

# HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL PREVIEW

THE DOMINION POST

2023

AUGUST 25, 2023 SECTION C



HAWKS



CEE-BEES





# University faces tough early season schedule



The seniors on University High School's football team, left to right, James Fortney-Garbart (82), Melique Lewis (45), Alex Donato (57), Anthony Rivera (62), Tanner Aucremanne (36), Luke Hudson (11), Seth Drvar (63), Trey Blunt (70), Michael Henson (25), John Coleman (8), Mason England (79).

## Kelley leads young Hawks in 37th year coaching UHS

BY MICHAEL GRIFFITH  
Sports@DominionPost.com

MORGANTOWN — Entering his 37th season as the head coach of the University High School football team, John Kelley has seen nearly every type of scenario when it comes to football.

This season, with nearly 80% of the roster either freshmen or sophomores, Kelley, his staff and the players are looking past a slight lack age and experience and focusing on discipline and playing to their strengths.

"We've had a great summer. The three-week period went well, now we're having a good camp," Kelley said. "A lot of young players who are inexperienced but I love it because they're talented. I say this every year, but the only way to get experience is by getting experience. The more they get, the better they're going to be. I think we have some great senior leadership and some older guys who are very talented returning for

us as well."

Fortunately, UHS has some impact players returning at key positions of the field, particularly on offense.

Senior quarterback Luke Hudson will enter his second year as the starter after throwing for over 2,500 yards last year. That includes a 500-yard, five touchdown performance against Wheeling Park.

"Luke has a ton of talent and threw the ball well last year," Kelley said. "Melique Lewis should be a force with a good offensive line. We have some receivers that can also go out and make plays. The defensive line is strong; Brock Kehler could be one of the best linebackers in the state."

Hudson and John Coleman, who also play on the basketball team together, have a strong connection when it comes to the football field and this year, will help each other lead a team that has a lot of eyes on its captains.

"We have a lot of people

that have come in an stepped up that we didn't expect," Hudson said. "Last year really helped me build the connections with the guys on the team that will carry over to this year, especially in the offense with the lineman and John and the wideouts."

Coleman said the examples set before him by the leaders he looked up to is something he hopes to do for the ones looking up to him now.

"Being a senior now we know we have to take the next step and be that leader," Coleman said. "It's important to keep that in mind before and during the season."

The Hawks will welcome two former members of the Trinity Christian football team, who had their program paused for the season due to lack of players. Junior Josh Jorge and sophomore Marcos Kniska will both aim to make an impact with UHS this fall.

The Hawks will open the year with two games at

home, first welcoming John Marshall to Baker's Ridge, followed by Parkersburg South, who appeared in the state championship game last season.

Two tough road tests at Brooke and Wheeling Park then face UHS, with the annual Mohawk Bowl being hosted this season on Oct. 27 at University High.

"John Marshall is going to be a tough start, then we have a tough team coming here in Park South, who I predicted to be in the championship last season," Kelley said. "Brooke has an experienced roster, Wheeling Park has some of the best talent in the state. Fairmont Senior reloads every year. I hope we can make some noise the second-half of the season and then we get to play Morgantown here, which we always like to do. I can always see a season going many ways, but we have the tools to make this one successful."

### University Schedule

- AUG. 25:** John Marshall 7:30 p.m.
- SEPT. 1:** Parkersburg South, 7:30 p.m.
- SEPT. 8:** at Brooke, 7:30 p.m.
- SEPT. 15:** at Wheeling Park, 7 p.m.
- SEPT. 22:** Fairmont Senior, 7:30 p.m.
- SEPT. 29:** at Buckhannon-Upshur, 7 p.m.
- OCT. 13:** Spring Mills, 7:30 p.m.
- OCT. 20:** at Preston, 7 p.m.
- OCT. 27:** Morgantown, 7:30 p.m.
- NOV. 3:** at Oak Hill, 7 p.m.



John Kelley is entering his 37th year coaching at Univeristy High School.


 <b>Alex Donato</b>	 <b>Anthony Rivera</b>	 <b>Brock Kehler</b>	 <b>James Fortney-Garbart</b>
 <b>John Coleman</b>	 <b>Luke Hudson</b>	 <b>Mason England</b>	 <b>Melique Lewis</b>
 <b>Tanner Aucremanne</b>	 <b>Michael Henson</b>	 <b>Trey Blunt</b>	 <b>Seth Drvar</b>



University quarterback Luke Hudson (11) makes a pass against Fairmont Senior last season. The senior is entering his second season as the Hawks' starting quarterback after passing for over 2,500 yards in 2022.



University wide receiver John Coleman (8) makes a catch during a game against Wheeling Park last season. As one of the seniors on the UHS football team, Coleman has stepped into a larger leadership role for 2023.




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# Cee-Bees on the hunt for 3rd straight playoffs



Benjamin Powell/The Dominion Post

The seniors on the Clay-Battelle football team, left to right, Dakota Walls (42), Easton Rowan (62), Maddox Shriver (36), Zac Hall (2), JC Spears (9), Brady Nestor (14) and Joe Stewart (70). Not pictured: Gunner Price (20).

## Clay-Battelle Schedule

<b>AUG. 25:</b>	at Hundred 7 p.m.
<b>SEPT. 8:</b>	Valley, 7 p.m.
<b>SEPT. 15:</b>	Beallsville (Oh.), 7 p.m.
<b>SEPT. 22:</b>	at Tygarts Valley, 7 p.m.
<b>SEPT. 29:</b>	at Hancock (Md.), 7 p.m.
<b>OCT. 6:</b>	Meadow Bridge, 7 p.m.
<b>OCT. 13:</b>	at Cameron, 7 p.m.
<b>OCT. 20:</b>	Belpre (Oh.), 7 p.m.
<b>OCT. 27:</b>	Paden City, 7 p.m.
<b>NOV. 3:</b>	Magnolia, 7 p.m.



Benjamin Powell/The Dominion Post

Ryan Wilson is entering his 29th season as head coach of Clay-Battelle football.

## Coach Ryan Wilson not downplaying his team’s goals

**BY MARK SCHRAF**  
Sports@DominionPost.com

BLACKSVILLE — On the first day of camp, Clay-Battelle’s veteran football coach Ryan Wilson brought it out into the open right away, talked about the elephant in the room, the one subject that some coaches ignore like a telemarketer’s phone call.

Playoffs.

“Yeah, we talked about a three-peat,” he admitted.

“Sure. We’ve qualified several times over the years, including the last two seasons, and I think it’s a good thing when your program is strong and consistent enough to where that’s an expectation every year. But we just mentioned it, then moved on and got to work. Getting to the post-season is always a goal every year, and we also know what it takes to get there.”

And it’s clear that the 2023 Cee-Bees are going go

as far as their talented senior backfield — quarterback JC Spears, fullback Max Shriver, and tailback Zac Hall — will take them.

“These guys played a lot for us last year,” Wilson explained, “so they’ve had plenty of varsity reps. They know what to expect, they know what’s expected of them within our offensive and defensive systems, and I know they’re really ready for their senior year. It’s their team, their chance to

make their mark, and all three of them are doing a great job preparing both themselves and our team for the season.”

Clay-Battelle’s offense is usually working at its best when featuring a balanced attack and Wilson feels like he’s been blessed with an arsenal of weapons to choose from.

“Spears is very comfortable in the passing game —

SEE CEE-BEES, C-6

 <b>Brady Nestor</b>	 <b>Dakota Walls</b>	 <b>Easton Rowan</b>	 <b>Gunner Price</b>
 <b>JC Spears</b>	 <b>Joe Stewart</b>	 <b>Maddox Shriver</b>	 <b>Zac Hall</b>



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# After Trinity Christian called off football, Marcos Kniska and Josh Jorge found a new home at UHS

BY MICHAEL GRIFFITH  
Sports@DominionPost.com

MORGANTOWN — After the pausing of the football program at Trinity Christian School on August 1, some of the Warriors' players have found a home in other programs around both Monongalia and Preston counties.

Per WVSSAC rules, with TCS being a private school, as long as the players hadn't participated in a practice after the designated beginning of the football season they could choose to play for whichever school was within the district of their home address.

Sophomore Marcos Kniska and junior Josh Jorge will join head coach John Kelley and the University Hawks for the 2023 season, and possibly beyond.

Jorge will transfer in-full, also attending UHS for school. Kniska will continue at Trinity Christian as a student and play with University as an athlete.

"Marcus Kniska is a real talent," Kelley said. "Josh Jorge, too, those guys are real talents. You can say that they were playing in single-A (with Trinity), but they can play at this level. They're very good. Kniska has really jumped off of the page defensively for us."

Jason White, who was named head coach at Trinity earlier this offseason, is a former assistant on Kel-



William Wotring and Benjamin Powell/The Dominion Post

Sophomore Marcos Kniska (42), left, and junior Josh Jorge (12), right, will be playing football for University High School after Trinity Christian was forced to cancel its season due to a lack of participation. Kniska led the Warriors in tackles as a freshman last season, racking up a team-high 78. Jorge was a two-way player at TCS, totalling 56 tackles to go along with 356 receiving yards and six touchdowns.

ley's staf and knew the talent of Kniska and Jorge could make an impact on any football team.

"Coach White, who was named the coach there and was on our staff for years, came up here for one of our practices and said that they had made the decision," Kelley said. "He said, 'You're going to get one of mine, and contrary to what you may have heard, he

may have been the best player that I had last year.' I was thinking, 'what? I don't know who he is.' But (Kniska) came in for a few days without pads and elevated fast."

It will be on the defensive side of the ball where both players could make the most impact. Kniska led TCS in tackles as a freshman with 78, including 39 solo tackles. Jorge tallied 57

himself, while also catching 28 passes as a wideout for 356 yards and six touchdowns.

"The transition has been good so far, to me, they've welcomed me and I like it here," Kniska said.

Jorge agreed with his teammate.

"Transition has been good," he said. "The kids have been nice. The coaches also, I couldn't ask

for a better staff."

Going from Class A to Class AAA is something both say they are excited to experience, especially at a school like UHS with the opponents they play and they crowds that they get to enjoy.

"The crowds, how loud it can get and the lights on Friday nights, it's going to be fun," Jorge said.

Kniska says the chance

to play at UHS while still attending TCS is the perfect option for him.

"I found out less than two weeks ago that we wouldn't have a team," Kniska said. "I had the opportunity open up for me to come here and play football while still going to school at Trinity. That was the golden opportunity for me."

# John Marshall leaning into smash-mouth identity

BY NICK HENTHORN  
The Intelligencer

GLEN DALE — Entering the 2023-24 season, the John Marshall Monarchs are decreeing a new edict — head coach Mark Cisar and his crew aim to dominate their opposition in the trenches.

Coming off a 4-6 season, the Monarchs are adapting to their new collection of players by moving away from their previous spread system and diving head-first into a new identity as a bruising, smash-mouth football team.

As John Marshall looks to have a successful, winning season, establishing an identity is a key first step against a tough slate of opponents.

"Our expectations are high," Cisar said. "We return a bunch of offensive linemen, a bunch of defensive linemen on both sides of the ball. Our expectation is to make the playoffs, that's our goal every year, is to get in the playoffs, and then let's see what happens."

"Our schedule is very good, it's very competitive. Last year, of our 10 teams we played, six teams made the playoffs. It's the same caliber this year, a very challenging schedule. But we still have great expectations and it all starts with our line play."

Cisar and his staff's decision to lean on their linemen was not ill-informed — the Monarchs are set to boast one of the biggest lines in the area, with an average weight of



William Wotring/The Dominion Post

John Marshall's Ashton Collett (28) stiff arms Preston's Trevor Thomas (11) during a game in Kingwood in 2021.

279 pounds, and two linemen topping 300 pounds.

"At left tackle will be Andreas Hunter, big kid, 6-5, 305," Cisar said. "Beside him will be Caleb Yates, who will be moving from center to guard, and our center will be Scotty Schenerlein, who last year was our number six lineman, but ended up getting a ton of reps in at different spots."

"Then we've got a two-year starter coming back at guard, Victor McElwee. Then we've got a new guy filling in at right tackle this year, he got a ton of reps last year in JV and who's done a good job for us this summer, Tanen McNeil. Four guys

who played a ton for us last year on the offensive line, and they're all really big, really strong kids."

Also in the mix will be Aiden Price, Bo Drake, Mason Mrkonich, Kyle Williams, Kreyton Gallaher, Josh Kaste, Silas Summers, Hudson Markwas, Jason Minor, Allick Summers, Willie Vessels, and Gage Hercules.

With familiarity, experience — all five starters are seniors — size and grit, the Monarchs will march to the drum of their big boys up front.

"It all starts with our line on offense," Cisar said. "We'll go as far as our line goes."

"Last year we were more spread, more three, four-wide. This year we're packing it in a little bit, and we're going to lean on our o-line this year. We're going to depend on them to win games. We're going to control the ball, and see what they can do. That's the goal going in, now could that change? Absolutely that can change, but right now that's our goal."

There remains a question to be answered for the Monarchs: who will be under center, taking snaps from their prime line? John Marshall has a quarterback contest on it's hands, between sophomores Kayden Knapp and Jackson

Helms.

"Right now, neither one has really taken the spot, they're still competing for the spot," Cisar said. "Both of them provide different things, one's got a stronger arm, one may roll out a little better than the other one. They're both sophomores, it's nice, we'll have them for two more years after this year. Hopefully we can run it, we don't think we'll throw it a ton this year, but if we have to they're very capable of throwing the ball."

Conor Fitzpatrick and Quinton West will be John Marshall's specialists this year.

Senior Dimarion White figures to be "our main guy on the outside," Cisar said, along with senior Mason Hagedorn, sophomore Xavier Wells, and junior Kaden Bungard.

Also in the mix to catch passes out wide for John Marshall is Hunter Dunfee, Jacob Thames, Gavin Mason, Cain Martin, Curtis Whorton, Luke Beaton, Ryan Hughes, Bryar Haught, Alexander Callislie and Waylon Wysong.

Where the Monarchs really want to hone in on is the running game. John Marshall is set to roll out a menagerie of skill sets and personnel to run the rock behind the offensive line.

At fullback, John Marshall is eyeing Brady Deem, Andrew Lyons and Eugene Henry III. All three can also play tight end. Henry III will see most of his playing time in-line.

"We'll have Brady Deem

who plays fullback, also will play some tight end. We'll also have Andrew Lyons who will play fullback, also some tight end. We have a nice tight end this year, our main tight end will be Eugene (Henry III). Eugene does a great job blocking so it just compounds on our running game."

Junior Maverick LeMasters is moving from fullback to tailback, and is prepared for a full workload this fall.

"Maverick LeMasters will probably not come off the field this year." He's a tailback, he's a linebacker, he's a team leader, and he's only a junior, so expect good things out of him."

"Maverick LeMasters will probably not come off the field this year. He's a tailback, he's a linebacker, he's a team leader, and he's only a junior, so expect good things out of him."

Two-way play will be close to the norm for the Monarchs this season, a challenge Cisar wants his team to be ready for.

"That's probably our biggest thing right now—we've got a lot of guys who are going both ways right now so we've got to be in-shape. We do have 13 seniors, but at the same time a lot of guys are going to play both-ways because the positions they're in, we're thin. We do have a lot of young guys, freshmen and sophomores, but they're not ready for varsity action right now. Maybe we get through the season a little bit, they get reps, maybe they can help us out."

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CEE-BEES

FROM PAGE C-3

we saw that in our 7-on-7 competitions in the summer,” Wilson said. “Hall will be our home run hitter both on the ground and in the passing game, and Shriver has really improved his speed and conditioning. Anytime you have a fullback who can get to the edge on a sweep, that’s something special that you’d like to use to your advantage.”

So how does this talented trio feel as they approach their final football season?

In a word, confident.

“We’ve grown up here in

this locker room and on this field with all our friends,” Hall explained, “and we’re all really close. We’ve run the same basic offense and defense, so we all know the system pretty much inside and out. Everything is in place, and now it’s our turn to go out and get the job done.”

Shriver concurred completely.

“So much hard work for so many years is about to pay off,” he smiled. “Camp is all about knocking the rust off, getting acclimated to getting hit again, and sharpening up our execution. We know our receivers are really athletic, and I think we’ve got a

chance to be an explosive, big-play offense as well as control the clock with our running game. We’re ready to go.”

While his two teammates lead more by example, Spears is embracing his spot as the vocal leader as well as commander of the offense.

“I’ve learned a lot watching from the sidelines and playing with some of the upperclassmen,” he explained. “But now it’s my time – it’s our time – to run this offense and make it go. I know that every player on this team knows his role, and everybody will get a chance to make an impact. That’s what has made camp

so great so far. Everybody knows they have to be ready.”

So about that P-word?

“Look, this is Clay-Battelle,” Spears stated with conviction, “and it’s not a good season if we don’t make the playoffs. It’s just expected, and I think that’s a good thing. But we don’t think too much about it either, because Coach Wilson is really good at helping us focus on each game as it comes. He always says, ‘we are 0-0 after every game’, and we know that if we take care of our business each week, we’ll be there at the end.”



Benjamin Powell/The Dominion Post  
Clay-Battelle running back Zac Hall (2) makes a move during a game against Cameron last season.



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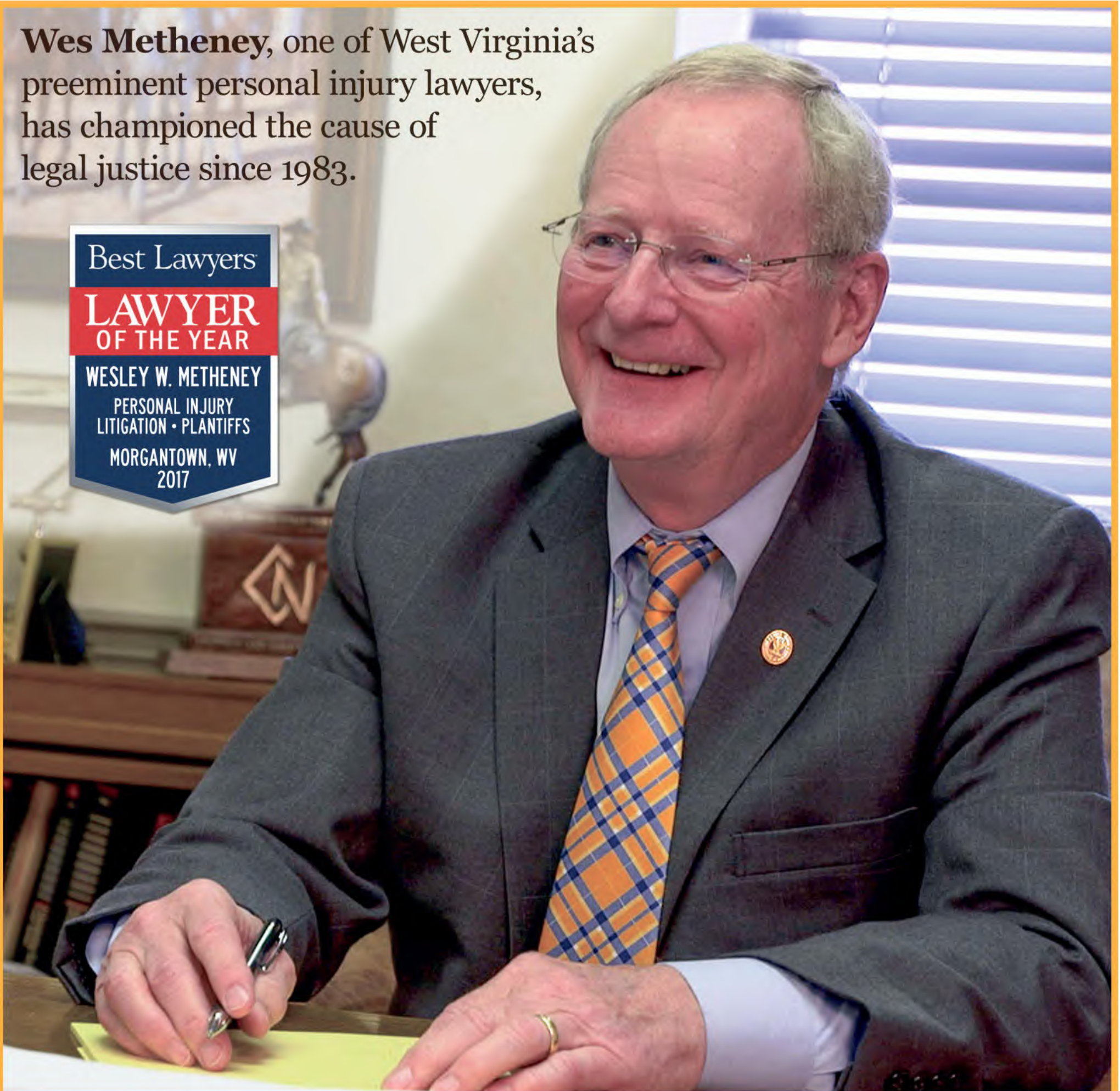
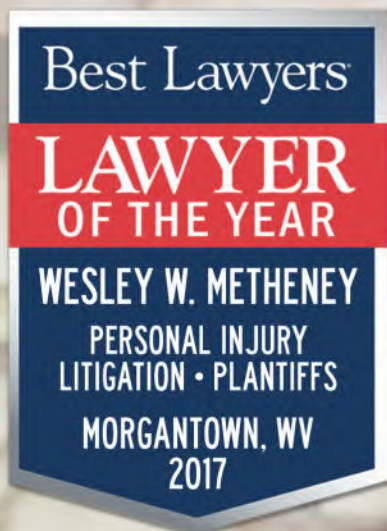
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# HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL PREVIEW

THE DOMINION POST

2023

AUGUST 25, 2023 SECTION D

## MOHIGANS



## KNIGHTS





# Expectations are soaring for Morgantown football in 2023



William Wotring/The Dominion Post

The seniors on Morgantown's football team. Front row, left to right, Braylon Brown (55), Maddox Bowers (16), Caleb Nutter (26), Bobby Powell (11), Jacob Keir (12), Andrew Phares (13), Nick Despresoro (88), Jake Anderson (24) and Marcus Ullom (32). Middle row, left to right, Malik M'Bayo (54), Trey Andis (23), Trenton Brigman (71), Jaylon Hill (22), Michael Savasta (42), Mikey Burkhart (60), Patrick Ryan (51) and Gary Lazzelle (43). Back row, left to right, Gage Pettis (74), Ryan Principe (69), Andrew Anobile (21), James Harper (27), DaQuan Jones (81), Landen Bradley (80), Nic Jones (6) and Caleb Parks (73).

## Morgantown Schedule

**AUG. 25:** South Charleston 7:30 p.m.  
**SEPT. 1:** at Bridgeport, 7 p.m.  
**SEPT. 8:** Musselman, 7 p.m.  
**SEPT. 22:** at Buckhannon-Upshur, 7 p.m.  
**SEPT. 29:** Wheeling Park, 7 p.m.  
**OCT. 6:** at Fairmont Senior, 7 p.m.  
**OCT. 13:** Parkersburg South, 7 p.m.  
**OCT. 20:** at John Marshall, 7 p.m.  
**OCT. 27:** at University, 7:30 p.m.  
**NOV. 3:** Linsly, 7 p.m.



William Wotring/The Dominion Post

Sean Biser is entering his fourth season as head coach of Morgantown football.

## Mohigans boast 25 seniors on roster

**BY ERIC HERTER**  
Sports@DominionPost.com

**MORGANTOWN** — Expectations always seem to be at the highest this time of year when it comes to high school football.

The injuries haven't happened yet, the aches and pains are minor, and no one has lost a game.

At Morgantown High School, expectations are high for the 2023 season, but not just for the normal reasons. The Mohigans return 25 seniors and have roughly 120 players out for a team that returns plenty of talent.

Head coach Sean Biser, in his fourth season, has seen the atmosphere around MHS steadily improve after inheriting a program that had just 85 participants in his first season.

"It has been a steady uptick over the last four years," Biser said. "We had some kids that didn't want to put the work in that didn't come back, but overall practices have been very competitive."

Biser enjoys the compe-

tition so much that not even returning starters are guaranteed their spots for week one.

"We return a lot of kids," Biser said. "Every job is up for grabs. We have a very big senior and sophomore class but as a coach you have to be able to adapt and change every season."

With skill players such as running backs Bobby Powell, AJ Thomas and Caleb Nutter returning in Biser's run-heavy Wing-T offense, the talent level is there for MHS to improve upon last year's 6-5 record and first-round exit in the playoffs.

The key for MHS is going to be in the trenches where it lost several starters from a year ago but does return some players with playing experience.

"Up front is going to be a big challenge for us," Biser said. "The kids who have waited their turn are going to get a shot."

Tight end Nick Deprospero figures to be a key component to the offensive line along with senior tackle Braylon Brown and senior guard Malik

M'Bayo. The other three spots are up for grabs as of right now with Trenton Brigran and Caleb Parks competing for the center spot. Ryan Principe, Dylan Shinkovich and Blake Buffington are fighting for time at tackle while Akir Johnson, Patrick Ryan, Gate Pettis, and Mike Burkhardt are all in the mix at guard.

"You usually know who your top five players are on the team," Biser said. "But the players who are six through 30 are going to be the ones who have to come up and play. Maybe an average player who works hard can turn themselves into a good player. That is the core of your team."

Senior Maddox Bowers is likely to start quarterback for the Mohigans, but Biser did say he will have to fend off competition from junior Alex Himes and senior Jacob Keir.

While Biser admits that he does enjoy running the ball, the Mohigans might air it out a little more this season with Powell, Nutter, Keir and Andrew Phares all

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## MOHIGANS

FROM PAGE D-2

capable of catching the ball.

“We want to do what helps us win,” Biser said. “In years past, we ran the ball because that’s what we did best. If we have kids that can throw and catch, we will air it out a little.”

Bowers is returning from an arm injury that he suffered at the end of last season. That injury prevented him from playing baseball in the spring but does have the signal caller feeling fresh to begin football season.

“I’m going into camp healthy,” Bowers, who injured his SC joint in his arm, said. “This is the best my arm has actually felt in a long time.”

While the MHS offense averaged over 28 points a game last year, it was the defense that struggled at times. In fact, the Mohigans surrendered just nine points a game in their victories but 37.4 points in their losses.

“We would like to shave the points off the defensive average,” Biser said. “There were a couple of times that we got in shootouts with people. I am a firm believer in defense winning championships

and hopefully we can improve.”

Last year, the Mohigans switched to a 4-3 hybrid defense from a base 4-4 under defensive coordinator Adam King and a key cog in that defense is Nutter who mans one of the linebacker spots.

“We have to be physical on defense,” Nutter said. “We have a saying where we want nine guys to the ball. This year, we need all 11 rallying to the ball and getting everyone on the ground.”

The line will be key on the defensive side as well with Brown, M’Bayo, and Deprospero all back after seeing time up front last season. Biser said that junior Owen Williams and senior Marcus Ullom will also see time on the line.

Powell is the anchor of the defense from a cornerback spot as he seems to always be around the football.

“He sets the tone,” Biser said of Powell. “He is going to run through you when he comes at you, and he is going to take your soul when he hits you. He is one of the hardest hitting players that I have coached.”

Thomas, Kier and Phares will also see time in the defensive backfield. Nutter anchors the

linebacker corps with Jaylon Hill, Troy Andis and Jake Anderson also in the mix.

The MHS special teams should be solid with Aiden Stire back at kicker while Powell and Landon Bradley will share punting duties.

Once again, the Mohigans will face a tough schedule. They open with a home contest against South Charleston on Aug. 25 but also face Bridgeport, Musselman, Wheeling Park, Fairmont Senior, and rival University High School this year.

“At Morgantown High, we don’t have a track record of ducking people,” Biser said. “I know there are games out there that some junior would like us to play but I think our tough schedule has hurt us at times. It’s tough to play all those teams without being dinged up.”

Biser said this might be his most talented team at MHS, but the focus remains on each play.

“We don’t worry about winning a game,” Biser said. “This play is our mentality. In the grand scheme of things, we want to win a state championship and my expectation is our guys are going to work towards that every day.”



Benjamin Powell/The Dominion Post

The Morgantown High School football team celebrates with the Mohawk Bowl Trophy after their victory against University last season.

# Wheeling Park Patriots looking to sustain 13-year playoff streak

BY NICK HENTHORN  
The Intelligencer

WHEELING — Going into the 2023-24 season, the Wheeling Park Patriots have a long track record of success behind them—and they expect, the pieces to continue to push forward at that same high standard.

With a playoff streak nearing the same number of years as some of the Patriot’s players’ ages, and a 7-4 record last year, there can be no doubt as to what Wheeling Park is working towards with the start of the season nearly upon them.

“Expectations are always high here at Wheeling Park,” head coach Chris Daugherty said. “I think we’ve made the playoffs 13 years in a row. Obviously we want to add to that. But it’s one week at a time—we’re going to have some young kids in some spots out on the field and it’s going to be real important that we just get a little bit better every week.”

Though they suffered some losses through graduation as every team does annually, the Patriots are hardly starting fresh, and are confident that the less

experienced among them can step up their games each day.

“Sophomores become juniors about midseason, and maybe juniors and seniors that didn’t get to play a ton last year are now looking like seasoned veteran kids,” Daugherty said. “I think the early part of the season is going to be real important for us, to be mistake-free. But also to continually grow every week, every practice.”

Offensively, Wheeling Park returns many parts of last year’s whole, though there is a new face at quarterback. Junior Aidan Davis will be tasked with running the offense this year.

“We have a new quarterback, but he’s a talented kid. And he had to wait for another talented kid to graduate. But honestly, Aidan Davis was capable of playing last year, he’s a quality quarterback, now it’s his turn to take over the offense and show everyone what he can do.”

“We’ve seen a lot of great things out of him in practice but now it’s going to be Friday nights that he’s going to get to go out. We expect big things out of him

for the football season.”

Davis will hardly be required to shoulder the entire show, as his surounding cast is filled with talent and experience. Senior tailback Zac Lydick, and senior wide receivers Mykel Davis and Keohn Stephens Jr. return after productive seasons in ‘22-’23.

Mykel Davis set a school record last year with four touchdown receptions in a single game.

“[Mykel Davis] had a standout year last year,” Daugherty said. “He really got better as the year went on.”

Along with Lydick, sophomore Amare Johnson figures to see time both in the backfield and lined up as a receiver. The up-and-coming athlete has quite a bit of family history going for him as well.

“We think we have a nice young tailback for us in Amare Johnson,” Daugherty said. “His brother was an all-state tailback for us, his father was an all-state tailback for us, they both went on to play college football.”

“But Zac is quality, so we’re going to use Amare in some ways where he might

be in the backfield, he might be a wideout, an inside slot. Amare’s going to be on the field as a wide receiver and maybe a back.”

Versatility can be a key advantage for the Patriots offense, between Johnson and another multi-faceted player, Jameson Maynard, who Daugherty called “the heart and soul of our team.”

Maynard, a junior, figures to line up as from the slot, as an in-line tight end, and in the backfield as a lead blocker or ball carrier. The ability to line up players in different spots, without bringing in different groupings of players, can help keep Wheeling Park from showing their hand.

Also in the receiver room—and defensive back room—will be Kam Shanley, Noah Short, Jared Marsh, Ian Richards, Owen Dobrzynski Hines, Mason Charlton, Xavier Neider, Isaac Sands, Bradley Kraft, Kolin Wiley, Brennan Wack, Cazz Campbell, Landon Hollingshead, Ronald Proctor, Michael West and Sinecar Galberth.

In the runningback room along with Lydick and Johnson are junior

Trey Kocher, junior Isaac Swauger, sophomore Jerome Maynard, sophomore Malaki Washington, sophomore Channing Biery and junior Gabe Larance.

Along the offensive line, junior Cameron Bryan looks to build off a sophomore season where the big man thrived in a position where physical maturity and strength is paramount.

“Our right tackle is returning in Cameron Bryan,” Daugherty said. “He’s only a junior but he had to start last year as a sophomore and he had a great season. He’s an even bigger, better version of himself.”

Junior Hunter Means and senior Derek Croghan are also penciled in at right and left guard, both receiving playing time along the line last season. The Patriots are not completely settled at center or left tackle yet, though junior Luke Miller and senior Carson Miller appear to be the front runners at each of those respective spots.

When it comes to the defensive side of the ball, it once again starts with Maynard, who returns as the

team’s middle linebacker.

In the trenches, Derek Croghan and Hunter Means give Daugherty and Park a luxury in two experienced, tough interior defensive linemen to repel run games and push the pocket.

Playing deep for the Patriots is another experienced player in Jared Marsh. Experience and speed, both physically and mentally, are must-haves at free safety, and Marsh—who Daugherty called “the brains back there [at safety],” checks all the boxes.

Surrounding those core four, senior Jordan Beasley will figure in heavily along the defensive line, Washington and Nolan Yanchak are top candidates for linebacker next to Maynard, while Mykel Davis and Stephens Jr. will likely fill in as defensive backs, perhaps next to Marsh as the safety tandem, perhaps in the mix at corner with senior Ian Richards, who saw plenty of time at cornerback last year, and Kam Shanley, who likewise got reps across from opposing wide-outs.

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# Knights look to continue building under coach Mark Deep



William Wotring/The Dominion Post

The seniors on Preston High’s football team, left to right, Donavan Weaver (52), Greyson Kuhn (64), Dillon Taylor (8), Aiden Swain (50) and Riley Land (20).

**BY MICHAEL GRIFFITH**  
Sports@DominionPost.com

KINGWOOD — Preston High School football head coach Mark Deep and his program have experienced plenty of “growing pains” over the years as far as the youth and inexperience of the roster at the Class AAA level.

Despite only five seniors on the team coming into the 2023 season, the Knights are slightly larger in numbers, welcome three new coaches on the staff and could find some success aiming to build on a 1-9 2022 record in a year that will be very important for the program going forward.

“This is what the summer is for,” Deep said. “We’ve been able to see some things click and take positive steps with our

scrimmages. We saw some things we were prepared for and that we weren’t prepared for and we will learn from that. We try to get as much out of our offense and defense as we can and there’s more to be done now and long-term for the season.”

Deep and his team will welcome two transfers from Trinity Christian, Aaron White and Landon Goodwin, after the temporary halting of the football program at the private institution. Per WVSSAC rules, since TCS hadn’t held a single football practice after the official season began, the players could choose to play for the school that was in-district of their home address. White and Goodwin will both suit up for PHS this season, and

will have a chance to see playing time and make a positive impact.

White, checking in at 6’5 and over 220 pounds, is only a junior and could be a big part of both the offensive and defensive lines for the next two seasons at Preston.

One returning senior, captain Greyson Kuhn who lines up on both lines for PHS, says the offseason has felt like one of the best he’s had during his time in the program and that he knows the future of the team is now.

“The summer has been awesome and we’ve seen so many freshman come out this year,” Kuhn said. “With only the five seniors we know they will rely on us a lot but we have a bright future up here with the

coaching staff and the youth. We are just ready to get out there and go fight.”

Three new coaches will join coach Deep on the sidelines this season in Dominic Lough, Drew Toth, and Kevin Fike. Toth will serve as the offensive coordinator and the QB/RB coach, while assisting the linebackers and DB’s on the other side of the ball.

“These first couple of weeks and games are important for leading and showing these new guys to have no doubt and play hard,” Kuhn said. “We are trying to build the pride back at this school and really show what we can be. In the past we’ve had roster of 30 or so players total, and this year we have over 20 freshman coming out for the team.”

## Preston Schedule

- AUG. 25:** at Hampshire, 7 p.m.  
**SEPT. 1:** at North Marion, 7 p.m.  
**SEPT. 8:** at Fairmont Senior, 7 p.m.  
**SEPT. 15:** Robert C. Byrd, 7 p.m.  
**SEPT. 22:** at East Fairmont, 7 p.m.  
**SEPT. 28:** Woodrow Wilson, 4 p.m. (Thursday)  
**OCT. 13:** at Bridgeport, 7 p.m.  
**OCT. 20:** University, 7 p.m.  
**OCT. 27:** at Buckhannon-Upshur, 7 p.m.  
**NOV. 3:** Philip Barbour, 7 p.m.



**Riley Land** **Greyson Kuhn** **Donavan Weaver** **Dillon Taylor** **Aiden Swain**



William Wotring/The Dominion Post

Preston’s Ethan Likens (7) reacts after making a play against Hampshire during a game last season.

Deep and his team will open the season with three straight games on the road, beginning with Hampshire who defeated the Knights 28-21 in the 2022 season opener. Two tough games against North Marion and Fairmont Senior follow in weeks two and three. PHS will play its home opener on September 15, welcoming Robert C. Byrd.

“We know where we need to improve at and we will get to work on that next week,” Deep said. “We have some talent on this team and are hopeful and excited to get started with this group.”

# Three new assistant coaches will be roaming Preston’s sideline

**BY MICHAEL GRIFFITH**  
Sports@DominionPost.com

KINGWOOD — The future of the football program at Preston High School is now. With a roster of only five players in the senior class and a large chunk aging in the freshman and sophomore ranges, head coach Mark Deep and his staff know this year will be crucial for success in the years to come.

One attempt to make a change is to bring in some new faces when it comes to coaching, something Deep has done in the offseason with the addition of three new assistant coaches. Kevin Fike, Drew Toth, and Dominic Lough will all join the Knights football program.

Toth will coordinate the



William Wotring/The Dominion Post

Preston football head coach Mark Deep added three new assistants to his coaching staff for 2023.

offense and coach the quarterbacks and running backs, while helping defensively with the linebacker group.

Fike will serve as the defensive coordinator and

also coach the inside linebackers on defense, assisting with the offensive line on the other side of the ball.

Finally, Lough will assist the wideouts and defensive

backs of the team.

Each bring years of coaching experience to the sidelines, and Deep said all three have done a wonderful job so far.

Lough comes to Preston after spending the past two seasons at Grafton High School, where Toth was the head coach previously.

“I recently moved from Morgantown to Grafton, so when the opportunity came up I couldn’t pass it up,” Lough said. “All of the staff has welcomed me with open arms and the transition has been smooth.”

Lough says one thing that has stood out to him with his new players is their coachability.

“I am impressed with how coachable our players are here,” he said. “They are willing to step put of

their comfort zone to learn things they never have before. Our team goal is to change the culture of the program this season and be competitive on Friday nights.”

Toth mentioned the challenge of being a first-time coach with a program, especially one aiming to turn itself around. After spending the past seven years on staff at Lincoln High School, Toth is ready to help the Knights win games.

“Personally I’m excited for the challenge that comes with this position at Preston,” he said. “The opportunity is exciting, I’ve been pleased with the effort from the kids so far, physically and mentally both. It’s not easy to go out and change a playbook or a

scheme, and they’ve done well.”

Fike is back for his second stint in the county after spending eight years coaching at East Preston.

“Being able to come back to the county I graduated, where my sons graduated, and where my grandkids will graduate from is special,” Fike said. “The evaluation process has been emphasized early in the year. Coach Deep and I talked before the season about the defense and we like the 4-2-5 and are working on the implementation.”

“We’ve got some young kids in the group, but they have potential,” Fike said. “They have some size and athleticism and we have some good things to work with in the group.”



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