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2016 PREVIEW

THE FIELD GENERALS



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On the cover: (Front Row)Belton's Peyton Mansell, (2nd Row) Florence's C.J. Giddens, (3rd Row) Shoemaker's Jaiden Spivey & Gatesville's Jett Truss, (4th Row) Harker Height's Robert Gray, (5th Row) Killeen's Marcellus Johnson, & Lampasas' Cohen Cockburn (Back Row) Salado's Hayden Haire, Copperas Cove's Caine Garner
 Photo by Josh Bachman

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The Herald sports staff: (from left) Jordan Mason, Mark Miller, Clay Whittington, Allan Mandell, C.J. Berryman, Eric Shelton, Josh Bachman

From the Editor

In 2015, we picked the toughest lineman from each area high school team to be on our “Texas Tough” cover. And that was one heck of a cover: When we took that photo, six of our 10 student-athletes were already committed to a Division I school.

This year, we’re featuring the quarterbacks.

Whether it’s actually fair or not, fans in football-frenzied Texas often pay particularly close attention to the quarterback. That’s why Texas coaches say it’s essential a quarterback must be mentally tough. A quarterback often gets too much blame when things go wrong so he must have mental toughness to stay focused on the task at hand.

And physical toughness is mandatory. From the time the National Anthem is finished until the final gun goes off, defensive linemen, linebackers and defensive backs want to feast on the quarterback.

The nature of the position demands a quarterback be an effective team leader, too. If his body language is poor, an entire team can lose its edge. But when the quarterback stays stout in the face of adversity, his teammates will follow with a collective boldness.

This is a unique year for our area. All 10 area teams have returning quarterbacks who have started games at the varsity level.

So inside your edition of “Texas Tough,” you’ll see a feature on a quarterback or quarterbacks for each of our area teams.

We’ll also provide you with the inside scoop on both the offensive and defensive units of each squad.

In “Texas Tough,” we’ve got you covered with college football, too.

Read about Belton’s Mary Hardin-Baylor, currently ranked No. 5 in America, and primed for a national championship run.

We’ve also got features on Baylor, Houston, North Texas, Texas, Texas A&M, Texas Christian and Texas Tech, which include our season-record predictions.

Plus, you’ll get our SEC, Big 12 and American Southwest Conference forecasts.

And of course “Texas Tough” is loaded with photos. We feel the sports photographers that cover contests for us are the best in Texas.

So, THANK YOU, our reader, for your continued loyalty to the Herald and visiting us at KDHPRESSBOX.COM.

This season, the writers on our sports staff will again be at plenty of NCAA contests to bring you all the action firsthand. And, of course, the Herald will provide you top-notch, in-depth, season-long coverage of all 10 of our area high schools.

No newspaper’s sports section covers its area as well as the Herald. And while that may seem boastful, we hope you’ll forgive us for that. We can’t help it . . . We’re Texas Tough.

Allan Mandell

Sports Editor
KDH Media Group

BELTON TIGERS

PEYTON MANSELL

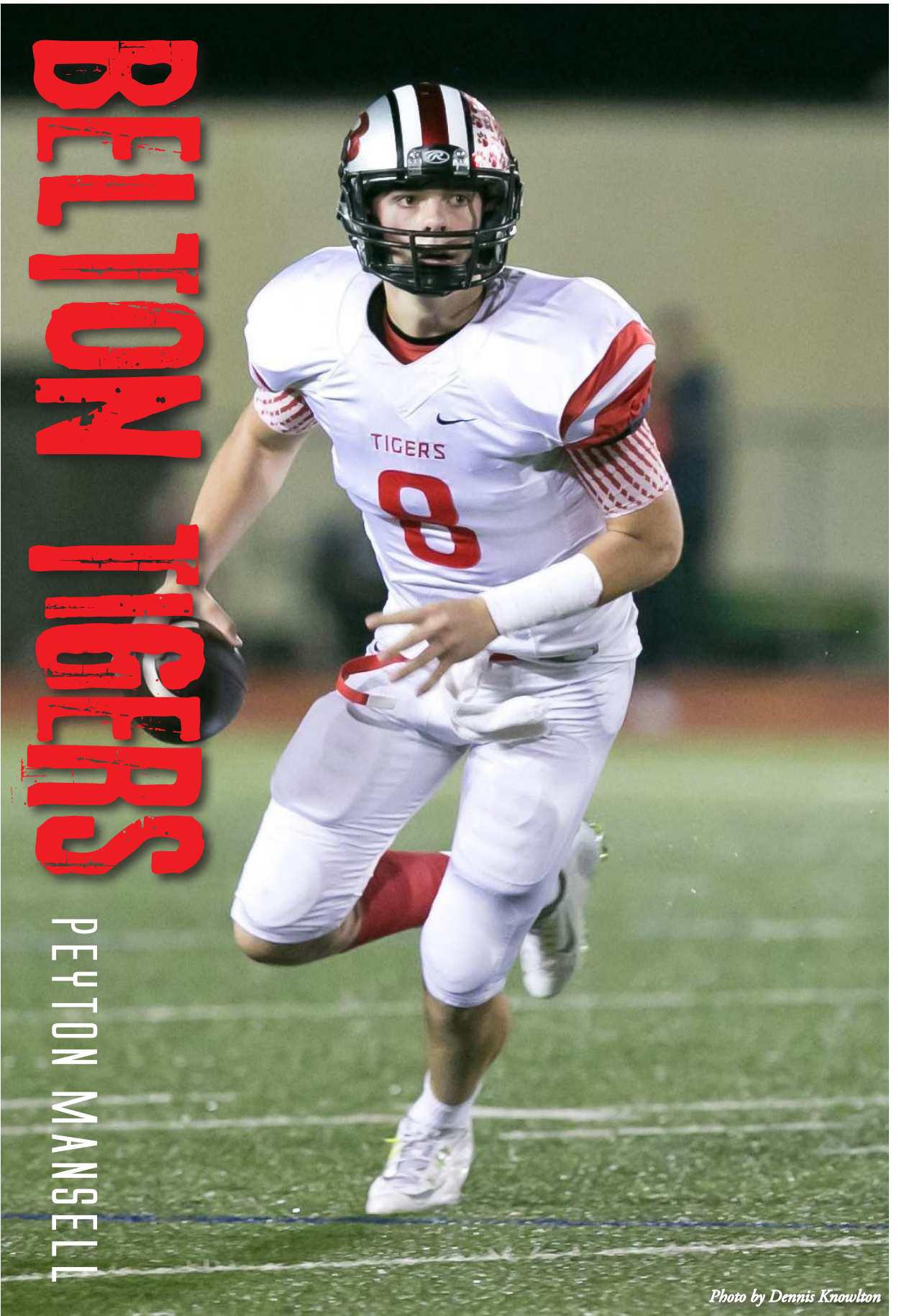


Photo by Dennis Knowlton

IF NEEDED, MANSELL CAN 'PUT THE TEAM ON HIS SHOULDERS'

By Jordan Mason

Belton senior Peyton Mansell said he can still feel the emotion, and tell you his exact thought process, of each play in the second half of the Tigers' come-from-behind win against Ellison last year.

But for Tiger head coach Bob Shipley, his logic in the season-saving victory was very apparent.

"At times he wasn't even reading his option keys," Shipley said. "He was just determined he was going to keep it and get the yards himself if he had to.

"And it's not something you recommend, but looking back on it now with hindsight it was great to see him show his competitive nature and willingness, if it comes to that, to put the team on his shoulders and will us to win."

For Shipley, the mental and physical toughness Mansell showed in that 21-point rally was a defining moment for him in his first season as the starter.

"Since that game, we've all gained so much confidence in him," Shipley said, "and I'm sure he's gained confidence in himself."

Mansell certainly has, but what hasn't changed is the fact that the Iowa commit believes in himself and his teammates to get the job done when it is absolutely necessary.

"For me, in crunch time like the Ellison game, I want the ball in my hands as much as possible whether that's me trying to throw the ball or me making reads and running," Mansell said. "But that was just an overall great team win."

In addition to that grit, it also helps that Mansell has all the physical tools.

At 6-foot-2, 189 pounds, Mansell is a consensus 3-star prospect and boasts a big arm that caught the eye of Hawkeye offensive coordinator Greg Davis like many before him.

"He's got a very powerful arm," senior wide receiver John Taggart said. "Since freshman year when he moved in here, that was something that everybody has always been impressed with.

"He can chunk the ball a mile."

Taggart also pointed out that Mansell is a very capable runner, as he proved in the second half of that Ellison game with 75 rushing yards and a score.

All of it is why Shipley confidently mentions Mansell in the same breath as the most accomplished quarterbacks he's coached in his storied career.

"I've had this luxury a couple of times in my career with Stephen McGee when I was at Burnet and he led us to two state championship appearances and then a young man named Graylon Brown at Brownwood," Shipley said. "It certainly gives you a lot of confidence."

Because of performances like that Ellison game last year, Shipley and the Tigers are similarly confident in Mansell.

And Mansell is hoping to reward that confidence with a run at a district title in 2016.

"You wind up losing three or four games by a total of five or six points, that can be discouraging, but it also can be encouraging if you look at it in the right way. That means we're not far off. And that's the way we've chosen to look at it. But we've got to find a way to win those close games."

-Belton head coach Bob Shipley



DISTRICT 8-6A

TEAM RECORDS

2015: 5-6

2014: 6-6

2013: 2-8

2012: 6-4

2011: 8-3

2016 SCHEDULE

| | |
|---------|-----------------------------|
| Aug 26 | Temple |
| Sept 2 | at Pflugerville Hendrickson |
| Sept 9 | Round Rock Stony Point |
| Sept 15 | at Round Rock |
| Sept 23 | Harker Heights |
| Sept 29 | at Killeen |
| Oct 7 | BYE |
| Oct 14 | Waco Midway |
| Oct 20 | at Shoemaker |
| Oct 28 | Ellison |
| Nov 4 | at Copperas Cove |



JERROD JACKSON

DAVION PEOPLES

Photo by Andy Zavoina

STRONG 'FINISH' IS KEY FOR TIGERS' OFFENSE

By Jordan Mason

Belton doesn't care about the fact it had a record-setting offense in 2015 — the Tigers truly believe they can be even better in 2016.

"We've got a lot of leaders that have stepped up, and it's just a lot better," senior running back Davion Peoples said. "We play together as a team."

Of course it helps any offense to have Peoples returning.

"It makes you feel good when you have your leading rusher back from the team that broke the school record for rushing," head coach Bob Shipley said with a laugh. "That's a great feeling."

The offensive line will look vastly different with Zach Shackelford now at Texas and Javon Chambers spending most — but not

all — of his time on defense.

The Tigers, however, are confident players like junior Caleb Smith — who started as a sophomore late last season — can step up.

Of Jerrod Jackson, a 5-foot-10, 238-pound senior guard, Shipley said, "He is every coach's dream. He is a hard worker, good student, model citizen, ideal role model and team player."

The Tigers are also hoping to get some solid play on the offensive line from Aaron Krueger and Jalin Bryant.

Belton lost an explosive receiver in Olajuwon Taylor. But with a bevy of pass catching options — including tight end and North Texas commit Remington Lutz and receivers Weston Lucas, John Taggart, Lane Holmes and Chandler Vela — Iowa commit

Peyton Mansell will still have plenty of viable targets to throw to.

"There's not a flashy guy out there, but they're really, really steady, they're consistent," Shipley said. "They're a blue-collar group of receivers."

But if there is one aspect the Tigers are looking to improve, it is keeping up that production late in games. "Finish. Finish, finish," Lutz said. "We lost all of our games in the fourth quarter. Hands down. I feel like we worked harder this summer.

"We realized that's what we did last year and we're going to finish."

In that case, maybe the Tigers can improve on a record-setting season last year.

The players, at least, certainly believe they can.

DEFENSIVE TIGERS HAVE POINT TO PROVE

By Jordan Mason

The Belton defense has been playing with a chip all offseason — from the spring to 7-on-7 to fall practice.

Because the Tigers are eager to put what they considered a subpar defensive season behind them and start anew in 2016.

Former Temple head coach Bryce Monsen has taken over as defensive coordinator, but that isn't the biggest addition to the unit.

All District 12-6A first teamer Javon Chambers will move from offense to defense to help improve the defensive line, and Chambers for one, is up for the challenge.

"It was a move that you knew was coming," Chambers said. "It was easy. I just do whatever for the team."

Joining Chambers on the line will be defensive ends D.J. Fisher, Logan Hall and Reagan Chapman, with senior C.J. Jones playing a hybrid linebacker/defensive end position.

Head coach Bob Shipley also had high praise for senior John Harvey, who will return to anchor the linebacking corps.

"If you had to name one overall leader it'd be John Harvey," Shipley said. "He plays so hard and is so fun to coach because he's going to give it everything he's got."

The safety tandem of senior Hunter Garrett and junior Garrison Vaughn is also a weapon for the Belton defense.

"They're both really smart, have a lot of football savvy and have picked up the new defense well," Shipley said.

Those two will anchor the secondary while seniors Zaki Hill, Bryan Thomas, Joseph Bledsoe and Matt Mahler will see most of the snaps at corner.

And for Vaughn, the key to improving defensively this season is clear.

"We didn't have enough turnovers last year," Vaughn said. "We've got to make stops in big situations."

Because the Tigers want to win games with defense in 2016 — and they've been waiting all offseason to prove it.



JAVON CHAMBERS

Photo by Dennis Knowlton

BELTON HIGH SCHOOL MARCHING BAND

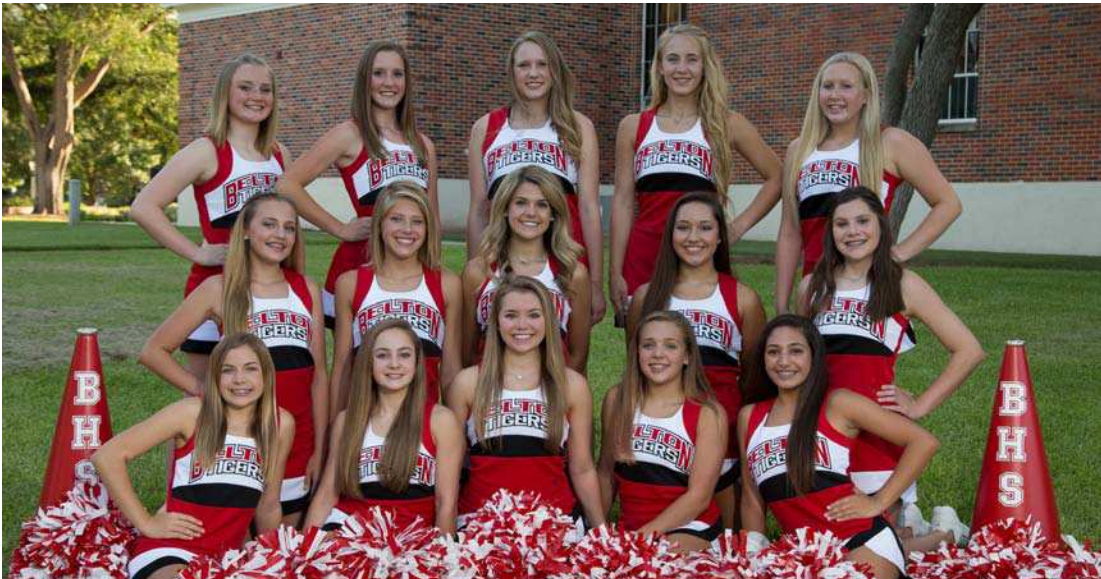
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GAINE GARNER

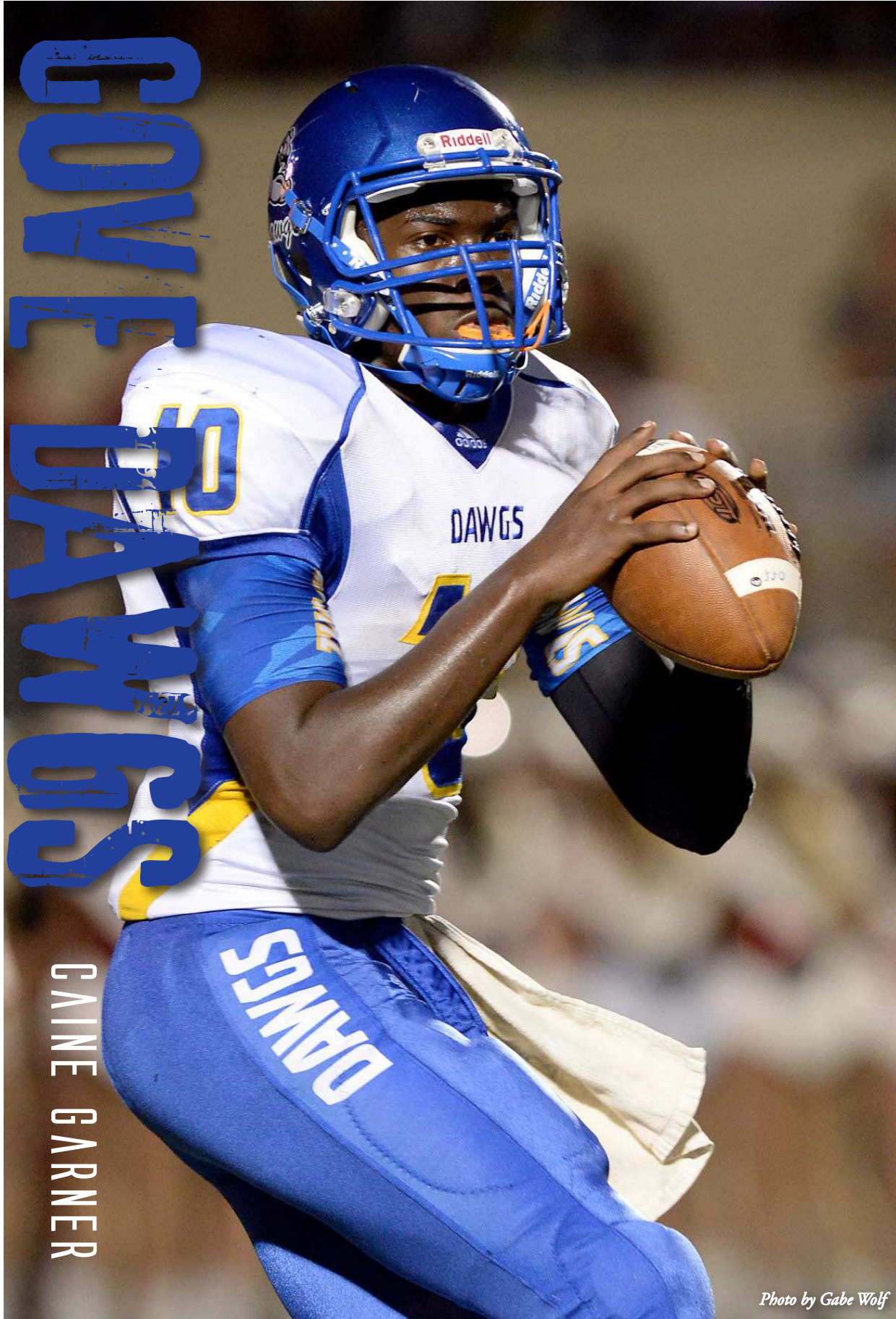


Photo by Gabe Wolf

DAWGS HAVE MORE OPTIONS WITH GARNER, SMITH

By Clay Whittington

Some say if a team has two quarterbacks, it really does not even have one. Jack Welch disagrees. Copperas Cove's head coach enters his 23rd season with the program with a pair of capable quarterbacks on his roster. Caine Garner, a senior, returns after inheriting the starting job from standout Manny Harris in 2015, while junior Jaylen Smith is preparing for his varsity debut.

While each possess different abilities, including proficiencies at other positions, the combination of the two skillsets could make the Bulldawgs one of the area's most dynamic offenses.

"Quarterbacks are typically in the middle of the field," Welch said, "but we're going to be able to put them out on the edge too. Now, for example, Caine could throw the ball over to Jaylen, and he might throw it again or Caine could run the ball.

"It just gives us more options, and by having these two guys, it adds versatility to our offense, so it's a blessing."

As a junior, Garner was a dual threat, completing 55 of 115 passes for 813 yards and eight touchdowns, while also rushing for 301 yards and five touchdowns.

Although his role is altered, Garner believes the philosophical tweaks will only benefit the Bulldawgs, who are attempting to reach the playoffs for a 13th consecutive year.

"This is going to give us an edge offensively," he said. "Most teams don't have these types of options, so it opens up our gameplan and makes other teams really have to guess at what we're going to be doing."

Smith possesses a strong arm and has the speed to be a serious threat at receiver, while Garner's in-game experience and physical maturity are two of his most significant traits.

While each bring different aspects to the offense, Welch feels comfortable starting either player, but said he will use them situationally throughout the games, adjusting to the defense and playing to their individual strengths.

Smith is eager for the opportunity, but he knows it will be challenging, and he has turned to Garner at times for advice during the tough transition.

"He told me to just stay calm," Smith said, "play my game and put the team in position to win. He stressed the importance of not trying to rush anything."

Garner understands the difficulties accompanying the leap to varsity after replacing Harris, who rewrote the program's passing records during his two seasons under center.

"I just told him to take things one step at a time and not to get overwhelmed with the situation," Garner said. "He just needs to put his trust into his receivers, and he can't be afraid to step up and be a leader for the offense."

"We can't worry about wins and losses in our first four ballgames because we are playing four tremendous teams. We've got to focus on ourselves and get ready for district play by getting these guys some experience and let them grow together in continuity and unity." -Copperas Cove head coach Jack Welch



DISTRICT 8-6A

TEAM RECORDS

2015: 3-8

2014: 7-4

2013: 6-5

2012: 7-4

2011: 10-2

2016 SCHEDULE

| | | |
|---------|-------------------|------|
| Aug 26 | A&M Consolidated | 7:30 |
| Sept 2 | UANL | 7:30 |
| Sept 9 | El Paso | 7:30 |
| Sept 16 | at Garland Sachse | 7:30 |
| Sept 23 | at Midway | 7:00 |
| Sept 30 | Shoemaker | 7:30 |
| Oct 6 | at Ellison | 7:00 |
| Oct 14 | BYE | |
| Oct 21 | Harker Heights | 7:30 |
| Oct 28 | at Killeen | 7:30 |
| Nov 4 | Belton | 7:30 |

OFFENSE WILL KEEP FOES GUESSING

By Clay Whittington

Copperas Cove has versatile athletes, and Jack Welch intends to use them in every way possible.

Perhaps no position exemplifies the notion more than at quarterback, where returner Caine Garner and newcomer Jaylen Smith will split time.

Although each possesses a unique skill-set under center, they are both equally talented in other aspects of the offense, meaning regardless of who is taking snaps, they will both spend plenty of time on the field.

For Welch, the approach adds a dynamic aspect to the gameplan and eliminates any chance the Bulldogs are burdened by being one-dimensional.

“Opposing coaches spend weeks preparing for you,” he said, “so if your team is good at passing and the other team has a strong secondary, then your team might get shut down.

“But when you have the ability to do one just as good as the other or one area is working better than the other, then you can just stick with one and go.”

With interchangeable pieces, the Bulldogs plan on keeping the opposition guessing at what is coming next, and they have the ability to attack in a variety of ways.

Senior running backs Elijah Washington and Kylan Herrera should carry the rushing load for Copperas Cove after Antonio Lealiiie graduated on the heels of breaking out for 1,397 yards and 13 touchdowns in 2015.

Complemented by Herrera and Garner, who combined to rush for 1,024 yards, the Bulldogs’ passing was limited with only two players catching double-digit receptions.

This season, however, Copperas Cove has a wealth of receivers, including Isaiah McGriff, who is the Bulldogs’ leading returner with 10 catches for 96 yards last season. Other receivers expected to contribute include seniors Josh Canete and Gabe Williams, Bryce Ranes and Floyd Connell.

Helping to solidify the offensive line will be seniors Fernando Ramirez and Alex Ramirez.



KYLAN HERRERA

Photo by Dennis Knowlton

STRONG FOUNDATION REMAINS FOR DEFENSE



TYSON CURRY

Photo by Gabe Wolf

By Clay Whittington

The game has changed, and Copperas Cove is adapting.

Over recent years, offenses across the state have taken advantage of talented playmakers and rule changes to dominate games. High-powered units can easily exploit unprepared opponents and run away with victories.

At times, the Bulldawgs have fallen victim to such squads, but they do not intend to let that be the case in 2016.

“The whole key is that you have to get some stops in order to win a ballgame these days,” Copperas Cove head coach Jack Welch said, “and that is extremely hard.

“So, we have to adjust, and that is what we are doing. We are making more adjustments than we have ever made and trying to let our talent mesh together.”

Welch, however, feels he has all the ingredients to successfully adapt.

While the Bulldawgs lost some key defensive pieces, a strong foundation remains.

Senior linebacker Tyson Curry returns after leading Copperas Cove with 54 tackles last season, while junior Zach Moody is expected to complement his counterpart after a strong spring showing.

At free safety, senior Blair Fraser should be a force thanks to his natural ability and knowledge of the position, and cornerback Marcus McCrea has the potential to become a game changer, according to Welch.

Along the defensive line, among others, ends Lavon Stepan and Rylan Hunter, and tackles Ronique Williams, Ethan Scruggs, James Venardos and Antoine Smith will be responsible for containing opposing offenses in the trenches.

To accomplish what he wants defensively, though, Welch knows his players must become so in tune with the scheme they simply react to what is presented.

“The game is so quick with the hurry-up offenses,” he said, “there is no time to sit there and send signals in and stuff. The kids have to be able to go out there and know what to do and when to do it.”

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ELLISON EAGLES

CARL ROBINSON



Photo by Dennis Knowlton

ROBINSON IS UNQUESTIONED LEADER OF EAGLES

By Jordan Mason

Carl Robinson III has been playing football since he was 3, and while the senior has become a staple under center for Ellison — earning the starting job as a sophomore — he originally didn't even want to play quarterback.

"I wanted to play receiver," Robinson said, "but nobody else could throw the ball like I did, so I didn't have a choice."

That choice turned out to be a good one for Robinson. The Eagles enter the 2016 season with expectations as high as they've ever been under fourth-year head coach Trent Gregory.

And Robinson is a big reason.

When Gregory arrived, and Robinson was a freshman, Ellison was in the midst of a 31 straight-game losing streak — a skid that ended a year later in the second game of his sophomore season.

And while Gregory was new to the program, it didn't take long to see why Robinson had entered Ellison as a heralded junior high quarterback.

"By watching him, you knew that he was special," Gregory said. "He had the leadership already within those kids because he had come up with a lot of those kids in middle school and was already beginning to kind of take control."

Indeed, those same kids that Robinson began throwing to before he was a quarterback by choice had become, and still are, his favorite

targets like fellow seniors Jayden Smith and X'zavier Green.

But first, Robinson had to compete for the starting job as a sophomore, a new experience that was admittedly hard, followed by a baptism by fire.

"I had a lot of expectations for my sophomore year," Robinson said, "but it built me up to who I was last year."

After earning 12-6A Newcomer of the Year honors as a sophomore, Robinson and buddies Smith and Green earned All-District 12-6A first team last season while helping Ellison to its first 5-0 start since 1997.

And part of that start featured a 20-18 rally in which Robinson was carted off the field in the first quarter only to return just in time to engineer the game-winning drive.

Recalling that game, and his toughness, still gives Gregory chills. "It helped our team mentally," Green added. "Carl didn't come back and throw a touchdown or anything, but it's just the fact to see him on the field.

"That's your leader — you want him out there."

Now, Robinson and the Eagles are hoping to take the next step from playoff contender to district title contender this season.

And Robinson, now a quarterback by choice, will be leading that charge.

"It's like (last year) happened to us, what do we do now? And I told the kids what we do know is we fall back on what we're all about, and those are the hallmarks of discipline, effort, toughness and honor. Those aren't going to go away. Those aren't just words -- that's the culture that we've built here at this school and in our program." -Ellison head coach Trent Gregory.



DISTRICT 8-6A

TEAM RECORDS

2015: 6-4

2014: 2-8

2013: 0-10

2012: 0-10

2011: 0-10

2016 SCHEDULE

| | |
|---------|------------------------|
| Aug 26 | Leander |
| Sept 1 | Round Rock Stony Point |
| Sept 9 | Montgomery |
| Sept 15 | at Waco University |
| Sept 23 | at Shoemaker |
| Sept 30 | BYE |
| Oct 6 | Copperas Cove |
| Oct 14 | at Harker Heights |
| Oct 21 | Killeen |
| Oct 28 | at Belton |
| Nov 3 | Waco Midway |

EAGLES' OFFENSE SETS THE BAR HIGH

TEXAS TOUGH 2016 • KDH MEDIA GROUP



JAYDEN SMITH

Photo by Dennis Knowlson

By Jordan Mason

Ellison has high expectations for an offense that scored at least 27 points in five of its first seven games last season.

And with senior quarterback Carl Robinson III and senior receivers Jayden Smith and X'zavier Green back — all 12-6A All-District first teamers last season — those expectations don't seem far-fetched.

"Me and (Green) are trying to get 1,000 yards," Smith said. "Carl's trying to 3,000, so maybe 4,000 (total)."

Only adding to the Eagles' explosiveness is the emergence of juniors Jyaire Shorter and Tavon Gwynn, who are both poised for larger roles in their second varsity season.

"I'm confident because it makes us very hard to guard, especially adding our juniors, Tavon and Jyaire, it makes us very hard to guard," Green said. "You can't double anybody on our team — we'll beat you one on one on the other side."

In the backfield, Ellison has a slew of players that will compete for time with incumbent starter Darrell Peterkine at running back.

Eagle head coach Trent Gregory said fellow senior Jaira Baker will also see carries, as will junior Kipshawn Washington, while junior Terry Gillespie will play at H-back.

Gregory was excited about the Eagle offensive line, which like the rest of the team, will feature competition across the board.

Gavin Adkins is a returning starter who will compete for the starting center spot.

"He's kind of one of the leaders on our offensive line," Gregory said, "kind of a quiet leader, he doesn't say a whole lot, but he leads by example."

Also competing on the line will be Alexander Buber, Fiatala Mata'utia, Forrester Polk, David Ortiz, Veshawn Shellman and returning starter Aubrey Kelly.

And with that many returning pieces in place, the Eagles believe the offense can be even better in 2016.

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JOSIAH DYKES

Photo by Dennis Knowlton

NEW LEADERS EMERGING FOR EAGLES' D

By Jordan Mason

Ellison lost many leaders from its defense last season, but the Eagles only see that as an opportunity for new leaders to emerge.

And senior defensive end Tiryek West is one who has already done that.

"It's a lot of work, but then everybody's got to step up one day," West said, "and I'm glad I'm the person to step up and lead the defense."

But West isn't just a leader — he is one of the most important players on the Eagle defense.

"I am real excited about him," head coach

Trent Gregory said. "He is a big, big piece of the defensive success that we had."

Also up front is senior nose guard Cameron Leatherwood, who Gregory was also excited about entering the season.

"Cameron Leatherwood is a real, strong, explosive, powerful kid and moves really good," Gregory said. "He's a load in there."

Leatherwood will rotate with fellow senior Quantee Richardson, who moves over from left tackle, and is also joined on the line by Marquis Tezino and Camaron Costley.

At linebacker, Gregory said sophomore Dominic Gomez had a great spring and will compete with Josiah Dykes for time at inside

linebacker while Aubrey Kelly will be outside.

In the secondary, returning starter Kipshawn Washington moves from corner to safety and is expected to lead the unit.

"It's time for me to step up," Washington said. "I've got a bunch of other guys with me — it's time for us to step up. This time, we want to go to playoffs."

Joining Washington in the secondary will be corners Marvin Caines and Rian McKinley.

And while the defense will be inexperienced, Ellison doesn't see any reason why it can't be just as good — if not better — than last year.

SCREAMING EAGLE MARCHING BAND



All photos by Amy Proctor

CHEER SQUAD



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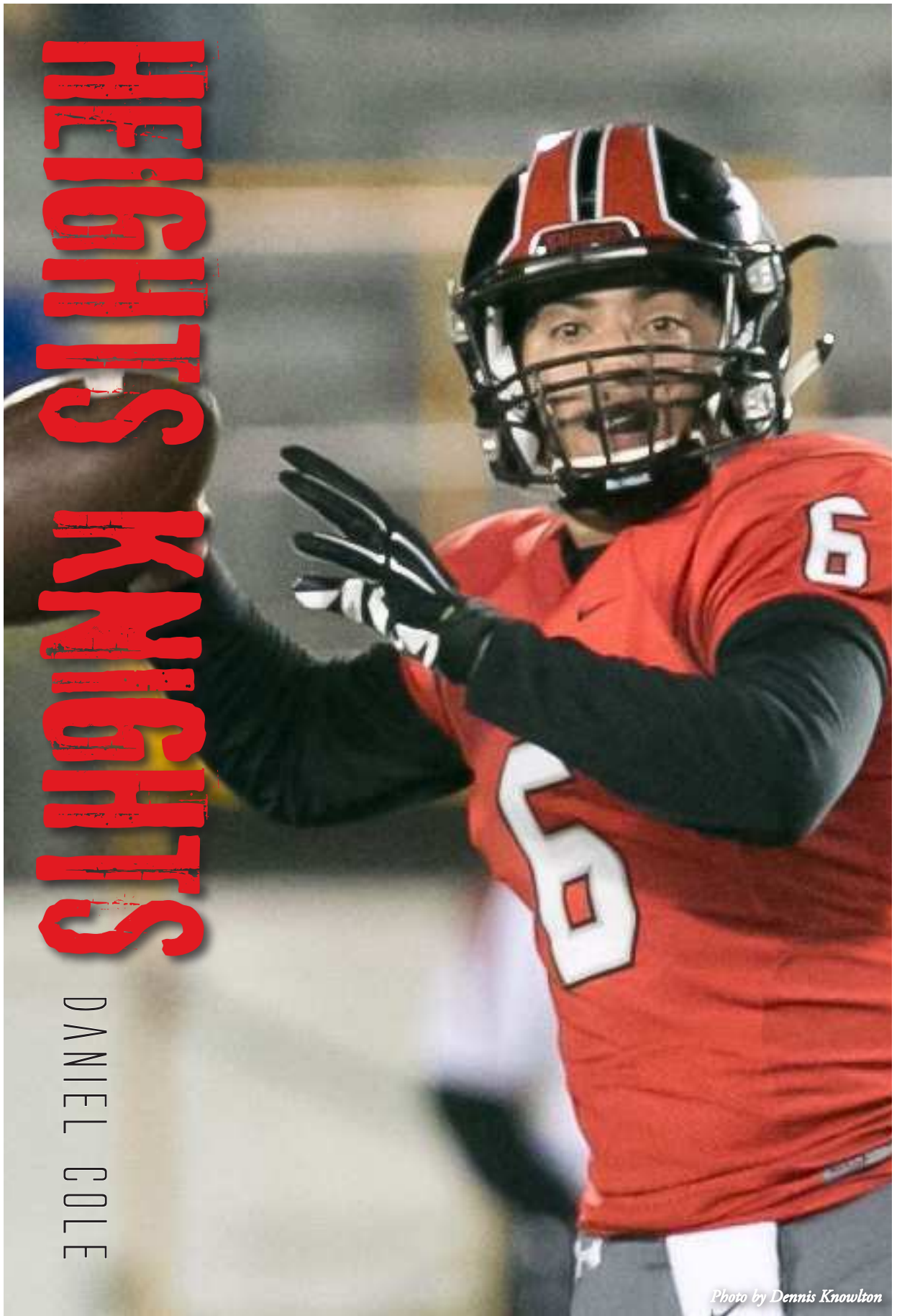


Photo by Dennis Knowlton

KNIGHTS CONFIDENT WITH COLE OR GRAY

By Jordan Mason

Harker Heights head coach Jerry Edwards said the conundrum he and his staff are facing is a good one to have.

On one hand, they can start a player with two years of varsity experience who also stepped right off the baseball field onto the gridiron and tossed two touchdowns, including the game-winner, in the spring game.

Or the Knights can start the guy who hasn't missed a practice or workout since last offseason and also led the team to its first ever Texas State 7-on-7 appearance and the Division I quarterfinals at state.

But while Edwards said it may be district season before he chooses a starter between seniors Daniel Cole and Robert Gray, what he and his staff are certain of is the Knights are in good hands either way.

"With either one of those guys," he said, "we feel confident."

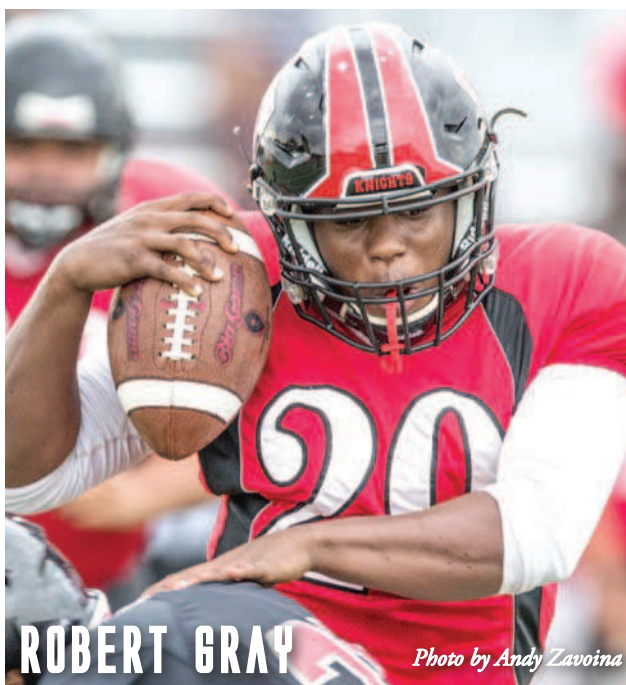
After backing up Troy Smith as a sophomore, Cole won the starting job last offseason, which was an impressive turnaround considering he hadn't played the position for two years.

But the mental toughness that Cole showed in the spring game — leading the Black team to a come-from-behind win after missing all of spring practice — was a prime example of what endears him to the staff.

In fact, Cole welcomed the competition with Gray this offseason.

"I'm glad," Cole said. "I'm happy to hear that because that's going to put fire under me and make me want to work harder for that job."

While Cole was earning co-District 12-6A MVP honors for the baseball team, Gray was honing his craft in spring practice after playing sparingly as a junior.



ROBERT GRAY

Photo by Andy Zavoina

Gray admitted the lack of playing time was disappointing but also said it only pushed him to work harder.

All that hard work paid off with a solid performance in the spring game followed by the unprecedented success the Knights experienced with him at the helm for 7-on-7.

Despite the accomplishments and the increased role, Gray hasn't lost his fire to outwork everyone.

"It's success, but I always know I've got to work harder," he said. "It's spring football and then 7-on-7, but I'm trying to work harder to do better in the season.

"That's what really matters."

And with that kind of mental toughness in both quarterbacks, all Edwards and his players know is that they have two quarterbacks who can take them where they hope to return this season — and that is the thick of the district race and the playoffs.

"Cole being out with baseball and Rob stepping up is good for us — it's been big," junior receiver Ja'Quan Tillis said. "Daniel's a good quarterback and so is Rob, but they're going to have to fight it out."

"On paper, do we feel like we have the pieces in place? Yes we do. I've told people I can't predict wins and losses because with what we went through last year, nobody could have foreseen that happening. So, I don't like to predict wins and losses. But this is probably the most complete team I've had since I've been here." -Harker Heights head coach Jerry Edwards

DISTRICT 8-6A

TEAM RECORDS

2015: 2-8

2014: 5-5

2013: 2-8

2012: 4-7

2011: 5-5

2016 SCHEDULE

| | |
|---------|-----------------------|
| Aug 25 | Elgin |
| Sept 1 | at Round Rock McNeill |
| Sept 8 | at Waco |
| Sept 15 | Vandergrift |
| Sept 23 | at Belton |
| Sept 30 | Waco Midway |
| Oct 7 | at Shoemaker |
| Oct 14 | Ellison |
| Oct 21 | at Copperas Cove |
| Oct 28 | BYE |
| Nov 4 | Killeen |





JAMEEL HODGES

Photo by Gabe Wolf

KNIGHTS BANKING ON 'BIG, STRONG' O-LINE

By Jordan Mason

By the time Harker Heights opened fall camp last season, it had already lost its best player in Kansas offensive lineman Chris Hughes — the first of many injuries that ravaged the offense over the course of the year.

This year, however, the Knights enter the season healthy and with depth at every position, starting where they lost Hughes last year — up front.

“This year, definitely, we have a closer bond because we’re all coming back,” senior tackle Khalil Corbett-Canada said, “we all played with each other before.”

Corbett-Canada leads an offensive line

that returns all five starters and head coach Jerry Edwards believes can be a strength.

“We’ve got Sam Pinkney (6-4, 345) and Taunty Motu (6-0, 350),” Edwards said. “They’re going to be juniors and they’re huge, big, strong beefy kids.”

Travis Simpson will move from tackle to center while Elijae Scott, who Edwards called the most consistent, will round out the group.

Running behind that offensive line will be a stable of running backs that was also marred by injury last season.

But senior Madu Eneli is back and ready to lead the group.

“This is probably the best I’ve felt coming into any year before,” Eneli said.

Sophomore Jameel Hodges and junior Michael Collier round out the backfield, and Edwards was particularly excited about Hodges.

“He suffered an arm injury, but he has been one of the biggest surprises in the spring and at 7-on-7,” Edwards said.

Under center will be either senior Daniel Cole or senior Robert Gray.

Whoever is named the starter will have a bevy of receiving options to throw to with explosive junior Ja’Quan Tillis, reliable senior Alex Pons, steady senior Ryan Lockhart and even a big red zone target in senior CJ Parker.

The Knights also have two kickers returning in Seth Bodolus and Joseph Kellam.

HEIGHTS PROUD OF TOUGH DEFENSIVE REPUTATION

By Jordan Mason

Harker Heights has fielded one of the top defenses in the league in each season Jerry Edwards has been head coach.

And while the Knights will be particularly green on that side of the ball, with just three returning starters, they are confident they can field a tough unit again.

“We feel that our scheme is sound and works well and we’ve kind of developed a reputation for being a better defensive type team,” Edwards said. “So, the kids have embraced that in the spring, and I told them they’ve got to step up and fill those voids.”

Perhaps the biggest void will be up front, as Harker Heights graduates every member of its defensive line rotation from last year.

But players like seniors CJ Parker and Howard Cross, who each had a pair of sacks in the spring game, are eager to replace that production.

Edwards also said junior Joseph Evans and senior Michael Nitti — who moves over from offense — will help, along with Anthony Palmer.

At linebacker, the Knights return seniors Jared Kaltenbaugh and Madu Eneli, who will team with fellow senior Gabe Lawrence to round out the linebacking corps.

Eneli started at linebacker as a sophomore and now will help anchor the defense.

“He’s a special kid,” Edwards said.

The majority of the Knights’ returning



JARED KALTENBAUGH

Photo by Gabe Wolf

experience is in the secondary where the senior quartet of Hurshie Williams, Marlon Cooper — who started every game at safety — Jonathan Medina and Pablo Alejandro will anchor the Knights’ pass defense.

The pass defense, in particular, is an aspect

that Harker Heights is hoping to improve on this season.

“I feel like if we stop the pass game and develop more on the outside run, we’ll do really good this year,” Kaltenbaugh said.

KNIGHTS MARCHING BAND



Photo by Amy Proctor

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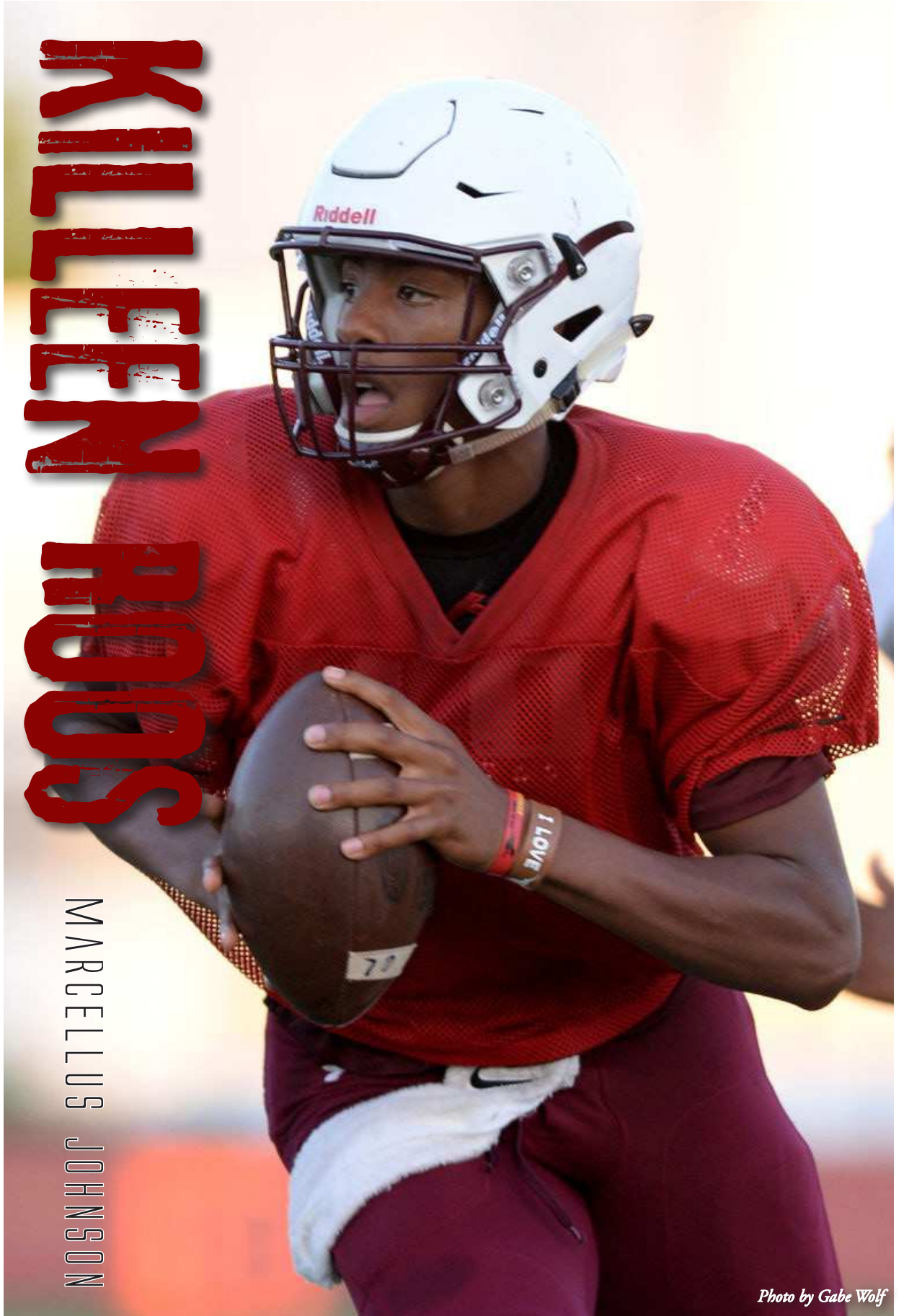


Photo by Gabe Wolf

JOHNSON HAS TAKEN 'LEADERSHIP ROLE' FOR ROOS

By C.J. Berryman

It is his turn now. After backing up for seven games as a sophomore and getting a cameo in Killeen High's final three contests last fall, Marcellus Johnson enters the 2016 season as the Kangaroos' starting quarterback.

In those final three contests, Killeen head coach Neil Searcy saw a tremendous amount of growth in the southpaw, and the coach said Johnson showed a lot of toughness by stepping into a difficult situation as an underclassman.

"To his defense, he was kind of thrown to the wolves as a sophomore," Searcy said. "His first start was against (Waco) Midway, the district champion. He didn't get an easy game to step into as the starter.

"I think it's going to benefit him and benefit all of us that he had that opportunity last year to kind of get his feet wet, and to know what to expect at this level."

The junior signal caller is gifted athletically. His 6-foot-3, 190-pound frame allows him to provide a solid presence in the pocket, but he also possesses the ability to beat opposing teams with his feet.

Obviously, the quarterback also must be a strong leader, and Johnson has fully accepted and willingly undertaken that responsibility.

"We've expected him to do all the little things and do the extra

work," Searcy said. "He organizes and calls his teammates to come up and do extra work during the summer — throwing the ball, running routes. He's really taken a leadership role on this football team, and that's what we expect him to do."

And that role follows Johnson when he leaves the field.

"It's always — out of school, in school," Johnson said. "It's everywhere, and it isn't a matter of just being a leader on the field. It's also being a leader off the field.

"That's one thing, being a quarterback, I need — leadership. Just having leadership and having chemistry with my guys, because no team can be led without chemistry."

Johnson also knows the importance of body language.

"The guys — they've got to look at you," Johnson said. "If your attitude is down, they're going to be down. If your attitude is up, they're going to be up. It's all about how you carry yourself on the field."

From a coaching perspective, Searcy has seen Johnson lead with both his actions and his words.

"He doesn't have to yell and scream to get his point across," Searcy said, "If he needs to be that sort of a leader, he can do that. But he's also that quiet, watch me and get on my shoulders and follow my lead-type of guy."

And the head coach looks forward to having Johnson under center for the next two years.

"We're not young age-wise, but we're young experience-wise as a team. I'm real excited about the group we have coming back, though. Our front seven on defense are all two- and three-year starters coming back. That's going to be the mainstay of our defense and our team." -Killeen head coach Neil Searcy



DISTRICT 8-6A

TEAM RECORDS

2015: 2-8

2014: 4-6

2013: 3-7

2012: 8-3

2011: 9-5

2016 SCHEDULE

| | |
|---------|---------------------------|
| Aug 25 | at Round Rock Stony Point |
| Sept 2 | Waco |
| Sept 9 | at Vandergrift |
| Sept 16 | Round Rock McNeil |
| Sept 23 | OPEN |
| Sept 29 | Belton |
| Oct 7 | at Waco Midway |
| Oct 13 | Shoemaker |
| Oct 21 | at Ellison |
| Oct 28 | Copperas Cove |
| Nov 4 | at Harker Heights |



MONTEGO MUCKELVANEY

Photo by Gabe Wolf

ROOS

PLANNING ON BALANCED ATTACK

By C.J. Berryman

Killeen High struggled to score in 2015, as it averaged just under 11 points per game.

Head coach Neil Searcy plans on seeing a considerable amount of improvement on the offensive side of the ball, and he believes the Kangaroos possess the tools necessary to have a consistent and balanced attack.

“We struggled last year putting the ball in the end zone,” Searcy said. “We’ve been working on our red zone offense and doing different things, but you’ve got to score points to win ballgames in this league.”

In the backfield, two different running backs will be utilized by Killeen. Five-foot-11, 165-pound senior Isaac Tolbert will likely be the featured back, and fellow senior Xavier Salazar will also get plenty of work.

Running the spread, the Roos also expect to throw the ball quite a bit. One of the biggest receiving targets for junior quarterback Marcellus Johnson will be 6-foot-4, 190-pound junior Montego Muckelvaney.

“Montego is a big kid who can go up and get the football,” Searcy said. “He’s going to play inside receiver, he’s going to play outside receiver, and he’s going to be a guy we move around to try to get into position to take advantage of his playmaking abilities.”

Robert Noble, a senior move-in from Oklahoma, is another wide receiver to keep tabs on, as are fellow seniors Tahir Everett, Markus Robinson and Chris Goff.

Former offensive lineman Greg Brewer has converted to the outside where he will be the Roos’ featured H-back/tight end.

Johnson, a southpaw, will have his blindside protected by 6-foot-5, 250-pound senior right tackle Tyler Kanaly. Six-foot-7, 296-pound junior Alyzcha Ulufale-Hentz will play left tackle.

Junior Jericho Garcia, a 6-3, 320-pounder, and seniors Adrian Manning and Chaydon Panapa will each take a turn at the two guard positions. Sophomore Kion Kolbusz will play center.

SEARCY COUNTING ON 'BIG-TIME LEADERS'

By C.J. Berryman

The Killeen High defense should be fun to watch this fall.

It will base out of the 3-4, and three players opposing teams will have to game plan for will be senior defensive end Shakim Wright, senior middle linebacker Jalil Bethel and junior outside linebacker Vrashon Walker.

"Those three guys, their play is going to speak for itself," Searcy said.

"But what's also special about those kids is they're big-time leaders on our football team. They're not all real vocal leaders, but they have a high expectation of their teammates, and they hold them accountable for what they're doing on and off the field.

"As a coach, you can't ask for more than that."

The other two starting linemen are expected to be Isaiah McFadden, who will play nose tackle, and junior Isaiah Bennett, who will man the other end. Senior Isaac Green and juniors Marcos Perez-Canales and Christopher Harris will rotate along the front three.

Senior Jamaal King will line up alongside Bethel at middle linebacker, and sophomore Chris Ingram will see some action in the middle, as well.

Sophomore Tulamalosi Lefotu will play outside linebacker opposite Walker, and senior DeAngelo Butler will also get plenty of reps outside.

In the secondary, Carlos Wilson, a senior move-in from Iowa, will play cornerback opposite fellow senior Tyreck Harper. Senior Tre Thomas and sophomore Willie McGee will be the two safeties.

Other defensive backs to keep an eye on are seniors Dacorian Turner and Jamaal McNeil, and junior Javarious Brown.

Killeen's secondary is a little on the small side, but Searcy is more than fine with that.

"They're little guys, but they're aggressive and in your face — like little gnats," Searcy said. "We've got a lot of mighty mites back there."



VRASHON WALKER

Photo by Gabe Wolf

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JAIDEN SPIVEY

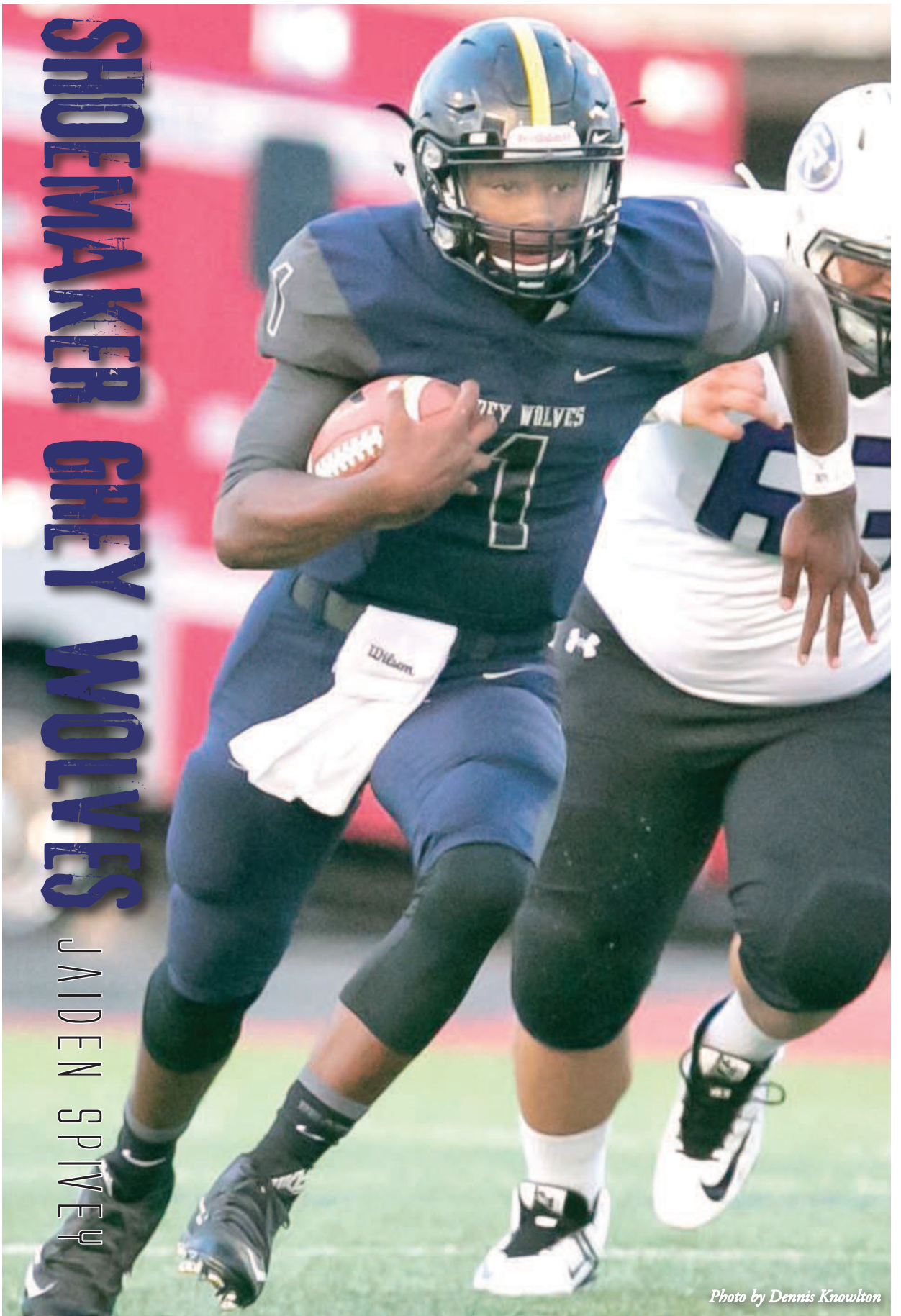


Photo by Dennis Knowlton

SPIVEY: MENTAL TOUGHNESS IS THE KEY

By C.J. Berryman

Last season, Jaiden Spivey was the quarterback of a Shoemaker football team that made school history. The Grey Wolves made the playoffs for the fourth time, and they defeated Garland Sachse 10-7 in the bi-district round of the Class 6A postseason for the program's first-ever playoff victory.

Spivey commandeered a Shoemaker offense that ground up the opposition with its rushing attack, and he took advantage of the attention paid to its ground game by consistently beating teams with his arm.

At 6-foot-2, 200 pounds, Spivey possesses the size necessary to absorb almost any blow delivered from a defender while also providing a sound presence in the pocket.

But he pointed to mental toughness as being the key to playing quarterback.

"It's all in your head," Spivey said. "You can't panic in tough situations. You've always got to stay cool.

"When it comes to physical toughness, you have to stand in the pocket and take that hit to get the ball off. You've got to wait for the play to develop, and you have to understand the cause.

"With emotional toughness, you have to stay calm in all situations.

Whenever you panic, the team panics. When they see you being cool and relaxed, they're going to stay cool and relaxed and follow your lead."

The offense does not take sacks and turnovers lightly, according to Spivey, because it does not want to force the defense into having to defend a short field.

But there is no shortage in the amount of confidence he has in the offense. After all, Shoemaker is returning an array of skill players that can make big plays and punish the opposition with long, methodical drives.

Spivey also has confidence in the defense. He has to line up across from the Wolves' defenders each day in practice, and neither side takes it easy on the other.

"When we scrimmage, we'll be going at each other's necks," Spivey quipped. "We are a very competitive team and are very aggressive. But at the end of the day, we all understand that we have each other's backs.

"You can feel the connection with your teammates. You may be on the other side of the ball from them in a scrimmage, but you can feel the connection that they're going to have your back in any situation. It's nice to have that feeling."

And Spivey said the team knows the harder they go against one another in practice, the better they will be on Friday nights.

"One of the things I think you have to build in kids is just a sense of over-achieving and hustling. A lot of kids will loaf if you let them. If you watch video, and you've got 10 or 15 kids jogging to the ball -- I don't want to ever see that. Make your individual sacrifices for overall team success."

-Shoemaker head coach Johnnie Fair

DISTRICT 8-6A

TEAM RECORDS

2015: 9-3

2014: 6-5

2013: 7-4

2012: 2-8

2011: 1-9

2016 SCHEDULE

| | |
|---------|-----------------------|
| Aug 27 | Nuevo Leon |
| Sept 2 | at College Station |
| Sept 8 | Cedar Ridge |
| Sept 16 | at San Angelo Central |
| Sept 23 | Ellison |
| Sept 30 | at Copperas Cove |
| Oct 7 | Harker Heights |
| Oct 13 | at Killeen |
| Oct 20 | Belton |
| Oct 28 | at Waco Midway |
| Nov 4 | OPEN |





JAIDEN SPIVEY

CAM BAUSLEY

Photo by Dennis Knowlton

WOLVES ARE LOADED WITH TALENT ON OFFENSE

By C.J. Berryman

Shoemaker's offensive attack is going to be difficult to contain.

It will not be an offense predicated on an aerial assault, but one that focuses on ball control while also utilizing its skill players out wide to beat opposing teams with deep passes.

The Grey Wolves have a bevy of talented skill players, a luxury first-year head coach Johnnie Fair will not take for granted, and he is excited about the potential to be a well-oiled offensive machine.

At wide receiver, Shoemaker is loaded athletically. Seniors Javon Jones, Tyri'K Barnes,

Chris Speidel, Mondra Randall, LeQue McLaurin and Sir Davis, as well as junior Quinton Clark, give it the potential to score on any down.

"I think our receiving corps is going to be really dynamic," Fair said. "Hopefully, we can win a lot of one-on-one battles.

"We don't have any 2s; everybody's a 1 in terms of their playmaking ability. All of our receivers that we have literally are dynamic players."

The Wolves' litany of options at wideout makes senior quarterback Jaiden Spivey even more dangerous, and it helps that they also possess a multi-dimensional running game.

In their I-formation base, juniors Cam

Bausley and Telly Sparks will provide both power and speed at tailback, and senior Rejon Pelham and junior Judiah Nicholas will add versatility at fullback, as well.

Two seniors, Emmanuel Tuitasi and Macio Branch, will spearhead the offensive line, and fellow senior Shemar Glenn will be the team's primary tight end.

"If the kids are coached up, we'll be really good, and I think we'll be coached up," Fair said. "If the backs are moving and everybody is blocking, that'll open up the passing game. The passing game will open up the running game, and hopefully we can keep everybody happy.

"And by happy, I mean winning."

FAIR WANTS 'RELENTLESS HUSTLE' ON DEFENSE

By C.J. Berryman

Johnnie Fair is in his first year as head football coach at Shoemaker, but he is not ushering in a completely new defense.

It will base of out of the 3-4 again in 2016, and it was the defense that was the Grey Wolves' strength in helping guide them to their best season in program history last year. This season, their defense looks strong again.

Shoemaker has a litany of athletes in the secondary, and leading that group will be senior Tavion Hawthorne, who was named to the All-District 12-6A First Team at cornerback last year.

Joining Hawthorne as starters in its defensive backfield will likely be juniors William Hooper, James Parker and senior Tyreike Beckett, who moves over from Killeen High. Along with Hawthorne, Beckett was the 12-6A Defensive Newcomer of the Year as a sophomore in 2014.

Juniors Andrew Sanders, Daron Allman and Joseph Lowe could also see plenty of time in the secondary.

Shoemaker's three starting defensive linemen will be senior TeAyveon Hill and juniors Nathalohn Nanai and Khenan Meriweather.

Junior Mi'idris Guy will rotate in along the defensive front, and fellow junior Caylon Moten is a candidate to join him.

At linebacker, senior Chris Francis and junior Darrell Crowder will man the two outside spots, and senior Nahcyem Brooks and junior Leonard Penick will team up inside.

Juniors Cornez Harris and Deante Goffney are two names to keep an eye on at linebacker as well.

Overall, Fair said he wants the defense to establish a sense of overachievement.

"On defense, everybody on the field has to be ready to go at all times," Fair said. "Everybody that is on the field, we're going to get ready to go overachieve with relentless hustle, and we're going to be ready to go with a sense of self-sacrifice."



TAVION HAWTHORNE

Photo by Dennis Knowlton

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VARSITY/JV CHEER

GATESVILLE HORNETS

JETT TRUSS



Photo by Dennis Knowlton

WORK ETHIC OF TRUSS IMPRESSES COOPER

By Clay Whittington

Jett Truss never avoided hard work.

Growing up as a coach's kid, the Gatesville senior cannot remember a time without football. He spent his entire life heightening his skills on the field and maturing as a leader.

During the past seasons, the quarterback watched from the sideline, preparing for the moment his opportunity arrived, as Jeff Speer engineered the Hornets' offense.

Now, Truss' time to shine is here, and he is seeing his efforts pay off.

"I feel like we are really developing as a team," the junior said, "and all those summer workouts really prepared us for the season.

"It is all about working hard to get where we need to be."

Truss spent much of his offseason exerting himself physically in the sweltering Texas weather, and some of his most grueling workouts occurred away from the field.

Throughout the summer, Truss spent his days working construction, and in the evenings, he waited tables at a local restaurant, while also finding time for conditioning, practices and 7-on-7 football.

But Gatesville head coach Kyle Cooper believes Truss displays a similar work ethic even in his free time.

"This sounds funny at first," Cooper said, "but I think there is a lot of truth in it. Every year, we have a pool party, and Jett is a four-time

belly flop champion.

"That says a lot about him. He's going to go all out, and he's a real competitor."

Gatesville is coming off a whirlwind season in which Truss helped the Hornets secure their first playoff appearance since 2012.

After losing five of six games to start the season, Gatesville began turning things around in district play, defeating Lampasas and Burnet before Speer was injured in a game against Robinson.

With the Hornets' starter sidelined, Truss came into the game and ran for a pair of touchdowns in a 32-14 win, clinching a postseason berth for the team.

The appearance not only allowed Gatesville to return to the playoffs, but it allowed Truss an opportunity to experience the game at the varsity level, including the big hits.

"I've always loved the physical aspect of the game," he said. "I've never been someone who was real shifty or anything, so I've always just been a guy who lowers his head and his shoulder pads down and goes.

"I want to be the guy whose teammates know is willing to take a hit and not get hurt. I'm going to stay in the game no matter what, and if they see that, then they will be more likely to play like that as well."

"We've still got a lot to work on, but this group is a lot of fun. It's a highly excitable team, they're passionate, and it is going to be a lot of fun to coach them."
 -Gatesville head coach Kyle Cooper

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DISTRICT 13-4A DIVISION I

TEAM RECORDS

- 2015: 6-7
- 2014: 4-7
- 2013: 3-7
- 2012: 13-1
- 2011: 4-6

2016 SCHEDULE

| | |
|---------|--------------------|
| Aug 26 | at Waco Connally |
| Sept 2 | Cameron |
| Sept 9 | at Waco University |
| Sept 16 | Hillsboro |
| Sept 23 | at Robinson |
| Sept 30 | BYE |
| Oct 7 | Lampasas |
| Oct 14 | at Burnet |
| Oct 21 | China Spring |
| Oct 28 | La Vega |
| Nov 4 | at Liberty Hill |



ALEX THOMPSON

Photo by Dennis Knowlton

EXPECTATIONS HIGH FOR GATESVILLE OFFENSE

By Clay Whittington

Some of the faces have changed, but the expectations remain the same.

After fielding a massive amount of experience last season, Gatesville enters 2016 with a small senior class and a number of newcomers.

Although the Hornets' personnel is different, especially on offense, where they lost their leading passer, top two rushers and best receiver, Gatesville head coach Kyle Cooper is excited about the potential.

"This year is just a little different as we are grooming up a new crop of kids," he said,

"but this is a very talented crop.

"We're just starting to feel out the young guys and find their strengths and weaknesses, and then it is our job to keep getting them better and putting them in the right positions."

One player who is always in the correct position, however, is Sam Jackson, who can play practically anywhere on the field.

The senior is embarking on his fourth season as a starter and will primarily play at receiver for the Hornets, but Jackson is also the team's punter and backup quarterback. Additionally, Cooper said Jackson will spend time at fullback and tight end along with his defensive responsibilities at inside linebacker.

"He's just a great football player," Cooper

said, "a hardnosed football player and a great team leader."

Jett Truss, a junior, inherits the starting quarterback job from Jeff Speer and will rely on receivers Jose Gamez, Josh Carroll, Payden Smalley, Derrick Bayer and Jackson, among others, to make plays.

Junior running back Alex Thompson will assume a larger rushing responsibility this season along with junior Charles Ramos.

Anchoring the offensive line will be returners Bailey Adair, a guard, and Dayton Vest, a center.

"I know those two guys are going to do a great job for us," Cooper said.

David Saldivar, who is a junior, will handle the place kicking duties.

PLENTY OF TALENT REMAINS ON HORNETS' DEFENSE

By Clay Whittington

Kyle Cooper wants every season to be special for his seniors, and this year is no different.

Following a pair of disappointing campaigns, Gatesville returned to the playoffs in 2015 behind a large senior class, advancing to the regional semifinals after losing five of their first six games.

While there are far fewer seniors on this year's team, there is nothing the Hornets' head coach wants more than to see them cap off their high school careers in style.

"We've got some really quality seniors," Cooper said, "who have really invested in this program for going on six years now, and I always feel like we owe it to the seniors to put a great product on the table and develop a great football team for their last year."

Many of those seniors will be producing for the Hornets' defense this year, including cornerback Josh Carroll.

After moving to Gatesville prior to last season with very little football experience, Carroll developed into a playmaker while on the junior varsity squad and has already been named a starter. He will play alongside fellow senior cornerback Teaguen Nolte.

Sam Jackson, an inside linebacker, is the most tenured player on the defense after starting in each of the previous three seasons, while second-year starter T.J. Miller, a junior, returns at outside linebacker.

"T.J. is just one of the best teammates I've ever seen," Cooper said. "He's going to be rock solid there."

Helping ensure the Hornets produce a successful sendoff for their seniors will be a defensive line loaded with talent.

Caleb Estill, Josh Johnson, Max Bartlett, Parker Floyd and Colton Robello will all play at defensive end this season, while Caire Chansler and Owen Sibley are the starting tackles with Bailey Adair and others backing them up.



SAM JACKSON

Photo by Dennis Knowlton

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VARSITY/JV CHEER

Photo by Dennis Knowlton



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LAMPASAS BADGERS

COHEN
COCKBURN

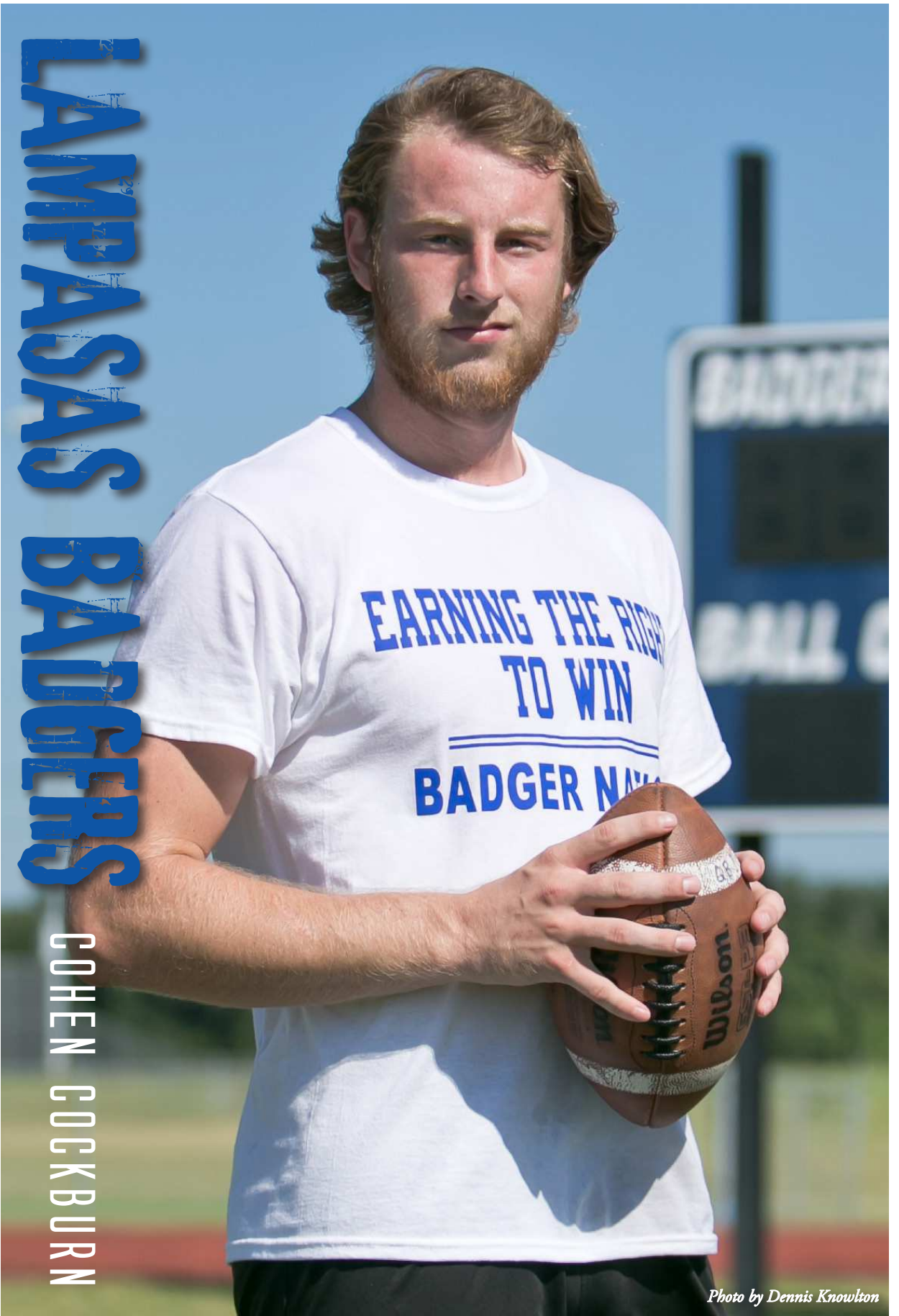


Photo by Dennis Knowlton

RUN-FIRST OFFENSE TOUGHENED UP COCKBURN

By Clay Whittington

When Cockburn remembers being scared. As a sophomore inheriting Lampasas' starting quarterback job, Cockburn admits he was anxious in the pocket. He knew opposing players were focused on delivering brutal, ball-jarring hits, and it affected his performance.

"I was pretty nervous coming into my first year on varsity because of the strength and the size of the guys we were playing against," the senior said, "and I just didn't have any experience."

Over time, however, he developed a toughness as former Badgers head coach Brian Emerson's ground-based offense primarily utilized Cockburn as a runner, leaving him open to routinely being tackled.

Due to the poundings endured over the last two years, Cockburn enters the final season of his high school career with no fears of being tackled. In fact, now he relishes the moments.

"Getting hit or delivering a hit is not really a problem for me," Cockburn said. "The last few years have really helped me get used to it and learn how to take on a hit.

"It has become so much easier over time."

The new mentality should pay dividends for Lampasas this season as first-year head coach Troy Rogers ushers in a new offensive philosophy, creating a more balanced attack that will leave Cockburn exposed as a passer at times.

Having developed patience and the ability to make decisions under

pressure, Cockburn is eager to show off skills hidden beneath the surface in years' past.

"I'm really excited to open the playbook up a little more and start passing," he said, "but I'm glad we're keeping portions of our running game because that gives me the option to run it also."

The Badgers attempted less than 100 passes last season en route to a 2-8 overall record as they missed the playoffs for a fourth consecutive season. Nevertheless, Cockburn still made an impact.

As a junior, Cockburn rushed for 1,150 yards, averaging close to six yards per carry, and 13 touchdowns, and Rogers believes the best is yet to come.

"I think he gets better every time I see him," Rogers said. "Every day we move on together, he grasps the offense a little bit better.

"It is just a matter of time. He's been learning it for the past several months, so now it is just about getting the timing down."

Although the changes have forced Cockburn to adapt, he is looking forward to trying to guide the Badgers back into the playoffs for the first time since winning a district championship in 2011.

He is also anticipating the opportunity to show off his development.

"I've really grown and matured as an athlete and as a student-leader over the past two years," Cockburn said, "and I would not be the player I am today without the offense we ran my sophomore and junior years."

"There is a little bit of change in the culture. The kids are learning what the expectations are now, and we need commitment. If the kids are only going to do a little 7-on-7 and summer conditioning, then we are going to be a team that looks like all it did was a little 7-on-7 and some summer conditioning.

-Lampasas head coach Troy Rogers



DISTRICT 13-4A DIVISION I

TEAM RECORDS

2015: 2-8

2014: 5-5

2013: 3-7

2012: 1-9

2011: 10-2

2016 SCHEDULE

| | | |
|---------|----------------|------|
| Aug 26 | Fredericksburg | 7:30 |
| Sept 2 | Robinson | 7:30 |
| Sept 9 | Wimberley | 7:30 |
| Sept 16 | Lorena | 7:30 |
| Sept 22 | at Canyon Lake | 7:00 |
| Sept 30 | BYE | |
| Oct 7 | at Gatesville | 7:30 |
| Oct 14 | Liberty Hill | 7:30 |
| Oct 21 | at La Vega | 7:30 |
| Oct 28 | at Burnet | 7:30 |
| Nov 4 | China Spring | 7:30 |

BADGERS CHANGING OFFENSIVE PHILOSOPHY



NATHAN KEESE

Photo by Gabe Wolf

By Clay Whittington

Change is coming.

For the first time since 2008, Lampasas is committed to throwing the ball. After years of religiously running, utilizing either a slot-T or wing-T offense, the Badgers are expanding their playbook.

While first-year head coach Troy Rogers is altering the approach, he is not ignoring any aspect of the game.

“In today’s age,” he said, “it is difficult to be successful by just doing one thing.

“We are going to throw the ball if that is working, and we’ll run if that is working, but we have to be able to do both.”

The gameplan hinges on senior quarterback Cohen Cockburn’s ability to thrive in the new system, which will focus on his ability to make the proper in-game decisions. In his first two seasons as a starter, Cockburn was primarily a rusher, accounting for more than 1,000 yards last year.

Now, Cockburn has the opportunity to show off his full array of abilities.

“I’m really excited to be able to start passing more,” he said, “but it is nice to know that I always have the option to run it.”

Cockburn rushed for 1,158 yards and 13 touchdowns in 2015, while passing for 655 yards and seven touchdowns.

After serving as the Badgers’ top receivers last season, seniors Harrison Gillespie (7-233, 4 touchdowns) and Jason Murphy (14-217, 1 touchdown) should see an increased workload. Additionally, Brandon Pierino and Logan Bender are expected to contribute.

Senior running back Nathan Keese, who also plays receiver, returns after missing most of last season with a torn ACL to lead a group of newcomers, including Zach Parrish.

Caul Smith and Brogan Wykes will anchor the offensive line alongside Chris Nix and Paul Peralta among others.

Jared Salazar returns as the Badgers’ kicker after connecting on 32 extra points and two fields goals last year.



LOGAN BENDER

Photo by Gabe Wolf

BADGERS 'TAKING ON A WHOLE NEW DEFENSE'

By Clay Whittington

Lampasas is in the midst of a learning process.

When head coach Troy Rogers inherited the program from Brian Emerson, who retired during the offseason, a plethora of changes followed. From new position coaches to fresh philosophies, the Badgers are bringing a different look into the season.

While every adjustment takes time, some are more in-depth than others.

"These kids are taking on a whole new defense," Rogers said, "so it is going to take a while to pick it up and learn it.

"There's just not a lot we can do during the summer to get them ready because everything is based on what they are seeing. It's just be a matter of how quickly they pick it up and how quickly the kids understand where they fit in schematically."

What Lampasas lacks in familiarity, however, it makes up for with experience.

The Badgers return numerous players on the defensive side of the

ball, including defensive back Logan Bender. In 2015, the safety led Lampasas in tackles, recording 97 total tackles and 67 solo tackles

But Bender is not the only defensive back expected to make an impact.

Nathan Keese, who missed most of last year with a torn ACL, and Isaiah Rosales will also be key in helping prevent opposing offenses from averaging 34.7 points like they did in 2015. Additionally, versatile receiver Harrison Gillespie may be called on to produce in the secondary as well.

Running a 3-4 formation, linebackers Jace Hankins, Michael Nguyen, Jack Procter and Zach Parrish will see lots of action as Eric Yescas, Justin Molina and Levi Rainwater anchor the defensive line.

"We've got some kids who are going to be really good players for us," Rogers said, "and we have a lot of guys coming back, so that is going to be good for us as we make this change."



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SALADO EAGLES

RYAN KYBURZ

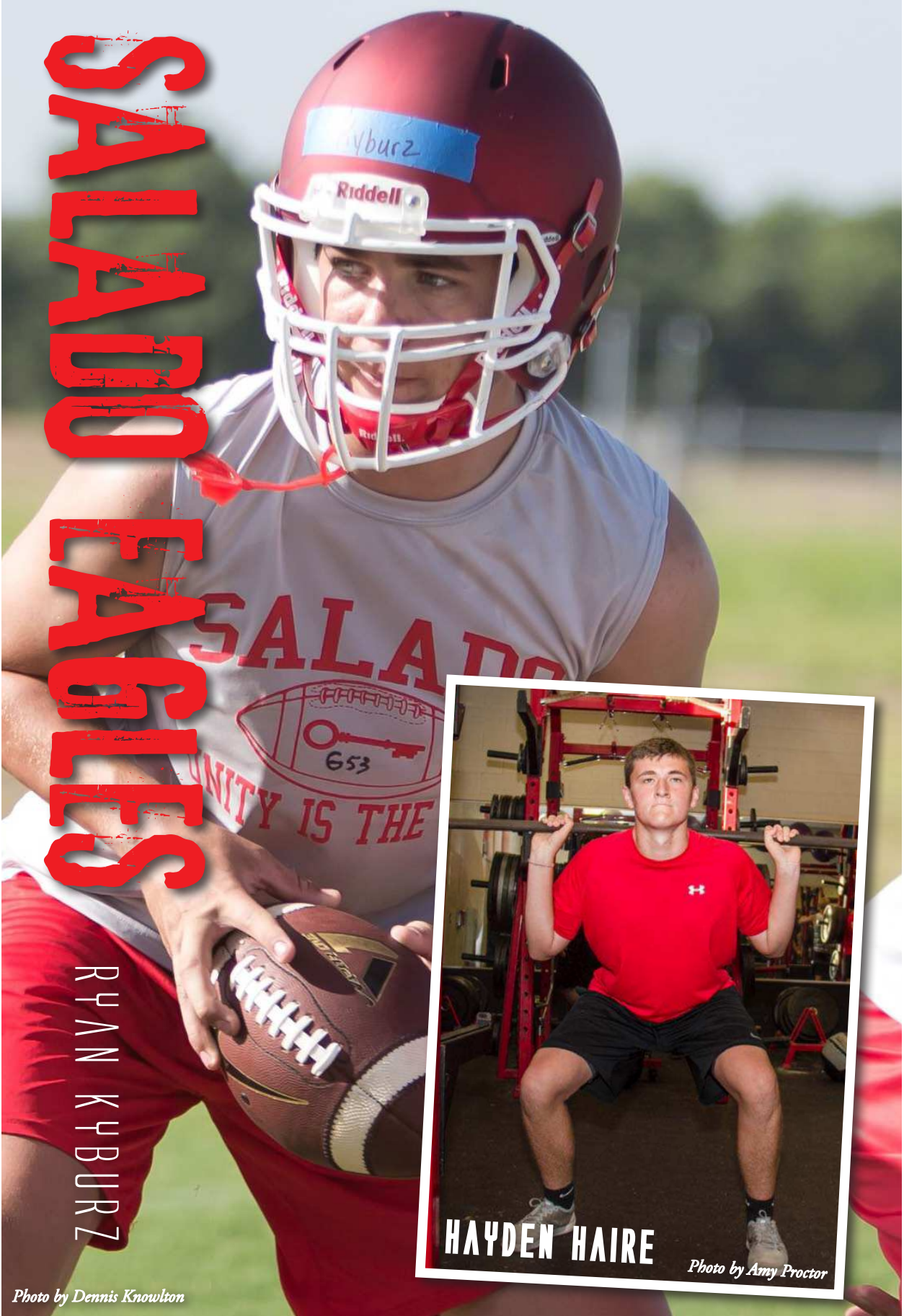


Photo by Dennis Knowlton



HAYDEN HAIRE

Photo by Amy Proctor

SALADO HEAD COACH: 'COMPETITION BREEDS SUCCESS'

By Allan Mandell

A 1988 graduate of Salado, Alan Haire earned 1987 first-team all-district honors at quarterback.

In the past 23 years, he's been a football coach. In 15 of those years, he's been a high school head coach.

This year, he returned home.

During the offseason, Haire was handed the keys to Salado's football program.

Among the decisions new head coach Haire will be making is who will be Salado's starting quarterback.

"I'd rather have two high-quality quarterbacks than one," he said. "And that's the situation we have. Competition breeds success. When you have two excellent players competing for the starting job, you'll be getting their best performances every day in practice — and that better prepares them for games."

Salado's competing quarterbacks are juniors Hayden Haire and Ryan Kyburz.

In 2015, the 5-foot-11, 172-pound Kyburz was Salado's quarterback, leading the Eagles into the postseason.

"You can depend on Ryan," coach Haire said. "He's a 'Yes, sir' and 'No, sir' type of guy. He was raised right. He shows up ready to work every day. He's athletic with good speed. He's done a real good job of getting stronger and faster this past offseason."

Haire's son Hayden is 6-foot-2, 200 pounds. He's also been raised

right.

"Unfortunately for Hayden, he always has to ride home after practice with the guy calling the offense," coach Haire said. "As a coach's kid, you're around football all the time and Hayden has become a student of the game."

Coach Haire said Hayden Haire and Kyburz have something important in common.

"They are both very tough kids," he said. "And I don't just mean physically tough. They're both mentally tough. I feel there are 55 ways an athlete can make himself a better football player and No. 1 on my list is 'Mental Toughness.' If you are not mentally tough, you will not be able to compete.

"And with my two quarterbacks, I have two mentally tough kids ready to compete."

Hayden Haire and Kyburz are both optimistic about this season.

"We have a lot of good players here," Haire said. "I'm excited and ready for the season to start."

"There are a lot more people out for football this season," Kyburz said. "Our team spirit is much better this year. Once in a while, I'll see guys very competitive with each other in the weight room, which is good to see. But then sometimes they may take it too far and so I've said, 'Hey, guys, let's not worry about who is better amongst us, let's keep our attention on being better than our opponents.' And the guys say, 'Yeah, you're right.'"

"We're not going to coach talent -- we're going to coach hearts. I think that's huge to understand is that when we go out as coaches we're not coaching talent, we're coaching their heart so that if we change a heart we can increase character. And with character you have hope -- and that's hope in being a successful person." - Salado head coach Alan Haire



DISTRICT 9-4A DIVISION II

TEAM RECORDS

2015: 1-10
2014: 0-10
2013: 1-9
2012: 2-8
2011: 5-5

2016 SCHEDULE

| | |
|---------|--------------------------|
| Aug 26 | Troy |
| Sept 2 | at Comfort |
| Sept 9 | Austin Hyde Park |
| Sept 16 | at Florence |
| Sept 23 | Austin St. Dominic Savio |
| Sept 30 | BYE |
| Oct 7 | at Fairfield |
| Oct 14 | Lorena |
| Oct 21 | at Mexia |
| Oct 28 | at Robinson |
| Nov 4 | Waco Connally |



TREY SHEPPARD

Photo by Dennis Knowlton

EAGLES WILL UTILIZE SLOT-T OFFENSE

By Jordan Mason

Salado ran a Slot-T offense two years ago that was similar to the one first-year head coach Alan Haire has installed this season.

Only that didn't last long before the Eagles reverted back to the spread early in the 2014 season.

"We ran this offense my sophomore year, two years ago — it was pretty sloppy," senior running back Jake Elliott said. "And this year, it looks pretty good."

This year, the Eagles expect the offense to stay with Elliott and fellow running backs Jake Harvey and Trey Sheppard handling the carries.

Haire also said junior Aaron Torczynski will contribute at running back.

The quarterback will be the winner of a competition between juniors Ryan Kyburz and Hayden Haire.

Kyburz is the incumbent starter while Haire is the son of head coach Alan, and Alan Haire said he believes he can depend on both quarterbacks to lead the offense.

Up front, Haire said Jonah Bassa, a newcomer who didn't play last year, will lead the way for a line that will be counted on heavily.

Newcomers making key contributions will be a theme this season, as Haire was happy to see the program grow, welcoming players

like Bassa and senior tight end Gabe Kane, who will also start.

"We've got kids coming from all different directions," Haire said.

Haire also had high expectations for guards Noah Barker and Peyton Blizzard up front.

When the Eagles do throw the ball, Haire said versatile junior Cutter Hudgens — who will play both sides of the ball — is a capable pass catcher, along with Kane.

The Eagles will have a new look and plenty of new faces on offense this season.

But this time, they plan to have a lasting impact.



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HAIRE ENCOURAGED WITH EAGLES' DEFENSE



By Jordan Mason

With no spring football in his first offseason at the helm, evaluating the Salado defense hasn't been easy for Alan Haire and his staff heading into this season.

But Haire is encouraged about the defensive side of the ball, and a big reason is the Eagles aren't planning on having many offensive starters help out.

"That's what we'd like to do," Haire said, "so that's the direction we're heading."

The Eagles won't have many seniors on defense, but linebacker Tate Hill is one, and his experience is highly valued.

"Any time a kid's played at the varsity level, they bring that experience to the field when you take the field for the first time," Haire said. "So, we're just looking to depend on his leadership and his experience."

Up front, the Eagles expect sophomore Wyatt Bagley and junior Zach Adams to contribute.

A player who has also impressed the staff is Jacob Wilk, a standout on the baseball team who will return to football after a year off, albeit playing defense rather than quarterback.

"He brings length and speed and just overall athleticism," said Haire of Wilk. "He's been quite a surprise as far as just picking up whatever we've put out before him and making the most of it."

In the secondary, Haire said juniors Quade Brown (cornerback), Holden Ford (safety) will contribute, along with junior Cutter Hudgens, who will see time on both sides of the ball.

"He's somebody that brings a lot of experience, and he's a ballplayer," Haire said.

Junior Kaden Smien is also a returning letterman on the defensive side of the ball, and Jay Quintanilla, Trey Sheppard and Willy Whigham are returning lettermen with defensive experience.

Haire said senior Trevor Stump will be punting for the Eagles.

TATE HILL

Photo by Dennis Knowlton

SALADO MARCHING BAND



VARSITY CHEER



JV CHEER

All photos by Eric Shelton

FLORENCE BUFFALOES

C. J. GIDDENS

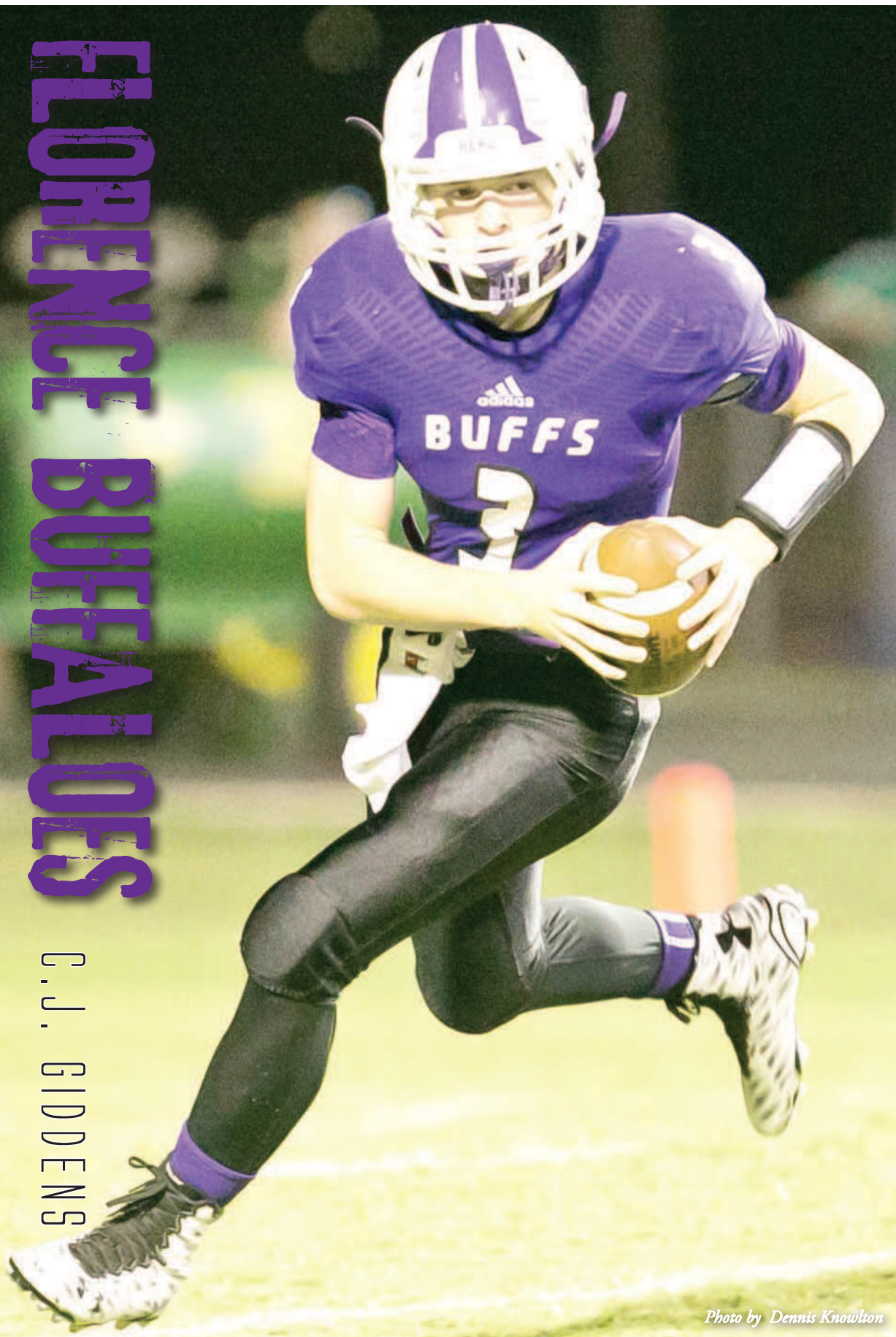


Photo by Dennis Knowlton

BUFFS' QB 'NOSE' TOUGHNESS

By C.J. Berryman

When it comes to toughness, C.J. Giddens has already proven to be one of the grittiest and most tenacious competitors in the area.

While manning shortstop for Florence during the 2015-16 baseball season, Giddens took a hard ground ball off his nose in the first inning of a league game against Jarrell on April 12.

Zane Bode, Buffaloes athletic director and head football coach, was present at the game. He rushed out to the field with head baseball coach Bryce Estes and the athletic trainer. What happened afterward left Bode in amazement.

"I'm nearly throwing up looking at it," Bode said. "His nose was sitting over beside his eyeball. He's standing there — and I'm trying to keep him comfortable and relaxed — and he asks me, 'Am I going to be able to run at the regional track meet?'"

"I said, 'C.J., I don't think you're going to be running.' That's when he finally started crying. Not because his nose is over by his eye, but he was heartbroken because he couldn't run in the regional track meet."

Giddens had surgery on the same day as Florence's next league game. To everyone's surprise, and despite knowing he would not play, the tough athlete showed up to the game in full uniform.

"I felt the obligation to be there," Giddens said. "Just to support and not just sit at home and do nothing. I felt like supporting my team and setting an example.

"If something like that happens, it doesn't matter. Show up and support your team."

It is that toughness, dedication and leadership that excites Bode about having the junior playing quarterback for the Buffs for the next two years.

"When you talk about quarterbacks, the first thing you look for is not athletic ability or arm strength," Bode said. "You look for that leadership that a quarterback is. Your quarterback is, for better or worse, the leader of your team.

"We are blessed to have a quarterback that is a tremendous leader and a tremendous athlete."

Giddens knows his responsibilities go far beyond just being accurate with the football and getting the offense lined up correctly, especially when things are not going well on Friday nights.

"You've got to keep your cool," he said. "Don't let it get to you, and keep calm. Just know that eventually the defense is going to break, and then there is your big push.

"You've got to know that they're going to break and that you're not going to break. Just keep fighting."

Giddens will spearhead a Buffs offense that will look to help the team capture its first playoff berth since 2001.

"We've got a lot of kids willing to do whatever it takes for their teammates. When you've got kids like that, you've got a pretty good shot at being competitive. We've got the attitude and the effort, and the attitude is the No. 1, most important thing." -Florence head coach Zane Bode



DISTRICT 13-3A DIVISION II

TEAM RECORDS

2015: 4-6
2014: 3-7
2013: 1-9
2012: 4-6
2011: 3-7

2016 SCHEDULE

| | |
|---------|-----------------|
| Aug 26 | at Rosebud-Lott |
| Sept 2 | Jarrell |
| Sept 9 | at Holland |
| Sept 16 | Salado |
| Sept 23 | Mario |
| Sept 30 | OPEN |
| Oct 7 | at Johnson City |
| Oct 14 | at Blanco |
| Oct 21 | Comfort |
| Oct 28 | at Rogers |
| Nov 4 | Lexington |

BODE CHANGING OFFENSIVE SCHEME TO FIT TALENT



By C.J. Berryman

Florence has adjusted its offense in order to take advantage of its talent to the max heading into the 2016 season.

It has moved from the slot-T to more of a one-back look, and it will deploy multiple formations and packages out of that scheme.

Its focal point will be senior Ediel Hernandez. A year ago, the 5-foot-8, 170-pound running back rushed for nearly 1,400 yards.

Buffaloes head coach Zane Bode wants to take advantage of Hernandez's special abilities while also utilizing the talent around him in its one-back scheme.

"We've got some tools we feel like this offense will allow us to take advantage of," Bode said. "We're very thin on numbers, but we've got some really good kids."

Bode said Florence has a litany of kids that possess an outstanding work ethic, and he believes all the hard work and effort they have put in over the offseason will benefit the team this fall.

Hernandez and junior quarterback C.J. Giddens are two of those kids, as are junior H-back Matthew Edgar, junior backup tailback Landon Byrne, senior right guard Ethan Bowers and senior tackle Cutter Callan.

Bowers, a 6-foot-1, 240-pound three-year letterman, will anchor the line. Callan and senior Caleb Allen will be the tackles, sophomores Colton Regier and Adrian Spencer will rotate at left guard, and junior Alex Gamboa will be the center.

Lining up at wide receiver will be seniors Dylan Gray, Zack Pluhar and Martin Quenga, and junior Justin Pilla.

While it will open things up offensively, Florence offensive coordinator Keith Virdell said the idea will be to keep it simple.

"We will be throwing the ball more this year," Virdell said. "We have a pretty efficient passing game that we are working on, right now, and we'll tie it to our running game."

EDEL HERNANDEZ

Photo by Andy Zavoina



CUTTER CALLAN

Photo by Andy Zavoina

BUFFS' DEFENSE RELYING ON SPEED, POWER

By C.J. Berryman

Florence head coach Zane Bode believes the right attitude can carry a football team, and he wants to see that attitude on display with his defense this fall.

"If you have a great attitude, there is no stopping you," Bode said. "If you have a poor attitude, there is no helping you.

"Our kids have a tremendous attitude. They want their teammate to be more successful than they are. When you've got that, and all the pieces are there and come together, I think we've got a chance to be competitive."

The Buffaloes will run the 3-4 this fall,

and defensive coordinator Richard Scales said the team will rely on speed, especially on the defensive line.

"Some of our fastest guys are actually on the line," Scales said. "That's where we kind of utilize their speed and power as the most explosive guys. Guys that will just tear you up, we're going to put them up front.

"We want them to make the offensive linemen move and just hate life."

Six-foot-tall, 190-pound senior Cutter Callan will be one of the defensive ends. Seniors Terrell Lee and Matthew Edgar will likely rotate at end opposite Callan.

At nose guard, senior Ethan Bowers will

start, but he will rotate with junior Alex Gamboa. Both players are starting offensive linemen, so the idea is to keep the two fresh by alternating them.

Juniors Landon Byrne and Weston Mathews will man the two middle linebacker spots. Senior Dylan Gray, juniors Jacob Cox and Justin Trussell, and sophomore Cameron Nauman will play outside linebacker.

In the secondary, senior Zack Pluhar and junior Justin Pilla will be the safeties with junior Mason Newlin rotating in. Seniors Martin Quenga and Damian Gamboa will be the cornerbacks with sophomore Peyton Wood rotating in.

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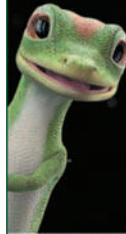
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FLORENCE MARCHING BAND



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PETE FREDENBURG

Photo by Andy Zavoina

CRUSADERS HAVE FREDENBURG'S FULL CONFIDENCE

Legendary head coach says: 'our players are hungry'



Photo by Michael Miller, FME News Service

By Allan Mandell

On July 1, 1997, the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor hired Pete Fredenburg to be its head football coach. There was no stadium. There was no field house. There was no equipment. There were no uniforms — because there were no players.

But UMHB had Fredenburg — and that was enough.

The former Baylor assistant coach — who earned the 1990 Southwest Conference Defensive Coach of the Year award — addressed his first Crusader football team on Aug. 14, 1998.

It's safe to say “losing” was not discussed.

Before three seasons were complete, Fredenburg had turned the Crusaders into a nationally ranked program.

In its fourth season, Fredenburg guided UMHB into the NCAA playoffs. In Year 5, the Crusaders were American Southwest Conference champions.

In 2004, UMHB was in the national championship contest. And

ever since, the Crusaders have remained a national power.

In 2013, the Crusaders moved into a \$20 million, 9,000-seat, state-of-the-art, on-campus football stadium.

Also in 2013, Fredenburg earned Division III NCAA National Coach of the Year honors.

In 2015, UMHB was 11-2.

Entering the 2016 season, UMHB is ranked No. 5 in America. Linfield, who eliminated the Crusaders from the 2015 NCAA tourney with a 38-35 last-second win, is ranked No. 2.

“I am very excited about this season,” Fredenburg said. “I know that loss to Linfield did not sit well at all with the leaders of our football team. We had an incredible and productive offseason. I like the fact that our players are hungry.”

Nowadays, as a national power, Fredenburg has his pick when it comes to hiring top-notch assistant coaches.

But make no mistake, no detail escapes Fredenburg's ever-darting eyes.

(continued on page 68)

(continued from page 67)

"I like the fact that our quarterback Blake Jackson has developed into an outstanding leader," Fredenburg said. "He had a great spring and I can tell he's ready to run our offense."

Senior defensive end Teidrick Smith is one of the top players in America. One guy can't block him. The 6-foot-2, 250-pound Smith collects sacks like mailmen pick up letters.

Senior defensive back Baylor Mullins anchors the secondary.

"Baylor Mullins has incredible skill and smarts," Fredenburg said. "And he's just one of a lot of players I'm excited to see play for us this season.

"We'll be banking on Duane Thompson to have a big year at running back. And the overall skill we have at receiver is as good as we've ever had here.

"Overall, I'm confident we'll be explosive on offense.

"And we're strong on defense, too. Haston Adams has picked up his game on the defensive line which means teams won't be able to focus so much on Teidrick. Matt Cody is tough and he returns at Mike linebacker.

Keith Reineke is solid at Will linebacker.

"Jaedon Johnson is very good at safety and we'll move Hunter Schmidt, who is very talented, from receiver to safety."

The Cru open the season at home Sept. 3 against Ohio Wesleyan.

"We know every week we get everybody's best game," Fredenburg said. "We always wanted to be looked at as a top program. We know we have a target on our back — and that's something we embrace."



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2016

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| 9/10 | TEXAS LUTHERAN UNIV. | SEGUIN, TX | 6:00PM |
| 9/17 | LINFIELD COLLEGE | BELTON, TX | 6:00PM |
| 10/1* | MCMURRY UNIV. | BELTON, TX | 1:00PM |
| 10/8* | HOWARD PAYNE UNIV. | BROWNWOOD, TX | 1:00PM |
| 10/15* | EAST TEXAS BAPTIST UNIV. | MARSHALL, TX | 1:00PM |
| 10/22* | HARDIN-SIMMONS UNIV. | BELTON, TX | 1:00PM |
| 10/29* | SUL ROSS STATE UNIV. | ALPINE, TX | 2:00PM |
| 11/5 | BELHAVEN UNIV. | JACKSON, MS | 1:00PM |
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CAN DEEP OFFENSE CARRY BEARS?

By Jordan Mason

The 2016 season was supposed to be one of great transition on one side of the ball for Baylor, but instead, it will be one of transition for the entire program.

Following a scandal that included the coverup of sexual assault allegations against former players, Baylor fired the engineer of its only two Big 12 titles, Art Briles, ending the most successful head coaching period in program history.

He was later replaced with former Wake Forest head coach Jim Grobe, whose time in Winston Salem included an Orange Bowl berth in 2006, when he was also named ACC Coach of the Year and AP Coach of the Year.

Former athletic director Ian McCaw was also dismissed and former chancellor Ken Starr also resigned, and on the field, the Bears lost the six best players from the 2016 recruiting class — including former Copperas Cove offensive tackle JP Urquidez (Texas) along with former blue-chip quarterback Jarrett Stidham — in the wake of scandal.

But all remnants of Briles' regime aren't gone.

Nearly all of his assistants were retained, and there is also plenty of talent remaining from a team that won 10 games and the Russell Athletic Bowl last season, albeit not on the defensive side of the ball.

Offensively, the Bears will get back senior quarterback Seth Russell, who posted 2,104 yards and 29 touchdowns in less than seven games before injuring his neck against Iowa State.

Baylor also returns senior running back Shock Linwood, who surpassed 1,000 rushing yards last season and enters his senior season 204 yards away from setting the school-career rushing mark.

Joining him in the backfield, and perhaps poised for a breakout season, is Shoemaker

product and redshirt junior Johnny Jefferson.

Jefferson set Baylor and Russell Athletic Bowl records last season with 299 yards rushing and three touchdowns in the Bears' 49-38 win against North Carolina.

Baylor also returns junior walk-on receiver and Gatesville product Cole Edmiston, who was the Bears' primary holder on placekicks last season and appeared in 14 games.

Kyle Fuller is the lone returning starter on the offensive line, but the presence of Russell and the two running backs — along with explosive wide receiver K.D. Cannon — ought to keep the Bear offense humming under offensive coordinator Kendal Briles.

The defense, however, returns no starters on the defensive line and just four total.

Keeping up with talented Big 12 offenses may be a challenge for the Bears, and Grobe said at Big 12 Media Days that the lack of depth up front may affect the schemes Baylor chooses to run.

But in a season surrounded by uncertainty, the Bears still will field one of the most talented teams in the conference with many of the same assistant coaches in place.

And as proven under Art Briles, that is enough to be in the top half of the league, and perhaps the league title conversation, if all goes well.



JIM GROBE

*Photo by Rod Aydelotte
Waco Tribune-Herald via AP*

PREDICTION
7-5



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CHARLIE STRONG

Photo by Associated Press

LONGHORNS HAVE A LOT TO BUILD ON

By Clay Whittington

The time for excuses is over.

In the two years since inheriting the head coaching job at Texas from Mack Brown, Charlie Strong has fought to turn the program around.

He spent his first seasons creating a new code of conduct, attempting to infuse the team with pride and elevate moral standards, but the efforts did not translate into victories as the Longhorns went 11-14 overall and failed to make a bowl game last year.

With pressure mounting for Texas to reclaim its position among the nation's elite, Strong understands there can be no more excuses.

"One of our themes right now is believe," Strong said during his Big 12 Media Day press conference. "I tell them all the time, 'If you don't believe in yourself, no one will ever believe in you.'"

"So it is time for everyone to start believing in themselves and get this program headed back in the right direction."

While the Longhorns still have a lot to prove, they also have a lot to build on.

After suffering through some embarrassing losses to Notre Dame, California, Oklahoma

State and TCU to start the season, Texas earned the biggest win of Strong's tenure with a 24-17 victory against bitter rival Oklahoma.

The momentum did not propel the Longhorns forward, however, as inconsistent performances caused them to lose three of their next five games before upsetting No. 12 Baylor in the season finale. It was Texas' first road win against a ranked team since 2012.

But moral victories will not be celebrated this season, especially by the public, who have shown their displeasure with the program's current situation by leaving gaping holes in the stands at home games.

"The expectations here are always high," Strong said, "which they should be. Why would you want it any other way?"

Local products Naashon Hughes, of Harker Heights, Zach Shackelford, of Belton, and J.P. Urquidez, of Copperas Cove, will help engineer the turnaround.

Hughes, a defensive end/outside linebacker, enters his junior season after producing 57 tackles, including a team-high nine tackles for a loss.

Meanwhile, Shackelford and Urquidez, who each play offensive line, are both

freshmen. Urquidez originally committed to Baylor before a scandal within the program led to his release and the decision to join the Longhorns, who also landed three other players from the Bears in the ordeal.

"Not only are they good players," Strong said, "but they're unbelievable young men and great character guys. That's why I told our team it's about us pulling them in, joining together and not ever making them feel like they don't belong because they do belong, and they're going to be a part of the success here."



SUMLIN LOOKING FOR STABILITY WITH KNIGHT



Photo by Associated Press

By C.J. Berryman

The 2015 season began positively for Texas A&M, but it did not end that way.

The Aggies started the campaign off 5-0, but a 41-23 loss at home to Alabama on Oct. 17 sent them into a downward spiral that saw them drop five of their final eight games to finish 8-5 overall. It concluded with a disheartening 27-21 loss to Louisville in the Music City Bowl on Dec. 30 in Nashville, Tenn.

Afterward, quarterbacks Kyle Allen and Kyler Murray elected to leave College Station to join Houston and Oklahoma, respectively, just one year after Kenny Hill bolted for TCU.

The constant unrest at quarterback, as well as the raising of expectations at Texas A&M

during the Johnny Manziel era, has put head coach Kevin Sumlin on the hot seat.

In the market for a quarterback this offseason after the sudden departures of Allen and Murray, Sumlin lured in Trevor Knight, a 6-foot-1, 215-pound dual-threat signal caller who spent three years at Oklahoma.

Under the NCAA's graduate-transfer rules, Knight, who graduated with his bachelor's degree in finance while playing for the Sooners, is eligible to play his senior season immediately. Sumlin all but handed the starting job to Knight over junior Jake Hubenak after his impressive performance during the spring.

At wide receiver, the Aggies return three starters who could be primed for an outstanding 2016 campaign in sophomore Christian Kirk, senior Josh Reynolds and junior Ricky Seals-Jones.

Five-foot-11, 215-pound junior running back Keith Ford, also a transfer from Oklahoma, has the body type and overall athleticism to be a big-play threat as well as a grinder out of the backfield, but Texas A&M will need more consistency out of its offensive line.

Defensively, its stud is Myles Garrett. The 6-foot-5, 262-pound junior registered 11 1/2 sacks and 19 1/2 tackles for a loss on his way to being selected as an Associated Press All-American a season ago.

Returning at end opposite Garrett is senior Daeshon Hall, who recorded seven sacks and 14 1/2 tackles for a loss in 2015.

The Aggies have some question marks at defensive tackle, however, where they are expected to have two new starters.

There is also some uncertainty at linebacker, although sophomores Otaru Alaka and Richard Moore could develop into a solid tandem.

A combination of juniors Priest Willis, Nick Harvey, Donovan Wilson and Armani Watts, and senior Justin Evans will lead a strong secondary.

Texas A&M will have to replace an outstanding kicker and punter on special teams, but Kirk returns as an all-conference return specialist.

The Aggies will be interesting to watch, and if Knight steps up and provides some consistency at quarterback, they could be looking at a 9-3 season.



PREDICTION:

8-4

MEAN GREEN WILL IMPROVE, BUT REBUILDING WILL TAKE TIME

By Brady Keane

The rebuilding process at North Texas is underway. After a season in which the Mean Green went 1-11, tied for the worst record in school history, the program enters 2016 with a new head coach in Seth Littrell.

The Mean Green were bad in just about every facet of the game last season, and ranked near the bottom of the Conference USA totem pole in most statistical categories. The team averaged just 15.2 points per game on offense and scored only 22 touchdowns in 12 games, and gave up more than 41 points per game defensively.

This year, Littrell will look to use a spread attack with a heavy emphasis on the passing game to give the Mean Green a more modern offensive attack. However, the only returning player that attempted a pass for the Mean Green last season is senior punter Eric Keena, as all three quarterbacks – DaMarcus Smith, Andrew McNulty and Josh Greer – either graduated or are no longer with the program.

Those departures opened the door for former Alabama quarterback Alec Morris to join the team as a graduate transfer. Morris was listed on the post-spring depth chart as the starter for the Mean Green going into the summer, but has not played in a game since his senior year at Allen High School.

In order for Littrell's spread offense to be successful, the Mean Green will also have to develop some playmakers. The returning Mean Green receivers combine for a career total of just 649 yards and three touchdowns, but were able to provide a glimmer of hope during the team's spring game in May.

Sophomore Tee Goree showed in the spring that he might be ready to break out this season, while sophomore O'Keeron Rutherford and freshman Kelvin Smith stood out as well. The three combined for 274 yards and three touchdowns in the spring game, and give Mean Green fans something to be excited about going into the season.

The team's best returning player is running back Jeffrey Wilson, who has the potential to be a 1,000-plus yard back on the ground if

he stays healthy and the offense is able to take some pressure off of him by being successful through the passing game. There are a lot of questions on the offensive line however, as the team returns just one starter in the trenches.

Defensively, the Mean Green should see significant improvement from top to bottom.

In Littrell's first season, the Mean Green will see improvement on both sides of the ball, but an immediate turnaround is unlikely.



PREDICTION:
3-9

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DENZEL JOHNSON

Photo by Associated Press

OUTSTANDING DEFENSE MAKES TCU TITLE CONTENDER

By C.J. Berryman

The last time TCU was on a football field, it was rallying from a 31-0 deficit in the Alamo Bowl to defeat Oregon 47-41 in three overtimes on Jan. 2.

That was just three days after starting quarterback Trevone Boykin was arrested and charged with assaulting a public servant at a bar in San Antonio. Boykin was replaced under center for the bowl game by fellow senior Bram Kohlhausen, who threw for 351 yards and two touchdowns in the come-from-behind victory.

Overall, the Horned Frogs went 11-2 last season and 7-2 in the Big 12 Conference, and while Boykin, Josh Doctson and five other offensive starters have been lost to graduation, they fully expect to be a threat for a league title once again.

A big reason for that optimism is what they have returning defensively.

Eight players are coming back to the 4-2-5 defense of TCU, including First Team All-Big 12 defensive end Josh Carraway. The 6-foot-4, 250-pounder registered 47 total tackles — 11 1/2 for a loss — and nine sacks

last year as a junior.

Also coming back on the defensive front are tackles Aaron Curry, a senior, and Chris Bradley, a junior.

Highly-touted junior Travin Howard will lead the linebackers, while sophomores Montrel Wilson and Ty Summers are expected to share the duties at the other linebacker spot.

Three of the Horned Frogs' five defensive backs — junior cornerback Nick Orr, senior safety Denzel Johnson and sophomore safety Ridwan Issahaku — are returning. The other two spots in the defensive secondary will likely be manned by junior Ranthony Texada and sophomore Niko Small.

But aside from junior tackle Joseph Noteboom, only a trio of wide receivers — junior Desmon White and sophomores KaVontae Turpin and Shaun Nixon — are coming back on offense.

The void Boykin leaves at quarterback is large, and the odds-on favorite to replace him is 6-foot-1 junior Kenny Hill. A transfer from Texas A&M after the 2014 season, Hill is battling with 6-foot-5 sophomore Foster Sawyer for the job.

With stud running back Aaron Green also lost to graduation, the TCU backfield will likely feature a combination of 5-foot-11,

226-pound junior Trevorris Johnson and 5-foot-10, 210-pound junior Kyle Hicks.

While there are a lot of moving parts to the offensive attack, it is not far-fetched to imagine the Horned Frogs having another double-digit-winning season.

It may hinge on Oct. 1, when they host Oklahoma for their fifth game of the season in Fort Worth. A win there could catapult them to an undefeated season and a conference title, and a loss could derail the whole thing.

Regardless if they win or lose to the Sooners that day, a 10-2 regular season appears to be in their future.



PREDICTION:
10-2

HOUSTON READY TO DEFEND AAC TITLE

By Clay Whittington

The Houston Cougars put together one of the best seasons in program history last year. Now, they will try to do it again.

With an overall record of 13-1, culminating with an impressive 38-24 victory against then-No. 8 Florida State in the Peach Bowl, Houston finished the season ranked No. 8 in both the AP Poll and Coaches Poll. It was the highest final ranking since ending the 1970 season at fifth.

During Tom Herman's first year as head coach, the Cougars averaged 40.4 points per game behind a stellar season from quarterback Greg Ward Jr. As a junior, Ward threw for 2,828 yards and 17 touchdowns, while rushing for 1,108 yards and 21 touchdowns.

While Ward returns for Houston, the offense is losing a number of playmakers, including running back Kenneth Farrow (185-

975, 12 touchdowns) and leading receiver Demarcus Ayers (98-1,222, 6 touchdowns).

The Cougars are also looking to replace some valuable pieces defensively after losing their top two tacklers. Elandon Roberts and Adrian McDonald each graduated after tallying 142 and 92 total tackles, respectively.

But there is still plenty of talent remaining. Along with Ward, cornerback Brandon Wilson, receiver Chance Allen, linebackers Tyus Bowser and Steven Taylor and center Will Noble were each named to preseason award watch lists.

Houston opens its season against Oklahoma at Houston's NRG Stadium on Sept. 3 before hosting Lamar the following week. The Cougars begin defense of their first American Athletic Conference championship since 2006 on Sept. 15 at Cincinnati.

In order to replicate last season's success, Houston will look to deliver another balanced performance.

Along with ranking 10th nationally in scoring offense, the Cougars also ranked 20th in scoring defense (20.7), becoming the only program in the nation to accomplish the feat.

Houston is rumored to be a highly coveted team by the Big 12 Conference, which is discussing expansion within the upcoming years.



PREDICTION:

11-1

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PATRICK MAHOMES II

Photo courtesy of Texas Tech Athletics

RED RAIDERS HAVE MAHOMES, NEED SOME D

By Allan Mandell

Scoring points wasn't a problem in 2015 for Texas Tech.

The Red Raiders (7-6), statistically, had the No. 2 ranked offense in America.

Behind the golden arm and fleet feet of quarterback Patrick Mahomes II, the Red Raiders averaged an eye-popping 45 points per game.

This year, Mahomes is back and he's surrounded by plenty of talent when Tech has the football.

The problem for the Red Raiders is their "defense."

Employing a hope-you-trip-while-you're-running philosophy, Tech was pathetic when opponents had the football.

The Red Raiders gave up 70 points to Oklahoma State, 63 points to Oklahoma, 63 points to Baylor and 55 to TCU.

All quality opponents to be sure.

But how does one justify giving up 45 points to Sam Houston State? A fine school as well but SHS enrolls around 16,000 stu-

dents, while Tech has close to 37,000.

Only three starters return from the 2015 Tech defense. And maybe that's a good thing. This is a unit that needs a new attitude — and a good starting point would be for all to understand that tackling a ball carrier is not a penalty.

Due to a reasonably soft schedule, the Red Raiders, with a little luck, could be 5-1 when they host Oklahoma on Oct. 22.

But if the Red Raider defenders are still collectively allergic to contact midyear, look for head coach and offensive guru Kliff Kingsbury to simply start going for it on fourth-and-anything.

Most likely, Oklahoma State quarterback Mason Rudolph has already marked Nov. 12 — a home game vs. Tech — as "Stat-Padding Day."

Then again, who knows?

As an old saying goes, the fact a football is pointy means it bounces funny — and anything can happen.

Tech is a big school, employs a solid head coach and recruits heavily in the top high

school football state in America. Plus, the 2016 Red Raiders have two key transfers, a nose tackle from Michigan, Ondre Pipkins, and defensive end from Notre Dame, Kolin Hill.

So maybe Tech can have a season with eight, possibly nine wins.

Mahomes is a legitimate candidate for the Heisman but he'll get ignored if the Red Raiders aren't at least a .500 team.



PREDICTION:
6-6



WYKEYHE WALKER

Photo by Andy Zavoina



CRUSADERS WILL TAKE ASC TITLE

By Allan Mandell

Pete Fredenburg's **Mary Hardin-Baylor** Crusaders have either won outright or tied for the American Southwest Conference title in 14 of the past 15 years.

This season, the Cru will be led by defensive lineman Teidrick Smith, one of the top players in America. But this is no one-man show. Smith is surrounded by a nasty cast of defenders who swarm to the football.

On offense, returning All-American guard Broderick Jenkins anchors an outstanding line. Wide receiver Wykeyhe Walker (57 receptions, 943 yards, 12 TDs) is a threat to score every time he touches the pigskin.

Quarterback Blake Jackson has a sweet arm, smarts and is a lethal runner. He's got halfback speed and a lineman's mentality, which means if Jackson is carrying the pill and he can sniff the end zone, he'll cross the goal line.

Last season, UMHB was upset by conference rival **Hardin-Simmons**, 29-26, and ultimately had to share the 2015 league title. The loss to the Cowboys ended a UMHB 60-game regular-season winning streak.

UMHB promptly made amends by knocking off Hardin-Simmons (37-19) in the 2015 playoffs.

But around eight weeks from now, on Oct. 22, the Cowboys must visit Crusader Stadium for an afternoon contest. Assume Fredenburg will give his Crusaders a gentle pregame reminder that some further payback for that 2015 regular-season loss would be welcome.

And so the prediction here is UMHB will defeat Hardin-Simmons, run the table in ASC play and capture the 2016 league crown.

The Cowboys do have a solid defense and should finish runner-up to the Crusaders.

East Texas Baptist was 7-3 in 2015 and returns plenty of talent and should finish third in the ASC.

On Sept. 17, Linfield College, the No. 2 team in America in pre-season polls, will travel from Oregon to Belton to face No. 5 UMHB in what could be the most hyped NCAA Division-III regular-season game of the year. **McMurray University**, new to the ASC, will be UMHB's next opponent. The War Hawks would like to catch the Crusaders in some sort of letdown — but that won't happen. McMurray will get beat by UMHB. But the War Hawks, making the move from Division II, have enough talent to finish fourth in the conference.

Louisiana College should finish fifth, followed by **Sul Ross State**, **Howard Payne** and **Belhaven**.



SOONERS STILL TEAM TO BEAT

BIG 12 (PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH)

By Allan Mandell

1 OKLAHOMA

It's an easy and obvious pick. The Sooners offense returns three starters from an already excellent offensive line. This is a unit filled with men that appreciate a good all-you-can-eat buffet.

They'll be blocking for one of the top quarterbacks in America, Baker Mayfield. And they'll be paving holes for running back Samaje Perine who churned out 1,349 rushing yards last season, averaging nearly 6 yards per carry.

The defense isn't nearly as good. But how good need it be when the Sooners offense will probably average close to 50 points per game?

2 TCU

Gary Patterson got kudos for another solid recruiting class. He's made winning a habit in Fort Worth and there is no reason to think the Horned Frogs won't stay on Oklahoma's heels all season.

3 TEXAS

Charlie Strong is on the proverbial hot seat.

The Longhorns could, and should, go 8-4 this season. And that should mean Strong won't need to rework his resume — for at least 12 months.

But if Texas goes 7-5, or worse, Strong will face questions such as these in December:

"Did you at least enjoy your three seasons at Texas?"

"What are your fondest memories of Austin?"

"Do you plan on ever coming back to 40 Acres for a visit?"

But enough negativity.

In 2016, the Longhorns will win eight games, possibly more, Strong says, he recruits another excellent class and the Longhorns will be in the thick of the 2017 Big 12 championship race.

4 OKLAHOMA STATE

They've got Mason Rudolph, an excellent quarterback, in Stillwater and 16 starters return from last year's 10-3 squad.

But the defense is vulnerable. The 2015 Cowboys gave up 45, 58 and 48 points in their last three games, all losses.

5 BAYLOR

Bears should be 3-0 before a tough home game against Oklahoma State on Sept. 24.

The prediction here is Texas defeats Baylor on Oct. 29.

6 WEST VIRGINIA

Not much to guess about with these guys lately. They win games they should win and they lose games they should lose. The Mountaineers, on paper, are better than seven of their 12 foes this year. So a 7-5 overall record seems reasonable.

7 TEXAS TECH

If the Red Raiders' defenders can be made to understand that it's not two-hand-touch at the NCAA level, Tech has a shot at a winning record. Scoring points should not be a problem. Tech quarterback Patrick Mahomes II is one of the best players in America.

8 KANSAS STATE

If you're looking for a long shot, consider rolling the dice on Bill Snyder and his Wildcats. Last season wasn't special (6-7) and nobody seems to be saying anything all that positive about K-State.

But Snyder is too good a coach to totally ignore.

9 IOWA STATE

Last Sept. 19, Matt Campbell's Toledo Rockets visited Ames and defeated Iowa State 30-23. Less than three months later, Iowa State hired Campbell.

According to some recruiting analyzers, Campbell had a big offseason, plucking plenty of blue-chippers.

Give Campbell a few seasons and he should turn things around in Ames.

10 KANSAS

The Jayhawks open the season Sept. 3 against Rhode Island. And they better win that one. In each of its next 11 games, Kansas, most likely, will be double-digit dogs.



GUS MALZAHN

Photo by Associated Press

FORECAST: ALABAMA WILL AGAIN TAKE SEC CROWN

SEC WEST (PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH)

By Allan Mandell

1 ALABAMA

Nick Saban doesn't recruit. He chooses. Bama will again have a sensational defense, score enough points to beat anyone and waltz into the SEC title game.

2 AUBURN

The Tigers were lousy on defense last year and even worse on offense. Auburn struggled to beat Jacksonville State in overtime in Week 2 and never caught traction.

Gus Malzahn is on the hot seat. Alumni are angry. Fans are angry. Expectations are low, which is when the Tigers most often stun the football world — and they'll do so again this year with a strong showing in the West.

3 LSU

LSU lost three in a row last season and Les Miles nearly lost his job. But LSU got to play Texas Tech in the season-ending Texas Bowl, used it as an offensive scrimmage, scored 56 points and, all of a sudden, optimism rules again in Baton Rouge.

And LSU should indeed win nine, 10 or 11 games this season. The Tigers got an excellent recruit in 2015 KDH All-Area Most Valuable Player Rahssan Thornton from Shoemaker. He'll be a force at linebacker sooner rather than later.

4 TEXAS A&M

Playing in the toughest division in the best conference in the nation makes things tough on Kevin Sumlin & Company. But if the Aggies can finish fourth in the SEC West — and they have the talent to do so — they'll be a top 20 team in America.

5 OLE MISS

Well who isn't already biting their nails in anticipation of the Ole Miss-Wofford game scheduled for Sept. 10?

What's especially curious about Mississippi's scheduling of this gimme game on Sept. 10 is the very next week the Rebs host the Crimson Tide.

Call us kooky here, but not sure Wofford will be able to actually simulate the team speed of Alabama.

Rebs will be 8-4 at best, perhaps fall to 6-6.

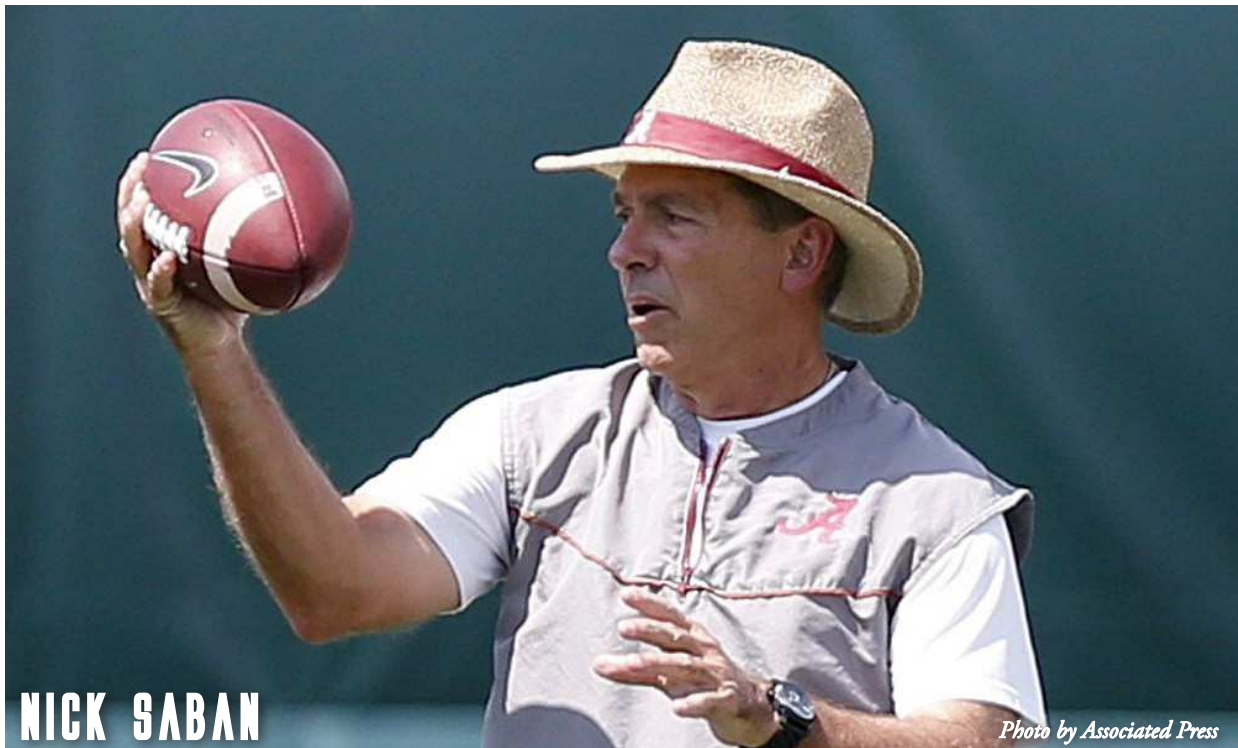
6 ARKANSAS

One of these years, Bret Bielema will explain the head-scratching move he made from Wisconsin, where he won most weeks — 68-24 in his seven years there — to Arkansas, where he gets absolutely whipped twice a month. He's 18-20 in three seasons in Fayetteville.

The Razorbacks give up too many points to challenge in this division.

7 MISSISSIPPI STATE

Quarterback Dak Prescott is now wearing Dallas Cowboy blue and the 2016 Bulldogs will be singing the blues. This is a rebuilding season in Starkville.



NICK SABAN

Photo by Associated Press

SEC EAST (PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH)

By Allan Mandell

1 FLORIDA

If winning games helps build confidence, Florida should have some swagger. Its nonconference schedule includes Presbyterian, Massachusetts and North Texas.

The 2016 Gators catch a scheduling break by missing Bama.

Georgia is probably the only team in the East that can beat Florida.

2 GEORGIA

Talk about a rough fan base, tough alumni group, brutal administrators.

In 15 years as top Dog at Georgia, Mark Richt took his team to a bowl in all 15 seasons, won 74 percent of his games and was 49-17 the past five years.

But that wasn't good enough for the powers that be at Georgia and Richt was told to look for a new job within hours of the Bulldogs 13-7 victory over archrival Georgia Tech on Nov. 28.

Richt did leave a lot of talent in Athens and the Dogs may edge out Florida for the East title.

3 TENNESSEE

A little calm might be in order here.

The Vols won their last six games in 2015 and, all of a sudden, Knoxville is planning a national championship parade after this season concludes.

Take a closer look: Five of those six wins were against Kentucky, a weak South Carolina, North Texas, Missouri and Vanderbilt.

Tennessee starts out the 2016 season with three winnable games and

ends it with five cupcakes. In between, the Vols will have four losses — to Florida, Georgia, A&M and Alabama.

4 KENTUCKY

The Wildcats haven't been to a bowl game since 2010 and maybe it's just as well. What fan of Kentucky University would travel to a bowl during hoops season?

5 VANDERBILT

A soft schedule means Vandy could go 6-6 this season and get to a bowl game. Vandy won't play Bama, LSU, Arkansas or A&M.

6 SOUTH CAROLINA

Steve Spurrier got out-recruited the past few seasons, got his butt kicked a few too many times and skipped town. It'll take a year or two to rebuild in Columbia.

7 MISSOURI

In 2015, the defense was excellent but the offense was pitiful. The Tigers didn't look like they wanted to block anybody — ever, which made running the ball very difficult. Passing didn't work all that well either.

Of Missouri's top seven recruits this season, none were offensive linemen. This should be another rough year for the Tigers.

PREDICTION: SEC CHAMPIONSHIP
GAME — ALABAMA OVER FLORIDA

CEN-TEX EXES

AREA ATHLETES PLAYING COLLEGE AND PRO FOOTBALL

| NAME | YR. | POS. | SCHOOL | HIGH SCHOOL | NOTEWORTHY |
|-----------------------|-----|-------|----------------|---------------|--|
| LAMONT ALEXANDER | SO. | DT | S.F. AUSTIN | KILLEEN | STARTED 1 GAME AS FROSH, PLAYED IN ALL 11 |
| LAJARIUS ANTHONY | FR. | DL | PANHANDLE ST. | ELLISON | CAPPED PREP CAREER ON ALL-DISTRICT FIRST TEAM |
| CAMERON ARMSTRONG | SO. | WR | UMHB | ELLISON | 2 TFL, 1 SACK IN 2015 |
| D'ANDRE BANKS | SR. | OL | KANSAS | HARKER HTS | STARTED 9 GAMES AT RG IN DIVISION I DEBUT |
| JEFF BANKS | JR. | TE | TEXAS STATE | KILLEEN | 4 TFL IN FIVE STARTS IN 2015 AS DE |
| MARIN BILETIC | SR. | DL | SO. NAZARENE | ELLISON | PLAYED IN 3 GAMES BEFORE SEASON-ENDING INJURY |
| QWOY BLUNT | SO. | WR | SW OKLA. ST. | SHOEMAKER | SAW ACTION IN 3 GAMES AS REDSHIRT FROSH |
| JOSH BOYCE | 3Y | WR | COLTS (NFL) | C. COVE | FORMER PATRIOT SIGNED BY COLTS IN APRIL |
| TRENT CANION | FR. | RB | W. TEXAS A&M | C. COVE | AVERAGED 6.7 YDS PER CARRY AS COVE SENIOR |
| DIAMON CANNON | FR. | LB | TULSA | SHOEMAKER | REDSHIRTED LAST SEASON |
| DARIAN CHILDERS-BROWN | SR. | DL | MIDWESTERN ST. | COPPERAS COVE | ALL-LONE STAR CONFERENCE HONORABLE MENTION |
| DAVID COBB | 1Y | RB | TITANS (NFL) | ELLISON | BATTLED INJURIES, STARTED SEASON FINALE AND RAN FOR 73 YARDS |
| JAMES COLLINS | JR. | OL | UMHB | SALADO | |
| ISHMAEL DAVIS | SO. | DE | TEXAS STATE | ELLISON | 1 START AS FROSH LB, HAD 10 TACKLES VS. GA. SOUTHERN |
| NIGEL DEAS | SR. | LB | HOWARD PAYNE | ELLISON | 4 TFL, 1 SACK IN 2014, DID NOT SEE ACTION LAST SEASON |
| CHRIS DUNCAN | SO. | DL | KAN. WESLEYAN | HARKER HTS | EXPECTED TO PROVIDE DEPTH ON D-LINE |
| SIR-DARREN DUNCAN | FR. | LB | PANHANDLE ST. | SHOEMAKER | WOLVES' SECOND-LEADING TACKLER IN 2015 |
| COLE EDMISTON | JR. | WR | BAYLOR | GATESVILLE | SAW ACTION IN 13 GAMES LAST SEASON |
| COOPER EDMISTON | FR. | LB | TULSA | GATESVILLE | CO-DISTRICT DEFENSIVE PLAYER OF YEAR |
| ROBERT GRIFFIN III | 5Y | QB | BROWNS (NFL) | C. COVE | WAS NAMED BROWNS NO. 1 QB IN EARLY AUGUST |
| BRANDON HAMILTON | SR. | S | RICE | C. COVE | SWITCHED TO DEFENSE IN SPRING AFTER 2 SEASONS AS RB |
| BLAKE HARRIS | SR. | DB | KAN. WESLEYAN | C. COVE | 27 TACKLES, 3 PBU, 1 FF, 2 FR IN 2015 |
| MANNY HARRIS | FR. | QB | UTSA | C. COVE | REDSHIRTED AFTER OBLITERATING MOST OF COVE'S PASSING RECORDS |
| RA'SHAUN HENRY | FR. | WR | ST. FRANCIS | C. COVE | LED DAWGS IN RECEIVING (22-497, 6 TDS) |
| DAVONN HOPKINS-PHELPS | FR. | WR | W. TEXAS A&M | C. COVE | PLAYED QB AND WR AT COVE |
| CHRIS HUGHES | FR. | OL | KANSAS | HARKER HTS | MISSED SENIOR SEASON WITH OFFSEASON INJURY |
| NAASHON HUGHES | JR. | LB/DE | TEXAS | HARKER HTS | LED TEAM WITH 9 TFL AND WAS 2ND IN SACKS (5.5) |
| BREYON JACKSON | SO. | DB | SO. NAZARENE | C. COVE | HAD 55 TACKLES, 1 INT, 1 FR IN FROSH SEASON |
| DARIUS JAMES | JR. | OL | AUBURN | HARKER HTS | SAT OUT LAST SEASON AFTER TRANSFER FROM TEXAS |
| TYLER JAYNES | JR. | DB | BAYLOR | GATESVILLE | 3 TACKLES (1 SOLO) IN 8 GAMES IN 2015 |
| JOHNNY JEFFERSON | JR. | RB | BAYLOR | SHOEMAKER | WAS MVP (299 YDS, 3TDS) OF RUSSELL ATHLETIC BOWL |
| JOSH KLENCLO | FR. | OL | TYLER JC | C. COVE | EARNED SECOND-TEAM ALL-DISTRICT HONORS LAST SEASON |
| ANTONIO LEALHIEE | FR. | RB | A&M COMMERCE | C. COVE | RANKED FIFTH IN CLASS 6A RUSHING YARDS |
| SHAMAD LOMAX | FR. | DB | NEW MEXICO ST. | C. COVE | TWO-TIME ALL-DISTRICT FIRST TEAM DB |
| ZACH MACK | FR. | OL | S.F. AUSTIN | GATESVILLE | WAS THREE-YEAR STARTER FOR HORNETS |
| JALIL MAXWELL | FR. | LB | SO. NAZARENE | HARKER HTS | KNIGHTS DE MOVES TO LINEBACKER |

LIST COMPILED BY MARK W. MILLER

| NAME | YR. | POS. | SCHOOL | HIGH SCHOOL | NOTEWORTHY |
|-----------------------|-----|-------|--------------------|----------------|--|
| ROY MILLER | 8Y | DT | JAGUARS (NFL) | SHOEMAKER | 40 TACKLES, 4 SACKS, 1 FUMBLE IN 16 STARTS |
| CALEB MOSES | JR. | LB | TEXAS ST. | ELLISON | FORMER WR TRANSFERRED FROM SOUTHWESTERN |
| JUSTIN MURPHY | SO. | OL | TEXAS TECH | BELTON | STARTED 4 GAMES AT RG BEFORE SEASON-ENDING INJURY |
| NATHANIEL NANAI | FR. | OL | W. TEXAS A&M | SHOEMAKER | SECOND-TEAM ALL-DISTRICT IN FINAL PREP SEASON |
| BOBBY JOE NIELSEN | JR. | OL | MIDWESTERN ST. | LAMPASAS | ALL-LSC HONORABLE MENTION LONG-SNAPPER |
| JAKOB POPPLE | JR. | OL | PANHANDLE ST. | SALADO | RETURNING STARTER FOR THE AGGIES |
| PHILIP REDWINE-BRYANT | FR. | WR | TEXAS TECH ACADEMY | HARKER HEIGHTS | RESIDENT SERVED ON OSU SCOUT TEAM |
| PEYTON SEARCY | SO. | DL | A&M-COMMERCE | KILLEEN | 2TFL, 1 SACK IN 11 GAMES AS FROSH |
| ZACH SHACKELFORD | FR. | OL | TEXAS | BELTON | TRUE FRESHMAN EXPECTED TO START RIGHT AWAY |
| DURHAM SMYTHE | SR. | TE | NOTRE DAME | BELTON | 1 TD BEFORE SEASON ENDING INJURY IN 2ND GAME |
| TYREL STOKES | SR. | S | SAM HOUSTON | HARKER HTS | PLAYED IN ALL 15 GAMES AS BACKUP, 1 INT |
| PAYNE SULLINS | SO. | QB | TEXAS TECH | WACO REICHER | GATESVILLE NATIVE APPEARED IN 1 GAME IN 2015 |
| MICHAEL SUMRALL | SO. | LB | SE OKLAHOMA | C. COVE | MADE 5 TACKLES IN SPRING GAME |
| OLAJUWON TAYLOR | FR. | WR | W. TEXAS A&M | BELTON | LED TIGERS IN RECEIVING IN 2015 |
| DAVID TEMPLE JR. | JR. | LB | HOWARD PAYNE | KILLEEN | DID NOT SEE TIME ON FIELD IN 2015 |
| DUKE THOMAS | R | CB | TEXANS (NFL) | C. COVE | EX-LONGHORN SIGNED AS UNDRAFTED FREE AGENT |
| RAHSSAN THORNTON | FR. | LB | LSU | SHOEMAKER | RANKED NO. 61 PROSPECT IN THE NATION BY ESPN |
| COLTON TUIASOSOPO | FR. | OL | TYLER JC | C. COVE | ONE OF TWO DAWGS ON APACHES' OL |
| JP URQUIDEZ | FR. | OL | TEXAS | C. COVE | CHOSE HORNS AFTER RELEASE FROM BAYLOR COMMITMENT |
| ERIQ VELEZ | FR. | OL/DL | UMHB | KILLEEN | |
| ZAKERRIUS WALKER | FR. | RB | PANHANDLE ST. | SHOEMAKER | EARNED SECOND-TEAM ALL-DISTRICT HONORS LAST SEASON |
| JAYLEN WATERS | FR. | LB | MINNESOTA | C. COVE | REDSHIRTED LAST SEASON |
| DEVYN WILLIAMS | JR. | WR | PANHANDLE ST. | KILLEEN | AGGIES' TOP RETURNING WR (42-651, 8 TDS) |
| DWAYNE WILLIAMS | SO. | CB | OREGON STATE | SHOEMAKER | 4 TACKLES IN 2015, LIKELY TO START THIS SEASON |
| COREY WILSON | FR. | LB | W. TEXAS A&M | SHOEMAKER | ONE OF TOP DEFENSIVE PLAYERS IN CENTRAL TEXAS |

NOTE: THIS IS NOT A COMPREHENSIVE LIST. SOME COLLEGE ROSTERS WERE UNAVAILABLE AT PRESS TIME.





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