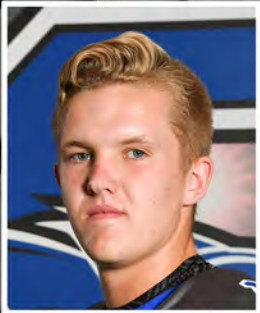


2018 SOLLENBERGER'S AZ

FOOTBALL

PREP MAGAZINE



JACOB CONOVER
6A CHANDLER



KELEE RINGO
4A SAGUARO

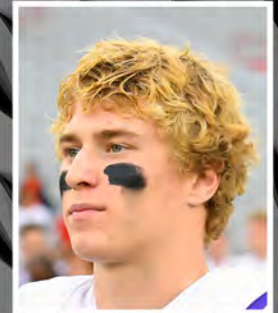


COLE MOTES
2A THATCHER

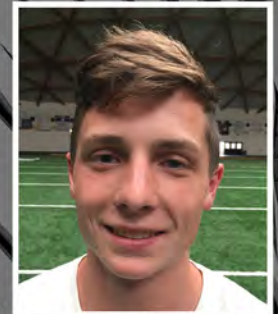


SPENCER RATTLER
PINNACLE

PHOTO BY:
KEVIN FRENCH/MAXPREPS.COM



JAKE SMITH
5A NOTRE DAME



CHANDLER MILES
3A BENJAMIN FRANKLIN



STEVEN YBARRA
1A SUPERIOR

COMPLETE ARIZONA FOOTBALL PREVIEW

5A IS QB LOADED · SALPOINTE'S ROBINSON CONTINUES FAMILY FB LEGACY
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Barry Sollenberger



Jose Garcia

By Jose Garcia
azpreps365.com

Arizona Interscholastic Association tournament director David Shapiro, azpreps365.com's sports information director Seth Polansky and I went hunting a couple of months ago.

The location was a Phoenix warehouse, where we scavenged for Arizona high school sports history items. Barry Sollenberger left behind a treasure trove of objects, which Dave Kukulski, Sollenberger's publishing partner and friend, and Kukulski's family stored at their warehouse.

The Sollenberger's AZ Football Prep Magazine is named after Sollenberger, the late Arizona high school sports historian of the AIA. Sollenberger and the Kukulskis published their first preseason Arizona high school football magazine in 1970.

The Kukulski's allowed the AIA to move Sollenberger's boxes and file cabinets to its Phoenix office, shrinking Polansky's office space.

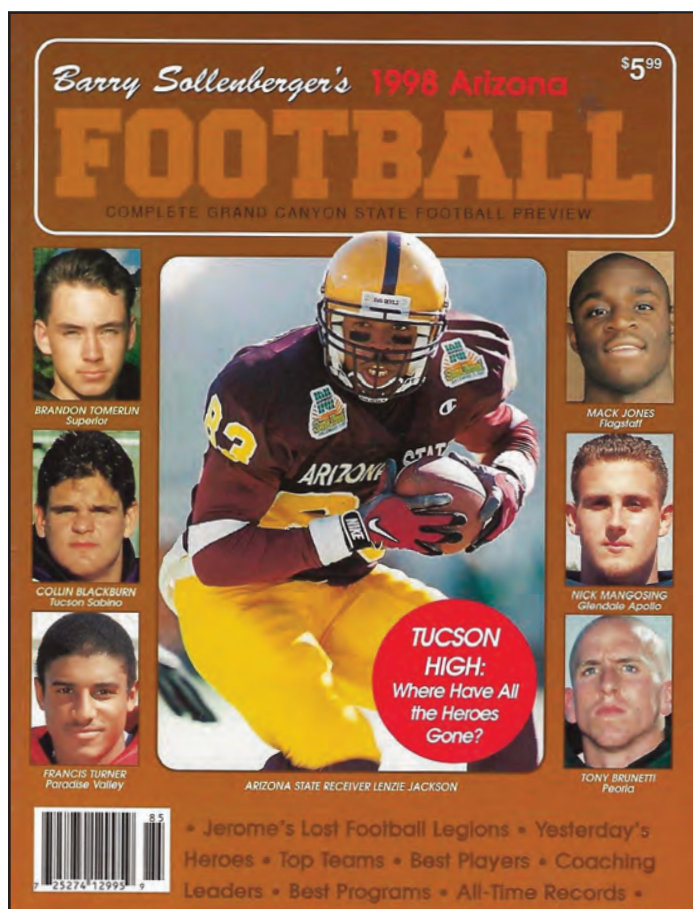
He is archiving Sollenberger's finds. Among Sollenberger's items were several photos, some of which you'll find in this magazine, including an image of Randall McDaniel playing at Agua Fria High School. McDaniel is the first Arizona prep football player to reach the NFL's Hall of Fame. Besides adding the names of as many football players as possible, Sollen-

berger also used his preseason magazine as a vehicle to deliver Arizona's high school sports history.

Since relaunching Sollenberger's magazine in 2014, we've added a story written by Sollenberger in every edition, continuing his tradition of keeping Arizona's high school sports history — and Sollenberger's memory — alive. In this year's issue, we have a story by Sollenberger on a 1960s Arizona 6-man two-time champ.

We want to thank all of the coaches who answered our calls and countless emails to help produce the magazine.

The football players were the beneficiaries. Just like Sollenberger wanted.



The 2018 Sollenberger's AZ Football Prep Magazine is designed and published by Kukulski Publishing. Special thanks to Seth Polansky, Andy Kukulski, Matt Kukulski and Pam Kukulski for their efforts with this publication. The staff writers are Andy Morales, Les Willsey and Jose Garcia of azpreps365.com. Sollenberger cover design by Daniel Navarrette. Cover photo credits: Jacob Conover/Mark Jones (maxpreps.com); Jake Smith/Mark Jones (maxpreps.com); Kelee Ringo/Katy Ruben (Saguaro); Chandler Miles/Dave Jefferies (Benjamin Franklin); Cole Motes/Darin Sicurello (maxpreps.com); Steven Ybarra/Paul Campbell (maxpreps.com).

Analyzing the New Realignment of Conferences, Regions

By Les Willsey
azpreps365.com

With the 2018 football season dawning, let's peruse what realignment has done to conferences since last our schools convened.

On paper, competition in some is ratcheted up. In others, there is at least balance with the subtraction of a few schools here or there.

What remains is trying to upend the dominance of Chandler, Centennial and Saguaro in 6A through 4A, respectively. And remember the only criteria placing schools in this realignment is enrollment.

A few years back, several other factors (free and reduced lunch, participation, competitive history) were used. While it helped in some cases, the overall result was mixed.

The conference most buoyed by realignment for is 5A. The addition of Higley, Sunrise Mountain and Casteel adds opposition for 5A power Centennial.

Centennial has ruled 5A and its equivalent (D-II and 5A-II) in the current decade. The Coyotes possess three championships and three runner-up finishes the last past eight years.

The likes of Williams Field and Cienega have been players for the top spot consistently in the conference. Higley and Sunrise Mountain enter from 4A, where they've been semifinalists and only unable, for the most part, to upend Saguaro. Casteel makes a bigger jump - 3A to 5A. The Colts were 3A champs, a perfect 14-0, and return all starters and the school's first senior class.

Peeking at 5A's region alignments, the San Tan is the eye-catcher. Members Williams Field, Higley, Casteel, Campo Verde, Gilbert and Maricopa easily comprise the toughest collection of schools.

All except Gilbert reached postseason last year. Campo Verde coach Max Ragsdale is bracing for the San Tan challenges.

"I do think competition is increased and it wasn't easy before," Ragsdale said. "We were a 14-seed last year and played Liberty (No. 3) tough. The quality of coaches is high. And we have two state champions in our conference with Centennial and Casteel. Top to bottom the competition in 5A is as good as you'll see."

Other notable additions to 5A from 6A are Desert Mountain (6-5), Horizon (7-4), Gilbert (4-6) and Millennium (4-6). Desert Mountain and Horizon made the playoffs in 6A in 2017.

Rising from 4A is Cactus Shadows, which was 7-5 and a postseason quarterfinalist. Also moving up a pair of conferences to 5A is Empire, which was 6-5 last year and reached postseason.

5A did lose Queen Creek, Liberty and Chaparral, used to making playoff runs, to 6A. Depth and competitive regions appear to be a staple for the next two years.

Centennial may be pushed with Sunrise Mountain and



Casteel, the 2017 champ at the 3A level, is moving up two conferences in 2018 (photo by Kevin French of maxpreps.com).

Raymond S. Kellis to contend with in the Northwest Region. The Northeast Valley houses Desert Mountain and Horizon, anxious to flex their muscles in their new digs with Notre Dame Prep, Cactus Shadows, McClintock, Paradise Valley and North Canyon.

6A's makeover isn't overwhelmed with new members, but those who are up are solid. Chaparral, Queen Creek and Liberty, as noted, add to a long list of folks trying to topple Chandler.

Unless Basha and Brophy Prep rebound significantly this year, the Central Region may be the most balanced and competitive top to bottom (Mountain Pointe, Desert Ridge, Highland, Desert Vista, Queen Creek and Corona del Sol).

Had it not been for 6A requiring all region champs qualify for postseason regardless of their spot in the power rankings, Gilbert and Desert Vista would have qualified for postseason. Desert Vista was No. 15 and Gilbert No. 16.

They were bumped by Westview and Cibola, who were ranked in the 20's. That would have meant five of six teams in the region would have made the playoffs.

Pinnacle, Chaparral and Liberty are a nice trio heading up the Desert Valley with Boulder Creek, Sandra Day O'Connor and Mountain Ridge playing catch up. 4A received an infusion from the 5A ranks - Arcadia, Deer Valley, Desert Edge, Lake Havasu, Mesquite, Poston Butte, Sahuaro and Vista Grande.

None appears strong enough to take Higley or Sunrise Mountain's place in trying to overtake invincible Saguaro. Deer Valley and Desert Edge are the best of the 4A newcomers. 3A brings in one 4A school - Coronado.

Moving up from 2A are San Tan Foothills, Arizona College Prep, Gilbert Christian, Paradise Honors, Bourgade Catholic and Kingman Academy. Three of those seven (San Tan Foothills, Kingman Academy and Gilbert Christian) posted winning records last year and made the playoffs.

Each was eliminated in the first round. With perhaps an ex-

ception or two, don't expect the usual 3A powers to be affected by the newcomers.

2A has a handful of schools new to it, either dropping from 3A or rising from 1A. They are Greyhills Academy, Santa Rita, Trivium Prep, Valley Lutheran, Globe.

The blood-bath region is likely the Black Region. It's five members are Round Valley, Thatcher, St. Johns, Pima and Morenci. All made the playoffs last year with .500 or better records. Thatcher won the conference crown and Round Valley was edged in the semis by runner-up Santa Cruz Valley.

Another region top-heavy in playoff participants last year is the Agua Fria. Santa Cruz Valley, Phoenix Christian, Scottsdale Christian and Arizona Lutheran are a solid four in the six-team league.

Three of them (PC, SCA and Santa Cruz) reached the quarters last year. 1A underwent little if any change.

Two of the top teams reside in the North Region -- defending champ Williams and Mogollon. The East has three quarterfinalist from last season in runner-up Superior, Ray and Hayden.

Bagdad is likely to continue ruling the West Region. Besides the new alignment, fans should keep in mind changes in 6A and 5A to the composition of their 16 playoff teams.

Both conferences decided not to give automatic berths to region champs, meaning the top 16, according to the power rankings, qualify.

4A, 3A, 2A and 1A opted for no changes. In those conferences region champs earn automatic berths regardless of power ranking.

4A will have eight region champs and 8 at-large qualifiers; 3A and 2A seven region champs and 9 at-large qualifiers and 1A four region champs and 8 at-large qualifiers.

NEW FOOTBALL CONFERENCE ALIGNMENTS FOR NEXT 2 YEARS

Schools in **bold green** moved up one or (2) conferences. Schools in *italics* moved down one conference.

6A ... Metro Region: Alhambra, Cesar Chavez, Maryvale, North, Trevor Browne, Tucson. **Desert Valley Region:** Boulder Creek, **Chaparral**, **Liberty**, Mountain Ridge, Pinnacle, Sandra Day O'Connor. **Southwest Region:** Copper Canyon, La Joya Community, **Shadow Ridge**, Tolleson, Valley Vista, Westview. **East Valley Region:** Dobson, Mesa, Mountain View, Red Mountain, Skyline, Westwood. **Southern Region:** Cibola, Kofa. **Premier Region:** Basha, Brophy Prep, Chandler, Hamilton, Perry. **Central Region:** Corona del Sol, Desert Ridge, Desert Vista, Highland, Mountain Pointe, **Queen Creek**.

5A ... Southern Region: *Buena*, Cienega, Ironwood Ridge, Marana, **Nogales**, Sunnyside. **Sonoran Region:** Cholla, Desert View, **Empire (2)**, Flowing Wells, Marana Mountain View, Rincon/University. **Union Region:** Betty Fairfax, Camelback, Carl Hayden, *Central*, Sierra Linda, South Mountain. **Northeast Valley Region:** **Cactus Shadows**, *Desert Mountain*, *Horizon*, McClintock, North Canyon, Notre Dame Prep, Paradise Valley. **San Tan Region:** Campo Verde,

Casteel (2), *Gilbert*, **Higley**, Maricopa, Williams Field.

Northwest Region: Apollo, Centennial, Ironwood, Raymond Kellis, Sunnyslope, **Sunrise Mountain**. **Desert West Region:** Agua Fria, Barry Goldwater, Independence, *Millennium*, Verrado, Willow Canyon.

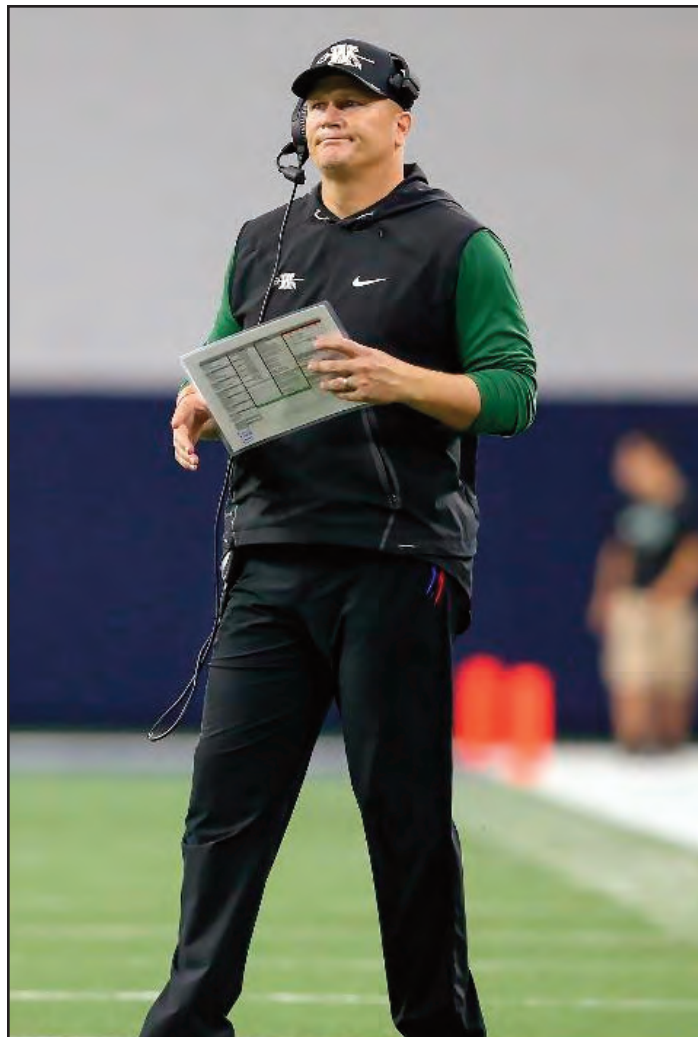
4A ... Desert Sky Region: *Arcadia*, Marcos de Niza, *Mesquite*, *Poston Butte*, Saguaro, Seton Catholic. **West Valley Region:** Cactus, *Deer Valley*, *Desert Edge*, *Lake Havasu*, Peoria. **Southwest Region:** Buckeye, Estrella Foothills, Gila Ridge, Youngker, Yuma. **Skyline Region:** Greenway, Moon Valley, Shadow Mountain, St. Mary's, Tempe, Thunderbird. **Grand Canyon Region:** Bradshaw Mountain, Coconino, Flagstaff, Lee Williams, Mingus, Mohave, Prescott. **Black Canyon Region:** Apache Junction, Combs, Cortez, Dysart, *Glendale*, Washington. **Gila Region:** Amphitheater, Douglas, Palo Verde, Pueblo, Rio Rico, Walden Grove. **Kino Region:** Canyon del Oro, Casa Grande, Catalina Foothills, *Sahuaro*, Salpointe Catholic, *Vista Grande*.

3A ... North Region: Chinle, Ganado, Monument Valley, Page, Tuba City, Window Rock. **South Region:** Catalina, Pusch Ridge, Sabino, Safford, Sahuarita, Tanque Verde. **East Region:** Blue Ridge, Holbrook, Payson, Show Low, Snowflake, Winslow. **West Region:** Chino Valley, Kingman, **Kingman Academy**, Northwest Christian, River Valley, Wickenburg. **Central Region:** American Leadership-Queen Creek, American Leadership-Ironwood, Benjamin Franklin, Coolidge, Florence, **San Tan Foothills**. **Metro Region:** **Az College Prep**, American Leadership-Gilbert, *Coronado*, Fountain Hills, **Gilbert Christian**. **Metro West Region:** **Bourgade Catholic**, Odyssey Institute, **Paradise Honors**, Valley Christian, Yuma Catholic.

2A ... Little Colorado Region: Alchesay, **Greyhills**, Hopi, Many Farms, Pinon, Red Mesa, Rock Point, Valley (Sanders). **Black Region:** Morenci, Pima, Round Valley, St. Johns, Thatcher. **San Pedro Region:** Benson, Bisbee, *Santa Rita*, Tombstone, Willcox. **Verde Region:** Camp Verde, Glendale Prep, Parker, Tonopah Valley, **Trivium Prep**. **Agua Fria Region:** ASU Preparatory, Arizona Lutheran, Heritage Academy Laveen, Phoenix Christian, Santa Cruz Valley, Scottsdale Christian. **Salt Region:** Antelope, North Pointe Prep, Scottsdale Prep, Sedona Red Rock, **Valley Lutheran**, Veritas Prep. **Gila Region:** Chandler Prep, *Globe*, Miami, San Carlos, San Manuel, Tempe Prep.

1A ... North Region: El Capitan, Fredonia, Joseph City, Mogollon, Rough Rock, Williams. **West Region:** Anthem Prep, Bagdad, Mayer, Mohave Accelerated, Salome, San Pasqual. **South Region:** Baboquivari, Bowie-San Simon, Duncan, Fort Thomas, St. David, Valley Union. **East Region:** Arete Prep, Hayden, NFL Yet, PDS, Ray, Superior.

High-Profile Coaching Changes Dot the Arizona Football Landscape



New Brophy Prep coach Jon Kitna (photo by Robbie Rakestraw of maxpreps.com)

By Les Willsey
azpreps365.com

Coaching changes are more common these days in prep football, but the number of highly successful programs bringing on new mentors from last year is staggering.

The big names resigning, retiring or without a head coaching job when the season begins in two weeks includes these folks: Larry Fetkenhier, Paul Moro, Scooter Molander, Bernie Busken and Norris Vaughan.

Eight perennial playoff/state title contenders have new/different head coaches in place. In alphabetical order they are: Brophy Prep, Cactus, Chaparral, Hamilton, Marcos de Niza, Mountain Pointe, Thatcher and Yuma Catholic.

In addition, a fledgling program set for its third varsity season — Casteel—underwent a late change up top this summer. So far this decade the above schools have won 11 state titles and nine runner-up finishes.

Still another coach—Bernie Busken — resigned at North.

Busken is a three-time state-title coach in the state. Former Minus coach Bob Young resigned in March, but is still in the game as an assistant at Notre Dame Prep.

A WHO'S WHO OF WHO'S OUT, IN

BROPHY PREP: Scooter Molander out. Jon Kitna in. Molander resigned shortly after the 2017 campaign ended. The Broncos were 1-9, the only year in Molander's 13-year stint the Broncos didn't make the playoffs. Kitna, like Molander, was a quarterback in his playing days sporting lots of time with several NFL teams. Kitna brings prep coaching experience from Washington and Texas and hopes to bring the Broncos back to playoff caliber in short order. A tough task given the Premier Region.

CACTUS: Larry Fetkenhier out. Joseph Ortiz in. Fetkenhier didn't leave by choice. He exited Cactus as the one of the state winningest coaches, spending 33 years at Cactus. The hiring of Ortiz, an assistant at Higley under Eddy Zubey at two of Zubey's coaching stops, brings an offensive mind as Ortiz served as Higley's offensive coordinator. Higley offenses have never had trouble putting up points with Ortiz lending his expertise. Ortiz hasn't discounted bringing in familiar coaches. He added longtime Cactus assistant Brian Belles, as defensive coordinator. A position Belles held at Cactus for nearly two decades after a year away at Hamilton.

CASTEEL: Spencer Stowers out. Bobby Newcombe in. Another summer change, this one taking place in June. Stowers and his wife secured jobs near family in Minnesota and informed the school and Chandler District they were relocating. Stowers was 23-2 with a state title in two varsity seasons leading the Colts after a three-year stint at Westwood. Newcombe, a varsity assistant (wide receivers) last season, was installed days later as interim coach for 2018. Newcombe enjoyed a nice college career at Nebraska as a quarterback and wide receiver in the late 1990s. He played on the 1997 Cornhuskers' national championship team.

CHAPARRAL: Thomas Lewis out. Brent Barnes in. Lewis left after the first of the year, citing too many other obligations on his plate to give the Firebirds program. Barnes will be the fifth Firebirds' coach this decade. The last three have served two-year stints. Barnes comes from the Oklahoma prep ranks where his teams produced high powered offenses, particularly through the air. He finished a three-year stint as head coach at Norman North High, Okla.

HAMILTON: Dick Baniszewski out. Mike Zdebki in. Everyone knew a coaching change was coming since Baniszewski signed on as a transitional coach. The Huskies did well going 8-4. To bring on the fourth head coach in school history, Hamilton reeled in longtime Michigan prep coach Zdebki. Zdebki was inducted into the Michigan High School Football Coaches Association Hall of Fame recently. His teams at Walled Lake Western High won 160 games and reached the playoffs 17 times, including a state title in 1999.



First-year Cactus head coach Joseph Ortiz (photo by Jacob Stanek of West Valley Preps)

MARCOS DE NIZA: Paul Moro out. Eric Lauer in. Moro was told late in the spring the school wanted to go in a different direction. Moro has the most wins in state history, most of those accrued at Blue Ridge over 30 seasons. Lauer, a longtime assistant at Mountain Pointe, mostly under Norris Vaughan, was hired in early May. He had taken a position at Arizona Christian University in the interim after Vaughan's replacement was hired. Lauer's expertise is on offense where he was allowed to hone his skills as a coordinator.

MINGUS: Bob Young out. Robert Ortiz in. Young was a fixture in Cottonwood certainly in football and additionally as baseball coach not to mention a couple other sports. He won a state title in 1997 and 20 region titles. With 30 years at the helm in football with a two-year hiatus to Westwood, Young exited Mingus at the end of spring. He's not done coaching as he's signed on as defensive coordinator for George Prelock at Notre Dame Prep. Ortiz, a Mingus alum, played for Young in 2007 and 2008. He played running back and receiver and went on to play in junior college (Scottsdale Community College) and D-II at Dakota State.

MOUNTAIN POINTE: Norris Vaughan out. Rich Wellbrock in. Vaughan exited on his own terms giving Mountain Pointe all it could ask for in nine years of toil. Vaughan posted a 99-19 record, a state title, two runners-up and five semifinal finishes. He has resettled to Georgia. Wellbrock is guiding his third program in as many years. He left playoff-rich Desert Edge, where he won a state title and picked up a runner-up finish, to go to a rebuilding job at Basha. That didn't go well and he's taking over for the Pride with tradition and playoff games aplenty.

NORTH: Bernie Busken out. Adan Mendoza in. Busken stepped down in early May to retire and relocate to Texas near family. North was his third Arizona prep stint after a four-year run with the Mustangs. Busken debuted in Arizona in 1995 with a seven-year run and three state titles at Mesa Mountain View. Busken's second stop was for four seasons at Basha High. Mendoza is a North High alum where he was a three-sport athlete. Mendoza served on Busken's staff for a couple seasons on the defensive side and just 10 years removed from high-school graduation.

THATCHER: Sean Hinton out. Ramon Morales in. Hinton abruptly resigned last month to tend to a personal issue after continuing to guide a long stretch of solid play from the Eagles. Thatcher won the last two 2A state titles — both years with Hinton at the helm. Hinton, also a former Thatcher player, was a stand-out running back in the early 2000s. Taking over is a longtime coach (30 years) in the Thatcher district.

YUMA CATHOLIC: Aaron Cheatwood out. Rhett Stallworth in. Cheatwood took over for Stallworth as head coach in 2016 and previously had worked on Stallworth's staff as defensive coordinator. Cheatwood wasn't asked to return and Stallworth, as school principal, made the decision to bring himself back. Stallworth had a successful run from 2007 through 2015 as Shamrocks' coach. They won three state titles in his first tenure at the school.



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Where They Are Ranking Our Boys



Chaparral's Jack Miller (photo by Mark Jones of maxpreps.com)



Notre Dame's Jake Smith (photo by Steve Paynter of maxpreps.com)

AZ's top-10 recruits in 2019 class

247sports.com

1. QB Spencer Rattler, Pinnacle
2. WR Jake Smith, Notre Dame
3. TE Brayden Liebrock, Chandler
4. DE Ty Robinson, Higley
5. DT Matthew Pola-Mao, Chandler
6. QB Jacob Conover, Chandler
7. S Noa Pola Gates, Williams Field
8. DE Bralen Trice, Sandra Day O'Connor
9. WR Khyheem Waleed, Casteel
10. DE Braxten Croteau, Liberty

rivals.com

1. QB Spencer Rattler, Pinnacle
2. ATH Jake Smith, Notre Dame
3. TE Brayden Liebrock, Chandler
4. DE Ty Robinson, Higley
5. S Noa Pola-Gates, Williams Field
6. DT Matthew Pola-Mao, Chandler
7. DE Bralen Trice, Sandra Day O'Connor
8. QB Jacob Conover, Chandler
9. QB Kedon Slovis, Desert Mountain
10. DE Braxten Croteau, Liberty

AZ's top-10 recruits in 2020 class

azcentral.com

1. DB Kelee Ringo, Saguardo
2. QB Jack Miller, Chaparral
3. DE Jason Harris, Higley
4. RB Bijan Robinson, Salpointe
5. DE/OLB Damian Sellers, Saguardo
6. DB Lantham Ransom, Salpointe
7. WR Brenden Rice, Hamilton
8. WR Tommy Christakos, Chaparral
9. RB Darvon Hubbard, Chaparral
10. OL Tye Kassen, Saguardo

AZ players ranked in top-10 nationally by position

– Pinnacle's **Spencer Rattler** is considered the No. 1 quarterback in the nation in the 2019 senior class by scouting services.

– Senior **Brayden Liebrock** (Chandler) is ranked No. 2 in the 2019 tight end class by rivals.com and No. 7 by 247sports.com.

– 247sports.com and rivals.com each ranked **Jake Smith** (Notre Dame) as the No. 6 best athlete in this year's senior class.

– Chandler's **Matthew Pola-Mao**, a transfer from Mountain Pointe, is rivals.com's 8th ranked defensive tackle in the 2019 class; No. 15 by 247sports.com

– 247sports.com listed **Kelee Ringo** (Saguardo) as its No. 1 cornerback and 15th overall prospect in the 2020 class. rivals.com has him rated as the 27th overall best prospect and No. 2 athlete.

– Chaparral's **Jack Miller** is the third-ranked pro style quarterback by rivals.com and 247sports.com in the 2020 class.

– Salpointe's **Bijan Robinson** is ranked No. 5 in the 2020 running back class by 247sports.com and No. 7 by rivals.com.

– Higley's **Jason Harris** is ranked No. 6 at wide defensive end in 2020 class by 247sports.com and No. 9 by rivals.com.

– Saguardo's **Damian Sellers** is No. 6 on 247sports.com's 2020 outside linebacker list and No. 9 on rivals.com.

– Arizona is also home to 247sports' No. 1 ranked punter, Highland's **Austin McNamara**, and No. 8 punter, Desert Vista's **Kyle Ostendorp**, in the 2019 class.



Coach Shaun Aguano and his Chandler Wolves are poised for another title run (photo by Mark Jones of maxpreps.com)

By Les Willsey
azpreps365.com

1. CHANDLER: The two-time defending champs lost a bunch to graduation. It doesn't matter because a bunch return. The cranking out of quarterbacks hasn't ceased in a decade and senior Jacob Conover (BYU commit) is set for his third varsity season at the controls. In two seasons he's thrown for just shy of 7,000 yards, 64 TDs and a paltry seven picks. The Wolves lost a pair of big-time, big-play receivers to graduation, but Texas-bound tight end-wide out and senior Brayden Liebrock is ready to become a focal point. Senior Decarlos Brooks brings 1,352 yards and 14 TDs of production to the backfield. There is work retooling the offensive line. The defense has a solid core back in Avery Carrington, Tate Romney, Zach Bowers, Detrick Gammage and Bryant Jackson. Chandler opens against Centennial (Corona CA), a team that handed it a defeat two years ago so motivation is there from the opening kickoff.

2. HAMILTON: The Huskies weathered an off-field storm last year posting an 8-4 record and reaching postseason and the quarterfinals. Its losses were to Perry (twice), Hamilton and Queen Creek. New coach Mike Zdebski has

landed from a long, highly successful coaching stint in Michigan to test the Premier Region and the two title-game finalists last year. Zdebski has talent and experience at the skill positions, but experience at quarterback is lacking. So is size and strength he desires. That said, the Huskies figure to be a playoff contender. It took a long time, but Hamilton's season-opener is one fans longed for not too long ago -- a matchup with Chaparral.

3. MOUNTAIN POINTE: Despite graduation losses and physical specimens to competing schools or sports, Mountain Pointe has the pieces to continue as kings of the Central Region. Rich Wellbrock has bounced over from Basha for longtime predecessor Norris Vaughan. Production returns at quarterback (senior Nick Wallerstadt), running back (senior) Jarem McKinney and wide out (senior Lacarea Pleasant-Johnson). Wallerstadt is a dual threat at the position and McKinney can be a workhorse back. Pleasant-Johnson figures to be a two-way standout stepping up at receiver this year. The defense lost more than the offense, but is capable of being retooled with four quality returnees -- linemen Kennhy Lofton and Anthony Dedrick and Jatu Gipson in the secondary. Pinnacle, Hamilton and Mountain View highlight the Pride's non-region slate.

4. PERRY: Perry likely has etched its name as a strong contender after the school's best-season in its decade of history last season. An extraordinary quarterback in Brock Purdy is planted at the next level in the Midwest so coach Preston Jones ushers in a new QB. Part of the potential solution, however, has gone awry. Sometimes-QB in 2016 D'Shayne James and one of the state's top receivers last year blew out a knee the first week of practice and is out for the season. James played nearly exclusively at wide out last year and caught 1,000 yards worth of passes with 15 TD receptions. Brock Purdy's younger brother, Chubba, looks to be the replacement at QB. He has the ability to be more than serviceable. Slot back Colby Dickie is a modern day Steve Largent. Dickie has amassed 128 receptions and scored 21 TDs in two seasons. Junior Kyle Patterson is set for a full season at tight end/receiver. Defensive end Travis Beckman up front figures to wreak havoc. The Pumas test three potential region champs in six-non-region contests facing Pinnacle, Red Mountain and Cesar Chavez.

5. RED MOUNTAIN: Mike Peterson piloted Red Mountain to the semifinals in his first year as head coach, making it the second year in a row the Mountain Lions were among the final four. Red Mountain hasn't dominated the East Valley Region sparring each year of late with Skyline and Mountain View for the top spot. Quarterback is a position lacking extensive experience and the explosive offensive presence of Lance Lawson will be missed. Defensive strength exists up front in seniors Alexander Randle and Francis Kumi and linebacker Anthony Giraldi turned in a good junior year. The season opener is against Desert Ridge with non-region matchups with Perry, Cesar Chavez and Westview later on.

6. PINNACLE: One has to believe Pinnacle quarterback Spencer Rattler wants to conclude his prep career in a blaze of glory. That would mean an extended playoff run, something that's eluded the Pioneers since he began taking snaps on varsity as a freshman in 2015. Rattler, who is committed to Oklahoma, has plenty of experience around him with seven other starters returning. Rattler passed for 3,946 yards and 45 TDs last year. It doesn't matter who his receivers are, he finds them. Leading rushers Kalelb Covington (718 yards rushing) and Amelac Juntunen (670 yards, 10 TDs) and receiver Quinn Powell (700 yards receiving, 8 TDs) look forward to big senior seasons. A majority of starters don't return on defense, but coach Dana Zupke likes the speed and depth at hand heading into preseason workouts. Linebacker Thad Dixon posted 99 tackles last year and has familiar faces around him in lineman Shane Sunday and Powell and Covington in the secondary.

7. CHAPARRAL: A lot of different head coaches have manned the head sets of late for Chaparral, which has been stymied most of the decade from returning to the pinnacle of 5A. 5A is behind them for at least the next two-year so they'll be under the spotlight vs. 6A opponents. this

season. New coach Brent Barnes, who is the fifth head coach this decade for the Firebirds, has a history of explosive passing offenses from his time in Oklahoma. He has one of the top quarterback recruits around in junior Jack Miller, beginning his second year at Chap. Weapons are in place at other skill spots junior running back Darvon Hubbard, wide out Tommy Christakos and slot Deavon Crawford. Defensively more experience returns than the offense.

8. LIBERTY: There may have been better years for Liberty to move up a conference with only six starters total returning. The Lions track record, however, shows they aren't often inhibited by that. It helps that their region -- the Desert Valley - is manageable to compete in. The Lions only losing season was in 2015 (4-7) with half its games decided by a TD or less. That was a year it competed at the highest level (D-I) and still made the playoffs. Defense has the most experienced players back. The unit is led by senior linebacker Ryan Puskas and senior lineman Braxton Croteau. They are the top two returnees in terms of tackles. Puskas had a nose for the ball with four picks and Croteau sacked QBs 11 times in 2017.

9. QUEEN CREEK: It's likely Queen Creek's stay in 6A will be short with a new high school opening soon. For now the Bulldogs are members of the hearty Central Region where Mountain Pointe, Desert Ridge, Desert Vista and Highland reside. Queen Creek brings as much experience from last year or more -- likely more - than any team in the region. The Bulldogs like their signal caller Devin Larsen, starting for the third year. Larsen's contributed 4,800 yards passing and 55 TDs thus far. A 1,000-yard rusher in Dylan Borja is returns as well as wide outs Ryan Dobbs and Jett Koester. The defensive line and secondary are well stocked with a need or two perhaps at linebacker. Queen Creek beat three 6A teams last year so they've shown they can compete. Chandler, Chavez and three East Valley Region schools -- Westwood, Skyline and Mountain View - comprise the non-region schedule.

10. CESAR CHAVEZ: Cesar Chavez has a stranglehold on the whatever the makeup of the Metro Region is. That shouldn't change this year. The Champions are eager to make the playoffs again and without an automatic berth to a region champ in 6A this year, they'll have to be among the top 16 in power rankings to qualify. A pair of outstanding seniors are on board for second-year head coach Manuel Alcantar. Two-way talents Andrew Blitzke and Thairyk Blue. Blitzke rushed for 1,183 yards and 13 TDs last year. He was in on 82 tackles. Blue hauled in 595 yards of passes and struck paydirt 10 times. He checked in with 64 tackles from his safety position. Chavez was 2-3 in non-region games last year. Two of the three losses were by six points or less to Queen Creek and Highland. This year Queen Creek and Red Mountain are two of the non-region foes plus the season opener that takes the Champions to Alaska to face East High of Anchorage.

6A Conference Team-By-Team Preview

By Les Willsey
azpreps365.com

EAST VALLEY REGION

Dobson

Head coach: Pete Wahlheim.

2017 record: 3-7.

No. of returning starters on offense: 6.

No. of returning starters on defense: 4.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. RB-WR-CB Issic Gomez (5-5, 150), 519 rushing yards, 4 TDs, 210 receiving yards, 1 TD, 26 tackles, 3 INT.; So. WR-CB Xavier Jimenez; Sr. QB, Nick Saro (6-0, 188); Sr. DE Seth Stratman; Sr. TE George Lupe; Sr. G-DT Jalen Youvella (5-9, 232); Sr. T Joseph Martinez; Sr. G-DT Joseph Herrera (5-11, 265).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Power run game and young skill players.

Strengths of defense: Depth at defensive back. Strong edge players. Play down hill.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Quarterback and line-backing.

2018 expectations: Work on improving each and every day.

Mesa

Head coach: Kap Sikahema

No. of returning starters on offense: 8

No. of returning starters on defense: 8

Key returning players and 2017 stats: Jr. OL-DL Lingi Havea, (6-1, 320). Sr. OL Esafe Fetu'u, (6-5, 320). Sr. OL Mike DiMaggio, (6-5, 250). Sr. WR-SS Eddie McClendon (6-0, 210), 341 receiving yards, 2 TDs, 61 tackles, 6 INT. Sr. WR Boyd Mox, (5-8, 180), 645 receiving yards, 5 TDs. Sr. WR-SS B.J. Foster (5-11, 200). Sr. NG Aleks Loncar (5-11, 275). Sr. OL-DL Diego Barroso (6-0, 260). Jr. LB Osaiasi Taueli (6-2, 210), 80 tackles, 2 sacks. Jr. LS-SS Jaden Green (5-11, 190), 24 tackles, 2 sacks. Jr. DB Marquis Owens, (5-11, 160), 22 tackles.

Strengths of offense heading into summer: Line is enormously big and should pave the way for our running backs.

Strengths of defense: Our front seven is strong.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Who will attempt to replace Kris Jackson.

2018 expectations: Play as a team and reach the playoffs.

Mountain View

Head coach: Mike Fell.

2017 record: 6-5.

No. of returning starters on offense: 6.

No. of returning starters on defense: 6.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. WR JaCobby Dinwiddie (6-2, 180), 730 receiving yards, 5 TDs; Sr. QB Brandon Nunez (6-5, 210), 2,279 passing yards, 14 TDs, 209 rushing yards, 7 TDs; Sr. MLB-RB Jeremiah Hollen (6-1, 200), 104 tackles, 164 rushing yards, 11 TDs; SR. G Aaron Pico (6-2, 222); Sr. WR-CB McKay Barney(6-0,160), 31 tackles; Sr. T-G Jeremiah Katt (6-3, 270); Sr. CB Rafael Jackson (5-11, 155); Sr. FS-LB Alex Talamontes (5-8, 155), 74 tackles.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Return-

ing QB and wide receiving corps. Third year in coach's system. Outstanding linemen in Pico and Katt.

Strengths of defense: Three-year starter at MLB in Hollen. Strong secondary. Outstanding hustle to the ball.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Defensive line. Kicking game. Stopping the run.

2018 expectations: Win East Valley Region. Compete and have a chance to win every game. Make playoffs.

Red Mountain

Head coach: Mike Peterson

No. of returning starters on offense: 9

No. of returning starters on defense: 7

Key returning players and 2017 stats: Jr.. OL Costen Cooley, (6-3, 280). Jr. OL Ben Bray, (6-4, 260). Jr. OL Jake Griffin, (6-5, 240). Jr. RB Ty McElroy, (5-10, 185), 632 rushing yards, 7 TDs. Sr. TE Carter Wheat, (6-3, 230), 263 receiving yards, 2 TDS. Sr. OL Francisco Saucedo, (6-0, 245). Sr. WR Lorenzo Bowers, (6-2, 195), 388 receiving yards, 1 TD. Sr. WR Kalim Reece-Peeplez, (6-1, 170), 121 receiving yards, 1 TD. Sr. OL Charlie Hola, (6-2, 235). Sr. DE Francis Kumi, (6-4, 215), 52 tackles, 8 sacks. Sr. DL Alex Randle, (6-3, 265), 64 tackles, 6 sacks. Sr. DB Shaq Daniels (5-11, 175), 26 tackles, 3 INT. Sr. LB Anthony Giralidi, (5-11, 220), 57 tackles. Sr. DB-LB Isaac Thompson, (5-9, 175), 32 tackles. Sr. S Evan Omta, (6-0, 170). Sr. LB Braydon Janzen, (5-8, 180), 24 tackles.

Strengths of offense heading into the summer: Line. lots of experience and size (and still young.)

Strengths of defense: Knowledge of scheme - lots returning as seniors.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Quarterback.

2018 expectations: Win the opener and ride that momentum for 13 more games. Expecting a lot after 10-3 season and losing in semifinals to Chandler.

Skyline

Head coach: Angelo Paffumi.

2017 record: 6-5.

No. of returning starters on offense: 8.

No. of returning starters on defense: 5.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. QB Steven Castle (5-11, 185), 1,194 passing yards, 9 TDs; Sr. RB Aaron Wood (5-10, 180), 1,139 yards rushing, 14 TDs; Sr. OT Noah Barta (6-4, 265); Sr. OT Declyn Kyler (6-3, 285); Sr. DL Jackson O'Brien(5-10, 235); Jr. WR-FS-QB Marcus Brown (6-1, 180), 351 rushing yards, 5 TDs, 224 rushing yards, 1 TD Jr; LB Zach Kriens (6-3, 220) 93 tackles; Sr. DE Danny To'otoo (6-3, 235).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Offensive line, depth at running back, explosive receiver.

Strengths of defense: Depth and speed at linebacker and overall team speed.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Depth and overall numbers.

2018 expectations: Only one goal -- winning a championship.



Jacobby Dinwiddie, Mountain View (photo by Steve Paynter of maxpreps.com)



Shaq Daniels, Red Mountain (photo by Jim Willittes of maxpreps.com)



Senior DB Lacarea Pleasant-Johnson, Mountain Pointe (photo by Ming Chung Lin of maxpreps.com)

Westwood

Head coach: Kyle Ide.

2017 record: 4-6.

No. of returning starters on offense: 6.

No. of returning starters on defense: 6.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. WR-FS Manny Collier (5-9, 165), 389 rushing yards, 3 TDs, 502 receiving yards, 7 TDs; Sr. T Reshard Antone (6-3, 275); Sr. WR-FS Will Driggs (5-10, 135), 228 receiving yards, 2 TDs; Sr. Keith Whiting (5-10, 180); Sr. DE-TE Tyler Ayre (6-4, 231), 34 tackles, 7 sacks; Sr. DT-FB Rayvon Williamson (5-10), 31 tackles, 4 sacks; Sr. LB-FB Blake Willis (5-8), 41 tackles.; Sr. LB-RB Carlos Jaime (5-9), 31 tackles; Sr. RB Derrick Horne (5-6, 175), 266 rushing yards, 1 TD.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Strong group of skill players and potential of strong line if players step up.

Strengths of defense: Strong at linebacker. Defensive line could be outstanding if healthy and eligible.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Key injuries we hope recover faster than anticipated. No returning experience at QB. Need one to step up.

2018 expectations: Focusing on getting better every day.

CENTRAL REGION

Desert Vista

Head coach: Dan Hinds.

2017 record: 5-5.

No. of returning starters on offense: 5.

No. of returning starters on defense: 5.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Jr. RB Tyson Grubbs (6-0, 180), 252 rushing yards, 1 TD, 127 receiving yards, 1 TD; Jr. RB Colby Humphrey (5-11, 175), 124 rushing yards; Sr. DL Brett Johnson (6-5, 270), 32 tackles; Sr. P Kyle Ostendorp (5-10, 200), 41.3 yards per punt; Jr. OL Miles LeBlanc (6-1, 250); Sr. OL Mike Lonski (6-0, 265); Sr. DB Clay Sokol (6-1, 185), 38 tackles, 2 INT; Jr. QB Parker Navarro (6-1, 190); Sr. WR Elijah Ervin (6-2, 180); Sr. WR Dominic Shephardson (5-11, 175), 329 receiving yards, 2 TDs.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Balanced ability to run and throw. Skill position players and offensive line.

Strengths of defense: Defensive line and depth in the secondary.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Brotherhood. How important will that be to this team.

2018 expectations: Be prepared and win early.

Highland

Head coach: Brock Farrel.

2017 record: 8-4.

No. of returning starters on offense: 8.

No. of returning starters on defense: 4.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. FS-RB Kohner Cullimore (6-1, 200), 409 rushing yards, 7 TDs, 293 receiving yards, 3 TDs, 65 tackles; Sr. P-K Austin McNamara (6-4, 170), 39.7 yards per punt; Sr. QB Kaleb Herbert (5-11, 165), 1,236 passing yards, 10 TDs; Sr. RB-CB Dayton Huffman (5-7, 155), 491 rushing yards, 3 TDs, 27 tackles; Sr. OL Kolton Allen (6-2, 270); Sr. ILB Griffin Nielson (6-1, 205), 28 tackles; Sr. OL-DL Jared Eisentraut (5-9, 260); Sr. WR-CB Noah Burdick (6-1, 190), 152 receiving yards, 1 TD; Sr. TE-FB Cord Crismon (5-11, 200); Sr. TE Cooper Holman (6-3, 215).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Experience at quarterback, running back, offensive line and wide receiver. Second year in offensive system.

Strengths of defense: Returning all-stater in FS Cullimore, two cornerbacks and mix of newcomers and senior leaders. Holman back from injury. Was starter as a sophomore.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Defensive line, inside linebackers replacing seniors and tight end.

2018 expectations: Compete for Central Region title and pick up where program left off last year in coach's first year.

Mountain Pointe

Head coach: Rich Wellbrock.

No. of returning starters on offense: 7.

No. of returning starters on defense: 4.



Queen Creek's Devin Larsen (left, photo by Darin Sicurello of maxpreps.com) and Brophy's Marques White (right, photo by Steve Paynter of maxpreps.com)

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. QB Nick Wallerstedt (6-3, 185), 1,567 passing yards, 11 TDs, 711 rushing yards, 9 TDs; Sr. Jakim McKinney RB (5-8, 175), 1,334 rushing yards, 18 TDs. Sr. OL-DL Alex Vogel (6-2, 260); Sr. OL Zach Quihuis (6-1, 190); Sr. TE-DL Anthony Dedrick (6-4, 230); Sr. DE Kenny Lofton (6-3, 220), 58 tackles, 12.5 sacks; Sr. DB Lacarea Pleasant-Johnson (6-2, 180), 436 receiving yards, 4 TDs, 20 tackles; Sr. DB Jatu Gipson (5-10, 175).

Strengths of your offense heading into the summer: We believe our strengths will be our O-line, but our skill players have had a great spring and keep getting better every day.

Strengths of defense: Our secondary has been excelling along with Rashion Hodge at inside linebacker.

Team's biggest question mark(s): How will we gel and who will stand out as leaders for 2018 Pride.

2018 expectations: Expectations are high as usual at Mountain Pointe. We expect us to be right in the thick of things come November.

Queen Creek

Head coach: Travis Schureman.

2017 record: 10-2 (5A).

No. of returning starters on offense: 8.

No. of returning starters on defense: 6.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. QB Devin Larsen (6-5, 215), 2,351 passing yards, 30 TDs; Sr. RB Dylan Borja (5-8, 165), 1,300 rushing yards, 9 TDs, 166 receiving yards, 3 TDs; Sr. C Dakota Banning (6-1, 225); Sr. RB-LB Armando Orona (5-10, 190), 56 tackles, 3 sacks; Sr. DE Christian Fuhrman (6-2, 235), 70 tackles; Sr. WR Ryan Dobbs (6-3, 185), 407 receiving yards, 15 TDs; Sr. DE Rafael Aldecoa (6-3, 200), 59 tackles, 6 sacks; Sr. OT Kyle Sawyer (6-2, 265); DT Isaak Clonts (6-0, 245); Sr. WR-DB Jett Koester (5-10, 175), 297 receiving yards, 3 TDs.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Experience at QB with Larsen. Good skill players in Dobbs, Borja and Orona. Two returning linemen in Banning and Sawyer.

Strengths of defense: Defensive front with Aldecoa, Fuhrman and Clonts. Secondary led by Koester and Danny Marshall.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Transition to 6A. Players are looking forward and motivated to compete at the highest level. Can we maintain health.

2018 expectations: Winning championship as always.

Region notes: **Corona del Sol** tries to improve on a 2-8 record in head coach John Beckett's second season piloting the Aztecs. Corona looks to improve particularly on the defensive side as it surrendered 35 points a game last year. Its best showing on that front was a win in its season finale (14-10) over Corona del Sol ... **Desert Ridge** managed to claim the region title last year, but was disappointed with its brief postseason run as it fell to Westview in the first round. The region title was the fourth this decade for the Jaguars. Jeremy Hathcock enters his 13th year as head coach. The Jaguars have sustained only one losing season in his tenure - his first year in 2006.

PREMIER REGION

Basha

Head coach: Chris McDonald.

2017 record: 2-8.

No. of returning starters on offense: 7.

No. of returning starters on defense: 6.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. OL-DL Jonathan Durand (6-3, 275); Sr. OL-DL Roman Dewys (6-4, 285); Sr. ATH Ty Siffermann (5-10, 175), 990 receiving yards, 6 TDs, 35 tackles, 2 INT; Jr. ATH Micah Harper (5-10, 170), 69 tackles; Jr. ATH Camden Mateen (5-11, 165), 183 receiving yards, 1 TD; Sr. RB-LB Nick Schinker (6-0, 190), 258 rushing yards, 2 TDs; ATH Cole Lundberg (5-8, 160); Sr. TE-DE Parker Jacobs (6-4, 225); Sr. QB Connor Phelan (6-3, 190), 1,197 yards passing, 7 TDs; Sr. LB Storm Mendoza (6-0, 185), 81 tackles.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Four offensive linemen back with starting experience. Speed at skill positions.

Strengths of defense: More experience than last year.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Overall physicality, quarterback competition and team chemistry.



Brayden Liebrock, Chandler (photo by Mark Jones of maxpreps.com)

2018 expectations: Being fundamentally sound in all three phases. Playing for each other.

Brophy Prep

Head coach: Jon Kitna.

2017 record: 1-9.

No. of returning starters on offense: 5.

No. of returning starters on defense: 7.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. K Jackson Garcia (5-11, 175); Sr. P Elijah Fischer (5-11, 180); Sr. ATH Marques White (6-2, 210), 90 tackles, 4 sacks; Sr. DB Sully Shannon (6-2, 195), 59 tackles; Jr. ATH Michael Diaz (6-2, 200), 26 tackles; Sr. OLB-DE Andrew Onyepunuka (6-2, 215), 81 tackles, 7 sacks; Sr. DT EJ Hamilton (6-1, 276), 14 tackles, 2 sacks; Sr. LB Will Broucek (5-10, 185), 34 tackles, 2 sacks; Sr. LB Joshua Lesley (5-9, 205), 31 tackles; Jr. OT Andrew Milek (6-5, 285); Sr. C Ryan Michael (5-11, 255); Sr. G Ethan Broer (5-11, 255); So. WR Denzel Burke (5-10, 175), 25 tackles.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Offensive line and wide receiver depth.

Strengths of defense: Football IQ and physicality.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Learning new culture and schemes.

2018 expectations: Play to our potential.

Chandler

Head coach: Shaun Aguano.

2017 record: 13-2.

No. of returning starters on offense: 6.

No. of returning starters on defense: 6.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. QB Jacob Conover (6-1, 200), 3,077 yards passing, 32 TDs; Sr. TE Brayden Liebrock (6-5, 220), 600 yards receiving, 5 TDs; Sr. CB Zach Bowers (6-0, 220), 69 tackles; Sr. RB De Carlos Brooks (5-10, 195), 1,352 yards rushing, 14 TDs; Sr. OL Josh Pena (6-1, 290); Jr. OL Nehemiah Magalei(6-2, 290); Sr. DB Avery Carrington (6-2, 200), 85 tackles, 2 INT; Jr. LB Tate Romney(6-2, 210), 65 tackles; Jr. DB Gunner Maldonado (6-0, 185), 41 tackles, 2 INT; Jr. LBBryant Jackson (6-0, 235), 47 tackles, 5 sacks.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Leadership, physicality, speed and size at receiver.

Strengths of defense: Size, speed, physicality, intelligence and tenacity.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Departing spots at wide receiver and replacements on line.

2018 expectations: State championship and winning two out of state games.

Hamilton

Head coach: Mike Zdebski

2017 record: 8-4.

No. of returning starters on offense: 5.

No. of returning starters on defense: 5.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Jr. C Finn Lecky (6-0,265); Jr. SE Brenden Rice (6-2, 188), 559 receiving yards, 7 TDs; Sr. TB Mo Parson (6-0, 182), 498 rushing yardsm 4 TDs; Sr. SE Brandon Schenks (6-3, 210), 599 receiving yards, 10 TDs; Sr. DE Derrick Porter (5-11, 215); Sr. ILB Ryan Guerrero (6-10, 210), 102 tackles, 3 sacks; Sr. K Danial Obarski (6-3, 170); Sr. DB Javin Wright (6-3, 190), 41 tackles; Jr. TE Dom Hilton (6-1, 245), 161 receiving yards, 2 TDs; Sr. DB Bryce

History: Hamilton's All-Time Best Player Still Going Strong



Terrell Suggs accepting a high school player of the year award in 1999. (Photo courtesy of the Arizona Interscholastic Association)

Terrell Suggs is considered the greatest player to suit up for Hamilton High and also its first official super star after Hamilton opened in the late 1990s. Suggs is 35 years old now and still producing mightily. He had 11 sacks for the Baltimore Ravens last year and needs 12 more to join the top-10 list of the NFL's career sack leaders. NFL fans know Suggs as a linebacker, but back in the day he got to run over defenders. He rushed for 367 yards in a high school game in 1999. In 2000 Gatorade picked Suggs as its Arizona High School Player of the Year. Suggs also attended Hamilton's rival, Chandler, as a freshman after moving from Minnesota.—Jose Garcia

Danielson (5-9, 145); Jr. OLB Jeremiah Trojan (6-3, 200), 42 tackles.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Split ends, slot and tailback.

Strengths of defense: Linebacking and cornerbacks.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Size up front and team strength.

2018 expectations: Investing lots of time in preparation.

Perry

Head coach: Preston Jones.

2017 record: 12-2.

No. of returning starters on offense: 5.

No. of returning starters on defense: 5.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. WR-QB D'Shayne James (6-3, 210), 1,086 receiving yards, 15 TDs, 251 passing yards, 3 TDs, 312 rushing yards, 5 TDs; Sr. WR Colbie Dickey (5-9, 180), 1,349 receiving yards, 15 TDs; Sr. OL Brayden Rohme (6-5, 260); Sr. DE Travis Beckman (6-4, 240), 39 tackles, 11.5 sacks; Sr. DBDavid Eppinger (5-10, 180); Jr. TE Kyle Patterson (6-5, 230).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Playmakers, depth at skill positions and experience at wide receiver. Conditioning.

Strengths of defense: Depth and versatility. Conditioning.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Kicking game, quarter-



D'Shayne James, Perry (photo by Darin Sicurello of maxpreps.com)



LB Ryan Puskas, Liberty (photo by Mark Jones of maxpreps.com)



Bralen Trice, Sandra Day O'Connor (photo by Kevin French of maxpreps.com)

back experience, ability to play to speed with defensive scheme and experience at linebacker.

2018 expectations: Develop well-rounded student athletes. Have team GPA of 3+. Make playoffs. Win state title.

DESERT VALLEY REGION

Chaparral

Head coach: Brent Barnes

No. of returning starters on offense: 8

No. of returning starters on defense: 5

Key returning players and 2017 stats: Jr. QB Jack Miller, (6-4, 205), 1,735 passing yards, 20 TDs, 306 rushing yards, 4 TDs. Jr. WR Tommy Christakos, (6-4, 200), 604 receiving yards, 8 TDs. Jr. RB Darvon Hubbard, (5-11, 205), 503 rushing yards, 7 TDs. Jr. RB-WR Deavon Crawford, (5-10, 175), 585 receiving yards, 4 TDs, 96 rushing yards, 4 TDs. Sr. OL Craig McFarland, (6-6, 270). Sr. DE Oliver Carras, (6-4, 215), 35 tackles, 6 sacks. Jr. DE Jaxon Richards, (6-5, 210), 39 tackles, 3 sacks. Sr. LB Zien Tessler, (5-10, 205), 119 tackles, 2.5 sacks. Jr. LB Braxen Tessler, (5-10, 185), 113 tackles, 4.5 sacks. Jr. DB Kamdan Hightower, (6-1, 170), 23 tackles.

Strengths of offense heading into the summer: Experienced group with elite skill players and playmaking ability.

Strengths of defense: Fast, pressure defenders learning a multiple system to give them opportunities to make plays.

Team's biggest question marks(s): Depth, especially moving up to the 6A level.

2018 expectations: Compete and get better each week.

Liberty

Head coach: Mark Smith.

2017 record: 11-2 (5A).

No. of returning starters on offense: 2.

No. of returning starters on defense: 4.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. LB Ryan Puskas (6-3, 220), 85 tackles, 4 INT; Sr. DL Braxton Croteau (6-5, 240), 70 tackles, 11 sacks; Sr. DB Eli Pittman (5-11, 170), 29 tackles, 2 INT; Jr. Jace Accurso (6-0, 215), 314 yards rushing, 9 TDs, 30 tackles; Sr. LB Ryan Pitts (6-0, 210); Sr. DB An-

thony Porras (5-10, 175), 53 tackles; Sr. RB Jett Kinsch (6-0, 215), 559 rushing yards, 6 TDs, 211 receiving yards, 2 TDs; Sr. OL Zach Hunzinger (6-2, 265); Sr. TE Michael Eyde (6-2, 205); Sr. K Kolter Nelson (6-1, 165).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Knowledge of scheme. Multiple. Length.

Strengths of defense: Same as offense.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Green.

2018 expectations: Win one week at a time.

Mountain Ridge

Head coach: Vinny Ciliberti.

2017 record: 2-8.

No. of returning starters on offense: 6.

No. of returning starters on defense: 8.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. LB Braiden Manusina (6-2, 210), 111 tackles; Sr. OL-DL-LS Ethan Hudak (6-0, 225), 43 tackles; Sr. WR-DB David Doucet (6-0, 160), 314 receiving yards, 3 TDs, 18 tackles, 3 INT; Sr. WR Preston Miller (5-11, 155), 531 receiving yards, 4 TDs; Sr. DL Jackson Pratte (6-3, 235); Sr. DE Carson Shoemaker (6-2, 225); Sr. OL-DL Jack Seeley (6-0, 235); Jr. LB-WR Tommy Ellis (6-0, 180), 29 tackles; Jr. RB Jacob Graf (5-10, 240), 152 rushing yards, 2 TDs; Jr. WR-DB Jack Evans (6-2, 155).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Power run game. Pocket passer. Experienced line. Ability to stretch field. Balance.

Strengths of defense: Majority of defense returning. Simpler schemes. Improved secondary. Aggressive line. Leadership and experience at linebacker.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Belief in ourselves. Ability to score consistently and not turn it over.

2018 expectations: Have a winning record at home. Limit turnovers and create takeaways. Win some region games.

Pinnacle

Head coach: Dana Zupke.

2017 record: 9-4.

No. of returning starters on offense: 8.

No. of returning starters on defense: 4.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. QB Spencer Ratler (6-2, 180), 3,946 passing yards, 45 TDs, 250 rushing yards, 4 TDs; Sr. RB-ATH Kaleb Covington (5-10, 170), 718 rushing yards, 9 TDs; Sr. WR-DB Quinn Powell (5-7, 165), 700 receiving yards, 8 TDs, 30 tackles; Jr. TE-DE Shane Sunday (6-3, 220), 5.5 sacks. Sr. G Matt Mickelson (6-1, 270); Sr. T Dylan Millbranth (6-4, 250); Sr. WR Jack Jepson (6-0, 175), 348 receiving yards; Sr. RB Amelac Juntunen (5-11, 180), 670 rushing yards, 10 TDs; Sr. LB Thad Dixon (6-0, 190), 99 tackles.; Jr. LB Alonzo Maya (5-11, 185), 29 tackles.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Quarterback ability. Speed. Size and strength up front. Running back depth.

Strengths of defense: Speed. Depth at all positions.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Backfield youth. Line youth.

2018 expectations: Win region. Make playoffs. Win our last game. Care about each other.

Sandra Day O'Connor

Head coach: Steve Casey.

2017 record: 3-7.

No. of returning starters on offense: 6.

No. of returning starters on defense: 8.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. DE Bralen Trice (6-4, 230), 75 tackles, 14.5 sacks; Sr. ILB Tanner Sharp (5-10, 230), 74 tackles, 2 sacks; Sr. ILB Dominic Alvarado (6-0, 215), 78 tackles, 4 sacks; Jr. ATH Damian Ortiz (6-1, 180), 56 tackles, 204 receiving yards, 3 TDs; Sr. NT Zach Cardenas (6-1, 240), 20 tackles; Jr. FS Ethan Ososkie (5-7, 140), 49 tackles; Sr. CB Evan Barnes (5-8, 140), 23 tackles; Jr. DE Chase Folkstead (6-0, 200). So. OL Meyer Shinsky (6-2, 240); Sr. QB Ethan Moller (6-3, 205), 2,031 passing yards, 19 TDs; Sr. WR Tyler Bergstrom (5-9, 145), 254 receiving yards, 5 TDs, 28 tackles, 2 INT; Sr. C Ben Fuenmayor (6-2, 285); Jr. HBAllijah Galbreath (6-1, 210), 133 yards rushing, 1 TD; Jr. WR Kody Say (5-11, 175), 113 receiving yards, 1 TD; Jr. WR Phoenix Payton (6-0, 190).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Line bigger and stronger. Experience and athleticism at skill positions. Chip on their shoulders. Unity. Coaching staff.

Strengths of defense: Overall speed and strength. Experience. Leadership. Desire to be great. Coaching staff.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Kicking game. Will hard work pay off. Handling of adversity.

2018 expectations: Making the playoffs.

Region notes: Boulder Creek hasn't had a winning season under third-year head coach Tony Casarella, but the Jaguars qualified for the playoffs last year. They fell to eventual state runner-up Perry in the first round. All of Boulder Creek's losses were "quality" defeats - Hamilton, Liberty, Queen Creek, Red Mountain, Pinnacle and Desert Mountain. Every one of those schools made the playoffs. The next step for the Jags is to knock off playoff-caliber and contenders.

METRO REGION

Alhambra

Head coach: Chris Crockett.

2017 record: 3-7.

No. of returning starters on offense: 8.

No. of returning starters on defense: 8.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. QB Andrew Favela (5-9, 160), 699 passing yards, 5 TDs; Sr. RB Freddy Cunningham (5-9, 160), 749 yards rushing, 6 TDs, 183 receiving yards; Jr. WR Tony Miller (6-5, 220); Sr. LB Rueben Fernandez(5-9, 190); Sr. OL-DL Sir Velvet Harris (6-2, 310). Sr. MLB Justin Cooley (5-10, 220); Sr. CB-WR Kevin Smith (5-9, 150); Sr. WR-DB Anthony Drew (5-10, 160), 248 receiving yards, 2 TDs; OL-DL Joshua Nance (5-10, 200); WR-DE-LB Jalen Vandiver(6-2, 210), 124 receiving yards, 1 TD.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: New and wide open spread attack. QB a dual threat in spread. Experienced line.

Strengths of defense: New coordinator Charles Rivera's new multiple defenses. Experience across on the board - DL, LB, secondary.

Team's biggest question mark(s): How will team do vs. a very challenging schedule. How they respond to new offense.

2018 expectations: Defeat Highland in season opener. Win region. Make playoffs and make noise when we get there.

Cesar Chavez

Head coach: Manuel Alcantar.

2017 record: 7-4.

Number of returning starters on offense: 4.

Number of returning starters on defense: 7.

Key returning starters and 2017 stats: Sr. MLB-RB Andrew Blitzke (6-1, 210), 1,183 rushing yards, 13 TDs, 137 receiving yards, 1 TD, 82 tackles, 3 sacks; Sr. DB-WR Thairyk Blue (5-10, 170), 595 receiving yards, 10 TDs, 64 tackles; Sr. DB-WRShay Guidry (5-11, 164), 171 rushing yards, 1 TD, 46 tackles; Sr. DB-WR George Poland (5-9, 150), 31 tackles; Sr. DB-WR-QB Daveyoine Camp (5-9, 165); Sr. DLAlberto Chariez (5-11, 295), 57 tackles; Sr. OL Sam Hernandez (5-10, 178) 63 tackles, 3 sacks; Jr. DL-OL Jay Martin (6-4, 250); Jr. MLB Mike Mendez (5-10, 210); Jr. SS-OLB-QB Josh Garcia (5-10, 160); Jr. DB-RB Tyraill Carrenethers (5-8, 160).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Consistency. Our boys will be in the same program for two years. They will be more disciplined than before. We are going to be fast.

Strengths of defense: Bring back the majority of players and they understand our system better with a full year under our staff.

Team's biggest question mark(s): How will we adjust to being a young team. The smallest senior class in last 10 years. We have a new quarterback and seeing what he can do with good receivers.

2018 expectations: Perform better than we did last year.

Schedule is more challenging and team ready to step up. Even though young we expect to compete and leave it on the field.

Maryvale

Head coach: Justin Watson.

2017 record: 1-9.

Number of returning starters on offense: 6.

Number of returning starters on defense: 3.

Key returning starters and 2017 stats: Sr. ATH Major Shepherd (6-0, 175), 348 rushing yards, 4 TDs, 200 receiving yards, 2 TD, 75 tackles; Sr. RB-SS Alexander Baker (6-3, 220), 90 tackles, 5 sacks; Sr. ATH Robert Garzon (5-8, 180), 55 tackles; Sr. Bryan Renteria (6-1, 340); Sr. OL-DL Adolfo Cano (6-3, 250); Jr. OL-DL Keivyn Lopez (6-3, 265); Sr OL-

DL Bryan Gomez (5-10, 200); Sr. FB-LB Angel Lopez (5-10, 230), 37 tackles.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: We are going to have some big boys up front to get our skill guys going.

Strengths of defense: We have some guys that are capable of playing different positions, which gives us a little room for creativity.

Team's biggest question marks: Jumping into a different conference with a new program.

2018 expectations: I want my guys to leave it all on the field and take back the Pride of the Westside.

North

Head coach: Adan Mendoza

No. of returning starters on offense: 5

No. of returning starters on defense: 5

Key returning players and 2017 stats: Sr. Maxamus Valdez DL-OL (6-1, 280), 46 tackles, 6 sacks. Sr. QB-S Anthony Badilla (5-11, 155), 370 rushing yards, 8 TDs, 394 passing yards, 3 TDs. Sr. DB X. Enrique SR. (6-0, 165), 58 tackles, 4 sacks.

Strengths of offense heading into the summer: Run game and toughness

Strengths of defense: Experience and a strong front seven

Team's biggest question mark(s): Developing a passing game

2018 expectations: Compete and continue improving upon previous years

Trevor Browne

Head coach: Jeremy Zimmerman

No. of returning starters on offense: 3

No. of returning starters on defense: 4

Key returning players and 2017 stats: Sr. LB Omar Hernandez (6-2, 230), 106 tackles, 19 sacks. Sr. OL-DL Jordan Towner (6-0, 308). Sr. DL Jordan Lazono (6-1, 270), 3 sacks.

Strengths of your offense heading into the summer: Line.

Strengths of defense: Line

Team's biggest question mark(s): Inexperience.

Tucson

Head coach: Justin Argraves.

2017 record: 4-6.

Number of returning starters on offense: 8.

Number of returning starters on defense: 9.

Key returning starters and 2017 stats: Sr. LB David Lopez (6-0, 190), 133 rushing yards, 2 TDs, 60 tackles; Sr. QB Jesus Montano (6-1, 205), 532 passing yards, 2 TDs, 352 rushing yards, 5 Tds; Sr. OL Ismael Ballesteros (6-0, 250); Jr. WR-DB Octavius Thomas (5-10, 165); Sr. OL-DL Javier Diaz (6-3, 280); Sr. TE-DE Wyatt Campos (6-2, 200), 170 receiving yards, 25 tackles; Sr. OL-DL Julian Villanueva (6-5, 300).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: We return eight offensive starters so they have much more confidence in our scheme. Junior-to-be-running back Gary Love will be a huge addition and we return four out of our five line-man from last season. We have increased our tempo during spring, which will help us tremendously.

Strengths of defense: We return nine defensive starters, which helps greatly with experience. Our run game defense will be a strength led by region defensive player of the year David Lopez.

Team's biggest question marks: Our passing game struggled last year, but our returning QB has shown great improvement over the offseason. Depth might also be an issue at the receiver spot.

2018 expectations: Our early goals heading into the season is to improve our team chemistry from last year. Also being the only high school from southern Arizona in 6A, we will be constantly traveling. We must stay healthy in order to compete for a region championship and playoff appearance.

SOUTHERN REGION

Kofa

Head coach: David Diehl.

2017 record: 3-6.

No. of returning starters on offense: 3.

No. of returning starters on defense: 5.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Jr. SB Jamar McFarlane (6-0, 180), 252 receiving yards, 1 TD; Sr. OT Jesus Barba (6-3, 230); Sr. WR-DB Keith Beal (5-10, 170), 18 tackles.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Too soon to tell.

Strengths of defense: Too soon to tell.

Team's biggest question marks: Every position is open for competition. Team starting with a new head coach. Much will change but the basis of the program will be daily competition.

2018 expectations: Get better every day.

Region notes: Cibola posted a 5-6 record in 2017 and won back the Southern Region title from Tucson High. The Raiders lasted one round in postseason with a loss to Mountain Pointe. Coach Lucky Arvizo's team won a second region title in three years but hasn't been able to get past the opening round of postseason in those seasons. The Southern Region is comprised of only two teams in 2018 with Tucson High shifting to the Metro Region and Sunnyside and Rincon moving down to 5A.

SOUTHWEST REGION

Copper Canyon

Head coach: Sean Freeman

No. of returning starters on offense: 6

No. of returning starters on defense: 8

Key returning players and 2017 stats: Sr. ATH Jacob Rosario (5-9-160), 537 receiving yards, 8 TDs. Sr. TB Josue Menjivar (5-6, 180), 709 rushing yards, 6 TDS, 145 receiving yards. Sr. CB Isaiah Hereford (6-2, 170), 28 tackles, 4 INT. Sr. LT-DE Julian Parker (6-5, 270).

Strengths of offense heading into the summer: Our running game will be key to our success.

Strengths of defense: We have a fast and physical defense that has eight starters returning.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Is this the same Copper Canyon that teams have seen before...No it's not !

2018 expectations: This is a playoff team in the making. We are flying under the radar and we love that no one is really paying attention to us. More fuel to the fire.

Shadow Ridge

Head coach: Bob Chappelle.

2017 record: 2-8 (5A).

Number of returning starters on offense: 7.



Andrew Rumary, Valley Vista (left, photo by Kevin French of maxpreps.com) and Andre Johnson, Tolleson (right, photo by Vasco Dixon of maxpreps.com)

Number of returning starters on defense: 7.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. LB-RB George Lamb (5-11, 240), 113 rushing yards, 1 TD, 96 tackles; Sr. LB-TE Travis Pantazis (6-0, 220), 74 tackles, 3 sacks; Sr. OL Andy Simek (6-5, 290); Jr. OL Isaiah Mercado (6-3, 280); Sr. WR Darius Moore (6-1, 180), 250 receiving yards, 1 TD; Sr. RB Julian Toles (5-10, 210), 377 rushing yards, 3 TDs; Sr. SS Devyn Flanagan (5-9, 190); Sr. CB Ralph Daoud (5-9, 170), 25 tackles, 3 INT; Sr. DB-WR Iosefa Custodio (5-9, 170), 235 receiving yards, 2 TDs; Sr. TE-LB Trent Hudson (6-3, 190).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: With seven returning starters and a lot of other players who had significant playing time, we are very confident with our experience. Offensive line is bigger and stronger after a great winter weight program. We have move in QB from Oregon, Kaiden Lansford. Should compete for the QB job and make us better at that position.

Strengths of defense: The overall speed has increased greatly. With seven returners we feel very confident with our starters.

Team's biggest question marks: Need to develop depth at every position. Need some of our younger guys to gain confidence.

2018 expectations: Win game No. 1 is always our first goal and compete for a region championship.

Tolleson

Head coach: Jason Wilke.

2017 record: 5-5.

No. of returning starters on offense: 8.

No. of returning starters on defense: 8.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. QB Patrick Ortega (5-10, 175), 1,604 passing yards, 15 TDs, 198 rushing yards, 2 TDs. Sr. WR-DB Andre Johnson (6-4, 190), 642 receiving yards, 7 TDs, 28 tackles, 2 INT; Sr. OL Randy Babchuk (6-0, 255).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Experience at quarterback. Balanced run-pass attack.

Strengths of defense: Experience in secondary. Speed.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Line play. Development of JV players moving up.

2018 expectations: Win first region title since 1984. Make playoffs.

Valley Vista

Head coach: Josh Sekoch.

2017 record: 5-5.

No. of returning starters on offense: 5.

No. of returning starters on defense: 9.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. OLB Alex Zacek (5-10, 200), 62 tackles, 12.5 sacks; Sr. OLB Daniel Villegas (5-11, 205), 41 tackles; Sr. DE Walter Fa'apouli(6-1, 250), 31 tackles, 7 sacks; Jr. FS Makai Obregon (6-0, 180), 36 tackles, 2 INT; Sr. SS Brendan Blanchard (5-10, 170), 64 tackses; Sr. CB Elijah Contreras (5-8, 160), 38 tackles, 3 INT; Sr. QB Antonio Gomez (6-1, 190), 799 passing yards, 6 TDs, 363 rushing yards, 3 TDs; Jr. RB-WR Aiden Cunningham (5-10, 170), 440 rushing yards, 3 TDs; Jr. OL Andrew Rumary (6-7, 280); Jr. RB-WR Henry Brown (5-10, 170).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Quarterback. Running back and slot-wide receiver.

Strengths of defense: Linebacking returning three of four starters. Secondary returning three of four starters.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Finding four offensive linemen to go with Rumary. Competition at skill position, wide receiver.

2018 expectations: Compete day in and day out. Win Dysart District. Win region. Win a playoff game.

Westview

Head coach: Nick Gehrts.

2017 record: 6-6.

No. of returning starters on offense: 6.

No. of returning starters on defense: 8.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. DT Dominick Russell (5-10, 260), 82 tackles, 8 sacks; Sr. MLB Sebastian Knox (5-10, 205), 136 tackles, 12 sack; Sr. SSMichael Campbell (6-1, 180), 75 tackles, 3 INT; Sr. DB-WR Kayden Staples (5-10, 160), 240 receiving yards, 3 TDs; Sr. WR Nathan Young (6-2, 170), 154 receiving yards; Sr. DE Carlos Aragon (5-10, 190), 49 tackles, 8.5 sacks; Sr. DE Jaden Moss(5-10, 200), 74 tackles, 5 sacks; Sr. RB Jacob Olivas (5-6, 170), 763 rushing yards, 7 TDs; Sr. RB Albert Curry (5-9, 180), 694 rushing yards, 5 TDs; Jr. OL Levyn Santillan(6-2, 250); Sr. QB Chase Pope (6-2, 170), 1,962 passing yards, 22 TDs.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Speed at skill positions and returning majority of offense. Pope supplies a threat at QB we haven't had before.

Strengths of defense: Best team speed for this unit. Only three starters not returning.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Establishing offensive line and replacing two of top seven on defense.

2018 expectations: Win our region and make the playoffs.

Region notes: La Joya Community finished last in the region with a 2-8 mark. The Lobos did not win a region game and have been up and down in terms of overall record. It's been four years since they posted a .500 or better record. The hope is improvement toward .500 in 2018.

The Rattler Way: Pinnacle QB Remains True To Himself

By Jose Garcia
azpreps365.com

It had never happened to Spencer Rattler before.
He was benched.

Rattler didn't break a rule. He's as trustworthy as it gets for a 17 year old.

The benching came in July in the biggest offseason event for high school quarterbacks, the Elite 11 finals in Texas. A few lapses by Rattler led to some interceptions during the 7 on 7 tournament and a loss.

But he brushed that off to solidify his spot as the top-rated high school quarterback in the nation heading into the 2018-19 season. The Oklahoma commit along with some future college teammates led their team to the 7 on 7 title, securing Elite 11 MVP quarterback status for Rattler in the process.

But gaining top-gun recognition didn't complete the Pinnacle quarterback's high school mission. His list of high school and post-high school goals is lofty.

Rattler fiercely chases those big dreams with a humble heart.

Guiding the super talented young man are caring parents. Now that he's crossed off Elite 11 MVP and nation's No. 1-ranked QB, as well as earning his 5th star, off his check list, it's time to move on to his next prep objectives:

A state football title.

Break state passing records.

Winning the Heisman and getting drafted No. 1 overall by an NFL team are also among the ambitions Rattler is pursuing.

"From a little kid," Michael, Rattler's father, said, "(Rattler) told me he wanted to be a pro. I told him you have to be the best at everything you do. You have to be the best player. He was seven when I told him, and he took it to heart. In every sport he played he tried to dominate."

Like the day he hit eight three-pointers in a game when he was in fifth grade.

Like when he would do Jeter-esque things on the baseball field, Michael said.

After a batting session with private instructor Jim Johnson, the Colorado Rockies hitting coordinator from 2001-12, Johnson told Rattler he wanted to become his agent after high school.

Rattler was just in 8th grade when Johnson made the offer.

"I was like dang I didn't know I was that good," Rattler said. "I could play baseball to this day. I still miss it."

azpreps365's attempts to contact Johnson through the Colorado Rockies and the Baseball Factory were unsuccessful.

Not wanting to affect Rattler's high angle football throwing motion, the Rattlers made the decision to stop playing baseball after junior high.

"Spencer was a quarterback from Day 1," Michael said.

There's another athletic moment that caught Michael's eye, and it came on off all things a punt.

Besides the pinpoint accuracy of his right arm, Rattler's right leg became another weapon last year when Pinnacle tabbed him as its punter. In his first season at the new position, Rattler led the 6A Conference with a 43.1 yards per punt average, but the mobile quarterback, as Pinnacle planned, also converted his share of 4th downs.

In his very first punt at practice, he booted the ball 50 yards.

"That's the type of stuff that really surprises me," Michael said. "How do you pick this up, and he doesn't even practice punting?"



Pinnacle's Spencer Rattler (photo by Darin Sicurello of maxpreps.com)

That's the type of stuff that put me in awe of him. I've never told him that."

Nobody in Rattler's immediate family played college sports.

There may not be an elite sports lineage in the Rattler family, but there are plenty of valuable life lessons that were learned. Some of those lessons were taught while Michael was growing up in Arkansas.

His life coach was his mom, Eva. Michael's parents divorced when he was three.

"You don't mess with Eva," Michael said. "She does not play. She is 78 and to this day it's all about respect. You better believe I'm old school."

After visiting a friend, Michael moved to Arizona in 1994 to start working as a marketing rep for a bank in Utah.

In 1999 he married Rattler's mom, Susan, a second grade teacher and the Rattler table tennis champ. Rattler's friendliness comes from his mom, Michael said.

A heavy dose of old school values and kindness are helping

raise an upright gentleman, Rattler, and his sister, Olivia, an up-and-coming high school volleyball player.

"I tell Spencer that I'm proud of the stuff you are doing on the field, stuff I knew you could do," Michael said. "But I want you to remain humble no matter what happens. I've stressed to him about being kind to these kids that come up to him, because a lot of them want to take pictures. Always be that way.

"Remain humble and keep God in your life. We stress that."

Why Pinnacle

Before enrolling at Pinnacle, Rattler was tugged to attend high schools not in his boundary.

A private school offered free tuition.

Some of the players from the Firebirds, the youth team Rattler played on, sometimes go to Chaparral.

A lot of Rattler's youth teammates were in the class that helped Notre Dame reach the 5A final last year. There was also the championship glow of Chandler.

But Michael knew all along where his son would end up. Unlike Arizona, there isn't open enrollment in Arkansas.

"We want him to play in the neighborhood he was raised,"

Michael said. "In (Arkansas) you play where you live. I hate open enrollment. (Rattler) knows everybody in his community. To me it's like betrayal (if you attend a school outside your boundary)."

Michael said folks told him he was making a mistake picking Pinnacle, a school that's never reached a football state semifinal.

"You will go to Pinnacle and make them better," he said he told his son.

That loyalty extends to the trainers Rattler stuck with, including quarterback coach Mike Giovando and basketball trainer/coach B.J. Letcher, and to the commitment he made to Oklahoma just before his junior year.

Arizona State was the first school to offer Rattler just after completing his freshman season, and UCLA came next on the same day.

The Rattler family and then ASU offensive coordinator Mike Norvell clicked. So much so that Rattler may have become a Sun Devil if Norvell, now Memphis' head coach, had stayed at ASU, Michael said.

Norvell left in 2015 when Todd Graham was the head coach of ASU, which is now under the direction of Herm Edwards.

The Rattlers, at first, were hoping Spencer would play close to home, in the Pac-12.

"We would have stayed (with ASU)," Michael said. "(Norvell) was a great guy and gave us some great advice when Spencer was a freshman. He told us to allow Spencer to keep playing basketball."

UCLA also was in the picture for Rattler because of then offensive coordinator Noel Mazzone.

Mazzone had a summer home in Scottsdale and knew Giovando, who trains quarterbacks in Valley, including in Scottsdale. Before Rattler enrolled at Pinnacle, Mazzone, stationed currently at University of Arizona, at times rode his bicycle to Scottsdale's El Dorado Park when Rattler trained with Giovando, Michael said.

Mazzone then went to Texas A&M, where the Rattlers visited but weren't convinced that was the right school for Rattler.

In stepped Oklahoma and Lincoln Riley, who started visiting Pinnacle as an Oklahoma assistant. Michael's first conversation with Oklahoma coach Bob Stoops, who has since retired, was memorable.

"I'm at a Discount Tire and get a call from (Giovando) saying that (Stoops) wants to talk," he said. "So for about 30 minutes I'm talking to him, and he's saying we should come up to (Norman) and visit. Nobody is going to believe me that I'm talking to Stoops outside a Discount Tire.

"Then I said it's getting serious with Oklahoma."

A week after that phone call, Stoops announced his retirement, but the Rattlers were already impressed with what they saw in Riley and had a hunch he'd become Oklahoma's next coach.

Riley is 34 and played quarterback at Texas Tech. This summer, NFL teams went to Oklahoma to pick his offensive brain.

But there was something else that connected with the Rattlers.

"(Riley) been humble and genuine since the first day I met him when I was 14 or 15," Rattler said. "Ever since we've been real."

Rattler was visiting USC when he decided to become a Boomer Sooner.

While at USC, Rattler received a text message from Riley, saying he was named Oklahoma's head coach. Riley also said that he wouldn't recruit another 2019 quarterback if Rattler picked Oklahoma.

Their word is their bond, and the Rattlers and Riley have kept it ever since Rattler made his Oklahoma commitment announcement last June. But in the game of recruiting, it ain't over until you sign on the dotted line.

Schools continue to try to get Rattler to flip via direct messages, mostly from USC, Florida and Clemson. Rattler said he is not 110 percent sure he'll be a Boomer Sooner.

"I am 150 percent a Boomer Sooner," he stated as clearly and unequivocally as one can.

Even if Riley were to leave Oklahoma for some crazy reason, Rattler made his commitment to that school and he is sticking with it, his dad said.

Seeing Rattler with an Oklahoma red visor, which he wore during the Elite 11 final, is a familiar sight.

So much so that the visor even has its own Twitter handle (https://twitter.com/rattler_s).

Last year, Rattler wore red socks with OU, Oklahoma lettering during the 6A basketball championship game won by Pinnacle, the first in school's history. We haven't checked his room, but we are sure it's likely decked out in OU red.

So Rattler doesn't know what else he can do to prove to recruiters he is Norman-bound.

Winning the basketball championship last year was a perfect way to cap his career as a dual sport athlete. Rattler finished behind another national prep star and good friend, guard Nico Manion, in scoring last season at Pinnacle.

"It was one of the best feelings in my life," Rattler said. "I told everybody before the season that we were going to win it. That was our goal from Day 1. We balled out."

From here on out it's strictly about football.

Unfinished business

Rattler's ideal high school ending is lifting the championship trophy along with his Pinnacle teammates.

It's conceivable that, with Rattler at the helm, Pinnacle can make a state title run just like Perry did last year behind a quarterback, Brock Purdy, that wasn't as highly-touted as Rattler but made a name for himself. But the reality is that dethroning two-time defending champ Chandler, the 2018 preseason 6A chief, will be tough.

Chandler has been tied to Pinnacle's hip, but in a thorny sense since Rattler's first varsity game. As a freshman, Rattler was thrown to the Chandler Wolves when Pinnacle opened its 2015 campaign.

That Chandler team featured ASU's N'Keal Harry and Chase Lucas. Chandler scored on its first possession, and the final result, 56-10, was anticipated.

In 2016, they met again, when Pinnacle led 16-10 at halftime before Chandler pulled out a 31-16 victory.

In 2017, Pinnacle got closer but lost 35-28 in overtime in the regular season and then stumbled again, 77-52, against Chandler in a state quarterfinal game that saw Rattler throw for a career high 580 yards.

COPPER, CATTLE, COTTON AND QUARTERBACKS

Arizona is known for its copper, cattle and corn exports, but they might want to start adding high school quarterbacks to that list.

In the past two years Arizona has produced eight quarterbacks that were in the top-50 in the 2018 and 2019 classes of 247sports.com's overall QB rankings. Only the U.S. states with the highest populations, Texas (12 top-50 QBs) and California (10), had more top-50 QBs in last year and this year's senior classes than Arizona, which ranks 14th in population.

Only one of those eight Arizona quarterbacks in the top-50 will play college football in Arizona, University of Arizona's Jamarye Joiner (Cienega High).

Chandler and Pinnacle won't tangle again this year unless they meet in the playoffs. But even through those frustrating moments against Chandler, Arizona saw Rattler blossom into one of the best quarterbacks in Arizona high school history.

The nation first got a glimpse of his potential during a nationally televised game in his sophomore season, Rattler's favorite game to this day, he said. That ESPN match-up was billed as a showdown between Basha quarterback Ryan Kelley, now at ASU, vs. Rattler and Pinnacle.

Each quarterback threw for 310 yards, but Pinnacle won 49-41 behind three touchdown passes via Rattler's broken right hand. Rattler revealed that he actually suffered the injury (carpal fracture) before a practice while covering a teammate in press coverage a couple of weeks before the big game.

He was expected to miss that Week 2 ESPN showdown, but the Mayo Clinic fitted Rattler with a hard pad and a glove. Advil an adrenaline took care of the pain.

The injury didn't fully heal until after that season in which Rattler tossed 29 touchdowns and threw for 2,893 yards.

This season, ESPN will showcase another Pinnacle game with Rattler, this time against a player who's also in the best ever Arizona high school quarterback conversation, junior Jack Miller of Chaparral. Rattler (6-2, 180) isn't built like the 6-4, 210-pound Miller.

"(Rattler) is not big," said former NFL quarterback Trent Dilfer during the broadcast of the Elite 11 final. "But he plays the position big."

Said his trainer, Giovando, who's worked with Rattler since he was 12, "Other than the arm talent, which is pretty special, nothing is too big for Spencer. He sees the biggest wall, and he'll climb it. He'll deal it with. Face it, and defeat it.

"I don't think nothing bothers him."

Off the field, about the only flashiness you'll spot on Rattler are his earrings and a tattoo he recently got of a bible verse (Proverbs 3:5-6).

He was allowed to get his first earring after fulfilling a promise to earn all A's as a freshman. He didn't stage a press conference to make his college announcement.

Rattler had videographer Charles Wilson of King of the Game record a video of him making the one-minute trip from his home to Pinnacle to deliver the OU announcement on the field with some of his teammates and Giovando.

The video was a minute and a half long. Simple and to the point.

Simple and on point is also a good way to describe what you

can expect from Rattler this season. He won't be running as much, will make better decisions and check down more often, he said.

"I feel like the game has slowed down," Rattler said.

One of the biggest questions heading into this Arizona high school season is who will be Rattler's No. 1 target.

Last year's primary weapon, tight end/wide receiver Hayden Hatten, and his brother, Hogan, transferred to Saguro. When asked how he took the news of the transfers, Rattler, like he did throughout the interview for this story, didn't pause.

"It didn't hit me at all," said Rattler about losing a couple of teammates. "I knew we had other weapons. I'm not worried about one or two players leaving."

Rattler added that he still sees Hayden.

"He (Hayden) is a great player, and we are still cool," Rattler said.

"We have to worry about us. I am looking forward to this year." Giovando was right.

Nothing bothers him, as evidenced also by his Elite 11 benching, when he continued to root for his teammates, including the quarterbacks.

Two days after claiming Elite 11 MVP honors, Rattler was back with Giovando in the Arizona heat.

Training.

Chasing after more.

Rattler said Pinnacle's speed has improved this season and then rattled off the names of guys he's itching to work with and expecting big things from on offense.

Kaleb Covington, the team's leading rusher last year, is moving to wideout, allowing another quality running back, Matt Goodlow, to step in. Quinton Powell, Rattler's good friend since eighth grade, along with Covington are the primary targets for Rattler now.

A physical blocker, tight end Shane Sunday, and Marcus Libman are Rattler's tallest targets.

In a program that's gone from Michigan State starter Brian Lewerke to Rattler, there's another good Pinnacle signal caller waiting in the wings.

Quarterback JD Johnson is a junior with a University of Arizona offer already on the table.

"We are getting closer and feel this is the year to do it (state title)," Rattler said. "I tell everybody we won the basketball championship because everybody was together. I am trying to be more of a leader this year. I want to help the younger players and help them get noticed."

Rattler is working toward possibly leaving after the fall semester so he can enroll early at Oklahoma.

There's a lot the mature young man wants to accomplish in college, including starting as a freshman and win a national championship. The probable starter for OU this season, Kyler Murray, signed a \$4.6 million baseball contract with the A's.

So Rattler might be in the mix for a starting role next season when Murray fully dedicates himself to baseball after this season. But if Rattler remains at Pinnacle in the spring, he'll enjoy the rest of his senior year at Pinnacle, his dad said.

And regardless of where he's at in his life, expect him to continue following the Rattler way.

"I am a son of God," Rattler said. "I am humble. I love my family. I go about getting better. It's about business all of the time.

When I need to be real funny, I am a comedian around my friends. I am really confident and taking life like it should be. I am having fun. It's high school. But I am also focusing on the bigger picture to get to the levels I want to be."

Rattler Makes, Continues to Chase History



"This was when I played with the Firebirds," Rattler said. "We were one of the best youth teams in the country. Had great memories with that team."



"This is a major throwback," Rattler said. "I am sure my dad and I were playing catch and playing soccer in my backyard."



Rattler playing for Cal Ripken baseball when he was young.



Rattler was a freshman in this photo. "No. 1, his will to win," said basketball trainer B.J. Letcher about working with Rattler. "That competitive edge was so high, it didn't matter what sport it was. I was in awe of him because there were times he didn't touch the ball in five months because of football. But the ball handling was still there. I've worked with football players who also played basketball when they were in high school (Arizona Cardinal D.J. Foster, Texas A&M tight end Trevor Wood, Baltimore Raven tight end Mark Andrews). All these guys were good, but Spencer just excelled." (photo by Darin Sicurello of maxpreps.com)



"This is one of the best feelings in my life," said Rattler about winning the 6A basketball crown last year. "I will never forget winning state." (photo by Jim Willittes of maxpreps.com)



Mom Susan on the left and sister, Olivia, is on the right. Rattler and dad, Michael, in the background.



Rattler's birth announcement photo.

By Jose Garcia
azpreps365.com

Spencer Rattler made history this summer by becoming the first Arizona high school quarterback to win the nation's premier offseason quarterback competition, the Elite 11.

Five other Arizona quarterbacks have competed at Elite 11 since the event's debut in 1999. Rattler, entering his fourth season as Pinnacle's starter, has a great chance to break most of the state's biggest passing records.

He can become the state's career leader in passing with 1,269 more yards and needs 780 passing yards to join Emanuel Gant (Tempe High) as the only quarterbacks in state history to reach the 10,000 career passing mark.

In his three years as Pinnacle's starter, he's never thrown less than 2,381 yards in a season. Rattler can also pass Perry's Brock Purdy's career 6A/5A touchdown state record total if he throws 15 more touchdowns.

Rattler currently sits at 93 total touchdown passes. He threw 45 TDs last season, and if Rattler duplicates that total this season, he will break the state's all-time career touchdown record.

"I've known about (Rattler) since he was in first or second grade playing basketball at the local (YMCA)," Pinnacle's football coach Dana Zupke said. "My wife teaches at the elementary school he went to. So I've seen him grow up. It wasn't like a big surprise that he was going to be this exceptional."

Returning Statistical Leaders

2017 PASSING

Gr.	Name/School	Passing Yards/Yds/G	TDs/Int
Sr.	Spencer Rattler, Pinnacle	3,946/303.5	45/11
Sr.	Gunner Cruz, Casteel	3,175/226.8	40/6
Sr.	Jacob Conover, Chandler	3,077/307.7	32/2
Sr.	Kedon Slovis, Desert Mountain	2,987/271.5	32/5
Sr.	Trenton Bourget, Marana	2,984/248.7	38/11
Sr.	Keegan Freid, Sunrise Mountain	2,941/226.2	39/7
Jr.	Gage Reese, Yuma Catholic	2,684/223.7	29/11
Sr.	Ryan Helt, Corona del Sol	2,650/265.0	20/16
Sr.	Devin Larsen, Queen Creek	2,351/213.7	30/6
Sr.	Tyler Duncan, Greenway	2,327/232.7	29/9

2017 RUSHING

Gr.	Name/School	Yards/Yds/G	Yds/C	TDs
Jr.	Bijan Robinson, Salpointe	2,023/155.6	10.7	26
Sr.	Mack Johnson, Casteel	1,712/122.3	7.5	27
Sr.	Dez Melton, Deer Valley	1,701/170.1	7.2	19
Sr.	Tyreck Cosay, Alchesay	1,692/188.0	9.3	27
Sr.	Shayne Pahnke, Scottsdale Chr.	1,651/137.6	...	23
Jr.	Zach Jefferies, Benjamin Franklin	1,643/136.9	...	21
Jr.	Amahri Bailey, San Tan Foothills	1,591/144.6	...	27
Sr.	Kele Meredith, Page	1,575/143.2	...	14
Sr.	Brandon Garcia, AZ Lutheran	1,567/142.5	...	20
Sr.	Greg Dostry, Youngker	1,566/142.4	...	20

2017 RECEIVING

Gr.	Name/School	Yards Yds/G	Yds/R	TDs
Sr.	Colby Dickie, Perry	1,349/103.8	20.1	9
Sr.	John Henderson, Yuma Catholic	1,336/121.5	...	16
Sr.	Ricky Pearsall, Corona del Sol	1,153/115.3	...	10
Sr.	D'Shayne James, Perry	1,086/77.6	...	15
Sr.	Jacob Cowing, Maricopa	1,081/108.1	...	11
Sr.	Shawn Charles, Camelback	1,080/108.0	...	11
Sr.	Kain Ream, Thunderbird	1,068/106.8	...	6
Sr.	Jake Smith, Notre Dame	1,055/75.4	...	15
So.	Gabe Imus, Kingman Academy	1,022/92.9	...	14
Sr.	Terrell Hayward, Cienega	1,021/78.5	...	12

2017 SCORING

Gr.	Pos/Name/School	Points	Pts/G	TDs
Sr.	Tyreck Cosay, Alchesay	204	22.7	31
Jr.	Bijan Robinson, Salpointe	180	13.8	30
Sr.	Mack Johnson, Casteel	178	12.7	29
Sr.	Brandon Garcia, AZ Lutheran	174	15.8	24
Jr.	Amahri Bailey, San Tan Foothills	174	15.8	29
Sr.	Jake Smith, Notre Dame	170	12.1	28
Sr.	Malik Taylor, Phoenix Christian	168	12.0	28
Sr.	Chandler Miles, Benjamin Franklin	158	12.2	26
Sr.	Anthodius Ashley, Fairfax	156	14.2	23
Sr.	Juwaun Price, Peoria	152	12.7	25

2017 TACKLES

Gr.	Pos/Name/School	Total Tackles	Tackles/G
Sr.	SS Colton Amos, Prescott	156	15.6
Sr.	LB David Brimhall, Snowflake	154	14.0
Sr.	LB Seth Solano, River Valley	151	16.8
Sr.	DL Eloi Kwete, Central	142	14.2
Sr.	LB Sebastian Knox, Westview	136	11.3
Sr.	LB Clayton Randall, Saguaro	133	9.5
Sr.	LB Connor Soelle, Saguaro	132	9.4
Jr.	LB Dalton Card, Casteel	131	9.4
Jr.	LB Jack Littleton, Casteel	128	9.1
Sr.	LB Jaren Rucker, Casteel	126	9.0

2017 SACKS

Gr.	Pos/Name/School	Total Sacks	Sacks/G
Sr.	LB Omar Hernandez, Trevor Browne	19.0	1.9
Sr.	DE Bralen Trice, O'Connor	14.5	1.5
Sr.	NG Owen Barton, Bagdad	14.5	1.3
Sr.	DE Cedric Mendoza, Superior	14.0	1.6
Sr.	DL Michael Ochoa, San Manuel	14.0	1.4
Jr.	DE Daniel McConnell, Superior	14.0	1.4
Sr.	LB Maverick Cashman, Cactus Shadows	14.0	1.2
Sr.	LB Tylen Coleman, Maricopa	13.0	1.3
Sr.	LB Logan Maxwell, Higley	13.0	1.1
Sr.	DE Ty Robinson, Higley	13.0	1.0

(Source: maxpreps.com)

Salpointe's Humble Rusher Continues Strong Family Football Legacy

By Andy Morales
azpreps365.com

Having a successful and somewhat famous family can be a burden or it can be rewarding, clearing a path towards your own success.

No one knows that more than Salpointe junior standout Bijan Robinson. Robinson has a great uncle who was an AFL Rookie of the Year and a grandfather who is, literally, a local sports legend.

That could be a lot of weight to carry - a lot to live up to - but Robinson has used his rich heritage to help him thrive in a world of interviews, awards and college recruiting.

"I've been handling it pretty well, just staying humble through the whole process," Bijan said. "Yeah, they help me and give me advice on what I should and shouldn't do and who I should hang out with. That's really helped a lot."

His great uncle, Paul Robinson, was a star athlete who shined in basketball, football and track at Marana High School, and his success in track at Eastern Arizona led to a scholarship at the University of Arizona. Robinson also spent one year playing football for the Wildcats, and he impressed famed coach Paul Brown and the Cincinnati Bengals enough in that short time to draft him.

In 1968, he rewarded the Bengals by being the first rookie in the league to rush for more than 1,000 yards. Joe Namath beat Paul Robinson for AFL MVP honors that year, but the league honored Paul with Rookie of the Year recognition, and he played in two pro bowls.

Cleo Robinson, a hurdles champion and all-state football player at Marana, went on to become one of the most respected referees in Tucson history. Cleo has worked everything from major college bowl games to wheelchair basketball to high school sports.

He is well-known and admired by his colleagues, coaches and players alike and his grandson has inherited his calm and respectful demeanor. Bijan was already somewhat of a known quantity before taking the field at Salpointe, with his exploits in the local youth football league, but high school is a different level.

As a freshman, a running back is getting hit by seniors with muscles, but Bijan has muscles on top of muscles to go along with his respectful and work-like attitude. He was ready.

He saw limited action his freshman year, but he still finished with 767 all-purpose yards or about 13 yards every time he touched the ball. It was only a matter of time before the college scouts realized what most people in Tucson noticed and his time came quickly.

Alabama, Michigan, USC, Washington, Arizona, LSU, Illinois, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Utah, Kansas State and ASU - who hasn't offered Robinson a scholarship?



Grandfather Cleo Robinson (left, photo by Andy Morales of azpreps365.com) and grandson Bijan Robinson (right, photo by Mark Jones of maxpreps.com)

One could say the 2017-18 season was an eye-opener for the rest of the state. Robinson rushed for 2,023 yards and 26 touchdowns at an amazing 11 yards per clip.

In all, the sophomore was putting in almost 178 all-purpose yards an outing to compliment his offensive partner Mario Padilla and his 1,188 APY in limited action.

Robinson helped lead the Lancers to a 4A state runner-up finish against Saguaro in which he rushed for 164 yards against one of the best teams in the country. He was named the top running back from Southern Arizona and was on the Gridiron Club's Ed Doherty Award list, which is Arizona's award for the best football player in the state.

He was only a sophomore.

Now a junior, the Lancers will surround Robinson with almost everyone returning on offense, but nine of the top ten defenders graduated. Still, one knows this is just a case of reloading for head coach Dennis Bene and his Lancers.

"We have a much more athletic team this year, and we have some more juniors this year than we had before, but we look really strong this year," Robinson added.

Saguaro, once again, is highly favored to win the 4A Conference championship, but Salpointe looks to be one of the few teams with enough talent to get in the way, but honestly a lot of that hope falls on Robinson's shoulders.

As noted before, he has plenty of help carrying that load. The weight of a team might crush other athletes his age or, even worse, it can expose the embarrassing cockiness displayed by other athletes with his abilities.

But that kind of behavior is something his family would not allow or accept.

"With me, I've been working hard, keeping my self conditioned because next season's going to be fun," Robinson said. "Let God work."

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By Jose Garcia
 azpreps365.com

By the numbers: Ranking NFL production, football population of AZ high schools

6 The amount of NFL draft picks that played at Chandler High since 2006, which is tied for 7th among U.S. high schools.

12 The number of former NFL players who played at South Mountain High, the highest total for an Arizona high school. Mesa and Chandler are next with nine each, and McClintock is third with eight.

14 Where Arizona's population (approximately 7.1 million) ranks compared to other states.

34 The amount of NFL players on 2017 active rosters with Arizona high school ties, the 20th highest amount compared to other states.

96 The number of Arizona high schools that have so far produced at least one NFL player.

249 The amount of NFL players Arizona high schools have produced, which ranks 28th in the U.S.

17,761 The amount of students who played high school football in Arizona during the 2016-17 season, which ranks 24th nationally.

Boys to men: AZ's HS stars in NFL in 2017

CB **Prince Amukamara** (Apollo) Chicago; DE **Alex Barrett** (Desert Ridge) Detroit; WR **Marquis Bundy** (Boulder Creek) New York Giants; TE **Braedon Bowman** (Skyline) Chargers; DT **Tyler Davison** (Desert Mountain) New Orleans; LB **Marquis Flowers** (Millennium) New England; LB **Reggie Gilbert** (Fairfax) Green Bay; DE **Everson Griffen** (Agua Fria) Minnesota; OLB **Kyler Fackrell** (Mesa High) Green Bay; QB **Ryan Fitzpatrick** (Highland) Tampa Bay; RB **D.J. Foster** (Saguaro) Arizona; QB **Brett Hundley** (Chandler) Green Bay; G **Richie Incognito** (Mountain Ridge) Buffalo; C **J.J. Jansen** (Brophy) Carolina; DE **Cameron Jordan** (Chandler) New Orleans; DE **Dion Jordan** (Chandler) Seattle; RB **Ka'Deem Carey** (Canyon del Oro) Chicago; LB **Devon Kennard** (Desert Vista) New York Giants; OT **Taylor Lewan** (Chaparral) Tennessee; OT **Alex Lewis** (Mountain Pointe) Baltimore; P **Jeff Locke**



Wide receiver Marquis Bundy (#18), a 2012 alum of Boulder Creek High School, is currently on the New York Giants' roster (photo by Chris Pondy of maxpreps.com).

(Mountain Ridge) Detroit; LB **Blake Martinez** (Canyon del Oro) Green Bay; DE **Avery Moss** (Corona del Sol) New York Giants; DE **Trent Murphy** (Brophy) Washington; OT **Andrus Peat** (Corona del Sol) New Orleans; RB **Paul Perkins** (Chandler) New York Giants; DL **Brooks Reed** (Sabino) Atlanta; OT **Wes Schweitzer** (Chaparral) Atlanta; LB-DE **Terrell Suggs** (Hamilton) Baltimore; C **Nick Sundberg** (North Canyon) Washington; C **Jon Weeks** (Mountain Ridge) Houston; OG **Christian Westerman** (Hamilton) Cincinnati; WR **Markus Wheaton** (Mountain Pointe, Chandler) Chicago.



Defending state champion Centennial looks formidable again in 2018 (photo by Mark Jones of maxpreps.com).

By Les Willsey
 azpreps365.com

1. CENTENNIAL: Hard not to place Centennial at No. 1 with its nearly two-decade track record and state titles three of the last four years. The Coyotes do not return a majority of starters on either side of the ball, but those back are solid offensive linemen and players on the defensive front. It will be hard to replace a running back the caliber of Zidane Thomas and the players behind him that made the Coyotes' ground game a crushing one. However, a 1,554-yard rusher with 18 TDs has moved to Arizona from Mojave High in Nevada. Senior Tawee Walker will do his best to replace Thomas. Additional help could come from Millennium senior transfer Davon Fountain, a 1,000-yard rusher in 2017. Top offensive line returnees are senior center Carson Keltner and tackle Jacob Fyffe. Coach Richard Taylor will unveil a new quarterback, but feels the team will possess run-pass versatility and experienced receivers. The Northwest Region has a new makeup in 2018 and figures to be tougher than the past two seasons. Centennial will be ready as it's loaded up its non-region slate with Casteel, Bishop Gorman (NV), Cienega and Ironwood Ridge.

2. HIGLEY: Moving up a conference will be a challenge, but not nearly enough to rule the Knights out of the confer-

ence-title chase. Higley's bugaboo has been Saguaro, who handed it three of its four losses the past two years in 4A. With a good amount of returning talent and an influx of transfers there's reason to be quite optimistic. The Knights' offense is led by senior quarterback Spencer Brasch, who committed to Cal earlier this summer. Brasch passed for 1,942 yards and 33 touchdowns and added 898 yards rushing and 13 scores on the ground. Skill player losses were large to graduation, but Brasch knows how to get the ball to whoever is out there. The addition of healthy junior defensive end-receiver Jason Harris, who sat out last year with shoulder injury following his transfer from Desert Ridge, has fans pumped up. Top defensive returnee is linebacker Logan Maxwell, who contributed 40 tackles and 13 sacks in 2017.

3. SUNRISE MOUNTAIN: Another school moving up from 4A to 5A. Sunrise Mountain shouldn't be worse for the wear. The Mustangs return prolific senior quarterback Kegan Freid, who accounted for 2,941 yards passing and 700 rushing to the tune of a combined 50 TDs. There are other skill players back, including running back Drake Flores and his 752 yards rushing and seven TDs and slot Jay Anderson (1,012 yards and 14 TDs combined rushing and receiving. Coach Steve Decker is looking for others to step up to man an offensive line depleted by graduation. The defense has many holes to fill with its lone returning starter

a very good one in linebacker Huntger Olsen. Sunrise won its region last year.

4. CASTEEL: Despite the loss of head coach Spencer Stowers to another job out of state for family reasons earlier this summer, Casteel should be a factor. They have the rare opportunity of returning all its starters as its first senior class is headed for graduation next spring. The coaching reins have been handed to assistant Bobby Newcombe and the community and team appear comfortable with it. The Colts brandish a talented senior quarterback in Gunner Cruz. Cruz lit up the scoreboard passing for 3,175 yards and 40 TDs last year. He is committed to Washington State. Workhorse running back Mack Johnson ran for 1,712 yards and 27 TDs to pace the ground game and Cruz had several receivers to choose from -- junior Brandt Goodwin, and seniors Zach Nelson and Jaime Lewis. The trio was on the receiving end of 26 of Cruz's TD tosses. The defense will be challenged much more often in the school's move up from 3A to 5A, especially competing with Higley, Williams Field, Campo Verde and Gilbert. The season opener is quite the barometer for the Colts -- defending conference champ Centennial.

5. WILLIAMS FIELD: The cupboard isn't bare at Williams Field and it hasn't been since the school opened a bit more than a decade ago. The Blackhawks marquee players stand out on defense in the secondary -- Noa Pola-Gates, Tashumbrae Brown and Jadon Pearson offer versatility at corner and safety. All are top recruits in the state at their positions. Starting at quarterback for a third year is senior Zach Shepherd. (1,857 yards, 15 TDs). A host of backs led by Jaden Thompson (611 yards, 9 TDs) will handle the ground game while Pola-Gates and and JC Carroll enjoyed the best numbers of returning receivers. Williams Field competes in arguably the toughest region in 5A and will renew a rivalry with nearby Higley. Its non-region schedule is stout. The season opener is at Norco, CA followed by Sunrise Mountain, Cactus Shadows, Verrado and Marana.

6. CIENEGA: Cienega will regroup after having its perfect season and title-hopes dashed by a semifinal loss to eventual runner-up Notre Dame Prep. The Bobcats have to start over at quarterback with Jamayre Joyner's phenomenal year in the rearview mirror. Coach Pat Nugent has a good core of players returning, including senior receiver-safety Tyrell Hayward and a good chunk of the offensive line. Hayward accounted for 1,021 yards receiving and 12 TDs. Moving the ball won't be a problem with several backs with experience ready to keep the ball and clock moving. Senior linebackers Zach Mattas (71 tackles, 2 sacks) and Diego Rivas (73 tackles) are anchors of the defense at the second level. Cienega didn't get a shot at Centennial last year due to its semi defeat, but gets a chance on Sept. 7 at Centennial.

7. MARANA: New 25-year-old head coach Louie Ramirez inherits a quality stable of skill players and defensive returners that should equal a postseason berth and perhaps a run at the Southern Region title. The leader of the offen-

sive pack for the Tigers is senior quarterback Trenton Bourguet. Bourguet passed up a storm (2,984 yards and 38 TDs) and chipped in another 424 yards and six TDs rushing/scrambling. The Tigers top rusher from last year returns in Rene Valenzuela (827 yards, 8 TDs). Three of the top five receivers -- Diego Miranda, Tariq Jordan and Alfred Ebunoha -- are again targets for Bourguet. Marana engaged in a lot of shootouts last season, but has a defensive stalwart in linebacker T.J. Cephers (111 tackles). Marana figures to have a battle on its hands with new region foes Cienega and Ironwood Ridge. The Tigers won Sonoran Region crowns each of the last two seasons and reached the 5A quarterfinals both years with 9-3 records.

8. MARANA MOUNTAIN VIEW: A change in region will benefit Marana Mountain View as it shifts to the Sonoran Region where it won't have to compete with Cienega and Ironwood Ridge for a region crown. The Mountain Lions won't shy away from one of the tougher non-region slates, however, facing Ironwood Ridge (season opener), Higley, Casteel, Cienega and Tucson. If they survive that stretch they are the favorite to win their new region. Aaron Logsdon (64 tackles) and Calib McRae (80 tackles) are key returners for the defense at linebacker.

9. VERRADO: A new makeup of the Desert West Region could make things interesting for Verrado to navigate. Millennium and Willow Canyon have dropped down from 6A to join the region and Millennium dealt Verrado one of its three losses last year in a tight game. The Vipers need to replace some key pieces to last year's 8-3 playoff club, but bring back its starting quarterback and two strong defensive players as catalysts. Senior Titan Widjaja passed for 1,700 yards and 20 TDs. Verrado has to identify a running back to fill the spot vacated by Ja'Tai Jenkins and his 1,900 yards. Defensive leadership on the field falls to end Jonathan Parks (74 tackles, 7 sacks) and cornerback Jimmy Richardson (57 tackles). The Vipers' non-region schedule is heavy on San Tan Region opposition -- Casteel, Williams Field (who Verrado beat last year), Campo Verde and 5A newcomer Sunrise Mountain.

10. DESERT MOUNTAIN: One of the most experienced teams with better than two-thirds of its starters back albeit several of them will need to go both ways. Desert Mountain held its own in 6A last year and made the playoffs with a first-round defeat ending its season. A huge plus is one of the elite quarterbacks sets up shop with the Wolves, USC commit Kedon Slovis. Slovis accounted for 2,987 yards passing and 32 TDs in 2017. Slovis lost his top two receivers to graduation, but a trio of capable receivers return with plenty of catches and scores. The offensive line has a couple three-year veterans and are as solid a unit as the team possesses. Defense is led by safety Riley Tucker, linebacker Cole Daddario and end Brandon Kron. Most of its Northeast Valley region foes are new and the schedule also includes non-region matchups with 6A Chaparral and 4A Saguaro.

5A Conference Team-By-Team Preview

By Les Willsey
azpreps365.com

SOUTHERN REGION

Buena

Head coach: Joe Thomas.

2017 record: 6-4.

No. of returning starters on offense: 9.

No. of returning starters on defense: 7.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. LB-TE Tim Jones (6-1, 220), 84 tackles; Sr. RB-CB Kaleb Bryant (5-10, 185), 173 rushing yards, 3 TDs, 134 receiving yards, 1 TD; Sr. WR-CB Mandrell Garrick (5-11, 180), 448 receiving yards, 6 TDs, 21 tackles, Sr. SLOT-FS Jacob Murphy (5-8, 160), 59 tackles, 3 INT; Sr. OT-DT Manaia Fruean (5-10, 240), 47 tackles; Sr. OT-DE De'Vyon Johnson (5-10, 195); Sr. WR-SS Nazir Riddle (5-11, 180), 24 tackles, 2 INT; Sr. C James Bias (5-11, 210); Jr. QB-FS Jovoni Borbon (5-10, 185), 1,385 passing yards, 12 TDs, 239 rushing yards, 2 Tds; Jr. WR-RB-DB Young Schwinof (6-2, 180); Jr. G-DT Santantoniano Smith (6-0, 250); Jr. TE-DE Jesse Avina (6-2, 190).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Experience. Depth. Speed. Confidence.

Strengths of defense: Experience. Speed. Strength. Confidence.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Number of incoming freshmen.

2018 expectations: Be aggressive. Execute. Trust the process.

Cienega

Head coach: Pat Nugent.

2017 record: 12-1.

No. of returning starters on offense: 6.

No. of returning starters on defense: 5.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. WR-DB Terrell Hayward (5-9, 160), 1,021 receiving yards, 12 TDs, 267 rushing yards, 3 TDs, 40 tackles; Sr. RB-DB Thomas Webb (5-10, 190), 212 rushing yards, 8 TDs, 50 tackles; Sr. RB Geo Owens (5-10, 165), 530 rushing yards, 3 TDs; Sr. OL-LB Zach Mattas (6-0, 215), 71 tackles, 2 sacks; Sr. TE-LB Diego Rivas (6-0, 220), 73 tackles; Jr. OL-DL Demaggio Strevary (6-3, 235); Jr. OL-DL Tyrae McKinney (5-10, 240); So. OL-DL Hunter Schlagel (6-3, 270).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Running back. Top receiver returns plus three returning linemen.

Strengths of defense: Secondary and two returning linemen.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Replacing quarterback and linebacking depth.

2018 expectations: Win region. Make playoffs and compete for state title.

Ironwood Ridge

Head coach: Matt Johnson

No. of returning starters on offense: 3

No. of returning starters on defense: 3

Key returning players and 2017 stats: Jr. QB-LB Octavio Audry-Cobos (6-3, 220), 42 tackles. Sr. RB Natahn Grijalva (6-0,

200), 418 rushing yards, 7 TDs. Sr. OL-DL Justin McGrath, 6-3, 220), 39 tackles, 1.5 sacks. Sr. WR Andrew Cook (5-11, 175). 601 receiving yards, 8 TDs, 101 rushing yards.

Strengths of your offense heading into the summer: Great attitude.

Strengths of your defense: Great attitude.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Undersized at most positions.

Nogales

Head coach: Jake Teyechea.

2017 record: 3-7 (4A).

No. of returning starters on offense: 5.

No. of returning starters on defense: 3.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. OL Brandon Rojas (6-1, 240). Sr. OL-LB-LS Joel Mendivil (5-11, 225); Sr. RB-LB Jesus Torres (5-8, 175); Sr. DL-OPL Jesus Ochoa (6-3, 265); Jr. DB Genaro Parra (5-5, 145), 41 tackles, 3 INT; Sr. WR Ivan Romero (5-11, 170), 232 receiving yards; Sr. DB-KR Eric Montano (5-11, 185), 29 tackles; Jr. QB Oscar Felix (5-10, 160).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Line, quarterback depth and speed.

Strengths of defense: Line, strength and speed up front and in secondary.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Youth, learning new schemes and adjusting to move from 4A to 5A.

2018 expectations: Work hard, commit to program, be positive role models on and off the field and compete.

Sunnyside

Head coach: Roy Lopez.

2017 record: 3-7 (6A).

No. of returning starters on offense: 8.

No. of returning starters on defense: 7.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. WR Elijah Wyatt (6-2, 210); Sr. OT Michael Perez (6-3, 280); Jr. LB Jacob Torres (6-1, 210); Sr. DT Adrian Monreal (6-2, 275); Sr. DB Julio Vasquez (5-8, 165); Sr. DB Isiah Hernandez (5-6, 160); Sr. QB Jonathon Lopez (6-1, 185); Jr. OT Harvey Gonzalez (6-4, 270); Sr. LB Nathan Drow (6-0, 215); Sr. DB Sebastian Olmos (5-9, 175).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Veterans at skill positions. Linemen Gonzalez and Torres.

Strengths of defense: Seven returners.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Maturity, speed and ability to bond as a team.

2018 expectations: Improvement if off-season commitment is there.

Region notes: Marana looks to continue a streak of success for the better part of this decade with new coach Louie Ramirez. Ramirez has previous prep experience as an assistant at Marcos de Niza and Mesquite. Marana was 9-3 last year, falling in the quarterfinal round of postseason. Ramirez replaces Andy Litten, who helped the Tigers forge a 36-28 record in six seasons, two region titles and its first playoff win in more than a decade.



Terrell Hayward, Cienega (photo by Andy Morales of azpreps365.com)



Cosomos Kwete, Central (photo by Paul Campbell of maxpreps.com)



Jaiden Hayes, South Mountain (photo by Paul Campbell of maxpreps.com)

SONORAN REGION

Cholla

Head coach: Shawn Wasson.

2017 record: 4-6.

No. of returning starters on offense: 4.

No. of returning starters on defense: 4.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. QB-DB Coy Contreras (5-11, 180), 40 tackles; Sr. OL-DL Rudy Tapia (6-4, 285); Sr. OL-DE Daniel Robledo (6-4, 255), 82 tackles, 4 sacks; Sr. OL-DL Mical Lewis (6-2, 230), 17 tackles; Sr. OL-FB-LB Emmett Holman (5-11, 210), 31 tackles; So. RB-DB Moses Nelson (5-9, 160), 133 yards rushing, 1 TD; Jr. RB-WR-DB-LB Estevan Reyna (5-11, 180), 14 tackles; Sr. WR-DB Kaden Dimuccio (5-10, 160), 278 receiving yards, 1 TD.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Line.

Strengths of defense: Line.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Many new faces on both sides of the ball.

2018 expectations: Increase overall numbers in program. Develop culture of winning by changing year-round commitment of players.

Empire

Head coach: W.T. Jeffries.

2017 record: 6-5.

No. of returning starters on offense: 4.

No. of returning starters on defense: 3.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. RB-LB Wyatt Jeffries (6-1, 190) 1,362 rushing yards, 11 Tds; Sr. QB Alex Verdugo (5-10, 180), 1,016 passing yards, 12 TDs; Sr. LB-FB Isaiah Sierra (5-10, 230), 31 tackles, 182 receiving yards, 1 TD; Sr. OG-DL Kody McPherson (6-1, 260); Jr. S-WR Cody Pacheco (6-4, 205), 108 receiving yards; Sr. K-DL Jacob Lange (5-9, 180), 19 tackles; Sr. RB-CB Jalen Smith (5-9, 155), 964 rushing yards, 8 TDs, 146 receiving yards, 1 TD.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Rushing leader Jeffries returns. QB Verdugo third year as starter. Solid running game.

Strengths of defense: Solid line. Sierra is defensive leader and back from knee injury.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Replacing senior leadership. Replacing all linebackers and need improved play from secondary. Replace four starters on OL.

2018 expectations: Compete and finish. Playing up two conferences 3A to 5A. Welcoming the challenge.

Flowing Wells

Head coach: Mark Brunenkant.

2017 record: 3-7.

No. of returning starters on offense: 8.

No. of returning starters on defense: 7.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. RB Rashaad Henderson (5-7, 175), 230 rushing yards; Sr. WR Thor Martinez (6-1, 198), 197 receiving yards, 2 TDs.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Strength and speed.

Strengths of defense: Speed and intelligence.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Underclassmen need to step up and make instant contributions.

2018 expectations: Win region. Make playoffs.

Rincon/University

Head coach: Mike Strack

No. of returning starters on offense: 3

No. of returning starters on defense: 3

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Jr. QB Preston Silvas, (6-1, 185). Jr. OL-DL Cooper Harris, (6-4, 275). Jr. RB-LB Damon Taylor, (6-0, 180). Sr. WR-DB Fabian Ruiz, (6-0, 170), 103 rushing yards, 2 TDs.

Strengths of offense heading into the summer: Uncertain. We are very young and learning new system.

Strengths of defense: Aggressive, run to the ball.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Need to improve numbers. We will be very inexperienced.

2018 expectations: To simply improve each week. Especially being so young.

Region notes: Marana Mountain View shifts on paper to a less formidable region after battling with Cienega and Ironwood Ridge of late. The Mountain Lions were 7-4 last year and dropped a first-round playoff game to eventual semifinalist Queen Creek. A trio of juniors figure to shoulder the load of the rushing game led by Varney Larson, Edward Gastelum and Aaron Logsdon. Last year's top receiver returns in senior Joshua Hart. Top defensive returners are senior linebacker Calib McRae, Logsdon, junior lineman Mike Contreras, junior safety Branden Devoy and senior cornerback Joseph Pena. ... **Desert View** finished 3-7 last year, losing a couple games that could have gone its way. The Jaguars have been up and down the last half of the decade under coach Robert Bonillas, an 8-3 record in 2016 was the best of those.

UNION REGION

Betty Fairfax

Head coach: Dylan Winemiller.

2017 record: 7-4.

No. of returning starters on offense: 4.

No. of returning starters on defense: 9.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. RB Anthodious Ashley (5-9, 180), 1,324 rushing yards, 23 Tds; Sr. LB Adam Lopez ((5-7, 185), 35 tackles. Sr. DE Kesontaye Lewis (6-2, 235), 58 tackles; Sr. WR-FS Jalen Holmes (6-1, 170), 226 receiving yards, 3 TDs, 29 tackles; Sr. QB Andrew Kauffman (6-2, 170), 120 yards passing, 3 Tds; Sr. C Taj Bryson (6-0, 335); Sr. RB-LB Will Collins (6-0, 170), 129 rushing yards, 1 TD, 53 tackles; Jr. OL-DL Jon Leon (6-1, 240). Jr. CB-WR Tashawn Lambert (6-0, 175), 2 INT; Sr. OL Deontra Cameron (5-9, 190), 21 tackles.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Run game led by Ashley and Collins. Size up front. Kauffman back from injury at QB. Size and speed at wideout.

Strengths of defense: Speed and experience.

Team's biggest question mark(s): How we match up with our toughest schedule to date. Finding a No. 2 quarterback.

2018 expectations: Compete week in and week out.

Camelback

Head coach: Joseph Brissette

No. of returning starters on offense: 3

No. of returning starters on defense: 4

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. WR-DB Shawn Charles (6-2, 185), 1,080 receiving yards, 13 TDs; 102 rushing yards, 2 TDs, 26 tackles, 3 INT. Sr. QB Eric Marquez (5-10, 195), 1,337 passing yards, 13 TDs.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Throwing the ball down the field.

Strengths of defense: We will be long athletic and ultra aggressive.

Team's biggest question mark(s): The offensive line and the running game.

2018 expectations: Win more than three games.

Carl Hayden

Head coach: Randy Gross.

2017 record: 1-9.

Number of returning starters on offense: 7.

Number of returning starters on defense: 4.

Key returning starters and 2017 stats: Sr. OL Michael Lopez (6-4, 280); Sr. OL-DL Kyle Boone (5-10, 260); Sr. OL Isael

Coronel (5-9, 210); Sr. OL Niock Brooks (6-1, 323).; Sr. RB-LB Daniel Torres (5-8, 160), 21 tackles.; Sr. RB-LB Justis Delgado (5-4, 140), 28 tackles.; Sr. TE-DL Javier Felix (5-10, 170).

What are your strengths of your offense heading into the summer: Line.

Strengths of your defense: Line.

What are the team's biggest question marks: Building adequate depth.

2018 expectations: Culture change has occurred. Now we need to clean up play on the field.

Central

Head coach: Jon Clanton.

2017 record: 6-4.

Number of returning starters on offense: 7.

Number of returning starters on defense: 7.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. TE Casey Clanton (6-4, 245); 7 TDs.

What are your strengths of your offense heading into the summer: Quarterback and tight end play.

Strengths of your defense heading into the summer: Line. although it took a hit with transfer of seniors Eloi and Cocmas Kwete.

What are the team's biggest question marks about your team heading into the summer: Depth.

2018 expectations: Win region go to the playoffs.

South Mountain

Head coach: Mark and Marcus Carter

No. of returning starters on offense: 4

No. of returning starters on defense: 8

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. DB Jaiden Hayes, (5-10, 180), 184 rushing yards, 5 TDs, 64 tackles. Sr. LB Cesar Caperon, (6-0, 215), 107 tackles, 2 sacks. Sr. WR Marvin Cotton, (5-11, 170), 212 receiving yards, 2 TDs. Sr. DT Desani Whitt, (6-5, 330). Sr. DE Caprice Fox, (6-2, 195), 35 tackles. Sr. DE Chris Lopez, (6-1, 230). Sr. QB Russvel Perez, (6-1, 200), 130 passing yards, 1 TD. Sr. FS Kyler Traini, (6-1, 180), 57 tackles. Sr. OL Mike Jackson Jr., (6-5, 255). Sr. C-G-T Jaydon Durazo, (5-11, 315). Jr. LB-RB Xavier Palmer, (5-11, 200), 52 tackles. Jr. RB Ka'Rashee Smith, (5-10, 185). Jr. DB-WR Devontae Ingram, (6-0, 170), 35 tackles, 3 INT.

Strengths of offense heading into the summer: Very seasoned O-line and veteran skill players at the impactful positions

Strengths of defense: Eight returning starters. A lot of experience.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Young players having to step in at some very important positions.

2018 expectations: Goals are to be better every play. We had our first winning season in a long time, so we want to build on that.

Region notes: Sierra Linda struggled through a miserable year losing all 10 of its games and scoring just one touchdown.

NORTHEAST VALLEY REGION

Cactus Shadows

Head coach: Mike Hudnutt.

2017 record: 7-5.

No. of returning starters on offense: 4.

No. of returning starters on defense: 7.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. LB-RB Maverick

History: Manucci Returning to McClintock



This Dan Manucci photo courtesy of the Arizona Interscholastic Association

Dan Manucci's passion for high school sports still burns, and it all started at McClintock High. From 3-6 p.m. every work day, Manucci offers his keen insight into the local and national sports world for 1580 AM The Fanatic along with longtime radio partner Mike Muraco. But come Friday night in the fall season, Manucci also broadcasts local high school football games. This season will provide Manucci with the chance to go back home to McClintock High, where he got his start before his NFL, CFL and USFL quarterback stints. His high school coach, Arizona High School Hall of Famer Karl Kiefer, is being honored during halftime of McClintock's Sept. 7 game against Central High. Manucci will get to call that game from the press box. "Playing for coach Kiefer is one of my biggest career highlights," Manucci said. "He was one of the best high school coaches in America." Manucci graduated from McClintock in 1975 but not before completing a successful senior season. His two touchdown passes were the difference in his team's 14-7 win over archrival Tempe. He also threw five touchdowns in a game, a couple to one of the best to play wide receiver in the state, Ron Washington. In his final high school game, Manucci's two touchdown passes helped defeat Chandler 21-20 in McClintock's homecoming game and wrap up an 8-2 season. — Jose Garcia

Cashman (5-10, 180), 255 rushing yards, 2 TDs, 89 tackles, 14 sacks; Sr. LB-RB Matthew Kuhlmann (5-10, 190), 55 tackles, 6 sacks, 3 INT; Sr. DB-WR Jackson Buchanan (5-9, 160), 35 tackles; Jr. LB-WR Logan Hasher (6-0, 160); Jr. DB-WR Matthew MacDonald (5-7, 145), 65 tackles; Jr. DB-RB Jackson Schneider (5-7, 160), 786 rushing yards, 8 TDs, 279 receiving yards, 2 TDs.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Stronger passing game. Still solid ground game. New QB Cole Cucotine. Addition of TE David Lutz. Team speed.

Strengths of defense: Seven starters back who helped a plus-12 turnover differential. Speed. Cashman school record-holder in sacks.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Rebuild offensive line. Depth at receiver. Replacing two dominant linebackers.

2018 expectations: Build on recent success for deeper playoff run. Control clock. Pressure defense. Win special teams each week. Trust the system.

Desert Mountain

Head coach: Dave Sedmak.

2017 record: 6-5.

No. of returning starters on offense: 8.

No. of returning starters on defense: 7.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. QB Kedon Slovis (6-3, 195), 2,987 passing yards, 32 TDs; Sr. WR-TE Brandon Kron (6-4, 230), 384 receiving yards, 4 TDs, 44 tackles, 6 sacks; Sr. Armand Reichelt WR-LB (6-2, 195), 528 receiving yards, 6 TDs, 46 tackles; Sr. OT-DL Ben Roots (6-4, 220); Sr. C-DL Evan Beason (6-0, 235); Sr. S-WR Riley Tucker (6-0, 170), 84 tackles, 3 INT; Sr. LB Cole Daddavio (6-0, 200), 83 tackles, 2 sacks; Sr. WR-RB Max Walker (5-8, 160), 397 receiving yards, 2 TDs; Sr. G-DE Ryan Pileggi (6-0, 195); Sr. OT Kyle Badaly (6-4, 290).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Experience at most positions. Strong, mobile line. Terrific quarterback.

Strengths of defense: Experience at most positions. Strong athletic line. Coaching continuity at coordinator.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Who will be new playmakers. Can 4-6 players play both ways. Create depth. Find capable kicker and punter.

2018 expectations: Stay healthy and win region. Make deep playoff run.

Horizon

Head coach: Ty Wisdom

2017 record: 7-4.

No. of returning starters on offense: 4.

No. of returning starters on defense: 6.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. LB-RB Nash Giffin (5-9, 185), 777 rushing yards, 5 TDs, 174 receiving yards, 3 TDs, 93 tackles, 4 sacks; Sr. S-RB Chris Gillo (5-10, 185), 160 rushing yards, 1 TD, 35 tackles; Sr. CB-K Cole Johnson (5-10, 170), 32 tackles; Sr. QB Isaac Enriquez (5-10, 190), 977 passing yards, 9 TDs, 751 rushing yards, 11 TDs; Sr. WR-S Jayson Beberniss (5-10, 170), 234 receiving yards, 1 TD; Jr. CB-WR Canaan Mullins (6-0, 185), 137 receiving yards, 1 TD; Jr. QB Jake Martinelli (5-11, 175), 675 passing yards, 5 TDs; Jr. LB-TE Jay Rudolph (6-4, 205), 52 tackles, 4 sacks, 2 INT.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Starting backfield all return.

Strengths of defense: Return three of four in secondary.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Graduated all five starting offensive linemen. Graduated all four starting defensive linemen. Need to get stronger in weight room.

2018 expectations: Win region. Make playoffs.

McClintock

Head coach: Corbin Smith.

2017 record: 6-4.

No. of returning starters on offense: 5.

No. of returning starters on defense: 5.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. WR-DB Will Roberts (6-1, 170), 326 receiving yards, 1 TD, 3 INT, Sr. OL Cheyne Sanders (6-1, 230); Sr. DE Keyon Lindsey (6-3, 210), 22 tackles, 3.5 sacks; Sr. DL Quincy Singleton (6-2, 225), 64 tackles, 3 sacks.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Line. Scheme. Speed. Toughness.

Strengths of defense: Speed. Experience. Physicality. Line. Linebackers.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Replacing seniors.
2018 expectations: A winning season. Win region. Make playoffs. Win state championship.

North Canyon

Head coach: Airabin Justin.

2017 record: 4-6.

No. of returning starters on offense: 7.

No. of returning starters on defense: 5.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. QB Louis Contreras (6-2, 190), 836 passing yards, 7 TDs, 164 rushing yards; Sr. OL Uriel Hernandez (6-4, 280); Sr. DB-WR Alphonso Taylor (6-1, 185); Jr. LB Trajan Forrester (6-2, 220), 59 tackles; Sr. DB Armon Bradley (5-9, 160), 17 tackles. Jr. WR-DB Brandon Johnson (5-10, 165); Jr. CSam Way (5-11, 210); Sr. DE-OL Devan Apodaca (6-3, 225), 24 tackles; Sr. LB Tanner Schartz (5-11, 205), 38 tackles.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Quarterback returns healthy for full year. Improved line. Dynamic passing game good skill players.

Strengths of defense: Defensive backs are really good. Quick-

ness helped by competing in track. Ability to put pressure on quarterback.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Depth. Replacing line due to graduation.

2018 expectations: Compete. Be eligible. Field three levels of teams.

Notre Dame Prep

Head coach: George Prelock

2017 record: 13-1.

No. of returning starters on offense: 3.

No. of returning starters on defense: 0.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. RB-WR Jake Smith (6-1, 185), 1,135 rushing yards, 11 TDs, 1,055 receiving yards, 15 TDs; Jr. OL Cade Bennett (6-4, 295); Sr. OL Cale Gregory (6-2, 265).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Passing game. Quarterback Jake Farrell outstanding reading defenses. Run game led by multi-purpose RB-WR Smith. Two quality returning linemen.

Strengths of defense: Unsure.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Graduated 35 seniors.

2018 expectations: Take it one game at a time and focus on task at hand.

Paradise Valley

Head coach: Greg Davis.

2017 record: 4-6.

No. of returning starters on offense: 7.

No. of returning starters on defense: 9.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Jr. QB Ben Finley (6-3, 185), 1,896 passing yards, 16 TDs; Jr. WR Caleb Diaz (5-10, 150), 443 receiving yards, 1 TD; Jr. WR Jovanni Haddad (5-10, 180), 314 receiving yards, 1 TD; Sr. LB Dylan Duggan (5-10, 200), 74 tackles; Sr. WR Tristen Lee (5-10, 168), 551 receiving yards, 9 TDs, 26 tackles, 3 INT; Jr. WR-RB Kyle Krautstrunk (5-10, 185), 144 rushing yards, 1 TD; Sr. RB Kevin Lutz (5-10, 165), 336 rushing yards, 4 TDs. Jr. OL Isaiah Hunkin (5-11, 220); Jr. DB Andrew Hunkin (5-10, 180), 59 tackles.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Passing game and experience.

Strengths of defense: Experience and scheme.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Offensive line play and play in defensive backfield.

2018 expectations: Get stronger. Become better leaders. Develop team first mentality. Community service.

DESERT WEST REGION

School: Agua Fria

Head coach: George Martinez

No. of returning starters on offense: 5

No. of returning starters on defense: 5

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. WR-DB Zac Vierhout, (6-0, 160), 182 receiving yards, 2 TDs. Sr. LB Adam Fuentes (5-8, 155), 88 tackles. Jr. QB Tre Lewis (6-0, 165). Jr. WR Carter Weeg (6-0, 170). Sr. WR-DB Quinton Boykins (5-1, 140), 23 tackles. Sr. WR-SS Michael Martinez (5-8, 150), 298 receiving yards, 4 TDs, 31 tackles. So. LB-FB Angel Martinez (5-8, 170). Sr. FS-DB Chris Martinez (5-11, 160), 30 tackles. Sr. FB-LB Eriyon Ward (5-9, 190), 266 rushing yards, 4 TDs. Jr. RB Nick Murguia (5-6, 155), 811 yards, 7 TDs, 109 receiving yards, 1 TD. Jr. RB-DB Jalen Williams-Fuller (5-7, 170). Sr. FB Quen-

HISTORY: AZ's 1st Prep Football Hall of Famer



Photo courtesy of the Arizona Interscholastic Association

Before settling into the position, left guard, at Arizona State he became famous for playing with the Minnesota Vikings, Randall McDaniel displayed his freakish athleticism at Agua Fria High School. McDaniel finished sixth at state in the 100-meter dash his senior year in 1982 — standing 6-foot-4 and weighing 230 pounds. At Agua Fria, he also got to play defense. In the photo above he is No. 88, closing in to help former Agua Fria standout Glenn Rogers tackle Maryvale's Clark Osborne. McDaniel wanted to become a tight end just like his idol Kellen Winslow Sr., but he was destined for greatness elsewhere. In 2009, he became the first player inducted into the NFL's Hall of Fame representing an Arizona high school. McDaniel picked his Agua Fria football coach, O.K. Fulton, to present him just before McDaniel gave his hall of fame speech. —Jose Garcia



Ben Finley, Paradise Valley (left, photo by Paul Campbell of maxpreps.com) and Titan Widjaja, Verrado (right, photo by Kevin French of maxpreps.com)

ton Upshear (6-0, 205). Sr. FB-LB Isaiah Williams (5-11, 190), 21 tackles. Jr. OL-DL Carson Kennedy (6-2, 260). Jr. LB Ramon Camarena (5-10, 175). Jr. DE-LB Jalen Beard-Gray (5-7, 165), 27 tackles. So. DE-LB Rodney Young Jr. (5-6, 160). Sr. OL-DL Armando Moya (6-3, 270). Jr. OL-DL Edgar Soto (6-1, 260). Sr. OL-DL DaQuarius Wright (6-2, 265). Jr. TE Josh Lamb (6-2, 185). Jr. TE-DE Tre Osborne (6-2, 190).

Strengths of offense heading into summer: Line, running backs.

Strengths of defense: Line and linebackers.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Buying into new coach and system.

2018 expectations: Playoffs

Barry Goldwater

Head coach: Doug Provenzano.

2017 record: 4-6.

No. of returning starters on offense: 3.

No. of returning starters on defense: 5.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. RB-CB Rasheed Sterling (6-0, 175); Sr. QB Jordan Gourley (6-3, 170); Sr. WR-S Chris Beck (6-4, 178), 602 passing yards, 4 TDs; So. TE-LB Matthew Phillips (6-0, 190); So. RB DeAndre Robinson (5-8, 155); So. RB Earnest Greenwood (5-6, 145), 257 rushing yards, 3 Tds; So. TE-CB David Valdez (6-0, 185).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Very fast and very explosive. Violent, disciplined group of young men.

Strengths of defense: Very smart and very disciplined.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Sophomore loaded and only eight seniors.

2018 expectations: Make playoffs and earn respect.

Millennium

Head coach: Lamar Early

No. of returning starters on offense: 6

No. of returning starters on defense: 6

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. OL-DL Anthonie Cooper, (6-3, 290), 27 tackles, 5.5 sacks. Sr. ILB David Enriquez (6-3, 210), 98 tackles, 2 INT. Sr. TR-LB Jamarlo Camp-

bell, (6-0, 210), 48 tackles. Sr. WR-DB Jaelon Taylor (6-3, 175), 604 receiving yards, 8 TDs. Sr. QB Zareq Brown (6-2, 185), 1,063 passing yards, 13 TDs, 376 rushing yards, 3 TDs. Sr. RB-DB Issac Oliver (5-5, 175), 811 rushing yards, 8 TDs. Sr. WR Jared Mendenhall (5-10,165), 133 receiving yards, 1 TD. Jr. WR-DB Treydan Stukes (6-1. 165). Sr. OL Mika Fuamatu (6-4, 270).

Strengths of offense heading into summer: Our speed and athleticism

Strengths of defense: Experience and speed

Team's biggest question mark(s): Finishing

2018 expectations: One day, one game at a time. Getting better as a team.

Willow Canyon

Head coach: Justin Stangler.

2017 record: 4-6.

No. of returning starters on offense: 6.

No. of returning starters on defense: 6.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. TE-DE Zack Enhelder (6-3, 230), 139 receiving yards, 5 Tds; Sr. DT-OL Jason Hickson (5-11, 220), 31 tackles, 6 sacks; Sr. DE-TE Brady Tardy (6-1, 215), 4 sacks; Sr. DE-TE Devin Leon (6-3, 210), 31 tackles, 5.5 sacks; Sr. DT-FB Jalen Schaefer (6-3, 230), 31 tackles, 2 sacks; Sr. OL-DL Matt McClure (6-3, 295); Sr. QB-S Brendan Haynes (6-0, 165), 995 passing yards, 8 TDs; Sr. WR-DB Martell Dorsett (5-11, 160), 31 tackles.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Four returning linemen. Tight end Enhelder. Deep group of receivers. Returning quarterback.

Strengths of defense: Four returning line starters.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Linebackers and running backs.

2018 expectations: Getting stronger and faster. Competing every week.

Region notes: Independence is creeping up on a .500 season after three- and four-win seasons the past two. Santiago Maldonado begins his sixth year as head coach. Competition will ratchet up a bit this year for the Patriots as they move from the Union Region to the Desert West. ... **Verrado.** Tom Ward's first season as coach at Verrado resulted in a Desert West Region title, although a postseason run was cut short by a tough 35-33 loss to Marana in the opening round. The Vipers have a streak of four consecutive winning seasons heading to this season.

SAN TAN REGION

Campo Verde

Head coach: Max Ragsdale.

2017 record: 7-4.

No. of returning starters on offense: 2.

No. of returning starters on defense: 2.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. DE Trevor Kauer (6-4, 240), 19 tackles., 4.5 sacks; Sr. RB Mike Leazier (5-9, 180), 1,069 rushing yards, 15 TDs; Sr. G Dylan Kauer (6-2, 230); Sr. S Brandon Hall (5-9, 175), 16 tackles.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Discipline and physical run game.

Strengths of defense: Physical.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Quarterback, wide receiver, replacing four of five offensive linemen and replacing two linebackers.



Senior QB Gunner Cruz, Casteel (photo by Darin Sicurello of maxpreps.com)

2018 expectations: Enter season in shape and disciplined. Build off last year's playoff berth.

Casteel

Head coach: Dr. Bobby Newcombe.

2017 record: 14-0 (3A).

No. of returning starters on offense: 11.

No. of returning starters on defense: 11.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. QB Gunner Cruz (6-5, 225), 3,175 passing yards, 40 TDs; Sr. WR Zach Nelson (6-1, 185), 804 receiving yards, 8 TDs; Sr. WR Khyheel Waleed (6-3, 190), 358 receiving yards, 8 TDs; Sr. WR Brandt Goodwin (5-9, 155), 1,008 receiving yards, 9 TDs; Sr. T Brandon Babcock (6-6, 220); Sr. SSCam Brown (6-0, 195), 91 tackles, 2 INT; Sr. RB Mack Johnson (5-7, 160), 1,712 rushing yards, 27 TDs; Jr. MLB-DE Dalton Card (6-0, 202), 131 tackles, 2.5 sacks; Jr. DE Malachi Siquieros (6-0, 245), 53 tackles; So. OT Brock Dieu (6-1, 265); Sr. G Baylor Ray (6-0, 235).

Strengths of offense heading to summer break: Build on 2017 championship season.

Strength of defense: Experienced players and qualify coaches.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Response to 5A competition.

2018 expectations: Focus on team and the process. We are excited about the opportunity to compete at the 5A level and look forward to continuing to develop our players.



Ty Robinson, Higley (photo by Darin Sicurello of maxpreps.com)

Gilbert

Head coach: Derek Zellner.

2017 record: 4-6 (6A).

No. of returning starters on offense: 5.

No. of returning starters on defense: 5.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Jr. QB-TE Will Plummer (6-1, 225), 264 receiving yards, 1 TD; Sr. WR-RS-DB Connor McKernan (5-8, 150), 226 receiving yards, 1 TD; Jr. OL-DL Jordan Mendez (6-2, 230); Sr. OL-DL Manny Meza (5-11, 250), 26 tackles; Sr. RB-LB Kawaii Lucio (5-10, 185), 77 taackles, 3 sacks; Sr. RB-LB Ray Vega (5-11, 190); Sr. WR Marco Meza (6-1, 185), 37 tackles; Sr. WR-LB Anthony Elzy (6-2, 180), 45 tackles; Sr. OL-DL Aiden Halley (6-2, 225), 20 tackles; Jr. WR-DB Tyler Hirnoaka (5-9, 175), 66 tackles.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Line depth, quarterback depth, tight end-wide receiver depth and all coaches returning.

Strengths of defense: Linebacker depth and line depth. All coaches returning.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Who steps up at quarterback. Who quarterbacks the defense. Who takes the reins of leadership.

2018 expectations: Handle the challenge of dipping to 5A with tough programs. Making the playoffs.

Higley

Head coach: Eddy Zubey



Senior DB Noa Pola-Gates, Williams Field (photo by Mark Jones of maxpreps.com)

No. of returning starters on offense: 6

No. of returning starters on defense: 6

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. QB-FS Spencer Brasch (6-4, 185), 1,942 passing yards, 33 TDs, 898 rushing yards, 13 TDs. Sr. DE-TE Logan Maxwell (6-4, 210), 40 tackles, 13 sacks. Sr. LB Dylan Pederson (6-2, 195), 69 tackles, 5 sacks. Sr. DE-TE Ty Robinson (6-5, 255), 5 tackles, 13 sacks. Sr. DB Jordan Rule (5-9, 165), 23 tackles.

Strengths of offense heading into summer: Quarterback play

Strengths of defense: Linebackers and line

Team's biggest question mark(s): We have to replace some offensive linemen.

2018 expectations: Win state championship.

Maricopa

Head coach: Brandon Harris

No. of returning starters on offense: 8

No. of returning starters on defense: 9

Returning key players: Sr. WR, Jacob Cowing, (5-10, 170), 1,081 receiving yards, 11 TDs, 82 rushing yards, 1 TD, 20 tackles, 3 INT. Sr. C Jake Meyer (6-1, 225). Sr. G Trey Keel, (6-3, 335). Jr. T Michael Flood, (6-4, 325). Sr. T Daniel Rojas, (6-5, 310). Sr. DE-LB-FB Tylen Coleman, (6-2, 225), 69 tackles, 13 sacks. Sr. QB Jordan Huddleston, (6-0, 205). So. TB Mister Chavis, (5-10, 165). WR Isaiah Crawford, (5-10, 170). Sr. WR Isaiah Hawkins (5-8, 165). Sr. OL Lonnie Wait, (6-0, 220). Sr.

FS Stephon Nelson, (6-0, 180), 83 tackles. Sr. TB Kaireem Moreira, (5-10, 180). Sr. LB-TE Bakari Jackson, (6-0, 215), 80 tackles, 2 INT. Sr. DL Kenneth Shelton, (6-0, 315), 17 tackles. Sr. LB Keone Pene (6-0, 240), 42 tackles, 6 sacks. Sr. DE Logan Taylor, (6-8, 235). Sr. DT Isaiah Narcia, (5-11, 250).

Strengths of offense heading into summer: Speed, power, flexibility in our ability to attack teams.

Strengths of defense: Experience and speed.

Team's biggest question mark(s): How will we respond to adversity.

2018 expectations: To win preseason, region and make the playoffs as a top 3 seed.

Williams Field

Head coach: Steve Campbell

No. of returning starters on offense: 5-6

No. of returning starters on defense: 6-7

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. QB Zach Shepherd (6-1, 200), 1,857 passing yards, 15 TDs. Sr. RB Jaden Thompson (5-9, 206), 611 rushing yards, 9 TDs. Sr. Ryan Wearne, C, (.). Jr. G Cooper Darling (6-4, 310). Jr. T Noah Nelson (6-8, 295). Jr. T Andrew Garcia, (6-7, 270). Jr. RB Kendrick Lurry (5-11, 175). Jr. TE Joshua Gale (6-3, 220). Sr. CB-S Noah Pola-Gates, (6-2, 180), 46 tackles, 3 INT. Sr. CB Tashumbrae Brown, (5-8, 175). Sr. S Jadon Pearson (6-3, 175), 42 tackles. Sr. DL Jackson Barnum (6-2, 245), 16 tackles. Sr. LB Trey Washburn (5-10, 170), 71 tackles. Jr. LB JC Carroll (5-10, 195), 218 rushing yards, 2 TDs, 247 receiving yards, 2 TDs. Jr. LB Sam Hancock (6-0, 210), 30 tackles.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Experienced quarterback, three-year starter and offensive line. Good running back depth.

Strengths of defense: Secondary and returning linebackers.

Team's biggest question mark(s): How players new to starting respond.

2018 expectations: A dogfight every week in our region and solid non-region schedule leading off with Norco (CA).

NORTHWEST REGION

Apollo

Head coach: Zack Threadgill.

2017 record: 8-3.

No. of returning starters on offense: 4.

No. of returning starters on defense: 4.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. RB Ali Mohamed (5-10, 175), 1,530 rushing yards, 22 TDs; 128 receiving yards, 2 TDs; Sr. QB Frank Sanchez (5-11, 175), 1,451 passing yards, 15 TDs, 354 rushing yards, 5 TDs; Sr. LB-RB Jamaury Jimenez (5-10, 180), 23 tackles; Sr. C-OL Liam Bannon (6-1, 275); Sr. LB Angel Vargas (5-10, 180), 18 tackles; Sr. DL Elias Guerrero III (6-1, 265); Sr. WR Burnadin Johnson (5-8, 140); Sr. LB Ian Delgado (5-9, 185), 26 tackles.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Return starting running back Mohamed and starting quarterback Sanchez who is 11-5 as starter. Solid core group working hard for opportunity to play.

Strengths of defense: Return key pieces at linebacker in Jimenez, Vargas and Delgado. Excited about young linemen future.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Graduated large senior class so need returnees to step up. Need consistency from both lines.

5 Away From 300



Centennial coach Richard Taylor (right) and son Andrew, Centennial's defensive coordinator. Photo by Jose Garcia of azpreps365.com)

Centennial football coach Richard Taylor is five wins away from joining the 300-win club. The Ohio native is entering his 28th season at the Peoria school, where he's won 234 games as the only head varsity coach in Centennial's history. Taylor's overall record is 295-109-6. If he wins his 300th this season, he'll join seven other Arizona legends who have reached the milestone. Only three other states have more 300-game winners, according to nfhs.org's record book. —Jose Garcia

2018 expectations: Improve at every position via weight room and practice reps. Compete in all phases - games, practice and classroom. Use football to develop character. Compete for region title.

Centennial

Head coach: Richard Taylor.

2017 record: 13-1.

No. of returning starters on offense: 4.

No. of returning starters on defense: 4.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. FS-WR AJ Jackson (5-11, 185), 230 receiving yards, 1 TD, 20 tackles. Sr. C-G Carson Keltner (6-3, 285); Sr. CB-WR Jeiel Stark (5-9, 170), 189 receiving yards, 2 TDs. Sr. T-G Jacob Fyffe (6-3, 280); Jr. RB-WR-SS Jaydin Young (5-10, 165), 97 tackles, 4 INT; Jr. WR-DE Dyelan Miller (6-2, 185), 294 receiving yards, 5 TDs; Jr. WR-CB Eric Haney (5-10, 165), 2 INT; Jr. FB-DE Derek Jodarski (6-1, 200); Sr. DL Tyler Watkins (5-11, 245), 37 tackles; Sr. FS-WR Eric Fields (6-3, 195), 51 tackles.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Line and run-pass versatility.

Strengths of defense: Strength. Speed. Line.

Team's biggest question mark(s): New leaders. Emerging leaders. Development at quarterback and running back positions.

2018 expectations: Goals established by seniors over the summer.

Ironwood

Head coach: Ian Curtis.

2017 record: 2-8.

No. of returning starters on offense: 7.

No. of returning starters on defense: 8.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. LB Stone Aguirre (5-9, 195), 96 tackles, 9 sacks. Sr. OL Woodburn Schofield (6-2, 275). Sr. RB Devante Wimbish (5-11, 190), 1,039 rushing yards, 8 TDs, 335 receiving yards, 1 TD, 41 tackles, 2 INT; Sr. WR Spencer Forsgren (6-0, 175), 118 receiving yards, 44 tackles; Jr. WR Nate Guzman (6-1, 170), 266 receiving yards, 6 TDs; Jr. DL Cameron Little (6-0, 260), 45 tackles, 1.5 sacks.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Running game, athleticism, speed, agility and intelligence.

Strengths of defense: Veteran leadership, tenacity, intelligence, speed and desire to succeed.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Quarterback battle - may best man win. Competition for five starting spots. Can underclassmen step up for graduates. Can offense operate at fast pace. We want to play fast.

2018 expectations: Every player earns respectable grades. Players and coaches behavior model for campus. Win region. Make playoffs and host a playoff game.

Raymond Kellis

Head coach: Stephen Hogg.

2017 record: 7-3.



Senior OL Carson Keltner, Centennial (photo by Mark Jones of maxpreps.com)



QB Keegan Freid, Sunrise Mountain (photo by Mark Jones of maxpreps.com)

No. of returning starters on offense: 4.

No. of returning starters on defense: 1.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. QB Cade Peterson (6-0, 175) 2,161 passing yards, 24 TDs, 372 rushing yards, 4 TDs; Sr. WR Plas Johnson (5-10, 165), 485 receiving yards, 12 TDs; Sr. RB Elijah Juarez (5-5, 160), 644 rushing yards, 4 TDs; Sr. WR Ricky Luna (5-7, 165), 121 rushing yards, 171 receiving yards, 1 TD; Sr. NG Josh Mendivil (5-10, 265), 26 tackles.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Skill positions are loaded.

Strengths of defense: Front seven will be really good.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Offensive line and secondary.

2018 expectations: Character plus hard work equals success.

Sunnyslope

Head coach: Damon Pieri.

2017 record: 6-5.

No. of returning starters on offense: 5.

No. of returning starters on defense: 2.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. RB Xamoi Penn (5-10, 185), 962 rushing yards, 9 TDs, 127 receiving yards; Jr. QB Niko Haen (6-1, 172), 2,010 passing yards, 12 TDs, 134 rushing yards; Jr. TE Michael Tupper (6-3, 222), 239 receiving yards, 3 TDs; Sr. OL Alex Faver (6-3, 205); Sr. DT Bub Dixon (6-1, 240); Jr. WR David Haen (6-1, 172), 253 receiving yards, 1 TD; Sr. OL-DL Jack Sanderson (6-1, 205).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Experienced quarterback in Haen. Running back Penn runs hard.

Strengths of defense: Dixon at tackle if he stays healthy.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Secondary returns no starters.

2018 expectations: Play hard.

Sunrise Mountain

Head coach: Steve Decker.

2017 record: 11-2 (4A).

No. of returning starters on offense: 4.

No. of returning starters on defense: 1.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. QB Keegan Freid (6-4, 185), 2,941 passing yards, 39 TDs, 700 rushing yards, 11 TDs; Sr. K-P Jaxen Meskimen (6-0, 215); Sr. DB-SL Jay Anderson (6-0, 185), 342 rushing yards, 8 TDs, 660 receiving yards, 6 TDs; Sr. RB Drake Flores (5-9, 170), 752 rushing yards, 7 TDs, 183 receiving yards, 2 TDs; Sr. LB Hunter Olsen (6-0, 195), 64 tackles, 3 sacks; Sr. WR Nate Duran (6-0, 170).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Return of starting quarterback and running back.

Strengths of defense: Middle linebacker Olsen.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Will young players be ready -- have many sophomores who will play. Offensive line.

2018 expectations: Rebuilding, but expectations the same. Win region and make the playoffs.



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BAILEY CHEWNING
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A Plethora of 5A Quarterbacks Mix of Newcomers and Stalwarts



Desert Mountain QB Kedon Slovis and his offensive coordinator, former NFL quarterback Kurt Warner (photo by Paul Campbell of maxpreps.com)

By Les Willsey
azpreps365.com

One significant reason 5A football figures to be ultra competitive this season is the rash of top-flight quarterbacks permeating the conference. 5A's shelves are stocked thanks in huge part by realignment.

Some of the newcomers have lofty credentials in the form of commitments to big-time colleges and performance to go with those nods. Some are plain pass-happy and can't wait for the chance to carve up the opposition. Others choose to throw and run to drive defenses nuts. 5A lost a pair of standout QBs to 6A in Chaparral junior Jack Miller and Queen Creek senior Devin Larsen. Still, it wasn't hard rustling up 10 QBs to peak at who are likely to shine this season. Always know there will be others who come to the forefront.

Five of the 10 highlighted found their way to 5A from either 6A, 4A or 3A. This quintet is the most publicized -- Desert Mountain's Kedon Slovis, Casteel's Gunner Cruz, Higley's Spencer Brasch, Sunrise Mountain's Keegan Freid and Marana's Trenton Bourguet.

The most seasoned in 5A wars is Williams Field's Zack Shepherd, set to start for the third season in a row. The remaining four showed promise in 5A battles last year as full-season starters or as an heir apparent in limited action. They are Verrado's Titan Widjaja, Paradise Valley's Ben Finley, Raymond Kellis' Cade Peterson and Notre Dame Prep's Jake Farrell. The former three enjoyed full seasons at the throttle for their schools.

SR. KEDON SLOVIS, DESERT MOUNTAIN, 6-3, 195: Slovis is pro style. A USC commit. Waited behind three-year starter Austin Nuesse for his chance prior to 2017. Works out of a pass-happy offense. Desert Mountain quarterbacks of late have slung the ball often between 375 and 400 times a season in recent years in 10 or 11 games. Last year was Slovis' first as a starter. He threw for 2,987 yards and 32 TDs. Completed 64 percent of his throws.

SR. KEEGAN FREID, SUNRISE MOUNTAIN, 6-3, 183: Freid is dual threat. Earlier this summer he committed to Air Force. The southpaw got his first chance as starter last year and responded passing for 2,941 yards and 39 TDs. Threw 238 times in 13 games and hit on 69 percent of passes. Tacked on an additional 700 yards rushing and 11 TDs leading the Mustangs to a 4A semifinal finish. Sophomore year saw back-up/spot duty.

SR. SPENCER BRASCH, HIGLEY, 6-4, 190: Brasch is dual threat. Will sign on this fall at Cal. Didn't post huge passing yardage numbers in first chance as starter (1,942 yards), but connected for 33 TDs at a 62 percent rate. With one of the top backs in the state last year and his own ability to run/scramble, Brasch burned foes for 898 yards and 13 TDs rushing. Wouldn't be surprised to see an increase in throws this year.

SR. GUNNER CRUZ, CASTEEL, 6-5 225: Cruz is pro style. Size is what excites folks at the next level along with his ability. He's committed to Washington State. In two seasons at the 3A level he's thrown for 5,775 yards and 70 TDs. Completed 72 percent of his passes. Has had a solid run game behind him each season. Helped Casteel to state title and unbeaten season (14-0) last year. Intriguing to watch his performance going up two notches in competition. Most believe he'll do just fine.

SR. TRENTON BOURGUET, MARANA, 6-0, 165: Bourguet is pro style. Still looking, waiting for college offers. Has played at least half the time on varsity since his freshman year. Three-years of varsity action has netted 5,152 yards through the air and 64 TDs. Accelerated as the guy in 2017. Passed for 2,984 yards and 38 TDs. Chipped in 424 yards rushing and 6 scores. Completion percentage for career is 65 percent.

SR. ZACK SHEPHERD, WILLIAMS FIELD, 6-1, 200: Shepherd is pro style. He recently committed to Brown. Piloted the offense in 2016 state-title season that saw Black Hawks run the table at 14-0. He passed for 2,749 yards and 25 TDs that year. Followed up throwing for 1,857 yards and 15 TDs in 2017.

JR. BEN FINLEY, PARADISE VALLEY, 6-2, 175: Finley is pro style. Passed for 1,896 yards and 16 TDs with a 50 percent completion rate as a sophomore. Has three offers -- Colorado State, Iowa State and Nevada with a couple varsity seasons still ahead. Older brother, Ryan, was prolific three-year starter for Trojans (2010-12).

SR. TITAN WIDJAJA, VERRADO, 5-11, 170: Widjaja is dual threat. A capable backup in 2016 completing 74 percent of throws. Graduated to starting role in 8-3 season in 2017. Passed for 1,708 yards and 20 TDs. Helped Verrado to region title and likely headed to D3 college as his next level.

SR. CADE PETERSON, RAYMOND KELLIS, 6-2, 171: Peterson is dual threat. Has a full season as starter under his belt. Passed for 2,161 yards and 24 TDs. Did toss 12 picks. Has ability to scramble. Enjoyed rare feat for any player scoring on a 99-yard scramble in 2017. With many skill position mates returning the familiarity should be an asset.

SR. JAKE FARRELL, NOTRE DAME PREP, 6-5, 205: Farrell is pro style. Saw action in reserve role on last year's state runner-up. Completed 66 percent of passes. Impressive size and strong arm. Has big shoes to fill with graduated Kylan Weisser throwing for 2,000 yards and 28 TDs. Could help take heat off senior RB-WR standout Jake Smith, who defenses will focus on.



Saguaro, shown here after winning another state championship in 2017, is looking for its sixth consecutive title this fall (photo by Mark Jones of maxpreps.com).

By Andy Morales
 azpreps365.com

1. SAGUARO: Saguaro has been good for a long time, but it wasn't always so. The Sabercats won their first of 11 state championships in 1995 under current University of Texas offensive coordinator Tim Beck. But from 1989 to 1993, the Sabercats had a combined record of 7-42-1, with only four victories in their region. Oh, the Sabercats had a runner-up season under head coach Bob Keller in the 5A Conference in 1978 to Mesa Mountain View (41-23) but then losing became the norm. The team hit rock bottom in 1982 with an 0-10 campaign. Keller, now an athletic director, brought in Beck in 1993. Beck left the program in 1996 to become an assistant coach at Southwest Missouri State and eventually landed high-profile coordinator jobs at Nebraska and Ohio State before heading to Texas. The Sabercats reverted to their losing ways but hope came in a semifinal finish in 2004. But a beat-down by Cienega in the first round of the 4A-Division I 2005 playoffs (38-14) was the spark that set the machine in motion. A 41-21 state championship victory over Sabino came in 2006 and the rest is history. Eleven championships against 10 different opponents with an average victory margin of 38-17 is now the norm and, under current head coach Jason Mohns

(73-9), there seems to be no end in sight. Mohns has guided the Sabercats to a state record five straight titles and is on a 37-0 streak against teams from Arizona. He has lost All-Americans, including once-in-a-lifetime talent such as D.J. Foster and Christian Kirk of the Cardinals, but he just reloads.

2. SALPOINTE: The Lancers had a shot at dethroning the Sabercats in the 4A state championship game last year at Arizona Stadium, but a costly fumble and penalty, uncharacteristically poor offensive line play and the inability to guard in the secondary helped the Sabercats seal a 28-7 victory. A team has to play almost flawless ball to beat the Sabercats. If a team is going to learn from its mistakes and rise to the occasion, it will be the Salpointe Lancers. It also helps to have talent, and the Lancers have plenty of that. Junior sensation Bijan Robinson rushed for 2,023 yards and 26 touchdowns last year and pulled in three more TDs as a receiver. His interest from the collegiate level reads like the BCS playoffs with Alabama, LSU, Michigan, Nebraska, Oklahoma, USC, Washington, Utah, Arizona and ASU calling. Throw in senior athlete Mario Padilla, who gained 1,188 all-purpose-yards in limited action, and junior Lathan Ransom, with 695 all-purpose yards and 48 tackles, and head coach Dennis Bene has the nucleus to reload and challenge.

3. SETON CATHOLIC: Higley and Sunrise Mountain have moved up to 5A this year, leaving a void that teams such as the Sentinels can fill. The Sentinels bring back 15 returning starters from a 9-3 season that ended in the quarterfinal round against Higley. Former coach Gary Galante is now assisting at Goldwater High, but former Arizona Cardinals assistant Mike Chiurco took over the coaching reins. Seton's strengths: Skilled athletes and senior leadership, who will put vertical and horizontal stress on opposing defenses. Sr. QB Vincent Wallace threw for 1,957 yards last year with 22 TDs, and Sr. RB Nick Wade rushed for 1,257 yards with 13 TDs. Wade also pulled down 394 yards to lead the team in receiving.

4. CACTUS: Joseph Ortiz replaces longtime coach Larry Fetkenhier after Fetkenhier led the Cobras to a 9-3 record and a quarterfinal finish against Salpointe. The Cobras will have to go without WR Damaria Norris, who graduated with 1,966 rushing yards and 34 TDs and another 462 yards through the air. It's going to be difficult, but the team brings back another big RB in JR. Anthony Flores (727 yards, 10 TD). Ortiz is counting on his passing game and big offensive line along with an experienced group of seven players. Cactus will know right away where it stands as it will visit Catalina Foothills to open the season and Salpointe makes a visit three weeks later.

5. PEORIA: The Panthers had the misfortune of meeting Saguaro in the quarterfinal round last year but there should be plenty coming back to provide for another postseason run. Will Babb returns 10 starters from last year, including Sr. RB Juwaun Price and his team-leading 1,463 yards rushing. The team will have to replace a QB and three top receivers, but there is an experienced offensive line and an experienced defensive secondary. The Panthers will be battling Desert Edge and Cactus for the West Valley Region crown. One game takes place midway through the season at Desert Edge and the other ends the season at home against rival Cactus. Either way, all three should be in good position for the playoffs.

6. DESERT EDGE: The Scorpions moved down from the 5A Conference with a 7-4 record and a playoff appearance. Jose Lucero only has 10 starters coming back but the conference alignment should be a perfect fit for his team. Lucero feels his team has a lot of experience with a strong secondary. Lucero also believes Nassir Sims is one the top defensive linemen in Arizona and expects Sims to hold down the middle. Sims has drawn interest from Arizona, Colorado and Oregon State. The Scorpions visit Salpointe in the third week of the season and then it's a difficult three-week span later with Peoria, Saguaro and Cactus in September and October. If Desert Edge somehow survives that run, then the playoffs would be a break. The Scorpions could probably survive half of those games and still be in the running for a top five seed due to the power points alone.

7. GREENWAY: Ed Cook wants his Demons to be a top five team in the 4A Conference this year and why not. There is very little difference between most of the teams after the top two so anything is possible. The Demons finished the year with a 6-4 record and a No. 15 ranking but No. 17 Mingus

Union and No. 24 Apache Junction bumped them out. The chances are very slim it will happen again. For one, Glendale should beat out Apache Junction in the Black Canyon Region and the Demons are in a more favorable Skyline Region this year. According to Cook, the Demons have a lot of depth at skill positions and the offensive line is very athletic. The secondary returns, which means Cook wants to be more aggressive on defense this year.

8. CATALINA FOOTHILLS: Jeff Scurran has revived more teams than anyone else in Arizona, and will need to pull some more magic out of his coaching handbook because his schedule is brutal. Cactus, Marana, Sabino and Salpointe are just four of the top teams on the schedule along with Sahuaro and Tucson rivals Canyon del Oro and Pueblo. There are a lot of land mines there, but there are also lots of possibilities and power points. The Falcons' run game returns Sr. RB Dominic Bynum (877 yards rushing, 5 TD) and Sr. RB Isaiah Bae (474 yards rushing) along with a strong defensive nucleus with Sr. MLB Bobby Heitzinger (109 tackles), Sr. OLB Kareem Swailem (78 tackles), Sr. S Gordon Dick (71 tackles, 3 sacks) and Sr. OLB Luke Mitchell (66 tackles, 5 INT).

9. GLENDALE: The Cardinals moved down from the 5A Conference with an 8-2 record. An 8-2 record usually means a postseason berth but the Cardinals finished ranked 26th despite only two losses. An 8-2 record this year means the Cardinals win the Black Canyon Region and an automatic berth to the playoffs. Apache Junction took the region last year with a 6-4 record. Ron York has 14 starters coming back, including his QB and most of his offensive line. Tim Owens threw for 1,552 yards with 15 TDs and rushed for 730 yards with nine more 9 TDs. RB Kevin Daniels had 473 yards rushing and 556 yards receiving with a combined 13 TDs. Even more, all the linebackers are coming back. According to York, most of the new starters played a lot last season and they are a lot bigger and stronger compared to last season up front.

10. YOUNGKER: Every Top 10 needs a wild card and the Roughriders fit that bill. The team finished 7-4 last year but finished No. 19 in the playoffs. An extra game accounts for the 11-game schedule and three of the losses were by one point. Win one more, and the team will be playoff bound, but the Roughriders want more than that and they will have to do it with two of the best running backs in the state. Sr. RB Greg Dotstry had 1,566 rushing yards and 17 TDs last year and Sr. RB Xavier Reeves finished with 1,345 yards rushing and 15 TDs at a combined nine yards per carry. Team such as Deer Valley, Pueblo, Sahuaro, Prescott and Flagstaff are ready to break into the Top 10 and there could be a few others ready to take a shot.

4A Conference Team-By-Team Preview

By Andy Morales
azpreps365.com

4A DESERT SKY REGION

Arcadia

Head coach: Kerry Taylor

2017 record: 0-10 (5A)

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Jr. RB/ILB Paxton Earl (5-8, 180) 4-7 yards rushing; Jr. WR/FS Connor Davis (6-1, 180) 142 yards receiving; Sr. RB/ILB Jonathan Hunter (6-0, 190) 51 tackles, 3 sacks.

2018 expectations: The Titans have lost 13 games in a row and are now playing under the third coach in three years. Former Hamilton, Arizona State and Cardinals receiver Kerry Taylor. Taylor was an assistant at Oregon State last year.

Marcos de Niza

Head coach: Paul Moro

2017 record: 5-6 (4A first round)

No. of returning starters on offense: 7

No. of returning starters on defense: 8

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. OT/DL Eilye Hill (6-3, 310); Sr. OT/DL JJ Hill (6-4, 235); Sr. C Zach Famoso (5-11, 235); Sr. TE Brandon Anderson (6-1, 210); Jr. RB Yakeen Baylis (5-8, 178) 1,158 yards rushing, 3 TD; Sr. LB Mario Gasteleum[^] (175) 73 tackles, 2 INT; Jr. LB Matt Canada (6-0, 195); DL Shad Tuiaana (6-1, 305); Sr. C/RC Torren Union (6-1, 175); Sr. C/RC Ty Frazier (5-11/175).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Experience. Return five out of six up front. Yakeen Bayles rushed for 1158 yards last year.

Strengths of defense: Secondary has a lot of experience. Linebacker Corp should be really good.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Quarterback experience.

2018 expectations: Learn to play hard and compete.

Mesquite

Head coach: Chad Michael DeGrenier

2017 record: 4-6 (5A)

No. of returning starters on offense: 5

No. of returning starters on defense: 4

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. RB/WR Chandler Coleman (5-7, 181) 393 yards rushing, 3 TD; Sr. RB/LB Cole Lester (5-9, 160) 299 yards rushing; Jr. WR Jacob Walker (6-0, 185) 405 yards receiving; Sr. LB/RB Holden Owen (6-1, 195) 76 tackles, 4 sacks.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Becoming a Family and holding each other accountable.

2018 expectations: We have to be ready in the early weeks we have a tough schedule.

Poston Butte

Head coach: Dain Thompson

2017 record: 6-4

No. of returning starters on offense: 4

No. of returning starters on defense: 3

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. WR/ATH/FS Tucker Usher (5-11, 165) 235 yards receiving, 3 TD; Jr. C Isaiah Navarro

(5-11, 235); Sr. DE/TE Thomas Gaitan (5-11, 250); Sr. OL/DL Michael Milton (6-2, 230); Jr. OL/DL Lavince Cooper (5-11, 215) 47 tackles.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Offensive line.

Strengths of defense: Defensive line.

Team's biggest question mark(s): We return only one player who touched the ball last season.

2018 expectations: Compete for a playoff berth.

Unique story: Poston Butte was placed into 4A Region with Marcos de Niza. Paul Moro coached Dain Thompson and Thompson was on Moro's first state championship team at Blue Ridge High School.

Saguaro

Head coach: Jason Mohns

2017 record: 12-2 (4A state champion)

No. of returning starters on offense: 5

No. of returning starters on defense: 8

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. LB Clayton Randall (6-2, 210) 133 tackles, 2 INT; Sr. LB Connor Soelle (6-1, 195) 132 tackles, 4 sacks, 5 INT; Jr. DB Kelee Ringo (6-1, 190); Sr. DB Brandon Shivers (6-1, 185); Sr. DB Nate Polk (6-3, 190); Sr. DT Jayden Swink (6-2, 250) 67 tackles, 5.5 sacks; Sr. OG Jelani Newman (6-3, 290); Jr. OLB Damian Sellers (6-4, 220); Sr. OLB Seth Robinson (6-3, 215); Jr. OT Tye Kassen (6-3, 265).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Big and athletic on the offensive line. Length and speed at the skill positions. Several very talented tight ends. Depth at running back, wide receiver and tight end. Athletic dual-threat quarterback.

Strengths of defense: Returning eight starters from championship team. Return top two leading tacklers and leading sack producer. Great length and athleticism on the edge and at linebacker. Great length, speed and talent in the secondary. Speed, speed and more speed.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Replacing 2-year starter at QB. Replacing 2-year starter at Center. Replacing both leading WR's. Replacing leading rusher. Developing new leaders.

2018 expectations: Compete with and beat two top tier out of state programs. Beat Chaparral. Win our region. Secure home field advantage in the playoffs. Win a state championship.

Unique story: Program looking to extend state record run of championships (currently 5 straight).

Seton Catholic

Head coach: Gary Galante

2017 record: 9-3 (4A quarterfinals)

No. of returning starters on offense: 8

No. of returning starters on defense: 7

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. RB Nick Wade (5-10, 175); Sr. QB Vincent Wallace (6-0, 175); Sr. C Mathew Martinez 5-11, 200) Sr. OL/DL Zach Sladek (5-11, 220); Sr. RB/LB/LS Peter Fugger (6-0, 185); Sr. OL/DL Sam Apeji (6-4, 250); Sr. OL/DL Ryan O'Connor (6-0, 220); Sr. WR/FS/P Michael Kenney (5-11, 185); Sr. NT/FB Benjamin Regalado, NT/FB (5-11, 175); Sr. WR/DB Michael Van Bruwaene (5-9, 160).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Skill Ath-



Seton Catholic senior RB Nick Wade (photo by Jim Willittes of maxpreps.com)

letes. Senior Leadership. Balanced. Vertical/Horizontal Stress on Defense. Quick Strike/Tempo.

Strengths of defense: Junk Yard Dog Mentality. Cohesive Unit. Pursuit to the FB. Returning Starters. Schematics/Pressure Style.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Depth. Key Positions from exiting Sr's being filled.

2018 expectations: Qualify for State Playoffs. Win the Sportsmanship of the Year Award. Never give up, fight to the end.

4A WEST VALLEY REGION

Cactus

Head coach: Joseph Ortiz

2017 record: 9-3 (4A quarterfinals)

No. of returning starters on offense: 5

No. of returning starters on defense: 6

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Jr RB. Anthony Flores (5-9, 175) 727 yards rushing, 10 TD; Sr. WR Zach Cullop (6-3, 185) 231 yards receiving, 5 TD; Jr. QB Connor Cordts (5-10, 170); Sr. OL Nick Becker (6-0, 280); Sr. OL Scott Mort (6-2, 277); Sr. LB Matthew Herrera (5-10, 200) 42 tackles; Sr. DB Rylee Williams (5-9, 170); Sr. LB Kevin Underwood (5-11, 180); Jr. DB Nicc Quinones (5-10, 170).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Passing Game and big offensive line with experienced running back.

Strengths of defense: Experienced back group of seven players.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Having depth on both sides of the ball and how many players will have to play both ways.

2018 expectations: To come together as a new regime. Build off of previous success of making the playoffs.

Unique story: First year coach replacing a coach who was here 34 years (Larry Fetkenhier).

Deer Valley

Head coach: Dan Friedman

2017 record: 5-5 (5A)

No. of returning starters on offense: 3

No. of returning starters on defense: 4

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. ATH Dez Melton (6-4, 220) 1,701, 19 TDS; Sr. LB Alex McKeon (6-1, 210) 73 tackles; Sr. LB Justin Quintero (5-10, 190) 84 tackles; Sr. C Brady Toppa (5-9, 165); So. Slot Sebastian Fiery (5-7, 150) 220 yards receiving.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Dez Melton and quarterback Will Haskell.

Strengths of defense: Linebacker play.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Varsity experience and depth.

2018 expectations: Make the playoffs.

Desert Edge

Head coach: Jose Lucero

2017 record: 7-4 (5A first round)

No. of returning starters on offense: 3

No. of returning starters on defense: 7

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. DL Nassir Sims (6-2, 285); Sr. RB/LB Milton Rodgers (5-11, 210); Sr. RB/WR Kody Ball (5-9, 175); So. OL Ben Roy (6-2, 265); So. WR/DB Steven Ortiz (5-11, 180); CB CJ McDowell (5-10, 160); Sr. S Anthony Davis (5-11, 180).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: We will be young but fast. Have some impressive speed coming up through the program.

Strengths of defense: A lot of experience. Secondary is going to be very strong. Nassir Sims is one the top defensive linemen in Arizona. We expect him to hold down the middle.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Looking for people to step and fill holes on the offensive line. With our young kids coming up we need them to step up and make plays early.

2018 expectations: Continue to improve weekly. We expect to maintain our high level of play. We have the same team goal each year, to win a state title.

Lake Havasu

Head coach: Karl Thompson

2017 record: 5-5 (5A)

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. QB Cole Wade (5-10, 165) 2,016 yards passing, 14 TD, 341 yards rushing; Sr. WR/RB Jacob Schafer (5-10, 140) 479 yards rushing, 4 TD; Sr. MLB Peyton Luzzi (6-0, 215) 57 tackles.

Unique story: Shifted down from 5A Conference.

Peoria

Head coach: Will Babb

2017 record: 8-4 (4A quarterfinals)

No. of returning starters on offense: 4

No. of returning starters on defense: 6

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. RB Juwaun Price (5-10, 185) 1,463 yards rushing, 19 Td.; Sr. OL/DL Jacob Golden (6-6, 285); Sr. DE/OL Shane Marshall (6-1, 235) 70 tackles, 2.5 sacks; Sr. RB/DB Malachi Potee (6-0, 170); Sr. WR Cameron Torres (5-11, 160); Sr. RB/DB Michio Cordero (5-8, 165) 61 tackles; Sr. DB Kahlil Muhammad (5-8, 170); Jr. DB Jeremiah Cross (5-8, 160); Sr. OL/DL Jarom Wallace (6-3, 240).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Returning leading Rusher. Experience at offensive line.



Moon Valley QB Isaiah Southwick (photo by Kevin French of maxpreps.com)f



Youngker's Greg Dotstry (photo by Steve Paynter of maxpreps.com)



Lake Havasu's Cole Wade (photo by Mark Jones of maxpreps.com)

Strengths of defense: Experience in returners Secondary. Team Speed.

Team's biggest question mark(s): New quarterback. Replacing three wide receivers. Depth in the lines.

2018 expectations: Start fast. Physical on both sides of the ball.

4A SOUTHWEST REGION

Buckeye Union

Head coach: Kelley Moore

2017 record: 8-4 (4A first round)

No. of returning starters on offense: 3

No. of returning starters on defense: 4

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. RB/QB Key-L Richardson (5-8, 168) 226 yards receiving; Jr. RB/MLB Zeke Barajas (5-10, 180) 47 tackles.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Lost top eight offensive players to graduation.

Estrella Foothills

Head coach: Derek Wahlstrom

2017 record: 6-4

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. QB/DB Regan Jenkins (6-3, 175) 680 yards passing; Sr. WR/DB Jacob McLeod (5-10, 175) 325 yards receiving; Sr. Daniel Ratkus, 48 tackles.

Gila Ridge

Head coach: Corey Semler

2017 record: 3-7

No. of returning starters on offense: 9

No. of returning starters on defense: 8

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Jr. RB Renan Duarte (5-7, 205) 406 yards rushing, 3 TD; Jr. OG Devin Graham (6-1, 235); Jr. OT Erick Flores (6-1, 235); Jr. WR David Randle (6-3, 275); Jr. WR Dominique Jones (6-7, 220) 273 yards receiving; Sr. DE Taylor Deibert (6-0, 205); Sr. ILB Jordan Canales (5-10, 210); CB Anthony Mejia (6-1, 155).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Balanced.

Nine returning starters. Height mismatches out wide. Powerful running back.

Strengths of defense: Experience in the back seven. Aggressiveness and speed. Edge pressure.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Special teams. Quarterback competition. Depth.

2018 expectations: Play with more physicality. Play instinctive. Team-building. Heart.

Youngker

Head coach: Dan Friedman

2017 record: 7-4

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. RB/CB Greg Dotstry (5-10, 170) 1,566 rushing yards, 17 TD; Sr. RB/S Zavier Reeves (6-0, 180) 1,345 yards rushing, 15 TD; Sr. MLB Anthony Aleman (5-11, 175) 79 tackles.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Two running backs combining for almost 3,000 yards.

Yuma

Head coach: Curtis Weber

2017 record: 2-8

4A SKYLINE REGION

Greenway

Head coach: Ed Cook

2017 record: 6-4

No. of returning starters on offense: 7

No. of returning starters on defense: 7

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. QB Tyler Duncan (6-1, 170) 2,327 passing yards, 29 TD, 588 yards rushing, 7 TD; Sr. TE Caden Hughes (6-2, 220) 656 yards receiving, 9 Td; Sr. RB TJ Murphy; Sr. S Will Hood (6-0, 190) 37 tackles; Sr. CB Seth Henry (5-9, 155) 37 tackles; Sr. DL Josiah Winans (6-3, 285); Sr. OL Matt Hernandez (6-0, 250); Sr. WR Kolbe Pesnell (5-11, 182); Sr. WR Julian Arias (5-10, 165) 437 yards receiving, 4 TD; Sr. LB Hayden Levenda (5-10, 200).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: We have a lot of depth at skill positions. Offensive line is very athletic. Should have great balance with run and pass.

Strengths of defense: Secondary are all returners. Going to be athletic on defense. Going to be more aggressive on defense this year.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Depth on offensive line. How fast a few sophomores can learn and contribute.

2018 expectations: Win region. Be a top 5 team in 4A.

Moon Valley

Head coach: Seth Millican

2017 record: 5-6 (4A first round)

No. of returning starters on offense: 4

No. of returning starters on defense: 7

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. QB Isaiah Southwick (6-6, 180) 1,611 yards passing, 15 TD; Sr. CB/WR Dayne Bobzien (6-0, 170) 55 tackles, 5 INT; Sr. SS/WR Ricky Rivas (5-7, 155) 64 tackles, 5 INT; DL Tino Vito (6-1, 290); Sr. RB Kaylen Elzy (6-1, 200) 306 yards rushing, 5 TD; Sr. DE/T Cooper Pinkerton (6-2, 265); LB Mikey Vazquez (5-11, 185) 55 tackles; Sr. FS Lane Clah (5-10, 165).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Playmakers in space. QB who can flat deal. Tough running back.

Strengths of defense: Aggressive to ball. Continuity in backfield. Selfless mentality.

Team's biggest question mark(s): 4/5 new offensive linemen. QB handling pressure. Head coach's growth in second year.

2018 expectations: Win a playoff game.

Shadow Mountain

Head coach: Ron Fagan

2017 record: 2-8

No. of returning starters on offense: 10

No. of returning starters on defense: 9

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. WR/MLB Jalen Williams (6-4, 195) 616 yards rushing, 9 TD, 98 tackles; Sr. RB/S Ronnie Fagan (6-1, 180) 631 yards rushing, 8 TD; Sr. QB/WR/DB Nainoa Shin (6-0, 185) 629 yards passing, 9 TD, 321 yards rushing; Sr. OL/DL TJ Clay (6-3, 330); Sr. DL/OL Logan Konya (6-3, 285) 58 tackles; Sr. OL/DL Ben Appleman (6-3, 290); Sr. WR/DB Michael Williams (6-1, 175).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Offensive line. Having everybody healthy. Having the whole team together to actually work on the offense. Run game and passing game should be good.

Strengths of defense: Having more players involved in what we're doing. More players in the weight room. Football IQ is going way up. They're bonding is a unit.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Really trying to work on our depth getting the next guy ready. Seeing how many of the new players are going to stick with it.

2018 expectations: Keep everybody in the weight room getting bigger stronger faster. Improve football IQ. Keep everybody healthy. Have a winning record. Playoffs.

St. Mary's

Head coach: Tom Brittain

2017 record: 1-9

Tempe

Head coach: Brian Walker

2017 record: 1-9

No. of returning starters on offense: 6

No. of returning starters on defense: 7

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Jr. DL Sione Tonga'uiha (6-1, 265) 56 tackles, 5.5 sacks; Sr. QB Nathan Clayton (6-5, 210) 1,6002 yards passing, 12 TD; Sr. OLB Amaru Johnson (6-2, 220); Sr. DL Soane Leha (6-0, 285); Jr. S/OLB Joseph Near (6-3, 190); Sr. HB Juwan Jefferson (5-7, 160); Sr. RB Bayyan Prince (5-7, 190); Jr. LB Keau Pau (6-0, 215); Sr. OL Keijuan Elam (6-2, 255); Jr. OL Alekisio Leha (6-0, 250).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Returning quarterback. Missed significant playing time last season due to injury. Has a very strong arm and is extremely coach-able and ready to lead the offense. Three returners on the offensive line. Should help form a very cohesive group.

Strengths of defense: Versatile players who have the ability to play several positions. Entire defensive line returning.

Team's biggest question mark(s): We lost a lot of quality depth in the receiver department and are very inexperienced. Depth is always a concern.

2018 expectations: To continue to come together and grow as a team.

Thunderbird

Head coach: Brent Wittenwyler

2017 record: 5-5

No. of returning starters on offense: 6

No. of returning starters on defense: 5

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. WR/FS Kain Ream (6-2, 190); Sr. DE/OL Dominik McNutt (6-3, 220); Sr. WR Taren Rose (5-7, 150); Sr. WR Joel Golbourne (6-2, 180); Sr. S Kyle Mitchell (6-2, 180); Sr. TE/DE Tyler Dungan (6-3, 210); Sr. OL/DL TJ Franklin (5-9, 225).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Experience and athleticism at receiver. High potential QB.

Strengths of defense: Athleticism in secondary and returners on line.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Production of quarterback and linebackers.

2018 expectations: Work hard all summer and compete.

4A GRAND CANYON REGION

Bradshaw Mountain

Head coach: Chuck Moller

2017 record: 4-6

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. QB/DB Austin Gonzales (6-0, 170); 1,411 yards passing, 15 TD, 433 yards rushing, 7 TDs; Sr. TE/DL Kai Tharp (6-3, 190) 290 yards receiving; Jr. TE/LB Noah Shaver (5-11, 195) 72 tackles, 4 sacks; Sr. WR/LB Luke Huenemyer (6-0, 175) 43 tackles.

2018 expectations: Can the Bears bounce back from first losing season since 2012?

Coconino

Head coach: Mike Moran

2017 record: 2-8

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. QB/WR Ty Furr (6-0, 180) 785 yards passing, 6 TD, 362 yards rushing, 6 TD; Sr. FB/OLB Moses Rilometo (5-7, 175) 72 tackles, 2 sacks.

2018 expectations: Panther basketball coach Mike Moran is in his first year with the football team.

Flagstaff

Head coach: Paul Wolf/Robert Castillo co-head coaches

2017 record: 6-4

No. of returning starters on offense: 7

No. of returning starters on defense: 6

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. QB/DB Henry Tagle (6-0, 175) 528 Yards passing; Sr. RB/LB Josh Morrow (6-3, 200) 272 yards rushing; Sr. RB/LB Josh Thomas (6-1, 225) 254 yards rushing, 63 tackles; Sr. RB/DB Michael Becenti (5-9, 160) 40 tackles; Jr. K/P/LB Oscar Castruita (5-11, 180); Sr. WR/LB Xavier Sheffield (6-3, 195) 228 yards receiving; Sr. TE/LB Colton Bond (6-3, 185) 52 tackles, 4 sacks; Sr. WR/DB Kaden Doucette (6-0, 170); Sr. OL/DL Moshe Odunze (6-0, 200); Sr. OL/DL Kevin Sun (6-1, 230).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Receivers, running backs and line.

Strengths of defense: Linebackers, defensive backs and line.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Getting offensive and defensive line experience. Adjusting to new offensive and defensive coordinators

2018 expectations: Should have a great kicking game and special teams and a great defense.

Unique story: Bob Castillo coaching - was on staff in the 1980's when the Eagles won four state championships in a row.

Lee Williams

Head coach: Clint Sasse

2017 record: 4-6

No. of returning starters on offense: 8

No. of returning starters on defense: 6

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. RB/LB Cameron Ott (5-10, 175) 50 tackles; Sr. QB/LB Enzo Marino (6-2, 180); Sr. OL/DL Matt Bathauer (6-3, 225) 57 tackles, 3.5 sacks; Sr. OL/DL Mike Bathauer (6-2, 220) 4 sacks; Sr. WR/DB Hunter Sturgill (5-11, 165) 38 tackles; Jr. RB/DB Donnie Simms (5-10, 160); Sr. QB/DB AJ Herrera (6-4, 180) 883 yards passing, 7 TD.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Experience. Skill players. Two returning All-Region linemen.

Strengths of defense: Physicality/Effort, speed and big up front, Good tacklers in the back.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Replacing senior class from last year and younger guys stepping into leadership role.

2018 expectations: We will play as fast and physical as possible with relentless effort.

Mingus Union

Head coach: Robert Ortiz

2017 record: 6-4 (4A first round)

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. QB Antoine Zabala (5-11, 170) 1,245 yards passing, 10 TD; Sr. RB/LB Alex Nelson (5-10, 175) 1,075 yards rushing, 13 TD, 44 tackles, 4 sacks; Sr. WR/DB Chaz Taylor (6-3, 175) 665 yards receiving, 6 TD, 76 tackles; Sr. MLB/FB Kendrew Streck (6-1, 210) 108 tackles, 11 sacks.

Unique story: Former Marauder Robert Ortiz takes over for longtime head coach Bob Young.

Mohave

Head coach: Rudy Olvera

2017 record: 3-7

No. of returning starters on offense: 6

No. of returning starters on defense: 5

Returning key players and 2017 stats: QB/DB Gavin Valdivia (5-10, 175) 387 yards passing, 4 TD; DB Diontay Bailey (5-9, 145); Anthony Arellano (5-10, 170); QB/OLB Brent Moore (6-2,



Flagstaff senior RB/LB Josh Thomas (photo by Mark Jones of maxpreps.com)

195) 7 TD, 430 yards passing, 457 yards rushing, 226 yards receiving; TE/RB/OLB Christian Bay (6-2, 205); K Adrian Silvestre (5-6, 150); RB William Robizine (6-1, 190) 1,480 yards rushing, 9 TD; LB Julio Robles (5-10, 195); DB Austin Foster (5-8, 160); C/DE Sean Acosta (6-3, 260).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: All skill players return including 1,480 yard rusher Robizine. Young but strong offensive line. Big athletic QB.

Strengths of defense: All skill positions return with depth. Strong athletic outside backers. Anchored by athletic nose guard.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Young offensive and defensive line. Returning Kicker needs to develop leg strength

2018 expectations: Go 3-1 freedom games and win the Grand Canyon Region.

Prescott

Head coach: Michael Gilpin

2017 record: 7-3

No. of returning starters on offense: 7

No. of returning starters on defense: 7

Returning key players and 2017 stats: OT Max Flores (6-3, 296); OG Kade Schroeder (5-10, 270); QB Austin Clark (6-4, 190) 1,065 yards passing, 12 TD; WR Giovanni Ruiz (6-1, 175); WR/DB Dellin Boyd (5-10, 160); OT Joseph Macalino (5-11, 240); SS Colton Amos (5-10, 180) 156 tackles; FS Hunter Kronberg (5-11, 170); LB Garrett Fenderson (6-1, 210) 115 tackles; DE Aaron Greene (6-4, 210).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Veteran group (lots of experience). Strong offensive line. Talented skill players.



Offensive lineman Max Flores of Prescott (photo courtesy of Prescott High School)

Strengths of defense: Experienced core returns. Defensive backfield is outstanding. Strong pass rush.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Running backs stepping up to replace graduating All-State Ryan Greene. Need a couple young guys to play well on the oline. Need a couple young guys to play well at linebacker.

2018 expectations: Win the Grand Canyon Region. Host a play-off game in Prescott

Unique story: Bumped from the playoffs despite 7-3 record by Mingus Union and Apache Junction.

4A BLACK CANYON REGION

Apache Junction

Head coach: Vince Miller

2017 record: 6-5 (4A first round)

No. of returning starters on offense: 8

No. of returning starters on defense: 9

Returning key players and 2017 stats: QB Gibson Limongello (6-0, 170); RB William Lohman (5-10, 175); LB Ethan Ferrera (5-11, 175); OL Ethan Wright (6-2, 210); FS Manny Acosta (5-10, 165); LB Joe Pomeroy (6-1, 180); WR Logan Dela Cruz (5-10, 165); WR Justin Ramirez (5-8, 175); SS Chazz Chavez (5-10, 165); DL Josh Tunstill (6-3, 225).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Quarterback experience, receiver depth and coaching staff.

Strengths of defense: Line experience and defensive back experience. LB speed and coaching staff.

Team's biggest question mark(s): How well will our young guys fill the holes.

2018 expectations: Win the region. Go deep in the playoffs. Stay healthy.

Combs

Head coach: Anthony Groth

2017 record: 0-10

No. of returning starters on offense: 9

No. of returning starters on defense: 8

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. OT Ismael Bautista (6-3, 315); Sr. CB Onesfori Anzaruni (5-7, 160); C James Bryan (6-2, 215); Sr. DE Davion Barnes (5-10, 185).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Youth and talent on the offensive line. Multiple returning starters. Additional talent coming up.

Strengths of defense: Multiple returning starters. Better comprehension of scheme.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Adjusting the offensive scheme to be more run focused.

2018 expectations: Win games.

Dysart

Head coach: John Ganados

2017 record: 5-6

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. QB/DB Kobe Ganados (5-11, 195) 917 yards passing, 11 TDs, 768 yards rushing, 5 TD; Sr. OL/DL Kelly Garcia (6-3, 240) 51 tackles, 2 sacks.

Glendale

Head coach: Ron York

2017 record: 8-2 (5A)

No. of returning starters on offense: 8

No. of returning starters on defense: 6

Returning key players and 2017 stats: QB Tim Owens (5-10, 165) 1,552 yards passing, 15 TD, 730 yards rushing, 9 TD; RB Kevin Daniels (6-2, 210) 473 yards rushing, 7 TD, 556 yards receiving, 6 TD; LT Jordy Ngabonziza (6-1, 265); LG Ivan Madrigal (6-4, 295); RG Marcelo Saenz (6-3, 295); MLB Brannon Lopez (6-2, 215) 99 tackles, 3,5 sacks; OLB Andre Neal (6-1, 180) 46 tackles; DE David Jimenez (5-10, 180); SS Johnny Apodaca (5-9, 175) 58 tackles, 2 INT; ILB Devon Moreland (6-0, 185) 62 tackles, 3.5 sacks.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: A lot of starters coming back. Same offensive system. Only one lineman that wasn't a starter last year.

Strengths of defense: All linebackers coming back. Most of the new starters played a lot last season. A lot bigger and stronger compared to last season up front.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Depth.

2018 expectations: Get better every day. Do the little things right. Work hard.

Washington

Head coach: Tim Mayfield

2017 record: 3-8

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. QB/SS Philip Pardia (6-1, 180) 1,593 yards passing, 15 TD, 596 yards rushing, 5 TD; Sr. CB/RB Jonathan Gruppo (5-9, 160) 254 yards receiving.

4A GILA REGION

Amphitheater

Head coach: Jorge Mendivil

2017 record: 2-8

No. of returning starters on offense: 5

No. of returning starters on defense: 8

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. RB/LB Ethan Ross (5-7, 166) 167 yards receiving; Sr WR/S Kevin Martinez (5-8,

160); Sr OL/DI Dominic Trejo (5-8, 175); Sr. TE/DE Julian Campos (6-0, 195) 35 tackles; So. OT/DT Daniel Dominguez (6-2, 235); Jr. RB/LB Julian Encinas (5-7, 160) 295 yards rushing, 37 tackles; Jr. RB/LB Angel Taylor (5-7, 170); Jr. OT/DT Orlando Burrueal (5-10, 270).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Solid group of skill kids. Understanding of the offense.

Strengths of defense: Team speed, added depth after many sophomores started last season. Team's biggest question mark(s): Offensive and defensive lines. QB position still up in the air.

2018 expectations: To work hard and continuously get better as a unit. Early away games at Buckeye and Vista Grande should pay dividends come region play.

Douglas

Head coach: James Fitzgerald

2017 record: 0-10

No. of returning starters on offense: 8

No. of returning starters on defense: 8

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Jr. TE/OLB Christian Estrella (6-5, 255); Sr. OT/DE Andres Moreno (6-4, 265); WR/LB John Ballesteros (6-0, 185); WR/DB Elian Villasenor (5-10, 165); Sr. FB/LB Kevin Chavez (5-8, 220); Sr. FB/LB David Grajeda (5-8, 235); Sr. RB/DB Manny Mejia (5-8, 170); Jr. QB Trey Rose (5-10, 180); OL/DL Mario Estrada (6-0, 250).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Returning 4-of-5 Offensive linemen, leading receiver and leading rusher. Strengths of defense: Top three leading tacklers returning. Top 6-of-8 leading tacklers returning. Returning four All-Region players on defense.

Palo Verde

Head coach: Laurence Ruhf

2017 record: 3-7

No. of returning starters on offense: 4

No. of returning starters on defense: 7

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. QB Jaquarious Hale (5-9, 150); Jr. RB Cesar Rose (5-9, 175) 169 yards rushing; Sr. OL Anthony Crawley (6-4, 250); Sr. OL Armando Montano (6-0, 260); Sr. OL Skylar Iban (5-10, 240); Sr. LB Gabe Clark (5-10, 160); Sr. LB Juan Quintana (5-10, 170); Jr. DE Brayan Martinez (5-11, 170).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Strong offensive line led by three 3-year starters. Big OL Anthony Crawley will anchor the run game. Dual threat QB with young fast Wide Receivers.

Strengths of defense: Defensively, we have experienced players who all can run to the ball. Should be the best defense Palo Verde has had in eight years.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Can the commitment and consistency carry over into the summer and the fall. Great start in the spring with over 30 players at spring football practice every day.

2018 expectations: Palo Verde should contend for a 4A Gila top three finish.

Pueblo

Head coach: Brandon Sanders

2017 record: 8-3 (4A first round)

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. SB Ruben Rivera IV (6-1, 180) 1,133 yards rushing, 10 TD, 184 yards receiving, 83 tackles, 2 sacks; Sr. OL/FB/DL Omar Ibanez (6-1, 215) 698 yards

rushing, 9 TD, 52 tackles, 4 sacks; Sr. RB/OLB Julio Carino (5-10, 210) 102 tackles, 5 sacks.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Receivers, running backs and line.

Strengths of defense: Linebackers, defensive backs and line.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Getting offensive and defensive line experience. Adjusting to new offensive and defensive coordinators

2018 expectations: Defending region champions.

Rio Rico

Head coach: Zach Davila

2017 record: 3-7

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. LB Ilias de la Roca (5-9, 187) 293 yards rushing, 57 tackles; Sr. LB/FB Kenneth Lilley (5-9, 186) 237 yards rushing, 51 tackles.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Receivers, running backs and line.

Strengths of defense: Linebackers, defensive backs and line.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Getting offensive and defensive line experience. Adjusting to new offensive and defensive coordinators

2018 expectations: Should have a great kicking game and special teams and a great defense.

Unique story: Bob Castillo coaching - was on staff in the 1980's when the Eagles won four state championships in a row.

Walden Grove

Head coach: Corey Noble

2017 record: 7-4 (4A first round)

No. of returning starters on offense: 6

No. of returning starters on defense: 5

Returning key players and 2017 stats: WR Jordan Lopez (6-1, 195) 209 yards rushing, 4 TD; OL/DL Seamus Button (6-2, 270); OL/DL Jackson Edwards (6-0, 220) 41 tackles, 5 sacks; OL/DL Adam Alvarenga (5-10, 230); OL/DL Carmine Leon (5-10, 240); WR/DB Jayson Allison (5-9, 175); RB/LB Bradley Capen (5-9, 175) 239 yards rushing, 4 TD, 81 tackles, 4 sacks; OL/DL Mitchel Cooper (6-1, 205); DL Brandon Terrell (5-11, 235); K/P Ryan Brady (6-0, 175).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Offensive line - Experience and Depth. Dual threat QB. Explosive play ability. Team strength.

Strengths of defense: Defensive line, linebacker, team speed and team strength.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Handling the graduation of many skill players. Will the offensive and defensive lines step up and lead the team? Will we raise the bar from last season?

2018 expectations: Win the region. Host a playoff game. Play in to the second weekend of November.

4A KINO REGION

Canyon del Oro

Head coach: Dustin peace

2017 record: 4-6

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. QB Zachary Eiden-schink (5-9, 160) 1,106, 16 TD; Sr. CB/RB Jose Cruz (484 yards receiving, 7 TD; Sr. DB/RB Ichiro Ramos (5-9, 155) 355 yards receiving, 5 TD, 43 tackles, 5 INT; Sr. LB/FB Eliseo Garcia (5-7, 190) 57 tackles; Sr. DB/WR Donnie Haley, Jr. (6-0, 175) 44 tackles, 3 sacks.

Casa Grande

Head coach: Jake Barro

2017 record: 4-6

No. of returning starters on offense: 5

No. of returning starters on defense: 5

Returning key players and 2017 stats: RB Seth Keeton (5-8, 175); OL Christian Quintana (6-2, 250); OL Kaleb Baisch (6-2, 265); QB Miguel Avila (6-1, 165); WR/DB Darrell Penn (5-8, 145); LB Michael Romo (6-0, 220); DL Elijah Cordova (6-1, 260); DL Trysten Williams (6-1, 275); DB Damion Allen (5-9, 155); WR/DB Jacob Madrid (5-9, 160).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Returning leaders on the offensive line. Returning senior leader at running back. Quarterback with varsity experience.

Strengths of defense: Lots of returning leadership and experience. Smart and physical front seven.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Consistency.

2018 expectations: Have a winning record. Make the playoffs.

Catalina Foothills

Head coach: Jeff Scurren

2017 record: 6-5

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. OLB/RB Dominic Bynum (6-0, 195) 877 yards rushing, 5 TD; Sr. RB Isaiah Bae (5-8, 170) 474 yards rushing; Sr. WR Michael Yslava (6-4, 165) 182 yards receiving; Sr. MLB/OLB Bobby Heitzinger (6-0, 180) 109 tackles; Sr. OLB Kareem Swailem 78 tackles; Sr. S Gordon Dick (51-11, 155) 71 tackles, 3 sacks; Sr. OLB/RB Luke Mitchell (6-0, 190) 66 tackles, 5 INT.

Sahuaro

Head coach: Scott McKee

2017 record: 4-6 (5A)

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. WR/KR Trayvion White-Austin (5-5, 135) 210 yards rushing, 144 receiving; Sr. WR/CB Amir Hunter-Huggins (6-0, 160) 142 yards receiving.

Unique story: Makes shift to the 4A Conference.

Salpointe

Head coach: Dennis Bene

2017 record: 12-2 (4A runner-up)

No. of returning starters on offense: 6

No. of returning starters on defense: 4

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Jr. RB Bijan Robinson (6-0, 190) 2,023 yards rushing, 26 TD; DB Lathan Ransom (6-1, 190) 48 tackles, 5 INT; WR Mario Padilla (5-9, 175) 776 yards rushing, 13 TD, 181 yards receiving, 3 TD; DB Alex Withers (6-0, 180); TE Connor Witthoft (6-3, 235); OL Thomas Lares (6-1, 250); OL CJ Franks (6-3, 270); DL Sergio Sanchez (6-1, 230).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Running back and skill positions.

Strengths of defense: Team speed and team strength.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Quarterback and linebacker.

2018 expectations: Win our region. Return to the State Championship. Win the State Championship.



Salpointe junior RB Bijan Robinson (photo by Mark Jones of maxpreps.com)

Vista Grande

Head coach: Chris Semore

2017 record: 0-10 (5A)

No. of returning starters on offense: 5

No. of returning starters on defense: 4

Returning key players and 2017 stats: QB Eddie Villegas (6-0, 175); WR/OLB Brice Gay (6-0, 180); OL/DL Bobby Rodriguez (5-11, 260); OL/DL Dizzy Garcia (5-8, 275).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Our experience at quarterback and depth at wide receiver are our strengths right now.

Strengths of defense: Our defensive line and secondary are the strengths of our defense at this point of the offseason.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Overall team depth and inexperience on the offensive line.

2018 expectations: Our expectations for early in the season is to get better every day and to be 1-0 each week.

3A Conference Football Preseason Rankings



Zach Jefferies (#24) of Benjamin Franklin (photo by Andrew Luberdia of countylinepreps.com)

By Andy Morales
azpreps365.com

1. BENJAMIN FRANKLIN: Defending 3A state champion Casteel is competing in the 5A Conference this year, 2017 runner-up Pusch Ridge is making a go of it this year with only seven seniors remaining and semifinalist American Leadership Academy – Queen Creek is on probation and not eligible for post-season play. One might think that makes the Chargers the top team by default with their 12-1 finish from last year but the team might have been near the top regardless. Junior running back Zach Jefferies (1,643 yards rushing) and his senior teammate Chandler Miles (1,517 yards) combined for 3,160 yards rushing and 42 touchdowns and, on top of that, the entire defensive secondary returns. The Chargers will have a chance to prove themselves against some of the top 3A teams with Snowflake, Northwest Christian, Sabino and Florence on their schedule.

2. SABINO: The Sabercats took Benjamin Franklin to the wire in a 35-31 quarterfinal loss last winter and the re-match scheduled for September 21 at Sabino could be a battle for one of the top seeds in the conference. The Sabercats lost standout quarterback Alex Bell to graduation but head coach Ryan McBrayer proved he has the ability to reload after losing Division I talent the year before. His offensive line is pretty much intact and his defense will be imposing. The big issue will be how to collect power points for the Sabercats down the stretch. The team will need to beat upper conference foes Catalina Foothills and Sahuaro, along with 3A powers Pusch Ridge, Blue Rudge and Benjamin Franklin to stay in the hunt.

3. NORTHWEST CHRISTIAN: The Crusaders lost in the quarterfinal round to a stacked Pusch Ridge squad and their schedule this fall should leave them with possibly one loss heading into the state playoffs. The Crusaders will visit Benjamin Franklin on September 7 and then the team

must remain focused the rest of the way. The offensive line has three returning starters, the top four running backs and top two receivers are back and the returning quarterback, Johnathan Metzger (1,319 yards passing, 18 TD), will be a junior. Eight starters are back on defense with the entire secondary returning, led by three all-conference defensive backs. 11 seniors might start on defense.

4. SNOWFLAKE: The Lobos captured the East Region title last year but three losses, including a 42-8 setback to Show Low, meant a ten-seed in the playoffs with little chance of advancing but this season might prove a bit more successful with quarterback Traegon Standerfer (1,241 yards passing, 10 TD) returning for his senior season. The schedule will be brutal with Benjamin Franklin, Florence, Page, Pusch Ridge, Blue Ridge and Show Low waiting. The Lobos need to win the majority of those games or they could be on the outside looking in. It's the kind of schedule that also offers rewards. Head coach Kay Solomon needs to fill some spots on his offensive and defensive line and he says he will be looking hard at some juniors and possibly sophomores to fill some of those key spots.

5. PUSCH RIDGE: It seems the name of the game in the 3A Conference is the ability to reload and head coach Jerry Harris has proven the ability to do so and he's been able to do it with only a couple dozen players on his roster. The ability to reload with few numbers is actually a badge of honor for Lions and, if Harris can do it one more time, he will be set for next year as well with only seven seniors suiting up this fall. A rare Oro Valley matchup is on the schedule with Canyon del Oro making the trip across the road (literally) on September 7 to take on the Lions. The one-mile trip is possibly the shortest distance between opponents in the state this year. The Lions will host Snowflake this year but a trip to Sabino in October could be for the 3A South Region title.

6. YUMA CATHOLIC: The Shamrocks lost in the quarterfinal round to American Leadership Academy last year and head coach Rhett Stallworth is coming right back with junior quarterback Gage Reese (2,684 yards passing, 29 TD) and senior receiver John Henderson (1,336 yards receiving, 10 TD). Stallworth needs to find a defensive identity to compliment that explosive offense. The Shamrocks open up at home against San Manuel on August 17 but three straight games at Northwest Christian, Brawley (CA) and American Leadership Academy – Queen Creek means a whole month on the road before River Valley visits Yuma on September 21. Valley Christian visits a week later and, if the Shamrocks survive the early schedule, they will be playing for a higher playoff seed down the stretch.

7. BLUE RIDGE: The Yellowjackets have a lot coming back from the playoff team from last year including four of top six defenders returning and a capable offense run by sophomore quarterback PJ London (865 yards passing). Head coach Bob London will have his work cut out for him with a gauntlet that includes Florence, Sabino, Ganado, Snowflake and Show Low. The Yellowjackets will host four of those games but it's a stretch that could make or break a team. The opportunity to grab tons of power points is right there for the taking.

8. PAGE: The Sand Devils won the 3A North Region last year and the team is a heavy favorite to win the region title gain this year but the first half of the season is cause for concern with Payson, Florence and Snowflake looming. Head coach Mitchell Stephens needs to replace four of his five offensive linemen in order to take advantage of his running game that includes senior Kele Meredith (1,575 yards rushing, 14 TD) and senior Hayden Gracia (733 yards rushing, 11 TD). 13 starters are returning so there will be plenty of experience to help guide the youth coming at the quarterback slot.

9. SHOW LOW: The Cougars have to replace Westin Keime and his 1,703 yards rushing but a favorable opening half of the season could be the break head coach Monte Maxwell needs to prepare his squad for region play. Senior running back/safety James Turner will be called upon to provide leadership on both sides of the ball once again with his 529 yards rushing and eight touchdowns on offense and 76 tackles, two sacks and two interceptions on defense.

10. FLORENCE: The Gophers gave Casteel everything they could handle last year in a 35-26 loss in the quarterfinal round. "We have had two really great years, 19-5 combined, losing in quarterfinals in two tightly contested games to the eventual state champs," head coach Scott Howard said. "Looking forward to how our younger kids respond given a chance to get on the field. We are hoping we are reloading, not rebuilding." The Gophers will know which it will be right away thanks to three straight games to open the season: Page, Snowflake and Blue Ridge.

3A Conference Team-By-Team Preview

By Andy Morales
azpreps365.com

3A NORTH REGION

Chinle

Head coach: Alan Barwick

2017 record: 5-5

No. of returning starters: 11 seniors and nine juniors return

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Jr. QB/RB/FS Own Maryboy (5-5, 140). Sr. RB/FB/OLB Alec Lewis (5-7, 165)

2018 expectations: The Wildcats are three years removed from a 10-2 record and have stalled at No. 18 two years in a row.

Ganado

Head coach: Mike Bitsuie

2017 record: 8-3 (3A first round)

No. of returning starters on offense: 6

No. of returning starters on defense: 4

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. QB/S Herman Kee (5-11, 150) 1,401 yards passing, 15 TDs, 277 yards rushing) So. Tony Shirley (252 yards receiving, 4 TDs, 34 tackles, 3 interceptions).

Team's biggest question mark(s): Graduated top two rushers (1,272 yards, 16 TDs); top three receivers (1,160 yards, 12 TDs) and top five defenders.

2018 expectations: Compete for the 3A North title.

Monument Valley

Head coach: Bryan Begay

2017 record: 6-4

No. of returning starters on offense: 5

No. of returning starters on defense: 5

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. C/TE Terrell Holiday (6-0, 200); Sr. RB/OLB DeMarquez Benson (5-6, 155) 393 yards rushing, 4 TDs; Sr. T/DT Tyler Litsui (6-0, 290); Sr. K Elisha Begay (5-10, 150) 9 PATs; Jr. OL/DL Simeon Thinn (5-10, 180); Sr. RB/CB Christian Lancaster; Sr. WR/DE Jackson Bia (6-1, 175); Jr. WR/DB Ryles Holiday (5-7, 125); Sr. WR/CB Morias Holiday (5-8, 145); Sr. OL/DL Ashton Smith (5-9, 180).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Offensive line; Young players last season to get a feel for the varsity game; Running game should be stronger this season; Senior class is the team strength; Weight room in the off season will be key.

Strengths of defense: Defensive back field should be strong; Defensive line; Tyler Litsui is a load he will demand a double team; Determined young bunch; Defensive minded group of kids.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Quarterback; Wide receivers; Coaches; Junior varsity program will Need to develop lots of young talent fast; Get better quick.

2018 expectations: Win as many games as possible; Win the 3A North; Make the state playoffs; Advance as far as possible

in the playoffs; Become better people off the football field.

Unique human interest stories: Majority of coaches not returning due to personal health, coaching other sports, children playing at the collegiate level, and personal - family reasons.

More about the program: 1.5 hour practice every day with late bus riders.

Page

Head coach: Mitchell Stephens

2017 record: 8-3 (Region champions)

No. of returning starters on offense: 6

No. of returning starters on defense: 7

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. RB Kele Meredith (5-10, 170) 1,575 yards rushing, 14 TDs; Sr. RB/DL Hayden Gracia (5-8, 165) 733 yards rushing, 11 TDs; Jr. WR/DB Makaio Warner (5-10, 160) 138 yards receiving, 3 TDs; Sr. OL/LB Jeremy Tallsalt (5-6, 180); Jr. OL Conner Begay (5-10, 275); Sr. DL Cheyenne Richardson (6-3, 250); Sr. OL/DL Terran Blackgoat (6-2, 210); Jr. TE/LB Kimball Begay (5-11, 160); Jr. FB/LB Nickolas Yazzie (6-0, 210); Sr. LB Brandon James (5-9, 155)

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Running Game; Returning our top two running backs; Several receivers returning; Depth at the skill positions.

Strengths of defense: Defensive line; Secondary; Defensive experience.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Inexperience at the quarterback position; Replacing four of five linemen.

2018 expectations: Win the 3A North; Win a playoff game; Win a state championship.

Tuba City

Head coach: Clemenston Lomayestewa

2017 record: 5-5

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. QB Ty Engel (5-10, 165); Jr. WR Jalen Bedonie; Sr. Dylan Johnson (5-8, 145).

Team's biggest question mark(s): Graduated 17 seniors.

2018 expectations: Finished 5-5 two years in a row. Won region in 2014 (8-3).

Window Rock

Head coach: Wilbur Begay, Jr.

2017 record: 0-9

No. of returning starters on offense: 10

No. of returning starters on defense: 10

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. RB/SS Denetrious Begay (5-5, 185); Jr. WR/C Adrian Desteaa (6-0, 160) 123 yards receiving; Sr. RB/SS Cobren Nez (5-10, 170) 205 yards rushing; Sr. QB Tyrell Boyd (6-0, 150) 278 yards passing; Jr. OL/DL Aaron Begay (6-1, 212); So. OL/DL Caleb Dickson; Jr. WR/FS Jason Yazzie (5-5, 110); Jr. RB/LB Shawney Sam (5-10, 165); Jr. OL/DL Jacob Tso (5-7, 210); Sr. WR/SS Douglas Dickson.



Pusch Ridge OL/DE Braedon Cole (photo by Darin Sicurello of maxpreps.com)

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Returners; Familiar with offense.

Strengths of defense: Returners.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Our offense.

2018 expectations: Win the first three games of the season; Good tackling; Score points early; Be fundamentally sound on offence and defense.

3A SOUTH REGION

Catalina

Head coach: Chris Barlow

2017 record: 5-5

No. of returning starters on offense: 6

No. of returning starters on defense: 4

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. QB Malik Martin, 1,351 yards passing, 11 TDs, 258 yards rushing. Sr. RB/OLB Tra Daniels (6-0, 195) 463 yards rushing; Sr. WR/S Philippe Kijana (6-3, 156) 283 yards receiving.

Team's biggest question mark(s): First-year head coach.

2018 expectations: Most wins since 2009. Can team improve?

Pusch Ridge

Head coach: Jerry Harris

2017 record: 13-1 (Region champion and state runner-Up)

No. of returning starters on offense: 4

No. of returning starters on defense: 4

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. OL/DE Braedon Cole (6-0, 180); Sr. DE Johnathan Stanton (5-11, 175); Sr. DL Casey Way (5-10, 175) 67 tackles, 5.5 sacks; Sr. RB PJ Haynes (5-9, 160); Jr. DB/RB Gavin Davis (5-8, 175) 315 yards rushing, 4 TDs, 167 yards receiving, 4 TDs; Jr. RB Ryan Garcia (5-8, 165) 623 yards rushing, 11 TDs.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Experienced running backs.

Strengths of defense: Experienced defensive line.

Team's biggest question mark(s): We'll be young with only seven seniors - Will they lead? Are we committed enough to our teammates to sacrifice and do what's necessary to be successful.

2018 expectations: Prove that PRCA Football is a program and that we have the ability to be competitive year in and year out... regardless of our numbers.

Sabino

Head coach: Ryan McBrayer

2017 record: 10-2 (3A quarterfinals)

No. of returning starters on offense: 3

No. of returning starters on defense: 4

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. MLB Richie Pina (6-0, 185) 48 tackles; Sr. DT/OT Luke Houchin (6-3, 300); Sr. DT/OT Caden Wechsler (6-4, 275); Sr. QB/CB Jimmy Hamilton (5-8, 160); Jr. WR/FS Diego Armijo (6-2, 180); Jr. DE/WR Jayson Petty (6-1, 190).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Experienced offensive line and a lot of guys who can score.

Strengths of defense: Big, strong front four. Ranging Safeties. Experienced MLB to run defense.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Who will take the QB spot? Do we have guys that can tackle at the second level? Who will become the go to guy at WR? Who will become the lead RB?

2018 expectations: Be physical upfront for/against the runner. Create excitement on the field. Set ourselves up for a post season run.

Safford

Head coach: Eric Hjalmarson

2017 record: 5-5

No. of returning starters on offense: 2

No. of returning starters on defense: 2

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Jr. QB Mason Duros (5-10, 175) 402 yards passing; Jr. F Collin Thompson (6-2, 205) 41 tackles, 7 sacks.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Lost senior QB, top two receivers and rushers and four of the top five defenders to graduation. Lack of experience and new coaching staff.

2018 expectations: Commitment, Quality Attendance, Compete For Conference Championship.

Unique human interest stories: New head coach, played and coached for Legendary Paul Moro.

Sahuarita

Head coach: Don Watt

2017 record: 4-6

No. of returning starters on offense: 8

No. of returning starters on defense: 8



Payson WR/DB Tim McCarthy (photo by Mark Jones of maxpreps.com)



Kingman Academy's Gabe Imus (photo by Mark Jones of maxpreps.com)



RB Chase Esparza, Blue Ridge (photo by Mark Jones of maxpreps.com)

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Jr. ATH Michael Mollo'o (6-1, 180) 522 yards rushing, 5 TDs, 54 tackles; Sr. ATH Colin Fanning (6-1, 180) 611 yards passing, 5 TDs; Sr. LB Anthony Garcia (6-1, 205) 486 yards receiving; Sr. ATH Tucker Leinen (6-1, 220); Jr. OL R.J. Ahumada (6-2, 235); Jr. ATH Franky Brito (5-9, 200); Jr. SB/WR Jay Haylock (6-0, 185); Jr. ATH Cristian Gonzalez (6-3, 215); Jr. ATH Orlando Williams (5-7, 175); Jr. RB Noah Vu (5-7, 175).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Leadership.

Strengths of defense: Returning starters.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Learning new systems.

2018 expectations: Improve from previous season's record. Health/Durability of Athletes. Increase in overall strength.

Tanque Verde

Head coach: Jeremiah Johnson

2017 record: 2-8

No. of returning starters on offense: 7

No. of returning starters on defense: 7

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Jr. QB/DB Aiden Gonzalez (510, 160); Sr. T/NG Cameron Austin (6-2, 300); Sr. TE/DE Dylan Murray (6-0, 300); Jr. C/LB Colton Karulski (6-0, 205); Sr. LB Jacob Jacome (5-9, 180) 204 yards rushing, 37 tackles; Sr. T/DE Peter Olberding (6-2, 185); Jr. SE/CB Tschawn Kasey (6-0, 165); So. G/DT Landen Lee G/DT (5-11, 250); Sr. G/DT Alex Borbon (5-9, 250); Sr. RB/CB Joe Lines (5-7, 145).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Line-men all coming back and know the offense. Offensive line has been working hard in the weight room.

Strengths of defense: Defense has spent a lot of time in the weight room.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Who will emerge as starting RBs? Who will emerge as starting LBs and DBs?

2018 expectations: Focus on weight room will pay off on the field this season. We will run the ball!

Unique human interest stories: Lance Olberding, line coach played in the NFL for the Bengals - great pickup as a coach.

3A EAST REGION

Blue Ridge

Head coach: Bob London

2017 record: 6-5 (3A first round)

Returning key players and 2017 stats: So. QB PJ London (6-1, 190) 865 yards passing, 11 TDs; Sr. RB Chase Esparza (5-8, 185) 554 yards rushing, 6 TDs, 56 tackles; Sr. WR/DB Corey Endfield (5-10, 174) 397 yards receiving, 4 TDs, 54 tackles; Sr. Tanner McCullough (6-0, 180) 57 tackles; Sr. Dominic Hoffmeyer (5-10, 150) 203 yards rushing, 186 yards receiving, 54 tackles, 2 interceptions.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Returning QB.

Strengths of defense: Four of top six defenders returning.

Holbrook

Head coach: Kelly Kinghorn

2017 record: 2-8

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. RB/DB Jeffrey Jones (5-9, 140) 265 yards rushing, 189 yards receiving, 48 tackles, 2 sacks; Sr. RB/LB Finn Kinghorn (5-10, 145) 155 yards receiving; Jr. RB/LB Tyson Begay (5-9, 150) 42 tackles, 2 sacks.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Replacing QB.

2018 expectations: Improve upon back-to-back 2-win seasons.

Payson

Head coach: Bryan Burke

2017 record: 3-7

No. of returning starters on offense: 4

No. of returning starters on defense: 5

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. WR/DB Tim McCarthy (6-0 165; So. QB Trevor Cline (5-10 170); Sr. G/DT

Tanner Mansoor (6-3 285); Sr. G/DT Devin Gingry (5-10 225); Jr. FB/LB Porter Flake (5-11 175); Sr. WR/DB Kevin Cerna (6-1 180); Jr. WR/DB Chris Chavez (5-8 160).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Lots of depth in the backfield and receiving group with a very athletic offensive line.

Strengths of defense: Physical defensive line that can shut down the run, with lots of depth in the secondary.

Team's biggest question mark(s): We have a very young team returning that has lots of talent but lacks experience in certain areas.

2018 expectations: I fully expect us to be the second place team in the East Region and to be playoff bound.

Unique human interest stories: We have a new head coach in Payson alumni Bryan Burke.

Show Low

Head coach: Monte Maxwell

2017 record: 7-4 (3A first round)

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. RB/S James Turner (5-6, 140) 529 yards rushing, 8 TDs, 76 tackles, 2 sacks, 2 interceptions; Jr. WR/S Keegan Clark (5-11, 150) 406 yards receiving, 2 TDs.

Team's biggest question mark(s): New QB and replacing 1,703 yard rusher Westin Keime.

Snowflake

Head coach: Kay Solomon

2017 record: 7-4 (Region champion)

No. of returning starters on offense: 6

No. of returning starters on defense: 6

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. QB Traegon Standerfer (6-2, 200) 1,241 yards passing, 10 TDs; Sr. LB/HB David Brimhall (5-10, 195) 559 yards rushing, 9 TDs, 222 yards receiving, 154 tackles, 5 sacks; Sr. RB/OLB Cody Fox (5-11, 150) 44 yards rushing, 5 TDs, 184 yards receiving; Sr. Brydon Hatch (5-11, 155) 82 tackles, 2 interceptions; Sr. RB/CB Jake Christensen (5-9, 155) 68 tackles, 5 interceptions.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Returning QB. Strong nucleus of returning starters. Depth/experience with skill players. Two returning OL starters (Caleb Uchytill is a 2-year returning starter)

Strengths of defense: Strong core of returning DBs/LBs. Two returning DL starters. Consistency in defensive scheme and coaching staff.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Some spots to fill on OL and DL. Will be looking hard at some juniors and possibly sophomores to fill some key spots.

2018 expectations: Take full advantage of early spring practice time to develop players at all levels. Maximize summer workouts/competitions to help prepare us for the season. Use a tough non-region schedule to make sure we are battle tested and ready to compete in region play and beyond. Win the 3A East Region. Win the 3A State Championship (These last two are perennial goals within our program.

3A WEST REGION

Chino Valley

Head coach: Wade Krug

2017 record: 4-6

Returning key players and 2017 stats: So. QB/CB Seth Jelovic (5-10) 572 yards passing, 5 TDs, 269 yards rushing, 36 tackles; Sr. QB/ATH Michael Paulus (5-7, 165) 486 yards rushing, 4 TDs, 835 yards rushing, 10 TDs, 243 yards receiving, 2 TDs, 35 tackles, 2 interceptions.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Can the team break .500 for the first time since 2008?

Kingman

Head coach: Cam Wierson

2017 record: 2-8

No. of returning starters on offense: 6

No. of returning starters on defense: 6

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. QB/LB Darrell Mitchell (6-2, 215) 736 yards passing, 4 TDs, 322 yards rushing, 5 TDs; Jr. LB/RB Powers Corbin (5-11, 170) 38 tackles.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: We installed a new offense in week 8 of the 2017 season. Our main run play averaged 7 yards per carry. We need to clean up ball security problems and we should have similar success with the new system.

Strengths of defense: We are returning our five of seven skill positions.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Our numbers are very low. We will dress about 20 kids for our home opener.

2018 expectations: We have thr33 very winnable non-conference games. I expect to compete well in each of them. There are few of us, but we're physically tough and finally have some physical strength from major improvements in the weight room. We will be able to move the line of scrimmage against a few teams on our schedule.

Kingman Academy

Head coach: John Morgando

2017 record: 7-4 (2A)

No. of returning starters on offense: 6

No. of returning starters on defense: 8

Returning key players and 2017 stats: So. WR/DB Gabe Imus (5-8, 145) 1,022 yards receiving, 14 TDs; Jr. WR Hayven Potter (6-3, 190) 636 yards receiving, 7 TDs; Sr. RB/DB Steven Wusstig (152) 912 yards rushing, 10 TDs; Sr. T/DT Bryan Jones (6-5, 255); Sr. SS Trevor Lowry (5-10, 174) 67 tackles; Sr. RB/MLB Tyler Wheeler (5-7, 167) 135 tackles, 3 sacks; Jr. G/DE Joseph Trevino (5-10, 222); Sr. WR/DB Nate Perea WR/DB (5-6, 141) 287 yards receiving, 4 TDs; Sr. C/DT Ethan Schmidt (6-0, 255); Sr. G/DT Sonny Munoz (5-8, 252).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Four returning Skill players. Decent Strength on the line.

Strengths of defense: Good team speed. Experience.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Several jobs to be won on offense and defense.

2018 expectations: Goal to continue the success from last year even while moving up a division we want to work towards a winning record and the playoffs.

Northwest Christian

Head coach: David Inness

2017 record: 10-2 (Region champion, 3A quarterfinals)

No. of returning starters on offense: 6

No. of returning starters on defense: 8

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. SS/WB/LS Dusty Inness (5-11, 185) 364 yards receiving, 3 TDs, 112 tackles, 4 interceptions; Sr. OL/DL Derick Henderson (6-0, 235) 76 tackles, 2.5 sacks; Sr. OL/DL Matt Cadriel (6-3, 235); Sr. OL/DL Andrew Tweety (6-0, 215); Sr. LB Levi Bourland (6-0, 210) 110 tackles; Sr. OL/DL Donato Zavala (6-6, 330); Sr. RB/DB Aren Van Hofwegen (6-1, 180) 692 yards rushing, 4 TDs; Sr. LB/TE Zach Heidel (5-11, 190); Sr. FS/WR Brady Wijbrants (6-2, 170); Sr. LB/TE Josh Heidel (5-11, 185); Sr. WR/DB Jordan Ehlers (6-1, 170); Jr. QB Johnathan Metzger (6-2, 170) 1,319 yards passing, 18 TDs; Sr. RB/DB Thomas Poe (5-10, 170) 198 yards rushing, 11 TDs, 4 interceptions.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Offensive line has three returning starters. Top four running backs and top two receivers are back from last year. Returning quarterback will be a junior. JV was 9-1 good kids going to help us out. Great offensive staff.

Strengths of defense: Eight starters back with entire secondary led by three all-conference DBs. Senior leadership could start 11 seniors on defense. Guys who will push to play. Overall team speed on defense good. Like to play and compete.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Who will play the other two offensive line-spots? Who will step up in the skill positions? Kicking game needs to continue to improve. Who's turn is it to step up have 25 seniors returning.

2018 expectations: Be ready to play and execute from day one. Strength and speed- have to be bigger and faster. Get better each and every week. Be playing our best football at the end of the year. Be in the hunt at the end of the year.

River Valley

Head coach: Chris Starkey

2017 record: 3-7

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. FB/OLB Shott Cole (5-10, 165) 396 yards rushing, 5 TDs, 117 tackles; Sr. OLB/OL Seth Solano (5-10, 180) 151 tackles; Jr. Isaac Miller (5-8) 99 tackles.

Team's biggest question mark(s): First losing season since 2009.

Wickenburg

Head coach: Carson Miller

2017 record: 6-5 (3A first round)

No. of returning starters on offense: 7

No. of returning starters on defense: 8

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. RB/LB Kegan Lindsay (5-9, 185) 1,148 yards rushing, 17 TDS, 51 tackle; Jr. RB/LB Michael Flinn (5-9, 155) 455 yards rushing, 5 TDs; Jr. WR/DB Dean Jones (6-4, 180); Sr. OL/DI Garrett Kennedy (5-10, 325); Jr. OL/DL Alex Ochoa (5-9, 230) 59 tackles, 3 sacks; Sr. OL/DL Joe Moder (5-9, 244) 645 yards rushing, 5 TDs, 48 tackles.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Lots of returning starters with playoff experience. Leading rusher from 2017 season is returning. Three out of five offensive lineman returning.

Strengths of defense: Lots of returning starters with playoff



Northwest Christian coach David Innes and his son Dustin (photo by Mark Jones of maxpreps.com)

experience. Weakness of youth in 2017 has turned into strength of experience and depth going into 2018.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Replacing our QB on offense. Switching schemes on defense

2018 expectations: Making and advancing in the state playoffs. We have turned the corner as a program and have made the playoffs the past few years, but now we need to step it up as a program and start winning playoff games.

3A CENTRAL REGION

American Leadership Academy Queen Creek

Head coach: Rich Edwards

2017 record: 10-3 (Team forfeited its wins after being placed on probation)

No. of returning starters on offense: 2

No. of returning starters on defense: 0

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. C Seth Verenski (6-1, 280); Jr. WR Carter Taylor (5-11, 170) 204 yards receiving, 4 TDs; Sr. K Talen Rider (5-10, 165) 73-75 PATs; 8-11 FGs; 97 points.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Experience. We have limited experience returning.

2018 expectations: We will need to be the hardest working team on the field. Develop kids quickly in the early part of the year in order to compete for a third straight region championship.

More about the program: We graduated 32 seniors from the 2017 team and only have two returning starters. We had a strong JV team in 2017 but this will be a year that we need a lot of young guys to step up.

American Leadership Academy Ironwood

Head coach: Michael Smith

2017 record: 2018 is initial AIA season

No. of returning starters on offense: 4

No. of returning starters on defense: 5



Wickenburg senior RB/LB Kegan Lindsay (photo by Mark Jones of maxpreps.com)

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Jr. QB Jake Maloy QB (6-0, 165); Sr. RB/LB Nathen Erickson (5-11, 175); LB Dante Bushell (5-11, 225); DL Joey Heywood (5-11, 175); C Trevar Johnson (5-9, 160); WR/S Ethan Lawlor (5-11, 170); WR/C Korey Martin (5-10, 165).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Second year in the system.

Strengths of defense: Third year in the system.

Team's biggest question mark(s): If we are tough enough for the division we moved up into.

2018 expectations: Be competitive every Friday and get better each week.

Unique human interest stories: We have a great group of boys that give back to their community. They have already did a team bonding activity at Feed My Starving Children in Mesa and on Veteran's Day, they partnered up with Nick Lowery's champions for the homeless at a shelter in downtown Phoenix.

Benjamin Franklin

Head coach: Dave Jefferies

2017 record: 12-1 (3A semifinals)

No. of returning starters on offense: 5

No. of returning starters on defense: 5

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. OL/DL Austin Bateman (5-6, 210); Jr. ATH/DB Danner Bowen (5-8, 150) 56

tackles, 3 INT; Jr. RB/OLB Zach Jefferies (6-0, 175) 1,643 yards rushing, 21 TD; Sr. TE/OLB Jordan Kemp (6-1, 200); Sr. OL/DL McCalister Loving (5-7, 215); Jr. FB/LB Cade McAfee (5-10, 180) 107 tackles, 3 INT; Sr. ATH/DB Chandler Miles (5-8, 145) 1,517 yards rushing, 21 TD, 307 yards receiving 5 TD, 49 tackles, 3 INT.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Top two running backs are back. We finally feel we have an offensive identity

Strengths of defense: Our entire secondary is back. We rotated several of our defensive linemen last year so even though they were not necessarily starters, we have a lot of experience returning on the line.

Team's biggest question mark(s): How will our seniors emerge as leaders...big shoes to fill from last year's group. 2018 expectations: I'm hoping to see them respond well to a much tougher schedule than last year.

Coolidge

Head coach: Bill Godsil

2017 record: 2-8

No. of returning starters on offense: 6

No. of returning starters on defense: 7

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Jr. QB Val Rodriguez (5-10, 165) 618 yards passing, 4 TD.; Jr. C Carlos Barraza (5-11, 220); So. G Joseph Cardenas (5-10, 210); Jr.



Florence junior Joshua Maignan (photo by Darin Sicurello of maxpreps.com)

G/NG Joaquin Murrieta (6-0, 225); Sr. T/LB Abram Palacios (6-0, 225) 42 tackles; Sr. WR/DB Manuel Perez (6-0, 170) 27 tackles, 2 INT; Jr. RB/DB Zerrick Perkins RB/DB (6-0, 165); Jr. LB Mike Bosquez (5-10, 180) 2 sacks; Jr. LB Nate Lucero (5-10, 160) 48 tackles, 3 sacks.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Returning youth and most of offensive line is returning.

Strengths of defense: Speed and returning youth.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Young players developing and replacing key graduating seniors.

2018 expectations: Improve win loss totals. Improve in region. Improve on offense.

Florence

Head coach: Scott Howard

2017 record: 8-3 (3A quarterfinals)

No. of returning starters on offense: 1

No. of returning starters on defense: 2

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Jr. RB/CB Joshua Maignan (5-10, 180) 597 yards rushing, 8 TD; Jr. DE Regen (6-4, 240) 35 tackles.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Skills positions are athletic and athletic offensive line.

Strengths of defense: Solid defensive ends and athletic defensive backfield.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Young team and young offensive line.

2018 expectations: I'm hoping to see them respond well to a much tougher schedule than last year.

Unique human interest stories: Regen Terry's father is the director of football operations at Boston College.

More about the program: We have had two really great years, 19-5 combined, losing in quarterfinals in two tightly contested games to the eventual state champs. Looking forward to how our younger kids respond given a chance to get on the field. We are hoping we are "reloading" not "rebuilding."

San Tan Foothills

Head coach: George De La Torre

2017 record: 8-3 (2A)

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Jr. RB/LB Amahri Bailey (6-0, 165) 1,591 yards rushing, 27 TD, 49 tackles; So. RB/LB Jimmy Brooks (6-0, 185) 228 yards rushing, 25 tackles; Sr. OL/LB/K Brandon McMahan (5-8, 205) 91 tackles, 53-60 PAT.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Moving up from 2A to 3A.

3A METRO REGION

AZ College Prep

Head coach: Myron Blueford

2017 record: 2-8 (2A)

Returning key players and 2017 stats: So. QB Mark Chavez (5-9, 140) 791 yards passing, 7 TD; Jr. LB/RB/DT Habacuc Ortiz (5-11, 235) 273 yards rushing, 2 TD; So. RB/DB Mario Duncan (5-9, 135) 273 yards rushing, 3 TD; Jr. WR/DB James Chadwick (5-10, 145) 300 yards receiving, 4 TD; Jr. RB/LB Saar Zutshi (5-7, 180) 84 tackles; So. FS/DB Joel Diaz (5-10, 155) 78 tackles, 2 INT; Jr. RB/LB Owen Sullins (5-6, 152) 68 tackles; So. DE/TE Kellen Gibson (6-1,

160) 59 tackles, 7.5 sacks.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Moving up from 2A.

American Leadership Academy Gilbert

Head coach: Randy Ricedorff

2017 record: 2018 is initial AIA season

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. QB McKay Thomason (5-11, 180); So. TE/DE Alex Lines (6-4, 220); Jr. G/OLB Conner Johnston (5-11, 215).

Coronado

Head coach: Curt LeBlanc

2017 record: 1-9 (4A)

No. of returning starters on offense: 5

No. of returning starters on defense: 6

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Jr. QB/SS Mikel James (5-9, 175) 891 yards passing 7 TD, 53 tackles; Sr. WR/OLB Angel Moreno (6-0, 180); Sr. OL/DL Alexis Ochoa (6-0, 220); Sr. OL/DL Francisco Burgos-Ortiz (5-10, 230); Sr. WR/DB Josh Fong (5-9, 170); Jr. OL/DL Tim Allen (6-0, 275); Jr. WR/OLB Robert Kendrick (6-1, 175); Sr. WR/DB DeKari Hamilton (5-10, 155); Sr. OL/LB Hazim Sedik (6-2, 190).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Returning three players that started as sophomores. Quarterback is our toughest and most committed player. Team speed and strength has improved. More experienced players than last season.

Strengths of defense: Defensive schemes will be more organized. Greater team speed and strength. Returning key players, especially at linebacker.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Consistent attendance at summer workouts, Staying healthy. Learning a new defensive scheme.

2018 expectations: Stronger work ethic and commitment, greater team unity, fewer academic issues and more success on the field.

Fountain Hills

Head coach: Jason Henslin

2017 record: 7-4 (3A first round)

No. of returning starters on offense: 5

No. of returning starters on defense: 5

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. C/MLB Leyton Kauffman (5-8, 185) 72 tackles, 5 sacks; Sr. WR/SS Cole Lupien (5-11, 170) 335 yards rushing, 6 TD; So. LT/DE Hafeez Momoh (6-1, 205); Jr. CB/WR Ahmed Momoh (6-1, 180); Sr. DE/WR/K Collin Robbins (6-0, 170) 33-35 PAT, 8-14 FG.

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Receiving Group. We have six legitimate candidates for four spots. We have the strongest offensive line we have had in several years led by Leyton Kauffman and Hafeez Momoh. Our young QB Shane Davenport is extremely athletic and accurate with his arm.

Strengths of defense: We will have our overall strongest team in many years and a lot of these guys have been playing on varsity for two or three years already. Speed- Our defense is fast at every position, our defensive line led by Hafeez Momoh will put a lot of pressure on opposing QBs and RBs.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Finding the right spot for

a few players. We are replacing several starters on both sides of the ball but we have the talent to do well, we just have to put people in the best spots to be successful.

2018 expectations: My goal is to win our region and host a playoff game. I expect us to be crisp, more focused and ready to compete than we have in years. I've been around this team for a long time and have not seen such hard work since the back to back region champs of 2008 and 2009.

More about the program: Influx of talent from around the state and around the country. We have eight players that have moved to Arizona in the last year which has shaken up the expectations in a good way. We have players who have moved in from CA, WA, MI, NJ, TX, IL who already have high school experience. We also have 3-4 guys that have transferred in from other valley high schools to play here. It's all been really cool to see it come together.

Gilbert Christian

Head coach: Scott McDaniel

2017 record: 7-4 (2A)

No. of returning starters on offense: 7

No. of returning starters on defense: 7

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. OL/DL Mitch Sullivan (6-1, 185); Sr. WR/DE/OLB Nicholas Pappas (6-0, 180) 58 tackles, 2.5 sacks; Jr. LB/OL Connor Swingle (5-10, 190) 88 tackles; Jr. RB/OLB Weston Zierer (5-9, 175); Jr. OL Joe Dickerson (5-9, 210); Sr. OL/DL Hunter Trask (5-10, 220); So. OL/DL Luke Webb (5-10, 180); So. QB/DB/WR Zach Miller (5-



Valley Christian senior quarterback Peyton Hanzal (photo by Jim Willittes of maxpreps.com)

8, 140); So. K/LB Jace Feely (5-11, 180); Jr. WR/DB Cole Sundt (5-10, 160).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Five returning starters on the offensive line and running backs have added bulk and speed during the off-season.

Strengths of defense: The interior of the defense returns. Great skill in the defensive backfield. We have speed at all positions on defense.

Team's biggest question mark(s): We graduation almost all of our offensive skill positions. Who will be our QB on day one? Can we replace 12 seniors? We are a young team; will our younger players be able to make the leap to varsity?

2018 expectations: Be a team of high character and moral values. Be amazing stewards of the game by displaying unimpeachable sportsmanship at all times. Win our region. Host a home playoff game. Win in the playoffs.

3A METRO WEST REGION

Bourgade Catholic

Head coach: Marcel Lopez

2017 record: 3-7 (2A)

No. of returning starters on offense: 8

No. of returning starters on defense: 7

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Jr. QB Louie Lopez (5-11, 158) 1,365 yards passing, 20 TD; Jr. RB Josh Dreher (5-7, 165) 762 yards rushing, 6 TD; Sr. LB Gustavo Bonilla (6-1, 195) 102 tackles; So. WR Sebastian Gameros (6-0, 160) 363 yards receiving, 4 TD; Sr. OL/DL Miguel Brito (6-1, 270); Jr. RB/LB Mason McDowell (5-11, 185); Sr. RB/WR Michael Morales (5-10, 173); Sr. S/LB Isaiah Jauregi (5-11, 170) 79 tackles, 3 sacks, 3 INT; So. WR/DB Justin Gomez (5-7, 160) 56 tackles, 3 INT; Sr. DB Charles Pusac (5-9, 158).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Running game will be our strength with experienced running backs re-tuning. Our QB will be entering his second year in our system and will be greatly improved. Four returning starters on the offensive line will allow us to be strong up front. Young receivers have a lot to prove but have tremendous upside. Competition at the tight end position will allow some versatility for us in our passing game.

Strengths of defense: Starting line backers all returning. Experience at the DB positions allows us to be flexible with our defensive scheme. Improved depth up front. Front seven will be strength of defense.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Can our QB take the next step in running the offense efficiently? How we will handle changing our focus to more of a run first team? Who is going to step up and fill the holes on offense left by our departing seniors?

2018 expectations: We will do a much better job taking care of the ball on offense. Our defense will play faster and more aggressive in our new scheme. We feel that we have the potential to be a playoff team this year and compete for a region title. We will field a disciplined team that will represent Bourgade Catholic proudly.

More about the program: This will be our first year in the 3A conference but we believe that we have the talent and experience to do well at this level.



Yuma Catholic junior QB Gage Reese (photo by Darin Sicurello of maxpreps.com)

Odyssey Institute

Head coach: Jon Castellanos

2017 record: 6-4

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Jr. HB/S Chris Weaver (5-10, 153) 1,184 yards rushing, 19 TD; Jr. WR/DB Tyson Regan (5-11, 140) 249 yards receiving, 3 TD; Sr. TE/LB Don Tisdale (5-10, 175) 92 tackles, 6 sacks, 2 INT; Jr. OL/DI Jonathan Velazquez (6-1, 230) 55 tackles, 4 sacks.

Paradise Honors

Head coach: Duane Brown

2017 record: 4-5 (2A)

No. of returning starters on offense: 6

No. of returning starters on defense: 6

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. QB/FS Clay Duzy (6-0, 190) 230 yards passing, 607 yards rushing, 9 TD; Sr. OL/LB Dylan Behymer (6-0, 235); Sr. OL/DL Brendan Feliciano (6-2, 315); Jr. RB Nathaniel Smith (6-1, 220) 1,171

yards rushing, 13 TD; Sr. DT Travis Sellers (6-0, 195); Jr. OL Tyler Griffin (5-9, 265); Jr. DB David Goita (5-8, 160); So. LB Mason Ashton (5-9, 190); Sr. WR/DE Aaron Dirks (6-3, 205).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Running attack, versatile backfield and experienced quarterback.

Strengths of defense: Solid in the box and versatility.

Team's biggest question mark(s): The growth of young players we will be counting on and depth.

2018 expectations: Winning record, stay healthy, improve week over week and make the playoffs.

Unique human interest stories: Regen Terry's father is the director of football operations at Boston College.

More about the program: Moving up from 2A.

Valley Christian

Head coach: Kirk Sundberg

2017 record: 3-7

No. of returning starters on offense: 6

No. of returning starters on defense: 6

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. QB Peyton Hanzal (6-4, 170) 1,304 yards passing, 12 TD; Jr. QB/WR/DB Vinnie LaGatta (5-8, 155) 265 yards receiving, 3 TD; Sr. OL/DL Evan Shiel (6-0, 235); Sr. WR/DB Matt McCreight (6-2, 180) 380 yards receiving, 3 TD; Jr. LB/RB Gage Summers (5-10, 180); Jr. DB/WR Justin Stinson (6-2, 170).

Strengths of offense heading into summer break: Wide variety of skills and strengths at the quarterback position; deep and talented at receiver.

Strengths of defense: Speed and skill in the secondary; DBs have a nose for the ball.

Team's biggest question mark(s): Can we establish a healthy and consistent team culture and always play with tenacity? Can we successfully transition to a mostly new coaching staff? With the coaching change, can we adapt to a new offensive system?

2018 expectations: We will play with love and tenacity. We seek to glorify God above all else with how we compete and behave.

More about the program: We are training to become fierce and loving men who follow Jesus Christ, lead in our community, and strain for excellence in football.

Yuma Catholic

Head coach: Rhett Stallworth

2017 record: 9-3 (3A quarterfinals)

No. of returning starters on offense: 5

No. of returning starters on defense: 1

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Jr. QB Gage Reese (6-1, 175) 2,684 yards passing, 29 TDs; Sr. WR/DB John Henderson (6-0, 170) 1,336 yards receiving, 10 TD; Sr. OL/DL John Rodriguez (6-0, 240).

Team's biggest question mark(s): We need to put a defense together. Going to be very young there.

2018 expectations: Survive first half of season and get ready for playoffs.



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Coach Jefferies Has Ben Franklin Ready for the Top



(left to right) Becki, son Zach and husband Dave Jefferies, Ben Franklin's coach (photo courtesy of Ben Franklin High School)

By Andy Morales
azpreps365.com

Some say it's by default, but if you look at the numbers and the trends, Benjamin Franklin is one of the top teams in the 3A Conference, if not the top team regardless.

Defending state champion Casteel is now playing 5A, state runner-up Pusch Ridge is rebuilding after graduation took its toll and American Leadership Academy Queen Creek is on probation and not eligible for postseason play. But Benjamin Franklin is almost fully intact from a semifinal finish in 2017.

"It is an honor to be chosen as the preseason favorite, but our current goal is to earn an 11th game. If we are able to do that, then we can shift our focus to be the top team in the state," head coach Dave Jefferies said. "Right now we need everyone in our program to get on the boat, start paddling, and make sure we are all paddling in the same direction. It will take a lot of maturity to handle the hype, no

question about it. Hopefully our kids will remember our humble beginnings as a program and realize that the success we had last year didn't just happen automatically but was a culmination of four years of hard work, blood, sweat, and tears, and even a little bit of luck."

Even with the shift in dynamics, Jefferies still sees plenty of landmines in the 3A Conference, especially in his own Central Region.

"The landscape may have changed a little bit in our conference, but last year we came out of nowhere, so what would stop any other team from doing that this year?" Jefferies said. "Also, coach Rhett Stallworth is back on the sidelines at Yuma Catholic, Northwest Christian always puts out a good product, one of the White Mountain teams is bound to make a statement, not to mention both Pusch Ridge and Sabino out of the South Region are always strong. And then I feel like our region has two of the top teams in the state in ALA-QC and Florence. Even with ALA-QC out of playoff contention, we have yet to come within four TDs on them, so that game means a little bit to us." Part of Benjamin Franklin's "coming out of nowhere" had to do with the vaunted Charger running attack led by senior Chandler Miles and Jefferies' son, Zach, a junior. The Charger offense went from 2,077 yards rushing as a team in 2016 to almost 4,000 last year behind Miles (1,517) and Zach (1,643), who combined for 42 TDs.

"It was definitely a planned shift, but it wasn't necessarily about running the football versus throwing the football," the coach said. "It was more about gaining an offensive identity, something that up until last year I had failed to create. It became evident to me that for two years I was trying to put a square peg into a round hole and finally toward the end of the 2016 season I saw the light. And so that following off-season we made a wholesale change to our offense and really the way we approached the game in general. Obviously when you run the ball more often you will most likely have more rushing yards. We joke that for most teams RPO stands for Run-Pass Option but for us it stands for Run Power Often. I believe it is deeper than that though. I believe this was more of a realization for me that I needed to worry less about appearances and what everyone sees on Saturdays and more about fundamental football (blocking, tackling, teamwork, toughness, etc.) and offensively I feel like we have found a good fit with the double-wing."

Most look at the impressive rushing stats for Miles, but he also has 307 yards receiving with five TDs, 49 tackles and three interceptions, making him a complete player.

"(Miles) is also a great return man and accounted for 525 yards in both kick and punt returns last year," Jefferies said. "He is an extremely gifted athlete who would be our top WR if we ran a standard offense and, defensively, he is

probably more of a true corner, but we have him playing safety in our 2-safety scheme. This just goes to show you his unselfishness when it comes to playing where the team needs him and not where he wants to play. This has become a theme in our program as we have had several players in the last few years play positions that were not their position of choice, but rather where the team needed them most. Chandler has proven himself to be a tough hard-nosed RB despite his small frame.”

As mentioned before, Zach Jefferies is a coach’s son. The father-son, coach-player dynamics can at times be tough to juggle, but it also has its rewards.

“I suppose it might be every father’s wish to be able to coach his own son,” Jefferies said. “It is definitely a dream come true for me to be able to coach Zach and see him having so much fun doing what he loves. You can see his passion for the game in his style of running. He has grown up around football and he’s been able to closely watch so many players that were great role models and great football players. I’m not going to lie, there are ups and downs to it as well. I am sure that most of those “downs” are times when I have been less of a father and more of a coach to Zach. Thankfully I have a wonderful wife, Becki, who keeps me in line and reminds me that my most important job is at home and not on the field, something I lose sight of often.”

Most look at the Charger offense, but there is also a lot coming back on defense, including five of the top defend-

ers. A complete team needs a strong offense and a stingy defense and it appears Benjamin Franklin appears to have both once again.

Jefferies said, “I think our offense gets the publicity mainly because we are doing something a little unconventional. As a program we actually promote a defense first mentality, and maybe that is part of the reason we are running such a simple offense. We want our best 11 athletes on the field for defense. I feel like one of the strengths of our defense is our preparation. Our defensive coordinator, Pete Heintz, does an amazing job of getting the kids ready each week for our opponent.”

Benjamin Franklin finished 12-1 last year with a semifinal loss to Pusch Ridge.

Two years ago it was 7-3.

Three seasons ago it was 5-5.

Whatever happens this year, the Chargers need to be accounted for.

“Any success we have this year must take a deliberate effort by all involved, and that starts with myself as the head coach, and trickles down to everyone in the program,” Jefferies added. “Last year we had the benefit of being a nobody. We used to be the team that everyone marked on their schedule as the automatic win, now we’ll be the team that everyone marks on their schedule for a different reason.”

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- OCTOBER 26**
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- NOVEMBER 2**
PLAYOFFS ROUND 1
- NOVEMBER 9**
PLAYOFFS ROUND 2

Stallworth Returns to Coach Yuma Catholic



Yuma Catholic Coach Rhett Stallworth will once again lead the Shamrocks in 2018 (photo by Mark Jones of maxpreps.com).

By Andy Morales
azpreps365.com

Yuma Catholic opened its doors in 2000 with only 76 freshmen, no stadium and no practice field.

Still, the Shamrocks started out as a better than average program, one that reached the 2A semifinal round three years after the program began under the guidance of Tom Hurt.

Hurt's assistant, Randy Plum, took over in 2005 and the former Minnesota Viking and Marine continued the winning ways, but the program reached incredible heights when Rhett Stallworth was hired in 2007. Stallworth played for Hurt when Hurt was in charge of Yuma High School and Stallworth was coming off of three years as the head coach of the Criminals when Yuma Catholic came calling.

The rest is a blur.

Only 14-16 at Yuma, Stallworth went on to accumulate a 103-14 record with the Shamrocks and three state championships. He stepped away from the powerhouse program in 2015 when he took on principal duties at the school, but

he is back on the sidelines after the school dismissed Aaron Cheatwood last spring.

On a sad note, Plum passed away on Aug. 12, 2016 in San Diego at the age of 68.

We talked with Stallworth about his journey over the last few years and where he is now.

Q: You stepped away from the game in 2016 when you became the principal at Yuma Catholic and you left with an incredible record of 103-14 with state championships in 2011, 2013 and 2014. How difficult was it to step away at that point?

A: At the time it was not that hard to step away from coaching to become the principal. I did not walk away from coaching because of my health (Had heart surgery in the past). At the time, I took the principal job and there was no way I could do both jobs. Now I have two years under my belt as the principal and have a good solid team around me and we are very efficient. That is what has allowed to me get back into coaching.

Q: It was announced that you will continue with your principal duties while taking on the role of head coach once again. Do you have a plan taking care of the stress that will come with both jobs? Can you fill us in on why you came back to coaching?

A: Our school is in a good place right now. I have a great team around me that allows me to step up and take this challenge. As far as stress, it has actually been nice to walk out of the office at the end of the day and mix it up with the kids on the field. It is a good stress reliever. I was ready for the new challenge. I came back to coaching because we terminated our coach that replaced me and we felt that at that late date it didn't give us time to get the right person in.

Q: Can you fill us in on the career of your nephew Stetson and possibly any other of your former players who might be playing at the next level?

A: Stetson started his college career at Adams State where he was competing for the QB job and eventually started his sophomore season at tight end. He has since transferred to Cal Lutheran where he is competing for the starting QB job. Matt Pistone is a tight end at Boise State. Jagen Cleary is a QB at Lakewood College in Chicago. He is 140 yards away from setting the career record for passing yards at that school. Tommy Pistone is playing quarterback at Tusculum University in Tennessee. Jason Pisano is playing at NAU as an inside linebacker.

Q: You're competing in the 3A Metro West this year. Can you give us a rundown of how you see the region?

A: I think the Metro West will be fairly competitive. I think it is an up and coming region as Odyssey and Paradise Honors are both up and coming programs. Valley Christian and Bourgade have long traditions of winning. We look forward to the competition. However, we still have a lot of work to do.

Q: Coaches who take a break often talk about having to meet the officials and opposing coaches all over again due to turnaround, new hires and retirement. Are you ready to see some new faces out there?

A: It will be nice to get into the swing of things and see what new people are out there and what they are running. As far as officials, it is what it is.

Q: Are you feeling like a new coach or a veteran coach? What are some of your personal routines from the past are you drawing upon to get back into the practice and game-day mode?

A: It has been like riding a bike. You don't forget it. We are doing the same routines that we did before. We have a great formula for success. It is just time to get down to

work and put into action. It is not easy. It requires a lot of time and commitment to do it right.

Q: Talk a bit about the travel involved and how that impacts a border team, away from all the spotlights?

A: Travel is always tough on us at Yuma Catholic. Especially when we can't get a game with the five other high schools in Yuma. The bottom line is we know we are going to have to travel so there is no use complaining about it. We need to control what we can control and deal with the rest.

Q: Tell us about your team this year.

A: This team this year will be improved on offense. However, we have a lot of holes to fill on the defensive side of the ball. Not to mention that we are very thin on numbers. We do have a big freshman class that is talented and it looks as if there will be some of those kids that will be able to contribute next year. We do have one freshman that will be starting for us on varsity this year. Just thin on numbers at the varsity.

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Thatcher celebrates its 2017 2A state title after a hard-fought 28-27 win over Eloy Santa Cruz Valley (photo by Darin Sicurello of maxpreps.com).

By Jose Garcia
azpreps365.com

1. THATCHER: It's never easy losing a head coach. There is always an adjustment period. The positive thing about Thatcher's head coaching transition is that most of the faces on and off the field are familiar. There's athletic director Don Conrad, the reported new offensive coordinator. But Conrad's been down this road before, having guided Thatcher, the two-time defending champ, to back-to-back titles in 2000 and 01. There's also new head coach Ramon Morales, who's witnessed several highs in his 30-plus years at Thatcher. The football program has experienced only two losing seasons since 1986. On the field, T/DT Quinten Mack, FB/OLB Riley Morris, TE Cole Motes, OL/DL Sam Nicholas, and RB/DB Quinton Turley made their introductions in the past couple of seasons with great success.

2. ROUND VALLEY: Sr. RB/LB Dylan Workman is out. It's a huge blow to the program's state title aspirations. The ACL injury occurred during a pole vault practice in the 2018 spring season. It may not happen, but Round Valley is hoping to see Workman in the playoffs. In the meantime, it is devising ground plans for juniors Marc Irigoyen, Dylan Jordan and Charles Holiday. "They are different backs with different styles," coach Marcus Bell said. "We'll use all three and see who rises up." The good news is that Round Valley returns three starters on the o-line, including three-year starter Andrew Cisco. On defense, three all-state quality performers, seniors Kason Wolfe, Colter Hogle and Hunter Ziegler, as well as DE/OL Brian Yellowhorse, give Round Valley a fighting chance at the trophy.

3. SANTA CRUZ: Every lineman on both sides of the ball returns except for one. The best of the bunch are the Castillo twins, Diego and Juan. The offensive linemen are

sophomores, established vocal leaders and the strongest kids on campus. Santa Cruz never seems to run out of running backs under fifth-year coach Rishard Davis. Hunter Ogle, a freshman fullback last year, can replicate what other backs have done in the past, Davis said. "We have the potential to run the ball better this year because of the line, but that doesn't mean anything (right now)." If approved to play immediately after transferring from Idaho, Austin Hukill (6-0, 215), might step in as the new quarterback. If not, the versatile Joe Salazar, a linebacker last year, will step in.

4. ARIZONA LUTHERAN: Stay healthy and the Coyotes should finish better than last year's 7-4 record, first-round postseason finish, coach Dave Peter said. "We are ahead at this point compared to last year for a combination of reasons," Peter said. The seniors that start have done so since they were sophomores. They took a pounding as sophomores, but they are another year older. The leadership will be better than last year. We are a top-5 team. We just have to prove it." Nine of the seniors have been on varsity since they were freshmen. Either the athletic Tyson Biciolis or the experienced Aaron Bode will run Arizona Lutheran's double-wing as quarterback. Wrestling champ Brandon Garcia is poised for another 1,000 yard rushing season. The defense will replace only two starters. "Our team's speed has increased," Peter said.

5. PHOENIX CHRISTIAN: The Cougars will experience some early growing pains after losing 17 seniors last year, but don't expect them to get pushed around. The front seven of its 3-4 defense, the strength of the team this year, returns six starters. LB Joseph Kellog, the leading tackler last year, is the head-honcho of PC's defense. The offense still boasts running backs Malik Taylor (32 career TDs) and fullback Dante Gilbert (5-11, 250). Mark Encinas, a backup the past couple of years, moves into the starting quarterback role. Sr. Mason Rhynard, a transfer from Joy Christian, which dropped football, will start as a safety and somewhere on offense, coach Brian Cole said. A couple of three-year starters, guard Jacob Sharp, the only senior on the o-line, and center Zach Cole (6-3, 240), Cole's son, anchor the offensive line. Booking a tougher schedule should help PC prepare for the postseason.

6. SCOTTSDALE CHRISTIAN: The Eagles hired another highly-motivated military veteran, Jason Cauley, as head coach. Cauley loves to talk shop and throw the ball, but since he possesses one of the state's best 2A running backs, Shayne Panke, Cauley's air-raid will at times be grounded. Panke's twin brother, Christian, who rushed for 244 yards in a game last year, will carry the ball more often this year. When the team does air out, there's a lot of confidence in Sr. QB Grant Schreyer's abilities. His No. 1, 2 and 3 targets from last year are gone, but Cauley likes what he sees in new No. 1, Ryan Witte, a basketball player. On defense, the book ends, Colby Heuser (6-4, 227) and Hunter Hancock (6-5, 220), are double-trouble.

Dale Hellestrae, a Super Bowl champ with the Cowboys, will be Scottsdale Christian's o-line coach. Beware of a freshman, Bryan Bogardus, one of the strongest players on the team.

7. ST. JOHNS: Three of the best receivers ever to play in coach Mike Morgan's 30 years at St. Johns will start this year. Kyren Ulibarri, J.J. Womack and Graham Nielson are about 6-feet-3 tall and are basketball players. Throwing to them is third-year starter Ramon Sanchez, a coach on the field who can also tuck it and run it in the team's spread attack. Junior state wrestling champ Tanner Crosby will be the featured back after St. Johns graduated its leading rushers last year. About 11 kids will hardly leave the field for St. Johns. Last year, the team won its first playoff game since 2013. If St. Johns can stay healthy, Morgan said his first 11 can matchup against anybody in 2A.

8. MORENCI: Every team on its scheduled except for one reached the playoffs last year. Morenci plays in the toughest region, Black, in 2A. David Gallegos, in his second season as Morenci's coach, sure got one heck of a welcome to 2A and Arizona football. Oh, and to start this season, Morenci gets two-time defending champ Thatcher. Morenci isn't backing down from the challenge. It didn't last year when it won a playoff game and eight games, the first time it's won that many since its 2012 state-runner up season. Luckily for Morenci, its strength this year is in its trenches, especially on the offensive line where they just need to replace one player. Mark Roybal slides in as the starting QB this year.

9. ALCHESAY: Alchesay didn't start capturing people's attention on the gridiron until the past two years, when it made its first ever postseason journeys. Credit the senior class and coach Brandon Newcomb for planting Alchesay's football flag. The small school is home to one of the state's best kept secrets, Sr. RB Tyreck Cosay. But keep your focus on Cosay in Alchesay's double-wing attack and RB Shane Stover will likely make you pay. Alchesay is 15-7 in the past two seasons, and its 15 returning starters are shooting for the program's first ever playoff win.

10. TEMPE PREP: The program returns only two starters, but it has never finished with a losing record except for two seasons in the past 14 years. The team is shooting for a region title this year. But there's a good group of contenders outside the top-10 as well. Kingman Academy returns 14 starters, Parker only has to replace about five starters, and Tonopah Valley's Angelo Anderson rushed for 1,539 yards and 16 touchdowns last year. Plus, there's a lot of intrigue with new 2A entry Trivium Prep, which returns most of its skills players after last year's 1A playoff season. Also, it shouldn't take Pima's John Bryant and Santa Rita's Richard Sanchez long to make their presence felt.

Revisiting the Green Pastures of Camp Verde's 6-Man Football Triumphs

By Barry Sollenberger

Camp Verde, located halfway up the historic General Crook trail, has more history etched into its past than most Arizona towns.

Surprisingly, one lost page from its historical past involves high school football. Six-man ball to be exact.

Between 1962-63, the Cowboys were the scrooge of Arizona 6-man football. Today, those small Arizona towns, with 200 or less students in their local school, play 8-man ball.

But 55 years ago it was a 6-man game, dominated by Camp Verde. The 6-man contest, founded in 1934 by a high school coach in Nebraska, had been part of the Arizona sports scene since 1938.

In fact, playoff games to determine state champions were sometimes staged by competing school officials long before the Arizona Interscholastic Association organized its playoff format in 1959. Ironically, in both championship seasons, the Cowboys dropped their opening games.

In 1962, Camp Verde fell to a bigger, more physical Orme Ranch squad 19-6.

The Cowboys' only score came on a fumble recovery in the end zone by Wayne Hodges.

The offense was ineffective. But one week later, CVHS served noticed that the future opponents had better be prepared.

In the first game ever played under the lights in the Verde Valley, the Cowboys' ground up Ash Fork's Spartans to the tune of 53-7.

Prescott referee Jack Gillis called off the game with five minutes remaining.

"I told everybody we were pretty green last week, and that we would be much improved for this game," said first-year coach Jess Batina, who was assisted by Don Parsons.

The scoring started with junior quarterback Cliff Bird hitting Mike Savage on a short touchdown pass and the Cowboys never looked back.

Two months later, CVHS was in the C-North title game in the White Mountains, where they skunked Lakeside High (today Blue Ridge) 27-0. In the finals against Patagonia, the Cowboys came from behind to overtake a big, powerful Patagonia squad, 32-31.

The difference in the game was a point after touchdown boot by Joe Reedy. In 6-man football, kicking the PAT earned two points.

Reedy, a 145-pound senior, was a bundle of dynamite for the winners. He carried the ball 21 times for 119 yards and added a 70-yard runback off a Patagonia kick to ignite a fourth quarter Camp Verde rally.

When the game ended and fans mobbed the field, players had to forego the traditional ceremony of parading their head coach on their shoulders. Earlier in the season Batina, had surgery for a ruptured appendix.

One year later Camp Verde fans looked into a mirror and liked what they saw. The Cowboys' season, including its record, was identical.

The only difference was the offense, which was more explo-



Camp Verde's Cowboys and the spoils of victory. Top row, L-R, Clifford Bird, Robert Parker and John Gray. Bottom, L-R, Mike Savage, Wayne Hodges and Bruce Spaulding.

sive. In eight games, including a 26-20 season-opening loss to McNary, the Cowboys averaged 44.8 points per game, best in 6-man.

Just like the previous year, Camp Verde rebounded from an opening game loss, headed to Seligman, and blistered the Antelopes 60-13.

"We have to improve our blocking and tackling, and when we do, watch out," warned Batina.

From that point on the 1963 Cowboys steamrolled through the C-North foes, beating St. Joseph of Prescott 48-0, Ash Fork 52-12, Salome 52-14 and Grand Canyon 48-14.

Offensively, CVHS spread the scoring around between Bird, end Wayne Hodges and halfback Ralph Cornwall. Hodges, a four-year letterman, scored eight touchdowns on pass receptions and averaged 10 unassisted tackles a game.

Cornwall, a triple-threat back, scored 16 touchdowns and averaged more than 100 yards per game. Bird, the scrappy 5-8, 150-pound all-state quarterback, passed for 1,500 yards and 21 touchdowns.

"Jess Batina was just a great coach, a player's coach," said Bird of Batina, who died in 1983 at age 57 of cancer. "He could walk on water as far as I was concerned. He got the most out of his players."

In early November, a 34-31 win over Fredonia, the best six-man game played in Arizona, clinched the C-North crown and sent Camp Verde to Patagonia for a rematch with the Lobos for the 1963 state championship.

But this championships game wasn't as close. The Cowboys ran and passed their way to a 44-18 win and back-to-back state crowns.

Sollenberger's story on Camp Verde's 1963 championship season was originally published in the 2003 Phoenix Metro preseason magazine, which you can view at kukulskipublishing.com.

Meet the Motes: Thatcher's 3 Generations of State Football Champions



Meet a family of state champions: (from left to right), Nathan Motes, Cole Motes and Rick Motes (photo by Rachel Rios Motes)

By Jose Garcia
azpreps365.com

Nathan Motes won it first.

Then came his son, Rick. And Rick's son, Cole, then clinched the trifecta.

Incredibly, the Motes represented the same school, Thatcher High, in state state championship football victories. Nathan's victory lap with Thatcher came in 1956, when his team went undefeated in the Class B Eastern Conference, sealing the state title.

It was a mythical state crown, but try telling Nathan, 78, a tackle and defensive end on the 1956 team, it didn't matter. He's proud of helping his program claim that championship just like his son is of his 1988 shining moment.

Rick was a tight end and defensive back for Thatcher. Like his father and grandfather, Cole also bleeds the Kelly green and white of Thatcher High.

But Cole, a tight-end/defensive end, one-upped his pops and grandfather, helping Thatcher win championships in 2016 and 2017. The Utah State commit can continue bragging at the dinner table during the holidays if his team three-peats this year.

"I don't know how many families have been a part of something like this, but for us it's pretty special," Rick said. "Our family was some of the first to settle the Gila Valley and eventually ended up in Thatcher. I guess you can truly call us homegrown. Thatcher is a unique town to grow up and live in. It's

a great place to raise a family, but when it's game day it's all about business. The community supports our teams like no other. Fans show up hours before the games and stay after to congratulate the players. You can't ask for a better place to play."

The Motes posed together with the championship hardware after Cole's team won it last year, 61 years after Nathan helped bring home the first gold trophy.

Believe it or not there's another Motes who also is a Thatcher state champion. In fact, Rachel Rios, Rick's wife, actually has won more titles than the Motes boys combined.

Rachel played on four state championship teams at Safford and coached two Thatcher softball teams to championship endings.

You're slacking Nathan, Rick and Cole.



Quinten Mack, Thatcher (photo by Darin Sicurello of maxpreps.com)



Round Valley's Kason Woolf (#5), Colter Hogle (#8) and Dylan Workman (#42) (photo by Darin Sicurello of maxpreps.com)

By Jose Garcia
 azpreps365.com

LITTLE COLORADO REGION

Alchesay

Head coach: Brandon Newcomb.

2017 record: 8-3.

No. of returning starters on offense: 6.

No. of returning starters on defense: 9.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. RB/DB Tyreck Cosay (5-8, 175) 1,692 rushing yards and 27 TDs, 52 tackles, 5 INTs, 31 total TDs; Sr. OL/DL Cesario Hernandez (5-10, 280) 33 tackles; Sr. QB/DB Kellen Parrish (5-10, 150) 5 TDs, 4 INTs; OL/DL Justin James (5-9, 270); Sr. FB/LB Jordan Brooks (5-8, 180) 35 tackles, 109 yards rushing; Sr. RB/LB Shayne Stover (5-9, 150) 551 rushing yards, 6 TDs; Sr. RB/DE Nick Kitcheyan (5-5, 120) 9 sacks, 56 tackles; Sr. OL/DL Daunte Colelay (6-0, 200); Jr. RB/DB Ryan Quintero (5-10, 140); Jr. FB/LB Zonte Upton (5-9, 155) 354 rushing yards, 57 tackles.

Strengths of offense heading into summer: Cosay is one of the top and leading rushers in all of 2A. We return three starters on the offensive line. Parrish will start his third year at QB. Stover will be a great complimentary RB to Cosay. Eight seniors will be in their fourth year of running our offensive system.

Strengths of defense: Secondary lead by Cosay and Parrish should be pretty good. Hernandez and Colelay are returning defensive linemen. Jordan Brooks returns as our MLB along with Stover as our WLB.

Team's biggest questions marks: Offensively we have to find a FB, a very important position in our system. Also, on offense we must replace two senior TE's who have graduated. Defensively, we have to find someone to replace our NT. Also

have to find another CB and establishing competent back ups will be essential.

2018 goals: Win the region. Make the playoffs. Win a playoff game. Stay healthy and eligible. Whip Blue Ridge.

BLACK REGION

Morenci

Head coach: David Gallegos.

2017 record: 8-4.

No. of returning starters on offense: 6.

No. of returning starters on defense: 5.

Returning key players: Sr. RB/LB Isaiah Pacheco; Sr. OL/DL Matthew Garcia; Sr. QB/RB/DB Mark Roybal; Jr. OL/DL Zachary Esparza; Sr. WR/DB Tito Casillas; Sr. DL Christian Alva; Jr. FB Matthew Harrington; Sr. DE/TE Chris Roybal; Sr. OL/DL Jude Perez; Sr. OL/DL Beau Wagner.

Strengths of offense heading into summer: We have some experience coming back. Offensive Line returns four. Strengths of defense: First-team linebacker returns. Safeties.

Team's biggest questions marks: Who is going to be the No. 1 guy at QB? Who is going to step up at the RB position? What player(s) will lead this team?

2018 goals: Be competitive in the toughest section in the state. Get better every day.

Thatcher

Head coach: Sean Hinton.

2017 record: 13-1.

No. of returning starters on offense: 7.

No. of returning starters on defense: 6.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. OL/DL Quinten Mack (5-10, 220); Sr. OL/DL Sam Nicholas (6-2, 300); Sr. RB/S Quinten Turley (5-10, 175) 9 total TDs, 31 tackles, 1,332 all-purpose yards; Sr. RB/LB Riley Morris (6-1, 195) 650 rushing yards, 11 TDs, 45 tackles; QB/DB Jack Kortsen

(6-3, 190); Sr. TE/LB Ben Shumway (6-1, 200) 24 tackles.
Strengths of offense heading into summer: Offensive Line and running game.

Strengths of defense: Fast. Hard hitting.

Team's biggest questions marks: Leadership. Filling holes at LB and in the secondary.

2018 goals: Play hard. Stay healthy. Less turnovers and penalties.

More about the program: Great staff with lots of championship experience. Four coaches have won multiple state titles as players for four different teams and have more than 10 titles combined. We shouldn't be ranked in the top-5 or picked to win it all. We have lots of work to do and there are a lot of great teams gunning for us.

2A Black notes: John Bryant, a coaching legend in the 8-man game, retakes the coaching reins of **Pima** for the first time since 2008. Pima was 5-7 last season, its first losing season since 2009. ... The entire secondary is back for **Round Valley** except a safety. The defense only lost three starters. DB Alex Martinez "had a great offseason." LJ Foster "will carry the ball a lot this year." Owen Young, a junior varsity player last year, will move to the starting varsity QB this year. ... RB/WR Dion Perry runs a 4.5 40 for **St. Johns**. Soph. FB Nick Patterson's dad played for BYU. St. Johns coach Mike Morgan sits at 318 wins.

VERDE REGION

Camp Verde

Head coach: Jerry Rhoades.

2017 record: 3-6.

No. of returning starters on offense: 6.

No. of returning starters on defense: 7.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. Ath. Dominiq Bruno (5-6, 130) 375 rushing yards, 35 tackles; Sr. OL/DL Tristian Stanfield (6-0, 230) 32 tackles; Sr. C/DE/Long Snapper Braden Schuh (6-3, 170) 42 tackles, 3 sacks; Sr. R/DB Steven Petty (5-10, 150) 26 tackles.

Strengths of offense heading into summer: Offensive line.

Strengths of defense: Defensive line.

Team's biggest questions marks: QB, skill players, leadership.

2018 goals: To find a QB and develop some leadership. To continue in a positive direction. To develop/teach character. More about the program: Dominiq Bruno: homeless, size, heart.

Parker

Head coach: Jeston Lotts.

2017 record: 5-4.

No. of returning starters on offense: 8.

No. of returning starters on defense: 8.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. RB/LB Shane Gottula (5-10, 175) 736 rushing yards with 6 TDs, 82 tackles; Sr. QB Adam Baldenegro (5-11, 140) 761 passing yards, 8 TDs; Sr. OLB/TE Fabyian Gonzales (5-11, 160) 26 tackles; Sr. OL/DL Seth Hannibal Fisher (6-1, 185); Sr. RB/DB Angelo Carballo (6-0, 175); So. RB/DB Emanuel Alaniz (5-10, 155); Sr. OL/LB Brannon Miller (5-8, 170) 52 tackles; Sr. OL/OLB Shane Robledo (6-1, 180); Jr. RB/DB Christian Lopes (5-9, 140) 14 tackles.

Strengths of offense heading into summer: Experience, speed, depth.



Senior QB Mason Moore, Trivium Prep (photo by Jim Willittes of maxpreps.com)

Strengths of defense: Experience, speed, toughness, leadership.

Team's biggest questions marks: Depth. Can we throw the ball consistently?

2018 goals: Toughness, compete in every game, win our region.

Tonopah Valley

Head coach: Dustin Johnson.

2017 record: 5-4.

No. of returning starters on offense: 5

No. of returning starters on defense: 7.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. OL/DL Tristian Diaz (5-9, 255); Sr. RB Angelo Anderson (5-11, 180) 1,539 rushing yards, 16 TDs; Jr. QB/WR/DB Cooper Arndt (5-10, 175) 77 tackles, 271 total yards; Sr. WR/DB Dalton Thompson (6-2, 180) 7 TDs, 44 tackles, 485 all-purpose yards; Jr. OL/DL Kolby Goetz (6-2, 215) 32 tackles; Sr. RB/LB Shad Sayer (5-9, 170) 58 tackles; Jr. RB/LB CJ McClure (5-8, 175) 51 tackles; Sr. WR/DB Jerome Wagoner (6-4, 170); Jr. DE Austin Arndt (5-10, 180) 77 tackles.

Strengths of offense heading into summer: Rushing experience, speed, athletic, versatile, good hands.

Strengths of defense: Solid, tackling, disciplined, speed, good in coverage, athletic.

Team's biggest questions marks: Line experience, size, QB experience, depth on the line, depth at RB.

2018 goals: Go 1-0 in every practice, the classroom and on Fridays. Compete for a region championship.

Trivium Prep

Head coach: Michael Spencer.

2017 record: 8-2.

No. of returning starters on offense: 8.

No. of returning starters on defense: 5.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. QB Mason Moore (6-1, 170) 1,644 passing yards with 17 TDs, 843 rushing yards with 15 TDs; Jr. RB David Marquez (5-6, 175) 603 rushing yards and 6 TDs, 34 tackles; So. WR August Hubbard (6-4, 175) 410 receiving yards and 4 TDs; Jr. DL Justin Aletor (6-3, 225) 50 tackles, 8 sacks; Jr. OL Zion Gamilla (5-9, 240) 23 tackles, 4 sacks; Sr. DB RJ Liston (5-8, 160) 51 tackles, 3 receiving TDs, 2 INTs; Sr. DB Jackson Alvidrez (6-3, 170) 31 tackles; Sr. TE Max Hirth (6-2, 210) 168 total yards; Sr. OL Tristin Baker (5-9, 220).

Strengths of offense heading into summer: Second team All-State QB (Moore) returns for his senior year. Returning four out five offensive linemen. Marquez is a tough runner.

Strengths of defense: Defensive line will be much stronger. Linebackers are quick and aggressive. Defensive backs are smart and versatile.

Team's biggest questions marks: The transition from 1A to 2A football this year will be tough. Depth at positions can be troublesome.

2018 goals: My goal is for our players to always play hard, smart and together.

2A Verde notes: Glendale Prep graduated its leading rusher, receiver, tackler and starting QB. Soph. Ryan Rafidi had 307 receiving yards and 3.5 sacks. Jr. Sebastian Cedeno finished with 45 tackles last year.

AGUA FRIA REGION

Arizona Lutheran

Head coach: David Peter.

2017 record: 7-4.

No. of returning starters on offense: 6.

No. of returning starters on defense: 9.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. RB/S Brandon Garcia (6-1, 175) 1,567 rushing yards, 20 TDs; Sr. RB/S Jamie Heyn (6-2, 180) 363 all-purpose yards, 43 tackles, 3 INTs; Sr. OL/DL Nolan Cereske (5-8 225) 41 tackles, 4 sacks; Sr. TE/DE Dylan Cook (6-3, 235) 27 tackles; Sr. OL/DL Marcus Perez (5-8, 225) 18 tackles; Jr. OL/DL Josh Wagenknecht (6-0, 210); Jr. QB/DB Tyson Biciolis (5-11, 150) 14 tackles; Sr. RB/DB Matthew Bernthall (5-9, 150) 402 all-purpose yards, 51 tackles, 6 total TDs, 2 INTs; Jr. RB/LB Maurice Chapman (5-7, 160) 27 tackles; Sr. TE/DE Sam Meyer (6-5, 210) 16 tackles.

Strengths of offense heading into summer: Our familiarity and experience with our scheme.

Strengths of defense: We return a large amount of our starters from last year.

Team's biggest questions marks: We need to replace a 2-year starter at QB. Our depth.

2018 goals: We want to develop more team chemistry since so many players are involved in many other sports. Get stronger so we stay healthy.

More about the program: We have many dual and tri sport athletes, so our coaches work together to share them and their time.



Shayne Paknke, Scottsdale Christian (photo by Mark Jones of maxpreps.com)

Heritage Academy

Number of returning starters on offense: 3.

Number of returning starters on defense: 3.

Returning key players: QB Dyson Ellison (6-1, 190) First year as QB, last year was WR; DE Milton Arvizu (6-1, 180); S Allan Villanueva (6-0, 160).

Strengths of your offense: We have a fairly versatile offense in terms of different formations, motions and looks. Our goal is to keep people guessing at all times as to what will be run next.

Strengths of your defense: Outside speed. The past few years we have done a great job of containing everything and making teams beat us up the middle.

Team's biggest questions marks: After graduating a good portion of our starters last year we have a very young team. We will have four new starters on the offensive line. While very young this year, they will have a couple of years to work together and grow.

2018 goals: With a new offensive system in place and a very young team we are looking to establish a good consistent run game to build on in the upcoming years.

More about the program: This will be our first year competing in the AIA. For the past four years we have been competing in the Canyon Athletic Association as an 8-man team for two years and then two years playing 11-man. We hope to continue building and growing and start creating some success for our players.



Joel Salazar, Eloy Santa Cruz Valley (photo by Darin Sicurello of maxpreps.com)

Scottsdale Christian

Head coach: Jason Cauley.

2017 record: 10-3

No. of returning starters on offense: 6.

No. of returning starters on defense: 6.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. Shayne Pahnke, 1,651 rushing yards, 23 TDs, 17 receptions; Sr. Christian Pahnke, 352 rushing yards, 51 tackles, 8 INTs, 26 passes defended; Jr. Reece Uphaus, 67 tackles; Sr. Grant Schreyer, 2,280 passing yards and 26 TDs, 316 rushing yards; Sr. Hunter Hancock, 62 tackles, 5 sacks; Sr. Marcus Winn; Sr. Justin Scholtes, 28 tackles; Sr. Marcus Winn, 58 tackles, 6 INTs; So. Andrew Jones; Jr. Colby Heuser.

Strengths of offense heading into summer: Running attack. Experience, proven QB. Returning core of offensive line. Young upcoming skill players. Very smart.

Strengths of defense: Returning the entire secondary. Returning linebackers. Fast. New defensive scheme. Smart.

Team's biggest questions marks: Size. Finding No. 1 wide receiver. Adjustment to new offensive scheme. New coaching staff. Replacing tight end.

2018 goals: Make the playoffs. Lead the region in creating turnovers. Pass for 2,500 yards and rush for 2,000 yards. Win our region. Play for a state title.

2A Agua Fria notes: Phoenix Christian's secondary is young but athletic, according to coach. Ramon Castro is a strong safety but will move down at times. Sr. RB Malik Taylor's cousin, Juan Taylor, moved in from Chicago and will play tight end. ... Every defensive lineman is back for Santa Cruz Valley.

SALT REGION

North Pointe Prep

Head coach: Daniel Norris.

2017 record: 2-8.

No. of returning starters on offense: 8.

No. of returning starters on defense: 8.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. ATH/LB David



RB Malik Taylor, Phoenix Christian (photo by Darin Sicurello of maxpreps.com)

Vargas (5-11, 225) 47 tackles; Sr. OL/DL Oscar Molinar (6-3, 270) 19 tackles; Sr. RB/DB Joe Soriano-Garfias (5-10, 170) 214 rushing yards, 16 tackles; Sr. ATH/LB Juan Medina (5-11, 175) 127 rushing yards, 38 tackles; Sr. ATH Nijel Rosado (5-10, 180) 19 tackles; Jr. RB/DB Jacob Edwards (5-9, 150); Sr. ATH Michael Zipprich (6-3, 250) 27 tackles, 3 sacks; Jr. OL/DL Connor Christensen (6-3, 240) 21 tackles; Jr. OL/DL Matthew McGovern (6-2, 235) 15 tackles; Sr. QB/ATH Joseph Faast (5-10, 160).

Strengths of offense heading into summer: Offensive line. Running backs. Returning starting QB.

Strengths of defense: Defensive line. Defensive back core. Strong leadership from MLB.

Team's biggest questions marks: Who will replace Daniel Ritchie as our No. 1 running back? How will our program respond to moving down to 2A?

2018 goals: Playoffs. Team GPA over 3.0. Plus-15 takeaway margin. Average more than 35 points per game.

More about the program: Moving down to 2A will put us in a position to compete against programs that are the same size as us. Norris is going into his 2nd year as the head coach, 4th total with the program. We have a senior class that has provided strong, quality leadership since its freshman year. This 2018 football season will be a special one as these young men are on a mission to be the first North Pointe football team to make the playoffs.



Versatile Sami Solis, Valley Lutheran (photo by Mark Jones of maxpreps.com)



Senior Carter Brown, Tempe Prep (photo by Paul Campbell of maxpreps.com)



Sebastian Tramutolo, Bisbee (photo by Mark Jones of maxpreps.com)

Veritas Prep

Head coach: Jason Black.

2017 record: 4-6.

No. of returning starters on offense: 8.

No. of returning starters on defense: 8.

Returning key players: Sr. Tony Jakubczyk; Sr. Andrew Oei; So. Harris Lytle; Sr. Payson McCallister; Jr. Zach Jackson; So. Johnathan Morrison; So. Matthew Africa; Sr. Peter Stamp.

Strengths of offense heading into summer: Returning players. Youth.

Strengths of defense: Smart, athletic.

Team's biggest questions marks: Youth, participation.

2018 goals: Winning record. Region contender.

2A Salt notes: **Scottsdale Prep** played a freshman, Oscar Frias, at QB in six games last year. Sr. Simeon Walther totaled 95 tackles last year and rushed for 238 yards. Jr. Finley Hobbs had 30 receptions last year. ... **Valley Lutheran's** Sammy Solis finished with 729 receiving yards and rushed for 218 last year.

GILA REGION

Chandler Prep

Coach: Chris Goodman.

Number of returning starters on offense: 8.

Number of returning starters on defense: 4.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: QB Ely Sannes (5-9, 150) 319 receiving yards, 4 Tds, 50 tackles; DE Isaiah Usher (6-3, 200) 32 tackles, 3 sacks; OL Griffin Serra (6-3, 250) 24 tackles; RB Izzat Mansour (5-7, 150) 18 tackles, 123 rushing yards.

Strengths of your offense: Returning a lot of players that understand what we do offensively, but they are still young.

Strengths of your defense: Defense is loaded with inexperience, but our guys are wanting to get after it this year and we're gonna let'em go.

Team's biggest question marks: Chandler Prep's biggest question is can our youth hold up for the duration of the season. We are asking some youngsters to step up into big roles.

2018 goals: Chandler Prep's goals haven't changed as they enter the new Gila Region. The goal is to take the region and get back into the dance.

More about the program: Coach Goodman is entering his

4th season at Chandler Prep. After taking over a 0-10 program, the Titans have gone 20-8 (0-1 postseason) with a region title and two separate back-to-back Region Player of the Year winners the past three seasons. Titan fun fact: In 2015 we walked on the campus with nine football players. In 2018 that number is up to 41 football players.

Tempe Prep

Head coach: Larry Cain.

2017 record: 7-5.

No. of returning starters on offense: 1.

No. of returning starters on defense: 1.

Returning key players: Sr. ATH Carter Brown (5-11, 175); Jr. QB Cannon Kartcher (5-9, 165); Jr. WR/TE Darrell Bailey (5-11, 175); So. ATH Louis Ternyik (6-0, 175); Jr. RB John Patterson (5-9, 175); Sr. C Caleb Brittain (6-1, 180).

Strengths of offense heading into summer: Youth, speed, football intelligence.

Strengths of defense: Speed.

Team's biggest questions marks: Depth, size, inexperience.

2018 goals: Win our section, playoff berth.

2A Gila notes: The **Globe-Miami** game will be played on Oct. 26. ... **San Carlos'** Raymon Sneezy threw for 700 yards in 2017 and rushed for 477. He was second on the team with 49 tackles. ... **San Manuel** went 6-4 last year after winning just one game two years ago. The team averaged 271.1 yards per game but graduated its 2,000-yard rusher. Its starting QB from last year, Jr. Caleb Quintero, and his top receiving threats, Rey Martinez and Benny Laguna, return. Michael Ochoa was second on the team with 96 tackles in 2017.

2A San Pedro notes: **Benson** won three games last year, only the second time the program finished with a losing record this decade. Its starting quarterback and leading rusher and wide receiver from last year were underclassmen. ... A coach with a championship pedigree, Richard Sanchez, is now **Santa Rita's** coach. ... **Tombstone** finished winless last year for the first time since 1986. ... In coach Alonzo Highsmith's first season as head coach, **Willcox** won five games for the first time since 2013.

State's Returning Leading Rusher, TD Scorer Hails from the Fort Apache Reservation

By Jose Garcia
azpreps365.com

Alchesay coach Brandon Newcomb heard the chirping from frustrated fans as the lead against his team increased during a varsity game three seasons ago.

Put in freshman Tyreck (ty-reek) Cosay and his junior varsity teammates. They'll give you a better effort, the fans insisted.

Newcomb conceded after an assistant coach repeated the fans' request. Dressing for varsity games is optional for Alchesay's junior varsity players, but Cosay always stood ready, suited up.

It's not an accident that when he got his shot three seasons ago, the fortunes for Alchesay and Cosay started to change. The team still lost that varsity game, but Newcomb was sold on Cosay, who had two 100-yard rushing days as a freshman.

The L's also stopped accumulating as Cosay led Alchesay's charge to relevance in football. In Cosay's 1,000-yard rushing sophomore and junior seasons, Alchesay recorded its first winning seasons in the program's 21-year history.

Alchesay is considered a basketball school, but despite its past football struggles it returns the state's rushing and touch-down leader. Believe it or not, no returning Arizona high school football player has rushed for as many yards (3,951) and scored as many touchdowns (69), according to maxpreps.com's stats, as Cosay has from 2015-17.

Fueling his production is a desire to elevate his football program, Fort Apache community and himself and does so with boundless determination.

"I want the spotlight to be on them (Alchesay High, Fort Apache Reservation)," he said. "I'm just trying to get to college to play football or basketball."

There was no summer vacation for Cosay.

From Monday-Friday, he was up by 5 a.m. to train on his own at school to prep for another 20-plus carries per game season. From there it was off to his summer job at a fish hatchery.

Before calling it a night, he returned to school for open gym basketball sessions and one more football workout. Cosay is the reigning defensive player of the year for his basketball region and was a starter on his team's state 2A Conference runner-up squads the past two seasons.

He also showcases his athleticism on the school's baseball field, where the starting centerfielder carries a career .542 batting average. Alchesay baseball also likely posted its first .500-plus campaigns with Cosay on the roster.

Just like on the football field, Cosay is all in-your-face grit on the basketball court and baseball field.

"Since I was little I always just had that tough mentality," Cosay said.

He carries that approach into the classroom as well, where he's cumulative GPA is 3.7.

Steering Cosay expertly is his mom, Cheryl Burnette, the school's nurse at Alchesay.

"Tyreck's always had a strong work ethic not just on the field but at home too," Burnette said. "He's always staying motivated and busy even in the offseason. He's constantly going and going."



Alchesay's (from left to right) Cesario Hernandez, Tyreck Cosay and Justin James (photo by Ray Acosta of Alchesay High School)

Burnette got a glimpse of his son's fighting spirit when he was just three months old and almost died.

As his face turned blue, Cosay was helicoptered to Phoenix Children's Hospital with a respiratory infection. He was on a ventilator for about five days before the anxious moments ended.

"God has a purpose for Tyreck, and that's why He allowed him to pull through the sickness," said Burnette, who raised her son by herself for about 11 years before remarrying.

Cosay aspires to keep pushing ahead as a collegiate athlete.

Newcomb, whose father won more than 200 high school games while coaching in California, said Cosay is an ideal Division II fit.

"If a school can get Tyreck on their campus and on a weight program and meal plan, he has the confidence and talent to compete," Newcomb said. "It's disappointing that Arizona doesn't have that many football programs and that junior colleges are deciding to drop football. Tyreck would be great for those programs."

The 5-9, 160-pound running back/defensive back has gotten the most out of his frame and can be proud about everything he's accomplished so far for himself and those around him.

This season, he is aiming for a 2,000-yard rushing season, pushing Cosay into the 5,000-yard career realm, something only a handful of Arizona high school players have ever accomplished.

Helping make way for Cosay are three experienced senior offensive linemen, three-year starter Cesario Hernandez, Justin James and Daunte Colelay.

Winning the school's first ever football playoff game is also a big goal for the seniors who are helping put Alchesay on the football map. The quest begins Aug. 17 in a regular season game against Globe.

"We want to three-peat as region champs and make it past the first round," Cosay said. "We should have a good chance this year."



Could it be Williams again in the 1A Conference (photo by Jim Willittes of maxpreps.com)?

By Jose Garcia
azpreps365.com

1. WILLIAMS: Despite graduating its starting championship quarterback, its offensive line, No. 2 rusher and best two receivers, coach Jeff Brownlee said, "We are not skipping a beat on offense this year." The burden of carrying the team will not fall on just the 2017 leading rusher and second-leading tackler, Jr. Chance Pearson, Brownlee said. Jr. Kolby Payne's breakaway speed is a perk the team didn't have last year at QB. DB Mario Velasquez and CB/WR David Lozano are next in line to contribute heavily. "There was more pressure on us last year than this year because we were the runner-up two years ago," Brownlee said. "This year we understand we are young, but everybody also understands the work ethic that is needed to get back to the final. We want to make another run."

2. SUPERIOR: It does return the most experience in 1A and last year took another big step toward its ultimate goal, but until it wins the big one and likely defeats

Williams and or Mogollon, teams it lost to last year, Superior still has a lot to prove. The team suffered a couple of injuries last year, eliminating one of its strengths, speed, but those players, including Adam Navarrette and Fredrick Mendoza, are now healthy. The team also possesses depth, mostly in its sophomore class. And of course there's Mr. Do Everything, Steven Ybarra. "Our defense is the best we've had since I've been here," Ybarra said. "Cedric Mendoza and Daniel McConnell are dogs at defensive end." Last season, Superior created mismatches with its speed in its spread option scheme, but the team is stronger up front, so look for Ybarra to run the ball more this year. Superior has never won a sanctioned AIA football championship game. Including last year, it has finished holding the state runner-up trophy four times. Superior is thirsting for a title.

3. MOGOLLON: The team dropped a 64-52 thriller to eventual champ Williams in last year's semifinal. It was Mogollon's first trip to the semis since its 2014 championship season. Third-year starting quarterback Sr. Trey

Tenney (64.4 career passing percentage) is also expected to line up at linebacker this season since Mogollon graduated two of its leading tacklers. Its No. 1 tackler, Sr. RB/DB Seth Reidhead, is back, however, and so is LB/RB Jayk Kelton, a sophomore who opened eyes with 79 tackles as a freshman. With its only 1,000-yard rusher gone, Kelton also will get his share of carries. But the bulk of the hand-offs will go to Reidhead, another third-year starter. Look for Tenney to also to run more in the team's multiple look set. The offensive line is inexperienced, but center Bruno Corrales is still a force.

4. BAGDAD: The love is gone. Quarterback Israel Loveall that is. But just because one of the greatest 8-man football players graduated doesn't mean that Bagdad's passion for being great also exited. Following the school's cool quarterback name thread, sophomore Rocky Sandoval might line up under center for Bagdad this season. Or the athletic Connor Watson, a freshman, might be the next signal caller. Most of the offensive linemen are back to protect whoever steps in. The team's strongest player, center Owen Barton, will get his shot to bowl over potential tacklers as a fullback this season. He also will continue to lead a strong defense that will welcome back Sr. DE Kort Chapin, who didn't play last season. Bagdad has reached the semifinals every year since coach Dalton Mills took over in 2012.

5. JOSEPH CITY: Cameron Baldwin scored 15 of the team's 42 TDs last year, punted 28 times for a 34.6 average, caused four fumbles, had 86 tackles, rushed for 674 yards and passed for 1,043 yards. Needless to say, Mr. Baldwin was all over the field last year. This will be the third year that Baldwin starts at QB. His top receiver is gone but Sr. Latrell Kinlicheenie returns to help out in the backfield and as a receiving threat. Baldwin and Kinlicheenie also pack a good one-two punch at linebacker. Five of its eight regular season opponents reached the playoffs last year, including its first four opponents this year.

6. HAYDEN: The freshmen who played when coach John Estrada returned to restore order at Hayden are now seniors. These seniors helped turn the program around and were rewarded with two state quarterfinal seasons, Hayden's first two winning seasons since 2006 and 07. "We are expecting to fight for another playoff berth," said Estrada, whose school's enrollment is about 75 students. "This is what I expect. But it's up to the kids. If they don't work hard, we won't get there. Just because we've been there doesn't mean we'll automatically be in the playoffs." In the past three seasons, Estrada's program improved its passing but is searching for a new QB this year for its old school double-tight formation. But senior running backs Joel Rodriguez, a 5-10, 225-pound bruiser, and Omar Lopez, a 5-9, 160-pound speedster, are the focal point of the team's offense.

7. FORT THOMAS: Coach Bracken Walker and his boys turned things around last year, winning six games for the first time since 2009. The team also reached the playoffs in 2017. It did lose its main work-horse, three-year starter Evan Stringfellow, but his brother, Todd, is still at school. Todd may throw the ball more than his brother out of the spread. A solid group of linebackers are back to see if Fort Thomas can slow down opposing teams. Forty kids came out for football this season, a high number for a 1A program. Two years ago, the program had 18 freshmen on the team. Most of them are still with the program, including the core group of contributors.

8. SALOME: Coach Bryan McCarty won't have to lean on lean offensive linemen this season. There's size in his boys up front for the first time in McCarty's three years. That should help new quarterback Pedro Velasquez and Salome produce another 1,000-yard rusher at quarterback. Junior Octavio Martinez (13 yards per carry last year) will be asked to carry the load in the backfield this year. The biggest question mark on defense is at linebacker, where the Frogs are green. The team graduated its two leading tacklers, but Martinez and Velasquez, safety Joel Gonzalez and DL Hugo Ibarry will plug some holes. Because of injuries and eligibility issues, Salome only had 10 players for last year's first round playoff game but still won. The team is back up to about 20 players.

9. MAYER: Reaching the postseason the past two years is nice, but Mayer is after bigger things. It's goal under coach Mike Gutierrez, a Mayer alum, is to become a top-tier program in 1A. Garrett Urquides will have a big say in how far the team travels this year as the frontrunner to start at quarterback. Gutierrez is still planning to be a run-first and often team with an experienced offensive line. Mayer's defense is set and may be Mayer's strength. It'll welcome back one of its most aggressive players, Marcos Leal, a linebacker who missed most of the second half of the season last year. Last year, two injuries in the first round led to an early playoff exit for Mayer.

10. NFL YET: The best freshman classes, in terms of talent, walked through NFL Yet's doors last year and this year. But unlike last year, the 2018 freshmen are strictly football players. The entire 2017 offensive line was comprised of freshmen. A more favorable schedule this year will allow the young team — only one senior and its biggest classes are in its junior and freshman classes — to continue to grow as the season progresses. Coach Armando Ruiz foresees a playoff season partly because of two step brothers, Isaac and WR/DB Mark Ayala. Isaac is one of the talented freshman. WR/DB Alejandro Ruiz missed a couple of big games last year but also is expected to make an impact this year.

By Jose Garcia
 azpreps365.com

NORTH REGION

Joseph City

Head coach: Eldon Larson.

2017 record: 5-4.

No. of returning starters on offense: 5.

No. of returning starters on defense: 5.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. QB/LB Cameron Baldwin (5-10, 160) 1,043 passing yards, 674 rushing yards with 13 TD, 86 tackles; Jr. RB/LB Latrell Kinlicheenie (5-10, 180) 337 rushing, 262 receiving yards, 35 tackles; So. TE/DE Jay Edwards (6-6, 210); Sr. OL/DLEligh Ashcroft (5-8, 165) 43 tackles; So. WR/DB Colter Westover (5-7, 140); Sr. OL/DL Carlos Sanchez (6-1, 200); Jr. OL/DL Porter Thomas (5-10, 230).

Strength of offense heading into the summer break: Baldwin will be the starting QB for the third year in a row, so we will have good experience leading the team. We will have a strong running game again.

Strengths of defense: We will have a very strong LB group. The DL should be strong up front.

Team's biggest questions mark(s): We need to find two new starting linemen. We need to find a good DB and a good WR. We also need a kicker.

2018 expectations: Have a strong rushing defense. Have a strong running game. Make the playoffs. Get past the 1st round of the playoffs.

More about the program: We are a small school that works hard to maintain the strong tradition of football our school has.

Mogollon

Head coach: Tim Slade.

2017 record: 8-1.

No. of returning starters on offense: 4.

No. of returning starters on defense: 4.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. QB/LB Trey Tenney, 16 TD passes, 2 INTs, 1,050 passing yards, 555 rushing yards, 32 tackles; Sr. RB/DB Seth Reidhead 650 rushing yards, 11.1 tackles per game; Sr. DE/TE Tobias Tomlinson 40 tackles, Jr. OL/DL Bruno Corrales; So. LB/RB Jayk Kelton 79 tackles; Jr. DE/QB/TE Denin Porter 34 tackles.

Strength of offense heading into the summer break: Having a 2-year starter at QB is always helpful. Two-year starter at RB. Returning starter on the OL. Three good RB prospects. Three good receiving prospects.

Strengths of defense: Two returning starters at DE. Good speed at LB.

Team's biggest questions mark(s): Back up QB. OL experience.

More about the program: Non returning starters that will start this season: Jr. QB/WR/LB Dallin Rice, Jr. DB WR Tim Porter, Jr. LB/RB/DL Rhett Mclaws, So. OL/DL Diego Amaya.

Williams

Head coach: Jeff Brownlee.

2017 record: 9-2.

No. of returning starters on offense: 2.



RB/LB Chance Pearson, Williams (photo by Jim Willittes of maxpreps.com)

No. of returning starters on defense: 4.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: So. RB/LB Chance Pearson (5-10, 190) 1,492 rushing yards, 24 total TDs, 72 tackles, 4 INTs; Jr. CB/WR David Lozano (6-0, 175) 16 receptions and 360 yards with 6 TDs, 37.1 punt per yard ave., 13 touchbacks; CB Jr. Mario Vasques (5-8, 165) 41 tackles; Jr. DE Dorian Ayala (5-10, 190) 4 TDs.

Strength of offense heading into the summer break: Speed, unity, solid depth from last year, stronger.

Strengths of defense: Returning four experienced players, solid playing time last year, speed, strength.

Team's biggest questions mark(s): Young, offensive Line.

2018 goals: Take it game by game. Solid run game to set up pass. Make playoffs.

More about the program: We will be a young but with solid play-off experience. A lot of young kids played the last two years and we will continue to grow into a solid football team.

1A North notes: El Capitan finished 2-5 last year. ... Fredonia has four state championships to its name, but has won only eight games since 2011. ... Rough Rock will just play a junior varsity schedule this season due to low numbers.



W/CB Jake Hanson, Anthem Prep (photo by Jim Willittes of maxpreps.com)

WEST REGION

Anthem Prep

Head coach: Nathan Miller.

2017 record: 0-9.

No. of returning starters on offense: 7.

No. of returning starters on defense: 7.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. W/CB Jake Hanson (5-10 185); Jr. QB/DL Jacob Miller (6-1, 205); Sr. RB/LB Christian Weissmueller (5-10, 190); Sr. WR/LB Kaleb Dixon (6-2, 175); Sr. WR/CB Zach Kuchta (5-9, 150).

Strength of offense heading into the summer break: QB and passing game.

Strengths of defense: Corner backs and linebackers.

Team's biggest questions mark(s): Offensive line and depth at running back.

2018 goals: Winning season and making the playoffs.

More about the program: After having one of the toughest schedules in 1A last year and a young squad, 2018 looks to be a good year with a senior dominated team. Looking for good things this year.

Bagdad

Head coach: Dalton Mills.

2017 record: 10-1.

No. of returning starters on offense: 3.

No. of returning starters on defense: 5.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. C/NG Owen Barton (5-11, 190) 84 tackles; Sr. G-DE Brady Finnerty (6-2, 210) 44 tackles; Jr. RB/LB Carson Jeans (5-10, 170) 6 total TDs, 75 tackles; Jr. RB/LB Elias Jauregui (5-8, 145); Jr. G/LB Riley Young (5-10, 160); Jr. DB Kaylab Owings (5-9, 145) 50 tackles; Sr. WR Tony Ventura (5-10, 155) 530 receiving yards 6 TDs.

Strength of offense heading into the summer break: Line Play. Return two starters and (a couple of subs) on O and D-lines. Good core of Juniors.

Strengths of defense: D-line play and more returners on that side of the ball.

Team's biggest questions mark(s): QB play. Replacing maybe the best QB in Arizona, eight-man history is going to be tough to do.

2018 goals: Our goal is always to be the state champion at the end of the season.

More about the program: We haven't lost a home game since the 2011 football season.

Mayer

Head coach: Mike Gutierrez.

2017 record: 8-2.

No. of returning starters on offense: 5.

No. of returning starters on defense: 4.

Returning key players: Sr. G/DL Marcos Leal; Jr. WR/QB/DE Garrett Urquides; Sr. C/DL Trane Hummel; Sr. DE/G Cameron Heneger; Jr. G/LB Morgan Mains.

Strengths of offense heading into summer: O-line.

Strengths of defense: Linebackers.

Team's biggest questions marks: Quarterback, injuries.

2018 goals: Playoff berth, region title.

Salome

Head coach: Bryan McCarty.

2017 record: 5-5.

No. of returning starters on offense: 6.

No. of returning starters on defense: 6.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Jr. QB/RB/CB Pedro Velazquez (5-9-150) 820 rushing, 590 receiving yards, 15 total TDs, 84 tackles; RB/LB Jr. Octavio Martinez (5-6, 155) 749 rushing, 228 receiving yards, 15 total TDs, 68 tackles; Jr. WR/S Joel



C/NG Owen Barton, Bagdad (photo by Mark Jones of maxpreps.com)



QB/RB/DB Pedro Velazquez, Salome (photo by Jim Willittes of maxpreps.com)

Gonzalez (5-7, 130) 9 receiving TDs, 3 INTs, 69 tackles, 929 total yards; Sr. OL/DL Hugo Ibarra (5-10, 260) 46 tackles; Jr. TE/LB Fabian Perez (6-0, 170) 57 tackles; Jr. OL/LB Jesus Martinez (5-9, 185); OL/DE Jeffrey Scott (6-1, 260); Sr. RB/WR/DE/CB Cobey Hager (5-8, 155); Jr. WR/LB/DE Kyle Graser (6-0, 155) 21 tackles; Jr. WR/DE Tatum Milts (5-7, 150).

Strengths of offense heading into summer: Young but experienced. Experienced playmakers. Size of the offensive line.

Strengths of defense: Very fast flowing to the ball defense. Size on the defensive line. Very experienced in the secondary.

Team's biggest questions marks: New players getting up to speed on schemes. Linebacking core is least experienced group. Finding starting QB. Moving playmakers around.

2018 goals: Winning region. Getting home playoff game. Deep playoff run.

More about the program: Female TE/WR (Milts) scored a varsity touchdown reception last season. She wants to score five times or more this season. Won first round playoff game last season with 11 players available.

SOUTH REGION

Baboquivari

Head coach: Gary Chavez.

Number of returning starters: 7.

Returning key players: DE Earl V. Bautista (5-9, 221); DL Terrel Tristan Lopez (6-0, 227); QB Kovias Manuel Buendia (6-1, 190); DL Justin Ortiz (6-0, 245); RB Silas Eleando (5-4, 170); FB Anton Jose (6-1, 206); RB Spencer Two Two (5-4, 180).

Strengths of your offense: Our experience in our backfield.

Team's biggest questions marks: Lacking experience on defense. Need players to step up and compete on the football field.

2018 goals: To be committed in the classroom and on the field.

To focus on pre-season conditioning and strength training. Our season goal is to compete as best we can on the football field.

More about the program: This is my second year as coach. I've been a head and assistant coach for several Tucson Youth Football and Spirit Federations teams. I was an assistant high school coach for the Tucson Unified School District.

Fort Thomas

Head coach: Bracken Walker.

2017 record: 6-3.

No. of returning starters on offense: 4.

No. of returning starters on defense: 2.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. DB Kendall Stanley (5-6, 145) 50 tackles; Sr. RB Tagipo Fiamé (5-10, 185) 669 total yards, 43 tackles, 5 sacks, 6 TDs; Sr. WR Jayven Elgo (5-10, 145) 339 receiving yards 4 TDs.

Strengths of offense heading into summer: Offensive line.

Strengths of defense: Defensive backs.

Team's biggest questions marks: Youth.

2018 goals: Make playoff run.

St. David

Head coach: Braden Davis.

2017 record: 1-7.

No. of returning starters on offense: 6.

No. of returning starters on defense: 7.



Defensive back Kendall Stanley, Fort Thomas (photo by Jim Willittes of maxpreps.com)

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. G/LB Chandler DeSpain (6-0, 190) 66 tackles; Sr. RB/DB Jayden Peterson (5-7, 130) 55 tackles, 290 all purpose yards, 1 INT, 2 TDs; Sr. WR/LB Alex Owens (6-1, 155) 43 tackles; So. TE/LB Kason Jacquez (6-2, 180) 37 tackles, 1 sack.

Strengths of team heading into summer break: We have strong leadership from our few seniors and a strong group of young players with several talented incoming freshman. We started a middle school football program two years ago and that will help our HS program. The middle school team lost just two games in two years and many of these boys are now ready to play HS football. We've improved significantly in the weight room and had a good spring practice, good attendance at summer passing camps and a very positive climate. We are looking at two talented sophomores to take over the QB position, Logan Davis (5-10, 120) and/or Robby Gooding (6-0, 140). Logan is described by coaches as having the best football IQ they've seen in a young player. He is also experienced at that position, is an accurate passer, and has honed his skills in several NSA QB camps. Robby is very athletic, quick with great feet, and excellent hands; he led the team in receptions last season. Jr. Skylar Merrill (6-3, 160), entering just his second year of football, has shown that he can also be a tough matchup at the receiver position and has the skills to be a force on defense.

Team's biggest questions marks: We're still a young team, overall, and we are still small in size and few in number. Barring a miraculous growth spurt, we're going to need to get tougher, more aggressive and more confident. Our preseason focus has been on improving our defense. We still have some question marks as to how we'll fill positions that make us the best team we can be on both sides of the ball. But we have kids who have shown the willingness to work hard and improve themselves, and a coaching staff dedicated to teaching, helping, mentoring, and remaining positive.

2018 goals: We had a rough season last year and a record that was uncharacteristic for St. David Football. We will be better this season. Although we never gave up in any game last year, we were not particularly competitive in many of them. We expect to compete in every game this season. We also continue to have the expectation that every player who comes through our program will become a better person each year, as well as a better football player.

1A South notes: Duncan's Jr. Wesley Conyer rushed for 1,169 yards and 13 touchdowns last year. Teammate Lucas Basteen added 677 yards with six touchdowns. ... **Valley Union** hadn't selected a coach when azpreps365.com contacted the school in late July.

EAST REGION

Arete Prep

Head coach: Cord Smith.

2017 record: 2-6.

No. of returning starters on offense: 8.

No. of returning starters on defense: 4.

Returning key players: Sr. OL Pierce Garver (6-0, 190); Sr. RB Ben White (5-9, 160); Sr. TE Brennan Weir (6-1, 180); Sr. WR Noah McClelland (5-10, 150); Sr. C Titan Palmer (6-1, 200); LB James Varner (5-8, 170); RB Bryce Carrington (5-9, 165).

Strengths of offense heading into summer: Two returning running backs. Returning starter at center. Moving from 11-man to 8-man football.



Jose Serrato, NFL Yet (photo by Darin Sicurello of max-preps.com)

Team's biggest questions marks: Who will replace senior Joe DeBratto at quarterback.

2018 goals: To make the postseason.

More about the program: Our program was cancelled in 2016. We had not won a game in three years and only two in the previous four seasons.

Hayden

Coach: John Estrada.

Number of returning starters on offense: 5.

Number of returning starters on defense: 6.

Key returning starters and 2017 stats: RB/DE Joel Rodriguez (5-10, 225) 569 rushing yards, 8 TDs, 59 tackles; RB/CB Omar Lopez (5-8, 150) 556 rushing yards, 7 TDs, 253 receiving yards, 34 tackles; NG/DE Noah Monroy (5-7, 175) 32 tackles; OG/DT Robert Manriquez (6-1, 225); QB/CB Gilberto Carmelo (5-9, 165) 32 tackles; R/LB Jorge Rodriguez (5-9, 180) 42 tackles; C/DT Peter Kame (5-11, 210).

Strengths of offense heading into the summer: Our strengths will be our seasoned players. They know our system. They'll just need to perform.

Strengths of your defense: The defense will be a challenge. We lost our defensive coordinator, but we'll adjust and move on.

What are your early expectations for the 2018 season?: Our expectations will be to build upon where our previous senior classes have taken us. How bad do they want it?

More about the program: Our defensive coordinator, Danny

Cruz, retired after many years of coaching. He's a Hayden High graduate. Coach Cruz and I are very good friends and grew up in this small town of Hayden.

NFL Yet

Head coach: Armando Ruiz.

2017 record: 1-7.

No. of returning starters on offense: 3.

No. of returning starters on defense: 2.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Jr. WR/DB Mark Ayala (5-11, 178) 36 tackles; So. WR/DB Alejandro Ruiz (5-8, 150) 20 tackles; So. RB/LB Xavier Milligan (5-8, 162) 25 tackles; So. OL/DL Francisco Casteneda (5-8, 215); So. TE/DL Guillermo Soto-Diaz (5-11, 200).

Strengths of offense heading into summer: Offensive line, athleticism.

Strengths of defense: Strength up front, athleticism, team speed, IQ of linebackers.

Team's biggest questions marks: Quarterback, team leader. Young team.

2018 goals: Good run game. Low amount of penalties. Discipline.

More about the program: Ninety percent of our players are from low-income homes. We have foster children on our team. Most of the players have never played organized football before. We are developing a program that we hope will send a majority of our athletes to college on scholarship and provide them with better opportunities to compete with kids on a national scale.

Phoenix Day School for the Deaf

Head coach: Dave Huber.

2017 record: 1-4.

No. of returning starters on offense: 5.

No. of returning starters on defense: 5.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: OL/DL Carlos Cordero; TE/DE Angel Cubas; RB/LB Brian Lynch; OL/DL Gabriel Meza; OL/DL Chancey Phillips.

Strengths of offense heading into summer: Our offensive linemen will be more experienced than in past. We are looking forward to improve football knowledge this summer.

Strengths of defense: Defensive linemen are our strongest group on defense.

Team's biggest questions marks: We need to replace our graduating quarterback. Our team is young and lacking varsity level experience.

More about the program: We will be playing a national deaf championship team, California School for Deaf- Fremont this fall.

Ray

Head coach: Frank Lechuga.

2017 record: 6-4.

No. of returning starters on offense: 6.

No. of returning starters on defense: 4.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. QB Jaden Pace (5-10, 140) 740 passing yards, 10 TDs, 222 rushing; Sr. WR/ CB Tino Barragan (5-8, 140) 63 tackles, 27 passes defended; Jr. RB/DB Jando Felix (5-8, 145) 272 rushing, 6 TDs; Jr. WR/CB Eric Manriquez (5-10, 120) 4 TD receptions, 49 tackles; Sr. RB/LB Dakota Willis (5-3, 115) 101 tackles, 373 receiving yards, 4 TDs; Jr. RB/LB Jayden Lagunas (5-10, 170) 3 rushing TDs, 26 tackles; Sr. OL/DL Bryen Lopez (5-9, 175); Jr. OL/DL Aiden Acuna (5-9, 165); Sr. OL/DL Angel Manriquez (5-10, 140).

Strengths of offense heading into summer: Returning QB and running backs. Good wide receiver core. Experienced lineman. Strengths of defense: Returning corner backs and linebackers. Dedicated lineman.

Team's biggest questions marks: Dedication from younger players to get into shape.

2018 goals: To have a winning season. To go deeper into the playoffs. Everyone to "buy in" and work harder than last year.

More about the program: Team is excited for this new season after last year's success. Looking forward to see what new goals they can accomplish.

Superior

Head coach: Ryan Palmer.

2017 record: 9-2.

No. of returning starters on offense: 8.

No. of returning starters on defense: 8.

Returning key players and 2017 stats: Sr. QB/LB Steven Ybarra, (5-11, 185) 2,188 passing yards with 28 TDs, 1,193 passing yards with 6 TDs, 116 tackles, 6 INTs; Sr. WR/DE Cedric Mendoza (6-2 170) 380 receiving yards with 5 TDs, 51 tackles, 14 sacks; Sr. WR/DB Jesus Castellanos (5-7, 150) 49 tackles, 305 receiving yards, 6 total TDs; So. RB/OLB Adam Navarrette (5-6, 130) 91 tackles, 230 rushing yards with 6 TDs, 303 receiving yards with 2 TDs; Jr. OL/DE Daniel McConnell (5-11, 160) 14 sacks, 54 tackles; Jr. OL/DL Gabriel Castillo (5-10, 200) 29 tackles.

Strengths of offense heading into summer: Experience and speed.

Strengths of defense: Experience and speed.

Team's biggest questions marks: Commitment to excellence. Improve strength. Add depth.

2018 goals: Compete for a state championship.

Ybarra Is Playing for His Family, Community, First Football Title for Superior



Superior's talented Steven Ybarra (photo by Paul Campbell of maxpreps.com)

By Jose Garcia
azpreps365.com

Steven Ybarra's 475-total yard, 12 tackle state semifinal show last season was just one of his prime postseason productions for Superior.

In the 2018 1A Conference state baseball semifinals, Ybarra tossed 8 1/3 innings of 2-hit ball, struck out 14 and allowed just one run against archrival Ray.

His high level efforts helped reserve Superior's spot in the 1A baseball and football title games, surprisingly without any seniors on either roster. But in the 2018-19 school year, Superior will dress plenty of senior football and baseball firepower, including Ybarra, in its championship ring pursuits.

Superior and Ybarra gained a lot of valuable football ex-

perience in 2017, but what they've lost — on the field and in life — also motivates them. Ybarra's mom, Marisela, died during a vehicle accident six days before his first birthday.

His father is not in the picture.

Besides a football, Ybarra also carries a lot of anger and pain into games.

"A lot of that anger, I release it on the football field," Ybarra said.

The accident that took his mom's life happened as she was on her way home from work.

"Everybody tells me she was a great person and loved to be around her," Ybarra said. "She died in her early 20s. Day by day I try to live in the present and don't look back."

Helping him move forward are his grandparents, Leo Sr. and Malinda (Marisela's parents), and Marisela's siblings, Leo Jr. and Diana.

"They are my world," Ybarra said. "I try to make them as happy as possible. I mess up, and they get on me, but I try to give back to them."

Superior's close knit community also is keeping an eye on Ybarra.

The 17 year old can't walk too far without being recognized by well wishers.

"They (grandparents) raised me," Ybarra said. "It's always been me and my grandparents. But everybody in Superior is just family."

There's a lot of talk around town that this might be the year that Superior finally wins its first official football championship.

Its been close, reaching the semifinals the past three years. As a program, it has four state runner-ups to show for.

On the last day of school in June, Superior's football team held a heart-to-heart to address how to finally win a championship this season.

Williams overpowered Superior, 57-14, in the 1A championship game last year.

"We need to be more of a family," Ybarra said. "We need to be in the weight room. Everybody needs to be in the weight room."

Ybarra is becoming a leader, something he said former Superior quarterback Gage Cruz (2017 class) has mentored Ybarra on.

Ybarra earned his stripes by contributing wherever needed. As a 5-9, 165-pound sophomore, he started on the offensive line.

Last year, he had a break out season to remember, finishing in the top-4 in 1A in passing yards (2,188), passing

touchdowns (28), rushing yards (1,193), total yards (3,409), tackles (116), and interceptions (6).

“Steven will run over you,” Superior coach Ryan Palmer said. “He’s not the fastest guy. He’s a linebacker playing quarterback. Not exactly the mentality you want out of your starting quarterback.

“He has a strong will to win. He will never stop working.”

Ybarra also has a strong left arm, a weapon Superior’s baseball program used effectively the past two seasons.

Last year, Ybarra posted a 1.69 ERA in 49 2/3 innings, striking out 81 batters for a 15-10 state runner-up team that overachieved. Two years ago, Superior was one of the favorites and brought home a baseball title.

Ybarra started that game on the mound at Surprise Stadium, where his team won 12-8. This summer he’s been pitching for a local scout team of the Los Angeles Angels.

Once school starts, he’ll strictly focus on bringing more joy to Superior and his family. He said he wants to win a football crown for a town and family members who have raised him, for a 10-year coach, Palmer, who resurrected a



(left to right) Kale Major, Steven Ybarra, Gabriel Otero, Jesus Castellanos (photo by Paul Campbell of maxpreps.com)

once cancelled program and to continue making his mom proud in spirit.

“I want to give back,” Ybarra said.

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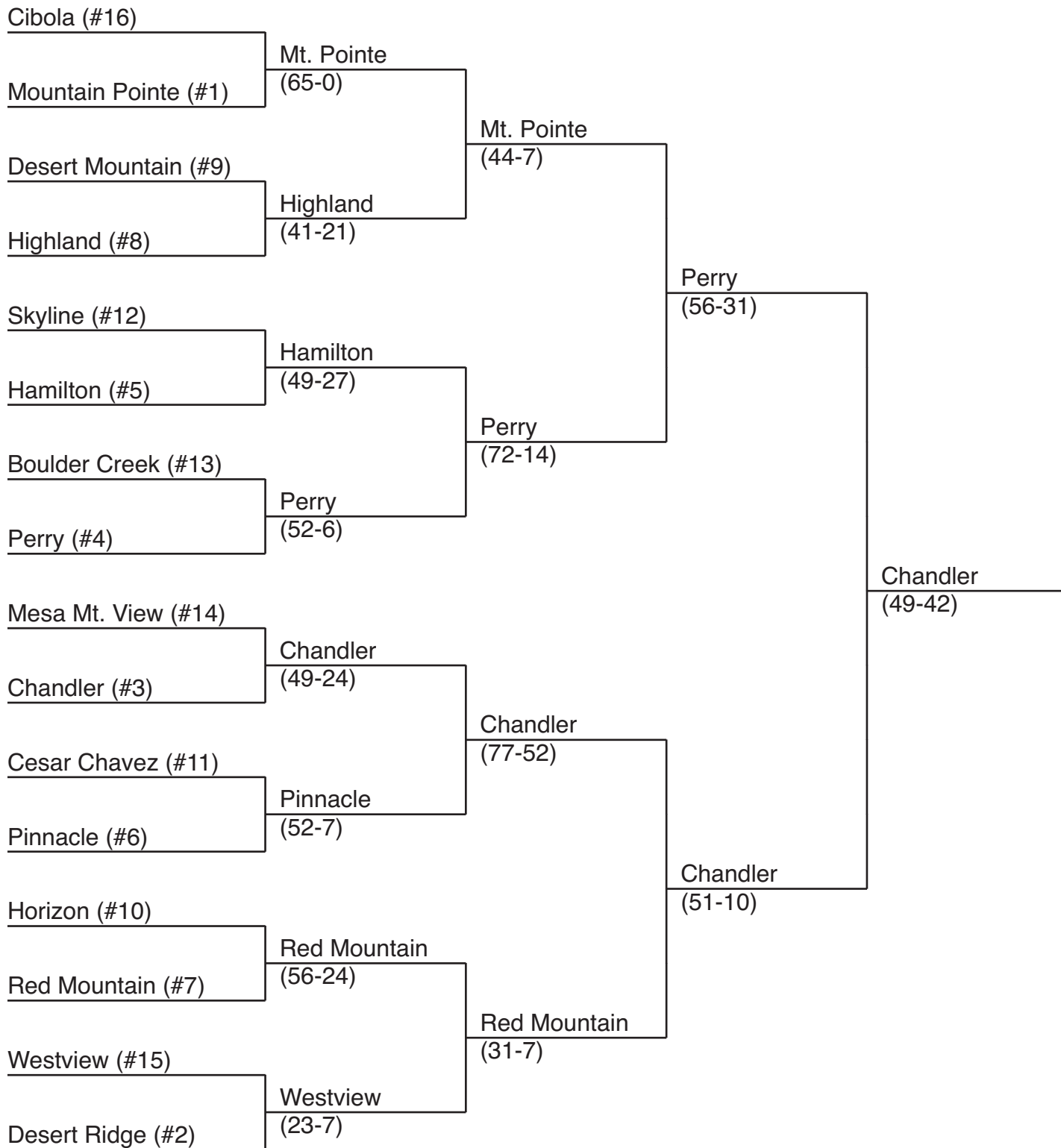
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Fri, Nov 3

Fri, Nov 10

Fri, Nov 17

Sat, Dec 2



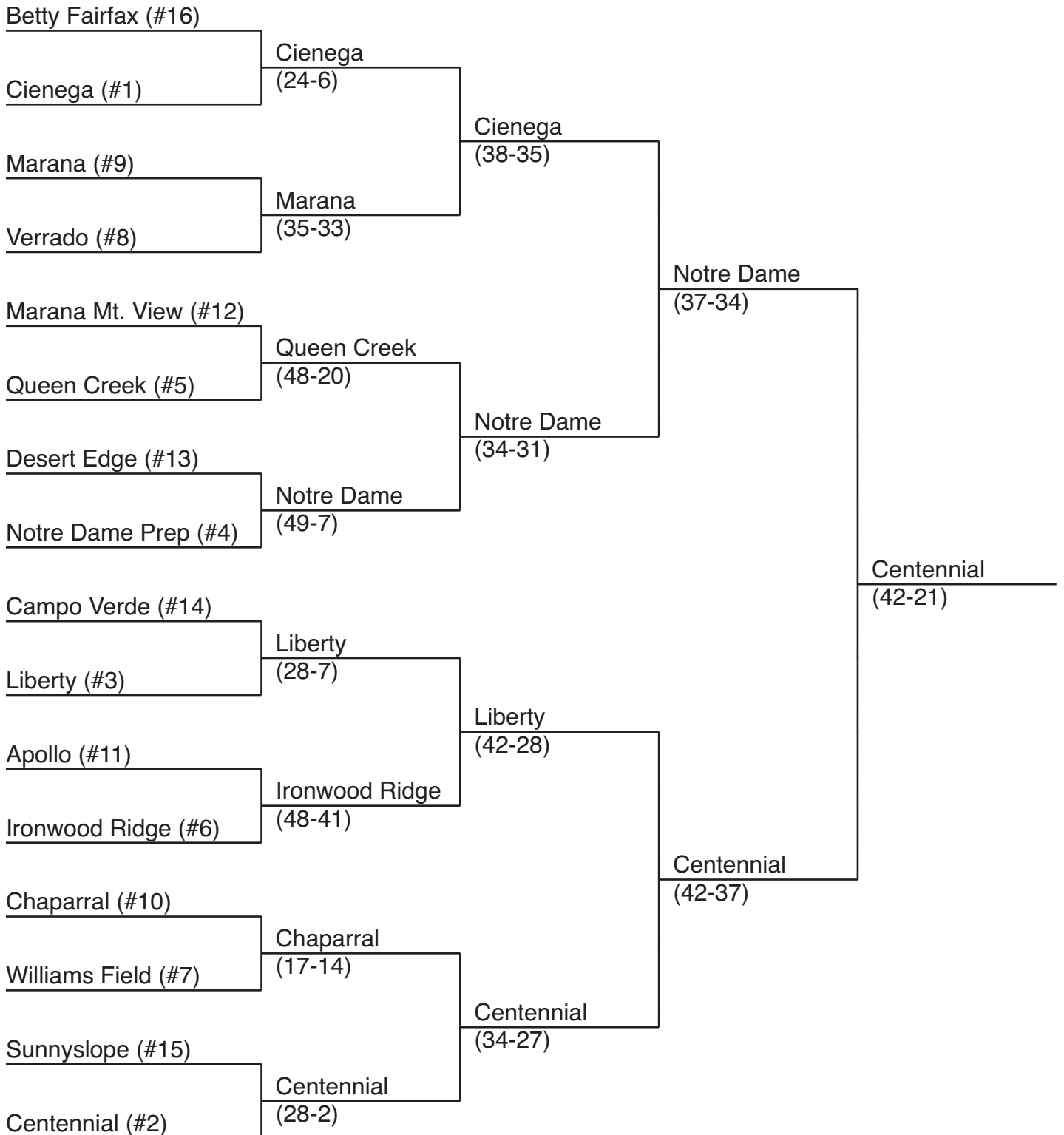
2017 5A State Championship Bracket

Fri, Nov 3

Fri, Nov 10

Fri, Nov 17

Sat, Dec 2



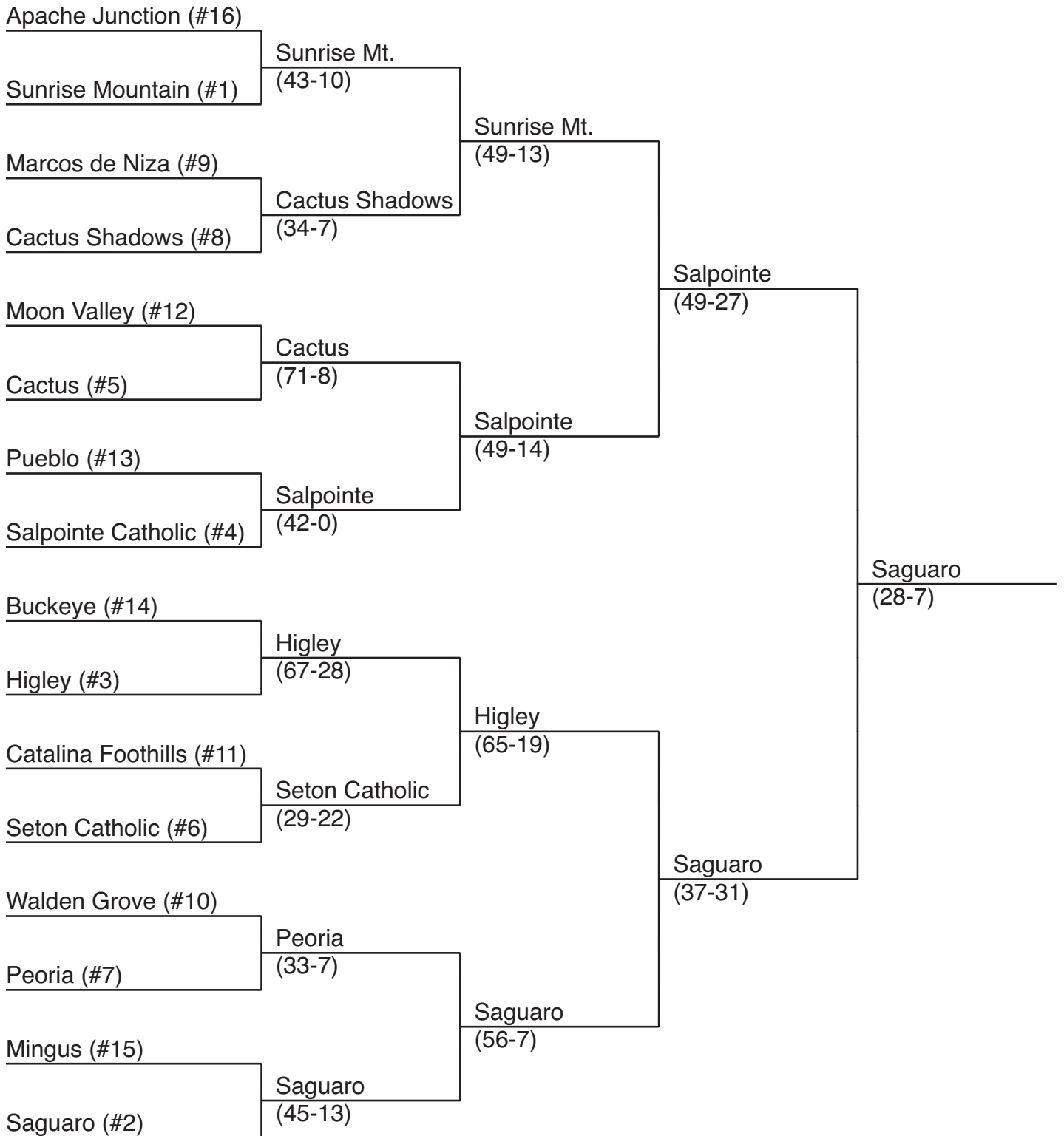
2017 4A State Championship Bracket

Fri, Nov 3

Fri, Nov 10

Fri, Nov 17

Sat, Dec 2



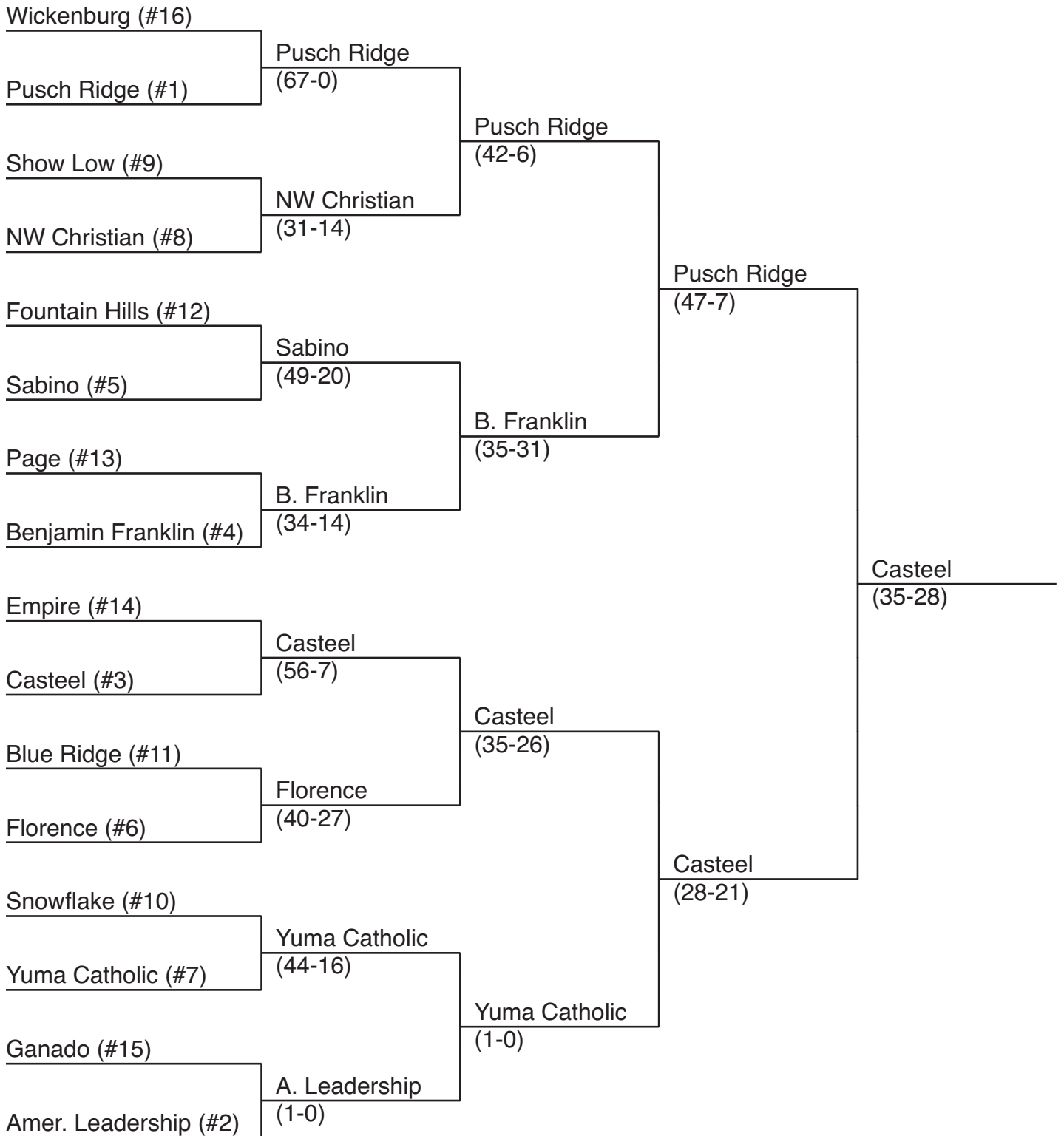
2017 3A State Championship Bracket

Sat, Nov 4

Fri, Nov 10

Sat, Nov 18

Sat, Nov 25

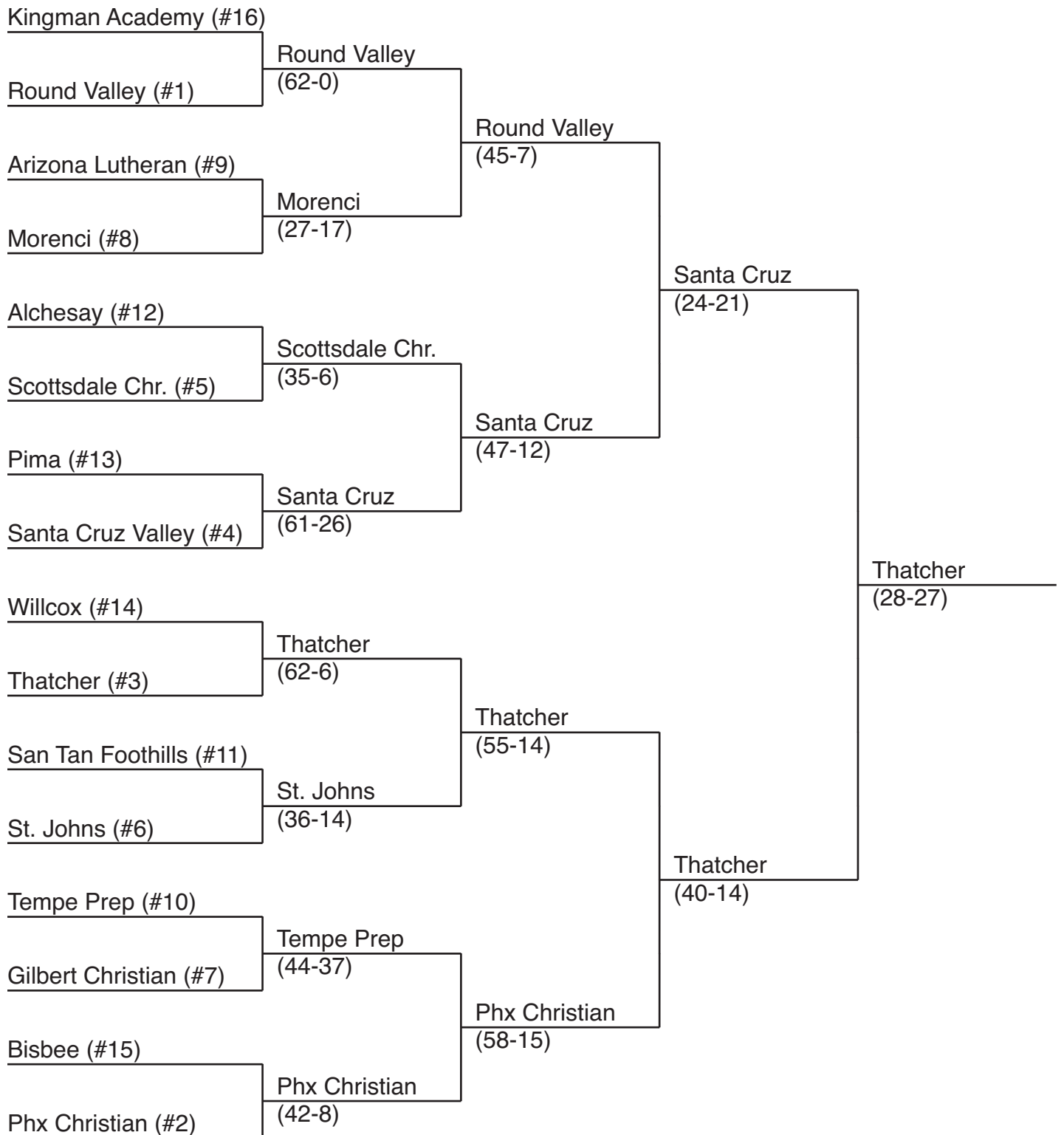


Sat, Nov 4

Fri, Nov 10

Sat, Nov 18

Sat, Nov 25



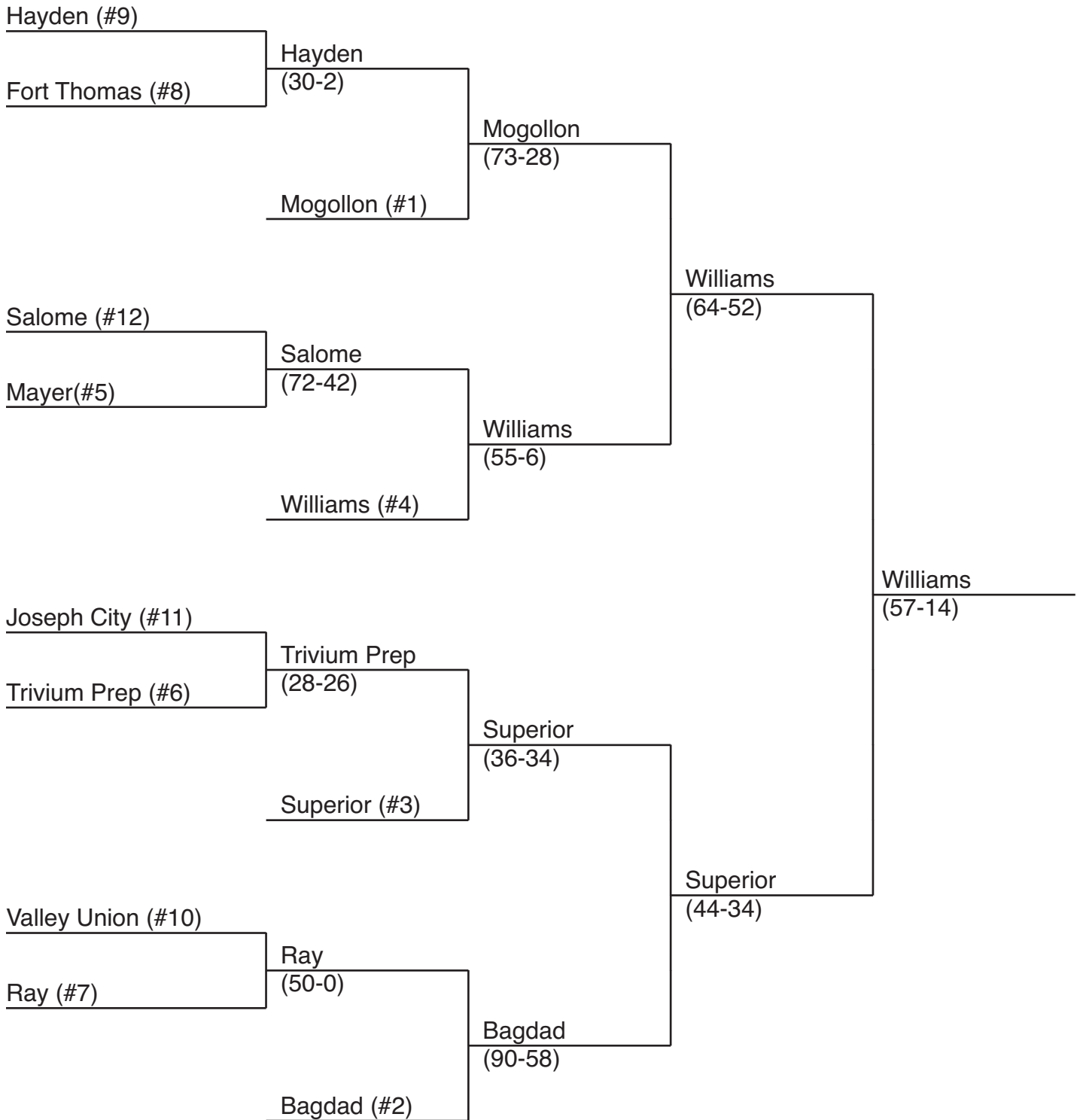
2017 1A State Championship Bracket

Sat, Oct 21

Sat, Oct 28

Sat, Nov 4

Fri, Nov 10



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