

2023 Mountain Home Bombers Football Team



Bombers want to turn heads in 2023

By Neal Denton
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The Mountain Home High School football team is looking to prove a lot of people wrong this season.

For the third straight season, the Bombers went on the road last year in the state playoffs to post an “upset” of sorts — although the 6A-West Conference has dominated the 6A-East head-to-head in the opening round of the playoffs each of the past three years.

The past two seasons, the Bombers have finished 4-8 but rallied to earn the No. 6 seed and final playoff spot from the 6A-West. In head coach Steve Ary’s first season, the Bombers went 6-6 and started their streak of three straight seasons in the state quarterfinals.

“Why are we so optimistic?” Mountain Home offensive coordinator Darin Acklin asked. “Well, for one, we had the best offseason we’ve had since coach Ary has been here. Two, we have more depth than we’ve ever had. Three, our culture is still slowly changing. Not only our coaches, but our players feel that way.”

The optimism could grow even larger if the Bombers open the season with a 2-0 start for the first time since 2011.

“We think we can play with anybody, we just really started slowly last year,” Ary said. “We’ve had a lot better off-season and summer than we did last year. We’re healthy and not going to limp into Week One. We are healthy right now.”

Despite Mountain Home returning most of its starters on both sides of the ball from its third straight quarterfinal team, state-wide publications have yet to buy in, ranking the Bombers as low as seventh in the nine-team 6A-West.

“Coach Ary’s goal is to win seven or eight,” Acklin said. “Let’s host a play-off game instead of going on the road. I’m proud of the kids for the hours they’ve put in during the offseason.”

Ary’s goal was clear going into Friday’s preseason benefit game at Jonesboro.

“We want to see some physicality and some enthusiasm,” he said. “We want to execute and look like we’re ready to play. Jonesboro is under a new coach and will run some Spread, which is good for us. We’ll see a lot of that in our league.”

The Bombers won both the varsity and junior varsity portions of the benefit game.

Mountain Home makes almost the same exact trip for its official season opener this Friday when it travels to Nettleton. The Bombers have not won their season opener since 2011.

Mountain Home’s second and final nonconference game of the season is Sept. 1 when it hosts rival Harrison. The Bombers have not beaten the Gobblins since 2012.

“We’ve come in here for years and years and haven’t beaten them,” Ary said. “These guys have beaten them at the junior high level, so our confidence is a lot better. We have higher expectations coming in. I don’t feel the inferior thing like we have in the past.”

While Mountain Home has gone on a run to end the season the past few years, the Bombers also want to knock off some of those perennial powerhouses they face during the first half of their eight-game, 6A-West slate this season.

The Bombers face the state’s top three ranked teams in Class 6A in their first five conference games. Four of the top seven teams in Class 6A are during that five-game stretch.

“We’re going to have Greenwood, Lake Hamilton, Russellville, Pulaski Academy and Little Rock Christian,” Ary said. “Those are arguably the top five teams in the conference. We know that four of them are.”

Playing the best also makes you better, as evidenced by Mountain Home’s perfect record against the 6A-East the past three seasons.

MOUNTAIN HOME VARSITY FOOTBALL SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT
Aug. 25	at Nettleton
Sept. 1	Harrison
Sept. 8	Greenwood
Sept. 15	at Lake Hamilton
Sept. 22	Russellville
Sept. 29	at Pulaski Academy
Oct. 6	Little Rock Christian
Oct. 20	at Siloam Springs
Oct. 27	Van Buren
Nov. 3	at Greenbrier

MOUNTAIN HOME JR. HIGH FOOTBALL SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT
Aug. 24	at Jacksonville
Aug. 31	Lighthouse Christian
Sept. 7	at Texarkana
Sept. 14	at West Memphis West
Sept. 21	West Memphis Wonder
Sept. 28	at Jonesboro MacArthur
Oct. 5	Jonesboro Annie Camp
Oct. 12	at Marion
Oct. 19	West Memphis West
Oct. 26	at West Memphis Wonder

Mountain Home went on the road and knocked off Pine Bluff in 2020’s first round of the state playoffs. The Bombers won road playoff games at Sylvan Hills in 2021 and at Marion last year.

“It worked out for us last year. We got better playing good teams,” Ary said. “In the end, we played better. We want at least seven or eight wins and to host a playoff game at Bomber Stadium. We’re going to have to go get somebody we’re not supposed to beat. We also need to win Week One and Week Two. And we need to take care of the back end of the schedule.”

2023 MOUNTAIN HOME BOMBER ROSTER

NO.	NAME	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	CLASS
1	Jacob Chenoweth	6-0	180	Jr.
2	Carter Adkins	6-1	170	So.
3	Kaeden Dotson	6-1	150	So.
4	Bryce Kincade	5-10	140	So.
5	Barrett Miller	5-9	175	So.
6	Cade Yates	6-0	195	Sr.
7	Brantlee Phillips	6-4	180	So.
8	Aiden Setzer	6-2	200	Jr.
9	Dayton Davis	5-9	150	So.
10	Landen Haynes	5-6	130	Sr.
11	Julian Cardenas	5-8	160	Sr.
12	Dawson Dunlap	6-1	175	Jr.
13	Seth King	5-6	130	So.
14	Connor Schultz	5-9	130	So.
17	Anthony Milbourne	6-3	200	Sr.
18	Talan Palmer	6-0	155	Jr.
20	Jacob Bellomy	5-8	155	So.
21	Aiden Howard	5-10	140	So.
22	Jett Hannaford	6-2	170	Sr.
23	Brendan Arki	6-1	150	So.
24	Ty Hannaford	5-8	170	Sr.
25	Chris Hubbard	5-9	200	Sr.
28	Maddox Carney	5-10	175	Sr.
30	Hunter Dooley	5-7	170	So.
32	Hunter Estes	6-2	150	So.
33	Tate Cudworth	5-5	135	So.
34	Ethan Clark	6-2	150	Jr.
36	Corwin Morris	6-4	220	Sr.
39	Robert Dover	6-4	230	Sr.
40	Justin Rula	5-7	180	Sr.
41	Caden DeSoto	5-10	180	So.
42	Frank Lockhart	5-10	150	So.
43	Brenton Setzer	6-1	185	Jr.
44	David Baxley	5-9	185	Sr.
47	Jax Wescoat	6-0	170	So.
50	Eli Jones	5-10	220	Jr.
51	Bradley Hill	5-10	160	So.
52	Noah Greninger	5-10	265	Jr.
54	Aidan Shrable	5-10	175	Jr.
55	Kingston McMechan-Savea	5-9	225	Jr.
56	Gray Padgett	6-0	220	Sr.
57	Nate Henderson	5-9	215	Jr.
58	Anthony Desparrois	5-11	230	So.
59	Aden Pittman	5-11	220	So.
61	Blake Vacco	5-11	180	So.
62	Kaden Andrews	6-4	220	So.
63	Tristan Cooper	6-4	225	So.
64	Zack Vanderstek	6-4	275	So.
65	Branson Guggino	5-7	190	So.
66	Ivan Pinkston	5-10	190	Jr.
67	Jacob Taylor	6-0	205	So.
68	Kayden Savea	5-9	230	So.
69	Peyton Bodenhamer	5-11	185	Jr.
70	Josiah Chapa	6-0	205	Sr.
71	Jason Trevino	6-3	180	So.
72	Lucas Bockstahler	6-0	210	Jr.
73	Caleb Perdue	6-4	275	Jr.
74	Nathan Yarborough	5-10	245	So.
75	Eston Ford	6-3	230	Jr.
76	Liam Alvarez	6-3	190	So.
77	Parker Reed	6-0	220	Sr.
78	Truden Faught	6-3	190	So.
79	Kyle McBride	6-5	275	So.
80	Orion Reuscher	6-2	170	Jr.
81	Landon Peoples	5-10	165	Sr.
82	Leo Grubbs	6-1	155	So.
83	Tucker Galloway	6-1	165	So.
85	Patrick Perales	5-10	160	So.
86	Taylor Peterson	5-8	130	So.
88	Kelso Haught	5-9	155	Sr.
90	Jett Blaylock	6-3	215	So.
97	Aaron Martin	6-0	280	So.

Head coach: Steve Ary
Assistant coaches: Darin Acklin, Brett Shrable, Blake Hendricks, Kyle Stephens, Cale Thompson, Chris Cudworth.



2023 MOUNTAIN HOME BOMBER COACHING STAFF

Mountain Home High School football coaches for the 2023 season are (from left): Kody Aldridge, Cale Thompson, Blake Hendricks, head coach Steve Ary, Chris Cudworth, Kyle Stephens, Darin Acklin and Brett Shrable.
PHOTOS BY NEAL DENTON/THE BAXTER BULLETIN



Mountain Home’s 16 seniors pose for a photograph earlier this month. The Bombers have advanced to the state quarterfinals each of the past three seasons.

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2023 Yellville-Summit High School football team



Members of the 2023 Yellville-Summit high school football team and managers pose for a photograph last week. NEAL DENTON/THE BAXTER BULLETIN

Yellville-Summit seeks return to playoffs

By Neal Denton
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The Yellville-Summit Panthers want to return to the playoffs this season, and they want to do so as hosts.

Yellville-Summit seeks to host its first playoff game at Panther Field since 2012 and is searching for its first playoff victory since 2011.

The Panthers came only one win away from a state playoff berth last season, placing sixth in the toughest league in Class 3A, the 3A-2 Conference.

"We had four teams from our conference reach the quarterfinals last season," Yellville-Summit head coach Justin Crain said. "We definitely play in the best conference in the state.

No other conference had four in the final eight."

Yellville-Summit made the playoffs in Crain's first season, the Panthers' final year in Class 2A, before moving back up to 3A last year.

"I let my seniors choose our goals every season," Crain said. "We want to be the most physical team every Friday night. Goal number two is know the game plan. We give them a packet every week that's about 20 pages long. Number three is keep the stands full. We want to have the biggest crowd we possibly can.

"And we want a home playoff game," he concluded, "which hasn't happened here in a long time."

Crain is in his third season as head coach of his alma mater.

"These guys have bought into the program and have been with me for three years now," he said. "They know the expectations, and I don't care if we're playing the Dallas Cowboys, we want to win."

The Panthers return 10 starters on both sides of the ball.

"We have to stay healthy," Crain said. "And those sophomores have to grow up quickly. We have 10 seniors who are all starters and have been with the program three years. They want to turn it around and get a home playoff game."

All five of the playoff teams from the 3A-2 last season are poised for big seasons again this year, but Crain feels his team can leapfrog some of those.

"We have experience and a chip on our shoulder," he said. "These guys know there were games last year we should have won. We were up on Salem 8-6 even with us having four turnovers. They hit a couple big plays before halftime and we were finished."

Newport and Melbourne were the top two in the league last year, and Salem, the conference's No. 3 team, is similar to Yellville-Summit in that it returns almost all of its starters from last season.

"Newport is Newport. They're athletic as all get-out," Crain said. "Speed kills. Salem returns almost everybody from a great season last year. Melbourne is always going to be good."

Quitman loses the most of all the playoff teams, while Perryville, last year's No. 5 team, returns a large portion from the previous campaign.

"Perryville returns a lot. It's going to be a very competitive schedule," Crain said. "But we do have Salem, Melbourne and Newport at home."

The Panthers swept through their non-conference schedule, starting 4-0 before finishing 5-5 last season.

"It's about getting the mentality back that we had in the 90s under coach (Calvin) Mallett," Crain said. "When last year's team got down a score or two, they thought the game was over. We're gaining the mentality that it's a four-quarter ballgame and to not get their heads down."

YELLVILLE-SUMMIT VARSITY FOOTBALL SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT
Aug. 25	at Baptist Prep
Sept. 1	at Johnson County Westside
Sept. 5	Lighthouse Academy
Sept. 15	at Mountainburg
Sept. 22	at Perryville
Sept. 29	Melbourne
Oct. 6	at Quitman
Oct. 13	Salem
Oct. 20	at Atkins
Oct. 27	Newport

YELLVILLE-SUMMIT JR. HIGH FOOTBALL SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT
Sept. 7	at Decatur
Sept. 14	Mountainburg
Sept. 21	Perryville
Sept. 28	at Melbourne
Oct. 5	Quitman
Oct. 12	at Salem
Oct. 19	Atkins
Oct. 26	at Newport

The team is bigger, stronger, and faster, thanks not only to being a year older, but also to a solid offseason in the weight room.

"We started spring ball with about 48 kids," Crain said. "We're down to about 37 or 38 now, but three of them are injured. We finally have every single lineman, linebacker and running back squatting over 300 pounds and power cleaning over 200. We're a lot stronger than we've been. We're very excited."

Yellville-Summit opens its season Friday at Baptist Prep. Four of its first five games are on the road. The Panthers host the JV squad from Missouri powerhouse Lighthouse Christian on Sept. 5.

"On our nonconference schedule, Decatur dropped," Crain said. "We searched everywhere trying to find a game. Lighthouse was the only team we could find, and we're playing their JV here on a Tuesday night."



Yellville-Summit's Tristin Teel rushes last year at Salem. The Panthers host Salem, Melbourne and Newport and Panther Field this season. NEAL DENTON/THE BAXTER BULLETIN

Panthers led by strong running game

By Neal Denton
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While Yellville-Summit breaks in a new quarterback, the rest of the Panthers' offensive personnel should look very familiar to fans this season.

Yellville-Summit head coach Justin Crain is excited about the rushing attack of his Panthers, who open Friday at Little Rock against the Baptist Prep Eagles.

"We return every one of our starting linemen from last year," Crain said. "We feel like we can line up and run the ball against anybody."

Yellville-Summit's offensive line has gotten bigger and stronger since last season. Four of six starters are seniors.

"We have Kody Martin at left tackle and Trenton Purdom at left guard," Crain said. "There's Arakin Faust at center, Cashton Tilton at right guard, Carey Martin at right tackle and Landyn Vctor at tight end. Those are all returning starters."

Senior Landen Keiter was the team's leading rusher last year and is poised to lead the backfield this season. Sophomore Noah Cantrell takes over at quarterback after leading the junior high team last season.

"He's a sophomore but has a good arm," Crain said. "He played well in junior high. All he has to do is manage the ship, and he has a good ship he's riding."

Defensively, the Panthers also return 10 starters and look to eliminate the big play and win the turnover battle each Friday.

"We return everybody except one starting linebacker," Crain said. "We have 10 back on both sides of the ball, so we're experienced. We work on creating turnovers and ball security two or three times a week. Those are critical things in our scheme."

Senior Tristin Teel is a returning starter at outside linebacker, while junior Denver Layton and sophomore

Eli Gerth return experience at inside linebacker.

"Denver is a returning starter. He's a junior, a smart kid who gets the defense lined up," Crain said. "Gerth is just a sophomore, but he started as a freshman last year."

The Panthers' secondary has both size and speed.

"We have a guy who moved in, Adam Stewart, his folks moved here from California, he's about 6-foot-2, 190 pounds," Crain said. "We have Caleb Hartle, Nick Vctor and Kobyn Hubbard at cornerback. Tristin Winningham is our strong safety and Drew Vigna can play some safety."





Mountain Home quarterback Cade Yates passed for more than 1,600 yards last season and returns to lead the Bombers this year. NEAL DENTON/THE BAXTER BULLETIN

Excitement level high for Bomber offense

By Neal Denton
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Versatility, athleticism and depth.

This year's edition of the Bomber football team possesses those traits at a level not yet experienced by head coach Steve Ary in his four seasons at Mountain Home.

It's no wonder Ary and offensive coordinator Darin Acklin are excited about the 2023 season.

"We're probably the most ver-

satile I've seen us in the last three years here," Acklin said.

A stacked backfield leads the charge for a Bomber offense that is looking to improve on its 26.6 points per game average from last season.

Mountain Home averaged 39.8 points per game over its final five games last season, winning four straight before falling to Pulaski Academy in the state quarterfinals.

"We're four-deep and we haven't had that since I've been

here," Acklin said of the team's tailback situation. "I've even implemented some two-back stuff, going back to the Bryce McKay, (Gage) Hershbecker and (Brock) Boggy days. It's kind of window-dressing though, unless the linemen can be road-graders."

The Bombers are replacing four of five starters on the offensive line, but Acklin thinks this bunch shows just as much promise.

"We've taken a big hit there," Acklin said, "but that's not to

say we can't be as good as we were. They are just getting used to where they fit in."

Backfield

Senior Cade Yates (6-0, 195) is projected to return as the starting quarterback, with support from talented sophomore Brantlee Phillips (6-4, 180).

"Both of them are very athletic and can wing the ball around," Acklin said. "Cade is a dual-threat guy. He throws it well, he's very

accurate, and he can throw the deep ball or the short pass."

Yates passed for 1,668 yards last season on his way to all-conference honors.

"The best thing about him is he has a high football IQ," Acklin said. "You can talk to him about making adjustments, and he can visualize that with you, play for play and possession for possession."

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MH defense, special teams look for big season

Mountain Home's Caden DelSoto makes a tackle for a loss against Jonesboro last Friday. NEAL DENTON/THE BAXTER BULLETIN

By Neal Denton
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In a stacked 6A-West Conference full of offensive playmakers, the Mountain Home Bombers are happy to have gained speed at the back end of their defense.

The improvement was evident in Mountain Home's preseason game

against Jonesboro, during which it allowed only one play of more than 30 yards.

"Our four secondary spots, we feel like this is the fastest, most athletic secondary we've had since I've been here," Mountain Home head coach Steve Ary said.

The Bombers are young but fast in their second-

ary, with two juniors projected at cornerback and a junior and sophomore at safety.

"We have Talan Palmer and Jacob Chenoweth at corner right now," Ary said. "Barrett Miller and Dawson Dunlap are our two safeties. Chenoweth is probably the corner who can hit the best, and Dunlap is the

safety that hits the best. Barrett runs the best, and Talan runs well, too."

Senior Anthony Milbourne, primarily a receiver, made an interception during the Bombers' preseason victory at Jonesboro.

"We can cover people, and we have a couple guys who are hammers," Ary

said. "They are the most athletic bunch we've had. Carter (Adkins) is athletic enough to play on the back end, and Anthony Milbourne will be in on certain situations."

Defensive line

The Bombers' defensive front is highlighted by highly-recruited de-

fensive end Robert Dover. The 6-foot-4, 230-pound senior made 114 tackles and 14 sacks last season for the Bombers.

Because of Dover's presence, opposing teams will run more to junior Aiden Setzer (6-2, 200) at the other defensive end spot.

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Arkansas quarterback KJ Jefferson passes against Kansas during the first half of the Liberty Bowl on Dec. 28 in Memphis, Tenn. Arkansas opens its season at home against Western Carolina on Sept. 2. ROGELIO V. SOLIS/AP

Pittman has Arkansas trending up

QB KJ Jefferson and the Hogs will try to take the next step

By ERIC W. BOLIN
The Associated Press

FAYETTEVILLE — Arkansas coach Sam Pittman is no longer learning what it takes to win in the Southeastern Conference. He has already made significant strides in his first three years.

The next step would be turning the Razorbacks into a consistent contender. The Razorbacks are on the right track — Arkansas is seeking its fourth straight bowl trip, which would mark its longest streak since a run from 1998 to 2003. A highlight of Pittman's tenure was last year's triple-overtime Liberty Bowl win over Kansas.

Moving up in the ranks might be easier said than done with Oklahoma and Texas joining the already-stacked SEC in 2024.

Quarterback KJ Jefferson gives the Razorbacks hope that more momentum can be built before the league expands. He threw for 2,648 yards with 24 touchdowns and five interceptions in 2022 and he ran for another 640 yards with nine touchdowns.

"He is our leader," Pittman said. "He's our leader both on the offense and the defense. Obviously on one side of the ball, a lot of times you'll have leaders that are on that side of the ball. KJ is our team leader, and we are awful happy that he is."

ROCKET MAN

Raheim Sanders was the league's No. 2 rusher with 1,443 yards last season and earned first-team all-SEC honors from the AP. The explosive back got even faster in the offseason and added 10 pounds of muscle. He teams with Jefferson to fuel what could be an elite running game. Only three power-conference teams in FBS last year averaged more than Arkansas' 236 yards rushing per game.

NEW SCHEME

The offense's scheme will be a bit different in 2023, though, even with Sanders and Jefferson returning.

Dan Enos is in his first year as offensive coordinator in Pittman's regime after last year's coordinator, Kendal Briles, left to take the same job at TCU. Enos knows the program, though, having been Arkansas' offensive coordinator from 2015 to 2017 under Bret Bielema. Pittman was Arkansas' offensive line coach in 2015, so he knows Enos.

"I hired Dan Enos because I thought he was the best play-caller I've ever worked with, and I felt like that's what we need," Pittman said.

TOP TARGETS

The Razorbacks lost their top four receivers from last year and the top three entering the fall are an FCS transfer in Andrew Armstrong, a Division II transfer in Isaac TeSlaa and a transfer from the Mid-Ameri-

can Conference in Tyrone Broden. Pittman feels positive about the unit, partly because of his own experience at lower levels.

"I think KJ will be able to answer that better than I do, but ... (Armstrong) is fast. He's big," Pittman said. "I was a DII player. Well, I was NAIA, but they're DII now. It's kind of neat to bring a couple guys from Division II ball. (TeSlaa and Armstrong) both I think had about 1,000 yards in catches. They develop later."

SECONDARY ADJUSTMENTS

Arkansas was last in FBS in 2022 in pass defense as the Razorbacks gave up 294.7 yards per game. Pittman landed four players from FBS schools out of the transfer portal in hopes of fixing the secondary issues.

Early in camp, it's taking some time, largely because of so many new bodies.

"The problem is we have too many penalties in the

secondary," Pittman said after the team's first fall scrimmage. "We were just giving (the offense) first downs. There had to have been maybe four, five different defensive penalties."

THE SCHEDULE

Arkansas opens at home Sept. 2 against Western Carolina. The Razorbacks host new Big 12 member BYU on Sept. 16. The Razorbacks open conference play at No. 5 LSU on Sept. 23 and visit No. 4 Alabama on Oct. 14.

SOPHOMORE QUARTERBACK



Mountain Home sophomore Brantlee Phillips is the Bombers' back-up quarterback this season, piloting the JV team. He was 6-of-10 passing for 72 yards in the second half against Jonesboro last week, and he passed for two touchdowns in a JV win over Salem on Monday. NEAL DENTON/THE BAXTER BULLETIN

Farmers & Merchants Bank wishes Barrett Miller, his teammates, and coaches a great season.

Go Bombers!

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End of an era

With super conferences, CFP expansion, 2023 is end of college football as we know it

By **RALPH D. RUSSO**
AP College Football Writer

Welcome to the final season of college football as we know it. Extreme? Maybe, but 2023 has an end-of-an-era feel.

Texas and Oklahoma are taking their last lap in the Big 12. The Pac-12 is still a Power Five conference. Will it even be a conference in 2024 after the Big Ten opens its West Wing and the Big 12 expands yet again? The College Football Playoff is a four-team event for the last time this year before tripling in size.

Everything about the collegiate sports model seems ripe for radical changes. But not quite yet.

"It does seem like it will feel like a lame-duck year at some point in time," former Big 12 Commissioner Bob Bowlsby said.

Before the maps are redrawn (again) and the stakes are remade (again), there is one more season to left to appreciate what is being lost — or long for what's being gained.

"I'm resigned to it," said ESPN's Rece Davis on The AP Top 25 College Football Podcast. "There are parts of it I will miss very much because I consider myself, at heart, a traditionalist. I love the nostalgia of the sport. Maybe, save, baseball, I don't think there is another sport that conjures up that type of deep emotional connection that college football does. And we're losing some of that."

CONFERENCE REALIGNMENT

Fourteen schools will be playing in new leagues this season: four in the Big 12, four in Conference USA and six in the American Athletic Conference. Next season, super conferences arrive as the Big Ten grows to 18 and the Southeastern Conference and Big 12 bulk up to 16 schools.

The Big 12 is where the past and future collide this fall.

While newcomers BYU, Cincinnati, Houston and UCF celebrate their arrival in the Power Five — that term is going away, too — Texas and Oklahoma are going on a farewell tour before heading to an SEC that will be anything but hospitable.

The Longhorns are favorites to win the Big 12 — something they have not done since 2009 — and happy to wear the black suit.

"They've kind of adopted the John Wick mentality," coach Steve Sarkisian told reporters. "I think that they've kind of assumed this mentality of, 'Embrace the hate.'"

Say goodbye to Bedlam. The 110th meeting of the Oklahoma-Oklahoma State series will be the last, at least for now.

"I think that sadness for me is around the rivalries that will fall by the wayside," Bowlsby said. "And I think it's extraordinarily difficult with the larger (conference) formats to keep traditional rivalries together. And a lot of that is what puts fans in the stands."

Realignment taketh away, but it can also giveth. After a decade apart, and insisting they don't care about each other, Texas and Texas A&M will play again in 2024.

When it comes to last-gorounds, the saddest will be in the Pac-12, which is simultaneously on the brink of extinction while also primed to be maybe the most competitive and entertaining conference in college football this year.

Heisman Trophy winner Caleb Williams and coach Lincoln Riley have No. 6 Southern California swaggering again.

"I think coaching or playing at USC is one of the great responsibilities in our sport," Riley said during Pac-12 media day. "This is the program that is so important to the sport, to the success of football on the West Coast in general, and has such a great history."



The Oregon football team walks through a tunnel before a game against South Dakota in Eugene, Oregon in 2014. RYAN KANG/AP

USC along with No. 10 Washington, No. 15 Oregon and UCLA, coming off consecutive winning seasons seasons under Chip Kelly, are moving to the Big Ten in 2024. Arizona, Arizona State, Colorado and Utah are bound for the Big 12.

The Big Ten's poaching of the Pac-12 to create a bicoastal conference has many in college sports questioning if what's good for television networks that pay billions for the rights to broadcast football is in line with what's good for the athletes. Especially those who don't play football.

"This thing was driven by money and by football and to say these decisions benefit the student-athletes, in most cases, I'm not sure I believe that," said Brian Polian, a longtime major college football coach who left LSU this offseason to become athletic director at Division III John Carroll University in Ohio.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF

For more than a century, major college football vigorously resisted using a playoff to decide a champion.

Then it took less than a decade for the first playoff to expand. Year 10 of the CFP will be the final one with only four teams compet-

ing for a title before the 12-team format is implemented in 2024.

The days of one bad game potentially ruining a team's title hopes are going away. There will be fewer winner-take-all moments, but some see upside.

"I felt like there was much to be gained in the regular season because there were going to be more schools at the midpoint in the year that had a legitimate chance to say they were in the playoff hunt," said Bowlsby, one of the architects of the new playoff format.

Do you love classic rivalries such as Michigan-Ohio State and Alabama-Auburn? Will you like them as much when they can be played two or even three times in a season? Maybe in back-to-back weeks?

In division-less super conferences, the odds of that happening go way up starting in 2024.

COLLEGIATE MODEL

NCAA and college sports leaders continue to push for congressional help with regulating the way athletes can be compensated for use of their names, images and likenesses.

There has been at least some momentum toward action on Capitol Hill in recent months. The NCAA is also working on

its own NIL rules in case the politicians don't come through.

One way or another, there will likely be some attempt to regulate NIL and booster-funded collectives next year.

Managing NIL could be nothing compared to having major college football players, whose sport generates billions that fuel all of college athletics, legally deemed employees. For some, the days of major college football players being paid can't get here soon enough.

"To say we're going to stretch out their season, we're going to expand the playoff, but still we're not sharing in the revenue with the student-athletes?" Polian said. "When billions of dollars are being made we have to figure out a way to share revenue with the people that are earning the money. Name, image and likeness was not intended to be the answer."

All this change on the horizon has some fans uneasy about the future of the sport they love.

Davis isn't too worried. "Once the games start, except for moments of wistfulness among certain fanbases and certain broadcasters or journalists ... it's not going to matter," Davis said. "Because the games are going to be a great as they have ever been."

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PICK SIX:

Marquee games abound with must-win showdowns late in season

By HANK KURZ Jr.
Associated Press

The college football schedule offers a weekly selection of marquee games between top teams and some would-be contenders will get an early chance to shine.

Two games that will impact the AP Top 25 quickly: No. 5 LSU playing No. 8 Florida State in Orlando, Florida, on Sept. 3 and No. 4 Alabama hosting No. 11 Texas on Sept. 9 in a preview of SEC games to come.

An early loss in an ambitious nonconference opener isn't an automatic death knell for a program's championship hopes. The virtual playoff elimination games come later when conference rivals in position for one of four playoff spots go head to head.

As Bobby Bowden quipped after No. 2 Florida State lost a November game at Virginia in 1995, "The national championship thing sorts itself out. Tonight, it sorted us out."

Some don't-miss games on the schedule this year (using AP Top 25 preseason rankings):

8 FLORIDA STATE at 9 CLEMSON, Sept. 23

The resurgent Seminoles have lost seven in a row against the Tigers, who long ago supplanted them as the marquee team in the Atlantic Coast Conference.

This Florida State team under Mike Norvell returns 15 starters from last year's 10-3 version and has designs on its first playoff appearance since 2014. The Tigers have missed the playoff two years running and are hoping new quarterback Cade Klubnick, a sophomore who led them to the ACC championship

last season, can re-ignite the offense, now led by offensive coordinator Garrett Riley.

5 LSU at 4 ALABAMA, Nov. 4

This could decide the West Division title in the Southeastern Conference and the Crimson Tide have every reason to have circled this one on the schedule. Last year, they lost to the Tigers 32-31, the difference a stopped a two-point conversion try in the fourth quarter.

Brian Kelly has brought the Tigers back to relevance, but Alabama's Nick Saban hasn't won seven national championships — the first at LSU in 2003 and the last six at Alabama — by failing to have his team ready for its biggest challenges.

10 WASHINGTON at 6 USC, Nov. 4

The Trojans will already have faced Notre Dame in South Bend and two-time defending Pac-12 champion Utah when they host the Huskies a week before they play at Oregon. The Huskies have an easier run-up, with only Oregon as a ranked foe, but their schedule gets tougher starting with their first visit to the LA Coliseum since 2015.

This could also have an impact on the Heisman Trophy race with USC's QB Caleb Williams, last year's winner, and Huskies QB Michael Penix Jr. expected to be among the contenders.

11 TEXAS at 17 TCU, Nov. 11

The Horned Frogs stated their case as a program to be reckoned with last season, beating Michigan in the national semifinals before getting



LSU head coach Brian Kelly disputes a call during the first half against Ole Miss on Oct. 22, 2022 in Baton Rouge, La. MATTHEW HINTON/AP

blown out by Georgia in the title game. The Longhorns are favored to end their last season in the Big 12 as its champion, but they haven't raised that trophy since 2009.

1 GEORGIA at 12 TENNESSEE, Nov. 18

The two-time defending national champion Bulldogs will have faced only one team ranked in the preseason in No. 22 Ole Miss (Nov. 11) when

they arrive the following Saturday at Neyland Stadium to face the Volunteers and more than 100,000 supporters. The Vols won't have Hendon Hooker behind center when they try to payback Georgia for last season's loss in Athens.

3 OHIO STATE at 2 MICHIGAN, Nov. 25

This becomes huge if both the Buckeyes and Wolverines get past Big Ten title contender

No. 7 Penn State. Jim Harbaugh's Wolverines will be looking for their third consecutive win in the series, and the first two come by an average of 18.5 points.

The Buckeyes won the national championship in 2015 but are 1-4 in the playoff since and followed their only win by getting blown out in the 2021 title game by Alabama. Michigan has reached the last two playoffs and lost both times.

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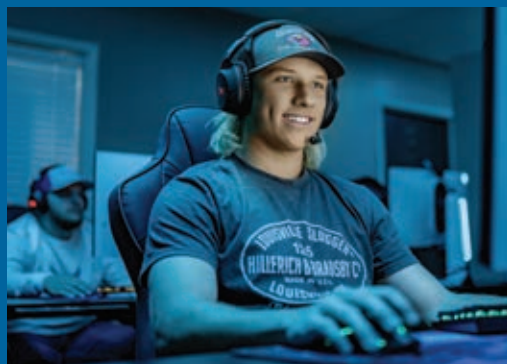
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OFFENSE

Continued from Page B4

Acklin said Mountain Home boasts at least four tailbacks in senior Chris Hubbard (5-9, 200), junior Jacob Chenoweth (6-0, 180), sophomore Barrett Miller (5-9, 170) and senior Justin Rula (5-7, 180).

"Hubbard has really come on at taking over the tailback position," Acklin said. "He's much stronger and quicker this year. He's confident in the weight room. Chenoweth is our number two."

Chenoweth, a returning starter, has also moved to slot receiver this season. Miller could eventually be the fastest player to ever don pads for the Bombers.

"Barrett Miller is our number three," Acklin said. "He's a sophomore, but he's not built like a sophomore. He has speed and natural instincts that you look for. Rula, a senior, has taken some snaps and has great vision tackle to tackle."

Receivers

Senior Jett Hannaford (6-2, 175) leads the receiving corps after racking up 391 receiving yards on 28 catches last season.

"He played baseball this summer, but we've had our hands on him a lot more this summer," Acklin said.

Acklin said junior Talan Palmer (6-1, 155) and sophomore Carter Adkins (6-1, 170) are battling at the 'H' position. Adkins showed out with eight catches for 94

yards in the Bombers' preseason game Friday at Jonesboro.

"They're both athletic, and Palmer has been with us for a year," Acklin said.

Senior Anthony Milbourne (6-3, 200) is a returning starter at the 'Z' position after catching 14 passes for 242 yards last year.

"He's one of those guys we look at man-on-man," Acklin said. "We have confidence in him."

Senior Corwin Morris (6-4, 220) is Mountain Home's largest target.

"The 'Y' is kind of a tight end, and we can use Corwin as a Travis Kelce type," Acklin said. "He knows the system, and he's worked enough in the weight room. We haven't had a true attached 'Y' since (Dawson) Tabor graduated a couple years ago."

Mountain Home has as much depth at receiver as it does in the backfield.

"Rula can work in there, and (Landon) Peoples, we call him Mr. Utility," Acklin said. "Guys like Chenoweth, Miller and Palmer will be playing both ways, so we'll have a rotation to keep our legs fresh. If you have guys who know the whole diamond, you can keep the same ones out there and not have to sub in four new guys for a package and do multi-formations without subbing."

Offensive line

Big junior Caleb Perdue (6-5, 275) is the only returning starter on the offensive line.

"Perdue was our center last year as a pup,"



Mountain Home sophomore receiver Carter Adkins catches a touchdown against Jonesboro last Friday.

Acklin said. "Now, we've moved him to left tackle.

He's still a growing boy and a huge man. He's tall

with length and good foot work. And he's smart."

Junior Eli Jones (5-11, 215) is projected at left guard and sophomore Nathan Yarborough (5-11, 245) is the starting center.

"Eli has taken a lot of reps in the two years he's been with us," Acklin said. "Newcomer Yarborough is one of the strongest kids in the weight room, so he can handle himself on Friday nights. He's also very coachable. The coaches told us he had zero bad snaps in junior high."

Senior Gray Padgett (6-0, 220) and junior Eston Ford (6-3, 230) toil on the right side of the line.

"Padgett's worked really hard to take a starting spot at right guard," Acklin said. "He's swelled up in the weight room. Our guys look different because of our offseason program. Ford at right tackle is another tall, lanky, long-armed guy who's worked hard in the weight room. Those four new starters are getting better every day, we just need to get a little more physical and used to the 6A-West speed."

Mountain Home officially opens at Nettleton on Friday, and the Bombers host Harrison on Sept. 1.

"All around we had the best offseason we've ever had here," Acklin said. "We're not walking in with a bunch of injured guys either. We've walked into the Harrison game already playing number-tuos and it doesn't work out too well."



Mountain Home's Chris Hubbard takes a handoff from quarterback Cade Yates against Jonesboro last week. PHOTOS BY NEAL DENTON/THE BAXTER BULLETIN

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DEFENSE

Continued from Page B6

“Those two are long, strong and run well. They’re hard to block,” Ary said. “I told Aiden, ‘you’re going to get a lot of action, dude.’ He’s big enough to hang on and do the job. We have quality defensive ends.”

On the interior will be junior Noah Greninger (5-11, 265) and senior Parker Reed (6-0, 225).

“Greninger is our biggest guy,” Ary said. “He’s been a pleasant surprise. He wasn’t a starter or even a number two last year. He’s come out of the woodwork with a great offseason. His motor is better than it used to be. Parker was always an offensive player, but he’s made some plays and put on some weight and is shining on defense.”

Linebackers

Ary describes the Bombers’ linebacking corps as “small and not very fast.”

The group could surprise some people, however, as it is led by the team’s returning leading tackler.

“Our DBs are bigger than our linebackers,” Ary said. “We have a guy who plays really hard in Ty Hannaford. He had 124 tackles last year.”

Seniors Justin Rula (5-7, 180) and Maddox Carney (5-10, 175) also toil at linebacker.

“Justin Rula has a lot of snaps under his belt,” Ary said. “Maddox Carney started like the last four games for us last year, so he’s back with some experience. Those three aren’t very big, but it’s an experienced group.”

Ary said it will be important to keep his defense fresh with substitutions. Brenton Setzer and Caden DelSoto will play linebacker, and Eli Jones will play some defensive line, Ary said.

“Our biggest thing right now is just to shed blocks and get off the big bodies,” he said. “We’ll try to keep some fresh bodies on the field.”



Mountain Home’s Noah Greninger attempts to sack Jonesboro quarterback Terrance Brown last Friday.

Special teams

Good hands and good feet can go a long way.

The Bombers found out last season how important special teams are against teams like Pulaski Academy.

Ary said the team’s kick return game should be stronger this season with added speed.

“We really like our return

game,” he said. “We’re just more athletic than we’ve been. Jett Hannaford has done a good job in the return game for us. (Sophomores) Barrett Miller and Carter Adkins are guys who can run, and Jacob Chenoweth. Those four guys will handle the bulk of that, kick return and punt return.”

Senior Kelso Haught is the primary placekicker, with junior

Ethan Clark backing him up.

“Kelso has the nod right now. He’s a senior and has a stronger leg,” Ary said.

Sophomore back-up quarterback Brantlee Phillips is the team’s starting punter.

“Brantlee is a dandy we’ll have for three years at punter,” offensive coordinator Darin Acklin said. “He has a thunder foot and

is learning how to be accurate.”

Ary and Acklin said Phillips reminds them a lot of Brady Barnett, another quarterback that turned into a solid punter.

“Brantlee will punt, and Aidan Shrable and Corwin Morris are competing for snapping responsibilities,” Ary said. “We’ll fill in around them with guys who can run and block.”



Mountain Home’s Kelso Haught kicks off against Jonesboro on Friday. PHOTOS BY NEAL DENTON/THE BAXTER BULLETIN

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