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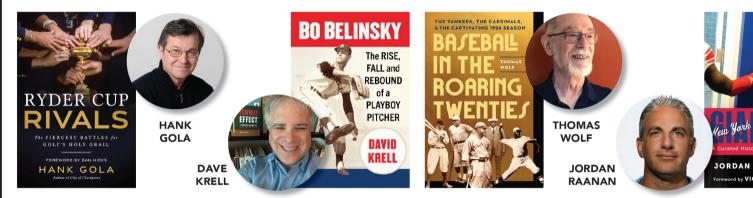
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## KEY BATTLES IN STORE

By JOE HOFMANN

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

By the time high school students walk into their respective schools for the first time in September, many New Jersey Hills Media Group high school football teams will have already played some meaningful games.

On Aug. 29, Mendham will make the short trip to rival West Morris Central in the annual sister-school rivalry between the two.

That's just the beginning. A trio of games that resemble playoff matchups are also on tap that night when Sparta visits Montville, West Essex entertains Old Tappan, and Mountain Lakes travels to Weequahic.

In addition, neighborhood foe Hunterdon Central pays North Hunterdon a visit, the Greg Gruzdis Era begins at Whippany Park as the Wildcats travel to Parsippany, and old rivals Dover and host Morris Hills will get together the following afternoon at Gifford Field.

Delbarton, meanwhile, will make the trip to Ohio, where it will take on traditional powerhouse St. Edward's on Aug. 30.

Locally, Morris Catholic and new coach Dave Albano will entertain Hope of Illinois.

Here is a look at some of the other games in 2025 that are more meaningful:

Randolph at Morristown, Sept. 5: Firstyear Randolph coach Ryan Gresik will lead the Rams at Morristown.

Parsippany at Boonton, Sept. 5: Who will win the annual Old Shoe game? We'll find out after these two lock horns.

Madison at Hanover Park, Sept. 5: Rookie Hornets coach Nick Liberato will lead Hanover against what should be a strong Dodgers club.

West Morris at Morris Knolls, Sept. 6: Who is the best team in the SFC-Liberty White? We'll begin to get some answers when these two get together.

West Essex at Caldwell, Sept. 12: What better way to set the tone for 2025 than by facing your neighborhood rival.

**Delaware Valley at Bernards, Sept. 12:** The Terriers gave the Mountaineers all they could handle last year on the way to Bernards winning the BCC Patriot Gold.

Hanover Park at Mountain Lakes, Sept. 12: The Herd would like a bounceback season in the American White and a win here could set the tone.

Mountain Lakes at Lenape Valley, Sept. 19: Lakes pulled out one of the wildest playoff wins in state history at Lenape's expense last year. Don't think first-year coach Mike Moschella will allow the Patriots to have forgotten.

**Ridge at Phillipsburg, Sept. 19:** Will this be a matchup of the BCC American Silver's two best teams again?

Boonton at Mountain Lakes, Sept. 26: This game usually tilts the way of the Herd, but this is still a spirited rivalry nonetheless.

Madison at Mountain Lakes, Oct. 3: The SFC-American White just may be decided right here. Both appear destined to enjoy big years.

**Delbarton at Pope John, Oct. 3:** Long before the days of the NJAC and Super Football Conference, this was a dream matchup ... it's nice to see these two locking horns every year.

Mount Olive at Morris Knolls, Oct. 3: Knolls beat Olive twice last year and no doubt the Marauders have circled this one on their calendar.

Randolph at Roxbury, Oct. 10: One of Morris County's oldest rivalries right here

Wallkill Valley at Boonton, Oct. 10: The Bombers beat the Rangers up at Wallkill to clinch a share of the National Blue last November. Will the league be at stake on this night?

**Sparta at Madison, Oct. 11:** Both look to be very strong and this one will have a playoff-like feel.

Mendham at Montville, Oct. 17: There is a chance the Mustangs ice the Liberty Blue on this night.

Hanover Park at West Essex, Oct. 17: First-year coach Dan Fulton of West Essex led the Hornets to their first sectional title since 1990 and would like nothing better than to show his old school that he is doing quite well in his new digs.

**Delbarton at Bergen Catholic, Oct. 18:** The Crusaders are arguably New Jersey's best Catholic-school program ... stunning Bergen on its home field would be a tremendous accomplishment for the Green Wave.

**Newton at Mountain Lakes, Oct. 24:** Both teams are likely playoff-bound, so it's nice to tune up against a stellar program entering the postseason.

### >> ON THE COVER

Jaret Haupt reaches for a pass at Roxbury High School.

**Photo by Ed Ruping** 

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**BERNARDS MOUNTAINEERS** 

# TIME TO RELOAD

By DAVE ARTUSO

**CONTRIBUTING WRITER** 

**BERNARDSVILLE** — As other high school football teams are rebuilding, and some are practically starting with brand new rosters, Bernards appears to be reloading for another potentially big season.

It's no surprise; just look at the numbers. Beginning with 2018, the Mountaineers have won at least eight games in every season, including 11 last year and a school record 12 in 2023. All told, in the last six autumns Bernards has put together a sparkling 63-12 record.

Yes, 2024 stars ranging from the gritty and gutsy Terrence Hanratty at running back, the leaping Jack Morra or reliable Max Austin at wide receiver and the school record-setting Noah Ochab at placekicker, to standout linemen David Silva and Dan Ferguson, and linebacker Aiden Gribben.

But at Bernards' intrasquad scrimmage during its Media Day practice on Saturday, Aug. 16, it didn't take long to see what 2025 has in store for the Mountaineers: talent and experience virtually everywhere you look.

So, who's back? Well, quarterback is as good a place as any to start. Junior Nolan Walsh (1,951 yards passing, 18 touchdowns and only six interceptions last fall) returns and not only looked poised in the pocket, but he put exclamation



Photos by Rich Mariani

Jon Simoneau begins his 18th season as head coach of the Bernards High School football team.

points on the scrimmage. He fired a laser slant pass to junior Sean Arcelay for one score, threaded a pass to junior Chase Hawthorne between two defenders, and lofted a bomb over the shoulder of double-covered senior wide receiver Ricky

### BERNARDS MOUNTAINEERS

**Head Coach:** Jon Simoneau, 18th year **Last Year's Record:** 11-1

**Playoffs:** Lost, 28-14, to Shabazz in the North 1, Section 2 final

Assistant Coaches: David Carmon, Brendan O Reilly, Ryan McCullough, Kyle Wierzbicki, Steve Masotti, John Maddaluna III, Chris Shilts, Chris Kulcsar, Mike Filleri, Zach Lakatos

#### **SCHEDULE**

Aug. 29 Cranford, 7 p.m.
Sept. 6 at Hillside, 1 p.m.
Sept. 12 Delaware Valley, 7 p.m.
Sept. 19 at Voorhees, 7 p.m.
Sept. 26 J.P. Stevens, 7 p.m.
Oct. 3 at South Plainfield, 6 p.m.
Oct. 11 at Summit, 1 p.m.
Oct. 17 Governor Livingston, 7 p.m.
Oct. 24 Carteret, 7 p.m.

Giebel, who made a great catch on the toss.

Arcelay catching the TD pass may be a harbinger of things to come. He hauled in two of Bernards' eight non-Morra touchdown receptions last season, and is the No. 2 returning receiver—to senior running back Logan Stevens (21 receptions, 315 yards and two scores last year).

Arcelay also returns as the team's punt returner and—surprise, surprise—Stevens was tops last season in kickoff returns and yardage.

Speaking of Stevens, he has 20 scores and nearly 1,300 yards rushing in two seasons, yet he was the second-leading rusher to junior Patrick Carlisle (762 yards and 10 TDs on 136 carries in 2024) last year. The pair could cause night-mares for opposing defenses.

The lines on both sides of the ball will be strong again for the Mountaineers. Senior tackle and defensive end Justin Simpson, who Simoneau calls "one of the best offensive linemen in the conference," is one of the team's newly announced captains—along with Stevens and senior outside linebacker Teagun Harnett. Senior two-way lineman Finn Osborne, junior defensive line standout Chase Caponigro, senior center James Renz look to round out what is one of the Mountaineers' key strengths.

But the best lineman on either side of the ball may prove once again to be the one who proved that Walsh wasn't perfect in the pocket on that Saturday: senior defensive end Thomas Diemar, who "sacked" (no hitting allowed) Walsh at least once during the scrimmage. Diemar already holds the career record for sacks at Bernards, with 20. He has amassed 120 total tackles in his career, including 64

PLEASE SEE BERNARDS, PAGE 5



### **BERNARDS:** Key players prepare for another great season

FROM PAGE 4

last season.

Some other Mountaineers who look to contribute significantly this season include junior linebacker Tyce Hanratty (Terrence's younger brother), junior defensive back Zach Favreau (nephew of actor/director/producer Jon Favreau, of Marvel fame), senior defensive back Max Caldwell, senior wide receiver/defensive back Westin Lukes, junior linebacker Jordan Riley, and junior defensive back/running back Luke Bubnowski, sophomore offensive lineman Matthew Ferguson and senior defensive back Antonio Britez.

Junior Daniel Nagy-Lewis is the Mountaineers' kicking specialist this season, after hitting on eight of nine extra points in 2024.

The list gets even longer when adding top newcomers. Strong-armed freshman A.J. MacCracken will back up Walsh at quarterback—"He's next in line as Bernards' QB, and he looks the part," says Simoneau.

Sophomore Victor Nina, one of the top javelin throwers in the state, hopes to contribute at defensive end, with juniors Hudson Gershon and Matthew Vazquez also looking to help the Mountaineers win from spots on the defensive line. And a pair of seniors who lettered as freshmen—linebacker Mike Melitski and defensive back Blake Dakin—have returned to the gridiron.

Collectively, the Mountaineers should be contention for a school record sixth division title and should make a playoff push. They'll need to stay healthy against



Key players for the 2025 Mountaineers include, from left, Nolan Walsh, Finn Osborne, Justin Simpson, Logan Stevens and Thomas Diemar.

a schedule dominated by larger schools.

"It's a much bigger schedule this year in terms of the teams we face," says Simoneau. "We need to stay healthy, and we need to play well on the road at traditionally tough places like Summit, Hillside and South Plainfield."

To continue the success of the recent

handful of years, the Mountaineers are also going to have to continue doing something that Simoneau preaches all the time: Have fun.

"It's a lot of work—for the players, for the coaches, for everybody," he says. "It's a long, hot, gross summer. And if you don't have fun, then it's just work."



Chris Kulscar, quarterbacks coach at Bernards, talks things over with Nolan Walsh.

Simoneau stops and gestures to the players and coaches finishing the morning with the last drills of practice and notes how consistent—or, rather, constant—his coaching staff has been, and how the team responds to that.

"I look around and I realize I get to work with my best friends, with former players who come back to help, and we have a great time. We're tight-knit. We're friends and family—we even know each other's pizza order or Chinese food order. And we have great support from the school, the district and the community. All of that makes this a special place to be"



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# 'WE HAVE THE PIECES'

By JOE HOFMANN

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

**BOONTON** – In the first year back at his alma mater, coach Sean Norton led the Boonton Bombers to a tie for the SFC National Blue championship.

So, what can he and the Bombers do for an encore?

Answer: Win it again.

Despite big graduation losses, the Bombers have enough left in the tank to remain in the thick of things.

And they just might have the ammunition to win it again.

"I'm feeling optimistic," Norton said. "We graduated a whole heckuva bunch of kids and some real good football players. But the cool thing about Group 1 football is that every year is a rebuilding year. Even if you don't graduate everyone, there are pieces you have to put into place."

Norton welcomes some fresh blood that figures to give the team explosiveness when it has the ball.

"I love Boonton football and have spent my whole life excited to see who is next to score a touchdown or have their name announced over the loudspeaker at a game," he said. "This is an exciting time."

The Bombers have a battle going on for the quarterback spot in the pre-season between senior captain Jeremiah Sibi and freshman Daniel Coutts. The team will still be stressing the running game.

"Sibi has varsity experience and was a good receiver and outside linebacker last



**Photos by Ed Ruping** 

Sean Norton, head coach at Boonton High School, runs a drill during pre-season practice.

year," Norton said. "He's been on the varsity field for two years. He plays varsity basketball and baseball. He is 185 pounds, strong and tough. He knows the option really well and knows (former Boonton) Coach (Bryan) Gallagher's system (that Norton still runs). He was a receiver last year but had some reps at QB in practice and is a hard runner. When he keeps he'll

### BOONTON BOMBERS

Head coach: Sean Norton, second season. Assistant coaches: Sal Montevego, Andy Scalone, Mickey Norton, Steve Delaporte, Jeff Tavolacci, Bryan Figueroa, Matt Emering, Vince Coiro

Section: North Group I Last year's record: 6-4.

**Playoffs:** Lost in the first round of the playoffs to New Providence, 49-24.

**Returning starters:** 5/5

#### **SCHEDULE**

Sept. 5 Parsippany 6 p.m. Sept. 12 at Whippany Park, 7 p.m. Sept. 19 Hopatcong 6 p.m. Sept. 26 at Mountain Lakes 7 p.m. Oct. 3 Kinnelon 6 p.m. Oct. 10 at North Warren 7 p.m.

Oct. 17 Wallkill Valley 6 p.m. Oct. 24 at Cedar Grove, 7 p.m.

get his vards.

"But Coutts is special, a special athlete. He is young but very hungry and determined. He asks a lot of questions and is a good kid. He is talented but doesn't want to tell the world he is talented. He is a very good athlete and had our second fastest 40 time. He is one of our top squatters in the weight room. He is a stocky dude and

throws a very good football. He is tough and a good football player.

"It'll come down to the scrimmages to see who gets the job. Scrimmages tell all."

Boonton has a strong stable of running backs.

"A good problem to have," Norton said. "I hope to keep guys fresh, get them a breather."

One of the runners will be Josiah Chaplain, a returnee.

"He didn't have a lot of carries last year but the ball will be in his hands at fullback and halfback," Norton said. "He is undersized but very fast and one of our best runners in the 40. He has the highest squat on the team. He is a strong, little guy but with a high football IQ. He lives, breathes and eats football, a real football junky."

Phoenix LaCorte is another running back candidate.

"He is so big and strong and can run," Norton said. "We have a lot of fast guys on the team. He is third or fourth in the 40 time. He is a good wrestler, a great line-backer, and a wild man on defense. He plays with a lot of heart. Watch clips from last year, he was diving all over the place. He is a heckuva captain, an obvious captain. He plays with a lot of heart and is a great young man."

Another contributor out of the backfield figures to be Isa Kupa, who has been a contributor on both sides of the ball the last two years.

PLEASE SEE BOONTON, PAGE 7



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## **BOONTON:** Bombers have the pieces to go a long way

FROM PAGE 6

"He was a receiver last year but he'll get carries." Norton said. "He is fast and tough and has packed on some muscle. He looks like a different human than last summer. He is thicker."

has opened some eyes in camp because Ahmetaj and tackle Trevan Zuercher. linebacker in the 3-4, with LaCorte and of his breakaway speed. He is getting a long look in the backfield, as is Coutts.

"The fastest kid on the team," Norton said of Cherry. "He can run. He is very strong in the weight room. He is undersized but won't shy away from contact

plays for us this year. You see him at practice and he looks 18."

Kali Polanco is a solid receiver and now his time." capable blocker. The line will be led by center Jack McLaughlin and tackle Santino Adornetto. Other line candidates fa will play up front. Freshman Hasan Cherry, meanwhile, include guards Enes Qose and Valdet Cawaon Cherry is the tight end.

> Heading up the defense will be middle linebacker Bryan Duffy, who is a ry will be in the secondary. "running-through-a-brick-wall kind of guy who plays at one speed," according to Norton. "He is not very big but said.

and is a tremendous athlete. He'll make plays mighty. He will make a lot of tackles and a lot of plays this year. He has worked hard for a long time and it is

> McLaughlin, Qose, Ahmetaj, Zuercher, Cawaon Cherry, and Quasai Musta-

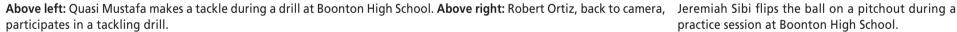
> Chaplain will join Duffy at inside Josh Leon at OLB.

Sibi, Kupa, Polanco, and Hasan Cher-

"I think we have the pieces to have another successful season." Norton









practice session at Boonton High School.

# GO BOMBERS!



Wishing you a Successful 2025 Season from all of us at The Citizen

**CHATHAM COUGARS** 

# RETURNING OFFENSIVE POWER

By CHRISTOPHER LAWLOR

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

**CHATHAM** – A year ago, Chatham wanted to fulfill a goal and achieved it by capturing not one but two playoff games in North 2 Group 4. The Cougars (7-3) recorded lopsided postseason victories by were brushed aside in the sectional semifinals by Phillipsburg, which advanced to the state final.

That's building a culture, something head coach Evan Picariello has established since taking over in 2021.

"We're looking to make the playoffs year in and year out, and make some deep runs," he said. "It's important to build that culture so Chatham, the community and players will be proud.

The biggest holes are seven players that earned All-Super Football Conference Liberty Blue honors with record-setting quarterback Will Allen signing with Bucknell. Allen threw for 2,022 yards and 17 touchdowns and rushed for 336 yards and five scores, while distributing the ball all over the field.

Eight senior wide receivers and a junior return but who will deliver them the ball. For now, Picariello won't name a starter as senior Michael MacAniff, junior Ryan Hogan and sophomore Milo Semioli will compete in the preseason.

"All three will battle it out to the end of preseason," Picariello said.

And the first-year starter will throw to Carnegie Mellon-bound wide receiver/cornerback Sonny Arden (29 recep-



Senior quarterback Michael MacAniff loads up with an attempt to complete a long pass during an offensive drill.

tions-347 yards-2 TDs), Hunter Bigham (12-179-3), tight end Tommy Douglas (11-135), all county running back-linebacker Caden Gabriele and junior slot Nick Lagunowich (53-737-6),who will miss two games with an injury. MacNiff could wind up as a pass-catcher if quarterbacking duties are earned by Hogan or Semioli.

Tommy Douglas, an all-league line-backer-wide receiver, transferred to Hun School. His father, Joe Douglas, was the former general manager of the Jets but was let go last November and moved the family to Haddonfield and is the senior



**Photos by Glenn Clark** 

Captains of the Chatham Cougars are, from left, Caden Gabriel, Jayce Tulo, Sonny Arden and Hunter Bigham.

personnel director with the Eagles.

The O-line is anchored by Pennsylvania-recruit and tackle Jase Catullo (6-4, 290), who was First Team All-Liberty Blue, Ryan Bailey (6-0, 215) and tackle Dylan Abernethy (5-11, 255).

The primary ball-carriers are Gabriele and senior Shep Boyd (5-11, 185), an all-state lacrosse player and Michigan

pledge, who returns to football after a two-year absence to concentrate on lacrosse.

The linebacking mainstays of Charlie Murray (5-10, 200), Gabriele and Bigham will patrol the second level. Free safety Michael Freeman and Arden return to

PLEASE SEE CHATHAM, PAGE 9

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### **CHATHAM:** 'We're looking to make the playoffs year in and year out'

FROM PAGE 8

the secondary.

Douglas and Bigham were also in the second team and form a hard-working duo. Bigham had 4.5 sacks, 2 interceptions, 10 tackles for loss and totaled 89 tackles and Douglas added 58 tackles (16 solo) and 7 for loss.

The SFC Liberty Blue is composed of defending champions Mendham, Morris Hills, Parsippany Hills, Montville and Warren Hills. The opening two games are division contests with the first visiting Morris Hills on Saturday, Sept. 6 and then back home for Montville on Saturday, Sept. 13. A late season challenge is at Mendham on Friday, Oct. 10 and by then the playoff picture should be in focus.

"We have continuity with our coaching staff and with both our offense and defense," Picariello said. "I like our speed and length but you always are concerned with you depth and just staying healthy. We have seven starters back on both sides of the ball and that's great experience."



Evan Picariello enters his fifth season as head coach of the Chatham Cougars.

## CHATHAM COUGARS

Head Coach: Evan Picariello, 5th season Assistant Coaches: Gary Lusardi, Pat DiMartino, Brian Nagy, Adam Agree, Dan Moskowitz, Chris Bournes, Joe Sullivan, Mike Papa, Luke McAloon, Liam Murphy, Jeff Keating, Tim Macko

Section: North, Group 4 Last year's record: 7-3

Playoffs: Group 4 North semifinals

**Returning starters:** 7/7

#### **SCHEDULE**

Sept. 6 at Morris Hills 1 p.m. Sept. 13 vs. Montville 7 p.m. Sept. 19 at Mount Olive 7 p.m. Sept. 26 at Livingston 6 p.m. Oct. 4 vs. Roxbury 1 p.m. Oct. 10 at Mendham 7 p.m. Oct. 18 vs. Warren Hills 1 p.m. Oct. 25 vs. Parsippany Hills 1 p.m.





**Above left:** Senior Michael Freeman makes a catch during pre-season practice at Chatham High School. **Above right:** Junior Ryan Hogan plays multiple positions for the Chatham Cougars.





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**DELBARTON GREEN WAVE** 

# TALENT BUT A MONSTER SCHEDULE

By JOE HOFMANN

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

**MORRISTOWN** – Delbarton is loaded with talent all over the roster, but the question is: Do the Green Wave have enough of it to compete against a monster schedule?

And does coach Brian Bowers' team have enough in the minefield known as the SFC United White Division (Pope John, St. Peter's, Seton Hall Prep, DePaul)?

Last year, Delbarton won the league thanks to a wild, stunning comeback over DePaul (52-51 in overtime). The Green Wave were one of the best teams in all of New Jersey for most of the year before they were upset in the first round of the playoffs by St. Augustine, 9-7.

Delbarton lost a ton to graduation but there is plenty of talent returning.

"I always feel good," Bowers said. "It's a blessing to coach and work with these kids. We are super excited to be back out here. At some positions, we are very young, but there is definitely some talent and some seniors leading the way. We'll have an exciting team."

The quarterback is a three-way race between junior Tore Sprague, sophomore Gavin Gilardi, and freshman Jayden Schmalz. All three have a lot of ability and no one has assumed control of the position in the early going.

"The quarterback has to be able to run our system effectively and he needs to throw downfield," Bowers said. "We have a lot of different elements with pre-snap reads, RPO, managing the run game, and



Photos by Chris M. Junior

Delbarton assistant coach Dave Reed fires a pass during an August practice.

making sure they can competently run the offense.

"Gavin is a prototypical, 6-foot-3 gunslinger with a great arm. Growth is coming. He is a classic pocket quarterback who can get the ball downfield with accuracy. He has a good head on his shoulders. He has a

year under his belt.

"Jayden is a really talented quarterback who can do a little bit of everything. He has a great arm. He has shown an unusual ability to pick up stuff and execute. We have been super impressed with him so far.

"Tore Sprague has done some nice things

for us, so you see it is a position where we have a lot to work with."

"If we use multiple QBs we are fine with that. All bring something to the table and all have talent and quite frankly if you spread the load around, that's not a bad thing. We are not ready to force the issue and we'll see how it plays out."

The running game figures to have a terrific 1-2 punch in Matt Tufari and Kobe Irby-Mason. Tufari was a running back as a freshman but the team was already loaded at the position with standouts Ryan Trafford and Brock Dandridge. Tufari moved out to receiver, where he caught 24 passes for 387 yards and four TDs last year.

"Physically, he is tough, he hits the holes, and is a captain for us because he is a great leader," Bowers said. "He is a warrior."

Irby-Mason is another one to watch in the backfield.

"We'll have a 1-2 punch," Bowers said. "Our running game will be very productive."

One of the team's big losses was the graduation of Phil Folmar and now it is time for some of those in his shadow last year to emerge. That would include Girard Yoo, Jack Castellano, Grant Van Raaphorst, and Xavier Rodriguez. Austin Kiely, Easton Wendorff, and John Trafford will see action in the tight end-H-Back position.

Delbarton's O-Line – always a strength – should have some stellar blockers in 2025 as well. The projected starters figure to be tackles Tanner Koss (6-3, 255) and Jack

PLEASE SEE DELBARTON, PAGE 11



### **DELBARTON:** 'We are super excited to be back out here'

FROM PAGE 10

Christie (6-2, 265), guards Max Markho (6-2, 280) and Brooks Koepke (6-2, 300) and center Matt Shivas (6-0, 250).

Christian Diehl (6-2, 260) and Quinton Moglia (5-11, 240) provide depth.

"We need them to be able to take the pressure off the quarterbacks early on," Bowers said. "We need to hunker down and run the football. Our quarterbacks need to make

but if we stay healthy we'll a nice 1-2 punch in backfield."

Defensive end Chris Dadas (6-3, 300) was hurt for much of last year but comes back to lead the defensive line. He'll be surrounded by nose guard Noah Christie (6-1, 250) and end Meshach St. Agathe (6-1, 235). Phil Garrubbo, Luke McBride (6-3, 225) and Michael Carroll (6-2, 235) will also get snaps.

Michael Sclafani, who verballed to Co-

plays and spread this thing out a little bit. lumbia, was all-league last year and leads a linebacking unit that also includes Emmett Caughey (6-4, 210), Vince Achilarre, Devin Martin (6-4, 200), and Alex Fazekas.

> Chaz Cusimano started as a freshman one of the few in school history to have done so - and leads a secondary that includes returning starter Nick Stoll, Chase Houser, Adrian Hunter, Colin Brady, Matt O'Leary, Andrew Henson, Michael Giordano, and Zack McNeil.



Brian Bowers enters his 22nd season at Delbarton.

### DELBARTON GREEN WAVE

Head coach: Brian Bowers, 22nd season Section: Non-Public A

Last year's record: 7-3

Playoffs: Lost in the first round of the Non-Public A playoffs to St. Augustine, 9-7.

#### **SCHEDULE**

Aug. 30 at St. Edward (OH), 1 p.m. Sept. 6 at Malvern Prep (PA), 1 p.m. Sept. 13 Msgr Farrell (NY), 1 p.m. Sept. 20 St. Peter's Prep, 1 p.m. Sept. 27 Seton Hall Prep, 1 p.m. Oct. 4 at Pope John, 1 p.m. Oct. 18 at Bergen Catholic, 1 p.m. Oct. 25 DePaul, 1 p.m. Nov. 1 Paramus Catholic, 1 p.m.





Above left: Delbarton senior running back Matt Tafuri runs through a drill at Delbarton. Above right: Delbarton assistant coach Rob Flynn oversees a tackling drill in August.



**DOVER TIGERS** 

# TRENDING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

By JOE HOFMANN

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

**DOVER** – When the Dover players come onto the field for warmups this fall, opponents might do a double take.

Their jaws might drop. They may well shake in their cleats, too. And they might wonder if a college team has arrived, not the Tigers.

Who are these behemoths, anyway?

Check out the roll call of some of this year's team:

Wide receiver Chris McKenzie is 6-foot-3, but that is short when you consider that left tackle Bradyn Brown is 6-5 and right tackle Ismael Lopez is also 6-5.

Tight end Max Piechota is 6-2.

"When we get off the bus, we'll look the part, that's for sure," coach Bill Goble said with a laugh.

Can the Tigers play up to their size? We'll soon find out.

The team finished 3-7 last year and graduated a huge senior class. This year's group has a handful of seniors.

"We were senior heavy last year," Goble said. "We are gonna be a younger team. We do not have a lot of varsity experience but most of the guys have been in the system for a few years.

"Our effort, intensity and energy is up this year. We have a lot of guys buying in to what we are doing and are trending in the right direction.'

Joaquin Prito will play quarterback. The team will run a Spread Wing T.

"He looks good, his timing is good, and



**Photos by Jim Petrucci** 

Dover High School football captains are, from left, Julio Santana, Brodyn Brown and Joaquin Prieto.

he has a good command the offense," a good arm and puts the ball in the right Goble said. "He can throw, he can run. places. We are hoping he can do some He can move. He's not fast like (Anthony) good things this year." Trongone was two years ago, but he has

C.J. Rodman spent much of the summer

# **TIGERS**

Head coach: Bill Goble, third season. Assistant coaches: Ken Quinones, Will Dodd, Dave Yura, Christian Gonzalez, Vic

Section: North Group 4 Last year's record: 3-7. Playoffs: None. Returning starters: 4/4

#### **SCHEDULE**

Aug. 28 at Morris Hills, 6 p.m. Sept. 5 Vernon, 6 p.m. Sept. 11 West Milford 7 p.m. Sept. 19 at Mendham 7 p.m. Sept. 26 Lakeland, 7 p.m. Oct. 3 at Sparta, 7 p.m. Oct. 10 Pascack Hills, 7 p.m. Oct. 17 Jefferson 7 p.m. Oct. 24 at Kittatinny, noon

practicing with the team and was expected to be its best player but transferred. Jacob Lorenzo will be a starting running back but the team is scrambling to replace Rodman.

'We went the whole summer thinking it was him," Goble sighed. "It is what it

PLEASE SEE DOVER, PAGE 13

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## **DOVER:** Tigers face a tough schedule this fall

FROM PAGE 12

is."

Osvaldo Ortiz, Antwan Johnson, and Chris Santana are fighting for backfield time.

McKenzie, Emmanuel Mendez (graduated standout Emilio Mendez's younger brother) and Michael Santana are vying for time at receiver. Piechota is the tight end.

"They look good," Goble said. "Chris is tall and can go get the ball. Emmanuel runs crisp routes. Michael is another kid making some plays for us."

The line will be built around Brown, who's a likely Division 3 recruit, if not higher. "He's a big kid getting recruited by D-3's, but once we get rolling and his name gets out there, he can go higher," Goble said. "He is raw and only started playing two years ago as a sophomore. He was an all-conference tackle last year."

Lopez has come back out for football after having not played last year.

"Once college coaches see his size, he'll get looks," Goble said. "We are hoping for good things out of the two of them."

Three-year starter Josh Perez, a junior, will play right guard.

"We are hoping for him to take that next step now that he is a junior," Goble said.

Franklin Juarez, a converted tight end who started at times at linebacker last year, will play left guard.

J.J. Filosa, who started as a freshman, is another three-year starter.

"A solid, reliable center," Goble said of Filosa. On defense, Piechota and Josh Perez will line up at end, with Brown playing tackle. McKenzie and Martin Noriega are vying for D-Line time.

Prito, Lorenzo, Johnson, Juarez, Dom Fritts, and Ortiz will play linebacker.

Chris Santana and Michael Santana will play cornerback and Mendez will play safety.



Bill Goble is in his third year as head coach of the Dover Tigers.

The Tigers will return to the Patriot Red this year, which includes, Sparta, West Milford, Vernon Lakeland and Jefferson.

"We have a pretty tough schedule," Goble said.
"We open up with our close rivals Morris Hills
(Aug. 28, of which Goble is an alum). I'm glad we
brought that rivalry back. For now, that is our
focus. We'll take it week by week. Vernon, West
Milford, Sparta, and Mendham are all tough. We
hope to compete. The ultimate goal is a state title
but it all starts with Morris Hills. We don't have
an easy game on the schedule."



A leaping catch is made during a Dover High School football practice.



**HANOVER PARK HORNETS** 

# It's A Family Affair

By MARK KITCHIN

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

**EAST HANOVER TWP.** — It wasn't just an opportunity to return to Hanover Park that made the football coaching job so appealing to Nick Liberato. It was also the opportunity to coach with his father John.

The Liberatos are excited for the new opportunity that opened up after former coach Dan Fulton took over the position at West Essex. After seven years of being an assistant coach at Madison High School, Liberato is thrilled with the opportunity to take over the Hornets with a little help.

It makes it extra special to do it with his father, who had success with the Hornets as head coach from 1994 to 2002. Nick, who went to school at Summit, often served as a ball boy for his father before he started playing himself.

"I knew I wanted to be coach from the moment I made that decision to go down the education route," Liberato said. "It is something we always talked about. It didn't matter when it would be or where it would be, I would love for him to coach with me. It wound up coming back home for the opportunity for us to coach together."

Early success won't be easy. Plenty of talented Hanover Park football players graduated from last year's sectional championship team. Most of the returnees have never played football under a different system.

"The kids have been learning pretty much all summer," Liberato said. "We have installed a brand new offense, brand new de-



**Photos by Glenn Clark** 

Lucas Kerr makes a dive during a defensive drill at Hanover Park.

fense and brand new special teams. There is a lot that has been transitioned over. Our kids are tremendous at adapting to adversity. They have picked it up and put the work in to learn it."

Lefty quarterback Jack Kovacs saw spot duty last year, especially when the Hornets wanted to change things up. He has a good

fense and brand new special teams. There arm and will be expected to move the ball is a lot that has been transitioned over. Our around.

"He has shown his ability in decision making as well as quarterback play to distribute the ball," Liberato said. "It is really focused around him making decisions on what he

PLEASE SEE HANOVER, PAGE 15

## HANOVER PARK HORNETS

Head coach: Nick Liberato, 1st season Assistant coaches: John Liberato, Rob Marino, Dan Gregory, Mike Filippone, Anthony Vitale, Mike Ramos, James Bensen, Justin Eveland, Will Castel.

**Section:** North Section 2, Group 2 **Last year's record:** 10-2

Playoffs: Defeated Newton 27-14 in quarterfinals of North 2, Group 2. Defeated Ramsey 34-6 in semifinals of North 2, Group 2. Defeated Glen Rock 24-3 in North 2, Group 2 Sectional Finals. Lost to Newark Shabazz 8-7 in Group 2 Semifinals.

#### **SCHEDULE**

Aug. 28 at Hudson Catholic, 6 p.m. Sept. 5 vs. Madison, 7 p.m. Sept. 12 at Mountain Lakes, 7 p.m. Sept. 19 vs. Glen Ridge, 7 p.m. Sept. 26 at Parsippany, 7 p.m. Oct. 3 vs. Pequannock, 7 p.m. Oct. 10 at Jefferson, 6:30 p.m. Oct. 17 at West Essex, 6:30 p.m. Oct. 24 vs. Weequahic 7 p.m.



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## **HANOVER:** Team has a supportive community

FROM PAGE 14

thinks is best for his team. The offense puts him in a spot to really make his teammates shine and him shine."

Dante Rosato, got plenty of work at running back last year especially in the second half of games when the Hornets were far ahead and just interested in moving the chains.

"He's very dynamic, very explosive, very coachable — a tremendous worker," Liberato said. "I can't wait to see what he does on Friday nights. He's worked hard since the off season. He has shown leadership through action."

Fullback Rocco Zirpoli is a terrific blocker and should also carry the ball quite a bit. Azad Parks is among the other Hornets who will spend some time in the backfield. At receiver, Liberato believes he has several playmakers. Receivers Darrien Ianaccone, Garrett Walters, Luke Morgesee and Nick Martinelli are among the names that will pop up.

"There are definitely some guys we can distribute the ball to," Liberato said. "We are going to spread the wealth."

Two of Hanover Park's starting linemen are returning. Center Gianmarco Canziani is a three year starter, and George Abdy a two-year starter..

"We are leaning on his senior leadership," Liberato said of Canziani. "He is a captain as well. We know he is going to take care of business up front."

Abdy at tackle is the other returning starter. He will play opposite Luis Rowe at the other tackle position. Guards Angelo Churchiello and Jimmy Casola, should fill those spots ably.



Nick Liberato is in his first season as head coach of the Hanover Park Hornets.

Overall the Hornets expect to inject some variety to their 3-4 defensive alignment. Ronny Madera, Lucas Andrade, Parks, Abdy and Churchiello expect to be rotated in and out of the defensive line throughout the game. As a sophomore, Parks was an occasional standout for the Hornets. He is a coachable player with tremendous stamina. Andrade, (6-foot-3, 275) and Madera have been solid on the line as well.

"Andrade is a big player for us," Liberato said. "He takes up a lot of space in the A-gaps. He's working to be a dominant nose guard. Madera is putting the work in. He's a wrestler. He's very aggressive and not afraid of contact."

Zirpoli and Nico Malgieri are seasoned returning starters at middle linebacker position. Luke David, a junior and. Lucas Kerr is a track and field standout have spent plenty of time in the weight room and will work to outdo each other in their efforts to get into



Assistant coach Anthony Vitale holds up an upcoming play, making sure everyone is on the same page.

the rotation.

Greg Glodek and Vincenzo LaSala are showing their senior leadership skills and setting the tone at outside linebacker.

Rosato, Ryan Medich, Walters and Jake Cosentino are battling for safety spots. Iannacone, Luke Morghese, Nick Martinelli and Mark Perrillo are pushing each other for the cornerback roles although Iannacone and Morghese have starting experience.

However, the decision on who plays will depend upon who can adjust to whatever type of defense the Hornets are thinking of playing.

"We have a new setup and a new scheme, but defense is defense," Liberato said. "We are going to be aggressive, we are going to be attacking and we are going to build off their prior knowledge of how to attack and track the ball and the ball carrier."

After a road contest against Hudson Catholic to start the season, the Hornets will be tested in their second game against Madison on Friday, Sept. 5. The Dodgers are a team that Liberato knows intimately.

"The Hanover Park community is so supportive," Liberato said. "The Madison community is so supportive. They care tremendously about their athletics. It's the opportunity to display that. What more could you ask for for a home opener.... It's going to be great for both sides."

# Go HORNETS!



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**HUNTERDON CENTRAL RED DEVILS** 

# READY TO TAKE THE NEXT STEP

**RARITAN TWP.** – The 2024 Hunterdon Central Red Devils got off to a nice start. winning their first two games and going 4-2 in the first six. But then they lost their last four games by an average of 30 points and finished 4-6 for the fall.

Ninth-year head coach Casey Ransone and the 2025 team are determined to erase that memory and build a new, lasting legacv of success.

"One hundred percent we're setting out to have a winning season," said Ransone in a pre-season interview.

Offensively, senior quarterback Drew Cella is back to lead the Red Devils' downfield marches. Last season he amassed 1,352 yards passing—the vast majority of them to the returning senior pair of James Mongno (687 yards) and Nick Vasquez (420 yards). Cella also added 208 yards rushing.

"I'm very excited about our skill players; they're extremely competitive—and Drew may be the most competitive of all," says Ransone. "It's in his lineage. He just wants to compete and be the best, and I expect him to take the next step.

"Mongno is a three-year starter and I'm expecting a lot from him, and Nick (Vasquez) is going to be a big part of what we do," the coach says. "Jayden Cozzie started both ways and returns to what we call a 'Y' position, really a slot receiverand he's a really good one."

Another offensive skill player the Red Devils are looking for production from is junior running back Reggie Osae-Aye.



**Photos by Bill Nagengast** 

PLEASE SEE CENTRAL, PAGE 17 Hunterdon Central players limber up at a pre-season practice.

# Go RED DEVILS!



Wishing you a Successful 2025 Season from all of us at the

# Hunterdon Review

## **CENTRAL:** Team has made 'huge strides' over the years

FROM PAGE 16

"He's a legitimate four-five (40-yard dash) kid," praises Ransone. "He's going to be a complement to Gio."

"Gio" is senior Giovanni Veliz, who rushed for nearly 800 yards last fall. In addition to Osae-Aye, he'll be helped by Cozze, who had 105 yards on the ground in 2024.

Junior Leo Paniagua returns as the Red Devils' placekicker after hitting 11 of 13 point-after attempts last season.

On both sides of the ball, size won't be an issue for the Red Devils. For example, they've added a couple of 6-foot-3 sophomore baseball players, Andrew Fisher and Jason Cebula. And they have a new right tackle, 6-foot-4, 280-pound sophomore Levi Rhodes, who started playing football only

Left tackle is taken by Declan Joyce vounger brother of Central's offensive coordinator, Conall Joyce. The younger Joyce "did an incredible job changing his body," to become stronger and in much better shape, according to Ransone. And 6-2, 230-pound senior Preston Shemanski, returns as the starting left guard. Mauricio Aguino and Jeremy Starks should both see plenty of action on the offensive line.

Defensively, the Red Devils had 11 players with at least 20 total tackles in 2024, and they lost their three top tacklers to graduation. But there's still reason for optimism. The top returner is senior Kasey Kingsley, who collected 31 tackles and a pair of interceptions last fall.

"Kacey was among the best Group 5 hurdlers in the state," says Ransone, "We had no expectations of him being on varsity last year, and all of a sudden he was



Casey Ransone is in his ninth season as head football coach at Hunterdon Central High School.

all over the field. He's fast and he's smart as hell."

Ryan Dentale, a 6-2, 230-pound senior, and 5-11, 240-pound Jaylen Civil will probably be counted on a lot to stop the run.

"They're physically dense; you don't want to hit them," says Ransone. "When you do, it just hurts."

They'll be joined by A.J. Melo, a returning defensive end, who'll play in certain situations.

If Ransone has his way, the Red Devils will have lots of situations this year—positive, winning situations.

"We're really optimistically excited," he says. "We've got to see where we are with toughness, and we need to not only beat

# HUNTERDON CENTRAL

Head Coach: Casev Ransone. 9th season Assistant Coaches: Conall Joyce, Mike Vergalito, Tyler Wrable, Jim Meert, Mark Wroblewski, Rob Martucci, Ethen Aguino, Joe Capasso, Marty Dowling, Matt Joyce, Logan Brodsky.

**Record Last Year: 4-6** 

### SCHEDULE

Aug. 28 at North Hunterdon, 7 p.m. Sept. 5 at Monroe, 7 p.m.

Sept. 12 Phillipsburg, 7 p.m. Sept. 19 at Bridgewater-Raritan, 6 p.m.

Sept. 26 Union, 7 p.m.

Oct. 3 at East Brunswick, 7 p.m.

Oct. 10 at Ridge, 7 p.m.

Oct. 17 Old Bridge, 7 p.m.

Oct. 24 Hillsborough, 7 p.m.

the teams we should beat, but show we're capable of beating peer teams, or ones better than we are.'

The team has made "huge strides" in the past few years, the coach adds, with culture as much as skill. "It's a fun locker room to be in; these are good kids and great teammates—and those are far better than wins," he says. "But we still want to win. This is big-boy football, and that's what we want. We're ready to take that A Hunterdon Central player reaches for a next step."



pass during a pre-season practice.

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**JAMES CALDWELL CHIEFS** 

# YOUTHFUL BUT CONFIDENT



Photos by Glenn Clark

Sophomore guarterback Adam Sepe sets up to pass at James Caldwell High School.



Kaelen Harper, a senior wide recever/defensive back, readies to receive a pass.

By CHRISTOPHER LAWLOR

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

**WEST CALDWELL TWP.** – There is always a dilemma when a Group 2 school suits up for another season: Most of the roster features two-way players.

It's the same, whereas linemen will be needed and rotated throughout the game on offense and defense. Ditto for the wide receivers, who double as cornerbacks or safeties, and running backs will be asked to play linebacker and perhaps return kicks.

You don't have to remind James Caldwell head coach Todd Romano, who returns for his fourth season and guided the Chiefs to the North Section 2 playoffs.

"Yeah, the players double up but we're used to it being a Group 2 school," Romano said.

Graduation claimed just over half of starters with five regulars back on both sides of the ball.

"We're a younger team and found that out at our minicamp in June," Romano said. "But what I like about these guys are they listen and want to learn and are intelligent. You can never replace intelligence; it's good to have smart and athletic players."

The Chiefs will run multiple sets with two backs, a dual threat quarterback and speed on the outside. Sophomore quarterback Adam Sepe returns after throwing

PLEASE SEE CHIEFS, PAGE 19



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### **CHIEFS:** Preparing for the challenging fall schedule

FROM PAGE 18

for 1,128 yards and 11 touchdowns and carried 74 times for 412 rushing yards and three more scores and uses a sleight of hand when using the run-pass option.

Sepe is joined in the backfield along with senior Solomon Soriente, junior Nicco Capaldo and senior Nick Moyano.

The O-line has two returning starters in left tackle Qays Rabah (6-0, 220 pounds), who shifts from guard, and senior guard Elvis Nikollaj (6-1, 215). The rest will be decided in the preseason with centers Chase Kehoe (6-0, 250) and John Aguirre (5-10, 235), guard Logan Arnott (6-0, 225) and junior tackle Jack Nyire (6-3, 220) and sophomore Jake Imperial (6-2, 220) all in the mix.

Senior Kaelen Harper is the main target when Sepe throws after catching nine passes for 143 yards and three TDs. He'll line up with Santino Russo, Nico Sozio, Jake Natanin and sophomores David Chichelo and Dante Placenti

Defensively, Romano favors an odd from with three safeties.

The D-line has senior end Teagan McOmish (6-3, 195) along with tackles Rabbah, Kehoe, Nikollaj. The linebackers are juniors Russell Albert (5-11, 197) and Logan Mooney (6-0, 185) and Moyano.

The secondary will start corners Natanin and Sozio. Russo is a hybrid safety and sophomore Lucas Alvaraz, Placenti, Soriente and Chichelo all getting reps. Capaldo is the weak side safety but the unit's top defender.

Junior Matt Murtagh will handle the punts and place kicks. Last year, he converted 26-of-30 extra points.

## JAMES CALDWELL CHIEFS

Head Coach: Todd Romano, 4th season Assistant Coaches: Rocco Antoniello, Sean Romano, Ryan Smith, Rob Petoia, Jack Docteroff, Vin Fano, Billy Connelly, Rory DeLuca, Calvin Harper, Travis Ruffo, Daryl White, Frank Davide, Mike Masella.

Section: North, Group 2 Last year's record: 4-5

**Playoffs:** Group 2 North Section 1 first

Returning starters: 5/5

#### **SCHEDULE**

Sept. 5 at Passaic Valley 6:30 p.m. Sept. 12 vs. West Essex 7 p.m. Sept. 19 vs. Westwood 7 p.m. Sept. 26 at Wayne Hills 7 p.m. Oct. 3 at Cedar Grove 7 p.m. Oct. 10 vs. Shabazz 7 p.m. Oct. 16 at Millburn 6 p.m. Oct. 24 vs. Nutley 7 p.m.

The schedule makers did not have pity on the young Chiefs. The opener is at Passaic Valley on Friday, Sept. 5. That's followed by West Essex, Westwood, Wayne Hills, Cedar Grove and Shabazz in succession.

"There's no breathing room until November. It's a quality schedule but we like the challenge," Romano said.



Todd Romano is in his fourth season as head coach of the James Caldwell Chiefs.



Photo By Phil Nardone

Dante Placenti practices returning punts.



Solomon Soriente goes through a running drill at James Caldwell High School.

Go CHIEFS!



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The Progress

**MADISON DODGERS** 

# STRONG CORE RETURNS

By MARK KITCHIN

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

**MADISON** — Madison football experienced a roller coaster season in 2024. The Dodgers are expecting a much better result this year with a strong core of players returning especially in some key spots.

Last year the Dodgers lost their first three games before going on a five-game winning streak midseason. They made the playoffs but fell to Pequannock 28-27 in a North 2, Group 2 quarterfinal round contest to end their season at 5-4. The lessons the returnees learned will no doubt help them in the coming year.

"We are mixed but we have a lot of three year starters and two year starters," Coach Chris Kubik said. "We have a core of veterans. This senior class has played a bunch. The core of our team is experienced and then we are kind of filling in the pieces with some guys around them."

One piece they don't have to fill is quarterback. Luke McGuire returns as the signal caller. A dynamic runner, he often uses his legs to move the chains.

"Luke is extremely strong," Kubik said. "He was a pretty physical runner last year. His weight room numbers are great. He is one of the strongest kids on the team. He is going to be very physical this year.

"We have a lot of athletes. We will try and get them involved. We will throw when we need to, but we want to control the ball."

The Dodgers will miss fullback Chris Carfano who ground out some of the hard yardage the last three seasons. Liam Mel-

# **MADISON**

Head coach: Chris Kubik. 19th season Assistant coaches: Steve Hughes, Marty Horn, Kevin Chiodo, Curtis Sallie, Jason Izsa, David Snell, Kevin Carroll, Mike Goodwin, Brian McGuire

Section: North Section 2, Group 2 Last year's record: 5-4

**Playoffs:** Lost To Pequannock 28-27 in overtime in North 2, Group 2 Quarterfinals.

### **SCHEDULE**

Sept. 5 at Hanover Park, 7 p.m. Sept. 13 vs. Mendham, 2 p.m. Sept. 19 at Cedar Grove, 7 p.m. Sept. 27 vs. Lenape Valley, 1 p.m. Oct. 3 at Mountain Lakes, 7 p.m. Oct. 11 vs. Sparta, 1 p.m. Oct. 17 at Pequannock, 7 p.m. Oct. 24 vs. Morris Catholic, 7 p.m.

vin should ably fill in at the position. Tailback should be split up between Javier Izzo, Naim Jacobs and Ryan Nallin, They are all capable but look for Izzo to get plenty of car-

"Izzo is a very strong, fast kid," Kubik said. "He is a track kid. He is a hard worker in the weight room. He is really strong but we have a group of them who are like that. He is a stocky, strong kid with good speed. He is going to have a pretty good year on of-



Senior quarterback Luke McGuire sets up to pass.

fense we think."

Titus Green will move from second tight end to first tight end this year. However, second tight end is a surprise as Madison plans to use freshman Matthew Curry, Curry and his sophomore brother Maxwell are



**Photos by Glenn Clark** 

Chris Kubik returns to the helm at Madison High School.

sons of New York Jets Linebacker coach Aaron Curry and have moved here from the Pittsburgh area. It is only the third time that Kubik can recall ever starting a freshman on varsity.

"We like some of the things he's done so far in mini-camp and practice," Kubik said. "He is 6-foot, 190. He's a good size kid. You notice him out there. We think he will definitely be able to help us in some spots."

Split end is A.J. Eldridge and slot receiver Carter Ferris are returning starters.

PLEASE SEE MADISON, PAGE 21

# Have a Great Season Dodgers!

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Left: Maxwell Curry, a receiver and defensive back, catches a pass at Madison. Middle: Peter McGuire gets ready to hit the sled. Right: Sahmir Beckwith, sophomore receiver, gets set to catch at pass at Madison.

## **MADISON:** Key match scheduled to start the season

FROM PAGE 20

Maxwell Curry is also expected to see plenty of time at receiver.

Center Alex Arndt and guards Hudson Fleming and James Doehner are all returning starters. Arndt anchors the offensive line with his 6-foot-5, 265-pound build.

"He is a pretty big kid," Kubik said of Arendt. "Last year was his first year starting. He definitely passes the eye test. He is a big strong kid."

Sam Kest and Nolan Tracy are front runners for the tackle spots. Dylan Starr, a senior, is also looking to make his mark. Although he will have to sit out the first Jack Graham will also contribute.

"He is a Madison kid." Kubik said of Graham. "He is coming back for his senior year. He is doing a great job on the offensive line, too. He will give us some depth and some versatility."

Arndt and Fleming will be key returnees on the defensive line as well while Doehner will be called upon at linebacker. Doehner will team up with Melvin on the inside while Nallin or Jacobs will be prominent at outside linebacker. Luke Maguire may also chip in if needed.

There is plenty of experience in the defensive backfield. Izzo and Eldridge are

back Carter Ferris. Maxwell Curry is pushing for the other safety spot.

Senior George Cripe will probably handle the kicking duties as well as serve as quarterback if needed. He is being challenged by junior Mac Russo at both kicking spots.

The schedule will be tough with a key matchup coming almost immediately against Hanover Park. A new pickup is a game against Sparta, a quality program that Madison has no history against.

One of the biggest losses going into the season may be on the coaching staff as assistant Nick Liberato has moved on af-

couple of games, Morris Catholic transfer both returning starters along with corner-ter seven years to be the head coach at Hanover Park. The change makes the annual spirited rivalry game even more interest-

> To replace him, former Madison assistant Dave Snell has returned to the program and Curtis Sallie will now call the defense by himself after sharing the duties with Liberato last year.

> "Me and the kids have a lot of respect for Lib," Kubik said. "He did a great job with us. The bottom line is it's a game we have to win. They are a good team. They have always been a good program and it's the first game we have. We definitely want to lock in and start the season strong."

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973-822-1956 www.hickorytreedeli.com MENDHAM MINUTEMEN

# FLYING UNDER THE RADAR

By JOE HOFMANN

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

MENDHAM - Mendham High School's football team won its first division championship in 20 years last year. But on graduation night ... pfft! ... all the key pieces were

Five thousand yards rushing. Gone. Fifty-four rushing touchdowns. Gone.

No team was torn apart by graduation quite like the Minutemen, who had an eightgame winning streak, swept through the SFC Liberty Blue, and had their best season in a long, long time.

But coach Ethan Jeros sees a ray of light Dell in OT, 36-35. in the new cast of Minutemen. Summer workouts were well attended. The new varsity players worked hard, paid the price, and are raring to go.

And they have a chip on their shoulder: The Minutemen have a we'll-show-you attitude that shined through in the summer months.

A Morris Country sports website indicated that powerful Montville may well be wrapping up the Liberty Blue on Oct. 17.

Montville's opponent that night? Mend-

"We have the type of kid who'll see that and say, 'Oh, no they're not gonna wrap up the division that night," Jeros said.

"We were mauled in graduation but the guys coming up are really excited and understand what happened last year and what our expectations are. We want to fly under the radar but we want to think we have a chance to win every game. And we couldn't

### **MENDHAM** MINUTEMEN

**Head coach:** Ethan Jeros, fifth season.

Assistant coaches: Tony Maglione, Nick Martinez, Jon Leef, Greg Solomon, Mike Fagan, Oliver Kattoura, Sal Specht, Todd Langdon, Dakota Kross

Section: North Group 3

Last year's record: 8-2

**Playoffs:** Lost in the first round to River

Returning starters: 2/2

#### **SCHEDULE**

Aug. 29 at West Morris 7:30 p.m.

Sept. 5 Parsippany Hills 7 p.m.

Sept. 13 at Madison, 2 p.m.

Sept. 19 Dover 7 p.m.

Sept. 26 at Warren Hills 7 p.m.

Oct. 3 Morris Hills 7 p.m.

Oct. 10 Chatham 7 p.m.

Oct. 17 at Montville 6:30 p.m.

Oct. 24 at Randolph 7 p.m.

be more proud. We have had a consistent group showing up all summer for volunteer workouts.

"I'll tell you, our kids are working their butts off. Our numbers are the lowest in five years so we have a lot of guys getting a lot of reps. They are working through it and

PLEASE SEE MENDHAM, PAGE 23



Mendham High School football captains for 2025 are, from left, Shea Craft, Thomas Guido, Jamie Ostaficiuk and Ralph Langone.

# Go MINUTEMEN!

Wishing you a Successful 2025 Season from all of us at the

Observer-Tribune

### **MENDHAM:** 'We need to be ready and that is the plan'

FROM PAGE 22

working hard."

The team returns only two starters but figures to make some noise regardless.

Ralph Langone (6-1, 230) was an all-division caliber defensive lineman and he'll also play on the O-Line this fall.

"He's been an all-division guy for two years," Jeros said. "He has the potential to be All-State if he plays to his capability. He is a hard-working, play making guy and I expect a lot of big plays from him.

"Playing both sides will be new for him. He has played no offense at all until now. He won't be coming off the field, but with him I don't worry about a drop off defensively."

The other returning starter is Thomas Guido, who started at safety and will be playing both ways (safety on defense, plus running back or receiver on offense).

"Talent-wise, he is a kid who could make waves for (all-league) recognition later in the year," Jeros said.

The rest of the team is new, though many of the players did get onto the field quite a bit last year because the Minutemen blew many teams out.

"Some of these guys got some time with our big leads in varsity action," Jeros said. "Some of the games were out of hand and it helps that our upperclassmen groomed this bunch to understand what the expectations are. We are not pushovers any more. We will show up and be a challenge for whoever we play."

Quarterback Rocco Racioppi will be running the triple option, the run-happy offense the team used to have the best running attack in Morris County last year, statistically speaking.

"He's looking great," Jeros said. "We expect big things from him."

Owen Lieberwirth has some experience in the backfield and will be joined by Ryan Kontely (the third and final Kontely brother). Guido and Shea Kraft will also play running back.

Hudson Loures will join Guido at receiver.

Ralph and his brother Jackson will play guard. Chris Montana will play center and David Lomello and Jimmy Gillard will play tackle.



Ethan Jeros is in his fifth season as head coach of the Mendham Minutemen.

On defense, Ralph Langone and Lomello will start at D-End and will flank Gillard and Montana, with Isaac Mejia and Will Manno being the backups on both lines.

Kraft, Lieberwirth and Jamie Ostaficiuk will play linebacker. Guido, Blake Kotarski and Luke Ginattassio are vying for time at safety. Loures and Kontely will play corner.

Jeros hopes the Minutemen have enough to compete in the Liberty Blue.

"Chatham and Montville could be elite," Jeros said. "Warren Hills may not have the numbers they want but they always have tough kids, a good line and skill kids. And I know for a fact that Morris Hills and Par Hills will be improved.

"We need to show up every week. A great way for us to start the season (Aug. 29) is with West Morris, one of the better teams and our rivals. And then we play Par Hills, so we get right into the division. We need to be ready and that is the plan."



Marco Casali takes a handoff at a Mendham High School football practice.



Jamie Ostaficiuk, center, practices his blocking skills.





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**MONTVILLE MUSTANGS** 

# LOOKING TO TAKE IT ALL

By JOE HOFMANN

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

**MONTVILLE** – Montville High School's football team has reached the sectional semifinals each of the last two years.

But that is not good enough, not any-

This year, the Mustangs want it all - and they just might get what they are after.

The team has looked good in the preseason. Players have bought into the team concept.

Coach Rick DeBonta's team is ready for a big year.

"We had a pretty good season last year," DeBonta said. "We loved the senior class. I think we're in a very good spot in terms of attitude toward each other and the team. They are trying to buy into the team perspective. They care about each other and are buying into everything. I'm real excited."

The program hasn't won a divisional championship since coach Gerry Gallagher led them to the Northern Hills Conference-Suburban title in 2006. That, too, is something they are after and they are going for that as well.

Montville is one of the co-favorites in the SFC-Liberty Blue and might well be playing for the league title at co-favorite Chatham on Sept. 13.

One of the team's strengths is an abundance of returnees on defense.

D-Lineman Dante Palladino, a returning two-time all-conference player, returns.



Photos by Ed Ruping

Rick DeBonta, head coach at Montville High School, directs his team through a

He had nine sacks and 19 tackles for loss last year. He'll play either right or left end and must be accounted for.

"He comes hard from both sides," DeBonta said. "He is a powerful kid, fast, and is leading everyone defensively. He brings a lot of energy every day. We are expecting really big things from him."

Nose guard Anthony Agnoli (one sack, six tackles for loss) is another lineman his district), and it's full steam ahead,"

# MONTVILLE

Head coach: Rick DeBonta (10th season) Assistant coaches: Keith Runne, Matt Chierici, Matt Testa, Gabe Rios, Joe Colella, Andrew Vito, Mike Burke, Alec Pensky

Section: North Group III Last year's record: 7-3.

Playoffs: Lost in the sectional semifinals to Pascack Valley, 28-12

**Returning starters:** 5/5

#### **SCHEDULE**

Aug. 28 Sparta, 6:30 p.m. Sept. 5 at Warren Hills, 7 p.m. Sept. 13 at Chatham, 1 p.m. Sept. 19 Roxbury, 6:30 p.m. Sept. 26 Parsippany Hills, 6:30 p.m. Oct. 10 at West Morris, 7:30 p.m. Oct. 17 Mendham 6:30 p.m. Oct. 25 at Morris Hills, 1 p.m.

that must be accounted for.

"Anthony had a great track season and did some great work in the weight room," DeBonta said. "He's an explosive powerful kid and he'll take on double teams.'

Palladino and Agnoli will be joined up front by Alex Husti and Kevin Volpe.

"Husti played sporadically last year, but he had a great wrestling season (Husti won DeBonta said. "He knows his assignments and is aggressive. So if Palladino and Agnoli are double-teamed, that leaves Husti inside, so how do you stop him? Andthen you have Kevin, another kid who got bigger and stronger and is very athletic. He's another good edge rusher."

Diego Naranjo and Zion Cyler are both capable reserves.

The defensive front being so active means standout linebacker R.J. Fardo (11 tackles for loss last year) can roam free to make plays.

"I want our LBs to clean things up," DeBonta said. "Our defensive linemen's job is for the linebackers to not get touched. If we can do that, it'll make Fardo look like a superstar and that is what we want.

"He is tough and our smartest player on the field. He knows the formation and studies the other team."

Clement Hofbauer will line up at outside linebacker.

"Clement is a tough and the most physical kid on the team," DeBonta said.

Tyler Goldman, who can really run, will be another LB. Carlo Maffucci and Shawn Thompson are other linebackers.

The D-Backs will be Ryan Conlan, freshman Andrew Baginski, CJ Tedesco, and Brett Kunkel.

"I think the defense should be good, but the offense will be good as well," DeBonta said.

PLEASE SEE MONTVILLE, PAGE 25



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## **MONTVILLE:** A strong defensive lineup returns

FROM PAGE 24

Jackson Gering will be starting at quarterback in Shotgun Spread.

"He was behind (Mike) Ciullo last year and came out on fire this year," DeBonta said. "He has a good strong arm, has good pocket awareness, good vision of the field, and makes very good decisions. We are excited."

Hofbauer (power) and Goldman (speed) will rotate at running back. Baginski should see some time back there and so should Cyler.

Kunkel is one receiver and others who should see

plenty of opportunities are twin basketball players Joey and Ricky Beyer, both of whom are 6-foot-4. Tedesco will be in the slot, as will Pete Matarazzo.

The O-Line will consist of, from left to right, Husti, Fardo, Luke Gilbert at center, Agnoli, and Volpe.

The Mustangs have a decided advantage in the kicking game with the powerful leg of Dominick Grunke. Jacob Vogt is a capable long snapper.

"We are hoping to get over the hump," DeBonta said. "That is a big thing among the coaches. We had one of the best first weeks of football we have ever had. The kids are locked in and focused on special teams, offense and defense."





**Above left:** Clement Hofbauer carries the ball at a Montville High School practice. **Above right:** Anthony Agnoli practices his blocking skills.



Zion Cyler carries the ball during a drill at Montville High School.

# Go MUSTANGS!

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The Citizen

MORRIS CATHOLIC CRUSADERS

# LOOKING TO TURN IT AROUND

By JOE HOFMANN

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

**DENVILLE** - New Morris Catholic head football coach Dave Albano spent a lot of time around great quarterbacks when he coached at Parsippany Hills - and Crusaders senior QB Ethan Everett fits right in with many of them.

That's great news, because Albano has something concrete to work with in his new post.

"Definitely," said Albano, who coached for 25 years at Par Hills. "He is 6-foot-3, very athletic and with a good strong arm. He is eager to learn. He's a good quarterback. He definitely fits in with the better quarterbacks I have had and (longtime Par Hills offensive coordinator and current Morris Catholic OC) Brian Francis agrees

"Ethan has gone to some camps. He is a Lafayette-Lehigh type quarterback. He's had a tough time here. This will be his fourth system in four years. But he's learning. He's a good one."

Albano guided Par Hills - a longtime underachieving program before he arrived to seven division IGHC-Hills titles and two sectional championships. He coached last season at Randolph.

He is trying to turn around a Crusaders program that has struggled recently.

Things are going well in the early going. "Our first practice is in the books and the kids are excited to be here at Morris Catholic," he said. "They ran around like you'd expect on Day 1. They are very attentive.



Photos by Jim Petrucci

Morris Catholic football captains are, from left, Laguan Worthy, Noah Billeci, Aidan Terrell and Ethan Everett.

We had a very good first practice. We just seeing." had lunch as a team. Now we'll start back in the classroom. It is a learning curve for everyone. Right now, we have one day in the books and I am thrilled with what I am

In the past, Albano and Francis have utilized multiple formations and multiple sets. They won one sectional title with a pass-heavy offense and another one that was run-heavy, so they adapt with whatever they have in order to win.

One thing to remember at Morris Catholic is that the roster includes just 23 players as of now, so Albano may try and slow the pace of things down. He encountered that early on in his coaching career at Group I New Milford before coming to Group 3 Par

The leading runner thus far has been 5-9, 190-pound Aiden Terrell, who looks to be getting the bulk of the carries.

"He is a solid kid who runs a 4.6, so he is kind of explosive," Albano said. "We will ride him. He is a solid football player."

Everett's favorite receivers should come from a group that includes Noah Billeci, twins Dylan and Deacon Moody, and R.J.

"Noah is a good, sure-handed kid, with good speed, he runs good routes, and is a solid, serviceable receiver," Albano said. "Dylan and Deacon Moody are twins. They are two sophomores who are very fast, are quick off the line, and have good hands. R.J. is our Wes Welker. He runs great routes and is shifty with sure hands.

"I love our skill kids, they're very good. They have to play both ways. Our biggest concern is a lack of numbers. We have to make sure they can finish games."

Nick Grabinski will play center and will be surrounded by guards Aidan Gilflan and Isaiah François and tackles Laquon Worthy (6-3, 250) and Carlo Vaccerelli (6-

PLEASE SEE CRUSADERS, PAGE 27



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### **CRUSADERS:** Albano brings years of experience as coach



Dave Albano is in his first year at Morris Catholic after successful stints at Parsippany Hills and Randolph.

## MORRIS CATHOLIC CRUSADERS

Head coach: Dave Albano, first season Assistant coaches: Cosmo Lorusso, Brian Francis, Matt DeFranco, Chris Ramsden. Section: Non-Public Group B Last year's record: 2-7 Playoffs: None Returning starters: 2/2

#### **SCHEDULE**

Sept. 6 at Gloucester Catholic, 11 a.m. Sept. 12 Holy Trinity (NY), 6:30 p.m. Sept. 20 Mahwah at Morris Catholic, p.m.

Oct. 3 at Parsippany, 7 p.m. Oct. 11 Pequannock, 1 p.m. Oct. 17 at Mountain Lakes 7 p.m. Oct. 24 at Madison 1 p.m. Oct. 31 at Hudson Catholic, 7 p.m. FROM PAGE 26

"Nick is solid and a good long snapper and he'll be a solid player for us," Albano said

"Aiden is 215 pounds with good size and good feet. He is a solid player. Isaiah Francois is undersized but he has great feet and we can pull with him.

"Laquan Worthy is recruitable with good feet and he is physical. He'll lead the line. Carlo Vaccerelli is young and inexperienced, but he never misses a day in the weight room."

The defense has some ability. The defensive coordinator is Cosmo Lorusso, who led Pequannock and Roxbury to four sec-

tional titles.

Grabinski, Gilfilan, Worthy and Vaccerelli will play up front and are vying for snaps with Dante Domino.

Pepling and Vincent Cantu will play outside linebacker. Terrell and Francois will play inside linebacker and both can "run like the wind," according to Albano.

The Moody twins will play corner.

"The biggest challenge will be getting them all on and off the field and keeping them healthy," he said. "The players we have are good. We just need to keep them fresh during the games.

"At New Milford, we had 24 kids at one point. The challenges are getting a look team. It's the job of my staff, myself, Brian,

Cos ... it's our job to figure this out.

"I like the kids we have. We have some talented players. But as a staff, we have to keep them fresh. Aiden and Ethan and Loquan and Isaiah on defense can play. We have to figure out how to get through every day."

There is already one casualty but it has nothing to do with the Crusaders. Hope of Chicago, which was supposed to come to Denville to play Morris Catholic on Aug. 30, has cancelled the game. Albano is looking for either a game in Week 0 or later in the season.

As of now, the team will host Gloucester Catholic in Week 1. Morris Catholic beat Gloucester last year, 17-14.



A Morris Catholic quarterback candidate sets up to pass during a pre-season drill.



A Morris Catholic receiver catches a pass at a pre-season practice.

# Go CRUSADERS!



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MORRIS HILLS SCARLET KNIGHTS

# SOPHS MAKING A DIFFERENCE

By JOE HOFMANN

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

**ROCKAWAY** – Morris Hills finished 1-8 the last two years and has gone 2-25 over the last three.

But the cavalry is on the way.

Coach Bruce Campbell sees a talented sophomore class coming in and making a difference.

Already, they are making their presence felt. There is a spark in the summer training camp.

"Overall they're looking good," said Campbell, in his fourth season. "I'm excited. We have a large sophomore class that are highly committed. They have been playing together since second grade with the Rockets. It's been exciting. Although they are only sophomores, they are goodsized with a lot of talent and ability."

Last year was a struggle on both sides of the ball.

The offense scored just 46 points all year and was shut out six times, including going an entire month without scoring a single point.

The defense allowed at least 28 points in every game except two, and allowed at least 41 points six times, including 56 points three times.

The freshman team, meanwhile, scored convincing wins in every game but two (Morris Knolls and Warren

And now many of those kids are up on varsity, ready to make their presence felt.

The program already appears ready to turn the corner. The team competed in a 7-on-7 with Mount Olive, Mendham, Garfield and Newton and performed well on both sides of the ball with the sophomores having a key role this summer.

"Some of the other coaches in the area were impressed with how they played as sophomores," Campbell said. "I know that was in tee shirts and shorts and not with pads. But it was exciting to be competitive.

'We took them to the East Stroudsburg team camp and



Photos by Jim Petrucci

Morris Hills captains are, from left, Robert Studer, Robert Parsons, Tyler Pfarrer, Tyler Disanto, Victor Gallardo and Devin Ginder.

did well. It was exciting to see the amount of participants Scarlet Knights will host neighboring Dover in the seaand we were competitive. It was difficult and challenging, but this group has made me feel positive. Now it's time to see how we do with pads on."

The team will open up with a quad scrimmage with Johnson, Garfield and Millburn and game scrimmage against Whippany Park.

Aug. 28 is circled on the calendar, which is when the

son-opening game for both teams in Week 0.

"They graduate a good senior class, so they have big shoes to fill," Campbell said. "Week 1 we have Chatham and that'll be a challenge. With those first two to open up, we'll see where we stand."

PLEASE SEE SCARLET, PAGE 29





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### **SCARLET:** There are 'big shoes to fill' for this year's team

FROM PAGE 28

The schedule is less daunting. Hills will not face sister school powerhouse Morris Knolls and instead will face rebuilding Parsippany. The Liberty Blue divisional slate will consist of co-favorites Chatham and Montville, Mendham, Parsippany Hills, and Warren Hills. The Scarlet Knights will also face Bergen County's River Dell and Hackettstown (Warren County) in crossover games.

"It'll be a nice balanced schedule with teams replacing a lot of graduating seniors," Campbell said. "I'm excited to see where Morris Hills fits in in the division."

One of the team's key returnees will be middle linebacker-center Tyler DiSanto. "He's a good leader," Campbell said. "He's a great communicator and leader. We are excited to have him lead the way."

Another one to keep an eye on is wide receiver-running back-safety Robert Parsons, who had two interceptions last year.

"He is one of two seniors in the program," Campbell said. "He er but does what is best for the sive end Victor Gallardo, who, went through some difficult seasons and stuck it out."

The other senior is Devin Ginder, who played both as a he played up front on the line. skill player and on the line.

to play on the line." Campbell of the team." said. "He is the ultimate team



Bruce Campbell is in his fourth season at Morris Hills.

team. He is on every special team like DiSanto, is on the school's SCHEDULE and learned a safety position and wrestling team. then with some injuries we had,

"We are excited that those coach said. "He was selfless enough to three have stuck it out and change his number midseason learned new positions for the best

Another key contributor figplayer. He is not always a start- ures to be running back-defen-

"Victor is someone who is physical for how small he is," the

Tyler Pfarrer will line up at quarterback and one of his favorite receivers will be Robert Studer, who is also a solid defensive



## MORRIS HILLS SCARLET KNIGHTS

Head coach: Bruce Campbell, fourth season.

Assistant coaches: Tony Lusardi, Chris Canning, Mike White, Jeff Danyus, Sr., Mark DiGennero, Nicholas Carlotti, Jeff Danyus Jr.

Section: North Group 3 Last year's record: 1-8. Playoffs: None. Returning starters: 2/2

Aug. 28 Dover, 6 p.m. Sept. 6 Chatham, 1 p.m. Sept. 13 Warren Hills 1 p.m. Sept. 19 at Hackettstown, 7 p.m. Sept. 26 at River Dell, 6:30 p.m. Oct. 3 at Mendham, 7 p.m. Oct. 11 Parsippany 1 p.m. Oct. 18 at Parsippany Hills, 7 p.m. Oct. 25 Montville, 1 p.m.

# Go SCARLET KNIGHTS!



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### **MORRIS KNOLLS GOLDEN EAGLES**

# STAYING IN THE MOMENT

By JOE HOFMANN

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

ROCKAWAY - Morris Knolls went through the savage beast known as the SFC Liberty White and didn't lose a single league game last vear.

The stellar group of seniors left its mark on the field (3,613 yards, 41 touchdowns) but the seniors did even more.

They left a gigantic finger print all over the program.

And their memory is felt every day at

Those shadows are mighty long.

"Those guys," coach Bryan Gallagher said, "left a pretty high standard."

The 2025 Golden Eagles will try and meet it.

Gallagher is sorting through the puzzle pieces in an effort to try and put it all together.

"Guys are working hard," he said. "It's tough to tell where we are at. Scrimmages well see some competition. We definitely have guys who are committed and worked hard all summer, that is for sure.

"We have a very competitive group of guys that don't shy away from hard work. They love football. They seem excited to be there every day. We lost some tremendous skill players between Justin Hanson, Bobby Brickner, Jayden Koger, and Chris Kaiser. The vast majority of our points and touchdowns graduated, but it is certainly a challenge for the kids doing everything they can to step into those



**Photos by Ed Ruping** 

CJ Rodman, right, is pursued by Lucas Zuravnsky at Morris Knolls.

tial to do those things. Those guys set a pretty good standard and it is neat to have guys build on what those great kids did last year."

The quarterback position is a battle between Kian Lago, Ryan McDonald, and Gavin Toland.

"They each bring their own thing,"

shoes and we have guys with the poten- Gallagher said. "Ki is the senior and has very good speed. Ryan is a junior who can throw and run well. Gavin, of the three, has the most varsity experience.

"In our semifinal playoff game (a victory over Mount Olive), Kaiser got hurt a little and Gavin filled in and led us to a couple of touchdown drives. He is a very interesting player, an all-around tremendous football player. He is ready to play wherever you want.

"The beautiful thing about these three kids is, and this goes back to last year's seniors, there is a culture in place – or at least building - where they support each other. It is not a cutthroat thing. When one person does something good, the other two let him know."

Luke Shivas will play fullback. Lucas Zuravnsky is another candidate. Jaylin Jones will play halfback and so will Nick Wong, Timmy Wiedman, or Toland.

The line should be strong with returning center Dean Cervona, returning tackle Derek Reinhardt, guards Peyton Ralston and Anthony Evaristo, and either Jake Kritz and Michael Demiss at the other tackle.

Max Minervini, Chase Bloete, Toland, or Aiden Kaintz will play receiver.

"They have all worked really hard at it," Gallagher said. "We have moved at a faster pace. We have some young guys coming in and guys in new positions."

The defense was sturdy last year and returns eight starters.

Minervini, Everisto, Ralston Cervona and Reinhardt will play on the defensive

Wiedman, Shivas, and Zuravnsky will play inside linebacker and Toland, Wong, McDonald will play outside linebacker

Bloete, Lago, Kaintz, and Adam Laws will play corner.

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### **KNOLLS:** 'Competitive group of guys that don't shy away from hard work'

FROM PAGE 30

Jones will be the safety. It was his dramatic interception in the end zone on West Morris' twopoint conversion try that sealed the Golden Eagles' 27-26 season-opening victory.

"We're looking forward to the season," Gallagher said. "It is crazy the level of competition in our league. You get sick of saying it, but look at our division. Last year

had a couple of plays go our way against West Morris and Morristown (35-28 Knolls win) or we could have lost to them.

"The win over Mount Olive (27-7) and the win over Randolph (36-18) was not indicative of the final scores. We pulled away to win, but into the third quarter they were up for grabs.

"So relaying the message to the kids was that last year is an-

a great, great season for us, but we cient history. All it does is it puts the target on our back. You need to truly be focused on one day at a time. That approach worked for us last year, but everything was so new (Gallagher had replaced legendary 49-year coach Bill Regan), and there was no time to think about playoffs or anything down the line.

"Guys need to stay in the moment and so far, this group has done that."



Bryan Gallagher is in his second season as head coach of the Morris Knolls Golden Eagles.

## MORRIS KNOLLS GOLDEN EAGLES

Head coach: Bryan Gallagher (second season).

Assistant coaches: Pete Cervona, Chris Cervona, Jim Pisciotto, Pete Llaneza, Mike Beach, Dave File, Anthony Vasile, Benjy Eaton,

Section: North Group 4 Last year's record: 10-1

Playoffs: Lost in Section 1, Group IV finals to Ramapo, 35-28

**Returning starters: 3/8** 

#### **SCHEDULE**

Aug. 29 vs. Bayonne at West Orange, 4 p.m.

Sept. 6 West Morris, 1 p.m.

Sept. 12 at Bridgewater, 6 p.m.

Sept. 20 Randolph 1 p.m.

Sept. 26 at Roxbury, 7 p.m.

Oct. 4 Mount Olive 2 p.m.

Oct. 11 Clifton 1 p.m.

Oct. 17 at Morristown, 6:30 p.m.

Oct. 25 West Essex 1 p.m.





Left: Gavin Toland runs through a drill at Morris Knolls. Right: Ryan McDonald practices at Morris Knolls High School.

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# **A LOOK BACK AT 2024**

#### By JOE HOFMANN

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Before we move on to the 2025 high school football season in the New Jersey Hills Media Group area, let us look back at 2024.

What a year it was!

Eight area schools won titles of some kind, including:

1. **Bernards**, which finished 3-0 in the Big Central Conference's Patriot Gold Division under coach Jon Simoneau. The Mountaineers won their first 11 games of the year and then lost in the North 1, Group 2 sectional final to Shabazz, 28-14.

2. **Ridge**, which was 4-0 in the BCC-American Silver under coach Andy West and was a sectional semifinalist in North 1, Group IV, losing to eventual champion Ramapo, 28-27.

3. **West Essex**, which was 4-0 in the Super Football Conference-Patriot White division under Chris Benacquista and advanced to the North 2, Group 3 final before losing to Old Tappan, 41-13.

4. **Hanover Park**, which beat Glen Rock, 24-3, and captured its first sectional championship since 1990. Coach Dan Fulton's Hornets swept through the SFC American White to win the league championship.

5. Morris Knolls, which reached the sectional finals for the first time since 2005 before losing to Ramapo, 35-28. First-year coach Bryan Gallagher's Golden Eagles went undefeated in the rugged SFC-Liberty White.

6. **Delbarton**, which stunned DePaul and came away with the SFC-United White with a 4-0 record under coach Brian Bowers. DePaul was arguably New Jersey's second-best team coming into the game behind Bergen Catholic.

7. **Mendham**, led by coach Ethan Jeros, went undefeated in the SFC-Liberty Blue (5-0) and won its first league title since 2004.

8. **Boonton**, led by first-year coach Sean Norton, defeated Wallkill Valley and finished tied with the Sussex school in the SFC-National Blue. Both had 4-1 records.

### **Quarterbacks Ruled**

Seldom was there as many top-flight performances at quarterback as there was in 2024, including:

• Bernards' Nolan Walsh was downright spectacular in his first varsity



**Photo by Ed Ruping** 

Morris Knolls High School quarterback Chris Kaiser goes over a Mount Olive defender in the semifinals of the North Jersey Section 1 Group 4 tournament in 2024.

season, going 110 for 178 for 1,951 yards passing with 18 touchdowns as the Mountaineers won their first 11 games and reached the sectional finals in North 1, Group II.

• Morris Knolls' Chris Kaiser only threw for 331 yards, but he was one of the Golden Eagles' most valuable performers and was one of the best running/option QBs the school has seen in a long time. He was 66 for 833 rushing (15 TDs) and orchestrated the team's intricate spread

option running attack. Other QBs from Morris who orchestrated running games beautifully were Boonton's Metin Ahmedi and Mendham's Cam Parrinello. Neither had Kaiser's running yardage but quarterbacked their schools to division crowns.

• Hanover Park's Joey Borrello had a big season passing (123 for 170, 1,679 yards, 19 TDs, 6 INTs) and ran the ball effectively (146 for a team-leading 510 yards, 11 TDs) in helping to lead the Hornets to their first sectional title since 1990.

• Chatham's Will Allen (157 for 270, 2,022, 17 TDs, 82 for 336 rushing, 5 TDs) helped lead one of Morris County's surprise teams. Last year, Chatham won its first playoff game since 2015.

• Delbarton's Jadon Prinzivalli (140 for 229, 2,083 yards, 16 TDs) performed superbly against one of the most demanding schedules in all of New Jersey.

• Mount Olive's Jake Asbury (133 for 205, 1,591 yards, 17 TDs, 47 for 157 rushing, 4 TDs) helped the Marauders reach the sectional semifinals.

• Randolph had a bit of a down year last season but Jackson Magley (112 for 177, 1,288 yards, 13 TDs) proved himself to be an able passer in the Liberty White, the best public division in Morris-Sussex by a wide margin.

• Montville's QB Michael Ciullo had a strong year throwing the football (113 for 191, 1,334 yards, 10 TDs, 3 INTs) and ran well when needed (77 for 321, 4 TDs) as the Mustangs reached the sectional semifinals

• Morristown-Beard's Ryan Novak played in a little anonymity (The Crimson play an independent schedule) but he deserves some kudos after a season in which he was 127 for 180 for 1,642 yards and 21 touchdowns while throwing just four INTs.

• Pingry QB Ryan Moye had a brilliant season passing and running for the Big Blue, going 125 for 225 for 1,926 yards and 25 TDs throwing and rushing 49 times for 349 more yards and four TDs.

• Hunterdon Central's Drew Cella was 100 for 201 passing for 1,352 yards and 14 TDs and rushed for an additional 208 yards and three more TDs.

• Voorhees' Sam Meekings was 89 for 169 for 1,327 yards and 16 TDs.

• North Hunterdon's Nick Ramaci was a dual threat, passing 94 times for 170 yards and 1,150 yards and 11 TDs and running 68 times for another 492 yards and three TDs.

# COACHING CAROUSEL KEEPS TURNING

By JOE HOFMANN

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Coaching vacancies popped up at several New Jersey Hills Media Group area schools this off-season.

Morris Catholic (Dave Albano), Whippany Park (Greg Gruzdis) and West Essex (Dan Fulton) turned to veterans, Hanover Park (Nick Liberato) and Randolph (Ryan Gresik) will be led by rookies.

Here is a look at each school.

1. Morris Catholic: The Crusaders turned to Albano, who did his best work at Parsippany Hills before coaching last vear at Randolph. He replaced Rae Oliver, who left after one season. The Crusaders were 2-7 last year.

Albano led Randolph to the playoffs last year. Before that, he turned Par Hills into a strong program, leading the Vikings to two sectional championships (2014, 2019), seven sectional finals, and six IHC-Hills divisional championships. For many years, the Vikings had been irrelevant.

Last year, Albano taught at Par Hills and coached at Randolph and found the situation difficult. But he has since retired from Par Hills and will teach at Morris Catholic. Albano is excited to have the opportunity to spend the entire day working with the athletes he will coach.

Albano tailors his team to the talent available. In 2014, Par Hills won a section with running back Angelo Gallego rushing 40 times for 192 yards to beat Cranford, 20-13.

Five years later, QB J.D. Breslauer threw five TD passes in a 38-21 win over West Essex in a sectional final.

Albano has already brought onto his new staff Cosmo Lorusso, who won a pair of sectional crowns at both Pequannock and Roxbury. Lorusso is a guidance counselor at Morris Catholic and had coached as an assistant at the school under John Hack before last year.

Albano and Lorusso are two of the best coaches ever in Morris County, as well as North Jersey, history.

Lorusso will run the Crusaders defense. In 2012, he built a defense that shut down Pascack Valley's high-powered passing attack in a sectional final. The Bergen County school was ranked in the Top 20 because of its ability to throw – but couldn't crack the Gaels defense in a 14-6 Roxbury win to win North 1, Group 4.

Now Albano (and highly regarded assistant Brian Francis, an offensive guru) gets a chance to work in tandem with Lorusso. The possibilities are definitely in- and wound up coaching under Albano triguing and it all begins in Denville on Aug. 29, when Hope (Ill.) pays the Crusad-

2. Whippany Park: The Wildcats will look to longtime Waldwick-Midland Park coach Greg Gruzdis, who put a soso Waldwick program on the map. Waldwick was known more for soccer before Gruzdis came along in 2010. He hopes to bring the Wildcats into prominence. He replaced Luke Maginnis, who was 7-13 in his two years and is now an assistant at FDU-Madison. The Whippany program was 29-54 in the last nine seasons under Maginnis and Don Morgenroth.

Gruzdis spent last year as an assistant to Chatham coach Evan Picariello, whose Cougars finished 7-3, won a playoff game at Wayne Valley, and were arguably the surprise team in Morris County.

Gruzdis hopes to bring a winner to Whippany, whose only sectional title was in 1980.

Waldwick struggled for many years until Gruzdis arrived. During his 14 years, the school went 88-47. The five years before he arrived, the program went through three different coaches and they combined to go 15-35. In his first year, Gruzdis guided the school to a 5-5 record its first winning season since 2004.

Soon, Waldwick found itself in the hunt for the playoffs and, sometimes, in the conversation for a sectional title.

Gruzdis will run what he calls the Modern Wing T at Whippany. It is a more advanced form of the time-honored Delaware Wing-T with more emphasis on the passing game.

It was a winning recipe at Waldwick, which went to 20-4 and back-to-back sectional finals in 2013-14, losing to Westwood both times.

Gruzdis will have the Wildcats in an attack mode out of the 4-3 on defense. In addition, he'll bring his own wrinkle to special teams as well.

Gruzdis and Whippany will put it all on display at Parsippany Aug. 29. The team will travel to Glen Ridge a week later and open its SFC-National Blue slate at home against defending co-division champion Boonton Sept. 12.

3. West Essex: The Knights have one of the most consistent programs in all of the area and hope to keep things moving with the addition of Fulton, who led Hanover Park to its second state championship in school history and first since 1990.

Fulton played for Albano at Par Hills

and at Whippany Park before coming to Hanover. He led the Hornets to a pair of division crowns in his seven years. He was 40-28 in his seven years at Hanover, including 17-5 the last two years.

Fulton replaced highly successful coach Chris Benacquista, who led the West Essex program to a 107-34 record since taking over for Dave Droziock after the 2010 season. Under Benacquista, the Knights won three sectional championships and more often than not found themselves in playoff and divisional rac-

Interestingly, Droziock left coaching West Essex so that he could watch his son, David, play for current Mount Olive coach Brian O'Connor at Wayne Valley. Drozjock would go on to become the school's AD. Benacquista's son, CJ. meanwhile, is an up-and-coming lineman in Wayne and Chris Benacquista originally dreamed about simply being an assistant to Roger Kotlarz (the one-time Dover coach).

But Kotlarz resigned to become a senior analyst with the Marist University football team after being the winningest coach in Wayne Valley history.

So Benacquista applied for Kotlarz's vacancy and was hired by AD Jason Car-

4. Hanover Park: If the name Liberato is familiar to Hanover Park fans, it should be. John Liberato coached the team for seven years in the 1990s. Liberato's son, Nick, was hired to replace Fulton, who took the West Essex job after leading Hanover to the school's first sectional championship in 34 years.

It has been an amazing climb to prominence for Nick Liberato, who was the Hornets waterboy while his dad was the head coach. John Liberato has come full circle as well. He will return to the Hanover sidelines as his son's offensive coordinator. Longtime Hanover assistant Dan Gregory will also be on staff.

Nick Liberato played on Summit's undefeated state sectional championship team in 2012 – coached by his dad - and played football for one year at Sacred Heart and then transferred to Kean. During his junior year at Kean, he returned to Summit, where he began his coaching career under Kevin Kostibos (who played for John Liberato at Hanover). He also coached for one year under John Power at Morristown. He graduated at Kean and then worked for the last seven years at Madison under the highly respected Chris Kubik.

Liberato had been the Dodgers defensive coordinator since 2022. So he has learned under the guidance of such successful coaches as his father, Kubik, and Kostibos.

5. Randolph: Rvan Gresik has moved up from assistant to head coach. He has been an assistant to Will Nahan and Albano, two outstanding coaches.

The rookie coach assisted for four years at Randolph, which clearly has the most tradition of the four Morris schools that filled a coaching vacancy.

Few high school sports in programs in Morris County carry the same historical weight as Randolph football. From 1986 to 1994, the Rams won five straight sectional titles, appeared in nine straight sectional finals, and was one of New Jersey's premier football programs.

The team won the 1990 North 2, Group IV sectional championship in stunning fashion with a last-second field goal to defeat Montclair for its then-state-record 49th straight victory. Less than a month earlier, legendary coach John Bauer passed away after a longtime illness and was replaced by his son, John Jr., who led the team to the win over Montclair and then four straight sectional championship-game berths.

During his time at Randolph, Gresik has worked on both the offensive and defensive sides of the ball. He was a great quarterback for Tom Brennan at Newton and then excelled calling signals at William Paterson, where he was named to the school's Hall of Fame and where he became an assistant coach after graduat-

After a couple of years at William Paterson, Nahan tried bringing Gresik on staff several times but was unsuccessful. Finally. Gresik came aboard as wide receivers coach in 2021 and then was elevated to offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach for two more years.

Nahan moved on to an assistant coaching position at High Point. When Albano came along, he moved Gresik to defense as co-defensive coordinator, so Gresik is now well-rounded and has coached on both sides of the ball.

Gresik is known as an outstanding teacher, a developer of quarterbacks, a passing game aficionado, and spreading the ball around offensively. Look for Gresik to bring the up-tempo, Multiple Spread to Randolph.







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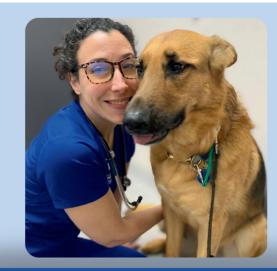
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# THE 2025 SCHEDULE

**FOOTBALL 2025** 

Week-by-week Football Sched-

Times and dates are subject to change

### Week 0

### Thursday, Aug. 28

Voorhees at Orange, 6 Hunterdon Central at North Hunterdon, 7 Pingry at Millburn, 7 Dover at Morris Hills, 6

#### Friday, Aug. 29

Moorestown at Watchung Hills, Randolph at Teaneck, 6 Summit at Morristown, 6:30 Cranford at Bernards, 7 Roxbury at Parsippany Hills, 7 Sparta at Montville, 7 Old Tappan at West Essex, 7 Mountain Lakes at Weequahic,

Whippany Park at Parsippany, 7

Mendham at West Morris, 7:30

### Saturday, Aug. 30

Delbarton at St. Edward's Lakes, 7 (Ohio), 1 Dover at Morris Hills, 1

### Week 1

### Friday, Sept. 5

Randolph at Morristown, 6:30 Mountain Lakes at Pequannock, 6:30

Woodbridge at Watchung Hills,

Parsippany at Boonton, 7 Roxbury at Mount Olive, 7 Parsippany Hills at Mendham. Friday, Sept. 19

Montville at Warren Hills, 7 Vernon at Dover, 7 Wayne Hills at West Essex, 7 Voorhees at JFK-Iselin, 7 Madison at Hanover Park, 7 Caldwell at Passaic Valley, 7 North Hunterdon at Colonia, 7 St. Joseph (Metuchen) at Ridge,

Hunterdon Central at Monroe,

### Saturday, Sept. 6

Morris Catholic at Gloucester Catholic, 11

Poly Prep at Morristown-Beard,

Bernards at Hillside, 1 Delbarton at Malvern Prep

West Morris at Morris Knolls, 1 Chatham at Morris Hills, 1 Whippany Park at Glen Ridge, 1 Pingry at MKA, 2

### Week 2

### Friday, Sept. 12

Morris Knolls at Bridgewater, 6 Voorhees at J.P. Stevens, 6 Holy Trinity (N.Y.) at Morris Catholic, 7

Boonton at Whippany Park, 7 Watchung Hills at North Hunterdon, 7

Phillipsburg at Hunterdon Central. 7

Mount Olive at Randolph, 7 Ridge at Hillsborough, 7 Sparta at Roxbury, 7 Vernon at Parsippany Hills, 7 Delaware Valley at Bernards,7 West Milford at Dover, 7 West Essex at Caldwell, 7 Hanover Park at Mountain

Morristown at West Morris,

### Saturday, Sept. 13

MKA at Morristown-Berard, 12 Msgr Farrell (NY) at Delbarton, 1

Montville at Chatham, 1 Mendham at Madison, 2 Warren Hills at Morris Hills, 1

### Week 3

Morristown-Beard at Hopkins School (Conn.), 6:30 Watchung Hills at Linden, 7 Boonton at Hopatcong, 7 Glen Ridge at Hanover Park, 7 North Hunterdon at Montgomerv, 7

Bernards at Voorhees, 7 Mountain Lakes at Lenape Val- Brunswick, 7

Roxbury at Montville, 7 Whippany Park at Kinnelon, 7 Randolph at Morris Knolls, 7 Morris Hills at Hackettstown, 7 Morristown at Clifton, 7 Chatham at Mount Olive, 7

Dover at Mendham, 7 Madison at Cedar Grove, 7 West Essex at Lakeland, 7 Westwood at Caldwell, 7 Ridge at Phillipsburg, 7 Hunterdon Central at Bridge-

water, 7 Warren Hills at West Morris,

### Saturday, Sept. 20

Mahwah at Morris Catholic, 1 St. Peter's Prep at Delbarton, 1

### Week 4

### Friday, Sept. 26

Morris Hills at River Dell, 6 Parsippany Hills at Montville,

Dalton (NY) at Morris- Week 6 town-Beard, 6:30

Bridgewater at Ridge, 7 Mount Olive at Morristown. 6:30

Rahway at North Hunterdon, 7 Watchung Hills at Montgom-

J.P. Stevens at Bernards, 7 Caldwell at Wayne Hills, 7 Whippany Park at Jefferson, 7 Boonton at Mountain Lakes, 7 Hanover Park at Parsippany, 7 Chatham at Livingston, 7 Voorhees at Delaware Valley, 7 Morris Knolls at Roxbury, 7 Lakeland at Dover, 7 West Morris at Randolph, 7 Mendham at Warren Hills, 7 West Essex at Nutley, 7 Union at Hunterdon Central, 7

### Saturday, Sept. 27

Seton Hall Prep at Delbarton, 1 Lenape Vallev at Madison, 1 Xavier (NY) at Pingry, 3

#### Week 5

### Friday, Oct. 3

Morristown at Old Bridge, 6:30 Caldwell at Cedar Grove, 7 Hunterdon Central at East

Bernards at South Plainfield, 7 North Hunterdon at Monroe, 7 South Brunswick at Watchung Hills, 7

North Warren at Whippany

Pequannock at Hanover Park, 7

Dover at Sparta, 7 Randolph at Warren Hills, 7 West Morris at Parsippany Hills, 7

Morris Catholic at Parsippa-

Morris Hills at Mendham, 7 Passaic Valley at West Essex, 7 Madison at Mountain Lakes, 7 Kinnelon at Boonton, 7 North Plainfield at Voorhees, 7

### Saturday, Oct. 4

Roxbury at Chatham, 1 Delbarton at Pope John, 1 Mount Olive at Morris Knolls, 2 Ridge at Union, 2 Morristown-Beard at St. Luke's (Conn), 3:30

### Friday, Oct. 10

Watchung Hills at Rahway, 6 Shabazz at Caldwell, 7 Hanover Park at Jefferson, 7 Boonton at North Warren, 7 Somerville at North Hunterdon, 7

Pascack Hills at Dover, 7 Morristown at Elizabeth, 7 Chatham at Mendham, 7 Vernon at Mount Olive, 7 Randolph at Roxbury, 7 Parsippany Hills at Warren Hills, 7

Hunterdon Central at Ridge, 7 Montville at West Morris, 7:30

### Saturday, Oct. 11

King (Conn.) at Morristown-Beard, 1

Pequannock at Morris Catholic, 1

Bernards at Summit, 1 Voorhees at Gov. Livingston, 1 Parsippany at Morris Hills, 1 Sparta at Madison, 1 Whippany Park at Wallkill Val-

Clifton at Morris Knolls, 1

### Week 7

### Friday Oct. 17

Morris Catholic at Mountain

Madison at Pequannock, 6:30 Morris Knolls at Morristown,

North Brunswick at Ridge, 7

Old Bridge at Hunterdon Central, 7

Elizabeth at Watchung Hills, 7 Caldwell at Millburn, 7 Gov. Livingston at Bernards, Wallkill Valley at Boonton, 7 Morristown-Beard at Pingry, 7 East Brunswick at North Hunt-

erdon, 7 Hopatcong at Whippany Park, 7 Jefferson at Dover, 7 Wayne Valley at Mount Olive, 7 Orange at Randolph, 7 West Morris at Roxbury, 7 Mendham at Montville, 7 Hanover Park at West Essex, 7

### Saturday, Oct. 18

Hillside at Voorhees, 7

Delbarton at Bergen Catholic, 1 Morris Hills at Parsippany Warren Hills at Chatham, 1

### Week 8

### Friday Oct. 24

Roxbury at Morristown, 6:30 Nutley at Caldwell, 7 Somerville at Watchung Hills, 7 Carteret at Bernards, 7 High Point at Whippany Park, 7 Boonton at Cedar Grove, 7 Newton at Mountain Lakes, 7 North Hunterdon at Voorhees,

Weequahic at Hanover Park, 7 Dover at Kittatinny, 7 Mendham at Randolph, 7 Morris Catholic at Madison, 7 Hillsborough at Hunterdon Central, 7

Mount Olive at West Morris,

### Saturday, Oct. 25

DePaul at Delbarton, 1 Parsippany Hills at Chatham, 1 Montville at Morris Hills, 1 West Essex at Morris Knolls, 1 Ridge at Westfield, 1

### Week 9

### Friday, Oct. 31

Morris Catholic at Hudson Catholic, 7

#### Saturday, Nov. 1

Paramus Catholic at Delbarton, 1

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### OFFENSE MOVED THE NEEDLE

By JOE HOFMANN

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Bernards High quarterback Nolan Walsh was a mere sophomore last year, but you'd have had a hard time telling that to the Mountaineers' opponents.

Walsh played like a seasoned veteran and made Bernards fans forget three-year starter Connor Laverty as he helped lead the Mountaineers to an 11-1 season, a Big Central Conference Patriot Gold championship, and a sectional final berth.

Walsh was 110 for 178 passing for 1,951 yards and 18 touchdowns as the team won its first 11 games before losing in the sectional finals to Shabazz in North 1, Group II, 28-14.

Bernards and Walsh had several other weapons on a balanced offense, including running backs Patrick Carlisle (136 for 762 rushing, 10 TDs) and Logan Stevens (88 for 606 rushing, 10 TDs, 21 for 315 receiving, 2 TDs).

Those three will lead an explosive unit that is led up front by linemen Finn Osborne and Justin Simpson.

There is a wealth of offensive talent in the New Jersey Hills Media Group area. Here are some of the names to keep an eye on.

Sam Meekings, QB, Voorhees – Meekings (89 for 169, 1,327 yards, 16 TDs) moved the ball through the air last fall and the Vikings hope he can open things up once again this year.

Jackson Magley, QB, Randolph – Magley was 112 for 177 passing for 1,288 yards and 13 touchdowns (25 for 168 as a runner for another two TDs) and is arguably the best quarterback in Morris County to start out 2025.

Jake Long, QB, West Essex – Long (70 for 297 rushing, 2 TDs, 66 for 118, 1,178 yards, 9 TDs passing) ran the Knights Wing-T beautifully and he hopes to orchestrate the offense just as well for new coach Dan Fulton.

**Drew Cella, QB, Hunterdon Central** – The Red Devils finished 4-8 last year and hope to make strides with Cella (100 for 201, 1,352 yards, 14 TDs passing, 3 TDs rushing) at the controls.

Nick Ramaci, QB, North Hunterdon – Ramaci (94 for 170, 1,150 yards, 11 TDs) had a big junior year for the Lions and hopes to make a bigger impact this fall.

**Ryan Moye, QB, Pingry** – Moye (125 for 225, 1,926 yards, 25 TDs) had a monstrous year passing the ball for the Big Blue and he found the time to stand out in the running game (49 for 349, 4 TDs).

Ethan Merritt, QB, Morris Catholic – First-year Crusaders coach Dave Albano coached some great quarterbacks at Parsippany Hills down through the years and he believes Merritt is on that same level.

Brandon Giangeruso, QB, Whippany Park – The Wildcats hope to turn things around with Giangeruso behind center. He was 80 for 165 for 927 yards and seven TDs last year. He is also a weapon with his feet as a runner (78 for 422, 5 TDs) and as a kicker (4 for 4 kicking field goals, 12 for 12 on extra points).

Luke McGuire, QB, Madison – The Dodgers went on a



Photo by Rich Mariani

Quarterback Nolan Walsh of Bernards High School is back for his junior season after leading the Mountaineers to an 11-1 record as a sophomore.

five-game winning streak and went to the playoffs and McGuire was one of the leaders in the air (48 for 88, 657 yards, 8 TDs) and on the ground (71 for 245 rushing 4 TDs)

Nick Lagunowich, WR, Chatham – The Cougars were arguably Morris County's surprise team last year and one of the reasons for that was the spark Lagunowich (53 for 737, six TDs) gave the team as a sophomore.

Joey Sommer, WR, Randolph – The Rams always have a group of sure-handed receivers and Sommer is one of the latest. He caught 44 passes for 659 yards and five touchdowns last year.

Matt Tufari, WR, Delbarton – Playing against North Jersey Parochial powerhouses on a weekly basis didn't stop Tufari (20 for 356, 4 TDs) from having a big year last year.

**Jack Kovacs, WR, Hanover Park** – The Hornets won their first sectional title since 1990 and had a star-studded group last year. If defenses left Kovacs alone, he

made them pay to the tune of 24 catches for 338 yards and two TDs.

**Darien lannacone, WR, Hanover Park** – Iannacone was a big-play man for the Hornets in their historic season (first sectional crown in 44 years) as he turned nine of his catches into five TDs.

Jasiah Brown, WR, Morristown – Brown is electric and helps the Colonials in many ways. He caught 25 passes for 611 yards and six TDs last year. He also returned three kickoffs for touchdowns.

**Cole O'Connor, RB, North Hunterdon** – The LIons look to have a strong running game with the likes of O'Connor (111 for 622 yards, 8 TDs in the backfield).

Matteo Tramutola, RB, Voorhees – Tramutola led the Vikings ground game with 195 carries for 1,258 yards and 17 TDs. He'll be one of Voorhees' building blocks this fall.

Carson Fitch, RB, Mountain Lakes – Fitch was a beast in the Herd's Delaware Wing-T and was 133 for 849 with 10 TDs, mostly between the tackles.

Massimo Corvelli, RB, Mountain Lakes – While Fitch was Mr. Inside for the Herd, Corvelli was Mr. Outside to the tune of 117 for 805 and seven TDs.

Oscar Speranza, RB, Morristown-Beard – The Crimson will look to the all-around ability of Speranza (66 for 343, 4 rushing TDs, 31 for 485 receiving, 6 TDs).

Giovanni Velez, RB, Hunterdon Central – HC has a solid runner in Velez (181 for 794, 6 TDs) to get things moving on offense.

James Mongno, WR, Hunterdon Central – Mongno (47 for 687, 7 TDs) was a big weapon last year and looks to improve on those numbers in 2025.

Jase Catullo, OL, Chatham – When the Cougars needed a big play last year, they often looked to Catullo (6-3, 250), who has already drawn looks from the Patriot League. His dad played college football at Auburn, so the genes are there.

**Hudson Flemming, OL, Madison** – The Dodgers improved as the 2024 season went along with Fleming leading the way in the trenches. He is one of the top returning linemen in Morris County.

**GianMarco Canziani, OL, Hanover Park** – The Hornets have an established lineman to build around in Canziani, who was one of the lead blockers for the sectional champion Hornets last year.

**Bradyn Brown, OL, Dover** – The 6-6, 255-pound Brown began realizing his potential by being named first-team All-Patriot Red last fall by the league's coaches.

**Dominick Grunke, PK, Montville** – Grunke just might be Morris County's best kicker this year after showing off what he could do as a sophomore, when he was 7 for 8 kicking field goals (with a long of 39 yards).

Noah Ochab, PK, Bernards – Ochab was 5 for 10 kicking field goals last year (with a long of 48 yards) and 32 of 33 kicking extra points.

Others to watch: Alex Finkelstein, RB, Pingry; Ja'Mar White, WR, Pingry; Adam Sepe, QB, Caldwell; Elvis Nikolla, OL, Caldwell; Mike Lozito, RB, West Essex; Nick Vasquez, WR, Hunterdon Central; Antonio Sauchelli, WR, North Hunterdon.

### DEFENSE DID IT

By JOE HOFMANN

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Montville's Dante Palladino, Mendham's Ralph Langone, and Bernards' Thomas Diemar made a home for themselves on the defensive line last year and in their opponent's backfield.

All three were terrors up front.

Palladino registered 57 tackles and almost half of them were for loss. He rang up nine sacks and 19 tackles for losses and helped Montville reach the sectional semifinals. He forced a fumble, recovered two, and returned one fumble for a touchdown.

Langone, meanwhile, was a big factor in the Minutemen winning their first divisional title of any kind in 20 years. In 10 games, he had 71 total tackles, including 12 for loss and 4 ½ sacks. He also caused a fumble.

Bernards' offense scored 28 or more points nine times last year and Diemar (64 tackles, 18 ½ for loss, 10 sacks) was unstoppable in leading the defense.

Here are some other defensive players to watch in the New Jersey Hills Media Group area:

Azaad Parks, DL, Hanover Park – Parks (38 tackles, 6 sacks, 3 tackles for loss, 1 forced fumble, 2 fumble recoveries) was a handful for opposing offenses. He was one of the top defenders on one of the best Hornet teams in school history.

Holden Gillespie, DL, Mountain Lakes Gillespie was almost unblockable at times and commanded double teams but still had 60 tackles, including two sacks and 12 behind the line.

James Giammanco, DL, Mount Olive – The hulking Giammanco (6-4, 260) couldn't be stopped up front and helped lead the Marauders with 70 tackles, including 6 ½ sacks, and 18 behind the line. He also had two forced fumbles, recovered two, and blocked two kicks.

Tommy Borgia, DL, West Morris - The Princeton-bound Borgia will be entering his fourth year as a starter for the formidable Wolfpack and keeps getting better and better, as evidenced by his 92 tackles, including 21 for loss, and 10 sacks last year.

Timmy Weidman, DL, Morris Knolls Weidman (38 tackles, two forced fumbles, one sack, eight tackles for loss) was a beast up front for the Golden Ea-



**HOLDEN GILLESPIE** 

gles, who swept through the stacked Lakes. SFC Liberty White undefeated.

Max Minervini, DL, Morris Knolls -Minervini (50 tackles, two safeties, seven tackles for loss last year) will combine with Weidman to give the Golden Eagles one of the area's top defensive lines.

A.J. Melo, DE, Hunterdon Central -The Red Devils would like to contend in the Big Central Conference American Silver's and hope that Melo (five sacks, four tackles for loss, 26 tackles) can lead the defensive line.

David Thornbourn, DL, Watching Hills - The Warriors lost a lot to graduation and hope that Thornbourn (42 tackles. four sacks, seven tackles for loss) can lead an inexperienced team.

Michael Sclafani, LB, Delbarton - Sclafani (60 tackles, two tackles for loss, one fumble recovery) was one of the best linebackers in the stacked SFC-White Division, one of the best in all of New Jersey.

Jack Bronico, LB, Mountain Lakes -The Herd reached the sectional semifinals after an injury-plagued season and Bronico was a big factor with 41 tackles, including four sacks and 5 ½ tackles for loss. His dad is a longtime coach at Whippany, P-Burg, and Mountain



**LUKE SHIVAS** 

James Doehner, LB, Madison - Doehner was an active member of the Dodgers defense last fall, when he registered 3 ½ sacks and 2 ½ tackles for loss among his 37 tackles and helped spearhead a dynamic defense during the team's stretch run to the playoffs after an 0-3 start.

RJ Fardo, LB, Montville - Fardo had a whopping 97 tackles for the Mustangs, including 11 tackles for loss. Liberty Blue opponents will have their hands full with Fardo this fall.

Jake Brough, LB, Morristown - The Colonials are making inroads in the SFC-Liberty WHite and Brough (47 tackles, nine for loss, three sacks) will be one of the headliners of the defense.

Hunter Bigham, LB, Chatham -Bigham was all over the field for the sectional semifinalist Cougars with 89 tackles. 4 ½ sacks, and 10 tackles for loss.

Caden Gabriele, LB, Chatham - Gabriele will form a great 1-2 linebacking punch for the Cougars with Bigham and had 53 tackles, one sack, and eight tackles for loss. He also forced two fumbles. had four INTs, and returned an INT for a touchdown.

Luke Shivas, LB, Morris Knolls -

last year and Shivas (54 tackles, four for loss, one sack, one INT) was right in the thick of things.

Braeydon Longo, LB, Mount Olive -Longo provided some big plays for the sectional semifinalist Marauders with two INTs - and both returned for touchdowns. He also forced two fumbles and had 31 tackles.

Patrick Woitac, LB, North Hunterdon – The Lions figure to rebound from last year's 4-5 season with an explosive offense and Woitac (53 tackles) among the leaders on defense.

Peyton Kiburz, LB, Butler - The Bulldogs won their first NJIC overall championship on the way to a sectional championship and Kibburz had a major role with 50 tackles, including five for loss, and four sacks.

Santino Russo, LB, Caldwell - The Chiefs finished 4-5 last year but look to bounce back into contention in the SFC Patriot-White with Russo (50 tackles. five for loss) among the mainstays on defense.

Brady Morais, LB, Morristown-Beard - The Crimson play an independent schedule and will look to Morais (81 tackles, two sacks, five tackles for loss) to dominate the way he did for much of last vear.

Chaz Cusimano, DB, Delbarton - Not many guys can start for a program like Delbarton as a mere freshman but that is how good Cusimano is. And he kept up his end of the bargain by grabbing four INTS to go with his 33 tackles.

Nico Malgieri, DB, Hanover Park - Malgieri helped the Hornets thwart opposing passing games with 57 tackles, five sacks and six tackles for loss last year.

Others to watch include: Jack Mc-Laughlin, DL, Boonton; Austin Mau, DL, Pingry; Teagun Hartnett, LB, Bernards; Justin Bullock, DB, Mount Olive; Jaylin Jones, DB, Morris Knolls; Roman Deconcillis, DB, Mountain Lakes; Liam Melvin, DB, Madison: Dante Mauriello. LB, Parsippany; Laz Lima, DL, Whippany Park; Caden Gabrielle, LB, Chatham; Anthony Agnoli, DL, Montville; Nathan Engdahl, DL, Ridge; D.J. Fiore, DL, West Essex; Tommy Douglas, LB, Chatham; Logan Direny, DB, Voorhees; Jack Graham, DL, Morris Catholic; George Abdy, LB, Hanover Park; Dimos Maroulis, DL, Knolls' defense was dynamic for most of Voorhees; Nick Moyano, DB, Caldwell.

#### **MORRISTOWN COLONIALS**

### Focus On Finishing The Close Ones

By PAUL BRUNO

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

MORRISTOWN – The Morristown High School football team's roster has been depleted somewhat from last season through graduation of several starters, but the Colonials are intent on solidifying a team-wide philosophy — closing out close contests.

Morristown's 2024 campaign ended in disappointing fashion when its valiant fourth quarter rally fell just short in a 34-33 setback to Elizabeth in the NJSIAA North Jersey Section 2, Group 5 quarterfinal round.

"We've talked about those situations," said Morristown coach Casey Flynn, who enters his fourth season at the helm. "We are trying to focus on some of those late game situations, games from where we weren't able to finish and lost some close ones. Looking at things we could have done to change the outcome."

The Colonials lost a pair of games by one point, a contest by two points and another by a touchdown in finishing with a 4-6 record.

The team didn't lack offense last season in averaging 28 points per game and though it lost a bunch of starters there is plenty of talent and experience back at the skill positions.

Flynn will again deploy a reliable pair of quarterbacks in James Dzikowski, a 6-0, 185-pound senior, along with junior Weston Elms (6-0, 170). Dzikowski threw for 452 yards and four touchdowns last season while Elms tossed six touchdowns and accounted for 789 yards in the air.



**Photos by Glenn Clark** 

James Dzikowski, senior guarterback and linebacker, works on his defense.

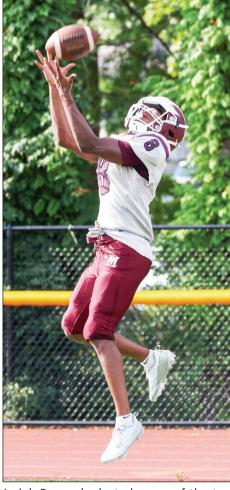
Sophomore halfback Kenneth Sharperson (5-9, 170) emerged last season as a significant weapon on the ground and will replace Reed Donegan, who graduated after leading the club with 892 yards rushing and 14 touchdowns. Sharperson will be joined in the backfield by juniors Bryan Urgilez and Justin Giardina and sophomore Noah Folmar.

As far as the aerial component goes the Colonials will showcase one of the top

receivers in Morris County in swift senior Jasiah Brown, who came through with 25 receptions for 611 yards and six touchdowns. Also on the flanks will be juniors Oliver Elms and Kayson Mills with returning tight end Jake Brough.

The offensive line looks to be senior Pat Hassan (5-10, 255), juniors Kush Singh (6-5, 335), Jimmy Mohrle (5-10, 210), Julian Alva-

PLEASE SEE COLONIALS, PAGE 45



Jasiah Brown looks to be one of the top receivers in the state this season.

### Go COLONIALS!



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#### **COLONIALS:** Line will be the focal point, that's where it starts

FROM PAGE 44

rez (5-10, 200) and Manny Boateng (6-1, 195) and sophomores Gavin Janosy (6-0, 180) and Henry Harding (6-1, 190).

"Our line will always be our focal point," said Flynn. "That's where it all starts. We live and die by our line play on both sides and we think we have a good group on both sides of the ball. Many of our starters will play both ways.

"We lost a lot to graduation with 18 seniors gone but we're going to rely on a new batch of seniors and underclassmen. They've formed a bond and we'll continue on a path of what we're trying to trend toward. As coaches we're looking at replacing that experience, see what holes we have to fill and play to their strengths."



Casey Flynn is in his fourth season as head coach of the Morristown Colonials.



Kushmunder Singh, a junior offensive and defensive lineman, blocks a field goal attempt during a pre-season practice.



Jake Rocco participates in a drill at Morristown High School.

#### MORRISTOWN COLONIALS

**Head coach:** Casey Flynn, fourth season.

Assistant coaches: Scott Jacobus, Bill Mullen, Pedro Aragon, JJ Riley, Kevin Yeager, Kai Dickerson, Jake Cahill, Kevin Sears, Ryan Flynn, Ed Shivas, Aaron Harris, Mike Sabo, Danielle Frey, Jake Charpentier.

Section: North Group 2 Last year's record: 4-6.

**Playoffs:** Lost in the first round of the playoffs to Elizabeth, 34-33

**Returning starters:** 5/5

#### **SCHEDULE**

Aug. 29 vs. Summit, 6:30 p.m.

Sept. 9 vs. Randolph, 6:30 p.m.

Sept. 12 at West Morris, 7:30 p.m.

Sept. 19 at Clifton (7 p.m.

Sept. 27 vs. Mount Olive 1 p.m.

Oct. 3 at Old Bridge, 6 p.m.

Oct. 10 at Elizabeth, 6 p.m.

Oct. 17 vs. Morris Knolls, 6:30 p.m.

Oct. 24 vs. Roxbury, 7 p.m.

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### THIRD TIME'S THE CHARM

By CHRISTOPHER LAWLOR

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

MORRISTOWN - When the summertime workout sessions started, Morristown Beard head football coach Tahj Valentine was giddy with excitement.

You would be too knowing 18 starters return to the fold and the Metropolitan Independent Football League title is within touching distance. Understand, the Crimson play in a league of like prep schools, where the competition is more on a level field.

For the first two years under Valentine, who is a Beard alumnus (Class of 2018), the Crimson made it to the league semifinal game before losing. This time, the Crimson hope to finish business with an experienced roster returning and the desire burning.

"We're near the top of three teams in our league," said Valentine, who played college ball at Stonehill in Massachusetts. "We play Poly Prep and MKA early in the season and that will give an indication of what's in store for the top of the league."

Paramount is finding a quarterback to replace Ryan Novak who accounted for more than 1,800 yards and 22 touchdowns. Valentine said, senior Nathan Kahm and junior Jude Franco are competing for the starting nod.

Whoever wins the quarterback battle will have several options when throwing it.

Senior wide receiver-defensive back Nicholas Anderson is a talented two-way player, who had 38 receptions for 641 yards and 11 touchdowns with a long of 70 yards. He added 26 tackles, including 19 solos. Ander-ries, 343 yards, four TDs), who plays in the secondary son is headed to Hampton University to play lacrosse next vear.

Kahm might wind up as a wide receiver and defensive lineman. So is senior Gavin White with 10 recepterception on defense.

Senior linebacker-wide receiver Brady Morais an-

#### MORRISTOWN BEARD CRIMSON

Head Coach: Tahi Valentine, 3rd season

Assistant Coaches: Jacob Patrick (OC), Brandon Wilson (DC), Mark Leibowitz, Nathaniel Coache, Joe DaKaser, Jordon DeCosca, Andrew Carfley, Matt DeFranco, Michael Wright.

Section: Non-Public, Group B

Last year's record: 4-5

Playoffs: Lost in MIFL Semifinals

Returning starters: 8/10

#### **SCHEDULE**

Aug. 28 at Ferris 7 p.m.

Sept. 6 vs. Poly Prep (N.Y.) 12 p.m.

Sept. 13 vs. Montclair Kimberly 12 p.m.

Sept. 19 at Hopkins (Conn.) 6:30 p.m.

Sept. 19 vs. Dalton (N.Y.) 6:30 p.m.

Oct. 4 at St. Luke's (Conn.) 3:30 p.m.

Oct. 11 vs. King (N.Y.) 1 p.m.

Oct. 17 at Pingry 7 p.m.

chors the defense and topped the Crimson with 81 tackles (32 solos, five for loss).

The run game features senior Oscar Speranza (66 carand had 28 tackles and an INT.

"All of our seniors will start," Valentine said.

Other senior contributors are wide receiver-defensive back Gavin White, wide receiver-defensive back Daritions for 76 yards and one TD and 20 tackles and an in- us Payne, two-way lineman Evan Dixter and lineman

PLEASE SEE CRIMSON, PAGE 47

Tahi Valentine begins his third season as head coach at Morristown-Beard.



**Photos by Glenn Clark** 

GO GRINSONI



Wishing you a Successful 2025 Season from all of us at the Morris NewsBee

#### **CRIMSON:** 'We're near the top of three teams in our league'

FROM PAGE 46

Matty Baum Jr. From the junior class it's lineman Jared Palker, lineman Yasim Earl and wide receiver-linebacker Nanakwsi Adutwum-Addae. Top sophomores are running back-linebacker Parker Koehler and wide receiver-defensive back Callen Levasseur.

When it comes to scheduling, don't expect to see the Crimson's docket chock full of New Jersev schools. This season the Crimson face three schools from the New Jersev State Interscholastic Athletic Association.

Although, Morristown Beard does belong to the NJSIAA, football competes in the MIFL with an emphasis from New Jersey, New York and Con-

In the NJSIAA, the Crimson would be grouped in ultra-competitive Non-Public B with the likes of De-Paul Catholic, Red Bank Catholic, Pope John, Immaculata, Holy Spirit, St. Thomas Aguinas and Morris Catholic. In six appearances, the Crimson are 1-6 and reached the title game in 2007 but lost to Paterson Catholic at Giants Stadium.

This year's schedule kicks off in Jersey City with Ferris on Thursday, Aug. 28 before returning home for dates with Poly Prep (Brooklyn, N.Y.) on Saturday, Sept. 6 and Montclair Kimberley on Saturday, Sept. 13. Other league games include Hopkins (New Haven, Conn.), Dalton School (Manhattan, N.Y.), St. Luke's (New Canaan, Conn.) and Kings School (Stamford, Conn.) before winding up at Pingry.



on private college preparatory schools Co-captains of the Morristown-Beard football team are, from left, Oscar Speranza, Gavin White, Nicholas Anderson, Morais Brady and Jake Kahm.



Morristown-Beard.



ristown-Beard.



Darius Payne is a senior cornerback at Matty Baum runs through a drill at Mor- Jake Kahm is a senior tight end/defensive end at Morristown-Beard.



### GO CRIMSON! Best of Luck for the 2025 Season



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MOUNT OLIVE MARAUDERS

### STAYING HEALTHY IS KEY

**Bv PAUL BRUNO** 

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

MOUNT OLIVE TWP. - Any gridiron coach will acknowledge that on offense it all starts up front, and the Mount Olive football team is ready to boast a powerful line on both sides this fall.

Senior two-way linemen James Giammanco (6-4, 275 OG/DT) and classmate James Rizzo (6-4, 285 OT/NG) will anchor both lines for the Marauders, who finished 6-4 last season.

The Marauders entered the post-season in 2024 and cruised to a 40-6 victory over Newark Central in the NJSIAA North Jersey Section 1, Group 4 quarterfinal round. The season ended the following week with a 42-14 setback to Morris Knolls in the semifinal round.

Mount Olive will surely miss the graduations of last year's standouts QB/DB Jake Asbury, who threw for 1.591 vards and 17 touchdowns, and RB/LB Tyler Cumming (1,121 yards rushing and 11 TDs), but Mount Olive coach Brian O'Connor is expecting strong play from senior quarterback Frank Gallo.

"We have our two big starters on the offensive line in Giammanco and Rizzo and our entire line is back on defense," said O'Connor. "On offense it's our skill players. They're all very experienced and talented."

That talent will be featured for the Marauders with seniors Raynell Derrick (RB/OLB), Tommy Canning (WR/



Photos by Ed Ruping

Luke Carter readies to make a catch at Mount Olive.

OLB) and Brayden Longo ((RB/LB/Returner) along with juniors Justin Bullock (WR/SS) and Jared Martini (TE/

Derrick, who rushed for 208 yards and two touchdowns in 2024, is expected to carry much of the ground game this season. Canning finished with 21 catches for 231 yards last year.



James Giammanco, left, runs through a tackling drill.

mains paramount to Mount Olive coach Brian O'Connor.

"If we can stav healthy I think we have some talent and I think we can surprise a lot of teams," said O'Connor,

As with every team, one factor re- who enters his 10th season guiding the Marauders. "I know I say the same thing every year but it's even more so this season in the need to stay healthy.

PLEASE SEE MOUNT, PAGE 49

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### **MOUNT:** Strong lineup on both sides of the ball

FROM PAGE 48

Depth may be a bit of a question mark this season with so many inexperienced players in backup roles."

The season opens at 6:30 p.m. on Friday, Sept. 5 when the Marauders play host to Roxbury, a team they defeated 49-0 to commence last year.

"Our only focus is on the Roxbury

game," O'Connor said. "That's our number one priority. We graduated a great group of seniors last season and now this group wants to prove what they can do. Our players are really looking forward to the start of the season.

Other Players to Watch: Seniors Matteo Valverde (LB/WR), Cadence Rupprecht (DB/WR); Juniors Justin Reed (QB/DB), Devon Rosado (DB/WR),



Frank Gallo lets off a pass.



Nico Orzillo, left, and Richard Darbig practice at Mount Olive.



Luke Carter takes a handoff from assistant coach Chris Carpini.



Brian O'Connor is in his 10th season at Mount

### MOUNT OLIVE **MARAUDERS**

Head coach: Brian O'Connor, 10th season.

Assistant coaches: Dave Benfatti, Dylan Rimsky, Rob Merle, Mike Gilbert, Marcus Gurdineer, Chris Carpini, Kevin Persson, Scott Buchanan, Khalid Alston, Nolan Clark.

Last year's record: 6-4.

Playoffs: Lost in the semifinal round of the playoffs to Morris Knolls, 42-14.

**Returning starters:** 6/6

#### **SCHEDULE**

Sept. 5 vs. Roxbury, 6:30 p.m. Sept 12 at Randolph, 7 p.m. Sept. 19 vs. Chatham, 7 p.m. Sept. 27 at Morristown, 1 p.m. Oct. 4 at Morris Knolls, 2 p.m. Oct. 10 vs. Vernon, 6:30 p.m. Oct. 17 vs. Wayne Valley, 6:30 p.m. Oct. 24 at West Morris, 7:30 p.m.



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### EXCITED FOR THE OFFENSE

By JOE HOFMANN

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

**MOUNTAIN LAKES** – Mountain Lakes began 2024 in a very un-Herd-like fashion: One win, three losses, and a whole lot of question marks.

Almost overnight, the Herd found the answers, all right – all the way up to the Group 1 sectional finals.

Someone forgot to tell coach Darrell Fusco's team that they were supposed to be rebuilding.

Turns out, the Herd built themselves into a sectional finalist in the span of about one month.

This year, Lakes returns a lot of talent and figures to get out of the gate much quicker – and no one would be surprised if the team returns to the sectional finals and wins it this time.

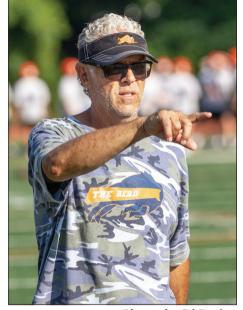
"We hadn't been 1-3 in a long, long time," Fusco said, "but we reached a sectional final. Give the kids credit."

Many of those same kids are back and ready to wreak havoc in opponents' secondaries – if not their end zones.

Mountain Lakes is loaded with game breakers in the backfield. Ever since the days of legendary coach Doug Wilkins, the Herd's Wing-T moved the ball, accumulated first downs, and ate up time of possession.

This time, there may be all of that – and plenty of long touchdown runs, too.

Punishing fullback Carson Fitch and speedy halfbacks Billy Barrett and Massimo Corvelli return, giving the team three



**Photos by Ed Ruping** 

Darrel Fusco is in his 16th season at Mountain Lakes.

backfield standouts to run the Wing T.

And throw in backup Jack Bronico, and that is yet another difference-making runner

"We knew that coming in last year, coming off back-to-back sectional championships, we started off slow, but we had a tough schedule with Weequahic, Pequannock, Hanover, and Madison," Fusco said. "And we knew Lenape was going to be a battle in our league. But we got through

### MOUNTAIN LAKES HERD

Head coach: Darrell Fusco, 16th season.
Assistant coaches: Jeff Reid, Matt Stanzione, Jeff Bronico, Nick Lane, Justin Ramirez, Joseph Cina, Dan Capriola, Lawrence Szabo, Steve Feltmann, John Borie, Paul Chiara

Section: North Group I Last year's record: 6-5

**Playoffs:** lost in the sectional finals to Butler 42-7

**Returning starters:** 5/5

#### **SCHEDULE**

Aug. 29 at Weequahic, 7 p.m. Sept. 5 at Pequannock, 6:30 p.m. Sept. 12 Hanover Park, 7 p.m. Sept. 19 at Lenape Valley, 7 p.m. Sept. 26 Boonton, 7 p.m. Oct. 3 Madison, 7 p.m. Oct. 17 at Morris Catholic, 6:30 p.m. Oct. 24 Newton 7 p.m.

that and a lot of the kids that played are back. So we're excited.

"Fitch is a special kid when he is healthy. He is as good a kid as we have coached here. He is a TD waiting to happen and physical. Billy Barrett committed to play at Boston College. He is a good kid, physical. Corvelli was one of our best last year. Bronico is another good one.

"We did a 7 on 7 with West Orange. Corvelli made a play where he outran one of their kids. He is dynamic and can make plays in space. He caught a ball against West Orange and they have kids who can play and he flew down the field right by them. We don't have the hogs up front. We do have some kids we like but the kids need work up front.

"So we have three starters in the backfield returning and we have never had something like that."

The blocker they will be depending on is Holden Gillespie, who returns at guard.

Ryan Sluck is the other guard. Romano DeConciliis returns on the line and will kick. Zach Sole and Marin Otun were both hurt last year but will play tackle.

Jeffrey Higgins will play center.

"Gillespie is a dude, he is special," Fusco said. "If we are good enough up front, we'll be very good. They are touchdown kids in the backfield. Veteran kids. We are very excited for the offense."

Vinny Cina played a little quarterback last year and returns. Lawson Fagan will also play quarterback.

Defensively, Dustin Gabriel will play nose, Fusco's son Vance will play one end and DeConsiliis will play the other end in the 3-4. Bronico and Gillespie will be at inside linebacker and will be flanked by Jack

PLEASE SEE LAKES, PAGE 51





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### LAKES: A lot of talent returning this year

FROM PAGE 50

Brown and Otun.

Corvelli will be at one corner and Tv Plotts will man the other. Christian Ramos and Nicky Rafizadeh will play safety, as will Cina.

The hope is for a faster start to the season and advance one round further than last year, if not further. That would mean the school's third sectional championship in four years.

The Herd were state Group 1 champions after beating Glassboro in 2023. They reached the state Group 1 final in 2022 before losing to Woodbury.

Fusco will know a lot more after a season-opening trip to Weequahic on Aug. 29.

"We're very pleased with the way we ended last year," Fusco said. "Going to Newark Jack Bronico practices his tackling techfor Weequahic will be a huge game for us."



nique at Mountain Lakes.



Josh Helmy makes a catch during a passing drill at Mountain Lakes.



Ethan Smith takes a handoff during a Mountain Lakes football practice.

### THE HER

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The Citizen

**NORTH HUNTERDON LIONS** 

### SENIOR LEADERSHIP SETS TONE



**Photos by Bill Nagengast** 

North Hunterdon High School football team co-captains are, from left, Anthony Saucelli, Brett Banek, Dan Figurski and Nick Rimaci.

By CHRISTOPHER LAWLOR

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

**CLINTON TWP.** – The rise of the North Hunterdon football team has been steady since head coach CJ Anderson took over after the 2022 season.

The program bottomed out in his inaugural season going winless in nine games before rebounding with four wins a year ago and remaining competitive throughout the campaign despite opening 0-3.

So, what's next?

"We had a great summer," said Anderson, who enters his third year. "We have a great group of seniors who make it fun and set the tone for the underclassmen. The primary focus from the beginning is to go 1-0 and come strong out of the gate. We've taken the necessary steps to do so."

And to compete in the Big Central Conference Liberty Silver Division against teams from Somerset and Union counties, an arsenal of offensive weapons is needed at the key skill positions—quarterback, running back and wide receiver.

As usual, it starts with the firing pin, senior quarterback Nicholas Ramaci (6-0, 185 pounds), who earned First Team All-Liberty Silver accolades last fall. The sure-handed and fleet-footed Ramaci put up respectable numbers operating the spread offense after hitting on 94 of 170 passes for 1,150 yards and 11 touchdowns and carried 68 times for 492 yards and three scores. His top game was a 208-yard, three-TD effort in

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### NORTH: Aiming for a strong start out the gate

FROM PAGE 52

a win over Montgomery.

"Nicholas [Ramaci] is our leader and runs the spread offense as a dual threat," Anderson said.

Antonio Sauchelli (5-9, 165), a senior wide receiver-defensive back, established himself as one of Somerset County's top pass catchers after nabbing a team-leading 38 receptions for 477 yards and four TDs. He totaled 33 tackles and an interception as a defender.

Sauchelli has company on the outside with two-way seniors Dan Figurski (6-2, 200) and Grant Hillman (6-0, 170). Figurski had 13 receptions for 251 yards and three TDs while Hillman added nine catches for 136 yards and two score. Both players figure more prominently into this season's scheme as will Jon Peck, who returns following an injury-riddled season.

Senior Cole O'Connor (5-11, 200), a running back-linebacker, averaged nearly six yards per carry with 622 yards and eight TDs. He also had 28 tackles and two INTs. Senior Xzavier Warner (5-7, 155) will also get carries. Senior two-way H-Backs Anthony DeSimone and Aidan Herlihy will also be heavy contributors.

The O-line is highlighted by seniors Bret Banek and Joseph Kozminski. Senior Dan Canavan and DeSimone are featured up front on defense.

Decorated senior linebacker Pat Wojtal (6-0, 210) is the centerpiece of the 4-2-5 defense after recording 53 tackles (31 solos) and two INTs. He's joined by junior Dom Farino and O'Connor. Lance Demmerle handles the kicking and punting duties.

### NORTH HUNTERDON LIONS

Head Coach: CJ Robinson, 3rd season Assistant Coaches: Blair Maginnis (OC), Chris Miller (DC), John McSweeney, Mike Vellucci, Brad Banken, Ryan Tatarka, Justin Friedel, David Berry

Section: North, Group 4 Last year's record: 4-5 Playoffs: None Returning starters: 8/8

#### **SCHEDULE**

Sept. 5 at Colonia 6 p.m.
Sept. 12 vs. Watchung Hills 7 p.m.
Sept. 19 at Montgomery 7 p.m.
Sept. 26 vs. Rahway 7 p.m.
Oct. 3 at Monroe Township 6 p.m.
Oct. 10 vs. Somerville 7 p.m.
Oct. 17 vs. East Brunswick 7 p.m.
Oct. 24 at Voorhees 7 p.m.

Aug. 28 vs. Hunterdon Central 7 p.m.

"Pat [Wojtal] is a quiet, physical leader who is a blue-collar kid and leads by example," Anderson said.

The senior-laden Lions aren't far removed from last qualifying for the 2022 NJSIAA Group 4, North Section 2 playoffs but dropped a first round game at Middletown South, 34-20. It's been eight years since the Lions won a playoff game when they annexed the Group 4, North



CJ Robinson is in his third season as head coach of the North Hunterdon Lions.

Section 2 title with a one-point win over Phillipsburg at MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford

The Lions entertain neighboring rivals Hunterdon Central in the season and home opener at 7 p.m. on Friday, Sept. 6 and are on the road for Colonia at 6 p.m. on Friday, Sept. 13. Then it's three straight games in the Liberty fir Watchung Hills, Montgomery and Rahway.

The annual Milk Can Game at rival Voorhees on Friday, Oct. 24 will wrap up the regular season. Last year, the Lions won 56-21, closing the campaign on a modest two-game win streak.

"Beating Voorhees is one of top our goals each season but getting out to a strong start is very important," Anderson said.



A North Hunterdon High School football player practices his technique at a pre-season practice.

Wishing you a Successful 2025 Season from all of us at the Hunterdon Review



**PINGRY BIG BLUE** 

### SPEED, SIZE = OPTIMISM

**Bv DAVE ARTUSO** 

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

BERNARDS TWP. - After falling one game short of the playoffs last season in the Metropolitan Independent Football League and finishing as what fifth-year head coach Joe Passaro says was "the best of the rest," Pingry could see a different, even happier, ending in 2025.

The Big Blue went 7-4 last season but Passaro is anticipating an autumn filled with even more success this time around.

"I'm kind of excited about this year," says Passaro. "We have a bunch of really skilled guys back who were contributors last season, and they're now coming into their own. It's a mix of young and old. From what I see so far, I think we're going to be pretty good."

One of the reasons is that Pingry has added athletes who have competed and succeeded on other surfaces.

"We were very lucky to get athletes from other sports," Passaro notes. "We look for kids who are used to putting forth a strong effort. We've got it moving in the right direction, with multi-sport athletes from basketball, water polo and wrestling.'

Pingry graduated 10 seniors but nine players return to a roster that's down a bit—35 players instead of the 45 Passaro had at the beginning of last year.

The player who has the most potential to leave opponents in the dust this fall is Ja'Mar White, a senior wide receiver and defensive back and one of the nation's top



Photos by Chris M. Junior

Pingry School quarterbacks Zach Zaslow, left, and Ryan Moye get together for a photo op at Pingry.

high school triple jump athletes.

with speed," the head coach says of White. who caught 19 passes last season, six for touchdowns.

The receiver will be one of the leaders "He's a special athlete and a weapon of an offensive now run by Passaro's son, A.J. The vounger Passaro has been an operations officer in the school, in charge of all transportation at Pingry's lower, mid-

dle and upper school for 35 sports, plus a baseball pitching coach and recruiting coordinator for the football program.

The Big Blue should be strong offensively as a whole, with senior Ryan Moye returning as the starting quarterback. Move, who threw for more than 1.900 vards and 25 touchdowns—against only seven interceptions—is the only returning captain from last year and should be one this fall, although Passaro is putting off naming the captains until just before the season begins.

"Ryan is a 'Cool Hand Luke' at the position," Passaro says, referencing the Paul Newman-played character in the classic 1967 film of the same name. "He handles pressure, he takes command of the offense, he's an accurate passer—the whole

Moye's backup will be junior Zach Zaslow, whom Passaro called "a super, super intelligent kid with skills."

The rushing game will feature senior Finn Cavanaugh, who'll also be the team's big-legged placekicker and punter. The backfield will also boast Oscar Irwin, whom Passaro said could be an NCAA Division I player if he had the size for it. And sophomore Alex Finkelstein "is as good of a receiver as he is a running back," according to his coach. Sophomore Teddy Peacock could also contribute in the running game, or as an H-back or tight end.

"We're really set at running back,"

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from all of us at New Jersey Hills Media Group

#### **PINGRY:** 'We really came together both on and off the field'

FROM PAGE 54

Passaro says, "and we're going to rotate them in different spot. We don't want the good guys standing on the sideline."

Joining White at wide receiver is James Lear, who should be able to handle pressure on the field. After all, he faces it every day as the son of Pingry's head of school.

"It's good for all of us that he's doing well," jokes Passaro. "He is coming back from a broken ankle and has really, really busted his jump to get ready."

Defensively, you'll see the same names as on the other side of the ball. For example, Passaro is looking for Cavanagh to possibly break the season tackling mark currently held by his brother, Riley, now attending the University of Rochester.

Passaro calls Finkelstein a "shutdown corner," and that he'll have help from senior Sam Nkansah, a hurdling champ who will set up camp in the Big Blue's defensive backfield.

Players going both ways in what seem to be huge front lines for Pingry include 6-4, 240-pound senior Patrick Lange.

"Patrick has some amazing work, including going to camps," Passaro says of a player who aspires to attend the Naval Academy. "His frame is bigger but he's also in really good shape. And he has the grades and the passion for all that takes."

Lange will be joined by 6-3, 200-pound sophomore Conor Albert, a lacrosse standout who'll play offensive tackle, tight end and defensive end.

"Conor has a lot of athletic ability. He's a standout defensive end," his coach says.

Senior Austin Mau, a "great nose guard" returns to anchor the middle of the line.

### PINGRY BIG BLUE

Head Coach: Joe Passaro, 5th season Assistant coaches: A.J. Passaro, Brad Banken, Kevin Riordan, Michael Carr Section: North Non-Public A Last year's record: 7-4

#### **SCHEDULE**

Aug. 28 at Millburn, 7 p.m. Sept. 6 at Montclair Kimberley, 2 p.m. Sept. 13 Poly Prep (N.Y.), TIME TBD Sept. 20 at King (Conn.), TIME TBD Sept. 27 Xavier (N.Y.), TIME TBD (Homecoming)

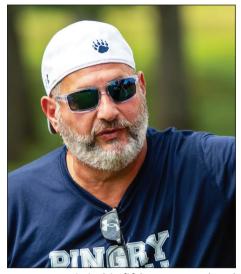
Oct. 11 at Horace Mann (N.Y.), TIME TBD Oct. 17 Morristown Beard, TIME TBD

"He's as strong as a bull and will wreak havoc on centers," Passaro predicts. "He is a wrestler and knows how to explode off the block, and he will dominate. I wish I had three of him."

Junior Mike Webster, whose father is Pingry's lacrosse coach, "has really come along" at linebacker and Passaro believes "he's going to stand out this year."

Pingry might have had an advantage over all its opponents this season before it even threw or caught a ball on the field: The team enjoyed an NFL-like training camp at the school's Pottersville campus.

"We really came together both on and off the field," says Passaro. "I think that's going to be a really good advantage this season."



Joe Passaro is in his fifth season as head coach of the Pingry Big Blue football team.



Pingry School senior offensive tackle Patrick Lange, left, works through an August practice.



Pingry School junior Zach Zaslow runs through a drill at Pingry.





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#### **RANDOLPH RAMS**

### Taking Nothing For Granted

By JOE HOFMANN

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

**RANDOLPH TWP.** – Ryan Gresik is Randolph's first-year head coach, but he didn't exactly have to introduce himself to the Rams when training camp began.

He is familiar with the program. The kids are familiar with him – and how he likes to roll.

The Randolph players know what he is all about.

For the last four years, Gresik has been an assistant in a variety of areas, including offensive coordinator two years ago.

So when he introduced his offense this summer, he didn't get blank, what-is-coach-talking-about stares in return.

They've seen it all before.

And that will come in handy with a top-flight quarterback such as returning Jackson Magley, arguably Morris County's best QB heading into 2025, and receiver Joey Sommer, one of the best receivers.

Those two are a nice starting point for Gresik, himself a great high school quarterback at Newton and a member of the William Paterson University Hall of Fame as a QB.

Gresik knows a great QB when he sees one and he sees one every day in Magley, who transferred back to Randolph from St. Joe's-Montvale as a sophomore – just in time for him to start some games late in the year under Gresik's system.

"He's been tremendous," Gresik said. "When he came back from St. Joe's, we worked him in doing some different pack-



**Photos by Ed Ruping** 

Brady Founds hits the tackling dummy at Randolph High School.

ages and he won the job towards the end of how much he loves football. That bleeds his sophomore year in Week 6." how much he loves football. That bleeds into Joey Summer. Football is something

Magley had a big season in 2024, going 112 for 177 for 1,288 yards and 13 touchdowns with seven INTs. He recently received a D-2 offer from St. Anselm's and figures to draw more interest.

"Last year he took a leap," Gresik said.
"The first thing I talk about with him is

how much he loves football. That bleeds into Joey Summer. Football is something that they are super passionate about. Joey is a one-sport athlete who used to play baseball but wanted his career to be in football. He is dedicated to his craft. Same with Jackson."

Sommer, meanwhile, caught 44 passes for 659 yards and five TDs. He is getting

Ivy League looks.

"He got hurt at the end of last year and the way he attacked the rehab, for a high school athlete, for what he has done is incredible and speaks to his character and how valuable football is to him," Gresik said. "With him, we'll be at a lift and he'll want to stay late to go over coverages. Having those two guys to lead the team has been tremendous."

The rest of the team tasted success down through the midgets with the Bulldogs.

"The senior class has stuck together. The Bulldogs were successful as a younger team. We have had really good leadership."

"Both of them are being recruited. Both of them want to play at the next level. Joey has gotten Ivy League looks. Those coaches have him on their recruiting board. Jackson and Joey want to make their college decision early so they can have their focus on the season. Hopefully soon."

Patrick Dell'Aglio started as a freshman and will play multiple roles. Logan Hankin returns at running back. E.J. Febles will play wide receiver and Matt Skrapits will play H-Back. Erich Hochstuhl will play receiver, as will Steven Nostrame and Manny Samaniego.

Two linemen to watch out for are Ben Quinn and Max Eisenberg, both of whom played last year. Greg Ford played at the end of last year. Kevin Kurdiza has great length. Anthony Helmstetter and John

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### RANDOLPH: Gresik goes from assistant to head coach

FROM PAGE 56

Ford will battle it out for the center posi-

"We'll have some inexperience but some good athleticism on the line." Gresik said. "They have played within the scheme before, there's nothing they haven't seen. They were sophomores when I was the offensive coordinator. I've heard some, 'I remember when we ran that play!' from the kids. We will have some inexperience but they have played varsity but haven't done a full season."

The D-Line will have a lot of starters from the O-Line and will also include Dillon Hines. Hankin, one of the best linebackers last year, is back, Joev Bosotina, John Andrade, Quinn, Hines, Eisenberg, and Greg Ford will also see time at linebacker.

Sommer is back. Febles and Joel Nieves will play in the secondary, as will

Sommer, Dell'Aglio, Tyler Bacharach and Erich Hochstuhl and Samaniego.

"We are super excited," Gresik said. "I have been here five years. I don't take for granted the history and tradition that is Randolph football. You can go anywhere in the state wear and wear a Randolph shirt and people know who you are. To put my own print on it ... the list of coaches before me ... I don't take it for granted. We want to get this thing rolling and see what we can do and compete for a conference title and go deep in a state playoff run."



Joey Bosotina, left, and Steven Nostrame run through a drill at Randolph High School. Greg Ford stretches out during a practice session at Randolph High School.



Ryan Gresik is in his first year as head coach of the Randolph High School Rams.

### RANDOLPH RAMS

**Head coach:** Ryan Gresik, first season. Assistant coaches: Paul Conboy, Ben Collins, Russ Hert, Chandler Boykins, T.J. Masella, Jerry Davis, Gary Baumwoll. Nick Gangemi, James Gangemi

Section: North Group 4 Last year's record: 4-5.

Playoffs: Lost in the first round to Ramapo, 47-27.

**Returning starters:** 4/4.

#### **SCHEDULE**

Aug. 28 Teaneck, 7 p.m. Sept. 5 at Morristown, 6:30 p.m. Sept. 12 Mount Olive 7 p.m. Sept. 20 at Morris Knolls, 1 p.m. Sept. 26 West Morris 7 p.n. Oct. 3 at Warren Hills, 7 p.m. Oct. 10 at Roxbury, 7 p.m. Oct. 17 Orange 7 p.m. Oct. 24 Mendham 7 p.m.





RIDGE RED DEVILS

### New Coach And Rebuilding Roster

By DAVE ARTUSO

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

**BERNARDS TWP.** — With a first-year head coach and an urgent need to fill 48 cleats that walked out the door on graduation day, the Ridge High football team has its work cut out for it in 2025.

Coming off a pair of 8-2 records and back-to-back sectional semifinal appearances, the Red Devils are facing a legitimate rebuilding year in 2025. They said goodbye to star players such as two-way stars Aidan Stieglitz, Conor McLachlan, Ryan Turner, Ryan Swan, Joe and Andrew Dachnowicz, and more—so many that having a new man at the head of the program will actually be less of an adjustment than replacing the small village they lost to graduation.

"When you lose 24 seniors, you have to regroup," said first-year coach Jeff Sutherland, Ridge's defensive coordinator under the departed Andy West and who came to Ridge in 2013 for a couple of seasons, left for New Brunswick High School and returned in 2019. "We have to do it in a way that's best for our kids. Can we do all the things we did last year? No, we're going to make changes."

The Red Devils, who have 21 juniors and 18 sophomores on the roster, will work with similar concepts as in previous years, the coach explains, except tailored to the talent they have now.

"We're starting to bridge the gap from last season to this one," he said, "and we're doing some things to adapt. The



Photos by Chris M. Junior

Jeff Sutherland, Ridge High School's new varsity head coach, instructs his players during a pre-season workout.

one thing I love about this team is they just want to be coached."

The Red Devils' familiarity with their new coach and his style will help. So will some stability on the offensive and defensive lines, including in the persons of two-way senior linemen Nate Engdahl—a Bates College commit called "an unbelievable kid" by his coach—and Anthony Valera, "a great, great kid who works extremely hard on the field and in

the classroom."

Other returning Red Devils include Nick Pfennig, who saw some action in a rotation of linebackers last season and will play there and at fullback. Senior Toby Nicholson returns at tight end and outside linebacker.

"Toby is one of the hardest workers and an unbelievable leader," praises Sutherland.

With McLachlan having departed from

### RIDGE RED DEVILS

Head Coach: Jeff Sutherland, 1st season Assistant Coaches: Chase Vena, Anthony Arimenta, Brian McCarthy, Matt Giordano, J.D. Moore, Jim Zilinski, Tyler Brandt, Chris Mattia

Section: North 1, Group 4 Last year's record: 8-2

**Playoffs:** Lost to Ramapo, 28-27, in the North 1, Group 4 semifinals

#### **SCHEDULE**

Sept. 5 St. Joseph (Met.), 7 p.m. Sept. 12 at Hillsborough, 7 p.m. Sept. 19 at Phillipsburg, 7 p.m. Sept. 26 Bridgewater, 7 p.m. Oct. 4 at Union, 2 p.m. Oct. 10 Hunterdon Central, 7 p.m. Oct. 17 North Brunswick, 7 p.m. Oct. 25 at Westfield, 1 p.m.

under center, the quarterback duties will fall to senior Sawyer Paul, who saw limited action in 2024, mostly in mop-up duty as Ridge won five games by at least 27 points.

"Sawyer will definitely be a key starter for us," says Sutherland. "He has worked really hard and I expect him to have a good year."

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### **RIDGE:** Bridging the gap between this year and last

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Paul will be throwing to a host of receivers, from Nicholson to senior running backs Lenny Paolillo and Max Amadon—the latter returning to the field after a vear's absence. Three juniors—Tristan Frank (also the backup quarterback), C.J. Griffith and Greg Brown will look to contribute. Brown will also be the Red Devils' placekicker, replacing the graduated Sean Davis and his 43-for-47 performance in point-after attempts in

#### 'The Little Things Become the Big Things'

When you're young and mostly inexperienced, the fundamentals become paramount.

"We want to be a tough, relentless football team," Sutherland says. "When you're in this all-hands-ondeck situation, the little things become the big things: What's the process? What's the 'why' about what happened? How do we correct what did we did wrong?"

You don't win games on Friday nights, the coach notes, "You win them starting the Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of June practice."

As a result, Sutherland isn't focused on a long-term outlook for his team. He wants to see incremental, daily improvement.

"I think, 'How do we get better tomorrow?" he explains. "I think the rest takes care of itself. To me, it's always a process. Be on time and work hard at practice, overall. Defensively, that means swarm to the ball and tackle. Offensively, it means finish the play, get the snap count right. And you've got to add luck on top of that, meaning can we stay healthy?"

Fundamentals will take Ridge only so far. At some points, the "Jimmies and Joes" have to show up and play well.

"If we're outmatched in a game, then we've got to work even harder," Sutherland offers. "At the end of the day, it takes what it takes. And if you keep your emotions in the middle, it makes the hard times easier and keeps you focused on your goals during the good times."

That goes for the coaches, too. Sutherland's wife, Re-



Ridge assistant coach Anthony Arimenta, the varsity squad's special teams coordinator, watches junior tight end/defensive end Greg Brown practice a kickoff.

becca, gave birth to their son during a game against Bridgewater-Raritan, and Rebecca urged her husband to go coach.

"I didn't want to go," he says, pausing to add, "I wanted to stay married.'

The moment underscored, though, the role families



Ridge High School junior lineman Michael Angelillo takes a knee during a pre-season practice.

play in the lives of high school football coaches—especially those whose responsibilities have just ramped up

"You can never do a great job unless your family is on the same page," Sutherland notes. "And my wife is awesome. Just like a team, we're going in the same direction, doing this together."

The Red Devils are going to need to stay together, too, and keep their emotions at an even keel as they face what Sutherland calls "a juggernaut" of a schedule in the Big Central Conference's American Silver Division.

"I call this the SEC (college football's Southeastern Conference) of high school football," he says with a laugh. "There are no days off. We have great coaches and great players in this conference. And we're excited to get on the field and play."

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**ROXBURY GAELS** 

### Work Is Showing Up

By JOE HOFMANN

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

**ROXBURY TWP.** – For much of last season, Roxbury was pushed all over the field – all the way down to the SFC Liberty White basement.

The Gaels linemen remember.

This past off-season, they did something about it – and chances are good that they'll be throwing their weight around this fall.

And maybe even contending in the division.

Hulking returnees Jonah Kali (6-1, 240), Vincent Zanni (5-9, 240), and Matt Donnelly (6-1, 215) lived in the weight room all off-season and it shows.

Coach Ryan Roumes loves what he is seeing in the early going.

"Our three big guys are showing up in a big way," he said. "We haven't seen anyone new yet on the field, but their technique, their leadership on the line ... all three returning starters are showing that experience. They have swagger and confidence that you need. They have worked their butts off in the off-season and it is showing up."

Those three will be joined up front by Aiden Mulholland, Patrick Shivas and William Connolly.

The quarterback spot will be a battle between Blake Lieberwirth (6-2, 170) and Frankie Falco (5-8, 165). The two are opposites physically but bring different things to the table.

"They're fighting for the spot," Roumes said. "Blake is tall and athletic and knows



**Photos by Ed Ruping** 

Roxbury High School football players line up for a play.

the system. Frankie is much smaller than Blake but he is like (Anthony) Skawinski 2.0 (Skawinski helped lead the team to a sectional final two years ago). He has a good arm, is quick, and athletic, and brings different aspects to our game.

"We're excited to see them battle and see who comes away with it."

Jimmy Murphy started on defense last year and is vying for a starting spot in the backfield with D.J. Benfatti. They are both 6-feet tall.



Devin Morin catches a pass during a Roxbury High School practice session.

"We have tall, dynamic running backs," Roumes said. "It might be by committee. We'll see how it all works out. Jimmy did a decent job last year. D.J. is only 160 pounds and doesn't have the build yet. But he is instinctual and asks great questions and we are excited to see where he goes in the next few years."

The receivers have some experienced talent returning as well with Gio DelRosario, Nik Edelman, and tight end Jack

PLEASE SEE GAELS, PAGE 61



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### **GAELS:** Players worked hard in the off-season

FROM PAGE 60

Mancino.

Meanwhile, Liam May and Ryan Valentine are getting a long look.

"We're excited to have DelRosario back and he and Edelman should be playmakers," Roumes said. "We will always try and be balanced, but we're Roxbury and we want to run the ball first. That's the way we were when I played (Roumes was an impactful player on the 2009 sectional championship team). But we are confident in the skill guys we have to throw to. Jack is a good player. He'll be a rock and reliable player on offense and defense. He makes the calls on defense and is one of the smartest kids in the program."

The D-Line will be one of the strengths of the team, with Donnelly, Zanni, Kali and Michael Geary all returning.

"We love our linemen," Roumes said. "We're excited for them to lead the way this year."

Mancino leads the linebacking unit and will be joined by Murphy, while Benfatti, Greg Webber, Peyton Seader, and Christian Tummino are battling for time.

"Jack will be the main guy getting us in the right calls," Roumes said. "Guys are fighting for ILB or MLB. We are looking for our best four linebackers."

DelRosario and Edelman are returning starters. May has emerged as a probable starter. Ryan Valentine, Luca Argenziano, Dominick DeMarco, and Jaret Haupt are vying for time.

"I like our energy," Roumes said. "Mostly, I like how our weight room off-season is starting to show up on the field. We have some big guys who did a great job in the off-season and are moving people around. We are flying around and doing the job. I like our big guys especially.

"Last year was tough. We had a lot of seniors graduate from our sectional finals team and we had a lot of inexperienced sophomores and juniors and even our seniors were inexperienced. Playing in the league that we are in, it is not easy playing games and developing. A lot of kids were thrown into the fire."



Ian McMahon, left, practices his blocking skills at Roxbury High School.



Ryan Roumes, head coach of the Roxbury High School Gaels, makes a point during a pre-season practice.



Frankie Falco sets up to pass during a drill at Roxbury High School.

#### ROXBURY GAELS

Head coach: Ryan Roumes, fifth season.

**Assistant coaches:** Frank Misurelli, Justin Spargo, Danny Diorio, Dave Biank, Michael Roumes, Kerry Drexler, Tommy Miller

Section: North Group 4 Last year's record: 1-8. Playoffs: None. Returning starters: 6/6

#### **SCHEDULE**

Aug. 29 At Parsippany Hills 7 p.m.

Sept. 5 at Mount Olive, 7 p.m.

Sept. 12 Sparta 7 p.m.

Sept. 19 at Montville, 6:30 p.m.

Sept. 26 Morris Knolls 7 p.m.

Oct. 4 at Chatham, 1 p.m.

Oct. 10 Randolph 7 p.m.

Oct. 17 West Morris 7 p.m.

Oct. 24 at Morristown, 6:30 p.m.



**VOORHEES VIKINGS** 

### THE 'COURAGE FOR CONTACT'

By DAVE ARTUSO

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

**LEBANON TWP.** – Voorhees head coach John Hack doesn't mince words when it comes to his No. 1 mission as a leader of young men: He's trying to change lives for the better.

But this season, starting with the summer's first practice, the Vikings made a pledge to focus on every moment as it's happening, or concentrate on "WIN"-What's Important Now.

"Whether it's the last rep in practice or the middle of a game, on the field or at home, we want our players to be the best version of themselves," explains Hack, who is beginning his second season at the helm of the Vikings. "That means the best player, the best son, the best brother. The best everything they can be. And be who we say we are.'

The Vikings will have no shortage of talented players at the skilled positions, and one who was at his best—and the school's best—last season is running back Mateo Tramutola. The senior set a Voorhees record last fall with 1,258 yards rushing, scoring 17 touchdowns along the way and fumbling a grand total of one time. Tramutola also happens to be the team's starting punt-

"We expect him to be the man," says Hack. "He's a hard worker and a good kid, and we expect great things from him. He'll be the focal point of every defense we play, although last year very few teams had success against him."



**Photos by Bill Nagengast** 

Head coach John Hack addresses his troops.

If opposing defenses focus too much on Tramutola, they may suffer the consequences thanks to the arm of returning starting quarterback Sam Meekings, who threw for 1,327 yards and 19 touchdowns last fall.

Meekings started maturing from the mo-

to Rahway last year.

"I walked off the field with Sam after that game, and he had such a good attitude, despite the loss. Then he went on to have one of the better seasons in school history."

Meekings, who worked out with his head coach every morning this summer, ment the Vikings lost their season opener is "stronger and smarter" than he was last

year, Hack says.

"Coaches worry about a lot of things," he notes, "but it's nice when you don't have to worry about your quarterback.'

The quarterback will have, as Hack points out, "really good tools around him," and not just in the person of Tramutola.

First, there's senior Ryland Benitez, who Hack praises as a potential star at both wide receiver and safety. Another senior, Logan Dierny, could be the Vikings' best overall talent as he returns from an injury-riddled junior year.

"You can make the argument that Logan is our best overall player," says his coach. "He's a great athlete and our true No. 1 receiver. He could have a big year, especially with teams loading the box against Mateo."

Dierny will also start at what Hack calls the "overhang" position—in effect, an outside linebacker. And he's the team's best returner on special teams. The other key to special teams—other than new assistant coach Jason Scott, a Clinton resident and the interim head coach at Union last season-will be senior Dustin Moke, a former Viking soccer player who joined the team last season.

Senior Drew Mahoney, who Hack says "does everything the right way" despite being in only his second season in football, will start at both receiver and cornerback for the Vikings.

"Drew works hard to get every ounce of himself," says Hack.

Dimos Mouralis, a senior and one of six

PLEASE SEE VIKINGS, PAGE 63

### **Go VIKINGS!**



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### Hunterdon Review

### VIKINGS: No shortage of skilled and talented players



John Hack is in his second season at Voorhees High School.

### VOORHEES VIKINGS

**Head Coach:** John Hack, 2nd season **Assistant Coaches:** Kyle Cleffi, Rob Miller, Jason Scott, Ish Mack, Pete Sepelya, Ed Balut

Section: North 2, Group 3 Last Year's Record: 3-6

#### **SCHEDULE**

Aug. 28 at Orange, 6 p.m.
Sept. 5 at Iselin Kennedy, 6 p.m.
Sept. 12 at J.P. Stevens, 6 p.m.
Sept. 19 vs Bernards, 7 p.m.
Sept. 26 at Delaware Valley, 7 p.m.
Oct. 3 vs. North Plainfield, 7 p.m.
Oct. 11 at Governor Livingston, 1 p.m.
Oct. 17 vs. Hillside, 7 p.m.
Oct. 24 vs. North Hunterdon, 7 p.m.

FROM PAGE 62

captains—along with Meekings, Tramutola, Dierny and Benitez and lineman John Seritella—will anchor the O-line with Serritella. And the defensive line, with junior Shawn Turino and senior Zach Taylor leading the way, could be the best unit on that side of the ball. And it may need to be.

"Our top concern is defense," Hack admits. "The last few defensive practices have been our best, and the key will be to take that into games and be consistent. We

want our guys to have the courage for contact—to have the same killer instinct as they do on the offensive side of the ball. If we don't take a big step forward defensively, we're not going to be successful."

Junior Toby Dorr will look to contribute again as a wide receiver and defensive back, and senior Madden Kramer is out to do some good things as a linebacker after switching from defensive end this summer.

But as the Vikings prepare for a schedule that starts with three road games and

features a matchup with another strong Bernards team in Voorhees' home opener and the Milk Can Game at home against North Hunterdon to close the regular season, their coach is happy to see just how far the team has come this summer.

"They're really light years ahead of where they were last year at this time," Hack boasts. "It's a really good thing, and I'm proud of them. We've got some good pieces, and if we stay mentally strong and respond to both good and bad things well, life will be so much easier this season."



Voorhees High School players practice their skills.



Voorhees High School football players practice their technique at a pre-season practice.



WATCHUNG HILLS WARRIORS

### Young, Tough And Physical

By DAVE ARTUSO

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

**WARREN TWP.** – After losing about 30 players to graduation, including their top quarterback, receiver, running back and kicker, Watchung Hills Regional's status entering the 2025 season can be boiled down to one sentence. In the words of 10th-year head coach Rich Seubert, "We're a young team without much experience."

Yet, that's not where the story ends. First, the Warriors have 105 players in the program, and it's a noteworthy number.

"It's fun to have this much participation," says Seubert. "If we stay above 100, it'll be the first time since I got here that we've had that many kids involved in the program."

Seventy-four of the 105 are either freshmen or sophomores (37 apiece).

"We'll be exciting in a couple of years," Seubert notes. "This year, they'll get baptized early and should get better and better as the season progresses."

Another reason that inexperience won't be the only Warriors' legacy in 2025 is they do boast some talent and experience at key skill positions—namely wide receiver and running back.

Senior Christian Warnicke and junior Evan Williams return in the backfield after combining for 78 carries, 382 yards and three touchdowns last year. Senior Dillon Nunes, who averaged 12.5 yards per reception last season, will lead a receiving corps that will strive to replace the combined 40 catches, 700-plus yards and six touchdowns



Photos by Chris M. Junior

Watchung Hills Regional head coach Rich Seubert works with his players during a pre-season practice.

put up by the graduated Brayden Kelly (now at The College of New Jersey) and Jake Arakelian.

"Dillon is a talented player and he's had a good summer. He'll be a two-starter, playing at cornerback as well," Seubert says. "He's also our starting punter and place-

In his punting and placekicking roles,

Nunes will be counted on to replace Byron McCann, the punter-placekicker who graduated after going 3-for-3 on field goals and 14-for-15 on extra points despite suffering an upper-body injury late in the season.

The Warriors' offense will be led by senior quarterback Liam Morris, whom Seubert calls, "a smart, talented kid who loves the game." He

### WATCHUNG WARRIORS

Head Coach: Rich Seubert, 10th season Assistant Coaches: Joe Ascolese, Joe Tremarco, Joe Almeida, Anthony Rizzolo, Paul Leinbach, Steve Fortugno, Jimmy Miller, Joe Hubert, Mark Crisafi

Section: North 2, Group 4 Last year's record: 5-5

Playoffs: Lost to Woodbridge, 35-15, in North 2, Group 5 quarterfinals

#### **SCHEDULE**

Aug. 29 vs. Moorestown, 6 p.m. Sept. 5 vs. Woodbridge, 7 p.m. Sept. 12 at North Hunterdon, 7 p.m. Sept. 19 at Linden, 7 p.m. Sept. 26 at Montgomery, 7 p.m. Oct. 3 vs. South Brunswick, 6 p.m. Oct. 10 at Rahway, 6 p.m. Oct. 17 vs. Elizabeth, 7 p.m. Oct. 24 vs. Somerville, 7 p.m.

had only one passing attempt last season but has had a good summer of practice, the coach says.

Defensively, senior David Thornbourne

PLEASE SEE WATCHUNG, PAGE 65



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### **WATCHUNG:** 'It's fun to have this much participation'

FROM PAGE 64

returns to anchor the line. Thornbourne made 45 tackles last year, seven for a loss. And the Warriors will have about half a dozen players vying for four linebacking spots, so Seubert is optimistic about putting together a good rotation in that position.

The Warriors will be playing the exact same schedule as in 2024, except with flipped locations—five home games and four away. It will start with a pair of home games—"week zero" on Aug. 29 against Moorestown, then Sept. 5 against Woodbridge. Kickoffs are set for 6 p.m. and 7 p.m., respectively.

"You don't know how that team is going to develop over time, but we'll be tough, fast and physical," says Seubert. "And if we don't make mistakes and can find ways to make plays, we'll be competitive."



Rich Seubert is in his 10th season as head coach of the Watchung Hills Warriors.



Watchung Hills Regional junior running back/defensive back Evan Williams gets ready to hit the tackle wheel.



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**WEST ESSEX KNIGHTS** 

### A New Chapter Begins

By CHRISTOPHER LAWLOR

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

NORTH CALDWELL - There is a lineage of great football coaches in the annals of West Essex High School.

Chris Benacquista ... Steve Tafaro ... Fred Keil ... Dave Drozjock ... Bill Roca ... Ron Anello to name a few. Now there's a newbie, Dan Fulton, the first year coach of the Knights who succeeds an Essex County legend.

After 14 years, Benacquista stepped down in March from the West Essex helm and took the same position at Wayne Valley. He went 116-37 during that span for a sparkling .758 winning percentage and is the program's winningest coach.

In 2023, Benacquista won his 100th game and the Knights captured the NJSIAA Group 3, North Jersey championship along with sectional title in 2011 and 2017. Last season, the Knights went 8-3 with a Super Football Conference Patriot White Division chip.

But that run is over and enter Fulton, who was hired on April 7.

Fulton piloted Hanover Park for the previous seven seasons, winning two conference titles as well as backto-back sectional titles in 2023 and 2024. Fulton's coaching dossier also includes assistant positions at Parsippany Hills, Whippany Park and Lock Haven University in Pennsylvania. Last season, Fulton's Hornets (10-2) advanced to the Group 2, North Section final but narrowly lost to Shabazz, 8-7.

"We haven't earned anything yet and are undefeated," Fulton said. "I told the parents it's still the honeymoon stage but we have a lot of work ahead. The kids are tough and respectful. They have to grasp X's and O's of a new offense and the wrinkles on defense and special teams. Regardless, we'll have our hands full every game."

The Knights return two starters on each side of the ball with senior three-year starting quarterback-line-



**Photos by Glenn Clark** 

Jordan Lato rushes the passer during a pre-season drill at West Essex.

multiple spread set. Long threw for 1,178 yards and nine touchdowns while rushing for 257 yards and two scores 

Ivy and Patriot League programs. as a junior. He has interest from Division III schools. Junior quarterback-wide receiver Gaetano Iavarrone (5-10, league performers. 160) is pushing Long for time under center.

Senior wide receiver-cornerback Justin Perini (6-4,

backer Jake Long (5-11, 190) pulling the strings from a 190) is Long's big target after catching 18 balls for 232 yards and two TDs. Perini has offers from Buffalo and

Long and Perini are West Essex's only returning all-

PLEASE SEE ESSEX, PAGE 67

Wishing you a Successful 2025 Season from all of us at The Progress



### ESSEX: Facing a high-level schedule this season

FROM PAGE 66

The running game is fueled by sophomore H-back Frank Iavarrone with senior Ryan McInerney, juniors Mike Lozito and Luke De-Marco, and sophomore Anthony Cirigliano also in the mix.

Up front, two-way senior linemen Matt Celentano (5-10, 225) and Santino Perri (5-10, 245) should earn starting roles. The secondary rotation was determined in the preseason but Perini is the leader. The defense will show multiple looks out of a 3-4 base.

"We have a lot of skilled players but what I told them is 'you have to play hard' in another to earn playing time; it's fair and it does not matter your age or grade," the head coach said.

Fulton's inaugural season in North Caldwell begins on Friday, Aug. 28 with Old Tappan—a team that eliminated the Knights in last year's Group 3, North Section 2 final—and Wayne Hills visit a week later on Friday, Sept. 7. The Patriot White schedule kicks up a notch at rival James Caldwell on Friday, Sept. 12.

The Knights are grouped in the division with Passaic Valley, Caldwell, Wayne Hills, Nutley and Millburn. However, Fulton's squad will entertain Hanover Park on Friday, Oct. 17 in a game that should have high emotion and sectional playoff point ramifications as the penultimate contest of the regular season.

# WEST

Head Coach: Dan Fulton, 1st season Assistant Coaches: Tim Glenn (DC). Tommy Brennan (OC), Alex Schoen (STC), Mike Ilauget, Kyle Kovats, Ron Rowe, Sal Fiorilli, Vin Cordasco. Tom Tran. Marcus Brown. Dave

Section: North, Group 3 Last year's record: 8-3 Playoffs: North 2 Group 3 final Returning starters: 2/2

#### **SCHEDULE**

Aug. 29 vs. Old Tappan 6 p.m. Sept. 5 vs. Wayne Hills 6:30 p.m. Sept. 12 at Caldwell 7 p.m. Sept. 19 at Lakeland 6:30 p.m. Sept. 26 at Nutley 6:30 p.m. Oct. 3 vs. Passaic Valley 6:30 p.m. Oct. 17 vs. Hanover Park 7 p.m. Oct. 25 at Morris Knolls 1 p.m.

"The Hanover Park game will be tough; I love those kids," Fulton acknowledged. "As for the league, I've been watching a lot of film and trying to get a book on them. Our opener is against one of premier public programs in the state. The schedule is at a higher level."



Dan Fulton is in his first year at West Essex after a successful tenure at Hanover Park.



Senior Brody Rella gives it his all at West Essex. Jake Long sets up to pass at West Essex.





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**WEST MORRIS WOLFPACK** 

### THE HORSES UP FRONT



Photos by Jim Petrucci

Some of the key players for West Morris Central are, back row, from left, Tommy Bortia, AJ Codella, Luke Daconti and Julian Lopez. In the front row, from left, are Matt Lacerenza, Mike Finaly, Jake Garofalo and Sam Turner.

By JOE HOFMANN

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

**WASHINGTON TWP.** – A football question for the ages: What comes first in a great running game?

Talented running backs?

A powerful O-Line?

West Morris is about to find out.

Coach Kevin Hennelly's Wolfpack returns powerful veterans who know their way around the trenches.

The backfield? It's riddled with newbies. Hennelly has already cast his vote: He'd rather have big boys up front who know what they're doing paving the way for the newcomers.

His reasoning: The nuances of West Morris' Wing-T can be taught to the backs. Having the horses up front clearing out running room makes life easier.

"I'd rather have inexperienced skill guys and experience up front, especially with what we run," he said. "We should be big up front. Sometimes we are tough but not big, but we should have some decent size up front."

The leading man in the trenches will be Princeton-bound guard Tommy Borgia, heading into his fourth year as a starter, a remarkable achievement at a football school like West Morris.

Borgia has one guard spot locked down while Matt Lacerenza, Julian Lopez, John Garcia and Brendan Dwyer, and Derek Inskeep are battling for the spot on the oth-

PLEASE SEE WEST, PAGE 69

### Go WOLFPACK!



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Observer-Tribune

### WEST: 'We'll be experienced up front'

FROM PAGE 68

er side.

Tackles Blake Parkinson-Gee and A.J. Codella are other key returnees from last year. Michael Carrajat is getting a look at one of the tackle spots.

Quarterback Stephen Braccioforte is the lone returning member of the backfield and returns to run the attack. Robert Fazzino has been getting reps at quarterback.

"Braccioforte understands the offense," Hennelly said. "He is good with the run game. We are not sophisticated. We might throw more but a lot of times we won't. He has a quick release. He does a few things that we can take advantage of. He's agile and has decent speed."

The backfield will consist of Brody Mansolino, Seamus Buckley, and Deacon Frayne at fullback. Sam Turner, Jake Garofalo, and Michael Finlay are getting long looks at halfback.

Tyler Klein and Turner are working out at receiver and Sean Conway is getting looks at tight end.

The O-Line candidates are getting looks at D-Line, as are Luke D'Aconti, Luke Gouse and Fazzino.

Conway, Mansolino, Garcia, Frayne, and Buckley are working out at line-backer.

Braccioforte, Turner, Klein, Aaron Witte and Finley will comprise the secondary,

Teddy Olsen might work his way into a spot as a receiver or in the secondary. Things are on schedule for the Wolf-



Kevin Hennelly enters his 25th season as head coach of the West Morris Central football team.

pack, which saw its three-year dynasty of sectional championships end last year with a playoff semifinal loss to West Essex. The team figures to be in the thick of things in the SFC Liberty White and in North Group 3. West Morris hosts sister school Mendham on Aug. 29. The league schedule opens up at defending league champion Morris Knolls the following week.

"We had great attendance with the training stuff," Hennelly said. "We have a good base in.

"I am satisfied with where we are. Our base in all three phases are in, though we are not geared toward any

### WEST MORRIS WOLFPACK

Head coach: Kevin Hennelly, 25th season.
Assistant coaches: Kevin J. Hennelly,
Henry Frayne, Barry Buchanan, Sean Morris, Tyler Berntsen, Robert Goodwin, Chris
DelPreore, Brian Nesfedder, Colin Eckert,
Jack Di Pietro

Section: North Group 3 Last year's record: 8-3.

**Playoffs:** Lost in sectional semifinals to West Essex. 28-14.

**Returning starters:** 5/5

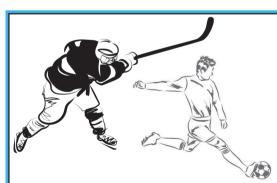
#### **SCHEDULE**

Aug. 29 Mendham 7:30 p.m. Sept. 6 at Morris Knolls 1 p.m. Sept. 12 Morristown 7:30 p.m. Sept. 19 Warren Hills 7:30 p.m. Sept. 26 at Randolph 7 p.m. Oct. 3 at Parsippany Hills 7 p.m. Oct. 10 Montville 7:30 p.m. Oct. 17 at Roxbury 7 p.m. Oct. 24 Mount Olive 7:30 p.m.

one specific team. We have some returning starters up front. Luckily, we'll be experienced up front but we'll be inexperienced in the skill positions. The one skill position back is the QB. We'll see where we go with what we have."



Mike Finaly practices catching punts at West Morris Central.



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WHIPPANY PARK WILDCATS

### New Coach Will 'Wing' IT

By CHRISTOPHER LAWLOR

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

HANOVER TWP. - Greg Gruzdis spent the spring and summer teaching a foreign language.

Welcome to Wing T 101, where the recently hired head football coach at Whippany Park, is indoctrinating his team into the nuisances and terminology associated with a new offense.

"The kids have bought into the Wing-T but with anything new, there's a learning curve," Gruzdis said. "There's a different language involved with the Wing T and this isn't the typical way it was originally run."

Designed by the late University of Delaware legendary coach Tubby Raymonds, Gruzdis has tweaked it with a kaleidoscope of looks, formations, misdirection and shifts, putting his stamp on an offense that suits his Wildcats quite well.

"I'm very optimistic about this team and the success we hope to establish," said Gruzdis, who is the program's third head coach in the last four years was an assistant last season at Chatham.

Whippany Park has recorded 16 wins in the last seven seasons, including seven in 2021, and 32-59 over a decade. Gruzdis rang up an 88-47 mark with five division titles in 14 years at Waldwick/Midland Park in Bergen County and inherited a 3-6 team after Luke Maginnis left the Wildcats to coach at Fairleigh Dickinson-Florham.

Quarterback Brandon Giangeruso, who threw for 927 vards and seven touchdowns and rushed for 422 yards and five more scores, has embraced the Wing T and will trigger it after earning second team all-league honors. Junior two-way back Nic Petty and sophomore Jason Sica will be the ball carriers.

Speedy senior wide receiver-defensive back Darian Jackson is a sectional sprint champion in the 100 and

**Photos by Glenn Clark** 

Senior Christian Giangrande, an offensive lineman and linebacker on defense, is looking for a big year at Whippany Park.



Darian Jackson hauls in a pass at Whippany Park.

PLEASE SEE PARK, PAGE 71

### Have a Great Season Wildcats!

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### **PARK:** Players and staff are both working hard to win

FROM PAGE 70

200 meters and runs a 4.5 40. "He's going to sneak up on people and can really fly," said Gruzdis of Jackson.

Two-way tackle Nick Rocco (6-3, 205) is one of two returning starters on offense.

The 4-3 defense has tackle Sica and rush end Gavin Brown up front and senior Christian Giangrande (6-0, 200) headlines the linebacker and will start as an offensive guard.

The secondary has length and experience with corners Oleksandr Kulyk (6-4, 190) and Justin Getzinger (6-3, 165) and free safety Nick Casale.

As for the schedule, it's lined up for success. The Wildcats along with reigning champions Boonton, Hopatcong, Warren Hills, Wallkill Valley, Kinnelon and North Warren are the Super Football Conference National Blue Division.

The opening two assignments are SFC crossover road contests at Parsippany at 7 p.m. on Thursday, Aug. 28 and Glen Ridge at noon on Saturday, Sept. 6. The Wildcats debut at home with division frontrunner Boonton at 7 p.m. on Friday, Sept. 12. A quick start is imperative but four of the first five are away.

"I think we can compete with anyone but we have to avoid injuries," the head coach acknowledged.

Additionally, Gruzdis has assembled an all-star coaching staff with a mixture of veterans and young ones with major college playing experience, most notably O-line coach Jim Cimino, who is in his sixth decade on the sidelines.

"Our players and staff are working hard to bring a winning program here," Gruzdis said.



Senior Justin Getsinger is a split end and defensive back at Whippany Park.



Greg Gruzdis is in his first season at Whippany Park.

### WHIPPANY PARK WILDCATS

Head Coach: Greg Gruzdis, First season

Assistant Coaches: Brian Feeney, Jim Cimino, Joe Schuchard, Trevaughn Rodriguez, Paris Black, Jacob Toupet

Section: North, Group 1 Last year's record: 3-6 Playoffs: None

Returning starters: 2/2

#### **SCHEDULE**

Aug. 28 at Parsippany 7 p.m.

Sept. 6 at Glen Ridge 12 p.m. Sept. 12 vs. Boonton 7 p.m.

Sept. 19 at Kinnelon 7 p.m.

Sept. 26 at Jefferson 6:30 p.m.

Oct. 3 vs. North Warren 7 p.m.

Oct. 11 at Wallkill Valley 12 p.m.

Oct. 17 vs. Hopatcong 7 p.m.

Oct. 24 vs. High Point 7 p.m.

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