
FREE
23rd ANNUAL MID-MISSOURI
PIGSKIN PREVIEW
2021
NOW INCLUDING:
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St. Francis Borgia
Washington
Winfield-Elsberry
Josh Talton
Monroe City
Jace Carr
Harrisburg
Derrick Merritt
Westran
Nate Norris
Rock Bridge
Ryan Capps
Louisiana
DJ Wesolak
Boonville
Dylan Keogh
Cuba
Luke Triplett
Palmyra
Calen Kruger
California
Nathan Cupp
Marceline
Brysan Jeffries
Blair Oaks
Tyger Cobb
Hallsville
Cole Stumpe
Helias
Ben Arnet
KOMU 8
Beau Gordon
Centralia
Brendan Decker
Owensville
Bryson Lay
Van-Far
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Previews & Predictions of Mid-Missouri High School and College Teams, Including Mizzou
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Mid-MO Pigskin

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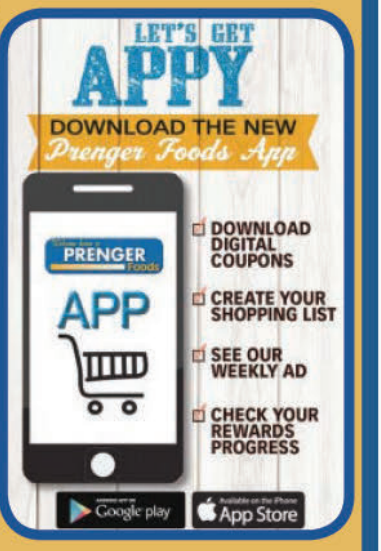
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2021's

Dylan Hair- QB Blair Oaks (6-0, 170) 3rd team All State, Class 3 Player Of the Year, 171-270 (63%) for 3,103 and 43 TDs passing, 168 rushes for 1,303 and 25 TDs rushing, accounted for 68 TDs. Hair is the leader of one of the state's most proficient offenses. The Falcons will only be better this year and so will Hair. With an experienced and talented O-Line in front of him and an efficient run game, opponents can't key only on Dylan. If he improves his numbers at all it will be because of a strong off-season of hard work and better timing with his receivers. Hair and the Falcon offense will be fun to watch again this year.

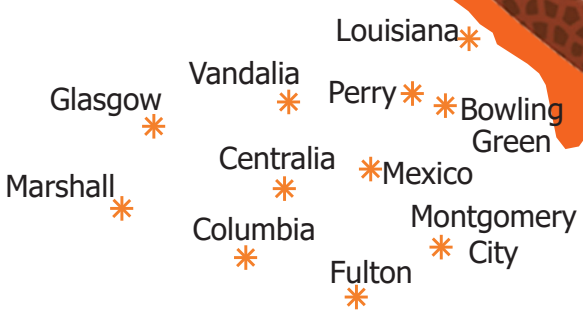


Wyatt Bonnett- OL Blair Oaks (6-1, 250) 1st Team All-State Center on an OL that paved the way for 5,991 yards of total offense. Nearly 6,000 yards! Wow! Believe it or not, the Falcon offense could be even better in '21. Bonnet is part of an O-Line unit that returns all five starters (3 seniors and 2 juniors). Wyatt had a very productive off-season, gaining some size and strength to go along with his solid fundamentals. His biggest asset is that he is a physical run blocker and he has balanced pass blocking skills. The Falcon offense has some playmakers, but it all starts upfront with the big boys like Bonnett.



Harrison Fowler- RB Hallsville (5-11, 200) 1st Team All Conference and 1st Team All District
209 carries for 1,348 yards, 18 rushing TD's, 6.45 yards per carry. 6 receptions for 157 yards and 3 TD's. 2 INT's on defense. A productive sophomore year will lead the Indians to lean on Fowler even more in '21. He is a shifty back with break-away speed and his ability to catch the ball will only give defenses more to deal with. On the defensive side of the ball is where he will make significant strides from last season. His improved strength will enable him to be an even more punishing tackler.





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TOP JUNIORS

Jayden Walters- OL Hallsville (6-1, 275) 1st Team All Conference and All District, 2nd Team All State. Helped pave the way for 2,694 rushing yards and 38 rushing TD's 1,875 passing yards and 20 passing TD's. Walters graded out at 90% assignment-wise on the season and recorded 93 knock downs. With his increased size and strength Jayden will be an even better, more physical blocker. Look for him to be a more efficient pass blocker so that the Indians can buy more time for standout QB Tyger Cobb to get the ball downfield. He will be the leader of a very solid O-Line.



Dylan Dalton- QB/FS Bowling Green (6-2, 185) 83 rushes, 702 yards, 8.46 yards per catch 10 rushing TDs, 52/90 passing, 58%, 787 yards, 10 TDs, 2 INTs. "Dylan is a tremendous leader both on and off the field (straight A student). Very coachable, always gives his best effort," bragged Coach Joe Chinn. "Tremendous competitor. Does a great job of taking care of the football, finding the open receiver and making good decisions. One of my favorite plays from last year really shows his competitive nature and will do everything for his team. On a rollout pass, Dylan decided to tuck the ball and run and when the safety was coming down at him, instead of running out of bounds he lowered his head and delivered the blow. That play just shows the type of kid he is. He is not going to back down from a challenge and he will do whatever possible to get a few more yards."



Gunner Bryant- OLB/TE Bowling Green (6-2, 195) 1st Team All EMO, All District. 61 solo tackles, 24 asst, 8 TFLs, 85 Total, 5 sacks, 2 forced fumbles, 2 fumble recoveries, 6 INTs (1 for a TD). 4 catches, 194 yards, 2 TDs. "Gunner is a quiet kid, who lets his play do the talking. He always seems to be around the football, and that is because he understands the game and flies around the field," stated Head Coach Joe Chinn. "He is the definition of a ball hawk and a playmaker. When we needed a big play on defense we could always count on Gunner to make a momentum changing play. Not very often do you see a sophomore be such an impact player on defense. Not only could he cover and make plays on the back end, he was also a force stopping the run and rushing the passer. Prototypical hybrid player on defense."





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2021's

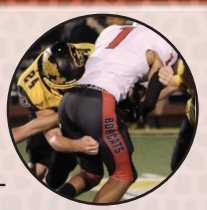
Wiley Powers- ILB CAMDENTON (5-11, 160) 141 Tackles, 10 TFL 3 Sacks. "Wiley is one of the most instinctive players I have been around," stated coach Jeff Shore. "He just has a real nose for the football and finds ways to get in on and make tackles. Having such a tremendous sophomore year has enabled the coaching staff to put a lot of trust in Wiley to lead to defense and get the job done. With his above average speed and some added strength look for even more eye popping numbers in 2021." Powers is the definition of a sideline to sideline defensive player. He has also worked on his coverage skills over the summer, so he can be a dual threat in passing situations.



Kyden Wilkerson- RB/DB- Centralia (5-9, 160) 10 rushes for 65 Yards and 1 TD Defense 72 tackles, 2 TFL, 3 Fumble Recoveries, and 6 Passes Defended (All-District DB) "He is a very good athlete that we are going to depend on to carry the load from the running back spot this year," stated Coach Tyler Forsee. "Last season he did a great job at Safety and really has a great nose for the ball. He is a State medalist in wrestling and knows how to tackle and get the ball carriers on the ground. He has a great work ethic and I expect big things from him this year on both sides of the ball." Wilkerson is a great weapon to have in the secondary for the Panthers. He can cover very well, but also fills quickly on run plays with physical tackles.



Ceaton Pennewell- LB Monroe City (6-1, 205) All-State LB, 900 yds rushing 14 TD. Pennewell is a punishing tackler from his linebacker spot and he has great speed for his size. Coach Kirby counts on his top defender to play sideline to sideline. With some added size and muscle in the offseason look for Ceaton to be even more of a physical presence in the middle of the defense. Not only is he an outstanding LB, on offense he is the go-to-guy for the tough yards from his fullback position. Last season, he totaled 900 yards and 14 touchdowns. Impressive, especially since the Panthers have another All-State RB in Josh Talton who gets most of the touches. Pennewell will be counted on again to lead an improved defense and a more efficient offense.



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TOP JUNIORS

Adam Czerniewski- QB Montgomery County (6-0, 170) Passing 76/127 60% Completion 983 Passing Yards, 14 TDs. Rushing 94 for 604 Yards, 5 TDs. “Adam is one of the hardest working players in our program in the weight room, on the field, and in the classroom,” boasted Coach John Klekamp. “Adam challenged a talented senior last season for playing time at QB and took over full-time as the starting QB in our last 4 games. Adam is extremely competitive and is poised to have a great junior year leading our offense.” Building on the experience he gained last season, combined with a strong offseason working with his receivers on routes and timing should mean more yards through the air and points on the board for the Wildcats.



Langdon Kitchen- OL/DL Westran (6-5, 245) 43 tackles, 12 TFL, 6 sacks 10 Hurries. All-Conference and All-District OL & DL. All-State DL. Kitchen uses his massive frame to separate from blockers and has a knack for bringing down ballcarriers. His wingspan helps make him an outstanding pass rusher and he has above average speed for his size. He also uses that length on the offensive side of the ball keeping pass rushers at bay. He is developing into a solid run blocker with some added strength this offseason. Kitchen will be a force on both sides of the ball, within the Lewis and Clark Conference.



John Martin- OL Union (6-1, 225) 2020 First Team All Conference, All District, 3rd Team All State. “He is an outstanding young man and an example to all of his teammates of what a student athlete should be,” states Coach Justin Grahl. “He has worked extremely hard in the classroom, weight room, and on the field to make himself into one heck of an offensive lineman.” Martin is an equally solid pass blocker and run blocker as evidenced by the Wildcat’s balanced offensive attack (164 yards rushing per game and 154 yards passing per game). Martin has put on some muscle this offseason and looks to take the next step by being a leader on the O-Line.



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KC CHIEFS

WK	DATE	OPPONENT	TIME
1	Sun, Sep 12	vsCleveland Cleveland	3:25 PM
2	Sun, Sep 19	@Baltimore Baltimore	7:20 PM
3	Sun, Sep 26	vsLos Angeles Los Angeles	12:00 PM
4	Sun, Oct 3	@Philadelphia Philadelphia	12:00 PM
5	Sun, Oct 10	vsBuffalo Buffalo	7:20 PM
6	Sun, Oct 17	@Washington Washington	12:00 PM
7	Sun, Oct 24	@Tennessee Tennessee	12:00 PM
8	Mon, Nov 1	vsNew York New York	7:15 PM
9	Sun, Nov 7	vsGreen Bay Green Bay	3:25 PM
10	Sun, Nov 14	@Las Vegas Las Vegas	7:20 PM
11	Sun, Nov 21	vsDallas Dallas	3:25 PM
12	BYE WEEK		
13	Sun, Dec 5	vsDenver Denver	12:00 PM
14	Sun, Dec 12	vsLas Vegas Las Vegas	12:00 PM
15	Thu, Dec 16	@Los Angeles Los Angeles	7:20 PM
16	Sun, Dec 26	vsPittsburgh Pittsburgh	3:25 PM
17	Sun, Jan 2	@Cincinnati Cincinnati	12:00 PM
18	Sun, Jan 9	@Denver Denver	3:25 PM

MIZZOU

Date	Opponent	Time
Sep 4	vs Central Michigan	3 p.m.
Sep 11	@ Kentucky	6:30 p.m.
Sep 18	vs Southeast Missouri State	11 a.m.
Sep 25	@ Boston College	TBD
Oct 2	vs Tennessee	TBD
Oct 9	vs North Texas	TBD
Oct 16	vs Texas A&M	TBD
Oct 30	@Vanderbilt	TBD
Nov 6	@ Georgia	TBD
Nov 13	vs South Carolina	TBD
Nov 20	vs Florida	TBD
Nov 26	@Arkansas	2:30 p.m.

2021 Senior Cover Players

Jace Carr - Harrisburg - WR/DB (6-2, 168)
2nd team All State. 23/358 yds; 3 TD's - (played in 6 games due to injury); Career 1,691 yds; 19 total TD's - 1st team All-District

Bryson Lay - Van-Far - RB/LB (6-0, 130)
1st Team All State (Returner). Speedster who does it all for the Indians

Josh Talton - Monroe City - DB/RB (6-1, 185) 2nd Team All State. Star on both sides of the ball- 900 yds rushing 12 TD

Calen Kruger - California - Ath (5-11, 175)
3rd Team All State. Outstanding player on both sides of the ball at QB and DB.

Nathan Cupp - Marceline - DE (6-0, 205)
1st Team All State. 1st Team All-Conf./Media, All-District, (69 tackles, 15.5 TFL)

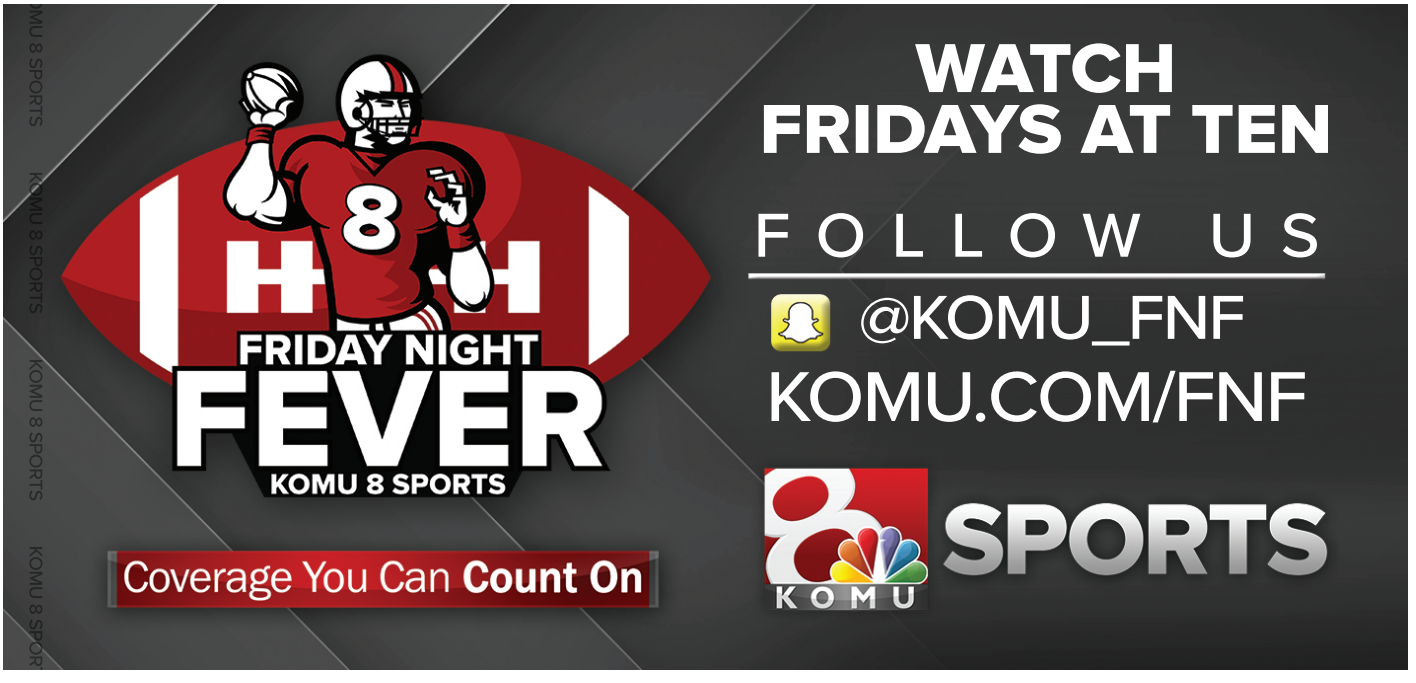
DeAndre Wesolak - Boonville - DE/REC (6-5, 240)
2nd Team All State-All-Conference both sides of ball, All State DE, POWER 5 Recruit

Luke Triplett - Palmyra - OL (6-2, 220)
1st Team All State 42 Tackles, 10 Solo, 15 TFL, 3 Sacks

Nate Norris - Col Rock Bridge - LB (6-2, 235)
2nd Team CMAC/ All District/ Academic All State

Ryan Capps - Louisiana - OL/DL (6-2, 245)
8 sacks-79 tackles-14 TFL (2nd team All-Conference-1st team All-District)

Beau Gordon - Centralia - QB/LB (5-10, 190)
Passing: 88-175-1,375 yds- 10 TDS Rushing: 122-525 yds- 13 TDS,
1st Team All-Conference LB 57 Tackles 1 Sack, 6 TFL





Brendan Decker - Owensville - QB (6-0, 170)
1st Team All Conf. QB, Conf. Offensive Player of the Year - 1st Team All District QB.
Passing: 2213 yards 32 TDs - Rushing: 486 yds 3 TDs

Derrick Merritt- Westran -QB/TE, (5-11, 170)
3rd team All-State (2020) - All LCC/All District

Cole Stumpe - Helias - WR (6-0, 175)
3rd team All-State (2020) 44 Catches 737 yds 10 TD. All-District and All-Conference DB
52 Tackles- 2 Int

Brysan Jeffries- Blair Oaks OL (6-2, 240)
2nd Team All-State (2020) Leader of an OL that paved the way for 5,991 yards of total offense

Tyger Cobb - Hallsville QB (5-11, 175)
1,875 Passing Yards & 20 passing TD's, 1,129 Rushing, 16 Rushing TD's, 1st Team All District.
2nd Team All-Conference

Dylan Keogh - Cuba DE/TE- (6-2, 240)
3rd Team All State, 1st Team all District, 78 Tackles 31 TFL. 26 catches for 346 yards

Other Top Seniors to Watch

DB Jamesian McKee (6-3, 205) Boonville
2nd team All-State (2020)
WR AJ Austene (6-4, 190) Hallsville
3rd team All-State (2020)
WR Derek Brandt (6-4, 180) Owensville
3rd Team All State (2020)
RB Gerry Marteen (5-10, 190) Battle
3rd team All-State (2020)
S Jaiden Tandy (6-1, 175) Col Hickman
All-Area/All-District/All-Conference/Conference Special Teams Player of the year
LB Trenton Hobbs (5-11, 185) Hallsville
3rd team All-State (2020)
LB Jasper Rees (6-1, 200) South Callaway
3rd team All-State (2020)
LB Ty Locklear (5-10, 210) Rolla
3rd team All-State (2020)
QB Grant Biere (6-4, 200) Salisbury
1st team All-Conference. All-district (2020)
RB/Slot Eric Richardson (6-0, 187) Waynesville
2nd Team All Conf., HM All Conf. Punter, 1st Team All District, AP 2nd Team All District (RB & DB)
RB Garrett Vrooman (5-11, 184) Fayette
All-Conference, All-District.
OL Evan Abercrombie (6-2, 220) Montgomery County
All Conference, All District

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Good Luck to all Mid-Missouri Football Teams on your 2021 Season!

OL Brayton Stephenson (6-2, 204) Harrisburg
All-District

Kicker Vinnie Calvaruso (6-5, 180) Helias
1st team All-State (2020)

Punter Chrisjen Riekeberg (5-9, 190) Macon
2nd team All-State (2020)

Punter Reid Dudenhoeffer- (6-2, 205) Blair Oaks
2nd team All-State (2020)

DL Jeremiah Nathan (6-3, 260) Rock Bridge
2nd team All-State (2020)

Punter Seth Brooks (6-2, 170) Jefferson City
3rd team All-State (2020)

Returner Wyatt Molloy (6-1, 160) Marceline
2nd team All-State (2020)

DB Sam Gillman (6-0, 170) Marceline
2nd team All-State (2020)

Punter Jack Gardner (6-3, 200) Warsaw
2nd team All-State (2020)

DB Landyn Smith (5-9, 175) Palmyra
2nd team All-State (2020)

OL Caden Selle (6-2, 240) Hannibal
3rd team All-State (2020)



2021 Conference Predictions



Clarence Cannon
1. Centralia
2. Palmyra
3. Monroe City
4. Clark County
5. Macon
6. Brookfield
7. South Shelby
8. Highland

Eastern Missouri
1. Bowling Green
2. Montgomery County
3. South Callaway
4. Mark Twain
5. North Callaway
6. Wright City
7. Louisiana
8. Van-Far

Four Rivers
1. Union
2. Owensville
3. Pacific
4. St. Clair
5. Hermann
6. St. James
7. Sullivan

Kaysinger
1. Windsor
2. Cole Camp
3. Lincoln
4. Tipton

Lewis & Clark
1. Marceline
2. Westran
3. Harrisburg
4. Fayette
5. Paris
6. Salisbury
7. Scotland County

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North Central
1. Hannibal
2. Moberly
3. Mexico
4. Kirksville
5. Marshall
6. Fulton

Ozark
1. Rolla
2. Lebanon
3. Camdenton
4. West Plains
5. Waynesville
6. Kickapoo
7. Glendale
8. Hillcrest
9. Parkview
10. Central

Tri-County–Central
1. Blair Oaks
2. Boonville
3. Hallsville
4. California
5. Southern Boone
6. School of the Osage
7. Eldon
8. Versailles

Central Missouri Activities Conference
1. Battle
2. Rock Bridge
3. Helias
4. Hickman
5. Jeff City
6. Capital City
7. Smith-Cotton

Others
Ozark Highlands- 4th Warsaw
GAC North- 2nd Warrenton 4th Winfield-Elsberry

Independent in Football
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Good Luck to all Mid-Missouri Football Teams

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Sept. 18	1:30 p.m.	vs. Purdue	NBC
Oct. 2	1:30 p.m.	vs. Cincinnati	NBC
Oct. 23	6:30 p.m.	vs. USC	NBC
Oct. 30	6:30 p.m.	vs. North Carolina	NBC
Nov. 6	2:30 p.m.	vs. Navy	NBC
Nov. 20	1:30 p.m.	vs. Georgia Tech	NBC

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Oct 30	@Vanderbilt	TBD
Nov 6	@ Georgia	TBD
Nov 13	vs South Carolina	TBD
Nov 20	vs Florida	TBD
Nov 26	@Arkansas	2:30 p.m.

Mid-Missouri Pigskin Preview

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Anthony Granda

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Blair Oaks falcons

There is no other way to state it: Ted LePage coaches winning football teams. The Blair Oaks head coach is undoubtedly one of the finest in the business, having put together an incredible winning percentage and multiple state championships. His time as a head coach has taken him from Blair Oaks to Jefferson City and back to Blair Oaks—where he's again making history. In 2020, the Falcons secured the Class 3 state championship, LePage's third overall and second in the three seasons since his return. The question now for Blair Oaks fans is: Can he do it again?

Some signs point to that answer being absolutely. The Falcons cruised through their schedule in 2020 on the back of an offense that averaged an astounding 52 points per game. And a major part of that corps returns in 2021. "We return the entire offensive line, our QB, and a wide receiver with several others who played receiver and running back," LePage says. "Experience is a key with this group and their chemistry is awesome."

The quarterback LePage mentions in passing is junior QB Dylan Hair (6-0, 170), who earned Class 3 Offensive Player of the Year honors as an underclassman last season. Hair, a starter since his freshman year, put up video-game numbers in 2020, completing 171 of 270 passes (63%) for 3,103 yards and 43 TDs, and rushing 168 times for 1,303 yards and 25 TDs. If 68 total scores doesn't sound scary enough, just think of Hair's potential with another year of experience under his belt and increased size and strength on body, behind an O-line that returns every starter. The thought must terrify the rest of the Tri-County.

The Blair Oaks O-line is big, knows the system back and forth, and has already proven just how successful it can be. Junior center Wyatt Bonnett (6-2, 250) will again have ball-snapping duties. Bonnett, steady as a rock game in and game out, was a First-Team All-State player last year. And he wasn't the only one receiving postseason accolades: senior guard Brysan Jeffries (6-2, 240) and junior tackle Kaden Hoelscher (6-4, 205) each landed spots on the All-State Second-Team. Additionally, Hoelscher made the Academic All-State team for his work in the classroom. Rounding out this fearsome bunch are senior tackle Cale Willson (6-4, 235) and senior guard Griffin Herst (6-0, 210). Junior OL Ethan Toebben (5-11, 195) will provide backup. This group looks ready to improve upon the 5,991 yards of total offense they paved the way for last fall.

It's no doubt, though, that the Falcons return less experience in the skill positions. Senior WR Zach Herigon (6-1, 150) showed some flashes of talent, with 3 receiving TDs in the playoffs. Senior RB Cadon Garber (5-8, 170) rushed for 150 yards and 1 TD in 2020, while junior WR Alec Wieberg (6-1, 165) and junior slot receiver Wil Libbert (6-0, 185) both played support roles. Other players looking to get in the mix are sophomore RB Jace Rackers (5-8, 170), junior WR Zach Prenger (5-10, 155), junior slot Adam Hall (6-2, 170), and sophomore WR Joey Wilde (6-1, 155).

With just three starters returning on the other side of the ball, LePage and his crew will be working to quickly integrate new blood into the Blair Oaks defense. The secondary looks to have a number of able bodies, with Second-Team All-Conference junior safety Alec Wieberg leading the way. Joining him are senior DBs Zach Herigon and Cadon Garber and sophomore DB Nick Closser (5-7, 140). Sophomore DB Jake Hagner (5-7, 140) provides depth. LePage has two very versatile players in junior DB/LBs Wil Libbert and John Bischoff (5-10, 160).

Class: 3
Conference: Tri-County
Head Coach: Ted LePage
Years at School: 8
Record at School: 88-14
Overall Record: 174-60
Offensive Starters Returning: 7
Defensive Starters Returning: 3
Total Returning Lettermen: 33
2020 Overall Record: 13-1

Blair Oaks Falcons 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Maryville	@Lee's Summit N.
September		
3	Knob Noster	Away
10	California	Home
17	Boonville	Away
24	Versailles	Away
October		
1	Eldon	Home
8	Hallsville	Away
15	Southern Boone	Home
22	Osage	Away
29	Districts	TBA





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The linebacking group will be composed of senior LB Zach Goeller (5-10, 165), junior LB Holden Brand (6-2, 185), and sophomore LBs Cole Peters (6-1, 170) and Brady Kerperin (6-1, 195).

The Falcons D-line is as inexperienced as the O-line is experienced. Junior DLs Ethan Toebben and Aiden Boeckman (6-0, 190) are the lone upperclassmen of the bunch. They'll be sided by sophomore DL Parker Bennet (6-2, 200) and freshman DL Bryson Varner (6-2, 205). "We had a lot of guys get experience in some big games," LePage says, "but they will need to make the next step to help us continue to be the defense we want to become at Blair Oaks."

Blair Oaks brings a proven, explosive offensive and an untested defense into 2021, but it may be enough for more success—especially with a coach as good as LePage. As ever, the coach remains calm and keeps the bigger picture in mind. "Our conference may be as good as it ever has been," LePage says, "so we will have to bring our 'A' game with us every week in order to compete." That 'A' game just might be better than anybody else's.

Pigskin's Pick: 8-1

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Boonville pirates

In 2020, the Boonville Pirates put together a four-game winning streak when it mattered most: in October. But when November rolled around, they fell to eventual state champion Blair Oaks—for the second time, finishing the season at 6-4. “We showed a lot of grit and potential through a season full of uncontrollables,” Head Coach Greg Hough says. And now, “We look forward to improving on some of the things we did in 2020. We’ll have some key athletes returning from a good 2020 team.”

Every conversation of those key athletes must start and end with senior DE D.J. Wesolak (6-5, 240). In 2020, Wesolak was an All-Conference performer on both sides of the ball and an All-State player lining up at defensive end, where he posted 59 tackles, with an insane 19 for loss, 8 sacks, 2 forced fumbles, and 1 fumble recovery. His oversized frame, quickness, and strength have seen him receive offers from just about every school in the country, including Florida, USC, Michigan, and Texas, to name just a few. It’s safe to expect nothing short of a monster year from Wesolak as he leads the Boonville defense in 2021. Another solid performer, senior DL Peyton Hahn (6-1, 230), will again work the D-line with Wesolak. As for the rest of the line, “Multiple guys are getting looks filling the empty spots,” Hough says. “Some young guys have stepped up and will challenge for some time on D-Line.” No matter who it is, it’ll be a fearsome front four with Wesolak involved.

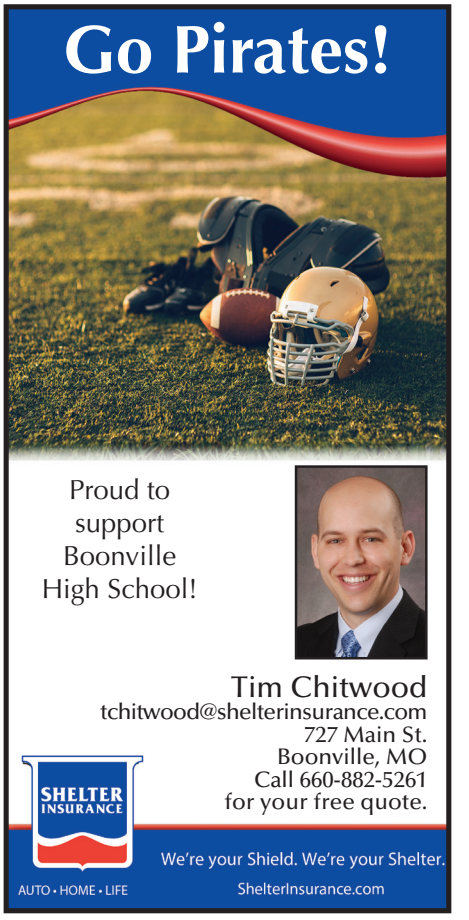
Elsewhere on the defense, the secondary comes back nearly fully intact. Senior DB Jamesian McKee (6-3, 210) also made the defensive All-State team and, like Wesolak, boasts the build to play at the next level. An All-Conference back, senior DB DaWan Lomax (5-9, 185), returns, as does sophomore DB Dakota Troost (5-8, 165). Two starting linebackers return to help form what could be the best defense in the conference in 2021. Senior LB Nash Mckenzie (5-9, 170) is coming off an ACL tear, and junior LB Max Eckerle (6-0, 220) is on the mend from shoulder surgery. If healthy, these two will show a nose for the ball and an ability to bring down ball-carriers. Other players in the mix for roles on defense in 2021 are junior ATH Jackson Johns (6-2, 180), senior ATH Travis Dell (5-9, 190), and sophomore ATH Rhodes Leonard (5-8, 170). “We hope to have a nice defense this year,” the coach says. And will they ever.

Offensively, the Pirates don’t return quite the treasure chest of talent as they do on defense, but they’re shaping up to be a formidable bunch nonetheless. Junior QB Colby Caton (5-8, 165) is again in charge of things. He completed 73 passes for 1,115 yards, 11 TDs, and 10 INTs, while also running for 436 yards and 6 TDs. “Colby competed and grew as the season went on,” Hough says. “He is one of the hardest-working kids on the team.” Expect Caton’s accuracy to improve in 2020, with fewer INTs and more TDs to follow.

Caton will have two massive targets in senior WR D.J. Wesolak and junior WR Jamesian McKee. Wesolak caught 20 passes for 256 yards and 2 TDs, and also rushed 21 times for 187 yards and 3 more TDs. His size makes him more than a handful to tackle. For his part, McKee posted 16 receptions for 290 yards and 2 TDs, and rushed for 125 yards and 2 TDs on 20 attempts. The versatility of these two All-Conference players will cause migraines for opposing defensive coordinators. But don’t forget about senior WR DaWan Lomax, who used his terrific speed to gain 213 yards and 3 TDs on 19 carries, and hauled in 14 passes for 220 yards and 3 TDs. Senior WR Luke Green

Class: 3
Conference: Tri-County
Head Coach: Greg Hough
Years at School: 4
Record at School: 20-12
Overall Record: 20-12
Offensive Starters Returning: 5
Defensive Starters Returning: 7
Total Returning Lettermen: 18
2020 Overall Record: 6-4

Boonville Pirates 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Pleasant Hill	Away
September		
3	Holden	Away
10	Southern Boone	Away
17	Blair Oaks	Home
24	California	Away
October		
1	Osage	Home
8	Versailles	Home
15	Eldon	Away
22	Hallsville	Home
29	Districts	TBA



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(6-2, 170) and sophomore WR Dakota Troost will get some touches as well. And, as on defense, junior ATH Jackson Johns, senior ATH Travis Dell, and sophomore ATH Rhodes Leonard are likely to figure into the mix.

The O-line will have lots of new faces, though, with senior OL Peyton Hahn the lone returning starter. This season, the All-Conference Hahn will be flanked by senior O-Linemen Chandler Stonecipher (5-10, 220), Daireus Brady (6-0, 240), and Cameron Ridgeway (6-0, 260). This group has size to spare, and if they gel well, the offense is primed to put big points on the board. Last season, the Pirates averaged over 32 points per game. Matching that output or coming close to it, combined with an improved defense should help them notch more wins in '21.

Though Boonville lost some talent to graduation, they boast some serious potential in 2021. "Our kids have done well this off-season," Hough says. "Our team and program grew through 2020, and as we approach the upcoming season we look forward to getting an opportunity to play in front of more people." More fans in the stands, more wins in the ledger for Boonville this fall.

Pigskin's Pick: 7-2

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Bowling Green bobcats

The future is bright for this experienced 2021 Bowling Green team. Although they battled through a shambolic season in 2020, the Bobcats were able to finish with a 7-4 record. Their skills were also tested against two state ranked class teams (Oak Grove and Centralia) in replacement of the two conference games that were canceled. "But I thought our kids did a great job fighting through adversity all year, and competed in every game we played," Head Coach Joe Chinn said. "I believe that started with summer workouts."

For every football player, next season starts in the offseason. From there, the Bobcats were hungry for a winning season. "We had over 90% of summer attendance in the weight room at 6 am," coach Chinn said. "I thought we made great strides on offense and defense as the year went on and really started playing our best football toward the end of the year." The Bobcats went on a 6-0 run in the EMO and won their first conference title since 2011.

Although the Bobcats are missing some starters from last year, the amount of talent that is returning this year is a huge benefit. "We are returning a lot of good players returning on an offense that scored 37 points per game," Coach Chinn said. They have seven returning starters on offense. Four out of the seven won 2nd Team All EMO honors last year. "A big strength of this offense will be the size of the OL," Coach Chinn said. "The OL will be big, strong and many have had significant varsity time." The Bobcats have two returning offensive linemen, Ryan Bowen (6-0, 240), who won 2nd Team All EMO and Devin Rue (6-3, 235). They will be joined by newcomers junior Jackson Charlton (6-3, 260) and seniors DJ Feldman (5-9, 180) and Seth Huber (6-2, 245). "Our skill positions are deep at every level," Coach Chinn said. Junior QB Dylan Dalton is one of the main pieces of this Bobcats' offense that's returning this season. Last year, the 6'2 185 quarterback was really versatile, throwing for 787 yards and 10 TDs and rushing for 702 yards and 10 TDs.

The Bobcats were extremely well known for their rushing attack, running for 272 yards per game. Seniors Charlie Bowen (5-10, 190) and Cooper Kiel (5-10, 175) are the top two returning rushing leaders on the team. Bowen ran for 669 yards and 8 TDs. On the receiving side, he had 103 receiving yards and 3 TDs. Kiel had 501 rushing yards and 6 TDs. He also had 53 receiving yards and tacked on 523 return yards and scored on kickoff return. Junior Marcus Starks (6-0, 180) will join them in the backfield. The Bobcats were also able to create a modest passing game as well, throwing for 85 yards per game. Their main returning target, Owen Neimeyer (6-0, 175), caught passes for 228 yards and scored two touchdowns. A new receiving threat is senior Brayden Heidecker (6-2, 185). Coach states he is a great blocker with equally solid hands. The Bobcats also have Junior TE Gunner Bryant (6-2, 195) returning to the offense as well. Last year he had 194 receiving yards and two touchdowns. Sophomore Harrison Hunt (6-2, 220) will join him after seeing time at TE as a freshman.

The Bobcats were highly dominant on the defensive side of the ball as well. Last year, they only allowed 15 points per game. They controlled the run by only allowing 150 rushing yards per game, and the passing attack by only allowing 75 yards per game. The Bobcats, this year, are seemingly coming in with a whole new defense this year, with only five starters coming back. "While we do not return a lot of starters, we have a lot of players that have got significant playing time at the varsity level," Coach Chinn said. "I think our front 7 will be very sound and will do a good job of stopping the run." Junior linebacker, Gunner Bryant, is the leader of the pack for this Bobcats' defense. Last year, he won 1st Team All EMO, and All District honors. He racked up a total of 85 tackles, 8 TFLs, 5 sacks, 6 INTs, and took one of them to the house. Junior lineman Jackson Charlton will be a great contribution to the Bobcats' defense. Although he came on late in the year, he showed great athleticism last season.

Classification: 2
Conference: Eastern Missouri (EMO)
Head Coach: Joe Chinn
Years at School: 2
Offensive Starters Returning: 7
Defensive Starters Returning: 5
Total Returning Lettermen: 22
2020 Overall Record: 7-4
2020 District Record: 1-1

Bowling Green Bobcats 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Van-Far	Home
September		
3	Palmyra	Away
10	Montgomery County	Away
17	Wright City	Home
24	Mark Twain	Away
October		
1	North Callaway	Home
8	Louisiana	Away
15	South Callaway	Away
22	Cardinal Ritter	Home
29	Districts	TBD





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Senior DJ Feldman will also be a huge asset to the defense with his great pursuit to the ball and being a sound tackler. The Bobcats' secondary is also a force to be reckoned with. "We returned some key members of the secondary who will do a good job leading our new players on the backend," Coach Chinn said. Niemeyer not only can play receiver, but he's an elite, lockdown corner. Last year he had 3 INTs and 27 tackles. Senior defensive back Brayden Heidecker will be a great contributor to the secondary this year, for he has great ball skills, he'll even be a huge benefit on offense as well.

The Bowling Green Bobcats have what it takes to have another great run this upcoming season. This team has been working hard since the last season from, running the ball to being a very sound defense. "Last season the guys really bought into this and it showed," Coach Chinn said. "This season we are really going to focus on the little details, like carrying out fakes, proper hand placement, all those little things that will add up to big success on Fridays." Coach Chinn also said that if they have a good summer offseason and the players are consistently working hard, the sky could be the limit. There are a lot of players on this team who have given 100% to be successful.

Pigskin's Pick: 7-2



Good Luck Bowling Green Bobcats!

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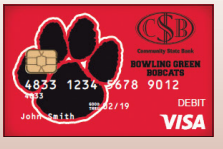
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Brookfield bulldogs

The 2021 football season for the Brookfield Bulldogs will be not only a new year, but a new era. In his first head-coaching gig, Cory Luke takes the reins of the program. Luke brings with him the crucial knowledge of two of high-school football's most important things: how to win and how to play at the next level. Luke was a key player on Stanberry's 2015 state championship team, and then went on to play wide receiver at Central Methodist University. His infectious energy could bode well for a program that could use a breath of fresh air.

Luke takes over for a team that finished 2020 at an even .500. "Last season's team went 5-5," he says. "They started well out of the gate but had a four-game losing streak in the middle of the season. By the end of the season, they were hitting their stride and playing very well, outscoring opponents 140-24 in their last three games." That included a 44-0 trouncing of Lawson in the playoffs. The Bulldogs' season ended to eventual state runner-up St. Pius X, in a tight 20-6 game.

That's certainly something to build on, but not a ton of talent returns to Brookfield in 2021, with just three starters back on each side of the ball. That'll put a lot of pressure on the youngsters in the program, but Luke well understands that, and is prepping them appropriately. "We're super excited to see a young core group of guys get bigger roles in a new style of offense," he says. That new style of offense will be a Spread attack. Expect a massive departure from Brookfield's ground-based offense, which yielded 243 rushing yards and a paltry 23 passing yards per game in 2020.

The centerpiece of this new offensive attack will be senior ATH Jaden Abongo (5-10, 170). Abongo's incredible athleticism turned a number of heads last fall, where he proved himself to be one of the more promising players around. Abongo had 23 rushes for 114 yards, and caught 5 passes for 104 yards and 1 TD. His breakaway speed is evident in those 20.8 yards per catch. It's a safe bet that we'll see Abongo's numbers skyrocket across the board as he becomes the focal point of the Bulldogs' offense in 2021.

"We're going to look to spread the ball around to many different skill-position guys," Luke says. And doing that spreading will be a newcomer: sophomore QB Colton Parn (5-8, 150). Parn has displayed real maturity and good decision-making for a young player. Other skill-position players poised to get touches are junior RBs Amos Baum (5-9, 150) and Gavin Rodriguez (5-10, 160), junior WR Gambal Staddie (5-11, 160) and sophomore WR John Walgren (5-11, 160). Also in the mix is freshman RB/WR Kendrell Carter (5-8, 140), who has impressed during summer workouts.

The Brookfield offensive line returns two starters in 2021. Senior OLs Peyton Armstrong (5-11, 220) and Trent Polley (6-0, 200) each bring loads of experience to the trenches. They'll be tasked with teaching the ropes to a group of newcomers that includes junior OL Coner Simons (6-3, 185), whose size and strength could make him an impact player this fall. While there are concerns over depth up front, Luke and his staff should have the right players in place and well prepared come opening night.

At the moment, Brookfield's secondary looks like it'll be the bright spot of its defensive unit. Senior S Jaden Abongo again leads the way. He posted 9 tackles, 2 pass break-ups, and 2 quarterback hurries in 2020. A swath of players will be competing for the open starting spots in the secondary, including junior DBs Amos

Class: 2
Conference: Clarence Cannon
Head Coach: Cory Luke
Years at School: First
Overall Record: 0-0
Offensive Starters Returning: 3
Defensive Starters Returning: 3
Total Returning Lettermen: 8
2020 Overall Record: 5-5

Brookfield Bulldogs 2021 Schedule

August		
27	Trenton	Home
September		
3	Marceline	Home
10	Centralia	Away
17	Palmyra	Away
24	Macon	Home
October		
1	Monroe City	Home
8	Clark County	Away
15	Highland	Home
22	South Shelby	Away
29	Districts	TBA

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Baum and Gambal Staddie, sophomore DBs Colton Parn and John Walgren, and freshman DB Kendrell Carter. No doubt, those players will be looking to Abongo for leadership this fall.

Senior LB Trent Polley, however, will be the anchor of the Brookfield defense. In an outstanding 2020 campaign, Polley compiled 54 tackles and 3 pass break-ups on his way to the All-Conference Honorable Mention squad. Expect junior LB Gavin Rodriguez to fill the open vacancy at linebacker in Luke's 4-2-5 setup. The team's third and final starting returner is senior DL Peyton Armstrong, who had 21 tackles, 2 for loss in a solid junior season. Junior DL Coner Simons is a sure thing to join him on the D-line. This year, "We are looking to be able to shut down the run and get after the quarterback," Luke says.

A tall task awaits Luke and his staff this fall. They'll have to implement a new system while integrating younger players into the program. Luke knows, though, that coaches alone can't do that. "We're looking forward to seeing our group of seniors and upperclassmen lead by example," he says. With good leadership in the staff and on the field, the Bulldogs should be competitive in 2021.

Pigskin's Pick: 4-5

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California pintos

The California Pintos put up more wins in 2020 than they had in their previous four seasons combined, signaling a turn-around within the Tri-County Conference. An offense capable of kicking it into high gear got the Pintos out to a blazing 6-1 start last year, before a three-game losing skid capped off by a 34-21 loss to Boonville in the district playoffs brought an end to the season. "The 2020 season team made great strides in improving from 1-9 to 6-4," said first-year Head Coach Seth Womack. "A strong senior class laid a solid foundation for the upcoming classes."

Womack previously served as head coach for two different high school football programs in Oregon prior to accepting the California job, and his mid-Missouri ties include a stint as defensive coordinator at Westminster College. He takes the helm of a Pintos team looking to build upon the turning tides from last year, and he's got plenty of playmakers returning on both sides of the ball who can make that happen. The Pintos have 15 total returning lettermen athletes, including five offensive starters and five defensive starters.

Offensively, senior quarterback Calen Kruger (5-11, 170) will lead the Pintos passing attack that brings back many of his favorite targets. Kruger was such a multi-faceted weapon last season he garnered All-State honors as an athlete. All-Conference First Team honoree, senior Drake Schlup (5-8, 165) and All-Conference Second Team honoree, Trevor Meyers (6-3, 215) stand out as versatile receivers alongside fellow seniors running back Enoch Dunnaway (5-7, 195) and wide receiver Kaden Bax (5-8, 165).

Womack noted that his "skill positions could separate us from other schools in the conference," and Kruger has demonstrated that he can put the puzzle together with the right pieces around him. Other contributors include senior running back Tyler Patterson (5-10, 190) and sophomore wideout Aiden Bryant (6-0, 155) and junior athlete Martin "Bud" Kilmer (6-2, 145) will make an implac lining up in multiple positions; Womack praised Patterson's bruising downhill running and Bryant's quickness and strength at the line of scrimmage.

The offensive line will be key in establishing what Womack described as a "new style of offense", emphasizing the importance of getting "great effort and energy from the offensive line." Looking to fill the void left by last year's seniors are guys like senior Jerry Potter (5-11, 270), junior DJ Schneider (6-0, 265), junior Peter Dampf (5-10, 230), and junior Hunter Berendzen (6-0, 190).

Last year's offense brought a balanced attack, with the Pintos averaging 200 rushing yards and 150 passing yards per game. Even when Kruger wasn't throwing the ball, California's offensive output still came by way of his athleticism as a runner. The Pintos were very successful in utilizing option looks to put defenses out of shape, as Kruger's speed forces linebackers to make tough gambles on the ball that often don't pay off. If Womack can acclimate his guys to a new playbook that incorporates the strengths of his quarterback and the playmakers who surround him, then it's only fair to expect the Pintos offense to grow even stronger in 2021.

Defensively, look for the Pintos to be aggressive in attacking the ball carrier. Womack wants his guys to "play fast and get all 11 hats swarming to the football" in a seven-diamond look, relying on the strengths of his defensive backs to put so many guys up front. Kruger, an All-Conference Second Team honoree as a defensive back, will contribute alongside Bax and Bryant as secondary leaders. Meyers, who also earned All-Conference Second Team honors as a defensive lineman, will lead the battle in the trenches alongside Berendzen, junior Cody Williams (5-8, 180) and junior Ryan Bleich (6-2, 330). Jerry Potter, DJ Schneider and Peter Dampf will also be in the rotation on the D-line.

Junior Ian Peterson (6-2, 210) will assume a larger role as a primary linebacker in the Pintos' defensive set, and he'll

Class: 3
Conference: Tri-County
Head Coach: Seth Womack
Years at School: First year
Overall Record: 29-37
Offensive Starters Returning: 5
Defensive Starters Returning: 5
Total Returning Lettermen: 15
2020 Overall Record: 6-4

California Pintos 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	ClintonHome	
September		
3	Fulton	Home
10	Blair Oaks	Away
17	Osage	Away
24	Boonville	Home
October		
1	Versailles	Home
8	Eldon	Away
15	Hallsville	Home
22	Southern Boone	Home
29	Districts	TBA





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be working in tandem with Patterson to provide another level of fortitude alongside the line of scrimmage. The scheme that Womack hopes to implement builds off California's run-stopping strengths from 2020, allowing opponents less than 100 yards on the ground per game. They were successful at getting behind into the backfield before running plays could even take form, causing big losses behind the line of scrimmage. The Pintos allowed opponents to score more than 21 points just three times last season, but high-powered offenses like Blair Oaks and Hallsville exploited them with big plays through the air.

Ultimately, the success of the California Pintos in 2021 will be determined by Womack's ability to instill his desired culture within his guys: "play assignment disciplined football in all three phases." As the offseason work finally came to fruition in terms of on-field results in 2020, the Pintos should have all the confidence in the world heading into this season to continue the program's upward trend. "[I'm] excited to see what our kids can bring to the season," said Womack. "They have worked extremely hard in the offseason." With proven athletes on both sides of the ball ready to contribute yet again, it will be fascinating to see what California brings to a talented Tri-County Conference.

Pigskin's Pick: 6-3

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Camdenton lakers

The Lakers struggled a little last season, but still managed to fight through. Camdenton finished 5-6 (4-5 in the Ozark Conference), lost in district semifinals to Washington 28-21. The good part about this year is that this team will bring many of the same players back, but much stronger. They have a lot of upperclassmen who are returning on both sides of the ball and they are talented.

On the offensive side, the Lakers will continue to run their pass heavy offense known as "The Purple Tide." Leading that attack will be junior Bear Shore (6-2, 180) who will return as the Lakers' starting quarterback. Last season, he threw for 462 yards and 3 touchdowns. Offensively, the Lakers are deeper in most positions this year than last, especially at wide receiver and O-line. "We look to play as many guys as possible to keep a very fast tempo," stated coach. Replacing a two-time All-State selection at wide receiver Cooper Ezard (now playing at Missouri State) won't be easy. At receiver, juniors Cam Durnin (5-10, 175) and Javari Stewart (6-2, 175) will step it up. Durnin had 304 receiving yards last season and a touchdown. Senior WR Adrian Kline has looked good this summer and fellow senior WR Coleson Schiefelbein has impressed as well. Adding to that depth coach mentioned are junior WRs Reece Waters and Ethan Evans. On the offensive line, seniors Dakota Davis (6-4, 275) and Zane Thompson (6-2, 255) will take charge. Joining them upfront will be senior OL Jayder Schwertz and junior O-linemen Gabe Norton and Hayes Hulett. Matching or even bettering the 28 points per game the Laker O averaged last season will go a long way in keeping the defense off the field and helping win those close games. That 28 points per game looks good, until you realize that the defense allowed opponent's an average of 29 points per game. If the Lakers are to improve in the win-loss column then the defense must be tougher and more physical at every level.

Defensively, the Lakers played a lot of underclassmen and now will be returning a lot of starting and playing experience. "We have been working on moving pieces in the defense to fit our needs best," coach stated. "And we have a number of guys ready to play in those positions." One of those top-of-the-line players is junior Wiley Powers (5-11, 160) who returns at linebacker. Last season, he racked up an outrageous total of 141 tackles, 10 TFL, and 3 sacks. Senior Connor Miller (6-1, 180) will return as the Lakers' starting outside linebacker. Last season, he had a total of 52 tackles. Senior Mason Swarts will also be in the mix at LB. Seniors Cale Bentley (5-10, 170) and Adrian Kline (5-9, 160) will also be major assets in the secondary. Bentley had 67 tackles and an interception last season, and Kline had 75 tackles and 3 TFL. Junior Jaden Parkman (5-10, 185) will be a dangerous weapon returning to the Lakers' defense at his strong safety spot. Last season, he had a total of

Classification: 5
Conference: Ozark
Head Coach: Jeff Shore
Years at School: 25 (10 as HC)
Offensive Returning Starters: 5
Defensive Returning Starters: 7
Total Returning Letterman: 27
2020 Overall Record: 5-6
2020 District Record: 4-5

Camdenton Lakers 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Kickapoo	Home
September		
3	Waynesville	Home
10	Parkview	Away
17	West Plains	Home
24	Bolivar	Away
October		
1	Hillcrest	Home
8	Lebanon	Away
15	Glendale	Away
22	Rolla	Home
29	District	TBA

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116 tackles, 5 INT, and 3 sacks. Senior Cole Schiefelbein started a few games on defense last year, so he along with fellow senior Evan Farrris will be part of the secondary. Juniors Gavin Brown and Reece Waters will be joined by fellow junior Cam Durnin in the defensive backfield. Senior D-lineman Landon Thomas (6-3, 245) is another asset to the Lakers' defense this season. Last year he had a total of 41 tackles, 4 TFL, and a sack. Also contributing on the line will be junior Gunner Morris at defensive end.

The Lakers have a good group of seniors who will take charge for this upcoming season. Coach Jeff Shore and the rest of his staff will prepare them for it. This will be a pretty exciting season to witness. The team chemistry over the off season and winter weights has really come together and they have a good core of kids wanting to win and play Laker football. With a challenging schedule week to week, Camdenton must focus on defensive improvement and the offense most keep the "Tide" rolling.

Pigskin's Pick: 6-3

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Capital City cavaliers

2020 marked a significant year for the Capital City football program. As new head coach Joe Collier puts it, "Last season we played without a senior class, due to being a new school. This will be the first year with all four grades." Things didn't go swimmingly for the Cavaliers, but nobody would have expected them to. And hey, it still could have been a whole lot worse. Capital City finished the year with a 1-7 mark, the high point of the year coming on a 13-7 win over Kirksville in the season's penultimate game.

There is no doubt that every player on the roster won some hard-earned experience during last year's campaign. And, encouragingly, the Cavaliers return every starting player from 2020's roster. To lead them this fall is a new coach, Joe Collier, nearly as green as the program—this will be Collier's first season leading a team at the high-school level. But that doesn't mean he doesn't know how a program should run, as Collier spent the last 16 years as the defensive coordinator at Rock Bridge.

And that defensive pedigree is important because defense was a problem for Capital City last fall. The unit allowed an average of 44.6 points per game, and twice surrendered 51 or more points. Collier sees one way in which the defense can improve in 2021, saying, "We will be much more physical this season." That will start at the line of scrimmage, where everybody is back in Collier's 3-4 approach. Senior DL Bashi Traylor (6-0, 220), senior DL Jeremiah White (6-2, 230), and senior DL Hunter Schulte (6-0, 230) bring excellent size to the Capital City defensive line. This trio will be tasked with showing the ropes to senior DL Lorenzo Gilliom (6-0, 190), who should figure into the equation much more than he did last fall. From the looks of it, Collier has a nice, big base to build his defense around.

Guarding the middle level of the field is an equally experienced group of linebackers. Senior LB Grayson Jones (6-2, 190) leads the bunch, and he'll work once again with senior LB Jabari Hubbard (6-0, 190), senior LB Ian Nelson (6-0 205), and junior LB Hurley Jacobs (6-0, 200). Sophomore LB Landon McNeal (5-10, 190) is set to join their ranks this fall. This is a linebacking corps that absolutely swarms to the ball, and if they play more physical, as Collier wants them to, they may be one of the more complete groups in the area.

Experience abounds in the Capital City secondary as well. Senior DBs Damon Upchurch (5-9, 160) and Colton Sheehan (5-10, 170) will once again form a unit with junior DBs Joe Schaefer (5-10, 170) and Ty Wood (6-0, 170). They boast exceptional size and strength in an area typically thought to belong to smaller players who can't tackle too well. With the addition of junior DB Jordan Gant (5-10, 160), they'll be looking to put that myth to bed this year.

The Capital City offense struggled for much of 2020, scoring 7 or fewer points in four different contests. This fall, Collier will institute a new Spread attack to try to jumpstart this group, saying, "The passing game should be more utilized this season." Doing the passing could be senior QB Kaden Dassrath (5-10, 170), who looks like he could be a real player if he can quickly adapt to Collier's new scheme. If nothing else, expect better accuracy and more downfield attempts from Dassrath this fall. He'll be in competition with junior QB Hayden Carroll (6-4, 170). Don't rule out Coach Collier going with a two QB system to start the season.

Dassrath has a nice stable of

Class: 5
Conference: CMA
Head Coach: Joe Collier
Years at School: First
Offensive Starters Returning: 11
Defensive Starters Returning: 11
Total Returning Lettermen: 20
2020 Overall Record: 1-7

Capital City Cavaliers 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Warrensburg	Away
September		
3	Battle	Home
10	Hickman	Away
17	Rock Bridge	Home
24	Jefferson City	Away
October		
1	Helias	Away
8	Smith-Cotton	Home
15	Winnetonka	Away
22	Kirksville	Away
29	Districts	TBA



Good Luck Capital City Cavaliers!

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receivers to throw to, including senior WRs Ethyn Otto (5-9, 170) and Damon Upchurch. This fall, they'll be joined by fellow senior WRs Cameron Harrison (5-11, 170) and Caleb Busch (5-10, 170). "We are going to be solid at the running back position," Collier says, referencing senior RB Ethan Wood (5-11, 200). Wood has good instincts, letting blocks develop to find a gap, but he's not afraid to bulldoze defenders. Senior FB Ian Nelson is set to be Wood's lead blocker. And the running game will likely have success, as Capital City returns its entire offensive line. Senior O-linemen Wilbert Phillips III (6-3, 300), Christian Flowers (6-0, 200), Gabe Strobel (6-2, 250), Hayden Miller (5-11, 220), junior OL Gavin McDaniel (6-1, 235), and senior TE Grayson Jones (6-2, 190) are all back for more. Sophomore OL Marcus Golliday (5-10, 220) will provide depth.

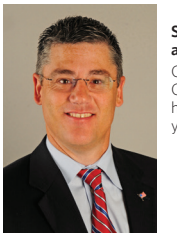
In 2020, Capital City worked out the kinks and put the worst behind them. Now, with an experienced group of players and a new head coach instilling schemes that will benefit those players, things are looking up. Capital City will have a tough road ahead, especially in the improving Central Missouri Conference, but expect a more competitive season from the Cavaliers this fall.

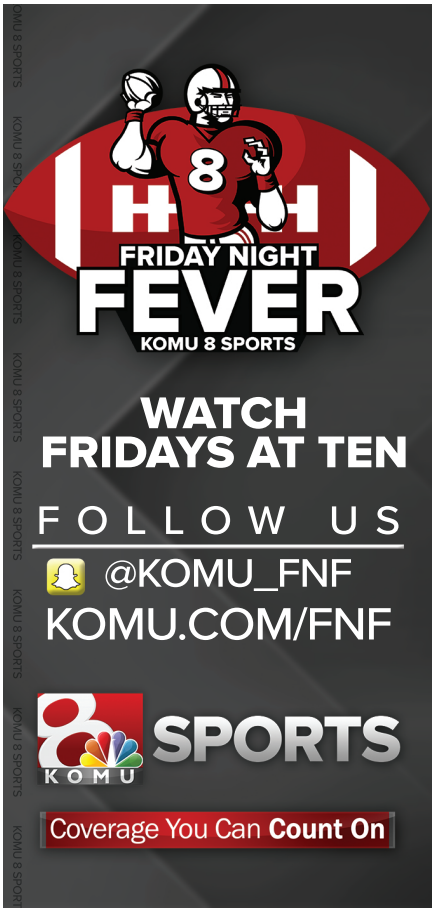
Pigskin's Pick: 3-6

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Centralia panthers

Tyler Forsee took control of the Centralia Panthers football program under circumstances that could kindly be called unusual. That didn't stop his squad from achieving a terrific record of 8-2—a good mark any year, and even better with only one game played on home turf. "We hosted only one home game due to COVID restrictions in Boone County," Forsee says. "We were coined 'Road Warriors' as the season went on." Forsee's group won their first seven games. "We put ourselves in a position to win conference," the coach says, "before falling short with one second left." That heartbreaker came against a physical Palmyra team, with Centralia's only other loss occurring in the district championship, to a Blair Oaks team that Forsee calls "one of the best teams I have seen."

A strong group of seniors did a lot of heavy lifting for the Panthers in 2020, and Forsee and his staff will have to turn to a younger group for production in the year ahead. Some standout performers do return on the defensive side of the football, though. "We will have good size up front on the D-line with a lot of experience," Forsee says. That includes senior D-linemen Bradley Werkmeister (6-5, 220) and Evan Bruns (6-0, 230). With 36 tackles (7 for loss), Werkmeister ably used his prodigious size to land on the All-District team. Bruns accounted for 29 tackles, 3 sacks, and 5 fumble recoveries. Junior DL Ben Forrest (6-1, 260) started one game a season ago, and will have a permanent spot in the year ahead.

In the middle of the field, senior LB Beau Gordon (5-10, 190) is the Panthers' most experienced and most decorated player. The two-time First-Team All-Conference player tallied 57 tackles (6 for loss) and 1 sack last year. This time around, he'll be flanked by senior LB Blayne Leonard (5-10, 170), who posted 17 tackles on special teams duty in 2020, junior LB Brayden Shelton (5-8, 160), and junior LB Jack Romine (5-9, 165). "We should be able to tackle, as we have several wrestlers that could see time on defense—and that's usually a good sign at stopping the run," says the coach.

Back in the secondary, junior DB Kyden Wilkerson (5-9, 160) is coming off a monster sophomore season in which he recorded 72 tackles (2 for loss) and 3 fumble recoveries. He was subsequently named All-District. Joining Wilkerson will be junior DBs Ethan Adams (5-10, 160) and Eli Carter (6-2, 180). "We are putting a little more focus on stopping the pass this season, and I think we have an athletic group to help do that in the secondary," Forsee says.

There isn't a lot of experience coming back for Centralia on the point-scoring side of the ball, but crucially, the quarterback does return. Senior QB Beau Gordon had a nice junior campaign, completing 88 of 175 passes for 1,375 and 10 TDs, while also running 122 times for 525 yards and 13 TDs. He'll again be receiving snaps from junior C Seth Hasekamp (5-10, 260), who started every game as a sophomore, and throwing to senior WR Mason Barr (5-10, 165) who had 7 receptions for 92 yards in 2020.

"Though we don't return a ton of starters on offense," Forsee says, "I am very pleased with what we have coming up. Several of the O-line rotated in the games last year and that will pay huge

Class: TBA
Conference: Clarence Cannon
Head Coach: Tyler Forsee
Years at School: 10 (2nd as HC)
Record at School: 8-2
Overall Record: 8-2
Offensive Starters Returning: 3
Defensive Starters Returning: 4
Total Returning Lettermen: 21
2020 Overall Record: 8-2

Centralia Panthers 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Mexico	Home
September		
3	Hallsville	Away
10	Brookfield	Home
17	Monroe City	Home
24	Clark County	Away
October		
1	Highland	Home
8	South Shelby	Away
15	Macon	Away
22	Palmyra	Home
29	Districts	TBA





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dividends this fall." That includes senior OL Toby Durant (5-9, 220) and junior OL Ben Forrest. "We lost a lot of skill guys from last season, but I like the mix that we have with our Junior and Senior classes stepping up," the coach adds. Forsee tips senior RB Kyden Wilkerson to have a big year and expects the athletic trio of junior WRs Ethan Adams, Jack Romine, and Eli Carter to make an impact as well.

While Forsee will hope so much of 2020 was just an aberration, he believes Centralia's successful season will carry over into this one. "We as coaches have as high or expectations for this group as they have for themselves," he says. "I know our guys are ready to compete to test themselves against a couple of tough teams to start the season. After the first two non-conference games, we break into tough CCC play. Our goal is to be a contender for the CCC title again and we know that we will have to play very well week in and week out to accomplish that task." And while the 'Road Warriors' title was well earned, it'd be nice for both Panthers players and fans to have an actual home-field advantage in 2021.

Pigskin's Pick: 7-2

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Cole Camp bluebirds

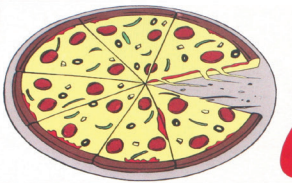
Last season, the Cole Camp Bluebirds were only able to play 9 games due to COVID protocols. The Bluebirds produced a 3-6 record despite the unorthodox season in 2020. They had lost 12 Seniors from the previous year, so the team was young. Starting off the season with a 1-4 record was something that the Bluebirds were not expecting, but they strung together a few wins in the second half of the season. They finished the year on a high note with a 2-2 record in the final four games including a District win over rival Lincoln. Even though there were some struggles, the Bluebirds saw plenty of positives. They were able to stay healthy throughout the year and improved each week of the season. Cole Camp has been coached by Kevin Shearer for the past 17 years. Throughout his time as head coach, Shearer has a 111-91 record overall and a 91-71 record at Cole Camp. In 2019, before the pandemic, the Bluebirds produced a winning record at 6-5. With Coach Shearer's expertise Cole Camp has a great chance of becoming a powerhouse program in 2021. Some important points that Coach Shearer likes to emphasize in his coaching technique are staying healthy, playing physical and aggressive. He wants the Bluebirds to use their size and speed to their advantage. "We need to be the most physical team on the field. Our default setting needs to be aggressive," states Coach Shearer. With this mindset, the Bluebirds are focused to make a pursuit for a district championship. Cole Camp will have 8 returning offensive starters and 8 returning defensive starters in 2021. This experience will guide the forceful Cole Camp squad to a successful season.

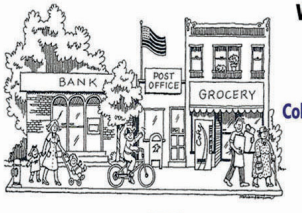
On offense, the Bluebirds produced in the middle of the pack in 2020. They averaged 226 rushing yards per game, 60 passing yards per game, and 20 points per game. Even though they lost six games, on the bright side, they were able to stay within 1 or 2 scores of their opponents in most of those losses. This is a giant step in the right direction for Coach Shearer and his squad. He wants his offense to be adaptable, quick, and aggressive. "We have returning experience on the offensive line, a 2nd year quarterback, and depth in the run game," Coach Shearer emphasizes. Coach Shearer believes this offense will produce more than last season with all of the experience and tenacity it brings to the field. Returning to the offensive line is Junior Michael Wissman (6-5, 290) and Seniors Andrew Hahn and Zach Thomas (6-3, 250). They provide a tremendous amount of size on the line to prevent opposing defenses from attacking through the middle. With their experience, Cole Camp will have no trouble in producing effectively in the run game. The passing game will need some improvement, but the agility, power, and aggressiveness from the offensive line will help them provide more yards in the air. The Bluebirds have a returning quarterback in Junior Ethan Shearer who was a huge factor in points per game through the air and on the ground. He was able to earn All Conference/All District honors by passing for 410 yards, running for 540 yards, and scoring 10 touchdowns in 2020. Alongside Shearer are his wideouts Sophomore Reid Harrison and Junior Ben Steenburgen. Steenburgen produced almost 100 yards with 6 catches in 2020. Harrison was an All Conference/All District receiver producing 137 yards and 1 touchdown. At running back, Senior Ethan Corpening is an all around player that provided much needed points. He earned All Conference/All District honors by running for 322 yards and scoring 2 touchdowns in 2020. He also converted 14/18 extra points and 1 field goal at 27 yards. With more of this experience and Coach Shearer's patented aggressiveness from the returning offense, expect the Bluebirds to score in waves. They will be running an "option" style offense in 2021.

On defense, Cole Camp allowed 250 rushing yards per game, 165 passing yards per game, and 33 points per game. Coach Shearer emphasizes the importance of making tackles, speed, and experience within his defense. "Our speed on the field needs to be improved, and we need to be better tacklers. The experience from last year will definitely help us in 2021," Shearer states. The two junior inside backers, Mateo Cano and Owen Ives led the team in tackles last season and will be the core of

Class: 1
Conference: Kaysinger
Head Coach: Kevin Shearer
Years at School: 17
Record at School: 91-71
Overall Record: 111-91
Offensive Starters Returning: 8
Defensive Starters Returning: 8
Total Returning Lettermen: 24
2020 Overall Record: 3-6

Cole Camp Bluebirds 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Warsaw	Away
September		
3	Lone Jack	Home
10	Crest Ridge	Away
17	Butler	Home
24	Wellington-Napoleon	Away
October		
1	Tipton	Away
8	Windsor	Home
15	Slater	Home
22	Lincoln	Away
29	Districts	TBA


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the D. Returning at defensive tackle is Senior Wyatt Bryan. He produced 28 tackles, 7 tackles for loss, 1 safety, and 1 fumbled caused. That type of power and tackling ability is what Coach Shearer wants. At defensive end is Junior Ben Steenburgen and Senior Andrew Hahn. Steenburgen and Hahn recovered 3 fumbles, completed over 80 tackles, and broke up 3 passes. They are a dynamic defensive tandem for Cole Camp. Senior Ethan Corpening, Junior Ethan Shearer, and Sophomore Reid Harrison are returning for the Bluebirds as defensive backs. Corpening made 40 tackles, broke up 6 passes, and recovered 3 fumbles. Shearer made 46 tackles and recovered 1 fumble. Harrison made 69 tackles, 6 interceptions, and broke up 8 passes. Together, these defensive backs forced opposing offenses to change their game plans because of their speed and aggressiveness. Coach Shearer believes the Cole Camp defense has plenty of potential and experience to make giant leaps towards a winning team.

Look for these newcomers to make an impact as well; Juniors Preston Oelrichs on the O-Line and Kage Stevenson at running back. Sophomore impact players include Peyton Webb on the offensive line, Grady Strathman at running back and Gentry Dieckman at defensive back

Cole Camp prides themselves on being the most punishing team on the field. Coach Shearer says, "We need to be the most physical, aggressive, and conditioned team on the field." If the Bluebirds can stay healthy they should get back on the winning side more often than not.

Pigskin Pick: 5-4

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Columbia Battle spartans

Last year the Battle Spartans waged war across their schedule going 6-1 in the regular season bowling through their opponents in the CMA Conference with explosive offense and a physical, tough tackling defense. They finish second in the conference, made a run in the playoffs winning the district championship, until losing in the quarterfinals of state to a very tough Ft. Zumwalt North in the Quarterfinals. A team they had beaten top start the year off. They made it through 2020 and had a successful season as well in only Attiyah Ellison's second year as a head football coach, but the craziness that Battle powered through in 2020, led to a crazy summer of 2021 when Coach Ellison left to take a job with the Missouri athletic department in July. The race was on for the administration at Battle the find themselves a new head coach. They were able to find a local gem in Jonah Dubinski, a former Missouri Tiger player himself. Dubinski has coached at Rock Bridge as well as his last stint at Capital City. With only a couple weeks to prepare before the practices start the Dubinski and a staff of have been hard at work putting pieces of the puzzle together for his preferred style of offense (Spread) and defense and also surveying what his returning player's strengths and weaknesses are. There are still many strengths around Battle, returning 32 lettermen with experience, 6 starters on offense and 6 starters on defense return. They will once again be a tough out versus their conference, in Districts and in the playoffs.

Forming yet another explosive offense won't be as challenging with the return of one of the areas premeier running backs Gerry Marteen Jr. (5-10, 190). Last season, the senior earned 3rd Team All-State, All-Conference and All-District honors. He is a slashing runner with big-play ability. It also is a bonus when the player with the second most TDs returns in junior running back Rickie Dunn (6-0, 220). He is a big, bruising runner who like to lower his shoulder on contact. Battle's leading receiver, Jaylen Broadus (5-10, 180) returns for his senior year. He has sure hands and runs great routes. He will be joined in the receiving corps once again by senior WR Donovan Hicks (5-11, 200) who is the 2nd leading receiver of returning players. Look for impact athlete senior Livingston Coaty (6-0, 220) to line up in multiple spots on offense. He is an X Factor for the Spartans and can use his combination of size and speed to open up the offense. Junior Justin Goolsby (6-4, 230) saw time at QB last season and will be back in charge for the 2021 season. Coach call him "An all-around athlete." The biggest questions remain with the offensive line, where there is very little experience but decent size and ability. The junior OL duo of Toby Cox and Hayden Hicks will be in the trenches in '21. "The 2021 Battle Spartan's offense will have a balanced attack with a number of contributors," stated Coach Dubinski. "The level of success reached by this group will be determined by the team's ability to continue building chemistry in the passing game, as well as the offensive line's ability to distort the line of scrimmage week in and week out." Matching last season's monstrous output of over 36 points per game will be hard to match, but even coming close top that mark will put the Spartans in position to will each game.

On the defensive side of the ball it starts with the linebacking duo of junior Rickie Dunn 6-0, 220) and sophomore Alijah Jackman (6-2, 230). Dunn earned All-District and All-Conference honors last season and Jackman was the team leader in tackles as a freshman! These two have the size and tackling ability to be a force in the CMAC this year. Add Livingston Coaty to that mix in the front seven and that is some senior size and toughness. Senior Jaylen Broadus (5-10, 180) will lead the defensive backfield this season after being an All-District selection a year ago. The D-line will feature the return of All-Conference DL senior D'Aire Williams (5-11, 230) and junior Austin Nickell (6-3, 220) who coach claims "Will grow into impact player on the line."

Class: 5
Conference: CMAC
Head Coach: Jonah Dubinski
Years at School: First
Offensive Starters Returning: 6
Defensive Starters Returning: 6
Total Returning Lettermen: 32
2020 Overall Record: 8-2

Battle High School 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Ft. Zumwalt N.	Away
September		
3	Capital City	Away
10	Helias	Home
17	Hickman	Home
24	Poplar Bluff	Home
October		
1	Smith-Cotton	Away
8	Rock Bridge	Away
15	Jefferson City	Home
22	Hannibal	Home
29	Districts	TBD

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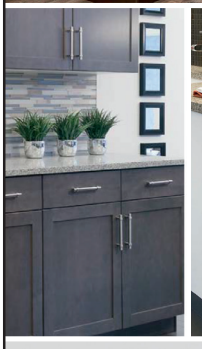
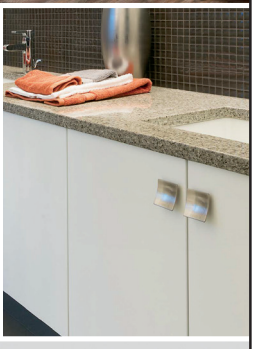
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"The 2021 Battle Spartan's defense looks to continue their aggressive style of play, by leaning on their most crucial trait: physicality," boasts Coach Dubinski. The Spartans D will have to play physical and cut down on big plays to decrease the 24 points per game they allowed in 2020.
Coach Dubinski was late to the party this summer, but he is still very excited to get the Spartans on the field. "Every battle is won before it is fought! The team who prepares best will yield the best results every Friday night! By focusing on the unique details of each matchup in game planning and practice, we can enable our players to trust themselves and act decisively in the most critical moments of each game."

The Battle Spartans continue to impress. Each year it seems like they reload even when they lose a lot from the previous they have plenty of athletes and physical players to fit their system. It will be up to Dubinski and his staff of Gary Tyler, Mike Godas and Mike Stannard to put those pieces together for yet another challenging schedule starting out with week one power Fort Zumwalt North, the team that ended their season or year ago.

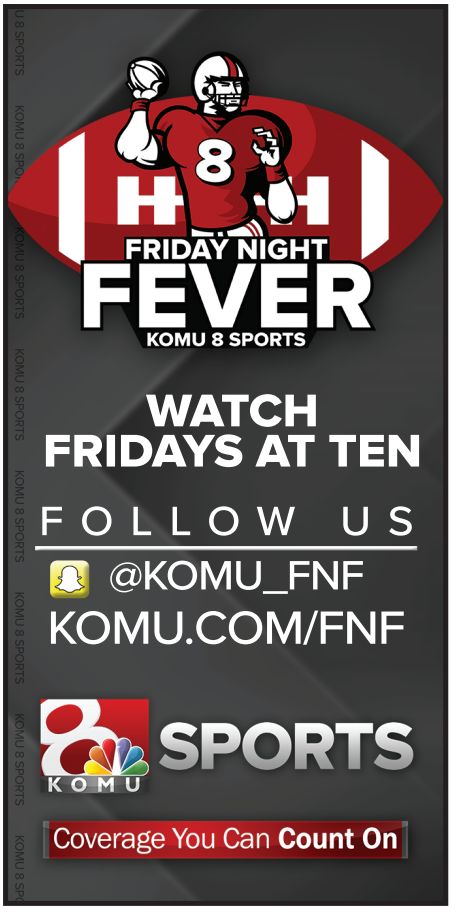
Pigskin's Pick: 7-2

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Columbia Hickman Kewpies

The Hickman Kewpies may not have a lot of seniors, but their young athletes are willing to step up and make their mark on the field this season. Although the record doesn't show the hard work, the Kewpies have played extremely well against tough teams. "Tough season last year, with an even tougher schedule," Coach Alvis said. "Faced three state champions, managed to play hard and physical in all games." They may have had a tough schedule, but that doesn't mean they lacked talent. The Kewpies have key players on both offense and defense who play tough.

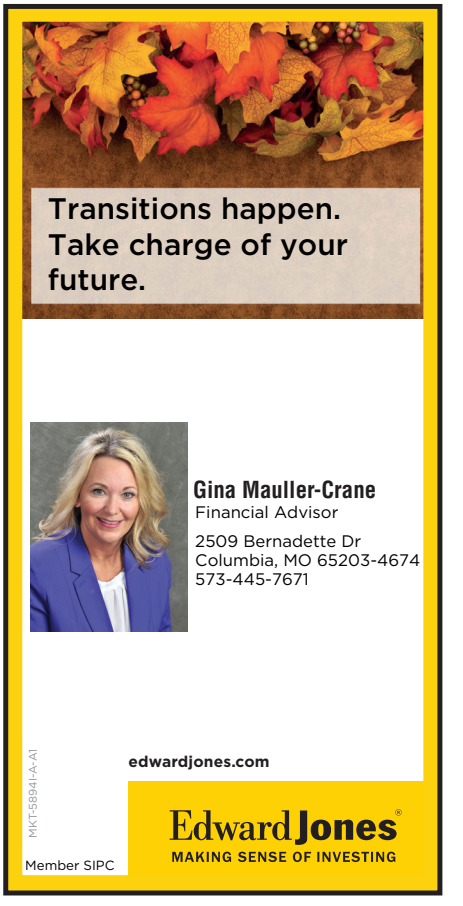
On the offensive side of the ball, the Kewpies have very few upperclassmen. With new players filling in roles, this will be a whole new offense for this season. "New offensive coordinator finding ways to better utilize athletes and get them the ball in space!" Coach Alvis said. "Added strength and size to our edge players, we expect to be more explosive and find more ways to attack vertically downfield." The Kewpies will continue to run a spread type offense like last year. They scored 19.7 points per game, rushed for 137 yards per game, threw for 156 yards per game last year. That's the kind of offensive balance Coach Alvis wants. He just wants more of it. This year, the offense has only four starters returning. Senior Carrig Irelan (6-1, 265) will be the main leader of the offensive line. For the skills position, Senior George Nickoloaus (6-4, 210) will play tight end and receiver. Last season, he had 5 catches for 35 yards and a touchdown. Senior Deon Weston (5-9, 175) will be the Kewpies running back. Last year, he had 56 carries for 327 yards and 6 TDs. Junior Cole Harrel (6-0, 165) will also play receiver. Last season, he had 7 catches for 81 yards.

The Kewpies have a few key players in the secondary on defense. "New defensive coordinator, going back to even front with a resurgence in our interior line," Coach Alvis said. "More experienced, bigger, stronger and faster secondary players, we play to rely on them for run support and isolate our corners." They will run a 4-3 defensive scheme. Last season they allowed 43.7 points per game, 206.8 rushing yards per game, and 138.8 passing yards per game. Seniors Jaidan Tandy (6-1, 175) and Demarcs Carthron (6-1, 185) will be the two safeties in the secondary. Last season, Tandy had a breakout season, racking up 105 tackles and 5 INTs. He also earned All Area, All District, All Conference, and Special Teams Player of the Year. Senior Kaiden Lucas (6-0, 185) will be the veteran linebacker of the Kewpies' defense. Last season, he had a total of 28 tackles.

The Kewpies have a lot of young players who show a lot of potential to play this upcoming season. Sophomore WR Tionne Milo (5-9, 160) has ability to make someone miss in a phone booth. Coach Alvis said that he has tremendous speed and is a great blocker on the edge. Sophomore defensive lineman Elijah Rainey (6-2, 295) is a physical D-Lineman with great hands and a high motor. Senior quarterback Colbin Clark (6-3, 200) is smart and very athletic with a strong accurate

Classification: 6
Conference: CMAC
Head Coach: Cedric Alvis
Years at School: 4
Offensive Starters Returning: 4
Defensive Starters Returning: 3
Total Returning Letterman: 7
2020 Overall Record: 2-7
2020 District Record: 2-3

Hickman High School 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Francis Howell	Away
September		
3	Helias	Away
10	Capital City	Home
17	Battle	Away
24	Smith-Cotton	Home
October		
1	Jefferson City	Away
8	Ray-Pec	Home
15	Rock Bridge	Home
22	Belleville West (Ill.)	Home
29	Districts	TBA





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arm. Sophomore O-Linemen Jayden Wood (6-2, 300) is a truly athletic lineman who plays to the whistle. Another sophomore O-Lineman Simon Hammer (6-1, 290) is a physical, strong player who has a great motor and makes plays. Senior Brandon Rhen (6-2, 320) will be on both sides of the ball, playing OL and DL. Coach Alvis said that he is a big physical kid who gives off a dominant presence up front. Sophomore Elijah Morton (6-1, 200) will play at the linebacker spot alongside Lucas. He's an athletic, physical kid with a great football IQ and speed. Senior Keith Kelley (6-1, 205) will also play linebacker. This will be his first year starting at linebacker. Last season, Kelley saw some action at running back.

The Kewpies are putting the past season behind them. It's a new season, and this is a young team that is willing to compete with anybody. "Excited to see our team compete, a lot of youth on the field," Coach Alvis said. "Kids that have bought in and worked hard in the offseason, they are playing with more intensity and passion." The will need that intensity week in and week out.

Pigskin's Pick: 3-6

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Columbia Rock Bridge bruins

There is no doubt that 2020 was an extraordinarily difficult year. When looking at the Rock Bridge football program's most recent season, Head Coach Van Vanatta makes sure to keep things in perspective. "Last year, like all of us, had a lot of ups and downs," the sixth-year head coach says. "I couldn't be more proud of my senior class, who fought hard and never complained with the issues involved." The Bruins' schedule was a tough one indeed, with respective games against a state champion, a state semifinalist, and a one-loss team. Rock Bridge endured, finishing with a 6-4 record. And now, with a load of experience back, bigger things may lie ahead.

With 8 starters returning, the Bruins' defense comes back nearly fully intact. Senior DL Jeremiah Nathan (6-3, 260) is the centerpiece on both the line and the defense as a whole. The towering Nathan earned a spot on First-Team All-Conference and Second-Team All-State squads, and was a major reason Rock Bridge allowed just 75 rushing yards per game in 2020. He'll be flanked again by senior D-linemen Brian Wyatt (6-3, 270) and Drew Sedwick (5-10, 205), two capable, tried-and-true players. Junior DL Eli Vincent (6-4, 205) will provide cover on the D-line in the year ahead.

Senior LB Nate Norris (6-3, 205) will anchor a talented linebacker corps. Norris was All-District, Second-Team All-Conference, and a proud member of the Academic All-State team. Senior LBs Aiden Alvis (6-2, 200) and August Phfitzinger (6-1, 185) make this one of the stronger and most experienced units around. Expect sophomore LB Spencer Irvin (5-11, 200) and sophomore OLB Grayson Crutchlow (6-3, 205) to get some reps as well.

With just two players with significant experience in the secondary, that unit is currently the biggest question mark for the Rock Bridge defense. Senior CB Exavier Hinton (5-8, 165) is a Second-Team All-Conference performer from a year ago, and junior FS Tomissac Johnson (5-8, 160) is back as well. Beyond that, "We have to find some young players to step up big time for us," Vanatta says. For the defense as a whole, Vanatta adds, "The key is we have several guys who understand our concept and will be able to lead our defense in big games."

Though the offense returns fewer players, several of them are quite lauded. That starts with senior QB Nate Dent (5-11, 180), an All-District and Second-Team All-Conference signal-caller who was involved in an incredible 29 TDs in 2020. He can use both his legs and arm to light up the scoreboard. "Our strength this upcoming year is our QBs," Vanatta says, referencing both Dent and sophomore QB Sam Kaiser (6-4, 215), who has the build and arm strength of an upperclassman. "We have some big shoes to fill at running back and on the O-line, so we will be young and inexperienced," the coach adds. Back on the line are senior C Ian Morgan (5-10, 250), junior OL Kosh Oduwole (6-2, 260), and senior TE Logan Wittman (6-4, 225). Sophomore OL Carter DeVore (6-4, 265) will claim one of the open spots on the line, and Eli Vincent is poised to see some action at tight end.

At the moment, senior RB Jim Whaley (5-9, 190) is tipped to get most of the carries, but don't count out Spencer

Class: 6
Conference: Central Missouri
Head Coach: Van Vanatta
Years at School: 5
Record at School: 28-16
Overall Record: 85-33
Offensive Starters Returning: 6
Defensive Starters Returning: 8
Total Returning Lettermen: 30
2020 Overall Record: 6-4

Rock Bridge Bruins 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Staley	Away
September		
3	Smith-Cotton	Home
10	Jefferson City	Away
17	Capitol City	Away
24	Helias	Home
October		
1	Liberty	Away
8	Battle	Home
15	Hickman	Away
22	Francis Howell	Home
29	Districts	TBA





Irvin. Each of these rushers brings terrific size and strength to the position, and should be a handful for opposing tacklers. Two starting targets out wide return in the form of senior WR Payton Messer (6-2, 170) and junior WR Mark Hajicek (6-2, 180). Junior WR Stephan Gibson (5-8, 170) will look to get in on the ball-catching fun as well. While the offense as a whole isn't loaded with experience, it does have a good amount of depth. "I do believe we have enough players to put together an offense that can be very versatile," Vanatta says.

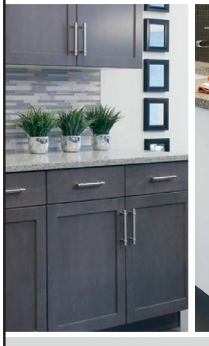
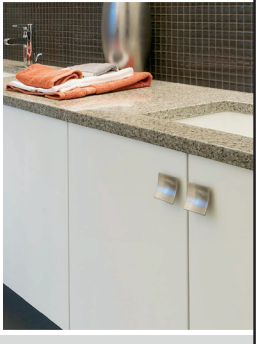
As always, the CMAC will be competitive and Rock Bridge's schedule not for the faint of heart. But the Bruins enter 2021 as a team with terrific depth, solid experience across the board, and excellent size. Success for Rock Bridge will depend on how well the underclassmen adapt to varsity football, and Vanatta firmly believes they'll come around as the season progresses. "We are one unit and play as a team" he says. "We will find ways to be successful, and the key for us is to focus on day to day, week to week, and I believe that at the end of the year we will be a tough team to beat."

Pigskin's Pick: 6-3

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Cuba wildcats

The Wildcats posted an above average season in 2020 winning 6 games including a District win. Their improvement throughout the season showed that they can compete with any team on their schedule. "Last season was a season of growth," Coach Timothy Duarte said. "We won the first two games of the season beating Sullivan and Jefferson." Those were really close games that the Wildcats played. They fought hard until the clock ran out, and came out on top. "Those were two big wins for us and really opened a lot of people's eyes as to what type of improvements we had made and how we're headed to building something that would last here at Cuba," Coach Duarte said about the team. "We ran into some tough opponents playing Owensville and Central Park Hills back-to-back." The Wildcats were struggling a lot with these teams throughout the season, but eventually they began to pick it up halfway. "We bounced back against an improved St. James team, but then struggled playing Centralia in a fill in game," Coach Duarte said about last season. "We really hit our stride week 8 and 9 heading into two districts on a 2 game winning streak. Our first district game was the best performance we had all year," Coach Duarte said. "We put everything together at the right time and beat Grandview convincingly." The Wildcats also ran into a brick wall, dealing with COVID-19. This had put everything to a standstill for their season. "Our season would end before we ever got to step on the field [for that next District game] because of a full team quarantine," Coach Duarte said. "We were lucky that we got to play as much as we did does it does leave us thinking what might have been. It has left our kids hungry." Coach Duarte is coming into this season with a philosophy of controlling the football. "We always work at being the most physical team on the field and that will ring true this year as well," he said. "We plan on running the ball with our big backs and holding onto the ball. Our defense will play strong in the box and force teams to get the ball outside."

The Wildcats offense is strongly powered by their run game within their hybrid spread scheme where they tend to feed their running back the ball...a lot. Last season, they scored 27 points per game, rushing for 224 yards per game, and passing for 163 yards per game. "We have two large running backs who run hard and physical," Coach Duarte said. "They will be hard to bring down and will wear out defenses." Senior running back Conner Gipson (5-10, 205) had 115 carries for 775 yards last season. Playing along with him will be senior Brian Declue (5-10, 230). "We have some long receivers who run good routes and will bring a good change of pace to our power run game," Coach Duarte said. "We have some young linemen mixed with some strong seniors to round out an athletic group that run blocks really well." The quarterback will be junior Evan Highley (5-9, 165) who can run very well and has a strong arm when needed. Coach calls Highley a vocal leader as well. Senior tight end Dylan Keogh (6-2, 240) will be the main target for the Wildcats' receiving corps. Last year, he had 26 catches for 346 yards and he is physical force blocking in the run game. Senior receiver Jaden Schmidt (6-1, 165) will also be in the mix along with junior WR Hunter Smith (6-2, 155). Hunter has great hands to go along with his height. On the offensive line will be senior tackle Derek Scott (6-1, 265), sophomore guard Riley Bouse (5-9, 300), and senior center Jaden "Doug" Huggins (6-0, 265).

On the defensive side, the Wildcats have a good group of seniors returning in the lineup. "Our box defenders are stout," Coach Duarte said. "We return 4 seniors on defense who are looking even stronger than last year." Senior defensive end Dylan Keogh will take charge on the D-line. Last season he earned 1st team All-District, 3rd Team All-State with 78 total tackles and a tremendous 31 TFL. "The two DEs we have might

Classification: 2
Conference: Independent
Head Coach: Timothy Duarte
Years at School: 6 (3rd as HC)
Offensive Starters Returning: 7
Defensive Starters Returning: 6
Total Returning Letterman: 39
2020 Overall Record: 6-5

Cuba Wildcats 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Sullivan	Home
September		
3	Jefferson Festus	Home
10	Owensville	Home
17	Central Park Hills	Away
24	St. James	Away
October		
1	Sweet Springs	Away
8	South Callaway	Home
15	Father Tolton	Away
22	Principia	Home
29	Districts	TBA

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be the best duo in all of Class 2 football," Coach Duarte said. "Our LBs are athletic and physical." Senior linebackers Conner Gipson and Brian Declue earned 2nd Team All District. Sophomore Levi Gipson (5-9, 185) will also see some playing time at linebacker as well. "Our secondary will be younger this year as we graduated 4 starting seniors," Coach Duarte said. "They are a combination of speed and toughness that will make us strong on the perimeter as well." Junior Evan Highley (5-9, 180) and Jaden Schmidt will hold it down in the secondary. Sophomore nose guard Cody Gann (5-9, 255) will be a force in the trenches with his relentless and physical style.

The Wildcats have a good team that they're putting together for this fall. It's exciting to see what they will do. "I am looking forward to this season as we continue to form the identity of Cuba Football," Coach Duarte said. "It is a very young program and has struggled to have depth in the past." Although they faced adversity last season, the Wildcats look to be even stronger than before. "This year we have the most depth we have ever had," Coach Duarte said. "We have a combination of speed and power and it is going to be fun to keep teams off balance."

Pigskin's Pick: 5-4

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Eldon mustangs

The 2020 football season for Eldon and Head Coach Chad Hult was a tough one. The Mustangs were loaded with underclassmen and finished with a 2-6 record, but Hult sees the importance of enduring a season like that. "Last year we were very young at many key positions and had to learn on the fly," he says. "We lost two games due to COVID and had another rescheduled on short notice. Our guys did a good job growing and learning as the year went on."

This year, those underclassmen are now older, stronger, wiser—and a good deal of them return on each side of the football, including eight starters on the offense alone. The Mustang offense relied on a superb running game in 2020, averaging 190.2 rushing yards per game in Hult's Wing-T attack. Back in the mix are some of the most important players from that unit, including sophomore QB Hunter Hees (6-1, 165). Hees made his mark as a freshman, throwing for 450 yards and 2 TDs, and rushing for 6 additional TDs. "We should have more success this season in the passing game with a talented QB and weapons around him to keep teams off balance," Hult says.

Two players will receive the majority of carries for Eldon this fall: senior FB Mason Kirkweg (5-11, 195) and junior TB Krystopher Shepard (5-8, 155). Both players were crucial to the rushing attack last season, with Kirkweg posting 568 yards and 4 TDs, and Shepard compiling 453 yards and 8 TDs. Kirkweg made the All-District team at the fullback spot. Another returning starter in the skill-position spots is senior WR Baylor Pearson (6-0, 170), who had 32 receptions. This year, it's probable that we'll see senior RB Dallas Hardy (5-10, 170), junior FB DaQuan Willliams (5-8, 190), and sophomore RB Zac Smithson (5-10, 170) all get some touches as well.

Up on the O-line, "We return both guards, which is very important in the Wing-T," says Hult. Senior G Sam Coppock (5-10, 195) is the premier player here, having garnered All-Conference and All-District honors for his blocking last fall. He'll again team up with senior G Colton Phillips (5-10, 235), senior T Zion Duncan (6-2, 200), and senior TE Tristan Robinett (6-0, 185), who'll figure into the passing game as well. The Eldon O-line boasts some serious depth this year, with a number of players ready to pitch in, including senior OL Porter Asbury (6-1, 220), junior OL Jasper Degraffenreid (6-3, 275), who is coming off a broken ankle, and sophomore OL Jace Robertson (5-11, 305). As a whole, the Eldon O-line has size and strength to spare.

It was the Eldon defense, though, that kept the team from being more competitive in 2020. Last year's unit surrendered 43.8 points per game, so any improvement for the Mustangs this year will start with greatly reducing that number. Luckily, though, Eldon returns some quality talent and will bring some promising new players into the fold this fall. "Our strength will be the secondary with very talented players at all positions back there," Hult says. That unit will be particularly deep and experienced, with three starters returning to action. Chief among them is senior S Baylor Pearson, an All-Conference player a year ago. Pearson has a nose for the ball and excellent tackling skills, making him one of the more complete defensive backs in the area. Back with Pearson are senior CB Nicky Martonfi (5-10, 165) and senior CB Killian Wilson (5-9, 155). They'll be

Class: 3
Conference: Tri-County
Head Coach: Chad Hult
Years at School: 9 (3 as HC)
Record at School: 9-20
Overall Record: 9-20
Offensive Starters Returning: 8
Defensive Starters Returning: 6
Total Returning Lettermen: 20
2020 Overall Record: 2-6

Eldon Mustangs 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Springfield Central	Away
September		
3	Owensville	Home
10	Osage	Home
17	Hallsville	Away
24	Southern Boone	Home
October		
1	Blair Oaks	Away
8	California	Home
15	Boonville	Home
22	Versailles	Away
29	Districts	TBA

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joined in the coming season by senior CB Dallas Hardy, sophomore S Zac Smithson, and sophomore S Tevin Eldridge. Hardy returns after a year away from football, Smithson might well be tipped for great things, and Eldridge is one of the smarter players in the program.

The linebacking corps has two assured starters in senior LB Tristan Robinett and senior MLB Sam Coppock. These two will be tasked with patrolling the middle of the field this fall, along with junior LB DaQuan Williams, who suffered a knee injury early in the campaign last season. Senior DL Colton Phillips is the lone returning starter on the Mustangs' defensive line. This year, senior DL Porter Asbury, junior DL Jasper Degraffenreid, sophomore DL Jace Robertson, and junior DL Evan Birdno (6-0, 160) will join him. Overall, "Our team speed is much improved, which should help cut down on big plays," Hult says.

This fall, Hult and his staff have a wealth of proven, high-quality players at their disposal. "We are extremely excited for the upcoming season since we are returning so much experience," the coach says. "Our guys have done a great job over the summer and I fully anticipate our growth as a team to continue." Expect Eldon to finish close to .500 this fall.

Pigskin's Pick: 4-5

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Fayette falcons

The Falcons had a roller coaster of a season last year. They battled through tough games, and excelled through others. “Little inexperienced and lost a few games due to critical mistakes,” Coach Thompson said. “Won games we should have, but weren’t able to win the toss up games due to our mistakes.” The season finished with a convincing District win over Carrollton, but ended with a loss to area power Marceline. Although they lack a lot of upperclassmen, they still have the athletes to make it a great season. The Falcons return 11 lettermen and 4 starters on offense and 3 starters on the defensive side of the ball. That’s not very much starting experience coming back, but they are talented especially their “X factor” Garren Vroman.

The Falcons’ offense does have a good core group of athletes to build around for the 2021 season. They ran out of multiple formations last year and scored nearly 28 points per game and rushed for 235 yards per game. Those a good solid numbers, but look for those to increase in ’21. Senior running back Garren Vroman (5-11, 184) will return in the backfield this season. Last year, he earned All-Conference and All-District, rushing for 1,200 yards and adding 500 receiving yards. Senior Tyler Bartholomew (5-9, 143), will also see some action in the backfield and as a blocker as will fellow senior Avery Powell (5-11, 170). Two good-sized juniors will also provide depth and a different look Caleb McComb (5-10, 205) and big 230 pound junior D.J. Moore. Junior quarterback Ben Wells (6-0,175) will also return to the offense. Last season, he earned All-District, had a 52% completion, and threw for 1,600 yards. The receivers have some experience starting with junior Chase Allen (6-3, 183) who is a matchup nightmare for D-backs and a nice big redzone target. Senior TE Logan Wiswall will be a blocking and receiving threat. Senior WR Cale Hudson and WR Dalton Collins will provide depth.

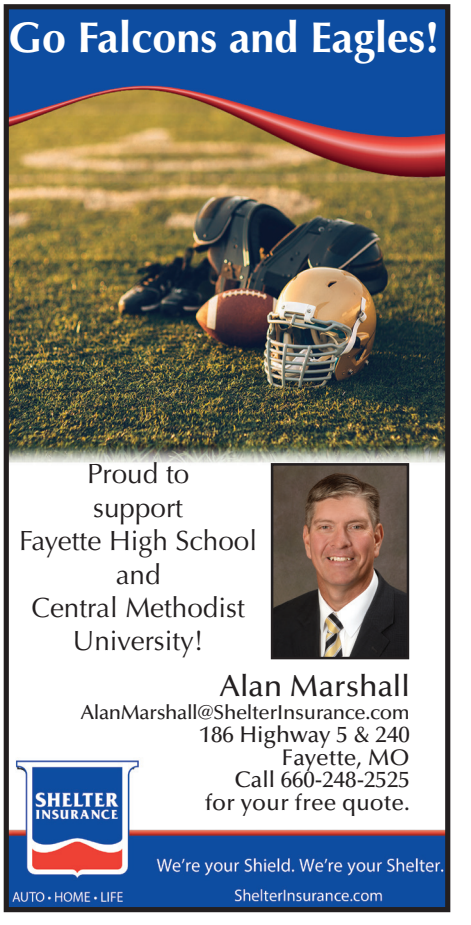
“More experienced at QB, Garren at RB is special, and Chase at WR will be excellent in both passing and running game,” Coach Thompson boasted. “Our skill players are very talented, our success will be determined by how the O-line develops.” Senior O-lineman Chris Brown (5-9, 290) will take charge of the offensive line this year. Last year he earned All-Conference and All-District. Juniors Haden Kelly (6-2, 223) Malakai Graves (5-10, 153) and Wesley Miner (6-2, 235) will also contribute on the offensive line.

On the defensive side, the Falcons are low on upperclassmen. They have little experience, but a lot of young guys who will have to step up and play their role on the field. They ran multiple formations on defense last year, allowing opponents 21 points per game and 110 rushing yards per game. “We have a lot of positions to figure out, how quickly we can get those positions

Classification: 1
Conference: Lewis and Clark
Head Coach: Mike Thompson
Years at School: 3
Record at School: 12-9
Offensive Starters Returning: 4
Defensive Starters Returning: 3
Total Returning Letterman: 11
2020 Overall Record: 6-5

Fayette Falcons 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Carrollton	Home
September		
3	Scotland County	Away
10	Slater	Away
17	Marceline	Away
24	Westran	Home
October		
1	Paris	Away
8	Harrisburg	Home
15	Salisbury	Away
22	Father Tolton	Home
29	Districts	TBA





playing well will be very important for our team success," Coach Thompson said. The seniors who will lead the defense this season are Tyler Bartholomew, Avery Powell and Logan Wiswall at linebacker. Juniors Caleb McComb and D.J. Moore brings some size in the middle at LB and sophomore Brandon Moore will provide some depth. Junior defensive end Chase Allen will also return this season. Last year, he earned All-conference and All-district with 10 total sacks. Senior DL Chris Brown and junior D-linemen Malakai Graves and Hayden Kelly will also rotate upfront. The secondary will feature Cale Hudson and Dalton Collins. Both are fast and can cover well.

Coach Thompson knows who his playmakers will be on offense, but will have to wait and see who will step up for the Falcons on the O-line and the defense this season. The defense must be more physical, better tacklers and not allow big plays to hurt them. They have a good group of seniors who are willing to make it a great run this fall.

Pigskin Pick: 5-4

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Fulton hornets

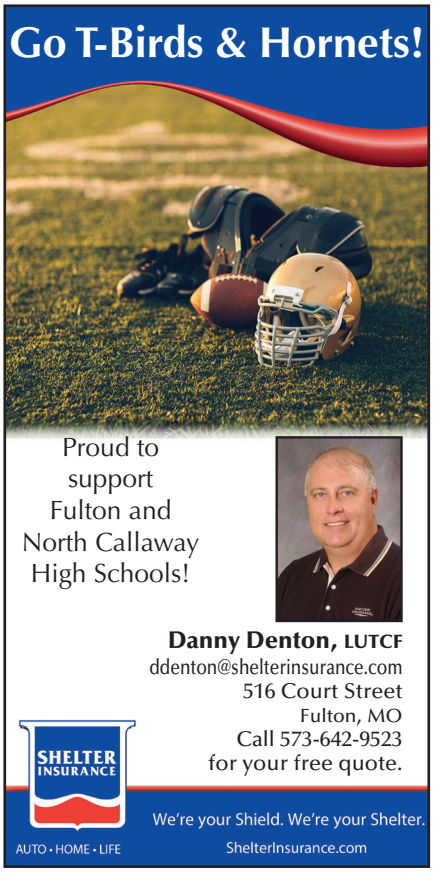
The Fulton Hornets finished the 2020 season with a 1-9 record. It was a disappointing season for the Hornets following a season with 3 wins. They compete in Class 4 and the NCMC Conference. Fulton is looking to start new traditions in the program with the hiring of Head Coach Dana Chambers. This will be his first year as a head football coach. It will be a challenge to get Fulton back on track, but he is more than capable. Working alongside Coach Chambers are assistant coaches John DeFily, Jantzen Bradford, Clifton Cooper, Matthew Greble and Tyler Payne. They are looking to change the mentality of their playstyle and return back to basics to improve their overall performance. Coach Chambers says, "Offensively, mental mistakes, discipline, and turnovers hurt us the most." The Hornets must put their best foot forward by practicing the basics and learning how to perform as a team. A positive for Fulton is the amount of returning starters for the 2021 season. They will have 9 returning offensive starters and 6 returning defensive starters. These players will come back to the field seeking vengeance for their disappointing performance in 2020. There will be a lot of grit, hard work, and effort put into Fulton's new season. Coach Chambers is expecting his team to put in maximum effort and turn this program around.

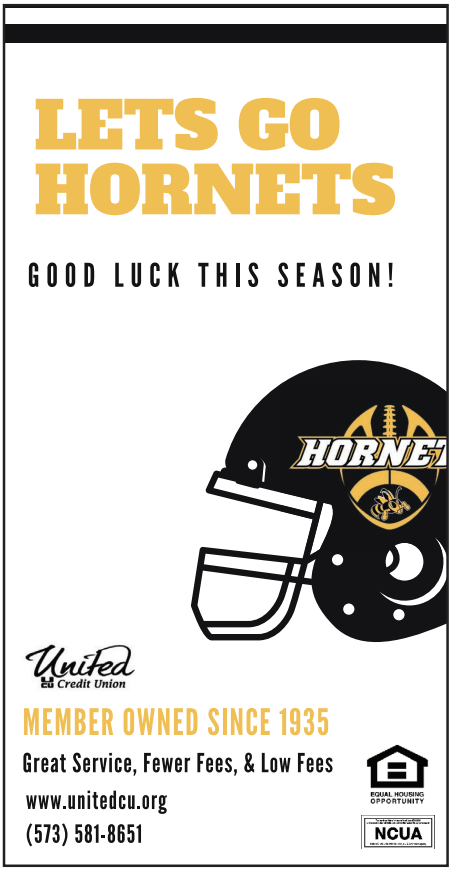
On offense, the Fulton Hornets produced 20 points per game, 158 rushing yards per game, and 133 passing yards per game in 2020. These numbers are a bright side to the Hornets struggles from the previous season. As stated before, Fulton will focus themselves on gaining experience through getting back to the basics of football. Other area of focus for the Hornets style of play is physicality, fast pace, and discipline. Coach Chambers states, "Our focus will be on playing physical, running the football, and taking care of the football at all times." The mindset of remaining physical, disciplined, and fast makes Fulton threatening for opposing defenses. The returning starters will play the biggest role in supporting the Hornets new playstyle. At guard, Seniors Curtis Humphreys (6-2, 290) and Cameron Schafer (6-0, 260) will be back. These two obviously bring the physicality, but what is even more important is their discipline on the offensive line. Coach Chambers and the Hornets need these two to instruct newcomers including Sophomore William Bell (6-4, 230) on how to remain physical and prevent penalties. Humphreys earned 1st Team All-Conference and All-District honors for his performance in 2020. Coach Chambers believes Bell has shown a promising start with explosiveness and good use of hands. Returning at center is Senior Cameron Lee (5-10, 230). Another big bodied Hornet player that brings experience on the line. Returning to tight end is Senior Josh Dunmire (6-0, 220). Dunmire earned 2nd Team All-Conference for his performance in 2020. Coach Chambers is comfortable focusing on the run game with great experience in the receiver category. The 4 returning wide outs are Seniors Paul Houf (6-0, 145), James Walker (5-9, 165), Brynn Bynum (5-11, 170), and Junior Walker Gohring (5-9, 165). These are the core players that bring Fulton plenty of fast paced physicality. All together these receivers were able to catch over 120 passes, over 500 yards and almost 10 touchdowns for the Hornets. Bynum earned 2nd Team All-Conference honors for his personal performance last season. Freshman newcomer Gabriel DeFily (5-9, 135) will have a tremendous group of wide outs to help him learn the pace of Fulton football. Junior running back Tyreion Logan (5-9, 185) is returning after rushing for 248 yards on 73 carries in 2020. Coach Chambers wants to use his speed and burst to keep opposing defenses on their toes. Expect a "pro style" offense in 2021.

The defensive side of the ball was underachieving for the Hornets last season. They allowed 46 points per game, 299 rushing yards per game, and 83 passing yards per game. Coach Chambers believes this team can play both sides of the football with help of returning members of the defense. He says, "Our focus will be on playing physical and fast every snap. We want to limit big plays." Juniors Joshua Reams (6-2, 223) and Joshua Dunmire are

Classification: 4
Conference: NCMC
Head Coach: Dana Chambers
Years at School: First
Offensive Starters Returning: 9
Defensive Starters Returning: 6
Total Returning Lettermen: 15
2020 Overall Record: 1-9

Fulton Hornets 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Osage	Home
September		
3	California	Away
10	Richmond	Home
17	Hannibal	Away
24	Moberly	Away
October		
1	Mexico	Home
8	Marshall	Away
15	Kirksville	Home
22	Sweet Springs	Away
29	Districts	TBA





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returning to the linebacker position for the Hornets. They bring the physicality and speed that Coach Chambers will require this season. Reams earned 2nd Team All-District for his performance in 2020. Junior Walker Gohring and Seniors James Walker and Brynn Bynumm are back at the defensive back position. These players are key pieces to both sides of the football. More physicality, speed, and discipline that Coach Chambers wants to drive the Hornet's strategies. Back on the line is Senior Cameron Schafer. The forcefulness he can bring to the line will help Fulton bust through offensive lines. The Hornets will need hands on impact. Expect a "multiple" style defense.

Again, Fulton is experienced from last year's struggles and these players want to put their best foot forward through the new strategy set in place. Coach Chambers is going to push his players to remain physical, fast, and play extra disciplined football. He states, "This team has been working hard this summer and putting a lot of time that will pay off when the season starts. The coaches and players are both excited and ready to compete every time they touch the field, fighting four full quarters."

Pigskin's Pick: 3-6

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Hallsville indians

In 2018, the Hallsville Indians posted a record of 3-7. Enter new Head Coach Justin Conyers and the program has seen a significant turnaround. After 15 seasons, combined, at Battle and Rock Bridge, Coach Conyers' 2019 Hallsville team went 10-3 capturing the school's first-ever district championship in football. Despite early-season cancellations and playing only 3 of their first 6 games, the 2020 Indians finally managed to play a full schedule, posting a record of 7-5. Although the program graduated a large number of seniors and featured a lot of new faces, the Hallsville team battled their way to their second consecutive district title. Coach Conyers, his staff and the team look to build on this success as they enter the 2021 campaign.

As they begin their quest for a three-peat, the Indians will be returning 22 lettermen for the 2021 season. As well, Coach Conyers will be sharing the sidelines with a strong group of assistant coaches which includes Mike Morris, Travis Kinkade, Jeremy Wooden, James Scholten, Chris Pickett, Isaiah Warren, Mitchell Jenkins and McGwire Dean. The Indians' offense and defense will be coordinated by this group of men as they look to continue Hallsville's recent success.

The Hallsville offense has been strong the last two seasons, averaging 34 points per game in both 2019 and 2020. With 8 returning starters, there is no reason to expect anything less than continued success from the offensive side of the football. Again, the Hallsville offense will feature multiple spread formations run by returning senior quarterback, Tyger Cobb (5-11, 175). The 1st Team All-District QB was equally dangerous in the air (passing for 1,875 yards and 20 touchdowns) as he is on the ground (1,129 rushing yards and 16 touchdowns) during the 2020 season. His prime target at wide receiver will be senior AJ Austene (6-4, 195) whose size and speed will create all kinds of problems for opposing defensive backs. Austene earned 3rd team All-State at wide receiver and he will provide leadership and experience as he looks to better his 897 receiving yards and 8 touchdowns on 55 catches from 2020. Junior wide receiver, Landyn Sievers (6-0, 185) should also play a much bigger roles for this year's Indians offense. Junior power running back, Harrison Fowler (5-11, 200) averaged almost 6.5 yards per carry in 2020 and his 1,348 rushing yards and 18 touchdowns were a major factor in the team averaging 224+ rushing yards per game last year and why the coaches expect to improve on those numbers this season. Also at running back will be senior Trenton Hobbs (6-0, 200) who will be looking to make a bigger impact this season. Clearly, the Hallsville team is talented at moving the football on the ground and in the air and Coach Conyers plans to take advantage of his team's offensive capabilities stating, "Look for the Indians to continue to run the football out of multiple spread formations and keep the defense honest with a balanced passing attack." Finally, the coaches will be looking to some serious O-line talent to provide blocking and protection for their many offensive weapons. Leading the offensive line is 2nd Team All-Stater, junior Jayden Walters (6-1, 275) who will continue to dole out punishment to opposing defensive linemen. Junior DJ Larkin (6-3, 255) provides both strength and quickness on the line and will be joined by senior Mitchell Simmerman (6-2, 275) and junior Garrison Ballard (5-11, 185) both of whom are strong blockers for the run and pass.

On defense, Coach Conyers looks to improve on Hallsville's 2020 season. In 2019, the Indians defense held opponents to just 13 points per game and 260 total yards per game (123 rushing / 127 passing). However, the 2020 defense was not as successful against the rush—allowing an average of 166 rushing yards and 28 points per game. According to Coach Conyers, "With 7 defensive starters returning, the Indians look to build on stopping the run. There will be a lot of players getting reps on Friday nights to help the defense play fast and physical." Senior linebacker, Trenton Hobbs leads that fast, hard-hitting defense and looks to better his 123 tackles (8 TFL) and 8 sacks from 2020. Those stats led to Hobbs being named 3rd team All-State. Senior linebackers Alex White (5-11, 170) and Jack March (6-0, 190) will bring speed and aggressiveness to the field. The duo combined for 126 tackles (19

Class: 2
Conference: Tri-County
Head Coach: Justin Conyers
Years at School: 2
Record at School: 17-8
Overall Record: 71-29
Offensive Starters Returning: 9
Defensive Starters Returning: 8
Total Returning Lettermen: 22
2020 Overall Record: 7-5

Hallsville Indians 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Palmyra	Away
September		
3	Centralia	Home
10	Versailles	Home
17	Eldon	Home
24	Osage	Away
October		
1	Southern Boone	Away
8	Blair Oaks	Home
15	California	Home
22	Boonville	Away
29	Districts	TBA





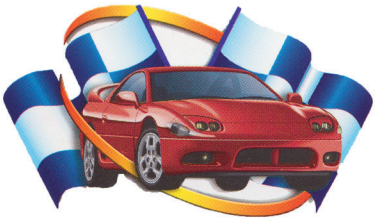
TFL) and 5 sacks a year ago and will round out the heart of the Hallsville defense. Senior linebacker Cale Crane (5-9, 175) will bring solid tackling ability and additional quickness to the Hallsville linebacking corps and should see increased playing time in 2021.

The defensive backfield is an area which will likely see a number of new faces this season, but will still be anchored by 2nd Team All-Conference DB, AJ Austene, whose size and speed challenge opposing receivers. Also returning will be junior defensive back, Harrison Fowler, whose athleticism is an asset to the Hallsville defense. One of those new faces will be senior DB/WR, Garrett Hargis (5-9, 155) who should see playing time on both sides of the football. The Hallsville team is tailor-made for their 3-3-5 defensive scheme—a defense which puts a premium on speed and athletic ability for teams which tend to lack overall size.

In terms of wins and stats, the 2020 Hallsville Indian team took a step backward from their 2019 team, yet still managed to persevere and capture a second successive district championship. This grit and determination plus the fact that the 2021 Hallsville team is loaded with senior and junior leadership, experience and talent are strong indicators this program is a strong contender for a third district title in a row. To accomplish this, the offense will have to match or exceed their 2019/2020 output and the defense will need to be stronger against the run and push that 28 ppg average below 20.

Pigskin's Pick: 7-2

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Hannibal pirates

The Hannibal Pirates have strung together one of the most impressive runs in mid-Missouri football over the last few years, district title winners in four of their last six seasons. Now, with a senior quarterback surrounded by one of the best skill groups in the state, Hannibal's goals aren't just to win the district title -- they're aiming for a state championship.

The Pirates announced in March that offensive coordinator Jeff Gschwender would take over as head coach of the program, working his way up across six years as an assistant coach. Gschwender has head coaching experience dating back to 2012-2014 with the Bowling Green Bobcats, and his familiarity with the Pirates should make the transition to the head coaching role seamless.

Hannibal returns seven offensive starters, including All-NCMC Second Team honoree, senior quarterback Courtland Watson (6-1, 185). Watson passed for over 1,400 yards last year and amassed 19 touchdowns as the leader of the Pirate's offense, making accurate deep throws, passes on the run, and plays with his legs as an agile runner with speed. Watson fits the mold for a do-it-all QB, and his core group of skill position players will provide him with outlets for upfield plays. Aneyas Williams (5-10, 190) made quite a name for himself as a freshman last year, being the only freshman in all of Missouri to receive All-State honors as a Class 4 Second Team selection. He put up over 1,200 scrimmage yards and 21 touchdowns for the Pirates last year, and his performance over the summer has only earned him more acclaim; he received his first FBS offer from the University of Oregon in the beginning of August after impressing at a camp hosted by the Ducks. Veteran guidance can also be found within the skill position group, notably with senior wide receiver Kaiser Greenwell (5-10, 180) and senior running back AJ Thomas (6-1, 190), an All-NCMC Second Team honoree. "Leadership in our upperclassmen will get our newcomers ready early," said Gschwender. "We have a bit more depth and a ton of team speed." Those newcomers include sophomore Kane Wilson (6-2, 200), a traditionally-sized tight end who can block at the line of scrimmage and serve as a red zone threat, and junior Jack Parker (5-8, 175), a guy who will likely serve as a field stretcher and attract attention from opposing defenses. Another big plus for the Pirates is their offensive line, which returns four of their five starters from last year. That includes All-NCMC First Team selection senior Caden Selle (6-4, 270), who earned Class 4 All-State Third Team honors as well last year, and All-NCMC Second Team selection Kanye Washington (5-11, 255). Giving more time to Watson in the pocket to let routes develop is going to make the Pirates offense one tough warship to sink.

On the other side of the ball, Hannibal returns seven more starting athletes, four of whom earned All-NCMC honors. Star defensive lineman Brady Zimmerman (6-2, 245) earned a selection to the All-NCMC First Team as a strong edge setter who can stop both inside and outside runs, and he can break into the pocket to rush opposing quarterbacks. Zimmerman is likely to get help from the well-framed Wilson as well as the sophomore duo of Noah Young (6-0, 185) and Trenton Cowden (6-0, 270). Junior Ashton Watts (5-11, 195), an All-NCMC Second Team selection, and senior Tyler Hardy (5-9, 170) look to coalesce into a linebacker duo that controls the middle of the field. Kaiser Greenwell and junior Markahl Humphrey (5-11, 170), both All-NCMC Second Team defensive selections in 2020, lead a secondary that also brings back seniors Braysen Douglas (5-9, 165)

Class: 4
Conference: NCMC
Head Coach: Jeff Gschwender
Years at School: First year
Overall Record: 21-14
Offensive Starters Returning: 7
Defensive Starters Returning: 7
Total Returning Lettermen: 18
2020 Overall Record: 8-3

Hannibal Pirates 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Helias	Away
September		
3	Jefferson City	Home
10	Ft. Zumwalt West	Away
17	Fulton	Home
24	Mexico	Away
October		
1	Kirksville	Home
8	Moberly	Away
15	Marshall	Home
22	Battle	Away
29	Districts	TBA





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and John Clubine (6-1, 175). Last year's Pirates defense allowed just 117 yards per game in the air to opposing offenses, and reliable matchups for four separate guys gives Hannibal the ability to protect against a vertical pass attack.

With difference-makers on both sides of the ball, Hannibal is well-positioned to make a deep playoff run in 2021. That's going to require "a true team mentality with the emphasis on playing on reaction and getting to the ball," according to Gschwender. The chance to prove themselves as true contenders comes quite early on for the Pirates. A week one matchup against defending Class 4 State Champions Helias Catholic should be a big test, one that will be met head-on by both teams. Perennial talents at the Class 4 level, the matchup could be a preview of two potential contenders for this year's state title. The transition to Gschwender isn't a traditionally challenging one, but high hopes are in place for a Pirates team that possesses a very talented group of athletes. Those hopes aren't just among fans; the players desire to win. "We have a great group of leaders who enjoy the work it takes to be successful."

Pigskin's Pick: 6-3

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Harrisburg bulldogs

The Harrisburg Bulldogs completed the 2020 football season with an impressive 8-5 record in the Lewis and Clark Conference. They were 5-2 in their league play which placed them at 3rd. Starting off the year, the Bulldogs went back and forth with wins and losses. They produced in waves in the next 4 games, winning all of them by a big margin. Unfortunately, their playoff picture closed quickly after losing to Marceline for the 2nd time in 2020. Harrisburg is a program that has turned around their record over the past 3 years. Head Coach Steve Hopkins is entering his 3rd year at Harrisburg. Over that time he has produced a winning record of 14-9. Overall, Coach Hopkins has been impressive in his career with a 109-67 record. He focuses on consistency and full-team effort when coaching the Bulldogs. Harrisburg assistant coaches include Zech Bowman (OL/DL), Blake Logan (WR/DB's/LB's), and Tanner Smith (QB/RB's/LB's). Coach Hopkins mentions that the beginning of 2020 was full of inconsistency and injuries, but the team came together to produce a winning record and potential playoff push. "We were inconsistent early and were missing a couple of key receivers for much of the season… In week 11, we finally got our receivers back at full strength and played our best game of the year," Coach Hopkins states. That playoff game was an impressive beat down of Westran, avenging an earlier season loss.

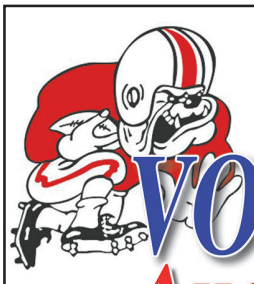
The Bulldogs will have 8 returning players on offense and 8 returning players on defense. With this experience the Bulldogs will be able to imitate their last season and possibly produce a better record.

Class: 1
Conference: Lewis & Clark
Head Coach: Steve Hopkins
Years at School: 2
Record at School: 14-9
Overall Record: 109-67
Offensive Starters Returning: 8
Defensive Starters Returning: 8
Total Returning Lettermen: 18
2020 Overall Record: 8-5

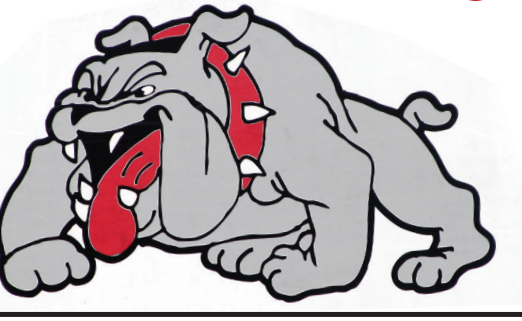
Harrisburg Bulldogs 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Paris	Home
September		
3	Milan	Home
10	Salisbury	Home
17	Westran	Away
24	Sweet Springs	Away
October		
1	Russellville	Home
8	Fayette	Away
15	Scotland County	Home
22	Marceline	Home
29	Districts	TBA

On offense, the Bulldogs produced very well in 2020. They averaged 33 points per game, 207 rushing yards per game, and 144 passing yards per game. Those numbers helped them push through all types of defensive strategies and win close games against opposing league teams. The Bulldogs will have plenty of returning players to produce at an elite level next season. Starting at QB is Senior Tanner Lanes (6'3, 168) who brings a great arm with great accuracy, and smart decision making. He threw for 1,382 yards with 17 touchdowns, 8 interceptions, and earned 1st Team All District in 2020. At running back Tanner Fike (6'1, 217) ran for 2 touchdowns, 190 yards, and was the key blocker at the Bulldog's point of attack. Receivers Jace Carr (6'2, 168) and Anthony Alicea (5'11, 162) were key contributors to the offense in 2020. They combined for 57 catches, 757 yards, and 9 touchdowns. Carr earned 1st Team All District honors and Alicea was named 3rd Team Lewis and Clark Conference in 2020. The offensive line is stacked with 4 returning starters for Harrisburg. Brayton Stephenson (6'2, 207), Austyn Furlong (6'2, 264), Logan Fritts (6'1, 191), and Gaven Samuels (5'11, 239) will be the powerhouse line that helps the Bulldogs continue their success. Stephenson was 1st Team All District and Fritts was 3rd Team All Conference in 2020. The Harrisburg Bulldogs are committed to competing heavily against all types of defenses. Because of their balance, expect them to run a "multiple" type offense in 2021. Coach Hopkins has high praise for his team's offensive production. "We are an experienced team with 4 of the 5 starting offensive linemen returning. Two wide receivers, Jace Carr and Anthony Alicea, who have done a great job of getting open and securing the catch -- plus another group of receivers who we look to step forward and be viable options in 2021," Coach Hopkins reports

The Bulldogs defense was impressive, only allowing 23 points per game, 196 rushing yards per game, and only 93 passing yards per game. Coach Hopkins believes that the returning players give them an edge against the teams in their conference in 2021. "Our front and back end of the defense is experienced with returning starters and quality depth," he confirms. Expect the Bulldogs to use different combinations of players to spread the wealth. It is important to Coach Hopkins and company that their team rotates players to stay fresh. Returning at defensive back are Jace Carr, Anthony Alicea, Austin Darwent (6'1,152), Brayden Ott (5'9, 154), and Harley Whitaker (6'0, 147). Carr earned 2nd Team All District Defense in 2020. Together, these players contributed to a wonderful performance in 2020. They combined for over 150 tackles, 5 interceptions, and 2 fumble recoveries. On the defensive line the Bulldogs have Brayton


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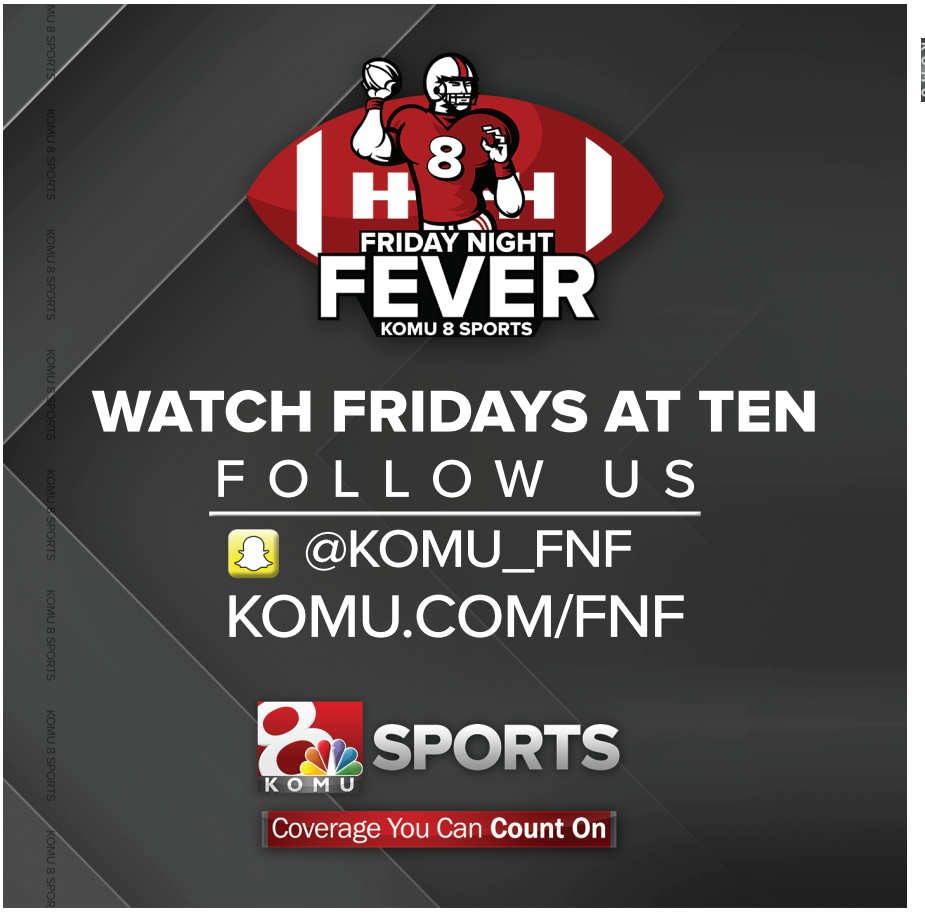




Stephenson, Gavin Curtis (5'8, 186), Tanner Fike, Logan Fritts, and Max Tadzhibayev (5'10, 181). Stephenson was 2nd Team DE All Conference in 2020. Fike earned 3rd Team DL for Lewis and Clark Conference and 2nd Team All District. Together, this defensive line was impressive combining for over 16 sacks, 40 tackles for loss, and 200 tackles. Harrisburg will be rotating plenty of returning starters and newcomers to increase the depth of their high performance players. Coach Hopkins says, "We expect to play a lot of kids early to rotate and to let them get settled into their jobs. It is level 2 of our defense we are focusing on now to improve, and expect to rotate until we find the correct combination."

The Harrisburg Bulldogs had an impressive 2020 and look to improve upon that performance. Coach Hopkins and company have everything set in terms of game plan to continue their recent successes in the Lewis and Clark Conference. Here is what Coach Hopkins believes is the key to coaching: "Kids matter and a team is a group of young people, each with a story, and each has a value as an individual. My task is to learn their stories and to encourage them to care for each other and for the team as a whole. In football, they join to form a brotherhood and a bond which lasts throughout their life." That bond could produce some winning memories in 2021.

Pigskin's Pick: 7-2





Helias crusaders

Football seasons don't get any better than they did for the Helias Crusaders and Head Coach Chris Hentges last fall. This Crusaders captured every title out there: city, conference, district, state. They did it behind Class 4 Offensive Player of the Year Jacob Weaver. And aside from Weaver and ten other players on the All-State team. "The experience and maturity of last year's team really helped our team deal with all the distractions brought on by COVID," Hentges says. "We graduated 19 fantastic young men who will be very hard to replace."

The 2021 version of the Helias Crusaders will look far different from recent iterations. Only three starters return on each side of the ball, meaning Hentges and his staff are working overtime to integrate new bodies into the roster—and that opportunities abound for younger players to obtain playing time.

"This year's offense has a lot of talent, just not much experience," Hentges says. "Our QBs have no varsity experience, so we will have to keep things pretty basic early on." Three players are currently competing to replace Weaver under center: junior QB Drew Miller (6-3, 210), senior QB Tyler Sandbothe (6-2, 215), and sophomore QB Sam Wyrick (5-10, 165). Whoever gets the job will have some seriously large shoes to fill.

"Our offensive line will be big and physical, but like the rest of our offense it lacks varsity game experience," says Hentges. Senior G Drew Distler (6-2, 280) is an experienced starter, and will this year be joined by junior LT Trevor Kolb (6-4, 240) and sophomore G Alex Cook (6-2, 265). Also in the mix are junior OL Jack Klebba (6-3, 265), senior OL Nicholas Heislen (6-3, 235), senior C Cristian Prasad (6-0, 215), senior TE Sam Schell (6-3, 205), junior TE Trey Beaten (6-2, 220), and senior TE Nate Roark (6-3, 200).

Elsewhere on the offense, "We are excited about the emergence of some of our young receivers," Hentges says. An older wideout, however, is the key to the Helias receiving corps. Senior WR Cole Stumpe (6-0, 175) made the All-State team after hauling in 44 passes for 737 yards and 10 TDs. Hentges expects him to be "a major weapon on this year's offense." Senior RB Will Herrbold (5-8, 155) and junior WR Jacob Lanigan (5-8, 160) are set for big roles this year as well. And don't discount the importance of senior K/P Vinnie Calvaruso (6-5, 180). Calvaruso displayed pinpoint accuracy last fall, hitting 52/57 PATs and 3/4 FGs, and earning himself a spot on the All-State squad. Other players competing for roles are senior WRs Harrison Miller (5-10, 185) and Kaden Hampson (5-9, 155), who had 7 catches for 115 yards, and senior RB Ryan Klahr (5-6, 140), who just might be the team's secret weapon. Klahr used his excellent speed to great effect last fall, making the All-Conference Second-Team as a punt returner, and tallying 450 rushing yards and 5 TDs.

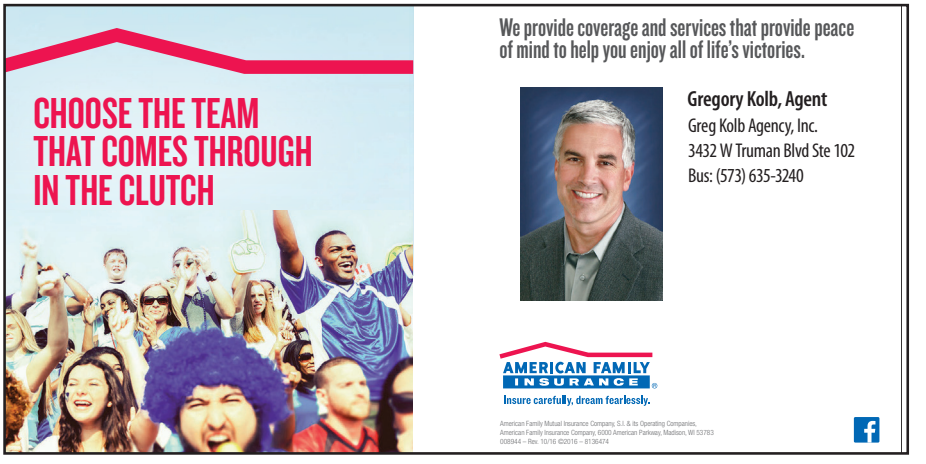
Defensive Coordinator Phil Pitts' defense "will have to replace multiple starters on all three levels of his defense," Hentges says. The secondary will have the most experience back this fall, with senior S Cole Stumpe and senior S Carson Brauner (6-2, 185) both back in action. Stumpe made the All-Conference and All-District teams after recording 52 tackles and 2 INTs, while Brauner nearly matched him with 42 tackles and 3 INTs. Ready to help fill out the secondary are senior S Billy Underwood (6-22, 185) and senior S Sam Hentges (6-1, 180). Senior DBs Ryan Klahr and Kaden

Class: 5
Conference: CMAC
Head Coach: Chris Hentges
Years at School: 28 (8 as Head Coach)
Record at School: 77-21
Overall Record: 77-21
Offensive Starters Returning: 3
Defensive Starters Returning: 3
Total Returning Lettermen: 24
2020 Overall Record: 14-0

Helias Crusaders 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Hannibal	Home
September		
3	Hickman	Home
10	Battle	Away
17	Granite City (Ill.)	Home
24	Rock Bridge	Away
October		
1	Capital City	Home
8	Jefferson City	Home
15	Smith-Cotton	Away
22	Vianney	Away
29	Districts	TBA







Hampson are ready to contribute as well. Klahr had 22 tackles in 2020, and Hampson posted 29.

Replacing lost talent at linebacker "will be the biggest challenge," according to Hentges. Helping to ease the transition is senior OLB Gage Wilde (6-0, 175), who made the All-District and Second-Team All-Conference squads after posting 61 tackles and 3.5 sacks last fall. Much will also be asked of senior LB Harrison Miller, who had 30 tackles last year, 3 for loss. Expect junior LB Korbin Fisher (6-1, 180) and senior LB Tyler Sandbothe to round out this group. The Crusaders' defensive line will be comprised of senior DEs Tanner Nappier (6-1, 210) and Sam Schell, senior DL Nicholas Heisler, and junior DL Jack Klebba. Schell accrued 15 tackles and 2 sacks last fall, Heisler had 12 tackles, and Klebba finished the season with 13 tackles.

The coach understands the challenge before him and players in the year ahead. "The early part of the season could be tough due to our lack of experience," Hentges says. "I know there are many who think we will have a down year because we lost so many good players off our state championship team, but we plan on surprising people early." Because they have so many upperclassmen who have waited for their turn to play, don't be surprised to see Helias play well both early and late in the season this fall.

Pigskin's Pick: 7-2

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Hermann bearcats

The Hermann Bearcats faced a challenging season in 2020. They finished the year with a 3-8 record and 1-3 during league play, but they did win their first round District game. The Bearcats improved their play before the pandemic hit and are looking to find their stride again in another full season. Head Coach Andy Emmons wanted only the best for the players and to play some football. "Last season was a very challenging one. We were able to play every single game without major quarantine issues. Our main goal was to allow the seniors to get the season in," Coach Emmons states. The Bearcats will have 6 returning offensive and 6 returning defensive players. This will be Coach Emmons tenth year at Hermann where he holds a career record of 51-47. He is assisted by Josh Schwenck, Jess Robb, Donnie Bell, Wayland McKague, Chris Heldt, and Matt Kessler. Their coaching experience and previous successes will place great building blocks for a good year in 2021. Coach Emmons emphasizes the importance of hard work, consistency, and having fun on the football field. "We are looking forward to a more traditional season!" Emmons emphasized. With returning players and a full season, the Bearcats will be able to showcase their skills and push for a division title.

On offense, the Hermann Bearcats need to improve their production. They averaged 15 points per game in 2020. Coach Emmons and the Bearcats have 6 returning players on the offensive side of the ball. This experience will open more doors to improving the offense. Among those returning starters are four Juniors and two Seniors. Juniors Levi Selfert (5'10, 175), Bryce Williams (6'3, 255) and Senior Schuler Erickson (6'7, 250) are manning the offensive line to help maintain their rushing game and improve their passing game. With their massive stature, those returning lineman will have an extreme impact on winning games for the Bearcats. Williams played well last season and earned 2nd Team All District. Junior Parker Anderson (6'3, 195) will be returning at quarterback. He carries the ball well and is working on his passing game this offseason. Anderson ran for 44 rushing yards scoring 4 touchdowns and threw for 4 more touchdowns. The returning running back tandem of Senior Kenny Hoener (5'9, 170) and Junior Conner Coffey (6'1, 170) are key components for the Bearcats offense. They averaged 220 rushing yards per game last season and look to maintain that number in 2021. Coach Emmons believes their experience on offense is the main piece to improving their record. "We have a lot of returning players with experience. Towards the end of the season we were starting a lot of Sophomores." Knowing the younger starters are returning makes Hermann a real threat with their chemistry. Expect the offense to run a "flexbone triple option."

On the defensive side of the ball, the Bearcats will focus on improving their quality of play. Unfortunately, Hermann allowed an average of 33 points per game in 2020. Coach Emmons wants his players to bring a fiery energy on the line and backfield of the defense. They have 6 returning starters on defense for 2021. With this experience, Coach Emmons and the Bearcats feel confident in improving their defensive production. Many of the returning starters on the defense come from the offense. Parker Anderson works his best to compete for his team by filling the role of linebacker after producing as the team's quarterback. He was able to take home 2nd Team All District honors as linebacker. With his height and weight, their defense can remain stable and put tons of pressure on opposing offenses. Another returning linebacker is Kenny Hoener. He is a workhorse who produces on offense at the running back position. On defense, he contains run games and makes tackles sideline to sideline. Conner

Classification: 2
Conference: Four Rivers
Head Coach: Andy Emmons
Years at School: 10
Record at School: 51-47
Offensive Starters Returning: 6
Defensive Starters Returning: 6
Total Returning Lettermen: 15
2020 Overall Record: 3-8
2020 District Record: 1-1

Hermann Bearcats 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Montgomery County	Home
September		
3	Fredericktown	Away
10	St. James	Home
17	Lutheran St. Charles	Away
24	Owensville	Home
October		
1	Sullivan	Away
8	St. Clair	Home
15	Pacific	Away
22	Union	Away
29	Districts	TBA





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Coffey uses his talents at the safety position. He can produce key tackles in the defensive backfield and prevent big runs up the middle. Junior Linebacker Gavin Hackmann (5'11, 255) brings a huge presence in the middle of the field. He is an intimidating player who can create key tackles and force offenses to adapt to their defense. Schuler Erickson and Bryce Williams are massive bodies on the defensive line. They will use their size to contain opposing point producers. Coach Emmons believes these returning starters can make an instant impact on improving the Hermann Bearcats 2021 season. Expect them to run a "3 front mixed" defensive strategy.

The Hermann Bearcats are an up and coming program in the Four Rivers Conference. They have had recent successes with Coach Emmons who has a positive record with the program in 10 years. "Football is the tool we use to teach life lessons," Coach Emmons states. He has a positive mentality on his players and program. With the amount of returning starters and flexible newcomers, the Bearcats could become a serious competitor in their conference. Tune into their games to see some progress in their turnaround in the near future.

Pigskin's Pick: 4-5

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Jefferson City jays

The last half-decade has been nothing short of chaotic for the Jefferson City football program. It hit a nadir last winter, when Head Coach Scott Bailey turned in his resignation—just five months after he accepted the job. And so, the program went on the search for its fourth head coach in five seasons.

That search strayed far beyond the borders of Missouri, ending in the foothills of the Rockies. There, in Rifle, Colorado, Jeff City secured the services of Damon Wells. It's a move seemingly out of left field, but it sure looks to be a good one. Wells put together a spectacular resume at Rifle High, winning an outrageous 76% of his games in charge. Under his watch, Rifle never had a losing season, and he won conference Coach of the Year honors six separate times. New blood was badly needed to lead the Jays, and the program just might have found one of the best leaders around.

Wells will be tasked with turning around a program that used to be a perennial contender but has struggled in recent years. The Jays' 3-7 record last fall is fairly indicative of the way things have been—not terrible, not great, somewhere right in the middle. That was certainly the case for the defense, which allowed 24.4 points per game, but had a terrific two-week stretch in which they allowed 6 points to Smith-Cotton and shut out Capital City. Wells will have six starters to work with from that unit, including two players manning the linebacker position. Senior LB Will Berendzen (6-0, 189) has proven himself time and again for the Jays, using his football smarts to attack the ball all across the field. He reads the game well and will be relied upon for his leadership abilities in the year ahead. Junior LB Jackson Figo (5-11, 227) is something of a force of nature in the CMAC. An incredibly strong player, Figo also moves well laterally. He may be primed for a monster season this fall. Anchoring the defensive line is the prodigious sophomore DE Brody Smith (6-5, 255). Smith announced himself on the scene as a freshman starter in 2020, and with a full summer of strength training under his belt enters this season as one of the most promising underclassmen in the conference. Smith has good quickness for his size, and a wingspan that allows him to deflect passes or obscure the quarterback's vision. It's going to be fun to see what kind of player he develops into. Manning the line's interior will be junior DT Jesse Bilyeu (6-0, 246). Bilyeu has steadily improved during his time at Jeff City, and could well be a force on the line this fall. He'll work beside a newcomer, sophomore NT Jayden Roling (5-10, 320), a young player with strength to spare. With these three up front, the Jays D-line is going to make things difficult for opposing offenses this fall. The Jeff City secondary will be composed of senior S Kevion Pendleton (5-10, 192) and senior CB David Bethune (5-7, 161). Both of these players are firmly ensconced in the Jeff City defense, and will be tasked with preventing big plays this fall.

The Jays' offense isn't shaping up quite like their defense. Only four starters are back, but two of them are excellent running backs. Senior RBs David Bethune and Will Berendzen offer a bit of a lightning and thunder look for the Jays. Bethune uses his quickness to slice through narrow gaps to get to the edge, while Berendzen is more likely to lower his shoulders and go right through defenders. This year, those two players will be backed up by junior RB Zane Wings (5-9, 190) and sophomore RB Jacob Wilson (5-10, 186), each of whom has shown some promise. Senior TE Seth Brooks (6-1, 183) has proven

Class: 5
Conference: CMAC
Head Coach: Damon Wells
Years at School: First
Overall Record: 118-36
Offensive Starters Returning: 4
Defensive Starters Returning: 6
Total Returning Lettermen: 21
2020 Overall Record: 3-7

Jefferson City Jays 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Chaminade	Home
September		
3	Hannibal	Away
10	Rock Bridge	Home
17	Smith-Cotton	Away
24	Capital City	Home
October		
1	Hickman	Home
8	Helias	Away
15	Battle	Away
22	Ft. Zumwalt W.	Home
29	Districts	TBA





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himself in both the passing and running games, and will likely be the Jays' main red zone target this fall.

The starting spot at quarterback looks like it'll go to senior QB Hayden Wells (5-11, 170). Wells, who just arrived in Jeff City with his head coach father this summer, has proven himself to be a steady, consistent performer during his short time in the program, and while he won't wow you with his athleticism, his terrific decision-making will help to keep the turnover count low. On the offensive line, junior OT Jordan Garth (6-1, 305) is the only known quantity. Wells will quickly have to integrate fresh blood into the O-line if the Jays are going to improve upon the 20.6 points they scored per game last year.

While Wells has proven himself to be a winning football coach, it might be too optimistic to hope for a winning season from Jeff City in 2021. The Jays have the framework for a decent squad, especially on defense, but they have a lot of unknowns going into this season. With yet another very challenging schedule, expect another middle-of-the road finish for the Jays, with better things yet to come.

Pigskin's Pick: 4-5



Good Luck Jeff City Jays!

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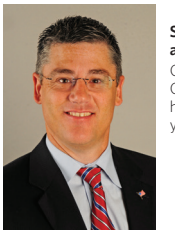
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Kirksville tigers

The last time the Kirksville Tigers returned from a winning season, they followed it up with just one win in the next two years. After multiple disappointing campaigns that saw zero playoff success, Kirksville welcomed Kevin Krietemeyer in 2020 to lead their football program, a decision which brought the Tigers their first winning season since 2013. A veteran team with massive contributions from star wideout Noah Copeland put up impressive offensive numbers and a playoff win against Warrenton for the second consecutive year. However, senior quarterback Jaden Ballinger (6-0, 180) will be without his favorite target from last year, and the spread offense that he will lead will put the ball in the hands of some new guys. "Losing Noah Copeland will be extremely difficult to replace," said Krietemeyer, "[and] that I hope we achieve. We have a lot of skills coming off a successful JV season that got in some varsity games. They will be ready."

His backfield, though, remains pretty stable. Running back Landon Yardley (5-8, 170) will assume lead duties as a senior. The quick athlete showed good chemistry with his quarterback and can pick up blocks with a sturdy frame. "Bringing back our starting backfield is huge for us," said Krietemeyer, who has full reason to be confident in his running back's ability as a smart runner who patiently follows open gaps.

2020 All-NCMC Second Team honoree, senior wide receiver Randon Baumgartner (5-6, 165) brings some familiarity to Ballinger's receiving core. Offensive output was relatively balanced for the Tigers last season, averaging 197 rushing yards and 166 passing yards per game. Adept as a runner and a pocket passer, Ballinger will benefit well from having proven teammates around him. The guys who will come alongside Baumgartner include senior John Behnen (6-3, 170), junior Kenny Hartman (6-0, 175), Jalen Kent (5-9, 165), junior Cristian Mendez (6-1, 205) and junior Nick Fortney (6-4, 225). The larger frames of many of these athletes should give the Tigers offense a ton of versatility in its downfield attack. The offensive line will also get two of its core pieces back from last year, including 2020 All-NCMC First Team selection senior Owen Fraser (6-6, 275) and senior Bryce Kertz (6-4, 270). We'll have more on those guys later, but they lead a young O-line unit that will also bring a lot of muscle in to protect Ballinger. Two standout athletes include junior duo Jaren Ingersol (6'5, 250) and Camden Dempsey (6-6, 230), who will immediately step in to provide pocket protection.

Defensively, the Tigers return many All-NCMC athletes to their front, including Fraser, also an All-NCMC First Team selection as a defensive lineman. Fraser is a freak athlete, earning himself third place in the discus throw for Class 4 at the MSHSAA Track and Field Championships this past May. He will undoubtedly be a leader for the Tigers on both sides of the ball, and Kertz, a 2020 All-NCMC Second Team defensive line selection, is also in line to contribute to both sides. "We have some good depth at the DL position," said Krietemeyer. "We lose our top tackler, but we bring back our starters up the middle DT, MLB and safety. We have an inexperienced back end, but they have played well and competed well last year, so we're excited about them." Fortney will look to use his athleticism and length as a pass rusher on the edge and a defense

Class: 4
Conference: NCMC
Head Coach: Kevin Krietemeyer
Years at School: 2
Record at School: 6-5
Overall Record: 42-41
Offensive Starters Returning: 5
Defensive Starters Returning: 5
Total Returning Lettermen: 20
2020 Overall Record: 6-5

Kirksville Tigers 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Macon	Home
September		
3	Chillicothe	Away
10	Savannah	Away
17	Moberly	Home
24	Marshall	Home
October		
1	Hannibal	Away
8	Mexico	Home
15	Fulton	Away
22	Capital City	Home
29	Districts	TBA

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set to bring a variety of looks will return senior linebacker Lane Gordy (6-1, 180), junior linebacker Drew Chrisman (6-1, 175), and Ballinger, an All-NCMC Second Team selection as a linebacker. Many of the athletes mentioned as potential receivers will also flip into the secondary, giving the Tigers a brooding size profile that matches up against virtually any program in mid-Missouri.

The Tigers' schedule opens with familiar opponents in Macon and Chillicothe, who Kirksville managed to pull out tough wins against. Starting off the season with back-to-back wins left the Tigers with a ton of momentum heading into conference play last year, and they'll look to do the same this time around as they look to turn in back-to-back winning seasons for the first time in over a decade. It's fair to expect that this go at that goal won't turn out as bad as it has in the past, as Kirksville has a solid returning core both offensively and defensively. They should pose a strong threat in an increasingly competitive North Central Missouri Conference.

Pigskin's Pick: 5-4



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Lincoln cardinals

Year one of Brad Drehle's tenure in charge of Lincoln was less than ideal—for a number of reasons. As Drehle puts it, "We overcame several injuries and survived COVID during the first half of the season." One of those injuries was to Lincoln's starting quarterback in week 2, forcing a change under center for the remainder of the season. At one point, "We lost four in a row, but the kids persevered and then won three in a row before losing to Cole Camp in district play," Drehle says. "Because of injuries, a lot of young kids saw significant playing time."

Things will certainly be different for Drehle and the Cardinals this time around. For starters, the team won't have to play through a pandemic. And also, for starters, the Cardinals return a ton of those—17, in fact, with nine starters back on offense and eight back on defense. That'll provide Drehle with some much-needed continuity as he begins his second year in charge.

On the offensive side of the football, "We were able to get a lot of valuable experience last season," Drehle says. Along with that hard-earned experience, Lincoln is getting several players back from injury, including junior QB Kyle Eckhoff (6-2, 180). Eckhoff is the aforementioned signal-caller who went down in Week 2, and is primed to put up big numbers after getting a clean bill of health.

Class: 1
Conference: N/A
Head Coach: Brad Drehle
Years at School: 1
Record at School: 4-5
Overall Record: 126-84
Offensive Starters Returning: 9
Defensive Starters Returning: 8
Total Returning Lettermen: 14
2020 Overall Record: 4-5

Also missing the majority of last season was junior RB Ross Johnson (6-0, 190). Johnson has excellent size for a rusher, and a positive offseason in the weight room portends well for Lincoln fans. Expect him to look like a bulldozer coming out of the backfield this fall. To round out the skill-position players are two returning starters at wideout and two newcomers. Senior WR Caden Smallwood (5-10, 165) and junior WR Connor Lynde (6-0, 165) are both proven quantities in the passing game. Each boasts solid speed and a terrific set of hands. It's easy to imagine Eckhoff establishing a fruitful connection with these players early in the season. Joining them this year are junior WR Caleb Mundy (5-9, 145) and Darren Roberts (6-0 145). Mundy flits around the field like a waterbug, making him a likely candidate for the slot position, while Roberts is a more traditional wideout.

The Lincoln O-line will also be bolstered by getting a player back from injury: junior OL Steven Kranz (6-0, 280), who started as a freshman in 2019 before missing his sophomore season. He'll join a group of junior OLs that all started as sophomores in 2020: Christian White (5-10, 250), Jacob Plumb (6-0, 230), Elly Tolliver (6-0, 210), and Phillip Doner (6-2, 260). With the addition of freshman OL Camden Everhart (6-0, 170), this large, strong group looks poised to push some D-lines around in 2021. Looking at his offense as a whole, Drehle says, "With the addition of these young men, the experience we gained last season, and improvement in the offseason, we are excited to see what we can do."

With eight starters back on defense, the outlook on that side of the ball is much the same. "Similar to the offensive side of the ball, we gained a lot of experience last season," Drehle says. "We look to build on that and to use our athleticism to improve on last season's numbers." Those numbers fluctuated wildly in 2020: three times Lincoln kept their opponent to 14 points or fewer and allowed more than 40 points on four separate occasions. The strength this year appears to be the secondary, with loads of bodies back in action, including senior S Levi Campbell (6-0, 185), senior DB Caden Smallwood

Lincoln Cardinals 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Midway	Away
September		
3	Windsor	Home
10	Tipton	Away
17	Scotland County	Home
24	Butler	Home
October		
1	Slater	Away
8	Crest Ridge	Away
15	Wellington-Napoleon	Home
22	Cole Camp	Home
29	Districts	TBA

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and junior DBs Connor Lynde and Caleb Mundy. Junior DB Darren Roberts may get some reps with this group as well.

The entire starting linebacker corps returns to Drehle's favored 3-3 setup. Senior LBs Jon Faulconer (5-8, 150) and David Jones (5-9, 165) combine with junior LB Ross Johnson to make this an exceptionally experienced crew. Junior DE Mack Hesse (6-4, 200) is the lone returning starter on the defensive line. His size and reach make him a menace coming off the edge. Expect senior DL Walker Beaman (6-0, 170) and freshman DL Camden Everhart to make the starting defensive unit as well. With little depth, though, the D-line could be a worry for Drehle in 2021.

Drehle is happy to be settled in at Lincoln, and hoping another rash of injuries won't befall his squad this fall. "We are excited for the upcoming season," he says. "We feel that we gained a lot of experience last year and feel that experience—along with a good offseason—will help us improve this year." Drehle has been successful everywhere he's coached, and Lincoln will be no exception. Expect the team to finish back above .500 this fall.

Pigskin's Pick: 6-3

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Louisiana bulldogs

2020 marked the first year of head coaching for Louisiana's Greg Pitzer. And while the year didn't pan out exactly the way he would have liked it to, Pitzer understands that rarely is the case. "Last season was one filled with highs and lows," Pitzer says. "There were many tough circumstances for everyone due to COVID. After a tough start to the season, we picked up our first ever EMO conference win against Van-Far in Week 5." That was one of the Bulldogs' two victories of the season—they finished with a mark of 2-8. However, Pitzer says, "I feel that we were playing our best football at the end of the season, which is what you always want."

If Louisiana is going to put together a more consistent campaign in 2021, they'll rely heavily on their trove of starters returning to action. On the defensive side of the football, Pitzer and his staff will be looking for ways to significantly improve upon the 39 points per game the Bulldogs surrendered last fall. With six upperclassmen back in starting duty, they are almost assured to be a better, more cohesive unit this year. It'll all start on the D-line, where senior DL Ryan Capps (6-2, 245) is the cornerstone. Capps made the All-Conference Second-Team and All-District First-Team after recording 79 tackles, 14 for loss, and 8 sacks in 2020. His ability to get into the backfield is nearly unparalleled in the EMO. Two new faces will play beside him in the trenches this fall: junior DL Syler Feldewerth (6-1, 210) and freshman DL Ben Nichtula (6-0, 175).

"Our defensive strengths will lie in our ability to come at opponents from different angles and positions on the field," Pitzer says. Junior OLB Wyatt Harrison (5-7, 145) is key to that approach. The Second-Team All-District player compiled 83 tackles and 4 fumble recoveries in an excellent sophomore season. With more muscle on his frame this fall, Harrison is poised to be one of the conference's best defensive players. Junior LB Sheldon Silvey (6-0, 170) is back at linebacker as well. He had 28 tackles last year, 5 of which came for a loss. Junior LB Kenny McCormick (5-9, 170) will also be tipped for a starting spot. Pitzer's defense will boast a deep, talented secondary, led by three senior DBs: Will Sheppard (5-7, 145), Mason Washington (6-3, 170), and Quincy Hutt (5-10, 150). Last season, Sheppard posted 40 tackles, 2 for loss, Washington had 24 tackles and used his good height to secure 2 INTs, and Hutt compiled 25 tackles. Sophomore DB Alex Dzierwa (5-9, 150) is set to join this formidable bunch.

Offensively, "Our strengths will lie in our speed and quickness," Pitzer says. Senior WR Mason Washington is certainly one of the swifter-moving players in the area. He had 25 catches for 334 yards and 8 TDs on his way to First-Team All-Conference and First-Team All-District honors last fall. As on defense, his height makes him a weapon to snag balls above other players. The senior WR/RB Quincy Hutt is also a smooth mover. Hutt posted 18 receptions for 313 yards and 2 TDs last season. Additionally, junior RB Wyatt Harrison used his quickness to compile 631 rushing yards and 5 TDs. This trio of speedy playmakers is going to cause matchup problems for opposing defenses throughout the 2021 season. Junior FB Kenny McCormick and sophomore WR Alex Dzierwa may get some touches as well.

This year, "We will be making an effort to improve the run game and control the clock," Pitzer says. "From there, play-action will be a big part of our passing game." Doing the passing will be senior QB Lucas Martin (5-11, 205), who recently moved over from Clopton.

Class: 1
Conference: Eastern Missouri
Head Coach: Greg Pitzer
Years at School: 1
Record at School: 2-8
Overall Record: 2-8
Offensive Starters Returning: 7
Defensive Starters Returning: 6
Total Returning Lettermen: 8
2020 Overall Record: 2-8

Louisiana Bulldogs 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	North Callaway	Home
September		
3	Montgomery County	Away
10	South Callaway	Away
17	Open	N/A
24	Van-Far	Away
October		
1	MO Military Academy	Home
8	Bowling Green	Home
15	Wright City	Away
22	Mark Twain	Home
29	Districts	TBA



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Pitzer praises Martin's "strong arm and football smarts." Up front, senior OL Ryan Capps will again anchor the O-line, while junior TE Sheldon Silvey will occasionally forgo his blocking duties to act as a ball-catcher. He had 9 receptions for 92 yards last fall. Set for other starting spots up front are junior OL Syler Feldewerth and freshman OL Ben Nichtula. Ultimately, Pitzer sees success for the offense as a fairly simple equation. "We will have to have discipline and execute our assignments," the coach says.

While 2020 certainly wasn't an ideal year for Pitzer, it might've helped to shake the cobwebs out in Louisiana. No rebuilding job ever goes by without a campaign like the one the Bulldogs experienced last fall. "This season we are looking to take another step in the right direction of building our program," Pitzer says. "We have a tough schedule that will prepare us for the district playoffs. Our goal is to focus on the process of what it takes to win and what we can control." Expect a better final record for the Bulldogs in Pitzer's second year in charge.

Pigskin's Pick: 4-4

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Macon tigers

While the Macon football team didn't set the world on fire in 2020, they did quite well, all things considered. In the middle of a pandemic, and under the tutelage of new head coach Jameson Allen, the Tigers finished the season with a respectable record of 3-5. Allen speaks admirably of last year's squad, saying, "We showed great improvement as the season progressed, grabbing some wins and playing some good games against quality opponents."

With nearly two dozen lettermen back for Macon this fall, there is no doubt that Allen and his staff will be elated to have a lot of continuity between the seasons. That will be especially true on offense, where the Tigers had some success instituting Allen's Multiple Spread attack in 2020. The team averaged 220 rushing yards and 230 passing yards per game, putting them in a position to win every week. However, the Tigers had some red zone troubles, and only put up 20 points per game after all that yardage. Lining up under center once again will be junior QB MyKel Linear (5-10, 170). Linear had a breakout sophomore season, landing on the All-Conference team after connecting on 40 of 73 pass attempts for 615 yards. The sublimely athletic Linear showed he can use his legs as well.

The real focal point of the Macon offense, though, is senior WR Chrisjen Riekeberg (5-9, 165). Riekeberg is something of a Swiss army knife for the Tigers, able to line up any number of ways. In 2020, he posted 30 catches for 505 yards and 2 TDs, and rushed 19 times for 110 yards and 5 TDs. He enters 2021 as one of the top prospects in the CCC. The lion's share of the team's carries this year will belong to senior RB Trevin Shrum (6-1, 210). Shrum, a downhill runner who loves to take on tacklers, had 246 yards and 3 TDs on 31 rushing attempts last fall. The final skill-position player returning as a starter is junior WR Landan Cole (6-0, 180). Cole proved to be a reliable target for Linear last fall, hauling in 22 passes for 355 yards and 3 TDs. An exciting newcomer to be on the lookout for is junior WR Bryant Carpenter (5-11, 173), a speedy, athletic player. This is a serious group of playmakers for Allen to build his offense around.

The offensive line, though, comes back light, with just one starter returning: junior C Greg Seipel (5-10, 230). The connection between Seipel and Linear should help the Macon offense to run smoothly in 2021. Joining Seipel in the trenches this fall are junior O-Linemen Cash Mitchell (5-8, 275) and Dalton Cashatt (6-1, 215), and senior OL Owen Milburn (5-10, 225), whom Allen calls the team's hardest worker. Senior TE Bryce Vaught (5-11, 230) and junior TE Maurice Magruder (5-11, 220) will do some blocking and catching as well. It's a simple recipe for offensive success for the Tigers this year. "We will be more athletic and know the system better in year two," Allen says.

The Macon defense will be looking to improve a porous run defense from 2020. Last year's unit allowed 245 rushing yards per contest, to go along with 170 passing yards and 25 points per game. This year, "We will be faster and more athletic," says Allen. "Getting to the ball will be key." The linebacker corps is coming together nicely for the Tigers this offseason. Junior LB Gage Lewis (5-10, 170) will lead this group. He had 62 tackles and 1 fumble recovery last fall. He'll again play alongside senior LB Boden Pillers (5-10, 183), who accrued 49 tackles. The fast, athletic junior LB Maurice Magruber will join them.

Class: 2
Conference: Clarence Cannon
Head Coach: Jameson Allen
Years at School: 1
Record at School: 3-5
Overall Record: 48-50
Offensive Starters Returning: 5
Defensive Starters Returning: 4
Total Returning Lettermen: 23
2020 Overall Record: 3-5

Macon Tigers 2021 Schedule

August		
27	Kirksville	Away
September		
3	Duchesne	Away
10	Palmyra	Home
17	Highland	Away
24	Brookfield	Away
October		
1	South Shelby	Home
8	Monroe City	Away
15	Centralia	Home
22	Clark County	Away
29	Districts	TBA

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Two starters are back in the secondary: senior S Landan Cole and senior S Preston Stewart (5-8, 165), each of whom had an impressive junior season. Cole compiled 38 tackles and 1 INT last fall, while Stewart put together 32 tackles, 2 INTs, and 1 fumble recovery. Up front, the Macon defensive line will be made up of entirely new faces. Senior D-Linemen Bryce Vaught and Owen Milburn will suit up beside junior DLs Dalton Cashatt and Cash Mitchell. Expect a variety of looks from the Tigers' defense this fall.

Extenuating circumstances made it hard for Allen to fully convey his coaching philosophy to the Macon program last year. "We want to create an environment that produces great young men of high character while producing more athletic kids each year," he says. "Love is crucial to our team's goals." After a full year fostering this positive environment, expect Allen and staff to produce a competitive football team in 2021. "We will be better than last year due to our knowledge, athletic ability, and passion for each other," the coach says.

Pigskin's Pick: 4-5

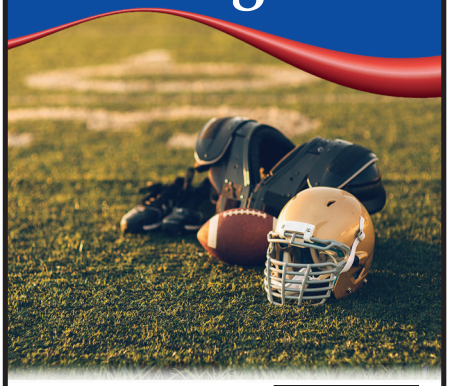
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Marceline tigers

Marceline Head Coach Mark Ross has something most head coaches only dream of—ALL his starters returning from the previous season, on BOTH offense and defense. However, like most head coaches, Coach Ross is always looking for areas where his team can improve, "We lost a couple of very talented seniors from our semi-final run. Above all else, we needed to develop new leaders for our team. We had some kids step up and take major steps on and off the field." Once the coaches have filled all those leadership voids, look for big things from the 2021 Marceline Tigers. Coach Ross and his assistant coaches—Jeff Wright, Dan White, and Blake Linebaugh look to take a team which finished 10-2 and was a 2020 Class 1 quarter-finalist even further in 2021.

In 2019, the Marceline Tigers started 16 sophomores and went all the way to the Class 1 semi-finals where they lost to Lincoln. The 2020 Tigers started 22 juniors and made it to the quarterfinals where they lost to a strong defensive Adrian team. This year, Coach Ross' team will start 22 seniors and are looking for this experience and leadership to pay off even bigger by the end of the 2021 season. According to Coach Ross, "We return all of our starters back on offense and defense and look forward to an exciting year. We have been able to develop more depth in the off-season and have lots of underclassmen that will be vying for playing time this fall. These kids have been in our system for 3-4 years now, and we hope to continue to take steps forward this year." Considering the Tigers' experience, talent and recent accomplishments, taking steps forward from 2019 and 2020 is a definite possibility.

After a lopsided 42-7 loss to Brookfield to open the 2020 season, the Tigers, similar to 2019, went on a dominating 9 game winning streak and they did it in a big way, outscoring opponents 441-108 over those 9 games. The Marceline offense was an absolute powerhouse in 2020, averaging 41 points and almost 400 yards per game (252 rushing / 141 passing). Eight of the eleven offensive starters were named to post-season teams and 7 were All-Conference picks. Leading the Marceline power spread offense again this season is senior quarterback, Jacob Stallo (5-10, 165) who is strong both running and throwing the football. The Tigers are primarily a running team and their top rusher from 2020 is senior running back Hunter Nelson (5-10, 185) whose speed and elusiveness helped him gain 1,500 yards last season with 22 TD's. Versatile senior wide receiver, Wyatt Malloy (6-1, 170) had over 1,000 rushing and receiving yards, combined, in 2020 with 12 touchdowns and looks to improve on those numbers this season. Rounding out the receiving corps are seniors Jace Bixenman (5-10, 160) and Sam Gillman (6-0, 180). Both are quick off the line and look to be major contributors in the Tigers' 2021 offense. Senior tight end, Will Heller (6-2, 215) is a strong blocker and a big, sure-handed target downfield. Much of Marceline's offensive success will be in the hands of their highly experienced O-line—5 seniors who have shown they can handle just about anything opposing defenses bring their way. Center Aidan North (6-0, 245) will be flanked by 2 strong blocking guards in Nathan Cupp (6-0, 205) and Mason Barnett (5-11, 165). At tackle there is quickness and athleticism in both Hunter Quinn (6-1, 210) and Landen Gardner (5-11, 215). The talent and experience of this offensive unit will no doubt wreak havoc on defenses in the Lewis & Clark Conference. As Coach Ross sums it up, "Most of these kids have been starters since their sophomore years and have playoff experience. We have to grow and built up what we have done in previous years."

If the Marceline offense can be considered a powerhouse, the defensive unit is right there with them. After the season-opening loss to Brookfield last season, the Tiger defense turned up the volume, just like the offense, and was fierce over their 9 game winning streak--allowing just 108 points over that streak. Also, like the offense, the D returns all 11 starters. Against the pass, the Tigers allowed only 84 yards per game, while allowing 166 yards per game on the ground. While the defense bent a little versus the run, they did not break—allowing only 15 ppg over the course of the season. In 2021, the coaches are looking for even better results. "We have more depth this season and some of our younger kids have progressed. We look to continue to be aggressive defensively and build on what our kids already know," explains Coach Ross. Up front, the Marceline 3-3-5 scheme features 3 seniors who make up for a lack of overall size with plenty of speed, aggressiveness and athleticism. 1st Team All-Stater, Nathan Cupp (69 tackles / 15.5 TFL in 2020) and All-District DL Brendan Catron (5-10, 185)—71 tackles / 18 TFL / 10 sacks in 2020—are a dynamic duo who put tremendous pressure on opposing offensive lines. Brayden King (5-10, 170) combines with Cupp and Catron for a vicious pass rush and a strong front 3 against opposing rushers. The Tigers have a trio of All-Conference picks at inside linebacker led by All-District ILB, Hunter

Class: 1
Conference: Lewis & Clark
Head Coach: Mark Ross
Years at School: 3
Record at School: 33-6
Overall Record: 33-6
Offensive Starters Returning: 11
Defensive Starters Returning: 11
Total Returning Lettermen: 21
2020 Overall Record: 10-2

Marceline Tigers 2021 Schedule

August		
27	Scotland County	Away
September		
3	Brookfield	Away
10	Quincy Notre Dame	Away
17	Fayette	Home
24	Paris	Home
October		
1	Northeast (KC)	Away
8	Salisbury	Home
15	Westran	Away
22	Harrisburg	Away
29	Districts	TBA

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Nelson who recorded 90 tackles and 13 TFL last season. Nelson is joined inside by fellow seniors Mason Barnett and Hunter Quinn; all three are excellent in pursuing runners down the line as well as strong tacklers. At outside linebacker are a pair of seniors who are equally good in pass coverage as they are against the run—Jaxon Schmitt (5-10, 200) and Wyatt Malloy (55 tackles and 4.5 TFL in 2020). The defensive backfield will be led by 2nd Team All-State DB, Sam Gillman who posted 32 tackles and 4 picks a year ago. Joining Gillman will be All-District selection, Jace Bixenman as well as Jack McCauslin (5-9, 160). These 3 excellent coverage backs played a major role in the Tigers' stingy 84 passing yards per game against last season.

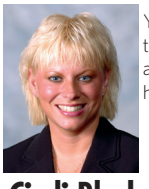
There will be a number of newcomers looking for playing time this season. Three who can expect to see some significant reps on Friday nights are junior ILB/TE, Ryder Gooch (5-10, 160), junior ILB/OL Tanner Sayre (5-10, 160) and sophomore RB/DB, Caleb Stallo (5-10, 160). Marceline looks poised to build on two strong seasons with all their starters coming back in 2021. Coach Ross has a simple coaching philosophy, stating, "We play an extremely aggressive, fundamental style of offense, defense, and special teams." If the Marceline Tigers can execute this simple strategy to their full potential—considering their overall levels of talent, experience and leadership—they have a strong chance to be playing football late into the fall.

Pigskin Pick: 9-0

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Mark Twain tigers

Head coaching jobs are hard. First-time head coaching jobs are even harder. However, if that first time happens when you're on familiar ground, with familiar faces around you, the task might be a bit more manageable. That's certainly what Austin Leake will be hoping as he takes over the head coach job for the Mark Twain Tigers in 2021. Leake, it just so happens, is a 2009 Mark Twain graduate as well as a former wideout and defensive back for the Tigers.

Also playing a part in helping to ease Leake's transition is the wealth of upperclassmen the Tigers return in 2021. Mark Twain lost just two senior players to graduation last fall. The defense comes back almost entirely intact, with nine starting players suiting up once again for the Tigers, a good portion of them up front in Leake's 3-3-5 formation. "Our biggest defensive strength is our front six," Leake says. "We return all those players from last season and return a solid run defense."

Anchoring the line will be junior NT Coleman Epperson (5-9, 185), who had a standout sophomore season. Epperson's 43 tackles, 6 for loss, and 1 sack earned him a spot on the All-Conference Second-Team. Junior DE Clayton Turnbull (6-1, 260) will look to build on his 27 tackles, 7 for loss, and 1 sack from a year ago. Expect freshman DL Brayden Moss (6-2, 225) to play a significant role for the Tigers in the year ahead. Leake calls Moss a "promising, talented" player. Two Second-Team All-Conference players are back in linebacker spots as well. Senior LB Dawson Talbott (6-2, 230) had an astounding 83 tackles, 10 for loss, 2.5 sacks, and 1 forced fumble in 2020, while fellow senior LB Trey Monroe (6-2, 225) added 62 tackles, 5 for loss, 2.5 sacks, and 3 forced fumbles. The size and experience of these two players will create nightmares for opposing teams in the middle of the field.

While the front of the Mark Twain defense is loaded, the secondary might well also be stacked. Senior S Payton Hawkins (5-10, 185) was Second-Team All-Conference in 2020 after accruing 36 tackles, 1 for loss, 1 interception, and 1 forced fumble. Senior S Landon Moss (5-10, 185) accounted for an incredible 79 tackles, 9 for loss, and 1 sack, and junior S Lakoda Preston (6-0, 170) pitched in with 29 tackles, 1 for loss, 1 sack, and 1 forced fumble. Elsewhere in the defensive backfield are junior CB Conner Eckler (5-11, 175), who had 13 tackles and 1 INT last year, and junior CB Jaxen Lake (5-11, 160), who tallied 10 tackles, 1 of which was for a loss. The depth and playing experience of this unit as a whole bodes well for Tigers fans in 2021.

Offensively, Mark Twain brings back nearly the same amount of experience, with eight starters returning. That includes the entire offensive line. Senior RG Trey Monroe had a spectacular junior season up front, and landed on the All-Conference First-Team. He'll be flanked by sophomore RT Wyatt Evans (6-0, 245), who had a fine freshman campaign. Senior C Mark Davenport (6-2, 260) is a sure thing as a snapper, and junior LG Clayton Turnbull will be tasked with helping to protect the blind side. As on defense, expect freshman OL Brayden Moss to see the field early and often.

Senior QB Payton Hawkins enters his third year of signal-calling duties for the Tigers. After a breakout sophomore season, Hawkins' numbers ticked back a bit last year, with the quarterback completing 11 passes for 139 yards and 2 TDs, and running 27 times for 83 yards and 2 TDs. But with one of the better rushers in the area behind him, Hawkins

Class: 1
Conference: EMO
Head Coach: Austin Leake
Years at School: First
Overall Record: 0-0
Offensive Starters Returning: 8
Defensive Starters Returning: 9
Total Returning Lettermen: 19
2020 Overall Record: 5-6

Mark Twain Tigers 2021 Schedule

August		
27	South Callaway	Home
September		
3	True Divine Word Acad.	Away
10	Van-Far	Away
17	MO Military Academy	Home
24	Bowling Green	Home
October		
1	Wright City	Away
8	Montgomery County	Home
15	North Callaway	Home
22	Louisiana	Away
29	Districts	TBA


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didn't need to do much more than be a caretaker. Senior RB Landon Moss had a big junior year, running the ball 162 times for 982 yards and 7 TDs—and finding a spot on the All-Conference Second-Team. His 6.1 yards per carry is excellent at any level, and his numbers are almost certain to increase in the year ahead. Other skill-position players who will make an impact are the versatile senior HB/TE Dawson Talbott and junior WR Lakoda Preston. Talbott had 9 receptions for 76 yards in 2020, while Preston showed himself to be a real multipurpose threat, carrying the ball 20 times for 114 yards and tallying 4 catches for 92 yards. Preston had 4 total TDs on the season.

Even with so much emotion over coming home to coach, Leake succinctly sums up the season ahead. "I'm excited with the effort our kids have put in this offseason and look forward to trying to improve upon our previous season," he says. "We return a large chunk of juniors and seniors from last year's team, so I believe we could make some strides." Expect them to—and expect Leake to be a natural fit at his alma mater.

Pigskin's Pick: 6-3

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Marshall owls

The Marshall Owls finished the 2020 football season with a 2-8 record while competing in Class 4 in the NCMC. 2020 marked back to back 2 win seasons. The Owls' Head Coach Adam Huse is entering his 5th season at Marshall. Unfortunately, he has not been able to pull the Owls out of their stretch of below .500 seasons. After taking some positive steps in the right direction 2020 they just could not win those close games. Marshall is more than excited to get back on the field in a normal, non-COVID season. Here is what Coach Huse had to say about last season: "2020 was a challenging season due to COVID restrictions and never knowing how things could go. Our kids did a great job and we were able to get all 10 games in." Following their 2020 season, Marshall is looking to come out of their shell and produce more wins in 2021. Assisting Coach Huse is BJ Costlet, Eric Brayman, Will Grace, Jermaine Solomon, Andrew Winston, and Tristian Ramberg. This group of coaches will help improve Marshall's game, and produce quality football on offense and defense. The Owls will have 12 returning lettermen and 10 returning starters. 6 on offense and 4 on defense. Coach Huse believes that their experience will shine light on their newcomers and produce quality opportunities for a successful football season. "We improved as a team, but lost many close football games last season. We were very proud of how our kids fought all year long," Coach Huse said. This positivity weaves its way into the players and coach's heads and can help produce some of Marshall's best football. Expect the Owls to improve in the 2021 season.

On offense, the Marshall Owls were able to produce and average of 23 points, 75 rushing yards, and 150 passing yards per game in 2020. Unfortunately, that was not enough to pull through in close games. There is plenty of room for improvement though. With 6 returning starters and plenty of new talent, the Owls look to compete with the best in their conference. On the offensive line, Junior Michael Carver (6-4, 255) and Senior Owen Kiso (6-2, 195) will be returning. Together they bring the mass and weight to withstand adapting defenses. They will be able to move laterally and quickly in order to protect their backfield. Two Senior wideouts Axavier Reed (5-9, 180) and Dylan Arends (5-8, 160) are returning for their final season. They were big contributors to the passing offense in 2020. With new players needing to step up in a big way, these seniors will need to remain confident and stable in 2021. They bring speed, agility, and a high football IQ. Returning to tight end are Seniors Zach Martinez (6-1, 225) and Andre Smith (6-1, 190). Again, their experience on the line and on routes is an important inclusion to an improving offense. With bigger size and that same speed and agility as the wideouts, Marshall can focus on quality passing. The newcomers also have weight on their shoulders to step up in a big way in 2021. Coach Huse stated, "We return skill players and a few offensive linemen. We will need a new QB after graduating our 3 year starter. We will look to be a lot more balanced this year." Expect the Marshall Owls to run "multiple" looks on offense in 2021.

The Marshall defense in 2020 performed underwhelmingly. Coach Huse wants the team to focus on basic defensive skills so the newcomers can quickly learn and become effective against opponents. Allowing over 20 points per game is not what Marshall wants to consistently do. With major players graduating, Coach Huse and the Owls look for the newcomers to learn and produce next season. "We were hit hard by graduation, but our top DB and LB are returning for us this season. We will need a new DL due to graduation. We need our younger, less experienced players to step up and learn quickly," Coach Huse informed. Returning linebackers are Seniors Zach Martinez and Andre Smith. As mentioned before, their massive stature and underlying speed will help defend against the opponent's run game and passing game. The linebackers are known as the captains of the on field defense, so having those 4 year veterans will help Marshall improve. The defensive back position will be held strong by 2 returning senior starters, Axavier Reed and Rowdy Souder (5'9, 150). They bring speed, agility, and high football IQ as well. The Owl's defense is set to take on the toughest tasks in the NCMC. They are focusing on basics, but expect returning starters and newcomers to

Class: 4
Conference: NCMC
Head Coach Adam Huse
Years at School: 4
Record at School: 7-33
Offensive Returning Starters: 6
Defensive Returning Starters: 4
Total Returning Lettermen: 12
2020 Record: 2-8

Marshall Owls 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Chillicothe	Home
September		
3	Center	Home
10	Odessa	Away
17	Mexico	Home
24	Kirksville	Away
October		
1	Moberly	Home
8	Fulton	Home
15	Hannibal	Away
22	Cameron	Away
29	Districts	TBA



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gel and create a high speed, strong defense. Coach Huse and the Owls will be more than ready to fight hard every game next season. Expect Marshall to run a "3-4" type defense in 2021. Some newcomers expecting to see action are juniors Issac Jackson- RB/LB (5-11,160) and Brenden Weaver-RB/LB (6-1, 180) and sophomores Jaxson Case-QB (5-9, 160), Tashaun Edmund- OL/DL (5-7, 225) Brenden Marquess-RB/LB (5-10,160), Stephen Caviness- WR/DB (6-0, 160).

The Marshall Owls have a long stretch of improvements and team building to do in 2021. Coach Huse and his players are going to be tested by quality competition, but mostly by themselves. It will be important for them to come together as a new team and build from the ground up. Expect some struggles, but their game will come together and might be able to shock some opponents. "We hope to become balanced on offense and work to control the ball to help our young defense along the way," stated Coach Huse "We have a very tough schedule and will have to get our young players ready to play right away. Over the past 2 years we have lost 7 games by one score or less. If we are able to figure out how to win those close games we can have a very successful season."

Pigskin's Pick: 3-6

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Mexico bulldogs

The Mexico Bulldogs are coming off back-to-back-to back .500 seasons, 6-6 in 2018 and 2019 and 5-5 in 2020, yet despite an overall lack of depth, Head Coach Steve Haag, is looking to his experienced and talented veterans and several newcomers to help the 'Dogs post a winning record this coming season. Consistent play will be the biggest key to success for the Mexico Bulldogs—especially consistent play on defense. Overall, the offense has managed to thrive under Haag's Flexbone scheme, but too often for the Bulldogs, what the offense takes, the defense gives away. The Bulldogs will have 11 lettermen returning from 2020—5 starters on offense and 6 on defense so they will be looking for some new faces to step up and make big plays this season. If the coaches can shore up the D and the offense can continue to produce, Coach Haag's "good year" could well happen for the Bulldogs in 2021.

Mexico's offense has shown growth in Coach Haag's Flexbone over the last few years. In 2019, the Bulldogs averaged 299 ypg and 27 ppg, while in 2020 they improved putting up 378 ypg and 29 ppg. Coach Haag believes he has the right young man at QB with junior Ty Sims (6-2, 200). Sims took over the starting duties for games 9 and 10 last season and showed he was the Bulldogs quarterback of the future, carrying the ball 17 times for 81 yards (4.8 average) and 2 touchdowns as well as completing 26 passes for 183 yards and 1 TD. Senior running back, Michael White looks to shoulder much of the rushing for the Bulldogs as he ran for 349 yards on 64 carries (5 TD). As with most teams, O-line play is a major factor in offensive production and the Mexico Bulldogs are no different. The Bulldogs have 3 returning starters on the offensive line led by JR Kendyr Taylor (5-10, 230)—a 2nd Team All-Conference and All-District performer in 2020—is a tremendous blocker and opens holes for his backs. Joining Taylor up front is senior Deacon Haag (5-10, 240) and junior Owen Paden (5-10, 230). "We return 3 offense lineman who did a really good job for us last year. We have some veteran options at the other two spots that should fill in nicely. Most of our RB's have had varsity experience, but some will be asked to carry more of the load this year and we are excited to see them in a bigger role. Ty Sims our QB started our last two games and gained valuable experience. He has shown growth as a player and a leader. He should do a nice job leading and running the offense," says Coach Haag as he reflects on his offensive unit for this coming year.

There are three players Coach Haag expects to carry a good deal of that load at running back. Senior Jaden Hatfield (5-10, 190) will be expected to fill the Bulldogs' vacancy at fullback. He has stepped up his game over the summer and has really shown an ability to play a physical game. There are also a pair of juniors who should see plenty of reps out of the Bulldog backfield. Anthony Shivers (5-7, 150), "a dynamic player in a small package," ran for 310 yards and 2 TDs a year ago. As well, Andrew Runge (5-8, 160), will be asked to bring his talents to the offensive backfield.

The defense which, a year ago allowed an average of 325 ypg (144 rush/181 pass) and 31 ppg. They struggled with their physical game and their tackling. As Coach Haag says, "We have to be more consistent. We have to be more physical and better tacklers! We should fill some openings with veterans who have played some varsity snaps, but our depth is not great, so we will have to be in shape and depend on some youth to help us." The good news for the coaches is they have several experienced, athletic starters coming back and have a solid base upon which to build this year. The Bulldogs' defensive scheme, this year, will vary depending on the situation. Coach Haag will employ both a 3-3 and a 3-5 set. The D-line only has one starter returning, but he's good one. Senior Deacon Haag was a 2nd Team All-Conference and All-District Selection a year ago when he posted 32 tackles and 2 sacks. Haag is strong and quick for a big guy; he's particularly effective against the run and has the quickness to penetrate and put pressure on opposing QB's. Expecting to play a major role on the Mexico D-line are juniors Kendyr Taylor and Owen Paden.

The biggest returning impact player on D for the Bulldogs is junior DB Michael White. White posted 84 tackles in just 8 games last season—an amazing number for a DB—and finished the season as a 1st Team All-Conference and All-District selection. Joining White in the Bulldog defensive backfield will be junior CB, Anthony Shivers. Shivers may lack size, but is an explosive, athletic player from whom the coaches are expecting big things. The Bulldogs will need linebackers and they have several returning—all started as sophomores. With 58 tackles in 2020, junior OLB Andrew Runge is definitely a leader on D. He is quick, athletic and a serious hard-hitting tackler. Junior Jaden Hatfield (27 tackles) is a strong, physical player. Juniors Morgan Grubb (5-11, 180) (31 tackles) and Matt McCurdy (5-11, 180) (20 tackles) round out the returning

Class: 3
Conference: NCMC
Head Coach: Steve Haag
Years at School: 21 (8 as HC)
Record at School: 51-28
Overall Record: 51-28
Offensive Starters Returning: 5
Defensive Starters Returning: 6
Total Returning Lettermen: 11
2020 Overall Record: 5-5

Mexico Bulldogs 2021 Schedule

August		
27	Centralia	Away
September		
3	Southern Boone	Home
10	Orchard Farm	Home
17	Marshall	Away
24	Hannibal	Home
October		
1	Fulton	Away
8	Kirksville	Away
15	Moberly	Home
22	Warrenton	Away
29	Districts	TBA

Good Luck
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LB's. Expecting to take a lot of reps at LB this season is junior Ty Sims. Considering the question marks the Bulldogs have on defense this coming season, they have the experience and athletic ability to make those adjustments. Their head coach seems to have the right philosophy for this season's Mexico defensive unit: "Keep it simple, play physical, and have fun."

While they are coming off 3 consecutive .500 seasons, the Bulldogs are looking to turn the corner in 2021 and shed their also-ran status in the NCMC. On the offensive side of the football, they have the experience, the ability and the weapons to grind up a lot of yardage and to score a lot of points. The offense has improved consistently over the last 4 seasons and there is no reason to doubt they won't continue that improvement this season. The big key to the Bulldogs' success will be their performance on D. Simply put, they have to be much stronger against both the run and the pass. Their head coach points out the need for more physical play and much better tackling. The defense must control the opposition, especially in the red zone much better and allow about 10 fewer points per game. Physical play and aggressiveness will also lead to more take-aways. Coach Haag sums up his main concerns and the Bulldogs' keys to success: "Depth is a real concern this year. We like the players we have, but they are going to be expected to play a lot. If we can do the little things, improve our physical play and tackling we should have a good year. Everyone will need to be in shape to play 48 minutes every Friday!"

Pigskin Pick: 5-4

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MO Military Acad. colonels

This fall, a new coach will patrol the sidelines for Missouri Military Academy, with Mike Pfeifer taking over as head coach for the Fighting Colonels. This has been a trend of late as the Colonels have had coaching turnover the last few years. Even with the coaching carousel MMA was able to have a successful campaign in a crazy 2020 season. They went 5-4 which was the first time in several years they finished above .500. They registered their biggest win in week 4 versus a solid Mark Twain team, which sparked a four game winning streak. They hosted their first ever district game under the current setup, but alas the promising season came to an abrupt end with a 41-14 loss to a well prepared Hermann team in Districts. Enter the new coach, Mike Pfeifer. He didn't have the luxury of preparing for this season like many other coaches for two reasons; #1 Many of MMA's players do not spend the summer in Mexico, MO, they tend to migrate back home and prepare individually for the season and #2 He was hired just a week before practices began. Pfeifer brings coaching experience with him and comes in with a military background as well, which should help him to connect with the students, players and culture at MMA. Fighting Colonels.

The MMA offense averaged an astounding 36 points per game in 2020 and were one of the leaders in Class 2 in yards from scrimmage and points scored. The main reason the squad so successful was because of their senior-laden team and All-State player Ricky Padron. The issue now is that those seniors have graduated and Padron has left the program and move out of state. That leaves many questions for Coach Pfeifer and his assistant coaches Treavonne Smith and Steve Scoot to answer. Coach Pfeifer states his offensive philosophy simply "Offense will place an emphasis on the run, using the passing game to keep teams honest." Junior QB Jeremy Ansell (5-10, 180) will steady the offense if he can utilize has arm and legs. A pair of senior receivers are a big key in the success of the passing game; WR Noah Corzine and Mauricio Gutierrez who will line up at tight end. Gutierrez will be called on to block most of the time and go out for an occasional pass. Junior wide receiver Gabriel Canonico (6-0, 145) will be a go-to target in the passing game and he is a solid perimeter blocker. The O-line will be formed around senior guard Noah Johnson and junior tackle Jose Elizondo. The line is where the most help is needed immediately and Coach Pfeifer and his staff will spend most of camp sorting it out. Look for seniors Jacob Merritt and Jackson Suggs to be in the mix on the line as well.

The defense allowed an average of 29 points per game in 2020. "Defensively we will be aggressive, which will hopefully lead to turnovers."

Senior DE Jacob Merritt and

Class: 2
Conference: Independent
Head Coach: Mike Pfeifer
Years at School: First
Offensive Starters Returning: 3
Defensive Starters Returning: 3
Total Returning Lettermen: 5
2020 Overall Record: 5-4

MO Military Academy 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Russellville	Home
September		
3	Highland	Away
10	Tolton	Home
17	Mark Twain	Away
24	Confluence Prep	Home
October		
1	Louisiana	Away
8	Central (Springfield)	Away
15	Crystal City	Away
22	Salisbury	Home
29	Districts	TBA

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fellow senior DT Jackson Suggs, will stabilize the D-line. Senior Noah Johnson and junior Jose Elizondo will also possibly be in the rotation along the line.

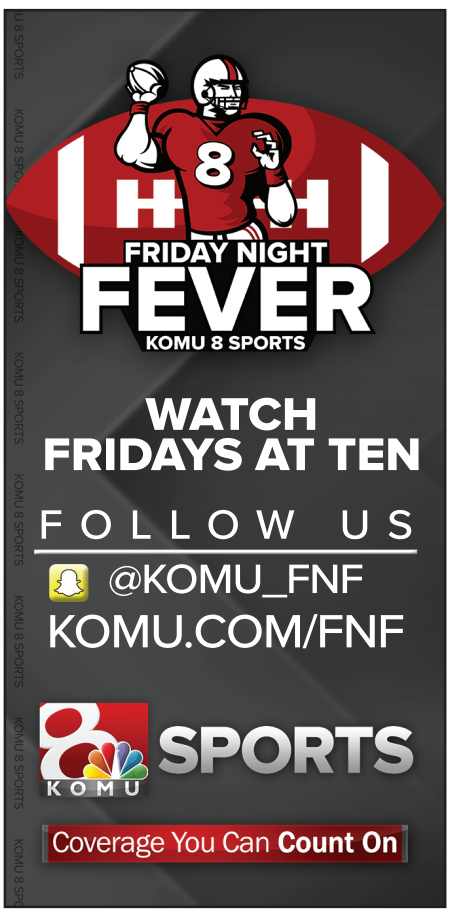
The Defensive secondary will possibly feature a rotation of juniors Jeremy Ansell and Gabriel Canonico and seniors Noah Corzine and Mauricio Gutierrez.

New faces abound at Missouri Military Academy, not least of all that of the head coach himself. With Coach Pfeifer's experience in both football and the military he understands the task before him. It's a daunting one with the deck stacked against him, especially with little time to prepare before the season even gets underway. With MMA's enrollment being finalized just before press time, this line-up could change in many ways. Additional cadets would help the cause, but a lack of returnees could send the Colonels back to their days of struggles.

Pigskin Pick: 2-7

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Moberly spartans

In his six years at the helm of the program at Moberly, Head Coach Cody McDowell has put together a nice run of football teams. The 2020 version was one of his best. “Last year was a special season with a special group of kids,” McDowell says. “And anytime you can win a conference championship, especially in our conference, those are things that stay with you forever.” McDowell then acknowledged the wider circumstances of playing football through a pandemic. “Unfortunately, due to the nature of a season dealing with COVID, a lot of people weren’t able to come watch due to the restrictions and limitations everybody had to work around. Unfortunately, we came up short in the district championship, but still had a pretty good run.”

Moberly graduated a load of talent after last season, and McDowell and his staff will be working overtime to find and integrate replacements for this fall. “I don’t know if we are as young as we are inexperienced,” McDowell says. “Our upperclassmen are starting to step up, it’s just going to take some time for them to learn, grow, and accept the risk of leadership.”

McDowell is grateful to have size and experience back on the offensive line in 2021. “I think our strength will be up front,” he says. Senior O-Linemen Brayden Price (6-0, 240) and Parker Armstrong (5-9, 230) will be the bedrock of the team’s offense. Among the players competing for open spots on the line are seniors Adrean Carr (6-2, 220), Danny Taylor (6-3, 225), and Beau Garrett (6-1, 210), juniors Rick Huff (6-1, 200) and Michael Goff (6-0, 210), and sophomores Zach Cox (5-11, 190) and Gage Fallaw (5-10, 195).

At the skill spots, senior WR Martez Nabors (6-3, 160) is the lone returning starter. Nabors nabbed 3 catches for 31 yards in 2020, and his height should make him the team’s premier red zone target this fall. Senior WRs Demarcus Gilson (6-1, 170) and Mar’Sean Winn (6-0, 165), junior WR Landon Andrews (6-0, 165), and sophomore WR Nick Kessler (5-10, 150) could all get looks out wide as well. Senior TE Devon Huff (6-0, 200) is the likely starter at tight end, with junior TE Gannon White (5-11, 190) and sophomore TE Gabe Flood (5-10, 150) acting as backups.

Two players are battling it out for quarterback duties: senior QB Dakotah Courtney (6-0, 155) and junior QB Collin Huffman (6-1, 175). A battle is raging for the ball-carrying spots in McDowell’s Power Option as well. Senior RB Nolan Garven (5-10, 165) and junior RBs Derieus Wallace (5-10, 175) and Jonah Black (6-0, 160) all look capable of carrying the load. Junior RBs Hunter Boots (5-11, 160) and JaVaughn Briscoe (5-10, 215), along with sophomore RB Chris Alexander (5-9, 150), add depth. “We take a lot of pride in running the ball, so our guys up front are going to have to gel quickly and our ball carriers are going to have to make plays,” McDowell says. “There are lots of opportunities, so it should be exciting.”

“Similar to the offensive side of the ball, opportunities will be everywhere for kids to play on defense,” says McDowell. Senior DB Martez Nabors and junior DB Derieus Wallace have starting spots secured in the secondary. Nabors had 14 tackles and 1 forced fumble last fall, while Wallace went for 38 tackles, 2 forced fumbles, and 2 fumble recoveries. That unit will be bolstered by senior DBs Demarcus Gilson, Dakotah Courtney, and Mar’Sean Winn, junior DBs Collin Huffman, Landon Andrews, and Hunter Boots, and sophomore DBs Chris Alexander and Nick Kessler.

Class: 4
Conference: North Central Conference
Head Coach: Cody McDowell
Years at School: 6
Record at School: 41-26
Overall Record: 69-42
Offensive Starters Returning: 3
Defensive Starters Returning: 3
Total Returning Lettermen: 11
2020 Overall Record: 8-2

Moberly Spartans 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Smith-Cotton	Home
September		
3	Osage	Away
10	Excelsior Springs	Home
17	Kirksville	Away
24	Fulton	Home
October		
1	Marshall	Away
8	Hannibal	Home
15	Mexico	Away
22	Troy	Away
29	Districts	TBA

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Anchoring the D-line will be senior DL Brayden Price. He had 25 tackles, 3 sacks, 1 forced fumble, and 1 fumble recovery in 2020. Joining him in the trenches will be senior DLs Adrean Carr and Beau Garrett, junior DLs Rick Huff, Gannon White, and JaVaughn Briscoe, and sophomore DLs Zach Cox and Gage Fallaw. The team's final returning starter is junior LB Jonah Black. In a nice sophomore campaign, Black posted 41 tackles and 1 INT. The linebacker corps will be rounded out by senior LBs Nolan Garven and Devon Huff, with sophomore LB Gabe Flood also in the mix. Says McDowell, "Our depth issues will have to be resolved by young guys stepping up and competing. How well they gel and play together will determine how successful we are on defense."

Moberly is young in 2021—quite probably McDowell's youngest squad since taking over. That'll pose new challenges for the coach and his staff, but present new opportunities for a slew of underclassmen. "Our kids have a done a pretty good job realizing the opportunities in front of them," McDowell says, "so it should be a fun and competitive process heading into the season." While Moberly won't reach last season's heights, they'll be a tough out nonetheless.

Pigskin's Pick: 6-3

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Monroe City panthers

The Monroe City Panthers had an outstanding run last season, and now they're looking to do it again. Coach David Kirby is looking forward to his 10th season with the Panthers, and also a shot at the state title. "Solid year only losses were to Class 3 Centralia and Class 2 State Semi-finalists Palmyra," Coach Kirby said. "Several young players gained great amounts of Varsity experience."

The Panthers have a chemistry like no other. Half of the returners are Juniors and Seniors that played with each other over the years. Monroe City's offense has 6 returners, running the infamous double wing T. Last year, they scored an average of 33.2 points per game, ran for 312 yards per game and had 102 passing yards per game. "We will be utilizing our speed and athleticism," said Coach Kirby. "We have numerous targets QB Kyle Hays can throw to stretch the field." Last year, at quarterback Hays (5-11, 155) had a successful junior season, throwing for 1,200 yards, scoring 12 touchdowns, rushing for 300 yards and scoring one TD. Senior running back Josh Talton (6-1, 185) was an All-State Running back, rushing for 900 yards and scoring 12 TDs. Junior fullback Ceaton Pennewell (6-0, 205) ran for 900 yards as well and scored 14 TDs. The main target that Hays will be able to look at this year is Senior Tight End Deion White (6-1, 175). Last year, he had 350 receiving yards and five touchdowns. The wing T wouldn't work without the help of the big boys up front as well. Senior Bo Patterson (6-3, 215) and Junior Jag Hays (6-1, 175) will lead the way for this offensive line. "Running backs Josh Talton and Ceaton Pennewell are both return All-Conference backs who can run with speed and power," coach Kirby said. "Our offense is built around the run, but we are very multiple in what we can do."

On the defensive side, the Panthers will run a 4-3 style defense. "We have numerous returning starters that understand our scheme," coach Kirby said. "We will play fast and look to put many hats at the point of attack." Last year, the Panthers only allowed opponents 180 rushing yards and 19 points per game. This team's secondary is the main core of this defense. They only allowed 64 passing yards per game last year. Hays not only can play quarterback, he is also a shut down defensive back as well. Josh Talton is also a star at defensive back, achieving All-State honors. His brother, senior DB Josiah Talton (6-0, 155) is another defensive back who will make a huge impact on this defense. Last year, he earned All-District honors. Another All-District DB who will be an asset to the Panthers is Sophomore Waylon DeGrave (6-2, 175). Ceaton Pennewell will be the captain of this defense from his linebacker spot. Last year, he was an All-State linebacker for the Panthers. Holding the defensive line down will be Senior Will Ball (5-10, 190), Junior Jag Hays (6-1, 175), and Junior Landon Holland (5-8, 190). Last season, the Panthers defense held opponents to 19 points per game, so look for this 2021 group of defenders to play fast and furious and improve on that bottom line.

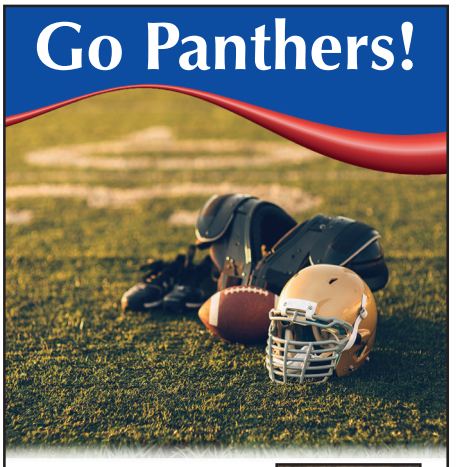
The Panthers also have some more upperclassmen who will contribute to the offense. They also have some athletes from different sports coming to help out. Senior Ashton Wallace (5-11, 190) will play along the offensive line. He made huge strides as a junior and had a great

Classification: 2
Conference: Clarence Cannon
Head Coach: David Kirby
Years at School: 9
Record at School: 65-32
Offensive Starters Returning: 6
Defensive Starters Returning: 7
Total Returning Letterman: 15
2020 Overall Record: 8-3
2020 Conference Record: 4-2

Monroe City Panthers 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	St. Plus (Festus)	Away
September		
3	Winfield	Away
10	South Shelby	Home
17	Centralia	Away
24	Palmyra	Home
October		
1	Brookfield	Away
8	Macon	Home
15	Clark Co.	Home
22	Highland	Away
29	Districts	TBD



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offseason. Coach Kirby said that he looks to be a great contributor on both sides of the ball. Junior Landon Utterback (5-9, 160) will play running back and linebacker. He saw limited time as a sophomore, but he played fast and aggressive. The Panthers also added two All-State track sprinters; Junior Cameron Jones (5-9, 145) and Senior Elmer Martinez (5-10, 160) to the roster. Both will be playing running back and defensive back for the Panthers. They will add depth along with their outstanding speed to the backfields and return game.

The Panthers are looking forward to having another great run in the '21 season. They have dangerous weapons and a very disciplined team. Coach Kirby is pushing this powerhouse to be fundamentally sound and play to their fullest potential. The Panthers will need it week to week as their top conference rivals, Palmyra and Centralia also return strong teams. Look for Monroe City to make some noise and a strong playoff push.

Pigskin's Pick: 7-2

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Montgomery County wildcats

Before John Klekamp, head coach of the Montgomery County Wildcats, even begins to talk about his team's 2020 campaign, he first focuses on the bigger picture. "The 2020 season was one that we were very thankful for, as the country dealt with a pandemic and many programs scrambled to schedule games," he says. Amazingly, "We played our entire schedule as it was originally scheduled." A 1-2 start gave way to a five-game winning streak which led to a heart-pounding ending. "The finish to the season was an exciting, thrilling, and disappointing loss," Klekamp says, referring to a 50-49 heartbreaker in the district semifinals. In 2021, much of the team is back in action for Montgomery County.

Incredibly, nine starters return to the Wildcats offense, led by junior QB Adam Czerniewski (6-0, 170). As a sophomore, Czerniewski came into his own, posting a 60% completion rate for 983 yards and 14 TDs, while also rushing for 604 yards and 5 TDs. Czerniewski was named All-District for his breakout efforts. Also back is senior RB Logan Hutcheson (5-10, 175), "perhaps the player most teams look to stop," says Klekamp. The All-Conference and All-District Hutcheson rushed for 1,175 yards and 19 TDs in 2020—and he did so in just 9 games.

And those aren't the only playmakers back for more. Montgomery County returns its top three wideouts as well. Senior WR Drake Smith (6-0, 185) is the probably the standout of the bunch, having made the All-Conference and All-District teams after compiling 562 yards and 7 TDs last fall. Fellow senior WR Ty Leu (6-0, 175) wasn't far behind, though, with 436 yards, 6 TDs, and All-Conference honors to his name. Junior WR Travis Hill (5-9, 170) pitched in as well, accruing 138 yards and 4 TDs. Newcomers to the skill positions are senior RB Gavin Mendoza (5-8, 150), junior QB Dominic Luttrell (5-10, 155), and sophomore WRs Mason Leu (5-10, 155) and Weston Marshall (6-1, 155). Senior TE/FB Thomas Klekamp (5-11, 200), yet another All-District performer, will get some pass looks and rushing attempts along with his blocking duties.

Speaking of blocking, "Like every offense, the success of our offensive unit will be determined by the work of the offensive line," Klekamp says. Multiple starters are back, including senior OT Evan Abercrombie (6-2, 220), who was named to the All-Conference and All-District teams; junior OG/OT Gunner Sexton (6-5, 240), an All-District player; and junior C Harrison Bishop (5-10, 200). Other players shooting for starting roles are senior OL Josh Gilbert (6-1, 380); sophomore OL James Pollard (5-11, 270); and sophomore OL Connor Finke (6-2, 240). Size, experience, and talent are scattered generously across the MOCO offense. Expect them to match—or even surpass—the gaudy 257 rushing yards, 127 passing yards, and 37.5 points per game they averaged last season.

Defensively, the Wildcats welcome back seven starters, anchored by senior LB Trenton Clardy (5-11, 195), who made the All-District and All-Conference teams after a season in which he had 97 tackles, 17 for loss, 1 sack, 2 forced fumbles, and 2 fumble recoveries. Senior LB/SS Thomas Klekamp will join Clardy in the center of the field. Klekamp had 21 tackles, 6 for loss, 1 sack, and 3 forced fumbles over 3 starts in 2020. Sophomore LB James Pollard will move to a full-time starting spot in 2021. He had 26 tackles, 3 for loss last fall. Bolstering this group are senior OLB Gavin Mendoza and junior OLB/SS Brendan Luttrell (5-11, 165).

The Wildcats D-line got crucial experience in 2020, and will look to better

Class: 2
Conference: Eastern Missouri
Head Coach: John Klekamp
Years at School: 23 (12 as Head Coach)
Record at School: 56-63
Overall Record: 56-63
Offensive Starters Returning: 9
Defensive Starters Returning: 7
Total Returning Lettermen: 19
2020 Overall Record: 7-4

Montgomery County 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Hermann	Away
September		
3	Louisiana	Home
10	Bowling Green	Home
17	South Callaway	Away
24	Wright City	Away
October		
1	Greenville (IL)	Home
8	Mark Twain	Away
15	Van-Far	Home
22	North Callaway	Away
29	Districts	TBA



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their numbers this year. Senior DT Blake LaBrier (5-8, 190) had 16 tackles, 3 for loss; junior DT Levi Larkin (6-2, 260) added 13 tackles with 1 for a loss; senior DE Nick Saak (5-11, 190) posted 11 tackles, 3 for loss, and 1 sack; and junior DE Matt Clark (6-4, 185) made a name for himself as a sophomore with 29 tackles, 3 for loss, 1 sack, and 1 fumble recovery. Senior DT Josh Gilbert is set for an increased role as well. Only one player is back in the secondary, but he's a solid one: senior CB Keenan James (5-11, 160), who had 32 tackles, 2 INTs, and 1 forced fumble on his way to the All-Conference squad. He'll lead a group that will include junior DB Dominic Luttrell, sophomore S Mason Leu, and sophomore CB Weston Marshall.

"In 2020," Klekamp says, "we proved we are a winning football program, with back-to-back seven-win seasons. However, can we take the next step in 2021 and compete for a conference championship, a district championship, and make a playoff run?" With the depth, talent, and experience on the Wildcats roster this season, expect them to be in the mix for all those things come October.

Pigskin's Pick: 8-1

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North Callaway thunderbirds

2020 was an excellent year for the North Callaway football team. The Thunderbirds finished with a record of 7-3, tearing through the Eastern Missouri Conference before falling to Hallsville in the state tournament. After the season, though, head coach and Thunderbird alum Don Boulware departed from his post. Into his place steps Travis Blevins, another North Callaway graduate. Blevins is a football lifer, having played quarterback in college at SEMO and held a number of coaching gigs throughout his career, including a prior stint at North Callaway as defensive coordinator. A familiar face goes back to familiar surroundings. That is usually a recipe for success.

On the field last fall, the Thunderbirds had terrific success on offense, using a balanced Spread attack to average 202 passing yards, 165 rushing yards, and 34 points per game. Some of that will certainly be diminished due to the graduation of EMO Offensive Player of the Year Cody Cash. That said, though, North Callaway still returns a ton of talent to their offense, starting with junior QB Braydn O'Neal (5-10, 165). O'Neal was a First-Team All-Conference performer after his sophomore season saw him rack up 1,504 passing yards and 12 TDs on 93 completions, and running 46 times for 180 yards and 5 TDs. O'Neal connected on an impressive 61% of his passes, but will have to limit the 12 INTs he threw last fall. He enters the 2021 season as one of the most promising players in the area, and Blevins will rely on him to help ease the transition.

Another player that Blevins and his staff will look to for production is senior RB Trevor Ray (6-0, 200), a Second-Team All-Conference player from a year ago. In his junior season, Ray posted 108 carries for 761 yards and 9 TDs, and hauled in 9 passes for 186 yards and 1 TD. He has true game-breaking ability, and is one of the fiercest rushers in the EMO when he lowers his shoulders. Ray will be backed up by senior RB Manny Moreno (6-0, 185), who did terrific work in second-string duty last fall, rushing 41 times for 234 yards and 2 TDs, and adding 5 receptions for 65 yards and 2 more TDs. The ability of both of these rushers to act as pass-catchers will really help to open up the North Callaway offense this fall. Also doing pass-catching are senior WRs Payton Olsson (6-0, 190) and Blake Whipple (5-10, 165). Olsson is the team's leading returning receiver; he had 17 catches for 255 yards and 2 TDs in 2020, while Whipple, in extremely limited playing time, had just 1 reception for 4 yards. Senior WR Matt Blair (5-10, 165) might get some looks out wide as well.

Only one starter returns to the North Callaway offensive line in 2021: senior OL Zeke Gilman (6-1, 210). Steady as a rock, Gilman attained Second-Team All-Conference honors for his efforts. He'll be joined on the line this fall by senior OL Brandon Speight (6-1, 265) and the towering senior TE Drew Blevins (6-5, 225), who will also be a key target in the red zone this year. "We will lean heavily on our seniors and establishing our running game," Travis Blevins says. "We are excited with this summer's progress and the leadership thus far."

On the defensive side of the football, the Thunderbirds return an equal amount of talent and experience. Senior LB Manny Moreno will run things in the linebacker corps. The First-Team All-Conference Moreno recorded an outrageous 93 tackles, 10.5 for loss, 2 sacks, 1 forced fumble, and 2 blocked punts in a terrific junior campaign. Playing beside him again his junior LB Davis Woods (5-10, 180), who had 82 tackles, 2.5 for loss, and 1 fumble recovery as a sophomore.

The North Callaway defensive line

Class: 2
Conference: Eastern Missouri
Head Coach: Travis Blevins
Years at School: First
Overall Record: 35-35
Offensive Starters Returning: 6
Defensive Starters Returning: 6
Total Returning Lettermen: 12
2020 Overall Record: 7-3

North Callaway 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Louisiana	Away
September		
3	South Callaway	Home
10	Open	N/A
17	Van-Far	Home
24	Strafford	Away
October		
1	Bowling Green	Away
8	Wright City	Home
15	Mark Twain	Away
22	Montgomery City	Home
29	Districts	TBA

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looks like it'll have depth to spare. This group will be anchored by senior DT Zeke Gilman and senior DE Trevor Ray, both of whom were named to the All-Conference Second-Team last fall. Gilman had 34 tackles, 4 for loss, 1 sack, and 1 TD in 2020, while Ray posted 33 tackles, 4 for loss, 3.5 sacks, and 1 fumble recovery. This year, they'll be joined by senior DE Drew Blevins and senior DT Brandon Speight. The secondary returns two starters: senior SS Blake Whipple and junior FS Braydn O'Neal. Whipple recorded 68 tackles, 2.5 for loss, 1 sack, and 1 forced fumble in an excellent junior campaign, while O'Neal pitched in with 7 tackles, 1 forced fumble, and 1 fumble recovery. Senior CB Matt Blair will join them in the defensive backfield.

Travis Blevins is back leading the program where he once played. It's a match made in heaven. "We have high expectations and will continue to improve day in and day out," the coach says. With an excellent group of returning players and a proven coach in charge, Thunderbirds fans have every reason to share those high expectations.

Pigskin Pick: 6-2

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Owensville dutchmen

Throughout all of the adversity the Dutchmen faced in 2020, they still managed to have a winning season. They went through many struggles due to COVID, but this team maintained a strong mentality of getting the job done. "Not knowing how COVID was going to impact our season we simply focused on what we could control and played every game like it was our last," Coach Nathan Cabot said. "Fortunately we escaped any major struggles and were able to play a full schedule." The Dutchmen were off to a sluggish start to the season, but they managed to pick things up as the season went on. "After a slow start offensively at Potosi, the offense really came to life and became the explosive offense that we knew they were," Coach Cabot said. "Defensively we were greatly improved. Having allowed the fewest points per game in the last 10 seasons." Coach Cabot has done a great job presenting his coaching philosophy to the players, and they have been consistent on sticking to the script. "Our success is attributed to their hard work, dedication, and the buy-in to the teams 'ALL IN' philosophy," Coach Cabot said.

The Dutchmen's offense is loaded with talent. "First off we have an incredible group of returning starters," Coach Cabot said. "Second, we have continued to develop the speed and strength of all our athletes." Last year, they excelled in running the spread option, scoring 32.4 points per game, rushing for 154.5 yards per game, and throwing for 217.5 yards per game. Nine of the starters from last season are returning for the fall. "Lastly, our athletes are hungry and play to win," Coach Cabot said. "My coaches and I believe that our team has an incredible opportunity to have a very special season."

Classification: 3
Conference: Four Rivers
Head Coach: Nathan Cabot
Years at School: 3
Offensive Starters Returning: 9
Defensive Starters Returning: 6
Total Returning Lettermen: 22
2020 Overall Record: 7-3

For the offensive returners, Senior Brendan Decker (6-0, 170) will be the Dutchmen's QB1. Last season, he won First Team All Conference, Offensive Player of the Year, and First Team All District. Decker threw for 2,213 yards, 32 TDs, and ran for 486 yards and 3 TDs. The Dutchmen also have a pretty solid receiving corps coming back. Decker's main target is Senior Derek Brandt (6-4, 180). Last season, he won 1st Team All Conference, 1st Team All District, and 2nd Team All State. Brandt had 1,251 receiving yards and 14 TDs and ran for 135 yards and 2 TDs. Decker's second target is Junior Bryce Payne (6-2, 165). Last season he won 2nd Team All-Conference, catching for 430 yards and 10 TDs. Senior Landon Valley (6-4, 160) is another contributor to the receiver group. Last year, he had 119 yards and 2 TDs. Senior Austin Lowder is also returning to the running back position, rushing for 379 yards and 6 TDs and catching for 188 yards and 3 TDs last season. Most of the Dutchmen's offensive line will return for this upcoming season as well. Senior Logan Evans (5-10, 240) and Junior Chance Clevenger (6-2, 230) will be the strength of this offensive line. Evans won 1st Team All-Conference and Clevenger won 2nd Team All Conference. Junior Trey Johnson (6-1, 175) and Sophomore Hayden Shoemaker (6-3, 295) are also major pieces to this powerhouse O-line.

On the defensive side, six starters will return this upcoming season. They have a dangerous defensive line and a lockdown secondary. "Our defensive line and our secondary have the greatest depth and will be our greatest strength," Coach Cabot said. "The defensive line is stronger and faster than it was last year and they have the ability to make some huge plays for us too." Last season, the Dutchmen only allowed 19.7 points per game, 190.5 rushing yards per game, and 89.5 passing yards per game. Coach Cabot is looking forward to this D-line on disrupting run plays a lot this year. "Our run defense was greatly improved in 2020 and we believe that it will be again this season."

Derek Brandt will play safety for the Dutchmen, where he earned 2nd Team All-Conference DB last season. He racked up 81 tackles, 2 INTs, and 1 fumble recovery. Landon Valley will be another safety that will dominate in the secondary. Last season he had 35 tackles, 1 TFL, and a sack. Bryce Payne may be an All Conference receiver, but he is also a shut down corner. Last season, he picked up 29 tackles and had 2 INTS. Logan Evans earned 2nd Team All Conference and 2nd Team All District DL. He had 33 tackles, 5 TFL, and 8 sacks last year. Senior DL Alan Kopp (6-0, 170) will be another returning asset to the Dutchmen's defense. Last season

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Owensville Dutchmen 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Potosi	Home
September		
3	Eldon	Away
10	Cuba	Away
17	St. James	Away
24	Hermann	Away
October		
1	Pacific	Home
8	Union	Away
15	Sullivan	Home
22	St. Clair	Home
29	Districts	TBA

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he had 21 tackles, 4 TFLs, and a fumble recovery. Another trench bully on the D-line is Senior Brent Helmig (5-10, 190). Last season, he won Honorable Mention All- Conference, racking up 30 tackles, 4 TFLs, and a fumble recovery.

The Dutchmen also have some upperclassmen who will see some playing time as well. Senior Eli Wilson (6-2, 185) will help out a lot at linebacker and tight end. Senior Dezmyn Moore (5-9 160) will be an all around athlete, playing wide receiver, linebacker, and defensive back. Junior Hunter Boyer (5-10, 250) will join the big boys on the line on both sides of the ball. Junior Charlie Whelan (6-0, 150) and Sophomore Tenner Meyer (5-7, 150) will fill in at DB and WR.

The Dutchmen are loaded with talent, and they are looking forward to making another run. This time, Cabot is looking to make it all the way to state. "Overall, we know our team is going to work hard each and every week this season and that we have a great opportunity before us to have an incredible season," Coach Cabot said. This team full of hardworking individuals who are hungrier than ever to have a great season. Most of the players have played alongside each other throughout their career, therefore building a certain level of trust with one another. They are also full of God-given talent. "Our offense and defense have great speed, strength, and depth, which leads us to be a very dangerous team this season." We agree coach.

Pigskin's Pick: 8-1

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Pacific indians

The Pacific Indians struggled through the challenging 2020 season with a record of 2-6, which was an improvement from the 2019 season where they finished 1-9. They finished 1-2 in the Four Rivers Conference which was good enough for fourth place. Over the last few years the Pacific Indians have been on the bottom of the Four Rivers Conference, but as proven by their improved performance where they became more competitive in each and every game, the 2021 season holds promise. Head Coach Paul Day believes the Indians will be able to take the next step this Fall. "We felt like we made great strides last year," Day states. It is important to him and the players that they improve their record and statistics. The Pacific Indians will have plenty of returning talent for 2021. On the offensive end, 6 players, and on the defensive end, 5 players return to their starting spots. This will be Paul Day's second year as head coach with Pacific. He preaches building strength and poise through hard work and dedication. Day is assisted by coaches Jimmy Meyers, Ken Grodie, George Dohm, Jay Mayfield, Ryan Buxton, James Menderski, and Craig Kiska. With their experience and coaching abilities, Pacific will be able to put the right foot forward in competing with their opponents in the Four River Conference. Coach Day emphasizes the importance of consistent work and maximum effort to compete in every game. He says his team is building for this season. "Our players built off last year's performance and had a great off season." Expect the Indians to have a solid 2021 campaign by staying focused on improving the fundamentals on both offense and defense.

On offense, Pacific was in the middle of the pack. They averaged about 24 points per game in 2020 which put pressure on their defense to help keep their games close. Coach Day and the Indians will have 6 returning offensive starters. With this experience, Pacific believes they can contend with the best in their conference. Among those returning starters are four linemen, Juniors Blake McCay (6-0, 220) and Cade Martin (5-11, 210), look to help their offense improve their passing game as well as maintain their rushing presence in 2021. They have similar builds which include quick lateral movement to prevent sacks and open up more holes in the defense for running lanes. Senior Ted Toney (6-2, 280) was 1st Team All Conference in 2020. He provides brute strength on the offensive line. With his size, improved strength and experience, the offensive line can become a solid block to build around. Returning at quarterback is Sophomore Luke Meyer (6-0, 190). He had a tremendous freshman year with the Indians racking up 679 passing yards, throwing just under 50%, for 8 touchdowns and 8 interceptions. He also had a big role in the rushing offense with 351 yards on the ground. Senior running back Matt Austin (6-0, 230) provided much needed carries last season by scoring 14 touchdowns for Pacific. He rushed for 974 yards at 7.4 yards per carry. Austin was 1st Team All Conference alongside his lineman Toney. Coach Day states, "Returning several guys up front as well as our top two rushers. Our quarterback is also back after a great freshman year starting on varsity." He believes that the Indians are experienced and can find their stride in the 2021 season with conditioning and focus. Expect their offense to run a "spread gun."

The Pacific defense will need some improvement in the new season after allowing over 37 points per game. That is a 13 point difference between their offense and defense. Coach Day believes they will need improvement in the most vital areas. "Depth, strength, and speed improvement should be big factors towards defensive improvement this year," Day says. Pacific has five returning defensive starters to build around. On the defensive line, Matt Austin and Blake McCay will continue to assert dominance on the line. They bring strength and quickness to the

Class: 4
Conference: Four River
Head Coach: Paul Day
Years at School: 2nd
Record at School: 2-6
Overall Coaching Record: 175-101
Offensive Returning Starters: 6
Defensive Returning Starters: 5
2020 Overall Record: 2-6

Pacific Indians 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Borgia	Away
September		
3	Washington	Home
10	St. Clair	Home
17	Union	Away
24	Sullivan	Home
October		
1	Owensville	Away
8	Festus	Away
15	Hermann	Home
22	St. James	Away
29	Districts	TBA

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trenches. Austin had 37 tackles (29 solo) and 8 tackles for a loss while McCay had 21 tackles (12 solo) and 1 tackle for a loss. Back at the corner position are Seniors Trenton Johnson (5-8, 155) and Isaac Sizemore (5-9, 145). Johnson contributed 11 tackles (10 solo) in 2020. Both will bring back speed and depth for their defense. Sophomore Luke Meyer will also help the defense at safety using his length and speed. He contributed 16 tackles (9 solo) and 1 interception last season. Expect them to play a "4-2-5" defense.

The Indians will have to balance their defense and offense in order to win games in 2021. Coaches and players are positive going into the new season that they can improve their record and fight for a conference title.

Coach Day and the Pacific Indians are a football program on the rise who are looking to overcome their previous obstacles and create new traditions. With the help of their returning players and experienced coaching staff, the Indians have a serious shot at making some noise in their conference and into District play. It is time to put their best foot forward in 2021.

Pigskin's Pick: 4-5

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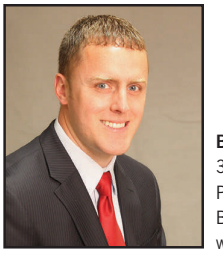
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Palmyra panthers

The Palmyra Panthers have been performing at a high level for several years and finally made the deep run in the playoffs they have been working so hard for. They went 12-1 overall in Class 2 with a 5-0 record in the CCC and 3-0 in their district. Unfortunately, the Panthers lost in the state semi-final game. An impressive season stems from the coaching staff and players involved with Palmyra. Head Coach Kevin Miles has been with the program for 10 years. He has worked hard to make the team stand out in their conference. Overall, Coach Miles has a 129-65 record with an 88-34 record strictly at Palmyra. Assisting Coach Miles is Mark Hoerr, Mark Loman, Nick Powell, Steven Jones, Mark Lickfield, Brian Rea, and Tyler Krietmeyer. This group of coaches has made Palmyra a powerhouse in the Clarence Cannon Conference. Coach Miles wants his team to continue this powerful path to a state championship. It all starts with the "New" pregame rituals. Coach Miles says, "We started playing at our new facility this year. It is a brand new multi-million dollar field and track. It is a beautiful setup and we are very lucky to have the community support and the administrative support." The Panthers are grateful for the amount of support from their community and look to bring them a championship in 2021. To help Palmyra return to their championship contention, 4 returning offensive starters and 6 defensive starters will help newcomers gain experience. The Palmyra Panthers are an impressive team focused on adding a trophy to their case.

On offense, the Panthers averaged 26.8 points per game, 295 rushing yards per game, and 150 passing yards per game in 2020. With these numbers, Palmyra has a great chance of continuing their success into 2021. Coach Miles has been able to produce an offensive system over the last 6 years that improved and can now be perfected by his players. "This will be our 6th year of running this offense and you could really start to see it kick in last year. The players understand what is expected and how to react to opposing defenses. We can now focus on bettering and fine tuning a scheme that the kids know and enjoy," Coach Miles states. The players who will be perfecting the Panthers offense include 4 returning starters and several newcomers. On the offensive line, Seniors Brayden Madden (6-2, 245) and Luke Triplett (6-2, 220) bring experience, speed, size, and a winning mentality. Following in their footsteps are newcomers Nick Erwin (6-4, 285), Tegan Pope (5-10, 215), Xzavier Battaglio (6-2, 255), and Nelsyn Cates (5-10, 230). Triplett gained All-State Honors for his performance in 2020. With a lot of size being planted on the offensive line, the Panthers will be a brick wall. They also bring agility, quick hands, and consistency. All-purpose rusher/receiver, Junior Hayes Miller (6-1, 180) was the offensive leader for Palmyra. He produced 753 rushing yards and 8 rushing touchdowns. Through the air, he caught 618 yards and 5 TDs. Carter Crane (6-0, 180), Ryan McKeown (6-2, 175), Christian Johnson (6-1, 185), and Ethan Redd (5-11, 185) are new receivers for the Panthers. Tall, speedy, and eager to produce big numbers, these receivers are important to a championship caliber offense. Senior Adam Goodwin (6-5, 205) is a returning tight end. Jose Juarez (6-3, 225) and Noah Welty (5-10, 185) are able bodied newcomers looking to produce quality numbers at the tight end position. Coach Miles weighs in, "We have a really good core of players coming back for this year, and an outstanding group of others ready to step in and take over." Expect the Panthers to be "multiple" in their offense again in 2021.

On defense, Palmyra allowed 14.6 points per game, 155 rushing yards per game, and 72.8 passing yards per game. They were effective and extremely disciplined on the line and in the backfield. The Panthers focus on strength, unique movement, and overall attack. Coach Miles mentions, "We return a good group of hardcore seniors who like to play downhill and put a hat on people. We play an attacking style of defense and we feel we have some good kids to replace the positions lost to graduation." The defensive line has 2 familiar names in Seniors Luke Triplett and Brayden Madden. Both combined for 85 tackles, 33 tackles for loss, 8 sacks, and 1 interception. Their quality on the line illustrates to newcomers the Panthers "attacking" style of defense. Entering the Panthers defensive line is Noah Getz (6-2, 220), Nick Erwin, Xzavier Battaglio, and Nelsyn Cates. As mentioned before, these newcomers are big in size and eager to produce even bigger numbers on the line. The returning outside linebackers are Seniors Nolyn Richards (5-11,

Class: 2
Conference: Clarence Cannon
Head Coach Kevin Miles
Record at School: 88-34
Overall Record: 129-65
Returning Lettermen: 18
Returning Starters Offense: 4
Returning Starters Defense: 6
2020 Overall Record: 12-1

Palmyra Panthers 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Hallsville	Home
September		
3	Bowling Green	Home
10	Macon	Away
17	Brookfield	Home
24	Monroe City	Away
October		
1	Clark Co.	Home
8	Highland	Away
15	South Shelby	Home
22	Centralia	Away
29	Districts	TBA

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175) and Adam Goodwin. Combined they made 66 tackles, 10 tackles for loss, and 2 sacks. They bring more size, more skill, and more attacking mentality to the Panthers defense. Newcomers at linebacker are Noah Welty and Hayes Miller. Coach Miles and Palmyra are stacking up the defense to contend and adapt against all types of offenses in the CCC. In the backfield, returning to the safety position is Junior Colin Arch (5-10, 170) and Senior Landyn Smith (5-10, 170). Together they produced 137 tackles, 12 tackles for loss, and 7 interceptions. Smith earned All-State honors for his performance. The speed and instinctual thinking proves that the Panthers are an aggressive defense looking to make noise in 2021. Alex Wilson (5-11, 185) and Aaron Ritchey (5-10, 150) are new safeties who are going to bring more attacking mentality and incredible speed and instincts. Coach Miles is excited for 2021, "We have gotten much stronger and look forward to having a very stingy defense. The athletes have a good feeling of what is expected and will be ready to rise to the occasion."

The Panthers are an experienced and hungry team. Last season was just the first step to becoming a championship team. Coach Miles and company believe in their core group of talented young men. A challenging schedule will once again prepare Palmyra for a chance at another conference championship and another deep playoff run.

Pigskin's Pick: 6-3



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Paris coyotes

There's no denying that the Paris Coyotes wished to turn in a better 2020 record, but a team facing many obstacles throughout the year rolled with the punches and put together some strong efforts within a schedule stacked with strong opponents. "Last year was an up and down year for us," said long-time Head Coach Gary Crusha, now in his eleventh year with the Coyotes. "We were competitive in most of our contests, and there was a time where we were battling injuries to some of our key players." Crusha was proud of his guys for "playing some of our best football at the end of the year," which included a big playoff win against Father Tolton Catholic and a hard-fought loss against South Callaway. He hopes the strong run to close out the season will translate to success at the onset of 2021.

Paris found success running the ball last season, averaging 159 rushing yards per game on average last season compared to just 74 passing yards. With sophomore wide receiver/quarterback Colton Kendrick (5-10, 150) set to lead a pistol scheme, the Coyotes will look to execute a similar look on offense. Kendrick caught a game-tying touchdown in the game against South Callaway, but the Coyotes will be utilizing his skills primarily to orchestrate the offense rather than to serve as a vertical threat. Lewis & Clark All-Conference Second Team selection Owen Totten (5-10, 205) will be the primary backfield weapon, as he strung together 900 yards in just eight games last season. One of his best performances also came in the South Callaway game, in which he torched the Bulldogs defense for multiple big gains.

The powerful runner will receive assistance from another physical tailback in senior Aaron White (6-0, 180), who will work in tandem to wear down opposing defenses. Junior wide receiver Leo Bounds (5-10, 140) can provide another dimension to the Coyotes offense when they turn to the air for offensive production. Sophomore Walter Rucker (6-1, 210) can block larger guys and run efficient patterns from his tight end spot. Any offense reliant on the run will need offensive linemen who can open up gaps to get runners into the next level. Fortunately for Paris, the Coyotes bring back three starting offensive linemen: senior Dalton Smith (5-10, 260), Wade Mason (6-3, 250) and Gunnar Fountain (6-2, 280). The familiarity at the line of scrimmage will undoubtedly boost the Coyotes as they find their bearings in the early part of the season, and the impressive size that the trio brings to the table will be a tough task for defenses to combat.

The Coyotes' defense also returns a bunch of significant contributors from last season. Owen Totten and Aaron White, a L&C All-Conference Third Team defensive lineman selection, will lead a young linebacker corps and defensive line. Junior linebacker Drew Williams (5-9, 150) will swarm the field alongside Totten to close off the boundary, and senior Zion Sanders (5-9, 230) gets the opportunity at both sides of the line of scrimmage to contribute strength at the interior. The defensive back core that the Coyotes will have on the field is going to provide

Class: 1
Conference: Lewis & Clark
Head Coach: Gary Crusha
Years at School: 11
Record at School: 41-64
Overall Record: 69-117
Offensive Starters Returning: 7
Defensive Starters Returning: 6
Total Returning Lettermen: 15
2020 Overall Record: 4-7

Paris Coyotes 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Harrisburg	Away
September		
3	Salisbury	Home
10	Scotland County	Away
17	Bayless	Home
24	Marceline	Away
October		
1	Fayette	Home
8	Russellville	Away
15	Herculaneum	Away
22	Westran	Away
29	Districts	TBA

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them with a ton of flexibility to adjust to opposing offenses. Senior defensive back John Parker (5-10, 150), Leo Bounds and Colton Kendrick are taking on starting roles in the secondary, while sophomore Walter Rucker can cover speedy receivers, regardless of positioning in the secondary.

Crusha's goals for his team are "being flexible and fundamentally sound, having the discipline and consistency to perform our responsibilities on and off the field." And, while he hopes to lead his guys to wins on the field, his focus also lies in "developing our players to be successful in life after sports." Paris hasn't put together a winning record in a football season since 2015, capping off a third consecutive year in which the Coyotes achieved that feat. But, they've spent the entire summer gearing up for the competition ahead, and Crusha is looking forward to what his guys will leave out on the field. "We are excited for the season to get started. We had a good summer and are ready for Friday night lights."

Pigskin's Pick: 5-4

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Rolla bulldogs

It seems that things might finally be trending the right way for the Rolla Bulldogs and Head Coach Jon Franks. Examining the Bulldogs' 5-4 season, Franks says, "We feel like the program is still continuing to improve and moving in the right direction. Our kids handled adversity really well, with COVID. We still felt like we left some wins on the table." This year, though, with an astounding 25 lettermen back in action, and the vast majority of starters back on each side of the ball, the Bulldogs won't be leaving many wins on the table.

The Rolla offense had very little trouble scoring in 2020, averaging 28 points per game in an Option/Power setup. Spectacularly, nine starters from that high-flying bunch will suit up again for Rolla this fall. Senior QB Adam Hounsom (6-3, 170) will lead this experienced, senior-heavy unit. In his first season starting, Hounsom completed 55 passes for 785 yards, 5 TDs, and 4 INTs. He also used his legs to great effect, running the ball 66 times for 330 yards and 10 TDs. Hounsom is poised to produce more consistent scoring for the Rolla offense in 2020. He'll be playing off the backs of an absolutely massive offensive line with four returning starters. Senior O-linemen Ethan Crouch (6-1, 250), Isaac Guffey (6-0, 280), Luke Beaugard (6-0, 275), and Reiss Clark (6-1, 265) have the strength and experience to make them the envy of O-line coaches across the state. For his efforts, Crouch was granted a spot on the All-District team. This year, those four will be joined by senior OL Austin McBride (6-2, 240) and junior OL Charlie Richardson (6-4, 310). Expect senior TEs Ty Locklear (5-10, 215) and Trevor Cox (5-9, 160) to do some serious blocking as well.

As the O-line is set and ready for action, so are the most important skill-position players for the Rolla offense. Senior RB Hayden Fane (6-0, 205) will be the focal point for the Bulldogs in 2021. Last fall, Fane made the All-District squad after rushing 151 times for 949 yards and 7 TDs. Senior Slot WR Gage Klossner (5-10, 155) figures to be the main passing target for the Bulldogs this fall. A true utility player, Klossner hauled in 25 passes for 292 yards and 2 TDs, and also had 24 rushing attempts for 180 yards and 2 more TDs. His ability to get all over the field will open things up for the Bulldogs in both the running and passing games. Junior WR Brock Lyle (6-0, 160) will also get some looks. As a sophomore, he posted 7 receptions for 66 yards, and had 5 carries for 77 yards and 1 TD. A bigger role will result in bigger numbers this fall. Sophomore RB Steven Harris (5-9, 150) and junior RB Kennedy Kearse (5-10, 150) will also get some touches. The Rolla offense should be explosive in 2021.

Seven starters return on the other side of the ball, including some highly lauded linebackers. Senior LBs Ty Locklear and Waylon Kinder (5-11, 210) were some of the better performers around, both making the All-District team, with Locklear additionally being named All-State. Locklear had 89 tackles, 10 for loss, 1 INT, and 1 forced fumble, while Kinder posted 78 tackles, 12 for loss, 1 sack, 1 fumble recovery, and 2 forced fumbles. These two will wreak havoc with more strength on their frames in the year ahead.

Half the secondary is back for the Bulldogs, in the form of senior SS Ben Tiddy (6-0, 175) and junior DB Brock Lyle. Tiddy compiled 34 tackles, 3 for loss, and 1 fumble recovery a year ago, while Lyle pitched in with 29 tackles, 1 for loss, and 2 INTs. A number of players are competing

Class: 5
Conference: Ozark
Head Coach: Jon Franks
Years at School: 5
Record at School: 26-29
Overall Record: 55-41
Offensive Starters Returning: 9
Defensive Starters Returning: 7
Total Returning Lettermen: 25
2020 Overall Record: 5-4

Rolla Bulldogs 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Bolivar	Away
September		
3	Glendale	Home
10	West Plains	Away
17	Hillcrest	Home
24	Parkview	Away
October		
1	Kickapoo	Away
8	Waynesville	Home
15	Lebanon	Home
22	Camdenton	Away
29	Districts	TBA

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for the other starting roles in the secondary, including junior DB Kennedy Kearse, junior DB Aaron Cook (5-9, 155), senior SS Evan Inskip (6-1, 175), and junior FS Landon Howdakowski (6-1, 155). Down in the trenches, junior DLs Brock Horton-Owens (6-1, 250) and Gabe Sutton (5-10, 190) are back for more. Horton-Owens had 30 tackles, 9 for loss, and 1 sack in 2020, while Sutton had 4 tackles and 1 fumble recovery in limited time. Junior DE Hayden Crider (6-0, 215) masterfully worked the edge, tallying 86 tackles, 7 for loss, 4 sacks, and 1 blocked FG. Playing across from him this year will be junior DE Ethan Yeggy (6-3, 205). There's talent at every level of the defense.

Surveying the year ahead, Franks says, "We are excited about our possibilities. Our kids have done a great job of putting us in a position to have a successful program. We understand we are still underdogs and have a lot to work for and much to prove." With a roster full of talented upperclassmen, that 'underdog' tag may not stick to the Bulldogs for long this fall.

Pigskin's Pick: 7-2


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Russellville indians

2020 marked the very first year of varsity football for the Russellville Indians. In its inaugural season, in which the team finished 0-8, Roger VanDeZande guided the program. In the offseason, VanDeZande stepped aside, and Tim Rulo returned to central Missouri to lead the nascent program. Rulo has established an impressive record over a career that has seen him hold head coaching positions at South Callaway, Helias and most recently Chillicothe. He encapsulated Russellville's 2020 season, saying, "With any new program there are growing pains. The team continued to improve each week and set up the program for future success. We are grateful for all the hard work that Coach VanDeZande did last year."

It's quite possible that VanDeZande took one for the team, enduring the winless season and setting the groundwork for better things to come. Better things are almost certain to happen on the defensive side of the football, where the Indians allowed 51.8 points per game last fall, one of the worst marks in the area. Rulo is galvanizing the group around a "Swarm and Punish" motto. "Our players will have to fly around and play physical to make up for a lack of overall size," he says. "The D-line will be key as responsibilities must be accomplished to allow linebackers and defensive backs to swarm all over the field and make plays." Back to man that defensive line are senior -linemen Bryce Hale (6-1, 195) and Kaden Shannon (6-4, 280). Hale posted 25 tackles a year ago, while Shannon had 10. This year, sophomore DL Jack Besche (5-8, 290) and senior DL Landen Waggoner (6-3, 205) will add much needed depth.

A slew of linebackers are back in action for the Indians this fall, including the team's leading returning tackler. Junior LB Chris Seaver (5-11, 175) had a terrific sophomore season in which he compiled 64 tackles, 11 of which came for a loss. He'll team up again with junior LBs Josiah Herman (5-10, 180) and Jesse Daniel (5-10, 165). Herman was all over the field last fall, posting 21 tackles, 1 INT, and 1 fumble recovery, while Daniel had 8 tackles and 1 INT. Working the outside are senior OLBs Blake Burling (6-1, 175) and Cameron Larimore (5-9, 150). Burling posted 6 tackles last fall, and Larimore chipped in with 3 tackles and 1 fumble recovery. This corps will get depth this year in the form of junior LB Luke Oligschlaeger (6-1, 160) and senior LB Dustin Wells (5-7, 175). In the secondary, junior DB Alex Oligschlaeger (6-0, 170) is the lone returning starter. He tallied 38 tackles and 1 fumble recovery in an excellent junior season. Junior DB Brennen Stinson (5-9, 160) and sophomore DBs Drake Armes (5-8, 145) and Payton Behrens (5-11, 150) are all in the mix for the open spots. Across the board there is talent, but with such a new program they are still building depth. On offense, "We will need to have the offensive line get good quickly for the team to be successful," Rulo says. Two stalwarts are back to provide the foundation up front: senior O-linemen Bryce Hale and Kaden Shannon. Rulo touts Hale's athleticism and Shannon's economy of movement. The line will be bolstered by the arrival of senior OL Dustin Wells, junior OL Luke Oligschlaeger, and sophomore OL Jack Besche.

At the skill positions, "We have talented athletes learning a new offense behind the O-line," says Rulo. Junior QB Jesse Daniel (5-10, 165) will lead this offensive unit. He completed 30 passes for 431 yards and 1 TD as a sophomore. A trio of backs will help make Rulo's Spread Option hum. Junior RBs Chris

Class: 1
Conference: N/A
Head Coach: Tim Rulo
Years at School: First
Overall Record: 99-55
Offensive Starters Returning: 7
Defensive Starters Returning: 8
Total Returning Lettermen: 13
2020 Overall Record: 0-8

Russellville Indians 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	MO Military Academy	Away
September		
3	Tipton	Home
10	Sweet Springs	Home
18	Grandview	Away (Sat)
24	Hogan Prep	Home
October		
1	Harrisburg	Away
8	Paris	Home
15	Sherwood	Away
22	Slater	Away
29	Districts	TBA





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Seaver, Alex Oligschlaeger, and Josiah Herman all contributed last fall. Seaver led the way with 135 carries for 832 yards and 10 TDs, Oligschlaeger rushed 93 times for 404 yards and 2 TDs, and Herman posted 36 carries for 150 yards. This year, junior RB Brennen Stinson and sophomore RB Drake Armes will be ready to help out when called upon. One of the team's more interesting players is senior WR/OL Blake Burling, playing a position combo rarely seen. Rulo is excited about Burling's growth in the weight room this offseason. Senior WR Landon Waggoner, WR Cameron Larimore and sophomore WR Payton Behrens will figure into the passing game as well. Overall, "We will need to improve daily and learn the new style of football," Rulo says.

Rulo is bringing his typical enthusiasm to his new role at the new program. "We're excited to begin the second year of varsity football here at Russellville," the coach says. "Each practice and game brings more experience to a young program. We'll need young players to step up and some older players to learn new positions to be able to compete week in and week out." With this coach and this group of players, expect Russellville to get into the win column this fall.

Pigskin's Pick: 2-7

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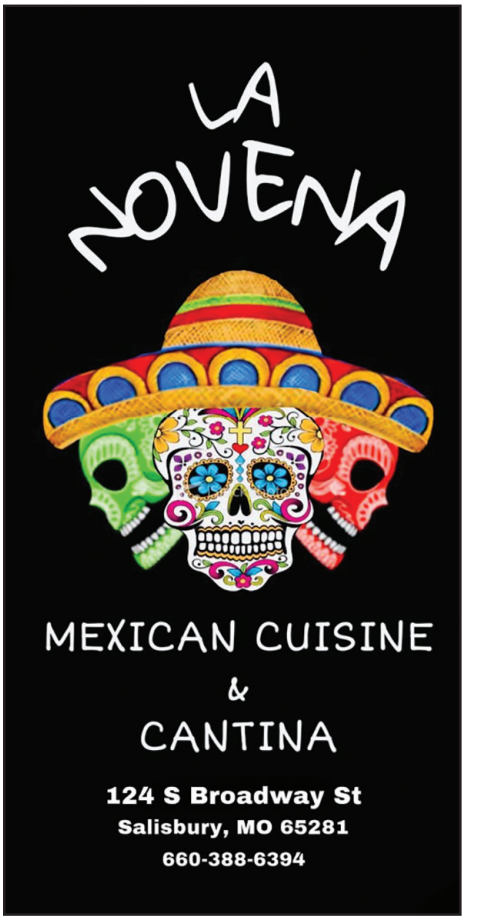


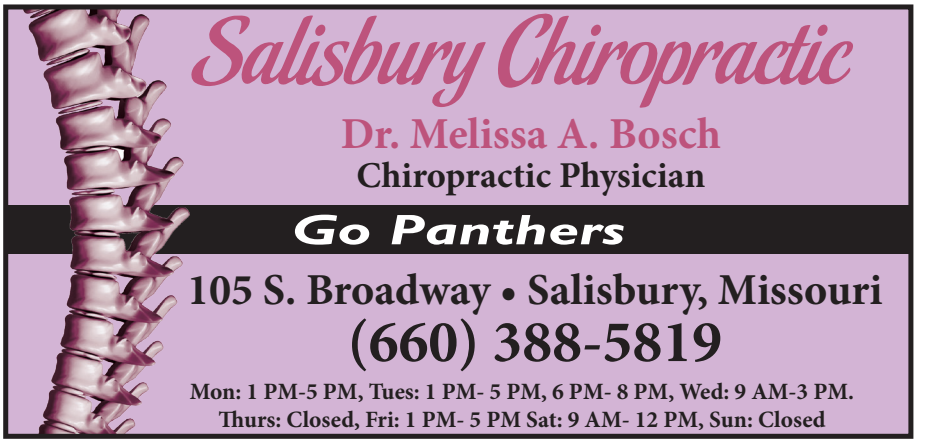
Salisbury panthers

For new Salisbury Panther Head Coach Oren Magruder, 2021 is shaping up to be a year of considerable change. The newlywed third-year head coach is leaving a highly successful 8-man program at Southwest Livingston, where he coached the Wildcats to the 8-man championship game in both 2019 and 2020—winning in 2020—to take over an 11-man program which has finished 2-8 and 1-9 over the last 2 seasons. This is a team which allowed an average of 47.2 ppg in 2020 while scoring only 14.5 ppg. The good news is Coach Magruder and his staff will have some experience and leadership to work with as they have 17 returning lettermen—8 starters on offense will be back this season as well as 9 starters on defense. Salisbury will feature a new offensive scheme in 2021. A year ago, the Panthers did average 214.4 yards per game (183—passing, 31.4 rushing). Gone will be the Spread Formation and replacing that will be Coach Magruder's Air Raid offensive scheme. This new offense will place a great deal of responsibility on the guy taking the snaps and the Panthers have the right guy for the job. Returning at quarterback will be 1st Team All-Conference and All-District senior, Grant Biere (6-4, 200). The big, pro-style passer threw for over 1,500 yards as a sophomore and added 1,814 yards (141-294) last season and has shown a strong ability to run the ball when called upon. Returning at wide receiver will be a pair of bookends in senior Gabe Haines (5-9, 140) and junior Jake Sellers (5-9, 140). Last season, Haines gained 156 yards on 19 receptions while Sellers posted 109 yards on 10 catches. Coach Magruder won't ignore the run game. "We have some speed on the edges that we are going to try to put in space." One of the guys they will look to for rushing yards is junior RB Daniel White (5-9, 155) who is also a solid receiver out of the backfield with 132 yards (17 rec) in 2020. Expected to get carries in 2021, are junior RB Tyson Parker (5-8, 155) and big-bodied freshman Daunte White (6-3, 200). The Air Raid offense requires a lot of receivers and two newcomers expect to see their share of reps on Friday nights; Junior Braden Sloan (5-10, 140) and freshman Collin Hurt (6-0, 150). Junior Vash Schick (6-3, 200) is an all-around athlete who promises to see time at both WR and RB this season. Four of the five starting O-line positions are held by returning starters. In the middle is senior center, Blake Kruessel (5-9, 180), a 3 year starter and the leader of the Panther O-line. Surrounding Kruessel will be 3 guys with some serious size and muscle; guard sophomore Colton Harman (6-2, 260) and at tackle will be junior Spencer Carter (6-3, 245) and sophomore Mason Stapleton (6-3, 260). "We have some big offensive lineman that we believe will allow us to be able to run the ball when teams line up to stop the pass," stated coach. Sophomore Mike Yarber (6-0, 300) is a big youngster who will definitely see playing time on the Salisbury O-line. In 2020, the Panther defense struggled to stop opposing offenses, allowing an average of 400 yards per game (343 passing, 57 rushing). This coming season, the Panthers will be playing Coach Magruder's 4-2-5 defensive scheme. "We plan to play a simple and aggressive defense. Ideally with less concepts to learn, we will be able to play a fast and attacking style of defense," stated coach. The good news is the Panthers will have a quite a bit of experience on D, returning 9 defensive starters from 2020. Despite this experience on defense, one big challenge the Salisbury team will face is 7 starters will be playing both ways, so conditioning and avoiding injuries will be key for the Panthers. Up front will be a trio of returning starters led by junior DL Spencer Carter and his 32 tackles from '20. Spencer is a big body who is outstanding against the run and has the speed to put pressure on the opposing QB. Joining Carter up from is fellow junior DL Garrett Hinkle (5-9, 260) who posted 12 tackles last season. Sophomore DL Colton Harman had 17 tackles as a freshman. Two newcomers to the defensive line will be sophomore Mike Yarber and freshman Daunte White. The Panthers have 4 returning starters at LB; Seniors Grant Biere (45 tackles, 1 sack) and Blake Kruessel (57 tackles) provide leadership and speed to the defense as three-year

Class: 1
Conference: Lewis & Clark
Head Coach: Oren Magruder
Years at School: First
Overall Record: 23-3
Offensive Starters Returning: 8
Defensive Starters Returning: 9
Total Returning Lettermen: 17
2020 Overall Record: 1-9

Salisbury Panthers 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Westran	Away
September		
3	Paris	Home
10	Harrisburg	Home
17	Carrollton	Away
24	Scotland County	Home
October		
1	Knox County	Away
8	Marceline	Home
15	Fayette	Away
22	MO Military Academy	Home
29	Districts	TBA





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starters at LB. Junior Daniel White (67 tackles, 1 sack) demonstrates the ability to control the middle of the field and sophomore Eli Jackson (5-10, 160) also added 45 tackles during his freshman year. Returning at DB are senior Gabe Haines (117 tackles) who was a 2nd Team All-Conference and All-District selection. Junior DB Jake Sellers is strong in coverage and put up 32 tackles with 1 pick in '20. Juniors Vash Schick and Tyson Parker will both be looking to contribute in the middle for Coach Magruder's defense, while junior Braden Sloan and freshman Collin Hurt promise to see time at DB. Overall, the Salisbury Panthers will be facing a number of significant changes this coming season—a new head coach, a new offensive scheme and a new defensive scheme. The defense was solid against the run last year but weak against the pass. As well, they simply gave up a lot of points. They have the experience and athletes to improve, but a lot depends on the ability of several guys to play both ways and log a good deal of playing time. On offense, the Panthers have talent at QB and the ability to move the football down the field. They must improve their running game to open up the passing game. It seems as though there are a lot of "ifs" for the 2021 Salisbury Panthers, but they have the talent and the experience to be a competitive member of the Lewis and Clark Conference.

Pigskin's Pick: 3-6

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School of the Osage indians

After a decade and a half away, Shannon Jolley returns to School of the Osage, where he led the program from 2000–2005. During that stint, he guided the Indians to back-to-back district titles in 2003 and 2004. Throughout Jolley's career, he's made a habit of rehabilitating programs, having done so at Eldon and starting one up at Capital City. Now, he'll be tasked with righting the ship of an Osage program that hasn't had a winning season since 2016. It might just be the veteran coach's toughest challenge yet. And no surprise, Jolley is up for it. "Our staff could not be more excited about coaching this year's group," he says. "We have had a great summer and are excited about the development we have seen in a short period of time. Reconnecting with former players from my first tenure at Osage has solidified to me that we have and will receive the support we need to return our program to a championship-caliber program."

On the field, there's a lot to like. The Indians return six starters to an offense that averaged 268 rushing yards, 147 passing yards, and 29 points per game in 2020. Key among those returning is senior QB Brockton McLaughlin (6-2, 170). McLaughlin had an absolutely monster junior year, completing 113 of 175 pass attempts (an incredible 65% clip) for 1,652 yards and 17 TDs. The dual-threat also rushed 114 times for 1,213 yards and 16 TDs—and was named First-Team All-Conference. "Our quarterback play this season will also be an exciting position to watch," says Jolley. "Brockton has had a tremendous summer and we are excited about his upside coming into his senior season."

Elsewhere on offense, "Our strength will be in our offensive line play," Jolley says. "We have a great group of lineman that are committed to leading our team by example." Senior OL Davis Sallee (6-5, 315) is the cornerstone, and will this year be accompanied by junior OL Paul Byrd (5-10, 220) and sophomore OL Spencer Lake (6-2, 230). Junior TEs Dalton Wall (6-0, 185) and Ryan King (6-1, 180) will also do some blocking. And then there's the skill-position players. Junior RB Eric Hood (5-11, 195) will be the primary ball-carrier for the Indians. He had 105 carries for 845 yards and 8 TDs in a terrific sophomore campaign. Also getting touches will be junior RB Derek Bradley (5-9, 170), with junior RB Jackson Funderburk providing depth. A couple of playmaking wideouts return to the offense. Senior WR Keegan Vaughn (6-0, 165) had 23 receptions for 473 yards and 6 TDs last fall, while junior WR Hunter Graber (6-1, 170), posted 39 catches for 556 yards and 5 TDs in a breakout sophomore season. Sophomore WR Charlie Dulle (5-8, 165) will also get some game time. Surveying his offense, Jolley says, "The combination of our quarterback play and developing receiver play should provide our fans with a balanced attack in 2021."

The Osage defense has a lot to work on if the Indians are to be successful in 2021, though. Last year's unit simply could not stop the run, surrendering 294 rushing yards and 45 points per game. "Our defensive strength will be our experience and growth from last season," Jolley says. "We played a lot of underclassmen and struggled at times due to maturity and playing experience." The secondary looks like it'll be a bright spot, with junior DB Conner Vaughn (6-2, 160) leading the way. With 72 tackles from 2020, he is the team's top returning tackler. He'll again be joined by junior DBs Keegan Vaughn and Derek Bradley. Vaughn accounted for 59 tackles, while

Class: 3
Conference: Tri-County
Head Coach: Shannon Jolley
Years at School: first (5 during previous tenure)
Record at School: N/A
Offensive Starters Returning: 6
Defensive Starters Returning: 7
Total Returning Lettermen: 22
2020 Overall Record: 4-7

School of the Osage 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Fulton	Away
September		
3	Moberly	Home
10	Eldon	Away
17	California	Home
24	Hallsville	Home
October		
1	Boonville	Away
8	Southern Boone	Away
15	Versailles	Away
22	Blair Oaks	Home
29	Districts	TBA

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Bradley posted 39 a year ago. Sophomore DB Charlie Dulle is also in the hunt for a starting spot.

Crucially, the defensive line looks like it's coming together nicely, with a good mix of size and experience. Junior DL Tanner Gardner (6-0, 260) had 26 tackles last year, and junior DL Matt Barnes (5-10, 210) had 25. Junior DLs Paul Byrd and Ryan King are each ready for a bigger role this fall, as is sophomore DL Spencer Lake. At the middle level, two capable players return for the Indians. Junior LB Jackson Funderburk (5-9, 170) accounted for 53 total tackles in 2020, and his counterpart, junior LB Ashton Carter (6-1, 200), compiled 44 tackles to go along with 3 sacks. They'll find depth this year in the form of junior LBs Dalton Wall and J.P. Kordula. "Our defensive unit will grow each week with valuable time in game situations," Jolley predicts.

They say you can't go home again, but that's exactly what Shannon Jolley is doing at Osage this season. He is one of the better coaches around, and this year, with an excellent coaching staff and a deep, talented roster, it won't be any surprise to see the Indians get back to their winning ways.

Pigskin's Pick: 5-4











Slater wildcats

Before even beginning to talk about football, Slater Wildcats Head Coach Michael Horton gets real. "Last year was devastating to our kids, like many throughout the state," he says. "We lost three games to COVID, including our district game." The Wildcats landed on a 4-4 record in that abbreviated season, with one of those losses coming to Windsor, the eventual state champion. Horton, ever one with perspective, adds, "We were really proud of what we were able to accomplish in such a crazy year."

And with a bit of normalcy creeping back into to everyone's lives, Horton and Slater can once again turn their focus to football. But first, Horton reflects on who won't be on the field in 2021. "We lost four really good seniors last year that will be missed," the coach says. (Three of those players signed to play collegiately.) "With that said, we have some very talented young men playing at our skill positions." There is no doubt that the Wildcats' offense will be peppered with playmakers, starting with senior QB Griffin Moore (5-11, 180). Moore completed 12 of 19 passes for 192 yards and 3 TDs in limited action as a junior. "We have a very good senior quarterback who can throw and run the ball," Horton says. "He finally gets his opportunity to step in." The success of the Slater offense will hinge on Moore's play in 2021.

Class: 1
Conference: West Central
Head Coach: Michael Horton
Years at School: 4
Record at School: 18-21
Overall Record: 18-21
Offensive Starters Returning: 7
Defensive Starters Returning: 7
Total Returning Lettermen: 15
2020 Overall Record: 4-4

Slater Wildcats 2020 Schedule		
August		
27	Wellington-Napoleon	Away
September		
3	Polo	Away
10	Fayette	Home
17	Skyline	Home
24	Windsor	Away
October		
1	Lincoln	Home
8	Tipton	Home
15	Cole Camp	Away
22	Russellville	Home
29	Districts	TBA

"We also have two very fast and physical running backs returning," Horton says. Sophomore RB Kenyon Minnis (5-11, 160) had a fantastic freshman campaign, rushing 28 times for 296 yards and 3 TDs, and hauling in 4 passes for 24 yards. It'll be fascinating to see what kind of player Minnis develops into. Junior RB Dustyn Simmons (5-9, 170) is a bruising rusher. He gained 113 yards and 2 TDs on 14 carries last year, and will be doing workhorse duty for the Wildcats this fall. Junior RB Jayce Case (5-8, 185) will act as backup. Two veteran wideouts will be Moore's main men out wide. Senior WR Ja'korie Terrill had 11 catches for 188 yards and 4 TDs in 2020, while junior WR/RB Christian Audsley (5-9, 160) proved his utility, catching 4 passes for 41 yards and rushing for 63 yards and 1 TD on 11 attempts. Sophomore WR Devon Moore (5-9, 155) may get some looks as well.

A big but young group of players will do the blocking for the Wildcats, starting with senior TE Tyler Malin (6-1, 200). Malin is "a very physical blocker who may end up playing some fullback for us," Horton says. Along with his blocking duties, Malin had 2 receptions for 33 yards and 1 TD last fall. The other returning starter in the trenches is junior OL Ian Stockman (6-0, 185). A wealth of size and potential will join these two in 2021, including senior OL James Gilpin (6-4, 300), junior OL Wylee Goff (6-0, 275), freshmen OLs Cody Gessling (6-4, 255) and Gannin Moore (6-1, 260), and senior TE Colton Arms (5-11, 175). "If our offensive line stays healthy and plays physical, with our set of skill guys, we have a chance to be very good," Horton says.

The Slater defense struggled at times last year, allowing 32 points per game. Says the coach, "We have to do a better job of tackling and covering than we did last year. We are changing our defense up some to be more multiple and aggressive." The Slater secondary looks like it'll be stacked this season, with three starters back. Junior DB Christian Audsley posted 42 tackles a year ago, while sophomore DB Kenyon Minnis had 37 tackles and 1 INT. Senior FS Ja'kore Terrill returns as the team's leading tackler, having



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recorded 58 in 2020. Senior DB Colton Arms and sophomore DB Devon Moore are set to join this formidable bunch in the year ahead.

The corps of linebackers will be deep as well. Senior MLB Griffin Moore had 33 tackles and 1 INT last fall, and junior MLB Dustyn Simmons added 17 tackles and 1 INT. Senior DE/OLB Tyler Malin, who had 38 tackles and 1 INT last season, will add some flexibility to Horton's new looks and varying schemes. Junior OLB Jayce Case and sophomore OLB Grayson Zdybel (5-8, 160) round out the unit. Zdybel showed some promise in 2020, tallying 20 tackles as a freshman. Outside of junior DE Ian Stockman, who posted 19 tackles last fall, the Slater defensive line will be composed of new faces. Expect senior DL James Gilpin, junior DL Wylee Goff, and freshmen DLs Cody Gessling and Gannin Moore to all start at some point throughout the year.

"We are going to have to play very physical football because we are in a tough conference, but I believe our young men will step up to the challenge," Horton says. Expect them to—and expect Slater to be a tough team to play against in 2021.

Pigskin's Pick: 4-5



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Smith-Cotton tigers

Every sports fan knows that there are ups and downs, highs and lows, and sometimes all you can do is roll with the punches. Last year was one of those times for the Smith-Cotton Tigers and Head Coach Charlie McFail. The Tigers went winless in 2020, a classic mix of a team that could rely on neither its offense nor its defense. All in all, it was a recipe for disaster.

McFail looks at the previous campaign with clear eyes. "We had a very disappointing 2020 season," he says. "We had some really good individual performances throughout the year and even some great team efforts at certain points during every game, but consistency was not one of our strengths. We could not put together great efforts on both sides of the ball at the same time." Having reached the nadir, the Tigers can only go back up, and McFail, his staff, his players, and fans around Sedalia are excited for the new season to begin.

The first fixes will occur on the defensive side of the football, where Smith-Cotton will be looking to improve upon the 153 rushing yards, 170 passing yards, and 31 points per game they allowed last fall. "We have some great experience coming back this year," says McFail. "We will have several seniors leading the way to a much-improved defense." Those seniors abound in the linebacking corps, which returns three starters to its ranks. Senior ILB Everett Wood (5-11, 200) might be the best of the bunch. Wood had a breakout junior season, tallying 74 tackles, 5 for loss, and 1 sack. The do-it-all inside backer even blocked a field goal. His size and quickness will be the bedrock of the Smith-Cotton defense this fall. And he'll again team up with fellow senior ILB Braxton Houchins (5-11, 170). The swift-moving Houchins posted 36 tackles in 2020, 4 of which came for a loss. Amazingly, Houchins also got his hands high to block a field goal. Senior OLB Kole Scott (5-10, 195) is the third returning starter in this group. Scott had 17 tackles, 1 for loss, and 1 fumble recovery last fall.

Only one starter is back in the Smith-Cotton secondary, but he's a good one. Senior S Jaron Washington (5-11, 170) had an excellent season in the defensive backfield, compiling 57 tackles, 2 for loss, 2 passes deflected, 1 fumble recovery, and 1 defensive touchdown. Washington's athleticism and ability to read the game could make him one of the better performers in the CMAC this fall. He'll join forces with junior CB Josiah Oliver (5-8, 160) and sophomore CB Mylan Hawkins (5-9, 160). Hawkins shows some promise, and in limited action last year Oliver had 5 tackles and 1 INT. No starters return to the Tigers D-line in 2021, but out of a base 3-4, that may not be the biggest problem for McFail and his staff.

Smith-Cotton returns a similar group to offense. Crucially, they will have experience at quarterback. "We will have a seasoned QB," says McFail, "and will be adding some athleticism to the skill positions." Junior QB Lane Simmons (5-11, 185) gained indispensable starting experience in 2020. He completed 50 passes for 649 yards and 2 TDs, and had a long carry of 19 yards. Without question, a lot of responsibility will rest on Simmons' shoulders this fall. Junior WR Connor Ladd (5-9, 155) is the top returning playmaker for the Tigers. Ladd had 9 catches for 172 yards and 1 TD last year. His experience will be crucial to the offense, and he will be tasked with showing the ropes to the younger skill-position players in the program. Senior RB Jaron Washington is likely to get a good number of touches in 2021. He had 5 rushes for 59 yards and 2 catches for 50 yards as a junior. Washington has the breakaway speed to leave opposing coaches scratching their

Class: 1
Conference: CMAC
Head Coach: Charlie McFail
Years at School: 13 (4 as Head Coach)
Record at School: 15-24
Overall Record: 15-24
Offensive Starters Returning: 4
Defensive Starters Returning: 4
Total Returning Lettermen: 17
2020 Overall Record: 0-8

2021 Smith-Cotton Tigers Schedule		
August		
27	Moberly	Away
September		
3	Rock Bridge	Away
10	Warrensburg	Home
17	Jefferson City	Home
24	Hickman	Away
October		
1	Battle	Home
8	Capital City	Away
15	Helias	Home
22	Hogan Prep	Away
29	Districts	TBA

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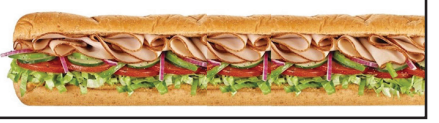
heads.

Junior WR Josiah Oliver is ready to get himself into the mix. "A gritty player with athleticism," McFail sees him slotting nicely into the offense. Oliver had 2 catches for 28 yards a year ago. Sophomore RB Mylan Hawkins will see an increased role as well. McFail praises Hawkins' "great speed and strength." Senior FB Kole Scott will also get some carries. Up front, the Tigers return two experienced players. Senior OT Alejandro Zuniga (6-0, 210) and senior OG Elias Washington (5-11, 210) both know the system and what it takes to be successful. "I expect our offense to improve in the run game to open up the passing game," McFail says.

After a year like 2020, there is no doubt that brighter things are ahead for Smith-Cotton. "We are very excited and eager to get this 2021 football season going," says McFail. "While the 2020 season was very disappointing, we were able to find some positives to build from." They should be more competitive this fall, but with their challenging schedule their climb back to their winning ways will be a tough go.

Pigskin's Pick: 2-7

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South Callaway bulldogs

In the half-dozen years he's led the South Callaway Bulldogs, Head Coach Zack Hess has put together something pretty special. Teams during his tenure have averaged a record of 8-3, meaning that the Bulldogs' 7-4 tally in 2020 is actually less than expected. Yet, that's still a mark most programs would be more than happy to have. "We had a large, dedicated, and athletic senior class that finished a great career here," Hess says. "We also had a smaller group of juniors that blended well with the senior group. We are proud of the 2020 team and their accomplishments."

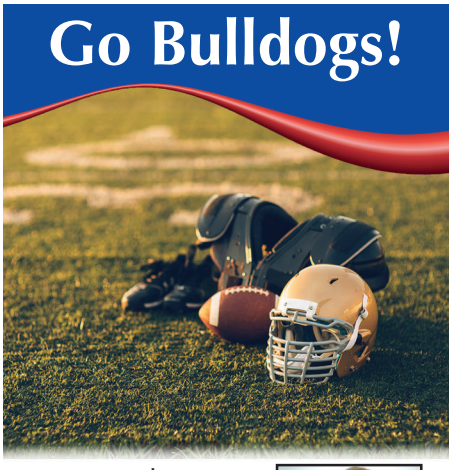
Those juniors are seniors now, and ready to make their own mark on the program. And with six highly lauded starters back on the defense, the coach is excited to see how this unit comes together. "The defense will look to 'Swarm and Punish' opponents again," Hess says. "We will have some familiar faces coming back and hope to improve our physical, attack-style defense." Chief among those familiar faces is senior ILB Jasper Rees (6-1, 215). Rees had an outstanding junior campaign, compiling an incredible 113.5 tackles, 9.5 for loss, 3.5 sacks, 2 INTs, and 2 forced fumbles. Those gaudy statistics earned Rees spots on the All-Conference, All-District, and All-State teams. And there's a lot more linebacker talent returning. Senior LB Trace Helsel (5-11, 185) had 55.5 tackles, 3 INTs, and 1 TD in 2020, and found himself on the All-Conference and All-District squads. Senior LB Sam Bucker, another All-District player, tallied 26 tackles, 2 for loss, and 1 INT, while fellow senior LB Corey Wallace (5-10, 185) posted 48 tackles. Expect senior LB Chrisjen Davis (5-10, 175) and junior LBs J.T. Thomas (5-9, 165) and Caleb Pezold (6-0, 190) to provide depth. All in all, this just may be the fiercest linebacker corps in the area.

The lone returning starter on the Bulldogs D-line is junior DL Kyle Dickinson (6-1, 220). Dickinson had 24 tackles, 1 for loss, 1 sack, and 1 forced fumble a year ago, and was named Academic All-Conference. Junior DL Tanner Marty (5-11, 210) will join Dickinson in the trenches this year. Senior DB Brandon Mealy (6-3, 185) had a terrific junior season, tallying 52 tackles, 2 INTs, and 1 forced fumble. He is yet another All-District and All-Conference performer. Outside of Mealy, the secondary will be made up all new bodies, including senior DB Donnie Fortner (5-8, 150) and junior DBs Jacob Martin (5-7, 140) and Dalton Belcher (6-0, 165). Hess understands the importance of this secondary forming a solid unit. "Our defensive backs must learn quickly and prevent the big play to see improvement and success on defense," the coach says.

South Callaway's Flexbone Veer Option ran like a well-oiled machine in 2020, as the Bulldogs averaged 32.5 points and an outrageous 277 rushing yards per game. Hess doesn't want to see too much change, saying, "We will continue to stress ball protection and tempo." Handling the ball the most will be senior QB Sam Buckner, who landed on the All-District team after 97 rush attempts for 422 yards and 9 TDs, and completing 25 passes for 298 yards and 3 TDs. A big passing target is back in the form of senior WR Brandon Mealy, who had 6 receptions for 68 yards and 1 TD a year ago. Perhaps the most important piece to the offense, though, is senior RB Trace Helsel. The multitalented Helsel ran the ball 148 times for 830 yards and 11 TDs in 2020 while also posting 8 receptions for 50 yards. His

Class: 1
Conference: Eastern Missouri
Head Coach: Zack Hess
Years at School: 12 (6 as HC)
Record at School: 50-19
Overall Record: 50-19
Offensive Starters Returning: 5
Defensive Starters Returning: 6
Total Returning Lettermen: 12
2020 Overall Record: 7-4

South Callaway 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Mark Twain	Away
September		
3	North Callaway	Away
10	Louisiana	Home
17	Montgomery County	Home
24	True Divine Word	Away
October		
1	Van-Far	Away
8	Cuba	Away
15	Bowling Green	Home
22	Wright City	Home
29	Districts	TBA

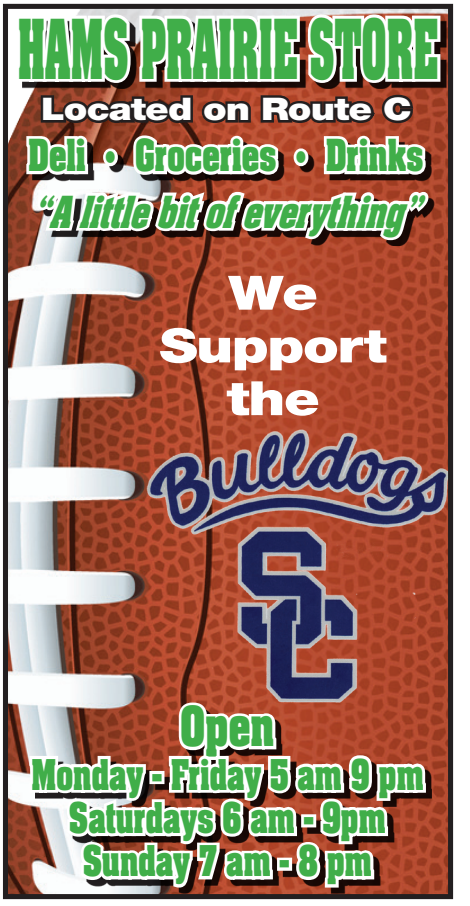


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5.61 yards per carry is a terrific number out of the option.

Overall, Hess likes this core group and its supporting players. "The 2021 offense should be dynamic both in the running and passing game and should feature some playmaking ability and athleticism." Further athleticism will come in the form of senior RB Donnie Fortner, who tallied 78 yards and 4 TDs on 15 rushing attempts last fall; senior RB Chrisjen Davis, who ran 7 times for 38 yards; and junior RB J.T. Thomas, who accrued 29 yards on 7 attempts. Junior WR Dalton Belcher and junior RB Jacob Martin could figure into the mix as well. The offensive line returns two starters: senior OL Jasper Rees and junior OL Kyle Dickinson, both of whom were Academic All-Conference. Junior OLs Caleb Pezold and Tanner Marty are likely to claim two of the open starting spots.

Although the Bulldogs lost a solid senior class, they now have another good one stepping up and filling in. And there is no better measure of success in high school football than that. Hess has done an admirable job during his time at South Callaway, so it's safe to expect the Bulldogs to be in the mix come Districts.

Pigskin Pick: 7-2

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South Shelby cardinals

In so many ways, 2020 was not what Adam Gunterman would have dreamed his first year as a head coach would be like. The South Shelby Cardinals finished winless—and Gunterman was tasked with leading his team through not just a football season but a pandemic as well. He takes it all in stride. "Last year was a rough year," Gunterman says, "but we grew a great deal as a team. We were very close in several games. Our players know that and are preparing with a chip on their shoulder."

The first thing South Shelby will have to do to improve is put more points on the board; the Cardinals were shut out three different times in 2020. But with five starters back—and a treasure trove of developing talent—things are looking up. "We have some of the best young players in the area," Gunterman says. "We will be much better on offense, with big goals." South Shelby will lean heavily on Junior QB Trey Countryman (6-2, 175). Countryman connected on 49% of his passes in 2020, totaling 893 yards and 5 TDs. Expect Countryman's increased comfort in Gunterman's Pistol Power to produce better decision-making and better accuracy.

The main playmaker for the Cardinals in 2021 will be senior WR/RB Wyatt Owens (5-11, 160). Owens made the All-District Second-Team last fall after catching 10 passes for 201 yards and 1 TD, and rushing 46 time for 284 yards and 1 TD. Owens' ability to do a little bit of everything will open doors for the South Shelby offense this fall. The potential blue-chip player on the Cardinal offense, though, is sophomore RB Kendal Hammond (6-2, 180). In just two starts as a freshman last fall, Hammond accrued 265 yards and 1 TD on 44 carries, and had 2 receptions for 32 yards. Hammond brings next-level size and strength to the position—it'll normally take more than one tackler to bring him down. Sophomore RB/WR Cameron Wiseman (5-10, 160) displayed some big-play skills in 2020, posting 2 catches for 100 yards. There may be no better proof of Wiseman's gamebreaking speed than that 50 yards/catch statistic. Senior WR Charlie Hall (6-1, 185) will be Countryman's top red zone target this fall.

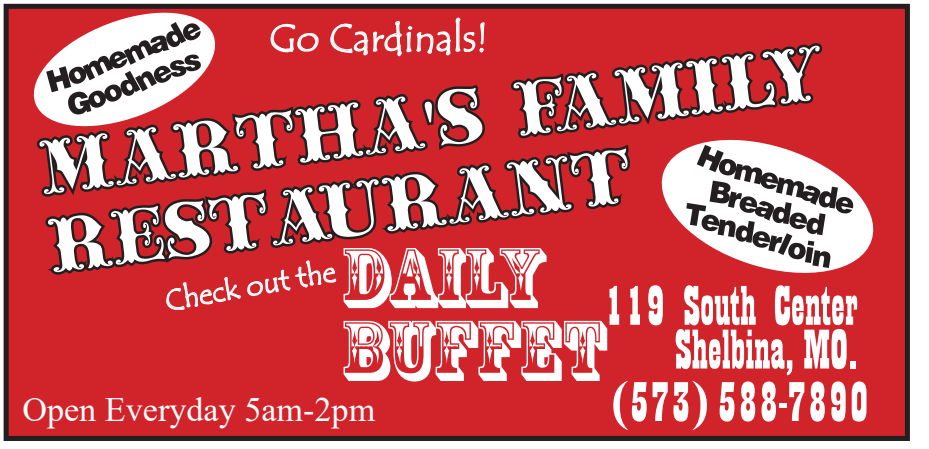
"We will have no seniors on the O-line," Gunterman says, "but the young guys are learning fast and are competitive." Junior C Connor Harre (6-0, 220) and sophomore OL Ethan Dodd (6-0, 215) each return to starting duty, while sophomore OG Chance Rainy (6-2, 190) will become a full-time starter this fall. It'll be crucial for Gunterman to get the young players quickly integrated into the South Shelby O-line if this offense is going to hum in 2021.

If they are to be competitive in the Clarence Cannon this fall, the Cardinals' defense will have to improve in a big way as well. "Defense is a major focus this offseason," Gunterman says. "We are returning several starters on defense, and building on the youth that we had. This group knows that last year was not what is expected out of South Shelby football." With eight starters back in action, the Cardinals looked poised to get better.

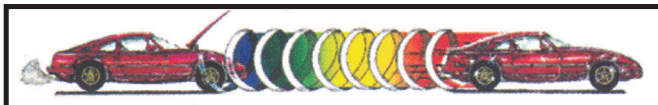
The defensive backfield comes back entirely intact. Senior S Wyatt Owens had an excellent 47 tackles and 1 INT out of the secondary last year, while junior S P.J. Schmidt (5-10, 160) saw his season cut short due to injury. Junior CB Trey Countryman used his size and instincts to good effect in 2020, tallying 17 tackles, 1 INT, and 1 forced fumble. Senior CB Levi Blevins (5-9, 160) had 9 tackles and 1 INT in 3 games' work—he, too, was lost to injury. This year, senior DB Charlie Hall

Class: 1
Conference: Clarence Cannon
Head Coach: Adam Gunterman
Years at School: 1
Record at School: 0-8
Overall Record: 0-8
Offensive Starters Returning: 5
Defensive Starters Returning: 8
Total Returning Lettermen: 20
2020 Overall Record: 0-8

South Shelby 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Milan	Home
September		
3	Westran	Away
10	Monroe City	Away
17	Clark County	Home
24	Highland	Away
October		
1	Macon	Away
8	Centralia	Home
15	Palmyra	Away
22	Brookfield	Home
29	Districts	TBA







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will figure into the equation as well.

The defensive line will be anchored by sophomore DE Ethan Dodd. Incredibly, Dodd led the team in sacks and tackles for loss as a freshman, and was named Second-Team All-Conference. Junior DT Connor Harre will work to control the line's interior, while sophomore DE Chance Rainy will take on the line's edge. Rainy had 5 tackles, 2 for a loss in one start in 2020. Junior ILB Ryder Friesz (6-0, 175) comes back as the team's leading returning tackler after posting 51 tackles last fall, and senior OLB Elijah Kline (5-11, 170) will work beside him. Though Kline played just one game because of injury, he compiled a promising 12 tackles in that effort.

It's entirely likely that South Shelby's 2020 campaign was just one of those seasons that a young coach and young players need to get out of their system. Now, it looks like some of the kinks are worked out and smoother seas lie ahead. "We will be much improved," Gunterman says. "This is a very young group that has been successful coming up through the ranks." It's only a matter of time before they taste success on the varsity level, too.

Pigskin's Pick: 3-6



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Southern Boone eagles

The Eagles had a fairly decent season last fall. They were 2nd in the Tri-County Conference, but were knocked out by Centralia in the playoffs. "Last season felt like a roller coaster of emotions and uncertainty," Coach Trent Tracy said. "We were very fortunate to have a football season and compete almost every Friday Night." The Eagles went through adversity due to COVID-19. They faced many players catching cases, causing them to miss games. "We dealt with (like so many others) numerous quarantines throughout the season," Coach Tracy said. "We lost opponents and picked up new opponents." Although they faced a lot of trials, the Eagles fought through and came out with a winning season. "While our record was 6-4, I feel like we were a very good football team," Coach Tracy said about the Eagles. "Our 4 losses were to Odessa (undefeated the past 2 years), Tonganoxie, KS (Class 4 state quarterfinalist), Blair Oaks (Class 3 State Champs), and Central (due to quarantines, we only had 24 players for that game)." The Eagles are starting off fresh with a new team, due to the large group of seniors graduating last year. "I am thrilled that the senior class got a season and wish them the best of luck in their next chapter of life," Coach Tracy said.

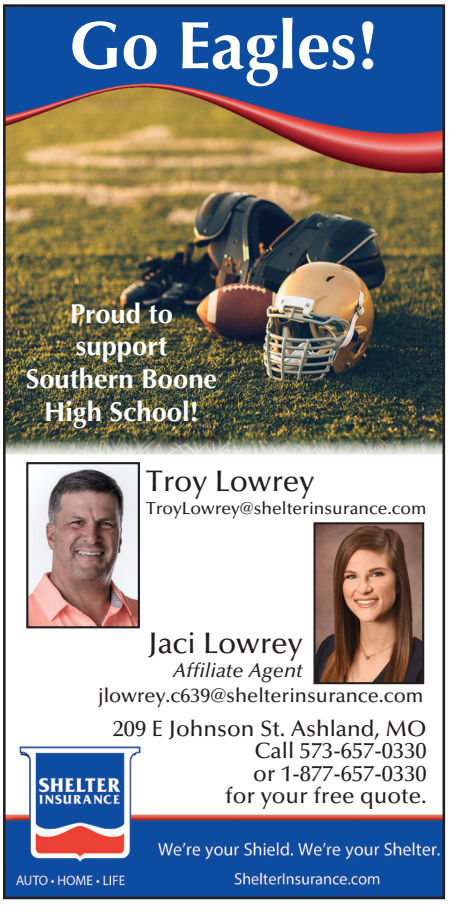
The Eagles had a talented offense last year, and are looking to rebuild this upcoming season. They ran a spread formation, scoring 28.9 points per game, rushing for 147.2 ypg and throwing for 187.2 ypg. "Offensively we are hoping to be a balanced offense this season," Coach Tracy said. "Hayden Steelman (5-9, 185) will be a first year starter at QB, but has a very good arm and is excited to take over the offense." Coach Tracy also spoke highly of Sophomore quarterback and defensive back Austin Evans (5-9, 160), for he provides a dual threat due to his mobility. "Tate John (5-11, 165) and Baden Glass (6-0, 175) return and look to be Steelman's #1 and #2 targets in the passing game," Coach Tracy said. "Joining John and Glass at receiver is a handful of guys who are still competing for starting spots." These receivers include Seniors Nathan West (6-0, 180) and Bob Andert (5-8, 190), Junior Carter Salter (5-9, 165), Sophomores Kellen Ash (6-0, 165), Tristan McKee (5-10, 165), Weston Jennings (5-9, 170) and James Basnett. Coach Tracy also stated that the running back position has 5 players who are competing for the starting spots, and all 5 will see the field. These include Junior Ben Taylor (6-0, 185), Senior Bradly Smith (5-8, 150), Sophomore Chase Morris (5-7, 150), Junior Jacob Bowles (5-10, 175) and Senior Anin McLeod (5-8, 170). Up front on the offensive line will be led by returning 2 year starter Sam Hampton (5-10, 280). Alongside Hampton on the offensive line will be Junior Dane Donigian (5-11, 200), Senior Johnah Sapp (5-11, 240), Senior Tyler Hilgedick (5-9, 200) and Junior Owen Fulk (5-11, 240). Junior Justin Post (5-10, 180), Sophomore Dylan Niles (6-6, 230), and Junior Aiden Boyce (6-0, 250) are also competing for starting spots on the offensive line and will see some Friday night action as well. "Only returning 3 starters means a lot of our guys have really had to step up and fill these spots," Coach Tracy said. "We have had a lot of internal competition this summer and are focusing on getting better every day."

On the defensive side, the Eagles were fairly dominant. Their secondary played lights out last season, only allowing 100.9 passing yards per game. The Eagles only allowed 25.9 points per game, and 152.9 rushing yards allowed per game last season. "With the Eagles only returning 1 starter from last year's defense, we are excited to see new guys step into these starting roles," Coach Tracy said. "Tate John returns to lead the secondary at his safety spot." Coach Tracy also said that Senior Baden Glass (5-11, 175) saw a lot of playing time last season and will be looked to be a leader on the defense at the linebacker position.

Classification: 3
Conference: Tri County Conference
Head Coach: Trent Tracy
Years at School: 7
Offensive Starters Returning: 3
Defensive Starters Returning: 1
Total Returning Letterman: 7
2020 Overall Record: 6-4
2020 District Record: 3-1

Southern Boone 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Odessa	Away
September		
3	Mexico	Away
10	Boonville	Home
17	Versailles	Home
24	Eldon	Away
October		
1	Hallsville	Home
8	Osage	Home
15	Blair Oaks	Away
22	California	Away
29	District	TBA





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Other players looking to compete for starting defensive back positions include West, Smith, Morris, Salter, Ash, Evans, Jennings, Andert, Basnett, and Mckee. "Linebackers is a position group which return no starters last year, but we are really excited about what our linebacking corps can accomplish this season," Coach Tracy said. The linebackers competing will be Donigian, Taylor, McLeod, Bowles, and Junior Teller Mange (5-8, 175). "Our defensive linemen are led by Sam Hampton," Coach Tracy said. "Sam saw a lot of playing time last year on defense and now we look for him to be a force upfront." Joining Hampton will be Hilgedick, who has a great combination of strength and speed. Other defensive linemen that are competing for a spot are Sapp, Fulk, Post, Niles, and Boyce.

The Eagles are looking forward to another great season. They have a lot of young talent and first year starters that show a lot of potential. "This is the most turnover that we have had in my 8 years at Southern Boone," Coach Tracy said. "Our goal is always to be playing our best football by the end of the season." Coach Tracy also states that he believes that this team will continue to get better each week last they get more comfortable playing on Friday nights. This team will be tested for the first two weeks of the season, going up against Odessa and Mexico. "We will be ready for the challenge,"

Pigskin's Pick: 5-4



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St. Clair bulldogs

The St. Clair Bulldogs have been on a roll the last few years. Year in and year out competing for a conference championship; just like last season where they won the Four Rivers Conference title. Coach Brian Robbins is proud of that group who persevered through a tough season of having games postponed or cancelled. "We had a great group of seniors last season they played well together," boasted Coach Robbins. "We missed 2 games due to quarantine, but were able to win our conference and lost to a very talented Cardinal Ritter team in the district championship finishing 9-1." Even though it didn't end with a deep playoff run like they would have liked, the Bulldogs had a successful and memorable 2020. Robbins and his staff of Sam Kruse, Travis Johnson, Kyle Juergens will have their work cut out for them as one of the byproducts of that successful, senior-laden team, the Bulldogs return only two starters this season. The cupboard is never really completely bare at St. Clair. They always seem to have new players step in and step up, but this year will test Coach Robbins and his staff like never before.

The defense was outstanding last season where they pitched five shutouts. FIVE! In fact they only allowed opponents to average 5 points per game, FIVE! That is excluding the tough season-ending game to powerhouse Cardinal Ritter where they surrendered more points than they did all year…combined.

The two returning starters are both on the defensive side of the ball and they are two solid juniors to build around. Defensive backs Anthony Broeker (6-0, 175) and Gabe Martinez (5-8, 150). These two were big reasons why the pass defense was so stellar last season. They both are good cover players, but can also support the run. They will be joined in the secondary by fellow junior DB Isaac Nunez. Look for junior Jordan Rodrigue (5-8, 150) and sophomore Gavin Shoemate (5-8, 155) to see some time at DB as well. There is some solid new talent at the linebacker position. Junior LB Cam Simcox will team up with sophomore backers Adrian Arguliez, Skyler Sanders, Carter Short (5-11, 175) and Creek Hughes (5-5, 135). These guys are young, but they are solid tacklers and have the quickness to get to the ballcarrier. Creek Hughes will most likely be lined up at outside linebacker. The D-line will have to build around sophomore DT Chase Thacker (6-1, 215) and senior Bass Hughes (5-9, 170).

The St. Clair offense was a juggernaut last season averaging over 40 points per game and over 450 yards per game of offense. Wow! Most of that damage was done with their ground attack where they averaged over 400 yards a game with their option offense.

The rebuild is even more dire on the offensive side where no starters return. They have some young talent to build around, but coach Robbins knows what job #1 is "We needed to find some linemen to develop this summer for us to be able to move the ball this season." One player will be senior Bass Hughes who has some experience at guard. Look for the possibility of sophomore Chase Thacker to be used on the line as well. His size and athleticism would be a plus. There are quite a few skill players who could step up this season including a stable of potential at running back. Junior runningbacks Gabe Martinez, Cam Simcox and Isaac Nunez will get their shots. The sophomore trio of Skyler Sanders,

Class: 3
Conference: 4-Rivers
Head Coach: Brian Robbins
Years at School: 11
Overall Record: 80-38
Returning Lettermen: 8
Offensive Returning Starters: 0
Defensive Returning Starters: 2
2020 Over Record: 9-1

2021 St. Clair Bulldogs Schedule		
August		
27	Perryville	Away
September		
3	Salem	Away
10	Pacific	Away
17	Sullivan	Home
24	Union	Away
October		
1	St. James	Home
8	Hermann	Away
15	Cape Central Home	
22	Owensville	Away
29	Districts	TBD

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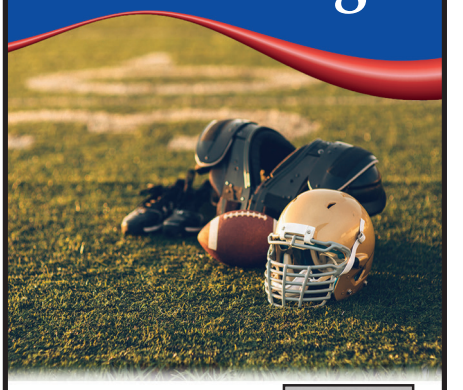
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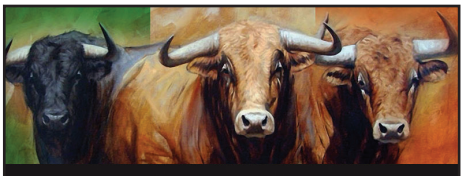
Creek Hughes and Gavin Shoemate will provide depth and a change of pace as each has different skills. The QB job will most likely be junior Anthony Broeker's to start the season. He can run well and has a good arm when called upon. Junior Jordan Rodrigue and sophomore Carter Short will provide depth at QB when Short is not playing tight end. Sophomore Adrian Arguliez will be at tight end as well.

"Depth is a concern and we will be very inexperienced to start the season," warned Coach Robbins. "We just want to improve each day and have fun while we do it. We lost a ton of kids to graduation and our seniors were the heart and soul of our team for the last 2 seasons. They will be difficult to replace. We have some good young kids in our program, but it will take a season or two for them to learn, grow, and develop." Coach Robbins and his staff will earn their play this season to get these newbies up to the Bulldogs standard. Step by step, game by game the Bulldogs will rebuild.

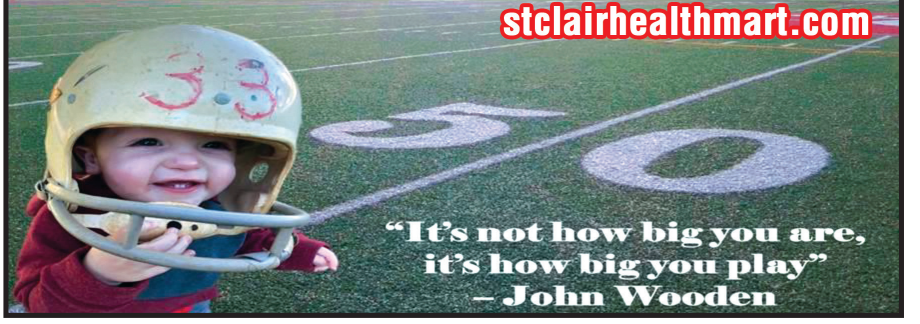
Pigskin's Pick: 4-5

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St. Francis Borgia knights

Last season marked the end of an era for Borgia. The Knights graduated one of the most decorated classes in school history, with the high-school careers of 21 players coming to a close. Amazingly, seven of those players went on to play at the collegiate level. In their final season, that class led the team to a 7-4 record, capped by a five-game winning streak that started in October. "Overall I felt we had a tremendous year," long-time Head Coach Dale Gildehaus says. "Our season ended as we took on Lutheran North. Not as far as we would have wanted but still a good year."

With that group gone, things are going to be significantly different for the program this fall. With just one letterman returning, Borgia has what at very best can be called a skeleton crew. Luckily for Knights fans, Gildehaus has the proper approach for molding a new group of players. "As the head coach I need to be a student of the game," Gildehaus says. "I'm not sold on a particular offense or defense each year—I adjust with the type of players I have. If we have speed and kids who can catch the ball, get it in their hands. If we have the line, pound it down the field. Be flexible as a coach."

The team's lone returning starter is junior OG J.J. McCubbin (6-1, 235). He will be tasked with anchoring the Knights' offensive line and showing the ropes to the younger players in the trenches. Taking on ball-snapping duties this year will be senior C Will Warden (5-10, 190). Warden has had a solid offseason, and while he has never played center before, Gildehaus trusts him in the role. Gildehaus says that senior OL Nick Elbert (5-9, 190) "is very quick and strong. He will be a big part of the offensive line." Senior OL Ryan Kampschroeder (6-0, 200) is tapped for a starting spot as well. Gildehaus admires Kampschroeder's attitude, saying that the player told him he'll do anything to help the team. Other players looking to contribute on the O-line are junior OL Jack Boone (6-1, 220), who has some major potential, and junior OL Tyler Dill (6-3, 235), who is likely to claim one of the tackle spots. Junior TE Luke Kopmann (6-2, 205) will do both blocking and catching this fall.

There's a competition in Washington to see who will get the starting job at quarterback. Gildehaus has narrowed it down to junior QB Ben Roehrig (5-10, 180) and sophomore QB Koen Zeltman (5-10, 170). Gildehaus calls Roehrig a "hard worker and good leader" and praises Zeltman's athleticism. It's entirely plausible that Gildehaus opts for a system that employs the strengths of both, keeping opposing defensive coordinators on their toes. Junior RB Trenton Volmert (6-0, 175) will get the nod at running back. He has excellent speed and big-play ability. Out wide, junior WR Jordon Mohesky (5-8, 167) will be the team's main target. Mohesky boasts a terrific set of hands and breakaway wheels. And a stable of newcomers gives the receiving corps some depth. Senior WRs Garen Parks (6-2, 185) and Alec Reigel (5-11, 165), junior WR Kabren Koelling (6-1, 175), and sophomore WR Kaden McCubbin (6-4, 180) will form one of the taller groups of wideouts in the area. Surveying his offense, Gildehaus says, "We have a talented group of sophomores and juniors, then mix in our seniors and we will improve each week. Speed is our strength."

Defensively, Borgia enters 2021 with a completely clean slate. Senior DL Ethan Clarkson (6-1, 210) will be a major contributor on the Knights' D-line this fall. Competing for the other starting roles up front are senior DLs Will Warden, Nick Elbert, and Ryan Kampschroeder, and junior DLs Jack Boone and Tyler Dill.

Class: 3
Conference: AAA
Head Coach: Dale Gildehaus
Years at School: 35
Record at School: 278-105
Overall Record: 278-105
Offensive Starters Returning: 1
Defensive Starters Returning: 0
Total Returning Lettermen: 1
2020 Overall Record: 7-4

St. Francis Borgia 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Pacific	Home
September		
3	Union	Away
10	Cardinal Ritter	Away
17	St. Mary's	Home
24	Valle Catholic	Away
October		
1	Duchesne	Away
8	St. Dominic	Away
15	Hillsboro	Home
22	Carnahan	Home
29	Districts	TBA



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Junior LB Luke Kopmann will lead the linebacking corps. Gildehaus sees some major upside in Kopmann's defensive game. He'll be joined by junior LB Nathan Dedert (6-1, 210). The secondary is likely to be composed of senior DB Garen Parks, junior DB Kabren Koelling, senior DB Alec Reigel, and sophomore DB Kaden McCubbin. Expect a group of utility players to find spots on the Borgia defense this year, including junior ATH Jack Guehne (6-0, 190) and sophomore ATHs Nathan Kell (6-0, 190), and Sam Tuepker (6-0, 185). Gildehaus is terse when examining his defense. "With no returners, naturally we have work to do," the coach says.

2021 will be a transition year for Borgia, with Gildehaus and his staff working to acquaint the younger players with the speed and demands of varsity football. "Holy cow, we are young," Gildehaus muses. "We've got a super tough schedule, but what a great challenge." Gildehaus has the experience to get this team playing the way he would like throughout the year. This year will be less about winning than preparing the younger classes to hopefully have a career like that of last year's graduating class.

Pigskin's Pick: 5-4



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St. James tigers

The St. James Tigers struggled a lot in the 2020 season. This year, they are looking to make a turnaround. "Although the record doesn't show it we have improved immensely from the year before," Coach Josh Rodriguez said. "Again, as we did in 2019, we played a lot of underclassmen that will be a big part of our future." This team is loaded with experienced Juniors and Seniors. "With small senior classes in 2019 and 2020, it gave us an opportunity to get valuable varsity experience for young guys who may have not been totally ready physically, but we feel the game speed experience and Friday Night Lights pressure will pay dividends for us in 2021 and beyond," Coach Rodriguez said. His coaching style motivates players to become good players not only on the field, but off the field as well. "In our program, we believe that it is our mission to raise good men," Coach Rodriguez said. "We stand on pillars of character, choices accountability, love, commitment, and we over me attitude." The Tigers' offense has a plethora of seniors who aren't strangers to the game. They will continue running the notorious Spread Wing T. Last season they scored 9.2 points per game, rushing for 1,168 yards and passing for 1,255 yards. "Both sides of the ball are returning tons of experience, especially the offensive side," Coach Rodriguez said. "Returning leading rusher, Cody Wilfong (5-9, 175) and the entire offensive line will dictate the pace of the offense as we look to see an offensive explosion in 2021." Senior QB Wilfong is the backbone of the Tigers' offense. Last season, he won All-Conference Honorable Mention, having 93 carries and rushing for 638 yards and 3 TDs. "With several deep and talented classes coming up we will have the ability to be very balanced with a run game that has the potential to be dominating and an efficient passing game with experienced Senior targets WR Peyton Maylee (5-10 180), TE Logan Sparks (6-4 220), and WR Dakota Kurtii (5-8, 160) and speed to burn with young wide receiver/running backs Snyder, Ford, Inda, and others that could make an excellent 4x1 team," Coach Rodriguez said. Maylee, last year, had 14 receptions for 232 yards and a touchdown. Sparks had 11 receptions for 136 yards and was a two-time 1st Team All-Conference punter. This Tigers' offense will also need the experience of the offensive line. They will run behind Seniors Jed Hitch (6-4, 270), Seth Keeney (6-0, 230), Lucas Morehouse (6-0, 255) and Juniors Cody Ward (6-1, 260) and Dale Hinderhand (5-9, 215). "The offensive line took major steps forward last season and collectively be a good group to lead us up front with 6 quality linemen in Hitch, Ward, Morehouse, Keeney, and Hinderhan," Coach Rodriguez said. Hitch also won Honorable Mention All-Conference for O-line. "Look for this offense to score a lot of points in 2021."

The Tigers' defense is also returning a number of seniors who played a lot of reps last year. They will continue to play in a 4-3 defense. Last year they allowed 30 points per game, 224 rushing yards per game, and 97 passing yards per game. "Like the offense, there will be a lot of experience returning to the defense," Coach Rodriguez said. "7 returning regular starters from a year ago will look to improve together to keep us in games." This defense is powered by the big boys up front and a secondary that loves to fly around and make plays on the ball. "The strength of the defense will be up front with the depth and quality of linemen returning," Coach Rodriguez said. "Chandler Tinsley (5-9, 220) missed most of 2020 with an injury and when healthy proved to be one of the better defenders in the area, earning All-Conference in 2019." Due to Tinsley's injury last year, he only had 30 tackles and 2 sacks. "Dale Hinderhann (5-9, 215) is an undersized powerhouse that demands double teams and often splits them with his speed," Coach Rodriguez said. Hinderhann earned 2nd Team All-Conference last season, recording 83 tackles and 4 sacks. James Perkins (6-1, 195) is a promising athlete who will be able to play with his hand in the dirt or possibly move to linebacker. Perkins became a starter during the second half of the season as a freshman. "A wild card may be Joe Oxner (6-0, 230), who played last season, but missed several games with health issues," Coach Rodriguez said. The secondary will also be a strength. The Tigers have lockdown defensive backs who are tremendous ballhawks. All-Conference DB Cody Wilifong will return to be a leader on defense and possibly one of the better players in class 3. Wilifong had 88 total tackles, a sack, and an interception last season. Seniors Dakota Kurtti (3 year captain)

Classification: 3
Conference: Four Rivers
Head Coach: Josh Rodriguez
Years at School: 3
Offensive Starters Returning: 8
Defensive Starters Returning: 7
Total Returning Letterman: 31
2020 Overall Record: 1-9
2020 District Record: 1-3

St. James Tigers 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Salem	Home
September		
3	Houston	Away
10	Hermann	Away
17	Owensville	Home
24	Cuba	Home
October		
1	St. Clair	Away
8	Sullivan	Away
15	Union	Home
22	Pacific	Home
29	District	TBA


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St. James Tigers

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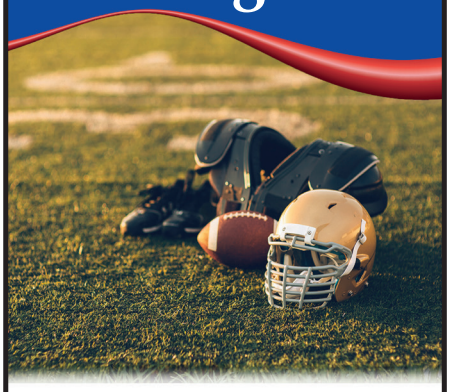

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and Peyton Maylee will anchor the secondary. Kurtti (5-8, 160) had 50 total tackles last season and Maylee (5-10, 180) had 68 total tackles and 2 INTS.

The Tigers have a lot of young potential that will see the field this fall as well. Sophomore Cooper Harlan (5-9, 200) will compete for the starting quarterback position. Sophomore Kaiden Snyder will play running back and wide receiver. He is an explosive athlete who will play a major role on offense. Sophomores Omero India (6-0, 155) will play WR and DB. Coach Rodriguez spoke highly of him, saying that he is another exciting athlete who will compete for jobs on both sides of the ball. Junior Joey Ford (5-9. 160) will also be in the mix at LB and a skill spot on offense playing WR. Junior Mike Dekock (6-0, 210) will look to fill in at linebacker after getting a lot of experiences a year ago. Junior Devin Skelley (5-8, 165) will be in the rotation in the secondary. Junior Jake Foust (6-0, 175) will compete for playing time at LB or DE on the front seven.

This team has a lot of potential. They have the talent and the work ethic to become more competitive in Class 3. "After a couple of down seasons, St. James is ready to take the next step and make a lot of noise this season and for the next few years," Coach Rodriguez said. "We expect to be competitive at the top of the Four Rivers Conference and soon to be a major player in the region."

Pigskin's Pick: 4-5

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Sullivan eagles

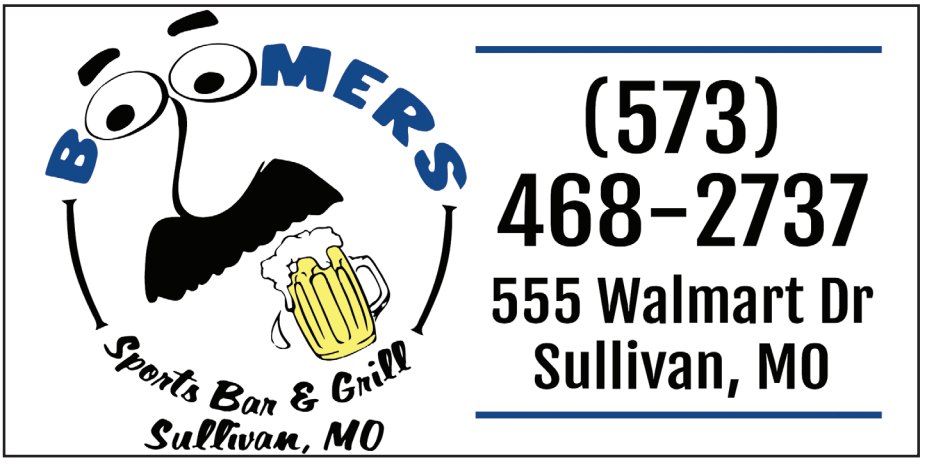
The Sullivan Eagles football program has been in a tumultuous state over the last few years. Second-year head coach Eddie Haar was the third Sullivan head coach in three years when he was brought on board last year, and a 2020 season marred by three COVID-19-related postponements saw the Eagles only secure two wins last season. However, one of them was in the district playoffs, and the Eagles' season came to an end on a note of improvement following a back-and-forth battle in a 21-20 loss to conference rival Union, a team they were shut out by earlier in the year. Haar has seemingly steered the program in the right direction heading into the upcoming season. "We are excited," said Haar. "We have had a great offseason in the weightroom and have been improving at a great rate throughout the summer." That improvement starts on the offensive end, where Sullivan struggled last season. However, returning nine starters should allow for the Eagles to take a collective leap in 2021. Junior quarterback Gabe Dace (6-2, 205) worked on his accuracy over the summer, impressing at Sullivan's Gridiron Classic scrimmages. The running back and fullback tandem of senior Alex Goly (5-9, 185) and sophomore Jeremiah Rodriguez (6-2, 235) will provide good duality to an offense that sets out to operate under multiple schemes. Goly's tape shows a shifty, tackle-breaking runner with strong feet, while Rodriguez is more of a mower than anything else with such a difficult frame to bring down. Returning starting wideout junior Gavin Dace (6-1, 180) leads a receiver group featuring a couple of newcomers in junior Kayden Bryan (5-9, 170) and junior Jonathon Martin (5-10, 160). Senior tight ends Trevor Carey (6-2, 215) and Ty Shetley (5-9, 160) round out the Eagles pass catchers, a varied group that showed upside in multiple games last year but couldn't stay consistent. Three of last year's offensive line starters are back in the fold for Sullivan. Senior Branden Traxler (6-3, 250), junior Sam Summers (6-5, 240) and Jordan Rice (6-1, 195) shore up an O-line unit whose ability to keep a clean pocket will be a big determinant in the Eagles' success. Sophomore Cayden Thacker (5-10, 270) is expected to fill one of the vacancies left behind by the now-graduated Four Rivers All-Conference Second Team selections Derek Johnson and Luke Lendwehr.

Sullivan's defense returns seven athletes, including three guys on the defensive line. Seniors Trevor Carey (6-2, 215) and Tim Kloos (5-11, 185) surround Summers in what is shaping up to be a 4-3 base, with the linebackers being Goly, Shetley and Gavin Dace. Shetley and Goly both earned Four Rivers All-Conference Second Team honors last season at the linebacker position, demonstrating an aggressive pursuit of the ball with a great sense of run action. With the experience and talent that both guys showed off last year, the LB spot is arguably Sullivan's strongest position group heading into the season. Senior defensive back Ian King (6-0, 170) takes leadership of a secondary unit that will receive contributions from both Bryan and Martin.

The Eagles defense allowed opposing

Class: 4
Conference: Four Rivers
Head Coach: Eddie Haar
Years at School: 2
Record at School: 2-6
Overall Record: 2-6
Offensive Starters Returning: 9
Defensive Starters Returning: 7
Total Returning Lettermen: 16
2020 Overall Record: 2-6

Sullivan Eagles 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Cuba	Away
September		
3	Festus	Home
10	Union	Home
17	St. Clair	Away
24	Pacific	Away
October		
1	Hermann	Home
8	St. James	Home
15	Owensville	Away
24	North County	Away
29	Districts	TBA





offenses to score just 40 points in the final four games of last season. As the culture set by Haar grew throughout the program, a more united front led to improved performances in the back half of the season. Although game cancellations left many athletes with diminished chances to get game experience, returning such a significant amount of starters on both sides of the ball should bode well for a team that progressively strengthened in 2020. “We strive ourselves on hard work on and off the field,” said Haar. “We believe this will create great teams, teammates and future leaders of our community.”

As the Eagles head into 2021 looking for its first district title since 2012, Sullivan is a program that looks poised to build upon the foundation of a strong learning year in Haar’s debut as head coach. It faced adversity in a pandemic-ridden year, grew tough skin from blowout losses and one-point heartbreakers, and adjusted to the style of a new leader. Now, it looks to be more competitive in a tough Four Rivers Conference.

Pigskin’s Pick: 4-5



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Tipton cardinals

2020 marked the end of an era for the Tipton football program. Longtime Head Coach Tony Braby stepped down after a 24-year tenure with the Cardinals. During Braby's final go-round, Tipton finished with a record of 4-6. Highlights included a 34-14 season-opening victory over University Academy Charter, a 50-6 stomping of Lone Jack with Kingsville, and a 56-18 trouncing of Russellville the day before Halloween. Every time the Cardinals put big points on the board, they won. The offense averaged an excellent 30.3 points per game, but the defense allowed 31.8 points per game. With a narrower difference between those two numbers, Tipton may have been in contention for the Kaysinger.

But that's all in the past. This offseason, Tipton brought in a new man to lead the program. Dr. Bill Duke will coach the Cardinals in his first head-coaching gig at the high-school level. He most recently spent the last three seasons as an assistant at Jeff City, and the five years before that on assistant duties at Blair Oaks. Duke is bringing some excitement and fresh blood to a program in need of it.

The Cardinals return some high-quality performers to their offensive unit this fall and Duke can take heart in knowing that his O-line comes back largely intact and highly regarded. Senior OL Carter Petree (6-3, 230) was the line's most consistent blocker in 2020. His ability to take on defenders and clear out holes landed him spots on the All-Conference and All-District teams. Junior OL Tyler Hineman (6-2, 225) had a terrific sophomore season, ending it on the All-Conference team along with Petree. These two may cause some migraines for opposing defensive line coaches this fall. They are again joined by senior OL Nakoda Savage (6-2, 230) and sophomore OL Cooper Pettigrew (6-1, 220), both of whom have shown a solid ability to make space for backs and give the quarterback time in the pocket. This fall, junior OL Connor Duke (6-1, 215) will join the ranks of this group that could be one of the best O-lines in the Kaysinger.

Two prime skill-position players are back for Tipton in 2021. Senior WR Mike Buckner (6-3, 175) earned All-Conference and All-District honors last fall after compiling 820 receiving yards and 10 TDs. Buckner has one of the surest sets of hands in central Missouri, superb height and a good vertical to go up and get the ball, and breakaway speed that can alter the makeup of any game. Cardinals fans are right to expect even bigger things from him this year. Junior RB Christian Whisler (5-9, 160) had a breakout sophomore season in which he made the All-Conference squad. He is the type of back who can lower his shoulders for extra yardage or wreak havoc with his legs if he gets to the edge. Sophomore WR Jackson Bailey (6-0, 160) and sophomore TE Tyler Baer (6-0, 180) retain their starting spots, while junior WR Seth Pinion (5-11, 170) could factor into the passing game.

The quarterback position remains a bit of a question mark for Tipton going into 2021. The job may go to junior ATH Zachary Nokes (5-11, 170), with sophomore ATH Cain Myers (5-10, 155) also in contention. Whomever gets the job, their main task will be competently getting the ball to Buckner and Whisler as often as possible.

The Cardinals return talent at all three levels of the defense this fall. Back on the D-line are senior D-linemen Nakoda Savage and Carter Petree. It's probable that junior DL Connor Duke will get some snaps in the trenches as well. The entire linebacking corps returns for Tipton, with a trio of players ready to cause some chaos for opposing defenses. Junior LBs Tyler Hineman, Christian

Class: 1
Conference: Kaysinger
Head Coach: Dr. Bill Duke
Years at School: First
Offensive Starters Returning: 6
Defensive Starters Returning: 7
Total Returning Lettermen: 12
2020 Overall Record: 4-6

Tipton Cardinals 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Univ. Academy Char.	Home
September		
3	Russellville	Away
10	Lincoln	Home
17	St. Michael the Arch.	Away
24	Lone Jack	Away
October		
1	Cole Camp	Home
8	Slater	Away
15	Windsor	Away
22	Crest Ridge	Home
29	Districts	TBA



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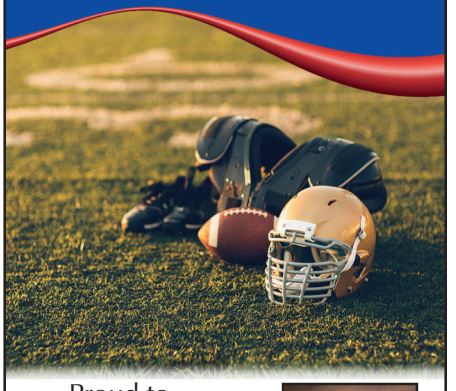
Whisler, and Zachary Nokes could form one of the better units in the area this fall. This formidable group will get depth in the form of senior LB Aiden Savage (5-11, 180) and sophomore LB Brenton Arnold (5-10, 170). Senior DB Mike Buckner will lead the Tipton secondary, with sophomore DB Jackson Bailey once again joining him. Don't be surprised to see sophomore DB Cain Myers as part of this crew in the coming season.

Coach Duke has a quality group of players to work with in his first year in charge at Tipton. "We will be relatively young this season after losing a large number of seniors at starting positions, but many underclassmen received quality playing time last year that should prove very valuable as the season progresses," he says. "Since the first day of arriving at Tipton I have noticed a commitment to getting better every day on and off the field. I look forward to seeing what these young men can accomplish." Expect them, at the very least, to improve upon last year's record.

Pigskin's Pick: 5-4

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Tolton Catholic trailblazers

2020 was a tough year for all the football teams in Central Missouri, but some had it tougher than others. The 2020 Father Tolton team really had struggles, whether it was having games canceled, having players quarantined or just having a low number of players out. All of those things lead to a 1-6 season that saw Coach Michael Egnew, in his second season, struggle across-the-board both offensively and defensively. High school football is a numbers game and the Blazers just didn't have those numbers last season. They played tons of young players, so that bodes well for the future, but there are still only a few seniors (6) and fewer juniors (2), so this year they are still working within a youth movement. Yes, some young players gained some experience last year, but coach hesitates to call them "returning starters" so they have zero starters returning on offense and defense. Coach Egnew and his staff will focus on the fundamentals and keep the schemes simpler in 2021.

Last season the offense was virtually nonexistent, except in their one win against Missouri Military Academy. They averaged the paltry 10.8 points per game and were unable to ever gain any momentum within the games. They had trouble both running and throwing, and their lack of size hurt them across-the-board. The QB spot features one of those more experienced players with senior Jonah Lybeck-Brown (5-8, 143). What he lacks in size he makes up for in quickness and elusiveness and he has a serviceable arm. A trio of senior wide receivers will be in the mix; Luke Drummond (6-2, 139), Jake Ryan (5-11, 147) and Ethan Hentges (5-11, 145). Junior WR Julian McKoy (5-8, 145) and sophomore WR Sam Drummond (5-8, 130) will also be looking to get open. Senior Ian Meyer (5-9, 182) will be at TE unless he gets pressed into duty on the O-Line and sophomore Cayden Roark (5-11, 140) will line up at WR and TE. One of the team's most experienced players is senior running back Xavier Pinhero (5-10, 200). His size and speed make him a weapon for the Blazer's offense. Junior RB Sam Andrews (5-7, 135) and sophomore RB Scott Hargis (5-7, 140) should also get some carries as well. Upfront on the line, Tolton features some experience with senior OL Spencer Haight (5-11, 179), senior OL Max Fellows (6-0, 163) and possibly Ian Meyer. They will be featured with Maximilian Wolff (6-0, 210) and sophomores Evan Tollenaar (5-9, 160) and Will Graves (5-10, 210).

On the defensive side of the ball it was not pretty. The defense surrendered an average of 42 points per game last season. Granted the schedule was very challenging featuring some powerhouse programs, but improvement in physicality, tackling, assignments, pass rush and coverage- all aspects, at all levels of the defense must happen. The secondary has the most potential with seniors Luke Drummond, Jake Ryan, Ethan Hentges and Jonah Lybeck-Brown back along with junior Julian McKoy and sophomore Sam Drummond. The backers will be led by seniors Xavier Pinhero and junior Sam Andrews. Both of these players can play sideline to sideline. The sophomore duo of Cayden Roark and Scott Hargis will also be part of the linebacking group. The D-line will feature the senior trio of Spencer Haight, Ian Meyer and Max Fellows. Maximilian Wolff and sophomores Evan Tollenaar and Will Graves will also be in the trenches.

Any team that is need of numbers may have to rely on some help from the freshman class. The following freshmen

Classification: 1
Conference: AAA
Head Coach: Michael Egnew
Years at School: 3
Offensive Starters Returning: 0
Defensive Starters Returning: 0
2020 Overall Record: 1-6

Tolton Catholic 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Sweet Springs	Home
September		
3	Putnam County	Away
10	Mo Military Academy	Away
17	Bishop DuBourg	Away
24	Grandview	Home
October		
1	Salisbury	Away
8	Hogan Prep	Home
15	Cuba	Home
22	Fayette	Away
29	Districts	TBA

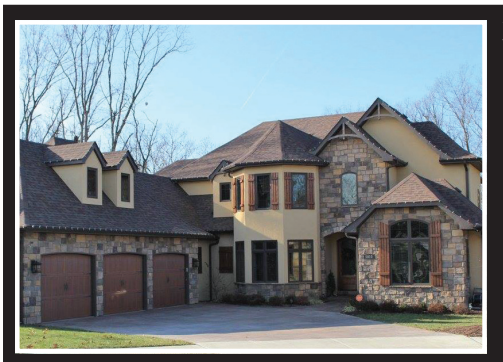
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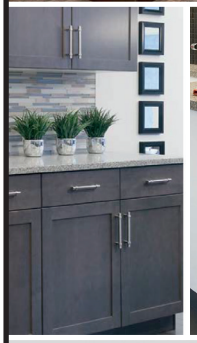
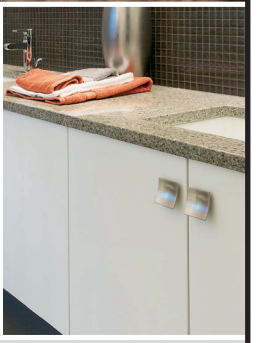
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could add depth or see some significant playing time in 2021; Sam Ryan WR/DB (6-0 184), Carson Jacaway WR/DB (5-8, 150), Elliot Kormeier WR/DB (5-8, 160), Lucas Earhart WR/DB (5-7, 152), Mac Thornburg TE/WR/LB (6-0, 169), William Hazelrigg WR (5-4, 145), Brett Muller WR/DB (5-8, 150) Cayden Dodds WR/DB/LB (5-8, 162), Carter Dampier OL/DL (5-6, 200), Conner Pfannenstiel OL/DL (5-7, 202), Lucas Wietholder WR/DB (5-8, 160), Henry Nichols TE/LB (6-0, 190) and Charles Sample WR/DB (5-8, 180).

As you can see the number of players on the team is higher than last year and some of those upperclassman did gain some experience over the last couple seasons, which should help, plus the schedule is completely revamped this year and there are a few opportunities throughout the year for the Trailblazers to be competitive and get a win or two. It all comes down to how the team forms, whether young players can step into the starting roles and perform and if they can stay healthy of course because of their lack of depth. The Trailblazers will need to focus on improvement from week to week and even simpler from play to play.

Pigskin's Pick: 2-7




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Union wildcats

In his third year with the Union Wildcats, Head Coach Justin Grahl boasts back-to-back winning seasons of 6-4 in 2019 and 7-5 in 2020, which included a run to the 2020 Class 4 Semi-finals where the 'Cats lost to MICDS. Coach Grahl and his staff are feeling positive about this upcoming season despite the loss of some key senior leadership from last year's squad. According to Coach Grahl, "[We are] excited to see our program take another step towards where we want to be. We want to build on last year's success as we work to accomplish our overall goals." While the 2021 Union team returns 22 letterman including all 11 starters from a good offense, the defense, which returns only 5 starters from the 2020 Semi-final team, will be a major factor in how far this team is able to go during the 2021 campaign. The offense has a chance to put a lot of pressure on Four Rivers Conference opponents this coming season. Like many programs during the 2020 season, the Union squad had their ups and downs. A general lack of experience, a two week team-wide quarantine, a district title and a trip to the Class 4 Semi-finals were all part of their 2020 roller coaster ride. As coach Grahl explained, "[We] began the season as very young team, starting 12 sophomores Week 1. Went through early growing pains and a two week team-wide quarantine during Weeks 8 and 9. Returned to play for the first round of districts. Ended up winning the district and making a run to the semi-finals where we lost to MICDS."

In 2020, the Wildcats featured a spread offense which put pressure on their opponents with a very solid, balanced attack, averaging almost 320 ypg (164.7 rushing and 154.4 passing) to go with a respectable 22.75 average ppg. Coach Grahl explains, "Led by 5 returning starters on the offensive line and QB Liam Hughes, the Wildcats will look to build on a balanced attack in 2021. We want to continue to improve from week to week and get the ball in our playmakers' hands." Taking the snaps for Coach Grahl's offense will again be Liam Hughes (6-4, 195). The big junior quarterback put up excellent numbers in 2020 as a sophomore, passing for 1,642 yards (55.4%) with 14 TDs and 10 picks, while running for 400 yards on 129 carries and breaking loose for 8 TDs. His quickness, accuracy and size indicate the All-Conference/All-District Honorable Mention selection may be playing at the next level in the future. Carrying a big portion of the rushing load will be senior Dalton Voss (5-11, 205)—a power runner with quick feet who gained 588 yards with 2 TD's in 2020. The Wildcat spread will also include 4 receivers who can get off the line, get downfield and catch the football. All 4 averaged over 10 yards per catch last season. Junior WR Hayden Burke (6-0, 175) led the foursome with 253 receiving yards last year (17 REC, 2TD, 14.9 avg). The sure-handed wideout gets downfield quickly and is willing to block for his teammates when called upon. Senior WR Nick Birke (6-4, 190) is a big target who creates all kinds of chaos for opposing defensive backs. He put up 246 receiving yards in 2020 (19 REC, 2 TD, 12.9 avg). Junior WR Colton Morrow (6-1, 180)—204 yards on 19 REC for an average of 10.7 and senior Ryan Ewald (6-0, 200)—124 yards, 9 REC, 3TDs, 13.8 avg. round out the experienced receiving core. There will be some new faces seeing reps on Friday nights for the Union offense. Senior WR Caden Motley (6-3, 200) gives QB Hughes another target with a size advantage and sophomore RB Wyatt Birke (6-1, 180) should get his share of carries out of Coach Grahl's single-back set. Sophomore Ryan Rapert (6-0, 175) brings speed and athleticism to the offense and is expected to see playing time at all the offensive skill positions in 2021. Those 5 returning starters on the O-line will be a major factor in Union's offensive success this season. Third Team All-Stater, junior guard Jonathan Martin (6-1, 225) brings strength and quickness to the line and is strong on both run blocking and pass protection. Junior center Alex Mendenhall (6-0, 240) is a three-year starter and All-Conference Honorable Mention whose experience and leadership will be valuable assets on the line. Another three-year starter is tackle Brady Lause (6-2, 230)—a 2020 All-District selection, this junior's ability to create holes will definitely pay dividends for the ball carriers. A pair of seniors complete this strong O-line; All-District tackle Caden Crawford (6-1, 240) and guard Trenton King (5-11, 235) add size and strength.

Ultimately, the Union Wildcat defensive squad may have the biggest impact on the fate of the 2021 team. With only 5 returning starters, there will be some question marks for the 'Cats on D. "We will look to replace some outstanding senior leadership and production on the defensive side of the ball in 2021. We will need to see some of our new faces step up to have a successful defense," according to Coach Grahl. Again, this season, the Wildcats will run a 4-2-5 defensive scheme and will work hard to hold opposing offenses to less than the 27.9 point per game they gave up in 2020. Up front, will be a trio of returning DTs. Leading the way is All-District selection, junior Brady Lause who had 24

Class: 4
Conference: Four Rivers
Head Coach: Justin Grahl
Years at School: 2
Record at School: 13-9
Overall Record: 13-9
Offensive Starters Returning: 12
Defensive Starters Returning: 5
Total Returning Lettermen: 22
2020 Overall Record: 7-5

Union Wildcats 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Washington	Home
September		
3	Borgia	Away
10	Sullivan	Home
17	Pacific	Away
24	St. Clair	Away
October		
1	Warrenton	Home
8	Owensville	Away
15	St. James	Home
22	Hermann	Away
29	Districts	TBA

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tackles a year ago. Junior Alex Mendenhall and sophomore Kelby Edmunds (6-7, 310) combined for 20 tackles in 2020. This threesome is big, strong and quick. All-District LB, junior Luke Koch (5-10, 185) is a tenacious defender and a strong tackler with 54 tackles and 1 int last season. The defensive backfield sees one returning starter from last year—junior CB Jayden Overschmidt, an All-District performer who is an excellent cover corner and had 28 tackles and 3 INTs a year ago. A pair of senior newcomers look to see more playing time at LB—Tanner Hall (6-0, 190) and Marshall Giebert (6-1, 210) should both get plenty of chances to contribute to the Union defense.

The 2021 Union Wildcat football team is entering the season with a solid amount of experience and talent as well as just enough question marks to give the coaches some sleepless nights. Their offense returns 11 starters, features a well-balanced attack in the air and on the ground and has shown the ability to put points on the board. As these players have grown and developed and as the season present opportunity for improvement, the 'Cats O should pay dividends throughout the season. Most of the questions lie on the defensive side of the football. Having to fill 6 starting spots with players who can make immediate impacts is a challenge for most coaching staffs and will likely be so for Union. However, if offseason workouts and preparation have paid off, this season could be an even better one than 2020 with the Wildcats still playing in November.

Pigskin's Pick 8-1

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Van-Far indians

The Van-Far Indians struggled last year, due to the pandemic. Although they faced a lot of adversity, they're determined to make a turnaround this season. "Last season was riddled with COVID problems from the school being shut-down to missing different key players due to quarantine," Head Coach Joe Drebes said. "We started a lot of underclassmen, specifically freshmen who performed very well given the situation." The Indians finished 1-7 last year. This year, they will migrate to Class 1 which should give them more of an opportunity to make some noise in District play.

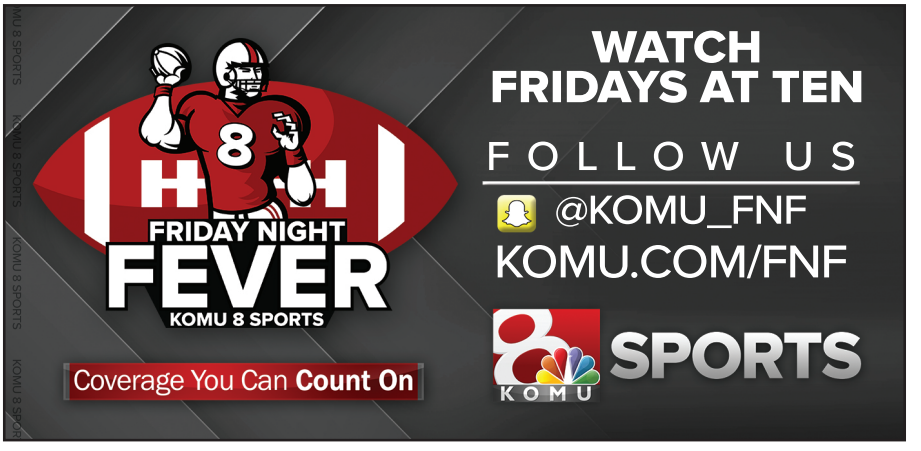
The Indians will have a fair number of upperclassmen returning for this season on both offense and defense. On offense, they have six starters returning. The main priority for this offense is using their speed in the spread formation in order to blow past defenses this year. "We have some fast kids that will make defenses cover sideline-to-sideline." Coach Drebes said. Senior running back Bryson Lay (6-0,130) is the top dog of the Indians offense. He is a 2x All State returner who is looking to make an impact this season out of the backfield. Another running back next to him is Junior Brandon Eoff (5-8, 200). These two backs will run behind three experienced linemen: Senior Easton McAfee (6-0, 270), junior Zach Couch (5-9, 270), and sophomore Morgan Regot (5-10, 215). Senior wide receiver Dalton Bailey (6-0, 150) will be the quarterback's main target for passing situations. Who that quarterback will be remains a question that will work itself out during August training camp. The Indian's offense averaged only 16 points per game last season, so a solid rushing attack with Lay and even an average passing game should improve that number.

The Indians' defense will have most of their defensive starters back this year. Although most of them are still young, they aren't new to the game. "We had a lot of young starters last year that are coming back and figuring out the defense since it's their second year in the same scheme," coach Drebes said. The Indians will continue the run the 4-3 defense this year. Bryson Lay not only plays running back, but he is a standout linebacker as well. Along with him is Brandon Eoff and Sophomore linebacker Gage Gibson (5-8, 140). These three backers will be the heart of the defense and will be counted on to make tackles sideline to sideline. Seniors Dalton Bailey and Easton McAfee will also play along the defensive line, which will help with size and depth. Sophomore Morgan Regot will also join them in the trenches. Sophomores Nikos Connaway (5-7, 140) and Brayden Lay (5-9, 140) will be in charge of controlling the secondary. Although there are some young guys stepping up, there are some new seniors who are looking to make a huge impact on the team. Hunter Scrogin (6-0, 200) will be beneficial on both sides of the ball, playing running back and linebacker. Fellow seniors Andrew Morris (5-11, 240) and Adam McCurdy (5-11, 220) will be a huge impact for the Indians' offensive and defensive lines. The

Classification: 1
Conference: Eastern Missouri (EMO)
Head Coach: Joe Drebes
Years at School: 1st as head coach (3rd overall)
Offensive Starters Returning: 6
Defensive Starters Returning: 8
2020 Overall Record: 1-7
2020 District Record: 1-4

Van Far Indians 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Bowling Green	Away
September		
3	Wright City	Home
10	Mark Twain	Home
17	North Callaway	Away
24	Louisiana	Home
October		
1	South Callaway	Home
9 (Sat)	Uniontown (KS)	Neutral
15	Montgomery County	Away
22	Scotland County	Away
29	Districts	TBD





Indian's defense must improve on stopping the run first in order to cut down on the 37 points per game they allowed in 2020.

Although it was a rough year in 2020, the Indians are looking to bounce back better than before, mentally and physically. "Accountability is only achieved through a high level of attendance while maintaining a winning attitude," coach Drebes said. Coach has seen some vast improvements in strength and attitude during summer workouts. This team is learning to not let the past affect them, and to keep moving forward. The Indians have a lot of leadership, from sophomores to seniors, on both sides of the ball. This will be a huge benefit going into this upcoming season since they know how to play alongside each other. "We are attempting to build our program from the bottom up," coach Drebes said. "We should see immediate improvements for the foreseeable future."

Pigskin's Pick: 2-7

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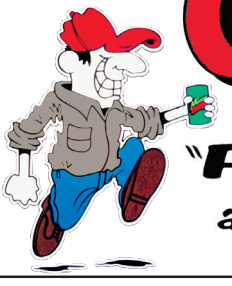
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Versailles tigers

There wasn't much excitement around the Versailles program in 2020, but there sure is this fall, with the hiring of Warren Seitz as the program's new head coach. If Seitz's name sounds familiar, it's because he quarterbacked the Missouri Tigers in the early '80s before briefly playing in the NFL. Seitz takes over a team in need of an injection of fresh blood. Versailles had a difficult 2020, going winless and rarely being in the position to compete for victories. "Versailles had a tough year last year," Seitz says. "Throughout the summer and into the fall they were constantly dealing with COVID issues."

Obviously, Seitz and his staff hope that won't be a worry this fall, as they'll have lots of good players to work with. Versailles returns a number of starters on each side of the ball, giving the team depth they haven't had in recent years. The 2020 version of the Tigers had trouble putting points on the board. Seitz is bringing a sea change to that unit. "With a change in offensive philosophy, hopefully we can throw the ball more and get our athletes in space," he says. Senior QB Adam Radcliff (6-1, 180) will again be doing that throwing. "I think Adam has an opportunity to have a big year," Seitz says. Radcliff completed 38 of 70 pass attempts for 394 yards and 4 TDs last fall, and ran the ball 74 times for 234 yards and 2 TDs. There's no doubt that Radcliff has the physical tools to be a standout in the Tri-County, but much will depend on how quickly he can get comfortable in Seitz's new offensive schemes.

Up front, "We will have a number of juniors on the offensive line that got some experience last year," Seitz says. Senior C Gabe Lehman (6-0, 175) will once again have ball-snapping duties, while junior OTs Gavin Brantley (6-1, 220) and Theo Stevenson (6-1, 260) will work the edges. Sophomore G Tristan Gavette (6-2, 225) is slated for a spot on the interior, and senior TE Kyle Flieger (5-10, 160) is back to do some blocking and catching. A number of players are back at the skill positions as well. Senior RB Cole Wilson (5-10, 170) looks to have the lock as the team's prime ball-carrier, with sophomore RB Chase Shewmaker (5-9, 155) performing as his backup. Wilson had a rough junior season without many stats, but a new coach and new system should benefit him greatly. Two wideouts will make nice targets for Radcliff this fall: senior WRs Kole Viebrock (5-10, 150) and Kannen Wilson (5-8, 140). Viebrock had 3 catches for 31 yards last fall, while Kannen Wilson caught 1 pass for 10 yards and had 1 TD. Senior WR Logan Rand (5-8, 175), junior WR Cage Pritchet (5-8, 155), and freshman WR Reece Murdock (6-2, 175) lend this group considerable depth.

The Versailles defense was porous in 2020, allowing 45 points per game. Seitz understands that significant changes in approach will have to take place in order for the unit to improve. "We are anticipating playing an aggressive, attacking style of defense," he says. "We want to put pressure on offenses, causing them to make mistakes and turn the ball over." A lot of that will begin at the line of scrimmage, where the Tigers return three defensive starters: junior D-linemen Michael Masters (5-9, 240), Gavin Brantley, and Trace Murdock (6-0, 205). Masters had 10 tackles and 1 fumble recovery last fall, while Brantley had 9 tackles over 4 games. In just 2 games of action, Murdock posted 5 tackles.

Versailles has what looks to be a particularly strong corps of linebackers in 2021. Senior LBs Kole Viebrock, Adam Radcliff, Kyle Flieger and Cole

Class: 2
Conference: Tri-County
Head Coach: Warren Seitz
Years at School: First
Overall Record: 134-113
Offensive Starters Returning: 8
Defensive Starters Returning: 8
Total Returning Lettermen: NA
2020 Overall Record: 0-6

Versailles Tigers 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Knob Noster	Home
September		
3	Warsaw	Away
10	Hallsville	Away
17	Southern Boone	Away
24	Blair Oaks	Home
October		
1	California	Away
8	Boonville	Away
15	Osage	Home
22	Eldon	Home
29	Districts	TBA





Wilson are back to form one of the better linebacking units in the Tri-County. Viebrock is the leading returning tackler, having compiled 22 tackles, 1 for loss in 2020. Radcliff posted 18 tackles and 2 blocked punts, proving himself to be the rarest of things: a legitimate three-way player. Flieger had 16 tackles and 1 fumble recovery, while Cole Wilson tallied 12 tackles, 1 forced fumble, and 1 fumble recovery. Sophomore OLB Chase Shewmaker and sophomore LB Tristan Gavette will pitch in this fall. Only one starter is back in the secondary: senior DB Kannen Wilson. He had 1 tackle, 1 forced fumble, and 1 fumble recovery in limited action last year. Senior DB Logan Rand and junior DB Cage Pritchet look set for starting roles in the season ahead.

First years for head coaches are never easy, but this is hardly Seitz's first rodeo. He's got a proven track record, and is poised to have a better Versailles squad on the field this fall. "Hopefully we don't have to deal with the COVID concerns they had last year and continue to improve throughout the year and be competitive," he says. Expect more points scored and fewer points allowed for Versailles in 2021.

Pigskin's Pick: 3-6

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Warrenton warriors

It's always tough when a longtime leader leaves a program. No doubt, there'll be a formidable presence missing on Warrenton's sidelines this fall, as Steve McDowell retired after the team's 2020 campaign, ending a three-decade stint at the school. What can make it easier, though, is transitioning to someone within the system, and that's what Warrenton has done by promoting former assistant coach Jason Koper to the head spot. Koper inherits a team that had a solid 2020 season. "We played well during conference and got a share of the GAC North," the new head coach says. "We lost a lot of senior depth, but we are getting a couple of our key players back."

For an improvement in the win-loss column in 2021, Koper will first have to shape up his defense. A porous run-stop set the Warriors back—they allowed 236 rushing yards and 31.5 points per game last fall. That's caused Koper to change the team's approach on defense. "We are running a new system that is fast, aggressive, and fits our players," he says. "We have multiple looks and fronts that will confuse teams." Four starters return from last year's unit, with two on the defensive line. Senior DL T.J. Ray (5-11, 300) will be the bedrock on the line once again. He earned Second-Team All-Conference honors last fall, and he'll again be joined by junior DL Troy Lundy (5-10, 275). Expect two youngsters to contribute on the D-line this fall: freshman D-linemen Carter Tittel (6-2, 210) and Evan Schenck (6-4, 210), both of whom are promising players.

A standout player, senior DB Kolby Meine (6-0, 170), will return to lead the Warrenton secondary this fall. Meine's ball-hawking skills and tackling ability helped to him win a spot on the All-Conference Second-Team last year. Sophomore DB Joe Goldsmith (6-1, 165) and freshman ATH Mason Thompson (5-7, 145) may work in the defensive backfield as well. Another stalwart, senior LB John Starkey (6-0, 170) will lead the linebacking corps this fall. Starkey's solid grasp of the game should help him teach Koper's new system to the younger players making their debut this fall. No matter what system Koper does employ, though, one thing is certain. "We will play hard and fast to the whistle," he says.

The Warrenton offense had some ups and downs in 2020. They were held to 10 or fewer points three different times, but scored in excess of 29 points five different times (unsurprisingly, they won four of the games in which they did so). A balanced but not explosive attack saw them average 107 rushing yards and 170 passing yards per game. With seven starters from last season suiting up once again, six of whom are seniors, Koper is happy with the experience and leadership on offense in the year ahead.

Most importantly, "We have our senior quarterback returning," Koper says, referring to senior QB Caelon Weir (6-1, 205). In a very good junior season, Weir made the All-Conference Second-Team. Says Koper, "He reads defenses very well and has good field vision." Expect a much improved statistical year from the seasoned signal-caller.

When the Warriors aren't passing the ball, they'll be handing the it off to senior RB Quincy McRoberts (5-10, 175). In a breakout junior campaign, McRoberts compiled 837 rushing yards and saw his name added to First-Team All-Conference list. "[He] is one of the most talented running backs in our area," Koper says. "He is an electric playmaker." He'll be running off the hip of senior FB Isaiah Jones (5-8, 195), who started three games last fall, and received backup in the form of sophomore RB Joe Goldsmith. The final skill-position player back starting is senior WR Kolby Meine, a Second-Team All-Conference performer. Meine

Class: 4
Conference: GAC North
Head Coach: Jason Koper
Years at School: 7 (1st as Head Coach)
Offensive Starters Returning: 7
Defensive Starters Returning: 4
Total Returning Lettermen: 22
2020 Overall Record: 4-6

Warrenton Warriors 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Liberty	Home
September		
3	Troy Buchanan	Away
10	Washington	Home
17	St. Charles	Away
24	St. Charles West	Away
October		
1	Union	Home
8	Winfield-Elsberry	Home
15	Orchard Farm	Away
22	Mexico	Home
29	Districts	TBA

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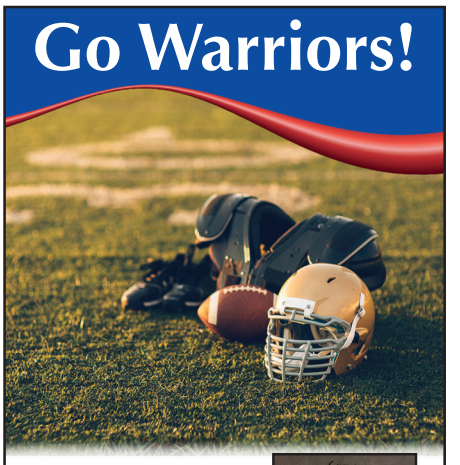
has excellent hands and a set of wheels that can turn a game. Junior WR Colton Brosene (5-7, 150) and freshman ATH Mason Thompson could get some looks as well.

As on defense, senior OL T.J. Ray leads the line up front. He might be a scary presence in the GAC North this fall, as Koper says Ray "has had great offseason." Senior OL Austin Johnson (6-0, 285) and junior OL Troy Lundy are also back, while freshman Carter Tittel and Evan Schenck are likely to help out on the O-line this fall. Overall, "Our offense is going to look different from last year in timing and pace," Koper says.

A new coach is always cause for excitement—and so is a quality group of players, especially one with loads of leadership from upperclassmen. "We have a great group of athletes and some strong lineman returning this school year," Koper says. "We have some players that are young and eager to earn varsity time. It should be an exciting season." It certainly will be. Expect the Warriors to get back above .500 this fall.

Pigskin's Pick: 5-4

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Warsaw wildcats

Ryan Boyer has done a terrific job of turning things around for the Warsaw football program. After a long stretch of losing campaigns, the Wildcats have posted consecutive winning seasons, the natural steps in rebuilding a program. In an abbreviated schedule in 2020, Warsaw finished 5-3. "Last year we were able to come out of the gate strong and have a lot of success early," Boyer says. Then, square in the middle of the season, the program was shut down for three weeks due to COVID before getting the okay to return to action. "It took us a little bit to get back into a rhythm, but I was very proud of how our kids bounced back and finished strong," says Boyer. The Wildcats made it to the district championship game before falling to Butler. And now, "Our goal for this season is to take that next step."

Much of the Wildcats' success in 2020 hinged on an excellent running game. Warsaw averaged 235 rushing yards per game last fall, along with averages of 80 passing yards and 32 points. It'll take a lot to match those numbers in 2021, but the Wildcats do have some talent back to make it a possibility. "We have an experienced group in the backfield and a hard-working group up front," says Boyer. Senior QB Brady Slavens (6-2, 175) enters his fourth year at the varsity level. Last fall, he connected on 38 passes for 640 yards and 5 TDs. More importantly, he ran the ball 146 times for 911 yards and 15 TDs. It comes as no surprise that Slavens was named Second-Team All-Conference.

This fall, junior RB Nick Bagley (5-9, 145) will get the lion's share of carries out of the backfield. Bagley showed some promise as a sophomore, rushing 38 times for 153 yards and 3 TDs. Junior WR Cameron Seevers (5-11, 155) might be the 'X' factor for the Wildcats, however. Seevers posted 6 receptions for 112 yards and 27 rushes for 142 yards and 5 TDs last season. One of the faster players around, he made the All-Conference Second-Team as a kick returner. It'll be interesting to see how Boyer and his staff employ Seevers in the offense this fall. Another player with the ability to open up things up is senior TE/WR James Kellner (5-11, 160). Kellner's sure hands saw him catch 12 passes for 92 yards in 2020. This year, sophomore Riley Taylor (5-9, 170) will be the backup at running back, while senior WR Gaven Cunningham (6-0, 170) will provide depth at wideout.

Two starters return to the trenches in 2021: senior O-linemen Cameron Taylor (6-0, 220) and Garrett McGann (6-1, 260), who are both intimately familiar with Warsaw's offensive schemes. They'll be asked to lend their hard-won wisdom to some fresh blood in 2021, including senior OL Jackie Esser (5-11, 235), junior OL Hudson Karr (5-10, 160), and sophomores Devon Boul (5-9, 180) and Austin Schibi (6-0, 240).

A slew of talent returns to the Warsaw defense in 2021. As a Second-Team All-Conference player, junior MLB Nick Bagley is the highest lauded of the bunch. Bagley had 38 tackles and 1 sack last fall. Back in the linebacking group with Bagley is the versatile senior MLB/OLB Gage Whitaker (5-10, 160), who compiled 16 tackles and 2 fumble recoveries in 2020. This year, junior LB Hudson Karr and sophomore LB Riley Taylor will play some backer as well.

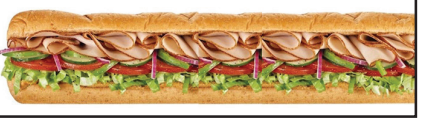
The defensive secondary returns all four starters, two of whom received postseason honors. Senior FS James Kellner got an All-Conference Honorable Mention, as did junior DB Cameron Seevers.

Class: 2
Conference: Ozark Highlands
Head Coach: Ryan Boyer
Years at School: 4
Record at School: 19-20
Overall Record:40-32
Offensive Starters Returning: 6
Defensive Starters Returning: 8
Total Returning Lettermen: 16
2020 Overall Record: 5-3

Warsaw Wildcats 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Cole Camp	Home
September		
3	Versailles	Home
10	Midway	Away
17	Sherwood	Home (HC)
24	Adrian	Away
October		
1	Eldorado Springs	Away
8	Butler	Home
15	Skyline	Away
22	Buffalo	Home
29	Districts	TBA

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Kellner had 32 tackles, 3 passes defended, and 1 forced fumble, while Seevers tallied 22 tackles, 4 passes defended, and 2 fumble recoveries. Rounding out this crew are junior SS Tayten Boyer (5-11, 175) and senior DB Grant Chapman (6-2, 150). Boyer posted 15 tackles, 3 INTs, and 1 forced fumble last fall, while Chapman chipped in with 6 tackles, 1 pass defended, and 1 recovered fumble. Senior DB Gaven Cunningham figures to get some snaps as well. Up front, the Warsaw defensive line returns two starters in the form of senior linemen Cameron Taylor and Garrett McGann. Taylor posted 19 tackles and 1 fumble recovery a year ago, while McGann got 12 tackles. Joining them this year are senior DL Jackie Esser, junior DL Hudson Karr, and sophomores Devon Boul and Austin Schibi. "Fast and physical is our motto," Boyer says of his defense, "and these kids have done a great job of buying in to that."

With a good group of players and some momentum behind them, Boyer and his staff are ready to kick things off. "I am excited for this upcoming season," he says. "Our boys have been working hard and doing everything asked of them." A lot will be asked of those players this season, but that's one of the side effects of having a winning football program.

Pigskin's Pick: 6-3

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Washington blue jays

The past two years have been gravy for Washington and Head Coach Derick Heflin, who enters his sixth season leading the program. In 2020, the Blue Jays finished with a 9-2 record for their second consecutive season, earning the top seed in the district for the first time in school history. Washington's recent success came on the back of a terrific senior class that had five players earn scholarships to play college football, including Mizzou commit Ryan Hoerstkamp.

Still, though, the Blue Jays return 30 lettermen to their squad in 2021, with four starters back on each side of the ball. Defensively, Heflin will mold a unit that will try to match the minuscule 16 points per game they allowed last fall. "The front six of our defense will be our strength," Heflin says. "We bring back a lot of experience in our defensive line and linebacker positions." The team's standout defensive player is junior DL Trevor Buhr (6-4, 275). Buhr had a spectacular sophomore season, compiling 62 tackles, 8 for loss and 9 sacks. Along with being named Third-Team All-State, First-Team All-Conference, and First-Team All-District, Buhr has received an offer to continue his career at the University of Kentucky. Expect more interest in the towering lineman to follow. Joining forces with Buhr on the D-line again are senior DL Gavin Holtmeyer (5-11, 270) and junior DL Mark Hensley (6-4, 250). Holtmeyer made the All-District Second-Team after accruing 41 tackles, 8 for loss and 1 sack, while Hensley added 21 tackles and 4 sacks. Sophomore DL Andrew Mateas (6-3, 320) is likely to nab the fourth starting spot in Heflin's favored 4-2-5 arrangement.

The linebacking corps will be led by senior LB Joey Avitia (5-11, 210), who brings excellent strength to the position. He had 13 tackles, 1 for loss last year. Also back is junior LB Clyde Hendrix (6-0, 180), a player with a nose for the football. He had 15 tackles, 2 INTs, and 1 fumble recovery last fall. Avitia and Hendrix will be backed up by junior LBs Dason Gould (6-0, 195) and Hanon Jarvis (6-1, 200) and sophomore OLB Landon Boston (5-11, 170). A worry for Blue Jay fans, though, is the secondary, which will be made up entirely of new faces. "We will have some inexperience in the back end, but we have a strong group of young explosive athletes to fill the roles left from graduation," Heflin says. Players in the mix are junior DBs Devon Deckelman (5-6, 135), Kellen Schiermierer (6-1, 160), and Luke Johnson (6-0, 165) and sophomore DB Casey Olzsowka (6-1, 165).

The Washington offense also had great success in 2020. Using Heflin's Flexbone attack, the Blue Jays averaged 32 points, 75 passing yards, and an outrageous 275 rushing yards per game. Heflin doesn't see cause to change a good thing, saying, "Offensively, we will rely on our option rushing attack." In charge of things once again is senior QB Cam Millheiser (6-0, 190). The veteran quarterback was First-Team All-Conference as an athlete last fall, carrying the ball 81 times for 489 yards and 5 TDs, and connecting on 53 of 89 pass attempts for 736 yards and 11 TDs. With a good set of legs and pinpoint accuracy, Millheiser enters his senior season as one of the best players in the area.

He'll be working behind an O-line that is big on size and experience. Senior OL Sam Rost (6-0, 240) paved the way for the Washington ball-carriers last fall and earned Second-Team All-Conference honors for his efforts. Playing beside him once again are senior OL Will Lingle (6-1, 210) and junior OL Mark Hensley, with sophomore OL Andrew Mateas slated for

Class: TBD (4 in 2020)
Conference: GAC Central
Head Coach: Derick Heflin
Years at School: 5
Record at School: 27-26
Overall Record: 27-26
Offensive Starters Returning: 4
Defensive Starters Returning: 4
Total Returning Lettermen: 30
2020 Overall Record: 9-2

Warsaw Wildcats 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Union	Home
September		
3	Pacific	Away
10	Warrenton	Away
17	Ft Zumwalt N.	Home
24	Ft Zumwalt S.	Away
October		
1	Liberty (Wentzville)	Away
8	Francis Howell N.	Home
15	Ft Zumwalt E.	Away
22	Francis Howell C.	Hone
29	Districts	TBA





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a spot as well. Junior TE Trevor Buhr is set to do some blocking and pass-catching. "Our offensive line will be our biggest strength," Heflin says.

Heflin and his staff will have a stable of rushers to work with this fall. "We will have a group of young, explosive running backs working to find a spot," the coach says. Players competing for carries are junior RBs Dason Gould, Devon Deckelman, and Kellen Schiermierer, junior FB Hanon Jarvis, and sophomore RB Landon Boston. Junior WR Luke Johnson will be the main passing target for Millheiser this fall, while sophomore QB Casey Olzsowka will act as Millheiser's backup.

With some terrific talent back on each side of the ball, Washington has the framework for a quality squad, though Heflin recognizes that things won't always go smoothly with so many new players to integrate. "There might be some bumps in the road early," Heflin says, "but this group has worked extremely hard in the offseason and is ready to have their opportunity on the varsity level." While the Blue Jays may not reach the soaring highs of the past two seasons, they will still be one of the tougher teams around this fall.

Pigskin's Pick: 7-2

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Waynesville tigers

While the events of 2020 affected virtually every football team across the state last season, few squads were hit as hard as Joe Haynes's Waynesville Tigers. "If I could sum up this season in one word, I think 'chaotic' would fit most accurately," the fourth-year head coach says. "There wasn't a single week last season that we had our full roster on the field at 100% full strength. Even going into the final game, we were missing 11 players/starters due to a combination of COVID, injuries, and discipline issues." The turmoil was evident in Waynesville's 2-7 final record. Even so, Haynes is grateful to his players and coaches for grinding through the year. "With all of that being the case," he says, "I feel my staff and the players met all the challenges with a great plan weekly, and we adapted to what became 'normal' for the 2020 season. The coaches and players accepted the challenges of adjusting to COVID and I feel we were able to make the best of the situation overall."

Waynesville now enters 2021 with a chance to reset completely. Having graduated the majority of their team, new bodies and fresh faces will be all over the field. Waynesville returns just three starters on each side of the ball this fall—the same three players doing both offensive and defensive duty. A lot will be asked of these three young men, but they've got the resume and the work ethic that should inspire Tiger teammates and fans alike.

For the offense this fall, "Our strength will come from our offensive line, which has four upperclassmen starting," Haynes says. That includes junior OL Niko Fau (6-4, 314), whom the coach calls "an up and coming player in our conference. He is a great run-game blocker and knows how to finish defenders." Fau will be asked to do some seriously heavy lifting in 2021, but with his frame and football know-how, expect him to always answer when called upon.

At the skill positions, "We have a core of special athletes in the run game and pass game that can tote the load of our offense," Haynes says. Senior WR Marion Fiame (6-1, 194) will be tasked with getting downfield to open up the offense. As a junior, Fiame tallied 23 receptions for 300 yards and 3 TDs. Fiame is one of the stronger wideouts in the conference, unafraid to go across the middle of the field, and is always a handful to bring down once he gets a head of steam behind him. As the main passing target for the Tigers in 2021, his numbers are likely to skyrocket. Fiame was an All-Conference Honorable Mention last fall.

In the running game, everything will go through senior RB Eric Richardson (6-0, 187). The supremely athletic Richardson can do—and has done— a little bit of everything throughout his career. Last fall, he made the All-Conference Second-Team after posting 678 rushing yards and 8 TDs on 111 carries, and 232 receiving yards and 1 TD from 16 catches. He even returned 3 kickoffs for TDs and handled punting duties for the Tigers (he was Honorable Mention All-Conference as a Special Teams player). Richardson is the type of player who causes defensive coordinators to lose sleep at night. Handing the ball off to him this fall will be sophomore QB Bishop Godwin (5-10, 168). Haynes says that the youngster "possesses solid athleticism and can deliver the deep ball very well for a young player." Also sharing the spotlight at QB junior Davin Vernon. Big bruising junior RB Evander Bradford (6-2, 260) will get some carries as well.

The Waynesville defense simply could not stop the ball in 2020, allowing 42 points per game. "We have

Class: 5
Conference: Ozark
Head Coach: Joe Haynes
Years at School: 3
Record at School: 12-18
Overall Record: 12-18
Offensive Starters Returning: 3
Defensive Starters Returning: 3
Total Returning Lettermen: 7
2020 Overall Record: 2-7

Waynesville Tigers 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Parkview	Home
September		
3	Camdenton	Away
10	Kickapoo	Home
17	Lebanon	Home
24	Hillcrest	Away
October		
1	Bolivar	Home
8	Rolla	Away
15	West Plains	Home
22	Glendale	Away
29	Districts	TBA





emphasized tremendous focus on our weak areas and we have a few players that could develop into solid impact players," Haynes says. The biggest-impact player is senior LB Marion Fiame. Fiame earned All-District First-Team honors after a junior campaign in which he compiled 41 tackles, 2 for loss, 1 forced fumble, 2 fumble recoveries, and 8 pass break-ups. His ability to move both laterally and vertically makes him an asset all across the field. Senior DB Eric Richardson will lead the secondary, while junior DL Niko Fau will anchor Waynesville's defensive line. Beyond those three players, though, question marks abound. "We do believe our defense will be tough, they will fly to the ball, and ultimately they will compete with great levels of pride," Haynes says.

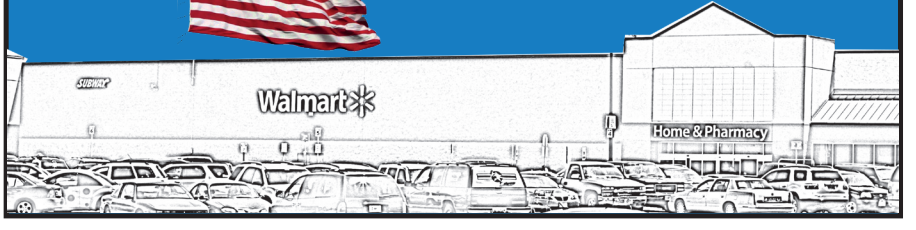
Haynes is realistic when looking at the road before him and his team. "We anticipate the growing pains of our youth and inexperience," he says. Yet he remains optimistic. "We still see ourselves as one of the better teams in our conference, and we are excited about the challenges that lay ahead." Things won't always be nice and easy for Waynesville in 2021, but it's safe to expect an improvement on their 2020 record.

Pigskin's Pick: 4-5

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Westran hornets

After a down year in 2019 where barely anything seemed to go right for Head Coach Aaron O'Laughlin and Westran, the Hornets got back to their winning ways in 2020. "Last year we were able to get things turned around and back to a successful season," O'Laughlin says. "Through it didn't end as we would've liked, it was a fun year considering the challenges these young men faced."

Ideally, that unique set of challenges is behind them, and they can all focus solely on football once again. The Hornets have a nice set of players who have bonded over the past several seasons, and are ready to take this one head on. "We have a core group of upperclassmen who will lead us on both sides of the ball," O'Laughlin says. That includes six starters apiece on both offense and defense. Senior QB/TE Derrick Merritt (5-11, 170) will again lead the offense. The do-it-all signal-caller completed 50 passes for 748 yards and 7 TDs last year, while also rushing 151 times for an astounding 1,099 yards and 14 TDs. Those numbers saw him placed on the All-Conference and All-District teams. Merritt's versatility makes him a coach's dream, and his experience behind center should pay dividends for the Hornets this fall.

Supporting Merritt on the offense are a couple of returning playmakers. Senior RB Quinn Massey (5-10, 165) is coming off a year where he proved his importance to Westran, catching 10 passes for 133 yards and 1 TD, and rushing 15 times for 67 yards. Expect him to be one of the focal points of the Hornets offense this fall. Senior WR Garrett Adler (5-8, 160) looks primed for a breakout season. The slightly undersized receiver posted 9 receptions for 158 yards and 1 TD in 2020, and also carried the ball 3 times for 36 yards and 1 TD. Aiding the offense this year will be junior WR Roland Brown (6-1, 155), sophomore RB Nate Kribbs (5-7, 145), junior TE Blake Williams (6-1, 215), and sophomore TE Brady Hollmann (6-0, 185). O'Laughlin has a concrete idea for how each of those players will fit into his Spread attack.

However, "Our biggest question going into the season is filling holes on the offensive line," O'Laughlin says. Three starters are back in the trenches: senior OL David Nelson (6-0, 215), junior OL Langden Kitchen (6-4, 230), and junior OL Brenin Howell (5-11, 225). Nelson made the All-Conference squad in 2020, while Kitchen found a spot on both the All-Conference and All-District teams. But beyond those three, O'Laughlin and staff are still on the search for new faces. "I am confident that we will have five to six guys who are ready week one," the coach says, "but there will be a lot of challenges and potential changes leading up to that week of the season to get the best personnel to fit this year's team."

On the other side of the ball, the offseason has seen Westran adopt a new system and a new coordinator. "Defensively, I see us making strides learning the new philosophies Coach Baxley will put in place," O'Laughlin

Class: 1
Conference: Lewis & Clark
Head Coach: Aaron O'Laughlin
Years at School: 6 (3 as HC)
Record at School: 22-13
Overall Record: 28-27
Offensive Starters Returning: 6
Defensive Starters Returning: 6
Total Returning Lettermen: 14
2020 Overall Record: 9-2

Westran Hornets 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Salisbury	Away
September		
3	South Shelby	Home
10	Marionville	Neutral (Camdenton)
17	Harrisburg	Home
24	Fayette	Away
October		
1	Scotland County	Home
8	Sweet Springs	Away
15	Marceline	Home
22	Paris/Faith Walk	Home
29	Districts	TBA

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says. No doubt, O'Laughlin, Baxley, et al will be leaning on junior DL Langden Kitchen, who had a massive sophomore season. Using his prodigious size to great effect, Kitchen had 43 tackles, of which an incredible 12 were for loss, as well as 6 six sacks that accounted for 43 yards. He even defended 7 passes—and found himself on the All-Conference, All-District, and All-State teams. Senior DL David Nelson and junior DL Brenin Howell will again accompany Kitchen on the D-line.

Anchoring the linebacker corps is senior LB Quinn Massey, another All-Conference and All-District performer. Massey was seemingly all over the field last fall, accounting for 66 tackles, 2 for loss, 3 fumble recoveries, and 1 forced fumble. This season, he'll show the ropes to junior LB Blake Williams and junior LB Austin Smith. Senior DB Garrett Adler is poised to lead the secondary. Adler was named All-Conference after an exceptional 2020 campaign saw him compile 32 tackles, 2 for loss, 1 sack, and 5 INTs. Junior DB Roland Brown and senior DB Steven Smith are each likely to earn a starting spot in the defensive backfield. Overall, the Westran defense has an excellent core of players, and could see major success in their new system. "We are excited and eager to see some of these changes develop as the season progresses," says O'Laughlin.

Westran had a very successful 2020, and though they don't return a treasure trove of talent, they might have just the right players in place to build on last year's success. "Though there are only five seniors on this year's team, they are five good leaders," O'Laughlin says. "I am confident that they will help lead this team the right way." Expect that to happen—and expect another winning season for the Hornets.

Pigskin's Pick: 7-2

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Winfield-Elsberry warriors

A coach's first year is never easy—and there was probably never one harder than for Winfield Head Coach Cody Spegal. In his first head-coaching gig, Spegal had to take the job in the middle of a pandemic. And he did so just five days before fall camp began. "We competed in almost every game," Spegal says, "but we couldn't put a win on the scoreboard. It was a trying year, to say the least."

This year's Winfield squad will look different, with Elsberry joining forces after the disbandment of the Clopton-Elsberry program. Spegal is getting a sudden injection of depth into his program—but will also have to quickly integrate a chunk of new players. Luckily for him, experience abounds at Winfield. Over two dozen lettermen are back this fall, helping to make Spegal's second year in charge much smoother than his first.

"The offense this year is bringing back a lot of experience—and will be bringing in a lot of new faces as well," Spegal says. Some of the team's brightest returning talent is at wideout. Senior WR Austin Carson (6-2, 185) just may be Winfield-Elsberry's best all-around player. He garnered Second-Team All-Conference honors last fall after compiling 5 catches for 89 yards and 88 rushes for 461 and 9 total TDs. What makes Carson so dangerous is his ability to do a little bit of everything. He can outjump defenders, use his size to go across the middle, turn on the jets to get to the outside, and even lower his shoulders to confront tacklers head-on. Also back at wideout is junior WR Cody Mense (5-9, 155). Mense had a nice sophomore season, tallying 14 receptions for 221 yards and 22 rushes for 106 yards and 3 total TDs.

The team's main ball-carrier out of the backfield will be junior RB Draven Ham (6-0, 200). An absolutely bruising rusher, Ham had 19 carries for 60 yards last fall. Junior RB Bryce Irving (5-10, 165) is ready to get some touches out of the backfield as well. Running things under center will be senior QB Wade Ellison (5-9, 185). Ellison hit on 8 of 16 passes for 153 yards and 1 TD last fall. A lot will be asked of him this season, but his familiarity in Spegal's spread offense positions the veteran quarterback for success. "We have a really good set of skill players along with plenty of depth to go along with our starters," Spegal says.

Up front, "Our offensive line has made great strides of improvement this summer," the coach says. The line's bedrock remains senior OG Hunter Dunn (5-11, 195). Dunn earned First-Team All-Conference and All-District honors after a terrific junior campaign. Beside him once again is senior OT Logan Trupiano (6-0, 205). Senior TE Cole Sams (6-2, 215) might be the team's 'X' factor this fall. Sams had 2 catches for 45 yards and 1 TD last year, and that along with his blocking ability landed him on spot on the All-Conference First-Team. This year, he'll be backed up by senior TE Colby Twellman (5-10, 220). "We will have a balanced offense of run and pass," Spegal says. "We are looking to make big improvements in the points-per-game category."

Class: 3
Conference: GAC North
Head Coach: Cody Spegal
Years at School: 1
Record at School: 0-10
Overall Record: 0-10
Offensive Starters Returning: 7
Defensive Starters Returning: 9
Total Returning Lettermen: 25
2020 Overall Record: 0-10

Winfield-Elsberry 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Confluence Academy	Home
September		
3	Monroe City	Home
10	Wright City	Away
17	St. Charles West	Home
24	Orchard Farm	Away
October		
1	St. Charles	Home
8	Warrenton	Away
15	Duchesne	Home
22	Lift for Life	Home
29	Districts	TBA



On the other side of the football, "[Our] defense is looking to make big improvements," Spegal says. "Last season we were really young across the board. We bring pretty much everyone back." The secondary will be excellent, with the entire unit returning. Senior S Austin Carson made the All-Conference First-Team after compiling 43 tackles and 2 INTs. Junior S Austin Bray (5-10, 155) posted 29 tackles and 2 INTs, junior CB Cody Mense pitched in with 28 tackles, and senior CB Liam Ransour (5-11, 160) had 14. Junior CB Bryce Irving and senior S Cody Webber (5-11, 170) make this a particularly deep group.

The linebacking corps will be anchored by senior LB Hunter Dunn (5-11, 195). Dunn made the All-Conference and All-District First-Team after he tallied 72 tackles, 1 sack, and 1 fumble recovery. Junior LB Draven Ham had 27 tackles and 2 sacks in 2020. Expect senior LB Colby Twellman to round out this group. Senior DE Cole Sams is the team's premier player up front. A First-Team All-Conference and All-District player from a year ago, Sams posted 80 tackles, 12 for loss, and 5 sacks. Senior DE Logan Trupiano will work the other edge. He had 25 tackles last fall.

2021 is sure to present us with a much different, much better Winfield-Elsberry team. "We're very excited to have Elsberry joining us for football this fall," Spegal says. "This is a win-win for both communities. This year, we're looking to make the jump as the most improved team in the state of Missouri." With loads of talent and experience, expect Spegal to earn his first win as a head coach—and maybe even more to come.

Pigskin's Pick: 3-6

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Wright City wildcats

In the 2020 season, the Wildcats produced an even 5-5 record a slight dropoff from the 2019 season where the Wildcats were Eastern Missouri Conference champions. “Following the loss of 20 seniors from the 2019 conference championship team, we went into last year with a lot of questions. However, we got off to a hot start with a 3-0 record,” Coach Rickard states. “Unfortunately, we then got hit by a few injuries and ran into some very strong teams in our conference. We ended up finishing the regular season 4-4. In district play, we were able to knock off Orchard Farm in the first round before losing to Lutheran North in the semifinals.” Wright City has a promising future though. With their previous head coach leaving, assistant coach Tyler Rickard has taken over the reigns. This will be Coach Rickard’s first season as a head coach in his career. Assisting Coach Rickard is Derek Lowe, Jake Wallace, and Kyle Horneker. One of the focuses that Coach Rickard has is reconstructing the offensive system. He believes that his returning starters, 7 offensive and 8 defensive, will play a key role in making this team stabilize the program now and in the future. It will take hard work, high football IQ, and consistency for Wright City to come back with a vengeance.

On offense, the Wildcats averaged 18 points per game, 169 rushing yards per game, and 111 passing yards per game. They value the production from both the run game and the passing game. Coach Rickard knows this team from his previous season as an assistant coach. This helps Wright City establish confidence in their new style that is being implemented. Coach Rickard says, “We return a lot of our core players in key positions, which is huge as we transition to a new offensive system. So far this summer they have done a great job of picking everything up. I look for us to be a balanced attack and able to spread the ball about to our playmakers.” At the quarterback position is senior Hayden Beck (6-4, 200). He earned 1st Team All-District QB in 2020. Also, Beck earned 1st Team All-Conference as a punter. Sophomore Joey Gendron (5-10, 180) is a promising backup at the QB position. He brings a good football IQ. Coach Rickard loves the consistency in the air. It will drive the passing game for the Wildcats. Returning running back is Junior Jeremiah Davis (5-10, 155). He earned 1st Team All-District after rushing for 616 yards and scoring 11 touchdowns. Newcomers sophomore Mason Newcomb (5-10, 160) and junior Blaine Neimann (5-9, 155) are both smart football players who are strong and fast. Another key component to Wright City’s changing playstyle will be a consistent run game. Senior wideout Jake Smith (6-0, 145) and Junior tight end Makiah Clark (6-3, 215) are the returning options through the air. Smith earned 1st Team All-Conference and 2nd Team All-Districts while Clark was 2nd Team All-District. Both were essential assets for Wright City. On the line, Senior Brandon Sirimanotham (5-9, 215) and Juniors Kyle Horneker (6-2, 240) and Noah Lamb (6-4, 200) will be back. All three are big, strong, and have fast hands. Overall, the Wildcats are trying to bring a new identity on and off the field. Coach Rickard believes this core can get them to a higher caliber.

On defense, Wright City allowed 29 points per game, 237 rushing yards per game, and 88 passing yards per game. It was an off year after winning the conference championship the year prior. Coach Rickard believes there is upside to their experience from last season. He wants the Wildcats to remain positive and use their strengths to push past opposing offenses. “Like our offense we return a good core of our defense. With all this experience back, I expect our defense to take a big step forward this year in their development,” Coach Rickard states. Returning starters at linebacker include Hayden Beck, junior Demetrice LeNoir (6-1, 185), and sophomore Carleon Jones (6-0, 185). They combined for over 150 tackles, 2 sacks, and 1 interception. Coach Rickard loves their tenacity, size and eagerness to fly to the football. Sophomore Denzel Dowdy (5-10, 150) is a tough gamer who had some

Class: 3
Conference: Eastern Missouri
Head Coach: Tyler Rickard
Years at School; 3 (1st as HC)
Returning Offensive Starters: 7
Returning Defensive Starters: 8
2020 Overall Record: 5-5

Wright City 2021 Schedule		
August		
27	Clark County	Home
September		
3	Van-Far	Away
10	Winfield	Home
17	Bowling Green	Away
24	Montgomery Cty	Home
October		
1	Mark Twain	Home
8	North Callaway	Away
15	Louisiana	Home
22	South Callaway	Away
29	Districts	TBA

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bright spots in his first year in the program. At defensive back is Jeremiah Davis, Jake Smith, and junior Nathan Womack (5-11, 150). The three are impressive defensive players with over 80 tackles combined. Makiah Clark will be returning at defensive end for Wright City. On the line, Kyle Horneker will be back to bring size and intimidation and he will be playing with senior Riley Shive (6-3, 270) after he missed the last season. Shive is a big and strong player for the Wildcats and he has quality experience. wants his defense to be structurally sound. "Expect our defense to be fundamentally sound and to fly around the football." Coach Rickard explains.

There are some hurdles Wright City has to consider going into the new season. Coach Rickard is an experienced coach with the Wildcats who wants his team to pursue a new identity including fast paced, high powered football. Consistency will be a major component to their style of play. "I am extremely excited to begin leading this football program. After serving as an assistant for two years, I am thrilled to have been selected as the next head coach," stated Coach Rickard. "We have a good group of returning starters, mixed with some talented underclassmen who are ready to step up. I look for us to utilize our speed and athleticism at the skill positions and be a tough, disciplined team up front."

Pigskin's Pick: 5-4

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Central Methodist eagles

It was not easy for any team to navigate the 2020 football season, but somehow the Eagles of Central Methodist made it through successfully with a winning record (5-4) and positive steps towards future success. Central Methodist University finished 3-2 in the Heart of America Conference. Head Coach David Calloway is in his sixth year at CMU with a record of 18-29-1. "Very proud of our team adjusting to all COVID-19 Protocols which allowed us to play our full 9 game schedule," Coach Calloway stated. He and his staff of Marty Steward DC, Jacoby Bellard QB and Brandon Cline-DB will be tasked with continuing the winning ways in 2021. Coach Calloway believes that the Eagles will have some core experience returning in 2021. The offense returns four starters, one for each position group. It starts at quarterback for the Eagles where freshman Paxton DeLaurent (6-3, 180) returns. The Camdenton High School product started the last three games of the 2020 season and showed real playmaking ability, as shown by throwing for 278 yards in the season's final game. He can also showcase his running ability as he led the team in rushing a couple games last season as well. Senior Shawn Simmons (5-9, 175) returns to his running back spot after a solid 2020 season. DeLaurent's main target will be senior wide receiver Kooper Wilson (5-9, 165). He makes up for his lack of size with quickness, good routes and great hands. Wilson was also named a Heart of America Conference Scholar Athlete. The O-line is in need of some rebuilding as only junior Trent Byers (6-3, 270) returns. This is where the focus will be for Calloway and his O-line coach when fall camp begins. The Eagle offense averaged 256 yards per game (65 rushing 190 passing) on their way to scoring an average of just over 20 points per game. Coach Calloway's philosophy across the board, on offense and defense is "Play together as a collective unit." That identity will have to form over training camp, where the pieces will come together.

The defense returns five starters with at least one at each level of the defense. Starting on the defensive line with big Trevor Ganaway (6-3, 310). The senior had a big year stopping the run and looks to improve his pass rush in 2021. The senior linebacking duo of Anthony Hernadez (5-10, 200) and London Chambers (6-0, 220) return in the middle of the D. They are both physical tacklers and can play sideline to sideline. The defensive backfield starts with senior Brandon Molanari (6-0, 180) and junior Erik Mays (5-10, 180) returning to the secondary. These two are not only solid cover players, but also are also sure-tackling run support guys. The Eagle defense allowed opponents an average of 275 yards per game last season (158 rushing and 117 passing). Overall, they kept opponents to just over 21 points per game. That's a solid number to build around, but depth might be an issue on the defensive side.

The Central Methodist Eagles have been looking forward to the 2021 season since last November. They have some solid veteran leadership and some young explosive talent, so the emphasis in camp will be to put it all together. Coach Calloway has a simple overall philosophy that guides his coaching, "Lead those who are willing to follow, push those who hesitate, pull those who become weary and achieve greatness together." Together is the operative word. The 2021 schedule is predictably tough with five Heart of America Conference teams being ranked in the top 25 preseason poll (Grandview #5, Baker #7 and Benedictine #17). Calloway knows that they must be prepared each and every week to be in a dogfight. The good news is that there is a good number of athletes on this roster for him to pull from and put to work. The progress the Eagles have made should continue in 2021.

Pigskin's Pick: 6-5

Class: NAIA
Conference: Heart of America
Coach: David Calloway
Record at school: 18-29-1
Overall record: 21-43-1
Returning Offensive Starters: 4
Returning Defensive Starters: 5
2020 Overall Record: 5-4

Central Methodist U 2021 Schedule		
August		
28	Grandview	Away
September		
4	Peru	Home
11	Clarke	Away
18	Graceland	Home
25	Culver-Stockton	Away
October		
2	William Penn	Home
9	Bye	
16	Benedictine	Home
23	MNU	Away
30	Missouri Valley	Home
November		
6	Baker	Home
13	Evangel	Away

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Missouri S & T miners

The Miners continue to show their dominance in the GLVC. Although their 2020 season was moved to the spring of 2021, due to COVID-19, they went 2-1 in the abbreviated season. Coach Todd Drury and the rest of the coaching staff said that The Miners ran the ball extremely well in those three contests, averaging 283 yards in those games; they averaged 477.3 yards of total offense overall. They allowed close to 400 yards on defense and had a defensive touchdown from Senior safety Justin Onwugbufor (5-10, 207), who led the team in tackles with 29. The Miners also recorded 12 sacks in those games, led by Ben Straatmann's three.

The one positive that came out of the crazy 2020 postponed season is that all 12 starters return for the Miners on both sides of the ball. That type of never-before-seen experience can help this S&T team compete for a GLVC title and beyond.

S&T had a loaded offense in the spring, and there are a lot of senior starters who will return for the fall. Senior Quarterback Brennan Simms (6-3, 207) will return to lead the Miners' dangerous spread offense. In the 2019 season, he threw for 2,721 yards and 21 touchdowns. Simms will also have a very solid receiving corps led by Senior Breon Michel (6-1, 205) who had 32 receptions for 627 yards and 4 touchdowns, and earning All-GLVC Honorable Mention in 2019. Right next to him is Senior Josh Brown (5-7, 155) who had 33 receptions for 504 yards and 4 touchdowns. Senior WR Tate Nickelberry (5-11, 177) had a productive spring with 12 receptions and 112 yards receiving and so did junior TE Ryan Langford (6-3, 232) with 5 receptions for 64 yards and 1 touchdown. S&T's running game showed a lot of strength in the spring season, with the help of Senior Payton McAlister (5-9, 185) who had 435 yards rushing and had 40 receptions for 477 yards. He also earned 1st Team All-GLVC in 2019. Coach Drury also mentioned last year's senior Aaron Moya (5-10, 195) who ran for 396 yards and 6 TD's, and Freshman Gideon Niboh, who saw playing time in the spring season. The Miners also have All-Conference Senior OL Josh Thornton (6-3, 314) and All-GLVC Honorable Mention Senior Offensive lineman Nino Schmitt (5-11, 289) returning as well, along with Junior guard Duncan Stamps (6-3, 302) and Senior guard Kyle Urich (6-1, 300). Junior transfer Jorge Escalante (6-2, 318) will be in the mix as well. Another offensive lineman to look out for this season is Freshman Jake Seidel (6-5, 296) who is a transfer from Missouri State.

On the defensive side of the ball, the Miners have a strong veteran team, with all 11 starters returning for the season. Coach Drury said that six of them are fifth-year seniors who are returning due to their blanket eligibility year provided to the 2020 roster because of COVID-19. Four of those starters are at linebacker, including All GLVC selections seniors Wulff Retziaff (6-1, 222) who had 63 tackles, 5 TFL, 2 sacks, Jack Hayes (5-11, 244) who had 51 tackles 5.5 TFL, and 3 sacks, Dontay White (5-11, 220) who had 62 tackles, 4.5 TFL, 2 INTs, and Stefan Camplin (5-11, 185) who had 57 tackles, 8 TFL, and 2 INT. The S&T secondary is also in good hands, with Justin Ownwugbufor who also earned 1st-team All-GLVC, having 97 tackles, and 2 TFL. Junior Ben Straatman (6-1, 231) returns at OLB where he had 28 tackles, 3.5 TFL, 3 Sacks, 1 PBU, 1 FR. The Miners secondary features senior

Classification: NCAA Division II
Conference: Great Lakes Valley Conference
Head Coach: Todd Drury
Years at School: 2
Offensive Starters Returning: 7
Defensive Starters Returning: 7
Total Returning Letterman: 42
2020 Overall Record: 7-4 in 2019, 2-1 in spring 2021

Missouri S&T Miners 2021 Schedule		
September		
2	South Dakota School of Mines	Away
11	Arkansas Baptist	Home
18	Wayne State (Mich.)	Home
25	Hillsdale	Away
October		
2	Quincy	Away
9	Truman State	Home
16	William Jewell	Home
23	McKendree	Away
30	Indianapolis	Home
November		
6	Lindenwood	Home
13	Southwest Baptist	Away



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Cameron Clemons (5-9, 185) returning this fall. Last year, he had 15 tackles, and 3 pass breakups. Cameron Orr (6-1, 177) will be at cornerback for his sophomore year. He had 12 tackles, 5 PBU, 1 FR. Freshman Derrick Thomas (6-0, 195) had 5 tackles, 1 PBU, 1 FF and senior CJ Hedgepeth (6-0, 191) had 9 tackles, 3 INT, 1 FF. Both will be at cornerback as well. Up front on the D-Line will feature sophomore DE Jack Roush (6-3, 284) who had 9 tackles, 3.5 TFL, 2.5 Sacks, junior DL Henry Preckel (6-4, 285) with 6 tackles, 0.5 TFL, 1 Sack, 2 PBU, All-Conference and senior transger DT Tyris Carr (6-4, 265).

Coach Drury stated "The Miners feel as if they can be in the mix for the GLVC title in 2021 with a veteran roster on both sides of the ball." In 2019, S&T lost in overtime to Lindenwood University and fell on a last-second field goal at Truman State. "The improved rushing attack in the spring can give this team a more potent offense and a means to help the defense in keeping it off the field," Coach Drury said. "It was on the field for more than 50 percent of the plays and time of possession in 2019, but in the spring of 2021, the numbers were in favor of the Miners in both categories."

Pigskin Pick: 8-3

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Missouri Valley College vikings

The Missouri Valley Vikings struggled a lot last season. It was a hard battle between COVID and falling short in hard fought games. “Had three games wiped out due to COVID-19 restrictions,” Head Coach Paul Troth said. “All three of those games would have been games we potentially could have won, which would have improved the season’s outlook.” The Vikings are a strong team, and they know how to compete. “Opened the 2020 season with a shutout win over Graceland, but played that game in late September, nearly two months after our team returned to campus for the start of fall camp,” Coach Troth said. “Lost close game to Central Methodist, Evangel and MidAmerica Nazarene, where any one of those games could have turned our season around.” They have the athletes to win the conference and make a playoff run. “Our student athletes played well last season, despite the sudden changes to the schedule, testing, and uncertainty that surrounded everything each week.” Coach Troth said.

` Coach Troth’s philosophy is to control the ball, win the turnover battle and limit penalties. “Our goal is to be the best team on the field conditioning-wise, and to limit our mistakes while taking advantage of the other team’s mistakes,” coach said. “The margin of error in the HAAC, especially in the South division, are always thin, so the difference between winning and losing can come down to one bad series, or even one bad play.” The Vikings are looking to dominate this year with the players they have. Most of them have played together throughout their college career. This is a huge advantage because they have built up a chemistry within the years they’ve been with each other. “Offensively, we want to control the ball, and have a balanced rushing attack that will wear down an opponent.” Coach Troth said. “We also have always had a good special teams unit, and want to be sound in the kicking game.”

The Vikings have a plethora of upperclassmen on the offensive side of the ball. They have a strong, experienced O-Line and electrifying skilled players returning in order to make plays out of the Shotgun and Pistol formation. Last season, The Vikings scored 18.5 points per game last year, rushing for 98 yards per game and throwing for 306 yards per game. “Offensive line and running backs should be our strength going into this season,” Coach Troth said. “Lots of returning experience at both position groups.” Juniors Cody Hohenberger (6-2, 275) and Lalomilo Losefa (6-1, 310), Senior Adam Balkin (6-1, 270) and Sophomore Petelo Loane (6-1, 330) will lead the way for this offensive line. Senior running back Isaac Bausley (5-9, 215) will return to his H-Back spot. Last season, he earned All-Conference Honorable Mention and had 339 receiving yards and 3 TDs. “Both position groups should provide good depth that will help keep our offense going through games, and will allow us to lean on our running game to help open up passing opportunities,” Coach Troth said. Senior receivers Keenan Young (6-0, 181) and Mike Flores (6-1, 190) will return to the offense this season as well. Last year, Young had 11 receptions for 164 yards and 3 TDs. Flores had 8 receptions for 151 yards and 3 TDs. The offense wouldn’t be complete without Senior quarterback Darrion Cole (6-2, 220). Last year, he was 69/125 in passing, throwing for 762 yards and 10 TDs with 79 yards rushing.

On the defensive side, “Lots of returning experience on the defensive line, and a deeper pool of linebackers and defensive backs to rotate guys in and out,” Coach Troth said. “Expecting to create a good pass rush with our line that will help the secondary and limit passing yards this season.” Last year, the Vikings allowed 30.4 points per game, 179 yards per game, and 187 rushing yards per game. The Vikings will continue to run the 3-4. Junior defensive linemen Faiilagi Shepherd (6-1, 298) and Colton Wilmes (6-1, 280) are returning. Last year, Shepherd had 18 tackles and 1.5 TFL, and Wilmes had 13 tackles and 1.5 TFL. Senior Tynan Braymiller (6-2, 230) will be the leader of this powerhouse defensive line. Last season, he earned All-Conference Second Team, racking up 39 tackles, 6.5 TFL, and 3 sacks. Next to him is Senior Chase Ohm (6-2, 245) who had 17 tackles, 4.5 TFL, and 2 fumble recoveries last year. The Vikings’ secondary is looking to improve this year as well, bringing back a lot of talented upperclassmen who are hungrier than ever. “Also hoping a deeper linebacker corps will help with keeping guys fresh and limit rushing yards given up,” Coach Troth said. Senior Tui Pulu (6-0, 230) will be the head honcho for the linebacker corps. Last season, he had 28 tackles and a sack. For the

Classification: NAIA
Conference: Heart of America Athletic Conference
Head Coach: Paul Troth
Years at School: 20
Offensive Starters Returning: 8
Defensive Starters Returning: 8
Total Returning Lettermen: 37
2020 Overall Record: 1-6
2020 Conference Record: 0-5

Missouri Valley College 2021		
August		
28	Peru State	Away
September		
4	Clarke	Home
11	Graceland	Away
18	Culver-Stockton	Home
25	William Penn	Away
October		
2	Grand View	Home
16	Evangel	Home
23	Benedictine	Away
30	Central Methodist	Away
November		
6	MidAmerica Nazarene	Home
13	Baker	Home





secondary, Juniors Drew Peterson (5-10, 190) and Keshaun Reynolds (5-9, 170) will return. Last year, Peterson had 28 tackles, 2 TFL and a fumble recovery. Reynolds had 13 tackles. The captain of the secondary, BriQuez Alvies (5-11, 195) is seeking to have a breakout season and end his senior career with a bang. Last year, he earned All-Conference Honorable Mention, having 20 tackles and a sack.

Although the Heart Conference is pretty tough, the Vikings still have what it takes to come out on top. "The Heart of America Athletic Conference has always been a premier conference, but the South division has developed into one of the most competitive divisions in the NAIA," Coach Troth said. "The margin for error is so thin, and all six teams in the division are just as talented as any other team." Although the teams in the South Division are fairly strong, Coach Troth has trained these athletes for the challenges ahead. "The difference between winning and losing could be one bad series, or even one bad play, so we focus on limiting mistakes and taking advantage of opportunities," Coach Troth said. "We are planning on playing all 11 games this fall, which will be exciting for the players and us coaches after a tough season in 2020." The Vikings have only two home games in the first half of the schedule, the last six games will be at their house. The two games that will test their strength are MidAmerica Nazarene and Baker. "We have the schedule to win some games early, and carry momentum into our divisional games, which begins in mid-October," Coach Troth said. "We only play two road games in the division, so we are looking forward to three home divisional games this season."

Pigskin's Pick: 5-6

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Westminster blue jays

Last football season was less than ideal for Head Coach John Welty and the Westminster Blue Jays, including schedule changes galore and only playing three games. “After the delay in the season our players stayed focused and were able to achieve success,” the coach says. And now, a load of talent returns to the Blue Jays in 2021, including nine starters on offense. “We are returning a lot of starters on the offense and have many guys who got playing time as backups ready to take over,” says Welty. Last year’s group was third in all of Division III in time of possession, and Welty says he and his staff “expect that to continue with the guys we have returning.” Senior QB Wyatt Ellis (6-2, 200) is back for one last fling. The Owensville product connected on 29 of 57 passes for 1 TD last fall, while also rushing 43 times for 3 TDs.

Out wide, “We have a lot of wide receivers returning for us,” Welty says. Junior WR Dylan Clapsaddle (5-10, 180) led the way last season with 6 receptions for 44 yards. Senior WR Ross Trittler (6-3, 200), a Southern Boone graduate, was not far behind, with 5 catches for 40 yards, and senior WR Matt Huffman (6-2, 180) added 1 catch for 61 yards. Another target back in the passing game is sophomore TE Hunter King (6-1, 200), who previously plied his trade at Centralia. Newcomers competing for playing time in the receiving corps are junior WRs Nick Painter (5-11, 165) and Jaben Shockey (6-0, 175) and sophomore WR Jeremy Cundiff (5-11, 180). One to watch out for is sophomore WR Peyton James (5-9, 160), who compiled 2 catches for 23 yards and 6 rushes for 40 yards and 1 TD. Finally, senior QB/WR Jaden Kendrick (5-10, 180) returns. Once an all-conference performer at Smith-Cotton, Kendrick completed 6 of 9 passes for 77 yards.

Up front, “The offensive line is largely intact from last season and there are a few newcomers looking to push for starting spots,” Welty says. A quarter of starters will again take on the dirty work of blocking, with senior O-linemen Demetrius O’Neal (6-5, 300) and Ray Samuels (6-5, 390) and juniors Eli Shaw (5-9, 250) and Ethan Taller (6-3, 275) all bringing good experience to the interior. This fall, they’ll be joined by junior OL Colton Glover (5-10, 250) and OL Joshua Johnson (5-11, 280) and sophomore linemen Keegan Whisenhunt (6-2, 300) and Ethan Everhart (5-10, 250). Welty expects senior RB Taylor Dobbins (5-10, 215) to get the lion’s share of the carries out of the backfield this fall. He had 12 rushes for 45 yards and 4 receptions for 77 yards and 1 TD. Providing depth are senior RB Dequinitin Smith (5-8, 170), from Hallsville, and sophomore RB Ben Wallace (5-5, 170). Overall, “We will be a well-balanced offense that is able to beat you on the ground or in the air,” Welty says.

On the defensive side of the football, “We graduated two of our best players from last year’s defense, but still return a number of key players,” Welty says. The secondary looks stacked, with all four starters returning. Senior DBs Corey Kroll (6-1, 180), Hunter Johnson (5-10, 180), and Easton Hanks (6-1, 160) have incredible experience, while sophomore DB Delrick Freeman (6-2, 180) has shown some promise. Senior DB Robert Anthony (6-1, 190) and sophomore DB Blake Bolin (5-11, 180) will vie for time as well. On the defensive line, junior DE Justin Scales (6-0, 22) and sophomore DE Rothman Harris (5-11, 215) will work the edges.

Class: Division III
Conference: UMAC
Head Coach: John Welty
Years at School: 23
Record at School: 103-101
Overall Record: 103-101
Offensive Starters Returning: 9
Defensive Starters Returning: 8
Total Returning Lettermen: 39
2020 Overall Record: 2-1

Westminster 2021 Schedule		
September		
4	Knox College	Home
11	Bye	
18	Sewanee U. of the South	Away
25	Rhodes College	Home
October		
2	Minnesota-Morris	Away
9	Bye	
16	Greenville	Home
23	U. of Northwestern-St. Paul	Away
30	Finlandia University	Home
November		
6	Martin Luther College	Home
13	Crown	Away





Good Luck Blue Jays!

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A number of new players are competing for the remaining spots, including junior DLs Jordan Lewis (6-3, 330) and Patrick Biggs (6-0, 320), and sophomore DLs Aiden Quinlisk (6-2, 240), Briley Dickerson (5-10, 260), and Marcus Stephens (5-9, 240).

Two starters return in the linebacker corps: junior LBs Dawson Brandt (6-1, 195), who was the team's leading tackler last season, and Dominic Licamelli (5-10, 185). Senior LB Cooper Mange (5-10, 190) and sophomore LBs Xavier Caffey (5-11, 200), Cole Amelunke (5-11, 220), Morgan Slatten (5-10, 190) and Mike Rogers (6-0, 220) will compete for time as well. Senior P/K Tim Branneky (6-2, 170) will again handle punting and kicking duties. "Our edge players and defensive backs are the strength of the defense coming into camp, but there will be battles for the DT and LB positions," Welty says.

Welty is excited for a Westminster reset this season. "Last year had its ups and downs for our football team," he says. "We feel like we are capable of competing for a conference championship this year if we stay healthy and get a few breaks to go our way." With the amount of talent returning for the Blue Jays, they will certainly be in the mix come season's end.

Pigskin's Pick: 7-2

Go Blue Jays!



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Mizzou tigers

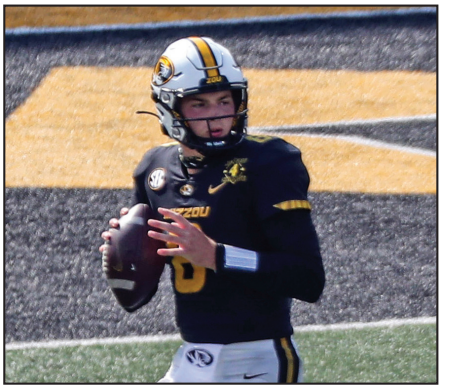
The first year of any head coaching job isn't really the start of a new era. Technically, it is, but it's a transition year more than anything. New offensive and defensive schemes are instituted and the former coach's recruits still play all the major roles, as the new man in charge gets the lay of the land. That's what 2020 was for Eli Drinkwitz in his debut season at the University of Missouri.

Most coaches don't have to take the reins of a program during the middle of a pandemic. But under Coach Drink's guidance, the Tigers cruised to an even .500 last year, finishing the year at 5-5. Speaking at SEC Media Days in Hoover, Alabama, Drinkwitz encapsulated the season by saying, "I really felt like last year we exceeded the expectations of many of the people in the room, but also many of the people within the state about what we could accomplish in such a challenging season." Mizzou won 5 conference games and finished third in the SEC East—far above the sixth place that they were predicted to land at before the season. One of those victories was a 45-41 barnburner against LSU, the defending national champion, proving that, if nothing else, things will be exciting in Columbia under Drinkwitz.

After the season, the Tigers had five players drafted and brought in some excellent recruits. Also bringing in top-quality talent, though, is just about the entire SEC. Drinkwitz recognizes the challenge posed by going against the big boys on both the field and the recruiting trail. "It's going to be a process," he says. "It's not something that just happens overnight. I've got to remind our fan base that [Georgia's] Coach Smart and [Florida's] Coach Mullen have years of experience at their school, and we're trying to close that gap in a hurry, but we're not going to do it overnight."

The gap didn't close in the new coach's first year, and it's unlikely to happen in his second year. Narrowing the space between Mizzou and the blue bloods will be difficult but not impossible. And that doesn't mean that year-by-year improvement can't happen all the same. Looking towards 2021, Drinkwitz likes what he sees. "We're very fired up about the opportunity that lies ahead. We return eight starters on defense. We return eight starters on the offensive side of the ball and four specialists. We got an opportunity to have a really strong line of scrimmage, which is one thing that we learned last year was needed in order to be successful in this league. We were able to bring guys back with the COVID year… We look forward to the 2021 football season and look forward to the challenges that lie ahead."

One of the knocks against Barry Odom during his tenure in charge of the Tigers was that he was too much of a defense guy. While the coach clearly did put a massive focus on his defensive units, the results bore out: in 2019, Odom's final year leading Mizzou, the Tigers allowed just 19.4 points per game, a mark good enough for 16th in the nation. A year later, under Drinkwitz (not coincidentally, an offense guy), Missouri allowed 32.3 points per game. That number dropped them all the way down to 85th in the country. To his credit, Drinkwitz recognizes that was a problem, and doesn't shy away from it. "[Defense] was obviously a weakness for us, especially towards the end of the season, so we're excited about the opportunity for us to improve," he says.



Connor Bazelak

To aid in improving the defense this fall, the Tigers brought in Steve Wilks to be the new defensive coordinator. Wilks's most recent coaching gig was the same role for the Cleveland Browns, and in 2018 he was the head coach for the Arizona Cardinals. Drinkwitz admires Wilks, calling him "A coach who is just a tremendous leader of men and a motivator of players." Wilks will have some good players to work with, including redshirt junior DE Trajan Jeffcoat (6-4, 276), an All-SEC player. After taking time away from the program in 2019, Jeffcoat returned in 2020 and immediately became one of the best defensive players around. He posted 23 tackles and 6 sacks

Conference: SEC
Head Coach: Eli Drinkwitz
Years at School: 2
Record at School: 5-5
Overall Record: 17-6
Offensive Starters Returning: 8
Defensive Starters Returning: 8
Total Returning Lettermen: TBD
2020 Overall Record: 5-5
2020 Conference Record: 5-5

Missouri Tigers 2021 Schedule		
September		
4	Central Michigan	Home
11	Kentucky	Away
18	SEMO	Home
25	Boston College	Away
October		
2	Tennessee	Home
9	North Texas	Home
16	Texas A&M	Home
30	Vanderbilt	Away
November		
6	Georgia	Away
13	South Carolina	Home
20	Florida	Home
26	Arkansas	Away (Fri)

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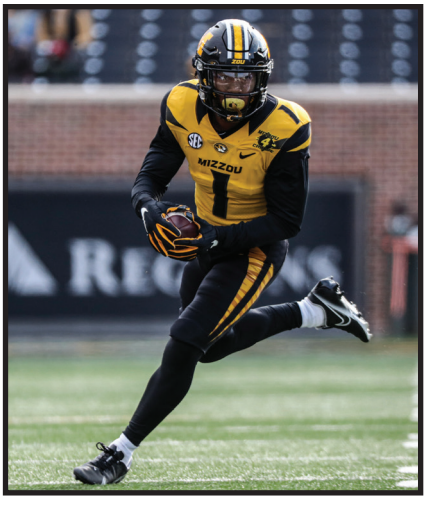


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Tyler Badie

in 2020—those 6 sacks being the highest mark for any Mizzou player since Charles Harris in 2016. Jeffcoat enters the season on the Bednarik Award watch list. He'll be a household name this fall.

Working the other edge is most likely to be junior DE Isaiah McGuire (6-4, 266), who tallied 18 tackles, 3 sacks, and 1 forced fumble last fall. McGuire has a nose for the football, and the ability to make game-changing plays. Also figuring into the end position are graduate student DE Chris Turner (6-3, 268) and senior DE Jatorian Hansford (6-4, 268). Turner has started 25 games throughout his career in Columbia, and in 2020 had 7 tackles, 1 for loss, and 1 blocked kick. Hansford had just 3 tackles in limited action last season. A trio of newcomers might factor in at end as well. Redshirt junior DE Daniel Robledo (6-2, 279) is a JUCO transfer, freshman DE Travion Ford (6-2, 239) arrives from St. Louis' Lutheran North, and freshman DE Ky Montgomery (6-5, 255) was a top 250 national recruit.

As usual, the Tigers have a number of good players on the defensive line's interior. Playing in just half the team's game last season, graduate student DT Kobie Whiteside (6-1, 298) had 12 tackles and 1 fumble recovery. Last fall, graduate student DT Akial Byers (6-3, 288) started 4 games on the line and played in 9, compiling 15 tackles, 2.5 of which came for a loss of yardage. Says Drinkwitz, "Akial Byers is a young man who's a leader on the defensive side of the ball. He has a lot of experience. He has the potential and has really invested himself into this season and into our football team." Two more players enter

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Manuel moves across the field with unusual quickness, and brings with him the crucial capability to make game-changing plays every single Saturday. Junior S Stacy Brown (6-2, 205) will likely be Manuel's backup. Other safeties battling it out for time are redshirt freshman S Tyler Jones (5-11, 191) and graduate student S Mason Pack (5-11, 194), who played high-school ball down in Kickapoo.

The cornerback position could be a worry for the Tigers, with the players competing for spots largely unknown quantities. Redshirt junior CB Akayleb Evans (6-2, 198) comes over from Tulsa. Evans is a top-notch human, as evidenced by his inclusion on the Wuerffel Trophy watch list last fall. In his final year as a Golden Hurricane, he had 24 tackles, 1 sack, 1 forced fumble, and 3 passes defended. Amazingly, he had 9 tackles in a single contest against Cincinnati. Sophomore CB Ennis Rakestraw, Jr. (6-0, 172) should be a solid performer in the SEC. He played on the same Texas high school team as Stacy Brown, where he won the 6A Division I State Championship game against Southlake Carroll. Incredibly, Rakestraw did not allow one touchdown all season that year. Redshirt sophomore CB Ishmael Burdine (6-1, 187) could figure into the equation as well. After missing 11 games in 2019 due to injury, he posted 9 sacks and 3 defended passes over 8 games in 2020. Expect sophomore CB Jaylon Carlies (6-3, 204) to see the field quite a bit. He had 8 tackles last season. One more player who is likely to see action is another Tulsa transfer, graduate student CB Allie Green IV (6-2, 202). Green put together a nice career down in the Sooner State, compiling 116 tackles, 11 passes defended, 1 INT, and 1 forced fumble. Overall, this is a talented group of cornerbacks but not a deep one. They'll need to come into the fall in tip-top shape for the Tigers to have a chance at some major improvements in 2021.



Case Cook

The Mizzou defense regressed in a big way last fall. Drinkwitz has begun making the necessary moves to amend that, starting with the hiring of Wilks as the new defensive coordinator, someone he is ecstatic about having on his staff. "I'm excited about the scheme that he's going to bring and the energy he brings to the football field every day," Drinkwitz says. Wilks will have a good group of core players to work with, and the Tigers' D-line should be excellent—just like it almost always is. There are concerns, however, in the linebacker corps and secondary. Wilks and his players will have to figure out a way to limit big plays and reduce the points allowed per game. If they do so, the Tigers could well be near the top of the heap in the SEC East this fall.

———

During Drinkwitz's first year in charge of Missouri, the Tigers didn't employ an offensive coordinator. That role belonged to Drinkwitz himself, more or less. And it re-

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the fall with a chance for a serious chunk of playing time: junior DT Darius Robinson (6-5, 290) and redshirt junior DT Ben Key (6-3, 289), the first Australian to ever wear the Black and Gold. In 7 games last year, Robinson had 12 tackles and 1 sack. His height and reach enable him to bat down balls at the line of scrimmage and obstruct the quarterback's view. Key is more of an unknown quantity—he saw action in just 2 games last year, but the former rugby player came to Mizzou as the #4 ranked JUCO DT in the nation, choosing Mizzou over the likes of Mississippi State, UCLA, and Oregon. "The defensive line should be a strength for us on the defensive side of the ball," Drinkwitz says.

The Mizzou linebacking corps looks significantly less fierce without All-SEC linebacker Nick Bolton, who was taken in the second round of the NFL draft by the Kansas City Chiefs. To replace him, Drinkwitz and staff went out and found a terrific transfer, graduate student LB Blaze Alldredge (6-2, 220). Alldredge comes over from Rice, where he spent three excellent years, proving himself to be a tackling machine and twice garnering Conference USA First-Team honors. Bringing in players like Alldredge points to the creativity and outside-the-box thinking Drinkwitz's team of coaches will need in order to compete in the SEC.

A player who has steadily grown in size and importance is junior LB Devin Nicholson (6-2, 221). The Detroit native had a monster sophomore season last fall, posting 82 tackles, 3 for loss, 1.5 sacks, 1 INT, and 2 forced fumbles in full-time starting duty. He and Alldredge look set to be a nice duo. More will be asked of redshirt junior LB Chad Bailey (6-0, 229) in 2021. The Missouri City, Texas, product had 11 tackles last fall, with 2 coming for a loss. Redshirt junior LB Cameron Wilkins (6-1, 234) will have a role to play as well. After a promising 2019 campaign saw him rack up 33 tackles and 1 INT, Wilkins had just 7 tackles across 3 games in 2020.



Akial Byers

The Tigers' secondary will have to be much better in 2021 if the defense is going to improve as a whole. They allowed too many big plays in too many contests. It's time for redshirt junior S Jalani Williams (6-1, 193) to live up to his billing as an all-world recruit. Jalani came to Columbia from St. Louis as the #19 safety prospect in the country, opting for the Tigers over a list of nearly two-dozen potential suitors that included Alabama, Georgia, and Ohio State. In 8 games of action last fall, Williams had 14 tackles, 1 for a loss, and 3 passes defended. The onus on Williams' shoulders will be heavy this fall, but he looks primed for a breakout year.

A player who already had his breakout season is junior S Martez Manuel (6-0, 208). A Columbia kid and Rock Bridge graduate, Manuel made the absolute most out of his opportunities last fall, putting up numbers more akin to that of a linebacker than a D-back. He compiled 64 tackles, 5 of which 7 came for a loss, 2.5 sacks, 5 passes defended, and 1 forced fumble. A ball-hawking back if ever there was one,



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sulted in the Tigers averaging 26.7 points per game, right in the middle of the pack among college football's major programs. Interestingly, it was the unit that Drinkwitz had reservations about that ended up a strong point for the offense in 2020. "When we went into last season didn't know what we would have as far as an offensive line, an area that appeared to be a weakness for us," Drinkwitz says. "Instead, it was a place of reliability."

The bedrock of this group is redshirt senior RG Case Cook (6-4, 291), the Tigers' lone returning captain from 2020. Amazingly, Cook played all of the Tigers' 731 offensive snaps in 2020. He holds an 84.2 rating in pass-blocking from ProFootballFocus.com, the second-highest mark among all guards in the SEC and the 17th best nationally. "I love Case Cook," Drinkwitz says. "He's played a lot of football at a high level in this league." Redshirt sophomore G Luke Griffin (6-5, 328) will back Cook up this fall. To Cook's right will no longer be Larry Borom—he was drafted in the fifth found by the Chicago Bears. That position will now likely belong to redshirt senior RT Hyrin White (6-7, 320), with redshirt junior RT Javon Foster (6-5, 297) set for spot duty. White missed all of 2020 due to a shoulder injury, and Foster saw some action when Borom was hurt last fall. Redshirt junior OL Connor Wood (6-4, 315), a Montana State transfer and former FCS All-American Honorable Mention, could see the field as well.

Providing more continuity in the middle of the line is graduate student C Michael Maietti (6-1, 290). After transferring from Rutgers, the New Jersey native had an excellent debut season at Mizzou, and is making use of the extra year of eligibility offered by the NCAA. Like Cook, Maietti played every down for the Tigers last fall. Redshirt freshman C Drake Heismeyer (6-3, 290) is there if needed.



Trajan Jeffcoat

Familiar faces are back on the left side of the line, with redshirt junior LG Xavier Delgado (6-4, 324) working the interior and redshirt senior LT Zeke Powell (6-5, 288) protecting the blind side. Redshirt junior LT Bobby Lawrence (6-9, 319) will step in when Powell needs a breather, and Luke Griffin can step in for Delgado, as he'll be doing for Cook on the other side of the line.

Year 2 for an offensive-minded coach is perhaps the most important year. It's not necessarily make-or-break, but there's a lot of 'making' that needs to be done. There is no doubt Drinkwitz will have been using every free second to better familiarize redshirt sophomore QB Connor Bazelak (6-3, 212) with his pro-style offense. Bazelak came to Columbia as a huge recruit, #5 overall from the state of Ohio, a perennial football powerhouse. Last year, with the starting job solely his, Bazelak displayed flashes of brilliance amid some hiccups. In the Tigers' biggest win of the year, over LSU, he threw 4 TDs—but only had 3 more over the next 7 games. Bazelak ended the season with a stat line of 218 completions on 324 attempts, 2,366 passing yards, 7 TDs and 6 INTs. That's 1 interception per every 54 pass attempts (roughly 2 games) and a 67% accuracy clip—truly incredible numbers for a first-year starter. Bazelak may be that rare type of quarterback that simply isn't prone to making big mistakes, so if he can make big plays more consistently this fall, he'll be in the running for one of the conference's best QBs. Two St. Louis-area products will provide depth under center. Redshirt freshman QB Brady Cook (6-2, 207), who connected on 6 of 7 passes for 1 TD last fall, and freshman QB Tyler Macon (5-11, 205), a four-star prospect and the nation's 13th-ranked dual-threat quarterback. Macon's scrambling ability will allow Drinkwitz to offer some different looks throughout ballgames.

Things will be significantly more difficult for the Tigers in the running game without Larry Rountree III this fall. Rountree had a prolific career in Columbia, compiling 3,720 rushing yards, the most yards ever for a running back at the school, and scoring 40 rushing TDs, tied with Zack Abron for most ever for the Tigers. Rountree was selected in the sixth round by the Los Angeles Chargers this spring. Taking over his starting duties in 2021 will be senior RB Tyler Badie (5-8, 194), easily one of

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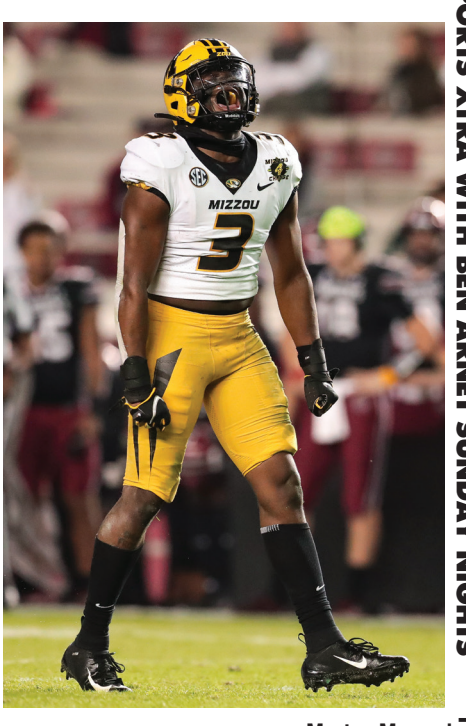


the most athletic players on the roster. Badie recorded 48 carries for 242 yards and 4 TDs last fall, and also caught 28 passes for 333 yards and 2 TDs. In 2019, Badie became the first running back since Brock Olivo to lead the team in receptions. When Bazelak has to check down and hits Badie over the middle or in the backfield, what is normally a fairly innocuous situation could become one of the Tigers' most dangerous offensive plays.

The second-string spot at running back will belong to sophomore RB Elijah Young (5-9, 185). The speedster from Knoxville, Tennessee, chose Mizzou over his hometown school as well as Arkansas, South Carolina, and Kentucky. In 7 games last fall, Young rushed 10 times for 78 yards—that 7.8 yards per carry is a sign of the kind of quickness he has with the ball in his hands. Graduate student RB Dawson Downing (5-11, 221) is set to get some carries as well. A perennial member of the SEC All-Academic Honor Roll, Downing had his best year in 2019, when he posted 40 rushes for 227 yards and 1 TD.

As usual, Mizzou's stable of receivers looks to be stacked, making life better for Bazelak and Drinkwitz alike. Graduate student WR Keke Chism (6-5, 214) is the leading returning wideout for the Tigers. Across 9 games last fall, the transfer from Division II's Angelo State recorded 35 receptions, 458 yards, and 1 TD. Chism's terrific size makes him a favored target for Bazelak, and his speed makes him a breakaway threat. He shows no hesitation going over the middle of the field. Redshirt junior WR Tauskie Dove (6-2, 195) had a nice 2020 campaign, tallying 30 catches for 300 yards and 2 TDs, and even completing 1 pass for 16 yards. He comes from Ryan High School in Denton, Texas, the same program that produced former Tiger standout wideout Bud Sasser. Redshirt senior WR Barrett Banister (6-0, 192) has a been an eerily consistent contributor for the Tigers over the past two seasons. In 2020, he had 27 catches for 252 yards; compare that to 2019, in which he had 27 catches for 246 yards and 1 TD. Drinkwitz has a particular fondness for the wideout from Fayetteville, saying, "He is a guy that does all the little things right. He's an extra gritty player. Works extremely hard at his craft to perform above his abilities on a day-to-day basis. He's the type of player that Mizzou football has always been about."

That trio of starters will cause some problems out wide for opposing defenses in 2021. Other players who may get some looks out wide are redshirt freshman WR J.J. Hester (6-3, 202), a four-star prospect, redshirt freshman WR Chance Luper (6-2, 186), graduate student WR Micah Wilson (6-2, 202), who had 5 catches for 81 yards and 1 TD last fall, and redshirt freshman WR Jay Maclin (5-11, 187) whose name might ring a bell (he is Jeremey's cousin). Expect serious production from this talented, deep group of wide receivers in 2021.



Martez Manuel

By this point, it's been well established that Mizzou is one of the premier tight-end producing programs in the country. In 2020 alone, three former Mizzou tight ends were on NFL rosters: Albert Okwuegbunam, Kendall Blanton, and Sean Culkin. (This is only several years removed from when former Mizzou teammates Martin Rucker and Chase Coffman were both playing in the NFL at the same time.) Per usual, the Tigers will have multiple options at tight end this fall.



Niko Hea

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Junior TE Niko Hea (6-4, 245) led Tigers' tight ends in receiving last fall, posting 14 catches for 130 yards and 2 TDs. He's likely to be the primary passing target this season, with senior TE Daniel Parker, Jr. (6-2, 235) the main blocker at the position. Parker came to prominence last year after a clip surfaced in which he bulldozed three Arkansas defenders on a single play to make loads of running room for Jalen Knox. Expect more of that in the year ahead. Besides those two stalwarts, redshirt junior TE Messiah Swinson (6-8, 251) is back in action; he had 2 receptions for 38 yards last fall. Sadly, Logan Christopherson retired due to medical issues, but the Tigers recruited two promising players to provide depth at the position: freshman TEs Ryan Hoerstkamp (6-2, 230) and Gavin McKay (6-3, 219). Hoerstkamp, a product of Washington, Missouri, might be poised to carry the torch for Mizzou tight ends. With his massive frame, nice athletic ability, and overall fearlessness, Hoerstkamp was deemed good enough to warrant a scholarship offer by Alabama.

Helping the Tigers in the field-position game will once again be graduate student P Grant McKinniss (6-0, 201). The former Kentucky player had an excellent debut season at Mizzou, punting the ball 32 times for 1,368 yards—an average of 42.8 yards per attempt. Impressively, he pinned 13 kicks inside the 20-yard line, and had 4 that went more than 50 yards. In charge of placekicking duties is sophomore K Harrison Mevis (5-11, 236). In his freshman year, the former five-star prospect and #2 kicking recruit in the nation nailed 28 out of 28 PAT attempts and hit 17 of 20 field goals, with a long of 52 yards. Another Rock Bridge product, redshirt senior Sean Koetting (6-4, 226), will again act as the team's primary holder and backup placekicker.

The Tigers have a solid offensive line, an excellent new O-line coach, a high-quality quarterback gaining comfort in the system, weapons galore at the skill positions, and two accurate, proven kickers. They will score points at a better clip this fall.

———

Things are looking up for Mizzou in 2021. One major reason why is the schedule. This fall, Mizzou fans won't have to fret about seeing the likes of Alabama, Auburn, LSU, or Ole Miss. It's the SEC, so of course it'll be tough, but not as tough as it might otherwise be (or as it's been in recent years). That alone bodes well for the Tigers.

And it's Drinkwitz's second year in charge. The system is firmly his and so are the newest recruits. In 2021, we'll see a program much more formed in the coach's image. And that starts not on the field but up in the head, with a brand new mentality. "I don't think there's any trepidation or fear in who we are at Mizzou," Drinkwitz says. "We have a lot of confidence in the preparation that we've put in. We have an edge about who we are, and we're going to have an energy. We're detailed. We've got

TURN THE PAGE FOR THE SEC EAST AND WEST PREVIEW

grit and emotional consistency. So I think that's what you're going to see to who we are on a day-to-day basis."



Harrison Mevis

2021 is the year that Eli Drinkwitz will make his mark on the program. A new mentality has been instilled, along with new offensive and defensive schemes. The right players are in the right places. The recruits and transfers continue to pour in. This fall, the second-year coach and his talented group of players will get the University of Missouri football program firmly back on the right track.

Pigskin Pick: 7-5

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SEC EAST PREVIEW

1) Georgia Bulldogs

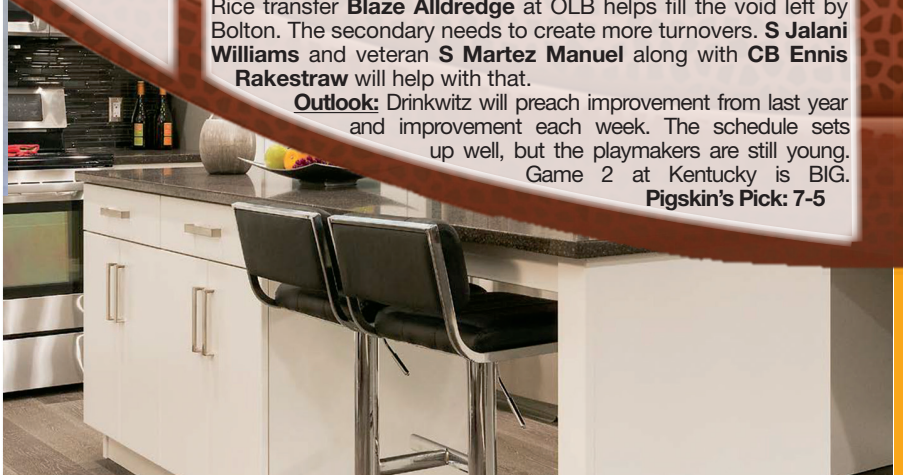
2020 Record: 8-2 overall
Coach: Kirby Smart- 5th Season
Offense: **QB JT Daniels** started only 4 games last year, but that was enough to see how good he can be. **RB Zamir White** will run behind a huge line that includes **OL Jamaree Salyer**. The Bulldogs best **WR George Pickens**, is injured to start the year, but may return late. Transfer **WR/TE Arik Gilbert** will be a player and leading receiver **Kearis Jackson** is back as is **WR Jermaine Burton**. **Defense:** One of best D-Lines in college starts with **DT Jordan Davis** and ends with **DE Travon Walker**. A pair of CB's in transfer **Derion Kendrick** and freshman **CB Nyland Green** will team up with **S Tykee Smith** in the secondary. **LB Adam Anderson** and **LB Nakobe Dean** are an all star duo. **Bottom line:** the defense must improve in the Red Zone. **Outlook:** Not much in the Bulldogs way in the East. They have Florida at home and they should be in the top 4 discussion all year.
Pigskin's Pick: 11-1

2) Flordia Gators

2020 Record: 8-4 overall
Coach: Dan Mullen- 4th Season
Offense: Can **QB Emory Jones** play close to what Trask did last season? It depends on the playmakers who step up to fill in for Toney and Pitts. **WR Jacob Copeland** is a huge target with great hands. The backfield is loaded with talent to take the pressure off of Jones. **RB Dameon Pierce**, **RB Malik Davis** and transfer **RB Demarkcus Bowman** have speed and power to spare. The only issue might be upfront. The Gators return 3 starters but will be shuffling around positions; **Richard Gouraige** will likely move to LT. **Defense:** After being so good in '19 (Allowed only 15 ppg) last year, the defense gave up over 31 ppg. The D needs to address some issues. The biggest positive returning is at LB where **Ventrell Miller**, **Brenton Cox** and **Mohamoud Diabate** combined for 206 tackles; finishing 1st, 2nd & 4th on the team, respectively. The line is serviceable especially with stud **DE Zachary Carter**. The DB' are led by **CB Kaiir Elam**. **Outlook:** No Trask means the D better step it up. **Pigskin's Pick: 9-3**

3) Missouri Tigers

2020 Record: 5-5 overall
Coach: Eli Drinkwitz- 2nd Season
Offense: Improved to 5.6 yards per play last fall. **QB Connor Bazelak** is back after a solid freshman year. **RB Tyler Badie** is an experienced replacement for Roundtree. Who will the playmaking receivers be? **Keke Chism** or Tauskie Dove or true freshman **Dominic Lovett** or Ohio State transfer **Mookie Cooper**. Upfront, the Tigers will build around **C Mike Maietti** & **Case Cook** at guard. Defense: New **DC Steve Wilks**, the NFL veteran takes over. The tandem of **Kobie Whiteside** and **Akial Byers** on the inside and top pass rusher **Trajan Jeffcoat** will solidify the line. Super-recruit **Travion Ford** adds even more athleticism. **LB Devin Nicholson** is solid in the middle & adding Rice transfer **Blaze Alldredge** at OLB helps fill the void left by Bolton. The secondary needs to create more turnovers. **S Jalani Williams** and veteran **S Martez Manuel** along with **CB Ennis Rakestraw** will help with that.
Outlook: Drinkwitz will preach improvement from last year and improvement each week. The schedule sets up well, but the playmakers are still young. Game 2 at Kentucky is BIG.
Pigskin's Pick: 7-5



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4) Kentucky Wildcats

2020 Record: 5-6 overall
Coach: Mark Stoops- 9th Season

Offense: The offense has finished last in the SEC in passing for 3 straight years and only averages 21 ppg last season. New OC must find a QB, most likely Penn St. transfer **Will Levis**. Big losses upfront, but the foundation is still strong with **OT Darian Kinnard** and **OG Luke Fortner**. **RB Christopher Rodriguez Jr.** is primed for a huge season, and Nebraska transfer **Wan'Dale Robinson** is a needed playmaker on the outside. **WR Josh Ali** and **TE Keaton Upshaw** will also contribute. **Defense:** The Wildcats have finished in the top 5 in the SEC in scoring defense for 3 straight years, but only 4 starters are back. There is a solid core to build around with All-SEC candidates End **Josh Paschal**, **LB DeAndre Square** & **S Yusuf Corker. LB Jacquez Jones**, **LB Jordan Wright** and true freshman **LB Trevin Wallace** will be great additions. **Outlook:** If they can get more production out of the offense and the new faces on defense continue the solid play they will challenge Mizzou for the 3rd spot.
Pigskin's Pick: 7-5

6) South Carolina Gamecocks

2020 Record: 2-8 overall
Coach: Shane Beamer- 1st Season

Offense: Improvement starts upfront for the Gamecocks O. Four starters return including tackles **Jakai Moore** & **Dylan Wonnum**. **RB Kevin Harris** should be able to build off a stellar start to his career and if former star-recruit **RB MarShawn Lloyd** can get healthy the backfield is set. **TE Nick Muse** is a weapon as are transfer **WRs Ahmarean Brown** and **E.J. Jenkins**. The QB spot is a toss up between **Luke Doty, Jason Brown** or even freshman **Colten Gauthier.** **Defense:** Improvement also starts upfront for the defense as well with stud **DE Kingsley Enagbare, DT Zacch Pickens** and **DE Jordan Burch.** The LB corps is thin with **Mohamed Kaba** joined by transfer **LB Debo Williams**. The secondary underperformed last season and they lost 5 key DBs. **S Jaylan Foster** and **CB Marcellas Dial** will try to hold it down. **Outlook:** Expectations are not high in Columbia, so there is no pressure on Beamer to win now. The talent isn't there yet to surprise much. **Pigskin's Pick: 4-8**



5) Tennessee Volunteers

2020 Record: 3-7 overall
Coach: Josh Heupel- 1st Season

Offense: Go, Go Go! New HC **Josh Heupel** brings his go-fast offense from UCF. He needs to find the right fit at QB; **Harrison Bailey** would be the starter right now, but Michigan transfer **Joe Milton** and Virginia Tech transfer **Hendon Hooker** will compete. The biggest playmakers will most likely be **WR Velus Jones** & **WR Jalin Hyatt**.Two solid building blocks OL **Cade Mays** and **Darnell Wright** are upfront. JUCO transfer **RB Tiyon Evans** will run behind them. **Defense: DT Matthew Butler** leads a deep front and transfer **LB Juwan Mitchell** will probably lead the team in tackles. **LB Tyler Baron** should breakout this year and true freshman **LB Aaron Willis** will contribute right away. The Secondary shapes up with **CB Alontae Taylor**, **S Trevon Flowers** & **S Jaylen McCollough**.**Outlook:** Vols got some good choices with transfers on both sides of the ball. If Heupel finds his QB, Tennessee will be back in the mix.
Pigskin's Pick: 6-6

7) Vanderbilt Commodores

2020 Record: 0-9 overall
Coach: Clark Lea- 1st Season

Offense: Last season, a weak run game & a so-so passing game = 14 ppg. **QB Ken Seals** is back after a solid freshman year & the Commodores return 4 players who caught at least 25 passes in 2020, including All-SEC candidate **Cam Johnson** & **TE Ben Bresnahan**. Add **WR Chris Pierce** to the passing game as well. The backfield is thin so transfer **RB Re'Mahn Davis** will be counted on to get something going. The line is a big question mark so freshman **C Kevo Wesley** needs to be good right away and transfer **OL Junior Uzebu** is a nice addition. **Defense:** Help is needed at every level (allowed opponents 37 ppg last season). The secondary is the strong point with **CB Jaylen Mahoney** who is a great tackler, will be joined by **S Dashaun Jerkins** & **S Brendon Harris**. **LB Anfernee Orji** is solid in the middle. **DT Raashaan Wilkins**, true freshman **DL Marcus Bradley** & transfer **DL Alex Williams** help round out the line.**Outlook:** Lea faces an uphill battle in his debut season. He is a Vandy guy so he knows what he's up against and there is some optimism.
Pigskin's Pick: 3-9





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SEC WEST PREVIEW

1) Alabama Crimson Tide

2020 Record: 13-0 overall
Coach: Nick Saban - 15th Season
Offense: With so many key losses from last year's epic offense the focus will be around future budding stars built around an outstanding and experienced O-Line. **OT Evan Neal** is NFL ready and talented **OG Emil Ekiyor** can play anywhere. QB Bryce Young is the next franchise QB and **WR John Metchie** is ready to step out of the shadow of Heisman winner **DeVonta Smith**. Watch true freshman **WR Agiye Hall** and transfer **WR Jameson Williams**. **Brian Robinson** will start at RB, but watch out for the dynamic **Roydell Williams**. New **OC Bill O'Brien** (Texans) will be a factor as well. **Defense:** The strongest LB corps in the nation is led by **Christian Harris** and includes **Christopher Allen**, **Will Anderson** and Tennessee transfer **Henry To'o To'o**. **CB Malachi Moore** will lead the secondary joined by true freshman C**B Ga'Quincy McKinstry**. On the line **DJ Dale** is a reliable veteran on the nose, **DE LaBryan Ray** is a force & **Phidarian Mathis** is hard to move. **Outlook:** Ho-Hum National Championship talent. Tide may not be perfect this year but they will be close.
Pigskin's Pick:10-2

2) Texas A&M Aggies

2020 Record: 9-1 overall
Coach: Jimbo Fisher - 4th Season
Offense: Lost a lot from last year, but still loads of talent. Hybrid **RB/WR Ainias Smith**, will star as will **RB Isaiah Spiller** and **RB Devon Achane**. QB position is still between **Haynes King** & **Zach Calzada**. All-American candidate **TE Jalen Wydermyer** will join **WR Chase Lane** in the receiving corps. The line needs 4 new starters built around **OL Kenyon Green** & transfer **OT Jahmir Johnson** & watch out for true freshman **OL Bryce Foster**. **Defense:** They were great last season and will be even better with 9 starters back. The line is set; **DT DeMarvin Leal**, **DT McKinnley Jackson**, **DE Micheal Clemons** and **DE Aaron Hansford** are outstanding together. The Aggies best defender is **LB Aaron Hansford** and will make plays all over the field. Star **S Leon O'Neal** will be joined by CB's **Jaylon Jones** and **Myles Jones**. **Outlook:**The offense will take time to find their stride and an outstanding defense will provide protection while they do so. **Pigskin's Pick: 10-2**

3) LSU Tigers

2020 Record: 5-5 overall
Coach: Ed Orgeron - 6th Season
Offense: Four starters are expected back on the O-Line including **T Austin Deculus, C Liam Shanahan, OG Ed Ingram & OG Chasen Hines**. This is a great starting point to an offense trying to find a little bit of the magic they had in 2019. The QB spot will be either **Myles Brennan** or **Max Johnson**, both look good when they were healthy last year. Their main targets will be the game-breaker **WR Kayshon Boutte** & the dynamic **Jaray Jenkins**. The backfield has speed & experience with **Tyrion Davis-Price** & **John Emery**. **Defense: CB Derek Stingley** is the best cornerback in the nation, so that's a plus & the other corner is **Eli Ricks** who is solid. **S Todd Harris** returns from injury. The D-LIne is loaded with talent ready to burst; **DE Ali Gaye**, **DE Andre Anthony** & **DT Glen Logan** are back. The linebacker group is led by **LB Damone Clark** & bolstered by two big transfers **LB Navonteque Strong** & **Clemson LB Mike Jones**. **Outlook:** The Tigers will rebound from a sub-par year. They have accumulated too much talent not to challenge at the top again.
Pigskin's Pick: 8-4

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4) Aubun Tigers

2020 Record: 6-5 overall
Coach: Bryan Harsin- 1st Season
Offense: Five at least part-time starters return to a line that was just OK. Led by **C Nick Brahms**. They need to open up lanes for the dynamic duo of **RB Tank Bigsby** and **RB Shaun Shivers**. **QB Bo Nix** needs to take the next step in his development or LSU transfer **TJ Finley** will take over. The Tigers lost a ton at WR so **Elijah Canion** needs to be the guy and hopefully true freshman **WR Hal Presley** is as good as advertised. Defense: **CB Roger McCreary** pairs up with transfer **CB Dreshun Miller**. Breakout star **S Smoke Monday** also returns to the secondary. The linebacking duo of **Zakoby McClain** & **Owen Pappoe** could statistically be the best in the land. The line features **DE Colby Wooden**, transfer **DT Tony Fair** & massive **DT Tyrone Truesdell**. **Outlook:** Harsin in his first year encounters a challenging schedule and has some rebuilding to do. **Pigskin's Pick: 7-5**

5) Ole Miss Rebels

2020 Record: 5-5 overall
Coach: Lane Kiffin- 2nd Season
Offense: Firepower all over with **QB Matt Corral** (1st in nation in total offense per game) & a receiving corps that features breakout star **WR Dontario Drummond**, **WR Braylon Sanders**, transfer **WR Jahcour Pearson** & true freshman **TE Hudson Wolfe**. The backfield returns **RB Jerrion Ealy** & big back **Snoop Connor**. **C Ben Brown** returns to the line along with 3 other starters. **Defense:** The defense was porous to say the least last season (allowed 519 ypg and 38 ppg). The good new/bad news is that most of these guys are returning. **S AJ Finley** is the bright spot on **D. Jon Haynes** rejoins the secondary as does **CB Keidron Smith** & **S Otis Reese**. With all this experience these guys have to play better. A good pass rush will help that as well. **DE/LB Sam Williams**, **DT KD Hill** & **DT Hal Northern** will be in charge of that. **LB Lakia Henry** will have to solidify the middle along with transfer **LB Chance Campbelle**. **Outlook:** The offense should pick up where they left off & the D should be better (it's hard to be worse). **Pigskin's Pick: 7-5**

6) Arkansas Razorbacks

2020 Record: 3-7 overall
Coach: Sam Pittman - 2nd Season
Offense: All-American candidate **WR Treylon Burks** is back as is solid **TE Hudson Henry** and transfer **WR Warren Thompson**. It will be **QB KJ Jefferson** as the signal caller & there's not much experience behind him. The O-Line returns all 5 starters including **OG Brady Latham**. They were solid as a unit last year, but expect the former **OL coach Pittman** to make sure they are a strength. **RB Trelon Smith** will team with big & physical **RB Dominique Johnson**. **Defense:** **LB Grant Morgan** & **LB Bumper Pool** form one of the best duos in the conference. The secondary is the strength as safeties **Jalen Catalon**, **Joe Foucha** & **Greg Brooks** return and watch out for **CB Montaric Brown**. Upfront, the Razorbacks are big and experienced with **Dorian Gerald** & **Zach Williams** along with **Eric Gregory** and Mizzou transfers **DL Markell Utsey** & **DL Tre Williams**. **Outlook:** Pittman's team surprised some last season winning 3 SEC games, so look for the squad to keep the chains moving. **Pigskin's Pick: 5-7**

7) Mississippi State Bulldogs

2020 Record: 4-7 overall
Coach: Mike Leach- 2nd Season
Offense: Leach's Air Raid was hit & miss in his first year. The QB spot is so important & it will be last year's 2nd half starter **QB Will Roger**'s job at first, but watch out for transfer **QB Jack Abraham** to push. The weapons are there with **WR's Jaden Walley, Austin Williams** & **Malik Heath** back. Don't forget about **RB Jo'quavious Marks** in this pass happy offense, he has all the tools. But..who will block for these guys? There is some talent returning and **OT Charles Cross** should shine. **Defense:** There are some tools to work with to improve, including a talented linebacking group with **Aaron Brule** & **Tyus Wheat**. The D-Line needs to most help so **NG Jaden Crumedy** & pass rushing specialist transfer **Randy Charlton** should help. The D-Backs are experienced, especially at corner with **Emmanuel Forbes** & **Martin Emerson**. Texas transfer **S Jalen Green** will be an immediate impact. **Outlook:** Look for a more talented squad overall and some more consistency on offense, which in-turn should help the D. **Pigskin's Pick: 5-7**

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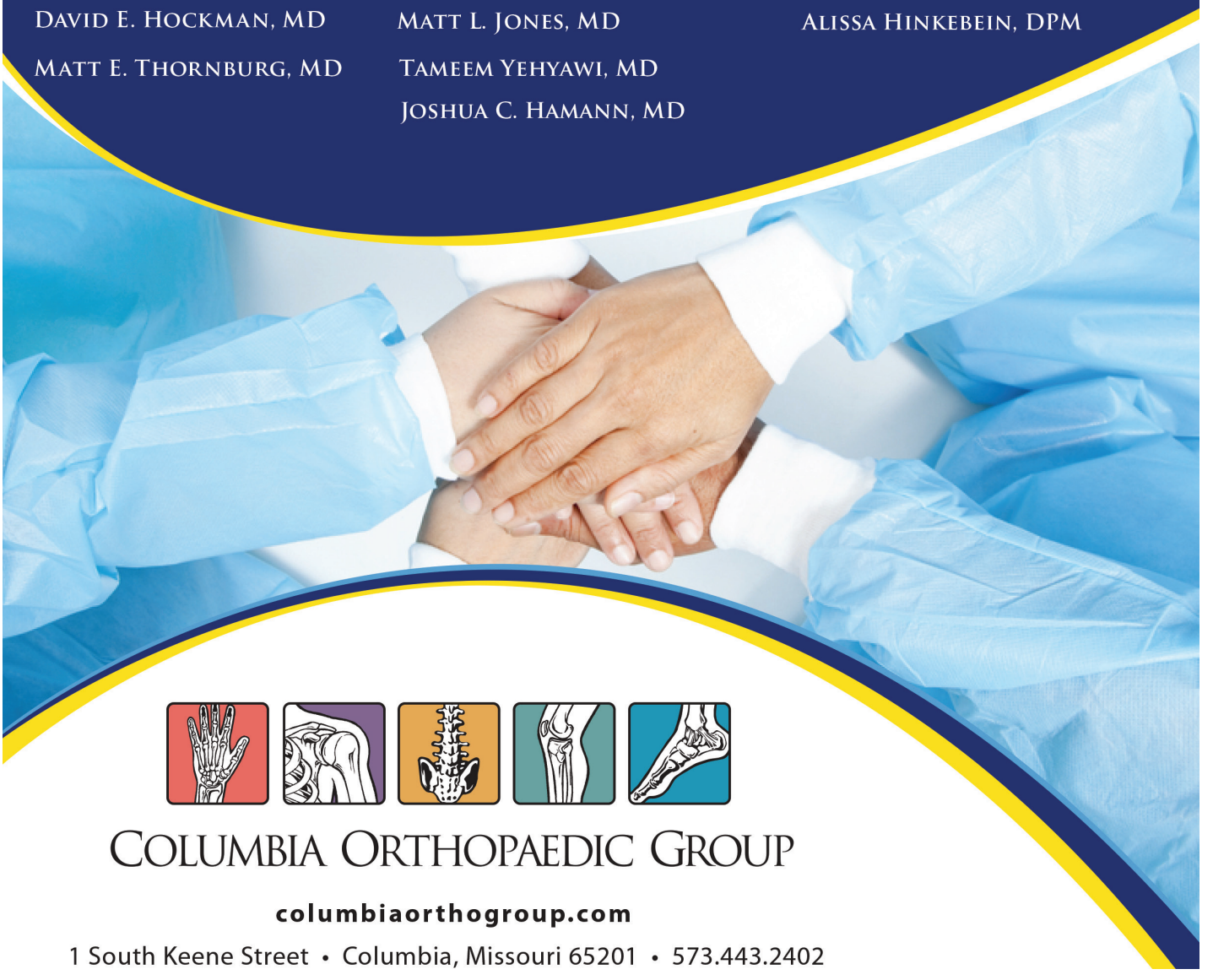
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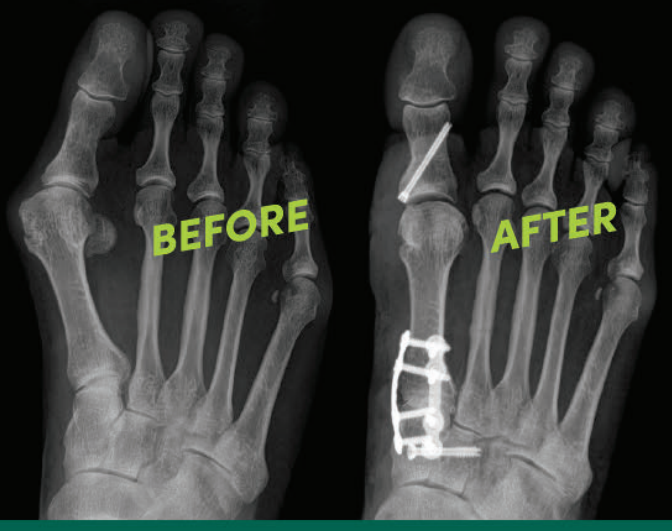
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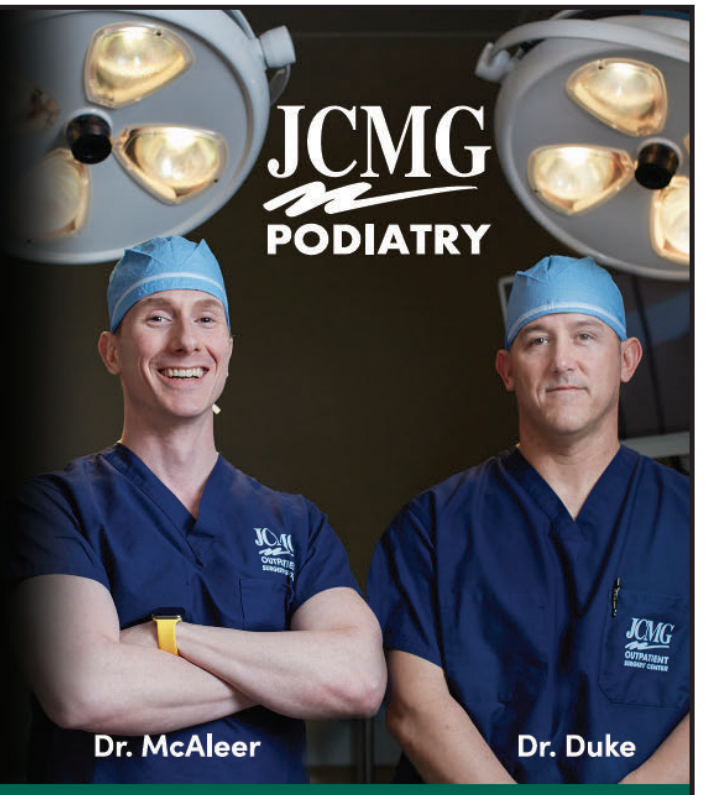
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