

FOOTBALL PREVIEW 2025

Featuring a look ahead at the 2025 High School Football season for teams from Mason, Manistee, Oceana County Schools and White Lake Area schools



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Contents

TEAM PREVIEWS

Hart 4
Hesperia..... 5
Ludington 6
Manistee 8
Mason County Central..... 10
Montague 12
Reeths-Puffer..... 13
Shelby..... 14
Whitehall 15

FEATURES

Ludington's QB..... 7

Manistee's QB..... 9

Mason County Central QB... 11

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Football is upon us



BY SEAN CHASE
SHORELINE MEDIA SPORTS EDITOR

As crazy as it seems, the 2025 varsity football season is nearly here. In less than a week, the bright lights of Friday night football will shine upon us.

Although it's my first season as the sports editor at the Ludington Daily News, allow me to welcome you into the 2025 Football Preview for the Ludington Daily News, Oceana's Herald Journal and White Lake Beacon — collectively known as Shoreline Media.

Having spent the last two years in the Upper Peninsula as the sports editor for a paper on the westside, I'm familiar with how quickly things

can move this time of year.

Inside this 24-page edition you'll find editorial coverage of the nine area football teams. As well as, feature stories focused on showing how some of the area's best quarter-

backs go about their business.

On top of finding individual schedules on each team's page, you can also find a complete schedule for all of the teams in the area on page 18.

As I mentioned, this is

my first season manning the sports desk in Ludington. However, I'm not new to the area. I graduated from Newaygo in 2008. Back then, the Orioles and Newaygo were both in the Lakes 8 Conference.

While things have changed since then, I'm excited to return to Oriole Field and the other stellar football fields in our regin as a reporter and editor.

Growing up, my best friend and I would scour the sports section in hopes of seeing our names mentioned or a picture of us in action. That's what led me into this field, originally.

Now, I get to give that back to another community.

I fully believe in community-focused journal-

ism. I'm here to tell your stories, and I am thankful for the opportunity I've been given. Things are going to move quickly over the next week or so, and I'm going to take in everything I can.

Things are going to move quickly over the next couple of months, too. But, my main mission is to make sure that the community is reflected in the sports pages. If you have a suggestion or story idea, please reach out to me at schase@ludingtondailynews.com.

I look forward to meeting you all and covering your athletes to the best of my ability.

I'll see you out there!

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Hart plans to take newfound physical strength to the football field

BY LARRY LAUNSTEIN JR.
SHORELINE MEDIA SPORTS WRITER

HART — According to their head coach, the Pirates had their best off-season in the weight room since he's been there, and that his team is older and stronger because of it.

The Pirates Head Coach, Joe Tanis, said that weight training will help an already physical lineup, and that Aaron Szura led the way in the weight room.

And some of these players were wrestlers, such as Adrian Lara, Halen Boos, Abdel Lopez, Hagen Hansen, Kole Thomas, Keaghan Monroe, Logan Jorissen and Blake Helenhouse.

In Tanis' backfield, Kyle Greiner and Monroe return from last season's squad, with Greiner having made great strides in his strength.

Hollis Rockwell IV, an All-Conference center, comes back for his third season.

And Tanis is moving Boos to wing, seeking to use his versatility as a runner, receiver, and passer.

"Kolt Rockwell takes over full-time at quarterback — an All-Conference



During walk through drills, a Hart ballcarrier works his way through the line.

basketball player with a strong, accurate arm," Tanis said.

According to Tanis, Greiner, who was also an All-Conference safety, along with Boos, will anchor the Pirates secondary, and Rockwell and Monroe will play outside linebacker.

"Inside linebacker spots are still being decided

with Haegan Hansen and Aiden Cull leading the charge, but I expect Jorissen to have a breakout senior season at cornerback after flashing his potential in week nine last year," Tanis said.

And all these things has Tanis talking about his expectations for his team this season.

"Same as always-max

out physically and mentally," Tanis said. "That's all we can control, and we work to keep our focus there."

Tanis also has some incoming players he said would have an impact on this year's team.

Thomas, Eddie Martinez, Wyatt Johnson and Jackson Bishop are moving up from the junior

varsity team.

Tanis said, "Seniors Desse Rodriguez and Chase Lorenz (the school's 100-meter dash record holder) join from soccer."

"Sophomore Carlos Salazar is a big, athletic lineman pushing for a starting spot," Tanis said.

And according to Tanis, both starting corners Brody Clark and Kaden Bond, linebackers Eman Hertzler and Alex Hicks, wide receiver Ty Schluker and tight ends Eric Hannan and Connor Riker all graduated.

Hertzler also played wing and Hicks played fullback.

Tanis said, "Talented players who will be missed, but we're excited for the next group to step in."

And Tanis talked about what changes the team has made that he hopes will help the Pirates be more successful this season.

"We're keeping our system simple and leaning on our depth from last year's QB/RB rotation-these four return," Tanis said.

Rockwell takes over at quarterback, Tanis said,

2025 Schedule

Aug. 28 - at Lake City
Sept. 5 - **vs. Ravenna**
Sept. 12 - at Shelby
Sept. 19 - **vs. Kent City**
Sept. 26 - **vs. North Muskegon**
Oct. 3 - **vs. Mason County Central**
Oct. 10 - at Orchard View
Oct. 17 - at Hesperia
Oct. 24 - at Central Montcalm

after showing flashes of big potential last season.

"Boos moves to wing without ego, adding explosiveness," Tanis said. "Our veteran OL will be key."

"If we play our best, we can compete with anyone," Tanis said. "With a small roster and a challenging schedule, we'll get what we earn, and our response will determine the ride."

Tanis also said that North Muskegon has not lost a game since joining the West Michigan Conference Rivers Division, that Ravenna will be improved, Mason County will remain a strong team, Shelby's junior varsity dominated with this group two years ago, and that Hesperia should take another step under Coach Fehler.

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Hesperia counts on older players to lead them in right direction

BY LARRY LAUNSTEIN JR.
SHORELINE MEDIA SPORTS WRITER

HESPERIA — Panthers Head Coach Tyler Fehler is counting on his older players to step up to help to move the team in the right direction.

His returning players include offensive-defensive lineman Noah Walker, Tucker Billings, also an OL-DL, Joseph Hall, yet another OL-DL.

This also includes running back-defensive back Zach Loughridge, Ben Westendorf, another WR-DB, running back-linebackers Dominic Rivera and Ryan Fuentes.

Fehler said, “Our offensive line will be the best it has been the last few years and we have some good skill guys returning as well.”

One player Fehler is excited about is Tucker Bolles, a freshman quarterback who, according to Fehler, has put in a lot of work in the offseason and is the hardest worker Fehler said he ever coached.

“Great things will come his way,” Fehler said.

In addition, Fehler said, “Weston Hasted, Landon Tiefenbach, Aiden Smith and Malakai Sellers will be playing their first year of varsity this year and we will be counting on them to play big roles for us.”

“Overall, the most important thing is the older guys on the team have to step up more as leaders to help this program move in the right direction!” Fehler said.

But Fehler lost four players from last season who had an impact on his team’s fortunes.

“Skyler Stalbaum, Ian Fox, Blake Sayer and Thor Klaus (all four all-conference guys) graduated this



Above, During practice, a Hesperia quarterback throws to an outside receiver.

Below, Three defensive players stop a Hesperia ball carrier during walk throughs



2025 Schedule	
Aug. 28 - at Farwell	
Sept. 5 - vs. Grant	
Sept. 12 - vs. White Cloud	
Sept. 19 - at North Muskegon	
Sept. 26 - at Shelby	
Oct. 3 - vs. Ravenna	
Oct. 10 - vs. Mason County Central	
Oct. 17 - vs. Hart	
Oct. 24 - at St Louis	

past year,” Fehler said. “They were all very good players and we will need to step up to fill those roles.”

Talking about where he hopes to see his team this season, Fehler said, “We are looking to be in the mix for the conference title.”

“Every team in our conference is tough and we are looking to be right there with them,” Fehler said.

LARRY LAUNSTEIN JR./SHORELINE MEDIA

Nine of 11 starters back on offense for Ludington football

BY GREG GIELCZYK

DAILY NEWS SPORTS WRITER

They're still talking about last year's heart-breaking 28-21 playoff loss to Big Rapids in the locker room.

Every day since practice started, and ever since the game ended.

It still stings.

But the Ludington football players are using it as motivation as they gear up for the 2025 season, and putting together another winning record.

After breezing through the month of July with all the 7-on-7s and camps they do, the Orioles are ready to get to work.

Ludington has won seven games in two of the last three years, including last year, and appear to be a good bet to do it again.

Especially with Cameron Gunsell, coach Charlie Gunsell's son, returning for his senior season at quarterback.

"He's done a lot of work. He's kind of changed his body in the off-season," coach Gunsell said. "We're excited to have him back.

"It's his third year starting for us, and we expect big things out of Cam. But, more than anybody Cam expects big things out of himself. I think he's done what he needed to do to get ready."

Now that he's a senior, the highly competitive Cam Gunsell is demanding more out of the younger players to compete at a higher level, his coach says.

They're all responding, too.

"Our attendance in the weight room and at zero hour, and at camps and

7-on-7s has been phenomenal, the best we've ever had here," coach Gunsell said.

"It's an exciting time."

Overall, the Orioles return nine out of 11 starters on offense, which gives rise to high expectations.

Even more, six players are back who started at least one game on the offensive line.

It starts with Taj Williams, a slot receiver who caught nine touchdown passes last year as a sophomore.

"We expect another big year out of him," said coach Gunsell.

"We're probably going to include him a little bit more in our running game.

"He's a very good athlete for us, and is a stand-out on the basketball court as well as on the football field."

Wide receiver Zac Gra-

ham is also back after hauling in seven TD passes last year, and has been working hard to get ready for the season.

Messiah Himes was a sophomore last year and might have been overshadowed by the other two according to coach Gunsell, who thinks he's just as talented.

"Messiah is going to be more involved, especially in our run game," coach Gunsells said. "He catches the ball well."

Incoming freshman Mikey Himes is thought to be a major contributor, able to do a variety of things ... play wide receiver, running back and even some quarterback at times.

A fifth projected skill player is Kyle Himes, an incoming sophomore who coach Gunsell says is a really good route runner.

"All those guys are go-

ing to get touches," coach Gunsell added. "That doesn't include newcomers like J.T. Keith and Cooper Holmes.

"So, we are blessed with some depth at the skill positions."

The Orioles return their entire offensive line, led by 6-foot-3, 290-pound right tackle Walt Autrey who has a couple of collegiate offers.

Right guard Donovan Salazar started last year on the varsity as a freshman, and coach Gunsell said he has gotten stronger.

Colin Shelton, the Orioles' center, is the smallest guy up front at 6-2 and 210. But he is also one of the smartest lineman, coach Gunsell said and makes all of the calls from the center spot.

Left guard Blake Nelson, 6-1 and 245, started last year as a sophomore and has virtually lived in

the weight room, and it shows.

At left tackle is Luis Salazar, 6-3 and 310 has successfully rehabbed from a torn ACL and MCL suffered in the Montague game last year and is expected to be ready to go by the start of the season.

Ludington has some work to do on defense, graduating its entire defensive line and is in the rebuild mode there.

Connor Chaney will play a lot of defensive tackle according to coach Gunsell.

Logan Sloan, who saw some action on varsity at the end of last year, has added 20 good pounds and coach Gunsell expects to use him at one defensive end.

A sophomore and a couple of juniors are battling to nab the other defensive end position.

The Orioles do return leading tackler from last

2025 Schedule

Aug. 28 - at Coopersville
Sept. 5 - at Mason County Central
Sept. 12 - **vs. Fremont**
Sept. 19 - **vs. Oakridge**
Sept. 26 - at Montague
Oct. 3 - at Manistee
Oct. 10 - **vs. Whitehall**
Oct. 17 - at Orchard View
Oct. 24 - **vs. Tri County**

year Cooper Holmes at linebacker, and the entire secondary is back intact.

Messiah Himes and Cam Gunsell are at the safeties, Graham and Mikey Himes at the corners.

Brody Jones and Michael Wilson will also be a part of that secondary.

"We have a lot of work to do on defense because of graduation, but we're happy with the kids we have to work with," said coach Gunsell.

"That will be an emphasis early in camp."



GREG GIELCZYK/DAILY NEWS

Ludington football team, front row, from left, Brody Jones, Connor Chaney, Bryce Buck, Liam Lenire, Deren Rodriguez, Landon Sloan, Owen Young, Kyle Himes, Mikey Himes, Victor Hercevea, Andrew Boussa, Corban Duffield, Cooper Holmes, Zac Graham, Georgia Wilson. Middle row, from left, Joyce Hodges, Asher Forfinski, Zach Staley, Waylon Britten, Trenton Trivisanno, Charlie Arman, Jackson Hoenie, Logan Sloan, Messiah Himes, J.T.Keith, Brandon Unsal and Donovan Salazar. Back row, from left, Finn Flannery, Austin Shelton, Colin Shelton, Cam Gunsell, Walt Autrey, Blake Nelson, Rockne Lemire, Keldan Moser, Gabe Gamez, Greg Schrader, Cooper Luce, Preston Nickelson, Aiden McDonald and Chase Gable.

Oriole quarterback Cam Gunsell primed for another big season

BY GREG GIELCZYK
DAILY NEWS SPORTS WRITER

The memory of last year's narrow 28-21 loss to Big Rapids in the opening round of the MHSAA playoffs is driving the Ludington Oriole football team, and senior quarterback Cam Gunsell.

Gunsell had a breakout season a year ago, completing 105 of 147 pass attempts with 17 touchdowns to just four interceptions for 1,176 yards ... an average of 168 passing yards per game.

A solid 6-foot-2, 180 pounds Gunsell can beat you with his legs as well as his arm, as he proved last year as a junior.

In fact, he was the Orioles' leading rusher, carrying the ball 151 times for 995 yards, an impressive 6.6-yards a try, and 16 touchdowns for 35 touchdowns overall.

"He's a good player. He's done a lot of work," his dad, Orioles head coach Charlie Gunsell said. "He's kind of changed his body in the off-season.

"We're excited to have him back. We expected good things out of Cam,



Ludington quarterback Cam Gunsell

but more than anybody Cam expects big things out of himself.

"I think he's done what

he needed to do to get ready."

Cam Gunsell admits that sometimes it's scary

playing quarterback, but he likes having the spotlight on him.

"I like making plays. If

you lose it's on you, but then again if you win, you're a big part of it," he said.

"It's super exciting. I love it."

The coach/dad thinks the game has slowed down considerably for Cam, and feels he's improved the most in his accuracy in the passing game.

He went from a 56 percent passing completion rate two years ago to 70 percent last year.

"He just takes his training so much more seriously now," coach Gunsell said before practice. "Diet and everything. He's doing everything he needs to do to be the best player he can be.

"So, I just think natural maturity has occurred. He competes at a really high level.

"I think now, as a senior, he's demanding maybe more out of the other guys to compete at a higher level."

Cam Gunsell has mixed emotions as he prepares for his final season under center for the Orioles.

"It's sad, but it's also super exciting. We've got a good group coming

back," Cam replied. "So, I'm really excited for this year.

"We were all crushed (after the season-ending loss to Big Rapids), but we also knew we had a big group coming back (nine of 11 starters return), so we had a lot to prove this season."

Other than working out in the weight room three days a week, and participating in 7-on-7s, Cam Gunsell said he would often get together with some of his teammates and throw the ball around when they are "bored."

The quarterback says he's improved his arm angle the most since he first took a snap from center on varsity.

"My arm angle was coming too high, so I had to lower it down," he explained.

"And just reading defenses, not throwing bad balls, (being) smarter," Gunsell added.

"I feel I'm a smarter football player, too."

With most of the running backs and receivers coming back from last year, Cam Gunsell be-

SEE LUDINGTON, PAGE 16

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Mariners defense a work in progress

BY GREG GIELCZYK

DAILY NEWS SPORTS WRITER

MANISTEE – Although the record wasn't as good as it had been the past couple of years, the competition on the schedule helped get the Manistee High School football team into the playoffs for a fifth straight year in 2024.

The Mariners, who won seven and eight games in each of the last two years, respectively, finished just 5-4 last season but still made the post-season.

But, they were in, and that was the only thing that mattered for the Mariners as they extended their string of post-season appearances.

In fact, the Mariners have made the playoffs six out of the last seven years, and their fans have come to expect it.

As with every season, Manistee is experiencing some transition as they need to replace departed seniors who were major contributors.

Of course, the biggest name on the list of graduated seniors is the school's all-time leading scorer Kaden Kott, who rushed for over 1,000 yards a second straight year.

"Those kind of players don't come along all the time," head coach Alvin Rischel said. "Certainly, it wasn't just about Kaden Kott last year. There was also several other seniors that contributed, and some underclassmen as well.

"Football is the ultimate team game, and Kaden would be the first one to tell you that it wasn't just all about him, and he couldn't have accomplished what he accomplished without the help of so many others."

Rischel, entering his

second season at the helm, isn't necessarily looking for anyone to fill Kott's shoes, but rather blaze their own path and stamp their own mark on the program.

Hoping to make their marks are a talented, but slightly untested in terms of playing time, group of juniors and seniors who need to step up to fill the open vacancies. The key returner is third-year quarterback Dayvion Neal-Berry, who started as a freshman and has consistently improved each year.

"Luckily for him, Dayvion had a really talented senior class surrounding him, and really took him under their wing as a freshman," Rischel said.

"I thought our offensive

coaching staff in 2023 did a good job of allowing Dayvion to learn and progress, but still minimizing and simplifying things for him."

Rischel is excited about the offensive backfield that is returning with Neal-Berry, including burners Josh Weiss and Wyatt Protasiewicz.

Both showed they have the speed to get to the outside, and are fast enough to run away from the defense. Landin Sowa is also back. A strong, physical fullback, Sowa is more of a straight ahead bruiser.

"He's got a lot of athletic ability, and is a smart kid. He understands the game. You can teach him things," Rischel said. "And he's a

natural leader, too. Sometimes, you want things to be player-led type motivation, and he's the one that always steps up."

Up front there's experience with fourth-year center Jacob Lee and Kiedis Underwood, who was First Team All-Region last year.

"Kiedis and Jacob have both been living in the weight room, and their numbers – just like a lot of the kids on this team – are starting to get really, really good," added Rischel.

Ean Guenthardt played some tight end for the Mariners last year, but Rischel says he'll probably fill different roles on the line this year.

The defense is more of a work in progress, as the

coaching staff trying to see where the best fit is for the players.

"Schematically, we like to keep things consistent. I've always been a big fan of building your players around the program, rather than the other way around," Rischel said.

"But, you also have to be smart enough to role play kids when you notice that you have a kid that can do things from one year to the next.

"When you recognize that, you have to design your scheme a little bit to allow them to play the game."

Kott played a major role on defense as well last year, coming away with several interceptions, and running a couple back for scores.

2025 Schedule

Aug. 28 - at Chippewa Hills

Sept. 5 - **vs. Fremont**

Sept. 12 - at Oakridge

Sept. 19 - at Orchard View

Sept. 26 - **vs. Whitehall**

Oct. 3 - **vs. Ludington**

Oct. 10 - at Shelby

Oct. 17 - at Montague

Oct. 24 - **vs. Mason County Central**

Neal-Berry will bring his experience and familiarity with the passing game to the secondary.

But, there's not much returning experience there other than that.

Manistee is scheduled to move down to the Rivers Division of the West Michigan Conference next year. A Lakes Division title would be a nice going away gift.



GREG GIELCZYK|DAILY NEWS

Manistee High football team front row, from left, Morgan Banicki, Aubrey Nickleson, Finnagan Nicholson, Travis Newenhouse, Jacob Bielski, Hoyt Edmondson, Ray Maycock, Wyatt Protasiewicz, Braylen Zimmerman and Josh Weiss. Back row, from left, Andy O'Donnell, Braden Cruz, Hudson Cole, Kiedis Underwood, Xavier Goodspeed, Keegan Shannon, Ean Guenthardt, Dayvion Neal-Berry, Landin Sowa and Jacob Lee. Missing, Chaos Davis, River Blair and Carter Konwinski.

'I make better decisions,' Manistee quarterback Dayvion Neal-Berry

BY GREG GIELCZYK
DAILY NEWS SPORTS WRITER

MANISTEE – It wasn't the way he would have preferred to get the starting quarterback job, but freshman Dayvion Neal-Berry was the Manistee High football team's only other option at the time.

So, when the original starter went down with a season-ending injury, then coach Troy Bytwork turned to the untried youngster to take over.

As you might imagine, Neal-Berry could barely feel his feet under him as he trotted unsteadily out to the huddle.

Looking at the faces of his teammates as he prepared to call the signals, Neal-Berry knew they were all older than him, and had been in difficult situations before.

"I was a little scared," Neal-Berry admitted before practice as he prepared for his third season under center. "I was scared to get hurt."

"But, now I make smarter decisions. Sometimes, I was scared to keep the ball, even though it might have been a better decision."

"Now that I know I can do it, I'll keep the ball myself if I need to."

Manistee head coach



Manistee quarterback Dayvion Neal-Berry

Alvin Rischel was an assistant and the defensive coordinator when Neal-Berry was a freshman, but he remembers how Bytwork handled the situation.

Instead of adding even more pressure on the young signal caller, Bytwork brought him

along slowly, letting him adjust to the speed of the varsity game.

"His freshman year, I thought we tried not to put a lot of the focus on him, and just let him manage a lot of things," Rischel said. "Not put too much on him, and let him learn and grow as a fresh-



GREG GIELCZYK/DAILY NEWS

Junior quarterback Dayvion Neal-Berry takes off on a bootleg around Wyatt Protasiewicz and Jacob Lee.

man. Last year, I think he kind of stepped out a little bit, and had multiple games where he threw multiple touchdown passes."

Neal-Berry says he loves to throw the ball, even if in the Mariners don't throw it a ton in the Wing T offense.

But, he also likes leading the team, and being the one ... other than the center ... who starts everything in motion.

"That's one thing I really like about quarterback," Neal-Berry said. "I feel (that) I'm one of the fastest guys on the team right now."

"I depend on my speed a lot, actually."

Neal-Berry isn't worried about the offense with Kott gone.

"Now that Kaden's gone, we have a lot more pressure on ourselves," he said. "We could really depend on Kaden. But,

now we have a lot of guys that have to step up, and I think they're ready for it."

Rischel knows that Neal-Berry is ready.

"He's going to continue to grow, and as he continues to learn and grow, we're going to continue to expand what he can do," Rischel said.

"We'll give him more opportunities to showcase his talents, because we think the sky is the limit for him."

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Spartans have six starters returning on offense, defense

BY GREG GIELCZYK

DAILY NEWS SPORTS WRITER

SCOTTVILLE - It wasn't the finish they wanted, or expected, but it was still the best season for the Mason County Central football team since the Spartans won seven games in 2015.

The Spartans shocked the world last year, going 9-1, including a six-game winning streak at the end of the season.

One of the highlights of their season for the Spartans was a wild 50-43 win over county rival Ludington in the second week.

Although their two-game winning streak was snapped with a 36-20 loss to perennial West Michigan Conference Rivers Division power North Muskegon, it didn't slow the Spartans down.

They didn't lose again until Standish-Sterling ended their season with a 50-32 win in the district playoffs.

"We struggled a little bit in the playoff game. That's just a learning process that goes along with building a program," Spartans head coach David Smith said.



Mason County Central football team, front row, from left, Cyric Jabrocki, Brody Walle, Jayden Reems, Rider Nicewander, Justin Rezendiz, Kaden Ruiz, Tobey Reed, Will Thomsen and Will Wright. Back row, from left, Mason Maidens, Eli Smith, Micheal Chye, Tyler Norton, Abel Edmonson, Pierce Bladzick, Gideon Sayles, Granite Miller, Kyle Peters, Parker Overmyer, Landon Angst and Brandon Peters.

Duplicating that performance is going to be hard to do, especially at a small school that struggles with numbers.

A numbers problem translates into the difficulty having adequate depth at all the positions.

The Spartans have six starters returning on both offense and defense, which can certainly help.

Especially with the experienced players providing mentorship for the

younger and less experienced guys.

Key returner on offense is quarterback Pierce Bladzick, set to begin his third season as the starter.

"We had a big senior class, but we had a lot of underclassmen playing," Smith said.

"We actually have five linemen coming back," Smith added.

"One just started basically half the season,

and we lost one lineman (to graduation) but the others are coming back. That's a big plus."

Two running backs who were out most of last year with injuries are back and fully healthy.

Both are seniors, and have played some big minutes.

"I think we're going to have a more complete offense," Smith added. "We know we should be able to run the ball.

"We're losing a big piece of our back field, but I think we have capable guys to step in. We're just going to be versatile."

"I think we're going to throw the ball more."

The Spartans have a senior receiver, the coach's son Eli Smith, who is finally beginning to understand the scheme.

His dad says it took Eli a little longer to mature in size, but he is expected to be pretty tough on the

2025 Schedule

Aug. 28 - at Lakeview
Sept. 5 - vs. Ludington
Sept. 12 - vs. North Muskegon
Sept. 19 - at Fremont
Sept. 26 - at Ravenna
Oct. 3 - at Hart
Oct. 10 - at Hesperia
Oct. 17 - vs. Shelby
Oct. 24 - at Manistee

outside.

While playing in the secondary last year, Eli Smith rotated into the offense and showed some promise as a receiver.

"He's 20 pounds heavier in muscle, and experienced, and just knows what he can do out there," coach Smith said.

"Normally he was kind of a running back, but now he's settling into the receiver spot. He and Pierce had a pretty good connection all summer."

"They're probably going to be fun to watch this fall."

Also returning to the backfield is three-year starter Tyler Norton who injured his foot in basketball camp last summer and missed most of the

SEE SPARTANS, PAGE 16



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Mason County Central quarterback Bladzick ready to raise the bar

BY GREG GIELCZYK

DAILY NEWS SPORTS WRITER

SCOTTVILLE - It was the kind of season every quarterback dreams of, let alone a high school junior in his second season as the starter.

The Mason County Central football team won six straight games en route to reaching the MHSAA playoffs for the second consecutive season, finishing 8-2.

Beating county rival Ludington in an exciting 50-43 shootout to get off to a 2-0 start certainly had to be the season's highlight.

It will be hard for the Spartans to replicate that record, but with third-year quarterback Pierce Bladzick coming back to run the offense, you can't count them out.

Especially with an experienced offensive line to provide protection when he drops back to pass, as well as taking off and running.

"He's a good leader, he's a good kid," Spartans head coach David Smith said. "He gets bigger and stronger every year."

"Time flies. He's already going to be a junior, but he still has a lot of football to play."

"I'm excited to see what he brings this year as the offense goes through him a little bit more now that he's a veteran."

Smith is looking to have a more balanced team on offense this year, with more of an emphasis on running the ball.

But he also expects to have Bladzick throwing the ball more because of that experienced line.



DAILY NEWS | FILE PHOTO

Mason County Central's Pierce Bladzick throws the ball down field during a game against Hart on Friday, Oct. 4 at Spartan Community Field in Scottville.

cluding his teammates and he knew it would take time to grow comfortable running the offense.

He began to see the light at the end of the tunnel as a sophomore, and his improvement last year as noticable.

Last year, Bladzick completed 40 of 91 passes for 637 yards, an average of 15.9 yards per attempt, with seven touchdowns.

"My freshman year I didn't know any of the guys, I never played football with any of those guys," Bladzick related. "Kyle Peters, I played football with him when I was younger."

"But, I hadn't had chemistry with any of those guys at all, so last year I grew closer to them. I thought our team chemistry was really good."

"I feel that our team

and it was just great to see, from the off-season on, through the course of the season," Bladzick added.

"It's just raising the bar every year, I feel like. We've improved the last two years. Two years ago we barely scraped into the playoffs, and last year we expected to be there, and this year we're expecting to make a run at least."

Bladzick has taken steps to further sharpen his game, attending several camps over the summer.

He also reviewed game film, studying what he was doing and taking notes of where he can get better, and got closer to his teammates.

Now, he's ready to get the season started, and make his mark.



MASON COUNTY CENTRAL QUARTERBACK PIERCE BLADZICK

"He's a **good leader, he's a good kid**. He gets **bigger and stronger every year...** I'm excited to see whay he brings this year as the offense goes through him a little bit more now that he's a veteran."

David Smith
Spartans head coach

New Montague head football coach wants to restore physical, passionate play

BY LARRY LAUNSTEIN JR.
SHORELINE MEDIA SPORTS WRITER

MONTAGUE — The Phil Koops head coaching football era kicks off this season for the season, and with it, a renewed emphasis on physical, intelligent and passionate play.

Koops said, “We have 15 seniors this year and four returning starters on the offensive line.”

Koops also said, “That’s the group we hope makes the biggest impact.”

“You win and lose games up front and those guys have worked really hard to get bigger and stronger and we hope when they combine that with all their experience, that we can be pretty good up front.”

In addition to the offensive line, Koops has high expectations for the rest of his team.

Koops said about those, “To play smart, physical football and have a lot of passion and excitement for the game and our town while doing that.”

“We are focusing on getting back to Montague having a really physical football team that scraps for every inch on the field

2025 Schedule

Aug. 28 - vs. Forest Hills Eastern
Sept. 5 - at Oakridge
Sept. 12 - at Orchard View
Sept. 19 - vs. Whitehall
Sept. 26 - vs. Ludington
Oct. 3 - at North Muskegon
Oct. 10 - at Fremont
Oct. 17 - vs. Manistee
Oct. 24 - vs. Ravenna

and plays hard for 48 minutes,” Koops said.

In addition, Koops said, “If we can do that, we have enough talent to accomplish our goals.”

As a new head coach, Koops said he didn’t quite know how the impact the departing players from last season would affect his team this season.

Koops did say, however, that juniors J.J. Atchinson, Cole Moss and Kian Peters should help the Wildcats on Friday nights.

“J.J. and Kian both play really hard defensively and Cole has some wiggle with the ball in his hands,” Koops said.

About how Koops sees his team in this year’s league race, he said, “I think we’ll be very competitive if we can take care of the football and



LARRY LAUNSTEIN JR./SHORELINE MEDIA

During run throughs, a Montague defender meets up with a ballcarrier during practice.

prevent big plays.”

“Until someone beats Whitehall, they are the team to beat,” Koops said.

“It’s been about half a decade since someone has knocked them off to take their league crown,” Koops said.

“So until someone does that, they are the team to beat.”



LARRY LAUNSTEIN JR./SHORELINE MEDIA

A Montague quarterback attempts a pass during preseason drills.

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Reeths-Puffer seeks leadership from upperclassmen this season

BY LARRY LAUNSTEIN JR.
SHORELINE MEDIA SPORTS WRITER

NORTH MUSKEGON — Reeths-Puffer will be fielding a young football squad in 2025 and much will be expected from the seniors playing on the team this fall.

Last season, the Rockets finished 2-7. They picked up a 26-14 win over Spring Lake and a 48-13 win over Grand Rapids Union.

Reeths-Puffer ended its year with five-consecutive losses. It finished fourth in the OK Conference-Green.

Cody Kater, the Rockets head coach, said that key players returning are Cal Millis, Mason Darke, Garrett Olejarczyk and Cole Piper.

“Their leadership will help guide our young squad,” Kater said.

Kater also said, “I expect them to help lead our program, with their actions and instincts.”

Incoming players Kater said could make a difference are Troy Swingley, Ja’Michael Williams, Garrison Niklasch and Braylon Swain.

As to why he said these players could make an impact, Kater said, “Young who want to make an impact ... strong athletes who have put in the work.”

“They will impact as the season goes along and they gain confidence through experience,” Kater said.

“I expect them to grow and make plays when they’re able.

Kater said he’d like to focus on the players he currently has, and did not talk about the players who have graduated.

2025 Schedule

Aug. 28 - vs. **Forest Hills Central**
Sept. 5 - at Caledonia
Sept. 12 - at Spring Lake
Sept. 19 - at Mona Shores
Sept. 26 - at Grand Rapids Union
Oct. 3 - vs. **Forest Hills Northern**
Oct. 10 - at Byron Center
Oct. 17 - vs. **Muskegon**
Oct. 24 - vs. **Forest Hills Eastern**

He has five returning starters on offense and four on defense.

“We had a strong off-season in the weight room and our seniors have helped identify where we need to go as a program,” Kater said.

Kater also said, “We have retained all our staff and have a young team who we expect to grow as the season goes on.”



Reeths-Puffer’s offensive, defensive players go at it in preseason practice.

LARRY LAUNSTEIN JR./SHORELINE MEDIA



During Reeths-Puffer’s fumble drills, a defensive player is at the bottom holding the ball.

LARRY LAUNSTEIN JR./SHORELINE MEDIA

2025 Shelby football wants to stay true to themselves, improve

BY LARRY LAUNSTEIN JR.
SHORELINE MEDIA SPORTS WRITER

SHELBY — The 2025 Tigers look to improve but are also looking to stay true to themselves and work on doing things the right way.

Tigers Head Coach Phil Fortier said his team wants to be determined, unselfish, disciplined and give great effort — D.U.D.E's

"If we focus on being D.U.D.E's every day this team will be extremely competitive," Fortier said.

Fortier expects his returning players to have an impact on the Tigers fortunes, and they are:

- Senior Colin Fenton, #52. Two-way starter last season. Strong run defender on defense. Potential devastating blocker on offense

- Junior Brody Fessenenden, #33. Running back/outside linebacker. 2nd year starter on defense. Sure tackler. Tough to block on defense. 13 tackles for loss. Strong runner on offense

- Sr. Isaac Garcia, quarterback and free safety, #9. Team Leader. Playmaker on both sides of the ball. Accounted for 14 TD's last season

- Sr. DayDay Garcia, wide receiver/defensive back, #5. All Conference 1st Team on both sides of the ball. Terrific speed, great hands, effective blocker and really good

"If we focus on being D.U.D.E's every day **this team will be extremely competitive.**"

2025 Schedule

Aug. 28 - at White Cloud
Sept. 5 - at North Muskegon
Sept. 12 - **vs. Hart**
Sept. 19 - **vs. Ravenna**
Sept. 26 - **vs. Hesperia**
Oct. 3 - at Muskegon Catholic Central
Oct. 10 - **vs. Manistee**
Oct. 17 - at Mason County Central
Oct. 24 - at Orchard View

instincts.

- Sr. Max Hagstrom, tight end and inside linebacker, #44. Team Leader. Highly competitive. Sound tackler, good hands and good blocker

- Jr. Jaylin Henderson, #16. QB/WR/OLB Honorable Mention All Conference. Playmaker. 3 rushing TD's 4 passing TD's, 2 Receiving TDs and 1 kick return for a TD

- Sr. Casey Lamblin, #51. Offensive/defensive line. Two-way starter last season. Intelligence and quickness make him effective on both sides of the ball

- Sr. Ethan Viterna, #50. All Conference Defensive Tackle in 2024. 3 year starter on offense.

- Sr. Trevor Weiss, #7. Has length as a receiver and defensive back. Very smart player.

Being counted on to step up and make significant contributions, Fortier said, are newcomers Elijah Dashiell and Santos Melchor, who will have opportunities to be two-way players on offense and defense.

Fortier also said, "I hate to make predictions because it puts a limit on what you think you can achieve."

"Predictions are made for entertainment on ESPN," said Fortier, who insists that his team stay true to themselves and work on doing all the right things necessary to have a better season.

Fortier said, "North Muskegon was the conference champion last year and returns a lot of players that went to the state semifinals last season and the year before."

"That makes them the team to beat," Fortier said. "I think Ravenna has a really good squad this year."

"Their junior varsity team was the best in the league last season as far as I could see," Fortier said.



LARRY LAUNSTEIN JR./SHORELINE MEDIA

Some of Shelby's offensive and defensive players go at it at the line of scrimmage during practice. The letters D.U.D.E's stand for determined, unselfish, disciplined and give great effort.



LARRY LAUNSTEIN JR./SHORELINE MEDIA

Head Coach Phil Fortier As the ball is snapped, Shelby offensive and defensive players go at it at the line of scrimmage in drills.

Whitehall is working to maintain high football standards

BY LARRY LAUNSTEIN JR.
SHORELINE MEDIA SPORTS WRITER

WHITEHALL — The 2025 Vikings are planning to maintain their culture of winning, including conference championships, play a tough schedule, and work on being physically and mentally ready for the playoffs and make deep runs into November.

Vikings head coach Tony Sigmon said, "The expectations for this group are the same as any of our teams before them."

"In short, the expectations do not change," Sigmon said.

"The expectation for our team is to pick up where we left off from 2024," Sigmon said. "It's their turn to leave their mark on our football program."

2025 Schedule

Aug. 28 - vs. **Unity Christian**
Sept. 5 - vs. **Orchard View**
Sept. 12 - at Zeeland West
Sept. 19 - at Montague
Sept. 26 - at Manistee
Oct. 3 - vs. **Oakridge**
Oct. 10 - at Ludington
Oct. 17 - vs. **Fremont**
Oct. 24 - vs. **Portland**

To accomplish those goals, Sigmon welcomes back several returning players to the team.

"On offense, Jacob Alger and Jamison Jeffery lead our offensive line," Sigmon said.

And Sigmon also said, "Last year, they did a wonderful job helping us win the conference for the fourth straight year and a district title."

"We will be leaning on them this year as well," Sigmon said. "We have a

lot of offensive weapons back who played a key role for us last year."

But they have some large shoes to fill to replace former quarterback Cam Thompson, but one of the quarterbacks, Cole Essebagggers, has emerged as the starter for this year's team.

Sigmon said that Essebagggers had an excellent summer getting ready for his new role.

"Hunter Osborne, Cody Manzo and Corde Anderson also return as wide receivers and will see an increased role on the team," Sigmon said.

Sigmon will also welcome a lot of newcomers to the team as well.

"Kolten Weiler has had an excellent summer at WR, along with Ayden Mendoza, Jacob Lewis and Judd Musk create a great group to pull from,"



LARRY LAUNSTEIN JR./SHORELINE MEDIA

A Whitehall quarterback, participating in walk throughs, attempts a pass.

Sigmon said.

In addition, Sigmon said, "Liam Leeke, Wyatt McFarren, Kolten Kyser, Max Kukowski and An-

drew Zuniga will be working into the linebacker spots with Hunter Peterson, who played a lot for us last season."

"We will lean on those kids as well at running back," Sigmon said.

Caden Bowyer is also poised to have a great senior season spending time on the defensive line," Sigmon said. "His role will grow as well."

However, they will be trying to maintain their standard of excellence without those who graduated after last season.

Those players were, besides Thompson, linemen Jack Ambrose, Connor Nash, Parker Mott and Peyton Ossenfort.

Other players who also graduated were Abram Stoudt, Blake English, Gavin Craner and Brock Morningstar.

"Last year we had the same questions about the 2023 team," Sigmon said.

Sigmon also said, "What

the 2024 team did so well was battling through adversity with injuries and a tough schedule."

"They did a wonderful job leading last year and watching the 2025 team so far during the summer, the lesson was learned well," Sigmon said.

But according to Sigmon, the newcomers will be expected to have an impact on the team this season.

In order to be successful again this season and for the future, Sigmon said, they will use small tweaks and minor changes in order to put the players in the right positions this season.

"The most important message for this team is the standard is the standard," Sigmon said. "They have done a wonderful job to this point."

Sigmon closed by saying, "Now they have to continue to progress during fall practice."



LARRY LAUNSTEIN JR./SHORELINE MEDIA

Whitehall offensive linemen put in the work on the blocking sled during preseason practice.

LUDINGTON: Gunsell wants more

FROM PAGE 7

believes they're ready for a quick start.

The entire offensive line returns, and have gotten bigger and stronger with religious attendance in the weight room.

Despite that experience, Cam Gunsell said they still come over to his house and watch film, and continue to do that two to three days a week before every game.

"We always talk about Big Rapids, no matter how much it sucks. We're going to use that game for

experience, and get better from it," Cam Gunsell said. "We're excited. We're taking it seriously.

"For me, I've to put the ball in my receivers' hands," Gunsell added.

"They're all super skilled, super smart kids.

"And, obviously I've got toe make plays when my time comes."

As for the regular season, Cam Gunsell says the Orioles are coming into it believing they can win the West Michigan Conference Lakes Division.

"This year we really think we can take the conference," he said emphatically.

SPARTANS: Returners lead the way

FROM PAGE 10

football pre-season.

Norton sat out the opener last year, but was pressed into service when two players went down with injuries in the Ludington game.

"Even most of the year he still wasn't moving like he could, but he's healthy now and is probably going to be the tailback," said coach Smith.

Jayden Reems suffered a knee injury two years ago, and then broke his collarbone halfway through the year.

He'll be another main

ball carrier, and Bladzick will run the ball more on designed plays.

Michael Chye is a young player who'll be used at several different positions, including receiver.

Kyle Peters is a returning All-Conference guard and a three-year starter on the line, senior Granite Miller is another senior who is moving from one guard to tackle next to Peters.

Senior lineman Gideon Sayles started at center halfway through last year after winning the job over an older player as a junior.

Junior Able Edmondson was brought up from the

junior varsity and started against the Orioles in the second game of the season.

"He was the starting center, but we moved him over to tackle to make room for Gideon," coach Smith said.

Two seniors and a junior are battling for the fifth spot on the line, although the two seniors will start on the defensive line.

Peters shined on the defensive line last year, and Norton was one of the Spartans best linebackers.

Eli Smith started at corner in the secondary last year, and Pierce returns in

the defensive backfield as well.

"What we have to tie together is we have a couple young guys in the secondary," said coach Smith. "They did well this summer, but passing camp is passing camp.

"It's just going to take time. We're going to have three or four sophomores playing key roles here and there."

The Spartans have a brutal start this year with North Muskegon and Ludington weeks two and three.

"We'll find out what kind of team we have real quick," coach Smith said.



SHORELINE MEDIA FILE PHOTO

LEFT: Players, coaches, and staff members of the Whitehall football team celebrate after defeating Forest Hills Eastern in during an MHSAA Division 4 district semifinal game Nov. 1 in Ada.

SHORELINE MEDIA FILE PHOTO

RIGHT: Ludington's Andre Walden, center, signs his national letter of intent to play football at Adrian College on Monday.



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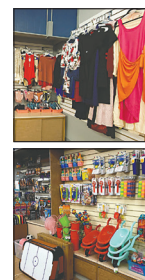


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LARRY LAUNSTEIN JR./SHORELINE MEDIA
Hart defensive players use bags to ward off offensive players in practice.



GREG GIELCZYK/DAILY NEWS
Manistee quarterback Dayvion Neal-Berry (center) fakes a handoff and prepares to run with the ball in practice.

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Attitude determines how WELL YOU DO IT.
- Lou Holtz

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FOOTBALL

SCHEDULE

Hart

AUG. 28 — AT LAKE CITY
SEPT. 5 — VS. RAVENNA
SEPT. 12 — AT SHELBY
SEPT. 19 — VS KENT CITY
SEPT. 26 — VS. NORTH MUSKEGON
OCT. 3 — VS MASON COUNTY CENTRAL
OCT. 10 — AT ORCHARD VIEW
OCT. 17 — AT HESPERIA
OCT. 24 — AT CENTRAL MONTCALM

Manistee

AUG. 28 — AT CHIPPEWA HILLS
SEPT. 5 — VS. FREMONT
SEPT. 12 — AT OAKRIDGE
SEPT. 19 — AT ORCHARD VIEW
SEPT. 26 — VS. WHITEHALL
OCT. 3 — VS. LUDINGTON
OCT. 10 — AT SHELBY
OCT. 17 — AT MONTAGUE
OCT. 24 — VS. MASON COUNTY CENTRAL

Reeths-Puffer

AUG. 28 — VS. FOREST HILLS CENTRAL
SEPT. 5 — AT CALEDONIA
SEPT. 12 — AT SPRING LAKE
SEPT. 19 — AT MONA SHORES
SEPT. 26 — AT UNION
OCT. 3 — VS. FOREST HILLS NORTHERN
OCT. 10 — AT BYRON CENTER
OCT. 17 — VS. MUSKEGON
OCT. 24 — VS. FOREST HILLS EASTERN

Hesperia

AUG. 28 — AT FARWELL
SEPT. 5 — VS GRANT
SEPT. 12 — VS WHITE CLOUD
SEPT. 19 — AT NORTH MUSKEGON
SEPT. 26 — AT SHELBY
OCT. 3 — VS. RAVENNA
OCT. 10 — VS MASON COUNTY CENTRAL
OCT. 17 — VS. HART
OCT. 24 — AT ST LOUIS

Mason County Central

AUG. 28 — AT LAKEVIEW
SEPT. 5 — VS. LUDINGTON
SEPT. 12 — VS. NORTH MUSKEGON
SEPT. 19 — AT FREMONT
SEPT. 26 — AT RAVENNA
OCT. 3 — AT HART
OCT. 10 — AT HESPERIA
OCT. 17 — VS. SHELBY
OCT. 24 — AT MANISTEE

Shelby

AUG. 28 — AT WHITE CLOUD
SEPT. 5 — AT NORTH MUSKEGON
SEPT. 12 — VS. HART
SEPT. 19 — VS. RAVENNA
SEPT. 26 — VS. HESPERIA
OCT. 3 — AT MUSKEGON CATHOLIC CENTRAL
OCT. 10 — VS. MANISTEE
OCT. 17 — AT MASON COUNTY CENTRAL
OCT. 24 — AT ORCHARD VIEW

Ludington

AUG. 28 — AT COOPERSVILLE
SEPT. 5 — AT MASON COUNTY CENTRAL
SEPT. 12 — VS FREMONT
SEPT. 19 — VS OAKRIDGE
SEPT. 26 — AT MONTAGUE
OCT. 3 — AT MANISTEE
OCT. 10 — VS WHITEHALL
OCT. 17 — AT ORCHARD VIEW
OCT. 24 — VS TRI COUNTY

Montague

AUG. 28 — VS. FOREST HILLS EASTERN
SEPT. 5 — AT OAKRIDGE
SEPT. 12 — AT ORCHARD VIEW
SEPT. 19 — VS. WHITEHALL
SEPT. 26 — VS. LUDINGTON
OCT. 3 — AT NORTH MUSKEGON
OCT. 10 — AT FREMONT
OCT. 17 — VS. MANISTEE
OCT. 24 — VS. RAVENNA

Whitehall

AUG. 28 — VS. HUDSONVILLE UNITY CHRISTIAN
SEPT. 5 — VS. ORCHARD VIEW
SEPT. 12 — AT ZEELAND WEST
SEPT. 19 — AT MONTAGUE
SEPT. 26 — AT MANISTEE
OCT. 3 — VS. OAKRIDGE
OCT. 10 — AT LUDINGTON
OCT. 17 — VS. FREMONT
OCT. 24 — VS. PORTLAND

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GREG GIELCZYK | DAILY NEWS PHOTOS

FILE PHOTO: Manistee blasted Shelby, 62-14, as senior running back Kaden Kott etched his name in the Manistee football record book, eclipsing Doc Cederholm's long standing mark of 44 career touchdowns.



LARRY LAUNSTEIN JR./OCEANA'S HERALD-JOURNAL

FILE PHOTO: Jubilant members of the Hart football team pose with the Blood, Sweat and Tears Jug that they won for the fifth consecutive year September 12.

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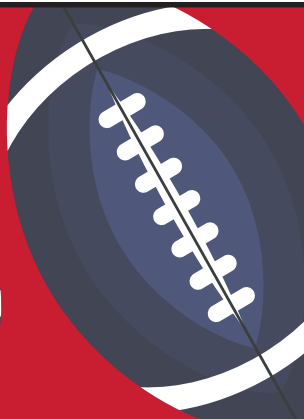
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- Tires
- Oil Changes
- Tuneups
- Heating & A/C
- Steering & Suspension
- Engine Repair
& Replacement
- Automatic Transmission
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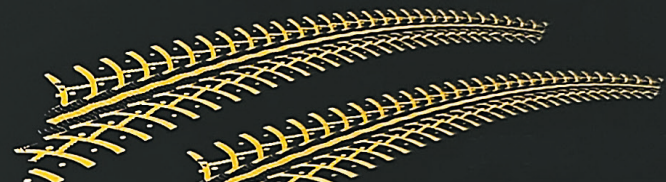
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