

CENTENNIAL COUGARS

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PHOTO BY JOHN CROSS

Centennial football coach Matt Kriesky and his Cougars are poised to reach the playoffs for the first time since 2017.

other athletic wideouts.

"We're more of a family, and that makes me a lot more comfortable," Jones said. "I trust our pass schemes. I trust our offense. I trust everything we

do."

Producing the program's first winning record and missing the playoffs still doesn't sit well with anyone on the new-look Cougars, which will boast Columbia blue helmets to go with the revamping of the school's logo this year.

For Zavion Haddox, a junior linebacker and running back, it was flat-out depressing to not play in an 11th game last season.

"Teams that we beat made the playoffs," he said. "We have to be more aggressive out there. That frustrated me."

Kriesky built a schedule last year that he felt could instill confidence in his team. It worked to a point as the Cougars won each non-conference contest, but managed just a 1-4 mark in Region 7-6A to miss the playoffs. Centennial fell flat against the region's top four teams — Summit, Ravenwood, Brentwood and Independence — getting out-scored 160-14 in the four losses.

The Cougars face the same teams this year and that's something Kriesky wishes he could tweak a bit in terms of out-of-region play to better prepare for the now notorious region.

"We have to let the conference know we are here and we are ready to come out and compete and earn that sport in the playoffs," he said.

Defensively, Centennial has plenty of experience returning at linebacker, led by seniors Matthew Rowan, Caleb Workman and Dylan Brewton, while Haddox and junior Keegan Scruggs will be relied on up front. Juniors Dominic Reed and Tytus Tagatauli plus the sophomore Johnson — all basketball players, too — will help anchor the secondary.

"Again, we're excited about this group," Kriesky said, adding how his team has recently showed poise in tough situations unlike in those shutout losses last year at Independence and Summit where the Cougars' reacted to mistakes "like the wheels were falling off."

"I really think these guys are ready to take that next step," he said. "They don't freak out when something goes wrong and move on to the next play."

The Cougars open with a tough contest at Overton before hosting Lincoln County and region foe Independence in back-to-back home games.

CENTENNIAL COUGARS

COACH: **Matt Kriesky (35-38 entering seventh year)**

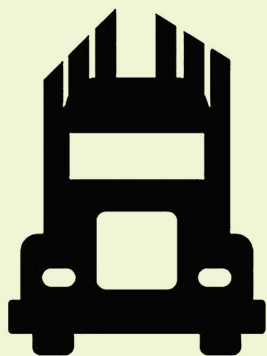
CLASSIFICATION: **Region 7, Class 6A**

LAST YEAR'S RECORD: **6-4, missed playoffs**

KEY RETURNEES: **QB Brendan Jones, OL/DL Keegan Scruggs, RB/LB Zavion Haddox, WR/DB Dominic Reed, RB/LB Taner Lee**

KEY LOSSES: **Cannon Plowman, Josh Forsee, Jeremiah Scruggs, Joe Nelson, Kofi Boggs**

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