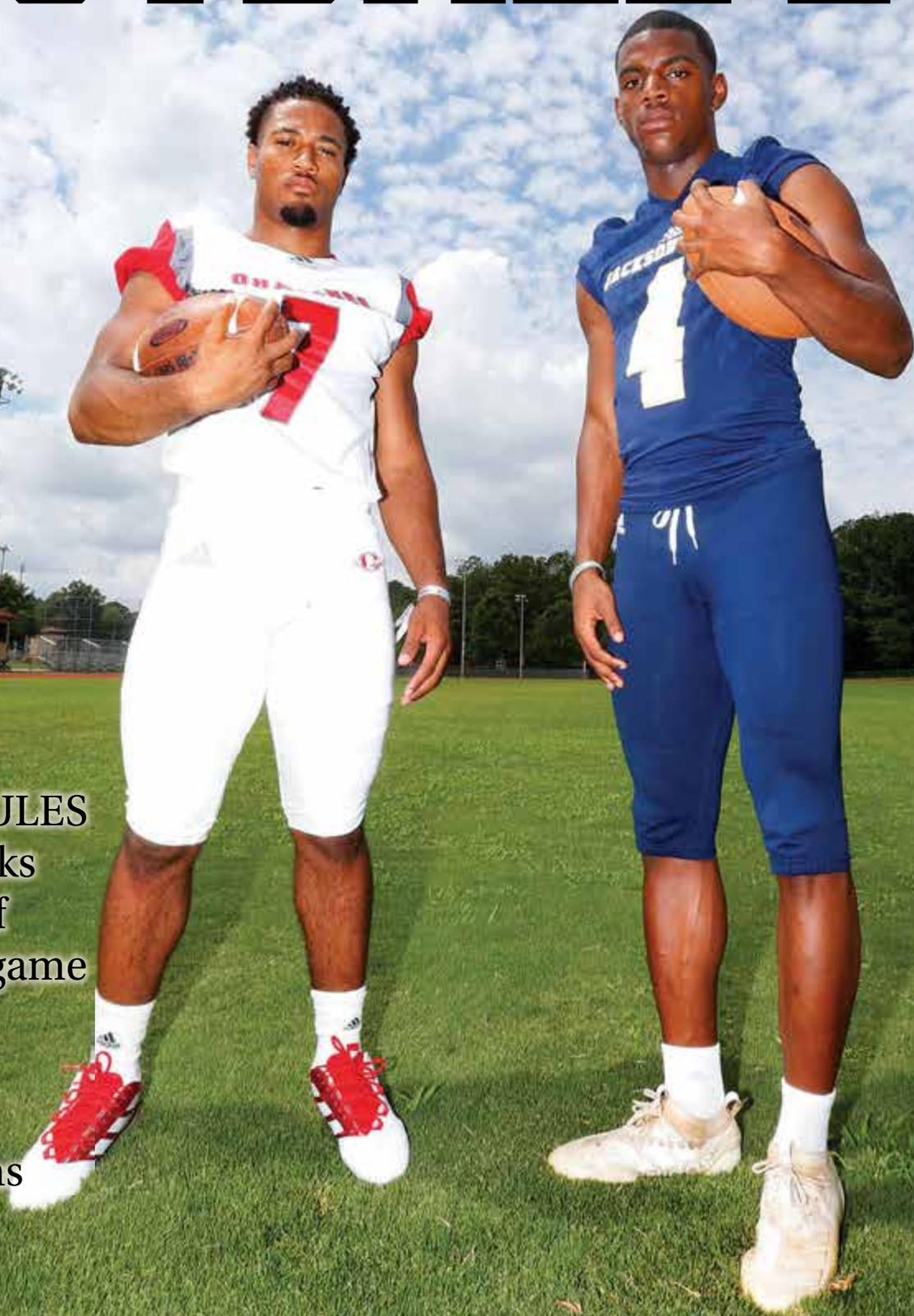


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The Anniston Star

FOOTBALL 2019



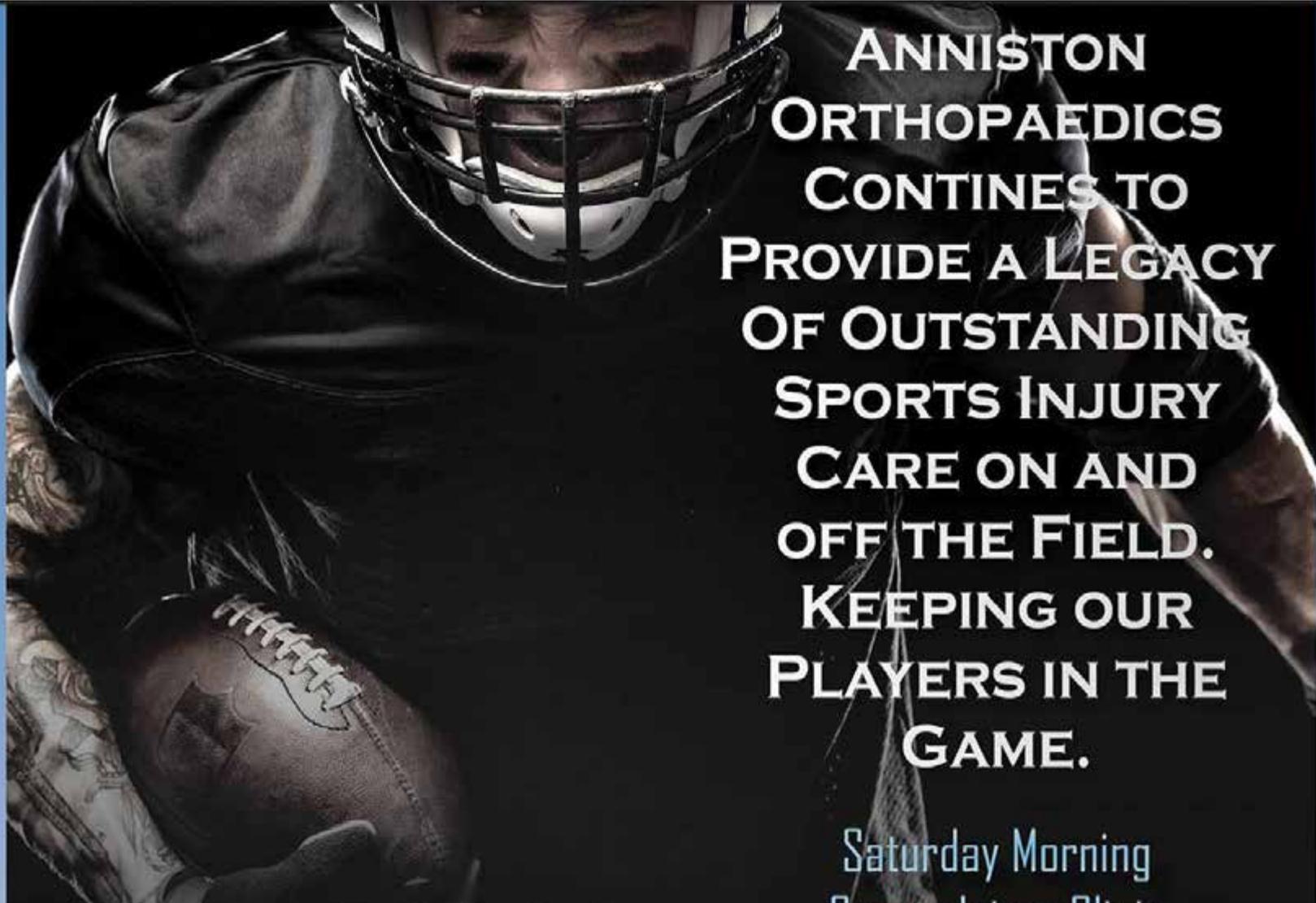
INSIDE:

GROUND RULES

Running backs
still at core of
high school game

ALSO:

Profiles of
12 local teams



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FOOTBALL 2019

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SCHOOLS

Preseason All-county teams . .	Page 10
Alexandria	7
Anniston	9
The Donoho School	12
Jacksonville	14
Ohatchee	16
Oxford	18
Piedmont	20
Pleasant Valley	23
Saks	24
Weaver	27
Wellborn	29
White Plains	30



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GROUND RULES

High school teams keep their feet on the ground

BY JOE MEDLEY

jmedley@annistonstar.com

Football evolution has not been kind to running backs.

In the NFL, where they draft talent and “shield” protectors hunt entertainment dollars, it’s all about the quarterbacks.

Even in major college football, where they recruit talent and want entertainment dollars, football has become more of a quarterback’s game.

Running backs, however, still rule high school football, where top quarterbacking skill does not come universal. Not every high school has a Bo Nix, and many schools make quarterbacks glorified running backs with schooling on read-game decision making.

Totes and G.O.A.T.s still correlate under Friday night lights, and Calhoun County comes blessed with excellent toters in 2019. Two will enter this season with top billing in the county.

Ohatchee’s Domonique Thomas enters this season as the preseason pick for All-County player of the year among 1A-3A schools. Jacksonville’s Rontarius Wiggins takes the same honors among 4A-6A schools.

Both enter 2019 among the county’s top returnees at their positions, following graduations of Oxford’s Tyetus Smith-Lindsey, Saks’ Johnathon Cobb, Alexandria’s Romeo Dye and Weaver’s Shamar Spinks.

J.B. Carlisle looks to be a rising star at Oxford, after running for 600 yards behind Smith-Lindsey last season. Donoho’s Rod Elston, Wellborn’s Calvin Spinks and Kentrez Hunt, Pleasant Valley’s Colton East and White Plains’ Jaden Harris had strong seasons in 2018 and look to this season. Nate McCallum figures to step in well as Alexandria’s primary ball carrier, historically a place of honor among county running

backs. Former Cleburne County running back A.J. Brown makes for an intriguing transfer, at Anniston.

Thomas and Wiggins top the class in preseason. Here’s a look at what each has done to warrant such billing and what each stands to mean to his team:

Domonique Thomas

Running back Austin Tucker teamed with then-quarterback Taylor Eubanks to make the county conversant with Ohatchee’s “Ugly Eagle” offense in 2015 and 2016. Thomas and quarterback Grayson Alward kept producing ugly numbers in 2017 and 2018.

Thomas returns, with 2,800 yards in his wake, including 1,585 yards with 26 touchdowns in 2018. He accounted for more than 1,700 total yards and 28 touchdowns.

Thomas is the lone returning running back among the three to make first-team All-County after last season. He was also an Alabama Sports Writers Association All-State pick and recently invited to play in the Blue-Grey All-American bowl, set for Jan. 13 of next year, in Atlanta’s Mercedes Benz Stadium.

To put Thomas’ numbers in perspective, he averaged 6.5 yards a carry in 2017 and 9.2 in 2018.

“Realize, he did not play in the second half, except for about three regular-season games,” Ohatchee coach Scott Martin said.

Thomas packs power in his 5-foot-8, 185-pound frame.

“He’s a very physical player,” Martin said. “He’s a very focused player. The effort is second to none. He’s a tough load. He’s a handful.”

Thomas doesn’t just lead by numbers. He’s known for motivational ploys, as well.



Trent Penny/The Anniston Star

Ohatchee running back Domonique Thomas and Jacksonville running back Ron Wiggins are pre-season All-County players of the year.



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ALEXANDRIA

HEAD COACH:

Todd Ginn, 6-5, entering second season as head coach at Alexandria.

CLASS, REGION:

Class 5A, Region 6

LAST YEAR:

6-5 overall, 3-3 region. The Valley Cubs finished fourth in region play and lost to Madison Academy 18-15 in the first round of the playoffs.

HOW IT WENT IN 2018:

Alexandria came close to bigger things. They lost a classic rivalry to a Jacksonville team that went on to have a historic season. The Valley Cubs also lost a 14-7 heartbreaker in region play at Boaz, in a game that came down to a controversial ending. Alexandria also had Madison Academy on the ropes in the first round. There was a clear gap between the Valley Cubs and the top two teams in their region. They lost to Southside 35-14 and Etowah 27-7.

KEY RETURNEES:

FB/LB Devin Burton, OL/DL Layton Ellison, RB Nate McCallum.

OUR TAKE:

There's a sense around Alexandria's team that last season should've lasted at least a week longer. The Valley Cubs came away from that heartbreaking loss to Madison Academy believing they could be better. It's a younger team this year, with key losses including running back Romeo Dye, quarterback Jacob Wells, wide receiver/safety/punter Joe Tucker, LB/FB Sam Shaw and lots of strength up front, but there was an infusion of belief. There's also an infusion of speed with younger players who moved up this season. This could be a sleeper team with a chance to return to the playoffs.

WORD FROM COACH GINN:

"Looking from last year, we got beat by Madison Academy, and anybody that followed us or knew about that game knows, we should've won the game. I don't even like going back and watching the film, because everybody said we should not have been in the game, but after we came up for air, after about the first eight minutes of the game, our players decided that we can play with these guys. We really controlled the entire game. That gave us a lot to build on. ... Everybody then started believing that, even though you hear we're young, and we're not going to be that good this year, our mentality and how hard these guys have worked is going to show, and we're going to be a good bit better than people think we're going to be."

2019 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30, at Jacksonville
 Sept. 6, Open date
 Sept. 13, vs. Boaz*
 Sept. 20, at Crossville*
 Sept. 27, vs. Cleburne County
 Oct. 4, at Sardis*
 Oct. 11, vs. Southside*
 Oct. 18, at Etowah*
 Oct. 25, vs. Douglas*
 Nov. 1, at Chilton County

* Class 5A, Region 6 game

2018 RESULTS

Aug. 23, Talladega (A), W 18-14
 Aug. 31, Jacksonville (H), L 35-28
 Sept. 7, Open date
 Sept. 14, Boaz (A), L 14-7
 Sept. 21, Crossville (H), W 66-14
 Sept. 28, Cleburne County (A), W 56-25
 Oct. 5, Sardis (H), W 33-15
 Oct. 12, Southside (A), L 35-14
 Oct. 19, Etowah (H), L 27-7
 Oct. 26, Douglas (A), W 54-6
 Nov. 2, Chilton County (H), W 42-35
CLASS 5A PLAYOFFS
 Nov. 9, Madison Academy (A), L 18-15



Trent Penny/The Anniston Star

Nate McCallum returns to Alexandria for his senior season, giving the Valley Cubs an experienced ball carrier.

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ANNISTON

HEAD COACH:

Rico White, 6-5, entering second season as head coach at Anniston. 36-77 in 11 years as a head coach overall.

CLASS, REGION:

Class 4A, Region 6

LAST YEAR:

6-5 overall, 5-2 region. The Bulldogs finished third in region play and lost to Deshler 21-7 in the first round of the playoffs.

HOW IT WENT IN 2018:

Anniston made progress in year one under White, as the Bulldogs' region record attests. They beat everybody but top-two finishers Hokes Bluff and Jacksonville and made the playoffs for the first time since 2015 while posting their first winning record since 2011. Anniston overcame key players' losses to injury, including running back Charrell Brown, to accomplish those feats on the strength of a strong defense.

KEY RETURNEES:

QB Tyree Carmichael, WR Mondreco Thompson, S/LB Ali Ware, WR Ladreka Hall, LB Kaleb Jennings, WR/S Jordan Caldwell, DT John Foster, TE/DE Jordan Felder, CB Tiquon Jackson.

OUR TAKE:

Anniston lost 13 seniors but returns nine starters on defense and seven on offense. Anniston picked up key transfers from Saks in QB/DB Daveon Dukes and S Tony Hunley. RB A.J. Brown and LB Micaiah Ross came from Cleburne County. It's a team that's ready to take the next step, but taking it means breaking through against Jacksonville and Hokes Bluff in region play.

WORD FROM COACH WHITE:

"The biggest thing coming into Anniston last year was to change the mindset. The previous years, we had had some ups and downs, fluctuating with the record. In order to get where we need to be, you had to change the mindset and predict high standards. I think it worked well, because we end up being 6-4 and went to the playoffs, and the team we lost to went to the state championship. That wasn't bad. This year, we've really put work in, and we're looking forward to a great season."

2019 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30, vs. Montgomery Catholic
 Sept. 6, at Cherokee County *
 Sept. 13, vs. Cleburne County *
 Sept. 20, at Hokes Bluff *
 Sept. 27, at American Christian
 Oct. 4, vs. Jacksonville *
 Oct. 11, vs. White Plains *
 Oct. 18, at Oneonta *
 Oct. 25, vs. Ashville *
 Nov. 1, at Childersburg

*Class 4A, Region 6 game

2018 RESULTS

Aug. 31, Montgomery Catholic (A), L 16-9
 Sept. 7, Cherokee County (H), W 14-10
 Sept. 14, Cleburne County (A), W 28-8
 Sept. 21, Hokes Bluff (H), L 28-18
 Sept. 28, American Christian (H), L 15-0
 Oct. 5, Jacksonville (A), L 40-20
 Oct. 12, White Plains (A), W 7-0
 Oct. 19, Oneonta (H), W 27-13
 Oct. 26, Ashville (A), W 42-6
 Nov. 2, Childersburg (H), W 23-0
 Class 4A playoffs
 Nov. 9, Deshler (A), L 21-7



Trent Penny/The Anniston Star

Mondreco Thompson returns to bolster a talented wide receiver corps at Anniston.

BULLDOGS

PLAYERS

Continued from Page 4

Last season, Thomas printed off a 19-item list of expectations for his team last season, and the Indians put up an 11-1 season. He enters this season with a cell-phone lock screen, showing Fyffe hoisting a state-championship trophy last season.

Ohatchee lost to Fyffe 21-13 in last year's quarterfinals, in a game that featured what Martin called the "two best teams in 2A."

"I'm still mad about that," Thomas said. "I want a reminder every day of why I should work hard."

Taking a page from Alabama coach Nick Saban's motivational playbook, Thomas printed off a list showing each team Ohatchee plays this season, along with a theme quote for that week.

"It's just different things every week,"

Thomas said.

Rontarius Wiggins

Wiggins was a revelation to county football watchers last season, exploding on the scene after a year as the second back behind Macey Carr. Wiggins made first-team all-state, rushing for 2,376 yards and 34 touchdowns.

He also caught 14 passes for 243 yards and two scores.

Only the fact of Oxford having a major recruit in lineman Clay Webb prevented Wiggins from finishing the season as The Star's All-County 4A-6A player of the year.

Wiggins has had another offseason to get bigger and stronger.

"I think he's gotten faster," Jacksonville coach Clint Smith said. "He went to some camps this year, and he's done a good job."

Maybe the biggest camp was a one-on-one camp, with former Anniston and Jacksonville State running back Troymaine Pope, now with the San Diego Chargers.

Wiggins and Pope worked together twice a week for an hour to two, at JSU, during July.

"He gave me a little flavor to my game," Wiggins said. "He said it was a little bit too basic, but he also was teaching me how the defense flows and how to score off that."

Wiggins has scored college offers in the past 12 months. He picked up his first offer, from FCS member JSU, during last season. Offers followed from FBS schools UAB, Arkansas State, Southern Miss and Troy.

What a difference a year has made for Wiggins.

"Last year, coming into the season, a lot of people didn't expect me to be rushing and running for that many yards against teams," he said. "This year, I felt like I had to work harder this summer to sustain my ability and get better."

"People are going to be expecting more out of me this year. Teams are going to game-plan around me, so I need to craft my game more."

While Wiggins' last 12 months were a surprise to outside observers, Smith saw it coming. A year ago, the coach touted Wiggins' field vision, that always-underrated quality for good running backs. Wiggins sees holes and angles and anticipates traffic well, which helped him to make several big plays last season.

A veteran offensive line helped him to maximize his chance to be Jacksonville's featured ballcarrier. He'll have to do it with a younger offensive line this season, but a big one. Smith said this year's line, which includes Omarion Pope, Troymaine's brother, averages nearly 300 pounds.

"I love it," Wiggins said. "They'll be knocking them out of the way for me. ... This is going to be a big season for the whole team."

Contact Anniston Star Sports Writer
Joe Medley at jmedley@annistonstar.com.
Twitter: @jmedley_star.

1A-3A PRESEASON ALL-CALHOUN COUNTY FOOTBALL TEAM

Player of the year: Domonique Thomas, Ohatchee

OFFENSE

QB: Jett Smith, Wellborn, 5-11, 170, Jr.
RB: Domonique Thomas, Ohatchee, 5-8, 185, Sr.
RB: Colton East, Pleasant Valley, 5-11, 185, Sr.
TE/WR: Cade Williamson, Ohatchee, 6-0, 185, Sr.
TE/WR: Tavaris Berry, Wellborn, 6-2, 215, So.
TE/WR: Colby Nelson, Pleasant Valley, 6-3, 221, Sr.
OL: Dylan Gilbert, Wellborn, 6-2, 240, Sr.
OL: Dalton Gilbert, Wellborn, 6-2, 240, Sr.
OL: Briley Hale, Ohatchee, 6-0, 175, Sr.
OL: Dalton Arnett, Weaver, 6-4, 300, Sr.
OL: Cole Proper, Pleasant Valley, 6-1, 245, Sr.
ATH: Rod Elston, Donoho, 5-11, 160, Jr.
ATH: Amari Smedley, Donoho, 6-0, 165, Jr.
ATH: Aiden Simpson, Ohatchee, 6-0, 190, Jr.
ATH: Calvin Spinks, Wellborn, 5-4, 155, Jr.

DEFENSE

DL: Isaiah Woods, Weaver, 6-1, 250, Sr.
DL: Bryson Ingram, Piedmont, 6-1, 225, Sr.
DL: Sean Smith, Piedmont, 6-1, 235, Jr.
DL: Colby Nelson, Pleasant Valley, 6-3, 225, Sr.
LB: Wyatt Reaves, Ohatchee, 5-11, 190, So.
LB: Ryker Lambright, Ohatchee, 5-10, 175, Sr.
LB: Logan Brooks, Wellborn, 5-10, 170, Jr.
LB: Dalton Mize, Pleasant Valley, 5-9, 160, Sr.
LB: Davontae Hilliard, Weaver, 5-10, 165, Sr.
DB: Brant Deerman, Piedmont, 5-11, 165, Sr.
DB: Christian Figueroa, Wellborn, 5-9, 160, Jr.
DB: Zay Elston, Saks, 5-11, 200, Sr.
DB: Jakari Foster, Piedmont, 6-0, 170, Jr.
ATH: Roilan Torres, Saks, 5-9, 215, Sr.
ATH: Harley Kendall, Wellborn, 5-10, 205, Sr.
P/K: Bryce Mohon, Piedmont, 5-9, 155, Sr.

4A-6A PRESEASON ALL-CALHOUN COUNTY FOOTBALL TEAM

Player of the year: Rontarius Wiggins, Jacksonville

OFFENSE

QB: Luke Jackson, Jacksonville, 5-10, 165, Sr.
QB: Trey Higgins, Oxford, 6-3, 185, Jr.
RB: Rontarius Wiggins, Jacksonville, 6-0, 175, Sr.
RB: J.B. Carlisle, Oxford, 5-10, 195, Sr.
WR: Roc Taylor, Oxford, 6-3, 205, Jr.
WR: Zay Britt, Oxford, 5-8, 175, Sr.
WR: Ladreka Hall, Anniston, 6-0, 155, Sr.
OL: Will O'Steen, White Plains, 6-3, 220, Sr.
OL: Omarion Pope, Jacksonville, 6-3, 290, Sr.
OL: Brandon Kirksey, Oxford, 6-5, 330, Jr.
OL: Layton Ellison, Alexandria, 6-1, 230, Sr.
OL: Deveon Coffey, Anniston, 6-4, 280, Jr.
P/K: Andrew Warhurst, Oxford, 6-0, 155, Sr.
ATH: Nate McCallum, Alexandria, 5-9, 185, Sr.
ATH: Jaden Harris, White Plains, 5-10, 160, Sr.

DEFENSE

DL: John Foster, Anniston, 5-9, 180, Sr.
DL: Octavious Adair, Oxford, 6-2, 195, Sr.
DL: Kristin Booth, Oxford, 6-2, 225, Sr.
LB: Jaylen Swain, Oxford, 5-9, 230, Sr.
LB: Jackson Moses, Jacksonville, 5-10, 180, Jr.
LB: Sam Dingler, Jacksonville, 5-10, 180, Sr.
LB: Omarion Adams, Jacksonville, 5-10, 160, Jr.
LB: Ethan Bozarth, White Plains, 6-1, 195, Sr.
LB: Kaleb Jennings, Anniston, 5-11, 215, Sr.
DB: Antwon Fegans, Oxford, 6-2, 180, Sr.
DB: Trequon Fegans, Oxford, 6-1, 170, So.
DB: Jordan Caldwell, Anniston, 6-1, 170, Sr.
DB: Teddy Hall, White Plains, 6-2, 180, Sr.



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FALCONS

DONOHO

HEAD COACH:

Mark Sanders, 11-11, entering third season as head coach at Donoho, 28-25 in five seasons overall.

CLASS, REGION:

Class 1A, Region 5

LAST YEAR:

9-3 overall, 5-1 region. The Falcons finished second in region play and lost to eventual state champion Mars Hill Bible 38-7 in the second round of the playoffs.

HOW IT WENT IN 2018:

Donoho flipped the script, going from 2-8 in 2017 to 8-2 in the regular season. That included a five-game winning streak that carried through a 59-14 rout of Coosa Christian in the first round of the playoffs. The Falcons shut out their final three regular-season opponents, beating Victory Christian 48-0, Appalachian 49-0 and Woodland 56-0. Their two regular-season losses came against Biggersville (Miss.) in the opener and region rival Spring Garden.

KEY RETURNEES:

RB/S Rod Elston, Amari Smedley HB/CB, OL/DL Payne Golden.

OUR TAKE:

Ridge Hopkins steps in at quarterback to replace graduated Donoho sports legend Hall Billings, and Hopkins brings a good passing arm along with the ability to run. He's a sophomore and has a lot to learn, but has ability to pair with Elston in the backfield. Reid Williamon is expected to step in at tight end for departed senior Will Nelson, and Sanders likes to use tight ends. Munford transfer Andrew Harris will share time at tight end, as well, after sitting out 2018. The Falcons have plug-ins to keep them in playoff contention in their region.

WORD FROM COACH SANDERS:

"We look forward to having a big year this year. We have a good squad coming back. We lost 10 seniors last year. We had some pretty good guys that are leaving us that had some really good career numbers, but we feel like the experience of our offensive, and we have one of the best running backs you can find, we're going to have a pretty good year."

2019 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30, at Horseshoe Bend
Sept. 6, at Ragland *
Sept. 13, vs. Winterboro *
Sept. 20, vs. Spring Garden *
Sept. 27, at Berry
Oct. 4, open date
Oct. 10, at Talladega County Central *
Oct. 18, at Victory Christian *
Oct. 25, vs. Appalachian *
Nov. 1, at Woodland

* Class 1A, Region 5 game

2018 RESULTS

Aug. 24, Biggersville (Miss.) (H), L 52-14
Aug. 31, Horseshoe Bend (H), W 35-12
Sept. 7, Ragland (H), W 41-7
Sept. 14, Winterboro (A), W 14-8
Sept. 21, Spring Garden (A), L 16-0
Sept. 28, Berry (H), W 42-14
Oct. 5, Open date
Oct. 12, Talladega County Central (H), W 45-18
Oct. 19, Victory Christian (H), W 48-0
Oct. 26, Appalachian (A), W 49-0
Nov. 2, Woodland (H), W 56-0
CLASS 1A PLAYOFFS
Nov. 9, Coosa Christian (H), W 59-14
Nov. 16, Mars Hill Bible School (A), L 38-7



Trent Penny/The Anniston Star

Donoho running back Rod Elston returns after rushing for 1,420 yards and 24 touchdowns last season.

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JACKSONVILLE

GOLDEN EAGLES

HEAD COACH:

Clint Smith, 55-24, entering eighth season as head coach at Jacksonville, 112-71 in 17 years as a head coach overall.

CLASS, REGION:

Class 4A, Region 6

LAST YEAR:

11-1 overall, 7-0 region. The Golden Eagles won their region and lost to Good Hope 27-12 in the second round of the playoffs.

HOW IT WENT IN 2018:

Jacksonville made school history, with the most wins in a single season and first 10-0 regular season. The Golden Eagles scored the most points (397) in school history. With 2,300-yard rusher Rontarius Wiggins leading the way, the Golden Eagles romped through most of their schedule and prevailed in close games against non-region rival Alexandria (35-28) and region foes Oneonta (22-21) and Hokes Bluff (16-14). Jacksonville's playoff loss came on a soggy field, against a team that was built for those conditions.

KEY RETURNEES:

RB Rontarius Wiggins, QB Luke Jackson, LB Sam Dingler, LB Omarion Adams, WR Jaeden Barksdale, WR Yessman Green.

OUR TAKE:

Jacksonville lost key players on the offensive and defensive lines but has 23 seniors and returns most of its playmakers. The Golden Eagles have six starters back on offense and eight on defense, and former Anniston High lineman Omarion Pope, brother to former Anniston and Jacksonville State running back Troymaine Pope, should lead an offensive line that will average close to 300 pounds. There's every reason to believe the region will come down to Jacksonville and Hokes Bluff, same as last year. Jacksonville hasn't lost to Hokes Bluff in Smith's eight years their head coach.

WORD FROM COACH SMITH:

"Last year, we took another step forward for our program. Each year, we want to move forward, and we want to try to get better each year. ... Last year's team was very special, and they have a lot to look back on. That was then, and this is now. We have to understand that what we did last year doesn't matter at all moving into this year, and we have to continue to work hard to get better and better this season."

2019 SCHEDULE

Aug. 23, at J.B. Pennington
 Aug. 30, vs. Alexandria
 Sept. 6, at Ashville *
 Sept. 13, vs. Cherokee County *
 Sept. 20, at Cleburne County *
 Sept. 27, at Piedmont
 Oct. 4, at Anniston *
 Oct. 11, vs. Oneonta *
 Oct. 18, at White Plains *
 Oct. 25, vs. Hokes Bluff *
 Nov. 1, open date

* Class 4A, Region 6 game

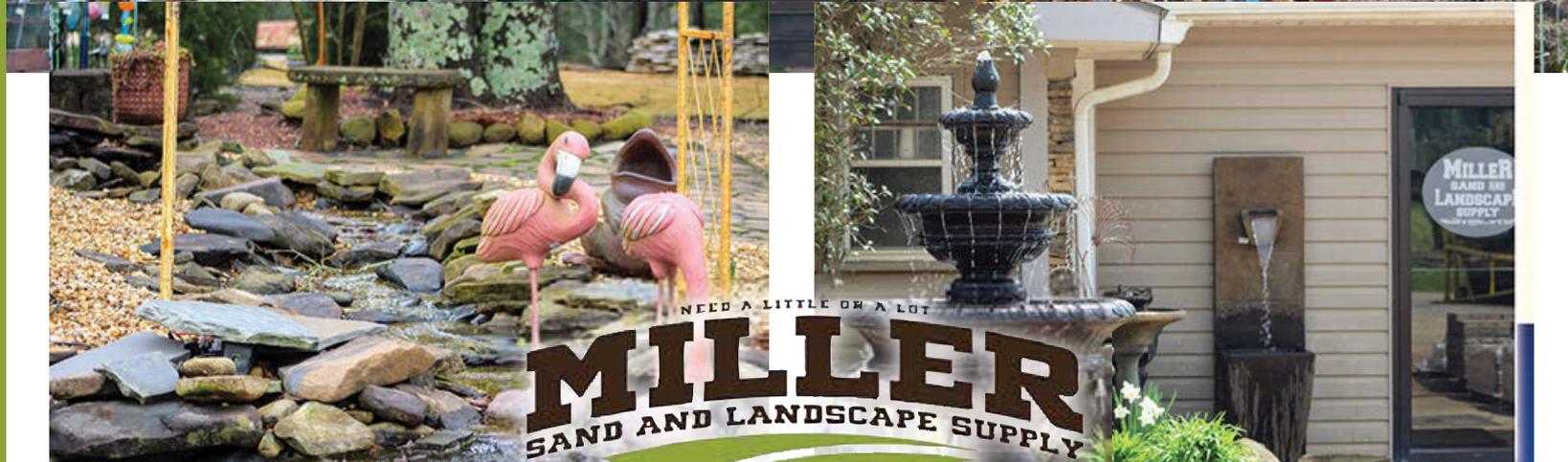
2018 RESULTS

Aug. 24, J.B. Pennington (A), W 34-21
 Aug. 31, Alexandria (A), W 35-28
 Sept. 7, Ashville (H), W 33-7
 Sept. 14, Cherokee County (A), W 56-21
 Sept. 21, Cleburne County (H), W 55-33
 Sept. 28, Piedmont (H), W 28-21
 Oct. 5, Anniston (H), W 40-20
 Oct. 12, Oneonta (A), W 22-21
 Oct. 19, White Plains (H), W 27-6
 Oct. 26, Hokes Bluff (A), W 16-14
 Nov. 2, Open date
CLASS 4A PLAYOFFS
 Nov. 9, Rogers (H), W 39-21
 Nov. 16, Good Hope (A), L 27-12



Jacksonville quarterback Luke Jackson is back after throwing for 1,852 yards and 15 touchdowns last season.

Trent Penny/The Anniston Star



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OHATCHEE

HEAD COACH:

Scott Martin, 36-21, entering sixth season as head coach at Ohatchee, 62-39 in nine seasons as a head coach in Alabama (coached in Louisiana before coming to Alabama).

CLASS, REGION:

Class 2A, Region 6

LAST YEAR:

11-1 overall, 6-0 in region play and region champions. Lost to eventual state champion Fyffe 21-13 in the playoff quarterfinals (third round).

HOW IT WENT IN 2018:

With a smaller, quicker offensive line, the "Ugly Eagle" offense was in-a-good-way ugly as ever, scoring 493 points. Quarterback Grayson Alward and running back Domonique Thomas led the way. The defense gave up just 162 points (13.5 a game), giving up no more than one score six times with one shutout. The fourth unbeaten regular season in school history included a 35-24 victory at Leeds, and playoff romps of Cedar Bluff (47-12) and Red Bay (42-6) established the Indians as one of 2A's best teams.

KEY RETURNEES:

RB Domonique Thomas, WB/LB Ryker Lambright, ATH Aiden Simpson, OL Briley Hale.

OUR TAKE:

Ohatchee must find replacements for the holes that Alward left at quarterback and safety. Alward made it impossible to key on Thomas, and he brought the pain on defense. However, Ohatchee has built something under Martin. After moving down in classification last year, the Indians were one of the best teams in 2A, and emotions from the heartbreaking loss to Fyffe in the playoffs have added extra motivation. There's every reason to think Ohatchee will be a state contender again this season.

WORD FROM COACH MARTIN:

"The reason I'm super excited about this football team is, I've finally got a team, six years worth, that the only habits they know are the habits that we've ingrained in them in the last six years. I think that's going to make a difference."

2019 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30, at White Plains
 Sept. 6, vs. Woodland *
 Sept. 13, at Cleveland *
 Sept. 20, vs. Westbrook Christian *
 Sept. 27, vs. Leeds
 Oct. 4, at West End *
 Oct. 11, open date
 Oct. 18, at Ranburne *
 Oct. 25, vs. Gaston *
 Nov. 1, at Pleasant Valley

* Class 2A, Region 6 game

2018 RESULTS

Aug. 31, White Plains (H), W 41-8
 Sept. 7, Woodland (A), W 54-19
 Sept. 14, Cleveland (H), W 45-6
 Sept. 21, Westbrook Christian (A), W 37-30
 Sept. 28, Leeds (A), W 35-24
 Oct. 5, West End (H), W 70-22
 Oct. 12, Open date
 Oct. 19, Ranburne (H), W 28-0
 Oct. 26, Gaston (A), W 55-8
 Nov. 1, Pleasant Valley (H), W 26-6
CLASS 2A PLAYOFFS
 Nov. 9, Cedar Bluff (H), W 47-12
 Nov. 16, Red Bay (H), W 42-6
 Nov. 23, Fyffe (A), L 21-13



Ryker Lambright returns to bolster both sides of the ball at Ohatchee.

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OXFORD

YELLOW JACKETS

HEAD COACH:

Keith Etheredge, 0-0, entering first season as head coach at Oxford, 125-49 overall in 13 seasons as a head coach.

CLASS, REGION:

Class 6A, Region 6

LAST YEAR:

10-3 overall, 4-2 region. The Yellow Jackets finished third in region play and lost to region rival Clay-Chalkville 45-9 in the quarterfinals (third round) of the playoffs.

HOW IT WENT IN 2018:

Oxford was arguably the third best team in 6A in 2018, behind region rivals Pinson Valley, which won its second consecutive state title with "Mr. Football" Bo Nix at quarterback, and Clay-Chalkville. All three Oxford losses came against those two teams. The Yellow Jackets won the rest of their games by an average score of 45.5-7.6. The defense recorded four shutouts, including a 49-0 romp over Decatur in the second round of the playoffs.

KEY RETURNEES:

QB Trey Higgins, WR Roc Taylor, WR Zay Britt, RB J.B. Carlisle, DE Octavian Adair, DE Kristin Booth, LB Jaylen Swain, DB Antwon Fegans, DB Traquon Fegans

OUR TAKE:

When Ryan Herring resigned as Oxford's head coach, he said he thought this year's team would be Oxford's fastest in years. Pinson Valley and Clay-Chalkville suffered key losses, and Oxford made arguably the state's biggest splash coaching hire with Etheredge. Expectations are high among Jacket backers, and there's every reason to believe they should be. Could they finally break through to the Super 7 in 6A?

WORD FROM COACH ETHEREDGE:

"I just think it's going to be a great year at Oxford High School."

2019 SCHEDULE

Aug. 23, vs. Munford
 Aug. 30, vs. Gadsden City
 Sept. 6, at Pell City *
 Sept. 13, vs. Charles Henderson
 Sept. 20, at Pinson Valley *
 Sept. 27, Open date
 Oct. 4, vs. Huffman *
 Oct. 11, at Shades Valley *
 Oct. 18, vs. Clay-Chalkville *
 Oct. 25, vs. Gardendale *
 Nov. 1, vs. Sumter Central

* Class 6A, Region 6 game

2018 RESULTS

Aug. 24, Munford (A), W 28-0
 Aug. 31, Gadsden City (A), W 35-6
 Sept. 7, Pell City (H), W 33-0
 Sept. 14, Charles Henderson (A), W 62-0
 Sept. 21, Pinson Valley (H), L 28-19
 Sept. 28, Open date
 Oct. 5, Huffman (A), W 57-6
 Oct. 12, Shades Valley (H), W 47-13
 Oct. 19, Clay-Chalkville (A), L 27-6
 Oct. 26, Gardendale (A), W 61-21
 Nov. 2, Sumter Central (H), W 41-16
CLASS 6A PLAYOFFS
 Nov. 9, Hazel Green (A), W 42-14
 Nov. 16, Decatur (H), W 49-0
 Nov. 23, Clay-Chalkville (A), L 45-9



Stephen Gross/The Anniston Star

Kristin Booth (9) and Jaylen Swain (8) return to lead a very talented defense at Oxford.

Good Luck To All Area Teams!



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PIEDMONT

BULLDOGS

HEAD COACH:

Steve Smith, 147-28, entering 14th season as head coach at Piedmont, 232-73 overall in 24 seasons as a head coach overall

CLASS, REGION:

Class 3A, Region 6

LAST YEAR:

12-3 overall, 6-1 region. The Bulldogs won their region and lost to Flomaton 23-12 in the 3A final at Auburn.

HOW IT WENT IN 2018:

Picked to finish third in its region, Piedmont showed the heart of a champion after losing most of the key players from state championship teams in 2015 and 2016 and a semifinal team in 2017. The Bulldogs' playoff run included dramatic victories over Westminster Christian (27-26) and Randolph County (26-21). Senior T.J. Fairs blocked two extra points against Westminster Christian. A tough schedule, including non-region victories over region champions Addison and Geraldine, allowed Piedmont to prevail in a three-way tie in region play.

KEY RETURNEES:

C Hayden Young, FB Elijah Johnson, DE Sean Smith, DE Bryson Ingram, DB Brant Deerman, DB Jakari Foster, P/K Bryce Mohon.

OUR TAKE:

It's tempting to pick against Piedmont, which lost four offensive linemen, its quarterback and tailback, all three wide receivers, a nose tackle, all four linebackers and two of four in the secondary. Then again, everybody made that mistake a year ago, picking a Piedmont team that lost a lot to finish third in its brutal 3A region. The Bulldogs won the region and reached the state finals. Piedmont's players come up through a cohesive system in the lower ranks. They've learned the system by the time they get to varsity ball. With Jack Hayes set as the heir apparent at quarterback and Smith proven as a championship coach, expect this team to compete for a region title and make another deep playoff run.

WORD FROM COACH SMITH:

"We've got 48 on our roster, and 35 are ninth- and 10th-graders. We've only got 13 older kids. We've had some classes that have been single digits. This is the first time of having back-to-back classes with that small of a number. I'm really, really excited about coaching this team. They've got a lot of youthful energy about them. We just lack experience, but I like our bunch."

2019 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30, vs. Addison
 Sept. 6, at Pleasant Valley *
 Sept. 13, vs. Randolph County *
 Sept. 20, vs. Weaver *
 Sept. 27, vs. Jacksonville
 Oct. 4, at Saks *
 Oct. 11, vs. Glencoe *
 Oct. 18, at B.B. Comer *
 Oct. 25, at Wellborn *
 Nov. 1, vs. Geraldine

* Class 3A, Region 6 game

2018 RESULTS

Aug. 31, Addison (A), W 32-20
 Sept. 7, Pleasant Valley (H), W 46-21
 Sept. 14, Randolph County (A), W 27-22
 Sept. 21, Weaver (A), W 29-21
 Sept. 28, Jacksonville (A) L 28-21
 Oct. 5, Saks (H), L 25-13
 Oct. 12, Glencoe (A), W 37-0
 Oct. 19, B.B. Comer (H), W 42-0
 Oct. 26, Wellborn (H), W 54-27
 Nov. 2, Geraldine (A), W 26-6
CLASS 3A PLAYOFFS
 Nov. 9, Clements (H), W 41-0
 Nov. 16, J.B. Pennington (A), W 41-16
 Nov. 23, Westminster Christian (H) W 27-26
 Nov. 30, Randolph County (H), W 26-21
 Dec. 6, Flomaton (N), L 23-12



Trent Penny/The Anniston Star

Piedmont's Brant Deerman (8) returns to bolster the Bulldogs' secondary.



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PLEASANT VALLEY

RAIDERS

HEAD COACH:

Jonathan Nix, 11-29, entering fifth season as head coach at Pleasant Valley, 48-57 overall in 10 seasons as a head coach.

CLASS, REGION:

Class 3A, Region 6

LAST YEAR:

5-5 overall, 3-4 and fifth place in region play.

HOW IT WENT IN 2018:

Playing in a brutal region with Piedmont, Saks, Randolph County and Weaver, Pleasant Valley mounted its first .500 or better season since 2008. A dramatic goal-line stand gave the Raiders 27-26 victory over Wellborn, clinching their place as best of the rest in their region. Linebacker Alex Parris and lineman Carson Brazier were honorable-mention All-State picks, Pleasant Valley's first All-State picks since 2010.

KEY RETURNEES:

QB Brody Phillips, RB Colton East, RB Jake Malsy, OL Cole Proper, DL Colby Nelson, LB Dalton Mize.

OUR TAKE:

Pleasant Valley seems like a team on the edge of breaking with its frustrating history and charting a new identity. The Raiders were the fifth team in a brutal 3A region last year and return a lot of reasons to think they can finish in one of those four playoff spots. The only pause comes from the fact that Piedmont, Randolph County, Saks, Weaver and what's expected to be Wellborn's best team in years all fight for the same thing. If Pleasant Valley breaks through in that mix, then the Raiders will have accomplished something special.

WORD FROM COACH NIX:

"That's been our goal from day one is to get the program where, every year, you're in the playoffs. Not, are you projected to possibly be in one of those spots, but where you're looking for us to, every year, to be one through four (in region finish). This group of kids that I've got now, they've been through the tough times. A lot of times, you're pulling an arrow back, and the pulling is the negative part. When that arrow shoots, it projects you forward. We've been in that pull-back process for a while. Last year, I feel like we took a step on letting that arrow go and shooting us forward."

2019 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30, at West End
 Sept. 6, vs. Piedmont *
 Sept. 13, at Weaver *
 Sept. 20, vs. Saks *
 Sept. 27, at Gaston
 Oct. 4, at Glencoe *
 Oct. 11, vs. B.B. Comer *
 Oct. 18, vs. Wellborn *
 Oct. 25, at Randolph County *
 Nov. 1, vs. Ochattee

* Class 3A, Region 6 game

2018 RESULTS

Aug. 31, West End (H), W 68-26
 Sept. 7, Piedmont (A), L 46-21
 Sept. 14, Weaver (H), L 40-13
 Sept. 21, Saks (A), L 41-14
 Sept. 28, Gaston (H), W 47-0
 Oct. 5, Glencoe (H), W 41-0
 Oct. 12, B.B. Comer (A), W 39-6
 Oct. 19, Wellborn (A), W 27-26
 Oct. 26, Randolph County (H), L 35-6
 Nov. 1, Ochattee (A), L 26-6



Trent Penny/The Anniston Star

Pleasant Valley's Colton East returns after rushing for 1,205 yards and 16 touchdowns last season.

SAKS

WILDCATS

HEAD COACH:

Jonathan Miller, 68-17, entering eighth season as head coach at Saks.

CLASS, REGION:

Class 3A, Region 6

LAST YEAR:

10-2 overall, 6-1 region. The Wildcats finished third in region play and lost to Randolph County 19-8 in the quarterfinals (third round) of the playoffs.

HOW IT WENT IN 2018:

Saks looked dominant in opening 7-0, including a 25-13 victory at eventual champion Piedmont, but a season-ending injury to starter quarterback Roilan Torres in the Piedmont game altered the course of the Wildcats' season. A 41-21 loss to Randolph County late dropped them into a three-way tie in region play, and Piedmont and Randolph County finished first and second. Who knows what could've been, had Torres been able to finish the season?

KEY RETURNEES:

QB/LB Roilan Torres, Kyle Goedde, WR/CB Leonta Jones, OL/DL Hunter McLeod, OL/DL Tre Bolton, DB/WR Zay Elston.

OUR TAKE:

While Torres returns, Saks lost running back Johnathon Cobb, the 2018 All-Calhoun County 1A-3A player of the year. Miller has said the Wildcats will go running back by "committee," which leaves the question of whether Saks will have the running back to offset Torres in the read game. Also, it's hard to replace Caleb Ogle, Marreo Thomas and Jaylen Childs up front. Then again, Miller has done nothing but win at Saks. He'll switch to calling offense this season, with long-time coordinator Michael Easley now head coach at Munford, so the Wildcats' offense will take on his personality.

WORD FROM COACH MILLER:

"We lost three really good offensive linemen last year, really good players for us. The key to our season is going to be how our younger guys step up and replace those guys. We will be very inexperienced on the O-line, and we hope we get some young guys to step up and fill those roles for us."

2019 SCHEDULE

Aug. 23, vs. Alabama Christian
 Aug. 30, vs. Cleburne County
 Sept. 6, at B.B. Comer *
 Sept. 13, vs. Wellborn *
 Sept. 20, at Pleasant Valley *
 Sept. 27, Open date
 Oct. 4, vs. Piedmont *
 Oct. 11, vs. Weaver *
 Oct. 18, at Randolph County *
 Oct. 25, at Glencoe *
 Nov. 1, Open date

* Class 3A, Region 6 game

2018 RESULTS

Aug. 24, Alabama Christian (A), W 35-22
 Aug. 31, Cleburne County (A), W 55-14
 Sept. 7, B.B. Comer (H), W 49-0
 Sept. 14, Wellborn (A), W 42-13
 Sept. 21, Pleasant Valley (H), W 41-14
 Sept. 28, Open date
 Oct. 5, Piedmont (A), W 25-13
 Oct. 12, Weaver (A), W 30-7
 Oct. 19, Randolph County (H), L 41-21
 Oct. 26, Glencoe (H), W 51-0
 Nov. 2, Open date
CLASS 3A PLAYOFFS
 Nov. 9, Colbert Heights (A), W 56-0
 Nov. 16, Fultondale (H), W 38-14
 Nov. 23, Randolph County (A), L 19-8



Roilan Torres is back at quarterback for Saks after suffering a season-ending injury midway through last season.

Bill Wilson/The Anniston Star

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Skills Evaluation (Ages U8-U14) Aug. 20, 5:30-7:00 PM

Coaches Meeting Aug. 22, 6-8 PM

Practices Start Aug. 26

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WEAVER

HEAD COACH:

Justin Taylor, 0-0, entering first season as a head coach.

CLASS, REGION:

Class 3A, Region 6

LAST YEAR:

7-4 overall, 4-3 in region play. Lost to Westminster Christian 42-27 in the first round of the playoffs.

HOW IT WENT IN 2018:

Playing in the last of Daryl Hamby's nine seasons as head coach, once again showed themselves to be the best fourth qualifier in any 3A region. The Bearcats just happen to play in the state's toughest 3A region. Their regular-season losses came against eventual state runner-up Piedmont (29-21), region runnerup and state semifinalist Randolph County (38-28) and the third team in a three-way tie atop the region, Saks, (30-7). An injury to quarterback Robert Gaines in the fourth quarter didn't help as the Bearcats lost in the first round of the playoffs.

KEY RETURNEES:

Isaiah Woods, DE; Davontae Hilliard, DB; Dalton Arnett, OL; Marcello D'Ambrosia, DB; Shemar Mays, OL.

OUR TAKE:

Weaver has an almost all-new look. Gone is the Daryl Hamby era, complete with standouts like Caleb Allison, Robert Gaines, Shemar Spinks and Jasper Dukes. New additions like quarterback Taylor Thompson, linebacker Quinton Blackberby, defensive back/wide receiver Jackson Williams and two-way lineman Brent Parks will try to come into their own this season, but 3A, Region 6 is a tough place for teams starting over. Another year as the fourth playoff qualifier would make a major accomplishment in Taylor's first year, but never count out a Cleburne County Tiger who knows all about winning.

WORD FROM COACH TAYLOR:

"The 2018 squad graduated more starters than usual at Weaver High School, so a lot of new faces will be on the field for the Bearcats this year, including me. This senior class has shown great leadership and drive and building the foundation for another great run of playoff appearances. They have all stepped up and bought into our P.R.I.D.E program off the field, too, and participate in community service activities, helping with youth camp, and several other projects. Because of the work we have done in the weight room, the field, and community this offseason, the 2019 Bearcats will give great effort in everything we do!"

2019 SCHEDULE

Aug. 23, at Cleburne County
Aug. 30, Open date
Sept. 6, at Wellborn *
Sept. 13, vs. Pleasant Valley *
Sept. 20, at Piedmont *
Sept. 27, at Cherokee County
Oct. 4, vs. Randolph County *
Oct. 11, at Saks *
Oct. 18, vs. Glencoe *
Oct. 25, vs. B.B. Comer *
Nov. 1, vs. Alabama Christian

* Class 3A, Region 6 game

2018 RESULTS

Aug. 24, Cleburne County (H), **W 49-35**
Aug. 31, Open date
Sept. 7, Wellborn (H), **W 30-29**
Sept. 14, Pleasant Valley (A), **W 40-13**
Sept. 21, Piedmont (H), **L 29-21**
Sept. 28, Cherokee County (H), **W 41-14**
Oct. 5, Randolph County (A), **L 38-28**
Oct. 12, Saks (H), **L 30-7**
Oct. 19, Glencoe (A), **W 42-13**
Oct. 26, B.B. Comer (A), **W 35-6**
Nov. 2, Alabama Christian (A), **W 37-22**
CLASS 3A PLAYOFFS
Nov. 9, Westminster Christian (A), **L 42-27**



Trent Penny/The Anniston Star

Isaiah Woods returns to Weaver to lead the Bearcats' defensive line unit.

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WELLBORN

HEAD COACH:

Jeff Smith, 62-47, entering 11th season as head coach at Wellborn, 138-102 overall in 22 seasons as a head coach.

CLASS, REGION:

Class: 3A, Region 6

LAST YEAR:

5-5 overall, 2-5 region. The Panthers finished sixth in region.

HOW IT WENT IN 2018:

Wellborn was so close to a better outcome last season. Considered one of the up-and-coming teams, lost 30-29 at Weaver and 27-26 at home, to Pleasant Valley, in games that could've sent them to the playoffs. The Pleasant Valley came down to a game-ending stop at the goal line. One of six teams in the region that finished 5-5 or better, Wellborn opened with routs of Oak Grove (55-13) and Lincoln (41-22). Lincoln made the playoffs in 4A.

KEY RETURNEES:

The Panthers return nearly all starters, led by last season's all-county selections: QB/LB Jett Smith, RB Kentrez Hunt, OL Dylan Gilbert, OL Dalton Gilbert, RB/CB Calvin Spinks, ATH Harley Kendall, DL Armonte Tyus, LB Logan Brooks, DB Christian Figueroa, CB/SB Tiquan Thomas, Keyonte Curry, Kegan Pritchett, C Kaden Goodwin.

OUR TAKE:

Wellborn has built toward this team, and the Panthers were not far from making the playoffs last year. Jett Smith enters his second full season as Wellborn's starting quarterback, and so much returns around him. There's every reason to think Wellborn could break into the top two playoff spots in a brutal 3A region this season.

WORD FROM COACH SMITH:

"These kids that we have now, I can say this, my son was a first-grader when we kind of got these kids together. They started out in midget football, and I think there's 16 of them that are still playing. That's been 10 years that we've been working with them, directly and indirectly. We're looking forward to it."

2019 SCHEDULE

Aug. 23, at Oak Grove
 Aug. 30, at Lincoln
 Sept. 6, vs. Weaver *
 Sept. 13, at Saks *
 Sept. 20, vs. Glencoe *
 Sept. 27, vs. Central-Coosa County
 Oct. 4, at B.B. Comer *
 Oct. 11, vs. Randolph County *
 Oct. 18, at Pleasant Valley *
 Oct. 25, vs. Piedmont *
 Nov. 1, Open date

* Class 3A, Region 6 game

2018 RESULTS

Aug. 24, Oak Grove (H), W 55-13
 Aug. 31, Lincoln (H), W 41-22
 Sept. 7, Weaver (A), L 30-29
 Sept. 14, Saks (H), L 42-13
 Sept. 21, Glencoe (A), W 40-0
 Sept. 28, Central-Coosa County (A), W 44-0
 Oct. 5, B.B. Comer (H), W 35-6
 Oct. 12, Randolph County (A), L 53-13
 Oct. 19, Pleasant Valley (H), L 27-26
 Oct. 26, Piedmont (A), L 54-27
 Nov. 2, Open date



Stephen Gross/The Anniston Star

Wellborn running back Calvin Spinks returns after rushing for 934 yards and 13 touchdowns last season.

PANTHERS

WHITE PLAINS

WILDCATS

HEAD COACH:

Chandler Tyree, 0-0, entering first season as head coach.

CLASS, REGION:

Class 4A, Region 6

LAST YEAR:

2-8 overall, 1-6 region. Finished seventh in region.

HOW IT WENT IN 2018:

Things looked up when White Plains opened 2-2, beating Vincent and region opponent Ashville. It was the Wildcats' best start since 2013, and the victory over Ashville marked White Plains' first region victory since 2014. Four of the Wildcats' region losses came by a touchdown or less: Cherokee County (22-13), Cleburne County (30-27), Anniston (7-0) and Oneonta (21-20). As close as White Plains came in those games, the Wildcats still managed to lose their last six to go 2-8 or worse for the fifth year in a row.

KEY RETURNEES:

QB Jaden Chatman, QB Jaden Harris, OL Will O'Steen, LB Ethan Bozarth.

OUR TAKE:

Tyree brings a shot of enthusiasm to go with a team that was a play or two away from a much better record last season. With Hokes Bluff, Jacksonville, Anniston and Oneonta looming in region play, there's a sense that White Plains, Cherokee County, Cleburne County and Ashville are the teams trying to break into the playoff picture. White Plains, Cherokee County and Cleburne County will try it with first-year coaches this season, Ashville has a second-year coach. History suggests White Plains is farthest away, but last year's close calls suggest not so far. Also, watch out for WR/S Teddy Hall, who transferred from Lincoln.

WORD FROM COACH TYREE:

"We're going to do everything we can to win football games. Understand that, first and foremost. No excuses. We're not going to make an excuse that our coach got hired almost in August. Excuses are for losers, and we're not losers."

2019 SCHEDULE

Aug. 23, vs. Vincent
 Aug. 30, vs. Ohatchee
 Sept. 6, at Hokes Bluff *
 Sept. 13, vs. Ashville *
 Sept. 20, at Cherokee County *
 Sept. 27, Open date
 Oct. 4, vs. Cleburne County *
 Oct. 11, at Anniston *
 Oct. 18, vs. Jacksonville *
 Oct. 25, at Oneonta *
 Nov. 1, vs. Ranburne

* Class 4A, Region 6 game

2018 RESULTS

Aug. 24, Vincent (A), W 49-18
 Aug. 31, Ohatchee (A), L 41-8
 Sept. 7, Hokes Bluff (H), L 34-8
 Sept. 14, Ashville (A), W 32-20
 Sept. 21, Cherokee County (H), L 22-13
 Sept. 28, Open date
 Oct. 5, Cleburne County (A), L 30-27
 Oct. 12, Anniston (H), L 7-0
 Oct. 19, Jacksonville (A), L 27-6
 Oct. 26, Oneonta (H), L 21-20
 Nov. 2, Ranburne (A), L 35-20



Trent Penny/The Anniston Star

White Plains' Jaden Harris returns after rushing for 628 yards and eight touchdowns last season.



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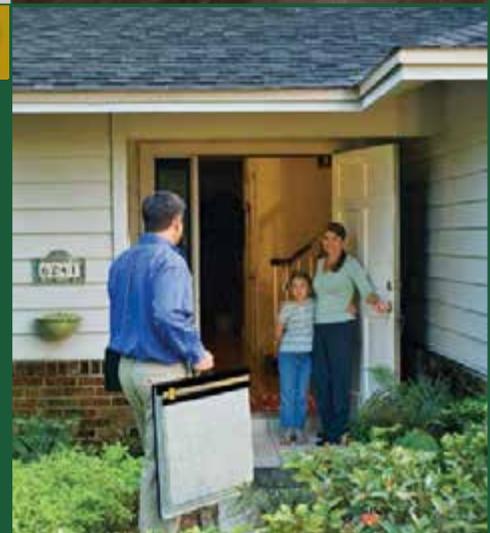
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