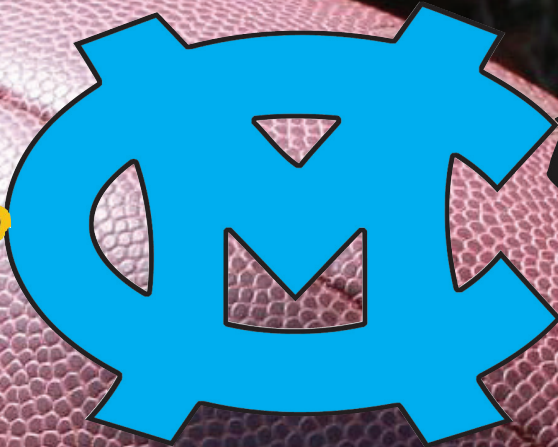


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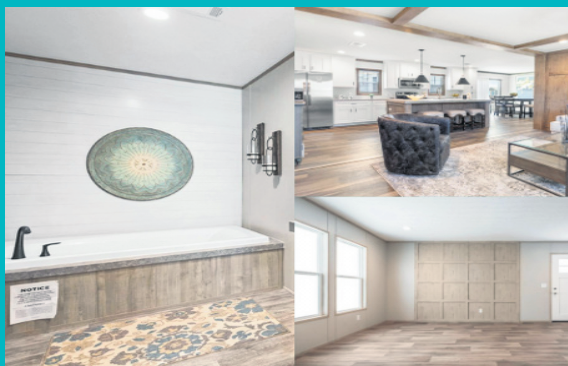
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Gabriel Garcia | The Daily Post-Athenian

2025 McMinn County Cherokees

McMinn County enters 2025 with postseason aspirations

GABRIEL GARCIA
Daily Post-Athenian

With 22 seniors on the roster and 17 starters returning from last year's team, McMinn County begins 2025 with expectations to contend for a region championship and make a deep run into the TSSAA playoffs.

At least that is what those on the outside say.

Head coach Bo Cagle, entering his 19th season in charge of the Cherokees, is focused instead on the Tribe's internal expectations, which are being the best team it can be every Friday and improving week to week.

"We can be as good as we can be," Cagle said. "The things that we can control is our attitude and effort and how we play each week and if we can improve in practice and show that on the field on Friday night. We can't control other teams. So the teams we play against have a lot

to do with external ideas of success. We'll keep our success internal and make sure we understand where we're going and what we're trying to accomplish are not necessarily wins and losses. We want to win every game we're out there, but we do understand we have to play our best to win each and every week, and even playing our best may not result in a win. So those are the key things that we try to accomplish each time we walk out there."

McMinn is coming off a 6-6 record last year, but one that included a runner-up finish in its former Region 4-5A – with the region title still a possibility having headed into the final week of the regular season. The Cherokees advanced to the second round of the Class 5A playoffs, which ended in a near-comeback at eventual state semifinalist Oak Ridge.

The Tribe is in a new region technically, Region 3-5A, but joined in that

region by a bunch of familiar foes. Walker Valley, Rhea County, East Hamilton and Ooltewah all followed McMinn to the new region. Old rival Soddy-Daisy, moving back up to Class 5A after the last few years in 4A, is also back as a region opponent, and Lenoir City is the lone remaining member of the old 3-5A.

Lenoir City and Soddy-Daisy represent two more playoff teams in region play that the Cherokees will have to deal with.

"It bolsters our region, which makes it really fun because you've got to be ready to play each and every Friday night and can't take a week off," Cagle said. "So we know what comes with that is being able to prepare and be ready to go each Friday night."

McMinn gets all three rivals to the county south of the Hiwassee River right off the bat. It begins the season Friday, Aug. 22, at Bradley

Central for the 102nd meeting between the archrivals, who have played at least once every year since 1927. The week after that is the Tribe's home opener against Cleveland, followed by a trip to Walker Valley to begin region play.

"You could go 3-0, you could go 0-3, you could win one or two of them, I don't know," Cagle said. "Those guys are going to be tough and hard to handle right out of the gate. You want to get through those three without serious injuries. They're going to be physical football games, so it's obviously a test right off the bat, which is good for us."

And to stress the importance of McMinn playing its best football every week, Cagle had only to point to last year, when the Cherokees surrendered a two-touchdown lead with less than four minutes left in a region-opening loss to East Hamilton. That September

game ended up being the difference that had the Tribe settling for the runner-up finish in 2024.

"The game that mattered was the East Hamilton game," Cagle said. "We let it slip through our fingers up two touchdowns with four minutes left in the game. That's why you've got to keep playing throughout the whole year. You can't give up opportunities, and that ended up costing us in the end."

Offense

Adopting more of a run-pass option style of attack last season that rounded into form late, the Cherokees put the ball in the air in 2024 more than

observers are typically used to seeing from them.

And while that trend may continue in 2025, make no mistake, Cagle emphasized that McMinn is still going to base what it does offensively on the run.

"I think the run game will develop as we go," Cagle said. "We're still putting the pieces together on the offensive line and moving them around a little bit. But we'll obviously be a run team first. We'll be a run team, and then we'll play off the run with our passing game. But if they take that away then we need to be able to do other things, and that's what we're

going to do."

Helping that along is an offensive line that returns all five starters from last year – although one of them, center Philip Hamby, was injured as of dead-line for the preview.

That means the Cherokees have already had to move linemen around up front. Regardless, anchoring that line is senior Cam Goforth, a 6'4" 330-pound West Virginia commit at right guard. Goforth is a two-time offensive lineman of the year in McMinn's former region.

Ty Miller, who was the left tackle, has moved to center to spell the injured

Hamby. That moved Ace Cagle – senior son of the head coach – from right tackle to left tackle. Jackson Lyle remains at left guard, and right tackle is being rotated among Jason Human, AJ Orozco and Deakon Haefield, all three of whom will also back up any of the offensive line positions.

"Hopefully Hamby will return at some point, but you have to prepare like he's not there," Cagle said.

Jakyran "Peanut" Dyer is the starting running back heading into his senior season. Dyer is the leading returning rusher, having run for 495 yards on 65 carries and 10

touchdowns, averaging 7.6 yards per carry, last year. Lincoln Watson, a junior, will also be an important part of the ground game spelling Dyer.

Luke Lawson, a junior, is back as the starting quarterback, coming off a sophomore season in which he passed for 1,534 yards and 15 touchdowns as he got more comfortable in the Tribe's RPO offense. The Cherokees are still searching for a backup quarterback, but Cagle noted that senior Drew Bottoms, normally a cornerback and wide receiver, could play quarterback if McMinn really needed him to.

Marshall Goodner is



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Cheryl Roberts, FNP

2025 McMinn County Cherokees

0 .. Maddox Frazier .. S/WR .. So.	42 .. Carson McDaniel .. LB .. So.
1 .. Colton Sneed .. LB/RB .. So.	43 .. Aiden Russell .. LB .. Fr.
2 .. Drake Frazier .. WR .. Jr.	44 .. Jake Ramey .. S/WR .. Sr.
3 .. Josiah Dyer .. CB .. Sr.	45 .. Bryce Cagle .. DE .. Fr.
4 .. Luke Lawson .. QB .. Jr.	47 .. Jack Goodin .. LB .. Sr.
5 .. Lincoln Pettitt .. QB/DB .. Fr.	48 .. Mike Kraskouskas .. K .. Sr.
6 .. Makye McDermott .. DT .. Sr.	50 .. Isley Stephens .. DL .. Fr.
7 .. Gage Hester .. S .. Sr.	51 .. Jonah Martin .. LB .. Sr.
8 .. Jakyran Dyer .. RB/DE .. Sr.	52 .. Jesse Jones .. DL .. Jr.
9 .. Marshall Goodner .. S/WR .. Jr.	53 .. Jackson Lyle .. OL .. Sr.
11 .. Jaxson Gonzalez .. CB/WR .. Jr.	54 .. Christian Edwards .. DE .. Sr.
13 .. Nathan Kessler .. WR .. Sr.	55 .. Roman Goins .. OL .. Fr.
15 .. Drew Bottoms .. CB/WR .. Sr.	56 .. Braylon Moses .. DL .. Fr.
16 .. Major Harrison .. CB/WR .. Fr.	58 .. Ace Cagle .. OL .. Sr.
18 .. Xavier Cole .. S/WR .. Sr.	60 .. Jason Human .. OL .. Sr.
19 .. Cam Green .. DE .. Sr.	61 .. Deakon Haefield .. OL .. So.
20 .. Hailee Garringer .. K .. Jr.	62 .. Tyler McGill .. OL .. Fr.
21 .. Bently Stroud .. CB/WR .. So.	63 .. Hayden Layman .. OL .. Fr.
22 .. Felix Robles .. RB/LB .. Fr.	64 .. Deh Patrick .. OL .. Fr.
23 .. Parker McDonald .. LB/RB .. Fr.	66 .. AJ Orozco .. OL .. Sr.
24 .. Winston Coffey .. RB/DB .. Sr.	67 .. Ben Jones .. OL .. Fr.
25 .. Logan Alston .. CB/WR .. Jr.	70 .. Bentley Campbell .. OL .. Fr.
26 .. Isaac Akers .. LB .. Jr.	72 .. Philip Hamby .. OL .. Sr.
28 .. Alex Powers .. P .. So.	75 .. Jackson Decker .. OL .. So.
29 .. Lincoln Watson .. RB/LB .. Jr.	76 .. Ty Miller .. OL .. Jr.
30 .. Samir Aguilar .. LB .. Jr.	77 .. Camden Goforth .. OL .. Sr.
31 .. Eli Dalton .. DE/H .. Fr.	78 .. James Fugate .. OL .. Fr.
33 .. Spartan Lyle .. TE/LB .. Sr.	79 .. Warren Price .. DL .. So.
34 .. Bryson Akers .. LB .. Jr.	80 .. Carson Tinsman .. WR/DB .. Jr.
35 .. Shane Burger .. DB/WR .. Fr.	81 .. Brayden Webb-Harvey .. LB .. Fr.
37 .. Brody Sanderson .. LB .. Jr.	82 .. Brendon Johnson .. K .. Fr.
38 .. Jace Richeson .. DB .. So.	87 .. Brodie Roundtree .. WR/DB .. Fr.
39 .. Drake Dominic .. DB/WR .. Fr.	88 .. Wyatt Graves .. DB/WR .. Fr.
41 .. Jacoby Williams .. DT .. Fr.	99 .. Javonte Parker .. DT .. Sr.

2025 Schedule

All game times 7 p.m.
 Aug. 22 .. at Bradley Central
 Aug. 29 .. Cleveland
 Sept. 5 .. at Walker Valley *
 Sept. 12 .. at Lenoir City *
 Sept. 19 .. Soddy-Daisy *

Sept. 26 .. at Ooltewah *
 Oct. 3 .. Knoxville Central
 Oct. 17 .. at Red Bank
 Oct. 24 .. Rhea County *
 Oct. 31 .. East Hamilton *
 * Denotes Region 3-5A game

McMinn

Continued from Page 4

back at receiver after leading the team last year with six touchdown catches, along with 529 receiving yards on 25 catches.

Fellow junior Drake Frazier is back after three touchdown grabs in 2024, along with Nathan Kessler, Maddox Frazier, Xavier Cole and Bottoms. Athletic junior Jaxson Gonzalez, a standout in basketball, also makes his football debut for McMinn in its receiving corps.

Defense

Everyone in the receiving corps is also in the rotation for the Cherokees' secondary on defense. Along with Gage Hester, Goodner and Maddox Frazier will play at safety. Cole, Bottoms, Gonzalez and Drake Frazier will make up the rotation at the corner-back positions.

McMinn returns some depth on the defensive line, where it will play its usual four-man front.

Javonte Parker, a senior, bring back the most total tackles from last year with 60 to one of the defensive tackle positions. Parker also had 5.5 sacks and 12 tackles for loss in 2024.

Makye McDermott, also a senior, is another defensive tackle starter, with Jesse Jones also rotating in that position. Jonah Martin and Christian Edwards, the latter returning from injury, will man the

defensive end spots.

Dyer will also line up on the defensive line at times this season.

The linebacking corps was a question mark heading into the offseason with the graduations of Cam Miller (team-high 113 tackles) and Kayden Melton (94 tackles), but Cagle likes where the depth of that position is now with senior Jack Goodin at the strong side bring back 42 tackles from last year, senior Jake Ramey in the middle and high-motor junior Bryson Akers at the weak side.

Also in the rotation at linebacker are Spartan Lyle, Colton Sneed and Isaac Akers.

Special teams

Mike Kraskouskas, a senior transfer from Meigs County, will handle placekicking duties, including kickoffs, extra points and field goals.

Kraskouskas could also be counted on early in the season at punter, as well, with starting punter Alex Powers injured as of deadline. Lawson is also a possibility at punter. Ace Cagle and Hester are long snappers and Bottoms the holder.

Returning kickoffs and punts are many of the same athletes playing receiver and secondary, with Gonzalez, Goodner, Drake Frazier and Watson among those who could do so at any time.

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Drew Cook | The Daily Post-Athenian

2025 McMinn Central Chargers

Central football 'ahead of schedule' entering 2025 season

DREW COOK
Daily Post-Athenian

McMinn Central first-year head coach Jonathan "JT" Ostrowski has been consistent in his rhetoric to the media this offseason: the Chargers are going to surprise people.

Losing 15 seniors from last year's team and undergoing a coaching change after the departure of Matt Moody, it might be expected that Central will have a down season. But Ostrowski said his players have completely bought in to the culture, scheme and standard set before them by the Charger coaching staff and are ready to compete.

"We are ahead of where we should be. There's always a learning curve when you come in with a new philoso-

phy and a new way of doing things," said Ostrowski. "Central is in a good place, that's what I've been telling people. Coach Moody did a great job of building up the program and setting the standard, and I'm coming in here just looking to elevate the standard and build on that success."

In setting that culture, Ostrowski and the team settled on a motto for 2025, T.A.P. -- team, attitude and pride.

"No matter how we come in, no matter however we're feeling or whoever we are playing, our focus is to go out there and compete," said Ostrowski.

Central moves from Region 3-3A, where it had been for several years, to a more northern region 2-3A. Old 3-3A foes Meigs County and Sweetwater joined

Central in the move to be grouped with Kingston, Scott and Austin-East.

"From top to bottom, this region is a very competitive region," said Ostrowski. "You've got a lot of historic rivalries in it with Central and Sweetwater, Central and Meigs County, Meigs and Sweetwater. Kingston is always a tough opponent -- Brian Pankey does a great job with that program. And from my time up in Knox County as OC at Fulton, Scott County was in our region and Austin-East is a historic Fulton rivalry. So as opposing region opponents go, I probably have the most familiarity with those types of programs."

Offense

It's no secret the Chargers have talent to replace. It lost key skill players like quarterback Ayden Plemons, Ray

McCarty, Devon Paxton and Dylan Carroll, and then both the offensive and defensive lines lose key players like Will Benton, Maddox Chrisman, Tay Hardy, Bryson Neely, etc.

But Ostrowski has seen new guys step up to fill the shoes of their predecessors. Perhaps most glaring of a departure at the quarterback position, it'll be first-year quarterback Bryce Mullins stepping up to fill the void left by the All-State Plemons.

"With each event we had this summer, Bryce Mullins has gotten sharper and sharper and sharper," Ostrowski said of his junior signal caller. "He's playing with a lot of confidence right now in practice and drills. Bryce is a born leader by the work he puts in and he earned the right to be one of our captains this year voted

Chargers

Continued from Page 8

on by the team.”

Mullins played wide receiver his freshman season at nearby McMinn County, but didn't play football last season. In his first year in Englewood, the junior has performed well in preseason scrimmages. The quarterback position is in Mullins' blood -- older brother Brady Mullins was McMinn's starting quarterback in 2023, leading the Cherokees to a 6-4 record.

Backing up Mullins at quarterback will be junior Jesse Holden, who comes to Central after two seasons at Polk County. With the Wildcats, Holden was a pivotal part of the offense and defense under head coach Derrick Davis. Per Ostrowski, Holden will have some designed packages in Central to get the ball in his hands.

In the backfield, Hunter Rayburn will lead a four person backfield that plays both ways. Rayburn, who was named a captain for the 2025 season, has been a key cog in the Charger defense as the starting middle linebacker the last two seasons and now moves to the offensive side of the ball, too.

Backing up Rayburn will be Bradley Mayfield, Kage McCroskey and Sambo Miller. Mayfield is arguably the biggest returning piece of the Charger defense as an edge, McCroskey slots in alongside Rayburn at linebacker and Miller will be a big piece of the Central defense, too. Because of the foursome's importance on both sides, Ostrowski said all four will likely see the field at running back each game to give the others a break.

“When I got this job, one of the first things I was asked to do was by Rayburn - ‘Can I run the football?’ I said no doubt, man,” said Ostrowski. “That room is very much by committee, and that’s a good problem to have when you have four guys that can run the ball effectively and control the line of scrimmage. We’re excited about those guys and the depth we have in that room -- it really makes me confident.”

The big play ability of senior captain Jake Goodin leads the wide receiver room for the Chargers. Goodin accrued 654 yards and seven touchdowns his junior season in just five and a half games before a season-ending knee injury. As a sophomore in 2023, Goodin had 400 yards and three scores.

Joining Goodin as starting

wideouts for the Chargers is the fourth and final captain Landin McInturff, who presents a sure-handed reliable target for Mullins and junior Mez Moss, who Ostrowski described as having “a big summer.” Landyn Giles will also start at wideout and play some tight end, according to Ostrowski.

On the offensive line, the Chargers have key pieces to replace. But Ostrowski has been pleased with their progression, especially under the leadership of elite coaches Josh Goodin and Kim Gossett.

“We have a lot of depth in that room,” said Ostrowski. “There’s probably seven or eight guys we feel comfortable throwing out there at multiple positions which is really good for a small school where depth can be an issue.”

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Chargers

Continued from Page 9

That's one of our groups that we have a strength there. I want to tip my cap to my offensive line coaches Josh Goodin and Kim Gossett, they've been doing it a long time and they might just be the best offensive line coaches I've ever had -- as a coordinator or a coach. They do so well with that position and they adapt to whatever crazy idea I throw out there."

Jeb Goodin and Ryder Moses are returning starters, while guys like Xevon Johnson and Maddox Bartel started a couple of games a season ago. Gunnar Goodin is the starting center for the Chargers, replacing Chrisman.

Defense

The lone returning starter on the defensive line is the aforementioned Mayfield, who made plenty of big plays as a junior last season. Moreover, Mayfield had four sacks against Walker Valley in the spring scrimmage in May.

"We had guys get some early experience last year that are now sophomores and juniors in the mix that we can roll with on that line. We've got a lot of good depth along that defensive line," said Ostrowski.

As mentioned before, the linebackers for the Chargers are experienced, talented and physical. Rayburn, McCroskey and Miller can all fly around and make plays at the first and second levels.

"Hunter Rayburn has all-state potential at linebacker. Absolute freak," said Ostrowski. "And then Kage McCroskey is our other starting linebacker -- he's earned it and has had a great spring and summer. He's been really impressive and he's selfless. Then Sambo Miller starting at outside linebacker as well -- he's kind of a hybrid

player and does a great job playing the pass and the run."

Athletic director Brent Masingale is making his return to the sidelines this season as the Central linebacker coach.

Former McMinn football standout Jalen Sharp is the Charger defensive backs coach and will call the defense.

"The whole team of kids absolutely play their butts off for Coach Sharp," said ostrowski. "They have really bought in to what he's trying to do and Sharp is our energizer. He really gets our guys going, and he does a great job in that defensive backs room."

In the secondary, Goodin will start at safety as a two-way player, showcasing closing speed and high IQ as the Charger "playcaller" on that side of the football. The other safety position is Will Mayfield, who pulled down four interceptions as a sophomore last year at corner.

"Very good athlete, very good ball player, very knowledgeable and very coachable," Ostrowski said of Mayfield. "I'm really looking forward to his junior year. Then we've got Zymari Clary starting at corner for us. He was a transfer last year from Jacksonville. He had a learning curve but as he's entering his senior year, he's been a fun kid to watch. He's come out of his shell."

Starting opposite Clary is Keller Grueber, a junior.

"This is his opportunity to start - he's earned this," said Ostrowski.

Josiah Haire and Landin McInturff are two names to watch to roll in there behind those four defensive backs.

Special Teams

As for who's kicking and punting for the Chargers -- Ostrowski said it's still up in the air. There are live try-outs of-sort each week and he'll roll out whoever he

feels is comfortable.

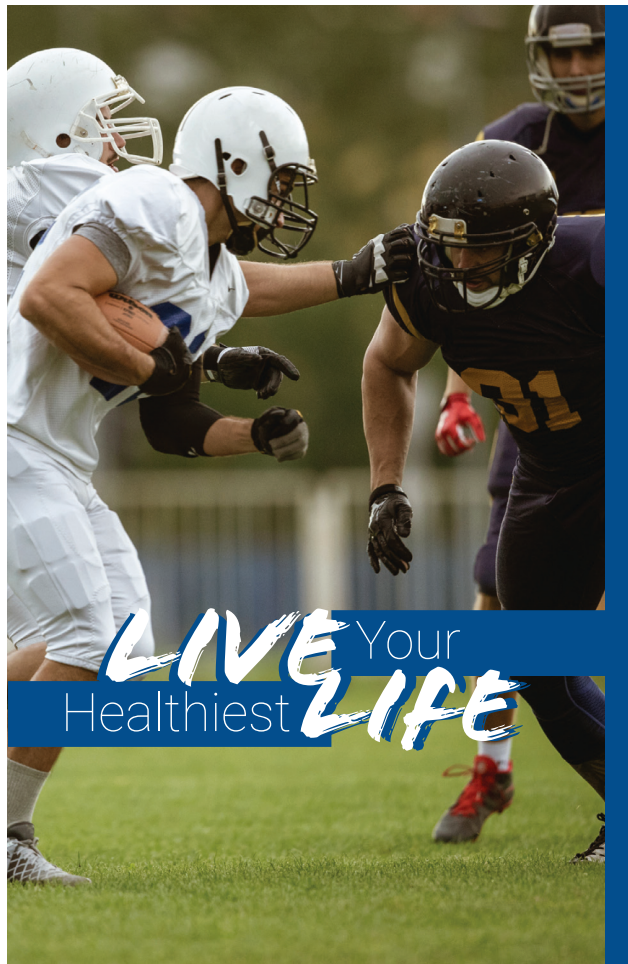
Returning kicks and punts will be Goodin, who did so his sophomore and junior seasons before his injury his junior year.

2025 McMinn Central Chargers

1 .. Zeb Masingale .. Fr	29 .. Evan Wilson .. Jr
2 .. Kage McCroskey .. Jr	31 .. Bryson Allen .. So
3 .. Bradley Mayfield .. Jr	34 .. Damian Rosario .. Jr
4 .. Rylan Killebrew .. Fr	35 .. Braiden Harris .. Fr
5 .. Hunter Rayburn .. Sr	37 .. Romeo Maldonado .. Fr
6 .. Zymari Clary .. Sr	41 .. Bradley Huff .. So
7 .. Jamez Moss .. Jr	42 .. Leo Maldonado .. Jr
8 .. Landin McInturff .. Sr	43 .. Harlee Cassada .. Fr
9 .. Sambo Miller .. Jr	44 .. Hudson Reed .. So
10 .. Jake Goodin .. Sr	50 .. Brylan King .. Sr
11 .. Will Mayfield .. Jr	51 .. Jeb Goodin .. Sr
12 .. Jesse Holden .. Jr	52 .. Gunner Cooley .. Fr
13 .. Tucker Carr .. Fr	53 .. Gunner Goodin .. So
14 .. Blaine McKee .. So	54 .. Jesse Stiles .. So
15 .. Bryce Mullins .. Jr	55 .. Tucker Williams .. Fr
16 .. Brodie Rogers .. Jr	56 .. Evan Medina .. Sr
18 .. Landyn Giles .. Sr	57 .. Christian Almeraz .. Fr
19 .. Tommy Hutchison .. So	58 .. Ryder Moses .. Sr
20 .. Keller Grueber .. Jr	59 .. Xevon Johnson .. Sr
21 .. John Mazzei .. Sr	60 .. Mason Reed .. Fr
22 .. Devon Lightfoot .. Fr	61 .. Derrick Moore .. So
23 .. Braxton Walker .. Fr	64 .. Landon Fasig .. Jr
24 .. JoJo Haire .. Sr	65 .. Matthew Cameron .. Jr
25 .. Aadonis Lamb .. Fr	71 .. Landon Morgan .. Jr
27 .. Aidan Allen .. Jr	74 .. Mathan Ailey .. Jr
28 .. Milynn Adams .. Fr	77 .. Maddox Bartel .. So

2025 Schedule

Aug. 22 .. at Polk County	Oct. 3 .. at Kingston
Aug. 29 .. at Eagleton	Oct. 10 .. Sequoyah
Sep. 12 .. Meigs County	Oct. 17 .. Tellico Plains
Sep. 19 .. Scott	Oct. 24 .. at Sweetwater
Sep. 26 .. Cumberland Cty.	Oct. 31 .. Austin-East



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Gabriel Garcia | The Daily Post-Athenian

2025 Meigs County Tigers

Tigers loaded with returning, new talent aiming for playoff run

DREW COOK
Daily Post-Athenian

A season ago, preseason expectations had Meigs County early on contending... but the Tigers blew those out of the water with a region championship and quarterfinal finish in the 3A playoffs.

This season, the stage is set for the Tigers to break through even further.

And while Meigs is loaded with talent at every position group, whether returning talent or incoming talent, head coach Nathan Simbeck and the program is firm on its belief that future goals or hopes of contention do not matter as much as getting better in the details every single day.

"I think the biggest thing is just to manage all that. We try to ignore (outside expectations) by just telling our kids and telling everyone that we want to improve each and every week," Simbeck said. "I think when you focus on yourself and you don't look at the opponent week in, week out, it's about improving, trying to fix the little things, the little details. I think that helps narrow the focus instead of looking at the bigger picture all the time."

"For us, we're trying to take it one week at a time. We want to improve every time we get on the field and not get complacent or comfortable with where we're at as a football team. It's certainly exciting. These kids deserve some of the hype and expecta-

tations because they performed well last year, and I'm proud of them for that. But we have to stay hungry and we have to go about like we haven't accomplished anything."

Meigs' 2024 season ended in a close 35-27 loss at Sequatchie County with a 9-4 record. There's certainly potential to improve upon that finish and record in 2025.

"We're really excited. We hope we can play deep into November. But the way we do that is just by focusing on just getting better each and every week and not really not just looking at, Hey, we're playing this team. This is a big game. Every game is a big game, and every game is an opportunity for us to improve."

It's a new region for the Tigers once again after just two years in Region 3-3A. Their third season back at the 3A level will now be in 2-3A. McMinn Central and Sweetwater make the move with the Tigers to Region 2, joining Kingston, Austin-East and Scott.

"I think anybody could beat anybody on any given night in this region," Simbeck said. "That's why you've got to be ready to play. You need to be prepared. And so I think that's good. Hopefully, we can be ready to go and Can be our best when region play comes around."

On top of region play, the Tigers have a tough non-region schedule.

"I think there's a balance in scheduling," said Simbeck.

“You don’t want to get banged up and be hurt and hobbling into the playoffs. But at the same time, if you want to play deep and you want to beat good teams late in November, you better schedule some teams that are going to help you do that. I think we’ve done that.”

Specifically the first three weeks of the season stand out for the Tigers against Chattanooga Prep, East Hamilton and York Institute.

“Chattanooga Prep is really athletic, so we’re hoping they test us there. East Hamilton is a 5A program. They’re going to be solid at every position, and we’ll have to play our brand of football to win that game, and I think we can. Then York Institute is a team that’s really physical. There’s no secret in what they do. If we don’t stop them, it’ll be a long night. I think all three of those teams could help us develop as a football team.”

Offense

The Tiger offense averaged 32.8 points per game in 2024, scoring 55 total touchdowns.

Tuff Ricker scored 36 of those touchdowns -- 20 rushing and 16 passing -- and the now-senior is back as the Meigs signal caller hoping for an encore.

“It’s always good to return your quarterback. This offseason has been evidence that the second year gets a little bit easier,” Simbeck said.

Ricker was a running back his first year in Decatur and a wide receiver in 2023, so the transition to quarterback in 2024 could have been a rocky one, but Ricker instead was one of the more prolific players in the state.

“I think besides hitting a baseball, quarterback is one of the toughest things to do in sports. We put a lot on him with his legs and his arms. This year, he’s had a really good offseason and he’s done a good job taking care of the football and making good decisions.”

In most high schools in Tennessee, having one capable quarterback is a blessing. In Meigs case, they’ve got three under the leadership of offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach Bryson Baker.

“I’ve got to give a lot of credit to Coach Baker, we’re always practicing two offenses. And all those guys are always getting reps,” said Simbeck. “If something were to happen, all of them are prepared to play. (McMinn County transfer) Kaiden Brewster is obviously a dynamic athlete and he also makes really good decisions. We’re excited about him. Colt Howard has a really strong arm. We feel like we have a chance to win if we have to play any of those guys.”

One of the few seniors on last year’s Meigs roster was tailback Bryson Hiefnar, who scored nearly 20 touchdowns. The Tigers will turn to sophomore Ethan Shaver to fill that vacancy with Bradley Central transfer Cornelius Morgan coming on in relief of Shaver under the leadership of Baker, who coaches the running backs, too.

“(Shaver and Morgan) are going to be the two kids that carry the load for us there this year,” said Simbeck. “Ethan has proven through preseason play that he’s running the ball well between the tackles, and he has speed to get on the edge and make plays. Really, really happy with him. Cornelius Morgan, he’s sort of the speedster, Scatback. He’s really dynamic. Both of these guys have potential to to be home run players for us.”

Returning at wideout is proven trio Daniel Mow, Bowen Combs and Brody Goines.

“Bowen Combs is our guy that stretches the field, takes the top off the defense,” Simbeck said. “We use him a lot in our Jet Sweeps, trying to get him the ball in space and throw it downfield to him because he can he can run away from people. He does that in football and he does it in baseball. So we’re we’re really excited about him.”

“Daniel Mow is another kid who’s really consistent. We’re never worried about him. He’s somebody that we try to get the ball to on some on some jet sweeps but he can also catch deep and intermediate passes and and some stuff. He’s hard to bring down. He’s a great blocker. We’re we’re we’re really excited for his senior season.”

“Brody Goines is extremely physical. He’s probably our best blocking receiver. And he just gets open. That’s probably his best trait. There’s things he does that that we don’t coach. He’s

2025 Schedule

Aug. 22.. at Chattanooga Prep	Sept. 19 .. Polk County
Aug. 29 .. at East Hamilton	Sept. 26 .. at Sweetwater
Sept. 5 .. at York Institute	Oct. 2 .. Brainerd
Sept. 12 .. at McMinn Central	Oct. 17 .. at Scott
	Oct. 24 .. Austin-East
	Oct. 30 .. Kingston

2025 Meigs County Tigers

0 .. Eli Lamb .. TE/DL	33 .. Noah Moats .. WR/DB .. Fr
1 .. Daniel Mow .. WR/DB .. Sr	34 .. Billy Nelson .. HB/LB .. Fr
2 .. Bowen Combs .. WR/DB .. Jr	40.. Briar Roberts .. TE/LB .. Jr
3 .. Brayve Adams .. TE/DL .. So	42 .. L.A. Paris .. TE/LB .. Fr
4 .. Jaxon Hope .. WR/DB .. Sr	46 .. Hunter Boyd .. TE/DL .. So
5 .. Tuff Ricker .. QB/DB .. Sr	49 .. David Aquino .. WR/DB .. Fr
6 .. Quinton Bennett .. WR/DB .. Jr	50 .. Kaleb Patton .. OL/LB .. So
7 .. Kaiden Brewster.. QB/DB .. So	52 .. Camden Thompson .. OL/DL .. Sr
8 .. Leroy Bowerman .. WR/DB .. So	54 .. Walt Hickman .. OL/DL .. Sr
9 .. Kegan Lenker .. H/LB .. Jr	55 .. Peyton Standridge .. OL/DL .. Jr
10 .. Colt Howard .. QB/DB .. Jr	56 .. Andrew Hutchison .. OL/DL .. Sr
11 .. Dawson Kelly .. TE/LB .. So	59 .. Gage Mason .. OL/DL .. Fr
12 .. Brody Goines .. WR/DB .. Sr	60 .. Kaiden Lamb .. OL/DL .. Jr
13 .. Ivan Gilbert .. TE/LB .. Fr	61 .. Jacory Clowers .. OL/DL .. So
14 .. Eli Barker .. WR/DB .. So	62 .. Lucas Hughes .. OL/DL .. Sr
15 .. Ethan Talley .. TE/DL .. Jr	63 .. Alec Moore .. OL/DL .. Sr
17 .. Cornelius Morgan .. RB/DB .. Jr	66 .. David Nelson .. OL/DL .. So
18 .. Ethan Shaver .. RB/LB .. So	68 .. Logan Keith .. OL/DL .. So
20 .. Isaak Levasseur .. RB/LB .. Jr	70 .. Braxton Kinkaid .. OL/DL .. Fr
21 .. Eli Hope .. WR/DB .. Jr	77.. Gavyn Withrow .. OL/DL .. Sr
22 .. Jason Kaley .. WR/DB .. So	78 .. Noah Hernandez .. OL/DL .. So
23 .. Xander Redman .. WR/DB .. So	79 .. Kenneth Miller .. OL/DL .. Fr
25 .. Barry Howard .. WR/DB .. So	80 .. Wyatt Gasper .. TE/DB .. So
26 .. Bryson Rose .. OL/LB .. Fr	81 .. Joshua Alonso .. WR/DB .. Sr
28 .. Cutter Harris .. WR/LB .. Fr	82 .. Dylan Ferkingstad .. WR/DB .. Jr
30 .. Mason Ward .. WR/LB .. Fr	83 .. Sephoroth Webb .. WR/DB .. Fr

Tigers

Continued from Page 13

just got really good football instincts. He's able to find windows. He's able to run routes and find a passing lane for the quarterback."

Behind that trio is a group of newcomers -- brothers Jaxon and Eli Hope, who came out to football for the first time this offseason after primarily playing basketball and baseball, and Quinton Bennett, a transfer from Bradley Central.

Coaching the wide receivers for the Tigers will be Durrelle Wood and Alex Parris.

Briar Roberts made the move to tight end and H-back for the Tigers, under the direction of position coach Hayden Wallen.

Up front is where the Tigers have arguably made their biggest impact for years. Meigs didn't graduate any players off of their starting offensive line from a season ago, but moved guards Eli Lamb and Briar Roberts to primarily the defensive part of the ball to give a lift there.

All-State tackle Lucas Hughes, center Gavyn Withrow and tackle Peyton Standridge return from an elite line a season ago.

"Returning your center is always good. That's arguably maybe the most important position because if you can't get a snap, you can't play at all. (Withrow) has worked extremely hard and has put a lot into this program. Then Lucas Hughes, obviously an all-state offensive lineman and it's always good to have a guy like that returning. We feel like he's a game changer for us. He's an athletic lineman at that, and so he's able to do some things for us in the run game that give us to make us better. It starts up front with us, and all five are extremely selfless."

Filling in at the guard positions (successfully, at that, in preseason scrimmages) will be sophomores

Walt Hickman and Braxton Kincaid.

"(Hickman and Kincaid) have worked extremely hard this offseason. They're both 400-pound squatters. They're physical. They play with an edge. We're really excited to have them the next three years. We're really pleased with their development this summer and spring."

Former Tiger lineman standout Austin Andrews is coaching the Tiger offensive line for the second straight year.

Defense

Perhaps the biggest question mark on the entire roster exiting last season was the defensive line, where Meigs lost several starters.

Those vacancies will be replaced by Lamb, who played some defense late in the season in 2024, and sophomore Brayve Adams, who Simbeck described as "one of the strongest kids pound for pound on the team."

"Eli Lamb is just extremely athletic and a hard worker. We hope he can be a difference maker for us there."

Simbeck said guys like Ethan Talley and Caleb Patton will come in to spell Lamb and Adams. PJ Hackney will coach the Tiger defensive line.

Meigs returns three pivotal playmakers at linebacker, arguably its strongest position group on the roster, in Ricker, Roberts, Shaver and Kegan Lenker.

"A lot of what we do hinges on what those guys do," said Simbeck. "Tuff is hard to block. He plays extremely physical. He gives people a really hard time at that position. Kegan Lenker, was third on our team in tackles last year. We're looking for him to fill the shoes of Hiefnar this year and hopefully, if he's our leading tackler, that's good. Briar Roberts has moved to inside linebacker. Those guys

have been really good for us. They're both very smart kids. They play really hard. Then Ethan Shaver, he played last year as a freshman. He was fourth on our team in tackles last year and started maybe half the year. He was fourth on our team in tackles, all-state as a freshman. He provides us a lot of length at that position."

Jadon Tullock is the inside linebackers coach and Jace Greene the outside backer coach for Meigs in 2025.

Finally, the Tigers' secondary -- under the direction of defensive backs coach Wood -- is a strong unit on the back end. At corner, Meigs will start Brewster -- who was All-State at McMinn with five interceptions and a forced fumble as a freshman in 2024 -- and Combs, who Simbeck said was great last year and has had a big offseason.

"We feel like both of our

corners can shut down their parts of the field."

At safety, Meigs returns Mow on the strong side and will implement Bennett at free safety. In preseason scrimmages, Bennett has flashed big play ability at multiple levels of the field.

"Daniel Mow is a really good tackler. A lot of times, the safety can be just a hat for a hat in open space and if they miss, he's gone. Daniel is able to get people on the ground, and that's been really good for us."

"Quinton has had a tremendous summer and pre-season. He's doing things we don't even coach him to do. He's playing deep safety and he's coming up and making tackles at two yards. I wish I could say that's coaching because it would make me feel like a better coach, but he's just that talented and has a lot of ability."

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Dewey Morgan | The Advocate & Democrat

2025 Sequoyah Chiefs

Sequoyah begins its next chapter this fall

NOAH HOUCK

The Advocate & Democrat

The Chiefs head into the new season with a not-so-new name leading the program. Alumni and first-time head coach Brett King takes over the reins as the Chiefs look to reshape the team and aim for redefining the program in 2025.

As Sequoyah moves forward, the Chiefs will look to find their own definition of success on the field. “Competing. No blowout losses, just straight competing. I want to be in every game. In my opinion, we can be,” King said.

That starts with slowing

the ball down on offense and leaving time for a team of multiple newer players to get acclimated.

“We are going to hold our pace and slow the game. We want to make the other team adjust to us and not the other way around,” King added. “I just want to compete. At the end of the game, I want to know that we have a chance of winning.”

Though the product on the field is what most people will see, King knows where the rebuild starts.

“For me, it was the weight room,” he said. “We have put the lifting forward. Our mindset was, if we only have guys on the offensive line benching 200 going against guys

benching 300, we are never going to win a game.

“You have to be able to shove some people on both sides of the ball.”

Redoing the weight program became the focus of the summer. Now the Chiefs have a pair of players who deadlift near 600 pounds and multiple athletes who squat around 500.

“I feel like that is going to be the start of our success,” King added.

King envisions adding weightlifting to the weekly schedule across Chief athletics — something that would benefit across all the fields and courts.

“The next level of athletes are going to be strong, so why

not get our guys strong right now,” King said.

Through the preseason, Sequoyah has had several players start to take over leadership roles for the program.

Seniors Brody Hunt and TK West have set an example for the linemen, with Canaan Powell doing the same for the skill players.

“We have to change that mentality of ‘we can’t win,’” King said. “I know there is this mentality shadowing over this school, but that is not realistic. These guys can win, we just have to change that mentality and belief in them.”

Part of the challenge this season will be Sequoyah

Chiefs

Continued from Page 15

establishing the confidence in the culture.

"It is pretty hard to build that confidence up. But then you get into 'are they too prideful and we don't want that attitude,'" King added. "We want this attitude of confidence and 'we know we can win,' but we don't want

to be overconfident."

Shaping up

Sequoyah plans for a versatile offense capable of running multiple sets out of the I-formation with several threats on the ground.

"Offensively, we are almost going to do everything. We have an I-formation, we have

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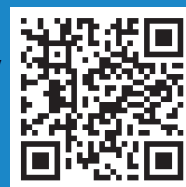
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Chiefs

Continued from Page 16

a tight end, we have 22-personnel, and we have 11-personnel. We have it all," King said. "We are going to adjust to what the defense gives us. Every team may see something different."

Senior Josh Phillips will start under center. A multi-sport athlete, Phillips brings arm strength and game experience despite not playing football since eighth grade.

Sophomore Caiden West will be a running threat in the program's backfield.

Christian Chambers and Powell will help set up Sequoyah's two-back set. Clint Staples also brings experience to the field, as does Carter Williamson at fullback.

"Somebody who has impressed me this fall since we put pads on is Clint Staples. He has really good vision," King added. "(Carter) can help us out with more depth."

Sequoyah does field several options in the receiving group. It starts with Meechi Rice, a returning athlete who has stood out this summer.

"We are pretty good at the receiver position, we just have to correct a few things," King said.

Evan Hunt is a returning, experienced athlete, with Leland Keller also bringing length.

"(Hunt) is probably one of our best athletes on the field. He is quick and headstrong," King said.

Eli Ellis has shown to be a strong athlete this offseason, with Andrew Smith showing he can be a reliable route-runner.

Eli Byrum joins the team after not playing since middle school.

Caiden West will also feature across the field.

"He is going to be everywhere," King said. "You are going to see him at running

back, quarterback, tight end, receiver. You will see him everywhere."

Sequoyah does have talent on the offensive line, led by Hunt and TK West, with Dillon Wilson adding to the mix.

"We have pretty longtime starters at offensive line. Hopefully, they will be able to hold that line and be a strong foundation for us," King said.

Sequoyah's defense has had to make changes following multiple offseason injuries that will impact the fall.

The Chiefs will set into a 4-3 defense that focuses on adding pressure up front.

"We had to adjust with our defensive line and put more guys with their hands on the ground," King said.

Sequoyah did see some success in scrimmages with Midway and Concord Christian.

"We have held our own," King added. "(In a scrimmage), Midway popped us in the mouth."

Sequoyah's season starts with rivalry games — Sweetwater, where King has coached the past seven years and Tellico Plains, where King will face his former coach as a player and once co-assistant coach in Bobby White.

"The first one to me means a lot. That is where I have been residing for the past seven years and a youth pastor for the past three years," King said. "I want to beat them badly, just because of my connection with them."

"We have the opportunity to start 4-0 and be pretty good, but if we drop one of those games, where does our confidence go?"

"Hopefully, for our morale, if we do lose one or two at the beginning, we can push that we have to get through it. No one said it is going to be easy."

2025 Sequoyah Chiefs

0 .. Hunner Johnson .. Sr.	54 .. Caden Atkins .. Jr.
1 .. Evan Hunt .. Jr.	58 .. Waylon Smith .. Fr.
2 .. Meechi Rice .. Jr.	62 .. McKenzie Lewis .. So.
3 .. Josh Phillips .. Sr.	63 .. Dillon Wilson .. Sr.
4 .. Kaden McKeown .. So.	64 .. Joseph Teaster .. Jr.
5 .. Canaan Powell .. Sr.	65 .. Jordan Jenkins .. Fr.
6 .. Caiden West .. So.	66 .. Dawson Frye .. Jr.
8 .. Clint Staples .. Sr.	70 .. Brody Hunt .. Sr.
9 .. Tanner Parcher .. Sr.	71 .. Braden Francis .. So.
10 .. Eli Ellis .. Sr.	77 .. Ayden Ayers .. Jr.
11 .. Leland Keller .. Jr.	78 .. Trey Lewis .. Sr.
12 .. Pruitt Nix .. Sr.	81 .. Beckham Steele .. Fr.
13 .. Hayden McGrail .. Sr.	Cayden Arden .. Fr.
14 .. Connor Bivens .. Jr.	CJ Bailey .. So.
15 .. Jordan Branson .. Fr.	Landon Berrong .. Jr.
16 .. Chayden Rose .. Fr.	Eli Byrum .. Jr.
18 .. Andreus Cortez .. Jr.	Christian Chambers .. Sr.
19 .. DJ Butts .. Fr.	Colten Colvert .. Jr.
21 .. Carver Parcher .. Jr.	Cordell Colvert .. Jr.
22 .. Dallas Taylor .. Fr.	Tai Delgado .. Jr.
23 .. Derrick Foreman .. Sr.	Logan Dupes .. Jr.
24 .. Triston Tipton .. Sr.	Elijah Harris .. Sr.
27 .. Carter Williamson .. Jr.	Logan Lee .. Sr.
34 .. Brody Burton .. Fr.	Daniel Macon .. So.
50 .. Thai Webber .. Fr.	Joseph Rice .. So.
51 .. TK West .. Sr.	Andrew Smith .. Jr.
52 .. Levi Jones .. Sr.	Carter Talentt .. So.
53 .. Jalen King .. So.	Mario Zavala .. Sr.

2025 Schedule

Aug 22 .. at Sweetwater	Oct. 3 .. Loudon*
Aug. 29 .. Tellico Plains	Oct. 10 .. at McMinn Central
Sept. 5 .. Polk County	Oct. 17 .. Bye
Sept. 12 .. Howard	Oct. 24 .. Red Bank*
Sept. 19 .. Signal Mountain*	Oct. 30 .. at East Ridge*
Sept. 26 .. at Hixson*	* = Region 3-4A

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Dewey Morgan | The Advocate & Democrat

2025 Sweetwater Wildcats

Sweetwater ready for next step

NOAH HOUCK

The Advocate & Democrat

Heading into the second season under coach Tommy Bunch Jr., the Wildcats have had another summer to get stronger while also adding depth to the program.

Across the field, the players are not only stronger and faster, but they are also more keen on what is being asked of them.

As the 2024 season progressed, improvements in the team were noticeable. That trend has continued through the spring and summer, setting up a group that is expecting to compete this fall.

"We have high expectations program-wise and expect to take our next steps in the rebuild of this program and the rebuild of this culture. I feel like, in our offseason and preseason so far, we have shown great signs of reaching a lot of those goals," Bunch said. "Our guys have definitely gotten bigger, faster, stronger throughout the offseason and we have been able to train some leaders in our locker room. I feel like this is more of a player-led team than it was in year one,

which is huge for the trajectory of our program.

"Our culture is definitely more right and we have high expectations program-wide for the 2025 season."

Familiarity is one of several catalysts behind the upswing. For both Bunch and the roster, it was a new experience — one that was tackled head-on and learned from.

New look, known names

Though personnel on the field will be similar, Sweetwater has made changes around the program. Michael Penna takes over as offensive coordinator with the program looking to create a blend of Wing-T and spread.

Quarterback Nolan Dacus returns for his junior season and has made his presence known in the summer.

"Nolan has always thrown the ball really well, but his footwork has improved in this offseason. He is understanding our scheme better and what his reads are supposed to be," Bunch said. "I also feel like he is more comfortable with the guys who are up front protecting him right now. And I feel like those guys have improved and that is going to improve

his game, which is going to improve our game."

Unanimously voted as a captain by his teammates, Dacus' presence in the huddle and locker room will be just as impactful as in the pocket.

"Nolan is a mature leader. He is going to have a great year and it is not just because of the talent that he has, but also the intangibles that he has and the people that he is surrounded with," Bunch said. "He has a great cast of teammates that want us to do well and, because of that, he is going to do well."

Bryson Bonnough offers support in the position, but the Wildcats plan to get the sophomore on the field in

other ways when allowed.

"If Bryson is in the ball game, our team does not fall off any. Bryson has had a great offseason," Bunch added. "(The depth) is huge because Bryson is also going to play other roles on our offense. He is going to play at receiver, running back and somewhere on the field.

"When you have two quarterbacks on the field, that allows you to add another element to your offense."

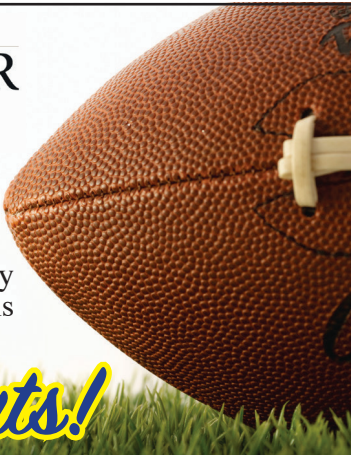
The Sweetwater backfield will have a "cast of characters" blocking and carrying the ball.

Key returners like Ty Fitch and Jeremiah Parris are joined by Bonnough, Kolt Correll, Will Watson, Landon

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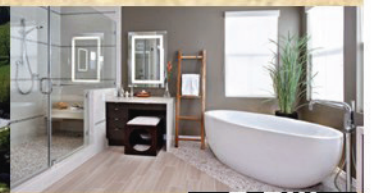
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Wildcats

Continued from Page 19

Dacus and others.

"All of those are guys that are either going to be playing full-back, tailback, wingback. They are going to be playing some combination of those backs," Bunch said. "A lot of different weapons there and we feel comfortable getting the ball in any of their hands as well as some of the other guys, too."

Some of those talents will blend into the wide receiver group. Bonnough, Correll, Landon Dacus and Parris are versatile, while joined by Kaeden Grabowski, Isaiah Stiles and tight end type athletes in Gus Campbell and Landon Murphy.

"We have a great receiving corps and we are deep there. That is why we have to have the spread to go along with our Wing-T because, if not, we are going to be wasting some players," Bunch said. "We have a lot of different receiver types. We have small guys that can run in that group and longer guys that can go up and win 50-50 balls."

"And we have bigger guys that, to use basketball terms, can post up and win their territories. I am excited we have so many weapons on the perimeter."

In the trench

Leading Sweetwater's offensive line will be another unanimously voted captain, Hayden Osborne.

"Hayden leads that group up front and does a good job with it," Bunch said. "It is incredibly important to have Hayden Osborne anchoring that line at center and being able to coach people up."

A second senior, Luke Dalton, joins the line alongside tackles Brayden Myers and Corbin Nile.

"Luke is a blue-collar type worker. He is going to do everything that you ask him to do and he is going to do it as perfectly as he can," Bunch added. "Both (Myers and Nile) have gotten strong in the offseason and footwork has gotten much better, so I am excited to see what they can do."

Sophomores Elijah Lowe and Logan Whaley add to the competition while Brody Gosa, Kaivon Latham and Ayden Steffa also have competed for roles.

Steffa and Latham, alongside Osborne, may be leading reps on the defensive line.

"We play 3A football, so you have to try to get your best players on the field right now," Bunch said.

Gosa, Lowe, Myers and Nile add to the mix.

"I actually think that is one of the more improved groups that we have had since spring. Their technique has gotten much better," Bunch added.

Depth in defense

Sweetwater has depth on the defense that opens up options for the scheme.

"I feel like we are deep at most positions. I feel like we have 22-25 guys that can go in and play at most positions," Bunch said.

Campbell, Dalton, Carson Faulkner, Fitch, Murphy, Jaxson Powell, Will Watson and Logan Whaley build the candidates.

The secondary shares the same strengths.

"We probably have 10 kids back there that I would feel comfortable with going into a game," Bunch said.

Bonnough, Landon Dacus, Braden Dowell, Grabowski and Dominic Yoemans make up the cornerbacks, with Correll, Nolan Dacus, Jeremiah Parris, Cy Prince, Stiles and Powell again make the secondary.

"Those guys are competing, they are athletic and they can run. There is a lot of excitement there, too," Bunch added. "We

have talked about this for the last two weeks, but nobody is comfortable right now.

"Somebody has somebody pushing them at every position and that is a good thing. It is going to require everybody to get better and if everyone gets better, then we are going to be pretty good."

2025 Sweetwater Wildcats

1 .. Bryson Bonnough .. So.	50 .. Carson Faulkner .. So.
2 .. Isaiah Stiles .. Jr.	51 .. Hayden Osborne .. Sr.
3 .. Kasen Mizer .. Fr.	52 .. Brody Gosa .. Jr.
4 .. Brayden Dowell .. So.	53 .. Elijah Lowe .. So.
5 .. Jeremiah Parris .. Sr.	54 .. Logan Whaley .. So.
6 .. Ty Fitch .. Jr.	55 .. Brayden Myers .. Sr.
7 .. Landon Murphy .. Jr.	56 .. Aiden Pinsley .. Fr.
8 .. Thomas Hawkins .. Jr.	59 .. Jonah Wilson .. Fr.
9 .. Jaxson Powell .. Jr.	60 .. Danny Contreras .. Fr.
10 .. Ashton Johnkins .. Fr.	62 .. Keldon Jolley .. Fr.
11 .. Johnny Gutierrez .. So.	63 .. Wyatt Brock .. Fr.
12 .. Augustus Campbell .. Jr.	64 .. Luke Dalton .. Sr.
14 .. Nolan Dacus .. Jr.	65 .. Payton Fordham .. So.
15 .. Liam McClure .. Fr.	66 .. Ayden Steffa .. Sr.
16 .. Kolt Correll .. So.	69 .. Diego Loreda .. Fr.
19 .. Austin Davis .. So.	70 .. Brandon Reed .. Fr.
20 .. Will Watson .. So.	73 .. Jasper Smith .. Fr.
21 .. Landon Dacus .. So.	74 .. Kaivon Latham .. So.
22 .. Cy Prince .. Jr.	75 .. Kanyon Caulder .. Fr.
23 .. Dominic Yoemans .. Sr.	77 .. Corbin Nile .. Jr.
24 .. Kaeden Grabowski .. So.	78 .. Caiden Ward .. So.
25 .. Elijah Johnson .. So.	80 .. Gabriel Buckner .. Fr.
26 .. John Dalton .. Fr.	81 .. James Gutierrez .. Fr.
31 .. Zackery O'Daniel .. Sr.	82 .. Kyland Breeden .. Fr.
34 .. Jeremiah Wilson .. So.	84 .. Jacob Smith .. Fr.
44 .. Preston Wall .. Fr.	85 .. Zach Sisk .. Fr.
46 .. Aiden McKenzie .. Sr.	

2025 Schedule

Aug. 22 .. Sequoyah	Oct. 10 .. at Campbell County
Sug. 29 .. Bye	Oct. 17 .. Oneida
Sept. 5 .. at Tellico Plains	Oct. 24 .. McMinn Central*
Sept. 12 .. at Polk County	Oct. 31 .. Scott*
Sept. 19 .. at Kingston*	* = Region 2-3A
Sept. 26 .. Meigs County*	
Oct. 3 .. at Austin-East*	



Courtesy of Bobby White

2025 Tellico Plains Bears

Tellico set for new heights in 2025

NOAH HOUCK

The Advocate & Democrat

Coming off the team's first playoff win in 15 seasons a year ago, the Bears have plunged the program forward. Tellico hopes to keep that trend going through the new year, eyeing a home playoff game and a Region 2-2A Championship.

Tellico's roster is interesting — the biggest that Bobby White has had and plenty experienced and talented, despite the need to fill the shoes of several graduated starters from the Class of 2024.

"There has been some good competition on the team and some guys have stepped up and really shown out in a lot of ways," White said. "Our leadership on the team has been better than I expected this year. These guys have worked hard, now we just have to see it come to fruition."

Not so new faces

Returning under center for Tellico will be Ike Hollinghead. The senior had his 2024 season end with a leg injury, but is set to cash in on his Bears' finale.

Hollinghead is moving well, showing improvement

and up to 190 pounds, per White. Tellico expects to get him involved in the team's run game as well.

"He has really grown as a leader. I think he is at 100% right now and I don't see any drop off from last year," White said.

His IQ for the game has taken off, helping younger teammates learn the playbook.

"(Everyone) is looking at him because he sets the tone. If he has a bad practice or hangs his head, it affects everybody," White added. "That is something we have talked about and he has gotten better at. Most of the time, he is very positive and upbeat. That is what you want to see at the quarterback position."

Tellico's backfield has always been the strength of the program and, with an experienced line blocking for capable runners, it should be another standout season.

"It has gotten better each season, especially as the linemen have been in the offense for four seasons now," White said. "We are really blocking well for those guys and we have some pretty good running backs."

Two speedy backs set up part of the backfield with Gio

Carter and freshman Jasper Hamilton.

"(Carter) can make all the cuts and all the runs. He is a special talent that does not come around very often on 2A football teams," White added. "(Hamilton) has great instincts, is strong and fast and can really run the ball."

Carter has been described as one of the fastest backs White has coached, with Hamilton showing he is fully ready for the varsity game as a freshman.

Nathaniel Bivens brings a different game as a powerful, hard-to-tackle 5-foot-9, 200-pound back.

"He is a load; he is a tank. They had trouble bringing him down and we have had trouble bringing him down in practice throughout the week with his strength," White said. "We have some lightning and thunder in the backfield and we are excited to see what they do on Friday nights."

The receiving group features a variety of options.

Trevor Kibler returns as a lengthy, speedy receiver capable of taking the top off or getting underneath. Clint Moser brings a good set of hands. Both have gotten more aggressive on the ball in the summer.

Allen Matthews has also

made solid improvements, highlighted by standout catches in the spring and summer. Dawson Edwards' baseball skills are translating to his ability to track the ball.

Bryson Collette is a strong, physical tight end who could flex into wider spots and is hard to tackle.

Big ol' Bears

Returning three of five starters from 2024, Tellico's offensive line might be the greatest strength of the team.

"I really like our starting five up front. Really big kids and physical kids," White said. "The great thing about having those starters back is they know who they can block, even if the defense (moves). They are picking things up pretty well — I am extremely proud of that group."

Hayden Phillips lines up as a 235-pound senior center and leader on the line. Jaden Driver also returns with plenty of experience for his final season.

Kobe Bradley and Tyler McDowell are two 300-pound sophomores who will fit into the openings on the line.

Lynkon Hamilton enters his junior year as a 235-pound left guard.

"He is playing probably better than anybody right

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Bears

Continued from Page 22

now. He has grown and gotten stronger in the weight room," White said. "He can really move and get after some guys."

Tellico adds depth with Jamarcus Melton-Frantzen, Dalton Thomas and Landon Hamilton — a junior who could fit into any spot on the line.

On the defensive line, Collette will be a leader at defensive end.

"He was a big-time playmaker for us last year off the edge. He has put on a lot of size in his upper body and probably got a little quicker," White said. "Teams are going to have a real hard time blocking him. He is relentless and has a high motor."

Tellico will see a rotation in several candidates like Bradley, Driver, Lynkon Hamilton, McDowell and Phillips.

A two-man rotation of Camdyn Davidson and Logan Hamilton set up on the opposite end.

Defensive Coordinator Trevor Hunt has retired, but the Bears do not expect to make many changes with Nathan Lynn leading the front seven and Kevin Ervin on the back end.

"It is the same defense and it really has been seamless. The players have picked up on what Coach Lynn likes to do. We might be a little different - might be a little more aggressive - but, overall, it is the same defense," White said.

Bringing the hits

Bivens returns at linebacker with plenty of experience and three years in the program. He'll be joined by senior Caden McConkey, who played a solid amount as a sophomore.

Jasper Hamilton also factors in, showing his speed and size to make him stand out early in his career.

Shane McNabb also adds to the rotation.

Kibler and Moser will lead the team at the safety position.

"Both those guys are kind of ballhawks," White said. "They can really cover some ground."

Erickson Sporre, a transfer from Florida, adds to the group. Hollinghead is also an option, but the Bears want to reserve him for offense.

Dawson Edwards has stepped up in the lead cornerback role, compared to All-State selection Braden Reed by White.

"I don't see a whole lot of dropoff at that position," White said.

The opposite side features a rotation of Bryson Holley and Matthews, with AC Carter adding depth to the field.

"In the football world, you are always talking about getting bigger, faster and stronger," White said. "A lot of our guys have grown. Now, we just have to see how that transitions into playing in a game and does it translate to playing in a game?"

2025 Schedule

Aug. 22 .. Greenback	Academy*
Aug. 29 .. at Sequoyah	Oct. 10 .. at Harriman
Sept. 5 .. Sweetwater	Oct. 17 .. at McMinn
Sept. 12 .. Bledsoe County	Central
Sept. 19 .. Oneida*	Oct. 24 .. Smith County
Sept. 26 .. Bye	Oct. 30 .. at Polk County*
Oct. 3 .. Eagleton	* = Region 2-2A

2025 Tellico Plains Bears

0 .. Bryson Collette .. Sr.	30 .. Colten Keys .. Fr.
1 .. Bryson Holley .. So.	32 .. Elliott Davisson .. So.
2 .. Allen Franklin .. Sr.	35 .. Camdyn Davidson .. Jr.
3 .. Dawson Edwards .. Sr.	42 .. Shane McNabb .. Sr.
4 .. Gio Carter .. So.	44 .. Adonai Ford .. Fr.
5 .. Landon England .. So.	52 .. Landon Hamby .. Sr.
7 .. Ike Hollinghead .. Sr.	54 .. Dalton Thomas .. Sr.
8 .. Cody Parker .. So.	55 .. Jamarcus Melton-Frantzen .. Sr.
9 .. Ryan Cunningham .. Fr.	56 .. Landon Hamilton .. Jr.
10 .. Clint Moser .. Sr.	57 .. Riley Smith .. Fr.
11 .. Logan Hamilton .. Jr.	58 .. Levi Lethcoe .. So.
12 .. Erickson Sporre .. So.	59 .. Legend Debit .. Fr.
13 .. Jasper Hamilton .. Fr.	60 .. Hayden Phillips .. Sr.
15 .. Brent Hamby .. Jr.	64 .. Lynkon Hamilton .. Jr.
20 .. A.C. Carter .. Sr.	66 .. Coby O'Dell .. Fr.
21 .. Nathaniel Bivens .. Sr.	68 .. Matthew Lynn .. So.
22 .. Trevor McCarthy .. Sr.	70 .. Jaden Driver .. Sr.
23 .. Jasin Davis .. Fr.	75 .. Tyler McDowell .. So.
24 .. Caden McConkey .. Sr.	76 .. Kobe Bradley .. So.
25 .. Trevor Kibler .. Jr.	

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