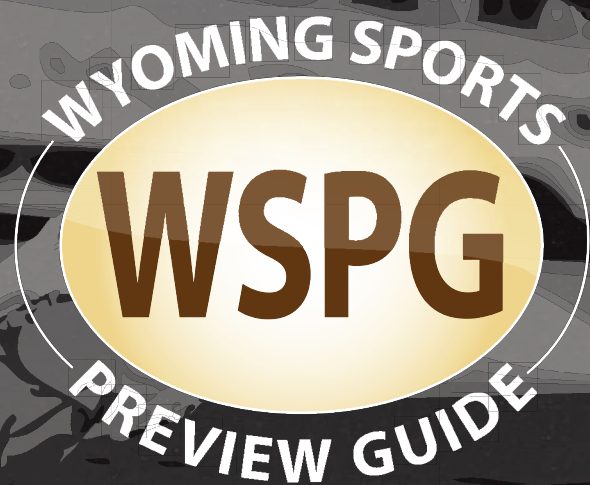


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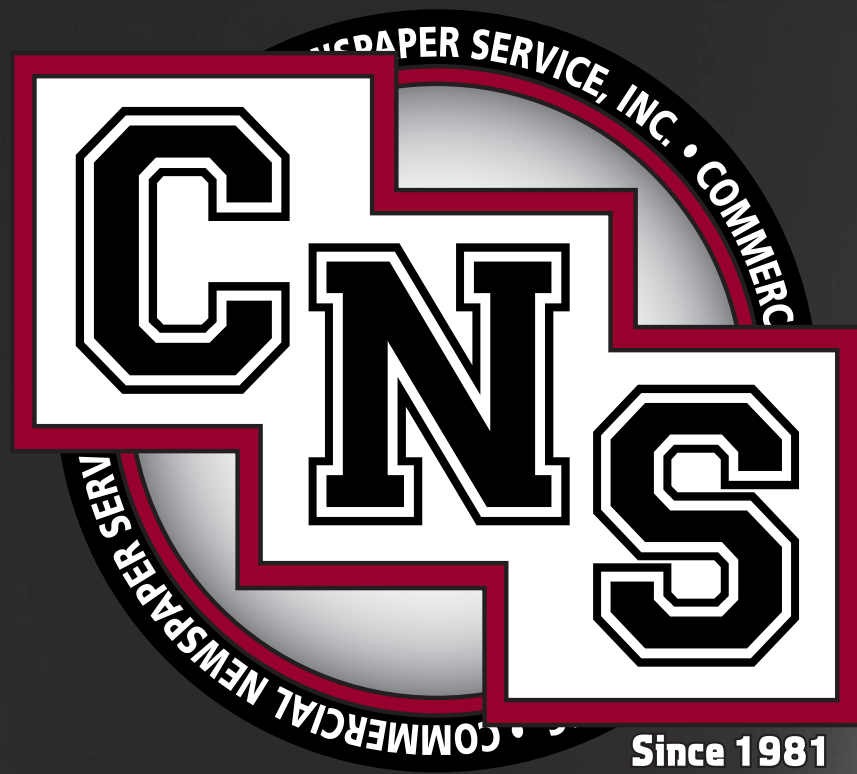
Wyoming High School
Football
Guide
2017

Who can stop
Sheridan?

Broncs chasing third straight 4A title



Coverage of Every Team in the State



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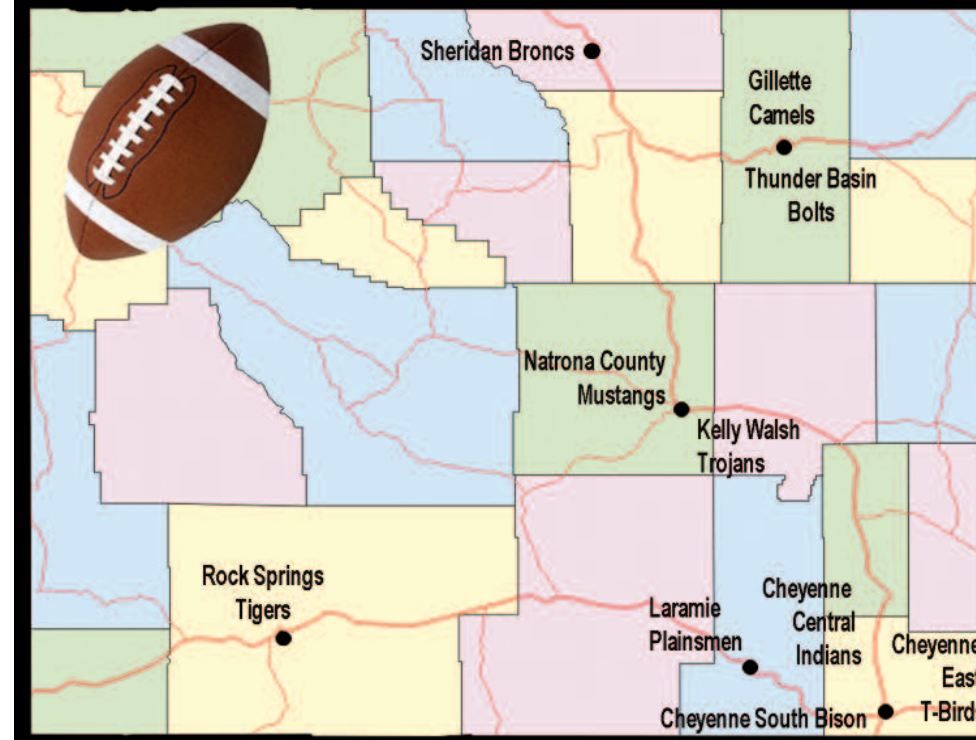
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Football Guide is produced by
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4A Preview



Broncs look for third straight

By Patrick Schmiedt

Four questions to answer

Can Sheridan pull off a three-peat? Definitely. The Broncos have the talent and the coaching to pull off Class 4A's first three-peat in 24 years. Even so, the graduation losses were heavy, so Sheridan will still need younger players to fill varsity spots quickly.

Who can stop Sheridan from that three-peat? Natrona. The Mustangs have four returning all-state players; Sheridan has three; no other 4A team has more than one. The returning talent alone puts Natrona and Sheridan on pace for a rematch of last year's 4A title game.

What sets the favorites apart this year? Returning talent at running back. Sheridan returns Kyle Custis, who ran for 1,118 yards last season, while Natrona gets back Brett Brenton, who notched 1,588. And we haven't even gotten to Thunder Basin's Austin Clemetson, who led 4A with 1,847 yards last year at Gillette.

What will the effect of a new high school in Gillette be? In Gillette? Massive. Everywhere else? Pretty small. Trading out Evanston for Thunder Basin doesn't change 4A's overall makeup all that much, but how the changes brought about by a halved talent pool manifest will be interesting to watch happen in Gillette.

Four key games

Rock Springs at Sheridan, Aug. 25. The Tigers are eager to prove that last year was no

fluke and that they're here to stay. What better way to do that than on the field of the defending state champions in the season opener?

Kelly Walsh at Laramie, Aug. 25. Year after year, this game has proven to be key for playoff seeding. By Week 8, chances are good we'll be looking at this game as crucial to the 4A playoff picture.

Natrona at Sheridan, Sept. 8. The rematch of last year's 4A title game – and the game between 4A's two clear-cut favorites to return to the title game this year – comes in Week 2.

Thunder Basin at Gillette, Sept. 22. The first steps for Wyoming's newest intra-city rivalry will take place at Camel Stadium. It will be interesting to see which squad takes the first leg up in the race to dominate the new Razor City rivalry.

Predicted order of finish

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

Way-too-early title-game score prediction

Sheridan 31, Natrona 24

The best chance for a rematch of a 2016 title game comes in 4A. Sheridan and Natrona clearly return more individual talent than other squads in the state; what remains to be seen is how that talent will coalesce into a single functioning unit.



State Champs
**Sheridan
Broncs**

2016 State Playoffs

State Championship

Sheridan 56, Natrona 28

State Semifinals

Natrona 30, Gillette 28

Sheridan 35, Rock Springs 6

State Quarterfinals

Gillette 48, Cheyenne South 7

Sheridan 34, Cheyenne East 17

Natrona 37, Kelly Walsh 21

Rock Springs 37, Laramie 15

Four players to watch

Austin Clemetson, Thunder Basin

Playing for Gillette last year, Clemetson topped 4A last year with 1,847 rushing yards and 21 touchdowns. He was the only junior to make the Casper Star-Tribune's Super 25 first team. And he's part of a brand-new team that will gladly use his talents.

Blayne Baker, Sheridan

The senior lineman got some significant attention from colleges; he's already committed to Wyoming. At 6-foot-5 and 260 pounds, he'll be one of the most athletic linemen for his size not just in the state, but in the region.

Brett Brenton, Natrona

Brenton was a huge threat out of Natrona's backfield, amassing 1,588 yards and 17 rushing touchdowns while also notching 323 receiving yards. His versatility will help anchor Natrona.

Garrett Worden, Laramie

Worden has the potential to be a disruptor on defense and a path-clearer on offense for the Plainsmen. Laramie's only returning all-state selection, Worden is Laramie's leading returning tackler and led the Plainsmen with 21 tackles for loss and six sacks.



Mascot: Camels
Division: 4A
Colors: Purple and gold
Coach: Micah Christensen, 1st season as head coach at Gillette, 13th overall
2016 Record: 9-2, lost to Natrona in state semifinal

Key Players
QB: Cameron Kirkwood, Jr.
WR/S: Morgan Merchen, Jr.
RB/DB: Geovanni Vazquez, Jr.
OL/DL: Zane Fichtner, Sr.

2017 Schedule
8-25: at Cheyenne East, 7 p.m.
9-1: at Natrona, 7 p.m.
9-8: vs. Laramie, 7 p.m.
9-15: at Cheyenne Central, 6 p.m.
9-22: vs. Thunder Basin, 7 p.m.
9-29: at Rock Springs, 7 p.m.
10-6: vs. Sheridan, 7 p.m.
10-13: vs. Cheyenne South, 7 p.m.
10-20: at Kelly Walsh, 7 p.m.



Mascot: Indians
Division: 4A
Colors: Red and black
Coach: Drew Severn, 4th year at Central
2016 Record: 2-7, did not qualify for playoffs

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New coach faces challenge

Exceptional circumstances in Gillette created an unprecedented challenge for the Gillette Camels.

With new cross-town rival Thunder Basin opening this fall, seniors and juniors in the Gillette system had the choice to attend either school.

Almost every football player chose Thunder Basin.

That leaves the traditional powerhouse Camels with only a handful of seniors and juniors committed to offseason training. The bulk of those players have little experience not just at the varsity level, but also with high school football in general.

The Camels also lost longtime coach Vic Wilkerson, who resigned in mid-July. Assistant coach Micah Christensen, who has been the Camels' line-backers coach the past 12 years, took on the job of head coach almost immediately after Wilkerson's resignation.

"There's going to be a lot of kids with a lack of varsity experience, so it's going to be a great learning opportunity for several young men," Christensen said. "... I love Camel football and I found this was a great opportunity to step in and build on what we had going."

While upperclassmen got to choose between the two schools, sophomores and freshmen didn't have a choice. Christensen said the numbers in those two classes are solid – about 30 sophomores and about 35 freshmen – and the sophomores especially will be called on to fill varsity spots, ready or not.

"If we do have a lot of young kids out, and

"I found this was a great opportunity to step in and build on what we had going."

~ Micah Christensen

we're forced to play some of those younger kids, it's going to be a heck of a challenge for those guys," Christensen said.

With that, Christensen said the next couple years, and 2017 especially, will be rebuilding years for a proud Camel program that has had winning seasons 18 of the past 20 years.

Christensen said players can switch from Thunder Basin to Gillette, or vice versa, until the first day of practice, but he said he wasn't counting on a big change come August.

Thunder Basin's opening didn't affect just the players; five coaches also left to join the Thunder Basin coaching staff.

Also, with sophomores likely taking up a big chunk of varsity, the Camels may have to alter their junior varsity and sophomore schedules based on the number of players who come out.

Christensen said senior lineman Zane Fichtner and four juniors – quarterback Cameron Kirkwood, wide receiver Morgan Merchen, running back Geovanni Vazquez and lineman Tyler Wilson – have emerged as the Camels' potential leaders in part because of their experience.

They will need to step into leadership roles sooner than expected, and Christensen said one of the most important things to the Camels' growth this season will be "teaching those kids the ins and outs of leadership and their importance to our program going forward."

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Health key to Indians' chances

Cheyenne Central coach Drew Severn has two goals for his team this year.

The first is goal direct: Stay healthy.

The second goal is more nebulous: Refine an approach to the game that emphasizes a high level of both mental acuity and physical fitness.

"We're not a platoon team," Severn said. "Our best 11 have to be on the field at all times. ... If one guy goes down, the next guy goes in, and he's got to pick up where the other guy left off."

Developing a mentality that facilitates this approach means working hard on football's mental aspects, such as understanding down-and-distance situations, how a player's responsibilities fit into a broader goal of play execution, or learning how to sacrifice personal goals for team goals.

"Once we get that idea going, I think it'll

spread, and it'll be great for us," Severn said.

The approach isn't new for Severn, who's entering his fourth year at Central, but meeting both goals at the same time has proven difficult.

In 2016, Central missed the playoffs for the second consecutive year – the first time that has

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T-Birds return skill players

When Cheyenne East coach Chad Goff dissected the 2016 season, he spent a lot of time looking at his program as a whole.

That examination started at the top.

"The changes that will occur start with me," Goff said. "It has been a long offseason and with plenty of time for reflection. I have not done the job that needs to be done to keep this program at a high level. It is my hope to change that."

Last year, East failed to win a playoff game for the first time in seven years and for just the second time in Goff's 11 seasons.

"Last year was a tough year for our program," Goff said. "Our finish truly indicated the year we started out with. We struggled replacing kids (starters) that we thought were going to play and did not come out for football. It took a lot of time to get those spots filled."

To return to their winning ways, the Thunderbirds will rely on experienced receivers and backs but an inexperienced crew of linemen.

East returns the bulk of its offensive weapons in seniors Matt Semler, Ethan Ashworth and Noah James – East's leading passer, rusher and receiver last season, respectively.

Semler threw for 862 yards and 10 touchdowns and also ran for 206 yards and four more scores as East's quarterback last season.

Ashworth ran for 1,103 yards and 11 touchdowns last year; he was also East's No. 2 receiver with seven catches for 133 yards.

James is the only one of East's five all-conference players to come back this year. He led East in receiving last season with 23 catches for 370 yards; he was the only East player with double-digit catches.

He was also East's leading kick returner and racked up 707 all-purpose yards.

Goff said the returning experience on the outside "allows us as coaches to start the year off with a little more trust and confidence in the peo-

"I have not done the job that needs to be done to keep this program at a high level. It is my hope to change that."

~ Coach Chad Goff

ple that will be handling the ball for us."

Meanwhile, seniors Jake Fogg and Gunner Bartlett will lead a group of linemen that as a unit lacks the experience the outside players have.

Defensively, the Thunderbirds lose their top four tacklers but return six starters. Semler, who had 78 defensive points last season, is the only one of East's top six tacklers to come back this year. Bartlett finished seventh for East in defensive points last year.

The returners are eager to overcome last year's frustration, Goff said.

"Kids are showing up to things and working hard in the weight room," he said. "It is my hope that they are a group that brings us back to where we are trying to get."

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Senior Riley Boltz was third on the team in defensive points last year, but Boltz and Bell are the only two of Central's top seven tacklers to come back.

They're part of a Central defense improved significantly last year, allowing only 24 points per game, more than 10 ppg better than 2015. But the offense fell off hard.

Central scored only 9.3 points per game in 2016, down significantly from the 24.3 ppg the team scored in 2015.

To turn around the offense, Central will rely on a variety of offensive threats. Senior Decker Mattimoe is Central's leading returning rusher with 199 yards on 37 carries last year, while senior Adarius Gallon added 92 rushing yards.

Senior Daniel Shumway threw for 325 yards and four touchdowns in split duty last season.

And Central's leading receiver, senior Niko Bostic (35 catches, 407 yards), returns.

Junior linemen Val Herd, Tanner Martin and DJ Weese – all thrown into starting roles as sophomores last year due to injury – and senior Dylan Miller will help control the offensive line.



Mascot: Thunderbirds
Division: 4A
Colors: Columbia Blue & Black
Coach: Chad Goff, 12th year at East
2016 Record: 4-6, lost to Sheridan in state quarterfinals

Key Players
QB/DB: Matt Semler, Sr.
RB/DB: Ethan Ashworth, Sr.
WR/DB: Noah James, Sr.
OL/DL: Gunner Bartlett, Sr.

2017 Schedule
8-25: vs. Gillette, 7 p.m.
9-1: at Kelly Walsh, 7 p.m.
9-8: vs. Thunder Basin, 7 p.m.
9-15: at Cheyenne South, 6 p.m.
9-22: at Natrona, 7 p.m.
9-29: at Laramie, 7 p.m.
10-6: vs. Cheyenne Central, 6 p.m.
10-13: vs. Rock Springs, 7 p.m.
10-20: at Sheridan, 6 p.m.



2017 Schedule
8-25: at Thunder Basin, 7 p.m.
9-1: vs. Sheridan, 6 p.m.
9-8: at Rock Springs, 7 p.m.
9-15: vs. Gillette, 6 p.m.
9-22: vs. Laramie, 6 p.m.
9-29: at Kelly Walsh, 7 p.m.
10-6: at Cheyenne East, 6 p.m.
10-13: vs. Natrona, 6 p.m.
10-20: vs. Cheyenne South, 6 p.m.



Mascot: Bison
Division: 4A
Colors: Black and gold
Coach: Dan Gallas, 2nd year at South
2016 Record: 3-7, lost to Gillette in state playoffs

2017 Schedule

8-25: at Natrona, 7 p.m.
 9-1: at Thunder Basin, 7 p.m.
 9-8: vs. Kelly Walsh, 6 p.m.
 9-15: vs. Cheyenne East, 6 p.m.
 9-22: vs. Rock Springs, 6 p.m.
 9-29: at Sheridan, 7 p.m.
 10-6: vs. Laramie, 6 p.m.
 10-13: at Gillette, 7 p.m.
 10-20: at Cheyenne Central, 6 p.m.



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 Attorney At Law

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Bison building steam

In 2016, Cheyenne South notched its first winning streak and its first playoff berth. The responsibility for the second winning streak and the second playoff berth, if they're to happen in 2017, will fall to a crew of untested players who saw little varsity action last fall. However, for second-year coach Dan Gallas, 2017 presents an opportunity for South to continue to establish a team-first approach. "Our strength is I think our youth, and we're building towards a team," Gallas said. "We're trying to establish ourselves as a team and not a bunch of individuals." Three weeks into the 2016 season, the Bison were the talk of Wyoming. After winning just three games in their first five seasons combined, the Bison had won their first three games of the season, their first with Gallas, including South's first victory against crosstown rival Cheyenne East. After starting 3-0, though, South didn't win again, finishing the season with seven consecutive losses, including a 48-7

Key Players
QB: Eric Fowler, Sr.
DL: Brady Dunn, Jr.
DL: Pryce Sanchez, Jr.
TE: Austin White, Jr.

loss to Gillette in the Class 4A quarterfinals. "They started with a lot of confidence," Pugh said of the Bison, "but we were very fragile emotionally still. So we have to continue that build that mental toughness and that confidence in ourselves to allow ourselves to make mistakes and overcome them." That process will be passed on to a young core of returners who don't have much experience – senior quarterback Eric Fowler is the only returning starter on offense, while the defense retains only three starters. South lost all six of its all-conference choices. In the offensive backfield, Bison lost their top four rushers, who combined for 2,828 rushing yards; senior Noah Patterson, who was fifth on the team

with 248 yards last year, is the team's leading returning rusher. Fowler threw for 427 yards last year, while junior tight end Austin White, who had 91 receiving yards on five catches to lead the Bison last year, also returns. Defensively, the Bison's top five tacklers were all lost to graduation. Junior lineman Pryce Sanchez is the only one of South's top eight defenders to come back this year. Junior Wyatt Garcia, who tied for the team lead with two interceptions, also comes back, and junior lineman Brady Dunn will add depth to the front. Even though last year's finish will remain in last year, Gallas said the limited success the Bison had last year has carried into the offseason. "The individuals that took part in that, they enjoyed that extra game and they see that there is potential there," he said. "... Any time you see success or find success, ... you want to continue it, so you work hard for it." At South, that feeling is rare no longer.

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Defense is Trojans' strength

Bit by bit, the Kelly Walsh defense has grown stronger. In 2014, the Trojans gave up almost 35 points per game. In 2015, that fell to 28 points per game. Last year, it fell further, to just less than 21 points per game.

Key Players
TE/LB: Joey Geil, Sr.
QB/DB: Caige McComb, Sr.
TB/LB: Brock Spiegelberg, Jr.
WR/CB: Laine Smith, Sr.

In a program that often depends on players who play both offense and defense, the Trojans learned playing slower on offense could create more opportunities for the defense. With a ball-control focus – an approach that hasn't slowed down the offensive point production even as it's brought the defense success – the Trojans have found balance. "That's been a good change for us, give those guys a bit of a breather and get some rotations going," coach Jon Vance said. Last year, that balance led KW to a 5-5 record and a home playoff game, the Trojans' first since 2007. To continue that success, though, the Trojans will need some young players to grow quickly, especially on the offensive and defensive lines. "We were really senior-dominated last year, so we've got some juniors filling that role (this year)," Vance said. "They need to gain some experience." Senior Logan Neuroth is the only returning starter on offensive line, and he only played half the year due to an ankle injury. Senior Andrew Skovgard started all last year but injured his shoulder during wrestling season and may not return to the gridiron.

Conversely, the Trojans do return a stable of backs to balance out the inexperienced line. Senior Joey Geil ran for 293 yards last year, senior Caige McComb added 291 yards and junior Brock Spiegelberg had 172. Senior Sesar Chavez, who ran for a team-high 575 yards last season, may not be back, Vance said. Even so, Vance said, "I definitely feel we're going to have some good depth" at running back. Senior Caige McComb added 869 passing yards and 10 touchdowns and returns under center. However, he lost basically his entire receiving corps. Seniors Taylor Maese and Caden Curry could develop into offensive weapons at running back and wide receiver, respectively. Geil was second on KW's defense with 151 points and led the squad in solo (38) and assisted (47) tackles. Spiegelberg was fourth, McComb was eighth and senior Laine Smith led KW with three interceptions. Geil and Smith were all-conference choices. In part, their motivation for 2017 stems from last season's early postseason exit, hastened by a 37-21 loss to crosstown rival Natrona. One of the lessons the Trojans pulled from that game was the importance of staying healthy. "We ended up getting a little thinned out going into that game, and that really affected us," Vance said.



Mascot: Trojans
Division: 4A
Colors: Green, gold and white
Coach: Jon Vance, 7th season
2016 Record: 5-5, lost to Natrona in state quarterfinals

2017 Schedule

8-25: at Laramie, 7 p.m.
 9-1: vs. Cheyenne East, 7 p.m.
 9-8: at Cheyenne South, 6 p.m.
 9-15: vs. Rock Springs, 7 p.m.
 9-22: at Sheridan, 7 p.m.
 9-29: vs. Cheyenne Central, 7 p.m.
 10-6: at Natrona, 6 p.m.
 10-13: at Thunder Basin, 7 p.m.
 10-20: vs. Gillette, 7 p.m.

Mascot: Plainsmen
Division: 4A
Colors: Maroon and white
Coach: Clint Reed, first year at Laramie
2016 Record: 4-6, lost to Rock Springs in state quarterfinals

2017 Schedule

8-25: vs. Kelly Walsh, 7 p.m.
 9-1: at Rock Springs, 7 p.m.
 9-8: at Gillette, 7 p.m.
 9-15: vs. Natrona, 7 p.m.
 9-22: at Cheyenne Central, 6 p.m.
 9-29: vs. Cheyenne East, 7 p.m.
 10-6: at Cheyenne South, 6 p.m.
 10-13: vs. Sheridan, 6 p.m.
 10-20: vs. Thunder Basin, 6 p.m.

New coach follows familiar path

The same things that made Laramie a powerhouse in the 1960s could be returning to the program in the 2010s. New head coach Clint Reed said he's taking a cue from former Plainsmen coaches John Deti and John Deti Jr., who led Laramie for 59 combined years (1944-2002). Reed started coaching in Laramie in 1995 and worked directly with the younger Deti. "Deti always would talk about (how) competition breeds success," Reed said, "and we need to get our numbers up. Also, there is a lot of work to do in our offseason and weight program." The Plainsmen are in better shape than they've been in for years. Last year's 4-6 record was Laramie's best since 2005. Laramie beat Cheyenne East for the first time since 2009, played within a point of eventual state champion Natrona and came within three points of hosting a playoff game for the first time since 2000. However, for the 16th consecutive year, the Plainsmen finished with a losing record and without a postseason victory.

Key Players
QB/CB: Nathan Burman, Sr.
TE/DE: Garrett Worden, Sr.
OT/DE: Frank Crum, Sr.
TE/MLB: Daylon Puckett, Sr.

The responsibility for breaking that streak will fall on disparate offensive and defensive units. The defense has great potential with six returning starters, but the offense has just two returning starters. The defense centers on Garrett Worden, Laramie's lone returning all-state selection. He was second for the Plainsmen in defensive points last season and led the team with 21 tackles for loss, six sacks and three fumble recoveries. "Garrett is a weapon and has had a great offseason in preparation for his senior year," Reed said. "Worden will be used all over the defensive line as we know teams will account for him." All-conference selection Jason Upton was fourth on the team in

defensive points, while senior Daylon Puckett was fifth and senior and returning all-conference choice Nathan Burman was eighth with a team-high four interceptions. Offensively, Upton – with 144 yards on 26 carries – is Laramie's leading returning rusher. He and junior Baxter Tuggle, who ran for 70 yards on 15 carries, are the only players back who ran for more than five yards last season. Upton is also Laramie's leading returning receiver; he had 21 catches for 298 yards last year. Burman, meanwhile, will move from wide receiver to quarterback. The line will include some experienced players, including seniors Alex Mendoza, Frank Crum and Zack Heil. Eventually, Reed said increased competition in practice will foster a competitive spirit that will transfer over to game days – and that will be a primary focus. "The work really is in reconnecting with our middle school and youth programs to increase our numbers," he said. It's a formula that's previously worked in Laramie.

Mascot: Mustangs
Division: 4A
Colors: Orange and black
Coach: Steve Harshman, 27th season
2016 Record: 6-6, lost to Sheridan in championship

Key Players
OL/DL: Dan Slack, Sr.
RB/S: Brett Brenton, Sr.
WR/OLB: Riley Shepperson, Sr.
QB/S: Jess Harshman, Sr.

2017 Schedule
8-25: vs. Cheyenne South, 7 p.m.
9-1: vs. Gillette, 7 p.m.
9-8: at Sheridan, 7 p.m.
9-15: at Laramie, 7 p.m.
9-22: vs. Cheyenne East, 7 p.m.
9-29: at Thunder Basin, 7 p.m.
10-6: vs. Kelly Walsh, 6 p.m.
10-13: at Cheyenne Central, 6 p.m.
10-20 vs. Rock Springs, 7 p.m.

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Natrona has talent, experience

Natrona County’s 2016 season started with back-to-back shutout losses. It ended in the state championship game. Starting a slew of juniors, the Mustangs started the season rough but ended as the No. 2 team in Class 4A.

Now those juniors are seniors, meaning Natrona – with nine starters returning on both offense and defense – is a favorite for the 4A championship.

Coach Steve Harshman said the Mustangs’ juniors learned last year how to “be ready early” and how to “play fast.”

As seniors, their responsibilities are broader. “We hope to be bigger, faster, stronger and more mature, (and) be able to do a few more things, but mainly be more consistent, and start fast and finish strong,” Harshman said.

Natrona returns four all-state selections, more than any other 4A team. Wideout/defensive back Maeson Gallegos, lineman Dan Slack, running back Brett Brenton and wideout/kicker Riley Shepperson, all seniors, front a class that’s as deep and as experienced as any in 4A.

On offense, Natrona returns its top two rushers, top four receivers and everyone who threw a pass from last season.

Meanwhile, on defense, the Mustangs have back five of their top nine tacklers.

Seniors Cross True and Jess Harshman were also all-conference selections last year; Natrona’s six returning first-team all-conference selections is higher than any other squad in 4A.

Brenton, one of the top running backs in the state, ran for 1,588 yards and 17 touchdowns last year.

Jess Harshman threw for 1,359 yards and six scores. Gallegos led Natrona with 333 receiving yards on 17 catches, while Brenton added 31 catches for 323 yards.

Senior Ben Acres added 227 receiving yards and Shepperson had 202.

On defense, Shepperson is Natrona’s leading returning tackler, while junior Chase Brachtenbach was third, Gallegos was fifth, True was seventh and Slack was ninth.

Seniors Hayden Thorpen and Wes Rice will add depth to the offensive and defensive lines.

NC had to pull an upset to pull off its deep playoff run; the fifth-seeded Mustangs beat top seed Gillette 30-28 in last year’s semifinals to reach War Memorial Stadium.

“We were confident when we got on the bus,” coach Harshman said. “We were even more confident when we did the walk-throughs at Gillette. We were really focused and business-like. The feeling after the game was that we were so happy we had another week to practice and be together.”

Despite losing decisively to Sheridan in last year’s title game, Harshman said he’s confident in his players’ experience, skill and strength. The missing ingredient might be cohesiveness.

“I think the challenge for us is to become a close team that loves and cares about each other at a new level of team,” Harshman said.

Broncs not spoiled by success

One of the consistent themes of the Sheridan football program is learning how to handle failure.

The past two seasons, Sheridan hasn’t failed much. Last year, Sheridan became the first large school to repeat as Class 4A champion since Rock Springs in 2001-02.

Coach Don Julian said Sheridan’s titles were in part inspired by previous seasons’ failures. Entering 2017, that inspiration is gone.

“This group of seniors hasn’t tasted that,” Julian said. “There’s been losses in their career, but all they know since being in our program at the high school (level) is state championships, as sophomores and as juniors.

“There’s real pluses that come with not knowing anything except a championship, but there’s also that possibility of... thinking it’s going to happen automatically.”

Therefore, the Broncos’ coaches spent considerable time with the incoming seniors this offseason re-emphasizing the ideas that have led Sheridan to consistent success.

“It’s just kind of ingrained in them, and we find that they believe in the process, and they’re not scared of some failures,” Julian said. “I think that they understand without failure, without some adversity, without some setbacks, we’re unable to get better, we’re unable to improve through that.”

This year, the Broncos return half their starters and three of their eight all-state selections in lineman Blayne Baker, running back Kyle Custis and kicker Sam Smart, all seniors.

Despite losing wideout Coy Steel, the Gatorade player of the year, and quarterback Drew Boedeker, who threw for more than 2,100 yards, Sheridan’s offensive firepower shouldn’t wane: The Broncos return their top two rushers and five of their top six receivers.

Custis ran for a team-best 1,118 yards and 12 touchdowns, while junior Parker Christensen added 292 rushing yards and is Sheridan’s leading returning receiver, catching 30 passes for 410 yards a year ago.

Senior all-conference selection Aaron Sessions caught 22 passes for 367 yards.

Senior Aaron Woodward, who played at wide receiver last year, will shift to quarterback.

On defense, an experienced core of linemen, led by Baker, seniors Max Myers and Connor Jorgensen and junior Quinton Brooks, will help balance out a less-experienced group of linebackers and defensive backs.

Their presence is huge in Sheridan’s four-front defensive strategy, implemented prior to 2015, Julian said.

“That move has changed us,” Julian said. “We are better against the run. ... This year we are stepping into the season with four very experienced d-linemen.”

Sheridan was, by far, the top defense in 4A last year, leading the classification in yards allowed per game (249.8) and points allowed per game (13.9).

However, the Broncos lose their top four tacklers from last year, as Myers – who averaged 8.7 points per game on defense – returns as Sheridan’s top tackler.

Mascot: Broncos
Division: 4A
Colors: Blue and yellow
Coach: Don Julian, 11th season
2016 Record: 11-1, beat Natrona in state championship

Key Players
OT/DL: Blayne Baker, Sr.
OL/DL: Max Myers, Sr.
RB: Kyle Custis, Sr.
RB: Parker Christensen, Jr.

2017 Schedule
8-25: vs. Rock Springs, 7 p.m.
9-1: at Cheyenne Central, 6 p.m.
9-8: vs. Natrona, 7 p.m.
9-15: at Thunder Basin, 7 p.m.
9-22: vs. Kelly Walsh, 7 p.m.
9-29: vs. Cheyenne South, 7 p.m.
10-6: at Gillette, 7 p.m.
10-13: at Laramie, 6 p.m.
10-20: vs. Cheyenne East, 6 p.m.

Offensive line fuels Tigers’ attack

Last year, Rock Springs’ running backs got the glory. This year, the offensive line may take their place.

The Tigers’ offensive line – which led Rock Springs to the top rushing offense in Class 4A and the No. 2 overall offense a year ago – returns five starters.

Although the backs behind them this year will be inexperienced at the varsity level, coach David Hastings said the line in front of them will ease that transition.

“This will probably be the best line we’ve had, no question,” Hastings said.

That’s bad news for other programs in Class 4A, who have seen the Tigers enjoy a resurgence in Hastings’ three years.

Last year was Rock Springs’ big breakthrough. The Tigers won a playoff game for the first time since 2007 and hosted a playoff game for the first time since 2002.

And their 8-3 record was the program’s best since going 11-0 in 2002.

This year, the question is if Rock Springs can sustain that success despite losing a senior class that guided the program to such heights, including a pair of 1,600-yard rushers in Oaklan Jenkins and Matt Fowler.

Senior lineman Bryan Mattinson will be the only all-state selection to come back for Rock Springs this season. Up front on the offense, he’ll be joined by senior lineman Will Petrovich, an all-conference selection a year ago, junior Michael Newman, senior Devon Clark and sophomore Craig Ash.

Who’s running behind them is uncertain. On offense, the Tigers lose their top three rushers as well as every single player who threw or caught a pass.

Senior Mason Randall, who ran for 117 yards on 14 attempts last season, is Rock Springs’ leading returning rusher, and senior Wyatt Martinez may also be key in the rushing game.

“We have a number of running backs coming back... that are

looking really good, so I don’t necessarily think it’s a weakness, I think it’s more of a question mark of where we’ll be throughout the season,” Hastings said. “... The more opportunities they have to carry the ball within our system, the more opportunities we have to duplicate that success.”

Losing a stable of running backs to graduation, though, won’t cause Hastings to make wholesale offensive changes.

“I’m a big believer the longer we stay with it, the better we get,” he said.

On defense, the losses to graduation weren’t as severe, as Rock Springs returns seven defensive players with starting experience.

Junior Coleman Welsh was fourth for the Tigers in defensive points, while Randall was sixth, Martinez was seventh and Petrovich was ninth.

Hastings said the front seven appears strong for the Tigers this fall, but untested players will likely make up the bulk of the secondary.

Mascot: Tigers
Division: 4A
Colors: Orange and black
Coach: David Hastings, 4th season
2016 Record: 8-3, lost to Sheridan in state semifinals

Key Players
OL: Bryan Mattinson, Sr.
OL: William Petrovich, Sr.
OL: Michael Newman, Jr.
RB/DB: Wyatt Martinez, Sr.

2017 Schedule
8-25: at Sheridan, 7 p.m.
9-1: vs. Laramie, 7 p.m.
9-8: vs. Cheyenne Central, 7 p.m.
9-15: at Kelly Walsh, 7 p.m.
9-22: at Cheyenne South, 6 p.m.
9-29: vs. Gillette, 7 p.m.
10-6: vs. Thunder Basin, 7 p.m.
10-13: at Cheyenne East, 7 p.m.
10-20: at Natrona, 7 p.m.



Mascot: Bolts
Division: 4A
Colors: Blue and Silver
Coach: Trent Pikula, 1st year at Thunder Basin
2016 Record: No team

2017 Schedule
8-25: vs. Cheyenne Central, 7 p.m.
9-1: vs. Cheyenne South, 7 p.m.
9-8: at Cheyenne East, 7 p.m.
9-15: vs. Sheridan, 7 p.m.
9-22: at Gillette, 7 p.m.
9-29: vs. Natrona, 7 p.m.
10-6: at Rock Springs, 7 p.m.
10-13: vs. Kelly Walsh, 7 p.m.
10-20: at Laramie, 6 p.m.

New program has veteran feel

Most new programs start from scratch. Not Thunder Basin.

The newest high school in Wyoming opens in Gillette this fall. While the uniforms, the stadium and the records are new, the coaches and players are familiar.

Coach Trent Pikula has been on staff at Gillette the past two years, and he brings with him six coaches and almost all the returning players who made up a Gillette Camel team that finished a strong 9-2 last season.

Gillette 11th- and 12th-graders had the choice to attend either high school. While the final number of students who chose each school was split almost equally, the number of football players who chose Thunder Basin far outweighed those who chose Gillette.

That gives TBHS a huge step up as a startup program.

“There’s a pretty big list of kids that either started last year for CCHS or got a lot of playing time,” Pikula said.

The ‘Bolts have three former Camels who earned postseason recognition last year in senior all-state running back Austin Clemet-

Key Players
RB: Austin Clemetson, Sr.
OL/DL: Jayd Culey, Sr.
WR/DB: Trenten Johnson, Sr.
CB: Ty Maya, Sr.

son and two other all-conference selections in seniors Jayd Culey and Keaton Wilkerson.

Clemetson ran for a Class 4A-best 1,847 yards and 21 touchdowns last year while averaging 8.5 yards per carry. He also had 20 catches for 332 yards and five scores last year.

Pikula said finding ways to get Clemetson the ball will be a priority, as the ‘Bolts will emphasize the run out of spread sets.

“He’s a special running back, so I think we’ll be able to run the ball well,” Pikula said.

Wilkerson threw for 1,631 yards and 23 touchdowns and also added 447 rushing yards, while Culey helped anchor Gillette’s offensive line.

The defense also brings in a

load of former Camels. Senior linebacker Kade Bradley was fourth for Gillette in defensive points, while junior lineman Marcus Glick was fifth for Gillette.

Seniors Fathan Ferdyawan, Trenten Johnson and Ty Maya, who led Gillette with seven pass break-ups, also make the transition to Thunder Basin and will anchor the defensive backfield.

They’ll play for a program that’s been busy shaping its identity. Pikula was hired shortly before Christmas, but he couldn’t bring on assistant coaches until February and couldn’t talk to potential players until after they had registered for classes, which happened April 4.

Some small hiccups have hit the program – the ‘Bolts didn’t have practice pants to wear to summer camps, for example – but nothing has derailed the program’s development.

“It’s been a thousand things... but it’s been an enjoyable spring,” Pikula said. “When you get the opportunity to start something from the ground up... it’s kind of a neat process.”



2016 State Playoffs

State Championship

Star Valley 28, Powell 10

State Semifinals

Powell 27, Green River 10

Star Valley 61, Douglas 42

State Quarterfinals

Powell 58, Lander 6

Green River 27, Torrington 21

Douglas 41, Cody 12

Star Valley 35, Riverton 27

Four players to watch

Josh Dawson, Star Valley

A two-time all-state selection, Dawson had 582 rushing yards and also led the Braves with 20 defensive points per game.

He led the team in all tackling categories a year ago.

Bryan Lemmon, Torrington

Lemmon, a junior, has multiple responsibilities: Last year, he ran for 1,034 yards; he had a team-high 28 catches; he was second on the team in defensive points; he had 27 solo tackles, a team high.

Brooks Asher, Powell

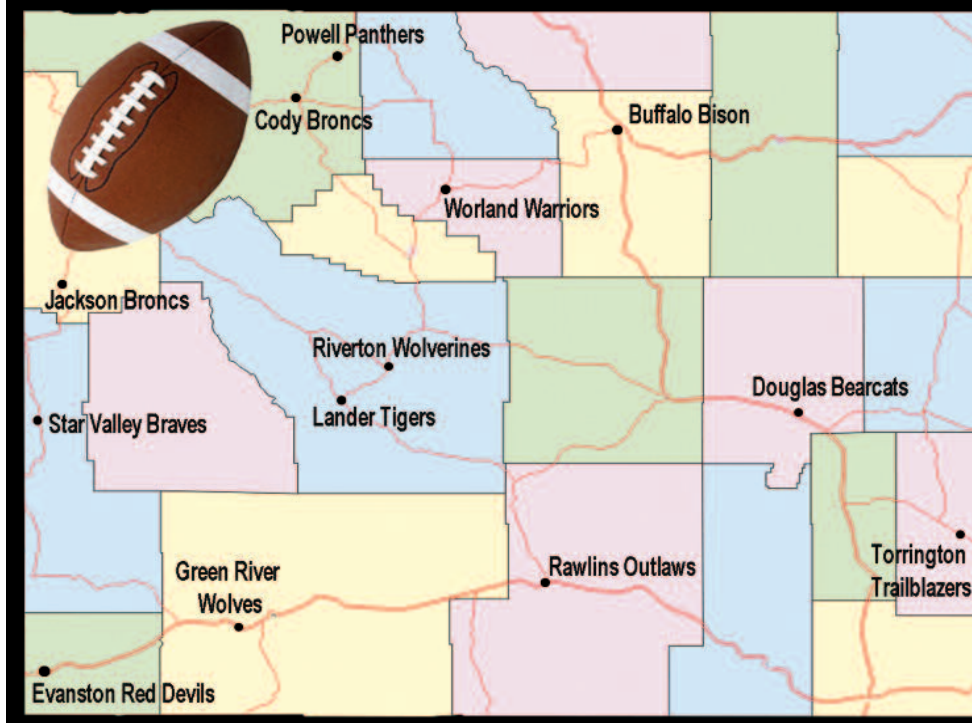
Asher led Class 3A in several key defensive categories. No 3A player in the state averaged more defensive points per game (20.5), had as many solo tackles (45) or had as many tackles for loss (16) as Asher.

Chance Hofer, Green River

Hofer is 3A's leading returning passer. He threw for 1,671 yards and 15 touchdowns a year ago while completing more than 50 percent of his passes.

Hofer's top three receivers return this fall to give the Wolves one of the most feared passing attacks in the state.

3A Preview



Star Valley still team to beat

By Patrick Schmiedt

Four questions to answer

Is Star Valley the favorite to win the 3A title again? Yes, but with an asterisk. Star Valley may need time to adapt without last year's seniors, but the Braves have enough depth and talent for a third consecutive state championship.

Who will be the Braves' biggest challengers? Oh, wow, take your pick. Torrington is the biggest challenger from the East – the Trailblazers have six returning all-stars, more than any other team in 3A – while Powell, Green River and a host of others all have the ability to beat the Braves, too.

What about Douglas? The perennial East Conference champions (47-5 in conference games since 2006) might be entering a down year. The Bearcats lost seven all-state and 10 all-conference selections to graduation.

How will Evanston affect 3A? Probably not too much. The Red Devils are moving down from Class 4A this year. The big change? Qualifying for the playoffs out of the West just got a bit tougher, with seven teams instead of six vying for four spots.

Four key games

Torrington at Star Valley, Sept. 8. The favorites to win the titles in the West and East conferences will play in a nonconference game in Week 2. The Trailblazers, though, will be at a distinct disadvantage: The trip from Torrington to Afton is nearly 500 miles, one way.

Torrington at Douglas, Oct. 6. Ten of the Bearcats' all-conference players from 2016

won't be on the field for this one – they graduated. With significant losses like that, Douglas may be stuck in a rebuilding phase. Except Douglas doesn't rebuild, it reloads.

Powell at Cody, Oct. 20. The traditional rivalry game between the Panthers and Broncos could be interesting, especially if Powell leaves behind any emotional baggage after playing Star Valley in Afton the week before. Cody, meanwhile, will come off a bye, with two weeks' time to prep for the Panthers.

Star Valley at Green River, Oct. 20. One of Star Valley's biggest challenges in its title runs the past couple years has been the Wolves. This game, scheduled for the final week of the regular season, could decide the West Conference title – and the Wolves will have home-field advantage.

Predicted order of finish

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

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

Way-too-early title-game score prediction

**Star Valley 24,
Torrington 21**

Right now, the Braves and the Trailblazers return more talented players than any other teams in the state. The problem with that is that no team a bare cupboard, and several teams have the potential to win it all.

Bison learned valuable lessons

The difference between a playoff berth and a postseason at home for Buffalo came down to a simple statistic: birthdays.

"I don't know if we were quite ready at the time yet," Buffalo coach Rob Hammond said. "... Our kids just needed some experience."

The Bison have that experience now.

With nine starters returning on offense and seven on defense, the Bison are in position to compete with the top teams in Class 3A and maybe pick up a playoff victory for the first time since 2011.

The Bison finished four points away from a playoff berth – an 18-14 loss to Rawlins forced a three-way tie for the final playoff spot from the Class 3A East Conference, and Buffalo lost the subsequent coin toss.

That frustration was accentuated in part by the fact that Buffalo beat eventual state runner-up Powell 7-6 in the second week of the season.

Buffalo had the chance to assure itself a playoff berth but couldn't beat conference frontrunners Riverton (54-28), Torrington (29-10) or Douglas (21-7) in the final three weeks of the season.

"They just have to keep putting in the work to get there."

~ Coach Rob Hammond

"They're doing the right thing, they were just a little young," Hammond said. "They saw what they could be... they just have to keep putting in the work to get there."

The Bison return four all-conference selections, second only to Torrington in Class 3A.

Buffalo returns its top four rushers and its top four receivers from last season. In the backfield, the senior pair of Ray Rabou and Jon Schultze, who combined for 1,197 yards and eight touchdowns a year ago, anchor the offense.

Juniors Caleb Jones (266 rushing yards) and Cody Milmine (249) also return.

Junior Aaron Thiele, who had 121 receiving yards, leads the returning receivers.

Also, junior Luke Glasscock, who threw for 299 yards, returns under center.

The line will need some rebuilding, Hammond said, but the Bison may use their team speed to help spread out opposing de-

fense and get players the ball with space to work. That may mean more opportunities in the passing game.

"We don't have a bunch of size, but we never do compared to the rest of 3A," Hammond said. "It's just kind of who we are."

Defensively, Nicholson returns as Buffalo's top tackler from last year, fronting the Bison in defensive points, assisted tackles and solo tackles.

Four of Buffalo's top five tacklers are back with Nicholson, Thiele, Schultze and Rabou; Schultze led Buffalo in pass break-ups (4) and interceptions (2) last year.

Hammond said the Bison's experience will help tremendously in situations where they needed it last year.

And he's optimistic Buffalo can use that experience in positive ways this season.

"The kids we have now, they're doing the right thing," Hammond said.



Mascot: Bison

Division: 3A

Conference: East

Colors: Black and gold

Coach: Rob Hammond,
6th year

2016 Record: 3-5, did not
qualify for playoffs

Key Players

RB/LB: Ray Rabou, Sr.

TE/LB: Isaac Nicholson, Sr.

QB: Luke Glasscock, Jr.

OL/LB: Clayton Auzqui, Sr.

2017 Schedule

8-26: at Lovell, noon (Zero
Week)

9-1: vs. Cody, 7 p.m.

9-8: at Worland, 7 p.m.

9-15: at Powell, 7 p.m.

*9-22: vs. Rawlins, 7 p.m.

*9-29: at Torrington, 7 p.m.

*10-6: at Lander, 7 p.m.

*10-13: vs. Riverton, 7 p.m.

*10-20: vs. Douglas, 7 p.m.

* Conference game

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Mascot: Bearcats
Division: 3A
Conference: East
Colors: Blue and red
Coach: Jay Rhoades, 12th year at Douglas
2016 Record: 8-2, lost to Star Valley in semifinals

Key Players

RB/LB: Michael Yeaman, Sr.
RB/LB: Brandon Henry, Sr.
QB: Harley Rhoades, Sr.
WR/DB: Dawson Bratton, Sr.

2017 Schedule

8-25: at Powell, 6 p.m. (Zero Week)
 9-1: Open week
 9-8: vs. Hot Springs, S.D., 6 p.m.
 9-15: at Wheatland, 7 p.m.
 *9-22: vs. Riverton, 7 p.m.
 *9-29: at Rawlins, 7 p.m.
 *10-6: vs. Torrington, 7 p.m.
 *10-13: vs. Lander, 7 p.m.
 *10-20: at Buffalo, 7 p.m.
 * Conference game

Bearcats relying on newcomers

Some coaches may look at what Douglas has coming back for 2017 – no starters returning on offense, only two on defense – and lament what's been lost to graduation.

Not Jay Rhoades.

"I love these types of seasons where we've got a whole new bunch coming in and kids ready to prove themselves," Rhoades said. "They always find a way to step up and surprise us."

That approach has Rhoades optimistic entering 2017, even though senior Brandon Henry is the only one of 11 all-conference picks back this fall.

"We never really worry about who we (graduated)," Rhoades said. "We worry about the kids we have coming back, and we coach them as hard as we would if we had 22 starters coming back."

That approach keeps Douglas competitive; in Rhoades' previous 11 seasons, the Bearcats have had one losing season.

This year's squad will center around the two defensive returners, Henry and senior Michael Yeaman, as well as a crew of players who have helped Douglas run off back-to-back undefeated JV seasons.

Rhoades said the two days the Bearcats spent at the Black Hills State team camp in June helped allay his fears of a drop-off this fall.

"We really grew as a team during those two days of camp

and hopefully that'll carry into the fall as well," he said.

Henry was Douglas' leading tackler last year, leading the Bearcats with 81 assisted tackles and tying for the team lead in solo tackles with 21.

Yeaman was fourth in defensive points and had a team-high 8.5 tackles for loss.

Yeaman and Henry are the only two of Douglas' top eight tacklers to come back this season; junior Dax Read was ninth.

The light number of returners doesn't have Rhoades worried. He said part of the design of Douglas' program is to avoid getting locked into any one particular approach on offense or defense, instead changing schemes fit the players.

"We will adapt to the kids that we have and then we'll

scheme from there," he said.

On offense, Yeaman is Douglas leading returning rusher; he had 362 yards on 80 carries to finish second on the team last season. Junior Heath Hayes was third with 159 yards.

Senior Harley Rhoades threw for 169 yards and is Douglas' leading returning passer. However, Douglas lost its top seven receivers to graduation. Senior Dawson Bratton, who had three catches for 27 yards last year, is the only returner to have more than one catch at the varsity level last season.

Even with myriad changes on the roster, though, Rhodes' enthusiasm remains high.

"It's great to watch those kind of kids step up and become a bigger part of our program," he said.

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Outlaws want more success

Rawlins' slow finish outweighed its fast start.

The Outlaws started the 2016 season 4-1 but lost their final four games of the season, as well as a coin flip for the final playoff spot out of the Class 3A East Conference, to finish out of the postseason.

The 4-5 mark tied Rawlins' best record since 2000 but still marked the program's 16th consecutive losing season.

Injuries and a tough East Conference slate slowed the Outlaws' momentum down the stretch but also provided motivation for the returners this fall.

"We have a lack of depth, and when injuries happened, we just weren't able to compete," coach Corey Wheeler said. "... Players were frustrated and wanted more after our 4-1 start."

That frustration has been turned into action, Wheeler said, through both weight-room attendance and work at summer camps.

"Going into the fall we are really excited about our run game. We return our whole o-line and who I believe will be the top back in 3A."

~ Coach Corey Wheeler

That helps, because the Outlaws are thick with returning starting experience – seven starters on offense, including the entire offensive line, and eight starters on defense.

In particular, a dynamic duo of offensive threats will lead Rawlins' approach this fall.

Junior Damon Taylor, who led Rawlins with 817 rushing yards and nine touchdowns, and senior Bryce Jerome, who led Rawlins with 30 catches for 460 yards, both earned all-conference honors last season.

Jerome could see some time at

quarterback this season, filling a hole left open by graduation.

Couple that with an experienced offensive line with seniors Cutter Foster, Colby Rodriguez Brian Paul and Tristan Mikesell and sophomore Kie Foster, and Wheeler said he expects big things from his running backs.

"Going into fall we are really excited about our run game," Wheeler said. "We return our whole o-line and who I believe will be the top back in

Continued on Next Page



Mascot: Outlaws
Division: 3A
Conference: East
Colors: Red and black
Coach: Corey Wheeler, 4th year at Rawlins
2016 Record: 4-5, did not qualify for playoffs

2017 Schedule

8-25: at Moffat County, Colo., 7 p.m. (Zero Week)
 9-1: vs. Evanston, 7 p.m.
 9-8: vs. Wheatland, 7 p.m.
 9-15: at Wind River, 7 p.m.
 *9-22: at Buffalo, 7 p.m.
 *9-29: vs. Douglas, 7 p.m.
 *10-6: at Riverton, 7 p.m.
 *10-13: vs. Torrington, 7 p.m.
 *10-20: at Lander, 7 p.m.
 * Conference game

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Mascot: Tigers
Division: 3A
Conference: East
Colors: Green and black
Coach: John Rounds, 4th year at Lander
2016 Record: 1-8, lost to Powell in state quarterfinals

Tigers have tasted success

Lander's victory total didn't change all that much between 2015 and 2016 – the Tigers went from zero victories to one.

But that one victory set off a Rube Goldberg-like chain of events that has the Tigers hopeful for continuous improvement.

Lander put a stop to a 23-game losing streak by beating Rawlins, in Rawlins, 19-0 in the seventh week of the season. That tied Lander for the fourth spot in the 3A East; the Tigers won the subsequent coin flip to reach the playoffs.

Although Lander lost in the first

round 58-6 to Powell, coach John Rounds said the trip to the postseason was important for the program.

"It definitely gave the kids that are returning a taste of what play-off football is like," Rounds said. "The hope is that it makes them hungry to get back there again and show strides to make a run."

Another playoff trip will depend upon an untested group of Tigers – the team returns four offensive and five defensive starters.

Rounds, though, said last year's junior varsity played well as a unit, "and they are going to get to work together again as a varsity unit this

year."

The growth in the program is apparent. From 2015 to 2016, Lander's points per game nearly tripled (from 3.6 to 9.8 points per game) and the defense developed some strength, dropping its points allowed per game from almost 46 to 32.

"The biggest thing is getting kids comfortable and confident in the things we are doing," Rounds said. "When they are confident, they can play fast and not have to think. That was a big reason for the improvements last year and we look forward to continuing that

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progression."

This year's challenge is to fill numerous spots on both sides of the ball.

Senior Brody Dempster is Lan-

der's leading returning tackler. He was second on the team in defensive points a year ago and led the Tigers with 37 assisted tackles. However, Dempster is the only one

of Lander's top six tacklers to return this season, though.

Seniors Deandre Velarde and Jori Shakespeare and junior Conrad Swenson return on defense.

Offensively, Velarde returns as Lander's most potent offensive weapon. He ran for 409 yards on 106 carries last year to lead the Tigers. Dempster added 123 rushing yards.

Meanwhile, Swenson, the Tigers' only returning all-conference selection, was second on the team in receiving yards, nabbing 12 passes for 146 yards.

The Tigers will need to find a new quarterback and several new linemen. However, junior Max Mazurie is likely to fill the open spot under center, while senior William Atnip and juniors Mason Cronk and Jack Applegate have emerged as potential leaders up front.



RAWLINS, Cont.

3A, Damon Taylor. We have moved Bryce around on the offense and like the run threat he gives us at quarterback and the ability to still move him out wide and create mismatches.”

Taylor, meanwhile, is also Rawlins’ leading returning tackler; he was second on the team last year in defensive points with 81.

Rawlins returns six of its top 10 tacklers. Sophomore Kadin Forney was third, Mikesell was sixth, sophomore Connor Mendez was eighth, Rodriguez was ninth and Jerome 10th.

Although depth is still a continuing question – and was ultimately what tripped up Rawlins in 2016 – Wheeler said he’s seeing progress toward a sustained winning program.

“Commitment to our program has continually increased over the last three years,” Wheeler said. “Our offseason program has also improved each and every year.”



They are seeking to build on last year’s fast start while learning lessons from the slow finish – and maybe lead Rawlins to its first winning season in almost two decades.

Key Players

RB/LB: Damon Taylor, Jr.

WR/DB: Bryce Jerome, Sr.

OL/DL: Cutter Foster, Sr.

LB: Tristan Mikesell, Sr.



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Wolverines shore up defense

Riverton had one of the rarest kinds of seasons last fall.

The Wolverines outscored their opponents but still finished 3-6.

A high-powered offense put up 37 points per game. A defense that struggled to keep up allowed 36 ppg.

And in the games when Riverton really needed defense, it wasn’t there.

The Wolverines’ three victories came in blowout fashion: 61-22, 54-28, 40-7.

Yet some of the losses were agonizingly close: 23-18 to eventual state runner-up Powell, 47-42 to 3A East Conference champ Douglas, and toughest of all, 35-27 in the first round of the playoffs to eventual state champion Star Valley.

“(It’s) extremely frustrating to know that you are in every game and that you can move the ball on anyone,” Riverton coach Pat Patterson said. “(It’s) equally frustrating to know that you have difficulty stopping anyone.”

The Wolverines finished at the

top, by far, in Class 3A in offensive yards per game (466.8). But they were second-to-last in yards allowed (433).

Patterson said he will coach the defense this year, and his team’s priority will be stopping the run first and then “let our athletes cover the pass.”

And Riverton has athletes.

Riverton returns a pair of all-state picks in seniors Brodie Roden and Jaren Draper.

Roden had 39 catches for 536 yards and Draper had 10 for 228. They were two of six Riverton receivers to finish the year with more than 200 receiving yards, but Roden and Draper are the only two to return this fall.

The receivers are also breaking in a new quarterback, as junior Treyton Paxton is slated to take charge under center.

Riverton also returns its top rusher, senior Nic Fenton, who ran for 482 yards and eight touchdowns last season.

The line only returns one starter, so Patterson said the

Wolverines will rely on last year’s JV players to hit varsity speed quickly. He said with a couple exceptions, Riverton will likely be smaller up front than in past seasons.

Defensively, the Wolverines lost nine of their top 12 tacklers, with Roden and Draper the top returners.

Roden was third on the team in defensive points last year and Draper fourth. Roden tied for the team lead with three interceptions. Paxton, meanwhile, was eighth on the team in defensive points.

Also back is junior James Hampton, who is recovering from knee surgery but tied for the team lead with four tackles for loss.

Even though Riverton ended 3-6, Patterson said he felt the team was capable of playing with anyone. He is hopeful that momentum carries into 2017.

“Without a doubt, we were starting to play better defense there at the end, as evidenced by the Star Valley playoff game,” he said.

Mascot: Wolverines

Division: 3A

Conference: East

Colors: Cardinal and white

Coach: Pat Patterson, 5th year at Riverton

2016 Record: 3-6, lost to Star Valley in state quarterfinals

Key Players

WR/OLB: Brodie Roden, Sr.

QB/LB: Treyton Paxton, Jr.

WR/DB: Jaren Draper, Sr.

OL/DL: Brokk Nyberg, Sr.

2017 Schedule

8-25: vs. Evanston, 6 p.m.

9-8: at Green River, 7 p.m.

9-15: vs. Glenrock, 7 p.m.

*9-22: at Douglas, 7 p.m.

*9-29: vs. Lander, 7 p.m.

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

*10-13: at Buffalo, 7 p.m.

*10-20: at Torrington, 7 p.m.

* Conference game

Blazers should be in mix again

Key Players

QB: Breyden Bivens, Sr.

WR/DB: Nathan Stitt, Sr.

OL/DL: Jake Wamboldt, Sr.

RB/LB: Bryan Lemmon, Jr.

Torrington no longer has the luxury of being an underdog.

With as many players as the Trailblazers have returning this fall, they’re among the preseason leaders in Class 3A this fall.

Now, Torrington is trying to embrace being the hunted rather than the hunter.

“You want your name to be circled on everybody’s schedule because that means you are having some success,” Torrington coach Mark Lenhardt said. “I hope we can handle the expectations with maturity and embrace the challenge that is ahead of us.”

The Trailblazers return three of four all-state selections and six of seven all-conference picks from a team that finished 6-3; only lineman Logan Harris, who’s bound for the University of Wyoming, isn’t returning from that bunch.

Seniors Nathan Stitt and Jake Wamboldt and junior Bryan Lemmon were all-state last year, while seniors Breyden Bivens, Ryan Johnson and Bo Moorehouse joined them on the 3A East all-conference team.

Lemmon broke out as a sopho-

more, running for 1,034 yards and seven touchdowns. He also led the Trailblazers in receptions (28) and added 310 receiving yards.

Bivens threw for 1,092 yards and 16 touchdowns with only three interceptions.

Stitt led Torrington in receiving yards with 317 on 20 catches; Moorehouse added 21 catches for 240 yards.

“As an overall group I think this is the best class of skill players that I have had here in Torrington,” Lenhardt said. “If we stay healthy, we should be able to create some matchup problems for people.”

The Trailblazers also return three starters on the offensive line.

Defensively, Lenhardt said the Trailblazers “will be as fast as we have been since I have been here.” Torrington returns four of its top

five tacklers and 11 of its top 13 from 2016.

Lemmon was second on the team in defensive points and led Torrington with 27 solo tackles. Senior Matthew Garcia was third, while Johnson was fourth and junior Josh Posten was fifth.

Moorehouse, Stitt, junior Cade Schwartzkopf and sophomore Cameron Murphy could also be important defensive stalwarts.

They all feel motivated by how last year ended. Falling 27-21 to Green River in the first round of the playoffs – at home, no less – is giving the Trailblazers the impetus to continue to develop this offseason.

“I do feel as though our kids have a little extra edge and confidence to them this offseason,” Lenhardt said. “I am really impressed at their eagerness to work and get better. ... I think our guys feel as though we let an opportunity slip away when we had a chance to host a home playoff game. Hopefully that will fuel them to do the little things all summer and into camp to get us over the hump.”



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Mascot: Trailblazers

Division: 3A

Conference: East

Colors: Maroon and gold

Coach: Mark Lenhardt,

7th year at Torrington

2016 Record: 6-3, lost to Green River in quarterfinals

2017 Schedule

8-26: at Southeast jamboree, 10 a.m. (Zero Week)

9-1: vs. Wheatland, 7 p.m.

9-8: at Star Valley, 6 p.m.

9-15: at Newcastle, 7 p.m.

*9-22: vs. Lander, 7 p.m.

*9-29: vs. Buffalo, 7 p.m.

*10-6: at Douglas, 7 p.m.

*10-13: at Rawlins, 7 p.m.

*10-20: vs. Riverton, 7 p.m.

* Conference game

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Mascot: Broncos
Division: 3A
Conference: West
Colors: Blue and gold
Coach: Matt McFadden, 5th year
2016 Record: 3-6, lost to Douglas in state playoffs

2017 Schedule

8-26: Cody jamboree, 1 p.m. (Zero Week)
 9-1: at Buffalo, 7 p.m.
 *9-8: at Evanston, 6 p.m.
 *9-15: vs. Jackson, 6 p.m.
 *9-22: at Green River, 6 p.m.
 *9-29: vs. Star Valley, 6 p.m.
 *10-6: at Worland, 7 p.m.
 10-13: Open week
 *10-20: vs. Powell, 7 p.m.
 * Conference game

Broncs primed for title run

Seniors can make or break a football team's success.

Cody is ready for a make.

With seven starters returning on both offense and defense, including a senior class that's deep and talented, the Broncos are poised to make 2017 a breakthrough year after back-to-back losing seasons.

"Any time you return a large number of starters, especially talented ones, you get excited as a staff," coach Matt McFadden said. "... The difference this year is the number of seniors and the experience they have. I think it gives them confidence and hungry to bring our program back where we feel we belong."

For Cody, that experience is most directly seen on defense. Cody gets back eight of its top 10 tacklers from a year ago, a level of experience that will allow the Broncos to "have more confidence in our schemes, and

"Any time you return a large number of starters, especially talented ones, you get excited as a staff."

~ **Coach Matt McFadden**

(they) can play faster," McFadden said.

Senior Ian Crawford led Cody in defensive points last season, piling up team highs in solo tackles (34), assisted tackles (36) and sacks (four).

Senior Owen Oilar was fourth and had seven tackles for loss, while classmate Jordan Wasia was fifth.

Seniors Aaron Finneman and Reece Andre and juniors Jackson Morris, Brayden Polley and Rigg Harrison were also among Cody's top tacklers a year ago.

The mix of seniors and underclassmen is a mix Cody hasn't had recently.

"In an ideal world we want to have strong senior class that is supplemented with juniors and some sophomores," McFadden said. "The last two years we haven't had that breakdown and it hurt us. We feel that we are now back on track with what we consider an ideal model of strong leadership from a senior class, talented juniors and some key sophomores."

On offense, senior Matt Skinner, Cody's lone all-state selection who's back this fall, leads the offensive line.

Key Players

RB: Jared Grenz, Jr.
RB: Jacob Deardorff, Sr.
OG: Matt Skinner, Sr.
DE: Ian Crawford, Sr.

Senior Jacob Deardorff led Cody with 721 rushing yards and eight touchdowns last season, while junior Jared Grenz was Cody's leading receiver with 12 catches for 339 yards and five touchdowns.

Wasia added 341 rushing yards and Grenz had 322. Wasia also had 124 receiving yards, good for second-best on the team a year ago.

Cody's three victories last season came against teams that went a combined 5-21. Even so, the Broncos made the playoffs after missing out in 2015 – small consolation for a program still redefining itself after a state title in 2014.

"We wouldn't consider it a step forward," McFadden said. "Our expectation is to make the playoffs each year and be competitive when we reach them. The last two years, our kids improved each game, we just did not have the depth or horses to make it past the first round."

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Red Devils like 3A West style

For the first time since 1990, the Evanston Red Devils won't play football with Wyoming's largest schools.

Evanston moves from Class 4A to Class 3A for the 2017 season, but coach Pat Fackrell said the move won't change much in how the Red Devils prepare or play. Evanston's offensive and defensive approaches are natural fits in the 3A West Conference. The Red Devils like to play grind-it-out, run-first games, a style many of Evanston's conference opponents will also embrace.

"We're going to see a lot more of power football," Fackrell said. "... We're going to see teams come right at us in the West, so we're going to have to be physical." The Red Devils' change comes at a good time: Evanston went 0-9 last season and lost all but one game by at least 13 points.

To boot, the Red Devils lost all four of their all-conference players to graduation. But Evanston does return senior Jess Richins, who led Evanston with 415 rushing yards and four



touchdowns last year, as well as Tyus Cornia, who was second behind Richins with 355 rushing yards.

Junior Seth Lloyd, who took the majority of the snaps behind center for Evanston last fall, also comes back. Lloyd had 537 passing yards last season on 48 completions. Evanston does lose its top two receivers, as senior Hunter Groll – who had 11 catches for 92 yards – is the Red Devils' leading returning receiver.

Up front, seniors Beau Lloyd and Blake Overy will be looked to as leaders, Fackrell said. The defense is less certain. Groll is the only one of Evanston's top 10 tacklers to come back from last year. Groll led the Red Devils with 41 solo tackles and was second in

defensive points.

Fackrell said the relative inexperience of his players on defense could force him to simplify some of the Red Devils' defensive schemes.

"We'll have to spend a lot of time this summer putting a big emphasis on it, (as well as) in the fall camp," Fackrell said. "... But our kids are smart and they pick up our system pretty well. I'm not worried about that."

Senior Brock Rigby, who will rotate between tight end and fullback on offense and across the line on defense, will also be called on to fill important spots on the field. Fackrell said despite seeing a schedule full of new opponents, his team will be familiar with the opponents' approaches because of how similarly they mirror Evanston.

"Teams are going to come downhill at you, play smashmouth football and really (try) to do the same thing we were doing in our league, slow the game down and run right at you," he said.

Mascot: Red Devils

Division: 4A

Colors: Red, white, blue

Coach: Pat Fackrell, 7th season

2016 Record: 0-9, did not qualify for playoffs

Key Players

OL/DL: Beau Lloyd, Sr.

OL/DL: Blake Overy, Sr.

TB/QB/DB: Jess Richins, Sr.

WR/RB/DB: Hunter Groll, Sr.

2017 Schedule

8-25: at Riverton, 6 p.m. (Zero Week)

9-1: at Rawlins, 7 p.m.

*9-8: vs. Cody, 6 p.m.

*9-15: vs. Star Valley, 7 p.m.

*9-22: at Powell, 7 p.m.

*9-29: at Green River, 7 p.m.

10-6: Open week

*10-13: at Worland, 6 p.m.

*10-20: vs. Jackson, 6 p.m.

GREEN RIVER WOLVES

3A WEST

Wolves have numerous weapons

When Green River coach Don Maggi asks his quarterback, Chance Hofer, who his favorite receiver is, the coach is looking for a certain answer.

"The answer should be the open guy," Maggi said.

Consistently, Maggi said, that's Hofer's answer.

With as many receivers as Hofer has returning this fall, the quarterback's answer has consistently made his coach happy.

"It's a lot of fun for the kids because we can spread the ball around," Maggi said. "We don't have to feature one guy."

The Wolves' four returning all-conference selections is tied with Cody for the most in the 3A West. Most of them are offensive weapons.

And they enter the year motivated. Even though the Wolves finished short of a repeat trip to the 3A title game, their 8-2 record was Green River's best since 2011.

Hofer was 124-of-228 passing last year for 1,671 yards and 15

touchdowns; he added 248 rushing yards last year.

Hofer's three top targets are all back, to boot. Devin Love had 434 yards and four touchdowns on 21 receptions; Cole White, the Wolves' only returning all-state choice, had 35 receptions for 429 yards and four scores; and Candon Croft added 28 catches for 351 yards. They're all seniors.

"This will be the strongest group of skill kids that we've had," Maggi said. "... When they walk up and spread those things out, that's going to open up some opportunities in the running game, especially with the younger linemen we have out there."

There's the rub: Green River lost all five of its linemen.

Defensively, almost of all of the Wolves' secondary and outside linebackers return, but the line and inside linebacker positions are open.

"We don't necessarily have the size to replace those kids, but we've got some smart kids and

some kids who can run," Maggi said.

Junior Chase Stoeger, who finished second on the team in defensive points last year, is Green River's leading returning tackler. However, he's the only one of Green River's top seven tacklers from last year to return.

Hofer, Croft, White and seniors Chance Anderson and Gavin Heiser will also play important roles on defense.

Maggi said the motivation for 2017 is easy – getting those returners back to a championship game.

"There's no doubt when you lose like we did in the semifinals, regardless of if it's expected or unexpected, it hurts," Maggi said. "... There's been a lot of work and effort put in getting to that point, and so there's really not anything you can say to make them feel better, but you can remind them about the upcoming year, what can we do to flip this so we're on the excited sideline next year."

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Mascot: Broncos

Division: 3A

Conference: West

Colors: Orange and black

Coach: David Joyce, 1st year at Jackson

2016 Record: 1-8, did not qualify for playoffs

Key Players

OL/LB: Said Jimenez, Sr.

OL/DL: Stetson Hutmacher, Sr.

RB/LB: Adam Meadows, Sr.

OL/LB: Ted McDaniel, Jr.

New coach likes a challenge

Jackson's program needed fixing, so they brought in a fixer.

David Joyce takes over as Jackson's head coach this year, and his reputation as a coach who turns around underperforming programs precedes him.

He's turned around three programs already: Battle Mountain in Vail, Colorado; Doherty in Colorado Springs; and Mountain Home, Arkansas.

In Vail, Joyce took Battle Mountain from 0-10 to 9-2 in four years. At Doherty, the program went from 2-8 to 8-3 in his two years there. At Mountain Home, he took over a small program on a 20-game losing streak and turned it into a team just on the edge of making the Arkansas playoffs.

Now, he takes over at Jackson, which went 1-8 last year. After back-to-back seasons in which the Broncos were con-

"It's just amazing up here. I couldn't pass it up. I don't want to look back and say I passed on paradise."

~ Coach David Joyce

tenders for the state title, the bottom fell out in 2016. Jackson won just one game last year, and that came against one-win Lander.

Joyce's plan is ready.

"I really feel like when you approach a program like that, you have to go in and establish a system from third grade on up and the system needs to have a process to it where you start developing kids," Joyce said. "... The immediate payoff is very little. You don't get much right away, but after a few years you see the payoff."

That's what Joyce wants in Jackson — a long-term investment.

The systems Joyce wants to install are flexible. He'd like to run a flexbone option, but only if he has the right quarterback in place to run it; he'd like to run an even-front defense, but only if he has the players capable of handling the responsibilities.

Joyce is still learning his players in Jackson, but with about 30 players consistently showing up to voluntary weight-room workouts, Joyce said the Broncos have potential.

In particular, Joyce said senior linemen Said Jimenez, Buddy Bragg, Billy Bragg and Stetson Hutmacher, senior running back Adam Meadows and junior linemen Ted McDaniel and Spencer Berezay have been particularly intriguing.

"We've got a few that look

really athletic, but I can't tell what they're going to do on the football field," Joyce said.

McDaniel, Hutmacher and Meadows were all among Jackson's top 11 tacklers a year ago. However, Jackson's defense lost seven of its top nine tacklers to either graduation or transfer.

The Broncos should also return senior Will Geraci, Jackson's leading receiver last year with 229 yards on 12 catches.

Beyond the rebuilding, a job in Jackson had some inherent qualities other jobs don't.

"Jackson, it's just amazing up there. I couldn't pass it up," Joyce said. "... I don't want too look back and say I passed on paradise."

Or a project.

Jackson has both.

2017 Schedule

8-25: vs. Teton, Idaho, 7 p.m. (Zero Week)

9-1: at Sugar-Salem, Idaho, 7 p.m.

*9-8: vs. Powell, 6 p.m.

*9-15: at Cody, 6 p.m.

9-22: vs. Mountain View, 6 p.m.

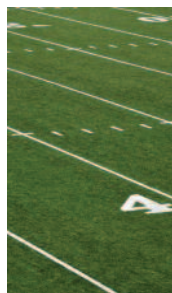
*9-29: vs. Worland, 5:30 p.m.

*10-6: at Star Valley, 6 p.m.

*10-13: vs. Green River, 7 p.m.

*10-20: at Evanston, 6 p.m.

* Conference game



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Mascot: Panthers

Division: 3A

Conference: West

Colors: Black and orange

Coach: Chanler Buck, 4th season at Powell

2016 Record: 8-4, lost to Star Valley in state championship

Key Players

OT/DT: Max Gallagher, Sr.

FB/MLB: Brooks Asher, Sr.

TB/OLB: A.J. Lewis, Sr.

WR: Carson Heinen, Jr.

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Panthers will be tested early

Powell's slow start to 2016 didn't prevent a memorable finish.

The Panthers tied for the Class 3A West Conference championship and reached the 3A title game.

Similar success this season comes with caveats, though.

"That just doesn't happen," head coach Chanler Buck said. "It begins now. It begins in team camp. It begins in summer training."

"It's going to be a process."

Powell lost six of its nine all-conference selections and have important roles left empty by graduation.

Unlike last year, Powell won't have the luxury of waiting until midseason to hit its stride.

In 2016, Powell started 2-3. After that wake-up call, Powell handed eventual state champion Star Valley its only loss of the season, leading to six straight victories before losing to Star Valley in the championship.

With Evanston joining the conference this year, Powell only has a Zero Week date with Douglas before facing Worland and Jackson in conference games in Weeks 1 and 2 — a huge change from last year, when Powell had four non-

2017 Schedule

8-26: vs. Douglas, 6 p.m. (Zero Week)

*9-1: vs. Worland, 7 p.m.

*9-8: at Jackson, 6 p.m.

9-15: vs. Buffalo, 7 p.m.

*9-22: vs. Evanston, 7 p.m.

9-29: Open date

*10-6: vs. Green River, 7 p.m.

*10-13: at Star Valley, 4 p.m.

*10-20: at Cody, 7 p.m.

* Conference game

conference games to start the season.

"We'll have a conference opponent right out of the gate," Buck said.

To get up to speed quickly, Powell will rely on three returning all-state selections, seniors Brooks Asher and Max Gallagher and junior Carson Heinen.

Defensively, Asher was not only Powell's top tackler, he was the top tackler in the entire classification. He had 20.5 defensive points per game and led 3A in solo tackles (45) and tackles for loss (16). He also led the Panthers' team tallies with 68 assisted tackles and also chipped in five

sacks.

Gallagher was third on the team in defensive points and added eight tackles for loss, while senior A.J. Lewis was sixth.

They'll be the lynchpins on a defense that lost the other eight of its top 11 tacklers to graduation.

On offense, Powell lost its top two rushers and everyone who completed a pass. Heinen led Powell in receptions (18) and receiving yards on a team that had seven players finish with more than 100 receiving yards but none more than Heinen's 223.

Junior Kanyon Gann (11 catches, 116 yards) and senior Jon Morrow (5 catches, 112 yards) also return to augment the Panthers' passing game.

Senior Josh Wolfe, who ran 38 times for 282 yards, is Powell's leading returning rusher; he is the only player back for the Panthers who broke into double-digit rushing yards a season ago.

Buck said the returning personnel may give the Panthers more opportunities to spread out other teams, opening up opportunities for both the passing game and the rushing game.

"We're not going to be real big up front, so were going to have to spread it out a bit," Buck said.

Braves seek third straight title

Star Valley High School the past two years has shown what happens when tradition meets momentum.

The accomplishments: two consecutive titles in football, wrestling and boys track and field, and five straight in boys cross country.

Last year's football title marked the first time in 20 years that the Braves had won back-to-back championships. Now, the challenge is to win a third straight — something the program has never done.

Not that the coach is counting. "We haven't talked about it," coach McKay Young said of a potential three-peat. "We're just focused on being the best version of this year's team we can be, both on and off of the football field."

This year's title try will revolve around three returning all-staters: seniors Josh Dawson,

"We're just focused on being the best version of this year's team we can be."

~ Coach McKay Young

Noah Hutchinson and Cosmo Morgan.

Dawson — who was the 3A West Defensive Player of the year — led the Braves with 20 defensive points per game and had team-highs in solo tackles (31), assisted tackles (80) and tackles for loss (13.5).

He also had 582 rushing yards and eight touchdowns on 72 carries and is Star Valley's top returning rusher. Dawson, who was also an all-state selection as a sophomore while at Jackson, also led the Braves in receiving yards last season, catching 10 passes for

127 yards.

Morgan returns at center to anchor the offensive line.

And Hutchinson, who nailed 35 of 36 extra points and six of 11 field goals, including a 52-yarder, gives the Braves an added weapon few teams can match.

They won't be alone.

Senior Payton Erickson returns under center after completing 49 of 91 passes for 552 yards.

The backfield has depth — senior Hunter Jacobson added 307 rushing yards and teammate Hunter Woodward added 209.

Continued on Next Page

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Mascot: Warriors
Division: 3A
Conference: West
Colors: Black and orange
Coach: Ryan Utterback, first year at Worland
2016 Record: 3-5, did not qualify for playoffs

2017 Schedule
8-26: at Cody jamboree, 1 p.m.
*9-1: at Powell, 7 p.m.
9-8: vs. Buffalo, 7 p.m.
*9-15: vs. Green River, 6 p.m.
*9-22: at Star Valley, 6 p.m.
*9-29: at Jackson, 5:30 p.m.
*10-6: vs. Cody, 7 p.m.
*10-13: vs. Evanston, 6 p.m.
10-20: at Pinedale, 7 p.m.
* Conference game

Utterback assumes lead role

For a program that's had seven head coaches in seven years, the word "continuity" wouldn't be an apparent strength.

Worland and coach Ryan Utterback are trying to change that.

Even with a new head coach, the Warriors' strength this season may rest in a smooth transition. Utterback has been an assistant coach with the Warriors the past three seasons, and for him, stability – even in the face of change – will be one of his top priorities.

Utterback will run the offense, running similar plays to last year, while Josh Garcia will retain his spot as defensive coordinator.

"We're going to try to keep it as close to last year as possible, at least as the beginning," Utterback said. "... The fact that I've been here, even though it's been in a different capacity, hopefully that'll be a huge advantage just to get some continuity going."

Worland started 2016 3-1 but lost its final four games to finish 3-5 and out of the playoffs. It marked the seventh consecutive year that the Warriors had missed the postseason, the longest such

Key Players
OL/MLB: Matthew Sanchez, Sr.
OL/DL: Morgan Tigner, Sr.
RB/QB/OLB: Josh Garza, Sr.
RB/LB: Dalton Jeffries, Sr.

streak of any Class 3A team.

But Worland had flashes of potential despite finishing last in the 3A West Conference. Worland more than doubled its scoring output, going from 8.6 to 17.8 points per game, while decreasing its points allowed per game.

This year, a senior class that runs 11 to 12 players deep will lead the team.

"I just really like this group," Utterback said. "It's kind of their time. I think they're ready to step up and have a good senior year."

Senior Matt Sanchez was Worland's lone all-state choice last year; he's also Worland's lone returning all-conference pick.

Sanchez was Worland's leader, by far, on defense, racking up team highs in solo tackles with 40, assisted tackles with 38 and fumble recoveries with two. He also added 4.5 tackles for loss.

Seniors J.R. Hoffman, Dalton Jeffries, Hayden Lambeth and Josh Garza were all among Worland's top 10 tacklers last year, as well. Hoffman led the Warriors with five tackles for loss.

On offense, though, Worland lost its quarterback, its top four rushers and its top two receivers. Senior Carson Lyman, who had 31 carries for 118 yards, is Worland's top returning rusher, while classmate Pete Douzenis, who had four catches for 79 yards, is Worland's top returning receiver.

Although the offense will continue to evolve, the mindset instilled under previous head coach Todd Weber and the assistant coaches who remain will continue to provide stability.

"A lot of things that he (Weber) implemented and the mindset he instilled in the kids is the direction we want to keep going," Utterback said.



Title race is wide open

By Patrick Schmiedt
Four questions to answer

What's different about 2A this year? Is "everything" too strong of a word? The defending 2A champions, Big Horn, are gone, moved to 1A 11-man. Most of last year's best players are gone, too: The entire classification only has seven returning all-state players, the fewest of any classification in the state.

With all the change, who's the favorites? Three teams – Glenrock, Greybull and Mountain View – have been getting the most attention this offseason. They've all got a chip on their shoulder after playoff losses last year.

Is any one of those three a clear-cut favorite? No. All three suffered big losses to graduation, leaving the door wide open for any one of the three – or any other program, honestly – to fill that gap.

How about Kemmerer? I think everyone in the state wants Kemmerer to break its state-record 36-game losing streak. But no one wants to be the team Kemmerer breaks the streak against. The season opener against Saratoga, in Kemmerer, might be the Rangers' best bet to break the streak.

Four key games
Glenrock at Greybull, Sept. 1. The most intriguing nonconference game on the schedule this season has the two early favorites for the East and West conference crowns facing each other.

Newcastle at Glenrock, Sept. 22. The most significant challenge Glenrock might

face in the East Conference could come from Newcastle. And the Dogies aren't afraid to make the trip to Converse County: They've won the last two times they've played in Glenrock.

Lyman at Mountain View, Oct. 6. The Eagles are an interesting team; they graduated the bulk of their offensive stars but return the bulk of their defensive stars. Against Mountain View in the annual Bridger Valley rivalry game, Lyman may have what it takes to push for its own claim to the top spot in the West.

Mountain View at Greybull, Oct. 20. The last game of the regular season for both teams may also be for the West Conference title. The two teams split first place last season, and neither one wants to do that again.

Predicted order of finish
East Conference: Glenrock; Newcastle; Wheatland; Thermopolis; Burns; Moorcroft.
West Conference: Greybull; Mountain View; Lyman; Big Piney; Lovell; Pinedale; Kemmerer.

Way-too-early title game score prediction:
Glenrock 20, Greybull 17

On paper, the Herders have more experience and more ability than almost any other 2A team. The difference in 2A this year may come from improvement throughout the season, so don't be surprised to see a team seeded third or lower make a run at a title.



2016 State Playoffs

State Championship

Big Horn 28, Greybull 20

State Semifinals

Big Horn 27, Newcastle 7

Greybull 26, Glenrock 0

State Quarterfinals

Glenrock 50, Lyman 0

Greybull 61, Wheatland 22

Big Horn 20, Pinedale 14

Newcastle 31, Mountain View 28

Four players to watch

Jason Stoddard, Mountain View

The only two-time all-state selection in 2A this year, Stoddard is a key piece of what the Buffalos do on both offense and defense.

He had 28 receptions for 449 yards and also a team-high 46 solo tackles on defense.

Riley Hill, Greybull

Hill is the only returning all-state selection for last year's runners-up.

He threw for 847 yards last year and had 1,357 passing yards as a sophomore. He's also one of Greybull's top defenders.

Cameron Quigley, Newcastle

Few players in 2A will be as tough to stop as the Dogies' quarterback. He ran for 744 yards and threw for 628 last year, and combined he notched 16 touchdowns either running or throwing.

Quigley was also Newcastle's leading defensive player.

Kia Sexson, Glenrock

In a year where 2A's losses to graduation will be apparent, the Herders return five of their top 10 tacklers, setting them up well for early success.

Sexson finished fourth on the team in defensive points and topped the squad with 46 assisted tackles.

STAR VALLEY, Cont.

However, the receiving corps will be untested: Aside from Dawson, no one else who caught a pass last season will return.

Senior linemen Hunter Cranney and Doug Dickey, who each missed time last season with injuries, will also return.

Defensively, Dawson is the only one of Star Valley's top five tacklers to come back.

Senior Alias Erickson was sixth in defensive points and led Star Valley with four interceptions, while Jacobson was 10th and had a team-high seven pass break-ups.

In all, they're the only three of the top 13 defenders to come back.

Although the Braves may not have the depth of previous championship teams, they do have tradition and momentum.

"Our kids expect to win, they have experience in big games, and even more importantly they know the kind of work and commitment required to be successful," Young said. "... We are successful because of the tradition in our community. There is pressure from their dads, brothers, uncles and neighbors to not be the weak link."



Key Players
RB/LB: Josh Dawson, Sr.
K/P: Noah Hutchinson, Sr.
C: Cosmo Morgan, Sr.
RB/SS: Hunter Jacobson, Sr.

2017 Schedule
8-25: vs. Spring Creek, Nevada, 7 p.m.
9-1: at Preston, Idaho, 7 p.m.
9-8: vs. Torrington, 6 p.m.
*9-15: at Evanston, 7 p.m.
*9-22: vs. Worland, 6 p.m.
*9-29: at Cody, 6 p.m.
*10-6: vs. Jackson, 6 p.m.
*10-13: vs. Powell, 4 p.m.
*10-20: at Green River, 7 p.m.
* Conference game

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Coach: Marv Mirich, 7th year
2016 Record: 2-6, did not qualify for playoffs

Key Players

QB/CB: Tyler Norris, Sr.
OT/DE: Ben Banville, Soph.
C/NT: Raymond Delgado, Jr.
WR/S: Alex Pyle, Jr.

Mascot: Broncos
Division: 2A
Conference: East
Colors: Black and orange

2017 Schedule

8-26: at Southeast jamboree, 10 a.m. (Zero Week)
 9-1: vs. Lusk, 7 p.m.
 9-8: at Pine Bluffs, 7 p.m.
 9-15: vs. Saratoga, 7 p.m.
 *9-22: at Moorcroft, 6 p.m.
 *9-29: vs. Newcastle, 6 p.m.
 *10-6: at Wheatland, 7 p.m.
 *10-13: vs. Thermopolis, 7 p.m.
 *10-20: at Glenrock, 7 p.m.
 * Conference game

Broncs have gained some seasoning

Burns will field one of the most veteran teams in Class 2A this year.

However, a lot of those veterans, hardened and prepared by previous varsity experience, will be sophomores.

The Broncos started several freshmen in last year's 2-6 season. Now a year older, they'll carry a substantial responsibility for Burns' potential success on their shoulders this fall.

"We are still going to be young," coach Marv Mirich said. "When we went to camp we had seven juniors and seniors and 20 freshmen and sophomores."

"We're real optimistic about our younger kids and getting up to 40 or 50 kids in the program."

That depth and consistency between classes is one of the missing links for Burns, which is a combined 4-20 the past three seasons.

A roster of 40-plus players might be a year away – Mirich said he expects about 33 or 34 players this year – but a sophomore class that runs potentially 14 or 15 players deep will be a huge part of building up sustained success.



For example: Three sophomores lead Burns' returning defensive unit. Sophomore Keenan Manlove is the leading returning tackler. He was third on the team a year ago in defensive points and led Burns with 40 assisted tackles.

Sophomore Mitch Miller, meanwhile, was fourth in defensive points, and sophomore Ben Banville – one of two returning all-conference players – was sixth.

Despite returning 11 players with starting experience on both offense and defense, Burns still has holes to fill. The Broncos' biggest loss is that of Klayton Clark, who was the team's leading rusher, passer and tackler last year.

Mirich said without Clark under center, Burns will need to use its running backs more and create offensive opportunities from

that.

"We'll rely on our running backs and hopefully we can get enough play-action plays in there to get some of the offense by air," Mirich said. "I think we can throw the ball. We probably won't throw it as well as we did last year, but enough to keep teams honest."

Senior Tyler Norris, an all-conference pick last year, and junior Alex Pyle were Burns' top two receivers last year. Each had 14 catches and four touchdowns, while Pyle (267 yards) barely edged out Norris (258) in yards. Mirich said Norris will likely make the move to quarterback this fall.

Senior lineman Darrell Goeckler, senior multi-purpose threat Daniel Childers, junior lineman Raymond Delgado and sophomore running back/linebacker Boe Clayson are expected to have key responsibilities on both sides of the ball.

Mirich, for his part, said he isn't worried about relying on younger players. That worry was for last year, not this year.

"They'll play like juniors and seniors this year," he said.

Herders rely on experienced leaders

Glenrock coach Ray Kumpula's theory suggests the Herders don't have any more raw talent than any other team in Class 2A.

The theory goes that the Herders, like most teams, have about 10 percent of their players who are potential game-changers.

What separates the average

teams from the great teams, Kumpula said, is how many players can join that group at the top and become game-changers in their own right.

That kind of change starts with developing a culture where leadership from those upper-echelon players bring others on the squad up to their level through offseason workouts.

"Can they reach back into somebody in their group and maybe make it 30 percent or 40 percent?" Kumpula said.

Last year, Glenrock's seniors did that, and it led to an undefeated regular season.

"We were able to get more and more kids toward that top group and that's going to be our key" this year, Kumpula said.

With a group of seniors ready to both build on last year's successes and move past last season's failures, reaching that potential is possible.

Senior Kia Sexson is Glenrock's only returning all-state selection, but the Herders return five all-conference selections in Sexson, seniors Josh Burrus, Richard Harris and Dalton Davies and junior Tucker Bopp. No other school in Class 2A has as many returning all-conference selections as Glenrock.

The Herders return four

Continued on Page 25

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Mascot: Wolves

Division: 2A

Conference: East

Colors: Green and white

Coach: Dusty Petz, 3rd year

2016 Record: 2-6, did not qualify for playoffs

2017 Schedule

8-26: at Wright jamboree, 10:30 a.m. (Zero Week)
 8-31: vs. Upton-Sundance, 7 p.m.
 9-9: vs. Gillette JV, 6 p.m.
 9-16: at Rapid City Central, S.D., sophs, 4 p.m.
 *9-22: vs. Burns, 6 p.m.
 *9-29: at Thermopolis, 6 p.m.
 *10-6: at Newcastle, 7 p.m.
 *10-13: vs. Glenrock, 7 p.m.
 *10-20: vs. Wheatland, 7 p.m.
 * Conference game

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Petz returns to Wolves' sideline

An unscheduled hiatus helped Dusty Petz regain his fire for coaching.

The Moorcroft head coach missed last season after surgery kept him away from the field.

"If I can't get out there and stand and move and show steps, I thought I'd be doing a disservice by being on crutches," he said. "... It was difficult to watch the kids and not be with them."

Instead, a group of assistant coaches – Toby Semlek, Cory Allison and Denny Glenn – helped instruct the Wolves last season. Now, Petz is back, and although he didn't want to miss last season, he said he feels a renewed motivation entering 2017.

"It can rejuvenate you to get out of it," he said.

With their coach back, this year's Moorcroft team has the personnel to improve on 2016's 2-6 record.

Senior Tucker Allison, an all-conference selection last year, was third for the Wolves in defensive points last season and was second on the team with 44 assisted tackles. He is Moorcroft's leading re-

Key Players

C/MLB: Tucker Allison, Sr.
FB/MLB: Solomon Petz, Sr.
TB/CB: Tommy Schlater, Sr.
OG/DT: Lane Mosteller, Sr.

turning tackler. He also anchors the offensive line at center.

Fellow seniors Lane Mosteller and Tanner Feehan add experience to the line. Behind them, junior Grayson Osmon is the Wolves' top returning offensive weapon; he's Moorcroft's leading returner in rushing yards (339) and receiving yards (114).

Between quarterbacks and running backs, Moorcroft ran six-deep with rushing options last year, and of those, four return. In addition to Osmon, sophomore Rowdy Pfeil added 272 rushing yards, while seniors Solomon Petz and Tommy Schlater had 217 and 186 rushing yards, respectively.

The Wolves will need to break in a new quarterback – likely sophomore Parker Seeley – but he'll be surrounded by seniors at

Mascot: Herders

Division: 2A

Conference: East

Colors: Purple and silver

Coach: Ray Kumpula, 23rd year

2016 Record: 9-1, lost to Greybull in state semifinals

2017 Schedule

8-25: at Pine Bluffs, 4 p.m. (Zero Week)
 9-1: at Greybull, 7 p.m.
 9-8: vs. Lander, 7 p.m.
 9-15: at Riverton, 7 p.m.
 *9-22: vs. Newcastle, 7 p.m.
 *9-29: vs. Wheatland, 7 p.m.
 *10-6: at Thermopolis, 7 p.m.
 *10-13: at Moorcroft, 7 p.m.
 *10-20: vs. Burns, 7 p.m.
 * Conference game

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Mascot: Dogies
Division: 2A
Conference: East
Colors: Orange and black
Coach: Matt Conzelman, 9th year
2016 Record: : 6-5, lost to Big Horn in state semifinals

Key Players

QB/FS: Cameron Quigley, Sr.
RB/LB: Lyle Whitney, Sr.
OG/DE: Wyatt Corley, Sr.
OL/DE: Sawyer Roberson, Jr.

2017 Schedule

8-25: vs. Custer, S.D., 7 p.m. (Zero Week)
9-1: at Lovell, 6 p.m.
9-8: at Upton-Sundance, 7 p.m. (at Upton)
9-15: vs. Torrington, 7 p.m.
*9-22: at Glenrock, 7 p.m.
*9-29: at Burns, 6 p.m.
*10-6: vs. Moorcroft, 7 p.m.
*10-13: at Wheatland, 7 p.m.
*10-20: vs. Thermopolis, 7 p.m.
* Conference game

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Dogies want to take next step

Newcastle is in the midst of one of its most impressive streaks in program history.

Prior to 2011, the Dogies had just one playoff victory in program history.

Since 2011, the Dogies have won four playoff games, reaching the Class 2A semifinals in 2011, 2012, 2014 and 2016.

Still, the Dogies are still seeking their first trip to a title game since 1981 and their first state championship.

"You take a look at all those semifinals, and whoever we lost to wound up winning the whole thing," Newcastle coach Matt Conzelman said. "... I just keep telling the guys we've been so close. If we keep knocking on the door, we'll get in one of these days."

The Dogies pulled off the surprise of the first round last year when, as a No. 4 seed, they upset the top seed from the West, Mountain View.

Newcastle lost to eventual state champion Big Horn 27-7 in the semifinals.

For Newcastle to make another deep playoff run, it will need some younger players to fill key spots on a team that returns seven starters on both offense and defense but lost several critical players to graduation.

Senior Cameron Quigley is the only one of Newcastle's four all-state and six all-conference selections to return this fall.

Quigley is a run-pass threat for the Dogies, throwing for 628 yards and 10 touchdowns while running for 744 yards and six touchdowns last year.

He's also Newcastle's leading returning receiver with six catches for 42 yards, as the Dogies lose their top three receivers to graduation.

"If we keep knocking on the door, we'll get in one of these days."

~ Coach Matt Conzelman

Quigley is coming off shoulder surgery, Conzelman said, and because of that will play several positions on offense. That will allow others to share the workload of carrying the offense.

"We've got enough skill guys around him that I think we can alleviate some of that (pressure)," Conzelman said. "... I'm hoping we can be in a position where we can kind of move him around a bit."

Sophomore Jake Deveraux added 190 rushing yards last year. Up front, senior Wyatt Corley and juniors Sawyer Roberson, Dayton Williams and Bryson Johnson give the Dogies experience.

Defensively, Quigley topped Newcastle's defensive point tallies with 14 per game; he led the team with three interceptions, three fumble recoveries and seven pass break-ups. But he's the only one of Newcastle's top four defenders to return.

Johnson, Roberson and senior Lyle Whitney were all in Newcastle's top 10 tacklers last year.

Their goal remains clear: make the playoffs, and then stir things up once they're there.

"First and foremost is taking care of everything in the regular season... and give yourself a chance to get to that next one," Conzelman said.

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Mascot: Bobcats
Division: 2A
Conference: East
Colors: Purple and yellow
Coach: Matt McPhie, 2nd year at Thermopolis
2016 Record: 1-7, did not qualify for playoffs

2017 Schedule

8-26: at Cody jamboree, 1 p.m. (Zero Week)
9-1: vs. Shoshoni, 7 p.m.
9-8: vs. Greybull, 7 p.m.
9-15: at Lander, 7 p.m.
*9-22: at Wheatland, 7 p.m.
*9-29: vs. Moorcroft, 6 p.m.
*10-6: vs. Glenrock, 7 p.m.
*10-13: at Burns, 7 p.m.
*10-20: at Newcastle, 7 p.m.
* Conference game

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Bobcats gaining momentum

Thermopolis lost its first two games of 2016 by identical scores of 63-0.

For coach Matt McPhie, in his first year with the Bobcats, the losses didn't just happen on the field on those Friday nights.

"I just looked at those boys and I said we lost that game a long time ago," he said.

McPhie enters his second year with clear expectations for his young squad. Those expectations will grow as the Bobcats grow, but McPhie said he knows developing a program takes time.

"We put in 530 hours in the weight room during the winter," McPhie said. "... I know it's 530 hours that wasn't put in the year before. These boys are starting to see the results from that hard work and some dedication."

And Thermopolis has a group of talent to make this year a clear step forward in the program's evolution. The Bobcats return all four of their all-conference selections in seniors Cullen Becher, Milton Peden and Noah Schwalbe and junior Jon Harvey.

That returning strength shows most clearly on defense, where

"These boys are starting to see the results from that hard work."

~ Coach Matt McPhie

Key Players

QB/LB: Cullen Becher, Sr.
TE/LB: Noah Schwalbe, Sr.
OL/DL: Tyson Tobar, Jr.
OL/DL: Milton Peden, Sr.

the Bobcats return their top three tacklers and nine of their top 10 – a corps of returners developed by necessity.

"We were a super, super young team last year," McPhie said. "We got into the third week of the season and we had freshmen starting for us."

"We had kids get a lot of experience last year. I wouldn't say experience is a strength of ours by

any means, but we have a fair share of players who have played."

Harvey led the defense in solo tackles with 17, assisted tackles with 28 and defensive points with 75. Schwalbe was second on the team in defensive points and led the Bobcats with three tackles for loss, while Becher was third. Harvey, senior Clemens Abbott, juniors Tyson Tobar, Kolby George and Jeffrey VanAntwerp and sophomore Riley Shaffer will help anchor an experienced and growing defense.

Meanwhile, Becher, Thermopolis' lone all-state selection last year, is the Bobcats' most versatile offensive weapon. A dual-threat quarterback, he led the Bobcats with 529 rushing yards and 419 receiving yards, accounting for six touchdowns.

Peden was the only other Bobcat with more than 20 rushing yards last year – he had 220 – while Harvey led the Bobcats with 142 receiving yards on 10 catches.

Peden (12 catches, 69 yards) was also an oft-used target, finishing second in catches and third in receiving yards last year.

Moreover, McPhie said he's encouraged by the development he's already seen so far.

"I believe they're starting to learn how to compete," McPhie said. "They've just been put in position where they've been out-manned, but that's starting to change."

GLENROCK, Cont.

starters on their offensive line (Harris, Burris and seniors Jadon Williams and Brock Jones) as well as both tight ends (Sexson and Davies), a huge piece of a team that runs the double wing and only completed two passes in the entire 2016 season.

Glenrock graduated a pair of 1,000-yard backs in Garrett Schwindt and Cooper Fargen.

Bopp, who was fourth on the team with 178 rushing yards, is Glenrock's leading returning rusher.

Junior Zane Moore is Glenrock's leading returner on defense; he was second in defensive points for the Herders last year and led the team with four interceptions.

Sexson was fourth in defensive points and led the Herders with 46 assisted tackles, while Bopp, Davies and Burrus were

all in the Herders' top 10 defensively a year ago.

The Herders led 2A in both total defense and scoring defense last year, allowing 200.2 yards and 10.1 points per game.

To boot, the Herders start the 2017 season against Greybull, the team that eliminated them in last year's semifinals.

Ultimately, though, Kumpula said the Herders' success rests with its leaders and how well they nurture a culture that al-

Key Players

TE/LB: Kia Sexson, Sr.
OT/DT: Richard Harris, Sr.
RB/DB: Tucker Bopp, Jr.
OG/DT: Jadon Williams, Sr.

lows average players to become great.

"Can we take that culture and replicate it again by the next group of seniors?" he said. "... If they do, then generally good things are going to happen."

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

Coach: Tom Waring, 2nd year at Wheatland
2016 Record: 4-5, lost to Greybull in state playoffs
Key Players
WR/DB: Zac Gunter, Sr.
QB: Trevor Vaughn, Sr.
OL/DL: Clayton Iacovetto, Jr.
TE/DE: Trigg Peasley, Sr.

2017 Schedule

8-26: at Southeast jamboree, 10 a.m. (Zero Week)
 9-1: at Torrington, 7 p.m.
 9-8: at Rawlins, 7 p.m.
 9-15: vs. Douglas, 7 p.m.
 *9-22: vs. Thermopolis, 7 p.m.
 *9-29: at Glenrock, 7 p.m.
 *10-6: vs. Burns, 7 p.m.
 *10-13: vs. Newcastle, 7 p.m.
 *10-20: at Moorcroft, 7 p.m.
 * Conference game

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Bulldogs could be dangerous

Tom Waring has a simple rule for his team: full effort, all the time.

"I won't ever change that expectation, no matter who we play," the Wheatland coach said.

Waring said the 2017 Bulldogs are willing to put in the work to meet that expectation.

That demand will be tested this season.

The Class 2A Bulldogs will face three Class 3A teams in Weeks 1-3: Torrington, Rawlins and Douglas.

Waring said scheduling a gauntlet of 3A programs was more out of convenience than any fully formed scheduling plan, but Waring isn't complaining.

"We don't want to play down," Waring said. "We want to make sure that we're playing teams that are really tough and a class above. Playing those 3A teams, that'll only help us in the long run."

Last year, with Waring as the new head coach and a bunch of new faces, the Bulldogs remained competitive and made the playoffs for the fifth consecutive year – something the program had never accomplished before 2016.

Returning to the postseason, and doing some damage once

"We want to make sure we are playing teams that are really tough and a class above."

~ Coach Tom Waring

they're there, is a distinct possibility for the Bulldogs again this fall, even though the squad lost several seniors and is heavy on juniors this year.

Senior Zac Gunter is Wheatland's only returning all-state player. Gunter, who had 27 catches for 523 yards and four touchdowns – good for second place in all three categories on the team a year ago – returns as quarterback Trevor Vaughn's top target.

"He's one of those players I never saw get tired," Waring said of Gunter. "... You only get those type of kids every few years."

"He's kind of our vocal leader. He'll get the other guys up and ready to play, and he has high expectations for effort, too."

Vaughn threw for 1,617 yards on 116-of-249 passing, notching 13 touchdowns in the process.

With an extra year of experience

with the offense, Vaughn could top those totals this year.

"When I came in, I changed a bunch of the offense's verbiage to make it what I thought it would be easier," Waring said. "... Trevor knows that backward and forward now. We can call half a play and he can reel off the whole play in the huddle."

Senior Trigg Peasley added 14 catches for 136 yards. Junior Colton Caves, who was third on the team with 169 rushing yards on 55 carries, is the only Wheatland returner who had more than 50 rushing yards last year.

Defensively, the Bulldogs lose six of their top eight tacklers to graduation. Junior Daniel Hutchins was second on the team in defensive points a year ago; Gunter was fourth, with a team-high five pass break-ups, and junior lineman Clayton Iacovetto was ninth.

Punchers could end playoff drought

By all accounts, this is Big Piney's year.

The Punchers, with eight state titles to their name – including five since 1998 – haven't been to the playoffs for six consecutive years.

However, this year, Big Piney has about 11 returning seniors who are ready to break that streak and take the Punchers to the postseason.

"This group definitely has high expectations and standards for themselves," Punchers coach Aaron Makelky said. "They have made qualifying for the playoffs the main goal for the 2017 season. That's something that they have set for themselves, not decided by the coaching staff. We have a great leadership structure in place that has already made a huge impact on the culture of our team."

That crew of senior leaders did more than just typical offseason training; they also did a 10-week leadership development course to help build in ownership of the team.

And they're talented. Big Piney returns four all-conference selections – the most in the 2A

Key Players

WR/OLB: Jake Pape, Sr.
QB/DB: Tristan Barney, Sr.
OL/ILB: T.J. Frazier, Sr.
WR/OLB: Adam Willoughby, Sr.

West – and they're all seniors. All-state selection Jake Pape is joined by classmates Zane Meisner, Tristan Barney and Adam Willoughby as returning all-conference selections for the Punchers this fall.

"We have the most athletic class that Big Piney has produced in quite awhile," Makelky said. "We have some very experienced guys who have started since their sophomore year... and our players have really been dedicated to the weight room and competing in other sports."

"We have a strong group of seniors that are not only good football players, but also great leaders. Many of them have been starting for 2-3 years already."

Makelky said Big Piney's wide

receivers, defensive backs, running back and quarterback are all entering their third year as starters.

"(We) hopefully have some continuity in guys being in the same spots," Makelky said. "This helps immensely with timing, communication and how guys play together on the field."

Pape led Big Piney last season with 388 rushing yards and also added 331 passing yards.

Meisner was Big Piney's top receiver with 20 catches for 390 yards and three touchdowns; Willoughby added 18 catches for 250 yards and a pair of scores.

Barney, who threw for 819 yards and nine touchdowns last year, also comes back.

The Punchers will be breaking in two new starters on the offensive line, though.

Defensively, the Punchers get back five of their top six tacklers. Willoughby was Big Piney's top tackler last year with 9.3 defensive points per game and a team-high 17 solo tackles.

A locker room full of other seniors, including T.J. Frazier, Noel Aguirre, Chancy Hunt, Tyler Young and Barney, will also have key defensive responsibilities.

Junior Justin Seeman will also be part of the foundation on defense.



Mascot: Punchers
Division: 2A
Conference: West
Colors: Red and white
Coach: Aaron Makelky, 6th year

2016 Record: 1-7, did not qualify for playoffs

2017 Schedule

8-26: at Lander jamboree, 3 p.m. (Zero Week)
 9-1: vs. Wind River, 3 p.m.
 *9-8: vs. Mountain View, 4 p.m.
 *9-15: at Greybull, 7 p.m.
 *9-22: at Kemmerer, 7 p.m.
 *9-29: vs. Lovell, 3 p.m.
 *10-6: vs. Pinedale, 3:30 p.m.
 10-13: vs. Big Horn, noon (at Riverton)
 *10-20: at Lyman, 2 p.m.
 * Conference game

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Coach: Marty Wrage, 4th year

2016 Record: 9-2, lost to Big Horn in championship

Key Players

QB/DB: Riley Hill, Sr.
RB/ILB: Zack Keisel, Jr.
OT/DE: Ralph Petty, Jr.
QB/TE/DE: Brock Hill, Jr.

Mascot: Buffaloes

Division: 2A

Conference: West

Colors: Blue and yellow

2017 Schedule

8-25: vs. Shoshoni, 7 p.m. (Zero Week)

9-1: vs. Glenrock, 7 p.m.

9-8: at Thermopolis, 7 p.m.

*9-15: vs. Big Piney, 7 p.m.

*9-22: at Pinedale, 7 p.m.

*9-29: vs. Kemmerer, 6 p.m.

*10-6: at Lovell, 7 p.m.

*10-13: at Lyman, 2 p.m.

*10-20: vs. Mountain View, 7 p.m.

* Conference game

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Buffaloes could be in title chase

Thirty-three years passed between Greybull's title-game appearance in 1983 and its appearance last year.

If the returning crew of Buffaloes have their way, the program – and the Greybull community – won't have to wait three-plus decades for another trip to a championship game.

The Buffaloes return six starters on both offense and defense from last year's Class 2A runners-up. Although the team has significant holes to fill – Greybull returns just two of its eight all-conference selections – coach Marty Wrage said he's optimistic his team can continue to set its goals high. In part, that's because of an increased off-season commitment.

"We had more players lifting and working out in this off-season than we have ever had," he said. "We had 40 players at football camp this year. Many of our returning players bring a focus and intensity that carried us last year."

The 28-20 loss to Big Horn in last year's title game was a bitter-sweet sendoff for the seniors, but Wrage said he hopes the success the Buffs had last year has rip-

"Many of our returning players bring a focus and intensity."

~ **Coach Marty Wrage**

ples for years to come.

"The departing seniors have taught these returners how to work and compete," he said. "We have high expectations with big impact players returning. We understand that last year is over and we have to make this year's team the best that they can be."

Senior Riley Hill, the only one of Greybull's six all-state selections to come back, threw for 847 yards and nine touchdowns last year. Junior Zack Keisel, an all-conference pick in 2016, is Greybull's leading returning rusher; he ran for 519 yards on just 47 carries (11 yards per carry) with 10 touchdowns last season. He's the only returning back with more than 100 yards rushing last year.

Senior Miguel Gomez was second on the team in catches (16) and receiving yards (355) and is Greybull's leading returning receiver. However, he's the

only one of three receivers who had triple-digit receiving yardage to return.

"We should be a more balanced attack this year," Wrage said. "We were run heavy last year."

The defense has some rebuilding to do, as five of Greybull's top eight tacklers graduated. Junior Ralph Petty was second on the team in defensive points last season and led Greybull with 14 tackles for loss. Keisel was fourth and Hill was fifth in defensive points; Hill had a team-high five sacks.

Gomez tied for the team lead with four interceptions a year ago, while senior Brayan Castro was also a solid defensive contributor. Juniors Brock Hill, Dade Greene and Calvin Farrow, all anticipated to be critical pieces to the defensive front, will also be called on to increase their roles from last year.

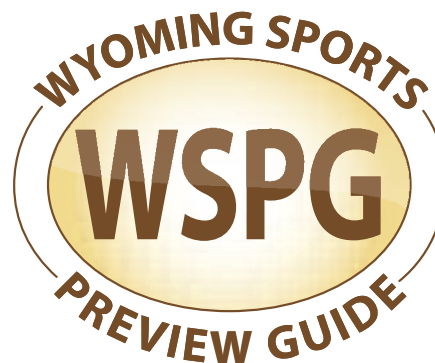
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Rangers look to end losing streak

Kemmerer enters the season on a 37-game losing streak – the longest losing streak in state history.

Now, it's up to a first-time head coach to help lead the Rangers out of a slump that now includes four consecutive winless seasons.

Not that coach Bart Jernigan is counting.

Jernigan said the streak "isn't important now. That's last season. ... The bottom line is that doesn't matter. It's irrelevant. The past doesn't define us."

Jernigan – who was Kemmerer's defensive coordinator the past two seasons – takes over a program that has nowhere to go but up.

Statistically speaking, last year's 0-9 season was Kemmerer's most difficult. The Rangers scored only 34 points, the fewest of the past four years, while the 408 points they gave up was the most allowed by the Rangers in the current streak.

The Rangers' closest game was a 28-point loss (42-14) to Lyman in the season finale; every other game was decided by at least 34 points.

Jernigan said the school's success in other sports, particularly wrestling and track and field, should transfer well to football.

"We're not a school without talent," he said. "I'd like to see us bring some of that talent together, put it on the football field and build something special together."

"In past years we've had talent to compete, but sometimes we've allowed our attitude to get in the

way... and that's shortchanged our effort."

Jernigan said his primary goal is to continue to instill a culture of accountability, and he's hopeful a strong corps of juniors will lead the Rangers in that shift this fall.

Lineman Jeydon Boyd, an all-conference selection a year ago, will lead that group.

Meanwhile, classmate Anthony Tibbetts ran for 167 yards last year to finish second on the team; he is Kemmerer's leading returning rusher. Several other juniors, including Josh Thatcher, Hayden Walker, Donny Proffitt and Lowell Ellis, will be important on both sides of the ball.

One question mark is under center, where junior Tanner Plowman – who threw for 348 yards a year ago – may not return due to a back injury.

Kemmerer returns eight of its top 11 tacklers from last year, although the Rangers do lose three of their top five. Proffitt is Kemmerer's leading returning tackler.

A pair of seniors, Noah Johnson and Louis Failoni, will help anchor the receiver and defensive back positions, and sophomore Quin Tibbetts will add depth.

Their goal is straightforward: build a culture that will sustain itself and let the victories follow.

"There are plenty of successful programs in this state and in other instances who have come from the bottom and risen to the top and are staying there," Jernigan said, "and that's really our goal."

Mascot: Bulldogs

Division: 2A

Conference: West

Colors: Blue and white

Coach: Doug Hazen, 9th year

2016 Record: 4-4, did not qualify for playoffs

Key Players

RB/LB: Porter Nichols, Sr.

OL/DL: Dylan Herreth, Sr.

OL/DL: Kerry Powell, Jr.

OL/LD: Kelly Powell, Jr.

2017 Schedule

8-26: vs. Buffalo, noon (Zero Week)

9-1: vs. Newcastle, 6 p.m.

9-8: at Shoshoni, 7 p.m.

*9-15: at Mountain View, 4 p.m.

*9-22: vs. Lyman, 7 p.m.

*9-29: at Big Piney, 3 p.m.

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

*10-13: vs. Pinedale, 7 p.m.

*10-20: at Kemmerer, 6 p.m.

* Conference game

2A WEST

LOVELL BULLDOGS

Bulldogs mix youth with experience

If any one program demonstrated the parity in the Class 2A West Conference last season, it was Lovell.

The Bulldogs went 3-3 in conference play. Of those six games, five were decided by eight points or fewer.

Ultimately, the Bulldogs lost too many games to qualify for the playoffs, as three close losses (20-13 to Greybull, 28-20 to Lyman and 21-14 to Pinedale) kept Lovell out of the playoffs for just the second time since 1997.

However, coach Doug Hazen emphasized this season is not a redemption season – the Bulldogs lost too many seniors for revenge to be an emphasis this fall. The Bulldogs lost all five of their all-conference selections, as well as their top three rushers, top two passers, top three receivers and nine of their top 12 tacklers.

"We're going to have a lot of new faces in," Hazen said.

"Some of our success and failure will depend on how guys fit into the system and how they take things – their attitude and resiliency and tenacity – as we get into the season."

As is typical, seniors will lead Lovell. Hazen said as many as 14 seniors could suit up this fall. But underclassmen will also be critical to the Bulldogs' success.

"I always say you win with seniors," Hazen said. "Not that we don't have a strong senior class, but there's a lot of unknowns for us."

Up front, seniors Dylan Herreth, Ben Bates and Kurt McNabb and juniors Kerry and Kelly Powell will be critical on both offense and defense.

Senior Logan Hitz, with 63 rushing yards on eight carries, is Lovell's leading returning rusher; senior Porter Nichols, with five catches for 51 yards, is the leading returning receiver.

Nichols led Lovell in defen-

Mascot: Rangers

Division: 2A

Conference: West

Colors: Black and red

Coach: Bart Jernigan, 4th year

2016 Record: 0-9, did not qualify for playoffs

Key Players

WR/CB: Louis Failoni, Sr.

FB/MLB: Anthony Tibbetts, Jr.

OG/DT: Jeydon Boyd, Jr.

WR/S: Josh Thatcher, Jr.

2017 Schedule

8-26: at Cokeville, 4 p.m. (Zero Week)

9-1: vs. Saratoga, 5 p.m.

*9-8: at Lyman, 4 p.m.

*9-15: vs. Pinedale, 7 p.m.

*9-22: vs. Big Piney, 7 p.m.

*9-29: at Greybull, 6 p.m.

10-6: at Lusk, 4 p.m.

*10-13: at Mountain View, 3 p.m.

*10-20: vs. Lovell, 6 p.m.

* Conference game

sive points a year ago, tallying a team-high six pass break-ups while adding 43 assisted tackles and 12 solo tackles.

However, he's the only one of Lovell's top seven tacklers to come back this year. Hitz, Bates and McNabb were also key contributors to last year's defense – but the Bulldogs will also rely on a bunch of untested talent to rise to the level of varsity play in a hurry.

Hazen said the Lovell program typically relies on its junior varsity program and its summer training to make sure those players are ready when their number is called. This season, he said, is no different.

"A lot of these kids, it's their opportunity to be on the field and to be a part of the program and put their stamp on it," Hazen said. "... I think a lot of it just boils down to how hard is everyone is willing to work, and how disciplined everyone is willing to be."



Mascot: Eagles

Division: 2A

Conference: West

Colors: Blue and white

Coach: Dale Anderson, 6th year

2016 Record: 4-6, lost to

Glenrock in state quarterfinales

2017 Schedule

8-25: vs. Altamont, Utah, 4:30

p.m.

*9-1: at Pinedale, 7 p.m.

*9-8: vs. Kemmerer, 4 p.m.

9-15: at Cokeville, 4 p.m.

*9-22: at Lovell, 7 p.m.

9-28: vs. Star Valley JV, 4 p.m.

*10-6: at Mountain View, 3 p.m.

*10-13: vs. Greybull, 2 p.m.

*10-20: vs. Big Piney, 2 p.m.

* Conference game

Eagles have strength in trenches

For the past couple years, the Lyman Eagles have experienced some struggles on the offensive line.

As freshmen and sophomores, the Eagle linemen learned under varsity pressure.

Now, those players are juniors and seniors, and coach Dale Anderson said he hopes the moxie his players gained from playing key varsity roles early will lead to success.

"We're hoping that materializes into a strength for us this year," Anderson said.

Two of Lyman's three returning all-conference selections, senior Dryden Menck and junior Wesley Eyre, are key pieces to the Eagles' offensive line. The Eagles also return senior Cayden Giles to help balance an offensive attack that will rely on experienced linemen to give time and space to an inexperienced set of backs and receivers. The Eagles lost two of their top three rushers, their quarterback and their top two receivers.

"That's the key (on offense), we lose a lot of our offensive firepower from last year," Anderson said.

Senior Beadee Bluemel is the Eagles' leading returner in rushing yards (309 on 60 carries) and receiving yards (153 on 26 catches). A handful of other players, including senior running back Colton Vangieson, senior tight end Ben Niederer and sophomore running back Brendan Martin, could also end up with key roles in the Eagles' offensive

"We'll adjust our offensive philosophy a little bit to play to the strengths of these other kids."

~ Coach Dale Anderson

game plan.

What that game plan will be is still being determined, but Anderson said he was intrigued by what he saw in the offseason.

"We'll adjust our offensive philosophy a little bit to play to the strengths of these other kids," Anderson said. "... We're hoping to find something that works for these kids. That sometimes takes a week or two into the season."

The Eagles have fewer questions on defense, as they return four of their top six tacklers.

Bluemel was second for the Eagles in defensive points and had team highs in tackles for loss (10), sacks (4) and fumble recoveries (4).

Martin was fourth for Lyman in defensive points, while Menck was fifth and Vangieson was sixth. Eyre, Neiderer, junior Gus Bluemel and sophomore Hagen Lamoreaux were also among Lyman's top 11 tacklers last season.

Most of the strength rests with the line, though.

"We've got to be able to find some ways to slow down some passing games," Anderson said. "There will be some growing pains there. We've got some



Key Players

RB/DB: Beadee Bluemel, Sr.

TE/LB: Ben Niederer, Sr.

OL/LB: Cayden Giles, Sr.

OL/DL: Dryden Menck, Sr.

kids that are capable, but they're just really inexperienced."

Lyman enters the year on an unprecedented run of success.

The Eagles made the playoffs seventh consecutive year – the longest such streak in program history – before Glenrock rudely bounced them from the playoffs, 50-0, in the first round.

To keep it going this year, the Eagles will need leadership from the guys in the trenches.

Buffalos need youngsters to shine

Mountain View's tentative roster has 49 players.

Of those, 43 went to the team's summer camp in Spearfish, South Dakota.

That kind of commitment has coach Brent Walk excited – especially for a team that's going to rely a lot on younger players.

"This year so far our offseason has been better than it's ever been," he said.

It needs to be. Mountain View's senior class is talented but small, leaving juniors and sophomores to fill critical roles on both offense and defense for the Buffalos.

"The big question mark is if the younger guys can step up into key roles and compete at the varsity level," Walk said.

Of the nine all-conference selections the Buffalos had, only two return: senior Jason Stoddard and junior Colby Rees.

Stoddard, a wide receiver and safety, is Mountain View's

"The big question mark is if the younger guys can step up into key roles and compete at the varsity level."

~ Coach Brent Walk

lone returning all-state player; he was also an all-state choice as a sophomore.

Stoddard, who was second for the Buffalos in both receptions (28) and receiving yards (449), will be a key piece of the offense this season both running and receiving.

Defensively, Rees and Stoddard return as the centerpieces. They finished 1-2, respectively, in defensive points last season for the Buffalos, with Stoddard leading the team in solo tackles

with 46 and Rees right behind with 45.

However, they are the only two of Mountain View's top eight tacklers to come back this season. Their return is "absolutely huge" for the defense, Walk said.

On offense, the Buffalos lost their quarterback, their top four rushers and four of their top five receivers from last season's attack.

Continued on next page



Mascot: Buffalos

Division: 2A

Conference: West

Colors: Purple and white

Coach: Brent Walk, 6th year

2016 Record: 7-3, lost to Newcastle in state quarterfinales

2017 Schedule

8-25: at Green River, 7 p.m. (Zero Week)

9-1: vs. Cokeville, 4 p.m.

*9-8: at Big Piney, 4 p.m.

*9-15: vs. Lovell, 4 p.m.

9-22: at Jackson, 6 p.m.

*9-29: at Pinedale, 7 p.m.

*10-6: vs. Lyman, 3 p.m.

*10-13: vs. Kemmerer, 3 p.m.

*10-20: at Greybull, 7 p.m.

* Conference game

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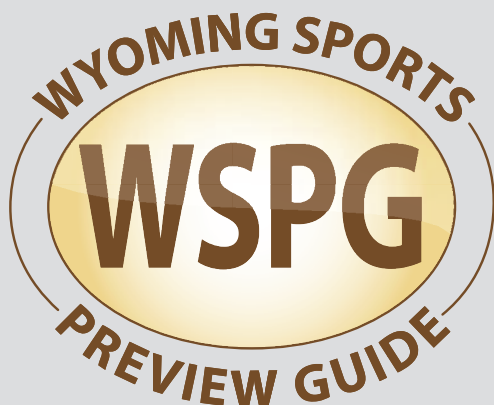
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**Key Players****WR/FS:** Jason Stoddard, Sr.**OL/LB:** Colby Rees, Jr.**OL/DL:** J.D. Andersen, Jr.**RB/S:** Briggin Bluemel, Soph.**MOUNTAIN VIEW, Cont.**

Sophomore Kimball Madsen, who ran for 70 yards last season, is Mountain View's leading returning rusher; he had more than twice as many yards as any other returning rusher for Mountain View.

Walk said Madsen will most likely step in at quarterback this season.

A host of young players – including junior linemen J.D. Andersen and Trevon Peterson,

sophomore running back Briggin Bluemel and sophomore wideout Braeden Walk – will add depth to the offense for the Buffalos.

Coach Walk said the younger players should integrate quickly into the offensive scheme.

"I don't see it as a problem," he said. "We run the same systems as far as terminology... it goes all the way down to our little league coaches."

Meanwhile, Walk said senior lineman Braxton Hysell and senior wide receiver Harland Benedict will add experience to the offense.

Walk said the team carries over no frustration from last year's finish. The Buffalos, the top seed from the West Conference, lost in double overtime to East No. 4 seed Newcastle in the first round of the 2A state playoffs.

Walk said he addressed the loss briefly in the offseason, but collectively, the Buffalos have moved on.

"This is a 2017 football team," Walk said. "They've got their own identity already."

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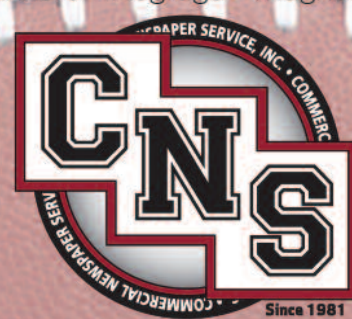
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Wranglers rely on youth movement

The only similarity between last year's Pinedale team and this year's Pinedale team will be the uniforms.

The Wranglers lost every offensive starter and all but three defensive starters to graduation. What remains is a crew of untested players who will need to adapt to varsity play quickly.

The only one of Pinedale's seven all-conference selections to return is junior Tyler Van Etten, who led the Wranglers in defensive points and had team highs in solo (28) and assisted (71) tackles and tackles for loss (4).

Van Etten is also Pinedale's leading returning rusher. After losing three seniors that combined for 1,572 rushing yards, Van Etten – who had 63 rushing yards last year – is ready to fill that void.

"Tyler is a leader on our team both on and off the field," second-year coach Mitch Espeland said. "He will anchor our offense and defense and his experience will be vital for all our players."

That's especially true on a team that lost so much and returns little senior experience – only

Key Players**RB/LB:** Tyler Van Etten, Jr.**QB/DB:** Wyatt Phelps, Jr.**OG/DL:** Ethan Carson, Jr.**OG/DL:** Kolby Carson, Jr.

about five of Pinedale's expected 45 players will be seniors.

On offense, the Wranglers lost their top three rushers, their top six receivers and their quarterback, and on defense, Van Etten is the only one of Pinedale's top six tacklers to return this fall.

Even so, Espeland said he is optimistic the youngsters can step up quickly enough.

"We have all new players on offense this year, but our run game can be just as strong as last year and our pass game will be dynamic as well," he said. "Our defense will be good as well with a lot of experience returning from last year."

On offense, the rebuilding begins around Van Etten and senior

Colton Taylor, who had one catch for 20 yards last season and is the only player on the Pinedale roster who caught a pass at the varsity level last season.

Junior Wyatt Phelps will likely step in at quarterback, with juniors (and twins) Ethan Carson and Kolby Carson leading the line play. Junior Porter Potts will step in at wideout, while junior Joey McCulloch will join Van Etten in the backfield.

On defense, Phelps was seventh in defensive points and led Pinedale with five pass break-ups and will lead the defensive backs.

McCulloch was eighth for the Wranglers in defensive points last year and junior lineman Kadar Criddle was 12th.

Even though this year's team will have a different look than last year, the 2016 team – which lost to eventual 2A champion Big Horn 20-14 in overtime in the quarterfinals – will have an influence on Pinedale teams to come.

"They helped us learn about winning and hopefully set a tone of how that feels," Espeland said.

Mascot: Wranglers**Division:** 2A**Conference:** West**Colors:** Green and white**Coach:** Mitch Espeland, 2nd year at Pinedale**2016 Record:** 5-4, lot to big Horn in state quarterfinals**2017 Schedule**

8-26: at Lander jamboree, 3 p.m. (Zero Week)

*9-1: vs. Lyman, 7 p.m.

9-8: at Cokeville, 1 p.m.

*9-15: at Kemmerer, 7 p.m.

*9-22: vs. Greybull, 7 p.m.

*9-29: vs. Mountain View, 7 p.m.

*10-6: at Big Piney, 3:30 p.m.

*10-13: at Lovell, 7 p.m.

10-20: vs. Worland, 6 p.m.

* Conference game

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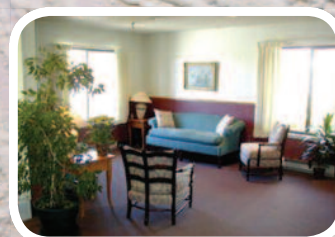
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Tongue River 37, Shoshoni 6

State Quarterfinals

Upton-Sundance 62, Saratoga 0
Shoshoni 29, Southeast 18
Pine Bluffs 23, Rocky Mountain 14
Tongue River 27, Cokeville 12

Four players to watch

Haize Fornstrom, Pine Bluffs

A two-time all-state selection at quarterback, Fornstrom helped lead Pine Bluffs to the 1A 11-man title last year by throwing for 1,050 yards and running for 231 more.

A four-year starter, the Hornets' repeat efforts will fall in large part on his shoulders.

Dawson Butts, Upton-Sundance

Another two-time all-state selection, Butts ran for 1,048 yards last year – a total that was actually down from the 1,202 rushing yards he compiled as a sophomore.

Now a senior, Butts could terrorize 1A 11-man defenses.

Rick Nate, Cokeville

On a team that has tremendous diversity in talent, Nate is hard to overlook. He led the Panthers with 871 rushing yards last year and was also the Panthers' No. 2 tackler.

Seth Mullinax, Big Horn

One of three sophomore all-state selections for the Rams last year, Mullinax stands out for his work on defense. He's the Rams' leading returning tackler after finishing third on the team last year in defensive points.



Big Horn invades 1A ranks

By Patrick Schmiedt

Four questions to answer

How will Big Horn's entry into 1A 11-man change the classification? Immensely. The biggest storyline in 1A 11-man football in 2017 is Big Horn. The defending Class 2A champs got bumped down to Class 1A 11-man thanks to Thunder Basin opening in Gillette. That move shakes up 1A's entire hierarchy in the process.

Who's Big Horn's biggest challenger? Cokeville. The Panthers return four all-state choices, more than any other program in 1A 11-man. Moreover, the Panthers haven't won a playoff game in two seasons and are motivated to return to their spot atop 1A 11-man.

Anyone else out there who could be a challenger? Pine Bluffs and Upton-Sundance. The Hornets are the defending state champions and return three all-state choices, so they have to be one of 1A 11-man favorites. And it's easy to forget about Upton-Sundance, but the Patriots were East Conference champs last year.

Is anyone else in the discussion for a state title? Short answer, no. Combined, Big Horn, Cokeville and Pine Bluffs have 10 returning all-state players; the other 10 programs have a combined five.

Four key games

Pine Bluffs at Big Horn, Sept. 15. It's not often that we get to see two defending state champions play each other during the regular season. However, that's what we'll get in Week

3 when last year's 1A 11-man champs go north to play last year's 2A champs in what is now a budding East Conference rivalry.

Cokeville at Rocky Mountain, Sept. 22. Rocky beat Cokeville for the first time in school history last year, and if the Panthers want to regain their traditional stranglehold on the West, they'll have to do so in Cowley in the first league game of the year.

Tongue River at Big Horn, Oct. 20. The Thunder Bowl is back after a three-year absence. The rivalry's revival is welcome, especially given both programs' recent success.

Upton-Sundance at Pine Bluffs, Oct. 20. Revenge? By the time this game rolls around, 2016 will be a faded memory, but you can bet right now that the Patriots have this one highlighted on their schedules.

Predicted order of finish

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

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

Way-too-early title game score prediction

Cokeville 22, Big Horn 14
Rocky beat Cokeville for the first time in school history last year, and if the Panthers want to regain their traditional stranglehold on the West, they'll have to do so in Cowley in the first league game of the year.

1A/11-MAN EAST

BIG HORN RAMS

PAGE 35

Young Rams don't lack talent

This year's Big Horn Rams are ready for their opportunity. And most of them will have at least two years to seize it.

With a roster that is thin on senior leaders, the Rams will need to rely on a lot of underclassmen to continue the Big Horn tradition.

Last year's Class 2A champions, who moved to Class 1A 11-man for 2017, lost seven starters on offense and six on defense and will only have two healthy seniors ready for this season.

"We're going to be mostly sophomores and juniors, maybe a couple freshmen in there," coach Michael McGuire said. "They're talented kids, just inexperienced."

The Rams return three all-state selections, and they're all juniors – Kade Eisele, Seth Mullinax and Kade VanDyken.

Eisele, with 234 rushing yards, is Big Horn's leading returning rusher, and VanDyken, with 234 receiving yards on 20 catches, is the Rams' leading returning receiver.

Mullinax, meanwhile, is an anchor on the offensive and defensive lines. That area should be a

Key Players

OL/DL: Aidan McCurry, Sr.

OL/DL: Seth Mullinax, Jr.

RB/LB: Kade Eisele, Jr.

WR/DB: Kade VanDyken, Jr.

strength for the Rams this fall – three of Big Horn's four returning starters on offense are linemen.

"On the offensive line, we have four kids who have started 10-plus games for us and a couple that have started 20 games... and there's only one senior in that group," McGuire said.

However, the Rams do lose their quarterback, their top two rushers and top two receivers to graduation.

On defense, the three returning all-staters will be cornerstones to the Rams' approach.

Mullinax is Big Horn's leading returning tackler; he was third on the team a year ago with 12.6 defensive points per game. Eisele was fifth and had six tackles for loss, while VanDyken was sixth

and notched five interceptions and two blocked kicks.

Senior lineman Aidan McCurry and sophomore Cutler Bradshaw will also be important for the Rams' success on both sides of the ball.

McGuire said the players returning this year had been stuck behind a talented group of seniors. Now, players sense the chance to see the field.

"I think they're all excited for their chance," McGuire said. "Their time has finally come."

"There's just an excitement in our program. A lot of guys who have been waiting the last couple years are going to get their opportunity. ... I'm really excited to see where this group can go."

Meanwhile, moving from 2A to 1A even after winning last year's 2A title isn't playing into the Rams' minds too much.

"I don't think it changes our motivation at all," McGuire said. "We really enjoyed playing 2A and I don't know that being the small guy was ever one of our motivations. We just wanted to be the best we could be."

1A/11-MAN EAST

NIORARA COUNTY (LUSK) TIGERS

Tigers ready to regain glory

Lusk's football tradition underscores just how anomalous the last two seasons have been.

From 3-4 in 2015 to 1-7 in 2016, the Tigers combined for the fewest number of victories in back-to-back seasons since 1989-90. Last year, the Tigers' lone victory came in a 58-12 blowout against Saratoga. In its seven losses, Lusk scored a combined 46 points.

The struggles were in part the result of playing a group of young players who had to learn quickly. Now, their experience may help Lusk break through.

"Six of my seniors this season have been starters since they were sophomores," coach Ryan Nelson said. "They were thrown into the fire when they were young and now they come into their senior years with as much varsity experience as anyone around."

Cole Mellot, the Tigers' lone all-state selection last year, finished sixth in Class 1A 11-man in defensive points. He led Lusk with 18 solo tackles and also had 89 assisted tackles.

"He was our top defensive player so he should really stabilize our d-line," Nelson said. "He makes plays all over the field even though he plays defensive end."

Mellot is one of eight starters to return on a defense that returns three of its top four tacklers.

After Mellot, sophomore Damien Molzahn was third in defensive points, while junior Andrew Brummond was fourth. Molzahn led Lusk with five tackles for loss and two sacks a year ago. Also, senior Ryan Gilkey broke up three passes last year and had two interceptions, team-highs in both categories.

On offense, Lusk lost its top two rushers to gradua-

tion, and Molzahn – who ran for 123 yards a year ago – is the Tigers' leading returning rusher. Sophomore James Stone (29 carries, 104 yards) and Gilkey (35 carries, 102 yards) put up similar numbers a year ago. They'll try to replace the efforts of graduated seniors Riley Ross and Tim Ross, who combined for 255 carries; the remainder of the team had 141.

However, they'll be running behind one of the most experienced lines in 1A 11-man, with three seniors – Mellot, Garrett Wurdeman and Jake Heil – who will be three-year starters.

Senior Kyle Anderson returns under center; however, the Tigers threw for only 154 yards last season. Gilkey, who had four catches for 64 yards, is Lusk's leading returning receiver.

Nelson said he's optimistic for this year, not only based on what he anticipates happening this year but on what he saw last year despite finishing 1-7.

"Even though our record wasn't very good last season, we almost never had a bad practice," Nelson said.

Mascot: Rams

Division: 2A

Conference: East

Colors: Maroon and yellow

Coach: Michael McGuire, 6th year

2016 Record: : 10-1, beat Greybull in 2A state championship

2017 Schedule

8-26: Wright jamboree, 10:30 a.m. (Zero Week)

9-1: vs. Rocky Mountain, 7 p.m.

*9-8: at Southeast, 6 p.m.

*9-15: vs. Pine Bluffs, 7 p.m.

*9-22: at Lusk, 6 p.m.

*9-29: vs. Wright, 7 p.m.

*10-6: at Upton-Sundance, 6 p.m. (at Sundance)

10-13: vs. Big Piney, noon (at Riverton)

*10-20: vs. Tongue River, 6 p.m.

* Conference game

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Mascot: Hornets
Division: 1A/11-man
Conference: East
Colors: Purple and yellow
Coach: Will Gray, 7th year
2016 Record: 9-2, beat Tongue River in championship
2017 Schedule

8-25: vs. Glenrock, 4 p.m.
9-1: at Mitchell, Neb., 7 p.m.
9-8: vs. Burns, 7 p.m.
*9-15: at Big Horn, 7 p.m.
*9-22: vs. Tongue River, 6 p.m.
*9-29: at Lusk, 7 p.m.
*10-6: at Wright, 6 p.m.
*10-13: vs. Southeast, 7 p.m.
*10-20: vs. Upton-Sundance, 5:30 p.m.
* Conference game

Hornets want to build on title

This year will be like no other in the history of Pine Bluffs football. This year, the Hornets enter the season as defending state champions.

While last year presented challenges – and rewards – that were unprecedented as the program won its first state crown, this year’s challenges are equally new. “They don’t want to be one-hit wonders,” coach Will Gray said, “and neither does our community.”

Therein lies the challenge for Pine Bluffs: Do something it’s never done before. Again.

Fortunately for Hornets fans, the team shapes up to be another Class 1A 11-man title contender.

The Hornets return three all-state selections with seniors Haize Fornstrom and Wyatt Fornstrom and junior Hunter Jeffres returning to anchor the repeat run.

The Hornets’ biggest hole is at running back, where they’ll have to replace Ruger Lewis, who led the classification with 1,764 rushing yards.

“Each year we look at our kids and try to do what fits them the

Key Players

QB/DB: Haize Fornstrom, Sr.
OL/DL: Wyatt Fornstrom, Sr.
OL/LB: Hunter Jeffres, Jr.
WR/DB: Ishmael DePaulitte, Sr.

best,” Gray said. “This year we won’t have a bell cow in the backfield, but we have plenty of talented kids who have their own strengths. ... We know we have to tweak some things to fit the kids, but I feel good about who we have on our roster.”

Haize Fornstrom, a two-time all-state pick who threw for 1,050 yards and 17 touchdowns last year, returns at quarterback. He’s also Pine Bluffs’ leading returning rusher with 231 yards a year ago; the Hornets lost their top two rushers to graduation.

Senior Ishmael Depaulitte, who led the Hornets in catches (26) and receiving yards (343), returns, as well.

Junior Andrew Fornstrom added 151 receiving yards, but the Hornets lose three of their top five

receivers – all of whom had at least 100 yards last year.

However, the line will have experience, with Wyatt Fornstrom, Jeffries, senior John Merryfield and juniors Josh Herman and Brad Shmidl bringing back good experience.

“We’ve got some skill kids to replace, but there is talent on our roster,” Gray said. “We just have to put the puzzle pieces together.”

On defense, Wyatt Fornstrom is Pine Bluffs’ leading returning tackler. He was third on the team in defensive points a year ago and finished with 37 solo tackles and nine tackles for loss.

Jeffres was fourth and had 29 solo tackles, while Haize Fornstrom was sixth and had a team-high seven interceptions.

Gray said the Hornets will be forced to rely on underclassmen to fill some key spots.

“We will have a smaller senior class, so some younger kids will have to step into leadership roles,” he said. “During the school year we’ve some growth in maturity from our younger kids, but more is needed to make a run.”



Mascot: Cyclones
Division: 1A/11-man/East
Colors: Blue and silver
Coach: Mark Bullington, 19th year
2016 Record: 5-4, lost to Shoshoni in quarterfinals

2017 Schedule

8-26: Southeast jamboree, 10 a.m.
9-1: vs. Bayard, Neb., 7 p.m.
*9-8: vs. Big Horn, 6 p.m.
*9-15: at Wright, 7 p.m.
9-21: vs. Cheyenne Central JV, 7 p.m.
*9-29: vs. Upton-Sundance, 6 p.m.
*10-6: at Tongue River, 6 p.m.
*10-13: at Pine Bluffs, 7 p.m.
*10-20: vs. Lusk, 7 p.m.
* Conference game

Hanson steps up to lead role

Now is the time for change at Tongue River.

New head coach Steve Hanson is taking advantage of that.

After back-to-back runner-up finishes in Class 1A 11-man, the Eagles lost their head coach and a huge crew of seniors.

Hanson, an assistant coach at Tongue River the past four years, inherits a team that lost six of seven all-conference selections.

Regardless of any coaching change, the Eagles were going to look different because of the player change. Even so, Hanson said the Eagles will reset their offense to better use the talent they have.

Some things, though, are staying.

“When I came on board with coach (John) Scott, it was more about teaching and establishing a culture,” Hanson said. “Four years ago, our seniors had no idea what commitment looked like. We had no weight room attendance. Now it’s about continuing a tradition, not changing it.”

Shortly after the Eagles’ 10-7 loss to Pine Bluffs in the 1A 11-man title game, Scott, who had been with the Eagles for five years, announced his resignation. Hanson was hired shortly thereafter.

“Much of what he did is established and alive,” Hanson said. “I have a great opportunity

“Now it’s about continuing a tradition, not changing it.”

~ Coach Steve Hanson

Key Players

FB/DE: Kyler Heiling, Sr.
WR/DB: Jay Keo, Sr.
OL/DL: A.J. Lytton, Jr.
QB/LB: Luke Stutzman, Jr.

to follow in the footsteps of my mentor and see where it goes.”

Hanson’s challenge is to keep the Eagles competitive despite returning just three starters on offense and only two on defense. The Eagles graduated their top two rushers, top two receivers and top three tacklers.

“Obviously our biggest weakness is inexperience, but that could work to our favor as many of these young guys are hungry to play and see the field,” Hanson said.

Senior fullback/linebacker Kyler Heiling, an all-state selection a year ago, is Tongue River’s most experienced returner.

Junior Elias Dillon-Bennett, who ran for 155 yards on 37 car-

ries, is Tongue River’s leading returning rusher; senior Jay Keo, who had nine catches for 115 yards, is the Eagles’ leading returning receiver.

Their talents will be used in a new offensive look that will emphasize the power option, which Hanson installed previously at Pagosa Springs, Colorado, while head coach there.

Defensively, the Eagles lost seven of their top nine tacklers to graduation. Heiling and junior Zack Schankey are the Eagles’ top defensive returners.

Hanson said the defensive schemes won’t change. The Eagles led the state regardless of classification by giving up only 10 points per game in 2016.

Meanwhile, Hanson, said his players’ best attribute is their buy-in to the program.

“Our guys know what it means to be part of Eagle football,” he said. “... I don’t care if it’s a senior or a freshman on the field, we expect to compete in every opportunity.”

And that’s nothing new.



Mascot: Eagles
Division: 1A/11-Man
Conference: East
Colors: Green and white
Coach: Steve Hanson, 1st year at Tongue River
2016 Record: 8-3, lost to Pine Bluffs in state championship

2017 Schedule

8-25: at Buffalo JV, time TBD
*9-1: vs. Wright, 6 p.m.
*9-8: at Lusk, 6 p.m.
9-15: vs. Shoshoni, 6 p.m.
*9-22: at Pine Bluffs, 6 p.m.
9-29: Open date
*10-6: vs. Southeast, 6 p.m.
*10-13: vs. Upton-Sundance, 6 p.m.
*10-20: at Big Horn, 6 p.m.
* Conference game

Cyclones work on turnover woes

Southeast’s approach to its off-season was as necessary as it was simple: get stronger.

The Cyclones’ shortcomings last season were defined by their inability to stand toe-to-toe with stronger teams.

That came out most clearly in Southeast’s loss to Shoshoni – a team they had beaten during the regular season – in the first round of the playoffs.

“We kind of got shoved around in the second half of that game and that’s kind of our fault,” coach Mark Bullington said.

Also, the Cyclones finished the season with 27 turnovers, the most in 1A 11-man, a total that included 18 lost fumbles and nine interceptions. The defense couldn’t keep up that pace, and Southeast finished the season minus-11 in turnover ratio, one of the worst totals in the classification.

In the loss to Shoshoni, Southeast lost five fumbles and threw two interceptions. Bullington said the Cyclones’ turnover troubles had the same root – not enough strength to secure the ball. The players listened – and worked.

“I think our kids are a lot

Key Players

QB: Brady Fullmer, Sr.
OL/MLB: Tanner Hort, Sr.
OT/DT: Hunter Woodruff, Sr.
TB/DB: Chase Lovercheck, Sr.

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stronger and faster than they were last year,” Bullington said. “We’ve had between 20 and 25 kids in the weight room all summer.

“I think with us being stronger this year, that’s going to help out. We can’t turn the ball over like we did last year.”

The Cyclones lost all five of their all-state selections to graduation but do return six starters on both offense and defense.

Senior quarterback Brady Fullmer passed for 484 yards and rushed for 363 yards a year ago. He’s Southeast’s leading returning rusher; however, through injury or graduation, the Cyclones lose their top five receivers.

Junior fullback Mick Steinhäusen added 206 rushing yards, while seniors Tanner Hort, Hunter Woodruff, Conner Smith and Bryan Baker will anchor the line.

On defense, Hort was second on the team in defensive points a year ago and led the Cyclones with 37 assisted tackles a year ago. But he’s the only one of Southeast’s top nine tacklers to come back.

Also, senior Chase Lovercheck and juniors Sterling Warner and Tim Becker will also be called on for increased responsibilities on both offense and defense.

Despite the losses, Bullington remains optimistic because of the work he’s seen his players put in during the offseason. He said assistant coach Jeff Fullmer has helped lead the charge in the weight room this summer.

“He’s kind of challenged the kids and made them accountable. I think really it’s going to pay off.”

Southeast’s players also understand tradition runs deep; the program has won nine state titles and eight in the past 18 years.

“They’ve seen the trophy cases and understand what our football program’s about,” Bullington said.



Mascot: Patriots
Division: 1A/11-man
Conference: East
Colors: Blue and red
Coach: Andy Garland, 15th year
2016 Record: 10-1, lost to Pine Bluffs in state semifinals

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Patriots moving past playoff loss

Upton-Sundance had every reason to be confident.

Entering the Class 1A 11-man semifinals last year against Pine Bluffs, the Patriots had won 16 games in a row. They were the defending state champs. And they beat Pine Bluffs 39-0 a month and a half prior.

But Pine Bluffs hung a 19-13 loss on Upton-Sundance to end the winning streak, the repeat title bids and everything else the Patriots were trying to accomplish.

Pine Bluffs went to Laramie and won the championship.

Upton-Sundance went to the film.

“We had some key moments in that semifinal game where we just didn’t make plays,” U-S coach Andy Garland said. “It’s hard to put a finger on it. I’ve watched that film over and over.

“Once you get to the playoffs, the regular season doesn’t matter a whole lot. It’s all 0-0 and

you’ve got to come to play.”

Getting back to the title game will be challenging for a team that lost all but one of its six all-conference selections, but U-S has enough talent to again be one of 1A 11-man’s top teams.

Their hopes start with senior Dawson Butts, a two-time all-state selection and the cornerstone to

Continued on next page

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2017 Schedule

8-24: at Deadwood, S.D., 6 p.m.
 8-31: at Moorcroft, 7 p.m.
 9-8: vs. Newcastle, 7 p.m. (at Upton)
 *9-15: vs. Lusk, 7 p.m. (at Sundance)
 *9-22: vs. Wright, 7 p.m. (at Upton)
 *9-29: at Southeast, 6 p.m.
 *10-6: vs. Big Horn, 6 p.m. (at Sundance)
 *10-13: at Tongue River, 6 p.m.
 *10-20: at Pine Bluffs, 5:30 p.m.
 * Conference game

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UPTON-SUNDANCE, Cont.

Upton-Sundance's offense. Butts ran for 1,048 yards on 163 attempts last season; he's also Upton-Sundance's leading returning receiver with nine catches for 148 yards.

"He's one of the best running backs in the state," Garland said. "... No matter what we do, and even though we've got to fit some linemen guys into some spots where some seniors left, it gives you a good feeling to

know he's back there, because he can make some plays by himself."

Upton-Sundance also returns junior Clayton Louderback, who saw some limited time under center but will take full control this fall.

"He's as good a quarterback as I've had in my time in Upton as far as throwing the ball," Garland said.

Defensively, the Patriots lose their top three tacklers and five of their top seven.

Key Players

QB: Clayton Louderback, Jr.
RB/WR/DB: Dawson Butts, Sr.
FB/LB: Tanner Hofland, Jr.
WR/DB: Dillon Barritt, Jr.

Junior Tanner Hofland is the Patriots' leading returning tackler; he had 30 solo tackles and 36 assisted tackles a year ago. Senior Payton Watt was sixth and had a team-high two interceptions. Louderback was eighth, Butts was ninth and junior Jerrett Schloredt was 10th.

The program also gets to christen a new football facility in Sundance, where the Patriots will host a pair of games this fall. All U-S home games have been in Upton the past two seasons.

"We tallied it up and last year they (the Sundance players) drove something like 3,500 miles for practice and games," Garland said. "... They've put in a hell of a sacrifice.

"It's a big deal for those guys and the community."



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PREVIEW GUIDE

Panthers have experienced core



Wright knows change. It also knows consistency. Moving from Class 2A to Class 1A 11-man last year boosted Wright's competitiveness, but the result was still the same — the Panthers missed the playoffs for the seventh consecutive season.

Coach Larry Yeradi said the shift is nothing new.

"In the brief history of our school we have been all over the board, from 3A to 1A," he said. "Our kids, our staff, just take the mindset that we will compete against whomever is on our schedule. There are terrific teams and terrific competition in every classification, and if you're not prepared to compete, it will show in the box score."

Wright's challenge now is to break the string of consistently missing the playoffs, although last year's 3-5 finish gave the Panthers reason for optimism. To break into the postseason, the Panthers will need to rely on an experienced squad with more depth than previous seasons, including nine players with starting experience on both sides of the ball.

"We return a great deal of experience, which should allow us to get up to speed quicker in fall camp," Yeradi said. "Our biggest question marks will be at quarterback and in special teams."

The question mark at quarterback is a bit unexpected, as Shayne Belt — who was expected to be Wright's only returning all-conference player — moved away.

Wright lost its top two rushers to graduation, while Belt was third. That leaves senior Tavin Salas, who had 153 rushing yards and 97 receiving yards, as is Wright's leading returning rusher and receiver and the only player back who had more than 40 receiving yards a year ago.

Senior Damion Goff should also see time at running back.

Yeradi said finding someone to

fill the spot under center will be a priority.

"This will be an area of extreme importance to us and our overall success in the season," he said.

However, the line is mostly set, as four offensive linemen return who had started at some point last season.

Defensively, the Panthers lost their top three tacklers; after that, though, Wright returns significant depth, with its seven of its next eight tacklers from last year all returning.

Senior lineman Cole Thomas is Wright's leading returning tackler. The defense also returns depth with Salas, senior Steven Monson, juniors Ian Knudsen and Austin Seeley and sophomores Dax Yeradi and Phoenix Buske.

That returning experience should give Wright some ability to mix up its defensive sets and do more to be unpredictable.

"This is an area that we should be able to install a bit more, because of the depth and experience, and possibly cause more confusion to the offenses we will see," coach Yeradi said.

Mascot: Panthers
Division: 1A/11-man
Conference: East
Colors: Black and gold
Coach: Larry Yeradi, 23rd year
2016 Record: 3-5, did not qualify for playoffs

Key Players

OL/DL: Steven Monson, Sr.
OL/LB: Cole Thomas, Sr.
RB/LB: Damion Goff, Sr.
RB/DB: Tavin Salas, Sr.

2017 Schedule

8-26: Wright jamboree, 10:30 a.m. (Zero Week)
 *9-1: at Tongue River, 6 p.m.
 9-8: at Saratoga, 5 p.m.
 *9-15: vs. Southeast, 7 p.m.
 *9-22: at Upton-Sundance, 7 p.m. (at Upton)
 *9-29: at Big Horn, 7 p.m.
 *10-6: vs. Pine Bluffs, 6 p.m.
 *10-13: vs. Lusk, 7 p.m.
 10-20: Open week
 * Conference game

Cokeville is loaded with talent

Few teams are set up for success like Cokeville is this fall.

The Panthers return six all-conference selections, double the number of any other team in Class 1A 11-man.

And they return 10 starters on offense and nine on defense from a 6-3 team. And they lose just three seniors to graduation.

And they may have as many as 13 seniors on the roster this fall.

And... and... and...

Cokeville's inexperience has shown the past couple years; for the first time since 1981-82, the Panthers finished two consecutive seasons without a playoff victory.

This year, though, the Panthers have depth at basically every position on the field.

"The last two years, we've been able to play with everybody, we haven't just quite got over the hump," Cokeville coach Todd Dayton said. "Hopefully this year with that experience, we'll be able to finish games off."

Cokeville finished tied for first place in the West Conference last year but lost to Tongue River in the first round of the playoffs.

Key Players

RB/LB: Antheny Petersen, Sr.
RB/LB: Rick Nate, Sr.
OL/DL: Cordell Viehweig, Sr.
OL/DL: Hunter Cheney, Sr.

The Panthers return four players who were all-state selections last year, more than any other team in Class 1A 11-man, in seniors Hunter Cheney, Rick Nate, Antheny Petersen and Cordell Viehweig. Sterling Murdock and Wyatt Awtrey, both seniors, were all-conference choices last year.

Nate led the Panthers with 135 carries for 871 yards and 14 touchdowns last year; Petersen added 458 yards on the ground.

Junior quarterback Bentley Johnson, who ran for 296 yards and threw for 189 in the Panthers' run-focused offense, returns, as does Jake Harmon, whose six catches and 107 receiving yards led the team.

On defense, the Panthers return their top three tacklers and 11 of their top 12. Petersen, Nate and

Johnson were the top three a year ago.

Teams can't key on any one player: Nate and Awtrey shared the team lead in solo tackles with 18. Petersen had a team-high 72 assisted tackles, Cheney led the Panthers with eight tackles for loss, Murdock had a team-high with five sacks and Johnson had the team high with three interceptions.

Senior Michael Moyes and juniors Ammon Teichert and Devan Moody will add depth.

Defensively, the Panthers were the only 1A 11-man team to give up more passing yards per game (125.7) than rushing yards per game (85.6). They led the classification in rush defense last year and were last in the classification in pass defense.

Dayton said Cokeville's approach will remain the same, but the mistakes the players have made the past couple years should be behind them.

"We're a pretty simple football team," Dayton said. "We don't do a lot of stuff, but we can do a lot of things better this year."



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Mascot: Grizzlies
Division: 1A/11-man
Conference: West
Colors: Brown and yellow
Coach: Richard Despain, 2nd year at Rocky Mountain
2016 Record: 6-3, lost to Pine Bluffs in quarterfinals

2017 Schedule
 8-26: at Powell, 11 a.m. (Zero Week)
 9-1: at Big Horn, 7 p.m.
 9-8: Open week
 9-16: vs. Gillette JV, 2 p.m.
 *9-22: vs. Cokeville, 6 p.m.
 *9-29: at Wind River, 6 p.m.
 *10-6: vs. Shoshoni, 7 p.m.
 *10-13: at Saratoga, 5 p.m.
 *10-20: vs. Wyoming Indian, 6 p.m.
 * Conference game

Grizzlies learn from setbacks

If once is an accident, and twice is a coincidence, and three times is a pattern, what is five times?

In 2016, for the fifth consecutive year, Rocky Mountain lost a quarterfinal playoff game. For the third time in four years, that loss came at home.

To boot, the Grizzlies actually outgained playoff foe Pine Bluffs, 274-199. But four turnovers hampered the effort in a 23-14 loss.

Pine Bluffs later won the Class 1A 11-man title.

However, for second-year coach Richard Despain, coincidences or patterns – or whatever they are – aren't affecting the Grizzlies' approach heading into 2017.

"We are looking to learn from what we experienced last year, but we are not going into the season with thoughts of making up for anything, or with a general 'looking back' attitude," Despain said. "This year's team will have its own personality, and its own goals and ambitions."

Reaching those goals will depend on continuing to execute the things that worked well last year. Rocky Mountain was third in

Key Players

RB/LB: Treyson Frost, Sr.

FB/MLB: Wyatt Horrocks, Sr.

WR/S: Tristan Jewell, Sr.

WR: Ethan Price, Jr.

Class 1A 11-man with nearly 326 yards per game on offense and were by far the most efficient defense in the classification, giving up just 142.7 yards per game. Rocky Mountain held Lusk to 125 yards, Saratoga to 101, Cokeville to 92, Wind River to 86 and Wyoming Indian to 35.

Despain said the Grizzlies will have "some returning players that are high character, solid leaders. They saw important time in important games, and we will rely on that leadership and experience."

Senior Tristan Jewell, an all-state pick last year, is the only one of Rocky Mountain's seven all-conference choices to return.

The backfield will be basically all new, as the Grizzlies lost their quarterback and their top three

rushers to graduation. Senior Treyson Frost (37 carries, 144 yards) is Rocky's leading returning rusher.

However, Jewell – who led the Grizzlies with 26 catches, 471 receiving yards and five touchdowns – returns, as does junior Ethan Price, who was second in all those categories behind Jewell with 13 catches for 244 yards and four scores.

Senior center Colby Davison is the only returning starter on the offensive line.

Price, who finished third on the team with 105 defensive points, is Rocky's leading returning tackler. Jewell was fifth on the team in defensive points, leading the Grizzlies with three interceptions and five pass break-ups, and was second with 21 assisted tackles.

Senior Wyatt Horrocks was seventh, junior Kyle Hoyt was ninth and Frost 10th.

"The kids will have a good idea of the program expectations and we as coaches have a much better understanding of each other's strengths and talents," Despain said. "... That experience and time to grow together for a season is valuable."

Panthers building on success

Saratoga's biggest challenge last season came in the regular-season finale.

Facing Wind River, the challenge was simple – the winner was in the playoffs, the loser was out.

The Panthers responded, overwhelming Wind River 31-14 to earn the program's first playoff berth since 2011.

Even though Saratoga's season ended rudely the following week with a 62-0 quarterfinal loss to Upton-Sundance, second-year coach Kegan Willford said simply having the chance to participate in the postseason was an important step forward for his program.

"Getting a taste for the playoffs has made the team eager to return," Willford said. "Participating in the playoffs last year against Upton-Sundance showed our team what it takes to be one of the top teams in 1A-11 man and has given our team a goal (and) level to strive for in the future."

The Panthers return a pair of all-conference choices in senior Wyatt Cox and junior Sam Schneider.

Cox was an all-state choice last year. He led the Panthers with 20 catches for 371 yards and four scores and was also Saratoga's top tackler with 148.5 defensive points and 33 solo tackles.

Schneider, meanwhile, had 47 completions for 753 yards and 10 touchdowns last year.

Cox and Schneider combined to make a tight aerial pairing after Cox moved to tight end about halfway through last season.

"Getting a taste for the playoffs has made this team eager to return."

~ Coach Kegan Willford

However, Willford said other players will be relied upon to take the pressure off the quarterback and tight end to carry the offense.

"We should have some other skill position athletes who we can get the ball to this year on offense," Willford said. "Cox will be a key target for us, but we will also be relying on some of the other athletes to contribute so we hopefully won't be as one-dimensional."

On offense, the Panthers lose their top three rushers and three of their top five receivers. Junior Sean Stewart, who had 10 carries for 41 yards last year, is Saratoga's leading returning rusher.

On defense, the Panthers return just of their top six tacklers – Cox and junior Michael Waggy, who led Saratoga with 8.5 tackles for loss.

Senior Cameron Travis and junior Kyle Miller were among Saratoga's top 10 tacklers last year.

Willford said a strong core of junior players who got significant varsity playing time as sophomores will help round out the team.

"Tackling was a weakness of our defense last year and we hope with more experience we can become better tacklers," he said.

The steps the Panthers have taken so far indicate such growth will continue in Willford's second year.

"There seems to be a lot of excitement within the schools and communities about football," Willford said. "The athletes seem to have gained more confidence as well."



Mascot: Panthers
Division: Class 1A/11-man
Conference: West
Colors: Purple and yellow
Coach: Kegan Willford, 2nd year at Saratoga
2016 Record: 2-7, lost to Upton-Sundance in state quarterfinals

Key Players

TE/LB: Wyatt Cox, Sr.

OL/LB: Cameron Travis, Sr.

QB/DB: Sam Schneider, Jr.

OL/DL: Tristan Gray, Jr.

2017 Schedule

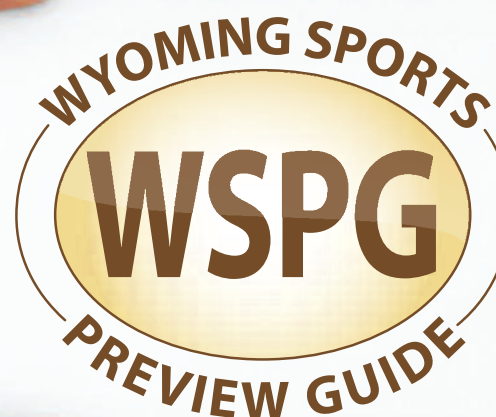
8-26: at Laramie JV, 11 a.m. (Zero Week)
 9-1: at Kemmerer, 5 p.m.
 9-8: vs. Wright, 5 p.m.
 9-15: at Burns, 7 p.m.
 *9-22: vs. Wyoming Indian, 6 p.m.
 *9-29: at Shoshoni, 3 p.m.
 *10-6: vs. Cokeville, 5 p.m.
 *10-13: vs. Rocky Mountain, 5 p.m.
 *10-20: at Wind River, 6 p.m.
 * Conference game

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WSPG
PREVIEW GUIDE**

Coach: Tony Truempler, 5th year
2016 Record: 6-4, lost to Tongue River in semifinals
Key Players
OL/LB: Mason Lucas, Sr.
RB/LB: Wyatt Ramsey, Sr.
RB/DE: Andrew Jennings, Sr.
C/LB: Tristen Boysen, Sr.

Mascot: Wranglers
Division: 1A/11-man
Conference: West
Colors: Blue and yellow

2017 Schedule

8-25: at Greybull, 6 p.m. (Zero Week)
9-1: at Thermopolis, 7 p.m.
9-8: vs. Lovell, 7 p.m.
9-15: at Tongue River, 6 p.m.
*9-22: vs. Wind River, 4 p.m.
*9-29: vs. Saratoga, 3 p.m.
*10-6: at Rocky Mountain, 7 p.m.
*10-13: at Wyoming Indian, 7 p.m.
*10-20: vs. Cokeville, 4 p.m.
* Conference game

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Mascot: Cougars
Division: 1A/11-man
Conference: West
Colors: Black and purple
Coach: Mykah Trujillo, 3rd year at Wind River
2016 Record: 1-7, did not qualify for playoffs

2017 Schedule

8-26: at Cody jamboree, 1 p.m. (Zero Week)
9-1: at Big Piney, 3 p.m.
9-7: vs. Natrona JV, 6 p.m.
9-15: vs. Rawlins, 7 p.m.
*9-22: at Shoshoni, 4 p.m.
*9-29: vs. Rocky Mountain, 6 p.m.
*10-6: at Wyoming Indian, 4 p.m.
*10-13: at Cokeville, 3 p.m.
*10-20: vs. Saratoga, 6 p.m.
* Conference game

Wranglers should be in the mix

This season, the Shoshoni Wranglers are trying to bridge the gap between rising upstart and consistent challenger.

In 2016, Shoshoni finished above .500 for the third consecutive season, something that hasn't happened for the Wranglers since 1987.

Now, Shoshoni needs to find a way to maintain that success despite graduating all four of their all-state choices and six of their seven all-conference choices.

"You've got to build that tradition before you can really take huge steps, and it's really starting that way," coach Tony Truempler said. "The players are really buying into it."

Winning makes buying in easier, Truempler said – and the Wranglers have been winning a lot lately. They finished tied for first place in the Class 1A 11-man West Conference last year, and for the first time since 2001, the Wranglers won a playoff game.

However, senior Mason Lucas is the lone returning all-conference choice.

"We lost a very talented, huge for us senior class this year, and the last two years we've had pretty talented senior classes," Truempler said. However, he added, "We're pretty balanced. We have some speedsters but we have some pretty big offensive linemen that we haven't had in the past."

Despite missing much of last year with a broken leg, senior Wyatt Ramsey was second on the team in rushing, finishing with 48 carries for 488 yards – a 10.2 yards-per-carry average – and tied for a team high with six rushing touchdowns.

However, he's the only one of Shoshoni's top five rushers to return.

The Wranglers also lose their quarterbacks and their top five receivers; Ramsey, with one catch for nine yards last season, is Shoshoni's top returning receiver.

Lucas, senior center Tristen Boysen and senior Brooks Woody will lead the line.

On defense, the Wranglers graduated their top five tacklers

and seven of their top eight. Lucas, who finished sixth for Shoshoni in defensive points last year, returns as the top tackler.

Senior lineman Andrew Jennings was ninth on the team in defensive points, while sophomore Kadon Dewitt was 10th and Ramsey was 11th.

Truempler said the move from upstart to challenger is rooted in larger program-wide goals. Consistency in the offensive approach is paying off – the Wranglers start running the offense they'll run in high school in fifth grade. He also said consistency in the coaching staff and off-season team-building exercises are paying off.

"We do a lot of youth stuff and we're out in the community, and I think that really helps," Truempler said. "We're constantly doing stuff, as far as a football team, even when we're not in season."

Those habits will give Shoshoni the chance to remain competitive despite graduation losses – a theme the Wranglers would love to make consistently.

Chiefs staying in the fight

One small offseason change has given Wyoming Indian football some new life.

In November, for the first time since the 2000 season, schools were granted the right to schedule their own nonconference games.

The Chiefs took advantage of the opportunity to schedule some regional sub-varsity games to gain some valuable experience, which may prove to be better for building skills than the varsity-versus-varsity games the Chiefs have played in early weeks in past seasons.

Wyoming Indian's first three games of 2017 will come against the junior varsities of Lander, Wind River and Riverton. Coach Todd Ghormley said these games should help players develop their skills before launching into West Conference games.

"My hope is that they will build their confidence in their ability with these games," Ghormley said. "This will also give us real practice on how our plays run at full speed against real opponents. With our numbers problem, it is hard to get quality reps in when you are going against a skeleton crew."

Key Players

TE/LB: Matthew Underwood, Sr.
OL/DL: Omar Tillman, Sr.
RB/DE/DL: Jayce Old Coyote, Sr.
QB/RB/LB: Mearl Goodnight, Sr.

The chance for the Chiefs to gain those game-speed repetitions is welcome for a squad that's still trying to find its footing. In the past three years, Wyoming Indian has been outscored 1,270-31. Their only victory in that span came in 2015 via forfeit. Last year was tough on the field for the Chiefs; they lost the seven games they took to the field by a combined 475-6. The 67.9 points allowed per game by the Chiefs was the most ever in Wyoming's 11-man history.

This year, though, Wyoming Indian returns seven starters on both offense and defense. A strong group of seniors, including returning all-conference selections Matthew Underwood and Jayce Old Coyote, as well as lineman Omar Tillman and linebacker

Mearl Goodnight, will help boost the program's prospects.

"With a growing group of seniors this year, we will have the leadership needed to push our program from within," Ghormley said. "That's how a team gets better, by having guys who have put in the time and keep pushing others to work hard with them."

Ghormley said junior lineman Joshua Nomee and sophomore wide receivers Grant Fletcher and Enean Bitsinni will also be key contributors this fall.

Juniors Kobe Tillman and Hiissi Goodnight alternated at tailback last year. However, Ghormley said Tillman may not return this fall. Hiissi Goodnight and William Carpenter split time at quarterback last fall.

Hiissi Goodnight was also the Chiefs' leading tackler last year, while Tillman, Carpenter and Underwood added depth on defense.

Ghormley said the team still needs to build its durability and its numbers, but the potential for improvement has players motivated.

"They are excited to get back out on the field," he said.



Mascot: Chiefs
Division: 1A/11-man
Conference: West
Colors: Blue and red
Coach: Todd Ghormley, 4th year

2016 Record: 0-8

2017 Schedule

9-5: vs. Lander JV, 4 p.m.
9-9: vs. Wind River JV, 10 a.m.
9-14: at Riverton JV, 5 p.m.
*9-22: at Saratoga, 6 p.m.
*9-29: at Cokeville, 4 p.m.
*10-6: vs. Wind River, 4 p.m.
*10-13: vs. Shoshoni, 7 p.m.
*10-20: at Rocky Mtn, 6 p.m.
* Conference game

Cougars still will be young

Wind River's roster this year breaks down simply: Lots of 10s and 11s, not too many 12s.

The Cougars will be thin on seniors but return eight starters on both offense and defense. Those strong junior and sophomore classes will be critical to the Cougars' success.

In terms of experience, "the pendulum is swinging back for us, but it's still not there," coach Mykah Trujillo said.

Trujillo said he only expects three seniors this fall. He said the focus on younger players will pay off not only this year but later, too.

"I think it works in our favor in terms of growing this group of kids," Trujillo said. "Our sophomore year coming in and our junior group is pretty good sized for Wind River, and a lot of them, they're finally starting to get the experience on a higher level."

They have work to do. Wind River has missed the playoffs for seven consecutive seasons; the Cougars are 13-45 in that span, including 1-7 last year.

"The pendulum is swinging back for us, but it's still not there."

~ Coach Mykah Trujillo

However, last year, the team experienced a bit of big-game atmosphere. The Cougars entered Week 8 in a win-and-in playoff scenario against Saratoga. Saratoga won 31-14.

Trujillo said he left that game disappointed in the loss but satisfied in the lessons his players learned.

"It was good to have that pressure on a game," Trujillo said. "I think we had three, maybe four freshmen starting that game, so that's a good game to break those guys in on."

This year's junior class includes the team's only two returning all-conference choices, Morgan Miller and Owen McAdams.

The Cougars ran a backfield

by committee last season; six players had at least 22 carries but no one had more than 55. Miller led Wind River with 331 rushing yards, while senior Jordan Kline added 203, junior Jaren Guina added 169 and sophomore Kage Vogel had 97.

Junior quarterback Dillan Cachelin is back after throwing for 464 yards and three touchdowns last year. However, only one of his top three receivers (Kline, who had eight catches for 163 yards) is back this fall.

On defense, Wind River lost its top two tacklers but returns its next six.

Vogel is Wind River's leading returning tackler. He was third for the Cougars a year ago in defensive points. Guina was fourth,



Miller was fifth, McAdams was sixth, Kline was seventh and sophomore McCaden Anderson was eighth.

Trujillo said the high number of returners will bode well for the squad both in practice and on gameday.

Key Players

RB/LB: Morgan Miller, Jr.
WR/CB: Jordan Kline, Sr.
OL/DL: Dillan Trussell, Sr.
OL/FB/DL: Owen McAdams, Jr.

"We'll have people returning wanting their spot back, and competition, whether it's on your team or against another team, is always good," he said. "... The competition is going to make our kids push harder."

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State Championship

Kaycee 41, Farson 30

State Semifinals

Kaycee 56, Meeteetse 21

Farson 61, Guernsey-Sunrise 25

State Quarterfinals

Kaycee 60, Burlington 18

Meeteetse 65, Midwest 38

Farson 85, Hanna 26

Guernsey-Sunrise 41,

Snake River 28

Four players to watch

Mark Largent, Kaycee

A two-time all-state pick, Largent was Kaycee's No. 1 tackler last season, leading the Buckaroos in virtually every tackling category. The senior also had 16 catches for 238 yards and seven touchdowns last year.

J.D. Corson, Snake River

Another two-time all-state pick, Corson is entering his fourth year as the Rattlers' starting quarterback. If his yardage totals keep growing, Snake River should again find success. Oh, he was also the co-defensive player of the year last year in six-man.

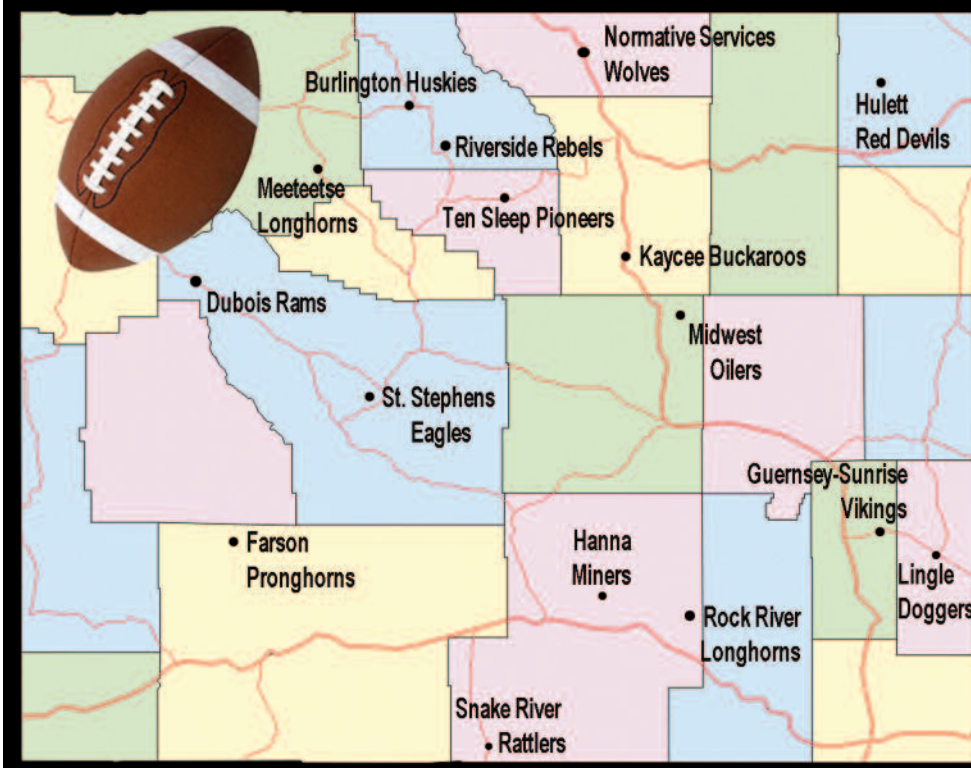
Lain Mitchelson, Farson

Mitchelson gets it done on both sides of the ball. He led six-man with 1,653 rushing yards last year; he also had 31 rushing touchdowns, also best in six-man. Just a junior, Mitchelson was also Farson's top tackler last year.

Josh Graybill, Meeteetse

If the Longhorns want to make it to Laramie in November, they'll have to go through Graybill. The senior is Meeteetse's leading returning rusher, receiver and tackler, and he's the Longhorns' only returning all-state selection.

1A/6-man Preview



Kaycee favored again

By Patrick Schmiedt

Four questions to answer

Will Kaycee lose this year? Probably not. The Buckaroos start 2017 having won their past 20 games – the longest active winning streak in the state regardless of classification. They also return four all-state selections, the most in six-man. Don't be surprised to see Kaycee go 11-0 again.

Who has the toughest schedule? Farson. While trying to defend their West Conference title, the Pronghorns will have three big challenges: Burlington, Snake River and Meeteetse. Farson has to play all three of those teams on the road. Farson played all three of those teams in Farson last year, so it will be interesting to see how they handle big games on the road.

Is anyone else even in the discussion? Yes, but only as upset picks. Snake River, Meeteetse and Burlington all proved to be worthy foes in the West, while Guernsey-Sunrise, Lingle and Midwest could challenge Kaycee in the East. However, it will be surprising if anyone other than Kaycee hoists the trophy in Laramie in November.

What's new for Lingle? A chance at the playoffs. The Doggers finished third in the East Conference last year but were held out of the playoffs for opting down from 1A 11-man. This year, with a cascade of classification changes, the Doggers are once again eligible for the post-season. Riverside, though, is still ineligible for the playoffs.

Four key games

Farson at Burlington, Sept. 8. The West

Conference opener for both squads will be telling. Can Farson overcome its losses to graduation? Can Burlington hang with last year's runners-up?

Lingle at Guernsey-Sunrise, Sept. 8. Both the Doggers and Vikings have big goals set for this season. This East Conference opener between the old rivals will set the pace for the season, for better or worse.

Guernsey-Sunrise at Kaycee, Sept. 30. On paper, the Vikings pose the biggest regular-season challenge to the Buckaroos' 20-game winning streak. Fortunately for Kaycee, it gets to play this one at home.

Farson at Snake River, Oct. 21. The Week 8 showdown between the Pronghorns and Rattlers last season decided the West Conference championship. It might do so again this season.

Predicted order of finish

East Conference: Kaycee; Guernsey-Sunrise; Midwest; Lingle; Hanna; Hulett; NSI; Rock River.

West Conference: Farson; Snake River; Burlington; Meeteetse; Riverside; Dubois; St. Stephens; Ten Sleep.

Way-too-early title game score prediction Kaycee 52, Farson 38

About the only thing that can stop the collision course between the Buckaroos and Pronghorns is some kind of unexpected regular-season upset. The odds are on both of last year's title-game participants to make it back to Laramie again.

Vikings have talent to compete

In his first season as head coach, Guernsey-Sunrise's Curtis Cook learned just how many people think they can do his job.

"The interesting part about the first year is that everybody had an opinion on what you should do," he said.

But Cook said he quickly learned to move forward with his vision, "charting new territory and not really worrying about what people think about it."

That "new territory" includes commitments to six-man team camps in Nebraska and strengthening the ties between the junior-high and high-school programs.

Now, one year after reaching the Class 1A six-man semifinals, Cook and the Vikings return three all-conference players and are in position to again be a contender for a state title.

"Taking them to the semifinals was a pretty good first year, so I'm hoping we can build on that," Cook said. "But we'll see. It's up to the kids and how hard they want to work."

The Vikings have talent, that's



Key Players

RB/LB: Gage Koeteman, Sr.

FB/LB: Garrett Oneyear, Sr.

RB/LB: Austin Albrecht, Jr.

RB: Dylan Rose, Jr.

for sure. Seniors Garrett Oneyear and Gage Koeteman and junior Dylan Rose were all-conference selections; in the East Conference, only Kaycee has more all-conference players back than the Vikings.

Oneyear was an all-state choice last year. He was Guernsey's top receiver with 20 catches for 412 yards and five scores. He also added 480 rush-

ing yards and 15 rushing touchdowns.

Rose led Guernsey with 1,226 rushing yards and 22 touchdowns last year.

Defensively, the Vikings get back their top two tacklers in Koetemen and Oneyear, respectively. Cook said the two seniors will be the keystones of the Vikings' defensive game plan.

"Gage is a little looser, a little less disciplined and Garrett is extremely disciplined," Cook said. "But they complement each other so well, it's crazy."

"It's going to be nice to have them back on defense. Next year will be the second year with our new defense, so they'll be even more comfortable with it."

Junior Austin Albrecht, who was fifth for the Vikings in defensive points, also returns.

To improve, the Vikings will have to take lessons from last year's losses. Guernsey's only three losses last year were to state champion Kaycee and twice to state runner-up Farson. Guernsey plays both teams again this year – and both games are on the road.

Cook said last year's losses helped Guernsey with "being more prepared mentally for those big games. That was the thing that kind of hurt us was the mental part of gameday preparation, and staying focused and being able to handle adversity in the middle of a game."

Cook said the doubters can continue to doubt, but he's happy with the direction of the program.

"It kind of helps you figure out what's important and what's not," he said.



Mascot: Vikings

Division: 1A/6-man

Conference: East

Colors: Black and white

Coach: Curtis Cook, 2nd year

at Guernsey-Sunrise

2016 Record: 7-3, lost to Far-

son in state semifinals

2017 Schedule

8-26: at Midwest jamboree, noon

(Zero Week)

9-2: at Farson, 2 p.m.

*9-8: vs. Lingle, 7 p.m.

*9-15: at Midwest, 6 p.m.

*9-22: vs. NSI, 6 p.m.

*9-29: at Kaycee, 2 p.m.

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

*10-14: at Rock River, noon

*10-20: vs. Hulett, 6 p.m.

* Conference game

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Mascot: Miners
Division: 1A/6-man
Conference: East
Colors: Blue and orange
Coach: Zack Scott, 5th year
2016 Record: 3-6, lost to Farson in state quarterfinals

Key Players

DL/LB: Jon Nelsen, Sr.
QB/DL: Tylor Goodro, Jr.
RB/LB: Conor McGraw, Soph.
RB/LB: Shane McGraw, Soph.

2017 Schedule

9-1: vs. St. Stephens, noon
*9-9: at Kaycee, 2 p.m.
*9-16: at Hulett, 3 p.m.
*9-23: vs. Rock River, 2 p.m.
*9-30: vs. Lingle, 2 p.m.
*10-6: at Guernsey-Sunrise, 7 p.m.
*10-13: at NSI, 6 p.m.
*10-21: vs. Midwest, noon
* Conference game

Young Miners are a threat

Hanna-Elk Mountain-Medicine Bow's football future will be shaped by its present.

Specifically, the Miners have one of Class 1A six-man's most talented sophomore classes – but those sophomores will need to play huge roles right away to help make the Miners successful.

The dependence on youth isn't necessarily a new thing. Most of HEM's key sophomores were critical pieces to the team as freshmen.

And although coach Zack Scott said the Miners will have "a few" seniors, it's really the underclassmen who will be the ones front and center of the offensive and defensive schemes.

"I think all the experience will be huge in how quickly we come together as a team," Scott said. "Many of these young players will be forced to play a bigger role in everything we do, although I truly feel like they are ready for the challenge."

"I am not concerned. Our sophomores are ready to lead HEM football."

Sophomore Shane McGraw, who was second for the Miners with 607 rushing yards on 86 carries, is the leading returning rusher. He's the only player back who had more than 30 rushing yards a year ago.

McGraw also split time at quarterback with junior Tylor Goodro. They combined for 813 passing yards – Goodro 448, McGraw 365 – and 11 touchdowns.

Also, McGraw and sophomore Brendan Reeves were the Miners' top two receivers last year, and they're both back. Reeves had a team-high 299 yards and six receiving touchdowns on 12 catches, while McGraw added 231 receiving yards.

Defensively, McGraw is the only one of Hanna's top four tacklers to return; he was third on the team in defensive points and tied for the team lead with four interceptions.

Sophomore Conor McGraw was fifth, while senior Jon Nelsen was seventh.

The sophomore invasion is

all the more important because of what Hanna lost. The Miners graduated all three of their all-conference choices.

With only a handful of seniors and juniors, the Miners will rely on those underclassmen to fill spots. However, despite losing three all-conference choices, the Miners do return three starters on each side of the ball. Although they're young, they've got game experience at their positions.

Scott said he's hopeful an extra year of maturity will help make the Miners more competitive against top-tier competition.

HEM was the final playoff qualifier from the East Conference. The Miners won three games, all by at least 28 points apiece; they lost six, though, all by at least 21 points.

"I hope another year of growth and experience at the high school level will be the difference in our team," Scott said. "Closing the gap and winning games will be our focus."

In big part, that difference will come from sophomores.

Buckaroos favored for third title

The difference between winning one state championship and winning three consecutive state championships comes down to handling expectations.

That's what Kaycee is trying to learn to do this fall.

Kaycee is the back-to-back Class 1A six-man champion and the winner of 20 consecutive games – the longest active winning streak in Wyoming, regardless of classification.

This year, though, Kaycee has the added pressure of trying to continue a championship streak, not just start one.

Tony Rouse, who moved from assistant to head coach at Kaycee this summer, said the Buckaroos' focus on discipline and accountability will help them handle that pressure.

"We just base everything on being a team sport and being everybody humble," Rouse said.

The approach worked last year, as Kaycee won its second consecutive title. The Buckaroos made quick work of all of their opponents, winning all but one of their games by 35 points apiece.

The only game that was close was the state title game; even then, Kaycee maintained control against Farson on its way to a 41-30 victory.

This year, the Buckaroos return a bevy of talent from that title team.

Kaycee returns four all-state players, more than any other team in the classification, in seniors Hunter Elmer, Mark Largent and Danny Ramirez and junior Hunter Rouse. The Buckaroos lost only two seniors to graduation and have eight seniors on this year's team.

"I think a good majority of them were leaders as juniors last year... so they'll just continue to go along and help the young guys, and hold them accountable and lead by example," coach Rouse said. "In order for us to be successful, they have to be leaders."

Kaycee also returns seniors Atticus Garrett, an all-conference choice last year, and Brice Austin, who was key to the team's defensive rotation.

Largent is one of just two two-time all-state selections in six-man this year. Defensively, Largent was Kaycee's top tackler a year ago and led the team in solo tackles (41), assisted tackles (44), tackles for loss (11) and sacks (3). Also, with 16 catches for 238 yards and seven touchdowns, he is Kaycee's leading returning receiver.

Ramirez led the Buckaroos with 1,364 rushing yards on 105 attempts – an average of 13 yards per carry – and 29 rushing touchdowns.

Elmer added 483 rushing yards and seven touchdowns.

Rouse completed 59 of 75 passes, a 79 percent completion rate, for 1,035 yards and 31 touchdowns, all without a single interception.

Largent, Garrett, Elmer, Ramirez, Rouse and junior Ben Kukowski all notched at least seven defensive points per game last season.

Meanwhile, Kaycee's focus remains squarely on the aspects that brought them success – not the success itself. And the winning streak?

"The kids might talk about it, but we certainly don't," coach Rouse said.

Mascot: Buckaroos
Division: 1A/6-man
Conference: East
Colors: Blue and red
Coach: Tony Rouse, 1st year as head coach at Kaycee
2016 Record: 11-0, beat Farson in state championship

Key Players

RB: Danny Ramirez, Sr.
TE: Mark Largent, Sr.
RB: Hunter Elmer, Sr.
QB: Hunter Rouse, Jr.

2017 Schedule

8-26: Kaycee jamboree, noon (Zero Week)
9-1: at Dubois, 2 p.m.
*9-9: vs. Hanna, 2 p.m.
*9-16: at Rock River, noon
*9-22: vs. Hulett, 2 p.m.
*9-30: vs. Guernsey-Sunrise, 2 p.m.
*10-6: at Lingle, 6 p.m.
*10-13: at Midwest, 7:30 p.m.
*10-20: vs. NSI, 1 p.m.
* Conference game

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Mascot: Red Devils
Division: 1A/6-man
Conference: East
Colors: Black and red
Coach: Boz Backen, 3rd year at Hulett
2016 Record: 1-8, did not qualify for playoffs

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Red Devils welcome back seniors

Hulett didn't expect its 2016 to be as much of a struggle as it was.

However, with two of their best players out due to injury, the Red Devils never got on track.

Hulett struggled to a 1-8 finish, last season, giving up 589 points – the most points allowed in a single season in state history – while only scoring 219.

The Red Devils' lone victory came against winless Rock River; their eight losses were all by at least 35 points.

"It was a rollercoaster of a season," coach Boz Backen said. "Losing both Austin Butler and Josh Stevens really took a toll. I am hoping the freshmen that played last year learned from their experience and will improve with a year under their belt."

This year, both Butler and Stevens return for their senior seasons, giving Hulett a boost of optimism for 2017.

"I think kids understand that last year was tougher than they expected," Backen said. "I am hoping they come back from summer more motivated and focused for the upcoming season."

Stevens had 25 catches for 419 yards and nine touchdowns and was also one of Hulett's top tacklers as a sophomore, when the Red Devils reached the Class 1A six-man semifinals.

"He was a factor when we had our great sea-

son in 2015 playing as a sophomore," Backen said.

"I am hoping he comes and will be a leader for our football team and make the plays for us when we need them."

Butler had a limited role as a sophomore but was still a key contributor to the semifinal team.

Stevens missed last year while recovering from an injury sustained during basketball; Butler missed the year thanks to an offseason knee injury.

The offense will have a completely different look. Bodhi Penning, Hulett's lone all-conference selection last year who led the team in rushes, rushing yards, catches, passing attempts and all-purpose offense, has graduated, leaving a big hole on offense.

"I think coach (Ryan) Neiman and I are going

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"They understand that last year was tougher than they expected."

~ Coach Boz Backen

to see what works best for the guys we got and build from there," Backen said. "Obviously we will have to change some schemes and formations, but I think once we figure it out, the guys will buy in and make it work."

Sophomore quarterback Jhett Letellier is Hulett's leading returning rusher, passer and receiver – he was credited with 93 rushing yards, 142 passing yards and 126 receiving yards last year.

Stevens will return at wideout with Butler coming back at running back.

Sophomore Dawson Butler is Hulett's leading returning tackler; he was second for the Red Devils last year. Senior linebacker James Hippen was fourth.

Junior Ethan Dykes and sophomore Alex Mastrovito will also have important defensive responsibilities.

Key Players

RB/LB: Austin Butler, Sr.
WR/CB: Josh Stevens, Sr.
LB: James Hippen, Sr.
QB/DE: Jhett Letellier, Soph.

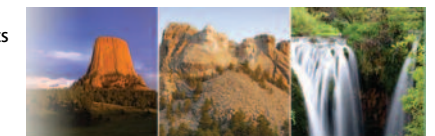
2017 Schedule

8-26: vs. Meeteetse, 2 p.m. (Zero Week)
9-2: vs. Ten Sleep, 2 p.m.
*9-9: at Rock River, noon
*9-16: vs. Hanna, 3 p.m.
*9-22: at Kaycee, 2 p.m.
*9-30: vs. NSI, 1 p.m.
*10-6: at Midwest, 6 p.m.
*10-14: vs. Lingle, 2 p.m.
*10-20: at Guernsey-Sunrise, 6 p.m.
* Conference game



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Mascot: Doggers
Division: 1A/6-man
Conference: East
Colors: Blue and red
Coach: Matthew Cornelius,
2nd year at Lingle
2016 Record: 5-3, ineligible
for playoffs

Key Players

RB/DB: Hayden Hill, Sr.
OG/DE: Jaden McDuffie, Sr.
WR/LB: Brandon Hill, Sr.
TB/S: Jacob Korell, Sr.

2017 Schedule

8-25: at Midwest jamboree, noon
(Zero Week)
9-1: vs. Snake River, 3 p.m.
*9-8: at Guernsey-Sunrise, 7 p.m.
*9-14: at NSI, 2 p.m.
*9-22: vs. Midwest, 7 p.m.
*9-29: at Hanna, 2 p.m.
*10-6: vs. Kaycee, 6 p.m.
*10-14: at Hulett, 2 p.m.
*10-20: vs. Rock River, 6 p.m.
* Conference game

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Doggers getting used to six-man

Last year, for the first time since 1956, six-man football was played in Lingle.

At first apprehensive, the community has learned to embrace the action in the six-man game, Lingle-Fort Laramie coach Matthew Cornelius said.

"It was kind of neat to see the old cowboys come out and watch the new style of football," he said. "... They seem to really embrace the style of the game. It's a fan's dream."

Lingle dropped from 11-man to six-man last year and, in doing so, was ineligible for the playoffs. This year, though, thanks to a cascading set of classification changes prompted by the opening of Thunder Basin High School in Gillette, the Doggers are eligible for the postseason this fall.

Cornelius said that change has brought some renewed energy to a program looking to capitalize on a winning record, even though a strong group of seniors has graduated.

"We did lose a solid core, especially kind of the specialty positions, but we also do have some good solid kids coming up who were right on their heels last year," Cornelius said. "... I think they're going to surprise some folks. I think they're going to show some folks some things they're not exactly expecting."

The Doggers graduated their top three rushers, their quarterback, two of their top three re-

ceivers and their top three tacklers.

But the Doggers aren't exactly a team full of inexperienced players. Cornelius said he's expecting about 15 players to fill the roster this year, and of those seven will likely be seniors.

Senior Brandon Hill is the only one of Lingle's four all-conference selections to come back this fall. He's the Doggers' leading returning tackler and also had six catches for 102 yards on offense.

Senior Jacob Korell, who ran 31 times for 242 yards, is Lingle's top returning rusher. Junior Ty Mueller, who had seven catches for 135 yards, could be Lingle's top returning receiver, but Cornelius said Mueller might not be back in the fall.

Hill, Korell and Mueller were fourth, fifth and sixth, re-

spectively, for the Doggers in defensive points last year. Hill was tied for the team lead with 11 tackles for loss.

Seniors Gavin Niles, Hayden Hill and Jaden McDuffie and sophomore Bailey Powell will add depth to the defense.

Most importantly, this crew understands the six-man game better thanks to the experience they gained last year.

The Doggers dealt with an "extremely steep" learning curve in six-man, something that was punctuated in back-to-back losses to Snake River and Guernsey to open last season. But Lingle closed the year by winning five of its final six games.

"Every game after that (first game), we got successively better," Cornelius said.

Good Luck Trail Blazers!



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Oilers have experienced group

Midwest coach Ken Swieter can tell when he has players who are ready to transition into leaders.

It starts with grasping the offense – not just the plays, but why they're needed.

"Grasping the offense and running plays versus understanding what to do are two different things," Swieter said.

That's the difference, Swieter said, between a team that just does what it's told to do and a team that adapts to in-game situations.

In Swieter's nine years of coaching six-man football, players have ascended to that level only occasionally.

This year, though, the Oilers have players capable of reaching that level.

"They feel ready for it," Swieter said. "We've got a lot of work to do, but last year they were learning the offense. This year I hope they understand the offense."

At the middle of all that is senior quarterback Kayden Best, the

only one of the Oilers' three all-conference picks to come back this fall.

Best threw for 1,193 yards and 29 touchdowns against just six interceptions; he added 153 rushing yards.

The offense retains most of its key players. The Oilers do lose their top rusher but return everyone else who finished the year with positive rushing yards.

Senior Will Chapman, who was second on the team with 383 rushing yards last year, is the Oilers' leading returning rusher; senior Deaton Joslyn added 341 yards on the ground and junior Dalton Bogart added 211.

And the Oilers also return three of their top four receivers, including leading receiver Kaleb Smith, who had 345 yards on 17 catches (a 20.3 yards-per-catch average). Bogart (192 yards) and Chapman (124) also proved viable targets in the Oilers' passing game.

Defensively, Midwest returns three of its top four tacklers. Chapman, Bogart and senior

Logan Drinkwater ranked second, third and fourth, respectively, in defensive points last season, and Chapman led the Oilers with 45 solo tackles.

Best was sixth and Smith was seventh.

Midwest's numbers will be down a bit this year – the senior class of four will anchor the team, which probably won't be much deeper than 12 total players – but their experience as a group helps them overcome a lack of depth.

"We are an older team, so hopefully experience will help us out," Swieter said. "... They do have an added confidence to them."

The lack of depth is also a concern for a team that usually played its best football in the first half of games last season, a struggle that became apparent as the season went on.

"We need to learn how to finish it, and that's what our struggle was last year," Swieter said.

And as players transition to leaders, that goal becomes easier to reach.

Coach: Ken Swieter, 11th year
2016 Record: 5-4, lost to Meeteetse in state quarterfinals

Key Players

QB: Kayden Best, Sr.
RB/LB: Dalton Bogart, Jr.
RB/CB: Will Chapman, Sr.
WR/CB: Kaleb Smith, Jr.

Mascot:

Oilers
Division: 1A/6-man
Conference: East
Colors: Maroon and silver

2017 Schedule

8-26: Midwest Jamboree, noon
(Zero Week)
9-1: at Burlington, 3 p.m.
*9-8: vs. NSI, 6 p.m.
*9-15: vs. Guernsey-Sunrise, 6 p.m.
*9-22: at Lingle, 7 p.m.
*9-29: at Rock River, 3:30 p.m.
*10-6: vs. Hulett, 6 p.m.
*10-13: vs. Kaycee, 7:30 p.m.
*10-21: at Hanna, noon
* Conference game

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1A/6-MAN EAST

Wolves always start at square one

The NSI Academy football team starts the 2017 season fresh. Again.

Once again, the Wolves will start the season without a single player who suited up for the squad last season. That's typical for the institution near Sheridan, where students tend to spend no more than one year.

The challenge for coach Anthony Simmons then becomes putting together a team with little to no experience with organized football, and definitely without experience in six-man football.

However, in his 10 years at NSI and in his four as the head football coach, Simmons has learned a few things about managing a program that might drive other coaches to frustration.

"That's when you take wins and losses out of the picture and focus on development," Simmons said.

The Wolves tend to struggle early in the season as they learn

the basics not only of six-man but of football, period. Teaching football technique from the rudimentary level and then trying to have players reach varsity speed in a short time, Simmons said, "is the roughest part of coaching football at NSI."

Last year, for example, NSI lost its first four games before winning a pair of contests, beating Hulett 98-50 and Rock River 91-30.

The big points are typical of the Wolves; last year, they averaged more than 47 a game, good enough to finish in the top half of Class 1A six-man. The problem was stopping points from happening – NSI gave up an average of more than 68 per game, including at least 70 in six of their eight games. Only winless Rock River gave up more points per game last season in six-man than the Wolves did.

"Our kids are just starting from scratch, so it takes them a while to get there, to understand form tackling and being physi-

cal at the right time," Simmons said. "... Catching and running and offense and moving the ball, we tend to catch on to that pretty quick."

As for this year, Simmons said the prospects on campus are thin.

"Our kids and the talent level at this point in time don't look too promising," Simmons said, "but I have not had a chance, really, to talk to the guys. ... This year will be slim pickings."

Simmons said a few players could have good talents for the game, but until practices can start officially in August, it's hard to measure that potential.

"You never know. You might find a diamond in the rough," Simmons said.

Simmons said this year's team might be young, as some of NSI's most athletic students are underclassmen. And NSI's tradition of finding its footing midway through the season will likely continue with its new crop of players.

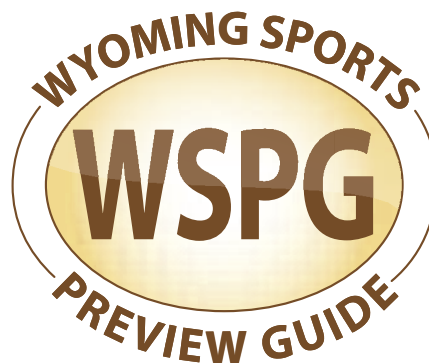


Mascot: Wolves
Division: 1A/6-man
Conference: East
Colors: Blue and silver
Coach: Anthony Simmons,
4th year at NSI
2016 Record: 2-6, did not
qualify for playoffs

2017 Schedule

9-2: at Riverside, 7 p.m.
*9-8: at Midwest, 6 p.m.
*9-15: vs. Lingle, 2 p.m.
*9-22: at Guernsey-Sunrise, 6 p.m.
*9-30: at Hulett, 1 p.m.
*10-7: vs. Rock River, 6 p.m.
*10-13: vs. Hanna, 6 p.m.
*10-20: at Kaycee, 1 p.m.
* Conference game

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Coach: Doug Spriggs, 2nd year at Rock River
2016 Record: 0-8, did not qualify for playoffs

Key Players

OL/DL: Kaleb Charles, Sr.
OL/DL: Chase Hargrow, Sr.
RB: Chase Stricklin, Jr.

Mascot: Longhorns

Division: 1A/6-man

Conference: East

Colors: Blue and white

2017 Schedule

9-1: at Meeteetse, 6 p.m.

*9-9: vs. Hulett, noon

*9-16: vs. Kaycee, noon

*9-23: at Hanna, 2 p.m.

*9-29: vs. Midwest, 4 p.m.

*10-7: at NSI, 1 p.m.

*10-14: vs. Guernsey-Sunrise, noon

*10-20: at Lingle, 6 p.m.

* Conference game

Longhorns continue to build



Rock River's climb from pushover to challenger may begin in earnest in 2017.

And it just might start with the team's youngest players.

The program's returning players may be outnumbered by their freshmen – a good sign for a developing program.

"We have a scrappy group of boys who work hard and commit to the team and one another," coach Doug Spriggs said. "We definitely have to have endurance to play the game as we do not have the depth other teams (have)."

That endurance comes from necessity. Only seven players donated pads last season, giving Rock River just one player on the bench at any one time.

Of those seven, two graduated, leaving seniors Kaleb Charles and Chase Hargrow, junior Chase Stricklin and sophomores Anthony Davila and Elijah Cox-Spriggs to return. While they give the team experience and endurance, the program's future may rest with its big group of freshmen – well, big for Rock River.

Spriggs said the Longhorns will

have four or five freshmen to add to the roster, giving Rock River depth it didn't have last year.

"Last year we played two games with only six players and all other games were played with one sub," Spriggs said. "My hopes for this year is to be able to grow our incoming freshman at a rate that will allow our returning starters to get some rest during the game."

"Being able to get some fresh legs on the field will really help all areas of our game. We have plenty of room to grow and some good talent to work with."

The potential in the Longhorns this year will help keep the struggles of previous seasons into the past.

In three combined varsity sea-

sons, the Longhorns are 2-20. They enter 2017 on a 14-game losing streak, the longest in six-man and the second-longest in the state regardless of classification behind Class 2A Kemmerer.

Last season, the Longhorns' closest game came in the season opener against St. Stephens, a 43-18 loss. The next week, Rock River lost 47-12 to Hulett; every game after that was decided by a minimum of 53 points.

In finishing 0-8, the Longhorns allowed 69.75 points per game, the third-highest average in state history.

"Our players learned to be great young men who support one another, regardless of the odds against them," Spriggs said. "Life is easy when you're winning. True grit and a testimony to our program is what it takes to continue to compete against all odds."

"Our boys love that they have to mentally conquer so many aspects of the game that other teams do not have to face. They know at the end of the day they are better men for all they accomplish."

Coach: Trent Aagard, 2nd year at Burlington
2016 Record: 6-3, lost to Kaycee in state quarterfinals

Key Players

OL/DL: Dallin Davidson, Sr.
QB: Tallon Wiles, Sr.
RB/LB: Malachi Cook, Sr.
WR/LB: Torey Wardell, Sr.

Mascot: Huskies

Division: 1A/6-man

Conference: West

Colors: Orange and black

2017 Schedule

9-1: vs. Midwest, 3 p.m.

*9-8: vs. Farson, 1 p.m.

*9-15: vs. Ten Sleep, 3 p.m.

*9-22: at St. Stephens, 2 p.m.

*9-29: vs. Meeteetse, 1 p.m.

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

*10-13: vs. Snake River, 3 p.m.

*10-20: at Riverside, 7 p.m.

* Conference game

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Mascot: Rams

Division: 1A/6-man

Conference: West

Colors: Blue and yellow

Coach: David Trembly,

20th year at Dubois

2016 Record: 3-5, did not

qualify for state playoffs

2017 Schedule

9-1: vs. Kaycee, 2 p.m.

*9-8: at Meeteetse, 6 p.m.

*9-15: vs. Riverside, 1 p.m.

*9-22: at Snake River, 3 p.m.

*9-29: at Farson, 2 p.m.

*10-7: vs. Burlington, 2 p.m.

*10-14: vs. St. Stephens, noon

*10-21: at Ten Sleep, 1 p.m.

* Conference game

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Rams working on finer points

Key Players

RB/LB: Warren Johnson, Jr.

RB/LB: Connor Hudson, Jr.

OL/DL: Matt Codevilla, Sr.

OL/DL: Justin Poppe, Sr.

Dubois' focus for improvement in 2017 falls on one specific area: toughness.

"From day one, (we) have to work on mental and physical toughness," coach David Trembly said.

The Rams' focus on improvement in that area has direct ties to what happened to the team last season, when Dubois was in the clear spot of middle-man.

In games against Farson, Snake River, Burlington and Meeteetse – the top four teams in the West – Dubois lost those games by an average of 63-23.

In games against Riverside, St. Stephens and Ten Sleep – the bottom three teams – Dubois won all three by an average of 73-13.

Trembly said the Rams need to improve in a few areas to make that transition into the top tier of the conference again.

"In six-man, speed kills," Trembly said. "(It's) definitely the most wanted skill. Being

able to make good decisions quickly are also key. In the first week we need to accomplish these skills. I believe this is what's holding us back in those tougher games."

Although Dubois doesn't necessarily possess game-breaking speed, Trembly said the Rams' knowledge of the game has improved, and making quick decisions mentally may help Dubois overcome a lack of quickness physically.

Junior multi-purpose threat Warren Johnson, who led the Rams with 416 passing yards but also had 154 receiving yards and 145 rushing yards, is also back.

Trembly said Johnson's presence will help less experienced players around him feel more comfortable.

"This will greatly help in terms for of confidence for the other players and decision making," Trembly said.

Junior Connor Hudson, who ran 17 times for 216 yards and

three scores a year ago, is Dubois' leading returning rusher.

On defense, Hudson is Dubois' leading returning tackler, while Johnson was sixth.

Senior Matt Codevilla is the only other returning player who registered at least one tackle per game.

The offseason losses were significant: The Rams lost their top two rushers – including Brock Baker, who ran for 1,228 yards and 21 touchdowns.

The Rams also lose their top three tacklers, four of their top five and five of their top seven.

Returning four players with starting experience on both sides of the ball will help Dubois overcome those losses, Trembly said. Trembly also said senior Aaron Mountain, the only one of Dubois' three all-conference selections slated to come back this fall, seniors Justin Poppe and Garret Jungck and sophomore Mason Slider are also ready to play key roles on both sides of the ball.

Toughness remains the focus, though.

"In terms of toughness, I would like the team to get back to a place that no matter who the opponent (is) that they take them on at 100 percent," Trembly said.

Huskies rounding six-man curve

Burlington's six-man schooling is just about done.

Now, the Huskies are ready to make the move from pupils to practitioners.

Entering their third year of six-man, coach Trent Aagard said the Huskies' players and coaches have bridged the gap between learning about the game as a whole and learning what strategies will define Burlington's particular approach.

"It seems like you are able to do so many things (in) six-man, but you need to find what works for your team," Aagard said. "I think that we will be able to expand a little in some areas. Last year was a real learning experience for me as a coach and hopefully us as a team."

In its first full varsity season of six-man football since 1955, Burlington finished 6-3, losing to eventual state champion Kaycee 60-18 in the playoff quarterfinals.

Aagard said the chance to return to varsity play last season rejuvenated his players.

"I think our players really enjoyed six-man last season," Aagard said. "I think we learned that it is a



very competitive class, and if you don't bring your 'A' game, you are going to get worked over in pretty short order."

In 2017, the Huskies lose their top two rushers and three of their top four receivers, but they do get back their quarterback and their top receiver.

Senior Dallin Davidson is the only one of Burlington's three all-conference choices to come back this fall. Davidson was Burlington's top receiver last year, leading the team with 19 catches and 277 receiving yards and tying for the team lead with four receiving TDs.

Senior Tallon Wiles threw for 946 yards last year, while junior Jacob Cook added 302 passing

yards. Junior Dontae Garza, who ran for 282 yards and six touchdowns to end up third on the team, is Burlington's leading returning rusher.

Defensively, Burlington loses its top two tacklers but returns Davidson – who was third for the Huskies in defensive points and had a team-high four fumble recoveries.

Actually, five of Burlington's top seven tacklers return. After Davidson, Cook was fourth, senior Malachi Cook was fifth, Garza was sixth and senior Torey Wardell was seventh.

"Most kids got quite a bit of playing time, which I think should help us out in filling some of the holes we will have," Aagard said. "I think that there is a confidence that comes from having players who have been able to help the team out for a few years coming back. It give someone for our younger players to look to and learn from."

This year, those players can worry less about learning the game and focus more on executing what they already know.

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Mascot: Pronghorns
Division: 1A/6-man
Conference: West
Colors: Green and yellow
Coach: Trip Applequist, 5th year
2016 Record: 10-1, lost to Kaycee in state championship

Key Players

RB/LB: Clancy Gines, Jr.
RB/DB: Lain Mitchelson, Jr.
RB/LB: Cruz Lucero, Sr.
LB: Cortland Barker, Jr.

2017 Schedule

8-26: at Evanston JV, noon (Zero Week)
9-2: vs. Guernsey-Sunrise, 2 p.m.
*9-8: at Burlington, 1 p.m.
*9-15: vs. St. Stephens, 7 p.m.
*9-23: at Ten Sleep, 2 p.m.
*9-29: vs. Dubois, 2 p.m.
*10-6: at Meeteetse, 6 p.m.
*10-13: vs. Riverside, 7 p.m.
*10-21: at Snake River, 1 p.m.
* Conference game

Sitzman's Motel

307-273-9200 Farson WY

Pronghorns have high expectations

Farson has a unique role to play this fall – favorite.

“I don’t think we’ll be the team that gets overlooked like we have been in years past,” coach Marvin “Trip” Applequist said.

With good reason.

Farson reached a state championship game for the first time in program history last year; the Pronghorns finished 10-1, with the loss to Kaycee in the Class 1A six-man championship game the team’s only loss.

The Pronghorns do lose four seniors who were all-conference selections last year, but they return three players – senior Cruz Lucero and juniors Lain Mitchelson and Clancy Gines – who were all-state picks last year.

The combination of success and returning players gives Farson the potential to again be one of six-man’s best teams this fall.

“I think people will be looking at us,” Applequist said. “I guess we kind of have a target on our back. Really, all it just comes down to is who shows up and plays football.”

The Pronghorns have the players to do just that.

Mitchelson led six-man in rushing yards last year, piling up 1,653 yards on 182 carries and a class-high 31 rushing touchdowns.

Lucero added 543 rushing yards and Gines 466.

Mitchelson also led Farson with 372 passing yards, while Gines added 231; Gines was also Farson’s top receiver last year with nine catches for 200 yards.



Applequist said he’d like to see more from the passing game this year.

“Probably our biggest weakness was our inability to throw the ball last year, so that’s something we’re really going to work on,” he said.

Defensively, the Pronghorns return three of their top four tacklers in Mitchelson, Gines and junior Cortland Barker.

Mitchelson led Farson with 43 solo tackles last year, while Barker tied for the team high in assisted tackles (47) and also finished with a team-high nine sacks.

Mitchelson and Gines each had eight pass break-ups and three interceptions, tied for the team lead in each category.

Senior Braxton Applequist was sixth in defensive points and Lucero was seventh.

In addition to being a team with talent, the Pronghorns are also a team with momentum that goes beyond the program.

Farson will break in a new stadium this fall. It will be Wyoming’s first six-man stadium with an artificial surface. Although lights weren’t installed by mid-summer, Applequist said he was hopeful lights could be put in by the start of the season.

The desire to make it back to a title game, combined with the new facility, is all part of building a program that sustains success.

“I think that goes for any sport, that winning kind of breeds winning,” Applequist said. “Once you get that culture of success, it kind of feeds on itself.”

Rebels still adjusting to six-man game

To save football at Riverside, the Rebels had to make a difficult transition from 11-man to six-man.

Riverside’s experiment with six-man football enters its second season this fall. After a year of adjustment, the Rebels are better at the game and have a better feel for their opponents.

But they also start the year with a big problem many six-man programs face – numbers.

As few as nine players could suit up for Riverside this fall, so that knowledge of the game they gained last year will be critical to finding success this year.

Coach Sam Buck said the Rebels learned a ton about six-man last year, including how game planning, strategy, conditioning and other aspects differ from 11-man football.

The Rebels started 0-4 last season while adjusting to the six-man game. Victories came against St. Stephens (53-0) and Ten Sleep (62-34). However, Riverside’s six losses were all by at least 36 points.

“It was definitely difficult and I think even more so for the coaches than it was for the players,” Buck said. “... Not having a lot of that (scouting) information, just film and a feel for what teams do and things like that, that just made it difficult.”

The Rebels have that this year, though, and the players Riverside does return will help keep it competitive.

Buck said a second year for the players “not in just our system but the six-man game will be a strength for us.”

Junior Ryan Vigil was Riverside’s most consistent offensive threat last year. He led Riverside in both rushing and receiving, catching 53 passes for 698 yards and 12 touchdowns and rushing 45 times for 288 yards and three more scores.

Senior Justen Miller returns as Riverside’s quarterback after throwing for 980 yards and 12 touchdowns and running for 227 yards and five more scores.

On defense, Miller is the only one of Riverside’s top three tacklers to come back this fall. He was second for Riverside a year ago in defensive points per game.

Vigil, meanwhile, was fourth, and junior Sterling Foss was sixth.

Sophomore Haden Duncan was an emerging playmaker last year, while junior Charles Ward added depth up front.

Riverside starts this season as it did last season: playing for the regular season. The postseason is out of reach again this year as the Rebels opt down to six-man from their assigned spot in 11-man.

Buck said the program would go back to 11-man “in a heartbeat” if the number of players was sufficient to sustain it.

“The way the numbers are looking, I don’t see that happening any time soon,” Buck said.

In the meantime, the program’s adjustments will keep them competitive and keep Riverside football alive.

Coach: Sam Buck, 5th year
2016 Record: 2-6, ineligible for playoffs

Key Players

QB/LB: Justen Miller, Sr.
RB/WR/DB: Ryan Vigil, Jr.
RB/DB: Sterling Foss, Jr.
WR/DB: Haden Duncan, So.

Mascot: Rebels

Division: 1A/6-man

Conference: West

Colors: Red and gray

2017 Schedule

8-26: at Kaycee jamboree, noon (Zero Week)
9-1: vs. NSI, 7 p.m.
*9-9: at Snake River, 1 p.m.
*9-15: at Dubois, 1 p.m.
*9-22: vs. Meeteetse, 7 p.m.
*9-29: at St. Stephens, 2 p.m.
*10-6: vs. Ten Sleep, 7 p.m.
*10-13: at Farson, 7 p.m.
*10-20: vs. Burlington, 7 p.m.
* Conference game

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Longhorns spread their attack

For several seasons, Meeteetse has relied on its quarterback for something special.

The offense ran through Dalton Abarr – or, before him, Seth Bennett – and the Longhorns succeeded in part because of those players’ individual talents.

This year, though, Meeteetse’s mentality has shifted.

The Longhorns don’t have an Abarr or a Bennett to put in the backfield, so instead they’ll rely on a balanced attack that doesn’t go through any one player.

Coach Matt Jensen said that change in approach has everyone excited, in part because everyone knows they will have the chance to contribute in new ways.

“We took more kids to camp this year than we ever have,” Jensen said. “They’re excited to do different things offensively and defensively.”

In 2016, Meeteetse advanced past the first round of the playoffs for the fifth consecutive year, but the season ended abruptly with a 56-21 loss to eventual state champion Kaycee in the semifinals.



To continue to repeat that success, Jensen said the Longhorns will need to embrace a blue-collar, hard-working mentality, something he’s already seen begin to flourish.

“It’s really just a combination of preparation and hard work,” Jensen said. “I’m really looking forward to this team because they’ve really embraced that and (are) wanting to get better.”

Such efforts start with senior Josh Graybill, Meeteetse’s lone returning all-state player. Graybill is Meeteetse’s leading returning receiver (19 catches, 312 yards, 6 TDs), leading returning rusher (31 carries for 281 yards) and leading returning tackler (a team-high 24.4 defensive ppg).

Senior Braenn Smith and junior Kirwin Johnson were all-conference selections last year; however, Johnson re-aggravated a leg injury

during summer camp, which may sideline him for the beginning of the season.

The receiving corps is deep. Meeteetse’s top four receivers -- Graybill, juniors Anthony Kluesner (12 catches, 296 yards), Clayton Corbin (18 catches, 224 yards) and Johnson (15 catches, 196 yards) – all return.

Jensen said Meeteetse might run some different looks to take advantage of the Longhorns’ bulk.

“We finally have some kids that have some size and some athletic abilities that can play an offensive line,” he said.

Defensively, Graybill leads a unit that returns three of its top four tacklers. Graybill led Meeteetse in solo tackles (51), assisted tackles (52), tackles for loss (8) and pass break-ups (6).

Smith was third and Corbin fourth for the Longhorns in defensive points a year ago, while Johnson was sixth.

Center Jack Fremlin, one of Meeteetse’s three anticipated seniors, adds depth to both the offensive and defensive lines.

Mascot: Longhorns
Division: 1A/6-man
Conference: West
Colors: Red and white
Coach: Matthew Jensen, 4th year
2016 Record: 8-3, lost to Kaycee in state semifinals

Key Players

RB/MLB: Josh Graybill, Sr.
WR/DL: Braenn Smith, Sr.
C/DL: Jack Fremlin, Sr.
WR/DB: Kirwin Johnson, Jr.

2017 Schedule

8-26: at Hulett, 2 p.m. (Zero Week)
9-2: vs. Rock River, 6 p.m.
*9-8: vs. Dubois, 6 p.m.
*9-16: vs. Snake River, 2 p.m.
*9-22: at Riverside, 7 p.m.
*9-29: at Burlington, 1 p.m.
*10-6: vs. Farson, 6 p.m.
*10-13: vs. Ten Sleep, 7 p.m.
*10-20: at St. Stephens, 2 p.m.
* Conference game

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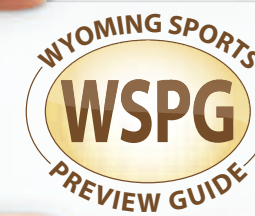
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Mascot: Rattlers
Division: 1A/6-man
Conference: West
Colors: Purple and yellow
Coach: Jack Cobb, 1st year at Snake River
2016 Record: 6-3, lost to Guernsey-Sunrise in state quarterfinals

2017 Schedule

9-3: at Lingle, 3 p.m.
 *9-9: vs. Riverside, 1 p.m.
 *9-16: at Meeteetse, 2 p.m.
 *9-22: vs. Dubois, 3 p.m.
 *9-30: at Ten Sleep, 2 p.m.
 *10-7: vs. St. Stephens, 2 p.m.
 *10-13: at Burlington, 1 p.m.
 *10-21: vs. Farson, 1 p.m.
 * Conference game

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New coach has familiarity

Normally, when a new coach takes over a program, a learning curve takes over as the players adjust to the coach and vice versa.

Don't count on that at Snake River this fall.

Jack Cobb takes over the program, but he's about as close to a program insider as there could be. He has been around Rattler football for eight seasons and coached most of this year's Rattlers when he was the junior high program's head coach.

"Before accepting the job, I met with the boys to get their thoughts and to see what their mindset was," Cobb said, "and after that meeting it was a very easy decision to become their head coach."

That smooth transition should keep the Rattlers in contention for a Class 1A six-man state title.

Last year's Snake River team lost in the quarterfinals. However, only one player graduated from that team, and a strong group of returners across classes will keep Snake River expectations high.

"We will have very strong senior leadership that will help our younger players develop more

Key Players

QB/LB: J.D. Corson, Sr.
RB/DB: Kameron Evans, Sr.
FB/DE: Trenton Jeannerett, Jr.
TE/DE: Thomas Duncan, Jr.

quickly this year," Cobb said.

The Rattlers return a two-time all-state selection in senior J.D. Corson and two all-conference selections in senior Kameron Evans and junior Thomas Duncan.

Corson threw for 1,853 yards, completing 121 of 176 passes for 19 touchdowns. He also ran for 603 yards and 11 scores. He also led Snake River in defensive points and was six-man's co-defensive player of the year last year.

But Snake River is far from a one-player show.

"He will be a big part of our team," Cobb said, "but we have other seniors that are ready to lead by example and juniors and sophomores that want to prove to the coaches that they belong in the starting lineup, and that makes me excited about our whole team."

Corson returns several receivers, including sophomore Rigen Myers (15 catches for 332 yards), senior Trenton Jeannerett (17 catches for 138 yards), Duncan (eight catches for 135 yards) and Evans (16 catches for 134 yards).

Evans led Snake River with 850 rushing yards and 14 touchdowns.

Defensively, the Rattlers' top four tacklers return. Corson led Snake River in defensive points last year, while Myers, Evans and Jeannerett filled out the top four spots, respectively. Evans had a team-high eight interceptions.

Senior Tyler Jensen and sophomore Oscar Herrera will also be key on defense.

As for players learning the style of the "new" coach? No problem.

"They know my expectations and I know theirs," he said. "... I was on the coaching staff when we brought back football to the valley after over 50 years of not having it and know first hand the competitive nature of this community."

Pioneers have a power approach

Big guys usually don't have much of a place on a six-man football field.

Unless they're at Ten Sleep.

Blessed with size but not much depth, new head coach Ross Hauptman said the Pioneers will rely on an 11-man approach centered on size for success in six-man.

Hauptman is taking his cues from his high school program in Highwood, Montana, a six-man Big Sky power.

"It was pure straight ahead, pound the ball, just go at them," Hauptmann said. The team was "not much for frills, just good technique, block and tackle. That's the mentality I'd like to bring."

Ten Sleep posted its third consecutive one-win season last year, with the only victory coming in the season opener against Hulett. The Pioneers went 0-7 in West Conference play and, aside from a 49-32 loss to St. Stephens, lost every conference game by at least 28 points.

However, most of last year's key contributors return. And on an anticipated roster that's only 10 deep, four players will be seniors



— a huge boon for a shallow program.

"There's never going to be much for depth in Ten Sleep, so you end up playing quite a few of the kids as freshmen," Hauptman said. "By the time they're seniors, they've seen a lot of football compared to some other schools."

Senior Corey Rice was Ten Sleep's lone all-conference selection last year. Fellow seniors Byron Powell and Zach Dorn were also key contributors to last year's squad.

Powell and Rice split time at quarterback and together, they were Ten Sleep's leading rushers and passers.

"I like the group of seniors," Hauptman said. "... They bring good leadership."

Sophomore Zane Taylor, meanwhile, was the team's center

last year and will anchor an offensive approach that will focus more on controlling the clock and the ball.

Ten Sleep has the size to do just that.

"We can use that to our advantage to our advantage on offense," Hauptman said.

Powell, Rice, Taylor and Dorn were all also critical pieces to Ten Sleep's defense last year, as was sophomore Will Loveland.

Hauptman said his defensive philosophy will be to create problems for opposing teams by forcing as many turnovers as possible.

"It's pretty easy to give up a lot of points in six-man, so if we can steal the ball a few times and control the ball on offense, that's going to be our thing," Hauptman said.

Hauptman, who was Ten Sleep's junior high coach last year, said the team has been receptive to his plans since taking over as head coach in June.

"They realize it's a lot of the kids' senior year and they realize it's their last chance to play football," he said.

Coach: Ross Hauptman, 1st year at Ten Sleep
2016 Record: 1-7, did not qualify for playoffs

Key Players

FB: Byron Powell, Sr.
C: Zane Taylor, Soph.
E: Zach Dorn, Sr.
QB: Corey Rice, Sr.

Mascot: Pioneers

Division: 1A/6-man

Conference: West

Colors: Red and blue

2017 Schedule

8-27: at Kaycee jamboree, noon (Zero Week)
 9-2: at Hulett, 2 p.m.
 *9-9: vs. St. Stephens, 2 p.m.
 *9-15: at Burlington, 3 p.m.
 *9-23: vs. Farson, 2 p.m.
 *9-30: vs. Snake River, 2 p.m.
 *10-6: at Riverside, 7 p.m.
 *10-13: at Meeteetse, 7 p.m.
 *10-21: vs. Dubois, 1 p.m.
 * Conference game

Mascot: Eagles
Division: Class 1A/6-man
Conference: West
Colors: Red and black
Coach: Lyle Valdez, 3rd year at St. Stephens
2016 Record: 2-6, did not qualify for playoffs

2017 Schedule

9-1: at Hanna, noon
 *9-9: at Ten Sleep, 2 p.m.
 *9-14: at Farson, 7 p.m.
 *9-22: vs. Burlington, 2 p.m.
 *9-29: vs. Riverside, 2 p.m.
 *10-7: at Snake River, 2 p.m.
 *10-14: at Dubois, noon
 *10-20: vs. Meeteetse, 2 p.m.
 * Conference game

Eagles continue to build program

St. Stephens football isn't what it used to be.

Slowly but surely, the program is growing in ways needed simply to be on par with the rest of the state.

Coach Lyle Valdez said several small changes have given his players pride and confidence. For example, the Eagles got travel bags last season, something the program hadn't had before; they also got Gatorade to donate water jugs, drinks and nutrition bars; new uniforms are coming in this year; and fundraising is in progress for a crow's nest and permanent restroom facilities at St. Stephens' field.

The incremental gains made with Valdez showed on the field last year.

After three consecutive winless seasons, the Eagles won their first two games of the sea-

Key Players

WR: Thomas Moss, Sr.
QB: Brian Williams, Jr.
FB: Roberto Hernandez, Jr.
WR: Kale Ferris, Jr.

son — 43-18 against Rock River and 49-32 against Ten Sleep. After that, though, the Eagles struggled, losing their final six games by a combined 442-28; the closest game was 53-0.

But with the incremental gains, Valdez said, comes an enthusiasm for football that St. Stephens hasn't seen since it brought back football to the varsity level in 2013.

"The community, they're behind me," Valdez said. "They're backing me up."

With renewed passion, this could be the Eagles' break-

through year: they didn't lose a single player to graduation.

The strength of the team is in its juniors, as a bevy of players — Brian Williams, Roberto Hernandez, Be'eno Bell, Vincent Brown, Kale Ferris, Ward Spoonhunter and Winter Hawk Felter among them — will carry the load this fall.

Williams ran the quarterback position last year, while Ferris and Brown were top receiving targets and Bell and Hernandez were St. Stephens' top rushing options.

Senior Thomas Moss and sophomores Hunter Washakie, Little Sun Felter and David Dewey could also contribute on a roster that may top 25 at the start of the season.

"We're pretty good on offense," Valdez said. "Our offense can score. Mostly this coming year, what we're going

"Our offense can score. Mostly this coming year, what we're going to be working on is defense and attacking."

~ Coach Lyle Valdez

to be working on is defense and attacking."

Valdez said the Eagles are still developing the fundamentals of wrapping up and of gang tackling. Most of the players didn't play much in junior high; a co-op with Wyoming Indian and Arapahoe at the junior-high level is still relatively new, Valdez said, and likely won't pay dividends for the Eagles on the varsity level for another year

or two.

"We've still got the notion that arm tackling is good," Valdez said. "... If we're going to be in there, we've got to start wrapping up and holding on."

With the program growing in myriad ways, the Eagles' confidence is high. And their goal is the program's first postseason berth at the six-man level.

"That's what the boys want," Valdez said.



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