

PREVIEW DISTRICT 7-5A DIV. II

>> **CRANDALL PIRATES** >> **DENISON YELLOWJACKETS** >> **GREENVILLE LIONS** >> **LOVEJOY LEOPARDS**
>> **MELISSA CARDINALS** >> **MESQUITE POTEET PIRATES** >> **PRINCETON PANTHERS** >> **TERRELL TIGERS**

The District 7-5A Division II championship race predictably went down to the final week of the season with Lovejoy and Melissa besting all comers beforehand.

The Leopards and Cardinals distanced from the pack with one double-digit win after another before wagging an instant classic that saw Melissa score a go-ahead two-point conversion with 52 seconds remaining in the game to secure a 36-35 victory.

The Cardinals' dramatic title win fueled a productive postseason for the first-time 5A program, advancing to the regional finals. Melissa is thinking bigger in 2023, however, and they're not alone in carrying the state's No. 1 ranking in Class 5A Division II.

Expect Lovejoy to have something to say about that. The Leopards are ranked No. 8 in the state and should put up some of the more prolific offensive numbers in the area.

Although Melissa and Lovejoy headline the district, 7-5A Div. II fared well overall in the postseason with all four programs, Terrell and Crandall being the others, earning at least one playoff win. Terrell should again be strong with star rusher Chase Bingmon towing the rock, while Crandall tries to weather the loss of a sizable graduating class.

That could open the door for playoff regulars like Denison and Poteet to make a move. The Pirates had a 10-year playoff streak snapped last season but return seven starters on each side of the ball.



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THE TOP FIVE: WHICH GAMES TO WATCH THIS YEAR

DENISON AT SHERMAN, AUG. 25

In a fitting start to the 2023 season, one of the state's great high school football rivalries is renewed with Sherman and Denison meeting for the 119th time. A matchup whose roots date back to 1902, Denison has had Sherman's number with 10 straight wins, and the Bearcats will try and spoil that momentum with a new coaching regime on board for this season.

WEST MESQUITE AT POTEET, AUG. 31

Even in separate districts, these two Mesquite ISD rivals have maintained their rivalry as a preseason bout of late. The Wranglers and Pirates are plenty of history on the gridiron, but the results haven't been the most back-and-forth of late with West winning eight straight from 2005-12 followed by Poteet winning eight of nine between 2013-21. West got the better of a 51-21 meeting last year and will try and author a new winning streak for this rivalry.

LOVEJOY AT ARGYLE, SEPT. 1

Even the most ardent Madden football gamer would have a hard time replicating a showdown as wild as this non-district clash between the Leopards and Eagles. Argyle outlasted Lovejoy 56-49 in a game where both teams combined for more than 1,400 yards of offense and scored a whopping 84 points in the first half alone. It's a tough act to follow, but both teams have the talent to produce another classic this season.

TERRELL AT CRANDALL, OCT. 20

Cracking the district's top tier with Lovejoy and Melissa won't be easy, but early signs point to Terrell and Crandall being the most viable candidates. There wasn't much separating the two playoff qualifiers in last year's meeting, tied 22-22 after three quarters before Crandall mounted a strong finish to win 36-29. There's also the chance that playoff seeding could loom large with this one coming in the third-to-last week of the regular season.

LOVEJOY AT MELISSA, NOV. 2

All signs pointed to this one deciding the district championship last season and it didn't disappoint in the slightest. A resilient Melissa team hung around before rallying late to upset the Leopards 36-35 following a two-point conversion inside the final minute. Expect more of the same between two of the area's best as the rematch shifts to Melissa for what could be another high-stakes finale.