

KNIGHTS PRIMED TO MEET EXPECTATIONS

By Charles Pulliam • Sports Editor



PHOTO BY JOHN CROSS

Nolensville's Coby Walton threw for 32 touchdowns and just six interceptions in 2021.

After a 1-5 start last year, the Nolensville High School football team gained momentum late and won four of its final six games during the program's first season in Class 5A.

The Knights also pushed budding Region 6-5A rival Page in the second round of the playoffs before falling just short, 20-15. That loss resonated with the Nolensville boys, who had played in back-to-back Class 4A state semifinals prior, while their late season energy has been the foundation this offseason.

"We were right there," said senior quarterback Coby Walton, who threw for more than 3,000 yards with 32 touchdowns and just six interceptions in 2021. "We know what to expect now. That motivated us to get better."

Do-all senior Nick Orefice, a starter at tight end who patrols at linebacker

and is the team's long snapper, agreed.

"We were so close and they may have been a growing pain, but it has helped us grow this offseason," he said.

Page went on to play for the program's first state championship after escaping the Knights. Nolensville coach Paul Derrick said his team is poised to meet their objectives this season.

"Even though we made it to the second round of the playoffs, I think if you ask our players, we did not meet our expectations that we have at our place," said Derrick, who returns 15 starters – eight of whom were just sophomores in 2021. "Last year, we were really a work in progress and battled some things early on.

"I think in the moment when you're young and inexperienced and you struggle at times, it's tough, but hopefully this year all those struggles and all

that experience can pay off for us."

Walton emerged as one of the top QBs in the area, completing more than 62% of his passes. Most of his top targets return, paced by seniors Dylan Northcutt and Chance Fitzgerald, in an offense that averaged 30 points despite a lesser-established ground game.

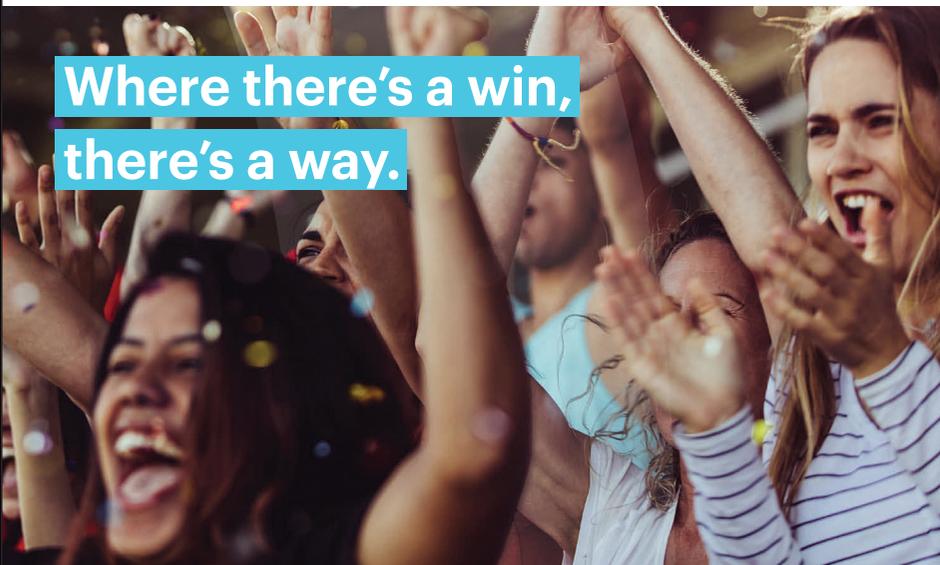
The 5-foot-7 speedster Northcutt hauled in 64 balls for 910 yards to go along with six touchdowns in 2021. Fitzgerald snagged 55 receptions with 12 touchdowns and racked up more than 700 yards receiving.

Senior running back Samson Johnson also proved to be big weapon in the passing game. Coming off back-to-back 1,000-yard rushing seasons, Johnson collected more than 500 yards receiving. His more than 900 yards

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