

FALL SPORTS PREVIEW

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The **Gonzales** *Inquirer*

2018

TEAMS
PICTURED

TEAM
SCHEDULES

TEAM
PREVIEWS

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RUN

FEATURING:



Gonzales



Nixon-Smiley



Shiner St. Paul



Waelder



Shiner



Luling

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SHIFTING FOCUS

Apaches take aim at run game

By José Torres

The Gonzales Apaches football team is back in Region IV after spending two seasons in Region III. The 2016-18 UIL Realignment forced a change of philosophy in terms of molding the roster. At the time, Head Coach Kodi Crane shifted players around on defense in order to match the speed of their new opponents. Back in Region IV, Crane and the coaching staff likes where the program is headed, so don't expect the team to revert back to their old ways.

"We kind of like the path that we're on," the fifth-year head coach said. "We have dedicated last spring and these two-a-days in refining our run game. We think we got a good core of running backs. We have done a good job of adding some formations. We have added schemes to increase our run game. The biggest thing that we want is a good solid run game to where we can control the clock, to where we can pound it, to where we can take advantage of their leverage issues and go run the football."

Known to spread touches among all of their athletes, the team is expected to keep that philosophy. Whoever ends up carrying the ball on any given down will have the task of making sure the offense controls as much of the clock as they can, wearing down defenses and, ultimately, scoring on those long 12-15 play drives.

For that to happen, you need a strong offensive line unit. The Apaches graduated most of their offensive line, with center Nico Anzaldua, a junior, as their lone returning starter. Yet Crane believes, just like he does most of the offense, that there is potential ready to be tapped into.

"I don't know if young is the correct word, but maybe [there's] some inexperience on our offensive line," he noted.

Indeed, young isn't the right choice. When looking at the varsity roster, there is only one player listed with the letters OL next to his name who isn't a junior or senior, and that is sophomore Colby Pruett who is one of many players competing for a spot on the line.

"We don't have a lot of game experience," Crane added.

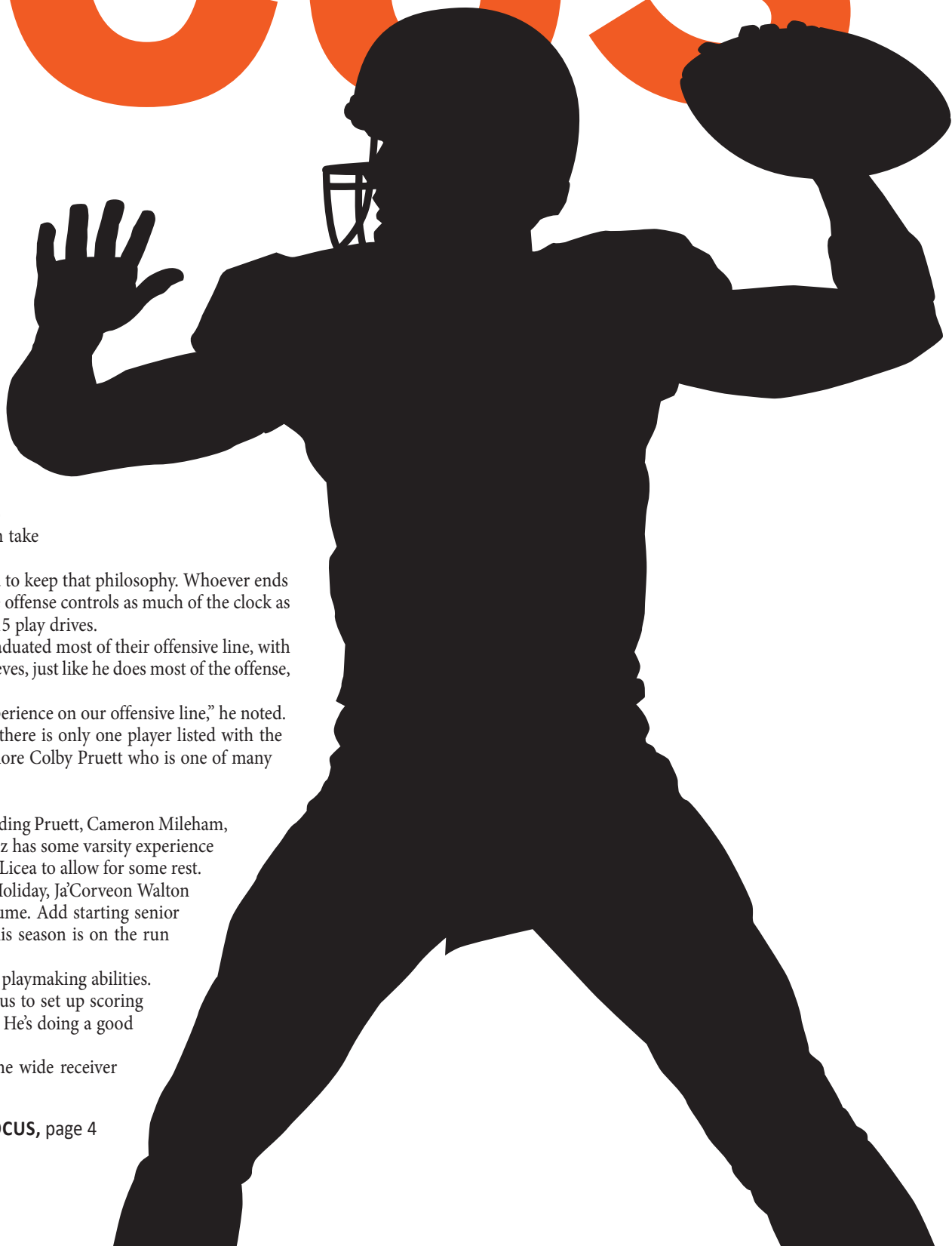
The team looks to solidify their line with several kids vying for a spot including Pruett, Cameron Mileham, Trent Wilkerson, Manuel Olalde Granados and Larry Gomez, though Gomez has some varsity experience from last season whenever he'd "spell" or relieve two-way player Juan "Bull" Licea to allow for some rest.

The running back group has the most experience. Players such as Elijah Holiday, Ja'Corveon Walton and James Martinez already have varsity running back carries on their resume. Add starting senior quarterback Marvin Cardoza to the mix and you can see why the focus this season is on the run game.

"That might be [Cardoza's] best strength," Crane said of his quarterback's playmaking abilities. "I remember that first game last year, he made a couple really big runs for us to set up scoring drives whenever we needed a scramble out of the pocket, or designed runs. He's doing a good job."

Cardoza started in two games last year as quarterback, then played some wide receiver throughout the season.

See **FOCUS**, page 4





COURTESY PHOTO BY TOMMY COOPER

FOCUS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

The senior signal caller will have some experienced wide receivers to throw to this season. Coby Rodriguez is a junior receiver, Heber Cardona is a three-time varsity starter at receiver and Matthew Velasquez-Banda is a senior receiver.

Though the experience on defense will mainly come out of the linebacker position, Crane expects the secondary to play a vital role this season for the Apaches. The head coach pointed at Seth Gibson as an example.

“[Gibson is] extremely intelligent, knows where the ball is,” he said of the senior. “That’s the thing, we have some playmakers and some IQ in our secondary. That’s going to be a really big benefit.”

Just like on offense, Crane admits the defensive line is where the team has had their focus on developing their depth. Trent Wilkerson returns as a defensive lineman, but with the graduation of three-year starter “Bull” Licea, there’s a hole that needs to be filled.

“Several people [are] competing for that job,”

GONZALES FOOTBALL			
DATE	OPPONENT	SITE	TIME
Aug. 17	Smithville (Scrimmage)	Home	6:30 p.m.
Aug. 23	Jourdanton & George West (Scrimmage)	Away	6 p.m.
Aug. 31	Navarro	Away	7:30 p.m.
Sept. 7	Austin Crockett	Home	7:30 p.m.
Sept. 14	Yoakum	Home	7:30 p.m.
Sept. 21	Cuero	Away	7:30 p.m.
Sept. 28	Hondo	Away	7:30 p.m.
Oct. 4	Mineral Wells	Neutral (Waco ISD)	7 p.m.
Oct. 12	Pleasanton	Away	7:30 p.m.
Oct. 19	Beeville	Home	7:30 p.m.
Oct. 26	La Vernia	Away	7:30 p.m.
Nov. 2	OPEN		
Nov. 9	Boerne	Home	7:30 p.m.

Crane said. “Manuel Olade [Granados], Vicente Reyna, Colby Pruett, Bryan Garza, there’s several people we’re just trying to evaluate and see.”

At defensive end, Crane is confident in his starters Lion Williamson and Diego Diaz De Leon, both juniors, but the depth behind those two is what needs to be developed.

Overall, the team will look at their secondary to stop the vertical threat of talented receivers they will face this upcoming season while leaning on their senior-laden linebacker corps of Jared Esparza (who moved from defensive end to linebacker), James Martinez, Ja’Corveon Walton, Sergio Torres and Contrell Smith.

The Apaches were placed District 15-4ADI this realignment. The five-team district consists of Gonzales, Beeville Jones, Boerne, La Vernia and Pleasanton. Due to a scheduling conflict, the Apaches added a neutral-site game right before district play, where the team will travel to

Waco to take on Mineral Wells. That game is just one of four straight road tilts the Apaches will face, which will be a good test for the team.

“We’ve got a good mix of teams that we’re playing,” Crane said. “A lot of tough teams on our non-district schedule. We’re going to be road warriors. We talked to our kids since that schedule came out that we’re going to have to be tough leaning into district.”

Prognosticators such as Dave Campbell’s Texas Football magazine have pegged the Apaches as the last place team in district. Matter of fact, this is the third year in a row that DCTF predicted a fifth-place finish for Gonzales.

Thankfully, playoff spots aren’t determined by predictions made in a magazine.

“In all the publications, we’re picked last in our district, which is no different than any other year,” Crane laughed. “I really believe this year in our district, all five teams are an eyelash apart, I really do. I think any of the five can win the district. I think any of the five teams can be out of the playoffs. And it is going to be up to us having discipline, doing what’s right. It’s going to be up to us just constant and steady improvement, staying healthy, and peaking our football team as we start district.”

‘BE A WARRIOR’

Lady Apaches to lean on depth for a deep playoff run

By José Torres

Usually when you hear the phrase “new head coach,” there tends to be a learning curve, or a period of time where the athletes have to get used to the new philosophies of the incoming skipper.

But Sam White has been in Gonzales since the 2014-15 school year. Though the head softball coach now adds head volleyball coach to his list of duties, the job isn’t a new one for White. He’s been an assistant coach on the staff since he’s been in Gonzales. Other than a few tweaks to the offense, the Apaches don’t expect growing pains like a team normally would with a new coach.

“I’ll be starting my fifth year in softball and my fifth year in the volleyball program,” White told the Inquirer over the summer, “only thing different is now moving into the head seat, the challenge of being the head coach now in volleyball.”

The two seniors on the team were coached by White while they were on JV years ago. So there’s already familiarity with him taking the head coach’s seat. Add that to the games the Lady Apaches already have under their belt, and now the team knows exactly what to expect this season.

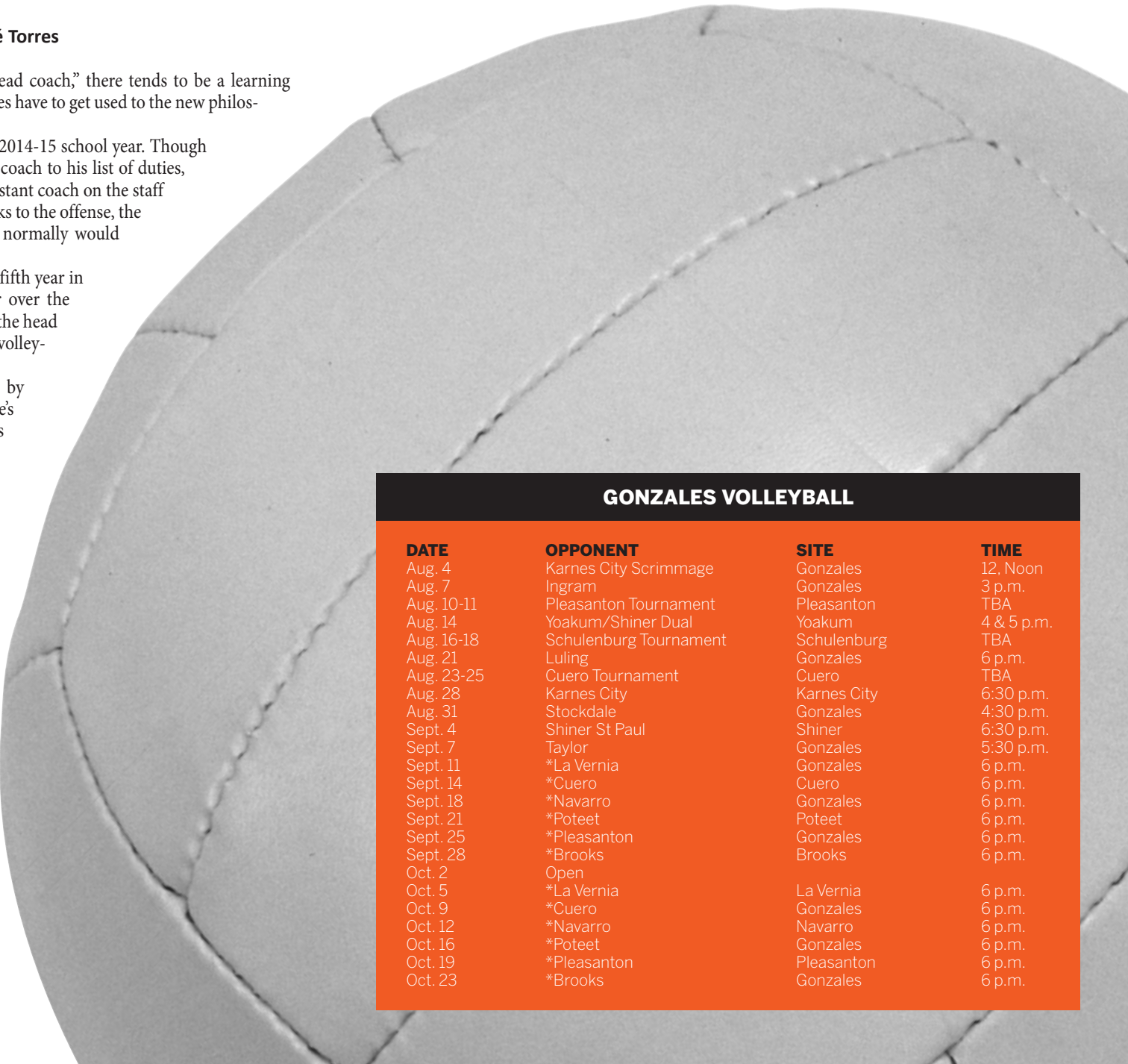
Depth will be one of the team’s biggest strength on the court. In a non-district game against Luling, the Lady Apaches didn’t rely on just one attacker — they had multiple players swinging and getting kills.

“There’s not a single person on this team that I don’t trust that they could not play,” White said. “Everybody can come in and pick this team up and bring something to the system.”

In that same game, the Lady Apaches unleashed a new offensive scheme in order to take advantage of their depth.

“Everybody can hit the ball, it doesn’t have to be just one person or two people on the front row, we need to swing from

See **WARRIOR**, page 6



GONZALES VOLLEYBALL			
DATE	OPPONENT	SITE	TIME
Aug. 4	Karnes City Scrimmage	Gonzales	12, Noon
Aug. 7	Ingram	Gonzales	3 p.m.
Aug. 10-11	Pleasanton Tournament	Pleasanton	TBA
Aug. 14	Yoakum/Shiner Dual	Yoakum	4 & 5 p.m.
Aug. 16-18	Schulenburg Tournament	Schulenburg	TBA
Aug. 21	Luling	Gonzales	6 p.m.
Aug. 23-25	Cuero Tournament	Cuero	TBA
Aug. 28	Karnes City	Karnes City	6:30 p.m.
Aug. 31	Stockdale	Gonzales	4:30 p.m.
Sept. 4	Shiner St Paul	Shiner	6:30 p.m.
Sept. 7	Taylor	Gonzales	5:30 p.m.
Sept. 11	*La Vernia	Gonzales	6 p.m.
Sept. 14	*Cuero	Cuero	6 p.m.
Sept. 18	*Navarro	Gonzales	6 p.m.
Sept. 21	*Poteet	Poteet	6 p.m.
Sept. 25	*Pleasanton	Gonzales	6 p.m.
Sept. 28	*Brooks	Brooks	6 p.m.
Oct. 2	Open		
Oct. 5	*La Vernia	La Vernia	6 p.m.
Oct. 9	*Cuero	Gonzales	6 p.m.
Oct. 12	*Navarro	Navarro	6 p.m.
Oct. 16	*Poteet	Gonzales	6 p.m.
Oct. 19	*Pleasanton	Pleasanton	6 p.m.
Oct. 23	*Brooks	Gonzales	6 p.m.



COURTESY PHOTO BY TOMMY COOPER

WARRIOR

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

the back row,” White said. “We need to move the ball around. That’s one thing Kiley Allen is doing, she’s running the offense doing a great job moving the ball around.”

Allen, a junior, will be the main setter for the Lady Apaches this season. She has plenty of varsity experience and White believes she has what it takes to distribute the ball accordingly.

Other players the team will lean on are seniors Chelsie Hastings and Maura Garcia. Hastings is a threat everywhere on the court, whether it’s in the back serving or up front getting

kills. Meanwhile, Garcia can get those digs and is also a great server.

The junior class of Sandra, Kiley Allen, Rachel Staggs and Rebekah Baker have been with White since they were freshmen. Add the “hungry” six sophomores to the mix and the team has plenty of talent to make noise this season.

Although depth is a strength, White believes it’s his team’s ability to compete that will lead to a successful season.

“I think they want to compete,” the head coach said. “I think they want to win. I think one of their biggest strengths right now is they trust each other, they believe in each other, they believe in the system, they believe in what we’re trying to accomplish.”

The team’s motto for the season is “I’m a warrior, nothing’s going to stop us.” That appeals to the competitive nature of the

team. Whether they are down by a lot or in a tight game, the Lady Apaches will “fight back,” White says, no matter the score.

That toughness on the court will be much needed with the realignment placing Gonzales in a district with state ranked opponents. Pleasanton, La Vernia and Navarro have all been ranked this season by the Texas Girls Coaches Association.

“We’re in a tough district,” White admitted. “Navarro and La Vernia are always going to be tough competitors. I think Pleasanton is a strong team. I think right now the way we’re playing, I think we’re 10-8 right now after [the Luling game on Aug. 21] and we haven’t been here in a long time with this amount of wins. The girls are buying in, they’re embracing winning, they’re learning how to win, they want to win, they’re hungry for the wins, and they’re excited.”

‘THREE-PEAT’



Gonzales cross-country sets sights on district, state titles

By José Torres

The Gonzales cross-country team took a step forward last season when they reached the state meet with their second district title in a row under their belts. Despite graduating two top-seven runners, the Lady Apaches are reloading with their eyes set on repeating as district champs for the third year in a row, while also adding the goal of winning state.

“Our goal is simply ‘the same, plus one.’” Gonzales Head Coach Cully Doyle said. “We’ve been back-to-back district champions, so our goal is to three-peat as district champions. Not everybody can say that. We know it’s going to be difficult.”

Graduating talented runners such as Romy Cantu and Haley Garza would usually be tough for a team. But Doyle’s philosophy of “reload, not rebuild” can prove to be the difference this season.

“We’re losing Romy Cantu and Haley Garza off the top end of last year’s run, but at the same time, I’ve graduated girls in the past,” Doyle explained. “There’s always somebody that’s going to graduate. I don’t ever want to say ‘hey let’s rebuild,’ I want to reload. That’s my philosophy since day one. Let’s build, so that we have enough ammunition to reload every year.”

Veronica Moreno had a strong summer. The junior Lady Apache will be one of the top runners to look out for this season. Stephanie Reyna is another returner that’s had a strong summer.

Senior Maura Garcia was a part of the top-seven group that went to state.

Krystalynn Buesing has had “her best summer ever” according to Doyle. Both she and Shelby Davis are “on fire” as the head coach said. “They’re just on another level from where they were last year,” he

GONZALES CROSS-COUNTRY		
DATE	SITE	TIME
Aug. 18	Gonzales Relays Independence Park	8 a.m.
Aug. 25	Yoakum Invitational	8 a.m.
Aug. 30	Schulenburg Invitational	4 p.m.
Sept. 8	Moulton Invitational	8 a.m.
Sept. 15	Lytle Invitational	8 a.m.
Sept. 20	Altair Rice Cons. Invitational	4 p.m.
Sept. 22	Pre-Regional Meet Corpus Christi	8 a.m.
Oct. 3	Seguin Starke Park Practice Meet	3 p.m.
Oct. 9	District Meet - Starke Park Seguin	9 a.m.
Oct. 22	Regional Meet - Corpus Christi	TBD
Nov. 3	State XC Meet - Old Settlers Park	TBD

continued. “They were ones that helped us get there. Yes, we lost some key pieces, but these key pieces are moving up in the chains.”

The Lady Apaches are able to reload with talent because of how deep the cross-country program has reached. Last season, the junior varsity girls won their respective district title race. Doyle is expecting big things from this group.

On the boys side, Antonio Hernandez is the returner as the regional qualifier, taking second as an individual in the district meet. This year, he will be joined by a “more solid group,” Doyle said.

“I think he can win the district,” Doyle added. “I don’t want to jinx him, but I think he’s running really well.”

Admittedly, the boys aren’t on the same level as the girls, so the word “build” is definitely one to use. The arrow, however, is pointing up for the Apaches.

Freshman Daniel Garcia is a solid runner that’s stuck with the program through the summer. Avery and Avrum Almaguer are another pair of runners who have put in the work.

Ruben Ortiz is the lone senior for the boys. “In the past, [Ortiz] hasn’t had a great summer,” Doyle admitted. “I don’t want to knock it, I’m just an honest person. But this summer he’s had one of his best summers, so he deserves that credit. He’s going to step in a role and help a little bit more. We’re excited about that.”

Mark Burek is another runner that will contribute to the program as well as Carlos Mendoza, Fernando Nava and Alejandro Reyna.

“We’re not as deep like the girls,” Doyle said, “but it’s the difference between rebuilding and reloading.”

Both the boys and girls face a tough task, especially with the realignment. The Lady Apaches have been placed in a district where five of the seven teams (including Gonzales) reached the Region IV-4A race.

“It’s going to be tough,” Doyle said. “We know that. But I take pride in that. I always say if we run against the best early, then we know where we stand. I don’t shy away from that. We’re going to be at some pretty big meets to test us.”

“Our ultimate goal is to win the state championship,” Doyle continued. “With that, I tell the girls all the time, we can be better than we were last year and not get to the state meet because there are other teams trying to get better as well. I do think that we can be pretty good. Our girls are on a mission for success.”

“The same, plus one” is the goal for both teams. That means reaching the regional meet for the boys and getting a state title for the girls. The talent is there. Doyle just hopes the team can stay healthy to reach those goals.

PIECING IT TOGETHER



St. Paul to find right fits for sustained success

By José Torres

There are a lot of unknowns in August when it comes to high school football. You might know some positions that are set, basic team philosophies, about how many athletes will be on the team and the names of the teams you're facing. Otherwise, it's a process figuring out who the team is and what they can become come December.

For the Shiner St. Paul Cardinals, who lost in the playoffs last season, but won the state title two straight seasons before that, the process will be an interesting one.

St. Paul Head Coach Jake Wachsmuth fields a team that has been picked this summer by the Dave Campbell's Texas Football prognosticators as the favorite to win the TAPPS Div. IV state champion. With the amount of young players on the team, the Cardinals have plenty to figure out before even thinking about where in their trophy case they should place this championship title.

See **TOGETHER**, page 9

ST. PAUL FOOTBALL

DATE	OPPONENT	SITE	TIME
August 17	Nixon Smiley (Scrimmage)	Away	6:00 PM
August 24	Flatonia/SA Cole	Flatonia	5:30 PM
August 31	Yorktown	Away	7:30 PM
September 7	Victoria St. Joseph (Homecoming)	Home	7:30 PM
September 14	Austin Saints	Away	7:30 PM
September 21	Cypress Christian	Away	7:30 PM
September 28	Weimar	Home	7:30 PM
October 5	Geneva Boerne	Home	7:30 PM
October 12	Brentwood	Home	7:30 PM
October 19	Temple CTC Away 7:30 PM		
October 26	Open		
November 2	Hallettsville Sacred Heart (Parent's Night)	Home	7:30 PM
November 8	St. Gerard	Away	7:30 PM
November 16/17	First Round Playoff		
November 23/24	Second Round Playoff		
Nov/Dec 30/1	State Semi-Final Playoff		
December 7/8	State Final		



TOGETHER

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

“I can’t tell you where it’s going to go, [but] it’s going to be interesting,” Wachsmuth said. “I think they can be really good — we can be really good. I have a feeling there’s a lot of things where if we’re to talk 10 weeks from now might be different than what I see now as far as kids working themselves into goals. I don’t know yet.”

The roster boasts seven seniors, three juniors and a large class of underclassmen. The youngsters will be tested early after TAPPS realigned the Cardinals to a four-team district, forcing Wachsmuth to schedule some tough non-district opponents.

“It’s a tough schedule,” he noted. “A lot of really good teams. When we scheduled, some of the teams are from our district in the past, we’re playing a lot of schools that are size-wise bigger than us, which we’ve never backed away from. You probably worry about that a little bit with a team that’s going to be a little bit younger. But I think the plan is going to be to work to where we finish rather than where we start.”

On the schedule are teams like Yorktown, a UIL playoff

team, Victoria St. Joseph, TAPPS Div. III state champion Cypress Christian, Geneva Boerne, a state semifinalist, an up-and-coming Brentwood Christian team and Weimar, another UIL team that’s played well.

“It’s not an easy schedule,” Wachsmuth said. “Hopefully as we go through that, we don’t get to a district game until much later. Hopefully we can develop some of these younger guys, by the time district rolls hopefully we’re healthy and hopefully we’ve matured and whether or not we win all those games, I don’t think that’s that big of a deal. I think we’ll win some, but I think it’s more important that we develop and get ready for the end of the season.”

On the field, expect the Cardinals to lean on that heavy-run offense they’ve operated in the past. Last season, Wachsmuth believes he went a bit too far off track, so he wants to refocus the team back to what they do best.

“One thing I learned last year — and we talked about it after the season — is if you get too far off track in what you believe in, sometimes that doesn’t always work,” the head coach said. “So I think these kids have things that they believe in and they know that we’ve run the football, obviously I think we’re going to have a couple quarterbacks that can do some things either running or throwing that we’re going to want to try to utilize them but it seems like in the past when we started to branch

off maybe a little bit too much, that it almost took their confidence away.”

St. Paul’s strength will come from their offensive and defensive lines. The question marks will be on the skill position players. There is plenty of talent on the team. It’s just a matter of the coaching staff trying to figure out which puzzle piece goes where.

But if there’s one thing the team knows is they will return to being a physical group that likes to run, but can come away with big passes as well.

When asked on how many yards their leading rusher — whomever that may be — is expected to gain, Wachsmuth paused, then with a grin gave an answer that will make Shiner St. Paul fans excited.

“If we’re going to be good,” Wachsmuth laughed, “he’s going to have probably 1,500+ if we’re going to be good. It’s kind of our identity. And I expect us to be good. Let’s say 1500-2000.”

“That’s been pretty consistent over the years. We’ve had some pretty good ones, I think we got some kids that can do that. We’ve always had some good line play, I think we got good linemen. I think that if the kids, if you were to talk to them, I think the neat thing is they probably know what we have to do to be good too and that’s important.”



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BATTLE TESTED



Senior-laden Lady Cardinals sets state as goal

By José Torres

The pressure is there for the volleyball program. Every year, Shiner St. Paul adds another state championship trophy to the case. But it seems volleyball is the one program that hasn't quite got there yet.

This season, the Lady Cardinals, led by their eight seniors, hope to break that glass ceiling and finally grab that brass ring.

"The biggest difference for us compared to bigger TAPPS school is we have athletes," Head Coach Kayla Natho said. "When we play some of these kids from bigger cities they have volleyball players, that's all they do. They're not going to go from volleyball to basketball to softball. They're going to go from volleyball to club volleyball. And we don't do that here in St. Paul.

"Every year I preach volleyball IQ. You should end the season with a higher volleyball IQ than when you came in. and the girls, especially the senior class, they're finally there, they finally understand the game, the ins and outs of it all, so hopefully that'll help us get there."

Natho is in her fifth year as head coach for the Lady Cardinals. During her time as head coach, Natho has realized that the team needs to refocus on "the little things," in order to find success this season.

"I'm sure every coach in the state says this, but we're really focusing on the little things," She said. "Those little things that turn into the big things. The reason we're not able to get a kill is because of something we did five seconds ago, getting our feet to the ball, getting in position quickly. Not taking a break. I tell them you play whistle to whistle. That whistle blows, you get your hands off your knees, you get on your toes ready to go get the ball. Once the whistle blows at the end of the play you can relax and chill for a second."

The biggest strength for the team seems to be their experience, which makes sense with a team with eight seniors.

"They've all been in those high pressure situations in any sport," Natho explained, "whether it be basketball or softball or running at the state track meet, they know how to handle themselves under pressure."

As August quickly turns into September, Natho is tasked with finding the right rotation for her experience-heavy team,

and with a slew of multi-talented athletes on the court, the Lady Cardinals' problem of finding the right fit is actually a good one to have. The team is deep.

"I have a lot of kids that play a lot of different spots and play them well," she said. "The hardest thing for me is trying to figure out how we're the best and in which rotation we're the best in."

The most vital thing the Lady Cardinals need to do on the court is to trust each other. Natho preaches the philosophy of "doing your job."

"I'm very confident in our skills," Natho said. "We just have to start playing together as a team. We like to, whenever things start to go bad, sometimes they try to do too much and they want to do someone else's job and then they can't do their job anymore we just have to make sure we're always doing what we're supposed to be doing and everyone else can work around us."

Expectations are always set high for the Lady Cardinals, no matter the sport. The volleyball team just hopes they can put it all together to get to state.

SUSTAINED SUCCESS



Dedication to the sport leads to sustained success

By José Torres

Not many programs can call themselves five time champs.

Yet this upcoming season, the Shiner St. Paul Lady Cardinals are not only touting that many titles, they did win all those state meets in consecutive years.

The boys team isn't too shabby either, taking second in state last season for the second year in a row.

"I was very proud and please of both teams for their success," St. Paul head coach Dana Beal-Sestak said. "We got girls in the program, just like last year's group, that have been runners since eighth grade. I think that really lends a lot to their dedication to the program and also to the ability to success. Our boys, last year, same thing. They had run in the fifth grade."

There's plenty of motivation for both squads this season. For the girls, it's a chance to get an unprecedented sixth state championship in a row. For the boys, it's another opportunity

to take gold like they did in 2015. And with a good mix of grade levels, St. Paul doesn't expect to fall off anytime soon.

"Any time you have a group of kids that are committed, they form great role models for the younger kids coming in," Beal-Sestak explained. "It's almost like I don't have to set the goals for them. They have the goals set for themselves."

"We have a really good solid group of runners this year. We have 17 girls running, we have eight boys running. They just make each other better by coming out and working hard every day. They know what's at stake. Today is only here once. You got to make the most of it. Otherwise, we're a day behind."

The Cardinals have been fortunate to have quality cross-country meets nearby that lend well to what the state course will look like.

"There's no reason for us to travel a long way when we got great meets right here," Beal-Sestak said.

The list of athletes that will contribute to both teams can fill this whole page. After all, most of the runners have ran the state cross-country race. But year after year, there's always a

young runner or two who creeps their way to the top seven, which helps motivates the team to push to new heights.

Sustained success is hard to achieve. Yet Beal-Sestak believes the unity of the coaching staff as well as the athletic program's culture of winning is important to get to that success.

"A lot of that is the fact that we're St. Paul. It's what we do," she said. "But we also emphasize the fact that if you have a gift that has been given to you by God, a talent, then you should use that gift. Whether you use that gift in cross-country or volleyball, it's not specific to just one area, and if you're gift is running, then you should be on the cross-country team, and if your gift is volleyball then that cross-country runner should play volleyball. We do the same thing for football. We play for each other, we compete for each other because we're a small school."

"We don't just run. We don't just play football. Our goal is to first off create good Christian young men and women, but secondly, complete people."



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UPHILL
BATTLE

*New look
Mustangs face
uphill battle in
tough district*



By José Torres

There will be a lot of new faces on the field for Nixon-Smiley, including on the sideline where Pablo Ybarra is now the head coach of the football team. Athletic Director Carlton McKinney will continue to be the boys head basketball coach as well as head coach for golf in the spring.

Ybarra was introduced as the new defensive coordinator last season when the team switched to a 4-3 defensive formation.

The Nixon-Smiley Mustangs are coming off a tough winless district season, going 2-8 overall. Most of the mistakes made on the field were due to inexperience, and the Mustangs are hoping their youngsters have progressed with another year of varsity football under their belts.

The team graduated starting quarterback Colby Newman, a playmaker who was a threat in both the passing game and the running game.

Last season, the offensive and defensive lines were where the bulk of the inexperience lied. Devon Lopez will be a key returner for the Mustangs on both sides of the field.

Offensive, Santos Pompa and Dominic Ramos are expected to be contributors.

The only change to the district after this recent realignment was Skidmore-Tynan, who replaced a Karnes City team that moved up to 3A-DI. District 15-3ADII is rounded out with Dilley, Natalia, Poth and Stockdale.

Prognosticators peg Nixon-Smiley as taking last in the district behind Stockdale. Poth,

NIXON-SMILEY FOOTBALL			
DATE	OPPONENT	SITE	TIME
Aug. 17	Shiner St. Paul (scrimmage)	Home	6 p.m.
Aug. 24	Randolph (scrimmage)	Away	6 p.m.
Aug. 31	Pettus	Away	7 p.m.
Sept. 7	George West (Parent's night)	Home	7:30 p.m.
Sept. 14	Hallettsville Sacred Heart	Home	7:30 p.m.
Sept. 21	Cole (Homecoming)	Home	7:30 p.m.
Sept. 28	Falls City	Away	7 p.m.
Oct. 5	Open		
Oct. 12	Poth	Home	7:30 p.m.
Oct. 19	Stockdale	Home	7:30 p.m.
Oct. 26	Skidmore-Tynan	Away	7:30 p.m.
Nov. 2	Natalia (Senior Night)	Home	7:30 p.m.
Nov. 9	Dilley	Away	7:30 p.m.

ranked by the Texas High School Coaches Association as tied for sixth in the Top 10 preseason rank for Region IV-3ADII, is currently picked to win district. Dilley and Natalia, ranked ninth and 10th respectively, are picked to go second and third.

Lady Mustangs continue to progress

By José Torres

Second-year coach Tara Wyrwich has one goal in mind. “Change the mindset and culture of the program,” she said.

The Nixon-Smiley Lady Mustangs return most of their team from last season, minus one graduating senior. Two new additions include sophomore Gracie Mejia as setter and right-side hitter Cheyenne Koehler, a freshman.

“We know to have a successful program, our ‘sisterhood’ has to hold a strong bond,” Wyrwich said. “[We need to] work well with each other, cover each other, and be there for one another. To have everyone back again except the one senior we graduated helps out a lot. They’ve had time to grow as a team together. [They know] what we expect out of them.”

So far, the team has been competitive early in the season.

“The girls are fired up!” Wyrwich gushed. And the head coach believes that their unity and “sisterhood” as she describe is what’s going to pay off this season.

Now back in a six-team district with Poth, Karnes City, Luling, Stockdale and Yoakum, the Lady Mustangs are eying a playoff berth. Poth will be the team to beat in District 27-3A.




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PATH TO SUCCESS

*Path to
cross-country
success starts
with discipline*

By José Torres

There hasn't been a lot of recent success with the Mustangs cross-country team.

Newly named head coach James Watkins wants to change that. And with a few key returning runners, he believes he can.

"I'm excited to be taking over the program and excited to compete in district and move on to new levels of success in cross-country we haven't had before," he said.

The small program will have eight runners, five boys and three girls.

On the boys side, Jesus Vasquez, who finished 18th in the district meet last year, is expected to lead the way. The senior Mustang is joined by sophomores Joel Barajas and Modesto Limon. Fernando Acevedo, a junior, is new to the program while Tony Rangel returns after a year hiatus from the program. Rangel is an incoming senior.

On the girls side, sophomore Sidney Alvarez is the lone returner, with newcomers Shayla Muñoz and Lilliana Jenks joining the squad. Muñoz is a sophomore while Jenks is a junior.

"The kids have a great attitude every day, they encourage each other," Watkins said. "It's exciting, it's a lot of fun."

The district realignment has the Mustangs facing off against familiar foes, including eight-time state champion Luling.

"Luling is obviously the most famous, the most prestigious cross-country program in the area, winning eight straight state championships, so we want to compete against them and obviously everybody else in the district," Watkins said.

In order for the team to have some success this year, the athletes will not only need to stay disciplined, but they also need to continue to have passion for the sport, Watkins said.

"When you get up at 5:30 in the morning, it's 'oh I just want to go back to sleep,'" he said. "You just [have to] continue to have that drive, support each other, call each other in the morning as they do, get each other up in the morning, just have a positive mindset to 'I can do it, I can compete it, I'm not intimidated by this crowd of people that are running around me,' and just expect success."



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Goals set high for Waelder volleyball

By José Torres

The arrow has been pointing up for the Waelder girls athletic program in recent years. After reaching the goal of finally getting back to the playoffs, the Lady Cats have now raised the bar a bit higher.

They just need to do so with a new coach taking over.

Enter new head coach Eric Hirtriter who makes his way to Waelder by way of Aldine ISD. A first-year skipper, what Hirtriter lacks in high school coaching, he makes up for in volleyball experience outside of the classroom.

“[I] coached for my daughter when she was 16 for YMCA, loved it,” he said. “I played volleyball when I was in the Air Force when I was stationed in Greece, was pretty good at it at the time, enjoy it a heck of a lot. I’m very enthusiastic to teach the girls what I know.”

The new coach comes into a program with players who already have varsity experience including senior Brejhai Montgomery who will be taking on the role as captain.

“She’s leading the team on the court,” Hirtriter said. “I think it’s going to work out really well this year.”

Previously known more for her attacking power, Montgomery has been pegged as the main setter. Despite some expected growing pains of a player switching positions, the head coach believes she’ll do “a very good job.”

“It’s just practice,” Hirtriter said. “We’ll be doing a lot more practices [with setting].”

One player to look out for is Raven Rodriguez, who coaches believe has a lot of potential.

“She’s impressive,” Hirtriter praised. “She’s definitely moving in that direction and she’s only a sophomore.”

Other returners on the team that will be contributing include Honesty Fields, Aquira Fields and Jakhia Thompson.

Hirtriter has high expectations of his team. In order for Waelder to reach them, he believes the team will need to focus on their defense.

“They have to be able to anticipate where the ball is going to end up and stay on their toes,”

WAEOLDER VOLLEYBALL			
DATE	OPPONENT	SITE	TIME
Aug. 3	Fayetteville/Victoria/Damon/Buckholts	Home	9 a.m.
Aug. 6	Runge	Away	4 p.m.
Aug. 13	Smithville	Home	5:30 p.m.
Aug. 14	Austwell-Tivoli	Home	4 p.m.
Aug. 18	Nordheim Tournament	Away	TBD
Aug. 21	Victoria Home School	Home	5 p.m.
Aug. 24	Fayetteville	Away	5 p.m.
Aug. 31	Damon	Away	5 p.m.
Sept. 4	Louise	Home	4 p.m.
Sept. 7	Open		
Sept. 11	*Prairie Lea	Home	5 p.m.
Sept. 14	*Shiner	Home	5 p.m.
Sept. 18	*Wiemar	Home	5 p.m.
Sept. 21	*Brazos	Home	5 p.m.
Sept. 25	*Flatonia	Away	5 p.m.
Sept. 28	Open		
Oct. 2	*Damon	Home	5 p.m.
Oct. 5	*Louise	Away	4 p.m.
Oct. 9	*Prairie Lea	Away	5 p.m.
Oct. 12	*Shiner	Away	4 p.m.
Oct. 16	*Weimar	Away	5 p.m.
Oct. 19	*Brazos	Away	4:30 p.m.
Oct. 23	*Flatonia	Home	5 p.m.

he explained. “If they do, they’ll be able to dig them out and make a save.”

Early in the season, the team’s focus has been on improving their serving. If they can shore up those two areas, the Lady Cats can not only reach the bar they’ve set, they’ll leap over it.

Luling takes on fall with youth movement

By José Torres

Football

Tough doesn't even begin to describe District 14-3ADI. Dave Campbell's Texas Football magazine deemed the district as one to watch, with heavy hitters such as Goliad, Yoakum, Hallettsville and Edna as top teams. The AP ranked Goliad fourth and Yoakum ninth in the Class 3A preseason rankings.

Newly hired Stacey Martin faces the daunting task of not only taking on such a stacked district, but also implementing his system in such a short period of job after taking on the athletic director and head football coaching job in July.

Senior back Isac Montalbo is a player to look out for on offense this season. Miguel Ordonez earned all-state honors last season as a defensive back.

Volleyball

Luling haven't made the playoffs since 2015. The Lady Eagles hope to change their luck in a smaller district after the realignment reduced District 27-3A from eight teams to six.

The team is already familiar with Nixon-Smiley, Stockdale and Yoakum. UIL rounded



out the district by adding Karnes City and Poth to the mix.

Poth, District 26-3A's district champion and Region IV-3A finalist, will be the team to top in the new District 27-3A this season.

Luling had two then-juniors make the all-district team in Morgan Scott and Abigail Bludau.

Cross-Country

There's no question that expectations are high for the Luling cross-country teams. A sign greets drivers who are going up US HWY 183 from I-10, welcoming them to Luling with a friendly reminder that the Eagles are back-to-back-to-back-to-back (you get the picture) state champions. Last

season, the Luling boys extended their state title streak to eight. The closest to that record is Humble Kingwood with six straight.

New head coach Brady Hand inherits a young, but deep roster after long-time coach Mike Barnett retired at the end of school year last season.

"Luling cross-country's biggest strength is their work ethic," Barnett told the Inquirer. "They believe in and value out-working our opponents, even if they don't know what others are doing. We are dedicated and know what good runners do."

Edwin Zamudio is someone to look out for, according to Barnett. The junior finished third at last year's state meet "and is hungry to improve."

"So is the whole team," Barnett added. "Don't be surprised to see a few of his teammates trying to chase him down."

High expectations brings extra effort to succeed.

"They don't like to lose," Barnett said, "so that means they hold each other accountable and are ready each and every day."

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Comanches to improve on last season's successes

By José Torres

Football

The Shiner Comanches return a majority of their players, especially on defense, this football season. An area finalist last season, the Comanches are pegged to not only win the five-team District 15-2ADI, but as a favorite for a deep playoff run. The Comanches enter the season ranked fourth in the AP Class 2A poll behind Refugio, Mart and Mason.

Senior linebacker Lane Nevlud was selected by Dave Campbell's Texas Football as the preseason district defensive MVP.

Shiner's strong suit this year is their depth. As long as the Comanches can stay healthy, their experience as well as their talent on both sides of the field should

be enough for some November and December football with a chance at reaching Dallas right before Christmas for state title game.

Volleyball

The returning district champs look to repeat this season as the Lady Comanches' early season successes have already opened the eyes of many.

The Texas Girls Coaches Association ranked Shiner 14th in all of Class 2A the week of Aug. 20.

Last season, the Lady Comanches made it to the Region IV-2A quarterfinals, losing to the eventual Region IV-2A champions three sets to one.

Shiner competes in District 27 along with Class 2A teams Flatonia, Louise, Wallis Brazos and Weimar.



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