

# LOCAL SPORTS Journal

**FREE**

**PREP FOOTBALL PREVIEW 2019**

**GREAT RIVALRY, GREAT QBs**

*Muskegon's Cameron Martinez, Mona Shores' Caden Broersma keeping the tradition alive*

*Previews of 22 area  
varsity football teams*



# LOCAL SPORTS Journal



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Every season LSJ's talented and dedicated crew of volunteer photographers capture the excitement of high school football - and most of them have taken a few nasty hits on the sidelines as they hunted for the great shots.

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**Fremont**  
 8/29 vs Ludington  
 9/6 at Reed City  
 9/13 Big Rapids  
 9/20 at Central Montcalm  
 9/27 at Newaygo  
 10/4 Grant  
 10/11 at Tri County  
 10/18 Chippewa Hills  
 10/25 at Lakeview

**Fruitport**  
 8/29 Forest Hills Eastern  
 9/6 at Spring Lake  
 9/13 Jenison  
 9/20 at Grand Rapids Union  
 9/27 at Muskegon  
 10/4 Grand Rapids Kenowa Hills  
 10/11 at Reeths-Puffer  
 10/18 Coopersville  
 10/25 Mona Shores

**Grand Haven**  
 8/29 Reeths-Puffer  
 9/6 at Traverse City West  
 9/13 at Hudsonville  
 9/20 Grandville  
 9/27 at Rockford  
 10/4 at East Kentwood  
 10/11 Caledonia  
 10/18 Holland West Ottawa  
 10/25 at Grand Rapids Union

**Hesperia**  
 8/30 North Muskegon  
 9/6 at Ludington  
 9/13 at Holton  
 9/20 White Cloud  
 9/27 at Lakeview  
 10/4 at Kent City  
 10/11 Morley Stanwood  
 10/18 Orchard View  
 10/25 at Shelby

**Hart**  
 8/29 Holton  
 9/6 Whitehall  
 9/13 at Mason County Central  
 9/20 at Montague  
 9/27 North Muskegon  
 10/4 at Oakridge  
 10/11 at Ravenna  
 10/18 Shelby  
 10/25 at White Cloud

**Holton**  
 8/29 at Hart  
 9/6 Carson City Crystal  
 9/13 Hesperia  
 9/20 at Morley Stanwood  
 9/27 at White Cloud  
 10/4 at Lakeview  
 10/11 Kent City  
 10/18 at Perry  
 10/25 Tri County

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# 2019 HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL SCHEDULES

**Kent City**  
 8/30 at Newaygo  
 9/6 Orchard View  
 9/13 at White Cloud  
 9/20 Lakeview  
 9/27 Morley Stanwood  
 10/4 Hesperia  
 10/11 at Holton  
 10/18 at Calvin Christian  
 10/25 at Grant

**Ludington**  
 8/29 at Fremont  
 9/6 Hesperia  
 9/13 at Manistee  
 9/20 Muskegon Catholic  
 9/27 Muskegon Heights  
 10/4 at Orchard View  
 10/11 Wyoming Lee  
 10/18 at Sault Ste Marie  
 10/25 Mason County Central

**Mason County Central**  
 8/29 at Manistee  
 9/6 Montague  
 9/13 Hart  
 9/20 at Oakridge  
 9/27 at Ravenna  
 10/4 Shelby  
 10/11 at Whitehall  
 10/18 North Muskegon  
 10/25 at Ludington

**Mona Shores**  
 8/30 East Kentwood  
 9/6 at Bay City Central  
 9/13 Reeths-Puffer  
 9/20 Rockford  
 9/27 at Kenowa Hills  
 10/4 at Grand Rapids Union  
 10/11 Jenison  
 10/18 Muskegon  
 10/25 at Fruitport

**Montague**  
 8/30 Reed City  
 9/6 at Mason County Central  
 9/13 at North Muskegon  
 9/20 Hart  
 9/27 Oakridge  
 10/4 Ravenna  
 10/11 at Shelby  
 10/18 at Whitehall  
 10/25 Portland

**Muskegon**  
 8/30 at Warren De La Salle  
 9/6 at Detroit Martin Luther King  
 9/13 East Grand Rapids  
 9/20 Grand Rapids Kenowa Hills  
 9/27 Fruitport  
 10/4 at Jenison  
 10/11 Grand Rapids Union  
 10/18 at Mona Shores  
 10/25 at Reeths-Puffer

**Muskegon Catholic**  
 8/29 Algonac  
 9/6 at Pontiac Notre Dame Prep  
 9/13 Orchard View  
 9/20 at Ludington  
 10/4 at Muskegon Heights  
 10/11 Manistee  
 10/18 at Benton Harbor  
 10/25 at Godwin Heights

**Muskegon Heights**  
 8/29 at Potterville  
 9/6 Breckenridge  
 9/13 at NorthPointe Christian  
 9/20 at Manistee  
 9/27 at Ludington  
 10/4 Muskegon Catholic  
 10/11 Orchard View  
 10/18 at Lenawee Christian  
 10/25 Ravenna

**North Muskegon**  
 8/30 at Hesperia  
 9/6 Ravenna  
 9/13 Montague  
 9/20 at Shelby  
 9/27 at Hart  
 10/4 Whitehall  
 10/11 Oakridge  
 10/18 at Mason County Central  
 10/25 at Orchard View

**Oakridge**  
 8/29 at Belding  
 9/6 Shelby  
 9/13 at Whitehall  
 9/20 Mason County Central  
 9/27 at Montague  
 10/4 Hart  
 10/11 at North Muskegon  
 10/18 Ravenna  
 10/25 Traverse City St. Francis

**Orchard View**  
 8/29 Spring Lake  
 9/6 at Kent City  
 9/13 at Muskegon Catholic  
 9/20 at Belding  
 9/27 Manistee  
 10/4 Ludington  
 10/11 at Muskegon Heights  
 10/18 at Hesperia  
 10/25 North Muskegon

**Ravenna**  
 8/29 Hopkins  
 9/6 at North Muskegon  
 9/13 Shelby  
 9/20 at Whitehall  
 9/27 Mason County Central  
 10/4 at Montague  
 10/11 Hart  
 10/18 at Oakridge  
 10/25 at Muskegon Heights

**Reeths-Puffer**  
 8/29 at Grand Haven  
 9/6 Grand Rapids South Christian  
 9/13 at Mona Shores  
 9/20 at Jenison  
 9/27 at Grand Rapids Union  
 10/4 Greenville  
 10/11 Fruitport  
 10/18 Grand Rapids Kenowa Hills  
 10/25 Muskegon

**Shelby**  
 8/29 Grant  
 9/6 at Oakridge  
 9/13 at Ravenna  
 9/20 North Muskegon  
 9/27 Whitehall  
 10/4 at Mason County Central  
 10/11 Montague  
 10/18 at Hart  
 10/25 Hesperia

**Spring Lake**  
 8/29 at Orchard View  
 9/6 Fruitport  
 9/13 at Sparta  
 9/20 at Coopersville  
 9/27 Comstock Park  
 10/4 GR West Catholic  
 10/11 GR Catholic Central  
 10/18 at Allendale  
 10/25 Holland Christian

**Whitehall**  
 8/29 at Parma Western  
 9/6 at Hart  
 9/13 Oakridge  
 9/20 Ravenna  
 9/27 at Shelby  
 10/4 at North Muskegon  
 10/11 Mason County Central  
 10/18 Montague  
 10/25 at Montrose



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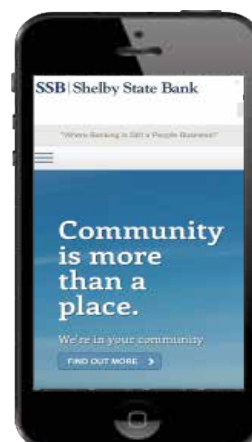
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# GREAT RIVALRY GREAT QBs

## Big Reds' Martinez, Shores' Broersma keeping tradition alive

By Steve Gunn  
LocalSportsJournal.com

In recent years, the annual Muskegon-Mona Shores game has become a huge rivalry, with the winner walking off with local bragging rights, and usually the O-K Black Conference championship.

And the game usually boils down to a showdown between two great quarterbacks.

Last season was no exception. Muskegon led 41-35 after three quarters, then sealed up a 55-35 victory at Hackley Stadium with two fourth quarter touchdowns.

Muskegon quarterback Cameron Martinez had an amazing game, rushing for 352 yards and six touchdowns, including a 44-yard scoring burst with under two minutes left to put the game out of reach.



**Cameron Martinez**

Mona Shores quarterback Caden Broersma was also outstanding, passing for 96 yards and one touchdown, and rushing for 63 yards and a touchdown.

Both All-State QBs were juniors in 2018, and both are back this season. They will have their final head-to-head matchup on Oct. 18 at Sailor Stadium, when the O-K Black Conference championship could be on the line again.

Mark that date on your calendar and get there early, cause there's bound to be a big crowd.

Younger fans may not know it, but for years the Muskegon-Mona Shores game was not a very big rivalry at all. In fact it was a one-sided affair.

Mona Shores has had a football team since 1962, but for years it wasn't very successful. In 49 seasons of football, from 1962 through 2010, the Sailors only posted winning records 15 times. Before 2013, they were only one of two local high school teams to never qualify for the state playoffs.

Against the Big Reds, things were really bad. Mona Shores is 7-31 all-time against Muskegon. Prior to 2014, the last time the Sailors beat Muskegon was 1982.

But the situation started to change radically in 2011, when former Muskegon coach

Matt Koziak took over the Sailors and installed a 13-year-old freshman - Tyree Jackson - as the starting quarterback.

Winning did not come overnight. The Sailors were 1-8 in 2011 and 4-5 in 2012. Then in 2013 they went 7-3 and made the playoffs for the first time in school history, and in 2014 posted a 12-2 mark, beat Muskegon, and advanced all the way to the Division 2 state finals.

Since 2013 Mona Shores has been in the playoffs five of six seasons, and made it all the way back to the state finals last year, before losing to Warren De La Salle.

Over the last few years, Mona Shores has maintained its excellence, and the rivalry with Muskegon has gained luster and importance.

Muskegon has a 5-2 edge in the rivalry since 2012, but most of the games have been great - and most have included terrific quarterback performances.

In 2013, Muskegon quarterback DeShaun Thrower rushed for 131 yards and passed for 70 in the Big Reds' 26-10 victory.

In 2014, Jackson threw for 197 yards and three touchdowns and rushed for 134 yards and two scores in Mona Shores' groundbreaking 48-27 win over the Big Reds at hostile Hackley Stadium.

In 2017, Muskegon quarterback La'darius Jefferson rushed for 290 yards and four touchdowns in a 35-24 win.

### Shores' turnaround started at QB

It's no coincidence that Mona Shores rose to prominence, and started giving the Big

Reds a run for their money, when the play at quarterback improved, with a series of great passers running the offense.

It started with Jackson, who held the job for four seasons before going on to star at the University of Buffalo.

Jackson passed the job on to Tyler Trovinger, who posted big passing numbers, beat Muskegon and took the team to the playoffs. Then came Tristan Robbins, an undersized two-year starter who was supposed to be the backup in 2015, but inherited the job when the projected starter injured his collarbone in the preseason. Robbins was very good for two seasons, leading the Sailors to the playoffs in his senior year.

Last year the duty fell to Broersma, who led the Sailors all the way back to the state finals in his first year under center. He maintained the QB tradition in style, throwing for 1,791 yards and 17 touchdowns and running for 1,011 yards and 17 touchdowns.

So how do the Sailors keep ending up with great quarterbacks in the Koziak era, when they didn't have too many good ones in all the decades prior to that?

It's a matter of careful selection and high standards, according to Coach Koziak.

"We have a criteria we want to meet for kids who we want at quarterback," Koziak said. "They have to be able to outwork everybody, and be the first guy in and out of the weight room. They have to have high character. I think our last few quarterbacks have all had 3.5 (grade point averages) or better. They obviously have to be good athletes, but there are more intangibles to it than that."

### Big Reds' QB tradition

Of course Big Reds football history is littered with great quarterbacks, which is not surprising, since Muskegon has won 18 state championships. The list is led by the great Earl Morrall, who went on to play 21 years as an NFL quarterback and appeared in two Pro Bowls and one Super Bowl.

The Big Reds have had an amazing run in recent years, advancing to the state finals at Ford Field for six of the past seven seasons - 2012, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017 and 2018.

Not coincidentally, Muskegon had a great quarterback each of those seasons.

It was Jalen Smith in 2012, Thrower (who led Ferris State to the NCAA Division 2 national finals last year) in 2013, Shawn Pfenning in 2014, Kalil Pimpleton (currently playing at Central Michigan University) in 2016, and Jefferson (currently playing for Michigan State University) in 2018.

Last season the job fell to Martinez, a transfer from Muskegon Catholic Central, and he used his amazing running skills to lead the Big Reds back to Ford Field, where they lost to powerful Detroit Martin Luther King in the Division 3 state finals.

Martinez, who recently committed to play college football at Ohio State University, rushed for 2,526 yards and 38 touchdowns on 258 carries. Both were Muskegon school records.

Muskegon Coach Shane Fairfield, like Koziak, acknowledges that having the right quarterback is a fundamental building block of a successful team.

"It's the toughest job in the stadium on any given night," Fairfield said. "The young quarterback who can handle the big crowd, the lights and the pressure is usually the quarterback that wins the game."

So how do the Big Reds keep coming up with great quarterbacks, year after year? Fairfield said it's a matter of properly training prospective QBs as they come through the system. He also said the school's great quarterback tradition tends to perpetuate itself.

"Muskegon has had a Mr. Football (top player in the state) finalist four of the last six years, and they've all been quarterbacks," Fairfield said, referring to Thrower, Pimpleton, Jefferson and Martinez. "Young kids look up and see that, and they say 'That's the position I want to play.' They aspire to that."



**Caden Broersma**



# Martinez: Just tell him it can't be done

By Steve Gunn  
LocalSportsJournal.com

When you tell Cameron Martinez he can't do something, you can probably count on him getting it done.

There were probably a few people who thought he would run into trouble during his freshman year at Muskegon Catholic Central, particularly when he was the starting quarterback in the Division 8 state championship game.

MCC won the game and the state title, and Martinez was the hero.

Then a year ago, when Martinez transferred from tiny MCC to big school Muskegon to become the Big Reds' quarterback, there were apparently some people who doubted his ability to make the transition.

They were mistaken. Martinez set new Muskegon single season records for rushing yards (2,526) and rushing touchdowns (38), led the Big Reds to an undefeated regular season and an overall 13-1 record, and was a finalist for the Mr. Football award, which goes to the outstanding player in the state.

He said the doubters gave him extra desire to succeed at the higher level, where the players are bigger and faster and the opposition is more talented.

"The word for it is motivated," said Martinez, who is starting his senior year. "Just hearing from a lot of people - a lot of them didn't think I could do it, they didn't think it would be like it was at Catholic -



just motivated me to prove all of them wrong. That was my mantra all season, and we had a really good year.

"There really wasn't too much of a difference. It was definitely more physical, like when we played De La Salle and their linebackers were really good, but there wasn't anything I couldn't handle. I adjusted well to it."

To say that Martinez knows how to deal with pressure and answer doubters is an understatement.

At Muskegon Catholic he was following immediately in the footsteps of his older brother, Christian Martinez, a senior who quarterbacked the Crusaders to a state title in 2015, a year before Cameron arrived as a ninth-grader and took over the job.

But he says that situation actually inspired him, because he wanted to keep pace with his brother.

"Our household is really competitive," Martinez said. "With him winning three state titles, it has definitely motivated me."

He was also under the gun to keep an amazing winning streak intact. Muskegon Catholic had won three straight Division 8 state titles going into the 2016 state title game, and everyone was hungry for another one.



Martinez admits that walking into Detroit's Ford Field as a freshman quarterback made him shudder for a moment. But it obviously didn't get the best of him, because he stole the show by rushing for 154 yards and a touchdown, and throwing for another 61 yards and a touchdown, to lead the Crusaders to a 35-6 victory over Ottawa Lake Whiteford.

"There were definitely a lot of nerves going on when that started, but once we got going it was just another game," he said.

At Muskegon, the challenge went beyond those whose questioned his ability to make the jump. He was following in the footsteps of star quarterback Ladarius Jefferson, who led the Big Reds to a state championship in 2017 before moving on to play at Michigan State University.

Before that there was Kalil Pimpleton, who took Muskegon to the state finals in 2016. Before that there were Shaun Pfenning, De-Shawn Thrower and many other great ones.

Every fan in Big Red Nation must have wondered if the star quarterback from the



small school could deliver the goods at the big school. He had huge shoes to fill, and he knew it.

"A little bit, I would say, knowing that I wanted to keep the legacy going," said Martinez, when asked if he was nervous about filling a whole bunch of big shoes. "All those quarterbacks were really good, and I wanted to do the same."

You can decide for yourself how he did.

In Week 1 he gained the attention of the entire state by rushing for an amazing 290 yards and five touchdowns in the Big Reds' 36-21 win over perennial power Warren De La Salle.

The next week, he rallied the Big Reds downfield and scored the winning touchdown with 1:22 remaining against another state power, Detroit Martin Luther King. Martinez rushed for 154 yards and two touchdowns in the 24-21 victory.

In Week 3 he ran for 180 yards and two touchdowns in a 49-21 win over East Grand Rapids. In Week 4 he showed off his passing skills by completing 9 of 10 throws for 193 yards and three touchdowns in a 73-14 win over Kenowa Hills.

In the sixth game, a 49-7 win over Jenison, Martinez ran for 126 yards on five carries with three TDS.

He peaked in the Week 8 rivalry showdown against undefeated Mona Shores. In front

of a packed house at Hackley Stadium, he broke loose for 352 yards and six touchdowns, including a 44-yard scoring burst with under two minutes left to put the game out of reach.

Martinez admitted that game was special for him, partly because his old school, Muskegon Catholic, used to have a huge annual rivalry game against Mona Shores, but that ended before he reached varsity.

"It was the deciding factor as far as who was the best team in the area last year," he said about the 2018 game. "It usually comes down to us or Mona Shores, and it just turned out to be a really good game. I was excited, there was a big crowd, and it was my first time playing Shores. I finally got my chance last year and it was a fun game."

Martinez wrapped up the regular season with 15 carries for 151 yards in a 62-12 victory over Reeths-Puffer.

In the playoffs, the junior quarterback was just as dominant, even as the competition got stiffer.

In a rematch against East Grand Rapids he rushed for 250 yards and threw for 81. Against Grand Rapids Christian he rushed for 301 yards and scored four touchdowns.

Against Cedar Springs he rushed for 180 of his 222 yards in the second half, including two long touchdown runs in the pivotal third quarter. Against Zeeland East in the state semifinals, he rushed for 112 yards and two touchdowns in the first quarter, before suffering a bruised leg that slowed him a bit before halftime.

Martinez is the first to admit that he was far from alone in helping the Big Reds to a perfect record through 13 weeks. On offense, skill players like Jeremiah Lockhart and Demario Robinson also put up big numbers, and Muskegon's massive offensive line played a huge role.

But he certainly played the leading role. As Muskegon head coach Shane Fairfield simply summed up Martinez' performance, "He was fun to watch."

The fun ended in the Division 3 state finals, in a rematch against Detroit King. Martinez played well, rushing for 211 yards and two touchdowns, but it was not quite enough in a 41-25 loss. It ended a 27-game win streak for Muskegon, and its bid for a second consecutive state title.

So Martinez was faced with another huge challenge, and this time didn't quite get it done. But he has another shot this season, and it's never smart to bet against him when he's determined to achieve a goal.

"I still have a bad taste in my mouth," said Martinez, who is expected to play other positions besides quarterback this year, on both offense and defense, to maximize his impact. "There were a couple of plays on offense and defense we missed. We were just a couple of plays away from winning. We were playing a really good football team, and there were a lot of opportunities that we just couldn't miss."

"I learned a lot and grew as a player in that game. The good news is we get to play them again in the regular season, and possibly in the state title game. That gives me a lot of motivation again. I don't want to end with a loss like last year."



# Broersma: Playing to a higher standard

By Steve Gunn  
LocalSportsJournal.com

Way back in 2005 and 2006, when he was very young, Caden Broersma was rooting for the Muskegon Catholic Central football team.

That's because his oldest brother, Nathan Broersma, transferred from Mona Shores to MCC as a junior, probably to get the chance to play for a winner. Catholic was always very good, and Mona Shores did not win very much in those days.

Forward to 2013, when Caden was in the sixth grade and was once again attending Mona Shores varsity games and rooting for the Sailors. His other brother, Hunter Broersma, was a promising sophomore on a vastly improved Mona Shores squad that qualified for the state playoffs for the first time in school history.

A year later, Caden and his seventh-grade buddies watched in amazement as the varsity beat Muskegon for the first time in years, won the O-K Black Conference title, and advanced all the way to the Division 2 state finals.

The young Sailors of the future learned that losing was not inevitable. A much higher standard had been set for them, and they were determined to live up to it.

Forward to 2018, when Caden and his classmates finally got their chance to put their own mark on the Mona Shores varsity, after watching the team post winning records for five straight seasons and establish itself as a legitimate state power.

They made the most of their opportunity, posting an 8-1 regular season record, going back to the

playoffs and making it to the state finals for the second time in school history. Their luck ran out at Ford Field, when they lost 29-16 to perennial power Warren De La Salle, but the season was still one of the best in school history.

"My seventh-grade year was when I really fell in love with football, when (the varsity) made a run to Ford Field and won the conference," Broersma said. "That's when my goals became clearer. I watched my brother succeed and I wanted to do the same thing. Now our mindset is to continue to do it, season in and season out. It's a goal now."

Broersma was at the center of all the winning, taking over as the starting quarterback and showing incredible skill through the air and on the ground. He passed for 1,791 yards and 17 touchdowns, rushed for 1,011 yards and 17 touchdowns, and won All-State honors.

That was exactly what head coach Matt Koziak and his staff had in mind for Broersma for several years. Despite his obvious talent and physical abilities, they let him develop slowly and naturally, quarterbacking the freshman team as a ninth-grader and the junior varsity as a sophomore.

He was called up to varsity for the state playoffs as a sophomore, and was immediately promoted to backup quarterback, behind senior standout Tristan Robbins. The writing was on the wall, Broersma was the heir-apparent, and he more than lived up to expectations when his time finally arrived last season.

"He really impressed me with how he handled big games," Koziak said. "The thing I was most impressed with, he had only two turnovers in 14 games. That shows how he managed games, didn't force stuff, and took care of the football."

"He knows our system, executes it and thinks fast. He made tons of plays after the original play broke down and he had to improvise. He's a very intelligent kid."

While everything seemed to fall into place for Broersma last season, the truth is that he faced a lot of pressure and challenges.

Unlike his brother and the previous Sailors, who were heroes for breathing life into a losing program,

Broersma and his teammates were tasked with keeping a winning program on the right track. That's never as easy as it sometimes looks.

Broersma was also following in the footsteps of a string of great Mona Shores quarterbacks, starting with the amazing Tyree Jackson, who took the team to the state finals for the first time in 2014, became a star at the University of Buffalo, and has been in training camp this summer with the NFL's Buffalo Bills.

Tyler Trovinger started for one season after Jackson graduated and helped his team beat Muskegon once again and advance to the second round of the playoffs. Robbins followed for two seasons and peaked his senior year, leading the Sailors to the playoffs.

By then Mona Shores fans were accustomed to watching great quarterback play, and all eyes were on Broersma.

But Broersma said the expectations really didn't bother him.

"Honestly, I wasn't really pressured by that," he said. "Our first four games I was kind of timid and was just trying not to make mistakes, but after that I just kind of relaxed and played ball. It was just a matter of my confidence growing game by game. I just got used to the faster speed of the game, and experience made me more comfortable as we went along."

The Sailor offense also faced the need to score a lot of points, week in and week out, because the Mona Shores defense gave up a lot of points. But Broersma said that didn't bother him, either, and the offense proved up to the task, setting a new single-season school record for points with 609 (an average of 43.5 per game).



"We just had confidence," he said. "Everybody on offense knew we could play with anybody, score at any point, and literally take over a game. Nobody was going to stop us - but sometimes the score was really up there."

Perhaps the biggest challenge for the Sailors last season were injuries, particularly on offense. Before the season star wide receiver Demari Roberson was lost with an ACL injury. In the first game slot receiver Keyshawn Sandifer went down and missed several games. About midway through the regular season, star running back Sincere Dent was hobbled by a knee injury that limited his effectiveness for the rest of the campaign.

Broersma admits all the injuries did indeed bring some pressure, but he was thrilled and relieved when numerous other Sailors stepped up to fill roles, did a great job, and helped the team keep winning.

The best example was wide receiver James Gilbert, who set a new school record for receiving yards in Roberson's absence.

"That was pressure for sure, not being able to play up to our full potential with those guys out," he said. "But at Shores, the mentality is always next man up. James Gilbert was not supposed to be the man, and he turned out to be amazing. When Sandifer went down, sophomore Keondre Pierce really stepped up. We just kept on rolling."

Broersma enters his senior season with a definite agenda. While he had a great junior season by any measure, the fact is that the Sailors lost their two biggest games of the 2018 campaign.

The first was a showdown against Muskegon for the O-K Black Conference championship. The game was close after three quarters, but the Big Reds scored two late touchdowns to seal up the victory.

"That's like our in-season Super Bowl," Broersma said. "Thinking back on it, it does hurt. There are plays I could have done something about. It leaves a chip on your shoulder until you play them again. You have to wait a full year, and I only get one more shot."

His other regret was the tough 29-16 loss to De La Salle in the state finals.

Broersma admits getting to the state title game in his first year on varsity was a definite thrill - but losing was definitely a downer.

His brother experienced that feeling in 2014, when Mona Shores also lost to De La Salle in the finals. Broersma would like to establish a family first, and a school first, by going back and getting a victory.

Broersma will get a late start this season, because he broke a bone in his right hand in the preseason, but he's expected back by Week 3, and is determined to pick up where he left off.

"You kind of look back at all the work you did, a whole year of it leading up to that game, and it ends in an L," he said about the state final loss. "That doesn't sit right."

"It was a great season. We were super successful, scored the most points in school history and got all the accolades, but in the end we came up short. The only thing we want to do is go back and win it this time."





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# FREEMONT

# Improving Packers return many veterans

By Simon Miners  
LocalSportsJournal.com

FREMONT - Once a team tastes victory, the determination to repeat the experience only grows.

That's particularly true for teams that have gone a long time without winning a game, like the Fremont Packers.

Heading into Week 4 of the 2018 season, the Packers were operating under the weight of a 30-game losing streak, which dated all the way back to Oct. 24, 2014, when they beat Montague 46-36.

Fremont did not win a game in 2015, 2016 or 2017.

The team finally got that monkey off its back last season, when the Packers came from behind in Week 4 to defeat Central Montcalm 26-12, a victory that set off a happy celebration on the field with the players, fellow students and fans.

Head coach Rick Tank was doused with water after the victory, and didn't mind at all.

"It was great to get wet," the coach said. "That was the best shower of my life. The entire student section came down and sang the fight song with the team. It was one school, Packer Nation.

"I was just proud and happy to see the looks on these kids' faces. That's what it's all about."

There were no more wins after that last season, and the Packers finished 1-8. But the signs of progress were numerous, beyond the win-loss record.

Fremont was outscored last season by a combined 316-133, a negative differential of 183 points. But that was nothing compared to 2017, when the Packers were outscored 492-146 (negative 346), or 2016, when they only produced 25 points all season.

There were also a few close brushes with a second win last season - a heartbreaking 30-26 loss to Evert in the season opener, a tough 14-12 loss to Tri-County and a 33-22 loss to McBain. Those games did not produce W's, but they did show the players that they can compete and win more than once.

This year's Packers return eight starters on offense and seven on defense, so the players



*"We must focus on the details and be resilient. Mentally we need to stay focused and play fast football. We have opportunities, the way the league is shaping up, and we need to capitalize each week."*

- Head Coach Rick Tank

## PREVIEWING THE PACK

2018 record: 1-8

Conference record: 1-6

Returning starters: 8 offense, 7 defense

Projected Quarterback: Cody Andree



## 2018 RESULTS

Evert 30, Fremont 26  
Reed City 44, Fremont 6  
Big Rapids 61, Fremont 14  
Fremont 26, C. Montcalm 12  
Newaygo 55, Fremont 7  
Grant 25, Fremont 0  
Tri-County 14, Fremont 12  
Chippewa Hills 42, Fremont 20  
McBain 33, Fremont 22

who tasted victory last season are a little more experienced and a little more hungry.

Meanwhile, the team will be in its second year of operating under the Wing-T offense, and the comfort level has grown.

All of that adds up to a team headed in the right direction, and Tank and the players are ready for some more wins.

"We must focus on the details and be resilient," Tank said. "Mentally we need to stay focused and play fast football.

"We have opportunities, the way the league is shaping up, and we need to capitalize each week."

In order to improve, the Packers need to solidify their defense and "not give up so many big plays," the coach added.

One key returnee will be senior quarterback Cody Andree, who gained a lot of valuable experience last season running the offense.

"Cody has put in a solid offseason and is working hard to focus on being a positive leader for our team," Tank said.

Senior Jared Luchies returns at a running back position after making solid strides last season and continuing his progress off the field since then.

"He had a great offseason in the weight room," Tank said. "His speed and grit will help on both sides of the ball."

The Packers will also have many other options at running back, including seniors Chris Kennedy, Shawn Murphy, Tristian Marfia and Matt Halasinski, plus juniors Wyatt Hansue and Carter Dunbar.

"The combined speed of our backs is better than it has been in many years," Tank said.

Leading the way on the offensive line will be senior Kyler Kolk, who has started the last 18 games on varsity for Fremont.

The strength of the defense could be the linebacker position, where Kolk will be joined by Dennis Zacharias, somebody Tank describes as a "hard-nose young man with considerable strength and poise."

Luchies will anchor the defensive secondary.

Several experienced linemen return, including seniors Jordan Van-Brocklin and Isiah Carnegie, along with juniors Noah Kemp, Payton Mansfield, and Cody Visscher.

"The will all play vital roles on the offensive and defensive lines for us," Tank said.

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# Trojans plan to keep putting up more points

By Andrew Johnson  
LocalSportsJournal.com

FRUITPORT – The Fruitport offense found a rhythm at the end of the 2018 season under first-year head coach Nate Smith.

After averaging 15.8 points per game through the first five games, the Trojans averaged 33 points per game in their final four contests.

None of those four games produced victories. Fruitport finished 1-8 on the season, with its only win coming against O-K Black conference rival Grand Rapids Union.

That continued a string of tough seasons for Fruitport, which has a long proud history in football, with 14 playoff berths in program history, including a spot in the state finals in 2001.

The Trojans have had five losing seasons in a row, dating back to 2014.

But there were definite signs of life last last season. In three of the last four games, the Trojans scored 35, 50 and 38 points. That means that Smith's offensive system started to click with the players, even though the defense was still giving up a lot of points.

That brings hope for the dawn of the 2019 season. The Trojans are hoping to keep the offensive progress moving forward, with the help of seven returning starters, including several very skilled veterans.

The most explosive returner to the Trojan offense is running back Ethan Flores (6-0, 175), who ran for 669 yards and eight touchdowns last season.

"He will be all over the field for us," said Smith about the senior running back, who averaged 7.2 yards per carry as a junior.

"He was a state champion in hurdles and he's been All-State in four different track events. He's got some speed and has really improved his skills. He'll be a leader for us since he's been a three-year starter."

Another returner who will be relied upon heavily is senior Crue Cooper (6-1, 205), who will play halfback and tight end for the Trojans.

"He'll be a kid that'll make some noise," said Smith about the Cooper, who rushed for 314 yards and five touchdowns last season, along with 197 receiving yards and three TD catches. "He's another three-year starter and he gives us a unique mix of size and speed along with some ball skills."



**2019 CAPTAINS**  
BR: Rico Jones. Cru Cooper. MR: Zane Lee, Ethan Flores.  
FR: Landon Doctor, Tyler Zimmerman.



*"We're light years ahead of where we were compared to last year. We had a full off-season and kids are understanding philosophy and coaching. We're much more cohesive, with guys understanding what's going on and what plays they're trying to make." - Head Coach Nate Smith*

## TRACKING THE TROJANS

2018 record: 1-8

Conference record: 1-5

Returning starters: 7 offense, 7 defense

Projected Quarterback: Tyler Zimmerman



## 2018 RESULTS

FH Eastern 21, Fruitport 6  
S. Lake 49, Fruitport 20  
Jenison 43, Fruitport 6  
Fruitport 41, GR Union 0  
Muskegon 63, Fruitport 6  
Kenowa Hills 38, Fruitport 36  
Reeths-Puffer 48, Fruitport 8  
Coopersville 62, Fruitport 50  
Mona Shores 57, Fruitport 38

One position where the Trojans will lack experience is quarterback. Junior Tyler Zimmerman (6-0, 175) is expected to start after seeing limited action last season.

"We're looking for him to provide leadership and playmaking," said Smith about Zimmerman, who was 10-for-23 through the air last season.

"He's spent a lot of time on film study this offseason and it'll be a huge advantage for him. He's improved all summer and has a much better understanding of the offense, compared to last year."

The Trojans are hopeful they'll be able to push defenders off the ball with senior returning offensive linemen Rico Jones (6-1, 200) and Tyler Thedorff (6-4, 220) leading the way.

Fruitport will also be bolstered by seven returning starters on defense.

The unit will be led by senior All-Conference honorable mention linebacker David Ross (5-10, 185), who had 49 tackles in eight games last season.

"He put a lot of time in the weight room," said Smith about Ross. "He's everything you want to see at the linebacker position. He always seems to outplay his athletic ability, and he really loves to get after it."

Rico Jones will head up the defensive line. He finished the 2018 season with a total of 30 tackles. Junior Landon Doctor (5-9, 165) and sophomore Camden Farrell (6-0, 170) will head up the secondary for the Trojans.

Overall, Smith feels like his team is in a much better place going into his second season.

The biggest challenge is to compete in the extremely tough O-K Black Conference. That means playing against powers like Muskegon and Mona Shores, who were both in the state finals last season.

The goal is to get back to the state playoffs for the first time since the Trojans had a three-year run between 2010 and 2012. The coach is determined to get there.

"We're light years ahead of where we were compared to last year," Smith said. "We had a full offseason and kids are understanding philosophy and coaching."

"We're much more cohesive, with guys understanding what's going on and what plays they're trying to make."

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# GRAND HAVEN

# Lots of experienced players back for Bucs

By Dave Hart  
LocalSportsJournal.com

GRAND HAVEN – Could this be the year that Grand Haven returns to the state high school football playoffs for the first time since 2011?

Buccaneer fans have reason to hope, because the 2019 varsity squad returns nine starters on each side of the ball.

In 2018 the Bucs started the season at 2-0 with victories over Reeths-Puffer and Traverse City West, but then went winless until a season finale victory over Grand Rapids Union.

The three wins last season improved on a 1-8 record in 2017.

With so many experienced players back this year, the goal is to keep improving in the victory column, and perhaps get the six wins necessary to automatically qualify for the playoffs.

“We have high expectations for the kids in terms of improvement and intangibles,” head coach Jioe Nelson said. “We want to produce more offense and points, which really stems from wanting to play flawless football. We have a goal in mind to make the playoffs.”

It was unclear at the time of this writing who will be the starting quarterback for the Bucs when they open the season against Reeths-Puffer on Aug. 29.

The coaching staff will choose between five different candidates for the crucial position: senior Alex Kapala (5-9, 170), senior Adam Strom (6-4, 200), senior Owen Krizan (6-0, 190), junior Luke Myers (5-9, 160) and sophomore Owen Worthington (6-3, 190).

The competition has been fierce during the summer, according to Nelson.

“At different times, all the guys have shined,” said Nelson about his QB candidates. “It will be a huge competition and we expect the next two weeks will tell a lot.”

Krizan, whether starting at quarterback or halfback, is expected to be a huge contributor to the offense after rushing for 528 yards on 109 carries for a 4.84 yards per carry average last season.

“We’re looking for great things out of him,” said Nelson about the senior. “He’s one of our



**2019 CAPTAINS**  
Owen Krizan, Conner Worthington,  
Austin Broemer, Alex Kapala



*“We have high expectations for the kids in terms of improvement and intangibles. We want to produce more offense and points. We have a goal in mind to make the playoffs.”*

- Head Coach Joe Nelson

## BUCCANEER BANTER

2018 record: 3-8

Conference record: 0-6

Returning starters: 9 offense, 9 defense

Projected Quarterback: Open competition



### 2018 RESULTS

Grand Haven 27, R-P 0  
Grand Haven 13, TC West 10  
Hudsonville 41, Grand Haven 0  
Grandville 73, Grand Haven 21  
Rockford 21, Grand Haven 0  
Kentwood 55, Grand Haven 6  
Caledonia 28, Grand Haven 27  
W. Ottawa 42, Grand Haven 0  
Grand Haven 54, GR Union 0

leaders and he’ll be depended upon.”

Another returning running back is senior Connor Worthington (6-3, 225), who led the Bucs in rushing last season with 587 yards on 108 carries for a 5.44 yards per carry average.

The Bucs can be expected to be a running threat at all times with an offensive line led by junior Landon VanBeek (6-4, 210) and senior Teague Wilson (6-0, 250).

The Grand Haven receiving corps will be led by senior Braydon Franz (5-11, 180), who averaged 41.3 yards per reception last season, and could play a much more significant role this year.

“He was our leading receiver last year,” said Nelson about Franz. “He’s gotten faster and stronger. He’s more confident and we’re expecting him to find space.”

New additions to the Bucs offense will be juniors Tanner Williams (5-7, 150) and Grant Ellis (6-1, 175), who are both expected to contribute at halfback.

On the defensive side, the Bucs will also have high expectations with nine starters returning to a unit that posted two shutouts last season - 27-0 over Reeths-Puffer and 54-0 over Grand Rapids Union.

Connor Worthington will lead the defense after having a first team All-State season at end last year. He had 30 tackles, including five for losses, while also forcing two fumbles.

At the linebacker position senior Aiden Cooper (5-11, 190) will be expected to lead a ferocious attack.

“He’s tenacious,” said Nelson about Cooper’s ability on the defensive side. “He loves to run around and make things happen. He’s one of those guys you’re thankful for and kind of have to back off at times. He has a nose for the ball and goes hard.”

Senior Will McWatters (6-1, 200) will join Cooper at the linebacker position while the secondary will be led by Krizan and Kapala.

While the Bucs have senior leadership to depend on this season, they’ll have a challenge ahead of them with five 2018 playoff teams - four of which are conference opponents - on their schedule in 2019.

The four conference teams who made the postseason were West Ottawa, East Kentwood, Rockford and Hudsonville. There is definitely room for the Bucs to improve against those rivals, because they lost to each of them last season by a combined score of 159-6.

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# Pirates keep improving with each season

By Fred Inglis  
LocalSportsJournal.com

HART - It's been a slow but steady climb up the ladder of success for the Hart Pirates football team.

They won just one game in Rick Witteveen's first year as head coach in 2016, won twice in his second season, and three times in 2018.

Naturally the Pirates would like to remain on a positive trajectory and win at least four games this season, for the first time since 2004. But Coach Witteveen is simply concentrating on getting better every day.

"It's a process," Witteveen said. "Even if we improve by a little or huge strides. It's knowing the playbook better, fine tuning our technique, or just becoming a better teammate. We can't settle for staying the same."

Nobody has seen that step by step progress more than senior Tanner Breitwisch. He's a four-year starter for Hart, and the two-time first team All-Conference lineman is stepping up his work regimen.

"I respect Tanner and I pushed him this summer," Witteveen said. "He's accepted the challenge. No one has put more time in the weight room than Tanner. He's in great shape and has the size and speed to dominate. He's not vocal, but he's very smart and he'll be our leader. He'll play at the next level next year."

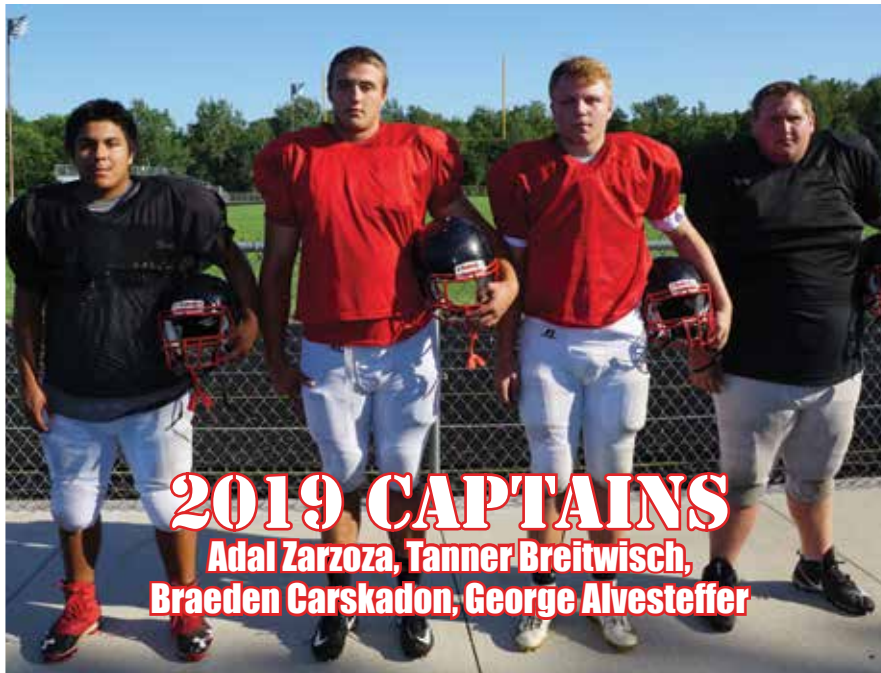
Breitwisch (6-3, 265) has played all offensive line positions, but will start the season at center. He'll snap the ball to quarterback Braeden Carskadon (6-1, 205), who got some varsity experience running the Pirates' spread offense last season.

"Last year Braeden learned the speed of the game the hard way," Witteveen said. "But he's had two great exposure camps at Northwestern University these last two summers. He's got a nice release, and has the size to carry the ball. But Braeden's got to prove he can run the show if we get down late in the game."

Junior Thomas Tanner (5-8, 170) is an experienced backup QB.

Joining Breitwisch in the task of keeping Carskadon from being sacked will be senior Alex Hernandez (6-0, 270) at right guard.

"Alex is also a soccer player, but he's now made football his priority," Witteveen said. "He knows the game. He's the kind of player we



*"It's a process. Even if we improve by a little or huge strides. It's knowing the playbook better, fine tuning our technique, or just becoming a better teammate. We can't settle for staying the same."*

- Head Coach Rick Witteveen

## PIRATE PREVIEW

2018 record: 3-6

Conference red: 2-5

Returning starters: 3 offense, 2 defense

Projected Quarterback: Braeden Carskadon



## 2018 RESULTS

Holton 26, Hart 18

Ravenna 55, Hart 8

Whitehall 49, Hart 0

Hart 20, Mason County 14

Hart 16, Shelby 14

Montague 58, Hart 0

N. Muskegon 48, Hart 0

Oakridge 62, Hart 0

Hart 36, White Cloud 0

always look for."

Senior Waylon Alvesteffer (6-2, 280) will start at right tackle, junior George Alvesteffer (6-0, 300) mans the left guard spot and junior Adal Zarzoza (5-9, 225) is slated for left tackle.

Senior Marco Martinez (5-7, 165) is the most experienced running back, but Thomas Tanner could push him for the starting job.

Junior Keagan Foster (6-0, 180) is also a candidate to take some handoffs. He was recruited by his friends to join the team, and he's impressed the coaching staff with his overall understanding of the running back position.

Witteveen hopes senior Jerry Brandel will be healthy in time to add running and receiving depth. Sophomore Leo Guadarrama (5-11, 175) will also be a key backup in the backfield.

Witteveen says the starting tight end position is wide open, but the slot receiver spot is held by senior Andrian Rendon (5-8, 175). Witteveen loves his versatility and says Andrian could switch back and forth to running back.

Junior Delfino Hernandez (5-9, 165) also has varsity experience and will assume a bigger role at the slot position.

Sophomore Antonio Colon (6-3, 175) is a first time football player, but Witteveen says he's got a great future as a wide receiver. Senior Leo McCulley (6-3, 185) did not play last season, but Witteveen expects him to contribute as a wide receiver.

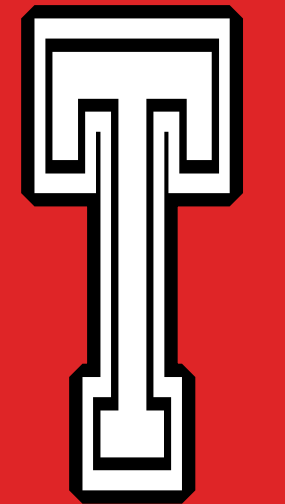
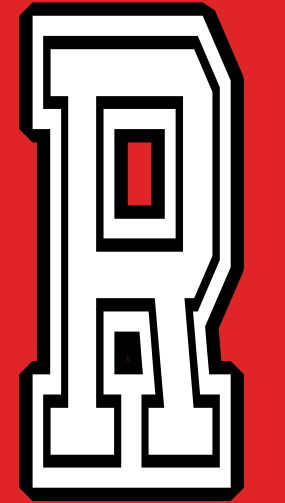
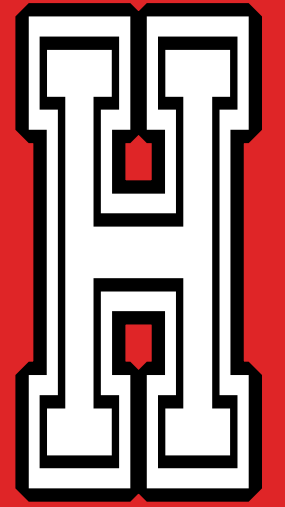
Another newcomer to the program is junior Rece Schlukebir (6-1, 170), who will see plenty of time as a wide receiver.

With only 20 players on the varsity squad, the same cast of characters will have to carry most of the load on offense and in Witteveen's 4-4 defense.

Breitwisch is the leader at nose tackle. He's joined up front by George Alvesteffer, Waylon Alvesteffer and senior Raul Mazorra (5-9, 200).

The talented linebacker crew includes Braeden Carskadon, Rece Schlukebir, Adrian Rendon, Thomas Tanner, Leo Guadarrama, Jerry Brandel, Keagan Foster, and Adal Zarzoza.

Senior Ayden Beachum, senior Delfino Hernandez, Leo McCulley and sophomore Antonio Colon will round out the defensive back positions.



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# THEY NEVER REALLY LEFT

**As players, Oakridge's Cary Harger and Montague's Pat Collins helped their teams become big winners. Now as longtime head coaches at their alma maters, they work year-round to maintain the excellence.**

By Ben Velderman  
LocalSportsJournal.com

High school football is a generational passion. Nowhere is that more abundantly clear than at Oakridge and Montague. The longtime head coaches at both schools played there as students, went away to college, and returned to lead the programs that played such a big role in their youth. And to nobody's surprise, both of their sons have followed in their footsteps as varsity football standouts at the same schools.

At Oakridge, Cary Harger is the keeper of the flame. With the exception of his college career, Harger has been involved with that school's football program, in one capacity or another, since about the time he got his driver's license.



He passed the passion on to his son, Cole Harger, who just graduated in June after spending three outstanding seasons on the Oakridge varsity.

At Montague, Pat Collins is the quarterback-turned-caretaker of that school's football program, and his son is headed down a similar path. Drew Collins took over as the team's starting quarterback as a sophomore last season, helped the Wildcats reach the state finals, and is expected to continue his rapid development this fall.

Harger and Collins have both accomplished what they set out to do when they returned to lead their former teams - maintain the winning traditions that spawned their careers.

Montague and Oakridge remain state powerhouses and annual rivals for the West Michigan Conference championship. Both coaches admire and respect the other's programs, despite the intense rivalry between them.



When they go head-to-head, the game is often a thriller.

That was true in 2015, when Montague led 15-0 early in the game, trailed 29-22 in the fourth quarter, then pulled out a 36-29 victory in overtime to win the conference title.

It was true in 2016, when Oakridge trailed 28-14 with only 6:50 remaining in the game, but stormed back to claim a 31-28 victory and the conference title.

It was true last season, when Montague trailed by 14 points after three quarters, but rallied and won 25-24 by scoring a touchdown to pull within one point with one second remaining, then pulled off a gutsy two-point conversion to complete the stunning victory. That also produced a conference title.

That's the way Oakridge and Montague play football. The student-athletes attack their challenge with passion and a sense of history. They know they are responsible for keeping a great thing going.

They learned that from their coaches, who have dedicated their careers to doing just that.

## ***Harger: 'I didn't want the torch to go out'***

Leading the varsity football program at Oakridge High School is a serious undertaking, and comes with a degree of pressure to succeed.

The Eagles have been winners for years, making the state playoffs every season since 2005, and the football-crazed fans of Egelston Township have come to expect no less.

Harger, who is entering his ninth season as the Eagles' head coach, understands that expectations are always high, and he doesn't waste a second of preparation. He begins planning and working toward the next season every November, as soon as the previous season is wrapped up.

That level of effort helps explain the Eagles' 72-17 record during Harger's tenure, which includes four West Michigan Conference championships, two district titles, one regional championship and a state semifinal berth in 2013.

"I call it an out-of-season, not an offseason," Harger explained to Local Sports Journal. "You tell me a month on the calendar, and I'll tell you what I'm doing related to football."

In the winter and spring, there are throwing sessions and weight room workouts for the players. In July, things ramp up significantly, with functional training twice a week, seven-on-seven drills once a week - and more time in the weight room.

"It's a huge commitment for the players," Harger said.



**Oakridge Coach Cary Harger, entering his ninth season, has had his team in the state playoffs every season of his career. Photo/Sherry Wahr**

He knows that from personal experience. Back in the late '80s, Harger was a two-way player at Oakridge under legendary coach Jack Schugars, and played on the 1989 Eagles squad that qualified for the playoffs for only the second time in school history.

After graduating from Hope College, he rejoined the team as one of Schugars' assistant coaches. That partnership lasted for 16 seasons and led to three state championships for Oakridge (1997, 2005, 2008).

When Schugars retired after the 2010 season as the winningest football coach in Muskegon County history, Harger was chosen as his successor.

Add it all up and Harger has been involved with Oakridge football in some capacity for nearly three full decades.

Following in the footsteps of the legendary Schugars was a daunting task, Harger admits. But it was important to him to do whatever he could to keep the school's winning football tradition going for another generation.

There was only thing that gave him pause before pursuing the job: He knew the time

## **THE HARGER ERA**

**Career record: 72-17  
Conference titles: 4  
District titles: 2  
Regional titles: 1  
State semifinals: 2013**

required to run the successful program would be significant, and would impact his family.

"I talked it over with my wife," Harger said. "She was on board with it. It was something we wanted to do. I didn't want that torch to go out."

For the past several seasons, Eagles football was literally a family affair for the Hargers. Son Cole Harger played for the Eagles for the past three seasons, before graduating this spring. He is now following in his father's footsteps by playing football at Hope College, while pursuing a degree in biomedical engineering.

When asked how much time he puts into coaching, Harger laughed. "I don't want to think about the number of hours. I've never added it up. Sometimes there aren't enough hours in the day."

Coaching is about more than just than Xs and Os for Harger. He and the entire Oakridge football coaching staff - from varsity down to the middle school - instill in their players



the crucial ideals of always doing the right thing, and battling even harder when things get difficult.

During a recent training drill, Oakridge linemen were tasked with pulling a weighted sled. Some players were having trouble digging in with their cleats – causing them to slip and slide – but they kept moving the sled, according to Harger.

“They kept trying to find a different way (of moving the sled),” Harger said. “They were getting uncomfortable with the situation, but they were finding a way to get it done, instead of giving up.”

The coach knows such lessons, taught in a repetitive manner, have multiple benefits. They lead to victories on the football field, and success in life for the players when they move on.



**LeRoy Quinn will lead the Oakridge offense this season.**

More lessons are learned during game situations. Some players will inevitably discover that some teammates or opponents are more talented, “but that doesn’t mean quit,” Harger said. Hard work and dedication can trump raw talent, and the coach makes sure his players know that.

The character lessons extend beyond the playing field. Oakridge players and coaches have “adopted” a two-mile stretch of nearly Apple Avenue, and take responsibility for keeping the roadside clean.

On a recent Sunday, a majority of them spent the day helping out at Camp Sunshine, which provides recreational opportunities for people with developmental disabilities.

Harger believes lessons in hard work, perseverance and “doing the right thing” will serve his players well, both on and off the football field.

“Determining if a season has been successful or not is bigger than just the win-loss record,” he said. “Did the kids give it their all? Did they have fun? Did they grow as people? Did they learn values along the way? We’re sending these young men out into the world and want them to be successful dads and husbands.”

This year a number of key players from last year’s team, which went 9-2 and won its first round playoff game, graduated and went out into the world. That means this year’s Oakridge squad is younger and less experienced.

But that doesn’t mean Harger’s expectations have been dialed back. That’s not how it works at Oakridge.

“Making the playoffs is one of our goals every year,” he said. “If we prepare well during the regular season, that can lead to a state championship. There’s a ton of work that goes into getting there. The bill has to be paid before you get to enjoy that kind of game.”

Even though Harger has spent most of his adult life on the sidelines at Oakridge, the prospect of a new season still brings that mix of nerves and adrenaline that he felt as a player.

“It’s such a big part of my life,” Harger said. “It’s still exciting.”

## ***Collins: ‘We need to finish the deal’***



**Montague Coach Pat Collins led the Wildcats to Division 6 state championships in 2008 and 2009.**

The 2019 season will be Pat Collins’ 16th year as Montague’s head varsity football coach, and it’s been an impressive run.

Over the past 15 years, Collins’ teams have made the playoffs 14 times, won two state championships, and finished as the Division 6 state runner-up last season.

Collins was named a 2018 Regional Coach of the Year by the Michigan High School Football Coaches Association.

Ironically, this golden era of Montague football is the indirect result of one heartbreaking loss during Collins’ playing days.

Back in 1992, Collins was the starting quarterback for the Wildcats squad that went undefeated during the regular season and won four playoff games.

The seeds for that nearly perfect campaign had been planted two years earlier, when Collins and his teammates – coming off a 1-8 season – decided to adopt the goal of win-

# **THE COLLINS ERA**

**Career record: 137-42**

**Conference titles: 5**

**District titles: 9**

**Regional titles: 6**

**State titles: 2008-09**

ning a state championship. Coach Ken Diamond agreed, despite the team’s recent struggles, and pushed the players to reach their goal.

“Ken instilled that work ethic of being in the weight room, working with our brothers, sweating with our brothers,” Collins said.

The hard work paid off and the team made it all the way to the state finals in ‘92 at the Pontiac Silverdome, before losing to Detroit St. Martin de Porres, 12-7.

For Collins, it was a dream denied – but not forgotten.

When Diamond announced his retirement in 2004, Collins, who was an assistant coach at Holland West Ottawa at the time, suddenly had a new purpose: to coach Montague to that state championship that eluded him and his teammates more than a decade earlier.

He had success right away, taking the Wildcats to the Division 6 state semifinals for three straight years - 2005 through 2007 - but losing each time. Then he finally got over the hurdle, leading Montague to consecutive state championships in 2008 and 2009.

“I told my wife, ‘We need to finish business in Montague. We need to finish the deal,’” Collins said. “We took what Ken Diamond started and won back-to-back titles.”

After Montague lost in last year’s state championship game 42-28 to Jackson Lumen Christi, Collins reminded his son Drew that good things can come from such a disappointing loss.

“I told him, ‘Dad wouldn’t have been motivated to win as a coach if we had won the championship (in 1992),’” said Collins.

Finding the positive in an adverse situation goes to the heart of Collins’ coaching philosophy. “Champions for Life” is his slogan for Montague’s football program.

“We want players to feel 10 feet tall and bulletproof,” Collins explained. “That comes from being conditioned, being in the weight room and knowing the fundamentals of their position.”

Players are also pushed to develop mental toughness.

“Most kids work with half their capacity,” he added. “We expect them to find their full potential, and most if it is mental. We push the kids to have mental and physical toughness. Football is a tough game. Life is tough. How you respond makes all the difference.”

While hard work and discipline is demanded at Montague, Collins makes sure to incorporate some fun. After all, the players are still kids, and kids should enjoy their high school experiences.

Collins credits former West Ottawa football coach Jim Caserta for demonstrating the importance of having a loose, fun vibe. After games, for instance, Caserta would turn up the music in the locker room and dance.

“That’s been known to happen in our locker room, too,” Collins said with a laugh.

Collins remembers one game, during his second season at Montague, when he wondered if his approach to coaching might be a little too loose. The opposing team came onto the field for pregame warm-ups looking like a military unit: hands behind their backs, shoulders back, maneuvering around cones in a choreographed manner.

“It was so tight,” remembered Collins. “One of my assistant coaches came over to me and said, ‘Coach, I think we’ve got a problem.’”

Collins looked at his players and coaches playing pick-up football at the other end of the field, and was struck by the “complete contrast.”

“I told my coach, ‘You don’t win games with warm-ups,’” Collins said. “I had to say something, but I was wondering, too.”

Montague went on to easily win the game, and the assistant coach returned to Collins and said, “I get it now.”

Montague’s overall record during the Collins Era is 137-42, and includes five conference, nine district and six regional championships, so it’s safe to say opposing teams get it, too.

The 2019 Wildcats will be much younger than last year’s squad, which won the West Michigan Conference championship and district and regional titles.

That doesn’t mean Collins is lowering his expectations.

“Our goal is to win a state championship every year,” he said. “I don’t put it past this group.”

Collins views each season as a chapter in the ongoing story of Wildcats football. He remembers some of his teams for their brilliant play and impressive victories, others for their grittiness and determination.

He can’t wait to see what’s next.

“I’m excited about the memories that are going to be made, the relationships that are going to be formed,” he said. “I wonder what chapter 16 is going to be like.”



**Drew Collins returns this year as Montague’s QB.**



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# HESPERIA

# Panthers welcoming players from Walkerville

By Dave Tomczak  
LocalSportsJournal.com

HESPERIA - Injuries, lack of depth - pretty much whatever problems you can think of, the Hesperia football program ran into them last year.

With only 17 players, the Panthers couldn't afford to lose anyone, but by the end of a 2-7 season, that's exactly what happened.

"The last game of last year, we started the first quarter with 10 players," Hesperia coach Doug Bolles said. "When you have a lot of injuries, and a small number of kids, that's devastating."

This year, Hesperia took steps to rectify its depth problem, putting together a football co-op with Walkerville High School, which does not have a team of its own, but has several students who want to compete.

Coach Bolles believes that joint venture will add an additional six to eight players to his squad, giving the varsity anywhere between 18-20 players, and allowing the school to keep its junior varsity program as well.

"Our numbers were better to begin with (going into this season), but this will hopefully help both the JV and the varsity," Bolles said.

What will help the team even more will be the return of six starters on both the offensive and the defensive side of the ball.

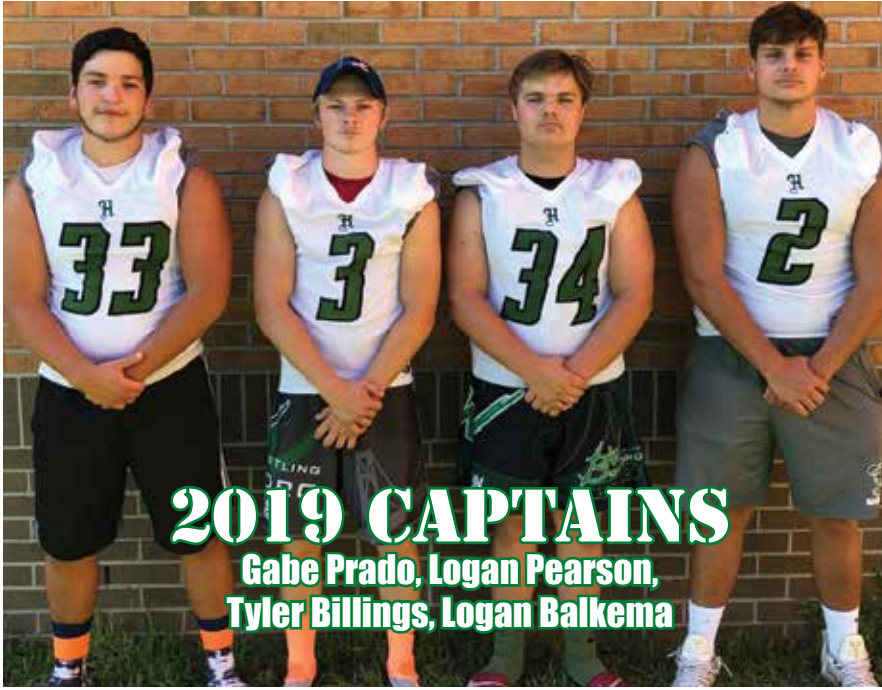
Hesperia, which has managed only one CSAA Silver Division win in the past two years, will be looking for more out of an offense that averaged only 9.4 points a game in its losses last season.

To help achieve that, the team will be adding more plays out of the shotgun formation this season, in addition to its plays out of Power-I sets.

Calling the shots will be Logan Balkema, the 5-11, 215-pound senior quarterback who has led the Panthers since midway through his sophomore year.

"(Logan) has a great arm and he's really getting better with his touch on passes," Bolles said.

"We're going to roll him out a lot and put the defenses on their heels. We'll make the defense pick - if they think he's going to run, he can hurt them with the



**2019 CAPTAINS**  
Gabe Prado, Logan Pearson,  
Tyler Billings, Logan Balkema



*"Everyone says you have to go 9-0, but I'm a realist. If we go 9-0 a lot of things have to go right. What we want now is six wins, and what I want is a conference championship, and I honestly believe we can do that."*

- Head Coach Doug Bolles

## PANTHERS PROFILE

2018 record: 2-7

Conference record: 1-4

Returning starters: 6 offense, 6 defense

Projected Quarterback: Logan Balkema



## 2018 RESULTS

N. Muskegon 41, Hesperia 6  
Pine River 42, Hesperia 14  
Holton 20, Hesperia 14  
Hesperia 52, White Cloud 0  
Lakeview 33, Hesperia 0  
Kent City 56, Hesperia 22  
M-Stanwood 35, Hesperia 6  
Beal City 47, Hesperia 12  
Hesperia 28, Shelby 0

pass."

Balkema will be joined in the backfield by senior running back Logan Pearson (5-7, 145), who rushed for more than 1,200 yards when he was on the JV, but had his junior season cut short due to a pair of concussions.

Junior running back Brandon Quinn (5-8, 150) will also get carries and is expected to pick up the hard yards for the Panthers.

Senior Kaiden Robbins (6-4, 195) returns as Balkema's top target out of the slot, and will use his speed to stretch defenses or get around the edge on shorter passes.

Juniors Tyler Billings (5-9, 215) and Gabe Prado both return to fill the guard positions along the offensive line, with Billings also seeing time at tight end. Prado was one of the many missing pieces down the stretch for Hesperia last year, due to an ankle injury.

Lineman Connor VanBuskirk, who overcame stage 4 Hodgkin's lymphoma and is now cancer-free, returned to the football field last year, but Bolles says fans didn't really get to see the true version of the player his teammates call "Baby Hulk."

"Last year he came back, but he wasn't really all there (shape-wise)," Bolles said of the 6-3, 285-pound senior. "He's in his best shape now. We were just going to have him on the defensive line but he wanted to play both."

There will be a lot of Panthers playing both ways, including the quarterback. Balkema will start on defense at linebacker.

"Someone once said, 'If your player is that good, don't keep him on the sidelines,'" Bolles said. "That's Logan. He's a leader on both sides of the ball and he's going to play."

Bolles says the defensive line will have pretty good size. Billings and Prado will occupy the defensive end positions.

The defensive backfield will feature a pair of speedsters in Robbins and Pearson, along with junior newcomer Johnny Majersky.

Majersky, the Panthers' JV quarterback last year, will also see time on offense at wide receiver.

Hesperia no longer has Beal City and LeRoy Pine River on its schedule. It has replaced them with Ludington and Orchard View, two Lakes 8 Conference teams that will provide a test for the Panthers. The team will once again open the regular season against North Muskegon.

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# Red Devils hope to build on 2018 playoff run

By Dave Tomczak  
LocalSportsJournal.com

HOLTON - When Mike Jados began preparing for Holton's 2019 football season, it was, once again, as an assistant coach.

Jados, who was the Red Devils' defensive coordinator last season, was going to fill the same position on the new staff, under a new head coach, following the retirement of Jack Nummerdor.

"I interviewed for the head coaching job, but didn't get it," Jados said. "But I decided to stay and help (the new coach) out. I really liked working with these kids."

Holton hired Greg Mayer to be the new head coach in January, only to see him resign in May. That put the Red Devils back to square one, and gave Jados another opportunity.

Jados, along with three other candidates, went through the interview process again, and this time he was selected to lead the Red Devils for the 2019 season.

Jados inherits nine returning starters off an 8-5 team that put together the greatest run in the school's football history.

The Red Devils snuck into the Division 8 state playoffs with a 5-4 record, despite dropping their final three games of the regular season.

But once they got in, and squared off against teams from schools their own size, the Red Devils won three playoff games and claimed the first district and regional titles in Holton history. The highlight was a 14-6 win at home over playoff powerhouse Mendon in the regional round.

The Cinderella run finally came to an end in the Division 8 state semifinals with a 38-0 loss to Reading.

Despite the great twist to the 2018 season, Jados doesn't expect too much pressure to be placed on this year's squad.

"Last year the feeling was, 'Let's see if we can get in and make a good run against teams our size,' and I think it's the same thinking this year," the coach said.

Holton's offense last season focused on running the ball out of the T-formation, before switching over to a veer-style attack late in the season. But when the playoffs began, the Red Devils went back to their reliance on the run from the T-formation.

This season, Jados is taking over the offensive play-calling duties, and



*"We've talked as a team about coming together early and getting enough wins to get in (to the playoffs). Once you get in, you don't know what will happen, and this team knows that because they did it last year."*

- Head Coach Mike Jados

## RED DEVILS REPORT

**2018 record: 8-5, D8 state semifinalist**

**Conference record: 3-2**

**Returning starters: 6 offense, 3 defense**

**Projected Quarterback: Drew Trygstad**



### 2018 RESULTS

**Holton 26, Hart 18**  
**Holton 46, Evart 7**  
**Holton 20, Hesperia 6**  
**M-Stanwood 21, Holton 8**  
**Holton 65, White Cloud 8**  
**Holton 34, Lakeview 24**  
**Kent City 46, Holton 0**  
**Pine River 29, Holton 22**  
**Tri-County 48 Holton 16**  
**Holton 25, Martin 24**  
**Holton 34, Decatur 7**  
**Holton 14, Mendon 6**  
**Reading 38, Holton 0**

the team is sticking with the veer, giving itself more opportunities to use speed around the edges.

Leading the way will be returning starting quarterback Drew Trygstad (5-10, 175 pounds).

The senior QB spent most of last year handing the ball off to Holton's tailback combo of Derek Pouch and Aaron Herron. That will not be the case this year, because the Red Devils hope to throw the ball as much as they run it.

The new open offensive attack will feature senior running back Kaleb Kitchka (5-8, 160) and wide receiver Ricky Enders (6-0, 170). One player Jados is very excited about is junior slot receiver Austin Hawkins.

Hawkins (5-11, 175) is the Red Devils' most elusive player, using his quickness on runs around the end or on short passing plays, anything to get him into space and make people miss.

A solid offensive line will be led by returning starter Anthony Crabtree. The 6-0, 225-pound senior earned Division 8 first team All-State honors last year at tackle, but will move to guard this year. He will be joined on the line by senior Kolton Plekes (6-0, 235) at right tackle and senior Chip Wright (6-1, 210) at center.

Jados is hoping the new offense provides more consistency. In its eight wins last year, Holton averaged 33 points per game, while in the losses, it only managed 9.2.

The defense will not return as many starters as the offense, but there will be some key veterans leading the way.

Kitchka will lead the linebacker corps and captain a young 4-3 defense. The senior led the team last season with 144 tackles, and will be joined by Crabtree, who will also play linebacker.

The defensive line will have all new starters, and they will be counted on to adjust quickly and meet their responsibilities.

While the defensive back positions remained open for competition as of this writing, Enders returns to occupy one cornerback spot. The senior DB finished strong last season, recording five interceptions during the Red Devils' playoff run.

Holton will look to pick up some early non-conference wins against Hart and Carson City-Crystal before playing CSAA games.

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# After 3 great seasons, KC Eagles are reloading

By Dave Tomczak  
LocalSportsJournal.com

KENT CITY - The Kent City football team is coming off another great season - an 8-2 record, its third straight Central State Activities Association Silver Division title, and its third straight postseason playoff berth.

In those three seasons, the Eagles compiled an outstanding 26-6 overall record. In conference play, they have 14 wins and one loss and averaged 40.5 points per game.

"Last year was another great year for us," Kent City coach Bill Crane said. "What we've been able to do for the past three years is really exciting. We are hoping to build on that tradition."

The players coming up through the ranks know what is expected of them - maintain what has become a winning program over the past three years, following 14 straight seasons of sub-.500 football.

But in order to do that, this year's group of players will have to fill some mighty big shoes.

Gone are two standouts who made a lot of things happen on offense - quarterback John Meek and running back Gio Weeks.

Meek won more games than any QB in school history, and Weeks set school records for career, season and single-game rushing yards.

"We know we'll miss those guys," Crane said. "But the nice thing with this program is the kids coming up have been running this same offense the past two years, and can come in and take over."

Participation has been up for both the JV and varsity teams, and Crane is expecting 25 players for both squads this fall.

As for filling the production void on offense, the Eagles will turn to a pair of senior running backs.

With an offensive system that runs the ball 95 percent of the time, Max Hudson and Dolan Bair will see their fair share of carries.

Hudson (6-0, 175 pounds) is one of the toughest kids Crane has ever coached, and is an aggressive runner who will hit the hole hard.

Bair (5-11, 180) is a three-sport athlete who is also a mem-



**"We know we have a target on our back and teams are gunning for us. We lost some key guys, but we have to reload and it's pushing the kids to get better."**

**- Head Coach Bill Crane**

## EAGLES UPDATE

**2018 record: 8-2**

**Conference record: 5-0**

**Returning starters: 3 offense, 4 defense**

**Projected Quarterback: Open**



## 2018 RESULTS

**Kent City 36, Newaygo 26**

**Kent City 13, Beal City 7**

**Kent City 54, White Cloud 7**

**Kent City 43, Lakeview 6**

**Kent City 42, M-Stanwood 7**

**Kent City 56, Hesperia 22**

**Kent City 46, Holton 0**

**Lake City 14, Kent City 7**

**Kent City 26, Grant 6**

**Saugatuck 29, Kent City 28**

ber of Kent City's All-State relay team in track. He will bring a change of pace in the backfield, but isn't afraid to go inside.

The two will be relying on an offensive line that will have all new starters in the trenches. In fact, Kent City only returns three starters on the offensive side of the ball - both running backs and tight end Brendan Boyd.

"He has a really good understanding of what we are doing on offense," Crane said of the 5-11, 205 pound Boyd. "He has stepped up to be the leader of our offensive line."

Boyd will be joined on the line by Dawson VanSickle, a 6-0, 210-pound senior tight end who will anchor the other end of the line.

While the ground game is set, there are still questions about who will lead the offense and hand the ball off.

Crane had not committed to a starting quarterback as of this writing. He would only say that the Eagles are looking at two players for the position, and he's grateful that his team doesn't throw the ball 20 times a game.

Defensively, the Eagles return four starters from a unit that held opponents to seven points or less in six games last season.

Hudson and Bair are joined by Lane Dailey at the linebacker position. Dailey, a junior, started every game for the Eagles as a sophomore.

"He's an extremely aggressive kid, and we are expecting a lot out of him this year," Crane said about Dailey. "Our linebackers are going to be the strength of our defense."

Senior Jayden Williams (5-8, 140) returns in the defensive backfield, moving from starting cornerback last year to safety this year.

On both sides of the ball, Coach Crane is expecting his running back/linebacker duo of Hudson and Bair to take over the leadership roles.

"They understand both sides of the ball so well and know what our philosophy is,"

The coaches hope that leadership will help all the new players stepping in at just about every position.

The Eagles are counting on early non-division games against Newaygo and Orchard View to get them prepared for the challenging Silver Division schedule.

Morley-Stanwood, which has only lost two conference games over the past two years, will be a major threat to steal the division title.

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# After solid seasons, Orioles seek playoff win

By Noah Genson  
LocalSportsJournal.com

LUDINGTON - During Charlie Gunsell's tenure as the head varsity football coach at Ludington, the goal each year was to get the necessary six wins and qualify for the state playoffs.

Through 2015, that was something the Orioles only managed to do three times, and it was considered a major accomplishment for a program that has struggled in the past, with a 246-346-12 record since 1950.

But now they are raising the bar at Ludington a bit. After qualifying for the playoffs two of the past three seasons, there are bigger goals on the horizon for the Orioles.

"We really want to get that first playoff win in school history," said Gunsell, whose team posted a strong 7-3 record last season. "We also think we can compete for that Lakes 8 title this year. I think we set the bar at a good spot last year for our program."

Competing for that conference title and first playoff win may be tough, because the Orioles will be battling without two major contributors from last year's team.

Quarterback Garrett Meeker and running back Shemar Jennings were both All-Conference selections for the Orioles last season, with Meeker being a three-year starter.

Both have graduated, leaving Ludington with some significant shoes to fill.

But Gunsell and his assistant coaches have trust in last year's backup quarterback, Riley Calhoun, to step in and capably run the offense.

"Riley has played quarterback his whole life," Gunsell said. "We had plans to use him more last year but an injury to start the year delayed those plans. He's not as strong as Meeker was, but he's very coachable and knows the game well."

With Luke Fountain (All-Conference/All-Area linebacker) graduated and off to Kalamazoo College, Coach Gunsell knows that there are even more big shoes to fill, but thinks he has another college prospect to lead the defense in Jake Plamondon.

"Jake is a legit Division 2 college prospect on the defensive line," Gunsell said. "At 6-4, 245 pounds, can run a 4.8 in the 40, he just does everything you need to do. Some juniors have a hard time being leaders,



**2019 CAPTAINS**  
Riley Calhoun, Jake Plamondon, Parker LaCombe



*"We really want to get that first playoff win in school history. We also think we can compete for that Lakes 8 title this year. I think we set the bar at a good spot last year for our program."*

- Head Coach Charlie Gunsell

## ORIOLES OUTLOOK

**2018 record: 7-3**

**Conference record: 2-2**

**Returning starters: 4 offense, 5 defense**

**Projected Quarterback: Riley Calhoun**



## 2018 RESULTS

Ludington 56, Inland Lakes 0  
Ludington 35, Maple Valley 6  
Manistee 33, Ludington 14  
M. Catholic 34, Ludington 0  
Ludington 28, M. Heights 14  
Ludington 27, Orchard View 8  
Ludington 35, Wyoming Lee 6  
Ludington 56, Stockbridge 15  
Ludington 28, Mason CC 21  
Escanaba 27, Ludington 20

but Jake isn't going to be shy."

As for the other 10 positions on defense, the Orioles still have work to do to fill some gaps.

"We graduated everybody from our linebacker unit and a couple guys from the line and secondary," said Gunsell. "But I've seen just about everybody on our roster in the gym at least three days a week, so we've got guys hungry for the spots."

One player who seems to be the hungriest Oriole this offseason is senior wide receiver and cornerback Parker LaCombe.

LaCombe didn't see many snaps last year, but he's 6-4 and transformed his body in the offseason by adding 35 pounds of muscle. Coach Gunsell says it will be hard to keep him off the field.

"Parker has really worked his way up the depth chart this summer," the coach said. "Not only up the depth chart but into a captain's role. He has taken a real big leap this summer and it's really going to pay off for him and us this season."

Some other players Coach Gunsell expects big things from on both sides of the ball are Drew Arce at slot receiver and cornerback, as well as Blake Benson in the secondary.

One key for Ludington will be getting off to a good start and maintaining that momentum. The Orioles started off strong enough last year, with a 56-0 victory over Indian River Inland Lakes and a 35-6 win over Maple Valley.

But then came a two-game losing streak, with defeats at the hands of two Lakes 8 conference opponents, Manistee and Muskegon Catholic. While Manistee had a very good season, MCC did not qualify for the playoffs.

The Orioles recovered, winning their last five regular season games before losing to Escanaba 27-20 in the first round of the Division 4 playoffs.

Coach Gunsell says if the Orioles really want to be successful this season, especially after losing so many key players to graduation, there is one main focus the team needs to have.

"We need to be tougher," Gunsell said. "We were tough for three quarters with Manistee, and we just didn't come to play against Muskegon Catholic last year. If we can keep that toughness up for four quarters, we will be tough to beat this season."

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# MASON COUNTY

# Spartans continue steep learning curve

By Noah Genson  
LocalSportsJournal.com

SCOTTVILLE – The last two seasons for Mason County Central have been quite unorthodox.

The 2017 campaign started with the merging of the varsity and junior varsity squads, due to low participation numbers. Mason County Central is not unique in that respect. A lot of high school football teams around the state and nation have had declining participation in recent years.

The problem with having a single high school team is that many sophomores and freshmen, who would otherwise be starting or at least playing a lot on JV, don't see the field too much during their first year of varsity.

That means they are less prepared when they have to play more significant roles the following season.

In 2017, the first season of having the combined team, the Spartans finished 2-7. Last year they were 1-8.

That marks a downhill trend for the team, which was 3-6 in 2016, and 7-4 in 2015, when it qualified for the playoffs for the last time.

But Coach Scott Briggs and the rest of the Spartan coaching staff is hoping that the worst days are over, and are looking forward to a smoother season ahead.

"It was a great year to coach," Briggs said about the 2018 campaign. "But we knew the inexperience we had with the JV team not getting a chance to play. I thought the kids came along really well, and that should translate into this year."

The first challenge for MCC will be replacing a few key players who were lost to graduation, including running back Austin Hofmann, who rushed for more than 1,200 yards and scored more than 10 touchdowns in both his junior and senior seasons.

"Austin was a horse and we went to him quite often," Briggs said. "But defenses knew that, so they could game plan for us a little easier."

While losing a player of Hofmann's caliber is never great for your offense, Coach Briggs is hoping a change in strategy will help move the chains and put points on the board this fall.



**2019 CAPTAINS**  
Jackson Kimes, Avery Carr,  
Jonathan Peterson, Ethan Johnson



*"It was a great year to coach. But we knew the inexperience we had with the JV team not getting a chance to play. I thought the kids came along really well, and that should translate into this year."*

- Head Coach Scott Briggs

## SPARTAN SPECIFICS

**2018 record: 1-8**

**Conference record: 1-6**

**Returning starters: 5 offense, 4 defense**

**Projected Quarterback: Avery Carr**



## 2018 RESULTS

Manistee 46, Mason County 6  
Whitehall 46, Mason County 16  
Montague 55, Mason County 0  
Hart 20, Mason County 14  
N. Muskegon 35, Mason County 0  
Oakridge 63, Mason County 6  
Ravenna 48, Mason County 6  
Mason County 62, Shelby 7  
Ludington 28, Mason County 21

"We aren't as limited on offense as we were, so being able to spread to ball around should make it harder for defenses to read what we're doing."

While his role in the offense hasn't been very big the last two seasons, quarterback Avery Carr will be a key player in the attack this season. He will actually play in several different positions as the coaches try to maximize his potential to help the team.

With more weapons around him for 2019, Briggs can picture Carr flourishing in the offense, even if all the snaps don't come from under center.

"He'll be all over the field," Briggs said. "Whether that is at quarterback, running back or split end, Avery will more than likely see some time there. We're definitely going to have to play to his strengths."

While Carr looks to be the focal point on offense, junior Khole Hofmann and senior Tucker Grey will be solid weapons for Carr and the Spartans on the outside and in the backfield.

On defense, the Spartans will be in need of some tacklers, because more than 65 percent of their tackles last season came from players who have graduated.

Khole Hofmann, however, will look to be a two-way leader for the Spartans, after coming off a sophomore season that included 22 tackles and a team-leading two interceptions.

Others on defense that will be playing big roles are senior Tucker Grey and Carr in the secondary.

As far as expectations for this season go, Coach Briggs likes to keep it simple, saying the goal of having a winning season is doable.

That would be no small accomplishment for the Spartans, who have had three straight losing seasons, and had seven consecutive sub-.500 records in the seasons before 2014.

Overall Mason County Central has only made the state playoffs four times in school history.

The Spartans have the extra challenge every season of playing in the very tough West Michigan Conference, with perennial powers like Montague and Oakridge and other always tough rivals like Whitehall, Ravenna and North Muskegon.

One definite goal this year for the Spartans is finally beating Mason County county Ludington. The Orioles have won the last three matchups.

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# New faces, but expectations remain the same

By Dave Hart  
LocalSportsJournal.com

NORTON SHORES - Last year the Mona Shores football team learned that depth can make a big difference for a squad hanging on the edge.

The Sailors were very talented, but ran into a slew of injuries, including some to key players, that could have been their undoing.

But younger players stepped in for the stars and got the job done, and the Sailors kept rolling. In the playoffs they defeated Grand Rapids Forest Hills Central and Jenison to capture a district title before knocking out Portage Northern in the regional finals.

The Sailors reached the state finals at Ford Field after winning a state semifinal contest against Midland.

The fun ended with a 29-16 loss to Warren De La Salle in the Division 2 state finals. It was the second time in five seasons the Sailors lost to De La Salle in the finals.

But all in all, 2018 still went down as one of the best football seasons in Mona Shores history.

"It was great to be able to make a run despite losing Damari Robertson early on," said Mona Shores Coach Matt Koziak, regarding the season-ending ACL injury to his star receiver. "We felt the show must go on and we had some great senior leadership, which helped a lot."

Now the Sailors are battling the injury bug again, before the first snap of the season.

Senior quarterback Caden Broersma (6-3, 210), who emerged as an All-Stater last season in his first full year of varsity, broke a bone in his right hand during the preseason and will miss several games.

Broersma had a huge impact last season, helping the Mona Shores offense set a new school record for points scored with 609. No Sailor squad had even hit the 600-point mark before.

"It's tough that we lost him for the start of the season after what he did for us last year," Koziak said about Broersma. "The guys are going to have to step up in his absence, which is what makes football great."

Junior Brady Rose (5-7, 160) is expected to be the guy to step in under center during Broersma's absence.

Rose saw some playing time last season. According to his coach he is a fearless player who is smart and



**2019 CAPTAINS**  
Cooper Wierengo, Tre Hatcher,  
Caden Broersma, Kolbe Trovinger



*"It's tough that we lost (Broersma) for the start of the season after what he did for us last year. The guys are going to have to step up in his absence, which is what makes football great."*

- Head Coach Matt Koziak

## SAILOR STATS

**2018 record: 12-2**

**Conference record: 5-1**

**Returning starters: 6 offense, 2 defense**

**Projected Quarterback: Caden Broersma**



### 2018 RESULTS

Mona Shores 48, E. Kentwood 38  
Mona Shores 35, Bay City 0  
Mona Shores 49, R-P 35  
Mona Shores 33, Rockford 14  
Mona Shores 41, K. Hills 0  
Mona Shores 56, GR Union 0  
Mona Shores 49, Jenison 42  
Muskegon 55, Mona Shores 35  
Mona Shores 57, Fruitport 38  
Mona Shores 34, FH Central 28  
Mona Shores 49, Jenison 10  
Mona Shores 58, P. Northern 28  
Mona Shores 49, Midland 28  
De La Salle 29, Mona Shores 16

can do anything asked of him very well.

The Sailors also face the challenge of replacing a lot of talent lost to graduation, with only two starters returning on the defensive side of the ball and six on offense.

Standouts who received their diplomas and moved on included running back Sincere Dent, receiver James Gilbert and wingback Keyshawn Sandifer.

But Mona Shores has reached the point where a changing of the guard does not make a big difference. The Sailors continue to have the same three goals headed into 2019 that past squads adopted:

Win the O-K Black Conference for the first time since 2015, make the state playoffs again, and finally complete the goal of winning a state championship.

There are capable new faces stepping into the lineup to help achieve those goals.

The Sailors will have senior Tre Hatcher (5-10, 180) at the running back position. Hatcher is in his third year at the varsity level and has bulked up during the offseason. He quietly rushed for more than 800 yards last season and could take a big step forward this fall.

The receiving corps will include seniors Kolbe Trovinger (6-0, 185), Keondre Pierce (5-9, 168) and Gary Humprey.

Humprey is a defending state champion in power lifting whose athleticism could be a big plus for the team.

The Sailors will have two players returning to the offensive line: seniors Cooper Wierengo (5-10, 215) and Blake Bustard (6-6, 275).

Wierengo is undersized for his position, but is scrappy enough to find a way to get the job done, while Bustard has gained some size this offseason.

The Sailors' defense will have even more new faces in the starting lineup.

Senior Logan Hekkema (6-4, 260) will lead the defensive line as an end. He has put on some size since his junior season.

Trovinger will lead the linebackers corps, along with senior Cam Sobish (5-10, 190) and junior Carson Marhugh (5-11, 225).

The secondary will consist of Rose at free safety with Pierce and senior Jaylen Hopson (6-0, 180) at cornerback.

"This team will be a very fun to watch," Koziak said.

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# 2018 STATE FINALS



*The best of years, and the worst of years, for the Muskegon area*

By Steve Gunn  
LocalSportsJournal.com

The Muskegon area is almost always well represented during the state football finals at Detroit's Ford Field.

That was certainly the case last year, when three area squads - Montague, Mona Shores and Muskegon - all advanced to state championship games and kept local fans glued to their televisions (if they didn't make the drive to Detroit) over Thanksgiving weekend.

That was another huge feather in the cap for the Muskegon area, which is widely regarded as one of the hot spots for prep football in Michigan. It's pretty rare for one county to have as many as three teams playing for state championships in one season.

It was only the third time since 2000 that more than two local teams secured a trip to the Motor City and a shot at state glory. The other two years were 2008, when four local teams were in the finals, and 2014, when three squads made it.



The 2008 season was the very best, because Muskegon, Oakridge, Montague and Muskegon Catholic Central all won state championships, and everyone was buzzing about the quality of football in our area. The 2014 campaign was not as successful, with Muskegon Catholic winning a title, but Mona Shores and Muskegon losing.

Last year turned out to be the least successful of the great years, because all three teams lost in the finals to perennial state powers. Montague fell 42-28 to Jackson Lumen Christi in Division 6, Mona Shores lost 29-16 to Warren De La Salle in Division 2, and Muskegon dropped a 41-25 decision to Detroit Martin Luther King in Division 3.

Having no local team bring home a trophy felt pretty odd. The Muskegon area has had at least one team in the state finals 17 times since

2000, and at least one state champion in 16 of those seasons. Before 2018, the last time the area was represented in the finals, but failed to capture a title, was 2001, when both Muskegon and Oakridge lost.

So will 2018 go down among the best of years or the worst of years for Muskegon-area postseason play?

The answer is unanimous among the three head coaches who made the trip to Detroit last fall, but came home without a championship trophy. They remind us of how tough it is to make the state finals, and how much hard work, dedication and luck is involved. They say just getting there makes it a championship season, and it's hard to argue with that logic.

As Muskegon Coach Shane Fairfield summed it up following the loss in the last year's Division 3 state finals, "This is fun. Losing is not fun, but winning 13 games, winning 27 in a row and getting back to another state championship game and winning all those trophies along the way, was fun."

## Division 6 - Montague

How rare is it for a football team to start and end the regular season and playoffs on a disappointing note, but still have a terrific season that will go down as one of the best in program history?

Very rare indeed, but that's what the Montague Wildcats did in 2018. Their season was a great testament to the power of persistence in the face of adversity, and the value of taking great risks with huge games on the line.

Montague came into the season with a great history (17 playoff appearances in the past

18 years and state titles in 2008 and 2009), lots of veteran talent, and high hopes for a historic campaign.

But things started out on a very sour note when the Wildcats fell 34-13 to a strong Reed City squad in the season opener. Suddenly everyone was wondering if the team had been badly overhyped in the preseason, and would end up being a bust.

Coach Pat Collins' squad quickly put that idea to rest by zipping off seven straight victories by a combined score of 357-73. That run included four games when the Wildcats put at least 50 points on the board.

The regular season highlight was a thrilling 25-24 victory over rival Oakridge on Oct. 5, which secured a second straight championship in the brutally competitive West Michigan Conference.

The Wildcats trailed by 14 points after three quarters and appeared to be doomed. But they kept fighting and pulled within a point with a touchdown with one second left on the clock, then won the game with a two-point conversion by senior Sebastian Archer.

The next week however, in the last game of the regular season, the Wildcats fell 27-20 to a powerful squad from Portland, and limped into the playoffs with a sobering defeat to account for.

But again Montague regrouped, dusted itself off for the playoffs, and won a district championship with a 49-29 victory over Fenville and a 48-16 win over Newaygo. The Wildcats followed that with an impressive 30-14 conquest of Schoolcraft in the regional round.

The highlight of the postseason came the following week, when Montague squeaked past undefeated and favored Traverse City St. Francis 14-7 in the Division 6 state semifinals.

Montague opened the fourth quarter trailing 7-6, and was pinned back with the ball on its own 7-yard line. But the Wildcats covered 93 yards with a 12-play scoring drive, capped by 14-yard run by Archer. Then Drew Collins hit Nick Stever with a two-point conversion pass, and Montague escaped with the victory.

The final challenge came against undefeated defending state champion Jackson Lumen Christi in the Division 8 finals at Ford Field, and the Wildcats' luck finally ran dry.

The game was tied 14-14 at halftime, but Lumen Christi outscored the Wildcats 28-14 in the second half to wrap up its third consecutive state championship.

Montague had several factors working against it. One was depth, because Lumen Christi came in with 15 more players on its roster than the Wildcats, and was able to substitute and



Montague running back Bryce Stark nears the end zone. Photo/Tim Reilly





**No strangers to Ford Field: Montague Coach Pat Collins (left), Mona Shores Coach Matt Koziak, and Muskegon Coach Shane Fairfield have taken their teams to the state finals 11 times collectively. Photos/Tim Reilly**

rest players far more frequently.

Another issue was Lumen Christi senior running back Nick Thomas, who ran for 249 yards and two touchdowns on 28 carries. His yardage total ranks eighth on the list of rushing yards for a single player in a Michigan state championship game.

Montague's senior running back Bryce Stark also had a big game, rushing for 156 yards and two touchdowns, but in the end it wasn't enough.

When the dust settled, the Wildcats were left with a 12-2 record, and conference, district and regional championships. That's pretty good for a team that lost its first and last game of the regular season, and battled injuries all season long.

Despite the loss in the state finals, Coach Collins said the team was one of his most memorable, because the players kept battling toward their goal. They may have fallen short, but they didn't allow anything to stand in the way of their pursuit.

"They were focused on winning a state championship, no matter what occurred, they just remained focused on that goal, whether we had injuries or losses," Collins said. "They showed amazing resilience."

## Division 2 - Mona Shores

Another case study on the power of persistence involved the 2018 Mona Shores Sailors.

The team was loaded with talent, to be sure. But challenges kept popping up over the course of the season that would have derailed a lot of teams.

The Sailors were plagued with injuries, starting way before the season began. They took a major hit when star receiver Damari Roberson was sidelined with a season-ending torn ACL. Five other Sailors also had season-ending injuries, and star running back Sincere Dent suffered an ankle injury that caused him to miss all or parts of four games.

Another problem was the defense, which had a tendency to give up a lot of points in a lot of games. That put great pressure on the offense to keep putting the ball in the end zone at a faster clip than opponents.

But Mona Shores kept plugging holes in the lineup, scored tons of points (the most in school history), and kept winning.

One big plus was the performance of several players who were not expected to be huge contributors. The best example was wide receiver James Gilbert, who was penciled in as a secondary passing target behind Roberson, but ended up setting a new school record for receiving yards.

It all started with a 48-38 victory over East Kentwood in the season opener. That was followed by victories over Bay City Central (35-0), Reeths-Puffer (49-35), Rockford (33-14), Kenowa Hills (41-0), Jenison (49-42), Grand Rapids Union (56-0) and Fruitport (57-38).

The only blemish on the Sailors' regular season record came in Week 8 against Muskegon. Mona Shores kept the game close for three quarters before falling to the Big Reds 55-35.

Then came the Division 2 state playoffs, and the Sailors plowed past Forest Hills Central (34-28), Jenison (45-10), Portage Northern (58-28), and Midland (49-28).

That set up the state championship game at Ford Field against Warren De La Salle, the same team the Sailors lost to in 2014, in their only other trip to the state finals.

Mona Shores had high hopes for a different result the second time around, but it wasn't to be.

The score was 7-7 at halftime, and De La Salle led 21-10 after three quarters. The Sailors pulled within five points, 21-16, with 7:26 remaining in the game on a 14-yard touchdown pass from quarterback Caden Broersma to Da'Varius Carter.

But De La Salle took the ensuing kickoff, drove steadily downfield, took 5:31 off the clock, and scored the clinching touchdown with a one-yard run by quarterback Nolan Schultz with 1:57 remaining.

That left Mona Shores with a 12-2 record, district and regional championships, and one of the best seasons in school history.

Head coach Matt Koziak, who turned a losing program into a winner over the past eight seasons, said he walked away from the 2018 campaign with a lot of pride.



**Mona Shores' Sincere Dent finds a hole in the Warren De La Salle defensive line.**



**Muskegon offensive lineman Anthony Bradford prepares for a play in the state finals.**

"I will never look back on whether we won it or lost it," Koziak said. "Obviously you want to win it, but when I look back on that team, how we overcame injuries, the schedule we had, I will never look back on it as a negative. I will always be proud and carry that with me the rest of my life."

## Division 3 - Muskegon

Muskegon's second and last games of the 2018 season were played against powerful Detroit Martin Luther King.

The Big Reds put King on the schedule for an obvious reason - to play a state-caliber opponent early, and start toughening up for a late-season playoff run.

The first game against King - played in front of a huge crowd at Hackley Stadium - worked out extremely well for the Big Reds and their fans.

The last one? Not so much.

But all in all, the Big Reds experienced yet another terrific season, and once again reminded everyone why they are one of the best teams in Michigan in any class, year in and year out.

The season started out with an exciting 36-21 victory over powerful Warren De La Salle. Then came the first King game, which turned out to be a thriller. Muskegon trailed 21-17 late in fourth quarter, before calmly driving down the field to reclaim the lead.

Big Reds quarterback Cameron Martinez scored the go-ahead touchdown on a one-yard run with 1:22 to play.

Even then the outcome remained in doubt. Detroit King threatened to steal the win by driving deep into Muskegon territory as the clock ran down.

But with just 30 seconds remaining, King quarterback Dequan Finn mishandled a snap and Muskegon's Billie Roberts was there to pounce on the loose ball and seal the win.

Suddenly the Big Reds had two wins in the first two weeks against two elite opponents, and a huge surge of momentum.

The Big Reds went 7-0 the rest of the way to wrap up a perfect regular season, and did it in devastating fashion, beating East Grand Rapids 49-21, Kenowa Hills 72-14, Fruitport 63-6, Jenison 49-7, Grand Rapids Union 70-6, Mona Shores 55-35 and Reeths-Puffer 62-12.

They had a scare in their playoff opener, sneaking past East Grand Rapids in a surprisingly close rematch, 42-35. Then came three easier playoff victories - 49-17 over Grand Rapids Christian, 34-12 over Cedar Springs and 45-22 over Zeeland East.

That set up the rematch with Detroit King in the Division 3 state championship game.

Muskegon led 7-0 after one quarter, and trailed 14-10 at halftime and 21-17 after three quarters. But then King pulled away, scoring 20 points down the stretch to walk away with a 41-25 victory and the state title.

On paper, the Big Reds should have won the game. They had a 21-15 advantage in first downs, a 302-227 edge in rushing yards, and a 29:36 to 18:05 advantage in time of possession.

The main problem was Finn, the outstanding Detroit King quarterback, who completed 9 of 13 passes for 173 yards and four touchdowns.

For Muskegon, it was the end of a 27-game winning streak going all the way back to 2016, and another sobering loss on the big stage. The Big Reds have appeared in state championship games six times in the past seven seasons, but have lost five of them. The only victory in that stretch came in 2017.

But Fairfield knows all too well how much hard work, dedication and skill it takes from players and coaches to get to the state finals. He knows a loss at Ford Field cannot define an otherwise sensational season.

"We have played some really good teams (in the finals)," Fairfield said. "Four of those losses came to Birmingham Brother Rice and Orchard Lake St. Mary's, two of the greatest programs in the state, and King had 13 Division 1 players. But just getting there is always a great experience."



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# There are big shoes to fill in Wildcats' lineup

By Dave Hart  
LocalSportsJournal.com

MONTAGUE - The Montague football team nearly accomplished its ultimate goal last fall, but fell just short of capturing another state championship.

The Wildcats finished the regular season with a 7-2 record and ended up 11-3 overall. The exciting season ended with a disappointing 42-28 loss to perennial state power Jackson Lumen Christi at Ford Field in the Division 6 state finals.

The team advanced to the finals after beating Fennville and Newaygo in district play, Schoolcraft in the regional finals and Traverse City St. Francis in the state semifinals.

Montague also posted a perfect 7-0 record in West Michigan Conference play to capture its second straight league title. The Wildcats are 14-0 in the very tough league over the past two years.

"The kids set that (state title) goal at the beginning of the season last year," said Montague head coach Pat Collins, who has spent 16 years with the Wildcats. "For the senior class, which was a very athletic class, it was their main focus.

"We went through some tough times last year with injuries, but our underclassmen really stepped up."

The Wildcats have had a tremendous amount of success in recent decades, making the playoffs for the last four seasons, and 17 of the last 18 years. That didn't happen by accident, according to Collins.

"Former head coach Ken Diamond set the expectations high and helped reestablish the football program," the veteran coach said. "I just helped maintain that strong tradition throughout the years."

If the Wildcats want to make another run to Ford Field, the underclassmen will have to play a huge role.

Montague, which is expected to field about 20-25 players at the varsity level, will have only six seniors on the squad this fall, which is the lowest number of the Collins era.

The Wildcats will have only four returning starters on both the offense and defensive side of the



**2019 CAPTAINS**  
BR: Drew Collins, Brennan Schwarz, Walker Martin, Remington Schneider. FR: Logan Metcalf, Mark Vanderleest, Johnny Monette.



*"We have a different team and style from last year. Some of our sophomores are really going to need to step it up if we are going to make another run for it this season."*

- Coach Pat Collins

## WILDCATS WATCH

**2018 record: 11-3, D6 state runner-up**  
**Conference record: 7-0**  
**Returning starters: 4 offense, 4 defense**  
**Projected Quarterback: Drew Collins**



**2018 RESULTS**  
Reed City 34, Montague 13  
Montague 67, Shelby 07  
Montague 55, Mason CC 0  
Montague 62, N. Muskegon 20  
Montague 48, Whitehall 7  
Montague 58, Hart 0  
Montague 25, Oakridge 24  
Montague 42, Ravenna 15  
Portland 27, Montague 20  
Montague 49, Fennville 20  
Montague 48, Newaygo 14  
Montague 30, Schoolcraft 14  
Montague 14, TC St. Francis 7  
Jackson LC 42, Montague 28

ball. The good news is that many of the players who didn't start last season got a lot of unexpected playing time due to injuries.

Those players saw a lot of action in some very big games, including last year's state championship contest.

"We have a different team and style from last year," said Collins. "Some of our sophomores are really going to need to step it up if we are going to make another run for it this season."

The Wildcats will be led by junior quarterback Drew Collins, who became the starting signal caller in Week 3 of last year, replacing senior Sebastian Archer, who suffered a shoulder injury.

Drew Collins made the most of the opportunity, throwing for 1,947 yards on 104-for-179 passing. He had 18 touchdowns passes and 11 interceptions while averaging 139.1 passing yards per game.

"He works hard for the program and he puts in a lot of time," said Coach Collins about his quarterback, who also happens to be his son. "He had a chance to play in some big moments for us last year and did well."

The Wildcats rushing attack will be led by senior Johnny Monette, who carried the ball 26 times last year for 251 yards and four touchdowns.

The Montague receiving corps will consist of seniors Remington Schneider (6-3, 180), Brennan Schwarz (6-2, 200) and Logan Metcalf (6-4, 170). Schneider was hurt all of last season and only dressed during the state finals, but never saw any playing time.

Schwarz caught 33 passes last season for 756 yards and seven touchdowns, while Metcalf has shown some promise and has worked hard this offseason.

The offensive line will be anchored by two returning players - senior Mark Vanderleest (5-11, 195) and junior Walker Martin (6-4, 285).

Both will be main forces on both the offensive and defensive lines.

The Wildcats will also have sophomore Hayden McDonald (6-2, 250) on the offensive line.

McDonald saw some playing time as a freshman and will play a bigger role this year.

The Wildcats' linebacker corps will be led by Collins and Schneider. The secondary will be led by Schwarz, who was All-State last season at free safety. Monette and Metcalf will play cornerback.

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# Big Reds' 2019 strategy: Just keep winning

By Nate Thompson  
LocalSportsJournal.com

MUSKEGON - There's really no fancy slogan or rallying cry for the Muskegon Big Reds football team this season.

If anything, head coach Shane Fairfield could just adopt the famous words of longtime Oakland Raiders owner Al Davis: "Just Win, Baby."

"It's nothing more than go out and win every game," Fairfield said. "That's the motivation. We came awfully close to doing that last year. These kids know the plan. They know what our program's about."

Muskegon followed that blueprint to victories in its first 13 games a year ago, before Detroit King's explosive, big-play offense exposed the Big Reds' defense in the Division 3 state finals at Ford Field, and Muskegon lost 41-25.

If Muskegon wants to follow a similar blueprint this fall - and perhaps get back to Ford Field for another shot at a state title - senior quarterback Cameron Martinez will once again be the architect.

In his first season starting at Muskegon, the 5-foot-11, 190-pounder was simply brilliant, running behind a veteran, dominant offensive line.

He totaled 2,316 yards and 36 touchdowns on the ground, both of which were Muskegon single-season records.

"In our biggest games, he had his biggest games," Fairfield said. "That's the type of player he is. I believe he could easily have as good a season this year. He's bigger, stronger, faster and he knows the offense top to bottom."

Martinez will likely switch over to slot receiver or defensive back once he gets to college, and Fairfield hinted that he will use Martinez in different looks on offense this year.

That will give opposing teams another thing to worry about, and an opportunity for junior backup quarterback Amari Crowley to showcase his skills. Fairfield said Crowley excels at running the option and has a strong throwing arm.

The key worry offensively is replacing four starters from the offensive line, including 350-pound Anthony Bradford, who is now at Louisiana State University.

Senior Billie Roberts (6-5, 265) will start at left tackle for the first time, and is still a potential Division 1 recruit at defensive end. The leader of the line will be senior center D'Andre Ellis (6-2, 300), who



## 2019 CAPTAINS

FR: Cam Martinez, Kolbe Lewis, Japrie Henderson, Quenten Reynolds, Tarran Walker.  
BR: D'Andre Mills-Ellis, Jordan Porter, Billie Roberts.



*"Last year, we knew our defense was young and a weak spot, so we wanted to control the ball. This year, you'll see us take more chances on offense. We've got a lot more confidence in our defense."*

- Head Coach Shane Fairfield

## BIG REDS BASICS

2018 record: 13-1, D3 state runner-up

Conference record: 6-0

Returning starters: 4 offense, 7 defense

Projected Quarterback: Cameron Martinez



## 2018 RESULTS

Muskegon 36, De La Salle 21  
Muskegon 24, Detroit King 21  
Muskegon 49, East GR 21  
Muskegon 72, Kenowa Hills 14  
Muskegon 63, Fruitport 6  
Muskegon 49, Jenison 7  
Muskegon 70, GR Union 6  
Muskegon 55, Mona Shores 35  
Muskegon 62, R-P 12  
Muskegon 42, East GR 35  
Muskegon 49, GR Christian 17  
Muskegon 34, Cedar Springs 18  
Muskegon 45, Zeeland East 22  
Detroit King 41, Muskegon 25

is a three-year starter. Sophomore Duane Anderson (6-2, 260) is the favorite to start at right tackle, while the competition for starting guards will likely be between sophomore Jamarrius Dickerson (5-11, 300), senior Darian Bridgford (5-9, 230), and junior Tayvid Elmore (5-10, 255).

In the other skill positions, Fairfield likes the strong committee of speedy running backs he can unveil, including senior Tarran Walker (5-9, 184); junior Desjuan Lindsey (5-10, 191); senior Tommy Watts (5-7, 160) and junior Jacarri Kitchen.

Fairfield said the senior duo of Quenten Reynolds and Kolbe Lewis are a dangerous pair of weapons at receiver, while equally strong and swift Japrie Henderson has had a great summer and will excel in the slot.

Muskegon has a pair of great athletes at tight end, and both will also star on the defensive line. Jordan Porter is a 6-4, 235-pound junior, while Dametrius Walker (6-5, 270 pounds) has already received scholarship offers.

Muskegon returns a total of seven players on defense, which Fairfield said will be a big factor in game planning.

"Last year, we knew our defense was young and a weak spot, so we wanted to control the ball and control the clock to keep our offense on the field," Fairfield said. "This year, I think you'll see us take more chances on offense. Even if we go three-and-out with more passes downfield, we've got a lot more confidence in our defense because all those dudes are back."

Roberts can play inside on the defensive line or shift out to end, while Ellis and junior Quinshawn Clincy are the other run-stuffers inside.

At linebacker, Walker is a returning starter in the middle, although Lindsey and Dwight McKinney will challenge for playing time. On the outside, the expected starters are junior Pierre Johnson and senior Billy Johnson.

At corner, sophomore Myles Walton started and played well as a freshman last season, and Fairfield said he's a potential Division 1 recruit. Kolbe Lewis will join him at corner, while the secondary will also feature a trio of smart, athletic safeties in junior Tyreese Oakes, senior Quenten Reynolds and junior Julius Sims.

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# MUSKEGON CATHOLIC

# Crusaders building after a rare losing season

By Tom Kendra  
LocalSportsJournal.com

MUSKEGON - The Muskegon Catholic Central football team is used to starting off the season with a target on its back, because it's been very successful for a very long time.

This year, that target has been replaced by a chip on the shoulder, because MCC did not perform up to program standards last fall.

The Crusaders, who won four consecutive Division 8 state championships from 2013 to 2016, finished with an overall record of 3-6 and missed the playoffs for the first time since 2010.

"We only had four seniors last year," said seventh-year MCC coach Steve Czerwon. "We had talented kids, but when they're that young, you're really not sure how they are going to react to certain things. And then the injuries hit and we were just holding on."

This year's Crusaders are still young - with just seven seniors on the 24-player varsity roster - but they are one year older, a little big bigger, more seasoned at the varsity level and, for now, healthy.

That is certainly the case with talented junior quarterback Max Price (5-11, 160), a returning starter who played through back injuries much of last season and finally missed the final two games altogether. Price has been impressive in 7-on-7s and other camps this summer, according to his head coach.

"Max can throw the ball and we have a good group of receivers - that's the strength of our team," Czerwon said. "But this isn't 7-on-7s. The key for us is that we have to block and we have to give him time to do his thing."

Price completed 52 of 96 passes last fall (54 percent) for 729 yards with eight TDs and eight interceptions.

He has his top two targets back in senior tight end Nolan Convertini (18 receptions for 423 yards and five touchdowns) and sophomore slot Dane Rutz (18 receptions for 173 yards and one touchdown).

Carson St. Amour, a senior slot receiver, is expected to have



## 2019 CAPTAINS

BR: Carson St. Amour, Prince Budu, Nolan Convertini, Andrew Fredrickson. FR: Tiovanni Knight, Solomon Waller, Josh Holden



"Last year, we were almost like a JV team playing varsity with so many freshmen and sophomores. But the kids have been great. They have done everything we've asked. They know they need to get bigger, faster and stronger."

- Head Coach Steve Czerwon

## CRUSADER FACTS

2018 record: 3-6

Conference record: 2-2

Returning starters: 7 offense, 8 defense

Projected Quarterback: Max Price



## 2018 RESULTS

MCC 35, Algonac 7  
Pontiac Notre Dame 21, MCC 7  
Orchard View 32, MCC 14  
MCC 34, Ludington 6  
Cassopolis 48, MCC 0  
MCC 47, Muskegon Heights 6  
Manistee 35, MCC 27  
Benton Harbor 41, MCC 21  
Newaygo 14, MCC 7

a breakout year, along with senior end Josh Holden. With all of those targets at Price's disposal, the Crusaders could well feature a pass-first offense - something unheard of in Mike Ribecky's 42 years as an MCC assistant coach.

For the first time in memory, MCC was outrushed last season (1,765 yards allowed, compared to 1,726 yards gained) and scored just 13 rushing touchdowns.

By comparison, former Crusader great Tommy Scott rushed for 34 touchdowns alone and ran for more than 2,100 yards in the 2014 season.

MCC will not have to rely completely on the passing game, because it has its two leading rushers back.

They are seniors Tio Knight (82 carries for 453 yards) and Soloman Waller (58 carries for 379 yards).

The challenge will be up front, where the projected starters on the offensive line are three sophomores (Landon Patterson, Jaden Johnson and Alex Barnhill), along with junior AJ Lock and senior Andrew Fredrickson.

"Well if that seems young, it's older than last year because it's basically the same kids," said Ribecky, the veteran line coach. "They are all a little older, a little bigger and a little more experienced."

Czerwon believes that if his team stays healthy, it will have a chance to win every game and get back into the playoffs, where MCC has thrived.

The Crusaders have 13 overall state titles, including 12 in the playoff era. Czerwon is 21-1 in his career in playoff games.

The schedule features three home games and five away games, with an open date on Week 5 that the school has been trying to fill.

"Last year, we were almost like a JV team playing varsity with so many freshmen and sophomores," Czerwon said. "But the kids have been great. They have done everything we've asked."

Muskegon Catholic returns seven starters on offense and eight on defense, including its five leading tacklers.

They are linebackers tConvertini (50 tackles, 2 interceptions), Holden (43 tackles) and junior Tommy Kartes (47 tackles), along with juniors Richie Ward (40 tackles) and Soloman Waller (39 tackles).

Speedy sophomore Bailey Williams and St. Amour return in the secondary, while sophomore Joe Waller is back at nose guard.

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# Tigers not discouraged after winless season

By Jason Goorman  
LocalSportsJournal.com

MUSKEGON HEIGHTS - What the Muskegon Heights football team lacks in depth, its core group of dedicated players might be able to make up with heart.

The Tigers return to the gridiron with renewed hope after posting a frustrating 0-9 record in 2018. Part of that hope rests in the hands of a core group of players who have been dedicated to improving in the offseason.

For second-year head coach Van Parker, hope combined with dedication means his Tigers squad will soon break the school's losing streak. Busting up that losing streak would mean a lot, because before last season, Muskegon Heights hadn't experienced an 0-9 season since 2000.

"The (team) numbers are going up slowly, but they are going in the right direction and that gives me hope," said Parker about the number of players who came for his team this season. "But our confidence is growing because there has been a dedicated core group of guys who have been with us all summer and throughout the offseason."

Key leaders this season include senior David Wallace and sophomore Devin Cooper.

Wallace, a 5-8, 225-pounder who will play on both sides of the ball, brings the experience Coach Parker is looking for in a leader.

"We need seniors to lead this team and Wallace has stepped up in this capacity," said Parker, who played on the Tigers' 2009 team with future NFL star Willie Snead IV. "He (Wallace) can move, he has game experience after starting all nine games last season, and he's hit the weight room. He's a leader up front, very strong and athletic."

The other leader for the Tigers, albeit young, is the 5-10, 220 pound Cooper.

"He's a physical kid, a lot stronger than your average sophomore, moves fast and is always dreaming about football," said Parker about Cooper. "The experience he garnered as a freshman last year on varsity will pay off for him this season. He's one of those kids who makes coaching fun because he is willing to put in the work."

Both Cooper and Wallace will play linebacker on defense, and Parker thinks they can fill the hole to stop plays from developing.



**2019 CAPTAINS**  
E'dreek Tornes, Devin Cooper, Anthony Floyd,  
Darrell Robinson, Emarion Mason,  
D'Angelo Hollins, David Wallace.



*"We have experienced a big influx of new players, and getting them on board and focused, is a challenge. But our core group of guys are here every day, putting in the time, and their attitude will influence their teammates and future Tigers."*

- Head Coach Van Parker

## TIGERS' TRAJECTORY

2018 record: 0-9

Conference record: 0-4

Returning starters: 2 offense, 2 defense

Projected Quarterback: E'dreek Tornes



## 2018 RESULTS

GR C. Central 42, M. Heights 14  
NorthPointe 13, M. Heights 12  
Det. Community 38, M. Heights 12  
Manistee 46, M. Heights 26  
Ludington 28, M. Heights 14  
M. Catholic 47, M. Heights 6  
OV 55, M. Heights 6  
Oscoda 53, M. Heights 6  
Ravenna 65, M. Heights 0

Muskegon Heights will rely on sophomore quarterback E'dreek Tornes to lead the offense this season. Despite his lack of experience, Parker speaks highly of Tornes' athleticism and ability to lead. Tornes was the point guard on the varsity basketball team that captured a Division 4 district title last season.

"We have seen a lot of development out of Tornes over the summer and he has grown physically and mentally," said Parker about his 5-11, 160 pound quarterback. "Everything we throw at him in practice, he figures it out. He's a good kid who is growing daily and has a ton of potential."

Tornes will rely heavily on senior receivers De'angelo Hollins (6-1, 185) and Darrel Robinson (5-10, 185).

"De'angelo is a freaky athletic kid," Parker said. "He is long, can run, and is a very smooth natural athlete. He couldn't play last year, so he's hungry and has a mean streak in him that is ready to get out there on the field."

Robinson, who will also play defense, brings a competitive edge to the lineup that reminds Parker of some of the old-school Tigers he remembers from years ago.

"(Darrel) is one of the toughest competitors on our team," the coach said. "He brings the sharp competitive edge I'm looking for in a player, but he is also a well-rounded player."

One newcomer that Parker thinks will see significant playing time throughout the next four years is freshman running back Anthony Floyd. The 5-10, 170 pounder brings a natural talent and an attitude that Parker thinks will help him make big strikes in his first year of varsity.

While Parker knows his young team will face some struggles on the field this season, he has one expert to turn to for guidance as he develops the squad. He stays in contact with his mentor and former coach Willie Snead III and said he learns a lot from him. Snead III coached the Tigers' 2009 team to the state semifinals, the deepest playoff run in school history.

"He is always, in a way, helping me," Parker said. "Coach Snead is an extension of my staff. Anything I need, he's always one call away. He brings in an X's and O's mindset that gives me confidence for keeping the kids on track."

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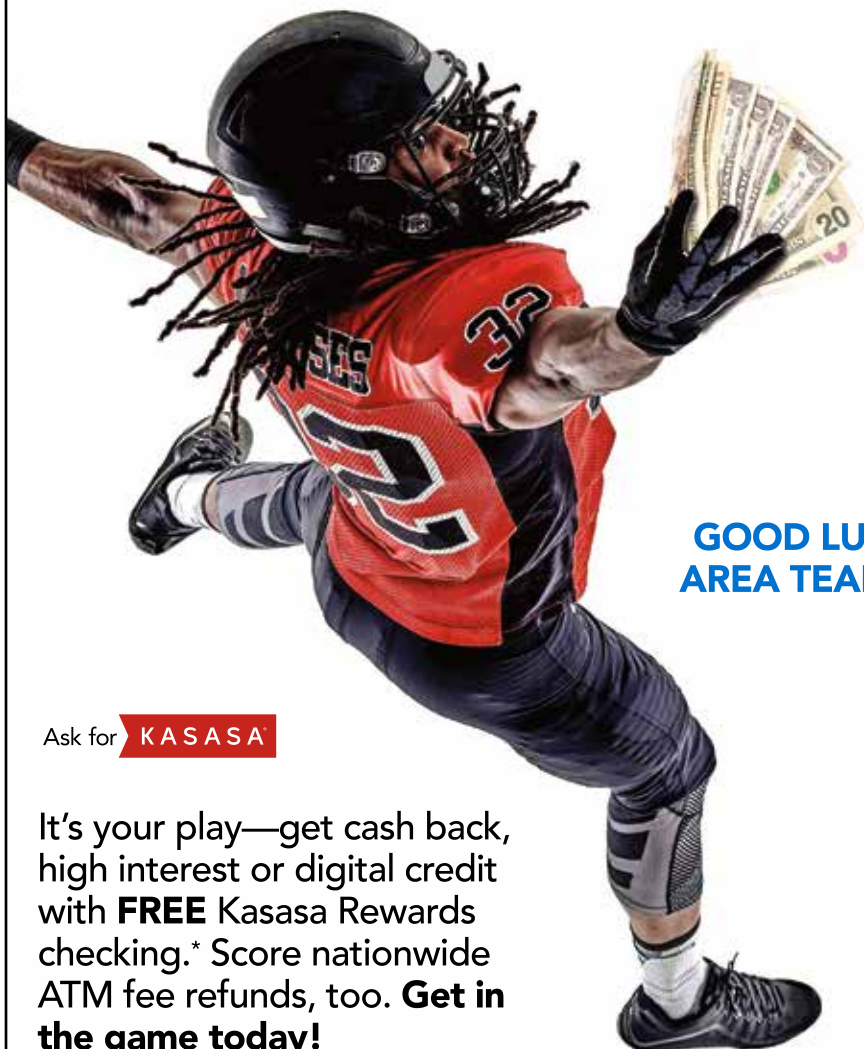
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# N O R T H M U S K E G O N

# Norse have sights set on a conference title

By Mitchell Boatman  
LocalSportsJournal.com

NORTH MUSKEGON - Coming off back-to-back playoff appearances for the first time since the 1994 and 1995 seasons, the North Muskegon football program is eager to build on its momentum.

Last year North Muskegon, behind a talented group of senior playmakers, was one of several teams to qualify for the playoffs in Division 7 with a 5-4 record, which is one victory shy of an automatic berth.

Then the Norse gave heavily-favored and undefeated Lake City all it could handle in a 30-28 loss in the opening round of the postseason.

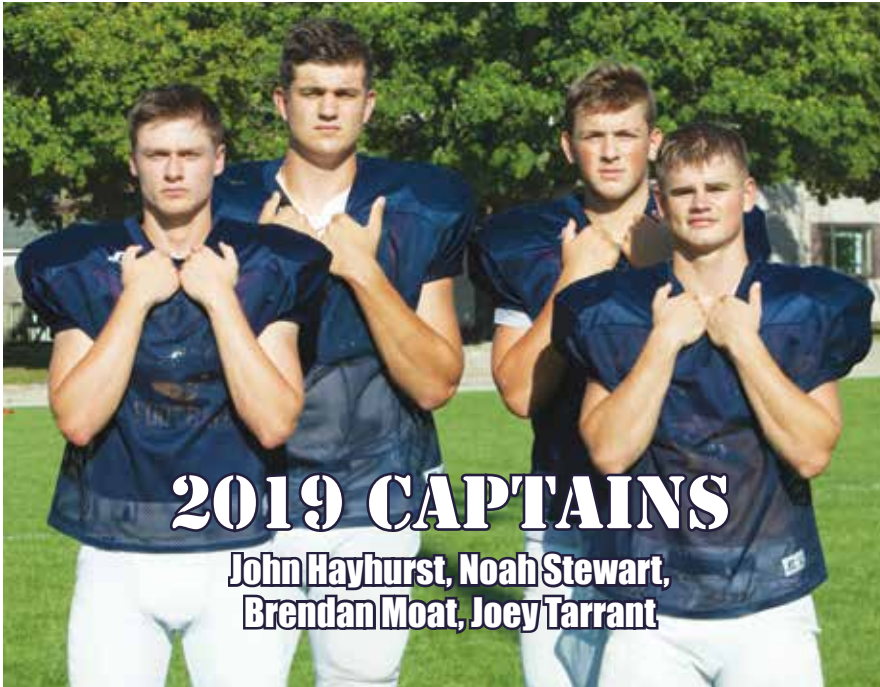
North Muskegon is replacing a lot of talent on the offensive side of the ball this season, but brings back the majority of its defense. Head coach Larry Witham still expects his team to be around come playoff time, and is hoping it can pick up some hardware along the way in the regular season, as well.

"I'm sure that the obligatory response to (our season goals) is we want to get in the playoffs and win a state championship," Witham said. "There's no doubt in our minds that that is what we want to do. But winning the league will certainly give us a spot at the table. That's really what our kids are focused on."

One challenge for North Muskegon will be replacing five college football-bound athletes on the offensive side of the ball. Quarterback Mack Young, wide receiver TJ McKenzie and tight end Jesse Cooke are off to Hope College, running back Chandler Edwards now suits up for Wayne State and wide receiver De'Shary Warren is playing at Alma College.

"We just had some phenomenal kids on the offensive side of the ball," Witham said. "The kids that played behind TJ, Chandler, Jesse, De'Shary and Mack, those kids could've started on a lot of different football teams."

Senior John Hayhurst (6-3, 200) will be tasked with leading the offense as the quarterback this season. Hayhurst saw some time as a running back last year while backing up Young under center, but did see action at QB in two



## 2019 CAPTAINS

John Hayhurst, Noah Stewart,  
Brendan Moat, Joey Tarrant



*"There's no easy game on our schedule, especially when you're 327 students strong. We're always going to be the smaller school in the fight, but that doesn't mean we're not the better school."*

- Head Coach Larry Witham

## NORSEMEN NOTES

2018 record: 5-5

Conference record: 3-4

Returning starters: 5 offense, 7 defense

Projected Quarterback: John Hayhurst



## 2018 RESULTS

N. Muskegon 41, Hesperia 6  
Oakridge 61, N. Muskegon 27  
Ravenna 53, N. Muskegon 26  
Montague 62, N. Muskegon 20  
N. Muskegon 35, Mason Co. 0  
N. Muskegon 49, Shelby 0  
N. Muskegon 48, Hart 0  
Whitehall 47, N. Muskegon 21  
N. Muskegon 47, OV 22  
Lake City 30, N. Muskegon 28

games. He showed promise, throwing for 405 yards, seven touchdowns and no interceptions.

"He has a great arm, he's a dual threat kid," Witham said. "A very good runner, he throws the ball well, makes great decisions."

Stephen Smith (5-9, 170) is expected to see a lot of time in the offensive backfield this season. Eric Rypstra (6-2, 180) returns as a starting wide receiver after playing opposite McKenzie last season.

"He didn't see a lot of balls come his way when TJ McKenzie was on the field, but he's a great athlete," Witham said about Rypstra. "He catches the ball extremely well."

Kyler Dena and Joey Tarrant will also see time as receivers, while Brendan Moat will have a chance to slide back into the tight end spot he started in as a sophomore.

Witham said this year's offense might be a little less explosive, but should still be able to move the ball down the field.

The Norse will be hoping for improvement up front after struggling to run the ball last season. Four of the five starters on the offensive line return, which should help. Noah Stewart (6-7, 240) returns at left tackle, Asa Poulin (6-0, 200) mans the left guard position, Caleb Rypstra (5-6, 195) will handle center duties and Joe Flynn (5-9, 180) will play right guard.

Defensively, the Norse will have to do better to challenge for the West Michigan Conference crown. In five wins last year, the Norse allowed just 28 total points, but in their four conference losses, they allowed 223 points.

North Muskegon will bring back seven starters on the defense, so the experienced players should be expected to show improvement.

Stewart, Poulin, Moat and Logan Richards will all see time on the defensive line. Tarrant, Flynn and Dena will comprise the linebacking corps, along with newcomer Brennan Pinucci.

Hayhurst, a safety, and Rypstra, a corner, return in the secondary. Collin Schotts, who ran for 1,200 yards as a running back on the JV team last year, will get a chance to start at cornerback.

"We have seven coming back (defensively), which is very nice," Witham said. "We have a lot of depth. We'll probably move some pieces around. We'll have some kids in a rotation to keep guys fresh and get (our two-way players) a break."



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# New faces, but Eagles expect similar results

By Mitchell Boatman  
LocalSportsJournal.com

EGELSTON TOWNSHIP - Most of the members of this year's Oakridge football team were likely in diapers the last time the Eagles missed out on the playoffs.

That was in 2004, and since then Oakridge has ripped off 14 straight postseason trips, including 24 playoff wins and two state titles.

Continuing that amazing run might be challenging for Oakridge this year, because the team will have just four returning starters on offense and three on defense.

But included in that group is standout running back Leroy Quinn. Now a senior, Quinn did just about everything for the Eagles last year. He dominated on the ground, handled punting duties and he was a leader on the defensive side of the ball.

Quinn ran for 1,777 yards and 28 touchdowns on 194 carries - a gaudy 9.2 yards per carry clip. He punted 12 times for 457 yards (38 yards per punt) and racked up 54 tackles, including eight for losses, two fumble recoveries, one forced fumble and one sack.

"We're definitely going to try to take advantage of him, having him back there," Oakridge head coach Cary Harger said of Quinn. "His leadership ability, his physical ability to run the ball, his size, his strength. We will definitely take advantage of the run.

"Leroy's put on a little bit more weight, he's excited to be a senior and get looks from colleges. He's making sure he can do his best to get that attraction from colleges."

Quinn will be taking handoffs from a new quarterback this year after the graduation of Koleman Wall. Taking over the position this year will be junior Ethan Dailey.

"He's done a very good job mechanically for us," Harger said. "We're working on his varsity reads versus his JV reads, getting the timing down with the release of the ball."

While Quinn will be a focal point of the offense, Harger said Dailey will be ready if defenses sell out to stop the run.

"If teams are giving us fits up front, we'll know that they're probably rolling the dice and leaving the secondary a little thin," he said. "With Ethan at quarterback, his mechanics and ability to throw the ball, I think we'll still have a good mix of



*"I'm liking more and more how this team is starting to gel together. I was a little worried about that, how they would react to not having so many of those familiar faces around ... it seems they're coming together pretty well."*

- Head Coach Cary Harger

## OAKRIDGE OUTLOOK

**2018 record: 9-2**

**Conference record: 6-1**

**Returning starters: 4 offense, 3 defense**

**Projected Quarterback: Ethan Dailey**



### 2018 RESULTS

Oakridge 55, Chippewa Hills 8  
Oakridge 61, N. Muskegon 27  
Oakridge 69, Shelby 0  
Oakridge 42, Whitehall 14  
Oakridge 48, Ravenna 12  
Oakridge 63, Mason County 6  
Montague 25, Oakridge 24  
Oakridge 62, Hart 0  
Oakridge 46, B. Springs 12  
Oakridge 58, Belding 29  
U. Christian 40, Oakridge 37

the run and pass."

Outside of Quinn, there are three returners on the offensive side, one of whom will be switching positions. Junior Jake Danicek returns to his role of starting wide receiver, senior Nate Fair will once again start at tackle and senior Will Scraver will make the move from tight end to offensive line.

Harger said Danicek brings athleticism and work ethic on the outside.

"He's a good athletic, strong kid that has worked his butt off in the weight room the last two years," he said. "He's just hungry to make plays."

Fair came back from a torn ACL in his sophomore season to start on the line as a junior. He'll be joined on the line by Scraver, who Harger said has been making a nice transition.

"He's gotten a lot stronger and gotten a lot more vocal being a senior," the coach said about Danicek. "He realizes he's giving up some things going from a glory position to a grunt position, but he's been very coachable."

The defense doesn't offer much in the way of returning starters either, bringing back just three starters, all two-way players. Scraver played on the defensive line, Quinn was a linebacker and Danicek played in the secondary.

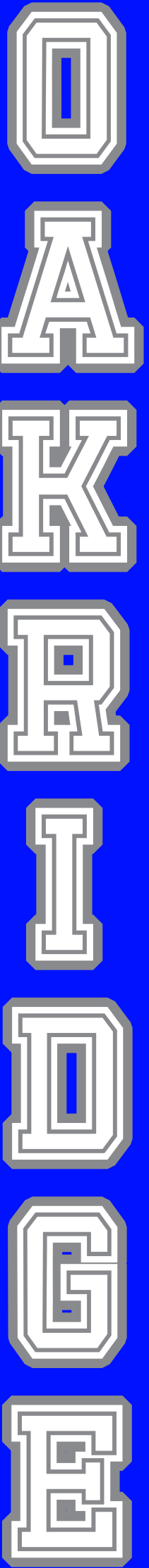
Harger believes some people may be underestimating his team because of what was lost to graduation. The Eagles will have plenty of chances to prove them wrong, in the conference and against two new non-league opponents.

Oakridge will face Belding in Week 1 and Traverse City St. Francis in Week 9. The Eagles topped Belding 59-29 in the playoffs last season, and have never played St. Francis.

The addition of two tough non-conference opponents will be challenging for the Eagles, but should also help them prepare for what very well could be a 15th consecutive trip to the state playoffs.

"Trying to schedule our non-league is very difficult," he said. "We have teams that we reach out to that don't want to play us. We get calls from bigger schools and respectfully turn them down."

"We look for games that are going to be fair for our kids, but at the same time we expect a challenge. We're happy to have (Belding and St. Francis)."



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# ORCHARD VIEW

# OV's new coach knows how to build winners

By Nate Thompson  
LocalSportsJournal.com

**MUSKEGON TOWNSHIP**  
- If the Orchard View varsity football team wanted to find a link to its glory days, the Cardinals may have located one in the form of new head coach Fred Rademacher.

Rademacher served for five years as an assistant under legendary former OV coach John Shillito, when both were at East Kentwood High School. It was there Rademacher learned the Xs and Os of the Wing-T offense, which Shillito perfected during his tenure at Orchard View in the 1990s.

Shillito led the Cardinals to a pair of state championship game appearances, which Cardinal fans remember well. So they are probably pretty happy to have a coach who learned under Shillito take over the program, which has struggled in recent years, with a 15-30 record over the past five seasons, including a 2-7 mark in 2018.

Rademacher, 51, not only took Shillito's Wing-T with him on his next stop - as the head coach at Hastings High School - but also his former boss' ability to turn programs around. Before Rademacher arrived at Hastings in 2005, the Saxons had won a total of one game in the previous three seasons. Rademacher rejuvenated the program, leading it to five playoff appearances during the next nine seasons.

"There's a certain blueprint I've tried to follow at different jobs, but there's really no magic," Rademacher said. "A lot of it is hard work and staying the course. You've got to put a plan in place and believe it will work and get everyone involved to embrace it."

Rademacher, who has spent the previous two falls as an assistant coach at powerful East Grand Rapids and as a volunteer offensive line coach at Hope College, now has another rebuilding challenge on his hands with the Cardinals, who have had only two winning seasons since 2008, which was the last time they qualified for the state playoffs.

Rademacher said there's been a strong core of 20-25 players showing up consistently for weightlifting and camps throughout the summer, but understands



**2019 CAPTAINS**  
Jordan Tuttle, Dayton Rose,  
Edmari Mitchell, Dominic Baushke.



*"When the job opened, it was appealing because I knew Orchard View had a good tradition of winning, especially back in the days of John Shillito. It's a place where we can win."*

- Head Coach Fred Rademacher

## OV OUTLOOK

2018 record: 2-7

Conference record: 2-2

Returning starters: 6 offense, 8 defense

Projected Quarterback: Owen Swanson



## 2018 RESULTS

Spring Lake 42, OV 19  
Reeths-Puffer 55, OV 34  
OV 32, Muskegon Catholic 14  
Belding 42, OV 34  
Manistee 35, OV 20  
Ludington 27, OV 8  
OV 55, Muskegon Heights 6  
Mason 28, OV 6  
N. Muskegon 47, OV 22

there will be some growing pains.

"It's a work in progress," he said. "The big thing is getting to know the kids, understanding our strengths and weaknesses and earning that trust from the kids."

Rademacher will inherit some veteran skill players from an offense that was productive last season, scoring at least 20 points in five different games, four of which were losses.

One very key returnee with be junior quarterback Owen Swanson, who has been on varsity since his freshman season. Coaches call Swanson "stronger than he looks," with his 6-foot-2, 175-pound frame, and say he brings a scrambling presence in the Wing-T, along with a solid throwing arm.

The Cardinals also have some talent returning in the backfield in senior Edmari Mitchell (6-1, 225), who can plow between the tackles, as well as Alex Andrews (5-10, 170), who can be a threat running and catching the ball.

In the passing game, senior Dayton Rose (6-2, 225) proved to be a key piece at tight end last season and will be one of Swanson's favorite targets again. Senior Hayden Stanfield (6-2, 190) will offer another option at tight end, while senior Brendan Nelson is one of the speedier targets at receiver.

On the offensive line, tackle Jordan Tuttle will be a key cog in the run game, while also being one of the Cardinals' most dependable run-stuffers on the defensive line. Depth will be an issue, since most of the offensive line will have to play both ways.

Other returning starters on the O-line include junior guard Arturo Herrera and senior center Dominick Baushke.

Improving on defense will be a major focus for Orchard View, which gave up at least 25 points in seven different games last fall.

Rose is the Cardinals' top returning linebacker and will be joined by Maverick Nelson. Mitchell, the running back, can also line up at linebacker or rush the passer at end.

Swanson, Andrews and Nelson are expected to be the key playmakers in the secondary

"From what I've seen, we've got a good core of kids," said Rademacher, who will teach physical education and social studies at the high school. "They've been taking to our coaching extremely well throughout the summer and it's an athletic looking group. It's a good starting point."

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# Bulldogs will again have an explosive offense

By Mitchell Boatman  
LocalSportsJournal.com

RAVENNA - When it comes to football season in Ravenna, making the state playoffs is not the goal, it's the expectation.

With four state championship trophies on the mantle - most recently in 2003 - there is a clear legacy of winning.

In 2018, Doug Samuels' first year as head coach, the Bulldogs came very close to meeting that expectation, posting a 5-4 record and missing an automatic playoff berth by one victory. That continued a recent trend, because the Bulldogs have only been to the playoffs twice in the last seven seasons.

Samuels knows that's not good enough, and he sounds determined to get the program back to where it was not so long ago.

"That's the goal, to make a run in the playoffs," Samuels said. "I think that's always the expectation in Ravenna. It's not to make the playoffs like it is a lot of places. It's to make the playoffs and make a deep run at things.

"We want to contend for a conference title every year. We're not shy about saying that. I think we've got a group of guys who are able to do that."

Ravenna will have a slew of returning seniors ready to forge the path back to the playoffs. The Bulldogs return eight starters on an offense that averaged more than 40 points per game last year.

The group is led by senior quarterback Conner Kilbourne, an all-conference selection as a junior.

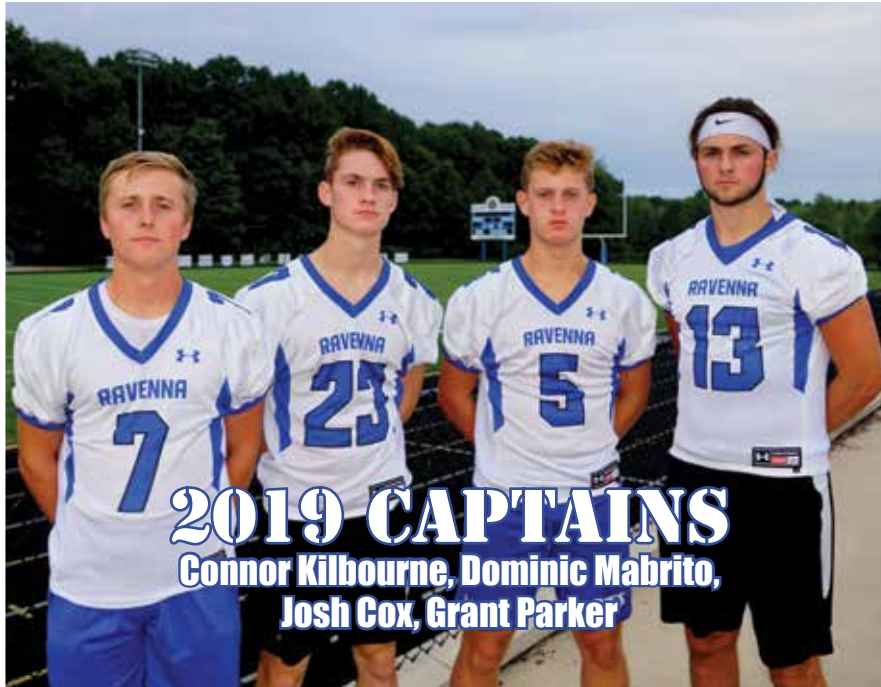
"Conner does a really great job spearheading the offense," Samuels said. "His most underrated asset, I think, is how he thinks about the game. He's very smart, he knows where he's going with the ball.

"His accuracy is outstanding. He's not going to wow you with arm strength, but he throws a catchable ball every time."

Kilbourne won't have to waste any time establishing chemistry with his receivers, because the Bulldogs bring back all of their top pass catchers from a year ago, as well.

Seniors Josh Cox, Calvin Schullo, Grant Parker and Jack Emery will all be key targets for Kilbourne in the Ravenna spread offense.

"All those guys play basketball together, some of them do track," Samuels said. "It's just a tight-knit group of friends in that senior class,



**2019 CAPTAINS**  
Connor Kilbourne, Dominic Mabrito,  
Josh Cox, Grant Parker



*"We don't just want to make the playoffs. We want to contend for a conference title every year. We're not shy about saying that. I think we've got a group of guys who are able to do that. Beyond the WMC, it's making a deep run."*

- Head Coach Doug Samuels

## BULLDOG BANTER

**2018 record: 5-4**

**Conference record: 4-3**

**Returning starters: 8 offense, 7 defense**

**Projected Quarterback: Conner Kilbourne**



## 2018 RESULTS

Hopkins 42, Ravenna 30

Ravenna 55, Hart 8

Ravenna 53, N. Muskegon 26

Ravenna 51, Shelby 0

Oakridge 48, Ravenna 12

Whitehall 40, Ravenna 38

Ravenna 48, Mason County 6

Montague 42, Ravenna 15

Ravenna 65, M. Heights 0

which is special to work with."

Samuels said junior Chad Erickson will compete for reps at the fourth receiver spot. The second-year coach added that he's been impressed with the crop of receivers the school has produced since he took over the traditional power-running team.

That crop is led by Cox, who will be the team's "A" receiver.

"Josh is an explosive player when you get him in space," Samuels said. "He understands spatial awareness really well. Being a multisport athlete has really helped him in that regard. He catches everything. If he gets a finger on it, he brings it in."

Ravenna will also have three returners on the offensive line: seniors Hunter Funk, Chase Shelley and Derek Place. Junior Hunter Burns and senior Nick Ely will also see time on the line.

Samuels said the Bulldogs will employ a running back by committee system, at least early in the season, while the competition for playing time continues. Seniors Dalton Hogan and Dom Mabrito and junior Tristan Whitt will battle for reps in the backfield.

"At running back, someone has got to step up and separate themselves there, or we're going to ride the hot hand week-to-week, whoever is producing," the coach said.

The Bulldogs bring back a majority of their defense from last season as well, with seven returning starters.

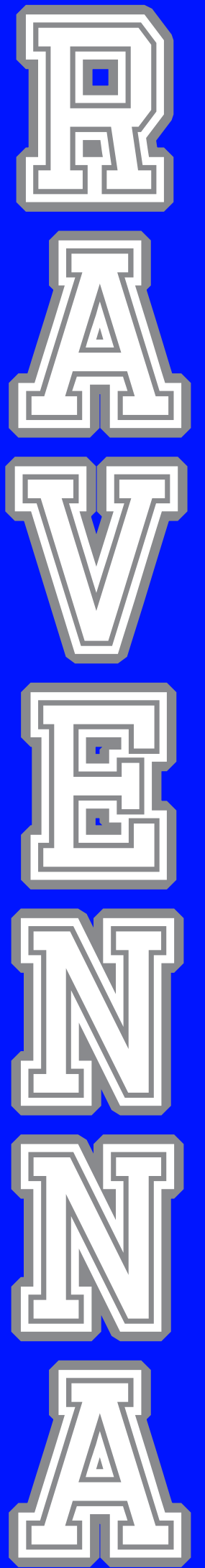
Ely, Funk, Shelley and junior Hunter Hogan will handle snaps on the defensive line. Parker, Mabrito, Place and Schullo will all play line-backer and juniors Kyler Nichols and Erickson will compete for time as well.

In the secondary, seniors Cox, Emery and Trevor Sterken will defend the passing game, along with Whitt and sophomore Thomas McCullough.

Samuels said that some pieces will shift and newcomers will compete for spots, but player height should be a big plus on defense for the Bulldogs.

"Our length is going to be a big advantage for us," he said. "That kind of cuts down on some passing lanes. We've got to use that to our advantage this year to be better on defense."

Ravenna will play the same nine teams as it did last year, opening with Hopkins.



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# REETHS PUFFER

# R-P's new coach has a long history of winning

By Nate Thompson  
LocalSportsJournal.com

MUSKEGON TOWNSHIP - For the Reeths-Puffer football program, Bird is definitely the word.

Matt Bird was named the school's new varsity football coach on Dec. 13, replacing former coach Kyle Jewett, who resigned last October, citing a need to spend more time with his family.

Bird was considered somewhat of a surprise hire by the Rockets, considering he led a strong program for years at Grand Ledge High School near Lansing.

In his 13 years as head coach for the Comets, he led the team to 10 playoff appearances, seven conference championships, and a trip to the Division 1 state semifinals in 2015. Prior to that, Bird served as the school's offensive coordinator under Hall of Fame coach Pat O'Keefe. Bird called the plays for the Comets' 2000 state championship team.

Despite those accomplishments, Bird thought it was a step up to make the move west to Reeths-Puffer, and coach in the Muskegon area, which he considers one of the prime-time spots for prep football in the state.

"It's a hub of football and you could argue there's only one other side of the state (the Detroit area) that rivals what we produce," he said. "It's exciting to think what we can accomplish at a school like Reeths-Puffer and in such a talent-rich area."

Aside from his coaching duties, Bird was also named the assistant athletic director at the school, where he will be working with fellow coaches and focusing on academic progress.

When it comes to progress on the gridiron, Bird has already established the groundwork for continued improvement, starting with organizing a leadership council of student-athletes. They've discussed upcoming goals and organized off-season training schedules.

"People want to ask when we can be like one of the area's established powers," Bird said. "I want to steer away from that and focus on what we can control and that's ourselves. The numbers (in the weight room) throughout the



*"People want to ask when we can be like one of the area's established powers. I want to steer away from that and focus on what we can control and that's ourselves."*

- Head Coach Matt Bird

## ROCKETS RUNDOWN

2018 record: 5-4

Conference record: 3-3

Returning starters: 7 offense, 5 defense

Projected Quarterback: Evan Moskwa



## 2018 RESULTS

- Grand Haven 27, R-P 0
- R-P 55, Orchard View 34
- Mona Shores 49, R-P 35
- Jenison 44, R-P 28
- R-P 65, GR Union 6
- R-P 52, Greenville 16
- R-P 48, Fruitport 8
- R-P 28, Kenowa Hills 19
- Muskegon 62, R-P 12

offseason have been absolutely great. It's a step in the right direction."

Offensively, Bird said he'll try to implement a style that fits the strengths of the roster. From eyeing the talent during summer camps and 7-on-7s, he said he wants to get the ball to the Rockets' athletes in space, likely in spread formations.

That should fit the skill set of senior quarterback Evan Moskwa very well. Last year as a junior he passed for 1,859 yards with 23 touchdowns. The 6-foot-2, 190-pounder also rushed for 426 yards and five touchdowns.

"Evan's approach in working with the coaching staff and being a leader have been phenomenal throughout the summer," Bird said. "He obviously has that game experience under his belt, so he'll play a big role for us."

Bird expects another big season for senior running back/receiver Gary Humphrey Jr. (6-3, 195), as well as senior Daven Fox (5-9, 180), who has speed to burn as a slot receiver or wing back.

Senior Monyae Franklin (5-10, 175) could also be a weapon with his blazing speed, while senior Brett Buchan (5-9, 185) will vie for some carries. Key passing targets will be senior Josh Jordan (6-6, 215) at tight end, and senior Emcee Williams (5-11, 175) at receiver.

On the offensive line, Bird mentioned probable starters Hunter Buzzell (5-10, 230) and Marco Fields (6-3, 280), but the goal is to establish more depth. Juniors Matthew Straley (5-10, 220), Jared Geiger (6-1, 240) and Ryan Kulesza (5-11, 200) will contend for playing time.

Defensively, three experienced linebackers will lead the way - junior Justin Nelson, junior Sam Bauer, and senior Colby Stephenson. Bird praised Nelson's 4.0 grade point average and said he has had a great summer, and said Bauer has adapted to the coaching staff well.

Jordan could be a key pass rusher at end, with Fields, Kulesza and senior Cole Haggard being the top defensive tackles.

Fox, Williams, and Franklin figure to be prominent in the secondary, Bird said, giving the Rockets a collection of speedy players to disrupt opposing receivers.

Bird said it's unfair to pinpoint a goal for wins in his first year on the job, but instead wants to focus on establishing a highly-organized, disciplined program that's known for toughness and competitiveness.

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# Tigers remaining positive despite struggles

By Fred Inglis  
LocalSportsJournal.com

SHELBY - Lorenzo Rodriguez has seen and heard it all during his 13 years as Shelby's varsity football coach.

The Tigers went to the playoffs four straight seasons under Rodriguez, and reached the state semifinals in 2012 and 2013. But over the past four seasons Shelby has posted a dismal 1-35 record.

Last season the Tigers finished 0-9 and were outscored by a humbling 418-41.

Considering all of that, it's probably a good thing that Shelby has a coach like Rodriguez in charge. He's seen the good times, he's seen the bad times, and he always remains optimistic about the future.

"It's been hard, real hard," Rodriguez said. "I mean nobody, coaches or players, want to lose. But you never just give up."

Rodriguez is not letting negativity overtake his rebuilding program. He's added more coaches to the staff for better individual attention for each player. The new focus is on stressing fundamentals, increasing strength and conditioning, improving the middle school program, and most of all, restoring team morale.

Third-year starter Gage Landis has seen the change in approach taking place, and said it's bringing hope to the Shelby program.

"Coach is still upbeat," said Landis, a senior. "But now we practice in different places to change things up. Our workouts are in high spirits. We already have better team chemistry."

Landis (6-0, 175) may never get off the field this season. Besides his duties as starting wide receiver on offense and safety on defense, Landis is also the Tigers' placekicker.

"He's a natural athlete," Rodriguez said. "He's smart, coachable. He's got a real nose for the football."

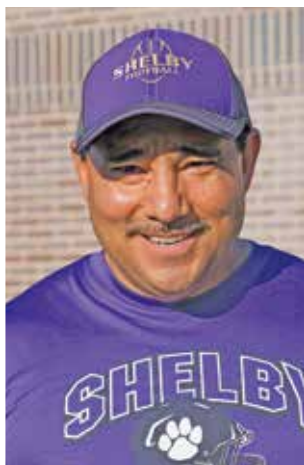
Another fresh look this year may be at quarterback. Rodriguez' son, junior Lorenzo Rodriguez II (5-9, 150) is in a battle with senior Danny Ibarra (6-0, 150) for the starting job.

"I'm not giving him any special favors," the coach said about his son. "But obviously Lorenzo has been around the game since he was my water boy at six years old. He understands concepts and sees the game as I see it. I don't have to explain a lot of things to him. I just need to find out how he does when



## 2019 CAPTAINS

Ian Purvis, Blake Greene,  
Jakob Whitlow, Lorenzo Rodriguez



*"I haven't seen drama at all this summer like I have seen in years past. I see more family support. More parents are on board and taking a greater role in their kids; commitment to the game"*

- Head Coach Lorenzo Rodriguez

## TRACKING THE TIGERS

2018 record: 0-9

Conference record: 0-7

Returning starters: 5 offense, 5 defense

Projected QBs: Lorenzo Rodriguez II, Danny Ibarra



## 2018 RESULTS

Grant 20, Shelby 13

Montague 67, Shelby 7

Oakridge 69, Shelby 0

Ravenna 51, Shelby 0

Hart 16, Shelby 14

N. Muskegon 49, Shelby 0

Whitehall 56, Shelby 0

Mason County 62, Shelby 7

Hesperia 28, Shelby 0

the going gets tough."

Ibarra was tossed into the quarterback role late last season, but strictly as emergency relief. Now he has a better feel for the position, according to the coach.

The bulk of the running back duties will be filled by a pair of seniors. Blake Greene (5-10, 175) has gotten stronger with his offseason workouts and has a better grasp of the job. Senior Jason Hubbard (5-10, 170) played just two games last season due to an injury, but his speed and athleticism will be important.

Hubbard will also take over the punting duties.

Junior Lazaro Madrigal (5-8, 150) brings his wrestling attitude to the running back spot.

Landis and Hubbard will be the 1-2 receivers on the team, and junior Griffin Fraass will be the main backup. Senior Logan Jobbins (6-0, 185) is listed as tight end. Newcomer and former soccer player Sam Routley (6-0, 170) will also see some action at tight end.

The offensive line features three returning starters. Senior Jakob Whitlow (6-0, 225) can be a dominate player at right tackle. Senior David Claxico (6-2, 275) is another third year starter. while senior right guard Ian Purvis (5-10, 190) is the third returning starter.

Juniors Sam Cederquist and Zack TenBrink are competing for the starting left guard spot. Angel Pena (5-8, 205) played center last year, and Issac Aebig is also a prime candidate for that position.

The 3-3 stack defense will be led by the same two big men from the offensive side: Claxico and Whitlow. Senior Oscar Salgado (6-1, 300) also returns up front. He took a lot of double teams last-year, which opened the line for his linebackers. Zack TenBrink and senior Zach Parker (6-3, 300) will also get plenty of playing time on the D line.

The inside linebacker spots will be filled by a host of players, including senior Lazaro Madrigal, Ian Purvis and Sam Cederquist, and Angel Pena.

Starting outside linebackers will be Logan Jobbins and Jason Hubbard. The defensive backs are led by senior Blake Greene, who was All-Conference last season. Joining Greene in the defensive secondary will be the very busy Gage Landis and junior Peyton Mero.

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# SPRING LAKER

# Young Lakers will break in a new QB in 2019

By Andrew Johnson  
LocalSportsJournal.com

SPRING LAKE – The Spring Lake football team snapped a three-year playoff drought in 2018, making the postseason despite falling one win short of the magic six-victory mark.

A big reason why the Lakers did so well was the play of stand-out quarterback Caleb Montgomery, who has since graduated.

Montgomery did a little bit of everything for the Lakers last year, but this year there will be a different voice leading the Spring Lake huddle, when either senior Zach Keyser (6-1, 195) or junior Zach Mitchell (5-9, 165) takes the starting position.

“I think we’re kind of expecting someone to come in and lead,” said Spring Lake head coach Dan Start. “We’re not going to put as much on the quarterback as we did last year. We’re going to be asking them to manage more and line up correctly and more efficiently.”

No matter which quarterback takes the starting position, he will be asked to lead a largely inexperienced but promising group.

One of those young players is sophomore running back R.J. Lisman (6-0, 180), who is expected to be a workhorse for the Lakers.

“He’s going to be a kid that will give us a lot of carries,” said Start about Lisman. “He’ll grind out the six and eight yards runs while hitting a big play here and there.”

Lisman will be joined by junior Steve Ready (5-10, 185) in the backfield, and the Lakers are hopeful the two backs will provide a solid punch.

“He’s an explosive and dynamic kid,” said Start about Ready. “He’s probably the most explosive kid in our entire program.”

One area where the Lakers will have some experience is the wide receiver position, where seniors Aidan Carlson (6-2, 185) and Kyle Garrison (6-0, 170) will lead the way.

“He was our leading receiver last year,” said Start about Carl-



**2019 CAPTAINS**  
BR: Hunter Throop, Matt Bierman, Blake Kelsey, Travis Throop. FR: Steve Ready, Sam Sheridan, Zach Keyser.



*“We’re going to be thin on experience, but I do think all of our seniors that return were starters last season. So I think experience will be lacking overall, but we’ll be very athletic.”*

- Head Coach Dan Start

## LAKER LOGISTICS

2018 record: 5-5

Conference record: 3-3

Returning starters: 4 offense, 5 defense

Projected QB’s: Zach Keyser, Zach Mitchell



## 2018 RESULTS

Spring Lake 42, OV 19  
Spring Lake 49, Fruitport 20  
Spring Lake 10, Sparta 0  
Spring Lake 38, Coopersville 0  
Spring Lake 37, C. Park 34  
W. Catholic 38, Spring Lake 21  
GR Catholic 35, Spring Lake 12  
Allendale 56, Spring Lake 14  
H. Christian 24, Spring Lake 17  
GR Catholic 59, Spring Lake 7

son, who is more of a deep threat type of receiver. “He had a lot of big plays and he’s really long and athletic. We expect him to take the top off the defense.”

Senior Matt Bierman (6-0, 215) will lead the offensive line, while being joined by sophomores Hunter Throop (5-11, 235) and Travis Throop (5-11, 230).

“They both played varsity at the end of last year,” said Start about the Throops. “They bring physicality and toughness. They are some of the toughest, hard-nosed kids I’ve ever been around. They have a mean streak in them, and they can push the rest of the line.”

On the defensive side of the ball, the Lakers will be dependent on end Blake Kelsey (6-1, 210) to get to the quarterback.

“He had a really solid year last year,” said Start about the senior lineman. “He puts a lot of pressure on the quarterback and will be a big contributor to what we do.”

At the linebacker position, sophomore Christian Folkert (6-0, 190) will be relied upon heavily despite being a first-year varsity player.

He’ll be joined by Keyser (the quarterback candidate on offense), who is expected to bring leadership and toughness to the position.

In the defensive secondary, the Lakers will be anchored by Ready and junior Sam Sheridan (5-11, 160), who played at the varsity level as a sophomore.

“We’re expecting him to take some leadership,” said Start about Sheridan, who will play the free safety position. “He’s kind of our quarterback on the defensive side.

We expect a lot out of him and think he can get it done.”

While the Lakers will be short on senior experience this season, Start is hopeful they will more than make up for it with their athleticism.

“We’re going to be thin on experience, but I do think all of our seniors that return were starters last season,” Start said. “So I think experience will be lacking overall, but we’ll be very athletic.

“I’m sure we’ll have some growing pains with younger guys playing, but with what they lack, they make up for with athleticism.”

Spring Lake will open the season Aug. 29 at Orchard View.

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# Whitehall targeting top spot in the conference

By Dave Hart  
LocalSportsJournal.com

WHITEHALL-There's no question that the Whitehall football team has had its share of success over the past five seasons.

The Vikings have won at least six games and qualified for the state playoffs every year since 2014, when they captured a district championship.

Last year was among the best. The 2018 Vikings were 7-2 in the regular season, which included a 5-2 record in the tough West Michigan Conference.

Whitehall defeated Allendale 38-33 in Division 4 pre-districts before falling to Grand Rapids Catholic Central in the district finals, and finished with an overall 8-3 mark.

That followed three straight 6-4 seasons, so it was a definite sign of progress. But now head coach Tony Sigmon, entering his seventh season, would like to see his team pick it up a notch, and compete for a conference title. To do that they will have to have more success against the conference heavyweights, Montague and Oakridge. The Vikings are 1-4 against each of those opponents over the last five years.

"We want to compete for a league championship," said Sigmon. "I think we can put ourselves in a good position to do that, but it starts by winning the first game and going from there."

The good news is that the Vikings will have a lot of starters returning from last year's squad, with six back on offense and nine on the defensive side of the ball.

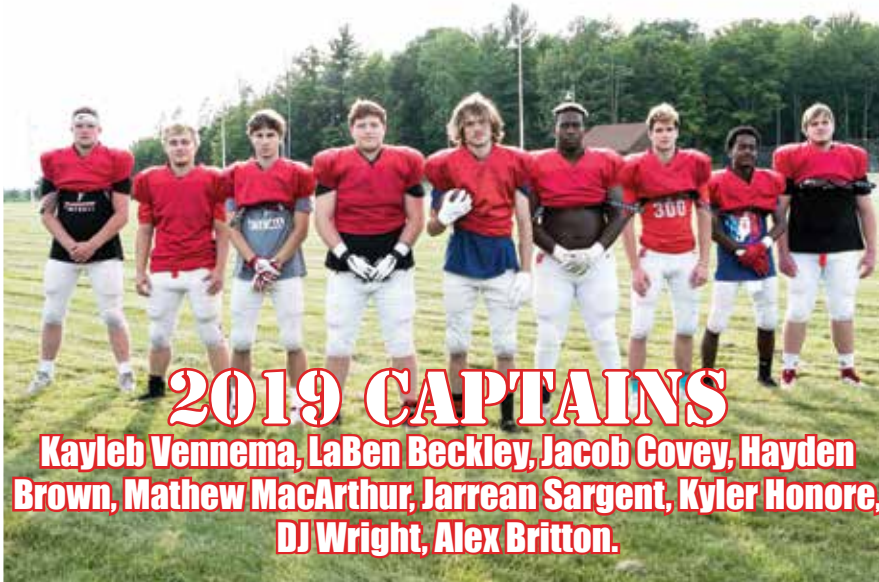
The returners worked hard during the offseason and have shown significant improvement, according to Sigmon.

But having a solid, experienced group of starters can only take a team so far. Depth is necessary over the course of a long, challenging season, and Sigmon thinks the Vikings will have that, as well.

The coach says there will be 25-27 players on the varsity roster, and there will be a lot of quality players fighting to get on the field.

Junior Andrew Durbin (6-2, 200) is expected to lead Whitehall at quarterback this season. He was the starter on the junior varsity last fall, and has a strong arm and the ability to run, according to his coach.

Backing up Durbin will be DJ Wright (5-7, 130), who saw playing time last year at wide receiver, and



**2019 CAPTAINS**  
Kayleb Vennema, LaBen Beckley, Jacob Covey, Hayden Brown, Mathew MacArthur, Jarrean Sargent, Kyler Honore, DJ Wright, Alex Britton.



*"We want to compete for a league championship. I think we can put ourselves in a good position to do that, but it starts by winning the first game and going from there."*

- Head Coach Tony Sigmon

## VIKINGS REVIEW

**2018 record: 8-3**

**Conference record: 5-2**

**Returning starters: 6 offense, 9 defense**

**Projected Quarterback: Andrew Durbin**



## 2018 RESULTS

Whitehall 23, Kelloggsville 12  
Whitehall 46, Mason County 16  
Whitehall 49, Hart 0  
Oakridge 42, Whitehall 14  
Montague 48, Whitehall 7  
Whitehall 40, Ravenna 38  
Whitehall 56, Shelby 0  
Whitehall 47, N. Muskegon 21  
Whitehall 23, Dexter 13  
Whitehall 38, Allendale 33  
GR Catholic 42, Whitehall 7

will play that position again..

"He has invested a lot of time in the offseason to play QB and has progressed over the summer," Sigmon said about Durbin. "He performed very well at veer camp this summer at Montrose."

Durbin will have weapons at his disposal, because the Vikings are expected to be strong this season at both the running back and wide receiver positions.

Senior Kayleb Vennema (6-1, 200) returns after rushing for 1,088 yards last season and scoring 16 touchdowns on 172 carries.

He is a strong football player and natural leader who has the potential to be an All-Area performer, according to Sigmon. Kris Dowdell will also see time at running back this season as a junior.

The wide receiving corps will be led by seniors Kyler Honore (6-0, 200), Matt MacArthur and Wright.

Honore caught 13 passes for 295 yards and three touchdowns last year while Wright stepped into the receiving role late in the season.

The offensive line will be anchored by two big returning seniors - Alex Britton (6-3, 275) and Jarrean Sargent (6-0, 255).

Britton started last season at center, works hard and has continued to develop. Sargent brings a lot of experience as a third-year varsity player, and may be the strongest guy on the team, according to Sigmon.

Sophomore Gabe Reavey (6-1, 266) will play on the offensive line after seeing some action last year as a freshman. Senior Hayden Brown (6-0, 250) will also be part of the equation on the O-line.

The defensive line will consist of juniors Travis Smith (6-4, 320), Merrick Bernhardt (6-2, 260) and Cole Battaglia (5-8, 210).

Vennema, the featured running back, will also return as a starter on defense at the important middle linebacker position. Junior Connor Young (6-1, 180) also returns at inside linebacker.

The Vikings should be very strong in the defensive secondary, with all four starters returning.

Dowdell and Wright will play at cornerback while Honore and MacArthur will return at the safety positions.

Honore should be fun to watch this season, according to Sigmon. He was one of the top defensive backs in the state last season with nine interceptions.



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# LSJ's talented photographers capture the great moments on the gridiron, sometimes at significant risk

## COMBAT DUTY WITH A CAMERA

By Adam Meilstrup  
LocalSportsJournal.com

The work that the staff at LocalSportsJournal.com performs for the community can be summed up by one word - passion.

The love of covering high school sports, particularly the Friday Night Lights experience in the fall, drives the efforts of the writers, editors and photographers.

But that passion may be the greatest among the dedicated photographers, most of whom have been serving LSJ and the local sports community for years without any compensation for their efforts.



They give of their time and talent, week after week and month after month, capturing the images that tell

the world about the hard work and dedication of the young athletes and the coaches who guide them.

They also face a lot more danger than other LSJ staffers, particularly during football season.

We've all seen the images on TV over the years of photographers on the sidelines of NFL and college games

good about myself."

Goorman oversees an outstanding photo staff that includes Dr. Tim Reilly, Leo Valdez, Rev. Joe Lane, Marc Hoeksema, Randy Riksen, Dr. Michael Banka, Kris Rake, Kristine Tyler, Eric Sturr, Sherry Wahr and Mitch Dixon.

The longest-serving LSJ photographer is Reilly, who has been with the company since 2012.

When he isn't busy working as a dentist at Great Lakes Dental, Reilly pursues his passion for photography.

In 2004, he began capturing the moments of his life with his 3-megapixel camera, especially when it came to his kids. He took photos of his children when they were performing in plays and noticed he had a talent for photography.

In 2006, Reilly started shooting football for Muskegon Catholic Central - the school his children attended - and continues to do so, on top of his work for LSJ.

Some of his favorite experiences have been covering the MCC football team playing for state championships many times at Detroit's Ford Field.

"I just had to pinch myself," Reilly reminisced. "How cool is it to be able to do this?"

Reilly's reputation as a gifted game shooter has grown over the years, and taken him far beyond the Muskegon area. He shoots football and basketball for Notre Dame.

He shoots game action for the South Bend Cubs, a minor league affiliate of the Chicago Cubs. He has also done work for the Detroit Tigers.

For Reilly, contributing to LSJ is "a labor of love." He says he remains committed to LSJ because of the work it does for the community.

"I work for the students and the parents," he said. "What LSJ does is so important."

Reilly not only appreciates how LSJ promotes high school athletics in the area, but is also thankful for the opportunity to further engage with his passion.

"Working for LSJ has helped me to do things I never thought I'd be able to," he said. "All of these opportunities outside of LSJ are, for me, just icing on the cake."

Like Goorman, Reilly has collision stories to tell from his years of sideline duty.

"I was taking photos in the back of the end zone for a Notre Dame game, and the wide receiver Will Fuller was running toward me, and I

just knew he was going to run into me," Reilly said. "I got my hand up basically to protect the camera, and of course he runs into me.

"Lots of my friends saw it on TV, knowing it was me, and it was quite funny. I got my 15 minutes of fame right there."

Leo Valdez, who is 63-year-old but more like a teenager when it comes to his enthusiasm for high school sports, joined LSJ three years ago. His love for the games comes from personal experience, and has never left him.

"As a kid in school, I played football, wrestled, and basically went out for every sport," said Valdez, who is a veteran of the U.S. Army who served in Germany and Korea.

Leo's passion for prep sports comes through in the photohe produces, of everything from the action on the field, to the band and cheerleaders, and even fans in the bleachers. He loves it all, and his pictures scream that fact.

As one person remarked to Leo, "You find the internal smile of the person you're taking a photo of."

Leo stresses the importance of "being in the moment" when taking photos, and there never seems to be a time when he's not in the moment.

"I'm always taking pictures," said Valdez, who is a longtime thermal technician at Arconic. "Sometimes I come off as being a bit of a nuisance. but often times people will thank me for having taken all those photos, because it gives them a memory."



LSJ shooters Dr. Tim Reilly (left) and Jason Goorman prepare to shoot a state final game at Ford Field.

His approach to his art is something he has passed down to his son Anthony Valdez, who is a cartoonist.

"I told Anthony it's not that you're the best, but you just have to work hard," he said.

Valdez is fully aware that football sidelines can be dangerous areas, and he's also earned his LSJ Purple Heart.

"I was setting up a shot when I noticed that the running back was coming right at me," Valdez said. "I put out my hand to block him, but really I was just trying to protect the camera and he smacked right into me. Man, did that hurt."

Joe Lane has been shooting area sporting events for LSJ since 2015. When he isn't shooting or working as an administrator at Reeths-Puffer High School, he devotes his time as a pastor for the New Life Christian Center.

Joe became seriously interested in photography in 2011, when he took senior photos for his nephew and noticed they came out pretty good.

"I don't just shoot sports," he said. "I do senior photos and will occasionally photograph weddings."



Rev. Joe Lane has his camera in gear during a West Michigan Ironmen indoor football game.



Marc Hoeksema, Leo Valdez, Kris Rake and Jason Goorman posing for a shot (instead of taking one, for a change) at the 2017 LSJ Kickoff Party.

getting plowed over by players as they run out of bounds.

That happens at high school games, too. Just ask Jason Goorman, who serves as publisher, photo editor and photographer for LSJ.

He remembers one game back in 2014, when Mona Shores was hosting Caledonia, and the play suddenly came his way before he had time to react.

"I remember as I'm taking photos of this running play (with Mona Shores on offense)," he said. "I can't remember who it was running the ball, but he got hit by about three linemen, and he just kept carrying the lineman over to the sideline. The next thing I know a thousand pounds of humanity is coming at me, and before I knew it, it was too late and I got throttled. I got hit so hard."

In the aftermath of the collision, Goorman learned that high school athletes can be very compassionate, even in the heat of battle. The first one to come to his aid and help him up was star Mona Shores quarterback Tyree Jackson, who has since been a standout at the University of Buffalo, and is currently in training camp with the NFL's Buffalo Bills.

"I closed my eyes, and when I opened them for the first time after getting hit, the first person I see is Tyree Jackson, yelling 'Are you OK?'" Goorman said. "When I answered that I was, Tyree went crazy, telling me how tough I was for taking a hit like that. Suddenly I was surrounded by Mona Shores athletes telling me how impressed they were, and I went from feeling very embarrassed to feeling pretty darn





**Marc Hoeksema**



**Dr. Tim Reilly**



**Leo Valdez**



**Rev. Joe Lane**



**Eric Sturr**



**Kristine Tyler**



**Mitch Dixon**

Lane's primary focus is shooting Reeths-Puffer events, since he works at the school and is known and loved by so many staff members, parents, students and fans.

But he's always willing to move around, covering anything for LSJ if he can possibly spare the time, because he views it as a service to the community.

"Depending on the season, I cover anything from two up to eight events a week," Lane said. "Some days I might cover four to five events that day."

"On certain days I'll be shooting one game and then I'm going to another one right after. It can be hectic, but I do it because I love it."

"What LSJ does is really important. If no one covers it, it won't get done."

Lane has also put his personal safety on the line while shooting football, like the time a few years ago when he was covering a local All-Star game in the summer.

"I was taking pictures on the sideline when I saw the



**Dr. Michael Banka**



**Sherry Wahr**



**Randy Riksen**



**Kris Rake**

running back rushing right at me," he said. "I got my hand up to block him but he barreled right over me. That stuff just happens sometimes. Basketball players often fall into my lap when I'm taking photos under the basket."

Marc Hoeksema is a full-time professional photographer who makes his living with his camera, but has also found time to donate his considerable talents to LSJ since 2014.

Hoeksema is LSJ's "go to" shooter when the necessity arises for that perfect, crisp still image, like the cover shot on this edition, featuring two of the area's best quarterbacks

- Muskegon's Cameron Martinez and Mona Shores' Caden Broersma.

His passion for photography goes back to his childhood.

His mother had her own photo gallery, and he followed her example by establishing his own studio and gallery in Grand Haven.

Sports are not the primary focus of Hoeksema's career. If you go to his gallery or look up his portfolio online, you'll find beautiful photos of Lake Michigan (a result of his

passion for surfing), as well as wedding and graduation shots.

But he has been taking sports shots since his student days at Mona Shores High School, and still loves the opportunity to be on the sidelines whenever possible.

"I haven't covered a lot of football for the past few years, but what's funny is that when I do, friends will see me on the sideline, and I receive photos on my phone of me taking photos of their kids."



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