OFFICIAL

FALL 2024 SPORTS GUIDE

POW!



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OH!

GO BAKER

COOL!

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SERVING NORTH OKALOOSA COUNTY

SCHEDULES AND ROSTERS: FOOTBALL • VOLLEYBALL

Randy's Report



By Randy Dickson
sports@crestviewbulletin.com

I'm quickly finding it true that the older I get, the younger I was.

I attended my first high school football game 54 years ago this fall when I was a 12-year-old seventh grader at Gulf Breeze Middle School.

I wasn't fortunate enough to grow up in a town that has the history of Crestview or Baker football. Gulf Breeze High School didn't exist until the fall of 1970. But since a warm Friday night in September of 1970, against a long-forgotten opponent, I have been a high school football fan.

I have covered high school football games on hot and humid nights in Northwest Florida with the heat index hovering around 100 well after sunset. I also covered a playoff game in late November in East Tennessee with the wind chill slightly below 0. And don't even get me started about games I've covered when it was pouring rain.

No matter the weather conditions, high school football has called me and captured my heart.

High school football in North Okaloosa County will forever mean to me the Big Red Machine playing at Jack Foster Stadium and Baker's Sounds of the Swamp filling a warm Friday night at Doug Griffith Memorial Stadium with music.

High school football is about rowdy student sections filled with some kids that care nothing about football, but they simply want to be there and share the memories with their friends. And that's OK too. Not everyone is a super fan or even a passing fan. It's about proud parents of players, cheerleaders and band members.

High school football is about homecoming courts and radiant young ladies being crowned queen.

High school football is rivalries like Crestview against Niceville or Baker and Jay battling in the War on Highway 4.

High school football is about helping our nation heal after a terrorist attack in September of 2001. It's also about local communities coming together in a sense of normalcy while rebuilding after a hurricane.

Four years after the Dolphins played their first game in the fall of 1970, I was a backup on the first winning football team in GBHS history in the fall of 1974. And by backup, I mean I was so far down the depth chart, people leaving early the one game I got into missed my two plays. I might not have played much, but I was a part of something bigger than myself and that has stayed with me all these years.

Being a part of something bigger than yourself makes high school football so special. It's teammates that become brothers in life. It's about the shared effort in searing heat and finding that push deep inside to make it through another day of practice.

High school football means life lessons. It is having a group that you share an unexplained bond with and whether you played football at Gulf Breeze in the 1970s or play at Baker or Crestview today, you understand that bond.

And finally, high school football to me will forever be the lessons learned and friendships shaped while a member of that first winning Gulf Breeze team 50 years ago.

CRESTVIEW HIGH SCHOOL VOLLEYBALL



Photo by Randy Dickson

By Randy Dickson
randy@crestviewbulletin.com

Crestview's volleyball team is a squad on the rise.

James Kerrell is now in his third season as the head coach and the tone has been set to soon ring in the sound of success.

"We've really been trying to change the way things were done," he said. "We've put in our program how we like to do things. The girls have bought into what we are trying to do here at Crestview.

"It's good to know that when the girls are succeeding it's because of what we've done as a team and the work they've put in. That's exciting. It's a good group of girls, and I wouldn't trade them for anything. I'm excited about this season."

The Lady Bulldogs will be upperclassmen-heavy, especially with a junior class that has eight members. Three seniors – Hope Stoutenburgh, Camille Reeves and Shaylee Frederick – highlight the group of upperclassmen. Braelyn Ditrapano is the lone freshman on a squad that has no sophomores.

Frederick is the most experienced senior and her versatility will be an asset Kerrell will take advantage of as the opposition dictates.

"Shaylee has played for us a little bit all over the place," Kerrell said. "This year she is going to be doing some hitting for us, and who knows what else.

"Camille is a setter and last year she set for us some. And Hope is a DS (defensive specialist), libero. We are looking for her to step in and contribute in whatever way she can."

Kerrell said not only is the junior class large, but the players are also very talented.

"Our junior class is just a phenomenal class," he said. "We've got Division I, Division II athletes within that group. We've got some really, just bang-up athletes, in that junior class.

"They came in with me and really bought into what we are doing. They know how I do things, so it's good. It's a good class."

Aubrey Sheffield, Dina Sheikho and Kaeden Foxx are arguably the top three players in the Class of 2026.

"Those are three of my best hitters right there," Kerrell said of Sheffield, Sheikho and Foxx. "When it comes to defense and things of that nature, Sara Robinson-Harner who is doing a great job at libero and DS. Kelsey Griffin also is doing a fantastic job."

Shanyia Faust is a junior that hasn't played as much as some of the other girls, but she is quickly making her mark on the program with her talent across the front line.

"We had to move her up last year when we had some injuries, and she stepped in and did a great job on the right side when we needed her," Kerrell said. "But we kind of knew last year we were probably going to have to have her in the middle.

"We tried to spend some time with her in the offseason to try and help her get there and make her feel comfortable. When you change positions, it can be a little uncomfortable at first."

Having a veteran team does make things easier for Kerrell and his assistant, Danny Meinecke. The Lady Bulldogs continually work on the fundamentals, but now the coaches can teach the finer points of the game and spend more time developing strategies and making adjustments during the matches.

Crestview will play in the new District 1-6A this year. The Lady Bulldogs dropped Chiles, Leon and Mosley from the district, but picked up Tate and the four schools from Santa Rosa County -- Gulf Breeze, Milton, Navarre and Pace. Niceville is the one district opponent that didn't change.

"Realistically, in 5A, 6A, 7A high school, there is rarely an easy path anywhere," Kerrell said. "This year, we are going to face some talented teams, but I think we are just as talented, if not more talented.

"Our goal is to win district. We want to win the district championship, and we want to go to the playoffs. We want to make a push for state."

2024 Crestview Volleyball Schedule

Aug. 22	at West Florida Tech	6:30 p.m.
Aug. 27	at Fort Walton Beach	6 p.m.
Aug. 29	at KSA Tournament	TBA
Aug. 30	at KSA Tournament	TBA
Aug. 31	at KSA Tournament	TBA
Sept. 5	at Tate	6 p.m.
Sept. 10	vs. Niceville	6 p.m.
Sept. 12	vs. Choctaw	6 p.m.
Sept. 17	vs. Pace	6 p.m.
Oct. 1	at Choctaw	6 p.m.
Oct. 3	vs. Navarre	6 p.m.
Oct. 8	at Niceville	6 p.m.
Oct. 10	vs. Fort Walton Beach	6 p.m.

2024 Crestview Volleyball Roster

1 Shanyia Faust
2 Kelsey Griffin
4 Braelyn Ditrapano
5 Aubrey Sheffield
6 Sara Robinson-Harmer
7 Shaylee Frederick
8 Adalyn Lewis
9 Camille Reeves
10 Dina Sheikho
12 Hope Stoutenburgh
14 Kyla Fry
15 Kaeden Foxx

CRESTVIEW HIGH SCHOOL CHEERLEADERS



Photo courtesy of Savannah McLean
Front row from left: Ana Ratcliff, Geovana Pappas, Katherine George, Kaylei Staples, Amylynn Hooks.
Middle row: Brooklyn Gibbs, Kinlea Newland, Brooke Kemp, Jasmine Cabrera, Kyleigh Moran.
Back row: Payton Blumer, Yamilet Devalle, Aubrey Sims, Meilana Devine, Bellamia Dwyer, Peyton Tucker.

LAUREL HILL HIGH SCHOOL CHEERLEADERS

Photo by Randy Dickson
Front: Kaiti Luke, Brinley Coon. Back: Kierstin Bachman, Skye Herndl, Curtis Calloway, Kinsley Bell, Audri Sullivan. Not pictured: Leah Merrill, Trinity Smiley, Cheryl Barnhill.



BAKER HIGH SCHOOL VOLLEYBALL



Photo by Randy Dickson

By Randy Dickson
randy@crestviewbulletin.com

So many times, the Baker volleyball team was on the cusp of a state championship, but to no avail.

The 2022 district championship was the 20th in a row, but the season ended in the state finals.

After so many heartbreaks and close calls, the 2023 district champion Lady Gators claimed their first state title in their 31st consecutive trip to the playoffs.

Lady Gator coach Chelsea Medley knows the pressure of defending a district championship, even 20 (it is 21 straight, but you don't defend the first one) in a row is one thing, winning back-to-back championships is entirely another beast.

"We are not going about things the same way," she said. "The bar is raised, expectations are raised, standards are raised. The girls are feeling it.

"But I think they want that extra responsibility, that extra pressure. I tell them all the time, 'Pressure is a privilege, not everybody gets to have it.'"

Fortunately for Medley, two-thirds of this year's team was part of the state championship team last year.

Katy Stephens, Eiress Rockwell, Kat Price, McKenzie McGraw, Annalese Saunders, Brooke Brunson, Kaleigh Moss and Maddie Mills were on the championship team.

"It helps tremendously because there are three of them that got major minutes in the state runner up (2022)," Medley said. "And there are five of them that got major minutes in the state championship. There are five girls that have either the state championship run, or state runner up run, under their belts.

"Once you've been through the journey and know what it is and know what it takes, it makes it that much easier to set your goals because you know what you are fighting for, you know what you are preparing for."

Powerful hitters McGraw, Moss and Mills sound like a law practice that hammers home the law. Instead, they distribute Lady Gator volleyball justice at the net with crushing kills and timely blocks.

"Three girls didn't get significant minutes in the state championship so there are new roles they are going to be put into," Medley said. "But they were the girls on the other side of the net (in practice), so they competed with our high level volleyball.

"There are two girls (Peyton Hardy and Jadyn Moss) that are in their first year of varsity. One's a junior and one's a sophomore. They've got to step up when their number is called and be consistent every day in practice."

Rounding out the Baker roster are two girls that didn't play last season, junior Carliegh Krumnow and senior Addison Cadenhead. Krumnow, a junior, is slated to start at libero.

It's hard for Medley to find anything she doesn't like about the team.

"I like the options they give me," she said. "We really do have a lot of athletes. With there being six seniors, there is a lot of leadership when we get to that last go around, we are giving it everything we've got.

"I think our juniors are great leaders. And they are all together. They are together as a team, and they continue to get closer as a team."

Baker Volleyball Schedule

Aug. 20	vs. Pace	6:30 p.m.
Aug. 22	vs. Walton	6 p.m.
Aug. 27	vs. Central	6 p.m.
Aug. 29	at Destin	6:30 p.m.
Sept. 3	at Niceville	6 p.m.
Sept. 6	at Arnold tourney	TBA
Sept. 7	at Arnold tourney	TBA
Sept. 10	at Choctaw	7 p.m.
Sept. 12	at Central	6 p.m.
Sept. 17	vs. Niceville	6 p.m.
Sept. 19	at Jay	6 p.m.
Sept. 26	at Walton	6 p.m.
Sept. 28	at Chipley vs. Chipley	10 a.m.
Sept. 28	at Chipley vs. Blounts	11:30 a.m.
Oct 1	vs. Jay	6 p.m.
Oct. 3	vs. Choctaw	7 p.m.
Oct. 10	vs. Destin	6:30 p.m.

Baker Volleyball Roster

1	Katy Stephens
2	Eiress Rockwell
3	Kat Price
4	McKenzie Price
5	Carleigh Krumnow
6	Annalese Saunders
10	Addison Cadenhead
14	Brooke Brunson
16	Jadyn Moss
22	Kaleigh Moss
25	Maddie Mills
30	Peyton Hardy



LAUREL HILL HIGH SCHOOL VOLLEYBALL



Photo by Randy Dickson

By Randy Dickson
randy@crestviewbulletin.com

Laurel Hill volleyball coach Kasey Campbell heads into the 2024 season with mixed feelings that might very well have to do with the makeup of her team.

The Lady Hoboes have three seniors in Kaelin Martin, Nevaeh Langford and Lexi Rollins. The remainder of the team is made up of sophomores, freshmen and middle schoolers.

Sophomores will be key players in several positions.

"We lost our outside hitters (to graduation), so Andrea (Barnhill) and Savannah (Riley), who are going into tenth grade, are going to have to fill those shoes," Campbell said. "I think they are up for the challenge. They come in with a good attitude, and they know what they have to do, and they are going to get it done."

Libero Kyndall Morrill is a key sophomore, and setter Carlee Boddy is a freshman to watch.

"They are still pretty young, but they come out and work hard every day and are going to lead this team," Campbell said.

Campbell said the team is putting in the work to be successful.

"They are probably the most excited group I've had in a while," she said. "They want to show up, and they want to stay late when I want to go home.

"They come in every day, great kids, great athletes. I'm just ready to see what they are going to accomplish. They have a great future ahead of them."

Her biggest concern is the players will stress when they make a mistake and will get away from playing their game. Once they learn to put mistakes behind them and play on, she's confident they will be OK.

Campbell, who is now in her third year as the head coach, has seen the players today are different than they were when she played not so long ago.

"I've learned the girls don't adjust to the way I was coached," she said. "They've taught me a new style, and it's going to help them get better. I have to accommodate them."

Laurel Hill Volleyball Schedule

Aug. 20	vs. PCA	6 p.m.
Aug. 22	at LEAD	6 p.m.
Aug. 27	vs. Florala	5 p.m.
Aug. 29	at Rocky Bayou	6 p.m.
Sept. 5	at Vernon	6 p.m.
Sept. 6	vs. Destin	6 p.m.
Sept. 9	vs. Rocky Bayou	6 p.m.
Sept. 10	vs. Central	6 p.m.
Sept. 12	at Northview	5 p.m.
Sept. 17	at Freeport	6 p.m.
Sept. 19	vs. Northview	5 p.m.
Sept. 20	at Destin	6 p.m.
Sept. 24	at Central	6 p.m.
Sept. 26	vs. Vernon	6 p.m.
Sept. 30	at Florala	5 p.m.
Oct. 3	vs. LEAD	6 p.m.
Oct. 4	vs. East Hill	6 p.m.
Oct. 8	vs. Freeport	6 p.m.

Laurel Hill Volleyball Roster

1	Carlee Boddy
4	Madilyn Richmond
5	Kaelin Martin
7	Nevaeh Langford
13	Andrea Barnhill
14	Skylin Baggett
33	Savannah Riley
Libero	Kyndall Morrill
Not pictured	Lexi Rollins

CRESTVIEW HIGH SCHOOL

BULLDOGS



Photo by Randy Dickson

By Randy Dickson
randy@crestviewbulletin.com

The Crestview High School football team is looking for a bounce-back year in a newly aligned District 1-6A.

There will no longer be suburban, metro and rural distinctions in districts as Crestview sheds District S1-4A that saw district opponents such as Niceville, Mosley, Leon and Chiles. The new look District 1-6A will be equally tough, and perhaps tougher, with Santa Rosa County powers Navarre and Pace included, as well as a Tate team on the rise.

And while Niceville is no longer in the same district, the Eagles remain on the Crestview schedule.

Head coach Thomas Grant enters his third season at the helm of the program, and he knows the Bulldogs are in for a battle every week. However, he thinks his team is talented enough to compete with anybody.

"We all have our strengths and weaknesses," Grant said of the four teams in the district. "It's going to be a very competitive district. Every team is extremely well-coached.

"It's going to be anybody's district. It's up for grabs. I think it's going to be some good, competitive football."

Grant said Pace coach Kent Smith and his staff are proven year in and year out. And while Navarre coach Garrett Bagley is in his first year calling the shots as a head football coach, he's been successful in every sport he's coached in his career. Finally, Rhett Summerford at Tate has quickly turned a struggling Aggie program around in a short time.

The Bulldogs posted a 4-6 record last season and lost about 20 players to graduation.

Offensive threats Zay Parks, Jaden Appleby and quarterback Turtle Nocher are gone. So are center Michael Foley, who anchored the offensive line and Maddox Reeves, who played on both sides of the line during the last half of the season.

The cupboard is hardly bare at Crestview. Patrick Rogers and Manwell Robinson proved to be a dynamic duo at running back when Parks and Appleby went down. The good news for Grant is Rogers is a junior and Robinson is a sophomore.

The starting quarterback job is up for grabs.

"They are still competing now, but Jay McQueen and Zy Tassin are still battling it out," Grant said. "It could come down to they each have their own package (of plays to run). They both can make any throw.

"They both have gotten better at reading defenses. I think Zy may be a little better outside the tackle box runner, and Jay is pretty good inside the box. One's a better outside runner, and one's a better inside the tackle the runner."

The one advantage Tassin has is he saw significant playing time last season backing up Nocher at quarterback.

"Any time you get varsity snaps and varsity experience as a younger player it's going to pay dividends when you are older," Grant said. "There are two things you can't substitute in football; weight room time and experience."

If McQueen is at quarterback, look for Tassin to get on the field as a receiver or running back.

Karson Kolmetz, Braylon Phillips, Jace Greene, Zi Morris and Stone Colburn are players who will also handle the football.

"We've got about eight guys who can really fit in at receiver or running back," Grant said. "They've been explosive with the ball in their hands. I'm very excited to get them in space. I'm just excited to see what we can do."

The biggest questions remain the offensive and defensive lines. If the Bulldogs can hold their own up front, it could be a magical season.

"We have the Washington twins, Chase and Chance Washington that are battling," Grant said. "We have RJ Grisby that is battling, Gavin Burns, Tauren Easter, Parrish Martsteller and Stone Coburn. Sometimes someone is at guard, and we move them to tackle to get the best (lineup on the field)."

The defensive front is more of the same with Crestview being smaller than most of the teams on the schedule. The lack of size has forced Grant and his staff to get creative in how they attack teams.

"We are trying different things at practice to keep teams from running right at us whether that is running around or bringing pressure," he said. "We are going to have to do some different stuff and take some chances.

"We don't have those pluggers (that can fill the gap) in play right now. I think we've got some that are coming once they mature and develop, but right now, we are still undersized a little bit. They've been practicing hard and doing everything we ask."

Aaron Coward, Ayz (Ayzdon Siaki), Dakota Jones, Easten Moore, Amir Kirkman and Zach Contri should see playing time on the defensive front.

"The linebackers are Damien Dodson, Max Anderson, Zy Rainge, Zi Morris," Grant said. "Anderson started for us last year. Hopefully, we will have Landon Scott back soon.

"He's going to be a sophomore, and he has a tremendous, tremendous motor. We have about six or seven guys to play four spots (at linebacker)."

Starters in the defensive secondary will be Sean Johns, Tassin and Rogers.

Phillips is expected to be the Crestview punter and Trey Hardman the kicker.

CRESTVIEW BULLDOGS

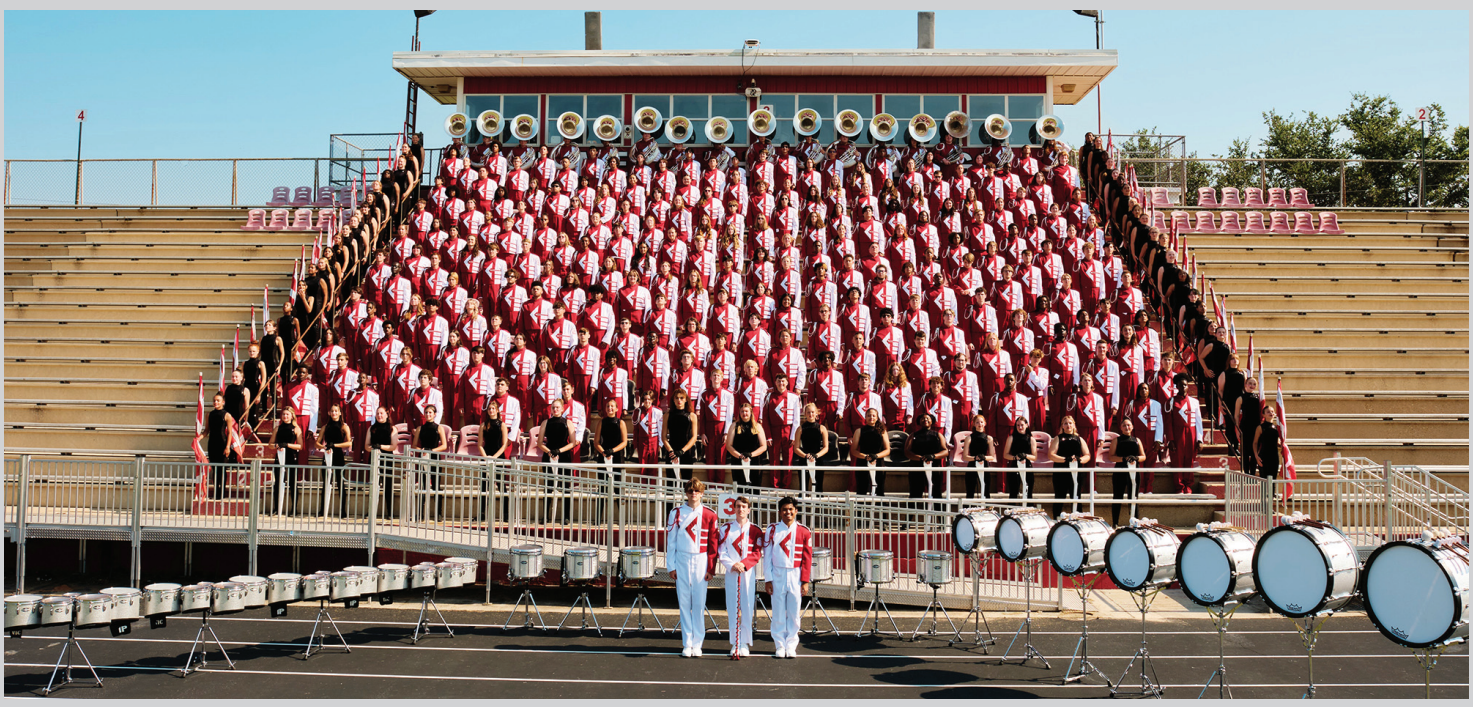
2024 Varsity Roster

#	NAME
0	Zy Tassin
1	Patrick Rodgers
2	Che'Shon Cobb
3	CJ Reynolds
4	Jay McQueen
5	Braylon Phillips
6	Zi Morris
7	Manwell Robinson
8	Kendell Stakley
9	Jace Greene
10	Sean Johns
11	JuJu Rover
12	Karson Kolmetz
13	Tj Union
14	Will Lyle
15	Zy Rainge
16	Amir Kirkman
17	Dakota Jones
18	Delijah Thomas
19	Easton Moore
20	Landon Scott
21	Gabriel Gottlieb
22	Jaden Urias-Flores
23	Marquis Thomas
24	Chasen Lawerence
25	Max Anderson
26	Damien Dodson
27	Ali Ingersoll
28	Jayden French
29	CL McQueen
30	Noah Smith
31	Aaron Coward
32	Andre Bridgewater
33	Cayden Cook
34	Chris Paduani
40	Charles Stewart
50	Izel Burton
53	Chase Washington
54	Zachary Contri
55	Tauren Easter
56	Kevin Craddock
57	Ayzdon Siaki
59	Matthew Cadenhead
62	Aiden Teague
64	Damien Tajalle
66	Gavin Burns
70	Peyton Simmons
72	Chance Washington
74	Parrish Marsteller
76	RJ Grisby
78	J'Lyn Thomas
80	Jayden Goldsmith
82	Stone Coburn
84	Hayden Harris
88	Rai Rai Traywick
90	Trey Hardman
92	Connor Zasada
98	Chandler McClendon
99	Jordyn Stoudmire

Crestview Football 2024 Schedule

Aug. 23	Milton at Crestview	7 p.m.
Aug 30	Walton at Crestview*	7 p.m.
Sept. 6	Crestview at Choctaw	7 p.m.
Sept. 13	Niceville at Crestview	7 p.m.
Sept. 20	Crestview OPEN	
Sept. 27	**Pace at Crestview**	**7 p.m.**
Oct. 4	Pine Forest at Crestview#	7 p.m.
Oct. 11	**Crestview at Navarre**	**7:30 p.m.**
Oct. 18	Crestview at Escambia	7 p.m.
Oct. 25	**Crestview at Tate**	**7 p.m.**
Nov. 1	Crestview at FWB	7 p.m.

Bold – District game
**Hall of Fame Game*
 # Homecoming



Submitted Photo

Crestview High School's Big Red Machine is one of the top high school marching bands in the state of Florida. With almost 300 members, the band rivals the size of many of the larger college bands. The band is directed by Jody Dunn, who is a former member of the band.

SPORTS

Bulldogs have dress rehearsal against Crusaders



Manwell Robinson pulls away from the Catholic defense.

Crestview quarterback Jay McQueen scans the field before throwing a touchdown pass.

By Randy Dickson
randy@crestviewbulletin.com

As far as Kickoff Classics go, Thursday's contest between host Crestview and Class 2A power Catholic, was at best, a form of football.

The best news for both teams is no player seemed to suffer a serious injury.

Instead of the typical format of a high school football game, the teams played a controlled scrimmage with each offense having a set number of snaps from different places on the field. If a touchdown was scored before the allotted number of plays, the team with the ball remained on offense.

No clock was used and no score was kept.

That doesn't mean Crestview coach Thomas Grant and his staff won't have plenty to work on in preparation for Friday's season opener when the Bulldogs host Milton in a 7 p.m. game at Jack Foster Stadium.

"We did some good things," Grant said. "Catholic is coming off a final four run. They are big, they are strong, they are fast.

"I thought at times we competed with them and did some good things. We have to do a better job of paying attention to the detail of the game plan and understand we can't have lapses in the scheme. We've got to do what we are coached to do."

Grant said Jace Greene, Karson Kolmetz and Sean Johns were some of the players that came up big. Kolmetz had a touchdown catch, and Greene had three or four receptions.

Grant credited Zy Tassin with the touchdown pass to Klometz.

Johns had an interception and was part of a strong performance by the Bulldog defensive secondary.

Bulldog senior Zi Morris said he thought Crestview might have surprised some people.

"We played good today," he said. "We were the underdogs, and people thought they were going to beat us, but we came out here and did what we did. We scored, and we did all of that.

"We played as a team, and we have to keep doing that. We have to do that against Milton, and we have to do that against everybody. We are going to show them we are not the underdog anymore."

Braylon Phillips agreed with Morris about Crestview making a stronger showing against Catholic than people might have expected.

"We already had our plan in mind, and we executed it perfectly," he said. "No if ands or buts about it, we are ready for the season. I'm through the roof right now.

"I could play Milton right now."

The preliminaries are over and the march to the playoffs starts Friday.

"Everybody in the state is 0-0 after this weekend," Grant said. "Now, it's for real. We've got to compete with a very high level football team (against Catholic).

"We did some good things, but we just have to be more consistent of making plays within the scheme of the game plan. I'm excited for this team. We need to have a good week of practice because we host Milton here Friday night."

Photos by Randy Dickson

Patrick Rodgers runs hard for the Bulldogs as he tries to break free from a Catholic tackle.

Freshman offensive lineman J'lyn Thomas looks for somebody to block.



Randy's Report



By Randy Dickson

randy@crestviewbulletin.com

Last week it was announced that Graceville High School would not be fielding a varsity football team this season.

Graceville, like Baker, is a 1A school and the Tigers came out of spring drills with just 19 players. When six players transferred and three more were ruled out because of academics, the school administration made the only decision it could. The sad thing is although Graceville hopes to field a team again next year, the two-time state champions might have played their last football game.

There is at least one tie between the North Okaloosa County area and Graceville High School. Former Crestview baseball coach Carlan Martin is the Graceville principal who had to make the final call to stop football for the year. Graceville hasn't been a hotbed for high school football, but one former Tiger made his mark on the game.

Running back Neal Anderson held the career rushing record at the University of Florida when he finished his eligibility. He was a first-round draft pick of the Chicago Bears and had the impossible task of replacing Walton Payton as the top Bears running back.

Not every school produces a Neal Anderson, and some schools, such as Laurel Hill, are too small to field a football team. But when the governing body of Florida High School athletics makes it so easy to transfer, a struggling program suffers as Graceville has.

Let's be realistic, if the rumors that were circulating late last year and into the early part of this year were true, there was a possibility that Baker could have been headed in that same direction.

I get it – every kid wants to play for a winner and every kid wants to play. There is no doubt that some Baker and 1A players could play and even start for a 6A team.

And like it or not, often parents pressure their son into transferring to another school to get more exposure or to be a part of a winning program. I can't think of too many seniors in high school who grew up attending Hometown High and wanted to transfer to a rival at the end of their career.

We have gone from a society of people who rise to the occasion of adversity to one that flees hardship as if we are trying to escape the lava flow of a volcano.

I'm hurting for the kids at Graceville today. Not just the football players who are still at the school and won't have a season, but the other students who won't experience a football homecoming game. I'm hurting for the cheerleaders who won't cheer and the band that won't play at halftime.

I'm confused by the "wisdom" of our state leaders who have lost sight of so many lessons student-athletes learn in the hard times.

It seems that we have substituted the pursuit of happiness, which sometimes requires work, and replaced it for the pursuit of leisure and easy street.

We want success without the lessons and hardships that one must experience to truly enjoy the fruit of success.

Perhaps the saddest thing is we have abandoned the concept of team in search of what's best for ourselves.

Gators shine in Kickoff Classic

By Randy Dickson

randy@crestviewbulletin.com



Photo by Randy Dickson

Baker's Calvin Wilks stiff arms a Pleasant Home defender as he gains extra yards.

It might be premature to declare that Baker's football program is back after a Kickoff Classic, but it's not too early to say the Gators are heading in the right direction with Matt Brunson back calling the shots as the head coach.

Baker hosted what was an old jamboree format for the Kickoff Classic on Friday taking on Pleasant Home, Alabama, and longtime rival Northview.

The Baker middle school team played Ernest Ward Middle School and the Gator JV also played the Eagles and the Chiefs. Baker's junior varsity split, beating Pleasant Home and losing to Northview. The Gator middle school team beat the visitors from North Escambia County.

In reality, Baker fans were there to see the Baker varsity hit someone else and to witness the continuing retransformation under Brunson. If one needed an indication of the way the Gators played, they only needed to look at the smile on Polly Brunson's face as she joined her husband after the game.

Baker made it look easy against Pleasant Home taking down the Eagles 20-0. Baker finished the night with an 8-6 win over Northview in a preview of the game that will be played Oct. 4 in Bratt.

"I'm proud of their effort, and we will take this as a beginning point and build from here," Brunson said. "It was awesome the way we played in the second outing against Northview. We established our physicality, winning the line of scrimmage, and our guys did a great job of taking care of the football and running downhill.

"It was fun to watch. Whenever they are keeping score, we want to win. Tonight was big."

Stats mean little or nothing in a preseason game. If stats were being kept, they would show that quarterback Kase Armstrong is going to do more than hand the ball off to the fullback up the middle or a wingback on a speed sweep.

The senior was impressive in spreading the wealth and was seldom off target in his pass attempts.

Don't expect Baker to suddenly start throwing the ball 20 or 30 times a game, but the ability to throw will open up other aspects of the offense.

"Teams can't cheat those corners and safeties down there and play the run 100 percent because we can throw it a little bit," Brunson said. "Kase did a great job and Austin Stanley made a couple of plays from the fullback alignment.

"Lane (Brewer) and then Jordan (Preston) and Joseph Blackshear and Jacob Beckworth all made plays coming out of the backfield on run, play action and that opened up the stuff so that was good."

It took Baker and Armstrong just two plays to show that throwing the ball will be an option in the Gator playbook this season. On Baker's second offensive play of the night, Armstrong connected with Stanley on a 39-yard pass play against Pleasant Home. Two plays later, Brewer took the ball in from two yards out.

Baker never trailed against the Eagles or the Chiefs.

Brewer's second touchdown of the night followed by the 2-point conversion by Armstrong.

Preston scored Baker's third TD against the Eagles as the half between the teams was winding down.

Wilks, although slight in stature, proved he can run tough between the tackles and break it to the outside and pull away from defenders.

Wilks scored Baker's only touchdown against Northview on a 16-yard run to cap the first Gator drive against the Chiefs. Brewer added the 2-point conversion that would be the difference in the game.

The Chiefs were able to score a touchdown, but the Gator defense rose to the occasion stopping the conversion.

In short, Friday's performance was just what one would expect from a Baker team coached by Brunson.

The Gators now turn their attention to their season opener Friday when they host Florida A&M High.

Brunson will make sure Baker is ready to play, and he knows the players will do what's needed to be successful.

"Next week we won't have a 30-minute halftime like we did tonight," he said. "We've got to get ready to play four quarters and keep being physical and see where it takes us.

"We've got a fun little group to coach."

Camille Reeves sets the table for Lady Bulldogs



Photo by Randy Dickson

Lady Bulldog senior volleyball player Camille Reeves, seen here playing beach volleyball, will be on the hardwood court for Crestview this fall dishing out assists to her teammates from her setter position.

By Randy Dickson

randy@crestviewbulletin.com

The story has been told time and time again. A friend is doing something so somebody decides to join them, and they are hooked before they know it.

That's the story of Crestview Lady Bulldog volleyball senior setter Camille Reeves.

"My friend did [played volleyball] when we were in middle school (at Shoal River), so I just did the same thing," she said.

Crestview coach James Kerrell might want to find out who that friend is and treat them to a Coke as Reeves has become a leader in the program.

"She's really a quiet leader," he said. "She has worked hard and improved so much each year. She contributes in a big way. She's not a real vocal person, she's not a real outspoken person, but she gets in there and gets the job done."

Kerrell is in his third year as the Lady Bulldog coach, and Reeves has been with him the whole time.

"I feel like the team is exactly how he wants it when he came to be our coach," she said. "He wants us all together and unified. I feel like it gets better and better every year.

"We all like each other, and we are going to be a good team this year. We are playing tough teams this year and that will make us better in the long run."

Reeves has been a setter almost as long as she's played volleyball. She gets her own satisfaction in delivering a key pass that leads to a big hit.

"My favorite part about being a setter is being able to set the ball up for my hitters to get kills," she said.

Reeves said her favorite part of volleyball is the time she spends with her teammates throughout the season in practice and at games. She plays volleyball for the purest of reasons, to have fun with her friends.

Teams don't always need a boisterous or outspoken presence to turn things around. Often, it's the actions that do speak louder than words. That describes Reeves as a leader.

"Sometimes that calm is what we need," Kerrell said. "She's also a very intelligent person as well as being a hard worker, so she's been a great addition to our program."

Karson Klometz ready for senior season



Photo by Randy Dickson

Crestview senior wide receiver Karson Klometz puts a move on a Gulf Breeze defender in last year's game between the Bulldogs and Dolphins.

By Randy Dickson
randy@crestviewbulletin.com

Karson Klometz has been playing football since his early days of elementary school.

The Crestview senior receiver now finds himself entering what might be the last season of his football career. As the 2024 season approaches Friday night, he's trying to take it all in stride.

"I played basketball and baseball when I was younger," he said. "I just love playing football a lot more. I enjoy having a team around me.

"In other sports, it's based on individual performances, but in football, everyone has to be good."

Of course, great individual performances in football lead to great team performances. Crestview coach Thomas Grant said Klometz has the talent to shine brightly under the Friday night lights.

"He's a great athlete for one thing," Grant said. "He leads by example. He does everything we ask him to do.

"He's just a great team player. He's a smart football player. He knows how to read coverages, and that's a really big deal because the receiver and quarterback have to be on the same page."

Grant heaped praise on Klometz, comparing him to a former National Football League All-Pro receiver.

"He's a Wes Welker type," Grant said. "He has an understanding of when a defense is in a zone and when to sit down (break off a route,) which is vital to a passing game. He's a guy we are going to try to get the ball to on the perimeter and get one-on-one opportunities."

Kolmetz admits it can get stressful keeping track of all of the assignments.

"The most difficult thing is remembering what your assignment is and running the play," he said. "Some plays you have to memorize what to do."

Klometz was a member of the 2022 Bulldog team that made it to the second round of the playoffs. He likes his team's chances of going back even with a new starting quarterback.

"I think we have a lot of potential to make the playoffs," he said. "But we all are going to have to stay focused.

"There won't be much of a change with the new quarterbacks. I've known them for a while, and we've worked together for a long time."

Grant thinks there's still a chance for Klometz to get an opportunity to play college football.

"I'm expecting a big season from him so you never know what (scholarship offers) will come in late," Grant said. "It's exciting because the NCAA just passed (an amendment) saying they are going to increase the number of scholarships for football. What I'm hoping that will do is allow high school recruiting to pick back up (to levels before the transfer portal).

"He's just a great young man. I enjoy being around him."

Local players to watch

By Randy Dickson
randy@crestviewbulletin.com

The Crestview and Baker football teams are always stocked with plenty of talent. This fall will be no exception.

The Bulldogs have a great stable of running backs and two talented young quarterbacks pulling the trigger. Crestview will be undersized up front but will have linebackers and defensive backs that should make life miserable for opposing offenses.

The Gators have worked hard all summer under coach Matt Brunson in his return to his alma mater. There are no doubts Baker players will hit hard and attack from all areas of the field. An experienced quarterback and strong offensive and defensive lines should mean success in the Swamp.



Braylon Phillips



Jace Greene



Patrick Rodgers



Sean Johns



Kase Armstrong



Lane Brewer



Maddox Smith



Makani Abdon

Crestview Players to Watch

Sean Johns: A returning starter in the secondary, the junior mirrored the other team's best receiver last season. He's going to be the strength in the team's secondary and can come up on first or second down to stop the run.

Jace Greene: He has probably had one of the best summers of any skill guy. He's catching everything and playing behind his pads.

Braylon Phillips: Phillips is another senior that is going to get some one-on-one opportunities (at receiver) and give the Bulldogs chances for big plays.

Patrick Rodgers: The junior stepped up at running back last season when injuries sidelined starters Lazarius Parks and Jaden Appleby. Rodgers will team with Manwell Robinson to give Crestview one of the top backfields in Northwest Florida.

Baker Players to Watch

Kase Armstrong: The senior has started at quarterback for the Gators since his sophomore season when he shared time under center. Undoubtedly, the master of the Baker offense, Armstrong will be bigger, stronger and faster this year. He's poised to have a breakout year.

Lane Brewer: As a junior last year, Brewer was a backup to Wyatt Straight, the leading rusher in the area. Straight decided to give up football, opening the door for Brewer. Weighing about 195 pounds and with a body chiseled from countless hours in the weight room, Brewer will be a hammer punishing opposing defenders in a style coach Matt Brunson loves. A two-way player, Brewer also will deliver blows from his linebacker position on defense.

Maddox Smith: The senior is a two-way lineman playing guard on offense and defensive end on defense. At 190 pounds, Smith is one of the smaller linemen on the Gator squad, but he is athletic enough to cause problems for tacklers and ball carriers. Smith might not be the biggest Gator, but he is definitely a Bull Gator.

Makani Abdon: If the senior lineman was six inches taller, he would be the envy of college coaches across the Southeast. Another of Baker's two-way players, Abdon, is a physical 245 pounds that will play offensive and defensive tackle. This explosive weightlifter will blow people up on both sides of the football.

BAKER HIGH SCHOOL GATORS



Submitted Photo

BAKER GATORS
2024 Varsity Roster

#	NAME
1	Calvin Wilks
2	Joseph Blackshear
3	Austin Stanley
6	Jacob Beckworth
7	Terrance Clausell
8	Kase Armstrong
10	Trace Matthews
11	Zavier Rodriguez
12	William Lindros
13	John Doucett
14	Braden Pazzaglia
18	Jordan Preston
20	Elijah Lindros
21	Caleb Murrell
22	Colin Kelly
24	Declan Crawford
28	Lane Brewer
45	Hunter Riley
50	Nathaniel Ball
52	Maddox Smith
54	Easton Pilkilton
56	Simon Yanora
60	William Hart
72	George Vargas
75	Morris Winston
78	Jeremy Fredericks

Baker Football 2024 Schedule

Aug. 23	FAMU at Baker	7 p.m.
Aug 30	Destin at Baker	7 p.m.
Sept. 6	Central at Baker	7 p.m.
Sept. 13	Baker at Jay	7 p.m.
Sept. 20	North BH at Baker	7 p.m.
Sept. 27	Houston Co at Baker *	7 p.m.
Oct. 4	Baker at Northview	7 p.m.
Oct. 11	Baker at Zion Chapel	7 p.m.
Oct. 18	Baker at Freeport	7 p.m.
Oct. 25	OPEN	
Nov. 1	Vernon at Baker	7 p.m.

Homecoming

By Randy Dickson
randy@crestviewbulletin.com

The buzz surrounding Baker School's Doug Griffith Memorial Stadium this fall will have nothing to do with a wasp nest being found under the press box.

It will have plenty to do with what the Gators are accomplishing on the field below as the team makes a run at returning to prominence with Matt Brunson back as head coach.

It's no secret that Brunson is old school. While many teams are running a spread offense and airing things out, Brunson remains dedicated to a run-first Wing-T or Wing-I offense that stresses the fundamentals of blocking and tackling rather than the flash of throwing long and playing fast.

Success in a Brunson offense almost always starts up front.

"I feel like the offensive line will be the strength of our team because we've got some guys up there who are experienced and are very strong," Brunson said. "In our tight end lineup, we've got Colin Kelly, Declan Crawford and Hunter Riley. We will be using two of those guys in a lot of our formations so our tight ends will be important.

"Our tackles right now are Easton Pilkilton and Makani Abdon. Easton Pilkilton is probably our strongest squatter. Makani is definitely one of our strongest guys, and those guys are very strong and very physical."

Jamie Winston will be the third offensive tackle in the rotation. Baker's guards are Maddox Smith, Logan Ward and Jeremy Fredericks. The two centers are Nathaniel Ball and Simon Yanora.

"All those guys will see a lot of action," Brunson said. "Our offensive line is going to be very physical. We've got a downhill running attack, and those guys will be a big part of the success we have.

"Our offensive line will be able to match up with anybody."

Senior quarterback Kase Armstrong has experienced a growth spurt in recent weeks and has gotten bigger, faster and stronger. A two-year starter, Armstrong has the confidence of Brunson.

"His experience in understanding what we are trying to do is very important, and he will do a good job," Brunson said. "He has gotten bigger and stronger, and we will be able to throw it when needed."

Elijah Lindros will be the backup quarterback.

Brunson's run-first offense sees Lane Brewer and Jordan Preston at fullback. Brewer will also play tailback.

A pair of sophomores, Calvin Wilkes and Austin Stanley, will fill out the tailback rotation. Baker's wingbacks are Joseph Blackshear and Jacob Beckworth.

Brunson looks forward to seeing Brewer in action.

"Lane is a typical Baker kid, a Baker fullback, running back type," Brunson said. "He's worked extremely hard in the weight program. He's about 190 pounds, but he's very strong and very physical.

"I like to say he plays the game the way it's supposed to be played. I'm excited to watch Lane as this season progresses."

Wilks is the lightning to counter Brewer's thunder and power.

"Calvin is a sophomore with very good speed," Brunson said. "We are hoping he will grow into that tailback position, but he's going to be a good one."

Austin Stanley, Tyler Gordon and Zavier Rodriquez fill out the tailback position.

Most of the Gators will go both ways and only rotate out to catch their breath or get some water.

Ward, Smith, Crawford and Riley will be the Gator defensive ends. Defensive tackles are Abdon, Pilkilton and Winston and Ball. At noseguard are Kelly and Yanora.

Preston will be a middle linebacker, Brewer at outside linebacker and Wilks will be at rover along with Blackshear.

"And our secondary will be Calvin Wilks, Trace Matthews and Austin Stanley. Joseph Blackshear will play corner and safety some as well." Brunson said.

With so many players going both ways, Brunson stressed the importance of conditioning that will allow the Gators to last four quarters.

His biggest concern is a defensive secondary lacking experience.

"We are athletic enough, and we just have to get some game experience under our belt and see how we do," Brunson said of the defensive backfield.

Paden Rodriguez will be the Baker kicker, and Crawford is set to be the punter.

"Our team understands that we support our school and our community," Brunson said. "There's a tradition here and a culture here, and the expectations are always high. It's special to play here in Baker and to represent Baker School.

"Our goal is to be successful in the regular season and make the playoffs. Ultimately, we would like to get a couple of rounds (playoff games) at home like we have in past years. After that, it would be awesome to practice one more Thanksgiving night to see what happens."

In other words, Brunson will hold the 2024 Gators to the same high standards of recent years before he stepped away from the program.

"All of our expectations are still very high," he said. "It's a special thing when they turn the lights on in Doug Griffith Memorial Stadium. Everybody shows up and supports the Gators."

BAKER HIGH SCHOOL CHEERLEADERS & BAND



Submitted Photo

Left side, front to back: Eiress Rockwell, Katy Stephens, Taylor Lambert, Bailey Tabor, Krista Caro, Utah Murphy, Karlee Ashburn, Hayden Peak. Right side, front to back: Roxy-Parker Fountain, Addison Cadenhead, Alyssa Mathews, Ava Adams, Rainetta Johnson, Shauntrice Wilks, Bella O'Bry, Layken Floyd, Kylee-Grace McDonald, Emily Patten.



Submitted Photo

The Sounds of the Swamp Marching Band might not be one of the biggest bands in the state, but there's no doubt it packs plenty of punch. Last spring the band earned the highest rating possible at the Florida State competition. The band, under the direction of Stuart Campbell, never loses a half-time show.