

2025 HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL



**Join us as we shine a spotlight on
17 players from The Star's coverage area**

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CONTENDER OR PRETENDER?

Find out where your
FAVORITE TEAM
stands heading into the 2025 season

By **JARED GRAVETTE**
Sports Editor

I'll keep the intro short and sweet. High school football is back, and we're here to separate the contenders, pretenders, and those straddling the fence of punching their ticket to the postseason.

Where does your favorite team lie?

ALEXANDRIA

The Valley Cubs bounced back in a big way last season. After going 1-9 in 2023, Alexandria improved to 8-4. The Valley Cubs shocked Class 4A, Region 8 champion North Jackson in the first round of the playoffs before falling to Brooks in the second round.

Alexandria should be even better this year. Junior Cole Wheeler enters his third season as the Valley Cubs' starting quarterback, and he'll have plenty of weapons around him. Sophomore MJ Morris and junior Evan White give Wheeler a pair of dynamic wide receivers, and junior JJ Beason can do a little bit of everything.

Alexandria no longer has a young team, and the Valley Cubs will prove it under the lights at Lou Scales Stadium.

VERDICT: CONTENDER

ANNISTON

After starting the 2024 season 2-4, the Bulldogs righted the ship during the second half and did some damage in the Class 4A state playoffs, blowing out Randolph and Good Hope before falling to West Morgan in the quarterfinals.

Anniston finished with a 7-6 record, but head coach Rico Jackson expects more consistency from the Bulldogs this season. They should have an explosive offense with quarterback Damon Pope, running back Jabari Williams and wide receiver Jakorie Carr leading the way. On defense, Anniston returns all-state performers Charles Thomas and Elijah Lanier.

The Bulldogs are loaded with talent on both sides of the ball, and they'll be looking to make a deep postseason run.

VERDICT: CONTENDER

CLEBURNE COUNTY

The Tigers struggled in their first season under head coach Vaughn Lee, who was tasked with replacing 20 seniors from Cleburne County's 2023 squad. With a roster consisting of only two seniors, an



PHOTO BY BOB CRISP, THE DAILY HOME
Oxford's Jaylin Taylor returns for his senior season after leading Class 6A in receiving yards a year ago.

inexperienced group stumbled to a 1-9 record.

Those kids are now a year older, and they're bigger and stronger. After gaining valuable experience during a difficult season, Cleburne County should be better, but it will still be an uphill battle to qualify for postseason play.

VERDICT: PRETENDER

DONOHO

The Falcons struggled out of the gate a year ago under first-year head coach

Bill Smith. Donoho lost five of its first six games but turned the corner after a four-game gauntlet against Pleasant Valley, Wadley, Winterboro and Ohatchee. The Falcons won their last four games to make the Class 1A state playoffs.

Donoho must replace some quality seniors from that team, including Alabama Sports Writers Association Class 1A lineman of the year Hayes Farrell. The Falcons will need sophomore

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Cover Photos By: Bill Wilson, Boyace Pope and Tucker Webb

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quarterback Luke Farrell, who started on the offensive line a year ago, to step up if they want to make the playoffs again.

VERDICT: ON THE FENCE

HOPE CHRISTIAN

In its first year to field a football team, Hope Christian will be led by head coach Chris Stone. The Saints will play in the Alabama Independent School Association and have eight regular season games scheduled for 2025. Stone says Hope Christian has 26 players on the varsity roster, and some of the names may sound familiar. Quarterback Kainen Bozeman transferred from Oxford, running back Nick Morrow from Wellborn and offensive tackle Caden Marturello from Piedmont. They'll be counted on to set the foundation for the Saints' program.

Hope Christian will attempt to make some noise in 2025, but some first-year growing pains should be expected.

VERDICT: PRETENDER

JACKSONVILLE

A lot has changed in Jacksonville since the last time the Golden Eagles took the field. After longtime head coach Clint Smith took the White Plains job, Jacksonville hired former Jacksonville State offensive lineman Jeremy Sullivan to lead the program. Sullivan spent the previous eight seasons as the head coach at Boaz, where his teams went 44-45.

The Golden Eagles moved up to Class 5A a year ago and snuck into the playoffs as the No. 4 seed out of Region 6, which includes powerhouses Moody and Leeds. Jacksonville has made the playoffs 12 straight seasons, and how the Golden Eagles adjust to Sullivan's coaching will likely determine whether they can extend that streak to 13.

VERDICT: ON THE FENCE

JACKSONVILLE CHRISTIAN

The Thunder won the Alabama Christian Football Association 8-man championship a year ago. That team lost a decent amount of talent, including wide receiver Jesse Gannaway, but JCA still has senior quarterback Noah Lee, a three-star prospect who recently committed to Jacksonville State. With a talent like Lee under center, the Thunder has a chance to repeat.

VERDICT: CONTENDER

OHATCHEE

With quarterback Jake Roberson, wide receivers Colby Hester and Brayden Collins and running back Jayden Heard leading the way, the Indians averaged just under 43 points a game last year. All of those guys are now gone, and Ohatchee is expected to go back to a ground-and-pound approach under new head coach Blake Jennings.

The Indians won their final three regular-season games last year to sneak into the playoffs as the No. 4 seed out of a stacked Class 3A, Region 6. Ohatchee has to replace a lot of star power, but if things break the right way, the Indians should have a shot to sneak into the playoffs again.

VERDICT: ON THE FENCE

OXFORD

The Yellow Jackets have plenty of star power returning in linebacker Keenan Britt, wide receiver Jaylin Taylor and running back Caleb Wynn. Those three helped Oxford win its first 13 games a year ago before the Yellow Jackets ran into eventual Class 6A state champion Parker in the semifinals.

Oxford will have to rely on some inexperienced players this year, including sophomore Maddox Mims, who takes over at quarterback for his older brother, Mason Mims, who is now playing for Louisville. Expect the Yellow Jackets to get better as the season progresses and be playing their best ball headed into the playoffs.

VERDICT: CONTENDER

PIEDMONT

The Bulldogs looked like themselves again last season, winning their first 13 games of the season before falling to Mars Hill in the semifinals of the Class 3A playoffs. Wide receiver Rollie Pinto, who committed to Jacksonville State this summer, returns after setting the AHSAA single-season record with 1,826 receiving yards. He'll be catching passes from new quarterback Cole Austin, who looked capable during limited action last season.

Austin, a sophomore, is more of a dual-threat than former quarterback Cole Wilson. He'll pair with Saks



PHOTO BY BILL WILSON, THE ANNISTON STAR

Rollie Pinto set the AHSAA record for single-season receiving yards with 1,826 during his junior season at Piedmont.

transfer Nick Mixson to improve Piedmont's run game.

The Bulldogs look poised for another deep postseason run.

VERDICT: CONTENDER

PLEASANT VALLEY

The Raiders made history last season when they finished second in Class 2A, Region 7 and hosted a playoff game for the first time in 40 years. Pleasant Valley finished with an 8-3 record, which matched the 1984 team for best record in school history, despite having to deal with the adversity of having to change quarterbacks early in the season after Braxton Salster injured his hand. Salster soldiered on, helping out in any way he could, while Jaden Sparks took over behind center.

With Salster back at quarterback and Sparks returning to what he knows best, the Raiders are filled with optimism. They've set a goal of going 10-0 during the regular season, and it's not an unrealistic one. It's also not unrealistic to expect this group to win its first playoff game in school history.

VERDICT: CONTENDER

RANBURN

Ranburne managed two Class 2A, Region 4 wins a year ago, which was good enough to finish in fifth place, but the Bulldogs missed the playoffs for the third straight season. Ranburne started strong, winning three of its first

five games, but the Bulldogs ran out of steam. They allowed 220 points to close out the season on a five-game losing streak. The 363 points they allowed were the most in school history.

The Bulldogs will need to shore up their defense if they want to return to postseason play.

VERDICT: PRETENDER

SAKS

The Wildcats have fallen on hard times since the departure of Jonathan Miller, managing just three wins over the last two seasons. Veteran head coach Shannon Felder has taken over the football program, but numbers are down significantly, with Felder reporting that Saks had just 18 varsity players on the roster at the end of July. That's something that Felder has dealt with in the past when he led Class 1A Donoho to a 67-54 record during his 11 seasons there.

The Wildcats have the right man to build the program back up, but it might take some time.

VERDICT: PRETENDER

SPRING GARDEN

Normally, when a 1A team loses 12 impactful seniors, the cupboard is left barren. That shouldn't be the case for Spring Garden under third-year head

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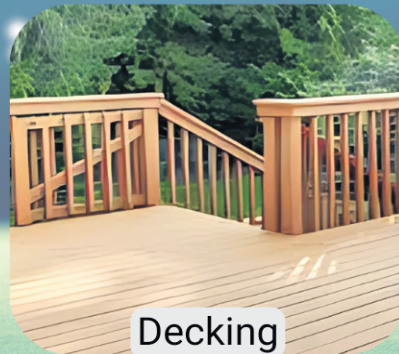


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2025 FOOTBALL SCHEDULES

By JARED GRAVETTE
Sports Editor

ALEXANDRIA

Aug. 22: Open
Aug. 29: at Jacksonville
Sept. 5: vs. White Plains*
Sept. 12: at Anniston*
Sept. 19: vs. Oneonta*
Sept. 26: vs. Sardis
Oct. 3: at Hokes Bluff*
Oct. 10: at Ashville*
Oct. 17: vs. Cherokee County*
Oct. 24: at Etowah*
Oct. 30: at Munford
*Class 4A, Region 6 game

ANNISTON

Aug. 22: Open
Aug. 29: at Beauregard
Sept. 5: at Ashville*
Sept. 12: vs. Alexandria*
Sept. 19: at Hokes Bluff*
Sept. 26: vs. Pleasant Grove
Oct. 3: vs. Cherokee County*
Oct. 10: at Etowah*
Oct. 17: vs. Oneonta*
Oct. 24: vs. White Plains*
Oct. 30: at Jacksonville
*Class 4A, Region 6 game

CLEBURNE COUNTY

Aug 22: Open
Aug. 29: at Sardis
Sept. 5: vs. Handley*
Sept. 11: at Talladega*
Sept. 19: vs. Booker T. Washington*
Sept. 26: vs. Wellborn
Oct. 3: at Tallassee*
Oct. 10: vs. St. James*
Oct. 16: at Munford*
Oct. 24: vs. Bullock County*
Oct. 30 at White Plains
*Class 4A, Region 3 Game

DONOHO

Aug. 22: vs. Gaylesville
Aug. 29: at Ragland
Sept. 5: at Pleasant Valley
Sept. 12: vs. Wadley*
Sept. 19: vs. Winterboro*
Sept. 26: at Ohatchee
Oct. 3: vs. Fayetteville*
Oct. 10: Open
Oct. 17: at Victory Christian*
Oct. 24: vs. Woodland*
Oct. 30: at Cedar Bluff

*Class 1A, Region 6 game

HOPE CHRISTIAN

(AISA)
Aug. 22: vs. Valiant Cross
Aug. 29: vs. Chambers Academy
Sept. 5: vs. Hooper Academy*
Sept. 12: vs. Crenshaw Christian*
Sept. 19: at Banks Academy
Sept. 26: vs. Abbeville Christian*
Oct. 3: Open
Oct. 10: at Edgewood Academy*
Oct. 17: at Bessemer Academy
Oct. 24: at Lakeside School*
Oct. 31: Open
*Area game

JACKSONVILLE

Aug. 22: vs. Etowah
Aug. 29: vs. Alexandria
Sept. 5: vs. Moody*
Sept. 12: at Center Point*
Sept. 19: vs. Leeds*
Sept. 26: at Corner
Oct. 3: vs. Springville*
Oct. 10: at Lincoln*
Oct. 17: Open
Oct. 24: at St. Clair County*
Oct. 30: vs. Anniston
*Class 5A, Region 6 game

JACKSONVILLE CHRISTIAN

(8-man)
Aug. 15: at Alabama School for the Deaf
Aug. 21: vs. Pineview Christian
Aug. 29: vs. Tuscaloosa Christian*
Sept. 5: at Tabernacle Christian*
Sept. 12: at Trinity Christian*
Sept. 19: vs. Victory Christian*
Sept. 26: at Russell Christian*
Oct. 3: vs. Southern Christian
Oct. 10: TBA
Oct. 17: Cornerstone Christian*
Oct. 24: Open
*Region game

OHACHEE

Aug. 22: at New Hope
Aug. 29: at Locust Fork*
Sept. 5: vs. Piedmont*
Sept. 12: vs. J.B. Pennington*
Sept. 19: at Weaver*
Sept. 26: vs. Donoho
Oct. 3: vs. Westbrook Christian*
Oct. 10: at Wellborn*
Oct. 17: vs. Glencoe*
Oct. 24: at Saks*

Oct. 31: Open

*Class 3A, Region 6 game

OXFORD

Aug. 22: vs. Central Carrollton (Ga.)
Aug. 29: at Moody
Sept. 5: vs. Shades Valley*
Sept. 12: at Pinson Valley*
Sept. 19: vs. Mountain Brook*
Sept. 26: vs. Helena
Oct. 3: at Pell City*
Oct. 10: Open
Oct. 17: at Clay-Chalkville*
Oct. 24: vs. Huffman*
Oct. 30: vs. Florence
*Class 6A, Region 6 game

PIEDMONT

Aug. 22: vs. Cherokee County
Aug. 29: vs. Saks*
Sept. 5: at Ohatchee*
Sept. 12: Open
Sept. 19: vs. Westbrook Christian*
Sept. 26: at B.B. Comer
Oct. 3: at Locust Fork*
Oct. 10: at J.B. Pennington*
Oct. 17: vs. Weaver*
Oct. 24: at Wellborn*
Oct. 31: vs. Glencoe*
*Class 3A, Region 6 game

PLEASANT VALLEY

Aug. 22: vs. West End
Aug. 29: at Spring Garden
Sept. 5: vs. Donoho
Sept. 12: at Pisgah*
Sept. 19: vs. Sand Rock*
Sept. 26: vs. Woodland
Oct. 3: at Cedar Bluff*
Oct. 10: at Gaston*
Oct. 17: vs. North Sand Mountain*
Oct. 24: at Section*
Oct. 31: Open
*Class 2A, Region 7 game

RANBURN

Aug 22: at Mt. Zion (Ga.)
Aug. 29: vs. Woodland
Sept. 5: vs. LaFayette*
Sept. 12: at Reeltown*
Sept. 19: at Central Coosa*
Sept. 26: at Randolph County
Oct. 3: vs. Horseshoe Bend*
Oct. 10: Open
Oct. 17: at Loachapoka*
Oct. 24: vs. Lanett*
Oct. 31: vs. Spring Garden



PHOTO BY TUCKER WEBB, THE DAILY HOME
Oxford head coach Sam Adams.



PHOTO BY BILL WILSON, THE ANNISTON STAR
Alexandria head coach Todd Ginn.



PHOTO BY BILL WILSON, THE ANNISTON STAR
Anniston head coach Rico Jackson.

*Class 2A, Region 4 game

SAKS

Aug 22: vs. Horseshoe Bend
Aug. 29: at Piedmont*
Sept. 5: vs. Westbrook Christian*
Sept. 12: vs. Weaver*
Sept. 19: at Wellborn*
Sept. 26: at Central Coosa
Oct. 3: vs. J.B. Pennington*

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Oct. 10: at Glencoe*
Oct. 17: Open
Oct. 24: vs. Ohatchee*
Oct. 31: at Locust Fork*

*Class 3A, Region 6 game

SPRING GARDEN

Aug. 21: at Sand Rock
Aug. 29: vs. Pleasant Valley
Sept. 5: vs. Ragland*
Sept. 12: at Woodville*
Sept. 19: vs. Valley Head*
Sept. 26: vs. Cedar Bluff
Oct. 3: at Appalachian*

Oct. 10: vs. Gaylesville*
Oct. 17: at Ider*
Oct. 24: Open
Oct. 31: at Ranburne
**Class 1A, Region 8 game*

WEAVER

Aug. 22: vs. Oak Grove
Aug. 29: Open
Sept. 5: vs. Wellborn*
Sept. 12: at Saks*
Sept. 19: vs. Ohatchee*
Sept. 26: at Winterboro
Oct. 3: at Glencoe*
Oct. 10: vs. Locust Fork*
Oct. 17: at Piedmont*

Oct. 24: vs. Westbrook Christian*
Oct. 31: at J.B. Pennington*
*Class 3A, Region 6 game

WELLBORN

Aug. 22: Open
Aug. 29: vs. J.B. Pennington*
Sept. 5: at Weaver*
Sept. 12: at Glencoe*
Sept. 19: vs. Saks*
Sept. 26: at Cleburne County
Oct. 3: Open
Oct. 10: vs. Ohatchee*
Oct. 17: at Locust Fork*
Oct. 24: vs. Piedmont*
Oct. 31: at Westbrook Christian*

*Class 3A, Region 6 game

WHITE PLAINS

Aug. 22: vs. Talladega
Aug. 29: Open
Sept. 5: at Alexandria*
Sept. 12: vs. Hokes Bluff*
Sept. 19: at Cherokee County*
Sept. 26: at Horseshoe Bend
Oct. 3: vs. Ashville*
Oct. 10: at Oneonta*
Oct. 17: vs. Etowah*
Oct. 24: at Anniston*
Oct. 30: vs. Cleburne County
**Class 4A, Region 6 game*

From **SEASON** | page 4D

coach Barrett Ragsdale. The Panthers have developed a winning culture under Ragsdale and former head coach Jason Howard, having claimed region titles in six of the last seven seasons.

After losing five all-state performers from a year ago, another region title may be a longshot, but Spring Garden should find itself back in the playoffs for the 12th straight season.

VERDICT: CONTENDER**WEAVER**

Weaver must replace track stars Kaden Gooden and KeShawn Allen, but the Bearcats turned a corner last year under head coach Ken Cofer. After starting 0-5, Weaver was a different team down the stretch, closing out the regular season by winning four of its last five games to make the playoffs for the first time since 2018. The most impressive result during that stretch may have been a 26-21 loss to eventual Class 3A semifinalist Piedmont.

Cofer won't be working with the same level of talent, but if the culture he created carries over, Weaver will be a dangerous team to face week in and week out.

VERDICT: ON THE FENCE

WELLBORN

When a proven veteran like Jeff Smith says something, ears tend to perk up. Smith, who is entering his 29th year as a head football coach and his

17th at Wellborn, said this Panthers' team reminds him of the 2018 squad that went 5-5. That was just the setup for a phenomenal 2019 run that saw Wellborn advance to the Class 3A state semifinals.

Wellborn may once again be one year away, but the Panthers' will still play the same hard-nosed football they

always have under Smith.

VERDICT: ON THE FENCE

WHITE PLAINS

What do you do when you haven't made the playoffs since 1994? You bring in a proven winner who has built a career turning around struggling football programs. Clint Smith, who has

won 143 games during a 20-year career coaching at Saks and Jacksonville, is the right man for the job.

He knows how to build it, but expecting immediate success in a loaded Class 4A, Region 6, may be too much to ask.

VERDICT: PRETENDER

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Alabama Sports Writers Association 2025 PRESEASON POLL

CLASS 7A

2024 CHAMPION:
THOMPSON

Team (first-place votes); 2024 W-L; Pts

1. Thompson (16); 11-3; 210
2. Central-Phenix City (1); 10-3; 146
3. Hoover; 10-3; 143
4. Auburn (1); 10-1; 133
5. Hewitt-Trussville; 8-3; 109
6. Mary Montgomery; 9-2; 92
7. Vestavia Hills; 6-6; 49
8. Opelika; 9-3; 48
9. Enterprise; 8-5; 32
10. Dothan; 5-5; 28

Others receiving votes: James Clemens (6-5) 27, Carver-Montgomery (6-3) 5, Austin (9-2) 2, Oak Mountain (4-6) 2.

CLASS 6A

2024 CHAMPION:
PARKER

Team (first-place); 2024 W-L; Pts

1. Parker (9); 14-1; 184
2. Clay-Chalkville (6); 9-3; 158
3. Saraland (2); 13-1; 148
4. Spain Park; 12-1; 115
5. Pike Road (1); 10-4; 108
6. Oxford; 13-1; 59
7. Mountain Brook; 8-4; 56
8. Muscle Shoals; 9-3; 40
9. Hartselle; 9-3; 28
10. Spanish Fort; 9-3; 27

Others receiving votes: Benjamin Russell (5-6) 24, Gadsden City (6-4) 19, Homewood (9-3) 16, Russell County (9-3) 10, St. Paul's (9-3) 10, Fort Payne (10-3) 7, Hueytown (9-4) 7, Chelsea (6-5) 5, Athens (8-3) 4, Helena (6-4) 1.

CLASS 5A

2024 CHAMPION:
MONTGOMERY CATHOLIC

Team (first-place); 2024 W-L; Pts

1. Moody (9); 11-3; 188
2. Vigor (2); 12-2; 161
3. Montgomery Catholic (7); 14-0; 157
4. Central-Clay County; 12-1; 124
5. Williamson; 10-2; 105
6. Fairview; 10-1; 53
7. Ramsay; 8-4; 52
8. Guntersville; 9-2; 42
9. Leeds; 11-3; 41
10. Scottsboro; 9-3; 39

Others receiving votes: Corner (11-2) 35, Briarwood (5-5) 13, Andalusia (7-5) 6, Boaz (9-3) 6, Demopolis (7-4)

2, Northside (8-3) 1, Shelby County (8-3) 1.

CLASS 4A

2024 CHAMPION:
JACKSON

Team (first-place); 2024 W-L-T; Pts

1. Jackson (18); 14-1; 216
2. Cherokee County; 13-2; 154
3. St. Michael; 12-2; 150
4. West Morgan; 13-1; 126
5. Anniston; 7-6; 80
6. Madison Academy; 7-5; 66
7. Tallahassee; 9-3-1; 54
8. Pleasant Grove; 9-2; 43
9. Good Hope; 10-2; 35
10. North Jackson; 8-3; 27

Others receiving votes: Dale County (8-3) 20, Opp (7-4) 18, Alexandria (8-4) 13, Fairfield (9-4) 9, Ashford (6-6) 7, Hokes Bluff (8-3) 3, Deshler (6-4) 2, Handley (7-4) 2, Oak Grove (8-3) 1.

CLASS 3A

2024 CHAMPION:
MARS HILL BIBLE

Team (first-place); 2024 W-L; Pts

1. Mars Hill Bible (14); 14-1; 201
2. Piedmont (3); 13-1; 155
3. Fyffe; 9-3; 129
4. Geraldine (1); 9-3; 116
5. Gordo; 10-2; 91
6. T.R. Miller; 12-1; 89
7. Houston Academy; 13-2; 66
8. Southside-Selma; 11-3; 52
9. Winfield; 11-2; 39
10. Bayside Academy; 9-4; 34

Others receiving votes: Collinsville (7-4) 14, Randolph County (7-4) 12, Glenwood (9-1) 10, Montgomery Academy (10-2) 8, Flomaton (6-4) 7, Thomasville (11-1) 2, Hillcrest-Evergreen (8-3) 1.

CLASS 2A

2024 CHAMPION:
REELTOWN

Team (first-place); 2024 W-L; Pts

1. Reeltown (11); 14-1; 190
2. Pisgah (2); 11-2; 148
3. Coosa Christian (5); 4-6; 141
4. Cottonwood; 12-1; 130
5. Tuscaloosa Academy; 12-3; 107
6. Clarke County; 8-4; 65
7. Vincent; 9-3; 59
8. Winston County; 12-1; 50
9. Sulligent; 9-5; 33
10. Pleasant Valley; 8-3; 31

Others receiving votes: Goshen (8-3) 28, Ariton (7-6)



PHOTO BY BILL WILSON, THE ANNISTON STAR

Piedmont head coach Jonathan Miller and the Bulldogs are ranked No. 2 in Class 3A in the Alabama Sports Writers Association preseason poll.

20, Highland Home (13-1) 11, Luverne (6-6) 11, Susan Moore (6-6) 2.

CLASS 1A

2024 CHAMPION:
WADLEY

Team (first-place); 2024 W-L; Pts

1. Wadley (18); 13-0; 216
2. Leroy; 10-2; 144
3. Sweet Water; 9-3; 114
4. Maplesville; 12-3; 113
5. McKenzie; 10-2; 102
6. Spring Garden; 11-1; 69
7. Hackleburg; 12-2; 65
8. Berry; 11-2; 64
9. Elba; 11-3; 53
10. Millry; 8-5; 28

Others receiving votes: Lynn (11-2) 25, Winterboro (8-3) 8, Brantley (6-4) 7, Valley Head (6-5) 5, Georgiana (8-5) 4, Meek (8-4) 4, Pickens County (4-7) 4, Addion (6-5) 1.

AISA

2024 CHAMPIONS:
CHAMBERS ACADEMY (AAA),
SOUTH CHOCTAW ACADEMY (AA)

Team (first-place); 2024 W-L; Pts

1. Chambers Academy (15); 11-1; 207
2. South Choctaw Academy (3); 13-0; 160
3. Lowndes Academy; 11-1; 147
4. Patrician; 9-3; 113
5. Wilcox Academy; 6-5; 89

Others receiving votes: Bessemer Academy (6-6) 21, Monroe Academy (9-3) 19.



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ONE ON ONE WITH ALEXANDRIA'S COLE WHEELER



By JARED GRAVETTE
Sports Editor

Alexandria head coach Todd Ginn calls junior quarterback Cole Wheeler “our kind of guy.”

That means being physical, gritty and having a love for the Orange and Black.

Wheeler, whose dad was a three-sport athlete at Alexandria, has proven he possesses all three of those characteristics during his first seasons as the Valley Cubs’ starting QB.

Wheeler has been through the ups and downs. As a freshman, he quarterbacked a team that finished 1-9. But Alexandria bounced back a year ago, going 8-4 and advancing to the second round of the Class 4A state playoffs before losing to Brooks 41-35.

The Valley Cubs return a physical group up front and plenty of talent around Wheeler at the skill positions with athlete J.J. Beason and wide receivers MJ Morris and Evan White.

The expectations are high this season with Ginn saying, “I feel like we’re back to being what Alexandria is all about.

Wheeler recently spoke to The Anniston Star about what it means to be a Valley Cub and what goals his team has for the upcoming season.

QUESTION: What does it mean to you to wear the Orange and Black on Friday nights?

ANSWER: My dad went here. He played all three sports. He was big into it. He just taught me, just loving Alexandria, and just Alexandria. Nobody is thinking about moving. Nobody wants to move. There ain’t no better place to be. The coaches are great. I love all our coaches. They really just teach us

everything about being a man, about being a good football player.

Q: You mentioned the coaches. What’s your favorite thing about playing for Coach Ginn?

A: His intensity and his excitement and how he just pushes us to be better. We couldn’t be anywhere near as good as we are without him.

Q: You guys got back in the playoffs last year. What do you need to do to keep that momentum going?

A: Keep working hard and keep executing and just win games. Win the big games. Win the close games. Brooks was a heartbreaker last year. ... I threw a pick late in the game that really hurt us. It ain’t going to happen again this year.

Q: Has that loss been motivation for you guys?

A: Oh, definitely, big time. It’s always on our mind in the weight room. It’s all we’re thinking about.

Q: What are the team’s goals this year?

A: Win state. We’re shooting for the end. We think we can get there. We know we can get there. We’re just working hard to get there.

Q: What would you say the strength of this team is?

A: Up front and our tenacity and just our ferociousness. People are going to be scared of us.



PHOTO BY JARED GRAVETTE, THE ANNISTON STAR

Cole Wheeler is entering his third season as Alexandria’s starting quarterback.

Q: You were thrown into the fire as a freshman. You are a junior now. How much more confident do you feel now?

A: A lot. The first two years, kind of skittish, kind of don’t think I belong here. But I’ve kind of settled into my role, and I’m a lot more confident now.

Q: You have two really good wide receivers in MJ Morris and Evan White. How much of a luxury is it to have two receivers like that?

A: It’s great. I can just sit back there and just throw it as far as I can, and MJ will run under it. I’ll just throw it up, and Evan will jump over the

corner and catch it. It’s great. It helps me out a lot.

Q: Is there a specific game that you are looking forward to this year?

A: Not really. We aren’t worried about who is in our way. We’re just running through everybody.

Q: Is there a former Alexandria player that you looked up to growing up?

A: Coach Todd and Coach Will. They’re my main two — Coach Will Ginn, Coach Todd Ginn — they’re great quarterbacks from here, great players and great people.

ONE ON ONE WITH ANNISTON'S JABARI WILLIAMS



By JARED GRAVETTE
Sports Editor

Jabari Williams says he grew up watching highlights of former Detroit Lions running back Barry Sanders, so it's no surprise that he's set a goal of 2,000 rushing yards for his senior season at Anniston.

Williams, who transferred from Wellborn to Anniston ahead of his junior season, has quickly become a leader for the Bulldogs.

Head coach Rico Jackson's team entered last season with a young roster. The Bulldogs suffered through some early growing pains before closing strong, advancing all the way to the quarterfinals of the Class 4A state playoffs.

Anniston returns a lot of key pieces from that team, so confidence is high.

Williams recently spoke with The Anniston Star about the upcoming season and what he and his team hope to accomplish.

QUESTION: You guys started last season 2-4. I know you guys had a young team. What did you guys learn during those first few games?

ANSWER: That we've got to grow up. I'm going right off of what Coach Jackson said, we had to grow up. We did a lot of immature things. We weren't focused. Focus is the key word here. We just weren't focused. You know, coming to practice, Coach planted a seed in us. We had to grow out of our ways, and we had to come and play, and I feel like we did that.

Q: Y'all made it to the quarterfinals of the playoffs before losing to West Morgan. Has that loss motivated you guys in the offseason?

A: It did. It did wonders. We were all pretty devastated after we lost. A lot of our seniors were upset. I'm not going to say any names, but some people were crying. Obviously so, it's their senior season, they lost in a big game that we could've won. In the offseason, we kind of looked back on that and had to learn from that, and we've been putting forth the effort and all the work into our practices and our workouts. It did a lot.

Q: What are the team's goals for this season?

A: Win our region, you know, state championship. But, the big thing, we've got to take it one step at a time. We want to win every game. Matter of fact, we know we're gonna win every game. We're winning every game that's in front of us if we just take it one step at a time.

Q: Individual goals. Coach Jackson said 2,000 yards. Is that what your goal is?

A: That's always been my dream. I've always wanted to get 2,000 yards. My sophomore year, I was pretty close. I think I had 1,700 yards, but I'm going to break that. I'm going to get 2,000. I've got to.

Q: I know you played at Wellborn before coming to Anniston. Do you feel more comfortable at Anniston this year than you did last year?

A: Most definitely. When I first got there, it was a learning curve. It was a completely different offense, you know, different schemes, so I just had to adjust, had to acclimate and just learn. And coach made it easy on me. He gave



PHOTO BY JARED GRAVETTE, THE ANNISTON STAR

Jabari Williams plays running back for the Anniston Bulldogs.

me the playbook. He taught me a lot of things. I'm just grateful for him giving me an opportunity to show my abilities.

Q: What's your favorite thing about playing for Coach Jackson?

A: He's very understanding, and he's very true to his word, I'd say. He'll give you a chance, and I love that. When I first came in, you know, a lot of people can say they'll do a lot of things for you, and I feel like Coach Jackson stayed true to what he said, and I earned my starting spot, so I'm pretty happy.

Q: What do you think the strength of this year's team will be?

A: Hard work. Just hard work. The whole offseason, we've been

putting forth the effort to get better, and I feel like we've done just that. During the spring, a couple of our guys got offers from that hard work.

Q: Is there a player that you grew up watching that you look up to and try to pattern your game after?

A: I used to watch a lot of Barry Sanders' highlights. My dad really instilled that into me. And another one, I like Bijan Robinson. I know I didn't really grow up watching him, but it's kind of a player I like. And obviously, Saquon Barkley, he's a monster. He does some unthinkable things. I was at practice, practicing the backwards hurdle. My coach would put me in a headlock if I ever tried anything like that on the field.

ONE ON ONE WITH CLEBURNE COUNTY'S OLIVER BROWN



By JARED GRAVETTE
Sports Editor

In his first season as Cleburne County's head coach, Vaughn Lee had his work cut out for him.

Lee, who previously served as Cleburne County's offensive coordinator for 20 years, took over a team gutted by graduation. The Tigers needed to replace 20 seniors from a playoff team that finished the 2023 season with a 4-7 record.

Lee inherited a young group — Cleburne County had only two seniors on the roster a year ago — and it showed on the field as the Tigers finished the season with a 1-9 record.

It was a difficult first year, but there's always a silver lining.

Almost all of the Tigers are back in 2025, and they're bigger, stronger and faster.

Maybe most importantly, they're more seasoned.

Lee's first Cleburne County team entered the season with next to no experience along the offensive line. Searching for guys to step up, Lee found one in Oliver Brown.

Brown, now a senior who plays the quick guard position, recently spoke to The Anniston Star about his expectations for the upcoming season.

QUESTION: You guys had a young team last year and finished the season 1-9. What do you guys need to do to improve upon that?

ANSWER: A big thing we've done is just in the offseason getting a lot bigger, a lot stronger, kind of clicking better on offense and defense. So, that's the main

thing, I'd say.

Q: What goals have you guys set that you want to accomplish this year?

A: Well, I mean, the goal is always to go all the way. But really, I guess just to do the best that we can.

Q: Do you have any individual goals that you'd like to accomplish?

A: I mean really just make this season worth it because it's my last one. So, just end with a bang, I guess.

Q: Do you feel any added responsibility since you are a senior this year?

A: Yeah, and I feel like I've grown a little bit from that too, just learning how to be a better leader.

Q: How do you try to lift up the young guys?

A: A lot of it is trying to set a good example for them to follow and then to encourage them whenever they are trying to do the same thing.

Q: What do you think the strength of this year's team will be?

A: I think our grit is something that will kind of be the great equalizer. Our motto is MTXE: Mental Toughness, Extra Effort. So, I think that's really gonna be what sets us apart.

Q: This is Coach Lee's second season back here. What's your



PHOTO BY JARED GRAVETTE, THE ANNISTON STAR

Oliver Brown plays guard for the Cleburne County Tigers.

favorite thing about playing for him?

A: Oh, I love Coach Lee. I don't know, he just brings a good attitude to practice every day. Practice is always fun, it's hard, but it's fun. You know, I feel like we've gotten a lot better since he's been here.

Q: There's been some good football players who played for Cleburne County. Did you grow up looking up to any of those guys?

A: Nobody in particular, but just the culture that came with Cleburne County, really, and that's what we're

really trying to get back to right now.

Q: Which game are you looking forward to the most this year?

A: Really, the whole season has kind of been what I've been looking forward to. Hopefully we'll shock some people.

Q: What's your favorite thing about suiting up on Friday nights?

A: I guess just making all the hard work pay off. You know, my favorite part is being with the guys, making memories.

ONE ON ONE WITH DONOHO'S LUKE FARRELL



By JARED GRAVETTE
Sports Editor Emeritus

Nobody can say Donoho football coach Bill Smith doesn't think outside the box. Or, in his case this season, outside the backfield.

With Kai Cleckler graduating, Smith needed a new starting quarterback, and instead of searching through the other skill position players for a new man behind center, Smith has picked offensive guard Luke Ferrell, a sophomore.

If you meet Farrell, the move makes sense. He's an all-around athlete, and even though he's just a sophomore, he's one of the team's leaders.

He's also a veteran player. He was part of the 0-9 team from 2023, and he was part of last year's team that improved to 5-6. That's the most wins by the Falcons since 2019.

They also went 3-2 in Class 1A, Region 6, which was good enough for third place. That's their highest region finish and first winning record in region play since 2019.

Farrell recently spoke with The Anniston Star about the upcoming season and his hopes and expectations.

QUESTION: What's it like going to quarterback?

ANSWER: I play baseball, and so I kind of have a feel for a throwing motion, I'd say. I guess a little bit. In 1A football, we tend to run the ball a lot, so it's not all about throwing. It comes about from just kind of herding the team up.

Q: What was the conversation with you and Coach Smith, when he told you, "I'm looking at you at quarterback."

A: One day at P.E., physical education, whatever you want to call it, he was talking to me, and he was like, "Luke, to be honest with you, if I had to put somebody at quarterback today, it would be you." And I was like, "Oh, that's different. That's different for sure."

And it's just ended up that way. It is what it is. And I'm going to do it for the team. If that's what's best for the team, I'm going to do that.

Q: What do you think it's going to be like for you?

A: We've had some seven-on-sevens (during the summer) already, and so I got a good feel for it. To be honest with you, I think it's going to be very similar to seven-on-seven. I think my offensive line is going to be phenomenal for me this year. We got some big guys on the O-line. And I think they're going to do great this year. And yeah, I think we'll have a lot of potential.

Q: Last year, you guys won more games than any Donoho team I think since 2019. What are the goals for this year for you and your teammates?

A: Same expectations. We have a young team, but I mean, I think we're a family right now. And I think the best football team is a family. Even today, you look at all the college sports with NIL and whatnot, I think the best teams are families, and I think right now, we're becoming a family.

Q: Coach Smith seems really happy at Donoho. He seems to really like you guys, the school, the team. What is it that you guys like about Coach Smith?



PHOTO BY MARK EDWARDS, THE ANNISTON STAR

Donoho's Luke Farrell is making the move from offensive line to quarterback.

A: I think he makes us like a family. He makes us feel at home, in a way. He's really done a lot for us, and we're really appreciative of him being at Donoho.

Q: You play baseball and will play basketball this year, too. It's hard to play three different sports. What do you enjoy about playing different sports?

A: The main thing for me is we have some basketball players playing football, and it's like, if they'll help me in my sports, I'll help them in their sports. And that's how 1A schools kind of have to work. Because if everybody plays all sports, they're

going to be good. The more people, more players on one team, the better they're going to be as a whole. So I'll do my deed and play all the sports to help support the other teams.

Q: Coach Smith says it seems like all the boys in the high school grades at Donoho pretty much get along. All of you guys are friends. You mentioned you're a family. There's a bond there. Could you describe what that bond is like for you and your teammates?

A: We have maybe 15 guys per grade. We find a lot of friendships through sports. I would say sports help build great friendships. If I needed help, I could call on any of those people.

ONE ON ONE WITH HOPE CHRISTIAN'S KAINEN BOZEMAN



By MARK EDWARDS
Star Sports Editor Emeritus

Hope Christian is starting football this fall, and even though the Saints haven't played a game yet, they already have a quarterback.

Kainen Bozeman, a junior, is a transfer from Oxford, and he's ready to take snaps in Hope Christian's inaugural season, which will include at least seven games. Home games will be played at the Barber Dairies field off Airport Road.

Bozeman attended school in Alexandria in elementary school before moving to Oxford, where he played some quarterback and receiver.

He's the younger brother of Eli Bozeman, who was a star pitcher for Hope Christian's AISA state semifinal team this past spring. Kainen was a catcher on the team.

Eli is now pitching for Gadsden State, and Kainen is earning his stripes behind center, as Hope Christian adds football to its list of varsity sports. Hope Christian, which is in its third year as a school, already has baseball, boys and girls basketball and volleyball.

Head coach and athletics director Chris Stone says Bozeman is a great leader who always brings energy.

Bozeman recently spoke with The Anniston Star about his hopes and expectations while playing for a fledgling program.

QUESTION: Can you tell us a little bit about what brought you to Hope Christian?

ANSWER: In public schools, there's not really an opportunity for you to have a Christ-centered education. You're not really allowed to talk about it much. And

that was what Hope Christian Academy offered.

My brother is a pitcher. That's what he's going to college for. I'm a catcher. So, my parents' dream was always for me to be able to catch him. So he transferred to Hope from Oxford, and then I transferred there. And, I really didn't have a plan on staying there, but then I got to Hope. It was a whole different atmosphere, people talking about Christ, talking about God. My relationship with Him grew, and it's been flourishing. I just decided that I didn't plan on leaving.

Q: It's pretty exciting to play for a new football team. What made you decide that you want to be part of it?

A: Setting the foundation is the biggest thing to me. I love to come out here. My biggest goal is to come out here and be a great leader to all these kids. So like, our high school was not typically ninth through 12th, so we have a whole lot of young guys that really are learning. So, all throughout practice, the leaders, we're almost like secondary coaches. So like little kids, when we notice it, there's something they can do better, like, we'll stop and give them a few coaching tips and then get right back to it.

Q: It sounds like you're having a lot of fun. Can you describe how much fun this is for you?

A: I've always been a quarterback. That's always been what I've wanted to play whenever I played football, but these past few years, I've



PHOTO BY MARK EDWARDS, THE ANNISTON STAR

Kainen Bozeman will be the starting quarterback for the Hope Christian Saints.

always had to be more of, like a role guy. Like, at Oxford, I had to go and be a wide receiver. I was kind of, like, in the background, like a glue guy. I've been more of a special teams kind of guy.

And then I got to come here and I had the opportunity to be a quarterback, which is, I mean, that's what I want to be.

Q: It's the first year of the program. Do you guys have any expectations of what you want to try to accomplish?

A: Every team's goal is to go undefeated and win a state championship, which I definitely think

we 100 percent have a chance to do. But our mission is the mission of the school. For any kind of sports, any extracurricular activity, it's to glorify God in everything that we do and make sure that he is the center of everything that we do.

Q: If you had to say today, who's going to be the first person to score a touchdown in the history of Hope Christian?

A: Since we've even talked about having a football team, it's been an argument between Nick (Morrow) and me. We butt heads back and forth, but both of us say that it's going to happen on the opening kickoff return of the game.

ONE ON ONE WITH JACKSONVILLE CHRISTIAN'S NOAH LEE



By JARED GRAVETTE
Sports Editor

Jacksonville Christian's Noah Lee is a name that even casual Calhoun County sports fans will recognize.

Lee is a walking double-double on the basketball court, but his future lies on the football field.

After quarterbacking the Thunder to the Alabama Christian Football Association 8-man state championship a year ago, Lee committed to play college ball at Jacksonville State over the summer.

The three-star prospect recently spoke to The Anniston Star about what it will take to win another state championship and what stood out about Jax State.

QUESTION: You guys won the championship last year. What was that feeling like?

ANSWER: About my ninth-grade year, we started to take off and lost in the championship. And then, my 10th-grade year there, we were undefeated and lost in the first round. So we were having good years, but we couldn't pull it all together, and to do that last year was incredible, and we're going to chase after that same success this year.

Q: What do you guys need to do to repeat?

A: I think in order to do that, we've all just got to stay level-headed and not take anything for granted. We had a hunger last year from going undefeated and losing, and we've got to keep that same hunger even though it was a different outcome last year. I think just not slacking off and staying prepared and ready to go week-in, week-out.

Q: I know you had a really good receiver last year in Jesse Gannaway. How do you guys replace him?

A: I think it's just all about being creative in the offense. He drew a good amount of attention from defenses last year, but we have some guys that are coming in that are going to be in that offense that I think will produce as well. I'm excited to see the style of offense we'll have this year and how we can put points up on the board.

Q: What do you think the strength of this year's team is?

A: I just think we're all in the same headspace about our end goal, and we're on the same page, and we're all working for that. There's no selfishness. There's no, you know, just thinking about ourselves. It's just putting the team first and working for each other.

Q: You are committed to Jacksonville State. What was it about Jax State that stood out to you?

A: Coach Kelly and Coach Trickett made a really good impression on me. I've been a JSU fan for about all my life. My dad finished up playing there. My mom finished up her school there. I went to all the games growing up, so it was always a special place in my heart. Getting to stay home and play in front of the people I grew up with and know and love was definitely something that weighed in on the decision. But just hearing the support of the coaching staff and their end goal, just really the way the program was trending, I felt like it was a great fit for me.

Q: You had a relationship with former Jax State quarterback Eli



PHOTO BY JARED GRAVETTE, THE ANNISTON STAR

Noah Lee returns at quarterback for the Jacksonville Christian Thunder.

Jenkins growing up. How much has he helped you throughout the years?

A: I couldn't say enough about Eli. He's really the first person who told me to play quarterback, throwing with him on the sidelines and going to practices and stuff. I still talk with him regularly. It was great seeing him light up defenses and be so creative in how he played. Watching them have so much success, it really sparked something in my mind. I feel like just watching him and him coming and training me and being able to keep building that relationship was definitely something special and kind of kicked off a lot of my football playing.

Q: What does it mean to you to be able to play for your grandfather Tommy Miller?

A: It's really all I've ever known. Just growing up at JCA, he's been the only coach there the entire time, and in pretty much every sport,

too. I think honestly it would be easier playing for someone else, because he stays on me pretty hard, but for the right reason. You know I love him for it. I'm thankful to have such a unique opportunity in that. It's really special. I love him as a granddad. You know, it's a different side of the coaching, I love him there too. I think it's been great.

Q: Coach Miller talked about other high schools being interested in you through the years. Why did you stay loyal to Jacksonville Christian?

A: As far as where I was supposed to be was never solely a football decision. It's definitely something that we had to think about and pray about, but I think the Lord had us there, and He was still able to get me to that next level. All glory to Him for doing that. I think it was just unique and it was special to be able to do that from a spot where a bunch of people said there was probably no chance of that happening.

ONE ON ONE WITH OHATCHEE'S BRAXTON DAVIS

By MARK EDWARDS

Star Sports Editor Emeritus

Ohatchee High's Braxton Davis is a big guy and a big leader for the school's football team.

A junior, Davis stands 5-foot-11 and 270 pounds and helps anchor the defensive and offensive lines. He's been an important part of the Ohatchee line since moving up to varsity as an eighth-grader.

A year ago, he helped Ohatchee post a 6-5 record with a berth in the state playoffs.

New head coach Blake Jennings — a former Ohatchee assistant — is back at the school after two years as White Plains' head coach, and he is promising a smash-mouth attack, which Davis said he loves.

Davis is Ohatchee through and through. Football is his sport, but two of his sisters have played for the school's volleyball team: Briley Meyer and Alyssa Davis.

Davis recently spoke with The Anniston Star about the upcoming season and his hopes and expectations.

QUESTION: What's it like being back with Coach Jennings, who's promising some smash-mouth football?

ANSWER: Last year, we did a lot more passing than usual, but this year, we're going back to hit everybody in the mouth so they get tired. And, I'm glad (Jennings) is bringing that back. I'm glad he's back, because he's a great coach.

Q: What will playing defensive line be like under Coach Jennings, who has such a strong background in defense?

A: It's great. He's teaching us a lot of these moves, because last year, we were eliminated on certain things, but he's teaching us a lot of things we can use. He's involved at practice every day. And you know, it's just going to be great.

Q: You're one of the team leaders, and you remember what it was like to be an eighth grader and you're new and you're relying on the older guys. What do you try to do as a leader for the team?

A: I try not to just work with them in practice, but outside of school, too. I've got a couple friends, and I'll be like, 'Hey, you want to go to the gym?' I'll go pick them up. I just like to work with the younger kids, because there was some seniors last year, like Owen Abernathy, when I couldn't drive, he'd come get me.

We'd go to the gym after practice and work. He'd teach me the plays. I started my freshman year, so he was just there to teach me. I've been trying to help the young kids as much as possible.

Q: What kind of year would you guys like to have at Ohatchee?

A: We would like to have definitely a winning year, obviously. But, we want to go back to Ohatchee tradition. We definitely just want to play Ohatchee football. Hit them in the mouth so they get tired in the fourth quarter. Blow it open.

Q: Do you ever say, 'Hey, Coach, let me just run the ball just once.' Do you ever ask about that?

A: Actually, two days ago we did a drill for the lineman. Everybody



PHOTO BY MARK EDWARDS, THE ANNISTON STAR

Braxton Davis is expected to play on both the offensive and defensive lines for Ohatchee.

else was practicing punt, but the linemen got to be the punt returners, so I actually got to run the ball a little bit.

Q: What's the best thing about being part of the football team?

A: I think the best part is just the community. Everybody loves Ohatchee football. Everybody's so involved. It's just great.





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ONE ON ONE WITH OXFORD'S KEENAN BRITT



By **AUSTIN TACKETT**
Star Sports Correspondent

Entering his fifth season as a starter for Oxford High School, senior linebacker Keenan Britt has set his expectations high before he heads off to Columbia to play college football at South Carolina — 15-0 to be exact.

The Oxford Yellow Jackets, coached by Sam Adams, finished last season with a 13-1 record, with their only loss coming to the eventual Class 6A state champions in the Parker Thundering Herd. This year, Britt wants 15-0 and the state title. After losing some key pieces in the likes of Mason Mims, James Tapley, D.K. Wilson, Cedric Twyman and many more, the Yellow Jackets will have their work cut out for them.

Luckily, they're one of the best teams in Calhoun County and have shown that.

Britt recently took the time to speak with The Anniston Star about the upcoming season, his expectations and more.

QUESTION: Talk to me a little about the move to linebacker this season. After spending most of last season at defensive end, how do you feel about that move?

ANSWER: I feel like it's been better on me all summer, with me being more physical and more violent with my hands and being able to move around the defense, and just being able to play multiple positions now. It's been a really good move, I feel like.

Q: With you and Jiyez Fleming leading that defense at linebacker, do you feel like that's a two-headed snake?

A: Yeah, that's a two-headed snake right there. I lean on Jiyez, Jiyez

leans on me. We lean on each other and make plays.

Q: What are the expectations for Maddox Mims going into his first year as QB1 after Mason graduated?

A: I feel like me and Maddox come from similar backgrounds. He's just gonna have to step up and do what he gotta do. I feel like he's been stepping up well and showing that he's gonna be a good quarterback for us this year and lead the Oxford Yellow Jackets on the offensive side of the ball.

Q: What about the rest of the guys? What are your expectations for the team?

A: I feel like I want to go 15-0 this year, that's what I'm feeling right now.

Q: How are the back-to-back losses to Parker in the playoffs fueling you this upcoming season?

A: I feel like I've got a chip on my shoulders because it's two years that we lost to the same team, and we fell short to them twice and we gotta get this right.

Q: Which Yellow Jackets are going to surprise us this year?

A: I'd say Andre Ford, Josh Stack, and I want to say Kamari English. Kamari English is a young DB, he's going into his sophomore year and I feel like he's going to step up into that role of being a leader really soon.

Q: How have you been able to carry your role as a leader as a young man?



PHOTO BY AUSTIN TACKETT, STAR SPORTS CORRESPONDENT

Keenan Britt will start at linebacker during his senior season at Oxford.

A: I got to hold myself to a different standard than Coach Adams holds other people. I gotta tell them lets get ready to practice, and we just got to come in and be a unit. There's no specific leader on the team, and right now I just want to lead everybody to one day get some D1 offers.

Q: What makes being a part of this team special to you?

A: What makes it special to me is when I run out and see those flashing lights, and just seeing all my brothers run out that paper on Friday. It's just the best feeling to me, ever.



ONE ON ONE WITH PIEDMONT'S BRAYLEN WILLIAMS



By RIP DONOVAN
Star Sports Correspondent

Piedmont was 13-1 last year, defeating Collinsville (46-28), Lauderdale County (21-6) and Fyffe (30-28) in the Class 3A state playoffs before losing to Mars Hill Bible School 49-20 in the semifinal round. The Bulldogs were 8-0 in Region 6 and Region 6 champions.

Junior Braylen Williams played on the offensive line for coach Jonathan Miller's team in 2024. This year he will switch positions on offense and take on defensive responsibilities, too.

Williams recently spoke to The Anniston Star about the upcoming season.

QUESTION: You started at left guard last year but will play center this season. How much of a change is moving from guard to center?

ANSWER: It's kind of a task because you've got to learn new stuff, new steps. You have priority of the ball getting to the quarterback. It's just a big opportunity for me to get better.

Q: Is the change to center easier because you're new there and starting quarterback Cole Austin is new or is it harder because both of you are new?

A: Cole and I have been playing since little league. I think our connection is real and deep. We just have good chemistry together.

Q: How much do you sense Cole's confidence level in himself grew and the team's confidence level in him grew when Piedmont won the Piedmont 7-on-7 passing tournament on July 19?

A: Our expectations are even higher now because if we can win the 7-on-7 we can most definitely win games and execute every play.

Q: Do you have any personal superstitions?

A: (Laughing) No, I don't. I just don't.

Q: As a team, how do you celebrate in the locker room after a win?

A: We always do a dance and we'll sing our favorite songs. We'll all get hyped up with the coaches at the end. Coach (Landon) Pruitt will cut a step or two.

Q: How much have you and your teammates talked about the feeling each of you had after losing at Mars Hill Bible?

A: We talked about it one time but we have to say it's a new season. We have to go try and win the state championship and take it one game at a time.

Q: For you, is run blocking easier or is pass blocking easier or is it all the same?

A: To me, run blocking is easier because I know who my target is and I don't have to worry about stunts and anything like that like in passing situations.

Q: You'll play defense for the first time this season. How has practice gone for you, getting accustomed to defense?

A: I love it. I've been wanting to play defense for the longest and



PHOTO BY RIP DONOVAN, STAR SPORTS CORRESPONDENT

Braylen Williams will play on the offensive and defensive lines for the Piedmont Bulldogs.

finally I have my opportunity to play. I'm ready to go in when my number gets called and make a play.

Q: What is it about football that you love, that makes you stick with it?

A: Really, it's the energy at the Field of Champions and the fans. They give us a lot of energy and we want them to have a fun time at the Field of Champions. We're going to

show them what Piedmont football is about this year.

Q: How far can this team go and what is going to make that happen?

A: This team can go very far if we hold ourselves accountable and push ourselves to the very last second of the game and continue to thrive and be successful every drive and every play.

ONE ON ONE WITH PLEASANT VALLEY'S JADEN SPARKS



By **RIP DONOVAN**
Star Sports Correspondent

Pleasant Valley was 8-3 overall for coach Jonathan Nix in 2024. That included an 8-2 run through the regular season, a 5-1 record in Class 2A, Region 7, and a 56-22 loss to visiting Sulligent in the opening round of the playoffs. The Raiders lost their opening Region 7 game to eventual region champion Pisgah. PV also lost to Spring Garden in a non-region game.

Senior Jaden Sparks was pressed into the role of starting quarterback last year when Braxton Salster injured his throwing hand. Sparks will return to running back and slot receiver this season.

He recently spoke with The Anniston Star about his expectations for the upcoming season.

QUESTION: To me, you seem a lot bigger this year. Is that accurate?

ANSWER: My first year on varsity was eighth grade and I was 5-7 and 145 pounds. Every year, I've tried to gain a bit more weight. Last year, I was 185 in shape. When we started fall camp on Monday (July 29), I was 205. Right now (July 31), I'm 200 pounds so I'm 5-9, 200 and pretty much in shape.

Q: What are the things about football that make you want to play?

A: Probably my favorite part of football is the Friday night lights, game day. ... Once we get in the games, I love scoring touchdowns. I love being in the end zone. I love celebrating with teammates. I love the environment of it. I love our fans, the student section

cheering for me.

Q: Has the time you spent at quarterback last season after Braxton Salster was injured helped you as a running back and as a receiver?

A: I saw the field last year. It took me a few weeks to really open my eyes to how people move. I hadn't played defensive back since I was seventh or eighth grade. Really understanding how a defensive back moves can change how you run your route. Now, I can anticipate something that I couldn't before. At running back, I know if I move this way a linebacker will move that way because at quarterback I can see it because I'm kind of reading the field. At running back, I'm kind of reading the guards. I'm reading lines, reading holes, but now I feel like my eyes are really open to the whole field.

Q: What are the goals your team has for the regular season?

A: Last year, we came second place (in Region 7). Our goal is to win it, obviously. I think that if we continue to work, keep on stepping forward, we'll get to our goal. I think we need to respect everybody going into it. No team is worse than the others. No team is better than the others. They're just another team on a Friday night that we've got to prepare for.

Q: Sulligent, your playoff opponent last year, was the No. 3 team in its region because key injuries had led to region losses early. By playoff time, the Blue Devils were healthy and won three playoff games. How much motivation is that loss to Sulligent for you this year?



PHOTO BY RIP DONOVAN, STAR SPORTS CORRESPONDENT

After playing quarterback last season, Pleasant Valley senior Jaden Sparks will return to running back and slot receiver this year.

A: The game ends and it hurt. It didn't hurt like you lose a game. It hurt more that we failed so I carried that one. Going into this year, preparing, I don't want to feel that again. Only one team in 2A is going to finish the season with a win and that's the state champion. I don't want to feel that hurt my senior year. I want to carry my community. My teammates and I want to get together and go all the way, go 15-0.



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ONE ON ONE WITH RANBURNE'S CREED YOUNG



By RIP DONOVAN

Star Sports Correspondent

Ranburne has missed the Class 2A football playoffs each of the past three seasons. Each time, one more region win would have gotten the Bulldogs into postseason play.

Stephen Bailey, entering his tenth season as Ranburne's head coach, will try to blend some talented sophomores with his seniors and juniors in an effort to find at least three, and potentially more, wins over Class 2A, Region 4 opponents Coosa Central, Horseshoe Bend, LaFayette, Lanett, Loachapoka and 2024 2A state champion Reeltown this time. Last year, the Bulldogs defeated Coosa Central (50-32) and LaFayette (19-14) in region action.

Sawyer Freed, Cason Jones and Jack Yearwood are three of the sophomores Ranburne is expected to start this year. Jones is the projected starter at quarterback. Yearwood and Freed are likely to get the starting nods as the inside linebackers. The arrival of Yearwood, Freed and Jones should allow senior Creed Young to make contributions at other positions.

Young recently spoke to The Anniston Star about the Bulldogs' upcoming season.

QUESTION: You were Ranburne's quarterback last season. Will you be the quarterback again in 2025?

ANSWER: I don't think so. I'm going to be at the sniffer position, like 'H' back, and then I'll come back and play running back. I'll rotate between those two positions.

Q: How is the transition from quarterback going?

A: It's good. I like it. I think Cason (Jones) has really adjusted to it. I think he's taken leadership really well. I think it's all going to work out pretty good.

Q: Do you feel Ranburne had good participation in summer workouts and that progress was made?

A: There wasn't a whole lot of missing. Here and there, you've got people that miss days. Most of the time you can't help that but for the most part everybody showed up and everybody gave it their all.

Q: Is being back in the playoffs again something you and your teammates talk about outside the locker room?

A: Yes, especially the seniors because we've never been to it. We at least want to go one time. We talk about it a little bit here and there.

Q: What do you consider key for the success of this year's offense?

A: (Junior running back) Aiden Whitman is really fast. I think if we can get him the ball and he can get to the edge that will help us a lot. ... He's most definitely the fastest guy we've got.

Q: What does Ranburne football do well defensively?

A: We try not to let things spread out and get to the outside because if they get to the outside it's tough, the way we play our defense and the way we play. We just try to keep everything to the inside and move on from there.



PHOTO BY RIP DONOVAN, STAR SPORTS CORRESPONDENT

Creed Young, who started at quarterback for Ranburne last year, is changing positions this season.

Q: Is that how you beat LaFayette last year?

A: I think keeping them to the inside, making tackles and then just not stopping, because it was a tough game. It was hard-nosed football.

Q: Based on what you saw in your region last year and who graduated from other region teams,

how realistic is being in the playoff this season?

A: I think we've got a shot. If we can stick together as a team and we can overcome the bad games, because we're going to have bad games, that's just how it is. If we can do that, I think we've got a real chance to do it.

ONE ON ONE WITH SAKS' QUAY JUDKINS



By RIP DONOVAN

Star Sports Correspondent

Coaching veteran Shannon Felder has replaced Alphonso Freeney as head coach at Saks. Freeney left the Wildcats after two seasons to join former Jacksonville State teammate Jeremy Sullivan at Jacksonville High School.

Saks was 2-8 overall last year and 1-7 in Class 3A, Region 6 with a region win over Weaver (26-20) and a non-region win over Coosa Central (44-0). Senior Quay Judkins has always been an offensive lineman but with just 18 varsity players when fall practice started he is expected to start at right guard on offense and nose guard on defense this year. Judkins got a taste of playing both ways in the Wildcats' spring game.

"I played both sides. I was exhausted. ... It was my first time playing both sides," he said of the experience.

Judkins and senior quarterback D.J. Allen were the two players who made all of Felder's summer workouts.

Judkins recently spoke to The Anniston Star about his expectations for the upcoming season.

QUESTION: Football isn't an easy game to prepare for or to play. What is it about football that keeps you playing?

ANSWER: Being on the field in the lights and seeing my Mom and my family cheering me on. Then, I'd say representing my school and being able to compete, make a name for yourself and for your team and for everyone that supports you.

Q: What is it about football that you wish just wasn't there?

A: Because I'm a bigger guy, I don't like running. I just don't like it.

Q: As a freshman, you played for coach Jonathan Miller. The past two seasons, you played for coach Alphonso Freeney. Now, as a senior, you're playing for coach Shannon Felder. That's three different head coaches in four seasons. How difficult is that?

A: It's always something different. Every coach wants things a certain way but it's never to the point where it's, like, unbearable. All coaches at the end of the day have the same goals — just wanting to win, wanting the best for their players — and that always makes the transition easy because I know the coach wants the best for me and my teammates.

Q: Has this preseason been different for you because you're a senior?

A: It's different because there won't be any more spring training or spring games, won't be any more summer workouts. It all seemed weird.

Q: What are your goals for this year, team goals and personal goals?

A: Personal-wise, two years I made all-county, one year I made all-region. Last year, I missed all-state. That's something I hope to do. Team-wise, Coach Felder came in and said, 'Hey, guys, I believe we can make the playoffs.' I believe we can do that as well. That's always the goal, making the playoffs.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Quay Judkins is expected to play right guard on offense and nose guard on defense for the Saks Wildcats this season.

Q: What has to happen for this team to make the playoffs?

A: Our team is very, very young. Right now, it's the younger players learning their assignments, everybody knowing what they have to do and why they have to do it. We don't have a problem with effort. It's more or less knowing what to do. If we get that down pat, I believe we have a pretty good chance.

Q: You were one of the two players who participated in all the workouts this summer. Why was that important to you?

A: I always pride myself on being there all the time, no matter what I've got going on. My Mom always makes sure I'm there. You've got to be there for your team because they're going to be there for you.

ONE ON ONE WITH SPRING GARDEN'S CLAYTON SADLER



By MARK EDWARDS
Star Sports Editor Emeritus

Spring Garden lost 12 seniors from last year's squad, which went 11-1, won the Class 1A, Region 8 championship, and reached the second round of the state playoffs.

But the cupboard isn't bare for the Panthers, who have 33 players and eight seniors on this year's roster. There's plenty of guys on that roster who even if they didn't start regularly last year, they received regular playing time.

Spring Garden senior Clayton Sadler has as much experience as anybody wearing maroon and gold. He is a four-year starter at linebacker and a three-year starter at running back, where he has mostly served as a blocking back.

He'll be even more important this year for head coach Barrett Ragsdale, who is entering his third year leading the program.

Sadler recently spoke with The Anniston Star about the upcoming season and his hopes and expectations.

QUESTION: You've been a mainstay at linebacker, but your role at running back will increase this year, won't it?

ANSWER: Yeah, I've started there since 10th grade, mainly blocking back. This year, I'm going to get to tote the ball a lot. But I think this year, Coach (Ragsdale) and I are expecting 1,500 yards plus. We're going to be running the ball out this year. I'm going to try to carry the team on my back. Basically, that's my goal.

Q: Why is Barrett Ragsdale such a successful head coach for Spring Garden?

A: He knows when to lighten the mood up, and he knows when to get on your tail about stuff. And he understands the game. He knows how to get your tail in gear. He knows how to communicate really well on the football field and teach you. He figures out how to simplify stuff for you.

Q: We've talked a lot about the expectations about Spring Garden after losing 12 seniors. But what about you guys? What's your expectations for your team?

A: We want to shock everybody, because I know a lot of people's been kind of questioning about, are we going to be any good this year, since we lost those seniors. I mean, we want to basically exceed what everybody's thinking. We want to shock everybody.

We're probably going to get in a little more dog fights than what we had last year, just because we lost a lot of size from last year. We had a pretty big team last year, but this year we all got some smaller kids, but they're strong. We're just planning on shocking everybody and making a statement and hosting a playoff game for the 12th year in a row. So that's our goal.

Q: Spring Garden is well-known for its community support. What is it about the school and the community that gives you guys the support that you need to be successful?

A: I think a lot of it's got to do with how committed everybody



PHOTO BY MARK EDWARDS, THE ANNISTON STAR

Spring Garden's Clayton Sadler is a four-year starter at linebacker and a three-year starter at running back.

is. I mean, we've been there since kindergarten. We get a couple move-ins, but other than that, I mean, you basically play with each other from 6U all the way up till you graduate. The parents, they support you all the way till you graduate. There's boosters, and we got good support from them.

Q: Defensive coordinator Draevan Bowman says you've got a lot of personality and that you're a good guy. Where does that come from?

A: Well, sometimes I can be mean. Sometimes, I guess it just depends on what day you catch me on. But for the most part, my goal for being a senior is I want to be a good example as a senior and to show them that you don't have to hop on somebody's case all the time. Being a senior, I want to pick them up instead of chewing them out. So, that's been my goal, just to kind

of be relaxed about stuff. And because I feel like, maybe put somebody down, it's going to make them not want to listen to you. I feel like if you pick them up and then show a good example, and they're going to listen to you, understand that you know what you're talking about.

Q: We've been told that at every home game, your dad buys two of the famous Spring Garden steak sandwiches from the concession stand, and you eat them after the game. How good are those sandwiches?

A: They're awesome. I mean, sometimes I got to wait a little bit after the game to eat them, because I can't process food right after a game like that. So a lot of times I had to wait a little bit, but I go home and heat them up in a microwave, though, and I eat them. They're good.

ONE ON ONE WITH WEAVER'S TAYLOR GREEN



By **AUSTIN TACKETT**
Star Sports Correspondent

Weaver took a major step forward last season. Despite finishing with a 4-7 record, the Bearcats made their first playoff appearance in six years.

It was a season defined by resilience in Bearcat country with Weaver dropping its first five games by substantial margins but finishing strong and showing its willingness to fight through adversity.

Despite the rocky roads the team faced last season, senior linebacker Taylor Green has high hopes. He took time to discuss the upcoming season with The Anniston Star recently.

QUESTION: What are your expectations for the upcoming season for Weaver football?

ANSWER: Really I just expect us to do a lot better, especially starting wise because last year we were a big second half team. We were down three touchdowns a lot in the first quarter. I just expect us to start a lot quicker and a lot harder next season.



Q: What do you believe that Weaver football excels in the most?

A: I think our strong point is hustle, mainly, just hustle and getting after it. We've got a lot of guys out there in the morning practicing and giving it all they got, even if they're little or big, just giving it everything they got and getting after it.

Q: How can you guys instill dominance you guys had against J.B. Pennington all season long?

A: I just feel like we have to get into our opponents really good, watch a lot of film, look at a lot of stats. Even being nervous before games helps, because J.B. Pennington man, I was nervous. Because a couple weeks before they played Westbrook Christian and beat them by three and we also beat them by three, so I was like "That's gonna be a close game," but we beat them by 30 and it wasn't even hard.

Q: You've been consistently at that linebacker and D-line spot in your career, but talk about the production you'll see at running back this year?

A: Last year I didn't get to play much and they ended up needing me at another position, which I'll gladly play. But when I get the ball, I just give it all I got. Whenever I run the ball, I just run through everybody really. I mean, they won't have me back there that much honestly, just a few short yardages and I'll also be an upback. But you know, if we're on a 4th and 1, then give me the ball!

Q: How has coach Ken Cofer built a culture with you guys at



PHOTO BY AUSTIN TACKETT, STAR SPORTS CORRESPONDENT

Taylor Green is expected to play linebacker and running back for the Weaver Bearcats this season.

Weaver going into his third season?

A: I've only been here for a year, but he's been a great coach. Not just football too, he'll take us out to eat sometimes. Like tomorrow night we have a lock-in at the school with him. He's a great guy, you need to spend time with him and really get to know him.

Q: What is something that fans can expect of Weaver this upcoming season?

A: I feel like it's gonna be electrifying, especially during games. We've got a lot of good guys and it's just gonna be fun to watch.

Q: What's your favorite part about Weaver football?

A: My favorite part is just the family, you got all your teammates and you guys hang out all the time and just have that bond.

ONE ON ONE WITH WELLBORN'S PARKER WILLIAMS



By MARK EDWARDS
Star Sports Editor Emeritus

Parker Williams grew up in Wellborn and knows all about life on the Hill.

The son of a former Wellborn player, he understands how much football means to his community. He's enjoyed football Friday nights since he was little.

Now a junior and a two-year starter on the offensive and defensive lines, Williams is one of the team's leaders.

He's got high expectations for his team, which went 5-4 last year and just barely missed the state playoffs. Williams, who also was part of the state championship track and field team this past spring, is ready to make the big show this year.

Williams recently spoke with The Anniston Star about the upcoming season and his hopes and expectations.

QUESTION: Your coach, Jeff Smith, is in his 17th season as Wellborn's head football coach. What's it like playing for a coach who's been through this so many times?

ANSWER: It's an honor to play with a coach that has as much experience as Coach Smith does. I mean, you come up to the Hill when you're a kid, and you hear stories and you see it firsthand, all these people, and you just aspire to be them. What got me into football so young is Coach Smith and these guys I grew up watching.

Q: What's something you feel like you've learned either from Coach Smith or being part of his team?

A: Definitely, my work ethic, for sure. It's improved so much since the time I came up for spring training

in sixth grade to now. I've learned so much from that man about working and dedication. It just really comes together, and it's learned a lot of lessons.

Q: Coach Smith considers you one of his team leaders. What's something that you try to do as a leader for your team?

A: I do enjoy leading by example. That's really how I try to communicate things to my team. I try my best not to get on anybody. We leave that to the coaches. We just try to lead the best by example. And there's a lot of people (on the team) I believe are great leaders. They're really the backbone of our team.

Q: What's the goal for the team this year? What do you guys want to get accomplished?

A: Well, obviously, we want to make it all the way. I see our work ethic as proven. We're in there, day in, day out, working, getting better, coming together as a team. That's what I enjoy seeing.

Q: You're also part of the track team, competing in shot put, discus and javelin. Does competing and working out for track and field help you in football?

A: It translates very well into spring training. You know, that starts up about the same time and the speed training definitely helps me. I've improved a lot in speed the past two years.

Q: What's your favorite thing about football?



PHOTO BY MARK EDWARDS, THE ANNISTON STAR

Wellborn's Parker Williams is a two-year starter on the offensive and defensive lines for the Panthers.

A: Definitely my teammates. I enjoy being around them, getting to share experiences with those guys, getting to work. Getting better with them.

Q: It seems like you're a big team guy and you really enjoy your teammates. What's the strength of your teammates?

A: The bond that we all share. That's a big one. And, everybody's work ethic has really improved. I know I've talked about that a good bit, but I mean, that's a big factor for our team.

In the past few years, we've had trouble working, but this year, everybody's been nose to the grindstone coming in bright and early, getting everything knocked out. It's great to be around.

Q: Can you describe what a Friday night home game is at Wellborn?

A: We talked a lot about legacy. We grew up from young ages, coming up and watching the varsity play, watching Coach Smith and all the guys in the field. Like I said, that's the reason I got in it and I'm really really happy that I get to do it myself and be a part of that.

ONE ON ONE WITH WHITE PLAINS' HUDSON INGALSBE



By JARED GRAVETTE
Sports Editor

Hudson Ingalsbe's White Plains' teammates have already given him the stamp of approval.

New head coach Clint Smith, who turned a struggling Jacksonville program into a playoff mainstay during his 13 seasons there, let his first White Plains' team vote on captains recently, and Ingalsbe, a 6-foot-7, 280-pound junior lineman, was one of the top two vote getters.

Ingalsbe, who has already received a scholarship offer from North Alabama, will play a big part in helping establish the foundation for what Smith wants to accomplish at White Plains.

The Wildcats, who finished 4-6 a year ago, haven't had a winning season since 2003 and haven't made the playoffs since 1994. They'll look to reverse those trends under the veteran Smith, who spent seven years as the head coach at Saks before taking the Jacksonville job.

Ingalsbe recently spoke to The Anniston Star about his new coach and what the team wants to accomplish during the upcoming season.

QUESTION: What are your expectations for the team this year?

ANSWER: I think it's just for us to perform at a high level and just be really athletic and be just to the point and do everything the correct way.

Q: It's been since 1994 since White Plains made the playoffs. If you guys were able to accomplish that, what would that mean?

A: That would be great. I think just to have our name on that board and to be able to say that our class did

it, and our team did it, I think that would be a great accomplishment.

Q: Do you have any individual goals for the season?

A: Ultimately, as a team, to get to the playoffs, but personally, I think, just to be a leader, to do everything to the best of my abilities and just perform at a high level.

Q: Coach Smith said you were voted a captain. What did that mean to you?

A: It was a great honor. I'm very appreciative of the respect that my teammates have for me. I'm very proud of that.

Q: What do you feel like the strength of this year's team is going to be?

A: The defense, during practice, I've seen them. Coach (Marcus) Albright, he's been really working the linebackers. The defense is really firing on all cylinders.

Q: How does it feel to be able to play for a coach like Clint Smith?

A: It's a very good feeling to have someone who can lead, who knows how to lead, and is very knowledgeable in the sport of football. He knows what he's doing.

Q: What game are you looking forward to most this season?

A: The game that I've always looked forward to since I've played varsity, I always love that last game, that Heflin game. That's a really special game. It's the last game with



PHOTO BY JARED GRAVETTE, THE ANNISTON STAR

White Plains offensive lineman Hudson Ingalsbe was voted a captain by his teammates.

the seniors. They're an in-town rival. I'm really excited for that game.

Q: Is there a guy who played at White Plains that you grew up looking up to?

A: I always looked up to Ty Roberts. He always led as a great example. He always showed up to practice. He always did everything to the best of his ability, and I always

looked up to him.

Q: Is there a specific teammate that you think might be in line for a big season?

A: I think Elijah Turner. He's really showed up to practice. He's really done what he's supposed to do, and he's just really to the point. He really enjoys the sport, and I think he'll have a good season.

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VALID TODAY THROUGH SEPTEMBER 15, 2025

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MONDAY - SATURDAY 10 AM - 9 PM (ANNISTON 10-6) SUNDAY 1-6 PM

*\$5 OFF \$25 OR MORE BEFORE TAX. EXCLUDES SHOE DEPARTMENT, EMPLOYEES, GIFT CARDS. OTHER EXCLUSIONS MAY APPLY. INSTORE ONLY.

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