight forward plan entering two-a-days," said Alvarez. "We're trying to make sure that everything fits and we can deliver the kids a message that they can learn and turn around and execute."

That execution will be tested dur-

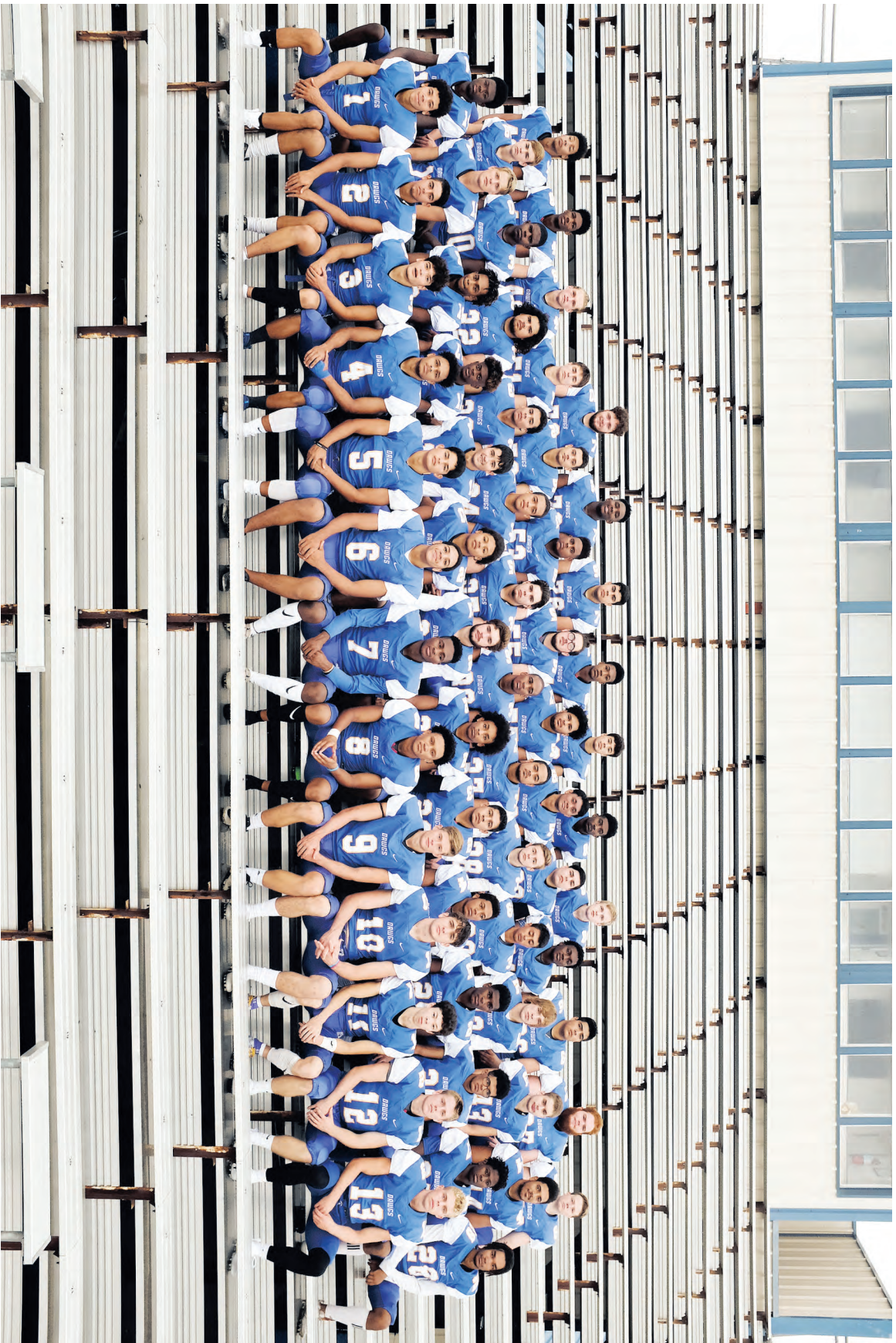
ing the first two weeks of the season against Universidad Autonoma de Nuevo León and Manor.

When practice begins for the Bulldawgs, everyone on the roster will have something to prove to the new staff, because no positions are guaranteed.

Alvarez and his staff will have their goals and expectations that they expect the kids to buy into, which will help establish their identity as a program.

"We're going to play for whatever's available, so if the state championship is available, that's what we're playing for," said Alvarez. "If you don't put that as a goal, then it's never attainable."

"I expect us to have a chance to win district, and I expect us to be a playoff team."



The 2018 Copperas Cove varsity football team.

GAISE WOLF-HERALD



COURTESY PHOTOS

The Copperettes, above, and varsity and junior varsity cheerleading squads, below, will cheer on Copperas Cove this season.



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Wright aims to keep Eagles on upswing

BY FELISA CARDENAS

When an athletic program undergoes a change in head coach, a team is usually on a losing streak, but Ellison's new head coach Todd Wright walked into the exact opposite.

"Here, it's been trending in the right direction, so my job is to keep building on it and keep raising expectations," said Wright, who looks to raise the bar both on and off the

ELLISON OFFENSE

field.

The Eagles broke a

10-year playoff drought last season and Wright looks to continue building upon last season's success.

"I think there's pressure no matter what," he said of the expectation people have of him leading Ellison back to the postseason.

Fortunately for Wright, he not only inherited a team that doesn't have to learn to win again but a group of solid returners, many with varsity experience which adds comfortable depth for the Eagles.

Breezion Spiller will lead Ellison at quarterback.

"He's fast," Wright said of the junior. "You'll think you've got him sacked and he'll squeak out of there and then he'll go 80 (yards) because he'll just outrun everybody."

Kaleb Luna is generating attention from college recruits at left tackle and is only a junior.

Wright isn't too worried about the backfield with senior Tye Hill returning along side junior running back Daylan Littlejohn.

Additionally, Wright has an extra weapon in versatile senior receiver Kahlil China.

"He can also play tight end," Wright noted. "He's in multiple positions, which makes it a little more



GABE WOLF | HERALD

Ellison head coach Todd Wright rides the sled through drills during a spring practice at Ellison.

difficult on defenses when they scout him because he's not always going to line up in the same spot. We can take that kid and put him in multiple spots."

Overall, Wright is feeling pretty good heading into his first season with Ellison, despite being one coach short on his staff.

Not only did he promote a couple of middle school coaches but Wright also added a coach from the state of Washington and another moving over from Temple.

"We will have one short," Wright said, "but probably at this point we'll adjust."

Instead of scrambling to fill the position, Wright said he'll wait to open the job up in spring to a bigger candidate pool.

Preparing to play 10 weeks straight, including a nine-team district, is familiar territory for Wright.

"Two years ago was the first time I ever had a Week 11 as my off day," he said, having previously coached in a nine-team district at Houston Waltrip, "and then I walk into here and Week 11 is our off day."

Wright is also no stranger to a

ELLISON EAGLES

LAST FIVE SEASONS

2017: 5-6

2016: 6-4

2015: 6-4

2014: 2-8

2013: 0-10

2018 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	A&M Consol.	7:00
Sept. 7	Austin Vandegri!	7:00
Sept. 14	Waco	7:30
Sept. 21	at Waco Midway	7:30
Sept. 27	Copperas Cove	7:00
Oct. 4	at Harker Heights	7:00
Oct. 12	Shoemaker	7:30
Oct. 19	at Temple	7:30
Oct. 26	Belton	7:30
Nov. 2	at Killeen	7:30

short preseason.

"I've worked through those things as far as how fast you have to work through here and then you have to be careful of how much you put in, you have to keep it simple so that you get rolling by the time the third week hits."

Ellison appears loaded on defense

BY FELISA CARDENAS

Todd Wright is shifting the focus from the field to the classroom this fall.

With plans for coach-led study halls when school lets out, the Eagles are changing their practice schedule.

"We'll have more afternoon practices," Wright said. "Last year, they practiced in the morning. Now, we'll practice more in the afternoon, and it's more of an academic reason than a practice reason."

Before they even suit up to take the field, the Eagles will have an academic meeting session with their position coaches. These meetings are aimed to keep the student-athletes on top of their grades instead of having to try and catch up later in the season.

"That way it doesn't turn into the sixth week and they have 15 zeros and can't make it up, versus two," Wright explained. "And that way the freshmen don't have time to get so far behind."

Ellison is shifting its focus in the classroom but there is one area on the field that Wright is feeling confident about, defense.

"The defensive line should be a strong point," he noted. "All of them are back, all of them have varsity experience."

Despite an early season knee injury, senior defensive end Ahmahd Basham is making his return after a strong spring showing.

"Everitt (Rogers) is at the nose, defensive tackle," Wright said of the junior.

"He has a chance to be as good as anybody in Texas.

"When he chooses to turn things on, he's tough to block."

At the other defensive end, senior



DENNIS KNOWLTON | HERALD

Ellison defensive end Isiah Brown downs Waco Midway quarterback Tanner Mordecai after a fumble on Nov. 9, 2017, at Panther Stadium in Waco.

Isiah Brown brings varsity experience to the position.

"Then we have an all-district linebacker, we have an all-district corner, we have an all-district safety," Wright listed off. "We've got a lot of kids that got a lot of varsity time last year. Then again, we're just athletic."

"We've got some kids in the secondary that ran track and were on winning relay teams and district relay teams, but my goal there is to keep things simple and let those kids learn how to play and not let their brains get in the way."

Wright also sees a lot of depth in his defense, along with players he can rotate in order to keep his starters fresh.

Ellison graduated a strong, varsity punter/kicker last year and that seems to be the one area that

has yet to figure itself out.

"We feel pretty good at deep snapper," Wright noted. "Although, we need some depth there."

"We've got some incoming freshmen that are going to be really good, but you hate to say we're going to throw any freshmen into the varsity level, because that's a big jump."

While a kicker has yet to stick out, overall, Wright is content with his team as they prepare for his first season in District 12-6A.

"We feel as good as Ellison's been in years," he said. "The staff last year did a great job, but they got Ellison back to winning games."

"The kids have learned how to win a little bit now and they've been in a playoff game, so the expectation is raised, and that's a good place for me."



COURTESY

The 2018 Ellison varsity cheerleaders.



ANDY ZAVOINA | HERALD

The 2018 Ellison Eagles varsity football team.



The 2018 Ellison Emeralds dance team.

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Knights backfield will have new faces

BY TEE WORD

Harker Heights will experience a youth movement in 2018, specifically on offense.

After graduating the district's leading rusher from the past two seasons, new faces will be occupying the backfield this fall.

In addition, the Knights will be working to develop stability and comfort across the offensive line as well as the skill positions.

Harker Heights finished the 2017 season tied for third in the district, but missed the playoffs on tiebreakers.

Two sophomore quarterbacks — LaPrinceton Dixon and Shaun West — will take snaps for the Knights this fall, and both are expected to be strong leaders who will take on the role of field general.

Harker Heights head coach Jerry Edwards is confident he has two young men who will be strong building blocks for the future and has not given an advantage to either player in regards to being "the guy" just yet.

Athleticism and passing ability will be the immediate impression that onlookers will observe with both players.

According to Edwards, "There's going to be some growing pains there at the quarterback position, but both are really good leaders, and they're learning the offense and getting a grasp of it, and that comes with being a sophomore quarterback"

The Knights will use a running-back-by-committee approach to replace Jameel Hodges, who was a major asset while rushing for 1,291 yards and 13 touchdowns in his senior season.

"That's a hard kid to replace,"



ANDY ZAVOINA | HERALD

Harker Heights' Nate Guillen (16) is forced out of bounds by an Elgin defender on Sept. 1, 2017, in Elgin.

Edwards said, "but we've got some younger kids who are ready to step up and fill that role. Right now, we got the finesse guy, the speed guy and got the power guy, and we're just kind of rotating those guys in there."

The new look offensive unit will attempt to be balanced while keeping opponents off balance with fresh faces rotating in and out of the backfield.

The receiving corps, including tight end, will return a couple of players from last season but will also feature a young group of talented players who are moving up from the subvarsity teams.

Jack Middleton is returning at tight end, and Nate Guillen brings experience at wide receiver. Both will be relied upon to provide leadership and mentoring to the young players who will be seeing extended action at the varsity level.

Edwards is optimistic about his young players who will step up.

"We have some younger guys who

HARKER HEIGHTS KNIGHTS

LAST FIVE SEASONS

2017: 5-5
2016: 6-5
2015: 2-8
2014: 5-5
2013: 2-8

2018 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Round Rock	7:30
Sept. 7	at RR Stony Point	7:00
Sept. 14	at Temple	7:30
Sept. 21	Belton	7:30
Sept. 28	at Killeen	7:30
Oct. 4	Ellison	7:00
Oct. 12	at Waco	7:30
Oct. 18	Waco Midway	7:00
Oct. 26	at Copperas Cove	7:30
Nov. 9	Shoemaker	7:30

played on the JV last year who we feel like can be big time playmakers down the field," he said.

In an effort to address depth at wide receiver, the Knights have moved some defensive players over to offense.

Harker Heights has three returning offensive players, but Marcel Ramirez was injured in spring football and will miss his senior season, and his presence will be sorely missed.

The young up-and-comers are presented with an opportunity to step up and shine at a variety of positions across the offense, but more important, they will grow together as they build the foundation for the future of Harker Heights football.

"They are ready to step in and fill those roles left by our offensive line and fill those other key positions," Edwards said.

Black, Dudley lead veteran Heights D

BY TEE WORD

Harker Heights' defense will have seven returners, including all-district tackle Dorian Black as well as all-district selection Rhomel Dudley at linebacker.

Solidifying the defensive side of the ball will be four returning players in the secondary.

Knights head coach Jerry Edwards adamantly stated, "There is no substitute for hard work."

And he expects his team to lean on the veteran leadership of an experienced defense in 2018.

Edwards knows there will be the normal growing pains a young team experiences when players graduate but is also aware that his experienced defense is a strength to be relied upon.

Scheme flexibility will aide the Knights' defensive charge and will consistently be a point of emphasis all season.

Black will be at the forefront of a defense that is a senior-heavy unit that gained a ton of experience in 2017. He is expected to be a leader by setting the tone and grooming the younger players to understand that hard works pays off and high-quality results will follow.

Edwards expects Black to "show the younger kids to put in the time to be successful."

Having a high-quality performer in the front seven will pay dividends for Harker Heights because Black will be a rallying point for his teammates to increase their efforts week after week. Optimism is at a high because the coaching staff has seen substantial effort from their players in the spring and summer team activities.

Team chemistry, team culture and a willingness to perform well on Fri-



ANDY ZAVOINA | HERALD

Harker Heights' Dorian Black (44) pursues a Shoemaker ballcarrier on Oct. 13, 2017, at Leo Buckley Stadium. Black is one of seven returning Knights defensive starters.

day nights will be the hallmark upon which the foundation of the 2018 Knights football team will be built, and that means taking advantage of returning an entire secondary unit.

Edwards expressed excitement about the flexibility his team will benefit from on the front seven because his cornerbacks and safeties will be experienced. In addition to the four returning starters at defensive back, the Knights have three additional players who saw varsity action last season and can contribute in sub packages.

Depth at defensive back will allow the team to be more dynamic on defense and open up the playbook by inserting more players in a variety of packages. Opponents will not be able to key on a specific player or secondary set as the Knights plan to give different looks.

Contrasting the youthful offense, which is experiencing an influx of new talent, the defense will rely on

multiple players to shoulder the weight of carrying the load early in the season as the team develops chemistry.

Fortunately, the kicking game will be relied upon to set the defense up with long fields for the opposition to navigate. Jose Vargas, a junior, returns as the place-kicker. He also plays soccer and will be a key component in pinning opponents deep and helping the defense in forcing long drives by their opponents.

Edwards is fully aware of the district competition that his team will face in 2018, including the addition of Temple and Waco. He said every night will be a "full-tilt, boogie to the end," and in-city rivalries will raise the stakes substantially as district play begins after just two pre-district games.

Despite facing a late bye week and a stretch of nine consecutive games, Edwards is optimistic his team will be ready for the challenge.

The 2018 Harker Heights Knights varsity football team.



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Roos expect better results this season

BY TEE WORD

Killeen head coach Neil Searcy knows his team was much better than its 4-6 record indicated in 2017.

Searcy believes a few missed opportunities during the season were the difference, but after graduating a small senior class, the Kangaroos return a roster filled with players who have gained a lot of experience in addition to some fresh faces who will be moving up from the junior varsity.

Heading into the 2018 season, the Kangaroos are poised to flip their 2017 record and take a giant step toward a postseason appearance.

On offense, Killeen will offer a different look at the skill positions, specifically quarterback as the Kangaroos will replace last year's starter Marcellus Johnson, who was lost to graduation.

James Terry will be stepping into the starting role after spending last season leading the junior varsity.

Searcy fielded Terry for almost every snap last season in preparation for the departure of Johnson.

In contrast to the mobility of Johnson, who was a threat to beat an opponent with his legs on broken plays, Terry is capable of the same improvisation with his passing ability.

A pocket passer by nature, Terry excels at completing accurate passes and making great reads. He will benefit from a receiving corps returning D.J. Dormeus, who will step into a leadership role vacated by Montego Muckelvaney, who also graduated.

While Dormeus was the 2017 receiving leader for Killeen, Brandon Fox and Nate Camper both look to take on larger roles in a revitalized



DENNIS KNOWLTON | HERALD

Killeen High's D.J. Dormeus runs for a gain against Ellison on Oct. 27, 2017, at Leo Buckley Stadium

passing attack. Quaman Williams will be moving up from the junior varsity, providing a familiar weapon for Terry to look for in the passing game.

Providing a solid threat as a passing team will pay dividends in setting up the run for an experienced backfield.

The ground game will be an area of focus for Killeen.

"At running back last year," Searcy said, "we struggled a little bit trying to run the ball, but all of those guys were underclassmen."

The Kangaroos will return all of the backs from last season, including Demariontae Moore, Blaze Albino and Teoni Gomez. Kadarius Marshall will move up to the varsity as a sophomore to challenge for touches as well.

Every running back will play a part in the execution of the Kangaroo offense, and the coaches expect the players' previous experience to help each of them take a step forward.

The Kangaroos' offensive line will

KILLEEN KANGAROOS

RECORDS

2017: 4-6
2016: 5-6
2015: 2-8
2014: 4-6
2013: 3-7

2018 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	at RR Stony Point	7:00
Sept. 6	CP Vista Ridge	7:00
Sept. 13	Waco Midway	7:00
Sept. 21	at Copperas Cove	7:30
Sept. 28	Harker Heights	7:30
Oct. 5	at Shoemaker	7:30
Oct. 11	Temple	7:00
Oct. 19	at Belton	7:30
Nov. 2	Ellison	7:30
Nov. 9	at Waco	7:30

be anchored by returning starter Steven Mendez.

Joining Mendez along the line is Ron Leuma, who moves from the defense to play guard alongside Cesar Garibaybartol, who will man the center position. Iesi Vaitupu will man the other guard position, and Jaden Jones, a 6-foot, 4-inch left tackle, will protect Terry's blindside.

Former offensive coordinator David Gaskamp returns as offensive line coach after a three-year absence from the Kangaroos, and Searcy is "excited about that bunch up there and what they can do."

The 2018 Killeen Kangaroo offense will have new leaders and expectations for success as the team looks to compete for the District 12-6A title.

Experience and hunger are the driving forces behind a senior-laden team, poised to control its own destiny.

Defensive potential has Killeen excited

BY TEE WORD

Every football team has a perceived strength as it heads into a season. Killeen is no exception.

Kangaroos head coach Neil Searcy expressed excitement about the potential of his defensive unit that will take the field. The Kangaroos will be more mature and have a great deal of experience to draw from and use as motivation to have an exceptional season this fall.

After starting several underclassmen in 2017, the Kangaroos have an opportunity to reap the benefits of the experience that was gained by the young players.

Tulsa commit Ra'Quan Thompson and Amir Ward will start at defensive end and will be joined by Ta'Shon Johnson at nose guard. All three played substantial snaps last season, creating a natural leadership role for each player.

Searcy expects a solid contribution from rotational players along the line as well.

Killeen will deploy a 3-4 defensive scheme in 2018, which will be buoyed by an exceptional linebacker group.

Middle linebacker Chris Ingram was a unanimous all-district first-team selection in 2017 and will be joined by Tulamalosí Lefotu in 'quarterbacking' the defense.

The Kangaroos return both starting outside linebackers as well, so in-game experience will be a strength across the middle of the defensive unit.

Killeen's linebacker group was fast and athletic last season, and the trend should continue with the return of four players who have developed a solid chemistry while working together.

A former collegiate defensive



DENNIS KNOWLTON | HERALD

Killeen High's Willie McGee (7) defends against Shoemaker on Oct. 19, 2017, at Leo Buckley Stadium.

back as a player and defensive backs coach, Searcy has a special place for the defensive backfield.

Regarding the defensive backfield, Searcy noted, "For the last couple of years, that's kind of been our weakness."

Willie McGee will anchor the unit as he heads into his third year as a starter. Tavion Grant will start at cornerback after a tremendous spring and summer performance.

Wide receiver D.J. Dormeus will appear at cornerback opposite Grant and Collin Price, who will switch from wide receiver to defensive back.

Searcy understands the advantage that is gained by an offensive player who switches to his counter position on defense. As wide receivers turned defensive back, Dormeus

and Price will be able to diagnose the routes of opposing wide receivers based on intricacies such as alignment and splits pre-snap.

Dormeus and Grant will allow the Kangaroos to play man defense more frequently.

The Kangaroos are expecting a strong improvement on the defensive side of the ball because each level of the unit returns starters with a lot of experience. Searcy believes the defensive line will be disruptive and aggressive, creating open lanes to the backfield for the linebackers and one-on-one opportunities for the defensive backs.

After finishing 2017 with a sub-.500 record, Killeen went to work in the offseason and expects to flip its record from a year ago.



COURTESY | HEIGHTS STUDIO

The 2018 Killdeer Kangaroos varsity football team.



PHOTOS BY DENNIS KNOWLTON | HERALD

The Killeen High School dance team (above) and varsity and junior varsity cheerleading squads.





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The Killeen High School marching band.

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Foreman, Wolves ready to start winning

BY FELISA CARDENAS

Shoemaker football head coach Toby Foreman heads into his second year at the helm of the Grey Wolves optimistic about the season ahead.

Although they will be primarily a young team, the Grey Wolves' time and work put in over the summer has Foreman excited for the return to Friday Night Lights.

Including freshmen, Shoemaker averaged between 125 to 135 athletes in the training room throughout the summer months.

"That's a good number of kids working out there every day," Foreman noted. "That being said, I'm excited to their commitment to working out in the summertime because that's not something you have to do, that's something that's solely voluntary."

One main focus of the offseason for the Grey Wolves was their agility and footwork, which they showcased in their 7-on-7 performance.

"I was really impressed with the kind of plays we were able to make with the space," Foreman said, considering that, defensively, you can't touch the offensive line in 7-on-7. "So, I was able to evaluate kids who've come away with their overall agility and I think that says a lot about the offseason we put them through."

One athlete has proven himself above the rest in spring and summer workouts — Atreall Bonnee.

Bonnee, a returning varsity letterman who played backup tight end and backup defensive end last season, has embraced a completely different position.

"If we had to roll the ball out right now for the first game, he would probably be one of the starting outside wide receivers," Foreman said. "He's a kid who came from basket-



ball and really transitioned well.

"I think for Year 2 of our program, he's really, really excelling. I'm excited to get him the ball and find out what he can do in a game and do underneath the lights."

Another change that comes in Foreman's second year in charge — the realignment into the largest district this area has seen with the addition of Temple and Waco to make up a nine-team District 12-6A.

Shoemaker now has a short preseason with a Week 4 bye before facing its first district opponent — the Temple Wildcats.

"That's going to be challenging, especially because I'm going to have a lot younger kids," Foreman said, noting last year he had almost double the 22 upperclassmen he has this year. "So we're not going to have the experience we've had in the past, but I'm excited because the young kids are coming off a really good freshman group and I expect 10 or 12 of them to be on varsity."

"As well as, we have a really good junior class and the seniors that are left are solid."

Foreman believes his senior class has what it takes to lead the pack this season.

Shoemaker quarterback Mark Walker throws against Killeen on Oct. 19, 2017, at Leo Buckley Stadium.

DENNIS KNOWLTON | HERALD

SHOEMAKER GREY WOLVES

LAST FIVE SEASONS

2017: 0-10

2016: 0-10

2015: 9-3

2014: 6-5

2013: 7-4

2018 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	at SA Central	7:30
Sept. 7	Midlothian	7:30
Sept. 20	Temple	7:00
Sept. 28	at Belton	7:30
Oct. 5	Killeen	7:30
Oct. 12	at Ellison	7:30
Oct. 19	Waco	7:30
Oct. 26	at Waco Midway	7:30
Nov. 1	Copperas Cove	7:00
Nov. 9	at Harker Heights	7:30

"I trust those guys," he said. "They've bought into what we're doing and they're going to be leaders on this team."

"That's where we are right now; we have to get a young team ready in a short period of time."



Shoemaker defensive back Tiji Paul tackles Harker Heights' Ja'Quan Tillis on Oct. 13, 2017, at Leo Buckley Stadium. Paul, back for his senior season with the Grey Wolves, picked off three passes last season.

ANDY ZAVOINA | HERALD

Wolves hoping to avoid injury bug this season

BY FELISA CARDENAS

With the addition of Temple and Waco to the district schedule, Shoemaker head coach Toby Foreman believes the season will all come down to his team staying injury-free.

"Last year, we had injuries I had never even heard of," he noted.

The Grey Wolves started the season with a scrimmage against Kerrville Tivy before heading west to face San Angelo Central in the season opener. Shoemaker will host Midlothian at the start of September before its early Week 4 bye.

The Grey Wolves will face the newly added Temple Wildcats to kick off district play on Sept. 20 at Leo Buckley Stadium.

"As a head coach, I've never lost a game coming off a bye week," Foreman said.

Last season, Shoemaker had a bye week at the end of the season after playing 10 games in a row.

SHOEMAKER DEFENSE

"That was tough," Foreman noted. "A lot of NFL teams don't even do that, so it does make it difficult because there's never time you can step back and just catch our breath."

And while some coaches prefer not to have a bye so early in the schedule, Foreman is just fine with it, "Because that gives me a week to just concentrate on fundamentals and kind of what we do best.

"Then it will give us a week and a half to prepare for Temple."

Following the early break, the Grey Wolves then face all eight district opponents in pursuit of a playoff spot.

Foreman isn't worried about the stretch of games because of the offseason work he's seen them put in, in the weight room.

Shoemaker also heads into the

season confident with its defensive line.

The Grey Wolves have senior defensive backs Tiji Paul and junior Devin Owens. Paul recorded three interceptions last season and Owens had five interceptions and 35 tackles.

According to Foreman, junior Jalen Guillory is one to watch this season. Although he was moved up to varsity late in the season last year, Guillory has experience at both defensive end, outside linebacker and safety.

"He moves around a lot," Foreman said of Guillory. "But he had a really good spring."

Guillory had five tackles and a sack in the Grey Wolves' spring game.

"We're really excited about where he's at," Foreman added. "He's gotten a lot bigger but he's one of those guys who's been a leader.

"He's been up here up here pretty much every day."



The 2018 Shoemaker Grey Wolves varsity and junior varsity football teams.

DENNIS KNOWLTON/HERALD



PHOTOS BY GABE WOLF | HERALD

The Shoemaker High School varsity and junior varsity cheerleading squads (above) and dance teams.





FELISA CARDENAS | HERALD

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Key losses, but a lot of talent at Gatesville

BY GARRETT ROSS

Football can be a tale of two halves, and for Gatesville, this was the epitome of their 2017 season.

The Hornets started the season 7-0 and looked to be in pursuit of a district championship, but that dream came to an abrupt end.

Gatesville had off-the-field distractions before the China Spring game that derailed their season.

The Hornets would lose their next four games, including a bi-district matchup with Canyon Lake 31-21.

Fast forward to 2018, however, and redemption is on the Hornets minds as they are chomping at the bit to strap on the pads.

Offensively, the Hornets will have to replace key players in quarterback Jett Truss and receiver Derrick Bayer, but they do return standout playmaker Zach Mueller.

"The strength of our team is in our skill positions, and we got a lot of guys coming back, which I'm excited about," said Cooper. "I feel like the talent at the positions might be the best we've had in my 12 years at Gatesville."

At 5 feet, 10 inches and 175 pounds, Mueller had a strong campaign his junior season. He rushed for 600 yards and five touchdowns while hauling in 456 yards and four touchdowns as a receiver.

"Mueller is going to touch the ball all over the field for us this year, and we're going to do our best to keep him healthy," said Cooper. "He's an extremely physical player and a great competitor with great vision and an understanding of the game."

Tyler Lewis (5-9, 160) and Josh Godfrey (5-11, 165) will join Mueller at the receiver positions.

"Lewis is a guy that nobody could match up with during 7-on-7," said

GATESVILLE OFFENSE



DENNIS KNOWLTON | HERALD

Gatesville's Zach Mueller puts six points on the board with a 19-yard run Oct. 20, 2017, against Burnet at McKamie Field in Gatesville. Mueller is part of a collection of skill-position players coach Kyle Cooper thinks might be the best he's had in 12 years with the Hornets.

Cooper. "He's really gave people some issues, and I'm really excited about him and his growth over the summer."

Anthony Costas (5-9, 180) returns to the backfield for Gatesville, and he will be joined by Isaiah Navejas (5-8, 160).

"Costas is another skill guy that is back, and he's coming back from an injury at the start of district play last season," said Cooper. "A lot of people might not recognize his name, but he's a great football player on both sides of the ball."

Preston Preciado and Seth Trotter will compete to see who will replace Truss at the quarterback position for the Hornets.

"The quarterback position is a

GATESVILLE HORNETS

LAST FIVE SEASONS

2017: 7-4
2016: 4-6
2015: 6-7
2014: 4-7
2013: 3-7

2018 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Midlothian Heritage	7:30
Sept. 7	at Robinson	7:30
Sept. 14	Cameron Yoe	7:30
Sept. 21	at Waco Connally	7:30
Sept. 28	at Lampasas	7:30
Oct. 5	Glen Rose	7:30
Oct. 12	Brownwood	7:00
Oct. 19	at China Spring	7:00
Nov. 2	at Stephenville	7:00
Nov. 9	Waco La Vega	7:00

pivotal position and obviously one that we are replacing," said Cooper. "We're gonna let Preciado and Trotter compete in practice and see where it falls.

"Those guys split time through 7-on-7, and when the time comes, we'll make the decision as a staff. We've got two great kids and great competitors who are both team guys."

The Hornets find themselves in arguably one of the toughest districts in Class 4A, Division I after realignment.

Gatesville will be replacing Lampasas, Burnet, and Liberty Hill with perennial powers Brownwood and Stephenville.

"It's out of the frying pan into the fire," Cooper said. "I think we were in the second-toughest district in the state last year, and I think we're in the toughest district in the state this year."

Hornets have new defensive coordinator

BY GARRETT ROSS

The Hornets will enter the season with a new defensive coordinator in David Carmona and a new assistant head coach/corners coach in Keith Stifflemire.

“Stifflemire is coming off the Copperas Cove staff and he was the Evant head coach before that,” said Cooper. “I’ve known him for a long time and I’ve been trying to get him over to Gatesville.”

“We are extremely fortunate to get him over here,” said Cooper. “He is high capacity and he’s a workhorse and the guy doesn’t sleep and he’s high energy.”

Carmona played college football at LSU, when UMHB head coach Pete Fredenburg was an assistant there, before transferring to Stephen F. Austin.

Carmona’s first coaching job was under Fredenburg, he was part of the staff that started the Cru football program.

The last two stops for Carmona came at Texarkana Pleasant Grove and Nacogdoches.

“We’re extremely excited about Carmona,” said Cooper. “We were able to get him here during the spring and work with the kids some, and he’s a great teacher and communicator.”

The change in defensive coordinators won’t change the philosophy that the Hornets are accustomed too.

“One of the first meetings we had with Carmona was with the entire defensive staff, including the old coordinator,” said Cooper. “We went through a number of things, like how we call things. Carmona just smiled and told the old defensive coordinator he should bake him a cake, because they had already done



DENNIS KNOWLTON | HERALD

Gatesville's Tyler Lewis runs for a gain against Robinson on Sept. 29 in Gatesville. Lewis will also be a key contributor on defense.

everything he needed done.”

The Hornets had a solid performance during spring and summer workouts, which Cooper called “pivotal because we are putting in a new defense.”

The Hornets finished seventh overall in the lineman challenge held in Abilene and the 7-on-7 team made it to the state championship bracket before losing to eventual champion Midlothian Heritage.

Offensive skill position stars Zach Mueller, Anthony Costas, and Tyler Lewis will also play key roles on the Hornets defense.

Costas and Lewis both played snaps at safety and Mueller played corner.

Jalun Taylor will return after an injury that forced him to miss all of district play for the Hornets last season.

Taylor is a two-year starter for Gatesville, who initially started as a sophomore.

“I’m really excited to have Taylor

back. He’s a force to be reckoned with out there,” said Cooper. “Taylor is a guy that people aren’t going to want to throw his way.”

The one area of the Hornets defense that will need the most improvement is the defensive line.

The skill positions are strong enough to compensate for a learning curve, but the defensive line will need to jell and get some pressure in the backfield.

“We’ve been able to rely on our line play in the past,” said Cooper. “Going back to our recent championship team in 2015, we knew we were going to be able to mash people and get after teams with our defensive line.”

Gatesville will be looking to continue the great tradition of what they like to call the “Black and Gold Line” in 2018.

The Hornets have been playing football since 1912 and they pride themselves on a commitment to excellence.



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Big Ace could give Badgers winning hand

BY GARRETT ROSS

The majority of freshmen football players at a Class 4A, Division I school see playing time on the JV at any position, especially if they are a quarterback.

That wasn't the case for Lampasas gunslinger Ace Whitehead.

Whitehead found himself one year removed from junior high football to leading the Badgers offense under the infamous Friday Night Lights of Texas last season.

So how much success can an inexperienced freshman have against varsity competition?

Whitehead threw for an astonishing 2,275 yards and 20 touchdowns. The Badgers coaching staff is excited to see how Whitehead was able to mature and develop over the summer.

"Getting him (Whitehead) back and having him physically more mature has helped," said Lampasas head coach Troy Rogers.

Up front, Whitehead will be in good hands as the Badgers return four offensive linemen from last year's squad.

Lampasas will rely on receiver Cameron Everts, who earned second-team all-district honors in 2017, to make some big plays.

Everts will be a junior this season, so he and Whitehead have time to become an impressive tandem for the next two seasons.

Tight end Owen Davis is another returning playmaker for the Badgers offense this season, and receiver Clayton Bever will be opposite Everts.

"I feel pretty good about where our offense stands entering the season," said Rogers. "Technically we have seven returning starters. We just have to become consistent and avoid turnovers."



GABE WOLF | HERALD

Lampasas quarterback Ace Whitehead throws a pass against Gatesville on Oct. 13, 2017, in Lampasas.

Turnovers have been one area that has hindered Lampasas the past couple of seasons.

"If you're going to throw the football, then you will have interceptions," said Rogers. "I'm never going to get on to a quarterback for interceptions, because that could make him stop pulling the trigger."

"The fumbles, however, that's just a lack on concentration," said Rogers. "It's a complete lack of mental focus to me when you fumble the ball."

The Badgers want to air the ball out and get it into the hands of their playmakers. The identity of their offense is multiple spread, with the hope of putting the ball in the hands of their playmakers.

"We want to play fast and we want to be up-tempo, while using the entire field," said Rogers. "We want to hit the defense in the gut quickly, then throw it out to the edge and let those kids play."

Another key area of improvement for the Lampasas offense is winning on third down.

Lampasas finds itself in a new

LAMPASAS BADGERS

LAST FIVE SEASONS

2017: 2-8
2016: 1-9
2015: 2-8
2014: 5-5
2013: 3-7

2018 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Joshua	7:30
Sept. 7	Lago Vista	7:30
Sept. 14	at Lorena	7:30
Sept. 21	at La Vernia	7:30
Sept. 28	Gatesville	7:30
Oct. 12	at Burnet	7:30
Oct. 19	at Liberty Hill	7:30
Oct. 26	Taylor	7:30
Nov. 2	at Canyon Lake	7:30
Nov. 9	Fredericksburg	7:30

district, but the Badgers are bringing former district foes Burnet and Liberty Hill along with them.

The Badgers will be in District 14-4A, Division I and they are familiar with the new teams (Canyon Lake, Fredericksburg, and Taylor), because they have played them over the past couple of seasons.

"I think the number one thing this realignment did was give us a little more parity," said Rogers.

"When you're in a district with a China Spring and (Waco) La Vega, sometimes we have a hard time matching up.

"We've already scrimmaged Taylor and we've been playing Canyon Lake already and we've already been playing Fredericksburg," said Rogers. "Taylor is going to be an explosive team and Canyon Lake is a Slot-T team like Liberty Hill. Fredericksburg is a team to be reckoned with, they have a lot of guys back and are on an upswing."

Irvin, new coordinator should help Badgers D

BY GARRETT ROSS

“Fast, Physical, and Fearless” is the motto of the Lampasas Badgers and that is a mentality coach Troy Rogers wants his team to display on every snap.

“We need to establish that mentality on defense and that’s something my staff and I have discussed,” said Rogers. “We need to be a little more fearless on defense and we must become more aggressive.”

The Lampasas defense will be run by new defensive coordinator Sam Waldrip, who comes to Lampasas from South Garland.

“Waldrip got here at the end of June because South Garland finished school late,” said Rogers. “He was able to be around the kids the last few weeks of summer workouts, so he was able to get a feel for the players.”

The defense Waldrip brings with him is based on the same structure the Badgers are used to playing.

“We should adjust to his defense well, because it’s based on the same structure we had,” said Rogers. “When you are changing structures from an odd to an even that can become a challenge, but we’re gonna stay in an odd front and change some schemes.”

The leader of the Badgers defense is senior LB Landon Irvin.

Irvin led the team in tackles last season and earned the Battling Badger award, which is the team’s top football award.

“The kids vote for the Battling Badger award and I don’t think another junior has ever earned it,” said Rogers. “Irvin is a great leader and one of our fastest kids, he’s also pound-for-pound the strongest player on our roster.”

The Badgers will rely on other players to help Irvin stop opposing



GABE WOLF | HERALD

Lampasas defensive back Koby Allen, right, watches as a pass he tipped is caught by Gatesville’s Derrick Bayer on Oct. 13, 2017, in Lampasas.

offenses, including Dylan Kannan and David Dennis.

Kannan will be making the transition from safety to corner this season and Dennis is a hybrid player, who can play defensive lineman and linebacker.

Ethan Rascoe will anchor the defensive line for the Badgers and use his high motor to get penetration into the backfield and disrupt plays.

The Badgers defense will need to improve on forcing turnovers this season and getting the ball back to their offense.

“We were negative, probably, 12 in the turnover ratio last season,” said Rogers. “It’s hard to win games when you do that.”

Another area of improvement for the Lampasas defense is getting off the field on third down.

Last season the defense let teams

convert too many big plays on third down, which in return caused fatigue and led to points.

“Last year we would have won probably two or three more games had we done better on third down,” said Rogers. “We would be in great position sometimes on first and second downs, then we’d give up a big play on third down and that’s killed us.”


The mindset of the coaching staff is to get the defense to win the battle of possessions.

“The game of football has changed and the old days of saying you’re gonna hold an offense to 14 points a game isn’t a defensive goal,” said Rogers. “Our goal defensively is to win the points per possession. We want to hold teams to a certain amount of points per possession depending on who we’re playing.”



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New faces tasked with keeping Salado rolling

BY GARRETT ROSS

Two years is all it took for Salado head coach Alan Haire to transform a 1-10 football team into a district championship contender.

The Eagles finished the 2017 season with a 12-2 record, going 4-1 in district play. Salado made it to the regional finals, before falling to perennial power West Orange-Stark 14-0.

“Our philosophy was to never talk about the past or look back, because there’s nothing you can do to change it,” said Haire. “We started out by building relationships with the kids — I don’t feel like you can coach them until you know them.”

The players definitely bought into what Haire and his staff were telling them and transmitted it into victories.

The Eagles will have to replace three 1,000-yard rushers, but for Haire, it’s all about clock management and resting his defense.

“It’s going to be fun to see what we can do to replace those guys,” said Haire. “The good thing is we have kids with heart who are interested in accepting the challenge.”

“We’re a Slot-T team who likes to get 3 or 4 yards a down. We like to keep the chains moving, the clock running and our defense off the field.”

Running back Reid Vincent and fullback Connor Cook could be two Eagles who see significant carries this season for Salado, while quarterback Wrook Brown will be the field general.

The trend for a lot of offenses across the state is to pass the ball and spread out the defense, but the Eagles approach is smashmouth.

“You know, our playbook is just about four things; Run, run, run, and run,” said Haire. “We’ll pass if



Salado’s Wrook Brown takes a snap during morning practice on Aug. 8 in Salado. Brown is set to be the Eagles’ new starting quarterback this season.

DENNIS KNOWLTON |
HERALD

we have to.”

The Eagles were able to put together a solid performance during spring and summer drills. Their 7-on-7 team competed in leagues in Jarrell and Georgetown, which allowed the defense to get in some good reps against passing offenses.

In order for Salado to be successful running the football, it must be able to open up some running lanes.

The Eagles have three guys who will be responsible for making this happen: Bryce Wales, Ryan Starritt and Trace Medlin.

Tight end Ashten Sniggs will also play a significant role in blocking for the running backs, but he will also need to be able to make himself a target for Brown in passing situations.

Wide receiver Hank Miller will be another valuable target for Brown, but he will also be used to seal downfield blocks for the rushing attack.

“We try to get our summer workouts wrapped up within the first six weeks,” said Haire. “Our deal is about mid-July, you want the kids to be kids and relax and have fun.

SALADO EAGLES

LAST FIVE SEASONS

2017: 12-2

2016: 7-5

2015: 1-10

2014: 0-10

2013: 1-9

2018 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Troy*	7:30
Sept. 7	at Academy	7:30
Sept. 13	at Austin Travis	7:00
Sept. 21	Taylor	7:30
Sept. 28	Waco Connally	7:30
Oct. 5	at Robinson	7:30
Oct. 19	Lorena	7:30
Oct. 26	at Madisonville	7:30
Nov. 2	Mexia	7:30
Nov. 9	at Fairfield	7:30
*At Crusader Stadium in Belton		

“You want them to look forward to coming back in August. We work really hard in the beginning of summer, and we give them some time off, because it’s a long stretch once we start.”

Seniors Hale, Harvey anchor Salado defense

BY GARRETT ROSS

Salado will heavily rely on two seniors to anchor its defense — defensive back Tate Harvey and linebacker Rustin Hale.

“With Tate, we’ll depend on his leadership within the secondary,” Salado head coach Alan Haire said. “Rustin was defensive newcomer of the year last season in district, and he started 14 games for us, so that’s important.”

Hale finished the 2017 season with 97 tackles and six sacks. With another year of maturity under his belt, he has the potential to surpass those numbers this season.

Free safety Connor Cook and defensive back Caleb Self will help shut down opposing receivers, while defensive linemen Andrew Sniggs and Kash Eddleman put pressure on the quarterbacks.

Kyle Saunders, a linebacker, could find himself with plenty of opportunities at making tackles as teams run plays his direction to avoid Hale.

The nondistrict schedule for Salado will be used as a learning scenario for both the offensive and defensive sides of the ball.

“I think we’re gonna have some struggles early, and we’re gonna have to learn on the run,” said Haire. “We’re gonna have some young kids out there that are gonna have to grow up pretty quick.”

This season was a realignment season, and Salado was able to survive a big shakeup.

The Eagles will remain with the same group of teams they’ve faced over the past two seasons with the exception of the addition of Madisonville.

District 8-4A, Division II is one of the few districts, however, in the classification with seven teams.

“I’d rather not be in a seven-team



DENNIS KNOWLTON | HERALD

Defensive back Tate Harvey is one of two seniors who will anchor the Salado defense.

district, because that makes things difficult,” said Haire. “The familiarity with teams makes things a little easier, but with Madisonville, we’ve just added another tough team to compete against.

“I think there will be three really good teams that stay home come playoff time. I feel like every team in our district is capable of winning a playoff game.”

One important aspect for teams will be their team captains.

Every coach has a different approach to assigning this role, and for Haire, it’s a business approach.

The Monday before the first game

of the season, players who are interested in becoming a captain must send a letter to Haire applying for the role.

“Once I receive the letters, I’ll interview the interested candidates,” said Haire. “I think that’s a fair way instead of me choosing, and we don’t do a team vote because of popularity.

“I want to sit these guys down and ask them why they feel they have what it takes to be a captain. I want to know how they’re going to contribute to the team, and I want to know how they’ve gained the trust and respect of their teammates.”

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Bufs looking to add to postseason streak

BY FELISA CARDENAS

Every team goes through a rebuilding period and the Buffaloes are no exception after graduating 14 seniors last year.

"That's the life of a high school coach," Florence head coach Zane Bode said. "Every year you have to reshuffle the cards and see what you can come up with to make a good hand."

For Bode, each season, the tone is set by his senior class.

"That starts back in November," he said. "As soon as our season is over, you start trying to cultivate that with your senior class."

"You're really only ever going to be as good as your seniors are."

While the Buffaloes are making adjustments, Bode is confident the 2018 senior class has what it takes to lead Florence to another postseason.

"We know it's going to be tough, but that's just part of it," Bode noted.

The University Interscholastic League made some big changes for Florence at the beginning of February with its biennial realignment.

Previously, the Buffaloes were in Region IV and traveled south in the postseason. Now, if Florence makes it out of district and into the playoffs, it'll head north as they're now part of Region II.

"It was completely shaken up," said Bode of the changes.

The Buffaloes are now in District 8-3A, Division II along with Lexington, Clifton, Hamilton and Rogers.

"Lexington is coming in ranked No. 5 in the preseason and they may be better than that," Bode noted. "And Rogers, they're going to be really good this year."

"I don't know a great deal about



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Florence's Kelby Vaughan will start at tailback and cornerback this season for the Buffaloes.

Clifton and Hamilton, other than I know that they're both really good programs, really well-coached programs, so it's going to be tough."

The road ahead may be difficult but Bode trusts his team can overcome with several varsity experienced players returning.

"Our skilled kids is where we lost quite a few, but we have some returning varsity players that will be seniors and I think they're doing a great job," he said.

Kelby Vaughan will start at tailback and cornerback for the Buffaloes and has emerged as a leader. Ramiro Gomez and Brandon Vazquez are just two of several three-year starters for the purple and white.

"It's going to be a very difficult year for what we want to do, which is make the postseason for the third straight year," Bode noted. "That's going to be a challenge, so we'll see

FLORENCE BUFFALOES

LAST FIVE SEASONS

2017: 4-7
2016: 5-6
2015: 4-6
2014: 3-7
2013: 1-9

2018 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	at Austin Savio	7:00
Sept. 7	Jarrell	7:30
Sept. 14	at Holland	7:30
Sept. 21	at Academy	7:30
Sept. 28	Johnson City LBJ	7:30
Oct. 5	Chilton	7:30
Oct. 12	at Lexington	7:30
Oct. 26	Clifton	7:30
Nov. 2	at Rogers	7:30
Nov. 9	Hamilton	7:30

what this senior class wants to do with it."

What stands out about the Buffaloes, for their coach, is that while they may not have as large of an athletic pool as the Class 6A schools, they make up for it in dedication and heart.

"What we have is hard-working kids that really like each other and really care for each other," Bode said. "One of them may get more touches than another on one night and they don't care, they're in it for each other."

"They understand that for us to have success, we're going to have to do that and we're going to have to rely heavily on each other and not let egos get in the way."

Heading into the season, Bode has no doubts that his team can get the job done.

"I think they're going to do great, I really do."

Seniors, dual roles key to Florence's success

BY FELISA CARDENAS

The past two seasons, Florence made it to the playoffs, but the Bufaloes have their eyes set on accomplishing much more.

"It's going to be a very difficult year for what we want to do," Bode noted, "which is make the postseason for the third straight year."

Although Florence doesn't have a strong tradition when it comes to football, Bode is out to change that. Making it to the playoffs the past two years is a start.

"Now we don't want to just make it anymore," he said. "We know that's tough, you got to get there."

"I hope that we're not satisfied with just making the postseason. That's what I'm really striving to do, start pulling in some championships and, boy, is it going to be tough."

Bode has a solid group returning with seniors experienced on both sides of the ball.

"In a small town, your starters on defense are your starters on offense," he said.

One senior that Florence is looking to on both sides of the ball is senior Shawn Davis, a defensive end and fullback.

Seniors Ramiro Gomez and Adrian Spencer are expected to lead. Gomez returns as starting linebacker and starting tight end. Spencer will be at nose guard and offensive tackle.

"The same names are going to pop up on both sides of the ball," Bode added. "They're kids we're going to rely heavily on, on both positions."

He also relies on his seniors to help the largely young varsity team.

With a fast-paced practice where the ball is snapped pretty quickly, there isn't much time for Bode and his staff to stop in order to instruct an underclassman.



ANDY ZAVOINA | HERALD

Florence's Kelby Vaughan (10) is tackled by El Maton Tidehaven's Call Davant (44) during a first-round playoff game Nov. 16, 2017, in Brenham.

"We let our kids coach that kid up," he noted. "Hey, here this is how you do this or this is how we're doing that."

"Our seniors do a really great job and (the underclassmen) understand that the seniors do that in order for them all to have success."

The pressures that come along

with Friday Night Lights can be a hard adjustment for young athletes new to varsity, "and when you're a small school like us, we have a pretty good number of sophomores playing on Friday nights."

"So the seniors, they take that ownership and help coach those kids up."



JEROMIAH LIZAMA | HERALD

The 2018 Florence Buffaloes varsity football team.

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9/15	SUL ROSS STATE UNIV.	ALPINE, TX	6:00PM
9/22	TEXAS LUTERAN UNIV.	SEGUIN, TX	6:00PM
9/29	SOUTHWESTERN UNIV.	BELTON, TX	6:00PM
10/6	HARDIN-SIMMONS UNIV.	BELTON, TX	6:00PM
10/13	HOWARD PAYNE UNIV.	BROWNWOOD, TX	1:00PM
10/20	BELHAVEN UNIV.	JACKSON, MS	12:00PM
10/27	MCMURRY UNIV.	BELTON, TX	1:00PM
11/3	LOUISIANA COLLEGE	BELTON, TX	1:00PM
11/10	EAST TX BAPTIST UNIV.	MARSHALL, TX	2:00PM



COLLEGE FOOTBALL PREVIEW

Cru ready to chase another title after turbulent offseason

BY ERIC DRENNAN
FME NEWS SERVICE

Eight months after Mary Hardin-Baylor's second consecutive appearance in the NCAA Division III national championship game, the Crusaders were back on the field Aug. 12 to take the first step toward putting last year's Stag Bowl loss — and everything else that happened in the offseason — behind them.

UMHB went through a brisk workout with 225 players at Crusader Stadium, and the first order of business for the 2016 national champion will be finding a quarterback and a new defensive front.

The Crusaders, who finished 14-1 last season after the loss to Mount Union in the title game, lost all four starting defensive linemen to graduation and are searching for a signal-caller after Kyle Jones and former Ellison standout Carl Robinson III — last year's starting quarterbacks — left the program.

"I feel like we're going to be able to find some defensive linemen. There are some athletes at that position," UMHB head coach Pete Fredenburg said. "At quarterback, it's going to take a while. What we have to do is put them in situations where they have to compete.

"It's more than just being talented when you're talking about quarterbacks. It's not just about who can throw it and run it. It's about the IQ and a bunch of intangibles."

Top receiver T.J. Josey understands what his coach is talking about and knows the offense will be

'It feels incredible to get back on the field. It's great therapy for everybody.'

Pete Fredenburg
UMHB head coach



a work in progress throughout fall camp.

"It will take a lot of time in the film room and a lot of time after practice to get extra work in," the senior said. "(Our quarterbacks) haven't taken a snap, but we know who we have. It will just take time."

The early front-runners for the quarterback job are Luke Poorman — a junior transfer from Mount Union — sophomore Will Chaney, who guided the UMHB junior varsity last season, and junior Abilene Christian transfer Jase Hammack.

Poorman has the most experience after appearing in 18 games and making a handful of starts for the Purple Raiders over the last two seasons, when he was 72-of-100 passing for 1,078 yards and 12 touchdowns with only one interception.

"It's a competition every day, regardless of whether the starter was returning or not," Poorman said. "It's football. You compete every day. That's how everybody has to look at it.

"I have to lead by example and show guys that I'm here to work. Coming from Mount Union, that's all in the past now. I'm a newcomer again and I have to prove myself."

That's the kind of outlook offensive coordinator Stephen Lee likes to see in his quarterbacks. Now it's his job to sort things out and find a

player who can lead the Crusaders.

"It's an open competition. You have to go daily and chart those guys on everything they do," Lee said. "Ultimately, we have to see who our leader can be. We were deficient in that aspect last year.

"I don't care who has the strongest arm and who can run the fastest. We want to see when the whistle blows, who can give us the end result we're looking for."

UMHB is ranked No. 2 nationally entering the season and is coming out of an offseason in which the school self-reported two major NCAA violations. Fredenburg was suspended for three months during the spring and early summer and will not coach the Crusaders in their first three games.

The school is still awaiting word of the results of the NCAA's investigation, but opening day gave the players and coaches a chance to finally focus on football.

"It feels incredible to get back on the field," Fredenburg said. "It's great therapy for everybody."

His players concurred.

"This is a fresh start and a new season," said senior Raylon Hickey, who is making the switch from cornerback to safety. "We're ready to get back to work."

UMHB opens the season Sept. 8 against Albright in Reading, Pa.

MICHAEL MILLER | FME NEWS SERVICE

Mary Hardin-Baylor's T.J. Josey (10) carries the ball down the field against Chapman during an NCAA Division III first-round playoff game Nov. 18, 2017, at Crusader Stadium in Belton.

Baylor has to learn how to win after progress under Rhule

BY FELISA CARDENAS

Every team goes through a rebuilding period, and Baylor is no exception.

Matt Rhule took charge of the Bears in December 2016 following the firing of Art Briles and went 1-11 last season.

Having a Year Zero team where a coach predominantly gives regular snaps to 11 freshmen and 14 others who had few to no statistics the year before, the only way to go is up.

Halfway through the season, freshman Charlie Brewer ended up taking over at quarterback for the Bears. He completed 69.5 percent of his passes, with nine touchdowns and three interceptions.

Brewer was third in line for the QB spot but stepped up in October after sophomore Zach Smith was injured.

He threw two fourth-quarter touchdowns to spark a comeback from a 38-12 deficit against West Virginia in an eventual 38-36 defeat.

In the team's only win, Brewer finished with a 68 percent completion rate.

As a freshman, he was able to connect on third-and-long as he was 19-for-25 for 216 yards with three touchdowns and only two interceptions on third-and-7 or longer.

Heading into his sophomore season, Brewer is expected to be the main man with a somewhat familiar offensive line.

Rhule's young team can take last season as a learning year but now it's time for everyone to do their job.

First, the Bears will need to improve their run game in order to not find themselves in third-and-long as often.

Baylor has 12 returning starters, four on the offensive line and eight on defense.

Denzel Mims and Chris Platt return as juniors who combined



AP | FILE

Baylor quarterback Charlie Brewer, left, scrambles past Iowa State defensive lineman Ray Lima on Nov. 18 in Waco. Brewer was among 33 different freshmen or sophomores to start a game last season. Only two FBS teams had more first-time starters than the 27 Baylor had. They played 17 true freshmen.

for 19.3 yards per catch. Juniors Pooh Stricklin and Tony Nicholson also return, along with sophomore Gavin Holmes.

After an early season knee injury plagued Platt, Holmes emerged as an option for Brewer behind center.

On the other side, Rhule and his defensive coordinator Phil Snow look to have more depth with a year of experience under their players' belts.

Snow's defense plans to be much more aggressive compared to last season when the Bears forced just 11 turnovers.

The youth movement was also notable in Baylor's special teams last season with a sophomore punter/kicker in Connor Martin,

a freshman kickoff specialist in Jay Sedwick and a sophomore punt returner in Tony Nicholson.

While the Bears had issues with kickoffs and kick returns, Nicholson was consistently solid and Martin did extremely well in place-kicking.

Prior to suffering a knee injury, senior Drew Galitz was a reliable leg for Baylor, averaging 45.2 yards.

All four guys are returning this season.

If the Bears can start the season strong in the first half with home wins against Abilene Christian, Duke, Kansas and Kansas State, along with a road win against Texas-San Antonio, Baylor might just be bowl eligible this year.

Longhorns looking for more in Year 2 of Herman's rebuild

BY TEE WORD

The Texas Longhorns football team is entering its second season under the leadership of head coach Tom Herman.

Last season, Texas fielded 12 seniors and a strong group of juniors who had hoped to reverse the recent fortunes of the team. The Longhorns finished the 2017 season with a 7-6 record overall (5-4 in conference play). The 6-6 regular season final tally and solid bowl win over Missouri was not the desired result for Herman as he wrapped up his first season in Austin.

The Longhorns enter 2018 with renewed focus and Herman is ready to get to work on improving the team's final record. With a top-five recruiting class, Texas' offseason theme has been simple: Develop and finish. Development for Texas is two-fold as Herman expects the players to develop positively in terms of getting bigger, stronger and faster. Sixty players can vertical jump over 30 inches, 42 players can power clean over 300 pounds from the floor, 34 players can squat over 500 pounds, and three can squat over 600.

The other area of development, according to Herman, is with play-calling. At the Big 12 Media Days, Herman said, "The way we handle play-calling is very collaborative. What we do throughout the week is much more important and the three hours on Saturday in terms of game planning, in terms of installing a game plan, in terms of the knowledge and retention of our players of that game plan."

Offensively, the 'Horns return two veteran quarterbacks who saw action in 2017. Junior Shane Buechele and sophomore Sam Ehlinger both saw action last season with mixed results. The duo combined for 3,340 yards passing and 18 touchdowns,



AP | FILE

Texas linebacker Breckyn Hager gestures to the crowd before a third-down play during the second half of the Texas Bowl on Dec. 27 in Houston.

along with 758 rushing yards and four touchdowns on the ground.

There will be no shortage of experience on offense as the quarterbacks will have familiar receiving targets in seniors John Burt and Jerrod Heard, juniors Devin Duvernay and Lil' Jordan Humphrey, and also sophomore Davion Curtis, a former Temple standout. Joining Buechele and Ehlinger in the backfield will be running back Kyle Porter, who will look to return Texas to a running threat. Along the offensive line, the 'Horns will be led by seniors Patrick Vahe (Outland Trophy watch list) and Elijah Rodriguez, as well as junior Belton product Zach Shackelford (Rimington Trophy watch list) and sophomore Copperas Cove product J.P. Urquidez. Leadership and experience will not be an issue in 2018.

On defense, Texas will need to replace some exceptional defensive talent, including Naashon Hughes (a Harker Heights product), Malik Jefferson and DeShon Elliott. Defensive back Kris Boyd will return

to lead the defense, along with linebackers Anthony Wheeler and Malcolm Roach.

Herman believes the 'Horns are ready to turn a corner because of their hard work in the offseason.

"We have been training our guys how to finish. Every drill that we do, every workout that we have, everything that we do has a finish component to it, meaning we require our guys to be at their very best when the game is on the line, and I think our guys have really taken to that."

Herman is optimistic about the season and the future for his players.

"I'm really excited to share with you our Forever Texas program which is a life-after-football program which is unique to the University of Texas more so than anywhere in the country. We culminated our spring semester with a career fair that was for our football players only, which led to a bunch of our graduating seniors getting job offers."

High expectations face Fisher in first season at Texas A&M

BY TEE WORD

Texas A&M hired coach Jimbo Fisher to bring change to its football program.

Fisher replaced former head coach Kevin Sumlin and walks into high expectations to deliver on his \$75 million salary which is spread over the next 10 years.

The new coach is acclimating himself to his new surroundings and picking up traditions as well. At SEC media days, Fisher dove right in, "Howdy. If you all don't know, you're supposed to say howdy back. That's an A&M thing. ... I'm very excited to be here at Texas A&M and very excited to be back in the SEC."

Fisher left Florida State to join the Aggies after compiling an 83-23 record and the 2013 national championship with the Seminoles.

Fisher inherited a young but talented 7-6 (4-4 in conference, tied 4th SEC) team from Sumlin and will relieve some of the pressure from redshirt sophomore quarterback Nick Starkel by switching to a pro-style offense in 2018.

Adding a fullback to the lineup will bolster the Aggies ground game and junior running back Trayveon Williams is excited about the opportunities that will come with a lead blocker.

Said Williams: "The thought of having a fullback in front of me is nice. That's a guy that can go in the hole before me to open things up.

"We have a great offensive line in front of us, and a great fullback that can set things up. I love the pro-style. I'm excited about it, coming from a spread as opposed to a pro style."

The offensive line is anchored by returning starters Keaton Sutherland at right tackle and Connor Lanfear at right guard. The seniors on the right side will be joined by



AP | FILE

Texas A&M head coach Jimbo Fisher speaks at Southeastern Conference Media Days.

juniors Erik McCoy and Colton Prater at center and left guard, respectively.

Texas A&M will be young at wide receiver and tight end, with nearly every player entering his sophomore season.

A solid run game will help keep defenses honest.

The Aggies' incumbent defensive players are just as excited about Fisher's arrival. Senior defensive lineman Kingsley Keke has high hopes and a glowing opinion of the new head coach.

"He's a real tough guy," Keke said. "He's all about business. He demands excellence, toughness, grit, all of those good things, both physically and mentally. ... I want to be a leader on this team, vocally, on and off the field. To make some good plays for my team, and be there for my teammates whenever they need me."

A&M returns much more experience on defense at every level and Fisher expects his defensive front to lead the charge.

"Keke is here with us today," Fisher said. (Landis) Durham up front. (Michael) Clemons up front. Daylon Mack I thought made as much progress this spring as anyone we had, 320 some pounds. You have (Jayden) Peevy coming back."

The secondary will feature two sophomores and two juniors, as well as senior nickel back DeShawn Capers-Smith.

Optimism is high in College Station, and so is the pressure on Fisher and his staff. When asked about A&M's chancellor setting a timetable for a national championship, Fisher had this to say: "People are never going to put more pressure on me than I put on myself in this business.

This is about dealing with pressure.

"I thought it was kind of nice. I liked it. He had the same commitment that we did."

After a highly successful eight-year stint at Florida State, Fisher is looking to make his mark in his return to the SEC with the Aggies.



AP | FILE

North Texas head coach Seth Littrell, center, watches from the sideline during a game against Iowa.

Mean Green aiming for rare 3rd straight bowl appearance

BY FELISA CARDENAS

Third time's the charm.

At least, that's what North Texas head coach Seth Littrell is hoping to prove this year.

After becoming to the first coach to take the Mean Green to bowl games in his first two seasons, Littrell will try to become only the second UNT coach to reach bowls in three consecutive seasons.

Some junior college additions to the young, experienced offense will help in the pursuit, but changes in the Mean Green defense may be the determining factor.

UNT has won a division title, and while they lost some key players from 2017, junior quarterback Mason Fine will lead the chase for the conference title along with 19 returning starters.

Fine is the reigning Conference USA Offensive Player of the Year after throwing for 5,624 yards and 37 touchdowns last season.

The experienced quarterback returns with depth among the receivers, including Michael Lawrence, Jalen Guyton and Rico Bussey Jr.

The three juniors combined for 158 catches for 2,271 yards and 20 touchdowns.

Fine will also see five of his six pass-catchers back.

The Mean Green defense gave up an average of 49 points in its five losses last season and gave up big plays mainly on third down.

In 2017, opponents converted 44 percent of third downs against the Mean Green.

And while the Mean Green will adjust after losing five starters from last season, it'll have a senior-heavy defensive front, including Roderick Young, E.J. Ejiya, Brandon Garner and Aston Preston.

Ejiya leads the pack with a team-leading 109 tackles with seven sacks and 12 tackles for loss. Garner had 68 tackles and Preston had 41 stops.

What the defense is lacking is

depth.

In the secondary, safety Khairi Muhammad recorded 94 tackles and cornerback Kemon Hall recorded 72.

And while UNT has volume tackling, it's lacking in pass coverage.

Making it to the Conference USA championship for a second year in a row shouldn't be much of a challenge for the Mean Green but winning it might be another story.

If UNT can win the West again, it most likely will meet Florida Atlantic in the conference title game once more.

North Texas lost twice to FAU last season. The Owls are looking to defend their title without offensive coordinator Kendal Briles, who departed for Houston.

Early nonconference wins, at least two, will help put UNT within reach of another bowl bid. The Mean Green will face Louisiana Tech, Southern Mississippi and Florida Atlantic at home with a chance to division title under their belt.

TCU's new quarterback will have talented players around him

BY FELISA CARDENAS

The Horned Frogs of Texas Christian University had 19 players from the Big 12 title game graduate, including quarterback Kenny Hill. Three starting offensive linemen, three receivers, two tight ends and running back Kyle Hicks also departed.

But don't expect this to be a rebuilding year for TCU.

With five offensive linemen — including three multiyear starters — now gone, most other teams would be worried.

But not Gary Patterson.

If anything, the numbers speak for themselves.

In the last four seasons, TCU has won 40 games, which is more than both Texas A&M (31) and Texas (23).

Don't forget the Horned Frogs rallied from a 21-3 deficit against Stanford to win the Alamo Bowl 39-37.

While players who combined for 120 receptions for 1,412 yards all graduated, TCU saw freshman wide receiver Jalen Reagor step up in San Antonio. He caught five passes for 169 yards, including a 93-yard touchdown.

Offensively, the Horned Frogs expect Shawn Robinson to take the lead in the middle, despite the limited action he got in 2017.

Robinson was 13-for-27 for 184 yards with three touchdowns and no interceptions. He also had 23 rushing attempts for 6.9 yards per carry.

Another name in the mix competing for the leading role is Penn transfer Michael Collins.

Fans worry the offensive line won't be as strong after having to replace four starters, but with some rearranging, Patterson could have a young dominant O-Line that's a force to be reckoned with in the Big 12.

The Horned Frogs' defensive line may look smaller than most average



AP | FILE

TCU wide receiver Jalen Reagor, left, catches a touchdown pass in front of Oklahoma cornerback Parnell Motley in the Big 12 Conference championship game Dec. 2 in Arlington.

D-Lines, but has the passion and know-how to make the game-defining impact plays.

Since TCU joined the Big 12, the Frogs have never fallen below the top three in defensive yards per play. They've even finished first three times, most recently in 2017.

After turning down early entry into the NFL, senior defensive end Ben Banogu will return. Last season he recorded 16.5 tackles for loss. He was selected by the media as the Big 12's preseason defensive player of the year.

TCU will also have to replace linebacker Travin Howard, a seventh-round draft pick by the Los Angeles Rams and the first player in Horned Frog history to lead the team in tackles for three consecutive seasons.

There's a good chance the Horned Frogs can make it back to AT&T Stadium for the Big 12 title game, but there's no room for error with their heavily stacked early-season opponents. TCU takes on No. 4 Ohio State on Sept. 15 before facing No. 22 Texas in Austin.

The Horned Frogs play Iowa State on Sept. 29 before a bye week and a matchup with Texas Tech in early October. By Halloween, the Horned Frogs will have gone head-to-head with No. 5 Oklahoma and Kansas.

With few obstacles standing in the way, it's possible TCU could take home a Big 12 title this year if they find their way back to AT&T Stadium.

The question is, can they pull it off?

They always seem to find a way.

Major improvement expected in Applewhite's second season

BY FELISA CARDENAS

Major Applewhite heads into his second season leading the Cougars with his eyes set on returning Houston to the top of the American Athletic Conference.

In his first year, Applewhite had four losses of six points or less in a season that saw the Cougars finish 7-5. But that's not good enough.

Since 2005, the Cougars have had four 10-win seasons and only missed a bowl game twice.

In order to help get Houston back to that winning culture, Applewhite brought in offensive coordinator Kendal Briles.

Briles helped his father, Art Briles, build one of college football's best offenses at Baylor before a sexual assault scandal cost both of them their jobs.

Last season, Briles led Florida Atlantic's offense under Lane Kiffin, and the Owls averaged more than 40 points a game, including a 50-3 victory against Akron in the Boca Raton Bowl in December.

For the Cougars, the key to getting back on top of the AAC is winning the games they're supposed to win.

Houston lost its top two receivers. D'Eriq King will start at quarterback with only four career starts and no experienced running backs with more than 400 yards or 100 carries in a season.

Fortunately for Applewhite and Briles, if they want to shake up the offense they could move King, a converted receiver, and put Tennessee transfer Quinten Dormady under center.

Defensively, the Cougars have All-American Ed Oliver, a potential

Heisman Trophy candidate. He is one of five returning starters on the defense and one of just two in Houston's front seven.

Last season Oliver had 16.5 tackles for loss and 5.5 sacks that helped a defense that excelled at big-play prevention and showed strength in the red zone.

Oliver will share the defensive line with Payton Turner, Jerard Carter and Zach Vaughan.

The Cougars also lost three of their inside linebackers but have both cornerbacks, Alexander Myres and Jeremy Winchester, returning from last year's team.

Houston's schedule sets up the Cougars for a big year as they are the projected favorite in nine of 12 games. If the Cougars overachieve, a 10- or 11-win season is well within reach.

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Kingsbury not nervous about Texas Tech's QB uncertainty

BY TEE WORD

The Texas Tech Red Raiders finished the 2017 season with a 6-7 record (3-6 in the Big 12) and an eighth-place finish in the conference.

Head coach Kliff Kingsbury is entering his sixth season as the head man at Texas Tech and has compiled a 30-33 record in five seasons. As the third youngest head coach in college football, Kingsbury uses his experience as a former Red Raider quarterback to create an offensive scheme that has led his offense to average 550 yards and 42 points per game since 2011.

Kingsbury expects similar output on offense and improvements on defense and special teams to move his team into contention for the Big 12 conference title. At the Big 12 media days, Kingsbury addressed the overall outlook for his team by stating, "We felt like we were competitive last year; more so than we've been. Had a chance in almost every game late in the fourth quarter and didn't get it done. We have to kick better. We have to be better on special teams and we preached finish in everything we do."

Offensively, the Red Raiders will look to replace playmakers at wide receiver and have young up-and-comers De'Quan Bowman and T.J. Vasher who will team up with do-it-all sixth-year player Jacob Hines.

"We lost quite a few playmakers that have been really good players for us at wideout," Kingsbury said, "but have some young guys waiting in the wings."

McLane Carter is poised to step into the starting role at quarterback as he is hoping to replace last year's signal-caller Nic Shimonek, who is now with the Los Angeles Chargers. A starter has not yet been named. Carter started one game in



AP | FILE

Texas Tech coach Kliff Kingsbury looks down at his notes during a Nov. 18 game against TCU in Lubbock.

2017 while appearing in four and is expected to be fully prepared to continue the aerial assault for which the Red Raider offense is known.

Travis Bruffy returns at left tackle after starting 11 games last and will be a key force in protecting the inexperienced quarterback's blind side. Paul Stawarz joins Bruffy as a returning starter and is the anchor of the offensive line at center.

On defense, Texas Tech will field eight upperclassmen, including a veteran secondary featuring senior safeties Jah'Shawn Johnson and Vaughn Dorsey. Joining Johnson and Dorsey are junior cornerbacks Deshaun Smith and Douglas Coleman III.

Manning the front seven will be Broderick Washington Jr. at defensive tackle and Jordyn Brooks at middle linebacker. Leadership will not be a major concern for the Red Raiders and Kingsbury is excited about returning the most all Big 12 selections within the conference. Kingsbury credits defensive coordi-

nator David Gibbs for his resilience in turning around a porous defensive unit.

"Obviously, it's preseason, so you take everything with a grain of salt," Kingsbury said. But (I'm) excited for coach Gibbs and that defensive staff and those defensive players. When coach Gibbs took the job four years ago, he kind of had to redo it all. He had a vision, knew what he wanted to do but had to go through two tough years."

Tech enters the 2018 season with a great deal of potential on both sides of the football while surprisingly appearing better suited to excel on defense instead of offense.

With tough opponents on the schedule early, including Ole Miss and Oklahoma, Kingsbury is preparing his team for an uphill battle to start the season.

"You just do the best job you can and try to get those guys ready," he said. "I don't think there is anything that can compare them for that game one atmosphere."

Ranking the Big 12 Conference from 1-10

BY FELISA CARDENAS

1 OKLAHOMA

The Sooners take a big loss in losing Heisman Trophy winner Baker Mayfield but have Texas A&M transfer Kyler Murray taking over as the starting quarterback. He will have two of the Big 12's best running backs beside him, Rodney Anderson and Trey Sermon. Despite having to rebuild an offense that lost three unanimous All-Americans, Oklahoma is still the most consistent team in the Big 12.

2 WEST VIRGINIA

West Virginia has a difficult schedule but with much of the Big 12 is rebuilding this season, 2018 may be the Mountaineers to attack. Will Grier returns at quarterback after missing the final three games of last season with a broken finger. West Virginia has one of the best returning passing game in the country and Grier has three of his top four receivers returning, including David Sills V who led the nation in touchdown grabs last season. Gary Jennings also returns and led the conference in receptions.

3 TCU

Gary Patterson and the Horned Frogs are going through a rebuilding year after losing many of their top playmakers. The season will start off rough for TCU, but they could still pull out a run for a second consecutive berth in the Big 12 Championship game. Luckily, the Horned Frogs won't have to travel too far this season as they have only two road games outside of Texas — against Kansas and West Virginia.

4 TEXAS

The Longhorns may have ended last season on a high with a bowl victory over Missouri but they enter the season with a lot of talent but look to replace key players across the roster. Uncertainty at quarterback could be a

major setback for Texas. The Longhorns will need the underclassmen to step up after losing their best overall players in linebacker Malik Jefferson and tackle Conner Williams.

5 KANSAS STATE

It was a bumpy 2017 season for Kansas State, but the Wildcats could build upon their late success in 2018. After an early season loss of starting quarterback Jesse Ertz, Kansas State was able to turn the season around and qualify for head coach Bill Snyder's 19th bowl appearance in 26 years at the program. The Wildcats have all five starters on the offensive line returning, including tackle Dalton Risner.

6 OKLAHOMA STATE

The Cowboys could see a rebuilding season after losing seniors Mason Rudolph and James Washington to the NFL. Fortunately, much of the Big 12 is also going through a rebuild, which keeps the possibility of a bowl appearance alive. Head coach Mike Gundy has produced three straight 10-win seasons, but the streak most likely will end.

7 IOWA STATE

In his second year as head coach, Matt Campbell and the Cyclones qualified for a bowl game for the first time since 2012. Fans now hope he can continue to build off that success and elevate the program even further. Like many of the Texas teams, Iowa State also may have to rebuild after several top playmakers left for the NFL or graduated. The Cyclones may have broken their bowl drought but they also have only made consecutive bowl appearances six times in program history. If Campbell can overcome having to rebuild this season and lead Iowa State to back-to-back bowl appearances, that will be quite the accomplishment.

8 TEXAS TECH

After starting the season 4-1, the Red Raiders lost four straight games before pulling off a tight comeback win over Texas and qualifying for a bowl to save Kliff Kingsbury's job. Texas Tech returns a majority of key players across the roster; there's still room for improvement. Defensively, the Red Raiders have 19 of the top 20 tacklers back this next season but they need to quickly develop a star quarterback out of sophomore Jett Duffey or junior McLane Carter while rebuilding at all the skill positions.

9 BAYLOR

The Bears are coming off one of their worst seasons in years after going 1-11 in head coach Matt Rhule's first season. There really is no other place for Baylor to go than up. Luckily for him, much of Baylor's roster returns with plenty of talent. The Bears were within one score in the fourth quarter in eight different games, going 0-8 in all of those games. Baylor won't let that happen again, especially with a fan base that is expecting a bowl game next season. If the Bears can take victories over Kansas and Kansas State and pull off one additional win they could make that bowl dream a reality. However, it's more likely that this will be a year of developing talent and depth for a strong 2019 season.

10 KANSAS

The Jayhawks have had little success since David Beaty took over in 2015 and haven't won a Big 12 game since 2016 against Texas. Beaty has gone 3-33 in his first three seasons and 1-26 in Big 12 play. Kansas has gone 4-74 in Big 12 play and has fired three coaches since 2009. Unless he can turn the program around, Beaty may be gone before the end of 2018. The Jayhawks have been forced to play young players the last few seasons which could pay off this year in terms of experience.

Michigan's Shea Patterson headlines list of key transfers

BY GENARO C. ARMAS
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Head coach Jim Harbaugh couldn't pass up a chance to deliver a coy response when asked about the quarterback situation at Michigan.

Going by numbers alone, there may not be much of a contest. Mississippi transfer Shea Patterson could be the new starter behind center this season.

Out of the SEC and into the Big House — the pressure won't let up. Patterson could be the most pivotal transfer in FBS this season.

Michigan is coming off an 8-5 season in which its offense floundered under Harbaugh, a former quarterback who had a reputation for developing QBs.

But the Wolverines finished 109th in the country in yards per pass attempt in 2017.

"Quarterback position, don't have any announcements to make today about that," Harbaugh said at Big Ten media days.

Michigan opens the season Sept. 1 at Notre Dame and if Patterson is not the quarterback that will be even bigger news than his transfer to Michigan.

Patterson played three games as a freshman in 2016 at Mississippi, passing for 880 yards and six touchdowns.

Last season, Patterson played the first seven games, throwing for 2,259 yards, 17 touchdowns and nine interceptions before tearing a ligament in his right knee.

He completed about 64 percent of passes.

In April, the NCAA granted Patterson's request to waive the usually required redshirt season at his new school, making him eligible to play beginning this year at Michigan.

"Shea Patterson went through all of spring practice with our team

and got great work in there. Played really well," Harbaugh said.

Some other notable names at new places:

SAIVION SMITH, DB, ALABAMA

It's a reloading year in the secondary for the defending national champions, who must replace all four starters. Smith, a junior college transfer and former five-star LSU signee, is among the talented reinforcements. He could have an immediate impact in a defensive backfield short on experience.

JOE BURROW, QB, LSU

The former Ohio State quarterback played behind J.T. Barrett for two seasons. Burrow will compete for a starting job with the Tigers, who are installing a new offense

under new coordinator Steve Ensminger and have been searching for high-level quarterback play for a while.

ANTONIO WILLIAMS, RB N. CAROLINA

Another former Buckeye, Williams was lined up behind two stars in Columbus. The former highly touted recruit cited opportunity and family in returning to his home state. Williams played one game with six carries as a freshman, then 12 more as a reserve last year.

ALOHI GILMAN, S, NOTRE DAME

Gilman sat out last year after transferring from Navy, where he made 76 tackles as a freshman. A versatile defender, Gilman could provide stability at a position where the Irish struggled in 2017.

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CENTEX EXES (A-L)

Area athletes playing college and pro football

NAME	YR.	POS.	SCHOOL	HS	NOTEWORTHY
Alejandro Aaron	So.	LB	NW Okla. St.	Belton	Practiced with the team but didn't see game action
Zach Adams	Fr.	DT	UMHB	Salado	Second-team all-district as prep senior
Lamont Alexander	Sr.	DT	S.F. Austin	Killeen	6 TFL, 2.5 sacks, 1 fumble recovery in 11 games as jr.
Marcus Anderson II	Jr.	RB	SW Okla. St.	Harker Hts	Redshirted after transfer from Navarro
Derrick Bayer	Fr.	WR	UMHB	Gatesville	Second-team all-district for Hornets
Marin Biletic	Sr.	DL	So. Nazarene	Ellison	Started all 11 games, 31 tackles, 3½ TFL
Clayton Blank	Fr.	DL	Tarleton St.	Belton	Led Tigers in sacks, TFL and fumble recoveries as senior
Trent Canion	Jr.	RB	W. Texas A&M	C. Cove	Saw action in 5 games, 1-5 rushing, 1 tackle in 2017
Diamon Cannon	Jr.	LB	Tulsa	Shoemaker	8 starts last season, 2 FF, 1 FR, 1 INT & 1 blocked kick
Will Carroll	Fr.	LB	S.D. Mines	Gatesville	Second-team all-district ILB as prep senior
Javon Chambers	So.	OL	Tarleton St.	Belton	11 games, split time at OL and TE
Logan Collins	So.	WR	UMHB	Belton	Appeared in 1 game in freshman season
Floyd Connell	Fr.	CB	La. Monroe	C. Cove	8-6A offensive player of year as Dawg senior
Khalil Corbett-Canada	So.	OL	N'western St.	Harker Hts	Transfer from Trinity Valley CC
Ishmael Davis	Sr.	DE	Texas State	Ellison	Started 1st 4 games in 2017 before season-ending injury
Cooper Edmiston	Jr.	LB	Tulsa	Gatesville	Had 6 games with double-figure tackles in 2017
Timothy Edwards	Fr.	RB	McMurry	C. Cove	2nd-team all-district as senior
Keith Gipson	Jr.	DB	UMHB	Ellison	
Alexzander Goosby	So.	RB	UMHB	Harker Hts	Expected to challenge for playing time
Robert Gri# n III	6Y	QB	Ravens (NFL)	C. Cove	Back in the NFL after one-year absence
Hayden Haire	Fr.	QB	UMHB	Salado	First-team all-district for 12-2 Salado last season
Logan Hall	Fr.	DL	Houston	Belton	Finished prep career with 106 tackles, 14 TFL, 5 sacks
Joshua Hancock	Sr.	WR	Houston	Ellison	2014 Ellison graduate
Ra'Shaun Henry	So.	WR	St. Francis	C.Cove	11 catches for 134 yards, started 2 games in '17
Jameel Hodges	Fr.	RB	Permian Basin	Harker Hts	First-team 8-6A RB as Knight senior
William Hooper	Fr.	CB	N'western St.	Shoemaker	First-team 8-6A CB as Grey Wolf senior
Cutter Hudgens	Fr.	CB	UMHB	Salado	First-team all-district safety and kick returner
Chris Hughes	So.	OL	Kansas	Harker Hts	10 starts at RG last season before injury
Breyon Jackson	Sr.	LB	So. Nazarene	C. Cove	Started 10 of 11 games, with 45 tackles as jr.
Reggie Jackson	Sr.	WR	Tex. Lutheran	Ellison	24-347 rec., 4 TDs in 9 games last season
Sam Jackson	Fr.	LB	Tarleton St.	Gatesville	Redshirted last season as true freshman.
Darius James	R	OL	Jets (NFL)	Harker Hts	Undrafted Auburn ex signed with Jets on May 4
Juan Jimenez	Fr.	DT	Abil. Christian	C. Cove	Second-team all-district as Cove senior
Marcellus Johnson	Fr.	QB	Lamar	Killeen	2,128 yards, 15 TDs passing, 827 rushing, 8 TDs as sr.
Logo Kaleopo	Jr.	DE	Permian Basin	C. Cove	
Antonio Lealiiiee	So.	RB	A&M Commerce	C. Cove	1-7 rushing as redshirt frosh for D2 national champs
Shamad Lomax	Jr.	DB	New Mexico St.	C. Cove	All-Sun Belt Conf. 3rd team, 4 INTs (3 vs. UTEP)
Remington Lutz	Fr.	TE	Abilene Christian	Belton	6-foot-6 target redshirted last season

CONTINUED ON PAGE 66

CENTEX EXES (M-Z)

Area athletes playing college and pro football

NAME	YR.	POS.	SCHOOL	HS	NOTEWORTHY
Zach Mack	So.	OL	S.F. Austin	Gatesville	Was three-year starter at Gatesville
Peyton Mansell	Fr.	QB	Iowa	Belton	Dual-threat redshirted last year after stellar prep career
Jalil Maxwell	Jr.	LB	So. Nazarene	Harker Hts	Did not see action as sophomore
Te'Ayveon Mayo	Fr.	DE	Sul Ross St.	Shoemaker	
Daniel McCants	Jr.	RB	Tarleton St.	Killeen	2nd Team All-LSC, No. 2 all-time in Texans KOR yards
Marcus McCrea	So.	DB	UMHB	C. Cove	Competing for a starting job this season
Montego Muckelvaney	Fr.	WR	La. Monroe	Killeen	First-team all-district in football and basketball
Nathalohn Nanai	Fr.	DT	N'western St.	Shoemaker	First-team all-8-6A as prep senior
James Parker	Fr.	DB	Sul Ross St.	Shoemaker	Second-team all-district safety for SHS
Joshua Pettit	Fr.	WR	Tex. Wesleyan	C. Cove	
Allen Scott	Sr.	LB	McMurry	Gatesville	Appeared in all 10 games: 21 tackles (14 solo), 1 TFL.
Peyton Searcy	Sr.	DL	A&M-Commerce	Killeen	Honorable mention all-LSC for D2 champs
Zach Shackelford	Jr.	OL	Texas	Belton	Has already started 17 times for Longhorns
Jameill Showers	1Y	DB	Cowboys (NFL)	Shoemaker	Placed on IR after preseason knee injury
Jyaire Shorter	Fr.	WR	N. Texas	Ellison	37-731 receiving, 3 TDs as prep senior
Jayden Smith	So.	DB	UMHB	Ellison	Played in 9 games as backup safety
Michael Smith	So.	OL	LSU	Ellison	Did not see action last season
Durham Smythe	R	TE	Dolphins (NFL)	Belton	Drafted in 4th round out of Notre Dame
Anthony Stephens II	Jr.	DB	So. Nazarene	Harker Hts	5 starts, 51 tackles in 7 games at soph.
Olajuwon Taylor	So.	RB	W. Texas A&M	Belton	Redshirted last season
Duke Thomas	2Y	CB	Cowboys (NFL)	C. Cove	9 tackles, 1 fumble recovery in 2017 preseason
Tyrell Thompson	Sr.	DL	Tarleton St.	C. Cove	All-LSC 1st team, preseason D2 All-American
Ray Thornton	So.	LB	LSU	Shoemaker	Played in five games as redshirt frosh
Jett Truss	Fr.	QB	Western St. Colo.	Gatesville	First-team all-district, 23 passing TDs, 12 rushing
Colton Tuiasosopo	Jr.	TE	Permian Basin	C. Cove	2nd-team all-district on O-line at Cove
Alyzcha Ulufale-Hentz	Fr.	OL	N'western St.	Killeen	2nd-team all-district OT as KHS senior
JP Urquidez	So.	OL	Texas	C. Cove	Played in 2 games in 2017 as redshirt frosh
Garrison Vaughn	Fr.	DB	Houston	Belton	Three-year starter in high school for Tigers
Jake Walrath	Fr.	P	Abil. Christian	Salado	2nd-team all-district kicker for Eagles as senior
Kipshawn Washington	Fr.	DB	Tarleton St.	Ellison	3-time all-district first-teamer in HS
Remington Weis	Jr.	OL	W. Texas A&M	C. Cove	Played in three games with 1 start as soph.
Willy Whigham	Fr.	LB	UMHB	Salado	All-district center for 12-2 Eagles last season
Dwayne Williams	Sr.	CB	Oregon State	Shoemaker	Started 1st 3 games in '17 before season-ending injury
Marcus Williams	Fr.	LB	UMHB	Ellison	
Treyvon Williams	Jr.	DL	N. Texas	Ellison	Transfer from Bethel College
George Wooten	Jr.	P	McMurry	Belton	Hasn't played since season-ending injury in 2016
Ozias Wright	Fr.	RB	Sul Ross St.	Shoemaker	Second-team all-district RB as SHS senior

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

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2018 FOOTBALL SEASON SCHEDULE

SEPT. 1

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VS.



SEPT. 8

AT



SEPT. 15

Presented by Premier ER & Urgent Care

VS.



SEPT. 22

VS.



SEPT. 29*

AT



OCT. 6*

Presented by H-E-B

VS.



OCT. 13*

AT



OCT. 25*

AT



NOV. 3*

Presented by Texas Farm Bureau Insurance

VS.



NOV. 10*

AT



NOV. 17*

Presented by TFNB Your Bank For Life

VS.



NOV. 24*

Texas Farm Bureau Insurance Shootout

VS.



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