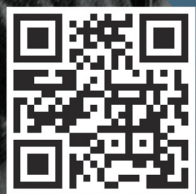


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ON THE COVER

Clockwise from the top are Ellison's Devonte Tezino, Harker Heights' Terrance Carter, Shoemaker's Omari Evans and Killeen High's Jacobia Thomas.
Photo by Andy Zavoina
Cover design by Renee Blue

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2021 KILLEEN ISD VARSITY FOOTBALL SCHEDULE

DAY/DATE	KILLEEN	ELLISON	HARKER HEIGHTS	SHOEMAKER
Fri - Aug 13		SCRIM - A&M CONSOL (7 p.m. / A&M Consol HS)		
Thur - Aug 19			SCRIM - ROUND ROCK (6:30 p.m. / Buckley Stadium)	SCRIM - MIDWAY (7:30 p.m. / Lorena HS)
Fri - Aug 20	SCRIM - MANSFIELD SUMMIT (7 p.m. / Buckley Stadium)	SCRIM - BYRON NELSON (6:30 p.m. / Byron Nelson HS)		
Thur - Aug 26	RR CEDAR RIDGE (Dragon Stadium)			
Fri - Aug 27		LIBERTY HILL (Panther Stadium)	PFLUGERVILLE WEISS (7 p.m. / The Pfield)	SAN ANGELO CENTRAL (7 p.m. / San Angelo Stadium)
Thur - Sep 2	PFLUGERVILLE HENDRICKSON (The Pfield)			
Fri - Sep 3		VANDEGRIFT (7 p.m. / Monroe Stadium)	GEORGETOWN EAST VIEW (7 p.m. / GISD Athletic Complex)	OPEN
Thur - Sep 9	WACO (Waco ISD Stadium)		RR MCNEIL (Buckley Stadium)	
Fri - Sep 10		CIBOLO STEELE (Lehnhoff Stadium)		KERRVILLE TIVY (Buckley Stadium)
Fri - Sep 17	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN
Thur - Sep 23		HARKER HEIGHTS (EHS Visitor @ Buckley Stadium)	ELLISON (HHHS Home @ Buckley Stadium)	
Fri - Sep 24	SHOEMAKER (KHS Home @ Buckley Stadium)			KILLEEN (SHS Visitor @ Buckley Stadium)
Thur - Sep 30				COPPERAS COVE (Buckley Stadium)
Fri - Oct 1	ELLISON (KHS Visitor @ Buckley Stadium)	KILLEEN (EHS Home @ Buckley Stadium)	TEMPLE (Wildcat Stadium)	
Thur - Oct 7		TEMPLE (Buckley Stadium)		
Fri - Oct 8	COPPERAS COVE (Bulldawg Stadium)		BELTON (Buckley Stadium)	BRYAN (Merrill Green Stadium)
Thur - Oct 14	BRYAN (Buckley Stadium)			
Fri - Oct 15		COPPERAS COVE (Bulldawg Stadium)	SHOEMAKER (HHHS Visitor @ Buckley Stadium)	HARKER HEIGHTS (SHS Home @ Buckley Stadium)
Thur - Oct 21		BELTON (Buckley Stadium)		
Fri - Oct 22	HARKER HEIGHTS (KHS Visitor @ Buckley Stadium)		KILLEEN (HHHS Home @ Buckley Stadium)	TEMPLE (Wildcat Stadium)
Thur - Oct 28				BELTON (Buckley Stadium)
Fri - Oct 29	TEMPLE (Buckley Stadium)	BRYAN (Merrill Green Stadium)	COPPERAS COVE (Bulldawg Stadium)	
Thur - Nov 4			BRYAN (Buckley Stadium)	
Fri - Nov 5	BELTON (Tiger Stadium)	SHOEMAKER (EHS Home @ Buckley Stadium)		ELLISON (SHS Visitor @ Buckley Stadium)

All Thursday games will be played at 7 p.m. unless otherwise stated above.

All Friday games will be played at 7:30 p.m. unless otherwise stated above.

Updated 08.18.2021

Tigers seek to end 2-year playoff drought

BY CLAY WHITTINGTON
HERALD CORRESPONDENT

His team is almost unrecognizable.

Last year, Brett Sniffin entered his first year as Belton's head coach under unimaginable circumstances.

Along with all the expected obstacles that accompany a career transition, like countless other coaches across the state, he was restricted by University Interscholastic League rules and protocols limiting practices and interactions due to concerns surrounding the coronavirus pandemic.

By the time opening night rolled around, Sniffin and his team were still strangers.

Now, however, it is not the case.

"Compared to last year," Sniffin said, "it is night and day. This team is so much further ahead at this point of the season than where it was at this time a year ago.

"The progress we have made in a year is just tremendous."

In addition to having a season with the program to build relationships, Sniffin benefitted from loosened safety constraints, allowing for a normal offseason routine, and the combined factors should improve the Tigers' odds of returning to the playoffs.

Belton has not made the post-season since 2018, falling two losses shy of being inside the playoff picture last year, when two of its four District 12-6A losses were by one score — a 34-33 defeat at Bryan and a 27-21 loss in overtime against Shoemaker at home.

Although the Tigers have made strides in a year; they have also suffered setbacks.

Among others, quarterback Ru-



HERALD | FILE

Belton's LJ Underwood is one of three running backs the Tigers plan to use this season.

ben Jimenez, running back Maurice Reed, offensive guard Thomas Bowman, utility player Kanyan Utley, offensive tackle Charles

Wilson, defensive tackle Bryan Luna and linebacker Joe Sniffin,

PLEASE SEE **TIGERS, 7**

TIGERS

FROM PAGE 6

who were each represented on the 2002 all-district list, graduated, leaving a raw roster, especially on offense, where Jimenez and Reed accounted for 34 of the team's 35 passing and rushing touchdowns.

"Most of our experience lies on the defensive side of the ball," Brett Sniffin said, "and those are the guys who are going to have to carry us and lead us into the season until the offense catches up."

"The offense is much younger, but it is more athletic, and we do have some seniors we will expect a lot from."

Senior tight end Bryan Henry, who verbally committed to Houston during the offseason, led Belton in receiving yards last season, catching 34 passes for 578 yards and five touchdowns, and will

BELTON TIGERS

LAST FIVE SEASONS

2020: 3-7

2019: 3-7

2018: 7-4

2017: 6-5

2016: 8-4

2021 SCHEDULE

Aug. 27 at Georgetown 7:00

Sept. 3 Round Rock 7:30

Sept. 10 Pfl. Hendrickson 7:30

Sept. 24 at Copperas Cove 7:30

Oct. 1 Bryan 7:30

Oct. 8 at Harker Heights* 7:30

Oct. 15 Temple 7:30

Oct. 21 at Ellison* 7:00

Oct. 28 at Shoemaker* 7:00

Nov. 5 Killeen 7:30

*-Leo Buckley Stadium

serve as a reliable target for the Tigers' new quarterback. Slade Leblanc, a junior, and sophomore Ty Brown have emerged as the leading candidates for the posi-

tion.

Belton will also rely on senior receiver Seth Morgan, who caught 22 passes for 408 yards and three touchdowns in 2020, and senior lineman Ryan Hunt.

Defensively, the Tigers could potentially start all seniors, including defensive backs Aaron Bain and Trenton West, linebacker Sam Ramirez, defensive end Braxton Hayes and cornerback Kage Carmichael.

Regardless of personnel, though, Belton must find a way to consistently win in district.

The Tigers won their first two district games last season before closing the schedule by losing three of their final four contests and experiencing a forfeit.

While the road to the playoffs remains rugged, Belton can find solace in having a home away from home.

Outside of traveling to Copperas Cove for the district opener, the Tigers will play all their remaining games at either Leo Buckley Stadium or home.

Belton plays Harker Heights, Ellison and Shoemaker at Killeen, and thanks to a year of progress, the Tigers feel capable of contending in any stadium, but they also know nothing will come easy.

"It is going to be like going out and rolling dice," Brett Sniffin said. "Anybody can beat anybody, and based on the finish of the standings last year, it is a wide open race."

"One or two losses may win district, and three or four losses might still get you in. It is going to be crazy."

"The progress we have made in a year is just tremendous."

Brett Sniffin
Belton head coach

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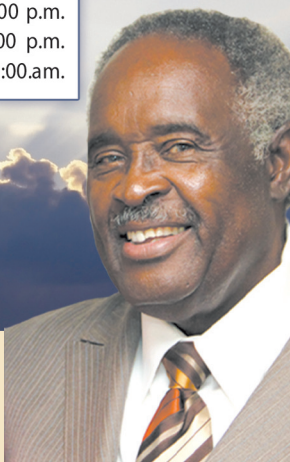
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'Dawgs look to grit their way back to success

BY THADDEUS IMERMAN

KILLEEN DAILY HERALD

Some coaches have a key word or phrase on which they base the theme of their upcoming season. For coach Jason Hammett and the Copperas Cove Bulldawgs, that word is “grit.”

“For us, grit is the most important thing,” Hammett said. “You can show grit and win and get better each week, and that’s what we’re looking for.”

Part of that grit involved practicing at different times.

“We’ve practiced in the afternoon in the real heat, we practice in the morning, so we’ve kind of done both the two things that we need to be ready to do as a mindset,” Hammett said.

Copperas Cove is coming off its worst season since 1993, going 1-9 in 2020, which included two coronavirus-related forfeitures.

“Grit’s going to be the thing,” Hammett said. “It gets you through the tough times or it makes the good times better. This is life, too. You’re gonna get knocked down, so how do you react to it?”

Dave Campbell’s “Texas Football” magazine has the Bulldawgs finishing last in District 12-6A.

Hammett said it doesn’t matter, and it shouldn’t matter to his players or the fans.

“We said it last year during COVID — nobody cares,” Hammett said. “Nobody cares that we got COVID. Nobody cares when you lose. They want to see how you respond to it, and that’s really what we’re going to push for this year.”

Offensively, the Bulldawgs will look to improve upon the 17.6 points per game average it put up in the games it did play last sea-



HERALD | FILE

Copperas Cove’s Shane Richey runs to the 7-yard line against Waxahachie in the teams’ season opener on Sept. 25, 2020, at Bulldawg Stadium.

son, while the defense will look to improve upon the 36.6 points per game it gave up.

Some of the final scores from last year were deceiving, however, as the team hung tough with play-off teams such as Waxahachie, Shoemaker and Harker Heights for a half of football. The Bulldawgs also kept the game close at Belton last season.

Hammett said scores are not

important to him.

“If you’re looking at just scores, then you’re either going to be artificially happy or artificially sad on some of these things,” he said. “You got to look at how we’re preparing and the amount of grit that they show when bad things happen.”

Hammett pointed out that hav-

PLEASE SEE **DAWGS, 9**

DAWGS

FROM PAGE 8

ing a full offseason has been a benefit with getting ready for the season.

Defensively, Hammett said it will be a “group effort” this season, as the team returns some linebackers and some defensive linemen.

“All in all, I think we got a bunch of kids — and not just the first group, but the second group, too — that are competitors, and a bunch of guys that are kind of a team-first attitude on defense,” Hammett said.

One of the defensive linemen who hopes to have significant playing time this season is senior Terrell Tardy.

Tardy, who is making the transition from offensive line to defensive line, has lofty goals for his senior season.

“I want to play — I actually want to play. I want to just give my all to my teammates,” Tardy said. “I actually want to take Cove to the playoffs and win a playoff game.”

The Bulldawgs have not won a playoff game since 2011 when they beat Mesquite Horn 48-47.

“It would feel great,” Tardy said of what it would feel like to win a playoff game. “It would just feel like all my hard work for the past

COPPERAS COVE BULLDAWGS

LAST FIVE SEASONS

2020: 1-9

2019: 3-7

2018: 7-4

2017: 5-6

2016: 4-5

2021 SCHEDULE

Aug. 26 at RR Stony Point* 7:00

Sept. 3 Georgetown 7:30

Sept. 10 at Austin Bowie^ 7:30

Sept. 24 Belton 7:30

Sept. 30 at Shoemaker% 7:00

Oct. 8 Killeen 7:30

Oct. 15 Ellison 7:30

Oct. 22 at Bryan 7:30

Oct. 29 Harker Heights 7:30

Nov. 5 at Temple 7:30

*-Reeves Complex

^-Burger Stadium

%-Leo Buckley Stadium

four years have paid off.”

On the offensive side of the ball, Hammett said it will be a similar group effort, with some playing on both sides of the ball, but some who play specific positions. Three offensive linemen return to the Bulldawg offense.

He said he also has a receiving corps that runs the gamut of all facets of the game, with some having good speed and good catching ability, while others have good route-running techniques.

One of the members of the receiving corps that is returning is senior tight end Caleb Newberry.

“We’re progressively growing as a team,” Newberry said. “We’ve got a lot of playmakers, we just got to put it all together.”

Newberry, who had kicking duties last season, said he hopes to help the team get more wins. He admitted, however, that the season means more than just wins and losses.

“We got a good team around us, and just share the love of (Jesus) Christ with people,” Newberry said, adding that he wants to grow lifelong bonds and friendships with his teammates.

Personally, Newberry said he hopes to score some touchdowns, something he hasn’t done since his freshman year.

Approximately one week into practice, Hammett said he noticed his team had a lot of energy.

“Especially the senior leadership,” he said at the end of practice in August. “And I got some young guys stepping up, so that’s really been good for this week.”

That said, Hammett said he knows there is a lot to work on.

“You talk about coming back from spring football, retention of information, we’ve got a lot of new guys that weren’t here in spring ball, too — catching those guys up,” Hammett said. “So we’ve got plenty of things to work on.”

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New Ellison coach hopes to instill physicality

BY THADDEUS IMERMAN

KILLEEN DAILY HERALD

Inside the office of new Ellison head coach Danny Servance, along the front of his desk, are three sledgehammers, symbolic of the mentality he hopes to instill in his new team going into the season.

“We talk about letting the hammer down,” Servance said during practice in August. “And we want to be the most physical team on the field — that’s what we really want to do.”

Servance said he believes being the most physical team on the field could help play an important role in getting more wins in the win column.

He looks to right the ship at Ellison that has seen one fewer win each season for the past five seasons.

“I believe that the game is won in the trenches — offensive and defensive line,” Servance said. “I believe a good passing game happens because of a good running game. So if you want to be great running the football, you’ve got to be physical up front.”

Along with physicality, Servance said a mentality he wants his players to have is “intentionality” and a “why.”

“Be intentional about what you’re doing,” he said. “And have the why — the reason — for why you’re doing what you’re doing.”

Servance said for the players to be successful, there has to be something other than an external motivation, such as coaches yelling at them, as the reason for them doing what they’re doing.

“I think our kids have done that,” Servance said. “They’ve kind of looked inside themselves and did some soul searching



HERALD | FILE

Ellison returning running back Khamari McClain carries against Killeen on Oct. 30, 2020, at Leo Buckley Stadium.

and found out why they’re really here.”

Killeen ISD announced the hiring of Servance on May 27, following the resignation of former coach Todd Wright.

Servance comes in with several years of coaching experience. Most recently serving as the head coach of Odessa High School for

four seasons from 2016 to 2019, he found success as head coach of Lubbock’s Estacado High School from 2007 to 2015.

During that nine-year span in Lubbock, the Matadors made the playoffs every season.

Since he was hired late, Ser-

PLEASE SEE **ELLISON, 11**

ELLISON

FROM PAGE 10

vance explained what his mentality was coming in.

“Just trying to make a positive impact — on the team and on the school and the community — and playing catch up,” Servance said. “I had to do some extra things to try and get caught up because we didn’t have spring ball and because I was such a late hire coming in.”

Some of the extra things he alluded to were trying to get right into strength and conditioning as well as working on some of the skill drills that the University Interscholastic League allows schools to participate in.

“We were able to work with our kids and do some football things that they otherwise would have missed out on if we wouldn’t have

ELLISON EAGLES LAST FIVE SEASONS

2020: 2-8
2019: 3-7
2018: 4-6
2017: 5-6
2016: 6-4

2021 SCHEDULE

Aug. 27	at Liberty Hill	7:30
Sept. 3	at Austin Vandegrift	7:30
Sept. 10	at Cibolo Steele	7:30
Sept. 23	at Harker Heights*	7:00
Oct. 1	Killeen*	7:30
Oct. 7	Temple*	7:00
Oct. 15	at Copperas Cove	7:30
Oct. 21	Belton*	7:00
Oct. 29	at Bryan	7:30
Nov. 4	Shoemaker*	7:00

*-Leo Buckley Stadium

had those days where we could’ve done skills,” Servance said.

Heading into the season, Servance said he will likely heavily rely on his defense early on. Eight starters return on the defensive side of the ball for the Eagles.

Servance said that in his experience, the defense is usually ahead of the offense in terms of chemistry, timing and being in-sync, especially early in the season.

He feels like what he has seen in practice, the same can be said for Ellison.

“Our defense is kind of what’s sticking out right now,” Servance said. “... The defense has an edge to a certain extent.”

One of the leaders on the Ellison defense is junior cornerback Deandre Reed, who said that Servance’s message so far has been to put forth 120% effort at all times.

“Always put effort in everything

you do and just do your best out there,” Reed said. “... Not 100%, 120%.”

For Reed, some of the things he has to do to give 120% effort is to give everything he has and leave everything on the field.

“Never go out there with anything unsettled, you know. Make sure that I’m always doing my best,” Reed said. “It’s just constantly going hard on every rep, you know, because you never know when is going to be your last time out there.”

Reed will anchor a defense that will look to give up fewer points than last season, where the team gave up an average of 34.7 points per game.

Offensively, Servance will look to junior wide receiver Dantrell Sterling to help get the ball down field.

“We’re going to be working hard and doing what we need to do to win,” Sterling said, adding that he likes the mentality that Servance has.

Sterling is one of a few returning starters to the offense. He added that part of his responsibility as a junior leader is to keep the underclassmen in check by making sure they know the plays and are going 100%.

“I basically pull them aside and talk to them a little bit,” Sterling said.

One of Sterling’s goals is to help Ellison reach the playoffs.

Ellison is scheduled to begin its season on Aug. 27 in Liberty Hill. The first time Ellison is expected to play at Leo Buckley Stadium in Killeen is Sept. 24 as the visiting team in a matchup with Harker Heights.

“We’re going to be working hard and doing what we need to do to win.”

Dantrell Sterling, Ellison wide receiver

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Knights eye 3rd straight trip to playoffs

BY THADDEUS IMERMAN

KILLEEN DAILY HERALD

Two years ago, the Harker Heights Knights kind of flew under the radar, surprising then-District 12-6A giant Waco Midway 17-14 in overtime en route to a 4-6 campaign and securing the final playoff spot.

Last year, the Knights improved upon that, riding a high-scoring offense to win three more games — some in thrilling fashion — and making a return appearance to the playoffs.

This year, head coach Jerry Edwards said his team will likely have a proverbial target on its back as it faces its familiar district foes.

“They know it’s hard to get on top — it’s hard to stay on top,” Edwards said toward the end of practice earlier in August.

Dave Campbell’s “Texas Football” magazine forecasts the Knights finishing second in the district behind the Temple Wildcats.

“That doesn’t go unnoticed by us either,” Edwards said. “Our expectations are high, but we want to ensure that we continue to put in the hard work that got us into a position to be a favorite team.”

Edwards said part of the reason his team has had sustained success is because the staff and players have stayed relatively intact the past four to five years.

The group of seniors on this year’s team have played together since they were freshmen, and it has allowed them to remain competitive.

Four days after starting practice, Edwards said he could see the “hunger and the desire” from his team to seek perfection and get better.



HERALD | FILE

Harker Heights’ Re’Shaun Sanford is one of many outstanding offensive weapons returning for the Knights in 2021.

He and his staff scheduled practice to begin at 6:10 a.m. during the first week of practice, and the players were lined up every day at 6 a.m.

“That says a lot about their character,” Edwards said.

Returning starting wide receiver and backup quarterback Terrance Carter said it’s all about having a championship mentality. “You gotta be strong-minded,”

PLEASE SEE **KNIGHTS, 13**

KNIGHTS

FROM PAGE 12

Carter said. “We just gotta stay focused and play the way we know how to play.”

Carter did not mince his words when speaking about the type of intensity he has had during practice so far.

“Really just prepare my mind to go out there and kill every opponent that’s lined up in front of me,” he said. “Also, as my teammates, I know they got the same mindset — trying to get 10-0.”

Aside from the goal of going undefeated, Carter said he hopes to make all-state and get invited to the Under Armour All-American Bowl.

Last season, Carter helped lead the Knights’ high-flying offense that averaged 35.4 points per game. It may be more of the same

HARKER HEIGHTS KNIGHTS

LAST FIVE SEASONS

2020: 7-4

2019: 4-7

2018: 1-9

2017: 5-5

2016: 6-5

2021 SCHEDULE

Aug. 27 at Pfl. Weiss* 7:30

Sept. 3 at Georgetown East View 7:30

Sept. 9 RR McNeil% 7:30

Sept. 23 Ellison% 7:00

Oct. 1 at Temple 7:30

Oct. 8 Belton% 7:30

Oct. 15 at Shoemaker% 7:30

Oct. 22 Killeen% 7:30

Oct. 29 at Copperas Cove 7:30

Nov. 4 Bryan% 7:00

*-Pflugerville’s The Pfield

%-Leo Buckley Stadium

this year.

“All of our offensive production from last year is back,” Edwards said.

Among those also returning, along with Carter, are running backs Re’Shaun Sanford and Aimeer Washington as well as wide receiver Marcus Maple.

“It’s going to be hard for a lot of teams to cover all those weapons,” Edwards said.

For Edwards, preparation is key. “We want to make sure that everybody’s ready to go. There are situations that come up throughout the year, and everybody’s got to be prepared, and our kids kind of buy into that through the offseason with 7-on-7, through fall camp so far,” Edwards said.

In preparation for the season during the summer 7-on-7 competition, Edwards said the team did “phenomenal.”

“I think we could pick up the energy a little more, but over time, we’re going to be a great team.”

Tyree Trammell, Harker Heights free safety

The Knights qualified for the state tournament and finished as one of the top eight teams in the state, losing to eventual champion Lewisville Hebron.

Edwards said he thought the 7-on-7 tournament was big for this year’s team, more so than other years, because it gave his players on defense some repetitions and playing time.

Coming into the 2021 season, the Knights have a relatively inexperienced defense, returning only a handful of starters.

One of the new faces to the defense is free safety Tyree Trammell.

“Not everybody has been playing on varsity yet, and we haven’t been playing together as a unit, so it’s like we all got to connect to each other, get used to being around each other and knowing everybody’s habits and everything,” Trammell said.

Trammell recently made the transition from running back to free safety.

“Everybody’s very athletic, very physical,” Trammell said. “I think we could pick up the energy a little more, but over time, we’re going to be a great team.”

The athleticism aspect of the defense is something that has caught the attention of Edwards.

On the defensive side of the ball, Edwards said his team will not likely be as big as last year, but he feels as though it will be more athletic.

The Knights are expected to open their season Aug. 27 in Pflugerville against Pflugerville Weiss.

Their first home game at Leo Buckley Stadium in Killeen is scheduled for Sept. 9 against Round Rock McNeil.

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Roos expect to contend for playoff spot

BY CLAY WHITTINGTON
HERALD CORRESPONDENT

Every year, Neil Searcy embraces it.

In 2015, Searcy inherited the job as Killeen's head coach from Sam Jones and immediately struggled, producing a 2-8 record in his debut.

The following year, however, Searcy guided the Kangaroos into the playoffs for the first time since 2012, but in the four seasons since, the program has not delivered a winning record, garnering just three victories in each of the last two campaigns.

Regardless of what the season could hold, Searcy appreciates each the same.

"This is what I live for," he said. "The hectic schedule, the hustle and bustle, the seven days a week and the 15-hour days; it is what I live for."

"I enjoy what I do. I enjoy being around the kids and my coaching staff. I love this time of year and everything it brings."

While Searcy's enthusiasm will undoubtedly inspire his players, it cannot guarantee victories.

Coming off a 3-6 showing, including a 2-5 District 12-6A record, Killeen embarks on an odd path to the playoffs with each of its first three games taking place on a Thursday and on the road. From there, the Kangaroos enjoy the home-field advantage at Leo Buckley Stadium for all but two contests — at Copperas Cove and Belton.

No matter when or where Killeen plays, though, the message is the same.

"We have to keep working hard and keep getting better every single snap," Searcy said. "We have to be ready for Sept. 24, when we



HERALD | FILE

Killeen High's Emory Arthur carries against Ellison on Nov. 6, 2020, at Leo Buckley Stadium.

open district against Shoemaker.

"We want to win every single game, but the goal is to be ready for district."

The Kangaroos will have to do so without several critical compo-

nents to their gameplan.

Among others, all-district selections Tyquan Jones, a defensive tackle; tight end Milan Kemp-

PLEASE SEE **ROOS, 15**

ROOS

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Murray, linebacker Jabez Elam and safety Jaden Hill graduated, but a number of playmakers remain on the roster.

Offensively, seniors Aunnor Wright, a guard, running backs Emory Arthur and Devante Johnson, quarterback Ahmad Bailey and receiver Jacobia Thomas will anchor the unit, while junior defensive tackle Aaron Barnwell returns as the defense's lone all-district representative.

Additionally, sophomore running back Cade Searcy, senior offensive lineman Tama Tii, senior defensive end Jaymeer Larkins, junior receiver Albert Powell, defensive back Jashaun Peyton and receiver Toree Landours each figure to factor heavily into Killeen's plans.

"We have five returning start-

KILLEEN KANGAROOS

LAST FIVE SEASONS

2020: 3-6

2019: 3-7

2018: 5-5

2017: 4-6

2016: 5-6

2021 SCHEDULE

Aug. 26 at RR Cedar Ridge* 7:00

Sept. 2 at Pfl. Hendrickson^ 7:00

Sept. 9 at Waco 7:00

Sept. 24 Shoemaker 7:30

Oct. 1 at Ellison% 7:30

Oct. 8 at Copperas Cove 7:30

Oct. 14 Bryan 7:00

Oct. 22 at Harker Heights% 7:30

Oct. 29 Temple 7:30

Nov. 5 at Belton 7:30

*-Round Rock's Dragon Stadium

^-Pflugerville's The Pfield

%-Leo Buckley Stadium

ers on offense and only three on defense," Neil Searcy said. "We've

pulled a lot of kids up from junior varsity, so we are somewhat inexperienced on the defensive side of the ball.

"From everything I've seen, our offense is our strongest unit, but the defense is quickly gaining ground on them."

The Kangaroos could use improved showings from both aspects.

Killeen averaged just 25.2 points per game last season, while allowing opponents to top the 33-point plateau five times and eclipse 40 points on four occasions.

Neil Searcy believes the Kangaroos reside in a district that constantly fluctuates, though.

"Over the past couple of years," he said, "you can pick winners for games, but you are probably going to be wrong on most Friday nights."

"Temple is the favorite, because they are the defending district champions, but anybody can lose on any night, so I like our chances of getting back into the playoffs."

Expecting an open race to the postseason where each game is capable of propelling a team forward or entrenching it behind, Killeen's three nondistrict contests — at Round Rock Cedar Ridge, Pflugerville Hendrickson and Waco — are instrumental.

"I want to see growth," Neil Searcy said, "and I want to see them get better every snap, but I also want to see some success. We need to win some ballgames early."

"That would do a lot for our kids' confidence heading into district play."

"I love this time of year and everything it brings."

Neil Searcy

Killeen High head coach

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Wolves starting to build a tradition

BY CLAY WHITTINGTON

HERALD CORRESPONDENT

Shoemaker has rediscovered its spirit.

For years, the Grey Wolves struggled to produce victories, suffering one disappointing season after another until former head coach Channon Hall helped reverse their fortunes, guiding the program to its first playoff victory in 2015.

His departure for Mansfield Summit, however, set Shoemaker back.

During the ensuing three years, the Grey Wolves endured consecutive winless seasons and emerged from the period with just two victories.

But things have changed, and after back-to-back playoff appearances, Shoemaker head coach Toby Foreman believes there is new life within the locker room.

“There is some type of tradition back at Shoemaker,” he said. “For a while, there wasn’t a whole lot of wining going on. Now, we’ve got some winning going on, and the kids take pride in that.”

“Nobody wants to let down the guys who have been a part of getting us here, and the younger guys want to build on it.”

Topping last season will be difficult, though, after falling one win shy of the program’s record for victories in a season, finishing 8-3 overall with four of their seven District 12-6A games being decided by six points or less.

The Grey Wolves went 2-2 in those contests to finish in a three-way tie for second place in the standings, and Foreman believes winning close games could be critical to his team’s success once again this year.



HERALD | FILE

Shoemaker’s Omari Evans returns a kickoff for a touchdown against No. 11 DeSoto in the opening round of the playoffs on Dec. 10, 2020, at Leo Buckley Stadium.

“We’ve been lucky the last two years in overtime and close games,” Foreman said, “but the

district race is going to be tough.

PLEASE SEE **WOLVES, 17**

WOLVES

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There are no easy opponents.

“You have to come prepared every week or you’ll lose to somebody you didn’t expect to, and that will put you back where you don’t want to be, which is on the outside looking in when it comes to the playoffs.”

Shoemaker should be rested for the district race after losing a game from their schedule less than two weeks before the season opens. Mexico’s Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León — an annual visitor to Central Texas — was forced to back out of the Week 2 contest due to increased international travel restrictions attributed to the coronavirus, leaving San Angelo Central and Kerrville Tivy as the Grey Wolves’ only nondistrict opponents.

SHOEMAKER GREY WOLVES

LAST FIVE SEASONS

2020: 7-3
2019: 7-4
2018: 2-8
2017: 0-10
2016: 0-10

2021 SCHEDULE

Aug. 27	at San Angelo Central	7:00
Sept. 10	Kerrville Tivy	7:30
Sept. 24	at Killeen	7:30
Sept. 30	Copperas Cove%	7:00
Oct. 8	at Bryan	7:30
Oct. 15	Harker Heights%	7:30
Oct. 22	at Temple	7:30
Oct. 28	Belton%	7:30
Nov. 5	at Ellison%	7:30
% - Leo Buckley Stadium		

“There were a couple of replacement options,” Foreman said, “but I just felt the best thing for us overall was to get the rest, focus

on practicing and focus on our squad.”

With a seven-game district slate waiting to close the season, the additional early layoff could be worrisome, but Foreman is confident his squad’s senior leadership will help keep the team on track.

While Shoemaker graduated a lot of talent, including all-district co-most valuable player Monaray Baldwin and co-offensive player of the year Ty Bell, key pieces remain. Among them are lineman Jamil Knight, defensive back Darmell Hollins, quarterback Omari Evans and receiver/defensive back Khamari Terrell.

“Those four guys have done an outstanding job of getting us where we are right now,” Foreman said.

Additionally, the Grey Wolves expect increased roles from senior defensive lineman To’O To’O Mugaotega, junior offensive lineman Wilbert Martin, senior running back Peydon Horace, sophomore defensive back/receiver Jerrod Hicks and junior Zavian Tibbs, who was last season’s all-district co-defensive newcomer of the year.

Now, after elevating the program from futility to prosperity, the Grey Wolves do not want to lose their momentum, and Foreman believes the pieces are in place to continue building toward winning a district championship.

More important than talent, though, Shoemaker has rediscovered its spirit.

“It’s an exciting time,” Foreman said. “There are a lot of young kids and new faces, and we look different as a team. We are not at all what we were the last two or three years.

“But our kids are hungry and ready to start the season.”

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Temple set for another big season

BY JOSHUA WEAVER

FME NEWS SERVICE

What happens when the then-eighth-graders on an undefeated Lamar Middle School team collide a few years in the future with the then-eighth-graders on an unbeaten Travis Science Academy squad?

It kind of sounds like the plot teaser (insert booming voiceover) to the next blockbuster film, except this script hasn't yet been written.

Whatever the ending might entail four months from now, there appears to be a lot of optimism and anticipation from those particular players — present-day seniors and juniors — when it pertains to what the Temple Wildcats might put together in 2021.

"I feel like this is the year that everyone has been waiting for — Lamar's 2022 and Travis' 2023 to matchup and mix in together and get this thing rolling," Wildcats junior starting linebacker Tauran York said earlier this month. "It's been a long time coming and I think we're just all ready for it."

Ready or not, it's time to find out.

Tickets are available.

The prequel to this season happened to be successful in its own right — a 10-2 record in 2020 complete with the program's first outright district championship since 2015, an eighth consecutive postseason berth and a playoff victory for the first time since 2017.

All that just adds to some of the billowing excitement. The Wildcats return not only a sizeable group of players from last year's team, but many of those also were varsity contributors the previous



HERALD | FILE

Temple's Samari Howard carries against Shoemaker on Nov. 19 at Leo Buckley Stadium. Howard shared the district MVP honor last season as a junior.

season of 2019 when Temple went 8-3.

The veteran presence has allowed head coach Scott Stewart — now in his sixth season at the helm after two seasons as defensive coordinator — and his staff to alter their starting points as they prepped for Friday night's opener against Austin Westlake at Wildcat Stadium and beyond.

"We break it down and try to look at some of the things we can do better — like consistency," Stewart said. "What we talked about all offseason with the coaching staff is tweaking our install program or some of our skill-set schedules to where we can start working on the nuances. We feel

like this is a more experienced group coming back. So, instead of talking about coverage leverage, we build off that progress and start talking about attacking the reception point. You start getting into the fine-tuned details."

A pair of details that are never overlooked: attitude and effort. Stewart said above all else, expect plenty of those ingredients from this batch of Wildcats. Not unlike those who came before and those who will follow.

"We just want to make the most of the seniors' last year, so we are going to make sure we push harder so that they go out with a

PLEASE SEE **TEMPLE, 19**

TEMPLE

FROM PAGE 18

bang,” York said.

OFFENSE

Temple will have four new starting offensive linemen — likely Jose Faz, Agustin Silva, Endrei Sauls and Jeremiah Mungia — joining lone full-time returner Colby Rice.

The Wildcats also will have their sixth starting quarterback in as many seasons when front-runner for the job Reese Rumfield, a sophomore, or one of the other three, Damarion Willis, Luke Law and Kaleb Hill, line up behind center Friday night.

Those spots feature the most newcomers.

Needing no introduction, however, is running back Samari Howard, who’s back for his fourth season following a dynamic junior year during which he rushed for a career-high 1,265 yards, added 337 yards receiving, totaled 22 touchdowns and earned District 12-6A co-MVP honors.

He’ll have capable running-mates and fellow seniors Jalen Robinson and Tavaris Sullivan in the backfield for an offense that averaged 417.3 yards per game a year ago and has multiple playmakers at the skill positions this season.

“It feels good to be able to lead the younger guys because I was in their shoes,” Howard said. “I know I’m like a big brother now and I have to be a mentor. I have to make sure they’re good.”

Highly recruited junior Mikal Harrison-Pilot (38 catches, 499 yards, seven TDs in 2020) anchors a deep wide receiver corps that includes Tr’Darius Taylor (18 receptions, 345 yards, four TDs), Michal Heckstall, Kobe Smith, Andre Anderson, Devan Williams, Nyles Moreland and Nick Skinner.

TEMPLE WILDCATS

LAST FIVE SEASONS

2020: 10-2

2019: 8-3

2018: 8-3

2017: 10-4

2016: 12-4

2021 SCHEDULE

Aug. 27 Austin Westlake 7:30

Sept. 3 Magnolia West 7:30

Sept. 10 Hutto 7:30

Sept. 24 at Bryan 7:30

Oct. 1 Harker Heights 7:30

Oct. 7 at Ellison* 7:00

Oct. 15 at Belton 7:30

Oct. 22 Shoemaker 7:30

Oct. 29 at Killeen 7:30

Nov. 4 Copperas Cove 7:30

*-Leo Buckley Stadium

Tight end Ke’Andre Smith adds another dimension, so, in short, there are options for offensive coordinator Josh Sadler.

“There’s just a lot of flexibility in what we do. With creativity, the sky is the limit. It is nice to game plan. It really is,” he said. “The hardest part is slimming the offense down enough to practice everything so that you can be effective on Friday night.”

DEFENSE

The Wildcats allowed just 299.4 yards per game last season — a more than 100-yard improvement over 2019 — and held opponents scoreless in 21 of 44 quarters, with perhaps their crowning achievement being a 38-0 victory over Waxahachie in the first round of the Class 6A Division II playoffs that marked the program’s first postseason shutout since 1993.

And they have plenty of familiar faces returning on that side of the ball.

They begin with York, the reigning 12-6A defensive MVP now in his third season. Senior Faylin Lee also returns at linebacker, and that pair will be supplemented by

senior Zion Moore, whose importance grew when Johnny Donoso, a projected starter, was injured during the summer.

Also returning on defense are linemen Tomas Torres, Eric Shorter, Ayden Brown and Jaylon Jackson, and safeties O’Tarian Peoples and Jaden Jackson. Stepping in at cornerback this year are Naeten Mitchell, LeMichael Thompson and Triston Cohorn.

“What I like is we’ve expanded the package some on defense and the kids are handling it mentally, and again, that comes with experience,” Stewart said.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Danis Bajric takes over for the graduated Aaron Wagaman as kicker. Bajric made field goals of 42, 35 and 51 yards in Temple’s Blue-White game on May 27. In his lone appearance last season, Bajric went 7-for-7 on extra points in a win over Killeen.

RECAP

Temple opened 2020 with a rousing 40-13 win over Longview and moved to 2-0 with a victory over Magnolia West. A slight stumble in the non-district finale against Arlington Martin led to eight straight wins (seven on the field and one on paper) before the season ended at Baylor’s McLane Stadium versus Rockwall-Heath in the area round.

ON TAP

Temple starts 2021 with three straight home games: the aforementioned contest against the Chaparrals, Sept. 3 vs. Magnolia West and Sept. 10 vs. Hutto.

“I don’t have a win (total) goal every year. I want to be better than we should be,” Stewart said. “If the experts think we should win 10 then let’s win 12. If the experts think we should win two then let’s win four. I want to be better than we should be.”

Hornets' playoff return marred by virus forfeit

BY CLAY WHITTINGTON
HERALD CORRESPONDENT

The mixed emotions are still lingering.

Last year, on the heels of a winless season, Gatesville turned its fortunes completely around, earning critical District 9-4A, Division II victories to clinch its first playoff berth since 2017.

The Hornets' grip, however, slipped.

Due to coronavirus concerns within the team, Gatesville was forced to forfeit its bi-district contest against eventual state champion Carthage.

Now, the Hornets enter a new year fueled by a variety of sentiments.

"We're proud and disappointed of last season," Gatesville head coach Luke Howard said. "We did enough to get into the playoffs, but obviously, we didn't get to play in that game.

"But the message this year is that we have to go and do it again."

After losing four of their first five games last season, the Hornets won two their final three district games to place fourth in the standings, and the squad returns multiple players responsible for the rally.

A total of 14 starters will suit up for Gatesville again this season, including all-district co-defensive newcomer of the year Lawson Mooney. Entering his sophomore year, the linebacker will help anchor the Hornets' defense along with seniors Jacob Baker, a cornerback, and safety Hayden Mooney, who were each all-district first-team selections last season.

Additionally, junior linebacker Ashtyn Culley, senior end Cayden



HERALD | FILE

Gatesville's Carson Brizendine scores against Glen Rose in the Hornets' 2020 home opener Sept. 4 at McKamie Stadium in Gatesville.

Mata and senior tackle Ryan Smiley will contribute heavily.

"Our defense is a little further ahead than our offense," Howard said. "They are very confident in what they are doing, but offensively, we need to find some answers.

"And that is fine, because that is what our process looks like, and

it is not going to happen overnight."

Gatesville averaged 21.6 points per game en route to its 4-6 overall record last year, topping the 25-point plateau just twice — in a pair of lopsided losses — before

PLEASE SEE **HORNETS, 21**

HORNETS

FROM PAGE 20

recording a combined 81 points in wins against Jarrell and Pecos to conclude the regular season.

While key pieces, including tight end Logan Edwards, line-men Evan Hanson and Jaiden Gomez and receivers Parker Allman, Carson Brizendine and Trevor Smith, remain, the offense will be ushering in multiple new faces, and time is limited.

In order to earn another playoff appearance, the Hornets must survive in a district highlighted by a pair of top-25 programs in No. 7 China Spring and No. 12 Salado.

And Gatesville's nondistrict schedule is equally difficult.

The Hornets travel to No. 17 Glen Rose for their second game of the season and host Class 4A, Division I No. 20 Lampasas in Week 5.

Last season, against the same

GATESVILLE HORNETS

LAST FIVE SEASONS

2020: 4-6
2019: 0-10
2018: 3-7
2017: 7-4
2016: 4-6

2021 SCHEDULE

Aug. 27	Llano	7:30
Sept. 3	at Glen Rose	7:00
Sept. 10	at Lorena	7:30
Sept. 17	at Hillsboro	7:30
Sept. 24	Lampasas	7:30
Oct. 8	Salado	7:30
Oct. 15	China Spring	7:30
Oct. 22	at Robinson	7:30
Oct. 29	Waco Connally	7:30
Nov. 5	at Jarrell	7:30

schedule, Gatesville lost its opening two games against Llano and Glen Rose by a combined 48 points before its game against Lorena was forfeited.

"We don't want to be 0-5 in nondistrict play," Howard said,

"so while we are bringing guys along, we have to find a way to be successful. We are just going to have to be able to adjust as we are growing and developing our kids.

"That is the tough part about having turnover within your program, but it is also what keeps it fun and keeps it exciting."

With the mixed memories of last season's conclusion still residing in the Hornets' collective conscious, they hope to grow from the experience and deliver another run to the playoffs.

Although the challenge can be daunting, Howard refuses to allow his players to be distracted from their immediate goals.

"We have to approach this season day by day and week by week," Howard said. "Our next opponent is our most important opponent, and we cannot look ahead.

"We have to show up every day with a great attitude and be ready to get better by focusing on our individual jobs within the team and our next opponent."



Gatesville's Trevor Smith, right, makes a sideline catch, setting up a touchdown for the Hornets in their home opener against Glen Rose on Sept. 4 at McKamie Stadium in Gatesville.

HERALD | FILE

Stiffer tests await Lake Belton in Year 2

BY MARCUS HOOD

FME NEWS SERVICE

What's the biggest benefit for a team that had only sophomores and freshmen in its inaugural year?

There were no key departures.

"And I'll probably have the same answer next year," joked Lake Belton head coach Brian Cope, whose Broncos indeed have no one to replace as they enter just their second season in program history.

"(Last year) was a blast," Cope said. "Building this program is so much fun. But you have to bring it every day, and not just on the field. You have to make sure everybody is prepared. Every coach was new to Lake Belton High School last year."

The Broncos went 9-1 last season playing a schedule exclusively of junior varsity and other first-year programs.

Not having to replace any departed seniors is a good thing, but the flip side is an expectation to match what was accomplished last year, only now against a tougher schedule that includes some solid varsity programs such as Llano, Mexia and Poteet — all of which made the playoffs last season, something the Broncos won't be eligible to do until 2022.

"I have a helmet in my office with 22 on it," Cope said. "It reminds the kids that's the first opportunity we have to make the playoffs. That doesn't necessarily mean we are going to take this year off to get ready for next year. We want to get better every chance we get. We've got a tough schedule."

Once again, the Lake Belton offense will be led by quarterback Connor Crews and running back/



RAY SWINDLE | SPECIAL TO FME NEWS SERVICE

Lake Belton players run through drills as the Broncos prepare for the program's second season. The Broncos will play established varsity programs for the first time this season.

wide receiver Micah Hudson. Crews was 87-of-152 passing for 1,297 yards and 20 touchdowns in 2020. Hudson was on the receiving end of 23 of those completions for a team-high 456 yards and five TDs. He also had 641 yards rushing on 40 carries, and Crews ran

for 688 on 102 attempts. Tristan Robin added 562 yards rushing on 74 carries.

"Our receiver corps, I would match with anybody," Cope said. "Micah, Connor Bartz and Jaydon

PLEASE SEE **LAKE, 23**

LAKE

FROM PAGE 22

Leza have done a phenomenal job out there.

“Our tight end, Isaiah Koonce also plays defensive end and is one of the most intelligent football players. And having running backs Tristan Robin, Darius Wilkerson and Daniel Hardin to go along with Micah and Connor running the ball gives us a lot of weapons and gives us good depth, which is what you are looking for.”

Cope knows that success on offense relies heavily on the front line, and he’s been impressed by the group that’s led by Christian Kunz and Dominic Simpson.

Several of those players also see time on defense because Cope likes having versatile athletes on the field and several options at

LAKE BELTON BRONCOS

LAST FIVE SEASONS

2020: 9-1 (debut season)

2021 SCHEDULE

Aug. 27	Mexia*	7:00
Sept. 3	at Arlington Heights	7:00
Sept. 10	at Poteet	7:30
Sept. 17	Cameron Yoe*	7:00
Sept. 24	Katy Jordan*	7:00
Oct. 1	at Llano	7:30
Oct. 8	Lamar Randle*	7:00
Oct. 16	at Katy Jordan	12:00
Oct. 22	LASA*	7:00
Oct. 29	at SA Davenport	7:00
*-at Belton High School		

each position.

“That is something our coaches have focused on,” he said. “Identify those kids that can help us win games on both sides. It helps build depth. Between injuries and COVID, depth is our No. 1 concern

right now.”

There’s good news for the Broncos as far as depth goes.

“Right now in three grades, we have 240 players,” Cope said. “That’s a lot of kids fighting for spots. That makes it fun, and the coaches have done a great job. We’ve had very few players leave the program, and that’s a testament to our coaching staff.”

Even with the higher expectations based on last season’s record, Cope is just as excited about Year 2 and expects to be just as nervous come kickoff Friday night against Mexia.

“(I had) big-time butterflies when we went to Stephenville (to open last season),” he said. “But there will be just as many this year when we open up against Mexia. It’s exciting. It’s a good, nervous energy. You just have to be sure you are prepared, and I think we will be when it comes time.”



RAY SWINDLE | SPECIAL TO FME NEWS SERVICE

Lake Belton players take a break during a recent practice. The Broncos went 9-1 in their inaugural season with a roster of freshmen and sophomores.

No Ace, but Badgers still expect to win

BY CLAY WHITTINGTON
HERALD CORRESPONDENT

For the past few years, Lampasas cruised.

Led by dual-threat quarterback Ace Whitehead — one of the most decorated players in program history — and a wealth of talented playmakers on both sides of the ball, the Badgers were almost unbeatable.

Since 2019, Lampasas hovered near the top of the Class 4A, Division I rankings, losing just three games and averaging more than 51 points en route to a pair of district championships.

Graduation, however, has taken away many of the familiar faces from previous Friday nights, and for the first time since working their way into the conversation among the state's elite, the Badgers are adopting a new mindset.

"Our motto for the season is 'Adapt to change,'" Lampasas head coach Troy Rogers said. "I think it is spot on, because we lost 23 seniors and have eight returning lettermen.

"Every year is a new year, but a lot has really changed from last season."

While many things about the Badgers are different, expectations remain high.

Lampasas enters the season ranked 20th in the state despite losing Whitehead, a two-time all-district most valuable player and 2019 all-state offensive player of the year; 1,000-yard rusher Jack Jerome and Michael Murray Jr., who was the team's leading receiver, along with 10 other all-district selections.

The departures usher in a new era for the Badgers and their coaching staff.

"You can't be a coach who is just



HERALD | FILE

Lampasas' Case Brister (15) returns a kickoff against Fredericksburg on Nov. 6, 2020, at Badger Stadium in Lampasas.

stuck thinking there is only one way to do things," Rogers said. "You have to be able to adapt to your personnel, because at the end of the day, it really doesn't matter what schemes you run offensively or defensively. It is all about if you can get the kids coached up to execute their assignments.

"We just have to make sure kids

are in the right positions and not overthinking things."

Even with the turnover, Lampasas still possess veteran experience on its roster, including returning all-state linebacker Case Brister. As a junior, Brister recorded a team-high 177 tackles, including 134 solo, to go with two

PLEASE SEE **BADGERS, 25**

BADGERS

FROM PAGE 24

sacks, two blocked punts and an interception.

He has other talents as well, though.

Serving a complementary role, Brister carried the ball 37 times for 299 yards and six touchdowns, but his role is expanding.

“We got to play him some at running back last year,” Rogers said, “and he showed what he can do, but when you have a player like Jack Jerome at running back, we didn’t really need to use him there.

“Now, Case has that opportunity, and we’re excited about it.”

And Brister will not be the only Badger seeing action on both sides of the ball.

Senior linebacker Dax Brookre-son, who led the team with three interceptions last year, will garner extra responsibilities at

LAMPASAS BADGERS

LAST FIVE SEASONS

2020: 9-1

2019: 13-2

2018: 7-5

2017: 2-8

2016: 1-9

2021 SCHEDULE

Aug. 27	at Brownwood	7:30
Sept. 3	Elgin	7:30
Sept. 10	at Wimberley	7:30
Sept. 17	China Spring	7:30
Sept. 24	at Gatesville	7:30
Oct. 8	Taylor	7:30
Oct. 15	Burnet	7:30
Oct. 22	at Austin LBJ	7:30
Oct. 29	Canyon Lake	7:30
Nov. 5	at Fredericksburg	7:30

receiver, while, among others, teammates Ethan Moreno, a de-fensive back/receiver, linebacker/receiver Carter Johnson and tight end/linebacker Aden Roscoe gain similar duties.

Additionally, senior lineman Sosa Sokimi, who was the 2020 all-district co-defensive newcomer of the year, and Conner Keele, a returning all-district first team selection as an offensive lineman, will each be instrumental regardless of whether Lampasas has the ball or not.

“All those guys understand their roles,” Rogers said, “and they all know they are going to have to play more football than they have.

“A lot of guys are going to be playing on both sides of the ball, and we haven’t had to do that before.”

If things go according to plan, the Badgers will continue their recent trend of reaching the playoffs — a destination they have not missed since 2017 — but it will not be easy.

“We play a lot of teams who have been to the playoffs and gone deep,” Rogers said, “so there is going to be a lot of good competi-tion.

“It should just make us better.”

“Every year is a new year, but a lot has really changed from last season.”

Troy Rogers

Lampasas head coach

Lampasas’ Ethan Moreno carries the ball against Fredericksburg on Nov. 6, 2020, at Badger Stadium in Lampasas.

HERALD | FILE



Salado reloads after reaching 3rd round of playoffs

BY MARCUS HOOD

FME NEWS SERVICE

Head coach Alan Haire doesn't like to live in the past.

He can't, however, help replaying one moment in time he may never forget — Nov. 27, 2020.

That was the night Haire's Salado team tried to upset the seven-time-state champion Carthage Bulldogs in a third-round playoff game.

"I replay that first series," Haire said. "We hold them. They punt and the ball rolls down to the 1-inch line, so we start from the 1 coming out, which is a great opportunity to drive it 99 yards. We get 2 (yards) on the first play and I think 7 on the next play to have a third-and-1. Then we get a procedure penalty. That changed the whole dynamic of the game.

"I feel if we could have got a first down, we maintain a drive and the clock, we can settle down into who we are and what we do. I replay that procedure penalty in my mind. We don't get the first down, have to punt, give them a short field and go from there."

The Eagles never got much going that night, falling 35-7 as the Bulldogs went on to win their eighth title.

The riddle for Haire to solve this season is how to get Salado in position for a rematch after losing two 1,000-yard rushers and returning just a handful of starters from last year's 11-2 squad.

The first step is by filling holes on the offense, primarily in the backfield. Halfback Caden Strickland, who rushed for 552 yards and nine touchdowns on 73 carries last year; and quarterback Hutton Haire, who completed 18 of 37 passes for 372 yards and six scores in his third season as a starter, give the Eagles experience



RAY SWINDLE | SPECIAL TO FME NEWS SERVICE

The Salado offense runs a play during a recent practice. The Eagles lost a lot of star power from 2020 but the cupboard is not bare.

in the backfield.

Aidan Wilson moves from a guard slot to be the fullback, and Seth Reavis moves from starting cornerback to the tailback position.

"Having new backs is always a little weird at first," said Hutton Haire, who was a District 9-4A-II first-team selection in 2020. "But we are getting used to it and are already good with it. I feel like all three backs are great, and I'm

looking forward to see how they all do."

With Wilson moving to the backfield, the only returning offensive lineman is Gavyn Keyser, who was the 9-4A-II offensive lineman of the year last season.

"He has done a great job getting himself into shape," Alan Haire said of Keyser. "He was a force with his size last year. He's gotten

PLEASE SEE **SALADO, 27**

SALADO

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more mobile this year, so we are going to play him at some other roles as well.”

Overall, Haire is excited about having new guys in the trenches.

“I think it gets us back down to basics,” he said. “You have to coach those guys. Two of them were holding clipboards on the sideline last year. Now they are starting. It gives you an opportunity as a coach to teach better, go back to the fundamentals and get them equipped to do the best they can do. I view it as fun, and it’s not stale to them because it’s all new coaching at the varsity level.”

The Eagles’ strength early on

SALADO EAGLES

LAST FIVE SEASONS

2020: 11-2

2019: 8-4

2018: 4-6

2017: 12-2

2016: 7-5

2021 SCHEDULE

Aug. 27	at Troy	7:30
Sept. 3	at Grandview	7:30
Sept. 10	at Stephenville*	7:30
Sept. 17	Mexia	7:30
Sept. 24	Taylor	7:30
Oct. 8	at Gatesville	7:30
Oct. 15	Waco Connally	7:30
Oct. 22	at China Spring	7:30
Oct. 29	Jarrell	7:30
Nov. 5	at Robinson	7:30
*-at Tarleton State		

may be its defense, despite having to replace district MVP Wrook

Brown, defensive MVP Peyton Miller and five others who helped last year’s unit limit opponents to 258 yards per game.

Linebacker Braydon Sumners, tackle Blake Volk and safety Josh Huckabee give Salado a solid base on which the defense can build.

“Sure we lost a ton (of players), but the kids in the locker room deserve the best coaching they can get and the best opportunity to be successful,” Alan Haire said. “We are going to be who we are, and I don’t think the depth chart is empty. We just have some that lack experience and for this group, we are going to see what we can accomplish with them. Maybe the experience they saw with that other group, maybe they said, ‘Hey, if I work hard, maybe I can accomplish that. Maybe it will happen.’”



RAY SWINDLE | SPECIAL TO FIVE NEWS SERVICE

The Salado Eagles lost to eventual champion Carthage in the third round of the playoffs last season. To return to the postseason, the Eagles will need some new faces to step up.

Nowhere to go but up for Florence

BY MARK W. MILLER

KILLEEN DAILY HERALD

As measured by wins and losses, the Florence Buffaloes have gotten progressively worse over the last four seasons.

It won't happen again.

It CAN'T happen again.

There's nowhere to go but up after the 2020 Buffs endured the school's first winless season since 1984.

Florence took its lumps last year with a young roster and an enlarged district loaded with stout programs. The Buffaloes were outscored by 30 points a game.

But with 17 starters back (nine on offense) and a bevy of prospects from the junior varsity, Florence is better equipped to fight its way back up.

Senior Victor Bonilla is back to lead the offense. The dual-threat quarterback was the only FHS player to earn first-team all-district honors in 13-3A-D2. He ran for 846 yards and four TDs and passed for 621 yards and four TDs.

"He's a fun kid to be around," third-year coach Drew Bridges said. "He's just a good player. He's one that he kind of keeps things lively at practice, then when it's time to work and get stuff done, he's all about it. He knows how to work hard. And everybody follows him, too. They kind of realize that he's a good one to get behind."

And a good one to move around and get some touches in the open field. Bridges plans on lining up Bonilla in the slot and possibly other spots on offense.

Junior Levi Martin, who played primarily in the defensive backfield last season, is expected to get most of the work at running back.

Jared Jimenez was expected to contribute mainly on the defen-



HERALD | FILE

Florence's Abraham Hernandez carries against Goldthwaite on Sept. 18, 2020, at Florence's Stampede Stadium.

sive line in 2020, but proved to be a revelation as a receiving target, catching 10 passes for 113 yards and three scores.

"He's definitely a big target we like to get it to," Bridges said.

Other wideouts that will see action are juniors Sam Whitson and Charles Meredith and senior Braeden Trantham.

PLEASE SEE **FLORENCE, 29**

FLORENCE

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In the slot will be junior Abraham Hernandez, who saw action at running back last season. Fellow juniors Zak Webb and Matthew Harris will also see snaps in the slot.

“Those are two juniors that played almost every snap on the JV and just got so much better because of it,” Bridges said.

The offensive line is anchored by four seniors, led by center Luke Harris. Rowdy Lilley returns at left tackle. John Moreland, who only began playing football last season, is the right tackle. Eloy Cavazos, who missed the last half of last season with an injury, returns at guard. Junior Mason Regier and sophomore Joey Lopez will man the other guard spot.

If the Buffs can’t quite make it to the end zone, they have a great chance to collect three points from junior third-year kicker Angel Perez, who has missed only one extra point in his career.

DEFENSE

The Buffalo defense improved by nearly 13 points per game last season, but still allowed 41.5 on average. With eight starters back, more improvement seems likely.

Up front is three-year starter

FLORENCE BUFFALOES LAST FIVE SEASONS

2020: 0-10
2019: 1-9
2018: 2-8
2017: 4-7
2016: 5-6

2021 SCHEDULE

Aug. 27	Johnson City LBJ	7:30
Sept. 3	at Bangs	7:30
Sept. 10	Bruceville-Eddy	7:30
Sept. 17	at Goldthwaite	7:30
Oct. 1	at Buffalo	7:30
Oct. 8	Clifton	7:30
Oct. 15	at Franklin	7:30
Oct. 22	Lexington	7:30
Oct. 29	at Riesel	7:30
Nov. 5	Rogers	7:30

Angel Maldonado (6-3, 320) at tackle. End Said Reyes is another three-year starter who earned all-district first-team honors two seasons ago.

“He’s the strongest kid in Florence High School,” Bridges said.

Lilley, Moreland and senior varsity newcomer Daniel Villareal will also contribute on the defensive line.

“All of them have good size, are big and so were excited to have that up front,” Bridges said.

Inside linebackers Zhane Shepard and Regier started as sophomores last season. Their development was easily on display

in the Buffaloes’ opening scrimmage against Holland.

“They’ve gotten a lot better, and it showed,” Bridges noted.

The outside linebackers are Whitson and juniors Tommy Giddens and Agustin Gutierrez. Giddens missed all of last season with an injury.

Junior Ryland Carlile will also see time at linebacker and is the backup QB.

In the secondary, Hernandez, who earned the Buffaloes’ other all-district accolade as a second-teamer, moves from safety to cornerback. Martin, at safety, may be the best tackler on the team. Senior newcomer Kross Ellis takes the other safety spot, with Webb, Meredith and Harris working on the corner.

TOUGH LOOP

Created in the 2020 realignment, District 13-3A-D2 proved to be every bit as formidable as expected. Franklin lost by one in the state championship game. Lexington and Buffalo advanced to the third and fourth round of the playoffs, respectively, where they lost to ... Franklin. There’s little reason to expect the league to take a dip.

“Almost everybody in our district has a lot of people back as well,” Bridges noted. “We’re not the only ones.”

The Buffaloes open the season at 7:30 p.m. Friday at home against Johnson City LBJ.

SPORTS NEWS

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Cru set to chase another crown

BY ERIC DRENNAN

FME NEWS SERVICE

BELTON — Mary Hardin-Baylor has been a perennial national championship contender for almost two decades, and there's no reason to believe the Crusaders' habit of chasing the crown will be broken in 2021.

All but two of the starters from last spring's American Southwest Conference championship game — a 23-15 victory over rival Hardin-Simmons to cap a 5-0 spring record — are back after the NCAA granted all athletes an extra year of eligibility because of the pandemic.

The quarterback position seems to be settled. The already stingy defense is getting comfortable in

some additional schemes, and a few transfers should make the talent-rich program even more so.

Oh, by the way. UMHB also is the No. 1-ranked team in the country heading into the Sept. 4 opener at home against Simpson.

In other words for the Crusaders, it's another season with a target on their backs. And nothing short of lifting that walnut and bronze trophy after the 15th game come mid-December will satisfy them.

"It's 20 in '21. We want to win 20 ballgames in the year 2021," said Pete Fredenburg, the program's only head coach since its inception in 1998. "Trying to win 20 ballgames says a lot about these seniors and these coaches. Last year was so incredibly hard. It

shows the resilience and desire of these youngsters that love to play the game."

OFFENSE

Ten of the unit's 11 starters from last season's ASC title game are back. The lone spot to fill is at center, where senior Jeffery Sims is expected to replace for Steven Sellers.

The triggerman will be senior quarterback Kyle King, who threw for 613 yards and six touchdowns while rushing for 181 yards and six scores last spring despite making just two starts after taking over for Tommy Bowden.

"Kyle has really come into his own. He's not a flashy guy but is a

PLEASE SEE **CRU, 31**

2021 UMHB.EDU/ATHLETICS



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ALL HOME GAMES ARE PLAYED
AT **CRUSADER STADIUM**

DATE	OPPONENT	PLACE	TIME
9/04	SIMPSON COLLEGE	BELTON, TX	6:00 PM
9/11	ETBU	BELTON, TX	6:00 PM
9/18	SOUTHWESTERN UNIV.	GEORGETOWN, TX	7:00 PM
9/25	HARDIN-SIMMONS UNIV.	BELTON, TX	6:00 PM
10/02	AUSTIN COLLEGE	SHERMAN, TX	1:00 PM
10/16	TEXAS LUTHERAN UNIV.	BELTON, TX	1:00 PM
10/23	SUL ROSS STATE UNIV.	ALPINE, TX	1:00 PM
10/30	BELHAVEN UNIV.	BELTON, TX	12:00 PM
11/06	HOWARD PAYNE UNIV.	BELTON, TX	1:00 PM
11/13	MCMURRY UNIV.	ABILENE, TX	1:00 PM

great leader and really loves this place,” Fredenburg said. “We still think Tommy is talented, but he just has to be able to throw the ball.”

The offense’s deepest position might be running back, with the return of sophomores Montana Miller (209 yards rushing) and Kenneth Cormier (203 yards) and the addition of junior Aphonso Thomas, who spent time at SMU and Trinity Valley before transferring to UMHB in the summer of 2020. After injuring his Achilles heel last fall, he’s now healed and available.

“Aphonso is really talented, and we also like Kenneth and Montana,” Fredenburg said. “I think we have three guys that are really good prospects there.”

Catching King’s passes will be a whole host of returners — including senior receivers K.J. Miller, Brenton Martin and Romello Cook and senior tight end Gary Ruckman — along with speedy Cameron Yoe product Aaron Sims, a senior who is finally on the field again after missing all of 2019 with an injury and sitting out last spring.

“I think we’re OK at wide receiver, but I don’t think we’re as talented there as we were in 2018,” Fredenburg said. “We’re very talented in the slot, though, and at tight end.

“Aaron is healthy physically. I’m really challenging him to come on as a leader. He’s such a competitor and such a robust guy that he needs to establish himself. K.J. has done that, much more than he ever has before.”

The offensive line will be the biggest work in progress. Jeffery Sims is the only upper classman in the bunch that includes Ethan

“We want to win 20 ballgames in the year 2021.”

Pete Fredenburg
UMHB head coach

Ruckman, Reuel Tandoh and Jesse Hoke, a trio of starters in the ASC title game as true freshmen.

“The line is a concern just because most of those guys are so young,” Fredenburg said. “We need some guys to step up there.”

DEFENSE

Like the offense, the defensive unit is filled with experience — 12 guys who started at least one game last spring — that should help as it continues to evolve after a few years of relying almost solely on its “Tampa 2” scheme.

“We had gotten to a point where we were playing so much Tampa that we had a harder time stopping the run,” Fredenburg said. “Don’t get me wrong. Tampa is great. We won two national championship games and played in a third one with it. But in 2019, opponents started coming on.

“Against Wisconsin-Whitewater (in a 2019 quarterfinal playoff loss), there were 13 times when they had third or fourth down and less than 3 yards, and they won every one of them. They were really talented of course, and we were still physical with them but couldn’t get it done in short-yardage situations.”

One of the benefits of the evolving scheme — which was partly installed for last spring — will be having All-American senior free safety Jefferson Fritz closer to the ball. The UMHB and ASC career leader in interceptions will continue to make plays in cover-

age but also have more chances to blitz and help against the run.

“If we just stayed in Tampa during practice, our offense is so good that it would go up and down the field on us,” defensive coordinator Larry Harmon said. “So by going against our offense every single day, it’s allowing our defense to work on it.

“Nothing is good, though, if everybody on the other team knows what (coverage) you’re in. So we’re working on how to disguise it and what works and what fits.”

Fritz will be joined in the secondary by fellow senior safety Jayden Smith and senior Keith Gipson and junior Titus Dunk on the corners.

Senior linebackers Akeem Jackson, Mikkah Hackett and Jacob Mueller — the Crusaders’ three leading tacklers last spring are back — as are seniors E’Monte Smith, Khevon Shepard, Sante Parker and Pete Smith and sophomores Josh Patteson and Tristan Green along the line.

“I think Khevon and Sante are really coming along as defensive ends,” Fredenburg said. “We’re a long way from being dominant there right now, but we have a good nucleus of defensive lineman.

“We’re really excited about (former Temple standout and new transfer) James Judie. I think he has a chance to really help us.”

SPECIAL TEAMS

Senior Anthony Avila and junior Brandon Cunningham are back to handle the kicking duties, and Cunningham and Fritz should share time again at punter.

The return game was a dynamic component of UMHB’s national championship team in 2018, when K.J. Miller and Aaron Sims combined for eight touchdowns. Having the two of them together again should be a boon for the special teams.



COURTESY | UMHB ATHLETICS

Mary Hardin-Baylor's Jefferson Fritz (2) runs with the ball against Louisiana College in the final regular season game of the Cru's spring season on March 20 at Crusader Stadium in Belton.

UMHB D on the Fritz —and that's good

BY ERIC DRENNAN

FME NEWS SERVICE

BELTON — It's just one of several childhood memories, a delightful little story really, but it tells so much about Jefferson Fritz. It doesn't have anything to do with the kind of football player he is today but, when pieced together with his beliefs and philosophies, it all fits to form a picture of a guy who attacks every aspect of life with an uncommon zeal.

"My very first football game was when I was in the third grade," the Mary Hardin-Baylor senior

recalled. "I was playing running back and I was really little. It was a pitch to the left, and there were these big dudes coming at me. I was scared. All I had played before that was soccer, so I never hit anybody, and nobody ever hit me. Now I have the ball and I'm scared, so I start running for my life.

"I ran 95 yards and, as soon as I crossed the goal line, I laid on my back because I couldn't believe I survived. The coach comes out and picks me all the way up in the air — because I only weighed about 50 pounds — and is telling

me, 'Good job. Great job.' Really, though, I was just running for my life."

It seems like an odd genesis for a two-time All-American free safety and the UMHB and American Southwest Conference career leader in interceptions with 22 through three full seasons and last spring's truncated five-game campaign.

That's the starting point, though, for a college career that's nearing the finish line.

Crusaders defensive coordina-

PLEASE SEE **FRITZ, 33**

FRITZ

FROM PAGE 32

tor Larry Harmon can remember when it began and knew right away that Fritz was something special.

“You could see his instincts, and he had such an ability to understand concepts,” Harmon said. “He gets it. He’s a football guy. Some guys come to Mary Hardin-Baylor and just expect they’re going to win. He really understood early on why we win, and he bought into it right then and there.

“Some positions in football, you have to be able to run or you have to be physical. When you talk about what is a free safety for us, the No. 1 thing is leadership. Our safeties have all been guys with great character, great leadership ability. They are servant leaders for their team and are internally motivated to be the best that they can be. That’s Jefferson.”

As for the journey that took Fritz from being a scared third-grader to a freshman tabbed as UMHB’s next great free safety and now to one of the most respected defensive players in the country, it’s filled with countless hours of hard work and a whole trove of deep-thinking philosophies — the kind of which some people believe elite athletes aren’t capable of producing.

Fritz can prove those people wrong with a 20-minute conversation, such as the one that produced these thoughts:

- On work ethic: “I try to show (my teammates) what it’s like to work hard. A lot of people expect something when they work hard. No. We’re just going to work hard because that’s what we’re supposed to do. The coaches might say, ‘Good job.’ If they don’t, oh well. You know you’re working hard



Mary Hardin-Baylor's Jefferson Fritz (2) runs with the ball against Huntingdon in a Nov. 30, 2019, playoff game at Crusader Stadium in Belton.

COURTESY | UMHB ATHLETICS

and know you’re getting better.”

- On how that translates to off-the-field aspects: “It’s the same in school or whatever you do. You have to approach life almost like it’s a football game and really put everything you have into it.”

- On his most memorable plays: “There’s a couple that are my favorites and a couple that I don’t like. You have to remember the good and the bad because you can’t live in just the highs or just the lows. You have to be somewhere in the middle.”

- On why he’s seen so often around campus and town with a smile on his face: “You have to be able to smile. It’s easier for me because I’m my biggest critic. Coach Harmon will come in here and get onto us about not making a play. Sure, that gets to me for a minute, but I’ve already thought about that play a hundred times before we ever got into the meeting. You have to be able to take it as a lesson that makes you better and not let it get to you emotionally. You can’t let criticism ruin your day because you have to get back to work, and you’d better find a way to enjoy that work and make it fun.”

As anyone around the UMHB field houses can attest, Fritz certainly enjoys the work. That enjoyment — along with the NCAA’s ruling to give every college athlete another year of eligibility after the pandemic wiped out nearly

all of sports in 2020 — is why he’s back for one final season with the Crusaders, seeking to hoist the national championship trophy just as he did in 2018.

“Four of my best friends are guys who were freshmen here the same year I was, and they’re still here,” he said. “Since we didn’t win the championship in 2019, I figured I’d come back so we can all try to win it together.”

So once again, Fritz will lead the pack in another title chase, helping his teammates find the middle ground between the highs and the lows and pulling them along through grueling workouts and crunch time on Saturdays while knowing full well that each step moves him closer to the end of his college career.

“I definitely want to take it all in, one day at a time. It feels like I’ve been here a very long time, but this is it,” he said. “I have to make the most of each day because there aren’t any more days here for me after this.

“I’m trying to give everything I’ve got every single day to get better and get to where we want to get.”

And there is the finished picture of Fritz, who — all these years after that long touchdown sprint in elementary school — is still running for his life. Not because he’s scared, but because he believes everything in life is worth running for.

Baylor moving on after NCAA investigation

BY STEPHEN HAWKINS
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Baylor players were on a knee in the middle of the practice field as athletic director Mack Rhoades and coach Dave Aranda addressed them about the NCAA ruling in a case for things that happened before any of them arrived on campus.

"I could feel them attentively listening to Mack. ... You could feel his energy, I thought it was very focused and very on point. That was a strong moment," Aranda said. "But once Mack said what he said, and I commented at the end, it was, 'How much time is there before lunch is over?' So, we were able to get right to it."

The Bears first had to get through Aranda's first season, shortened and altered by the pandemic after keeping them from spring drills with their new coaches. Now gone is that lingering shadow of an NCAA investigation of the school's sprawling sexual assault scandal dating back as long as a decade. No major penalties were handed down.

Senior receiver R.J. Sneed said there is a different feel with team chemistry going into 2021, nearly 20 months after Aranda was hired.

"COVID didn't help out, especially with getting a new coach and you couldn't talk to guys and we couldn't really hang out with people," Sneed said. "But after the season, in the spring and the summer, every Monday we've had like a gathering and get to know a new group and have personal talks with them. ... So, yeah, I sense a change in that, and I get to know my teammates better."

Even after only limited on-field work to install his system before



AP | FILE

Baylor linebacker Terrel Bernard had 55 tackles in five games and was the Big 12's leading tackler last year before a torn labrum and shoulder fracture ended his season.

playing games, the Baylor defense was actually solid under Aranda, who got to Baylor fresh off a 15-0 national title as LSU's defensive coordinator.

But the Bears never developed an identity on offense while going 2-7, and Larry Fedora is gone after the Bears ranked 118th nationally with 310 total yards a game and averaged fewer than 24 points a game in his only season as offensive coordinator. New OC Jeff Grimes was in that role at BYU the past three seasons, after overlapping with Aranda on LSU's staff.

Aranda said going through last season, and knowing the history of productive Baylor offenses in the past, provided insight of what he really wanted.

"The wide zone offense, the play action pass, the shot plays, I think those are all things that allow our guys to take great ownership, play fast, be aggressive," he said. "And those are things that we are in need for."

BERNARD BACK

Terrel Bernard had 55 tackles in five games and was the Big 12's leading tackler last year before a torn labrum and shoulder fracture ended his season. The senior linebacker is back, and now really knows Aranda's scheme.

"As negative as (the injury) was to have him off of the field, he really hunkered down and got in the film room and really mastered our playbook," linebacker Dillon Doyle said. "He really solidified his leadership. He already was a leader; but he is the guy that everybody looks to to see what the standard is."

THROWING AND CATCHING

Charlie Brewer started 39 games at quarterback and threw for 9,700 yards while leading the Bears in passing each of the past four seasons. He could have come back for yet another season, but instead transferred to Utah.

PLEASE SEE **BAYLOR, 38**

SEC can wait: New coach, new QB for Texas

BY JIM VERTUNO
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

AUSTIN — A new coach, a new quarterback and a new conference. Well, that last part doesn't apply to No. 21 Texas just yet.

The eventual move to the Southeastern Conference by the Longhorns and Oklahoma set off a summer earthquake across the college football landscape when it was decided. But that's for future seasons when Texas hopes it has shaken off years of underachieving.

For 2021, the Longhorns are still in the Big 12, still trying to conquer Oklahoma and now trying to catch up to Iowa State in hopes of winning their first league crown in a decade.

Those hopes lie with a new coach. Texas fired Tom Herman after four winning but still mostly disappointing seasons, and plucked Steve Sarkisian from Nick Saban's staff at Alabama. Sarkisian brought a group of former Crimson Tide assistants with him.

Texas gave Sarkisian, a former head coach at Washington and Southern California, a guaranteed six-year, \$34 million contract that should take him into the eventual move to the SEC planned for 2025, if it doesn't happen sooner.

And if Texas' patience doesn't run out sooner, like it did on Herman.

BREAKOUT BIJAN

Running back Bijan Robinson was the breakout player of Texas' final two games last season with 355 yards rushing with an incredible 18.7 yards per carry. Sarkisian promised to get him the ball more than Herman did. A lot



Texas coach Steve Sarkisian watches players run drills during an Aug. 7 practice in Austin.

AP | FILE

more. Sarkisian even compared Robinson to former USC running back Reggie Bush, who Sarkisian coached as Trojans assistant.

"The biggest thing Bijan resembles to Reggie Bush is the one-cut ability," Sarkisian said. "I hadn't seen that for quite some time, the ability to make that full-speed, violent one cut, not lose top speed and get vertical, and Bijan has that."

QUARTERBACK BATTLE

Casey Thompson was supposed to be the easy choice at quarterback after four years of Sam Ehlinger. Hudson Card has made him work hard for it. Thompson was flawless in last season's relief appearance in the Alamo Bowl with four touchdown passes. Yet Card made it an all-out competition in the spring and has kept up the pressure in training camp. He could even steal the job.

"I wanted them to make it hard on us," Sarkisian said, "and they're doing just that."

DEFENSIVE LINE

Defensive tackle Keondre Co-

burn is the anchor up front for the Longhorns defense. Alfred Collins is the potential star. A former 5-star recruit, the 6-foot-5, 300-pound Collins got his first start in last season's Alamo Bowl and had five tackles, a pass breakup and even an interception.

TRIO OF TRANSFERS

The Texas defense could get a boost from a group of transfer linebackers. Ben Davis from Alabama and Ray Thornton from LSU were with national championship programs. Ovie Oghoufo played on last year's Notre Dame team that made the College Football Playoff.

All three left those programs after limited playing time, but all "know how to win," Coburn said.

SCHEDULE

Texas will be tested early. The schedule includes a season-opener against an experienced Louisiana team on Sept. 4, and the annual matchup with Oklahoma in Dallas on Oct. 9. If Texas is still in the Big 12 title chase after October, a Nov. 6 trip to Iowa State may settle it.

No. 6 A&M needs to find replacement for Mond

BY KRISTIE RIEKEN
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

COLLEGE STATION — For the first time since arriving at Texas A&M, coach Jimbo Fisher doesn't have Kellen Mond at quarterback.

But with a veteran-laden defense and a powerful running game the sixth-ranked Aggies believe they can contend for their first national title since 1939 despite a new face at QB.

Fisher returns for his fourth season at Texas A&M after leading the Aggies to a 9-1 record last year with their only loss coming to national champion Alabama in the second game of the season.

Haynes King and Zach Calzada have both been taking snaps with the first team since camp started and Fisher wouldn't say whether one of them leads the QB competition so far.

"We're in a really, really good situation," he said. "I love our (quarterbacks) room, however that situation turns out."

Offensive coordinator Darrell Dickey also didn't indicate who he favors for the job and raved about both players.

"Haynes is probably one of the best pure athletes on the team, but Zach has also got some athletic ability of his own," Dickey said. "Zach may be one of the best throwers of the ball that I've worked with. He's a very gifted thrower. Haynes is also a very gifted thrower. Both are very competitive."

Regardless of who wins the job, Fisher and Dickey are counting on the team's veterans to help make his transition to starter easier.

"The one thing you have to guard against with a new quarterback is the feeling they have to make every play, and everything

is all on their shoulders," Dickey said.

SPEEDY SPILLER

Running back Isaiah Spiller is expected to power Texas A&M's offense after running for 1,036 yards as a sophomore last season. Spiller was a Doak Walker Award finalist in 2020 after ranking third in the SEC by averaging 103.6 yards rushing a game in a year where the Aggies ranked second in the league in yards rushing a game.

"He's as good a running back as there is, as far as making people miss, running between the tackles, catching the ball out of the backfield, and then we can line him up in the slot," Dickey said. "He's a playmaker out there."

Texas A&M's running game should get a boost this season

with the development of Devon Achane, a sprinter on the track team, who ran for 364 yards on just 43 carries as a freshman last season.

LEAL LEADS

DeMarvin Leal leads a defense that returns nine starters, and the defensive end is projected to be one of the top players in the country. The junior led the Aggies last season with eight quarterback hurries and had 37 tackles. At 6-foot-4 and 290 pounds, Leal is a disruptive force whose fumble recovery against Florida last season set up Texas A&M's game-winning touchdown.

ANCHORING THE LINE

Left guard Kenyon Green is

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2021 sees return to normal wrapped in change

BY RALPH D. RUSSO
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The 2021 college football season holds the promise of a return to normal after a pandemic-wrecked fall led to cancellations, postponements and headache after headache.

The games are on. Fans are getting ready to head back into the stadiums. College sports is entering a new era, with less-restrictive transfer rules and players who are permitted for the first time to be paid endorsers.

And the pandemic is not over. While there are plenty of reasons to be optimistic that this season won't be the struggle 2020 was, there is still more than a little uncertainty about how this all plays out — on the field and off as No. 1 Alabama tries to win a second consecutive national title against a host of challengers.

"It's an interesting time," North Carolina coach Mack Brown said. Is it ever:

THE PANDEMIC

The season is a go, unaltered at this point, with all the conferences onboard — unlike last year at this time. Vaccination rates among college football teams appear to be significantly ahead of the general adult population.

Last season, 118 Bowl Subdivision games were either canceled or postponed as teams battled COVID-19. There will be no rescheduling of games in 2021. Conferences have said teams will be forced to forfeit if they can't field a team because of COVID-19 issues.

Health and safety protocols are still not uniform across all of major college football, but the common ground is this: Unlike last year when everyone was being tested frequently for the virus,



EVERT NELSON | THE TOPEKA CAPITAL-JOURNAL VIA AP

Kansas wide receiver Tanaka Scott runs a drill during practice Aug. 19 in Lawrence, Kan.

only unvaccinated players and team personnel will be subject to routine surveillance testing. Only unvaccinated individuals will be automatically be quarantined if they come into contact with someone infected with the virus.

"That gives us a competitive advantage in my mind, as we should not miss any time as a football team due to COVID," new Arizona coach Jedd Fisch said before the school proudly tweeted the team had reached 100% vaccination status.

Many coaches have been publicly encouraging vaccination.

"I think it's irresponsible to not to get the vaccine," said Ole Miss coach Lane Kiffin, whose team also is 100% vaccinated.

Not every coach is taking this approach. Washington State's Nick Rolovich initially said he did not plan to be vaccinated on a campus where it is mandatory for all students and employees before saying he would comply.

Where the pandemic could have a deeper impact is with fans. The

number of COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations and deaths has been on the rise. But schools have been touting a return to full-capacity stadiums and tailgating after a season of playing in mostly empty buildings.

"I'm really excited, man, just to get back in The Swamp finally with 90,000 screaming out there," Florida defensive end Zach Carter said.

It seems unlikely those plans will change unless local governments step in, which happened last week in Hawaii. The Rainbow Warriors' opening game against Portland State on Sept. 5 will be played without fans.

Oregon and Oregon State became the first Power Five schools to announce fans will need to show proof of either vaccination or a negative COVID-19 test to attend their games.

"I think disruptions that players had to deal with, and may still have to deal with in the future

PLEASE SEE **2021, 45**

FROM PAGE 36

the only returning starter on the offensive line. Green had a great 2020 season where he was named first-team All-America by FWAA and The Sporting News after helping the Aggies allow just seven sacks all year and rush for 205.1 yards a game. The 6-4, 325-pound Green started each game last season and has 23 starts in his career.

SCHEDULE STUFF

The Aggies open the season Sept. 4 against Kent State before playing Colorado in Denver on Sept. 11. They open SEC play Sept. 25 when they face Arkansas at AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas.

The game already circled on many calendars is Oct. 9 when Texas A&M hosts top-ranked Alabama. The Aggies will try to snap an eight-game skid to the Crimson Tide and get their first win in the series since a 29-24 victory in 2012 in Johnny Manziel's Heisman Trophy-winning season.

The schedule also includes home dates against Auburn and South Carolina and visits to Missouri and LSU.



AP | FILE

Texas A&M head coach Jimbo Fisher speaks to reporters during Southeastern Conference Media Days on July 21 in Hoover, Ala. Fisher enters the fourth season of his massive \$75 million contract at Texas A&M having elevated the Aggies to among the top programs in the country. Now the challenge for Fisher and the Aggies is to take the next step and contend for their first national title since 1939.

BAYLOR

FROM PAGE 34

Junior Gerry Bohanon and sophomore Jacob Zeno got only limited snaps when Brewer was around, but they are now competing to be the starter along with redshirt freshman Blake Shapen.

While the Bears will have a relatively inexperienced quarterback, they return their top five

receivers and tight end Ben Sims. Leading receiver Sneed caught 39 passes for 497 yards and three touchdowns in the nine-game season last year.

ADDING APU

Baylor returns 10 starters on defense and added transfer nose tackle Siaki "Apu" Ika, a 6-foot-4, 350-pounder who as a freshman was part of Aranda's defense for LSU's championship two seasons ago.

"I expect him to have the biggest impact on the defense," said defensive tackle TJ Franklin.

THE SCHEDULE

Baylor opens Sept. 4 at Texas State, becoming only the second Big 12 team to visit San Marcos. The Bears play five of their nine Big 12 games at home, with all of the league's Top 25 teams set to visit Waco: No. 7 Iowa State (Sept. 25), No. 21 Texas (Oct. 30) and No. 2 Oklahoma (Nov. 30).

Tech hoping old and new QBs revive offense

BY STEPHEN HAWKINS
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Texas Tech has brought a former Red Raiders quarterback back to the Lubbock campus to call the plays for a Pac-12 championship quarterback who is expected to run them.

Third-year coach Matt Wells knew something had to change after a pair of four-win seasons with offenses not nearly up to par with what's expected from Tech fans who have watched the likes of Patrick Mahomes and Kliff Kingsbury throw balls up and down the field.

So Wells hired Sonny Cumbie as the new offensive coordinator. The former walk-on QB who threw for 4,742 yards and 32 touchdowns as a Red Raiders senior in 2004 replaced David Yost, the OC that Wells had brought with him from Utah State.

"It's good to have Sonny back. He's West Texas, from Snyder, Texas, obviously had a really good senior season at Tech and a career at Tech," Wells said. "I think the vibe is really good with him and the offensive players, they're excited. In terms of him and the quarterbacks, that's part of the reason I do believe I chose him, is just his ability to coach and connect with those quarterbacks."

Those QBs include 6-foot-5 junior Tyler Shough, who as a redshirt freshman at Oregon backed up NFL first-round draft pick Justin Herbert before being the Ducks starter last season when they won their second Pac-12 championship game in a row. He threw for 1,703 yards with 16 touchdowns in seven games.

"He got here in spring and he's already showed a lot of leadership," junior receiver Erik Ezu-



AP | FILE

Texas Tech coach Matt Wells knew something had to change after a pair of four-win seasons with offenses not nearly up to par with what's expected from Tech fans, so Wells hired Sonny Cumbie (shown) as the new offensive coordinator.

kanma said of Shough.

Ezukanma is the first Tech underclassman to lead the team in receiving yards in consecutive seasons since Michael Crabtree in 2007-08, and has fully recovered from the broken arm suffered in spring practice.

Cumbie threw for 520 yards and three touchdowns in a Holiday Bowl win over then-No. 4 Cali-

fornia in his final game, and has since worked for every Tech head coach.

Initially a grad assistant in 2009 for Mike Leach, Cumbie became a full-time assistant the following year for Tommy Tuberville. Cumbie was promoted to co-offensive coordinator when Kingsbury

PLEASE SEE **TECH, 46**

TCU hits 10 in Big 12 having proven itself worthy P5 team

BY STEPHEN HAWKINS
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

FORT WORTH — TCU is going into its 10th season in the Big 12, a conference headed toward a more seismic shift than the one that made the Horned Frogs a Power Five team.

The Frogs have proven themselves quite worthy of that status.

Of the 12 teams that have changed or moved into power leagues in the past decade, only Texas A&M in the SEC and Pittsburgh in the ACC have better conference records since switching. In the Big 12, only second-ranked Oklahoma has more league wins than TCU since 2014, the season the Frogs shared the conference title with Baylor before the Sooners won the last six.

In the pandemic-altered 2020 season, the Horned Frogs won five of their final six games before not being able to play in their bowl game because of COVID-19 issues.

“Mentally, to be honest with you, even for me, it was really tough,” coach Gary Patterson said about that uneven season, which was his 20th as TCU’s head coach after three years as defensive coordinator.

TCU and West Virginia started play in a 10-team Big 12 in 2012, following the departures of Texas A&M and Missouri to the SEC. The SEC is where Oklahoma and Texas, the only Big 12 teams to win national championships, are headed no later than 2025.

“Maybe I’m just a kind of a little bit of an old school when it comes to it. Just regional rivalries, that’s what I worry about. I worry about the state of Texas more than I worry about anything else, and Fort Worth,” Patterson said. “Because that’s what we’ve tried to do, why I stayed here. It’s not



AP | FILE

TCU quarterback Max Duggan (15) throws downfield against Oklahoma State during the first half Dec. 5, 2020, in Fort Worth.

about just TCU, TCU football. It’s about Fort Worth.”

Left out of the initial 12-team Big 12 that started play in 1996 after the old Southwest Conference was dissolved, TCU then won or shared titles in the Western Athletic Conference, Conference USA and the Mountain West over a 16-season span.

MAX TIME

Max Duggan has accounted for nearly 5,000 total yards of offense and 41 touchdowns in 22 games for TCU. Yet, the junior quarterback is just now coming off what could be considered a somewhat normal offseason for the starter.

“People don’t really understand what Max went through a year ago,” Patterson said. “So for him to grow up where he’s at, an unbelievable leader.”

After starting the final 10 games as a true freshman in 2019, there were only a few practices last spring before COVID-19 shut those down. Duggan was then sidelined most of preseason camp last fall after a previously undetected

heart issue was revealed during more extensive testing amid the pandemic. He ended up not missing a game due to the delayed start of the season.

“Once you have spring ball, you have summer workouts, you just feel more confident going into the season,” Duggan said. “You’ve been with your guys a little bit more, get a little bit more comfortable with everything. So it’s been awesome. It’s been very productive.”

DEFENSIVE GAPS

While there are eight returning starters on defense, the Frogs have to replace two All-Big 12 picks: linebacker Garret Wallow and safety Trevon Moehrig. Those are two key positions in Patterson’s primary 4-2-5 scheme.

Wallow was the team’s leading tackler the past two seasons, and was the Big 12 leader in 2019. His likely replacement is Jamoi Hodge, a 6-foot-2, 224-pound former transfer from Independence

PLEASE SEE **TCU, 46**

Army's Monken looking to build off 9-win season

BY JOHN KEKIS

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Army won nine games last season and finished just outside the AP Top 25 despite having to cope with a schedule that constantly changed because of COVID-19.

Coach Jeff Monken hopes to build off that success despite the usual loss of senior stars. The class of 2021 won 35 games, the most for a class in West Point history.

"I'm just excited about the leadership that we've got, a good group of seniors," said Monken, whose 49 wins in seven seasons put him at the doorstep of second place all-time at the academy. "I am anxious to see them compete. It's going to be interesting."

Last season's schedule ended up including three Championship Subdivision teams the Black Knights defeated by a combined score of 118-35, though The Citadel played Army to a near standoff, losing just 14-9 at Michie Stadium. Shutouts of Middle Tennessee State (42-0) and archrival Navy (15-0) helped Army end the season with the top defense in the nation (275.3 yards per game) under first-year coordinator Nate Woody.

Those gone from that defense include linebackers Jon Rhattigan and Amadeo West. Also departed are 6-foot-6, 300-pound offensive guard Peyton Reeder and fullback Sandon McCoy (10 TDs), key cogs on a team that finished fourth nationally in rushing with an average of 273 yards.

"I wish we could re-sign those guys that we lose every year to new contracts and keep them around," Monken joked. "But that's not college football."

Still, more than 20 returning players participated in 10 or more



AP | FILE

Army won nine games last season and finished just outside the Top 25. That's a good omen for coach Jeff Monken as he starts his eighth season along the banks of the Hudson River on the verge of becoming the second-winningest football coach in West Point history.

games on defense last season. The offense had six quarterbacks take snaps in games. Monken hinted the quarterback position will have many faces, among them seniors Christian Anderson and Jabari Laws, junior Tyhier Tyler, and sophomore Cade Ballard.

"There are enough guys that played," said Monken, who is two wins from tying Jim Young for second in academy history, behind Hall of Famer "Red" Blaik's seemingly untouchable 121 wins in 18 seasons. "My concern isn't the experience. It's just them playing together as a unit. It's going to be key for us."

DEFENSE RULES

The Black Knights chose four defensive players as team captains — senior DL Nolan Cockrill, senior DB Cedrick Cunningham, senior LB Arik Smith, and DB Marquel Broughton, just the third junior since 2015 to be so honored.

"We lean on other leaders on

the team," Smith said. "It's by committee. There's no one guy. It's been going well."

Cockrill had a breakout junior year with 28 tackles, including seven for losses. He led the team with four QB hurries and had two pass breakups and one forced fumble. Cunningham had 37 solo stops, and Smith tied for the team lead with Rhattigan in total tackles with 78. Broughton led the team with 40 solo tackles.

"We want to make sure that we don't outsmart ourselves," Woody said. "Being able to be somewhat multiple in coverages and make quarterbacks have to think where they want to go with the ball is incredibly important to us."

ALMOST 10

Army finished last season at 9-3 after a three-point loss to West Virginia in the Liberty Bowl, just missing its third double-digit win

PLEASE SEE **ARMY, 45**

Bell, Enagbare among nation's best on losing teams

BY ERIC OLSON

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Great players make for great teams. Well, not always.

Elite talent is spread across college football, and some of the top players at their positions are on teams that struggle.

Consider this: five players on The Associated Press All-America first or second teams were at schools with losing records.

In that spirit, let's take a look at some great players on not-so-great teams:

WR David Bell, Purdue

With his knack for making the difficult catches as well as the easy ones, Bell is among the most dependable receivers in the country. He started all six games as the Boilermakers went 2-4 in their pandemic-shortened season, and he finished with 53 catches for 625 yards and eight touchdowns. He had four 100-yard receiving games and made a season-high 13 catches for 121 yards and three TDs against Iowa.

DE Kingsley "JJ" Enagbare, South Carolina

Enagbare broke out in a big way for a Gamecocks team that went 2-8 in 2020, and he should thrive on the edge in new defensive coordinator Clayton White's 4-2-5 base alignment. Engagbare recorded two sacks and a career-high nine tackles in the opener against Tennessee and finished with a team-best six sacks and three forced fumbles in eight games. He missed the last two games because of injury and is coming off hip surgery in the offseason.

RB Jahmyr Gibbs, Georgia Tech

One of the most versatile play-



AP | FILE

With his knack for making the difficult catches as well as the easy ones, Purdue wide receiver David Bell (3) is among the most dependable receivers in the country.

ers in the country and a preseason All-ACC pick, he had 968 all-purpose yards and seven touchdowns while playing in only seven games because of injury for the 3-7 Yellow Jackets. He became the seventh Power Five player since 2000 to compile 450 rushing yards, 300 receiving yards and 200 kickoff return yards in a team's first eight games of a season.

OT Abraham Lucas, Washington State

Lucas excelled in Mike Leach's "Air Raid" system and was expected to declare for the NFL draft after the Cougars played only four games (1-3) last season in Nick Rolovich's run-and-shoot offense. The 6-foot-7, 319-pounder said he didn't think he was quite ready to go pro. Already one of the best pass protectors in the country, Lucas will add to his game with another year in an offense featuring more runs and tighter line splits.

LB Carlton Martial, Troy

Martial is the preseason defensive player of the year in the Sun Belt Conference after making a nation-leading 113 tackles for a team that finished 5-6. He showed up as a walk-on and has made a rapid ascent. He made 21 tackles and a late interception in a narrow loss to conference champion Coastal Carolina, and he enters the season as Pro Football Focus' No. 3 college linebacker.

Jalen Pitre, S, Baylor

Pitre is listed as a safety but actually is a safety-linebacker hybrid. He can be a rush end, a true linebacker or a high safety. He led the Bears with 60 tackles and 13 for loss during a 2-7 season. Among his TFLs were 2.5 sacks. He also ran back both of his interceptions for touchdowns, including a 30-yarder in a closer-than-expected loss at Iowa State. Pro scouts love his high motor and football IQ.

Freshmen with high expectations to watch in 2021

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Ga'Quincy McKinstry not only arrived at defending national champion and preseason No. 1 Alabama with a reputation as a lockdown cornerback, but also with a nickname: Kool-Aid.

It's even how he's listed on the Crimson Tide roster:

McKinstry is just one example of blue-chip high school standouts who arrived on campus — many last spring — with accolades and expectations to match.

Defensive end Jack Sawyer is at Ohio State and already tooling around Columbus in a loaded Chevy pickup he got as part of an endorsement deal from actor Mark Wahlberg's Chevrolet dealership.

And Sawyer, regarded as the top recruit in Ohio, hasn't played a snap in a live game in well over a year after sitting out last season because of the pandemic.

Here are just some of the freshmen facing high expectations to watch in 2021:

GA'QUINCY MCKINSTRY, CB, No. 1 ALABAMA

McKinstry may be too talented to keep off the field for a defense replacing first-round NFL draft pick Patrick Surtain II. "Kool-Aid" (he just struck an endorsement deal with the beverage maker) is 6-foot-1 and 180 pounds and will likely compete for early playing time with no real experienced starting cornerback listed opposite of Josh Jobe. He also practiced with the Southeastern Conference champion basketball team some last season after enrolling early and planned to play both sports.

"He is what we thought he was, but I thought he was more physical," defensive coordinator



AP | FILE

Georgia wide receiver Adonai Mitchell catches a touchdown pass during Georgia's spring game on April 17 in Athens, Ga.

Pete Golding said. "I think with any freshmen that's very talented — and Kool Aid is no exception — is still the same thing of the consistency."

JACK SAWYER, DE, No. 4 OHIO STATE

Rated by some as the top high school football player in the country, and that's even though he sat out his senior season in the Columbus suburb of Pickerington because of the pandemic. Committed to the Buckeyes during his sophomore season, Sawyer is a 6-foot-5 pass rusher who has added 30 pounds since arriving on campus, defensive line coach Larry Johnson said.

"Expectations are very high because he's a local guy, but I think he still has to get on the field and play," Johnson said. "He hasn't played football in almost a year and a half now, and spring football doesn't really count."

WILL SHIPLEY, RB, No. 3 CLEMSON

The 5-foot-11, 200-pound five star

from Waddington, North Carolina, might already be the fastest guy on a team loaded with fast guys. He could eventually assume a role similar to that of Travis Etienne, the ACC player of the year in 2018 and 2019. Shipley has to climb because the Tigers have depth, but could move up quickly.

ADONAI MITCHELL, WR, No. 5 GEORGIA

He made a splash with seven catches for 105 yards and a touchdown in Georgia's spring game. With the Bulldogs facing questions at receiver, he could get a real shot early because some ahead of him on the depth chart are nursing injuries. LSU transfer Arik Gilbert, a former tight end, is not currently with the team.

TROY FRANKLIN, WR, No. 11 OREGON

Arrived in time for spring practice with the intention of changing the run-first culture for which the Ducks are known, and began making inroads on that quest right away. Had four catches for 93 yards in the spring game, and was cited by coach Mario Cristobal for looking like a veteran by the time fall camp opened. At 6-foot-2 and 170 pounds, he appears to be in line for a starting spot on the outside on a team loaded with freshmen talent.

KOREY FOREMAN, DE, No. 15 USC

At 6-foot-4 and 265 pounds, he's known as a pass rusher first, but also works well in the running game. The former California prep star can beat a defender with quickness or power. Will have much to learn at the college level, but could make an impact right away being used as a designated pass rusher whose primary role is to get to the QB.

Helton, Harbaugh heading into pivotal seasons

BY RALPH D. RUSSO
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Last year, around this time, the conventional wisdom was that a financial crunch brought on by the pandemic would discourage schools from laying out a multimillion-dollar buyout to fire a football coach.

Conventional wisdom was wrong.

Arizona was on the hook for more than \$7 million when it sacked Kevin Sumlin.

South Carolina paid a lump sum of \$12.9 million to part ways with Will Muschamp.

Texas laid out \$15.4 million to get rid of Tom Herman.

Auburn forked over more than \$21 million to move on from Gus Malzahn.

Fifteen schools changed coaches, fewer than what has become a typical number across the Bowl Subdivision, but a lot more than what was initially expected.

The hot spots heading into this season include a coach who got a somewhat surprising reprieve, one who took a pay cut and, of course, Clay Helton.

CLAY HELTON, SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Might as well start in Los Angeles, where Helton is remarkably entering his seventh season as Trojans coach. Helton's status has seemingly been tenuous for the last three seasons. His 45-23 record is good, but USC wants great and has invested in assistant coaches and staff to support the well-respected head coach. With only two more seasons left on his contract and a buyout that figures to be around \$10 million, Helton is likely to have a high bar to clear in 2021 for No. 16 USC to keep him.

JIM HARBAUGH, MICHIGAN

Harbaugh took a big pay cut after Michigan went 2-4 last season. The former Michigan quarterback has not delivered success at the level expected when he returned to Ann Arbor. But not until last season did it look as if the program was regressing. Harbaugh will get another season with a revamped coaching staff to show he can change the trajectory, but incremental improvements in year seven might not be enough to get him to year eight.

Michigan and USC coming open at the same time could make for one wild coaching carousel, especially if Matt Campbell has another big season at Iowa State and becomes a top target.

JUSTIN FUENTE, VIRGINIA TECH

The Hokies went to the Atlantic Coast Conference title game in Fuente's first season as Frank Beamer's replacement. He seemed like the perfect fit. Virginia Tech is 28-22 since. The Hokies went 5-6 last year and speculation about Fuente's status was so intense that the announcement of a news conference with athletic director Whit Babcock the day before Fuente's buyout was scheduled to drop in February caused the school to clarify that the coach was indeed coming back. Fuente needs a big turnaround, but a tough early schedule and VT's recent recruiting rankings don't suggest one is coming.

HERM EDWARDS, ARIZONA STATE

On the field, Edwards has done OK, 17-13 in three seasons. The season the 25th-ranked Sun Devils have been building toward. They look like legitimate Pac-12 contenders. Off the field, the

program is being investigated by the NCAA for possible recruiting violations. The question is not only can the 67-year-old former NFL coach survive the scandal, but does he even want to deal with it?

DINO BABERS, SYRACUSE

The Orange won 10 games and finished No. 15 in the country in Babers' third season. It now seems like a fluke. Syracuse is 14-33 in Babers' other four seasons. This has become one of the toughest jobs in the Power Five and Babers has two more years after this left on his contract. Modest improvement could be enough to buy him another year, but even that will be tough to achieve.

MATT WELLS, TEXAS TECH

Red Raiders fans are getting restless. Since Mike Leach was fired in 2009, Texas Tech has gone 11 straight seasons without a winning record in the Big 12. Wells has only been in Lubbock for two years, but is just 8-14. Compounding the problem for Wells, a school that has become synonymous with proficient offenses has been pedestrian on that side of the ball. It's one thing to be bad. It's another to be boring.

EXTRA POINT: It's a big season for two much-hyped and well-paid Big Ten coaches: Nebraska's Scott Frost and Purdue's Jeff Brohm. Both have buyouts in the \$20 million range that will likely provide some cover as long as their teams show some improvement. ... Amazingly, there are no obvious hot seats in the Southeastern Conference, but things could go sideways quickly at LSU for Ed Orgeron if the Tigers turn in another .500 season.

2021

FROM PAGE 37

relative to our circumstance right now, (are) probably something that helps them be a little more resilient,” Alabama coach Nick Saban said.

SUPER SENIORS AND TRANSFERS

The NCAA froze eligibility for every football player who played through the uncertainty of the pandemic last season, essentially handing them another year to play if they wished.

The result is hundreds of players who would have otherwise had no choice but to move on after 2020 will be back playing in 2021. Call them super seniors, and they won't count against the scholarship limit of 85. Other players are back after opting out of 2020.

Longtime Utah coach Kyle Whittingham described his roster, brimming with extra experienced players, as “the most unique since I've been a football coach.”

Then there are the transfers.

After an NCAA rule change in the spring, football players can now transfer one time and be immediately eligible to play. For decades, transferring players would have to sit out their first season after switching schools. It led to

more player movement than ever. “Transfer portal's changed everything. Super seniors coming back has changed everything,” Brown said.

ATHLETE COMPENSATION

The NCAA lifted its ban on college athletes earning money from their names, images and likenesses on July 1, and football players started cashing in immediately.

Quarterbacks are endorsing fast food and offensive linemen are promoting barbecue joints. At Michigan, Ohio State, North Carolina and Texas, players will be making money from jersey sales.

Every Miami football player was offered a deal to make \$500 a month to promote a local gym and a Utah-based company will pay every walk-on at BYU the equivalent of tuition to promote its protein bars and snacks.

Saban said Bryce Young, next up to be Alabama's starting quarterback, has NIL deals lined up that could be worth \$1 million.

There are concerns about how all this money will affect team culture, competitive balance and corruption, but college sports is mostly trying to embrace the change.

NCAA REFORM AND CFP EXPANSION

Two of the biggest stories in col-

lege sports will be taking place off the field this season.

A plan to expand the College Football Playoff from four to 12 teams is in the pipeline. There still appears to be support, but the Southeastern Conference's planned addition of Texas and Oklahoma in 2025 seems to have leaders in other conferences stepping back to take in the full picture.

“There's lots about the current playoff expansion proposal that is good,” said Pac-12 Commissioner George Kliavkoff, an unequivocal expansionist. “The real question is the details of that. The details unfortunately were worked out with a subset of the folks who have to sign off on it. The result is not every detail was covered and not every concern was addressed.”

The next CFP managers meeting is scheduled for Sept. 28 in Chicago.

Meanwhile, the NCAA is in the process of scaling back, starting with a rewrite of its constitution this fall. The result could be a national structure for college football that is shaped more than ever before by conferences.

Put it all together and college football is in the midst of a dizzying period of change. As for the immediate future, at the very least it looks better than last year.

ARMY

FROM PAGE 41

season in four years. The Black Knights were without eight key players and offensive coordinator Brent Davis.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF'S TROPHY

Army won the Commander-in-Chief's Trophy last year for the third time in four years with a

decided home advantage — both games were played on consecutive weekends at Michie Stadium. The Navy game was moved from Philadelphia because of the pandemic.

The traditional regular-season finale against Navy this year is at East Rutherford, New Jersey. The game against Air Force will be played in Arlington, Texas. The Falcons and Black Knights have not played at a neutral site since 1965 at Soldier Field in Chicago.

Air Force is at a little bit of a disadvantage because they play at Annapolis in September.

SCHEDULE

The schedule is a distinct upgrade from last year. The Black Knights play two Power Five teams and Liberty, which finished ranked 17th last season. The stiffest challenge promises to be on the road at Wisconsin, ranked No. 12 in the preseason. Wake Forest of the ACC visits in late October.

TCU

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Community College who played in only two games last season before getting hurt.

“You won’t find a better looking linebacker in college football as far as just the way, body type and everything he does. He’s just got to stay healthy,” Patterson said.

TCU does still have an All-Big 12 defensive back, with the return of junior cornerback Tre’Vius Hodges-Tomlinson, the nephew of NFL Hall of Fame running back and

former Frogs standout LaDainian Tomlinson.

FIRST MONTH AT HOME

TCU opens the season with four consecutive home games: non-conference matchups against FCS team Duquesne in the Sept. 4 opener, California from the Pac-12 and local rival SMU before its Big 12 opener Oct. 2 against No. 21 Texas. The Horned Frogs play five of their nine conference games on the road. That includes trips to No. 2 Oklahoma and then No. 7 Iowa State the day after Thanksgiving to end the regular season.



AP | FILE

TCU head coach Gary Patterson gives instructions during the first half as TCU plays Oklahoma State on Dec. 5 in Fort Worth.

TECH

FROM PAGE 39

became head coach in 2013 before spending the past seven seasons as co-OC at Big 12 rival TCU.

“He knows we need to play well,” Wells said. “Texas Tech means a lot to Sonny.”

TRANSFER DBS

Four transfer defensive backs were added this off-season who have started at other Power Five schools. The most experienced of that group is super senior Marquis Waters, who played in 49 games (35 starts) for Duke the past four seasons. There are also three juniors with three seasons of eligibility remaining: Reggie Pearson (Wisconsin), and 6-foot-3 cornerbacks Rayshad Williams (UCLA) and Malik Dunlap (North Carolina State).

SUPER SENIORS

Texas Tech has 12 super seniors, those players staying for an extra year since the NCAA didn’t count the pandemic-altered 2020 season against their eligibility. That’s the most in the Big 12. Defensive back Seth Collins began his college career in 2015, when as a true freshman he started seven games at quarterback for Oregon State, where he then switched to receiver in 2016 and had a season-ending injury in 2017. He played

12 games for Tech at receiver in 2018, but missed all of 2019 season because of a shoulder injury.

WELL-TRAVELED TACKLE

Texas Tech returns four starters on the offensive line, and adds a second-team All-Big 12 tackle playing on his fifth college team. Super senior T.J. Stortment played last season at TCU, where the 6-foot-7, 325-pound tackle was one of the league’s top offensive linemen. He initially enrolled at Old Dominion, where he redshirted in 2016 and played in 2017 before one-year stints at Fullerton College, Colorado State and TCU.

BOWL DROUGHT

The Red Raiders have gone three consecutive seasons without a bowl game for the first time since 1990-92. The last time they had a longer postseason drought was an eight-season stretch from 1978-85.

THE SCHEDULE

Texas Tech opens Sept. 4 at NRG Stadium, home of the NFL’s Houston Texans, against former Southwest Conference rival Houston. Its other non-conference games are at home against Stephen F. Austin and Florida International. The Red Raiders play five of their nine Big 12 games on the road, including the league opener Sept. 25 at No. 21 Texas. They go to No. 2 Oklahoma on Oct. 30, then have a bye week before hosting No. 7 Iowa State.

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