

2023 WVU FOOTBALL KICKOFF

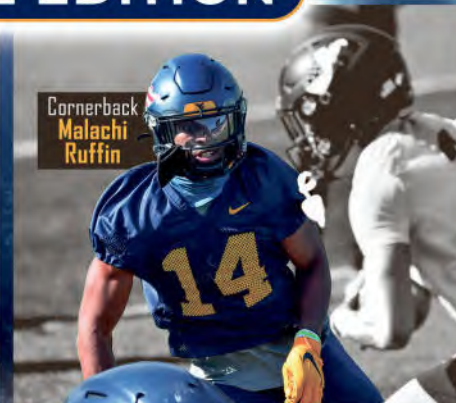
SPECIAL EDITION



Running Back
CJ Donaldson Jr.



Bandit Jared Bartlett



Cornerback
Malachi Ruffin



Offensive Lineman
Zach Frazier



Offensive Lineman Doug Nestor



Safety Aubrey Burks



Head Coach
Neal Brown



Defensive Lineman
Sean Martin



Quarterback
Garrett Greene



Linebacker
Lee Kpogba

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1990-2023

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Coach Bios

Neal Brown, head coach**Birthday:** March 11**Hometown:** Danville, Ky.**Education:** UMass, 2002 (bachelor's); UMass, 2005 (master's)**Playing Career:** Kentucky, 1998-00; UMass, 2001-02**Family:** Wife, Brooke; children, Adalyn, Anslee, Dax

Neal Brown is in his fifth year as the head coach at West Virginia.

Since arriving in Morgantown in January 2019, Brown has covered a lot of territory representing Mountaineer football as its chief ambassador, ensuring the great story about his program is told to everyone.

In his first four full recruiting classes, the average signee star rating has been among the best in the program's history, highlighted by the signing of 15 four-star recruits during that time. The program has landed multiple targets after beating out many high-level schools. WVU has landed the top in-state recruits every year that the program has pursued these coveted prospects, including All-American Zach Frazier and Wyatt Milum.

The 2021 class had the highest average star rankings (3.25) for WVU according to Rivals since the start of the company.

With the landscape of college football changing more than ever, Brown has had to evaluate and give even more attention to his role as the CEO, overseeing the big picture, managing all areas of the program and making



sure all areas concerning the players and staff are accomplished.

This past offseason, Brown showed his investment in his staff even more by elevating

former co-offensive coordinator and running backs coach Chad Scott to the offensive coordinator role. Scott has an extensive understanding of the scheme, has done an outstanding job in player development and was responsible for coordinating the run game for the Mountaineers in 2022.

The 2022 Mountaineers defeated rival Virginia Tech to hold on to the Black Diamond Trophy and won two of the final three games, including victories against Oklahoma and at Oklahoma State. The win over Oklahoma marked the first Big 12 Conference win over the Sooners, and the win over the Cowboys was the first since 2014 and snapped the Cowboys' 14-game, home winning streak. WVU also defeated 2021 Big 12 Champion Baylor.

West Virginia had 21 student-athletes named to the Academic All-Big 12 Teams, and kicker Casey Legg earned a spot on the prestigious College Sports Communicators Academic All-American Second Team. WVU also had nine players named to one of three postseason Big 12 all-conference teams by media organizations with Dante Stills and Zach Frazier earning first-team all-conference honors, and Stills was drafted by the Arizona Cardinals.

Chad Scott, offensive coordinator/running backs**Birthday:** June 11**Hometown:** Plant City, Fla.**Education:** North Carolina, 2004 (bachelor's)**Playing Career:** Kentucky, 2000-01; North Carolina, 2002-04**Family:** Wife, Shambrica; children, Kori, Jakobe

more than 60 yards per game, more than 90 yards of total offense and almost seven points a game.

Scott has worked with coach Neal Brown during three different coaching tenures: Kentucky (RB/2013-14), Texas Tech (RB/2010-12) and Troy (RB/2007-09). He also was a teammate of Neal Brown's at UK.

He came to WVU after serving as the tight ends and hybrids coach at North Carolina from 2016-18.

Scott returned to Chapel Hill after coaching at Kentucky, where he tutored running backs from 2013-15 and was the run-game coordinator in 2014-15.

A native of Plant City, Fla., Scott began his collegiate playing career at Kentucky before transferring to North Carolina, where he lettered in 2003 and 2005. He earned first-team All-ACC honors from ESPN.com after rushing for 796 yards and eight touchdowns as a senior. Scott made his first career start as a Tar Heel against No. 4 Miami and rushed for a career-high 175 yards on 25 carries and scored twice in a 31-28 victory.

Scott spent time in the National Football League with the Cleveland Browns and Pittsburgh Steelers before returning to his alma mater in 2006 as a graduate assistant video analyst.

He graduated from UNC in 2004 with a degree in sociology. He is married to the former Shambrica Jones, who played basketball at Kentucky.

Coach bios courtesy of WVU Athletics

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Coach Bios

Jordan Lesley, defensive coordinator/outside linebackers**Birthday:** Dec. 15**Hometown:** Fulton, Miss.**Education:** Troy, 2006 (bachelor's); Troy, 2007 (master's)**Playing Career:** Troy, 2000-04**Family:** Wife, Ann-Katherine; Children, Mary-Kate, Mae-Blake, Jordan Jr.

Jordan Lesley is in his fifth year on the Mountaineer football coaching staff and third year as the defensive coordinator. The 2020 and 2021 Broyles Award nominee coaches the outside linebackers for the third year after working with the defensive line his first two years.

In 2022, fifth-year senior defensive tackle Dante Stills finished as the school's all-time leader in games played (59) and tackles for loss (52½) and was fourth in sacks (23½). He finished his career earning All-Big 12 Conference First Team honors twice (2021, 2022) and second team twice (2019, 2020). He earned a spot in the 2023 NFL Combine and was drafted in the sixth round by the NFL's Arizona Cardinals.

Safety Aubrey Burks was named an All-Big 12 Conference Second Team selection by the Associated Press, Phil Steele named linebacker Lee Kpogba to the all-conference second team and defensive tackle Jordan Jefferson to the third team.

The defense finished with three touchdowns, ranking No. 12 nationally and the rushing defense finished



No. 4 in the Big 12, improving three spots from the previous year.

Lesley joined the Mountaineer coaching staff as the defensive line coach in 2019. He came with Neal Brown after serving as an assistant coach at Troy for three years (2016-18), the first two years as the defensive tackles coach and the 2018 season as the defensive line coach.

Prior to Troy, Lesley was the defensive coordinator at East Mississippi Community College in Scooba, Miss. (2013-15), before serving two stints at Northwest Mississippi Community College in Senatobia, Miss., first as defensive line coach in 2010 and then as the defensive coordinator and defensive line coach in 2012. He also spent two stints at Kilgore College in Kilgore, Texas, first as the linebackers coach from 2007-09, and as the defensive coordinator in 2011. He spent a year as a graduate assistant coach at Troy in 2006.

Lesley was a versatile player for the Trojans and was a key part of teams that successfully made the transition to the FBS ranks. A two-year starter at tight end, Lesley helped lead Troy to the 2004 Silicon Valley Bowl and was named a team captain.

A native of Fulton, Miss., Lesley was a three-time all-district performer at Itawamba Agricultural High School, earning Class 4A All-State Second Team as a senior in 1999.

Matt Moore, assistant head coach/offensive line**Birthday:** Oct. 18**Hometown:** Canton, Ga.**Education:** Valdosta State, 1996 (bachelor's)**Playing Career:** Valdosta State, 1991-94**Family:** Wife, Kelly; Children, Tanner, Reece, Sutton

Matt Moore is in his fifth year on the Mountaineer staff as offensive line coach and fourth year as the assistant head coach.

In 2022, the offensive line paved the way for the running attack to record 2,058 yards and 24 touchdowns. It was led by All-Big 12 Conference First Team performer Zach Frazier, who finished with 51 knockdowns and had 38 great blocks. Tackle Wyatt Milum started all 12 games at left tackle and finished with Academic All-Big 12 honors and finished second on the team with 36 knockdowns. Doug Nester started 11 games at right guard and registered 27 knockdowns, had 16 great blocks and recorded eight games without allowing a sack. Left guard Tomas Rimac played in all 12 games, started the final five games and was named a Freshman All-American.

In 2021, the offensive line cleared the way for a 1,000-yard rusher in Leddie Brown for the second straight year. Center Zach Frazier earned All-America second team honors by the Walter Camp Football Foundation and the American Football Coaches Association, and tackle Wyatt Milum was

named to three different freshman All-America teams. Frazier earned All-Big 12 Conference Second Team honors by the league head coaches, and guard Doug Nester

was named to the All-Big 12 Second Team by PFF College.

In Moore's first year, left tackle Colton McKivitz earned Walter Camp and Associated Press All-American honors and was named the Big 12 Conference's Co-Offensive Lineman of the Year. The All-Big 12 First Team honoree played in the Reese's Senior Bowl in Mobile, Ala., participated in the NFL Player Combine in Indianapolis, Indiana, and was selected in the fifth round of the NFL Draft.

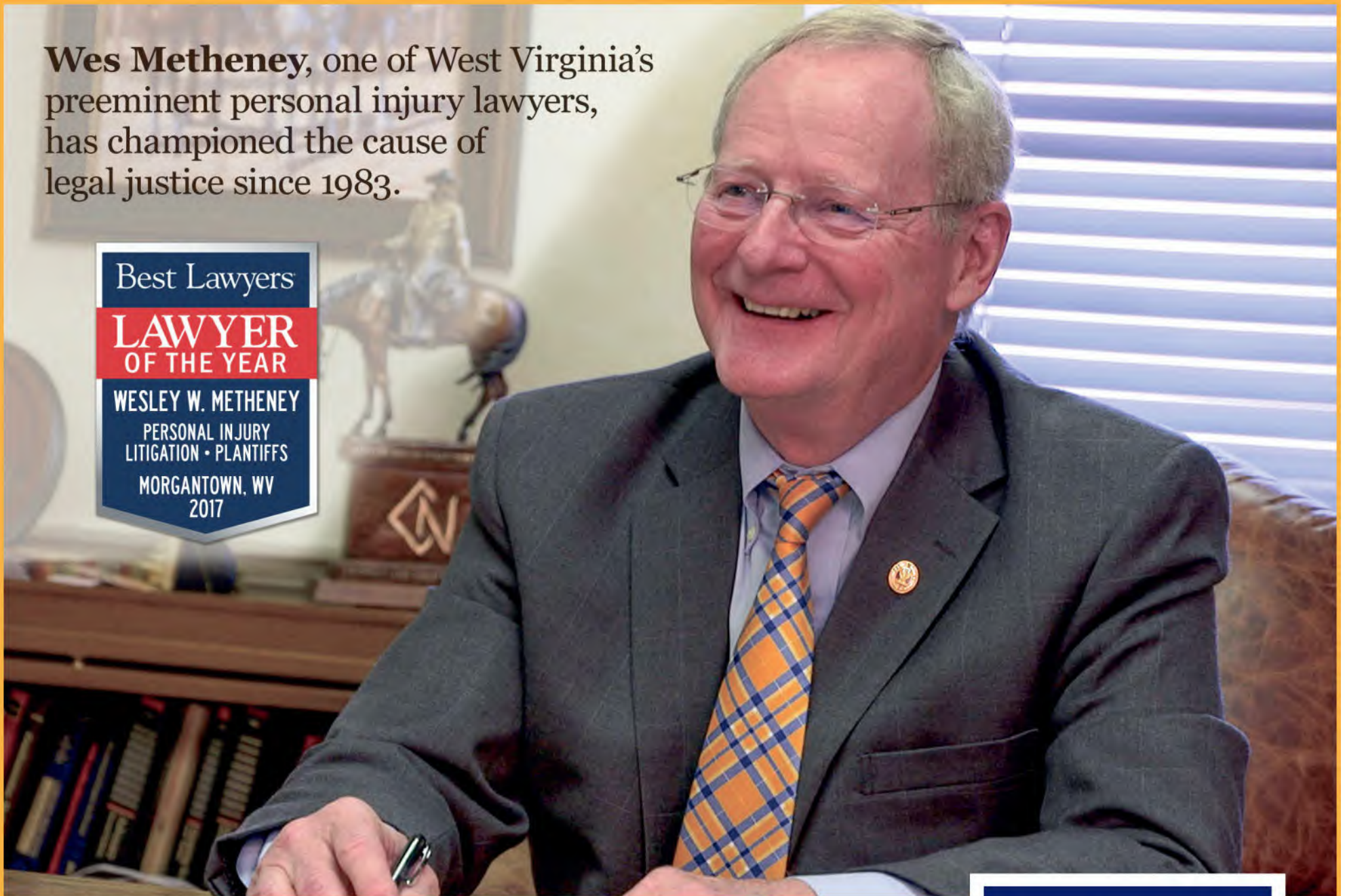
Moore joined the football coaching staff as the Mountaineers' co-offensive coordinator and offensive line coach in January 2019. Moore came with WVU coach Neal Brown after serving as the offensive coordinator and offensive line coach for four years at Troy (2015-18). He spent two years on the offensive staff at Texas Tech in 2010-11 and was on the staff with Brown at Troy in 2006.

A native of Canton, Ga., Moore played at Valdosta State, starting 34 games at left guard from 1991-94. He earned All-Gulf South Conference First-Team honors as a senior. He graduated from Valdosta State in 1996 with a bachelor's degree in health and physical education.

Coach bios courtesy of WVU Athletics

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West Virginia University

2022: 5-7 (3-6 Big 12)



William Wotring/The Dominion Post

West Virginia running back CJ Donaldson.

BY CODY NESPOR

CNespor@DominionPost.com

Following four mediocre seasons, year five might finally be head coach Neal Brown's make-or-break season in Morgantown.

If the Mountaineers are to finally have a breakout season under Brown they'll have to do it the hard way, playing one of the toughest schedules in the country with 11 Power 5 opponents.

The gauntlet begins at No. 7 Penn State and three of WVU's next four games are against Pitt, No. 17 TCU and Texas Tech, all of whom received votes in the AP Top 25 preseason poll.

The renewed series against Penn State dates back to 1904 but has not been played since 1992. The Mountaineers are 9-48-2 all-time against the Nittany Lions, last winning in 1988 and last winning on the road in 1954.

A late pick-six spoiled the renewal of the Backyard Brawl in Pittsburgh last season and snapped a three-game winning streak the Mountaineers have against their biggest rivals. TCU was the national runner-up last season and Texas Tech has beaten WVU four years in a row.

Offense

For the first time in 10 years, WVU will open the season with a high school signee under center. Brown is going to wait as long as possible to name a starter, but whichever of junior Garrett Greene or redshirt-freshman Nicco Marchiol wins the job will be the first high school recruit to start the season at quarterback since Paul Millard in 2013.

The best hope for the Mountaineers to have success is on the ground, where a talented stable of running backs will rush behind an experienced offensive line led by new offensive coordinator Chad Scott, promoted from running backs coach.

Leading that stable will be sophomore CJ Donaldson. The converted tight end ran for 534 yards and eight touchdowns as a freshman last season before suffering a season-ending injury.

Joining Donaldson will be Justin Johnson Jr. (447 yards, three touchdowns), Jaylen Anderson (282 yards, two touchdowns) and impressive true freshman Jahiem White.

WVU returns all five of its offensive line starters from last season — Zach Frazier, Doug Nester, Wyatt Milum, Ja'Quay Hubbard and Tomas Rimac.

A rebuilt receiver room is led by NC State transfer Devin Carter, a three-year starter with the Wolfpack. Fellow transfer EJ Horton (Marshall) and Noah Massey (Angelo State), returners Cortez Braham and Preston Fox and true freshman Rodney Gallagher make up the rest of the group.

LSU transfer tight end Kole Taylor gives the team a true receiving threat at tight end to pair with returner Treytan Davis.



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Mountaineers

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Defense

Defensively, WVU looks to turn around from a disastrous 2022 that saw the Mountaineers finish second-to-last in the Big 12 in pass defense (262.3 yards per game) and last with a paltry four interceptions.

To help alleviate some of the woes in pass defense, WVU brought in four experienced transfers, cornerbacks Beanie Bishop (Minnesota) and Montre Miller (Kent State) and safeties Anthony Wilson (Georgia Southern) and Keyshawn Cobb (Buffalo). They will join returning cornerbacks Malachi Ruffin and Andrew Wilson-Lamp and Jacolby Spells and safeties Aubrey Burks and Marcis Floyd.

Middle linebacker Lee Kpogba is the leader of the defense entering his second season out of junior college. The senior led WVU with 92 tackles last season. Battling to start opposite Kpogba in the middle are underclassmen Jairo Faverus, Trey Lathan and Ben Cutter.

The defensive line will be headed by in-state product Sean Martin, who posted eight tackles for loss and four sacks last season. He will be surrounded by returners Edward Vesterinen, Mike Lockhart, Asani Redwood and Hammond Russell and transfers Fatorma Mulbah (Penn State) and Tomiwa Durokaiye (Kentucky).

Specialists

The Mountaineers will feature two of the best specialists in the nation at their positions with punter Oliver Straw and long snapper Austin Brinkman. Michael Hayes transferred in from Georgia State to take over placekicking duties.

Bishop and fellow transfer Ja'Shaun Poke (Kent State) will look to rejuvenate the Mountaineers' return game.

PLAYERS TO WATCH

RB CJ Donaldson, So. — The converted tight end burst onto the scene last season before his season was cut short due to injury, rushing for 534 yards and a team-high eight touchdowns in just seven games.

S Aubrey Burks, Jr. — He was pressed into service last season due to injuries and transfers and turned in a up-and-down year with one interceptions and three pass deflections. Burks has been the talk of camp and the face of WVU's rebuilt secondary.

C Zach Frazier, Jr. — Perhaps the Mountaineers' best overall player, the in-state product is a multiple-time all-conference and all-american selection. Entering his fourth season as a full-time starter, Frazier is also currently the team's best pro prospect.



William Wotring/The Dominion Post

West Virginia linebacker Lee Kpogba.



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Penn State University

2022: 11-2 (7-2 Big Ten)



Penn State running back Nicholas Singleton.

AP Photo

BY CODY NESPOR

CNespor@DominionPost.com

Entering his 10th season as head coach, James Franklin has Penn State squarely back in place as being one of the premier programs in the country.

The Nittany Lions went 11-2 last season, winning the Rose Bowl over Utah. They open the 2023 season ranked No. 7 in the country.

A revitalized ground game and a defense laden with NFL talent has Penn State ready to challenge top dogs Ohio State and Michigan for the top spot in the Big Ten. Penn State has lost to both Ohio State and Michigan in five of Franklin's first nine seasons.

The Nittany Lions open the 2023 season in prime time, reviving a rivalry with West Virginia which they have dominated dating back to 1904.

PSU and WVU have not played since 1992 with the Nittany Lions owning a 48-9-2 all-time record against the Mountaineers.

The season opens on Sept. 2 at 7:30 p.m. inside Beaver Stadium in State College, Pa., where WVU has only won three times in 34 tries, last doing so in 1954.

Offense

Long-time starting quarterback Sean Clifford is gone, as are his dangerous receivers, but a dynamic running back duo and veteran offensive line look to make life easy for expected signal-caller Drew Allar.

As true freshmen, running backs Nicholas Singleton and Kaytron Allen combined for 1,928 rushing yards and 22 touchdowns. Singleton ran for 1,061 yards and 12 touchdowns on the year, including 120 yards and two scores in the Rose Bowl.

Paving their way will be an offensive line that featured future NFL draft pick Olumuyiwa Fashanu at left tackle and five others who started at least five games in 2022.

Allar, a former five-star prospect, has played in 10 career games with a completion percentage above 50, 344 yards and four touchdowns.

Catching his passes will be a patchwork receiving corps made up of KeAndre Lambert-Smith and transfers Dante Cephias (Kent State) and Malik McClain (Florida State). Lambert-Smith caught 24 passes for 389 yards and four scores last season.

Returning tight end Theo Johnson made over 300 yards and four touchdowns in 2022.

Defense

On paper, the Nittany Lions appear to be strong on the outside and weak in the middle for a team that allowed more than 30 points just three times last season.

Outside linebacker Abdul Carter broke out as a true freshman with 10.5

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Nittany Lions

September 2, 2023 @ Beaver Stadium

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tackles for loss and 6.5 sacks. He starts opposite of Curtis Jones, who returned to PSU after considering the NFL.

Outside cornerback Kalen King led the Big Ten last season with 21 passes defended to go along with three interceptions. Veteran Johnny Dixon starts on the opposite side after picking off two passes last year.

Defensive end is also formidable with Adisa Isaac and Chop Robinson combining for 9.5 sacks in 2022.

At defensive tackle, however, three of the Nittany Lions' seven scholarship players are listed under 275 pounds and returning starter Hakeem Beamon weighs in at just 256.

Special Teams

PSU brought in a pair of transfers to compete at the specialist positions in kicker Alex Felkins (Columbia) and punter Riley Thompson (Florida Atlantic). Felkins hit on 11-of-16 field goal tries while Thompson averaged 45.4 yards per punt last season.



Head Coach: James Franklin

Years at School: 11

Record at Penn State: 78-36

Overall Record: 102-51

Bowl Record: 6-5

PLAYERS TO WATCH

RB Nicholas Singleton, Soph. — Eclipsed 100 rushing yards in four games and scored multiple touchdowns five times. Was held under 50 yards just four times averaging 6.8 yards per carry as a freshman.

CB Kalen King, Jr. — A second-team all-american, he led the Big Ten with 23 passes defended to go along with three interceptions. Leads a secondary that racked up 14 picks and 85 pass break-ups in 2022.

LT Olumuyiwa Fashanu, Jr. — A potential first-round draft pick, he is the standout on an offensive line that returns six players who made at least five starts last season. Did not allow a sack last season.



AP Photo

Penn State defensive backs Jaylen Reed and Kalen King.



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Duquesne University

2022: 4-7 (3-4 NEC)



AP Photo

Duquesne players celebrate scoring a touchdown last season.

BY CODY NESPOR

CNespor@DominionPost.com

Prior to 2021, Duquesne had not played a Power 5 opponent since 1950. They will do so for the third season in a row now with a week two matchup at West Virginia.

WVU is 4-3-1 all-time against Duquesne but the series has been dormant since 1935. The last time the Dukes were in Morgantown, they defeated the Mountaineers 19-0 at Old Mountaineer Field on Nov. 16, 1935.

The Dukes haven't fared well in their recent return to major competition, losing 45-3 to TCU in 2021 and 47-7 against Florida State the following year, but they are led by 19-year head coach Jerry Schmitt and are expected to make a turnaround in the Northeast Conference.

After going just 4-7 in 2022, Duquesne was picked third in the NEC preseason poll, receiving one first-place vote. The team started last season 1-5 but went 3-2 down the stretch.

The Dukes lost their leading passer, rusher, receiver and tackler but have a strong core of returners, especially on defense.

Offense

The Dukes are missing a lot from last season as they lost leading passer Joe Mischler and leading receiver Dwayne Menders Jr. to graduation and leading rushing Billy Lucas transferred to Liberty.

Taking over full-time under center will be junior quarterback Darius Perrantes. A part-time starter in each of the last two seasons, Perrantes has thrown for over 2,000 yards with a completion percentage above 50 to go with 23 touchdowns and 10 interceptions across 16 career games.

Redshirt sophomore JaMario Clements will lead a sparse running back room after rushing for 220 yards and a touchdown last season.

At receiver, the Dukes welcome back Joey Isabella, an all-NEC preseason selection who was limited to just four games last season due to injury. The junior has 41 receptions for 460 yards and five touchdowns in his career.

Defense

Duquesne lost its defensive leader from last season, linebacker Todd Hill, who led the team with 61 total tackles, 22 tackles for loss and 11.5 sacks. WVU will still see Hill this season as he transferred to Pitt.

The strength of the Duquesne defense will be up front with a line anchored by all-NEC preseason selection A.J. Ackerman. He put up 4.5 tackles for loss and 2.5 sacks last season and will be joined by fellow returner Kevin Kurzinger (7.5 TFL, three sacks).

Former Pitt transfer Noah Palmer had 3.5 tackles for loss last season and will be joined on the defensive line by Stony Brook transfer Ryan Lopez.

At linebacker the Dukes return junior Shane Stump (54 tackles) and

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Dukes

September 9, 2023 @ Milan Puskar Stadium

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graduate student Jayden Johnson (29).
Duquesne's secondary picked off 12 passes last season and return eight of them, led by Ayden Garnes (two), Ezekiel Daure (two) and CJ Barnes (one).

Specialists

The Dukes return both of their specialists from last season. Senior kicker Brian Bruzdewicz made 10-of-15 field goals with a long of 40. Junior punter Michael Berarducci averaged 37.5 yards on 47 punts with a long of 54.



Head Coach: Jerry Schmitt
Record at Duquesne: 113-79
Years at School: 19
Overall Record: 141-100

PLAYERS TO WATCH

QB Darius Perrantes, Jr. — A part-time starter each of the last two years. Has thrown for 2,159 yards completing 58% of his passes with 23 touchdowns and 10 interceptions.

WR Joey Isabella, Jr. — An all-conference preseason selection who missed all but four games due to injury last season. Still put up 191 yards and two touchdowns.

DL A.J. Ackerman, Jr. — An all-conference preseason selection, anchors the Dukes' deep defensive line. The 310-pounder had 20 tackles, 4.5 tackles for loss and 2.5 sacks.



AP Photo

Duquesne kicker Brian Bruzdewicz.

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University of Pittsburgh

2022: 9-4 (5-3 ACC)



AP Photo

Pittsburgh defensive back MJ Devonshire.

BY CODY NESPOR
CNespor@DominionPost.com

The Backyard Brawl returned with a bang in 2022 as a week-one primetime matchup on ESPN. The 106th Backyard Brawl has received less national fanfare as a week-three affair, but it will again be in primetime on a major network.

WVU's biggest rival Pitt returns to Morgantown for the first time since they played in the Big East. The game will be played Sept. 16 in front of what should be the largest crowd Milan Puskar Stadium has seen in quite some time. The Panthers' last trip to Morgantown was a 21-20 loss in 2011, the last time the rivals met as Big East conference-mates.

The Pitt team that travels south on I-79 this season will look quite different than the one that defeated WVU 38-31 at Acrisure stadium last season. Entering 2023, the Panthers have a new offensive coordinator, starting quarterback, lead running back and six new starters on defense.

Offense

The Panthers replaced one transfer quarterback with two others this offseason. With former USC Trojan Kedon Slovis's graduation, Pitt brought in Phil Jurkovec (Boston College) and Christian Veilleux (Penn State) to battle with returning backup Nate Yarnell.

Jurkovec, who has 32 careers games split between Notre Dame and BC under his belt, has won the starting job and is reunited with offensive coordinator Frank Cignetti Jr. from their Boston college days.

Jurkovec flourished under Cignetti in 2020, throwing for 2,500 yards and 17 touchdowns with five interceptions, but struggled the next two seasons missing time with injuries and throwing a combined 18 scores and 12 picks in 14 games.

The Panthers also lost 2/3 of their running back committee to graduation, leaving junior Rodney Hammond Jr. as the incumbent front man. Hammond missed several games with an injury last season, but ran for 460 yards and five touchdowns, including 74 yards and two scores against the Mountaineers.

Pitt returns three starters on its offensive line, starting receivers Konata Mumpfield (58 receptions, 551 yards) and Bub Means (27, 401) and tight end Gavin Bartholomew (21, 283).

Defense

Pitt ranked second nationally in sacks last season but lost more than half of that production, returning just 20.5 of its 48 sacks from 2022. Calijah Kancey (7.5 sacks), SirVocea Dennis (seven) and Deslin Alexandre (5.5) were three of six defensive starters the Panthers lost after last season.

The Panthers will try to reload up front with returning redshirt-senior David Green at tackle. At linebacker, the team returns senior starters Bangally Kamara (49 tackles) and Shayne Simon (46) and junior Solomon DeSheilds (four sacks) will move into a starting role.

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Panthers

September 16, 2023 @ Milan Puskar Stadium

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The strength of the defense will be at cornerback, where the Panthers return seniors M.J. Devonshire, Marquis Williams and A.J. Woods. The trio has 12 combined career interceptions, including Devonshire's game-winning pick-six against WVU last season.

The Panthers only gave up more than 30 points four times last season, including 31 against WVU.

Specialists

Returning kicker Ben Sauls was 20-of-24 on field goals last season with a long of 51. He made 15 of his final 16 attempts.

The Panthers were last in the ACC in average punt length last season at just 38.4 yards. Walk-on Caleb Junko returns and will need to show improvement without much competition behind him.



Head Coach: Pat Narduzzi

Years at School: 9
Record at Pitt: 62-41
Overall Record: 62-41
Bowl Record: 2-4

PLAYERS TO WATCH

QB Phil Jurkovec, Sr. — The Pittsburgh native returns home to play his sixth college season with the Panthers. He brings plenty of experience with him, with 32 career games and 46 total touchdowns.

RB Rodney Hammond, Jr. — Without Isreal Abanikanda and Vincent Davis, Hammond becomes Pitt's go-to tailback. One of his best games in 2022 was against WVU with 129 total yards and two touchdowns.

CB M.J. Devonshire, Sr. — Pitt's top corner led the team with three interceptions in 2022, including the game-winning pick-six against WVU. He was also an All-ACC punt returner, averaging 9.7 yards with a touchdown.



AP Photo

Pittsburgh running back Rodney Hammond.

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Coach Bios

ShaDon Brown, co-defensive coordinator/defensive backs

Birthday: Nov. 20
Hometown: Danville, Ky.
Education: Campbellsville, 2003 (bachelor's); University of the Comberlands, 2008 (master's)
Family: Wife, Rhonda; Children, Shaelyn, Braylon, Keenan

ShaDon Brown is in his third year as the co-defensive coordinator and oversees the defensive secondary. In 2022, WVU finished with three defensive touchdowns, all by defensive backs (Jasir Cox, Malachi Ruffin, Jacolby Spells). That mark ranked No. 2 in the Big 12 and was No. 12 nationally. Cox led the Big 12 and was No. 22 in fumbles recovered, and Ruffin led the Mountaineers in passes defended. Heading into the 2023 season, safety Aubrey Burks was named one



of the top safeties returning in 2023 by Mike Farrell, one of the top recruiting experts in the nation and by PFF College. He earned All-Big 12 Conference Second Team honors by the league's Associated Press writers and was named by PFF College for first-team recognition. Brown served as the safeties coach at Louisville for two years (2019-20). Prior to Louisville, Brown spent the 2017 and 2018 seasons at Colorado, overseeing the secondary. He was promoted to defensive passing game coordinator for the 2018 season. Brown graduated with his bachelor's degree in physical education and a minor in health education from Campbellsville University in Campbellsville, Ky. in 2003 and earned his master's degree in secondary education from the University of the Comberlands in 2008.

Jeff Koonz, special teams coordinator/inside linebackers

Birthday: May 30
Hometown: Wallkill, N.Y.
Education: Auburn, 2004 (bachelor's); Texas, 2006 (master's)
Family: Wife, Maura; Children, Mary, Jameson, MacKenzie

Jeff Koonz is in his fourth year on the Mountaineer coaching staff as the special teams coordinator and the inside linebackers coach. In 2022, punter Oliver Straw earned Freshman All-America honors, finishing with an average of 42.3 yards per punt, had seven punts of 50 yards or more and placed 17 punts inside the opponent's 20-yard line. Kicker Casey Legg connected on 14-of-15 field goals, including hitting his first 13 of the season. He was No. 8 nationally in field goal percentage and No. 5 in the Big 12 in field goals made



per game. He finished his career No. 7 in program history in field goals made (40) and is No. 8 in kick scoring (208). Linebacker Lee Kpogba earned All-Big 12 Honorable Mention honors after leading the WVU defense with 92 tackles and was No. 8 in the league. Koonz came to West Virginia after serving as the inside linebackers coach at Ole Miss for the 2019 season. Prior to that, Koonz spent two years at North Texas. He graduated from Auburn in 2004 with a bachelor's of science degree in physical education and his master's degree in educational administration from Texas in 2006. His father, also named Jeff Koonz, retired after serving for 15 years as the head coach at Holmes Community College in Goodman, Miss.

Coach bios courtesy of WVU Athletics



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Coach Bios

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Sean Reagan, passing game coordinator, quarterbacks

Birthday: Dec. 27
Hometown: Conyers, Ga.
Education: North Georgia, 2008 (bachelor's)
Family: Wife, Elizabeth; Children, Heidi, Chole, Maggie

Sean Reagan is in his fifth year on the Mountaineer coaching staff, recently being named the passing game coordinator and quarterbacks coach in 2023. He served his first three years coaching the quarterbacks before moving to tight ends in 2022.

In 2022, despite losing a veteran starter, his tight end group still made its presence felt in the offense on more than 800 snaps.

Reagan came to West Virginia in 2019 after serving as an assistant coach at Troy from 2008-18, including the last four years as a member of



Brown's staff. He was the co-offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach in 2018, oversaw the quarterbacks and running backs the previous three years (2014-17) and was the quarterbacks coach from 2011-14. He also served as a graduate assistant in 2010 at Texas Tech, where he worked with Brown, the offensive coordinator of the Red Raiders at the time.

Reagan began his coaching career at the high-school level as an assistant at Rockdale High School in Conyers, Ga., for four years (1998-01), before moving to Chestatee High School in Gainesville, Ga., for four years (2002-06), including the

A native of Conyers, Ga., Reagan received his bachelor's degree in physical education and leadership from North Georgia College & State University in 2008.

Dontae Wright, safeties

Birthday: May 26
Hometown: Louisa, Ky.
Education: Miami (Ohio), 2007 (bachelor's); Kentucky, 2009 (master's)
Playing Career: Miami (Ohio), 2003-06

Dontae Wright is in his fourth year on the Mountaineer coaching staff as the safeties coach after serving as the safeties coach at Western Michigan for two seasons.

In 2022, safety Aubrey Burks earned All-Big 12 first-team honors by PFF College and second team honors by the league Associated Press members, finishing second on the team with 66 tackles.

He also was listed as one of the top safeties entering the 2023 season by PFF and national media member Mike Farrell. Spear Jasir Cox was



named a third-team selection by PFF College.

At Western Michigan, his safeties helped WMU turn around its scoring defense in 2019, yield-

ing 25.9 points per game, the best for the program since surrendering just 19.8 in 2016, and nearly nine points per game better than the 34.5 points a contest allowed in 2018.

Prior to WMU, Wright served as an assistant coach at Tennessee Tech for two seasons (2016-17).

As a player, Wright was a four-year linebacker at Miami (Ohio) from 2003-06 and was a part of two Mid-American Conference East Division championship teams.

A native of Louisa, Ky., Wright earned a bachelor's degree in physical education from Miami in 2007.

Coach bios courtesy of WVU Athletics

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Texas Tech University

2022: 8-5 (5-4 Big 12)



Texas Tech safety Dadrion Taylor-Demerson.

AP Photo

BY CODY NESPOR

CNespor@DominionPost.com

Head coach Joey McGuire's debut season at Texas Tech was a full success as the Red Raider swent 8-5 in 2022. That was TTU's most wins since 2013.

Texas Tech won all three of its overtime games last season and closed the year winning four straight, including the Texas Bowl over Ole Miss.

McGuire added instant stability to the Red Raiders, who's aggressive offense ranked highly in yards and points. The defense was stout as well, leading the Big 12 in sacks and performing well in the red zone.

The Red Raiders return experienced players at key positions on both sides of the ball and, notably, have not lost to West Virginia in four games under former TTU offensive coordinator Neal Brown. WVU's last win over Texas Tech was a 42-34 victory in 2018. The Red Raiders have out-scored the Mountaineers 143 to 74 since then.

Offense

McGuire and offensive coordinator Zach Kittley put together one of the best offenses in the Big 12 last season. The Red Raiders finished second in yards per game (461.2) and fourth in points (34.2).

Running the offense in 2023 will be senior quarterback Tyler Shough, a part-time starter the last two seasons. He threw for 1,065 yards and five touchdowns in the team's final four games in 2022, all wins.

Shough has 3,800 yards and 37 total touchdowns in 22 career games split between Texas Tech and Oregon.

At running back, TTU loses Sarodorick Thompson, but returns Tahj Brooks, who ran for 691 yards and seven scores.

The Red Raiders will return several starters on the offensive line, supplemented with the transfer of center Rusty Staats from Western Kentucky.

TTU returns three of its top four receivers from last season with Jerand Bradley (51 receptions, 744 yards, six touchdowns), Myles Price (51, 513, 2) and Loic Fouonji (34, 451, 3).

Defense

Like on offense, Texas Tech's defense was solid under McGuire in year one. The Red Raiders led the Big 12 with 31 sacks and ranked top-10 in the nation in red zone defense. Sacks leader Tyree Wilson was a first-round NFL Draft pick, however, as TTU will have to replace his seven sacks.

Syracuse transfer Steve Linton will get the first crack at replacing Wilson after recording 3.5 sacks for the Orange last season.

Up front, the team returns fifth-year seniors Jaylon Hutchings and Tony Bradford Jr.

At linebacker, the team lost both of its leading tacklers in Krishon Merriweather (112 tackles) and Kosi Eldridge (91). Jesiah Pierre (40 tackles) is



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Red Raiders

September 23, 2023 @ Milan Puskar Stadium

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the lone returning starter.

In the secondary, the Red Raiders will return senior cornerbacks Malik Dunlap and Rayshad Williams, who each had an interception last season. Safety Dadrion Taylor-Demerson also returns after posting 73 tackles, three interceptions and two forced fumbles last season.

Specialists

Senior Austin McNamara is considered to be the best punter in Texas Tech history and returns after averaging 44.3 yards per punt with 15 50-plus yard boots last season.

The graduation of Trey Wolff leaves TTU wide open at kicker. Frontrunner Gino Garcia is 7-for-7 on PATs in his career, but missed his lone field goal attempt.



Head Coach: Joey McGuire

Years at School: 2
Record at Texas Tech: 8-5
Overall Record: 8-5
Bowl Record: 1-0



AP Photo

Texas Tech wide receiver Jerand Bradley.

PLAYERS TO WATCH

S Dadrion Taylor-Demerson, Sr. — A playmaker in the Red Raiders' secondary, racked up 73 totals tackles, a sack, three interceptions and two forced fumbles in 2022.

DL Jaylon Hutchings, Sr. — A preseason All-Big 12 selection, enters his fifth season as a starter. Had 5.5 tackles for loss last season to raise his career total to 15 with 5.5 career sacks.

WR Jerand Bradley, Soph. — Another All-Big 12 preseason selection, the 6-foot-5 Bradley led TTU in receptions (51), yards (755) and touchdowns (six) as a redshirt-freshman last season.



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Texas Christian University

2022: 13-2 (9-0 Big 12)



TCU quarterback Chandler Morris.

AP Photo

BY JUSTIN JACKSON

JJackson@DominionPost.com

In his first season at TCU, Sonny Dykes turned in the greatest turnaround story of the season.

TCU went from 5-7 in 2021 to going a perfect 12-0 in the regular season in 2022 and finishing 13-2 with a trip to the national championship game.

Dykes accomplished that on the strength of a roster that returned 18 starters overall that won eight games that was within 10 points.

Moving ahead, TCU must replace eight starters on offense, including Heisman finalist Max Duggan at quarterback.

The defense is in better shape with seven starters back and looks solid at linebacker and defensive back.

Offense

Even with Duggan gone from the offense, TCU sort of returns its starting quarterback in Chandler Morris.

The former Oklahoma transfer actually won the starting job in 2022, but was injured in the first game of the season.

Enter Duggan, who became the Big 12 Offensive Player of the Year.

But now Morris is back and ready to assume the job he won last season, but he'll have a ton of new faces around him.

The good news is TCU returns both starting tackles in Andrew Coker and Brandon Coleman.

The bad news is the Horned Frogs lost their top four receivers and top two running backs.

The running back spot could be filled by Alabama transfer Trent Battle and incoming freshman Cam Cook will likely get a good look, too.

Savion Williams had 29 catches for 392 yards, and he represents the team's leading returning receiver. Tight end Jared Wiley added 24 catches and four touchdowns.

Another Alabama transfer, JoJo Earle, could step in right away, as could LSU transfer Jack Bech and Oklahoma State transfer John Paul Richardson.

Defense

Cornerback Josh Newton is the top returner. He was an all-Big 12 first-team selection last season after finishing with 35 tackles, three interceptions and 12 pass breakups, but the Horned Frogs will miss Thorpe Award winner Tre'Vius Hodges-Tomlinson.

The back end is in fine shape with the return of safeties Mark Perry (84 tackles) and Bud Clark (45 tackles, 5 INT).

Florida transfer Avery Helm will also help out at cornerback.

At linebacker, leading tackler Johnny Hodges returns. Hodges was an all-Big 12 second teamer last season after finishing with 87 tackles. Jamoi Hodges (82

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Horned Frogs

September 30, 2023 @ Amon G. Carter Stadium

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tackles) also returns, giving TCU a solid 1-2 punch.

The defensive line will be led by sophomore Damonic Williams, who was solid as a freshman at nose tackle, but will need to find an edge rusher to replace Dylan Horton, who led the team with 10.5 quarterback sacks last season.

Defensive lineman Markis Deal was the top-ranked recruit in TCU's 2023 class, so he could see some time early.

Special teams

Griffin Kell was the Big 12's top kicker last season, going 62 of 64 on extra-point attempts and 17 of 19 on field goals. He returns for his senior season.

Punter Jordy Sandy also returns after averaging 39.9 yards per punt. The biggest need is finding a returner, where Derius Davis leaves a big hole after combining for 840 return yards and two scores last season.



Head Coach: Sonny Dykes

Years at School: 2
Record at TCU: 13-2
Overall Record: 84-65
Bowl Record: 2-3

PLAYERS TO WATCH

QB Chandler Morris, Soph. — Morris returns to take over the starting duties he lost to injury last season. In the season opener, Morris was 13 of 20 for 111 yards before a knee injury in the third quarter.

RB Trey Sanders, Jr. — Was a backup for three seasons at Alabama, where he rushed for 528 yards and averaged 4.6 yards per carry. The former 5-star recruit finally gets his chance to shine.

CB Josh Newton, Sr. — Opposing teams will have trouble throwing against an experienced TCU secondary, especially against Newton. He had 12 pass breakups last season and was named all-Big 12 first team.



AP Photo

TCU defensive back Josh Newton.



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University of Houston

2022: 8-5 (5-3 American)



Houston defenders Nelson Ceasar and Jamal Morris.

AP Photo

BY JUSTIN JACKSON
JJackson@DominionPost.com

Dana Holgorsen makes his return to the Big 12 with a second school this season. The former WVU head coach guided the Mountaineers through their introduction to the league in 2012, and now Holgorsen leads Houston through its first season 12 years later.

He'll do so looking to replace quarterback Clayton Tune, who passed for 4,074 yards and 40 touchdowns last season and was also the team's leading rusher with 544 yards.

Tank Dell is also a big loss at receiver after catching 109 passes for 1,398 and 17 TDs last season.

The Cougars also lost two starters on the offensive line to the transfer portal and eight of its top nine tacklers from last season.

Holgorsen is 20-7 at Houston over the past two seasons, but the Cougars first season in the Big 12 could be a rough transition.

Offense

Houston signed former Texas Tech quarterback Donovan Smith out of the transfer portal, so the Cougars may have a softer landing in replacing Tune than thought.

In two seasons with the Red Raiders, Smith passed for 2,686 yards and 19 touchdowns, while also adding 271 rushing yards and 10 scores.

The Cougars' top two recruits are wide receivers, and both Mikal Harrison-Pilot and Jonah Wilson will get their shots at early playing time.

The leading returning receiver is Matthew Golden, who caught 38 passes for 584 yards and seven touchdowns. The sophomore had two games with more than 100 yards last season.

A pair of former WVU starters could also help. Running back Tony Mathis Jr. rushed for 562 yards and five touchdowns last season, while tight end Mike O'Laughlin could add some help on the depth chart, but he's battled injuries throughout his career.

The running game does return both Stacy Snead and Brandon Campbell, but Mathis is the projected starter.

The offensive line was projected to return all five starters, but Cam'ron Johnson and Lance Robinson both entered the portal after the spring. Johnson is a tough loss.

Patrick Paul was the all-AAC first-team tackle last season and he returns, as does starting center Jack Freeman.

Defense

Houston allowed 422 yards and 32.2 points per game last season. With holes to fill on the defensive line and linebacker, it's hard to see how the Cougars improve those numbers in 2023.

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Cougars

October 12, 2023 (Thursday) @ TDECU Stadium

23

Up front, Oklahoma transfer David Ugwoegbu is being moved to a rush end after recording 110 tackles with the Sooners last season. He's the top name to watch on Houston's defense.

Jamal Morris (42 tackles) is the leading returning tackler, but he started just three games at linebacker last season. Malik Robinson was a starter at the start of the season, but was injured and out for the year after two games. He's now back, too.

Safety Hasaan Hypolite (32 tackles) is making the switch to linebacker and Trimarcus Cheeks also returns after starting five games last season.

The secondary will likely all be new and Holgorsen brought in a slew of transfers and junior-college recruits to fill those holes. The top name there may be former New Mexico safety A.J. Haulcy, who had 87 tackles last season.

Special teams

Alabama transfer Jack Martin may help a kicking game that struggled last season. Punter Laine Wilkins has a booming leg and averaged 43.7 yards per punt.



Head Coach: Dana Holgorsen

Years at School: 5
Record at Houston: 27-20
Overall Record: 88-61
Bowl Record: 4-6



William Wotring/The Dominion Post

Former WVU running back Tony Mathis transferred to Houston this offseason.

PLAYERS TO WATCH

QB Donovan Smith, Jr. — Started nine games over two seasons at Texas Tech. In those nine games, he averaged 278 passing yards. He also has 10 rushing touchdowns over his career.

RB Tony Mathis, Jr. — The West Virginia transfer is coming off his best season with 562 yards and five touchdowns. He averaged 4.2 yards per carry and had a career-high 163 yards against Baylor.

DE David Ugwoegbu, Sr. — A transfer from Oklahoma, where he was second on the team with 110 tackles. He also had two quarterback sacks and 5.5 tackles for loss.



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Oklahoma State University

2022: 7-6 (4-5 Big 12)



Oklahoma State running back Ollie Gordon.

AP Photo

BY JUSTIN JACKSON

JJackson@Dominion Post.com

Will it be the start or finish of the 2022 season that will be the tell-tale sign for Oklahoma State heading into this season?

At one point, the Cowboys were 5-0 and ranked No. 7 in the country, but Oklahoma State finished 2-6, including a loss against Wisconsin in the bowl game.

Quarterback Spencer Sanders was hurt down the stretch, which can account for some of that, but then Sanders transferred to Ole Miss.

Oklahoma State does return seven starters on offense and six on defense to help out the new quarterback, but it's also looking to fill holes at all the skill positions, as well as in the secondary and defensive front.

The Cowboys were picked seventh in an expanding 14-team Big 12 this season, meaning not many are really sure what to expect from OSU this season.

Offense

Garrett Rangel was a true freshman who started three games at quarterback last season. He'll be battling Texas Tech transfer Alan Bowman for the starting job.

The running back position didn't live up to expectations last season, but if sophomore Ollie Gordon lives up to recruiting expectations, the Cowboys may have their next great running back in house.

The key name on OSU's offense is receiver Brennan Presley. He led the team with 67 catches for 813 yards, but Oklahoma State lost its next five receivers to graduation or the transfer portal.

It brought in transfer De'zhaun Stribling from Washington State and keep an eye on tight end Josiah Johnson, a transfer from UMass.

The offensive line returns three full-time starters and six players who started at least once last season.

Oklahoma State's run production has dipped for four consecutive seasons, but that could change this season if the Cowboys don't suffer injuries up front like they did in 2022.

Defense

The defensive line is a major question mark. The only returning starter is Collin Oliver (28 tackles, five sacks), but he's being moved to outside linebacker.

Oliver is a preseason all-Big 12 first-teamer, along with defensive back Kendal Daniels, but the rest of the OSU defense has a lot to live up to.

Transfers Anthony Goodlow (Tulsa) and Justin Kirkland (Utah Tech) may help up front, but depth will be an issue.

Xavier Benson (76 tackles) returns at linebacker and Tulsa transfer Justin



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Cowboys

October 21, 2023 @ Milan Puskar Stadium

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Wright (101 tackles) could be a key name by season's end.

Daniels is moving to rover, which is a hybrid linebacker-defensive back spot, so the OSU secondary will have to fill some holes fast.

Korie Black returns at cornerback after recording 25 tackles and four pass breakups last season.

Both projected starters at safety — Lyrik Rawls and Trey Rucker — were backups last season. Both saw action in every game.

Special teams

Alex Hale was once a Lou Groza Award semifinalist in 2020, but an injury cut that season short. Last season, he only handled kickoff duties.

Hale is the projected kicker now, while Wes Paul will take over at punter.

Presley was the main returner last season and he averaged 24.3 yards per kickoff return.



Head Coach: Mike Gundy

Years at School: 19

Record at OSU: 156-75

Overall Record: 156-75

Bowl Record: 11-6

PLAYERS TO WATCH

RB Ollie Gordon, Soph. — Had a breakout game against WVU last season, rushing for 136 yards and a touchdown, but otherwise went through growing pains as a freshman. Averaged 5.0 yards per carry.

WR Brennan Presley, Jr. — A 5-foot-8 speedster who can do damage in open space. Caught 67 passes last season, but only two went for touchdowns. Also a dangerous kick and punt returner.

LB Collin Oliver, Jr. — A second-team all-Big 12 player last season as a defensive end. He's moving to outside linebacker this season. Finished with 28 tackles and five quarterback sacks last season.



AP Photo

Oklahoma State linebacker Collin Oliver.



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University of Central Florida

2022: 9-5 (6-2 American)



Central Florida linebacker Jason Johnson.

AP Photo

BY JUSTIN JACKSON

JJackson@DominionPost.com

Of the four teams coming in fresh into the Big 12 this season, none placed higher in the conference's preseason poll than UCF, which was picked eighth.

The Knights have an experienced coach in Guz Malzahn, who is in his third season. They also have a tradition of winning. UCF has averaged 9.8 wins over its last six seasons playing in the American Athletic.

The Knights enter Year 1 in the Big 12 on solid footing, returning eight starters on offense and seven on defense.

It's an offense that averaged 470 yards per game, despite shuffling quarterbacks due to injuries.

And the last time UCF entered a new conference — the Knights entered the AAC in 2013 — it won the league and played in the Fiesta Bowl.

Can history repeat? It's unlikely, but UCF appears to be better situated for the transition to the Big 12 as does other newcomers Houston, BYU and Cincinnati.

Offense

If quarterback John Rhys Plumlee can stay healthy, the Knights have the opportunity to be one of the more dynamic offensive teams in the Big 12.

The former Ole Miss transfer battled shoulder injuries last season, although he did play in all 13 games.

When healthy, the dual-threat quarterback has games like this: 339 yards passing and 121 yards rushing against Florida Atlantic or 176 yards rushing and 132 yards passing against Tulane.

In all, Plumlee threw for 2,586 yards and 14 touchdowns, while adding 862 yards on the ground with 11 scores.

The running game will also see tailback R.J. Harvey take over full-time. He averaged 6.7 yards per carry as a backup last season and had a breakout game with 151 yards on 17 carries against Memphis.

The offensive line lost three key starters, but the team brought in some talented transfers, beginning with Amari Knight (Alabama), Drake Metcalf (Stanford) and Bula Schmidt (Fresno State), who will likely get the start at center.

The Knights return four of their top five receivers from last season, as well, led by Javon Baker (a former Alabama transfer). He finished with 56 catches for 796 yards and five touchdowns.

Defense

The defensive line will be the key for the Knights. Two top starters in tackle Ricky Barber and end Tre'mon Morris-Brash return, but the line gave up 244 yards rushing per game over the last four games of 2022.

The line has good depth and the Knights' top recruit, 300-pounder John



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Golden Knights

October 28, 2023 @ FBC Mortgage Stadium

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Walker, will add to that.

Jason Johnson led UCF with 126 tackles and returns at outside linebacker and Georgia transfer Rian Davis could make an impact at middle linebacker.

The holes are in the secondary, where East Carolina transfer Jireh Wilson is projected as the starting free safety, while Clemson transfer Fred Davis will see a lot of time at cornerback. UCF does return starter Brandon Adams at corner, who had 34 tackles last season.

Special teams

Colton Bonner took over the kicking duties midway through last season as a true freshman and he was 14 of 15 on field-goal attempts with a long of 43.

Mitch McCarthy was also a true freshman last season, but was solid punting, averaging 43.4 yards per kick.



Head Coach: Gus Malzahn

Years at School: 3

Record at UCF: 18-9

Overall Record: 95-47

Bowl Record: 3-6

PLAYERS TO WATCH

QB John Rhys Plumlee, Sr. — One of the top dual-threat quarterbacks in the country when healthy. Had five games last season with more than 280 yards passing and five more with at least 100 yards rushing.

WR Javon Baker, Jr. — A former Alabama transfer who began to come into his own last season. The Atlanta native had five games with at least 80 yards receiving, topping out at 138 yards against SMU.

LB Jason Johnson, Jr. — A first-team all-AAC player last season after leading the Knights with 126 tackles. He had six games with at least 10 tackles, including 15 against East Carolina.



AP Photo

Central Florida quarterback John Rhys Plumlee.



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Brigham Young University

2022: 8-5 (Independent)



AP Photo

Quarterback Kedon Slovis transferred from Pittsburgh to BYU this offseason.

BY MATTHEW PEASLEE
Sports@DominionPost.com

The BYU Cougars enter their first season in the Big 12 looking to make a splash.

For the past 12 seasons, the Cougars have been Independent. Prior to that, they spent a decade in the Mountain West and were in the WAC for 36 years.

The new-age BYU football team has a fresh look in 2023, coming off an 8-5 campaign last year and a victory over SMU in the New Mexico Bowl.

The Cougars have just one previous matchup against West Virginia, a neutral site tilt at FedEx Field in Washington, D.C., in 2016 as the Mountaineers pulled out a thrilling 35-32 win.

BYU is entering a new conference at just the right time in its storied history, stringing together five-straight winning seasons and tallying double-digit wins in two of the last three seasons.

Offense

A familiar face to WVU fans is the new quarterback at BYU. Kedon Slovis, a transfer from Pitt, takes over the offense after completing 184 out of 315 passes for 2,397 yards and 10 touchdowns with the Panthers.

Slovis battled injuries and a turnover problem in the second half of the 2022 season and announced his intentions to transfer out of Pittsburgh even before the Panthers' bowl game. He's not the only one on the BYU offense looking for a change of scenery.

Starting running back Aidan Robbins, a Louisville native who spent two seasons with the Cardinals before transferring to UNLV last season, put up more than 1,000 rushing yards in his first full season of Division I football and ran for nine touchdowns.

The Cougars averaged nearly 32 points per game a year ago but lost all four

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Cougars

November 4, 2023 @ Milan Puskar Stadium

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of their starting wide receivers to graduation or transfer.

Defense

BYU head coach Kalani Sitake was a defensive assistant at several schools before taking over his alma mater in 2016. He will use his past experience to help break in a new defensive coordinator, Jay Hill, who spent the past few seasons as head coach at Weber State.

Sitake hired several other new defensive assistants this year after the Cougars ranked 97th in the country giving up 29.5 points per game and 94th allowing 408.1 yards per game.

Boise State transfers Jackson Cravens and Isaiah Bagnah will shore up the defensive front. Ben Bywater and Max Tooley return at linebacker after they battled injuries with the Cougars in 2022.

Also at linebacker is AJ Vongphachanh, a Utah State transfer who led the Aggies with 101 tackles last year. The secondary will be led by Eddie Heckard, Micha Harper, Malik Moore and Jakob Robinson.

Specialists

Ryan Rehkow is in his fourth season as starting punter and has as strong a leg as anybody else in the conference.

The Cougars must replace the program's all-time leading scorer Jake Oldroyd, who made 50 collegiate field goals and racked up 336 points.

Hinckley Robati, a backup running back, will likely be the team's kick and punt returner. There is also a new special teams coordinator, Kelly Poppinga, who also serves as the defensive ends coach.



AP Photo

BYU linebacker Max Tooley.

PLAYERS TO WATCH

QB Kedon Slovis, Sr. — Infamous for calling out West Virginia prior to the 2022 Backyard Brawl, Slovis is entering his first year with the Cougars following a one-year stint at Pitt and three seasons at USC.

LB Max Tooley, Sr. — Started six games in 2022 before missing the second half of the season with injuries, still finished as the team's fourth-leading tackler with 57 and is BYU's active leader in interceptions with six.

RB Hinckley Ropati, Sr. — May start the season at backup running back but has a chance to break out as one of the only seniors in the backfield. Has strong hands catching passes, too.



Head Coach: Kalani Sitake

Years at School: 8
Record at BYU: 56-34
Overall Record: 56-34
Bowl Record: 4-2

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University of Oklahoma

2022: 6-7 (3-6 Big 12)



Oklahoma quarterback Dillon Gabriel.

AP Photo

BY MATTHEWS PEASLEE

Sports@DominionPost.com

Last year was an uncharacteristically down season for the Oklahoma Sooners. Finishing 6-7, with only three conference wins and a loss to Florida State in the Cheez-It Bowl, Oklahoma is out to prove 2022 was just a fluke in its long and storied history. This year will be the closing chapter of the Sooners' 28-year run in the Big 12; prior to that, they were members of the Big 8 Conference dating back to 1920.

This is head coach Brent Venables' second year at the helm as he looks to make up for last season's failures just in time for a new journey in the SEC come 2024. Offensive coordinator Jeff Lebby and defensive coordinator Ted Roof are also in their second seasons in their roles and hope some retooling will be the ticket to gaining momentum in a pivotal transition for the program.

The Sooners received a solid transfer class that many said was the best in the Big 12.

Offense

Returning at quarterback is Dillon Gabriel coming off an impressive season, his first at OU, as he tossed for more than 3,000 yards and 25 touchdowns which earned him Big 12 Newcomer of the Year honors.

Behind Gabriel is five-star, National Gatorade High School Player of the Year Jackson Arnold, who could see a lot of snaps before likely taking over the starting role next season.

The receiving corps lost the talented Marvin Mims — drafted in the second round by the Denver Broncos — but Andel Anthony and Austin Stogner will become the top pass catchers.

The ground game also suffered the departure of Eric Gray — drafted in the fifth round by the New York Giants — but another duo of Jovantae Burns and Gavin Sawchuk are equipped to handle a bulk of the carries.

The strength of the offense is the offensive line, led by 6-foot-6, 320-pound Stanford transfer Walter Rouse at left tackle.

Defense

Defense is Venables' specialty, but there were definite holes that have been patched up coming into a new campaign.

Linebacker Danny Stutsman led the Big 12 with 125 tackles last year and Indiana transfer Dason McCullough was a freshman All-America who tallied 49 total tackles with four sacks.

Jordan Kelley and Isaiah Cole return along the line and will be joined by a group of several transfers.

Houston transfer Reggie Pearson, along with returners Woodie Washington and Billy Bowman will highlight the secondary.

Among the lowlights of 2022 were surrendering 30 points per game, 99th



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Sooners

November 11, 2023 @ Oklahoma Memorial Stadium

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nationally, and 122nd overall in total defense. The memory of an embarrassing 49-0 loss to rival Texas is something the Sooners have to wash away if they want to improve on defense this season.

Sprcialists

The kicking game may be a bit inexperienced. Field goal duties will be handled by Zach Schmitt, who missed six attempts last year.

Central Michigan transfer Luke Elzinga will be handed the starting punting role but needs experience playing in tough environments.

The best aspect of the special teams will be in the return game, as LV Bunkley-Shelton and Jalil Farooq, also wide receivers, are speedy and explosive.



Head Coach: Brent Venables

Years at School: 2
Record at Oklahoma: 6-7
Overall Record: 6-7
Bowl Record: 0-1



AP Photo

Oklahoma linebacker Danny Stutsman.

PLAYERS TO WATCH

LT Walter Rouse, Sr. — This huge presence is one of 11 transfers the Sooners got through the portal following Rouse's Campbell Trophy finalist campaign at Stanford.

QB Dillon Gabriel, Sr. — He put up eye-popping numbers throwing the ball but Gabriel is also quick on his feet, rushing for more than 300 yards and six touchdowns last season.

LB Danny Stutsman, Jr. — Danny Stutsman: Another solid season could make Stutsman a first-round NFL Draft pick. Along with 125 tackles, he also had three sacks and two interceptions.



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University of Cincinnati

2022: 9-4 (6-2 American)



Cincinnati defensive lineman Dontay Corleone.

AP Photo

BY MATTHEW PEASLEE
Sports@DominionPost.com

Of the four newest additions to the Big 12 Conference, Cincinnati is certainly the most familiar with those in Morgantown.

From 2005 to 2012, the Bearcats and Mountaineers locked horns together in the Big East. From 2013 to 2022, Cincinnati was stuck in the American Athletic Conference, though it punched well above its weight class.

The Bearcats had a winning record in all but two seasons in the AAC and finished with three double-digit win seasons, including a trip to the CFB Playoffs in 2021.

The history with West Virginia predates the Big East as the first matchup between the two programs took place on Oct. 1, 1921 — a 50-0 WVU win in Morgantown. The Mountaineers own a 16-3-1 record against UC, with the most recent win coming in the last game of the series, a 24-21 win on Nov. 12, 2011, in Cincinnati.

This year's Bearcats have fallen down from their recent string of success, going 9-4 a year ago, finishing third in the AAC and losing to Louisville in the Fenway Bowl, 24-7.

The new era of UC football starts at the top with a new coach, Scott Satterfield, who was actually with Louisville for four seasons. His team is new all around, too, with only seven returning starters — six are on defense.

Offense

A new-look offense also highlights the 2023 campaign with Emory Jones at quarterback. He is an Arizona State transfer who started his career at Florida.

Jones is a dual-threat quarterback who has more than 1,300 rushing yards in his well-traveled career. Through the air, he has amassed 4,880 yards with 33 touchdowns in 45 career games. He was a top 100 prospect coming out of high school in 2018, but there is still competition at the position.

Cincinnati-native Evan Prater may see some time at quarterback after playing there sparingly the past two seasons. He is also listed as a starting wide receiver.

There is no shortage of wide receivers to get the ball to and almost all of them, aside from Prater, are transfers. Dee Wiggins from Miami and Louisville, Donovan Ollie from Washington State, Xzavier Henderson from Florida and Aaron Turner from UConn are definite deep-ball threats.

On the ground, UC was 10th in the AAC last year with barely over 100 yards per game rushing, though Corey Kiner and Myles Montgomery have greatly improved.

Defense

If the Bearcats hope to compete right away in their new conference, the

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Bearcats

November 18, 2023 @ Milan Puskar Stadium

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defense will have to take it up a notch.

The homegrown Cincinnati native Dontay Corleone was regarded as one of the best all-around defensive players in the country last season as a freshman. At 6-2, 320 pounds, Corleone is a force up front. Joining him on the line are Malik Vann and Jowon Briggs who are sack masters and live in opponents' back-fields.

Deshawn Pace is a veteran defensive player who plays all over the field. He will mostly see time at linebacker, joined by transfers Daniel Grzesiak (Utah State) and Dorian Jones (Louisville).

In the secondary, transfers Jordan Young (Florida) and D.J. Taylor (Arizona State) join a pair of experienced players in Sammy Anderson Jr. at corner and Bryon Threats at safety.

Specialists

Mason Fletcher finished fourth nationally with 46.3 yards per punt last season. Carter Brown will handle kicks after transferring in from Arizona State.

It's unclear who will return kicks for UC after Tre Tucker was drafted by the Las Vegas Raiders last season. He averaged nearly 25 yards per kick return in 2022.



Head Coach: Scott Saterfield

Years at School: 1
Record at Cincinnati: 0-0
Overall Record: 76-48
Bowl Record: 4-1

PLAYERS TO WATCH

DL Dontay Corleone, So. — Racked up 45 total tackles, 5.5 tackles for a loss, three sacks, two forced fumbles and two fumble recoveries in 2022.

WR/QB Evan Prater, Jr. — Even add RB to the mix for this wild Bearcat, he will see action in numerous formations though he may not always be in the starting lineup.

OL Gavin Gerhardt, Jr. — The only returning starter on offensive, he stands at 6-4, 3-5 pounds and is excited to lead the new-look offense.



AP Photo

Cincinnati wide receiver/quarterback Evan Prater.

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Baylor University

2022: 6-7 (4-5 Big 12)



Baylor running back Richard Reese.

AP Photo

BY MATTHEW PEASLEE
Sports@DominionPost.com

Baylor has the potential to win the Big 12, like it did three times in the past 10 seasons and as recently as 2021, but a losing season in 2022 has put a blemish on the recent success of the program.

A three-game winning streak highlighted the middle part of last season, but the Bears dropped four-straight games to end the season, including a two-touchdown loss to Air Force in the Armed Forces Bowl.

Dave Aranda enters his third season as head coach and three new coaches, including defensive coordinator Matt Prowledge, join his staff, looking for a new vision on all sides of the ball. The Bears were middle of the pack in the conference in both defensive and offensive production a year ago, but they return 12 total starters who are ready to improve.

Offense

At one point, he was one of the most highly touted high school prospects in the country. Now, Baylor quarterback Blake Shapen is attempting to get back to the basics to lift his team.

The redshirt junior completed 233 of 368 passes — a completion percentage of 63.3 was fifth-best in program history and his 2,709 yards was ninth-best in Baylor history.

Sawyer Robinson, also a big name in the prep ranks, is a transfer in from Mississippi State and will assume the backup role to Shapen.

Monoray Baldwin was Shapen’s favorite wide receiver last year, as he led the team with 33 catches. Other receivers are Hal Presley and Josh Cameron. Ketrone Jackson (Arkansas) and Jake Roberts (North Texas) transferred in to provide depth in the passing game.

The running backs will be taking a big step this year with Oklahoma State transfer Dominic Richardson and freshman All-American Richard Reese leading the way.

Up front, brothers and transfers from BYU Campbell and Clark Barrington, anchor the offensive line. They were part of a Cougars unit that only allowed 15 sacks in 2022.

Defense

Powledge was a co-defensive coordinator at Oregon last season, but it’s a homecoming of sorts for the DC at Baylor now. He was one of Aranda’s first hires back in 2020 and he returns to lead the defense moving forward. Last year, the Bears gave up 371 yards and 26.8 points per game.

Devin Lemear is the top returning starter after he made 57 tackles with two interceptions and two fumble recoveries. Alongside Lemear in the secondary are Bobby Devin, Tevin Williams and Miami transfer Isaiah Dunson.

Up front, redshirt senior defensive ends TJ Franklin and Gabe Hall lead the



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Bears

November 25, 2023 @ McLane Stadium

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way after Siaki Ika was drafted by the Cleveland Browns. Mike Smith transferred in from Liberty and looks to be the top linebacker.

AJ McCarty played safety a year ago but moves over to be a linebacker this year.

Specialists

Isaiah Hankins has never missed an extra point, but he did miss most of last season. He will handle the field goals for the Bears while freshman Palmer Williams takes care of the punting duties.

Jordan Nabors plans on returning punts, while Baldwin will return kicks.



Head Coach: Dave Aranda

Years at School: 4
Record at Oklahoma: 20-16
Overall Record: 20-16
Bowl Record: 1-1



AP Photo

Baylor quarterback Blake Shapen.

PLAYERS TO WATCH

LB Mike Smith, Sr. — Last year, he racked up 85 total tackles, with 10 tackles for a loss and three forced fumbles while at Liberty.

RB Richard Reese, So. — He totaled nearly 1,000 rushing yards and 14 touchdowns as a Baylor freshman last year.

WR Monaray Baldwin, Jr. — The top returning receiver led the team in catches (33), yards (565) and touchdown receptions (4).

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Coach Bios

Blaine Stewart, tight ends

Hometown: Morgantown
Education: James Madison, 2016 (bachelor's); Charleston, 2017 (master's)
Playing Career: James Madison, 2013-15; Charleston 2016-17

Blaine Stewart is in his first year on the Mountaineer coaching staff as the tight ends coach.

Stewart comes to the Mountaineers from the NFL's Pittsburgh Steelers, where he has worked as the assistant wide receivers coach for the past two years. In that role, he assisted in game plan preparation and installation, coached the defensive scout team, broke down opponent film and conducted self-scouts. He assisted a wide receivers room in 2020 that included rookie wide receiver Chase Claypool, who led all NFL rookies in touchdown catches (9) and finished second among all rookies in total touchdowns (11).

From 2018-20, Stewart was a coaching assistant on Mike Tomlin's staff in Pittsburgh, and he brings a total of four years of NFL experience with him to Morgantown.

In his first two NFL seasons, he worked with the offense and special teams and was responsible for quality control of the entire offensive unit. He coached the defensive scout team, compiled weekly offensive installation plans and produced opponent scouting reports. Stewart also played a significant role in leading the wide receiver position group during a coaching vacancy as well as helping the personnel department prepare for



the NFL Draft and free agency.

During his four seasons with Pittsburgh, the Steelers were the AFC North Champions in 2020 and made the playoffs twice. He coached three Pro Bowl receivers in Antonio Brown, JuJu Smith-Schuster and Diontae Johnson.

In January 2020, Stewart coached the West quarterbacks at the East-West Shrine Bowl, leading individual meetings and being involved in all aspects of offensive installation, game planning and practice schedules.

Stewart started his collegiate playing career at James Madison (2013-15) as a wide receiver. He finished his playing career at the University of Charleston (2016-17), where he was coached by former Mountaineer football staff member Pat Kirkland.

He received his bachelor's degree from James Madison in 2016 and a master's degree from Charleston in 2017. Stewart played high school football at Morgantown High School for Coach John Bowers and captained the 2013 West Virginia OVAC All-Stars who defeated the Ohio OVAC All-Stars at Wheeling Island Stadium. While at MHS, Stewart also played baseball and ran track.

He is the son of the late West Virginia head football coach Bill Stewart, who led the Mountaineers to a 28-12 (.700) three-year record from 2008-10. His mother, Karen, still resides in Morgantown.

Andrew Jackson, defensive line

Birthday: Feb. 18
Hometown: Middletown, N.Y.
Education: LIU Post, 2011 (bachelor's); Long Island, 2012 (master's); Stony Brooke, 2014 (master's); Penn State, 2017 (master's)
Playing Career: LIU Post, 2007-11
Family: Wife, Blair

Andrew Jackson is in his third year as the defensive line coach.

Jackson came to Morgantown after serving as the defensive line coach and recruiting coordinator for defense at Old Dominion in 2020.

Jackson started his coaching career at LIU Post as a graduate assistant.

Jackson was a three-year captain



and three-year starter for LIU Post. He was an All-Pennsylvania State Athletic Conference Second Team honoree as a senior after recording five sacks and 12 tackles for loss for the Pioneers.

Jackson earned his bachelor's degree in physical education science and coaching from Long Island University in 2011 and three master's degrees, one in Interdisciplinary studies from Long Island in 2012, liberal arts and science from Stony Brook in 2014 and educational leadership from Penn State in 2017.

He and his wife, the former Blair Kersh, were married in July 2022.

Bilal Marshall, receivers

Hometown: Miami Gardens, Fla.
Education: Purdue, 2016 (bachelor's); West Virginia, 2021 (master's)
Playing Career: Purdue, 2012-16
Family: Wife, Alexa

Bilal Marshall rejoined the Mountaineer football coaching staff as the receivers coach in January 2023.

He returns to West Virginia after serving as the wide receivers coach at VMI for the past year.

Prior to VMI, Marshall was an offensive graduate assistant on Neal Brown's coaching staff in 2020 and 2021, working with the wide receivers.

Marshall began his coaching career at Champagnat High School in



Miami, Fla.

Marshall played the 2017 season in the Canadian Football League for the Ottawa Red Blacks.

He was a receiver for Purdue from 2012-16 and played in the Heart of Dallas Bowl in 2012. As a senior, he was the team's second-leading receiver with 40 catches for 477 yards and three touchdowns.

Marshall, a native of Miami Gardens, Fla., with numerous ties to that area, earned his bachelor's degree from Purdue in 2016 in organizational leadership and his master's degree from WVU in communications studies in 2021.

Coach bios courtesy of WVU Athletics

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Contact Becky Raspperry at the NCOA WV Resource Center at 1(304)218-2873 for more information.

2022 Season Recap

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Game 1: L, 38-31 @ No. 16 Pitt



William Wotring/The Dominion Post

Game 2: L, 55-42 OT vs. Kansas



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Game 3: W, 65-7 vs. Towson



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Game 4: W, 33-10 @ Virginia Tech



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2022 Season Recap

Game 5: L, 38-20 @ Texas



AP Photo

Game 6: W, 43-40 vs. No. 23 Baylor



William Wotring/The Dominion Post

Game 7: L, 48-10 @ Texas Tech



AP Photo

Game 8: L, 41-31 vs. No. 7 TCU



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2022 Season Recap

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Game 9: L, 31-14 @ Iowa State



AP Photo

Game 10: W, 23-20 vs. Oklahoma



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Game 11: L, 48-31 vs. No. 17 Kansas State



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Game 12: W, 24-19 @ Oklahoma State



AP Photo

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