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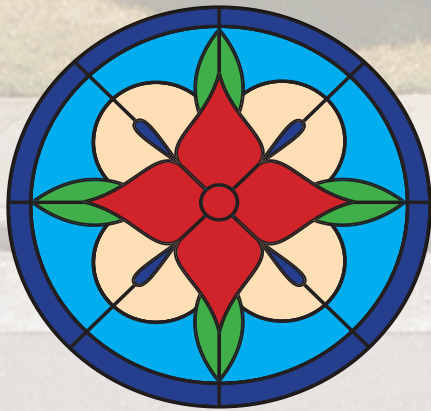
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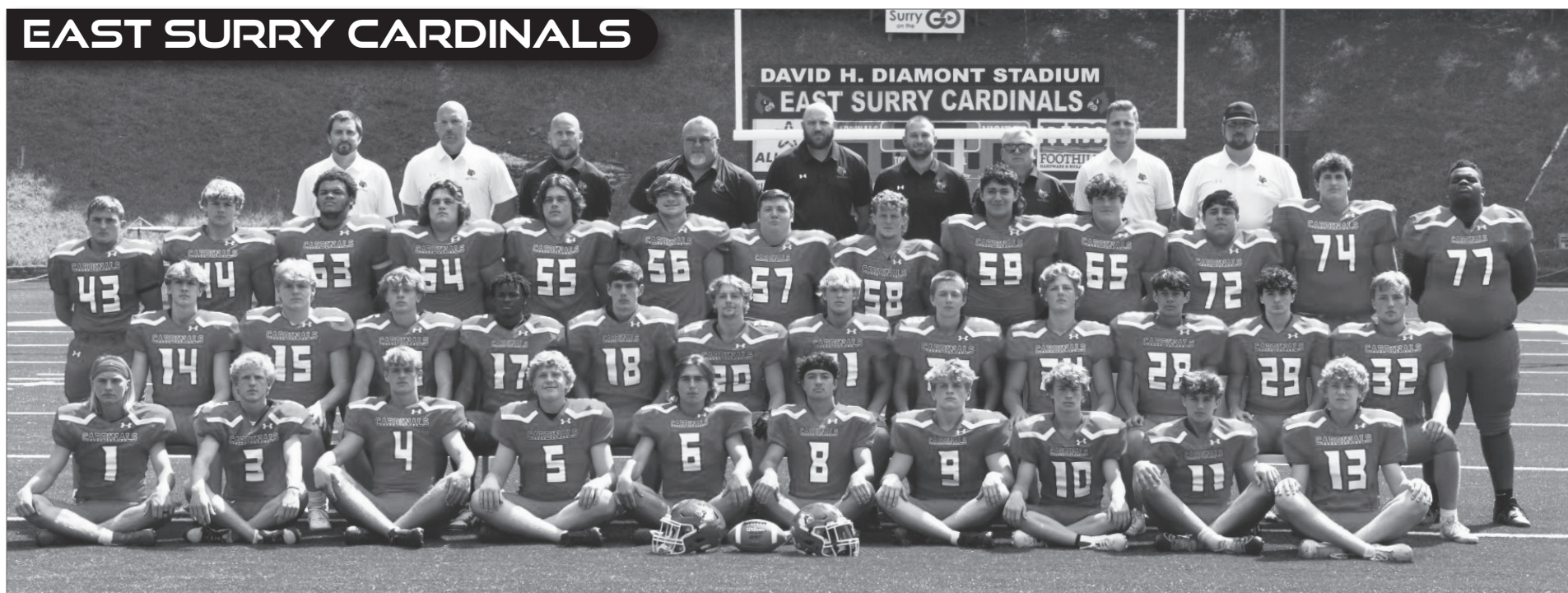


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EAST SURRY CARDINALS



CARDINALS are ready to FLY HIGH with PARDUE

By CORY SMITH
csmith@mtairnews.com

HEAD COACH

Caleb Pardue

ASSISTANT COACHES

Rusty Slate (Defensive Line, Associate Head Coach); Kolt Bullington (Linebackers, Special Teams Coordinator); Joe Denny (Defensive Backs); Andy Jessup (Inside Linebackers); JT Lichtenberger (Outside Linebackers); Logan Holder (Offensive Coordinator); Garrett Chamberlain (Running Backs, JV Head Coach); Travis Lowery (Offensive Line); Jarrod Wilhite (Wide Receivers)

LAST SEASON

8-4 overall, 5-1 conference, Foothills 2A Conference Runner-up, second round of the 2A State Playoffs, AVG points for 34.3, AVG points against 22.6, point differential +11.7

KEY LOSSES

East Surry was led by 11 seniors in 2023: Will Jones, Matthew Edwards, Jaxon Bottoms, Levi Surratt, Ethan Slater, Isaac Vaden, Christian Mikolics, Jorge Santos, Fletcher Gibson, Lane Snow and Eli Senter.

Three of the graduates – Jones, Edwards and

Gibson – earned all-conference honors on offense. Jones served as the starting QB and threw for more than 1,500 yards with 22 touchdowns. Jones was also the team's leader in carries and ran for more than 400 yards. Edwards was East's leader on the ground with nearly 800 rushing yards and 12 touchdowns. He was also the Cardinals' second-leading receiver.

Gibson earned all-conference honors on the offensive line and was the team's only returning starter from the 2022 season. Many of Gibson's fellow graduates spent the bulk of their time in the trenches.

SEASON OUTLOOK

Leading East Surry into battle in 2024 is Caleb Pardue, who is just the third man to serve as the program's head coach this millennium. The coach said everything has gone smoothly so far during his time in Pilot Mountain.

"The kids have worked hard all summer, and the numbers are good," Pardue said. "I'm really pleased with their work ethic. We're focusing on what we can control."

East Surry was a relatively young squad in 2023 after graduating 19 seniors from the previous season. Last year's defense was filled with juniors and

sophomores but is now the most experienced group on the team. All four of East Surry's all-conference defensive selections, including the Foothills 2A Conference Defensive Player of the Year, and both all-conference honorable mentions from 2023 will suit up this season. The Cardinals also returned their top-10 leaders in tackles.

Lucas Chappell and Ryan Metz will lead the charge on the defensive line. Pardue said Chappell did incredible in the offseason getting into great shape. This not only will allow Chappell to be more dominant at his position, but the coach added it opens the door for Chappell to be moved around some if needed.

Metz is expected to move around some as well. During his sophomore campaign Metz led the team with 19 tackles for a loss and was fourth in total tackles at 57. Pardue expects Metz to continue being a big part of East's defense as a physical force. Apart from Chappell and Metz, there are multiple spots on the DL still up for grabs.

"It's a good problem to have when you're having trouble narrowing down your best 11 to put on the field," Pardue said. "We've got a lot of talented, hard-working guys competing for spots, and a lot of them are hybrid athletes."

Pardue highlighted Porter Gibson, who was third



on the team last year with 65 tackles, and Troy Watson as the Cards' outside linebackers. He also mentioned Luke Bruner and Braxton Davis as guys that could make a big impact on the outside, and that it would just depend on what matchups they're presented with.

Braden Snow and Hatcher Hamm return as inside linebackers. Snow was named FH2A Defensive Player of the Year in 2023 after finishing with 108 tackles, 16 tackles for a loss, one blocked punt and one forced fumble. Hamm, a multi-year starter at the position, was another defensive player of the year candidate with 82 tackles, 11 tackles for a loss, two interceptions and two fumble recoveries – all while missing two games.

"I've been really pleased with those guys as leaders," Pardue said. "They've had a great fall camp."

East Surry lost Will Jones as one of its defensive

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6



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backs in 2023, but returned three of its top defensive players in Carter Motsinger, Stevie Keener and Noah Felts. Motsinger grabbed a team-high four interceptions last year, Keener had a team-high seven passes defended and Felts forced a team-high two fumbles.

Some spots in the defensive backfield are up for grabs, and one of those may end up being free safety. Motsinger currently holds that position but may take time off defense as he's also leading the offense at quarterback.

"He's done a really good job picking up the offense," Pardue said. "He's such a good playmaker and is so cerebral. It's something you expect from somebody who is a pitcher and a utility guy in baseball and the point guard in basketball. He understands where the ball needs to go based on what the defense is doing. We want to see him managing the game."

Motsinger primarily played defense as a sophomore this past season. He did complete his only pass attempt for an 18-yard touchdown.

On East's offensive identity this season, Pardue said the Cardinals will play a physical run game while also having the ability to spread the field in the air.

"One of the things we said during the summer was that we want to put people in a phone booth and make it a fist fight," Pardue said. "Then when they load the box, we'll take it outside and punish them that way."

East Surry's offense will have a different look in areas beyond just quarterback. The Cardinals enter this season without last year's top four rushers that combined for 2,394 of the team's 2,751 rushing yards, 25-of-31 rushing touchdowns, and all 10 of the team's individual 100-yard rushing games. Snow is the only returning player with more than 100 rushing yards and multiple touchdowns.

East has certain players in mind for different situations but will use a running back by committee at the start of the season. Watson is one person Pardue highlighted as a potential ball carrier, saying the senior has popped off a few big runs in scrimmages and was ready to go after having his junior season impacted by injuries. Felts is another player highlighted by the coach. Some other returning players that scored a rushing touchdown in 2023 were Hamm, Keener and Bruner.

Keener made his biggest impact in 2023 as a wide receiver. The junior finished with 52 receptions for 1,000 yards and 10 touchdowns.

"We're going to try to be creative in how we can get Keener the ball," Pardue said. "We hope to establish the run game so we can give him space and just let him operate."

The Cards graduated their second-leading receiver, but returned the next three – Motsinger, Snow and Noah Myers. The Cards will also look to incorporate players such as Braxton Davis and newcomer Chris George into the passing game.

Some players serving on the Cardinals' offensive line will be Trey Grubbs, Cameron Allred, Knox Galyean, Landon Galyean and Tommy Ledesma.

The Cardinals aren't ready to name a starting kicker or punter just yet.

BIG GAMES

East Surry opens the season by hosting 2023 1A West Regional Runner-up Robbinsville – a team that dominated its competition all year and was likely the second-best 1A team in the state this past season. Waiting for East in Week 2 is two-time 1A State Champion Mount Airy, which is the team that defeated Robbinsville in last year's regional final. Mount Airy has won its past 30 games since losing to East Surry in August 2022.

East Surry then goes to West Stokes to face-off

CARDINALS SCHEDULE

KICKOFF AT 7 P.M. UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED

FRIDAY, 8/23 VS. ROBBINSVILLE

FRIDAY, 8/30 @ MOUNT AIRY

FRIDAY, 9/6 @ WEST STOKES**

FRIDAY, 9/13 @ SOUTH STOKES**

FRIDAY, 9/20 OPEN

FRIDAY, 9/27 @ WEST WILKES*

FRIDAY, 10/4 @ WILKES CENTRAL*

FRIDAY, 10/11 VS. FORBUSH*

FRIDAY, 10/18 @ NORTH WILKES*

FRIDAY, 10/25 VS. SURRY CENTRAL*

FRIDAY, 11/1 VS. NORTH SURRY*

*CONFERENCE **7:30 P.M. START

with its former head coach Trent Lowman in the Battle for the County Line. The Cards will close out nonconference play against South Stokes.

Even with the team's tough nonconference slate approaching, Pardue said East Surry hasn't put much thought into their specific opponents.

"We're just focused on us," Pardue said. "We've been working on the things we know we have to do to win against anyone. We're establishing how to practice, and how to do the little things that'll separate us later on. I know Robbinsville is really

talented. Mount Airy and West Stokes are too. But, we're not consumed by them. We're competing with ourselves right now."

East Surry will make a run for the FH2A Conference Championship when the time comes after finishing runner-up in 2023. Waiting for East will be teams like 2023 FH2A Champion North Surry, county rival Surry Central and a Wilkes Central squad that gave East trouble in their most recent meeting.

CONTINUED AT TOP OF PAGE 7

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CARDINALS ROSTER

#	First	Last	Grade	Ht.	Wt.	Pos.
1	Stephen	Keener	12	6'2	180	WR, DB
3	Carter	Motsinger	11	5'10	155	QB, DB
4	Luke	Bruner	12	6'1	215	QB, LB
5	Braxton	Davis	11	6'2	215	WR, LB
6	Hatcher	Hamm	12	5'10	180	RB, LB
8	Noah	Felts	12	5'11	170	WR, DB
9	Braden	Snow	12	5'10	180	RB, LB, K
10	Aidan	Harpe	11	5'10	150	WR, DB
11	Zach	Keener	11	6'0	155	WR, DB
13	JB	Davis	10	6'1	155	QB, DB
14	Caleb	Bowman	11	6'2	190	WR, DB
15	Ryan	Metz	11	6 2	215	TE, DL
17	Chris	George	11	5'11	170	WR, DB
18	Nolyn	Myers	11	6'0	160	WR, DB
20	Jackson	Key	12	5'10	175	RB, LB
21	Troy	Watson	12	5'10	165	WR, DB

#	First	Last	Grade	Ht.	Wt.	Pos.
22	Lane	Allen	11	6'0	170	WR, DB
23	Logan	Moore	11	5 11	170	WR, DB
24	Porter	Gibson	11	5'11	195	RB, LB
28	Jacob	Phipps	11	5' 9	165	WR, DB
29	Dakota	Bunton	11	5'11	165	WR, DB
32	Jonathan	Parker	12	6'0	175	RB, LB, K
43	Payton	Senter	11	5'9	180	TE, LB
44	Josh	Key	11	5'11	200	RB, DL, P
50	Trey	Grubbs	12	6'4	260	OL, DL
53	Brett	Moser	10	6'5	270	OL, DL
54	Landon	Galyean	12	5'10	255	OL, DL
55	Knox	Galyean	10	6'2	270	OL, DL
56	Lucas	Chappell	12	6'3	215	OL, DL
57	Bryce	Lancaster	12	5'10	225	OL, DL
58	Ethan	Grimes	11	5'10	180	OL, LB
64	Andrew	Boles	10	5'8	200	OL, DL
65	Cameron	Allred	10	6'2	250	OL, DL
74	Tommy	Ledesma	12	5'11	225	OL, DL
77	Aaden	Wright	10	6'5	360	OL, DL

From UNDERDOG to TOP DAWG



By CORY SMITH
csmith@mtairynews.com

HEAD COACH
JACKSON SMITH
ASSISTANT COACHES

Danny Lyons (Assistant Head Coach, Offensive Line); Daniel Draughn (Defensive Coordinator, Strength and Conditioning Coordinator, Defensive Line); Will Hodges (Offensive Coordinator, Quarterbacks); Robby Spurlin (Running Backs); Brandon Crouse (Linebackers); Daryll Johnson (Defensive Backs); Tyler Beamer (Statistician/Historian)

LAST SEASON

7-4 overall, 6-0 conference, Foothills 2A Conference Champions, 2A State Playoffs First Round, AVG points for 36.8, AVG points against 30.2, point differential +6.6

KEY LOSSES

North Surry graduated nine seniors from its 2023 Foothills 2A Conference Championship squad: Landon Thomas, Jovani Flores, Jake Simmons, Ty Gwyn, Aiden Martin, Garrett Shore, Harley Felts, Steven Snow and Jaime Martinez. Two Greyhound grads will continue their football careers in college, with Simmons attending UNC-

Charlotte and Martin attending Ferrum College.

Simmons, a running back named FH2A Conference Offensive Player of the Year in 2023, set numerous school records while at North including career rushing yards (4,771) and career rushing touchdowns (61). Joining Simmons on last year's all-conference squad were two members of the Greyhounds' offensive line – Gwyn and Martin.

Linebackers Shore and Flores, who finished first and third in total tackles respectively, were both named to the All-Conference squad on defense. Gwyn was also a key contributor on the defensive line, while Martin was a rotational player on the DL later in the season. Thomas started for the Hounds at defensive back.

Flores managed kicking duties for the Greyhounds and earned the honor of FH2A Specialist of the Year.

SEASON OUTLOOK

The Greyhounds played the role of the underdog this past season after finishing 2-8 in 2022. The 2023 Hounds flipped the script the biggest way possible by going 7-4 and winning the Foothills 2A Conference Championship – the program's first since 2018.

Now, North Surry is looking to maintain its spot on the mountaintop.

“Our guys are learning how to compete with that ‘pressure is a privilege’ mentality,” said Jackson Smith, the 2023 FH2A Conference Coach of the Year. “Last year we were definitely the underdog but knew how good we could be. This year winning is the expectation, and we know we have a lot of people gunning for us. We have a lot of returning talent from that championship team, so it's impacted how we prepare and how we approached things in the offseason.”

The Hounds football program stayed above 60 student-athletes for the second-consecutive season, which Smith said was impressive given the relatively small freshman class. The coach was pleased with the high participation throughout the summer and said the Hound are “a lot further ahead than they were at this time last season.”

North Surry returned most of its offensive starters from last year, including five of the team's seven all-conference selections on that side of the ball.

Returning for his third year with the varsity program and second as a starter is quarterback Kam McKnight. As a junior, McKnight threw for 1,851 yards and 24 touchdowns with eight interceptions.

“Kam has matured immensely and has really embraced his role as a leader,” Smith said. “He throws the ball really well, has great timing and great decision making. You've got to give a lot of credit to coach Will Hodges for putting together an offense that fits his skill set. We're really excited with his growth and think he's primed for an even better year than last season.”

Adding to McKnight's confidence is the camaraderie he's built with the Hounds' veteran receiving corps. Fewer than five of McKnight's 111 completions last season went to graduating players.

Fisher Leftwich, Derrick Simmons and Isaac Webb return as the team's leading receivers. Leftwich led the squad with 44 catches for 658 yards and eight touchdowns, Simmons had 23 receptions for 556 yards and nine touchdowns, while Webb finished with 28 catches for 415 yards and four touchdowns. The Hounds also

NORTH SURRY GREYHOUNDS



used Owen McMillian as a deep threat.

"That's a really talented group with a lot of varsity experience," Smith said. "You could see how well they developed chemistry over the past season or two, and that only strengthened over the summer."

Smith said the plan is to leave Derrick on the outside while leaving McMillian, who makes his biggest impact on defense, as a rotational wide receiver. Webb operated primarily out of the slot in 2023, as did David Schuyler who Smith said could play a tight end/flex role this season. Schuyler, like Webb, made his biggest mark on the defensive side of the ball, but looks to get more involved in the offense this season. Leftwich was moved around based on the team's needs last season, and Smith expects that to continue in 2024. He will even serve as the backup quarterback.

"Fisher is our Swiss Army Knife; we really can't give him a label for his position," Smith said. "He's a great playmaker, but I'd say his best attribute is his willingness to play everywhere on the field from quarterback to tackle. With Jake leaving we needed someone to fill that role as a vocal leader and Fisher has stepped up to that."

Graduate Jake Simmons accounted for 1,900 yards and 26 touchdowns last season. Zamari Sweatman was second on the team with 20 carries for 188 yards and three touchdowns, though he split time between JV and varsity. McKnight, McMillian and Kyler Cain were also used in the run game.

Smith said Sweatman and Cain will operate as a one-two punch, and the team will run more by committee than the past few years.

Helping the young group of running backs will be an experienced offensive line. The Hounds returned Anthony Williams and all-conference players Eli Ramey and Braxton Montgomery. Ramey, the Hounds' center, is a four-year varsity player that Smith said, "has a chance to be one of the best offensive linemen in the area." The coach also said that Ramey, like many members of the North Surry football program, is country strong and "fully embodies Greyhound Grit."

North has the potential to start five seniors on the OL as players such as Marcus Alford and Juan Rico had great offseasons. The coach mentioned a few younger guys that could fit into the rotation, but that he hopes to rely on experience so those players can get more reps on JV before moving up.

Williams will also return on the defensive line alongside Uriah Kearse; both players earned all-conference honors their junior year.

"Ant and Uriah are two phenomenal athletes," Smith said. "Ant is 265-270 and can do a standing backflip, and Uriah is north of 300 pounds and moves really well. They developed into great pass rushers last year. We'd love to see both of them be three-down guys."

Williams led the Hounds with four sacks in 2023 and also recovered four fumbles. Kearse forced two fumbles and had five tackles for a loss.

North Surry typically runs an odd front, leaving just one additional spot on the defensive line most of the time. The Greyhounds plan to go by committee for the remaining spot, at least for the start of the season.

Returning to linebacker is Derrick Simmons, who earned all-conference honors in 2023. Derrick was second on the team in tackles with 62, had a team-high 11 tackles for a loss and grabbed one interception.

"Derrick plays the game physical," Smith said. "He finishes tackles, runs people down from the backside and is extremely athletic. He gives us a lot of flexibility."

The other outside linebacker will be

situational at the start of the season. Payten Sechrist and Jaxton Turney are two players that could fill that role.

Erik Cabrera returns as an inside linebacker. Cabrera was North's leading tackler through seven games in 2023 but suffered a season-ending injury in Week 8.

"He's a kid we're looking for to have a really big year," Smith said. "He reads things really, really well, and we're going to need him to be one of our leaders on defense. He worked a ton to come back from his injury and is even stronger now."

Cabrera will be joined by Alex Cazares on the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 9

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inside.

North returns most of its starters in the defensive backfield. McMillian was an all-conference safety in 2023 and finished the season with 46 tackles, two sacks, one forced fumble and one fumble recovery. Smith said McMillian will shift to cornerback to play alongside Leftwich.

Schuyler joined McMillian as all-conference defensive backs in 2023. As a sophomore, Schuyler grabbed a team-high three interceptions to go along with 30 tackles. Cain will slide into the second safety spot but also has the skillset to fill in at linebacker if needed.

Webb primarily handled punt returns for North this past season, while Leftwich often took the lead on kickoff returns. Schuyler also saw reps on the return team.

Cabrera will take over all kicking duties for the Greyhounds.

BIG GAMES

Few teams in North Carolina have a bigger Week 1 matchup than North Surry – the two-time defending 1A State Champion Mount Airy Bears. Mount Airy has won the past 16 meetings in its rivalry with North Surry, and the Bears are also riding the longest active win streak in the state at 30-consecutive victories.

“I have a lot of respect for Mount Airy as a program and as a coaching staff,” Smith said. “Our goal since I started here three years ago was to be one of the most talented and well-established programs in the western half of the

state, and the way to get there is to beat one of the teams that is already one of the best. We had a great offseason and I know we’re going to go out there, compete to the best of our ability and represent our community well.

“I think you’ll see two high-quality football teams, two passionate fan bases, and a lot of talented kids that have played together or against each other their entire lives. I’m very excited.”

Smith emphasized the importance of North’s nonconference schedule against Mount Airy, South Stokes, South Caldwell and West Stokes. The Hounds started 1-3 last season before winning six-straight, so this season the coaching staff is looking for the team to hit its stride a few weeks earlier.

North Surry opens the Foothills 2A Conference with Wilkes Central, Forbush and North Wilkes – all teams North Surry split meetings with each of the past two years. Wilkes Central finished third in the conference standings in 2023. Surry Central then travels to Toast for a rivalry game. In 2023, Surry Central gave North Surry its closest conference game at 35-30.

“We know we’re always in for a battle with Central because Coach (Monty) Southern always gets the best out of his kids,” Smith said.

Up next is West Wilkes, a team that Smith said, “will take a pretty big step forward this season,” as it was one of the youngest squads in the conference in 2023.

GREYHOUNDS SCHEDULE

**NONCONFERENCE GAMES BEGIN AT 7:30 P.M.,
CONFERENCE GAMES BEGIN AT 7 P.M.**

FRIDAY, 8/23 VS. MOUNT AIRY

FRIDAY, 8/30 @ SOUTH STOKES

FRIDAY, 9/6 @ SOUTH CALDWELL

FRIDAY, 9/13 VS. WEST STOKES

FRIDAY, 9/20 @ WILKES CENTRAL*

FRIDAY, 9/27 VS. FORBUSH*

FRIDAY, 10/4 @ NORTH WILKES*

FRIDAY, 10/11 VS. SURRY CENTRAL*

FRIDAY, 10/18 VS. WEST WILKES*

FRIDAY, 10/25 OPEN

FRIDAY, 11/1 AT EAST SURRY*

***CONFERENCE**

North Surry will have its Bye Week in Week 10, then will close the season at East Surry. The 2023 meeting between East and North decided the FH2A Championship game. East had won 27-consecutive conference games before falling to North 34-20 in last year’s championship game.

“East brings a lot of guys back,” Smith said. “They’ve been one of the best programs around for a while, and we know we always have to be ready for them. I’m sure that’ll be an exciting end

to the regular season, but right now we’re not focused on anything except going 1-0 on August 23.”

GREYHOUND ROSTER

#	First	Last	Pos.	Grade	Ht.	Wt.
0	Zamarri	Sweatman	RB, LB	Jr.	5’9”	175
1	Derrick	Simmons	WR, DB	Sr.	6’2”	170
2	Dayvion	Duncan	QB, DB	Sr.	5’8”	140
3	Fisher	Leftwich	WR, DB	Jr.	6’0”	175
4	Kyler	Cain	WR, DB	Jr.	5’9”	150
6	Owen	McMillian	WR, DB	Sr.	6’1”	170
7	Jasper	Wilmoth	WR, DB	So.	5’11”	165
8	David	Schuyler	WR, DB	Jr.	5’10”	180
9	Alex	Cazares	RB, LB	Sr.	5’10”	170
10	Isaac	Webb	WR, DB	Sr.	5’8”	140
11	Jaxton	Turney	TE, LB	Jr.	6’0”	195
12	Kam	McKnight	QB	Sr.	6’1”	195
13	Jace	Euart	WR, DB	So.	6’0”	170
14	Gage	Combs	TE, LB	Jr.	5’8”	180
15	Jhett	Tolbert	QB, DB	Fr.	5’9”	155
16	Najm	Hines	WR, DB	Sr.	6’1”	155
21	Payten	Sechrist	RB, LB	Sr.	5’10”	160
23	Khalil	Galloway	WR, DB	Jr.	5’9”	130
25	Matthew	Rogers	WR, DB	Jr.	5’8”	160
28	Demarcus	McClure	RB, DB	Fr.	5’10”	170
44	Erik	Cabrera	TE, LB, K	Jr.	6’0”	225
50	Markus	Alford	OL, DL	Sr.	6’3”	280
53	Ethan	Hart	OL, DL	Jr.	5’9”	185
54	Braxton	Montgomery	OL, DL	Sr.	5’10”	250
55	Parker	Dunbar	OL, DL	Jr.	6’5”	225
56	Ben	Lakey	OL, DL	Jr.	5’11”	245
57	Juan	Rico	OL, DL	Sr.	5’10”	270
59	Gariel	Chamberlain	OL, LB	Jr.	5’9”	205
64	Eli	Ramey	OL, DL	Sr.	6’2”	265
65	Dillion	Shore	OL, DL	Jr.	5’11”	270
69	Anthony	Williams	OL, DL	Sr.	6’2”	255
70	Hayden	Mosley	OL, DL	Jr.	5’11”	285
71	Austin	Ravit	OL, DL	Jr.	6’1”	340
73	Jason	Moncus	OL, DL	Sr.	5’11”	250
74	Dodger	Hodges	OL, DL	So.	6’1”	265
75	Wyatt	Hooker	OL, DL	So.	6’4”	320
79	Uriah	Kearse	OL, DL	Sr.	6’1”	325

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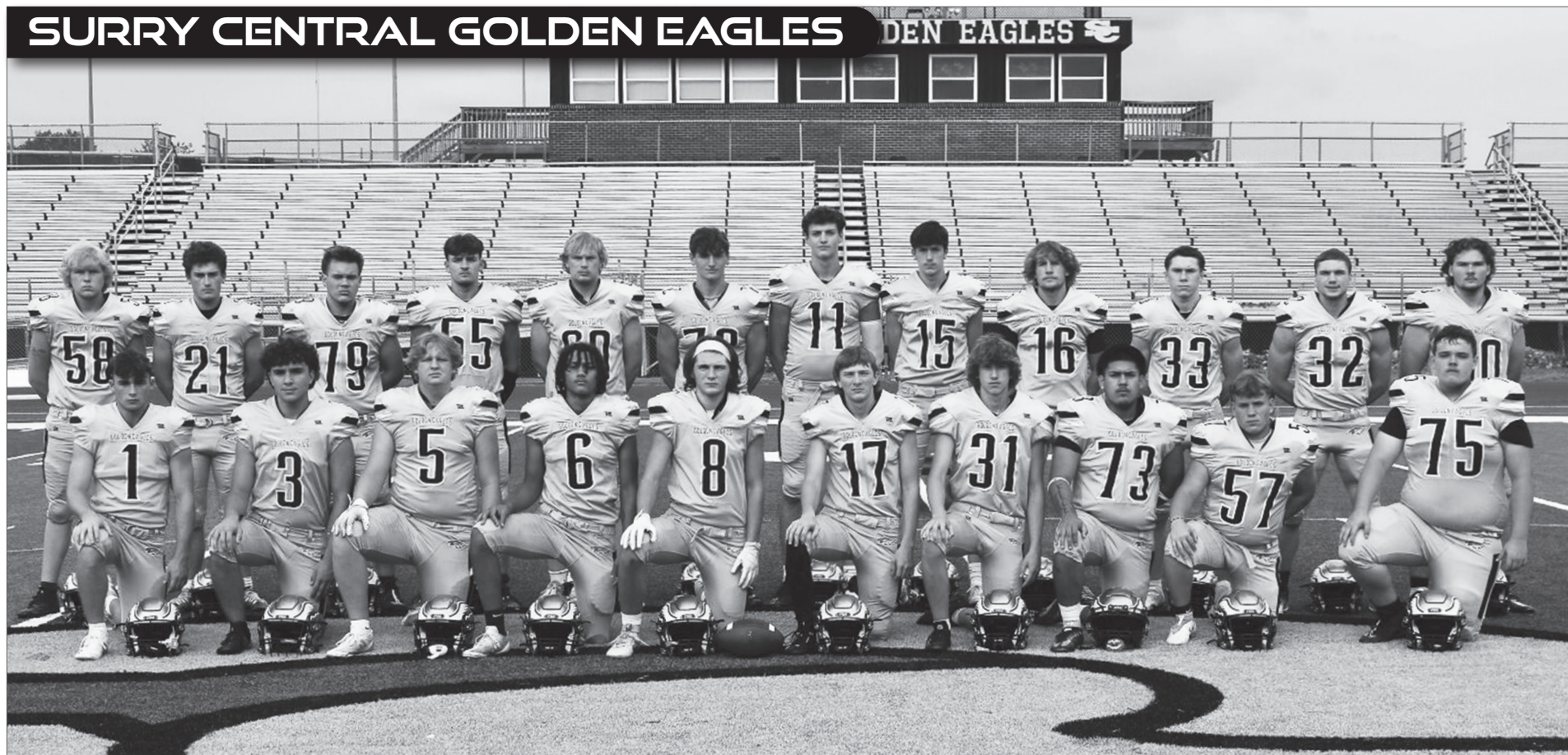
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SURRY CENTRAL GOLDEN EAGLES



A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY for the GOLDEN EAGLES

By CORY SMITH

csmith@mtairynews.com

HEAD COACH

Monty Southern

ASSISTANT COACHES

Stephen Priddy (Co-Defensive Coordinator, Defensive Line); Wes Evans (Co-Defensive Coordinator, Defensive Backs); Stephen Bruner (Inside Linebackers, Athletic Director); Sam Nussman (Outside Linebackers); Karson Crouse (Running Backs); Avery Wilmoth (Running Backs); Logan Priddy (Receivers, Defensive Backs); Mason Cox (Defensive Line, Tight Ends)

LAST SEASON

3-7 overall, 2-4 conference, fifth in Foothills 2A Conference, did not make 2A State Playoffs, AVG points for 25.1, AVG points against 34.7, point differential -9.6

KEY LOSSES

Surry Central graduated 16 seniors from its 2023 squad: Evan Wall, Kyle Inman, Rhylee Anderson, Ayden Wilmoth, Eli Scott, Landon Pack, Alex Huffman, Mason Cox, Dylan Mosley, Tyler Wilson, Landan Beverly, Colby Cruise, Maddox Martin, Reid Danley, Hunter Gilmore and Edinson Gonzalez.

Central felt the impact of graduation heavily in the trenches. Four of the 2023 team's starting offensive linemen graduated, including all-conference player Danley. The same was true on the defensive line as many players played both positions this past season. Cox was an all-conference honorable mention on the DL.

Inman, Wall and Wilmoth were three of the team's top-5 leaders in receiving yards. The trio, as well as Pack, also played in the defensive backfield, with Inman earning all-conference

honors at cornerback.

Gonzalez handled kicking duties for the Golden Eagles.

SEASON OUTLOOK

Surry Central coach Monty Southern said the Eagles had an enjoyable offseason despite having low numbers.

"We've had good practices overall and had great leadership from our seniors," Southern said. "It's been really nice being able to practice on the game field now that it's turf. We're able to get great reps and don't have to worry about a muddy practice field every time it rains."

Central's most experienced group coming into the season is its offense, particularly at quarterback and running back.

Senior Allen Huffman led Surry Central in rushing yards each of the past two seasons.



Huffman, who earned all-conference honors in 2023, finished the season with 160 carries for 1,040 yards and nine touchdowns. The workhorse

CONTINUED ON PAGE 11

accounted for 67% of Central's total rushing yards, 57% of total rushing attempts and 53% of rushing touchdowns. He also recorded the program's first 1,000-yard season since Ryan Martin in 2018.

"What makes him so good is his work ethic," Southern said. "He'll show up and lift weights by himself. He's just worked so hard since I've known him. His eighth-grade year was the COVID year that was all out of whack, and where things didn't overlap he was able to play five sports. He's very coachable and maximizes his potential for sure."

Brian Williams and Mason Jewell fill out Central's big three of returning backs. Williams rushed for 229 yards and scored four rushing touchdowns, but also caught 25 passes for 207 yards. Jewell, who will suit up as the starting quarterback for the third-consecutive season, also surpassed 200 rushing yards and scored three touchdowns.

Jewell was crucial to the Eagles mixed offense which nearly split passing and rushing down the middle. Jewell threw for 1,429 yards and 13 touchdowns in eight games played. He had four games throwing for at least 200 yards, seven games with at least 100 yards and seven games with at least one passing touchdown.

"When you look at it on paper it shows that Jewell had a great season, but when you consider he didn't even play the last two games due to injury it's pretty spectacular," Southern said. "He's a good signal caller back there, and I think he's the best in the area when he's on. He has a swagger and a mojo that guys feed off of."

Backing up Jewell is Lucas Johnson, whom Southern said would start on almost any other Surry Central team during his tenure. Johnson started the final two weeks of the season and

had 25 completions for 349 yards and three touchdowns. Southern said he has a lot of confidence knowing Johnson is ready to step in at any moment.

Jewell and Johnson nearly hit 2,000 yards passing when two of Central's top receiving threats never shared the field due to injuries. Graduate Evan Wall posted more than 260 yards across the first four games before suffering an injury. Rising senior Tripp McMillen then returned from injury for the last five games and finished with a team-high 525 yards and six touchdowns in what was just his first season of football at any level.

On McMillen, Southern said: "I've been involved with Surry Central football for a long time and we've never seen a kid like Tripp; I don't know that a ton of schools in northwest North Carolina ever have. It's rare to have a 6-foot-5 kid that is that fast, has great coordination and great hands. He's a very good leader too. He hasn't even played a full year of football and has picked up a lot that he's willing to share with younger guys."

Joining McMillen and Williams in the receiving corps is Eli Snow who, like McMillen, was primarily a basketball player. Snow is another big, athletic target at 6-foot-3. Southern also mentioned senior Jesse Jester, junior Traxon Sawyers and sophomore Wyatt Wall as players that will contribute on offense.

Central lost four of its starting offensive linemen from last season but does return center Houston Whitaker. Southern called Whitaker, who enters his third year as a starter, the leader of the offensive line and one of the overall leaders on the team.

"We're very fortunate he's the center so he can communicate both ways and help our guys

with less experience as varsity starters," Southern said. "He's done really well for us the past two years. He's not the biggest guy, but pound-for-pound he's incredibly strong and has set numerous squat records at the school."

Seniors Hagan Simpson and Henry Godinez are expected to line up with Whitaker on the OL; both started on JV as sophomores. Simpson frequently filled in on the O-line as a junior, and both he and Godinez spent a lot of time on the defensive line this past year. The other starting spots and reserve spots on the OL are still up for grabs.

Godinez and Simpson will also be featured on the defensive line. Southern said they plan to move Whitaker to the DL as well, while also adding Huffman into the mix.

"We needed to bolster that group a little bit since we didn't have many tackles for a loss and sacks last year," Southern said. "We want to disrupt some things and as a defense we have to find ways to create some negative plays. We know we're going to be a little bit undersized and there's no need to try and hide it. If we're going to be undersized let's be explosive and quick off the ball."

Returning at linebacker is Surry Central's defensive leader: senior Wyatt Wall. As a junior, Wall led the team with a monstrous 129 total tackles, 11 tackles for a loss and two forced fumbles – all of which were team highs.

"Wyatt's a tackling machine," Southern said. "We got to coach him during his eighth-grade year so we could see his potential for a long time. He's always around the ball and where he's supposed to be on both run and pass plays. He's 100% go all the time and has been really good for us the last two years. He sets the tone."

Another returning starter is sophomore

linebacker Micah Whitley. In 2023, Whitley started as an eight-quarter JV player that was quickly moved up to varsity for good. Whitley's 8.9 tackles per game were second only to Wall. Southern said he fits in well with the older group of linebackers.

Seniors Johnson and Jester will also lead the Eagles at linebacker.

Surry Central graduated all four players that recorded an interception in 2023, but Southern has confidence in his athletic defensive backfield for this season. Williams and Sam Wood will return to the position, and Southern said there are multiple players competing for the final spots.

Nothing is set in stone yet for special teams, but Jewell and McMillen are both in consideration for punting and placekicking duties.

BIG GAMES

Surry Central's performance in its four-game nonconference slate has set the tone for the team's success each of the past three seasons, particularly its week one matchups against Alleghany.

"The first year we played them in the opener was 2021," Southern said. "We played them well and it gave us a springboard to a 6-4 regular season. We made the playoffs for the first time since 2016, and it was long overdue."

"In 2022 we played them at home, led by two touchdowns in the fourth quarter and lost. It was a heartbreaker and the hardest nonconference loss I've ever had. We've been fortunate to make some crazy comebacks late, but I've never been on the other end of it."

"In 2023 we go up to Alleghany and they just

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

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flat out outplayed us. I take the credit for that loss because Alleghany was more prepared than we were. The next week we were leading East Wilkes when they hit a field goal late to send it to overtime, where we lost. We played so well so it took the wind out of our sails. It didn't help being 0-2 then having to go to Mount Airy the next week.

"We hope to start off stronger this year. Our

first game is home again and we've got a new field, so there will be a lot of people and a lot of energy."

Surry Central's schedule is favorable for fans as the team only plays two games outside of Surry County, and one is the final game of the regular season.

Central opens with a nonconference schedule of Alleghany, East Wilkes, Mount Airy and Elkin.

The Eagles hope to get some revenge after starting 0-3 last season, then will look to top Elkin for the fourth-consecutive year.

"Those are four really talented 1A teams that will help prepare us for our league," Southern said.

The Golden Eagles played back-to-back-to-back one-possession games to begin conference play last year. Surry Central defeated North

Wilkes after a loss the year before, then dropped a 6-point game to West Wilkes and a 5-point game to North Surry. Surry Central was the only Foothills 2A Conference team that didn't lose to North Surry by at least two touchdowns.

Surry Central then hosts Forbush, a team it has traded victories with in their past four meetings, before finishing the season on the road at East Surry and Wilkes Central.

GOLDEN EAGLE ROSTER

#	First	Last	Pos.	Grade	Ht.	Wt.
1	Brian	Williams	AB/DB	12	5'8	160
3	Micah	Whitley	AB/LB	10	5'9	175
4	Hayden	Wood	AB/LB	10	6'1	180
5	Lucas	Johnson	TE/QB/LB	12	5'11	220
6	Travon	Sawyers	AB/LB	11	5'10	155
8	Jesse	Jester	SE/LB	12	5'11	160
11	Tripp	McMillen	SE/DB	12	6'5	210
15	Eli	Snow	SE/DB	12	6'3	150
16	Mason	Jewell	QB/DB	12	5'11	150
17	Landon	Easter	SE/DB	12	5'9	145
19	Dru	Gaddy	SE/DB	10	6'2	165
22	Destin	McMillian	SE/DB	11	5'8	140
32	Allen	Huffman	BB/DL	12	5'9	180
33	Sam	Wood	AB/DB	12	5'10	160
50	Preston	Hall	OL/DL	11	5'10	205
55	Wyatt	Wall	OL/LB	12	6'0	180
57	JJ	Longworth	OL/DL	11	5'4	170
58	Jeremiah	Harris	OL/DL	12	6'0	180
60	Paydon	Snow	OL/DL	12	6'2	200
62	Robert	Staler	OL/DL	11	5'9	160
68	Karson	Flippen	OL/DL	12	6'3	290
72	Houston	Whitaker	OL/DL	12	6'2	200
73	Henry	Godinez	OL/DL	12	5'8	200
75	Daniel	Shumate	OL/DL	11	5'11	250
79	Hagan	Simpson	OL/DL	12	5'9	195

GOLDEN EAGLES SCHEDULE

KICKOFF AT 7:00 UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED

FRIDAY, 8/23 VS. ALLEGHANY

FRIDAY, 8/30 @ EAST WILKES

FRIDAY, 9/6 @ MOUNT AIRY

FRIDAY, 9/13 VS. ELKIN

FRIDAY, 9/20 VS. NORTH WILKES*

FRIDAY, 9/27 OPEN

FRIDAY, 10/4 VS. WEST WILKES*

FRIDAY, 10/11 @ NORTH SURRY*

FRIDAY, 10/18 VS. FORBUSH*

FRIDAY, 10/25 @ EAST SURRY*

FRIDAY, 11/1 @ WILKES CENTRAL*

*CONFERENCE

BEARS look to stay on the MOUNTAINTOP



By CORY SMITH

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HEAD COACH

Austin Taylor

ASSISTANT COACHES

Darron Taylor (Defensive Coordinator)

David "Murdock" Meredith (Defensive Line)

Jordon Tucker (Defensive Line)

Richard Grissom Jr. (Defensive Backs)

Nic Isom (Safeties)

Reece Deaton (Linebackers)

Wes Bowman (Defensive Assistant)

Kelly Holder (Offensive Coordinator)

Justin Combs (Offensive Line)

Weston Miller (Offensive Line, Tight Ends)

Justin Moore (Running Backs)

Dennis Moore (Running Backs)

Ashton Simmons (Wide Receivers)

Tanner Hiatt (Quarterbacks)

Caleb Thomas (Offensive Assistant)

Gerald Travis (Gameday Coordinator)

Sam Chamberlain (Gameday Coordinator)

LAST SEASON

16-0 overall, 6-0 conference, Northwest 1A Conference Champions, 1A West Regional Champions, 1A State Champions

KEY LOSSES

Mount Airy graduated 13 seniors from its 2023 State Championship squad: Mario Revels, Tyler Mason, William Pilson, Blake Hawks, Ian Gallimore, Walker Stroup, Caleb Reid, Deric

CONTINUED ON PAGE 13

Dandy, Nassir Lemon, Spencer Baldwin, Hayden Bender, Landon Cox and Anderson DeVore.

Five Bears elected to continue their football careers in college: Revels, Mason, Dandy, Lemon and Ian Gallimore. Mason and Dandy represented the Granite Bears in the 2023 Shrine Bowl of the Carolinas, while Stroup and Baldwin competed in the N.C. East-West All-Star Game. Mason (offense), Stroup (special teams) and Ian Gallimore (defense)

all earned player of the year honors for the Northwest 1A Conference this past season.

Mason led the nation with 13 yards per carry in 2023 (minimum 170 carries). He also set career school records for rushing yards (6,022), rushing touchdowns (11), total touchdowns (120) and points scored (724). Stroup led the state in both PATs (87) and kickoffs (114), while also setting a school

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14

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MOUNT AIRY GRANITE BEARS



record for PATs in a single game (11). Dandy set the Mount Airy school record for career sacks in the MaxPreps era (31.5).

SEASON OUTLOOK

In addition to losing 13 seniors, Mount Airy also enters the 2024 season without its coach of the past six years: JK Adkins. Taking over for Adkins is Austin Taylor – a Mount Airy graduate that has also coached in the program for a decade; he most recently served as a co-defensive coordinator.

Graduating so many multi-year starters means the Bears will look different in many position groups, but Coach Taylor said the returning players benefited greatly from playing alongside such a talented class. The Bears coaching staff hasn't just

been looking to find players to fill the holes on the depth chart though.

"We lost so many leaders that took care of so many things for us the past few years," Coach Taylor said. "Trying to take that step has been our thing this summer. It doesn't have to just be one person, and it won't be. There are a lot of guys that are excited to finally get their time to shine."

The Granite Bears' general on offense for the past three seasons had the last name Gallimore, and the same will be true for 2024 as senior Landon Gallimore takes over the role previously held by his brother Ian. Landon, a senior, has served as the team's backup QB the past few years and even started three games in 2023 – including a pair of playoff victories.

"Some people don't want the responsibilities that come with those leadership roles, but Landon has really taken to that," Coach Taylor said. "Landon last year would've been playing QB for a lot of people. He's more of a pure passer than his

brother and can provide us with some different looks on offense."

Coach Taylor said the Bears will keep a similar

CONTINUED AT TOP OF PAGE 15

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game plan on offense running a triple option out of the shotgun but will look to expand their versatility in the passing game. Returning players only accounted for seven receptions last season, but the receiving numbers were relatively low across the board for a simple reason: Mount Airy didn't need to pass. The Bears finished the year with 949 passing yards and 5,873 rushing yards.

Coach Taylor said Zach Goins is primed for a huge year. He will be one of the leaders in the receiving corps alongside Fletcher Gallimore and newcomers Bryson Taylor and Saul Oakley. Taylor was an all-conference player for Forbush in 2023 that put up more than 1,000 total yards in just nine games.

"Those are guys that can do a lot outside and will give us versatility," Coach Taylor said. "We have great running backs of course, but being more balanced is really going to help us compete the way we want to compete."

Only one of Mount Airy's top five rushers from last season returns, but he's no ordinary running back. Taeshon Martin was second on the team with 1,436 yards and 17 touchdowns in 2023. As a sophomore Martin had seven games rushing for at least 100 yards and led the state in yards per carry with 14.2 (min. 100 carries). Martin has already surpassed 2,000 career rushing yards entering his junior season.

DJ Joyce was the Bears' sixth-leading rusher with 336 yards, but still averaged 11.2 yards per carry. Goins and Kylan Mason will also be key parts of the ground game.

Mount Airy's offensive line took a hit by losing multi-year starters Baldwin, Cox and Bender, as well as Dandy at tight end.

Coach Taylor pointed to returning starters Jourdain Hill and JD Harper, who both earned all-conference honors in 2023, as leaders on the line. Filling out the starting lineup will be sophomore McKennon Hiatt at center, junior Jackson Byerly at right guard and senior Dee Dawkins at right tackle. The coach added that players such as Ethan Clabo and Bryson Caudle will look to fill in Dandy's spot at tight end.

"When you lose a group that good it's a big jump to fill that hole, but we've got a lot of guys we feel confident with in the rotation," Coach Taylor said.

Despite the loss of Dandy and other studs on the defensive line, Coach Taylor said the DL is probably the defense's biggest strength at the moment.

Joyce had 95 tackles, 37 tackles for a loss, 12.5 sacks, and four forced fumbles during his

sophomore season. Dawkins added 82 tackles with 19 TFL in 2023, and junior Third Floyd – who enters his third season as a varsity starter – had 58 tackles with five TFLs. Harper stepped up on the line last season, particularly during the playoffs.

"I don't see how you can get much better than that group right there, and we have guys in the rotation we're also really excited about," Coach Taylor said.

Tyson Youmans had a breakout year as a sophomore in 2023 with 84 tackles, which is the second-most of any returning player. He will help lead the linebackers alongside Caudle, who finished just behind Youmans and Dawkins with 69 tackles despite missing one game, and John Martin who returns after missing most of last season with an injury.

"That's another group of guys that stepped up big when we needed them to," Coach Taylor said. "It's kind of a recurring theme where you had talented guys last year, guys that would start at a lot of schools, that played behind seniors on a once-in-a-generation team. They really took advantage of their opportunities."

Goins returns as a defensive back that tied for a team-high three interceptions to go along with 11 passes defended. Martin also returns at DB with two interceptions, six passes defended and a pick-6. Other players competing for reps at linebacker and defensive back are Oakley, Fletcher Gallimore, Kylan Mason, Karson Strickland and Bryson Taylor.

Martin was Mount Airy's leading returner last season with 324 return yards and two punts returned for a touchdown. Goins also returned a punt for a touchdown. Kylan Mason will join the pair on the return team.

Clabo will handle placekicking duties for Mount Airy, and Fletcher Gallimore will take over as punter.

BIG GAMES

Mount Airy enters the 2024 season with the longest active winning streak in the state, but Coach Taylor said that win streak hasn't even come up in the Bears' locker room. As far as Taylor is concerned the Bears' schedule only has one game right now and that's at North Surry on Aug. 23.

"Not many people get that rivalry game the first week so it's good that we can put a lot of focus just on that," Coach Taylor said. "But that also means you have to be ready to go Week One when you play a team like that; you can't go in unprepared. Jackson (Smith) has done a great job and has them rolling over there. It's very important for us to start the season off right."

GRANITE BEARS

SCHEDULE

KICKOFF AT 7 P.M. UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED

FRIDAY, 8/23 @ NORTH SURRY**

FRIDAY, 8/30 VS. EAST SURRY

FRIDAY, 9/6 VS. SURRY CENTRAL

FRIDAY, 9/13 @ ASHE COUNTY**

FRIDAY, 9/20 VS. NORTH STOKES*

FRIDAY, 9/27 @ STARMOUNT*

FRIDAY, 10/4 VS. EAST WILKES*

FRIDAY, 10/11 @ SOUTH STOKES*

FRIDAY, 10/18 OPEN

FRIDAY, 10/25 @ ELKIN*

FRIDAY, 11/1 VS. ALLEGHANY*

*CONFERENCE **7:30 P.M. START

Coach Taylor stressed the importance of the Bears' nonconference games by comparing this year's squad to the 2022 team. Both teams entered the season looking to find their footing after graduating an all-time great class the year before. The 2022 Bears played a tight opening game at North Surry before scoring 23 points in the fourth quarter, lost a nail-biter to East Surry in Week Two, found their footing against Surry Central in Week Three, then relied on another fourth-quarter explosion to beat Ashe County.

"It's the same thing. We keep telling the guys we don't have time to get there gradually – we have to be ready to go Week One," Coach Taylor said. "After North, East and Central are always tough and are going to play hard. I know Caleb (Pardue) is doing some similar stuff that we are and will definitely have East ready to go. All four of the head coaches we're going to face in nonconference are great."

Coach Taylor said the Northwest 1A Conference is a bit of an unknown this season due to so many coaching changes. He did mention Elkin as a team with a lot of quality players returning, then said East Wilkes – one of the only NW1A schools with the same coach as last season – will be tough because "they're going to run the football and get after you."

Starmount, which finished runner-up in the conference behind Mount Airy each of the past three years, is projected to be a contender once again. The Rams return most of their core from a 10-2 team a year ago.

"Starmount is big up front and their quarterback is great; he's one of my favorite players we competed against last year," Coach Taylor said. "They're a hungry team. It's a game our boys are really looking forward to because the environment is always great."

CONTINUED AT TOP OF PAGE 16

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GRANITE BEARS ROSTER

#	First	Last	Pos .	Grade	Ht.	Wt.
1	Zach	Goins	Jr.	WR, DB	6'0"	154
2	Landon	Gallimore	Sr.	QB, DB	6'2"	205
3	Fletcher	Gallimore	Sr.	WR, DB	5'9"	164
4	Taeshon	Martin	Jr.	RB, DB	5'10"	173
5	Kylan	Mason	So.	RB, DB	5'11"	154
6	Scott	Moore	Jr.	RB, DB	6'1"	164
7	Cash	Hemric	Sr.	WR, DB	5'8"	136
8	Yanniel	Arce	Sr.	WR, DB	5'9"	142
10	John	Martin	Sr.	RB, LB	6'1"	174
12	Tyson	Youmans	Jr.	TE, LB	6'0"	246
14	Aidan	Polmeroy	Jr.	QB, DB	6'3"	173
15	Bryson	Taylor	Sr.	WR, DB	6'1"	169
19	Saul	Oakley	Jr.	WR, LB	6'2"	164
20	Jayle	Bryant	Sr.	HB, LB	6'0"	202
21	Ethan	Clabo	Jr.	HB, DL	6'5"	208
22	DJ	Joyce	Jr.	RB, DL	6'3"	230
25	Karson	Strickland	Jr.	WR, DB	6'2"	176
27	Cashtyn	Revels	Jr.	WR, DB	5'9"	157

#	First	Last	Pos .	Grade	Ht.	Wt.
42	Spencer	Ferris	Jr.	HB, LB	6'0"	173
44	Bryson	Caudle	Sr.	HB, LB	5'11"	202
50	Dee	Dawkins	Sr.	OL, DL	6'2"	232
51	McKennon	Hiatt	So.	OL, DL	6'3"	235
54	Bryson	Grey	Jr.	OL, DL	6'0"	206
59	Keegan	Simpson	Sr.	OL, DL	6'0"	183
60	Wyatt	Creed	Jr.	OL, DL	5'7"	225
64	Britton	Ward	Jr.	OL, DL	6'3"	225
65	Cyle	Johnson	Jr.	OL, DL	6'0"	200
66	JD	Harper	Sr.	OL, DL	6'0"	222
67	Haden	Goins	Jr.	OL, DL	6'2"	216
68	Jayden	Sechrist	Sr.	OL, DL	5'9"	240
70	Jourdain	Hill	Sr.	OL, DL	6'2"	217
71	Third	Floyd	Jr.	OL, DL	6'1"	356
73	Colin	Hiatt	Sr.	OL, DL	6'2"	205
74	Jackson	Byerly	Jr.	OL, DL	6'5"	235
77	Carter	Moncus	Jr.	OL, DL	6'0"	300
80	Dyson	Long	Sr.	WR, DB	5'11"	154
82	Saadiq	Pilson	Sr.	WR, DB	5'5"	148
88	Will	Shelton	Sr.	WR, DB	6'1"	153
99	Janet	Ramirez	Jr.	WR, DB, K	5'1"	149

ELKIN leaning on EXPERIENCED SQUAD in 2024

By ROBERT MONEY
rmoney@thestokesnews.com

HEAD COACH

Brad Baker

ASSISTANT COACHES

Matthew Altemueller, Kerry Norman, Tyler Robbins, Cory Rycroft, Damon Smith

LAST SEASON

3-8 overall, 2-4, conference, tied for fifth in Northwest 1A Conference, First Round

State 1A Playoffs, points for: 19.3, points against: 29.2

KEY LOSSES

Aaron Caudle, Jericho Edwards (not playing), Jude Pardue (OL), James Steele,

Luke McComb

SEASON OUTLOOK

New coach Brad Baker will take over a

CONTINUED ON PAGE 17



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ELKIN BUCKIN' ELKS



CONTINUED ON PAGE 18

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squad that finished 3-8 last season and tied for fifth in the Northwest 1A Conference.

Baker will look to an experienced roster with 17 starters returning for the up-and-coming season.

Three-year starting quarterback Rhet Pardue, top running back Drew Kupner, wider receiver Djimon Brown, and three returning offensive linemen Benjamin Spencer, William Santos, and Braulio Mata-Reyes will lead an experienced offensive unit that average almost three touchdowns per game last season.

The front seven return on the defensive side for the Elks. Hill Canter, Holt Canter, Demetrius Wheeler, Julian Figueroa, Peyton

Luffman, Zachary Stewart, and Kupne along with Pardue and Brown in the secondary should spark well for Elkin.

Ty Bumgarner, Kameron Hall, Carter Oaks, and Solomon Speer will be big contributors as well for the Elks, according to Baker.

"We have a big picture in mind, but we will focus on going 1-0 each and every day," said Baker. "We return 17 starters who have a lot



of experience, but we don't have many numbers, we lack depth, and learning a new offense will be a weakness for us early."

BIG GAMES

The biggest contest on Elkin's schedule each year is the "Battle of the Bridge" game against Starmount High School. The last time Elkin had possession of the trophy is when the Elks won 29-6 in Feb. of 2021. Starmount has a three-

game winning streak over Elkin.

Elkin opens at North Wilkes and then host West Wilkes in the first two weeks of the season. The Elks won 28-8 last year against the Vikings but lost 28-21 to the Blackhawks. A fast start over the first two opponents could propel the team to a fast start before entering Northwest 1A Conference play.

Other big games include neighboring schools Forbush and East Wilkes. The Falcons and Elks are deadlocked at 7-7 overall in the past 14 meetings and celebrated a 13-0 win over the Cardinals last year while holding a 16-5 record since 2004.

BUCKIN' ELKS ROSTER

#	First	Last	Grade	Ht.	Wt.	Pos.
1	Rhet	Pardue	Senior	6'0	165	QB/DB
3	Carter	Oakes	Senior	5'11	155	WR/DB
4	Julian	Figueroa	Senior	6'0	170	RB/LB
5	Peyton	Luffman	Senior	5'10	195	RB/LB
7	Soloman	Speer	Sophomore	6'0	170	WR/DB
8	Lucas	Keller	Senior	5'10	165	K
9	Djimon	Brown	Senior	6'3	195	WR/DB
10	Ty	Bumgarner	Junior	6'1	165	WR/DB
21	Zachary	Stuart	Senior	5'11	200	WR/LB
24	Greg	Ramsuer	Senior	5'10	210	RB/DL
32	Holt	Canter	Senior	6'3	180	WR/DL
42	Demetrius	Wheeler	Junior	6'4	250	WR/DL
45	Drew	Kupner	Senior	6'1	220	RB/LB
52	Gavin	Ward	Senior	6'1	220	OL/DL
54	Elias	Amaya	Junior	5'11	265	OL/DL
55	Kameron	Hall	Sophomore	5'11	225	OL/DL
56	Hill	Canter	Senior	6'0	195	OL/DL
58	David	Anderson	Senior	6'2	190	OL/DL
65	Angel	Ledesma	Junior	6'2	295	OL/DL
68	Braulio	Mata-Reyes	Junior	6'2	255	OL/DL

BUCKIN' ELKS SCHEDULE

KICKOFF AT 7:30 UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED
FRIDAY, 8/23 @ NORTH WILKES
FRIDAY, 8/30 VS. WEST WILKES
FRIDAY, 9/6 OPEN
FRIDAY, 9/13 @ SURRY CENTRAL
FRIDAY, 9/20 VS. SOUTH STOKES*
FRIDAY, 9/27 @ NORTH STOKES*
FRIDAY, 10/4 @ FORBUSH
FRIDAY, 10/11 @ EAST WILKES*
FRIDAY, 10/18 @ ALLEGHANY*
FRIDAY, 10/25 VS. MOUNT AIRY*
FRIDAY, 11/1 VS. STARMOUNT*
*CONFERENCE

#	First	Last	Grade	Ht.	Wt.	Pos.
73	Benjamin	Spencer	Senior	6'3	250	OL/DL
74	William	Santos	Senior	6'0	220	OL/DL

EXPERIENCE is key to EAST WILKES' SEASON

By ROBERT MONEY
rmoney@thestokesnews.com

HEAD COACH

Travis Walker

ASSISTANT COACHES

Jeff Mickel (Offensive Line), Brannon Church (Offensive Line), John Vestal (Running Backs), Trey Dezern (Wide Receiver), Tyler Conlon (Defensive Line), Ben Moody (Defensive Line),

Eddie Guessford (Safeties), Preston Perry (Defensive Backs), Andrew Elmore (Inside Linebackers), Robert Johnson (Outside Linebackers)

LAST SEASON

6-5 overall, 3-3, conference, tied for third in Northwest 1A Conference, First Round State 1A Playoffs, points for: 23.7, points against: 17.5

KEY LOSSES

Tristan Alkire and Owen Combs were big contributors to last year's team. Alkire led the team with 522 rushing yards and five touchdowns, while Combs played in ten games with 54 receiving yards and was 14-of-17 in extra point attempts and two field goals with his longest being 39 yards.

SEASON OUTLOOK

East Wilkes was 6-5 overall and was third in the Northwest 1A Conference

in head coach Travis Walker's first season at the helm. According to the 2023 Maxpreps roster, the Cardinals only lost five seniors from last year's team.

The team's strength on offense will be running the ball with two returning starters at the A back positions in Austin Nash and Reece Dobbins and

CONTINUED ON PAGE 19

EAST WILKES CARDINALS



two great options at the quarterback position in Phoenix Blackburn and Seth Lambert. Blackburn started last season and with a year under his belt of running the triple option, but Walker feels comfortable with either running the offense.

Payton Luffman, Colt Stowe, and Ayden Guessford are battling it out for the B back position and trying to replace leading rusher Tristian Alkire from last season.

The offensive line will be anchored by returning starters Sam Nelson and Levi Sadler.

Walker feels better about his defense as they will be able to play fast with

experienced players coming back. The Cardinals return eight starters with Nelson, Luffman returning on the defensive line, Levi Sadler and Ayden Guessford at inside and outside linebacker spots along with the entire secondary will return.

"Our expectation is to play every single down with the most effort that we possibly can," said Walker. "Our numbers are down this year, but I feel that as long as we stay healthy that we will be all right and be able to compete in each game. We need to take one game at a time and not overlook anyone."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 20

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BIG GAMES

Big games for East Wilkes include county games against West Wilkes, North Wilkes, Wilkes Central, and nearby Elkin. With wins over the county schools the Cardinals have the potential to start the season at 3-1 or 4-0 before starting conference play against South Stokes.

The Cardinals open against West Wilkes in which East won 28-21 last season and are now riding a three game winning streak against the Blackhawks. The team will host North Wilkes in week three and beat their rivals 48-2 last season winning three consecutive games and eight out of the last 10 matchups.

Two other important games include Wilkes Central and Elkin. East Wilkes lost to the Eagles 21-7 and to the Elks 13-0 last year. The Cardinals look to bounce back against both teams this season behind their experienced team.



CARDINALS

SCHEDULE

KICKOFF AT 7:30 UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED

FRIDAY, 8/23 @ WEST WILKES

FRIDAY, 8/30 VS. SURRY CENTRAL

FRIDAY, 9/6 VS. NORTH WILKES

FRIDAY, 9/13 @ WILKES CENTRAL

FRIDAY, 9/20 OPEN

FRIDAY, 9/27 @ SOUTH STOKES*

FRIDAY, 10/4 @ MOUNT AIRY*

FRIDAY, 10/11 VS. ELKIN*

FRIDAY, 10/18 @ STARMOUNT*

FRIDAY, 10/25 VS. ALLEGHANY*

FRIDAY, 11/1 VS. NORTH STOKES*

***CONFERENCE**

CARDINALS ROSTER

First	Last	Grade
Phoenix	Blackburn	Senior
Issac	Brown	
Isaac	Collins	
Tanner	Cooke	
Reece	Dobbins	Junior
Ryan	Ford	
Gradyn	Graham	Senior
Ayden	Guessford	Junior
Rhett	Hudson	Junior
Seth	Lambert	Senior
Ky	Logan	Junior
Payton	Luffman	Senior
Brody	Mathis	Senior
Peyton	Mahan	Junior
Austin	Nash	Junior
Sam	Nelson	Junior
Dylan	Ramage	Senior
Andrew	Russell	Senior
Levi	Sadler	Senior
Colt	Stowe	
Braylen	Walker	Junior
Braylon	Walker	Junior
Dalton	Wood	Junior
Jordan	Dobson	
Brady	Shore	Junior



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FALCONS

aim to ascend in 2024



By CORY SMITH

csmith@mtairynews.com

HEAD COACH

Jeremy Funderburk

ASSISTANT COACHES

Jake Hoots (Running Backs); Joe Sikes (Linebackers); Shane Compton (Quarterbacks/Wide Receivers); Jeremy Helton (Offensive Line); Loudon Hundley (Defensive Backs)

LAST SEASON

2-8, 1-5 conference, sixth in the Foothills 2A Conference, did not make 2A State Playoffs, AVG points for 23.1, AVG points against 37.3, point differential -14.2

KEY LOSSES

Forbush graduated 12 seniors from its

2023 team: Mckinley Reavis, Logan Boles, Austin Choplin, Bryan Avila, Cristofur Martinez, Holden Moxley, Nick Myers, Wade Gough, Seth Shore, Logan Shore, Jason Beck and Phillip Jenkins.

Moxley was the Falcons' all-conference quarterback that threw for more than 1,300 yards. Reavis, who is continuing his football career at Guilford College, was Forbush's leading receiver and punted. Moxley handled PATs in 2023.

Martinez was one of the team's leading rushers while also earning all-conference honors at defensive back. Choplin and Myers were leaders on defense as well.

SEASON OUTLOOK

The Forbush Falcons set high goals for 2024 and are ready to take flight this football season.

"The offseason has been exciting," said Forbush coach Jeremy Funderburk. "The new turf field in our stadium has been amazing. We've had a great turnout and hard work during our summer program. We have good numbers on both varsity and JV."

The Falcons graduated 12 seniors from last year's squad but have a class of 15 seniors this year that are ready to leave their mark on the program. Funderburk said the seniors are defining the team's roles and are leading by example.

The 2024 Falcons have mixed levels of varsity experience. Helping set the example for the less-experienced groups is the offensive line. Senior Juan Hernandez was an all-conference honorable mention at the position in 2023. Fellow senior Ian Brewer and junior Jake Pettit were also starters on

last season's offensive line.

Kaleb Bales and Shawn Semones both saw time on the OL as freshmen and are expected to be large contributors this season. The pair will help to fill the spot of Wyatt Hauser, a 2023 all-conference selection who will miss the season due to injury.

"That's a huge loss for us," Funderburk said. "Wyatt's a great young man and a hard worker."

The Falcons also return all-conference honorable mention tight end Hayden Bales, a senior.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22



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FORBUSH FALCONS



KIM HARRISON PHOTOGRAPHY

Forbush will lean on the OL as they transition to a new-look offense. The team enters this season without last year's quarterback, the top three rushers and three of the top four receivers.

The Falcons graduated all-conference quarterback Holden Moxley who threw for 1,303 yards and 10 touchdowns. Moxley also ran for 150 yards and two touchdowns. Fellow Class of 2023 member Mckinley Reavis was Moxley's top receiver. Reavis accounted for 45 of Forbush's 89 total receptions for 825 of the team's 1,361 receiving yards. He also caught seven of the team's 11 receiving touchdowns.

Forbush's second-leading receiver, Bryson Taylor, is no longer with the program. Taylor was Forbush's leading rusher with more than 800 yards and 11 touchdowns; he averaged 113 total yards per game. Graduate Cristofur Martinez was the team's second-leading rusher with nearly 400 yards and five touchdowns, and Moxley was third with 160 and four touchdowns.

Forbush finished the 2023 season with 1,532 rushing yards and 1,356 passing

yards.

"We will lean into the run game this year," Funderburk said. "Holden Moxley and McKinley Reavis gave us lots of opportunities to throw the ball more than usual last year."

Junior Tyler Winters will take over as quarterback for the Falcons. Senior Joseph Barnes will serve as backup quarterback as well as one of Winters' top receivers. Barnes grabbed 11 catches for 124 yards and a touchdown this past season. Tight end Hayden Bales also returns as a pass catcher after averaging close to 20 yards per reception as a junior. Funderburk has a few other receivers included in the rotations such as Alan Benitez.

Brady Trivette and Brady Collins, both seniors, are the returning players that had the most rushing yards in 2023 with 84 and 49 respectively; Collins also had two rushing touchdowns. Junior Keanu Escalante will take on a featured role as a running back, as will Skylar Kimber.

Kimber made his mark on last year's

team as a defensive wall. Kimber recorded 110 total tackles during his all-conference sophomore season, which nearly doubled the next-highest player at 63. He also had 11 tackles for a loss, one forced fumble and one pass defended. The linebacker will be a leader on Forbush's defense, which Funderburk said had much more experience than its offense.

Up front for the Falcons' defense, which recorded three of its top five leaders in tackles, is a stout defensive line with a similar level of experience to its OL. Hernandez, Hayden Bales and Tucker Durham return as starters, while Semones and Kaleb Bales will take on larger roles.

Trivette was a defensive end last season that can play both DE and outside linebacker. He had the third-most tackles of any returning player at 54. Nate Ayers, who had 57 tackles last season, will also start at linebacker, and will be joined by players such as Collins and Escalante.

Forbush graduated two impactful defensive backs in Martinez and Austin Choplin. Funderburk said the Falcons will

FALCONS ROSTER

#	First	Last	Pos.	Grade
1	Joseph	Barnes	WR/QB/DB	12
2	Alan	Benitez	WR/DB	11
3	Wyatt	Chappell	WR/DB	12
4	Tristin	Baum	WR/DB	11
5	Keanu	Escalante	RB/LB	11
7	Giovanni	Valerio-Real	WR/DB	11
9	Alex	Clevenger	WR/DB	12
10	Tyler	Winters	QB/DB	11
12	Nate	Ayers	WR/LB	12
15	Hayden	Bales	TE/DL	12
16	Jovanny	Zarate	RB/LB	12
19	Chase	Lane	WR/DB	12
21	Brady	Collins	RB/LB	12
22	Brady	Trivette	RB/LB	12
23	Skylar	Kimber	RB/LB	11
50	Levi	Reece	OL/DL	12
53	Lucas	Pettit	OL/DL	12
54	Albert	Brayfield	OL/DL	11
55	Jake	Pettit	OL/DL	12
59	Shawn	Semones	OL/DL	10
65	Ian	Brewer	OL/DL	11
66	Jaxon	Freeman	OL/DL	11
71	Juan	Hernandez	OL/DL	12
72	Troy	Wood	OL/DL	11
75	Colt	Melton	OL/DL	11
77	Riley	Jester	OL/DL	12
78	Landon	Marler	OL/DL	12
79	Kaleb	Bales	OL/DL	10
88	Tucker	Durham	TE/DL	11

CONTINUED AT TOP OF PAGE 23

rely on guys such as Giovanni Valerio-Real and Alex Clevenger to serve as impact players in the defensive backfield.

Forbush isn't ready to name starters on special teams just yet.

BIG GAMES

Funderburk and the Falcons don't want to wait until September or October to hit their stride. Forbush went 0-4 during nonconference last year.

Week 1 will see Forbush travel to North Forsyth, who has won the past two meetings against Forbush after the Falcons won the previous three. Forbush will also look for revenge in Week 2 by hosting McMichael.

The annual Unifi Bowl against Starmount will take place in Boonville on Sept. 6. Starmount won the rivalry game's last two installations,

but before that neither team won consecutive games in the series since 2014-15.

The Falcons jump straight into Foothills 2A Conference Competition after its bye week. Forbush will first host West Wilkes. The past two games between Forbush and West were decided by one possession; Forbush won 21-20 in 2022, then West won 20-14 in overtime in 2023.

Up next is a battle with defending FH2A Champion North Surry before going back to nonconference to host Elkin. The Falcons have won their past four meetings against the Buckin' Elks.

Forbush goes to Surry County for its next two games against East Surry and Surry Central, then closes the season with back-to-back home games against Wilkes Central and North Wilkes.

FALCONS SCHEDULE

KICKOFF AT 7 P.M. UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED

8/23 @ NORTH FORSYTH**

8/30 VS. MCMICHAEL**

9/6 @ STARMOUNT

9/13 OPEN

9/20 VS. WEST WILKES*

9/27 @ NORTH SURRY*

10/4 VS. ELKIN

10/11 @ EAST SURRY*

10/18 @ SURRY CENTRAL*

10/25 VS. WILKES CENTRAL*

11/1 VS. NORTH WILKES*

*CONFERENCE **7:30 P.M. START

STARMOUNT RAMS



STARMOUNT ready to RAM the COMPETITION

By CORY SMITH

csmith@mtairynews.com

HEAD COACH

Josh Pardue

ASSISTANT COACHES

Dillon Reeves (Defensive Backs); Kris Allen (Defensive Line); Ian Patterson (Offensive Line); Blake Chipman (Running Backs); Peyton Mullins (Inside Linebackers); Noah Tomlin (Outside Linebackers); Chris Brown (Offensive Line); Austin Laws (Defensive Line); J Max Swaim (Wide Receivers); Josh Resignalo (Offensive Coordinator)

LAST SEASON

10-2 overall, 5-1 conference, Northwest 1A Conference Runner-up, 1A State Playoffs second round, AVG points for 41, AVG points against 17.8, point differential +23.2

KEY LOSSES

Starmount graduated nine seniors from its 2023 squad: Ja'Don Hurt-Bailey, AJ Pardue, Preston Williams, Jovany Maya, Mason Anthony, Dawson Hayes, Houston Stokes, Trace Johnson and Jonathan Argueta.

Hurt-Bailey, Pardue and Anthony all earned all-conference honors and were impact players on both sides of the ball. Anthony helped lead the offensive line for a unit that put up more than 4,600 yards of total offense – including 3,121 rushing yards – in 12 games. He was also part of a physical defensive line and was joined by fellow grads Hayes, Stokes, Johnson and Argueta on the lines.

Hurt-Bailey led Starmount in both receptions and receiving yards, while Pardue finished third in both categories. Pardue was also the Rams' third-leading rusher. Pardue and Hurt-Bailey both played in the defensive backfield, with Pardue earning all-conference honors at that position as well.

Maya handled most of the kicking duties.

SEASON OUTLOOK

Starmount enters the season with a new head coach, but he's no stranger to the program. Josh Pardue won a state title with Starmount as a

student in 1998 and later served as an assistant coach with the team, including the 2014 team that finished state runner-up.

Pardue takes over a team that went 10-2 last season, which was the program's first 10-win season since the state runner-up team nine years earlier. The Rams look to build on that success in 2024.

"Guys have done a great job this offseason getting used to new expectations and working hard to install some new concepts for offense and defense," Pardue said. "Our seniors have modeled how we would like for the rest of the team to respond to adversity. We not only focused on getting physically stronger, but mentally stronger as well."

Starmount is led by a large senior class that contains many returning starters. The Rams' most experienced group is its offense which averaged 41 points per game a year ago.

Starmount accumulated 66% of its 5,314 total yards on the ground. As a junior, Kinston Crater was the team's workhorse with 168 carries for 1,125 yards and 18 touchdowns. Crater had six games of at least 100 rushing yards, including a career-high 175 yards in a playoff game against Cherokee.

Crater was far from a one-man show at running back. Jymir Billups ran for 622 yards and eight touchdowns by averaging 8.5 yards per carry his sophomore season. Dual threat quarterback Luke Collins averaged 9.6 yards per carry on his 519 rushing yards; he was the third-leading rusher on the team despite missing three games due to injury. Two more returning Rams – Colton Allen and Cody Hernandez – also surpassed 1,000 yards on the ground.

Leading the way for the offense will be an experienced offensive line that contains returning all-conference players such as Jacob Mabry and Sam Shore. The Rams have numerous qualified players competing for spots in the OL rotation and haven't set a starting lineup in stone.

Even though most of Starmount's offense last season came from rushing, the team still passed for 1,587 yards.

"Our offensive production should be more balanced, and our focus is to just take what the defense is gonna give us," Pardue said.

Collins returns as the Rams' dynamic quarterback with unfinished business. The QB passed for 1,027 yards with 14 touchdowns and just three interceptions. Collins was 8-1 as a starter before his season ended prematurely due to injury. Colton Allen stepped in throughout the season as the backup QB and had 535 passing yards and seven touchdowns. This included a 229-yard game against North Stokes and a 115-yard, two touchdown performance in a playoff victory over Cherokee.

Colton Allen was also a member of the receiving corps. He was fourth on the team in receiving yards with 189 but averaged 17.2 yards per reception and grabbed a team-high seven touchdowns. KJ Allen had the most receiving



yards of any returning player with 434 and four touchdowns while averaging 31 yards per reception. Crater also surpassed 100 yards receiving.

Pardue said Starmount's defense is the group that has dealt with the most change after losing most of its all-conference selections from 2023.

Sam Shore and Jacob Mabry are some of the returning players from last year's defensive line. Similar to the O-line, the Rams have seven or eight guys competing for reps on the D-line as

CONTINUED ON PAGE 25

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they aim to fill the hole left by players such as all-conference selection Mason Anthony.

Statistics for forced fumbles, total tackles, tackles for a loss, sacks, QB hurries and passes defended were not available at the time of publication.

Another key loss on defense was linebacker AJ Pardue, a multi-year starter who earned all-conference honors a year ago. Evan Shore returns as a linebacker after finishing with three fumble recoveries and one interception last season. Crater had one interception in 2023, and Corey Armstrong added two fumble recoveries. Starmount recovered 17 fumbles and forced 9 interceptions as a team.

Collins was an all-conference defensive back, and Billips was an all-conference honorable mention.

KJ Allen led Starmount with 349 return yards last season and had a kickoff returned for a touchdown. Billips was second on the team with 151 return yards, and both Timothy Boles and Cody Hernandez were also part of the return unit.

BIG GAMES

Starmount opens the season with two tough away games at Trinity and North Iredell.

In 2023, Starmount fended off a late comeback attempt to defeat Trinity 43-30 in Week 1. The Rams put up 508 yards of total offense in the victory. The following week Starmount outlasted 3A North Iredell 32-29.

The annual Unifi Bowl against Forbush will serve as Starmount's home opener on Sept. 6. Starmount has won its past two meetings against Forbush, but before that neither team won consecutive games in the rivalry since 2014-15. The Rams will close nonconference competition against North Wilkes.

The Rams look to get over the hump in the Northwest 1A

RAMS SCHEDULE

KICKOFF AT 7 P.M. UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED

8/23 @ TRINITY**

8/30 @ NORTH IREDELL

9/6 VS. FORBUSH

9/13 VS. NORTH WILKES

9/20 @ ALLEGHANY*

9/27 VS. MOUNT AIRY*

10/4 VS. NORTH STOKES*

10/11 OPEN

10/18 VS. EAST WILKES*

10/25 @ SOUTH STOKES*

11/1 @ ELKIN*

***CONFERENCE **7:30 P.M. START**

Conference this season. Starmount is 15-3 in the conference with three runner-up finishes across the past three seasons. Starmount finished behind Mount Airy each of those years, then Mount Airy went on to win the 1A State Championship in two of those seasons.

Apart from Mount Airy, Starmount

decimated NW1A Competition in 2023. East Wilkes played the Rams the closest at 35-6, and every other NW1A victory was decided by at least 40 points.

Starmount will compete for another trophy against a local rival by taking on Elkin for the Battle of the Bridge trophy on Nov. 1.

RAMS ROSTER

#	First	Last	Grade	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.
0	Kevon	Propst	So.	RB, LB	5'11"	190
1	Luke	Collins	Sr.	QB, DB, P	5'11"	170
3	Cole	Freed	Jr.	WR, LB	5'10"	160
4	Colton	Allen	Sr.	QB, WR, DB	6'4"	200
5	Kinston	Crater	Sr.	RB, LB	5'11"	205
6	LT	Adams	Sr.	WR, DB	5'9"	160
7	Aamir	Adams	Jr.	WR, DB	6'0"	155
8	Timothy	Boles	Jr.	WR, DB	5'11"	165
11	KJ	Allen	Sr.	WR, DB	5'11"	165
12	Luke	Burchette	Jr.	QB, LB	6'0"	180
13	Adam	Deyab	So.	RB, DL	5'11"	175
14	Brayden	Snow	Sr.	TE, LB	5'11"	185
15	Cody	Hernandez	So.	RB, LB	5'11"	200
16	Jymir	Billips	Jr.	RB, DB	5'10"	145
17	Savian	Billips	Jr.	RB, LB	5'10"	150
20	Axl	Gonzalez	Jr.	WR, DB	5'10"	150
21	Evan	Shore	Sr.	TE, LB	6'3"	210
22	August	Townsend	Sr.	WR, LB	5'8"	140
23	Corey	Armstrong	Jr.	TE, DL	6'3"	220
24	Domnic	Adams	Jr.	WR, DB	5'9"	140
50	Ethan	York	Sr.	OL, DL	5'10"	290
51	Hunter	Johnson	Sr.	OL, DL	5'11"	210
54	Silas	Brown	So.	OL, DL	6'2"	260
55	Brayden	Cass	Sr.	OL, DL	6'1"	260
66	Sam	Shore	Jr.	OL, DL	6'3"	250
70	Jacob	Groce	Sr.	OL, DL, P	6'2"	230
71	Jacob	Mabry	Sr.	OL, DL	6'3"	270
78	Mario	Harlee	Sr.	OL, DL	6'5"	290
97	Landon	Roberts	Sr.	OL, DL	6'0"	320

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NORTH STOKES VIKINGS



FORTNER optimistic about VIKINGS' SEASON

By **ROBERT MONEY**
rmoney@thestokesnews.com

HEAD COACH

Jamie Fortner

ASSISTANT COACHES

David Anderson (Defensive Coordinator/RB/LB); David Diamont (QB/WR); Ted Cook (DB/Special Teams); Elijah Cone (QB/P/DB); Brayden Ring (WR); Jeff Whitaker (Snappers/Practice Coordinator)

LAST SEASON

1-9 overall, 0-6, conference, seventh in Northwest 1A Conference, No Playoffs, points for: 7.3, points against: 42.0

KEY LOSSES

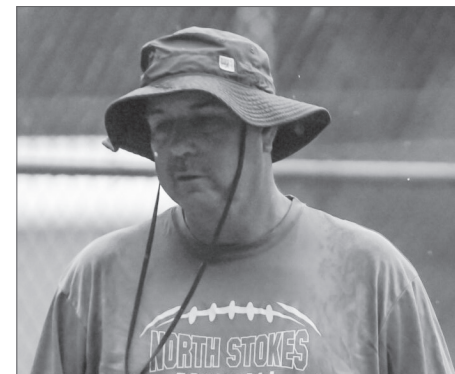
The Vikings lose All-Conference quarterback and defensive star Amos Stanbery, Honorable Mention players Ethen Garcia and Cameron Bullins, and All-County performers

Kevin Farmer and offensive lineman Evan Tucker.

Amos accounted for nearly 500 yards of offense and scored half of the Vikings' season touchdowns while recording 61 tackles and two interceptions on the defensive side of the ball. Garcia led the team in rushing yards with 625 yards, had five catches for 33 yards, and recorded 31 tackles, had one interception, and a fumble recovery on defense. Bullins registered 61 tackles from the linebacker position, but also started on the offensive line. Farmer led the Vikings in tackles with 77, and Tucker started on both the offensive and defensive line.

SEASON OUTLOOK

Despite numbers being low again and likely not having a JV team, Coach Jamie Fortner is encouraged after spring and summer workouts.



North Stokes Coach Jamie Fortner

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CONTINUED ON PAGE 27

"This years team has been the best spring and summer workout team I have had since coming to North Stokes," said Fortner. "We have had an average of 21 players come to workouts this off season. I am very optimistic about this season, if we stay healthy and continue to work hard, I believe it will be a good year at North Stokes."

The Vikings return seven defensive starters and six on offense and have more skilled players on this year's roster but lack depth on the offensive line. Players Gavin Hernandez, Justin Rakes, Noah Fulp, Levi Smith, John Pratt, Wyatt Collins, Lane Stephens, and Carter Joyce will be looked upon to lead and produce in order for North Stokes to be successful.

Hernandez has good vision and is a hard runner and produced 315 rushing yards last season before being injured in game four against Patrick County.

Newcomer and basketball player Justin Rakes will take over the quarterback reigns. According to Fortner he has good speed, is very coachable, and sees the field well considering his lack of experience.

Fulp is small but was impactful for the Vikings last season in kick returns and at corner. He had 687 return yards on kickoffs and averaged 18.1 yards per return. Fulp recorded 51 tackles and had one interception on the season.

Pratt has nursed injuries over the past couple of seasons but is expected to have a breakout year according to Fortner. He will play wide receiver, outside linebacker, some safety, and will be the back up quarterback behind Rakes.

Smith, a coaches dream to coach, Collins, led the offensive line in pancakes last season, Stephens, who has tremendous heart and goes hard on every play, and newcomer Carter Joyce, who has good speed with great hands, will all be expected to perform in order for the Vikings to succeed.

"I was excited and very pleased after our scrimmages at West Stokes on Thursday," added Fortner. "We were able to move the ball and gained confidence in the way we played. The kids remained excited after the scrimmage, and we are looking forward to a good year. I believe we will surprise

some people this season."

Fortner also add that he was excited about his staff this year.

"Coach (David) Anderson has a great defensive mind, and we are like brothers. We have gotten to where we can finish each other's thoughts. Ted Cook will help in the secondary and special teams, Jeffery Whitaker to help with practice organization, former players Elijah Cone and Brayden Ring, and the biggest addition is Coach David Diamont. He has one of the greatest football minds around and we are excited and happy he is a Viking."

BIG GAMES

The Vikings will once again open against Chatham Central; the team's only win last season. North Stokes is

6-0 all-time including last year's 22-20 four-overtime victory.

Another early key game for North Stokes is against South Davidson. The Wildcats have beaten the Vikings the past two season and hold an overall 6-5 record against North.

Rival games Patrick County and South Stokes are always big games for North Stokes. The Vikings have dropped their last two games against the Cougars and the last three against the Sauras.

With the expectations of this year's team, the Vikings could realistically start the season at 3-1 or even 4-0 before opening Northwest 1A Conference play against reigning state champion Mount Airy.

VIKINGS ROSTER

#	First	Last	Grade .	Pos.
1	John	Pratt	Senior	WR/DB
2	Aiden	Bennett	Junior	WR/DB
3	Carter	Joyce	Senior	WR/DB
7	Micah	Roberson	Junior	RB/DB
10	Justin	Rakes	Senior	QB/DB
11	Lane	Stephens	Junior	WR/DL
12	Gannon	Dunn	Junior	WR/DB
16	Josh	Moser	Junior	WR/DB
19	Gavin	Hernandez	Junior	RB/LB
20	Hunter	Overby	Sophomore	RB/DB
23	Austin	Durham	Senior	TE/LB
25	Zach	Taitt	Freshman	RB/DB
29	Noah	Fulp	Senior	RB/WR/DB
30	Michael	Anderson	Freshman	WR/DB
33	Lucus	Lankford	Junior	WR/DB
38	Tommy	Barley	Freshman	WR/DB
41	Dalton	Whitener	Freshman	RB/LB
44	Isaiah	Torres	Freshman	RB/LB
50	Gavin	Umberger	Freshman	OL/DL
52	Landon	Winfrey	Senior	OL/DL
65	Levi	Smith	Senior	OL/DL
72	Alex	Brown	Sophomore	OL/DL
73	Dakota	Shores	Senior	OL/DL
77	Wyatt	Collins	Sophomore	OL/DL
78	Darrell	Priddy	Junior	OL/DL
88	Jonathan	Bryant	Senior	WR/DB

VIKINGS

SCHEDULE

KICKOFF AT 7:30 UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED
FRIDAY, 8/23 VS. CHATHAM CENTRAL
FRIDAY, 8/30 VS. BISHOP MCGUINNESS
FRIDAY, 9/6 @ SOUTH DAVIDSON
FRIDAY, 9/13 @ PATRICK COUNTY
FRIDAY, 9/20 @ MOUNT AIRY*
FRIDAY, 9/27 VS. ELKIN*
FRIDAY, 10/4 @ STARMOUNT*
FRIDAY, 10/11 VS. ALLEGHANY*
FRIDAY, 10/18 VS. SOUTH STOKES*
FRIDAY, 10/25 OPEN
FRIDAY, 11/1 @ EAST WILKES*

*CONFERENCE

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SOUTH STOKES SAURAS



MICKEY set to lead a YOUNG SAURA PROGRAM

By **ROBERT MONEY**
rmoney@thestokesnews.com

HEAD COACH

Josh Mickey

ASSISTANT COACHES

Charles Brewer (Running Backs/
Quarterbacks/Assistant Head Coach); Luke
Mickey (Defensive Coordinator); Mickey Tuttle
(Offensive Line); Chad Amos (Defensive Line);
Devin Blevins (WR/DB)

LAST SEASON

2-9 overall, 2-4 conference, tied for fifth in
Northwest 1A Conference, first round of 1A
State Playoffs, points for: 14.8, points against:
45.7

KEY LOSSES

South Stokes lost several key members from
last year's team including Barry Hairston Jr.,
Deuce Chalmers, Michael Wertz, Dez Galloway,
and Jordan Fulp.

Losing these players accounted for 81
percent of their offense and 80 percent of their
defensive tackles.

Hairston threw for 578 yards and four
touchdowns, rushed for another 227 yards
with three more touchdowns, and recorded
32 tackles and one interception on defense.
Chalmers, a Guilford College signee, rushed

for 978 yards with 11 touchdowns and had 28
tackles on defense.

Wertz (49 tackles), Fulp (76 tackles), and
All-Conference performer and another Guilford
College signee Dez Galloway (92 tackles) will
be huge gaps to fill on the defensive end for
South Stokes.

SEASON OUTLOOK

New head coach Josh Mickey will open
the Sauras season against rival West Stokes
on Aug. 23. Mickey is a 2018 West Stokes
graduate and a former member of the Wildcats'
coaching staff from 2020 to 2022.

Mickey will look to players Elijah Tyler,
Kymoni Brown, Elijah Tilley, Dalton Hutchings,
and Parker Barron for leadership and
experience for this year's team success.

"We want to build a great foundation for
our program going forward and consistently
improving," said Mickey. "I expect us to be
competitive, probably more so than people
think that we will. We want to play one play at
a time."

Tyler will be behind center this fall after
projected starting quarterback Tucker Monday
received a season-ending injury in the team's
scrimmage game against West Wilkes on
Aug. 15. Tyler saw limited playing time on varsity
last year for the Sauras, but big things are

expected from the junior this year. Tyler looked
smooth and comfortable in scrimmage play
after Monday was injured.

Brown and Barron are the most experienced
offensive producers returning other than Tilley
and Hutchings who anchored the offensive
line. Brown rushed for 292 yards with four
touchdowns and had six catches for 33 yards.
Barron led the team in receptions with 21
catches for 242 yards and a touchdown.

Barron is the only two-way starter returning
for the Sauras and he recorded 52 tackles on
the season. Also returning defensive players
Justin Joyce (87 tackles) and Bryce Epperson
(25 tackles) will be looked upon for the team's
success.

"I thought our effort and communication
was good," added Mickey after his scrimmages
against West Wilkes. "I thought Parker Barron
and Kymoni Brown looked really good on
offense. Elijah Tyler looked comfortable
despite not having a lot of practice time at
quarterback."

BIG GAMES

Always a big game for South Stokes is their
annual game against rival West Stokes. The
teams open up against each other on Aug. 23,
where Mickey will begin his coaching career
against his former team. West Stokes holds a



Sauras' Head Coach Josh Mickey

19-5 overall record against the Sauras. Adding
to the rival is students from South Stokes were
split in 1999-00 to help create West Stokes
High School.

Other big games for the Sauras are North
Surry, McMichael, East Surry, and county-rival
North Stokes.

South Stokes will play three 2A non-
conference games against the Greyhounds,
Cardinals, and Phoenix in weeks two through
four. Success in the first four weeks of the
season will carry over into the Sauras first
Northwest 1A Conference game against Elkin.

The Sauras and Vikings is the biggest game
on both team's schedule. The atmosphere
and excitement is thick and both sides of the
stadium will be filled with fans from all over
the county including school administration.
South Stokes has a three-game winning streak
against North Stokes including last year's 28-21
victory.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 29

SAURAS SCHEDULE

KICKOFF AT 7:30 UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED

FRIDAY, 8/23 @ WEST STOKES

FRIDAY, 8/30 VS. NORTH SURRY

FRIDAY, 9/6 VS. MCMICHAEL

FRIDAY, 9/13 VS. EAST SURRY

FRIDAY, 9/20 @ ELKIN*

FRIDAY, 9/27 VS. EAST WILKES*

FRIDAY, 10/4 @ ALLEGHANY*

FRIDAY, 10/11 VS. MOUNT AIRY*

FRIDAY, 10/18 @ NORTH STOKES*

FRIDAY, 10/25 VS. STARMOUNT*

FRIDAY, 11/1 OPEN

*CONFERENCE

SAURAS ROSTER

#	First	Last	Grade .	Pos.
1	Desian	Leeper	Senior	WR/DB
2	Dylan	Allen	Sophomore	WR/DB
3	Keymani	Brown	Sophomore	RB/DB
4	Elijah	Tyler	Junior	QB/WR/DB
5	Jamison	Canty	Junior	RB/DB
6	John	Czerkiewicz	Freshman	WR/DB
7	Tamar	Gray	Junior	WR/DB
8	Amari	Conrad	Senior	RB/LB
9	Tucker	Monday	Senior	QB/WR/DB
10	Nick	Turner	Junior	WR/DB
11	Elijah	Wright	Junior	WR/DB
13	Sawyer	Scott	Sophomore	WR/DB
14	Aiden	Clark	Sophomore	WR/DB
15	Michael	Brown	Sophomore	WR/DB
16	Blaine	Ellis	Sophomore	WR/DB
17	Isaiah	Galloway	Freshman	WR/DB
18	Tre	Watkins	Senior	WR/DB
20	Isaac	Mitchell	Freshman	WR/DB
21	Gage	Miller	Freshman	WR/DB
22	Parker	Barron	Senior	TE/LB
24	Jonathon	Bullins	Freshman	RB/DB
33	Justin	Joyce	Senior	RB/LB
50	Bryce	Epperson	Senior	OL/DL
51	Carter	Duncan	Sophomore	OL/DL
52	Patrick	Chaney	Senior	OL/DL
55	BJ	Grey	Junior	OL/DL
56	Bryson	Mabe	Senior	OL/DL
59	Jaylin	Craig	Junior	OL/DL
61	Caden	Hart	Junior	OL/DL
62	Jackson	Hittle	Freshman	OL/DL
64	Conner	Chaney	Sophomore	OL/DL
65	Colten	Wilmoth	Freshman	OL/DL
68	Elijah	Tilley	Senior	OL/DL
70	Dalton	Hutchens	Senior	OL/DL
73	Davarius	Stanley	Freshman	OL/DL
78	Colton	Pruitt	Senior	OL/DL
87	Avery	Mendenhall	Senior	OL/DL



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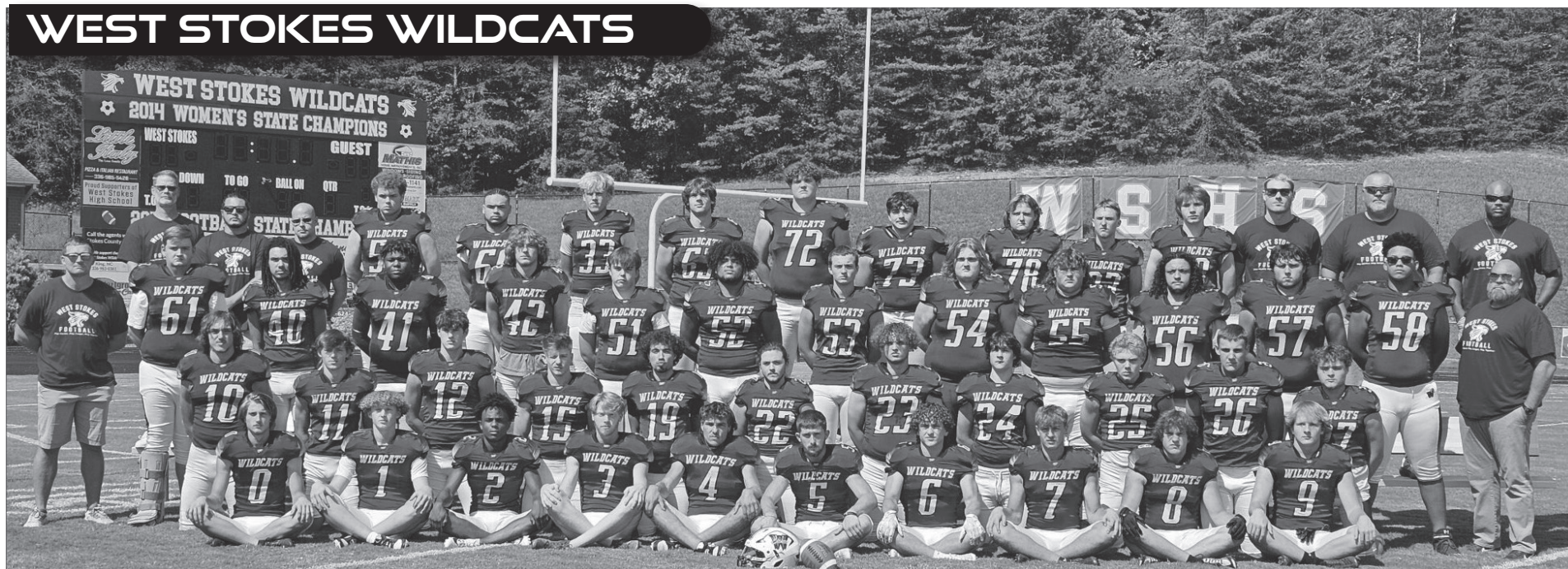
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WEST STOKES WILDCATS



LOWMAN brings a Whole New EXCITEMENT to WEST STOKES

By **ROBERT MONEY**
rmoney@thestokesnews.com

HEAD COACH

Trent Lowman

ASSISTANT COACHES

Chris Nelson (Defensive Coordinator/ Linebackers); Steven Whitt (Offensive Lineman); Luke Bowen (OLB/SS); Brandon Dawson (Running Backs); Eric Belton (Offensive Line); Greg King (WR); Mike Grayson (JV Head Coach/TE); Parker Pratt (DL); Justin Rogers (DB/Special Teams Coordinator)

LAST SEASON

7-5 overall, 4-2 conference, tied for second in Mid-State 2A Conference, second round of 2A State Playoffs, points for: 24.1, points against: 19.7, differential: +4.4, Preseason 2A Ranking: No. 24

KEY LOSSES

The Wildcats lost some impactful players from last year's roster including Keyon Rawley, Jarious Campbell, Caleb Wood, Alec Wood, Ben Rothrock, and Kory Wilkins.

Rawley, a Mars Hill signee, had 680 rushing yards, 13 of the Wildcats 26 touchdowns, recorded

438 receiving yards, four touchdowns, 48 tackles, and led the team with six interceptions. He was All-County, Mid-State 2A All-Conference, and a two-way HighSchoolOT Honorable Mention All-State.

Campbell had nearly 400 yards of offense with six touchdowns and registered 38 tackles and three interceptions on the defensive end. He was All-County and All-Conference.

Brothers Alec and Caleb Wood was big for West Stokes' defense. Caleb, a Guilford College commitment, recorded 65 tackles, and Alec had 55. Both were All-County and Mid-State All-Conference.

Rothrock and Wilkins played in the trenches for the Wildcats. Rothrock on the defensive end gathering 57 tackles with 31 solo. Wilkins helped anchor the offensive line earning All-County and All-Conference. West Stokes' offense recorded nearly 2,200 yards scoring a team total of 36 touchdowns.

SEASON OUTLOOK

Former East Surry coach Trent Lowman was hired in the spring to replace Jimmy Upchurch who's one-year return propelled the Wildcats

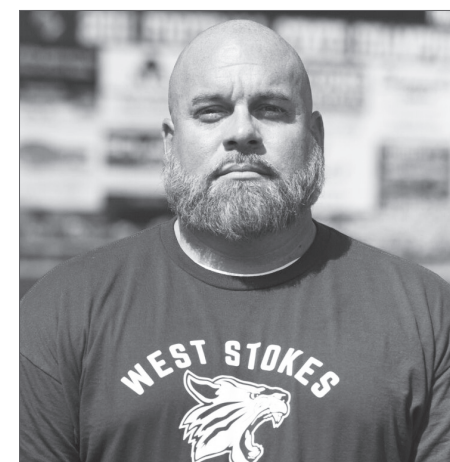


to a second place finish in the Mid-State 2A Conference and a second round playoff appearance. Upchurch retired after the 2019 season and then the program went through three consecutive years of losing seasons.

Lowman's hiring has brought a whole new excitement to the King/Pinnacle Community with record numbers in the Wildcats' program. The varsity team features 43 players with the JV having 37 with a few more players expected to be added over the next week.

"These guys have worked really hard in the weight room and have a desire to be good and win," noted Lowman. "Our win-loss success will be determined by our execution and efforts on the field matching the efforts and drive of the offseason."

West has 23 returning varsity players with nine starters returning on the offensive side and six on the defensive side. All-Conference players Aydden Cherry, Nate Akers, Mikah Webster, Sam Reeves, Luke Whitt, Jackson Sammons, Kyle Sellers,



Trent Lowman

Jackson Roscoe, Dylan Gastley, Alex Pegram along with newcomers Lindann Fleming and Derek Studer are expected to lead and excel on the gridiron this fall.

"We have a good core of guys with playing experience who have worked really hard this offseason," said Lowman. "Our OL is big and strong, and also athletic. We have a lot of length and guys on the perimeter that enjoy blocking for each other."

"Defensively we bring back guys who gained a lot of experience last year and I expect to match that experience with being stronger and faster to produce greater success."

Reeves stepped into the quarterback role last season and threw for 1,425 yards completing nearly 60 percent of his passes with eight

WILDCATS ROSTER

#	First	Last	Grade	Ht.	Wt.	Pos.
0	Mikah	Webster	Senior	5'11	165	WR/DB/PR/K/P
1	Devin	Gastley	Sophomore	6'1	195	QB/DB/LB
2	Lindann	Fleming	Senior	6'0	170	RB/DB/KR
3	Sam	Reeves	Senior	6'3	190	QB/WR
4	Jackson	Roscoe	Senior	6'2	195	TE/LB
5	Ayddn	Cherry	Senior	6'1	180	RB/LB
6	Matthew	Grubb	Senior	5'9	175	WR/DB
7	Kobe	McMillian	Senior	6'0	190	RB/NG
8	Daniel	Stanley	Senior	6'1	200	RB/OL
9	Tanner	Hodcock	Senior	6'0	175	TE/LB
10	Nate	Akers	Junior	6'4	215	TE/LB
11	Jonah	McCoy	Senior	5'9	155	WR/DB
12	Derek	Studer	Senior	6'5	190	WR/DB
15	Alex	Pegram	Senior	6'0	205	RB/LB/LS
18	Nate	Zamora	Senior	6'0	180	WR/DB
19	Jason	Hernandez	Senior	6'0	175	WR/DB
20	Tyler	Doby	Junior	6'0	190	TE/LB
22	Austin	Rierson	Senior	6'0	180	RB/DB
23	Dylan	Gastley	Senior	6'3	225	TE/LB
25	Ayden	Pilcher	Junior	5'10	175	RB/LB
26	Micah	Long	Junior	6'5	220	TE/DL
27	Landis	Pritchard	Senior	5'10	185	RB/DB
33	Myles	Knox	Senior	6'2	190	Kicker/Punter
40	Dallas	Frasier	Junior	6'2	185	RB/LB
41	Tyrese	Borders	Junior	6'2	220	OL/DL
42	Charlie	Reeves	Junior	6'4	200	WR/DB
51	Chase	Graham	Junior	6'0	215	OL/DL
52	Kyle	Sellers	Senior	6'2	265	OL/DE
53	Jack	Adams	Junior	6'2	220	OL/DL
54	Connor	Moore	Senior	6'3	285	OL/DL
55	Luke	Whitt	Senior	6'1	280	OL/DL
56	Ayden	Smith	Junior	5'11	280	OL/DL
57	Jackson	Sammons	Junior	6'3	290	OL/DL
58	Omari	Graham	Sophomore	6'4	280	OL/DL
59	Isaac	Silmser	Junior	6'2	245	OL/DL
60	Chris	Twyman	Junior	5'11	215	OL/DL
61	Ethan	Hurley	Senior	6'2	220	OL/DL
63	Jordan	Cave	Senior	6'2	225	OL/DL
72	Dalton	East	Sophomore	6'6	295	OL/DL
73	Noah	Wilkinson	Senior	5'10	235	OL/DL
78	Peyton	Delgardo	Senior	5'10	225	OL/DL
83	Xander	Hicks	Junior	5'9	150	WR/DB
88	Brayden	Darby	Junior	5'11	175	WR/DB

WILDCATS SCHEDULE

KICKOFF AT 7:30 UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED
FRIDAY, 8/23 VS. SOUTH STOKES
FRIDAY, 8/30 @ RANDLEMAN
FRIDAY, 9/6 VS. EAST SURRY
FRIDAY, 9/13 @ NORTH SURRY
FRIDAY, 9/20 VS. T.W. ANDREWS*
FRIDAY, 9/27 @ MOREHEAD*
FRIDAY, 10/4 VS. NORTH FORSYTH*
FRIDAY, 10/11 @ REIDSVILLE*
FRIDAY, 10/18 VS. MCMICHAEL*
FRIDAY, 10/25 OPEN
FRIDAY, 11/1 @ WALKERTOWN*
*CONFERENCE

touchdowns. Cherry rushed for 699 yards, averaged 4.8 yards per carry, recorded 13 touchdowns, and had 71 tackles on defense. Akers jumped onto the scene with 153 yards rushing, 217 yards receiving, and led the Wildcats' defense with 130 tackles. Webster was also a two-way starter with 302 yards receiving and 41 tackles with five interceptions.

"I love the passion and aggression our guys are taking to the field right now," said Lowman after the Wildcats' two scrimmage dates. "We have a lot to clean up still in the nuts and bolts of it, but I'll take the energy and joy they're playing with any day.

"We have a group that right now is giving everything they have for each other, for West Stokes, and for the King and the Pinnacle areas. It's been a fun start and I'm excited as long as we come every day knowing we have so much room

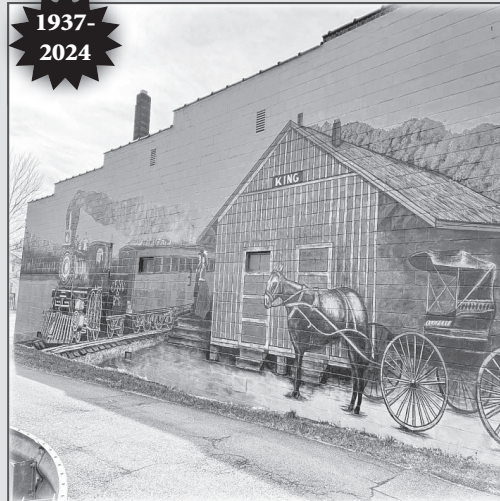
for improvement and the mindset and focus to do so."

BIG GAMES

The Wildcats again open their season against rival South Stokes. Although West Stokes holds a 19-5 all-time record against the Sauras, the game has always brought excitement between the two communities despite their records. The Wildcats are currently enjoying a three-game winning streak over South Stokes.

Other big games include East Surry (8-13), Lowman's former team and probably the Wildcats biggest rivalry, North Surry (14-6) who won their conference last season despite falling to the Cats 56-28, McMichael (10-4) who have a three-game losing streak to the Phoenix, and of course Reidsville (0-9), the reigning state champion who the Wildcats have never beaten.

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