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FOOTBALL PREVIEW

2023



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THURSDAY, AUGUST 31, 2023



Photos by Anthony Richards

Senior quarterback Ben Burk's vision as a runner presents the Sharks' offense with dual-threat capability.

PONTE VEDRA OFFENSIVE PREVIEW

Veteran group ready to shine after years in scheme

By Anthony Richards

The offense for the Ponte Vedra Sharks has the potential to really make some noise and be the best offense head coach Steve Price has had since taking over three years ago.

There are many reasons why this has the chance to be the case, but at the top of the list is the return of quarterback Ben Burk, who is a senior and is entering his third year in the system as the starting signal caller.

Not only does Burk look more comfortable and in command than he ever has, but he presents a dual-threat capability to hurt defenses from in the pocket by completing passes down the field or picking up yards of designed run plays.

It also helps that he will have plenty of help around him, from a solid offensive line to a powerful rushing attack and an assortment of receiving options to target.

A couple of those receiving options include deep threat Ryan Smith, whose speed allows him to break free of the secondary and junior tight end Landon Okla.



The Sharks' offensive line will look to help pave the way to a productive season, with Michigan commit Jake Guarnera (No. 53) leading the way at center.

At 6 feet 2 inches tall, Okla offers a large target for Burk to aim for, as he uses his combination of speed and size to prevent matchup problems on a nearly weekly basis.

Senior Cole Madison is also part of the veteran-laden receiving corps and presents another sure-handed option for Burk and the Sharks' coaching staff, while fellow senior Griffin Owen is making the transition from the backfield to receiver.

"We just need to work a little more

on our timing and getting that perfect depth on our routes," Owen said. "We're loaded with talent, but now we just need to execute."

At the end of the day, the Sharks' identity in recent years has been to look to establish the run in order to ensure a balanced offensive attack.

The pieces are once again in place to do just that and lean on their running game at times during games if they need to, thanks to not only a strong group of

backs, but also a powerful offensive line that should be able to open plenty of holes to run through.

"I'm really tight with our o-line and we even hang out on the weekend," Case said. "I really appreciate all the work they put in and all that they do."

One of the most talked about players heading into the 2023 season is senior center Jake Guarnera, who is a University of Michigan commit.

Guarnera played offensive tackle in recent years but makes the switch to center for this season to help the team fill a hole there and solidify the middle of the line.

Looking to take advantage of the running lanes created by the offensive front is a backfield led by junior Brian Case, who is a hard-nosed runner between the tackles and has shown good hands in the screen game as well.

"We've got a really good running back room," Case said.

Case enjoys the more carries he gets in a game, as he tends to build a rhythm as the game goes on and the ball gets placed in his hands more.

"My favorite play is inside zone, because I like running inside and between the tackles because that's where I can really do my thing," Case said.

Case and Burk will pose a dangerous duo in the backfield this season for the Sharks, as a result.



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PONTE VEDRA SHARKS

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DATE	TIME	OPPONENT/LOCATION
Sep. 1	7:00 pm	@Florida State University High School
Sep. 15	7:00 pm	Middleburg
Sep. 22	7:00 pm	@Menendez (St. Augustine)
Sep. 29	7:00 pm	@Flagler Palm Coast
Oct. 6	7:00 pm	Bishop Kenny
Oct. 13	7:00 pm	Tocoi Creek
Oct. 20	7:00 pm	@Orange Park
Oct. 27	7:00 pm	Nease
Nov. 3	7:00 pm	@Creekside

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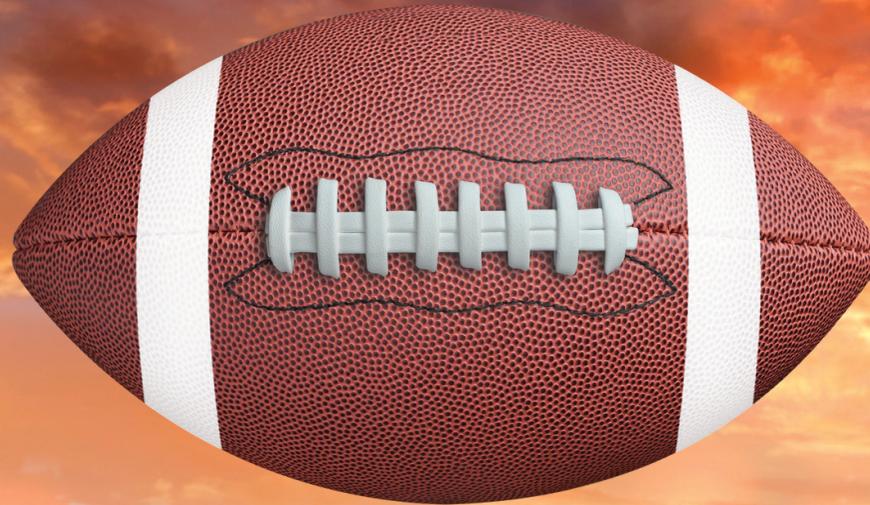
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NEASE PANTHERS

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DATE	TIME	OPPONENT/LOCATION
Sep. 1	7:00 pm	Creekside
Sep. 8	7:30 pm	@Ridge Community
Sep. 15	6:00 pm	@Fletcher
Sep. 22	7:00 pm	Orange Park
Sep. 29	6:30 pm	@Sandalwood
Oct. 6	7:00 pm	St. Augustine
Oct. 13	7:00 pm	Flagler Palm Coast
Oct. 27	7:00 pm	@Ponte Vedra
Nov. 3	7:00 pm	Tocoi Creek

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DATE	TIME	OPPONENT/LOCATION
Sep. 1	7:00 pm	Seabreeze
Sep. 8	7:00 pm	Mainland
Sep. 22	7:00 pm	@St. Augustine
Sep. 29	7:30 pm	@Fleming Island
Oct. 6	7:00 pm	IMG Academy
Oct. 13	7:00 pm	Creekside
Oct. 19	7:00 pm	@Buchholz
Oct. 27	7:00 pm	Oakleaf
Nov. 3	6:30 pm	@Mandarin

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BEACHSIDE BARRACUDAS

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DATE	TIME	OPPONENT/LOCATION
Sep. 1	7:00 pm	@Fernandina Beach
Sep. 8	7:00 pm	@Menendez
Sep. 15	7:00 pm	Sebastian River
Sep. 22	7:00 pm	Ridgeview
Sep. 29	7:00 pm	@Hollis Christian Academy
Oct. 13	6:30 pm	@Paxon School For Advanced Studies
Oct. 20	7:00 pm	@Crescent City
Oct. 27	7:00 pm	North Florida Educational Institute
Nov. 3	7:00 pm	Providence School

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CREEKSIDE KNIGHTS

2023 REGULAR SEASON SCHEDULE

DATE	TIME	OPPONENT/LOCATION
Sep. 1	7:00 pm	@Nease
Sep. 15	7:30 pm	@Buchholz
Sep. 22	7:00 pm	Mandarin
Sep. 29	7:00 pm	Oakleaf
Oct. 13	7:00 pm	@Bartram Trail
Oct. 20	7:00 pm	Fleming Island
Oct. 26	6:30 pm	@Atlantic Coast
Nov. 3	7:00 pm	Ponte Vedra

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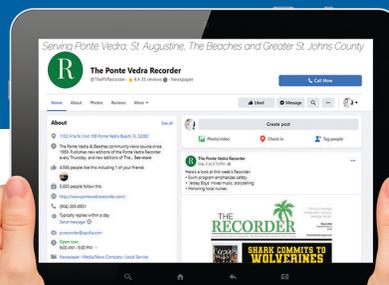
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DATE	TIME	OPPONENT/LOCATION
Sep. 1	7:00 pm	@Chiles
Sep. 8	6:30 pm	Andrew Jackson
Sep. 15	6:00 pm	Nease
Sep. 22	6:30 pm	Sandalwood
Sep. 29	6:30 pm	@Parker
Oct. 6	6:30 pm	ED White
Oct. 13	6:30 pm	Englewood
Oct. 26	6:30 pm	First Coast
Nov. 3	6:00 pm	Atlantic Coast

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Photos by Anthony Richards

Senior running back Cam Smith has the ability to break free for a long run every time he touches the football.

NEASE OFFENSIVE PREVIEW

Panthers look to beat opponents in a variety of ways

By Anthony Richards

The biggest question surrounding the Nease offense heading into the season pertains to the starting quarterback spot and who will fill the vacancy left with the graduation of two-year starter Marcus Stokes, who is now playing college ball at the University of West Florida.

That question remained a constant factor throughout the spring and fall practice and head coach Collin Drafts has given the nod to junior Nate Harry heading into the season.

“Coach Drafts is a great coach and he’s taught me everything I know,” Harry said. “I’m just excited to get out there and make the most of this chance that I have.”

Harry beat out senior Zach Buttacavoli for the starting spot and showed signs of his potential during the kickoff classic against Menendez.

He looked comfortable operating the offense in his first competitive snaps since gaining the role and made some plays both with his arm and with his legs.

One of the things that helps Harry as



Maddox Spencer (No. 14) will be a major threat in the passing game for the Panthers this season.

a first-time starter is the weapons he will have surrounding him this season.

And it starts with senior running back Cam Smith, who will be the guy primarily lining up with Harry in the backfield.

Smith has game-breaking ability and has a combination of vision and explosiveness to find the hole along the line of scrimmage and then use his speed to make things happen at the next level of the defense.

Smith’s playing time increased as

the year progressed a season ago due to injuries to other members of the backfield and he took full advantage of his opportunity.

“In our offense, it doesn’t matter who gets the balls, as long as we’re driving the ball down the field, and I just want to help with that,” Smith said.

He enters his senior season as the top option at running back and will look to be someone the Panthers can lean on, as well as a reliable offensive line led by

senior Demarco Blackmon.

“There’s been a lot of competition this offseason,” Blackmon said. “At the end of the day, iron sharpens iron. As seniors, we know we’ve got to step up and be the leaders this year.”

The Panthers’ strong rushing attack is something defensive coordinators will have to adjust for, which means opening possibilities for big plays in the passing game.

The receiving corps is deep for the Panthers with several options, and it will be fun to see how the Nease coaching staff incorporates them all into the scheme on a weekly basis.

Leading the way is junior Maddox Spencer, who shined in the kickoff classic and looks to already have developed quite the rapport with Harry in the early going.

“Maddox is like my best friend off the field, but I’m super close with all of the receivers,” Harry said. “It definitely makes a difference out there.”

Spencer has proven a knack for finding the holes in the secondary and has sure hands to go with his quickness.

“We’ve been very strong in the weight room this offseason, because that’s always a big thing for us,” Smith said. “The work you put in there will show up on the field. It’s all about having high energy in everything that we do.”

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Sep. 8	7:00 pm	Wolfson
Sep. 15	7:00 pm	North Florida Educational Institute
Sep. 22	7:00 pm	@Christ's Church Academy
Sep. 29	7:30 pm	@University Christian
Oct. 5	7:00 pm	Hilliard
Oct. 13	7:00 pm	Master's Academy
Oct. 27	7:30 pm	Trinity Christian Academy
Nov. 3	7:00 pm	@Beachside

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Sep. 17	1:00 pm	Kansas City Chiefs
Sep. 24	1:00 pm	Houston Texans
Oct. 1	9:30 am	Atlanta Falcons
Oct. 8	9:30 am	@Buffalo Bills
Oct. 15	1:00 pm	Indianapolis Colts
Oct. 19	8:15 pm	@New Orleans Saints
Oct. 29	1:00 pm	@Pittsburgh Steelers
Nov. 12	1:00 pm	San Francisco 49ers
Nov. 19	1:00 pm	Tennessee Titans
Nov. 26	1:00 pm	@Houston Texans
Dec. 4	8:15 pm	Cincinnati Bengals
Dec. 10	1:00 pm	@Cleveland Browns
Dec. 17	8:20 pm	Baltimore Ravens
Dec. 24	4:05 pm	@Tampa Bay Buccaneers
Dec. 31	1:00 pm	Carolina Panthers
Jan. 7	TBD	@Tennessee Titans

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PONTE VEDRA DEFENSIVE PREVIEW

Tradition of stingy defenses continues with Sharks

By Anthony Richards

Making life difficult has become a staple of the Ponte Vedra High defense in recent years and this year's crop looks to keep it going.

The last couple of classes were able to create a tradition of stingy defenses and the current players were either a part of those squads or have been around the program and are fully aware of what the expectation for the unit is.

"Our goal every year is just to be the best defense in the state," Senior linebacker Maddux Babin said.

The expectations can be lofty and provide pressure at times, but the squad embraces that pressure and expects nothing left from themselves as well.

One of the key members patrolling the back end of the Sharks' defense in the secondary is senior cornerback Joe Mahoney, who continues to progress with each year and has reached the point where he is one of the best cover men on the First Coast.

He has a knack for keeping pace and staying stride for stride with receivers down the field, and seemingly always being in the right position to make a play on the ball in the air.

He rarely seems to get rattled by a game's situation, which is such a valuable trait to have, especially as a defensive back with the mindset needed to have success at that position.

Regardless of the various top receivers the Sharks face this season, they can feel confident that they will have the ability to hold their own against them knowing Mahoney is in coverage.

The Sharks have had to replace leaders at linebacker the past couple of seasons with Luke Pirris and Trooper Price



Photos by Anthony Richards

The Ponte Vedra student section roots on their defense.

graduating in their respective years.

However, the Sharks are poised to have their next linebacker leader step up this season in the form of Babin, who presents an attaching style similar to the previous two.

"I've really worked on my speed, strength and agility every day in the summer, and I can see now where that's really paying off," Babin said.

It is a family affair for the Sharks, as his younger brother Talan Babin is a sophomore and a member of the line-backing corps.

Up front for the Sharks is Nicholas Grieco, who enters his senior season as a force to be reckoned with along the interior of the defensive line.

"We just need to keep improving on the little things, and just keep containing on our gaps," Grieco said.

He moved from primarily nose tackle a year ago to playing a three-technique, which is where he positions himself wider down the line so that he is lined up with the outside shoulder of the guard instead of with the center.

The transition has made it a busy but productive offseason for him.

"I've really been working on getting better with my first step so that I can really explode into the guard," Grieco

said. "It's all about staying lower and that takes place with a good first step."

The brotherhood of the Sharks' defense is one of the aspects Grieco has enjoyed the most during his time as a member of the program.

"We've been together for a long time now, so we've really had time to develop together," Grieco said. "We're all out here just helping each other, and as a result, we get better as a team. It's scary to know it's my last year, but we're all just ready to make the most of it."



Senior Joe Mahoney has established a reputation as one of the best defensive backs on the First Coast.

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Sep. 16	7:00 pm	Tennessee
Sep. 23	7:00 pm	Charlotte
Sep. 30	TBA	@Kentucky
Oct. 7	TBA	Vanderbilt
Oct. 14	TBA	@South Carolina
Oct. 28	3:30 pm	Georgia (Jacksonville, FL)
Nov. 4	TBA	Arkansas
Nov. 11	TBA	@LSU
Nov. 18	TBA	@Missouri
Nov. 25	TBA	Florida State

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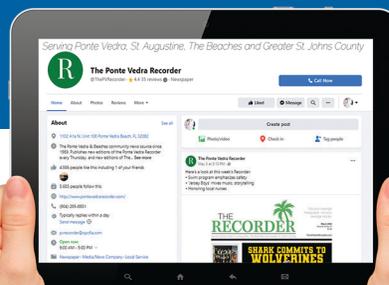
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NEASE DEFENSIVE PREVIEW

Panthers are all grown up, ready for bounce back

By Anthony Richards

Look for the Nease Panthers to be much improved on the defensive of the ball this season, as they have the potential for a big bounce back campaign after a disappointing season a year ago.

Disappointing is exactly what it felt like for many Panthers' defenders who know firsthand how tough it was and are happy to see the light at the end of the tunnel, because they believe there is more potential there and that last year does not live up to the standard of defense at Nease and what they expect of themselves.

However, one thing to remember is that the talent has always been there, but in many ways last year was a perfect storm of both a bevy of young players everywhere on the field and a new defensive coordinator.

Well do not look now, but those players are now having a year of experience under their belt and are not having to learn a new coach this time around.

"Everything was just really new last year, but we've just been learning more and more every day and another offseason has just been so helpful in learning the defense," McClafferty said.

The result is a defense that looks so much more in control and the playmaking ability for that entire side of the ball has escalated because of it.

For the Panthers, it starts up front with a powerful and athletic front that does a nice job of getting penetration into an opponent's backfield or collapsing the pocket do their quarterback does not have time to let the receiving routes develop.

Helping lead the way are a trio of seniors, Noah Hellyer, Morris Halyard and Logan Terry.

Terry handles a lot of defensive tackle duties and occupies the space in the middle of the line with the goal of creating interior push and standing tall against the run.

"We've been focusing on a lot of team bonding and just trying to make those connections happen, and now we just want to come out and give our best and show that it's all been worth it," Hellyer



Photos by Anthony Richards

Flying to the ball is the name of the game for the Panthers, including for seniors Cade Papineau (No. 2), Canon McClafferty (No. 17) and Adriann Reyes (No. 7).

said.

The linebacking corps for the Panthers has some young talent within it, highlighted by sophomores Noah Hodge and Jacob Curry.

One of the signs of Curry's athleticism is that he is one of the return men back to receive kickoffs for the Panthers, which is not a usual duty performed by a linebacker.

It just shows his versatility, and that if needed he could play both sides of the ball, but at the moment he is starting to really showcase himself as a talented linebacker.

Providing a veteran presence in the linebacking corps is seniors T.J. Noel and Adriann Reyes.

The last line of defense for the Panthers is its secondary, which appears to be a strength on the team heading into the season.

Senior safety Cade Papineau patrols the back end and has a knack for reading the quarterbacks eyes and breaking on to the pass if thrown in his area. His patrol back there provides a nice safety net for the Panthers to prevent big plays from happening.

Junior Elisha Luckett and senior Canon McClafferty are a pair of defensive backs that can keep pace and stay on the hips of receivers during routes, which can make completing passes difficult.

"It's going to be different this year," McClafferty said.



Noah Hellyer is a relentless defender coming off the edge for the Panthers.

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Sep. 9	8:30 pm	Southern Miss
Sep. 16	12:00 pm	@Boston College
Sep. 23	TBA	@Clemson
Oct. 7	TBA	Virginia Tech
Oct. 14	TBA	Syracuse
Oct. 21	TBA	Duke
Oct. 28	TBA	@Wake Forest
Nov. 4	TBA	@Pitt
Nov. 11	TBA	Miami
Nov. 18	TBA	North Alabama
Nov. 25	TBA	@Florida

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BARRACUDAS, BEARS, KNIGHTS LOOK TO MAINTAIN WINNING FORMULAS

By Anthony Richards

St. Johns County has a lot of football talent at the schools in the area, and there are big things heading into the 2023 season for several teams.

Beachside High School's second season is underway and there is enthusiasm in the air after the Barracudas finished with a winning record of 6-4 in their inaugural season.

Winning is something people gravitate to and there is a good vibe that the Barracudas can replicate that success this year.

One thing the Barracudas did not struggle to do last year was move the ball, and at times even looked to do it with ease, as they averaged 37.3 points per game and proved fun to watch.

The offense appears to have what it takes returning to have another spectacular year both through the air and on the ground, and they got off to the right foot scoring 35 points in week 1 against Toco Creek, despite losing the contest 38-35.

A couple of the main weapons fueling the offensive side of the ball for the Barracudas is senior wide receiver Bryce Gee, whose 6-foot-3-inch frame makes him a matchup nightmare and a perfect suspect for jump balls, especially in the red zone.

And adding yet another dimension to the offense is fellow senior Cohen Beebe, who is the opposite in terms of size compared to Gee, but lightning quick and a hard man to tackle in the open field.

It may only be still the early stages of year two, but head coach Pete Duffy has some things cooking in the Beachside football program.

For Bartram Trail, it has more than a decade since they last had a losing season, and this year will be perhaps the most uncertainty they've had in a long time, at least when it comes to the sideline.

That is what happens when a legendary coach retires as Darrell Sutherland did following last season.

Now, Cory Johns takes over the program that Sutherland helped establish into a power across the state.

That may sound like some big shoes to fill, but Johns does have the help of having some extremely talented players to coach in his first year on the job.

It all starts on offense with senior Riley Trujillo, who is a verbal commitment to UCF, and knows how to use his tall frame to impose his will on a defense with his strong arm and dynamic mobility.



Photos by Anthony Richards

Bryce Gee of Beachside will be a tough matchup for opposing secondary's during his senior season.

No play is ever over when Trujillo is taking snaps because he has no issues with breaking out of the pocket and making plays happen.

Senior running back Laython Biddle offers a nice compliment for Trujillo, as Biddle is not shy about sticking his nose into the pile and fighting for the yards he needs for the first down.

The Bears main rival Creekside also has high expectations heading into the season, and looks to build on the 9-3 record they finished with last year.

One thing about last year's squad is that although they won a bunch of games, they found themselves in a lot of high-scoring affairs.

Although the offense proved that they could hold their own and come out ahead on most occasions, the goal is for the defense to take the next step in 2023 and not allow as many points.

Junior quarterback Harrison Miller will run the show once again for the Knights, after he threw for 1,773 yards and 20 touchdowns as a sophomore.

It should be fun to watch Miller and the offense continue to grow together even more in the next couple of years.



Senior Riley Trujillo returns at quarterback for Bartram Trail for the 2023 season.



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Sep. 9	12:00 pm	Ball State
Sep. 16	3:30 pm	South Carolina
Sep. 23	TBA	UAB
Sep. 30	TBA	@Auburn
Oct. 7	TBA	Kentucky
Oct. 14	TBA	@Vanderbilt
Oct. 28	3:30 pm	Florida (Jacksonville, FL)
Nov. 4	TBA	Missouri
Nov. 11	TBA	Ole Miss
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