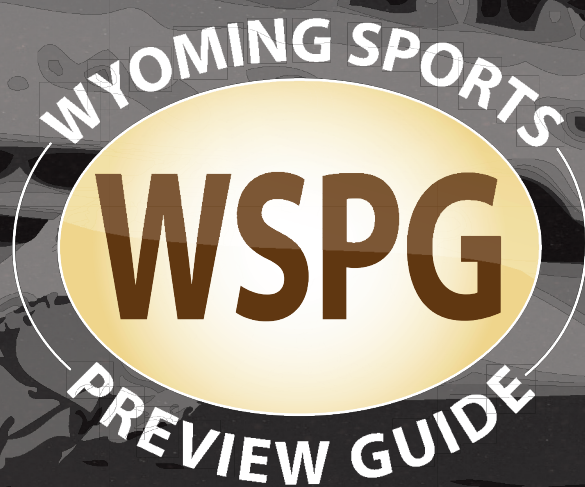


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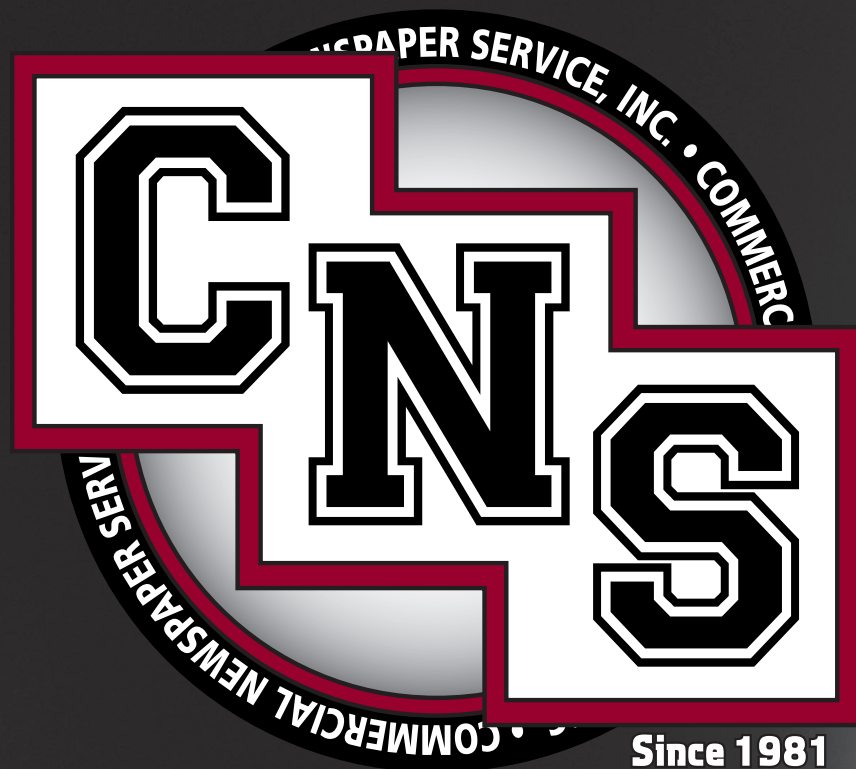
Wyoming High School Football Guide 2018

Who can be
Bronc Busters?

Cody and Sheridan have more than nickname in common



Coverage of **EVERY TEAM** in the State!



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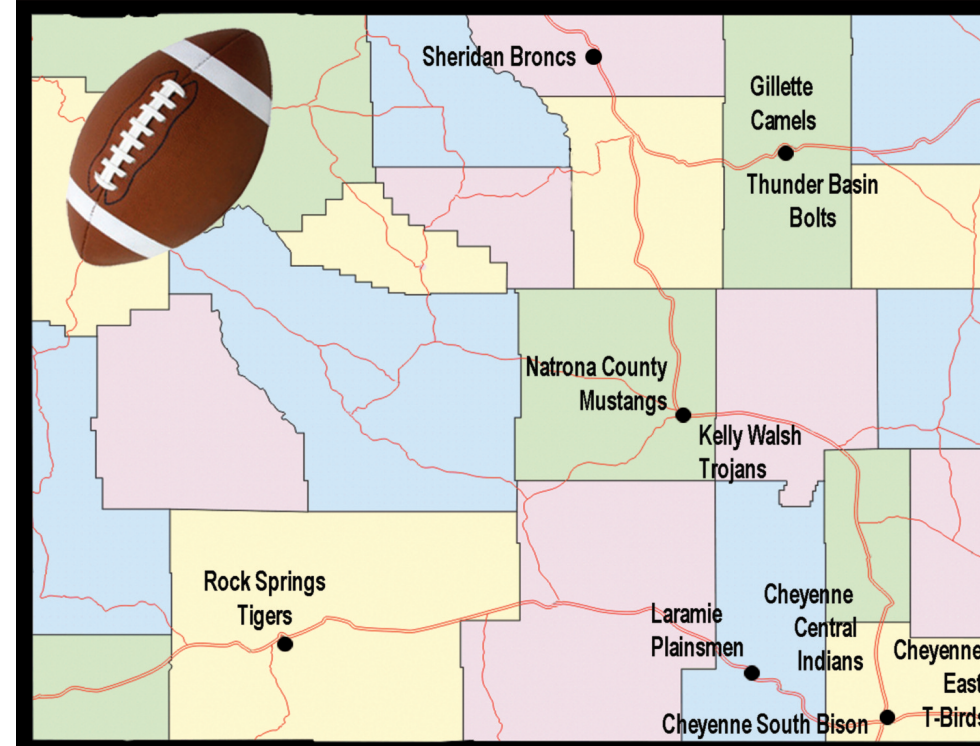
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4A Preview



Broncs favored for title No. 4

By Patrick Schmiedt

Four questions to answer

Will Sheridan win a fourth consecutive championship? The odds are good. The Broncos have a ton of new personnel and a new coach in Jeff Mowry, but they also have tradition, high expectations and momentum.

Who's got the best shot to challenge Sheridan? No one knows. Kelly Walsh has a chance, maybe Natrona, maybe East, maybe Thunder Basin... but not a single coach could give a specific reason, outside of tradition, why any team other than Sheridan should be considered a legit contender for the 4A crown.

So who actually has the best shot? Kelly Walsh. If you cut through all the presuppositions, the team that's unanimously on the rise is KW. Opposing coaches came away impressed with the Trojans' performance last year, their ability to finally get a playoff victory (first since 2009) and the personnel that returns.

Will new coaches at Sheridan and Cheyenne Central change 4A much? Not this year. Jeff Mowry in Sheridan learned from Don Julian for several years and likely will not mess with what's working. And Mike Apodaca inherits a rebuilding project at Cheyenne Central that will take longer than a year to turn around completely.

come back after losing a large chunk of seniors? How will Central play under new coach Mike Apodaca? Will either one be a surprise challenger?

Kelly Walsh at Cheyenne East, Aug. 31. If the Trojans want to be taken as a serious 4A title contender, they have to beat the Thunderbirds. East has beaten KW nine consecutive times, and KW hasn't won at East since 2006.

Sheridan at Natrona, Sept. 7. Sheridan got the best of Natrona in both of their matchups, including the big one in the state title game. This early season matchup should set the pace for 4A for the rest of the season.

Natrona at Kelly Walsh, Oct. 5. This Oil Bowl could have higher stakes than any Oil Bowl in the past decade. Both the Mustangs and Trojans want to be in the title chase, and what better way to prove yourself than against your cross-town rival?

Predicted order of finish

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

Way-too-early title-game score prediction

Sheridan 34, Kelly Walsh 26

There's a lot of uncertainty in the 4A ranks this year. What is clear, though, is that no one team has specifically risen up to give Sheridan a challenge for 4A supremacy.

Four key games

Thunder Basin at Cheyenne Central, Aug. 24. Questions: How will Thunder Basin



State Champs
**Sheridan
Broncs**

2017 State Playoffs

State Championship

Sheridan 28, Natrona 14

State Semifinals

Natrona 44, Cheyenne East 0

Sheridan 28, Kelly Walsh 7

State Quarterfinals

Kelly Walsh 30, Thunder Basin 7

Sheridan 54, Cheyenne Central 7

Natrona 44, Laramie 6

Cheyenne East 50, Rock Springs 15

Four players to watch

Parker Christensen, Sheridan

Christensen for 1,049 yards on just 98 carries (do the math and that's 10.7 yards per carry). As one of the top running backs in the state, playing for the three-time defending champs, Christensen will have a huge responsibility ahead.

Brock Spiegelberg, Kelly Walsh

As KW shifted to a balanced running game, Spiegelberg piled up the stats. He ran for 1,399 yards and 17 touchdowns last year. As the centerpiece of the Trojans' offense, he could put up even bigger numbers this fall.

Zach Alexander, Cheyenne East

Alexander is preparing to enter his third year as East's starting middle linebacker – an honor few 4A players could ever claim. As the centerpiece of the defense, he'll lead East's defense in a wide-open 4A race.

Chase Brachtenbach, Natrona

Not too many players lead Natrona in defensive points as a junior, but that's exactly what Brachtenbach did last season. The Mustangs' leader in tackles for loss and sacks, Brachtenbach will be a key piece of a rebuilding defense.



Mascot: Camels

Division: 4A

Colors: Purple and gold

Coach: Micah Christensen, 2nd season at Gillette

2017 Record: 0-9, did not qualify for playoffs

Key Players

QB: Cameron Kirkwood, Sr.

RB/LB: Vijay Pitter, Jr.

OL/DL: Ethan Marshall, Sr.

WR/DB: Desmond Medina, Jr.

2018 Schedule

8-24: vs. Cheyenne East, 7 p.m.

8-31: vs. Natrona, 7 p.m.

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

9-14: vs. Cheyenne Central, 7 p.m.

9-21: at Thunder Basin, 7 p.m.

9-28: vs. Rock Springs, 7 p.m.

10-5: at Sheridan, 7 p.m.

10-12: at Cheyenne South, 6 p.m.

10-19: vs. Kelly Walsh, 6 p.m.

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CAMPBELL CO. (GILLETTE) CAMELS

4A

Camels still in building mode

As far as the Gillette Camels are concerned, last season's raw numbers don't represent the season they had.

The raw numbers themselves are brutal: 0-9, outscored by an average of 63-8.

However, the Camels depended significantly on younger players to fill spots that would normally go to seniors – and with most of the city's seniors playing for the new Thunder Basin High School, the Camels' underclassmen got lots of opportunities to grow.

"I think they found out a lot about themselves, the resilience that they had," Gillette coach Micah Christensen said. "We didn't have a lot of attrition, and that was one of the big fears going in."

"The resiliency of those kids and their will and determination will bode well for the future. We're still pretty early in the process of getting back to where Gillette was, but they're working hard at it. Our numbers were significantly higher for football camp, and weight room numbers are better than last year, so they're working on getting things back together."

With only seven total seniors gone, most of the team's key contributors from last year return. Even so, Gillette will still field a young team that will depend a lot on sophomores and juniors. Christensen said he expects about 10 seniors to come out, once again leaving opportunities for younger players.

Senior Cameron Kirkwood will return under center after completing 103 of 193 passes for 939 yards and six touchdowns.

Senior Morgan Merchen is the Camels' leading returning receiver after finishing second on the team last year with 31 catches for 262 yards. Junior Tanner Hilliard also returns after catching 12 passes for 109 yards.

"I think they found out a lot about themselves, the resilience that they had."

~ Coach Micah Christensen

Junior Vijay Pitter will be Gillette's leading returning rusher; he was second for the Camels last season in both attempts (52) and rushing yards (154).

The Camels' lines will be much more experienced and physically bigger, Christensen said.

The Camels return four of their top six tacklers, including Pitter, who was second in defensive points and led the team with five tackles for loss.

Sophomore Kaden Race and juniors Desmond Medina and Dawsen Hayden were also among Gillette's top six tacklers last year, while Merchen, junior Marcus Wilson and sophomores Hunter Kramer and Colter Rankin also saw significant time on defense.

The other big change the Camels have on their side this fall is time. Christensen took over the Camels in July last year, leaving little time for preseason preparation.

"It was fly by the seat of your pants all season because we didn't have any time to prepare," Christensen said. "This offseason has been a lot better. ... I feel like going into the season, (we are) much more prepared and knowing what to expect."

4A

CHEYENNE EAST THUNDERBIRDS

PAGE 5

T-Birds need to grow up fast

Cheyenne East's conundrum this season is straightforward to explain but difficult to solve.

The Thunderbirds should have plenty of players take the field – enough to be competitive in Class 4A.

The problem is that most of those players have little varsity experience.

So, even though East will be loaded with seniors, inexperience could be the team's biggest weakness entering 2018.

"They have the experience of the game," East coach Chad Goff said, "just not the varsity game."

Senior linebacker Zach Alexander is the only one of East's five all-state players to return this fall. Senior punter Dakota Merritt was also an all-conference pick, but East lost eight all-conference players to graduation, second only to Natrona in Class 4A.

The Thunderbirds graduated their quarterback, their top three rushers and four of their top five receivers from a team that went 8-3 and reached the Class 4A semifinals for the 11th time in the past 13 seasons.

Even so, Goff said he expects 24 or 25 seniors and about 30 juniors to compete for varsity spots this fall.

"Numbers-wise, we should probably be similar to where we were last year ... and that always gives you an opportunity to compete," Goff said.

Alexander is the only one of the Thunderbirds' top 11 tacklers to come back this fall. Alexander – who is preparing to enter his third consecutive season as East's starting inside linebacker – was second on the team in defensive points. He led the Thunderbirds in assisted tackles with 53 and was second on the squad with 29 solo tackles.

"They have the experience of the game, just not the varsity game."

~ Coach Chad Goff

"Having close to 20 games under his belt at the varsity level should really pay off" this season, Goff said.

Senior Brenden Diesing, who was 12th in defensive points for East a year ago, is the only other returner to log significant defensive minutes last year.

On offense, senior Riley Cooper had 13 carries for 122 yards last year; he is East's top returning rusher. However, he is also returning from a torn ACL that kept him out of portions of last season.

Goff said the makeup of this year's team may lend itself to more of a grind-it-out approach, even though the squad only returns one starter on the offensive line – senior Jacob Fernandez – from last year.

"We have some strong kids," he said. "We're getting a little bit bigger, hopefully a little bit bigger, up front. We've always been predominantly a small offensive line team."

Merritt had 13 catches for 220 yards last year and was second on the team in receiving yards. However, he is the only one of East's receivers to gain more than 26 yards last year who is back this fall – a microcosm for the Thunderbirds' lack of experience at multiple positions.



Mascot: Thunderbirds

Division: 4A

Colors: Columbia Blue & Black

Coach: Chad Goff, 13th year at East

2017 Record: 8-3, lost to Natrona in state semifinals

Key Players

ILB: Zach Alexander, Sr.

OL: Jacob Fernandez, Sr.

RB/LB: Riley Cooper, Sr.

WR: Dakota Merritt, Sr.

2018 Schedule

8-24: at Gillette, 7 p.m.

8-31: vs. Kelly Walsh, 6 p.m.

9-7: at Thunder Basin, 7 p.m.

9-14: vs. Cheyenne South, 6 p.m.

9-21: vs. Natrona, 7 p.m.

9-28: vs. Laramie, 6 p.m.

10-5: at Cheyenne Central, 6 p.m.

10-12: at Rock Springs, 6 p.m.

10-19: vs. Sheridan, 6 p.m.



Mascot: Indians

Division: 4A

Colors: Red and black

Coach: Mike Apodaca, 1st season at Central

2017 Record: 2-8, lost to Sheridan in quarterfinals

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4A

CHEYENNE CENTRAL INDIANS

Apodaca returns to lead Central

Mike Apodaca wasn't necessarily looking to leave Colorado.

For 15 years, Apodaca was the head coach at Silver Creek High School in Longmont, Colorado, leading his squad to the playoffs seven times, to state championship games three times and to a Class 3A championship in 2012.

But when the opening at Cheyenne Central – Apodaca's alma mater – came open, he decided he couldn't ignore the opportunity it represented.

"It's a good challenge," Apodaca said. "I've been at Silver Creek for a long time, and this was time for a new challenge."

What Apodaca inherits at Cheyenne Central is, indeed, challenging. The Indians haven't finished above .500 and haven't won a playoff game since 2009.

But the new coach likes what he sees, espe-

cially in the weight room, where he said he's seeing "literally daily improvement, and that's not just a coach cliché."

"I don't think they're that far away," he added. "We'll have our work cut out for us... (but) each and every day, just our commitment to the weight room in terms of attendance and the work getting done each day, it gets stronger and stronger."

The Indians lost both of their all-state picks but do return two all-conference selections in senior defensive back Nico Vite and senior lineman Val Herd.

Vite was second for the Indians in both receptions and yards a year ago with 24 catches for 401 yards. However, of Central's three receivers to reach triple-digit receiving yardage last year, he's the only one who's back.

Vite, who was third in defensive points for the

Key Players

OL: D.J. Weese, Sr.

WR/DB: Nico Vite, Sr.

WR/DB: Blain Dilly, Sr.

OL: Val Herd, Sr.

Indians last year, is also Central's leading returning tackler.

Herd, along with seniors D.J. Weese and Tanner Martin, will lead the efforts up front. However, the Indians lost their top three rushers to graduation. Senior Braydon Marks leads the returners, but he only had 41 yards on five carries a year ago.

Junior Dawson MacLeary took over early in the season under center and finished with 61 completions for 979 yards and seven scores.

Offensively, Apodaca said he has a reputation for running a spread offense that emphasizes the pass while also establishing the run, but conceded, "the reality is we're going to take what the defense gives us."

Defensively, in addition to Vite, Martin and Herd, seniors Blain Dilly and Hayden George were all in the top 10 for defensive points a year ago. They'll fit into what Apodaca called a "balanced" defensive system.

And the new coach will have influence on both sides of the ball.

"I spend more of my time on the offensive side as a coach, but as a player I was much more of a defensive side of the ball kind of guy," Apodaca said.



2018 Schedule

8-24: vs. Thunder Basin, 6 p.m.

8-31: at Sheridan, 6 p.m.

9-7: vs. Rock Springs, 6 p.m.

9-14: at Gillette, 7 p.m.

9-21: at Laramie, 7 p.m.

9-28: vs. Kelly Walsh, 6 p.m.

10-5: vs. Cheyenne East, 6 p.m.

10-12: at Natrona, 6 p.m.

10-19: at Cheyenne South, 6 p.m.



Mascot: Bison
Division: 4A
Colors: Black and gold
Coach: Dan Gallas, 3rd year at South
2017 Record: 1-8, did not qualify for state playoffs

2018 Schedule

8-24: vs. Natrona, 7 p.m.
8-31: vs. Thunder Basin, 6 p.m.
9-7: at Kelly Walsh, 7 p.m.
9-14: at Cheyenne East, 6 p.m.
9-21: at Rock Springs, 6 p.m.
9-28: vs. Sheridan, 6 p.m.
10-5: at Laramie, 6 p.m.
10-12: vs. Gillette, 6 p.m.
10-19: vs. Cheyenne Central, 6 p.m.

Bison rely on ground game

The offseason training program for Cheyenne South has shown coach Dan Gallas what his team might look like this fall.

When he looks at the players committing to that kind of approach, he sees progress.

"The students and the athletes that are there have been working extremely hard," Gallas said. "I'm very proud of the ones that are showing up."

But the Bison's offseason success is also an indicator of a potential problem entering this season: Gallas said several key contributors to last year's South team may not be out this season.

Nevertheless, the Bison are moving forward with their plans focused on what they know they have.

"We've got some kids that have some experience, and we're doing our best to get them prepared for the season," Gallas said.

South will return roughly seven starters on both offense and defense; however, senior lineman Jace Packard is South's lone returning all-conference selection.

The running game will again be South's offensive strength.

Six players broke into triple

Key Players

TE/DE: Hunter Scott, Jr.

LB: Austin White, Sr.

OL/DL: Jace Packard, Sr.

RB/LB: Wyatt Garcia, Sr.

digits in rushing last year for the Bison, and at least four of those six return.

Senior Trey Trimble led the Bison in rushing last season, running 101 times for 455 yards. Junior Alex Soto added 382 rushing yards, senior Wyatt Garcia chipped in 154 and senior Dominic Dominguez added 125.

"Any time you've got experience, you hope that the experience pulls you along and gives you desires to do better," Gallas said.

Junior tight end Hunter Scott is South's leading returning receiver. He was second on the team in both receptions (9) and receiving yards (134) a year ago; Dominguez was third in both categories (7 catches, 115 yards).

On defense, four of South's

five top tacklers, and eight of the Bison's top 10, could potentially return this fall, come back this fall, with Garcia, Trimble, Packard and Soto finishing second through fifth, respectively, in defensive points last year.

Packard led the Bison in assisted tackles while Garcia led the team with seven tackles for loss.

Dominguez and senior Austin White were also key contributors on last year's defense.

However, the Bison still struggled in 2018, finishing 1-8, the lone victory coming against a rebuilding Gillette program. Gallas said based on last year's problems, his team has some specific areas of improvement on which it can focus.

"I hope they took away from it that we all need to work hard and take advantage of the opportunities we have when they come upon us," Gallas said. "Hopefully they understand they need to be more ball aware, take care of the ball and play better defense."

For the players who are there, that renewed focus could help the Bison reverse their fortunes this season.

Plainsmen building momentum

In Clint Reed's first year as Laramie head coach, two things out of his control kept the Plainsmen from achieving their full potential.

The first was injuries. Several Plainsmen fought injuries all season long, forcing young players into key positions.

"We had a lot of kids that had to step up," Reed said. "... Sometimes it was spot duty, sometimes it was half a game, sometimes it was a whole season."

The second was, quite simply, time. Reed was hired as Laramie's coach just before the start of the summer, limiting the amount of change the program could do in the short time before the season began.

Nevertheless, Reed said he feels like the program continues to grow in the right direction, "not only this year but for all the years to come."

"I don't think we're going to build this championship team in one year," he added. "I want to win just like everyone else does, but I want to build that foundation."

"I think we've got some good guys that are willing to commit to

Key Players

QB/FS: Jason Upton, Sr.

RB/OLB: Baxter Tuggle, Sr.

OL/DL: Calvin Webb, Jr.

OL/DL: Ben Martinez, Sr.

helping us turn this around."

After a 17th consecutive losing season, Laramie lost all five of its all-conference selections to graduation. But with extra time, and players back from injuries, the Plainsmen's future is looking brighter.

Senior Baxter Tuggle led Laramie last year in rushes (111), rushing yards (498) and rushing touchdowns (four).

Tuggle also added 243 receiving yards, good for second on the team last year, and is Laramie's leading returning receiver, as well.

Senior Jason Upton will take over at quarterback after running for 220 yards and receiving for 190 a year ago.

"We've tweaked some things offensively and hopefully we can get back to a good, strong run

game just like the Deti days," Reed said.

Senior Ben Martinez and junior Calvin Webb return to the offensive line after missing most of last year with injuries.

Laramie lost its top two tacklers to graduation, but the Plainsmen do return three of their next four. Senior linebacker Ethan Sell finished third for Laramie in defensive points a year ago and is the Plainsmen's top returning tackler. He led the team with four pass break-ups and was second with 39 solo tackles.

Also, Upton finished fourth in defensive points and tied for the team lead with a pair of interceptions.

Tuggle and seniors Preston Buszkiewicz and Woodrow Gamboa also averaged more than five defensive points per game a year ago.

Reed said he's satisfied with the progress he's seen — both on the field and in the relationships with people outside of the program's direct sphere of influence.

"I'm very pleased with being able to connect with the community again," he said.

Mascot: Plainsmen

Division: 4A

Colors: Maroon and white

Coach: Clint Reed, 2nd

year at Laramie

2017 Record: 3-7, lost to Natrona in state quarterfinals

2018 Schedule

8-24: at Kelly Walsh, 7 p.m.

8-31: vs. Rock Springs, 7 p.m.

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

9-14: at Natrona, 7 p.m.

9-21: vs. Cheyenne Central, 7 p.m.

9-28: at Cheyenne East, 6 p.m.

10-5: vs. Cheyenne South, 6 p.m.

10-12: at Sheridan, 6 p.m.

10-19: at Thunder Basin, 6 p.m.

KELLY WALSH TROJANS

Trojans have traditional approach

An old-school approach is paying off for Kelly Walsh.

With a hard-nosed running game, a strong defense and a focus on ball control, the Trojans had one of their best seasons in recent memory last year.

KW finished 7-4, hosted a first-round playoff game for the second consecutive year and reached the semifinals for the first time since 2009.

KW's seven victories last year was the most for the Trojans since 2006. Nothing trendy led to the Trojans' turnaround. In fact, Kelly Walsh coach Jon Vance said the team's basic approach is "trying to really control the ball and keep our defense off the field and slow the game down. We're kind of going old school, but if we can stick with that, I think we'll find some successes."

Although the Trojans did graduate some key players, they return enough contributors from last year's team to remain a contender in Class 4A.

Senior Brock Spiegelberg is KW's only returning all-state selection. However, three other returning seniors — linemen Kameron Mellon and Connor Shopp and wide receiver Tyler Whitley — were all-conference picks. KW's four returning all-conference selections is the highest total in Class 4A.

Spiegelberg ran 207 times for 1,399 yards and 17 touchdowns last season. However, he's the only one of KW's top four rushers to return this fall.

Key Players

RB/LB: Brock Spiegelberg, Sr.

OT/DT: Kameron Mellon, Sr.

OT/DT: Connor Shopp, Sr.

WR/DB: Tyler Whitley, Sr.

"I feel we've got one of the best running backs in the state," Vance said. "... He's definitely a key for what we're trying to do. He's a big back and he always seems to find positive yardage."

Spiegelberg will run behind an experienced offensive line that returns Mellon, Shopp and senior George Wagstaff, and senior

Spencer Wilson will provide a backfield option.

Whitley led KW in receiving yards last fall, finishing with 250 yards on 13 catches; he'll be joined by junior Jevon Davis and senior Jayden Simmons.

At quarterback, Vance said seniors Sage Coventry and Matt Hayes have both shown potential.

"I think those guys both bring some good things to the table," Vance said.

Spiegelberg will also lead KW's defense, which led Class 4A in pass defense, allowing just 95.9 yards per game through the air, and finished third in 4A in total defense. Spiegelberg was third in defensive points and is the Trojans' leading returning tackler.

However, the Trojans graduated six of their top seven defensive players from a year ago, leaving big holes on a unit that only returns two starters.

Senior lineman Chad Bila was eighth and Mellon was 10th in defensive points, and Vance said junior defensive end Bastain Hansen will also be called on to contribute.



Mascot: Trojans

Division: 4A

Colors: Green, gold and white

Coach: Jon Vance, 8th season

2017 Record: 7-4, lost to Sheridan in state semifinals

2018 Schedule

8-24: vs. Laramie, 7 p.m.

8-31: at Cheyenne East, 6 p.m.

9-7: vs. Cheyenne South, 7 p.m.

9-14: at Rock Springs, 6 p.m.

9-21: vs. Sheridan, 6 p.m.

9-28: at Cheyenne Central, 6 p.m.

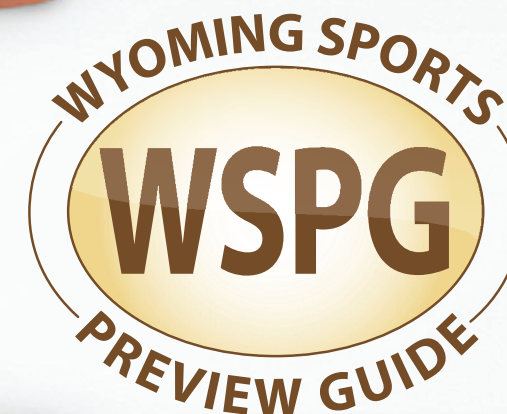
10-5: vs. Natrona, 6 p.m.

10-12: vs. Thunder Basin, 6 p.m.

10-19: at Gillette, 6 p.m.

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Mascot: Mustangs
Division: 4A
Colors: Orange and black
Coach: Steve Harshman, 28th season
2017 Record: 10-2, lost to Sheridan in championship
Key Players
TE/DE: Jordan Bertagnole, Sr.
RB/ILB: Chase Brachtenbach, Sr.
ILB: Hunter Brandt, Sr.
OL/DL: Kooper Claney, Sr.

2018 Schedule

8-24: at Cheyenne South, 7 p.m.
8-31: at Gillette, 7 p.m.
9-7: vs. Sheridan, 7 p.m.
9-14: vs. Laramie, 7 p.m.
9-21: at Cheyenne East, 7 p.m.
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10-12: vs. Chey. Central, 6 p.m.
10-19: at Rock Springs, 6 p.m.

Mustangs reload for title run

The story's familiar in the Class 4A ranks by now. Natrona County lost a huge group of seniors to graduation, and yet the Mustangs are still one of the favorites to win a state championship.

Annually, Natrona seems to follow that pattern. Coach Steve Harshman said the methods have changed in his 28 years at Natrona, but the basic ideas of developing players in time for them to contribute as seniors remains the same.

"Football's a real developmental game, and as kids, I think the key thing is when they start as young guys... that they don't get chased off from football," Harshman said.

He said all players are different in how fast they develop, and "I think it's just recognizing that kids are all going to get there eventually. ... The key is to keep them developing, keep working and keep (them) investing in themselves."

That method will be tested again this fall: Of Natrona's 11 all-state selections, only senior linebacker Chase Brachtenbach returns.

However, seniors Tehl Campbell and Yahav Schraiber were all-conference picks last year, and a group of seniors numbering about 25 will help keep the Mustangs in contention after back-to-back Class 4A runner-up finishes.

Brachtenbach led Natrona in defensive points last year and finished with a team-high in two categories – 14.5 tackles for loss and seven sacks.

Senior Hunter Brandt was fourth in defensive

points for NC last fall. Of Natrona's top 14 tacklers from last year, they are the only two certain to be returning; both play the inside linebacker positions.

Harshman said those players "parked in the middle on defense will be a key part."

Offensively, the Mustangs have proven diverse – Natrona led Class 4A in rushing offense and total offense and was second in passing offense, as well. However, Natrona loses its quarterback, its top rusher and its top three receivers from 2017.

Junior Dante Wallace, who ran 53 times for 436 yards and five touchdowns last year, is Natrona's top returning rusher.

Campbell, meanwhile, caught 17 passes for 268 yards – a total good for fourth for NC last year – and is the Mustangs' leading returning receiver. Of the five receivers who cracked triple-digit yardage totals last year, he's the only returner.

Senior tight end Jordan Bertagnole will see his role expanded this season, while Harshman identified senior Kooper Claney as a leader on the line.

Harshman said seniors Jhett George and Kade Stoner are competing for the quarterback spot.

Overall, though, the focus continues to be on development, not just for this year but for future seasons, to make sure Natrona is formidable every year.

"Our older kids are doing a great job of mentoring our young kids and bringing them along," Harshman said.

Tigers have plenty of experience

The 2017 season brought a lot of change to Rock Springs.

Now, those changes have had time to marinate – and thanks to a big crew of returners, the Tigers could be ready to take advantage of that opportunity.

The normally run-heavy Tigers threw the ball a lot more in 2017. In fact, they finished averaging nearly equal amounts of rushing yards (159.5) and passing yards (148.9) per game.

"We really liked what we did," coach David Hastings said, "so I think you're going to see us kind of morphing into both (the old approach and the new approach)... and be a lot more balanced."

This year, Rock Springs returns eight starters on both offense and defense, and although the Tigers will rely a lot on juniors, Hastings said he likes who is returning. He said he had 28 sophomores play at the varsity level last year, many of them in starting positions.

"We're really looking forward to having pretty much all of them back, and I think that bodes well for where we're

"We're really looking forward to having pretty much all of them (28 sophomores) back, and I think that bodes well for where we're headed."

~ Coach David Hastings

headed," Hastings said.

The Tigers will likely not have more than about 10 seniors, Hastings said, and junior lineman Craig Ashe is the only one of Rock Springs' four all-conference selections to return this fall.

Defensively, Rock Springs returns several key contributors.

Senior free safety Tristan Profiazer was second on team a year ago in defensive points, led the team in assisted tackles with 54 and tied for the team lead with 33 solo tackles.

Senior Coleman Welsh finished fourth for the Tigers in defensive points, while senior Damon Longfellow was sixth and senior Lewis Atkinson was

ninth.

However, the Tigers were second-to-last in 4A in yards allowed per game last year.

On offense, three juniors – Favor Okere, Justis Reese and Chase Petty – were among five Tigers who broke triple digits in receiving yards. Okere led the team with 292 receiving yards and three touchdowns, while Reese added 288 yards receiving and Petty 184.

"It's exciting to have these guys back and have them in the weight room and see what they can do coming in for their junior year," Hastings said.

Rock Springs' leading returning rusher is junior Brendan Jassman, who was second for the Tigers with 283 rushing yards and three touchdowns last year.

The Tigers will need a new quarterback, as Graedyn Buell – who started as a freshman last year – transferred.

Hastings said he's satisfied not only with the core group of players he has but how they've committed themselves.

"Our numbers have been way up," he said. " ... The weight room for me has always been the biggest measurement, and they've done a great job of coming in when we've asked them."

Mascot: Tigers

Division: 4A

Colors: Orange and black

Coach: David Hastings, 5th season at Rock Springs

2017 Record: 4-6, lost to Cheyenne East in state

quarterfinals

Key Players

OL/FB: Lewis Atkinson, Sr.

C: Craig Ashe, Jr.

WR: Favor Okere, Jr.

WR: Justice Reese, Jr.

2018 Schedule

8-24: vs. Sheridan, 6 p.m.

8-31: at Laramie, 7 p.m.

9-7: at Cheyenne Central, 6 p.m.

9-14: vs. Kelly Walsh, 6 p.m.

9-21: vs. Cheyenne South, 6 p.m.

9-28: at Gillette, 7 p.m.

10-5: at Thunder Basin, 6 p.m.

10-12: vs. Cheyenne East, 6 p.m.

10-19: vs. Natrona, 6 p.m.

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Mascot: Broncos
Division: 4A
Colors: Blue and yellow
Coach: Jeff Mowry, 1st year at Sheridan
2017 Record: 12-0, beat Natrona in state championship

Key Players
RB/LB: Parker Christensen, Sr.
RB/LB: Garrett Coon, Jr.
RB/S: Quinn Heyneman, Sr.
CB: Jaron Brewer, Sr.

2018 Schedule
8-24: at Rock Springs, 6 p.m.
8-31: vs. Cheyenne Central, 6 p.m.
9-7: at Natrona, 7 p.m.
9-14: vs. Thunder Basin, 7 p.m.
9-21: at Kelly Walsh, 6 p.m.
9-28: at Cheyenne South, 6 p.m.
10-5: vs. Gillette, 7 p.m.
10-12: vs. Laramie, 6 p.m.
10-19: at Cheyenne East, 6 p.m.

PAGE 10

SHERIDAN BRONCS

4A

New coach leads title defense

Sheridan could have been rocked by change. Instead, the Broncos seem to be rolling right along. The winners of three consecutive Class 4A championships, the Broncos lost a talented and deep senior class. They also lost the architect of the program, coach Don Julian, who resigned to move closer to his parents.

"You can't replace someone like him," new head coach Jeff Mowry said, " ... He left us in such a great place that hopefully we can carry on what he built here and started."

To do so, Mowry helped make sure every other varsity assistant stayed on staff to help with continuity during the changeover. He also kept Julian's basic structure, adapting it slightly to fit the needs of this particular team.

"Having the same staff on board has helped make things a little more seamless," Mowry said.

Mowry said the program will miss the players who helped lead Sheridan to three consecutive titles, but losing a big senior class like that is "not uncommon in high school. We've faced it before."

The Broncos graduated seven of their nine all-state selections, with senior running back Parker Christensen and junior linebacker Garrett Coon the only ones coming back for Sheridan this fall. However, no other 4A team returns more than one all-state player.

The Broncos return just one offensive starter (Christensen) and just three defensive starters (Christensen, Coon and cornerback Jaron Brewer).

Christensen, who verbally committed to the Uni-

versity of Wyoming in July, ran 98 times for 1,049 yards – an average of 10.7 yards per carry – on his way to 13 touchdowns.

Coon was fourth on the team with 20 carries for 205 yards.

And senior Quinn Heyneman gives the Broncos another option in the backfield, as well.

"We're really confident in them and what they can do, not only running the ball but catching the ball out of the backfield," Mowry said.

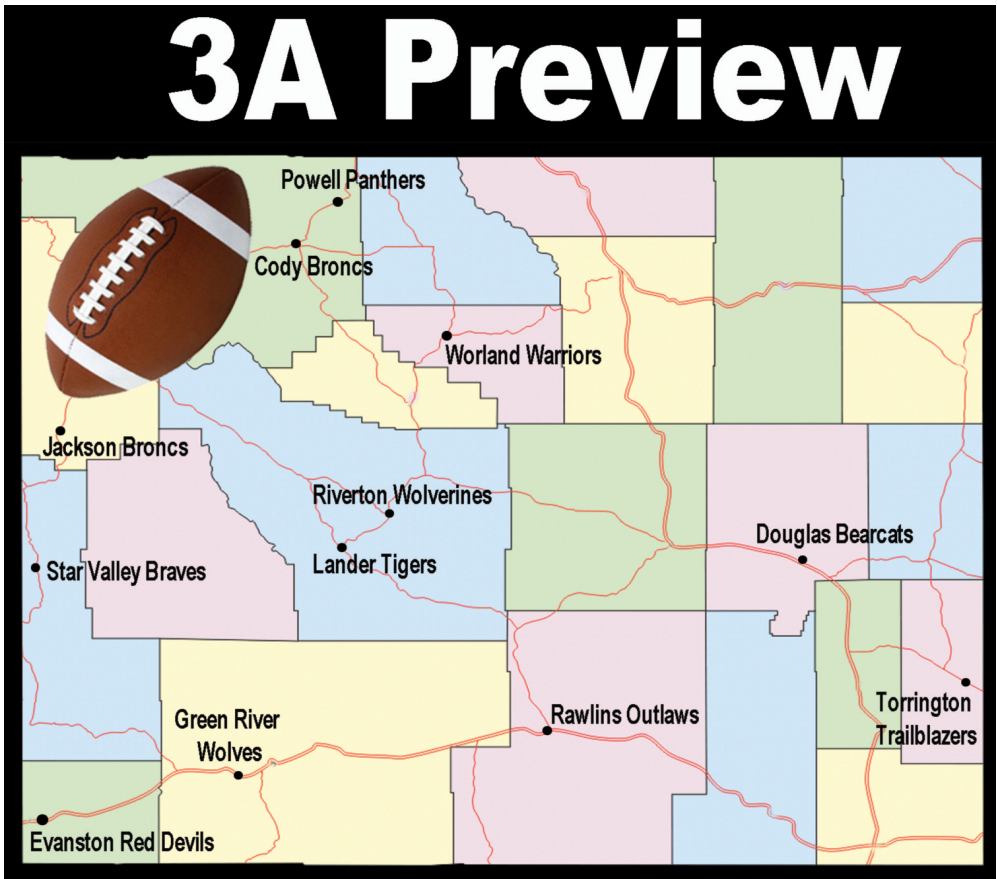
Of the four Sheridan players to top 60 yards receiving last year, Christensen (with 34 catches for 383 yards and 10 touchdowns) is the only one returning.

Coon led Sheridan in defensive points last year and led the Broncos with 41 solo tackles and 88 assisted tackles. However, he's the only one of Sheridan's top five tacklers to return.

Christensen was sixth and Heyneman was seventh in defensive points last year for the Broncos.

Even with change, the championship tradition remains, and one of Mowry's biggest challenges is to make sure the Broncos don't lose their work ethic, "keeping them humble and hungry to make sure on top of their game."

"We've got to have a fresh start and go back to work and grind it out and do the best we can," Mowry said.



Torrington could challenge Cody

By Patrick Schmiedt

Four questions to answer

Was Cody's state championship a fluke?

No way. The Broncos proved they were the best team at the right time last year, and their playoff victories against Buffalo, Star Valley and Torrington – all as the lower seed – were all definitive.

Does that mean that Cody's the favorite to win the 3A title again this year? Sort of. Cody returns three all-state players, more than any other 3A school except Torrington. And there's the rub. Torrington, last year's 3A runner-up, is loaded for another deep playoff run.

Isn't Star Valley still in the mix? Yeah... but this year is a true test for the program. The Braves lost more seniors than a nursing home at Sunday brunch. Until we know if those new players have the ability to bear the brunt of the old expectations, it's best to wait and see with the Braves.

What big offseason change will affect 3A the most long-term? John Scott's hiring at Lander. Scott has a history of taking underperforming programs and turning them around. The turnaround won't be immediate, but knowing Scott's history, it will happen.

Four key games

Green River at Torrington, Sept. 14.

One of the most intriguing nonconference games of the season is the same matchup that ended the Wolves' season last year. This game will be huge for both teams to gauge their

abilities against teams from the other side of Wyoming.

Rawlins at Douglas, Sept. 21. A heart-breaking 17-14 loss to Douglas last year nearly marked the end of a long string of losses the Outlaws had suffered to the Bearcats. Both teams will need this victory to stay in the race for a home playoff game.

Riverton at Worland, Sept. 21. The Warriors' East Conference opener... wait, what? Yep, it's true – after years in the West, Worland jumps to the East this year. And this game against the Wolverines will likely have huge playoff implications.

Cody at Star Valley, Oct. 12. The Braves have to be hungry for the opportunity to play the Broncos again. This game won't have the same stakes as their last meeting, but it will be a chance for both teams to make a late push in the West Conference.

Predicted order of finish

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

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

Way-too-early title-game score prediction
Torrington 20, Cody 13

On paper, the Trailblazers and Broncos are the clear favorites in their respective conferences. But 3A is quirky, especially in the playoffs, so there may be a surprise or two after Week 8.

4A

THUNDER BASIN BOLTS

Bolts building on initial success

Some of the biggest concerns for Thunder Basin's coaching staff came away from what happened between the sidelines last season.

Whether they were waiting for gear to arrive or waiting to occupy their new stadium until the day of the first game of the season, little problems inherent in first-year programs kept dogging the 'Bolts.

"Last year we had to add into that all of the things that go along with starting a new program," head coach Trent Pikula said. " ... Little things would come up all of the time that new programs encounter that established program do not."

Nevertheless, Thunder Basin finished 5-5 in its first season and reached the postseason – better than most startups but short of Pikula's goal of competing for a state championship.

In year two, those first-year problems are gone, and players and coaches can focus solely on football. This year, that means transitioning from an experienced, senior-heavy squad to one that will rely on underclassmen to fill some vital roles.

Key Players

C/ILB: Terren Swartz, Sr.
OL/DL: Marcus Glick, Sr.
QB/SS: Mason Hamilton, Jr.
RB/LB: Riley Mitchell, Sr.

Fortunately for Pikula, Thunder Basin returns two all-conference linemen in seniors Marcus Glick and Terren Swartz and has a bevy of other returning linemen, including seniors Brenden Jordan, Tate Daly and Will McLain.

"We were fortunate last year to be able to play even or eight offensive linemen at different times throughout the year," Pikula said. "That will benefit us so much this year as we now have kids with quality varsity playing time."

Glick and Swartz were also the 'Bolts' top two tacklers on defense last year. Swartz led the team with 34 solo tackles and 49 assists, while Glick racked up eight tackles for loss and a team-high seven

sacks while leading the 'Bolts in total defensive points.

On offense, the 'Bolts led Class 4A in passing yards, picking up 197.3 per game. Junior Mason Hamilton shared time under center but still managed to throw for 1,042 yards and seven touchdowns, completing 92 of 160 passes.

"Although he was in a situation where he shared time, the experience he got was invaluable and will help so much as we move forward," Pikula said.

Hamilton loses his top eight receivers, though. Thunder Basin's leading returning receiver is junior Tyson Edwards, who had nine catches for 38 yards a year ago.

Edwards was second for Thunder Basin last year with 82 carries for 341 yards, is the 'Bolts' leading returning rusher. Senior Riley Mitchell added 276 yards. Also, Hamilton finished seventh on the team in defensive points and had a team-high three interceptions.

However, Hamilton, Glick and Swartz the only three starters, and the only three of Thunder Basin's top 13 tacklers, to return.

The logo for the Thunder Basin Bolts, featuring the word "BOLTS" in a stylized blue font with a lightning bolt graphic.

Mascot: Bolts
Division: 4A
Colors: Blue and Silver
Coach: Trent Pikula, 2nd year at Thunder Basin
2017 Record: 5-5, lost to Kelly Walsh in state quarterfinals

2018 Schedule
8-24: at Cheyenne Central, 6 p.m.
8-31: at Cheyenne South, 6 p.m.
9-7: vs. Cheyenne East, 7 p.m.
9-14: at Sheridan, 7 p.m.
9-21: vs. Gillette, 7 p.m.
9-28: at Natrona, 7 p.m.
10-5: vs. Rock Springs, 6 p.m.
10-12: at Kelly Walsh, 6 p.m.
10-19: vs. Laramie, 6 p.m.

The logo for the Cody Broncos, featuring a horse head in a blue circle with the word "BRONCS" below it.

State Champs
Cody
Broncs

2017 State Playoffs

State Championship
Cody 20, Torrington 0

State Semifinals
Cody 31, Star Valley 21
Torrington 17, Green River 13

State Quarterfinals
Cody 27, Buffalo 0
Green River 28, Douglas 7
Torrington 46, Worland 21
Star Valley 62, Rawlins 0

Four players to watch

Bryan Lemmon, Torrington
Lemmon might be 3A's best running back – for the second year in a row. He ran for 1,261 yards and 18 touchdowns last year in leading the Trailblazers to Laramie. He was also Torrington's leading tackler.

Jared Grenz, Cody
One number makes Grenz stand out on the stat sheet: 31.8. That's how many yards per catch Grenz averaged last year, needing only 16 catches to rack up 509 yards. His big-play ability will be key for Cody's repeat run.

Anthony Mitchell, Green River
The Wolves' lone returning all-state player did most of his damage on defense, where he was second for Green River in defensive points. Mitchell will also likely be the Wolves' main aerial threat this year.

Treyton Paxton, Riverton
Paxton led Riverton's passing game, throwing for 1,520 yards and 12 touchdowns. However, this year he has to break in basically an entirely new group of receivers (Riverton's top four receivers from 2017 are all gone).



Mascot: Bearcats
Division: 3A
Conference: East
Colors: Blue and red
Coach: Jay Rhoades, 13th year at Douglas
2017 Record: 6-3, lost to Green River in playoffs



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2018 Schedule

8-24: Lander Jamboree, 4 p.m.
 8-31: at Buffalo, 7 p.m.
 9-7: at Hot Springs, S.D., 6 p.m.
 9-14: vs. Powell, 6 p.m.
 *9-21: vs. Rawlins, 7 p.m.
 *9-28: at Torrington, 7 p.m.
 *10-5: vs. Worland, 7 p.m.
 *10-12: vs. Lander, 7 p.m.
 *10-19: at Riverton, 7 p.m.
 * Conference game

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Bearcats have strength in numbers

One big number separates Douglas from most other Class 3A football programs.

This summer, the Bearcats sent 70 players to a team camp at Black Hills State. Yes, 70.

Not many 3A teams get 70 players out for the team, let alone 70 to a camp. Yet Douglas, after finishing 6-3 and getting bounced from the 3A playoffs in the first round last year, has managed to transition into the offseason refocused.

"At camp, we showed a level of toughness that I think we've been missing the last couple years for whatever reason," Douglas coach Jay Rhoades said.

To return to the form of a state title contender, though, Douglas will need help from younger players to fill critical roles, especially on offense.

Fortunately for the Bearcats, they have four players returning who were all-conference selections last year: senior lineman Dylan Hime, senior linebacker Dax Read and junior linemen Cody Pinkerton and Dawson Stinson. Douglas' four returning all-conference picks in second only to Torrington in Class 3A.

However, the Bearcats need to replace their top two rushers, their top three receivers and their quarterback, who all graduated.

Read was third on the Bearcats last year in rushing yards and is the team's leading returning rusher, but he only ran 13 times for 53 yards.

Senior Kanyon Cecil was fourth on the team in catches

Key Players

FB/LB: Dax Read, Sr.
TE/DE: Dylan Hime, Sr.
OL/DL: Cody Pinkerton, Jr.
OL/DL: Dawson Stinson, Jr.

(10) and receiving yards (129) and is Douglas' top returning receiver.

Junior A.J. Yeaman is the leading candidate to take over at quarterback, Rhoades said.

"That's always kind of a question mark when you start is how do you get that quarterback comfortable to run your system," Rhoades said.

Fewer questions exist on the offensive line, where Pinkerton, Stinson and junior Ediel Diaz-Jaime return after starting last season as sophomores.

"I think that's going to take some pressure off of A.J. to have to perform right away," Rhoades

said.

Read led Douglas last season in defensive points, topping the squad with 22 solo tackles, 66 assisted tackles and seven tackles for loss. Of Douglas' 11 top tacklers a year ago, seven return.

Hime was fourth in defensive points, while senior Colby Davidson was fifth and led Douglas with seven pass break-ups.

Cecil, Stinson, Pinkerton, Yeaman and senior Brady Brooks all finished with at least five defensive points per game.

"Especially early in the year, our defense is going to be one of our strong points," Rhoades said.

Senior transfer Dylan Case and senior Christian Coffman will also have key roles to fill on both offense and defense.

"I think we're going to be able to use a lot of different kids and hopefully keep kids fresh and healthy the whole game," Rhoades said.

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New coach has proven record

John Scott has a blueprint for success at Lander.

It's the same one he followed at Kemmerer. And Gillette. And Tongue River. And Black Hills State University.

For Scott, program success starts with player investment. Player investment starts in the weight room.

"That was a big emphasis coming in with the administration," said Scott, who's helped mold programs at several other

coaching stops across the state before becoming Lander's head coach this spring. "They recognize they have to build things around that. Football requires that. That's just a given."

In Lander, Scott has a massive project. He's taking over a program that's gone 2-31 in the past four seasons and has had just one season with a winning record since 2006.

Even so, he feels further ahead at Lander than he has at

other stops. He has a strong group of seniors ready to work hard. He inherits a program that had many of the right things already in place. And, unlike some other stops, Scott had the chance to invest himself in the program and the community before the end of the school year.

"We were on a four-day week at Tongue River, so basically all spring, every Friday, every weekend was spent in Lander," Scott said.

McSpadden returns to Rawlins

Rawlins coach Clayton McSpadden played for the Outlaws in some tough times — through the middle of 16 consecutive losing seasons.

With the Rawlins football program on the upswing, McSpadden was brought in during the offseason after spending the past four years as an assistant coach at West Grand High School in Kremmling, Colorado.

It was always his goal to return to his hometown and coach — and, more importantly, to give back to the Rawlins community.

"If it wasn't for this place, I wouldn't have been able to play college football," said McSpadden, who played at Black Hills State after graduating from Rawlins in 2009. " ... I've just been waiting for the right time (to come back)."

Now, one of McSpadden's goals is to continue Rawlins' recent run of success in which the team went from 2-6 in 2015 to 4-5 in 2016 to 7-3 last year. Continuing that success, McSpadden said, is reliant on cultivating leaders in the program and connections in the community.

"As far as instilling that success all the way around, it's not only a buy-in from the kids and the parents, but it's also a buy-in from the community," McSpadden said.

This year, Rawlins returns

"If it wasn't for this place, I wouldn't have been able to play college football. I've just been waiting for the right time (to come back)."

~ Coach Clayton McSpadden

two all-conference choices: senior defensive back Lorenzo Ebell and junior linebacker Kadin Forney.

The stable of running backs is set, as the Outlaws return every running back who had at least 20 rushing yards last year. Senior Damon Taylor was the leader of that group, running 151 times for 512 yards, while Forney added 93 rushes for 372 yards.

Forney played spot duty at quarterback and finished with 394 passing yards on 22 completions.

However, the Outlaws graduated their top two receivers. Junior Connor Mendez, with 12 catches for 163 yards in 2017, is Rawlins' top returning receiver.

McSpadden said he will likely transition the team to more of a run-based approach focused on Taylor and Forney — "We'd be crazy not to, just to

make those two our work-horses," he said — but also left the door open for other offensive approaches based on what his personnel shows him during the preseason.

"You can run any offense and be successful as long as you believe in the person next to you and you buy into your coach," McSpadden said.

The offensive line lost four starters; junior Kie Foster is the only returning starter from that unit.

"Kie is going to be the leader on that line, and he's going to be a very, very good leader," McSpadden said. " ... He's as strong as an ox, and he's an Einstein too."

Defensively, the Outlaws return three of their top five tacklers in Forney, Ebell and Mendez. Foster and senior Alex Rodriguez also contributed to Rawlins' defense last season and should play key roles.



Mascot: Outlaws
Division: 3A
Conference: East
Colors: Red and black
Coach: Clayton McSpadden, 1st year at Rawlins
2017 Record: 7-3, lost to Star Valley in state quarter-finals

Key Players

RB/LB: Damon Taylor, Sr.
RB/LB: Kadin Forney, Jr.
OL/DL: Kie Foster, Jr.
WR/CB: Lorenzo Ebell, Sr.

2018 Schedule

8-24: vs. Lyman, 6 p.m. (Zero Week)
 8-31: at Evanston, 7 p.m.
 9-7: at Green River, 7 p.m.
 9-14: vs. Cody, 7 p.m.
 *9-21: at Douglas, 7 p.m.
 *9-28: vs. Worland, 7 p.m.
 *10-5: at Lander, 7 p.m.
 *10-12: vs. Riverton, 7 p.m.
 *10-19: vs. Torrington, 7 p.m.
 * Conference game

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Mascot: Tigers
Division: 3A
Conference: East
Colors: Green and black
Coach: John Scott, 1st year at Lander
2017 Record: 1-7, did not qualify for playoffs

"Football requires (player investment). That's just a given."

~ Coach John Scott

Consequently, he knows the team better than he usually does in his first year, and he had the logistics in place for offseason weight training and camps.

The team he inherits has two returning senior all-conference picks, lineman Jasper Roy and wide receiver Conrad Swenson.

Senior Max Mazurie returns at quarterback after throwing 40 completions for 495 yards last year. He returns his top two aer-

ial targets, too: Swenson was Lander's top receiver last year with 20 catches for 210 yards, while senior Connor Jay added 13 catches for 193 yards.

Scott said Mazurie may rotate at quarterback with junior Tyler Massey to help take advantage of both players' versatility, while Roy and senior Mason Cronk will lead the linemen.

Swenson was third and Roy was fourth in defensive points

for the Tigers last year. However, they're the only two of Lander's top seven tacklers to return this fall.

Scott said he's been happy with what he's seen out of the players who have been with him in the spring and summer. But he said he still has to determine how hard his returning players are willing to push themselves for success.

"The big thing is always, what are you willing to do to get it?" Scott said. "And that's where I come in to close that gap and get them to do what they don't want to do."

"Winning's fun, but it's not necessarily going to be easy for you."

Key Players

OL: Jasper Roy, Sr.
WR: Conrad Swenson, Sr.
QB: Max Mazurie, Sr.
OL/DL: Mason Cronk, Sr.

2018 Schedule

8-24: Lander Jamboree, 4 p.m. (Zero Week)
 8-31: at Green River, 7 p.m.
 9-7: at Powell, 7 p.m.
 9-14: vs. Evanston, 7 p.m.
 *9-21: vs. Torrington, 7 p.m.
 *9-28: at Riverton, 7 p.m.
 *10-5: vs. Rawlins, 7 p.m.
 *10-12: at Douglas, 7 p.m.
 *10-19: vs. Worland, 7 p.m.
 * Conference game

Mascot: Wolverines
Division: 3A
Conference: East
Colors: Cardinal and white
Coach: Pat Patterson, 6th year at Riverton
2017 Record: 2-6, did not qualify for playoffs

Key Players

QB/LB: Treyton Paxton, Sr.
OL/DL: Kyle Yellowbear, Sr.
OL/DL: Leo Riley, Sr.
RB/LB: Cade Campbell, Jr.

2018 Schedule

8-24: at Powell, 7 p.m. (Zero Week)
8-31: at Cody, 7 p.m.
9-7: vs. Evanston, 6 p.m.
9-14: vs. Star Valley, 7 p.m.
***9-21:** at Worland, 7 p.m.
***9-28:** vs. Lander, 7 p.m.
***10-5:** at Torrington, 7 p.m.
***10-12:** at Rawlins, 7 p.m.
***10-19:** vs. Douglas, 7 p.m.
*** Conference game**

Wolverines shore up defense

Riverton's weakness last season was clear.

It was so clear, in fact, that coach Pat Patterson has re-focused his team's efforts on one specific point.

The Wolverines gave up almost 100 rushing yards per game more than any other Class 3A school at 328.8 yards per game. The Wolverines' defense ranked last in 3A, allowing 432 yards per game.

Patterson said he knew it was a problem, and the offseason focus was as clear as the problem.

"We have rededicated ourselves as a staff to go back and start with the basics and rebuild our defense from the ground up," he said.

Even with the defensive struggles, the Wolverines were competitive; a 14-9 loss to Rawlins was the deciding factor in a season where Riverton finished 2-6 and missed the playoffs for the first time since 2008.

The offense finished fifth in Class 3A in yards per game and

sixth in points per game. But the defense put pressure on the offense that was unsustainable.

"We felt like there were several games that we really had a shot to win if we could have made a stop here or there," Patterson said. "So our defense will really be a focus this offseason."

The hard part about doing that? The Wolverines return only one of their top seven tacklers from a year ago.

Junior Cade Campbell, who finished third for Riverton in defensive points last year, is the Wolverines' leading returning tackler. He is one of five players returning for the Wolverines who started at some point last season.

Up front, the Wolverines will have decent size and experience. Seniors Kyle Yellowbear, Leo Riley and Callahan Healy will help lead Riverton on both the offensive and defensive lines.

Senior defensive back Dawson Lane were also key contributors to the defense last fall, and junior cornerback Dillon Lange is in position to contribute as

well.

On offense, the Wolverines return the quarterback that led 3A's top passing offense; Riverton threw for 193.1 yards per game, and senior quarterback Treyton Paxton – Riverton's only returning all-conference player – returns to lead the offense.

Paxton completed 110 of 224 passes for 1,520 yards and 12 touchdowns a year ago. However, his top four targets from a year ago are gone, including a pair of all-state choices, leaving junior Kendric Muehler (3 catches, 47 yards last year) as Riverton's top returning receiver.

Patterson said many players have the potential to fill those receiver spots, including Lange, Lane, Muehler, junior Tyler Emerson and sophomore Damon DeVries.

"It is really nice to have someone with (Paxton's) experience returning," Patterson said. "However, the question is who will be our next receiver in a long line of great receivers to step up."

Warriors make move to East

Even in the midst of change, Worland is doing what it can to maintain stability.

Last year, the Warriors had a new coach with Ryan Utterback; this year, the Warriors jump conferences, moving from Class 3A's West Conference to the East Conference.

As change happens, though, Utterback has tried to do what he can to make sure the players can continue to focus on what matters most.

"It helped that most of the staff last year was the same and we tried hard to have as much continuity as possible," Utterback said. "I think reducing transition was beneficial so that most of the changes felt like fine-tuning rather than an overhaul."

Heading into this season, Worland returns enough players to remain competitive in its new home. Even though the Warriors lost their only all-state pick, all three of their all-conference selections and several linemen to graduation, Utterback said Wor-

Key Players

QB/LB: Andrew Edholm, Sr.
WR: Andy Deniz, Sr.
OL/DE: Peyton Woffinden, Sr.
WR/DB: Devon Mercado, Jr.

land retains most of its backs and receivers.

"We will have some spots up for grabs and need some younger players to step up," he said.

However, on defense, the Warriors return five of their top seven tacklers from a year ago.

Junior Jaime Luna is Worland's top returning tackler. He was third for Worland in defensive points in 2017.

Meanwhile, junior Devon Mercado, senior Andrew Edholm, senior Peyton Woffinden

and junior Luke Mortimer were fourth through seventh on the team, respectively, in defensive points. Edholm and Mortimer tied for the team lead with two interceptions, while Mercado led Worland with four pass break-ups.

"With the guys we get back, I am excited to see what they can do," Utterback said.

On offense, Edholm was a dual-threat quarterback, throwing for 475 yards and running 139 times for a team-high 404 yards.

His top three aerial targets return. Mortimer, Luna and Mercado snagged nine passes apiece last year, with Mortimer leading the trio with 175 yards to Luna's 142 and Mercado's 94.

With the quarterback and receivers returning, Utterback said he will look to "utilize the talents of those kids" and potentially throw the football more than last season.

Luna, meanwhile, was third on the team with 318 rushing yards.

As the coaches, the schemes and, in many cases, the personnel have found some stability, the move from the West to the East conference is a welcomed change, Utterback said. He noted the team's travel time will be reduced, and the idea of fresh challenges has helped invigorate his players' enthusiasm.

"It was late in the year when I got the job (in 2017) and felt like we were playing catch-up even up to the season," Utterback said. "This year it will be nice to know what to expect and be able to improve planning."



Mascot: Warriors
Division: 3A
Conference: West
Colors: Black and orange
Coach: Ryan Utterback, 2nd year at Worland
2017 Record: 4-5, lost to Torrington in quarterfinals

2018 Schedule

8-25: vs. Buffalo, 1 p.m. (Zero Week)
8-31: vs. Powell, 7 p.m.
9-7: at Cody, 7 p.m.
9-14: vs. Jackson, 7 p.m.
***9-21:** vs. Riverton, 7 p.m.
***9-28:** at Rawlins, 7 p.m.
***10-5:** at Douglas, 7 p.m.
***10-12:** vs. Torrington, 7 p.m.
***10-19:** at Lander, 7 p.m.
*** Conference game**



Blazers poised for title shot

All too often, a team that reaches a state championship game does so with a huge senior class, leaving the team scrambling to recapture that success the following season.

The opposite is true in Torrington.

Although the Trailblazers graduated some talented seniors, they also get back three all-state players, tied with Cody for most in Class 3A. Senior linemen Josh Kingsley and Scott Woodruff and senior running back Bryan Lemmon set the Trailblazers up well for the fall and another potential run at a 3A title.

"I really like our leadership situation on our football team," coach Mark Lenhardt said. "This is the most seniors I will ever have had out this year, and so that maturity should be a big advantage for us in regards to leadership."

Key Players

RB/LB: Bryan Lemmon, Sr.
OL/DL: Scott Woodruff, Sr.
DE: Josh Kingsley, Sr.
WR/DB: Josh Posten, Sr.

In addition, seniors Brandon Bennick, Cade Schwartzkopf and Josh Posten were all-conference selections in 2017. Torrington's six returning all-conference selections is more than any other program in 3A.

By default, Lemmon ends up being the focus of many opposing teams. Lemmon ran 182 times for 1,261 yards and 18 touchdowns last year and also led Torrington with 40 solo tackles, 31 assisted tackles and nine tackles for loss as a linebacker.

"Bryan is the most well-rounded player I have had here

in Torrington," Lenhardt said. "He has the ability to run well obviously, but his ability to catch the football out of the backfield and be a stabilizing force at linebacker makes him very valuable."

Meanwhile, Posten added 73 carries for 464 yards and seven touchdowns of his own. And the Trailblazers also return four of their five starting offensive linemen.

However, Lenhardt said he knows Torrington can't have a one-dimensional offense. "I expect teams to sell out to stop the run and so we must prove that we can consistently throw the ball to beat people when needed," he said.

To do so, the Trailblazers will need to find a new quarterback; the program also graduated two of its top three pass-catchers. Lemmon, with 25 catches for 475 yards, is



Mascot: Trailblazers
Division: 3A
Conference: East
Colors: Maroon and gold
Coach: Mark Lenhardt, 8th year at Torrington
2017 Record: 9-2, lost to Cody in state championship

2018 Schedule

8-25: at Southeast Jamboree, 10 a.m. (Zero Week)
8-31: at Glenrock, 7 p.m.
9-7: vs. Gering, Neb., 7 p.m.
9-14: vs. Green River, 7 p.m.
***9-21:** at Lander, 7 p.m.
***9-28:** vs. Douglas, 7 p.m.
***10-5:** vs. Riverton, 7 p.m.
***10-12:** at Worland, 7 p.m.
***10-19:** at Rawlins, 7 p.m.
*** Conference game**

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TORRINGTON TRAILBLAZERS

Torrington's top returning aerial threat.

Torrington's front seven on defense will be its strength entering the season, Lenhardt said.

Torrington's defense returns its top three tacklers from last year in Lemmon, Kingsley and Posten; in addition to Lemmon, Kingsley had a team-high four sacks and two blocked kicks while Posten chipped in 27 solo

tackles, second-best on the team.

Schwartzkopf, Woodruff and senior Braden Mecham were also key contributors on defense a year ago.

"This is a group I have been very excited to work with for a long time," Lenhardt said. "They have been very committed from the time they have gotten here and they are all good kids."

Good Luck Trail Blazers!

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Mascot: Broncos
Division: 3A
Conference: West
Colors: Blue and gold
Coach: Matt McFadden, 6th year
2017 Record: 7-3, beat Torrington in championship

2018 Schedule

8-24: at Big Horn Jamboree, 5:30 p.m. (Zero Week)
8-31: vs. Riverton, 7 p.m.
9-7: vs. Worland, 7 p.m.
9-14: at Rawlins, 7 p.m.
***9-21:** at Jackson, 6 p.m.
***9-28:** vs. Evanston, 6 p.m.
***10-5:** at Powell, 7 p.m.
***10-12:** at Star Valley, 5 p.m.
***10-19:** vs. Green River, 6 p.m.
 * Conference game

Broncs have horses to repeat

Cody needed a while to put together the pieces.

Once they did, they proved they were championship caliber.

Even with three losses in the regular season, the Broncos put together three consecutive playoff victories – two on the road and one at the neutral site in Laramie for the state championship – to win the Class 3A title.

They've got enough returning talent to contend for a second consecutive title, but coach Matt McFadden isn't hanging medals around anyone's necks just yet.

"I think as a coach you have to separate last year's team from this year's," he said. "We celebrated that amazing season and those amazing seniors but it is a new year, new season, with new seniors."

The Broncos return three all-state players – tied with Tor-

"We celebrated that amazing season and those amazing seniors but it is a new year, new season, with new seniors."

~ Coach Matt McFadden

rington for the most in 3A – in senior wide receiver Jared Grenz, senior lineman Jackson Morris and junior running back Charlie Beaudrie.

Despite heavy losses to graduation, the Broncos have six starters back on offense and four on defense.

"Every position lost some depth," McFadden said, "but we return at least one starter in every spot, which is huge to provide consistency to help the new athletes learn the system."

Conversely, the Broncos also lost nine players to graduation who were all-conference selections.

Cody had six different running backs carry for at least 100 total yards, and four of them are back this fall. Beaudrie led the Broncos in rushing with 648 yards on 76 carries in 2017. Grenz added 48 carries for 341 yards, senior Hunter Lazar chipped in 31 carries for 207 yards, and senior Jakoby Vipperman added an even 100 yards on 23 carries.

The Broncos will need to break in a new quarterback; however, Grenz was Cody's leading receiver last year, averaging 31.8 yards per catch while fronting the Broncos in catches (16), receiving yards (509) and touchdowns (six).

Beaudrie was second for the

Key Players
WR/DB: Jared Grenz, Sr.
RB/DB: Charlie Beaudrie, Jr.
OL/DL: Jackson Morris, Sr.
RB/DB: Jakoby Vipperman, Sr.

Broncs with 15 catches for 222 yards.

"Players like Jared and Charlie need to touch the ball," McFadden said. "It is a luxury to be able to throw or run the ball with them. When teams take away our run, we must be able to throw it, and those two are not only amazing (running backs) but just as dangerous as (wide receivers)."

The Broncos do lose their top four tacklers on defense and six of their top seven.

Beaudrie was fifth on the team in defensive points last year and is Cody's top returning tackler.

Grenz was eighth, Morris was 10th and senior Heston Williams was 11th.

McFadden said he has confidence in returning players around them to step in where needed.

"(This) group played a large role in the championship, and those who were reserve players are anxious to step up," he said.



Red Devils building on success

In its first season in Class 3A, Evanston held its own.

The Red Devils finished 4-4 and, although they didn't qualify for the playoffs, they earned some confidence by playing with, and beating, some of the better teams in the classification.

"It starts kids believing again when they feel that success," said coach Pat Fackrell, whose team went 0-9 in 2016 in its last year in the big-school Class 4A. "But it hopefully will spring us into a great summer and a good fall."

Despite the .500 season, the Red Devils still have work to do. Evanston graduated all four of its all-conference picks and will need to replace six starters on both offense and defense.

The offense will be centered around a pair of seniors. Running back Tyus Cornia led the Red Devils with 729 rushing yards and nine touchdowns a year ago, and quarterback Seth Lloyd took the majority of snaps under center last year, finishing with 581 passing yards and six touchdown passes.

"It does help immensely hav-



ing a quarterback who's played 20-some games and a tailback who had a solid junior season and looks to have a great senior season," Fackrell said.

Fackrell said Evanston's running game could be a strength with Cornia and "an o-line that has some experience but has really come a long way in a short period of time."

If the running game develops as Fackrell hopes, that could open up opportunities for a young group of receivers.

Senior Kody Smith, who had eight catches for 167 yards last year, is Evanston's leading returning receiver. Of the three receivers who finished with at least 100 receiving yards, he's the Red Devils' lone returner.

However, seniors Rylie Griggs,

Pablo Escalante, Chris Perimann and Reid Gross could all be aerial threats for the Red Devils, Fackrell said.

Senior Ethan Moir will help anchor the offensive line, with Brenden Thompson and Bridger Barker also bringing experience.

Griggs finished second on the team in defensive points last year and is Evanston's top returning tackler. He led Evanston with 46 solo tackles and tied for the team lead with seven tackles for loss.

However, he's the only one of Evanston's top four tacklers to come back.

Escalante was fifth and Gross was sixth, the only others among Evanston's top 10 tacklers from 2017 coming back.

Fackrell said the strength of the defense will be at linebacker, where the Red Devils return a pair of starting inside linebackers.

Even so, Evanston needs to replace a pair of outside linebackers, but Fackrell said speed will be a strength in that position.

"Those kids coming in are quick kids," Fackrell said.

Mascot: Red Devils
Division: 4A
Colors: Red, white, blue
Coach: Pat Fackrell, 9th season

2017 Record: 4-4, did not qualify for playoffs

Key Players

RB/LB: Tyus Cornia, Sr.
QB: Seth Lloyd, Sr.
RB/LB: Rylie Griggs, Sr.
WR/DB: Kody Smith, Sr.

2018 Schedule

8-24: at Altamont, Utah, 7 p.m. (Zero Week)
8-31: vs. Rawlins, 7 p.m.
9-7: at Riverton, 6 p.m.
9-14: at Lander, 7 p.m.
***9-21:** vs. Powell, 7 p.m.
***9-28:** at Cody, 6 p.m.
***10-5:** vs. Green River, 7 p.m.
***10-12:** at Jackson, 6 p.m.
***10-19:** vs. Star Valley, 7 p.m.
 * Conference game



Mascot: Wolves
Division: 3A
Conference: West
Colors: Green and white
Coach: Marty Wrage, 1st season at Green River
2017 Record: 7-3, lost to Torrington in state semifinals

Key Players

RB/LB: Kyle Ivie, Sr.
RB/LB: James King, Soph.
TE/LB: Anthony Mitchell, Sr.
OL: Eric Gwaltney, Sr.

2018 Schedule

8-24: Green River Jamboree, 7 p.m. (Zero Week)
8-31: vs. Lander, 7 p.m.
9-7: vs. Rawlins, 7 p.m.
9-14: at Torrington, 7 p.m.
***9-21:** at Star Valley, 6 p.m.
***9-28:** vs. Jackson, 6 p.m.
***10-5:** at Evanston, 7 p.m.
***10-12:** vs. Powell, 6 p.m.
***10-19:** at Cody, 6 p.m.
 * Conference game

Wrage moves up to lead Wolves

When the head football coach's position came open at Green River, the vacancy immediately drew Marty Wrage's attention.

The head coach in Greybull at the time, Wrage was drawn toward the Wolves like a duck to water. Wrage said multiple factors – academics, administrative support, multi-sport athletes and support for the football program – made Green River appealing.

"This was one (opening) I didn't hesitate on when it came open," Wrage said.

Wrage was hired in April and immediately started making connections and building the program to fit his vision.

"Before school got out, I went down and met with the team and met with the coaches," he said. "... (I) had a good meeting with them, and then right away started working with them."

Wrage produced a winner at Greybull, going 27-12 in four seasons as the Buffalos' head coach. He takes over a program

that's had quite a bit of success of its own; the Wolves are 21-10 the past three seasons and made the Class 3A semifinals each of those years, reaching the 3A title game in 2015.

However, only one of Green River's all-conference picks – senior linebacker Anthony Mitchell – will return in 2018.

"It was a really good senior class that they lost last year," Wrage said. "... (But) we have a lot of good prospects coming up, too, in the grades below, and look for good leadership out of this year's seniors."

On offense, Green River loses its quarterback, its top four receivers and two of its top three rushers.

Green River had three backs finish with at least 400 rushing yards last year, but senior Kyle Ivie is the only one of those to return. Ivie ran for 451 yards on 53 carries in 2017.

Mitchell, who logged nine catches for 158 yards last year, is the Wolves' top returning re-

ceiver.

Defensively, Mitchell was second for the Wolves in defensive points a year ago and logged 63 assisted tackles, second-best on the squad.

Dallin Serrano, fifth on the team in defensive points, also returns, as do juniors Payton Tucker and Anthony Johnson, who were seventh and ninth, respectively, in defensive points for the Wolves last season. Tucker leads the returning players with three tackles for loss last season.

Since taking over as the Wolves' head coach, Wrage arranged a team camp in Green River and also led the team during a team camp in Evanston. But he also said he knows there's still a lot more work to do – and a lot more about Green River to learn – before the football season starts.

"(I'm) just looking forward to getting down there and getting to know the community a little better, and the players," Wrage said.

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Broncs hitting the weights

Mascot: Broncos

Division: 3A

Conference: West

Colors: Orange and black

Coach: David Joyce, 2nd year at Jackson

2017 Record: 0-9, did not qualify for playoffs

2018 Schedule

8-24: at Teton, Idaho, 7 p.m.

(Zero Week)

8-31: at Bear Lake, Idaho, 7 p.m.

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

9-14: at Worland, 7 p.m.

***9-21:** vs. Cody, 6 p.m.

***9-28:** at Green River, 6 p.m.

***10-5:** vs. Star Valley, 6 p.m.

***10-12:** vs. Evanston, 6 p.m.

***10-19:** at Powell, 5 p.m.

*** Conference game**

David Joyce didn't need long to figure out the most pressing problem with the Jackson football program.

In his first season with the Broncos, he tested his players to see how many of them could join the "1,000-pound club" – a combined total of each player's combined maximum squat, deadlift and bench press.

"When I got here, we had one kid in the 1,000-pound club," Joyce said. "Now we've got 19."

The Broncos struggled with low numbers and a lack of experience last year, finishing 0-9. However, Joyce said he is confident that the program is going in the right direction, and the evidence of that starts with the progress in the weight room.

Now in his second year, Joyce said on the first day of practice last year, the Broncos had 13 players. That was boosted to 21 by the first game, and mid-30s by the end of the season.

This summer, the Broncos took 30 players to summer camp, and Joyce said he expects more than

Key Players

RB/S: Jeydon Cox, Jr.
FB/LB: Kirby Castagno, Jr.
OT/LB: Spencer Berezay, Sr.
OG/LB: Ted McDaniel, Sr.

50 players at this season's opening practice.

"The contact with the kids on a daily basis is the biggest difference," he said.

Jackson returns most of its offense, including its top two rushers, its quarterback and its top receiver. Eight starters return on both offense and defense.

"We have a lot of returning starters, which will be a strength," Joyce said. "A year together always helps (with) scheme, language (and) cohesiveness."

"Juniors will be the majority of starters, so we're still young."

Juniors Jeydon Cox and Kirby Castagno carried the load in the backfield last year; Cox finished with 822 rushing yards and six

touchdowns, while Castagno added 667 yards and four touchdowns. No other Jackson player had more than 58 rushing yards.

Junior quarterback Pearson Evans had 29 completions for 373 yards, while senior Madden Hart was Jackson's top receiver with 12 catches for 137 yards.

Cox, Castagno, and seniors Kegan Butler, Zach Wientjes, Ted McDaniel and Spencer Berezay were all key parts of the Broncos' defensive gameplan last season.

There's still a lot of growing to do, though. The Broncos finished the season with a minus-18 turnover ratio – worst in Class 3A. The Broncos lost every game by at least 17 points and lost all but one conference game by at least 29 points.

Even so, the development in the weight room, coupled with the grit his team showed in a winless season, left Joyce optimistic for the growth they could show this year.

"We did not lose a single kid to injury all year, so we showed a lot of toughness," he said.

Young Braves rely on tradition

When the Star Valley Braves took the field for their final game of 2017, they had no expectation it would be their final game of 2017.

But a 31-21 loss to eventual Class 3A champion Cody ended Star Valley's season, its undefeated record, its attempt at a third consecutive championship and the collective careers of one of the most successful senior classes in SVHS history.

"The previous two years we really benefitted from a loss during the regular season to wake us and refocus us," Braves coach McKay Young said. "Unfortunately, we got that in the semifinals and didn't get to play another game; however, that loss has given special focus and motivation this off-season."

Star Valley had eight all-state and nine all-conference players last year – all seniors, now lost to graduation. In fact, the Braves return just one

"We may take some lumps early, but I have confidence in our guys to be playing very good football by the time we get to league play."

~ Coach McKay Young

starter, senior linebacker Will Johnson, from either side of the ball.

"We've been fortunate the past three years to have a about half of our starters consistently returning the following year," Young said. "We don't have that luxury this year."

So without experience to turn to this season, the Braves will look to the one thing they have in excess and can always tap: tradition.

"Our guys know how to work hard and be selfless," Young said. "The last three

senior classes have only lost three total games, so there is an expectation for this year's guys to keep that going. Even though we graduated an incredible group this spring, they and the classes before them have done a nice job setting an example of the kind of work required year-round for success in the fall."

Senior Wyatt Moore is the only one of Star Valley's top five rushers to return to the Braves' backfield in 2018. He

Continued on Page 20



Mascot: Braves

Division: 3A

Conference: West

Colors: Maroon and gold

Coach: McKay Young, 3rd season at Star Valley

2017 Record: 10-1, lost to Cody in state semifinals

Key Players

TE/RB/LB: Will Johnson, Sr.

RB/DB: Wyatt Moore, Sr.

OL/DL: Brandon McDonald, Jr.

QB/DB: Dean Shaw, Jr.

Papich leads rebuilding efforts

In 2016, Powell finished as the Class 3A runners-up.

In 2017, Powell finished 1-7.

The fall from state title contender to also-ran came quickly and definitively for the Panthers. Now, Aaron Papich takes over as head coach, and he's ready to help Powell rebuild.

"I know the coaches there really well and when I was there, the players that I got to coach were outstanding kids," said Papich, who was previously an assistant at Powell before stints coaching at Burlington and Riverton. "... That's something that I'm excited for, because I've built relationships with those guys in the past, and I think that'll help this transition be as smooth as possible and help the team."

The rebuilding effort begins with what Papich said will be "simplicity and clarity of purpose and

"If we put the right things in place first, the Xs and Os will take care of themselves."

~ Coach Aaron Papich

what we're doing every day at practice, and it all starts with fundamentals and working to master those.

"... If we put the right things in place first, the Xs and Os will take care of themselves."

Papich inherits a team in transition. Powell graduated its two all-state choices and three of its four all-conference choices; senior tight end/defensive lineman Carson Heinen is the only returning all-conference player Powell has.

Rebuilding the offense is a key; the Panthers finished with only 176.5 yards per game, by far the lowest mark in Class 3A, and scored more than seven points in a game only once in 2017.

Senior quarterback Kaelan Groves threw for 471 yards with 55 completions last year. Heinen was his favorite target; he led the squad in catches with 16 and receiving yards with 190. However, he's the only one of Powell's top three receivers back this

Mascot: Panthers

Division: 3A

Conference: West

Colors: Black and orange

Coach: Aaron Papich, 1st season at Powell

2017 Record: 1-7, did not qualify for playoffs

Key Players

TE/DL: Carson Heinen, Sr.

QB/S: Kaelan Groves, Sr.

QB/S: Ethan Asher, Jr.

RB/LB: Brody Karhu, Jr.

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fall.

Senior Jacob Harrison is Powell's leading returning rusher. He ran 28 times for 190 yards last year, good enough for second on the squad.

Seniors Ryan Good and Sawyer Manthe and sophomore Seth Horton will set the pace on the offensive line.

On defense, the Panthers lose their top three tacklers from 2017

but return four of their next five.

Junior linebacker Brody Karhu is Powell's leading returning tackler. He was fourth on the team a year ago in defensive points and was tied for third with 15 solo tackles and was third with 28 assisted tackles.

Groves was fifth, junior Ethan Asher was sixth, Good was eighth and Heinen was 10th in defensive points for Powell last

year.

Above all, Papich said he's most excited for the culture and leadership the program has, and how parents, players and community members support the program.

"I've got a great feel for the community," Papich said. "It's one that me and my family are really thrilled to be moving back to."

2018 Schedule

8-24: vs. Riverton, 7 p.m.

8-31: at Worland, 7 p.m.

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

9-14: at Douglas, 6 p.m.

***9-21:** at Evanston, 7 p.m.

***9-28:** vs. Star Valley, 6 p.m.

***10-5:** vs. Cody, 7 p.m.

***10-12:** at Green River, 6 p.m.

***10-19:** vs. Jackson, 5 p.m.

*** Conference game**

STAR VALLEY, cont.

was third on the team a year ago with 257 rushing yards on 23 carries.

The Braves also need to replace a starting quarterback and production from their top six receivers; Moore, with three catches for 44 yards last year, is Star Valley's top returning receiver.

Johnson, who was third for the Braves in defensive points and led the team with 45 assisted tackles, is the only one of Star Valley's top 14 tacklers to return this season. The only other player returning with at



least two defensive points per game last season is junior R.J. Cazier.

However, Young said junior quarterback Dean Shaw could help the team adapt on offense, and junior lineman Brandon McDonald also played significant varsity minutes last sea-

son.

The Braves also start the season by playing a trio of Idaho schools, a challenge the Braves embrace. Star Valley meets Hillcrest (Idaho Falls) and Blackfoot – two schools that both compete in Idaho's second-largest classification – to start the season. The third Idaho foe is Sugar-Salem, which plays in Idaho's 3A classification, similar in size to Wyoming's 3A.

"We may take some lumps early, but I have confidence in our guys to be playing very good football by the time we get to league play," Young said.

2018 Schedule

8-24: vs. Hillcrest, Idaho, 10 a.m. (at Pocatello, Idaho)

8-31: vs. Blackfoot, Idaho, 7 p.m.

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

9-14: at Riverton, 7 p.m.

*9-21: vs. Green River, 6 p.m.

*9-28: at Powell, 6 p.m.

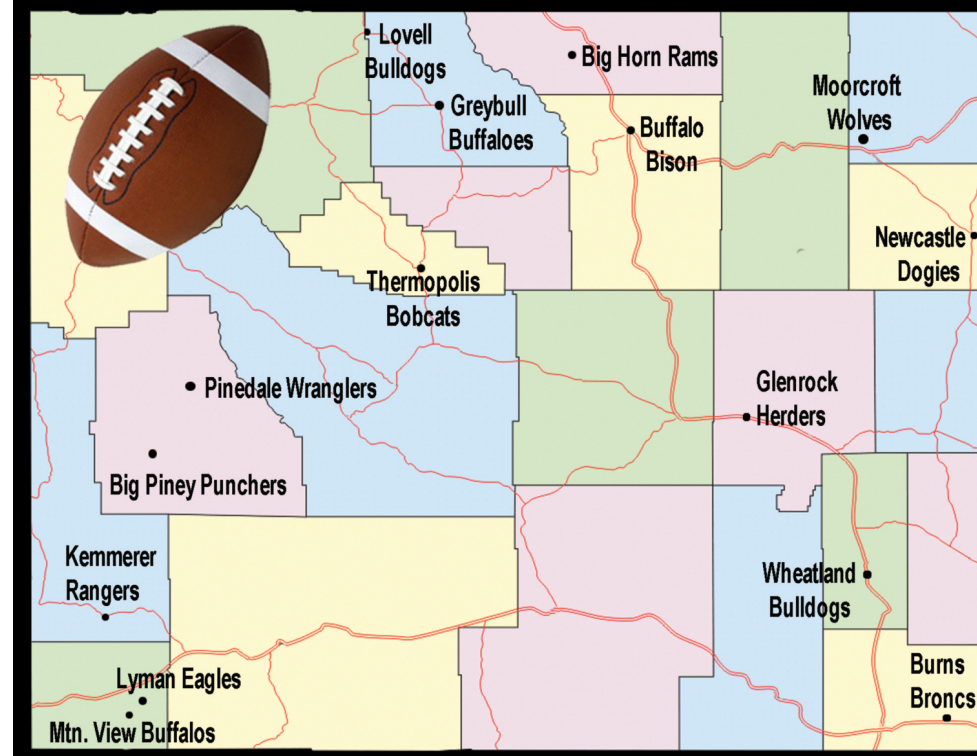
*10-5: at Jackson, 6 p.m.

*10-12: vs. Cody, 5 p.m.

*10-19: at Evanston, 7 p.m.

* Conference game

2A Preview



State Champs
Mtn. View
Buffalos

2017 State Playoffs

State Championship

Mountain View 35,
Glenrock 28

State Semifinals

Glenrock 30, Big Piney 27
Mountain View 45, Wheatland 0

State Quarterfinals

Glenrock 61, Lovell 6
Big Piney 42, Newcastle 14
Mountain 45, Thermopolis 0
Wheatland 37, Greybull 6

Six players to watch

Ian Arnold and Tucker Bopp,
Glenrock

There's not a more dynamic pair of running backs in Class 2A. The speedster Bopp ran for 1,949 yards and 20 touchdowns last year, while the powerful Arnold ran for 1,546 yards and 19 touchdowns.

Kimball Madsen
and Braeden Walk,
Mountain View

The juniors split time at quarterback and wide receiver last season, combining for 1,874 passing yards and 409 receiving yards. The Buffalos' plan is to do more of the same this year.

Colton Caves, Wheatland.

Don't overlook Wheatland this season, and don't overlook Caves. He ran for 1,305 yards and 13 touchdowns last year and also led the Bulldogs in solo tackles last season.

Colby Rees, Mountain View.

If the foundation of all great teams begins with the line, then the Buffalos are in good shape with Rees leading the way. He was the Class 2A lineman of the year last year as a junior, and he should be even better this year with 46 assisted tackles.

Title race is wide open

By Patrick Schmiedt

Four questions to answer

Will Mountain View repeat as 2A champion? Definitely maybe. The Buffalos definitely return enough talent (five all-state selections) to win another title. The problem is that Glenrock is also returning boatloads of talent, and Buffalo is moving from Class 3A to Class 2A right in the middle of a resurgence.

What's that about boatloads of talent in Glenrock? Two running backs, 3,495 combined yards – that's what the Herders have back in seniors Ian Arnold and Tucker Bopp. There hasn't been a more dangerous pair since Butch and Sundance. The Herders' line is still young, but their backfield is stacked.

And what was that about Buffalo? The Bison are ready for a breakthrough. And they would have been ready for a breakthrough even without a move from 3A to 2A. With seven starters back on both offense and defense, including three returning all-state picks, the Bison will be competitive immediately.

How much have coaching changes affected 2A? In a word, bigly. Five Class 2A schools – Burns, Greybull, Lovell, Moorcroft and Wheatland – have new coaches. That's more than any other classification in the state.

Four key games

Wheatland at Newcastle, Aug. 31. Even though the bulk of the 2A focus has been elsewhere this offseason, both the Bulldogs and Dogies have talented and deep squads return-

ing this season. They'll need to be on their games early – they meet in Week 1.

Buffalo at Glenrock, Sept. 21. Glenrock has won or shared the East Conference championship four years running, but Buffalo presents a league challenge the Herders haven't had to face in years. The Bison's move from 3A gives the East Conference an entirely new dynamic.

Mountain View at Pinedale, Sept. 28. On paper, this showdown between the Buffalos and Wranglers could have important implications for the West Conference championship and playoff seeding. Both squads return lots of players from last year's squads, and Pinedale gets the home-field advantage this time around.

Mountain View at Greybull, Oct. 19. In the aftermath of Mountain View's state title, it's easy to forget how efficiently Greybull beat Mountain View in Week 8 last season. It will be interesting to see if this year's game is more competitive – or more critical.

Predicted order of finish

East Conference: Buffalo; Glenrock; Wheatland; Newcastle; Thermopolis; Burns; Moorcroft.

West Conference: Mountain View; Greybull; Pinedale; Lovell; Big Piney; Kemmerer; Lyman.

Way-too-early title game score prediction:

Buffalo 20, Mountain View 19

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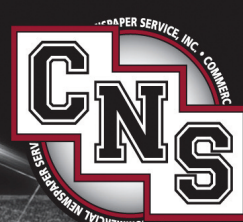


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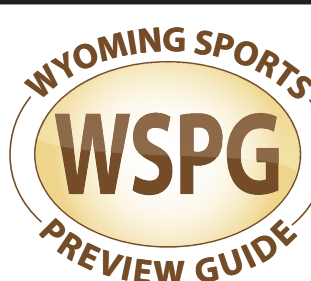


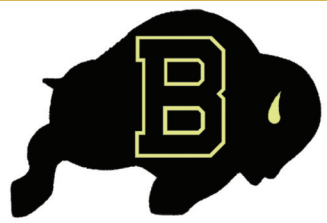
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Mascot: Bison
Division: 3A
Conference: East
Colors: Black and gold
Coach: Rob Hammond, 7th season

2017 Record: 6-3, lost to Cody in state quarterfinals

Key Players

WR/LB: Aaron Thiele, Sr.
QB/K: Luke Glasscock, Sr.
RB/CB: Cody Milmine, Sr.
OL/DL: Hunter Pope, Jr.

2018 Schedule

8-25: at Worland, 1 p.m. (Zero Week)
8-31: vs. Douglas, 7 p.m.
***9-7:** at Thermopolis, 7 p.m.
***9-14:** vs. Burns, 6 p.m.
***9-21:** at Glenrock, 7 p.m.
***9-28:** vs. Moorcroft, 7 p.m.
***10-5:** at Wheatland, 7 p.m.
10-12: at Big Piney, 2 p.m.
***10-19:** vs. Newcastle, 7 p.m.
*** Conference game**

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Bison not taking 2A move lightly

Buffalo has a unique spot in Wyoming this season – the only football program making a classification change.

The Bison are moving from Class 3A to Class 2A, just about the same time as they felt ready to make a championship run.

Coach Rob Hammond feared that moving from 3A to 2A could have slowed his players' development. Instead, he said "this is our best offseason that we've ever had."

"We took more kids ever to camp than we have and we have more kids in the weight room than we ever had," he said.

Instead of stunting the growth of the program, Hammond said moving to 2A hasn't really affected the approach of his players; in part, that's because of a strong set of expectations put in place over several seasons.

"Our mantra this year internally is just focusing on being the best we possibly can be no matter who we play," Hammond said. "... If we're not pushing our kids to be the best they can be, we're not going to reach our potential."

The Bison return three players who were all-state selections at Class 3A last year in defen-

"If we're not pushing our kids to be the best they can be, we're not going to reach our potential."

~ **Coach Rob Hammond**

sive back Cody Milmine, line-backer Aaron Thiele and kicker Luke Glasscock, all seniors.

Senior Caleb Jones was an all-conference selection last year, as well; they're among the seven returning starters Buffalo has on both offense and defense.

Jones ran 101 times for 519 yards last season, while Milmine added 47 carries for 311 yards. Both had four touchdowns.

Glasscock was also Buffalo's quarterback; he completed 50 of 99 passes for 494 yards and four touchdowns.

Thiele, Milmine and Jones were Buffalo's top three receivers last year. Thiele led the way with 18 catches for 226 yards; Milmine added 13 catches for 104 yards; and Jones bagged eight catches for 53 yards.

"This isn't your traditional Buffalo team where it's big and thick and plodding," Hammond

said. "It's a little more speed and athleticism than we're used to."

Thiele led Buffalo in defensive points, finishing second on the team with 26 solo tackles and seven tackles for loss and leading the Bison with four pass break-ups and two fumble recoveries.

Milmine was fourth in defensive points and had a team-high five interceptions, while Glasscock was seventh and had three interceptions of his own.

Jones and juniors Rowen Ruby, Austyn Carder and Dawson Hatch were also among Buffalo's top 12 tacklers last year.

Hammond said the Bison need to fill spots at linebacker, but he said the team switched to a 3-4 base last year and both techniques and schemes are more ingrained.

"Our understanding of our defense is so much further ahead than it was last year," he said.

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New coach used to his surroundings

Even before his first official practice as head coach at Burns, Brad Morrison already felt some familiarity with his new position.

Morrison said he felt comfortable in Burns because of its similarities to his hometown of Lamar, Colorado.

"That's a function of this community, just tough, hardworking people, put their head down and get the job done no matter what," he said.

Such mental toughness was on display this summer, as Morrison put his players through summer training – often after those players had been working all day at their summer jobs.

"My expectations have been exceeded, and I think that culture has to permeate into the program and really emphasize those characteristics," Morrison said.

The Broncos are primed for improvement on last year's 1-7 finish.

Burns gets back three of its four all-conference selections in senior Alex Pyle and juniors Ben Banville and Boe Clayson, and a host of other returners – about eight starters on both offense and de-



fense – should help Burns see improvement this fall.

"We knew it was a really young team that has a lot of guys that have played a lot, and that's definitely a strength (now)," Morrison said. "It's hard when you have a bunch of sophomores playing a lot of snaps, but eventually those sophomores become veteran juniors and veteran seniors."

The effect of those returners is felt most on defense, where the Broncos return their top three tacklers in Clayson, Banville and Pyle. Clayson led Burns' defensive in points and had a team-high 50 assisted tackles. Banville was second and led the Broncos in tackles for loss with five, while Pyle was third.

On offense, Clayson led Burns with 688 rushing yards and six

rushing touchdowns last year. Pyle added 216 rushing yards.

They'll likely be keys in Morrison's offensive approach. Although the Broncos will try to keep opposing defenses honest with different looks and schemes, "our bread and butter's going to be a power run game," he said.

Junior Kaden Lakin took the majority of snaps under center last year, finishing with 429 passing yards and three touchdowns.

Pyle caught 16 passes for 164 yards and three scores to lead the Broncos last season; senior Aiden Carroll added eight catches for 113 yards.

Juniors Logan Lerwick, Mitchell Miller and Hunter Parry also played important roles for Burns last year and will likely be called on to do so again this year on both sides of the ball.

Morrison said the schemes will likely be emphasize creativity and simplicity, especially as the players learn them.

"It's a little bit about me, but it's more about the kids and how they will buy into what we're doing and play for each other," he said.

Coach: Brad Morrison, 1st season at Burns
2017 Record: 1-7, did not qualify for playoffs

Key Players

WR/DB: Alex Pyle, Sr.
WR/DB: Aiden Carroll, Sr.
RB/LB: Boe Clayson, Jr.
FB/DL: Ben Banville, Jr.

Mascot: Broncos

Division: 2A

Conference: East

Colors: Black and orange

2018 Schedule

8-25: at Southeast Jamboree, 10 a.m. (Zero Week)
8-31: at Wright, 6 p.m.
***9-7:** vs. Moorcroft, 6 p.m.
***9-14:** at Buffalo, 6 p.m.
***9-21:** vs. Wheatland, 7 p.m.
***9-28:** at Glenrock, 6 p.m.
10-5: vs. Pine Bluffs, 7 p.m.
***10-12:** vs. Newcastle, 6 p.m.
***10-19:** at Thermopolis, 7 p.m.
*** Conference game**

Herders have tough schedule early

Usually, a state runner-up returning a bevy of players enters an offseason feeling comfortable about its chances to compete for another title.

Not Glenrock.

Even with a dynamic backfield, a solid defense and the desire to erase a last-second Class 2A championship loss from their memories, the Herders know they can't look any further down their schedule than their next game.

In Week 1, the Herders host 2017 Class 3A runner-up Torrington. Then they face conference rivals Newcastle and Wheatland – both playoff teams last year – on the road in back-to-back weeks. Then they play 2A newcomer Buffalo, down from 3A and trying to keep Glenrock from winning the East Conference crown for a fourth consecutive year.

"I know it's a cliché, but that's the way we look at it," coach Ray Kumpula said of his team's one-game-at-a-time approach.

Nevertheless, Glenrock is loaded, with seniors Ian Arnold and Tucker Bopp coming back from the all-state team.

Key Players

RB: Tucker Bopp, Sr.
RB: Ian Arnold, Sr.
OT: Urian Moreno, Sr.
RB: Payton Steinmetz, Sr.

Bopp and Arnold make for the most dynamic backfield paring in the state. Bopp ran for 1,949 yards on 177 carries last year and scored 20 touchdowns; Arnold ran for 1,546 yards on 216 carries and scored 19 times.

Also back is senior Payton Steinmetz, who was third for the Herders with 633 rushing yards and 11 touchdowns, and quarterback Zane Moore, who is a key piece of the double wing's timing.

Kumpula called the group "probably one of the fastest backfields I've ever had here."

However, the Herders only return two starters on the offensive line – an important piece for an offense that only completed four passes in 2017.

"If we can open holes for them, it's going to be tremen-

dous," Kumpula said. "I've done this job for a long time, and I understand you need a line in front of them to open the holes."

"If we can get these guys into space, they're going to take care of business."

The Herders return four of their top five tacklers in senior Bryson Collier, Arnold, Moore and Steinmetz. Collier led the Herders in defensive points and fronted the squad with 6.5 tackles for loss and two fumble recoveries. Arnold led Glenrock with 64 assisted tackles, while Moore had a team-high 32 solo tackles.

Bopp added a team-high 10 pass break-ups, and senior Urian Moreno played significant time on the defensive front.

Also motivating Glenrock is the desire to put last year's 35-28 loss to Mountain View in last year's 2A title game behind them.

"I think the kids realized how close they were," Kumpula said. "... They see their chance. They see what it's going to take to get there, and they see it's going to take more than they gave last year."

Mascot: Herders
Division: 2A
Conference: East
Colors: Purple and silver
Coach: Ray Kumpula, 24th year
2017 Record: 9-2, lost to Mountain View in state championship

2018 Schedule

8-24: vs. Pine Bluffs, 5 p.m. (Zero Week)
8-31: vs. Torrington, 7 p.m.
***9-7:** at Newcastle, 7 p.m.
***9-14:** at Wheatland, 7 p.m.
***9-21:** vs. Buffalo, 7 p.m.
***9-28:** vs. Burns, 6 p.m.
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***10-19:** vs. Moorcroft, 7 p.m.
*** Conference game**

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New coach hopes to reverse fortunes

Mascot: Wolves

Division: 2A

Conference: East

Colors: Green and white

Coach: Travis Santistevan,

first year at Moorcroft

2017 Record: 3-5, did not qualify for playoffs

2018 Schedule

8-24: at Big Horn Jamboree, 5:30 p.m. (Zero Week)

8-31: vs. Tongue River, 6 p.m.

***9-7:** at Burns, 6 p.m.

***9-14:** vs. Thermopolis, 6 p.m.

***9-21:** vs. Newcastle, 7 p.m.

***9-28:** at Buffalo, 7 p.m.

10-6: at Rapid City, S.D., Central JV, 6 p.m.

***10-12:** vs. Wheatland, 6 p.m.

***10-19:** at Glenrock, 7 p.m.

* Conference game

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The Moorcroft football program has taken its share of lumps since the start of the 21st century.

The Wolves have finished above .500 just once since 2001 and haven't made the playoffs in the past nine years, one of the state's longest active streaks of missing the postseason.

However, new coach Travis Santistevan has high hopes for a program long mired in struggles.

For the Lusk native, Moorcroft's path to consistent success starts with a simple expectation:

"I think the kids will want to work hard," he said.

For Santistevan, that means building a program much like the one he played in during his high school years in Niobrara County.

Lusk was a consistent contender under former coach Matt VandeBossche, whom Santistevan played for and also coached alongside as a volunteer assistant while in college.

"He's a big reason why I got into teaching and coaching," Santistevan said. "... He's probably my mentor and somebody I strive to be a lot like."

In execution, that means San-

Key Players

OL/DL: Kagen King, Sr.

RB/LB: Rowdy Pfeil, Jr.

QB: Parker Seely, Jr.

WR: Grayson Osmon, Sr.

tistevan will put a focus on discipline and on playing tough, hard-nosed football on both offense and defense. Not surprisingly, Santistevan said he'd like to focus on establishing a run-first offense.

"I come from a big running background," he said, "so it'll kind of depend on who we have for personnel."

That's where it gets tricky, as Santistevan – who's coming to Moorcroft after six years at Britton-Hecla, South Dakota, including three years as an assistant coach for the Britton-Hecla football team – hasn't had a ton of chances yet to work with his new crew of players.

Regardless, the attempts to establish a running game will likely begin with the Wolves' two returning all-conference selections, senior lineman Kagen King and

junior running back Rowdy Pfeil. Pfeil led the Wolves with 129 carries for 879 yards and five touchdowns in 2017. He's the only one of Moorcroft's top three rushers to return to the Wolves this season.

Junior quarterback Parker Seely completed 34 of 70 passes for 382 yards and a pair of touchdowns last year. Senior Grayson Osmon is Moorcroft's leading returning receiver; he caught nine passes for 155 yards last season.

On the defensive side of the ball, Pfeil is Moorcroft's leading returning tackler. He was third on the team in defensive points a year ago and had a team-high 30 solo tackles.

King was fourth on the team in defensive points and had four tackles for loss, while sophomore Hunter Garoutte was fifth and tied for the team high with three pass break-ups.

Seely and junior Parker Schlater were also in Moorcroft's top 10 in defensive points last season, while Osmon also chipped in at least four defensive points per game.

Dogies rely on line experience

Newcastle coach Matt Conzelman would love to have experience at every position.

He doesn't have that luxury this year.

This year's Dogie squad will be loaded with seniors on the offensive and defensive lines, but juniors and sophomores will do a lot of the work in the other positions. Consequently, Newcastle will have to rely on younger and less experienced players to get the job done outside the trenches.

The Dogies only lost three seniors from last year's team. However, they still need to replace their two top rushers, their quarterback, their top receiver and their top two defensive players from last year.

The line, though, is led by four seniors with plenty of experience. Sawyer Roberson was an all-state choice last year, and he'll be joined by Dayton Williams and Bryson Johnson, both all-conference choices last year, as well as Isaiah Covey.

"That's a good place to have your strengths," Conzelman said.

Meanwhile, junior all-conference pick Dylan Tidyman is the Dogies' top returning offensive threat. He had a team-high 35 catches last season, going for 509 yards and six receiving touchdowns.

However, no running back returns with more than 43 yards gained last year; no returning quarterback threw for more than 15 yards; and no returning receiver aside from Tidyman had more than 62 receiving yards.

Finding a quarterback to run the offense is the Dogies' immediate concern; Conzelman said he had never seen such open competition for the spot under center.

"I've been here for 16 years, and this is the first time it's ever kind of been like that," he said.

Conzelman said the process of finding a quarterback is "kind of like a little experiment contest," where several players are being given the opportunity to show what they can do. Leadership, though, is what Conzelman wants more than anything.

"He's got to be another coach out there on the

"Big plays would gouge us a bit. In some of those games, we'd be right there, and then the big play would hit, and that would be it."

~ Coach Matt Conzelman

field," he said.

Meanwhile, the defense will rely on several key returners to improve on the squad's frustrating performance last season; Newcastle ranked last in Class 2A last season in total defense, allowing 349.2 yards per game.

"Big plays would gouge us a bit," Conzelman said. "In some of those games, we'd be right there, and then the big play would hit, and that would be it."

Newcastle's top returning defender is junior Jake Deveraux, who was third on the team in defensive points and was tied for second with 38 assisted tackles.

Roberson was fourth and had 5.5 tackles for loss and two sacks, while Tidyman was fifth and had team-highs in interceptions with three and pass break-ups with four.

In addition, five other players – Johnson, Williams, Covey, senior Kyle Haslam and junior Conagher Testerman – all notched at least four defensive points per game last year.



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Mascot: Dogies

Division: 2A

Conference: East

Colors: Orange and black

Coach: Matt Conzelman,
10th year

2017 Record: : 5-5, lost to Big Piney in state quarterfinals

Key Players

OL/DL: Sawyer Roberson,
Sr.

OL/DL: Dayton Williams,
Sr.

FB/LB: Jake Deveraux, Jr.

WR/DB: Dylan Tidyman,
Jr.

2018 Schedule

8-24: at Custer, S.D., 7 p.m.
(Zero Week)

***8-31:** vs. Wheatland, 7 p.m.

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

9-14: at Rocky Mountain, 6 p.m.

***9-21:** at Moorcroft, 7 p.m.

9-28: vs. Lusk, 7 p.m.

***10-5:** vs. Thermopolis, 6 p.m.

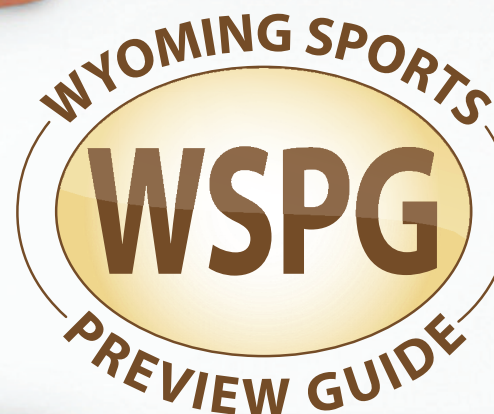
***10-12:** at Burns, 6 p.m.

***10-19:** at Buffalo, 7 p.m.

* Conference game

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Bobcats moving up the ranks

Mascot: Bobcats

Division: 2A

Conference: East

Colors: Purple and yellow

Coach: Matt McPhie, 3rd year at Thermopolis

2017 Record: 3-6, lost to Mountain View in state quarterfinals

2018 Schedule

8-25: Thermopolis Jamboree, 11 a.m. (Zero Week)

8-31: at Big Horn, 6 p.m.

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

***9-14:** at Moorcroft, 6 p.m.

9-21: at Mountain View, 4 p.m.

***9-28:** vs. Wheatland, 6 p.m.

***10-5:** at Newcastle, 6 p.m.

***10-12:** vs. Glenrock, 7 p.m.

***10-19:** vs. Burns, 7 p.m.

* Conference game

Slowly but surely, Matt McPhie's plan is coming into place in Thermopolis.

In 2016, his first season as coach, the Bobcats went 1-7.

Last year, the Bobcats improved significantly, bumping up their record to 3-6 while qualifying for the playoffs.

This year, McPhie is hopeful the steady improvement his team has shown will continue, and that the Bobcats will again improve on their record.

"We are creating a culture here in Thermopolis that is built on hard work and discipline," McPhie said. "The players are beginning to reap the benefits as we have begun to experience some success."

The personnel is there for continued improvement – the Bobcats return seven offensive starters and six defensive starters. Thermopolis also gets back two of its three all-state selections in seniors Chandler Maddock and Jeffrey VanAntwerp, while sophomore Logan Cole was an all-conference pick.

Cole ran for 933 yards on 143 carries, while Maddock added 594 yards on 74 carries.

Senior Jon Harvey split time

Key Players

FB/LB: Jeffrey

VanAntwerp, Sr.

RB/LB: Chandler Maddock, Sr.

RB/LB: Logan Cole, Soph.

QB/LB: Jon Harvey, Sr.

under center last year and finished with a team-high 244 passing yards. Maddock, with 11 catches for 92 yards last year, is Thermopolis' leading returning receiver.

That trio of Harvey, Cole and Maddock makes things difficult for opposing defenses.

"We ran the ball much more effectively in 2017," McPhie said. "... We need to improve our ball skills and decision making in all of our skill positions, but feel we are creating a culture of healthy competition among our players, which will improve our play going forward."

They'll run behind what McPhie called a young but experienced offensive line that includes senior Tyson Tobar, junior Spencer Axtell and sophomores Remington Ferree and Hyrum Rich, among others.

Senior Ethan Becher leads a defense that returns three of its top four tacklers and nine of its top 12 from last year.

VanAntwerp and Harvey also ranked in the Bobcats' top four tacklers last year, while Maddock, Cole, Tobar, juniors Riley Shaffer and Dustin Harvey and senior Kolby George all had at least four defensive points per game last year.

However, the Bobcats' defense ranked 12th of the 13 Class 2A teams last year, giving up 320.2 yards per game. Thermopolis also has to learn the schemes of a new defensive coordinator, former Worland head coach Todd Weber.

McPhie said he expected a "physical, sound defensive unit that will fly around to the ball."

Overall, though, McPhie said he's happy with the direction in which his team is moving.

"Early on, as in any relationship, the message was received, but implementing change takes time and effort, both of which are independent of talent," McPhie said. "We have some momentum right now, and I expect the results and success to follow."

Punchers take consistent approach

Big Piney coach Aaron Makelky said his team enters 2018 with a simple rallying cry: "Rosters change, but expectations don't."

Makelky said the motto stems from a basic fact that no one can overlook: Big Piney lost four all-state and eight all-conference players to graduation, and not a single all-conference pick returns this fall.

However, Makelky said this year's players know they can remain competitive – and grow into roles quickly – if they accept the challenges they have.

"I think kids recognize that years like this bring great opportunities for them," Makelky said. "... If you're a sophomore, (you think) 'What a great opportunity for me to step in and contribute.'"

Senior linemen Shawn Pelham, Justin Seeman and Tanner Hansen are the Punchers' only returning offensive starters. Makelky has confidence in his big guys up front, though.

"Two of them have started every game the last two years in the exact positions" they will

Key Players

OT/DL: Shawn Pelham, Sr.

OT/DL: Justin Seeman, Sr.

OL/LB: Tanner Hansen, Sr.

RB/LB: Tate Hughes, Sr.

play this year, he said.

Big Piney's leading returning rusher and receiver is senior Tate Hughes, who had 17 carries for 106 yards and one catch for 16 yards last season.

For the defense, Hansen is the only one of Big Piney's top six tacklers to return this year. Hansen finished fifth on the team in defensive points and led the Punchers with 57 assists.

Hughes was seventh, Pelham was eighth and Seeman ninth in defensive points in 2017.

The Punchers will need to replace all of their starting defensive backs, who graduated, but they return a strong core of linebackers and linemen.

"We were young at linebacker last year," Makelky said. "Now

that's going to be our veteran spot on defense."

Even with all the turnover, Makelky said he sees advantages to having a young squad.

First, the players have already built chemistry at the sub-varsity level, and that experience together will ease the transition.

Second, Makelky has worked with other coaches to encourage more players to go out for football, eschewing sport specialization. With so many opportunities, Makelky said he's seen steady renewed interest from athletes who haven't played football in a couple years.

Third, Makelky said the season presents a chance to find out which players are hungry, ready to respond to the challenges they have to accept the opportunities ahead.

Finally, Makelky said the loss of such a big senior class will mean lowered expectations from opponents.

However, the expectations he has – and that they players have for each other – aren't changing, even as the rosters do.

"We have that advantage of being under the radar," Makelky said. "... I think we can catch some people by surprise just because they may not expect a lot out of us."



Mascot: Punchers

Division: 2A

Conference: West

Colors: Red and white

Coach: Aaron Makelky, 7th year

2017 Record: 7-3, lost to Glenrock in state semifinals

2018 Schedule

8-24: at Lander Jamboree, 4 p.m. (Zero Week)

8-31: at Shoshoni, 7 p.m.

***9-7:** at Mountain View, 4 p.m.

***9-14:** vs. Greybull, 2 p.m.

***9-21:** vs. Kemmerer, 2 p.m.

***9-28:** at Lovell, 6 p.m.

***10-5:** at Pinedale, 7 p.m.

10-12: vs. Buffalo, 2 p.m.

***10-19:** vs. Lyman, 2 p.m.

* Conference game

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Bohlander moves up to main role

The Wheatland Bulldogs should feel good about their chances at success in 2018.

They have a lot of returning starters – seven on offense and eight on defense.

They have six returning all-conference selections, the most in Class 2A.

And their new coach is someone who already has familiarity with the team.

"We have a lot of good experienced players that I am going to look at to help lead the team in the di-

rection we want to head," said first-year head coach Cody Bohlander, who takes over after three years on Wheatland's staff as an assistant. "Most of the kids we have coming back (have) been starting since they were sophomores, and have been in the playoff picture every year. I think this is something that will really benefit us as a team."

Those returners include two all-state picks – seniors Colton Caves and Clayton Iacovetto – and senior all-conference choices Dylan Pearson, Wyatt Crane, Daniel Hutchins and Carlos Garcia.

Caves was Wheatland's rushing workhorse last year, carrying 226 times for 1,305 yards and 13 touchdowns.

The Bulldogs do need to replace quarterback Trevor Vaughn, who threw for 1,596 yards and 12 touchdowns, but the receiving corps returns three of its top four receivers in Caves, junior Kobe Preuit and senior Kye Hicks. Preuit is Wheatland's leading returning receiver, notching 17 catches for 301 yards last year, while Caves had 239 receiving yards and Hicks 218.



Mascot: Bulldogs

Division: 2A

Conference: East

Colors: Blue and yellow

2018 Schedule

8-25: at Southeast Jamboree, 10 a.m. (Zero Week)

***8-31:** at Newcastle, 7 p.m.

9-7: vs. Upton-Sundance, 6 p.m.

***9-14:** vs. Glenrock, 7 p.m.

***9-21:** at Burns, 7 p.m.

***9-28:** at Thermopolis, 6 p.m.

***10-5:** vs. Buffalo, 7 p.m.

***10-12:** at Moorcroft, 6 p.m.

10-19: vs. Pinedale, 7 p.m.

* Conference game

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WHEATLAND BULLDOGS

Defensively, the Bulldogs return their top five tacklers in Pearson, Caves, Hutchins, Crane and Hicks, and eight of their top nine in all.

And it was a team effort, as each player led in a different way: Hutchins led the team in assisted tackles (42) and tackles for loss (4), Caves in solo tackles (36), Pearson in points, interceptions (6) and pass break-ups (5), Crane in sacks (4) and fumble recoveries (2).

Hicks added three interceptions, while senior Drake Amundson, Garcia, Iacovetto and Preuit were all in Wheatland's top nine tacklers a year ago.

"I am excited I have so many guys returning on

the defensive side of the ball for me," Bohlander said. "It will allow me to get our base concepts in very quickly and play with some different looks that I feel could really help us."

And Bohlander's familiarity with his squad will help make the transition easy.

"This senior class were freshmen when I first started my coaching career in Wheatland," he said. "They have been a really great group to work with over the years and I feel we have a good coach and player dynamic built already. They know what I expect of them as a coach, and I know what every one of them is capable of doing on the field."

Coach: Cody Bohlander, first year at Wheatland
2017 Record: 5-5, lost to Mountain View in state semifinals

Key Players

OL/DL: Clayton Iacovetto, Sr.

RB/LB: Colton Caves, Sr.

RB/LB: Wyatt Crane, Sr.

WR/DB: Kye Hicks, Sr.

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New coach has conference ties

Coach: Eli Moody, first year at Greybull
2017 Record: 5-4, lost to Wheatland in state quarterfinals

Key Players
RB/LB: Zack Keisel, Sr.
OL/DL: Gerardo Corral, Sr.
WR: Brock Hill, Sr.
OL/DL: Abe Mendez, Sr.

Mascot: Buffaloes

Division: 2A

Conference: West

Colors: Blue and yellow

2018 Schedule

8-24: vs. Tongue River, 5 p.m. (Zero Week)
8-31: at Rocky Mountain, 7 p.m.
9-7: vs. Big Horn, 7 p.m.
***9-14:** at Big Piney, 2 p.m.
***9-21:** vs. Pinedale, 4 p.m.
***9-28:** at Kemmerer, 4 p.m.
***10-5:** vs. Lovell, 7 p.m.
***10-12:** at Lyman, 2 p.m.
***10-19:** vs. Mountain View, 7 p.m.
*** Conference game**

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When Eli Moody was hired as the head coach at Greybull, one game drew his immediate attention – the one against Lovell.

Aside from being regional rivals, just 33 miles apart in Big Horn County, Moody had an extra incentive for being interested.

He's a 2012 Lovell graduate. "That was always a strong rivalry and a game I looked forward to playing, so it will be fun to see it from the other side," Moody said.

The former Bulldog, entering his first season as the head coach with the Buffaloes, said taking the head coaching job in Greybull was pretty straightforward despite the rivalry ties between the two schools.

"There was a lot the interested me about the job here," Moody said. "It is close to my hometown, so I love the area."

Moody's mother, grandparents and uncles were also Greybull graduates, "so it runs in my family."

Now he gets to take over a program that's had four consecutive winning seasons and returns several key contributors from last year's squad.

Even though the Buffaloes only lost four seniors from last year's team, senior Zack Keisel is Greybull's lone returning all-state selection. Classmates Gerardo Corral and Brock Hill were all-conference choices last year, as well.

Keisel is the Buffs' leading returning rusher, but he had just 120 yards on 23 carries last year.

Greybull led Class 2A in passing yards per game with 181.8. Hill caught 23 passes for 206

"There was a lot the interested me about the job here."

~ Coach Eli Moody

yards to finish third on the team last year. Junior Felipe Gaytan (13 catches, 201 yards) and Keisel (12 catches, 200 yards) were also consistent offensive contributors in the passing game.

However, Hill may be in position to take over as starting quarterback; he completed five passes in mop-up duty last year and is the only returning player to have completed a varsity pass last season.

On defense, Greybull returns four of its five top tacklers in Keisel, Corral, Hill and senior Abe Mendez. Keisel led the Buffs in solo (34) and assisted (71) tackles as well as defensive points, while Hill led the team with 6.5

tackles for loss.

Junior Ben Kraft and senior Calvin Farrow also logged significant minutes on defense.

Moody said he wasn't all that familiar with the players he's inherited, but he did say the team retains its defensive coordinator in Jeff Hunt and Moody himself has been watching as much film as he can to prepare for the transition.

"The things I'm wanting to put in place right away are the new formations, plays and terms as well as working on team culture," Moody said. "We will build the offense and defense around the players we have but want to be strong in the run and run-stopping game."



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Rangers have experienced group

Kemmerer's 1-8 record in 2017 was the beginning of a slow, steady turnaround that coach Bart Jernigan wants to engineer.

Jernigan said he knows a steady growth is better than a sudden flare-up. That means placing an emphasis on doing things the right way, every time.

"For me it's just been a matter of keeping that vision in mind and not sacrificing," Jernigan said.

That vision includes high ideals and high requirements of his players.

"We've been really, really insistent that we hold these things up," he said.

So even though quicker on-field success may come from cutting corners, Jernigan said he's not interested in building something for the short term.

His hope is that approach pays off this year, especially with eight offensive starters and nine defensive starters returning.

"When I came into the program, this group of seniors were freshmen, and they were always kind of the group we were looking forward to," Jernigan said. " ...

Most all of them have been three-year starters, so we'll be playing a lot of four-year starters."

Senior Jeydon Boyd was an all-state selection, and seniors Hayden Walker and Anthony Tibbetts return as all-conference selections.

The Rangers return their top four rushers from last year. Sophomore A.Q. Martinez led the Rangers with 485 rushing yards, while Tibbetts added 401 rushing yards. Senior Donny Proffit chipped in 163 yards on the ground and senior Josh Thatcher added 76.

Thatcher threw for 445 yards and five touchdowns. He returns his top two receivers; Walker led the team with 175 receiving yards and three touchdowns on 10 catches, while senior Tanner Plowman finished with 14 catches for 134 yards.

Jernigan said he wants to see better production from his team in the red zone.

"It's hard to win football games when you get to the 20 (-yard line) but keep getting turned away," he said.

Senior lineman Lowell Ellis leads a defense that returns its top five tacklers and six of its top seven. Ellis led the Rangers with 22 solo tackles and 72 assists.

Boyd was second in defensive points and had a team-high four tackles for loss and three fumble recoveries, while Proffit had a team-high two interceptions and Tibbetts was fourth in defensive points. Junior Colter Brunski also logged key minutes on defense.

They're all part of Jernigan's bigger vision to develop consistent competitiveness.

"A lot of these kids didn't grow up with the expectation of playing Ranger football," he said, noting that overcoming that problem is "going to be key in making the program what it can be."

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Mascot: Bulldogs

Division: 2A

Conference: West

Colors: Blue and white

Coach: Jeny Gardner, first year at Lovell

2017 Record: 4-5, lost to Glenrock in state quarterfinals

Key Players

QB: Mat Savage, Sr.
C/DL: Kurt McNabb, Sr.
FB/LB: Coy Trainor, Jr.
WR/CB: Kaleb Snyder, Sr.

2018 Schedule

8-25: at Natrona JV, 2 p.m. (Zero Week)
8-31: vs. Wind River, 7 p.m.
9-7: at Shoshoni, 7 p.m.
***9-14:** vs. Mountain View, 7 p.m.
***9-21:** at Lyman, 4 p.m.
***9-28:** vs. Big Piney, 6 p.m.
***10-5:** at Greybull, 7 p.m.
***10-12:** vs. Pinedale, 7 p.m.
***10-19:** at Kemmerer, 4 p.m.
*** Conference game**

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2A WEST

LOVELL BULLDOGS

Gardner breaks the gender barrier

Jeny Gardner grew up a huge football fan.

But beyond playing backyard games with friends and in her school's annual "powder puff" game, she never had the chance to play the game she loved.

Until college, when Gardner discovered Women's Professional Football League.

For six years, Gardner played on the defensive line with the Sacramento Sirens; later, she spent three years as a defensive line coach.

After a few years away to have her children, she got interested in coaching again.

"When I was offered the chance to return to coaching three years ago with Lovell, I jumped at the chance," she said.

After three years as an assistant coach with the Bulldogs, Gardner is now the head coach, the first female head football coach in Wyoming high school football.

She inherits a team in transition. The Bulldogs lost 12 players to graduation and have lots of question marks on both sides of

the ball.

Gardner said the Bulldogs will be young, "all the way around from coaching staff down to players. However, we have some key leadership returning and a several players who I believe can step up and fill the large holes our seniors are leaving."

One strength, though, is the Bulldogs' line play, where the team has plenty of experience in seniors Kurt McNabb, Kerry Powell and Kelly Powell. McNabb is Lovell's lone returning all-state selection, while the Powells were all-conference picks last year.

Quarterback Mat Savage threw for 306 yards last season. However, no receiver cracked 100 yards total on the season, and the Bulldogs' top five receivers graduated. Senior Kaleb Snyder, who had four catches for 22 yards, is Lovell's top returning receiver.

Lovell's leading returning rusher is junior Coy Trainor, who ran 106 times for 440 yards and five touchdowns last year.

Gardner said she probably won't change many of the team's

Mascot: Rangers
Division: 2A
Conference: West
Colors: Black and red
Coach: Bart Jernigan, 2nd year

2017 Record: 1-8

Key Players

OG/DE: Jeydon Boyd, Sr.
TE/DE: Hayden Walker, Sr.
QB/FS: Josh Thatcher, Sr.
CB: Dawson Schramm, Jr.

2018 Schedule

8-24: vs. Cokeville, 7 p.m.
8-30: at Riverton JV, 4 p.m.
***9-7:** vs. Lyman, 7 p.m.
***9-14:** at Pinedale, 7 p.m.
***9-21:** at Big Piney, 2 p.m.
***9-28:** vs. Greybull, 4 p.m.
10-5: vs. Glenrock, 7 p.m.
***10-12:** at Mtn View, 3:30 p.m.
***10-19:** vs. Lovell, 4 p.m.
*** Conference game**

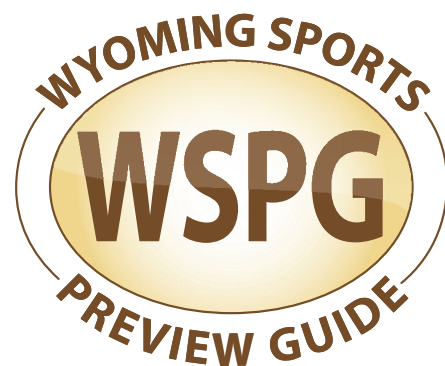
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Mascot: Eagles
Division: 2A
Conference: West
Colors: Blue and white
Coach: Dale Anderson, 7th year
2017 Record: 3-6, did not qualify for playoffs

2018 Schedule

8-24: at Rawlins, 6 p.m. (Zero Week)
***8-31:** at Pinedale, 7 p.m.
***9-7:** at Kemmerer, 7 p.m.
9-14: vs. Cokeville, 4 p.m.
***9-21:** vs. Lovell, 4 p.m.
9-27: vs. Star Valley JV, 4 p.m.
***10-5:** at Mountain View, 3:30 p.m.
***10-12:** vs. Greybull, 2 p.m.
***10-19:** at Big Piney, 2 p.m.
*** Conference game**



Experience a challenge for Eagles

The Lyman Eagles were a team in transition last year.

Whether they like it or not, graduation will force them to be a team in transition again this year.

The Eagles' offensive approach underwent significant changes last year, shifting from a balanced attack to a run-oriented scheme.

This year, Lyman has to continue to adapt after graduating all four of its all-conference selections, its top two rushers, most of its receivers and its top three tacklers.

Even so, coach Dale Anderson said he and his team are ready for the challenge, as the Eagles return several players who played significantly as juniors and sophomores last year.

"We're kind of in a position right now where our young kids are playing, but hopefully it helps them grow up quick," Anderson said. "... We're hoping their experience last year will help them carry over from being part-time players to full-time players."

While shifting to a primarily run-based offense, Lyman finished last in Class 2A last year with only 164.4 yards per game, almost 30 yards per game behind any other team in the classification. The defense picked up the slack, finishing fifth in the class in yards allowed, but the Eagles still were outgained by more than 100 yards per game.

Anderson said even though

"We just find some ways to do the same things to take advantage of the kids we have."

~ **Coach Dale Anderson**

the results may not have shown it, he was satisfied with the progress his team made with the changes to the offense, which were designed to take advantage of the Eagles' personnel.

"We try to find ways to play to their strengths," Anderson said. "The basic concepts are the same, we just find some ways to do the same things to take advantage of the kids we have."

"By the end of the season I thought we had kind of found that to a degree."

On offense, the Eagles do return their quarterback in junior Hagen Lamoreaux. Lamoreaux threw for 100 yards last year and ran for 108 more – he is Lyman's top returning rusher. He isn't called on much to throw the ball; the Eagles completed only 13 passes all season on only 37 attempts and didn't score a touchdown through the air last year.

On offense, Lyman also returns senior linemen Jacob Woodland, Lucas Anson and Jaxon Peacock, along with senior tight end Carson Ellis and running backs Brendan Martin (junior) and Gus Bluemel (senior).



Key Players

OL/LB: Jacob Woodland, Sr.

OL/DL: Lucas Anson, Sr.

RB/DB: Gus Bluemel, Sr.

TE/LB: Carson Ellis, Sr.

"We've got three returning linemen, which I think will help us a little bit," Anderson said. "It's always nice to have those kids back."

On defense, Martin, who had a team-high 20 solo tackles and finished fourth on the team in defensive points, is Lyman's leading returning defensive player. Additionally, Lamoreaux, Woodland and Bluemel all logged more than five defensive points per game.

Buffalos hungry for title defense

Mountain View coach Brent Walk understands why his team won't be complacent this fall, even after winning 2017's Class 2A championship.

He's seen how culture has obliterated complacency.

"Honestly, with Mountain View kids, it's a non-issue," he said. "Those kids are working harder than they've ever worked."

"These kids, they are absolutely getting after it, and they're hungry."

The Buffalos return five all-state selections, more than any other Class 2A program, from their championship squad.

Moreover, only one of those returners, Colby Rees, is a senior. The rest – Briggan Bluemel, Hunter Gross, Kimball Madsen and Braeden Walk – are juniors.

Bluemel and Madsen were Mountain View's top two rushers last year; Bluemel ran for 933 yards and 13 touchdowns while Madsen had 768 rushing yards and 11 touchdowns.

Walk and Madsen split time

"These kids, they are absolutely getting after it, and they're hungry."

~ **Coach Brent Walk**

under center; they combined for 1,874 passing yards and 18 touchdowns, split almost evenly between them. The rotation under center could continue, coach Walk said, because both players buy into the approach.

"We have two of the better quarterbacks in the state, and they both happen to be on our team," coach Walk said.

Bluemel, with 26 catches for 405 yards, is Mountain View's leading returning receiver. Walk added 20 catches for 248 yards, while Madsen added 11 catches for 161 yards.

The Buffs led 2A in total defense, scoring defense and turnover ratio last year, and sev-

eral contributors return. Rees was second for the Buffalos in defensive points and led the team with 59 assisted tackles. Bluemel had team highs with nine pass break-ups and two blocked kicks; Gross had team highs with 18 tackles for loss and four sacks.

Madsen was sixth and Walk was eighth in defensive points last year for Mountain View; in all, the Buffs get back five of their top eight tacklers.

Mountain View has few weaknesses, but Walk said he only expects four seniors to come out, and of those only two have starting experience. Walk

Continued on next page



Mascot: Buffalos
Division: 2A
Conference: West
Colors: Purple and white
Coach: Brent Walk, 7th year
2017 Record: 9-2, beat Glenrock in state championship

2018 Schedule

8-24: at Green River Jamboree, 7 p.m. (Zero Week)
8-31: at Cokeville, 4 p.m.
***9-7:** vs. Big Piney, 4 p.m.
***9-14:** at Lovell, 7 p.m.
9-21: vs. Thermopolis, 4 p.m.
***9-28:** at Pinedale, 6 p.m.
***10-5:** vs. Lyman, 3:30 p.m.
***10-12:** vs. Kemmerer, 3:30 p.m.
***10-19:** at Greybull, 7 p.m.
*** Conference game**

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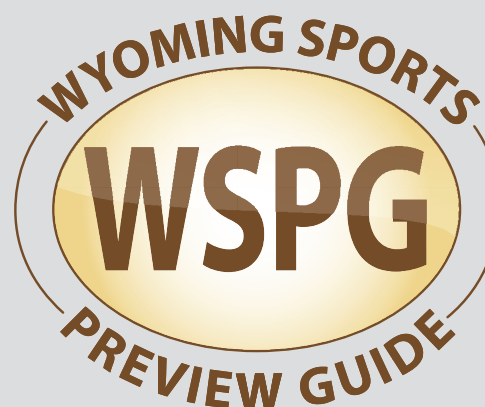
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said he will rely on a strong and stable set of juniors while continuing to foster leadership across classes.

"(When) we talk to our guys about leadership, we don't care how old you are," Coach Walk said.

Most importantly, the Buffalos' offseason program, with nearly 50 players in the weight room each day, has pushed players to grow.

Key Players

OL/LB: Colby Rees, Sr.
RB/S: Briggan Bluemel, Jr.
QB/WR/S: Braeden Walk, Jr.
QB/WR/LB: Kimball Madson, Jr.

"What we've got going on now is pretty cool because the kids pick each other up," Walk said.

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2A WEST

PINEDALE WRANGLERS

PAGE 33

Wranglers have experienced crew

Pinedale's 2017 season was both motivating and frustrating. The Wranglers played well against good competition, but they finished 2-6, out of the play-off race in the Class 2A West.

"Unfortunately, close doesn't get you into the playoffs... but I think that's something we can build on now," Pinedale coach Mitch Espeland said. "... I think our fellas know what that competition looks like now."

Learning how to win is still something the Wranglers will need to do to be competitive in the West Conference in 2018. However, after those growing pains last fall, Pinedale appears all grown up this fall, in position to make big improvements.

The Wranglers return 10 starters on both offense and defense, as well as all five of its all-conference selections in seniors Joey McCulloch, Tyler VanEtten, Senddey Gutierrez, Porter Potts and Kadar Criddle. McCulloch was also all-state.

Espeland said he expects about 15 seniors and about 40 total players.

"The fact that we can have guys who have been playing on Friday nights, some of them for

Key Players

RB/LB: Tyler VanEtten, Sr.
RB/LB: Joey McCulloch, Sr.
OL/DL: Kadar Criddle, Sr.
TE/LB: Porter Potts, Sr.

four years... that's huge," Espeland said.

Espeland said his philosophy is to put the best players on the field regardless of age.

"Fortunately, we have a lot of seniors who have put in the work to make sure they get on that field," he said. "... This class has been playing football a long time and they like it."

McCulloch, VanEtten, Criddle and Potts, in order, were Pinedale's top four tacklers last year. McCulloch led the Wranglers with 10 tackles for loss and 59 assisted tackles, while VanEtten led the team with 33 solo tackles.

Gutierrez was sixth, while junior Bryce VanEtten was ninth. Seniors Wyatt Phelps, Sammy White, Kolby Carson and Ethan Carson also played significant

minutes on defense last season.

On offense, Tyler VanEtten led the Wranglers with 173 carries for 702 yards and four touchdowns.

Phelps returns under center after completing 39 passes for 399 yards and eight scores a year ago. While he returns four of his top five receivers, Pinedale's top receiver last year only managed 83 yards.

The offensive responsibilities will be critical this fall. The Wranglers only managed 193.4 yards per game, second-worst in Class 2A. The defense did what it could, allowing only 263.5 yards per game (second-best in 2A) but couldn't do everything.

Espeland said having a stable core of seniors will help Pinedale expand on its options, but the squad isn't abandoning anything it's already built.

"You still always have to get those fundamentals down," Espeland said. "The only difference (with having so many experienced players) is we can expand on those fundamentals a little bit quicker."

Loaded with experience, the Wranglers appear ready for that challenge.

Mascot: Wranglers

Division: 2A

Conference: West

Colors: Green and white

Coach: Mitch Espeland, 3rd year at Pinedale

2017 Record: 2-6, did not qualify for playoffs

2018 Schedule

8-24: at Lander Jamboree, 4 p.m.

(Zero Week)

*8-31: vs. Lyman, 7 p.m.

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

*9-14: vs. Kemmerer, 7 p.m.

*9-21: at Greybull, 4 p.m.

*9-28: vs. Mountain View, 6 p.m.

*10-5: vs. Big Piney, 7 p.m.

*10-12: at Lovell, 7 p.m.

10-19: at Wheatland, 7 p.m.

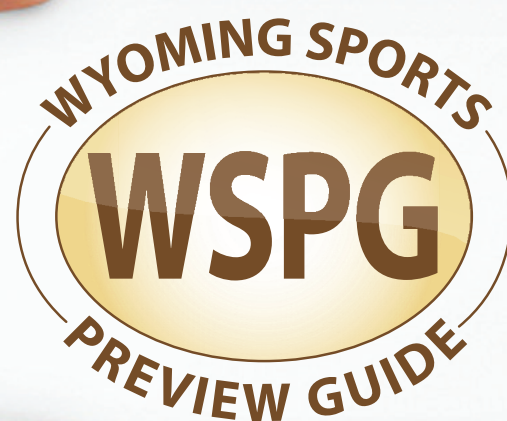
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Pine Bluffs 20, Big Horn 16

State Semifinals

Pine Bluffs 14,
Upton-Sundance 7

Big Horn 12, Cokeville 7

State Quarterfinals

Pine Bluffs 58, Saratoga 0

Upton-Sundance 39,
Rocky Mountain 22

Cokeville 42, Southeast 0

Big Horn 51, Wind River 0

Four players to watch

Kade Eisele, Big Horn

Eisele was a huge part of Big Horn's success last year, running for 1,768 yards and 25 touchdowns. The work-horse of the Rams' offense could put up even bigger numbers this year thanks to an experienced offensive line.

Seth Mullinax, Big Horn

One of the guys blocking for Eisele is Mullinax – and he's hard to miss. At 6-foot-4 and 275 pounds, Mullinax is a nimble and powerful offensive guard. He's also got the potential to be a terror on defense.

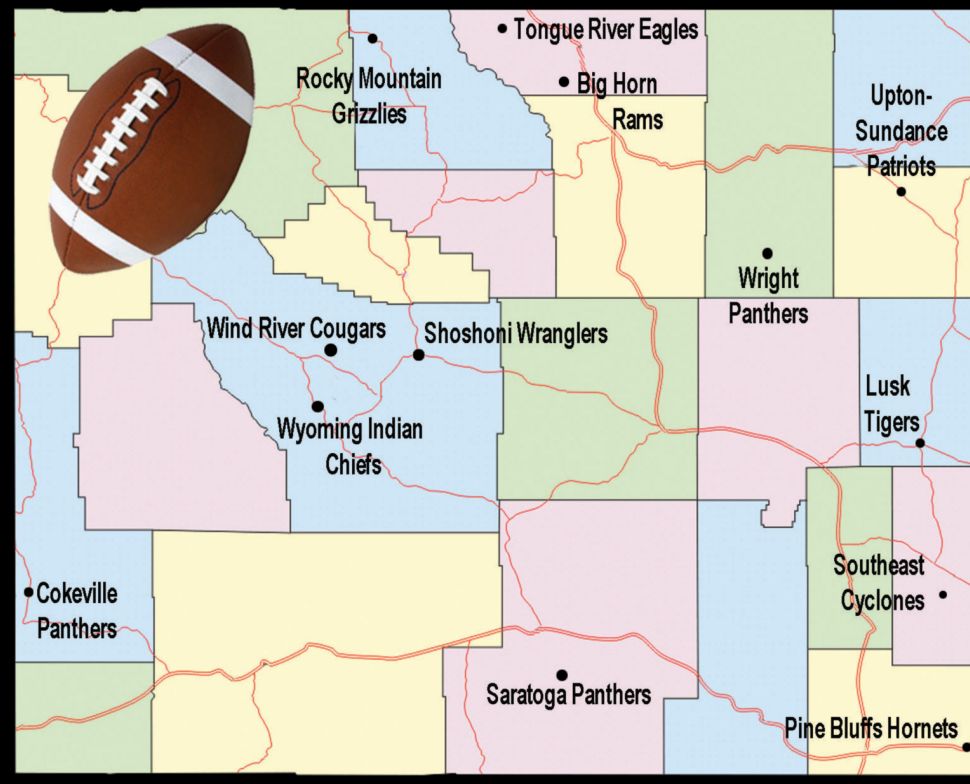
Hunter Jeffres, Pine Bluffs

As a junior, Jeffres led Pine Bluffs in defensive points. He might draw more attention from opposing offenses this year, which may affect his stats, but he'll still be a key piece of the Hornets' three-peat run.

Clayton Louderback, Upton-Sundance

On a senior-laden Patriot team, Louderback the quarterback has the job of keeping the offense chugging. He's a dual threat, and with a veteran line in front of him, he could be even more dangerous this fall.

1A/11-man Preview



East has the power in 1A

By Patrick Schmiedt

Four questions to answer

Where's the strength of Class 1A 11-man? The East Conference. With Big Horn, Upton-Sundance and Pine Bluffs, the three best teams (on paper) in the classification are all in the East Conference.

Of those three, which one is most likely to win it all? Big Horn. By far. The Rams return all six of their all-state selections and almost the entirety of the rest of their squad. That will make the transition to new head coach Kirk McLaughlin smoother than usual.

No love for the West Conference this year? Nope. Cokeville graduated 10 seniors. Wind River is resurgent but may still be a year away from title contention. Rocky Mountain lost a bunch of players and has a history of quarterfinal losses. Don't be surprised if the East sweeps the West in the first round of the playoffs.

Wait, what? A sweep??? The West Conference may field only four teams this fall. If that's the case, they're all guaranteed playoff spots... and the seven teams in the East are left fighting for the remaining four. Competition will breed success.

Four key games

Upton-Sundance at Big Horn, Sept. 21. Big Horn smacked Upton-Sundance 53-13 last year, so you know the Patriots have been looking forward to proving that one was an anom-

aly. An upset could make the Patriots the team to beat in the East.

Big Horn at Pine Bluffs, Sept. 28. Obviously, this is a rematch of last year's Class 1A 11-man title game. But more than that, this game is likely to be a key piece of the East Conference championship race this fall.

Wind River at Rocky Mountain, Oct. 12. If either the Cougars or Grizzlies want to challenge Cokeville, they've got to get past each other first. For Wind River, this could be huge, with the Cougars' game with Cokeville looming in Week 8.

Pine Bluffs at Upton-Sundance, Oct. 12. When the preseason top three are all in the same conference, it makes sense that each one of their meetings will be huge. This Week 7 contest is likely to play a huge part in determining playoff hosting duties and more.

Predicted order of finish

East Conference: Big Horn; Upton-Sundance; Pine Bluffs; Wright; Tongue River; Lusk; Southeast.

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

Way-too-early

title game score prediction

Big Horn 34, Upton-Sundance 26
The Rams start the season above the rest of the 1A 11-man field. Whether U-S, or Pine Bluffs, or Cokeville, does enough to catch the Rams this season will be the huge question of the season.

1A/11-MAN EAST

BIG HORN RAMS

PAGE 35

Rams reload for shot at crown

In his first season as Big Horn's head coach, Kirk McLaughlin inherits a powerhouse.

The Rams graduated only two seniors from 2017's Class 1A 11-man runner-up team; they return 10 offensive starters and 11 on defense. The Rams return their top five rushers, quarterback, every receiver and their top 15 tacklers.

"It is always a good thing to have a lot of returners and that makes the job easier," said McLaughlin, who was previously Big Horn's defensive coordinator. "There will always be high expectations with me and the staff; that can make the job harder, but I look forward to the challenge."

Big Horn's first challenge will be to stave off attempts to crown them champions before a down is played. After all, the Rams return six all-state and seven all-conference players, more than any other team in Wyoming.

The returning all-staters are seniors Kade Eisele, Seth Mullinax and Kade VanDyken and juniors Quinn McCafferty, Will Pelissier and Nolan Rader. Junior

Kyler Ostler was all-conference.

"I knew that we had a great team coming back and that Coach (Michael) McGuire laid a great foundation of success with this program," McLaughlin said. "I could not stand the thought of anyone else coaching this team other than this coaching staff."

Last year, Big Horn had a pair of 1,000-yard rushers in Eisele (1,768 rushing yards, 25 touchdowns) and Pelissier (1,089 yards, 10 touchdowns). McCafferty threw for 1,800 yards, completing 120 of 201 passes, and 21 touchdowns. VanDyken (566 receiving yards), Pelissier (429), Ostler

(248) and Eisele (242) were consistent receiving targets.

Big Horn led Class 1A 11-man in both rushing and passing yards, outgaining every other team by almost 100 yards per game.

"We will keep what we liked while also adding in some stuff that we feel is necessary to get us to the top," he said.

Eisele led the team in defensive points, solo tackles (33) and pass break-ups (five). Junior Cutler Bradshaw led the squad with 64 assists; VanDyken intercepted nine passes; Ostler finished with a team-high six tackles for loss; Mullinax led with a pair of sacks and a pair of blocked kicks.

Pelissier, Rader and seniors Liam Greenelsh and Jaxon Parker added at least five defensive points per game.

Complacency from being in the favorites' role won't be a problem for the Rams – not after losing the 1A 11-man title game.

"We had a heartbreaking end to the 2017 season, so there will be a lot of self-motivated players and coaches going into the season," he said.



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Mascot: Tigers

Division: 1A/11-man/East

Colors: Red and white

Coach: Ryan Nelson, 4th year at Lusk

2017 Record: 3-5, did not qualify for playoffs

Key Players

RB/MLB: Damien Molzahn, Jr.

RB/S: Drake Lamp, So.

WR/DB: Teagan Tschacher, Sr.

OL/DL: Jasper Caldera, So.

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1A/11-MAN EAST

NIORARA COUNTY (LUSK) TIGERS

Tigers still have growing to do

Lusk's reliance on youth showed last season.

Their two all-state selections – Damien Molzahn and Drake Lamp – were a sophomore and a freshman last year, respectively.

That reliance on youth isn't expected to change.

"I'm hoping to have 20-25 (players) out next season, but as many as 12 of those could be freshmen," Lusk coach Ryan Nelson said.

He said Lusk returns only 11 players from last year, but "a large freshman class should immediately help with our depth, as I expect three or four of them to compete for starting spots."

The Tigers do return six starters on offense and five on defense.

The offensive game plan centers on the running game. Lamp led the Tigers with 129 carries for 858 yards. Junior James Stone added 110 car-

"We won't be as big as we have the last few years, but team speed should be very much improved."

~ Coach Ryan Nelson

ries for 484 yards, while Molzahn chipped in 274 rushing yards on 74 carries.

"We have another very talented running back coming in as a freshman next season who actually broke Drake's middle-school rushing records, so we should have a very good

Continued on Next Page



2018 Schedule

8-25: at Southeast Jamboree, 10 a.m. (Zero Week)
***8-31:** vs. Upton-Sundance, 7 p.m.
***9-7:** at Tongue River, 6 p.m.
9-14: vs. Wind River, 6 p.m.
***9-21:** vs. Southeast, 7 p.m.
9-28: at Newcastle, 7 p.m.
***10-5:** vs. Wright, 7 p.m.
***10-12:** at Big Horn, 6 p.m.
***10-19:** at Pine Bluffs, 7 p.m.
*** Conference game**

PAGE 36

NIOBRARA COUNTY (LUSK) TIGERS 1A 11-MAN EAST

TIGERS, Cont.

competition to get to carry the ball next season," Nelson said.

The Tigers only completed nine passes last year, but Lamp caught three of those passes for 48 yards and sophomore Ryan Bruegger caught a pair for 25 yards.

Senior Jacob Miller and sophomore Jasper Caldera will help anchor the offensive line.

On defense, Molzhan led the Tigers in defensive points and had team-highs with 26 solo tackles, seven tackles for loss, five sacks and three fumble recoveries.

However, he's the only one of Lusk's top five tacklers to come back this fall.

"Damien is the key to our defense and is the guy opposing teams have to focus on," Nelson said. "We did lose a lot of experience on that side of the ball, but I think we could be more athletic

with some of the young additions coming in to the program. We'll once again be counting on freshman and sophomores but they are talented enough to figure things out as we go. We'll make some mistakes along the way, but the early experience should help us out in the future."

Junior James Stone was sixth for Lusk in defensive points, while senior Teagan Tschacher was seventh, Lamp was eighth and Bruegger was 10th.

Despite relying on young players, Nelson is optimistic about what Lusk could be – and could become – this year.

"We have the potential to be very athletic at nearly every position," he said. "We won't be as big as we have the last few years, but team speed should be very much improved."

"... (The freshmen) are a very athletic group, but we'll have to learn as we go next season."

For Lusk, that's nothing new.

1A/11-MAN EAST

PINE BLUFFS HORNETS

PAGE 37

Hornets go for three straight

Each of Pine Bluffs' two Class 1A 11-man title teams was different. The 2017 team – which went 11-0 to notch the school's first undefeated season since 1950 – won games through consistency and steadiness.

The 2016 team was more explosive, but also more unpredictable. The character of the 2018 team will be different yet, coach Will Gray noted.

"Every year is different, even with the same group of core players," Gray said. "... Last year's senior class will be tough to replace, but every year is different. We don't need guys to be somebody they're not. We need to be the best version of themselves."

Even though the Hornets graduated six seniors, half of Pine Bluffs' eight all-state choices return this fall, as seniors Andrew Fornstrom, Hunter Jeffres, James Merryfield and Brad Shmidl are all slated to come back.

The Hornets' obvious strength is in its line, as Jeffres, Merryfield and Shmidl all play up front for the Hornets. That strength showed

Key Players

OL/LB: Hunter Jeffres, Sr.
OL/LB: Brad Shmidl, Sr.
OL/DL: James Merryfield, Sr.
WR/DB: Andrew Fornstrom, Sr.

on defense last year, where the Hornets were the only Class 1A 11-man team to give up fewer than 100 yards per game on the ground, allowing only 98.3 ypg, and finished second to Cokeville in total yards per game allowed at 175.1.

In all, Pine Bluffs returns seven players who started at some point on offense and eight total defensive starters.

Gray said he likes the experience his team has, "but it's not the golden ticket. At the end of the day the kids still have to block and tackle to the best of their ability to be successful in big games."

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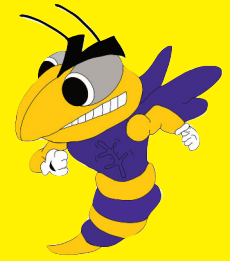
Offensively, senior Isaiah Montanes was Pine Bluffs' leading rusher last year, carrying 187 times for 921 yards and eight touchdowns. Junior Brian Steger added 123 carries for 471 yards.

Fornstrom was one of Pine Bluffs' two consistent aerial targets, finishing with 36 catches for 415 yards and four scores.

Jeffres was Pine Bluffs' top tackler last year, finishing with team highs in solo tackles (38), assisted tackles (69) and fumble recoveries (three). However, he is returning from an Achilles injury that he suffered during basketball season.

Merryfield was fourth and finished with nine tackles for loss, while Shmidl was sixth and Fornstrom was seventh in defensive points. Steger, senior Colby Lamb and senior Seth Tangeman also logged significant minutes on defense a year ago.

"We like the kids we have on our roster," Gray said. "Some will have to move positions to give us the best chance to be successful, but we have a room full of team-first guys."



Mascot: Hornets
Division: 1A/11-man
Conference: East
Colors: Purple and yellow
Coach: Will Gray, 8th year
2017 Record: 11-0, beat Big Horn in state championship
2018 Schedule

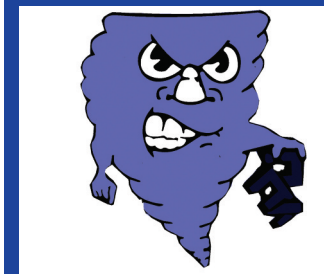
8-24: at Glenrock, 5 p.m. (Zero Week)
8-31: vs. Yuma, Colo., 7 p.m.
***9-7:** vs. Wright, 6 p.m.
***9-14:** at Southeast, 7 p.m.
***9-21:** at Tongue River, 6 p.m.
***9-28:** vs. Big Horn, 7 p.m.
10-5: at Burns, 7 p.m.
***10-12:** at Upton-Sundance, 5:30 p.m. (at Sundance)
***10-19:** vs. Lusk, 7 p.m.
*** Conference game**

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Mascot: Cyclones
Division: 1A/11-man/East
Colors: Blue and silver
Coach: Mark Bullington, 20th year
2017 Record: 4-4, lost to Cokeville in state quarterfinals
2018 Schedule

8-24: Southeast Jamboree, 10 a.m. (Zero Week)
8-31: at Mitchell, Neb., 7 p.m.
9-7: vs. Cokeville at Rawlins, 4 p.m.
***9-14:** vs. Pine Bluffs, 7 p.m.
***9-21:** at Lusk, 7 p.m.
***9-28:** vs. Tongue River, 6 p.m.
***10-5:** at Upton-Sundance, 7 p.m. (at Upton)
***10-12:** vs. Wright, 7 p.m.
***10-19:** at Big Horn, 5 p.m.
*** Conference game**

1A/11-MAN EAST

SOUTHEAST CYCLONES

Cyclones must rely on youth

Southeast coach Mark Bullington can sum up his 2018 Cyclone team succinctly:

"We're going to be young," he said. "Young and small."

One year after losing seven seniors to graduation, the Cyclones will likely have no more than two seniors – and three juniors – out this fall.

Right now, Southeast is in an un-Southeast-like cycle: lots of boys in the school, but not many football players. Or wrestlers. Or basketball players.

"The numbers are not there," Bullington said. "We'll probably have 20 to 25 kids out. We have a big senior class this year, but none of them are athletes."

"It's just one of those deals."

The Cyclones have had just one losing season in Bullington's 19 seasons as head coach at Southeast. Fending off the second losing season will likely fall to a deep and talented, but raw, sophomore class.

The Cyclones will depend on as many as nine sophomores to fill the gaps normally plugged by upperclassmen.

While seniors Tim Becker and Mick Steinhausen and junior Greg

Key Players

C/DT: Tim Becker, Sr.
FB/MLB: Mick Steinhausen, Sr.
TB/S: Brant Fullmer, Soph.
QB/S: Hayden Anderson, So.

Logsdon will be key in the Cyclones' strategy, it's sophomores like Brant Fullmer, Hayden Anderson, Sawyer Anderson and Harrison Hall that will have to shoulder responsibilities normally given to older players.

Bullington is realistic about what the Cyclones face this fall.

"We're young, and we've got a lot of growing to do," he said.

However, Bullington said likes the group he has.

"You never know until the season starts, but last year that group of kids, as true freshmen, ended up third at the regional basketball (tournament), and they ended the (last) game with four freshmen and a junior," Bullington said. "... They know how to compete. They've been competitors all

through junior high."

Steinhausen, at fullback, and Becker at center are Southeast's key offensive returners. Southeast racked up 272.4 rushing yards per game, second-best in Class 1A 11-man, and ranked third in total offense at 319.6 ypg; Steinhausen was fourth on the team last year with 49 carries for 223 yards.

However, the Cyclones lose their top three rushers, their top three receivers and their quarterback to graduation. Fullmer, with two catches for 42 yards in 2017, is Southeast's leading returning receiver.

The gaps on defense are just as wide: Only two of Southeast's top 10 tacklers are back this fall.

Steinhausen was fifth on the team in defensive points a year ago, while Hayden Anderson finished seventh on the team in defensive points last year and had a team-high three interceptions.

Fullmer led the team last year with two fumble recoveries.

Logsdon will fill gaps at wide receiver and defensive back, Hayden Anderson will move under center, and Hall will join Becker as key components of the lines.

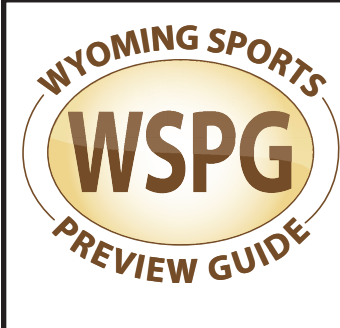
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Mascot: Eagles
Division: 1A/11-Man
Conference: East
Colors: Green and white
Coach: Steve Hanson, 2nd year at Tongue River
2017 Record: 2-6, did not qualify for playoffs

2018 Schedule

8-24: at Greybull, 5 p.m. (Zero Week)
8-31: at Moorcroft, 6 p.m.
***9-7:** vs. Lusk, 6 p.m.
***9-14:** at Upton-Sundance, 6 p.m. (at Upton)
***9-21:** vs. Pine Bluffs, 6 p.m.
***9-28:** at Southeast, 6 p.m.
***10-5:** vs. Big Horn, 6 p.m.
10-13: vs. Sheridan JV, 11 a.m.
***10-19:** at Wright, 7 p.m.
*** Conference game**

Eagles learn from last year's lumps

Entering his first season as Tongue River's coach, Steve Hanson knew the transition would be tough. It was; after back-to-back Class 1A 11-man runner-up finishes, the Eagles fell to 2-6. Now, as Hanson enters his second season at Tongue River, he's thrilled at the progress he's seen from last offseason to this offseason.

"Last year we were so young and green that it took a year of lumps to help build who we are, and this year we are a far improved team from last year," Hanson said. "The things we can do and the depth we built will definitely pay off this year."

The Eagles have nine starters returning on both offense and defense. And toughness might be the team's calling card.

"We took 15 kids to Chadron State for camp this summer and they played hard, both sides of the ball, and nobody quit," Hanson said. "These seniors are dogs – not fast, not big but they don't back down. We won't win many beauty of finesse contests, but we do come to work."

The Eagles do two-thirds of their all-conference selections in seniors J.T. Hammond and A.J. Lytton; however, Hammond will miss the first half of the season

"These seniors are dogs – not fast, not big but they don't back down."

~ **Coach Steve Hanson**

Key Players

QB/LB: Luke Stutzman, Sr.

RB/LB: Zach Shankey, Sr.

RB/LB: Elias Dillon-Bennett, Sr.

OL/DL: A.J. Lytton, Sr.

for a rule violation.

Senior Zach Shankey was the team's top rusher last year, carrying for 367 yards; classmate Elias Dillon-Bennett added 239 yards on the ground.

Senior Luke Stutzman, who threw for 191 yards, returns as quarterback, while Hammond had 143 receiving yards to lead the Eagles last season.

The Eagles return five of their top eight tacklers from 2017.

Schankey was Tongue River's top tackler last year; he led the team in both solo (26) and assisted (21) tackles.

Hammond tied for the team lead with three interceptions, while Lytton, Dillon-Bennett, Stutzman and juniors Marcus Sharp and Kyle Breen all finished with at least four defensive points.

"I am very confident in this team and what they can bring," Hanson said. "We are not going to shock anyone athletically, but this team is very eager to prove that last year was not the norm."

Therein is Tongue River's problem. In finishing 2-6, the Eagles were out-gained by more than a 2-to-1 ratio, giving up 291.3 yards per game while gaining just 141.9 yards per game.

However, Hanson said he has faith in his team to not only pick up the lessons he's teaching but to make the team their own, as well.

"I think my boys know who I am and what I want and expect," he said, "but more than that I think they know it is their team, and they are beginning to own that idea."

Panthers look to end playoff drought

Despite past struggles, hopes are high in Wright.

The Panthers haven't made the postseason in eight seasons, but with a sizable core of last year's team returning, they're hopeful that streak will end in 2018.

With seven returning starters on both offense and defense, Wright has the potential to do just that, even in a competitive Class 1A 11-man East Conference.

"We have a great nucleus of kids returning with varsity experience," coach Larry Yeradi said. "... Having a strong number of varsity returners will help us with our install time and should allow us to be further along come Week 1."

The Panthers get three of their four all-conference picks back in senior Ian Knudsen and juniors Dax Yeradi and Phoenix Buske. Yeradi was one of Wright's two all-state picks last fall.

Yeradi threw for 1,150 yards and 12 touchdowns last year; the elusive signal-caller was also Wright's leading rusher with 302 yards and five touchdowns on 49 carries.

"Any time the quarterback returns with varsity experience, you expect the offense to gel quickly," coach Yeradi said. "I feel as though he has a firm grasp of what we want to accomplish offensively."

"This group of young men enjoys competition and brings a winning mentality to everything they do."

~ **Coach Larry Yeradi**

compish offensively."

Dax Yeradi was also a key contributor on defense, leading Wright in defensive points last year. He had team highs in solo tackles (57), pass break-ups (five) and interceptions (five).

But he won't have to do anything alone.

Senior linemen Logan Robb, Austin Seeley and Frank Murphy, along with junior linemen Buske and Zeb Goodrich, help stabilize the Panthers' offensive and defensive fronts.

With 33 catches for 553 yards, Knudsen led Wright in receiving last year. He also carried the ball 33 times for 138 yards.

However, Wright lost its top two running backs and, after Knudsen, its next three receivers to graduation. Coach Yeradi said the Panthers will turn to senior Ace Leithead and Garrett Strohsehn to help carry the load offensively.

Meanwhile, Buske was third on the squad in defensive

points and led the Panthers with nine sacks and seven tackles for loss. Knudsen was fourth, Robb was fifth and Seeley was seventh in defensive points last season.

Most importantly, the team has momentum; the Panthers entered the offseason off back-to-back victories to end last season.

With an experienced group returning from last year's 3-5 team, coach Yeradi said he feels like the players carried an upbeat attitude into the offseason.

He said participation in summer weights and conditioning increased, as did the number of players Wright took to summer camps.

Moreover, coach Yeradi said he likes the players he has as competitors, not just as football players.

"This group of young men enjoys competition and brings a winning mentality to everything they do," he said.



Mascot: Panthers
Division: 1A/11-man
Conference: East
Colors: Black and gold
Coach: Larry Yeradi, 24th year
2017 Record: 3-5, did not qualify for playoffs

Key Players

RB/LB: Ian Knudsen, Sr.
OL/DL: Logan Robb, Sr.
OL/DL: Phoenix Buske, Jr.
QB/DB: Dax Yeradi, Jr.

2018 Schedule

8-24: at Big Horn Jamboree, 5:30 p.m. (Zero Week)
8-31: vs. Burns, 6 p.m.
***9-7:** at Pine Bluffs, 6 p.m.
***9-14:** vs. Big Horn, 7 p.m.
9-21: at Wind River, 6 p.m.
***9-28:** vs. Upton-Sundance, 7 p.m.
***10-5:** at Lusk, 7 p.m.
***10-12:** at Southeast, 7 p.m.
***10-19:** vs. Tongue River, 7 p.m.
*** Conference game**

Patriots have plenty of firepower

All that's separated Upton-Sundance from three consecutive trips to the state title game is 13 points.

After a Class 1A 11-man title in 2015, the Patriots finished both 2016 and 2017 in similar ways – losing to Pine Bluffs in the semifinals. The losses were by six points in 2016 and by seven points last year.

Now, with a huge cadre of returning of players, the Patriots are in prime position to bust their streak of semifinal heartbreaks.

Upton-Sundance returns nine players who started on offense and seven who started on defense last year, including four all-state selections in seniors Tanner Hofland, Clayton Loud-erback and Jarrett Schloredt and junior Jayden Caylor.

"We're going to have a large senior class, so I expect it will be good leadership for our younger kids," coach Andy Garland said. "... It's important that you've got some guys like that coming back that can kind of anchor your squads."

For the Patriots' offense, it all starts under center. Loud-erback helped direct



Mascot: Patriots

Division: 1A/11-man

Conference: East

Colors: Blue and red

Coach: Andy Garland, 15th year

2017 Record: 8-3, lost to Pine Bluffs in state semifinals

Key Players

QB: Clayton Loud-erback, Sr.

FB/LB: Tanner Hofland, Sr.

TB/OLB: Jayden Caylor, Jr.

C/NG: Jarrett Schloredt, Sr.

the offense, completing 71 of 143 passes for 1,114 yards and 16 touchdowns while running 105 times for 586 yards and eight more scores.

"It's big for our whole team that we've got a veteran guy there," Garland said.

Caylor was the Patriots' top receiver, finishing with a team-high 327 yards on 16 catches to go with his 216 rushing yards. Senior Dillon Barritt added 10 catches for 115 yards.

"We still have some pretty decent speed and athleticism with our skill guys, and so that should be a strength," Garland said.

What's happening up front, though, may be the key to the Patriots' success this fall. Schloredt and seniors Nolan Turner and Isaac Bishop help lead a line that returns pretty much intact from last season.

"It's nice when you know you've got seniors like that coming back," Garland said.

Hofland and Caylor were US's top two tack-

lers last year, with Hofland leading the Patriots with 29 solo tackles and 68 assisted stops. Caylor chipped in with 24 solo tackles and 54 as-

sists. Bishop was fourth and led the squad with seven tackles for loss, while Barritt was fifth and had three interceptions.

Upton-Sundance's biggest threat, though, may come from outside its control.

The co-op that has been in place since 2012 could be bumped to Class 2A in 2020, depending on the fallout of a new rule from the Wyoming High School Activities Association that changes how enrollments for co-ops are calculated. Even so, Garland said the Upton-Sundance co-op will survive even if a classification change is a possibility.

"It's working well for us right now, so in a couple years if we move up to 2A, that's completely fine with us," Garland said.

2018 Schedule

8-24: vs. Lead-Deadwood, S.D., 7 p.m. (at Sundance)
***8-31:** at Lusk, 7 p.m.
9-7: at Wheatland, 6 p.m.
***9-14:** vs. Tongue River, 6 p.m. (at Upton)
***9-21:** at Big Horn, 7 p.m.
***9-28:** at Wright, 7 p.m.
***10-5:** vs. Southeast, 7 p.m. (at Upton)
***10-12:** vs. Pine Bluffs, 5:30 p.m. (at Sundance)
10-18: vs. Natrona sophs, 6 p.m. (at Sundance)
*** Conference game**

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Mascot: Panthers
Division: 1A/11-man
Conference: West
Colors: Orange and black
Coach: Todd Dayton, 39th year

2017 Record: 10-1, lost to Big Horn in state semifinals

2018 Schedule

8-24: at Kemmerer, 7 p.m. (Zero Week)
8-31: vs. Mountain View, 4 p.m.
9-7: vs. Southeast at Rawlins, 4 p.m.
9-14: at Lyman, 4 p.m.
***9-21:** vs. Shoshoni, 1 p.m.
9-27: vs. Green River JV, 4 p.m.
***10-5:** vs. Rocky Mountain, 4 p.m.
***10-12:** TBD
***10-19:** at Wind River, 2 p.m.
* Conference game

Panthers welcome new crop

Key Players

QB/OLB: Bentley Johnson, Sr.
OL/DL: Brayden Johnson, Sr.
RB/DL: Ammon Teichert, Sr.
OL/LB: Andrew Thomas, Sr.

Now entering his 39th year as the head coach at Cokeville, Todd Dayton has not allowed himself to become complacent.

As the architect of perhaps the most tradition-laden football program in Wyoming, Dayton knows tradition is not self-perpetuating.

"We've got to (keep working)," Dayton said. "Tradition is hard to come by. You've got to keep working at it to keep it. It's real easy to lose."

One season ago, the Panthers fielded a talented squad led by 10 seniors; they were unbeaten until a loss to Big Horn in the 1A 11-man semifinals ended their run.

This year, the Panthers don't have as many seniors – perhaps only seven or eight this fall. But they do retain tradition, and the work ethic that goes with tradition. That will help keep Cokeville in the hunt for a 23rd state championship.

Of Cokeville's six all-state selections, though, only senior Bentley Johnson returns. Senior Brayden Johnson (unrelated) was also an all-conference selection.

On offense, Cokeville lost its

top two rushers; Bentley Johnson, who had 98 carries for 624 yards, is the Panthers' leading returning ground-gainer. He added 397 passing yards from his quarterback spot.

The Panthers also return senior Hayden Hatch, who only had three catches last season but turned all three into touchdowns. His total of 134 yards was tops for Cokeville last year.

Cokeville had Class 1A 11-man's top defense last year, allowing only 157.7 yards per game and 4.8 points per game. However, the Panthers lost nine of their top 11 tacklers to graduation.

Bentley Johnson is Cokeville's top returning tackler, and he's the only one of Cokeville's top five tacklers to come back this fall. He

led Cokeville with 13 tackles for loss last year.

Brayden Johnson was sixth on the squad last year in defensive points.

Seniors Jakob Harmon, Ammon Teichert, Devan Moody, Lochlyn Teichert and Andrew Thomas and junior Matt Thomas played support roles a year ago and will be asked to step up and fill spots on both sides of the ball.

"We've got a real good senior class coming in that I think's going to do a real good job for us," Dayton said. "... They've been understudies for three years. Now's their chance to shine."

Those seniors are less likely to feel any kind of negative emotion from last year's quick end to their season, Dayton said; the 12-7 loss to Big Horn kept Cokeville out of the championship game for a third consecutive year, just the second such time in Dayton's tenure that Cokeville hasn't appeared in at least one championship game in that long of a span.

"This is a whole new group of kids," he said. "We're starting fresh."

Panthers will play JV for now

Saratoga's plan this season is to do what it can to keep its program going.

After all, when there aren't enough players interested in playing the sport, keeping the program alive is the Panthers' primary need for this season.

In mid-July, administrators decided to cancel the scheduled 11-man season and pursue a sub-varsity season of six-man games.

Saratoga activities director Greg Bartlett said only about 10 to 12 students at Saratoga and at nearby Encampment – with whom Saratoga combines for football – had indicated any interest in playing football this season. With that many players, Bartlett said, "it's tough to keep a season together."

Bartlett was busy putting together a six-man schedule; as of mid-July, only one game had officially been set. Bartlett said he hoped for five or six games this year.

Bartlett said one of the driving forces behind keeping the program alive was three seniors – Sam Schneider, Tristan Gray and Andrew Everett – who com-

"I'm certainly going into it looking at like were a varsity team and we're going to put our best foot forward every day. Whether the games count or not doesn't matter to me."

~ Coach Logan Wright

mitted to play their senior seasons for Saratoga.

Two freshmen, five sophomores and a junior were also committed to the program, Bartlett said, and more may come out on the first day of practice. Even so, that wasn't enough commitment to continue with an 11-man varsity season.

The Panthers will also have a new coach this season, Logan Wright. Wright said his approach is to treat the season as both an opportunity to keep the program going as well as a chance to build fundamentals that will apply to both six-man and 11-man.

"I'm certainly going into it looking at like were a varsity team and we're going to put our best foot forward every day," he said. "Whether the games count or not doesn't matter to me."

Wright also has coaching experience with six-man football. At Rock River, he was a middle-school assistant in 2013 and was an assistant with the Longhorns' high school program in 2014 and 2015.

Many of the Panthers' returners had significant playing time last season.

At quarterback last season, Schneider was an all-conference choice and helped carry Saratoga's offensive load. He led the Panthers with 364 rushing yards and six touchdowns last year and also completed 59 passes for 637 yards and six touchdowns.

Defensively, the Panthers relied a lot on freshman last year, and sophomores Teegan Love, Dalton Peterson and Kagan Gilbert were second, fourth and seventh, respectively, in defensive points per game for Saratoga last season. Love had a team-high three interceptions and Gilbert led the Panthers with three sacks.

Bartlett said the move to six-man is probably temporary.

"In about two to three years, we have some elementary boys coming into the middle school where there might be 20 boys per class," Bartlett said.



Mascot: Panthers
Division: Class 1A/11-man
Conference: West
Colors: Purple and yellow
Coach: Logan Wright, 1st year at Saratoga
2017 Record: 3-7, lost to Big Horn in state quarterfinals

Key Players

QB: Sam Schneider, Sr.
DB: Teegan Love, Soph.
OL/DL: Tristan Gray, Sr.
LB: Dalton Peterson, Soph.

2018 Schedule

TBD

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Grizzlies learn from setbacks

When Rocky Mountain coach Richard Despain looks at his roster, he sees a lot of 10s.

Not perfect players. Sophomores.

In a year where Rocky Mountain begins with only five upperclassmen – and only three upperclassmen with varsity experience – Despain is depending on a group of 10 sophomores to help carry the Grizzlies in 2018.

"We're going to need them, and they're working very hard to get there," Despain said.

Fortunately for him, the opportunities available to the underclassmen have them fired up to improve quickly and contribute as soon as they can.

"We do have some good young kids that are excited to learn and are excited to get in and play," Despain said. "Several of them are saying, 'Put me wherever, I just want to be on the field.'"

Three seniors – linemen Kyle Hoyt and Nathan Hatch and a position-flexible Travis Lytle – give the Grizzlies some stability and leadership.

And a host of sophomores – in-

Key Players

OT/DE: Kyle Hoyt, Sr.
OL/DL: Nathan Hatch, Sr.
LB: Travis Lytle, Sr.
C: Jaxon Jolley, Soph.

cluding Jaxon Jolley, who started as a freshman at center, and Cason James, who started in four different positions last year – will round out the squad.

Despain is depending on that group not only for depth but for growth. He's hoping to see an entirely different Rocky Mountain team by the end of the season.

"When you've got sophomores, from game one to game eight, they're just a whole different kid," he said. "Just that season of experience that they gain will really help them grow and change quite a bit."

Rocky Mountain graduated all three of its all-state choices and loses six of its seven all-conference choices. Hoyt is the Grizzlies' lone returning all-conference player after senior Ethan Price,

Rocky's quarterback last season, decided not to play in 2018.

Without Price, Rocky loses its top five rushers. James, who ran 10 times for 27 yards, is Rocky Mountain's top returning rusher. The Grizzlies also lose every single player who caught a pass last year to graduation.

On defense, Rocky graduated eight of its top 10 defensive players and returns just one. That's rough, because the Grizzlies' biggest struggles were on defense; they allowed 329.3 yards per game, second-worst in 1A 11-man.

Hoyt was fifth on the squad in defensive points last year, notching 11 solo tackles, 32 assisted tackles and five tackles for loss. Meanwhile, Lytle was 11th and Hatch was 12th.

Despain said the team's lack of experience hasn't hindered its enthusiasm for training.

"We've had some kids that have been taking advantage of the weight room," he said. "As a coach, I'd always like to see more, but we've had some getting in regularly and taking it (seriously), so I'm encouraged with that."



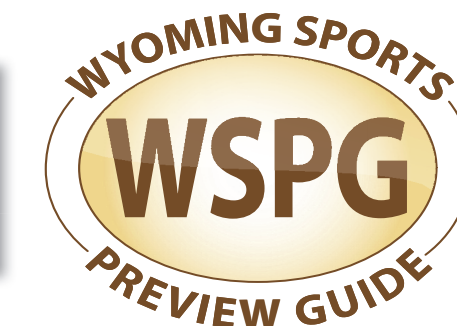
Mascot: Grizzlies
Division: 1A/11-man
Conference: West
Colors: Brown and yellow
Coach: Richard Despain, 3rd year at Rocky Mountain
2017 Record: 4-4-1, lost to Upton-Sundance in quarterfinals

2018 Schedule

8-25: at Powell JV, 11 a.m.
8-31: vs. Greybull, 7 p.m.
9-7: at Wind River, 2 p.m. (nonconference)
9-14: vs. Newcastle, 6 p.m.
***9-21:** TBD
***9-28:** at Shoshoni, 7 p.m.
***10-5:** at Cokeville, 4 p.m.
***10-12:** vs. Wind River, 4 p.m.
***10-19:** at Wyoming Indian, 2 p.m.
* Conference game



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Coach: Tony Truempler, 6th year
2017 Record: 1-7, did not qualify for playoffs

Key Players

RB/CB: Wade Cornell, Sr.
OL/DL: Ethan Highsmith, Sr.
WR/DB: Justin LaJeunesse, Sr.
RB/OLB: Kade Fike, Soph.

Mascot: Wranglers

Division: 1A/11-man

Conference: West

Colors: Blue and yellow

2018 Schedule

8-24: at Thermopolis Jamboree, 11 a.m. (Zero Week)
8-31: vs. Big Piney, 7 p.m.
9-7: vs. Lovell, 7 p.m.
9-13: at Riverton JV, 7 p.m.
***9-21:** at Cokeville, 1 p.m.
***9-28:** vs. Rocky Mtn, 7 p.m.
***10-5:** at Wind River, 3 p.m.
10-11: vs. Natrona sophs, 6:30 p.m.
10-19: TBD
*** Conference game**

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Mascot: Cougars

Division: 1A/11-man

Conference: West

Colors: Black and purple

Coach: Mykah Trujillo, 4th

year at Wind River

2017 Record: 3-6, lost to Big Horn in state quarterfinals

Key Players

OL/DL: Justin Martin, Sr.
OL/ILB: Colton Befus, Jr.
RB/LB: Morgan Miller, Sr.
RB/S: Jaren Guina, Sr.

Wranglers should be in the mix

When looking at last season, Shoshoni coach Tony Truempler keeps coming back to one phrase: "eye-opening."

After three consecutive winning seasons from 2014-16, the Wranglers finished 1-7 last year; the only victory came by forfeit. Injuries and inexperience plagued Shoshoni throughout 2017.

"We've had a lot of time to grow from last year," Truempler said. "It was definitely an injury-plagued season and a growing season. We were really young. I had two freshmen ending up as my starting quarterback and one of my starting running backs halfway through the season. It wasn't what we had in mind... (but) most of them stepped up really well."

This year, the squad loses four all-conference choices to graduation and enters the year with only five seniors – and only two entering their fourth year with the program. Consequently, the Wranglers will again rely on young players, and those players need to grow for Shoshoni to have success, Truempler said.

Of the 30 players Truempler said he expects out, as many as 10 of those could be freshmen, and they'll be asked to play immediately on both offense and defense.

"We've had a lot of time to grow from last year."

~ Coach Tony Truempler

Truempler said he's seen good production in the weight room during the offseason, as the coaches offer open weight sessions twice a day and focus on grooming committed players to improve.

"There's a big difference between middle school and high school, huge, and we're starting to learn that now," he said.

The Wranglers ranked last in Class 1A 11-man in total offense, scrounging up only 127.7 yards per game. And the rush defense ranked last in the classification, giving up 253.6 yards per game on the ground; Shoshoni allowed 362.7 total yards per game.

Sophomore Kade Fike, who ran for 163 yards, and senior Wade Cornell, who ran for 142 yards, are the only two of Shoshoni's top five ground-gainers to return this year.

Sophomore quarterback Tryston Truempler returns after compiling 49 rushing and 49 passing

yards a year ago; the Wranglers only completed 11 passes last season.

Only one player who caught more than one pass last year, senior Wade Cornell, returns.

Senior Ethan Highsmith will help anchor the offensive line, while senior wideout Justin LaJeunesse will add depth to the receiving corps.

Meanwhile, only two players who were in Shoshoni's top eight tacklers a year ago will return – and they're the sophomores Fike and Truempler.

Junior running back/safety Kadon DeWitt is recovering from a shoulder injury, but may not be ready to go by the time the season starts.

The motivation to return to winning ways, though, is noticeable.

"I think we kind of had an eye-opener a little bit, just that it's not going to be given to us," coach Truempler said.

Numbers are boosting Cougars

Wind River's progress from also-ran to contender can be tracked by one simple measure: participation.

Fourth-year coach Mykah Trujillo sees the progress of his program encapsulated in the number of players attending summer camps.

"My first year here, we couldn't get a kid to go to camp," Trujillo said.

Two years ago, two players went to separate individual camps.

This year, 19 players went to a team camp at Black Hills State.

Beyond that, numbers are up at summer weight training, and Trujillo said he expects 40 players to come out for the team this fall.

"We're starting to see the numbers pop up across the

"We're starting to see the numbers pop up across the board."

~ Coach Mykah Trujillo

board," Trujillo said.

Consequently, the Cougars are gaining momentum. They made the playoffs for the first time in eight seasons last year, and even though the team lost in the first round, Trujillo said the experience of playing in the post-season was a big step forward for the program.

"They know what it takes to get to the next level now, and that's something that had been missing from the program for eight years," Trujillo said.

Expectations are even higher

this year, as the Cougars return six all-conference players, three times more than any other Class 1A 11-man West program. Five seniors – Jaren Guina, Dylan Cachelin, Castor Collins, Morgan Miller and Justin Martin – and junior Colton Befus account for those returners.

Befus and Guina were all-state selections, as well.

On defense, the Cougars return seven of their top 11 tacklers.

Befus was Wind River's top tackler a year ago and led the

Low turnout is a challenge

Wyoming Indian faces a perpetual challenge with its numbers.

Recruitment doesn't always work, and retention isn't always at a level coach Todd Ghormley would like to see.

That doesn't mean Ghormley, or his players, are compromising. "We are building a culture of hard work and commitment, which takes time and effort," Ghormley said. "We are very reliant on convincing kids to come and play, which works in the short term, but these athletes usually don't know our system and we have to go slow at the beginning of the season to make sure they understand that how we do things is non-negotiable."

Wyoming Indian couldn't complete last season after finishing with 10 players, forfeiting its final two games of the season. This year, the team faces the same potential problem. The Chiefs graduated all three of their all-conference picks, and despite returning seven starters, the program may not have enough players out to start the season, much less complete it.

"As with any program, there

Key Players

RB/OL/LB: Jacob Perry, Sr.
OL/DL: Theron Mason, Jr.
RB/TE/LB: William Carpenter-Old Coyote, Sr.
QB/FS: Hiissiis Goodnight, Sr.

are going to be the kids who are in it because they love the game, love the coach, or want to play because of their friends," Ghormley said. "With our numbers problems over the years, I feel that the kids we have now are true fans of the game. This makes the core group very motivated to stick it out till the end."

"However, with our rocky history in the last few years, there are... athletes who are not as committed as we need to turn the program around."

Nevertheless, the Chiefs do return several players who could keep the season alive and build on what's been done.

Senior linebacker Jacob Perry

was one of the squad's leaders on defense last year.

Senior Hiissiis Goodnight can play both quarterback and running back and is a key defensive player at safety.

A pair of linemen – senior Tyreke Dewey and junior Theron Mason – give WIHS anchors up front.

And senior William Carpenter-Old Coyote is versatile and set to return to the team after a year away.

"We will have a good core of leaders this year that will help us keep turning the ship in the right direction," Ghormley said. " ... We had a good showing in the weight room at the end of the year, and we will continue to build during the summer."

Now the question is if their work is enough for the team to survive long enough to have them hit the field.

But Ghormley said he can't worry about that.

"I feel that is very important for the committed athletes to see their coaches working towards a winning program, regardless of what is going on in the wings," he said.

2018 Schedule

8-25: at Thermopolis Jamboree, 11 a.m. (Zero Week)
8-31: at Lovell, 7 p.m.
9-7: vs. Rocky Mountain, 2 p.m. (nonconference)
9-14: at Lusk, 6 p.m.
9-21: vs. Wright, 6 p.m.
***9-28:** TBD
***10-5:** vs. Shoshoni, 3 p.m.
***10-12:** at Rocky Mountain, 4 p.m.
***10-19:** vs. Cokeville, 2 p.m.
*** Conference game**



squad with 19 solo tackles and five tackles for loss.

Guina, Collins, seniors Owen McAdams, Jereko Martinez and Kyle Laird and sophomore Colter Collver were all among Wind River's top 11 tacklers last year.

On offense, the Cougars return their quarterback and two of their top three rushers, but they will need to replace their top two receivers.

Miller (58 carries, 223 yards) and Guina (28 carries, 151 yards) both showed their capabilities as rushers, while Cachelin returns under center after completing 39 passes for 423 yards and four touchdowns.

Miller will carry the load for the receivers; he's the top returner after catching nine passes for 119 yards. No other returning player

had more than 22 yards last season.

There's still work to do – the Cougars lost a couple players who decided to pursue other opportunities, and the program still hasn't won more than three games in a season since 2009.

But with a deep and talented group of players, Trujillo said he expects the Cougars to be contenders and hopefully make a deep playoff run.

"That's just what I expect out of this group of boys," Trujillo said.



Mascot: Chiefs

Division: 1A/11-man

Conference: West

Colors: Blue and red

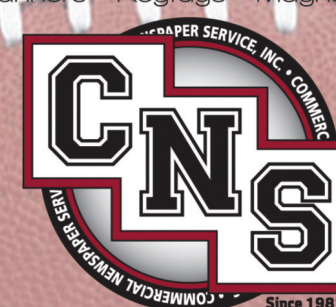
Coach: Todd Ghormley, 5th year

2017 Record: 1-7

2018 Schedule

9-4: vs. Shoshoni JV, 4 p.m.
9-8: vs. Natrona JV, 10 a.m.
9-11: vs. St. Stephens, 6 p.m.
9-17: at Wind River JV, 4:15 p.m.
***9-28:** at Cokeville JV, 2 p.m.
***10-5:** TBD
10-13: at Shoshoni JV, 10 a.m.
***10-19:** vs. Rocky Mountain, 2 p.m.
*** Conference game**

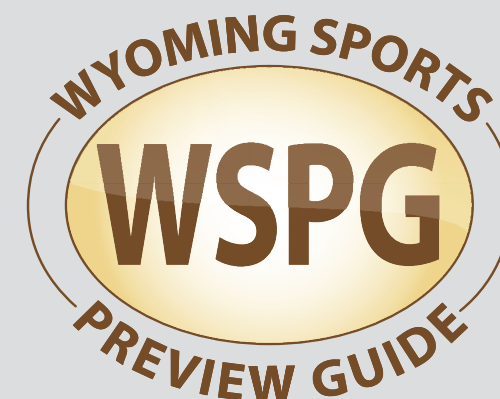
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2017 State Playoffs

State Championship

Kaycee 55, Farson 30

State Semifinals

Kaycee 47, Burlington 38
Farson 50, Snake River 32

State Quarterfinals

Kaycee 77, Meeteetse 0
Burlington 52, Midwest 22
Farson 73, Guernsey-Sunrise 24
Snake River 75, Hanna 13

Five players to watch

Lain Mitchelson, Farson

Mitchelson is arguably the best athlete in Class 1A. Also an accomplished basketball player and track athlete, Mitchelson ran for 944 yards, threw for 412 and received for 276, combining for 24 touchdowns, last year, and led Farson's defense.

Clancy Gines, Farson

Gines helps give the Pronghorns the physicality they need to be both respected and a little bit feared by opponents. His 954 rushing yards was tops for Farson last year, and he was second (behind Mitchelson) in defensive points per game.

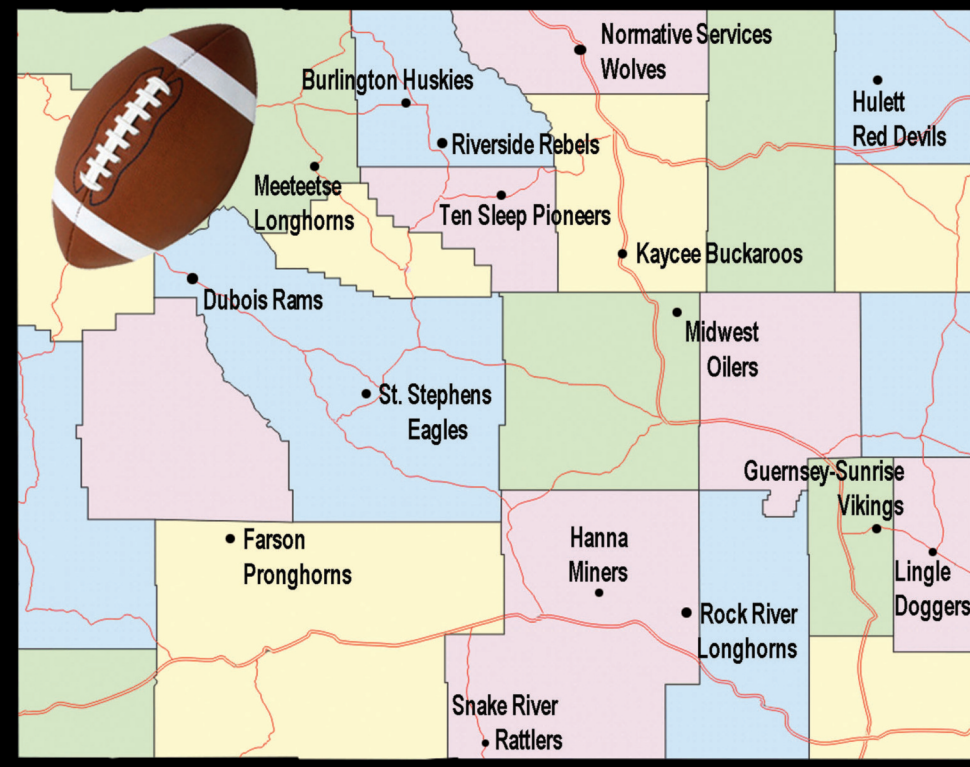
Hunter Rouse, Kaycee

Rouse threw for 18 touchdowns last year and had only two interceptions. His ability to control the pace of the game – and protect the ball – will be huge keys.

Conor McGraw and Shane McGraw, Hanna

The twin juniors are the sons of NFL player Mike McGraw and grandchildren of NFL player "Fum" McGraw. Conor was all over the field last year and led Hanna in receiving and defensive points, while Shane led the Miners in rushing yards and also split time throwing the ball.

1A/6-man Preview



Farson is the favorite

By Patrick Schmiedt

Four questions to answer

Will Kaycee win a fourth consecutive six-man championship? Probably not. The Buckaroos lost half its team to graduation – yes, half – and will rely on a ton of younger players to stay competitive. That turnover opens the door for Farson, the six-man runners-up the past two years, to come into the season as favorites.

If Farson's the favorite, who else is in the title chase? Snake River and Burlington. The three teams split the West Conference title last season, and all three return enough firepower to be state title contenders. Farson's individual talent – always a bigger deal at six-man than 11-man – gives the Pronghorns the upper hand in the preseason.

Is anyone from the East a contender? Not really. As noted, Kaycee lost a lot of talent, but pretty much every other team in the East did to. Hanna is the lone exception, but most of the Miners' key players this year are juniors.

Who's got the best chance to be a surprise contender? Meeteetse. The Longhorns will have six seniors – a ton for six-man – and could compete for the West Conference crown. We'll know Meeteetse's fate early: The Longhorns play Snake River, Burlington and Farson consecutively in Weeks 3-5.

Four key games

Snake River at Burlington, Sept. 7. The Rattlers and Huskies are trying to challenge Farson's supremacy in the West Conference. However, the team that can't get this victory in Week 2 to open conference play will be chasing not

only Farson but also the team that wins this game.

Meeteetse at Farson, Sept. 28. Meeteetse's brutal three-game stretch of Snake River, Burlington and Farson ends here. Meanwhile, this will probably be Farson's first big test of the season.

Farson at Burlington, Oct. 12. This Week 7 showdown might be Farson's toughest challenge on the season. Overcoming a long trip to Burlington, as well as a formidable Huskies team, will be key for the Pronghorns to prove their mettle.

Kaycee at Hanna, Oct. 13. Kaycee's trip to Carbon County might be a trap if the quickly maturing Miners continue to improve. Will this game signal a changing of the guard in the East Conference?

Predicted order of finish

East Conference: Kaycee; Hanna; Hulett; Guernsey-Sunrise; Midwest; Lingle; NSI; Rock River.

West Conference: Farson; Burlington; Meeteetse; Snake River; Riverside; St. Stephens; Dubois.

Way-too-early title game score prediction

Farson 48, Burlington 42

After two runner-up finishes, it's about time for Farson to hoist the first-place trophy. They have the talent and the experience to do just that.

Vikings have experienced crew



Key Players

FB/MLB: Austin Albrecht, Sr.

QB: Alex Delgado, Jr.

OL/DL: Jeremy Hartt, Jr.

OL/S: Preston Elmore, Jr.

Guernsey-Sunrise's football future came into focus on Oct. 27, 2017.

That day, the Vikings lost to Farson in the first round of the Class 1A six-man playoffs, and did so with their top two seniors sidelined by injuries sustained the week prior to the playoffs.

Even though the Vikings lost 73-24, coach Curtis Cook said he liked what he saw.

"Over half the team were underclassmen last year," Cook said. "This year we're starting to have that shift to upperclassmen."

"(In the playoffs) I got a feel for what we look like without those two seniors, so I'm pretty encouraged by what we can do."

The Vikings had five all-conference selections in 2017, and two of those – senior Austin Albrecht and junior Alex Delgado – come back this fall.

Albrecht, who was third on the team with 311 rushing yards and six rushing touchdowns last year, is the Vikings' leading returning rusher.

Sophomore Justin Malcom

added 284 rushing yards.

Cook said Albrecht will likely carry much of the load for the Vikings' offense, which emphasizes the run.

"That's us, from the beginning of six-man," Cook said. "That's what we do. We're physical running the ball."

Delgado led Guernsey with 522 passing yards and eight scores, and his efficiency running

the offense will also be a valuable asset, Cook said.

"It's huge to have Alex back and keeping him healthy to run that offense," Cook said. "We're a different team when he's under center."

"It will be nice to have him as a junior, comfortable with what we're doing, understanding our lingo and poised in the huddle."

However, junior Preston Elmore, who was second on the team with 134 receiving yards, is the only one of Guernsey's top three receivers to come back this fall.

On defense, the Vikings graduated three of their top five tacklers. Albrecht, who finished second for Guernsey in defensive points, had 23 solo and 23 assisted tackles a year ago.

Elmore was fourth for the Vikings in defensive points a year ago and, like Albrecht, finished with 23 solo tackles. Malcom and Delgado also logged quality minutes on defense.

Senior Jason Wenzel and junior Jeremy Hartt will add depth to the offensive and defensive fronts.

The Vikings won't be flush with depth – Cook said he expects 13 to 15 players to come out – but Cook said the peek into the future from the Farson game left him excited for what's to come this season.

"I really like where we're at," Cook said. "I really like where we sit in the East Conference. I feel like there are quite a few teams who lost more than we did."

"It's up to the boys to take care of business."



Mascot: Vikings

Division: 1A/6-man

Conference: East

Colors: Black and white

Coach: Curtis Cook, 3rd year at Guernsey-Sunrise

2017 Record: 4-4, lost to Farson in state quarterfinals

2018 Schedule

8-24: Guernsey Jamboree, 6 p.m. (Zero Week)

8-31: vs. Farson, 6 p.m.

***9-8:** at Hulett, 3 p.m.

***9-14:** vs. Kaycee, 7 p.m.

***9-22:** at NSI, 1 p.m.

***9-28:** vs. Rock River, 7 p.m.

***10-5:** vs. Midwest, 7 p.m.

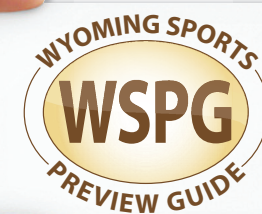
***10-12:** at Lingle, 7 p.m.

***10-19:** at Hanna, 3 p.m.

* Conference game

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Know what's below.
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Mascot: Miners
Division: 1A/6-man
Conference: East
Colors: Blue and orange
Coach: Zack Scott, 6th year
2017 Record: 5-4, lost to Snake River in state quarterfinals

Key Players

QB/LB: Tylor Goodro, Sr.
RB/LB: Shane McGraw, Jr.
RB/LB: Conor McGraw, Jr.
WR/S: Brennan Reeves, Jr.

2018 Schedule

8-31: at St. Stephens, 2 p.m.
*9-7: at Midwest, 6 p.m.
*9-15: vs. Hulett (at Midwest), 1 p.m.
*9-21: at Lingle, 6 p.m.
*9-28: vs. NSI, 1 p.m.
*10-6: at Rock River, noon
*10-13: vs. Kaycee, noon
*10-19: vs. Guernsey, 3 p.m.
* Conference game

Miners ready to compete

Looking for the breakthrough team in Class 1A six-man this year?

Look no further.

The Hanna-Elk Mountain-Medicine Bow Miners finished 5-4 last season; they finished second in the East Conference and hosted a playoff game for the first time since 2010.

And this year, they're ready for more.

The Miners graduated only two players from last year's team, so it's no surprise they return their top four rushers, their top four passers, their top eight receivers and six of their top seven tacklers.

"I think we are ready for a great year," head coach Zack Scott said. "Our leaders are experienced and determined to make this a great year. The positive winning attitude is infectious and you can truly feel it when you are around the kids."

HEM returns all four of its all-conference selections, more than any other six-man team in the state. The returners are led by

a trio of juniors – Conor McGraw, Shane McGraw and Brendan Reeves – as well as senior Tylor Goodro.

Conor McGraw, who led Hanna in catches (41), receiving yards (1,152), total touchdowns scored (26), defensive points (211), solo tackles (56) and tackles for loss (13), was Hanna's lone all-state pick last year. He also had 595 rushing yards.

Shane McGraw led HEM with 711 rushing yards and 14 rushing touchdowns; he also added 701 passing yards and 11 passing touchdowns.

The McGraws have football DNA, as well; they're the sons of Mike McGraw, who played at the University of Wyoming and later with the Cardinals and the Lions in the NFL, and they're the grandsons of Thurman "Fum" McGraw, who played for five years for the Lions and was the NFL's rookie of the year in 1950.

The McGraws have plenty of support around them, talented players in their own right. Goodro threw for 1,306 yards

and 19 touchdowns, while Reeves added 596 receiving yards and 10 scores.

Conor McGraw, junior Basil Phillips, Shane McGraw and Goodro went 1-4 for Hanna in defensive points. Phillips shared the team lead with three sacks, while Goodro fronted Hanna with four interceptions.

Reeves, meanwhile, was sixth in defensive points and added a team-high seven pass-breakups in addition to three interceptions. Sophomore Devon Grosstick also played significantly on defense last year.

The Miners' weakness could be depth – Scott said he only expects 13 to 15 players to come out total – but that hasn't tempered the coach's expectations.

"We want to win and win a lot," he said. "Our expectations this year is to compete with the best teams."

"It is a very nice feeling to have things in place for a great season from our skills, plays, and drills to our positive attitudes and winning expectations."

Buckaroos rely on younger group

Kaycee's football success is both unquestioned and historic.

Winners of three consecutive Class 1A six-man championships, the Buckaroos enter 2018 on a 30-game winning streak, tied for the second-longest in state history and just five games shy of the all-time state record of 34 set by Laramie from 1959-63.

But after graduating nine of

the 18 players on last year's roster, this year's Kaycee squad is in transition.

The winning tradition, though, hasn't changed.

"We've built the culture, and I think any of the kids that are out know the expectations and know what standards we're expecting out of them," coach Tony Rouse said. "They've witnessed it for three years of how

we do business, so I think it's just kind of the natural course as they get older, they have to step up, and they'll do it."

The only one of Kaycee's six all-state choices to come back this fall is senior Hunter Rouse, who threw for 790 yards and 18 touchdowns – against only two interceptions – last season.

The top receiving target is senior Eric Cleveland, who was fourth on the team in both receptions (six) and receiving yards (75) a year ago. Cleveland is the only one of Kaycee's top seven receivers to return.

Sophomore Dylan Fauber is the only one of Kaycee's top four rushers to return; he had 182 yards last year. Sophomore Nathan Largent added 154 rushing yards and Cleveland had 118.

"We'll have the system in place for three years, this being the fourth year, so the kids are pretty familiar with the system

Continued on Page 48

Key Players

QB: Hunter Rouse, Sr.

FB/LB: Ben Kukowski, Jr.

TE/DE: Eric Cleveland, Sr.

WR/DE: Dion Ealy, Jr.

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Mascot: Red Devils
Division: 1A/6-man
Conference: East
Colors: Black and red
Coach: Boz Backen, 4th year at Hulett
2017 Record: 3-5, did not qualify for playoffs

Key Players

WR/DB: Ethan Dykes, Sr.
QB/DB: Jhett Letellier, Jr.
RB/DE: Dawson Butler, Jr.
RB/DB: Dalton Butler, Jr.

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Red Devils welcome back seniors

When Hulett coach Boz Backen looks at his roster for 2018, he sees potential.

He knows the potential is there because he's already seen it on the field.

Younger players, particularly sophomores, were important pieces to the Red Devils' lineup last season. Now, a year more experienced, those players are ready for bigger roles and, the hope in Hulett at least, more victories.

"I believe that they are more mature and prepared for this upcoming year," Backen said. "We had a lot of kids step up last year and fill some holes, and they did a fantastic job."

On a roster that will likely go not quite 20 players deep, Hulett will still only have two or three seniors.

But they'll be ready to hit the ground running, as the bulk of them have varsity experience.

Senior Tracen Mills is the only one of Hulett's

three all-conference picks to return this fall, but Backen said Mills' return is in doubt as he recovers from shoulder surgery.

Junior Jhett Letellier, who split passing duties last year, threw for 415 yards and four touchdowns in 2017.

He returns a bevy of potential targets. Senior Ethan Dykes, Mills and junior Logan Kromarek were all viable aerial options last year – Dykes led the team with 270 receiving yards on 15 catches, while Mills and Kromarek split the team lead with 17 receptions apiece.

The rushing game is in search of a leader: After graduating its top two rushers, senior Trey Svoboda, who ran for 107 yards, is Hulett's leading returning rusher.

Junior Dawson Butler, Mills and junior Dalton Butler finished 2-3-4, respectively, for the Red Dev-

"I believe that they are more mature and prepared."
~ Coach Boz Backen

ils in defensive points a year ago. Mills had team-highs in pass break-ups with four and interceptions with three, while Dawson Butler had six tackles for loss and tied for the team lead with three sacks.

Sophomore Joseph Kennah also reached double digits in solo tackles.

With or without Mills, Hulett's defense will be experienced.

"Bringing that those guys I believe is going to be a huge lift to us," Backen said. "We also have a few kids that didn't get much defense of time that I believe can come in and make a huge impact for us."

Backen is also encouraged by how close Hulett came to qualifying for the playoffs last year, even with a young team. The Red Devils lost close games to playoff qualifiers Hanna (53-40), Midwest (27-14) and Guernsey (38-32), finishing just out of the

2018 Schedule

8-25: at Meeteetse Jamboree, noon (Zero Week)

9-1: TBD

*9-8: vs. Guernsey, 3 p.m.

*9-15: vs. Hanna (at Midwest), 1 p.m.

*9-22: vs. Rock River, 1 p.m.

*9-29: vs. Kaycee, 2 p.m.

*10-5: at NSI, 7 p.m.

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

*10-19: at Lingle, 6 p.m.

* Conference game

postseason.

"They were a little disappointed that we didn't make (the playoffs)," Backen said. "But what I have seen the past few weeks with our summer lifting (is) the boys are wanting to put a little more work in."



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Mascot: Doggers
Division: 1A/6-man
Conference: East
Colors: Blue and red
Coach: Matthew Cornelius, 3rd year at Lingle
2017 Record: 1-7, did not qualify for playoffs

Key Players

TB/S: Alex Pugsley, Jr.
C/LB: Zane Rising, Jr.
QB/S: Scotty Gilchrist, Sr.
RB/S: Cooper Hill, Soph.

2018 Schedule

8-24: at Guernsey Jamboree, 6 p.m. (Zero Week)
8-31: at Sioux County, Neb., 2 p.m.
***9-7:** vs. NSI, 7 p.m.
***9-13:** at Rock River, 3:45 p.m.
***9-21:** vs. Hanna, 6 p.m.
***9-28:** at Midwest, 6 p.m.
***10-5:** at Kaycee, 2 p.m.
***10-12:** vs. Guernsey, 7 p.m.
***10-19:** vs. Hulett, 6 p.m.
* Conference game

2018 Schedule

8-24: vs. Mon-Dak, Montana, 1 p.m. (at Broadus, Montana; Zero Week)
8-31: vs. Burlington, 2 p.m.
***9-8:** vs. Rock River, noon
***9-15:** at Guernsey, 7 p.m.
***9-21:** vs. Midwest, 2 p.m.
***9-29:** at Hulett, 2 p.m.
***10-5:** vs. Lingle, 2 p.m.
***10-13:** at Hanna, noon
***10-20:** at NSI, 1 p.m.
* Conference game

Doggers getting used to six-man

With a small and young team, Lingle is looking for every advantage it can find.

The Doggers may have one in their schedule.

Coach Matthew Cornelius said the Doggers' schedule this year could lay the groundwork for later success. After starting with Sioux County, Nebraska, in Week 1, the Doggers face NSI (winless last year) and Rock River (did not field a varsity team last year) in the first two weeks of conference play.

"The schedule we have this year, I feel, is very advantageous for us," Cornelius said. "We have some early games that'll hopefully set us up for later games."

After those first three weeks, though, the Doggers dive deep into Class 1A six-man East Conference games. They'll have to rely on some as-yet untested players to carry them through.

Lingle's lone all-conference pick has graduated, their quarterback transferred to Torrington and their top receiver has opted not to play football. That will leave the Doggers with about 14 players, and only one senior.

Cornelius, though, likes the crew he has.

"The kids are very motivated this year," he said. "Their work ethic is much stronger than it's been in previous years."

"Even though we only have one senior on the team, we have very good leadership throughout the ranks."

Scotty Gilchrist will likely be Lingle's lone senior, and he's likely going to be the Doggers' quarterback.

His targets will include sophomore Cooper Hill, who was fourth for Lingle with 153 receiving yards last year, and junior Alex Pugsley, who added 149 receiving yards.

Pugsley is Lingle's leading returning rusher. He ran 32 times for 205 yards, second-best for the team in 2017; he's the only returning player who had more than 38 rushing yards last year.

Between graduations, transfers and disinterest, the Doggers lost their top five tacklers from 2017.

Junior Zane Rising is Lingle's leading returning tackler. Hill and Pugsley also added at least three defensive points per game last year.

After finishing 1-7 last year, Cornelius said his returning players are learning how to take advantage of the opportunities they have to grow during the off-season.

"The kids realized what it feels like to lose some big games, so that is some major motivation for our young kids," Cornelius said. "... They felt quite a sting of some of those games and the fashion in which we lost, so that was the major motivator for their work ethic."

And with a young team, Cornelius said he's prepared for the challenges that lay ahead.

"They're going to have some growing pains, and they're going to have to grow into some positions," he said.

However, the schedule shapes up well to allow for that growth early.

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KAYCEE, Cont.

and the expectations that go along with it," coach Rouse said.

Defensively, Hunter Rouse finished third in defensive points for the Buckaroos and Cleveland was seventh. Of Kaycee's top 10 tacklers last year, seven were seniors.

Kaycee also returns senior Ben Kukowski, who started as a sophomore but missed most of last year with an ACL injury, and junior Dion Ealy, who played in spot duty last year but will be called on as a wide receiver and defensive end this fall.

Coach Rouse said he expects 13-14 players to come out, including four seniors.

"They're all competitive kids and want to be successful like their peers who graduated before

"I think we'll be fine moving forward."

~ Coach Tony Rouse

them," he said. "... I think they're just wanting to continue it on. They work hard, they're willing to learn and put themselves out of their comfort zone to get better and make strides to be successful."

The winning streak, though? Not a concern. "It's not even a part of our discussion; (it's) out of our minds," Rouse said. "... With the leaders we have, I think we'll be fine moving forward and not looking in the past."

Oilers have experienced group

It's easy to spot the Midwest Oilers' key players this fall.

Just look for any player with a "12" next to their name.

Dalton Bogart and Kaleb Smith have a heap of responsibilities on them this season. As returning all-conference players, and as Midwest's only two seniors on the roster, Bogart and Smith will carry the load not only on the field but off the field, too.

Midwest coach Ken Swieter said he'll rely a lot on his seniors to bring the younger players up to speed – and how fast those younger players develop may make or break the Oilers' chances this fall.

"The older ones have to be on board and be willing... to understand that we have a young team, and for us to have a successful team, we've got to get the younger ones up to speed fast," Swieter said.

But Swieter said he's confident his seniors – Midwest's only returning starters – can fulfill that

role.

"Our upperclassmen do know the system," he said, "(and) they're willing to help the younger ones out."

Bogart led the Oilers with 435 receiving yards, 31 catches and five receiving touchdowns a year ago. With 167 rushing yards, he is also Midwest's leading returning rusher. He was third on the team a year ago; he's the only one of Midwest's top four rushers to come back.

Smith added 228 receiving yards, good for third on the team, on 12 catches.

For now, Swieter said, the plan is to move Bogart to running back and Smith to quarterback.

"We're just going to kind of have to adapt from there, but they're the ones we're going to lean on," he said.

On defense, Bogart was Midwest's top tackler a year, leading the Oilers in defensive points. He had a team-high with 14 tackles for loss and 3.5 sacks and was

second on the team with 31 solo tackles.

However, he's the only one of Midwest's top four tacklers to return. Junior Zack Kahtola was fifth on the squad in defensive points, while Smith was sixth while snagging a team-high three interceptions.

Junior wideout/defensive back Austin Sansoucie will also have a key role to fulfill on this season's team; Swieter said he only anticipates 12 players suiting up.

The Oilers enter 2018 with some motivation for redemption from last season. After starting 4-1 last season, the team dropped its final three games; a Week 8 loss to Hanna cost Midwest a chance to host a playoff game for the first time since 2013.

Midwest lost to Burlington in the first round of the playoffs.

"I hope they're hungry," Swieter said. "I hope they realize, especially with the Hanna game, in this league you cannot have a slow start."

Wolves working on the basics

Note: NSI hired Antoine Proctor as its new head coach at press time.

The cyclical nature of football at the NSI Academy can be frustrating at times for coach Anthony Simmons.

Just as the program shifts players from season to season, the Wolves can also shift players from week to week during the season.

"It is very difficult," Simmons said. "Even when you get something going or a system going with the kids, it's late on in the season when we seem to gel (and that) is when some of our kids are gone."

"I may have 17 (players), but (by the end of the season) I may only bring 13 kids, or 10 kids."

That means the Wolves have to focus not only on building a system that brings along players quickly but also brings along their understudies.

"Every day in practice, it's the same system, but you have to get

kids behind the starters ready, because you never know," Simmons said.

The work begins anew again this season, as not a single player returns from NSI's 0-7 team from last season.

Last season was a struggle for the Wolves, as they were outscored by an average of 78-9. The Wolves gave up at least 68 points in every single game last season; NSI lost its closest game by 56 points.

Conversely, Simmons said he may spend some more time coaching on the defensive side of the ball this year to help his players latch on to the fundamentals of tackling quicker than past seasons.

"I think that's where we struggle at the most, tackling people, so I might change and go on the defensive side of things," he said. "... I'm hoping the defense is better than we've seen because we've got a few athletic kids that I see."

Simmons said he's identified a few students at NSI who could

be valuable additions to the team this year, but whether they go out, or whether they'll still be at the academy by the time the season starts, is still questionable.

Regardless, Simmons said the wolves "will be more athletic than we were last year."

"There's a few kids that I've seen that have potential," he added.

Joshua Andrakin, who was on NSI's track team last spring, is one of the more athletic students that Simmons expects to join the team.

And Roman Estrada, who also ran on the track team, could fit in at wide receiver and defensive back in Simmons' game plan.

Simmons said the cyclical nature of the NSI program is a unique challenge – one that isn't always fun.

"It's hard for me because I'm very competitive," Simmons said. "I don't like (losing) but I do like seeing our kids get something going and see they do have potential."

Coach: Ken Swieter, 12th year
2017 Record: 4-4, lost to Burlington in state quarterfinals

Key Players

RB/LB: Dalton Bogart, Sr.
WR/QB/S: Kaleb Smith, Sr.
RB/DE: Zack Kahtola, Jr.
WR/CB: Austin Sansoucie, Jr.

Mascot: Oilers

Division: 1A/6-man
Conference: East
Colors: Maroon and silver

2018 Schedule

8-24: at Guernsey Jamboree, 6 p.m. (Zero Week)
8-31: vs. Dubois, 6 p.m.
***9-7:** vs. Hanna, 6 p.m.
***9-15:** at NSI, 1 p.m.
***9-22:** at Kaycee, 2 p.m.
***9-28:** vs. Lingle, 6 p.m.
***10-5:** at Guernsey, 7 p.m.
***10-13:** at Hulett, 2 p.m.
***10-19:** vs. Rock River, 2 p.m.
* Conference game



Mascot: Wolves

Division: 1A/6-man
Conference: East
Colors: Blue and silver
Coach: Anthony Simmons, 5th year at NSI
2017 Record: 0-7, did not qualify for playoffs

2018 Schedule

9-1: vs. Riverside, 1 p.m.
***9-7:** at Lingle, 7 p.m.
***9-15:** vs. Midwest, 1 p.m.
***9-22:** vs. Guernsey, 1 p.m.
***9-28:** at Hanna, 1 p.m.
***10-5:** vs. Hulett, 7 p.m.
***10-12:** at Rock River, noon
***10-20:** vs. Kaycee, 1 p.m.
* Conference game

Coach: Doug Spriggs, 3rd year at Rock River
2017 Record: 1-3 at JV level
Key Players
QB: Elijah Cox-Spriggs, Jr.
WR: Tristan Bunce, Sr.
LB: Colton Elliot, Soph.
C: Mindoe Walrath, Soph.

Mascot: Longhorns
Division: 1A/6-man
Conference: East
Colors: Blue and white

2018 Schedule

8-24: vs. Saratoga, 4 p.m.
(Zero Week)
8-30: vs. Natrona JV, 3 p.m.
***9-8:** at Kaycee, noon
***9-13:** vs. Lingle, 3:45 p.m.
***9-22:** at Hulett, 1 p.m.
***9-28:** at Guernsey, 7 p.m.
***10-6:** vs. Hanna, noon
***10-12:** vs. NSI, noon
***10-19:** at Midwest, 2 p.m.
* Conference game

Longhorns return to varsity

With only six players on their roster last year, the Rock River Longhorns couldn't start, much less finish, the schedule they had.

"We simply didn't have the varsity experience to play safely at that level," coach Doug Spriggs said.

So they improvised.

Playing a patchwork schedule of sub-varsity opponents, the Longhorns grew as individuals and as a program, Spriggs said.

Now, the Longhorns are ready to return to the varsity level, potentially with double the number of players on the roster from last year.

"With last year's drop to JV, it really set a new tone for our program," Spriggs said. "The team loves this game and wants to play ball. These boys are ready to get after it this year and, in all reality, it created a hunger to play. That hunger and love for the game is contagious. I fully expect these boys are ready to come out and compete against any team in six-man."

Rock River played four games at the sub-varsity level last year, finishing 1-3 in those games before



ending the season early due to injuries.

The Longhorns enter 2018 with a pair of seniors ready to lead a roster that may be as deep as 12 players – a huge step up from the seven who started last year and, after an injury that led to the move to the sub-varsity level, the six who finished.

Senior wide receiver Tristan Bunce will be one of those seniors and a key to the team's success.

Spriggs said junior quarterback Elijah Cox-Spriggs and sophomores Colton Elliot and Mindoe Walrath will also be key contributors to this year's team.

Rock River's rebuild faces some long odds. In the program's three years of varsity play, the

Longhorns have only two victories; they have yet to win an East Conference game since moving to the varsity level in 2014.

At the same time, though, the renewed interest in football comes at the same time as an upswing for Rock River's basketball team, which reached the state tournament last March for the first time in 47 years. Spriggs said there's some crossover between the two programs – "As a school, we strive to have three-sport athletes across the board," Spriggs said. But the number of players who contributed to both sports last year was relatively small.

"Our football players are creating their own culture and identity," Spriggs said. "It's positive, uplifting, energetic, family oriented, and very contagious."

"Really that's what it's about, creating an atmosphere where people are helping people achieve their best self. The bonds, memories, disappointments, successes, and love are all icing on the cake. To be able to do that as one football family, that's a beautiful thing."

Coach: Trent Aagard, 3rd year at Burlington
2017 Record: 8-2, lost to Kaycee in state semifinals
Key Players

QB/DB: Jacob Cook, Sr.
RB/DB: Dontae Garza, Sr.
RB/LB: Jarom Davidson, Jr.
OL/DL: Tanner Jones, Sr.

Mascot: Huskies
Division: 1A/6-man
Conference: West
Colors: Orange and black

2018 Schedule

8-31: at Kaycee, 2 p.m.
***9-7:** vs. Snake River, 3 p.m.
***9-14:** at St. Stephens, 2 p.m.
***9-21:** at Meeteetse, 7 p.m.
***9-28:** vs. Dubois, 3 p.m.
10-6: TBD
***10-12:** vs. Farson, 3 p.m.
***10-19:** vs. Riverside, 3 p.m.
* Conference game

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Rams developing young unit

The time for Dubois' younger players to wait for their opportunity to play is gone.

In fact, it never really existed.

After graduating six seniors from last year's 2-6 team, the Rams will need to rely on several underclassmen to succeed in 2018, including a group of freshmen who may be asked to fulfill varsity roles from day one.

For coach David Trembly, this season presents both a challenge and an opportunity. The biggest challenge is preparing those underclassmen for the speed and versatility necessary for success in six-man; the opportunity is to give several young players key experience in big games, helping them develop not only for later games this season but for years into the future.

The approach at first is to focus on building fundamentals.

"We'll just try to keep things as simple as we possibly can," Trembly said.

He said his goal is to build his young players' confidence as they grow, and "as the season progresses, add more responsibilities."

The Rams do, however, return a couple seniors who were key to their success last season.

Connor Hudson was the Rams' leading rusher and receiver last year, running 84 times for 508 yards and six touchdowns while catching seven passes for 49 yards. And Warren Johnson added 338 rushing yards and four touchdowns and three catches for 31 yards – second behind Hudson in all categories.

"We'll just try to keep things as simple as we possibly can."

~ Coach David Trembly

Junior Mason Slider added 148 rushing yards and will also be a part of the offensive approach this fall.

The Rams emphasized the run last year, averaging 35 rushing attempts per game but fewer than 10 passing attempts per game. Trembly said with most of Dubois' size gone to graduation, and team speed better than last year, offensive opportunities will be more diverse.

Trembly also said his players are smart and understand the game.

"We'll be a whole different team," Trembly said. "Last year we were an older group, and literally size-wise, we were huge. We didn't have the speed necessarily you need in six-man."

Defensively, Johnson was second for the Rams in defensive points and led the squad with three interceptions. However, he's the only one of Dubois' top five tacklers to come back this fall.

Hudson was sixth and had a team-high six fumble recoveries, while Slider was seventh.

Sophomores Jaryd Wells and Aiden Slider tied for 10th.

However, Dubois will only have about 13 to 15 players on its roster. Of those, about five or six will be freshmen.

The mix of faster players and younger players is a dynamic that will take time to understand, both for players and coaches.

"It will be interesting to see how that plays out as the season goes on," Trembly said.



Mascot: Rams

Division: 1A/6-man

Conference: West

Colors: Blue and yellow

Coach: David Trembly,

21st year at Dubois

2017 Record: 2-6, did not qualify for state playoffs

Key Players

RB/DE: Warren Johnson, Sr.

RB/DE: Connor Hudson, Sr.

DB: Mason Slider, Jr.

DB: Aiden Slider, Soph.

2018 Schedule

8-31: at Midwest, 6 p.m.
***9-7:** at Riverside, 6 p.m.
***9-14:** vs. Farson, noon
9-22: vs. Saratoga, 2 p.m.
***9-28:** at Burlington, 3 p.m.
***10-5:** at St. Stephens, 2 p.m.
***10-12:** vs. Meeteetse, noon
***10-20:** vs. Snake River, 1 p.m.
* Conference game

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Huskies rely on sports tradition

Since 2009, the Burlington basketball team has won five state championships; the Burlington boys track team has finished in the top three on three separate occasions; and, until last year, the Burlington football team had won just one playoff game.

The big breakthrough for the Huskies in 2017 was learning that, yes, they can play with the best Class 1A six-man teams in the state. A quarterfinal victory – just the program's second postseason victory since finishing as Class 1A runners-up in 2008 – coupled with a hard-fought 47-38 loss to eventual state champion Kaycee in the semifinals helped give the Huskies confidence that their success in other sports can translate into football, too.

"I think our season last year taught our guys that they can compete with any of the teams," Burlington coach Trent Aagard said. "After they lost (to Kaycee) on the way home, the boys said that it was nice to be taken (seriously) in football again."

"I think they realize that they were close to doing something



pretty special, and that if they work hard and believe, they are capable of doing a lot."

Senior Jacob Cook is the only one of Burlington's three all-state choices to return this fall. However, senior Dontae Garza joined Cook on the all-conference team.

Cook was second for the Huskies in both rushing and passing yards last year. He ran for 474 yards and threw for 117, tallying 14 rushing and four passing touchdowns. He also had 449 receiving yards and nine receiving touchdowns.

Garza had a team-high 27 catches, finishing with 507 receiving yards and eight touchdowns.

"I think that having Jacob and Dontae returning is big for our team," Aagard said. "They are both

good athletes who do whatever is asked of them. I think they give the younger guys someone to look up to.

"It also gives the team a little more confidence going in with some kids who have had pretty good success, but there are other kids who I think will be ready to step up and really help the team this year."

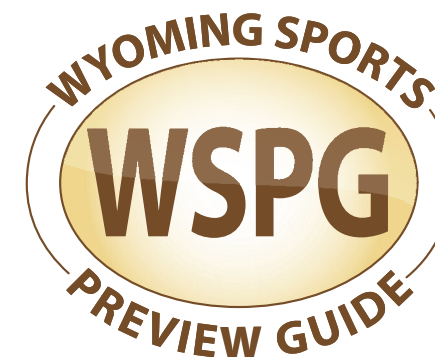
In all, seven Burlington players had at least 140 receiving yards. Junior Jarom Davidson (15 catches, 233 yards) and senior Tanner Trujillo (nine catches, 148 yards) give the Huskies more aerial options.

Defensively, Cook was Burlington's No. 2 tackler and led the Huskies in solo tackles with 35. Davidson was fourth, senior Tanner Jones was sixth and Trujillo was seventh.

Together, they're building Burlington's football reputation to match that of its other sports.

"As a team we have a more established understanding of who we are, and I think that the athletes we have are coachable and want to get better," Aagard said.

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Mascot: Pronghorns
Division: 1A/6-man
Conference: West
Colors: Green and yellow
Coach: Trip Applequist, 7th year
2017 Record: 9-2, lost to Kaycee in state championship

Key Players

TB/LB: Lain Mitchelson, Sr.
FB/LB: Clancy Gines, Sr.
C/NG: Cortland Barker, Sr.
OL/DL: Mike Gribowskas, Sr.

2018 Schedule

8-25: vs. Evanston JV, noon (Zero Week)
8-31: at Guernsey, 6 p.m.
9-7: vs. Saratoga, 11 a.m.
***9-14:** at Dubois, noon
***9-21:** at Riverside, 5 p.m.
***9-28:** vs. Meeteetse, 2 p.m.
***10-5:** vs. Snake River, 2 p.m.
***10-12:** at Burlington, 3 p.m.
***10-19:** at St. Stephens, 1 p.m.
* Conference game

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Pronghorns have high expectations



Any discussion of Farson football in 2018 starts with the Pronghorns' seniors.

After all, it's difficult to find another six-man team in Wyoming that returns as talented of a senior class as Farson.

The Pronghorns' attempt to win a Class 1A six-man title after back-to-back title-game losses begins with six seniors, who are talented enough to play against any other six-man team in the state and come into 2018 motivated.

"I think this team really wants to win that game there (in Laramie)," coach Trip Applequist said. "I think they're tired of coming in second."

Farson's dynamic pairing of seniors Lain Mitchelson and Clancy Gines, who were both all-state selections last year, immediately gives Farson an edge few teams can match. No other six-man team returns more than one all-state choice this season.

Gines and Mitchelson made a tough one-two rushing punch for the Pronghorns last year. Gines led Farson with 954 rushing yards and 18 touchdowns, while Mitchelson had 944 rushing yards and nine scores.

Mitchelson was second for the Pronghorns with 412 passing yards and seven touchdowns, while

Gines threw for 283 yards and seven more scores.

Finally, Mitchelson was second and Gines was fourth for Farson in receiving yards; Mitchelson had 276 yards and a team-high eight touchdowns while Gines had 203 receiving yards and a pair of scores.

They were just as effective on defense, with Mitchelson leading Farson with nearly 20 defensive points per game and Gines finishing second with 17.5 defensive points per game.

"They've been making plays for us for several years now," Applequist said. "They've grown up and taken over those leadership positions now."

But they won't do it alone. Senior Cortland Barker was an all-conference selection, as well; no other 1A six-man West team returns as many all-conference picks as Farson's three. Fellow seniors Mike Gribowskas, Cody Sloan and Hagan Jones help give the Pronghorns versatility – something the seniors have shown since losing four seniors from last year's team to graduation.

"We started looking at different people in different positions and figuring out what kind of offense and defense will suit us," Applequist said. "I think we're well on our way to figuring things out."

The seniors' influence was most felt last year on defense; the Pronghorns actually return their top four tacklers in Mitchelson, Gines, Barker and Gribowskas. Farson also has depth behind those seniors. Applequist said he expects the Pronghorns to have about 20 players; of those, 18 went to a team camp in Chadron, Nebraska, this summer.

And as for those two title-game losses? Applequist said he's seen no Pronghorn pity parties in the offseason.

"I think it just makes them hungrier," he said.

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Longhorns to host Canadian squad

The most interesting game on Meeteetse's schedule – at least in the preseason – comes in the first week of the season.

On Aug. 31, Meeteetse will host Hafford, Saskatchewan, Canada, in its season opener, the first international game for a Wyoming school since 2000.

Meeteetse coach Matt Jensen said he met the Hafford coaches while coaching in the Can-Am Bowl, a six-man all-star game, a couple years ago. Those connections, plus Meeteetse's proximity to Yellowstone and an educational field trip opportunity for students from both schools, helped make the game a reality.

"Besides the football game, we're also kind of making it an educational experience for our kids and for their kids," Jensen said.

Immediately after that, though, the Longhorns play St. Stephens in the first of seven consecutive Class 1A six-man West Conference games.

Meeteetse appears up for the challenge. The Longhorns graduated two all-state players but lost only three seniors total. Meanwhile, the squad will have six seniors, as well as junior Asa Eldredge, the Longhorns' only returning all-conference choice.

But seniors Clayton Corbin, Kirwin Johnson, Anthony Kluesner, Nick Anderson, Trevor Burbank and Levi Lamb give the Longhorns a solid chance to compete for the conference and state crowns, as well as a seventh consecutive winning season.

"We do have a lot of potential and I have a lot of confidence in

our guys that they're going to fight," Jensen said. "... The sky's the limit. It's just a matter of how we gel as a team."

Jensen said one of his team's strengths will be its versatility. Past Meeteetse teams had been predictable, Jensen said, based on formations and personnel.

"Really, for the first time, we're going to have guys we can line up in different formations and have three guys throw the ball if we need to," he said.

Corbin threw for a team-high 267 yards and also added 161 rushing yards last year. Anderson ran for 198 yards, good for third-best on the team a year ago; he's Meeteetse's leading returning rusher.

Kluesner and Eldredge were Meeteetse's top two receivers a

Mascot: Longhorns
Division: 1A/6-man
Conference: West
Colors: Red and white
Coach: Matthew Jensen, 6th year
2017 Record: 6-4, lost to Kaycee in state quarterfinals

2018 Schedule

8-25: Meeteetse Jamboree, noon (Zero Week)
8-31: vs. Hafford, Sask., 7 p.m.
***9-7:** vs. St. Stephens, 7 p.m.
***9-15:** at Snake River, 2 p.m.
***9-21:** vs. Burlington, 7 p.m.
***9-28:** at Farson, 2 p.m.
***10-5:** vs. Riverside, 7 p.m.
***10-12:** at Dubois, noon
10-20: TBD
* Conference game

Rebels need to gain some experience

Riverside's problem hasn't been recruitment. It's been retention.

When the Rebels take the field this fall, coach Sam Buck expects to have about 12 players. Half of those will be freshmen – a problem Riverside has repeated recently.

"We had three classes in a row that could have had some decent numbers, but we've had some guys decide maybe football isn't their thing, and that makes it tough," Buck said.

This season, freshmen will again be key to what Riverside does, but three experienced returners will front the Rebels' hopes.

Senior Ryan Vigil, junior Ryan Miller and sophomore Tate Clutter will be the team's leaders, Buck said.

"Outside of them, anyone is really getting first-time (varsity) experience," Buck said. "... We're going to be young, we're going to be inexperienced, so those returners, we're going to look at them and lean on them."

Vigil, Clutter and Miller were second, third and fourth, respectively, in all-purpose offense last year; Clutter was also the Rebels' No. 2 tackler, while Vigil was third and Miller was fourth.

Vigil, an all-conference selection, led the Rebels in both rushing yards and receiving yards. He ran for 433 yards and three touchdowns on just 41 carries – averaging 10.6 yards per attempt on the ground. Through the air, he caught 48 passes for 480 yards and seven touchdowns.

"He'll be a big bulk of what we do on offense,"

Buck said.

Clutter was second behind Vigil with 290 rushing yards; he led the team with 47 carries and seven touchdowns. He also notched 20 catches for 333 yards.

Clutter, who averaged 16.4 defensive points per game in 2017, was one of only two Rebels to finish with more than eight defensive points per game. He led the Rebels with 13.5 tackles for loss, 6.5 sacks and four fumble recoveries.

"We're looking at him to really take a step forward," Buck said.

Vigil notched almost eight defensive points per game and had a team-high two interceptions, while Miller had almost six defensive points per game and tied for the team lead with three pass break-ups.

However, with so few returners, options will be available to the half-dozen freshmen playing this fall.

"There's some really good potential there, and more than (the) potential, I like the work ethic they bring," Buck said. "... We're going to have to get some contributions from them."

Another big change for Riverside this year is that the middle-school program will shift to six-man this season. In previous seasons, Cloud Peak Middle School – the feeder for Riverside – played an 11-man schedule.

"Now we're going to start getting kids (as freshmen) who have at least a little bit of familiarity with that," Buck said.

Coach: Sam Buck, 5th year
2017 Record: 4-4, ineligible for playoffs

Key Players

RB/WR/DB: Ryan Vigil, Sr.
RB/WR/DB: Ryan Miller, Jr.
RB/LB: Tate Clutter, Soph.

Mascot: Rebels

Division: 1A/6-man
Conference: West
Colors: Red and gray

2018 Schedule

8-25: at Meeteetse Jamboree, noon (Zero Week)
9-1: at NSI, 1 p.m.
***9-7:** vs. Dubois, 6 p.m.
9-14: at Saratoga, 2:30 p.m.
***9-21:** vs. Farson, 5 p.m.
***9-29:** vs. Snake River, 2 p.m.
***10-5:** at Meeteetse, 7 p.m.
***10-13:** vs. St. Stephens, 2 p.m.
***10-19:** at Burlington, 3 p.m.
* Conference game

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year ago, with Kluesner notching nine catches for 116 yards and Eldredge 10 catches for 89 yards; both had three touchdowns.

Defensively, Eldredge ranked third on the team in defensive points, while Corbin was fourth and junior Courtney Braten was fifth. Junior Kaden Redding, sophomore C.J. Justice and Kluesner also all notched at least five defensive points per game.

Jensen also said the addition of former head coach Zeb Hagen onto the coaching staff will give

Key Players

WR: Clayton Corbin, Sr.
RB: Kirwin Johnson, Sr.
OL/DE: Asa Eldredge, Jr.
WR/DB: Anthony Kluesner, Sr.

the team some advantages and some excitement it hasn't had in past seasons.

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Mascot: Rattlers
Division: 1A/6-man
Conference: West
Colors: Purple and yellow
Coach: Jack Cobb, 2nd year at Snake River
2017 Record: 8-2, lost to Farson in state semifinals

2018 Schedule

8-25: vs. North Park, CO, 11 a.m.
 9-1: vs. Natrona sophs, 2 p.m.
 *9-7: at Burlington, 3 p.m.
 *9-15: vs. Meeteetse, 2 p.m.
 *9-22: vs. St. Stephens, 2 p.m.
 *9-29: at Riverside, 2 p.m.
 *10-5: at Farson, 2 p.m.
 10-12: Open
 *10-20: at Dubois, 1 p.m.
 * Conference game

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Rattlers need seasoning

Snake River's frustrating end to its 2017 season came with a small silver lining.

A 50-32 loss to Farson in the Class 1A six-man semifinals ended the Rattlers' season earlier than they would have liked.

Injuries were a key contributor to the loss, but because of that, some of Snake River's younger players gained valuable experience in a high-pressure postseason game.

That kind of experience will come in handy in 2018, as the Rattlers enter the season needing to rely on those young players to return to the postseason once again this year.

On a team with only one senior, the Rattlers have no other choice.

Coach Jack Cobb said Snake River "will count on some freshmen for contributions to the team. With key injuries last year in the playoffs, it gave our younger players valuable time in the playoffs, which should help this year."

Junior Riggen Myers is the only one of Snake River's three all-state picks to come back in

Key Players

OL/DL: Thomas Duncan, Sr.

TB/S: Riggen Myers, Jr.

TB/S: Tony Enriquez, Jr.

QB/CB: Taylor Otte, Jr.

2018. Myers was second for the Rattlers with 1,057 rushing yards and 14 rushing touchdowns a year ago. He also led Snake River with 236 receiving yards, 16 catches and eight touchdowns. He's also Snake River's leading returning tackler.

Cobb said Myers is ready for the responsibilities he will have this season.

"We will look to him for leadership both on and off the field," Cobb said. "We can use Riggen in many ways, but I will have to wait and see how the rest of the team fits in the picture. We will have to have some balance and will count on our younger players to step up for that balance."

Junior Tony Enriquez added 507 rushing yards and seven

scores, the only other returning player to crack triple digits in rushing yards for the season.

The Rattlers do return their top two receivers. In addition to Myers, senior Thomas Duncan (the only senior Cobb expects to see out this fall) added 213 receiving yards.

However, junior Taylor Otte, who completed 12 passes for 64 yards, is the only returning player to have completed a pass.

Myers was third for the Rattlers in defensive points last season and is the team's leading returning tackler. He was second on the squad with 28 solo tackles and tied for the team lead with four interceptions.

Junior Oscar Herrera was sixth and Enriquez was seventh.

Even with a young team, Cobb said he expects tradition to play a part in the development of the younger players.

"It is expected at Little Snake River to compete as hard as you possibly can," Cobb said. "We have had success in our school's sports programs and the younger kids want that same success."

Eagles are building a tradition

Slowly, St. Stephens is moving from having a football team to having a football program.

Five years after returning to varsity football for the first time in almost half a century, what other programs take for granted, St. Stephens is beginning to implement.

For example, the Eagles made two huge strides this summer – they attended a summer football team camp, and they implemented a summer weights routine.

While that may not sound like much, at St. Stephens, it's huge.

"The kids have been waiting for the stability in the program," said coach Billy Brost, who's entering his second year as the Eagles' head coach after taking over at midseason last year. "They've been waiting for the funding to do what we want to do in the program."

Consequently, interest in football – both in season and out of season – has skyrocketed.

"We have close to 30 guys out for football right now," Brost said. "We ended last season with 12."

Of those 30, about 10 are seniors. Another 10 are juniors, with sophomores and freshmen



making up the difference.

The Eagles' only all-conference selection last year, senior Roberto Hernandez, will be joined by a large crew of supporting seniors – running back/linebacker Brian "Bob" Williams, lineman David Kills Pretty Enemy, center/nose guard Be'enoo Bell, lineman Winter Hawk Felter and wide receiver Kale Ferris, among others.

The Eagles will also have depth thanks to their juniors, including quarterback Little Sun Felter, linebacker Dale C'Hair and tight end/nose guard Hunter Washakie, as well as sophomore safety Asaiah Felter.

With a nontraditional six-man offensive line that averages – get this – 303 pounds, the Eagles will have to eschew the

usual six-man approaches of outside running and constant passing.

"We're probably going to try to make it a little more traditional football and control the clock," Brost said. "... I think there's going to be those days where we roll out and physically dominate everything in front of us."

Defensively, though, is where the Eagles need the most help. A lack of fundamentals still hounds the St. Stephens players, and Brost said he hopes the summer training will pay off once the season starts as players pin down pursuit angles and tackling techniques.

"It's going come down to defensive consistency," Brost said.

Ultimately, though, Brost said he wants to instill pride in his players. Even though the program has won two games combined in the past five seasons, Brost said his players have bought into the kind of training, preparation and commitment necessary to overcome the problems past Eagle teams faced.

"We've got a really good group of athletes that I'm proud of that have worked hard," Brost said. "They want to make football relevant again."

Mascot: Eagles

Division: Class 1A/6-man

Conference: West

Colors: Red and black

Coach: Billy Brost, 2nd

year at St. Stephens

2017 Record: 0-8, did not qualify for playoffs

Key Players

TB/LB: Roberto Hernandez, Sr.

HB/LB: Bob Williams, Sr.

G: David Kills Pretty Enemy, Sr.

C/NT: Be'enoo Bell, Sr.

2018 Schedule

8-31: vs. Hanna, 2 p.m.

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

*9-14: vs. Burlington, 2 p.m.

*9-22: at Snake River, 2 p.m.

9-28: Open

*10-5: vs. Dubois, 2 p.m.

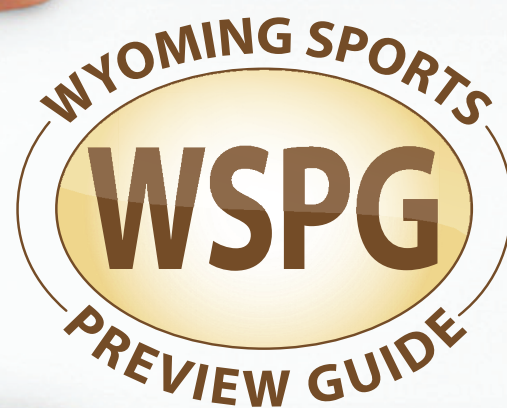
*10-13: at Riverside, 2 p.m.

*10-19: vs. Farson, 1 p.m.

* Conference game

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TEN SLEEP PIONEERS

Ten Sleep will not field team in 2018

Ten Sleep will not field a football team this fall, marking the first time since 1990 that the Pioneers will not play.

By mid-July, only four students had committed to play for the six-man team, and only one other student had shown any interest at all.

"We can't continue to play with six kids, and this year I'm not even sure we'd have six," Ten Sleep activities director Sarah Novak said at the time.

Ten Sleep went 1-7 last season

*"We can't continue
to play with six kids."*

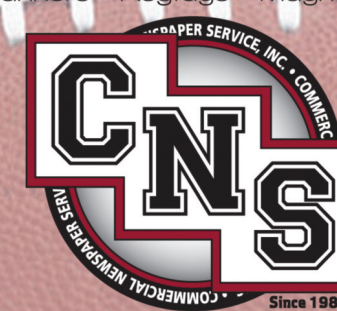
~ AD Sarah Novak

and has gone a combined 4-26 the past four seasons.

Ten Sleep will offer middle-school football, and high-school players interested in playing football can play for Worland.



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