



2026 BEDFORD COUNTY FOOTBALL PREVIEW

SHELBYVILLE CENTRAL
GOLDEN EAGLES

CASCADE CHAMPIONS

COMMUNITY VIKINGS

Schedules

Rosters

Team Photos

Outlooks

A Special Supplement to

SHELBYVILLE
TIMES-GAZETTE

Youthful Vikings Continuing to Lay Foundation in Year Two of Tidwell Era



UNIONVILLE, Tenn. – When Glenn Tidwell accepted the head football coaching position in 2025, he knew that he would have to build the Vikings' program from the ground up. What he may not have realized, at least initially, is just how much of a foundation he would have to lay. So much so that he and his staff are still working on putting the finishing touches on a foundation strong enough to begin building up the program in the way that it should go.

"I've had to learn the kids," Tidwell admitted, "At Shelbyville Central and Cascade, I think those kids were a lot further along in football knowledge. Here, you go into it thinking the kids already know what you know and they don't. We might be talking about certain techniques and certain gaps, and they're looking at me and nodding their heads like they're agreeing with me but they didn't actually get what you're saying. We had to tell them that if they don't understand something we are saying, please let us know so they can learn it."

"We've upgraded a lot of equipment,

we've installed a weight room program which we didn't have before I got here based on what I was told," he said, "We've had to start things that we didn't know didn't exist before we got here. You don't know what you don't know. It was a year of fixing a lot of things. The whole culture surrounding the program has had to be changed, and it's still a work in progress."

"In the final six games [last season], we didn't score a point," he continued, "When I got here, there was a lot more going on behind the scenes and off the field that we needed to fix. We have corrected a lot of that, but it's still an ongoing process. We are nowhere close to where we're going to be, but we are so much farther along than where we were. The kids know that, and the kids see it. It just goes to their work in the weight room, and their diligence to do the little things that we've asked them to do."

That statement is indeed true. Community did not score a point in the final six games of the 2025 campaign en route to a second-consecutive winless season. Despite this, the future is looking up for

the Purple & Gold. They have a consistent system, and there is more of a buy-in from the players heading into Tidwell's second season.

"Mental and physical improvement, and just being in a program for a full year, you could tell over the summer how our overall physique's improved," Tidwell said, "I've only got three seniors, so the next few years should hopefully be on the

up and up. There's a whole other year of retention. It's a big building block year."

Offensively, the Vikings are focused on controlling the ball and the clock by lining up under center and running the ball. That's no secret, but the execution and effectiveness of the system should be improved from year one to year two.

"Of the six running backs, four of

See VIKINGS, 3



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2026 COMMUNITY FOOTBALL SCHEDULE

Aug. 21 – AT Moore County
 Aug. 28 – VS Eagleville
 Sep. 4 – AT Huntland
 Sep. 11 – VS Cannon County
 Sep. 18 – AT Richland
 Sep. 25 – VS Watertown*
 Oct. 2 – VS Chapel Hill* (Homecoming)
 Oct. 9 – AT Giles County
 Oct. 16 – AT Sequatchie County*
 Oct. 23 – BYE
 Oct. 29 – VS Cascade* (Senior Night)

VIKINGS From page 2

them will probably play more than the other two, and of those four – five if you count the quarterback – if all of those guys combine to run for close to 2,000 yards on the ground, that's a success," said Tidwell, "That comes out to each kid averaging about 500 yards apiece, and that's extremely possible with what we're going to do. The kids running the ball are hard-nosed kids, and they're going to run the ball hard. They're not necessarily speed burners, but they can run. Some are more powerful while others are more quick-footed. We've got a nice mixture. Same way with the quarterbacks. If we're throwing the ball 10 times a game, that means we're not running it well. We're going to run the ball. We want to minimize the running clock as much as we can."

In the trenches, Community will be starting a couple of freshmen at the tackles, but the interior is more experienced and should see some success this season.

"We'll have two freshman tackles," he said, "Junior at right guard, junior at center, and a sophomore at left guard. Tight end is a junior. Up front offensively, we have good size, and they should all be coming back next year. Our middle three are bigger guys, and our quickest two guys are the freshman at the two tackle positions. We've got a freshman that'll be a backup center while also playing one of the two guard spots throughout the year."

"It may sound simple, but one of our goals is scoring points," said Tidwell, "With what we want to do on offense, our goal is to control the ball for as long as we can. Even if we don't get points, we hopefully took a lot of time off the clock to shorten the game. I think we'll be able

2026 COMMUNITY FOOTBALL ROSTER

#	Player Name	Position	#	Player Name	Position
0	Kaidyn Brown	(QB/DB)	9	Austin Shultz	(WR/DB)
27	Wyatt Livingston	(WR/DB)	62	Carter Davis	(OL/DL)
1	Dakota Perkins	(WR/DB)	10	Emmet Paskwietz	(WR/DB)
29	Jasper Small	(WR/DB)	63	Walter Dugger	(OL/DL)
2	Adriel Rodriguez	(RB/LB)	12	Karrison Wimley	(QB/WR/DB)
44	Wyatt Elsner	(RB/LB)	64	Owen Lamaster	(OL/DL)
3	Braxton Stacy	(RB/LB)	13	Jayden Lamb	(TE/DL)
50	Mac Davis	(OL/LB)	72	Easton Brown	(OL/DL)
4	Kaeden Hensel	(QB/DB)	14	Hayden Ronnow	(WR/DB)
51	Mason Wyatt	(OL/DL)	76	Gabriel Hendon	(OL/DL)
5	Jarrett Yancy	(K)	15	Jonathan McCullough	(WR/DB)
52	Eli Maldonado	(OL/DL/LB)	77	Eligah Griggs	(OL/DL)
6	Jackson Collier	(WR/LB)	17	Carson Greenhaw	(WR/DB)
55	Miles Ashwander	(OL/DL/LB)	78	Jackson Hoover	(OL/DL)
7	Guner Harden	(RB/LB)	18	Slaten Neeley	(RB/LB)
59	Brayden Thomas	(OL/LB)	79	Dayton Holder	(OL/DL)
8	Mason Bogle	(RB/LB)	19	Miles Ashwander	(OL/DL)
61	Andres Navarro	(OL/DL)	21	Lapray Strayhorn	(WR/DB)
			25	Gabe Reyna	(WR/DB)

to do that as well as scoring some points."

Defensively, Tidwell says that the Vikings struggled at times last season just to simply get lined up correctly, but most of those problems have been addressed moving forward.

"Going back and watching every single game every Monday, our biggest problem – especially on defense – was getting lined up correctly," he said, "We couldn't figure out why. It was almost like we were talking a foreign language at times, and a lot of that can go back to the fact that they weren't getting to learn it in youth league, or maybe in middle school. Getting them to answer why they were doing what they were doing. Learning all the little things that will help them get better is what we've been working on. I'm expecting those things to be a lot better."

"The goal is to not give up a bunch of big plays and just be where we are supposed to be," he continued, "Just to see that we are taking those steps. The defense has stayed pretty much the same, the verbiage has stayed the same, so in the spring when we would make a call, they remembered it and how to line up. That was a positive. We just want to keep building. I don't want to go backwards."

One disadvantage Community has compared to much of the state is the lack of competent facilities, like a fieldhouse.

"We've got to work on getting facilities," explained Tidwell, "Right now, we're in a trailer. If we can get a fieldhouse and stuff like that, it would be huge. Right now, the county just doesn't have \$30 mil-

lion to build a football stadium, a baseball stadium, a softball stadium, and all the parking lots. It's like building a whole new school. We need to get more facilities with more than one bathroom and some showers. We're just not there, and it's a work in progress. I think the right people know, but a lot of people don't. The school system really wants to do something, but with how tight the budget is, it's tough right now."

"If there are people out there that want to get involved and do some things facility-wise, we're all open to hear ideas," he continued, "We've got a blank canvas sitting out behind the high school where anyone can come in and donate X amount of dollars into building a really nice facility for folks, there is plenty of room to do it. We just need to get that part of the culture changed. There's a lot of new faces in this building, and we want to show that off to everybody. Softball showed it's possible to be very competitive and make good runs. They're the most recent example. It's hard to look at what we don't have compared to what Cascade has for example. We don't have a fieldhouse. Baseball and softball have no indoor facilities either. Outdoor sports here have nothing. We share everything with the middle school. These kids deserve to have nice facilities that they can be proud of. I know the school system is trying to do everything that they can do, but the community is where we're going to have to have the most help. Those large businesses can donate large sums to help

build facilities. A lot of things should be coming softball's way because of the success they have had and the fact that they won a state championship. We've got the kids, we just need facilities for other sports."

Despite the massive disadvantage with the facilities, Tidwell says the Vikings will continue to press forward until that day comes. The biggest improvement that he's looking for is from the body language on gameday.

"One of the big things was body language, and the mental aspect of it all," he said, "When things go bad, how are you going to react? You have to have a little bit of pride. In life you don't want somebody to run all over you. How are you going to respond when things go bad? You may not win, but how are you going to respond? I told them starting this offseason in the weight room, bad body language is not something I should have to deal with on a game night instead of coaching the football game on a Friday night."

Finally, Tidwell thinks that the fans who come out to watch the Vikings on the gridiron will see a noticeable improvement on both sides of the ball.

"I think fans coming out to see us this year will see better execution, better effort, and hopefully it'll look like we know what we're doing on the field with putting kids where they're supposed to be," he concluded, "I think the overall vibe and culture of the guys with what we've been doing will look different this year."

"Overall, they're stronger, they understand more of how we do things so they're teaching these new freshmen about what to do and not to do. The defense has stayed pretty much the same, the verbiage has stayed the same, so in the spring when we would make a call, they remembered it and how to line up. That was a positive. The next few years should be really positive with all the retention and carryover."

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See VIKINGS,

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From page 3

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for us. He's 14 years old and he's almost 6'3. You can't miss him on the field. He's helped change how a lot of these kids play because he would play at a higher level which would bring them up to his level. As a freshman, his football IQ is off the charts, and he's played for a long time. That's helped tremendously. Carson Wembley. He transferred down from Blackman Middle in January. He'll play some basketball in the winter.

"On defense it's mostly the same kids as on offense. What's crazy is a lot of the freshmen that played last year are sophomores now, so we're a little seasoned despite being incredibly young. We only had seven seniors last year, and not all of them played."

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"The way I look at the region, us, Cascade, Chapel Hill, and Watertown are fighting for the third and fourth seed in the playoffs behind Sequatchie and Giles."

"I think they see what we're trying to do. Going back and watching every single game every Monday, our biggest problem – especially on defense – was getting lined up correctly. We couldn't figure out why. It was almost like we were talking a foreign language at times, and a lot of that can go back to the fact that they weren't getting to learn it in youth league, or maybe in middle school. A lot of it is they don't actually watch a lot of football. Getting them to answer why they were doing what they were doing. Learning all the little things that will help them get better is what we've been working on. I'm expecting those things to be a lot better."

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be where we are supposed to be. Just to see that we are taking those steps. We just want to keep building. I don't want to go backwards."

"Of the six running backs, four of them will probably play more than the other two, and of those four – five if you count the quarterback – if all of those guys combine to run for close to 2,000 yards on the ground, that's a success. That comes out to each kid averaging about 500 yards apiece, and that's extremely possible with what we're going to do. The kids running the ball are hard-nosed kids, and they're going to run the ball hard. They're not necessarily speed burners, but they can run. Some are more powerful while others are more quick-footed. We've got a nice mixture. Same way with the quarterbacks. If we're throwing the ball 10 times a game, that means we're not running it well. We're going to run the ball. We want to minimize the running clock as much as we can."

"I have a feeling that things are going to be a little different here this year. Last year, I wasn't even worried about wins and losses. We had too many other issues to fix first, and you can't win until you fix those issues."

"One of the things was body language, and the mental aspect of it all. When things go bad, how are you going to react? You have to have a little bit of pride. In life you don't want somebody to run all over you. How are you going to respond when things go bad? You may not win, but how are you going to respond? I told them starting this offseason in the weight room, bad body language is not something I should have to deal with on a game night instead of coaching the foot-

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Champs Have Eye on Postseason in Year Three of Carkuff Era



BELL BUCKLE, Tenn. – When Jared Carkuff first returned to Cascade to be the Head Football Coach before the 2024 season, he knew it would take time to build the culture up to the standard he expected and has experienced at previous stops. After limping to a 1-9 record in his first season, the Champions showed notable improvement in 2025, starting out the season by winning three of their first four games before finishing a respectable 4-6 (1-4) after reclassifying up to Class AAA. With that improvement, Carkuff is seeing that shift in culture that he has been wanting.

“This summer has been really good. We have a good group and they get after it,” he said, “We finally are seeing that culture and mentality change that I’ve been looking for from top to bottom. Before, we had plenty of it, but it was just a select few that was hindering the change. Everyone is pretty bought in, so it should be fun.”

Cascade is returning some nice pieces from a team that showed flashes a year ago, but was unable to keep it all together

er once region play came around. And make no mistake, Region 4-AAA is one of the more competitive regions in the state. At the top last season was Sequatchie County as well as Giles County, but both teams saw their season end in the second round of the playoffs to Meigs and Tyner, respectively. However, Carkuff feels like Region 4-AAA isn’t as cut and dry as some might think.

“Giles and Sequatchie last year were probably the best teams, but Watertown beat Giles, and Chapel Hill could have beat any of them,” Carkuff said, “When you have a kid like Quincy [Mitchell], you’re in every game. I think this year, the answer to who gets in the playoffs might come down to tiebreakers. I think almost everybody can beat almost everybody in this region.”

“The whole thing with 3A and below is you have to have a quarterback, an offensive line, and a solid defense,” he continued, “You can win games without that, but to make a true run, that’s what you have to have. We have the quarterback, our O-line should be much better, and

our defense should be a lot better as well. We’ve made progress in the three most important parts of the game at this level, so we have no excuse.”

The most important position group – as well as the one with a few outside questions – for the Champions is the offensive line. Last year, Sam Bradley – who is a dynamic quarterback and should have a breakout senior season this year

– was forced to improvise more than Cascade would like, and he eventually sustained an injury in the process. This year, after returning three of the five starters, the biggest goal is to Keep Sam Healthy – or KSH – and that hinges on the development and improvement up front.

“I feel like a lot of the leadership on the team comes from our offensive line.

See CHAMPS, 6

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2026 CASCADE
FOOTBALL SCHEDULE

Aug. 21 – AT Cheatham County
Aug. 28 – VS Moore County
Sep. 4 – VS Summertown*
Sep. 11 – AT Eagleville
Sep. 18 – VS Sequatchie County*
Sep. 25 – BYE
Oct. 2 – AT Giles County
Oct. 9 – VS Chapel Hill* (Homecoming)
Oct. 16 – AT Watertown*
Oct. 23 – VS Marion County (Senior Night)
Oct. 29 – AT Community*

CHAMPS From page 5

Everyone expects the quarterback or the running back to be a leader, so when you have o-linemen that are leaders for the whole team and not just in their position group, that's huge. Across the board, they seem to be best friends with the skill guys, and that's when it's great. This year, it's the third year in our system. They're more comfortable because there's no thinking anymore. They have the mindset of 'I'm going to put this guy in the dirt', and it's because they know what they're doing. It took time. Before, they're thinking about who they're going to block or where they're going to go, and now it's second-nature."

Behind the offensive line, Sam Bradley returns for his second and final season in Carkuff's offense. Bradley's statistics from last season aren't particularly eye-popping – 100-for-178 (56.2%) for 1,161 yards through the air with eight touchdowns and seven interceptions while being the team's second-leading rusher with 402 yards and two touchdowns on 77 attempts – but there were plenty of flashes throughout the season.

"We talk about having to have a quarterback at this level to make a run, and he [Sam Bradley] is that good, but off the field, everyone is on time because of him," Carkuff said about his star QB, "He leads by example – he shows up and gets his work done. He's not a ra-ra guy, if he has to get into you he will, but he just wants to play football. The way he goes about it though, he elevates everybody around him. I think that's just as or more valuable than him being an elite passer, and he can really run the ball as well. Our philosophy is to keep Sam healthy this

2026 CASCADE FOOTBALL ROSTER

#	Player Name	Position	#	Player Name	Position
0	Braxtyn Burris	(WR/DB)	15	Cole Hutson	(TE/OLB)
29	Easton Martin	(WR/DB)	56	Kolton Strickland	(OL/LB)
1	Brett Heunik	(Te/OLB)	16	Easton Finch	(RB/DB)
30	Tay Smith	(WR/DB)	60	DaShawn Ferrell	(OL/DL)
2	Sam Bradley	(QB)	17	Xander Shockley	(WR/DB)
31	Kori Smith	(WR/DB)	61	Eli Miller	(OL/DL)
3	Delontae Clay	(WR/DB)	18	Josh Rose	(WR/DB)
4	Ty Hazelwood	(WR/DB)	62	Korbin Smith	(OL/DL)
33	Brady Lyons	(WR/DB)	19	Garrett Caswell	(QB/DB)
6	Johel Perez	(RB/LB)	63	Cyontay Simmons	(OL/DL)
35	Peyton Jacobs	(WR/DB)	20	Nate Zimmerman	(RB/LB)
7	Allan Blanton	(WR/OLB)	64	Adrian Cass	(OL/LB)
36	Roman Blackman	(WR/DB)	21	Sully Brainard	(WR/DB)
8	Slater Hall	(WR/DB)	65	Ty Mann	(OL/OLB)
44	Diego Torres	Perez (K/P)	22	Blake White	(TE/LB)
9	Landon Gordon	(WR/DB)	66	Slade Thompson	(OL/DL)
50	Nick Moreland	(OL/DL)	23	Josh Cunningham	(RB/OLB)
10	Robbie Davis-Jackson	(WR/DB)	67	Braxton Byrd	(OL/DL)
51	Elijah Hord	(OL/LB)	24	Laythan Wix	(TE/LB)
11	Xykaiah Dixon	(WR/DB)	70	Cambron Reynolds	(OL/DL)
52	Gabriel Graham	(OL/DL)	25	Malaki Tyre	(WR/DB)
12	Malaki Holloman	(WR/DB)	74	Titus Schudar	(OL/DL)
53	Damian Slusher	(OL/DL)	26	Lando Martin	(K/P)
13	Jeremy Weldon	(WR/DB)	75	Landon Finch	(OL/DL)
54	Isaac Rimes	(OL/DL)	27	Eli Blackman	(WR/DB)
14	Wyatt Hooker	(QB)	76	Levi Morgan	(OL/DL)
55	Fermin Estrada	(OL/DL)	28	Patrick Dowell	(WR/OLB)

HC – Jared Carkuff
DC – Braxton Waddell
OC – Alex Roberts
DL – Phil Hord
QB – Drew Hooker
LB – Chris Arnold

WR – Will Carter
DB – Ricky Hord
OL – Ethan Calvert
SPT – Sanders Lovvorn
O Analyst – Brent Mansfield
D Analyst – AJ Vanderpool

year so that whenever we get in important games we can run him a bit more. KSH, Keep Sam Healthy. He's elite with the ball in his hands and in the open field. When you have a guy who can do both at a high level and he's a leader, there's nothing more valuable than that. He escapes and improvises at such a high level when the play breaks down as well. A lot of people can't do that."

If Bradley gets time to throw, he has dangerous targets downfield who can make plays, as well as stud standing beside him in the backfield in Nate Zimmerman.

After transferring in from Shelbyville Central before the 2025 season, Zimmerman finished as the team's leading rusher with 495 yards and seven touchdowns on 126 attempts. If the offensive line is as improved as it sounds like, Zimmerman has a realistic chance of reaching 800 yards on the ground to complement the dual-threat nature of Bradley.

"I think for the first time since I've been here, we have a true two-deep

across the board," Carkuff said, "Nate [Zimmerman] at running back is elite and has that big-play potential, but behind him, Josh Cunningham is someone a lot of people would take as their main guy. He's smaller, but he's going to run downhill, he's going to find the seam, and he's going to do his job.

"At receiver, we don't have any really big guys, but with what we do, it works," he continued, "We have [Delontae Clay], [Braxtyn Burris], Xykaiah [Dixon] who is the fastest guy on the team, and Alan Blanton, who is a converted running back. We also really have three tight ends. [Brett] Heunik is doing great, Ty Hazelwood, and freshman Cole Hutson. We feel very comfortable at the skill positions on both offense and defense, since a lot of them play both ways."

Last year, rising seniors Burris and Clay were the second and third-best receivers, respectively, by yardage behind Corey Gooch, who graduated. Burris caught 26 balls for 254 yards and one touchdown while having to step in at

quarterback a few times. Meanwhile, Clay accumulated 232 yards receiving with three touchdowns on 21 receptions.

Defensively, the Champions play a lot of skill guys both ways, but up front, Carkuff has found a way to limit it to just two guys subbing in for each other.

"There is really just one, maybe two guys that play both ways up front," he said, "Isaac Rimes, and then Titus Schudar will flip with him to make sure he gets a few breaks. Our goal for this year up front defensively was to have a true set of guys that were defense-focused."

"[Clay] and [Burris] at safety, and those are physical dudes that want to hurt you, so that's fun to have back there," he continued, "Ty [Hazelwood] will play corner this year, and Lendon [Gordon] is playing corner after playing safety last year. We're technically bringing back a lot of returners, but we have shuffled their positions."

At linebacker, Heunik and Blanton – both tight ends on offense – are projected starters at outside linebacker. In the middle, Nate Zimmerman and Blake White are the other two projected starters in the 3-4 setup.

One of the biggest hurdles for the Cascade program has actually been off the field and away from X's and O's. Not just learning how to win, but learning how to play through adversity and come out the other side has been perhaps the biggest challenge for the Champions to work through in the offseason.

"Our biggest thing last year was we would get fatigued, we start getting beat, then we'd blow up mentally," Carkuff admitted, "Watertown was a two-point game going into halftime. We would have been within one point at halftime if not for a blocked field goal returned for a touchdown against Giles County. It felt like at Sequatchie, everything that could go wrong did go wrong in the first half. We rolled into Sequatchie for the first region game and the guys were just so stressed out to start. Every other game, one thing would go wrong and we'd go back to thinking we suck and it fell apart. I don't think this group has that. Obviously time will tell, but in the Spring Game we came out terrible and then turned it around to dominate. I think that's what is different this year."

CHAMPS

From page 6

With all the improvement and changes heading into Year Three, Cascade seems poised for a breakout season. The excitement is palpable among the coaching staff.

"I truly feel like this group can be really special, but they have to believe it," Carkuff admitted, "I told them the other day, 'If you think you can't do it, then you're right.' Whatever you think is what you'll do. On paper we are there, and we should win a lot of games, but that's not always what plays out on the field."

The aim for Cascade is to find a way to make the playoffs for the first time in the Carkuff era, and to do that, the Champions are going to have to win at least two, if not three, region contests this season: Community, Chapel Hill, and/or Watertown. Whatever team finishes with two region wins will be white-knuckling the final day, but three wins will clinch a spot in the postseason. With the pieces Cascade has this season, the potential is definitely there.

"It's going to be exciting," Carkuff concluded, "It's going to be entertaining. We're going to sling it, we're going to run it, and we're going to fly around and hit people on defense. The confidence in this group to fly around and make something happen makes it fun to watch. If you come out here, there's going to be excitement all around you. Home games are going to be a lot of fun."

Year 3. Nice returning pieces.

"The whole thing with 3A and below is you have to have a quarterback, an offensive line, and a solid defense. You can win games without that, but to make a true run, that's what you have to have. We have the quarterback, our O-line should be much better, and our defense should be a lot better as well. We've made progress in the three most important parts of the game at this level, so we have no excuse."

"We were in every single game last year until one bad thing happened. We feel like we should have been 6-4 at least and in the playoffs. We have one of the strongest regions in the state for 3A. Of course, you have individual teams like Westview, but as far as top to bottom, like we don't know which four teams are making the playoffs for us this year."

"Giles and Sequatchie last year were probably the best teams, but Watertown beat Giles, Chapel Hill could have beat any of them. When you have a kid like Quincy, you're in every game. I think this year, the answer to who gets in the playoffs might come down to tiebreakers. I think almost everybody can beat almost everybody in this region."

"I feel like a lot of the leadership on the team comes from our offensive line. Everyone expects the quarterback or the running back to be a leader, so when you have o-linemen that are leaders for the whole team and not just in their position group, that's huge. Across the board, they seem to be best friends with the skill guys, and that's when it's great."

"This year, it's the third year in our system. They're more comfortable because there's no thinking anymore. They have the mindset of 'I'm going to put this guy in the dirt', and it's because they know what they're doing. It took time. Before, they're thinking about who they're going to block or where they're going to go, and now it's second-nature."

On the line three returners.

"I think for the first time since I've been here, we have a true two-deep across the board. Nate [Zimmerman] at running back is elite and has that big-play potential, but behind him, Josh Cunningham is someone a lot of people would take as their main guy. He's smaller, but he's going to run downhill, he's going to find the seam, and he's going to do his job. At receiver, we don't have any really big guys, but with what we do, it works. We have [Delontae Clay], [Braxton Burris], Xykaiah [Dixon] who is the fastest guy on the team, and Alan Blanton, who is a converted running back. We really have three tight ends. Heunik is doing great, Ty Hazelwood, and freshman Cole Hudson. Norton? We feel very comfortable at the skill positions on both offense and defense, since a lot of them play both ways."

"There is really just one, maybe two guys that play both ways up front. Grimes, and then Titus will flip with him to make sure he gets a few breaks. Our goal for this year up front defensively was to have a true set of guys that were defense-focused."

"Our biggest thing last year was we would get fatigued, you start getting beat, then we'd blow up mentally. Wa-

tertown was a two-point game going into halftime. We would have been up at halftime if not for a blocked field goal returned for a touchdown against Giles County. It felt like at Sequatchie, everything that could go wrong did go wrong in the first half. We rolled into Sequatchie for the first region game and the guys were just so stressed out to start. Every other game, one thing would go wrong and we'd go back to thinking we suck and it fell apart. I don't think this group has that. Obviously time will tell, but in the Spring Game we came out terrible and then turned it around to dominate. I think that's what is different this year."

The weight room has always been important, but this offseason we really kicked it up a notch. That's where your toughness is formed and comes from, and we beat the crap out of them in the weight room."

"We want to be player-led, but you have to train that. You can't just tell someone to go be a leader, you have to teach them how to be one, and give them opportunities to fail and succeed. We had a terrible practice one day and I told the coaches to not say anything to the kids to let them try and figure it out. See if they were like, 'this sucks, something needs to change,' by themselves. They're still teenagers though."

Secondary

"[Clay] and [Burris] at safety, and those are physical dudes that want to hurt you, so that's fun to have back there. Ty will play corner this year, and Lindon is playing corner after playing safety last year. We're technically bringing back a lot of returners, but we have shuffled their positions."

"We talk about having to have a quarterback at this level to make a run, and he [Sam Bradley] is that good, but off the field, everyone is on time because of him. He leads by example – he shows up and gets his work done. He's not a ra-ra guy, if he has to get into you he will, but he just wants to play football. The way he goes about it though, he elevates everybody around him. I think that's just as or more valuable than him being an elite passer, and he can really run the ball as well. Our philosophy is keep Sam healthy this year so that whenever we get in important games we can run him a bit more. KSH, Keep Sam Healthy. He's elite with the ball in his hands and in the open field. When



Cascade's Sam Bradley (2) returns for his senior season as the starting quarterback after a tantalizing junior campaign in 2025. Bradley hopes to lead a dynamic Champions' offense to their first playoff berth under Jared Carkuff. (Image courtesy of David Smith)

you have a guy who can do both at a high level and he's a leader, there's nothing more valuable than that. He escapes and improvises at such a high level when the play breaks down as well. A lot of people can't do that."

"I truly feel like this group can be really special, but they have to believe it. I told them the other day, 'If you think you can't do it, then you're right.' Whatever you think is what you'll do. On paper we are there, and we should win a lot of games, but that's not always what plays out on the field."

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Golden Eagles Striving for Another Playoff Appearance While Replacing Starters at Key Positions



SHELBYVILLE, Tenn. – In 2025, Shelbyville Central returned to the top classification in Tennessee High School Football for the first time since 2022. That season, the Golden Eagles finished 1-10 overall with their lone win coming against Warren County in Jud Dryden's first year as the head coach. Last season, Dryden's program went 5-6 (4-2) in a more difficult region, and established themselves as a tough out on any given Friday night.

"Going into it last year, there was the shock and worry of being in 6A, and then we had the realization that we can do this," fifth-year head coach Jud Dryden said, "We don't have that shock factor anymore and we understand what we are getting into, so now it's time to go compete."

Overall, the Golden Eagles graduated 14 seniors from 2025, and eight of them were starters. One of those starters, star tailback Robert Bailey who was last season's Region 6-6A Offensive Player of the Year, graduated and is now at Austin Peay. Bailey played in nine games, carrying the ball 189 times for 1,227 yards

and eight touchdowns on 6.5 yards per carry despite dealing with a nagging injury for much of the season. The Golden Eagles now turn their focus to a dynamic committee headlined by junior Torrior Mathis. As a sophomore, Mathis showed plenty of juice in his time on the field, finishing second on the team in rushing with 747 yards on 133 carries with six touchdowns.

"[Our backfield] has a ton of promise, and Torrior has had a great offseason," Dryden said, "Treyveon [Mathis] has had a great offseason, and Laron Brown, who spent most of the year injured, is coming back as a sophomore, so we have a good three backs to rely on. It's gotten to the point where we are running Laron as a wide receiver. He's very athletic, a natural running back, and he's playing well in space."

Treyveon Mathis, a rising senior, tallied 182 yards rushing on 35 attempts with three touchdowns on 5.2 yards per carry.

Of course, no running game can succeed without an offensive line, and the

2026 Golden Eagles front returns all five starters from a year ago. This continuity and cohesion should help ease the transition at quarterback as well with Stephen Bobo moving on to focus on his baseball future for his senior season.

"Last year, the offensive line grew up so fast and so well, starting with Franklin really," said Dryden, "Our offensive success is going to hinge on our offensive

line. It sounds cliché, but for us, it is 100% correct. That's where all of our experience is and they all had a great offseason. Ravenwood is always going to be Ravenwood, but we competed well with everyone else last season. [Them returning] changes everything offensively. We didn't have to spend an inordinate amount of time prepping them and getting them

See EAGLES, 9

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SHELBYVILLE CENTRAL FOOTBALL SCHEDULE	
Aug. 21	VS Tullahoma
Aug. 27	VS Marshall County
Sep. 4	VS Franklin*
Sep. 11	AT Independence*
Sep. 18	VS Brentwood*
Sep. 25	VS Summit* (Homecoming)
Oct. 2	BYE
Oct. 9	VS Clarksville (Senior Night)
Oct. 16	AT Ravenwood*
Oct. 23	AT Hendersonville
Oct. 30	AT Coffee County*

EAGLES

From page 8

ready to play because they're already Game One ready coming in. We've been able to do a lot more with them up front. Having Torrior and Treyveon with the number of snaps they've gotten, having those two in the backfield alongside Cyonn Rucker at quarterback. We're returning a good chunk, and we've been able to progress the offense because of that. "

Cyonn Rucker, a shutdown corner as a freshman last season, stepped in as the backup quarterback in Shelbyville's Week Four defeat at Brentwood when Bobo had to sit with a lower-leg injury. The rising sophomore finished 2025 going 12-for-29 for 108 yards with one touchdown and no interceptions while rushing for 113 yards on 14 carries. After that game, Dryden made sure Rucker commanded a few drives every game as Bobo returned from injury, allowing the youngster to gain invaluable reps. Rucker's growth offensively – especially since taking over the full-time starting job in the spring once Bobo made it clear he would be focusing on baseball – has been notable and a major cause for excitement.

"Cyonn has had an amazing off-season," Dryden said about his young but promising quarterback, "He's gotten thicker, obviously he's in more control of everything going on, he understands where we're headed, and that's been big for a lot of our other guys. So far he has played well above the 10th grade status. I think he'll find his footing sooner rather than later. For the most part, coming into game one this season, it's coming into game five for him with an offensive line that has 11 games under them as a group. He's a good arm talent to start with. He

2026 SHELBYVILLE CENTRAL FOOTBALL ROSTER											
#	Player Name	Position	Height	Weight	Grade	#	Player Name	Position	Height	Weight	Grade
0	Treviyon Mathis	RB/LB	5'10	180	12	3	Te'Sean Keney	LB	5'7	180	9
2	Kyvell Rippy	WR/DB	5'11"	170	11	39	Tyler McAdoo	TE/MLB	6'0	210	9
3	Elij Prince	WR/DB	5'10	150	11	40	Kaison Tidwell	WR/S/CB	5'7	135	9
4	Ethan McBee	TE/LB	5'10	215	12	41	Zakyus Jordan	WR	5'8	180	9
5	Jackson Themm	TE/LB	6'0	225	12	42	Michael "Zeb" Wilson	RB/LB	5'11	200	9
6	Tltan Long	RB/LB	5'11	185	12	43	Kayden Thomas	WR/DB	6'0	190	9
7	Devin Young, JR	TE/LB	6'1	220	12	44	Jayden Nowlin	TE/DL	6'0	240	11
8	Bryce Carter	H/DE/DL	5'10	200	12	45	Jonathan Wright	TE/LB	5'11	205	11
9	Nathaniel Barajas	WR/DB	5'9	160	11	50	Lane Canady	OL/DL	6'2	265	10
10	Richard Howey Jr. (RJ)	TE/LB	6'0	180	12	51	Finn Theadus	OL/DL	5'9	215	9
11	Christian Hearn	TE/DL	6'2	185	12	52	Emmanuel Solis	DL/OL	5'9	185	9
12	Laron Brown Jr.	RB/LB/WR	6'0	195	10	53	Feliciano Juarez	TE/OL	6'0	185	9
13	Reager Edwards	WR/DB	6'0	185	12	55	Adarius Fleurier	OL/DL	5'11	325	10
14	Cyon Rucker	QB/DB	6'0	155	10	56	Issac Smith	WR/DB	5'7	150	9
15	Marquise Tipton (JJ)	WR/DB	5'11	185	10	57	Hunter Phelps	OL/DL	6'4	245	11
16	Torrior Mathis	RB/LB	5'11	185	11	58	J.D. Wiser	OL/DL	6'2	315	11
17	Kaleb Morrow	QB/S	5'10	165	9	59	Hudson Dill	OL/LB	5'10	180	9
18	Hudson Oaks	QB/S	5'10	150	9	60	Ransom McElhiney	OL/DL	6'1	275	11
19	Payton Carpenter	WR/DB	6'0	165	11	61	John "Hondos" Miller	WR/LB	5'9	145	9
20	Lucas Tindall	QB/WR/LB	5'11	185	10	62	Prentice Johnson	WR/DB	5'5	110	9
21	Keterion Allen	WR/DB	5'8	155	10	64	Jacob Vanatta	WR	5'6"	175	9
22	Brylee Sneed	K	6'0	180	12	65	Randall Kain Council	OL/DL	5'7	180	9
23	Payton Farless	RB/LB	5'10	170	12	66	Gavin Reid	OL/DL	6'3	260	11
24	Tobin Hathcock	WR/S	5'10	145	9	67	Lennon Martin	OL/DL	6'1	285	10
25	Michael Gresham	TE/LB	6'2	215	11	68	Gage Newsom	OL/DL	5'10	210	11
26	Julian Riveria	WR/DB	6'1	175	10	69	Chase Kologinczak	OL/DL	6'0	250	9
28	Sawyer Theodus	WR/DB	5'8	160	10	70	Victor Flores	OL	5'11	295	9
29	Brady Beecham	WR/S	5'9	160	9	71	Brock Robb	OL/DL	5'7	230	10
30	Marcus Evitts	WR/DB	5'9	160	10	72	Landon Coffey	OL/DL	6'0	270	12
31	Treydon "Trey" Taylor	RB/OLB	5'9	205	9	73	Malcolm Bobbitt	OL/DL	6'4	240	12
32	William Rippy	RB/LB	5'10	190	10	74	Tyrone Everett Jr.	TE/DL	6'2	240	9
33	Alex Cervantes	TE/DL	5'10	190	11	75	Blake Leigh	OL/DL	6'4	300	12
34	Michael Cortinas	WR/DB	5'8	145	9	76	Jayden Everett	OL/DL	6'4	280	10
35	Jaxon "Ryder" Smith	ATH	5'8	175	9	77	Pierce Smith	OL/DL	5'10	260	11
36	Cameron Farless	WR	5'8	165	9	78	Wiley Floyd	OL/DL	6'2	310	11
37	Elijah "Shaggy" Keffer	WR/DB	5'6"	125	9	79	Esteban Carreon	OL/DL	6'4	315	12
						99	Ramiz Hawkins	OL/DL	6'0	230	11

has gotten to where he's recognizing the windows as they open. He's starting to throw guys open instead of waiting until they're open, so his timing is better. Everything has gotten better with every rep he's taken since spring ball. He's constantly got guys working with him out there with him outside of practice. He's going to be confident and he's going to be fine. What's crazy is he is as good or better in the secondary. We'll be able to use him as a nickel corner, safety, just when the situation dictates that we need another defensive back on the field, then he'll be that guy."

Seemingly the only question mark on the offensive side – besides the growth rate at quarterback – is the receivers. Reager Edwards is the lone returner with any significant snaps under his belt. The senior was Shelbyville Central's leading receiver a year ago with 24 receptions for 371 yards and one touchdown.

"One of the reasons Laron [Brown] is at WR is that we're a bit limited on skill positions," Dryden admitted, "Reager [Edwards] was a good target for Stephen [Bobo] last year, but he's about the only returner. Laron, JJ Timton(?), Lucas Tindle, have all come along well. As they've learned more, they've gotten better."

The Golden Eagles prefer to establish the run and control the game on the ground already, but they will need to find a few options for Rucker to be able to throw to when necessary.

Defensively, the front seven will be the strength of Dryden's team. Despite losing every starter from a year ago on the defensive line, the Golden Eagles like the guys stepping up in their place, as well as returning All-Region linebacker Jackson Themm for his senior season. Themm was by far the team's leading tackler last year, totaling 100 tackles in 11 games with 6.5 TFLs.

"All of our starters on the defensive line graduated, but our returners there all rotated in and got a lot of snaps," Dryden said, "They're talented, thick, strong, and have a good first step. They're going to be difficult to deal with for a lot of teams. At linebacker, Jackson Themm is back as an all-region player, and Ethan McBee has taken over the other inside linebacker spot. At outside linebacker, it will be a rotation between the three running backs."

However, the defensive backfield will have to get their sea legs underneath them quickly. They are having to replace both starting safeties – Stephen Bobo and Chandler Jones – as well as both corner spots with Rucker transitioning to more spot duty while being the full-time quarterback.

"At safety, JJ Tipton has looked good," said Dryden, "He's progressing, young and athletic as a sophomore, but he's new

See EAGLES, 10

EAGLES

From page 9

to the role. Then you've got Eli Prince at corner – a recent move there – who is a little undersized, but he makes up for it with his tenacity and coachability and his toughness. Lucas Tindle has moved from outside linebacker back to safety, and he's incredibly intelligent with a great football IQ. The other corner spot is still up in the air being fought for by a couple of guys.”

Tindle is a sophomore while Prince is a junior.

One of the biggest questions returning to 6A last season was how would the Golden Eagles be able to match up athletically? Shelbyville Central proved that they aren't as far off as many might have anticipated, and Dryden feels like his program is continuing to take positive steps in that direction, even in comparison to a really tough region.

“Athletically we stack up pretty well with everyone outside of Ravenwood,” he said, “We have six or seven dudes and they'll have 11 at all times. Everyone is well coached, so we have to be able to maximize our talent, take advantage of what we do well, shore up weaknesses where we can, and go play football. Last year, Summit, who was down, had the same coaching staff that won a state title a few years ago. We've got to be prepared every week to get after everyone that we see.”

“[Making the playoffs last year] showed us we are capable of doing this in 6A,” he continued, “Anybody we play in the playoffs is going to be really good, and we'll have to be prepared, but at the end of the day, I'm looking forward to seeing what they can do. If the growth happens in the way that it could, then who knows. We'll play until we're done.”

On the whole, Dryden is visibly excited – almost giddy, or at least as giddy as you'll see a football coach, which is to say not too much externally – about his team's potential this season. There is a ton of youth, sure, but there is also experience in just enough key positions combined with heavy potential that the 2026 outlook for Shelbyville Central should be a positive one.

“I'm very excited for this season,” he admitted, “I want to see what our offensive line can do now that they're all in and gelled. Three brand new running backs

that we know are incredibly talented, I want to see what they can do on the field. I'm excited to see what Cyonn can do. There's so many unknowns, and that's exciting to me, being able to see the growth from our guys. I'm excited to help and take the journey with our guys in the secondary and on defense as a whole as they get better. I want to see Jackson Themm have an absolutely stellar year, I want to see our outside linebackers have a breakout year, and I want to see that defensive line play with the amount of joy that their coach coaches them with. There's nothing about this year that doesn't excite me in not only its potential, but in the process and journey of getting to that potential.”

Last year, the Golden Eagles went 4-2 in region games, but three of the four wins were one-score games that could have gone either way. The fourth was a 28-14 win over Coffee County to close the season and clinch a playoff trip to Antioch. Hopefully the fourth quarter success stays with Shelbyville Central in 2026.

Finally, the Golden Eagles' skipper wants to let the fans know exactly what they can expect from his team in 2026 on the gridiron.

“What I want the fans to see is our guys excited to play for each other,” he concluded, “I want them to see us always in the fight regardless of whatever else is going on, and I want them to see the joy that it is to play this game. If those things are evident, then we've done a good job this year.”

“We got a lot of good work in the summer. We knew everything that we needed to improve on coming out of spring ball, and we've been able to knock out a lot of really good stuff in the summer leading into a great camp at Carson-Newman. Our scrimmage against Columbia Central really showed how much we improved. Night and day are different from the spring scrimmage.”

Lost 14 seniors, eight of them were starters. Also lost Stephen Bobo due to baseball commitments. Returning the entire offensive line. Returning Torrior and Treyveon at RB. Return a lot of guys in the front seven.

“Ton of promise, and Torrior has had a great offseason. Treyveon has had a great offseason, and Laron Brown, who spent most of the year injured, is coming back as a sophomore, so we have a good three

backs to rely on. It's gotten to the point where we are running Laron as a wide receiver. He's very athletic, a natural running back, and he's playing well in space.”

Bringing all 5 linemen back. “It changes everything offensively. We didn't have to spend an inordinate amount of time prepping them and getting them ready to play because they're already Game One ready coming in. We've been able to do a lot more with them up front. Having Torrior and Treyveon with the number of snaps they've gotten, having those two in the backfield alongside Cyonn Rucker at quarterback. We're returning a good chunk, and we've been able to progress the offense because of that. One of the reasons Laron is at WR is that we're a bit limited on skill positions. Reager was a good target for Stephen last year, but he's about the only returner. Laron, JJ Tinton(?), Lucas Tindle, have all come along well. As they've learned more, they've gotten better.”

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“I think he'll find his footing sooner rather than later. For the most part, coming into game one this season, it's coming into game five for him with an offensive line that has 11 games under them as a group. What's crazy is he is as good or better in the secondary.”

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“Tullahoma is going to be physical, come downhill, and be well coached and ready to go week one. We're going to have to be prepared. It's a good test right out of the gate, and there's really no easy game on our schedule anywhere. All four non-region games are tough and against playoff caliber teams. There are no tune-ups.”

“All of our starting dline graduated but our returners there all rotated in and got a lot of snaps. They're talented, thick, strong, and have a good first step. They're going to be difficult to deal with for a lot of teams. At linebacker, Jackson Themm is back as an all-region player and has one or two offers already, and Ethan McBee has taken over the other inside linebacker spot. At outside linebacker, it will be a rotation between the three running backs.”

“Athletically we stack up pretty well with everyone outside of Ravenwood. We have six or seven dudes and they'll have 11 at all times. Everyone is well coached, so we have to be able to maximize our talent, take advantage of what we do well, shore up weaknesses where we can, and go play football. Last year, Summit, who was down, had the same coaching staff that won a state title a few years ago. We've got to be prepared every week to get after everyone that we see.”

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“Our offensive success is going to hinge on our offensive line. It sounds cliché, but for us, it is 100% correct. That's where all of our experience is and they all had a great offseason. Defensively, our success is going to hinge on how fast the guys on the back end can grow up and learn on the job. They're going to be tested every single week, and they're going to have to be the ones to shut things down.”

“I'm very excited for this season. I want to see what our offensive line can do now that they're all in and gelled. Three brand new running backs that we know are incredibly talented, I want to see what they can do on the field. I'm excited to see what Cyonn can do. There's so many unknowns, and that's exciting to me, be-

EAGLES From page 10

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Shelbyville Central returns Cyonn Rucker (14) at quarterback with Torrion Mathis (16) at tailback for the 2026 campaign. Rucker – a sophomore – and Mathis – a junior – aim to lead the Golden Eagles back to the playoffs for the sixth-consecutive season while playing behind an offensive line unit that brings back all five starters from a year ago. (T-G Archive)

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