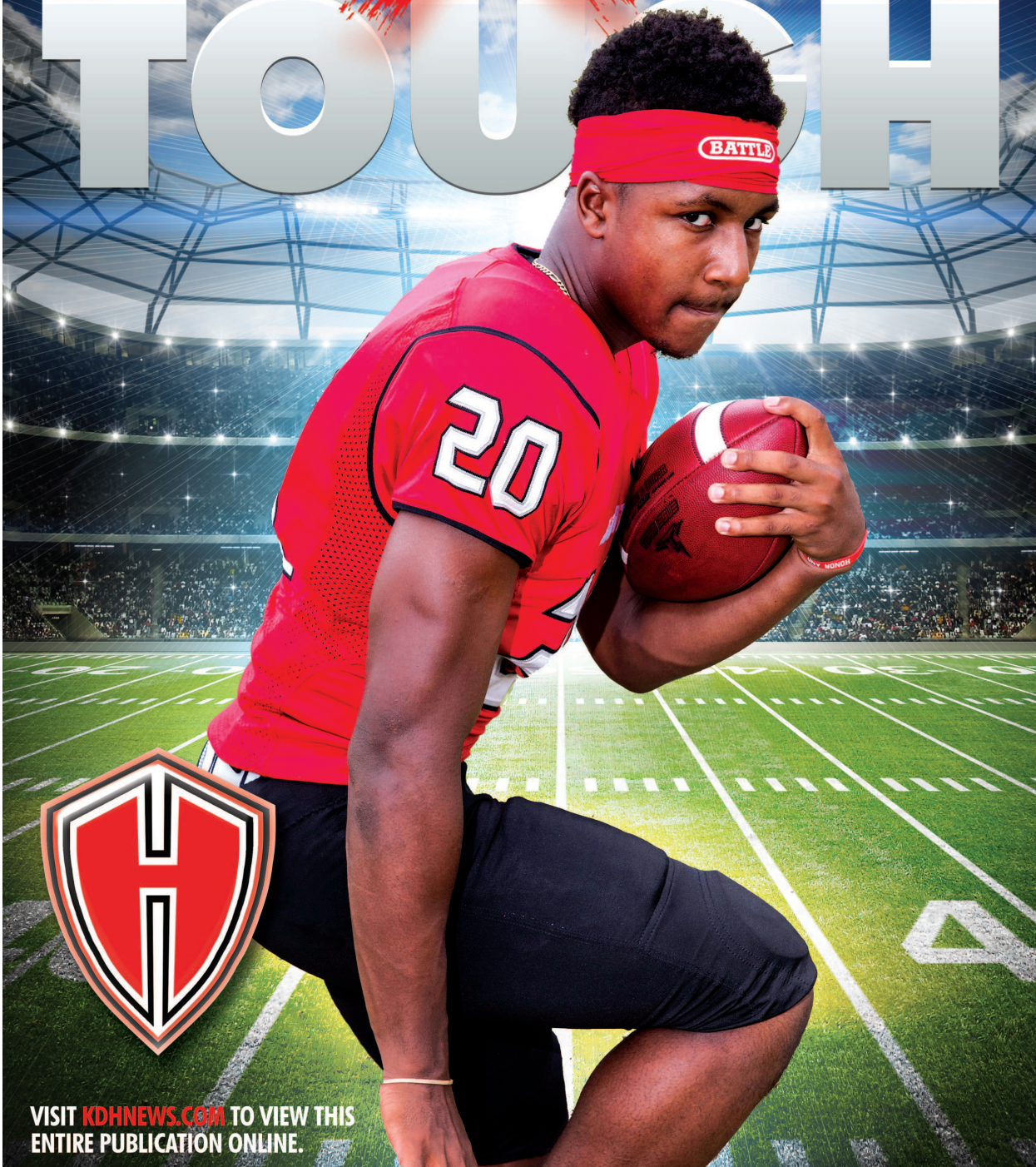


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2017 PREVIEW

TEXAS TOUGH



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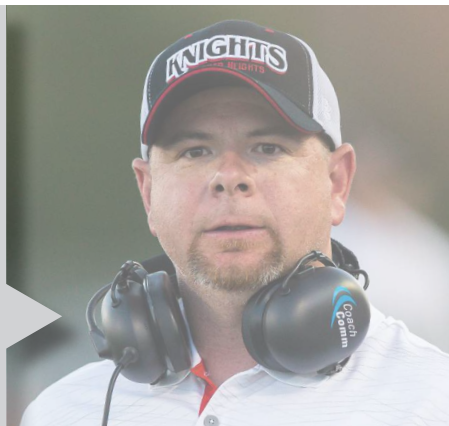
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HARKER HEIGHTS' JAMEEL HODGES
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Coach Jerry Edwards expecting a deep run in playoffs

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IT'S GOOD TO BE IN

BY QUINTON LILLEY
 HARKER HEIGHTS HERALD

When Jerry Edwards became the head football coach at Harker Heights High School during the summer of 2013, he knew he was accepting a challenge — to rebuild the Knights into a winning program that regularly made playoff appearances.

During the 2016 season, Edwards and the Knights did exactly that as they finished with a 6-5 record, making their first playoff appearance in over a decade.

Edwards came to Harker Heights from one of Texas' more dominant high school programs — Mansfield High School — that was coming off a second-round playoff appearance as the 45th-ranked team in the state in 2012 by MaxPreps.

Edwards has a defensive background as a former defensive coordinator at Mansfield.

Edwards is originally from Quitman — a small East Texas town north of Tyler. There, he starred as a varsity football player before going to Texas A&M University, where he initially chose to pursue a pre-med degree.

However, shortly after graduating, Edwards realized what he truly wanted to do was affect the lives of young people through coaching.

"I just love being around kids, and

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“ME AND THE COACHES HERE SAY IT ALL THE TIME: WE DON’T EVEN CONSIDER THIS A REAL JOB.”

JERRY EDWARDS

being a part of a team. Me and the coaches here say it all the time: We don’t even consider this a real job,” Edwards said.

While people who watch Edwards on the sideline may believe he’s a very serious and intense guy on the field, at home he’s a fun-loving family man to his wife of 13 years, Jillian, and his three young sons.

“We’re a football family in every sense, they’re at every game. And I appreciate their support tremendously,” Edwards said.

Taking on a new challenge was something Edwards said he welcomed when he got the job at Harker Heights. While many people may have questioned what he could do to bring back winning ways to

the school after an 11-year drought between playoff berths, the Knights’ stock seems to be trending upward this year as Edwards doesn’t want to just make the playoffs now; he wants to win.

“Our motto is to ‘win every day’ and if we continue to do that leading into the season, we’ll be just fine,” Edwards said.



HARKER HEIGHTS 2017 SCHEDULE

9/1	AT ELGIN	7:30
9/7	ROUND ROCK MCNEIL	7:00
9/15	WACO	7:30
9/22	AT AUSTIN VANDEGRIFT	7:30
9/28	BELTON	7:00
10/6	AT WACO MIDWAY	7:30
10/13	SHOEMAKER	7:30
10/20	AT ELLISON	7:30
10/26	COPPERAS COVE	7:00
11/10	AT KILLEEN	7:30

HARKER HEIGHTS DISTRICT 8-6A RECORDS

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

“ We have a lot of talent on both sides of the ball, and I would be remiss not to utilize it as much as possible. ”

Harker Heights head coach

JERRY EDWARDS



PHOTO BY ANDY ZAVOINA | HERALD



PHOTO BY ANDY ZAVOINA | HERALD

2017 brings challenges

Harker Heights' Jameel Hodges (20), left, runs to the outside as the Knights beat Elgin at Leo Buckley Stadium last season.

BY QUINTON LILLEY
HARKER HEIGHTS HERALD

In 2016, the Harker Heights football team finished with a 6-5 record, making its first playoff appearance in over a decade, with the Knights' season ending at the hands of the Duncanville Panthers.

Last season, the team boasted one of the top offensive lines in Central Texas paired with some of the area's best running backs.

However, with every new season comes new challenges as the Knights lost both of their starting quarterbacks from 2016.

Robert Gray and Daniel Cole — who both saw action at quarterback last year — have graduated. Other players will need to step up in leadership roles to build on the success of last season.

The 2016 season saw the Knights

win four of their first six games, with quality wins against Austin Vandegrift, Belton, and a two-point loss to eventual district champion Waco Midway.

Head coach Jerry Edwards said he plans to keep a similar mindset going into this season of being a solid defensive team, consistency controlling the line of scrimmage on both sides of the ball, while also mixing in some spread elements to get the Knights skill-position players in open space to make plays.

“We have a lot of talent on both sides of the ball, and I would be remiss not to utilize it as much as possible,” Edwards said.

Edwards will now enter his fifth year as head coach of the Knights and if the team continues to better its record each season, the Knights will likely be a team that advances in the playoffs.

**HARKER
HEIGHTS
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PHOTO BY ANDY ZAVOINA | HERALD

**JERRY
EDWARDS**

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TAUNTY MOTU

Smash-mouth football to be a key for Knights' success

BY QUINTON LILLEY
HARKER HEIGHTS HERALD

Heights head coach Jerry Edwards has shown an old-school approach to winning football games.

Last year, the Knights had a slew of senior quarterbacks who all had opportunities to lead the offense, including Robert Gray and Daniel Cole. However, the team used its stable of running backs and strong offensive line play to help the Knights reach the playoffs for the first time in 11 years. The team's strong run game

led the district in yardage.

With sophomore quarterback Stacy Brown looking to replace the senior leadership of Gray and Cole, other players on offense will need to step up in leadership roles to build on the success of last year's squad.

Senior running back Jameel Hodges — who ran for more than 1,000 yards last year as a junior — is expected to be one of the offensive leaders.

"We have a lot of great weapons on offense, but Jameel has really stepped it up this year," Edwards said. "He's been at every practice and every meeting the last two years. He's been

"THE COACHES HAVE REALLY BEEN WORKING WITH ME ON IMPROVING MY TECHNIQUE, DOING LOTS OF SQUATS AND DEADLIFTS SO BULL RUSHES WON'T WORK ON ME THIS SEASON."

TAUNTY MOTU

a great example of how hard you have to work in order to be a great leader."

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

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

Hodges, who was arguably one of the best running backs in the district last year, said he also wants to become a great receiving threat out of



PHOTO BY ANDY ZAWONAT/HERALD

Harker Heights' Jameel Hodges (20) tries to escape a Waco tackler last season in Waco.

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

Another player expected to step up this year is senior offensive lineman Taunty "Tank" Motu. Starting at right guard, Motu will look to lead running lanes for Hodges.

Motu said he believes last year's experience will help the team to perform better in key moments during the upcoming season.

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

Motu said he has worked on his technique and lower-body strength to hold off pass rushers more effectively this season.

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

Last season, the Knights got off to a tremendous start, going 4-1 through the first five weeks. However, the Knights seemed to peak too early as they went on to lose four of their final six games, ending the season with a respectable 6-5 record.

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

"As an offense, we need to continue to put the pressure on teams, never let up and score points every quarter," Hodges said. "If we always respect our opponents and remain humble, we have a great shot at winning multiple championships."

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JOSEPH EVANS



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

“LAST YEAR, WE LET A LOT OF SHORT PLAYS TURN INTO LONG PLAYS, AND WE CAN’T DO THAT THIS YEAR IF WE WANT TO WIN.”

JOSEPH EVANS

New faces on Knights’ defense

BY QUINTON LILLEY
HARKER HEIGHTS HERALD

The Knights lost nearly their entire starting defense from a year ago and have been working tirelessly to bring all the new faces up to speed in head coach Jerry Edwards’ attacking, aggressive scheme.

While many people might question how much talent the defense will have

this year, the lone returning starter might be one of the district’s best defensive ends — Joseph Evans.

“Joseph is just a big, tall, fast, track athlete who plays football really well,” Edwards said.

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

Edwards has been instrumental in the improvements made to the defense during spring ball. He has



PHOTO BY ANDY ZAVOINA | HERALD

Jaylan McElrath, center, is sandwiched by Joseph Evans, right, and Mark Styles during Harker Heights' 2017 spring game at Leo Buckley Stadium. The Knights defense beat the offense 37-27.

“WITH MY DEFENSIVE BACKGROUND, I’VE DEFINITELY BEEN HEAVILY INVOLVED WITH THE DEVELOPMENT OF OUR TEAM DEFENSE. IF WE CAN’T PLAY DEFENSE, WE CAN’T WIN GAMES.”

JERRY EDWARDS

implored the unit to give better effort, tackle with better technique and know its defensive assignments.

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

Edwards credited the defense for how well it played in the spring game and at practices, saying the team’s overall effort has been much

better and the team has consistently swarmed to the ball.

Evans said he believes fans will see an improved team this season, especially on defense, where players seem more hungry and focused on the task at hand.

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

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

“Last year, we let a lot of short plays turn into long plays, and we can’t do that this year if we want to win,” Evans said. “The better our communication is, the better we will be.”

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

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HARKER HEIGHTS

Red Brigade



PHOTO BY GABE WOLF | HERALD

Knights band to play lots of pop music this season

BY QUINTON LILLEY
HARKER HEIGHTS HERALD

With an uptempo, synchronized style, the Harker Heights marching band will entertain thousands of fans this year with its use of pop music.

The band will be heard at many pep

rallies, halftime shows and even during timeouts this year.

Director of Bands David Norris says the band will boast over 200 members playing all kinds of instruments, from drums to saxophones to clarinets to trumpets.

"I look forward to seeing what level of success our students can achieve this year. They keep raising the bar and

reaching their goals. So far this season, they have established that they will be stronger than ever," Norris said.

The Knights band practiced throughout the summer in the Texas heat preparing to support all the sports teams this year.

The band also has 25 seniors who will be playing for their last time in high school. Their first performance this year will be at the Spirit Spectacular tomorrow.

Knights Cheerleaders excited to show off improved skill

BY QUINTON LILLEY
HARKER HEIGHTS HERALD

While the Knights basketball and football teams will be focused on outscoring their opponents, the cheer team will look to entertain and encourage the crowd simultaneously.

The team, which is very underclassmen laden, will have only four seniors, including the mascot.

New cheer coach Maryelise Daniel says she's most excited to see the improved skill sets of each member of the squad after all their hard work this spring and summer.

"I am excited to see what our team will achieve skill-wise, as we have been pushing them athletically. I am also very excited to work with the teams on improving school involvement and a sense of community among the students," Daniel said.

The cheer squad will be led by captain Rachel Forrest and co-captain Kayla Watts. The team's spirit captain is Madisson Smith and the junior varsity captain is Gracie Alvarez. The team will mostly perform to songs played by the Knights band.

The team will also compete in the University Interscholastic League state competition this year.

While Daniel hasn't been the coach for long, she says she's most proud of her team's effort this summer.

"I have been coaching since April 2017, and we have been practicing since then, including the summer. The girls have definitely been working really hard," she said.

HARKER HEIGHTS *Varsity Cheerleaders*



HARKER HEIGHTS *JV Cheerleaders*



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