

The News Reporter
August 22, 2024

PIGSKIN PREVIEW



The Original Dale’s Seafood salutes the Columbus County Head Football Coaches



Fred Pedro
East Columbus

Education
High School: Purnell Swett
Army: 1999-2021
College: Liberty University

Football Coaching Experience
East Columbus assistant 2021-2024

Name two things that make a great teammate:
Character and leadership skills

If you were stranded on an island what album or book would you want to have with you?
Book-The Holy Bible





Russell Dove
South Columbus

Education
High School: Bladenboro
College: UNC Pembroke
Degree(s): B. A. Physical Education
M. A. Physical Education

Football Coaching Experience
West Columbus assistant: 2003–2008
West Bladen assistant: 2009–2012
West Bladen Head Coach: 2013–2015
South Columbus Head Coach: 2016–present

Name two things that make a great teammate:
Committed and selfless

If you were stranded on an island what album or book would you want to have with you?
Album-Guns and Roses “Appetite to Destruction”
Book-Uncommon: Finding your Path to Significance” By Tony Dungy





La Monte Williamson
West Columbus

Education
High School: West Columbus
College: Winston-Salem State University
Degree: B. A. Physical Education

Football Coaching Experience
West Columbus assistant: 2016–2018
West Columbus Head Coach: 2019–present

Name two things that make a great teammate:
Dependable and committed

If you were stranded on an island what album or book would you want to have with you?
Album-Any album by Jay-Z
Book-The Holy Bible





Jarrett “JP” Price
Whiteville

Education
High School: South Columbus
College: UNC Pembroke
Degree: B.A. Secondary Social Studies

Football Coaching Experience
South Columbus assistant: 2007–2008
Wallace-Rose Hill assistant: 2009–2016
St. James, S.C. assistant: 2017
Whiteville Head Coach: 2018–present:

Name two things that make a great teammate:
Competitive, readiness, takes ownership

If you were stranded on an island what album or book would you want to have with you?
Book-The Holy Bible



Good luck to all Columbus County teams in 2024!



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2024 Waccamaw Conference High School Football Schedules

EAST COLUMBUS

AUG. 23	Latta, S.C.
AUG. 30	OPEN
SEPT. 6	at Hobbton
SEPT. 13	at West Bladen
SEPT. 20	at Pender*
SEPT. 27	East Bladen*
OCT. 4	at South Columbus*
OCT. 11	Whiteville*
OCT. 18	ALA-Johnston
OCT. 25	Trask*
NOV. 1	at West Columbus*

SOUTH COLUMBUS

AUG. 23	at West Bladen
AUG. 30	South Brunswick
SEPT. 6	at Loris, S.C.
SEPT. 13	at Union
SEPT. 20	East Bladen*
SEPT. 27	at Pender*
OCT. 4	East Columbus*
OCT. 11	West Columbus*
OCT. 18	at Trask*
OCT. 25	OPEN
NOV. 1	at Whiteville*

WEST COLUMBUS

AUG. 23	at Lake Norman Charter
AUG. 30	at Sandhills Titans
SEPT. 6	West Bladen
SEPT. 13	St. Pauls
SEPT. 20	Trask*
SEPT. 27	OPEN
OCT. 4	at Whiteville*
OCT. 11	at South Columbus*
OCT. 18	East Bladen*
OCT. 25	at Pender*
NOV. 1	East Columbus*

WHITEVILLE

AUG. 23	Bunn
AUG. 30	West Brunswick
SEPT. 6	at James Kenan
SEPT. 13	at Clinton
SEPT. 20	OPEN
SEPT. 27	at Trask*
OCT. 4	West Columbus*
OCT. 11	at East Columbus*
OCT. 18	Pender*
OCT. 25	at East Bladen*
NOV. 1	South Columbus*

HEIDE TRASK

AUG. 23	Rocky Mount Prep
AUG. 30	at Hobbton
SEPT. 6	Sandhills Titans
SEPT. 13	at Dixon
SEPT. 20	at West Columbus*
SEPT. 27	Whiteville*
OCT. 4	OPEN
OCT. 11	at East Bladen*
OCT. 18	South Columbus*
OCT. 25	at East Columbus*
NOV. 1	Pender*

PENDER

AUG. 23	Lejeune
AUG. 30	OPEN
SEPT. 6	Union
SEPT. 13	at Wallace-Rose Hill
SEPT. 20	East Columbus*
SEPT. 27	South Columbus*
OCT. 4	at East Bladen*
OCT. 11	at Hobbton
OCT. 18	at Whiteville*
OCT. 25	West Columbus*
NOV. 1	at Trask*

EAST BLADEN

AUG. 23	North Brunswick
AUG. 30	at West Bladen
SEPT. 6	Ashley
SEPT. 13	at James Kenan
SEPT. 20	at South Columbus*
SEPT. 27	at East Columbus*
OCT. 4	Pender*
OCT. 11	Trask*
OCT. 18	at West Columbus*
OCT. 25	Whiteville*
NOV. 1	OPEN



*Waccamaw Conference contests



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2024 MIDDLE SCHOOL FOOTBALL SCHEDULES

October 24 Columbus County Middle School Football Jamboree at West Columbus October 30 Bladenboro at South Columbus Clarkton at West Columbus Elizabethtown at East Columbus Central at Tar Heel November 7 East Columbus at South Columbus Central at West Columbus Elizabethtown at Clarkton Bladenboro at Tar Heel	November 14 West Columbus at Bladenboro East Columbus at Clarkton Elizabethtown at Central Tar Heel at South Columbus November 21 East Columbus at Bladenboro Clarkton at Central South Columbus at Elizabethtown Tar Heel at West Columbus November 26 Central at Bladenboro South Columbus at Clarkton West Columbus at Elizabethtown Tar Heel at East Columbus	December 5 South Columbus at West Columbus East Columbus at Central Clarkton at Bladenboro Elizabethtown at Tar Heel December 10 South Columbus at Central West Columbus at East Columbus Tar Heel at Clarkton Bladenboro at Elizabethtown December 12 Make up date if needed. Games are scheduled to begin at 6 p.m.
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Columbus County Middle School Head Football Coaches



Brad Smith
East Columbus Gators



Roosevelt Colson III
Central Hornets



Clint Watts
South Columbus Stallions



Donovan Worley
West Columbus Warriors



Football Broadcast Schedule

8/23	Latta at East Columbus
8/30	South Brunswick at South Columbus
9/6	West Bladen at West Columbus
9/13	St. Pauls at West Columbus
9/20	East Bladen at South Columbus
9/27	East Bladen at East Columbus
10/4	East Columbus at South Columbus
10/11	West Columbus at South Columbus
10/18	East Bladen at West Columbus
10/25	Trask at East Columbus
11/1	East Columbus at West Columbus

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Commentators - Kevin Toman and Brett Burroughs

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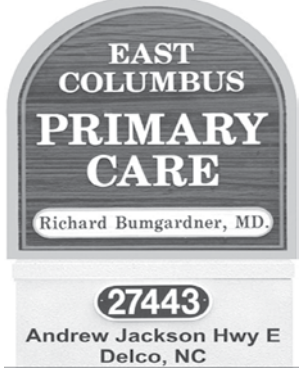
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Forget what the coaches say: All games are not created equal

By FRANKLIN DAVIS
franklindavis@nrcolumbus.com

In a fictional world far, far away, every football game played matches teams with equal talent, and every game is equally important. But in reality that is not the case.

N.C State’s head coach Dave Doeron and South Columbus head coach Russell Dove will tell you that every contest counts the same. I have a sneaky suspicion that some wordplay is taking place. Counting the same is different from meaning the same.

The most important game at any one time is the game you are playing. That is the only game you can win. But when you look at a schedule in its totality, especially prior to the season, certain games stand out as key to one or both schools.

Here’s my take on the key matchups of the coming season and a reason why I consider each one important.

AUG. 23

LATTA, S.C., AT E. COLUMBUS

The Gators’ opening game was supposed to be with Jones Senior at Lake Waccamaw. However, after only three wins in its previous 63 games, Jones Sr. dropped 11-man football to play the 8-man version in 2024.

East Columbus was fortunate to pick up Latta, S.C., to fill the slot and also to come to “The Swamp.” The downside is that Latta was 9–2 in 2023. What would have been a great opportunity for a confidence-building win for first-year coach Fred Pedro becomes a much more difficult task.

W. COLUMBUS AT LAKE NORMAN CHARTER

West Columbus replaced Union with this game to be played in Huntersville, N.C. The Vikings will travel 160 miles to play a 3A Knights squad that was 6–3 in 2023. Expect Lake Norman to be a much tougher opponent than Union was in the 2023 opener (West won 59–0).

The biggest question is, how will coach LaMonte Williamson’s team follow up the best football season in Vikings history? What players will step up to fill the numerous positions vacated by graduated starters?

This contest is more likely to give at least partial answers to those questions than playing Union would have done.

West Columbus will play this season as the hunted, not the hunter

S. COLUMBUS AT W. BLADEN

Factor in that this is the inaugural game for West Bladen’s Preston Worley as a head coach, and that it is against his high school alma mater, and this game must make the list.

The Knights’ unexpected 29–22 victory in 2023 was the first over South Columbus since 2001 (the year West Bladen opened). A season-opening win for the Stallions would be a big confidence boost.

AUG. 30

WEST BRUNSWICK AT WHITEVILLE

The last time these teams met at Legion Stadium, Whiteville won 64–62. I don’t expect anywhere close to that point total this time. The Trojans are usually a good measuring stick for the type of season Wolfpack fans can expect.

SEPT. 6

WEST BLADEN AT WEST COLUMBUS

The Vikings used 428 total yards from Unique Kelly to rally from a 9–6 deficit early in the second half in 2023. Who will replace that yardage? Will last year’s Vikings defensive coordi-

nator Preston Worley, now West Bladen’s head coach, have the scoop on defeating the school where he previously coached?

S. COLUMBUS AT LORIS, S.C.

The Border Battle is always important no matter what the circumstances. The two teams were unable to play last year due to weather issues. South leads the series 17–12, but the Lions have won five of the last nine, including a 46–14 win in 2022.

SEPT. 13

ST. PAULS AT W. COLUMBUS

The Vikings will be looking to avenge their only 2023 regular-season loss. The Bulldogs edged West 14–12 for their 11th consecutive win in the series at St. Pauls in 2023.

2A St. Pauls is coming off what, for them, were two lackluster seasons (6–4 and 6–5). The Bulldogs are also looking to have a big season in what is likely their last in 2A before the upcoming realignment brings a large jump in classification.

WHITEVILLE AT CLINTON

Two Eastern NC 2A heavyweights meet. Clinton was a 47–14 winner at Whiteville last year on its way to an East Region championship. Lots of changes have taken place at Clinton, with former head coach Cory Johnson taking much of his staff with him to Marlboro County, S.C.

Johnny Boykin, a 1990 Clinton graduate, takes over the head coaching position after compiling a 29–45 record at Jamestown Ragsdale the past seven seasons.

It will be interesting to see if Clinton continues to have an influx of talent under Boykin’s leadership.

SEPT. 20

E. BLADEN AT S. COLUMBUS

For a number of years, this contest used to determine the conference winner. Not so much lately though. Both teams are looking to get back to dominance. East Bladen did have a good run in the 2023 football playoffs after dropping into the 1A classification.

This game is the foundation for a successful conference slate for whoever wins it.

OCT. 4

E. COLUMBUS AT S. COLUMBUS

Last year’s 22–21 East Columbus win broke an 0-and-forever (30 games) losing streak to the Stallions. It also started South on a four-game slide to end the season. The Gators were not able to build on the win, losing their final four games as well.

There is some thought that the law of averages simply caught up with South. Another win by the Gators this season would debunk that explanation.

W. COLUMBUS AT WHITEVILLE

Duh! The arguments still go on today: “Did he or did he not catch the football for a touchdown?” And then West Columbus returning a blocked game-winning field goal attempt for a touchdown on the final play to win 26–20 will live in Vikings sports lore forever.

Make no mistake. West Columbus did not sneak up on Whiteville to win. But the incentive to win may have been wearing the Columbia shade of blue rather than the royal. That incentive should be equal this season or maybe even lean towards the

royal-clad team.

Arrive early. It should be a large gathering.

OCT. 11

W. COLUMBUS AT S. COLUMBUS

For a number of seasons, West Columbus football has declined after the Whiteville game. Last year was certainly an opportunity to slide again, but instead the Vikings stepped it up and drubbed South Columbus 54–6 the following week.

This rivalry has heated up since a controversial (at least in Vikings fans’ minds), last-second Stallions win in 2022.

By this time in the season, we should have some idea which directions both teams are headed for 2024. This game has now become a coveted win for both schools after years of Stallions dominance.

Oct. 18

E. BLADEN AT W. COLUMBUS

East Bladen will have already played Pender and East Columbus by this date. Possibly the automatic 1A Waccamaw Conference playoff bid could be on the line.

The Vikings are in the opposite boat (pun intended) as they play Pender and East Columbus the next two weeks.

OCT. 25

WHITEVILLE AT EAST BLADEN

Last season Whiteville rolled to a 55–18 win. However, that isn’t the norm as the East Bladen Eagles hold a 14–9 series advantage since 2002.

Expect the unexpected from East Bladen coach Robby Priest, and often his teams find a way to make it work.

The Wolfpack have bettered the Eagles by substantial margins (a total of 148–45) since the last East Bladen win, 47–43, in the spring of 2021. The 2020 season was delayed and shortened due to COVID-19 concerns.

NOV. 1

S. COLUMBUS AT WHITEVILLE

Whiteville is in the midst of its longest winning streak in the series at five games. South still leads the overall series 20–12. The Wolfpack’s last two wins against the Stallions have come by a combined score of 109–0.

It is difficult for the school that loses this game to consider a football season successful no matter what its final record is.

E. COLUMBUS AT W. COLUMBUS

West took the lead, 17–16, in the all-time series with its fifth consecutive win, 55–0, last season.

Will this be the icing on another fine regular season for West Columbus or the cherry on top of an East Columbus football surge?

NO CRYSTAL BALL

As the season progresses, some of these games will grow in stature while others may wane. But without a crystal ball or the ability to time travel, this is a good starting point.

2024 ‘Pigskin Picks’ contest

The News Reporter “Pigskin Picks” contest will open Monday, Aug. 26. A link to the contest will be on the NRcolumbus.com website. Paper entry forms will appear in the Thursday, Aug. 29, print edition of *The News Reporter*.

Entries may be submitted online at NRcolumbus.com. or by dropping off a paper entry at The News Reporter office by closing Friday of that week’s contest. NO reproductions will be accepted!

Mailed entries must be postmarked by the Friday of that week’s contest and received no later than the following Tuesday.

Wishing all the county players and coaches a great 2024 season!



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Local cheerleaders travel to CheerHawaii Invitational

By **DASHUAN VEREEN**
dashuanvereen@nrcolumbus.com

Eleven local cheerleaders had the opportunity to participate in the The CheerHawaii USA Invitational, which took place at the University of Hawaii campus on the island of Oahu.

Participating were Bella Moore, Grace Wilkins, Daijah Davis and Brenna McPherson of Whiteville High School; Emma Parker, Emerson Tompkins, Kayla Stanley, Kyndall Buffkin, Ella Fowler and Hayden Hardee of South Columbus High School; and Morgan Nix of West Columbus High School.

“It was a very long trip,” said Nix, “but the flight experience was great. When we were about to land in Hawaii, the view was amazing.”

According to cheerhawaiiusa.com, the event “provides an amazing blend of college prep cheer instruction with an incredible Hawaiian experience.”

“My experience at Cheer Hawaii was one to never forget,” said Davis. “I’m still in contact with the new friends I’ve made and I am very grateful for the experience.”

“Some of my favorite moments were the polynesian cultural center,” said Nix, “The beach day

▶▶SEE **CHEERLEADERS** 13B



Brenna McPherson of WHS



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

From left to right: Whiteville’s Bella Moore, Grace Wilkins, West Columbus’ Morgan Nix and Whiteville’s Daijah Davis.

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2024 ACC Football Schedule

2024 COMPOSITE FOOTBALL SCHEDULE		
WEEK 0	WEEK 4	WEEK 9
Saturday, Aug. 24 <i>Aer Lingus College Football Classic - Dublin, Ireland</i> Florida State vs. Georgia Tech * noon ET, ESPN SMU at Nevada.....8 p.m. ET, CBSSN	Friday, Sept. 20 Stanford at Syracuse * 7:30 p.m. ET, ESPN	Thursday, Oct. 24 Syracuse at Pitt * 7:30 p.m. ET, ESPN
WEEK 1	WEEK 5	WEEK 10
Thursday, Aug. 29 Western Carolina at NC State..... 7 p.m. ET, ACCN North Carolina A&T at Wake Forest..... 7 p.m. ET, ACCNX North Carolina at Minnesota..... 8 p.m. ET, FOX	Friday, Sept. 27 Virginia Tech at Miami * 7:30 p.m. ET, ESPN	Saturday, Nov. 2 Louisville at Clemson * Duke at Miami * North Carolina at Florida State * Stanford at NC State * Pitt at SMU * Virginia Tech at Syracuse * Open: Boston College, Cal, Georgia Tech, Virginia, Wake Forest
Friday, Aug. 30 Elon at Duke 7:30 p.m. ET, ACCN TCU at Stanford 10:30 p.m. ET, ESPN	Saturday, Sept. 28 Holy Cross at Syracuse.....noon ET, ACCNX Louisville at Notre Dame 3:30 p.m. ET, Peacock Western Kentucky at Boston College Stanford at Clemson * North Carolina at Duke * Florida State at SMU * Northern Illinois at NC State Louisiana at Wake Forest Open: Cal, Georgia Tech, Pitt, Virginia	WEEK 11
Saturday, Aug. 31 <i>Aflac Kickoff Game - Atlanta, Ga.</i> Clemson vs. Georgia noon ET, ABC Virginia Tech at Vanderbilt noon ET, ESPN Kent State at Pitt noon ET, ESPN Austin Peay at Louisville noon ET, ACCN Miami at Florida 3:30 p.m. ET, ABC Ohio at Syracuse.....3:30 p.m. ET, ACCN UC Davis at Cal 5 p.m. ET, ACCNX Richmond at Virginia 6 p.m. ET, ACCNX Georgia State at Georgia Tech..... 8 p.m. ET, ACCN Houston Christian at SMU 8 p.m. ET, ACCNX	WEEK 6	Friday, Nov. 8 Cal at Wake Forest * 8 p.m. ET, ACCN
Monday, Sept. 2 Boston College at Florida State * 7:30 p.m. ET, ESPN	Friday, Oct. 4 Syracuse at UNLV 9 p.m. ET, FS1	WEEK 12
WEEK 2	WEEK 7	Saturday, Nov. 9 Florida State at Notre Dame..... 7:30 p.m. ET, NBC Syracuse at Boston College * Clemson at Virginia Tech * Duke at NC State * Miami at Georgia Tech * Virginia at Pitt * Open: Louisville, North Carolina, SMU, Stanford
Friday, Sept. 6 BYU at SMU 7 p.m. ET, ESPN2 Duke at Northwestern..... 9 p.m. ET, FS1	Saturday, Oct. 5 Boston College at Virginia * Miami at Cal * Clemson at Florida State * Duke at Georgia Tech * SMU at Louisville * Pitt at North Carolina * Wake Forest at NC State * Virginia Tech at Stanford *	WEEK 13
Saturday, Sept. 7 Pitt at Cincinnati noon ET, ESPN or ESPN2 Georgia Tech at Syracuse * noon ET, ACCN Cal at Auburn.....3:30 p.m. ET, ESPN2 Charlotte at North Carolina 3:30 p.m. ET, ACCN Duquesne at Boston College 3:30 p.m., ACCNX Jacksonville State at Louisville.....3:30 p.m., ACCNX Marshall at Virginia Tech..... 4:30 p.m. ET, The CW Florida A&M at Miami 6 p.m. ET, ACCNX Virginia at Wake Forest * 7 p.m. ET, ESPN2 Cal Poly at Stanford 7 p.m. ET, ACCNX <i>Duke’s Mayo Classic - Charlotte, N.C.</i> NC State vs. Tennessee 7:30 p.m. ET/ABC App State at Clemson 8 p.m. ET, ACCN Open: Florida State	Saturday, Oct. 12 Stanford at Notre Dame 3:30 p.m. ET, NBC Cal at Pitt * Clemson at Wake Forest * Georgia Tech at North Carolina * Louisville at Virginia * Syracuse at NC State * Open: Boston College, Duke, Florida State, Miami, SMU, Virginia Tech	Thursday, Nov. 21 NC State at Georgia Tech * 7:30 p.m. ET, ESPN
WEEK 3	WEEK 8	WEEK 14
Saturday, Sept. 14 Memphis at Florida State noon ET, ESPN Louisiana Tech at NC State noon ET, ACCN Boston College at Missouri..... 12:45 p.m. ET, SECN West Virginia at Pitt..... 3:30 p.m. ET, ESPN or ESPN2 Ball State at Miami 3:30 p.m. ET, ACCN VMI at Georgia Tech.....3:30 p.m. ET, ACCNX N.C. Central at North Carolina..... 6 p.m. ET, ACCNX UConn at Duke 6 p.m. ET, ACCNX Virginia Tech at Old Dominion..... 6 p.m. ET, ESPN+ Ole Miss at Wake Forest..... 6:30 p.m. ET, The CW Maryland at Virginia 8 p.m. ET, ACCN San Diego State at Cal 10:30 p.m. ET, ESPN Open: Clemson, Louisville, SMU, Stanford, Syracuse	Thursday, Oct. 17 Boston College at Virginia Tech * 7:30 p.m. ET, ESPN	Saturday, Nov. 23 North Carolina at Boston College * Stanford at Cal * Virginia Tech at Duke * Pitt at Louisville * Wake Forest at Miami * SMU at Virginia * UConn at Syracuse The Citadel at Clemson Charleston Southern at Florida State
IT'S FOOTBALL SEASON!	Friday, Oct. 18 Florida State at Duke * 7 p.m. ET, ESPN2	Friday, Nov. 29 Stanford at San José State 4 p.m. ET, CBS Georgia Tech at Georgia 7:30 p.m. ET, ABC
	Saturday, Oct. 19 Wake Forest at UConn noon ET, CBSSN NC State at Cal * Virginia at Clemson * Miami at Louisville * SMU at Stanford * Notre Dame at Georgia Tech Open: North Carolina, Pitt, Syracuse	Saturday, Nov. 30 Pitt at Boston College * Cal at SMU * Duke at Wake Forest * Miami at Syracuse * NC State at North Carolina * Virginia at Virginia Tech * South Carolina at Clemson Florida at Florida State Louisville at Kentucky

10 questions to be answered

By FRANKLIN DAVIS
franklindavis@nrcolumbus.com

I know you are thinking, “Only 10 questions?” I’m sure a survey of fans would come up with many more, but, hey, our space is limited here. I apologize in advance if I haven’t included the questions that you want answers to. And furthermore, none of these questions will be answered until the games are played, anyway.

Will coaching changes be noticed?

It is true that only one head coaching change has taken place. Fred Pedro is now in charge at East Columbus. And even that change is a familiar assistant coach ascending to the head coaching title. However, there are some faces that will no longer grace the sidelines for Columbus County football teams.

I doubt I will get much argument in saying that Matt Scott’s retirement at Whiteville is the most significant occurrence. Scott arrived at Whiteville with Luke Little in 2012. Scott’s decision to remain at Whiteville when Little left after the 2017 season was a key for the continuity of the Whiteville program. The Wolfpack defense, under Scott’s tutelage, allowed an average of only 15 points a game during his 12 seasons at Whiteville.

Former Whiteville assistant coach Jerry Singletary is now at West Bladen. Singletary was also instrumental in helping with a smooth transition from Little to Price. Both Singletary and Scott had a talent for connecting with their players.

You certainly can’t blame former West Columbus defensive coordinator Preston Worley for parlaying the outstanding season the Vikings had in 2023 into the head coaching job at West Bladen.

South Columbus welcomes Jake Fonvielle back in an assistant coach’s role. He is a known commodity, not only at South Columbus, but throughout the North Carolina football coaching community.

While head coaches get much of the credit (and blame), today’s successful high school football teams must have knowledgeable individuals in assistant coaching roles.

Will South Columbus be back?

The last five seasons have not been what Stallions fans hoped for. The South Columbus football program was, in my opinion, one of the most adversely affected by COVID-19. The inability to have the players on campus involved in the weight training program was a major factor. Stallions football has always been based on the ability to beat you at the line of scrimmage. Strength is a necessity to win the battle in the trenches.

Coach Russell Dove is cautiously optimistic

that his team is ready to get back to Stallions football. Judging from the material I saw at practice, he has reason to be enthused. The feeling is there is something in the air at South that has been missing the last few seasons.

Can West Columbus repeat its 2023 success?

Coach LaMonte Williamson’s teams have improved every year, as the team’s records have demonstrated. An improvement in the win column (from 12 wins in 2023) would be asking a lot in 2024. Will the confidence carry over into 2024?

West Columbus lost a number of players who were stalwarts in the Vikings football rebuilding process. And, this season, West Columbus will have a target on its back! That is a welcome thing for a team because it is indicative of the esteem opponents hold for you. It is also a burden because typically you get every opponent’s best effort.

Frankly, the Vikings don’t have to match last year’s team to be successful. But with winning come expectations.

Is Fred Pedro the answer at East?

I hope so, and every high school football fan in Columbus County should hope so as well. Everyone benefits when all four Columbus County teams are competitive. One instance is that it helps everyone’s RPI ranking when county teams win out-of-conference contests.

Coach Pedro understands the situation he comes into since he previously served as an assistant. Hopefully, his enthusiasm will help attract larger numbers to the Gators football program.

If Pedro can last more than one season as Gators head coach, he will have done more than four of the previous six East Columbus football coaches have done. That may seem trivial, but coaching continuity is a must to build a foundation for a program. I don’t really expect this season’s results to answer this question.

Will Pender’s defense stop anyone in 2024?

Pender allowed a whopping 48.4 points per game in 2023. Remove the Patriots’ shutout of East Columbus, and that average climbs to 53.2.

A second and related question could be, “How many points do we expect Hobbton and Pender to score when they meet on Oct. 11?” Pender won last year’s game 106–83, and there was still time remaining on the game clock when the field lights went out, causing the game to end.

Pender averaged 39.3 points on offense, but gave up over 53 points in six of its games.

Will teams kick the ball deep?

I believe the casual fan thinks the onside or the

squib kick is designed for the kicking team to recover. I disagree! I believe coaches use this tactic to not have to work on kickoff coverage. The possibility of a recovery and extra offensive possession is simply a fringe benefit.

Does East Bladen’s 2023 playoff success carry over?

East Bladen was 5–5 in the 2023 regular season. However, they won three times and only lost 20–13 to Tarboro in the 1A playoffs. The Eagles’ overall winning record was their first since the 2020 COVID-19 season (5–2).

Enrollment has dwindled at East Bladen as they are playing as a 1A school for the second season. Are the student population losses affecting the football program?

Who are the real Trask Titans?

After Trask went 8–4 in 2022, you figured Coach Ches had the program on the rise. Now, 6–5 in 2023 isn’t bad. Especially when you consider that the Titans did not win a game in 2020 or 2021 and had not enjoyed a winning season since 2017.

But I believe more was expected last season. Trask was a “tweener” in 2023. They defeated the teams you expected them to and lost to Dixon (a surprise), West Columbus, Whiteville, East Bladen and Cummings. The losses to West Columbus, Whiteville and East Bladen were the Titans’ first three conference games, but they recovered nicely until losing to Cummings, 27–22, in the first round of the 2A playoffs.

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▶▶SEE QUESTIONS 12B

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Top Row L-R: J'mauria Williams, Sadee Brown, Carlie Jacobs, Shamiah Johnson, Callie Jacobs, Ariel Patrick, Kirstin Jacobs, Reese Bennett, Lakyn Wilson
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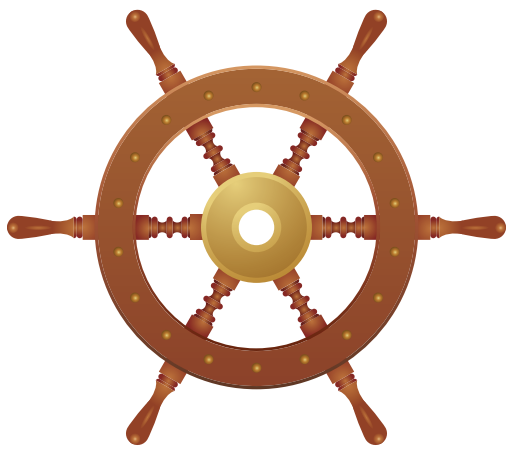
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2024 South Columbus Stallions Cheerleaders



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Middle Row L-R: Brookelynn Benton, Carmyn Williams, Zykasha Jenrette, Ariana Garnica, Azyriah Bush, Kayla Hayes, JamieLynn Godwin, Mya Johnson, Karlie Clewis, Dakiya Smith
Top Row L-R: Essence Rouse, Madison Long, Alieyah Godwin, Laney Barnhill
Coach: Mary Gore



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SCRIMMAGE ACTION

East Columbus



PHOTOS BY DASHAUN VEREEN

Whiteville



PHOTOS BY FRANKLIN DAVIS

QUESTIONS

Continued from 7B

fense and total tackles have donned their caps and gowns and moved on. No, the talent cupboard isn't bare. But a number of the familiar names heard over the PA system at Legion Stadium are not going to be called this season. Maybe the question should be, "Is it the system or the player?" In my way of thinking, it has to be some of both. A challenging non-conference schedule should provide some answers as to whether the mixture is working.

Does it really matter?

Certainly it does, at least short term to the players and the fans. I mean bragging rights are

definitely a big deal. If it didn't matter, there wouldn't be a "Pigskin Preview" or Friday Night scoreboard shows.

Sometimes, though, we forget that for the coaches, this is their livelihood. No coach goes into a game wanting to lose, and for many high school teams you must play the hand you are dealt. Maybe some of the games are against teams that are playing under a different, more favorable, set of circumstances.

Maybe we should each take a moment to reflect on how well we could coach a teenager to do our job, with the understanding that how well they perform would keep us employed. And most of us have occupations where someone isn't on the other side, try-

ing to keep us from being successful. I hope all your questions about this season have positive answers!

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SCRIMMAGE ACTION

West Columbus



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South Columbus



PHOTOS BY FRANKLIN DAVIS

CHEERLEADERS

Continued from 6B

with canoeing, and being able to make lots of new friends so fast and perform an amazing routine.”

The website added that the invitational focuses on three main areas, “building cheer skills and preparing for the college level, growth in leadership, and learning about the Hawaiian culture.”

“Cheer Hawaii was an amazing opportunity that I’m so glad I could be a part of,” said Stanley. “The island is so beautiful and fun to be on. The Cheer Hawaii staff was so professional and fun to be around. They really incorporated cool tourist spots while also making workouts fun. I really enjoyed our leadership classes because they showed us a new way to look at life after cheer.”

“I look forward to the girls sharing the material they learn while at Cheer Hawaii with

us when they come back,” said South Columbus cheerleading coach Mary Gore. “Each year we learn something new from the girls’ time at camp.”



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

South Columbus cheerleaders from left to right: Emma Parker, Emerson Tompkins, Kayla Stanley, Kyndall Buffkin, Ella Fowler and Hayden Hardee.

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<u>WHITEVILLE WOLFPACK</u>		<u>WEST COLUMBUS VIKINGS</u>	
Amadeus Morris*	Luke Odham*	Dwayne “DJ” Bryant*	Ryan Strickland*
Amari Best*	Jamal Faulk*	Ryder Haynes	Jaylen Bellamy*
		Triston Freeman*	Junior Stewart*
		Unique Kelly*	
Honorable Mentions			
<u>WHITEVILLE WOLFPACK</u>		<u>SOUTH COLUMBUS STALLIONS</u>	
Alzaish Baldwin*	Nallegem Powell	Mason Parker*	
Will Fisher			
<u>EAST COLUMBUS GATORS</u>		<u>WEST COLUMBUS VIKINGS</u>	
Brison Mintz*		Jahmir Dorsey*	Joseph Specht*
		Kenny Barfield*	Lannon Stewart*
* Graduated players			

Experience abounds in Waccamaw football head coaches’ resumé’s

By FRANKLIN DAVIS
franklindavis@nrcolumbus.com

Entering the 2024 high school football season, East Columbus’ Fred Pedro is the only new head football coach among the seven Waccamaw Conference schools. The remaining six coaches have a total of 79 years of prior head coaching experience. Granted, Pender’s Tom Eanes accounts for almost half of that total as he is entering his 39th season as a head coach. West Columbus’ LaMonte Williamson is the least experienced of those six, with five seasons at the helm of the Vikings football ship.

Tom Eanes – Pender

Eanes has a career record, according to the carolinapreps.com website, of 182–209–1. He began his head coaching career at East Lincoln in 1986. Additional stops were Hillsborough Orange, Albemarle, East Surry, East Rowan, Pender (2004–2010), Wilmington Ashley, Patton High in Morganton, Bandys High in Catawba and finally his current job, a second stint at Pender.

Eanes’ overall record with Pender is 83–57. His teams are 25–20 over the past four seasons. In Eanes’ second season back at Pender, the Patriots advanced to the fourth round of the 2021 1A playoffs before losing to Tarboro.

Robby Priest – East Bladen

Priest took over the Eagles head coaching position from Lenon Fisher prior to the 2012 season. His teams have a record of 92–52. East Bladen advanced to the third round of the 2A playoffs in 2012, 2014, 2016 and 2017.

East Bladen’s record is even-steven at 27–27 over the past five seasons. However, the Eagles reached the fourth round of the 2023 1A playoffs

before losing to Tarboro.

Russell Dove – South Columbus

Dove’s overall record as a head coach is 67–53. This includes his first job, leading West Bladen to a 16–19 record from 2013–2015. Won and lost records can be deceiving as the Knights had lost 19 consecutive games prior to the 2013 campaign; therefore 16 wins in three seasons was a big step forward.

Dove’s record at South Columbus is 51–34. After a 36–6 start during his first three seasons at Vinegar Hill, the Stallions have struggled to a 15–28 record since.

South Columbus advanced to the fourth round of the 2A playoffs in 2016. Their last playoff win came against Greene Central, 63–28, in November 2019.

Many variables figure into a high school coach’s win-loss record.

Lawrence Ches – Trask

Ches’ teams have compiled an overall record of 43–29 during his seven seasons as a head coach. He led Red Springs to a 29–20 record from 2017–2021 before taking over a Trask program that had lost 24 of its previous 26 contests.

Trask is 14–9 in Ches’ two seasons as head coach.

JP Price – Whiteville

Price is entering his seventh season as Wolfpack head coach. The Wolfpack have lost in the fourth round of the playoffs the previous two seasons. Prior to 2022, Whiteville had not played a fourth-round contest since 1987. Price’s

teams now own an overall record of 55–15 in his six seasons.

LaMonte Wiliamson – West Columbus

Williamson’s Vikings have improved their number of wins in each of his five seasons as head coach. They will be hard pressed to continue that streak after going 12–2 in 2023 and reaching the fourth round of the 1A playoffs for the first time in the school’s football history. The Vikings lost in the fourth round to Tarboro, a team that always seems to be the kryptonite to our local schools in the gridiron playoffs.

West Columbus is 30–27 during Williamson’s tenure. This includes records of 1–11 (2019) and 2–4 (2020), his first two seasons. Their 9–4 record in 2022 was the school’s first winning season in football since 2005.

Fred Pedro – East Columbus

Pedro becomes the fourth coach in four seasons to head the Gators football program. He follows James Hobbs (2018–2021), Luke Barker (2022) and Douglas Skipper (2023). Pedro is the 13th head football coach since East Columbus opened in the fall of 1992. East Columbus’ record since then is 89–255. Toby Kasell (2010–2012) has the best winning percentage of any of the previous dozen Gators head football coaches at 47.4% (18–20).

But buyer beware

Many variables figure into a high school coach’s win-loss record. Available talent, schedule, injuries, assistant coach continuity and program support all play a role, as do the X’s, O’s and motivation supplied by any one individual.



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2024 West Columbus Vikings Cheerleaders



Bottom L-R: Taylor Lancaster (Captain), Morgan Nix (Co-Captain), Eisha Long, Layla King, Kynnedee Graham, Addisyn Williamson, Alice Christian Spivey (Captain)
Middle L-R: Brionna Bennett, Ari Britt, Abby McCleney, Madison Green
Top L-R: Mariyah Mzungu, Cloie Grace Spivey, Kenzie Bowen, Kyasia Smith, Hannah Potter, Chloe Edmund, Lily Miller
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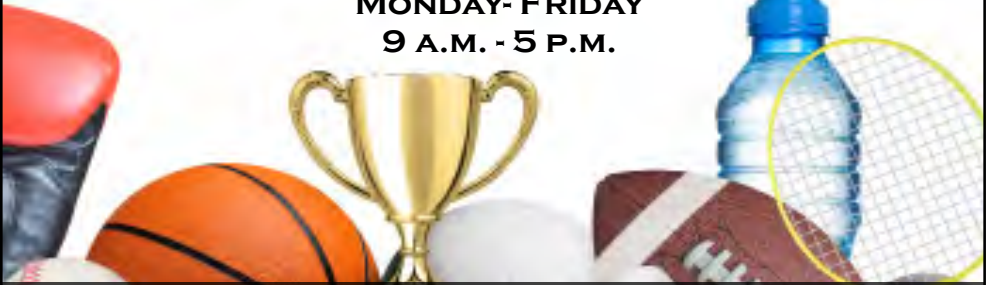
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Middle Row L-R: Faith McMillan, Dennisha Richardson, Aria Bartley, Alex Stoll, Laney Bullard, Porsha Smith, Leslie Pham
Back Row L-R: Carrie Nicholson, Brenna McPherson, Zoe Elleby, Lauryn Singletary, Angel Smith, Grace Wilkins
Not pictured: C’Nyia Thompson
Coaches: Amanda Hill (Head Coach) and Carrie-Ann Clemons (Assistant Coach)



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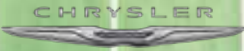
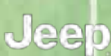


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