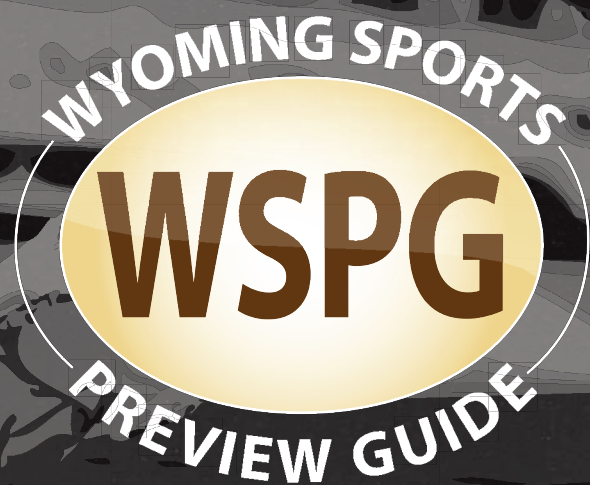


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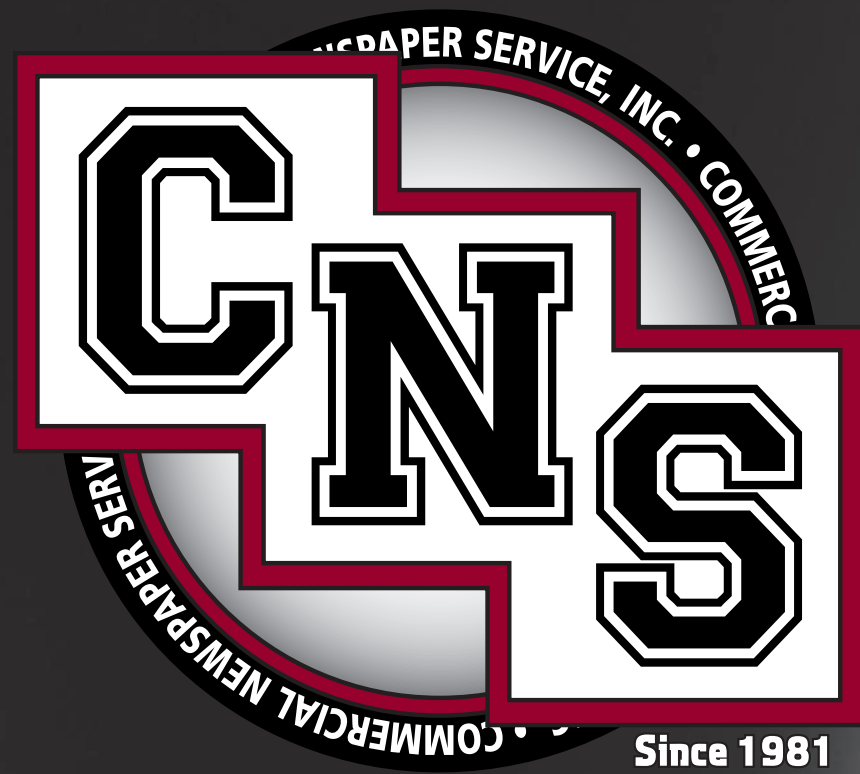
2016

**Camel
attack?**

**Gillette
chases
4A crown**



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Photo courtesy of Wyoming Tribune Eagle

Sheridan will need to replace QB Blake Godwin to be in contention.

Camels looking for revenge

By Patrick Schmiedt

Four questions to answer

The Big Four again? Yes, the Big Four again. A state championship game involving anyone but Cheyenne East, Sheridan, Gillette or Natrona seems unlikely. The same four teams have occupied the 4A semifinals every season since 2010, and although they'll be challenged this year, these four programs aren't going anywhere.

Which one of the Big Four has the best chance of winning it all? Gillette. In a year where Class 4A is somewhat turbulent due to the number of seniors who graduated, the Camels' two returning all-state selections is tied for the most in 4A. Maybe most importantly, Gillette is fired up to avenge last year's title-game loss.

Who has the best chance of ruining 4A's status quo? Rock Springs. The Tigers finished one point away from a trip to the semifinals last year and showed tremendous improvement. If that improvement continues, Rock Springs could be a title contender.

Will a new coach bring success to Cheyenne South? It will be tough. Dan Gallas takes over at South after a successful career in Colorado. The Bison have won three games in five varsity seasons; Gallas' responsibility will be to move from "patience" to "progress."

Four key games

Cheyenne East at Rock Springs, Aug. 26
You think the Tigers haven't had the season opener circled on their calendars all offsea-

son? The team that booted them from the playoffs is the same team they'll see in Week 0.

Natrona at Gillette, Sept. 16

As usual, this one will be big. The Camels have the advantage in both returning firepower and home field, but games between these two teams rarely tilt decisively one way or another.

Gillette at Sheridan, Sept. 30

This rivalry was already intense enough. This time, though, the two teams are staging not only the Energy Bowl, they're also staging the rematch of last year's Class 4A title game.

Cheyenne East at Cheyenne Central, Sept. 30

One of the forgotten oddities of the 2015 season is the Indians' 20-17 victory against the Thunderbirds, Central's first over East since 2010.

Predicted order of finish

Gillette; Sheridan; Rock Springs; Cheyenne East; Natrona; Laramie; Evanston; Kelly Walsh; Cheyenne Central; Cheyenne South.

Way-too-early title-game score prediction

Gillette 34, Sheridan 28

The Camels win the title they thought they'd get last year as one last sendoff to the days of one high school in Gillette. And then we spend all offseason wondering how much the addition of Thunder Basin High School will affect the Camels' repeat bid.

4A Preview



State Champs
Sheridan
Broncs

2015 State Playoffs

State Championship

Sheridan 38, Gillette 31

State Semifinals

Gillette 61, Cheyenne East 6

Sheridan 35, Natrona County 10

State Quarterfinals

Gillette 73, Laramie 33

Cheyenne East 14, Rock Springs 13

Sheridan 48, Evanston 0

Natrona County 23, Kelly Walsh 7

Four players to watch

Lane Tucker, Gillette

The most college-ready player in the state might be the lineman from Gillette. He drew several Division I scholarship offers before committing to North Dakota State. Tucker's responsibilities will be diverse — he was an all-state selection on both the offensive and defensive lines last season.

Matt Fowler, Rock Springs

Fowler ran for 1,293 yards last season, more than any other player in Class 4A. He's the leading returning rusher in the classification by a wide margin. And he's part of an offense that focuses on the run.

Madden Pikula, Gillette

Just in case you forgot, the Camels scored more points in a single season last year than any other team in state history. Pikula was a big part of that; he notched 1,014 receiving yards, more than any other player in Wyoming.

Jacob Hallam, Sheridan

Hallam is the only one of Sheridan's seven all-state players from 2015 to return this fall. But he was an all-state selection on both the offensive and defensive line, and his presence in the middle of the action will help anchor the Broncos.



Mascot: Camels
Division: 4A
Colors: Purple and gold
Coach: Vic Wilkerson, 13th season at Gillette
2015 Record: 11-1, lost to Sheridan in state championship

Key Players

OT/DE: Lane Tucker, Sr.
WR/DB: Madden Pikula, Sr.
TE/LB: Parker Long, Sr.
OL/DT: Bryer Sims, Sr.

2016 Schedule

8-26: vs. Kelly Walsh, 7 p.m.
9-2: at Evanston, 6 p.m.
9-9: vs. Cheyenne Central, 7 p.m.
9-16: vs. Natrona, 7 p.m.
9-23: at Cheyenne South, 7 p.m.
9-30: at Sheridan, 7 p.m.
10-7: vs. Rock Springs, 7 p.m.
10-14: at Laramie, 7 p.m.
10-21: vs. Cheyenne East, 7 p.m.

Camels could finish on top

Everything went right for Gillette in 2015. Except the final game.

A loss to Sheridan in the Class 4A championship ended Gillette's attempt at an undefeated season.

Gillette coach Vic Wilkerson said the returning Camels embraced the challenge of trying to improve on that runner-up finish.

"The players have used last year's championship game as motivation to get better in the off-season," Wilkerson said, "and now a new group of players will have to develop their own team identity and write their own story."

If the 2016 chapter of the story is anything like the 2015 chapter, the offense will be something to behold.

The Camels set a state record last year with 539 points. Gillette led the state regardless of classification in passing with 278.1 yards per game.

Senior all-state selection Madden Pikula, who led all classifications in both catches (60) and receiving yards (1,014), and six other starters return. Critically, Gillette returns four starting offensive linemen in seniors Lane Tucker, Alex Lumbardy, Bryer Sims and Jayd Culey.

And Pikula isn't the only pass-catcher coming back. The Camels also return junior Kade Bradley (24 catches, 331 yards) and junior Austin Clemetson (19 catches, 321 yards) in their aerial arsenal.

However, Gillette lost record-setting quarterback Dalton Holst to graduation. The Camels also lost their top six rushers; Pikula, with 70 rushing yards, is actually Gillette's leading returning rusher.

Wilkerson said the offense's development is encouraging but developing a quarterback may take some time; that race is between Pikula, senior Anthony Johnson and junior Keaton Wilkerson.

"A new group of players will have to develop their own team identity and write their own story."

~ Coach Vic Wilkerson

"We try and take advantage of our talent and tweak our scheme to match our players, so each year is different and unique," coach Wilkerson said. "We will find ways to use the players we have coming back and get the ball in the hands of playmakers."

The defense has bigger question marks. Tucker, Pikula and Long are the only three of Gillette's top 12 tacklers to return.

Tucker, an all-state pick who has several Division I offers entering this season, is Gillette's leading returning tackler; he was third on the team in defensive points and led the Camels with 7.5 sacks.

This year also presents a unique challenge to the Camels' program. Thunder Basin High School is set open in 2017, halving the talent pool of the largest Class 4A school.

Wilkerson said Thunder Basin's opening won't change the goals he and his staff impart to players.

"Each year, we just try and develop a competitive team while at the same time trying to teach young men skills that will carry over into their lives off the field," Wilkerson said. "Thunder Basin opening will not change that goal or philosophy in our program."

Indians have extra motivation

Cheyenne Central missed out on the Class 4A playoffs last year by one point.

Twice.

In losses to Laramie (35-34 in overtime) and Evanston (17-16), the Indians wasted their post-season chance.

A victory in either game would have earned Central a playoff berth. Instead, Central missed the playoffs for the first time since 2003.

Talk about a motivator.



those situations and everyone understands what's going on in the game."

"If we compete, we will win," Severn said, "that's the biggest thing."

This year, that approach will be tested, as Central graduated all six of its all-conference selections.

Offensively, senior Kurt Simmons, who threw for 101 yards in limited time last season, is the heir apparent at quarterback for an offense that finished third in Class 4A in passing yards per game (191.8). Central also lost its top four re-

Key Players

TE/DE: Eric Lundgren, Sr.
QB: Kurt Simmons, Sr.
WR/OLB: Jackson Rudolph, Sr.
OT/DT: Bryson Delbridge, Sr.

"All I've got to do is bring it up (the Laramie loss) and you can just see our team work that much harder."

~ Coach Drew Severn

ceivers to graduation, and senior tight end Ethan Sipe (9 catches, 131 yards) is the Indians' leading returning receiver.

Senior Hayden Petsch, who was second on the team with 185 rushing yards last year, is Central's leading returning rusher but may not play after suffering injuries in a car crash. Senior Austin Farkas (145 yards) also returns.

Senior Bryson Delbridge is the only returning starter on the offensive line.

"We're going to be young up front and the guys we have up there working right now I've got total faith in them," Severn said. "... We've got to establish the run game, and to do that we've got to establish the line of scrimmage."

That goes for defense, too, Severn said; Central led Class 4A in pass defense last year (137.3 yards per game) but also gave up 240.1 yards per game on the ground, next-to-last in 4A.

Junior Keaton Bell, who finished third on the team in defensive points, is Central's leading returning defender. Senior Eric Lundgren was fourth; they're the only two of Central's top nine defenders from 2015 to return.

Still, Severn sees potential, not just for this year but also for the next few years.

"We've got more incoming freshmen than we ever have in two years in the weight room," Severn said. "... It's all voluntary, and they're all showing up. That's really cool to see."

"My hope is that we're going to start reaping those benefits now and really getting after it."



Mascot: Indians

Division: 4A

Colors: Red and black

Coach: Drew Severn, third year at Central

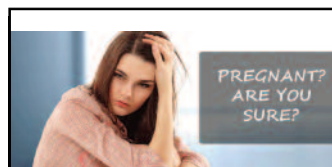
2015 Record: 2-7, did not qualify for playoffs

2016 Schedule

8-26: at Natrona, 7 p.m.
9-2: vs. Cheyenne South, 6 p.m.
 B at Gillette, 7 p.m.
9-16: vs. Rock Springs, 6 p.m.
9-23: at Laramie, 7 p.m.
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10-7: at Sheridan, 6 p.m.
10-14: vs. Kelly Walsh, 6 p.m.
10-21: vs. Evanston, 6 p.m.

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Mascot: Thunderbirds
Division: 4A
Colors: Columbia Blue & Black
Coach: Chad Goff, 11th year at East
2015 Record: 6-5, lost to Gillette in state semifinals

2016 Schedule

8-26: at Rock Springs, 7 p.m.
 9-2: vs. Natrona, 7 p.m.
 9-9: at Cheyenne South, 7 p.m.
 9-16: vs. Sheridan, 6 p.m.
 9-23: vs. Kelly Walsh, 7 p.m.
 9-30: at Cheyenne Central, 6 p.m.
 10-7: vs. Laramie, 6 p.m.
 10-13: at Evanston, 6 p.m.
 10-21: at Gillette, 7 p.m.

T-Birds have veteran group

Cheyenne East is one of Class 4A's top programs. No one doubts that.

The 2015 season was further validation of that stance. The Thunderbirds notched their fifth winning season in a row and earned a sixth consecutive trip to the Class 4A playoff semifinals.

Coach Chad Goff's goal now? Keep his team motivated. So when the T-Birds take the field this fall, the theme will be simple: refocus.

"We can't expect that just because we wear an East jersey we're going to make it to the playoffs," Goff said. "We've got to earn our keep."

East returns enough talented players to again be one of 4A's frontrunners. East returns five all-conference players, more than any other 4A program in the state.

The bulk of that experience is on defense. East returns seven starters on defense, and

Key Players

OT/DE: Jacob Ross, Sr.
S: Braden Morris, Sr.
OL: Nate Logemann, Sr.
LB: Rayce Phipps, Sr.

they know how to get the job done: The Thunderbirds led Class 4A in total defense at 300.1 yards allowed per game last year.

East also led Class 4A in rushing defense (131.8 ypg). "We've got some really good leaders coming back in a very important facet of the game," Goff said.

Lineman Jacob Ross and defensive back Braden Morris, East's returning all-state players, front a group of returners as deep as any other team in the classification.

Senior lineman Nate Logemann, senior linebacker Rayce Phipps and junior running back Ethan Ashworth all earned first-team all-conference honors a year ago for the Thunderbirds.

Morris led the Thunderbirds in defensive points last season, racking up a team-high 37 solo tackles. Phipps was fifth, Ross sixth, senior Mitchell Bell seventh and senior Seth Green eighth.

Offensively, East has more question marks; the Thunderbirds only return a pair of starters and will have to break in four new starters on the offensive line.

"Offensively, we're obviously very young as far as playing time, and so that's going to be a work in progress," Goff said.

"It's going to take time for that to gel ... and understand how the guy next to you is going to work. Once they start gelling, the work in progress will get better."

Ashworth was sixth in Class 4A last fall in rushing yards per game (78.7), finishing the season with 866 yards on 163 carries. However, he is the only one of East's top four rushers to return.

Junior Noah James, who caught 21 passes for 421 yards, also returns, as does senior Erik Garnica-Cole, who will see time at both running back and linebacker.

While the T-Birds' theme targets refocusing, Goff said he has no doubt his players can do just that.

"I think our program has been heading in the right direction, and I think our kids understand what it takes to be a part of our program," Goff said.

South welcomes new coach

No program in Class 4A faces longer odds this season than Cheyenne South.

The program was winless last year, and the returning players will have to learn new schemes and strategies quickly under new head coach in Dan Gallas.

A complete turnaround isn't likely this season, but Gallas said he has hope he can start the program building for the future.

"I just think that if we stick to a consistent message here with the kids and love on them the best they can so they feel like they want to be around this program, I believe our coaches will get them pointed in the right direction," Gallas said. "... They've struggled in the past a bit and what we're trying to do is establish a positive atmosphere here that they're proud of and want to be a part of."

In five seasons of varsity play, South has won just three games and has never made the playoffs.

But Gallas has the pedigree to build the program.

Gallas compiled a 101-70 record at coaching stops in Colorado, including five seasons as head coach at Smoky Hill High in Aurora and six years at Grand Junction High, and helped Grand Junction to a state runner-up finish in 1994.

Now that he has built his coaching staff at South, his next goal is to begin to learn his team.

Key Players

LB: Caleb Price, Sr.
WR: Keyshawn Farmer, Sr.
NG: Brandon Holbrook, Sr.
RB/LB: D'Andre McCray, Sr.

"We feel like we're way behind," Gallas said. "Once we get to know (the players), we'll be a lot better off."

Senior linebacker Caleb Price is South's only returning all-state selection. Price led Class 4A in defensive points last season, finishing with a 4A-high 56 solo tackles. He also had team highs with 11 tackles for loss and 47 assisted tackles.

Senior wide receiver Keyshawn Farmer, an all-conference selection last year, is South's leading returning threat on offense. He led the Bison with 593 receiving yards, notching six touchdowns on 29 catches.

He was also third on South's

defense in total points and led the Bison with two interceptions.

Senior Brandon Holbrook finished seventh for the Bison in defensive points and senior D'Andre "Dre" McCray was ninth.

South had an efficient offense — the Bison were third in Class 4A in yards per game. But the defense was leaky. South finished second-to-last in 4A in yards allowed per game (409.2) and dead last in points allowed per game (41.4).

Gallas said he likes to run multiple looks on both offense and defense, and the playbook will be dictated by the capabilities of the players, something he's still learning.

Still, the goals for building the program start with the right attitude.

"More than anything else, I'd like for the kids to be proud of the program," Gallas said.



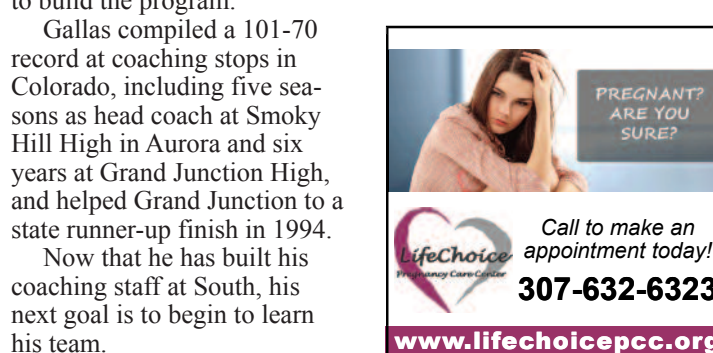
Mascot: Bison
Division: 4A
Colors: Black and gold
Coach: Dan Gallas, first year at South
2015 Record: 0-9, did not qualify for playoffs

2016 Schedule

8-26: vs. Evanston, 7 p.m.
 9-2: at Cheyenne Central, 6 p.m.
 9-9: vs. Cheyenne East, 7 p.m.
 9-16: at Kelly Walsh, 7 p.m.
 9-23: vs. Gillette, 7 p.m.
 9-30: at Laramie, 6 p.m.
 10-7: vs. Natrona, 7 p.m.
 10-14: at Rock Springs, 7 p.m.
 10-21: vs. Sheridan, 6 p.m.



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• Dine In
 • Take Out
 • Delivery!



Mascot: Red Devils
Division: 4A
Colors: Red, white, blue
Coach: Pat Fackrell, 7th season
2015 Record: 3-7, lost to Sheridan in state quarterfinals

Key Players
QB: Jesse Barker, Sr.
WR/DB: Malek Wagstaff, Sr.
RB/LB: Kaleb Fackrell, Sr.
OL/LB: Braden Tethal, Sr.

2016 Schedule
8-26: at Cheyenne South, 7 p.m.
9-2: vs. Gillette, 6 p.m.
9-9: at Sheridan, 6 p.m.
9-16: vs. Laramie, 6 p.m.
9-23: at Natrona, 7 p.m.
9-30: vs. Rock Springs, 7 p.m.
10-7: at Kelly Walsh, 6 p.m.
10-13: vs. Cheyenne East, 6 p.m.
10-21: at Cheyenne Central, 6 p.m.

Red Devils control tempo



No team's statistics better reflect its character than Evanston. Evanston finished last – by far – in offensive yards per game (236.9) and points per game (13.4) in Class 4A. Conversely, the Red Devils' defense remained stout, ranking second in 4A in yards allowed per game (300.8). And that was no accident. Evanston forged its path by playing close, low-scoring games, and winning those games when given the opportunity. Two of the Red Devils' three victories last season came by the skin of their teeth, as they beat Cheyenne South 12-7 in the season opener and Cheyenne Central 17-16 in the regular-season finale.

Coach Pat Fackrell said the approach works for the Red Devils, Class 4A's smallest school in terms of enrollment, because of the buy-in from his players. "I think our kids understand our system, and, really, our system is built around our kids," Fackrell said. "They know who they are and they know who we are, so they buy into that."

The Red Devils' approach is

centered on neutralizing deeper teams by slowing the pace and creating problems for other teams. "We're not an offense that tries to score early and often and as fast as possible," Fackrell said. "... The goal is to control the ball, control the clock and play great defense.

"Hopefully it works out even better for us this year."

However, the Red Devils have some holes to fill. Evanston graduated all six of its all-conference selections; three of those players were also Class 4A all-state picks. Even so, Fackrell said the Red Devils will have a strong and deep senior class.

"We're going to have some kids that are experienced," he said. "We have great leadership."

Senior Jesse Barker will return under center; he threw for 829

yards and six touchdowns last year. More importantly, he has the confidence of his coach to run the system.

"I think he's got a better understanding of the game and a better understanding of our system," Fackrell said. "... He's going to get better and better each game."

Senior Malek Wagstaff is Evanston's leading returning receiver and defender. He was fourth on the team in defensive points and led the Red Devils with five pass break-ups and also caught a team-high 33 passes for 253 yards.

However, Evanston lost five of its top six tacklers and nine of its top 12. Senior Kaleb Fackrell was seventh on the team in defensive points, and senior Griffen Mitchell was eighth.

Offensively, junior Brendan Mathson, who ran for 298 yards and three touchdowns, is Evanston's leading returning rusher. Junior Jess Richins also had 193 rushing yards, including 127 in Evanston's playoff-clinching victory against Central in Week 8.

Plainsmen are on the upswing

Key Players
QB: Taylor Dodd, Sr.
WR: Connor Beeston, Sr.
LB: Carless Looney, Sr.
OL: Zane Garner, Sr.

The Laramie Plainsmen have finished 3-7 for three consecutive years. However, with a core group of players returning, Plainsmen coach Chuck Syverson has more reason for optimism heading into his fourth season.

"I feel this can be a breakthrough year for us," Syverson said. "We have a passing game that will be very difficult to defend and if we can develop a compatible running game, our offense should be very good. Defensively, if we can bounce back from last year and improve on some key aspects, we should be much more formidable."

Laramie returns three of its four all-conference picks with senior wide receiver Conner Beeston, senior quarterback Taylor Dodd and senior linebacker Carless Looney all coming back.

They're building off a season that saw its momentum crest toward the end of the year. The Plainsmen started 0-4 but beat Cheyenne Central – a team it hadn't beaten since 2001 – 35-34 in its fifth game. That victory kick-

started a resurgence. Laramie beat Cheyenne South the next week and walloped Kelly Walsh 48-14 in a must-win playoff qualifying game in the final week.

Even though Laramie lost to Gillette by 40 in the first round of the playoffs, the Plainsmen return enough weapons on both offense and defense to break out of its 3-7 rut this fall. Syverson said the key to doing so rests on two pieces: consistency and depth.

"I feel we are very solid with our No. 1s but when we suffer injuries, our second groups are not at the level they need to be," he said. "We need to continue to develop numbers and improve our off-season lifting adherence for us to crack the next level."

Dodd is a true dual threat; he led Laramie in both passing (1,779 yards) and rushing (864 yards) last season and leads a versatile, deep offense. Beeston, Laramie's only returning all-state player, was by far his favorite target; he had team highs in catches (41), receiving yards (835) and total touchdowns (10). However, Laramie returns its top three and six of its top seven receivers, including senior Idris Elias (203 receiving yards) and junior Nate Burman (195 receiving yards), giving Dodd some other viable options in the passing game.

Senior Zane Garner and juniors Alex Mendoza and Zach Heil will be key contributors on the offensive line.

The defense returns its top three tacklers in Looney, Elias and Burman. Looney led the Plainsmen – and was second in Class 4A – last season in defensive points, while Burman had a team-high three interceptions and nine pass break-ups. Elias blocked three kicks.

Beeston also had three interceptions and will also be a key part of Laramie's defense.

Mascot: Plainsmen
Division: 4A
Colors: Maroon and white
Coach: Chuck Syverson, 4th year at Laramie
2015 Record: 3-7, lost to Gillette in state quarterfinals

2016 Schedule

8-26: at Sheridan, 6 p.m.
9-2: vs. Rock Springs, 7 p.m.
9-9: at Natrona, 7 p.m.
9-16: at Evanston, 6 p.m.
9-23: vs. Cheyenne Central, 7 p.m.
9-30: vs. Cheyenne South, 6 p.m.
10-7: at Cheyenne East, 6 p.m.
10-14: vs. Gillette, 7 p.m.
10-21: at Kelly Walsh, 7 p.m.

Trojans want to take next step

For better or worse, Kelly Walsh will figure out where it stands in the Class 4A football hierarchy within the first two weeks of the season.

KW opens its season for the fourth consecutive year with two of 4A's best teams: Gillette and Sheridan. Sheridan beat Gillette in last year's 4A championship.

By now, the Trojan players are used to the early challenge. "They don't know any different," coach Jon Vance said. "It's been Gillette-Sheridan every time. And you've got to play them no matter what, so you want to come out and play some tough football and get things going in the right direction."

The past three seasons, KW is 0-6 in those first two weeks. Conversely, the Trojans have been middle-of-the-pack teams.

Last year was a microcosm of the program's recent trend. For the fourth consecutive year, KW made the 4A playoffs, and for the fourth consecutive year, it lost in the first round.

Now, with back-to-back 3-7 seasons, Kelly Walsh will look to

Key Players
QB/DB: Lamont Frisby, Sr.
OL/DL: Tanner Bloom, Sr.
WR/FS: Sam Marsh, Sr.
OL/DE: Joel Strube, Sr.

its experienced linemen and an explosive quarterback to improve its fortunes, not only in the first two weeks but also throughout the season.

The Trojans return all four of their starting defensive linemen, including senior all-conference selection Tanner Bloom, and Vance said the team's success might start there. Vance said senior edge rushers Joel Strube and Hunter Wright have good speed, while interior linemen are good with their hands.

"If they can do a good job on the line of scrimmage, that will set a good tone for us," he said.

On defense, the Trojans return five of their top six tacklers. Senior Kenny Manasco was second on the team in defensive points

last season and led the Trojans with 51 solo tackles and two interceptions. He is KW's leading returning tackler. Bloom was third on the team in defensive points and all-conference senior safety Sam Marsh was fourth, while senior Hunter Wright was fifth and senior Ben Gallagher sixth.

Offensively, senior Lamont Frisby returns as KW's quarterback. He threw for 810 yards and five touchdowns last year after sharing time with Jacob Kostal as Frisby fought off injury and played some wide receiver late in the year. Frisby is also KW's leading returning rusher (436 yards, team-high six rushing touchdowns).

Gallagher, who caught 28 passes for 261 yards, is KW's leading returning receiver.

Vance said the experience in the trenches will help set the tone for Frisby and the offense, as Bloom, Strube and senior Kyle Bacon will be called on to keep the heat off their signal-caller.

"If we can get Lamont free, he's definitely got some game-breaker speed for us," Vance said.



Mascot: Trojans
Division: 4A
Colors: Green, gold and white
Coach: Jon Vance, 6th season
2015 Record: 3-7, lost to Natrona in state quarterfinals

2016 Schedule

8-26: at Gillette, 7 p.m.
9-2: vs. Sheridan, 7 p.m.
9-9: at Rock Springs, 7 p.m.
9-16: vs. Cheyenne South, 7 p.m.
9-23: at Cheyenne East, 7 p.m.
9-30: vs. Natrona, 6 p.m.
10-7: vs. Evanston, 6 p.m.
10-14: at Cheyenne Central, 6 p.m.
10-21: vs. Laramie, 7 p.m.

Mascot: Mustangs
Division: 4A
Colors: Orange and black
Coach: Steve Harshman, 26th season
2015 Record: 8-3, lost to Sheridan in state semifinals

Key Players
TE/LB: Tom Robitaille, Sr.
FB/LB: Lee Hedges, Sr.
OL/DL: David Schall, Sr.
WR/DB: Maeson Gallegos, Jr.

2016 Schedule
8-26: vs. Cheyenne Central, 7 p.m.
9-2: at Cheyenne East, 7 p.m.
9-9: vs. Laramie, 7 p.m.
9-16: at Gillette, 7 p.m.
9-23: vs. Evanston, 7 p.m.
9-30: at Kelly Walsh, 6 p.m.
10-7: at Cheyenne South, 7 p.m.
10-14: vs. Sheridan, 7 p.m.
10-21: at Rock Springs, 7 p.m.

Mustangs rely on tradition

See if this sounds familiar: Senior-laden Natrona County makes a deep run in the playoffs; those seniors graduate, leaving a group of inexperienced underclassmen to fill their void.

It happened in 2015. And it will happen again in 2016. Even though the Mustangs return only a handful of players with any varsity playing time – Natrona lost all 10 of its all-conference selections, all four of its all-state selections – coach Steve Harshman said he feels optimistic his team can still remain competitive with any team on its schedule.

The biggest difference, though, comes in senior class size. Last year's senior class was large; this year's senior class, by Natrona standards, is small, only 15 players deep.

However, the Mustangs have familiarity on their side. Last year, Natrona lost 13 of 14 all-conference selections. Yet the inexperienced players developed quickly and the Mustangs finished 8-3, reaching the Class 4A semifinals.

Harshman said toughness made the difference. Natrona only out-gained teams by about 3 yards per game. The Mustangs' offense was ninth in the 10-team 4A in yards per game; its defense was third. Consequently, NC won some grind-it-out affairs: 16-0 against Cheyenne Central; 17-6 against Cheyenne East; 12-0 against Evanston; 20-14 against Kelly Walsh; 19-14 against Rock Springs.

"I think the key for us last year winning eight games was that we won five close ball games, several that we trailed in," Harshman said. "I think it was a testament to the toughness of our kids."

Most of those players are gone. The Mustangs return just two offensive starters – junior wideout Maeson Gallegos and senior lineman David Schall – and two defensive starters – senior linebackers Tom Robitaille and Lee Hedges.

Natrona lost its top four rushers and four of its top five receivers. Gallegos, who had 299 receiving yards, is the only returning player who reached triple digits in either rushing or receiving yards last season. Gallegos was also Natrona's leading kick and punt returner.

Robitaille finished fifth on the team in defensive points and is NC's leading returning defender, but the Mustangs lost seven of their top eight tacklers. Even so, Harshman said Natrona's inexperienced players play like experienced veterans because of preparation.

"We focus on our guys being great people, mentors, competitors and workers," he said. "If we do that, then our young people grow, mature and make the most of opportunities when they present themselves because they have prepared the right way."

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Mascot: Tigers
Division: 4A
Colors: Orange and black
Coach: David Hastings, 3rd season
2015 Record: 5-5, lost to Cheyenne East in state quarterfinals

Key Players
RB: Matt Fowler, Sr.
RB: Oaklan Jenkins, Sr.
RB/WR: Marcus Kalista, Sr.
LB: Isaac Huffman, Sr.

2016 Schedule
8-26: vs. Cheyenne East, 7 p.m.
9-2: at Laramie, 7 p.m.
9-9: vs. Kelly Walsh, 7 p.m.
9-16: at Cheyenne Central, 6 p.m.
9-23: vs. Sheridan, 7 p.m.
9-30: at Evanston, 7 p.m.
10-7: at Gillette, 7 p.m.
10-14: vs. Cheyenne South, 7 p.m.
10-21: vs. Natrona, 7 p.m.

Mascot: Broncos
Division: 4A
Colors: Blue and yellow
Coach: Don Julian, 10th season
2015 Record: 11-1, beat Gillette in state championship

Key Players
OL/DL: Jacob Hallam, Sr.
WR/DB: Coy Steel, Sr.
OL/DL: Blayne Baker, Jr.
WR/LB: Hayden Hastings, Sr.

2016 Schedule
8-26: vs. Laramie, 6 p.m.
9-2: at Kelly Walsh, 7 p.m.
9-9: vs. Evanston, 6 p.m.
9-16: at Cheyenne East, 6 p.m.
9-23: at Rock Springs, 7 p.m.
9-30: vs. Gillette, 7 p.m.
10-7: vs. Cheyenne Central, 6 p.m.
10-14: at Natrona, 7 p.m.
10-21: at Cheyenne South, 7 p.m.

Tigers expect continued growth

Close games defined Rock Springs’ 2015 season. Eight points or fewer decided eight of Rock Springs’ 10 games in 2015, and three were decided by one point.

The Tigers went 4-4 in those games, beating Laramie, Kelly Walsh, Evanston and Cheyenne South (combined record 9-27) by a combined 12 points but falling to Cheyenne East, Sheridan, Natrona and East again (combined record 20-6) by a combined 18 points, including 14-13 to East in the 4A quarterfinals.

The big takeaway: Rock Springs played close games with the best teams in 4A but also played close games with the worst teams in 4A.

Even so, Rock Springs finished with its best record since 2003 and improved significantly from its 1-8 record in 2014.

“We feel like we now need to take that next step and get a little further into the playoffs and go from there,” third-year coach David Hastings said. “... There’s

a lot higher expectations because of what we were able to do last year.”

Well, that and the Tigers’ significant number of key returners. Seniors Matt Fowler, Isaac Huffman and Marcus Kalista were all-conference selections last year; Fowler, the Tigers’ only returning all-state selection, ran for 1,293 yards and 18 touchdowns while gaining 5.9 yards per attempt.

But he’s got help, as the Tigers have their top three rushers back: Senior Oaklan Jenkins ran for 614 yards; Kalista ran for 536.

“The more we’re able to spread it around and use these athletes, the better we’ll be,” Hastings said.

Receivers don’t play a big role in the Tigers’ offense – the Tigers only completed 22 passes last season – but three of Rock Springs’ four players who caught a pass are back this year in Jenkins, Kalista and senior Kell Ransom. Ransom’s 107 receiving yards led the team last year.

Senior John Malland and jun-

ior Brian Mattinson will help lead the offensive line.

Defensively, the Tigers return significant experience: Huffman, Ransom and Kalista went 1-2-3 in defensive points. Huffman had eight tackles for loss to lead the team.

Most importantly, Hastings said he’s happy with his players’ commitment to improving during the offseason.

In part, the confidence boost the Tigers gained by winning close games and playing step-for-step with 4A’s top programs spurred that commitment.

“Any time you take over a program that’s down or has been down for a while, one of the biggest things is building that confidence and that belief you can win, and I think last year went a long way toward that, as far as believing what we can do and who we can play with,” Hastings said.

The Tigers’ task this fall is finding a way to win those close games against 4A’s best.

3A Preview

State Champs
Star Valley
Braves

2015 State Playoffs

State Championship

Star Valley 31, Green River 15

State Semifinals

Star Valley 42, Torrington 27

Green River 24, Jackson 15

State Quarterfinals

Torrington 38, Powell 24

Star Valley 35, Douglas 13

Jackson 44, Riverton 21

Green River 24, Buffalo 20

Four players to watch

Logan Harris, Torrington

In short, Harris is one of the state's top linemen. Harris was second for the Trailblazers in defensive points last year and notched a Class 3A-best 14 tackles for loss. He's just as valuable on offense.

Blake Waite, Green River

Last year's 3A West Defensive Player of the Year was the classification leader in defensive points last year. He was everywhere – 64 solo tackles and 69 assisted tackles proves that. As offenses turn their attention to him, his numbers may dip, but his presence will help open up opportunities for teammates.

T.J. Abraham, Powell

Not many players lead their teams in rushing, tackling, punt and kick returns and scoring in the same season. Usually, when they do, they're seniors. Abraham did that for the Panthers as a junior.

McCabe Smith, Star Valley

Smith leads the Braves' charge for a repeat title. A valuable piece of both the offensive and defensive lines, Smith led the Braves with 11 tackles for loss and four sacks a year ago.



Photo courtesy of Wyoming Tribune Eagle

Star Valley is eyeing a second consecutive 3A championship.

Star Valley looks for repeat

By Patrick Schmiedt

Four questions to answer

Can Star Valley defend its title even after losing its head coach? Yes. New coach McKay Young has been with the program for several years and has already proven himself a capable head coach, going 25-6 at Malad High in Idaho.

Does that mean Star Valley is the favorite to win the 3A title? Again: Yes. The Braves return enough talent – fronted by returning all-state selections Kellen Hansen, Collin McGinley and McCabe Smith – to make another successful run at a 3A championship.

Who's most likely to challenge the Braves for the throne? Douglas. Don't let the Bearcats' 3-6 record from 2015 deceive you. This team is loaded for 2016. The Bearcats return all three of their all-state choices and lost little to graduation. Watch out.

Anyone else in the mix? Definitely. Jackson, Torrington, Green River, Riverton and Buffalo have all been mentioned by 3A coaches as having what it takes to compete for a title. Green River in particular, thanks to its run to the title game with a junior-heavy squad in 2015, has the attention of 3A coaches across the state.

Four key games

Star Valley at Douglas, Sept. 16. The most intriguing nonconference game pits the defending champs on the road against a team in Douglas that returns almost every key player from a year ago.

Torrington at Riverton, Sept. 23.

It would be easy to look at both the Trailblazers and the Wolverines and say they're rebuilding. Far from it. Both have enough talent to compete for the East Conference title. The conference opener will be telling for both programs.

Jackson at Green River, Sept. 30. Jackson certainly hasn't forgotten how last season ended. The Broncos will be fired up for this rematch against the Wolves in a game that may be key in deciding home-field advantage in the playoffs.

Green River at Star Valley, Oct. 7. The regular-season game between these two last season came down to the final play. The state championship game rematch wasn't as thrilling. Even so, both teams will be on edge for this one, especially given their recent history.

Predicted order of finish

East Conference: Douglas, Riverton, Torrington, Buffalo, Rawlins, Lander.

West Conference: Star Valley, Green River, Jackson, Powell, Cody, Worland.

Way-too-early title-game score prediction

Star Valley 20, Douglas 14

The Braves will start as 3A's favorites, but not by much. They'll need to prove themselves every week. The fact that their coach has experience in the Star Valley system should make the transition easier than usual – and that gives the Braves the early edge.

Broncs have holes to fill

The Sheridan Broncos’ situation this fall is not a bad one to have.

Last year’s Class 4A champions lost a big group of seniors from that title team that finished 11-1 overall and avenged a loss earlier in the season to Gillette. The Broncos have another talented senior class ready to make their own mark, however.

At a relatively small 4A school like Sheridan, perpetual success is built on perpetual renewal – and the Broncos appear to have that pipeline of talent in place. Coach Don Julian has led seven teams to state championships as a head coach, and he said the success of the team that follows a championship team depends heavily on the incoming senior class avoiding an “inferiority complex.”

“Sometimes you’re able to really get a lot out of that class, (and) sometimes they just struggle with having to lead,” Julian said.

Julian said the initial approach of this year’s seniors “has been very, very good, that they’d kind of like to make a name for themselves in their own way. I like what I’m seeing so far.”

The losses to graduation were significant: Senior lineman Jacob Hallam is the only one of Sheridan’s seven all-state and eight all-conference players to return this season.

Senior Coy Steel injured his ACL midway through last season but still managed 333 receiving yards and six touchdowns. He’ll be the Broncos’ leading returning receiver.

Junior Kyle Custis ran for 341 yards and is by far the Broncos’ leading returning rusher. He is the only Bronc player returning this fall who had more than four carries last season.

Only two of Sheridan’s top 10 tacklers return. Hallam was fifth on the team in defensive points, and senior Hayden Hastings was eighth.

However, Sheridan benefits in other ways from its usual deep playoff runs by gaining additional weeks of practice late in the year other teams don’t.

“I think the fact that we’ve been able to play late in the year adds to the experience level of next year’s team,” Julian said.

Additionally, Julian said Sheridan is constantly trying to put younger players in varsity situations to build depth – a strategy implemented to offset Sheridan’s lack of pure numbers of players. With that in mind, Julian said this year’s seniors and juniors will have more experience than it appears.

Seniors like Drew Boedecker, Jacek Aksamit, Zach Gale, Derek Vela and Andrew Boint and juniors like Aaron Sessions and Connor Jorgenson should be ready to step in on Friday nights.

However, Julian and his staff constantly remind players that the journey is more important than the destination. Sheridan works on renewal 365 days a year with his players, not just on game days.

“We are continually talking about process with our kids,” Julian said. “It’s not about this Friday night. It’s about a process instead of results.”



Mascot: Bison
Division: 3A
Conference: East
Colors: Black and gold
Coach: Rob Hammond, 5th year
2015 Record: 4-5, lost to Green River in state quarterfina

Key Players

OL/DL: Caden Milmine, Sr.
OL/DL: Tanner Verplancke, Sr.
RB/LB: Ray Rabou, Jr.
QB/LB: Jon Schultze, Jr.

2016 Schedule

8-27: vs. Lovell, 1 p.m. (Zero Week)
9-2: at Cody, 7 p.m.
9-9: vs. Powell, 7 p.m.
9-16: vs. Worland, 7 p.m.
***9-23:** at Rawlins, 7 p.m.
***9-30:** vs. Lander, 7 p.m.
***10-7:** at Riverton, 7 p.m.
***10-14:** vs. Torrington, 6 p.m.
***10-21:** at Douglas, 6 p.m.
*** Conference game**

Bison will rely on ground game

Buffalo will go by a new name this season: Pound Town.

While other programs across the state have switched to zone-read spread formations, the Bison will put their hands in the dirt and run right at their opponents.

The Bison know if they can pound the ball at four yards a pop, they'll win a lot of games.

"Four of five yards (per play), that's winning football," coach Rob Hammond said.

The Bison, one of Class 3A's thinner teams, adopted that mentality last year as a way to shorten games and maximize talent.

The payoff: Buffalo earned its first home playoff game since 2010 and broke a string of back-to-back one-win seasons.

"They started to see that's

winning football and that's how you win a game in the fourth quarter," Hammond said. "... (After a four-yard gain) they run back to the huddle like they just beat the world. We're not going to change that mindset."

The Bison will rely on an experienced and competitive group of offensive linemen to continue that mentality. Buffalo returns four offensive starters, and all four are linemen.

That group includes seniors Caden Milmine, Buffalo's only returning all-state selection; Tanner Verplancke, who was an all-conference pick last year; and junior Devin Matthews.

"That should be our strength this year is on the line," Hammond said. "They're just a bunch of blue-collar, physical kids."

Conversely, inexperienced

players will fill most other positions.

Junior Ray Rabou ran for 399 yards last year and will be Buffalo's leading returning rusher. However, the Bison lost four of their top five rushers, their quarterback and their top four receivers to graduation.

Hammond said he will rely on several sophomores and juniors to fill those spots. He said those players showed potential at team camps last summer but still have to prove themselves in the fall.

"They're ultra talented and the future's bright, but when you put them out that sophomores, you don't know how they're going to respond," he said. "... You put them out there and you have high hopes... but I don't think you can ever be ready."

On defense, the Bison return five starters. Milmine was third on the team in defensive points last year and led the Bison with 11 tackles for loss. Senior Shad Hepp was fifth on the team in defensive points, while Verplancke was seventh and senior Ethan Richins was 10th.

Overall, Hammond said the efforts of his players are finally starting to show on the scoreboard.

"You put the work in, the rewards will come, and when you aren't winning, those messages aren't heard or (players) aren't as receptive," he said.

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Tigers looking to notch a win

Lander's long rebuilding process finally has a light at the end of the tunnel.

After 17 consecutive losses, Lander may have the talent and the ability to turn the program around this fall.

For third-year coach John Rounds, the path to success is simple: Rely on the players who don't get another chance.

"We have a solid group of seniors who are motivated to turn things around," he said. "Their leadership will make or break our upcoming season."

With seven returning starters on both offense and defense, the Tigers have more experience than they've ever had in Rounds' tenure.

Lander has back its quarterback, top rusher, top five receivers and nine of its top 12 tacklers.

And optimism is high.

"Many players are taking ownership of the team and working very hard to ensure we have a better season," Rounds said. "We started last year with 67 players and finished the season with 64. Our kids have not quit or given up. They are in this from start to finish."

"There was definitely frustration with the final results in games last year. However, the team was able to see areas where they improved and areas where they need to improve. Film doesn't sugar-coat anything and we need to get better in all phases of the game."

Both sides of the ball need work: The Tigers only scored four touchdowns last season and were outscored 367-29.

Even so, Rounds said off-season motivation has been good

and weight room and camp participation encouraging. And those players have a better mental understanding of the game, too.

"Due to returners experience, we do have a higher football IQ, which allows us progress further than we have," Rounds said.

Offensively, Lander is set at skill positions.

Senior Noah Knell threw for 526 yards last season and returns under center, and Lander's top five receivers – including seniors Ryan Connell (208 receiving yards), Patrick Hickerson (113) and Anthony Schaff (97) – all come back as well; however, Lander did not have a passing touchdown last season.

Junior DeAndre Velarde was Lander's leading rusher last year.

However, Rounds said the offensive line lost most of its starters and will need some rebuilding.

Defensively, Lander's top three tacklers return in Connell, senior Sam Rodgers and senior Jim Fehringer.

Schaff, Hickerson, Velarde, junior Brody Dempster and seniors Treyton Martinsen and Josh Reed were all among Lander's top 12 tacklers last year, and both Hickerson and Rodgers were all-conference selections a year ago.

"This season is going to be about how good we can be at the basics," Rounds said. "... If we can perfect a few things, we will be far better than being mediocre at a lot of things."



Mascot: Tigers
Division: 3A
Conference: East
Colors: Green and black

Coach: John Rounds, 3rd year at Lander
2015 Record: 0-8

Key Players

FB/LB: Sam Rodgers, Sr.
WR/DB: Patrick Hickerson, Sr.
WR/RB/LB: Ryan Connell, Sr.
QB/DB: Noah Knell, Sr.

2016 Schedule

8-26: vs. Thermopolis, 6 p.m. (Zero Week)
9-2: at Worland, 7 p.m.
9-9: at Jackson, 7 p.m.
9-16: vs. Cody, 7 p.m.
***9-23:** vs. Douglas, 7 p.m.
***9-30:** at Buffalo, 7 p.m.
***10-7:** vs. Torrington, 7 p.m.
***10-14:** at Rawlins, 7 p.m.
***10-21:** vs. Riverton, 7 p.m.
*** Conference game**



Mascot: Bearcats
Division: 3A
Conference: East
Colors: Blue and red
Coach: Jay Rhoades, 11th year at Douglas
2015 Record: 3-6, lost to Star Valley in quarterfinals

Bearcats will be long in the tooth

In 10 years as Douglas' head coach, Jay Rhoades had never had a losing season.

Until 2015. The Bearcats finished 3-6, Douglas' first losing season since Rhoades became coach in 2006.

Though Douglas finished below .500, Rhoades still came away from last season satisfied with the progress of his players.

"There's different ways to measure success, but unfortunately in our society it's always kind of measured on your wins and losses," Rhoades said. "... Every game, we learned something. Finishing up the way we

did at Star Valley (in a quarterfinal loss) and playing a very, very tough team the way we did, that's what I want to take away."

Rhoades said Douglas' two games against the eventual state champions epitomized the season. In the first, the Braves blew away the Bearcats 66-21. In the second, the Bearcats played tough, trailing only 21-13 after three quarters before eventually losing 35-13.

"The strides we made from the first game versus Star Valley to the second game were huge," Rhoades said. "At the end of the season, I felt really good about where we were at."

And almost everyone is back. Led by a senior class that could be as deep as 20 players, Douglas returns 10 offensive starters and nine defensive starters, including all three of its all-state selections in seniors Zach Hoopman, Eric Jamerman and Gage Pitt.

The Bearcats also get back six of their seven seven all-conference picks; seniors Thomas Bolinger, Talon Howard and Ty Larson joined the all-state choices on the all-conference team.

It doesn't end there. Rhoades said the number of underclassmen who played significant minutes last season helped create depth.

Key Players

WR/DB: Gage Pitt, Sr.
RB/LB: Zach Hoopman, Sr.
WR/DB: Eric Jamerman, Sr.
QB: Ty Larson, Sr.

"(We're) a little thin at line-backer, but (at) pretty much every other position we have good depth," Rhoades said.

Douglas returns its top five tacklers in Hoopman, junior Brandon Henry, Howard, Jamerman and junior Michael Yeaman. Pitt, senior Mark Vandeventer and senior Tyrel Leman will also have key roles to fulfill on defense.

On offense, the Bearcats return basically every key player. Larson threw for 1,564 yards and 21 touchdowns. Pitt and Jamerman were a potent one-two receiving punch, combining for 56 catches,

2016 Schedule

8-26: at Wheatland jamboree, 6:30 p.m.
9-2: vs. Powell, 6 p.m.
9-9: at Cody, 6 p.m.
9-16: vs. Star Valley, 6 p.m.
***9-23:** at Lander, 7 p.m.
***9-30:** at Torrington, 7 p.m.
***10-7:** vs. Rawlins, 7 p.m.
***10-14:** at Riverton, 7 p.m.
***10-21:** vs. Buffalo, 6 p.m.
*** Conference game**

1,046 yards and 18 touchdowns in numbers that were split nearly down the middle.

Hoopman led Douglas with 563 rushing yards and four touchdowns.

And the offensive line returns four of its five starters, with

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Bolinger and seniors Chandler Back, Jacob Hertz and Daniel Maidl leading the way.

Rhoades said he's challenged his line to develop their physical

skills and aggressiveness.

"We've got to establish our run game again like we have in the past," Rhoades said. "We weren't able to do that last year."



Mascot: Outlaws
Division: 3A
Conference: East
Colors: Red and black
Coach: Corey Wheeler, 3rd year at Rawlins
2015 Record: 2-6, did not qualify for playoffs

2016 Schedule

8-26: vs. Moffat County, Colo., 7 p.m. (Zero Week)
 9-2: vs. Lyman, 7 p.m.
 9-9: at Green River, 7 p.m.
 9-16: at Jackson, 7 p.m.
 *9-23: vs. Buffalo, 7 p.m.
 *9-30: vs. Riverton, 7 p.m.
 *10-7: at Douglas, 7 p.m.
 *10-14: vs. Lander, 7 p.m.
 *10-21: at Torrington, 6 p.m.
 * Conference game

Outlaws seek consistency

The Rawlins football program has been locked in a Sisyphean struggle of seeing its progress wiped away at the end of every season.

With just two winning seasons the past 29 years, Rawlins still has work to do to develop its program into one capable of perpetual success.

The Outlaws saw this firsthand last season. After finishing 4-5 in 2014 and entering 2015 with high expectations, Rawlins fell back to 2-6 in 2015.

The slip was a painful lesson for the Outlaws in how to build

"Our kids have not given up. They are in this from start to finish."

~ **Coach Corey Wheeler**

a winning program.

"(The) biggest difference in my opinion was our senior leadership and lack of commitment to the little things, such as offseason weight training," third-year coach Corey Wheeler said. "I believe the biggest lesson was that we had

one good year and to remain in the mix of 3A you have to put in the work year-round and not expect success after prior success."

While the victories weren't there, the progress was. Rawlins held its own against 3A run-

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Key Players

FB/DL: J.D. Smith, Sr.
 QB/LB: Trey Young, Sr.
 RB/LB: Damon Taylor, So.
 WR/DB: C. Garlington, Sr.

ner-up Green River, 3A West champion Jackson and perpetual contender Douglas; the 29-26 loss to Douglas kept Rawlins from making the playoffs.

"We believe those are three games we should have won and need to win to be a top team in 3A," Wheeler said. "I believe our players finally are realizing we can compete with the top teams in 3A. But we must finish those close games and come out with victories."

Success in 2016 will center on eight returning starters on defense and the return of the top rusher and receiver on offense.

Senior Trey Young, Rawlins' only all-state selection last year, will likely move from receiver to quarterback this year. A player Wheeler called "the most coachable kid I've ever coached," Young brings a run-pass versatility to the position that might inspire some scheme changes on offense.

Sophomore Damon Taylor, who led

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the Outlaws with 582 rushing yards and also had 18 catches for 226 yards, returns to anchor Rawlins' backfield, while senior Colton Garlington, who led Rawlins with 49 catches for 640 yards, will lead the way for the receiving corps.

On defense, Rawlins returns exactly half of its top 10 tacklers. Senior J.D. Smith, an all-conference selection, was Rawlins' top tackler a year ago and returns to anchor the defensive line. Young was second, while Taylor, Garlington, senior linebacker Jeremiah Nicholson and junior linebacker Tristan Mikesell also will be key on defense.

Now that Rawlins' players have begun to understand how to buy into the program's development, Wheeler's optimism is high.

"I do believe with the commitment our kids have shown this spring and summer we will put our best product since I've taken over on the field this fall," Wheeler said.

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Mascot: Wolverines
Division: 3A
Conference: East
Colors: Cardinal and white
Coach: Pat Patterson, 4th year at Riverton
2015 Record: 5-4, lost to Jackson in state quarterfinals

Key Players

WR: Teron Doebele, Sr.
QB: Brady Fullerton, Sr.
WR/CB: Kyren Higgs, Sr.
OL/DT: Hunter Lee, Sr.

2016 Schedule

8-26: at Cody, 7 p.m.
9-2: vs. Green River, 7 p.m.
9-9: at Star Valley, 7 p.m.
9-16: at Powell, 7 p.m.
***9-23:** vs. Torrington, 6 p.m.
***9-30:** at Rawlins, 7 p.m.
***10-7:** vs. Buffalo, 7 p.m.
***10-14:** vs. Douglas, 7 p.m.
***10-21:** at Lander, 7 p.m.
*** Conference game**

Wolverines look for balance

The dichotomy of the Riverton football team is easy to spot. Great offense.

Questionable defense. "When we look back on what we've done since I've been here, every year we've improved offensively," said coach Pat Patterson, who's entering his fourth year with the Wolverines this fall. "... We just haven't been that stout on defense, so this year we've put a lot of emphasis on improving on defense."

The stats illustrate that gap between what the Wolverines accomplish on both sides of the ball.

Riverton's offense (410.4 yards per game) was one of the best in Class 3A; its defense (379.2 yards allowed per game) was second-worst in the classification.

In part, Riverton's struggles on defense are tied to its offensive success; the offense moves so efficiently that the defense has to play more.

Patterson admitted he put his emphasis as the head coach on the offense. This year, though,

Riverton's practices will start with defense.

The focus is clear for the Wolverines.

"We've got to be a better defensive team," Patterson said. "We put up a lot of yards, but we give up a lot of yards."

Senior Matthew Reinig is Riverton's leading returning tackler, but he is the only one of Riverton's top six tacklers to come back. Also, Reinig was injured during the wrestling season and sat out most of the spring and summer, although Patterson said he expects Reinig to be at full strength in time for the season.

Offensively, the Wolverines return a bevy of weapons for its passing attack but will need to replace a 1,000-yard rusher in Steven Reinig and a nearly 2,000-yard passer in Brayden Draper.

However, Teron Doebele, Riverton's lone returning all-state selection, returns to lead what might be the best receiving corps in Class 3A.

Doebele, senior Brady Fullerton, senior Kyren Higgs

and senior Kylan Shultz were Riverton's top four receivers last year; Doebele's 40 catches, 821 yards and five touchdowns were team highs.

Patterson said Fullerton will likely move to quarterback this season, while senior Nic Fenton will anchor the backfield and junior Brodie Roden will see time in the backfield and as a wideout.

Meanwhile, senior Hunter Lee, a three-year starter who checks in at 6 feet 3 inches tall and nearly 270 pounds, will lead both the offensive and defensive lines.

Patterson said his job this summer will be to find players to fill the holes the team has, particularly in the front seven defensively.

"That's our job, we're kind of talent scouts," Patterson said. "We've got to find the kids that can play and match your system to what they do best. That's kind of the beauty of high school football."

If that happens, Riverton's frustrating dichotomy may disappear.

Blazers running with favorites

For the better part of two decades, Torrington has not been the team other programs circle on their schedules as the team to beat.

That might change now.

The Trailblazers won their first outright conference championship since 1994 last year, sweeping through the Class 3A East Conference without a loss.

Although Torrington lost a big part of its core to graduation, the name "Torrington" will likely be circled on schedules this year thanks to a talented and diverse group of returning players – players who will be in a unique situation.

"I think it'll be interesting to see how the guys respond to having a target on their backs," coach Mark Lenhardt said. "They've always just been the underdog."

"That's only going to make us better in the long run. Higher expectations is what we wanted when we started."

The Trailblazers lost 10 seniors – including their quarterback, their top three rushers, three offensive linemen and eight of their top 10 tacklers – to graduation.

In particular, Torrington must find a way to replace Skyler Miller, who ran for 1,657 yards and was also the Trailblazers' leading tackler.

Senior lineman Logan Harris, who was a Casper Star-Tribune Super 25 first-team selection last year, is the only one of Torrington's five all-state players to return this fall. Harris, who checks in at 6 feet 3 inches tall and 280 pounds, was second on the team in defensive points and led the squad by far with 14 tackles for loss.

However, Harris is the only one of Torrington's

"I think it'll be interesting to see how the guys respond to having a target on their backs. They've always just been the underdog."

~ Coach Mark Lenhardt

ton's top four tacklers to return.

Junior Nathan Stitt was an all-conference choice and was Torrington's leading receiver last year, catching 23 passes for 396 yards and five touchdowns. He was also fifth on the team in defensive points and tops on the squad with five interceptions.

Senior Tristan Demott, who ran for 118 yards in 2015, is Torrington's leading returning rusher, while junior Jake Wamboldt and seniors Lane Johnson, Aaron Loya and Brandon Flores – who all come in above 220 pounds – will be key with Harris on the line.

Senior Bo Moorehouse is also a versatile offensive weapon either out of the backfield or split wide, and junior Breyden Bivens is set to take the reins at quarterback.

Lenhardt said he has learned that a roster of 70 players is unlikely. Instead, coaches target the 10 or 15 best athletes in each class.

Once students join the program, Lenhardt said, they know they need to put in the requisite time to improve.

"There's no substitute for hard work," Lenhardt said. "That's one of the nice things of being in a blue-collar community like Torrington is that they're not afraid to work."

That's how Torrington got to where it is today – circled.



Mascot: Trailblazers
Division: 3A
Conference: East
Colors: Maroon and gold
Coach: Mark Lenhardt, 6th year at Torrington
2015 Record: 9-1, lost to Star Valley in state semifinals

Key Players

OL/DL: Logan Harris, Sr.
WR/DB: Nathan Stitt, Jr.
OL/DL: Jake Wamboldt, Jr.
WR/DB: Bo Moorehouse, Jr.

2016 Schedule

8-26: at Glenrock jamboree, 5 p.m. (Zero Week)
9-2: at Wheatland, 7 p.m.
9-9: vs. Worland, 7 p.m.
9-16: vs. Green River, 7 p.m.
***9-23:** at Riverton, 6 p.m.
***9-30:** vs. Douglas, 7 p.m.
***10-7:** at Lander, 7 p.m.
***10-14:** at Buffalo, 6 p.m.
***10-21:** vs. Rawlins, 6 p.m.
*** Conference game**

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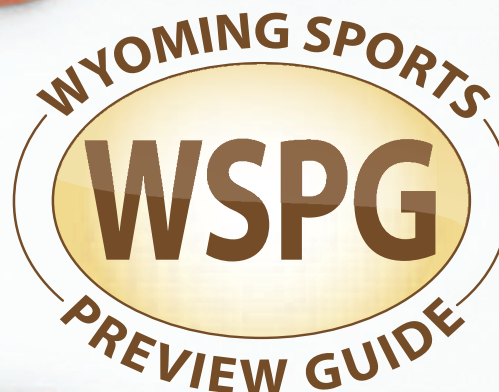
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Mascot: Broncos
Division: 3A
Conference: West
Colors: Blue and gold
Coach: Matt McFadden, 4th year
2015 Record: 3-5, did not qualify for playoffs

2016 Schedule
8-26: vs. Riverton, 7 p.m.
9-2: vs. Buffalo, 7 p.m.
9-9: vs. Douglas, 6 p.m.
9-16: at Lander, 7 p.m.
***9-23:** at Star Valley, 6 p.m.
***9-30:** vs. Worland, 7 p.m.
***10-7:** at Jackson, 6 p.m.
***10-14:** vs. Green River, 7 p.m.
***10-21:** at Powell, 7 p.m.
*** Conference game**

Broncs will be experienced

Cody had the most deceptive finish in Class 3A last year.

The defending Class 3A champions started their season 3-0 but crashed hard in West Conference play, losing all five conference games to finish out of playoff consideration.

Yet the crash wasn't as bad as it looked. Cody actually out-gained its opponents by about 37 yards per game and its defense ranked second in 3A in yards allowed per game (226.9).

In the process, a bunch of young players earned valuable experience after being forced into action by injuries higher on the depth chart.

"With sophomores comes a steep learning curve," coach Matt McFadden said. "We were in many games and played with tremendous effort but were not as strong mentally or physically as we needed to be."

Now, those sophomores are experience-rich juniors, and

"Our offseason commitment has been terrific."

~ **Coach Matt McFadden**

with what McFadden called "a committed but small senior class" ahead of them, a lot of the Broncos' success this year will depend heavily on those younger players.

They'll be ready, McFadden said.

"Most are 10-20 pounds heavier and significantly stronger and faster," he said. "Many of them were forced into a starting role, in some cases on both sides of the ball. For most it was baptism by fire."

Senior lineman Brennen "Bubby" Blaylock was an all-conference selection last year, and he joins fellow senior Brandon Nash in leading the Broncos on both the offensive and defensive lines.

Another senior, Matt Lovera, is in line to take over at quarterback, and senior Billy Walbert is the only one of Cody's top four tacklers to return this year.

From there, more or less, juniors will carry the load.

Juniors Jacob Deardorff (181 rushing yards), Jordan Wasia (177) and Brady Erickson (141) are Cody's leading returning rushers; the Broncos lost their top three rushers.

Junior Reese Andre, with

Key Players

QB: Matt Lovera, Sr.
OL/DL: Bubby Blaylock, Sr.
OL/DL: Brandon Nash, Sr.
LB: Billy Walbert, Sr.

111 yards on nine catches, is Cody's leading returning receiver. Junior lineman Ian Crawford notched a team-high 10 tackles for loss last year. Junior linemen Peter Kleeson and Matt Skinner will be essential up front.

"Our offseason commitment has been terrific," McFadden said. "We had a great winter and spring in the weight room and most of our athletes competing in two or more sports. We have had a strong buy-in to our leadership program, meeting two to three times a month to become team leaders."

While the Broncos are still smarting from the fall from state champion to conference cellar-dweller, McFadden said his players learned important lessons.

"You can't lean on what you accomplished previous year just as you can't let a down year define the next year," he said. "Each year you have to go out and establish yourself and your identity."

Wolves could be dangerous squad

More than anything, desperation motivated Green River last season.

The Wolves needed to win both of their last two games just to make the playoffs. A couple tweaks to the personnel, a couple scheme changes, the motivation of needing to win out... it all coalesced into a storied end-of-season run.

The Wolves won those two games they needed to win to make the playoffs. Then they beat Buffalo, in Buffalo, in the quarterfinals. Then they beat Class 3A West Conference champion Jackson, in Jackson, in the semifinals.

Less than a month after being left for dead at 2-4, the Wolves were in the 3A championship game.

"Our seniors had endured two difficult seasons and were determined to finish well," Maggi said. "That is what we did by continuing to work hard and believing in ourselves when nobody else did."

No one will make the same mistake of leaving the Wolves for dead this year.

With eight offensive and six defensive starters returning – including four players who were all-conference selections last year, tied with Star Valley for the most in the 3A West – Green River is one of the most dangerous teams in 3A this fall.

"I do think that we have carried some momentum from last

"Our seniors had endured two difficult seasons and were determined to finish well. That is what we did by continuing to work hard and believing in ourselves when nobody else did."

~ **Coach Don Maggi**

season," Maggi said. "The weight room has been hopping and participation in spring ball and team camp was great."

Seniors Blake Waite and Hunter Spartz were all-state selections last year.

Waite, the reigning 3A West defensive player of the year, led Class 3A in defensive points last season, notching 64 solo tackles, 69 assists and nine tackles for loss.

Spartz, meanwhile, helps anchor both the offensive and defensive lines.

Junior Chance Hofer and senior Drew Wilson were both all-conference picks.

Wilson, who ran for 445 yards, is Green River's leading returning rusher; Hofer had 209 receiving yards and Wilson had 109.

Junior Candon Croft is Green River's leading returning receiver with 303 yards. He added 420 rushing yards.

Wilson was fourth on the team in defensive points, but Waite and Wilson are the only two of Green River's top six tacklers to return this year.

Juniors Chance Anderson and Cole White finished seventh and eighth in defensive points, with White's three interceptions tied with Hofer for tops on the team. Hofer also had a team-high six pass breakups.

Offensively, the Wolves will have to find a way to replace all-state quarterback Tyler Vendetti, who led the team in rushing and passing last year; Maggi said both Hofer and White are in the running for that spot.

"In many ways, we will be more difficult to defend as we will have an increased ability to spread the ball around to some talented skill players," Maggi said.



Mascot: Wolves
Division: 3A
Conference: West
Colors: Green and white
Coach: Don Maggi, 6th year
2015 Record: 6-5, lost to Star Valley in state championship

Key Players

OG/LB: Blake Waite, Sr.
OT/DE: Hunter Spartz, Sr.
RB/LB: Drew Wilson, Sr.
QB/WR/DB: Chance Hofer, Jr.

2016 Schedule

8-26: Green River jamboree, TBD
9-2: at Riverton, 7 p.m.
9-9: vs. Rawlins, 7 p.m.
9-16: at Torrington, 7 p.m.
***9-23:** vs. Powell, 7 p.m.
***9-30:** vs. Jackson, 7 p.m.
***10-7:** at Star Valley, 7 p.m.
***10-14:** at Cody, 7 p.m.
***10-21:** vs. Worland, 6 p.m.
*** Conference game**



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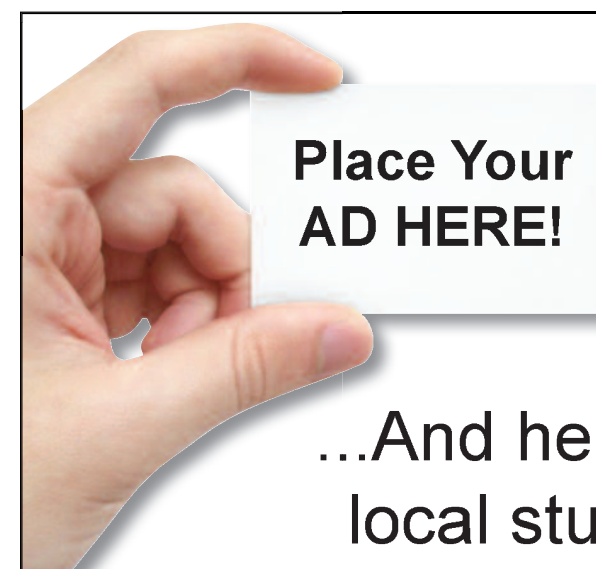
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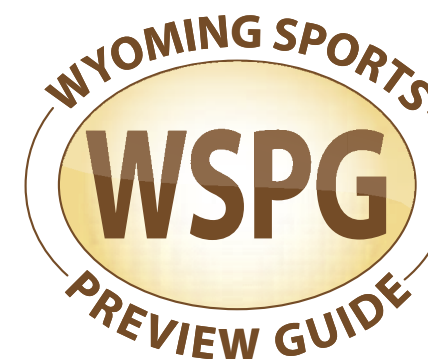
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Mascot: Broncos

Division: 3A

Conference: West

Colors: Orange and black

Coach: James Howell, 7th year

2015 Record: 9-2, lost to Green River in state semi-finals

Key Players

FB/DE: Ronnie Kaye, Jr.

C/LB: Brayden Gaston, Sr.

QB/CB: Erich Elzemeyer, Sr.

OT/DT: Vinny Caffaro, Sr.

2016 Schedule

9-2: at Sugar-Salem, Idaho, 7 p.m.

9-9: vs. Lander, 7 p.m.

9-16: vs. Rawlins, 7 p.m.

***9-23:** at Worland, 6 p.m.

***9-30:** at Green River, 7 p.m.

***10-7:** vs. Cody, 6 p.m.

***10-14:** at Powell, 6 p.m.

***10-21:** vs. Star Valley, 7 p.m.

*** Conference game**

Broncs will need to grow quickly

This year's Jackson football team will be younger and less experienced than last year's senior-laden team.

Where other programs might see that as a crisis, coach James Howell and the Broncos see a chance for redefinition.

And competition for those 11 spots on the field may bring out the best in the Broncos this fall.

"We have a lot of hard work ahead of us and have many players that are hungry to get varsity time," Howell said. "The young crew of players we have coming up are extremely excited to get their shot at playing varsity football."

Last year's Class 3A West Conference champions graduated 17 seniors and return just three starters on offense. On defense, the Broncos return four starters from a unit that led Class 3A in total defense last year, allowing just 211.9 yards per game.

The Broncos had six all-state players last year, but five were seniors, including Gatorade Player of the Year Theo Dawson, who took his 2,283 rushing yards and 27 touchdowns to the University of Wyoming. The only all-state player who was set to return, junior Josh Dawson, won't be with the program this year, Howell said.

Jackson loses its top seven tacklers, its top four rushers and three of its top four receivers from last year.

However, Howell has confidence in his younger squad this year.

"We do have many young players in our program with tremendous potential," he said. "We are excited to see what many of them can do as

"The young crew of players we have coming up are extremely excited to get their shot at playing varsity football."

~ Coach James Howell

they compete for starting roles."

Senior Erich Elzemeyer and junior Ronnie Kaye, all-conference selections last year, are both back. Elzemeyer threw for 923 yards and 11 touchdowns; Kaye, with 156 receiving yards and two TDs, is Jackson's leading returning receiver.

Senior linebacker Brayden Gaston will be Jackson's leading returning tackler; he was eighth on the team in defensive points last year. He also returns as a starter on offense, splitting time between center and fullback.

Senior lineman Vinny Caffaro will help anchor both the offensive and defensive lines, as will junior Said Jiminez.

Senior Alex Martinez, junior Adam Meadows and sophomore Spencer Berzey will be key on both sides of the ball, while senior kicker Lucas Shelton will give the Broncos a consistent special teams threat.

And Jackson is motivated to redefine itself after falling short in the semifinals last year, losing to Green River. The Broncos beat the Wolves 26-15 in the regular season, only to lose at home 24-15 in the playoffs.

"We were highly disappointed that we did not make the title game last year, Howell said. "Considering we beat the state champion (Star Valley), it was very frustrating."

But 2016 brings opportunity – disguised as inexperience.



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Mascot: Panthers

Division: 3A

Conference: West

Colors: Black and orange

Coach: Chanler Buck, 3rd

season at Powell
2015 Record: 4-6, lost to Torrington in state quarterfinals

Key Players

QB/FS: Mason Olsen, Sr.

RB/LB: T.J. Abraham, Sr.

TE/DE: Zach Easum, Sr.

WR/DB: Paige Gann, Sr.

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Panthers aren't one-man show

Powell's biggest asset this season will also be its biggest challenge.

Senior T.J. Abraham led the Panthers in rushing, tackling, punt and kick returns and scoring. He was an all-state selection and one of just six juniors named to the Casper Star-Tribune's Super 25 first team.

Now, the challenge for coach Chanler Buck and the rest of the Panthers is to find ways to stop teams from keying on Abraham – and to find ways to take pressure off their top players.

"We're not asking him to do it all, and we won't," Buck said. "That's something that we're very much aware of, and we're planning for it."

Abraham will be the focus, and Buck said Abraham has embraced the idea of spreading the responsibility. Buck said he hopes the approach will both allow Abraham to play to his potential while allowing the rest of the team to have confidence in each other.

That means finding ways to diversify on offense to mix pass and run plays. What form that takes – either play-action throws or more read option plays – remains to be seen.

"We've got to be able to do

2016 Schedule

8-26: at Miles City, Mont., 6 p.m. (Zero Week)

9-2: at Douglas, 6 p.m.

9-9: at Buffalo, 7 p.m.

9-16: vs. Riverton, 7 p.m.

***9-23:** at Green River, 7 p.m.

***9-30:** vs. Star Valley, 7 p.m.

***10-7:** at Worland, 7 p.m.

***10-14:** vs. Jackson, 6 p.m.

***10-21:** vs. Cody, 7 p.m.

*** Conference game**

both (passing and running)," Buck said. "We've got to be pretty dynamic on that side of the ball to be competitive."

Powell returns every player who rushed for at least 10 yards last year; Abraham ran for 987 yards and had a team-high 14 TDs, while senior Mason Olsen, who ran for 454 yards and threw for 531 last year, returns under center. Senior Page Gann, who was Powell's leading receiver with 13 catches for 165 yards, also returns.

Buck said the depth in the backfield might allow him to move some running backs to tight end positions to give the offense more flexibility.

"We'll be more versatile,"

Buck said.

Defensively, Abraham, senior Zach Easum and junior Max Gallagher were Powell's top three tacklers last year, and they're all back. Abraham led Powell with 33 solo tackles, 48 assists, four pass break-ups and three blocked kicks, while Easum, an all-conference choice, added team highs with six sacks, five tackles for loss and two fumble recoveries.

With those players returning, "you get that leadership and also that confidence on that side of the ball," Buck said.

Olsen and senior Brekyn Herd were also among the Panthers' top tacklers last year.

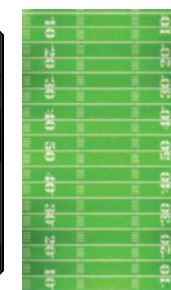
However, Buck said the Panthers' depth and experience on both the offensive and defensive lines, where Powell returns just two starters, will be a weakness – but not for long.

"They're bright football players and they'll be great leaders," Buck said.



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Braves want another crown

Watch out, Class 3A. Star Valley isn't satisfied. After winning their first state championship since 1996, the Braves feel like they're capable of winning it all again. With numerous key players from last year's run coming back this year and a senior class that might be as deep as 30 players, Star Valley has every reason to feel good entering the season.

But the Braves aren't complacent.

"I honestly feel like we are even hungrier this year," coach McKay Young said. "We know how sweet the taste is, and the boys want it again. ... They know what it takes to win it all, and they know that glory is fleeting."

Young, in his first year as Star Valley's head coach, has been on the Braves' coaching staff for the past four years as offensive coordinator.

He benefits from returning three all-state selections – seniors Kellen Hansen, Collin McGinley and McCabe Smith – the most in the 3A West and tied with Douglas for the most in 3A.

The holes are significant, though.

The Braves have to replace the school's all-time leading passer, four offensive linemen, a tight end, all but one starter on the defensive line and every starter in the defensive backfield.

"There's no way to sugar coat it; we have some pretty big shoes to fill on both sides of the

"I honestly feel like we are even hungrier this year."

~ Coach McKay Young



Key Players

OL/DL: McCabe Smith, Sr.

RB/LB: Collin McGinley, Sr.

RB/DB: Kellen Hansen, Sr.

WR/DB: Joey Swanson, Sr.

yards on 23 catches, a game-breaking 23 yards per catch. However, McCabe Smith is the only returning starter on the o-line.

Defensively, the Braves lost six of their top nine tacklers to graduation. Conner Smith, an all-conference choice a year ago, is Star Valley's leading returning tackler; he was third on the team in defensive points a year ago.

McCabe Smith was fifth but led the Braves with 11 tackles for loss and four sacks, while senior Hayden Erickson was seventh.

Star Valley also returns junior kicker Noah Hutchinson.

Now the trick for Young and Star Valley's staff is to keep the motivation going all season.

Fortunately for them, and unfortunately for every other team in 3A, they don't have to look far for inspiration.

"It was an incredible feeling to pull into Afton on top of the fire engines and see how happy the community was," Young said. "... I simply love these particular kids and feel extremely blessed to have the opportunity to be their coach."

ball," Young said.

Even so, the Braves are both talented and deep despite the losses.

Hansen is 3A's leading returning rusher. He piled up 1,264 yards – 114.9 per game – to rank fourth in the classification in yards per game.

Junior Hunter Jacobson added 819 yards despite missing time due to injury.

Senior Joey Swanson led the Braves with 530 receiving

Warriors are building tradition

When Worland took the field for its final game of the 2015 season against Green River, it did so with 18 players in uniform.

Meanwhile, the Green River sideline was filled with players; the deeper Wolves won 45-20.

Worland coach Todd Weber said Green River coach Don Maggi told him after the game Worland's sideline brought on déjà vu. Not long ago, Maggi's program was in the same position. Maggi reassured Weber after the loss that he was on the right track.

"He just said, 'Stay with it,' and all the 3A coaches I know have been super supportive," Weber said. "They've all gone through the same thing, and they all just say stay with it."

With limited depth, the Warriors finished 2-6 and missed the playoffs for the sixth consecutive year. However, Weber has higher expectations for his second season. Part of the reason for the optimism is simple: stability at the top.

Worland went through a stretch of five years with six different head coaches from 2011-15. Simply entering the offseason without doubt about who the coach will be has al-

Key Players

QB/DB: Talon Lloyd, Sr.

OL/DL: Nathan Kern, Sr.

RB/LB: Daniel Araiza, Sr.

OL/DL: Morgan Tigner, Jr.

ready paid off for the program.

"I've gotten to know some more people and the community support has always been there," Weber said. "With that coaching turnover, I think that really kind of set the program back, and I think that would be any program. But the community has been very supportive of what we're trying to do."

After ending with 18 players in uniform for the finale, Weber said he hopes to have 65-70 players this fall.

Senior Dan Araiza is the Warriors' only returning all-conference selection. He ran for a team-high 389 yards last year and was third on the team in tackles.

Seniors Kyle Lamb and Dylan White, the Warriors top two targets in the passing game, also return; Lamb had 17

catches for 260 yards and White 10 catches for 140 yards.

And senior quarterback Talon Lloyd, who threw for 462 yards last year, also returns.

Defensively, the Warriors lose three of their top five tacklers, but Araiza, senior Nathan Kern, Lloyd, Lamb, junior Dalton Jeffries, junior Matthew Sanchez, junior Morgan Tigner and White were all among Worland's top 11 tacklers last year.

Weber said his goal is simple: a playoff berth. And despite all the struggles the Warriors have had recently, they were only two points away from reaching that goal last year: a 14-12 loss to Powell in Week 6 was all that kept Worland out of the playoffs.

Weber said he sees just how close his program is to a breakthrough.

"There's tradition here," Weber said. "We've just kind of got to get it stirred back up again."



Mascot: Warriors
Division: 3A
Conference: West
Colors: Black and orange
Coach: Todd Weber, 2nd year
2015 Record: 2-6, did not qualify for playoffs

2016 Schedule

9-2: vs. Lander, 7 p.m.
9-9: at Torrington, 7 p.m.
9-16: at Buffalo, 7 p.m.
*9-23: vs. Jackson, 6 p.m.
*9-30: at Cody, 7 p.m.
*10-7: vs. Powell, 7 p.m.
*10-14: vs. Star Valley, 7 p.m.
*10-21: at Green River, 6 p.m.
* Conference game



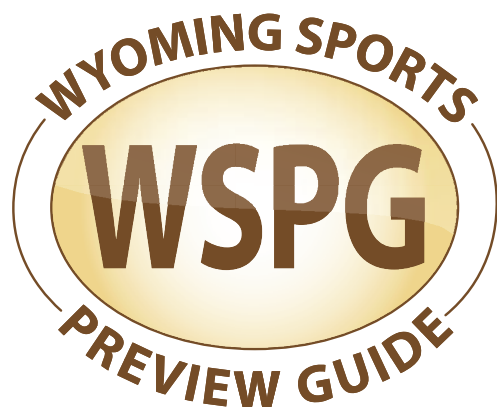
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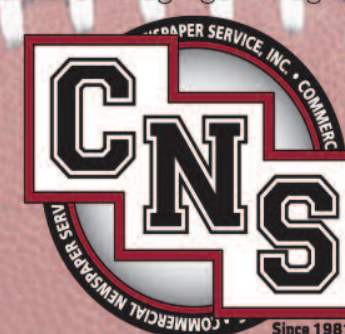
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2A Preview

State Champs

Wheatland Bulldogs

- 2015 State Playoffs

State Championship

Wheatland 22, Glenrock 8

State Semifinals

Wheatland 40, Greybull 0

Glenrock 13, Lovell 10

State Quarterfinals

Wheatland 70, Lyman 6

Greybull 27, Big Horn 25

Lovell 28, Thermopolis 14

Glenrock 37, Mountain View 0

- Four players to watch

Garrett Schwindt, Glenrock

Last year's 2A East Offensive Player of the Year ran for 1,341 yards and 14 touchdowns in 2015. With the Herders' Nos. 2 and 3 options in the running game lost to graduation, Schwindt will take on an even bigger role in Glenrock's option offense.

Dawson Forcella, Greybull

Forcella was one of the Buffs' top players on both offense and defense. He ran for 848 yards and 11 scores on one side of the ball and notched six tackles for loss, four pass breakups and an interception on the other.

Nolan McCafferty, Big Horn

McCafferty is the only returning 2A player who was on the Casper Star-Tribune's Super 25 first team last year. And it was mostly for his work on defense, where he was the Rams' leading tackler. However, look for McCafferty to also take on more responsibilities on offense this year, as well.
- Jaret Collins, Lovell

Collins was the 2A West Lineman of the Year last season and is back for his senior year. On a Lovell team that lost four of its top six tacklers to graduation, he will be called on to do even more to get the Bulldogs back to the top of the West.
-
- ## WHEATLAND DEFENDS
- The Wheatland Bulldogs were the favorites all season in 2015 with a senior-laded squad, but a new coach and plenty of turnover will provide challenges this season.
- Photo courtesy Wyoming Tribune Eagle
- # 2A has no clear favorite
- By Patrick Schmiedt
- ### Four questions to answer
- Defending champion Wheatland has to be the favorite, right? Well... no. The Bulldogs are restructuring, both with personnel and with new coach Tom Waring bringing a different approach. They'll still be in the hunt, but they won't be the favorites from Day 1 like they were last year.
- What team WILL be the favorite on Day 1? No one knows. Really. A strong case can be made for several teams – Greybull, Big Horn, Glenrock, Wheatland, Mountain View, Lovell – but no one team has a better case than any other.
- Is this surprising? No way. Not for Class 2A. Nine different programs have won the Class 2A title the past 10 years. Parity atop the classification has defined 2A for a decade, and this year appears no different.
- Surprise me: Which team has the best chance to come out of nowhere? Pinedale. The Wranglers have a new coach (Mitch Espeland) and a new approach. With nine starters back on both sides of the ball, the Wranglers might just be the surprise team of the classification.
- ### Four key games

Mountain View at Lyman, Sept. 9
- The Bridger Valley Bowl is now in Week 2. So, in addition to being the rivalry game, this game takes on the added dimension of being both programs' first conference game.
- #### Lovell at Greybull, Sept. 16
- Last year, this game was a squeaker; Lovell's 18-15 victory gave it the West Conference championship. The stakes for this year's game could be just as high.
- #### Glenrock at Wheatland, Sept. 23
- Games won't get much bigger than this. Rematch of last year's title game... regional rivals... contenders for the conference crown again... Yeah, this game has just about everything going for it.
- #### Big Horn at Wheatland, Oct. 21
- People tend to forget how efficiently and completely the Rams beat the Bulldogs last year. That's because the Bulldogs overcame the loss to win the state title. Even so, this Week 8 matchup should again have huge postseason implications.
- ### Predicted order of finish
- East Conference: Glenrock, Big Horn, Wheatland, Newcastle, Thermopolis, Burns, Moorcroft.
- West Conference: Greybull, Mountain View, Lovell, Pinedale, Lyman, Big Piney, Kemmerer.
- ### Way-too-early title game score prediction:
- #### Glenrock 20, Greybull 18
- The thing about the 2A playoffs this year? Every game could be decided by a single possession. Don't count on anyone running away with the championship this year.
- 2A EAST
- BIG HORN RAMS
- PAGE 25
- # Turnover ratio key for Rams
- One statistic defined both success and struggle for Big Horn in 2015. The Rams had a plus-18 turnover ratio, the best in Class 2A.
- However, in the biggest game of the season, Big Horn's turnover advantage disappeared, and the Rams' season ended early. The 27-25 quarterfinal loss to Greybull was the only time all season Big Horn had more turnovers than it forced.
- Forcing turnovers while protecting the ball is something coach Michael McGuire has emphasized since he took over in 2012.
- In 2014, the Rams were plus-10 in turnover ratio; they were a 2A-best plus-17 in 2013; they were plus-seven in 2012. In 2011, the year before McGuire showed up, the Rams were minus-15.
- "On the offensive side of the ball, we really, really stress taking care of the football," McGuire said.
- The loss to Greybull was a reminder of just how much turnover margin is a part of the team's success. This season, forcing turnovers on defense and preventing them on offense will again be
-
- an emphasis for Big Horn – a team that will likely be a contender for the Class 2A championship.
- The Rams return a pair of all-state selections in seniors Nolan McCafferty and Colton Williams. They also bring back five of their eight all-conference selections, as seniors Andrew Ratty, Tanner Warder and Colton Bates were all-conference picks in 2015. They are part of a group of seven seniors.
- McCafferty is Class 2A's leading returning tackler; he averaged more than 20 defensive points per game last year.
- Williams finished in the top 10 in Class 2A for both rushing and receiving yards; he ran for 1,069 yards and 16 touchdowns and also had 318 yards receiving. He led
- Class 2A with 22 touchdowns. Warder threw for 1,220 yards and had a 14-5 touchdown-to-interception ratio.
- "We have a big senior class coming up this year with a lot of leaders," McGuire said.
- The Rams also return the bulk of their defensive firepower in Williams, Bates, Ward, Rattay, junior Aidan McCurry and sophomores Kade Eisle, Seth Mullinax and Jaxon Parker.
- McGuire said Big Horn had four freshmen starting on the varsity level at times last season, and depth has slowly started to emerge. "They've really taken off for us," he said.
- Big Horn's strength is its speed – one of the things that helps the Rams compete with bigger, deeper teams. Big Horn is the smallest school in Class 2A, part of why the team puts so much emphasis on protecting the ball on offense and taking it away on defense.
- "We're not the biggest team, so we've got to do some things and force some turnovers," McGuire said. " ... It's something from day one that we start with."
- BURNS BRONCS
- 2A EAST
- # Broncs still dealing with depth issues
- Burns' good news: The Broncos return nine starters on both offense and defense.
- Burns' bad news: The Broncos didn't win a game last year.
- The team's fortunes in 2016 will rest on an experienced group of players; however, those players haven't had much success in the win-loss column.
- Part of the problem is depth: The Broncos didn't graduate many seniors in part because they didn't have many players, period.
- Coach Marv Mirich said Burns started four freshmen in varsity games last year, and this year's team, for better or worse, shapes up similarly.
- "Depth is always something we're going to fight here," Mirich said. "A good year here is going to be 35 (players). We're never going to get more than that."
- This year's team, though, could be a peek at what's to come.
- Mirich said he might have as many as 18 freshmen out this year, coming up from a junior high team that went undefeated last year.
- Even so, this team will in big part belong to senior Klayton
-
- Clark, Burns' only all-state player last year.
- Clark led Burns in rushing (588 yards, 6 touchdowns), passing (380 yards) and defensive points in 2015. His 51 solo tackles were a team-high, as were his two interceptions.
- Mirich said Clark has played at both quarterback and wide receiver, giving him a unique perspective under center.
- "He's got a pretty good grasp of what's going on," Mirich said. " ... He's going to have to know what's going on at the line of scrimmage."
- Senior linebacker Roman Delgado was Burns' No. 2 tackler, but Burns lost its next three top tacklers to graduation.
- Seniors Sam Sharpe and Isaac Ronning were also important cogs in the defense last year. However,
- Coach:** Michael McGuire, 5th year
2015 Record: : 7-2, lost to Greybull in state quarterfinals
- ### Key Players
- RB/LB:** Nolan McCafferty, Sr.
RB/S/KR: Colton Williams, Sr.
QB/S: Tanner Warder, Sr.
OL/LB: Andrew Ratty, Sr.
WR/DB: Colton Bates, Sr.
- Mascot:** Rams
Division: 2A
Conference: East
Colors: Maroon and yellow
2016 Schedule
- 8-27: Big Horn jamboree, 10 a.m. (Zero Week)
 - 9-2: vs. Lovell, 7 p.m.
 - *9-9: vs. Burns, 7 p.m.
 - 9-16: at Kemmerer, 7 p.m.
 - *9-23: vs. Newcastle, 6 p.m.
 - *9-30: at Glenrock, 6 p.m.
 - *10-7: vs. Thermopolis, 7 p.m.
 - *10-14: at Moorcroft, 7 p.m.
 - *10-21: at Wheatland, 6 p.m.
 - * Conference game

Mascot: Herders
Division: 2A
Conference: East
Colors: Purple and silver
Coach: Ray Kumpula, 22nd year
2015 Record: 8-3, lost to Wheatland in championship

Key Players

OT/DT: Logan Downs, Sr.
QB/TE/DE: Cooper Fargen, Sr.
RB/DB: Garrett Schwindt, Sr.
OG/LB: Kia Sexson, Jr.

2016 Schedule

8-26: Glenrock jamboree, 5 p.m. (Zero Week)
9-2: vs. Pinedale, 6 p.m.
***9-9:** vs. Thermopolis, 7 p.m.
***9-16:** at Newcastle, 7 p.m.
***9-23:** at Wheatland, 7 p.m.
***9-30:** vs. Big Horn, 6 p.m.
***10-7:** at Burns, 7 p.m.
10-14: at Lyman, 2 p.m.
***10-21:** vs. Moorcroft, 7 p.m.
* Conference game

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Herders back to their winning ways

Glenrock spent the 2015 season focusing on restoring its identity and legacy.

Consider both goals met.

The Class 2A runners-up last year, the Herders refocused their offense on executing their traditional double wing to perfection – re-establishing their hard-nosed identity in the progress.

At the same time, Glenrock proved itself to be one of 2A's top teams, a legacy it established in six title-game appearances between 2002 and 2009 but had fallen off recently, failing to reach the playoffs in 2013 and 2014.

"I think we really challenged the senior class last year to make us relevant again," longtime Glenrock coach Ray Kumpula said. "We had gone a couple years without the playoffs and we were nowhere where we needed to be in the upper echelon of our league."

Those seniors answered the challenge. They left behind an established set of traditions from which future teams will build.

"We kind of got away from what we had done with the double wing," Kumpula said, "and I think we just got back to that, and I think that legacy will help us going forward. We know who we are. We know what we do."

Glenrock led 2A in rushing (296 yards per game) and finished last in passing (20 ypg) last season, a combination that works on a team built on establishing control of the line of scrimmage.

The Herders executed a similar run of success

on the defensive side of the ball. The Herders finished second in Class 2A in both yards allowed (170.8) and points allowed (8.1) per game; they were second only to 2A champion Wheatland in both categories.

The Herders return three all-state players – the highest total in Class 2A – in seniors Logan Downs, Cooper Fargen and Garrett Schwindt.

In addition, all-conference picks Blake Hall and Kia Sexson also return.

Schwindt led Glenrock with 1,341 rushing yards and 14 touchdowns and also led the Herders in defensive points. He had a team-high 8.5 tackles for loss and also blocked two kicks.

Fargen was Glenrock's leading receiver with six catches for 101 yards, an expected limited role in Glenrock's run-oriented offense, and finished third on the team in defensive points.

The Herders did graduate three of their five top tacklers, including both linebackers, but still return a solid core of defenders. Downs was sixth on the team in defensive points, Hall seventh and Sexson eighth.

Offensively, Glenrock returns four of its five offensive linemen, "so that is going to be helpful in the double wing," Kumpula said.

The Herders should also be deeper: Glenrock lost six seniors to graduation but will likely have 12 players in both their senior and junior classes.

"It'll be a learning process for us more than a physical process for us," Kumpula said.

Wolves stepping up to 2A ranks

Perhaps no football program in the state has a bigger adjustment to make this season than Moorcroft.

Moorcroft is the only program in the state moving up a classification this year.

The move from Class 1A 11-man to Class 2A will be tough on the Wolves, who finished 1-7 last year.

For now, all Moorcroft's players and coaches can do is keep working, and that's the approach coach Dusty Petz is taking with his players.

"We're keeping kids in the weight room and keeping our nose to the grindstone," he said. "... It's definitely going to be an adjustment to 2A, with the different types of competition we're going to see night in and night out."

The Wolves' lone victory last year came over a struggling Wyoming Indian squad in Week 1.

Moorcroft had its chances but couldn't keep pace in close losses to Tongue River (26-16), Lusk (20-17), Southeast (22-14), the Gillette JV (21-14 in overtime) and Pine Bluffs (36-21).

Now, the Wolves will need to find their way in 2A after losing their quarterback, top three rushers, top three receivers and four of their top six tacklers to graduation.

Senior Chace Peterson, who had 314 passing yards, 69 receiving yards and 68 rushing yards last year, is Moorcroft's leading returner in all three categories; this year, his efforts will be concentrated at quarterback, Petz said.

However, the Wolves' line is experienced, with junior center Tucker Allison leading a group that's as good as Moorcroft has had in several years.

"It's definitely going to be an adjustment to 2A."

~ **Coach Dusty Petz**

"For so long, our line has been young," Petz said. "We've played a lot of freshmen and sophomores the past couple years, and now they're juniors and seniors."

"Going into what we are up in the 2A level, we're going to need to have some experience on the line and size as well in order to compete with those (schools)."

Allison, who was third on the team in defensive points and led the Wolves with 11 tackles for loss and three fumble recoveries, is also Moorcroft's leading returning tackler.

Senior Brett Wassberg was fifth on the team in defensive points last year, while classmate Trey Fischbach was seventh.

Petz said senior Rowdy Cranston, junior Solomon Petz and sophomore Grayson DeLarosa will have extended responsibilities this year on both sides of the ball.

Coach Petz said one of his primary goals is to develop enough depth to compete at 2A. He said he anticipates about 30 players, but only about five players apiece from the freshman and sophomore levels.

"We've just got to fill holes and learn on the go with some of those kids," Petz said.

Ultimately, this is simply one more adjustment in a season full of them.



Mascot: Wolves
Division: 2A East
Conference: East
Colors: Green and white
Coach: Dusty Petz, 3rd year
2015 Record: 1-7, did not qualify for playoffs

Key Players

QB/DE: Chace Peterson, Sr.
C/NT: Tucker Allison, Jr.
RB/CB: Rowdy Cranston, Sr.
FB/DE: Solomon Petz, Jr.

2016 Schedule

8-27: at Big Horn jamboree, 10 a.m. (Zero Week)
9-2: vs. Lusk, 7 p.m.
***9-9:** vs. Newcastle, 7 p.m.
***9-16:** at Burns, 6 p.m.
***9-23:** vs. Thermopolis, 6 p.m.
9-30: at Lovell, 7 p.m.
***10-7:** at Wheatland, 7 p.m.
***10-13:** vs. Big Horn, 7 p.m.
***10-21:** at Glenrock, 7 p.m.
* Conference game

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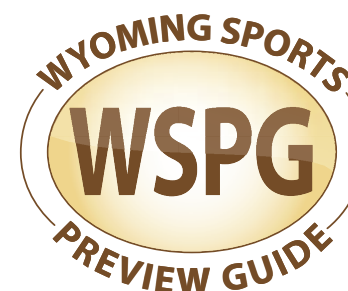
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Mascot: Dogies
Division: 2A
Conference: East
Colors: Orange and black
Coach: Matt Conzelman, 8th year
2015 Record: : 3-6, did not qualify for playoffs

Key Players

QB/LB: Triston Roberson, Sr.
RB/DB: Preston Rushton, Sr.
OL/DL: Bryce Womack, Sr.
OL/DL: James Lewis, Sr.

2016 Schedule

8-26: at Custer, S.D., 7 p.m. (Zero Week)
9-2: vs. Upton-Sundance, 7 p.m.
***9-9:** at Moorcroft, 7 p.m.
***9-16:** vs. Glenrock, 7 p.m.
***9-23:** at Big Horn, 6 p.m.
***9-30:** vs. Wheatland, 7 p.m.
10-7: at Big Piney, 3 p.m.
***10-14:** at Thermopolis, 6 p.m.
***10-21:** vs. Burns, 6 p.m.
*** Conference game**

Dogies now expect success

Expectations have been forever changed for the Newcastle football team. A decade ago, a 3-6 season would have been successful.

Now, 3-6 is a disappointment. That 3-6 finish the Dogies had in 2015 marked the first time in five years that Newcastle missed the playoffs and was the program's first losing season since 2010.

Coach Matt Conzelman said the team was "definitely disappointed" by missing the playoffs, providing all the motivation the team needed to enter offseason preparation with renewed enthusiasm.

"This team has the talent and ability to excel this season," Conzelman said. "I am very excited to see what these young men can do on the field and get us back on track."

The refocusing brought on by a losing season and a postseason-free finish is bolstered by Newcastle's returning depth — nine starters are back on both offense and defense.

"I like the experience that our young players were exposed to this past season," Conzelman said. "I'm excited that this experience will help us play smarter on the field. They know what it takes and the caliber they need to play at to be beat the teams they will face."

Newcastle's only all-state selection last year, senior Triston Roberson, returns, as do juniors Cameron Quigley and Lyle Whitney, who were all-conference choices as sophomores.

Newcastle had one of Class 2A's best rushing offenses last year, running for 233.9 yards per game, second only to run-heavy Glenrock.

From that, the Dogies return four of their five offensive linemen, with seniors Bryce Womack and James Lewis anchoring the returning core.

And although the Dogies lose top rusher Ethan Schuessler to graduation, the Dogies' other top rush-

ers — senior Preston Rushton (350 yards), Robertson (233 yards) and Quigley (205 yards) — all return. Whitney, meanwhile, had 10 catches for 113 yards led Newcastle in both categories.

The line play, though, will be key. "Whenever you are running the ball, the foundation to the run game is our offensive lineman," Conzelman said. "Last year, I thought we ran the ball really well at times but just weren't very consistent with finishing drives."

On defense, the Dogies return five of their top six tacklers from last year.

Whitney led the team in defensive points and notched a team-high eight tackles for loss, while Quigley was second on the team in defensive points, Roberson fourth and Womack fifth.

Quigley had two interceptions.

Conzelman said the experience the defense has will allow players to run more blitzes and checks on the fly.

"This group of guys are pretty football savvy and they really understand what we are trying to accomplish," he said.

In part, the Dogies will be shown the way by past success. And they know 3-6 isn't enough.

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Bobcats welcome new coach

Thermopolis has one of Class 2A's most experienced teams.

It also has one of Class 2A's youngest teams.

The Bobcats have six offensive and seven defensive starters back this fall, but the bulk of those players are juniors.

Consequently, the atmosphere around the halls of Hot Springs County High School is one of cautious optimism.

"Those sophomores and juniors are going to have to carry the torch for sure," said Cory Sova, who's preparing to enter his third year as an assistant coach with the program. "... Given some game time opportunities, I think by middle to late year these guys will be pretty good."

The Bobcats will also have a new coach, as Matt McPhie comes in from Augustana College in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. McPhie spent one year as the wide receivers coach and one year as running backs coach there.

He inherits a team that graduated all three of its all-state selections from last year — including Class 2A's leading rusher last year in yards per game, Tyler Cornwell.

However, the junior class, led by all-conference selections Milton Peden and Noah Schwalbe, is stacked.

The Bobcats return four of their top eight tacklers on defense, and both Peden and Schwalbe were in the top three. Schwalbe was No. 2 for the

"Those sophomores and juniors are going to have to carry the torch for sure. I think by middle to late year these guys will be pretty good."

~ Assistant Coach Cory Sova

Bobcats in defensive points and led the team with 49 assisted tackles, while Peden was third led Thermopolis with six tackles for loss and three sacks.

The junior class also features quarterback Cullen Becher, who is Thermopolis' leading returning rusher and passer. He ran for 210 yards and threw for 286 last year, but also returns to a backfield that lost three of its top four rushers.

Thermopolis also lost its top four receivers; junior Clemens Abbott, who caught one pass for zero yards last year, is the only returning player who caught a pass at the varsity level last season.

Sova said Peden and Schwalbe will be key on the lines, and senior Michael Harvey will likely take the center's spot, but, as a whole, the Bobcats don't have much size.

"(We're) not going to be very big, but these kids are going to strap it up and aren't afraid," Sova said.

The sophomore class will also be key this year, with

Ethan Becher — who was seventh on the team in defensive points last year — cornerback Chandler Maddock and line-backer Jon Harvey among the key players from that class.

Sova said Thermopolis may need time to find its identity both with a new coach and with some new personnel. Even so, Sova said the team isn't afraid to learn from experience.

"That's one definite strength of this batch of kids. They're pretty relentless," he said.

Mascot: Bobcats
Division: 2A
Conference: West
Colors: Purple and yellow
Coach: Matt McPhie, first year at Thermopolis
2015 Record: 3-6, lost to Lovell in state quarterfinals

Key Players

QB/DB: Cullen Becher, Jr.
OL/ILB: Noah Schwalbe, Jr.
OG/DE: Milton Peden, Jr.
WR/CB: Clemens Abbott, Jr.

2016 Schedule

8-26: at Lander, 6 p.m. (Zero Week)
9-2: at Greybull, 7 p.m.
***9-9:** at Glenrock, 7 p.m.
***9-16:** vs. Wheatland, 6 p.m.
***9-23:** at Moorcroft, 6 p.m.
***9-30:** vs. Burns, 7 p.m.
***10-7:** at Big Horn, 7 p.m.
***10-14:** vs. Newcastle, 6 p.m.
10-21: vs. Mountain View, 7 p.m.
*** Conference game**



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Mascot: Bulldogs
Division: 2A
Conference: East
Colors: Blue and yellow

Coach: Tom Waring, first year at Wheatland
2015 Record: 10-1, beat Glenrock in state championship

Key Players
WR/SS: Josh Madsen, Sr.
RB/LB: Bubba Ward, Sr.
RB/LB: Poston Anderson, Sr.
OL/DL: Cody Cagle, Sr.

2016 Schedule
8-26: Wheatland jamboree, 6:30 p.m. (Zero Week)
9-2: vs. Torrington, 7 p.m.
9-9: at Pinedale, 7 p.m.
***9-16:** at Thermopolis, 6 p.m.
***9-23:** vs. Glenrock, 7 p.m.
***9-30:** at Newcastle, 7 p.m.
***10-7:** vs. Moorcroft, 7 p.m.
***10-14:** at Burns, 7 p.m.
***10-21:** vs. Big Horn, 6 p.m.
 * Conference game

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Defending champs have new look

About the only similarity between last year's Wheatland team and this year's will be the colors.

The defending Class 2A champions lost a massive senior class as well as their head coach. That combination of turnover means the Bulldogs will gain a new identity this fall.

Of course, that doesn't mean there won't be carryover from last year's title, the first state football championship for Wheatland since 1984.

"State titles are hard to come by," incoming head coach Tom Waring said. "I think this one will give the program a bit of a bump. The key is to continue the success of the past teams and build a program that will continually be in the playoffs."

The Bulldogs weren't just good last year — they were dominant. The Bulldogs led Class 2A in both yards per game (364.7) and yards allowed per game (100.6), as well as points per game (43.5) and points allowed per game (5.1). Defensively, the Bulldogs led Class 2A in both rushing defense and passing defense.

To be in the title hunt again in 2016, the Bulldogs will need to rely on a senior class that has

"The key is to continue the success of the past teams and build a program."

~ Coach Tom Waring

experience but not necessarily extended responsibility; only four starters return.

Six of Wheatland's eight all-state selections have graduated; seniors Josh Madsen and Jacob "Bubba" Ward are the lone returners from that group.

But they're a pretty potent duo.

Ward, who ran for 915 yards and 12 touchdowns, was Wheatland's leading rusher last year. Meanwhile, Madsen had 37 catches and 634 receiving yards, the highest totals in 2A last year.

After Ward, the Bulldogs' next five top rushers graduated; after Madsen, the only other player returning who caught a pass at the varsity level last year is Ward.

Defensively, senior Poston Anderson is the only one of Wheatland's top eight tacklers to return; he finished sixth for the Bulldogs in defensive points a year ago.

Even so, numerous players are lined up to assume key roles on both sides of the ball.

Seniors Cody Cagle, Wes Taylor and Nick Trujillo will be critical on both the offensive and defensive lines, and senior Hayden Madsen will be a threat at wideout and will help Madsen lock down the Bulldogs' pass defense.

"I think the guys who will be stepping into starting roles are excited for the opportunity to show what they can do," Waring said.

Waring, who is the principal at Chugwater and was previously the head coach in both Rawlins and Hanna, said Wheatland has good speed on both sides of the ball. Most of the players had varsity experience last year, although some of it came late in blowout victories.

That's a trend the Bulldogs wouldn't mind continuing this year.

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Punchers are young, but talented

Aaron Makelky can do the math.

He can see his Big Piney team graduated 10 seniors.

He can see that, even with 10 seniors, the Punchers still finished 2-6.

He can see people putting two and two together and not expecting much out of southern Sublette County this fall.

"A lot of people are going to overlook us and see how many guys we graduated and not expect much of us," Makelky said, "and I think that's a good position to be in."

That's because Big Piney is loaded with players who saw significant minutes last year,

Key Players

OG/LB: Adam Raza, Sr.
DB: Jake Pape, Jr.
OL/DL: Beau Hansen, Sr.
QB/DB: Tristan Barney, Jr.

including a deep junior class ready to lead a resurgence.

"They'll be as experienced as most people's seniors," Makelky said.

The junior class, led by Chancy Hunt, Jake Pape, Tristan Barney, T.J. Frazier, Adam Willoughby and Noel Aguirre, will have important responsibilities.

"Someone's going to have to step up and fill those roles."

~ Coach Aaron Makelky

Of course, Big Piney will still rely on seniors. Senior lineman Adam Raza is the only one of Big Piney's five all-conference selections to return this fall, while classmate Beau Hansen will join Raza in leading Big Piney up front.

However, most of their experience is on offense; the Punchers graduated all of their defensive front seven.

"That's going to be a challenge to overcome," Makelky said.

Two of the four players from Big Piney's rush-by-committee approach, where four players carried the ball between 64 and 79 times but no other players carried the ball more than twice all season, return for 2016.

Hunt led the team in rushing (370 yards); Pape added 247 rushing yards and threw for 289 more.

However, Barney, who threw for 193 yards in spot duty, will also compete for the starting quarterback spot.

"Two returning starters at quarterback, that's a good problem to have," Makelky said.

Pape, who was fourth on the team in defensive points and had a team-high three interceptions, is Big Piney's leading returning defensive player. Only three of the Punchers' top 10 tacklers come back this fall; Willoughby was sixth for the Punchers in defensive points and Aguirre was eighth.

"They know they've got work to do because we graduated 10 great seniors and someone's going to have to step up and fill those roles," Makelky said.

As far as expectations? Well, for a team that has gone five straight years without a playoff berth and has finished five straight years below the .500 mark, they're appropriately low. Prior to this stretch, Big Piney had not had five straight losing seasons in more than 60 years. Makelky has challenged his team to break that streak.

"Why not us?" Makelky said. "Why not the guys in the room now? Because somebody's got to do it."

No matter the expectations.



Mascot: Punchers

Division: 2A

Conference: West

Colors: Red and white

Coach: Aaron Makelky, 5th year

2015 Record: 2-6, did not qualify for playoffs

2016 Schedule

8-26: vs. Pinedale, 4 p.m. (Zero Week)
9-2: at Shoshoni, 7 p.m.
***9-9:** at Lovell, 7 p.m.
***9-16:** vs. Lyman, 3 p.m.
***9-23:** vs. Kemmerer, 3 p.m.
***9-30:** at Pinedale, 7 p.m.
10-7: vs. Newcastle, 3 p.m.
***10-14:** at Mountain View, 3 p.m.
***10-21:** vs. Greybull, 3 p.m.
 * Conference game

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Coach: Marty Wrage, 3rd year

2015 Record: 8-2, lost to Wheatland in semifinals

Key Players

RB/LB: Dawson Forcella, Sr.

OG/DT: Gabe Keisel, Sr.

RB/LB: Dawson McEwan, Sr.

WR/LB: Cade Dooley, Sr.

Mascot: Buffaloes

Division: 2A

Conference: West

Colors: Blue and yellow

2016 Schedule

8-26: at Shoshoni, 6 p.m.

9-2: vs. Thermopolis, 7 p.m.

***9-9:** at Kemmerer, 7 p.m.

***9-16:** vs. Lovell, 7 p.m.

9-23: at Burns, 7 p.m.

***9-30:** vs. Lyman, 6 p.m.

***10-7:** at Mountain View, 3 p.m.

***10-14:** vs. Pinedale, 6 p.m.

***10-21:** at Big Piney, 3 p.m.

*** Conference game**

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Mascot: Rangers

Division: 2A

Conference: West

Colors: Black and red

Coach: Jason Ferrarini, 2nd year

2015 Record: 0-8, did not qualify for playoffs

2016 Schedule

8-26: vs. Cokeville, 7 p.m.

(Zero Week)

9-2: at Rocky Mountain, 6 p.m.

***9-9:** vs. Greybull, 7 p.m.

9-16: vs. Big Horn, 7 p.m.

***9-23:** at Big Piney, 3 p.m.

***9-30:** vs. Mountain View, 7 p.m.

***10-7:** at Pinedale, 7 p.m.

***10-14:** at Lovell, 7 p.m.

***10-21:** vs. Lyman, 7 p.m.

*** Conference game**

Buffaloes could be in title hunt

The Greybull Buffaloes know exactly how far they've come.

And they know exactly how far they still have to go.

In many ways, last year was a breakthrough year for Greybull. The Buffs won their first playoff game since 2010 and finished 8-2.

The second of those two losses, though, was a reality check: a 40-0 thumping courtesy of eventual Class 2A champion Wheatland in the state semifinals.

That loss showed Greybull's players they still needed to do more to be a serious contender for the 2A title.

It's a challenge the Buffs have embraced.

"We are more physical because we have more players dedicated to weight training and development of football skills," coach Marty Wrage said. "We have more going to camps, more players developing into leaders. Offense and defense and special teams will be much improved and more versatile."

Greybull has every reason to be optimistic for 2016. From that 8-2 team, it returns nine starters on offense and eight on defense, including seniors Dawson Forcella and Gabe Keisel, both returning all-state selections.

Greybull also returns six all-conference players, the highest number of any team in Class 2A, in Forcella, Keisel, seniors Cade Dooley, Elias Ewen and Dawson McEwan and junior Riley Hill.

Forcella ran for 848 yards and 11 touchdowns, both team highs, last year. McEwan added 426 rushing yards, the only other player on the team with more than 33 yards on the ground.

Hill threw for 1,357 yards, distributing the ball to five different receivers who had at least 194 receiving yards apiece.

Four of those five are back. Junior Miguel Gomez led the Buffs with 337 receiving yards; Dooley

added 279; McEwan 249 and Forcella 194.

Greybull also returns its top three tacklers from 2015.

Sophomore Zack Keisel led Greybull in defensive points last season, including a team-high 13 tackles for loss.

McEwan was second and Forcella third; Dooley added a team-high four interceptions and eight pass breakups.

Senior lineman Jose Carmona and junior running back Brayan Castro will add depth on both sides of the ball.

Wrage said one of the added benefits of this year's team is that many players will be three-year starters.

With that many players returning – the Buffs graduated just five seniors – Wrage said the team has lofty goals. However, he said those goals are commonplace in the program.

"The players and coaches have high expectations to perform well in every game," he said. "We lost focus at times last year and were not physical at times. That should not be a problem this year."

"We had some good program wins, but these players continue to work hard to improve, and the Wheatland loss has been the driving force for off-season focus."

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Rangers remain work in progress

Jason Ferrarini has a vision for the future of the Kemmerer football program – and it's bright.

That vision will take time to bring to fruition.

In the meantime, the Rangers are still struggling to find their way after three consecutive 0-8 seasons and 28 consecutive losses.

Another 0-8 season would give Kemmerer 36 consecutive losses, the longest losing streak in state history.

"A lot of people like to talk about the current losing streak, but it really doesn't have any affect on

us," Ferrarini said. "Our kids worked hard throughout last summer and played hard all season. We simply didn't have the depth to deal with the amount of injuries we faced last year."

Injuries and inexperience caught up with a thin Ranger team last year. Kemmerer lost every game by at least 11 points.

"Heading into last year we knew we could be competitive if we stayed healthy," Ferrarini said.

"Unfortunately, that didn't happen, and we had to play a lot of freshmen. At any level, that's not a good

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Bulldogs making youth movement

Lovell coach Doug Hazen knows exactly how close his team was to playing for a state championship in 2015.

The Bulldogs were just a few seconds and a few points away from what would have been their third trip to the Class 2A championship game in the past five years. Instead, Lovell fell to Glenrock 13-10 in overtime, ending its season in frustration on its home field.

With a deep senior class and an imposing set of linemen, Hazen said his team is committed to capitalizing on the opportunities they have.

"We have kids that are going to come out and compete," Hazen said. "That's what I'm going to ask them to do every week is compete, and I think we'll have a very competitive football team."

The Bulldogs return five of their nine all-conference picks, with seniors Jaret Collins, Riley Abraham, Trace Murphey, Brandon Teter and Tyler Teter leading the way.

At 6 feet 2 inches tall and 280 pounds, Collins can be dominant up front; he was the 2A West Line-man of the Year in 2015 and is Lovell's lone returning all-state selection.

Hazen said Collins' on-field ability has rarely been a question. Now, Collins and the other 10-12 seniors will have to inherit the leadership roles.

"Now we're going to be searching again for who are those guys who will take the reins as far as the team goes and we certainly hope he's one of those

kids," Hazen said.

He won't have to do it alone.

Tyler Teter led the Bulldogs with 839 rushing yards and 10 touchdowns; Brandon Teter was the Bulldogs' leading receiver with 24 catches for 433 yards and five touchdowns.

On defense, the Bulldogs lose four of their top six tacklers to graduation, with Abraham and Collins coming back as Lovell's leading tacklers.

Collins led the Bulldogs with six tackles for loss and three sacks.

Senior Kaleb Mayes, who had a team-high 11 pass breakups, will also return.

Linemen Kade Gifford and Dylan Hereth will also play key roles on both sides of the ball.

Lovell does lose quarterback Beau Green, who accounted for nearly 1,900 yards of total offense. Who will step into that position is still a big question. Brandon Teter might move from wide receiver to under center, and junior Logan Hitz will also compete for the spot.

Nevertheless, it still starts up front for the Bulldogs, as they return three starters on both the offensive and defensive lines.

"We'll have some big bodies on both sides of the football," Hazen said. "... When we return seven guys on a defense that hung in there pretty tough a year ago, I expect our defense to be stout."

KEMMERER RANGERS

situation. The upside is that a lot of freshmen got a lot of varsity playing time the last half of the season."

And that's where the vision for the future takes shape. Ferrarini said he will have close to 25 ninth- and 10th-graders out this year, including a group of sophomores that could give the program a fresh start.

Kemmerer could start as many as nine of those sophomores this fall. Ferrarini said those players had tremendous success in junior high and at the JV level.

"They're not sweating any streaks."

"For the majority of our players, they feel as if the recent struggles don't pertain to them," Ferrarini said.

"They feel that they're the same group that has done extremely well at the level they've played for the past several years and that their success will continue."

However, the team's biggest leader may be junior Noah Johnson. He was the team's leading rusher last year with 554 yards and five touchdowns.

"I feel as a junior he will establish himself as one of the top run-

Key Players

RB: Noah Johnson, Jr.

OL/DL: Colton Rydstrom, Sr.

RB/LB: Anthony Tibbetts, Soph.

OL/DL: Lowell Ellis, Soph.

ning backs in 2A," Ferrarini said.

But the Rangers graduated their quarterback and their top receiver; Johnson, with six catches for 98 yards, is also Kemmerer's leading returning receiver.

Defensively, Kemmerer returns four starters, with junior Louis Failoni the top returning tackler. Failoni finished fifth in defensive points and tied for the team lead with three pass breakups.

Sophomores Anthony Tibbetts, Jeyden Boyd and Lowell Ellis were also among the Rangers' top 10 tacklers last year.

Although the Rangers may still be a year or two away from playoff consideration, Ferrarini remains confident in the program's trajectory.

"Kemmerer is heading in the right direction," Ferrarini said.

Mascot: Bulldogs

Division: 2A

Conference: West

Colors: Blue and white

Coach: Doug Hazen, 8th year

2015 Record: 8-2, lost to Glenrock in state semifinals

Key Players

OL/DL: Jaret Collins, Sr.

RB: Tyler Teter, Sr.

WR/QB: Brandon Teter, Sr.

FB/LB: Riley Abraham, Sr.

2016 Schedule

8-27: at Buffalo, 1 p.m. (Zero Week)

9-2: at Big Horn, 7 p.m.

***9-9:** vs. Big Piney, 7 p.m.

***9-16:** at Greybull, 7 p.m.

***9-23:** vs. Mountain View, 7 p.m.

9-30: vs. Moorcroft, 7 p.m.

***10-7:** at Lyman, 2 p.m.

***10-14:** vs. Kemmerer, 7 p.m.

***10-21:** at Pinedale, 7 p.m.

*** Conference game**



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Eagles looking to reverse trend

Lyman's progression the past four years shows a distinct pattern.

12-0, 6-4, 5-5, 3-7.

The Eagles' fall from Class 2A champions to also-rans wasn't sudden or spectacular. Still, coach Dale Anderson said he thinks the program is doing the right things the right way – and results will come.

"To me, it's just getting the kids in to work hard," Anderson said, "and the kids for the most part have bought in to what we're trying to accomplish. It's just a matter of putting in the time."

This year, the Eagles will pin many hopes on senior Bryton Bluemel, their quarterback and leading tackler last year and Lyman's only returning all-state player. He threw for 721 yards and added 704 more on the ground; on defense, he led the team in assisted tackles (47), solo tackles (24), pass breakups (6) and interceptions (2) from his linebacker position.

Amderson said Bluemel is not a natural quarterback, but he stepped into the void when it became clear he would be the best option at the position.

"He's not the most vocal kid but he works hard, he plays hard and he's a great example for our kids," Anderson said. "... He has a real good feel for the game, he's a good athlete and he puts himself in position to make plays (on defense)."

He won't be alone. Senior Preston Quinney, an all-conference selection, was Lyman's

"The kids for the most part have bought in to what we're trying to accomplish. It's just a matter of putting in the time."

~ Coach Dale Anderson

leading receiver with 20 catches for 317 yards; junior Beaudée Bluemel added 13 catches for 312 yards. Together, they accounted for all eight of Lyman's receiving touchdowns last year.

Beaudée Bluemel was fourth on the squad in defensive points and had a team-high three sacks. He leads a deep junior class that includes Dryden Menck, Colton VanGieson and Ben Neiderer; they, along with sophomore Wesley Eyre, were key contributors to the defense last year. However, Lyman returns just three of its top seven tacklers.

Lyman will benefit from the return of senior wide receiver/defensive back Damian Chandler, who missed last season with a broken foot. Even so, Lyman will only have about 25 players.

"Our biggest weakness is depth," Anderson said. "We have some decent kids, we just don't go very deep, especially on our offensive and defensive lines. We only go five or six deep there, so it's going to take everybody staying healthy."

Lyman fought the same



Key Players

QB/LB: Bryton Bluemel, Sr.
WR/DB: Preston Quinney, Sr.
WR/DB: Damian Chandler, Sr.
WR/DB: Jeremiah Stover, Sr.

problem last year, finishing the season with about 17 players. Playing eventual state champion Wheatland in the first round, the Eagles lost 70-6.

In 2012, Lyman beat Wheatland in the quarterfinals 50-0.

"We had been on the flipside of that a few years ago," Anderson said.

The hope in the program is, with time, the Eagles will be back again.

Buffalos have been here before

Brent Walk's feelings of déjà vu increased significantly over the summer. The head coach at Mountain View, Walk saw the way his players were developing in the offseason and started to have flashbacks to 2014.

The Buffalos of 2014 and the Buffalos of 2016 have many similarities in Walk's mind: They had a strong senior class; they had lots of game experience; they hit the weight room hard in the offseason; they were hungry to avenge some disappointment from the previous season.

Mountain View won the Class 2A championship in 2014.

So forgive Walk for thinking his team is capable of great things this fall.

"The kids are very, very hungry at Mountain View right now," Walk said. "We're really excited about it."

Walk said the similarities

Key Players

QB: Dane Covington, Sr.
RB/LB: Spencer Madsen, Sr.
OL/DL: Caden Bolken, Sr.
OL/DL: Blake Murray, Sr.

between 2014 and 2016 start with experience. This year, nine starters return on both offense and defense – and they're talented.

Junior Jason Stoddard earned an all-state nod in 2015, while seniors Caden Bolken, Dane Covington and Spencer Madsen were all-conference picks.

Senior lineman Blake Murray also returns after missing 2015 due to injury; he started as a sophomore on the 2014 championship team.

Madsen was Mountain

View's leading rusher, carrying for 842 yards and 13 touchdowns.

Covington piloted the offense under center, throwing for 1,513 yards and nine scores. Mountain View led Class 2A in passing yards per game last year with 187.8; Covington's 168.1 yards per game through the air was tops in the class.

Stoddard was one of Covington's favorite targets, with 422 receiving yards on a team-high 35 catches.

Defensively, the Buffalos return eight of their top 11 tacklers, with Stoddard, Madsen, Bolken, Covington, seniors Kolbe Weber and Dawson Case, junior Jonathan Anderson and sophomore Colby Rees all playing big parts on that side of the ball.

That returning group gives Mountain View experience that has allowed the Buffalos' coaches to start offseason

Continued on Next Page



Mascot: Buffalos

Division: 2A

Conference: West

Colors: Purple and white

Coach: Brent Walk, 5th year

2015 Record: 6-3, lost to Glenrock in state quarterfinals

2016 Schedule

8-26: at Green River jamboree, TBD (Zero Week)

9-2: vs. Cokeville, 4 p.m.

*9-9: at Lyman, 4 p.m.

*9-16: vs. Pinedale, 4 p.m.

*9-23: at Lovell, 7 p.m.

*9-30: at Kemmerer, 7 p.m.

*10-7: vs. Greybull, 3 p.m.

*10-14: vs. Big Piney, 3 p.m.

10-21: at Thermopolis, 7 p.m.

* Conference game

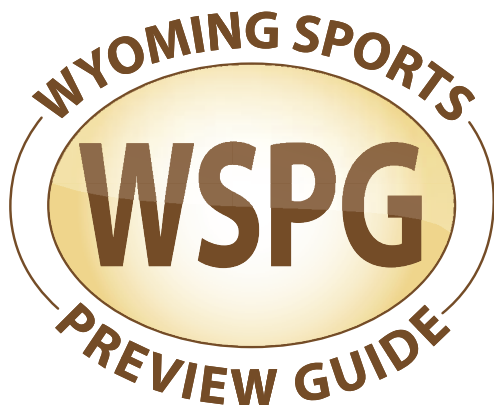


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MOUNTAIN VIEW BUFFALOS

Mountain View, Cont.

preparation at higher level.

After Mountain View's quarterfinal loss, Walk told his staff he wanted to start the offseason at the same level where the team ended the 2015 season.

"So far, knock on wood, I think that's what we've been able to do," he said.

At the same time, expectations are tempered. Mountain View gave up more yards per game (295.4) than it gained (292.9) last season and, despite a 6-3 record, finished the season outscored by its opponents.

Still, Walk said this year's team in particular is capable of



success.

"I tell the kids this is a great a job as I've ever had," Walk said. "These kids are amazing. They're hitting the weight room. They're hungry. They're doing the things they need to do."

And they know what it takes to win a championship.

"The kids are very, very hungry at Mountain View right now. We're really excited about it."

~ Coach Brent Walk

2A WEST

PINEDALE WRANGLERS

PAGE 37

Wranglers have new head coach

At first glance, Mitch Espeland will inherit a struggling football program this fall in Pinedale.

After all, the first-year coach is taking over a program that finished without a playoff berth for the seventh consecutive year, the second-longest such streak in the state regardless of classification.

But look closer. The Wranglers finished 3-5 but actually outscored their opponents 187-172. They played well in conference losses to playoff qualifiers Lovell (30-27) and Mountain View (39-36) and conference champion Greybull (25-12).

Already with a year under his belt as an assistant with the program last season, Espeland has reason to be hopeful. And he is.

"I knew this group has the ability to be very successful," he said, "and I wanted to try to help them get to that point."

The Wranglers' hopes for 2016 rest not only with the first-year coach but also with a team that returns nine starters on both offense and defense.

Espeland said he will likely transition Pinedale's offense to feature three wide receivers and two running backs to take advantage of speedy receivers; the

defense will run from a 4-3 base.

"We're not trying to reinvent the wheel, but we are trying to mix things up, do some simplifying on both sides of the ball so they can be in the right spots and make plays without thinking about it," Espeland said.

Seniors Micah Brown and Spencer Criddle were all-conference players a year ago. Criddle is a centerpiece on both offense and defense; as Pinedale's quarterback, he threw for 680 yards and eight touchdowns and ran for 207 more yards and seven more touchdowns.

Criddle was also Pinedale's leading tackler, fronting the team with 57 assisted tackles and two interceptions.

However, the Wranglers will need to find a way to replace Caleb Raney, an all-state choice and last year's 2A West Offensive Player of the Year who led the team in both rushing and receiving yards.

Three seniors will probably inherit the bulk of that responsibility. Taylor Jensen ran for 473 yards and five touchdowns last season; Garrett Lozier finished with 227 receiving yards on seven catches and is the Wranglers' leading returning receiver; Zackary Winer added 149 receiving yards last year.

The Wranglers do get back three of their top four tacklers. Jensen was third on the team in defensive points, while senior Logan Sandner was fourth. Winer, Brown, Lozier and seniors Aldo Arredondo and Jacob Mitchell will be key defenders as well.

"They have a certain level of confidence that we know how to compete in games," Espeland said. "We've been right there. We were 3-5 last year but we easily could have been 5-3 if we made a couple plays here and there."

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Mascot: Wranglers

Division: 2A

Conference: West

Colors: Green and white

Coach: Mitch Espeland, first year at Pinedale

2015 Record: 3-5, did not qualify for playoffs

Key Players

QB: Spencer Criddle, Sr.

RB: Taylor Jensen, Sr.

OL/DL: Connor Sullivan, Sr.

OL/DL: Aldo Arredondo, Sr.

2016 Schedule

8-26: at Big Piney, 4 p.m.

9-2: at Glenrock, 6 p.m.

9-9: vs. Wheatland, 7 p.m.

*9-16: at Mtn. View, 4 p.m.

*9-23: at Lyman, 4 p.m.

*9-30: vs. Big Piney, 7 p.m.

*10-7: vs. Kemmerer, 7 p.m.

*10-14: at Greybull, 6 p.m.

*10-21: vs. Lovell, 7 p.m.

* Conference game

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1A/11-man Preview



State Champs

Upton-Sundance Patriots

2015 State Playoffs

State Championship

Upton-Sundance 33, Tongue River 14

State Semifinals

Upton-Sundance 26, Southeast 14
Tongue River 28, Lingle 9

State Quarterfinals

Upton-Sundance 39, Rocky Mtn. 12
Southeast 21, Shoshoni 3
Lingle 42, Riverside 6
Tongue River 28, Cokeville 21

Four players to watch

Brennan Kutterer, Tongue River

There wasn't a player in the state who averaged more defensive points per game last season than Kutterer, who led 11-man football regardless of classification with 282 defensive points (25.6 per game) and 76 solo tackles.

J.J. Pingetzer, Shoshoni

The player closest to Kutterer's heels in defensive points last season was Pingetzer. The Wrangler senior was the centerpiece of Class 1A 11-man's best defenses last season, winning West Conference defensive player of the year while notching nearly 12 tackles per game.

Ruger Lewis, Pine Bluffs

The senior led Class 1A 11-man with 168.4 rushing yards per game, the best of all returning players statewide, and finished the year with 1,179 yards. On an improving Pine Bluffs team, Lewis might be primed for an even better season.

Dawson Butts, Upton-Sundance

As a sophomore, Butts was a huge part of the Patriots' title run, leading the team in rushing yards (1,202), receiving yards (181) and interceptions (four). Now that opponents know what he is capable of doing, he may be keyed on more this season.



Upton-Sundance could run through the competition again in 2016 after beating Tongue River in the 2015 1A/11-man championship game.

Upton-Sundance favored for another championship

By Patrick Schmiedt

Four questions to answer

Can Upton-Sundance repeat? Not only can the Patriots repeat – they will be the favorites to do so. Of the Patriots' six all-state selections last year, four were underclassmen. The Patriots will be the odds-on favorites to win Class 1A 11-man.

Is anyone else even in the discussion? Yes, but not really. Shoshoni could be Upton-Sundance's biggest challenge to a title defense. Sure, you can throw in Tongue River, Cokeville, Rocky Mountain and Southeast into the conversation... but for now, these teams have more to prove than Upton-Sundance.

How much did reclassification affect 1A 11-man? In some ways, a bunch; in others, hardly at all. Riverside, Burlington and Lingle made the move to six-man, while Wright and Moorcroft flip-flopped spots between 2A and 1A 11-man, but the biggest ripples from those changes will be felt in the nonconference schedule.

Is the East Conference still ahead of the West Conference? Yes. Although it's unlikely the East will sweep the West in the first round of the playoffs as it did a year ago, the East Conference league schedule is definitely more challenging – and probably will prepare those teams better for the post-season.

Four key games

Shoshoni at Southeast, Sept. 9. These teams both have lofty goals this fall. Throw in the revenge angle – Shoshoni's loss to Southeast in last year's quarterfinals ended an undefeated season – and the game takes on a significance in early September.

Pine Bluffs at Upton-Sundance, Sept. 23. The Hornets' 3-4 finish in 2015 was a huge step forward. Their growth will be tested, though, in their first conference game, which just happens to come on the home field of the defending state champions.

Shoshoni at Cokeville, Oct. 21. For now, the Wranglers are the favorites in the West Conference; the Panthers aren't. How that role reversal changes this Week 8 matchup will be intriguing to see.

Tongue River at Upton-Sundance, Oct. 21. The rematch of last year's 1A 11-man title game doesn't happen until the final week of the regular season. But that will only add to the suspense.

Predicted order of finish

East Conference: Upton-Sundance, Tongue River, Southeast, Pine Bluffs, Wright, Lusk.

West Conference: Shoshoni, Cokeville, Rocky Mountain, Saratoga, Wind River, Wyoming Indian.

Way-too-early title game score prediction
Upton-Sundance 36, Shoshoni 20

Tigers looking for strong finish

Lusk's season began so well. The Tigers started the season 3-1 and notched a huge victory in Week 4 when they beat eventual state runner-up Tongue River 28-21.

Then their season fell apart.

Lusk lost its final three games by massive margins: 32-0 to Pine Bluffs, 53-16 to Lingle and 51-18 to Southeast.

Just like that, the Tigers' season was finished at 3-4 – the program's first losing season in more than a decade of high school football.

"Our youth and inexperience really began to show along with a few injuries that took what little depth we had," coach Ryan Nelson said. "Last year we largely only had two guys that had ever played significant varsity ball.

"For the most part, the kids never quit and kept on fighting 'til the game was over. Several of the younger guys became better leaders, which should be a real asset moving towards next season."

The Tigers return seven starters on offense and eight on defense – and Nelson, entering his second year as head coach, said he has already seen more commitment to improving on last year's record than he did in his first season.

"We're off to a much better start than last summer."

~ **Coach Ryan Nelson**

He said he consistently had 15 to 20 players in the weight room for early summer workouts.

"We'll probably have around 25 (players) out, so we're off to a much better start than last summer," he said.

Offensively, the Tigers graduated their top rusher, passer and receiver but return four starters on the offensive line and three running backs with significant experience.

Lusk's running-back-by-committee approach netted five running backs with triple-digit yardage for the season but none with more than 385.

Senior Jacob Haney, who ran for 363 yards, leads the returners in the backfield; senior Riley Ross added 245 yards last year and junior Kyle Anderson had 119.

Nelson said that returning experience in the backfield coupled with an experienced line fronted by senior Monte Wade – Lusk's only returning all-confer-

ence player – and juniors Jake Heil, Garrett Wurdeman and Cole Mellot will give the Tigers some expanded offensive options.

"It should allow us to add some new wrinkles to the playbook," Nelson said. "I've challenged them over the summer to make sure they have the offense down well so when preseason hits we can work on building more in to it. The biggest challenge will be whether our quarterback is ready to step in and play."

Defensively, the Tigers lose three of their top six tacklers but return most of their other defensive stalwarts.

Wade was second on the team in defensive points last year while Mellot was third and Wurdeman fifth.

Even with those eight returning starters, Nelson said Lusk still needs to develop depth to compete.

The Tigers learned that lesson too late in 2015.



Mascot: Tigers

Division: 1A/11-man

Conference: East

Colors: Red and white

Coach: Ryan Nelson, 2nd year at Lusk

2015 Record: 3-4, did not qualify for playoffs

Key Players

C/LB: Monte Wade, Sr.

RB/DB: Riley Ross, Sr.

RB/LB: Jacob Haney, Sr.

G/DE: Cole Mellot, Jr.

2016 Schedule

8-27: at Burns, 11 a.m. (Zero Week)

9-2: at Moorcroft, 7 p.m.

9-9: vs. Saratoga, 7 p.m.

9-16: at Rocky Mountain, 6 p.m.

*9-23: vs. Wright, 7 p.m.

*9-30: at Tongue River, 7 p.m.

*10-7: vs. Upton-Sundance, 7 p.m.

*10-14: vs. Southeast, 7 p.m.

*10-21: at Pine Bluffs, 7 p.m.

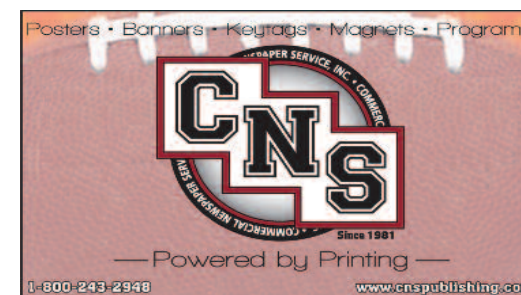
* Conference game

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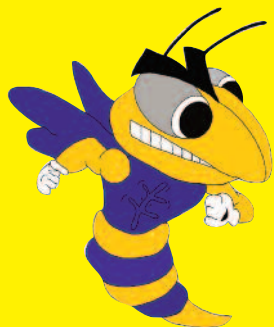


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Mascot: Hornets
Division: 1A/11-man
Conference: East
Colors: Purple and yellow
Coach: Will Gray, 6th year
2015 Record: 3-4

Key Players
WR/DB: Kyle Steger, Sr.
QB/DB: Haize Fornstrom, Jr.
RB/LB: Ruger Lewis, Sr.
OL/DL: Wyatt Fornstrom, Jr.

2016 Schedule
8-26: at Glenrock jamboree, 5 p.m. (Zero Week)
9-2: vs. Mitchell, Neb., 7 p.m.
9-9: at Wind River, 6 p.m.
9-16: vs. Wyoming Indian, 6 p.m.
***9-23:** at Upton-Sundance, 6 p.m.
***9-30:** vs. Wright, 6 p.m.
***10-7:** at Southeast, 7 p.m.
***10-14:** at Tongue River, 6 p.m.
***10-21:** vs. Lusk, 7 p.m.
*** Conference game**



Mascot: Cyclones
Division: 1A/11-man
Conference: East
Colors: Blue and silver
Coach: Mark Bullington, 18th year
2015 Record: 6-5, lost to Upton-Sundance in semifinals

Hornets should be in the mix

In March, Pine Bluffs won the Class 2A boys basketball championship.

In May, Pine Bluffs won the 2A boys track and field championship. In November, Pine Bluffs hopes to be in position for a football title, too.

That might be a tall order for a program that went winless just two seasons ago and finished with a losing record while missing the Class 1A 11-man playoffs last year.

However, success in the school's other sports has definitely raised expectations on the gridiron.

"Thankfully for us it's the same kids having all of the success," coach Will Gray said. "It might be different kids leading the way in the different activities, but they all play a role, and they all have a common purpose. This is a great group of kids to be around – they are hungry for more success and they are willing to put the time in to earn it."

Expectations are high for Pine

Bluffs this fall not only for what's gone on off the field but for who comes back on the field.

"It's going to come down to three things," Gray said, "how well we can run the ball, can we avoid giving up the big play on defense, and can we continue to improve our physicality in the trenches."

Senior Ruger Lewis and junior Haize Fornstrom were all-state picks last year, and they lead a team that returns five of its top six tacklers on defense and returns eight starters on offense that produced Class 1A 11-man's top offense last year.

Lewis led the Hornets with 1,179 rushing yards and 10 touchdowns; Lewis' 168.4 yards-per-game average was the best in the classification.

Fornstrom added 736 passing yards; junior receiver Ishmael Depaulitte led the Hornets with 13 catches for 308 yards. Pine Bluffs' 370.1 yards per game led Class 1A 11-man.

Senior Kyle Steger was sec-

ond on the team in defensive points and is Pine Bluffs' leading returning tackler on a unit that has seven returning starters.

Lewis was third, senior Alex Graves was fourth, junior Wyatt Fornstrom was fifth and sophomore Hunter Jeffres was sixth.

Lewis led Pine Bluffs with six tackles for loss; Haize Fornstrom led Pine Bluffs with two interceptions.

Senior lineman Tristan Lind, senior wideout/defensive back Cade Kissinger, senior wideout/defensive end Hunter Thompson – a Division I basketball commit – and junior lineman John Merryfield will also be critical to Pine Bluffs' success. Gray said their versatility gives him options.

"We don't have to label kids at certain positions or skill types," Gray said. "They are all very versatile, which allows us to do different things, but also allows us to play a base defense and not have to change from week to week."



Eagles gaining confidence

The Tongue River football program has been as low as a program can go.

The team had to cancel its 2011 season due to a lack of interest. But last year, the Eagles rose to heights few teams reach, making the Class 1A 11-man championship game.

Only three seniors graduated from that squad, putting the Eagles in position to keep building – if they can avoid the complacency that comes with success.

Coach John Scott said he hopes his players "understand what's still out there to compete for, not being satisfied with what we did a year ago, and that they really understand what it's going to take to get there."

"For the most part, this group has held together really well and we've just got to fight off any signs of complacency and still realize we fell short of the greatest prize," Scott said. "... That has to be a driving force for us."

Among Tongue River's corps of returners is two all-state selections, seniors Cody Buller and Brennan Kutterer.

Kutterer led Class 1A 11-man in defensive points last season; his 76 solo tackles was tops in the classification. However, he is the only one of Tongue River's top four defenders to return.

"We've just got to fight off any signs of complacency."

~ Coach John Scott

Key Players

WR/LB: Brennan Kutterer, Sr.
OL/DL: Mason Schroder, Sr.
WR/DB: Cody Buller, Sr.
RB/LB: Dean Hatzenbiler, Sr.

Kutterer also ran for 429 yards last year and is the Eagles' leading returning rusher, and he will also see time at wide receiver and quarterback.

Senior Will Kerns, who threw for a Class 1A 11-man best 1,291 yards and had a 15-3 touchdown-to-interception ratio, also comes back. His top two targets return in Buller (36 catches, 578 yards) and Kutterer (31 catches, 436 yards).

Senior Mason Schroder was an all-conference pick last season, while seniors Matt Lobach, Dean Hatzenbiler and Austin Miller also have important re-

sponsibilities to fulfill. They are among a class of about 10 seniors primed to bring Tongue River back to the title game – especially now that they've had a taste of success.

Scott said the trip to the championship game was validation for the communities and for the players who stuck with the program after 2011.

"It was all those things that I envisioned in coming back to a town that had lost football," he said. "... It was really an overwhelming experience just to see the uplift that it did for the school and community."

Still, the Eagles lost the title game to conference rival Upton-Sundance, 33-14. Even though the trip to Laramie was both validating and uplifting for a program that had seen so much struggling, the fact that Tongue River lost the title game is never far from Scott's mind.

"We're not resting on our laurels, and there's something just a little better to shoot for," he said.

Key Players

FB/LB: Chance Werner, Sr.
OL/DL: Jasper Heggem, Sr.
RB/CB: Jacob Cushman, Sr.
TE/DE: Jacob Schmitt, Sr.

state choices in seniors Jasper Heggem and Chance Werner.

Heggem is Southeast's leading returning tackler. He was No. 2 on the team last year in defensive points and tied for the team lead with 10 tackles for loss.

Werner was third on the team in defensive points and, with 466 rushing yards last year, is the Cyclones' leading returning rusher.

Senior Jacob Cushman added 384 rushing yards.

Junior Brady Fullmer will take over at quarterback, filling the spot left by Jeff Burroughs, who's now playing for the University of Wyoming.

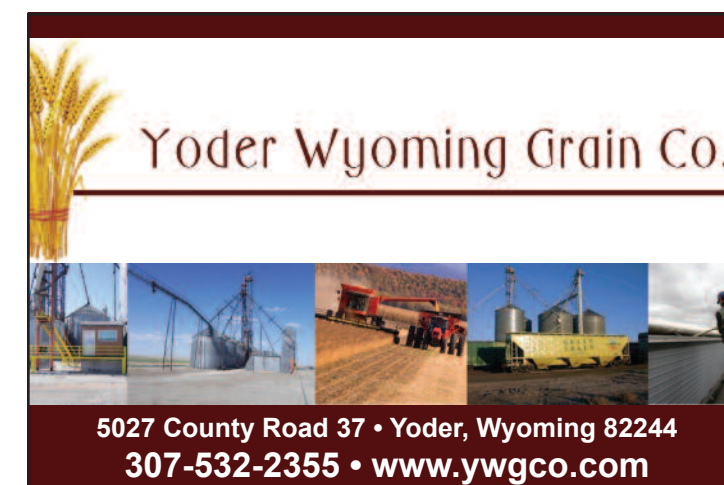
The Cyclones return four of their top five tacklers from last

2016 Schedule

8-26: at Wheatland jamboree, 6:30 p.m. (Zero Week)
9-2: at Bayard, Neb., 7 p.m.
9-9: vs. Shoshoni, 7 p.m.
9-16: at Saratoga, 6 p.m.
***9-23:** vs. Tongue River, 6 p.m.
***9-30:** at Upton-Sundance, 6 p.m.
***10-7:** vs. Pine Bluffs, 7 p.m.
***10-14:** at Lusk, 7 p.m.
***10-21:** vs. Wright, 7 p.m.
*** Conference game**

season and seven of their top nine, with seniors Jacob Schmitt, Porter Ross and Dalton Keller and juniors Tanner Hort and Kaden Malm expected to be key pieces to the defense.

Bullington said Jeff Fullmer took over at the beginning of the summer teaching PE and weight training at the school, and his in-



tensified workouts have already produced noticeable change.

The weight training is a smaller piece of Southeast's bigger challenge of fully realizing its capabilities.

Bullington said the Cyclones' abilities were most evident in the semifinal loss to Upton-Sundance. "(With) five minutes left in the



Mascot: Eagles

Division: 1A/11-Man

Conference: East

Colors: Green and white

Coach: John Scott, 5th year

2015 Record: 8-3, lost to Upton-Sundance in state championship

2016 Schedule

9-2: vs. Wind River, 6 p.m.
9-9: at Wyoming Indian, 6 p.m.
9-17: vs. Cokeville, 11 a.m.
***9-23:** at Southeast, 6 p.m.
***9-30:** vs. Lusk, 7 p.m.
***10-7:** at Wright, 7 p.m.
***10-14:** vs. Pine Bluffs, 6 p.m.
***10-21:** at Upton-Sundance, 6 p.m.
*** Conference game**

game, we were at midfield down by six," Bullington said. "I think that gave a lot of confidence to our kids. ... We could have won that game if we had gotten that first down."

"They played up to their potential, and with all those kids coming back, they realize they could have been there."



Mascot: Patriots
Division: 1A/11-man
Conference: East
Colors: Blue and red
Coach: Andy Garland, 14th year
2015 Record: 10-1, beat Tongue River in state championship

Key Players
QB/S: Hunter Woodard, Sr.
TB: Dawson Butts, Jr.
C/LB: John Sullivan, Sr.
FB/NG: Thomas Davis, Sr.

2016 Schedule
8-27: at Big Horn jamboree, 10 a.m. (Zero Week)
9-2: at Newcastle, 7 p.m.
9-9: vs. Rocky Mountain, 7 p.m.
9-16: at Shoshoni, 2 p.m.
***9-23:** vs. Pine Bluffs, 6 p.m.
***9-30:** vs. Southeast, 6 p.m.
***10-7:** at Lusk, 7 p.m.
***10-14:** at Wright, 7 p.m.
***10-21:** vs. Tongue River, 6 p.m.
* Conference game
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Patriots favored to repeat

There's never been a better time to be a Patriot. The Upton-Sundance co-op football team is coming off its first state championship, and with eight starters returning on both sides of the ball, the Patriots have the goods to repeat.

The Patriots return four all-state selections from last year in seniors Thomas Davis, John Sullivan and Hunter Woodard and junior Dawson Butts – double the number of any other program in Class 1A 11-man.

Senior Donovan Gray was also an all-conference selection. In all, the Patriots return five all-conference picks, the most in the East Conference.

In short, the Patriots' first title may not be their last.

Coach Andy Garland said the championship was "special for us with the co-op. It has been a four-year thing. We'd been increasingly getting a little better each year and this year was the first year where the kids have been together for all four years."

Garland added the title was a tribute to those people in both communities who traveled the 30 miles between Upton and Sundance "and all the sacrifices they put in to make our co-op work."

The program's combined success starts with the players, though.

Offensively, Butts, Woodward, Davis and senior Cort Ingalls were all critical pieces in Upton-Sundance's backfield last year, although Butts' 1,202 yards drew the majority of attention.

Woodard was the Patriots' No. 2 rusher last year, going for 625 yards; both Butts and Woodard had 17 rushing touchdowns apiece.

Davis added 400 yards rushing and Ingalls 217.

Butts was also U-S's leading receiver last year with 13 catches for 181 yards; Ingalls added 152

receiving yards on 10 catches.

The Patriots also return sophomore quarterback Clayton Louderback, who split time with Woodard under center last year.

Meanwhile, Upton-Sundance's defense was tops in Class 1A 11-man last year in yards allowed per game (143.7) and points allowed per game (6.5).

The Patriots do lose three of their top five tacklers but return Sullivan, who tied for the team lead with 50 assisted tackles and was No. 2 on the team in defensive points, and Davis, who was third and had team-highs with 14 tackles for loss and four sacks.

Gray, Butts, Woodard, senior Yuli Viergets and junior Payton Watt were all among the Patriots' top 11 tacklers last year; Butts had a team-high four interceptions.

Now, Garland said, the Patriots have to make sure they put in the requisite amount of work to repeat the title run they had last year.

"We've already been talking about that in the weight room," Garland said. "... We know there's going to kind of be a bull's eye on our back. We're not going to get ahead of ourselves."

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Panthers drop down a division

Wright will start the 2016 season riding momentum from a pair of changes – one brought on by the team itself, the other brought on by outside forces.

The first change: Wright enters the season coming off a victory.

More specifically, the Panthers entered the offseason off their first victory in two seasons.

A 22-19 victory over winless Burns in the season finale – a victory that broke a 15-game losing streak – had deep reverberations, coach Larry Yeradi said.

"The final win over Burns has shown to provide a boost of confidence and has seemed to bring football back to the forefront," Yeradi said. "We had a record number of kids attend summer camps and have a wonderful number bettering themselves in the summer workouts. Hopefully, this will spill over into the fall."

The second change: the schedule. The Panthers will move from Class 2A to Class 1A 11-man this fall. Changing the competition level may pay off for Wright, which missed the playoffs the past



six seasons at 2A.

Yeradi downplayed that change; changing classifications doesn't change approach, he said.

"I'm not sure how it will really affect our program other than now we will compete against schools in football that we compete against in almost all of the other sports we offer," Yeradi said. "Our football team will still strive to be well prepared, play with enthusiasm and desire, and compete to the best of our ability."

Still, the two momentum-builders come at a good time for a struggling program.

Wright's offense finished last in Class 2A last year in yards per game (140.4). The defense was second-to-last in yards allowed per game (372.4) and allowed 44.9 points per game, the highest

mark in the 32-year history of the program.

The Panthers never managed to stay any closer than 24 points in its seven losses. But the two big changes, combined with Wright's returning players, make those struggles look like afterthoughts.

The Panthers return 10 of their top 12 tacklers, including seniors Kane Leithead and Ryan Speidel – both all-conference selections last year. Speidel, who was second on the team in defensive points in 2015, is the Panthers' leading returning tackler.

Offensively, the Panthers return eight starters.

Junior quarterback Shayne Belt returns after throwing for 605 yards in 2015.

Leithead had 150 receiving yards on a team-best 16 catches, while Speidel had 138 rushing yards and 136 receiving yards and is the Panthers' leading returning rusher.

"With a large number of returners, we should be able to start off jogging day one instead of a slow walk," Yeradi said.

Panthers look to regain swagger

Cokeville was the master of its own undoing last year.

Despite finishing with a winning record and qualifying for the playoffs, the Panthers failed to win at least one playoff game for the first time since 1992. They lost a game by shutout for the first time since 1997 and failed to win a conference championship for the first time since 2008.

Coach Todd Dayton said the problem was simple to identify.

"Last year, we'd self-destruct about two or three or four times a ballgame," Dayton said, "and hopefully we don't do that this year."

The statistics bear out that insight: The Panthers finished minus-14 in turnover ratio, worst in Class 1A 11-man.

"We worked as hard as any team we've had," Dayton said. "We just made mistakes. We'd shoot ourselves in the foot. Right now I think we've got the confidence that we can go out there and not hurt (ourselves)."

Cokeville returns eight starters. However, the Panthers once again are thin in the senior

Key Players
OL/DE: Trent King, Sr.
RB/LB: Rick Nate, Jr.

ranks – no more than five seniors will be out – and the team will need to rely on its junior class to pick up leadership roles normally handled by seniors.

"If we're going to be successful they're going to have to," Dayton said. "We're counting on that."

The Panthers return every player who ran the ball or threw the ball at the varsity level last year and four of the five players who caught at least one pass.

The Panthers return three all-conference picks in senior Trenton King and juniors Rick Nate and Cordell Viehweg.

Nate was fourth in Class 1A 11-man with 131.8 rushing yards per game; he finished with 1,186 yards.

Sophomore Bentley Johnson added 533 rushing yards and 222 passing yards last year.

Defensively, the Panthers lose

Mascot: Panthers
Division: 1A/11-man
Conference: East
Colors: Black and gold
Coach: Larry Yeradi, 22nd year
2015 Record: 1-7

Key Players
QB/RB/LB: Kane Leithead, Sr.
OT/LB: Kholton Bosh, Sr.
FB/LB: Ryan Speidel, Sr.
WR/DB: Kevin Salas, Sr.

2016 Schedule
8-26: at Big Horn jamboree, 10 a.m. (Zero Week)
9-2: vs. Wyoming Indian, 6 p.m.
9-10: at Cokeville, 2 p.m.
9-16: vs. Wind River, 7 p.m.
***9-23:** at Lusk, 7 p.m.
***9-30:** at Pine Bluffs, 6 p.m.
***10-7:** vs. Tongue River, 7 p.m.
***10-14:** vs. Upton-Sundance, 7 p.m.
***10-21:** at Southeast, 7 p.m.
* Conference game

three of their top five tacklers to graduation.

Junior Antheny Petersen was second on the team in defensive points and is the team's top returning tackler. King was fourth.

Juniors Sterling Murdock, Tristan Nate, Rick Nate and Hunter Cheney also figure to be prominent pieces of Cokeville's defense.

"We're not as big and as strong as a lot of teams we're going to play," Dayton said. "We're going to have to be fundamentally better than them."

Execution has long been Cokeville's calling card. As consistently the smallest school in Class 1A 11-man, the Panthers have long relied on execution to beat bigger and deeper teams.

Time to work on those fundamentals may help bring Cokeville back to the heights it's enjoyed.

"We've got a year of experience under our belt," Dayton said. "We were all new last year and they're all coming back (this year), so I think that year of experience is going to help us."



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Mascot: Grizzlies
Division: 1A/11-man
Conference: West
Colors: Brown and yellow
Coach: Richard Despain, first year at Rocky Mountain
2015 Record: 5-4, lost to Upton-Sundance in quarterfinals
2016 Schedule
9-2: vs. Kemmerer, 6 p.m.
9-9: at Upton-Sundance, 7 p.m.
9-16: vs. Lusk, 6 p.m.
***9-23:** at Cokeville, 1 p.m.
***9-30:** vs. Wind River, 6 p.m.
***10-7:** at Shoshoni, 6 p.m.
***10-14:** vs. Saratoga, 1 p.m.
***10-21:** at Wyo. Indian, 6 p.m.
*** Conference game**

New Grizz coach has pedigree

The new era of Rocky Mountain football will take its cues from another successful program right down Highway 14.

The Grizzlies enter 2016 with a new coach, Richard Despain, who was an assistant coach at nearby Powell during the Panthers' championships in 2006, 2011, 2012 and 2013.

The Powell influence will be felt throughout the Rocky program, from offensive and defensive philosophy to offseason approaches.

"If we can learn to trust our reads, our game plan and our teammates to do their jobs, I believe we can find success," Despain said. "With new systems, we have a lot to learn, and I am looking forward to that with this group this year."

It helps that Despain already knows most of Rocky Mountain's players from his time as a volunteer assistant two years ago.

"That will be nice," he said.

Despain already knows about the Grizzlies' potential. Rocky returns four of its five all-conference selections from last year: seniors Gehrig Sweat, Brian Crawford and Garrett Vezain and junior Tristan

Key Players

RB/LB: Gehrig Sweat, Sr.
OL/DL: Garrett Vezain, Sr.
RB/LB: Brian Crawford, Sr.
WR/QB/DB: Cole Simmons, Sr.

Jewell.

Sweat was an all-state choice last year; he totaled 442 rushing yards and is the Grizzlies' leading returning rusher. He also finished as Rocky's No. 2 tackler.

Rocky Mountain actually returns its top three tacklers in Jewell, Sweat and Crawford; however, Rocky's next top three tacklers left via graduation. Senior Zac Zier was seventh on the team in defensive points and senior Cole Simmons was ninth.

"I have full confidence in our guys this year coming in," Despain said. "We will need to make plays, and we will need to learn our jobs, and do our job each night. As we do that, we will find success, and the wins will come." Offensively, the Grizzlies lose

top rusher Cordell McFarlane and quarterback Cole Wambeke to graduation.

However, Simmons, who had 11 catches for 201 yards to lead the Grizzlies in both categories, fronts a receiving corps that returns its top three pass-catchers in Simmons, Sweat and Jewell.

The offense also returns three experienced senior offensive linemen in Zier, Vezain and Triston Rusch.

The Grizzlies had Class 1A 11-man's No. 2 offense a year ago with 366.3 yards per game, but Despain said some changes could make the offense even better.

"We will look different," Despain said. "I will look to teach what I know, and the things I have seen be successful. We will use several formations as we progress through the year and learn."

Despain said the template he will use was set in his time in Powell under former coach Jim Stringer.

"I hope to remember as much of what he had to teach as possible," Despain said.

The approach worked well in Powell. Why not down the road in Cowley, too?

Panthers start with momentum

Six teams in Wyoming enter the 2016 season with at least three straight victories.

Five of those six won state championships last year. The sixth is Saratoga.

The Panthers started 0-5 last year but won their final three games, including one by forfeit, to close out the season. Although the victories didn't earn Saratoga a playoff berth, they did give the Panthers a nice confidence boost.

The offseason did bring change, as Kegan Willford took over as the head coach, but Willford said the momentum is noticeable.

"We're going have new systems, new philosophies this year, but hopefully with that experience we'll get some leaders," he said.

The Panthers' optimism isn't wide-eyed naiveté, though. Before winning three in a row, the Panthers had some clear struggles: In their first four conference games, Saratoga lost by scores of 55-0, 55-0, 57-0 and 56-0.

Willford's addition to the program is a call back to earlier Saratoga football. Willford's father Burt coached the program from 1992-2002, and Kegan Willford played in the Saratoga program in the early 2000s.

Willford teaches in Encampment and has been the Tigers' track coach for the past six years, but he said taking over as Saratoga's football coach was something he always wanted to do.

"After I was able to come back here and get a teaching job, that was definitely a motivation of mine and something I wanted to be involved with someday," he said. "... I have a lot of pride with this program still, and my goal is to bring it back and be competitive again."

The Encampment connection has already drawn dividends for the Saratoga football program. The Saratoga-Encampment football co-op hasn't been fruitful lately – only one Encampment player joined the team last year, and none participated two years ago – but Willford said between

seven and 10 Encampment players will join Saratoga's team this fall.

They're joining a team that's already deep. The Panthers lost just three seniors from last year's team; however, among the three seniors Saratoga lost were its quarterback, its top rusher and its top two tacklers.

Seniors Alex Ziegler, Max Schneider, Jerriah Gonzales, Matt Lincoln and Morgan Rempel will all be key to the team this fall – Lincoln is the team's leading returning tackler, Rempel the team's leading returning rusher. Juniors Cameron Travis and Preston Dew will give depth.

Willford said he's been happy with the leadership from the upperclassmen but has been excited to see large numbers of freshmen and sophomores in the weight room during the offseason.

"I think having that youth is really going to help and we're going to be able to build this program from the ground up," Willford said.



Mascot: Panthers
Division: Class 1A/11-man
Conference: West
Colors: Purple and yellow
Coach: Kegan Willford, first year at Saratoga
2015 Record: 3-5, did not qualify for playoffs

Key Players

WR/RB: Alex Ziegler, Sr.
OL/DL: Max Schneider, Sr.
QB: Jerriah Gonzales, Sr.
TE/DE: Matt Lincoln, Sr.

2016 Schedule

9-2: vs. Burns, 6 p.m.
9-9: at Lusk, 7 p.m.
9-16: vs. Southeast, 6 p.m.
***9-23:** at Wyoming Indian, 6 p.m.
***9-30:** vs. Shoshoni, 6 p.m.
***10-7:** at Cokeville, 4 p.m.
***10-14:** at Rocky Mountain, 1 p.m.
***10-21:** vs. Wind River, 6 p.m.
*** Conference game**

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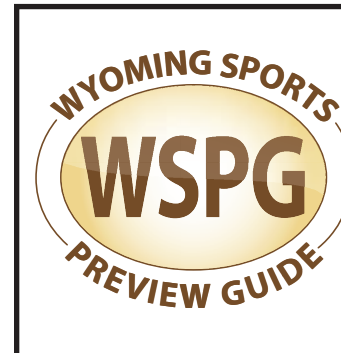
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WYOMING SPORTS
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 PREVIEW GUIDE

Coach: Tony Truempler, 4th year
2015 Record: 8-1, lost to Southeast in quarterfinals
Key Players
OL/LB: J.J. Pingetzer, Sr.
QB/DE/K: Jason Thoren, Sr.
WR/CB: Tony Cousineau, Sr.
RB/OLB: Pat Cornell, Sr.

Mascot: Wranglers
Division: 1A/11-man
Conference: West
Colors: Blue and yellow

2016 Schedule
8-26: vs. Greybull, 6 p.m.
9-2: vs. Big Piney, 7 p.m.
9-9: at Southeast, 7 p.m.
9-16: vs. Upton-Sundance, 2 p.m.
***9-22:** at Wind River, 7 p.m.
***9-30:** at Saratoga, 6 p.m.
***10-7:** vs. Rocky Mountain, 6 p.m.
***10-14:** vs. Wyoming Indian, 3 p.m.
***10-21:** at Cokeville, 2 p.m.
* Conference game

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Mascot: Cougars
Division: 1A/11-man
Conference: West
Colors: Black and purple
Coach: Mykah Trujillo, 2nd year at Wind River
2015 Record: 2-6, did not qualify for playoffs

2016 Schedule
8-26: at Lander JV, 4 p.m.
9-2: at Tongue River, 6 p.m.
9-9: vs. Pine Bluffs, 6 p.m.
9-16: at Wright, 7 p.m.
***9-22:** vs. Shoshoni, 7 p.m.
***9-30:** at Rocky Mtn., 6 p.m.
***10-7:** vs. Wyo. Indian, 7 p.m.
***10-14:** vs. Cokeville, 6 p.m.
***10-21:** at Saratoga, 6 p.m.
* Conference game

Wranglers learned from playoff loss

Shoshoni was a victim of its own success.

Last season, the Wranglers went 8-0 in the regular season, winning their final five games by scores of 57-0, 69-0, 63-0, 48-0 and by forfeit.

However, when the Class 1A 11-man playoffs started, Shoshoni wasn't ready.

Southeast, the No. 4 seed from the East, came to Shoshoni and beat the West No. 1 seed Wranglers 21-3.

Shoshoni coach Tony Truempler said Southeast benefitted from playing numerous tough games during the regular season.

"We didn't have that luxury," he said. "There were pretty much all but two games last year where I had my JV in by halftime.

The lesson? "We've got to be able to play any time," Truempler said

This year's schedule addresses that problem: Shoshoni plays Greybull in its Zero Week game, Class 2A Big Piney in Week 1, season-ender Southeast in Week 2 and defending Class 1A 11-man

champion Upton-Sundance in Week 3.

"That's four games that we have to be ready to play right away," Truempler said. "We're going to be tested right away. ...

"The schedule that we have this year is the schedule I wish we would have had last year."

With eight starters back on offense and nine on defense, those critical tests will help reveal the character of a team that coaches from across the state have pegged to repeat as conference champs.

Shoshoni returns a pair of all-state selections in J.J. Pingetzer and Jason Thoren, while seniors Pat Cornell, Anthony Cousineau and Coleter Jordan and junior Wyatt Ramsey were all-conference selections along with Pingetzer and Thoren. No other program in Class 1A 11-man returns as many all-conference players as Shoshoni.

Thoren, Shoshoni's quarterback, and Cousineau, the top receiver, will highlight the skill positions on an offense that lost its top two rushers to graduation.

The line remains small, Truempler said, but "what we lack in size we definitely make up for in speed."

Defensively, the Wranglers return the bulk of their squad, including their top tackler Pingetzer – the team's leader in solo and assisted tackles, tackles for loss and sacks.

Thoren finished No. 2 on the team in defensive points, while Jordan was fourth, senior Zach Pickinpaugh was fifth, Cornell sixth and Cousineau seventh.

They'll lead a group of 11 seniors ready to leave a legacy that goes deeper than a conference championship and a first-round playoff exit.

Truempler said last year's seniors set the bar with Super 25 and Shrine Bowl invitations – the individual accolades now seen as attainable with team success.

And team success is the focus. "They've already said we need to be playing in Laramie this season," Truempler said. "Honestly, we kind of thought that's were we should have been last year."

Chiefs take pride in play

One word comes up often when Wyoming Indian coach Todd Ghormley talks about his team: pride.

At every opportunity, Ghormley brings up how proud he of his players who come back day after day, week after week, to a perpetual on-field struggle.

Football ranks third in Wyoming Indian's fall athletics hierarchy, behind a championship-laden cross country program and preparation for basketball.

That's why football players at Wyoming Indian have to bring that pride to the program daily. When that happens, Ghormley sees the type of development he wants from his squad.

"It's hard to be a ballplayer out here, especially with not a huge following, but the coaches and I really stress (to players) they need to be proud of themselves after each game, after each practice, because we as coaches are proud of them," he said.

Last year, the Chiefs started with about 28 players but finished with 11. In five games, the Chiefs lost by scores of 61-0, 55-0, 56-0,

Key Players

OL: Avery Galloway, Jr.
C: Josh Wallowingbull, Sr.
RB: Kobe Tillman, Soph.
RB: Hiissiis Goodnight, Soph.
RB: Trayton Washington, Soph.

69-0 and 39-6. They forfeited two other games. The lone game that went into the scorebook as a Chiefs victory was a forfeit against Burlington.

The last time Wyoming Indian beat another team on the field was in 2013, when the team was playing its only season of six-man football. The 39-6 loss to Saratoga that the Chiefs had to close out last season was the team's closest game the past two years.

However, winning is not the program's focus. Ghormley said he believes winning is a byproduct of the process of mastering the fundamentals – and that is where he and his coaching staff focus.

"I'll talk about (winning) the first day of practice and I probably won't talk about it again," Ghorm-

ley said. "... Me and my coaching staff, we will emphasize on these kids doing all the little things right, from their first steps to the count of the snap to proper technique.

"The wins are going to come regardless when we get the little things worked out."

The Chiefs should benefit from the return of two players who missed last season. Junior Avery Galloway was a solid contributor for the Chiefs during his freshman year and returns after transferring back to the district, while senior Josh Wallowingbull returns after missing last year due to injury.

Three sophomores – Kobe Tillman, Hiissiis Goodnight and Trayton Washington – all showed potential at the running back position as freshmen, while junior Mearl Goodnight is one of the team's most versatile players and could see time at running back, quarterback or tight end.

Win or lose, Ghormley wants his team to leave the field with their heads high.

"We'll play with anybody, and we'll give it our best," he said.



Mascot: Indian Chiefs
Division: 1A/11-man
Conference: West
Colors: Blue and red
Coach: Todd Ghormley, 3rd year
2015 Record: 1-7

2016 Schedule
9-2: at Wright, 6 p.m.
9-9: vs. Tongue River, 6 p.m.
9-16: at Pine Bluffs, 6 p.m.
***9-23:** vs. Saratoga, 6 p.m.
***9-30:** vs. Cokeville, 4 p.m.
***10-7:** at Wind River, 7 p.m.
***10-14:** at Shoshoni, 3 p.m.
***10-21:** vs. Rocky Mtn., 6 p.m.
* Conference game

Cougars continue to improve

The biggest difference between the first year and the second year for Wind River coach Mykah Trujillo hinges on a single word: trust.

Trujillo was Wind River's sixth head coach in 12 years when he was hired last year. That turnover had created some skepticism among the Cougars, who weren't sure what to expect from their latest coach.

Slowly but surely, Trujillo has started to break down those barriers, and he's hopeful the players' trust in him – and vice versa – will lead to improvements on the field.

"You can see some of them starting to trust (me)," he said. "... They've learned that I'm pretty straightforward, I have pretty high expectations for them and I'm not letting up my expectations."

Year One was a struggle. The Cougars went 2-6, the only victories coming over struggling Wyoming Indian and a forfeit against Burlington, which now fields a six-man team.

Meanwhile, the Cougars' six losses came by a combined score

of 204-31.

Nevertheless, Trujillo enters Year Two optimistic, in part because the Cougars only lost four seniors but gain a big freshman class.

"We do have more upperclassmen this year than we did last year for sure, about double the upperclassmen," he said. "We're still pretty bottom heavy, though."

The Cougars could end up with as many as 30 players this fall, but Trujillo said 25 is more realistic.

Wind River does return players in key positions, though, with seven starters returning on both offense and defense. Senior Xavior Oats returns at quarterback, while senior Taylor Tidzump will be one of the team's top wide receivers.

The Cougars return three of their top four tacklers in Oats, Tidzump and senior John Thoman.

Trujillo said having that much returning experience will give the team a great point from which to start the season.

"It's going to be huge because (of) the learning curve," Trujillo said. "Those guys already know what to expect, they know plays, versus last year, everything was new to them."

"Having that experience and having guys that know what's going on and what's expected will be huge."

The newcomers will help, too. Trujillo said he has at least three freshmen who could make an immediate impact, while Kaiden Burk, a 215-pound junior, returns

"You can see some of them starting to trust (me)."

~ Coach Mykah Trujillo



after missing last year while recovering from surgery.

And Wind River's returners are consistently improving. Trujillo said part of gaining the players' trust was making sure their offseason commitment was in the forefront.

Key Players

QB/LB: Xavior Oats, Sr.
RB/LB: John Thoman, Sr.
FB/DE: Chance Jennings, Sr.
TE/DE: Taylor Tidzump, Sr.

"Last year, we had one or two kids in the weight room during the summer, and this year, we probably have, on average, eight," Trujillo said. "We're starting to get those norms and those expectations established, and I think it's just going to get better, too."

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1A/6-man Preview



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State Championship Kaycee 51, Meeteetse 32 State Semifinals

Kaycee 51, Snake River 14

Meeteetse 68, Hulett 36

State Quarterfinals

Kaycee 76, Dubois 18

Meeteetse 70, Guernsey-Sunrise 26

Hulett 42, Farson 16

Snake River 68, Normative Serv. 46

Four players to watch

Seth Frederick, Guernsey-Sunrise

If the Vikings are going to reach Laramie, it'll be on the legs of Frederick, who is the team's lone returning all-state player, and a player every coach in the state will devise defensive game plans to stop.

Dalton Abarr, Meeteetse

A two-time all-stater already, Abarr runs the Longhorns' offense like a surgeon. He led the team in passing (1,391 yards, 30 touchdowns, zero interceptions) and rushing (881 yards, 20 touchdowns). Abarr's leadership in his senior season will be a big piece of the Longhorns' push for another title game trip.

Mark Largent, Kaycee

The junior was the leading tackler on the Buckaroos' state championship team last season, and he leads a defense that returns four of its top six tacklers – meaning opponents won't be able to key solely on him. He's also one of Kaycee's top receivers.

Dallen Fleenor, Lingle

The senior was an all-stater for the Doggers at the 11-man level after piling up 872 rushing yards, 78 defensive points and team highs in receiving yards (103) and interceptions (three). Fleenor's versatility should make Lingle's transition from 11-man to six-man easier than usual.



WILD BUCKAROOS

Kaycee senior running back Taylor Rouse runs for a touchdown during the 2015 Class 1A six-man Wyoming State Football Championship. The Buckaroos will try to defend their title beginning Sept. 2 against Riverside.

Photo courtesy Wyoming Boomerang

6-man race will be wide open as usual

By Patrick Schmiedt

Four questions to answer

How will six-man's newcomers affect the state title chase? Not all that much, to be honest. Three programs – Lingle, Riverside and Burlington – will move from 11-man to six-man this fall, but only Burlington will be eligible for the playoffs.

Who should be in the title chase, then? The usual suspects. Kaycee and Meeteetse, last year's state champion and state runner-up, have the talent needed to again be contenders. Only six players return from last year's six-man all-state team, and half of them play for either the Buckaroos or the Longhorns.

Who's everyone overlooking? Farson. The Pronghorns have some young but talented players returning – the team's top three tacklers last year were all freshmen – and also play what will likely be their most strenuous West Conference games at home.

So there's not a lot of parity, then? Wait, wait, wait... I didn't say that. Actually, coaches say this may be the most wide-open year in recent six-man history, with six or seven teams possessing legitimate ability to run at a title.

Four key games

Midwest at Normative Services, Sept. 9. The Oilers lost just one senior from last year's team. The Wolves are coming off their first six-man playoff qualification. Both teams are

eager to prove they belong.

Burlington at Farson, Sept. 10. The Huskies' first conference game comes on the road against the Pronghorns, a team that could be one of the classification's best. This will be a good litmus test for both teams.

Meeteetse at Snake River, Sept. 16. The Longhorns and Rattlers finished 1-2 in last year's West Conference standings, and this Week 3 showdown in Baggs may again decide who takes the top seed into the playoffs.

Kaycee at Guernsey-Sunrise, Sept. 30. Kaycee's only conference loss last year came at the hands of the Vikings. Both teams figure to be chasing the East Conference title this year, so this one will again be important.

Predicted order of finish

East Conference: Guernsey-Sunrise, Kaycee, Lingle, Midwest, NSI, Hanna, Hulett, Rock River.

West Conference: Meeteetse, Farson, Snake River, Riverside, Burlington, Dubois, Ten Sleep, St. Stephens.

Way-too-early title game score prediction

Meeteetse 44, Guernsey-Sunrise 36

The most interesting week in six-man might actually be the semifinals; enough parity exists in the classification to ensure that any team making it that far has a better-than-usual shot at a championship.

New coach inherits rich tradition

Consistently, Guernsey-Sunrise has one of the best small-school football teams in the state.

The Vikings have won state football titles in 2004, 2006, 2009 and 2014 – and did so with four different head coaches.

So even though Guernsey will have a new coach this fall, it's still one of the favorites to win the Class 1A six-man championship.

Former assistant coach Curtis Cook was named the head coach in late July. Cook, who's been with the program for five years, said the program's consistency is due in large part to community support.

"We're just really competitive," he said. "Football is the main sport at Guernsey. Football is like that marquee sport that the school and the community kind of hangs its hat on. ... It all goes to the kids and the culture we have here when it comes to football."



Key Players

RB: Seth Frederick, Sr.

DE: Ryan Orr, Sr.

CB: Cody Quynn, Sr.

RB: Gage Koeteman, Jr.

The Vikings have enough talent returning to be one of six-man's better teams.

It starts with senior Seth Frederick, who was an all-state choice last year, rushing for more than 1,200 yards.

Frederick was the Class 1A champion in the 400-meter dash last spring.

"He's obviously our top

threat," Cook said. "... Our big focus for him is going to be that leadership. Getting that senior leadership is always crucial, and for him it's going to be something we start grinding into him from the start and set that expectation for him."

But he won't be the team's only threat, as juniors Gage Koeteman and Garrett Oneyear and sophomore Austin Albrecht also have both size and speed to be threats out of the backfield, while senior Cody Quynn, who split quarterbacking duties with Frederick last fall, also returns.

"Guernsey's strength has always been running the ball," Cook said. "That's been our MO since the early 2000s. We've been a ground and pound team. It's one of our core philosophies."

On defense, the Vikings return four of their top five tacklers.

Senior rush specialist Ryan Orr was second on the team in defensive points and is Guernsey's leading returning tackler. He led the Vikings with 10.5 tackles for loss last year.

Koeteman was third, Quynn fourth and Frederick fifth.

"I think defensively we've got some guys who are really solid tacklers, especially in the open field," Cook said.

In a parity-filled East Conference where the top four seeds last year were separated by one game, the Vikings will have little time to learn a new approach.

However, Cook said, "If we can put things together the way we want to, I think we can make a run for another title."



Mascot: Vikings

Division: 1A/6-man

Conference: East

Colors: Black and white

Coach: Curtis Cook, first year at Guernsey-Sunrise

2015 Record: 5-4, lost to Meeteetse in state quarterfinals

2016 Schedule

8-27: at Kaycee jamboree, noon (Zero Week)

9-3: vs. Farson, noon

***9-9:** at Lingle, 7 p.m.

***9-16:** vs. Midwest, 7 p.m.

***9-23:** at NSI, 2 p.m.

***9-30:** vs. Kaycee, 7 p.m.

***10-7:** at Hanna, 2 p.m.

***10-14:** vs. Rock River, 7 p.m.

***10-22:** at Hulett, 3 p.m.

*** Conference game**

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Mascot: Miners
Division: 1A/6-man
Conference: East
Colors: Blue and orange
Coach: Zack Scott, 4th year
2015 Record: 2-6, did not qualify for playoffs

Key Players

C/LB: Landon Jones, Sr.
QB/RB/LB: Brandon Scott, Sr.
RB/WR/LB: Jarrett Neimark, Sr.
QB/RB/DE: Jiel Matthews, Sr.

2016 Schedule

9-2: at Meeteetse, 6 p.m.
***9-10:** vs. Kaycee, 2 p.m.
***9-17:** vs. Hulett, 1 p.m. (at Midwest)
***9-23:** at Rock River, 3 p.m.
***9-30:** at Lingle, 7 p.m.
***10-7:** vs. Guernsey-Sunrise, 2 p.m.
***10-15:** vs. NSI, noon
***10-21:** at Midwest, 6 p.m.
*** Conference game**

Miners have some firepower

The Hanna-Elk Mountain-Medicine Bow Miners have a simple strategy this fall: Pick your poison.

With four seniors leading the way – all of whom are potential game-breakers – the Miners' opponents will be faced with some difficult decisions.

All four seniors will play big roles for HEM, which will put its hopes on the shoulders of its most experienced players this fall.

So far, they've embraced that challenge, coach Zack Scott said.

"They have all played a lot of football and understand our

"I expect great things from all of them."

~ **Coach Zack Scott**

offense and defense very well," Scott said. "I expect great things from all of them."

The expectations start with the player who starts every play.

Senior center Landon Jones was an all-conference choice last year and is the only Miner player returning this season so honored.

Senior Jiel Matthews, who threw for 319 yards and ran for 205 more, is Hanna's leading re-turner in both categories.

Senior Jarrett Neimark had 31 catches for 444 yards and a team-high 10 touchdowns; he is back as the team's leading re-turning receiver.

Continued on Next Page

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Red Devils have some holes to fill

Boz Backen's promotion to head coach of the Hulett football team came as a surprise.

Prior to Hulett's first game last year, former head coach Ryan Neiman started telling Backen all the responsibilities a head coach has prior to a game.

"I told (Neiman) that's his job," Backen said, "and that's when he said, 'Not this year.'"

Neiman stepped down to devote time to his wife, who was expecting the couple's first child. All of a sudden, Backen was head coach.

"The transition was a little difficult at first," Backen said, "coming from being just a volunteer coach and helping with just special teams to being in charge of managing practice and having an input in all parts of the game. Coach Neiman did a fantastic job of helping when I had questions."

Hulett did well in Backen's first season, finishing 7-3 and earning a home playoff game, Hulett's first in five years of six-man play.

The seven victories were the most for Hulett at the six-man level and the program's highest total since winning eight in 1994.

However, Hulett lost its top three rushers, its quarterback, its top receiver and its top four tacklers – as well as all four of its all-conference players – to graduation.

In addition, the Red Devils lost junior Josh Stevens, who had 419 receiving yards and was slated to be Hulett's top re-turning tackler. Stevens tore his ACL during basketball and won't be ready to go for football.

Clearly, the team Backen inherited last year will be much different from the one he builds this year.

"We did have a really good group of seniors last year," Backen said. "I really don't know how we replace those guys. Hopefully last year our sophomores and juniors paid attention and will be willing to step up and fill that void."

Senior Bodhi Penning and sophomore Austin Butler will carry Hulett's load early.

"I expect them to come in and be the leaders that our last years senior group showed last year," Backen said. "I want them to take the young kids coming up under their wings and help them get better."

Offensively, Penning finished third in receiving for the Red Devils with 249 yards. Also, with 178 rushing yards last year, Penning is Hulett's leading re-turning rusher.

However, the Red Devils don't return any players who threw a pass at the varsity level last season.

Backen said he expects to have about 10 players out this year; of those, five will be freshmen.

"This year with the youth we will have, I think we're going to start at the basics to catch them up and getting them to feel comfortable in any situation that we put them in," Backen said.



Mascot: Red Devils

Division: 1A/6-man

Conference: East

Colors: Black and red

Coach: Boz Backen, second year at Hulett

2015 Record: 7-3, lost to Meeteetse in state semifinals

Key Players

RB/DE: Bodhi Penning, Sr.

DE: Austin Butler, Soph.

2016 Schedule

9-3: at Ten Sleep, 2 p.m.
***9-10:** vs. Rock River, 3 p.m.
***9-17:** vs. Hanna, 1 p.m. (at Midwest)
***9-24:** vs. Kaycee, 2 p.m.
***10-1:** at NSI, noon
***10-8:** vs. Midwest, 1 p.m.
***10-14:** at Lingle, 7 p.m.
***10-22:** vs. Guernsey-Sunrise, 3 p.m.
*** Conference game**

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Hanna, Cont.

And senior Brandon Scott added 403 receiving yards and ran for 108 more.

Stop one, and opportunities open for another.

But they can't do it alone. The Miners' offense lost its top rusher, passer and receiver to graduation but get back their No. 2 players in all three categories.

The Miners do return three of their top four tacklers from a year ago. Jones was second on the team in defensive points, while Scott was third and Matthews fourth.

Jones led the Miners in tackles for loss and sacks.

Even so, on a roster of about 15 players, the seniors will be called on to lead as much as they will be called on to play.

"It will be great for our seniors to teach and lead our incoming freshman class," Scott said. "Hopefully with such strong

leaders they can bring them along quickly and smooth the inevitable transition to high school football."

Hanna's prospects for a playoff berth will depend significantly on how quick the crew around those four seniors develops.

Last year, the Miners missed the playoffs for the second time in three years, with their only victories coming against one-win Rock River and winless St. Stephens.

The Miners were consistently competitive – they scored 366 points last year and allowed 384, a fairly slim margin for a team that finished 2-6.

But HEM lost both games that finished with single-digit margins, falling 34-31 to Snake River and 47-38 to Midwest.

"The only frustration was not being able to win those close games," Scott said. "I think these kids are ready to lead us over the hump, continue to be competitive, and win the close games."



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Mascot: Buckaroos
Division: 1A/6-man
Conference: East
Colors: Blue and red
Coach: Lee Kremers, 2nd year at Kaycee
2015 Record: 10-1, beat Meeteetse in state championship

2016 Schedule

- 8-27: Kaycee jamboree, noon (Zero Week)
- 9-2: vs. Riverside, 2 p.m.
- *9-10: at Hanna, 2 p.m.
- *9-16: vs. Rock River, 2 p.m.
- *9-24: at Hulett, 2 p.m.
- *9-30: at Guernsey-Sunrise, 7 p.m.
- *10-7: vs. Lingle, 3 p.m.
- *10-15: vs. Midwest, 2 p.m.
- *10-21: at NSI, 2 p.m.
- * **Conference game**

Mascot: Doggers
Division: 1A/6-man
Conference: East
Colors: Blue and red
Coach: Matthew Cornelius, first year at Lingle
2015 Record: 7-3, lost to Tongue River in 1A 11-man state semifinals

Key Players

RB/FS: Dallen Fleenor, Sr.
QB/LB: Garrett Cooper, Sr.
OL/LB: Jared Shepardson, Sr.
RB/DB: Preston Bowers, Sr.

2016 Schedule

- 9-3: at Snake River, 2 p.m.
- *9-9: vs. Guernsey-Sunrise, 7 p.m.
- *9-16: vs. NSI, 7 p.m.
- *9-23: at Midwest, 6 p.m.
- *9-30: vs. Hanna, 7 p.m.
- *10-7: at Kaycee, 3 p.m.
- *10-14: vs. Hulett, 7 p.m.
- *10-21: at Rock River, 3 p.m.
- * **Conference game**

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Buckaroos ready for title defense

While Kaycee was winning its first state football championship in school history, it was also working on its second.

The Buckaroos won the Class 1A six-man title last year, and in doing so gave their underclassmen significant varsity minutes.

Those opportunities will bear fruit this year as Kaycee goes for a second consecutive title, relying on players who saw extended varsity minutes in 2015.

“All season long, we got to work on next year’s team,” coach Lee Kremers said.

Although underclassmen will still be key, the team returns three players who started last year.

The Buckaroos return a pair of all-state selections in senior Reed Stafford and junior Mark Largent.

Stafford and Largent were Kaycee’s top two receivers last year, while sophomore Hunter Rouse – who completed 79 percent of his passes last year – returns as Kaycee’s quarterback.

Even though Kaycee lost its

Key Players

E/LB: Reed Stafford, Sr.
E/LB: Mark Largent, Jr.
LB: Atticus Garrett, Jr.
QB: Hunter Rouse, Soph.

two top rushers to graduation, Kremers said the Buckaroos’ running game will be buoyed by experienced players. Junior Danny Ramirez is Kaycee’s leading returning rusher, while juniors Atticus Garrett and Hunter Elmer also saw significant carries.

“This year we should have a pretty strong running game again,” Kremers said. “With the talent we had last year, we were able to (play) a lot of our younger guys. They just got a little better, a little more refined, a little more polished each time.”

The Buckaroos also return four of their top six tacklers. Largent and Garrett were Kaycee’s top two tacklers last year, while Stafford

was fourth and Ramirez was sixth in defensive points.

The program continues to ride championship momentum. In its first year under Kremers, Kaycee won a program-record 10 games and its first state championship since starting its program in 2009.

“It was an awesome experience, and I’m sure there are some of the kids that wouldn’t mind going back there,” Kremers said.

Kremers, who also doubles as a policeman in Kaycee, said the difference between being a contender and being a champion was in the Buckaroos’ response to adversity.

“We had a strong discipline,” Kremers said. “We never got down on ourselves, and that’s going to be huge again this year.”

Kremers said he will again focus on fundamentals. He said fundamentals can make a team explosive, but being explosive doesn’t improve fundamentals.

“A disciplined team can do all the little things all the time, and the big things come,” he said.

Doggers transition to new class

Lingle-Fort Laramie’s decision to move to six-man football was no decision at all. Keeping football alive meant opting down to six-man.

The consequence is steep: Since Lingle is technically classified as an 11-man program, the Doggers won’t be eligible for the playoffs. However, with only 11 or 12 players expected out this fall, the Doggers’ choice was straightforward.

New head coach Matthew Cornelius said of all the changes he’s seen the program undergo the past few months, the one that brings him the most pride is how his returning players have made the most of a tough situation.

“They realize we won’t even be eligible for the playoffs, so I’m proud of the kids that have sacrificed this summer,” Cornelius said.

The Doggers lost 13 seniors but still return all-state selections Garrett Cooper and Dallen Fleenor, both seniors. Fleenor ran for 872 yards and was also Lingle’s top receiver in its run-heavy offense with 103 yards on nine catches. Cooper was fourth on the team in defensive points while Fleenor was fifth.

Cornelius said Cooper and Fleenor form a dynamic pairing at the six-man level; they’ll likely form a full-back-tailback pair on offense and a linebacker-safety pair on defense. They’ve earned those roles, Cornelius said, by being Lingle’s leaders in the transition from 11-man to six-man.

While they could have dropped football or played other sports, Cornelius said, “it’s really great for them to understand it’s a character-building process and I’m really proud of them for that.”

A core group of seniors, including Fleenor, Cooper, Preston Bowers, Jared Shepardson and Taylor Wagner,

were among Lingle’s top 10 tacklers a year ago.

However, depth is a question: Nine of the Doggers’ top 14 tacklers were lost to graduation. And, of course, the transition to six-man awaits. Cornelius said he saw glimmers of how good the Doggers could be when he took the team to a six-man team camp in Nebraska. There, Lingle hung with the better six-man teams despite being new to the game.

“We were really competitive,” Cornelius said.

Meanwhile, even though the Doggers won’t compete in the playoffs this year, the community has supported the decision to move to six-man.

“They understand why we made the decision we made,” Cornelius said. “It was a hard decision because we were not exactly sure of the number of kids that will come out next year. It would be hard to opt up to 11-man and only have 11 or 12 kids go out.”

The decision, difficult as it was, may save football in Lingle. And that decision was easy, with or without the playoffs.

“(The players) love football,” Cornelius said, “and they’re excited to just go throw the pigskin around.”

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Oilers point to postseason berth

Midwest has a reasonable goal this season: make the playoffs.

From 2009-14, the Oilers made the playoffs every year. Last year, the Oilers’ string of good fortune ran out.

Coach Ken Swieter said he knows how big of a motivator it is for his players to have the opportunity to play in the postseason, and he saw how much missing out on that opportunity frustrated his players.

“I want to get back to the playoffs,” he said. “Last year was the first year we didn’t make the playoffs in six-man. I didn’t like that. We didn’t like that.”

“It stung for many of those kids, especially the ones that did put a lot of work and effort into it.”

Fortunately for the Oilers, the sting has morphed into motivation, and nearly every player returns for vindication.

The Oilers only graduated one senior from last year’s 3-5 team but suffered a big offseason loss

when Dylan VanFleet, who ran for more than 1,000 yards last year as a junior, moved to Tennessee.

But everyone else is back. Midwest could have more than 20 players out this fall, including as many as eight seniors. Those seniors are part of a program that reached a state championship game their freshman year.

Defensively, the Oilers have back eight of their top nine tacklers, including seniors Nick Ray – Midwest’s only returning all-conference player – Dustin Bogart, Kia Hudson and Logan Drinkwalter and junior Will Chapman. Those players all averaged at least seven defensive points per game last year.

Offensively, VanFleet’s presence will be missed, but Ray had 259 rushing yards and 150 receiving yards and is the team’s leading returner in both categories. Junior Kayden Best also returns after taking the reins at quarterback last fall.

Swieter said the offense

should be able to grow. He said the Oilers’ offense was limited last year, and “the kids knew it.”

“We had to learn the basic plays, when to audible, when to use those plays, and I’m hoping that we can expand it,” Swieter said.

One bit of uncertainty still hangs over the season: the location of Midwest’s home games.

A leak that released toxic gases into the school in late May forced students to complete their year in Casper. As of early July, the school was still unable to be occupied, forcing administrators to make contingency plans for the football season, among other plans.

Swieter said there is a “very realistic chance” the Oilers may not play any games in Midwest this year; home games may be moved to Casper if the school building remains closed.

“I hope not,” Swieter said. “I want to play in Midwest. I think everyone wants to play in Midwest. That’s our home.”

Coach: Ken Swieter, 10th year
2015 Record: 3-5, did not qualify for playoffs
Key Players
RB/LB: Nick Ray, Sr.
QB: Kayden Best, Jr.
TE: Colby Uran, Sr.
CB: Dustin Bogart, Sr.

Mascot: Oilers
Division: 1A/6-man
Conference: East
Colors: Maroon and silver

2016 Schedule

- 8-26: vs. Dubois/Snake River, 3 p.m. (Zero Week)
- 9-2: vs. Dubois, 6 p.m.
- *9-9: at NSI, 6 p.m.
- *9-16: at Guernsey-Sunrise, 7 p.m.
- *9-23: vs. Lingle, 6 p.m.
- *9-30: vs. Rock River, 7 p.m.
- *10-8: at Hulett, 1 p.m.
- *10-15: at Kaycee, 2 p.m.
- *10-21: vs. Hanna, 6 p.m.
- * **Conference game**

Wolves remain a work in progress

The NSI Academy Wolves were the most exciting team in the state last year regardless of classification – if you like offense.

NSI averaged nearly 63 points per game, but also gave up more than 57 ppg. Both marks were near the top of Class 1A six-man, and the combined 120 points per game is the highest mark in state history.

An almost entirely new crop of players will be on the field for the

Key Player

WR/DB: Corey Wyatt, Sr.

Wolves this fall, and their identity won’t necessarily be the same.

Even so, coach Anthony Simmons knows where the priority will be for his team.

“We’ll focus a lot on defense, for sure,” Simmons said. “I think

that was our problem last year. We were able to score, but we weren’t always able to stop people.”

Even with a leaky defense, the Wolves often just outscored their opponents to finish 4-4 and make the playoffs for the first time in three years of six-man play.

Simmons said only one player, senior wide receiver/defensive back Corey Wyatt, will be back this fall, as all of NSI’s other players from last season have moved out of the facility west of Sheridan.

“Most likely he’ll be the star of the team, for sure, if he ends up staying,” Simmons said. “I try to make it with what we have. It’s always a new experience when you’ve got to start from scratch.”

Simmons said the team will probably have about 15 players this fall. He said the team may not be as explosive as last year’s team.

“Compared to last year, I would say we don’t seem to be as fast,” Simmons said, “but we’ve got some kids with some ability throughout the campus.”

“It all depends on how kids adapt, how well they gel together.”



Mascot: Wolves
Division: 1A/6-man
Conference: East
Colors: Blue and silver
Coach: Anthony Simmons, 3rd year at NSI
2015 Record: 4-4, lost to Snake River in quarterfinals

2016 Schedule

- 8-26: TBD (Zero Week)
- 9-2: at Burlington, 1 p.m.
- *9-9: vs. Midwest, 6 p.m.
- *9-16: at Lingle, 7 p.m.
- *9-23: vs. Guernsey-Sunrise, 2 p.m.
- *10-1: vs. Hulett, noon
- *10-7: at Rock River, 3:30 p.m.
- *10-15: at Hanna, noon
- *10-21: vs. Kaycee, 2 p.m.
- * **Conference game**

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Coach: Unknown at press time

2015 Record: 1-6

Key Players

RB: Cade Sanchez, Jr.

LB: Kolten Moss, Sr.

RB/DB: Matt Baxter, Jr.

DB: Chase Stricklin, Soph.

Mascot: Longhorns

Division: 1A/6-man

Conference: East

Colors: Blue and white

2016 Schedule

8-27: at Kaycee jamboree, noon (Zero Week)

9-2: vs. St. Stephens, 4 p.m.

*9-10: at Hulet, 3 p.m.

*9-16: at Kaycee, 2 p.m.

*9-23: vs. Hanna, 3 p.m.

*9-30: at Midwest, 7 p.m.

*10-7: vs. NSI, 3:30 p.m.

*10-14: at Guernsey-Sunrise, 7 p.m.

*10-21: vs. Lingle, 3 p.m.

* Conference game

Longhorns have question marks



Off the field, this year will be a transition year for the Rock River football team.

On the field, the Longhorns will look pretty close to their 2015 squad.

Rock River's head coach the past two years, Terrance Reese, resigned in mid-July, citing a desire to spend more time with his three children and his family, the distance between Rock River and his home in Laramie, and the extra time needed to pursue a master's degree. A successor was not immediately named, and Reese said last year's assistant coaches have also stepped down, leaving the team without a coaching staff.

Reese had been Rock River's coach for the duration of its existence as a varsity-level program; the Longhorns started playing six-man football at the varsity level in 2014. At the same time, though, the Longhorns will enter 2016 with a large portion of their team intact.

The Longhorns lost just two seniors from last year's team, the biggest loss being that of quarterback and top tackler Scott Broyles.

However, the Longhorns do re-

turn junior Cade Sanchez, who led the team with 722 rushing yards and 305 receiving yards. He was also Rock River's No. 2 tackler a year ago and led the team with 10 pass breakups.

Defensively, the Longhorns return four of their top five tacklers. Along with Sanchez, senior Kolten Moss, junior Matt Baxter and sophomore Chase Stricklin all averaged more than 11 defensive points per game last year.

Junior Dakota Holaday and sophomore Tristan Bunce also played key roles in the Longhorns' defensive rotation last year.

Offensively, Stricklin also played some quarterback last year and could replace Broyles as the team's signal-caller. The Long-

horns do return their top four receivers in Sanchez, Bunce, Baxter and Moss.

Even though the team only lost two seniors, Rock River will be one of the youngest teams in six-man. Moss was the only junior or the roster last year; of the Longhorns' 11 players on the roster last year, eight were either freshmen or sophomores.

Last year's squad struggled to put the pieces together consistently. The Longhorns finished 1-6 for the second consecutive year, and for the second year in a row failed to win a conference game.

Rock River played close in a 34-30 loss to Midwest but lost every other East Conference game by at least 40 points. The team's lone win came in the season opener, a 61-18 thumping of winless St. Stephens.

Nearly the same Rock River team will be on the field in Week 1 when the Longhorns face St. Stephens again. The question hanging over the program entering 2016 is how much the off-the-field transition will affect the on-the-field performance.

Rams rely on strong tradition



Mascot: Rams

Division: 1A/6-man

Conference: West

Colors: Blue and yellow

Coach: David Trembly, 19th year

2015 Record: 2-7, lost to Kaycee in state quarterfinals

2016 Schedule

9-2: at Midwest, 6 p.m.

*9-10: vs. Meeteetse, 2 p.m.

*9-16: at Riverside, 2 p.m.

*9-24: vs. Snake River, 3 p.m.

*10-1: vs. Farson, 2 p.m.

*10-7: at Burlington, 3 p.m.

*10-14: at St. Stephens, 2 p.m.

*10-22: vs. Ten Sleep, 2 p.m.

* Conference game

Key Players

RB: Brock Baker, Sr.

RB: Wade Beavers, Sr.

WR: Kyle Eulberg, Sr.

OL: Case Neal, Sr.

defensive points.

Even so, the Rams return four starters on both offense and defense, and the 2016 efforts will start with their leadership.

From there, the key will be for the team to find its own identity rather than trying to replicate another.

"From year to year, I do not believe you replace anyone," Trembly said. "You take the kids you have and you build the best team."

Senior Brock Baker is Dubois' lone returning all-conference selection. He is Dubois' leading returning rusher, with 483 yards last year.

Seniors Wade Beavers and Case Neal were the Rams' only receivers in triple-digit yardage last season, and both return this fall.

The Rams return 10 of their top

12 tacklers from last year; Beavers, senior Kyle Eulberg and sophomores Warren Johnson and Connor Hudson all averaged at least five defensive points per game a year ago.

"Our guys did get lots of time and our hope is to build on that experience," Trembly said.

Even so, Trembly said the team is overall still young – many key contributors last year were underclassmen – and a lack of experience may be one of the team's weak points entering the fall. Trembly said the players need to continue to develop their football smarts and toughness; pairing those two elements together will give the Rams more confidence as the season progresses.

Dubois will also break in a new field this year. Trembly said Dubois' new school opened two years ago; the field, scoreboard and bleachers came together this summer.

"It will be nice to finally get moved in," Trembly said, "and not having to go across town to practice and across town to play. It'll be nice to be all in one location."

Huskies make move to 6-man

After one game last season, Burlington's players knew a change had to come.

The Huskies finished last season with about 14-15 players but only had 11 in their first game against Lusk – the 52-0 loss that ended up being Burlington's last 11-man game of the year.

Soon after, the Huskies forfeited the remainder of their games, knowing that playing without a single player on the bench wasn't an option.

Instead, Burlington tried six-man football. The Huskies went 4-2 in six-man exhibition games, beating JV teams from Meeteetse, Midwest and Kaycee and the varsity squad from Billings (Montana) Christian and losing to the Hot Springs (Montana) varsity and the Custer (Montana) JV.

This year, the Huskies made the move to six-man official, joining the Class 1A six-man West Conference. The adjustment to six-man, even with a year of exhibition game, will still take some time.

"A lot of these teams have been playing six-man for awhile," new head coach Trent Aagard said.



"Even though we were able to play against a few Montana schools and some Wyoming JV games, there is still a bit of a learning curve when switching to six-man.

"Football is still football, but it seems like there is less room for error in six-man. I hope we can take some of the stuff we saw last year and try and (shore) up parts of our game."

Aagard, a Burlington native, has been an assistant coach with the Huskies for three years and is the younger brother of former head coach Mike Aagard. Aagard said he was pleased to see the team's resilience shine through during tough times last season.

"Last year, we didn't know

what if any games we were going to be able to play, but the kids showed up to practice and worked hard every day," Aagard said. "It would have been easy to say, 'We aren't going to play anyway, why practice?' But they showed up and went to work every day."

From that group, Burlington only lost two seniors, and one of those seniors missed most of the year due to injury.

Senior running backs Kyle Broederlow and Dallin Christiansen have the most experience at the running back position, with Christiansen the speedy outside option and Broederlow a runner who can get tough yards.

Senior Austin Nicholson missed some time due to injury but is a big, physical presence who can disrupt opposing offenses.

And junior Talon Wiles has been Burlington's quarterback the past two years.

"I think the kids really enjoyed the switch last year," Aagard said. "It is a learning process, but most of what I have heard has been positive in terms of the switch. At least we will get to play."

Coach: Trent Aagard, first year at Burlington
2015 Record: 0-8; 4-2 in six-man exhibitions

Key Players

RB: Kyle Broederlow, Sr.

RB: Dallin Christiansen, Sr.

OL/DL: Austin Nicholson, Sr.

QB: Talon Wiles, Jr.

Mascot: Huskies

Division: 1A/6-man

Conference: West

Colors: Orange and black

2016 Schedule

9-2: vs. NSI, 1 p.m.

*9-10: at Farson, 2 p.m.

*9-17: at Ten Sleep, 2 p.m.

*9-23: vs. St. Stephens, 3 p.m.

*9-30: at Meeteetse, 7 p.m.

*10-7: vs. Dubois, 3 p.m.

*10-15: at Snake River, 2 p.m.

*10-21: vs. Riverside, 1 p.m.

* Conference game

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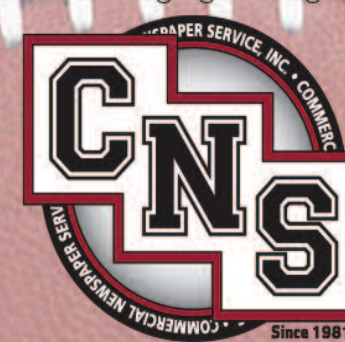
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Mascot: Pronghorns
Division: 1A/6-man
Conference: West
Colors: Green and yellow
Coach: Trip Applequist, 5th year

2015 Record: 6-3, lost to Hulett in state quarterfinals

Key Players

RB/LB: Jake Richey, Sr.
WR/C/LB: Ed Barlow, Sr.
TE/DE: Ryan Curtis, Sr.
LB: Thomas Rezzonico, Sr.

2016 Schedule

9-3: at Guernsey-Sunrise, noon
***9-10:** vs. Burlington, 2 p.m.
***9-16:** at St. Stephens, 4 p.m.
***9-23:** vs. Ten Sleep, 2 p.m.
***10-1:** at Dubois, 2 p.m.
***10-8:** vs. Meeteetse, 2 p.m.
***10-14:** at Riverside, 7 p.m.
***10-22:** vs. Snake River, 1 p.m.
* Conference game

Pronghorns seek playoff success

Farson has figured out ways to win in the regular season. This year, the Pronghorns' challenge will be to win games in the postseason, too.

With only four seniors slated to come out – but only three seniors lost from last year's 6-3 team – Farson is in a unique situation of having high expectations without a massive senior class to accompany those expectations.

"We have to have people step up to leadership positions," coach Marvin "Trip" Applequist said.

The Pronghorns return almost every key contributor from last year but do lose their only all-state selection in Neale Jones. Jones led the team in rushing and passing and was fourth in defensive points.

However, Farson returns two all-conference selections from last year, senior Jake Richey and sophomore Clancy Gines, and the Pronghorns will line up a defense whose top three tacklers last year were just freshmen.

For two consecutive years, the Pronghorns have finished 6-3, but both seasons ended with first-round playoff losses. Applequist said both players and coaches around the program are no longer satisfied with reaching the postseason – their goals include winning playoff games.

"I think we have very high expectations," Applequist said. "I think all the players are expecting to make a run through the playoffs."

The leadership from that run will in part come from the seniors, including Richey, Ed Barlow,



Thomas Rezzonico and Ryan Curtis.

But sophomores will be a key part of the Pronghorns' attack, too, especially on a defense that returns eight of its top nine tacklers. As freshmen last year, Lain Mitchelson, Gines and Cortland Barker occupied the top three spots, respectively, on Farson's defensive points tally.

"They're really solid football players and have a good grasp of the game," Applequist said. "It's a bonus for us for sure."

Barlow, Richey, Rezzonico, Braxton Applequist and Zack Gail will all be key pieces of the defense.

Offensively, the team will need to find a new identity without Jones, who was by far the team's leading rusher and top scorer.

"It's definitely going to be a hole that has to be filled, but I think we have the talent coming up to fill those spots," Applequist said. "And it may not be all in one person."

Gines and Mitchelson – the team's leading returning receiver and rusher, respectively – figure to be part of that.

Farson's path to a championship isn't smooth, though. The entrance of two new teams into the West Conference, Burlington and Riverside, will make conference play that much deeper and that much more challenging.

"Teams are really going to have to play well just to make the playoffs, because the teams that are coming in are going to be solid teams," Applequist said.

Rebels transition to six-man game

In all facets, this will be a transition year for the Riverside football program.

The Rebels will make the move from 11-man to six-man football this year, a move with both benefits and drawbacks.

The biggest benefit? Football survives at Riverside. Coach Sam Buck said he will probably have 10 to 14 players out this fall – a number not beneficial to either the Rebels or potential opponents in 11-man. Buck said having six-man football is better than not having football at all.

"I'm excited about the opportunity," he said. "... Now that we're in this situation, I'm definitely taking it on with enthusiasm and excitement for what the six-man game has to offer. I know it can be a fun and exciting game."

The biggest drawback? No playoffs.

The Wyoming High School Activities Association classifies Riverside as an 11-man program by enrollment. Since the program opted to play six-man instead, it is ineligible for postseason play.

That has Buck frustrated.

"We want to do what's right for the players," Buck said. "It's almost like your getting penalized by doing what's best for the players."

However, Buck said he won't dwell on that lost opportunity, nor will he let his players. Instead, the team will focus on taking their one shot at the opponents on their schedule.

"That's your one shot at these guys, and that's

kind of like your championship, your playoff,"

Buck said. "... At the end of the year, (if) these teams go on to win the title, you kind of know where you stack up. Whether or not you have a trophy to show for it, you'll have proven it to yourselves."

When the Rebels take the field this fall, not only will they be playing a new version of football, they'll be doing so with basically a whole new cast of players.

Only one of Riverside's five all-conference picks returns this fall – senior Jack Kimsey. The Rebels lost every single player who threw the ball, every single player who caught the ball, their top six rushers and their top seven tacklers to graduation.

Kimsey is the team's leading returning tackler. Kimsey and senior Zach Owen will anchor Riverside up front, while junior Justen Miller and sophomores Ryan Vigil and Sterling Foss are the Rebels' most versatile threats on the outside. However, Buck said the team needs to develop a dependable skill-position player who's a consistent offensive threat.

Buck said Kimsey and Owen might lead a power running game, but he also flexibility will be important to fit how six-man is played.

"We've just got to get our selves right and make sure we're competent and have our players ready to compete at the six-man game," he said.

Coach: Sam Buck, 4th year
2015 Record: 5-4, lost to Lingle in state quarterfinals

Key Players

OL/DL: Jack Kimsey, Sr.
OL/DL: Zach Owen, Sr.
WR/LB: Justen Miller, Jr.
WR/DB: Ryan Vigil, Soph.

Mascot: Rebels

Division: 1A/6-man

Conference: West

Colors: Red and gray

2016 Schedule

8-27: TBD (Zero Week)
9-2: at Kaycee, 2 p.m.
***9-9:** vs. Snake River, 7 p.m.
***9-16:** vs. Dubois, 2 p.m.
***9-23:** at Meeteetse, 7 p.m.
***9-30:** vs. St. Stephens, 7 p.m.
***10-8:** at Ten Sleep, noon
***10-14:** vs. Farson, 7 p.m.
***10-21:** at Burlington, 1 p.m.
* Conference game

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Longhorns motivated by loss

One of the biggest challenges in six-man football is preparing younger players for varsity play.

With so few players on each roster, junior varsity games are rare. Meeteetse has found a workaround.

The Longhorns won their first 10 games in 2015 by at least 21 points – and won six of those by at least 40 points – and those large margins gave the Longhorns' younger players extended varsity playing time.

"Those freshmen and sophomores got to play a lot," coach Matt Jensen said. "They're not going to get shocked by going out into a game, because they've done it."

The 11th game was the toughest of the season, though, as the Longhorns lost to Kaycee 51-32 in the six-man championship.

Meeteetse graduated three all-conference players and might also lose senior all-conference pick Adam Poole, who might transfer to Colorado. Even so, the Longhorns are still in position to be one of six-man's best teams, thanks in part to



younger players with enough experience to contribute immediately.

"We know the system really well," Jensen said. "They know what to expect. They're smart kids when it comes to football, and just continuing on with the program is going to be really huge for us."

The Longhorns return three of their seven all-conference selections from last year, including senior Dalton Abarr and juniors Josh Graybill and Braenn Smith.

Abarr, an all-state selection last year, led the Longhorns in rushing yards (881) and passing yards (1,391) and accounted for 52 total touchdowns either via his arm or his legs.

Abarr threw 30 touchdowns last year without an interception.

Jensen said Abarr relied a lot on the Longhorns' other weapons last

year; this year, Abarr will have to transition from facilitator to leader.

"I've been impressed with the way he's taken some of those sophomores under his wing," Jensen said. "... You're really going to start to see some of those younger kids emerge because of him."

The Longhorns do lose three of their top four tacklers to graduation, with Smith – who was second on the team in defensive points last year – the top returning tackler.

Graybill was fifth, senior Owen Burbank sixth and Abarr seventh.

The younger players, including sophomores Kerwin Johnson, Anthony Kluesner, Clayton Corbin and Nick Anderson and junior Jack Fremlin will be in position for extended minutes this fall.

Senior Cole Burbank could also be key on both sides of the ball.

The title-game loss has the Longhorns motivated, too.

"Our kids didn't sit and dwell on it," Jensen said. "We had a real strong presence in the weight room for kids who weren't out for basketball. I really think it's made our kids pretty hungry."

Mascot: Longhorns
Division: 1A/6-man
Conference: West
Colors: Red and white
Coach: Matthew Jensen, 3rd year

2015 Record: 10-1, lost to Kaycee in state championship

Key Players

QB/DB: Dalton Abarr, Sr.
WR/DE: Braenn Smith, Jr.
RB/LB: Josh Graybill, Jr.

2016 Schedule

8-26: TBD (Zero Week)
9-2: vs. Hanna, 6 p.m.
***9-10:** at Dubois, 2 p.m.
***9-16:** at Snake River, 3 p.m.
***9-23:** vs. Riverside, 7 p.m.
***9-30:** vs. Burlington, 7 p.m.
***10-8:** at Farson, 2 p.m.
***10-15:** at Ten Sleep, 1 p.m.
***10-21:** vs. St. Stephens, 6 p.m.
* Conference game



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Mascot: Rattlers
Division: 1A/6-man
Conference: West
Colors: Purple and yellow
Coach: Mike Bates, 8th year
2015 Record: 7-3, lost to Kaycee in state semifinals

2016 Schedule

8-27: at Midwest, 3 p.m.
(Zero Week)
9-3: vs. Lingle, 2 p.m.
***9-9:** at Riverside, 7 p.m.
***9-16:** vs. Meeteetse, 3 p.m.
***9-24:** at Dubois, 3 p.m.
***10-1:** vs. Ten Sleep, 2 p.m.
***10-7:** at St. Stephens, 4 p.m.
***10-15:** vs. Burlington, 2 p.m.
***10-22:** at Farson, 1 p.m.
*** Conference game**

Mascot: Eagles
Division: Class 1A/6-man
Conference: West
Colors: Red and black
Coach: Lyle Valdez, 2nd year at St. Stephens
2015 Record: 0-7, did not qualify for playoffs

2016 Schedule

9-2: at Rock River, 4 p.m.
***9-10:** vs. Ten Sleep, 2 p.m.
***9-16:** vs. Farson, 4 p.m.
***9-23:** at Burlington, 3 p.m.
***9-30:** at Riverside, 7 p.m.
***10-7:** vs. Snake River, 4 p.m.
***10-14:** vs. Dubois, 2 p.m.
***10-21:** at Meeteetse, 6 p.m.
*** Conference game**

Rattlers always in the mix

By now, Snake River's down years are other programs' dream seasons.

The Rattlers finished 7-3 last year – their sixth consecutive winning season. They reached the Class 1A six-man semifinals and lost all three of their games to the two teams that played in the state championship game (Kaycee and Meeteetse).

Although the Rattlers lose some experienced players to graduation, coach Mike Bates' plan is to keep the program moving in the direction it has already established.

The one new wrinkle in Snake River's approach is new opposition. The Rattlers will see two new opponents this year in conference play with Riverside and Burlington moving down from 11-man and into six-man's West Conference.

"It keeps six-man going strong and that is important," Bates said. "I believe the competition statewide is going to be amazing, and that of itself makes this season fun because it could be wide open or it could have a team that no one expects."

What is expected? Snake

Key Players

QB/LB: J.D. Corson, Jr.
WR/DE: Erik Ortega, Sr.
RB/LB: Kameron Evans, Jr.
RB/DE: Trenton Jeanerett, Jr.

River, as always, will field a team capable of playing with the best in six-man.

Junior J.D. Corson was an all-state selection last year and will be a key piece of Snake River's approach on both sides of the ball in 2016.

Corson, the Rattlers' quarterback, threw for 1,220 yards and 22 touchdowns; he was also Snake River's leading tackler, topping the team in solo tackles, assisted tackles and defensive points.

The Rattlers did lose their top two rushers and top two receivers to graduation, though.

Experience at quarterback and inexperience at running back might mean Snake River changes its offensive approach. However, Bates said that decision won't be made until later.

"We have some years where

you can grind and some you have to be more air (oriented)," he said. "(We're) not sure where we are at yet in that equation, but summer and two-a-days will hopefully get it answered."

Junior Kameron Evans and senior Eric Ortega – the Rattlers' only anticipated senior this year – were all-conference picks last year.

Evans was second behind Corson in defensive points last year for Snake River, notching team highs in both interceptions (four) and fumble recoveries (five).

Junior fullback/defensive end Trenton Jeanerett will add depth to the squad.

However, of the six players who saw the most consistent time on defense, three of them graduated. And Snake River could go deep into its roster to replace their contributions.

"We have a crop of freshman (players) who will get playing time for sure... but we will have to acclimatize them to high school play, of course," Bates said.

"Most schools, you can't even hit freshman with upperclassmen, so how they will figure in is still yet to be seen."

Eagles stress the fundamentals

Key Players

QB/RB: Roberto Hernandez, Jr.
RB: Be'enoo Bell, Soph.
C: Winter Hawk Felter, Soph.
OL/DL: Thomas Moss, Jr.

61-18 loss to Rock River, a team whose only victory last season came against St. Stephens.

The Eagles lost their seven games by a combined score of 561-113.

"That was our problem last year, was tackling," Valdez said. "... We need to learn how to tackle. When we get that down... we can stop anybody."

Valdez said the emphasis on tackling is rooted in the team's biggest problem, one that was clear in 2015.

Last season, the Eagles gave up 80.1 points per game, a state record. The Eagles' closest game in their 0-7 season was a

how to tackle, block and play certain positions – continue to be the focus.

But there's reason for optimism.

The Eagles could have one of six-man's deepest teams, as Valdez said he could have more than 20 players out this fall, including as many as 11 sophomores and a sizable incoming freshman class.

Juniors Robert Hernandez, Thomas Moss and Antonio Divers will all be called on to lead those younger players.

Sophomores Be'enoo Bell, Winter Hawk Felter, Roberto Hernandez and Brian Williams Jr. were on the roster last year as freshmen, and Ward Spoonhunter and Isaih Divers will also contribute as 10th-graders.

Another reason for optimism? Most of those players were part of a team that aver-

Pioneers will be youth challenged

Most football players have three years to learn a system before they're asked to execute at the varsity level.

Players at Ten Sleep have three weeks.

Coach Jake Zent said the team has a theme for its incoming players: "Start fast, go hard, hold on and hope it's enough."

With limited players – Ten Sleep ended 2015 with seven players in uniform – the Pioneers' younger players don't have the luxury of time.

"You really have to manage playing time and injuries and practice time very carefully," Zent said. "You have to be kind of cognizant of how much contact they're getting in practice. ... You can't take the chance of getting a kid hurt in practice if you need them in the game."

Of the seven players listed on Ten Sleep's roster last year, three were seniors. This year, Zent said he hopes he can have a dozen players out; that's the magic number in six-man, because that allows teams to scrimmage in practice.

Ten Sleep hasn't consis-



tently had that kind of depth.

"For years we've run drills against trash cans or had older guys from the community come in," Zent said.

Zent, who was Ten Sleep's coach from 2007-12, retakes the helm this year. And he inherits a team that runs into a problem he's faced before.

"We're a very young team at this point," Zent said. "We don't have any seniors, so it'll be our juniors' responsibility to step up and show that leadership."

"They're eager to learn and they want to play hard."

Junior Corey Rice returns as the team's top offensive threat. Rice led the Pioneers in both passing and rushing, throwing for 912 yards and running for 281, and was also the team's No. 3 receiver with 181 yards

on 12 catches.

However, Ten Sleep will need to overcome the loss of Quentin Fettig, who was the team's top receiver and scorer, and J.D. Nelson, who was an all-around offensive threat and finished as Class 1A six-man's top tackler.

The three seniors Ten Sleep graduated last year (Fettig, Nelson and Luke Fenton) were the team's top three tacklers.

Rice was fourth on the team in defensive points and junior Byron Powell was fifth.

Junior Zach Dorn is also slated to return.

Zent said one of the challenges Ten Sleep faces this fall is how to use size. Powell is 6 feet 2 inches tall and weighs about 225 pounds; incoming freshman Zane Taylor is 6-4 and almost 300 pounds.

"We've got to figure out how to use his strengths and figure out how he can be successful," Zent said.

At Ten Sleep, one thing's for sure: He'll be called on to play right away.

Coach: Jake Zent, seventh year at Ten Sleep
2015 Record: 1-6, did not qualify for playoffs

Key Players

QB: Corey Rice, Jr.
DE: Byron Powell, Jr.
LB: Zach Dorn, Jr.

Mascot: Pioneers

Division: 1A/6-man

Conference: West

Colors: Red and blue

2016 Schedule

8-27: TBD (Zero Week)
9-3: vs. Hulett, 2 p.m.
***9-10:** at St. Stephens, 2 p.m.
***9-17:** vs. Burlington, 2 p.m.
***9-23:** at Farson, 2 p.m.
***10-1:** at Snake River, 2 p.m.
***10-8:** vs. Riverside, noon
***10-15:** vs. Meeteetse, 1 p.m.
***10-22:** at Dubois, 2 p.m.
*** Conference game**



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aged 16.14 points per game on offense, the highest total for a St. Stephens team in three years of six-man varsity play. However, most of the returning players will need to apply what they've learned quickly to fill spots left by a big graduating class.

"I lost all my offensive guys, our top guys who played a lot," Valdez said. "... (But) those freshmen, coming up as sopho-

mores, they'll know their assignments now."

Valdez said he's motivating the players this year by encouraging them to get their first victory to give the team a much-needed confidence boost.

"If we get that first win, they'll realize we can play with anybody now," Valdez said.

For St. Stephens, the path to that first victory starts in practice.

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