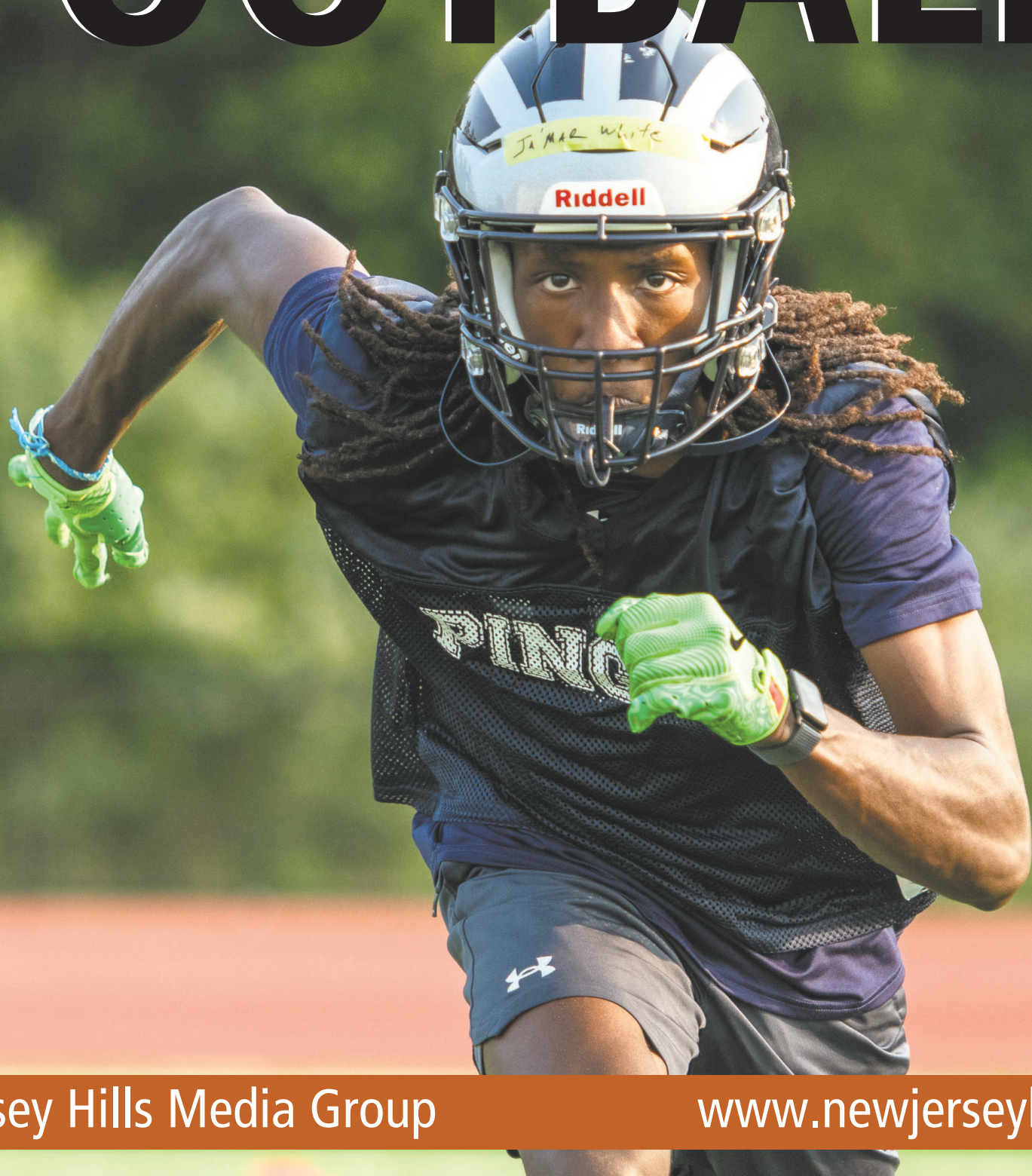


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BEST GAMES ON HORIZON

By **JOE HOFMANN**
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

West Morris, coming off its school-record third straight sectional championship, will begin building for a possible fourth.

But sister school Mendham would like nothing better than to throw a monkey wrench into the Wolfpack’s plans.

The Minutemen will play host when their respective seasons get underway Friday night, Aug. 30.

That is one of many games to keep an eye on this fall. All high school football games have some meaning, but some games have more than others.

Here is a look at some of the other more meaningful games on tap.

Bernards at Monmouth Regional, Aug. 29: The Mountaineers were 12-1 and won their first-ever sectional title and are gunning for another. Monmouth, a Shore Conference member, was 6-4 last season.

Voorhees at Rahway, Aug. 29: How will the Vikings look under new coach John Hack? The veteran coach comes over from Morris Catholic.

Morris Catholic at Teaneck, Aug. 29: Morris Catholic lost Hack to Voorhees and brought in Rae Oliver. It’ll be interesting to see how the Crusaders fare in their first game.

North Hunterdon at Hunterdon Central, Aug. 30: These two Hunterdon sister schools won’t waste much time and will get things going right away in their respective season openers.

Weequahic at Mountain Lakes, Aug. 30: These are two of the best Group I programs in all of New Jersey – and just might be facing each other with a lot more at stake in November.

Morris Hills at Dover, Aug. 30: The two schools spent many years going after it against one another in the old Iron Hills Conference-Hills Division. Dover is out of the Ivy and would gain instant credibility with a win here.

Morris Knolls at West Morris, Sept. 6: Bryan Gallagher, a Knolls graduate, takes over for legendary coach Bill Regan, who stepped down after 49 years.

Hillside at Bernards, Sept. 6: These two teams no longer share the same division but this game still carries a lot of weight.

Mount Olive at Roxbury, Sept. 6: The Marauders won a sectional championship in Roxbury last year. The Gaels won on Mount Olive’s turf last year and that helped them

win a NJSFC-Liberty White championship.

Parsippany at Boonton, Sept. 6: The Bombers and new coach Sean Norton will try to win the Old Shoe in a historic rivalry that took root in 1965 in the old Jersey Hills Conference.

Hanover Park at Madison, Sept. 7: These two neighboring schools have had a bitter rivalry going on since the forming of the NJAC in 2009 and the Super Conference in 2016.

Caldwell at West Essex, Sept. 13: These two backyard rivals will set an early tone for their season right here.

Mountain Lakes at Hanover Park, Sept. 13: The Hornets upset Mountain Lakes last year before the Herd righted themselves and won a state Group 1 crown.

Phillipsburg at Ridge, Sept. 20: The BCC American Silver title could come down to this meeting. These two shared the regular-season crown with Hillsborough last year.

Boonton at Hopatcong, Sept. 20: Sean Norton returns to Hopatcong, where he coached the Chiefs the last two years.

Delbarton at St. Peter’s Prep, Sept. 20: The Green Wave knocked off the Jersey City school in OT last year on the way to being New Jersey’s second-best team.

Montgomery at Watchung Hills, Sept. 27: Montgomery beat the Warriors last year and that victory decided the BCC-Liberty Silver crown last year. Watchung is looking forward to the rematch.

Mountain Lakes at Boonton, Sept. 27: Not many rivalries in Morris County can match this one. Many of these players played in the same youth program growing up.

Pope John at Delbarton, Oct. 5: The Green Wave defense smothered the Lions last year. Pope John would like to return the favor this time.

Morris Hills at Morris Knolls, Oct. 10: Knolls will bring out the portable lights when its sister school comes calling.

Roxbury at Randolph, Oct. 11: Morris County’s granddaddy of all rivalries, dating back to the 1960s.

Montville at Mendham, Oct. 18: When the smoke clears, this might be the game that decides the NJSFC Liberty Blue.

Roxbury at West Morris, Oct. 18: Both teams might be in rebuilding mode but this is always an entertaining and intriguing game.

Bergen Catholic at Delbarton, Oct. 19: New Jersey’s two best teams last year. Bergen won the Non-Public A title over the Green Wave last year, 24-14.

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>> ON THE COVER

J'mar White of Pingry runs a drill during a preseason practice.

Photo by Chris M. Junior

BERNARDS MOUNTAINEERS

BACK FROM A HISTORIC RUN

By DAVE ARTUSO

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

BERNARDSVILLE – If the 2024 Bernards High School football team is going to repeat, or even approach, its history-making 12-1 season of 2023, the Mountaineers have a lot of growing up to do.

“There’s a lot of talent here. We just need to do all the other things that prove we’re ready to have a great season,” 17th-year coach Jon Simoneau said shortly after the Mountaineers’ Aug. 17 Media Day practice and intrasquad scrimmage. “Our seniors have had the luxury of not being called upon to lead because the class before them paved the way, and now they need to grow up fast.”

That was evident hours before when, according to the coach, 80 percent of the team arrived late. And Simoneau called them on it before dismissing them to enjoy some post-practice hot dogs and beverages.

“Everything is a learning experience,” he said. “And I hope they learned something today.”

Talent To Spare

The Mountaineers may have some fun teaching new opponents a thing or two this year—namely, Bernards still has plenty of talent on both sides of the ball.

It begins with a three-headed monster at running back. Senior Terrence Hanratty, who missed most of last season with an injury after scoring nine touchdowns the previous year and five in 2023 on only 38 rushing attempts, rejoins last year’s full-season



Jon Simoneau begins his 17th season as head coach of the Bernards High School football team.

stars, junior Logan Stevens and sophomore Patrick Carlisle.

Stevens led the way statistically with 676 yards and 10 touchdowns for the Mountaineers, with Carlisle turning in stellar freshman campaign with 350 yards and eight scores.

Despite the loss of Jake Caldwell’s team-leading 594 yards on 42 receptions, the Mountaineers’ receiving corps returns a wealth of talent. They are led by sometimes-acrobatic senior Jack Morra, who

BERNARDS MOUNTAINEERS

Head coach: Jon Simoneau, 17th season

Assistant coaches: David Carmon, Brendan O’Reilly, Ryan McCullough, Kyle Weiberkiki, Steve Masotti, John Maddaluna III, Chris Shilts, Chris Kulcar, Zach Lakatos, James Horan, trainer

Section: North Section 2, Group 2

Last year’s record: 12-1

Playoffs: Lost, 17-0, to Westwood in the state Group 2 semifinals

SCHEDULE

Aug. 29 at Monmouth Regional, 6 p.m.

Sept. 6 vs. Hillside, 7 p.m.

Sept. 13 at Delaware Valley, 7 p.m.

Sept. 20 vs. Voorhees, 7 p.m.

Sept. 27 at J.P. Stevens, 7 p.m.

Oct. 4 vs. South Plainfield, 7 p.m.

Oct. 12 vs. Summit, 7 p.m.

Oct. 19 at Governor Livingston, 1 p.m.

Oct. 25 at Carteret, 7 p.m.

corralled 24 balls for 394 yards and six touchdowns last season.

Fellow senior Max Austin (21 receptions, 323 yards and five touchdowns) is back for another year. Sophomore Sean Arcelay returns, as well, after averaging about 26 yards for his four catches, three of which went to the house. And when Stevens wasn’t running, he was racking up 155 yards and a touchdown as a receiver. Senior Brendan Shafer didn’t score last year but he racked up 119 yards receiving on nine catches.

Bernards also has its 2023 starting tight end back in the person of senior Aiden Gribben, who will double as a linebacker on defense.

Up front, senior Grayson Meyer will anchor the offensive line, joined by juniors James Renz and Finn Osborne.

The one skill spot where the Mountaineers don’t have an experienced player is at quarterback. The 2024 starter is Nolan Walsh, a sophomore who threw only two passes last fall. But if genes have anything to do with it, the young man is in for an exciting career: His father and two uncles are members of the Bernards High Athletic Hall of Fame.

Defensive Standouts

The Mountaineers aren’t lacking for defensive experience and talent, either. Junior defensive end Thomas Diemer and Austin, at defensive back, combined for 86 tackles, including 32 solo style. Senior linebacker Dan Ferguson (40 total tackles), who’ll also play tight end, and lineman Justin Simpson, a junior, are back again—as is senior defensive lineman David Silva (20 tackles), who has set records in the weight room.

“Hanratty will lead the linebackers and Diemar should threaten—and possibly pass—the school sack record,” said Simoneau. “Austin anchors the secondary for the third straight season, and Silva should have another stellar season anchoring the D-line.”

PLEASE SEE HISTORIC, PAGE 5



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Photos by Rich Mariani

Some of the key players on the 2024 Bernards High School football team include, from left, senior Daniel Ferguson, senior Grayson Meyer, junior James Renz, junior Finn Osborne and junior Justin Simpson.

HISTORIC: Back from a run for the ages

FROM PAGE 4

With all the returning starters the Mountaineers can boast, it hasn't left much room for newcomers to surprise. Or so one would think.

In addition to Walsh, who the Mountaineers are counting on to step up, strong-legged junior kicker Noah Ochab hopes to contribute some points this season. The defensive side looks to linebackers Teagun Harnett (junior) and Tyce Hanratty (sophomore), as well as Osborne and sophomore Chase Caponigro, to break through this year.

Strength Of Schedule

One unintended consequence from the Mountaineers' record-setting run in 2023 was a more difficult slate of games this fall.

"When you do well, they give you good teams—all big, strong, physical teams—to play," Simoneau noted.

Five of Bernards' nine opponents are new this year. And the uneven number means the Mountaineers are playing in what's known as "Week Zero"—the last weekend in August.

"I'll roll the dice that we can get our program to play a week earlier," the coach asserted. "I think we can do this."



Assistant coach Kyle Weiberkicki of Bernards High School drills linemen at a preseason practice.



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BOONTON BOMBERS

LIVING THE DREAM

By JOE HOFMANN

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

BOONTON – Someone pinch rookie Boonton High School football coach Sean Norton. Let him know that he is not dreaming ... and yet he is, in a way.

How many people get a chance to work at their dream job?

That's where Norton finds himself – running the Bombers football program.

Spend five minutes talking with him and it's obvious that he is exactly where he wants to be.

Norton bleeds red and black. The 2007 Boonton grad is home again.

He wouldn't have it any other way.

"It feels great," he said. "It's been a lot of fun so far."

The other day, he and his older brother Mickey, an assistant coach, drove up to the school before practice.

Sean turned to his brother and said, "Dude, this is really happening now."

The Nortons' uncles played for the Bombers. So did their dad. Sean and Mickey did.

No wonder Sean said, "I really love Boonton football."

He returned to his alma-mater after helping to rebuild Hopatcong. The Chiefs won one game in his first year and four in his second. But when longtime Boonton coach Bryan Gallagher took over at Morris Knolls last winter, Norton filled the void.

And now he gets to run the program he once played for. And the one he truly loves.



Photos by Ed Ruping

Sean Norton is in his first year as head coach of the Boonton Bombers High School football team.



Jordan Thomas runs an offensive drill.

PLEASE SEE BOMBERS, PAGE 7



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BOMBERS: Boonton alum takes over head reins



Liam Onopa works with the tackle wheel at a Boonton High School football practice.

BOONTON BOMBERS

Head Coach: Sean Norton, first season

Assistant coaches: Mickey Norton, Sal Montevago, Andy Scalone, Steve Delaporte, Jeff Tapolacci, Bryan Figueroa.

Section: North, Group 1

Last year's record: 4-7.

Playoffs: None.

SCHEDULE

Aug. 30 vs. Belvidere 7 p.m.
Sept. 6 at Parsippany 7 p.m.
Sept. 14 vs. Whippany Park 1 p.m.
Sept. 20 at Hopatcong 7 p.m.
Sept. 27 vs. Mountain Lakes 7 p.m.
Oct. 4 at Kinnelon 7 p.m.
Oct. 10 vs. North Warren 6 p.m.
Oct. 19 at Wallkill Valley, Noon
Oct. 25 vs. Cedar Grove 7 p.m.

FROM PAGE 6

'Well-conditioned'

"The kids are excellent," he said. "The staff is walking into a good program. I was on coach Gallagher's staff for a long time, so I know what Boonton kids are like. The kids are well-conditioned football players. They have a high IQ, they come to meetings with questions. They know how to run in between drills. They get into the weight room. They get in and get out. The kids make it extra special for me."

Sylas White (1,300 yards rushing last year) returns at running back and will be one of Morris County's best backs this year. Boonton will run the triple option.

"He's bigger, faster and stronger," Norton said. "My favorite thing about Sylas is ... now, I'm still trying to figure the kids out ... Sylas around the coaches is a quiet guy, a mellow dude. But he is becoming a vocal leader with the kids. That's enjoyable to watch."

"He is fast, strong, has great vision, makes people miss, and breaks tackles," Norton said.

Calling the signals will be quarterback Metin Ahmedi, who was a receiver last year.

"He gives us a good option at QB," Norton said. "He is an AP student, has the second-fastest 40 time on the team and he really cares. It's a new position for him. Five minutes before practice, he is out on the field, working on steps, asking coaches about his reads, and he wants to be great."

Joining Ahmedi and White in the backfield will be running back Drew Cabalar.

"He packed on muscle this off-season,



Metin Ahmedi works on his passing.



Santino Adornetto goes through a blocking drill.

he is an AP student and was first-team all conference last year," Norton said. "We'll use him all over the place – fullback, halfback, middle linebacker, and special teams. I coached his two older brothers and I'm excited to coach another Cabalar. Colin Bostrom will round out the backfield."

Guard Sal Vitale is big, fast, and strong and will lead the line.

"He is very physical with a very high football IQ," Norton said. "He gets the offense, how things work."

Joining Vitale up front will be tackles Hamza Shehbaz, Enes Qose, Santino Adornetto, Trevan Zuercher, guard Ryder Williams-Jones, and center Jack McLaughlin.

"The line is looking good," Norton said.

The 3-3 defense will be led by Vitale and Shehbaz up front. Those two will be joined by a group that includes Qose, Valdet Ahmetaj and Liam Onopa.

Cabalar will lead the linebacking unit along with Phoenix Lacorte, Bryan Duffy, Josiah Chaplain, and Isa Kupa.

Ahmedi, White, Bostrom, and Jeremiah Sivi will man the backfield.

The Bombers will open against Belvidere and are contenders in the SFC-National Blue, a league that includes Hopatcong, Kinnelon, North Warren, Wallkill Valley, and Whippany Park.

"The SFC did a good job putting the league together," Norton said. "No one stands out and there is no one that stands as a bad football team. It's pretty even across the board."

Go BOMBERS!



Wishing you a Successful
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CHATHAM COUGARS

POST-SEASON IS THE GOAL

By CHRIS ORLANDO

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

CHATHAM – If there was a silver lining to the Chatham Cougars' season last year it's that they were able to go out and win their final two games.

And while they were both contests in the North Jersey, Group 4 consolation bracket, head coach Evan Picariello hopes that energy carries over into the upcoming campaign.

"We're definitely optimistic for this season," began Picariello, now in his fourth season at the helm. "We were disappointed last year for sure but I think we finished really well in our final two games. The players were challenged and responded in a businesslike way. I like that momentum factor for the players that are back."

Chatham, which finished 4-7 last year, is scheduled to open its fall season at 1 p.m. on Saturday, 7 against Morris Hills.

The Cougars have won the last two matchups with Morris Hills including a 35-7 victory last year that signaled Chatham's first win of the season after starting with three straight losses.

Chatham is situated in the Liberty Blue Division of the Super Football Conference this season along with Mendham, Montville, Morris Hills, Parsippany Hills and Warren Hills.

The Cougars lost quarterback Jackson Hodges to graduation but still boast senior Will Allen, who threw for just under 600 yards and five touchdowns last season.

Chatham should also be led by senior



Photos by Glenn Clark

Will Ritchie carries the ball at a Chatham High School football practice.

two-way linemen Eric Riso and Will Colvin.

The remainder of the Cougars' roster includes seniors Jeremy Angeles,

Ben Bernich, Alex Booth, Jackson Canto, Ryan Carey, Nick Carillo, Alex Fairbairn, Jack Haid, Jeremy Hoffman, Harrison Housman, Carl Johnston, Joey Levato,

CHATHAM COUGARS

Head Coach: Evan Picariello, fourth season

Assistant Coaches: Greg Gruzdis, Todd Pivnick, Pat DiMartino, Brian Nagy, Adam Agree, Dan Moskowitz, Chris Bournes, Tony Rodriguez, Joe Sullivan, Mike Papa, Luke McAloon, Liam Murphy

Section: North, Group 4

Last year's record: 4-7

Playoffs: Did not qualify

Returning Starters: 6/6

SCHEDULE

Sept. 7 vs. Morris Hills, 1 p.m.

Sept. 13 at Montville, 6:30 p.m.

Sept. 21 vs. Mount Olive, 1 p.m.

Sept. 28 vs. Livingston, 7 p.m.

Oct. 4 at Roxbury, 7 p.m.

Oct. 11 vs. Mendham, 3 p.m.

Oct. 18 at Warren Hills, 7 p.m.

Oct. 26 at Parsippany Hills, 1 p.m.

Alex McWilliams, Avery Medd, Kyle Rudy, Dylan Scarpelli, Max Sherman, Nerissa Sime-Zuluaga and Chase Sullivan and juniors Dylan Abernethy, Sonny Arden, Ryan Bailey, John Barrett, Matt Bedoya, Hunter Bigham, Jase Catullo, Jack Cooper, Jack D'Antoni, Tommy Douglas, Michael Freeman, Caden Gabriele, Liam Kirby, Michael MacAniff, Gavin McNaugh, Charlie Murray, Carter Rasmuson and Evan Shah.

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CHATHAM: Tough schedule starts with Morris Hills

FROM PAGE 8

After traveling to play at Montville on Sept. 13, Chatham returns to Cougar Field for three of its next four games including contests against Mount Olive (Sept. 21), Livingston (Sept. 28) and Mendham (Oct. 11).

"Our schedule is a tough one, division-wise and with cross-over games," said Picariello, who guided the Cougars to consecutive 7-4 seasons including playoff berths in 2021 and '22. "There is no letup to it and it will definitely test us."

An eight-game regular-season slate plus a potential of five more post-season games as the state plays down to overall group champions can see teams play as many as 14 games a year.

"It can be a very long, exhausting season but that's the goal: to get into the post-season and make a long run," said Picariello. "But right now our full focus is on preparing for Morris Hills."



Evan Picariello is in his fourth season as head coach of the Chatham Cougars.



Above: Chatham High School football players, from left, Tommy Douglas, Ben Bernich and Charlie Murray run through a drill. **Left:** Will Allen sets up to throw.



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DELBARTON GREEN WAVE

'LAST YEAR DOESN'T MATTER'

By JOE HOFMANN

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

MORRISTOWN – Delbarton fell short in its quest to win a state championship last year. But the Green Wave put together a Morris County resume for the ages.

How so? How about with wins over Don Bosco, St. Joseph-Montvale, Seton Hall Prep, St. Peter's Prep, Pope John, DePaul, and Paramus Catholic.

No other Morris County school has ever assembled such a who's-who of great teams on its schedule – and none have ever remotely approached that many wins over such a daunting slate.

From the beginning of the year right down to the end, coach Brian Bowers' team made its precedence felt in New Jersey football.

And now, Bowers wants everyone wearing the Green and White to forget it.

"Last year doesn't matter," he said. "The only thing that matters is development day to day, eliminating the noise and, by mid season, for us to be playing very well."

While last year's club was loaded with veterans, this year's will turn to plenty of newcomers, which doesn't seem nearly as gloomy as it sounds.

Many returnees mixed it up with the top-tier talent that graduated and lifted their game up in the process.

And now they get their shot.

'Starting From Scratch'

"We'll be starting from scratch, like everyone else," Bowers said. "We don't have the returning experience we had last year.



Brian Bowers begins his 21st season as head coach of Delbarton football.

We do have a good amount of guys who are seniors who are very good and waiting for their opportunity. Maybe they have been behind multiple-year starters and gotten playing time but now have a front and

PLEASE SEE DELBARTON, PAGE 11



Photos by Ed Ruping

Dever Hanlon, left, and Grant Van Raaphorst practice their skills at a Delbarton practice. The Green Wave is coming off a 10-2 season.



Best of luck to the
DELBARTON FOOTBALL TEAM

from all of us at
 New Jersey Hills Media Group

DELBARTON: Talent is plentiful for Green Wave

FROM PAGE 10

center role. Guys want to prove themselves. “We don’t have a lot of experience. We do have talent.”

Jadon Princivalli will lead the offense at quarterback.

“Last year he was our backup to Christian Zabrowski, but there wasn’t much difference in terms of ability,” Bowers said. “Jadon got half the reps last year. He knows how to run the offense. He is a dual threat. He throws a great ball and is very athletic. He’ll make good decisions. Jadon is very good and has spent a lot of time waiting for his opportunity. He has taken the reins right from the summer. He has a lot of ability.”

Last year, the team pounded away with running back Ryan Trafford operating behind a big line. This year, Bowers vows to spread the ball around.

Brock Dandridge will be one of the mainstays out of the backfield.

“He is a very good football player,” Bowers said. “He’s fast, powerful, runs with patience, he can block, he can catch. He can do all the things we need him to do. He’s dynamic.”

Another threat out of the backfield will be Kobe Irby-Mason, “hopefully a home run hitter,” according to Bowers. “He has top-end speed.”

Freshman Austin Kiely has been impressive in the preseason.

Bowers would also like to get the ball to talented receivers such as Phil Folmar, Matt Tafuri, and Joe Skuraton, all of whom are versatile and can play running back or receiver.

“Dandridge is the clear No. 1 but we have other guys who can contribute with speed

DELBARTON GREEN WAVE

Head Coach: Brian Bowers, 21st season

Assistant coaches: R.J. Cobbs, Patrick Cummings, Tim Fell, Ross Martin, Nick Mangold, Luke Chiarolanzo, Matt Leotti, Rob Flynn, John Ahsler, Zack Tabor

Section: Non-Public A

Last year’s record: 10-2.

Playoffs: Lost to Bergen Catholic in Non-Public A final, 24-14

SCHEDULE

Aug. 31 vs. Iona Prep 1 p.m.
Sept. 7 vs. Malvern Prep (Pa.) 1 p.m.
Sept. 13 at Msgr. Farrell (NY) 6 p.m.
Sept. 21 at St. Peter’s Prep 7 p.m.
Sept. 28 at Seton Hall Prep 1 p.m.
Oct. 5 vs. Pope John 1 p.m.
Oct. 19 vs. Bergen Catholic 1 p.m.
Oct. 25 at DePaul 7 p.m.
Nov. 1 at Paramus Catholic 7 p.m.

sweeps and things of that nature,” Bowers said. “The goal for us is to spread the ball around. We have the athletes and we’d like to stretch the field vertically and horizontally.”

Folmar will be a four-year starter and is one of the best receivers in New Jersey.

There is plenty of ability at receiver with the likes of Patrick Goetz (6-4, 205), Tafuri, Skuraton, Danny Dotro, Grant Van Raaphorst, Xavier Rodriguez, and Girard Yoo.

Spread The Field More Than Ever

“We have a lot of options,” Bowers said. “We’ll spread the field more than we ever have.”



Tyler Jackson runs an defensive drill at Delbarton.

The line was a strength last year and should be once again despite the loss of four starters. Delbarton churns out college-bound linemen like no other school in Morris County.

The returnee is right guard Andy Covello, who will be joined by Peter Donini (6-8, 270), a tremendous discus and shot putter who “has a lot of power and is flexible and looks great playing tackle. He is that long tackle you dream about having,” according to Bowers.

Lorenzo Petrucci will play left guard, Matt Shivas will play center and Jack Christie will play tackle.

The leader of the defense will be line-

backer Kyle Checchio, one of the best in North Jersey, if not all of New Jersey. He’ll be joined at the position by Michael Scalfani.

Three-year starter Troy Bailey returns and he is another great one to help anchor the defense.

The D-Line is loaded, led by Chris Dadas (6-4, 315), Luca Lopez, Tyler Jackson, Emmet Caughey, Joe Tulli, and Devon Martin.

The inside linebackers will be Alex Fazekas and Aiden Barber.

Joining Bailey in the secondary will be Lucas Cardinale, Will Trafford, and Chaz Cusimano, Nick Stoll, Chase Houser, Giuseppe DiPietro, and Matt O’Leary.



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DOVER TIGERS

BRINGING IT BACK

By **JOE HOFMANN**
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

DOVER – Welcome back to Morris County, Dover football.
Well, kind of.
The rebuilding Tigers spent the last four seasons in the NJSFC-Ivy Division, which consists mainly of Bergen County programs who are struggling with numbers or just struggling.
But now, Bill Goble’s team is back in the area – in a way.
Dover finds itself placed in the SFC-Patriot Red, along with Jefferson, Sparta, Lakeland, Vernon, and West Milford. The Tigers will be paying a little more in gas mileage than in the IHC-Hills days, but Goble is delighted to be facing better competition with a chance to make the playoffs now.
“It’s nice to be back playing in the area,” Goble said.
Gone are the days of the Tigers playing in the Hills, but there are games against former Hills rivals Morris Hills (home on Aug. 30) and Mendham (home on Sept. 20). Goble’s team will also travel to former Ivy foe Pascack Hills (Oct. 10) and host Kittatinny (Oct. 25).
The Tigers, since they are now out of the Ivy, are now eligible for the state playoffs. They are in Group 3 – and Goble hopes to perhaps make an impact..
It has always been his goal to get the program back into the state playoff conversation.
“We’re trying to bring back Dover to the



Bill Goble begins his second season as head football coach at Dover High School.

1980s and 90s and even early 2000s,” Goble said, reflecting on the Glory Days, where the Tigers were a Morris County and state playoff powerhouse. “I grew up watching



Photos by Jim Petrucci

Shea Bowman runs through a drill at a Dover High School football practice.

PLEASE SEE **DOVER**, PAGE 13

Go TIGERS!



Wishing you a Successful
2024 Season from all of us at
The Citizen of Morris County

DOVER: Tigers football back into the fold

FROM PAGE 12

them. They were tough, no matter what happened. They always seemed to be big, bad, dudes."

The last time Dover made a playoff impact was in 2003, when the Tigers reached the sectional finals and lost to Sparta at Giants Stadium.

"After 2003, I don't know what happened to the program, but we are trying to get back," Goble said. "I think right now we are trending in the right direction. We have a good group of seniors that are trying to turn the program back. We hope to keep building."

The team will move on without graduated quarterback Anthony Trongone, who was the best QB the school has had in a long, long time.

The QB job now belongs to Henry Soto, who comes in with some working knowledge of the position.

"He started his first career game as a freshman, when Anthony had a concussion," Goble said. "He would have started on 80 percent of the teams we faced the last two years but he was behind Trongone. He played tight end last year. He's a good kid with a good arm. We are expecting the same out of him as Anthony."

Varied Offense

The Tigers will run a little bit of everything on offense.

"We'll run a Gun T," Goble said. "We'll go Spread, we go Pistol, we'll go traditional Wing T under center. So some Spread and some Wing-T. We tailor every year to who we have. Henry is a good quarterback who makes good reads. He can run too, though not as fast as Anthony."



Dover High School football players run through a drill at a preseason practice.

Anthony Lazaro, a three-year starter, will head the running game. Derek Martinez, who played receiver last year, will also line up in the backfield.

"We want to get the best kids on the field," Goble said. "He was behind some good kids last year."

Emilio Mendez, who is being recruited by Rutgers and is one of Morris County's best all-around players, will play receiver along with Anderson Daza, a three-year starter.

"Two solid guys with great hands and can

move well," Goble said.

Goble said that the linemen have some ability but he is piecing together who will play where.

Jesus Zayas (6-2, 330) will play guard or tackle. Alex Chambers, who will be a four-year starter, returns at guard, where he is a three-year starter. One of the tackles will be Bradyn Brown (6-2, 280). Ethan Nieves, who started last year at guard and tackle, returns. J.J. Filosa, who started the last game of the year at center last year, might open the year at center.

DOVER TIGERS

Head Coach: Bill Goble, third season

Assistant Coaches: Cody Czerniak, Will Dodd, Ken Quinones, Dave Yura, Mike Hunchak, Christian Gonzalez.

Section: North, Group 3

Last year's record: 5-4

Playoffs: None

SCHEDULE

Aug. 30 vs. Morris Hills 7 p.m.

Sept. 6 at Vernon 6:30 p.m.

Sept. 13 at West Milford 7 p.m.

Sept. 20 vs. Mendham 7 p.m.

Sept. 27 at Lakeland 6:30 p.m.

Oct. 10 at Pascack Hills 7 p.m.

Oct. 18 at Jefferson 7 p.m.

Oct. 25 vs. Kittatinny 7 p.m.

The tight ends will be Shea Bowman and Max Piechota.

"We return a lot of skill guys," Goble said. "All kids have been in the system and know what they are doing. We have meshed pretty well. We are getting off to a fast start and hoping for big things this year."

Goble is mixing and matching his defense, especially up front.

Bowman and Piechota will play defensive end. Josh Perez is in the mix up front, and so are Brown, Nieves, Zayas, and Brayhan Lazo.

Chambers is the heart of the defense at linebacker, where he will be joined by Soto, Martinez, and Lazaro.

Daza and Jose Adames, both three-year starters, will play cornerback. Mendez (8 INTS last year) will play safety.

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HANOVER PARK HORNETS

MANY QUESTION MARKS

By MARK KITCHIN

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

EAST HANOVER TWP. — No one has been more surprised at the expectations others have placed on this year's Hanover Park football team than their coach Dan Fulton. As far as he's concerned, the Hornets have a long way to go.

"Expectations are a good thing," Hanover Park coach Dan Fulton said. "Pressure is a privilege. We are lucky that people are picking us but that means absolutely nothing. These kids have done nothing. We made semifinals last year. None of that matters."

"We have nothing to be proud of yet. We have a lot of work to do before we can start patting ourselves on the back. We have too many question marks for me to even feel good."

Hanover Park does have a lot of returning players in key spots that should benefit them moving forward. It always helps to have your starting quarterback returning.

Senior Joey Borrello will lead the offense once again with junior lefty Jack Kovacs filling in as backup or in their wildcat sets.

"He looks unbelievable," Fulton said. "He grew a little bit. He has had a really good summer, better than last year. He is doing a really nice job running the team."

"He has worked hard this off-season. He had a little shoulder thing with wrestling but he got that taken care of. He looks great."

Running back is by committee with Azmir Parks, Joey Filippone and Kovacs



Dan Fulton is in his seventh season as head coach of the Hanover Park Hornets.

all having a hand in carrying the ball at times. P.J. DiMaiolo has been penciled in at tight end. When Borrello is at quarterback, Kovacs will be at wide receiver, a position he played most of last year.

The offensive line has three returning starters.

The left side is set with Frankie Falco at



Photos by Lisa Mita

Vinnie Fusella, left, and Azaad Parks work on handoffs at Hanover Park.

tackle and Danny Macdougall at guard. Gianmarco Canziani will also be a force at center. Falco is a player that makes a difference.

"He is a leader," Fulton said. He is a three-year starter. He weighs 190 pounds

but he is tough as nails. The kids listen to him."

Macdougall will be playing both offense and defense on the line. Another candidate

PLEASE SEE QUESTION, PAGE 15



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QUESTION: Returning players in key spots

FROM PAGE 14

sure to see time on both ends of the ball is Aiden Hamilton, a 6-foot-2, 230-pound athlete also coming off a strong wrestling campaign. Overall, Fulton likes the competition on D-line.

"There are 10 names," Fulton said. "I have a lot of kids that are fighting for spots. The competition is going to make us better. There are a lot of question marks."

But not at linebacker where Hector Lopez III, Filippone and P.J. DiMaiolo, will be back a year stronger, quicker and smarter.

"I think Hector and Flip are two of the best kids in the county," Fulton said. "They make a lot of plays for us."

"Hector is tough. He is 180 pounds now, but I think he is too chubby. I have to trim him down."

Another difference maker is defensive back Joey Tantawi who is a hard hitter in a small package.

"Tantawi is an absolute stud," Fulton said. "He's one of the nicest kids but on the field he plays mean. He is not scared of anybody. He is so tough. He's 5-7 and he's a pit bull. I wish every kid was like Joey T."

Parks and Darien Iannacone will also have roles at defensive back. The kicking and punting specialists have yet to be decided at this writing.

The Hornets have three new assistant coaches. Tommy Brennan, who was a varsity offensive coordinator from Hasbrouck Heights, Hanover Park alum Justin Eveland and West Essex grad Kyle Kovats, who will be working with the quarterbacks. They will join assistants Dan Gregory, Rob Marino, Patrick Stewart, Alex Scheon, Dave Fulton, Andy Detore, Joe Gossweiler, Tom Tran, Donato Casolaro, Corey Geiger

HANOVER PARK HORNETS

Head Coach: Dan Fulton, seventh season

Section: North 2, Group 2

Last year's record: 7-3

Playoffs: Lost to Rutherford in North 2 Group 2 second round, 28-7; defeated Pompton Lakes 49-7, first round

SCHEDULE

Sept. 7 at Madison 1 p.m.

Sept. 13 vs. Mountain Lakes 7 p.m.

Sept. 21 at Glen Ridge 1 p.m.

Sept. 27 vs. Parsippany 7 p.m.

Oct. 5 at Pequannock 2 p.m.

Oct. 10 vs. Jefferson 7 p.m.

Oct. 18 vs. West Essex 7 p.m.

Oct. 25 at Weequahic 7 p.m.

and Anthony Salvemini.

Among the scrimmages, Hanover Park has scheduled Rutherford, who they lost to in the state semis last year, and another playoff juggernaut Caldwell. The Hornets are already setting a tone for the season.

"I want those kids to be tested," Fulton said. "I want to see where we are at. I want to see physicality. If we can hang with them, if I know we can run with Rutherford physically, I feel pretty confident if we get in the playoffs we can beat some teams. If we can play with Caldwell, we can play with anyone in the section."

The Hornets know not to take anything for granted. The conference looks as tough as ever and they will face a motivated Madison team opening day.

"This conference is well coached and the kids are talented," Fulton said. "We don't play many bad teams."



Joey Filippone runs a play during a preseason practice at Hanover Park.

Go HORNETS!



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HUNTERDON CENTRAL RED DEVILS

CONTINUING To BUILD

By LOU MONACO
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

RARITAN TWP. – Last season, a two-win improvement from 2022 enabled the Hunterdon Red Devils to go over the .500 mark for the first time since 2018 when they went 5-4 overall.

The building upon that improvement is ahead in 2024, however, it will have to be completed with just seven returning starters: four on offense and three on defense.

Junior quarterback Drew Cella will take over the reins at quarterback for the departed RJ Hart (92-of-196, 1,367 yards, 11 touchdowns and seven interceptions), who took his talents to Moravian (Pa.). Senior running back Xavier Arteaga (30 carries, 235 yards, three TDs) will head up the backfield, along with junior Giovanni Veliz. will heo

A good core of wide receivers will help Cella get the ball down the field with senior Devin Marrero (seven catches, 95 yards, one TD) and junior Nick Vasquez. Senior Alex Kagan and junior Ryan White will also be part of the rotation.

The Red Devils totaled 224 points for a 22.4 points per game average in 2023.

Protection for Cella should not be a problem as the Red Devils offensive line is strong with three seniors (Kyle Ettere, Quinton Fisher, Tyler Suk) and three juniors (Mauricio Aquino, Declan Joyce, Preston Shamanski).



Casey Ransone begins his eighth season as head coach of the Hunterdon Central High School football team.



Players go through pass catching drills at Hunterdon Central High School. Photos by Bill Nagengast

PLEASE SEE BUILD, PAGE 17

Go RED DEVILS!



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Hunterdon Review

BUILD: Hunterdon Central relying on experience

FROM PAGE 16

Hunterdon Central’s defense allowed 169 points for a 16.9 points per game average last season. Their defensive line is solid with four seniors and four juniors. Sophomore Jayden Cozze, senior Jesus Vargas and Veliz comprise the linebacker trio in the team’s 4-3 defensive formation.

Three seniors (Tyler Farley, Matt Smith and Arteaga) along with two juniors (Troy Arteaga and Nick Vasquez) comprise a strong secondary.

“We have gone from four to six wins in the last two years and need to build on that,” said Hunterdon Central head coach Casey Ransone, who has been at the helm since 2017. “We have a good core with three offensive linemen returning plus our tight end. Junior Drew Cella has the ability and the talent to take over for Hart at the quarterback position. Xavier Arteaga replaces Jakob Saus at running back and he saw some time last season, showing good ability with the ball. We have to stay healthy and rely on the experience coming back.”

The Red Devils started out strong in 2023 winning their first four games, however, they lost four of their last six to end the season with a 27-14 home loss to Kingsway in the quarterfinals of the NJSIAA South Jersey, Group 5 Playoffs on Oct. 27.

Hunterdon Central opened the 2024 campaign against rival North Hunterdon on Friday, Aug. 30 to begin a stretch of two straight, three of their first four and four of their first six games at home.



KYLE
ETTERE

QUINN
FISHER

MATT
SMITH

HUNTERDON CENTRAL RED DEVILS

Head Coach: Casey Ransone, 8th season
Assistant Coaches: Ethan Aquino, Logan Brodsky, Joe Capasso, Marty Dowling, Conall Joyce, Paul Kolody, Rob Martucci, Jim Meert, Mike Vergalito, Alex Wasserman, Tyler Wrabel, Mark Wroblewski
Section: South Jersey, Group 5
Last year’s record: 6-4
Playoffs: SJ, G5 Quarterfinals
Returning Starters: 4/3

SCHEDULE
Aug. 30 vs. North Hunterdon, 7
Sept. 6 vs. Monroe, 7
Sept. 13 at Phillipsburg, 7
Sept. 20 vs. Bridgewater-Raritan, 7
Sept. 27 at Union, 7
Oct. 5 vs. East Brunswick, 1
Oct. 10 vs. Ridge, 7
Oct. 18 at Old Bridge, 7
Oct. 25 at Hillsborough, 7



Hunterdon Central football players perform a drill at a preseason practice.

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JAMES CALDWELL CHIEFS

Moving On From The Streak

By CHRIS ORLANDO

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

WEST CALDWELL TWP. – The James Caldwell High School football team ended last season in a fashion that it hadn't in its three previous campaigns: with a loss.

After winning its final three games of its 6-3 2020 season, Caldwell went 12-0 in '21, winning the NJSIAA North Jersey, Section 1, Group 2 championship and North, Group 2 regional title.

The Chiefs then went 13-0 in '22 garnering not only the North Jersey, Section 2, Group 2 crown but the first-ever overall Group 2 state championship.

Last year, Caldwell, which was 1-8 in 2019, started last season by winning its first nine games before bowing, 33-28, to Lakeland in the semifinal round of the North Jersey, Section 2, Group 2 tournament, ending its winning streak at 37 games.

"The streak was outstanding in the sense that there was a high level of sustained success," began head coach Todd Romano. "It's very rare that you see that and every team we played wanted to be the one to end it."

"But it's something that ended and you have to move on from that."

The Chiefs' 2024 campaign will get underway on Thursday, Sept. 5 with a home game against Passaic Valley at Bonnel Field at 7 p.m. Passaic Valley went 7-3 a year ago and reached the North Jersey, Section 2, Group 3 championship game where it dropped a 14-6 decision to West Essex.

While the Chiefs will have to replace First Team All-State honoree linebacker Julian Casale as well as First Team

All Group 2 selections running back Joey Marinello and defensive back Jake Gruzaz they return a slew of talented players.

That contingent includes junior Nick Mignone (445 rushing yards, six touchdowns), senior Michael Mignone (323 receiving yards, three touchdowns, three sacks, three interceptions), senior Andrew Fonseca (three sacks), senior Sean Murtagh (42-of-45 extra points made; two interceptions) and senior Aiden Hartney, who was a Third Team All-Group 2 selection as an offensive lineman last year.

"Every good program loses good players every year," said Romano, set to begin his third season at the helm. "We lose a lot in Casale, Marinello, Gruzaz and others but we have some good options with players stepping up."

The quarterback slot, which was serviced admirably by 2024 graduate Louie Anemone last season, looks like it will be filled by sophomore Jake Matanin, a transfer from Seton Hall Prep.

"Jake is a very hard worker and very athletic," said Romano. "We're looking for good things from him."

Other returnees for the Chiefs include seniors Cole Bazerman, Anthony Capaldo and Dominick Gaffney and juniors Nick Moyano, Solomon Soriente, Kaelen Harper.

Newcomers include juniors Quays Rabah, Ryan Healey, Teagan McOmish and Elvis Nikollaj and sophomore Logan Arnett.

This season, the Chiefs are situated in the Patriot White Division of the Super



Photos by Glenn Clark

PLEASE SEE CALDWELL, PAGE 19

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



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CALDWELL: ‘Schedule is a gauntlet, no letups’

FROM PAGE 18

Football Conference along with Millburn, Nutley, Passaic Valley, Wayne Hills and West Essex.

After its home opener against Passaic Valley, Caldwell will make the short trip to North Caldwell to take on neighboring rival, West Essex, on Sept. 13 at 6:30 p.m.

A year ago, Caldwell outlasted the Knights, 21-14, at Bonnel Field to earn its second straight victory over West Essex. The Knights had won the previous seven meetings between the schools prior to the Chiefs’ 16-13 decision in 2022.

“Playing West Essex is a great thing for high school football,” said Romano. “There’s mutual respect between the programs and their kids are so well coached. It’s a game both schools get excited about playing.”

Caldwell will then travel to Bergen County on Sept. 20 to play state power Westwood. The Cardinals went 13-0 a year ago winning the overall Group 2 state title, defeating Bernards (12-1), 17-0.

In 2022, Westwood took an 11-0 record into the Group 2 semifinal round before it ran into Caldwell, which earned a hard-fought 13-7 victory at Franklin High. The Chiefs then went on to defeat Rumson, 18-14, two weeks later at Rutgers University to capture the first-ever state Group 2 championship.

“Our schedule is a gauntlet,” said Romano. “There are really no letups on it. We start with a sectional finalist, a Group 3 finalist and then a Group 2 champion. Iron sharpens iron and we’re really looking forward to getting the season under way.”



Solomon Soriente, a junior running back, goes through a drill at a preseason practice at James Caldwell High School.



Jake Matanin sets up to pass.



James Caldwell High School football captains are, from left, Aidan Hartney, Cole Bazzerman and Mike Mignone.

CALDWELL CHIEFS

Head Coach: Todd Romano, third season

Assistant Coaches: Rocco Antoniello, Sean Romano, Ryan Smith, Rob Petoia, Jack Docteroff, Vin Fano, Billy Connelly, Rory DeLuca, Calvin Harper, Matt Patierno, Travis Ruffo, Daryl White, Frank Davide, Mike Masella.

Section: North, Group 2

Last year's record: 9-1

Playoffs: lost in North Jersey, Section 2, Group 2 semifinals

Returning Starters: 6/6

SCHEDULE

Sept. 5 vs. Passaic Valley, 7 p.m.
Sept. 13 at West Essex, 6:30 p.m.
Sept. 20 at Westwood, 7 p.m.
Sept. 27 vs. Wayne Hills, 7 p.m.
Oct. 4 vs. Cedar Grove, 7 p.m.
Oct. 10 at Shabazz, 7 p.m.
Oct. 18 vs. Millburn, 7 p.m.
Oct. 25 at Nutley, 7 p.m.
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MADISON DODGERS

LOOKING FOR A REBOUND

By **MARK KITCHIN**
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

MADISON – After 13 years, Madison football has a brand new turf field to run on, and they plan to employ as much of it as they can this upcoming season.

A \$79 million dollar school referendum approved last year, has given the school a boost in a variety of ways including an upgrade in the quality of the turf at Ted Monica Field which was starting to show its age.

The Dodgers hope to rebound from last year's 3-6 mark through improvements on its overall team speed and expect to bounce back into the win column more.

"We are tired of competing," Madison Coach Chris Kubik said. "We want to get to the point where we want to start winning. That is a big thing for these guys."

"I like the fact that our underclassmen are that motivated. Our seniors that are great leaders do a good job keeping them rolling and the whole team feeds off of each other."

Juniors Luke McGuire and George Cripe are pushing each other at quarterback. McGuire has the early lead but the final decision hasn't been made yet.

"Luke is a physical runner," Kubik said. "Cripe is more of a true passer but he's athletic enough to run. They are different body types and different kinds of kids but they both can execute stuff. We like them both."

Chris Carfano, Andrew Carreno, Liam Melvin, Javier Izzo, and Ryan Nallin all



Andrew Carreno carries the ball in a drill at Madison High School.

bring skills and talent to the backfield. Carfano, the 6-1, 190-pound fullback, is one to watch. For the last two years, he's proven to be a hard between-the-tackles runner with a nose for the goal line. He will want to make his senior season one to remember.

"Chris is a physical kid," Kubik said. "He is our blocker out of the group. He is one of the strongest kids on the team. He has had a great offseason. We have some sets where we can get him the ball because

he does run hard."

Jon Erickson, Caleb Hewes and Carter Ferris and A.J. Eldridge are among the top competitors at receiver. Erickson at 6-3, 195, is the biggest target and has good speed, but teams can't sleep on Hewes, who made plenty of catches himself.

"Hewes is a hard working kid," Kubik said. "He's solid. He's strong. Works hard, he runs really good routes. He's improved his speed. He is a great complement to Jon out there when we get into our two receiv-

MADISON DODGERS

Head Coach: Chris Kubik, 19th season
Section: North 2, Group 2
Last year's record: 3-6
Playoffs: None

SCHEDULE

Sept. 7 vs. Hanover Park 1 p.m.
Sept. 13 at Mendham 7 p.m.
Sept. 21 vs. Cedar Grove 1 p.m.
Sept. 27 at Lenape Valley 7 p.m.
Oct. 5 vs. Mountain Lakes 2 p.m.
Oct. 10 at Parsippany 7 p.m.
Oct. 18 vs. Pequannock 7 p.m.
Oct. 25 at Morris Catholic 7 p.m.

er sets."

Brody Dineen and Titus Green are in a battle for tight end.

The line has some veteran leadership and good size overall with each projected starter weighing 205 pounds or more. Juniors James Doehner and Hudson Flemming are returning guards. Another junior Alex Arndt, at 6-6, 225, is stepping up at center. Senior tackles Lex Peterson and Aaron Leak take up a lot of space at 6-foot, 265-pounds each.

Leak, Peterson, Flemming and Arndt all saw time on the defensive line last year. Erickson will also use his speed to get into opposing backfields.

"There is a core group that are in a good

PLEASE SEE MADISON, PAGE 21

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MADISON: 'No problem getting up for opening day'

FROM PAGE 20

spot," Kubik said. "The competition is the guys that are either backup players or rotating guys."

Carfano is a returning starter at linebacker and Doehner was rotated in and out of that position last year. The Dodgers are finding themselves treating one of the linebacker positions as more of a hybrid and going technically with five defensive backs depending upon an opponent's offense. It's one of the way they can best employ their team speed.

"Our base, we will have five D-backs out there until we play some of these running teams," Kubik said. "We have some guys that can run around, definitely our younger athletes. We have a good group there and we are just trying to do a couple of different things to patch up some of the spread offense that we see."

Carter Ferris is returning at one corner, with A.J. Eldridge, and Javier Izzo battling to start at the other corner. Three safety positions will be decided among Hewes, Andrew Carreno, McGuire, Liam Melvin and Ryan Nalin. Melvin and McGuire saw work at the position last year.

Punting and kicking have yet to be sorted out, but the Dodgers always seem to find players to fill those roles.

Their assistant coaches are Steve Hughes, Ralph Sandello, Marty Horn, Jason Izsa, Kevin Chiodo, Kevin Carroll, Curtis Sallie, Mike Goodwin, Nick Liberato and Brian McGuire.

Scrimmages include tri-scrimmages with opponents like Chatham and West Essex. They also have a game scrimmage with traditional rival Millburn.

There will be no problem getting up for



Chris Kubik enters his 19th season as head coach of the Madison High School football team. The Dodgers open Sept. 7 at home.

opening day. Madison will christen its new turf surface against rival Hanover Park.

"It's a bigger deal to people outside the program," Kubik said. "It's a rivalry. When good football teams play each other, they want to beat each others."



Above: Madison High School football players go through a drill at a pre-season practice. Left: George Cripe throws a pass during a practice at Madison High School.

Photos by Glenn Clark

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MENDHAM MINUTEMEN

EXPECTATIONS ARE HIGH

By **JOE HOFMANN**
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

MENDHAM – Many high school programs would love to have a single 1,000-yard rusher.

Mendham had two last year. And they’re both back.

Memo to the SFC-liberty Blue: You’d better load the box against the run-happy Minutemen.

Coach Ethan Jeros’ team loves to run the ball with its option attack and they’ll be doing that with the return of standout running backs Cole Capuzzi and Kevin King.

“The two-headed, 1,000-yard monster,” Jeros said.

Capuzzi (215 for 1,095, 6 TDs) rushed between the tackles and King (121 for 1,081, 14 TDs) was the outside threat.

Teams expected Mendham to run the ball last year and still couldn’t contain those two.

No wonder Jeros said, “I feel really good about the offense.”

The Minutemen ran the ball up and down the field on opponents last year but were nosed out of the postseason in the final week of the regular season by Sparta.

This time, Jeros doesn’t want his team to forget that.

They open up with a huge test: Hosting sister school West Morris Central in Week 0 (Friday, Aug. 30).

Success is not determined in a season’s opening game, but beating the Wolfpack would sure help.

“Our guys know we are not making



Photos by Jim Petrucci

Mendham High School football team captains are, from left, Kevin King, Cole Capuzzi and Declan Higgins.

the playoffs winning or losing Week 0,” Jeros said. “We go one week at a time. We were ousted because Sparta played their last game after us and they won. We expected to make the playoffs and didn’t.”

Expectations High

Expectations are high because of a talented group on both sides of the ball. Capuzzi and King are just the beginning of

PLEASE SEE MENDHAM, PAGE 23



Ethan Jeros begins his fourth season as head coach of the Mendham High School football team.

MENDHAM MINUTEMEN

Head Coach: Ethan Jeros, fourth season
Assistant Coaches: Colin Eckert, Sal Specht, Jack Bradley, Oliver Kattoura, Tim O’Connor, Mike Fagan, Marcus Brown.
Section: North, Group 3
Last year’s record: 6-5.
Playoffs: None

SCHEDULE

Aug. 30 vs. West Morris 7 p.m.
Sept. 6 at Parsippany Hills 7 p.m.
Sept. 13 vs. Madison 7 p.m.
Sept. 20 at Dover 7 p.m.
Sept. 27 vs. Warren Hills 7 p.m.
Oct. 5 at Morris Hills 2 p.m.
Oct. 11 at Chatham 3 p.m.
Oct. 18 vs. Montville 7 p.m.
Oct. 25 vs. Randolph 7 p.m.

Go MINUTEMEN!



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from all of us at the

Observer~Tribune

MENDHAM: Team returns two 1,000-yard rushers

FROM PAGE 22

a talented group.

The quarterback figures to be either Cam Parrinello, who ended the 2023 session as the starter in the last 6-7 games last year, or Tommy Suchanek, who was the starter for the first two games before tearing his knee against Montville.

"It'll be a tough call, but it is the first time in my time here with starting experienced returnees," Jeros said. "Tommy is a little bigger. It's an even matchup and it'll come down to the scrimmages."

Jeros is high on the O-Line, which will consist of center Rowan Killam, who started at tackle last year. Steven Lomello, a strong blocker who started at tight end last year, will move to guard.

Nick Bruno, who was a receiver last year, is the other guard.

"He played inside linebacker last year, so he understands what guards should be doing," Jeros said.

Will Wallace started the first three games last year and hurt his shoulder and missed the rest of the season. He'll be one of the tackles. Max Higgiston has some experience and is returning at the other tackle.

Declan Higgins returns at tight end. Harrison Spence is back at receiver.

Shea Kraft, Jordan Lieberwirth, Owen Lieberwirth, and Ryan Kontely are vying for the third backfield spot.

"They all offer something a little bit different," Jeros said. "Whoever plays the best in the scrimmages will start."

Ethan Mershimmer, who contributed on special teams last year, will be Capuzzi's backup.

The defense has many of the same play-



Jordan Lieberwirth runs a drill at Mendham.

ers and should be strong.

Ralph Langone will man the middle at nose and will be flanked by Killam and Wallace on the D-Line. Lomello and Higgins will play outside linebacker and will team with inside linebackers Bruno and Suchanek.

Spence and King will man the corners.

At safety will be Capuzzi and transfer Thomas Guido, who comes in from Seton Hall Prep.

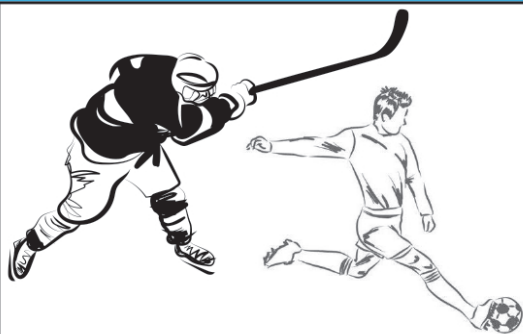
The Minutemen figure to be the co-favorites in the league along with Montville, but Jeros doesn't want to hear any of that.

"First is West Morris," he said. "Then



Declan Higgins carries the ball at a preseason practice at Mendham High School.

we play Par Hills and they kicked our butts last year. We don't think about Montville because we face them at the end of the year. We also have Chatham and Warren Hills to worry about. Warren Hills kicked our butts last year. Each game is a new challenge and we are in a very tough division."



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MONTVILLE MUSTANGS

HIGH EXPECTATIONS

By JOE HOFMANN

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

MONTVILLE TWP. – The subject: Montville football history.

The lesson: The Mustangs have not won a division championship since ... 2006.

The teacher: Head coach Rick DeBonta.

The assignment: Bring back a division championship this fall.

Extra credit: Win the first sectional championship in school history.

The bell has rung. Students have sat down. Attendance has been taken.

Class is now in session.

The seeds for the 2024 season were planted last season, when the team was ousted from the sectional semifinals by Passaic Valley.

The Mustangs haven't won a division championship in 18 years, when Gerry Gallagher roamed the sidelines as head coach and the team captured the old Northern Hills Conference-Suburban Division over such schools as Caldwell, Pequannock, Butler, and Delbarton.

Current head coach Rick DeBonta was a young assistant back then.

And the current players? Well, they were either in their diapers or weren't even born yet.

That's quite a long time – and time for the Mustangs to do something about it. That is their No. 1 objective this fall: Coming away with the SFC-Liberty Blue Division.

Oh, and if the Mustangs want to be really impactful, they could bring home a sec-

tional championship in Group 3. That same year that they won the Suburban, the Mustangs lost an 8-7 heartbreaker to West Essex in the sectional finals at Giants Stadium.

The team has a slew of talent returning from last year and figures to contend along with Mendham and perhaps Warren Hills.

"We are hoping to get to the state sectional finals, at least ... anything short of that ... we don't want to fall short and we are making a run for it," DeBonta said. "Getting there isn't enough with this group of guys. Our expectations since December are getting to the finals and winning a championship."

"I talk about it a lot. I'm the only one left on staff from when we went there. I think we can do it. We have the talent, it all hinges on how healthy we stay."

The team leader will be do-everything running back Anthony Feaster, who is a threat to score any time he touches the ball. Feaster is one of the few four-year starters in school history.

"We'll try and get the ball into his hands as much as we can," DeBonta said. "We expect him to have a dynamic year. He was on the all-Morris County coaches' team as a junior, and they usually pick just seniors, so that was very meaningful. He has dedicated himself to weights, he ran track in the spring, and his speed and strength are up."

Mike Vespe and Mike Vito, will line up in the backfield as well. Mike Ciullo will play quarterback.

Other skills players who look to contribute include Mike Colaiacovo, C.J. Todesco,



Photo by Ed Ruping

Rick DeBonta is in his ninth season as head coach of the Montville High School football team.

Corey Wang, Ryan Conlan, and Joey Beyer will rotate in in skill positions along with Brett Kunkel.

The line will include Giovanni Vecchione at center, guards Tyler Josepin and Dominick Kraemer, Vincent Hurley, Brandon Kimball, Sean Elsmore, and Anthony Agnoli.

MONTVILLE MUSTANGS

Head Coach: Rick DeBonta, ninth season

Section: North, Group 3

Last year's record: 7-4

Playoffs: Lost to Passaic Valley in North 1, Group 3 semifinals, 28-13

SCHEDULE

Aug. 29 at Sparta 7 p.m.

Sept. 6 vs. Warren Hills 6:30 p.m.

Sept. 13 vs. Chatham 6:30 p.m.

Sept. 20 at Roxbury 7 p.m.

Sept. 27 at Parsippany Hills 7 p.m.

Oct. 10 vs. West Morris 6:30 p.m.

Oct. 18 at Mendham 7 p.m.

Oct. 25 vs. Morris Hills 6:30 p.m.

Kimball is a three-year, two-way starter. "They are all in the weight room getting after it," DeBonta said.

There is a strong group of returnees on defense as well, led by Kimball, who is surrounded by Agnoli, Vecchione, Alex Husti, Hurley, and Kraemer. Elsmore and Dante Palladino are about as good a pair of defensive ends as it gets in Morris County. Jake Montano is one to watch at end.

R.J. Fardo is one linebacker and he will be joined by Carmelo Amoia, Kraemer, Jared Colon, and Vespi, who has come up from safety.

Vito and Ryan Conlan will safety, while Feaster, Todesco and Colaiacovo will play corner.

Go MUSTANGS!



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Montville quarterback Michael Ciullo sets up to pass.



Michael Vito works on the bag tackle drill.



Anthony Feaster runs through a drill at Montville High School.



Gio Vecchione runs through a drill at Montville High School.



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MORRIS CATHOLIC CRUSADERS

'SLOW BUT STEADY' HOPE

By JOE HOFMANN

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

DENVILLE TWP. – Morris Catholic hit rock bottom last year – but there is newfound optimism.

Last year, the Crusaders finished oh-and-10. They were outscored, 391-48.

And they were discouraged.

"I felt like one bad thing would go wrong and then it was, 'Here we go again,'" quarterback Ethan Everett said. "There was no fight, we put our tails between our legs and we just took the losses."

Things looked a whole lot more promising in a recent controlled scrimmage against Kinnelon. The Crusaders showed some fight on both sides of the ball. Everett threw two TD passes.

There is hope. Rae Oliver is the new coach and he has brought in a lot of new players.

"It's slow but steady," Oliver said. "We are slowly growing."

"I think with a lot of new players and new coaching staff, we played pretty good," linebacker Erik Edelman said. "We didn't look the worst. This coming week of practice will be better."

Edelman, a senior who transferred from Pope John in Sparta after his sophomore year, had a terrific junior campaign with six sacks, 28 forced fumbles, two forced fumbles, one fumble recovery, and two blocked kicks. The 6-3, 220-pounder would love to play college football and has attracted interest from Rutgers and Army.

He wants to lift his game and bring the



Photos by Jim Petrucci

Rae Oliver begins his first season as head coach of the Morris Catholic High School football team.

Crusaders up along with him.

"I think I could have played better last year," he said. "It was my first full season on varsity. I grew a lot from my experience last year. I had a lot of things to work



Reed Oliver will be one of the key players at Morris Catholic this season.

PLEASE SEE HOPE, PAGE 27



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HOPE: Crusaders look to bounce back from 0-10

FROM PAGE 26

on in the offseason. I learned how to read my keys and not get caught looking in the backfield. Knowing formations, reading keys, and things like that were what I had to work on. The weight room I took care of, but that was the easier part."

Against Kinnelon, Edelman was one of the best players on the field. He had two tackles for loss and forced a fumble.

"Reading the guards helps a lot," he said. "Doing that takes you right to the play."

Morris Catholic's defense looks to be improved from last year with defensive lineman Reed Oliver, linebacker Aiden Terrell, and defensive back Dante Palmer.

The Crusader offense, meanwhile, moved the ball at times with Everett.

"Ethan is looking good," Edelman said. "He has a lot bigger frame and is stronger than last year."

"We didn't want to show too much and ran the ball a lot and punched it up the middle," Edelman said. "It worked here and there. We have more work to do in assignments and blocking. When we threw we were successful. We need to work on things. The passing game was there. It was like a miracle when we scored last year, but we hit some deep passes against Kinnelon. We just have to sharpen up the running game."

Edelman was joined on the O-Line by Oliver, Laquan Worthy, and Ryan Lucas, among others.

"Today's scrimmage was a success, for the most part," Everett said. "We had a lot of flashes. We are dangerous on both sides of the ball. We are still not perfect, but once we come together we should be good."



Morris Catholic High School football players run through a blocking drill at a preseason practice. The Crusaders hope to bounce back from an 0-10 season.

"Our passing game is looking good. We have some people who can catch. We just need to stay locked in and focused and execute the plays."

Some of the leading skill position players include Palmer, Cam McCleod, Noah Billeci, R.J. Peplin, Mahrod Bishop, and Ben Ross.

"I feel like at this time last year, after

the scrimmages, everyone put their heads down and were not ready for the ride and gave up," Everett said. "We saw what we did today but now we know we have to put the work in."

Everett (6-3, 180) would like to play college ball and has been in contact with UMAss. He attended camp this summer at Monmouth and the University of Delaware.



Ryan Lukis runs through a drill at Morris Catholic. Rae Oliver is the new head coach.

MORRIS CATHOLIC CRUSADERS

Head Coach: Rae Oliver, first season

Section: Non Public B

Last year's record: 0-10.

Playoffs: None

SCHEDULE

Aug. 29 at Teaneck 6:30 p.m.

Sept. 6 vs. Gloucester Catholic 7 p.m.

Sept. 20 at Mahwah 7 p.m.

Oct. 5 vs. Parsippany 2 p.m.

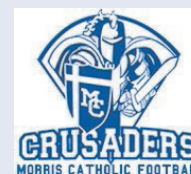
Oct. 11 at Pequannock 6:30 p.m.

Oct. 18 at Mountain Lakes 7 p.m.

Oct. 25 vs. Madison 7 p.m.

Nov. 1 vs. Hudson Catholic 7 p.m.

Go CRUSADERS!



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MORRIS HILLS SCARLET KNIGHTS

BACKS: FRONT AND CENTER

By JOE HOFMANN

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

ROCKAWAY – It's an age-old football question, dating back to the leather-helmet days:

What would you rather have: Experienced and talented skill players ... but with newcomers in the offensive line?

Or ...

O-linemen who know how to throw their weight around but ... they are blocking for new, untested skill kids?

Morris Hills head coach Bruce Campbell would choose the former.

And that is exactly the situation he and the Scarlet Knights are in this year.

The team has talent in the backfield. The line? Well, it is a work in progress with just one returning starter.

"I played football at East Stroudsburg and back then would have said the line," he said. "As a coach, you think you can control the Xs and Os and get numbers. But at the high school level, you can have the greatest scheme, but if there are no backs to break tackles or run by someone, it's hard to score points.

"I believe at the high school level, a lot of times some backs can make it right. An all-star running back can run by guys and make the O-line look better. We are hoping our experienced backs can help develop a lot of new faces up front.

"So ... I believe it's the backs."

Campbell and Morris Hills hope that the line can progress rapidly. The team struggled moving the ball and lost its first eight games last year before beating Ridgefield



Bruce Campbell is in his second season as head coach of the Morris Hills High School football team.

Park in a post-season consolation game, 42-13.

During the eight-game losing streak, points were at a premium. The team scored just 67 points and was shut out in back-to-back weeks against Warren Hills and Morris Knolls.

But Campbell hopes the team can take a step up this year because of some returning talent in the backfield.

Fullback Omaldy Ferreira returns to lead the backfield in the Delaware Wing-T.



Photos by Jim Petrucci

Emmanuel Ospina of Morris Hills High School runs through a ball carrier drill.

He will also play linebacker.

"He was at the top of the list in the lifting program," Campbell said. "He is a returning starter and physical on both sides of the ball. He is talented with the ball in his hands and as a blocking back. We are excited for him to return as a linebacker and we will increase his load at fullback."

Wingback Manny Ospina is another option out of the backfield. He will also play safety.

"Last year, we used a lot of him in motion

MORRIS HILLS SCARLET KNIGHTS

Head Coach: Bruce Campbell, second season

Assistant coaches: Chris Canning, Mike White, Nick Carlotti, Jeff Danyus, Jeff Danyus, Jr., Tony Lusardi, Mark DiGennaro

Section: North, Group 3

Last year's record: 1-8.

Playoffs: None

SCHEDULE

Aug. 30 at Dover 7 p.m.

Sept. 7 at Chatham 1 p.m.

Sept. 13 at Warren Hills 7 p.m.

Sept. 21 vs. Hackettstown 1 p.m.

Sept. 28 vs. River Dell 1 p.m.

Oct. 5 vs. Mendham 2 p.m.

Oct. 10 at Morris Knolls 6:30 p.m.

Oct. 19 vs. Parsippany Hills 1 p.m.

Oct. 25 at Montville 6:30 p.m.

and blocking," Campbell said. "We look to increase his carries this year. He is getting bigger and stronger."

Campbell and the Scarlet Knights hope to get big running plays out of the speedy duo of Ayden Carela and Luke Romano.

"They are fast," he said. "Ayden Carela is more of a speedy back. He is a track athlete. He is a smaller, shifty back. Luke Romano battled some injuries last year but was our big play threat."

PLEASE SEE BACKS, PAGE 29



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BACKS: Sophomores and juniors battling for spots

FROM PAGE 28

Romano broke off a 70-yard touchdown play on a counter in Morris Hills' 30-14 season-opening loss to Vernon. But Romano wound up getting injured.

"When he is in the game, he is a big threat, including catching the ball," Campbell said. "He is someone we have put in at fullback to get him additional carries. He is only a junior. We are trying to build up his strength and durability, but he is a big-play threat, for sure."

4 New O-Linemen

The lone returning O-Lineman is Braeden McDonnell, who started at guard last year.

"We have four new O-Linemen," Campbell said. "We are developing our fronts on both sides of the ball. We have low numbers returning up front. I may be switching guys around up front."

Veteran Rocco Marchese returns at quarterback.

"He got a little bit of playing time at the end of his freshman year and played QB last year and took some lumps," Campbell said. "Now he returns as a second-year starter and he understands the offense a lot better. With his knowledge and experience, we look for him to increase his ability to pass and move the ball downfield in 2024."

One of the team leaders will be tight end-defensive end Nick Rex.

"He is an old-school football player, not the tallest or biggest, but a fundamental, old school kid, who is tough, experienced and has a good football IQ," Campbell said. "He knows the positions and plays as a returning player."



Morris Hills High School football players run through a drill at a preseason practice.

Nico Wright returns to play split end and cornerback.

"I like that we have an experienced group of backs on both sides," Campbell said. "Our linebackers, defensive backs and running backs are all players in the varsity mix since their sophomore year."

If the O-Line steps up, the team could improve over last year. Campbell has been sifting through the candidates in training camp.

"We graduate a lot up front and are trying to figure out who we have," Campbell said. "New players coming out. Sophomores and juniors are battling for spots."



Morris Hills High School football players take a break during a preseason practice.

That's a concern. We have new, inexperienced players in the line spots. We liked our group that graduated. We had all seniors up front. Our second-team line was not sophomores or juniors across the board.

"We actually graduated six senior linemen, so it's not as simple as plug and play."

Go SCARLET KNIGHTS!



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MORRIS KNOLLS GOLDEN EAGLES

A DRAMATIC SWITCH IN LEADERSHIP

By **JOE HOFMANN**
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

ROCKAWAY – There is a monumental change at the top, but the style will remain the same at Morris Knolls.

The Golden Eagles will run the ball. Over ... and over ... and over ... and ...

The big change is that, for the first time in almost a half century, Bill Regan will not be coaching the team. The 49-year coach was not brought back and was replaced by former Knolls player Bryan Gallagher, who had coached at Boonton.

Knolls' football landscape saw a dramatic switch in leadership, but the run-happy Green and Gold will still run the ball.

During Gallagher's time at Boonton, the Bombers often ranked among the best running teams in all of New Jersey, according to Max Preps.

Gallagher had much success at Boonton and brought that style to Knolls.

"It has been a good start," Gallagher said. "It's exciting. It's a new beginning and exciting for everybody involved. The guys have really bought in and have worked hard and the stuff that Knolls has always been is still there. These kids are hardwired to be hard workers and to be dedicated to the sport. We as a staff are lucky in that sense."

Chris Kaiser will open the season at quarterback.

"In any offense, the guy that has the ball in his hands is important, for sure," Gallagher said. "He makes a lot of decisions. Chris is a senior. He played defense last year and had a few spurts at quarterback.

He is a good, athletic kid, and from the very beginning has taken the learning of the offense very seriously. He has picked things up very very quickly."

The running back position is loaded with capable candidates such as Bobby Brickner, Jayden Koger (200 yards vs. Randolph last year), Luke Shivas, Justin Hanson, and Jaylin Jones.

"A good number of these kids showed promise," Gallagher said. "Bobby Brickner played quite a bit of linebacker last year and had some carries. Jayden Koger was a major contributor on both sides last year. He is a real threat. He has been outstanding not just on the field but in his leadership. Luke Shivas, as soon as wrestling was over, he was working hard and has had a good summer.

"Justin Hanson might have been the leading rusher last year until he had some injuries in the second half of the season. Jaylin Jones has really, really made tremendous progress in the weight room in the winter and spring. He has shown promise to be a good one.

"I feel really good about the skill positions."

Dean Cervona will be the starting center. Josh Savitch is working at guard. Brent Burchin will play right tackle. Michael Harrison and Marcello Flamia are working at guard.

Derek Reinhardt and Peyton Ralston are working at tackle.

Ayden Espeut, who made some big catches in the team's sectional semifinal loss to

PLEASE SEE SWITCH, PAGE 31



Photos by Ed Ruping

Bryan Gallagher takes over a Morris Knolls High School football program succeeding Bill Regan, who had the reins for 49 years.

MORRIS KNOLLS GOLDEN EAGLES

Head Coach: Bryan Gallagher, first season

Assistant coaches: Chris Cervona, Pete Cervona, Jim Pisciotto, Joe Kelly, Anthony Vasile, Mike Beach, Benji Eaton, Dave File, Gerry Gallagher, Pete Llanaeza.

Section: North, Group 4

Last year's record: 6-4

Playoffs: Lost to Ramapo North 1 Group 4 second round, 52-27

SCHEDULE

Sept. 6 at West Morris 7:30 p.m.

Sept. 14 vs. Bridgewater-Raritan 1 p.m.

Sept. 20 at Randolph 7 p.m.

Sept. 28 vs. Roxbury 1 p.m.

Oct. 5 at Mount Olive 1 p.m.

Oct. 10 vs. Morris Hills 6:30 p.m.

Oct. 19 vs. Morristown 1 p.m.

Oct. 25 at West Essex 7 p.m.

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SWITCH: Change in leadership; still run oriented

FROM PAGE 30

Ramapo, will lead the receiving unit.

"He showed some flashes and has been awesome in the offseason and summer," Gallagher said.

Jake Merlucci, one of Morris County's best kickers, is working at receiver along with Nick Van Dean and Max Minervini.

The team will use a 3-4 front on defense, with Savitch, Zach Rospond, and Cervona working at nose, Minervini, Reinhardt, and Anthony Evaristo at D-End.

Brickner will work at inside linebacker along with Shivas and Lucas Zuravnsky. The outside backers are Burchin and Timmy Wiedman.

Koger, Van Dean and Merlucci will play safety, with Kaiser, Jones, and Esput at cornerback.

"We're in a good spot," Gallagher said. "I have to pinch myself when I pull up to the hill every morning. The staff and kids and their families have bought in. We are excited about what we can make happen. We are making the most out of each day to get ready."



Vincenzo D'Asti of the Morris Knolls Golden Eagles participates in a drill.



Morris Knolls players run blocking drills at a recent practice.



A Morris Knolls player runs through a drill at a recent practice.



Jayden Koger catches a pass during a Morris Knolls football practice.

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2023: THE YEAR IN REVIEW

There were many memorable endings to a memorable season

By **JOE HOFMANN**

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

As the first few weeks of the 2023 high school football season went by, New Jersey Hills Media Group-area fans could have been forgiven if they hit the snooze button over and over.

And over again.

Not much was happening.

But that all changed by the end of the year, when a whole lot had happened.

It turned out to be one of the most memorable seasons in recent memory.

So what took place? Quite a bit, including:

Mountain Lakes had a historical run to a state Group 1 championship. Darrell Fusco's Herd made it back to the state Group 1 championship game after finishing as a state runnerup two years ago and finished the job with a convincing 24-6 victory over Glassboro at Rutgers. Mountain Lakes was dominant defensively and on special teams. The Herd crushed highly-regarded Shabazz in the state semifinals, 49-12.

Delbarton gave mighty Bergen Catholic a run for the money in the state Non-Public Group A championship game before losing, 24-14, and wound up being the No. 2 team in all of New Jersey. The Green Wave had beaten such powerhouses as Don Bosco, St. Joseph-Montvale, Seton Hall Prep, Pope John and DePaul along the way, among others. Coach Brian Bowers' team just might have had the greatest season, on paper, of any school in Morris County history.

Mount Olive On Top

Mount Olive staged the biggest drive in school history to nose out Roxbury for the Section 2, Group 4 championship, 27-26. Mount Olive drove downfield and scored in the waning moments against one of the area's best defenses to win it before some 7,500 fans at Roxbury. Coach Brian O'Connor's team was winless during the regular season the year before, winning a consolation game to finish 1-9 in 2022.

West Essex dropped its first two games of the season but then went on a hot streak by winning nine of 10 to win the North 2, Group 3 championship over Passaic Valley, 14-6. Chris Benacquista's Knights then dispatched red-hot West Morris to win the state Group III semifinals, 21-20, before losing in the state Group 3 final to Delsea, 28-3. West Morris had beaten West Essex in the sectional finals the previous two years.



Photo by Carlos Vargas

Mountain Lakes High School's football team celebrates its 2023 Group 1 state championship. The Herd defeated Glassboro, 24-6, Sunday, Nov. 26, at Rutgers University.

West Morris, which had many graduation losses from its back-to-back championship run of 2021-22, pulled together in the end and won its third straight sectional championship in North 1, Group 3. Kevin Hennelly's Wolfpack had a 3-5 record at one point and barely beat Morristown in its regular-season finale before going on a playoff run for the ages by defeating Pascack Valley (on a last-second field goal), Sparta, and then winning at heavily-favored Old Tappan.

Bernards Wins Section

Bernards captured the first sectional championship in the playoff era when quarterback Colin Laverty rushed for a 7-yard touchdown in overtime as the Mountaineers defeated upstart Lakeland in the North 2, Group 2 championship game, 23-17. Coach Jon Simoneau's team swept through its first 12 games and won the Patriot Gold of the Big Central Conference along the way. The Mountaineers fell to Westwood, 17-0, in the state Group 2 semifinals to finish at 12-1.

Roxbury posted a big season by winning the brutal NJSFC-Liberty White over such programs as Mount Olive and West Morris (both of whom won sectional championships) and Morris Knolls, which was good enough to win a playoff game. Ryan Roumes' Gaels swept through the regular season undefeated and beat Colonia and Irvington be-

fore succumbing to Mount Olive in the North 2, Group 4 final.

Caldwell was a dominant team for two years and was gunning for a third straight sectional championship before it was stunned by fifth-seeded Lakeland in the North 2, Group 2 semifinals, 33-28. Lakeland scored the go-ahead touchdown with just 41 seconds left. Caldwell had won 37 straight games and had the longest streak in all of New Jersey.

The area had a terrific group of all-around players, including

1. Mount Olive's Tyler Cumming rushed 270 times for 1,467 yards and 14 touchdowns and was a horse on defense as well with one-and-a-half sacks, 12 tackles for loss and 53 tackles. He rushed for 200 yards in the sectional final championship win over Roxbury.

2. Caldwell's Julian Casale was a two-way force. He was one of the leading linemen for an offense that accumulated more than 3,400 yards. On defense, he was one of the best linebackers in all of New Jersey, accumulating three sacks and 102 tackles – 28 for loss.

3. Mountain Lakes' Marco Dzamba was a terrific blocker, caught 21 passes for 650 yards and 10 touchdowns as a tight end. On defense, he had four sacks and 11 ½ tackles for loss among his 57 tackles. He was a one-man wrecking crew in the state Group I finals victory over Glassboro.

4. Roxbury's Colin Richter had a big-time season and single-handedly helped the team win a couple of early-season games to get the Gaels going. On defense, he made 86 tackles (5 for loss) and had four INTs and a sack, and forced four fumbles and recovered one. As a receiver, He caught 50 passes for 711 yards and nine TDs and also threw a TD pass. He also returned a punt for a touchdown in the sectional final loss against Mount Olive.

5. Bernards' Colin Laverty was a two-way standout at quarterback. He was 119-for-177 passing for 1,729 yards and 17 touchdowns while throwing just one INT. He also rushed for 446 yards and scored 11 rushing TDs.

6. Delbarton linebacker Kyle Checcio was a mainstay at linebacker against a demanding schedule. He had four and a half sacks and nine tackles for loss among his 78 tackles. He also forced a fumble and returned a fumble for a touchdown for one of New Jersey's best defenses.

7. West Essex's Chris Nigro was a force on the defensive line with five sacks and eight tackles for loss among his 65 tackles.

8. West Morris' two-way lineman Tom Borgia dominated on both sides of the ball during a season where the Wolfpack were banged up for much of the time. The offense accumulated almost 4,000 yards with Borgia one of the lead blockers. He had four sacks and 15 tackles for loss among his 91 tackles.

CHANGES IN DIVISION LINEUPS

By JOE HOFMANN

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

You can't tell the football players without a scorecard – and you cannot tell where New Jersey Hills Media Group teams are without a division-by-division list.

Not all area schools packed their bags and moved to a different division, but their opponents may have.

There wasn't a single major shift, but there were many tweaks. Many divisions either lost a team or have a new one coming in.

Dover and Hopatcong have left the New Jersey Super Football Conference-Ivy Red, a league created for schools that are struggling with numbers. The move of those two schools caused a trickle-down effect among the existing divisions in Morris and Sussex counties.

Follow the bouncing teams.

High Point moves to the Group 2 American Blue and Dover is now in the Group III Patriot Red. Wallkill Valley goes to the National Blue.

Hopatcong has joined the National Blue.

Mountain Lakes, meanwhile, received great news after seeing nemesis Caldwell move out of its division and into the Patriot White along with Millburn, Nutley, Passaic Valley, Wayne Hills, and West Essex. Caldwell ran away with the American Gold the last couple of years, including two blowout wins over the Herd.

Parsippany moves in with the Group 2 schools in the American White.

Caldwell leaves the American White, which it won resoundingly over the last two years, and now finds itself in the Patriot White along with Millburn, Nutley, Passaic Valley, Wayne Hills, and West Essex.

In Hunterdon County, North Hunterdon remains in the Big Central Conference Liberty Silver, but the powers that be completely revamped the division. So Plainfield is out, and Rahway and Somerville are in.

Bernards remains a part of the BCC Patriot Gold, but Bound Brook and South River are out and will be replaced by J.P. Stevens.

Get all of that?

Here is the divisional setup involving local teams in both the Super Conference and the Big Central.

NJSFC UNITED WHITE: Delbarton, DePaul, Pope John, Seton Hall Prep, St. Peter's Prep.

NJSFC LIBERTY WHITE: Morris Knolls, Morristown, Mount Olive, Randolph, Roxbury, West Morris.

NJSFC LIBERTY BLUE: Chatham, Mendham, Montville, Morris Hills, Parsippany Hills, Warren Hills.

NJSFC PATRIOT RED: Dover, Lakeland, Jefferson, Sparta, West Milford, Vernon.



Photo by John Lanza

James Caldwell's Joey Marinello, left, runs during for a touchdown during the Chiefs North 2, Group 2 semifinal matchup with Lakeland on Nov. 3 in West Caldwell. Marinello scored three times for the second straight game, but Caldwell lost on a late score, ending the team's 37-game winning streak. The Chiefs leave the American White Division for the Patriot White.

NJSFC AMERICAN WHITE: Hanover Park, Madison, Morris Catholic, Mountain Lakes, Parsippany, Pequannock.

NJSFC AMERICAN BLUE: Hackettstown, High Point, Kittatinny, Lenape Valley, Newton, Sussex Tech.

NJSFC NATIONAL BLUE: Boonton, Hopatcong, Kinnelon, North Warren, Wallkill Valley, Whippany Park.

NJSFC PATRIOT WHITE: Caldwell, Millburn, Nutley, Passaic Valley, Wayne Hills, West Essex.

BIG CENTRAL AMERICAN SILVER: Bridgewater, Hillsborough, Hunterdon Central, Phillipsburg, Ridge.

BIG CENTRAL LIBERTY SILVER: Montgomery, North Hunterdon, Rahway, Somerville, Watchung Hills.

BIG CENTRAL PATRIOT GOLD: Bernards, Delaware Valley, J.P. Stevens, Voorhees.



Logan Stevens of Bernards High School carries the ball in the state Group 2 semifinal against Westwood on Nov. 17. Bernards had won 12 straight before falling, 17-0. The Mountaineers are still in the Patriot Gold Division and will face a new foe in J.P. Stevens which has been added to the division. Bound Brook and South River are off the schedule.

Photo by Rich Mariani



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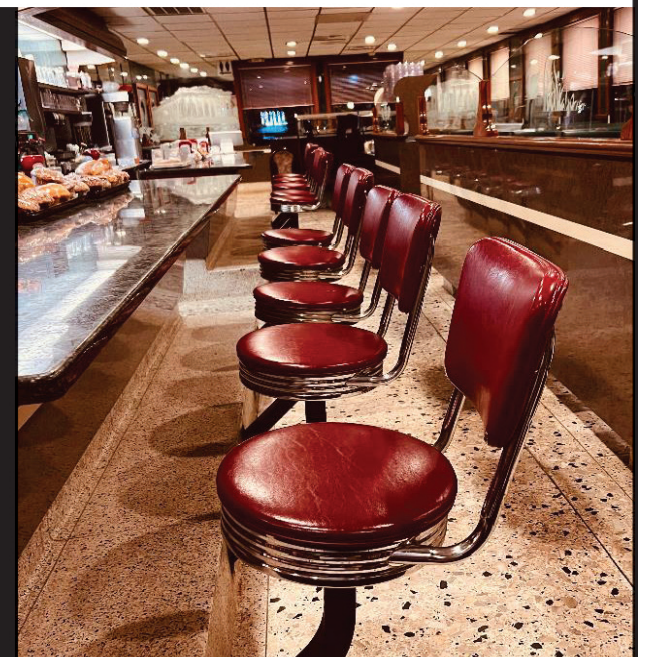
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THE 2024 SCHEDULE

(Times and dates subject to change)

WEEK 0

Thursday, Aug. 29

Bernards at Monmouth Regional, 6
Voorhees at Rahway, 6
Morris Catholic at Teaneck, 6:30

Friday, Aug. 30

Watchung Hills at Moorestown, 7
N. Hunterdon at Hunterdon Central, 7
Ferris at Morristown Beard, 4:30
Weequahic at Mountain Lakes, 6
East Side at Morristown, 7
West Morris at Mendham, 7
Montville at Sparta, 7
Parsippany Hills at Roxbury, 7
Morris Hills at Dover, 7
West Essex at Old Tappan, 7
Saturday, August 31
Iona Prep at Delbarton, 1

Week 1

Thursday Sept. 5

Pequannock at Mountain Lakes, 7

Friday, Sept 6

Watchung Hills at Woodbridge, 6
Dover at Vernon, 6:30
Kennedy-Iselin at Voorhees, 7
Colonia at North Hunterdon, 7
Passaic Valley at Caldwell, 7
Hillside at Bernards, 7
Morristown at Randolph, 7
Mendham at Parsippany Hills, 7
Warren Hills at Montville, 7
Mount Olive at Roxbury, 7
Parsippany at Boonton, 7
Glen Ridge at Whippany Park, 7
Gloucester Catholic at M. Catholic, 7
West Essex at Wayne Hills, 7
Morris Knolls at West Morris, 7:30

Saturday, Sept 7

Newark Academy at Mo Beard, 12
Ridge at St. Joseph-Metuchen, 1
Morris Hills at Chatham, 1
Malvern Prep at Delbarton, 1
Hanover Park at Madison, 1

Week 2

Friday, Sept. 13

Delbarton at Msgr Farrell (N.Y.), 6
West Morris at Morristown, 6:30
North Hunterdon at Watchung Hills, 7
Caldwell at West Essex, 7
J.P. Stevens at Voorhees, 7
Bernards at Delaware Valley, 7
Randolph at Mount Olive, 7
Mountain Lakes at Hanover Park, 7



Photo by P.C. Robinson

Roxbury's Jahmani Miller, carries the ball against Colonia in last season's North 2, Group 4 quarterfinal. Roxbury won, 21-14.

Madison at Mendham, 7
Roxbury at Sparta, 7
Dover at West Milford, 7
Hillsborough at Ridge, 7

Saturday, Sept. 14

Bridgewater at Morris Knolls, 1
Morristown Beard at MKA, 1
Whippany Park at Boonton, 7

Week 3

Friday, Sept. 20

Clifton at Morristown, 6:30
Mo-Beard at Dobbs Ferry (N.Y.), 7
Voorhees at Bernards, 7
Linden at Watchung Hills, 7
Phillipsburg at Ridge, 7
Caldwell at Westwood, 7
Lakeland at West Essex, 7
Montgomery at North Hunterdon, 7
Morris Knolls at Randolph, 7
Mount Olive at Chatham, 7
Montville at Roxbury, 7
West Morris at Warren Hills, 7
Mendham at Dover, 7
Boonton at Hopatcong, 7
Kinnelon at Whippany Park, 7
Morris Catholic at Mahwah, 7
Lenape Valley at Mountain Lakes, 7

Delbarton at St. Peter's Prep, 7

Saturday, Sept. 21

Hackettstown at Morris Hills, 1
Hanover Park at Glen Ridge, 1
Cedar Grove at Madison, 1

Week 4

Friday, Sept. 27

Delaware Valley at Voorhees, 7
North Hunterdon at Rahway, 6
Mountain Lakes at Boonton, 6
Bernards at J.P. Stevens, 7
Wayne Hills at Caldwell, 7
Ridge at Bridgewater, 7
Nutley at West Essex, 7
Montgomery at Watchung Hills, 7
Morristown at Mount Olive, 7
Warren Hills at Mendham, 7
Montville at Parsippany Hills, 7
Dover at Lakeland, 7
Parsippany at Hanover Park, 7
Madison at Lenape Valley, 7
Jefferson at Whippany Park, 7
Randolph at West Morris, 7:30

Saturday, Sept. 28

River Dell at Morris Hills, 1
Roxbury at Morris Knolls, 1

Delbarton at Seton Hall Prep, 1
Pingry at Morristown Beard, 6:30
Livingston at Chatham, 7

Week 5

Friday, Oct. 4

North Hunterdon at Monroe, 7
Voorhees at North Plainfield, 7
West Essex at Passaic Valley, 7
Cedar Grove at Caldwell, 7
South Plainfield at Bernards, 7
Warren Hills at Randolph, 7
Union at Ridge, 7
Chatham at Roxbury, 7
Sparta at Dover, 7
Parsippany at Morris Catholic, 7
Boonton at Kinnelon, 7
Whippany Park at North Warren, 7
Parsippany Hills at West Morris, 7:30

Saturday, Oct. 5

Morris Knolls at Mount Olive, 1
Pope John at Delbarton, 1
Mendham at Morris Hills, 2
Mountain Lakes at Madison, 2
Hanover Park at Pequannock, 2
Capital Prep Charter (NY) at Morristown Beard, 2:30
Old Bridge at Morristown, 2:30
Watchung Hills at South Brunswick, 7

Week 6

Thursday, Oct. 10

Hackley at Morristown Beard, 3:30
North Warren at Boonton, 6
Wallkill Valley at Whippany Park, 6
Morris Hills at Morris Knolls, 6:30
Elizabeth at Morristown, 6:30
Mount Olive at Vernon, 7
Voorhees at Gov. Livingston, 7
North Hunterdon at Somerville, 7
West Morris at Montville, 7
Warren Hills at Parsippany Hills, 7
Dover at Pascack Hills, 7
Jefferson at Hanover Park, 7
Madison at Parsippany, 7
Ridge at Hunterdon Central, 7

Friday, Oct. 11

Mendham at Chatham, 3
Morris Catholic at Pequannock, 6:30
Roxbury at Randolph, 7
Caldwell at Shabazz, 7
Saturday Oct. 12
Rahway at Watchung Hills, 7
Summit at Bernards, 7

Week 7

Thursday, Oct. 17

Whippany Park at Hopatcong, 7

Friday, Oct. 18

Watchung Hills at Elizabeth, 7
Randolph at Orange, 7
North Hunterdon at East Brunswick, 7
Millburn at Caldwell, 7
Mount Olive at Wayne Valley, 7
Chatham at Warren Hills, 7
Montville at Mendham, 7
Ridge at North Brunswick, 7
Morris Hills at Parsippany Hills, 7
Dover at Jefferson, 7
West Essex at Hanover Park, 7
Morris Catholic at Mountain Lakes, 7
Boonton at Wallkill Valley, 7
Pequannock at Madison, 7
Whippany Park at Hopatcong, 7
Roxbury at West Morris, 7:30

Saturday Oct. 19

Bergen Catholic at Delbarton, 1
Voorhees at Hillside, 1
Bernards at Gov. Livingston, 1
Boonton at Wallkill Valley, 1
Morristown at Morris Knolls, 1
Morristown Beard at Poly Prep, 2

Week 8

Friday, Oct. 25

Whippany Park at High Point, 6:30
Watchung Hills at Somerville, 7
Caldwell at Nutley, 7
Delbarton at DePaul, 7
Morris Knolls at West Essex, 7
Bernards at Carteret, 7
Westfield at Ridge, 7
Morristown at Roxbury, 7
West Morris at Mount Olive, 7
Randolph at Mendham, 7
Chatham at Parsippany Hills, 7
Morris Hills at Montville, 7
Chatham at Parsippany Hills, 7
Kittatinny at Dover, 7
Hanover Park at Weequahic, 7
Madison at Morris Catholic, 7
Mountain Lakes at Newton, 7
Voorhees at North Hunterdon, 7
Cedar Grove at Boonton, 7

Saturday Oct. 26

No games scheduled

Week 9

Friday Nov. 1

Delbarton at Paramus Catholic, 7
Hudson Catholic at Morris Catholic, 7
NJISAA Public Playoffs, Quarterfinals

Saturday Nov. 2

NJISAA Public Playoffs, Quarterfinals
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OFFENSE: PLENTY OF PUNCH RETURNS

By **JOE HOFMANN**

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

The Mount Olive High School football team put together a post-season run for the ages in 2023 – and the Marauders have many of the pieces in place on offense to make it two sectional championships in a row.

Coach Brian O'Connor's team captured the school's first sectional title since 2002 with a stirring 27-26 victory over Roxbury.

Mount Olive did it with an offense that felt at home either grinding it out on the ground or going to the air.

And the best news of all is that O'Connor returns most of the cast that moved the ball so well all season.

Quarterback Jake Asbury, who engineered the team's 80-yard drive with 6:54 left in the game against Roxbury, returns for another season. He was 141 for 265 for 1,667 yards and 15 TDs last year. He also found the time to rush 94 times for 423 yards and nine TDs.

Receivers Jekori Zapata (37 for 299, 2 TDs), Rondell Derrick (14 for 234) and Vin Carpini (15 for 216, 3 TDs) give Asbury solid targets.

Carpini caught a 9-yard touchdown pass on fourth down with just 23 seconds left to beat Roxbury and give the Marauders the sectional title in North 2, Group IV.

And if those aren't enough tools to give Asbury, he has this: bruising running back Tyler Cumming is back after a year in which he carried 270 times for 1,467 yards and 14 TDs. He is being recruited by Monmouth as well as Ivy and Patriot League schools.

Cumming will have plenty of holes with which to run through, thanks to the return of three standout linemen in Anthony Giammanco, Richie Vanatta, and Connor Smyth.

How good was the 6-3, 250-pound Giammanco last year? Well, when scouts came by to watch Virginia Tech-bound Aidan Lynch, they had trouble telling Giammanco and Lynch apart. No wonder Giammanco is being recruited by Boston College and Wisconsin.

Vanatta (6-3, 260), meanwhile, is being sought after by Sacred Heart and gives the Marauders a standout at the right tackle spot.

Tight end Lincoln Youtz, meanwhile, was impressive as a blocker and as a receiving threat (14 for 186, 3 TDs).

While Mount Olive appears loaded on offense this fall, there are many, many other players in the New Jersey Hills Media Group's area who should help their team put up some points, such as:

Quarterbacks: Joey Borrello (Hanover Park), Brandon Giangeruso (Whippany



Photos by Jim Petrucci

Mount Olive High School's Tyler Cumming eludes a tackle in the Marauders' 27-26 victory over Roxbury in the North 2 Group 4 title game last November. Cumming carried for 1,467 yards and 14 touchdowns in 2023 and returns for his senior season.

Park) and Mike Ciullo (Montville).

Running backs: Anthony Drago (West Essex), Anthony Feaster (Montville), Kevin King (Mendham), Cole Capuzzi (Mendham), Syllas White (Boonton), Jashiah Brown (Morristown), Carson Fitch (Mountain Lakes), Ryan Turner (Ridge), Aiden Stieglitz (Ridge), Lucas Garcia (Watchung Hills), Logan Stevens (Bernards), Matteo Tramutola (Voorhees), Xavier Arteaga (Hunterdon Central).

Receivers: Phil Folmar (Delbarton), Dylan Morgenroth (Whippany Park), Jack Morra (Bernards), Brayden Kelly (Watchung Hills), Nicholas Ramaci (North Hunterdon), Jack Moye (Pingry), Brayden Kelly (North Hunterdon), Corey Wang (Montville).

Linemen: Mike Cerisano (West Essex), Jacob Giordano (Ridge), Kyle Borgh (Voorhees), Cole Bazerman (Caldwell), Aidan Hartney (Caldwell), Brandon Kimball (Montville), Jake Minolis (Randolph), Peter Donini (Delbarton), Andy Covello (Delbarton), Dom Sette (Whippany Park).



Jack Morra of Bernards High School picks up yardage after catching a pass against Lakeland last season. Morra, who scored three TDs in a game last year, returns to the Mountaineers for his senior season.

Photo by Rich Mariani

THE DEFENSE DOES IT

By JOE HOFMANN

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Hanover Park's defense flooded the outside. The Hornets packed the middle.

For one glorious night late last September, the Hornets entire defense was all over the field — and Mountain Lakes could never crack the code.

In a year when the Herd was on the way to a state Group 1 championship, they could do nothing in a 14-7 Hanover Park victory.

Hanover Park's defense was too much. Too fast. Too quick. Too immovable.

Mountain Lakes' vaunted Delaware Wing-T running game was stuck in neutral — thanks to Hanover Park's defense.

More could be in store for the Hornets in the 2024 season.

Defensive back Joey Filippone returns, as does linebacker Hector Lopez.

The hope is that they do the same this year as they did last season, when they were both named first-team All-NJSFC American Gold in a league that included state-wide powerhouses such as Caldwell and Mountain Lakes.

Neither are especially big — Filippone is 5-9, 160, Lopez is 5-7, 170 — but they play a lot bigger. They are quick, close gaps, and are sure tacklers.

Filippone had two sacks, 10 tackles for loss and 71 total tackles. He is a hard hitter, as evidenced by his three forced fumbles.

Lopez, meanwhile, had four sacks and nine tackles for loss among his 88 tackles. He also intercepted two passes.

The team made it to the second round of the playoffs and there is reason to believe they could be in the mix again because of a strong defense.

"Lopez and Filippone are studs," Fulton said. "They are little. I don't care what kids look like, if you're fast and scrappy and coachable, we'll find a spot for you. Between the two of them they don't weigh what some linemen weigh, but they are tough and make a lot of plays."

The Hanover defense also returns standout linebacker P.J. DiMaiolo and defensive back Joey Tantawi.

Both were impactful that night against Mountain Lakes. Hanover will miss graduated standouts on 'D' such as Finn Kenney, Jason Grzymala, Kevin Loparnos, Azmir Parks, Austin Pastena, Michael Farrell, Luke Riordan, Nick Williams and Robert Davis.

But the return of Filippone, Lopez, DiMaiolo and Tantawi showed the possibilities last year and that is a good place to



Photo by Rich Mariani

Logan Marks (88) and Thomas Diemar (89) of Bernards High School corner a Governor Livingston ball carrier in a game last season. Diemar returns for his senior season.

start.

Here are some of the other defensive standouts in the New Jersey Hills Media Group area entering the 2024 season:

Linemen: Tom Borgia (West Morris), Ralph Langone (Mendham), Sean Elmsore (Montville), Erik Edelman (Morris Catholic), Andrew Fonseca (Caldwell), Dante Palladino (Montville), Declan Higgins (Mendham), Dean Mangiocavallo (Randolph), Kyle Checchio (Delbarton), Luca Lopez (Delbarton), Chase Fritz (Ridge), Thomas Diemar (Bernards), Rafferty Harris (Pingry), Jack Rewey (Pingry), Luke Testa (North Hunterdon), Chris Dadas (Delbarton), Sebastian Borie (Mountain Lakes), Jake Long (West Essex), Jonathan Erickson (Madison), Sam Cobane (Whippany Park), Sal Vitale (Boonton), Tyler Suk (Hunterdon Central), A.J. Melo (Hunterdon Central).

Linebackers: Jared Colon (Montville), Joe Levato (Chatham), Omaldy Ferreira (Morris Hills), Dom Graziano (Morris Hills), Steven Lomelo (Mendham), Sean Murtagh (Caldwell), Mike Mignone (Caldwell), Nick Sangillo (West Essex), Pat Wojtac (North



Hunterdon), Luke Bartnett (Voorhees), Drew Cabalar (Boonton), Alex Chambers (Dover), Lincoln Youtz (Mount Olive), Dan McGarry (Mount Olive), Bobby Brickner (Morris Knolls), Lucas Reza (Morristown), Tyler Houser (Delbarton), Chris Carfano (Madison).

Backs: Jordan Simeone (West Essex), Mike Vito (Montville), Mike Vespi (Montville), Manny Ospina (Morris Hills), Mario Valastro (Morristown-Beard), Emilio Mendez (Dover), Troy Bailey (Delbarton), Connor Higgins (Mountain Lakes), Max Garcia (West Essex), Dan Figurski (North Hunterdon), Max Austin (Bernards), Nick Moyano (Caldwell), Anthony Facchino (Whippany Park).

Versatile Sean Murtagh of James Caldwell High School, shown here jumping high, intercepted a pass, forced a fumble and kicked six extra points in a game against Cedar Grove last year.

Photo by John Lanza

MORRISTOWN COLONIALS

IMPRESSIVE RETURNING PLAYERS

By PAUL BRUNO

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

MORRISTOWN – Leadership is sometimes overlooked but the Morristown High School football team is counting on that segment to propel the team this fall.

There appears to be plenty of that quality returning to help carry the Colonials into their 2024 campaign.

The club boasts an impressive number of returning players, including nine seniors with loads of experience on both sides of the ball.

“We have quite a handful of players returning who have played varsity level for two years or more,” said Morristown head coach Casey Flynn, who enters his third season in command of the Colonials with a 7-13 record. “We believe that with that experience, the last couple of years of being in so many close games, that mental toughness will allow us to overcome those tight games.”

The Colonials, whose career program win total stands at 498 entering the season, opened the 2023 campaign season with three straight victories and managed to qualify for the state tournament — Morristown suffered a 49-7 setback to Phillipsburg in the NJSIAA North Jersey Section 2, Group 5 quarterfinal round to finish with a 4-6 record.

Seniors Reed Donegan (5-10, 173 RB/LB), Jeremiah Moreau (WR/LB), Lucas Rezza (RB/LB), Greydon Carcich (6-2, 245) and Dimitrios Mihalakakos (5-10, 182) and sophomores Jasiah Brown (WR/DB) and James Dzikowski (QB) all return to bolster both

MORRISTOWN COLONIALS

Head Coach: Casey Flynn, third season

Assistant Coaches: Scott Jacobus, Bill Mullen, Willie Rzucidlo, J.J. Riley, Kevin Yeager, Kai Dickerson, Jon Leef, Aaron Harris, Ted Olshefski, Steve Weiss, Ryan Flynn, Ed Shivas, Azem Koliq, Pedro Aragon, Mike Sabo, Bob Biondich.

Section: North 2, Group 5

Last year's record: 4-6

Playoffs: Lost in North 2, Group 5 quarterfinal
Returning Starters: 7/7

SCHEDULE

Aug. 30 vs. Paterson Eastside, 6:30 p.m.

Sept. 6 at Randolph, 7 p.m.

Sept. 13 vs. West Morris, 6:30 p.m.

Sept. 20 vs. Clifton, 6:30 p.m.

Sept. 27 at Mount Olive, 6:30 p.m.

Oct. 5 vs. Old Bridge, 1 p.m.

Oct. 10 vs. Elizabeth, 6:30 p.m.

Oct. 19 at Morris Knolls, 1 p.m.

Oct. 25 at Roxbury, 7 p.m.

sides of the ball for Flynn's squad.

“They're some of the top players we're depending on,” Flynn said. “They've all been playing for two years or more and that experience they've gained has allowed us to develop mental toughness that we hope will allow us to overcome those tight games.”

Seniors Ny Aire Lyle (RB), Ryan Meyers (WR), Christian Vander Groef (WR) and junior Jake Brought (WR) are back and ready to supply depth for a Colonials offense that



Photos by Glenn Clark

Casey Flynn begins his third season as head coach of the Morristown High School football team.

PLEASE SEE COLONIALS, PAGE 45

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Wide receiver Sidney Williams catches a pass during a drill at Morristown High School.



Chase Bright, a lineman on offense and defense, goes through his paces.



James Dzikowski sets up to pass at a Morristown High School football practice.



Running back Ny'Aire Lyle practices his footwork at a Morristown High School practice.

COLONIALS: ‘Fundamentals and execution’

FROM PAGE 44

totalled 82 points in those opening three victories last season.

A talented group of sophomores are also ready to fill the football pipeline as well in Oliver Elms (WR/DB), Justin Giardina (RB/DB), Kadin Hackett (OL/DL), Weston Elms (QB/DB) and Saahir Henry (WR/LB).

‘Mental Training’

One aspect Flynn and his staff have focused on is the team’s focus throughout

four quarters.

“There are several parts of mental training that we’ve been focusing on during our off-season and summer training,” Flynn said. “Using the parts of certain game situations we’ve gone through to learn how to execute better. We’ve focused on real-game scenarios, working on two-minute drills when we need a quick store or on defense situations where we need a key stop on a crucial drive.

“We’ve been big on mental training, then it comes down to execution. In the end the

game’s about fundamentals and execution.”

Morristown opens the 2024 season when it plays host to Paterson Eastside, another Group 5 opponent, on April 30 at 6:30 p.m. It will mark the first meeting with the Passaic County squad since Paterson Eastside took a 42-26 victory in 2017.

“Another bigger thing this off-season was to load up our schedule with teams we may see in the postseason,” said Flynn. “We have one of the toughest schedules in the state with our division. Last year all six teams made the state tournament, three

advanced to their sectional final, and two were state champions.

“Playing some Group 5 schools gives us a good indication of where we can be. We have to stack good days together now so that we can be at peak performance by that opening game.

Newcomers to watch: Sophomores Robert Mauriello (WR/LB), Kayson Mills (WR/DB), Jimmy Mohrle (OL/DL), Kushmunder (OL/DL), Joseph Spinoza (OL/DL), Christian Thomas (WR/DB), Bryan Martinez Urgilez (RB/DL).t



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MORRISTOWN BEARD CRIMSON

PALPABLE OPTIMISM

By LOU MONACO
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

MORRISTOWN – Entering the 2023 season, a new direction and attitude was needed for the Morristown Beard football team. After just one season, the foundation has been set and the next step is ready to be taken as the Crimson kick off their 2024 season at home versus Group 4 member Ferris on Friday, Aug. 30 with kickoff scheduled for 4:30 p.m.

Second-year head coach Tahj Valentine, believed to be the youngest head coach in the Garden State at the age of 24, has lifted the program up with new energy, enthusiasm and excitement and with 17 returning starters (11 offense, six defense) back in the fold, there is palpable optimism on Whippany Road.

“Last year, we finished with a 6-4 record and made it to the Metropolitan Independent Football League (MIFL) semifinals, though we fell just short of our ultimate goal. It was an outstanding season for the team, as we laid a strong foundation for the future success of this program,” said Valentine, who starred in the backfield for the Crimson (2015-18).

“I couldn’t be prouder of our student-athletes for fully embracing our philosophy of mindset, behavior, and strength, and for showing up to practice ready to put in the hard work necessary to succeed.”

Key returning starters on offense include senior quarterback Ryan Novack. Last



Charlie Fernandez, a junior defensive end, goes through his paces at Morristown Beard.



Photos by Glenn Clark
Tahj Valentine begins his second season as head coach of the Morristown Beard football team.

PLEASE SEE CRIMSON, PAGE 47

Go CRIMSON! 

Wishing you a Successful
2024 Season
from all of us at the
Morris NewsBee

CRIMSON: Something special shaping up in year 2

FROM PAGE 46

season, Novack completed 74-of-168 passes for 1,150 passing yards with 12 touchdowns and 12 interceptions. Junior running back Oscar Speranza picks up from over 1,200-yard rusher and now Sacred Heart University attendee Marcello Laracca (163 carries, 12 TDs) and had 56 carries for 233 yards and one score last season.

Two-year starters and seniors Marco Valastro (SLOT) (14 catches, 125 yards, one TD) and wide receiver Jawaad Travis (two catches, 23 yards) will help Novack with the passing attack. Others include senior center/defensive lineman Sean Rizzo who anchors both lines, senior offensive/defensive lineman Sam Cherins and junior wide receiver Nick Anderson.

Four seniors and four juniors return on defense including seniors Valastro (defensive back), Rizzo, Travis (defensive back) and defensive lineman Sam Cherins. Juniors include defensive backs Speranza, Anderson and Darius Payne, along with defensive end Jake Kham.

Last season, the Crimson (6-4) started off strong, winning five of their first six games however dropped three of their last four to end the season including a 40-10 home setback to eventual champion Rye Country Day (N.Y.) in the MIFL Semifinals last November.

“Year two is shaping up to be something special. We have a talented, athletic team that’s ready to compete against anyone who steps onto the field with them. I’ve never seen them hungrier,” said Valentine. “We’re aiming for the league championship this season, and to achieve that, we need to focus on the details – tightening up areas where we fell short last year – so we



Sean Rizzo, a senior center and linebacker, works out at Morristown Beard.



Jake Kham, a junior end and defensive back, runs a drill at Morristown Beard.

MORRISTOWN BEARD CRIMSON

Head Coach: Tahj Valentine, 2nd season
Assistant Coaches: Nathaniel Coache, Jared Cook, Joe Da-Kaser, Jordan DeCosca, Matt DeFranco, Kevin Meany, Robert Rollo (OC/DC), Michael Wright.
Section: Non-Public, Group B
Last year’s record: 6-4
Playoffs: MIFL Semifinals
Returning Starters: 11/6

SCHEDULE
Aug. 30 vs. Ferris, 4:30
Sept. 7 vs. Newark Academy, 12
Sept. 14 at Montclair Kimberley, 1
Sept. 20 at Dobbs Ferry (NY), 7
Sept. 28 vs. Pingry, 6:30
Oct. 5 vs. Capital Prep (NY), 2:30
Oct. 10 vs. Hackley (NY), 3:30
Oct. 19 at Poly Prep (NY), 1



Morristown Beard football team captains are, from left, Ryan Novak, Marco Valastro, Jawaad Travis and Sean Rizzo.



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MOUNT OLIVE MARAUDERS

It's ABOUT THIS SEASON

By PAUL BRUNO
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

MOUNT OLIVE TWP. – The 2023 season was indeed memorable for the Mount Olive High School football team but the reflection on that is past — it's time to gear up for the 2024 campaign.

The Marauders will count on another consistent season from rugged senior running back/linebacker Tyler Cumming. The 6-0, 200-pounder rushed for more than 1,400 yards and scored 14 touchdowns in helping lead the club to an 11-2 record and the NJSIAA North Jersey, Section 2, Group 4 championship with a 27-26 victory over Roxbury last November.

Lincoln Youtz, a 6-1, 205-pound ILB/TE, is another two-way staple who returns for the Marauders.

Senior Jake Asbury, who threw for more than 1,600 yards and 16 touchdowns, brings his cool demeanor back to direct the Marauders attack at quarterback. He'll be protected by senior linemen Richie Vanatta (6-3, 260) and Connor Smyth (6-0, 200) and junior James Giamannco (6-4, 260).

Cumming's reputation as a runner is well known by opponents.

"We expect Tyler to pick up where he left off last season," Mount Olive head coach Brian O'Connor, who enters his ninth season with a 49-34 record. "He's one of the top running backs in the state and teams will be focusing on stopping him, but we're also fortunate to have a lot of skill players and depth at many positions.

"We've got Asbury back at quarterback and he's shown a lot of growth and maturi-



Photos by Ed Ruping

Brian O'Connor begins his ninth season as head coach of the Mount Olive Marauders.

ty. I think teams will expect Tyler to get the ball a lot but one of the big things offensively is we don't have to rely too much on him because we have other weapons."

The Marauders, who eventually suffered a 24-19 setback to Ramapo in the Group 4

state semifinal last season, secured their second title in school history with the 2023 victory over Roxbury. It was a satisfying turnaround from the 2022 campaign which saw the club struggle to finish with a 1-9 record.

MOUNT OLIVE MARAUDERS

Head Coach: Brian O'Connor, ninth season
Assistant Coaches: Dave Benfatti, Farsheed Taschayodi, Robert Merle, Mike Gilbert, Dylan Rimsky, Khalid Alston, Scott Buchanan, Chris Car-pini, Nolan Clarke, Kevin Persson.
Section: North 2, Group 4
Last year's record: 11-2
Playoffs: Won North 2, Group 4 championship
Returning Starters: 7/7

SCHEDULE
Sept. 6 at Roxbury, 7 p.m.
Sept 13 vs. Randolph, 6:30 p.m.
Sept. 20 at Chatham, 1 p.m.
Sept. 27 vs. Morristown, 6:30 p.m.
Oct. 5 vs. Morris Knolls, 1 p.m.
Oct. 10 at Vernon, 7 p.m.
Oct. 18 at Wayne Valley, 7 p.m.
Oct. 25 vs. West Morris, 7 p.m.

The victory was a bit of revenge for Mount Olive, which opened last season with five straight victories before being edged by Roxbury, 10-7. Mount Olive's other championship came in 2002 when it edged Jefferson, 14-13 in the North Jersey Section 2 final.

"If we look back we had a tremendous season last year," O'Connor noted. "We enjoyed it and we have a lot of players back, but they want to take it a step further. Now it's about this season, so there is very little talk about last year. It's a new year and we

PLEASE SEE SEASON, PAGE 49

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SEASON: Looking to go one step further

FROM PAGE 48

have to prove ourselves all over again. We won't sneak up on anyone this year."

Asbury will have a solid stable of skilled receivers to look for downfield in senior wideouts Vin Caprini, Jekori Zapata, Rondell Derrick, Anthony Derrick, Anthony Collier and Dan McGarry.

"We're cautiously optimistic," said O'Connor. "We return a lot of our starters and have some very good depth at our skill positions. We'd like to win our conference this year, repeat as sectional champs, and take it one step further."

Mount Olive will dive right into the schedule with a tough opponent when it opens at 7 p.m. on Friday, Sept. 6. The Marauders are looking to earn their fourth victory in the past six meetings between the two clubs.

Newcomers to watch: Juniors James Rizk (OG/NG), Frank Gallo (SS/QB), Raynell Derrick (RB/LB), Tommy Canning (WR/OLB); sophomore Brayden Longo (RB/LB).



Dan McGarry runs through a drill at Mount Olive.



Mount Olive High School football players stretch before practice.



Mount Olive High School football players run through a drill during a preseason practice.



Jared Martini hits the tackle wheel during Mount Olive High School football practice.

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MOUNTAIN LAKES HERD

BACK TO BASICS

By JOE HOFMANN

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

MOUNTAIN LAKES – A beautiful 2023 state Group 1 championship trophy sits in the Mountain Lakes trophy case.

The glorious run of football is over – but that was last year.

The 2024 season is upon us. The slate is clean. A terrific group of Herd seniors are off to college. The program now has fresh faces – and a brand, new start.

How does coach Darrell Fusco's team fill those gigantic shoes?

By starting over. By going back to basics.

"It's funny," Fusco said. "We played really well with a great senior class and we won the group. For 3-4-5 weeks everybody sees you at your best and our program is heralded.

"And now we are back to teaching kids how to put their shoulder pads on."

The Herd were more than up to the task last year. The team lost a 34-0 game at Caldwell in the final regular season game but then peaked at just the right time with five straight playoff wins to become the first Morris County team to bring home a Group title.

Mountain Lakes dominated from start to finish and beat Glassboro at Rutgers, 24-6, to win Group 1. Fusco's team overwhelmed Hawthorne to win the section, 35-14, and then blew out ultra-talented Shabazz in the state semifinals, 49-12.

"We enjoyed it, but then we kinda step

PLEASE SEE BASICS, PAGE 51



Photos by Ed Ruping

Darrell Fusco is in his 14th season as head coach of the Mountain Lakes High School football team.



Leo Kaplan, left, runs a drill at a Mountain Lakes practice.



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BASICS: Herd to defend Group 1 title with new crop

FROM PAGE 50

back and say we are starting all over,” Fusco said. “People ask how we’ll do. The expectations are high. I go back to (legendary Mountain Lakes coach) Doug Wilkins, and we’ll just start from scratch. We’ll go old school.

“It’s a challenge.”

The new quarterback could be transfer Brett Beierle, who moved from Sparta. Will he play right away or does he have to sit 30 days? Fusco didn’t know at press time.

“He may have to sit for 30 days, we’ll see,” Fusco said. “He is a great kid and works hard. He is more of a shotgun kid who can be very good.”

The other candidate is Brad Rodgers, who has also shown progress.

Fullback Carson Fitch rushed for 800 yards last year but went down with an injury and is destined for a solid year. The halfback out of the Wing-T is Nick Signorelli, who had a season-ending injury last year but is back and looking healthy.

Others in the backfield mix include Massimo Corvelli and Billy Barrett. Esa Ellahi might get some looks.

The line will be Barry Donohue at center, guards Holden Gillespie (possibly the program’s best player, according to Fusco) and Anthony Argen, and tackles Trey Schneider and Will Murphy.

“Some kids don’t play a lot until their senior year,” Fusco said. “Some of our kids sat behind really good kids. That’s normal for us.”

Another one to watch is tight end Mario Dzamba, who is the younger brother of the graduated Marco Dzamba, one of the best all-around players in school history.

Romano Deconcillis is another tight end.



Vance Fusco hits the tackle wheel at a Mountain Lakes practice.

Luke Davi will play split end.

Schneider will play nose and other line candidates include Gillespie, Collin Webb, and Argen.

Rodgers, who started every game last year, is back at outside linebacker, where he will be joined by Jack Bronico.

“Jack will be special,” Fusco said. “We don’t normally start sophomores.”

Sebastian Borie, who had a terrific post-

season, returns and will play inside linebacker.

Ellahi and Max Kaplan are two other inside linebacker candidates.

Milo Penniston and returning starter Connor Higgins will play corner and Signorelli and Grant Nikolsky will play safety.

“It’s funny, we are not what we were last year,” Fusco said. “Cos (Fusco’s son Cosmo, a two-way standout), Marco, (running

MOUNTAIN LAKES HERD

Head Coach: Darrell Fusco, 14th season

Assistant Coaches: Matt Stanzione, Dan Capriola, Larry Szabo, Jeff Bronico, Jeff Reid, Joe Cina, Nick Lane, Justin Ramirez, Steve Feltmann, John Borie, Dave Leshnower, Paul Chiara, Paul Bongiorno

Section: North, Group 1

Last year’s record: 11-2

Playoffs: Won state Group 1 championship by beating Glassboro, 24-6.

SCHEDULE

Aug. 30 vs Weequahic 6 p.m.

Sept. 5 vs. Pequannock 7 p.m.

Sept. 13 at Hanover Park 7 p.m.

Sept. 20 vs. Lenape Valley 7 p.m.

Sept. 27 at Boonton 6 p.m.

Oct. 5 at Madison 2 p.m.

Oct. 18 vs. Morris Catholic 7 p.m.

Oct. 25 at Newton 7 p.m.

back Jordan) Hernando, (Giacomo) Bevacqua and guys like that were studs. But we have a good group. We start off tough though.”

Mountain Lakes has a brutal schedule to start off 2024 with talented Weequahic to open up, followed by American White contenders Pequannock, Hanover Park, and Lenape Valley all in a row.

Can the Herd gel in time?

Fusco cannot wait to find out.

“You pinch yourself all offseason with all of the honors,” he said. “Everyone loves you. I was trained by Doug Wilkins and Ray McCrann. They celebrated all offseason. Now it’s time, and we are looking forward to seeing what the seniors can do.”

THE HERD

Wishing you a Successful
2024 Season from all of us at
The Citizen of Morris County

NORTH HUNTERDON LIONS

Looking To Turn The Page

By LOU MONACO
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

CLINTON TWP. – After a winless 0-9 record with just 71 points scored last year, the North Hunterdon High School football team has turned the page onto another chapter.

Looking for their first victory since a 49-35 home triumph over Randolph to win the New Jersey Interscholastic Athletic Association North Jersey, Section 2, Group 4 sectional final on Nov. 12, 2022 and hoping to snap a 10-game winless streak, second year head coach CJ Robinson enters the 2024 regular season in Annandale with six returning offensive starters, anchored by a core of three on the offensive line: senior Luke Testa, senior Russ Hyland and junior Bret Banek.

Junior wide receiver Dan Figurski (17 receptions, 171 yards, one touchdown) and junior H-Back Anthony DeSimone (four receptions, 33 yards) also return.

Offense will be a huge priority and focus for Robinson as the Lions were outscored, 396-71, in his first season at the helm with their closest loss a 21-point road setback, 35-14, at Voorhees in their annual Milk Can Rivalry Game on Oct. 20.

The loss was the first loss for the Lions in their annual county showdown since 2011.

With quarterback Tyler Anderson (100-of-231 passes, 1,249 yards, seven TDs, seven interceptions, 87 carries, 403 rush yards, three TDs) lost to graduation, Robinson will have a new leader directing the offense in junior Nicholas Ramaci. Ramaci, who started as a wide receiver/defensive back



CJ Robinson is in his second year as head coach of the North Hunterdon Lions.

last year, saw sporadic snaps at center last season.

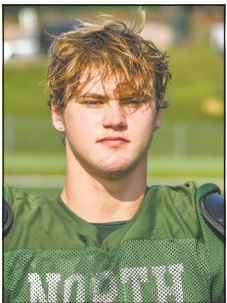
Last season, Ramaci had 28 receptions for 452 yards with one TD and had 19 carries for 84 yards on the ground as a sophomore.

Figurski (linebacker), Testa (defensive line) and junior linebacker Pat Wojtal (22 solo tackles, 36 total, three for loss) are the three returning starters on defense. Figurski was third on the team last season with 23 solo tackles (40 total) with one safety, one forced fumble and one fumble recovery. Testa had 13 solo tackles (33 total) with three tackles for loss.

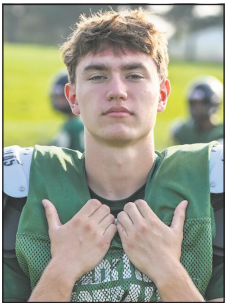
“We are very excited to get the season started. We’ve worked hard this off-season and over the summer to get better, stronger, and more conditioned,” said Robinson.



DAN FIGURSKI



COLE O’CONNOR



NICK RIMACI



LUKE TESTA



A North Hunterdon player sets up to catch a pass in a preseason practice.

“We want to improve each facet of the game and focus on the little things at practice trying to get better every day.”

The Lions will visit rival Hunterdon Central to open the 2024 campaign on at 7 p.m. on Friday, Aug. 30, before returning to Annandale for their home opener against Colonia at 7 p.m. on Friday, Sept. 6.

N. HUNTERDON LIONS

Head Coach: CJ Robinson, 2nd season
Assistant Coaches: Blair Maginnis, John McSweeney, Chris Miller, Ryan Tatarka, Mike Vellucci
Section: North, Group 4
Last year’s record: 0-9
Playoffs: N/A
Returning Starters: 6/3

SCHEDULE
Aug. 30 at Hunterdon Central, 7
Sept. 6 vs. Colonia, 7
Sept. 13 at Watchung Hills, 7
Sept. 20 vs. Montgomery, 7
Sept. 27 at Rahway, 6
Oct. 4 vs. Monroe Township, 7
Oct. 10 at Somerville, 7
Oct. 18 at East Brunswick, 7
Oct. 25 vs. Voorhees, 7

Go LIONS!
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Hunterdon Review





Photos by Bill Nagengast

North Hunterdon High School players practice in the preseason in preparation for their opener against Hunterdon Central on Friday, Aug. 30.

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THE PINGRY BIG BLUE

‘WAY AHEAD OF SCHEDULE’

By DAVE ARTUSO
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

BERNARDS TWP. – The Pingry School football team hasn’t yet played a down of meaningful football in 2024, but the Big Blue are already winning.

“This is year four for me and we’re way ahead of where I thought we’d be at this point,” says head coach Joe Passaro. “We have commitment from school leadership, especially Tim Lear, our new head of school, who is a proponent of both academics and athletics. I think his support has helped on all levels, in all sports. It’s getting athletes out of the hallways and onto team, and it has really bolstered our roster.”

Bolstered by about 50 percent, to be exact. When Passaro arrived at Pingry after years as a youth and high school coach, including a stint in Florida, he had 27 players in the entire program—“as light a roster as I’ve ever coached”—he says. But Passaro began this summer with 45 players in camp.

“We’re really growing the roster, and we’ve even instituted a junior varsity schedule,” the coach notes proudly. “We’re also changing the perceptions about us.”

That began right from the start of Passaro’s first season. Three opponents selected the Big Blue for their Homecoming opponent—something high school and college football teams do when they’re looking for an easy victory in front of a big crowd of alums and boosters. But Pingry ruined the



Photos by Chris M. Junior

Quarterback Ryan Moyer and wide receiver Jack Moyer pose for a photo at Pingry.



Joe Passaro is in his fourth season as head coach of the Pingry Big Blue.

PINGRY BIG BLUE

Head Coach: Joe Passaro, 4th season
Assistant Coaches: A.J. Passaro, Brad Banken, Michael Carr, Kevin Riordan
Section: North Non-Public A
Last year’s record: 6-2

SCHEDULE
Aug. 31 vs. St. Luke’s (Connecticut), 2:30 p.m.
Sept. 7 vs. Montclair Kimberley, Noon
Sept. 13 vs. Newark Academy, 7 p.m.
Sept. 20 at Hackley (N.Y.), 7 p.m.
Sept. 28 at Morristown-Beard, 6:30 p.m.
Oct. 10 vs. Rye Country Day (N.Y.), 3:30 p.m.
Oct. 19 New Hope (Pa.) - Site and time TBD

PLEASE SEE AHEAD, PAGE 55



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AHEAD: 'Enjoy every minute while they can'

FROM PAGE 54

parties, emerging victorious in all three games.

The Passaro-led program is 17-7 in its first four seasons, including 6-2 last year. And the two losses were by a combined three points.

The Big Blue plays in the three-division Metropolitan Independent Football League, which encompasses 14 schools from New Jersey, Pennsylvania, New York and Connecticut. The regular season is seven games long, followed by the four-team league play-offs. Unfortunately, because Pingry doesn't play enough teams from New Jersey, under NJSIAA rules it can't qualify for the official state tournament.

"I hope to win this league—we've qualified for the playoffs a couple of times—and then possibly move to a New Jersey-centric schedule," says Passaro.

Big Blue Ready To Attack

On both sides of the ball, Pingry heads into the 2024 season positioned to, as Passaro puts it, "attack downfield and look for weaknesses in our opponents."

The team has seven starters returning on both offense and defense, mainly the same players going both ways. Offensively, the Big Blue will spread the field and look to make plays, featuring the talents of such players as junior quarterback and co-captain Ryan Moye, who started several games as a freshman and backed up 2023 starter Michael Holloman, who has since moved to Florida.

He'll be throwing to a trio of fellow co-captains—seniors Jack Moye (his brother), Matt Galusha (a four-year starter) and Rafferty Harris—plus junior Ja'Mar White,



Defensive end John Kelly goes through his paces at Pingry.

the fastest player on the team, at wide receiver. The elder Moye also returns at safety, Galusha is a linebacker and Harris is a pass-rushing specialist from his outside linebacker position.

Senior Jack Rewey returns from the Big Blue at tight end and defensive end, John Kelly is back as the only senior on a young offensive line (he'll also play on the defensive front) and junior Patrick Lange also plays both ways on the line.

Passaro will also be looking to players

like a pair of freshmen—running back/cornerback Alex Finkelstein and 6-foot-3, 185-pound Conor Albert, a tight end and potential lineman—to step up.

"Alex has been outstanding. He'll play defensive back and will see some reps at running back," the coach says, "and Conor, I can put him almost anywhere."

Other newcomers include junior Finn Cavanagh, a punter/kicker who "can kick the ball a country mile," according to Passaro, and senior defensive back Diego Gal-



Quarterback Ryan Moye runs the offense during an August practice at Pingry.

van, who Passaro praises for "the heart he puts into everything."

A former undefeated high school player at Monsignor Farrell on Staten Island in New York City, and later a center at Villanova University in Philadelphia—on the same squad as future NFL Hall-of-Famer Howie Long—Passaro would don some pads and a helmet at a moment's notice, if he could.

"I tell these kids every day, 'You come stand here with the clipboard and give me the helmet,'" he says with a laugh. "I remind them that before they know it, they'll have played their last game. So they should enjoy every minute while they can."

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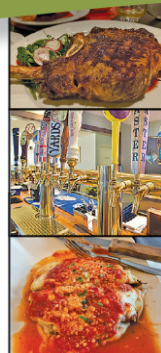
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RANDOLPH RAMS

BIG AND PHYSICAL

By JOE HOFMANN

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

RANDOLPH TWP. – New head coach Dave Albano comes to Randolph having weaved state football championships out of completely different rosters at Parsippany Hills.

His 2014 team beat Cranford in MetLife with a power running game. His 2019 Vikings beat West Essex with a Spread.

So what will Albano's MO be in 2024?

It's too early to say, but he knows he will always have a big, physical O-Line to fall back on.

"We have a big offensive line, a really good O-line," Albano said.

The leader up front is mammoth left tackle Dean Mangiocavallo, a 6-3, 295-pounder who committed to Georgetown.

"He is a big kid, very coachable and a captain," Albano said.

Mangiocavallo will have a lot of help up front. There are some big boys at Randolph.

Ben Quinn (6-2, 230) will play left guard. Jayden Morreale will play center. Nick Hart (5-11, 280), another captain, will play right guard. Ryan Collins (6-3, 240) and Brooks Koepke (6-1, 270) will play right tackle. John Andrede will vie for center snaps.

"We're pretty big up front," Albano said.

The quarterback will be Jackson Magli, who threw for more than 300 yards and three TDs against playoff semifinalist Morris Knolls in a late-season start last year.

"He's a great kid and he wants to learn," Albano said. "He is always with our OC (Brian Francis, in his 30th year with Albano). They have a great rapport. He is a big kid and stands in the pocket well. We like to move and he is one of the most athletic kids here. We use the Boot game and Sprint game and he fits the mold for what we are looking for. And the best thing is, we have him for two years."

Down through the years, Randolph has always thrived in the



Photos by Ed Ruping

PLEASE SEE RANDOLPH, PAGE 57

Gideon Ochieng participates in a lineman drill with coach Mile Lyons.

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RANDOLPH: New coach takes over reins



Dave Albano is in his first season as head coach of the Randolph High School football team.

RANDOLPH RAMS

Head Coach: Dave Albano, first season

Assistant coaches: Brian Francis, Ryan Gresik, Mike Lyons, Nick Gangemi, Paul Conboy, Tom Hennesy, Russ Hert, Abram Kazaba, Chris Ramsden, Gary Buamwooll, Dan Conte.

Section: North, Group 4

Last year's record: 5-5

Playoffs: Lost to Northern Highlands in North 1 Group 4 first round, 48-21

SCHEDULE

Sept. 6 vs. Morristown 7 p.m.

Sept. 13 at Mount Olive 7 p.m.

Sept. 20 vs. Morris Knolls 7 p.m.

Sept. 27 at West Morris 7:30 p.m.

Oct. 4 vs. Warren Hills 7 p.m.

Oct. 10 vs. Roxbury 6 p.m.

Oct. 18 at Orange 7 p.m.

Oct. 25 at Mendham 7 p.m.

FROM PAGE 56

passing game with many sure-handed receivers. This year's group includes Mason Wilson, Pat Dell-Aglio, Joey Sommer, Justin Novak, Will Varanelli (also a captain), Zayne Carswel, and Dustin McFarlane.

"We have some depth, receiver-wise," Albano said. "For what we are doing (four-wide), we can be two-deep."

'Perfect Fit'

Running back Gideon Ochieng "runs like a deer," according to Albano. "He is great in this offense. He finds a hole and hits it. A perfect fit for what we do."

"We'll do a lot of things with formations. We use those four-wide receiver kids. We'll go double-tight. We'll move the kids around, go to some two-back sets, three-back sets. I'm a big formation guy. We have a lot of numbers, so we can do that."

Jadyen Aguilar will play tailback.

"On offense, our numbers are good," Albano said. "Kids can play a couple of positions. Inside slot, wide receiver, two-back set. We'll do a lot of things like we have done in the past."

On defense, Albano will use a 5-0 front with Hart at nose, and Collins, Mangiacavallo, Andrew Zeidman, Quinn, Max Eisenberg and Koepke at end. Inside linebacker will be manned by Joey Bosotina, Ochieng, and Dell-Aglio. Will Varanelli, Novak, and Matt Skrapits will play outside linebacker.

Joey Sommer, Mason Wilson, Carswell, Dustin McFarlane, and EJ Febles are vying for time in the secondary.

"We have some really good linebackers and we are really big up front," Albano said. "In the past, we have been more athletic, with only one guy with his hand down. Now, here,



Will Varanelli, left, and EJ Febles go through their paces.



Jayden Aguilar runs an offensive drill at a Randolph practice.



Jackson Magli gets set to pass during a preseason practice.

we have big guys playing with their hand down with the D-Linemen we have here. We have big people up front who will free up the five linebackers. We have some depth there.

"The secondary is very athletic. We just have to stay healthy. If we can get to week one with the starters on the field we can compete."

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RIDGE RED DEVILS

'KEEP THE TRAIN ROLLING'

By DAVE ARTUSO

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

BERNARDS TWP. — Coming off an 8-2 season that included averaging about 26 points a game and taking a run to the sectional semifinals before bowing out in a loss to Northern Highlands, it won't take long for the Ridge Red Devils to find out just how good they are in 2024.

Every regular season game this autumn will pit Ridge against a team that made the state playoffs last year—starting with St. Joe's (Metuchen), coached by former Ridge head coach Bill Tracy.

"Last year, after our opener every team we faced was a playoff team. This year, every opponent made the playoffs (in 2023)," says fifth-year head coach Andy West, a Ridge alumnus who coached eight years under Tracy, including a stint as defensive coordinator. "We could be very good, and it's taking a lot of effort and work, but we'll know from the first game if that effort is paying off."

Unlike some teams in the area, including Bernards, Ridge isn't playing a game before Labor Day—known as "Week Zero." And that's just fine with West.

"Week Zero seems so rushed," he notes.

The extra time will help a Red Devils team that returns eight starters—five on offense and three on defense.

"Every year we seem to be senior-heavy, and we rely on them," West says. "And every year, we lose great guys to graduation. But our expectation is to keep the train rolling."

Turner, Stieglitz Top Ballcarriers

The Red Devils' offensive returners include senior Aidan Stieglitz, a running back West describes as "a physical runner, hard worker and a kind of thunder-and-lightning player." Stieglitz will also see action at an outside linebacker position.

Another key returner is senior running back/cornerback and co-captain Ryan Turner, who turned in an impressive season in 2023 after taking over in the offensive backfield.

"Initially Ryan wasn't starting, but he won the job because, seemingly, every time he got in, he would score. He made things happen."

Although it wasn't "every time," Turner did score 10 touchdowns on only 40 total touches last season, including a 70-yard touchdown to start the second half against Hunterdon Central, igniting an offensive explosion that turned a nailbiter at half-time into a one-sided affair.

"After that game was when I had a conversation with the senior who was the starter at that position," West recalls. "I really couldn't ignore the hot hand. To his credit, the senior didn't bat an eye. He knew that starting Ryan was best for the team."

West's other three offensive starters are in the trenches, and they have one thing in common: They're good communicators.

"Our whole blocking system starts and ends with communicating," West explains. "One of key players on the line is senior center Bode Ganny. He's a good athlete and a good leader, and I feel so confident when he's out there."



Andy West is in his fifth season as head coach of the Ridge High School Red Devils.

RIDGE RED DEVILS

Head Coach: Andy West, 5th season

Assistant Coaches: Tom Blackwell, Chase Vena, Matt Giordano, J.D. Moore, Brian McCarthy, A.J. Peterpaul, Ben Donaghy, Tyler Brandt

Section: North 1, Group 4

Last year's record: 8-2

Playoffs: Lost to Northern Highlands, 31-26, in North 1, Group 4 semifinals

SCHEDULE

Sept. 7 at St. Joseph (Metuchen), 1 p.m.

Sept. 13 vs. Hillsborough, 7 p.m.

Sept. 20 vs. Phillipsburg, 7 p.m.

Sept. 27 at Bridgewater-Raritan, 7 p.m.

Oct. 4 vs. Union, 7:30 p.m.

Oct. 10 at Hunterdon Central, 7 p.m.

Oct. 18 at North Brunswick, 7 p.m.

Oct. 25 vs. Westfield, 7 p.m.

Ganny will be flanked by a pair of returning starters and seniors—right guard and co-captain Nick Giordano, and left guard Andrew Dachnowicz.

"Nick is a very good player, and tough," says his coach. "Once he has made up his mind, he goes forward with reckless abandon. He can pull, trap, block on a toss—he can do it all. Andrew is brilliant. We have a complex system, and he can take in so much."

The experienced line—which will also include senior co-captain Nate Schneider—will be protecting senior quarterback Con-

nor McLachlan, who has, "really stepped up and risen to the challenge" of the position, says West, "and he can certainly throw it. In baseball, he got to the upper-80s on the mound."

McLachlan will be throwing to players like Turner, senior co-captain Chase Fritz, seniors David Hamilton, Jason Wiatroski and Sam Ginn, and junior Toby Nicholson. And joining Turner in the backfield will be senior co-captain Joe Dachnowicz—Andrew's twin—and senior Ryan Swan and senior Matt Bober.

PLEASE SEE RIDGE, PAGE 59



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RIDGE: Team is focused, determined to succeed

FROM PAGE 58

Twin Power

Defensively, the Red Devils will feature Nick Giordano's twin, Jacob, who returns at nose guard.

"When you're looking for a nose guard, there are two types of players you look for—either bigger and hard to move, or lightning quick. Jacob is lightning quick," West says, adding with a laugh, "and he's a pain in the neck. He's in the backfield constantly and can take on a double-team at the same time. I'm expecting big things from him."

Junior Nate Engdahl, who started as a sophomore and "really held his own," according to his coach, returns this fall. "Nate really dedicated himself," West says. "He's a little bigger and stronger, and he has soaked in all the coaching we've given him."

The third returning starter on defense is senior end and co-captain Chase Fritz, who West notes "did a really nice job out there last year. He's very fast and a very good athlete, and also a good leader and team player. When a teammate makes a play, Chase is the first guy to run over and tap him on the helmet."

Junior Anthony Valera is also competing for a spot on the defensive line.

Holes To Fill On Defense

If experience is the word for the players at the line of scrimmage, the same can't be said for the defensive secondary and line-backing crew.

"We've had to replace a lot of guys," says West, "including our whole secondary. Swan played at safety last year, so that will help. He's a physical kid who flies around and loves to hit you."

Bober and Turner will take corner spots in the secondary, along with Joe Dachnowicz. "They'll get tested," West acknowledges.

How well the Red Devils do this season won't rely on how big the players are. West has a list of other attributes he finds more important.

"We don't put a premium on size," the coach explains. "We look for toughness, athleticism and taking care of the fundamentals. We'll succeed doing it our way."

And "our way" for the Red Devils is a great mix of fun and hard work.

"They're a fun group that jokes around and has a good time, and then they line up and they're ready to go," West says. "In my experience, you need both to have good seasons, and it seems this team has found that mix. They're very focused and determined, and they go all out for each other."



Senior halfback/safety Ryan Swan, left, and senior quarterback/safety Connor McLachlan observe football practice at Ridge High School.



Ridge Red Devils go through their paces during a preseason practice.



Aidan Stieglitz is a senior fullback/defensive end for the Ridge Red Devils.

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ROXBURY GAELS

NEW TEAM, NEW START

By JOE HOFMANN

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

ROXBURY TWP. – Hey, who are these guys?

Morris County football fans might be asking this very question entering 2024.

But those inside the Roxbury High School football locker room know exactly who the new Gaels are.

The faces might be fresh to opponents in the area, but they aren't new in the Roxbury locker room. The new kids on the block showed everyone what they were all about during practice last year.

No wonder coach Ryan Roumes is excited to see what they can do in 2024.

The team lost many outstanding seniors to graduation. Some of this year's newcomers played well in practice last year but couldn't get onto the field.

Now, they will.

Roumes cannot wait.

"Yes, it's a very, very new team," he said. "We did a good job in June and July. We're off to a real good start in camp. I like the guys we have returning a lot. They have done a good job being leaders. I like their physicality and aggressiveness, especially for guys without much varsity experience. They are not shying away and we want to see how that looks on the field."

The team reached the North 2, Group 4 championship game before losing in the closing seconds to Mount Olive. Roxbury graduated two-way standouts Anthony Skawinski, Colin Richter, Matt Rattay, and Jahmani Miller, among many others.



Photos by Ed Ruping

Ryan Roumes is in his third season as head football coach at Roxbury High School.

"We're not going to ask anyone to replace a Richter or a Skawinski, that'll be hard to do," Roumes said. "We want some of the new kids to step into their own abilities and handle things by committee."

Connor May will open up at quarterback. Nick Edelman will be the main receiver.



Connor May fires a pass during a Roxbury High School practice.

Vincent Dolise will play running back.

"Connor May will be solid," Roumes said. "He is different from what Anthony did, but we don't worry about that. Nick Edelman will replace Richter, but he does his own thing. He'll be a guy we rely on. We want to get the ball to him. Those two guys

ROXBURY GAELS

Head Coach: Ryan Roumes, third season

Assistant coaches: Frank Misurelli, Justin Spargo, Dave Biank, Danny Diorio, Michael Roumes, Tommy Miller, Anthony Alecci, Jim Fiorello, Craig Roumes, Jim Dolan, Greg Trotter

Section: North, Group 4

Last year's record: 8-2.

Playoffs: Lost to Mount Olive in the North 1, Group IV finals, 27-26.

SCHEDULE

Aug. 30 vs. Parsippany Hills 7 p.m.

Sept. 6 vs. Mount Olive 7 p.m.

Sept. 13 at Sparta 7 p.m.

Sept. 20 vs. Montville 7 p.m.

Sept. 28 at Morris Knolls 1 p.m.

Oct. 4 vs. Chatham 7 p.m.

Oct. 10 at Randolph 6 p.m.

Oct. 25 vs. Morristown 7 p.m.

are trying to fill the bigger-name guys who left and we think they are capable.

"Vincent Dolise has been a guy in practice who has shown dynamic ability. He has speed and quickness and is a different runner than Jahmani."

Other backs include Jimmy Murphy and Trevor Klapmuts.

Jaylen Eatman. Nate Fehsal and Gio Del-Rosario will also play receiver.

"They'll be on the outside and rotate

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Jonah Kali hits a sled during a Roxbury High School football practice.



Roxbury High School players run sprints at a preseason practice.

ROXBURY: 'Football is back and that's fantastic'

FROM PAGE 60

until we find out who the playmakers are," Roumes said. "Nate has been running good routes and has great hands. He catches everything. Jaylen and Gio catch the deep balls and run deep routes and have explosiveness. So we have a possession receiver and deep shot guys."

Nick Riska played some last year and will open the year at center. Liam Aregz saw some time and will play guard.

"He and Nick both got time on offense

and defense last year and have been bringing leadership and toughness," Roumes said. "They were a part of it last year. They know what it takes to have a good practice."

Jonah Kaliand and Michael Geary will see time at guard. The tackles will be Vincent Zanni and Matt Donnelly.

Aregz and Geary have been working at nose on defense. Riska, Zanni, Donnelly, and Kali are rotating at tackle.

Jack Mancino and Murphy are in the middle of things at linebacker.

"Jack has shown, even last year, the ability to be smart and poised and we're excited for him to make the calls and bring physicality," Roumes said. "Jimmy is learning the process but it's good to have a guy like Jack next to him."

May played outside linebacker last year and returns. Dolise played in the secondary last year but is more of a linebacker. The staff wants to see what Billy Connolly brings to the linebacker position.

Those in the secondary include Edel-

man, Klapmuts, DelRosario, Fehsal, Eatman, and Dominic DeMarco.

It's a brand new start for the Gaels.

"People asked a lot of questions this offseason," Roumes said. "The kids hear that and they're excited and football is back and that's fantastic. How do we replace Colin? How do we replace Anthony and Jahmani? A lot of people are excited to see what they can do. We are not worried about Par Hills or Mount Olive or anyone else. We are worried about Roxbury and who we are."



VOORHEES VIKINGS

‘LESS THINKING, MORE REACTING’

By DAVE ARTUSO

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

LEBANON TWP. – The 2024 high school football season is one with a couple of prominent firsts for John Hack, but that doesn’t mean Voorhees’ new head coach is a sideline novice.

This season is Hack’s first leading the Vikings—and first coaching at a public school—but he’s a coach with two decades of experience, from St. Peter’s College to Immaculata of Somerville (his alma mater) and then nine seasons at Morris Catholic, where he took the Crusaders to their second playoff appearance in school history and served as director of athletics.

“I’m excited to start the season,” says the Chester resident. “I have a phenomenal staff, the kids have worked really hard since June 17, and I’m really proud of them.”

Voorhees won six of its final seven games last year to finish 7-4, including soundly defeating rival North Hunterdon, 35-14, in the annual Milk Can game, ending the Lions’ decade-long hold on the can.

The Vikings’ schedule once again features a fight for the Can, as Voorhees and North will close out the regular season at 7 p.m. on Oct. 25, at North Hunterdon. Another highlight will be a Sept. 20 road game at Bernards, which recorded a school record 12 victories last season and reached the state Group 2 semifinals.

“The team was very senior-heavy last year, so we’re going to need some underclassmen to step up,” Hack notes. “One of



John Hack comes to Voorhees from Morris Catholic.

the things we’ve been talking about is a set of core values: heart; effort; attack; respect; and toughness.”

Overall, the Vikings’ theme this season is “Iron Sharpens Iron.” Whether in the weight room, in meetings or on the field,

toughness will be key.

“We obviously want to be physically tough on the field,” Hack says, “but we also want to be mentally tough so we can put ourselves in a position to win close games.”

Hack’s coaching staff includes offensive

VOORHEES VIKINGS

Head Coach: John Hack, 1st season

Assistant Coaches: Kyle Cleffi, Rob Miller, Nick Perkalis, Ish Mack, Pete Sepelya, Colin Rapach

Section: North, Group 3

Last Year’s Record: 7-4

Playoffs: Lost, 35-21, to Mendham, NJSIAA North Group 3 Semifinal Consolation Game

SCHEDULE

Aug. 29 at Rahway, 6 p.m.

Sept. 6 vs. Iselin Kennedy, 7 p.m.

Sept. 13 vs. J.P. Stevens, 7 p.m.

Sept. 20 at Bernards, 7 p.m.

Sept. 27 vs. Delaware Valley, 7 p.m.

Oct. 4 at North Plainfield, 7 p.m.

Oct. 10 vs. Governor Livingston, 7 p.m.

Oct. 19 at Hillside, 1 p.m.

Oct. 25 at North Hunterdon, 7 p.m.

coordinator Kyle Cleffi, whom he brought with him from Morris Catholic. In addition to being “the CEO” of the program, Hack will also help out with wide receivers and the defensive line.

“I think like that will benefit both myself and the team,” he says. “I like to let my coaches coach and I try to be the CEO.”

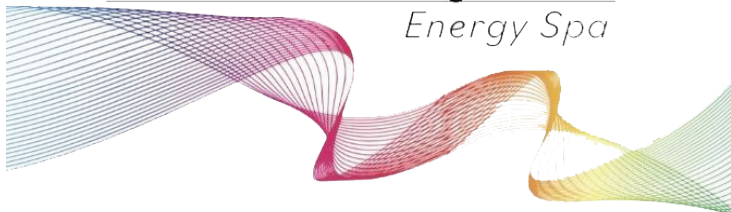
Hack says he’s “always guarded” when it comes to talking about strategy before the season kicks off, but one thing high on his list is team culture.

“Attitude and effort will be extremely

PLEASE SEE VIKINGS, PAGE 63

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VIKINGS: New head coach takes reins at Voorhees

FROM PAGE 62

important,” he says. “We’ll be doing a lot less thinking and more reacting this season.”

Line Looks Good

One area of Xs and Os in which the Vikings could excel is both offensive and defensive lines.

“Up front, we could be pretty darn good, which could make life a lot easier,” Hack says with a laugh. “We feel we’ll have six or seven, and maybe eight, talented players who could rotate in and out of the line, so everyone stays fresh. We’re going to be led by Kyle Borgh, who’ll play center offensively and will also be on the defensive line. He’s excellent, and we expect a lot from him.”

Borgh will be joined on the O-line by seniors Lucas Knaghenhjelm and Patrick McGeough (the latter also to play middle linebacker defensively) and four junior linemen: Zack Beers, Dimos Maroulis, Zach Taylor and John Serritella.

“They’ll all play, if not start, on both sides of the ball,” Hack said.

Senior Zak Bergmann will look to earn time in the trenches on both sides of the ball.

In the skill positions, the starting quarterback job is still undecided with a pair of juniors—Sam Meekings and Matt Rocha—vying for the top spot.

One of Hack’s best players on both sides of the ball will be junior Logan Direny, who’ll be a slot receiver and will play safety in the defensive backfield. Junior Matteo Tramutola returns at running back and linebacker and senior Anthony Vasiliades, who’s recovering from surgery,



Kyle Borgh will play center and defensive tackle for the Vikings.

should be ready to play at running back, slot receiver and in the defensive secondary and linebacking corps.

Sophomore Shawn Turino could be the class of the younger players and should see action at tight end and on the defensive line.

The Vikings will boast a list of other key two-way players, including seniors Brent Ansbach (wide receiver and cornerback) and Luke Barnett (receiver and linebacker), and juniors Ryland Benitez (receiver and corner) and Madden Kramer (receiver and outside linebacker). Juniors Drew Mahoney, Dylan Bernick, Jack Schlaudecker and David Shaw



Luke Barnett grabs a pass during a practice session at Voorhees.

should provide receiving depth.

Hack is keeping his offensive strategy close to the vest but says he’s a big proponent of marrying strategy with talent.

“Offensively, I like to match our type of play with the types of players we have,” he explains. “Defensively, I’m a pretty aggressive coach by nature. We’ll play a four-man front with two linebackers and five men in the secondary. We’ll work hard to get after the quarterback, get takeaways and force other teams to make mistakes. I’m constantly preaching that the team that wins the plus-minus game (in turnovers) usually wins.”

Winning is obviously the goal each Friday night or (one week this season) Saturday afternoon, but it’s not why Hack has been on the sidelines for 20 years entering this fall.

‘Better People’

“The reason I coach is to change as many lives as possible,” he says. “I try



Photos by Bill Nagengast

Voorhees High School football players run through a drill during a preseason practice.

to show our players the kind of person they should be each and every day. What’s important is making these guys in to better people as well as better football players.”

Hack has made hard work a staple of practices this summer, but he does it with love.

“I think there are days when the guys think I’m crazy because we’re working so hard,” he says, “but they also know I care for them and love them. We’re very close.”

A close-knit culture is one step toward a culture that breeds winning, the coach notes.

“Being disciplined, tough, precise and strong enough to make plays when we have the opportunity—all those things go into being a winning football team,” he says. “The goal is to just be our best and winning will take care of itself. I look forward to seeing them in action, tuning out all the noise, making the best of each day and enjoying the experience.”

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WATCHUNG HILLS WARRIORS

SEEKING LOFTIER HEIGHTS

By DAVE ARTUSO
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

WARREN TWP. – One, two, three, throw. From the first day of practice every summer, that has been critical to the Watchung Hills Warriors’ offensive scheme. And 2024 will be no different.

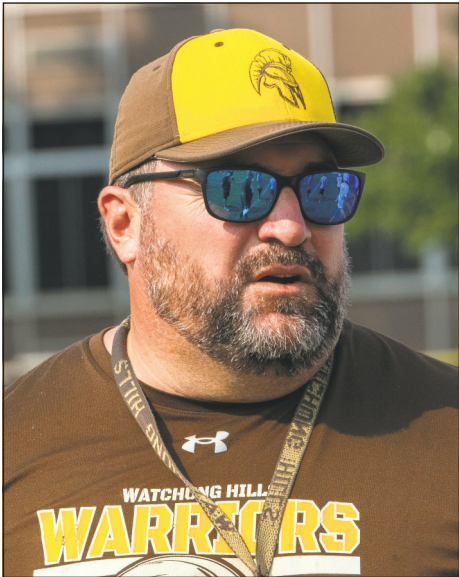
“The three-step passing game is a key every year,” said head coach Rich Seubert, in his ninth season as head coach of the Warriors. “That’s square one—get rid of the ball and maintain ball security. After summer workouts we went back to that starting from the first practice after summer workouts, reinstalling some of the things we didn’t do that well.”

Chances are the lessons got absorbed quickly, when you consider the Warriors boast 30 seniors in the program this season.

“We’re at the point in the program when we don’t have to rely on sophomores,” Seubert said in what might be the understatement of the preseason. “Many of these kids have played together and have been having fun on the football field since Pop Warner level. They’re all used to working for the common goal.”

Six starters return to a Warriors team that finished 8-3 last season and came within a last-second field goal from reaching the finals of the North Section 1, Group 5 playoffs. So the common goal is pretty clear: Erase the memory of that heartbreaking defeat to Montclair.

“Eight years ago we were just finding a way to make it into the state playoffs. Now we have our eyes on a state title,” says Seubert.



Rich Seubert is in his ninth season as head coach of the Watchung Hills Regional Warriors.

bert. “So obviously we’re not the same Watchung Hills football program we were back then. The kids are excited; they all want to come here at 7 a.m. to practice.”

To reach a higher mountain, Watchung Hills will need to replace graduated quarterback Aleks Sitkowski and his nearly 2,400 combined rushing and passing yards and 30 total touchdowns. That’ll be senior Mason Kelly’s job. Kelly was 15-for-22 for

PLEASE SEE WATCHUNG, PAGE 65



Byron McCann is an all purpose player for the Watchung Hills Warriors. He’s a tight end, linebacker, kicker and punter.

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WATCHUNG: Warriors focus on fundamentals

FROM PAGE 64

125 yards and a touchdown last year, including when he subbed for an ailing Sitkowski and engineered a regular-season victory over Bridgewater-Raritan.

Kelly may have lost Jack Clintock and his 777 yards and nine touchdowns from 2023, but returning to snag his throws will be senior Brayden Kelly, who caught 33 balls for 478 yards and five scores. Seniors Mike Mancino and Dillon Nunes will also look to step up on the receiving end of Kelly's throws.

To help the passing game, the Warriors return several key running backs from 2023, led by senior Lucas Garcia, who suffered a broken leg as a sophomore but recovered to run for 461 yards last fall.

'Lunchpail Kids'

The Kellys, Garcia and company will be protected by a line featuring three returning senior starters: right tackle Finn Slatery, who played as a sophomore and started as a junior; and guards Jake Carfaro and Alejandro Dilone.

"I'm going to rely on those three guys," notes Seubert. "They're all 'lunchpail' kids. They work hard and they play with grit and heart."

The Warriors' defense will feature players such as senior linebacker Jack Arakelian, who made 54 tackles and nabbed a pair of interceptions last season. Braydon Kelly, Watchung Hills' "lockdown corner," according to Seubert, will anchor defensive backfield with senior safety Nick Valenti, of whom Seubert says, "He always comes ready to work."

The Warriors may have a not-so-secret weapon on special teams: senior Byron Mc-



Photos by Chris M. Junior

Brayden Kelly, left, and C.J. Brown work out at a preseason practice at Watchung Hills Regional High School.

Cann.

"Byron is one of the top kickers and punters in the state," praises his coach. "He will also start on both sides of the ball, at tight end and outside linebacker."

With about half of the team in new positions and the other half returning, Seubert is comfortable with the familiarity he has with the 2024 squad, and the fact they're carrying on a few proud traditions.

"We've always hung our hat on being smart, fast and tough," he said. "Nothing's going to change that this year. Young student athletes always step up; it'll probably be someone we don't know yet. I just want every kid on my team to contribute and have fun playing football. If they do that, the better this team is going to be."

That includes Seubert's son, Isaac, playing his final season as a Warrior—

WATCHUNG HILLS WARRIORS

Head Coach: Rich Seubert, 9th season

Assistant Coaches: Joe Ascolese, Joe Tremarco, Jim Huff, Joe Almeida, Anthony Rizzolo, Paul Leinbach, Steve Fortugno, Jimmy Miller, Kenneth Ridley, Adam Kudlack, Anthony Montafur, Kevin Marshall, Chris Grundman, Joe Ferraro, Nate Scala, Matt Hubert

Section: North 1, Group 5

Last year's record: 8-3

Playoffs: Lost to Montclair in North 1, Group 5 semifinals, 24-21

SCHEDULE

Aug. 30 at Moorestown, 7 p.m.

Sept. 6 at Woodbridge, 6 p.m.

Sept. 13 vs. North Hunterdon, 7 p.m.

Sept. 20 vs. Linden, 7 p.m.

Sept. 27 vs. Montgomery, 7 p.m.

Oct. 5 at South Brunswick, 3 p.m.

Oct. 12 vs. Rahway, 7 p.m.

Oct. 18 at Elizabeth, 6 p.m.

Oct. 25 at Somerville, 7 p.m.

seeing action most likely on the defensive line.

"I love him to death; he works his ass off. I'm proud of him," boasts his dad. "He always makes me proud."

Coaching his youngest son is only one reason why Seubert looks forward to stepping on the field each day.

"I love the game of football in New Jersey, and what it has done for me and my family," explains the former pro football Giants guard. "I truly enjoy being in the locker room, and I enjoy finding ways to make these kids better as players and as fine young men."

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WEST ESSEX KNIGHTS

IN DEFENSE OF A TITLE

By CHRIS ORLANDO

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

NORTH CALDWELL TWP. – Despite the fact that West Essex High School's football team lost three of its first five contests a year ago, head coach Chris Benacquista refused to panic.

"We've been doing this a long time and you realize that there's ebbs and flows to a season," said Benacquista. "There were positives to take from those losses and it's the kids that really get the credit for being able to go on a phenomenal run."

After their 2-3 start, the Knights went on to reel off eight straight victories, which included winning the NJSIAA North Jersey, Section 2, Group 3 playoffs with a 14-6 decision over Passaic Valley.

West Essex then edged West Morris in the Group 3 state semifinal round before bowing to Delsea, 28-3, in the Group 3 final to conclude its campaign with a 10-4 mark.

The sectional crown was the 10th overall for the Knights and first since it won the same section in 2017. West Essex had also reached the sectional final in 2021 and '22 bowing to West Morris each year.

"It was definitely a relief after six years and three straight trips to the final," said Benacquista, who is beginning his 14th season at the helm. "Even though the state now plays down to a group champion, winning a sectional title is still a big deal for us and a huge accomplishment."

The Knights began their 2024 campaign when they traveled to Bergen County and played at Old Tappan on Friday, Aug. 30.



Photos by Glenn Clark

Michael Cerisano, a senior lineman and defensive back, runs through a drill at a West Essex High School football practice.

Old Tappan went 9-2 a year ago, reaching the North Jersey, Section 1, Group 3 championship game.

West Essex will then remain on the road to play at an always-competitive Wayne Hills on Sept. 6.

The Knights will then play their first home game of the year at Travis Field on Sept. 13 when it hosts rival, Caldwell.

West Essex had won seven straight games against the Chiefs before dropping consecutive close contests the past two sea-

WEST ESSEX KNIGHTS

Head Coach: Chris Benacquista, 14th season

Assistant Coaches: Tim Glenn, Ron Rowe, Joseph, DeGiacomo, John Mendez, Kevin Wilkins, Vincent Cordasco, Sal Fiorilli, Drew Freeman, Will Perez

Section: North, Group 3

Last year's record: 10-4

Playoffs: lost in Group 3 semifinals

Returning Starters: 5/6

SCHEDULE

Aug. 30 at Old Tappan, 6 p.m.

Sept. 6 at Wayne Hills, 7 p.m.

Sept. 13 vs. Caldwell, 6:30 p.m.

Sept. 20 vs. Lakeland, 6:30 p.m.

Sept. 27 vs. Nutley, 7 p.m.

Oct. 5 at Passaic Valley, 6 p.m.

Oct. 18 at Hanover Park, 7 p.m.

Oct. 25 vs Morris Knolls, 6:30 p.m.

sons (21-14 in 2023 and 16-13 in '22).

"Anytime you play Caldwell it's an exciting atmosphere," said Benacquista. "And to have it as our first home game of the season just adds to it. (Head coach) Todd (Romano) and his group do a great job. Even if we weren't in the same division we'd find a way to get each other on the schedule."

The Knights – along with Caldwell – are in the Patriot White Division of the Super Football Conference this year along with Millburn, Nutley, Passaic Valley and Wayne Hills.

PLEASE SEE KNIGHTS, PAGE 67



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Cole Fiore gets set to catch a pass.



West Essex High School football captains are, from left, Jack Kostic, Anthony Drago, Michael Cerisano, Nick Sangillo, Max Garcia and Brady Phillips.

KNIGHTS: 8 straight wins elevated Knights



Chris Benaquista begins his 14th season as head coach of the West Essex Knights.

FROM PAGE 66

One of the Knights' top returning players this season is senior receiver/defensive back Anthony Drago, who is headed to Duke to play lacrosse. Drago was a Second Team All-State selection last fall, totaling 91 tackles and six interceptions as a safety and also caught 32 passes for 569 yards and four scores.

"Anthony is a super athlete," began Benacquista. "What I like most about him is his effort. Nobody practices harder and he is always giving max effort. We use him as an example to the younger players all the time."

Drago is one of the team captains this season along with seniors Brady Phillips,

Nick Sangillo, Max Garcia, Mikey Cerisano and Jack Kostick.

Junior Jake Long takes over at quarterback, replacing his brother, Sam Long, who graduated after passing for more than 1,100 yards and eight touchdowns last season.

"Jake is taking over the reins and he had a good camp," said Benacquista. "We have a lot of strong leadership and we're looking forward to seeing how the younger kids progress."

The Knights have always had a strong penchant for running the ball and this year's offensive line returns seniors Michael Conforti (tackle), Cerisano (guard) and Joe Russo (center) that should open lanes for Phillips and junior Ryan McInerney at fullback, with Sangillo and seniors

TJ Barbella and Vin Giaquinto adding depth in the backfield.

Defensively, Drago will lead the secondary with defensive backs Garcia (58 tackles, four interceptions) and Sangillo (115 tackles), linebackers Long (65 tackles, two interceptions), Cerisano (45 tackles) and Phillips (75 tackles) also starring.

Benacquista, who also delivered sectional championships to the North Caldwell school in 2011 and '17, owns a career record of 108-34.

"It's a weird feeling, even after doing this for so long," he said. "Despite all the practices and scrimmages you sometimes just never feel fully prepared. But the kids are excited and ready to take the next step into this season."

Go KNIGHTS!

Wishing you a Successful
2024 Season
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The  Progress



WEST MORRIS WOLFPACK

THE SAME WORK ETHIC

By **JOE HOFMANN**
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

WASHINGTON TWP. – Late last season, West Morris Central’s two-year dynasty was supposed to be over ... right?

By mid-October, the Wolfpack were sputtering, cooked, banged up, and running out of gas.

They barely made the playoffs.

The end was near.

Remember?

But somehow, coach Kevin Hennelly and the coaching staff got things right and the Wolfpack won their third straight sectional championship – and easily the school’s most unlikely one.

This year, they’re going for a fourth.

There are a host of new names, but after the way last year turned out, who’s gonna write them off again?

“Our job as coaches is to let players know that no one cares that we just three-peated,” Hennelly said. “We cannot live off the success of the last couple of years, especially the seniors. It’s their year and their legacy. It’s great to have won three straight, but that was for those seniors of those years. It was their year. As for this year’s seniors, it’s now their year. You cannot live off the past.

“The success we had helps, but it can hurt. You don’t want kids to think they can live off someone else’s success.”

West Morris was ravaged by graduation (once again) but the program is ready to push forward and go for another title. There are many, many newcomers but that

WEST MORRIS WOLFPACK

Head Coach: Kevin Hennelly, 29th season

Assistant Coaches: Henry Frayne, Barry Buchanan, Sean Morris, Tyler Berntsen, Kevin J. Hennelly, Augie Meyer Brian Stukes, Rob Goodwin, Ken Kane, Jack DiPietro.

Section: North Group 3

Last year’s record: 7-6.

Playoffs: Lost in state Group 3 semifinals to West Essex, 21-20, after winning North 1, Group 3 over Old Tappan, 21-17.

SCHEDULE

Aug. 30 at Mendham 7 p.m.

Sept. 6 vs. Morris Knolls 7:30 p.m.

Sept. 13 at Morristown 6:30 p.m.

Sept. 20 at Warren Hills 7 p.m.

Sept. 27 vs. Randolph 7:30 p.m.

Oct. 4 vs. Parsippany Hills 7:30 p.m.

Oct. 10 at Montville 6:30 p.m.

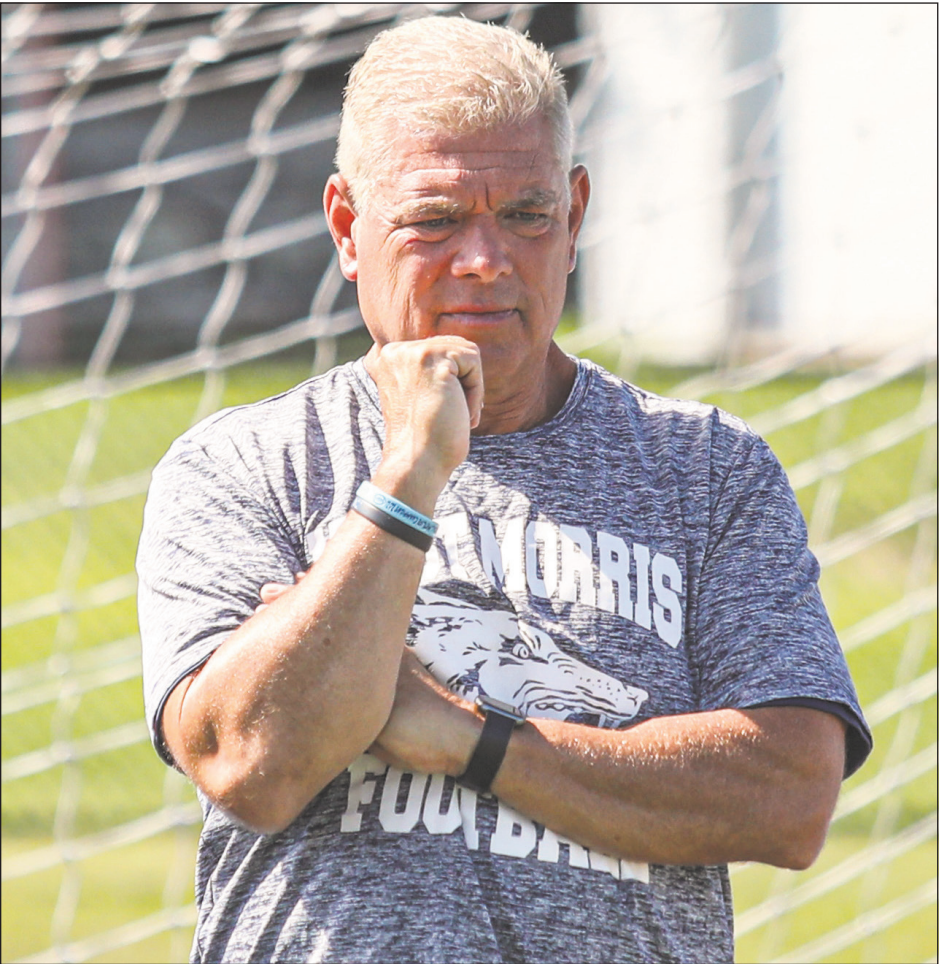
Oct. 18 vs. Roxbury 7:30 p.m.

Oct. 25 at Mount Olive 7 p.m.

hasn’t stopped the program in the past.

The leading returnee is two-way lineman Tom Borgia, a junior who has been impactful on both sides of the ball for two years already.

“One of our better players,” Hennelly said. “He brings experience. He’s a great wrestler and the two sports go hand in hand. He is tough and athletic. He could play in the Ivy or Patriot League.”



Kevin Hennelly begins his 29th season as head coach of the West Morris Central High School football team.

PLEASE SEE WOLFPACK, PAGE 69

Go WOLFPACK!



Wishing you a Successful 2024 Season
from all of us at the

Observer~Tribune

WOLFPACK: No less expectations, more uncertainty

FROM PAGE 68

Other returning players to watch out for are two-way players Jaxson Corkery, Brady Bentrewicz, and Brady Ashburn.

Hennelly said late last year that Corkery was the team's best overall player. He will play running back and in the secondary. Brady Ashburn and Brady Bentrewicz showed themselves to be contributors last year.

The quarterback spot is between Steven Braccioforte, Sean Conway, and Robert Fazzino, who transferred in from Perth Amboy.

"All three are battling," Hennelly said. "Rob brings athleticism running the ball. Steven has a strong arm. Conway has a good football IQ. We want someone who can run the offense and knows where everything is. We'd like to throw more. The last time we were able to throw was (Trevor) Hillier three years ago. Jacob Morris came on at the end of last year. He was a big reason we got as far as we did. He made two nice passes against Pascack Valley and made some nice throws against Old Tappan."

Gabe Morgan and Michael Pescatore are vying for tight end time. Luke Gouse is a fullback-tight end candidate.

Peter Mirgliotta played some fullback last year and should get some snaps.

"He's a hard runner," Hennelly said. "He doesn't have blazing speed. He makes one cut and lowers his shoulder."

Corkery should get the majority of time at halfback with other candidates being Ashburn, Zavad Marsa, Mike Finlay, Seamus Buckley, Jake Rosario, Sam Turner, and Antonio Montella.



Peter Miragliotta carries the ball at a preseason practice at West Morris Central High School.

Joining Borgia up front should be A.J. Codella, Blake Parkinson-Gee, Alex Dynicki, Julian Lopez, Matt Lacerenza, Steve Chatfield, Mike Borgia, and Joseph Drown.

"The line is a work in progress," Hennelly said. "We do have some kids that can help us. We're just not sure who they are yet. We should be able to get five kids. Who knows, it might be the strength of the offense."

Tyler Klein, Jake Novello, Danny Brzozowski, and Ethan Early are vying for split end time.

Corkery, Brady Bentrewicz, Marsa, Turner, Brzozowski, Klein, and Novello are battling to play defensive back. Ashburn and Brody Masolino are getting a lot of reps at linebacker. Corkery could also play linebacker.

Borgia, Morgan, Gouse, and Braccioforte are working at defensive end. Lopez, Lacerenza, Codella, and Parkinson-Gee are at defensive tackle.

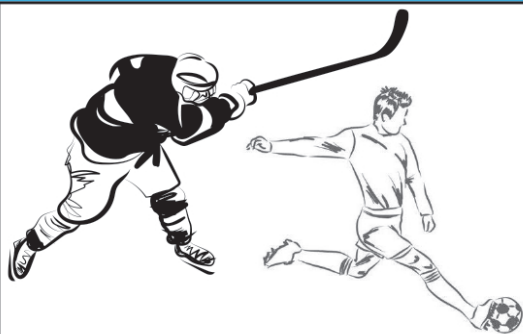
Can the Wolfpack make it four sectional championships in a row?

"We know we are circled on a couple of people's schedules, which is fine," Hennelly said. "We don't have less expectations but more uncertainty. We expect the same work ethic. A lot of positions are up in the air."



Photos by Jim Petrucci

West Morris Central High School players run through a drill during a preseason practice.



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WHIPPANY PARK WILDCATS

DARING To DREAM

By MARK KITCHIN

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

HANOVER TWP. — The last time Whippany Park football won a state playoff game it was in 1980. That is a challenge worth hanging a helmet on.

The Wildcats realize ending that drought is a tall order but why not go for it. They have 16 seniors returning, many with experience. They are coming off a 4-6 season. Their last game was a wild 58-56 double overtime win over Secaucus. Why not dare to dream?

"We haven't won a playoff game in 44 years," Whippany Park Coach Luke Maginnis said. "That's the mold that they want to break. We moved into the locker room yesterday and they put that big sign up in the locker room. That's a goal that they have. They want to win a playoff game."

Getting into the playoffs is the first step and the Wildcats believe they have the building blocks to get that done. Junior quarterback Brandon Giangeruso passed for 1,416 yards and 10 touchdowns and rushed for 648 yards and seven touchdowns last year. He has only gotten better.

"He is getting a lot better at taking care of his football," Maginnis said. "He is taking a lot more command. His confidence is going through the roof."

"He's put on 10 pounds and he has gotten faster. We are able to put more on his plate, too."

It's running back by committee for the



PLEASE SEE WILDCATS, PAGE 71

Whippany Park football players run through a blocking drill.

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WILDCATS: Getting better with 'every little thing'



Luke Maginnis is in his second season as head coach of the Whippany Park High School football team.

WHIPPANY PARK WILDCATS

Head Coach: Luke Maginnis, second season
Section: North 2, Group 1
Last year's record: 4-6.
Playoffs: None

SCHEDULE

Sept. 6 vs. Glen Ridge 7 p.m.
 Sept. 14 at Boonton 1 p.m.
 Sept. 20 vs. Kinnelon 7 p.m.
 Sept. 27 vs. Jefferson 7 p.m.
 Oct. 4 at North Warren 7 p.m.
 Oct. 10 vs. Wallkill Valley 6 p.m.
 Oct. 17 at Hopatcong 7 p.m.
 Oct. 25 at High Point 6:30 p.m.

FROM PAGE 70

Wildcats with several candidates coming in and out of the action depending upon what is needed. Senior Anthony Facchino, a former wide receiver, has the most experience in the group.

Seniors Dylan Morganroth and Sal Palmisano key the receiver group. Morganroth in particular is a crisp, possession receiver with very good hands.

"He runs, very, very good routes," Maginnis said. "He is fearless across the middle. He will be a guy that will run across the middle, take a big hit and get right back up."

There's no shortage of leadership on the offensive line. Four returning starters are back with seniors Dominic Sette, Adam Katz, Sam Cobane and junior Nick Rocco. Senior Tyler Petty and junior Christian Giangrande are battling for the center spot.

The defense likes to go with a 3-3 lineup with five defensive backs. Rocco plays both ways with nose tackle Leo Lima and 6-foot-6 Laz Lima playing strictly on defense. Considering his size, Laz Lima, a junior, has great promise.

"Laz is just figuring out how to use his body," Maginnis said. "He is still raw and he has a lot to learn but he has come a long way."

Senior Sam Cobane and two-way players Katz and Petty will play important roles in the linebacker positions.

Senior Patrick Dalgauer along with Morganroth, Facchino and Palmisano will see plenty of action at defensive back. The Wildcats are deep in that regard and shift players around often.

"They will be on a rotating basis," Maginnis said. "It depends upon whoever needs a break and who is playing well. That's what we like to do as much as we can."

The arrangement helps to get more kids experience at different positions on the field and takes advantage of the team's speed which is an aspect they have been working to improve in the off-season.

"Our philosophy is it gives us more versatility," Maginnis said. "We can create more movement and alignment issues for other teams. It gives you a lot of versatility without creating a new defense every week."

Cobane will return to do the punting. There will be a battle for the kicking position.

Whippany Park has scheduled practice style scrimmages with Newton and Lenape Valley and a game scrimmage against Dayton



Photos by Lisa Mita

A Whippany Park Wildcat fields a punt during a preseason practice.

Regional High School.

Their assistant coaches are Brian Maginnis, Al Singleton, Jimmy Zilinski, Greg Solomon, Angelo Gallego, Isaiah Turner, Alec Fenstermacher.

Three of the assistants are new. Gallego, who is from Randolph, is helping with d-backs and safeties. Solomon, a former freshman head coach at Morristown, will work with the varsity o-line. Fenstermacher, a teacher and basketball coach at Whippany Park, is also helping out on offensive and defensive lines and will coach the jayvee.

Maginnis is in his second year as head coach with the Wildcats and with his system in place and knowledge of his personnel, the young team has made strides. Making the state playoffs and winning a game might be beyond the team's grasp this year, but it's a goal worthy of striving to achieve.

"That is something that hasn't happened here in a very long time," Maginnis said. "It's something they are hungry for and they are not a complacent group. They want to get better with every little thing each day."

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