

PREVIEW DISTRICT 7-5A, DIV. I

>> FORNEY JACKRABBITS >> LANCASTER TIGERS >> LONGVIEW LOBOS >> LUFKIN PANTHERS >> MCKINNEY NORTH BULLDOGS
>> NORTH MESQUITE STALLIONS >> TYLER LIONS >> WEST MESQUITE WRANGLERS

There was plenty of mileage racked up throughout this eight-team district, which includes schools as far as 209 miles apart.

But when the dust settled, a familiar face resided atop the conference as Longview ran the table with a staggering 36.8-point margin of victory. Only Lancaster mounted a serious challenge to the powerhouse Lobos, and that could again be the case with Longview and the Tigers entering the fall ranked Nos. 2 and 4, respectively in Class 5A Division I.

Longview is back to build off a state semifinal run, while Lancaster was an area finalist. Forney is here to stay after making it two playoff appearances in a row after a 15-year drought, and the Jackrabbits should be right back in the thick of things this season with eight starters back on defense.

Just as Forney navigated a head coaching change to qualify for the postseason, so did McKinney North with a seven-win season under Kendall Brewer. The Bulldogs have enough skill talent and defensive starters back to make some more noise, but a playoff spot in this district won't come easy with Lufkin and Tyler lurking.

North Mesquite and West Mesquite hope for better returns in their second swim through the district after finishing seventh and eighth, respectively, last year.



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THE TOP FIVE: WHICH GAMES TO WATCH THIS YEAR

LONGVIEW AT MCKINNEY, AUG. 24

One of the top Week One games in the area, Longview makes the drive west to partake in the annual McKinney Classic against the state-ranked Lions. Both teams have high hopes for this season and get a major test out of the gates. This one also features two of the top running backs in the state with Longview's Taylor Tatum (Oklahoma) and McKinney's Bryan Jackson (USC).

LONGVIEW AT LANCASTER, SEPT. 22

The Lobos and Tigers made short work of everyone in the district except for each other, meeting for the third straight year in a game that didn't lack for defensive play. Longview got the better of Lancaster in a close one, 21-13, and prognostications point to this mid-September rematch carrying plenty of weight in the 7-5A Div. I title picture with both ranked inside the state's top four to begin the season.

NORTH MESQUITE AT WEST MESQUITE, SEPT. 22

For two schools separated by just four miles, there isn't a ton of history on the gridiron between the Stallions and Wranglers, mostly due to competing in separate classifications. But last year gave the district's two Mesquite ISD bunkmates a chance to forge their own rivalry, and the 2022 edition produced an entertaining scrap won by North, 30-24.

MCKINNEY NORTH AT LUFKIN, OCT. 13

Arguably the best game played throughout last year's 7-5A Div. I schedule, North and Lufkin staged an instant classic that produced seven lead changes and triple overtime before the Bulldogs prevailed 53-51. Plenty of the star performers from that contest, including running backs Jayden Walker and Kedren Young, will be back for the mid-October rematch in Lufkin.

MCKINNEY NORTH AT FORNEY, OCT. 27

Cracking the district's top tier with Longview and Lancaster won't be easy, but early signs point to North and Forney being the most viable candidates. There's plenty of intriguing matchups throughout this one with North's wealth of skill-position talent paired opposite a veteran Forney defense, and there's also the chance that playoff seeding could loom large with this one coming in the penultimate week of the regular season.