



High School Football Preview 2022



Petty, Jackets poised for grand season

Photo by Austin Frayser

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Austin Frayser via Scorebook Live

Starkville quarterback Trey Petty wasn't the unquestioned starter heading into the 2021 season, but he won the job and ran with it. Petty had a breakout season as a sophomore, launching him onto a national stage.

Petty focused on here and now with Jackets ahead of 2022 season

BY COLIN DAMMS
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Last Oct. 1, the Starkville Yellow Jackets came into the fourth quarter against Clinton down 21-14.

They found the end zone with just a couple minutes left to tie the game. A quick stop on defense and change of possession gave them the chance to win, and with 59 seconds left on the clock, sophomore quarterback Trey Petty found Braylon Burnside for a 30-yard touchdown. Starkville beat Clinton, 28-21.

Standing at about the 20-yard line, watching this happen, I turned to a man dressed in an SHS polo and hat after the play.

"Is this quarterback really a sophomore?" I asked.

He smiled.

"Yes," he said, "he is."

Petty threw for 240 yards and all four touchdowns in that game, rushing for over 100 more yards. It was the Jackets' third straight comeback win and their fifth win in five games. The young team led by a young quarterback would finish just one game short of a berth in the state championship game.

The season was a roller-coaster journey for Petty, but looking back he feels the experience validated the confidence he had in himself all along.

A year later, the new season is approaching, and the Jackets are considered true contenders. Petty is a three-star prospect according to both Rivals and 247 Sports, and he's ranked near the top of the 2024 class of Mississippi recruits. From just his sophomore campaign, he's generated interest from multiple Division I schools, including three Southeastern Conference programs, and he has offers from Mississippi State and Southern Miss.

But if you ask him, he's not caught up in any of that. He's focused on what he's got right now.

"I want to win it all, 15-0," Petty said. "I think we can do it. We've got the guys to do it, more experience on defense and the same guys on offense, so I feel like we can do it. I feel like the defense is playing with more aggression; they're hungrier this year. To be honest, sometimes in practice I don't even have time to throw the ball. They're playing like dogs this year, and I like it. That gives me more chances to score with the ball."

Petty is now the Jackets' established starter less than a year after he had to beat out Jaquez Harris for the first-string position in Starkville.

"I was still competing for the starting

spot, and my mindset was just compete and do what I could to get it," he said. "Me and (Harris), we were both doing well, I didn't think either one of us was better than the other really. It was Coach's decision at the end of the day."

Harris and Petty shared playing time in a messy Week 1 win over Columbus, but Petty cemented himself as the starter in a 38-7 win at Olive Branch in Week 2. From there, his confidence in himself and the offense only grew.

"I'm a competitive person, so I'm gonna go out there and compete no matter who's on the other side, but I think I definitely got better as the season went on, and that built my confidence even more," Petty said.

Petty has been a quarterback since he was 7 years old. In Pee Wee football, he played with a lot of guys he still plays with now for the Jackets. He's got several friends on the team, and for now, he's not worried about the pressure of being a top quarterback recruit. He enjoys playing the game with his friends, and that connection is just as important to him as winning.

"It's good; it shows our community is heading in the right direction, not everybody is involved in the streets and stuff nowadays with the team, and I think the chemistry is better because we've been playing so long together," Petty said. "We hang out all the time, outside of school and practice on the weekends, stay at each other's houses, and do all sorts of stuff outside of football."

Petty enjoys getting away from the game every once in a while, playing video games with his friends, going out to the pool or playing basketball and just being a kid while he still can be.

The pressure of being recruited by college programs hasn't gotten to him, and while he knows he will have to make a decision eventually — he has set the goal of playing quarterback for a Power Five program — he's not distracted. He wants to win with Starkville, and he wants to take things as they come. More importantly, he just wants to play ball.

"Schools talk to me as much as they can, obviously as a sophomore they couldn't really but I took as many visits as I could," Petty said. "It's been going good. Lots of coaches have been interested in me. Honestly right now I'm just trying to let that play out. I'm playing ball, and if it comes it comes. By my senior year, that's when I really need to make decisions about my future with football and thinking about the next level, but for now I'm just playing ball."



Austin Frayser via Scorebook Live

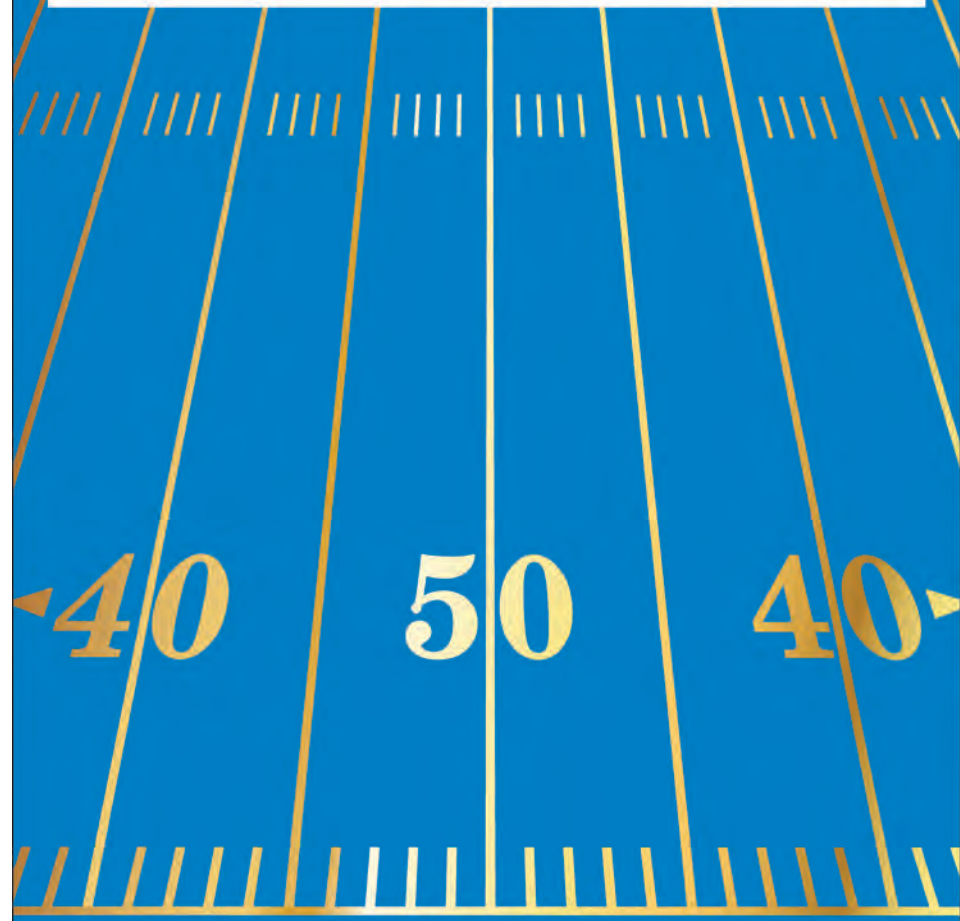
Trey Petty is aiming to play Power Five football, but the Starkville quarterback isn't worried about college just yet. "Honestly right now I'm just trying to let that play out," Petty said. "I'm playing ball, and if it comes it comes."



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Columbus Falcons



Mississippi High School Activities Association: Class 5A, Region 1; 2021 Record 4-7 (3-4 Class 5A, Region 1)

Athleticism the key to successful 2022 for young Columbus team

BY THEO DEROSA
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After hearing the question, Columbus football coach Joshua Pulphus let out a long, loud whistle that echoes through the hallway of the team's field house.

It's not hard to tell how much Pulphus thinks of the Falcons' previous senior class.

"Whew, that's a lot of production," the fourth-year head coach said. "That's a lot of experience, a lot of ballgames we lost. We're going to miss them."

The departure of a strong corps of seniors leaves Columbus with a young and small — yet talented — team as the Falcons enter the 2022 season.

"The strength of our team this year is not experience but athleticism," Pulphus said. "We're not the biggest team. We're pretty small, so we're going to rely on our athleticism to keep us in a lot of ballgames."

The list of players the Falcons graduated is impressive. Defensive linemen Isaiah Harris and Derrick McCray signed with local community colleges. Running back Tawoon Troop and linebacker/kicker Darion Mosley did the same, as did defensive backs Elijah Short IV and Michael Mosley. Linebacker Jamarion Moody, who racked up more than 100 tackles in 2021, graduated as well.

Plenty of other Columbus players moved on, too, leaving a much less battle-tested roster to begin 2022.

"I'm going to miss them because that was a



Jim Lytle/Special to the Dispatch
Columbus High School quarterback Jaquavious Bankhead (8) throws a pass during practice on Wednesday.

good class right there," senior lineman Chris Martin said. "I feel like we really needed them."

The Falcons will have to make do with what they have in 2022, and what they have is still quite a bit.

Senior defenders Hemyar Nagi and Antonio O'Neal return. So do two-way linemen in Martin and senior Tyrese Erby. Khristian Watson leads the Falcons' wide receiver corps, while a pair of talented players will battle it out at quarterback.

Pulphus said junior Jaquavious Bankhead and sophomore Darius Miller are competing for the starting job vacated by

graduated senior Omari Williams.

Watson praised Bankhead's decision-making and accuracy with the football.

"He's going to be one of the best quarterbacks to come through here," the wide receiver predicted.

Erby, meanwhile, mentioned senior Tyrone Sherrod-Payne — known as "T Payne" — as another potential candidate at signal-caller.

"We've got a deep ball guy (Bankhead)," Erby said. "We've got a guy who can do it all (Payne). We've got guys."

Not all of them are seniors, either. Pulphus said



Jim Lytle/Special to the Dispatch
Columbus High School receiver Antonio Johnson Jr. (41) catches a pass during practice on Wednesday.

junior Reginald Wilkins is set to start at running back, having claimed the starting job with a strong offseason showing.

Wilkins is one of several young Falcons who have approached the maturation process the right way, according to his coach.

"We lost a lot of production last year, but we have a good group of younger guys who actually sat back and watched and paid attention and saw how those guys carried the torch," Pulphus said. "We've been excited to see them grow, but we've also seen them learn from the (things) the previous group did wrong. It's good

to see them mature in the process of all that."

Now it's time to see how the Falcons stack up against a perpetually tough schedule both in and out of MHSAA Class 5A, Region 1. Columbus' non-district opponents include three Class 6A teams — Starkville, Southaven and Tupelo — as well as perennial Class 4A contender Louisville.

Pulphus said the Falcons' record in the four-game stretch doesn't matter, but the experience they'll gain will — a lesson his players seem to have taken to heart.

"If you play the best people in the state, it makes you better," Wat-



2022 Schedule
Aug. 26: vs. Starkville*
Sept. 2: at Southaven*
Sept. 9: at Louisville*
Sept. 16: vs. Tupelo*
Sept. 23: vs. New Hope*
Sept. 30: vs. Greenville*
Oct. 7: at Lafayette
Oct. 14: at Cleveland Central
Oct. 21: vs. Sallisaw
Oct. 28: vs. Lake Cormorant
Nov. 3: at West Point
 *All starred games begin at 7:30 p.m. due to an MHSAA mandate for varsity football games in August and September. All other games begin at 7 p.m. unless otherwise noted.

son said. "It makes you get better. It makes you win championships along the way."

Columbus, which hasn't had a winning season since 2015, has a ways to go in that regard. But there are encouraging signs so far, particularly when it comes to jump-starting an offense that has been sluggish for years.

"I know we've got the fastest team in the state for sure," Erby said. "... We've got pretty much the best O-line I've ever seen here. I guarantee we're going to be running the ball and passing really well."

And even despite the losses on the other side of the ball, Erby and the Falcons seemed optimistic about keeping opponents off the board in 2022.

"I feel like Columbus High has always been known for their defense, so we're going to do what we're going to do when it's time," he said.



Jim Lytle/Special to the Dispatch
Columbus High School offensive lineman Chris Martin executes a blocking drill during practice on Wednesday.



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New Hope Trojans



Mississippi High School Activities Association: Class 5A, Region 1; 2021 Record 5-5 (2-5 Class 5A, Region 1)

Sizable senior class could fuel breakout year for New Hope

BY THEO DEROSA
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NEW HOPE — It took New Hope High School football coach Seth Stillman over a minute to count up the number of seniors on his roster.

For the Trojans in 2022, that could be a very good thing.

Last year's New Hope team had 13 seniors. This season's squad features 25.

So the stage is set for a big year for Stillman's team — if his crop of seniors can make it happen.

"I think we have a chance to be as good as our seniors are," Stillman said. "We have a lot of senior leadership this year."

Chief among those senior leaders are linebacker Alex McCarter, defensive back Alex Dawkins, running back Ladarius Tate, linebacker Qua Sherrod and defensive end Zach Dismuke.

Four out of those five play defense, part of a New Hope team returning nine defensive starters, including rising sophomore linebacker Jeremiah Harkins. The Trojans posted three shutout wins last season, and their defense this year could be even better.

"Defense, you can get momentum from that," Dawkins said. "You can change games because if they can't score, they can't win."

On the flip side, though, New Hope was itself shut out three times and averaged only 18.4 points per game. The Trojans graduated quarterback Ty Crowell, wide



New Hope quarterback Ty Crowell is tripped up during a 2020 game against Saltillo. Crowell was one of 13 seniors to graduate after the 2021 season, but the Trojans bring back 25 seniors for the 2022 campaign.

receiver Richard Guy and three starting offensive linemen, including Ty Jackson and Jeremiah Jefferson.

New Hope has just four returning offensive starters — Tate, two linemen (both of whom started as freshmen) and pass-catcher Grant Fleming.

"Once we start to jell at offensive line, I think we can be dangerous and play well," Stillman said. "We have a chance to be probably as good as our offensive line is."

The Trojans already made a jump in their first season under Stillman, who was promoted from defensive coordinator after coach Wade Tackett resigned. New Hope went 6-28 in three seasons under Tackett but posted a respectable 5-5 campaign in 2021 despite missing the playoffs.

"Most of the years, we haven't been getting that many wins, but last year we were a little bit better," McCarter said.

New Hope's 2021 season was slated to start

off with a county rivalry game against Caledonia, but the contest was canceled because of COVID-19 concerns with the Cavaliers.

This time around, the two teams will meet in the Aug. 26 season opener in New Hope before the Trojans play non-district games against Itawamba Agricultural and Shannon.

"It means a ton, especially with it being Week 1 for both teams," Stillman said. "I think that kind of jump-starts us

into the year. If you can pick that one up, it really makes believers out of your team, and then you can move on to the rest of your nonconference and then hopefully build on that in your district games. I think it's imperative that you win that game to really get the season moving."

McCarter took a different tack in describing the importance of games against Caledonia and MHSAA Region 1-5A rival Columbus.

"I'm very excited to



2022 Schedule
Aug. 26: vs. Caledonia*
Sept. 2: at Shannon*
Sept. 16: at Itawamba AHS*
Sept. 23: at Columbus*
Sept. 30: vs. West Point*
Oct. 7: at Greenville
Oct. 14: vs. Lafayette
Oct. 21: at Lake Cormorant
Oct. 28: at Cleveland Central
Nov. 3: vs. Saltillo
 *All starred games begin at 7:30 p.m. due to an MHSAA mandate for varsity football games in August and September. All other games begin at 7 p.m. unless otherwise noted.

play them because they talk a lot of trash," he said.

New Hope chipped in its own bit of trash talk about the Cavaliers and Falcons, though.

"We think we can beat them — we know we can beat them," Dawkins said. "We've just got to execute when it's time. Everybody's got to be on the same page and click."

It's a pretty good way to sum up every game on the Trojans' schedule. If New Hope's multitude of seniors can live up to their billing, it could be the breakout year the Trojans have waited for.

If not...

"If they continue to work hard and continue to lead the way, the sky's the limit," Stillman said. "But if they don't, then we're going to continue to sit at that average mark until they continue to push us there. I think we've got a chance to be pretty good."

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Caledonia Cavaliers



Mississippi High School Activities Association: Class 4A, Region 1; 2021 Record 11-3 (4-1 Class 4A, Region 1)



Austin Frayser/Special to the Dispatch

Caledonia quarterback Daniel Wilburn finds a hole in the Amory defense during the Cavaliers' 30-18 home win over the Panthers in this Sept. 3 file photo.

North state loss won't stop Caledonia from setting the standard high

BY THEO DEROSA
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CALEDONIA — The pain is everywhere.

It's in the bedroom of Caledonia left tackle Judd Shelnut, who wrote down the fateful score on a board so he can read it every morning.

It's in the bathroom of coach Michael Kelly, whose wife affixed a picture of the Cavaliers' final shortcoming onto the mirror.

Caledonia might not be talking openly about last year's loss to Senatobia in the north state championship game, but the Cavs sure haven't forgotten it.

"We fought hard; obviously, we came up short," quarterback Daniel Wilburn said. "We don't really want to talk about it, but we're using it as a mindset."

How short, exactly? Two inches, according to Kelly — but perhaps none at all. The Cavaliers were the victim of a bad spot by the officiating crew, taking what looked like a clear first down away from them on a late-game Wilburn run. That brought up fourth-and-inches, and Wilburn was stuffed on another close play with another controversial spot.

Caledonia's historic season was over, but the Cavs maintain their program is still intact — and hopefully still on the rise.

"We were two inches short, but they still trust me to come to work, and



Austin Frayser/Special to The Dispatch

Caledonia High School linebacker Shepherd Donald makes a tackle for loss early in Thursday night's 49-7 home victory over Tishomingo County in this Oct. 8 file photo.

I trust them to show up to work," Kelly said. "Hopefully we can overcome those two inches this year, and I think we'll surprise a few people."

The Cavaliers won't catch as many of their opponents by surprise as last season, when they won a playoff game for the first time in school history — then won two more.

But they graduated several key players, including running back Darrius Triplett, fullback Curtavis Johnson, defender Darquez Williams, tight end Will Donald, defensive lineman Antwaun Adkins and offensive lineman Tyshawn Graham.

Not everyone is gone, of course.

"We graduated great young men," Kelly said,

"but we've got great young men still sitting in that locker room. We have a great senior and junior class. Some of them just never had to step out there and do it, but they're fixing to. I expect these young men who have done it to lead them to the promised land."

Wilburn is back for his senior year. Karsten Gullette, a three-year starter at safety who also plays slot back on offense, is back for his senior season. Shep Donald returns at inside linebacker, Reed Frady is back at kicker, and senior Parker Harris will replace Graham at right tackle.

"These guys can play," Kelly promised.

They'll have to as they

step into new roles in a district still new to Caledonia. The Cavs were moved from MHSAA Region 2-4A to Region 1-4A, with only Mooreville joining them in the swap.

Caledonia gained four new region opponents in Corinth, Itawamba Agricultural, Shannon and Tishomingo County.

In 2021, the Cavs beat three of them. Itawamba dealt Caledonia a late loss to clinch the region crown — Caledonia's only defeat save a COVID-19-related forfeit to rival New Hope in the season opener.

"We have a great division, but I think our young men have made their name in Region 1-4A also," Kelly said. "We hope people are saying the same thing about

us: 'Ooh, we've got to go to Caledonia and play, and I don't look forward to it.'"

A rematch with New Hope on Aug. 26 begins the Cavaliers' 2022 season, and Caledonia is counting down the days — literally.

Gullette said he instituted a countdown on his Snapchat story in advance of the road matchup with the Trojans.

"We're at 51 days right now until we play New Hope," Gullette said in mid-July. "I'm ready. We're all ready. You can all tell in there. It's the big talk about it."

But early in summer workouts, Kelly expressed doubt about that.

Caledonia, he said, was a long way from being ready for its Aug. 26 bus trip to south Lowndes County.

"We've got some young kids that we still need to grow up," he said. "The biggest thing I'm concerned with with our team right now is they still need to find their identity. They're not last year's team. We had a really good football team last year, but there's a lot of people in the state of Mississippi who had real good football teams, and that has nothing to do with this year."

Of course, the Cavaliers' record-setting 2021 still matters — especially for the players who still remain.

"It's great because everybody's like, 'It's just



2022 Schedule

- Aug. 26: at New Hope*
 - Sept. 2: at Amory*
 - Sept. 9: vs. Holly Springs*
 - Sept. 16: at Nettleton*
 - Sept. 23: vs. Aberdeen*
 - Sept. 30: vs. Corinth*
 - Oct. 7: at Tishomingo County
 - Oct. 14: at Mooreville
 - Oct. 21: vs. Itawamba AHS
 - Oct. 27: vs. Shannon
- *All starred games begin at 7:30 p.m. due to an MHSAA mandate for varsity football games in August and September. All other games begin at 7 p.m. unless otherwise noted.

Caledonia,' but now we're up there," Wilburn said. "Now we're trying to prove ourselves to other people."

That's not always easy given Caledonia's history. In more than 50 years of football, the Cavaliers made the playoffs just six times prior to 2021. Each time, they lost in the first round.

As recently as 2017, Caledonia went winless.

"That 0-10 team, that was a sorry team," Shelnut said. "That team didn't do anything. That showed, because they didn't win anything. And when we actually get our crap together, we go and win 11 games. We'll beat people."

"As long as we can keep up that standard, there will be something to show for it."

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Columbus Christian Academy Rams



Midsouth Association of Independent Schools: Eight-Man Football Class 2A, District 1; 2021 Record 2-7 (0-6 Eight-Man Football Class 2A, District 1)

New coach, big roster spark optimism for Columbus Christian Academy

BY THEO DEROSA
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STEENS — Columbus Christian Academy senior Beau Kemp admits having three head football coaches in three years isn't ideal.

Kemp played under Jason Williams in 2020 in Steens. Last season, Rusty Mason took over; now, it's Jeremy Brock in charge.

"At times, you just can't stay in the same rhythm that you always are because you're always shifting with a whole bunch of new coaches," Kemp said. Then he pointed out Brock, who stood off to the side as the Rams went through a July workout at their home field.

"But he's a lot better than the other ones," Kemp said.

With Brock in charge and a serious roster bump, there's optimism in Steens for a strong 2022 — even after a disappointing 2021.

"This team right here has all the capabilities to bring home a championship," Brock said.

It would be the first for the Rams, who have never won a state title and currently play eight-man football in MAIS Class 2A. Columbus Christian has never won more than one playoff game in a season and went just 2-7 last season.

With minimal depth on the 2021 team, Rams players tired quickly, and opponents cashed in.

"Last year, a lot of us were playing both ways, and by the third quarter, everybody's pretty much tired," senior McCory Humphres said. "We lost a few games because we wouldn't do good in the first



Photo courtesy of Amy Shaw

Columbus Christian Academy lines up on offense against Marvell Academy (Ark.) in a 2020 game. The Rams are looking to rebound from a 2-7 season in 2021.

half, and in the second half we were just gassed."

That should no longer be the case. Senior Luke Phillips said past CCA teams with "not that many people who wanted to play and wanted to win that bad" have given way to a sizable roster this fall.

Brock said the Rams will field roughly 25 players, giving the team a considerable bench to work with.

"The numbers are what really get me excited," Brock said. "For an eight-man team to have this many kids plus missing several, that gives you a lot of hope for what we can do."

That depth is in part thanks to transfers, including former South La-

mar (Alabama) quarterback Garrett Weathers.

Weathers and his sister Emma — who plays softball and basketball and will run track at Columbus Christian — both transferred across the state line for the fall, ready to help the Rams. A starter as a freshman and as a sophomore, Weathers can "really sling it," according to Brock.

"We came here, and we just loved it right off the start," Weathers said. "We just loved how the atmosphere is around here. The first day I came to practice, all these guys just took me in like I was their own. That made me feel great. I was like, 'Wow, these people really are great.'"

Brock himself was an-

other factor in Weathers' decision. The Rams' new head coach was previously an assistant at South Lamar, and it's no coincidence Weathers and former Stallions teammate Corey Davis both chose to transfer to CCA.

Columbus Christian returns eight seniors in 2022 despite losing star defender Lahndon Townley to graduation.

"He was the biggest guy we had and hardest hitter we had, and everybody was scared of him," senior Drake Shaw said. "He was definitely a big help, and it will be tough losing him. We're just going to try to use what we have here and use the leadership that we have this year and go forward from that instead of hav-

ing to worry about what was in the past."

Still, it took a while for all those players to gell in Steens. Spring workouts got off to a slow start.

"When we first came here, we were like, 'Ah, whatever,'" Kemp said. "About a week or two in, we started getting the momentum and actually going a lot harder than we were before — practicing a lot harder, running drills a lot faster. We're just getting better all in all."

Brock got a good taste of the Rams' efforts when a few players called him up about running routes on a voluntary basis the next day. They asked him to come to the field at 5:15 a.m., well before practice began, to get extra work



2022 Schedule

- Aug. 19: vs. Christian Collegiate Academy
 - Aug. 26: at Marvell Academy (Ark.)
 - Sept. 2: vs. Calhoun Academy
 - Sept. 9: at Kemper Academy
 - Sept. 16: vs. Tunica Academy
 - Sept. 23: at DeSoto School (Ark.)
 - Sept. 30: at Humphreys Academy
 - Oct. 7: vs. Manchester Academy
 - Oct. 14: vs. Hebron Christian
 - Oct. 21: at North Sunflower Academy
- *All games begin at 7 p.m. unless otherwise noted.

in. Weathers said he'd already seen plenty of improvement in his new teammates.

"From the first day to now, everybody's just gotten a whole lot better, and there's still many more days to come," he said.

The Rams hope those days will translate into wins, perhaps en route to their first district title since 2019. On CCA's schedule, Kemp highlighted games against Calhoun Academy, Humphreys Academy, Marvell Academy (Arkansas) and North Sunflower Academy.

"They were the ones that would trash-talk us," Kemp said. "This year, we can go back and whoop the crap out of them this time and trash-talk on them."

It's a bold prediction, but maybe Kemp and the Rams can back it up.

"We're just ready to get after it," Brock said.



Victory Christian Eagles

Eight-Man Christian Football Association; 2021 Record: 1-6 (1-5 Christian Football Association)



For Victory Christian Academy, attitude adjustment is cause for optimism in 2022

BY THEO DEROSA
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What's changed from last season to this one for the Victory Christian Academy football team?

"Well, we're not constantly arguing with each other, for one," senior end Ethan Clark said.

The Eagles' 2021 campaign was filled with disagreements, players at odds with each other and general discontent inside the locker room.

"It wasn't really arguing, but you'd joke, and it would lead to something," senior linebacker Zac Carr said. "Someone would get mad, and he'd hit you. Really, it just wasn't a bond you should have. They'd come out here and try to kill each other and not work together."

Consequently, Victory's 2021 season featured, well, not much victory. The Eagles went 1-6, giving up more than 50 points per game in the eight-man Christian Football Association while scoring less than 24 themselves.

And it took some of those lopsided losses for the Eagles to fix their attitude problem.

"Really, it started to change when they realized, 'All we come out here to do is get our butts whooped,'" Carr said.

In 2022, Victory hopes to have assembled a roster not only capable of avoiding those embarrassing defeats but perhaps dishing out some of its own.

The Eagles bumped up their roster size to 20 players after having just



Jackie Harrison/Special to The Dispatch

Victory Christian's Logan Clements (82) and Ethan Clark (25) wrap up New Life Christian quarterback Charlie Irwin in this Sept. 26 file photo in Columbus. Matthew Moore (52) and Kayden Barksdale (21) trail the play.

12 in 2021, making it impossible to practice with its full offense and defense on the field.

"This year, we've got a good group of guys, and we actually have numbers for both sides of the field," head coach Andrew Pace said. "It can help tremendously. Being able to put in fresh legs and fresh players makes a huge difference compared to playing Iron Man football and not leaving the field."

Pace has seen that in roughly a decade as an assistant for the Eagles. This year is his first as head coach, replacing

Chris Hamm, who led Victory since the inception of the football program in 2004.

Pace said he and Hamm first discussed the leadership change at the end of the past school year in May. In early July, the move became official.

Pace said he still calls Hamm a lot for advice as he adjusts to the new position.

"I've got some big shoes to fill," Pace said. "The play-calling and stuff and designing plays is what's really been the most difficult part, but it's been fun."

He said Victory won't change much — but the Eagles might add a few new looks — in his first season in charge. What Pace has shown his players so far has gone over well with them.

"This year, they're actually looking really good," Pace said. "We are young, but we have some really eager boys ready to play. They've done really well so far in learning what we have to teach them. I think they're going to be a really good team this year."

Pace was on staff when Victory compiled a 10-1

season in 2014, avenging a loss to Tuscaloosa Christian to win the CFA title. The Eagles' unity and team chemistry then, he said, were unmatched.

So far, his 2022 squad seems eerily similar.

Maybe that's due to the longstanding relationships among the players, particularly among the players who have been at the school the longest.

Clark, Carr, Matthew Davis, Emmett Newman, Jeremiah Smith and transfer Gabriel McCarty are the Eagles' six seniors in 2022, and most of them have known each other a



2022 Schedule

- Aug. 26: vs. Unity Christian Academy
 - Sept. 9: at Russell Christian Academy
 - Sept. 16: vs. Tabernacle Christian (Ala.)
 - Sept. 30: at Tuscaloosa Christian (Ala.)
 - Oct. 7: vs. Cornerstone Christian Academy (Ala.)
 - Oct. 14: vs. Jacksonville Academy (Ala.)
 - Oct. 21: at Success Unlimited Academy (Ala.)
- *All games begin at 7 p.m. unless otherwise noted.

long time.

"We've worked together, started working out and growing together," Carr said. "We've all been pretty close throughout the years. We all know each other and try our best to get along and come out here and get the job done."

Slightly over two weeks prior to the Aug. 26 season opener against Unity Christian Academy, Victory is in a strong place — although not the place the Eagles want to be.

"As of right now, we're not ready ready, but we're more ready than most people should be," Carr said. "But we have a lot more to work on."

How much the Eagles can improve will determine how far they go.

But Clark knows one thing for sure.

"We're definitely a lot better than we were last year — 100 percent," he said.

Heritage Academy Patriots

Midsouth Association of Independent Schools: 11-Man Football Class 5A, District 1; 2021 Record 12-1 (4-0 Class 5A, District 1)

'Championship caliber': Heritage Academy enters season riding high off 2021 title

BY THEO DEROSA
tderosa@cdispatch.com

Heritage Academy's 2022 schedule is written in black marker in the top left corner of a whiteboard in the Patriots' coaches' office.

Head coach Lance Pogue knows his team might appear in a different font on its opponents' slates.

"Heritage is somebody that people star on their schedules," Pogue said. "We're going to get everybody's best shot every Friday."

Pogue hasn't had to be on Magnolia Lane long to realize that. The first-year Patriots coach spent the previous five seasons at Jackson Academy and was well aware of Heritage Academy's state titles in 2019 and 2021.

And he's taking an approach that seems to mirror the adage "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" with this new squad.

"They're championship caliber," said Pogue, who led South Panola to five state titles in 10 seasons with the Tigers before stepping down to coach at JA. "What you do is try to maintain that and add to it. I've had experience in different roles with that. This is not a new experience for me."

Nor was the 2021 Class 5A title a new experience for those around two years prior. Heritage Academy couldn't put together an undefeated season this time around, but the Patriots bounced back from a late loss to Leake Academy to make a playoff and defeat Copiah Academy for their fourth state championship.

The Patriots have made the state semifinals or better in each of the past four seasons.

And they're hoping to extend that streak to five. "We've been thinking about it all summer, and we're just ready to get back out there," senior wide receiver Trey Naugher said. "We've created a tradition here where we win every year, and we're going to keep that tradition."

Naugher credits the Patriots' seniors back in 2019 with establishing that standard. A team led by current Ole Miss right guard Eli Acker, Central Arkansas wide receiver Jared Long and Northeast Mississippi Community College quarterback Carter Putt dominated all comers, going 14-0 and stomping rival Starkville Academy in the state title



Heritage Academy's Lane Goodman is brought down by South Pontotoc defenders during a Sept. 10 game. Goodman returns for the Patriots in 2022.

"They started this whole thing, and we're just going to keep building on it," Naugher said. "It's just really amazing what we've been able to accomplish the past couple years."

The Patriots hope to continue that into 2022. Their schedule isn't easy — it includes a rematch with Leake and a road game at powerhouse Jackson Prep — but Heritage Academy is ready to face just about anyone but itself.

"Until you actually play somebody, it's hard to say, but I think we're at the point where we need to go play somebody," Pogue said. "You get to a point where you think you've done about all you can do against each other, and we're about to that point."

Heritage Academy will take the field for its Aug. 19 season opener without standout quarterback Mack Howard, who transferred to Oxford this spring. But Pogue and Co. have tabbed junior Jack Ketchum to replace Howard and expect big things from their new signal-caller.

"He's going to be really good," Naugher said.

"He's going to be one of the best quarterbacks in the MAIS this year."

Heritage Academy also added Eupora transfer running back Jay Stevenson, who enters his junior season.

Pogue said it was hard to evaluate Stevenson prior to the Patriots' home season opener Friday against Lamar School but was looking forward to getting Stevenson on the field.

"I'm excited to get him to the game next Friday and turn him loose and let him play," he said Aug. 10.

Ketchum and Steven-

son will team up with a host of experienced seniors, including Lane Goodman, Drew Kizer, Carson Hollis, Naugher and linebacker Luke Fisher.

With how many games they've won in their Heritage Academy tenures,

becoming seniors won't affect much leadership-wise, Fisher said.

"I don't really think much changes except for another number next to our name," he said. "Instead of 11, it's 12."

And maybe instead of four titles, it'll be five —

if Heritage Academy can play up to its potential. Pogue called every game the "Super Bowl" for each of the Patriots' opponents.

"We're not in a position to say, 'OK, this week we may just relax a little bit,'" he said. "We've got to roll."



2022 Schedule

- Aug. 19: vs. Lamar School
 - Aug. 26: at Jackson Prep
 - Sept. 2: vs. East Union
 - Sept. 9: vs. Washington School
 - Sept. 16: at Starkville Academy
 - Sept. 23: at Bayou Academy
 - Sept. 30: vs. Wayne Academy
 - Oct. 7: vs. Magnolia Heights
 - Oct. 14: at Leake Academy
 - Oct. 21: at Pillow Academy
- *All games begin at 7 p.m. unless otherwise noted.



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West Lowndes Panthers



Mississippi High School Activities Association: Class 1A, Region 3; 2021 Record 10-3 (7-0 Class 1A, Region 3)

West Lowndes looks to build on strong 2021 season

BY COLIN DAMMS
cdamms@cdispatch.com

The start of a new season brings excitement for any football team, and the confidence is high with or without good reason. At West Lowndes, however, there is good reason.

"We're getting great energy," West Lowndes Panthers head coach Anthony King said, looking over his team's offensive drills in practice. "We're starting to get more and more players showing up. Some have been working out pretty much all year and are looking good, some were gone for the summer or had summer jobs but are showing up."

The Panthers went on a tear in 2021, and despite going 1-2 in their first three games, they won seven straight to go undefeated in district play and entered the playoffs with an 8-2 record. An offense led by quarterback Fred Rice leaned on its running schemes, but its X-factor was the passing game with targets Marquez Shelton and Decamby Willis. They were electric targets in the passing game, intelligently putting themselves in positions to win physical battles and create separation.

West Lowndes dominated Richton in the opening round of the playoffs and handled a slightly tougher test against Taylorsville in the second round. With a berth in the 1A state championship game on the line, they had to go through Bay Springs.

Then suddenly, it was



Theo DeRosa/Dispatch Staff

West Lowndes running back Jaquavious Tate carries the ball during a 2021 game against Biggersville. Tate returns for his junior season as a dynamic playmaker in the Panthers' backfield.

over.

Bay Springs won 42-6 and went on to defeat Simmons in the championship game.

The loss was tough to swallow for the Panthers, but it was a motivating experience for the team who now have their sights set on replacing their high impact seniors and going again to try and win it all.

"We're very confident in our young guys," King said. "Most of them on the line were underclassmen, and we'll have them for another year and we're planning to win the line of scrimmage for a couple years in a row."

"The good thing about us as a 1A school is we've

got a lot of big bodies, and we don't have to have guys playing both ways on the line. Offensive line and defensive line will be fresh, while most 1A schools have guys playing on both sides of the ball. So we're looking pretty good in terms of development on that side."

Football games can be won or lost at the line of scrimmage, and King certainly has an advantage with options and depth in that regard. Replacing Shelton and Willis at receiver and Rice under center will be another matter, but he's not short of offensive weapons. Running back Jaquavious Tate, a big asset last sea-

son, returns for his senior season at running back, and Elijah Johnson, an electric athlete at receiver and defensive back last season, will take over as quarterback.

Described by King as "probably the best athlete on the team" who could be a star receiver if he wasn't needed at quarterback, Johnson will have to adjust to the change in responsibilities as the leader of the offense. He's embracing the opportunity, though, and he gets a chance to lead a group he's played with most of his life.

"I've been playing with a lot of them since middle school," Johnson

said. "It's given me a lot of confidence. I've just got to step up and play the role."

His first game as a quarterback came in the Panthers' spring game, which Johnson said went well, and he thinks he has a pretty good arm even though running is his greatest strength. It will suit the offense well with Tate and other speedy athletes operating behind a powerful offensive line.

The Panthers' attack will look a little bit different from last year, but the expectation is the same in terms of challenging for success and winning trophies.

"We've got the target on our back," King said



2022 Schedule

Aug. 26: at Biggersville*
Sept. 2: at Okolona*
Sept. 9: vs. Tupelo Christian Prep*
Sept. 16: vs. Noxapater*
Sept. 23: at Sebastopol*
Sept. 30: vs. Leake County*
Oct. 7: at French Camp Academy
Oct. 14: vs. Hamilton
Oct. 21: at Ethel
Nov. 3: vs. Vardaman
 *All starred games begin at 7:30 p.m. due to an MHSAA mandate for varsity football games in August and September. All other games begin at 7 p.m. unless otherwise noted.

of the team's reputation coming into the new season. "We won district last year, so a lot of teams will be coming after us, but we're looking forward to it. We want big games, we want to be tested all year, and the team that beat us in the playoffs was the state champion, so we're gunning for them."

Senior defensive back Rodarious Price didn't shy away from the expectations; he even set some himself for the team. He thinks the group should be strong enough to defend their district title as well as shake the memory of their defeat to Bay Springs.

"This year we want to go a step farther than that and win the championship as well as keep the district title. We've got to get 'em back for last year. They came here, took pictures on our field. We've got to get 'em back."

Go Panthers!



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Starkville Yellow Jackets

Mississippi High School Activities Association: Class 6A, Region 2; 2021 Record 11-2 (6-1 Class 6A, Region 2)



Championship or bust? Jackets carry exceptional talent and expectation with them into 2022 season

BY COLIN DAMMS
cdamms@cdspatch.com

There's a positive vibe surrounding Starkville High School this season. The Jackets found themselves on a thrilling — but a bit surprising — 9-1 regular season run in 2021, led by a prolific offense. What seemed like it could be a bit of an experience season for a young team soon spawned championship aspirations as then sophomore quarterback Trey Petty emerged and fast-tracked the project.

A blowout win over Hernando in the first round of the playoffs, followed by a 42-27 win over Southaven in the second round, set up the Jackets with a rematch against Madison Central for a spot in the state championship. The Tigers, however had other plans, avenging their loss in Starkville earlier that season with a strong defensive showing in a 35-13 win.

"Last year we were a bit inexperienced, but you only get better with failure and mistakes," Starkville head coach Chris Jones said.

Jones had no problem putting 2021 in perspective despite the tough loss and believes the experience was valuable for his team as they continue to develop and grow.

"We made some mistakes last year that to me were due to being young, but that's part of the process of getting better on both sides of the ball," he said. "I think experience itself will help eliminate a lot of mistakes, but we've



Austin Frayser/Special to The Dispatch

Starkville receiver Braylon Burnside throws a stiff arm at Clinton linebacker Quinton Whitehead in this Oct. 3 file photo. Burnside caught the game-winning pass from Trey Petty in the final minute.

seen throughout the course of the spring and summer that we're a lot better than we were last year just by knowing how to line up and what to do. There's a way to play the game the right way, and we got a lot of kids playing the right way because of the experience they gained last year as sophomores and juniors. I think it's going to pay off for us this year."

The 2015 season was the last time the Jackets won the championship. They reached the state semifinals in 2019 and 2021 and lost in the championship game in 2017. If they want to get back to the top in 2022, they'll have to take on some of the best to do it. They will face each of the last

6A champions in Madison Central and Oxford, as well as 5A contenders West Point and 4A contenders Louisville. It's a tough ask to take it all, let alone go undefeated, but the confidence and talent is there, and both senior defensive end Jonathan David Methvin and junior quarterback Trey Petty have their sights set on glory.

"In my opinion, we should be winning every year," Methvin said. "That's just the culture here. We haven't won one in way too long, and every year it's a culture of fighting for a championship. We've gotten pretty far every year I've been here, but I think this is going to be the year we win it."

"I want to win it all: 15-

0," Petty added, buying into the narrative that the Jackets should be considered contenders. "I think we can do it. We've got the guys to do it, more experience on defense, and the same guys on offense, so I feel like we can do it. I feel like the defense is playing with more aggression, they're hungrier this year. To be honest, sometimes in practice I don't even have time to throw the ball. They're playing like dogs this year, and I like it. That gives me more chances to score with the ball."

There was a lot of focus on improving the defense after some hiccups last year, but both sides of the ball were led by young players last season who come into the 2022 sea-

son with valuable experience and leadership.

That's important given the massive expectations Starkville's players themselves have for their team. There is an awareness in the building and on the field that they play for one of the most storied football programs in Mississippi, and they want to live up to that. There's also an awareness of the skill around them for players who have known each other most of their lives.

"It's like a bond," wide receiver Braylon "Stonka" Burnside said. "I've been playing with these guys since I was about 8 years old, and it feels the same. Same people, same place, and it's great playing with them. I think if we do our



2022 Schedule
Aug. 26: at Columbus*
Sept. 2: vs. West Point*
Sept. 9: vs. Olive Branch*
Sept. 16: at Louisville*
Sept. 23: at Madison Central*
Sept. 30: at Clinton*
Oct. 7: vs. Tupelo
Oct. 14: vs. Murrah
Oct. 21: at Oxford
Oct. 28: at Germantown
Nov. 3: vs. Grenada
 *All starred games begin at 7:30 p.m. due to an MHSAA mandate for varsity football games in August and September. All other games begin at 7 p.m. unless otherwise noted.

job, I think we should be good this season."

"It's bigger than me; it's the culture here," Jones said when asked about the winning mentality present in the team and the tradition that fuels the program. This is one of the winningest programs in Mississippi high school history, so it's just in the DNA to invest in sports in general. These kids have grown up wanting to be great, wanting to win, and I think they're used to seeing it because they've seen it from their uncles or their dads. They know this is their opportunity to cash in on carrying the tradition set before them, and even before me."

The narrative could be championship or bust this season for the Jackets, but the mindset now and every season before is the same, simple and direct: win.

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Midsouth Association of Independent Schools: 11-Man Football Class 5A, District 1; 2021 Record 7-5 (3-1 Class 5A, District 1)

Starkville Academy carries enthusiasm and drive into new season

BY COLIN DAMMS
cdamms@cdispach.com

On a muddy field in the November cold, the Starkville Academy football team made a playoff stand against eventual champion Heritage Academy. It was a game the Volunteers weren't favored to win, having lost 30-0 in the regular season, and in the end they couldn't finish the fight.

The game's final score of 31-12 indicates a similar game to the first loss, but only reflects the difficulty the Vols had in finding the end zone against the Patriots. They fought hard with intensity and physicality against their rivals, and it wasn't until late that the Pats put the game away.

At the end the Vols were emotional in defeat, knowing the year was over, and for seniors their time with the team was over, but it was a season they were proud of, and one that exemplified what head coach Chase Nicholson strives for from his team.

"I think that's what we work for every day," Nicholson said, reflecting on the effort his players put in last season. "I can go back years in the past and keep listing guys who put the work in every single day, and as a coach that's what you're trying to do no matter what. You want to go out and compete and leave it all out there no matter what. There are a lot of guys like that here that will go out and leave it all on the field no matter what."

Wyatt Johnson, a senior defensive end and



Heritage Academy receiver Mitchell Woodard (7) catches a pass for a touchdown over Starkville Academy defender Briggs Bennett (20) during the third quarter of their football game in Columbus in this Nov. 5 file photo.

tight end, gave some insight into the work ethic throughout the team and the environment that fosters it.

"I think it's practicing in a game-like atmosphere, practicing like you're gonna play with the same physicality and intensity of a game," Johnson said.

One of the players who graduated last year was starting quarterback Randall Futral. Junior Briggs Bennett and sophomore Luke McKenzie have been fighting to succeed Futral as starting quarterback, and Nicholson intends to give both

of them a fair shake when the season gets going.

"We're gonna give both of them opportunities to get game time and improve their game. We're gonna have a solid QB1 but (also) a backup who gets his chances and game time as well because I've gotta have them ready if something happens. That's what's best for the team; I can't sell out on one and then something happens Week 1 and the other isn't ready. So they'll both get plenty of time, have opportunities to lead the team, and they're both going to be good at it and

enjoy the competition."

Senior Josh Word has plenty of interest in who will win the starting job, as he'll be one of the leaders on the offensive line at left tackle this season. There's not much concern from him about either candidate, though, and he's very encouraged about what he's seen from their work with the rest of the offense in the summer.

"It's been great seeing how much they want to work and want that position, we've got two good quarterbacks fighting everyday for it," Word said about the competi-

tion. "It's still ongoing, it'll go until week one for sure. There's a lot of excitement, a lot of competition, and we're all thinking that we'll do pretty well this year."

There hasn't been a decision yet on who will be QB1, but that hasn't caused any distraction for the team. Nicholson likes to create a positive environment for the players, because for the coaches and players both football is fun, and putting in the work and maintaining the intensity just comes along with it.

"For me it's exciting," Nicholson said of the re-



- 2022 Schedule**
- Aug. 12: at Lamar School Academy
 - Aug. 19: vs. Jackson Academy
 - Aug. 26: vs. Trinity Collegiate School (S.C.) at Carrollton, Ga., 5 p.m.
 - Sept. 2: at Leake Academy
 - Sept. 9: vs. French Camp Academy
 - Sept. 16: vs. Heritage Academy
 - Sept. 23: at Winston Academy
 - Sept. 30: at Magnolia Heights
 - Oct. 7: vs. Pillow Academy
 - Oct. 14: vs. Bayou Academy
 - Oct. 21: at Washington School
- *All games begin at 7 p.m. unless otherwise noted.

turn to football season. "It's a long wait, especially when you lose in the playoffs like that, a hard, tough loss. It's hard to wait, but I'm excited and we're ready to get back out there and play again."

"One of the main things we talk about is balancing the work and the fun, and I think that's what they get good at. They love football, they love practice, and they love trying to get better. Everything about the game they love, and it makes it such a joy because it's not a grind. Every day I get to come to work, but it's not really work."

The real fun began for the Vols on Friday when they took on Lamar School in Meridian. Their first home game will take place Friday against Jackson Academy.

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West Point Green Wave

Mississippi High School Activities Association: Class 5A, Region 1; 2021 Record 11-1 (7-0 Class 5A, Region 1)



Austin Frayser/Special to The Dispatch

West Point running back Cameron Young scores against Picayune in the MHSAA Class 5A championship game in Hattiesburg. Young has graduated, but Keshawn Henley is set to step into his role for the Green Wave.

West Point looks to revive dynasty after consecutive championship game defeats

BY COLIN DAMMS
cdamms@cdispach.com

West Point High School football players have to deal with a lot of expectations. It only takes one look up at the banner years listed on the press box to understand where those expectations come from, but ask anyone in the building and they'll tell you it just comes with the territory. Building a culture of winning matters to West Point football, and it keeps the future in mind throughout the process.

But in sports, the past doesn't guarantee anything in the future.

A dynastic West Point team won four straight state titles from 2016 to 2019, but ask coach Chris Chambless and he'll tell you the ones that stuck with the Green Wave were the losses in 2020 and 2021 that kept them from winning six straight.

"It puts a bad taste in

your mouth," Chambless said of losing in the championship game. "We've played for a state title for six years and won four of them, but the last two coming up short, and our guys are hungry to finish the job."

Last season the Green Wave went 11-0 on their run to the championship game, storming through their regular season and the first three rounds of the playoffs before meeting Picayune for the 5A state title.

"I tell guys all the time, we gotta be better than the other team on that one night," Chambless said. "That's what you practice for, that one night, and on that night they got us. Our guys have been hungry to start the season but to get better too. And they'll quote me on this, I tell them every day: Our goal is to get better every day. Every game, get a little better. You don't want to start the season peaking out; you want to peak

at the end."

Chambless knows a thing or two about winning, but more importantly, he knows about program building. It takes a village, and running backs coach Jerry Freeman gave evidence to the singularity of the program's direction when discussing the mental fortitude for overcoming losses and continuing the work to get better.

"Just keeping (the championship game loss) fresh on their minds, and reminding them the feeling of the hard work and the dedication that got them there, the blood, sweat and tears it took to get there. Anytime it gets hard in practice or in the weight room, just reminding them of the feeling, especially getting there the last two years and not getting the job done. It drives them, it keeps them hungry, and it's the same with us coaches. It motivates us to work hard and get the best out of our

kids so we can get back to that mountaintop."

The values and work ethic Chambless hopes to instill in his players at West Point clearly shines through in the team, as does the passion for fostering strong people as well as strong football players. Players have shown their motivation to grow and put last season behind them. It's a group he can depend on and one he looks to for leadership in the ranks beyond his coaching staff.

Jhace Mallard, a senior linebacker and leader on the defense, summarized the mindset of the team.

"We always try to use the loss as motivation, but now we're trying to take things week by week," he said. "The expectation in our community and culture is to win and be a state champion, and that's always going to be the expectation. I wouldn't say there's too much pressure because we put in the work, and

we expect to get the results out as long as we put in the work to get there. Coach puts it on [seniors] to lead and set the expectations because we go as we want to go."

"We've just got to finish better and stay dedicated to the game," said junior quarterback Kahnen Daniels. "I feel pressure to do things the right way and to get the team behind me. We've got to play as a unit the whole time; that's really what got us there in the first place. It gives us fire, it motivates us to finish, and that's what we go by everyday in practice: just finish."

Chambless credits his staff, the team and the school administration for their continued success and for transforming the program into a powerhouse year to year. It's a refined program that moves with coordination and intention for the future. The message is clear: West Point intends



2022 Schedule

Aug. 26: vs. Louisville*
Sept. 2: at Starkville*
Sept. 9: vs. Noxubee County*
Sept. 23: at Lafayette*
Sept. 30: at New Hope*
Oct. 7: vs. Cleveland Central
Oct. 14: vs. Lake Cormorant
Oct. 21: vs. Greenville
Oct. 28: at Saltito
Nov. 3: vs. Columbus
*All starred games begin at 7:30 p.m. due to an MHSAA mandate for varsity football games in August and September. All other games begin at 7 p.m. unless otherwise noted.

on continuing that success, and its goal is to finish the job this time around.

The Green Wave have the foundation, the talent and the know-how to do just that. Their path begins Aug. 26 at home against Louisville.



Hebron Christian Eagles

Midsouth Association of Independent Schools: Eight-Man Football Class 1A, District 1



Hebron Christian continues rebuilding football program under Foster

BY COLIN DAMMS
cdamms@cdispach.com

Last season, Hebron Christian School was unable to field a varsity football team. Football has long been played at the school, but in 2021, the team has had to play only at a junior varsity level on Thursday nights under coach David Foster, once a Hebron player himself.

Foster expects that to change this fall.

"I want to get back to playing high school football," Foster said. "We play eight-man football because we just haven't had enough upperclassmen to play. This year, if I get them all here, I should have probably eight high schoolers from 10th-12th grade, and we'll have a ninth-grader and some eighth-graders too."

Working with somewhere around 14-15 players, Foster hopes to field a team big enough to handle a varsity schedule for the upcoming season. He's put in a lot of work getting players to come out and buy into football,



Colin Damms/Dispatch Staff

Hebron Christian football coach David Foster leads his players through a preseason workout. Hebron did not field a varsity football team last season.

a predicament that certainly hasn't been ideal but has still been a positive experience for getting the team back on the map. Some are lacking in experience and know-how, but Foster is proud of the increased turnout and happy to coach up those who will put in the

work. "There's a couple guys out here right now who have never played before, but they stepped up to try and get involved and help out," he said. "The school is small, real small, so there's not a big crowd to draw from. But they kind of figured out they can

come help out the guys that want to play football so they can help them play basketball or baseball. That way you get to play the sports you want to play the most by helping your buddies out so they'll come help you play your sport."

Foster is entering his

20th year as a coach at Hebron and has spent nearly a decade as head coach. He cares deeply about his alma mater and cares deeply about giving students opportunities to get into athletics. For him it's about the life lessons as much as the game itself, and while it's been a tough road since 2017 — when just one kid showed up to tryouts — it's been a road going in the right direction since then.

"I keep talking about wanting to change the culture, and we did have a good culture for athletics that kind of went south a bit because of (lack of) participation. So I want to get kids wanting to participate again, boys and girls, and we want to get back to winning. That's why you play, you want to win, but there's ways of winning other than the scoreboard."

The work has led kids at the school back to the game and back to new sports as well. And because of the revival, the football team is on track to field a varsity team,



2022 Schedule

Aug. 19: vs. Tunica Academy
Aug. 26: at Humphreys Academy
Sept. 2: at West Memphis Christian School (Ark.)
Sept. 9: vs. Calhoun Academy
Sept. 16: at Delta Academy
Sept. 23: vs. Lee Academy (Ark.)
Sept. 30: vs. DeSoto School (Ark.)
Oct. 7: at Kemper Academy
Oct. 14: at Columbus Christian Academy
Oct. 21: vs. Deer Creek Academy
*All games begin at 7 p.m. unless otherwise noted.

hoping for a fully healthy group next Friday night for its preseason jamboree.

Because of the work to build the program back up, Hebron is playing on Fridays and hopeful for the future of the program.

The Eagles' season begins Aug. 19 at home against Tunica Academy

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Oak Hill Academy Raiders



Midsouth Association of Independent Schools: 11-Man Football Class 4A, District 1; 2021 Record 5-7 (3-1 11-Man Football, Class 4A, District 1)



Colin Damms/Dispatch Staff

Oak Hill Academy participates in a preseason practice in West Point. The Raiders improved to 5-7 and won their district last season.

Oak Hill coach Rosenthal looks to continue progress into Year 3 with Raiders

BY COLIN DAMMS
cdamms@cdspatch.com

Building a winning program and establishing a culture is a painstaking process, especially for a program that hasn't experienced much success in such endeavors. Oak Hill Academy hasn't had a winning season since 2017 and hasn't won a playoff game in 30 years. The Raiders have a lot to do in terms of contending, but third-year head coach Bill Rosenthal sees the fruits of his team's labor.

The Raiders went 2-6 in Rosenthal's first season as coach in 2020, a year where they felt the effects of COVID-19 as much as anyone. In 2021 they improved to 5-7, which included a first-place finish in MAIS Class 4A, District 1 and a playoff appearance. COVID continued to have an impact, but this year Rosenthal is hoping for a more normal year and a healthy squad.

"It is what it is," Rosenthal said, "you have to go by what the CDC says. We lost a game last year where about six kids were out with COVID and lost our first game last year. I'm just glad it's died down some. I know it'll be back, but I hope our kids are smart enough to take care of themselves and do what they need to do to stay healthy."

They've had some work to do in the offseason by way of replacing

lost talent and experience, but Rosenthal saw the bright side in enduring the COVID years by giving most of his younger guys a chance to play varsity football. Even in the worst losses last year he sees room for improvement and areas where marginal differences can swing games the Raiders' way. In short, he wants his team to fight hard, establish the run and take care of the football.

"The games we won (last season) we were able to stop the run, run the ball ourselves, and we didn't turn the ball over. When we lost we had turnovers and got down early, and you can't play catch-up and beat good football teams."

And the Raiders played some good football teams. Three of their losses in 2021 were against teams who had legitimate shots at winning the state title, including Tri-County Academy, who eventually did win the Class 4A championship.

"I think in four of the games we lost we turned over a total of 20 times, and you just can't do that," Rosenthal said.

Another major part of managing those goals will be replacing quarterback Cameron Dill, who as a senior in 2021 led the team to their first playoff appearance since 2016. Junior Noah Brand

has battled with senior John Ross Craven for the

starting quarterback job and looks to be the starter with Craven remaining a leader on defense. If you ask either of them, though, it's never been about the competition; it's been about them growing as leaders and finding the best way for them to help the team.

"It's been a battle for sure," Brand said of the level of play between himself and Craven. "And whoever gets the job, that's what's best for the team and we're gonna be behind them no matter what. We're trying to help the team win."

Craven and Brand were on the same page when it came to doing their best to help the team, and both were candid about their strengths and weaknesses as well.

"We don't have as

much experience as [Cameron Dill] did," Craven said, "and neither of us have been starting quarterbacks before, so we're just out here doing our best to build and help the team."

Brand has some experience running Rosenthal's offense at quarterback from his time in junior varsity, and Craven has only played as a back-up to Dill. Regardless of who wins the job permanently, Rosenthal

stressed the importance of having both prepared and both in positions to lead the team, and in that regard they certainly understand their role. There is confidence that the team will have the playmakers in the run and passing game, they just need the right person conducting the offense.

Friday's jamboree gave the Raiders a better idea as to who will lead them, and from there the business begins. Oak

Hill hopes to continue its progress under Rosenthal and, if possible, build on its 5-7 record from last season. They will have confidence from their 3-1 record in district play last season, let alone their improvement from just one district win the year before despite moving up to Class 4A, but nothing is given in football. The game keeps moving and the work continues to bring consistency to the program.



2022 Schedule

- Aug. 19: at East Rankin Academy
- Aug. 26: at Benton Academy
- Sept. 2: vs. Winona Christian
- Sept. 9: vs. Canton Academy
- Sept. 16: vs. Lee Academy
- Sept. 23: at Kirk Academy
- Sept. 30: vs. North Delta School
- Oct. 7: vs. Carroll Academy
- Oct. 14: at Central Holmes Christian
- Oct. 21: at Marshall Academy

*All games begin at 7 p.m. unless otherwise noted.

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Noxubee County Tigers



Mississippi High School Activities Association: Class 3A, Region 4; 2021 Record 7-4 (3-1 Class 3A, Region 4)

Noxubee County seniors seek elusive state title after two near misses

BY THEO DEROSA
tderosa@cdispatch.com

MACON — Sitting neatly in a row, Noxubee County's five MHSAA championship trophies made their presence felt in the Tigers' field house July 8.

The gleaming gold footballs were on display for the dedication of the building to former Noxubee County standout Jeffrey Simmons, who paid to renovate the facility, but they served another purpose for the players inside that day.

None of them has ever won a state title, and they know it.

"It's a great thing," offensive lineman Bryson Kelly said. "It just gives us motivation to get us one. We've been to state twice, and we know how it feels not to get it. So we're just going to do everything we can to get it this year."

Noxubee County made the MHSAA Class 3A championship in 2019 but couldn't bring home the crown. A year later, the Tigers went back to the title game, and they lost again.

For seniors like Kelly, the 2022 season represents a last chance to add a sixth gold ball to the collection in Macon.

"The guys have one goal in mind: to win a state championship," Noxubee County coach Teddy Young said. "This senior class, they're hungry, and I think we'll go where this senior class takes us."

The Tigers' senior leaders include Kelly, wide receiver Anthony Little and defensive back Shunterrion Sherrod. With Kelly at tackle and a senior-heavy defensive



West Point senior Jamarquez Melton makes a touchdown catch over Noxubee County defensive back Antonio Fowler Jr. on Sept. 12 in Macon. The Tigers had a down season last year, losing in the second round of the Class 3A playoffs, but they have high expectations in 2022. Austin Frayser/Special to The Dispatch

line of James Mayo, Tony Deloach and Tony Tate, Young is optimistic.

"I'm a big believer that the game is won in the trenches, so we're going to go as far as these guys take us," he said.

The Tigers hope that will be farther than they went in 2021, when Noxubee County experienced a down season — relative to its standards, at least. Losses to West Point and Amory and a blowout by Louisville led to a 6-3 regular season, and Noxubee County bowed out to Winaona in the second round of the playoffs.

Young said work ethic — or lack thereof — was a big part in the Tigers' struggles, and health

played a role, too.

"We had some key injuries along the way," he said. "I think this year if we can stay healthy and start playing our best football toward the end of the year, I think we'll have a chance to make a run."

Kelly said Noxubee County has a chance to go undefeated, but that won't be easy against a schedule featuring road games against each of the three teams that beat the Tigers in 2021: West Point, Louisville and Amory. A season-opening road trip to Philadelphia High School won't be easy, either.

But with sophomore quarterback Kamario Taylor set to take over, anything is possible.

Young touted the chemistry between his wide receivers and Taylor, the nephew of former Noxubee County quarterback and Mississippi State standout Omarr Conner; Little praised his new signal-caller's talent and 6-foot-3 frame.

And Taylor's leadership ability might surpass any of his other attributes.

"For him to be as young as he is, he's a great leader," Kelly said. "With someone to be young and push you to be the best you can be is a great feeling. It makes you want to work even harder."

Taylor's weapons include Little (516 yards, seven touchdowns in 2021) and junior De-

Quadron Welch (257 yards, two touchdowns). Running back Martavius Wicks ran for 749 yards and five scores as a sophomore last season.

Taylor and Wicks are part of a young group that offers plenty of promise, according to Little.

"We've got younger guys coming in to work and showing that they really want to play and really be good," he said.

If they can break out — and if Noxubee County's seniors can lead the way — the Tigers could add another trophy to their collection come December.

"It feels good," Little said. "I think it's going to be a good season."

Austin Frayser/Special to The Dispatch



2022 Schedule

- Aug. 26: at Philadelphia*
- Sept. 2: vs. Amanda Elzy*
- Sept. 9: at West Point*
- Sept. 16: vs. Shannon*
- Sept. 23: at Louisville*
- Sept. 30: vs. Hatley*
- Oct. 7: at Kemper County
- Oct. 14: at Amory
- Oct. 21: vs. Nettleton
- Oct. 27: at Aberdeen

*All starred games begin at 7:30 p.m. due to an MHSAA mandate for varsity football games in August and September. All other games begin at 7 p.m. unless otherwise noted.

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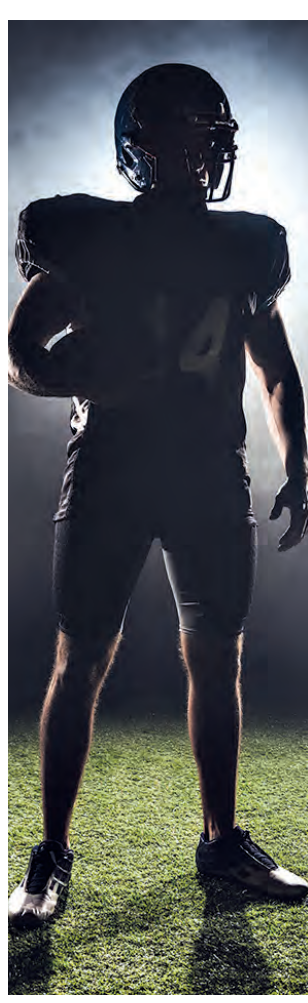


2022 High School Football



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Area Team Football Schedules



*All starred games begin at 7:30 p.m. due to an MHSAA mandate for varsity football games in August and September. All other games begin at 7 p.m. unless otherwise noted.

CALEDONIA CAVALIERS

2021 record: 11-3, 4-1 Region 1-4A
Aug. 26: at New Hope*
Sept. 2: at Amory*
Sept. 9: vs. Holly Springs*
Sept. 16: at Nettleton*
Sept. 23: vs. Aorinthen*
Sept. 30: vs. Corinth*
Oct. 7: at Tishomingo County
Oct. 14: at Mooreville
Oct. 21: vs. Itawamba AHS
Oct. 27: vs. Shannon

COLUMBUS CHRISTIAN ACADEMY RAMS

2021 record: 2-6, 0-6 Eight-Man MAIS Class 2A, District 1
Aug. 19: vs. Christian Collegiate Academy
Aug. 26: at Marvell Academy (Ark.)
Sept. 2: vs. Calhoun Academy
Sept. 9: at Kemper Academy
Sept. 16: vs. Tunica Academy
Sept. 23: at DeSoto School (Ark.)
Sept. 30: at Humphreys Academy
Oct. 7: vs. Manchester Academy
Oct. 14: vs. Hebron Christian Academy
Oct. 21: at North Sunflower Academy

COLUMBUS FALCONS

2021 record: 4-7, 3-4 Region 1-5A
Aug. 26: vs. Starkville*
Sept. 2: at Southaven*
Sept. 9: at Louisville*
Sept. 16: vs. Tupelo*
Sept. 23: vs. New Hope*
Sept. 30: vs. Greenville*
Oct. 7: at Lafayette
Oct. 14: at Cleveland Central
Oct. 21: vs. Salttillo
Oct. 28: vs. Lake Cormorant
Nov. 3: at West Point

HEBRON CHRISTIAN EAGLES

Eight-Man MAIS Class 1A, District 1
Aug. 19: vs. Tunica Academy
Aug. 26: at Humphreys Academy
Sept. 2: at West Memphis Christian School (Ark.)
Sept. 9: vs. Calhoun Academy
Sept. 16: at Delta Academy
Sept. 23: vs. Lee Academy (Ark.)
Sept. 30: vs. DeSoto School (Ark.)
Oct. 7: at Kemper Academy
Oct. 14: at Columbus Christian Academy
Oct. 21: vs. Deer Creek Academy

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HERITAGE ACADEMY PATRIOTS

2021 record: 12-1, 4-0 MAIS District 1-5A
Aug. 19: vs. Lamar School
Aug. 26: at Jackson Prep
Sept. 2: vs. East Union
Sept. 9: vs. Washington School
Sept. 16: at Starkville Academy
Sept. 23: at Bayou Academy
Sept. 30: vs. Wayne Academy
Oct. 7: vs. Magnolia Heights
Oct. 14: at Leake Academy
Oct. 21: at Pillow Academy

NEW HOPE TROJANS

2021 record: 5-5, 2-5 Region 1-5A
Aug. 26: vs. Caledonia*
Sept. 2: at Shannon*
Sept. 16: at Itawamba AHS*
Sept. 23: at Columbus*
Sept. 30: vs. West Point*
Oct. 7: at Greenville
Oct. 14: vs. Lafayette
Oct. 21: at Lake Cormorant
Oct. 28: at Cleveland Central
Nov. 3: vs. Salttillo

NOXUBEE COUNTY TIGERS

2021 record: 7-4, 3-1 Region 4-3A
Aug. 26: at Philadelphia*
Sept. 2: vs. Amanda Elzy*
Sept. 9: at West Point*
Sept. 16: vs. Shannon*
Sept. 23: at Louisville*
Sept. 30: vs. Hatley*
Oct. 7: at Kemper County
Oct. 14: at Amory
Oct. 21: vs. Nettleton
Oct. 27: at Aberdeen

OAK HILL ACADEMY RAIDERS

2021 record: 5-7, 3-1 MAIS District 1-4A
Aug. 19: at East Rankin Academy
Aug. 26: at Benton Academy
Sept. 2: vs. Winona Christian
Sept. 9: vs. Canton Academy
Sept. 16: vs. Lee Academy
Sept. 23: at Kirk Academy
Sept. 30: vs. North Delta School
Oct. 7: vs. Carroll Academy
Oct. 14: at Central Holmes Christian
Oct. 21: at Marshall Academy

STARKVILLE ACADEMY VOLUNTEERS

2021 record: 7-5, 3-1 MAIS District 1-5A
Aug. 12: at Lamar School
Aug. 19: vs. Jackson Academy
Aug. 26: vs. Trinity Collegiate School (S.C.) at Carrollton, Ga., 5 p.m.
Sept. 2: at Leake Academy
Sept. 9: vs. French Camp Academy
Sept. 16: vs. Heritage Academy
Sept. 23: at Winston Academy
Sept. 30: at Magnolia Heights
Oct. 7: vs. Pillow Academy
Oct. 14: vs. Bayou Academy
Oct. 21: at Washington School

STARKVILLE YELLOW JACKETS

2021 record: 11-2, 6-1 Region 2-6A
Aug. 26: at Columbus*
Sept. 2: vs. West Point*
Sept. 9: vs. Olive Branch*
Sept. 16: at Louisville*
Sept. 23: at Madison Central*
Sept. 30: at Clinton*
Oct. 7: vs. Tupelo
Oct. 14: vs. Murrah
Oct. 21: at Oxford
Oct. 28: at Germantown
Nov. 3: vs. Grenada

VICTORY CHRISTIAN ACADEMY EAGLES

2021 record: 1-6, 1-5 Eight-Man Christian Football Association
Aug. 26: vs. Unity Christian Academy
Sept. 9: at Russell Christian Academy
Sept. 16: vs. Tabernacle Christian (Ala.)
Sept. 30: at Tuscaloosa Christian (Ala.)
Oct. 7: vs. Cornerstone Christian Academy (Ala.)
Oct. 14: vs. Jacksonville Academy (Ala.)
Oct. 21: at Success Unlimited Academy (Ala.)

WEST LOWNDES PANTHERS

2021 record: 10-3, 7-0 Region 3-1A
Aug. 26: at Biggersville*
Sept. 2: at Okolona*
Sept. 9: vs. Tupelo Christian Prep*
Sept. 16: vs. Noxapater*
Sept. 23: at Sebastopol*
Sept. 30: vs. Leake County*
Oct. 7: at French Camp Academy
Oct. 14: vs. Hamilton
Oct. 21: at Ethel
Nov. 3: vs. Vardaman

WEST POINT GREEN WAVE

2021 record: 11-1, 7-0 Region 1-5A
Aug. 26: vs. Louisville*
Sept. 2: at Starkville*
Sept. 9: vs. Noxubee County*
Sept. 23: at Lafayette*
Sept. 30: at New Hope*
Oct. 7: vs. Cleveland Central
Oct. 14: vs. Lake Cormorant
Oct. 21: vs. Greenville
Oct. 28: at Salttillo
Nov. 3: vs. Columbus

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