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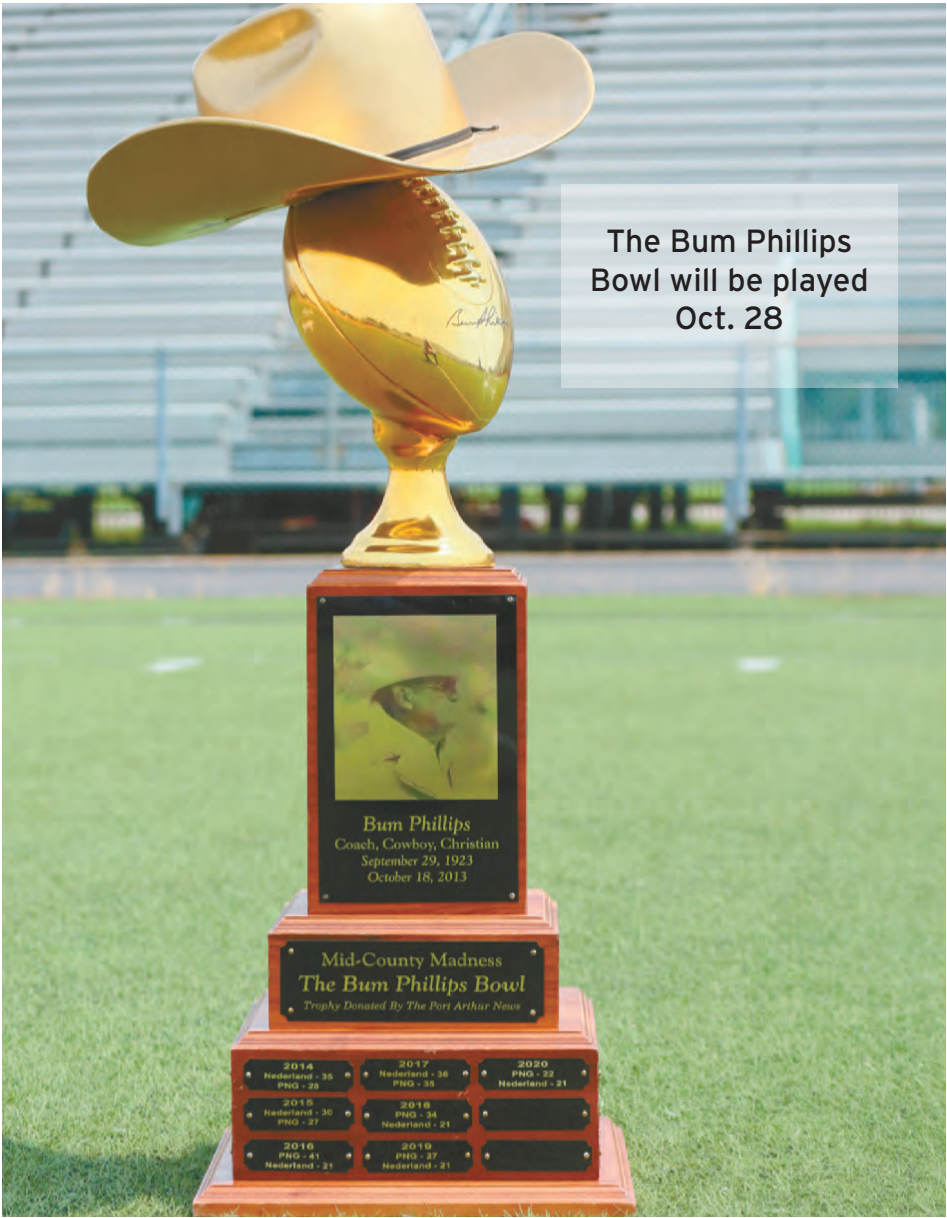
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ON THE COVER: West Orange-Stark first-year head coach Hiawatha Hickman has big goals set for the Mustangs this season and will look to sparkplugs Jamal Shaw (left) and Jailen Brown (right) to help lead the way. Photo by Van Wade.



The Bum Phillips Bowl will be played Oct. 28



FOOTBALL 2022

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BRIDGE CITY

Cardinals ready to soar even higher

By Van Wade

van.wade@orangeleader.com



CODY MCGUIRE

2nd year
4-6

CARDINALS

2021 record:
4-6, Class 4A Region III
Division II
Record since 1977:
204-251-3 (16-15 in the
playoffs)

BRIDGE CITY — After making nice headway in Coach Cody McGuire's first campaign, the Bridge City Cardinals are aiming to soar in 2022.

The Cardinals certainly improved leaps and bounds last year, going 4-6 and snagging a couple tight confidence-building district wins over

Hardin-Jefferson and Hamshire-Fannett.

That is a far cry from what was a tough 1-7 season in 2020.

McGuire said coaches saw a lot of faces throughout the summer, adding participation was really good.

"Most of the kids have come in here and are looking pretty good," he said. "Now is when it really gets fun. We have a pretty good schedule set as

far as practices go. The Cardinals are ready to go."

The Cardinals are installing a few new things this year on both sides of the ball.

"We've got Coach (Jason) Aubry in here as the new offensive coordinator and the kids really like his ideas, and they look forward to grasping them," said McGuire. "Defensively, a lot of it is going to be new. We've worked on some of this stuff during the summer during our allotted times, but now we can spend more time on what we want

See 'Cardinals,' page 5



Tommy Mann Jr.

The Bridge City Cardinals defense converges on a Tarkington running back last season.



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CARDINALS

Continued from 4

to do.”

The Cardinals are anxious to run a spread offense.

“It’s going to be a lot of 10-Personnel and some 20-Personnel,” said McGuire. “We’re going to be throwing the ball around and running it, so it’s going to be a balanced offense, for sure, and we’ll see what happens.”

Offensively, the Cardinals are looking at sophomore Hutch Bearden to step in and play well in replacing three-year starter Ethan Ocegüera.

“Hutch looks really good, so we’re excited to see what he can do. He attend the

Manning Quarterback Camp over the summer and he can really sling it,” said McGuire.

Also in the backfield at the backs include returning H-Back Noah Broussard, along with Caleb Breaux, Jerris Brown and Gavin Bodin.

McGuire is looking at a host of receivers to get the ball to and he likes his depth. Breaux, who has bounced back nicely from a knee injury last season, and sophomore Case McGuire have shown excellent hands and route-running in the summer.

“I really like our numbers, overall,” said McGuire. “I’m really impressed with a lot of our sophomores that are going to help us in

a lot of spots.”

Matt Livingston, with all of his valuable experience, will look to anchor the offensive line.

The Cardinals are making the switch to a new 3-4 Defense in 2022. Senior linebacker Mason Pruitt is eager to lead the way after having a monstrous season last year by amassing 154 tackles.

“Mason is really stout and flies to the ball,” said McGuire. “He’s a good leader and all the kids really follow his lead well.”

Nick Lejeune looks to again power to defensive front at his noseguard position.

The secondary is led by the likes of Breaux, Stephen Stone and

Jagger Carlin.

McGuire is excited about what the Cardinals are putting on the field this year. They were close to a playoff berth before the injury bug got them last year at times.

“Last year was tough because we lost four starters to ACLs, and so you’ve got to have guys behind the starters,” said McGuire.

“We were a few plays away from making the playoffs. We played Silsbee really well, and we had big wins over H-J and Liberty. Our kids fought the whole year. It’s that ‘next man up’ mentality, so when somebody goes down, somebody’s got to step up and make plays when they get the chance. I think

we’re building much better depth than we had last year and that’s a great sign.”

The Cardinals are not shying away from tough opponents in non-district play. Even though Orangefield is no longer in the district, the Bayou Bowl will go on when the Cardinals open up the season at Orangefield Aug. 26.

They host Buna and LC-M before visiting Lumberton to close out non-district.

“We feel we have a formidable non-district schedule; it’s not hard finding tough opponents around Southeast Texas,” said McGuire.

The Cardinals are striving hard to compete in what many

people consider the toughest district in the state, which includes state powers West Orange-Stark, Silsbee and Jasper. Bridge City will also have to tackle opponents in Hamshire-Fannett, Hardin-Jefferson, and Liberty again.

“There is no doubt, we’re in one of the toughest 4A districts in the state,” said McGuire. “The expectation is you want to be the best team every Friday. That’s always going to be the goal. Our kids worked hard all summer and all off-season.”

The Cardinals visit Hamshire-Fannett to crank up district play Sept. 23. They then have bye before hosting Jasper Oct. 7.

GOOD LUCK TEAMS!

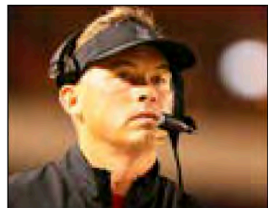


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BLANE MORGAN
3rd year
1-9 since 2021

CARDINALS
2021 record: 1-9,
Southland Conference
Record since 1923:
221-306-9 (2-1 in bowl
games; 0-1 in playoffs)

By Chris Moore

chris.moore@panews.com

BEAUMONT — The Lamar Cardinals' move back to the Southland Conference dominated the headlines during the offseason. With all of the attention back on the field, the Cards are looking to improve on last year's 1-9 record.

Head Coach Blane Morgan, who is entering his third season with Lamar, said the team made significant strides in the offseason.

"Last fall we were a very physically immature team," he said. "A lot of our guys were coming out of playing their senior year in high school. I think from a strength and speed standpoint, we will see how far we have come and how much closer we are to looking and feeling like a college team when we get out on the field."

Defensive lineman Jack McCarthy said the addition of strength coach Davis Conley has already produced results.

LAMAR UNIVERSITY

Cardinals feeling strong about upcoming season



Courtesy photo
Lamar defensive lineman Jack McCarthy rushes the edge.

"You can tell there is a clear difference from where we were last year to now," McCarthy said. "I have gained 20 lbs. since last year alone. I think that it across the board. I think we have all shot up in strength and speed. Coach Conley has done a great job and has been a great addition to the program. I feel like we are putting it together a little bit."

Morgan said the move back to the

See 'Lamar,' page 7

Leonard M. Thome, MD, PA
Wishes the area teams
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THIS FOOTBALL SEASON!

Leonard M. Thome, MD

*Fellow, American College of Cardiology
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LAMAR

Continued from 6

Southland was a positive financially and for quality of life.

"It feels like home," he said. "It feels like where we need to be. We were a founding member. If we really care about our athletes and their livelihood and welfare, certainly looking at the travel in the two conferences, the Southland makes more sense. I think it is more of a cost situation. We chartered planes for two trips last year, which is almost a six-figure cost for each trip. That certainly adds up. Prior to that, I don't know how many planes were boarded for away



Courtesy photo

Jalen Dummett hopes to have a breakout year.

games."

McCarthy said he is happy to regain the rivalry with McNeese with the move back to the Southland.

"I just want to win some games," he said. "We have had a tough couple of years. I am going to do whatever I can to help the team win. I am excited for

the season. It just feels different in there. There is a different energy."

On the defensive side, Morgan will lean on guys like linebacker Tyler Jackson, lineman Jaymond Jackson and Ayden Bell.

"They played significant snaps last fall and are slated to be there

again," Morgan said. "On the back half, we have guys like Austin Goffney at safety. Demarco Roberts played a lot last year. The two corners from New Orleans will be good. We are looking for a lot from those guys."

Morgan feels really good about the offensive line.

"I like our leadership there," he said. "Jacob Bayer at center can be really good. B.J. Williams from Deridder and Jeremy Davis, we are excited about them. Moving Jalen Dummett out to receiver. We have a guy named Sevonne Rhea, who came to us from Texas State. We are excited about Khalan Griffin, who is a tailback from Rice

and we have Demashja Harris, who will be a surprising factor."

Dummett began last season as the team's starting quarterback before being moved out wide.

"I am taking the change day by day," Dummett said. "It has been fun. It is like learning to play football all over again. I have done both but this time, I am playing receiver full time. Now, I am just focusing on that and trying to make plays."

At 6'2" 210 lbs., Dummett brings quite a bit of size to the receiver group.

"I take a little bit of everything from receivers in college or pro," he said. "I think I will be good with yards af-

ter catch. I think I am a little harder to bring down. I think that will be a big thing for me."

Quarterback play is always important for college teams, and Morgan said the staff believes Mike Chandler played the best for the Cards last year.

"We have to develop depth," Morgan said. "We have to find a second quarterback and we have a good battle there, not that Mike is the starter yet."

The Cards start the season Sept. 1, when they travel to Abilene Christian. Lamar's first home game is Sept. 17 against Northern Colorado.

Conference play starts the following week against Northwestern State.



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ERIC PEEVEY
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11-3 at LCM

BEARS
2021 record: 11-3,
Class 4A Region III
Division I Regional
Finalists
Record since 1977:
203-250-3
(8-11 in the playoffs)

By Van Wade

van.wade@orangeleader.com

LITTLE CYPRESS
— One thing for sure, the Little Cypress-Mauriceville Bat-tlin' Bears will not be sneaking up on anyone this season.

Bears second-year head coach Eric Peevey recognizes that and is making sure this year's players are not be resting on last year's laurels.

The Bears stormed to an 11-3 mark last season, advancing all the way to the Class



LC-M running back Da'Marion Morris eludes Jasper de-fenders for a nice gain last season.

Mark Pachuca

4A Region III Division I Finals. It was the Bears' furthest run in the postseason since 1997 and a far cry from their 1-8 2020 season.

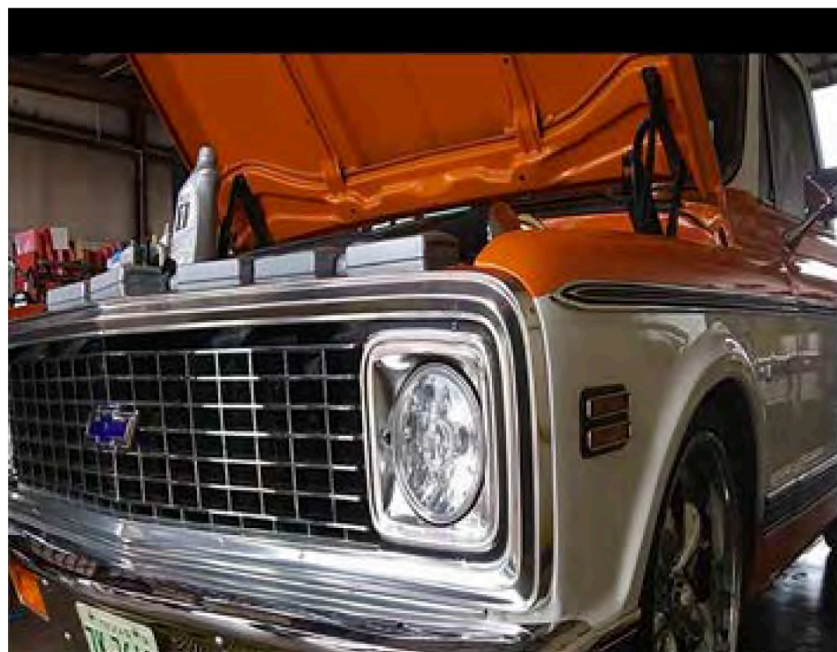
"We're still running the same offense and the same defense pretty much," Peevey said. "We have some good athletes, and the kids really understand the X's and O's and we can coach them up to the best of our abilities as a staff, but it all boils down to playing with intensity and discipline and with their hearts."

The Bears return five

starters on each side of the ball.

"We really like what we have at quarter-back and running back, our two defensive ends and what we have in the trenches overall on both sides of the ball," said Peevey. "Our biggest things that we need some of the younger kids to step in and do or at the receiver and defensive back spots. We lost a lot of those with the great senior class we had last year. We see some talent there. It's

See 'Bears,' page 10



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BEARS

Continued from 8

just a matter of who unleashes it."

Leading the offensive surge should be senior running back Da'Marion Morris, who was a headache for opposing defenses throughout last season and a finalist for the Willie Ray Smith Offensive Award.

Morris cut up for 1,811 yards and 22 touchdowns rushing. He also hauled in 36 receptions for 434 yards and two TDs.

He proved his worth at defensive back, picking off six passes.

"Da'Marion is so versatile and performs so well, especially in big games," said Peevey. "The experience he brings is unreal. His

ability to take it to the house on any given play, whether it's offense or defense, is something special to have on your team."

Dean Reynolds, who had a great year at tight end last season, moves over to quarterback to replace All-District performer Ashton Landry.

"Dean is a great leader and has always done what is asked of him," said Peevey. "He's really amped up to be back at quarterback. He has improved a ton with his speed and agility and he can hum the ball out there."

Offensive linemen Jan Nazario and Brady Wright look to anchor the offensive front, with sophomore Carson Phelps expected to step in and play well.

Defensive end Amier Washington will certainly anchor the defense. The Willie Ray Smith Defensive Award Finalist, who verbally committed to Texas Tech, had 21 tackles for losses, including nine sacks a season ago.

Fellow defensive end Jarvis Riley is back to make his mark after being involved in 64 stops, including eight tackles for losses and four sacks.

"You talk about two excellent bookends, we've got them in Amier and Jarvis," said Peevey. "To see what they have been lifting during the summer has been phenomenal."

Luke McDow looks to step in and make strides at linebacker, along with William

See 'Bears,' page 11

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BEARS

Continued from 10

Payne. Gianni Huffman will look to make an impact along the defensive front.

The Bears have an assortment of skill players that can play on both sides of the ball, including wide receiver/defensive back Darius Roberts, running back/defensive back Daunte Greer, wide receiver/defensive back Jacob Pollock and his brother, tight end/defensive lineman Jordan Pollock.

Many predictions across the state have the Bears battling Vidor and Lumberton for the district crown, but Huffman, Livingston and Splendora certainly can't be discounted.

LC-M shared the district title with Vidor last season but lost to the Pirates

in district play. They squeezed out a tight victory against Lumberton.

"We have a tough old district for sure," said Peevey. "You can't discount anybody. Coach (Jeff) Mathews always has those Vidor Pirates ready. Lumberton is really strong and have some great athletes, which we saw last football season and this past track season. Huffman is always in the mix and have been near the top of the district year after year. Livingston always has tremendous athletes and had a great team a couple years ago and Splendora, they have big numbers and a lot of kids out. A lot of the games are going to come down to who plays the most mistake-free football. We did that well last year and we need to do that again. Play hard but play disciplined."

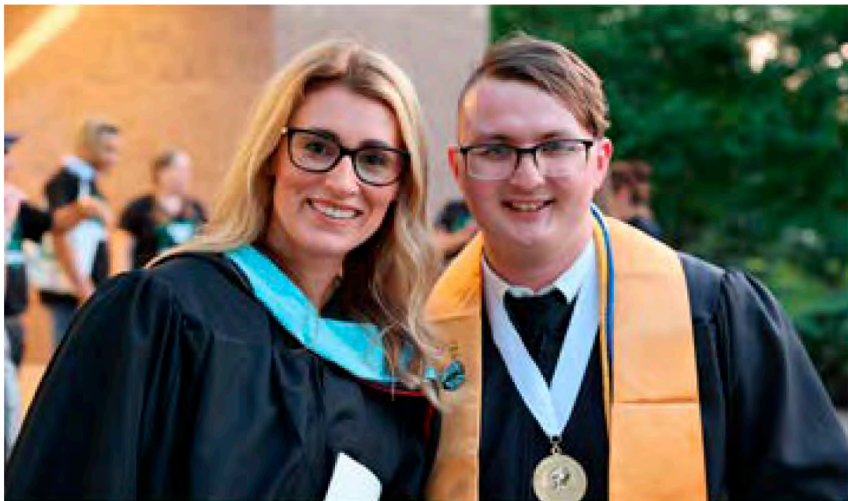
The Bears also have a

stiff non-district schedule to get them ready, including games with Hardin-Jefferson, West Orange-Stark, Bridge City, Houston Kincaid and Spring Legacy.

"It wouldn't be Orange County football if we don't play people like WO-S and Bridge City," said Peevey. "The Mustangs, everyone knows what they are about and they are loaded again with Coach (Hiawatha) Hickman leading the way now. Bridge City was much improved with Coach (Cody) McGuire last year and will be even better. Hardin-Jefferson has a new style of football with a new coach. We know Houston Kincaid is one of the best private schools in the state every year. Spring Legacy, that's a new one for us and we'll know more about them when the time comes."

LC-M's Dean Reynolds celebrates after scoring a touchdown against Jasper last season.

Mark Pachuca

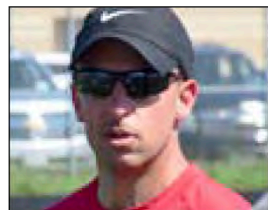


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TITANS
2021 record: 8-3,
Class 5A Region III
Division I
Record since 2002:
135-83-0
(13-15 in the playoffs)

By Chris Moore

chris.moore@panews.com

PORT ARTHUR — The Memorial Titans lost a lot of talent to graduation. The team lost the starting quarterback, who was a two-time district MVP, all of the leading skill players and several key playmakers on defense.

Despite the losses, the Titans have retooled and are hoping to earn the district title for the third consecutive season.

Head Coach Brian Morgan raved about how the team looked

in the offseason but admitted it is a different game when pads come on.

"The summer has been good for us," he said. "There has been a lot of hard work. We haven't been able to tackle anybody."

"You don't know if you can really play football. You feel good about t-shirt and shorts football."

The Titans don't look completely different. Junior Daevon Iles returns for the Titans at safety to anchor a strong secondary with McNeese commit

See 'Titans,' page 13

PORT ARTHUR

Titans retool as district competition toughens



Chris Moore

Daevon Iles breaks up a pass against Nederland.

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TITANS

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Jelani Chevalier at corner. Caden Pitre led the district in sacks last year and returns to the Titans defensive line, and playmaking linebacker Darrell Thornton rounds out the front seven at linebacker.

"We graduated a good linebacker in Jayden Fisher and filling his spot has been kind of up in the air," Morgan said. "We have a couple of good candidates and we feel good there."

Chevalier said the team is looking good. "We have had a lot of good players come in," he said. "I feel good about where we are at. We are a family. If you show you are good —

even if you aren't good — we are a family. We take family seriously. That is a big thing here."

He looks for the secondary to lead the way for the Titans.

"The secondary is the best unit on the team," Chevalier said.

Chevalier stepped up as a leader and learned a lot from Jaylon Guilbeau, who is now with the Texas Longhorns.

During the past two seasons, the Titans were heavily reliant on the success of, now, former quarterback Jah'mar Sanders.

Morgan said Sanders was a constant, but added the rise in skill position players should ease the transition.

"He was really comfortable to sit in that chair and talk to. You knew he understood

everything," Morgan said. "We have really talented kids. We possibly have more talent on the offense across the board, but a little less experience. You just knew how he was going to react in a game, and we don't know how these guys will react."

The Titans will lean on the leadership of left tackle Cayden Bowie, who verbally committed to the University of Houston. Bowie missed most of last season with a torn ACL, but has recovered well and is ready for 2022.

"I am very confident in our team," Bowie said. "We have been preparing since spring mentally and physically. I am just ready

See 'Titans,' page 14

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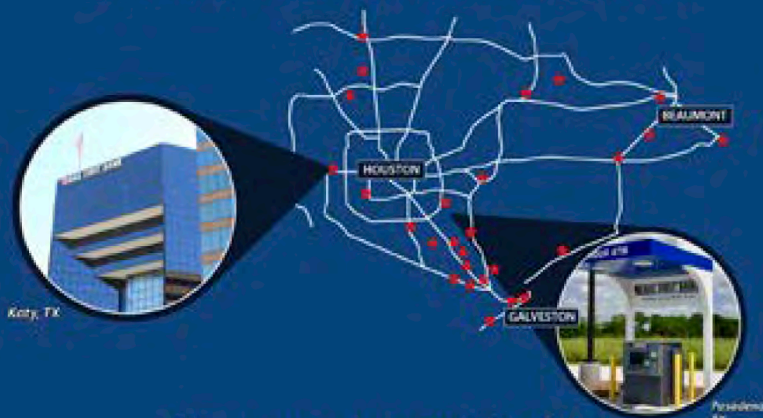
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TITANS

Continued from 13

to win games. I have been saying how much I miss football since I got injured. Now, I have to come back hard and be safe and smart."

Morgan said the receiving corps has played particularly well. Caleb Goodie, a senior transfer from Louisiana has played well during the spring and summer and is expected to be the top target for the Titans.

Jajiyah Green will be a big target for Memorial at 6'4". Junior Quinton Harper and Jaquan Holmes will be the speedsters of the group.

"We have really high thoughts of Goodie," Morgan said. "Holmes and Harper played a

little for us last year and are solid. The biggest growth was Green. Physical growth and mental growth."

Morgan said he is also excited to see a young one-two punch at the running back position. Sophomore Ja'Coryn Baker and freshman Amante Martin will take turns carrying the ball.

"The work ethic they have is unreal. They both just work so hard," Morgan said.

"I think they know neither of them are at the point to carry the load themselves.

"It lets us stay fresh, too. Baker is a kid that works, works, works. Amante has really had to push himself, because he has probably always been the best on the field for his age."

The Titans will rotate three sophomores along the defensive line.

"We think, in time, they are going to be special players," Morgan said. "It is just at what point. It could be early this year, late this year or next year, but they are going to be Power Five recruits."

Memorial added two teams to their district when Barbers Hill and Crosby moved up from Division II. The Titans played both teams last season, beating Barbers Hill and losing to Crosby in non-district play.

The Titans were named by Dave Campbell's Texas Football magazine as a dark horse that could "bust some brackets come playoff time."



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(49-36-3 in the playoffs)

NEDERLAND

Young Bulldogs hope to cut teeth on tough non-district slate

By Chris Moore
chris.moore@panews.com

NEDERLAND — Last year's Nederland Bulldog team took home the Bum Phillips Bowl trophy with a 38-28 win over rival Port Neches-Groves. This year a young Nederland team hopes to keep the trophy in their paws and return to the playoffs after missing the postseason for the first time since 2016.

"We told them Day 1 that we are excited as

a coaching staff about this group," Head Coach Monte Barrow said. "We have worked with them over the summer and they like the game of football. As a coach, you like to show up with kids that want to be out here. They are not forced to be out here. We want to get the season started and get better every week and see where we can go."

Barrow said players who have played under the Friday night lights will have to use

their experience to help guide the younger players.

"They have to step up in certain situations and help the younger kids," Barrow said. "And we have plenty of those. Offensively, we have Jack Bieber and Colby Smith on the line. We have Reeve Barrow and Bryson Bryant on the outside. Defensively, we have Landon Caywood and Joseph Dugat and Travis Roman. Those guys have been in the fire. That is the thing about



Chris Moore

Landon Caywood flies off the edge for the Bulldogs.

the fire. You can't just talk about it. You don't get it until you are in it. Hopefully, we have some guys that will grow up real fast."

The Bulldogs un-

expectedly lost six players to transfers or those wanting to focus on other sports. Nederland will be particularly young on defense,

See 'Bulldogs,' page 18

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SCHEDULES

PN-G INDIANS

Aug. 26: Memorial
 Sept. 2: at Beaumont United
 Sept. 9: at West Orange-Stark
 Sept. 16: Open
 Sept. 24: at Fort Bend Marshall*
 Sept. 30: Texas City*
 Oct. 8: at Fort Bend Willowridge*
 Oct. 14: Dayton*
 Oct. 21: at Santa Fe*
 Oct. 28: Nederland*
 Nov. 4: at Galena Park*

MEMORIAL TITANS

Aug. 26: at Port Neches-Groves
 Sept. 2: Nederland
 Sept. 8: Open
 Sept. 16: Porter*
 Sept. 22: at Sterling*
 Sept. 30: Crosby*
 Oct. 7: at La Porte*
 Oct. 14: Goose Creek Memorial*
 Oct. 21: at Lee*
 Oct. 28: Barbers Hill*
 Nov. 4: at Kingwood Park*

NEDERLAND BULLDOGS

Aug. 26: at West Orange-Stark
 Sept. 2: at Memorial
 Sept. 9: Silsbee
 Sept. 16: Open
 Sept. 23: at Fort Bend Willowridge*
 Sept. 30: Dayton*
 Oct. 7: at Santa Fe*
 Oct. 14: at Fort Bend Marshall*
 Oct. 21: Galena Park*
 Oct. 28: at Port Neches-Groves*
 Nov. 4: Texas City*

SABINE PASS SHARKS

Aug. 26: at Frassati Catholic
 Sept. 2: Open
 Sept. 9: at KIPP Houston
 Sept. 16: Cristo Rey Jesuit
 Sept. 23: Open
 Sept. 30: Open
 Oct. 7: at Hull Daisetta*
 Oct. 14: Evadale*
 Oct. 21: at Lovelady*
 Oct. 28: Deweyville*
 Nov. 4: Colmesneil*

LAMAR CARDINALS

Sept. 1: at Abilene Christian
 Sept. 10: at SMU
 Sept. 17: Northern Colorado
 Sept. 24: Northwestern State*
 Oct. 1: Houston Baptist*
 Oct. 8: at UIW*
 Oct. 15: Open
 Oct. 22: Prairie View A&M*
 Oct. 29: Nicholls*
 Nov. 5: Southeastern Louisiana*
 Nov. 12: New Mexico State
 Nov. 19: McNeese State*

SCHEDULES

LC-M BEARS

Aug. 25: Hardin-Jefferson
Sept. 2: WO-S
Sept. 9: at Bridge City
Sept. 16: at Houston Kinkaid
Sept. 23: Open
Sept. 30: Spring Legacy
Oct. 7: at Vidor*
Oct. 14: at Livingston*
Oct. 21: Splendora*
Oct. 28: at Lumberton*
Nov. 4: Huffman*

VIDOR PIRATES

Aug. 26: at Silsbee
Sept. 2: Santa Fe
Sept. 8: at Brazosport
Sept. 16: Lake Charles St. Louis
Sept. 24: at Trinity Christian
Sept. 30: Open
Oct. 7: LC-M*
Oct. 14: at Lumberton*
Oct. 21: Livingston*
Oct. 28: at Huffman*
Nov. 4: Splendora*

BRIDGE CITY CARDINALS

Aug. 26: at Orangefield
Sept. 2: Buna
Sept. 9: LC-M
Sept. 16: at Lumberton
Sept. 23: at Hamshire-Fannett*
Sept. 30: Open
Oct. 7: Jasper*
Oct. 14: at WO-S*
Oct. 21: Hardin-Jefferson*
Oct. 28: at Silsbee*
Nov. 4: Liberty*

WO-S MUSTANGS

Aug. 26: Nederland
Sept. 2: at LC-M
Sept. 9: PN-G
Sept. 16: at Newton
Sept. 23: at Silsbee*
Sept. 30: Liberty*
Oct. 7: at Hamshire-Fannett*
Oct. 14: Bridge City*
Oct. 21: at Jasper*
Oct. 28: Open
Nov. 4: Hardin-Jefferson*

ORANGEFIELD BOBCATS

Aug. 26: Bridge City
Sept. 2: at Spring Legacy
Sept. 9: Shepherd
Sept. 16: at Woodville
Sept. 23: Buna*
Sept. 30: at Anahuac*
Oct. 7: Tarkington*
Oct. 14: at Hardin*
Oct. 21: Open
Oct. 28: Kirbyville*
Nov. 4: at East Chambers*



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BULLDOGS

Continued from 15

with potentially six sophomores in starting spots.

"We are anxious to see how the sophomores will respond," Barrow said. "There are a couple on offense, too. I don't want to say it is a scary thing. Young is good if young is good. We are excited about these kids. They have some skillsets that will allow them to be successful on Fridays. It is just going to be a different speed than they are used to seeing on Thursdays."

Caywood is aware of the perception of this year's team.

"To be honest, I think a lot of people don't believe in us," he said. "We came to work. We

are putting it together. The young kids are stepping up and the older kids are being leaders."

The defensive end said he has not had to be that vocal and praised the younger players' abilities to come in and learn quickly.

"They are being really coachable," he said. "All of them are stepping up and doing what they need to do. They are listening really well."

Caywood wants a winning season in his senior year and to provide leadership when called on.

Despite the youth, Barrow said he still has high expectations for the team.

"We talked about setting goals and the purpose of them," Barrow

said. "I told them that if we are looking at what the end result is going to be right now, we are going to miss out on the journey. It is about the journey. We want them to enjoy the journey, because that is going to make them what they will end up being at the end of the year. We want to go out, make mistakes, get them corrected and then go out and make some more mistakes."

Nederland has not missed the playoffs in back-to-back years since 1994-95.

The Bulldogs' district lost Barbers Hill and Crosby, who were both playoff teams last season, but gained Fort Bend Marshall, who enters the season with the No. 4 ranking for Division II.



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By Van Wade

van.wade@orangeleader.com

ORANGEFIELD – No matter what “class” the Orangefield Bobcats attend, a top-notch effort has usually always been in store.

That will be the case again in 2022 as the Bobcats venture back to Class 3A after competing in a rugged 4A district the last two seasons.

The Bobcats went a solid 7-4 and made the playoffs again in 4A in 2021 for long-time coach Josh Smalley. This year, they are one of the early district

favorites in their new 3A league. It won't be really new to them, though, as they will see most of the opponents they had in their last year in 3A (2019), when they went 9-2 and made the postseason.

“We've had a great offseason for sure and have had an amazing turnout, it's probably the best summer we've had,” said Smalley. “The kids have really bought in and have gotten so much stronger and faster.”

Smalley and the staff made sure there would

See ‘Bobcats,’ page 21

ORANGEFIELD

Bobcats seeking nice run in the Class 3A ranks



Tommy Mann Jr.

Orangefield running back Cameron Dischler looks to shrug off an Anahuac defender last season.

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Tommy Mann Jr.

Orangefield quarterback Brayden Parker gets off a nice pass against Buna last season.

BOBCATS

Continued from 19

the likes of East Chambers, Anahuac, Buna, Hardin and Kirbyville.

"Number-wise, we hope it is beneficial to us," said Smalley. "That doesn't mean you are going automatically go out there and win every game. We found that out in 2018 when we dropped back down and didn't make the playoffs. I think the kids understand that. Also, it doesn't matter what 'A' you are in, you have to stay healthy, that's always a big key."

Running back Cameron Dischler and quarterback Brayden Parker are back to spearhead the offensive backfield. Dischler zipped for over 1,400 yards and 19 touchdowns last season.

"Dischler was a 'hoss' last year and we expect a lot out of him again, and he's the type of kid that would run through a brick wall and play anywhere we ask of him," said Smalley. "Brayden is the type of kid that lets nothing rattle him. He always has tremendous composure and loves to compete."

There will be plenty of talent to get the ball to in the backfield.

Gavin Perry-Koci is back at a tailback spot after having success last year. Also expected to see a slew of carries are

be no
cake-
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with

Kyle Michael, Lane Gipson, Mason Manning, Case Singleton and Kane Smith. A lot of those guys will also see time catching the ball on the outside as receiver threats.

"We've got a really good group we can mix in and out of the backfield," said Smalley. "Perry-Koci, he showed he had 'wheels' last year and he's even faster now. As usual, we have a bunch of guys who are playing on both sides of the ball, so it's good to have some depth like we have."

The Bobcats' biggest concerns comes along the offensive line, in which every starter graduated.

Offensive line candidates include Gavin Pollock, Diego Garcia, Ethan Brown, Ethan Blackburn, Brayden McGee, Blake McRight, Kaleb Myers, Ruston Traxler and Leonardo Aguinaga.

Orangefield has two excellent big guys in senior tight ends and defensive ends Morgan Sampson and Koen Maddox to help lead the younger guys as they get their feet wet.

"Those two guys there are so important to what we want to be able to do on both sides of the ball," said Smalley. "They definitely know what it is all about and our younger kids look up to them. We really want those two to step in and lead the way."

Joining Sampson and Maddox along the defensive front

are McRight, Brown, Myers, Pollock, Garcia and Asher Addison.

The outside linebackers consist of Beau Elkins, Leyton Loft and Mason Howton, while Michael, Gipson and Traxler will be at inside linebacker.

In the secondary, Dischler will play at safety quite a bit as well as some linebacker. Smith and Logan Trahan will also play at the safety spots.

At cornerback, Perry-Koci, Singleton, Jackson Humpalik, Caleb Fregia and Korbin Pennington will all see action early on.

The Bobcats have a nice non-district schedule stacked ahead of them as they will take on Bridge City, Spring Legacy, Shepherd and Woodville.

Orangefield has some formidable tasks in district play. East Chambers has been a 3A powerhouse for years. Anahuac came on strong late last season. Never discount the Bobcats' long-time rivalry with Buna. The Bobcats have been familiar with district foes Hardin and Kirbyville and will get a look at a newcomer in Tarkington.

"We expect a dogfight every Friday against those guys," said Smalley. "I think it's going to be a very competitive district, and we certainly have a stout non-district schedule to get us ready for it."

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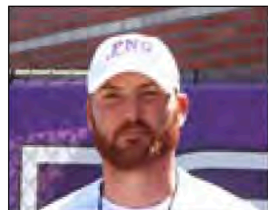
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JEFF JOSEPH
1ST year

By Chris Moore

chris.moore@panews.com

PORT NECHES — Port Neches-Groves enters the season with perhaps the highest expectations in the area. Last year's team made it to the third round of the 5A Division II

playoffs and returns nine starters on offense and six on defense.

"I feel like we have worked hard this summer," Head Coach Jeff Joseph said. "I think it is going to be a learning experience for me, as well. I am not entirely sure what to

expect once we line up against someone else. I expect them to grow as the season grows. I expect them, from Day 1, to play with great effort and play really hard."

PNG went through a fairly rigorous spring and summer with Joseph opting to have padded spring games.

Several players also commented on the intensity of the offseason program in relation to previous years.

While Joseph is anxious to see how his team responds to playing against another opponent, that does not mean he has any relaxed expectations.

"We kept our team goals pretty simple," he said. "We want to win a district championship."

PNG's deep playoff run was a bit of a surprise to some last year. Preseason predictions had the team missing the playoffs, and the Indians entered the final week of the season with a chance to get

the third seed or miss the playoffs completely. After getting in, PNG busted some brackets with upsets in the first two rounds.

This year, there aren't many taking the team in purple lightly. Dave Campbell's Texas Football has quarterback Cole Crippen as the preseason district offensive MVP and predicts PNG to finish second in the district behind Fort Bend Marshall, which enters the season ranked No. 4 in the state.

Crippen said he is aware of the expectations.

"You always keep it in your mind during your workouts," he said. "You want to advance to (the fourth round) and maybe even further than last year."

The quarterback said the large senior class has played together since youth leagues and have often talked about playing their senior season.

"It is my and my

friends' last year," he said. "We can't wait and we are ready. We have all been working really hard since the spring practice."

Crippen will be playing behind what could be one of the most dominant offensive lines in the state, which returns all five starters from last season. PNG also brings back Crippen's top-two targets in Chance Prosperie and Landon Guarnere.

"Guarnere has really stepped up his leadership skills and work ethic throughout the summer," Joseph said. "He has really worked and made people respect him. It is not necessarily what he says, but the way he shows up and works his butt off. He has done a really good job for us this summer."

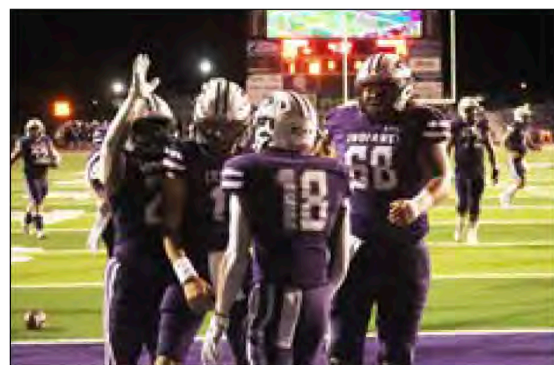
The coach also pointed to defensive linemen Isaac Baker and Peyton Broom as two who greatly improved over the offseason.



Chris Moore

TOP: Landon Guarnere hauls in a deep pass for a touchdown.

BOTTOM: Port Neches-Groves returns 15 starters from last year's squad.



We wish all area teams a successful 2021 season!

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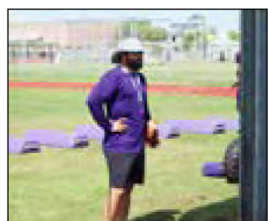


SABINE PASS

Sabine Pass Sharks see strength in numbers



CODY ALMOND
1st year



Chris Moore.
First-year head coach Cody Almond watches his team practice.

By Chris Moore

chris.moore@panews.com

SABINE PASS — For the Sabine Sharks, the questions surrounding the team are not usually how good the team will be, but rather will they be able to complete a season. If the team's summer workouts are any indication, the chances seem higher now than they been in recent seasons.

As high schools across the state put pads on for the first time this summer, the Sharks had 26 student-athletes in

attendance.

"That is a lot more than we are used to having," new head coach Cody Almond said. "Usually, we can count them on two hands."

Almond's quip might sound like sarcasm but is typically true for Sabine Pass summer workouts. Last season, the Sharks had nine players participate in the offseason program and coaches usually wait until school starts to get an accurate head count with students often coming in from Port Arthur for school.

See 'Sharks,' page 24



Chris Moore

Alexander Jackson works the ropes at training camp.

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Lukas Blood runs the ladder drill.

Chris Moore

SHARKS

Continued from 23

"We should have another handful more when they get back from vacation," Almond said. "Right now, we are fielding a team."

In 2A football, players often play both sides of the ball. While it appears the Sharks could have enough bodies to allow players to rest, each player often takes on at least two roles.

Rylan Johnson returns this year to play quarterback and linebacker. Drake Trahan will play receiver and corner.

"Alexander Jackson is also returning to play offensive and defensive line for us," Almond said. "He is one of our biggest kids and strongest kids. We have a few freshmen coming in from our junior

high team that played well. They will show up Day 1."

Almond said he is ready to get the season started. The Sharks open up the schedule at home against Cristo Rey Jesuit.

"I think we have fared pretty well against them in the past," he said. "Hopefully we can get a win there. We are always ready for our big rivalry games. We have Hull-Daisetta, Evadale and Deweyville. Hopefully with the numbers we have, we can get up for them and give them a better game than what we have recently."

Jackson is most looking forward to playing Hull-Daisetta, who the Sharks have not played in two seasons.

Almond said the staff and fans of Sabine Pass

are getting excited as kickoff nears.

"We haven't had a team, two out of the past three years," he said. "They deserve a good football team. These coaches love football. To have numbers now, we want to move forward. I think the excitement level is at an all-time high."

That excitement has reached the players, who seemed happy to just have more players at practice.

"I feel good about the team," Johnson said. "We have a lot of numbers coming out. We still have a lot of people doubting us, but I believe in everyone here. I just want to finish the season. We could look at the wins and losses, but if we finish, I am going to be proud of the group of guys here."

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Nederland celebrates after winning the Bum Phillips Bowl in 2021.

Chris Moore



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JEFF MATHEWS
24th year
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2021 record: 8-2, Class
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Record since 1977:
177-271-2
(4-10 in the playoffs)

By Van Wade

van.wade@orangeleader.com

VIDOR – It's hard to fathom Vidor head football coach Jeff Mathews is entering his 24th season in guiding the Pirates.

It's even harder to fathom Vidor football without him leading the way.

One thing for sure, Mathews is ready to push the Pirates to another tremendous campaign.

The Pirates certainly made headway in their



Tommy Mann Jr.

A host of Vidor defenders look to chase down LC-M quarterback Ashton Landry.

second year in the Class 4A ranks after dropping down from 5A going into the 2020 seasons.

The Pirates mauled just about everyone in their path last year, going 8-2 to share the district title with LC-M. The Pirates earned the district's top seed with a win over the Bears and fell to eventual 4A Region III Division I Regional Champion Tyler Chapel Hill in the bidistrict

See 'Pirates,' page 27

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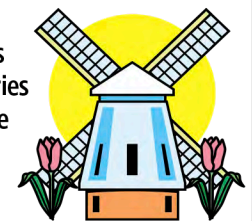
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PIRATES

Continued from 26

round.

"The kids are stoked about kicking this season off," said Mathews. "They have been going about the process of being here all summer long, and this might be the strongest team we've ever had. We have a lot of great senior leaders that the younger kids have certainly looked up too. We have kids coming up from an undefeated JV team and some players will also help us who were on a very good freshman unit."

The Pirates return seven starters on both sides of the ball.

"We've got guys that know what that Friday Night Experience is all

about," said Mathews. "They know our offensive and defensive schemes so well. It's been instilled in them since they were in junior high."

Once again, the Pirates intend to wear down opposing defenses with their vaunted Slot-T Offense. With several key skill people back and tremendous returners along the offensive line, Mathews feels the Pirates will move the ball up and down the field."

He said some of the guys coming back "are beasts."

Jarrett Odom is guiding the offense at quarterback.

He is a good athlete who knows the system.

"He has that hard-nosed mentality and has been a good line-

backer for us, too," Mathews said.

The backfield consists of fullback Jason Watson and halfbacks Ricky Gall, Isaac Fontenot and Wyatt Flores.

"It's great to have Ricky back healthy after we lost him to an injury after about three weeks last season," said Mathews. "He was on such a role, too. He had about 700 yards rushing in those first three games. Watson is a beast anywhere we put him."

Of course, the success with the Slot-T starts with the big fellas up front.

A.J. Tatum, Jesse Myers, Brooklyn Freeman, Landon Wilcoxson, Brayden Root and Payton Ragan all bring back valuable experience.

"A lot of those guys had a great run last year, and they are even stronger now," said Mathews. "We're really counting on them to pave the way."

The Pirates defensive line should be sparked by Watson, Blaydin Laughlin and Haydon Garrett.

Mathews likes his linebacker group with Kruz Lozano and Tate Ardis leading the way.

Jarrett Odom is moving from linebacker to safety this year, while also handling the QB duty with Lance Beavers at the other safety. Dane Villadson and Bryce Dubois are likely to get the nods at cornerback.

"We should be sound on the defensive side," said Mathews. "We've shuffled a few guys

around but we believe they will pick it up well."

The Pirates have a stout non-district schedule that includes games with Silsbee, Santa Fe, Brazosport, Lake Charles St. Louis and Trinity Christian.

"We feel we have a pretty salty nondistrict again," said Mathews. "Four of the five made the playoffs last season. Silsbee is going to be tough right out of the chute."

The Pirates, along with LC-M, Lumberton and Huffman have been the "heavies" of late in district play, but Livingston and Splendora look to throw a kink in the plans.

Vidor has two tough games for sure when entering district play, hosting LC-M Oct. 7

and venturing to Lumberton Oct. 14.

"Top to bottom I thought our district was really strong last season and has a chance to be even stronger this year," said Mathews. "Coach (Eric) Peevey has the Bears rolling over at LC-M. Lumberton has a lot of kids out and they have some really good athletes. Huffman will be typical Huffman, well-coached and fundamentally sound. Livingston is always tough with the athletes they field, and Splendora, they can give you trouble, too. I definitely think the Pirates have a shot though, especially with the kids we have back. Our goal is to go out and outwork everybody."



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WEST ORANGE-STARK

Mustangs ready to stampede for Coach Hickman



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By Van Wade

van.wade@orangeleader.com

WEST ORANGE – A new coaching era begins at West Orange-Stark this season, but one thing remains the same: the pedigree of the Mustangs.

Hiawatha Hickman steps in as the new Athletic Director and Head Football Coach, replacing the legendary Cornel Thompson.

One thing for certain, Coach Hickman knows what the Mustangs and the tradition is all

about after serving as a tremendous assistant over the years, including a couple of State Championship trophies.

The Mustangs are on a quest for their 12th straight district title. They are also on a mission to reach the 4A Region III Division II Finals for the 11th time out of the last 12 seasons. Sandwiched in between all of that were four trips to the Class 4A Division II State Championship games (2014-2017) that

saw them win back-to-back titles (2015, 2016).

"It's been busy and hectic, getting all of the admin stuff completed," said Hickman. "I'm so thrilled though, because I have every spot on our coaching staff filled up. We're excited, ready to go and can't wait for the Mustangs to hit the field on Friday nights."

The Mustangs have a slew of key returnees from their 11-2 squad that won district and went to the 4A Region

See 'Mustangs,' page 29



Mark Pachuca
West Orange-Stark's Jailen Brown heads down the sideline after a big catch against Silsbee last season.

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MUSTANGS

Continued from 28

III Division II Finals a season ago.

"We've got so many kids returning and that's a huge plus," said Hickman. "We're not going through wholesale changes and we still plan on doing everything the Mustang Way. We're going to go a little more up-tempo on offense and get the ball to a nice skill set because we have a lot of kids who will get their hands on the ball. We want our opponents having to key on as many kids as possible."

Keyshawn Robinson and Marcus Turner are getting early snaps at quarterback.

"Keyshawn came on strong for us late last season and in the play-offs and knows what it is all about," said Hickman. "Marcus is young, but he has a great arm and is versatile. They are both very capable, and whoever is not playing at quarterback will also be utilized at receiver, in the backfield and on defense."

Hickman likes the stable of running backs.

"Jamal and Jailen are back in the mix, and watch out for Raymond Mallett, too, this season," said Hickman.

The receiving corp is led by the return of Darren Anderson, along with Nicholas Crosson.

The offensive line has key veterans

back in Davin Heard, Andrew Wilson, along with Joshua Sterling, Josh Miller and Dylan Edwards. Clayton Whatley will play tight end and sometimes as the H-Back.

The defensive front is anchored by the likes of Wilson, Whatley, Jatterious Brown, Carlton Simien, Makelon Sells and Rueben Ceasar.

The linebacker group is solid with Jalen Gilmore, D.J. Warren, DeShawn Brunson and Chapa Gomez.

The secondary is loaded with All-District talent with Shaw and Dakarion Judge at the corners and Brown and Anderson at the safeties. Crosson and Andrew Cooper will also play key roles.

"Everyone knows how much pride goes into playing for the Mustang defense," said Hickman. "We've got a lot of kids back and we expect big things out of them again."

New to the district fray will be the Jasper Bulldogs, as Orange-field moved down to 3A, which allowed Jasper to move into the Golden Triangle district that also features Bridge City, Silsbee, Hamshire-Fannett, Hardin-Jefferson and Liberty.

As usual, the Mustangs have a stacked non-district schedule to get them prepped for a rugged district.

They open the season at home against Nederland, venture to LC-M to face the Bears,

return home to take on PN-G before heading to Newton in their last non-district tilt.

All four of those teams made the play-offs last season and are expected to again.

"That's quite the gauntlet of a non-district schedule, but we are accustomed to playing teams like that to help us in what we face ahead," said Hickman. "Our scrimmages and non-district games really give us a good look at where we need to improve and what works. It will definitely prepare us for a tough district."

That will certainly get the Mustangs ready for their district opener, which is Sept. 23. The Mustangs also visit Jasper Oct. 21, as

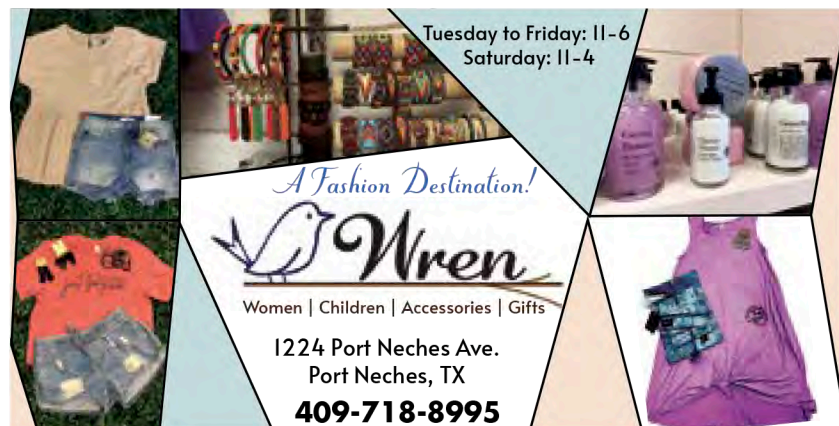
those three teams are certainly the district favorites heading into the season.

Of course, the Mustangs also have to deal with a rising Hamshire-Fannett program, a Bridge City team that was much improved last year, along with Hardin-Jefferson and Liberty.

"There are definitely challenges ahead for the Mustangs, but we feel they will be ready for the task, they always are," said Hickman. "I think our district is one of the toughest in the state, if not the toughest. Don't be surprised to see the four teams making the playoffs out of our district playing one another again down the road in the playoffs."

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Van Wade

WO-S first-year head coach Hiawatha Hickman will look to sparkplugs Jamal Shaw (left) and Jailen Brown (right) to help lead the way.



Chris Moore

Nederland tight end/defensive end Landon Caywood, Memorial tackle Cayden Bowie and Port Neches-Groves guard Elizardo Pena represent their schools.




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