

2026 HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL PREVIEW

THE DOMINION POST
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SECTION C



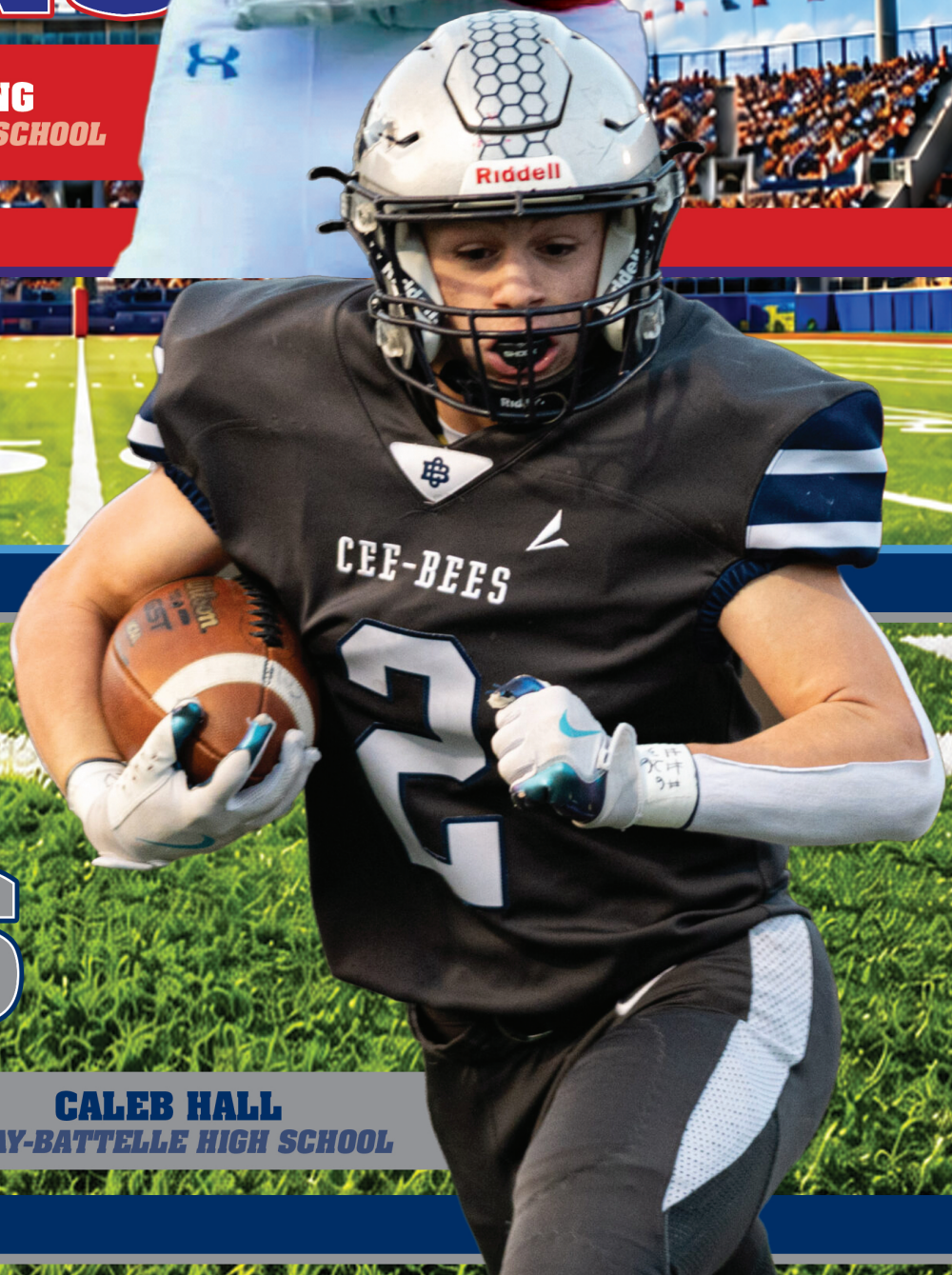
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CEE-BEES

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Maddox Twigg
Morgantown High

Harrison Helbig
University High

Corey Coen
Clay-Battelle

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Twigg, Helbig, Coen give area three exciting quarterbacks for 2026

BY JUSTIN JACKSON
JJackson@DominionPost.com

Depending on how traffic goes on Route 7, you could go from University High to Morgantown High to Clay-Battelle in about 50 minutes.

That short amount of time connects Harrison Helbig to Maddox Twigg to Corey Coen, the three high school quarterbacks in Monongalia County who all put in historical seasons in 2025.

The kicker: All three return for another run this season.

“To me, that just says there’s going to be a lot to be excited about this season,” said Twigg, who guided the Mohigans to the Class AAAA state championship last season following a dramatic 28-21 victory against Martinsburg. “Three guys who all had great seasons are all coming back; yeah, that could be a lot of fun.”

Their accomplishments from last season are in the books now. Twigg won a state title. Coen led the Cee-Bees to their first-ever appearance in the Class A state championship game, while Helbig’s arm passed University High to the Class AAAA state semifinals, one game away from the finals.

“It’s a phenomenal point that they’re all coming back, especially from the same area,” was the way UHS head coach Eric Snyder put it. “Usually when you have that much success from one area, you’re probably going to have a senior-laden team, and guys move on. Those guys did it as underclassmen. I think that’s kind of amazing thinking about it that way.”



Morgantown High quarterback Maddox Twigg throws a pass under pressure against Martinsburg in last season's Class AAAA state championship game.

Benjamin Powell/The Dominion Post

What got them here

All three are unique in their own cleats.

Coen is the stocky 5-foot-8 athlete with the looks of a fullback rather than a quarterback. That makes sense, because fullback was the position he grew up playing. It wasn’t un-

til he reached high school that Coen was converted to quarterback.

“I guess I’ve always been a natural runner,” he said. “I’ve had to put in work to develop the other parts of being a quarterback. That’s been fun, because it was a new challenge for me.”

Twigg is built more like an oak, but plays with a flair for the dramatic. Big plays can come with his arm or his legs, and Twigg has always seemed able to take a busted play and turn something positive out of it.

“You’re the guy, you have to lead your team,” Twigg said.

“I think that’s how every quarterback feels. What all three schools do with their offense, that’s a big thing to be able to have your guy back there.”

Helbig stands 6-foot-4, and his more traditional pocket-passing style orchestrates University High’s hurry-up spread offense.

Helbig does not shy away from the pocket-passer moniker – “Especially with all the receivers we have,” he said – yet he doesn’t want that style to be his entire definition. Twigg even refers to Helbig as a “gunslinger.”

“I always remind people I did have six rushing touchdowns last season,” Helbig said. “Being able to run is something I’ve worked very hard on. I feel like in today’s game, a quarterback has to have a great arm, but also has to show some athleticism. This summer, I was able to get my 40 (yard dash) time down a little bit. I feel like I’m a stronger runner and I have more confidence to do it.”

Their stats last season were off the charts.

Twigg accounted for 45 touchdowns over 14 games. He passed for 2,227 yards and 26 scores, while adding 1,073 yards rushing and 18 touchdowns. On defense, he added a pick-six touchdown.

In the state championship win against Martinsburg, he passed for 181 yards and a TD and added 135 yards rushing and three more scores.

Coen passed for 1,539 yards, including 323 yards passing in the state championship loss against Wheeling Central. He passed for 26 touchdowns and

See EXCITING, C3



EXCITING
CONT. from C2

added 876 yards and 16 scores on the ground. Helbig passed for 3,110 yards and 30 touchdowns, while completing 61% of his throws. His stats would have been more, except he was held out of the state semifinal loss against Martinsburg due to a concussion he suffered the week before. “I’ve gone back and watched the play a few times,” Helbig said. “It’s hard to watch for me. It was third-and-four, and I was worried about getting the first down. I slid late, which was the problem. “Missing that next game, I don’t know if I’ll ever get over that. I think it could have been really interesting against Martinsburg if we had the whole team out there.”

Taking the
next step

Before this season even begins, all three seemingly have their futures mapped out. Coen, a senior, has already enlisted in the Air Force, while football will still be in the cards for both Helbig and Twigg. Over the summer, Helbig, also a senior, received his first Division I offer from Morgan State. He also has a slew of Division II offers on his resumé. “The (Morgan State) coaches have been great. They’ve remained in constant contact,” Helbig said. “They called me up one day and said, ‘We’re going to offer you.’ That was such a good day.” Twigg is the young one of the three, a junior, but his abilities have long been noticed by Division



Benjamin Powell/The Dominion Post

University High quarterback Harrison Helbig (left) threw for 30 touchdowns last season, while Clay-Battelle quarterback Corey Coen (right) passed for 26 touchdowns and rushed for 16 more.

“THREE GUYS WHO ALL HAD GREAT SEASONS ARE ALL COMING BACK; YEAH, THAT COULD BE A LOT OF FUN.”

Maddox Twigg

Morgantown High quarterback

I colleges. He received a scholarship offer from West Virginia just prior to beating Martinsburg in the state finals. Marshall was the first school to extend an offer and Syracuse is also in the mix. For now, just improving his game is first on Twigg’s mind. “Connecting with my teammates is something that was important to me this summer, because our chemistry was a big reason why we won last

year,” he said. “Even off the field, I wanted to make new connections and be there for my guys.” As cross-town Morgantown quarterbacks, Twigg said he and Helbig have often hung out off the field. “Me and Harrison are cool, there’s no animosity there at all,” Twigg said. “There’s really no competition between us, until the week we’re about to play against each other.

“I think he’s a great quarterback in a great offense. He’s got great receivers around him, and he’s really good at distributing the ball. I think we’re both similar that way. I hope he has a great season, but just not when he plays against us.” Coen is the outlier. He’s seen Helbig and Twigg up close during summer 7-on-7 camps, but has never introduced himself.

“If I ever had the chance to talk with them, I would ask them about their approach to the game,” Coen said. “I’d like to know what kind of steps they take to prepare for each game and how they see different defenses, stuff like that.” The bigger question is how much further can all three quarterbacks take their game? After lofty numbers in 2025, can they better them a season later?

“For all three of them, they had great stats last year, so the bar is pretty high,” Snyder said. “I’ve seen the work Harrison put in this offseason. He was in the weight room every day. I’m sure Maddox and Corey were the same way. Harrison is so much stronger than he was last year. I’d be surprised if he didn’t put up better numbers. I think all three can have better numbers, which would be pretty exciting.”



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MORGANTOWN HIGH

Mohigans face challenge of going for a repeat



Morgantown High head coach Sean Biser (center) reacts after the Mohigans defeated Martinsburg 28-21 for the Class AAAA state championship last season.

MHS returns only seven starters in 2026

BY MICHAEL GRIFFITH
MGriffith@DominionPost.com

MORGANTOWN - Morgantown High's 28-21 victory over Martinsburg in last year's Class AAAA state football championship game ended a two-decade title drought and delivered the program its first championship since 2005.

But just like the "This Play" mentality head coach Sean Biser has instilled in his program, the Mohigans are focused on what's ahead of them.

"We took care of what we needed to do, and it was great to win the state championship," Biser said. "But that was all last year, and that's all in the past now. What happened last season doesn't help us win games this season. We've been focusing on us and trying to get ready to go, getting our guys bigger, stronger, and faster to be the best we can be."

Morgantown returns just seven of the 22 starters from last year's championship team, but its most important piece remains under center.

Junior quarterback Maddox Twigg returns for his third season after



Morgantown High's Chase Travis (55) was second-team All-State last season for the Mohigans along the defensive line.

winning the J.R. House last season, including er said. Award as the state's top four scores in the state There will be plenty of new faces around Twigg, as a sophomore. Twigg "He is a dynamic ath- particularly along the accounted for 3,323 total lete with all the physical offensive and defensive yards and 45 touchdowns attributes he needs," Bis- lines.

MHS 2026 SCHEDULE		
AUG. 28	at Parkersburg, 7:30 p.m.	
SEPT. 4	JEFFERSON, 7 p.m.	
SEPT. 11	at Hedgesville, 7 p.m.	
SEPT. 18	OPEN	
SEPT. 25	SPRING MILLS, 7 p.m.	
OCT. 2	at Wheeling Park, 7 p.m.	
OCT. 9	MARTINSBURG, 7 p.m.	
OCT. 16	at Parkersburg South, 7 p.m.	
OCT. 23	at Baldwin (Pa.), 7 p.m.	
OCT. 30	UNIVERSITY, 7 p.m.	
NOV. 6	at Musselman, 7 p.m.	
** Home games in caps		

2025 RESULTS (13-1)		
AUG. 28	W	vs. Parkersburg, 44-7
SEPT. 5	W	at Jefferson, 38-7
SEPT. 12	W	vs. Hedgesville, 52-7
SEPT. 19	W	at Connellsville (Pa.), 48-21
SEPT. 26	W	at Spring Mills, 21-0
OCT. 3	W	vs. Wheeling Park, 28-7
OCT. 10	L	at Martinsburg, 34-6
OCT. 17	W	vs. Parkersburg South, 45-10
OCT. 31	W	at University, 21-0
NOV. 7	W	vs. Musselman, 45-0
NOV. 14	W	vs. Buck.-Upshur, 56-0
NOV. 22	W	vs. Spring Mills, 34-33 (2OT)
NOV. 29	W	vs. Jefferson, 52-21
DEC. 5	W	Martinsburg, 28-21

Senior Konnor Mott of Morgantown's most returns after missing dependable defenders a nearly all of last season year ago.

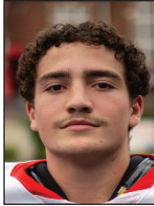
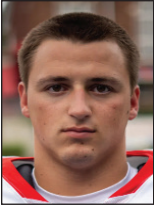
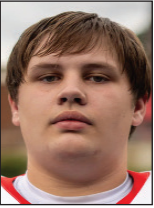
The Mohigans also added some experience to their coaching staff with the arrival of Mark Yoho. Yoho was part of Grafton's 2008 state championship staff and has directed high-powered offenses at North Marion. He will coach Morgantown's running backs.

Morgantown is scheduled to face five teams that won at least one playoff game last season, including Spring Mills, Jefferson and Martinsburg, the final three teams the Mohigans defeated on their way to the championship.

MHS will play just four home games in 2026, but will once again play one of the toughest schedules in the state, starting with a road trip to visit Parkersburg on August 28, who the Mohigans defeated 44-7 in the 2025 WVSSAC Kickoff Classic in their 2025 season-opener.

See REPEAT, C6

THE SENIORS

 Colin Andis	 Carson Keeling	 Kooper Sainato	 Chantz Lenhart	 Alex Harris	 Chase Travis	 Aidan Petsko	 Zachary Estep
 Derrick Kosiniski	 Angelo Lacy	 Kane Williams	 Mathew Feeley-Mack	 Coal Park	 Anthony Carr	 Peyton Nicola	 Colton Moran
 Bryson Washington	 Konnor Mott	 Dustin Preece	 Justin Fridley	 Rudy Carrillo	 Brenden McCutcheon	 Tanzer George	

Tanzer George looks to make an impact for MHS

Averaged 31.2 yards per catch last season

BY MICHAEL GRIFFITH
MGriffith@DominionPost.com

MORGANTOWN - The 2025 Morgantown High School football team had plenty of players on the offensive side of the ball who made a major impact on its run to the program's first state championship in 20 years.

Maddox Twigg, Jayden Smalls, Carter Cooper, Isaiah Thompson, Zaiden Lockett, and the entire offensive line, to name a few.

But there's one name we may have forgotten to mention: rising senior Tanzer George, who was a silent but deadly option for the Mohigans in the passing game.

Behind All-State selections Carter Cooper and Jayden Smalls, George became a reliable third option for Twigg and MHS through the air.

George caught 17 passes for 532 yards in 2025, averaging a whopping 31.2 yards per reception. Seven of his 17 catches went for touchdowns as well.

His seventh and final score of the season came in the Class AAAA state championship game against Martinsburg on a 21-yard strike from Twigg that George secured as he ran out of bounds

Earlier in the same game, he made one of the best catches of the season on an over-the-shoulder



MHS receiver Tanzer George (right) hauls in a pass during the Class AAAA title game last season.

Benjamin Powell/The Dominion Post

snag on the MHS sideline to extend a drive.

George finished the state title game with three catches for 82 yards and the score.

"Last year I tried to continue to learn and get better every single day," he said. "One thing I think I can try to carry over from last season was

my ability to be a serious threat down the field for Maddox and the offense. He's able to throw the ball so accurately down the field, and I think it goes well with my ability to catch the ball at the highest point possible."

George says playing alongside players like Smalls and Cooper

helped him learn to be a role player, which will aid his transition to being one of the main options out wide for the Mohigans.

"Being able to be a player other teams weren't really planning for helped me figure out different ways of being effective," he said. "The way our offense operates allows for a lot of different ways to be successful, and as long as you're doing your job, the ball will find you eventually."

The ball definitely found George, who took all but ten of his 17 catches

to the end zone for six.

The new and improved MHS offense, which showed a more balanced approach with a strong mix of running and passing, is something George says the team welcomed with open arms.

"We all wanted the change to happen," George said. "Having the type of athletes that we have and having a quarterback with the ability that Maddox has allows us to attack defenses in so many ways. It didn't take long for us to adjust to the offense at all, and it showed from the first

game all the way through the end of the season."

After proving his ability as a junior in 2025, George enters his senior season with high hopes for both his team and himself.

"I want to be all-state this season," he said. "That was a goal of mine last year, and this year I want to build on what I did last season to have my name in those conversations at the end of the season. First and foremost, I want the team to win, and I will do whatever I need to help that happen."

3 PLAYERS TO WATCH



Maddox Twigg (QB/DB, Jr.): After leading his team to the Class AAAA state championship and earning the 2025 J.R. House award, Twigg returns for his third year at Morgantown High with big expectations. Twigg will have an impact on both sides of the ball as he did last season, and could improve on his numbers from last year. Twigg accounted for over 3,300 total yards of offense and 44 touchdowns for MHS last season, and will fill the box score again in 2026.

Brooks King (LB, Jr.): The linebacker exploded onto the high school football scene in 2025, helping lead the state's best defense to a state title. King became a staple of the MHS defense with his ruthless aggression and cerebral instincts, punishing opposing offenses all over the field. He earned All-State honors as the defensive captain of the second-team after his sophomore season, and will return to lead another talented defense.

Chase Travis (DL, Sr.): Another huge piece of the Morgantown High defensive puzzle, Travis returns after a junior season that ended in a state title and second-team All-State honors. Travis is one of the Mohigans' more vocal and emotional leaders, and will often be found in the backfield chasing opposing quarterbacks. With a talented group behind him, Travis will be the one to help the MHS defensive presence be felt early and often.



Benjamin Powell/The Dominion Post

Tanzer George (12) breaks free against Buckhannon-Upshur in the first round of the Class AAAA playoffs last season.

REPEAT CONT. from C5

Martinsburg will travel to Pony Lewis Field on October 9, 10 months after the Bulldogs fell to MHS in the state championship game.

"We wanted to make sure we had quad-A

teams on our schedule," something that was important to us as far as playing as many 4A schools as possible. Last year proved the Mohigans could win it all. For Morgantown, the challenge this year is to prove they can do it again.

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portant to us as far as playing as many 4A schools as possible.

Last year proved the Mohigans could win it all. For Morgantown, the challenge this year is to prove they can do it again.

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C-B's Hall, Snodgrass provide deadly combo out of the backfield



Benjamin Powell/The Dominion Post
Caleb Hall amassed more than 1,400 yards and scored 10 touchdowns last season.

BY MICHAEL GRIFFITH
MGriffith@DominionPost.com

BLACKSVILLE - It would be hard to find a pair of running backs in West Virginia high school football that complement each other the way Clay-Battelle's Caleb Hall and Caleb Snodgrass do.

The pair of returning ballcarriers became a force to be reckoned with in 2025, punishing opposing defenses with speed and power to the tune of 2,140 rushing yards and 19 touchdowns.

Hall, a rising junior, earned Class A first-team All-State honors after surpassing 1,400 yards and scoring 10 touchdowns as a sophomore. He averaged over eight yards per tote and lost zero fumbles

all season.

Snodgrass, a rising senior, carried the ball 103 times for 681 yards and nine touchdowns, averaging 6.6 yards per carry as a junior.

Hall is more of an elusive, speedy runner, known for breaking long runs and racking up yards quickly. Snodgrass is more of a bruiser; a third-down/goal line specialist who runs more like a full-back.

"Last season, I learned that being a successful runner takes more than simply your ability to gain yards and score touchdowns," Hall said. "Really, it's your offensive line and blocking you receive that does that for you. Without that protection, I would just get

See COMBO, C9



Benjamin Powell/The Dominion Post
Caleb Snodgrass rushed for 681 yards and nine touchdowns last season.

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CLAY-BATTELLE

Cee-Bees look to build on magical 2025 momentum

BY MICHAEL GRIFFITH
MGriffith@DominionPost.com

BLACKSVILLE - For Clay-Battelle, last season changed the standard. The Cee-Bees won a program-record 12 games, reached the Class A state championship game for the first time and turned a once-lofty goal into something tangible. Now comes the hard part: Doing it again. After losing its opening game last season, Clay-Battelle reeled off 12 consecutive victories. During that run, no opponent scored more than 20 points. The memories are still fresh, but so is the expectation.

“There’s more of a challenge maintaining a level of success as opposed to trying to go and getting that success a first time around,” coach Aaron LaPoe said. “We know there’s a challenge ahead of us. But we also know that’s an opportunity to show what we are made of. We are up for the challenge.” The Cee-Bees have reason to believe they can handle it. Much of an offense that averaged 37 points per game returns, including quarterback Corey Coen, who enters his second season at the helm after earning first-team All-State honors in 2025. “We’re going to let him make a few more decisions,” LaPoe said. “He has really grown as a player. Last year, he showed everyone



Benjamin Powell/The Dominion Post
Clay-Battelle receiver Cody Clovis celebrates after scoring a touchdown against Wheeling Central in the Class A state title game last season.

that he’s tougher than a two-dollar steak, but this year on top of that, he’s grown to show himself as more of a leader, and we are very happy with that. The best thing is he leads by example with his level of commitment.” Coen will have two different options in the backfield. Senior Caleb Snodgrass is the physical runner, the one who prefers finding a crease and making somebody pay for trying to close it. Junior Caleb Hall, a returning first-team All-State selection, brings a little more agility. “The same thing I said about Corey could be said about those two (Hall and Snodgrass),” LaPoe said. “All three of them have



Benjamin Powell/The Dominion Post
Clay-Battelle head coach Aaron LaPoe is 17-7 over his first two seasons at the school.

worked so hard this off-season to get bigger and faster and stronger. We are obviously excited to see how they can build on last season’s success.” That combination of op-

tions should allow the Cee-Bees to keep fresh legs in a run-heavy offense. “It is just nice to not have to give one kid 40-something carries when you like to run the ball so much,” LaPoe said. “We can spread the carries around. I think another guy who will surprise people is Caleb Bragg. He was good on defense for us last year and has shown his ability as an athlete during the offseason. He will provide some offense for us this season.” Clovis will have more on his plate, too. The senior receiver and cornerback inherits a larger role in the passing game following the graduation of all-state selection Braden Ponceroff. On defense, he already established himself as one of the Cee-Bees’ most dependable players. “His athletic ability is through the roof,” LaPoe said. “He’s great on offense as a receiver and

C-B 2026 SCHEDULE	
AUG. 27	CAMERON, 7 p.m.
SEPT. 4	OPEN
SEPT. 11	at Valley Wetzel, 7 p.m.
SEPT. 18	TUCKER COUNTY, 7 p.m.
SEPT. 25	GILMER COUNTY, 7 p.m.
OCT. 2	at Meadow Bridge, 7 p.m.
OCT. 9	RICHWOOD, 7 p.m.
OCT. 16	at Tygarts Valley, 7 p.m.
OCT. 23	BRIDGEPORT (Ohio), 7 p.m.
OCT. 29	at Weirton Madonna, 7 p.m.
NOV. 6	at Magnolia, 7 p.m.
** Home games in caps	

2025 RESULTS (12-2)	
AUG. 29	L at Cameron, 22-16
SEPT. 5	W vs. Frontier (Ohio), 42-20
SEPT. 12	W vs. Valley Wetzel, 48-6
SEPT. 26	W at Gilmer County, 58-6
OCT. 3	W vs. Meadow Bridge, 54-12
OCT. 10	W at Richwood, 47-6
OCT. 17	W vs. River View, 40-18
OCT. 25	W vs. Sherman, 16-14
OCT. 31	W vs. Oak Glen, 16-8
NOV. 7	W vs. Magnolia, 30-0
NOV. 15	W vs. Ritchie County, 44-8
NOV. 22	W vs. Wirt County, 46-14
NOV. 29	W vs. Cameron, 24-12
DEC. 5	L Wheeling Central, 56-34

equally as effective on defense. Last season he basically shut down one half of the field for us and managed some huge interceptions. His speed is also exceptional for the Class A level, and he has some great hands and instincts to catch the ball no matter where it’s thrown.” The biggest question is not in the backfield or at receiver. Rather, up front. Clay-Battelle doesn’t return a starter on the offensive line, leaving a young group to battle for jobs. “The position group with the most question marks is the offensive line,” he said. “We’re essentially going to be replacing all five from last season. We’re going to be young there, but we have Jacob Layton at right tackle who got time as a freshman last season, and he’s got great size. Also had an impact on defense for us. T. J. Barr started games as a freshman and is a junior now. We have some guys that have put time in with the program who are ready to make the most of their opportunity.” The Cee-Bees know what they can be. They showed it a year ago. Now they have to find out whether a young offensive line can give their playmakers enough room to make it happen again. The first test comes quickly. Clay-Battelle opens the season at home against Cameron in the 2026 WVSSAC Kick-off Classic on Thursday, August 27 at 7:00 p.m. The teams split two meetings last season, but the Cee-Bees got the one that mattered most, knocking off Cameron in the Class A semifinals on their way to the state championship game. A year ago, Clay-Battelle was trying to make history. This year, the Cee-Bees are trying to make last season something more than a great memory.

THE SENIORS



Corey Coen



Caleb Snodgrass



Cody Clovis

3 PLAYERS TO WATCH



Corey Coen (QB, Sr.): Coen enjoyed a breakout season in 2025, leading Clay-Battelle to its first appearance in the Class A state championship game in school history. Coen totaled over 2,000 yards of offense and 40 touchdowns as a junior on his way to first-team All-State honors. If the Cee-Bees are able to repeat the success of a year ago, Coen will be a driving force behind that effort.

Caleb Hall (RB, Jr.): Hall was a breakout player for the Cee-Bees in 2025 with over 1,300 rushing yards and 10 touchdowns. Hall averaged over eight yards per carry last season, and along with Coen and fellow tailback Caleb Snodgrass, could lead one of the state’s leading rushing attacks in 2026.

Cody Clovis (WR/DB, Sr.): One of only three seniors on the roster, Clovis will make his presence known on both sides of the ball. Clovis was a bright spot on offense and defense for C-B in 2025, with 12 catches for 331 yards and five touchdowns, plus 39 tackles and five interceptions.

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GAMES TO WATCH

Road to the playoffs go through these key matchups

BY MICHAEL GRIFFITH
MGriffith@DominionPost.com

The 2026 high school football season is among us, and there are plenty of games on the radar to look out for on the schedule. From the 2026 WVSSAC Kickoff Classic to the Mohawk Bowl, coverage-area teams will take the field every week in intriguing matchups that will shape the season.

August 27:
Clay-Battelle vs. Cameron

In what has blossomed into an exciting rivalry in Class A in recent years, Clay-Battelle will host Cameron to open the 2026 campaign. The Cee-Bees and Dragons will battle in the annual WVSSAC Kickoff Classic in Blacksville on Thursday, August 27. Last season, the two teams split a pair of contests (one in the regular season and one in the Class A semifinals), with C-B getting the upper hand in the postseason, ending Cameron’s run. Both teams lost some key players from last season but bring back some of their leading producers. Like last season, this game will allow both teams to figure out what kind of team they are early in the season, with the winner earning a strong win to begin 2026.

September 4:
University at Parkersburg South

This is a matchup that I look out for each year for University High. Last season, the Hawks downed Parkersburg South 38-27 on Baker’s Ridge to open the year with a solid win. After winning only three games in 2025, the Patriots will surely be poised to improve on that total and could catch some



Benjamin Powell/The Dominion Post

The rematch of the 2025 Class AAAA state championship game between Morgantown High and Martinsburg is scheduled for Oct. 9, when the Bulldogs will travel to Pony Lewis Field.

teams off guard if not prepared. We know how talented UHS will be, but a tough game on the road in Week 2 will give us a great idea of just how far Eric Snyder’s club could go in 2026.

September 11:
Preston vs. Fairmont Senior

Simply put, Preston’s annual contest with the Polar Bears will say a lot about the 2026 version of both teams. Each club has moved on from some of the best talent the programs have ever had and are looking toward the future. The Knights haven’t been close to Fairmont Senior in recent years but could take advantage of a younger, less-experienced opponent than they’ve gotten used to seeing.

September 25:
Morgantown vs. Spring Mills

Each of the last two seasons, Morgantown and Spring Mills have met in the Class AAAA state playoffs and eliminated the other. The Cardinals bested MHS in 2024, followed by an all-time classic triple-overtime thriller in 2025, won by the Mohigans. Spring Mills has steadily been one of the top programs in the state in recent years but will spend their first season in four years without someone named Max or Xavier Anderson on the roster. This will be a huge matchup for the Mohigans coming off a bye week, and a victory will help generate some momentum going into some tough games on the schedule.

October 2:
Clay-Battelle at Meadow Bridge

For two seasons in a row, Clay-Battelle has bested Meadow Bridge in massive Class A regular season matchups. In 2024, the Cee-Bees went on the road and upset the then-ranked No. 8 Wildcats. Last season, C-B dominated visiting Meadow Bridge 54-12. A long midseason road trip will be a good test for the Cee-Bees and one that could be a big victory towards a favorable Class A playoff seed.

October 9:
Morgantown vs. Martinsburg

When Martinsburg heads to Pony Lewis Field on October 9 to battle Morgantown High, you better get your eyes on it. This isn’t only

the biggest game of the year in Class AAAA, but maybe the biggest matchup of the season in all classes in the state. The Mohigans took their only loss in 2025 at the hands of the Bulldogs 34-6 on the road. MHS got its revenge in the Class AAAA state championship game with a 28-21 victory when it mattered most. Martinsburg brings back a plethora of talent, including Kennedy Award candidates Brian Dick and Boston Todd. Morgantown will be a stout defensive team in all three levels and still have Maddox Twigg under center, who the Bulldogs couldn’t seem to handle last December. This is a game that everyone should have circled on the calendar if you’re a fan of high school football.

October 16:
University at Spring Mills

University will make two consecutive road trips to the Eastern Panhandle, with the second of the two being the tougher matchup against Spring Mills. The Hawks will battle Jefferson prior to their matchup with the Cardinals but will have a quick turnaround before hitting I-68 again. Both teams could be fighting for crucial playoff seeding down the stretch after the Hawks earned a solid win over Spring Mills at home in 2025; they’ll need to perform well to tally a massive victory late in the year.

October 30:
Mohawk Bowl University at Morgantown

Until the end of time, the Mohawk Bowl will be the game to watch for the high school football season. In recent years, Morgantown High has owned the rivalry with four consecutive victories. In the last eight quarters of Mohawk Bowl football, MHS has outscored the Hawks 70-7. There isn’t anything UHS would love more to do in 2026 than travel across town to South Park to earn its first victory in the Mohawk Bowl since 2021. Not only will this game be massive in the rivalry, but it could also play a major part in determining playoff seeding and home-field advantage throughout the postseason in Class AAAA. It may be said every year, but the 2026 edition of the Mohawk Bowl has the potential to be one of the greatest in the history of the game.

COMBO
Cont. from C7

tackled every play and wouldn’t have the space to run at all.” Snodgrass echoed his teammate’s thoughts. “The biggest thing I learned about myself as a runner last year was that I’m not an elusive guy,” Snodgrass said. “I’m the type of player you can

give the ball to to get some crucial yards, but also a guy you can send in the game to provide a block for one of my teammates. I want to be the toughest player on the field.” Together they make up a solid 1-2 punch coming out of the C-B backfield. Along with senior quarterback Corey Coen, who was also a First-Team All-State selection,

adding 854 yards on the ground with 15 touchdowns. “Our offensive line puts in so much work and gives us everything they have,” Snodgrass said. “We also have a great group of coaches who understand the game very well. Our backfield is simply made up of three guys who love to carry the football and do the dirty work when it

comes to the run game.” Their talent on the field isn’t the only reason for the duo’s success, as they both say their relationship on and off the field is a strong bond. “Hall and I are basically brothers,” Snodgrass said. “We push each other to be better without having any bad blood or either of us being jealous of the other. He uses his speed and agility to get

us down the field, and I use my power to get the tough yards when we really need them. It’s also nice to have someone to rely on when you need a breather too.” Hall agreed. “We just have that brother-like connection on the field,” he said. “We’ve known each other since middle school and have paired well together from the beginning.”

Hall and Snodgrass will take the field for the first time this season as the Cee-Bees host Cameron in the annual WVSSAC Kickoff Classic on Thursday, August 27 in Blacksville. The two teams split the series last season, with the Dragons winning the regular-season matchup before C-B was victorious in the Class A state semifinals.

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HAWKS



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Football was in for George once hoops was out

UHS receiver now one of state's top pass catchers

BY ERIC HERTER
For The Dominion Post

MORGANTOWN – In another universe, time-line, or whatever Marvel Comic lore one believes in, University High School senior Hayden George is preparing to lead the 2026-27 Hawks’ basketball team.

However, in this world, a shattered ankle in fifth grade changed the trajectory from a basketball-loving point guard to a ball-hawking wide receiver and defensive back on the football field for UHS.

“I didn’t play football when I was younger,” George said. “To be honest, I was scared of contact.”

Then came that fateful basketball season when George broke his ankle after landing awkwardly on his left side. After 10 months of rehab, he decided to give up bas-

ketball and focus on the gridiron.

First, it was flag football but in his eighth-grade year, he decided to play tackle football.

By the time he was a freshman, and after recording 200-plus yards against Parkersburg South, George was all in on football.

“All my friends played football, and I was honestly traumatized by basketball,” George said. “After that game against Parkersburg South, my freshman year on JV, I knew there was something with football. A couple of games later, I got some varsity reps.”

By then, George was hooked and he hadn’t had any thoughts of returning to the hardwood since.

He enters the 2026 football season after recording a school-record in receptions (94) and yards (1,323) along with 11 touchdowns. He will



University High receiver Hayden George caught 94 passes for 1,323 yards last season. Benjamin Powell/The Dominion Post

be among the favorites to take home the Randy Moss award given to the state’s top wide receiver.

“I was really hoping I was going to get (Moss Award) last year,” George said. “It would mean a lot to me and be a big accomplishment.

That name – Randy Moss – is just awesome.”

At 5-foot-10, George is a different type of receiver than the 6-foot-4 Moss but the UHS top wideout has made his share of highlight reel catches.

“Catching a deep pass is awesome because I don’t have to waste all my energy running around,” George said. “Short passes are my favorite though. I enjoy running with the ball after the catch. I know I have good stamina, and I use that too keep moving against other defen-

sive backs. I really enjoy making people miss.

That ability to draw interest from college coaches. George currently has college offers from Glenville State, West Virginia State University, Fairmont State and Ohio Northern University. He also had a solid camp at Marshall University, and his goal is to play Division I football, but he also said playing D2 can lead to his ultimate goal – especially with the transfer portal.

“I just love football,” George said. “In the off-season I am lifting and I am studying film. I am a competitive person, and I want to play at the highest level I can. I also hate losing. Now that I have found a passion for this sport, I want to keep winning and I don’t want to lose.”

George is part of a talented wide receiver group at UHS, and head coach Eric Snyder said it is one of the strengths of this 2026 Hawks’ team.

See GEORGE, D3

Kehler’s return from injury a massive X-factor for Hawks

BY MICHAEL GRIFFITH
MGriffith@DominionPost.com

MORGANTOWN – Through the first three and a half games of the University High football season in 2025, running back Brody Kehler was enjoying one of the hottest starts to the season in the entire state.

The then-sophomore running back tallied 56 carries for 319 yards and nine touchdowns, averaging 5.7 yards per carry and 79.8 per game until a shoulder injury in Week 4 against Wheeling Park sidelined him for the remainder of the campaign.

Had Kehler continued his season and played all 13 games for UHS, averaging the numbers he was at prior to his injury, he was on pace to finish his sophomore season with over 1,000 rushing yards and 29 touchdowns.

Even without their second-year standout, the Hawks finished the season with a 9-4 record and reached the Class AAAA semifinals as the 7-seed



University High running back Brody Kehler returns for his junior season after missing most of last season with a shoulder injury. Benjamin Powell/The Dominion Post

in the playoffs behind a massive upset on the road against No. 2 Huntington.

Now, Kehler returns for his junior season with more motivation than he’s ever had after being forced to watch the magical 2026 season unfold for his team from the sidelines, poised to make an immediate impact for the Hawks.

“Seeing our team succeed is the top priority, but it definitely hurt me on the inside having to watch from the sidelines,” Kehler said. “I

really learned not to take anything for granted. Especially having the season that I was having to start. Things change so fast and can come to an end just like that. This season I have a different mindset coming into the beginning of the year.”

Coming off of a high-impact injury like Kehler experienced isn’t only physically challenging, but mentally as well.

“It’s not something I think of when I’m running the ball,” he said. “It’s not even an injury to me anymore. I have the same confidence now as I always have. With the time off I had, I was able to hit better PR’s in the weight room and clock some faster times running. I’m seeing things differently when it comes to the running game coming into this year.”

Brody had nine catches for 61 yards and two interceptions on defense as a safety, including a pick-six against Parkersburg South in Week 2. He

See INJURY, D3

3

PLAYERS
TO
WATCH

- Hayden George (WR/DB, Sr.):** One of the early frontrunners for the Randy Moss Award will be George, who caught 93 passes for 1,323 yards and 11 touchdowns in 2025. He became a weapon for the Hawks in all phases of the offense a year ago and will again be a player that the Hawks’ opponents will need to gameplan for. George is also a huge piece of the UHS defensive backfield, with seven interceptions in 2025.
- Harrison Helbig (QB, Sr.):** Helbig completed 61% of his passes for 3,100 yards and 30 touchdowns in 2025, and returns with nearly his entire offense. Helbig had some trouble escaping pressure at times last year but still scored six touchdowns on the ground. With another year to grow and an improved offensive line, Helbig should enjoy another successful season that could culminate in a 4,000-yard passing season.
- Luke Braham (OL, Sr.):** A Virginia Tech commit, Braham is one of the top prospects in the entire state. With the UHS offense bringing back the majority of its production from last season, Braham will lead an improved offensive line in 2026 and is expected to perform. The Hawks will have multiple ways to be successful on offense, but either way they go, they’ll need to be solid up front. Braham is the type of player who can make a massive difference in the offense.







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Benjamin Powell/The Dominion Post

Hayden George (11) races in for a touchdown against Buckhannon-Upsur during his sophomore season.

GEORGE CONT. from D2

“It’s probably one of the tops that we have ever had in terms of talent,” Snyder said. “Hayden was obviously a record breaker last year for us and he catches everything and he can really run. He has a great motor too. He has a lot of experience on the field and he continues to improve.”

While George might be eyeing the top receiver award in West Virginia, he is also a highly productive defensive player. Last year he finished with seven interceptions, and some publications rank him as the No. 1 defensive back heading into this campaign.

He has set a goal of another six or seven interceptions this season which would give him the school record for a career.

“Being a receiver helps being a defensive back,” George said. “I know what a receiver would do when the balls in the air. I can anticipate that. I also love watching film

and I am pretty good at predicting if the ball is going to come to me.”

George also has a prediction for the 2026 UHS season. After the Hawks went 9-4 last year and lost in the Class AAAA state semifinals, he sees another successful season ahead.

“As a team, I don’t see a world where we don’t win at least eight games, but I really am thinking 10-0 and a state championship run,” George said. “I really don’t see us losing a game this year. There isn’t a team on our schedule that I can see us losing to.”

In fact, George has already cancelled his family’s Thanksgiving Day plans. He is admittedly a huge North Carolina men’s basketball fan, and his family had plans of going to the game against WVU on Nov. 27 in Charlotte, NC – the day after Thanksgiving.

“I already told my mom ‘No, we can’t go,’” George said. “We are going to be practicing football on Thanksgiving Day.”



Benjamin Powell/The Dominion Post

Brody Kehler was on pace to score 29 touchdowns last season before a shoulder injury cut his junior season short.

INJURY CONT. from D2

aims to continue making opponents feel his presence the same way they did early last season.

“Last year we were very strong offensively, and I simply want to add to that on the ground and in the air,” he said. “My number one goal is health in order to stay on the field and help our team reach its goals and the goals I have set for myself.”

One thing going for Kehler in 2026 will be the UHS offensive line, led by Virginia Tech commit Luke Braham.

The protection will be welcomed as Brody chases his goals.

“What excites me the most about this year is just having the opportunity to show people what was supposed to happen last season,” he said. “I haven’t really heard or read my name being mentioned in anything this offseason, and I’m ready to prove to everyone why our team is special and how explosive we can be. We return as nine starters on offense,

and this will be the biggest group of offensive linemen I’ve ever had the chance to run behind. Plus, it’s always fun to run behind a Division-I commit in Luke. The Curt Warner Award (states top RB) is something I’ve been thinking about, and I would love to be in the conversation for the Kennedy Award (states top player).”

There’s no question the return of Brody Kehler will be welcomed on Baker’s Ridge this season as an experienced UHS team aims to build upon the success of 2025 and reach heights the program has yet to reach.

“We can’t get complacent,” he said. “I think one thing that made us play so well last season was being the underdog in a majority of our games. We have to play with the same mentality and intensity this season because we truly have the pieces we need to win it all. Personally, I think I’ll be able to really help our offense be explosive on the ground and as a receiver as well.”

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Monongalia County Schools values student success, and regular student attendance is the foundation of an exceptional education. Regular Attendance is defined as being physically present at least 95% of the time, engaged in the educational process. Even excused absences keep a student out of school and unengaged with learning, so excused absences do count against Regular Attendance. Be aware that a parent or guardian note for excused absence must specify a valid excused absence reason listed in the MCS attendance policy 5200. The following excused absence reasons are summarized from state code

(<https://code.wvlegislature.gov/18-8-4>) and MCS Policy 5200 (<https://go.boarddocs.com/wv/mono/Board.nsf/Public>)

- Absences that result from school-approved curricular/co-curricular activities; failure of the bus to run/hazardous conditions, SAT Plan, IEP or 504 Plan, and other Board-approved excused absences
- Personal illness or injury of the student*
- Personal illness or injury of the student's parent, guardian, custodian, or family member, with a reasonable explanation for the student's absence caused by the illness or injury in the family*
- Medical or dental appointment with valid written excuse from physician or dentist
- Documented chronic medical condition or disability that may require multiple or regular absences
- Participation in homebound or hospital instruction due to an illness or injury or other extraordinary circumstance that warrants home or hospital confinement
- Documented disabilities consisting of any mental or physical impairments documented annually with a valid physician's approved and reviewed quarterly by the SAT, IEP or 504 team
- Calamity, such as a fire or flood*
- Death in the family*
- Judicial obligation or court appearance involving the student with official documentation
- Military requirement for students enlisted or enlisting in the military with official documentation
- Observation of a religious holiday or attendance at approved religious instruction
- Contagious or parasite conditions: contact the school nurse

*When absence notes are submitted by a parent or guardian, without additional documentation from a qualified professional, excused absences are limited to a total of ten (10) for the entire school year. If the student’s absences exceed two (2) days, the absences shall be unexcused unless written verification from a physician supports a longer time period.

Unexcused Absences: Any absence not specifically included in the definition of an excused absence will be unexcused. This includes out of school suspension and students unable to attend school due to not having the required immunizations. At the secondary level, class periods missed will count as an appropriate fraction of the day and will be used when calculating the total number of days absent.

Make-up Work: Any absence results in missing learning, and it is not possible to fully make up for missed time and engagement. However, students will have the opportunity to make up graded work missed due to absence. Students will have 2 days per day of absence to submit make-up work, up to a maximum of 6 days from the student’s return to school. Teachers may, at their discretion, extend the deadline for make-up work beyond 6 days. Students are expected to work with their teachers if more time is needed. When possible, students should obtain make-up work prior to their absence.

Tardiness: Monongalia County believes that preventing student tardiness is very important and will serve students well throughout student and work life. Helping students acquire the habit of promptness requires positive preventive measures as well as appropriate consequences. Therefore, each student is responsible for addressing reasonable prevention of student tardiness. Unexcused tardies will also be used when determining total unexcused absences as follows: Elementary/Middle/ High School: Five tardies equal one day of absence

Homebound: Absences incurred during homebound schooling will be assessed as follows:

For each day of homebound schooling that is an unexcused absence 2.5 days of absence will be assessed to the student.

Academic Recovery Days: TBA

***Chronic absenteeism** - missing 10 percent or more of school days due to absence for any reason - excused, unexcused absences and suspensions - can translate into students having difficulty learning to read by the third grade, achieving in middle school, and graduating from high school. (Attendance Works) As a result, Monongalia County Schools is committed to reducing student absences for any reason. Students missing 18 or more days (out of 180 school days) are chronically absent and are at high risk of negative educational outcomes. Students should strive to miss less than 5 percent (9 out of 180 school days) to best prepare them for academic and social success.

The full policy can be read at <http://boe.mono.k12.wv.us/>. Please take the time to read this policy in its entirety. Should questions arise, please direct them to the Director of Attendance, Teddy Stewart, MCS Attendance Office at (304) 291-9210 ext 1547 Attendance/Homeschool





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Good Luck Hawks!



UHS has sights set on Class AAAA superiority



Photo by Tim Goodenow

University High lineman Luke Braham (52) is committed to play at Virginia Tech last season and is one of the Hawks' returning stars who played in last season's Class AAAA state semifinals.

After semifinal run, Hawks look for more

BY ERIC HERTER
For The Dominion Post

MORGANTOWN — Much has changed in three years for the University High football team.

Yes, Eric Snyder is entering his third season as the UHS head coach. Yes, the Hawks unveiled a new up-tempo offense in 2025 and yes, University is coming off a Class AAAA semifinals appearance.

But the big change is what has physically happened to the players on the team and it's easy to see by just a quick glance — the Hawks are BIG.

"It's funny because I was giving out sweat-pants for team gear and two years ago, I was giving out a lot of mediums, a few larges and maybe one XL," Snyder said. "Now, I had to order like 10 XXLs and we needed a lot more XLs as well. We are a lot bigger and stronger. The weight room has really treated this team well in the past couple of years."

Snyder said the UHS strength team made the offseason even more difficult as the Hawks try to find consistency after a 9-4 record that ended with a 44-13 loss to Martinsburg in the state semis last year.

"This team was really able to rise to the occasion in the weight room," Snyder said. "The turnout was amazing. This senior class really did a nice job of getting everybody to buy in. I would take roll after a session and there may be one or two seniors that missed that particular day. That's when you know that they have bought in and they are ready to roll this season."

Snyder said the 2026 version of University football is looking to build on what last year's team accomplished. The seniors and juniors on this year's team have been a building block for three and four seasons and quite honestly, UHS was probably one year ahead of schedule. This squad has tasted success and Snyder said they want more of it.

"These guys are hungry," Snyder said. "We probably weren't supposed to win some of the games that we did last year. We have a lot of



Benjamin Powell/The Dominion Post

University High head coach Eric Snyder is 13-11 overall with two trips to the state playoffs over his first two seasons as the Hawks' head coach.

confidence and we know that we aren't just lucky, we are a good football team."

Last year, UHS showed a new wrinkle with a no-huddle offense installed by offensive coordinator Dustin Lawless. It's one thing to install the offense, but it's an entirely different thing to have the horses to run it.

The Hawks ran it nearly perfectly, as they averaged over 37 points per game. The trigger man of the four-wideout offense is senior quarterback Harrison Helbig who threw for 30 touchdowns and for more than 3,000 yards last year.

"Harrison is really comfortable in coach Lawless' offense," Snyder said. "He definitely knows where to go with the football, and he has added a little extra layer this year with his running ability."

Helbig is one of the Hawks who is noticeably bigger. He is listed at 6-foot-4, 200 pounds.

"We are hoping to use Harrison a little more in the run game," Snyder said. "He has got some good muscle on him and has picked up some foot speed. We can keep defenses honest — they can't just crash down on our running back."

At running back, the Hawks return junior Brody Kehler who missed much of last year with a shoulder injury. Jady Katchur will also see time in the backfield after serving as the main running back down the stretch last year.

"Brody is a jack of all trades," Snyder said. "He can play running back,

he can play wide receiver but he can also play slot corner or free safety for us. He's a really unique piece to our puzzle."

The strength of the UHS offense might just be on the outside where the Hawks are rich in talent. Senior Hayden George set the single-season school record in receptions and yards last year while Kaleil wLewis is a big target, Kyle Weaver has great hands and junior Branden Custer saw time last year on the outside. Added to the mix is senior Evan Toler who hasn't played football since the seventh grade.

"Evan has gotten very comfortable really quickly with our offense," Snyder said. "Harrison did a great job of bringing him along during the offseason and when you put him out there with Hayden, K.K., Kyle and the rest of those guys, Evan can hold his own."

The offensive line has also gotten bigger and stronger since a year ago. Virginia Tech commit Luke Braham anchors the line with his 6-foot-7 frame, sophomore Keenan Brown is back at left guard, and senior Jack Gamble returns at center after missing all last season with an injury. The right side of the offensive line features senior Dylan Aponowicz and junior Luke Padula at tackle.

"Luke (Braham) is a really tough kid," Snyder said. "The athleticism he has at that size is amazing. He is going to have a great year, and he does a fabulous job out there being a good athlete and making some great blocks for us."

The defensive side of the ball might look a little different this year as Snyder takes over playcalling duties.

"I have an exceptional coaching staff, and I am able to call the defense because I have such a great staff that supports what we do," Snyder said.

The defensive line will feature many of the same players from the offensive front but expect seniors Gavin Stone and Deuce Williams to both see plenty of playing time on the D-line along with junior Wayland Fowler.

University lost 360 tackles to graduation at the linebacker position and is looking at an entire new unit.

"We aren't going to be able to replace those tackles with two players," Snyder said. "But our defensive front is going to be better, and our defensive backfield is going to be better. We are going to be a cohesive unit."

Senior Max Vitale, junior Cooper High, junior Trevor Sigley, and junior Jackson Clawges all are expected to play in the middle of the defense. However, don't be surprised if Weaver or George also see reps at linebacker.

The defensive backfield features junior MJ McKenzie who recently picked up an offer from Glenville State along with Lewis, George, Kehler and junior Nico Maisel.

Special teams will look a little different for the Hawks after losing an all-American punter. Snyder said the Hawks could deploy a few different players at that position including Toler and Katchur which could add some tricks to the UHS special teams.

Senior Brady Goodenow returns as one of the top kickers in the state while Braham will handle the long-snapping duties.

After last season's success, what's the next step for this UHS team?

"We are looking to knock down the door," Snyder said. "We would love to be able to practice on Thanksgiving Day. That's our goal. We have little mini goals all throughout, but we want to be able to play down there in Charleston in December."

UHS 2026 SCHEDULE

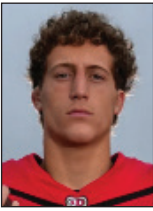
AUG. 28	MUSSELMAN, 7 p.m.
SEPT. 4	at Parkersburg South, 7 p.m.
SEPT. 11	WASHINGTON, 7 p.m.
SEPT. 18	WHEELING PARK, 7 p.m.
SEPT. 25	at Fairmont Senior, 7 p.m.
OCT. 2	LINSLEY, 7 p.m.
OCT. 9	at Jefferson, 7 p.m.
OCT. 16	at Spring Mills, 7 p.m.
OCT. 23	PRESTON, 7 p.m.
OCT. 30	at Morgantown, 7 p.m.
NOV. 6	OPEN

** Home games in caps

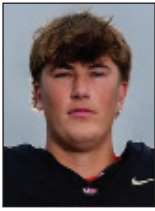
2025 RESULTS (9-4)

AUG. 29	W	at Musselman, 40-21
SEPT. 5	W	vs. Parkersburg South, 38-27
SEPT. 12	W	at Buck.-Upshur, 62-12
SEPT. 19	L	at Wheeling Park, 42-35
SEPT. 26	W	vs. Fairmont Senior, 37-28
OCT. 3	L	at Butler (Pa.), 35-27
OCT. 10	W	vs. Connellsville (Pa.), 52-12
OCT. 17	W	vs. Spring Mills, 35-28
OCT. 24	W	at Preston, 49-13
OCT. 31	L	vs. Morgantown, 21-0
NOV. 14	W	vs. Parkersburg, 62-14
NOV. 21	W	at Huntington, 35-28
NOV. 29	L	at Martinsburg, 44-13

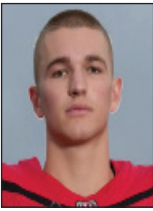
THE SENIORS



Max Vitale



Luke Braham



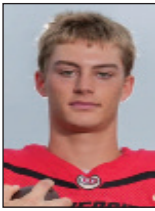
Kyle Weaver



Brady Goodenow



Kaleil Lewis



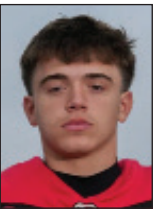
Ethan Toler



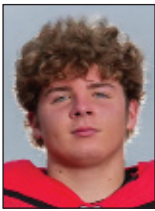
Jady Katchur



Devon Williams



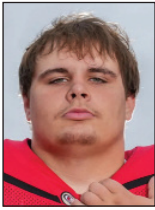
Hayden George



Ethan Garbrick



Harrison Helbig



Dylan Aponowicz



Jack Gamble



Hank Crites



Gavin Stone

PRESTON HIGH

Knights want to return to power football attack



Former East Fairmont starting quarterback Roland Cramer will play his senior season at Preston High. Photo by Teran Malone

PHS has size up front to be more consistent

BY MARK SCHRAF
For The Dominion Post

KINGWOOD -- Last year, it would not have been surprising if at some point during the season, Preston head football coach Mark Deep turned to the crowd at Knight Stadium and, in his best imitation of Russell Crowe shouted, "Are you not entertained?"

After all, with quarterback Slaton Manko and wide receiver Aiden Schmidl setting state records and earning All-State recognition, the average score from 2025 was 49-27, or one touchdown for every 4:20 seconds.

Blink, or grab a hot dog or pepperoni roll, and you'd miss something big.

However, each new high school season brings new personnel, new personalities, and new challenges, and Deep is looking to return to his offensive roots for 2026.

"Every year, we go into it looking to establish the run game," he explained. "We'd like to be physical, to take control of the line of scrimmage, to control the clock, shorten games, and dictate the tempo. Sure, splash plays are great, and we'll take them anytime we get one, but it puts a lot of pressure on an offense when you have to rely on big plays for success. There's nothing quite so energizing to an offense and demoralizing to a defense than a power run attack, especially late in games."

With Manko, Schmidl,



Mark Deep returns for his sixth season at Preston High. Benjamin Powell/The Dominion Post

and six other seniors graduating, the Knights will look to improve on their 1-9 record from 2025 from the inside out, beginning with a solid trio of three-year starting linemen, Max Huggins, Hayden Cole, and Jayden Livengood.

"We always like to build around solid line play, since everything flows from there," Deep said. "Those guys have been leaders in the weight room since January, and they do a great job in helping the younger guys get up to speed. We will be much deeper and stronger on both sides of the line, which should help tremendously over the long haul of the season."

Deep believes a solid running back trio of

Zaden Peddicord, Robert Wilson, and William Lilly, along with East Fairmont transfer quarterback Roland Cramer and a young, quick, talented group of receivers is ready to step in offensively.

Of course, preventing points is just as important as scoring them, and PHS is counting on added experience, speed, and

PHS 2026 SCHEDULE

AUG. 28	HAMPSHIRE, 7 p.m.
SEPT. 4	NORTH MARION, 7 p.m.
SEPT. 11	FAIRMONT SENIOR, 7 p.m.
SEPT. 18	at Robert C. Byrd, 7 p.m.
SEPT. 25	EAST FAIRMONT, 7 p.m.
OCT. 2	at Baldwin (Pa.), 7 p.m.
OCT. 9	OPEN
OCT. 16	at Bridgeport, 7 p.m.
OCT. 23	at University, 7 p.m.
OCT. 30	BUCKHANNON-UPSHUR, 7 p.m.
NOV. 6	at Elkins, 7 p.m.

** Home games in caps

2025 RESULTS (1-9)

AUG. 29	L	at Musselman, 40-20
SEPT. 5	L	at North Marion, 54-26
SEPT. 11	L	at Fairmont Senior, 63-13
SEPT. 19	L	vs. Robert C. Byrd, 41-14
SEPT. 26	W	at East Fairmont, 49-31
OCT. 3	L	vs. Woodrow Wilson, 45-34
OCT. 17	L	vs. Bridgeport, 49-7
OCT. 24	L	vs. University, 49-13
OCT. 24	L	at Preston, 49-13
OCT. 31	L	at Buck.-Upshur, 60-57
NOV. 7	L	vs. Elkins, 53-35

THE SENIORS

Hayden Cole

Brody McCleary

Kaleb Stone

Max Huggins

Zaden Peddicord

Jayden Livengood

William Lilly

Rowan Cramer

Jake Gibson

athleticism to reduce the points per game numbers to acceptable levels.

"Speed kills," Deep admitted, "and there were too many times we got beat over the top and on the edge last year. Part of that was our youth and inexperience, and part of that was a lack of depth up front. We think we are much quicker and more athletic at linebacker and in the secondary, and we hope that a deeper rotation on the defensive line will keep us fresher and make the QB get the ball out quicker. That will be key for us."

Because, while 49-27 games are exciting, everyone at Preston High would absolutely sign up for a series of steady, methodical – maybe even boring – 16-6 games...if they're in the WIN column.



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Sizable linemen look to lead Preston in 2026



Photo by Becky Jones

Preston High senior linemen Hayden Cole (65), Max Huggins (75), and Jayden Livengood (68).

Cole, Huggins, Livengood give PHS a solid foundation

BY MARK SCHRAF
For The Dominion Post

KINGWOOD – Football has been aptly described as organized chaos, but every so often, everything goes according to plan. And when that happens – as it did so often last year for Preston’s record-setting passing game – well, it’s nothing less than beautiful, according to senior offensive linemen Hayden Cole, Max Huggins, and Jayden Livengood.

“You work so hard on the game plan during the week,” Cole explained, “looking at tendencies, working on the right play to call at the right time to take advantage, and then, when it goes just right,

everybody does their job, and you hit for a big play, man, it is a truly great feeling.”

But then was then, and the All-State pitch-and-catch tandem of quarterback Slaton Manko (2,734 yards passing with 27 TD, plus 690 rushing yards and eight scores) to receiver Aiden Schmidl (74 catches for 1,228 yards and 14 TDs) has graduated. So, PHS head coach Mark Deep has decided to return to what he sees as his team’s strength – the firm of Cole, Huggins, and Livengood – and refocus on the running game.

And according to just about 100% of the offensive linemen you ask, including this trio

of Knights, the response is an enthusiastic ‘Let’s go!’

“I definitely prefer run blocking,” said Huggins. “When you’re pass protecting, there so much more pressure on you, because it’s often one-on-one, and it’s all about reacting to what they do. But when we run the ball, we get to initiate the contact and be proactive rather than reactive. We get to push them instead of getting pushed.”

For Livengood, no matter what the play call, the key is communication, and he knows that his fellow three-year starters have that part of the game pretty much squared away.

“We’ve been starting

together since we were sophomores,” he said, “so we know each other’s tendencies, and we have a kind of shorthand or code we use for picking up specific blitzers or overloads. And it’s been going really well with helping the younger guys get up to speed for what’s expected of them. I think we are going to be pretty stout.”

All three seniors have wholeheartedly embraced their leadership roles, starting with January’s weight room routine for the whole team.

“We’ve been through it, and we know how critical it is to put in the work,” Cole said. “So, we made sure the young guys came, and made sure they

were doing things right, getting the results they need and want. It really helps to bring us together as a team, too. And I love paying it forward for all the guys who’ve helped me along the way. I think my teammates know I’m here for them, both on and off the field, that they can ask me anything. That’s important.”

Huggins really enjoys being like a coach on the field for the young, strong, talented players moving into varsity for the first time.

“It’s a whole different ballgame,” he smiled. “Players are bigger, stronger, faster, and the speed of the game is an especially big jump. So, it’s very interesting to

help the young linemen on either side of the ball. You can’t just dominate them – you have to kind of let them make their moves, then explain why that will or won’t work, or what will counter those moves. To be able to get that immediate feedback is huge, and I love to help. I’m sure I will want to coach someday (both of his linemates have the same desire). It’s great to see them get better every practice.”

Helping your teammates become the best players they can be – that’s a senior leader’s job, and when that happens, well, it’s nothing less than beautiful.

3

PLAYERS
TO
WATCH

- Max Huggins (OL/DL, Sr.):** Preston High is entering a new era in 2026 with the graduation of players like Slaton Manko and Aiden Schmidl. Huggins will be one of the leaders of the team. Success in football starts in the trenches, and Huggins is the type of player who can help make a statement up front for the Knights.
- Kaleb Stone (ATH, Sr.):** Stone will be another player to watch for Preston High in 2026. He was fourth on the team in all-purpose yards last season with 515, including 23 catches for 385 yards and four touchdowns.
- Brayden Miller (LB, Sr.):** Miller returns in 2026 after leading Preston in tackles last season. The Knights will need to be strong defensively to have success in 2026, and Miller will be a massive part of that.





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TOP WV PLAYERS

Best of the Best

The top 20 players in West Virginia heading into the 2026 season



Luke Braham (52) is committed to play at Virginia Tech next season.



Harrison Helbig has received a scholarship offer from Morgan State.

1. Maddox Twigg, QB	Morgantown	2028
2. Luke Braham, OL	University	2027
3. Lucas Lambert, OL/LB	Logan	2028
4. Jaden Black, RB	George Washington	2029
5. Boston Todd, WR	Martinsburg	2027
6. Landyn Moore, OL	Princeton	2027
7. James Payne, OL/DL	George Washington	2027
8. Max Simpson, QB	Bluefield	2028
9. Brian Dick, QB	Martinsburg	2027
10. Gavin Williams, RB/K/P	Bridgeport	2027
11. Hayden George, WR	University	2027
12. Dakota Dalton, QB	Chapmanville	2028
13. David Robinson Jr., RB	Herbert Hoover	2027
14. Colton Roberson, QB	Pendleton	2028
15. Peyton Grigsby, QB	Herbert Hoover	2027
16. Ilias King, LB	Huntington	2027
17. Konnor Mott, OL	Morgantown	2027
18. Harrison Helbig, QB	University	2027
19. Brock Green, QB	Independence	2028
20. Morgan Watts, OL/DL	South Charleston	2027



Maddox Twigg accounted for 45 touchdowns as a sophomore.



Hayden George caught 93 passes for 1,323 yards and 11 touchdowns last season.



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