

2023 HIGH SCHOOL



FOOTBALL PREVIEW

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A special supplement to *The Farmville Herald*, *The Kenbridge-Victoria Dispatch* and *The Charlotte Gazette*

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Paying tribute to 'the boys of fall'

We played on grass, mud or whatever was available. If the only option was the concrete parking lot, then hey, that worked too.... until somebody tried to tackle. In the small western North Carolina town where I grew up, sports meant different things. Baseball was a seasonal thing,

it was what you did during spring and summer. The only problem was making sure we had enough players. Basketball? That was only if you had a goal at the house or knew someone else who did. But football? Football was a year-round deal. It was the after-meal game at family summer barbecues, it's what you did at Thanksgiving, going outside

to throw the pigskin while the adults tried not to burn the turkey. (And now having assumed that 'don't burn the bird' role, I can respect how hard it was for them).

There's just something about the game that gets people energized. Grab a couple friends, no matter the age, and you've got a game. You can go 3 vs. 3, 8 vs. 8 or in this case, 11 vs. 11. For at least the next 10 weeks, the spotlight falls on our local football fields, come Thursday and Friday nights (and some Saturdays too). Yes, classes have started back and there's plenty to talk about in terms of everything from politics to festivals. But when Friday comes, the sun goes down, the lights go up and for those few hours, everyone is a kid again, cheering on their team.

In high school, I was a two-sport guy, playing baseball and suiting up as a fullback under those Friday night lights. It's hard to put into words what those games mean to a player, but I can definitely talk about the cheering section.

Our high school science teacher Mrs. Minton had a cowbell you could identify out of any crowd. Then there was the church choir, who teamed up at games to form the most unique cheering section imaginable. And yes, they stayed in harmony the whole time. I also remem-



Brian
Carlton

ber when my grandfather and dad jury-rigged a series of car horns to go off any time the team scored, which was often.

So here we are. It's time for another high school football season, a chance for each of us to play a role. Are you a first-time parent in the stands? Maybe you're there with a group or you just feel like going to a game. Do you have a cowbell on hand? I can tell you that your cheers matter. Each of these players hear your voices loud and clear. And they will remember. Let's give them all some good memories to look back on.

BRIAN CARLTON is the editor for Farmville Newsmedia, LLC. He can be reached at Brian.Carlton@FarmvilleHerald.com.



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What to watch: Must see games of 2023

BY MATT HATFIELD

High school football returns this month all across the state of Virginia. For many – whether that means players, coaches or fans alike – there are some new twists and turns to get accustomed to when the 2023 campaign officially begins.

Various schools move up or down in the VHSL's six classification system. There are also some new regions to adapt to as well as subtle scheduling changes.

So what are the must-see matchups on the gridiron?

“Like I tell my wife, every game is big when the Chargers play,” quipped Central Lunenburg Head Coach Will Thomas, whose Chargers will certainly be involved in some interesting tilts after enjoying their first unbeaten regular season in 27 years.

“The district will be tough, and like al-

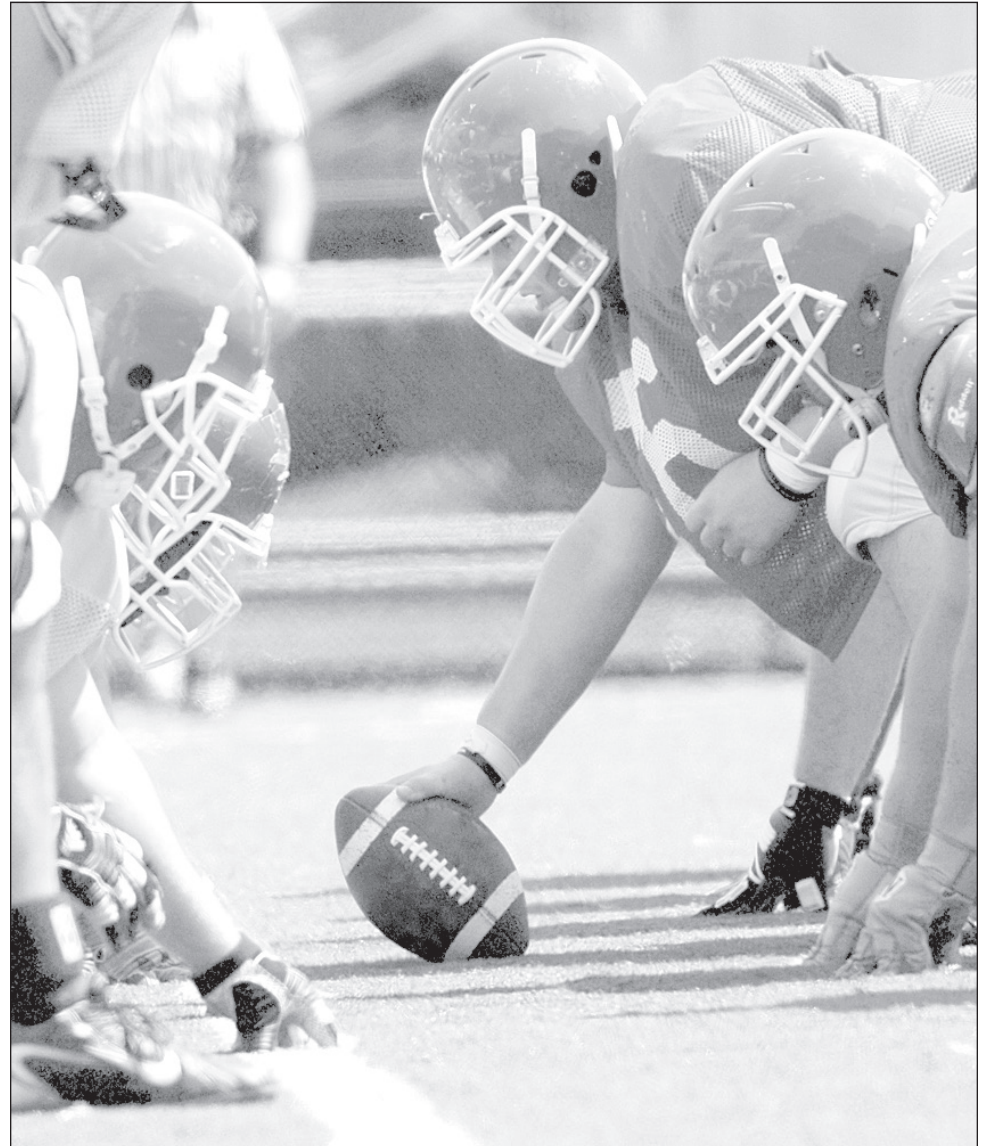
ways, we'll be in a dogfight. Sometimes it goes in cycles. That's the beauty of High School Football.”

Nonetheless, we're here to bring you five games to circle on your calendar if you're an area football fan that could be worth your time checking out ...

FIVE TO SEE:

- **September 15** — William Campbell at Randolph-Henry: For a Randolph-Henry team that just barely missed the playoffs in 2022, this one looms largely as an out-of-district matchup that could better position themselves for a spot in the postseason in Region 2A. William Campbell has owned the Statesmen to the tune of a 13-1 record in the series since 1997. Randolph-Henry's lone win in that stretch came by a 34-28 margin in 2013. Look for Kanye Dailey, a 2nd Team All-James River District running back, to power the ground game for Ray Conner's crew.

- **September 22** — Buckingham at



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Central-Lunenburg: These games have produced some absolute classics and nail-biters in recent years. In the past seven meetings, Lunenburg is 4-3 with two of those battles – 2018 and 2021 – going to overtime. All four wins in that stretch came at home in Victoria for the Chargers. Last year, Seth Wilkerson's Knights were blanked 14-0, which was stunning considering they had eclipsed 40-plus points on five occasions on the season. It also marked the program's first regular season shutout loss since 2017 when Nottoway beat them 21-0, one year prior to Wilkerson's arrival.

• **September 23** — Prince Edward at Northumberland: This is a very rare matchup for Prince Edward to take on Northumberland. As far as the all-time series goes, Prince Edward leads it 2-0, winning 20-12 in 1979 and 14-12 in 1978. It could be close again as the Indians, usually a contender out of the Northern Neck District and Class 1, must replace dynamic Tennessee signee Cam Seldon, but welcome back eight starters on defense. This is a good

gauge for Larry White's Eagles before diving into the teeth of their James River District slate.

• **October 13** — Central-Lunenburg at Nottoway: Ending a four-game losing skid in the head-to-head series, Lunenburg not only re-grouped from a 28-14 loss to Nottoway two years ago, but simply steamrolled them to the tune of 47-0 in 2022. The Cougars will surely be out for revenge, though this one has the makings to be a much closer affair and go a long way towards determining the James River District Championship.

• **November 3** — Amelia at Buckingham: The Raiders of Amelia return a host of players on both sides of the ball. In fact, just three of their 11 All-District honorees were seniors. Buckingham dropped three straight in the series to Amelia from 2016-18 before winning each of the past three encounters. This one will have major playoff implications with Amelia competing in 2A and Buckingham in a rugged 2B that now features a Riverheads team that won seven straight Class 1 state titles.



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Eagles come in with a driven mindset

BY BRIAN CARLTON

PRINCE EDWARD

The players learned a lesson from last season. When the Prince Edward Eagles walked off the field for the last time in November, having beaten Randolph-Henry 30-14, they saw what could have been. The 5-5 Eagles fell just short of the playoffs and promised themselves and their coach not to let that happen again.

“Most of them showed up in January, ready to work,” Prince Edward coach Larry White said. “They saw how close we were to making the playoffs and their goal is to get in here, do the work to have a winning season and make the playoffs this time.”

White said he’s seen a difference in the mindset since everyone started working. The team wants to learn, they want to do more than just line up on Fridays. They want to study plays, get in the weightroom and do the work

needed to be successful.

“I want to give the whole team credit, because it’s been a team effort,” White said. “Everyone wants to be in that mix for the top teams in the district. They worked on getting the “I” and “me” out of their system. It’s becoming “we” and “us” on and off the field. They’ve realized to be successful, we don’t just do football. We don’t just lift weights or play on Friday. We’re working on fundamentals and going from there.”

The biggest part of that, White said, is seeing players encouraging each other, motivating and picking up when others struggle.

MAKING SOME CHANGES

This marks White’s fifth season with Prince Edward, but just his fourth full year, due to the pandemic. You can already see the development during that time. Two years ago, the Eagles were

2-8. Last year, they made the improvement to go 5-5 and fell just short of the playoffs. And that playoff chase was just a couple points out of reach. If that 22-20 loss to Greenville County goes a different way, who knows what would have happened.

White says the players see how close they were. And they don’t want to be

close again. They want to be in the hunt.

This marks White’s 15th year in coaching. He spent nine of those at Prince Edward Middle School, with two more at Buckingham High. Throughout all that time, his philosophy has stayed the same.

“My philosophy has always been run



Prince Edward County High School Varsity Football Head Coach Larry White, left, gives instruction to one of his players.

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first," White said. "I'm gonna run to open up the pass. I've been a run first man ever since I've been coaching."

To do that successfully, you have to build a strong connection between the running backs and the offensive line. The Eagles are focusing on zone and combo blocking this season. A combo block is where you use two linemen to block defenders on different levels. One offensive lineman catches the defensive end rushing in, while another picks up the linebacker. That can free a running back for some big gains, but they all have to be in synch. That's where this year's buy-in from the team, coming in early and learning those fundamentals, studying hard with the playbook, all pays off.

"These boys all wanted to improve and they're doing what it takes to make that happen," White said.

LOOKING AHEAD

When it comes to this year's schedule, White said he and his team already know there are a few games people have circled. Lunenburg Central comes to town on Sept. 29 and the Eagles will go on the road to face Buckingham on Oct. 20.

"Buckingham and Lunenburg, they were 1 and 2 last year, so we know what they bring to the table," White said. "But as far as what we're looking at, we're focused on everybody in the district. Every team is gonna be tough. We know this going in. But the thing is, we all go in with a 0-0 score. You just have to compete with them and play hard. That's what we're going to do."

Prince Edward starts off the season at home against Chatham, then goes on the road against Altavista, before returning to take on Nelson County here. The way this season is structured, there's no real home or away series. By that, we mean the Eagles play one game at home, then go on the road the next week and vice versa. It's similar to last year, where the back and forth allowed the team to get into a rhythm early and rattle off three straight wins to start the season.

This time around, White said he's looking for players to step up, to take leadership on and off the field and make good decisions.

"I like to push my guys to be the best they can be," White said. "They know I love them but show tough love as well."

Prince Edward Eagles — 2023 Schedule —

Aug. 25	Home vs. Chatham	7 p.m.
Sept. 1	Away vs. Altavista	7 p.m.
Sept. 8	Home vs. Nelson County	7 p.m.
Sept. 23	Away vs. Northumberland County	1 p.m.
Sept. 29	Home vs. Central Lunenburg	7 p.m.
Oct. 6	Away vs. Amelia County	7 p.m.
Oct. 13	Home vs. Randolph-Henry	7 p.m.
Oct. 20	Away vs. Buckingham County	7 p.m.
Oct. 26	Home vs. Nottoway County	7 p.m.
Nov. 3	Away vs. Cumberland County	7 p.m.

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Knights look to make a playoff run

BY MATT HATFIELD

BUCKINGHAM

The Buckingham Knights are traditionally considered one of the top contenders in both the James River District and Class 2 level. The 2022 squad finished 8-3 overall, achieving its fourth straight winning season. Their three losses all came to quality opponents in Appomattox, Central-Lunenburg and Central-Woodstock, which ended their season in the opening round of the playoffs by a count of 17-12. Those three teams went a combined 33-8 overall.

Now, the Knights wipe the slate clean with sights set on making a splash in 2023 after graduating roughly 13 senior starters, many of whom had a significant impact.

“We’re younger this year than we have been in a while. We’ve got more sophomores this year than I can

remember. I think we have a good core group that I’m excited about,” Wilkerson stated.

“We’re going to need some of those sophomores to grow up pretty quick and play some key roles. The main thing is they just need reps. We’ll use the film from these two scrimmages we’ve got and go from there.”

SETTING THE TONE

Two seniors, linemen KorDonte’ Williams and Ethan Martin, return in the trenches for Buckingham to set the tone. Williams, who is drawing recruiting attention from a host of schools that include Hampden-Sydney, is coming off a stellar junior campaign where he posted 65 tackles, 11 stops for loss, five sacks, three fumble recoveries and two forced fumbles.

“He’s just a great all-around kid. He

went from starting at quarterback his sophomore year when we got out of COVID and then his junior year we asked him to play offensive line. He had no problems with it and ended up being All-Region on the offensive and defensive line,” Wilkerson relayed.

“I don’t know too many players who would take that kind of change the way he did. We just told him we needed him on offensive line, he said ‘Yes, Coach,’ and that was it.”

Defensively, Buckingham really shined during its seven-game winning streak last year when they held opponents to just 7.4 points per game. They’re optimistic some new faces will step up around their two line leaders, Williams and fellow senior Demorris Eubanks, as well as sophomore DE/TE Emerson Edwards and junior linebacker Will Motley.

Replacing the rushing production of Kymeir Lockett and Kenneth ‘K.J.’ Williams, who together rushed for more than 2000 yards a season ago, won’t be an easy task for the Knights. Wilkerson mentioned they have about eight different running backs in the equation. Their preseason scrimmages with Class 3 contender Brookville and Luray will give them a better idea of where they stand in terms of the depth chart.

“We’re going to find out in these



SETH WILKERSON

Buckingham Knights Head Coach

scrimmages who’s going to get the majority of the carries,” Wilkerson said.

FOCUSING ON QBs AND WRs

Senior Zahir Chambers will be used at quarterback after enjoying moderate success both throwing and running with the football during last year.

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He'll have a capable group of receivers, headlined by junior Jayden Maxey, sophomore Amare Gough and senior Jarrod Gaines.

Buckingham opens its season on August 25 at home against Appomattox, a perennial powerhouse in Class 2. Appomattox has won five of the past eight state titles at the Class 2 level, including three straight from 2015-17. The Knights then play Madison County, William Campbell and Fluvanna before their district opener at Central Lunenburg on September 22.

Regardless of who lines up on Friday nights or who the opposition is, the aspirations don't change at Buckingham.

"Our goals remain the same. Win the district and advance in the playoffs," Wilkerson commented. "Our main thing is we're just trying to get better each day. We're ready to get it rolling."

Buckingham Knights — 2023 Schedule —

Aug. 25	Home vs. Appomattox County	7 p.m.
Sept. 1	Home vs. Madison County	7 p.m.
Sept. 8	Away vs. William Campbell	7 p.m.
Sept. 15	Away vs. Fluvanna County	7 p.m.
Sept. 22	Away vs. Central Lunenburg	7 p.m.
Sept. 29	Away vs. Randolph-Henry	7 p.m.
Oct. 6	Home vs. Nottoway County	7 p.m.
Oct. 20	Home vs. Prince Edward County	7 p.m.
Oct. 27	Away vs. Cumberland County	7 p.m.
Nov. 3	Home vs. Amelia County	7 p.m.



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A return to regionals? Chargers look to keep building

BY MATT HATFIELD

LUNENBURG

A proud program with four state titles in its history – 1980, 1986, 1987 and 1992 – the Central Chargers of Lunenburg are gearing up for another quest to get to the top. The squad is fresh off its first unbeaten regular season since 1995, though veteran coach Will Thomas knows there are quite a few holes to fill from the 11-1 team that dominated the James River District before falling to eventual State Champion Riverheads by a count of 42-13 in the Region 1B Championship.

“We’re going to need some J.V. kids from last year who are sophomores to step up. Our defense was very solid last

year. It didn’t show against Riverheads, but every other game they played really well,” commented Thomas, embarking on his 16th season at the helm.

“We lost probably about 75% of our rushing output last year, but we do have a good group coming on the offensive line. Those guys have been playing forever and are seniors. They’ve got a little bit of size.”

Hunter Word, a four-year starter at center who measures in at 6-foot-4, 255 pounds and earned Second Team All-Region honors a season ago, anchors the o-line.

“It’s good to have him. He’s a good, reliable player and a tough kid,” Thomas

noted.

Word is joined in the trenches by fellow seniors in Collin Burke (6-5, 275) and Hayden Gary (6-1, 215).

There’s also experience at the quarterback position in senior Connor Mattox, who besides earning Second Team All-Region accolades at defensive back last year, proved to be a prudent decision maker with the football in completing 59% of his passes for 334 yards and 10 touchdowns compared to just one interception during the regular season.

Thomas also likes his ability to escape out of the pocket and make plays.

“To be 215 pounds, he’s got some wheels,” pointed out Thomas of his field general who ran an 11.30 in the State Championship 100 meters in track. “We’re going to have to depend on his legs this year because he’s big, strong and fast.”

Others that will be counted on for

rushing production include junior Amarrion Moore and senior Thomas Morrison, an All-Region First Team selection as a kick returner. Morrison scored a key touchdown in their 15-14 playoff win over Buffalo Gap last November.

“He’s a small guy, but he’s pretty quick,” said Thomas, adding that Tony Jones will also see time at halfback in addition to lining up on defense.



Central Lunenburg Head Coach Will Thomas gives instruction to his players during a practice.

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Perhaps the biggest graduation loss is that of Jamel Alexander, one of the eight defensive starters that must be replaced. A stalwart at defensive end and tight end, Alexander was tabbed the James River District Defensive Player of the Year in 2022.

Thomas will turn to a couple of First Team All-JRD performers in Mattox and Seth Bishop, who racked up 56 tackles and four interceptions through the first 10 contests last year, to be the cornerstones of the defense for 2023.

“Both of them started as freshmen on a team that lost in the regional finals to Riverheads,” stated Thomas.

While the Chargers prepare for their season opener at home on Aug. 25 against Altavista, there is plenty to get adapted to that’s new. One of the biggest adjustments is a new classification and region.

Lunenburg moves up from Class 1 to Class 2 in the VHSL’s six-division format and will compete in Region

A, where three schools – Bruton, King William and Poquoson – have made it to the State Championship game since 2009.

Riverheads, meanwhile, also moves up to Class 2 after winning seven consecutive state titles, yet will compete in Region B. That means the Chargers or anyone else in Region A would not see them in the postseason until the semifinal round of the State Playoffs.

“Out of the fire and into the frying pan,” Thomas remarked. “You don’t have to play the red team, but man, you’ve still got some historic programs with King William, Poquoson and a lot of teams from our district.”

Going further than last year’s team and capturing a regional crown certainly is one of the goals for the seniors in their final chapter.

“That would be something we haven’t done in a long time. It would be great and a feather in our cap,” Thomas acknowledged. “But we’re going to have to work.”

Central Lunenburg Chargers — 2023 Schedule —

Aug. 25	Home vs. Altavista	7 p.m.
Sept. 1	Away vs. William Campbell	7 p.m.
Sept. 8	Away vs. Brunswick County	7 p.m.
Sept. 15	Away vs. Mecklenburg County	7 p.m.
Sept. 22	Home vs. Buckingham County	7 p.m.
Sept. 29	Away vs. Prince Edward County	7 p.m.
Oct. 6	Home vs. Randolph-Henry	7 p.m.
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Dukes look to redefine football program

BY BRIAN CARLTON

CUMBERLAND

The scores last year didn't tell the full story for Cumberland football. Yes, they went 0-10, but that record came after a situation where new coach Josh Fleenor wasn't hired until mid-July, then tasked with putting together a last-minute staff. With less than a month between hiring a staff and playing the first game, that didn't leave much time to actually install his system. But with that in mind, Fleenor mapped out other goals for the season.

"My goal last year was building a strong foundation, getting these kids together as a team," Fleenor said. "I wanted to create an experience on Friday nights to help these kids fall in love with this game and understand it. We knew it would be a rough road, but we got through it together as a team and as a family."

While he acknowledges the final scores weren't great, Fleenor said he was proud of the team's effort.

"Even though the scoreboard wasn't what we wanted it to be, we never quit," Fleenor said. "We never gave up. There were a lot of mistakes, but we could also find a lot of things we could build on."

And that's where the Dukes stand as we enter the 2023 season. The coach and players want to define what Cumberland football is. They want to remove 2022 from everyone's mind and give them new games and challenges to focus on.

"We got a good group of kids. We're not the biggest (and) we're not gonna be stacked four or five rows deep like some teams," Fleenor said. "We gonna come out and fight. We're gonna play with some heart. That's what it's

gonna take for us to establish a long-standing program."

WHAT IS CUMBERLAND FOOTBALL?

That's the question some other teams and communities are asking. What will Cumberland football look like? When asked to define it, Fleenor paused to think.

"It's about family, team and heart," Fleenor said. "Our kids work hard. They were in the gym after the end of last season, working to get better. They took part in open gym and conditional weight training. Our actions now take the first step to lay the foundation of the program. It's heart-filled, prideful football."

Part of that buy-in from the players comes from knowing and trusting the coach. Some of these seniors were 10th graders not too long ago, competing on a team that Fleenor

took to the James River District Championship. That group came within two points of tying for the title and they



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Cumberland Dukes Head Coach

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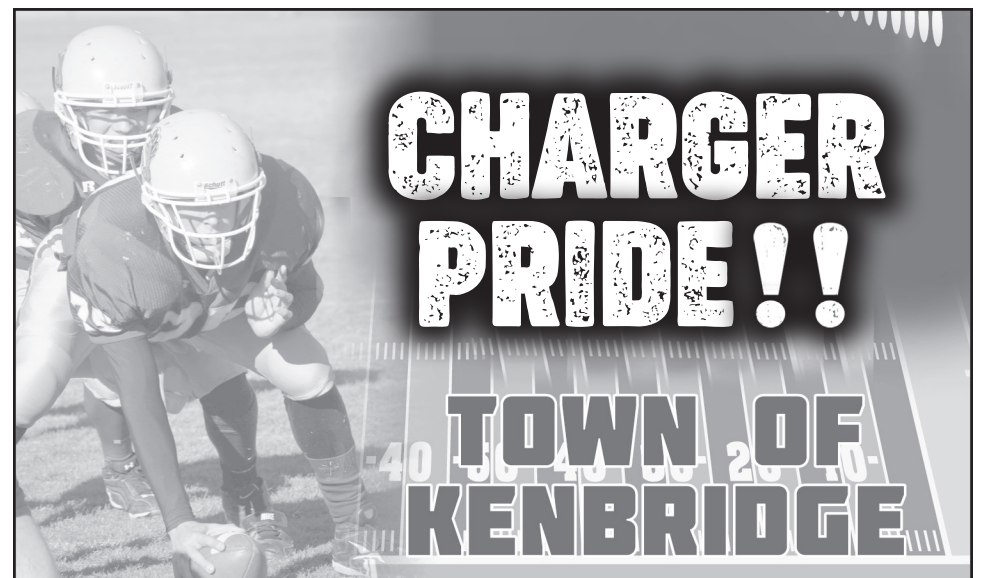
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want to build something similar on the varsity side.

“That leadership at the top is going to be a major factor to our continuing success,” Fleenor said. “And our young guys have bought in. I really like what I see coming up the line. I think you’re going to see Cumberland football improve.”

SEEING IMPROVEMENT

The wins will come, Fleenor says. But first, you have to lay a foundation. You have to teach fundamentals, you have to help players understand the game and their roles.

“That’s what it’s gonna take for us to establish a long-standing program at Cumberland,” Fleenor said. “We welded ourselves together as a team through those challenges we had. The wins will come if you teach the right attitude.”

And it looks like some of that is already happening. The team switched offensive coordinators after the season, also making some changes to the overall scheme. It’s simpler, Flee-

nor said. Then they went and held a scrimmage with Charles City and Brunswick County Thursday night. A team that only scored 37 points total in 2022, while giving up 471, did a lot better one year in.

On Thursday, they only gave up three touchdowns all night, while scoring six.

“From what I saw last night, we’re in a better place than I even thought we were,” Fleenor said. “I’m really excited about the coming season. We’ve got a good energy on this team.”

Now Fleenor acknowledges that the Cumberland Dukes won’t be the biggest football players and they won’t be the largest team.

“We’re not gonna be stacked four or five rows deep like some teams,” Fleenor said. “We’re gonna come out and fight. We’re gonna play with some heart. I think over time, you’ll see a different Cumberland football program that will earn people’s respect. We want their respect and we’re gonna get it.”

Cumberland Dukes — 2023 Schedule —

Aug. 25	Home vs. William Campbell	7 p.m.
Sept. 1	Away vs. Parry McCluer	7 p.m.
Sept. 8	Away vs. Altavista	7 p.m.
Sept. 15	Home vs. Nelson County	7 p.m.
Sept. 22	Away vs. Randolph-Henry	7 p.m.
Sept. 28	Home vs. Nottoway County	7 p.m.
Oct. 12	Away vs. Amelia County	7 p.m.
Oct. 20	Away vs. Central Lunenburg	7 p.m.
Oct. 27	Home vs. Buckingham County	7 p.m.
Nov. 3	Home vs. Prince Edward County	7 p.m.



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Statesmen focus on fitting into new roles

BY BRIAN CARLTON

CHARLOTTE

Development is the one word you'll hear a lot while talking with the Randolph-Henry coaching staff. They see young players taking a next step and upperclassmen now stepping into leadership roles. It's that change and development they believe will help push the team to be better this season.

Things didn't exactly go as planned for the Statesmen last year. Riding a 5-3 record into the final two weeks, the team ran straight into a wall, being outscored 58-22 in those final two contests.

But Randolph-Henry Head Coach Ray

Conner says this year's squad is using that to build off of.

"We realized we fell short. We left something on the table there," Conner said. "You look at two of our games, we were right there until halftime and we let it go. It's a lesson for everyone on the team."

A YEAR OF TRANSFORMATION

For some players, developing meant switching positions and, as Conner puts it, "a lot of hard work."

Take Colton Mann. On the 2022-23 squad, Mann played both sides of



The Statesmen are working hard to prepare for the upcoming high school football season.

the ball, suiting up as a tight end and linebacker. But this year, he's trained in the offseason, made some changes and will be in the starting lineup as a wide receiver.

"He's been probably one of our most improved players," Conner said. "It's tough, transitioning from tight end to receiver. You have to work on catching and running routes, there's a lot of offseason training involved, developing a little more speed. But he's done it."

Another player Conner singled out is

Aviaire Jennings. Pulling double duty last year as both tight end and running back, Jennings will be a larger part of the running game this season.

"He ran the ball some last year, but he'll get a heavier load this season," Conner said of the rising junior.

And in some cases, Conner said, it's not a new physical role that players are picking up. As some get older and come in with more experience, they're now expected to help lead this team.

"It's very critical," Conner said of this



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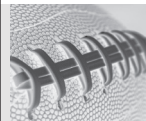
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year's senior leadership. "With several new guys stepping into roles, they need support. Seeing that senior leadership, it picks those guys up."

Those upperclassmen include the team's entire backfield, including two second team all district backs. And they'll be needed, as the group's schedule includes two away games to start off, at Nelson County, followed by a trip to James River. Once that's finished, the Statesmen are home for all of September, not traveling for another road game until Oct. 6 at Lunenburg.

DEALING WITH NEW LINES

One of the challenges facing this year's team involves both sides of the line. The Statesmen saw multiple offensive line and defensive line starters graduate after last season, so again, some players will just have to grow into their new roles.

"We have to put some pieces together on that offensive and defensive line, but we can do that," Conner said. "It just takes time. Even with the loss of so many kids on both lines, I think we have the potential to be better than last season. We just have a lot of athletes who can make things happen."



Randolph-Henry Statesmen — 2023 Schedule —

Aug. 25	Away vs. Nelson County	7 p.m.
Sept. 1	Away vs. James River	7 p.m.
Sept. 8	Home vs. Smith Mountain Lake	7 p.m.
Sept. 15	Home vs. William Campbell	7 p.m.
Sept. 22	Home vs. Cumberland County	7 p.m.
Sept. 29	Home vs. Buckingham County	7 p.m.
Oct. 6	Away vs. Central Lunenburg	7 p.m.
Oct. 13	Away vs. Prince Edward County	7 p.m.
Oct. 20	Home vs. Amelia County	7 p.m.
Nov. 2	Away vs. Nottoway County	7 p.m.

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Falcons make transition to 8-man football

BY BRIAN CARLTON

FUQUA

It's a year of transition for Fuqua on and off the football field. The team is converting from 11-man to 8-man competition and is doing it with a new person in charge. Tyler Cristo took over both as football coach and athletic director back in May. Cristo spent the last four years in the Prince Edward County school system, while also being heavily involved with the Prince Edward County Youth Association. Now he's in charge of a group learning not only new positions, but how to play a different version of the sport.

"When you're out on the field, you can't really tell that it's only eight (players)," Cristo said. "The main differences are that there are five men on the line of scrimmage and the field is narrow. It's 40 yards instead of 53. If it was 53, the scores would be astronomically high."

The width of the field for 8-man competition is 40 yards. That's about 1/3 narrower than the traditional field, which is 53 1/3 wide. All of that translates to a much faster game than regular high school football, with scores that can reach the 70s at times. For Cristo, that means the key to winning is speed.

"The main thing is if you have some skill guys with speed, you're good," Cristo said. "If you can get to the edge (offense and defense), you're good."

It's a change that comes after a rough 2022 season. The Falcons went 2-8 on the year, including a four game losing streak to wrap up the season. They especially struggled on the defensive side, giving up 327 points while only scoring a total of 170. But that was while playing 11-man football. Now things are changing.

CREATING SOMETHING NEW

When someone mentions Fuqua football, Cristo wants them to think of

a relentless and competitive team. He also wants them to think about the run.

"We're not a pass-oriented team, we're a run-oriented team," Cristo said.

He's been helped in making that transition work by upperclassmen on the line, both offense and defense.

"My senior core group are great leaders," Cristo said. "The o-line and d-line are gonna be pretty good. We're senior heavy there, with five on the line of scrimmage."

That helps drive everything else, Cristo said. A strong offensive line helps get the run going each night and a strong defensive line keeps the other team from being able to do the same.

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The Falcons charge through a lane formed by the school's cheerleaders just before the start of the game.

Cristo also points to freshman Jackson Hicks as someone who will be key this season.

"We have a good quarterback in Jackson, he just needs the reps," Cristo said.

And really, he added, that's true of everyone.

"They're grasping a new offense," Cristo said. "There's assignments they need to get. A new scheme, new cadence. There's a lot to get used to."

With so many underclassmen on the team, and switching to a different style of play, Cristo says he understands there will be some trial and error. He just wants players to learn from mistakes.

"I'm ok with some mistakes if they get better the next time," Cristo said. "We have some young guys that are taking on new roles, so it'll take time. Penalties do happen, but I don't want to be an undisciplined team. That just comes

with practice and repetitions."

PLAYING SOME CATCH-UP

And while the team is developing, the new coach recognizes they'll face challenges. One of the challenges Cristo sees in Year One is just that lack of experience with 8-man football.

"The Brunswick Academies and the Southhamptons, they've already been 8-man for a while now," Cristo said. "We go to Charlottesville against Covenant School that first game. They're a juggernaut. We're still just catching up."

But at the end of the day, Cristo said he's tried to get the team to ignore what's come before and focus on the future.

"We can't worry about what's happened in the past," Cristo said. "We're focusing on Fuqua. We're gonna embrace this change and see where it takes us."

Fuqua Falcons — 2023 Schedule —

Aug. 26	Away vs. Covenant School	4 p.m.
Aug. 31	Home vs. Chincoteague	7 p.m.
Sept. 7	Away vs. Quantico	7 p.m.
Sept. 23	Away vs. Broadway Academy	2 p.m.
Sept. 28	Away vs. Brunswick Academy	7 p.m.
Oct. 5	Home vs. Richmond Christian	7 p.m.
Oct. 12	Home vs. Southampton	7 p.m.
Oct. 19	Home vs. Blessed Sacrament-Huguenot	7 p.m.
Oct. 26	Away vs. Kenston Forest	6:30 p.m.

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Kavaliers learn lessons from 2022

BY BRIAN CARLTON

KENSTON FOREST

Last season was a rough one for the Kenston Forest Kavaliers. Going 3-7, the team gave up 126 points more than they scored. They also finished with a four-game losing streak, including a 56-0 final against Brunswick Academy. But there was a benefit, as many players of the young team got their first real game experience on the high school level. It basically turned into a rebuilding year. Now all of those players are one year older, with more confidence about what it takes to play on this level. That development has already shown on the field.

On Friday, Aug. 11, the group took part in the Greenbrier Christian Academy Scrimmage Jamboree, winning three out of their four games. Junior Zain Queen, the 5'10 ft. wide receiver, running back and safety from Notoway County, rushed and caught a total of four touchdowns. Massive 6'7 ft. senior Gergely Hudak added four more touchdown catches on the night. All those and two more were thrown by senior quarterback Noah Cole. The Fuqua School transfer threw for six touchdown passes on the night. The 5'11 ft. senior, who also plays running back and inside linebacker, also forced three fumbles while on defense.

Kenston Forest Head Coach Joe Kaiser said he was glad to see effort in practice translate.

"I think scrimmages are important," he said. "You get to see what your team and the other team will do against live action."

Kaiser also felt the effort was a sign the work done this summer is paying off.

"We've been going hard since the end of July," Kaiser said. "And they've put the work in. We've got a good group of seniors and juniors driving

the effort."

CAPTAINS STEP UP

Kaiser said those juniors and seniors were his captains. None of them are focused on complaining or attacking. Instead, they work with younger players on how to improve.

"When they say something, it means something," Kaiser said. "They give a lot of good, constructive criticism."

The coach applauded the effort of all five captains. That includes Nathan Daniel, Zain Queen, Gergely Hudak, Noah Cole and Blake Bolter.

Now one thing that might be



JOE KAISER

Kenston Forest Kavaliers Head Coach



From left, Nathan Daniel, Zain Queen, Gergely Hudak, Noah Cole and Blake Bolter are this year's captains on the Kenston Forest squad.

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different, if you're going to your first Kenston Forest game, is the fact they play 8 on 8 football. This is mainly used by schools and divisions with smaller enrollments. Typically, most offenses have two fewer offensive tackles and one less receiver, but a creative coach can mix and match.

Players also compete on a smaller field. The width of the field is 40 yards. That's about 13 1/3 narrower than the traditional field, which is 53 1/3 wide. All of that translates to a much faster game than regular high school football, with scores that can reach the 70s at times.

The schedule also shifts around more than other schools. For the Virginia Independent Schools Football League, teams play on Wednesday, Thursday, Friday or Saturday, there's just no set day of the week for games to take place.

But for the majority of Kenston Forest players, this is normal. And this time around, they're coming in with a lot more confidence.

Kaiser said his team could make a run, if one thing happens this year.

"This team, if they work really hard, will go far," Kaiser said. "We just have to keep working towards our goals."

Tigers aim at playoffs

The Tigers finished 2022 with a final record of 5-5 overall, including 4-3 in the Old Dominion Athletic Conference. Things ended with a 38-17 loss to Randolph-Macon in the 127th edition of "The Game".



Hampden-Sydney Tigers

— 2023 Schedule —

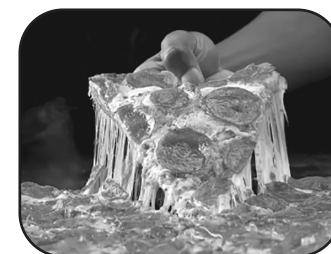
Sept. 2.	Home vs. Wabash	1 p.m.
Sept. 9.	Home vs. Brevard	1 p.m.
Sept. 16	Away vs. Greensboro	1 p.m.
Sept. 30	Home vs. Bridgewater	1 p.m.
Oct. 7	Home vs. Ferrum	1 p.m.
Oct. 14	Away vs. Averett	4 p.m.
Oct. 21	Home vs. Washington & Lee	1 p.m.
Oct. 28	Away vs. Guilford	1 p.m.
Nov. 4	Home vs. Shenandoah	1 p.m.

Kenston Forest Cavaliers

— 2023 Schedule —

Aug. 23	Home vs. Greenbrier Christian Academy	6:30 p.m.
Sept. 2	Away vs. Massanutten Military Academy	7 p.m.
Sept. 7	Home vs. Rappahannock County	7 p.m.
Sept. 15	Away vs. Blessed Sacrament - Huguenot	7 p.m.
Sept. 22	Home vs. Southampton Academy	7 p.m.
Oct. 7	Away vs. Broadwater Academy	2 p.m.
Oct. 12	Home vs. Brunswick Academy	7 p.m.
Oct. 21	Away vs. Richmond Christian	12 p.m.
Oct. 26	Home vs. Fuqua	6:30 p.m.

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