

THE ALBANY HERALD'S HIGH SCHOOL PREVIEW FOOTBALL SEASON



Kickoff

STORIES YOU'LL FIND INSIDE

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high school sports

Monroe looks for trench toughness, red zone answers in 2025 playoff push

By Joe Whitfield
Sports Editor

ALBANY — The 2024 record reads 3-8, but don't let that fool you.

Inside the Monroe High locker room, last year's season wasn't a disappointment — it was a stepping stone.

"We made the playoffs again," said head coach Lacey Herring, entering his third season at the helm. "That tells me there's something here to build on."

With an experienced defense, a pair of promising backs, and a fortified offensive line, Monroe is setting its sights on more than just another postseason appearance. The Golden Tornadoes want to win Region 1-AAA and make a real playoff run.



The Monroe Golden Tornadoes 2025 Football Team

But Herring is clear-eyed about what it takes to get there.

"We can match up skill-for-skill with just about anybody," he said. "It's in the trenches where we've got to take that next step."

To speed that growth, Herring built a front-loaded schedule loaded with powerhouse programs — including Thomas County Central, Colquitt County, and Dothan — before region play begins.

"We've got to see how we stack up at game speed," Herring said. "Expose our guys to top-end competition and let them adjust. That's the best way to grow."

QB competition and new faces

The Golden Tornadoes welcomed two quarterback transfers — Keyon Thomas and Jordan Shorter, both from rival Westover — giving Monroe immediate depth and experience under center. Thomas is expected to start, but Monroe has also developed rising sophomores Aiden Mathis and Brandon Massey.

"Mathis understands the system and gives us more in

the run game," Herring said. "Massey has a real arm and can spread it around. We'll go with whoever gives us the best chance to win."

In the backfield, Herring has high hopes for sophomore duo Ethan Aubrey and Justin Grice, calling them a "one-two punch" that can keep defenses off balance. Aubrey brings burst and vision; Grice delivers power and elusiveness.

Cleaning up the red zone

If there's one stat that kept Monroe from flipping last year's close losses into wins, it's red-zone scoring.

"We had four trips inside the 10 against Westover and came away with zero points," Herring said. "That's the difference between 3-8 and 6-5. We've made that a point of emphasis all summer."

Defense leads the way

Monroe's defense — the team's most experienced unit — could be the foundation for a strong start.

Senior Talaun Jones headlines a talented secondary, joined by Division I prospect Eric Spann. Up front, Rah-

shekie Molden and Raymond Thompson give the Golden Tornadoes a pair of physical, fast-moving linemen. Thompson, a Troy University commit, anchors the unit with leadership and grit.

"Defense has to set the tone for us," Herring said. "It's where most of our experience and leadership is."

Linebacker Devonte Jones adds size and speed to the middle, and freshman Robert Adams has turned heads with his relentless motor.

Meanwhile, Monroe's offensive line — once filled with sophomores — returns four starters. After another off-season in the weight room, Herring says they're stronger, more confident, and ready to run the football.

Special teams could swing games

Junior kicker Josh Martinez returns for his third season, and Monroe is placing a renewed focus on special teams.

"They've got to help win field position, steal points, give us a spark — something," Herring said. "Special teams matter."

The mission is clear

"We're focused on winning the region and making a deep playoff run," Herring said. "We feel confident in our guys. We've worked for it all summer. Now it's time to take it snap by snap."



TALAUN JONES

Staff Photo: Joe Whitfield

Fantastic Fifteen Monroe's Talaun Jones is a lockdown defender — and now a college commit

By Joe Whitfield
Sports Editor

ALBANY — Talaun Jones has spent most of his high school football career shutting down one side of the field. Now, the Monroe senior cornerback knows exactly where he'll be playing next fall.

Jones, a 6-foot-2, 175-pound two-way standout for the Golden Tornadoes, recently committed to Southeastern Missouri State. He made the decision after a summer visit that left a lasting impression.

"It felt like a real brotherhood — great culture and a great environment," Jones said. "It just felt right."

Jones enters his senior season as one of the most accomplished returning defensive backs in southwest Georgia. He earned All-State and All-Region honors last year after recording seven interceptions, and he's aiming to top that this fall — though he knows opposing quarterbacks might think twice before throwing in his direction.

"My goal is nine picks," Jones said. "But I know teams are going to look the other way, so I may not get the chances."

He's still preparing like a player who expects the ball to

come his way. Jones focused this off-season on speed, strength and technique, specifically improving how quickly he comes out of breaks and how well he tracks the ball in the air.

"I've worked to get faster and to be more explosive when the ball is in the air," he said.

Monroe head coach Lacey Herring says Jones' physicality and awareness set him apart from most high school corners.

"TJ is one of those kids that's just naturally skilled," Herring said. "He has great hand-eye coordination, and he's very physical at the defensive back position. That makes receivers nervous."

Jones also plays wide receiver and returns kicks, and Herring said his ability to score from anywhere makes him an all-around threat.

"He's a guy I can play anywhere on the field," Herring said. "And he can lock down an entire side of it."

Jones' uncle, Brenden Kimble, now Monroe's defensive coordinator, played college football at Albany State. That early exposure made a lasting impact.

"I used to run up and down

See **JONES**, 3B

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Fantastic Fifteen Quiet leader, big goals: Eric Spann anchors Monroe's secondary

By Joe Whitfield
Sports Editor

ALBANY — When Eric Spann says he wants to "get my mama out of the hood," it doesn't come across as a dramatic line. It's not loud. It's not meant for headlines.

It's just real.

"I just want to be great," Spann said quietly after a recent Monroe workout, sweat still dripping from his face. "And get my mama out of the hood."

That's the kind of focus Spann brings to everything he does — on the football field, in the weight room, and even on the track. He's a junior now, a long-limbed defensive back for the Monroe Golden Tornadoes. At 6-foot-2 and 160 pounds, he's still filling out. But his speed is already elite, and his instincts are hard to teach.

"He's always where he's supposed to be," Monroe head coach Lacey Herring said. "He's not loud, but he leads by example. He does it right — in the classroom, in the weight room, and on the field. He's the kind of kid colleges are looking for."

Spann has already caught the attention of a few programs, with Georgia State currently holding his strongest interest. That's a long way from where he started. He didn't even take football seriously until he got to Monroe. Now? He's chasing something bigger.



ERIC SPANN

Staff Photo: Joe Whitfield

Spann doesn't talk much about himself. Ask about interceptions — he'd like to snag five or six this season — and he's quick to turn the conversation toward team goals.

"We're not going to give up," he said. "We're going to keep pushing to get better every time."

That mindset will be tested early. Monroe's opening stretch might be the toughest in the state: Thomas County Central, Colquitt County, and Dothan. All three are playoff-caliber teams with serious size and speed.

But if anyone is ready for it, it's Spann. He's already been sharpening his technique, trying to eliminate mental mistakes and tighten his cover-

age reads. For him, it's about being in the right place at the right time — something he's already shown a knack for.

Spann's discipline also shows up in spring. He's a track standout, running the 200m, 400m, and relays for Monroe's track team. It's another place where he leads without saying much — and where his long stride and quiet toughness stand out.

"He's got length, he's got speed, and he's got a great attitude," Herring said. "I'm expecting big things from Eric this year."

The stakes are high. Spann isn't just chasing wins or scholarship offers. He's chasing opportunity. He's chasing a

See **SPANN**, 5B



Staff Photo: Joe Whitfield

The Lee County Trojans are expecting another big season led by, from left, Lasiah Jackson, Jaden Upshaw, Gregory Batson, and Dominique Ball.

Loaded defense has Lee County eyeing big season despite offensive turnover

By Joe Whitfield
Sports Editor

LEESBURG — Lee County’s defense opened the season by holding defending Class AA champion and No. 1-ranked Carver to minus-18 yards Friday night, a statement that the Trojans plan to win big with defense in 2025.

The Tigers, with 12 starters back from last year’s title team, managed just one big play against a swarming Trojan defense that recorded 10 sacks in a 21-7 preseason victory.

The performance reinforced what many around the program

believe — that this year’s team will be defined by its defense. The unit is stocked with proven playmakers, including linemen Martin Atkins and Gregory Batson, linebacker Jaylon Carolina, a transfer from Monroe, and secondary standouts Stanford commit Lasiah Jackson, Trey Bush and Kenauri Floyd.

The defensive dominance is a big reason Lee County begins the season ranked No. 8 nationally in the High School Football America Top 25 and No. 5 in the AJC’s Class 5A preseason poll.

Many expected 2025 to be a

rebuilding year after the graduation of record-setting quarterback Weston Bryan and Florida State signee Ousmane Kromah, the most prolific running back in school history. But Lee County’s defensive firepower — coupled with head coach Dean Fabrizio’s track record of keeping the Trojans among Georgia’s elite — has kept expectations high.

Now in his 17th season, Fabrizio has led Lee to five semifinals and two state championships.

“We lost some great players and leaders off last year’s team,”

Fabrizio said. “But replacing great players is something we have had to do on a yearly basis here. We have some good returning experience and a lot of kids eager to make a name for themselves.”

The offense is younger but not without weapons. Senior running backs Canton Williams and J.R. Walker return, joined by Westover transfer Dominique Ball. The quarterback job belongs to Marcus Snipes Jr., a transfer from Albany, N.Y., who threw a touchdown pass to Carter Blackwell in the second half against Carver.

“Our region will be one of, if not the toughest, in the state again this season,” Fabrizio said. “We’re going to have to



Staff Photo: Joe Whitfield

Lee County senior Canton Williams will lead the Trojan backfield this season after rushing for more than 700 yards as the No. 2 back behind Ousmane Kromah who is now at Florida State. Williams put the Trojans on the board first with a 51-yard run Friday night in a scrimmage against Carver of Columbus.

stay focused and take it one game at a time.”

Region rival Thomas County Central is ranked just ahead of the Trojans at number four in the preseason poll, Coffee is ranked eighth, with Houston County ninth.

The Trojans open the season Friday night at No. 9 (Class 4A) Warner Robins and will host Hapeville Charter in their home opener on Aug. 22.

From 2B JONES

that hill at the ASU Coliseum when I was little,” Jones said. “Watching my uncle, I knew I wanted to be like him and play college football one day.”

Now, that day is coming. But first, there’s one more season to play. And Jones has goals to check off.

“I want to be All-State again. All-Region again. And help our team go deep in the playoffs,” he said. “I’ve been working for it. Now it’s time to go do it.”



Staff Photo: Joe Whitfield

The Lee County Trojan defense will be the catalyst for Trojan victories early. A stacked defense led by Lasiah Jackson, Martin Atkins, Gregory Batson, Jaylon Carolina, and Trey Bush held the defending state champion Carver Tigtets to -18 yards in recent scrimmage.

Fantastic Fifteen Gregory Batson ready to lead Trojan defense

By Joe Whitfield
Sports Editor

LEESBURG — At six years old, Gregory Batson signed up for rec football in Lee County because it looked like fun. It didn’t take long for his father to recognize there was more than just a game unfolding.

“He saw I had something,” Batson said. “He told me, ‘If you’re going to do this, do it all the way.’ So we started playing travel ball — more reps, more exposure, more competition.”

Now a junior linebacker and the leading returning tackler on one of Georgia’s premier high school defenses, Batson isn’t just playing football anymore. He’s chasing something bigger — for his team, his family, and for the name on the back of his jersey.

“I want to make my family proud,” Batson said. “I want to make a name for myself and put us in a better place. Football has given me that chance.”

Last season, Batson was the beating heart of a Lee County defense that powered the Trojans to a 13-1 record and a trip to the Class 6A semifinals, where they fell to eventual state champion Milton. That night stuck with him — not as a failure, but as fuel.

“We were close,” he said. “Now it’s about finishing. I want to lead this team to a state championship. That’s the goal.”

He means it. Everything about Batson’s offseason — from the weights to the film room to the locker room — has been aimed at raising the



Staff Photo: Joe Whitfield

GREGORY BATSON

bar. He’s already among the most heavily recruited juniors in the state, a four-star prospect according to 247sports.com. He holds offers from Florida, Florida State, Georgia Tech, Ole Miss, Oklahoma State and others.

But Batson isn’t in a hurry. “I’m focused on my team and this season,” he said. “We’ve got to stay hungry because there are a lot of eyes on us. We’ve got to continue to play physical Lee County football and not let there be any letdown.”

Lee County head coach Dean Fabrizio doesn’t worry much about Batson letting up.

“Gregory is relentless,” Fabrizio said. “He’s one of those kids who practices as hard as he plays. He leads by example, and now he’s learning how to lead with his voice, too. He’s always encouraging

guys to keep pushing — even when they’re tired or banged up. That’s what makes a great linebacker.”

Batson sees the bigger picture. Football, to him, isn’t just about winning games or getting offers — though he’s doing both. It’s about life.

“This game teaches you how to push through stuff, how to stay disciplined,” he said. “It teaches you how to be a man.”

This season, he’s working on refining his technique — hand placement, footwork, recognition. He’s also working on his communication — calling out adjustments, helping teammates line up, and keeping the unit tight.

Away from football, Batson keeps things simple. He’s either working, watching film, or spending time with his family.

See **BATSON**, 5B

2025 Lee County Football Schedule



Aug. 15 — at Warner Robins, 7:30 p.m.
Aug. 22 — Hapeville Charter, 7:30 p.m.
Aug. 29 — Tift County, 7:30 p.m.
Sept. 12 — Colquitt County, 7:30 p.m.
Sept. 19 — NFEI, 7:30 p.m.

Sept. 26 — at Thomas County Central, 7:30 p.m.
Oct. 3 — at Coffee, 7:30 p.m.
Oct. 17 — Veterans, 7:30 p.m.
Oct. 24 — Northside (WR), 7:30 p.m.
Oct. 31 — at Houston County, 7:30 p.m.

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KYSON MALLARD

Staff Photo: Joe Whitfield

Fantastic Fifteen Kyson Mallard brings power, leadership to Patriots' trenches

By Joe Whitfield
Sports Editor

ALBANY — The first time Kyson Mallard stepped onto a football field as a ninth grader, he didn't know what to expect. New to the game and still learning how to move his 6-foot-6 frame, Mallard was raw — but impossible to ignore.

By his sophomore year, college coaches weren't ignoring him either.

"I knew I must be pretty good when I got my first offer — from Colorado State," Mallard said. "That's when it got real."

Now a junior at Westover High School, Mallard is one of the most coveted offensive linemen in the state. At 6-foot-6 and 300 pounds, the rising junior is rated a four-star prospect by 247Sports and ranked No. 31 in Georgia's Class of 2027. He holds more than 15 Division I offers, including Georgia, Florida,

Florida State, Ole Miss, and South Carolina.

But for Mallard, football isn't just about scholarships or stars.

"My goal is to get my family in a better place," he said. "That's what keeps me working."

Mallard is the son of Kayla and Bennie Mallard and says his motivation comes from wanting to change the course of life for those around him. His powerful story has mirrored his play — determined, physical, and rising fast.

On the field, Mallard is a force in the trenches. With long arms, powerful hands, and surprising quickness for his size, he anchors the Patriots' line with a blend of size and technique that has drawn the attention of SEC coaches across the South. He helped lead a Westover offensive line that powered a 9-0 start last season, protecting future Pitt

See **MALLARD**, 5B

Westover reloads with new quarterback, experienced defense

By Joe Whitfield
Sports Editor

ALBANY — Westover's new quarterback wasted no time making an impression.

In last week's scrimmage against Dooly County, junior Jayshaun Bobb completed 7 of 11 passes despite three drops from young receivers, threw two touchdowns, and broke free for a 40-yard score on a zone read. It was the kind of debut that had Head Coach Corey Joyner grinning about what's possible this fall.

"Jayshaun has a lot of great skills at the quarterback position," Joyner said. "We feel great about our opportunities with him as quarterback."

Bobb steps in for a Patriots team coming off a 9-0 start last season in Joyner's first year — a run that packed Hugh Mills Stadium on Friday nights and sent nine seniors on to play college football. The headliners from that breakthrough season are gone, but the expecta-

tions aren't.

If the offense is still finding its identity, the defense is already a known force. Leading tacklers Jordan Lassiter and Christian Nix return, joined by Morgan Williams, Randy McAfee, and Jaylen Tate in the secondary. Up front, William Owens and Jabari Watson anchor a physical front line.

"The majority of our defense is back," Joyner said. "We'll be really good on defense, and we'll have explosiveness."

That explosiveness will have to hold up against a region schedule featuring two preseason top-10 opponents — No. 5 Peach County and No. 10 Cairo — along with tough matchups against Bainbridge, Monroe, and Dougherty.

Joyner's approach from last year won't change.

"One game at a time — we didn't look ahead last year," he said. "We competed and put ourselves in the best position every week. It's differ-

ent every year, but we will be ready to play football."

The new look starts up front, where 6-foot-6, 300-pound Kyson Mallard — one of the state's top junior prospects — and senior Corey Porter (5-11, 260) will anchor the offensive line. Senior Saylor Edwards takes over at running back, giving the Patriots a balanced attack to complement Bobb's arm and legs.

"We will miss the offensive line guys that were the anchor of our team," Joyner said. "But this team knows the expectations and the excellence that we showed last year. The guys have responded very well."

Westover opens Friday night at home against Early County — the first of seven games they'll play in the friendly confines of Hugh Mills Stadium.

"We know what it takes," Joyner said. "If we stay healthy and keep building, we can be playing our best football in November."



2025 Westover Football Schedule

Aug. 15 — Early County (Hugh Mills Stadium), 7:30 p.m.

Aug. 22 — @ Bradwell Institute, 7:30 p.m.

Aug. 29 — Westside (Macon) (Hugh Mills Stadium), 7:30 p.m.

Sept. 12 — Griffin (Hugh Mills Stadium), 7:30 p.m.

Sept. 19 — @ Jackson, 7:30 p.m.

Sept. 25 — Peach County (Hugh Mills Stadium), 7:30 p.m.

Oct. 3 — Bainbridge (Hugh Mills Stadium), 7:30 p.m.

Oct. 17 — Monroe (Hugh Mills Stadium), 7:30 p.m.

Oct. 24 — Dougherty (Hugh Mills Stadium), 7:30 p.m.

Oct. 31 — @ Cairo, 7:30 p.m.



Westover Patriots 2025 Football Team

Special Photo: Westover High School

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Fantastic Fifteen

Heart of the Patriots: Christian Nix leads Westover’s rise



CHRISTIAN NIX
Staff Photo: Joe Whitfield

By Joe Whitfield
Sports Editor

ALBANY — Before Christian Nix became the heart of the Westover Patriots, he was a four-year-old kid in oversized pads, taking handoffs from a man he still calls his hero—his father.

“That’s where it all started,” Nix said. “He coached me from day one and taught me what it meant to really love football.”

That early start shaped more than just a player. It helped shape a leader—and few understand that better than Westover head coach Corey Joyner.

“Christian is one of the heartbeats of our team,” Joyner said. “He is our spiritual leader, weight room leader, and conditioning leader. He is a great young man.”

Last fall, Nix led Westover with 76 tackles, including eight for loss and two sacks. This season, he’ll be even busier—returning as a senior linebacker and adding running back duties to his résumé. The added responsibility suits him just fine.

“I want to be Region Player of the Year,” Nix said. “I’m going both ways, and I’ve been working hard on mastering the ability to focus on the little things and still keep my intensity. That’s what separates great players from good ones.”

Nix doesn’t make those goals sound like boasts. Instead, they land like promises—from a young man who understands what he represents, not just to his team but to his family and community.

One of his favorite football memories? Last season’s 18-14 win over Cairo—a gritty victory that, in his words, “changed the narrative.”

“People thought Westover couldn’t have a winning team,” he said. “We proved we could. Celebrating with my teammates after that game—that was unforgettable.”

There’s pride in his voice, but it never drifts into selfishness. For Nix, football is about more than stats or headlines. It’s about impact—especially off the field.

He hopes to play Division I football and study constructional engineering. The dream is to make life better for

his family, especially his mother, who holds four degrees but still carries student loan debt.

“I want to take care of her,” Nix said. “She’s done so much for me.”

Ask him his favorite subject, and it’s not what you’d expect from a hard-hitting linebacker. “American history,” he says with a grin. “I love digging into the thoughts of people from the past and learning from their mistakes. It’s interesting to see how people went and conquered places way before me.”

But now, it’s Christian Nix who’s out conquering—on the practice field, in the classroom, and in the weight room, where Coach Joyner says his presence sets the tone for everyone else.

“Every person out here is going 100 percent,” Nix said. “We’re doing the work. I believe in these guys. We have a real opportunity to do something special this year.”

Westover football is no longer a story of what might be. With Nix leading the way, it’s becoming a story of what’s possible.

Fantastic Fifteen

Lassiter’s leadership fuels Patriots’ region title hopes

By Joe Whitfield
Sports Editor

ALBANY – Jordan Lassiter didn’t grow up playing football.

He didn’t wear youth league pads or score touchdowns in pee-wee games.

In fact, he didn’t start playing until his freshman year at Westover High. Four years later, he leads one of the best defenses in southwest Georgia.

Lassiter, a 5-foot-10, 210-pound senior linebacker, is the heart of the Westover Patriots defense and the team’s top returning tackler. He posted 103 stops last season and enters 2025 as one of the most respected defensive players in Region 1-AAA.

Now, he’s focused on being more than just productive. He wants to lead.

“My goal is to help us win the region and go deep in the playoffs,” Lassiter said.

“We’ve been working this summer to get everybody on the same page. We’ve got good chemistry. I want to help make sure everybody plays together.”

That mindset has earned praise from head coach Corey Joyner, who sees Las-

siter as one of the team’s most dependable voices in the huddle — and one of the most physical players on the field.

“He’s a leader by example,” Joyner said. “You don’t have to ask him twice. He’s always locked in, and his teammates follow that.”

Though relatively new to the sport compared to most top defenders, Lassiter has made a rapid rise. His instincts, toughness, and ability to shed blocks make him a natural in the middle of the field.

His favorite football memory came as a sophomore — a reminder of how far he’s come and how fast. “I’ll never forget that game,” he said.

“I chased a guy down from behind, knocked the ball out, and then picked it up and ran it back 30 yards. But what made it special was the seniors on that team. They were leaders and role models. They made it fun. That whole season was my favorite.”

Now, it’s Lassiter’s turn to be that senior. He’s already leading film sessions, keeping the linebackers organized, and making sure effort stays high during team workouts. He said

one of the biggest keys to Westover’s success this season will be alignment — not just physically, but mentally.

“If everybody’s lined up right and knows their role, we’re going to be hard to beat,” Lassiter said. “We’ve got guys who can hit, who can fly around. We’ve just got to be disciplined.”

Off the field, Lassiter excels in the classroom, too. His favorite subject is math, and he plans to study construction engineering in college — a fitting choice for a young man who builds defenses and future plans with the same steady hand.

“I like problem-solving and building things,” he said. “It makes sense to me, just like reading the field.”

Lassiter will be a major reason Westover remains a contender this fall. And if the Patriots do break through and win their first region title since 2005, don’t be surprised if No. 4 is in the middle of it — wrapping up ball carriers, calling out signals, and making up for all the time he didn’t have before ninth grade.

He might’ve been late to the game. But now, Jordan Lassiter is right on time.



JORDAN LASSITER
Staff Photo: Joe Whitfield

Fantastic Fifteen

Dominique Ball - working to prove them wrong



DOMINIQUE BALL
Staff Photo: Joe Whitfield

By Joe Whitfield
Sports Editor

LEESBURG – Dominique Ball doesn’t need a spotlight. He just needs the football.

The 5-foot-8, 190-pound junior running back quietly became one of the most productive players in Georgia last fall, racking up more than 1,900 rushing yards and leading all of Class AAA in scoring while helping Westover to a 9-2 record.

Now he’s back where his football journey started — at Lee County — and he’s not concerned with the opinions that followed him down Highway 19.

“People are going to talk,” Ball said. “But I’m out here working to prove them wrong.”

Ball transferred to Lee County over the summer in what became one of the most talked-about moves in Southwest Georgia. The decision wasn’t about playing time or exposure. It was personal.

“It was for my sister,” Ball said. “It was about putting my family in a better situation. That’s what matters most.”

Lee County head coach Dean Fabrizio has known Ball since his days at Lee County Middle School West.

“I’ve been watching Dominique play since he was in middle school,” Fabrizio said. “He was a great player for us at Lee West, and he’s a great kid. He’s got strength, vision, and great acceleration. He’s going to add a lot to our team.”

He joins a Trojan backfield that may not have four-star Ousmane Kromah anymore — the four-year starter is now at Florida State — but it’s still loaded. Canton Williams, who rushed for over 700 yards and 10 touchdowns in 2024, is back, along with Jordan Bush and JR Walker.

That kind of competition doesn’t bother Ball. It motivates him.

“I want to be consistent,” Ball said. “I want to put up the same kind of numbers I did last year, or even more. But most of all, I want to win.”

To do that, he’s focused on learning the Trojans’ system — the playbook, the reads, the tempo. He’s working on improving his vision and his burst through the hole.

“The biggest difference here is the speed of the game,” Ball said. “There’s more energy, more urgency. You feel it in every drill, every rep. That pushes me to keep getting better.”

Ball is also a standout baseball player and plans to compete on the diamond for Lee County this spring. He hopes to play both sports at the college level.

For now, he’s focused on making an immediate impact in a program that expects to contend for another deep playoff run.

Ball models his game after Philadelphia Eagles running back Saquon Barkley — a blend of power, agility, and open-field creativity. And while he’s not chasing comparisons, Ball knows the standard he’s chasing.

“I try to stay humble and encourage my teammates,” he said. “I play this game to help my family and represent my school the right way.”

Ball is the son of Heaven Ball and Ezekiel Knowles. He may have changed uniforms, but his purpose — and his potential — remain the same.

From 2B
SPANN

future — and trying to rewrite the story for the person who’s been with him every step of the way. His mother, Johnny Russ, is never far from his thoughts.

“That’s who I do it for,” he said. “She’s my reason.”

He doesn’t say it loud. But he means every word.

Monroe opens the 2025 season on Aug. 15 at Thomas County Central. Spann will be there, likely quiet as always — until the ball is in the air. Then he speaks the way he knows best.

From 3B
BATSON

“Not much else,” he said with a laugh. “Football keeps me busy.”

It’s the kind of answer you’d expect from a young man who knows exactly what he wants — and what it takes to get there.

For now, Batson’s only deadline is the one set by the scoreboard each Friday night. A college decision? That can wait.

“Next June or July,” he said. “Right now, it’s about Lee County.”

And leading them — as always — from the middle of it all.

From 4B
MALLARD

signee Torian Chester and several other seniors who have since moved on.

Now, Mallard is stepping into a leadership role, anchoring a younger line with a new quarterback behind him.

“I’m trying to help my teammates understand that you have to go as hard as you can every time the ball is snapped,” he said. “We’ve got a new quarterback, and I think we can make it to state, but only if we play with the same intensity we did last year.”

Mallard credits head coach Corey Joyner for raising the standard at Westover and

weightlifting coach Coach Bryant for establishing a mindset that fuels the team’s physical edge.

“When Coach Joyner came in, everything changed,” Mallard said. “Now it’s about giving 100 percent, whether it’s a game or a Tuesday practice. And in the weight room, that’s where the mindset really starts.”

Off the field, Mallard enjoys history and economics and plans to major in business in college. But first, he’s focused on this season — leading by example and helping Westover chase a deeper playoff run.

“I want to bring attention to my team and my city,” he said. “This is bigger than just me.”

SEASON PREVIEW:

Dougherty Trojans reaching for Region title in 2025

By Joe Whitfield
Sports Editor

ALBANY — Uyl Joyner still remembers what it felt like to lead Dougherty to a state championship as the Trojans’ quarterback in 1998. Now, 27 years later, he’s entering his



2025 Dougherty Football Schedule

August 14 @ Central Macon 4:00
August 22 Toombs County - Hugh Mills Stadium - 7:30
August 29 @ Valdosta - 8:00
September 5 @ Harris County - 7:30
September 12 @ Crisp County - 7:30
September 26 Monroe - Hugh Mills Stadium - 7:30
October 3 @ Peach County - 7:30
October 16 Cairo - Hugh Mills Stadium - 7:30
October 24 Westover - Hugh Mills Stadium - 7:30
October 31 Bainbridge - Hugh Mills Stadium - 7:30

third season as head coach at his alma mater, and this time, he’s coaching a team that includes his own son under center.

Freshman Micah Joyner is one of several young standouts giving the Trojans new life after back-to-back difficult seasons. And if you ask Coach Joyner, this isn’t just a team looking to improve, it’s a team quietly setting its sights on a region title.

“These kids aren’t OK with just trying to make the playoffs,” Joyner said. “They want to win the region. Now the coaches are talking about championships, too, because that’s what (the players are) talking about.”

Dougherty finished 2-8 last season and went winless in Region 1-AAA, but Joyner said he believes the program has turned a corner. A large group of talented freshmen from Albany Middle has raised the bar across the board.

“We don’t have to play freshmen,” he said. “But they’re making us because they’re that good. They’ve come in hungry and competitive.”

The Trojans lost nine seniors to graduation, including seven who signed to play college football. Five more starters transferred: two to Colquitt County and three to Lee County. Joyner doesn’t dwell on it.

“Kids think the grass is greener,” he said. “But that helicopter that lands in Leesburg? It



Special Photo: Dougherty High School

The Dougherty Trojans are working to break through to the state playoffs and beyond this season. The Trojans opened Thursday afternoon in Macon and will host Toombs County Friday night at Hugh Mills Stadium.

lands in Albany, too. I focus on getting the next guy ready.”

Defensively, Joyner said he believes his team is starting to resemble the old-school Trojans — aggressive, fast, and physical. Despite losing standout linebacker Jaquavus Hallman (Texas Southern), Dougherty returns leading tackler Trevon Williams, who will play on both sides of the ball.

“Trevon’s a difference-maker,” Joyner said. “He’s one of our fastest backs and our de-

fensive anchor.”

Improving the running game has been a priority this off-season. Morris Hill will start at running back behind a developing offensive line coached by newcomer Cameron Hines. Two freshmen, Richard Washington and Amari Jones, are already contributing in the trenches.

“Coach Hines has brought toughness and unity to that group,” Joyner said. “Those freshmen are going to be special.”

At quarterback, senior David “Blue” Burgess returns as the leader but will also line up at wide receiver when Micah Joyner steps in. Burgess, a 6-foot-4 athlete with Division I interest, has helped mentor the younger Joyner.

“Blue and Micah have had a connection since Micah was in sixth grade playing basketball,” Coach Joyner said. “That chemistry is real, and it’s helping us grow.”

The Trojans must replace top receivers Braylen Still

(who graduated) and Antwann Lockett (transferred to Colquitt County), but junior Jeryn Smith has emerged as a key target and two-way contributor.

“Jeryn’s growth since the spring game has been amazing,” Joyner said. “He’s ready for a breakout.”

Dougherty opens the season Aug. 14 at Central Macon. Kickoff is at 4 p.m. The Trojans host Toombs County on Aug. 22 at Hugh Mills Stadium in their home opener.

Fantastic Fifteen

Dougherty’s David “Blue” Burgess ready to lead — and fly — as Trojans eye playoff run



Staff Photo: Joe Whitfield

DAVID BURGESS

By Joe Whitfield
Sports Editor

ALBANY — The quarterback position is often reserved for the loudest voice in the huddle, the fiery leader who commands attention. That’s not David Burgess.

Known to everyone at Dougherty High as “Blue,” the Trojans’ junior signal-caller does things a little differently. He leads not with volume, but with vision. Not with bravado, but with balance. And now, after two years of growth under the Friday night lights, Burgess is ready to take the next step — no matter where he lines up.

“I want to do whatever the team needs for us to be successful,” Burgess said, calmly but confidently. “If that means playing quarterback, receiver, whatever it takes — I’m good with it.”

At 6-foot-3 and 175 pounds, Burgess is a rare blend of size, speed and skill. He’s not just

one of the most athletic players in southwest Georgia, he’s one of the most respected. A two-sport standout who also stars for the Trojans’ basketball team, Burgess is one of the Albany Herald’s 2025 “Fantastic Fifteen,” a collection of the area’s top high school football players.

But before he was slinging spirals or throwing down dunks, Burgess was just a curious 6-year-old boy who saw a busload of football players roll through town — and knew instantly that he wanted to be one of them.

“I just told my mom I wanted to play,” Burgess said. “She was nervous about it. She didn’t want me to get hurt. But I begged her, and eventually she said yes.”

From there, it didn’t take long to find his true calling. One of his earliest and favorite memories came when a coach saw him throw a ball during practice and made a decision that would shape his future.

Fantastic Fifteen

Trojans’ Trevon Williams brings toughness, vision to both sides of the ball

By Joe Whitfield
Sports Editor

ALBANY — Trevon Williams doesn’t need a lot of words to explain why he plays football. The answer is simple: He wants a ring. And he wants Albany to know his name.

“My motivation is to win a state championship and bring some attention to my city,” Williams, a 5-foot-9, 185-pound two-way junior for the Dougherty Trojans, said. “That’s what I’m working for.”

Williams is next up in the Albany Herald’s Fantastic Fifteen, a spotlight on the area’s top high school football players for 2025. He’s one of the most versatile athletes in the region — a downhill middle linebacker on defense and a physical, north-south running back on offense.

“He’s the kind of player who sets the tone on both sides of the ball,” Dougherty Head Coach Uyl Joyner says of his athlete. “Trevon brings intensity to every rep. He doesn’t talk about it. He just does it.”

Williams began playing



Staff Photo: Joe Whitfield

TREVON WILLIAMS

football at age 5. He took a short break before returning to the field at 10 with the Wolverines youth program. He hasn’t looked back since.

Now entering his junior season, Williams says he’s focused on refining his craft.

“I’m working on reading my keys better on defense,” he said. “That’s what will help me take the next step.”

Williams is aiming for nine tackles per game this fall and says he believes it’s achiev-

able — if he can block out distractions.

“I’ve got to stay out of my head and not listen to the outside noise,” he said.

On offense, he’s just as driven. Dougherty’s running game struggled in 2024, but Williams says he believes that’s about to change.

“We have a new offensive line coach and some new guys up front,” he said. “They’re working really well together and giving us a chance

to run the ball. I think we’ll surprise people.”

The Trojans have depth at running back — four or five backs Williams says can make plays — but he’s setting a personal goal of 10 yards per carry.

For Williams, it’s all about execution and unity.

“We’ve got to work together and stay together,” he said. “If we do that, I think we can make it to 15 games.”

That’s not just a number. Fifteen games is a full post-season — all the way to the GHSA state championship.

Williams’ favorite memory from the sport goes back to where it all began. At age 5, he was playing running back when his coach pulled him aside.

“I was always juking,” Williams laughed. “Coach told me, ‘Just run the ball.’ He even talked to my dad about it. Next play, I ran it straight up the middle and scored. I guess I listened.”

Now, a decade later, Williams is still running — and leading — straight ahead. He hopes to play college football and major in physical education.

But first, there’s unfinished business at Dougherty.

“He said, ‘You don’t need to be a running back — you need to be our quarterback,’” Burgess recalled.

That moment stuck with him. And when star quarterback Kam Davis went down with an injury during the 2022 season, a freshman version of “Blue” was suddenly under center.

Thrown into the fire, he took his lumps. But last season, as a sophomore, he looked far more at home, reading defenses, delivering strikes, and growing into his frame. Now a junior, he’s poised to shine.

“This year is all about staying focused and keeping a posi-

tive mindset,” Burgess said. “If we do that, we can go far. We can make it to state. But it takes chemistry. It takes unselfishness. And we can’t let the outside noise get in our heads.”

That level-headed mindset is no surprise to those who know him. The nickname “Blue” came from his older sister after a family movie night watching Finding Nemo — she thought he reminded her of the lovable, loyal fish Dory, who just kept swimming.

He still does.

“He’s just the most respectful, humble kid,” Dougherty Coach Uyl Joyner said. “He’s

one of those you never have to worry about. Works hard, leads by example, and cares about his teammates.”

This season, Burgess will continue to start at quarterback but will also spend time at wide receiver. Joyner’s son, freshman Micah Joyner, has emerged as another capable option at QB, a development that gives Dougherty a unique two-quarterback dynamic. Burgess isn’t threatened. He’s energized.

With a personal goal of 2,500 passing yards and 800 receiving, Burgess is dreaming big, but he’s also thinking long-term. Off the field, he plans

to study engineering in college. On the field, he isn’t sure if he’ll choose football or basketball if both sports come calling.

“That would be a really hard decision,” he said with a grin. “But it would be a good one to have.”

For now, he’s focused on the here and now. The season opens Aug. 14 at Central Macon, and Burgess will be ready, whether he’s throwing the ball, catching it, or simply leading the way.

“I just want to help us win,” he said. “That’s all that matters.”



2025
Worth County
Football Schedule

Aug. 15 – Turner County, 7:30 p.m.
Aug. 22 – Irwin County, 7:30 p.m.
Aug. 29 – Dooly County, 7:30 p.m.
Sept. 5 – at Brooks County, 7:30 p.m.
Sept. 19 – Fitzgerald, 7:30 p.m.
Sept. 26 – at Brantley County, 7:30 p.m.
Oct. 3 – Thomasville, 7:30 p.m.
Oct. 10 – at Berrien, 7:30 p.m.
Oct. 17 – Bacon County, 7:30 p.m.
Oct. 24 – at Jeff Davis, 7:30 p.m.

Region Champs: No more surprise — Worth County hungry for state run

By Joe Whitfield
Sports Editor

SYLVESTER — Worth County is no longer chasing respect in Class A Division I. The Rams start the 2025 season with it — and a target on their backs.

Fresh off their first region championship since 1998, Worth County enters the season ranked No. 2 in the GHSF Daily preseason poll and boasts two preseason All-State selections. Junior quarterback Lyndon Worthy was named the best player in Class A Division I by Georgia High School Football Daily and leads the preseason All-State team. His top target, senior tight end Jayden Farley, also earned preseason All-State honors.

Worthy has the numbers to back the hype. As a sophomore, he passed for 3,408 yards and 37 touchdowns, showing a command of the passing game rare at the high school level. Farley, at 6-foot-1 and 180 pounds, caught 37

passes for 710 yards and nine touchdowns last year, creating matchup problems for defenses with his size, hands and athleticism.

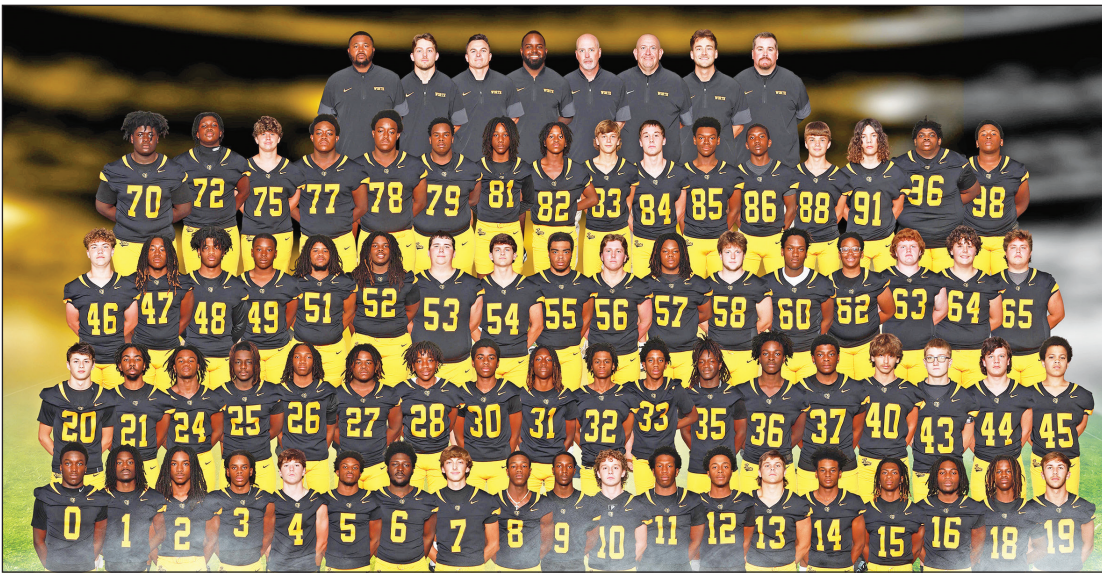
“Winning a region in South Georgia is extremely hard to do at any level,” head coach Jeff Hammond said. “I was proud for our team and our community. The players worked so hard to achieve that accomplishment.”

Now comes the bigger challenge: proving it wasn’t a one-year peak.

The Rams graduated a senior class full of three-year starters, including all-state linebacker Sherman Smith (South Alabama) and wide receiver D’Ontae Fulton (Georgia State). Hammond said the next wave of leaders has stepped in seamlessly.

“They’ve done an amazing job of leadership,” Hammond said. “We’ll need a few new starters to keep getting better.”

The offense remains loaded beyond Worthy and Farley. Senior running back Kaden



Special Photo

Worth County High School Rams 2025 varsity football team.

Chester piled up 1,150 rushing yards and 22 scores last season. Kalijah Thomas and Tre’Shaun Jones provide depth in the backfield, while the offensive line will break in three new starters.

Defensively, the line might be the surprise strength. Seniors King Toomer and Josh McGee lead a rotation deep enough to keep fresh bodies on the field for four quarters.

The Rams’ schedule leaves no room for complacency — opening at home against Turner County before hosting Irwin County, Fitzgerald and Thomasville. Road trips to Brooks County, Brantley County and Jeff Davis add more top-tier challenges.

“We won’t sneak up on anyone this year,” Hammond said. “Playing those opponents should prepare us for

playoff football.”

Worth County’s goals haven’t changed: make the playoffs, win the region, and win the state championship. Last season checked the first two boxes. The third would put the Rams in territory they’ve never reached.

“These players are hungry,” Hammond said. “They want to bring a state championship back to Worth County.”

Early mornings, loud practices: Baconton raising the bar



Special Photo

Baconton Community Charter School Blazer 2025 Football Team.

By Joe Whitfield
Sports Editor

BACONTON — The sound of cleats hitting the grass before sunrise. The clang of weights echoing through a quiet gym. The energy of teenage voices calling out assignments in crisp, confident rhythm.

These are the sounds of a football program waking up — not just early, but for real.

As Baconton Charter enters its third season under

head coach Jermaine King, there’s a noticeable shift — not in hype, but in heartbeat. What King hears now isn’t just hope. It’s belief.

“When you’ve got more than 40 boys showing up for a 6 a.m. workout in March,” King said, “you know something’s changing. That kind of commitment says everything.”

Last year’s 2-8 record didn’t capture the strides the Blazers were making behind the

scenes. This year, King says, the work is beginning to show.

The weight room hums with purpose, and practices now crackle with urgency and effort — the kind that only comes from ownership.

“They’re learning how to practice,” King said. “The energy is different. They’re stronger, they’re having fun, and they’re not missing workouts. That’s a big deal for a young program.”

There’s continuity, too. Every member of King’s coaching staff returns for 2025, providing the kind of structure that turns potential into progress.

“Having all our assistants back means we’re building off what we’ve started,” he said. “These kids know what’s expected now — and they’re responding.”

While Baconton will again compete in a non-region schedule, King said the groundwork is being laid for a future return to region play.

“We’re preparing for that,” he said. “Teaching them to play the right way, the smart way. This group is starting to get it.”

The offensive line — still young — is a particular point of emphasis.

“They’ve grown a lot,” King said. “They’re still learning, but you can see the physical changes and the confidence coming. That’s where games are won.”

At quarterback, the battle

is ongoing between junior Dane Frock and sophomore Kaden Logue, who continue to split reps. King says both are talented and competing hard, and a starter will emerge as camp unfolds.

Wide receiver is another position buzzing with competition, as several underclassmen push for playing time.

“We’ve got some young guys making plays,” King said. “It’s going to be exciting to see who steps up.”

The Blazers will open the season on the road Aug. 15 at Montgomery County, then return home for six games — including the Aug. 22 home opener against Atkinson County, which could give fans their first real look at this new-look Baconton team.

There’s still work to do. But if King’s gut is right, and the players keep buying in, those familiar Friday night lights may shine a little brighter in Baconton this fall — and the crowd may just feel a little louder.



Baconton
Charter Blazers
Schedule

Aug. 15 — @ Montgomery County, 7:00 p.m.
Aug. 22 — Atkinson County, 7:30 p.m.
Aug. 29 — Piedmont Academy, 7:30 p.m.
Sept. 12 — @ Mt. Zion, 7:30 p.m.
Sept. 19 — @ Aucilla Christian, 7:00 p.m.
Sept. 26 — Deerfield-Windsor, 7:30 p.m.
Oct. 3 — South Georgia STEM, 7:00 p.m.
Oct. 17 — @ Terrell Academy, 7:30 p.m.
Oct. 24 — Pataula Charter, 7:30 p.m.
Oct. 31 — Calhoun County, 7:30 p.m.

Fantastic Fifteen: Stanford commit Lasiah Jackson pushes for more

By Joe Whitfield
Sports Editor

LEESBURG — When Lasiah Jackson first stepped onto the football field, he was 10 years old, just back in Georgia and unsure of himself.

“I was the tallest kid out there, so they put me at tight end and defensive end,” Jackson said. “It was bad. I wasn’t making any tackles and couldn’t catch any passes.”

That was then. Now, Jackson is a 6-foot-3, 180-pound senior cornerback for Lee County High School — a Stanford commit, a quiet leader, and one of the most polished defensive backs in Georgia. He’s also a member of the Albany Herald’s Fantastic Fifteen, a recognition for the region’s top high school football players.

Jackson’s growth didn’t come through shortcuts or viral highlights. It came through deliberate work — and a mindset he’s carried ever since those early awkward practices.

“Nothing is going to be easy,” Jackson said. “You have to have the mindset that if you’re going to have the life you want, you have to wake up every morning, get out of bed, and go get it.”

Lee County head coach Dean Fabrizio has coached more than his share of elite players. Jackson, he says, is exceptional in every sense of the word.

“The thing about Lasiah is that he wants to be excellent

at everything he does,” Fabrizio said. “He is an excellent person, an excellent student, and an excellent athlete — and he gives his all in each of those areas.”

That pursuit of excellence shows on the field. Jackson stepped into the spotlight last season as a junior, helping the Trojans reach the Class 5A semifinals and finish 13-1. Lee County’s offense, with stars like Ousmane Kromah and Weston Bryan, drew most of the headlines. But Jackson and the defense quietly set the tone. In a key region win over Thomas County Central, Jackson broke up two deep passes in the final quarter to help seal a 35-23 victory.

“That’s when I really felt the work paying off,” he said. “It’s about being ready when the moment comes.” Now a senior, he’s focused on leading — not just by example, but with his voice. “Some people come to practice just to go to practice,” Jackson said. “But I want our younger guys to understand — you come to get better. I want to be the kind of leader that demands the best from everyone.”

He points to teammates like Martin Atkins, Greg Batson, and Trey Bush as part of a defensive unit that’s ready to dominate.

“We’ve got the pieces,” he said. “We just have to stay focused and do our job every rep.”

Off the field, Jackson plans to study sports medicine or sports



Staff photo: Joe Whitfield
LASIAH JACKSON

management at Stanford. His choice of school wasn’t just about football — it was about future. “Stanford just felt like home,” Jackson said. “It’s not just about football. It’s about building a life after football, and they’re one of the best in the world for that. And if the NFL wants me, they can find me at Stanford.”

At home, it’s his mother, Techelle Matthews, who drives his purpose.

“I always see my mom out helping people,” he said. “That’s made me want to help others too. I’m going to be good no matter what — but I want to be someone who helps people that need it. That’s not popular right now, but it’s important.”

It’s not the loudest message you’ll hear this preseason. But it might be the one that lasts the longest.

Fantastic Fifteen: Lee County’s Jaden Upshaw chasing greatness

By Joe Whitfield
Sports Editor

LEESBURG — Jaden Upshaw isn’t just chasing stats or scholarship offers. He’s chasing greatness.

The Lee County junior wide receiver, a 6-foot-2, 190-pound playmaker, is one of the most heavily recruited athletes in south-west Georgia. A four-star recruit on 247Sports.com, Upshaw already holds 22 Division I offers from national powerhouses like Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee, Auburn, Clemson, and South Carolina.

But for Upshaw, the focus right now isn’t on rankings or recruiting buzz — it’s on leading the Trojans to perfection.

“My goal is for us to be 15-0 with a state championship,” Upshaw said. “Personally, I want to get 1,200 receiving yards and 15 touchdowns, but it all starts with team success.”

That team-first attitude, combined with elite athleticism and a relentless work ethic, is what has made Upshaw one of the headliners on this year’s Fantastic Fifteen — a group of the Albany Herald’s top players to watch in 2025.

Upshaw’s football journey began at age 10 with the

South Georgia Wolverines youth program. He played middle school ball at Merry Acres before transferring to Lee County, where he’s emerged as one of the top wide receiver prospects in the state.

He models his game after legendary wideouts like Julio Jones and Jeremiah Smith — a blend of size, speed, and physicality with the hands and route-running to match.

“I’m working to become one of the greats,” Upshaw said. “That’s the standard I hold myself to.”

This season, the Trojans’ offense features several new faces, including at quarterback, but Upshaw isn’t worried. He’s taken it upon himself to help build chemistry with his teammates — on and off the field.

“We’ve been throwing after practice, before practice — just trying to build chemistry together,” he said. “We’re going to be working as a team, and I’m going to be encouraging each of our other players to make big plays.”

Lee County has a long tradition of explosive offenses and deep playoff runs, and Upshaw is poised to be the centerpiece of a new-look unit under head coach Dean Fabrizio. With his size, catch



Staff photo: Joe Whitfield
JADEN UPSHAW

radius, and ability to win contested balls, Upshaw will be a matchup nightmare for opposing defenses.

He already proved his ability to shine under the lights during the Trojans’ summer OTAs, making highlight-reel catches and consistently showing why so many college programs are lining up for his commitment.

But through it all, Upshaw remains grounded and driven.

“I love this game, and I love my team,” he said. “I want to win for them. I want to win for Lee County.”

That’s the kind of mindset that builds champions. And if Jaden Upshaw has his way, this fall could be one for the record books in Leesburg.



2025 Mitchell County Football Schedule

Aug. 15 — @ Lanier County, 7:30 p.m.
Aug. 22 — vs. Dooly County, 7:30 p.m.
Sept. 5 — @ Turner-County, 7:30 p.m.
Sept. 12 — vs. Clinch County, 7:30 p.m.
Sept. 18 — @ Randolph-Clay, 7:30 p.m.
Oct. 3 — vs. Terrell County, 7:30 p.m.
Oct. 10 — vs. Pelham, 7:30 p.m.
Oct. 17 — @ Miller County, 7:30 p.m.
Oct. 24 — @ Early County, 7:30 p.m.
Oct. 31 — vs. Seminole County, 7:30 p.m.

Mitchell County Eagles ready to soar in 2025

By Joe Whitfield
Sports Editor

CAMILLA — There’s no shortage of speed, strength, or swagger in Mitchell County’s 2025 football team. After finishing 9-3 last season and earning a top-10 state ranking in Class A Division II, the Eagles have raised expectations — and they’ve got the track medals to back it up.

Now, they’re chasing rings. “This senior class might be the most talented and hard-working group we’ve had since I returned,” said Head Coach Dondrial Pinkins. “But our success will depend on how well they lead. We have to be a player-led team.”

Pinkins knows what a winning team looks like. The former Mitchell County standout played running back at the University of South Carolina before returning to his alma mater to coach — a journey that also included a stint at arch-rival Pelham. Now in his fifth

season back at the helm in Camilla, Pinkins says this group might be the most promising he’s had since returning.

The leadership starts under center with senior quarterback Jonathan Isom, a poised dual-threat who also leads the Eagles’ secondary at free safety. Isom’s presence extends beyond football — he helped anchor the Eagles’ back-to-back state championship runs in track and field, adding explosiveness and big-game experience to his football résumé.

He’s not alone. Eight of Mitchell County’s top 10 returnees were key contributors on the state-winning track team, a reflection of the raw athleticism and discipline Pinkins says could make the difference this fall.

“Our boys had a tremendous spring and a great start to the off-season,” Pinkins said. “Now it’s about staying locked in and raising the bar.”

Pinkins isn’t one to schedule easy wins. The Eagles open



Mitchell County Eagles 2025 Football Team

Special Photo

with a demanding non-region schedule designed to prepare them for a challenging region slate. They’ll kick things off on the road at Lanier County on August 15, then return home to face Dooly County a week later.

“We talk about winning state,” Pinkins said, “but the focus is on winning the region first. That puts us in the best position for everything else.”

The roster is built for a run. Alongside Isom, the offense

features running back Marcus Vicks and a dangerous trio of receivers in Quinton McCraw, Darrius Robinson, and Jerran Grissom. The offensive line, anchored by Antiquon Bell, Kaden Murray, and Paul Davis, provides both power and protection.

Defensively, Mitchell County has the pieces to be just as tough. Marcus Vicks and Cameron Vicks form a disruptive duo up front, while linebacker Quintavius McCraw returns as

the defense’s emotional anchor.

The Eagles did graduate several key players, including stand-out right tackle Fenadale Hicks, now at Eastern Kentucky, and all-around playmakers Leon-te Thomas (Georgia Military), D’Armonta Jackson, Kendrick Cooper, and Nicolas Williams.

Still, if this year’s group has anything to say about it, the Eagles won’t be taking a step back.

“This group is hungry,” Pinkins said. “And they’re ready.”

No easy schedule, no excuses: Baker County Bears ready to compete



Baker County Bears 2025 Football Team

Special Photo

By Joe Whitfield
Sports Editor

NEWTON — The Baker County Bears don’t have a typical football schedule because nothing about being an 8-man team in rural south Georgia is typical.

With limited opponents and little support from the GHSA, head coach Terrance King is building the season week by week, adding games wherever he can — including an 11-man matchup against a tough Cross Keys squad in Atlanta.

“The GHSA doesn’t offer much for 8-man football, so we’ve had to look beyond our usual options,” King said. “We’ve scheduled a mix of 8-man games and a couple of 11-man contests. We’re doing whatever it takes to give these kids

a full season and the recognition they deserve.”

The effort is starting to pay off. Two seniors from the 2024 team signed college football scholarships — a rare achievement for a program that often flies under the radar.

“Our kids work really hard,” King said. “They deserve the chance to play a full schedule just like kids at the bigger schools. That’s why I’m going outside the box to make it happen.”

King said he’s also exploring opportunities like an 8-man tournament in Panama City, Fla. — anything that benefits his players and keeps the program moving forward.

The Bears finished 4-6 last season after key injuries derailed a promising start.

“We began the season with 21 players,” King

said. “By the last game, we had just 14 dressed out.”

This summer, King had a core group of 18 to 20 players in the weight room, and he said he’s hoping more will join once school gets underway.

Leading the way is junior quarterback Taylor Sanders, who returns as the starter. He spent part of his summer at passing camps.

“Taylor has great speed and is an excellent talent,” King said. “He’s looking to take the offense to another level. He’s also working to become more of a vocal leader and understand how to put players in the right position for success.”

Senior Lyshombie Douglas will be another leader on both sides of the ball, playing running back and linebacker.

“Lyshombie is a very strong young man,” King said. “He works hard in the weight room, has excellent speed and great hands. He’s a big asset for us.”

Also returning is senior El’Lix Jackson, a nose guard who missed most of last season due to injury and surgery.

“He anchors that defensive line,” King said. “He’s a vocal leader for us, and if he stays healthy, he’ll be a big part of what we do.”

The Bears open the season Friday on the road against David Emanuel Academy in Stillmore. They’ll play their home opener next Friday night, Aug. 22, against Rock Springs Christian — one of the two 11-man games on the schedule.

In Baker County, there may not be big crowds or bright lights, but there’s no shortage of fight.



2025 Baker County Schedule

August 15 - David Emanuel Academy - Away - 7:30
August 22 - Rock Springs Christian - Home - 7:30 (11-man)
August 29 - Southern Christian - Away - 8:00
September 4 - Cross Keys - Away - 7:30 (11-man)
September 12 - Skipstone Academy - Away - 7:30 (11-man)
September 19 - Vidalia Heritage - Away - 7:00
September 26 - Stewart County - Home - 7:30
October 3 - Stewart County - Away - 7:30
October 10 - Coastal Home School - Away - 6:30
October 24 - Georgia Force Home School - Home - 7:30
November 1 - First Baptist Christian Academy - Home - 6:00

Lamar takes the lead, Lawson steps up as Colquitt County reloads

By Joe Whitfield
Sports Editor

MOULTRIE — In most places, an 8-4 season and a region championship earns banners, not blame.

But in Colquitt County, it’s a reminder the job wasn’t finished.

The Packers — winners of three straight Region 1-6A titles — spent the offseason

not celebrating, but self-correcting.

For a program that measures success in playoff rounds and state rings, last season’s second-round exit didn’t meet the standard.

“We’ve got to be better at doing the simple things consistently,” head coach Sean Calhoun said. “That’s where it starts. We had too many moments where we didn’t play clean football.”

Ranked No. 7 in the pre-season poll, the mission for 2025: Raise the ceiling. Cut the mistakes.

To do that, Colquitt is betting on a young but battle-tested nucleus — a group of underclassmen who played meaningful snaps last season and are now expected to lead.

At the center is sophomore quarterback Cohen Lawson, who flashed talent as a freshman in Georgia’s highest classification. The Packers are counting on him to grow into more than a passer — they want a field general.

“He’s showing the growth we want,” Calhoun said. “But there’s still a ton of room to improve. That’s exciting.”

The backfield belongs to Jae Lamar, a Georgia commit who rushed for 885 yards and 11 touchdowns last fall while sharing carries. With senior Day’Shawn Brown (1,300+ yards, 17 TDs) graduated, Lamar steps into the lead role — and the spotlight.

He’ll have help. Receivers Na’Ryan Sumlin and Ja’Mari Stokes return, giving Law-



Colquitt County Packers 2025 Football Team

Special Photo

son proven targets. The offensive line is anchored by veterans Kamdon Gay and Sawyer McCard, while the defense returns size, speed, and depth with Ry’Sheed Fuller, Stacey Lambright, Alfonso McNeil, Ty’mhyr Moore, and Brayden Ruis.

“We’ve got guys who’ve played a lot of football already,” Calhoun said. “Now it’s about taking that next step.”

New look defense, new kicking game

On defense, there’s a new voice at the top: long-time assistant Stan Luttrell has been promoted to defensive coordinator, replacing a unit that loses sack leaders Jartavius Fluonoy and Amari Wilson, who combined for 18.5 sacks in 2024.

One of Colquitt’s biggest questions heading into the

fall? Special teams.

For the first time in eight years, there won’t be a Fitzgerald kicking in Moultrie. Brett Fitzgerald, who nailed 12-of-14 field goals last season, including a 52-yarder, is now at Georgia Military College. His brother, Ryan, kicked before him and is now with the Carolina Panthers.

“We’re replacing the entire kicking game — snapper,

holder, kicker,” Calhoun said. “That’s a big deal.”

A fourth straight region title would be a program first — a milestone even for a powerhouse. But the goal, as always, is bigger.

“Win the region. Win the state,” Calhoun said. “That hasn’t changed. We played a lot of young guys last year. Now it’s time for them to grow up and go get it.”



2025 Colquitt County Packers Football Schedule

Aug. 15 — Benedictine, 7:30 p.m.
Aug. 22 — Monroe, 7:30 p.m.
Aug. 29 — @ North Gwinnett, 7:30 p.m.
Sept. 12 — @ Lee County, 7:30 p.m.
Sept. 19 — Rickards (Fla.), 7:30 p.m.
Sept. 26 — @ Lowndes, 7:30 p.m.
Oct. 3 — Valdosta, 7:30 p.m.
Oct. 10 — Tift County, 7:30 p.m.
Oct. 24 — Camden County, 7:30 p.m.
Oct. 31 — @ Richmond Hill, 7:30 p.m.

“If you do the bare minimum, expect bare minimum results. You want to be great, work to be great.”

- J.J. Watt

Sherwood Christian football not just defending a title — it’s defending a standard

By Joe Whitfield
Sports Editor

ALBANY — Four years ago, Sherwood Christian Academy’s football program was starting over.

Now? It’s the team everyone else is chasing.

After storming through the 2024 season with a high-octane offense and a punishing, opportunistic defense, the Eagles are no longer a surprise. They’re the standard — back-to-back state champions in two leagues (GAPPS in 2022, GIAA 8-man in 2024) and hungry for more.

“This senior class might be the most talented and hard-working group we’ve had,” head coach Doug Eason said. “But last year’s trophy won’t win us a game this season. We’ve built something special — now we’ve got to defend it the right way. With hunger. And humility.”

The Eagles return 11 starters, including quarterback Tripp Roberts, the reigning GIAA Player of the Year, who passed and rushed for a combined 2,500+ yards and 35 touchdowns last fall. Now a senior, Roberts enters his final season with a sense of urgency — and

responsibility.

“I’m trying to end my senior year with a bang,” Roberts said. “We want another state championship. But it’s also about leaving the program in good hands and making sure we’re growing every week.”

His coach believes Roberts’ impact will go far beyond stats.

“This year, we’re asking him to elevate everyone else,” Eason said. “He’s become more vocal, more intentional with the younger guys. That’s going to be his most important stat this season — leadership.”

Sherwood’s offense, already known for its creativity and tempo, is expected to stretch the field even more in 2025.

“We’re gonna spin the ball all around,” Roberts said. “It’s going to be fun. The guys have bought in — working hard in the weight room, getting stronger and faster.”

Among those playmakers: seniors Dallas Williams and Qwinton Murray, who bring both experience and explosiveness. Both added size this offseason, giving Roberts more options and more reasons to believe Sherwood can go the distance again.

Defensively, the Eagles are



Sherwood Christian Eagles 2025 Football Team

Special Photo

anchored by veterans Grady Mills, David Albano, and Dylan Clark — each poised for breakout seasons. Sherwood’s defense was among the stingiest in the GIAA last year, and Eason believes this year’s unit could be even better.

But the real edge may lie up front.

Seniors Aaron Mackey, Micah Hall, and Colton Mathis form the foundation of an offensive line that Eason calls “battle-tested and tone-setting.”

“We’ll go as far as the offensive line takes us,” he said. “Games are won in the trenches, and

these guys understand that.”

In the backfield, junior Chuck Lagrange could emerge as a breakout player. A patient, powerful runner who earned his shot by showing up every day, Lagrange has the tools to become a consistent weapon in Sherwood’s spread scheme.

“He brings great effort every day,” Eason said. “He’s earned his place and has a real opportunity to impact the game.”

With several underclassmen stepping into rotation roles, the challenge will be maintaining the high standard that Sherwood football now represents.



2025 Sherwood Christian Academy Schedule

Aug. 15 — Meet the Eagles Night

Aug. 22 — vs. Vidalia Heritage, 7:30 p.m.

Aug. 29 — vs. Citizens Christian, 7:30 p.m.

Sept. 5 — @ Crisp Academy, 7:30 p.m.

Sept. 12 — vs. Stewart County, 7:30 p.m.

Sept. 19 — @ David Emanuel Academy, 7:30 p.m.

Sept. 26 — @ Georgia Christian, 7:30 p.m.

Oct. 10 — vs. Westwood, 7:30 p.m.

Oct. 17 — vs. Fullington Academy, 7:30 p.m.

Oct. 24 — @ Grace Christian Academy, 7:30 p.m.

Fantastic Fifteen: Roberts rewrites record book, Chases third state title

By Joe Whitfield
Sports Editor

ALBANY — There almost wasn’t any football at Sherwood Christian Academy. Not really. Not after the coach and athletic director stepped away.

The program was on life support. But one freshman didn’t get the memo.

His name was Tripp Roberts, and now, as a senior, he’s not just the best player in the program’s history. He’s the face of a revival that turned a forgotten team into a two-time state champion.

And he headlines the Albany Herald’s Fantastic Fifteen, the annual list of the area’s top high school football players.

“I want to go out with a bang with these guys,” Roberts said. “And I want to end with another state championship.”

From survival to state titles
Three years ago, Sherwood Christian dropped back to 8-man football. There was no head coach, no real plan, only a group of players that wanted to keep playing.

Kenny Roberts, Tripp’s dad and the school’s basketball coach, stepped in. Jay Flynt became the new athletic director. And the Eagles didn’t

just survive, they soared.

Now Kenny Roberts is the school’s headmaster. Sherwood has played in three straight state championship games, winning two of them. And Tripp Roberts? He’s become the engine behind it all.

“I’m proud of what my dad and Coach Flynt did to keep the program going,” the senior athlete said. “Now, Coach [Doug] Eason is making us even better. Everybody’s bought in. Everybody’s working.”

The stats are staggering
Roberts didn’t just fill in at quarterback. He filled the stat sheet like he was trying to make up for lost time.

His numbers read like a video game:

- 5,500 passing yards
- 82 passing touchdowns
- 2,044 rushing yards
- 41 rushing scores

One night, he racked up nine total touchdowns, six of them through the air. His all-purpose yardage across three seasons? A staggering 7,566.

Last season alone, he passed for nearly 2,000 yards with 23 touchdowns and ran for more than 1,000 yards with 24 scores. He was named GIAA Player of the Year.

You don’t rewrite the record

book. You replace it.

A veteran team and one more shot

Sherwood returns 11 starters from last year’s title team, including All-State standouts Dallas Williams and Qwinton Murray. The supporting cast — Micah Hall, David Albano, Aaron Mackey, Colton Mathis, Dylan Clark, Grady Mills — gives the Eagles a chance to make it three titles in four years.

They’ll open the season Aug. 22 at Legacy Park against Vidalia Heritage Academy. It’ll be Roberts’ final first game, and likely one of his most emotional.

“We’re just focused on getting better every day,” he said. “We’ve got a good group, and we believe in what we’re building.”

Beyond Sherwood
Roberts is already preparing for life after high school — and life after 8-man football.

“I’ve been studying 11-man schemes and trying to adjust to the speed of the college game,” he said. “I don’t know where I’ll end up yet, but I plan on playing in college.”

Wherever he lands, the foundation has been laid: through hard work, family, faith, and an unwavering belief that



TRIPP ROBERTS

Special Photo



Staff photo: Joe Whitfield

WR Qwinton Murray, quarterback Tripp Roberts, and running back Dallas Williams

“It’s not whether you get knocked down, it’s whether you get back up.”
—Vince Lombardi

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Deerfield-Windsor
Schedule**

August 15 Southland Academy 7:30
August 22 @ Mount de Sales 7:30
August 29 @ Westfield 7:30
September 5 Southwest Georgia 7:30
September 19 @Terrell Academy 7:30
September 26 @ Bacon-ton Charter 7:30
October 3 Brookwood 7:30
October 10 Tiftarea Acad-emy 7:30
October 17 @ Valwood 7:30
October 24 Maclay 7:30

Deerfield-Windsor football focused on making history

By Joe Whitfield
Sports Editor

ALBANY — At Deerfield-Windsor, the bar isn't just high. It's historic.

Coming off a dominant state championship run, the Knights are eyeing something that's never been done in school history: back-to-back state titles. And with 18 seniors, many of them three-year starters, they might just have the experience, the depth, and the firepower to do it.

"To say expectations are high is an understatement," Head Coach Jake McCrae said. "These kids work hard, and they're hungry. They know what it feels like to be 1-9, and they know what it feels like to win a state championship. And I think they like how that second one felt a whole lot more."

Deerfield-Windsor returns nearly every key piece from last year's 12-2 championship

team, especially on offense. It all starts with senior quarterback Lane Sceals, who passed for 2,925 yards and 27 touchdowns a season ago. His top three targets — Gabe Daniel, David Hutchins, and Brantley Michlig — are all back, giving the Knights one of the most seasoned passing attacks in the GIAA.

The only major departure is running back Cole Jones, who graduated after a standout senior season. But don't expect the ground game to stall.

"We had one really good running back in Cole Jones. Now we've got five," McCrae said. "None of them is quite where Cole was yet, but they're all really good."

The group will be running behind a massive and experienced offensive line anchored by seniors Cleland McCrae, Cooper Harris and Davis Schneider, a unit that helped pave the way for more than 5,000 yards of



Staff photo: Joe Whitfield

From left, Deerfield-Windsor seniors Grier Morey, Gabe Daniel and Lane Sceals will be key leaders for the Knights in the 2025 football season. All three return as experienced starters and will play pivotal roles as Deerfield-Windsor aims to contend for another deep playoff run in the GIAA.

offense last year

But for all the firepower on offense, it's the defense that has McCrae buzzing.

"I'm an offensive guy, but our defense is going to be really, really good," he said.

That's not just coachspeak. Nearly every defensive starter returns, including standout seniors Luke Ivey, Seth McKenzie, Boyd Pollock, Mangham Pippin, Tony Powell, Grier Morey, Ben Everett and Cross Mitchell. The unit also added a boost with the arrival of Turner Simmons, a transfer from Southland Academy, and rising junior Gage Tomlinson, who has stood out all summer.

"We've had a really great summer," McCrae said. "About 80% of the boys in the school are playing football, and the other 20% are winning cross country championships. Deer-

field-Windsor is really a phenomenal place to be right now."

Still, McCrae is well aware that the Knights aren't sneaking up on anyone this season.

"We had that little advantage last year — people weren't sure what we had," he said. "That's gone now. Everyone knows who we are. They're coming for us."

Deerfield will open the season at home against rival Southland Academy on Aug. 15, and the path through Region 3-AAA won't be easy. McCrae called it "as tough as it's ever been," with teams like Valwood, Tiftarea and Terrell Academy all capable of making deep playoff runs.

"Valwood is going to be good again, and Tiftarea might be the team to beat," McCrae said. "The region is full of great coaches from top to bottom. There are

no gimmes anymore. A couple of years ago, people thought you couldn't beat John Milledge — then Valwood did. Then nobody thought you could beat Valwood — but we did. Now, they're saying that about us."

For McCrae, the challenge this season isn't about opponents. It's about maturity and discipline.

"The only thing that can derail us is us," he said. "Sometimes we're a little immature. We talk about STPs all the time: sacks, turnovers, and penalties. If we can keep those down, we'll be OK."

The Knights have the roster. They have the experience. And they have the hunger. Now all that remains is the challenge of doing what no Deerfield-Windsor team has ever done before.

Repeat.

Fantastic Fifteen 'Assassin' under center: Lane Sceals keeps Knights on championship path

By Joe Whitfield
Sports Editor

ALBANY — Lane Sceals doesn't chase headlines. He doesn't count touchdown passes or track yardage totals. His focus is simpler: Win the next one — and then the one after that.

"I think we can win every game," the Deerfield-Windsor senior quarterback said. "The only way we lose is if we hurt ourselves."

That quiet confidence defines Sceals, a 6-foot-3, 170-pound three-sport athlete who led the Knights to the GIAA Class AAA state championship last fall. He threw for 2,925 yards and 27 touchdowns as a ju-

nior, including a near-flawless performance in the title game against Valwood. He completed 24 of 29 passes that night.

After the win, head coach Jake McCrae called him an "assassin."

"I'm just trying to get us in the best position every play," Sceals said. "We've all been playing together for a long time. It's fun."

That word — fun — comes up a lot when Sceals talks football. He's motivated not by stats or rankings but by teammates and the shared work that makes winning possible.

"I like spending time with my friends," he said. "It's about working together and



Staff photo: Joe Whitfield
LANE SCEALS

doing something bigger than

See **SCEALS**, 12B

Fantastic Fifteen: Gabe Daniel brings big-game spark to Deerfield-Windsor's repeat bid

By Joe Whitfield
Sports Editor

ALBANY — The crowd was loud, the moment tense, and defending state champion Valwood had just taken the lead.

Then came the catch.

On third-and-long in the biggest game of the 2024 season, Gabe Daniel climbed the sideline ladder, secured the ball through contact, and helped turn a potential loss into a statement for Deerfield-Windsor.

"It was a close game at home, and that catch was a big one," Daniel said. "That night really gave us confidence. I had a good game, and I'll never forget how it felt to beat them like that in front of our fans."

Daniel would go on to make plenty more big plays for the Knights, who eventually beat Valwood again — this time in the GIAA state championship game.

Now a senior, Daniel returns as one of the most dynamic wide receivers in the area. He caught 64 passes for 1,115 yards and 10 touchdowns last fall and was the go-to target for longtime friend and quarterback Lane Sceals.

Their chemistry didn't happen overnight. The two have been playing football together since they were six years old.

"We just know where each other's going to be," Daniel said. "We've been doing this for so long. I just hope we can keep it going this year."

Daniel has set the bar high for his final season: 1,300 receiving yards and an undefeated run to back-to-back state championships. His coach believes he's more than capable.

"Gabe is a difference-maker," head coach Jake McCrae said. "He does things we need at the highest level you could ask from a high school football player."

Daniel's production comes from more than just talent. He prides himself on preparation — on being sharp in practice, locked in at workouts, and ready when it matters most.

"I don't want to be embarrassed in a game," Daniel said. "That's what drives me. I work hard every day because I want to be ready, and I don't want anyone looking down on my team."

Daniel, the son of Brett and Jacie Daniel, plans to attend



Staff photo: Joe Whitfield
GABE DANIEL

Georgia Southern University after graduation. He enjoys history and economics and models his football mentality after Georgia Tech quarterback Haynes King.

As Deerfield-Windsor begins another season with title hopes, Daniel knows what it will take to finish the job again.

"The only thing that can stop us is dumb mistakes and penalties," he said. "We've got the pieces. We just have to stay focused."

And with Daniel leading the way — quietly, confidently, and always prepared — the standard at Deerfield-Windsor isn't going anywhere.

Fantastic Fifteen: Grier Morey's relentless play fuels Deerfield-Windsor's title hopes

By Joe Whitfield
Sports Editor

ALBANY — Grier Morey calls it the best game of his life — and not just because it ended with a state championship.

In last year's GIAA title game at Georgia Southern University, the Deerfield-Windsor senior safety delivered the play that set the tone. With Valwood's quarterback racing downfield for what looked like a 30-yard gain, Morey tracked him down from behind, reached over his shoulder, and knocked the ball loose. The Knights recovered.

"That was my favorite play," Morey said. "He had a big run going, but I just didn't give up on it. That changed everything."

Morey finished the game with 10 tackles, a forced fumble, and a second-half interception that

helped the Knights seal a win over the three-time defending champs. It was the culmination of a journey that began in frustration — and ended in redemption.

"It all goes back to that 1-9 season," Morey said. "It was embarrassing to go to school every Monday knowing we'd lost again. That's when we got serious — in the weight room, in practice. We wanted to prove everybody wrong. And that's what we did."

Now a senior, Morey is the emotional leader of a defense looking to defend its title. He has set a personal goal of 80 tackles and multiple interceptions this fall — but says leadership is just as important as stat sheets.

"I want to lead by example," he said. "And keep us focused."



Staff photo: Joe Whitfield
GRIER MOREY

Morey, the son of Bo and Carla Morey, plays with a physical edge — one that occasionally needs fine-tuning. He learned that during last season's game against Westfield, when a helmet-popping

See **MOREY**, 12B

FRIDAY KNIGHTS



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Jack Harris era set to kick off at Terrell Academy



Terrell Academy Eagles 2025 Football Team

Special Photo

By Joe Whitfield
Sports Editor

DAWSON — The Jack Harris era at Terrell Academy began Friday night in Damascus against one of the toughest opponents on the schedule. Southwest Georgia Academy, last year’s Region 3-AA champion and state runner-up, beat the Eagles 22-8 in 2024 and finished 12-1.

Harris, who comes over from Terrell County, takes over for long-time friend, coach Bill Murdock, now the school’s full-time headmaster. Terrell Academy has posted three straight 6-5 seasons, but Harris insists the expectations remain high. “Some people are thinking we are going to be down this year, but I don’t think so,” he said. “We’re not talking about

being down. We’re talking about championships.” The offense will have a different look. Former quarterback Bryse Peachey, who rushed for more than 1,000 yards as a sophomore, shifts to running back. The quarterback job will go to either Josh Cabatit, a transfer from Lee County, or Holton Whatley. Defensively, the Eagles re-

turn experience and leadership with senior linebacker Dylan Harden and defensive end Cohen Rumpf anchoring the front. Harris, a defensive-minded coach, calls that unit the team’s strength. “We might need another year in the weight room to get where we really want to be,” Harris said. “But I love the effort and the way this group is buying in.” The Eagles won’t ease into the schedule — three straight road games lead up to their Sept. 12 home opener against Pataula Charter. **Terrell Academy at a glance**
Region: 3-AA
2024 record: 6-5
Returning starters: 6 offense, 6 defense
Head coach: Jack Harris (first season)
Key losses: RB Ty Thomas,

lineman Wes Peachey
Key returners: RB Bryse Peachey, LB Dylan Harden, DE Cohen Rumpf, OL/DL Paxton Epply, Noah Daniel, WR/DB Evan Montgomery, Reed Payne
Newcomers to watch: QB/ATH Josh Cabatit (transfer from Lee County), QB Holton Whatley
Strengths: Veteran defense led by All-Region linebacker Harden, versatility at skill positions
Concerns: Breaking in a new quarterback, offensive line depth, three road games to start the season
Toughest games: Aug. 15 at Southwest Georgia, Sept. 19 at Brentwood, Oct. 3 at Windsor Academy



2025 Terrell Academy Schedule

- Aug. 15 — @ Southwest Georgia, 8 p.m.
- Aug. 22 — @ Brookwood, 7:30 p.m.
- Sept. 5 — @ Mount de Sales, 7:30 p.m.
- Sept. 12 — Pataula Charter School, 7:30 p.m.
- Sept. 19 — Deerfield-Windsor, 7:30 p.m.
- Sept. 26 — @ Southland Academy, 7:30 p.m.
- Oct. 3 — Windsor Academy, 7:30 p.m.
- Oct. 10 — Valwood, 7:30 p.m.
- Oct. 17 — Baconton Charter, 7:30 p.m.
- Oct. 24 — Tiftarea Academy, 7:30 p.m.



2025 Terrell County Schedule

- Aug. 15 — Calvary Christian, 7:30 p.m.
- Aug. 22 — Calhoun County, 7:30 p.m.
- Aug. 29 — @ Wilcox County, 7:30 p.m.
- Sept. 5 — @ Jordan, 7:30 p.m.
- Sept. 19 — Early County, 7:30 p.m.
- Sept. 26 — @ Miller County, 7:30 p.m.
- Oct. 3 — @ Mitchell County, 7:30 p.m.
- Oct. 10 — @ Randolph-Clay, 7:30 p.m.
- Oct. 17 — Seminole County, 7:30 p.m.
- Oct. 31 — @ Pelham, 7:30 p.m.

‘Do your dang job’: New coach, new mindset in Dawson

DAWSON — Change takes time, but Terrell County is wasting none of it. In his first season at the helm, head coach Marco Kirk isn’t promising a quick fix for the Greenwave football program. He’s promising a foundation. After a 2-8 finish in 2024, Kirk was brought in not just to win games — but to reshape how the program works from the ground up. “It all starts with mindset,” Kirk said. “We’re building around core values — hard work, accountability, discipline — and expecting our guys to be excellent in everything they do. On the field. In the weight room. In the classroom. In the community.” That shift in culture has been the centerpiece of Terrell County’s offseason. Kirk and his staff have focused less on setting specific win-loss

goals and more on instilling a belief that consistent daily effort leads to success. “We want to compete at the highest level,” Kirk said. “But we’re focused on improvement — rep by rep, day by day. If we do that, the rest will take care of itself.” The Greenwaves will be tested early with back-to-back home games to open the season, beginning Aug. 15 against Calvary Christian. Their toughest stretch may come in region play, with three consecutive road games against Miller County, Mitchell County, and Randolph-Clay. Kirk’s early evaluations show promise, especially in the trenches. “Our offensive line is a strength,” he said. “We’re seeing flashes from a lot of positions, but what we need now is consistency — showing up, staying healthy, and



Staff Photo: Joe Whitfield

Terrell County Greenwave seniors include, from left, Amir Kimbrough, Donnoveen Scott, Damarion Huckaby, Ramarion Thomas, Karson Greene, Kaleb White, Symauri Smith, Hyson Davis, and Anshad McKay. doing the little things right.” Offensively, Terrell County will aim for balance — taking what defenses give them — while defensively, the Greenwaves plan to play fast, physical, and disciplined. “We’ve got one rule on defense: DYDJ — do your dang job,” Kirk said. “We’re going to be sound, aggressive, and get to the football every snap.” Kirk also praised the unity forming behind the scenes, from his assistant coaches to the wider school and community. “This place has embraced us,” he said. “The principal, the superintendent, the cafeteria staff, the bus drivers — everyone’s played a part in lifting this program up. That means something. That creates belief.” It’s not just about football. It’s about building something that lasts. “We want to be the kind of team that leaves everything better than we found it,” Kirk said. “And I’m proud of the way these guys are buying in.”



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Fantastic Fifteen: From QB to RB, Terrell's Bryse Peachey ready to run wild

By Joe Whitfield
Sports Editor

DAWSON — When Terrell Academy takes the field on Aug. 15 to open the 2025 football season against Southwest Georgia Academy, something will look a little different in the Eagles' backfield.

Bryse Peachey, who started at quarterback a year ago, won't be behind center this fall. He'll be a few steps back ... and ready to run.

Peachey, now a junior, is making the move to running back after rushing for more than 1,000 yards last season while also playing defensive back. And if the position change seems unusual, it makes perfect sense to new Head Coach Jack Harris.

"He ran for over a thousand as a quarterback," Harris said. "Now we're lining him up with the ball in his hands from the start. We want to see just how far he can go."

Peachey, listed at 5-foot-9 and 165 pounds, is no stranger to the game, or the grind. He says football has been a part of his life as long as he can remember.

"My brother, my cousin, and I were always out in the yard throwing a football," he said. "Now I'm playing because of the joy the game brings me — and getting to be with my

friends and work to get better."

Peachey has clear goals for his first season as a featured back.

"I definitely want to hit 1,000 yards again — and go beyond that," he said. "I've been working on my footwork, my reads, just trying to improve my technique. And I'm also trying to be a better leader, encouraging my teammates more."

The position shift brings not only opportunity but also, oddly enough, a bit of relief to Peachey.

"Running back feels a little less stressful," he said. "At quarterback, you've got to know everything — every route, every blocking assignment. At running back, I can focus more on just doing my job and running the ball."

Off the field, Peachey is working on something just as important.

"I'm focused on growing my relationship with God so I can be a help to others who need it," he said. "That's something that matters a lot to me."

In the classroom, math is his strongest subject, though he also enjoys diving into history. He's already thinking about the future, and he doesn't have to look far for inspiration.

His older brother, Wes Peachey, was a member of the Herald's "Fantastic Fifteen" last season and has since



Special photo
BRYSE PEACHEY

graduated and gone to work as a utility lineman.

"I've been learning more about what he does," Bryse said. "I think I might want to follow in his footsteps."

Before he does that, though, there's still plenty of football to be played. Two full seasons, to be exact — and the Terrell Academy faithful will be watching closely.

The road begins Friday night in Damascus, where the Eagles will face a familiar challenge: Southwest Georgia Academy, a program known for hitting hard and playing fast.

"They're always tough," Peachey said. "But we're ready."

So is he — even if he's not where he used to be.



Staff photo: Joe Whitfield

Deerfield-Windsor senior quarterback lets go of a pass during the recent preseason scrimmage. Sceals and the Knights opened the season Friday night against Southland Academy as they begin their campaign to make school history by winning back-to-back state championships.

From 10B SCEALS

yourself."

The son of Stephen and Stephanie Sceals, Lane first picked up a football around age 5 at the Lee County Rec Department. His first start at quarterback came in the playoffs his freshman year: three games, all pressure-packed, ending with a trip to the state finals. The Knights fell to John Milledge Academy in the title game.

"I was very nervous during all three of those games," he recalled. "Just trying not to make mistakes."

His sophomore season was humbling — a one-win campaign as the program rebuilt with underclassmen. But even then, Sceals never wavered.

"It gave us experience," he said. "It was hard. But we were always working."

That work paid off last fall, when the Knights stormed to a championship. Sceals led the charge, and in big moments, his go-to target was often wide receiver Gabe Daniel.

"Gabe's always been my favorite target," Sceals said. "We've grown up together and started playing football at the same time. I think we just have that connection."

Daniel agrees: "I just hope we can keep it going this season."

The two will be at the center of another title push this fall. Sceals hasn't set any personal goals for yards or touchdowns — just a team goal: to win it all again.

McCrae said he believes Sceals has the talent to play Division I football but said college recruiting looks different these days.

"We used to have recruiters coming by all the time, even when we didn't have D-I talent," McCrae said. "Now I've

got a kid like Lane who can play at that level, and it's like a ghost town. The transfer portal has changed everything."

For now, Sceals plans to attend the University of North Georgia and later transfer to the University of Georgia. If offers came in for football, basketball, or baseball — he's a sharp-shooting guard on the basketball team and a pitcher/outfielder in the spring — choosing would be tough.

"That would be a difficult decision," he said with a grin. What isn't difficult is watching him play. Calm, efficient, and trusted by teammates, Sceals lets his performance speak for him.

The Knights open the 2025 season on Aug. 15 at home against rival Southland Academy.

He'll be under center, probably not saying much, but always ready to deliver.

From 10B MOREY

hit led to his ejection.

"I led with my head and celebrated a little too much," he said. "It was a lesson. Now I keep my head up — literally — and I keep my emotions in check. Just make the play and get ready for the next one."

Morey believes Deerfield-Windsor has what it takes to

repeat — but only if the Knights avoid complacency.

"If we get too cocky, that's how we lose," he said. "We can't get comfortable."

In the spring, Morey swaps shoulder pads for a glove and moves to second base on the Knights' baseball team. But when it comes to the future, his heart is on the gridiron.

"If I got offers for both football and baseball, I'd choose football," he said. "There's nothing like Friday night lights."

Morey intends to attend the University of North Georgia after graduation and hopes to transfer to the University of Georgia later in his college career. For now, his focus is on finishing what he helped start — with one more season of big hits, forced turnovers, and sideline leadership.

"We've come too far to let it slip now," Morey said. "We've got to keep proving it — every Friday night."