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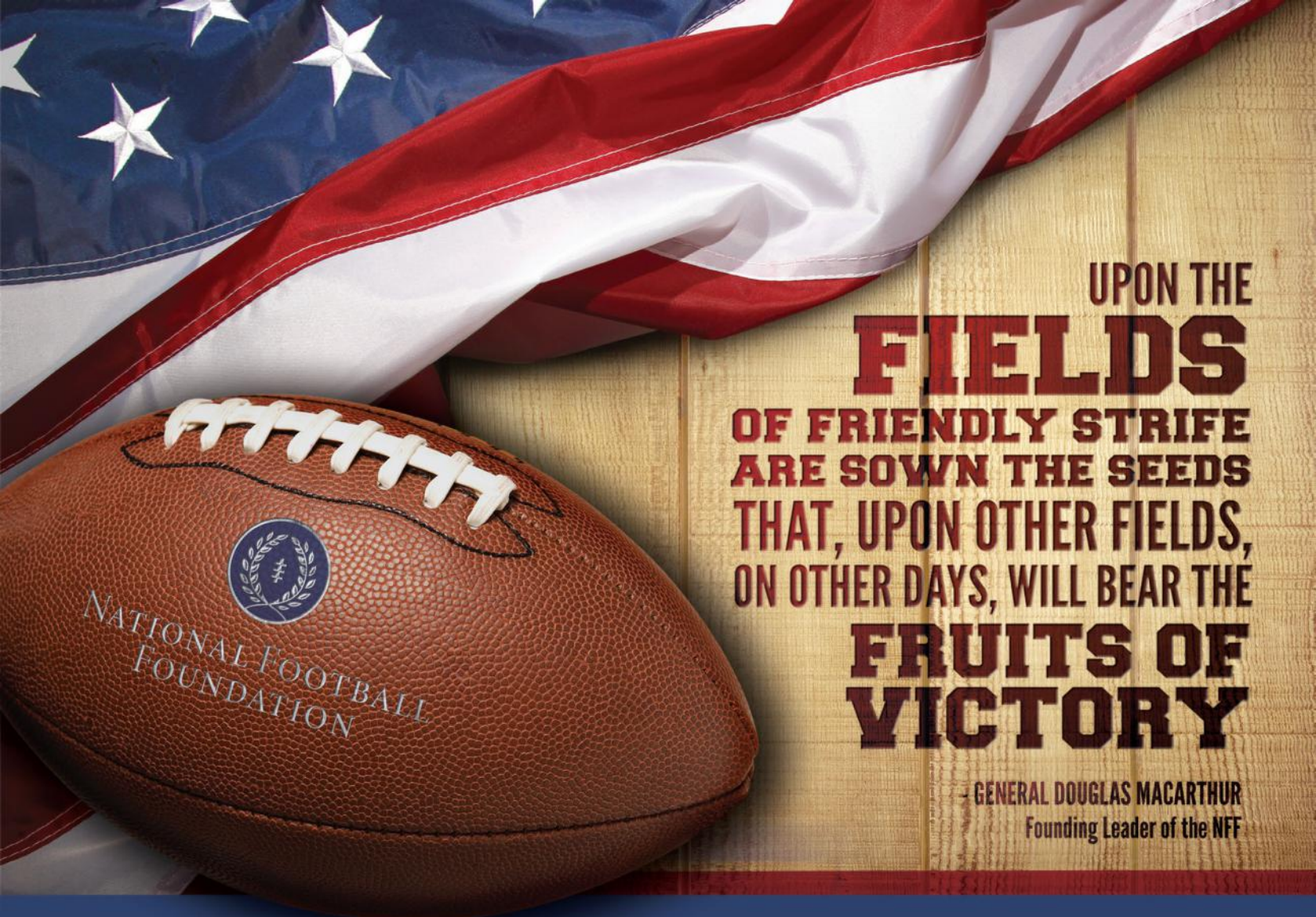
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COMPLETE ARIZONA FOOTBALL PREVIEW

SOLLENBERGER CLASSIC RETURNS • NEW DIVISION BREAKDOWN • Q&As WITH FRIAS, RUIZ
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Sollenberger Classic, Teams, Magazine Cover Return Home

By Jose Garcia
azpreps365.com

The placement of Arizona high school football teams and the Sollenberger Classic are returning to their roots.

Beginning this year, divisions and sections are out, and classifications and regions are back in as the new homes of teams. Also returning home after a one-year hiatus and two years in Nevada is the Sollenberger Classic.

In the spirit of the homecomings, this year's edition of the Sollenberger AZ Football Prep Magazine is also turning back the clock with the design of the magazine's cover. Before Barry Sollenberger, the Arizona Interscholastic Association's historian, passed away in 2005, the cover pages of his preseason football magazines had a familiar look.

With Barry's pre-2005 issues in mind, we went with a similar look for this year's cover, with mug shots of some of the state's best players and a centerpiece photo.

We did so, because Arizona is once again hosting the football event, the Classic, that honors Barry's 30-plus years of covering and archiving AZ's high school sports history.

After Barry died, his good friend and publishing partner, Dave Kukulski, continued to produce an AZ preseason football issue. Two years ago, azpreps365.com jumped in to help continue Sollenberger's AZ Football Prep Magazine, an Arizona football tradition that Barry started in 1971. Barry also teamed up with friend Steve Paynter of paynterpics.com for the magazine's photos.

This year's cover centerpiece photo of Basha quarterback Ryan Kelley was shot by Paynter. One of Barry's magazine sponsors, Cox 7, rejoined us this year with an ad that features its Thursday night 2016 high school football season broadcast schedule.

Flagstaff Coconino High School is the site of this year's Sollenberger Classic on Aug. 20. The event will spotlight returning West Valley state champions Centennial and Desert Edge and a rematch of last year's playoff overtime nail-bitter Brophy won over Pinnacle, avenging a regular season final second loss to Pinnacle.

Two football games in one day at one site, a perfect day for Barry.

Barry and his good friend, former Tempe Marcos de Niza coach Ron Cosner, used to attend two football games every Friday night.

2016 Sollenberger Classic

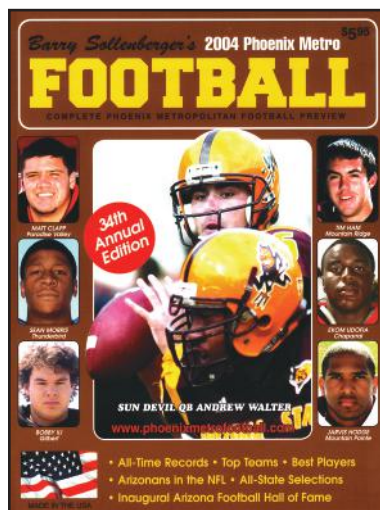
The Aug. 20 games between Brophy-Pinnacle and Centennial-Desert Edge will start at 1 and 6 p.m., respectively.

azpreps365.com will live stream each game. After the first game, stay tuned to azpreps365.com for a sit down interview with Arizona high school football coaching legends Pat Farrell, Karl Kiefer, Bill Mitton, Jim Murphy, and Jesse Parker.

Sollenberger Classic results

2006: The first game honoring Barry was held at Sun Devil Stadium on the campus of Arizona State University. Chandler Hamilton, the 2005 AIA 5A Division I state runner-ups, defeated Mesa Red Mountain 21-7.

2007: The Phoenix Brophy Prep Broncos hosted Tucson Salpointe Catholic at Phoenix College on Thursday, Aug. 23. The Broncos defeated Salpointe Catholic 33-17 to take hold of the Sollenberger Classic Trophy.



2008: Phoenix Brophy Prep, the 2007 AIA 5A D-I state champions, defeated Las Vegas Bishop Gorman, the 2007 NIAA 4A state champions, 16-6. The game was played at University of Phoenix Stadium, home to the Arizona Cardinals.

2009: The Sollenberger Classic was played in Reno, Nevada at MacKay Stadium on the campus of the University of Nevada, Reno. AIA 5A D-II defending state champion Peoria Centennial defeated NIAA 4A defending state champion Reno McQueen 51-20.

2010: The Hamilton Huskies and Bishop Gorman Gaels made their second Sollenberger Classic appearance in 2010 at NAU's J. Lawrence Walkup Skydome. The Huskies, the AIA defending 5A-I state champion, defeated the Gaels, the NIAA defending 4A state champion 24-17 in a tightly contested game.

2011: The Sollenberger Classic was hosted at University of Phoenix Stadium. This marked the first year the Classic featured two games. In the first game, the NIAA Class 3A runner-up, Moapa Valley, defeated the AIA Class 3A defending state champ Show Low 28-26. In the second game, the NIAA Class 4A defending state champion, Bishop Gorman, defeated the AIA Class 5A-II defending state champion, Chaparral, 42-22.

2012: University of Phoenix Stadium was host for the second straight year and third time in the history of the Sollenberger Classic. In the first game, the AIA D-IV defending state champions, Blue Ridge High School, defeated the NIAA Class 3A runner-up, Moapa Valley, 23-14. In the second game, the AIA D-I state champion Desert Vista defeated the NIAA 4A Sunset Region runner-up, Palo Verde, 20-10.

2013: Fertitta Field on the campus of Bishop Gorman High School played host to the 2013 Sollenberger Classic, presented by Station Casinos. In the first game, 2012 AIA D-I state runner-up Mountain Pointe defeated 2012 NIAA D-I Champion Bishop Gorman 28-21. In the second game AIA D-II state semi-finalist Salpointe Catholic defeated 2012 NIAA D-I State Runner-up Liberty 48-7.

2014: The Sollenberger Classic, presented by Station Casinos, was again held at Fertitta Field on the campus of Bishop Gorman High School. In the first game, 2013 NIAA D-I champion Bishop Gorman defeated 2013 AIA D-I quarterfinalist Brophy Prep 44-0. In the second game, 2013 AIA D-I champion Mountain Pointe defeated 2013 NIAA Division I runner-up Reed 66-13.

Cover photo credits: Mountain Pointe's Isaiah Pola-Mao and North Canyon's Austin Jackson/Mark Jones, maxpreps.com; Bagdad's Israel Loveall and Round Valley's Sullivan Udall/Jim Willites, maxpreps.com; Ralph Frias/Safford High staff; Sabino's Drew Dixon/Andy Morales, azpreps365.com.

The Good-Bad of 2016 Football Realignment

By Les Willsey, azpreps365.com

The first thing football fans need to familiarize themselves with for 2016 is the turn-back-the-clock realignment. A realignment method that doesn't go back far — essentially a year.

It's a lot of change on the surface. Eighty-seven schools have moved up a conference or two. Sixteen have gone down a conference. That's movement of 103 out of 235 (44 percent).

Like any realignment, there are pluses and minuses. This writing is to sort out the good and bad of the change with regard to football.

Here we go:

THE GOOD

Even though a boatload of schools have moved up from last year's experimental job at realignment, using factors beyond enrollment (competitive history, school population makeup via free and reduced lunch data), it shouldn't be cause for despair. The number of conferences/classifications is the same (6). Conferences are balanced in terms of number of schools in each — Class 6A has 40, Class 5A (43), Class 4A (44), Class 3A (37), Class 2A (41) and Class 1A (30). Regions (formerly sections) are comprised of a more manageable and flexible 5 to 7 schools. In most cases geographic location prevailed in setting regions.

Schools were diligent in tailoring their schedules to their capability/competitive level, as last year's realignment strived with schools being able to petition what conference they competed in based on the added factors. That's a concession — sad in many respects — but the reality is the majority of schools in every conference have little to no chance of winning a state championship. Being competitive and settling for achievable levels of success is the norm going forward. Winning two or three games, instead of none, going .500, maybe even winning a region are now goals. Even if they're unspoken or hidden under a "our goal is to win a state championship."

An example is what took place with Phoenix Union district schools last year. The current 6A Metro Region (six schools) and its 5A Union region sister schools (four out of six) competed together — two conferences down last year in the same section. The result? More of their games were competitive. Five teams had winning records. One finished 0-10. The year before only one of the 10 had a winning record. While they are split up in two conferences this year, they will cross over and play most of their games against one another. The exception is Cesar Chavez. Winning a couple games, perhaps breaking even or better, beats going 0-10 or 1-9. Phoenix Union schools have gone more than 20 years without advancing to a championship game.

Decline is not limited to Phoenix Union either. The newly formed 6A East Valley Region consists of Mesa's six high schools. Two were D-I last year (Red Mountain and Mountain View) and four D-II (Dobson, Mesa, Skyline and Westwood). Mesa schools dropoff has taken off quite a bit in the last decade. This year, a Mesa school is guaranteed a region title and playoff berth that comes with it. A Mesa school played in six championship games in the 2000-2009 decade. No Mesa school has reached a final thus far this decade. Skyline came close reaching the semi last year, but it took a drop in conference to do it.

There was debate over how the Chandler schools would be placed in the new 6A. Most favored all of Chandler's schools together and Brophy Prep to make five-team region. Not Chandler's first choice and perhaps not Brophy's either, but the three 6A Gilbert schools and three from the Tempe district wanted a region devoid of Chandler. Thus the Premier Region was born — Hamilton, Chandler, Basha, Perry and Brophy. Every school in this newly-formed region has reached the semifinals or better the last five years except Perry.

THE BAD

Last year's experiment in using multiple factors to determine conference placement upped the ante on schools that have the wherewithal to battle for a state title every year. The trend in Arizona football is an ever-widening divide between the haves and have not-so-muches. Centennial and Chaparral held their own, forced into D-I, as most knew they would and could. Heck, Centennial won D-I least we forget.

Ditto Saguaro, Marcos de Niza, Williams Field, Queen Creek, which moved up from D-III to D-II. Combined with Skyline, Westview, Mesa High and O'Connor all dropping from D-I to D-II, it turned out to be quite competitive for the top spot. The exception was Saguaro, which lost two games — both to D-I opponents and ended up an overwhelming the eventual champ.

Since enrollment only now defines a school's placement, Centennial and Chaparral have returned to 5A (D-II). That's scary for most of the conference unless Queen Creek, Williams Field or Notre Dame Prep really strike it rich. The calamity-waiting-to-happen is 4A where the state's premier destination school, Saguaro, resides. Is Paul Moro-coached Marcos de Niza up to taking on Saguaro again for the title? Not sure anyone else in 4A can or will come close. Here's hoping member schools will find a way to return to 2015's alignment model for football only and get obvious high-profile programs placed where they belong.

It's the right path to revisit if you look at Saguaro, with its double-digit college prospects for a school of 1,300 students, according to several top 100 prospect lists one can peruse.



AIA GAME OF THE WEEK

PRESENTED BY



- Aug. 20** *The Sollenberger Classic*
Brophy vs. Pinnacle @ 1 p.m.
Centennial vs. Desert Edge @ 6 p.m.
- Aug. 26** *Deer Valley at Williams Field*
Canyon del Oro at Shadow Mountain
- Sept. 2** *Millennium at Verrado*
Notre Dame at Desert Mountain
- Sept. 9** *Hamilton at Desert Ridge*
Trevor Browne at Camelback
- Sept. 16** *Raymond S. Kellis at Arcadia*
Red Mountain at Boulder Creek
- Sept. 23** *Saguaro at Sunrise Mountain*
Ironwood Ridge at Queen Creek
- Sept. 30** *Desert Vista at Mountain Pointe*
Casa Grande at Greenway
- Oct. 7** *Chaparral at Liberty*
Mesa at Skyline
- Oct. 14** *Marcos de Niza at Seton Catholic*
Westview at Valley Vista
- Oct. 21** *Peoria at St. Mary's*
Williams Field at Mesquite
- Oct. 28** *Westwood at Red Mountain*
North Canyon at Paradise Valley

All games at 7 p.m.
Schedule is subject to change.



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6A Conference Preseason Rankings

By Les Willsey
azpreps365.com

No. 1. Hamilton: Wow. Has it really been 2012 since the Huskies last won a championship? That's a major drought for the Huskies so expect the skies to open up and rain down another title. Hamilton may be a more run-oriented this year in part because of their confidence in a seasoned, big quick O-Line. Defensively they are strong up front and overall its D on paper looks imposing. That could spell curtains for all-comers come Thanksgiving weekend.

2. Desert Ridge: Plenty of returning players -- top-flight variety -- from runner-up finish. Like Hamilton, defense is a strength and offense should be up to the task. Not a particularly imposing non-region schedule, but section has some bite to it. No reason a final-four berth isn't in the cards.

3. Mountain Pointe: The Pride aren't that much different than Hamilton or Desert Ridge. Defense figures to be the strong suit. The offensive question mark is at quarterback. Two title games (one a win) and two semifinal berths make for a good four-year run. A fifth is calling.

4. Chandler: The injury bug caught up with the Wolves last year and they still managed to reach the semis. A good chunk of firepower returns, sans a veteran quarterback. How good the defense turns out to be will be the difference in whether or not a deep title run is in the offing.

5. Pinnacle: The buzz surrounding quarterback Spencer Rattler ups the ante for the Pioneers. Competing in a not-so-heavyweight region will help. How Pinnacle fares in its six non-region games should tell a bunch. It plays as tough a non-region slate as there is -- Brophy, Basha, Chandler, Mountain View, Centennial and Mountain Pointe.

6. Brophy Prep: A lot of this year's top teams will employ unproven varsity quarterbacks. The Broncos are another. They'll need the handful of returnees with meaningful time to lead and the rest to develop quickly. Season opener at the Sollenberger Classic on Aug. 20 vs. Pinnacle is a good test.

7. Skyline: Skyline is perceived -- and shown -- it's the top Mesa high school in football the last couple years. The



The 2016 Mountain Pointe Pride should contend for 6A region and state honors (photo by Mark Jones of maxpreps.com).

Coyotes have to prove it against Red Mountain and Mountain View -- like they did in 2014. They played neither last year. The offense returns its quarterback and a 1,000-yard rusher. The defense must remain capable. Watch for results vs. Desert Vista and Hamilton the first half of the season.

8. Basha: It's a broken record. Basha cranks out prolific quarterbacks only to see defense more often than not give up more than the offense can provide. Ryan Kelley is set to finish up a solid three-year stint behind center. Can the Bears' defense at least hold its own to make postseason possible, and if so, more than one-and-done?

9. Desert Vista: The Thunder plan on running the opposition into submission. They have the tools to do so with nearly 3,000 yards of offense returning at quarterback, running back and receiver. Desert Vista plans an up-tempo offense, which generally doesn't take much time off the clock even if successful. That can stress a defense, especially considering the trouble the Thunder had in the red zone last year.

10. Westview: Can't see the Knights being anything less than a region champ. How far they advance beyond that depends on their prowess against the elite teams. They play a couple the first half of the season, including their opener with Basha, then Brophy and a bit later Centennial.

2016 6A Football Preview

By Les Willsey
azpreps365.com

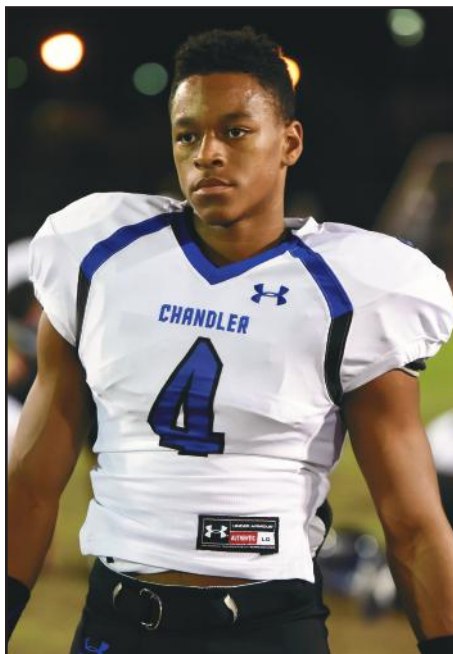
METRO REGION

Alhambra: A new head coach steps in for the Lions. George Medrano, an assistant coach at Cesar Chavez and former head coach at Miami, takes over for long-time coach Frank Lauth, who stepped down after Alhambra's 8-2 mark in 2015. Alhambra has a string of .500-or-better seasons to greet Medrano. Alhambra was senior-oriented, but the program has been able to stay competitive in the recent past when classes move on. Top returning player on offense is Sr. Yakir Cobb (1,130 yards rushing, 17 TDs). On defense it's Sr. Alex Acosta and Sr. Salah Abdi, linebackers with 64 and 43 tackles, respectively.

Central: The Bobcats managed their first winning season since 2010 by going 6-4 last year. Coach Jon Clanton has a couple key performers back to help Central scale the .500 mountain again. Sr. Tommy Works gets it done on both sides of the ball. Works rushed for 654 yards, 7 TDs and was in on 69 tackles at linebacker. Quarterback Sr. Rico Davis passed for 597 yards, 11 TDs and only two picks. So. Casey Clanton made an impact in the secondary with 51 tackles.

Cesar Chavez: The rest of the region undoubtedly will be in pursuit of the Champions for the top spot. Cesar Chavez won the all-Metro-team section last year with its only losses bookend defeats to Higley and in the playoffs to D-III champ Desert Edge. No sister school from the Metro came closer than 35 points of upending the Champions. Coach Jim Rattay, who joined the 300-win club last season, lost a lot of key players to graduation, but boasts the most numbers and depth in the region. Sr. Taylor Skaff, a D-I a highly-touted D-I line prospect and Sr. Tavion Allen, a standout at safety, are the top returnees. Allen had 10 interceptions and was among the leaders in tackles last season. Cesar Chavez doesn't shy away from top competition in its freedom games. It opens at home in a zero-week matchup vs. 5A power Queen Creek. A couple weeks later Hamilton visits Laveen.

Maryvale: The Panthers made strides last year netting three wins in 10 tries after back-to-back winless seasons. Coach George Martinez hopes to see his inexperienced 2015 squad increase the win total with 10 players with starting experience back on both sides of the ball. Sr. George Campos and Sr. Victor Melendez are linemen getting looks at the next level. Sr. Jose Chavez returns to lead the offense. Chavez passed for 770 yards, 13 TDs and rushed for 636, 6



RB T.J. Green, Chandler (photo by Mark Jones of maxpreps.com)

TDs. Sr. Miguel Vasquez and Jr. Julio Valencia were defensive leaders in tackles -- Vasquez at linebacker and Valencia in the secondary.

North: The Mustangs held their own last year in posting a 6-4 record. Coach Bernie Busken is aiming higher this year. More than half of last year's starters return among 18 lettermen. Six linemen with starting experience and a good amount of seasoning at linebacker and the secondary are good signs. A quality replacement at quarterback is needed with the graduation of 2,000-yard passer Torey Blevins. The strength rests in the lines on both sides. Busken expects a physical team, most of whom are juniors. Top returners are Jr. Milon Henry, Sr. Sisqo Juarez, Sr. Angelo Myler, Jr. Jason Cortez, and top lineman Sr. Enrique Sanchez. Henry rushed for 502 yards, 5 TDs. Juarez had 56 tackles and 5.5 sacks and Myler caught 16 passes for 353 yards, 4 TDs.

Trevor Browne: It's coach Ryan Prassas' second year as head coach and the Bruins are aiming to get into the win column this year following last year's 0-10 campaign. A modest 10 lettermen return with three starters back on offense and four on defense. The key returnee is Sr. Javier German, who played quarterback and passed for 700 yards and six TDs. Prassas expects more close games in 2016 and improved team chemistry. The Bruins open up with a zero-week game and lengthy road trip to Yuma to face Kofa.

PREMIER REGION

Basha: The Bears are eager to see if this is the year they'll make a lot of noise as Sr. Ryan Kelley finishes up a prolific career. Kelley, who is committed to ASU after decommitting from Oregon late in the spring, is one of the top QB recruits in the nation. Kelley piled up 3,065 yards rushing and passing last season (20 TD passes, 4 rushing TDs and only 7 INTs). In his two seasons as Basha's starting quarterback the Bears are 6-6. Top receiver Sr. Terrell Brown returns (1,078 yards, 16 TDs) if he recovers from nagging summer injuries. Also helping out on offense is Sr. Jonathan Nathaniel, a top recruit with a dozen offers and counting as the season beckons. Sr. Bryce Ashcroft is gritty tough at safety and leads the defense.

Brophy Prep: The Broncos are looking for more consistency in the new season after posting a 7-5 record yet still reaching the big-school quarterfinals last year. That may be a tall order. Coach Scooter Molander has to replace a boatload of key graduated seniors and has quite a bit of inexperienced varsity folks waiting to fill in. Brophy won its first four games last year, then dropped four of five. Four of its five losses were by four points or less. Players the Broncos are looking to for leadership on and off the field are Sr. Matthew Kempton, Sr. Noah Pittenger, Sr. Robert Brooks, Sr. Rex Tessler and Sr. George Rivera. Pittenger and Kempton excelled as pass catchers. Pittenger had 42 receptions for 642 yards, 7 TDs/ Kempton, a tight end, had 25 catches for 405 yards, 4 TDs. Brooks was injured and missed most of last season, but is expected to cause defenses trouble. Tessler is the top returning defender with 92 tackles and five sacks at linebacker.

Chandler: A big-school repeat just wasn't in the cards last season. Still the Wolves posted a glossy 11-2 record. Retooling will take a little work, but coach Shaun Aguano and company are up for it. Seven starters are back on offense and five on defense. For the first time in a bunch of years quarterback isn't a given or strength at the start. The early burden falls to playmakers Sr. Kolby Taylor, Sr. Johnny Johnson and Sr. TJ Green. Green rushed for 1,148 yards, 17 TDs. Taylor caught 69 passes for 879 yards and Johnson 37 for 552. All three have received D-I offers as have defenders Sr. Sam Pepper and Sr. Imani Lee. Lee was in on 38 tackles, 5 INTs. Pepper, at linebacker, had 58 tackles and Sr. Parker Henley is the top returning tackler with 81 from his linebacker spot. Chandler won't lack speed, but young players will be pressed to keep Chandler deep in the hunt.

Hamilton: The Huskies are always hun-

gry, but after having to watch the semis and finals for the first time in almost a decade, they figure to be ravenous in 2016. Hamilton finished 10-2 last year, but it's stunning, late loss in the quarters to eventual champ Centennial left a bad taste. Coach Steve Belles, two wins shy of 200 in his career, has some pieces to work with in righting the wrong from last mid-November. It starts with a big, smart quick O-line led by Sr. Tyler Stephens, Sr. Jack Patterson, Jr. Hunter Waygines and Sr. Jacob Barnard, That line is the springboard for a commitment to the run, which features backs Jr. Jawhar Jordan and Sr. Tyler Alexander and a top-notch receiver in Sr. Chance Brewington. Interior D-linemen Sr. Joshua Bosolet and Sr. Jared Darby are deemed unblockable by Belles. Hamilton seeks some replacements at line-backer and in the secondary. There are lots of players to choose from. If those pan out, watch out.

Perry: For the Pumas to keep up in with their region brethren, they need to execute more of the basics, according to coach Preston Jones. On defense that means eliminate an excess of big plays and creation of more turnovers. On offense it's scoring in the red zone and taking care of the ball. Those things happened quite infrequently last year in a 4-7 season that finished with seven successive losses. Perry returns ample skill players led by Sr. Nate James, Jr, Cutter Hatch, Jr. Brock Purdy and Jr. Kenny Fultz. The latter trio combined for nearly 1,200 yards rushing and Purdy shared time at quarterback in 2015, passing for better than 1,000 yards. James' stats stood out the most with 51 receptions for 974 yards and 8 TDs. Offensive and defensive lines will be a work in progress from the outset. Sr. Clayton Nocella, a linebacker, is the Pumas' top returning tackler.

DESERT VALLEY REGION

Boulder Creek: Nowhere to go but up in 2016 for the Jaguars. They have a new coach in Anthony Casarella. He's tasked to make inroads for a program that produced a 1-10 record on the field and qualified for postseason in team-thin D-I (17 teams, 16 made the playoffs). Boulder Creek lost a bunch of starters to graduation and transfer, including a solid starting quarterback. The good news is its new region features three teams who competed in D-II last year plus Horizon, the only team it defeated on the field last year. The schedule isn't as rigorous so odds of improvement are high. Leading returnees are receivers Sr. Tristen D'Angelo and Willie Muller and Sr. Tyler Mackey and Sr. Wyatt Henderson, linebacker and D-lineman, respectively.

Desert Mountain: The Wolves begin the new season with their third head coach in as many seasons. David Sedmak, an assistant at Desert Mountain for two seasons, comes



Spencer Rattler, Pinnacle (photo by Kevin Abele of maxpreps.com)

over from a one-year stint as head coach at Scottsdale Prep. Sedmak has been on the job less than two months after getting hired in mid-June to replace Mike Morrissey, who left for a job in Illinois. Sedmak takes the reins of a team 6-5 in D-II last year. Top returning players are quarterback Sr. Austin Nuessle and wide receiver Sr. Kade Warner. Nuessle passed for 2,479 yards and 29 TDs. Warner had 96 catches for 1,142 yards. Other weapons are versatile RB-R Jr. Josh Walker and receiver Sr. Brett Teller. Leaders on defense are strong safety Sr. Rourke Freeburg (81 tackles, 3 sacks) and linebacker Sr. Cody Liebeskind.

Horizon: The Huskies also tote a new head coach with Ty Wisdom coming over from Valley Vista. Wisdom served as offensive coordinator at Valley Vista and replaces Kris Heavner. Horizon has been offense minded, but improvement on defense is paramount. Horizon gave up 515 points last season, nearly 300 more than it scored. Horizon has allowed 330 points or more each of the last three seasons. That worked with a prolific offense two of those seasons, but last year the sub-par defense was glaring. Horizon is going to be young, but has some talent. Speedy Jr. Dylan Lizarraga, a receiver-slotback, OL Jr. Hunter Weber and DE Jr. Justin Segura are players to build around.

Mountain Ridge: The Mountain Lions look to rebound from a 3-7 season, one that ended with a win to snap a six-game losing streak. Bobby Green begins his 11th season as head coach. Top returning players are

QB Sr. Elijah Lorence and DL Sr. Gabe King. Lorence passed for 1,994 yards and 13 TDs and added 806 yards rushing, 9 TDs. Lorence will work on reducing interceptions (16 last year). King is a monster up front. He led in tackles last year with 91 and contributed 7 sacks. Mountain Ridge opens the season with a home game vs. Tucson High, a much friendlier slate than last year. Mountain Ridge faced Skyline, Marcos de Niza and Saguaro in consecutive weeks. Those were three of D-II's final four.

Pinnacle: There's plenty to be excited about for the Pioneers even though they were one-and-done in postseason last year. The playoff loss was a heartbreaking, double-overtime decision to Brophy. Longtime coach Dana Zupke possesses one of the best young quarterback's in the state in So. Spencer Rattler. Rattler passed for 2,381 yards and 19 TDs last year. Sr. Dalton Cash and Sr. Nick Spohn weren't Rattler's top targets last year, but should emerge as those in 2016. Helping protect Rattler in the pocket is O-line college recruit Sr. Ben Thomas, (6-3, 300). The leader on defense is cornerback Jr. Dylan Stevenson (37 tackles, 5 INT). Zupke is confident in an experienced offensive line and an athletic secondary, but the Pioneers need to fill linebacking spots and be more disciplined on defense. Better balance on offense is a goal to alleviate focus on Rattler.

Sandra Day O'Connor: Keeping a post-season streak alive. That's what the Eagles are striving for as coach John Rodriguez's

team has posted back-to-back 7-5 campaigns. Defense will be relied on at the outset with eight returning starters compared to one returnee on offense. Three players getting decent looks at the next level are Sr. Chris Aguilar, Sr. Logan Bayus and Sr. Jake Callaway. Callaway (45 tackles, 6 sacks) and Bayus (49 tackles, 3 sacks) are D-linemen. Aguilar (47 tackles, 1 INT) plays in the secondary. Linebackers Sr. Trevor Quan and Sr. Trace Isidro (30 tackles, 3 sacks) and DB Sr. Eric Unverferth also made their presence felt last season. Rodriguez wants the unit to be more staunch against the run.

SOUTHWEST REGION

Copper Canyon: The Aztecs move back up (two conferences) to compete in the newly-formed 6A region. All of their region opponents competed in either D-II or D-III as well. Coach Shawn Kemmer has a schedule that should lend itself to improving 2015's 0-10 mark. Top returning players are Sr. Xaveaun Morris, Sr. Tre Allen and Sr. Tim Slone. All got playing time at receiver or running back. So. Chase Pope got his feet wet at quarterback behind a senior last year and will look to mature with a set of experienced skill players. Top lineman is stout Jr. Juan Ortega. Defense needs work and time as the Aztecs gave up 51 points a game last season.

La Joya Community: The Lobos emerged from D-III last year with a 3-7 record. With progress they believe they can contend for the region title, according to fifth-year coach Josh Mitchell. La Joya needs to settle on a quarterback, but other skill positions are covered. Running back Jr. Davon Jones rushed for 468 yards, 3 TDs. Sr. Hunter Older, a wide receiver, led the team with 30 catches for 488 yards, 4 TDs. Five starters return on defense, which should make that unit a plus. Sr. Devin Dourisseau (DL-OLB), Sr. Aaron Murphy (LB-S), Sr. Alejandro Ceja (C-DL), Sr. Maurri DeBerry (SS) and Jr. Saafir Newton (LB) are the veterans.

Millennium: The Tigers were a respectable 4-6 last year and enter the new season with a new coach in James Carter. Carter piloted Sunrise Mountain the past four seasons (11-2 and a D-III quarterfinal berth last year) with a 47-20 record in six seasons total. Carter gets his hands on seven offensive starters and four defensive starters. He's impressed with team speed, but is concerned about depth. Returning on offense are QB Jr. Ernie Pina, RB Sr. Romelo Johnson and Sr. JJ Gayles, WR Sr. Cameron Taylor, TE Sr. Raymond Pauwels, C Jr. Connor Roy and OL Sr. Keith Tucker. Gayles and Johnson combined for 1,800 yards rushing and 17 TDs. Pauwels and Taylor teamed up for 67 receptions and 800 yards. The defense sports LB Sr. Charles Walker, S Sr. Mike Garverick, LB Sr. Patrick O'Connell and T Sr. Jeremiah Russell.



Creston Cooledge, Valley Vista (photo by Mark Jones of maxpreps.com)

Tolleson: It was a competitive year for the Wolverines in 2015. Just about every week. They finished 5-6 and each game was decided by two touchdowns or less save a loss to D-II semifinalist Westview. Coach Jason Wilke has six starters back on both sides of the ball, a couple two-way. Top players are Sr. Dallas Dixon, a receiver-defensive back. Dixon caught 31 passes for 605 yards, 3 TDs. Sr. Lionel Suaza figures to be the lead ball carrier coming up with 303 yards, 3 TDs last year. Top lineman is Sr. Angel Torres. Tolleson opens with three home games among its first four contests -- Sandra Day O'Connor, Agua Fria and Mountain Ridge. Region play begins with the best team from last year in this year's region, Westview, in late September.

Valley Vista: The Monsoon broke even at 5-5 last year. Josh Sekoch enters his fifth season as head coach with a 24-18 record. Every season has been .500 or better. Valley Vista is experience heavy in the skill positions on offense with defense needing a few new faces. The running game will feature Jr. Raymond Baquero, who rushed for 419 yards as the non-feature back last year. WR Sr. Vodrey Gates (37 catches, 605 yards, 3 TDs), WR Sr. Ben Collier (37 receptions, 566 yards, 2 TDs) and WR Sr. Gavin Smith (13 catches, 178 yards) are solid receivers. Top O-lineman is Sr. Creston Cooledge. He teams up with returnees Sr. Guiseppe Simonesci and Sr. Alex Garcia up front. The defensive stalwarts are safety Sr. Darrin Perkins and nose guard Sr. Blake Reylea.

Westview: The Knights endured a head

coach stepping down for the second time in three years, but don't expect results to change much from one of the westside's most consistent programs. Taking over for Joe Parker, who replaced Jeff Bowen to begin 2014, is Nick Gehrts. Gehrts completed a four-year stint at Tonopah Valley and led the D-V Phoenix to a 9-2 record last year. The jump from D-V (2A) to 6A is hefty. Gehrts is taking it with confidence with several assistants still on staff and a good-sized group of seniors who know the ropes. Westview's marquee player is Sr. Tyler Vasko, a workhorse running back. Vasko was part of tandem backfield last season -- each rushing for better than 2,000 yards. Vasko finished with 2,018 yards and 22 TDs. Starting QB Sr. Ryan Martinez is back. Martinez might get to throw a little more this season. He passed for 1,164 yards and 10 TDs a year ago. Top returning target is Sr. Daryl Stagger (18 catches, 316 yards). Seven starters have another go-round on defense led by linebacker Sr. Abram Chapa (72 tackles), lineman Sr. Deonsaye Dean (44 tackles) and cornerbacks Sr. Bryan Rodriguez (51 tackles) and Sr. Delano Bryan.

SOUTHERN REGION

Cibola: The Raiders (8-3) were again the best big-school team in Yuma, winning their D-III section title before bowing in the opening round of the playoffs. Cibola was hit hard by graduation, losing two-big play threats at quarterback and running back. Coach Lucky



Tyler Vasko, Westview (photo by Mark Jones of maxpreps.com)

Arvizo has a few skill players left to build an offense. Two-way starter Sr. Gabriel Claudio was among the leading tacklers and picked off five passes as a defensive back. He's joined in the secondary by another two-way starter Sr. Jesus Romero. The top receiver back is Sr. Miguel Alvarado (35 receptions for 423 yards).

Kofa: The Kings are beginning the third year with Ben Franz as head coach. Franz is hopeful the previous two seasons developing very young players will pay off. Kofa was 0-10 last year and 3-17 the last two. Offensive line is the most stable portion of the squad. Four starters -- Sr. Juan Marin, Sr. Anthony Wolff, Sr. Oscar Galindo and Sr. Jesus Burrola -- are back. Top defenders from last year are Sr. Esteban Ledezma (67 tackles at linebacker) and lineman Sr. Eddie Shepherd. The skill positions are wide open with some beginning to emerge after spring and summer auditions.

Rincon: It's a decade and counting since the Rangers posted a winning record. Last year was one of the worst with Rincon going 1-10 and dropping its final seven games. The Rangers scored 78 points and surrendered more than 500. A third coach in four years - Cody House - a standout quarterback at Cholla High a decade ago -- is the new mentor. House had a one-year stint as head coach at Santa Rita (2014). There aren't many head coaches younger than House at the moment. Rincon's schedule is light with many of its games against 4A and 3A opponents.

Sunnyside: It's been a topsy-turvy off-season for the Blue Devils. Glenn Posey stepped down as coach shortly after last season to join the staff at Pima College. Posey had a successful five-year stint with three playoff appearances. The hiring of Kevin Kuhm to replace Posey didn't last long as he exited for a dual role as AD and football coach at Nogales. Finally in June, Sunnyside hired former longtime Marcos de Niza head coach Roy Lopez. Lopez spent the last two years as an assistant at Mesquite. Sunnyside was senior dominated last season and graduated nearly all its top skill position players and most of its defensive starters.

Tucson: The Badgers got a brief taste of D-II postseason last year in completing a 7-4 season, its second playoff appearance in three years under coach Justin Argraves. A first-round loss to eventual semifinalist Westview cooled the momentum from a section-clinching win over Sunnyside the week before. Plenty of offensive firepower is in hand with quarterback Sr. Jorge Flores (2,062 yards passing, 16 TDs) running back Jr. Jeff Lockwood (563 yards, 5 TDs), wide-outs Sr. Tyree Pierson (547 yards, 7 TDs) and Sr. Malik Patterson (230 yards, 3 TDs) and slot receiver Daquavin Bennett (494 yards, 3 TDs). The strength defensively is at linebacker and in the secondary led by MLB



Jalen Harris, Desert Ridge (photo by Mark Jones of maxpreps.com)

Sr. Bryan Lopez (127 tackles, 4 sacks) and strong safety Sr. Adrian Valenzuela (50 tackles).

EAST VALLEY REGION

Dobson: The Mustangs have to shake off last year's 0-10 record and get focused quickly in a return to D-I (6A). Coach George De La Torre lamented the loss of four games late in those contests. Three of those defeats were to sister schools Mesa, Mountain View and Westwood. Dobson's emphasis is on improved offensive execution and better quickness on defense. The offensive line is the neediest position with only one returning starter. The Mustangs return a handful of full- or part-time starters on both sides of the ball and will rely on newcomers from the JV to step up.

Mesa: The Jackrabbits reached back in history for a former player to take over as head coach, landing Kap Sikahema to replace Scott Hare. Sikahema, the younger brother of Vai Sikahema, played in the mid-1980s. He's put together a staff of former Mesa coaches and players in an attempt to continue the success Mesa found at 8-4 in D-II last year. Mesa possesses a break-away back in Jr. Kris Jackson, who piled up 975 yards and 13 TDs last year. Quarterback Sr. Roberto Baeza had a nice corps of receivers to throw to last year, passing for nearly 2,200 yards and 21 TDs. Baeza will need new blood to step in at receiver. Sr. Leon Morgan, a safety and part-time receiver a year ago, may be one of those who steps up on the offensive end. Lineman Nami Tuitu'u racked up 42 tackles.

Mountain View: The last time a Mesa school dipped into Ohio to land a head football coach it hired Jim Rattay at Mesa High in 1985. Success and a couple state titles followed in pretty short order. Mountain View is trying its luck with the hiring in January of Mike Fell, another highly successful mentor from the Buckeye state. Fell has turned around programs in Ohio and inherits a team that lost a school-record eight games (3-8). A pair of quarterbacks shared time for the Toros in 2015 and both return. Sr. Wheeler Harris (1,469 yards, 12 TDs) and Sr. Tristan Askan (1,296 yards, 7 TDs). Most of the receiving corps is gone, but a tall, athletic target returns in Sr. Curtis Hodges (51 catches, 556 yards, 6 TDs). Fell employs the spread, but likes to run the ball often out of that attack. The defense has experience at linebacker and in the secondary. In the backfield are Sr. Brody Daniels and Sr. Matthew Schoonmaker and at linebacker Sr. Derek Read and Sr. Preston Wright.

Red Mountain: A 4-7 season wasn't what the Mountain Lions planned on last year, but facing many upper-echelon big schools can produce such an outcome. Coach Ron Wisniewski and company figure they can contend for the region title vs. the other Mesa schools since all are now together. All seven of Red Mountain's 2015 losses were to winning teams and most were one-score decisions. Marquee talent for Red Mountain this season is versatile Jr. Lance Lawson, who proved a threat running, receiving and passing. He totaled 1,319 yards all told about half with his 50 receptions for 679 yards. Top defender returning is linebacker Sr. Jacob Porter (54 tackles) and linebacker Jr. Delton Jackson. Red Mountain opens with three Chandler schools -- Chandler, Hamilton and Basha.

Skyline: The Coyotes aren't used to having a target on their back, but they've shown to be the force in Mesa of late. Skyline turned in a 12-1 record in D-II last year with its lone defeat in the semis to Marcos de Niza. Coach Angelo Paffumi has led Skyline to a 33-13 record in his first four seasons. Skyline has been successful in D-I (2014) and of course last year so the level hasn't mattered much. Paffumi welcomes back seven starters on offense and four on defense. Two of its most productive offensive players are among those -- quarterback Sr. TJ Duarte and running back Kaleb Hardin. Duarte completed 70 percent of his passes for 1,966 yards, 15 TDs and only three INTs. He also scrambled for 378 yards, 4 TDs. Hardin chimed in with 1,229 yards rushing, 15 TDs. The defense is anchored by a rare, four-year starter, tackle Sr. Kolo Uasike (57 tackles, 5.5 sacks) and linebacker Sr. Jacob Scott (109 tackles, 5.5 sacks).

Westwood: The Warriors were 2-8 as Jim Ewan returned to the East Valley and head coaching after a stint as an assistant at

Yuma Catholic. Westwood faces a tough test this fall with its numbers down and four returning starters. Ewan is eyeing help from the lower levels, perhaps sooner than expected from an 8-1 freshman team. Three of those players were ushered in to the varsity the last few games a year ago. Top returnee is Sr. Cooper Tingey, a tight end-linebacker who caught 20 passes for 230 yards, 7 TDs. Westwood opens with a region game against the city's best team a year ago -- Skyline. The Warriors next five games should allow for growth and some success.

CENTRAL REGION

Corona del Sol: The Aztecs made a late-coaching change with Cory Nenaber resigning to take over as the school's athletic director early in May. Corona made defensive coordinator Richard Mettlach, interim head coach for 2016. Corona enjoyed its best season and first winning season since 2008 with a 7-4 record in a one-year stay in D-II. The Aztecs are back competing with the big boys this fall. Mettlach has some of his defense back. Linebacker Sr. Jacob Clemens (67 tackles, 5 sacks), lineman Sr. Dylan Conner (23 tackles, 4 sacks), cornerback Jr. Kobe Marion (34 tackles, 4 INTs) and safety Sr. Kaden Carter (76 tackles). Carter also contributed at receiver. Offensively the top returnee is running back Sr. Cameron Brice, who rushed for 1,092 yards and 12 TDs.

Desert Ridge: Always lurking at playoff time, the Jaguars made it to the D-I title game for the second time in six years, but settled for runner-up honors at 11-3 after falling to longtime nemesis Centennial. There's a wealth of talent returning to give coach Jeremy Hathcock a shot at another long postseason run. Desert Ridge's good players come in all sizes with huge wide receiver-defensive end Sr. Jalen Harris, smallish running back-safety Sr. Stephan Gomez, O-lineman Sr. Nick Omitt, linebacker Sr. Adam Bay and quarterback Sr. CJ Fowler (1,700 yards passing, 12 TDs).

Gilbert: A .500 season (5-5) was something for Tigers fans to get excited about in coach Derek Zellner's first year at the helm. Gilbert must replace a lot of solid senior players. There's plenty of promise and an even better season awaits quarterback Jr. Jack Plummer. Plummer passed for 1,577 yards and 16 TDs in his first varsity season and his stock continues to rise as recruiters get a look. One of Plummer's many wide out targets returns in Sr. Chris Heywood. Much of Gilbert's rebuilding from graduation will center on the defense. The Tigers schedule is hefty. They won't leave the East Valley home or away for their 10 games.

Desert Vista: The Thunder check in with a solid number of returnees from a 7-5 season and quarterfinal playoff berth. Twenty-eight lettermen and five starters on each side of the ball give Dan Hinds confidence of a



Tyler Johnson, Highland (photo by Barry Shaffer of maxpreps.com)

good showing entering his 15th year as the school's head coach. Sr. Lelon Dillard will lead an up-tempo ground attack. Dillard rushed for 981 yards, 11 TDs last year. Jr. Jr. Keishaud White piled up over 1,000 yards rushing and receiving with 13 TDs. Sr. Nick Thomas is back at quarterback. Other top returnees are D-line and linebacker Sr. Myles Wilson and Jr. James Stagg.

Highland: A strong work ethic from a largely untested group has impressed coach Pete Wahlheim leading up to practice. The Hawks posted a 4-7 record and postseason ended with a tight 19-14 opening-round loss to Chaparral. Four returning starters on offense and three on defense will be counted on. Highland boasts a big-time talent in Sr. Tyler Johnson, who averaged 23 yards a reception and scored 11 TDs counting six rushing tallies. Quarterback Sr. Jake Kersting is on hand again and set to operate some spread-oriented sets via new offensive coordinator and former Highland quarterback Travis Epperson. Top lineman is Sr. Connor Stott and at linebacker is Sr. Savion Sow.

Mountain Pointe: The Pride will contend again for big-school supremacy with plenty of starters back, including what coach Norris Vaughn figures will be a staunch defense. Mountain Pointe's bid for a perfect season ended with a semifinal loss to Desert Ridge. The defense is ost experienced up front and in the secondary led by free safety-receiver Sr. Isaiah Pola-Mao (98 tackles, 4 INTs), linemen Sr. Khaliff Ravelil, Jr. Mathew Pola-Mao and Jr. Shamari Hayes (59 tackles). The secondary is bolstered by strong safety Jr. Kenny Churchwell, (44 tackles, 2 INTs) and cornerback Sr. Antwan Woodbury. The linebacking corps is led by Sr. Rashie Hodge. The offensive line returns three starters and Sr. Jaydon Brooks (55 catches for 906 yards, 5 TDs) again pairs with Isaiah Pola-Mao at receiver.

Returning Statistical Leaders

2015 PASSING

Gr. Name/School Passing yards Yds/G TDs Int
 Sr. Nazareth Greer, Marcos de Niza 3,320 221.3 24 10
 Sr. Mason Crossland, Higley 3,190 290.0 38 11
 Sr. Chase Cord, Sunrise Mountain 3,173, 264.6 52 6
 Sr. Brock Hall, Casa Grande 3,010 273.6 36 7
 Sr. Rhett Ricedorff, Show Low, 2,979 248.3 29 9

2015 RUSHING

Gr. Name/School Yards Yds/G Yds/C TDs
 Sr. Stone Matthews, Saguaro 2,155 153.9 7.7 24
 Sr. Tyler Vasko, Westview 2,018 155.2 8.6 22
 Sr. Kyron Woolf, Round Valley 1,736 144.7 18.9 14
 Sr. Tehran Thomas, Desert Edge 1,652 150.2 9.5 28
 Sr. Sullivan Udall, Round Valley 1,555 119.6 10.6 12

2015 RECEIVING

Gr. Name/School Yards Yds/G Yds/R TDs
 Sr. Trevor Russell, Casa Grande 1,214 110.4 19.0 19
 Sr. Kade Warner, Desert Mountain 1,142 103.8 11.9 15
 Sr. Terrell Brown, Basha 1,078 98.0 13.1 16
 Sr. Bryce Gilbert, Higley 1,056 96.0 16.2 16
 Sr. Nate James, Perry 974 88.5 19.1 8

2015 TOTAL POINTS

Gr. Name/Pos/School Total Pts/G TDs
 Sr. Garret Veldhuizen, RB, Sunrise Mountain 184 15.3 28
 Sr. Tehran Thomas, QB, Desert Edge 168 15.3 28
 Sr. Jaylen Barnes, RB, Yuma Catholic 168 14.0 28
 Sr. Jeremiah Boyd, RB, American Leadership 156 13.0 26
 Sr. Stone Matthews, RB, Saguaro 156 11.1 26

2015 TACKLES

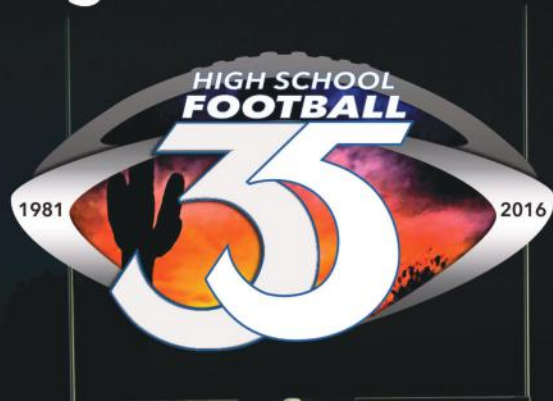
Gr. Name/Pos/School Total Tackles/P
 Sr. Joseph Mask, MLB, Campo Verde 163 16.3
 Jr. Dakota Haynes, LB, Pusch Ridge 154 11.0
 Jr. Tre O'guinn, MLB, North Canyon 145 14.5
 Sr. Joe Castaneda, DL, Miami 141 14.1
 Sr. Bryan Lopez, MLB, Tucson 127 11.5

2015 SACKS

Gr. Name/Pos/School Total Sacks/G
 Sr. My-king Johnson, DE, Tempe 22 2.6
 Sr. Jaquan Graves, DT, Cesar Chavez 20 1.8
 Sr. Jalen Harris, DE, Desert Ridge 17.5 1.3
 Sr. Kavarry Burns, DE, Cesar Chavez 17 1.4
 Sr. Joe Castaneda, DL, Miami 13 1.3

(Source: maxpreps.com)

COX7 ARIZONA High School Football Game of the Week



August 25	Liberty vs Boulder Creek
September 1	Centennial vs Chaparral
September 8	Chandler vs Mountain Pointe
September 15	Desert Mountain vs Basha
September 22	Westview vs Centennial
September 29	Marcos de Niza vs Saguaro
October 6	Paradise Valley vs Notre Dame
October 13	Peoria vs Sunrise Mountain
October 20	Desert Ridge vs Desert Vista
October 27	Verrado vs Desert Edge



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Mature, Talented Kelley Eyeing Big Year for Basha

By Jose Garcia
azpreps365.com

When Ryan Kelley received his first traffic ticket, the responsible side of Kelley shifted into high gear.

Since the teenager and trouble don't mix, Kelley took the initiative to get a job to pay for traffic school.

"I wanted to fix my mistake without burdening my parents," Kelley said.

He might be only 17, but Kelley, Basha's high-profile quarterback, understands accountability.

His level of maturity reflects well on the way in which his parents, Martha and Ted, are raising him and how his older siblings, Gillian and Brianna, watched over him — mixed in with Gillian beating Kelley in a game or two.

That support at home and Kelley's maturity shielded him from the scrutiny he received from University of Oregon fans after making one of his biggest decisions so far — decommitting from Oregon. In the process, Kelley, a team-first player, learned that it's OK to be selfish when making a life-changing choice.

The recruiting campaign — a coaching staff blitz — that stepped in to win Kelley's pledge next was Arizona State.

But that hasn't stopped other teams from inquiring about the senior's interest to flip again.

Nothing is official until Kelley signs on the dotted line on Feb. 1, but Kelley seems intent on staying put in the Valley.

Vision for the future.

Kelley can't see that well out of his right eye without a contact lense.

Defensive backs will have a hard time believing that the Basha QB has a vision issue as soon as Kelley shows off his right arm and timing with wide receiver Terrell Brown on deep passing routes this season. If it weren't for the contact lens, Kelley would probably bump into walls like he did when he was a little kid wearing an eye patch.

Timing helped Kelley identify the reason for his misshaped right cornea. And destiny gave him his first glimpse into his football future, all because of his right eye.

During a routine eye exam he had to take before enrolling at a school when Kelley was four, he covered his left eye and was asked to identify the object in front of him. It was a sailboat, but it could've been the Queen Mary and it still wouldn't have mattered.

A specialist diagnosed the problem, an astigmatism. Eye drops, a patch, glasses, time and eventually a contact lense were the recommendations from doctors.

Kelley has 20/60 vision in his right eye, which is considered mild vision loss. He started to like football around when he was four, when the specialist told Kelley that his right cornea was shaped like a football.

"Of course it is," he answered as a matter of fact to the specialist.

It wasn't his vision that brought more nervous moments to the Kelleys last year, however.

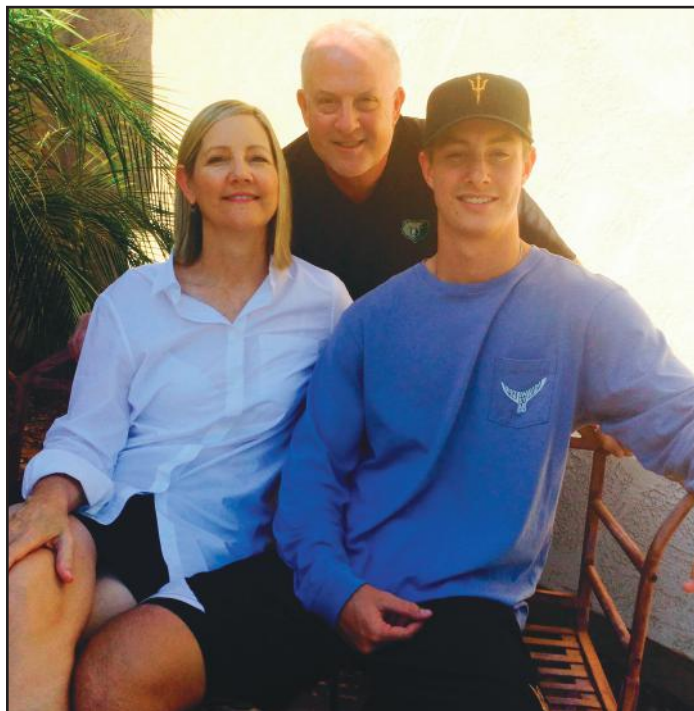
Kelley didn't suit up after learning he broke some ribs and was mistakenly told that he had also broken his right elbow during Basha's game against Chandler in Week 7 in 2015. Kelley had felt some chest pain in games prior to the Chandler contest.

X-rays were taken when Kelley began to feel the pain, but X-rays can't really reveal fresh fractured ribs, according to the Mayo Clinic. Kelley continued to play until after the Chandler game, when he took a hit that sent him to the emergency room to get his chest checked again.

While in the ER, Kelley began to feel pain in his right throwing arm and elbow. X-rays on his ribs and elbow finally revealed four broken ribs and, according to an X-ray technician, a broken elbow.

Kelley didn't believe his elbow was broken because he could still move his arm, but he was still concerned about his future.

He canceled his recruiting trip to UCLA because of the injuries



Ryan Kelley with his mom Martha and dad Ted (photo by Jose Garcia of azpreps365.com)

and thought about a career in coaching if playing was out of the question.

But a couple of days later, after the ER visit, a specialist told Kelley to put his coaching plans on hold, because he just had a sprained elbow. He sat out the following week's game and returned to action with a flak jacket, which he wore prior to the Chandler game, two weeks after getting sidelined and still not 100 percent.

Kelley also continued with the stressful college recruiting process. Because of his ability to make every throw in the pocket or on the run, athleticism, smarts, and competitiveness, Kelley is considered one of the nation's elite dual threats at his position, according to his 6th-year QB coach Dennis Gile of the QB Academy.

The injuries did affect Kelley's mechanics and consistency, though, but he's almost back to his old self. "Ryan has such an extreme arm talent," Gile said. "But the hard work he's put in is a testament to the kid's dedication."

On the recruiting front, Kelley narrowed his college choices to Oregon, Arizona State, Cal, Michigan State and UCLA in October and picked Oregon a couple of weeks later.

The rapport he struck with then Oregon offensive coordinator Scott Frost was the biggest reason Oregon won out, he said. But on Dec. 1 Frost was named Central Florida's head coach.

The coaching exit combined with Oregon not communicating with Kelley for a couple of weeks during Oregon's Spring ball left Kelley questioning if Oregon was the right fit. That opened the door for ASU, which stepped in full-force.

The day after ASU announced Chip Lindsey as its new offensive coordinator, and 12 days after Frost's move to Central Florida became official, Lindsey showed up at Basha. It was an awkward first meeting with Kelley, who was decked out in Oregon garb while working out in the weight room.

But the Oregon green didn't dissuade Lindsey from giving his ASU sales pitch to Kelley. Kelley gave himself enough time to think things through as he tried to form a bond with Oregon's new offen-



Ryan Kelley on the move (photo by Steve Paynter of Paynter Pics)

sive coordinator and quarterback coach and stayed in touch with Lindsey.

On May 1, Kelley and his parents visited the ASU campus to meet with supposedly just Lindsey, but when the Kelleys got off an elevator they were greeted by an ASU contingent, including ASU offensive line coach Chris Thomsen, recruiting coordinator Donnie Yantis, recruiter Ryne Rezac and Lindsey. ASU coach Todd Graham joined the group on that day, driving directly from an airport to ASU to talk with the Kelleys.

"There were all these people there," said Martha, Kelley's mom. "We didn't expect that at all. It was really nice and welcoming. It felt like we were home.

"That was the clincher, seeing everybody."

But Oregon had one last prayer after ASU's May 1st Sunday congregation of coaches.

The following day, Oregon's new QB coach David Yost visited Kelley at Basha.

On Tuesday night May 3rd Kelley called Oregon coach Mark Helfrich to tell him he was decommitting. On May 4 Texas A&M offensive coordinator Noel Mazzone, who used to coach at ASU and live a block away from the park Kelley trains at, visited Kelley at Basha. So did University of Auburn offensive coordinator Rhett Lashlee.

On Friday May 6 Kelley made it official on social media: Forks up. "I knew it was ASU," Kelley said. "Me and Chip (Lindsey), we had a great relationship.

"I wouldn't change a thing about the recruiting process. You need to talk it out to make the right decision for you. Don't listen to friends, family or coaches. You have to be selfish, because you are going to be the one living at the school, not them."

Something's missing.

What's lacking from the resumes of Kelley and Basha in recent years are signature playoff moments.

Since Kelley open enrolled at the school, Basha is 18-18 in the past three seasons. But achieving postseason triumphs is tough when Chandler sister school powers Chandler High and Hamilton are in Basha's backyard.

Kelley wants what Chandler High and Hamilton have for his program. Any individual accolades or attention that comes his way, he shares it.

During the interview for this story he raved about his left tackle Jonathan Nathaniel, receiver Terrell Brown, nose tackle Mike Brown, a transfer from Tucson, and how motivated his team is this year.

"There's no ego," said Martha about her son. "He doesn't like to be pulled aside to do interviews, but when he does them he wants the whole team to get the credit."

At home, Kelley is grateful for the team he has there as well.

Martha is an active participant in Basha's football booster club, and Ted, Kelley's father, designed Basha's football program. His other two role models, sisters Gillian and Brianna, have left the nest.

Gillian is a school teacher, and Brianna is in college.

"I'm blessed," Kelley said. "I'm definitely lucky because of them. They've always giving me everything I've needed to get me where I need to be, and my sisters always challenged me to get better."

Kelley, like his team at Basha, has a lot to prove this year.

For some reason, the 6-foot-4, 190-pound signal caller's stock is down nationally. He is also no longer considered the top-dual QB threat in the nation but will get the chance to prove he belongs with the best. On Jan. 1, in Orlando, Fla. he'll play in the Under Armour All-American Game, which ESPN will televise. If he continues on the same career passing path, he can become the state's all-time career passing 5A/6A leader if he throws at least for 2,664 yards this season.

But ask him what is driving him more than anything this year, and, as is always the case with Kelley, his focus is on the team.

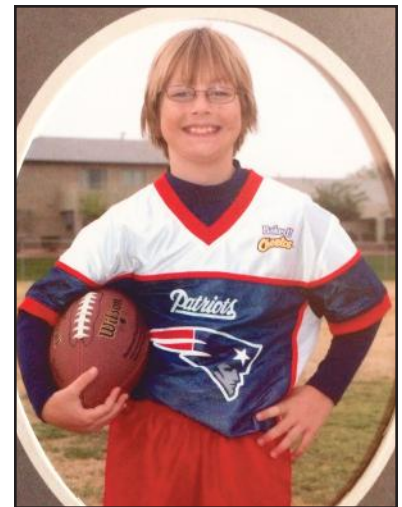
"A state championship," he said.

5 ?'s with Ryan Kelley

Best advice, quote: "Philippians 4:13 Bible verse: I can do anything through Christ, who gives me strength."

Is it true that you used to play the trumpet?: "Yes, in 5th and 6th grade. I was first chair. It was fun. Me and my friend Johnny Meere, we would always do solos at our little band concerts, so that was fun."

Instagram, Twitter or Snapchat?: "I like Twitter and Instagram. I have more followers on Twitter (https://twitter.com/Ryankelley_14). I have more little kids who follow me on Twitter, so I always try to Tweet motivational things. On Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/ryankelley14/>) I post a lot of things about football and every once in a while something fun about doing something with my friends."



Most embarrassing moment: "When I was younger I had super long blonde hair and wore glasses. And that was pretty embarrassing to look back at. I was a skater kid."

Favorite emoji: "The face with the money eyes and the money tongue. Just because of the way it looks."

Brandon Ruiz Headed to Alabama



Alabama Head Coach Nick Saban with Brandon Ruiz (photo courtesy of the Ruiz Family)

By Andy Morales
azpreps365.com

Williams Field kicker Brandon Ruiz attended an Alabama camp in early June and he committed to the program days later after receiving a phone call from legendary coach Nick Saban. Yes, when you are good, things work that fast.

Ruiz, 5-foot-10, 170 pounds, had the distance and hang time coaches were looking for on kickoffs and his accuracy on field goals was equally impressive. Don't be surprised if he breaks the state record of 63 yards held by Jeff Locke (Mountain Ridge in 2007).

Ruiz routinely breaks that mark in practice and his personal record is 76 yards. His 79-yard, 4.1 second hang time on a kickoff at a camp in South Carolina made him a U.S. Army All-American, the first from his school.

His competition this year?

Nathan Taylor made a 57-yarder for Thunderbird last year and he is now playing for Colorado State-Pueblo. Ruiz will be pushed by Coronado senior Alfredo "Junior" Marquez this year. Marquez nailed a 53-yarder last year and is

deadly from 45 and in. O'Connor senior Trey Ratkovich also hit from 53 yards last year. Cesar Chavez junior Carlos Ritchie made a 51-yarder last year also.

We talked with Ruiz on his incredible summer:

Question: When did you start kicking and when did you know you were getting good at it?

Answer: I started kicking in 8th grade. My brother Blake taught me and I knew I was good my freshman year.

Q: Tell us how the process with Alabama came about?

A: I attended their camp and competed with the best kickers across the country. Alabama had always been my dream.

Q: How did they inform you? Was it right away?

A: No it was a four-day process for them to make their decision and then I got the call from Coach Saban.

Q: What was your parents' reaction to the news?

A: They were super excited. This is what we were all hoping for.

Q: Did you say yes right away?

A: Yes, we talked as a family over the four days before.

Q: What is your longest kick? Longest in a game and longest in practice?

A: 51-yard game winner (against Mesa) and 79 in practice but 76 is on film.

Q: Tell us about all the all-star games or camps you are doing this summer.

A: The only camps I did this summer were Alabama and Tennessee where I earned offers at each and the Top Gun last week in South Carolina where I competed and earned a spot in the Army All American Game.

Q: Have any other schools tried to get you to drop Alabama and commit to them since?

A: Some have stayed in contact but I'm completely committed to Alabama.

Q: What is Saban like in person?

A: He is intimidating but very nice and down to earth.

5A Conference Preseason Rankings

By Andy Morales
azpreps365.com

No. 1. Desert Edge: The Scorpions are stacked. Almost every top player returns from the 2015 Division III championship team that went 12-2, keeping the streak of at least 10 wins a year over the last four years alive for head coach Rich Wellbrock (64-13). Wellbrock's "worse" year was a respectable 7-4 mark in 2011. He took that team and finished 13-1 the following year so imagine what he can do after a state championship? Senior QB Tehran Thomas ran the offense last year with 1,149 yards passing and 1,652 yards rushing. Sr. RB Roshawn Johnson (688 yards rushing and 481 receiving), Sr. LB Eric Marsh (89 tackles), Sr. LB Vince Delponte (100 tackles), Jr. RB Rocky Perez (1,040 yards) and Jr. LB Treyvon Williams (94 tackles) also return. Some might question the shift from D-III to 5A but that can be said for almost every other team. Desert Edge is not just another team.

No. 2. Centennial: In a world full of first-year coaches, Richard Taylor is starting his 27th year with the Coyotes. The Coyotes have finished 12-2 three of the last four years including last year where the team won a Division I state championship. The separation between Centennial and Desert Edge comes from the loss of QB Isaac Steele (2,205 yards passing), RB Quentin Gomez (1,478 yards rushing), RB John Rincon (666) and his top two receivers (Carl Barrs and Marcel Perez) to graduation. Still, eight starters return and Taylor has a proven record of success with 10 plus wins a year since, well, forever.

No. 3. Chaparral: Questions remain after Conrad Hamilton resigned in April to join Todd Graham's staff at Arizona State. Former New York Giants first-round draft pick Thomas Lewis (1994) will be entering his first year with Firebirds and he inherited another stacked team that includes Sr. QB Grayson Barry (1,885 yards passing) along with Sr. WR Gianni Tomasi (438) and Sr. LB Parker Walton (96 tackles). Even though Thomas is the programs' fourth coach since 2011 expectations remain high.

No. 4. Paradise Valley: Greg Davis is in his third year with the Trojans and he has compiled a 23-3 record at the school including a Division III runner-up finish last year and a Division II quarterfinal appearance in his first year. "We graduated so many players that this will be a completely different team," Davis wrote. "We are looking for all of our players to improve dramatically during the course of the season. Looking forward to a great year. This will be a rebuilding year for us, but the expectations do not lower. We are looking for athletes that can rise to the expectations."

No. 5. Williams Field: Steve Campbell is in his ninth year with the Black Hawks. He has won at least eight games a year including a 9-3 team from last year that kept the streak alive. He also earned a No. 3 ranking heading into the Division II playoffs. Receiver Max Fine returns (953 yards) along with Justis Stokes (584). Place Kicker Brandon Ruiz has committed to play for Alabama. The No. 1 ranked kicker in the country, Ruiz also fielded offers from ASU and Arizona.

No. 6. Queen Creek: Travis Schureman has compiled an impressive 30-9 record with the Bulldogs including a 9-3 campaign last year that included a No. 2 ranking in Division II. The QB position is in question and the Bulldogs will have four new starters in the defensive backfield, still there is a new sense of tradition at the school. "At Queen Creek, we have high expectations about being successful every sea-



Coach Rich Wellbrock and his Desert Edge squad (photo by Chris Hook of maxpreps.com)

son, including winning championships," Schureman wrote. "That will continue to be the same expectation we have this year. We expect to make the playoffs and be a team that competes for a state title."

No. 7. Ironwood Ridge: Matt Johnson lost a few big names to graduation including, All-State lineman Chase Laurita, the offensive threats in Harrison Beemiller and Cole McLafferty along with top defender Jared McKemy but he's been written off before. He has collected 62 wins and a state title (2012) in his eight years with the Nighthawks. He always finds a way. Sr. QB Cole Gerken returns (1,098 yards) along with Sr. tight end/linebacker Daniel Peabody. According to Johnson, a great attitude and competition at every spot is the team's strength this year.

No. 8. Sunnyslope: Damon Pieri is starting his sixth year with the Vikings. The Vikings went 31-4 over the last three years including a semifinal appearance (11-2) in Division III last year. Even with all that success, Pieri sees lack of varsity experience and lack of team speed as weaknesses. "We need to improve in all areas," Pieri wrote. "We have a very young team with no experience." This could be a defining year for the Vikings. It could cement the program as a contender.

No. 9. Verrado: Derek Wahlstrom is starting his sixth year with the Vipers. He led the team to a 10-2 record and a 34-27 semifinal loss to eventual Division III state champion Desert Edge last year. The move to a higher division this year leaves lots of questions. "To play against a deeper level of competition this upcoming season may not show an improvement numerically," Wahlstrom wrote. "But we will find out how good we really are over the course of an entire season." QB Lathan Lax (2,519 yards passing and 27 TDs) has graduated so this will be a huge test for Wahlstrom and the Vipers.

No. 10. Cienega: Based on the theory that there is always one surprise team, the Bobcats could be that team. Pat Nugent went 4-6 in his first year with Cienega. Nugent rebuilt Canyon del Oro before helping to rebuild Pima Community College and he appears to have the pieces together to do the same with the Bobcats after the legendary Nemer Hassey resigned to be the school principal. Salpointe transfer Jamarye Joiner looks to be the added boost the Bobcats need and will battle for QB time.

2016 5A Football Preview



LB Parker Walton, Chaparral (photo by Michael Cazares of maxpreps.com)

By Andy Morales
azpreps365.com

REGION I: SOUTHERN REGION

Buena: The Colts posted a disappointing 0-10 record last year under first-year coach Joe Thomas. The school record is 12 losses in a row (1997-1999). Thomas is the program's 12th coach in 19 years. Braxton Bennett graduated which leaves the QB position wide open. Bennet only played nine games but still managed to throw for almost 1,300 yards on an offense with very little rushing offense (552 total rushing yards). Reports have Sr. Chris McGuyer moving over to receiver with freshman Jovoni Borbon battling for the top QB spot. Senior transfer Trijan Powell (Pennsylvania) looks to figure into the throw-

ing offense as well. The Colts will open up at Tucson on Aug. 19.

Cienega: Pat Nugent went 4-6 in his first year with Cienega. Nugent rebuilt Canyon del Oro before helping to rebuild Pima Community College and he appears to have the pieces together to do the same with the Bobcats after the legendary Nemer Hassey resigned to be the school principal. A program known for its quarterbacks, Sr. Tyler Hammons threw for only 797 yards last year. Adriell Alvarado threw for over 2,000 yards the year before and finished with 5,910 career yards and Michael Archie threw for over 2,000 yards before that and Jordan Mills finished with 4,510 career yards prior to Archie taking over. Current professional baseball player Seth Mejias-Brean collected 4,198 ca-

reer yards to start things off. Salpointe transfer Jamarye Joiner looks to be the added boost the Bobcats need and will work with Hammons for QB time. Seniors Aaron Sauls and Nico Jordan return from the running back position but the top receivers have all graduated. Walker Frighetti was the top graduate.

Ironwood Ridge: Matt Johnson is in his eighth year with the Nighthawks and he has collected 62 wins and one state championship (2012). He lost a few big names to graduation including, All-State lineman Chase Laurita, the offensive threats in Harrison Beemiller and Cole McLafferty along with top defender Jared McKemy. Sr. QB Cole Gerken returns (1,098 yards) along with Sr. tight end/linebacker Daniel Peabody. Johnson lists linebackers Tommy Baden and Ken Samson as two of his top returners along with linemen Kyle Breed, Noah Becerra, Brayden Smith and Mike Kreamer. "We lost 14 starters for 22 spots on offense and defense, Johnson wrote. "Four of out of five starting linemen graduated." According to Johnson, a great attitude and competition at every spot is the team's strength this year.

Mountain View Marana: Head coach Bam McRae in in his fifth year with the Mountain Lions. His biggest loss to graduation was QB Justice Summerset. Summerset finished his career with 5,264 career passing yards, becoming only the fifth from Southern Arizona to pass for more than 5,000 yards in a career. Summerset holds the state high jump record (7-2.5) and will be competing for Arizona this year. Sr. Caleb Ryden only attempted 10 passes last year. Top running back Bryce Coleman (1,124 yards) also graduated along with all-purpose standout Deshaun-Flannigan-Fowles. The program returns one of the top receivers in the state in Sr. Isaiah Lovett (852 yards) but Sr. Stan Berryhill, Jr. moved to California in the summer. The Mountain Lions have not made the playoffs since 2013.

Sahuaro: Scott McKee is in his eighth year with the Cougars, making the playoffs five years in a row and seven of his eight years with the program. QB Stephen Miller has graduated along with his top running backs Alec Valenzuela and Ernie Loreto and receiver Jacob Miller. Almost all of the top returners are from the offense and defensive lines. The Cougars open up at rival Sabino on a rare Thursday game, Aug. 18.

REGION II: SONORAN REGION

Cholla: Ryan Scherling will be in his first year at Cholla. Scherling was successful at Buena, posting back-to-back playoff teams including an 8-3 campaign in 2012. The

Chargers flirted with a playoff spot last year at 6-4 but the program has not been to the postseason since 2005 when they finished 9-3. Cholla has only won 24 games since that year. Quarterback Bobby Vega-Rodriguez has graduated but running back Shawn David Fontenette is slated to return for his senior year.

Desert View: Robert Bonillas is in his fourth year with the Jaguars. The former University of Arizona standout led the team to three wins to open up the 2015 campaign but six straight losses followed. Bonillas lists Alex Courtemanche, Cesar Olivas, Jesus Equihua, Omar Yussuf, Carlitos Ybarra and Anthony Frausto as his top returners. Bonillas feels his players are beginning to understand their roles and he lists that as one of his key points on defense this year.

Flowing Wells: Mark Brunenkant is in his eighth year with the Caballeros and the program is coming off of a 9-2 campaign with the two losses coming to state champion Pusch Ridge and state runner-up Northwest Christian. The Caballeros suffered some huge losses to graduation including QB Julio Sandoval, RB/WR Tyler Stiltner (1,314 total yards) but the biggest void will be from the graduation of RB Dionte Flores and his 2,062 yards rushing. Sr. Dylan Valenzuela rushed for 659 yards last year. The program also lost the top two defenders in Henry Barboa (118 tackles) and Flores (117) but Sr. DT Kevin Sotelo (84) returns.

Marana: Andy Litten is in his fifth year with the Tigers. The program finished 6-4 last year with two heartbreaking losses (39-36 to Nogales and 35-28 to Sabino) keeping the team from reaching the playoffs for the first time since 2007. Litten returns the majority of skill positions back including Sr. QB Connor Leavens (1,397 yards) and So. QB/WR Trenton Bourguet. Bourguet collected 771 yards passing as a freshman. Other top returners according to Litten include WR BJ McDaniel (651 yards), WR Dominic Gehr (387), OL Travis Darrough and DL Cameron Sample. "I think we can be one of the best offensive units in the state if we can stay healthy and find a good combination in our offensive line," Litten said. "We need our defense to step up and match our offense. We have the talent, just need the kids to make the plays."

Poston Butte: Cody Collett will be in his first year at Poston Butte. Collett went 27-14 at Prescott. His prior experience included coordinator stints at Red Mountain and Dobson. Collett replaces legendary coach Paul Moro. Moro needs seven more wins to become Arizona all-time winningest coach and is now at Marcos de Niza. The Broncos went 0-10 last year. Sr. quarterback Shavez Hawkins threw for 773 yards last year and Sr. Running back Brandon Hatfield rushed for 826 yards and pulled down 257 yards through the air. Jr. LB Tyler Thompson (93) tackles also returns.



Chase Cord, Sunrise Mountain (photo by Kevin Abele of maxpreps.com)

REGION III: UNION REGION

Betty H. Fairfax: Dylan Winemiller is entering his third year with the Stampede. He posted an 8-3 record last year, the best finish since 2010. "We return an experienced coaching staff in place that the kids play hard for. In particular, our secondary coach Kevan Walker, who has brought his coaching pedigree, a level of enthusiasm, and knowledge to our secondary that will have them playing at a high level," Winemiller wrote. Walker is the son of collegiate and NFL coach Dwayne Walker. "We have potential, and we have to do a great job of coaching our kids in a way to maximize it," Winemiller added. Winemiller listed seven top returning seniors: FS/Ret SP Shamar Moreland, WR Ezzard Carroll, ILB/FB Kaleb Williams, OL/DL Emilio Hernandez, RB Jamarius Jamerson, QB Andrew Zemruski and WR DaRon Stevenson. Jr. WR Chris Richardson is his top newcomer.

Camelback: Joseph Brissette is in his first year with the Spartans. The team finished 4-6 last year and has only posted one winning record (6-5 in 2011) in the last decade. Brissette will have to replace QB Alejandro Ruiz (734 yards) and RB Elijah Newkirk (520), WR Anthony Stennis (293) and top defender Henry Monzon (68 tackles). Multi-purpose athlete Choya Hampton is slated to return for his senior season.

Carl Hayden: Randy Gross is in his first year with the Falcons. We plan on being a run based offense and that is extremely physical especially in between the tackles," Gross wrote. "Defensively we will be a sound group that will hopefully be able to line up and play against anybody." Gross coached at

Trevor Browne from 2007-2010 where he produced the first playoff team in a decade but Carl Hayden might prove to be more difficult. The program has only produced 17 wins since 2004 with no winning records. Sr. QB Mario Castaneda returns.

Glendale: Rob York coached Kingman from 2009-2012 before moving over to be a coordinator at Agua Fria. He will be in his first year with the Cardinals. Glendale last made the playoffs in 2006. York will need to replace QB Carlos Meza (1,435 yards and 17 touchdowns) but Sr. RB Henry Duanah (1,061 yards) and Jr. RB Isaiah Biggs (439) are due to return as are Sr. receivers Byron Bowen (556) and George Apodaca (297) and Curtis Barrientos (269). Sr. defenders Chris Hankins (55 tackles) and Johan Soto (50) also return.

Independence: Santiago Maldonado is in his fourth year with the Patriots. Success has been difficult with only three wins since 2012. RB/CB Joshua Fisher is slated to return to the Patriots for his senior year.

South Mountain: Mark Carter is starting his first year with the Jaguars. "The job at South Mountain is being taken care of by two people. Myself (Mark Carter) and my assistant head coach and twin brother (Marcus Carter)," Carter wrote. "This has been a dream of ours since we started coaching football. To run a program together. Our staff is comprised of young energetic coaches who are alumni, who have played on the collegiate level and some on the semi-pro level. Our staff has been working tirelessly since I got the job to ensure we put a great product on the field and to make a positive impact on our student-athletes." Key players include: LB/TE Jayson Garcia, LB/OL Nestor Avila, DI/OL Rawshaad Moore, DB/WR Keon Edwards, DB/RB Robert Williams, DB/WR Kendrick Revels, QB Jeremiah Williams and DB/WR Gavin Hak.

REGION IV: NORTHEAST VALLEY

Arcadia: Lenny Abt is entering his fifth year with the Titans. Abt is looking to build on his 2015 campaign where the Titans returned to the state playoffs for the first time since 2011. Abt points to returners RB Ryan Alexandre, QB Luke Ashworth, dual threat Cameron Brown, lineman Mekhi Beler and TE Aaron Formanek. "Returning players working hard and bringing along the new additions to the varsity squad (is our strength)," Abt wrote.

Chaparral: Thomas Lewis is in his first year with the Firebirds after Conrad Hamilton resigned in April to join Todd Graham's staff at Arizona State. A former NFL wide receiver, Lewis was a first round pick of the New York Giants in 1994. Sr. QB Grayson Barry (1,885 yards passing) returns along with Sr. WR Gianni Tomasi (438) but the Firebirds lost RBs Kurt Shughart (839) and Spencer Greenberg (829) to graduation.

Senior linebacker Parker Walton (96 tackles) returns.

North Canyon: Jose Lucero is in his first year with the Rattlers. Lucero was the offensive coordinator at Desert Edge the last four years. "I think an important story to tell is how, in this day when transferring schools is a very common thing, the top recruit in the state of Arizona was found at a school who has struggled over the years," Lucero wrote. "It speaks to the true character of Austin Jackson the he has chosen to remain a North Canyon Rattler and has displayed great commitment to his school, community and friends." Besides Sr. lineman Jackson, Lucero names WR/DB Solomon Enis, QB Trevor Leinstock, LB/WR Tre O'Guinn, OL/DL Chase Killough and WR/DB Samson Enis WR/DB his top returners. The rattlers finished 1-9 last year but Lucero sees that changing, "We expect to show great improvement from previous years," he added. "We are going to play an exciting brand of football and expect to push for the playoffs."

Notre Dame Prep: Mark Nolan is in his second year with the Saints. "We have Charlie McBride helping us out for a second year," Nolan said about the former Nebraska assistant who spent 23 years with the Huskers. "Having a guy who coordinated the Nebraska defense in six National Championship games is a real asset to our team. A real blessing for us all." Top returners are: QB Kylan Weisser (1,150 yards passing), QB/FS Cam Yowell, RB Cole Fisher, WR Jordan Stengel, WR Blake Storey and DE Kyle White.

Paradise Valley: Top returners are RB/DB Jared Beamon (1,192 rushing yards, 20 TDs), center Andrew Morris, LB Max Seifer (116 total tackles, 2 INT), guard Joseph Caballero, DL Jason Valenzuela and DL Parker Johnson.

REGION V: EAST VALLEY

Campo Verde: Max Ragsdale is in his seventh year with the Coyotes. Ragsdale lists experience at important positions and depth on his line as his biggest concern this year but he brings back CB Khalil White, LB Eric Healy, LB Joseph Mask, DT Jayden Lee and T/DT Jozia Myers. QB Cole Pineda (1,497 yards passing and 225 rushing) has graduated but he returns his top to RBs in Sr. Trevor Crowe (383) and Sr. Jacob Cabezudo (283). WR Elijah Jones (823) has also graduated. The Coyotes have not had a winning season since 2013 when they finished 9-3.

Mesquite: Jim Jones retired after three years with the Wildcats. Former MaxPreps National Coach of the Year Chad DeGrenier will be taking over. DeGrenier led Cactus Shadows to a 15-0 record in 2006 and then moved over to lead Mesa Mountain View in 2011. He left the Toros after posting a 3-8 record last year. A former quarterback with Washington State and the Arizona Rattlers,



Jack Warner, Lake Havasu (photo by Mark Jones of maxpreps.com)

DeGrenier has used some of his connections to bring former ASU and Oakland Raider QB Andrew Walter to his staff. Senior quarterback Preston Smith returns along with senior wide receiver Robert Ortiz.

Queen Creek: Coach Travis Schureman lists RB/DB, Jace Koester, WR/DB Armon McGuire, WR/LB Ian Woods, T Mike Young, T Tyson Gardner, RB/LB Packer Brown and MLB Sam Oram as his key returners. "We only have two returning starters on defense - Oram and Brown - and we will have four new starters in the defensive backfield," He added. "We have four players competing for the starting quarterback job - Devin Larsen, Braxton Gries, Wyatt Harris and Joey Martin."

Vista Grande: Tracy Stuart is entering his fourth year with the Spartans. He guided the program to their first playoff appearance last year with a 7-4 record. He lists DL Skylar Collins, WB Alec Meza, QB Sam Barragon, WR Brendan Ethington, OL Chris Ortega, LB Jesus Velasco, OL Juan Castro, TE D'montae Williams and OL/DL Alex Soto as his top returners.

REGION VI: METRO

Apollo: Zack Threadgill is entering his 11th year with the Hawks. He led the program to its first playoff appearance since 2012 last year and finished the season with a 7-4 record. "We graduated a lot of seniors," Threadgill wrote. "We will have a young team but we are excited for their opportunity." His top returners are: WR/DB Josh Raskin, OL/DL Andres Primero OL/DL, OL Pedro Hernandez, OL/DL Kaleb Seumanutafa, QB Chris Russell, ATH Taz Middleton and WR Alric Howell. New players to watch out for: WR/DB Jontae Garland, WR Adam Pieri and RB/LB Roderick Lockett.

Ironwood: Ian Curtis is entering his seventh year with the Eagles. The team finished an even 5-5 last year and went to the playoffs in 2011. "Three of the games we lost last season were by a touchdown or less," Curtis explained. "In each of these games we turned the ball over at least five times. We will not turn over the football this season with this kind of regularity. We will win the turnover battle." The team returns nine starters including QB Mason Nguyen, RB Ronnie Gandara, RB Isaiah Young, OL Isaiah Brown, WR Dustin Hoffarth, WR Jaylin Lemons, DL Sean James and DB Manuel Romero. "We will be tested early in the season when we face off against three east valley schools," Curtis added. "I expect us to compete for a region championship in 2016."

Maricopa: Chris McDonald is in his third year with the Rams. The program just missed out on the playoffs last year despite a 7-3 record. QB Aaron Owens (1,844 yards) has graduated along with WR Johnny Johnson Jr. (782 yards) but McDonald lists several key returners: WR/DB David Owens, OL/DL Dakota Halverson, OL/DL Nic Carbajal, RB/LB Cameron Sanders, DB Jathan Washington, DB Kemo Akins, WR/DB Longman Pyne, RB/LB Claytin Valenzuela, TE Johnny Smith Jr. and LB Eanis Olmos.

McClintock: Spencer Waggoner is starting his second year with the Chargers. The team recorded two wins last year and has not had a winning record since 2006. Waggoner lists several top returners with DB Kydell Snyder (9 interceptions), Quintin Matthews (7 Ints) and LB Damon Crawford (89 tackles) standing out. Other top returners include: Adan Tinoco (DB), Zane Hekking (Tackle), Evans Lindor (Tackle), Ruben Amancio-Ramos (Gaurd/Center), Hakeem Mathieu (DE), Pete Lopez (QB), Lawrence



Andrew Ruelas, Centennial (photo by Jim Willittes of maxpreps.com)

Charles (WR), Francisco Reyes (WR) and Alayjon Tamplin (DT).

Raymond S. Kellis: Shawn Copeland is entering his third year with the Cougars. The team finished 3-7 last year, rebounding from an 0-10 campaign the year before and Copeland is hoping for a lot more: "If we stay healthy and have a great summer we should be a team to reckon with during the playoffs," he wrote. Sr. QB Kimani Nelson (1,400 yards passing) returns along with Jr. WR/RB Josiah Bailey (610 yards receiving and 725 rushing). RB Anthony Ramirez (1,392) graduated.

Sunnyslope: Damon Pieri is starting his sixth year with the Vikings. The Vikings went 31-4 over the last three years including a semifinal appearance last year. Even with all that success, Pieri sees lack of varsity experience and lack of team speed as weaknesses. He lists CB Marcus Fox, WR/CB Marlon Noralez and DB Colby Holt as his top returners. "We need to improve in all areas," Pieri wrote. "We have a very young team with no experience."

REGION VII: DESERT WEST

Agua Fria: Former Sierra Linda coach Ross Crow is taking over but he will have to go without QB Jalen Green (965 yards passing, 1,301 yards rushing and 24 touchdowns) and RB Chris Cofield (1,555 yards rushing, 234 yards receiving and 26 touchdowns). CB DJ Charles (71 tackles) returns for his senior season.

Barry Goldwater: Rich Metcalf is entering his fourth year with the Bulldogs. The program went 0-10 last year after finishing 5-5 the year before. "The nucleus of our coaching staff returns for my fourth season," Metcalf wrote. "Some changes on both offense

and defense within the coaching staff is nothing any other 0-10 team might work through." Sr. WR Kellen Ray (263 yards receiving), Sr. QB Isaiah Ellis (1,955 yards passing), Sr. OL/DL Isaiah Arana and Jr. LB Wyatt Jordan return.

Deer Valley: Eric Bolus is starting his fourth year with the Skyhawks. The team finished 2-8 last year after back-to-back 8-3 campaigns. Bolus lists his offensive line and linebackers as his greatest strength this year. He lists several key returning players: OL/DL Joey Ramos, WR/DB Dez Melton, RB/LB Tali Tanai, TE/DL Ryley Conaway, QB Kyler Angst and WR/DB Chandler Pearson.

Desert Edge: Rich Wellbrock is entering his seventh year with the program. He has won at least 10 games five of the last six years including a 12-2 record and a Division III state championship last year. He returns almost every top player from his championship season. Sr. QB Tehran Thomas (1,149 yards passing and 1,652 yards rushing), Sr. RB Roshawn Johnson (688 yards rushing and 481 receiving), Sr. LB Eric Marsh (89 tackles), Sr. LB Vince Delponte (100 tackles), Jr. RB Rocky Perez (1,040 yards), Jr. LB Treyvon Williams (94 tackles), OL/DL Max Wilhite, OL/DL Tyson Jones, OL/DL Austin Young and Sr. lineman Dante Blissit

Lake Havasu: Karl Thompson is entering his eighth year with the Knights. He led the program to one of the best finishes in school history last year with a record of 11-2 and a 17-14 overtime semifinal loss to eventual Division III state champion Pusch Ridge. Thompson lists his running back position as his biggest concern and with good reason - Jacob Kalogonis graduated and took his 1,257 yards rushing and 383 yards receiving along with his 25 touchdowns with him. QB Jack Warner (1,950 yards passing) returns for his senior year

Verrado: Derek Wahlstrom is starting his sixth year with the Vipers. He led the team to a 10-2 record and a 34-27 semifinal loss to eventual Division III state champion Desert Edge. The move to a higher division this year leaves lots of questions. "To play against a deeper level of competition this upcoming season may not show an improvement numerically," Wahlstrom wrote. "But we will find out how good we really are over the course of an entire season." He lists FB/MLB Donte Richardson, CB Tino Cruz, RB JaTai Jenkins and FS Eli Johnson as his top returning players. QB Lathan Lax (2,519 yards passing and 27 TDs) has graduated.

REGION VIII: NORTHWEST

Centennial: Richard Taylor is in his 27th year with the Coyotes where winning 10 games or more a year is the norm. The Coyotes have finished 12-2 three of the last four years including last year where the team won a Division I state championship. Taylor says



Kaden Dodge, Liberty (photo by Mark Jones of maxpreps.com)

the goals at Centennial are always high but he would still like to improve in all three phases of the game. He returns eight starters and lists the following players as his top returners: DE/TE Andrew Nichols, OL Andrew Ruelas, LB/RB Taylor Fiame, S/RB Isaac Haney, WR Connor Sovacki, LB/RB Marcus Wakeham TE/DE Jared Villa DB/WR Gleason Sprewell DB Gage Franklin and P Jacob Parks. He does lose QB Isaac Steele (2,2025 yards passing and RB Quentin Gomez (1,478 yards rushing, RB John Rincon (666) and his top two receivers to graduation.

Liberty: Mark Smith is in his second year with the Lions. The team went 4-7 last year. Smith indicated he is looking for playmakers this year so he can compete for a region title. He lists Sr. RB Colton Newton (786 yards rushing and 359 receiving) and defenders Kaden Dodge (65 tackles) and Ryan Puskas as his top returners.

Shadow Ridge: Ray Karvis is starting his third year with the Stallions. The team finished 3-7 in 2014 and 2015. QB Austin Ansbach (1,113 yards passing) has graduated but Jr. RB Scotty Nixon (704) yards rushing) is slated to return. The top five receivers have also graduated.

Sierra Linda: The Bulldogs finished 4-6 last year and this year might prove difficult with nine of the top offensive players graduated. Jr. LB Jaiil Mitchell returns.

Willow Canyon: Joe Martinez is in his fourth year with the Wildcats. The team went 2-8 last year. Sr. QB Jacob Hale (1,059 yards passing and 312 yards rushing) returns as does Sr. LB Brendan Kinnee (100 tackles).

2016-17 Enrollment Figures

In 1964, Phoenix Union High School reported an enrollment of 6,320 students to the Arizona Interscholastic Association. It was one of the highest enrollments ever recorded in the state. Phoenix Union closed its doors in 1982.

Today, Hamilton leads the enrollment charge, but it doesn't even come close to the number of students who once roamed Phoenix Union's halls.

Class 6A (42 teams)

Hamilton: 3850 Public
 Mesa: 3464 Public
 Red Mountain: 3415 Public
 Perry: 3405 Public
 Mountain View, Mesa: 3355 Public
 Tucson: 3208 Public
 Maryvale: 3148 Public
 Chandler: 3130 Public
 Westwood: 3114 Public
 Desert Vista: 3107 Public
 Highland: 3094 Public
 Trevor G. Browne: 3011 Public
 Corona del Sol: 2899 Public
 Alhambra: 2816 Public
 San Luis: 2761 Public
 Desert Ridge: 2716 Public
 Cesar Chavez: 2693 Public
 Dobson: 2681 Public
 Mountain Pointe: 2647 Public
 Brophy Prep: 2628 Private
 Cibola: 2628 Public
 Boulder Creek: 2590 Public
 Skyline: 2576 Public
 North: 2561 Public
 Valley Vista: 2556 Public
 Basha: 2528 Public
 Tolleson Union: 2517 Public
 Pinnacle: 2470 Public
 Sandra Day O'Connor: 2443 Public
 Westview: 2440 Public
 Xavier Prep: 2416 Private
 Gilbert: 2413 Public
 Central: 2361 Public
 Copper Canyon: 2350 Public
 Mountain Ridge: 2283 Public

Kofa: 2265 Public
 Desert Mountain: 2263 Public
 Horizon: 2260 Public
 La Joya Community: 2234 Public
 Rincon/University: 2215 Public
 Millennium: 2215 Public
 Sunnyside: 2207 Public

5A (43 teams)

Buena: 2180 Public
 Liberty: 2172 Public
 Camelback: 2138 Public
 Desert View: 2131 Public
 Independence: 2125 Public
 Carl Hayden: 2124 Public
 Chaparral: 2104 Public
 Centennial: 2095 Public
 Cienega: 2054 Public
 Campo Verde: 2043 Public
 Apollo: 2037 Public
 Sunnyslope: 2033 Public
 Shadow Ridge: 2013 Public
 Marana: 2012 Public
 Queen Creek: 1975 Public
 Ironwood: 1954 Public
 Poston Butte: 1951 Public
 Maricopa: 1949 Public
 Willow Canyon: 1946 Public
 Vista Grande: 1941 Public
 Mountain View Marana: 1928 Public
 Verrado: 1918 Public
 North Canyon: 1916 Public
 Sierra Linda: 1913 Public
 Raymond S. Kellis: 1906 Public
 Mesquite: 1892 Public
 Barry Goldwater: 1884 Public
 Williams Field: 1879 Public
 Cholla Magnet: 1873 Public
 McClintock: 1865 Public
 Lake Havasu: 1864 Public
 Betty H. Fairfax: 1844 Public
 Ironwood Ridge: 1827 Public
 Deer Valley: 1818 Public
 Glendale: 1809 Public
 Paradise Valley: 1794 Public
 Desert Edge: 1785 Public
 Arcadia: 1760 Public
 Agua Fria: 1760 Public
 Flowing Wells: 1755 Public

Sahuaro: 1752 Public
 South Mountain: 1734 Public
 Notre Dame Prep: 902 Private

4A (44 teams)

Gila Ridge: 1837 Public
 Washington: 1746 Public
 Nogales: 1738 Public
 Cactus Shadows: 1724 Public
 Metro Tech: 1717 Public
 Catalina Foothills: 1697 Public
 Higley: 1691 Public
 Tempe: 1689 Public
 Bradshaw Mountain: 1683 Public
 Sunrise Mountain: 1673 Public
 Casa Grande: 1670 Public
 Canyon Del Oro: 1634 Public
 Pueblo Magnet: 1604 Public
 Dysart: 1584 Public
 Youngker: 1580 Public
 Marcos de Niza: 1565 Public
 Flagstaff: 1549 Public
 Prescott: 1541 Public
 Thunderbird: 1537 Public
 Peoria: 1491 Public
 Buckeye Union: 1465 Public
 Moon Valley: 1465 Public
 Greenway: 1446 Public
 Coconino: 1438 Public
 Shadow Mountain: 1394 Public
 Mohave: 1342 Public
 Douglas: 1341 Public
 Saguaro: 1323 Public
 Combs: 1289 Public
 Cactus: 1280 Public
 Apache Junction: 1270 Public
 Amphitheater: 1264 Public
 Palo Verde Magnet: 1232 Public
 Mingus Union: 1207 Public
 Rio Rico: 1193 Public
 Yuma: 1146 Public
 Cortez: 1143 Public
 Walden Grove: 1099 Public
 Salpointe Catholic: 1093 Private
 Coronado: 1053 Public
 Estrella Foothills: 1052 Public
 Lee Williams: 1046 Public
 Seton Catholic Prep: 597 Private
 St. Mary's: 543 Private

2016-17 Enrollment Figures

3A (37 teams)

Chinle: 1049 Public
 Kingman: 962 Public
 Sabino: 961 Public
 Empire: 924 Public
 Sahuarita: 906 Public
 Safford: 897 Public
 Florence: 850 Public
 Page: 842 Public
 Payson: 822 Public
 American Leadership: 802 Charter
 Show Low: 798 Public
 Blue Ridge: 790 Public
 Catalina Magnet: 783 Public
 Chino Valley: 780 Public
 Holbrook: 715 Public
 Snowflake: 711 Public
 Winslow: 709 Public
 Tuba City: 708 Public
 Monument Valley: 698 Public
 River Valley: 641 Public
 Window Rock: 629 Public
 Wickenburg: 619 Public
 Coolidge: 584 Public
 Tanque Verde: 569 Public
 Fountain Hills: 567 Public
 Globe: 554 Public
 North Pointe Prep: 544 Charter
 Santa Rita: 531 Public
 Ganado: 504 Public
 Odyssey Institute: 472 Charter
 Northwest Christian: 440 Private
 ASU Preparatory Academy: 425 Ch.
 Benjamin Franklin: 399 Charter
 Valley Christian: 387 Private
 Pusch Ridge: 339 Private
 Yuma Catholic: 330 Private
 Casteel: 255 Public

2A (51 teams)

Paradise Honors: 526 Charter
 Parker: 497 Public
 Alchesay: 493 Public
 Thatcher: 483 Public
 Tonopah Valley: 454 Public
 Santa Cruz Valley: 451 Public
 Sedona Red Rock: 446 Public
 Camp Verde: 442 Public
 Benson: 434 Public

Many Farms: 424 Public
 Horizon Honors: 422 Charter
 San Tan Foothills: 413 Public
 Round Valley: 406 Public
 Willcox: 405 Public
 Hopi: 400 Public
 Bourgade Catholic: 389 Private
 Morenci Jr./Sr.: 387 Public
 Kingman Academy: 386 Charter
 Pinon: 371 Public
 Chandler Prep: 367 Charter
 AZ College Prep: 366 Public
 San Miguel: 345 Private
 Northland Prep: 341 Charter
 Veritas Prep: 338 Charter
 Scottsdale Prep: 334 Charter
 Bisbee: 332 Public
 Tombstone: 316 Public
 San Carlos: 313 Public
 Miami: 312 Public
 Gilbert Classical: 292 Public
 St. Johns: 285 Public
 San Manuel Jr./Sr.: 284 Public
 Phoenix Country Day: 276 Private
 Scottsdale Christian: 274 Private
 Valley (Sanders): 264 Public
 Pima: 255 Public
 Mingus Mountain: 250 Private
 Mohave Accelerated: 248 Charter
 Antelope Union: 241 Public
 Gilbert Christian: 239 Private
 Glendale Prep: 235 Charter
 Arete Prep: 234 Charter
 Tempe Prep: 210 Charter
 Arizona Lutheran: 189 Private
 St. Augustine: 187 Private
 Phoenix Christian: 186 Private
 Leading Edge Acad. - Gilbert: 180 Ch.
 Desert Christian: 164 Private
 Trivium Preparatory Acad.: 162 Ch.
 Joy Christian School: 156 Private
 Rancho Solano Prep: 104 Private

1A (44 teams)

Baboquivari: 224 Public
 Red Mesa: 210 Public
 Williams: 206 Public
 Mayer: 200 Public
 Greyhills Academy: 199 Public

San Pasqual: 195 Public
 NFL Yet HS and JH: 195 Charter
 Anthem Prep: 192 Charter
 Arizona Charter: 192 Charter
 Valley Lutheran: 165 Private
 Basis School Flagstaff: 162 Charter
 Ray: 156 Public
 Academy of Tucson: 154 Charter
 The Gregory School: 151 Private
 El Capitan: 148 Public
 Rough Rock: 146 Public
 Mogollon: 133 Public
 Valley Union: 126 Public
 St. David: 126 Public
 Fort Thomas: 122 Public
 Duncan: 118 Public
 Joseph City: 117 Public
 Bagdad: 115 Public
 Tohono O'Odham: 114 Public
 Rock Point: 110 Public
 St. Michael: 110 Private
 Salome: 109 Public
 Superior Jr./Sr.: 109 Public
 Telesis Preparatory: 102 Charter
 North Phoenix Preparatory: 93 Charter
 Immaculate Heart: 91 Private
 Hayden: 89 Public
 Cibecue: 84 Public
 PDSB: 84 Public
 Lourdes Catholic: 82 Private
 Grand Canyon: 81 Public
 Shonto Prep: 81 Public
 Ash Fork: 75 Public
 Patagonia Union: 71 Public
 Fredonia: 70 Public
 Bowie/San Simon: 57 Public
 Seligman: 55 Public
 Red Valley-Cove: 41 Public
 ASDB: 31 Public

(Source: AIA)



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4A Conference Preseason Rankings

By Andy Morales
azpreps365.com

No. 1. Saguario: Jason Mohns has a 39-3 record over the last four years with the Sabercats including three straight championships. The Sabercats will start the season at home against Gardena Serra (CA) and then at Valor Christian (CO). The game in Colorado will be a nationally televised game. "The offense will return to having some of the dual-threat capability that was seen in the Teddy Ruben/Luke Rubenzer eras with junior to be QB Max Massingale taking the reins," Mohns said. "Defensively we return eight starters from last year's state championship squad, and have had several high impact transfers on that side of the ball. That group has the potential to dominate football games."

No. 2. Marcos de Niza: Legendary coach Paul Moro will be in his first year with the Padres. Moro has 326 wins and needs six more to pass the former Amphitheater coach Vern Friedli. "The outlook for 2016 for the Padres is a good one" Moro wrote. "Even though they graduated a plethora of quality players they still return a few players that can make a difference in big games." A top QB's in the state, Nazareth Greer, will be returning for his senior season. He threw for 3,320 yards and 24 TDs last year to help guide the Padres to a Division II runner-up finish. Sr. WR Marcus Naisant (668 yards) also returns. Moro also inherits kicker Krysten Muir. "Best Female kicker this side of the Mississippi," Moro added. "She is one of the hardest workers on the Padre squad."

No. 3. Sunrise Mountain: Steve Decker is in his first year as the head coach of the Mustangs after serving as offensive coordinator for the last six years. The team went 11-1 last year and made it to the Division III quarterfinal round. Decker would like to, "Work extremely hard, give back to the community and compete for a state championship" this year. Sr. QB Chase Cord returns (3,173 yards passing, 52 TDs, 1,059 yards rushing and 13 TDs). RB Garrett Veldhuizen (974 yards rushing, 19 TDs, 481 yards receiving and 9 TDs) also returns. Top defenders include Frank Masiano LB, Zach Friedman DB, Ty Love DB, Jaleon Luten DL, Mook McCann DL and Gavin Chad-dock DL.

No. 4. Catalina Foothills: Jeff Scurran is entering his fourth year with the Falcons. The team finished 9-3 last year and has made the playoffs three years in a row. "Since we lack any real size, we must continue to execute and perhaps improve on that," Scurran wrote. Rhett (Rodriguez) has only thrown five interceptions (with 37 TDs) in his career, and we only lost three fumbles last year. We must continue on that track. Our defense must get more turnovers, but we've been playing a very young team on both sides of the ball. We can't leave our opponent's offense on the field so long as we did last year." His top returners include: QB Rodriguez and TE-DE Max Michalczik. Rodriguez is the son of University of Arizona head coach Rich Rodriguez and Michalczik is the son of Arizona assistant coach Jim Michalczik.

No. 5. Salpointe: Dennis Bene returns for his 17th year with the Lancers. The Lancers went 5-5 last year but look to return to playoff contenders. The quarterback position has been the main concern with the Lancers effectively playing with their third string QB for most of the season. "We have a very challenging schedule, opening vs St. Mary's will be huge," Bene wrote. "I do expect us to win our region and contend for a state championship" Bene lists QB Sean Barton, RB Trevor Volpe, DB Rodrigo Nieto, DB Jason Parrish and K



Saguario is loaded again and should battle for another state championship (photo by Mark Jones of maxpreps.com).

Cameron Scharf as his top returners. "Our QB Sean Barton improved greatly as season went on," Bene added. "We need to throw the ball better to complement our running game. Defensively, we need to play faster and control the line of scrimmage."

No. 6. Casa Grande: Jake Barro is in his second year with the Cougars. He recorded a 9-2 record and averaged almost 40 points a game. The Casa Grande faithful can point to their 1950 10-0 squad as being the only rival to what happened last year. QB Brock Hall (3,010 yards passing and 265 yards rushing) returns for his senior season as does RB Trenton Diaz (489 yards rushing), WR Trevor Russell (1,214 yards receiving also returns) along with Jr. Cameron Gardner (811).

No. 7. Bradshaw Mountain: David Moran is in his third year with the Bears and the team finished 8-4 last year including a Division III quarterfinal finish. The Bears look to be one of the few Division III teams expected to do well with the move to 4A. QB Gunner Bundrick (2,34 yards passing and 672 yards rushing) returns for his senior year as does Sr. WR Ryan Shaver (493 yards receiving).

No. 8. Canyon Del Oro: Dusty Peace is in his eighth year with the Dorados and his team went 3-7 last year, missing the playoffs for only the only the second time in over 10 years. Jr. RB Elijah Carey returns (304 yards rushing). Carey is the younger brother of former Arizona and current NFL running back Ka'Deem Carey. WR Garrett Woodlock (759 yards passing) returns for his senior year as does LB Tyler Necochea (65 tackles).

No. 9. Estrella Foothills: Lamar Early is in his seventh year with the Wolves. The team finished with a 10-2 record which was the best finish in school history (opened in 2001). Unfortunately, RB Joe Logan (2,600 yards rushing and 35 TDs) has graduated.

No. 10. Mingus Union: Bob Young starting his 20th year with the Marauders. He lists Trevor Galloway TE/DE, Jordan Vincent C/LB, Josh Scaf DE, Charles Hardy OL/DL, Juan Ruiz DB, Trey Meyer QB/K/P, Alejandro Stabreff DB and Jordan Taylor OL as his top returners. Could be a tricky pick for this spot.

2016 4A Football Preview

By Andy Morales
azpreps365.com

REGION I: DESERT SKY

Higley: Eddy Zubey is entering his sixth year with the Knights. The team went 4-7 last year. Zubey sees the passing game as the team's strength but defense is something that needs attention. "Running game for offense and getting off to a quicker/more efficient start to games," Zubey said when asked about improvements this year. "Defensively would be getting more stops and holding opponents to under 20 points a game." WR/DB Bryce Gilbert has drawn attention from Arizona and ASU according to Zubey. He went for 1,056 yards receiving last year. QB Mason Crossland (3,190 yards passing and 38 TDs) returns for his senior year. WR Chris Crescione (860 yards) and WR Drayecn Hall (788) also return.

Seton Catholic: Gary Galante is starting his second year with the Sentinels. The team finished 2-8 last year, breaking a string of four consecutive years of at least 11 wins. Seventeen starters return and Galante lists WR/DB Jacob Terrell, WR/DB Michael Marx, TE Dominic Sycamore, OL/DL Chris Rodriguez, Zachery Muchinski, Roman Decaro, Thomas Kenny and WR Kevin Lawlor as the top returners.

Tempe: Brian Walker is entering his eighth year with the Buffaloes. The team finished 6-5 in last year. Walker has some high expectations for his young team: "To progress and get better each day," Walker wrote. "Obviously the goal is to compete and make the playoffs. It is going to be an uphill battle because of our youth, but if anyone can do it, these young men can." His top returners include DE My-King Johnson, DB DeAndre Hughes, DB Ivory Williams, DB Aureleo Flores and OL Damian Triana.

REGION II: WEST VALLEY

Cactus: Larry Fetkenhier is in his 33rd year with the Cobras. He has qualified for the playoffs every year since 2001, finished 8-3 last year. Fetkenhier points to declining enrollment as a factor in creating more depth on his team. He lists the following players as his top returners: WR Matt Eberhardt, DB Chandler Jennings, Punter Azer Duliman, Kicker Tyler Combs, RB Damaria Norris, SS Trent Davis, DL Luis Ochoa, Daniel Herra, Adam Taylor, OL Evan Helitzer, WR Noah Martinez and DL Scott Jones.

Greenway: John Bechtold is starting his first year at the school. He came from Washington where he was an assistant/head coach for the last 24 years. He inherits a team that went 3-7 last year and has not been to the playoffs since 2010. According to



Brock Hall, Casa Grande (photo by Doug Owens of maxpreps.com)

Bechtold, pretty much everything is a mystery right now. He lists Sr. lineman Ian Fox as his top returner.

Moon Valley: Sam Jacobs is starting his fifth year with the Rockets. The team went 2-8 last year after going 10-2 the year before. "With a lot of returners on defense we expect to be fast and sound," Jacobs wrote, "Offensively the key will be to control the ball." He lists DT Malik Clark, LB Lanny Glenn, OL Zachariah Southwick, WR Tim Knight, WR Cam'Ron Davis and LB Randy Grivel as his top returners.

Peoria: Will Babb is starting his fifth year with the Panthers. The team went 4-6 last year after finishing 9-2 the year before and 11-1 the year before that. Babb would like to run the ball better and don't turn ball over on offense this year and he lost his top QB, top two RBs and his top three WRs to graduation but lists Nathan Torres OL, Tyrell Aponte OL, Isaiah Veal WR, Robert Duque DE, Jevon Alexander DL, and Zach Bingham DE, and Ray Cortez WR as his top returners.

REGION III: SOUTHWEST

Buckeye: Kelley Moore starts his third year with the Hawks. The team finished 7-3 last year. QB Art Bojorquez graduated (1,582 yards passing) as did top RB Andrew Gomez (469 yards rushing). The team also lost WR Jordy Casado (1,037 yards receiving). Seven of the top defenders also graduated including LB Robert Aceves (124 tackles). In short, Moore has to fill almost every top position.

Gila Ridge: Tyler Kossel is in his first year with the Hawks. He would like to win the

Yuma City Championship and the section championship. In order to accomplish his goals Kossel feels his team needs to do a few things: "Being more consistent on offense, cutting down on turnovers. Defensively eliminating the big play and cause more turnovers." He lists DT Brandon Hultine, LB Chance Morland, OL/DL Rafael Duarte, OL/DL Chris Femia as his top returners.

Youngker: Kelly Epley is starting his second year with the Roughriders. The team went 3-7 last year, which is more wins than the program has had in the last two years combined. Sr. QB Alex Rodriguez is slated to return. So. RB Greg Dotstry (742 yards rushing) and Sr. RB Rashad Griffis (612) are also set to return.

Yuma: Curtis Weber is starting his fifth year with the Criminals. The team finished 3-7 last year and the program last went to the playoffs in 2009. Weber would like to run the ball and be able to stop the run on defense and, to accomplish his goal, he lists several returning players: DE Adrian Madrid (5 sacks), RB/DB Joe Herrera, OL/DL Nate Hand, OL/DL Shane Garcia and WR/DB Alex Guerra WR/DB.

REGION IV: SKYLINE

Cactus Shadows: Michael Hudnutt is starting his third year with the Falcons. The program went 6-4 and have been to the playoffs since 2010. "Our expectations for this team are to get into the playoffs and host a home game," Hudnutt wrote. "We will need to do this by winning on special teams and controlling the ball on offense." He lists the following players as his top returners: Andrew Young QB, Tyler Collins OL, Joe Emmett OL, Nick Kuhlmann OL, Sam Covert OL, Payton Kuehn RB/LB, Hayden Rummell RB/LB, Gavin Stapely LB, Dylan Speirs S and Sam Nollette CB.

Shadow Mountain: Brock Farrel is in his third year with the Matadors. The team finished 4-6 last year. "At Shadow Mountain we embrace the concept of the renaissance man," Farrel said. "We have four players on our team that were on the state champion basketball team, as well as multiple players who run track and play baseball as well. Not only do we embrace multi-sport athletes, we also embrace the well-rounded young man. Tyler Lithgoe not only plays football, but is an all-state choir singer." His top returning players include: QB Darion Spottsville, WR Jordan Pace, TE Tony Rodriguez, CB Nick White, C Alex Motley, LB Matt Schilling and LB Hamilton Mee.

St. Mary's: Tommy Brittain starts his first year with the Knights after a long run at Tempe Prep. The Knights finished 3-7 last

year. "Offensively we will recommit to a punishing run game, Brittain wrote. "Defensively we will become more simple than checkers so we can play fast." He lists Abel Navarrette aLB/TE; Jordan Blake WR; Ricky Cardines RB/LB; Isaiah Casillas CB; Paul Dozeman LB/TE; Clint Harrington LB/RB; Mike Hernandez OG/DE; Odua Isibor TE/DE; Daniel Meador QB/CB; Hunter Perkins WR/CB; Erasmo Quirino C/DT; Matthew Ramos RB/LB; Jeremy Rios OG/DE; Gabe Salazar OG/DT and Darion Stewart TE/DE as his top returners.

Thunderbird: Brent Wittenwyler is starting his 12th year with the Chiefs. The Chiefs finished 7-3 last year. "We have been blessed with great Running backs the last 7-8 years," Wittenwyler said. "We need someone to fill the role." Wide outs B Bozeman and Martin Niven have been moved to the RB position according to Wittenwyler.

REGION V: GRAND CANYON

Coconino: Jeremiah Smith enters his third year with the Panthers. The team hasn't made the playoffs since 2005 and the program finished with back-to-back 3-7 finishes in 2014 and 2015. Smith lost his starting QB, top four RBs and top three WRs to graduation. Sr. FS David Quick (85 tackles) returns for his senior season.

Flagstaff: Paul Wolf and Bob Castillo will serve as co-head coaches this year after Dave Dirksen was named superintendent. Wolf was the defensive coordinator last season Castillo served as the team's offensive and defensive line coach. Together, the two will be the 10th and 11th head coach the program has had since 2006. The team finished 5-5 in Dirksen's sole season.

Lee Williams: Jacob Iolence will be in his first year with the Volunteers. This will be his first head coaching job after a few years of coaching Division II football as an assistant coach. The team finished 2-8 last year after going 7-4 the year before. WR Justin Sturgill, Jr. (462 yards receiving) returns for his senior year.

Mingus Union: Bob Young starting his 20th year with the Marauders. He lists Trevor Galloway TE/DE, Jordan Vincent C/LB, Josh Scalf DE, Charles Hardy OL/DL, Juan Ruiz DB, Trey Meyer QB/K/P, Alejandro Stabreff DB and Jordan Taylor OL as his top returners.

Mohave: Rudy Olvera is in his first year with the Thunderbirds. The team finished 5-5 last year. With five alumni on the staff (including Olvera), the coach is ready to install a new offensive and defensive scheme this year. His top returners are RB/LB Bradley Jackson, QB/DB Daniel Laughlin, OL Vincent Bejarano, OL Richard Salzer, HB/LB Mason Phillips, DB Raymond Sevillano and LB/RB Nikki Holloway.

Prescott: Former assistant coach Michael Gilpin is starting his first year with the Badgers. Despite going 7-3 in 2014 and 2015, the school has not made the playoffs

since 2012. QB Ryan Greene will be a junior (729 yards passing and 61 yards rushing) and RB Christian Setter (1,237 yards rushing) returns for his junior season also.

REGION VI: BLACK CANYON

Apache Junction: Vance Miller is starting his third year with the Prospectors. The team went 2-8 last year and has not made the playoffs since 2010. "Just as it takes a few years for kids to buy into a new system and coaching style, it takes the same for coaches," Miller wrote. "Now entering my third year as head coach and fourth year here at Apache Junction, that gel is happening." Miller has 14 returning starters from last year. "Just graduated two dynamic receivers," He added. "There will be big shoes to fill as the younger guys step up to fill those receiver roles. School enrollment numbers are down. Curious to see what numbers we get out at the lower levels." DE Alex Avakian and OG Peni Latuselu return.

Combs: Jesse Hart is entering his fourth year with the Coyotes. The team went 5-6 last year in Division IV. "We expect to be a more balanced team offensively with the run and pass and we expect to be a dominant defensive team in 2016," Hart wrote. Hart lists FS Fide Quirarte, TE James Stillwell, LB Sheldon Pearson, QB Skylar Johnson and RB Jordan Lee as some of his top returners.

Coronado: Mike Olson is starting his third year with the Dons. The Dons went 7-3 last year. The team hasn't had a winning in record since 2009. Olson is hoping for no missed assignments on both sides of the ball and he will return SR. QB Jay Vanderjagt (2,171 yards passing and 27 touchdowns), Sr. RB Victor Carson-Washington (775 yards rushing) and senior kicker Alfredo Marquez who made 38-of-40 PTAs and five field goals with the longest coming from 53 yards.

Cortez: The Colts went 0-10 last year. The Colts last had a winning record in 2005.

Dysart: Jeff Huelster is starting his fourth year with the Demons. The team went 7-4 last year. RB Pacey Prettyman (412 yards rushing) and WR Christopher Medcalf (458 yards receiving) returned for their senior seasons.

Washington: Tim Mayfield is in his first year with the Rams. The Rams went 2-8 last year and made the playoffs in 2013. QB Mario Armendarez (3,205 yards passing and 34 touchdowns) graduated but RB Nathaniel Little (693 yards rushing) returns for his senior year as does WR Roger Hernandez (889 yards receiving).

REGION VII: GILA

Amphitheater: Jorge Mendivil is starting his third year with the Panthers. The team went 0-10 last year. "Offensively we are looking to finish drives and take care of the football after stalling quite a bit in the red-zone," Mendivil wrote. "Defensively we hope to get back to the fundamentals, win the turnover battle and play faster." His top returners are

OT/DT David Watson, TE/DE Ezra Thomas and OT/DT Michael Beach. Watson is being recruited by Oregon and Colorado.

Douglas: Riki Valdez is entering his third year with the Bulldogs. The team has gone 2-8 three years in a row and last made the playoffs in 2010. "Offensively our skill players were all experiencing their first year of varsity football last year," Valdez wrote. "That experience and a full year of playing within our system should provide a breakout season for multiple players. Defensively we have more speed all over the field and a bigger and stronger defensive line." Valdez lists WR/DB Chris Galaz, WR/DB Bryan Goodman, OL Jude Romero, OL Victor Peraza and HB Miguel Luna as his key returners.

Palo Verde: Laurence Ruhf is starting his third year with the Titans. The team finished 2-8 last year. Ruhf is counting on his system being more comfortable for all returning players and he lists Stephen Downs Sr. (RB), Anthony Cummings Sr. (DL), Kiyomi McKinley Jr. (WR/FS), Andy Heidrick Sr. (RB/LB) and Albert Payne Jr. (QB) as his top returners.

Pueblo: Former University of Arizona and NFL standout Brandon Sanders returns for his third year. The Warriors finished 7-4 last year, making the playoffs for the first time in a generation (25 years). "Offensively we are expecting to be more balanced as a team," Sanders wrote. "We had super star players including the All Conference Player of the Year Justin Pledger and the school's all-time leading rusher Jorge Romero that we have to replace. Defensively we expect to cause more turnovers and be aggressive." Returning players include: Armando Lucero WR/DB, Rivera WR, Daniel Vega QB, Jesus Rodriguez OL/DL and Michael Beltran OL/DL.

Rio Rico: Former Utah lineman Zach Davila takes over at Rio Rico. The Hawks went 4-6 in 2014 and 2015. "The biggest improvements we are expecting on offense and defense is our mental toughness and discipline," Davila wrote. "We are really working hard on paying attention to the details of our offense and defense and stressing those details. The amount of offensive and defensive plays will be reduced but more focused." He lists corner Ricky Perez, OL Daniel Urias and OL Matthew Downs as his top returners.

REGION VIII: KINO

Nogales: Kevin Kuhm is in his third year with the Apaches. Kuhm had resigned from Nogales to take over at Sunnyside but returned to take over athletic director duties as well. The Apaches went 8-3 last year. Sr. QB Ricky Paredes (721 yards passing) returns but the team lost RB Freddy McCarty (1,731 yards rushing) to graduation.

Walden Grove: Chris May is starting his second year with the Red Wolves. The team finished 4-6 last year. Sr. LB Lance Killgore (53 tackles) is the top player slated to return.

Safford's Ralph Frias Ready for 2016

By Jose Garcia, azpreps365.com

Ralph Frias lives in a city, Safford, with a population of about 9,600, where high school sports fans recognize him for his size (6-6, 310) and whisper about his football potential.

But being a big hombre in a small pueblo also makes him a target.

When Frias was in junior high he was bullied. Back then, he was too scared to tell his family and friends, even his biggest influence, his mom, Melody.

Now a junior at Safford High School, his confidence and message about an issue that can harm one's self-esteem is empowering. Messing with Frias now is not recommended.

azpreps365.com caught up with the small-city big name this summer to talk about how his summer is going, football and bullying.

Are you taking time off, enjoying your summer vacation so far?: "There's no days off. You have to go for what you want. There hasn't really been a vacation, sir. I wake up at six or seven and go work out."

What's for breakfast before you head out?: "Four pieces of toast. A regular cheese omelet with four to five eggs. And a glass of chocolate milk."

That's not really a regular omelet.: "Well, no not really (laughs). But for me it is."

In Safford, do you get recognized often?: "Not everywhere, sir. Not too long ago I went to get a haircut. An older man went up to me and said, 'Wait a minute. Are you Ralph Frias? Yo, this is No. 77. Oh, wow!' It happened at the barbershop. It's an amazing feeling."

Any football genes in the family?: "My dad (Rafael). He also was No. 77. He used to play football at Superior High, just take after him. He played left tackle as well. He played at Eastern Arizona."

Is your mom also tall?: "Yes, sir. She's 6-foot tall. My mom (Melody) is amazing. I'm close to her. I'm a mama's boy."

You're a mama's boy. But I bet you are not a softy on the football field.: "No, sir. That's a different topic."

When did you start playing football?: "I was in shoulder pads when I was in 5th grade. But I was really uncoordinated when I started. I took it upon myself to get better and started jumping rope and lifting. I had some help from my uncles also, Yoda Chavez and Robert Abalos (Safford High P.E. teacher). Yoda's first name is Jason. We just call him Yoda."

What was the big moment where people started to notice you outside of Safford?: "It probably happened at an Arizona State camp when some footage got out last summer."



Photo of Ralph Frias courtesy of the Safford Football Staff

A knee injury set you back last year, but it didn't keep New Mexico State from offering a scholarship at the end of your sophomore season. How does your knee feel?: "It put me out for three weeks, but I'm good right now. It was a minor injury. Right now I'm ready to roll, just to prove some people wrong. There are some haters right now."

PlayStation or Xbox, and what games do you like to play?: "Xbox. I'll play NBA 2K and Madden 15. I play with the Cavaliers and New York Giants. The Giants are my favorite because of my step dad (Nigel.)"

Have you faced any other obstacles in life?: "I have been bullied. You are going to have hard times when that happens. It happened when I was younger, in middle school, because of my size. People would say something behind your back or say it to your face. I'm a huge target in small community. I was hiding from my mom. But eventually I talked to her. That's when things became smoother. Go get help right away if you are in that situation, a teacher, your mother, counselor, but right away. Don't be afraid. Nowadays some people still like to push my buttons, but I just ignore them."

3A Conference Preseason Rankings

By Les Willsey
azpreps365.com

No. 1. Snowflake: The number of legitimate contenders for the conference title is arguably more than any other conference so identifying the ultimate winner is a crapshoot. The choice here is the Lobos. They return the majority of starters and play in one of the most competitive regions. Eight years in a row playing at least 12 games, but no championship in that span. The odds seem to be in their favor for a breakthrough.

2. Sabino: The Sabercats should find their new home a conference down to their liking. They competed well up one conference last year and have firepower back that makes them dangerous. Once a power in the big-school ranks, title contention is within reach in 2016.

3. Show Low: Don't count out the Cougars in the title chase. They've alternated region titles the last three years with Snowflake and bring a prolific offense to the fight this year. The East Region is itching to bring the conference title back to the White Mountains.

4. Northwest Christian: Like Pusch Ridge in 2015, the Crusaders weren't deterred in moving up a notch. The loss in the title game to Pusch Ridge gives them motivation to finish the job this time. NWC always brings a physical squad no matter the conference and it serves them well.

5. Pusch Ridge: Titles don't come any tougher than the one the Lions took home last year as they moved up a conference. They know what to expect and have key pieces back from an exceptional defense that was springboard to winning the championship. Their matchup with Sabino the last game of the regular season should be a blast.

6. River Valley: The West Region isn't a gimme for Northwest Christian. Not with the Dust Devils in the mix. Though not as accomplished offensively as the 2014 championship team, River Valley returns enough pieces to throw their hat in the title ring.



Pusch Ridge won the Division 4 title a year ago and will challenge the best in the 3A Conference for the 2016 state championship trophy (photo by Mark Jones of maxpreps.com).

7. American Leadership: If there's one school that should dominate its region in 3A, it's American Leadership. Don't see any other team in its region beating them. It's the post-season that will be treacherous. See the six teams above.

8. Yuma Catholic: The Shamrocks don't appear as strong on paper as they have in the past. They certainly won't be discounted by the opposition having averaged 11 wins a year the last decade. An interesting team to watch with its head coaching change.

9. Blue Ridge: The Yellow Jackets rebounded some last year, but still have work to do to battle toe to toe with Snowflake and Show Low. Making the playoffs should be expected. How far they advance is the question.

10. Payson: The Longhorns are intent on challenging for their region title. An interesting season opener vs. Safford would be a nice get. If they improve (perhaps upend one of the region's best) -- they have an experienced squad returning -- they may reach the playoffs and eclipse last year's brief stay there.

2016 3A Football Preview

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NORTH REGION

Chinle: The Wildcats are one of two teams in the newly-formed region that won a region title last season in a lower conference. Chinle was 9-2 overall with both losses coming to non-reservation squads. Coach Tim Su'e Su'e has posted four winning seasons out of six in his tenure. The battle for the top spot likely will come down to Chinle, Page and Monument Valley. Chinle and Monument Valley meet the last game of the regular season, likely having region-title implications.

Ganado: The Hornets finished 5-5 last year, the fifth year in a row with that record. Expect something similar given the makeup of the region and the non-region foes on their schedule. Top players returning are Sr. Tim Benally, who played quarterback, running back and managed a few receptions. Benally accounted for 742 yards all told and scored 5 TDs. Sr. Tracey Wheeler got the bulk of playing time at quarterback. He passed for 683 yards and 8 TDs.

Monument Valley: The Mustangs turned in a 10-1 season last year with the only loss coming in the first-round of post-season to Santa Cruz Valley. No reservation school has more continuity in coaching than this school. Coach Bryan Begay begins his 12th year and has several assistants with five years on the staff as well. With about 75 percent of their starters back, the Mustangs are arguably the region favorite. Sr. Kobe Holiday is the returning sack leader. Sr. Cauly Nelson is a two-year all-conference selection. Sr. Royce Charley is a two-year, two-way starter at receiver and defensive back; ditto Jr. Billy Mitchell, a running back and linebacker. Sr. Merwin Sullivan is the team's best interior lineman and lineman Sr. Keola Yazzie is a three-year starter.

Page: If the Sand Devils have an edge heading into the season, it's that they played in the same conference/division last year (3A/D-IV). The rest of the region members are all moving up a notch. Page finished 1-9 last year and returning lettermen are sparse -- nine. Coach Jeff Wheatley is expecting improvement all around, but it must come from a fast maturing team with little varsity experience. Top returning players are Jr. Jacob Doyle, quar-

terback and cornerback, Sr. Jaden Myers, a linebacker and interior linemen, Sr. Dakota Richardson and Sr. Keinan Davis. Page played one team who has joined the newly formed region -- Monument Valley. Page came close to prevailing, dropping a 34-32 decision.

Tuba City: The Warriors were 2-7 last year and will be young for coach Rick Benjamin and staff. A glaring need is at quarterback where Benjamin is looking for a dedicated player to learn and grasp the offense. Top returning players are Sr. Brandon Whiterock, who caught 25 passes for 243 yards, 2 TDs and Sr. Anthony Wertz, who saw plenty of time at running back (658 yards, 6 TDs).

Window Rock: The Scouts have their work cut out for them after last year's 0-10 season. It was a bit of a surprise after four successive .500 or better seasons, but many of their games were against stronger, non-reservation opponents. That isn't changing too much this year as Window Rock has games against 3A stalwarts Show Low and Blue Ridge.

SOUTH REGION

Catalina: The Trojans didn't have an enjoyable year in 2015, dropping nine of 10 games. Last year they were outscored 499-57. They'll look to get better, but it won't be easy. The school has a new coach, Joe Butler. Butler, defensive coordinator at San Tan Foothills last year, is hoping to coax some improvement in the program. Catalina hasn't had a winning season since 2004

Empire: Skill position players top the list for the Ravens, who are coming off a 5-5 record under coach W.T. Jeffries. Jeffries is 15-15 in three seasons. Empire is seeking its first playoff berth under Jeffries, who shook up the coaching staff in the offseason. Sr. Will Kobata-Martin (1,016 yards, 12 TDs), Sr. DeErick Smith (803 yards, 8 TDs) and RB Wyatt Jeffries (289 yards in four games) are back to lead the ground game. All were part of the second-place 4 x 100 relay team at state. So. Alex Verdugo, who was the backup quarterback last year played in seven games and passed for 239 yards. Sr. Cade Powell, a linebacker, is the key returnee on defense. Powell contributed a team-high 86 tackles last season. Speed is the team's strength while youth is the question mark. As many as six sophomores could start.

Pusch Ridge: The Lions enter the new season as defending state champs with a 13-game winning streak, the last three postseason nailbiters. They also start with a new coach, Jerry Harris, who takes over for Troy Cropp. Pusch Ridge is blessed with seven starters back on each side of the ball. The top returnees are Jr. Dakota Haynes, running back and linebacker. Haynes rushed for 619 yards and 10 TDs. On defense he was in on 154 tackles and registered six sacks. Another two-way standout is Jr. Tamerat McLeod. McLeod led the team in rushing (821 yards, 15 TDs) and had 91 tackles. Up front is Sr. Paul Bertelsen, a defensive end (66 tackles, 7 sacks, Sr. Edwin Lovett (48 tackles at cornerback) and a wide receiver. Helping out the ground game and on defense is Jr. Mitch Maas (497 yards rushing and 68 tackles).

Sabino: Odds are this will be a stellar year for the Sabercats. Coach Jay Campos' team was 8-2 last year competing in D-III and has dropped a level this year. They're one of only a handful of Tucson high schools not aligned in 6A, 5A or 4A and the second-largest school in the conference by enrollment. Sabino returns the bulk of its offensive skill players led by quarterback Sr. Drew Dixon. Dixon's a two-way threat. He passed for 1,146 yards and 17 scores and rushed for 446 yards and 12 TDs in 2015. Sr. Wyatt Short and Sr. Noah Brown combined for 750 yards rushing and 9 TDs behind Dixon. A trio of decent receivers averaging 15 receptions each also return. Sabino allowed just more than 10 points a game last year. Much the same can be expected.

Sahuarita: The Mustangs held their own at 5-5 last year, but must contend with the loss of nearly all their offensive weapons from last year. Rodney Day begins his second year piloting Sahuarita. Day has a few players on defense to work with from last year. Sr. Knyles Sotomayor, a linebacker-safety, is the top returning tackler (33) and on the interior line is Sr. Da'Shae Henderson (22 tackles). Defensive back Sr. Erick Thompson likely will be the go-to target at receiver. Last year's backup quarterback, Sr. Austin Ahumada, has a shot at starting this year for the Mustangs..

Santa Rita: The Eagles find themselves struggling in the sport much like Catalina. Santa Rita was 1-9 last year and

after a few years of resurgence almost a decade ago have fallen back. Felix Jamero begins his second season as head coach.

Tanque Verde: The Hawks picked up a few more wins last year in Jeremiah Johnson's second year as head coach. The goal is more progress. Tanque Verde was 1-9 in 2014 and 3-7 in 2015. Moving up a conference, the only team of the seven in the region, and returning only 10 lettermen makes improvement a tough go. The Hawks do return their most prolific offensive player in Sr. Joey Gould. Gould will shift from running back to quarterback. He rushed for 940 yards and six TDs last year. Johnson is looking for a better running game. That hinges on how a very inexperienced line performs.

3A EAST REGION

Blue Ridge: The Yellow Jackets got back on the winning track last season, finishing 7-4 with an opening-round playoff loss to River Valley. Bob London, a long-time assistant in the program, took over last year. Blue Ridge did not fare well against the upper-echelon teams in the section, losing to Show Low, Snowflake and Payson. Three narrow wins early a year ago made the winning record possible.

Holbrook: The Roadrunners benefited by competing a conference down in 2015. They got much needed experience from a relatively young team that's moving back up a notch to a tough region. Coach Brady Pond begins his second season after a 5-5 mark last year. Seven starters return on both sides of the ball, but Pond is concerned about the physicality his team brings to East Region wars. Top returning players are quarterback Sr. Cade Maestas, running back Sr. Danny Gonzales, leading tackler and linebacker Sr. Oscar Hernandez, Sr. Shane McGraw, a running back/linebacker and lineman Sr. Zach McLaws.

Payson: Coach Jake Swartwood begins his fifth season at the helm and likes his team's chances of battling the big boys in the region. They'll need to raise their level of play, however, against Show Low and Snowflake. Pond's optimism stems from an experienced offensive line and key defenders returning. Four of five offensive linemen are back and they're also defensive starters -- Sr. Korben White, Sr. Trey Glasscock, Sr. Sammy Bland, and Sr. Trent Cline. Glasscock led the team in tackles as an end with 62. White, a linebacker, had 58 tackles. Skill position spots are up for grabs, namely quarterback and



QB Ryan Economou, River Valley (photo by Mark Jones of maxpreps.com)

running back. Payson was 6-5 last year and lost in the first round of the playoffs to eventual state champ Pusch Ridge.

Show Low: The Cougars are a program able to compete for a state title every year. This is the 10th-year for coach Randy Ricedorff at Show Low. A number of experienced and outstanding players are back. Sr. Jaisen Brown is a two-time all-state linebacker and the leading tackler (126 tackles). Sr. Rhett Ricedorff continues at quarterback. This is his third season starting. He passed for 2,979 yards and 29 TDs last year. Sr. Jamie Webb and Sr. Dallin Tenney are three-year starters at T-DE and C-NG, respectively. A couple two-year starters -- Sr. Chris Imoto, running back-linebacker and Sr. Dyland Gabbard, a OG/LB are in the fold as well. Imoto is the top returning rusher with 373

yards. New receivers is the early question mark.

Snowflake: Until proven otherwise, the region title goes through Snowflake and Show Low of late. Snowflake is well-equipped to contend again with a like pedigree to Show Low -- 21 returning lettermen and six starters back on both sides of the ball. The Lobos were 11-2 for Kay Solomon in his first year as head coach. The offense lost a talented quarterback to graduation. As such the running game figures to stand out. Sr. Zach Solomon rushed for 1,008 yards and 11 TDs and found time to catch 25 passes for 277 yards and 4 TDs. On defense Solomon added 72 tackles. Sr. JT Tate caught 33 passes for 707 yards and 9 TDs. On defense he was in on 72 tackles. Two-way linemen Sr. JT Fox (89 tackles)

and Sr. Leon LaGrange (87 tackles) are part of a quick, aggressive defense.

Winslow: The Bulldogs managed a playoff berth in Brandon Guzman's first season, settling for a 5-6 record after losing in the first round of postseason to Yuma Catholic. Winslow must fill a hole at quarterback so the burden falls to promising running backs Jr. Peanut Brown and Jr. Mikel Bonner. They combined for nearly 800 yards and 9 TDs when they got opportunities. Brown is the top returning tackler with 50. Sr. Quintin Begody and Sr. Kevin Brown are experienced linemen with 25 and 18 tackles each, respectively, last year.

3A WEST REGION

Chino Valley: The Cougars are moving up a conference where they were 0-10 in 2014. Coach Wade Krug is confident, however, his team is better able to handle the jump up again. Chino Valley was 4-6 last year in D-V. The lower-level programs have stabilized -- two years in a row with a junior varsity and expecting a full freshman team this fall. Heading the returnees is Sr. Josh Fisher, who can play multiple positions. Last year he was quarterback and cornerback. He passed for 363 yards and rushed for 279 yards. He was in on 36 tackles. Sr. Tyler Gianfrancesco, a defensive lineman, amassed 39 tackles and 9 sacks. The question mark is offensive line. All five starters graduated as did a couple of back ups.

Kingman: It's been a long dry spell for the Bulldogs. Not in terms of making the playoffs. Never mind that. Just producing a winning season (last one in 1999). To that end a new coach is on hand to try to change fortune. Cam Wierson brings experience as a player and coach at the collegiate level. He played for Northwest Missouri State, the Division II national champion in 2009. Wierson's first goal toward improvement is shaking up the culture. Football will be a big part of every day. Kingman has won just one of its last 20 games.

Northwest Christian: Last year was a near miss at another title as the Crusaders settled for D-IV runner-up with an 11-3 record. Coach Dave Inness is 67-12 in six seasons. With development up front on offense as the season progresses, Northwest Christian is capable of a fourth title-game appearance in seven years. There are plenty of players to keep an eye on. Sr. Caleb Egherman, a four-year defensive starter who delivered 55 tackles and 8 INTs last year, also added a trio of kick-return TDs and a chunk of rushing



Running back Jermiah Boyd, American Leadership (photo by Darin Sicurello of maxpreps.com)

yards. Sr. Tyler Kohner, a receiver and linebacker, had 549 yards receiving and 9 TDs and on defense chipped in with 99 tackles. The quarterback replacing Inness' son is expected to be Sr. Tyler Worrell, who helped plenty on defense last year. Returning is Sr. Bubba Ponce, a three-year starter at wide receiver (550 yards, 9 TDs) and a DB this fall. The offensive lineman to watch is Jr. Jaden Hoyt. Other experienced players on the defensive side are Sr. Jacob Lytle at linebacker, Sr. Vinnie Castaneda on the line and Sr. Caleb Johnson at defensive back.

Odyssey Institute: Last year was the first playing varsity football for Odyssey Institute, located in Buckeye. The Minotaur played an independent schedule, navigating a 5-5 season. That included a five-game winning streak in the middle and three successive losses to close out the year. The Minotaur are part of a region this year -- a tough one - led by coach Scott Saylor. The region features perennial playoff contender Northwest Christian (D-IV runner-up last year) and River Valley (D-IV semifinalist last year).

River Valley: The Dust Devils gave a good account in their bid to repeat as D-IV champions. They fell a couple wins shy with a quarterfinal loss to eventual champion Pusch Ridge. Co-coaches Paul Duchaineau and Mark Ruckle begin their third season in the sharing role, part of a nifty, five-year run for the program. Skill positions on offense are a strength for

2016. Sr. Ryan Economou is the incumbent at quarterback. Economou passed for 1,735 yards, 20 TDs and only 3 INTs. He added 338 yards rushing, 7 TDs. Running backs Sr. Bryson Fohs and Sr. Devin Anderson checked in with a combined 1,279 yards rushing, 11 TDs. Wide receiver Sr. David Larrabee, Anderson and tight end Jr. Jesse Braun teamed up for 1,200 yards in receptions and 13 TDs. Defensive standouts returning are nose guard Sr. Logan Cummings (88 tackles, 8 sacks), linebacker Sr. Chance Miller (105 tackles) and tackle Sr. Steven Holmes (71 tackles).

Wickenburg: A 5-5 record last year has the Wranglers hungry to take the next step. That next step (playoffs) has eluded them since 2010. Carson Miller, a Wickenburg alum, is in his third year as head coach. He played for Norris Vaughan when Vaughn coached Wickenburg a decade ago. Miller assisted at Mountain Pointe briefly. Miller is counting on veteran players, especially a group of 12 seniors. Among those are Sr. Riley Shuck a running back, has ability. He missed nearly all last season with an ankle injury. Sr. Keilan James will be the quarterback for second year and Sr. Cole Watson is a three-year starter on the offensive line. Top defenders are Sr. Robert Moralez, a lineman who has led the team in tackles two years in a row and Sr. Hunter Hastings, a two-year starter at linebacker.

3A CENTRAL REGION

American Leadership: The Queen Creek charter school took a leap forward with an 11-2 record and semifinal finish in D-V (2A) last year. Coach Rich Edwards, who has coached four of the five years the school has played football, is eager to see what the Patriots can do. They move up a conference, but have lots of talent to comfortably make the transition. Returning starters are quarterback Sr. Dallin Edwards, running back Sr. Jermiah Boyd, wide receiver Jr. Bujon Boyd, tight end Sr. Donovan Hanna, safety Jr. Haideen Stowers and middle linebacker Sr. Chandler Way - all three-year starters. Edwards passed for 2,056 yards and 24 TDs, Jermiah Boyd rushed for 1,474 yards and 23 TDs and Bujon Boyd caught 50 passes for 828 yards and 9 TDs. Way had 43 tackles and was second to Bujon Boyd in receptions. Remaking the offensive line has been a focal point of the offseason.

Benjamin Franklin: The Chargers finished 5-5 last year as the charter school advances up the ladder a notch in competition. Dave Jefferies first year as head coach after a successful run at Thatcher

was a good start. Jefferies had a small senior class last season and the hope is returning players can mature and step up their game. Jefferies goal in the spring and summer focused on teaching players a position on both sides of the ball. That's going to be needed in the highly competitive 3A.

Coolidge: The Bears struggled to a 2-8 record last year and missed the playoffs for the first time in six years. A pair of 10-win seasons preceded last year's down campaign. A relatively new set of foes dot the schedule for coach Cayle Ferguson. The non-region schedule is hefty with a pair of conference heavyweights -- a season-opener with River Valley and a mid-season matchup with Show Low.

Florence: The Gophers, like three other teams in the newly-formed region, turned in a .500 season (5-5) --- the debut season for Scott Howard as head coach. Skill positions are the strength on both sides of the ball. Sr. Jared Wood was effective at quarterback. He passed for 1,865 yards and 16 TDs. Two of his top receivers are back -- Sr. Josh Williams (40 catches for 635 yards, 6 TDs) and Sr. Ramazeese Severe (28 catches for 445 yards, 3 TDs.) On defense cornerback Jr. Shane Mathis had 38 tackles and 3 INTs, Jr. Nolan Susel, a safety (46 tackles) and defensive end Jr. Shelton Mathis (60 tackles).

Globe: The Tigers held their own in D-V (2A) in 2015 finishing 5-4. They've moved back up to 3A where it's going to be much tougher. New head coach Nathan Morales inherits a small group of returning players. The schedule features only two teams Globe faced last year -- traditional rival Miami and San Manuel. Both compete in 2A.

Safford: The Bulldogs get a break as their alignment is a conference lower, 4A to 3A. They were 4-6 in 2015. The season finished with five straight losses. Coach Michael Alba has a modest set of returning players to face a completely new schedule other than rival Thatcher. Safford's inexperience at the varsity level is Alba's top concern. Key returning players are Jr. Ralph Frias, a 6-foot-7, 305-pound offensive tackle. Jr. Manuel Aparicio will play somewhere in the backfield. Aparicio rushed for 421 yards and eight TDs last season and likely will land at quarterback. Sr. Eric Estrada played in the offensive and defensive backfields last year.

3A METRO REGION

ASU Preparatory Academy: The Sun Devils prepare for a third season among

the lower conferences in the state and are going up a conference this year after posting a 3-7 record in 2015. Coach Byron Evans, who prepped at South Mountain HS, played collegiately at Arizona and professionally as a linebacker for Philadelphia, has coached the program since its inception. Last year was ASU Prep's first not playing an independent schedule.

Casteel: Chandler's fifth traditional high school rolls out its first varsity team. The school opened last year with freshmen and will house freshmen and sophomores this year. Head coach Spencer Stowers, hired away from Westwood after the 2014 season, tastes the wares of 3A life after a couple seasons in the big-school classification. Casteel, the Colts, plays its first varsity game Aug. 19 on the road at Globe. Its first region game comes Sept. 30 against one of the top teams in 3A on the road -- Yuma Catholic.

Fountain Hills: The Falcons struggled last year transitioning from the retirement of long-time coach Jim Fairfield. A 1-9 record, the school's fourth losing season in a row, greets new head coach John Flynn. There's not a lot of help coming back with just 12 lettermen. All five starters returning (four on offense, one on defense) are underclassmen. They are Jr. Derek Weinreich, Jr. Ian Mackiewicz, Jr. Dakota Hamby and Jr. Tray Fuller. Weinreich played quarterback and the other three were receivers. Mackiewicz led the group in receptions with 25 for 336 yards. Jr. Tommy Ferington played on the defensive line and had 31 tackles.

North Pointe Prep: The Falcons are one of two charter schools in the region and have their work cut out for them. They are moving up a conference after last year's 1-9 campaign that ended with eight successive losses. Coach Ron Cluckey is in his second season at the helm. The numbers are thin and nearly all the top players from last year graduated. North Pointe Prep opens the season against the only team in defeated last year -- Veritas. North Pointe has not recorded a winning season its eight years in an established conference/region (non-freelance or independent schedule).

Valley Christian: The Trojans have been slightly above .500 the past couple of years and were exactly .500 (5-5) last season. Coach Jeff Rutledge has one of the conferences top athletes in Jr. Alijah Gammage, a quarterback who can hurt the opposition running or throwing. Gammage passed for 1,078 yards in five games of action. He's an excellent defender as well (3 INTs). Gammage figures to have most



Senior running back Jaylen Barnes, Yuma Catholic (photo by Mark Jones of maxpreps.com)

of his top targets back -- Sr. Stephen Mohan, Sr. Felix Benitez, and Sr. Chase Sanchez. Sanchez had a solid year in the defensive secondary with 5 interceptions.

Yuma Catholic: The big news this summer is longtime coach Rhett Stallworth (104-14 in nine seasons) stepping aside as coach and athletic director to take over as the school's principal. Aaron Cheatwood, an assistant the past six seasons with Stallworth is the successor. It's a light year at the outset in terms of experience for the Shamrocks, who went a typical 11-1 last year. Eight lettermen return with one starter on offense and four on defense. Despite a lack of seasoned players, expectations aren't falling. A trio of marquee players are being counted on as leaders, particularly based on their performance last year. Sr. Daniel Callendar excelled at defensive end. Callendar had 49 tackles at the point of attack and feasted on quarterbacks with 11.5 sacks. Sr. Jaylen Barnes figures to be a handful at running back after rushing for 702 yards and 15 TDs and hauling in 52 receptions for 844 yards and 13 TDs. Jr. Jason Pisano (113 tackles, 3 sacks) leads the linebacking corps, the team's strength. The offensive line may be the team's most vulnerable area.



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2A Conference Preseason Rankings

By Jose Garcia
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No. 1. Round Valley: “This team has the ability to be the best I’ve coached, but some things need to happen,” sixth-year coach Marcus Bell said. “Do they have the work ethic? How bad do they want to be champions?” It’s hard to imagine Kyron Woolf and Sullivan Udall doing more than what they did last year. But don’t be surprised if the senior dynamic duo weave around defenders even more this year. Woolf and Sullivan, two of Arizona’s top-5 returning leading rushers from last year, accounted for 87 percent of the team’s total yards in 2015. In his first year as the starting QB, Woolf led his team in rushing with 1,736 yards (18.9 yards per carry!) in Bell’s multiple look offense. As a passer, Woolf’s reads and release improved throughout 2015, when he completed 67 percent of his passes and threw 21 TDs and only 6 INTs in 168 attempts.

No. 2 Santa Cruz: It took coach Rishard Davis just two seasons to reawaken a small school program that was dominant from 1960-1990. Santa Cruz, known for successfully mining some of Arizona’s football playing giants from a small city, Eloy, is once again tapping into its talent reserve. Besides the skill 19 returning starters carry, the 2016 Santa Cruz Dust Devils are at present a unified group. That’s because most of the players dressed for the same community football teams before they even enrolled at Santa Cruz. Senior RB/LB Devon Neal’s (23 TDs, 80 tackles, 1,308 total yards in 2015) hard-working approach is paying off for his team.

No. 3 Benson: The program reached its third ever state championship game last year, but the outcome didn’t go as planned. Benson also bid adieu to an experienced senior quarterback. But don’t worry Benson fans. Another senior quarterback is ready to step in to try and continue a championship game trend. The new QB, David Arthur, also was a starter in a championship game last year but in North Dakota. Arthur lived in Benson, moved before his freshman season and is now back home. His leadership and footwork has impressed coach Chris Determan so far.

No. 4 Tempe Prep: The football coaching torch was passed from one Brittain to another this season. It’s fitting since so many Brittains were involved in helping Tempe Prep become the first charter school to reach an AIA football championship game. The first go-around as head coach will begin this season for Joshua, one of a handful of Brittain players who walked the school’s halls. “I am honored to take over for my father (Tommy),” Joshua said. “He has built something truly special here. He will always be a part of this program, and our goal is to one day finish what he started.” The unfinished business is winning a state championship.

No. 5 Scottsdale Christian: Not many small school programs can absorb the loss of 17 seniors and expect to still make the playoffs the following season. But third-year coach Chuck Gibbs is in no mood to rebuild. Next man up. The goal for this year — seven or more regular season wins — is reasonable, considering

that lack of defensive line and linebacker experience and overall team leadership. But that won’t keep Gibbs from scaling back his aggressive defensive approach. He wants the trend of creating turnovers and limiting big plays and having one of the top special teams in the state to continue. Speaking of special, TE/DE Zac Lane (6-4, 210) “will be almost unstoppable.”

No. 6 Thatcher: Its leading rusher and entire starting offensive line graduated last year, but this is a program that has won seven or more games in 10 of the past 12 seasons. Despite the lack of seniors in the run game, a drop off isn’t expected this season after last year’s 7-3 campaign. Senior Kaleb Mattice, a state championship hurdler, takes over as the No. 1 back in second-year coach Sean Hinton’s split-back veer. It’s the same offense Hinton ran as a player before graduating from Thatcher in 2002. A couple of sophomores will step in and make an immediate impact.

No. 7 Paradise Honors: What can be better than returning two 1,000 yard rushers? How about adding another back with the potential to exceed the rushing totals of last year’s leading ground gainers, Brandon Brown and Sekou Tyler. A torn meniscus sidelined sophomore Rasheed Sterling the entire 2015 season. But Sterling can’t wait to showcase his speed and strength in Paradise Honors’ wing-T. Paradise Honors also added to its starting roster TE/OLB Nate Tomlinson, a transfer who sat out last year.

No. 8 Phoenix Christian: Are the young Cougars ready to fend off the big cats, especially in their region, or do they need another year to mature before venturing off as contenders? The development of their offensive line, new linebackers and quarterback may hold the key to this season. Junior Matt Hocking (2,126 rushing yards, 23 TDs in career) and 15 other returning starters also will have a lot to say about how far the team goes this year.

No. 9 Tonopah Valley: At 9-2, the program is coming off its best season ever. Continuing to excel will depend on the new faces, beginning with first-year coach Dustin Johnson. The coaching staff only lost two coaches. Besides introducing a new coach, Tonopah Valley also will welcome 13 new starters. What isn’t changing are the team’s “solid” fronts on both sides. Eduardo Zaragoza (6-4, 305) anchors the o-line, and linebacker Jess Pennington and safety Sebastian Young have added a lot of muscle.

No. 10 San Tan Foothills: Richie Martin’s first head coaching gig after spending 14 years as an assistant came unexpectedly. A week after he was brought in to fill a coordinator opening at San Tan Foothills, the former head coach, John Sanders, left after his first and only season. Martin applied and was handed the keys to the 8th-year varsity program. He was at Arizona Western College prior to arriving at San Tan but spent most of his time coaching in Portland. That’s also where he was named an All-State player before winding up as an All-American at Linfield College, where he was a fraternity brother of Chandler High coach Shaun Aguano.

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NORTH REGION

Alchesay: Jalin Parrish and Brandon Newcomb have been tied at the hip since Newcomb returned as Alchesay's head coach in 2014, when Parrish was named the starting quarterback. Heading into Parrish's third year as the starting QB, Newcomb wants Parrish to continue bringing some stability to the Whiteriver program and to his position. Playmaker Tyreck Cosay, a returning second-team All-Section player, DL TJ Henry and OL Anakin Parker are also capable of shouldering the leadership roles. The season starts in August, but for Alchesay it really began during the summer workouts, where the level of commitment needs to rise, Newcomb said. During the summer Newcomb also was hoping to fill a couple of open spots on the offensive and defensive lines as well as find a full-back, linebacker and free safety. "We are expecting to be playing football in November," the coach said. Lineman Lloyd Cheney wants to keep a streak intact. He hasn't missed a day of school since his kindergarten days, Newcomb said. Congrats and good luck, young man.

Region Notes: Red Mesa is coming off back-to-back 7-3 seasons, but only four starters and seven lettermen are back this year. ... Hopi finished 8-3 last year under first-year coach Raleigh Namoki but graduated a slew of skill players, and 16 of its 20 players were seniors last year. ... Many Farms went 5-5 last year, its best season under eight-year coach John Willie. ... Pinon was 2-8 last year and will strive not to give up the points it did last year. ... Rock Point only won one game last year but had a chance to win four total. ... Valley is looking to finally post a .500 record or better after winning four games in each of the past four seasons.

EAST REGION

Miami: Was the revival of Miami into a playoff winning program a one-year tale? With 17 of last year's 27 players no longer with the team, a repeat of last year's 9-3 breakthrough season might look bleak. But a couple of very important pieces are still in place, so don't write this year's team off. The Maxpreps fourth leading returning tackler in Arizona, Joe Castaneda, Miami's MVP last year, is back to torment teams and so is Miami's entire offensive line, led by Dusty Brunson. The skill positions also weren't depleted even with the loss of the team's leading rusher and receiving yard gainer last year, Joseph Radke. A couple of young but experienced players, QB Z Gabriel Saenz and



Keegan Graff, Benson (photo by Mark Jones of maxpreps.com)

junior Gabe Gomez (638 rushing yards last year), as well as seniors Diego Garcia (team's second leading wide receiver last year) and RB/WR Jimmy Durnan can help Miami's offense control the clock. New coach David Klassen spent a year coaching and learning under Randy Ricedorff at Show Low. The 102nd meeting between Miami and Globe is scheduled for Sept. 2 at Miami. "Our team lost some key players from last year's squad, but the boys have been working hard to play at the same level as last year's team," Klassen said.

Pima: "We should be a solid team," said coach Jace Hancock, whose team went undefeated last year and won the 8-man crown. "We are moving up a division, but still have a solid corps of players, a strong junior class and four dominant seniors." Twins Justin (6-5, 220) and Jarred (6-5, 220) Kartchner, OL/DL Hadley Schmidt, and OL/DL Ethan Claridge are the dominant seniors. Junior RB/CB Aaron Judd is the other dominant player on the team. Juniors Josh Whitaker and Ryne Lewis were dueling for the starting QB spot. Pima's JV team played a handful of 11-man games last year to prepare for this year. "We are just going to have to regroup and learn the new teams and see what they are running," Hancock (48-5 at Pima) said.

Round Valley: Sullivan Udall, "a smart player with cutting ability," added some muscle in the offseason. Not only did Udall rush for 1,555 yards, but the DB also is the team's returning leading tackler. At 5-6, 140 pounds, Dylan Workman was a starting

linebacker last year and wound up with 66 tackles — as a freshman. Workman will get his share of reps at WR this year since two of the three leading receivers last year graduated. Senior WR Marshall Donaldson and junior RB/LB/S Markas Adams also will add some offensive punch to help keep the focus off the offensive leaders. Sr. OL/DL John Stokes is coming back from a knee injury and should help fill one of the open slots on the O-line. "This is a close group of guys," coach Marcus Bell said. "They've played together a lot. They are not selfish, and that's a sign of a team that can be special."

San Carlos: Ninth-year coach Shawn Pietila returns eight starters on each side of the ball. WR/S Dorian Ganilla, FS/HB Adriano Steele, HB/CB Tristan Sneezy (98 tackles last year), HB/FS Al Case Jr. (352 receiving yards and 5 TD catches), WR/DB Raymond Sneezy, WR/CB Xavier Allen (14.7 yards per carry in 2015), and DT/C Lydell Clark are some of the key returning starters who spent a lot of time in the weight room, preparing for their tough 2016 region schedule. Ganilla and Steele are undecided about their college football plans. "We want to make the state playoffs for the first time in school history or at least win six games, which would be the most in school history," Pietila said.

St. Johns: The best case scenario panned out for St. Johns in its late summer search for a new head coach. But now the real work begins. Even with coaching legend Mike Morgan returning to steer St.

Johns, rough waters might await during the first stretch. The program scrambled to organize a late summer program workout, and its summer camp was cancelled while St. Johns searched for a new coach. But the pieces — Morgan, experienced coaching staff, 16 returning starters — are in place for the team to make a late run barring injuries or other setbacks. St. Johns only had about 30-35 players for its two football teams. The focal point of the offense is senior Dillon James, who rushed for 1,400 and 23 touchdowns last year. Running back/defensive back Trent Sherwood (600 rushing, 11 touchdowns, team-high 85 tackles in 2015) also is back. Junior defensive end Joseph Ramsey (team-high 11 sacks last year) and senior lineman Ayden Overson (6-4, 255, captain last year) are on the radar of some colleges.

Thatcher: Second-year starting quarterback Jake Dunlap, a junior last year, completed 53 percent of his passes and is now well-versed in running the split-back veer. Thatcher's schedule is tougher this year, which should help it if it finish with the same record as last year, when it missed the playoffs. MLB Brandon Hayes and FS Tyler Roebuck are the main-men for a defense that will introduce a handful of new faces. Danny Battraw, who coached at Thatcher in the 1990s before leaving and returning for one season a couple of years ago, is back with the team.

Region Note: Morenci has had a .500 or better record in six of the past seven seasons. It won five of its finals regular season games before bowing out in the first round of the 2015 playoffs.

SOUTH REGION

Benson: Last year's defense allowed just under eight points per game. What comes back from that dominant unit is a good group of linebackers and defensive backs, which helped pick the ball off 22 times last year. The line play on each side of the ball are the biggest unknowns heading into this year. The team's top-three leading scorers last year, seniors Tyson Coleman (7 INT's, 10 TD's) Brandon Laird (11 TD's, 74 tackles) and Keegan Graf (17 TD's, 69 tackles), form a formidable two-way, three-headed threat. The versatility of RB/WR Alex Hernandez, the brother of last year's starting quarterback, Nick, will come in handy this season.

Santa Cruz Valley: "I'm glad the expectations are there," coach Rishard Davis said. "But honestly I try to down play it. I don't like it. I want to keep our egos in check. We deserve it, but at the same time we understand we have to work to get better." Last year's injuries to WR Tony Jimenez and DL Jose Diaz hurt not only the two players but also the team in the 2015 postseason, but their injuries healed in the offseason. Senior Emilio Cosillos (only 7 career INTs in 160 attempts) is heading into his third year as the starting QB and is one



Devin Neal, Eloy Santa Cruz (photo by Darin Sicurello of maxpreps.com)

of the field generals on the team. The only two positions Davis had to fill during the summer were at linebacker. Other than that, it's been a stress free summer for him and his boys. "I'm not worried about the team executing or its mentality," Davis said. "They hold each other accountable."

Region Notes: Bisbee tied its highest win total (8) in the past 12 seasons last year but graduated its state-record setting receiver, Spencer Schuller, starting QB Danny Barrow, and its 1,000-yard rusher/100-plus tackler, Tony Chavez. ... San Manuel is looking to rebound from its worst season in more than a decade. ... Mike Mayhurst's return as Tombstone's head coach last year resulted in a two-game improvement in the win column. The team averaged 291 rushing yards per game, but Christian Wilridge, who rushed for 1,700-plus yards is no longer on the roster. ... Willcox is coming off its second consecutive 2-8 season against a touch competition.

CENTRAL REGION

Camp Verde: The team is returning nine starters on offense, including its entire offensive line, and every defensive line starter from a team that almost finished with a .500 record last year. Junior QB Payton Sarkesian passed for 1,344 yards and 12 TDs last year in his first full-time stint under center. The biggest objective for Camp Verde's offense this season is to develop its young players into scoring threats. The team also has to replace five starters on defense, but junior defensive lineman Reyes Herrera, third on the team with 64 solo tackles last year, is still at the school.

Kingman Academy: The Tigers' 1-9 record last year was deceiving. The program was moved up last year and played against bigger schools, but it is back where it belongs. Most of the players that helped the program reach the playoffs two years ago are still with the team and so is well-experienced coach D.B. Stroup. Stroup's son,

Kekoa Makaiwi-Stroup, the team's starting QB, missed a good portion of last year due to an off the field injury. The junior is back in shape and will run Kingman Academy's spread offense. Kingman Academy also plans on pounding the ball behind two "terrific" running backs, seniors Clayton Holway and Jordan McDowell-Syebert. Despite its 19 returning starters, Kingman Academy's offensive and defensive lines are still young. It's defense also is undersized but quick. The team will run a similar version of the flex defense University of Arizona's "Desert Swarm" teams employed in the 1990s. Linebackers Seybert and Kannon Butler, corners Nate Carter and Trevor Lowry and sophomore NT Sonny Munoz will set the tone on defense.

Mohave Accelerated: Coach Steve Price doesn't want his team to get pushed around again this year like it did last year when it gave up 38 points per game. "We need to be more physical on defense," he said. "On offense we need to be more consistent." The team's offensive line was working hard this offseason to solidify itself as a cohesive unit. There's senior leadership on the team with WR Andrew Hedge and ATH Billy Handlin as well as with the 12 returning starters.

Paradise Honors: College prospect Zach Labarbera (6-2, 270), a right guard, is the man in charge of an offensive line that only replaced one starter. "I think we are going to be there in the end," coach Doug Provenzano said. "I really do. We just don't have a lot of depth. The injury monster is always around." Last year, Provenzano's team evaded that monster. This year, about 6-7 players will play on both sides of the ball. Last year, it took the offense a while to adjust to the wing-T. Paradise Honors doesn't plan to abandon the passing game entirely. Not when it possesses the strong passing arm of talented quarterback Jordan Gourley.

Parker: There's some intrigue with the Broncs since they are moving down one division with 19 returning starters from a team that almost finished with a .500 record last year. "With so many returning starters, we look to have a higher football IQ on both sides of the ball," coach Jeston Lotts said. "Our offensive line will be much improved from last year and are the leaders of our team since they all return except for a tackle position. We also look to be able to play faster and more aggressive than last year. I think defensively we will be better tacklers and control the run better." The team will play against unfamiliar foes, but the goal is to win a region title. Senior QB Josh Golding is still developing, but Lotts is impressed with how much Golding, entering his second year as the starter, has improved as a passer and leader. Outside LB Juan Camacho, a senior, let the team in tackles and sacks last year. Daniel Aaker, a junior LB and FB, was calling the defense last year before an injury forced him to sit.



Jess Pennington, Tonopah Valley (photo by Kevin Abele of maxpreps.com)

Junior wingback/kicker James Hoban led the team in points (53) last year.

Tonopah Valley: "Our main team strength is enthusiasm, and we have been working great as a team," first-year head coach Dustin Johnson said. "There is no individual selfishness." Junior Chris Davis started eight games at QB but another athletic QB with a strong arm, Paul MacStevens, was also competing for starting time. The team moved down a division.

Region Note: Junior Dawson Barber threw 15 TDs and just 3 INTs for Sedona Red Rock (7-3 last year), but the team lost its three leading rushers of 2015 and Barber's No. 1 target, WR Bailey Ehrlich.

METRO WEST REGION

Arizona Lutheran: Eleven sophomores played in its lineup of 30 players last year. The team is likely a year away from returning to its perch atop the rankings. The team lost one of its young standouts, sophomore RB/OLB Brandon Garcia, to a broken hand last year during the second game of the year. But Garcia is 100 percent, and a fellow wrestling teammate, OL/DL Alex Jordan, a junior, should help fill the leadership void left by the loss of linemen and skill players after the 2015 season. The team also said goodbye to a decent amount of size and experience with the loss of 16 starters. Injuries last year forced some of the young talent to step in sooner than expected. "That experience is needed now as they'll be stepping into prominent roles," coach David Peter said. "We are working to get stronger and healthier so we can compete for championships in our section and division. More importantly than being cham-

pions on the field, we are also working to be champions of character off it also."

Bourgade Catholic: Since the Golden Eagles will be young this year, they must improve greatly on both sides of the ball, veteran coach Pat Lavin said. The biggest holes Bourgade Catholic needs to plug are on the offensive and defensive lines and at QB. Senior RB/WR David Aguilar finished with 1,013 all-purpose yards last year. Lavin is five wins away from No. 200 in his career. He picked up three former St. Mary's players/coaches, Michael Espinoza, Jerry Chavez and Ike Gomez. Lavin attended and coached at St. Mary's.

Gilbert Christian: Welcome to 11-man football, Gilbert Christian. The program brings a first-year coach with NFL playing experience and a good group of receivers and quarterbacks. Coach Shawn Patterson is a former second round pick of the Green Bay Packers, where he played from 1988-1993 and finished with 11 career sacks. Before attending Arizona State and earning All-Pac-10 honors, Patterson starred at McClintock High. Gilbert Christian lost one of its best senior classes last year but returns Brayden Finkbeiner, who threw 44 career touchdowns in 8-man football, and his favorite target, senior Caleb Young (26 career receiving touchdowns). Junior WR/RB Blake Kelly, sophomore RB/WR Kyle Patterson, junior WR/CB Sam Mominee and junior ATH Max Webb also will lead their team during its first foray into 11-man ball.

Phoenix Christian: The offensive line will introduce a couple of new faces this year except for right tackle Isaac Pitman, right guard Jacob Sharp and Dorean Gardner. Pitman and Sharp each started 10 games in 2015, and Gardner, along with Hocking and QB/DB Tylin Rodgers, are the seniors that will lead the way for a team that started 11 sophomores and two freshmen last year. Junior ATH/DB Corey Leary, an honorable-mention All-Section player last year, is the fourth and youngest of three Leary brothers to play at Phoenix Christian. Jay, Corey's father, is Phoenix Christian's assistant head coach. "We want to improve our downhill running game," Olson said. "On defense we want to improve our open field tackling."

Scottsdale Christian: Arizona's high school football Twitter feeds will likely be filled with Jack Miller mentions this season. He's just a freshman, but Scottsdale Christian will start the talented 6-3, 187-pound Miller at quarterback. Miller was recognized as one of the top QBs at Trent Dilfer's camp in Atlanta and was invited to Texas A&M and South Carolina to throw, Gibbs said. Miller will have the luxury of throwing to an experienced receiving corps, with Jacob Kaites, Dalton Johnson and Caleb Dunn. Kaites and Johnson also head a top-notch secondary. Last year, Scottsdale Christian led its section in rushing with the help of All-State center Jacob Hartmann, a senior, and lineman Dominic Lorenzi. Look for a more



Scottsdale Christian's Zac Lane (#28) jumping to block a pass attempt (photo by Mark Jones of maxpreps.com)

balanced offense this year from Scottsdale Christian. The school signed a 5-year deal with Under Armour. Senior Jacob Hartmann worked with Pittsburgh Steeler's long snapper Matt Dooley all summer.

Tempe Prep: Look for Tempe Prep to continue running its methodical ground-and-pound plan down opponents' throats. But the passing game might add a wrinkle or two to help take some pressure off its inexperienced offensive line. Tempe Prep's indispensable commodities always seem to be in the trenches, but this year's hogs will need time to adjust to varsity ball. Coach Joshua Brittain will depend on senior TE/ILB Herman Flores, Jr. G/ILB Brendan Phelan, senior ATH Joe Swingle, senior RB/LB/DB Jacob Matsomoto and junior QB Max Rich to lead the way. "I expect my team to play passionately, courageously and in a disciplined manner on every play," Brittain said. "If they do that, the rest will take care of itself." Tempe Prep's players and Arizona's football community are bound to gain inspiration from Brittain, who was born with cerebral palsy.

Region note: Micah Johnson is the name of the new football coach at Joy Christian. The program didn't return its annual azpreps365.com football questionnaire. It's unknown what the program is returning from last year's state championship.

METRO EAST REGION

Antelope Union: It's been seven years since the program last experienced a winning season. But with 19 starters back there's a lot of optimism swirling around

third-year coach Gary Mauldin's program this year. But for Antelope to reach Mauldin's goal of making the playoffs this season, its pass protection, run game and run defense must improve this year. A strong senior class, receiving corps and big backfield, headlined by Angel Esparza, Estevan Martinez, Ruben Castaneda, Esteban Juarez, Mario Castro and Anthony Brister, are the strengths of this year's team. Mauldin will go up against his former high school head coach in Benson on Aug. 26, when coach Mike Hayhurst's Tombstone squad faces Antelope.

Chandler Prep: Chandler Prep will make the jump to 11-man ball with all of its skills players who helped the team finish 5-3 in 8-man last year in tow. Among that experienced talent are seniors Harrison Strong (706 rushing yards, 99 tackles, 7 INTs, 18 TDs in 2015) Trey Harris (134.7 all-purpose yards per game last year), OLB/SS/RB Samauel Decker and junior Alex Brandt (15 TD passes, 11 sacks in 2015). "As we make the adjustment from 8 to 11-man football, our greatest strength is the foundation our seniors put down last year and the pride these next group of seniors will take in building on that foundation," coach Chris Goodman said.

Glendale Prep: Glendale Prep, which opened its program in 2010, never missed the 8-man playoffs. However, the playoffs streak is at risk this year with the rebuilding plans that are in place. The team had only about 16 players before summer break. But coach Jamie Self's boys aren't about to back down just because of the roster turnover and 11-man introduction. "We will

be tough and scrappy," Self said. "We will be learning a whole new system with largely new players. I expect we will improve in the area of clock control and ball security."

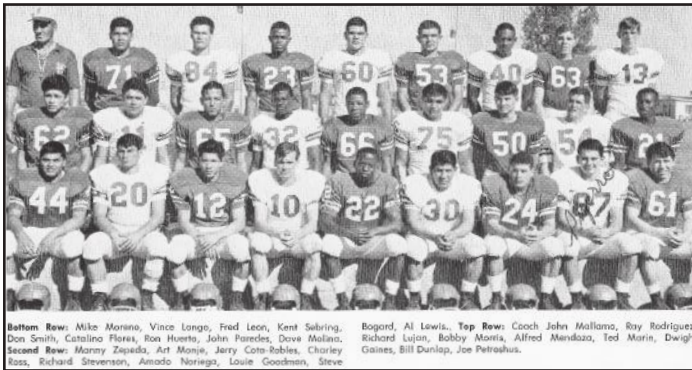
San Tan Foothills: Coach Ritchie Martin played in the CFL for 10 years as a receiver. "I expect big things and to hold my players accountable," Martin said. "I want our kids to go to college and get their school paid for." Martin's offense will show multiple looks, including spread, I-formation and off-I. Running the offense will be offensive coordinator Delaurian McKenzie, who coached with Martin in Yuma. Martin is confident that QB Danny Herrera, a junior transfer from Florence, and his "strong, live arm" and smarts can help guide San Tan to the playoffs. Herrera's big targets are expected to be TE Johnny Craig (6-4, 230) and WR/FS Dante Scharon. Scharon wears hearing aids and can read lips, but it's his 4.6 speed that defenders need to pay attention to. Senior RB Devon Ziman (6-1, 190) didn't play last year but will this year and will be the featured back. WR Brandon Williams, FS Michael Posey and RB Deronte Pope will also play important roles this season, Martin said. "I think we are a playoff team," he said. "That's my goal." Eighteen San Tan players were academically ineligible to play, but Martin helped reduce that number to 4.

Scottsdale Prep: Since 2013, the program has had four different head coaches. Hoping to bring some stability is Troy Head, a former head coach at Salt River and Mayer, who took over this year. Scottsdale Prep hasn't had a winning season since current Saguaro coach Jason Mohns was the coach in 2008.

Veritas Prep: The Falcons, not surprisingly, struggled last year while playing with only two seniors. This year they want to rebound in a big way — playoffs is the goal — with the help of QB/DB Aneurin Minson and C/DT Nick Ackerly, two of about 10 seniors on the 2016 squad. Junior RB/DL Sebastian Bautista, a captain last year, also figures to lead the way in the program's quest for its first plus-.500 season. "This is the second year in the offensive and defensive systems for the sophomores, and it will also be a full year of weight training," second-year coach Jim Ellison said. "We will expand the playbook and hope to execute better and score more points." Ellison coached at Arcadia from 2008-11, where in 2011 he guided Arcadia to a 10-3 record.

Region Note: Arete Prep struggled last year with very young last year, as only four of the team's 19 players were seniors.

Fifty Years Ago: Tucson Wins Physical Title Tilt in Final Game for Coaches



Bottom Row: Mike Marino, Vince Longo, Fred Leon, Kent Sabring, Don Smith, Catalino Flores, Ron Huerta, John Paredes, Dave Mallamo. **Second Row:** Manny Zapata, Art Monje, Jerry Cano-Robles, Charley Ross, Richard Stevenson, Amado Noriega, Louie Goodman, Steve Bogard, Al Lewis. **Top Row:** Coach John Mallamo, Ray Rodriguez, Richard Lujan, Bobby Morris, Alfred Mendoza, Ted Marin, Dwight Gaines, Bill Dunlap, Joe Petralius.



Bottom Row: Greg Leavitt, Art Moore, Rene Madrid, Tony Gradillas, Henry Anderson, Abe Aragon, Rudy Gallego, Dave Dehart, Bob Morrison. **Second Row:** Ruben Youngblood, Leon Bryant, Gilbert Felix, George Fass, Oscar Romo, Gary Warner, Keith Ritchie, Don Givens, Ron Curry. **Top Row:** Manny Inigo, Ernie Fimbres, Mike Clark, Eddie Quintana, Joe Yoncz, Bill Dawson, Albert Soto, Cedric Williams, Albert Espinosa, Coach Harry Smith, Coach Ralph Bailey.

By Barry Sollenberger

It was the “old guard” against the “new kid on the block.” Tucson High vs. Mesa Westwood. Played before an estimated 12,000 fans at Sun Devil Stadium in 1966, Tucson’s Badgers scored with 41 seconds left to win the school’s 11th state football crown since statehood.

Quarterback Art Monje hit a diving Keith Ritchie in the end zone with a 34 yard scoring strike to give the defending state champs a 14-7 win.

It was a thrilling climax to a brutal defensive game, one of the most physical in playoff history. Penalties wrecked Edgar “Mutt” Ford’s Westwood team. An omen of things to come happened in the second period when Bill Higgs returned at Tucson punt 39 yards to the Badger 8-yard line. But it was called back on a clipping infraction.

Moments later the Badgers’ Rene Madrid broke a 61-yard run to the Warrior 23-yard line to set up the game’s first score. Then Monje, faking beautifully (a Badger trademark for half-a-century), tossed a 19 yard scoring pass to Ernie Fimbres on fourth down. Fimbres then booted the extra point. Lineman Tim Boubelik recovered a Tucson fumble on the Badgers’ nine-yard line to open the third period, but a great goal line stand, led by all-state tackle Bill Dawson, stopped Westwood cold.

However, Warrior quarterback Jay Ray Rokey (later a starting catcher at the University of Arizona) tossed a 32-yard pass to Roger Schmuck (later an All-American baseball player at ASU) at the Tucson nine.

Three plays later tailback Bob Soza, the state’s leading scorer, dived over from the one. Bob Blake booted the PAT and the game was tied. From that point on, Westwood couldn’t move against the Badger line, led by Dawson, a 220-pound All-American (who later started at Michigan State), and 225-pound guard Leon Bryant.

Ironically, it was to be the last high school game coached by both team’s coaches, Tucson John Mallamo and Westwood’s Ford.

“The difference was simply the penalties,” Ford told Phoenix Gazette writer Steve Weston after the game. “We got them and they didn’t. I am not crying, though. Tucson has a real good ball club and coach John Mallamo deserves a lot of credit. Tucson fought for it. They wanted it as badly as we did.”

The Warriors were slapped with nine penalties for 72 yards, Tucson four for 37. The Badgers rolled up 213 yards rushing to 111 for Westwood, while Tucson had 274 yards total offense to the Mesa school’s 197. Madrid led all ball carriers with 112 yards on 14 carries. The Badgers’ Greg Leavitt, later a University of Pennsylvania halfback who tragically died in an automobile wreck, had 75 yards on 17 totes. Westwood’s Soza, limited in the second half by a leg injury, got just 49 yards on 17 carries.

But it was Dawson who was tremendous. Westwood ball carriers bounced off him on contact. Toward the end of the game he threw reserve Warrior quarterback Dempsey Ford for a 17 yard loss.

Tucson’s lone loss came in the second week of the season, a 19-13 setback at Phoenix Union. During the 49-13 win over Tucson Salpointe, Leavitt averaged 33.1 yards per carry on seven carries. Following a 48-20 win over Tucson Sunnyside, the losers head coach, Elwood Turner, said, “This is the best Tucson High team that has played against me.”

Both state finalists took opposite routs to the finals. Westwood earned a berth in the championship game by defeating Phoenix Maryvale in an electrifying playoff game. The regulation game ended 14-14 between the Warriors and Panthers and a “Colorado Playoff” was required to decide a winner.

In Tucson, the Badgers’ fleet stable of backs and quick-charging line trounced Phoenix St. Mary’s 34-0 in the other semifinal match, played before 13,500 fans at University of Arizona. The difference was Tucson’s bruising line play, headed by Dawson.

“I’ve had some long nights in this stadium,” said St. Mary’s head coach Ed Doherty, a former University of Arizona mentor. “This was one of them.

“Tucson High is by far the best football team we’ve played. They’re incomparable. They’re just great.”

(This story was originally published in Barry Sollenberger’s 1996 Tucson Football report. The Arizona Interscholastic Association is planning to reunite members of the 1966 Tucson High state football championship team during half-time of the Class 6A state championship game at University of Phoenix Stadium in December.)

1A Conference Preseason Rankings

By Jose Garcia
azpreps365.com

No. 1. Bagdad: Coach Dalton Mills challenged his seniors in the offseason to write themselves into Bagdad's record book. What those seniors are shooting for is to help etch Bagdad into the 8-man championship trophy this season. The last time Bagdad accomplished that feat was when this year's seniors were freshmen. Bagdad's title quest last year ended in the semifinals to Pima and two years ago to Mogollon in the 8-man final. Blocking Bagdad from its title target this year will be tough because of the offensive firepower that'll suit up. Junior Israel Loveall's debut as QB last year was stellar (8-man state record-tying 50 TDs). The holes to fill, a defensive back and a couple of guard spots, are the only concern. But with so many weapons — the players who scored 79 of the team's 88 TDs last year return — the focus of Bagdad's opponents will be elsewhere.

No. 2 Superior: Like Bagdad, Superior wants to cradle a state championship trophy that was within reach last year. Like Bagdad, Superior was still searching for the right offensive linemen combination as of late July. Like Bagdad, there's no question that Superior can be an offensive juggernaut behind an athletic quarterback. Nicolaus Cruz led the team in passing and rushing last year, but the rushing stats were not by design in Superior's spread scheme. Teams keyed in on Superior's bruising and athletic back, Edgar Galindo, allowing lanes to open for the speedy Cruz. Coach Ryan Palmer will place a lot more on and off the field responsibilities on Galindo's plate this year. The third offensive option, believe it or not, is left guard Jalon Murray (6-4, 200). Murray clocked the fastest 100 on the team. He'll be a big target for Cruz in the middle of the field, and on the outside he'll look for receivers Austin Navarrete and Marcos Bueno.

No. 3 St. David: Sr. Travis Davis blossomed into one of the state's best dual threats last year, helping him get close to breaking one state career record and needing to duplicate last year's TD passing total to set another career state record. With 1,286 passing yards this year, a mark he surpassed each of the last two seasons, he'll break the career 8-man passing record. If he throws 34 TDs again this year, the career 8-man TD record is all his. The senior has been a workhorse on offense since his freshman season, averaging a career 250.1 total yards each game.

No. 4 Williams: Williams took its lumps without any senior leadership in its return to 8-man football last year and still reached the playoffs. Williams' players will learn more 8-man lessons this season as one of the favorites, but they'll start to dish them out as well. The team didn't lose a starter off last year's 7-4 team and gained more firepower. Daniel Lopez, a "solid" running back and receiver for the team, suffered a leg injury in the first game of the 2015 season and is ready to roll this year. The program also added a solid freshman class that'll provide some depth, seven-year coach Jeff Brownlee said. "I feel very good about our team in all phases of the game," Brownlee added. "We got our first year of 8-man out of the way, and it's time to build on our success from last year."

No. 5 Mogollon: The strength of the team heading into the summer was its depth at running back and its only two returning offensive linemen, seniors Barr Turley and Hans Darga. Darga might move to tight end since coach Tim Slade has a couple of juniors he can slide in at the guard spot. The team graduated its leading rusher, Brock Slade, but sophomore Seth Reidhead and senior Aaron Ballesteros averaged more yards per carry, 8.7 and 7.9 respectively, than Slade last year. Five running backs finished with 16

or more carries for Mogollon in 2015. As of early July, senior Donnie Adams and sophomore Trey Tenney were splitting time at quarterback. They each bring different talents to the table, as Adams has a stronger arm and Tenney is a better runner.

No. 6 Salome: Bryan McCarty, an assistant coach/defensive coordinator for the past eight years at Salome, takes over as head coach this year. He'll inherit 12 returning starters that helped the team almost advance to the second round of the playoffs last year. The team did lose a couple of experienced defensive backs, which a couple of young players will try to fill this year. "Defensively, the starters have played together since middle school and kept us in a lot of games over the past 4-5 years," McCarty said. The coach said he plans on getting his athletes in open space more to set up 1 on 1 situations. Salome's run blocking should improve this year with the experience that's returning. "We are ready to take the next step," McCarty said.

No. 7 NFL Yet: There's a lot to like about coach Armando Ruiz's program. Thirteen returning starters. Impressive summer 7-on-7 tournament victories over St. Mary's, Tempe Prep and Boulder Creek. Plenty of skill players. NFL Yet finished with a 2-6 record last year, but it came against some tough competition and NFL Yet's lineup was comprised of mostly freshmen and sophomores. Last year, the team's biggest weakness was its inexperienced offensive line, but Ruiz simplified the schemes and is emphasizing strength and conditioning this season. The new defensive coordinator, Albert Ramirez, is working on improving the team's pass defense.

No. 8 Trivium Prep: The Crimson Knights. That's the first-year school's mascot. Now it's up to the players to start making a name for themselves as one of the newest members of the Arizona Interscholastic Association. But it shouldn't take long for the talent on this team to get noticed. Michael Spencer will don the headsets for the first time as head coach. But he arrived at Trivium Prep with a lot of experience as an assistant, mostly as an offensive coordinator, and highly recommended. He has served time studying under a couple of quality coaches, Rich Wellbrock and Liberty's Mark Smith, when Smith was at Millennium. Spencer's defensive coordinator, Phil Friedrich, also coached with Spencer at Millennium and Desert Edge. Friedrich studied the fly-sweep, what Trivium Prep will run, under the guru of the fly-sweep, Mark Speckman of Lawrence University.

No. 9 Joseph City: Joseph City and coach Eldon Larsen are used to winning, but that hasn't been the case during the past so-so three seasons. The program lost its two leading tacklers, leading receiver and starting quarterback after the 2015 season. But it's two leading rushers, Matthew Fields (844 yards, team-high 15 TDs) and Troy Poudrier (550 rushing yards in 2015), were underclassmen last year. LB Kaden Westover, Aaron Johnston, Poudrier, a captain and LB/DE, Fields, a DE, had productive seasons on defense last year.

No. 10 Valley Union: The Blue Devils lost only eight seniors from last year's 9-2 state championship run. But those seniors accounted for a majority of the 84 TDs and 354.2 yards rushing per game. RB/LB Sean Hahn will attempt to fill the void. The senior was one of the state's leading tacklers (97 solo tackles) while contributing 759 all-purpose yards and nine touchdowns. Sr. Brandon Martinez and his 200-pound frame will do as much as he can in the trenches on both sides of the ball. The team only lost two linemen after last year's playoff run but will need to develop some skill players.

2016 1A Football Preview

By Jose Garcia
azpreps365.com

NORTH REGION

Mogollon: Linebacker Aaron Ballesteros, junior Josef Watkins and sophomore defensive back Seth Reidhead are the team's returning defensive starters, and senior defensive lineman Jordan Cochran also played significant minutes last year. The team is returning nine lettermen.

Williams: Several small colleges are after senior DT/OL Josh Sanders (6-2, 255). Junior QB/CB Martin Soria (13 TDs, 1,252 total yards last year), senior RB/CB Cruz Pearson and junior WR/DE Zack Perkins are the go-to guys on offense. On defense, Soria, junior FB/OLB Tate Grantham (63 tackles in 2015), senior MLB Ethan Johnson (48 tackles last year), senior DE Francisco Ortiz, junior DL Emmanuel Flores, Sanders and Perkins (58 tackles) will lead the charge.

Region Notes: El Capitan finished 1-5 in its first season of varsity ball last year. ... Fredonia was working on adding more than the 11 players to its roster of last year. ... Greyhills Academy finished 1-9 in each of the past three seasons, but the program was competitive compared to what last year's record shows. ... A third of the Joseph City's players last year were seniors and a fourth were freshmen. ... At 43 games, Rough Rock might be home to the state's longest current losing streak.

WEST REGION

Bagdad: Besides leading the passing attack last year, QB Israel Loveall also was the team's second leading rusher, but the team wants to have a more balanced attack this year. The lack of it hurt the team against Pima, which moved up a division this season and gave Bagdad its only two losses last year. The rushing roles of Devin Nelson and Connor Pacheco should increase this year. Bagdad's linebackers are experienced, and its defensive line, where you'll find leader Michael Mendez, is quick. "We are looking at this season as unfinished business," coach Dalton Mills said. "We are embracing it. We've been close the last two years. We are not taking anything lightly or for granted."

Salome: RB/DE Tyler Luz, C/NT Thomas Rees, QB/LB Brian Castillo,



Barr Turley, Mogollon (photo by Mark Jones of maxpreps.com)

FB/LB Ryan Perez, TE/LB Brayan Mendoza, G/DE Jose Ortiz, RB/DB Jose Armenta, and WR/DB Rene Soqui were listed at Salome's key players this year. The program has finished with winning record in the past six seasons.

Region Notes: Coach Nathan Miller is in his third season as Anthem Prep's head coach and is getting players to come out. This year's he'll have a program-high 29 players suit up. ... Gary Wells (768 receiving yards, 11 TDs) and Dylan Wilhide (6 receiving TDs on 12 receptions) were juniors last year for Mayer. ... Telesis Prep went 0-5 last year and is looking for more ways to score points this year. ... Valley Lutheran graduated all of its offensive and defensive stat leaders last year. Jr. CB/WR Romeo Valenzuela is next in line to help contribute. ... San Pasqual is returning six starters and 11 lettermen. Its top players are QB Victor Alvarez and WR/LB Raphael Dominguez.

SOUTH REGION

Patagonia: The southern Arizona school will introduce a new coach this season, Kenny Hayes, who served at the school's junior varsity coach the past three seasons. Six juniors and only one senior comprise the total of returning lettermen for Hayes. But the team does return 10 starters. Hayes' biggest concern heading into the summer was the run game, but Chris Quiroga, Victor Barajas, Chris Mi-



Justin Kartchner, Pima (photo by Jim Willittes of maxpreps.com)

randa and Stevie Beltran are expected to help carry the team in one way or another.

St. David: The good news for QB Travis Davis is that his two favorite receivers, Austin Bryant (10 TDs) and Logan Brubaker (6 INTs), on the outside will help keep the pressure off him. The bad news is that Pima has to replace some leadership in the trenches. But defensive stalwarts LB Ryan Trejo (second leading tackler last year) and NG Billy Tarango (8 sacks in 2015) are back.

Trivium Prep: Former Ironwood High football and track standout Travaris Forrest will help coach Trivium Prep's skill players, and former college lineman Chris Scriptor will coach the offensive and defensive lines. "We have a nice number of young athletes who are dedicated to leaving their legacy as the school's first ever varsity players," coach Michael Spencer said. "We have a lot of athletes who can play various positions. Leadership will be our biggest strength." Look out for twins Adan and Robert Sanders. The 6-2, 180-pound juniors are "phenomenal athletes." Sophomores Mason Moore, Luke Johnson and Max Hirth were battling to become the starting quarterback. TE/LB Colby Bader (6-2, 190) is another impact player. Of the 28 players in the program only two are seniors, including RB Matt Rodriguez. Athletic director Matthew Akins had everything in place to help Trivium Prep succeed right off the bat, Spencer said.



Martin Soria, Williams (photo by Mark Jones of maxpreps.com)

Region Notes: Baboquivari snapped its seven-year winless streak last year. ... Tohono O'odham snapped a two-year winless streak with a victory last year.

EAST REGION

Duncan: Ten seniors want to cap their high school careers by helping their program post a plus-.500 year, something that's happened at Duncan only three times since 20004. "I think we will have a solid team," seven-year coach Eldon Merrell said. "We also have some really tough competition on our schedule. We will have a solid defense, but our offense has some questions at this time." The biggest question mark for the team during the off-season was who will third-year quarterback Chris Corona (1,248 total yards in 2015) throw to. Merrell's confidence in his defense comes from knowing he returns five starters, including senior linebacker Jonathon Bejarano (11 tackles per game in 2015) and junior defensive back Toby Harris (90 career tackles).

Fort Thomas: For the first time in 30 years, Fort Thomas' sideline will be without coach Will Hinton, the man the Eastern Arizona Courier dubbed Mr. Fort Thomas. But adjusting to the new coach, Bracken Walker, Fort Thomas' offensive coordinator for the past five years, shouldn't last long. What might take time to fine tune is getting six new starters on offense up to speed. Shoring up a defense that gave up an average of 46.6 points per game last year is also a priority for Walker. Having four returning starters on that side of the ball will help, including senior Manny Carrizoza and juniors Evan Stringfellow and Iversin



Sean Hahn, Valley Union (photo by Jim Willittes of maxpreps.com)

Nelson, the team's leading tacklers last year. On offense, Carrizoza averaged a team-high 164.4 all-purpose yards and caught 11 touchdown passes last year, tied for team-high in that category, and Stringfellow split his time at wide receiver, quarterback and receiver last year. Carrizoza and Stringfellow are the only returning starters on offense, but, like Hinton, the expectations still are high for Walker. "We want to contend for a playoff berth," he said.

Hayden: John Estrada was met with adversity in his return as Hayden's head coach last year. Estrada (53-19 at Hayden from 2003-09) lost his "stud" running back and team's "rock" on and off the field, Santiago Pina, who was in a car accident at the start of the season. "It was life threatening, and thank God he pulled through," Estrada said. "But we as a team never recovered from that." Pina is confined to a wheelchair and is working on recovering some of his motor skills and to speak. "Before the accident and even now, Santiago continues to be a leader and a fighter," Estrada said. Last year, after Santiago's accident, the team continued to deal with adversity throughout the season, with injuries depleting the roster. If the 10 seniors on the team are up for leading this year's team, and the commitment from players was present during the offseason, expect Hayden to rebound in a big way this year. Running backs Brandon Cruz and Ryan Donovan and receiver Michael Guerrero are healthy and ready to restore Hayden and honor Pina. Almost every starter returns from a team that went 1-6 last year. Estrada saw a good amount of players



Travis Davis, St. David (photo by Chris Hook of maxpreps.com)

sign up for football in the offseason for the Lobos.

NFL Yet: Look out for freshman Tyraille Carrethers, a possible D-I recruit Ruiz said. NFL Yet's QB, Izaak Ruiz, is coach Ruiz's son, and two more sons of Ruiz, Armando Jr. and Eli, will be assistant coaches on the team. "Our goal is to make the playoffs and compete for a championship," Ruiz said.

Ray: First and foremost, new head coach Frank Lechuga, a junior high coach for the past two years, said he is searching for players who are willing to step up and help the program rebound from last year's 2-6 season. Lechuga and returning assistant coaches Fred Cruz and James Fessenden have the experience to help the players succeed, he added. "We are expecting a renewed level of performance on both sides of the ball," Lechuga said. "This translates to speed, agility and the willingness to finish every play with an aggressive attitude." FB/LB Paul Wormwood, WR/DE Jordan Pace, OT/NG Anthony Acuna, WR/DB Nathan Molar, and DL/OL Fabian Valenzuela will have a say in how much Ray improves this season.

Superior: Defensively, Superior has one of the state's better units in 8-man ball. Galindo, a linebacker, was the team's leading tackler last year. "We've made a lot of growth," nine-year coach Ryan Palmer said. "When our seniors were freshmen, they lost to everybody. But with that experience and growing pains, we've gotten better every year. We were in the semifinals last year, and hopefully we'll that the next step this year."

Players, Coach Within Reach of Setting New Records; Moro Five Wins Away from Friedli

By Andy Morales
azpreps365.com

A coach and some of the state's elite players are within reach of breaking some of the state's marquee state football records this season.

Two of those potential record breakers, coach Paul Moro and quarterback Nazareth Greer, call Marcos de Niza home. Moro needs five wins to tie the state's all-time career coaching victory record, and Greer has a chance to become just the second quarterback in Arizona history to reach the 10,000 yard passing mark.



Marcos de Niza quarterback Nazareth Greer (photo by Andy Morales of azpreps365.com)

Career Coaching Victories

331-159-6 Vern Friedli, Tucson Amphitheater
326-66 Paul Moro, Marcos de Niza
315-87 Larry Fetkenhier, Glendale Cactus
310-115 Jim Rattay, Cesar Chavez
309-139-4 Jesse Parker, Gilbert
308-138-3 Karl Kiefer, Phoenix Mountain Pointe
303-74-2 Mike Morgan, St. Johns

Career Passing Yards

For his career, Greer has 6,423 passing yards and 63 touchdowns. He is averaging 3,200 yards a season, which will put him near the 10,000 mark but still a bit short of the Class 4A record currently held by former Tempe QB Emanuel Gant (10,489 career passing yards).

Greer needs 4,067 yards to break the 4A record and 3,577 yards to break 10,000. At this point, it looks like 10,000 might be more attainable. Still, the season passing yards 4A record is 4,662 (Desert Edge QB Anthony Hernandez). Hernandez accomplished that record in 2013.

Former Saguaro QB Luke Rubenzer has the 4A record for career touchdown passes at 130 from 2011-13. That mark appears to be safe. Maybe.

Although Greer only has 63 career touchdown passes, Higley Sr. Masson Crossland has 72 and Sunrise Mountain Sr. Chase Cord has 99 career TDs. Cord collected 52 touchdown passes last year alone (Rubenzer had 61 in 2013), so the career mark of 130 is in jeopardy.

Cord "only" needs 31 TD passes this year to become the new 4A stat leader in that category. At any rate, he could get his 100th TD pass at Buckeye on Aug 26.

Career Passing Yard Leaders

5A 8,377; Dalton Sneed, Scottsdale Horizon 2011-14
4A 10,489; Emanuel Gant, Tempe 2011-14
3A 8,517; Rathen Ricedorff, Show Low 2008-10

Career Passing Yard Leaders (cont)

2A 9,141; Matt Inman, Yuma Catholic 2005-08
1A 6,408; Brian Chason, Tucson Christian 1982-85

Career Receiving Yards

Christian Kirk's 3,943 4A career receiving yard record might get touched this year. Casa Grande Sr. Trevor Russell has 2,436 career receiving yards after last year's 1,214 yard season. It appears Kirk's record might be safe, but the 3,000 career mark for Russell is well within reach.

Russell has 31 career touchdown catches. The 4A record is 44 (Elijah Marks, Desert Edge 2011-13). Russell collected 19 TD receptions last year.

Receiving Yards Career Leaders

5A 3,674; Mark Andrews, Desert Mountain 2011-13
4A 3,943; Christian Kirk, Scottsdale Saguaro 2011-14
3A 3,311; Josh Weeks, Show Low 2008-10 (Jr)
2A 2,626; Caine Palone, San Pasquel 1994-97
1A 4,221; Paul Hatcher Tucson Christian 1982-85

Career Rushing Yards

Desert Edge standout Tehran Thomas has 3,272 career rushing yards. The 5A record is 5,669 by Mike Mitchell of Brophy (1990-92). Thomas would need 2,398 yards to break the record, which is highly unlikely. But he needs 1,728 to break 5,000, which would put him at his average per year.

Rushing Yards Career Leaders

5A 5,669; Mike Mitchell, Phoenix Brophy Prep 1990-92
4A 5,878; Marcus Thomas, Tolleson 2000-02
3A 6,750; Brandon Long, Mohave Valley River Valley 2011-14
2A 7,544; Casey Jahn, Phoenix Northwest Christian 2008-11
1A 5,760; Arley McNeil, Patagonia 1985-88

Career Catches

Desert Mountain Sr. Kade Warner has 158 career receptions. The 5A record (207) was set by Mark Andrews of Desert Mountain from 2011-13. Warner had 96 catches last year, with an average of 80 receptions over the last two seasons. With 50 receptions, he will have the new big school state reception record. He needs 64 catches to set a new state record regardless of school size.

Casa Grande standout Trevor Russell has 158 career receptions. The 4A record is 203, set by Christian Kirk of Saguaro (2011-14). Collect 46 receptions this year and the 4A record is his. He is also chasing the overall state record of 221.

Career Reception Leaders

5A 207; Mark Andrews, Desert Mountain 2011-13
4A 203; Christian Kirk, Scottsdale Saguaro 2011-14
3A 149; Rod Denetso, Ganado 1994-95
149; Josh Weeks, Show Low 2008-10 (Jr.)
2A 163; Clifton Jones, Florence 1994-96
1A 221; Paul Hatcher, Tucson Christian 1982-85

For more individual and team state records please visit azpreps365.com/archives

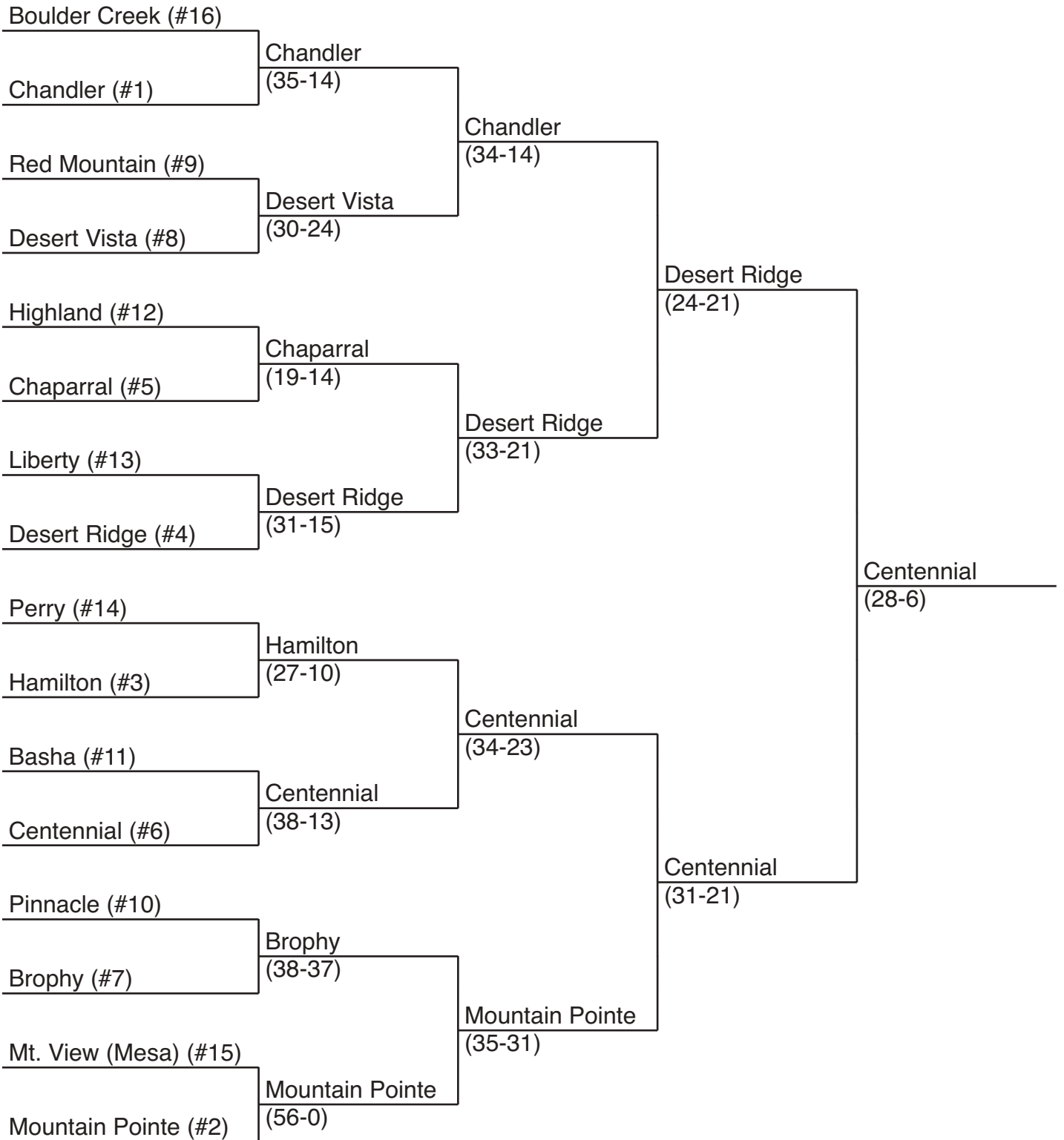

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2015 Div. I State Championship Bracket

Fri, Nov 6

Fri, Nov 13

Fri, Nov 20

Fri, Nov 27



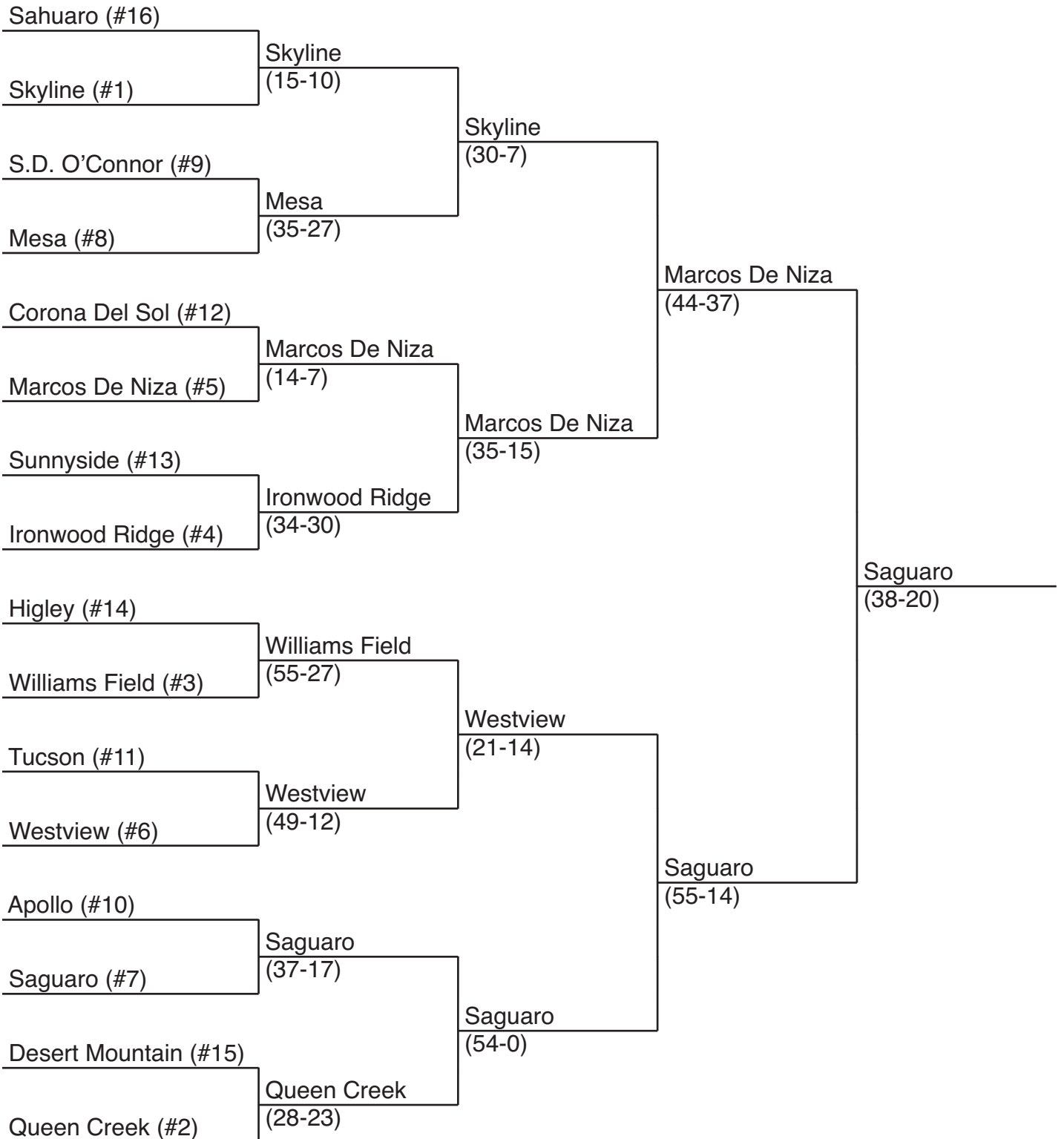

PREPS REPORT POWERED BY FAIA 161.com
2015 Div. II State Championship Bracket

Fri, Nov 6

Fri, Nov 13

Fri, Nov 20

Sat, Nov 28



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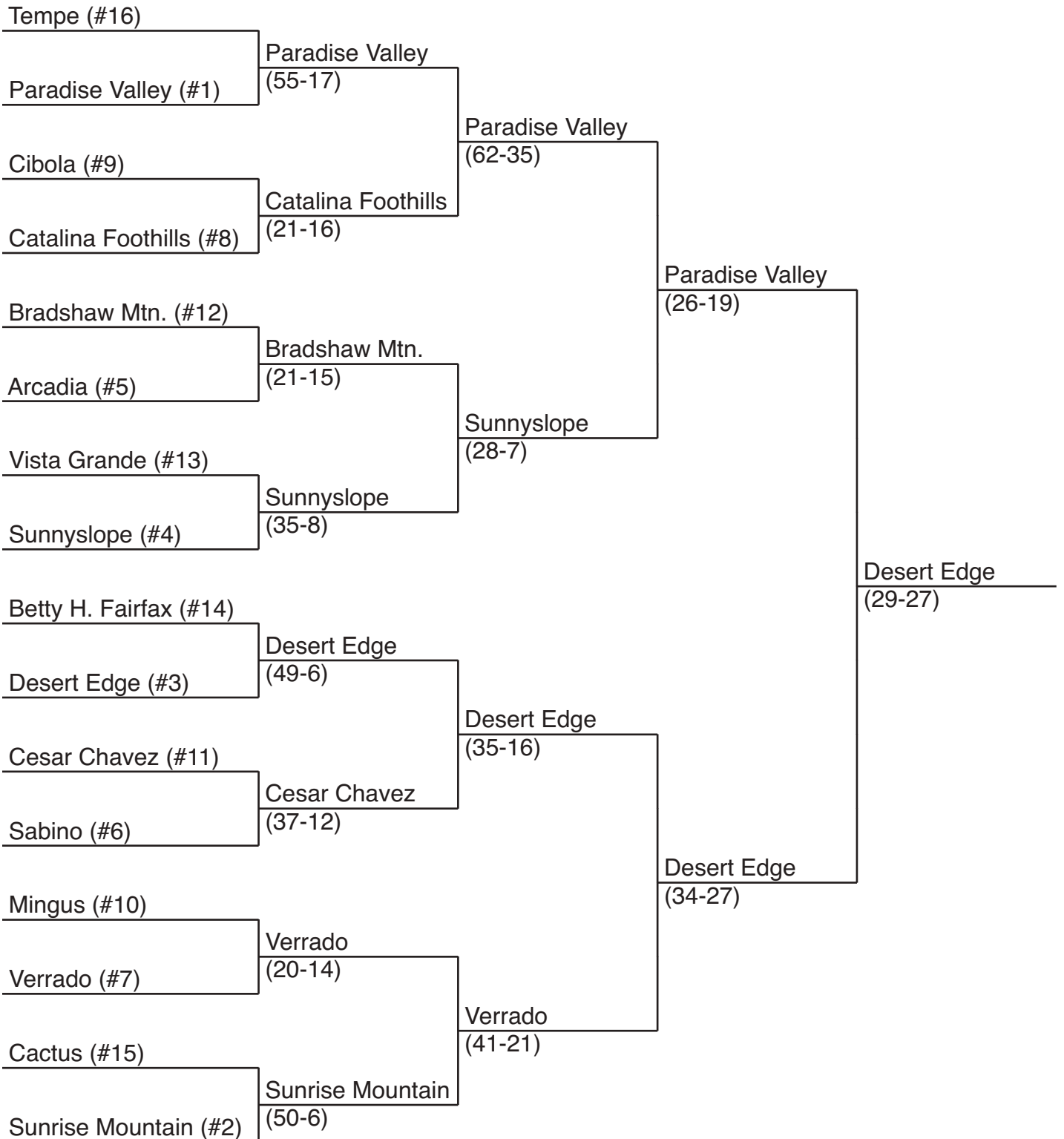
2015 Div. III State Championship Bracket

Fri, Nov 6

Fri, Nov 13

Fri, Nov 20

Sat, Nov 28



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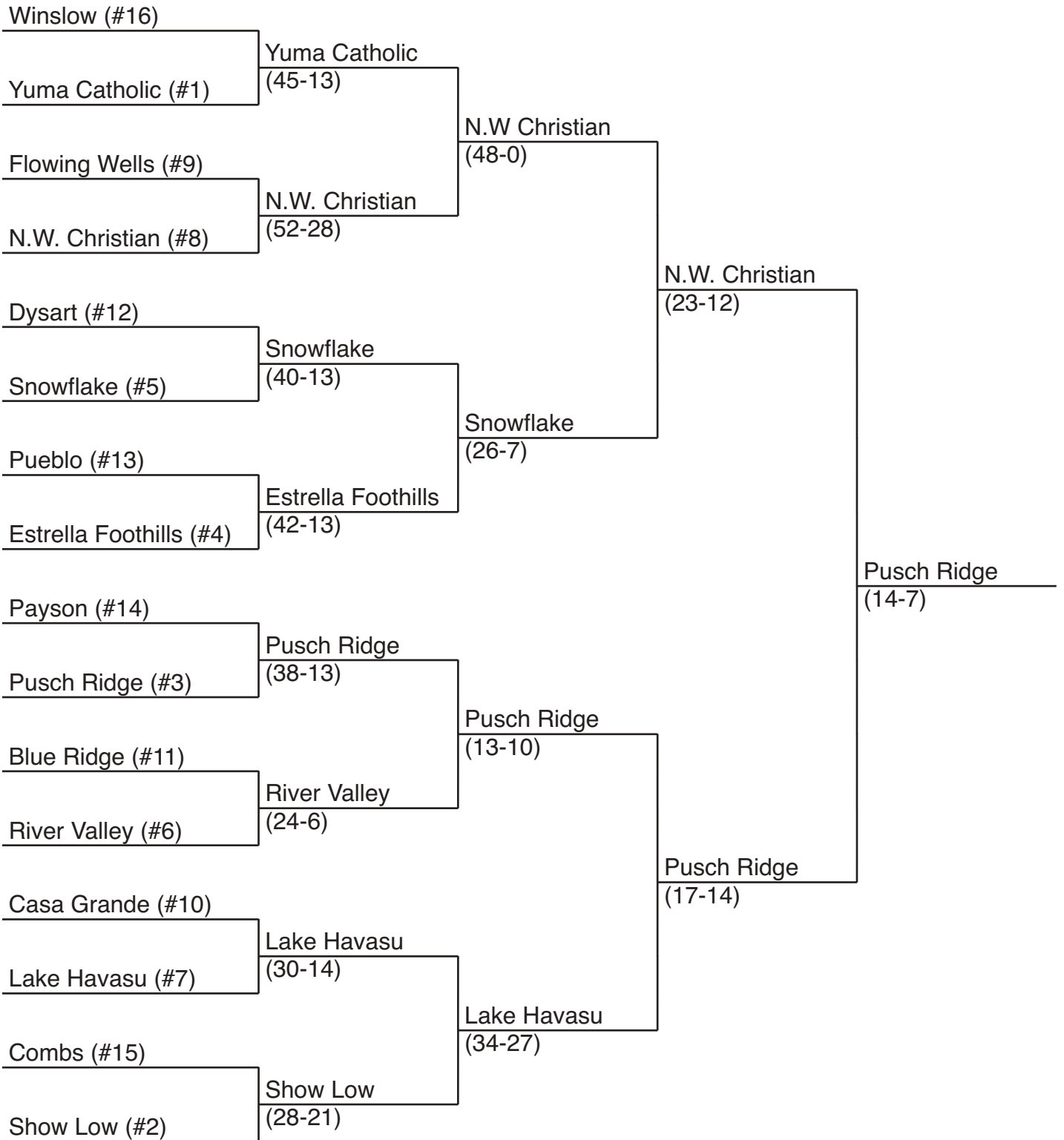
2015 Div. IV State Championship Bracket

Sat, Nov 7

Sat, Nov 14

Sat, Nov 21

Sat, Nov 28



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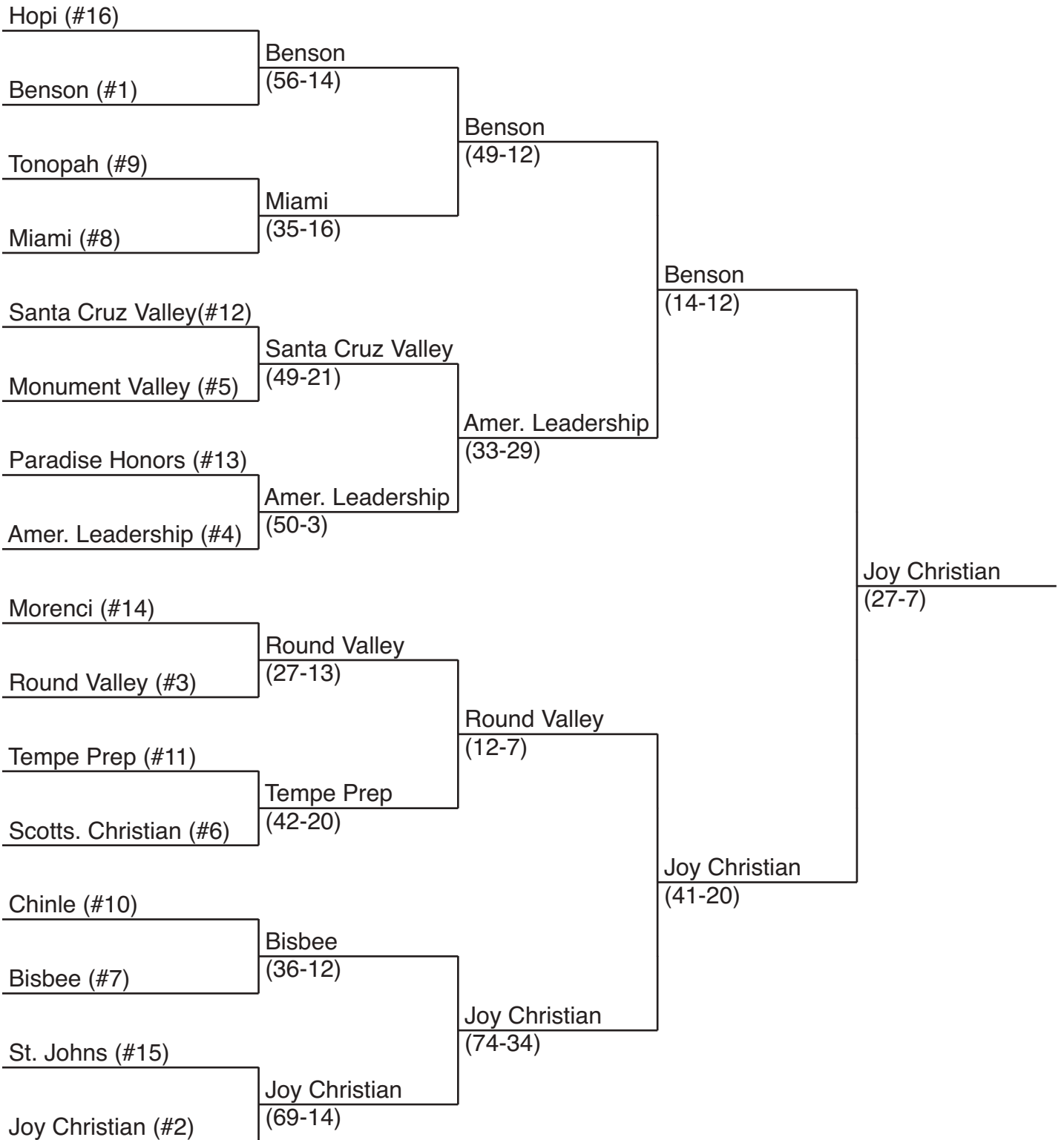
2015 Div. V State Championship Bracket

Sat, Nov 7

Sat, Nov 14

Sat, Nov 21

Sat, Nov 28



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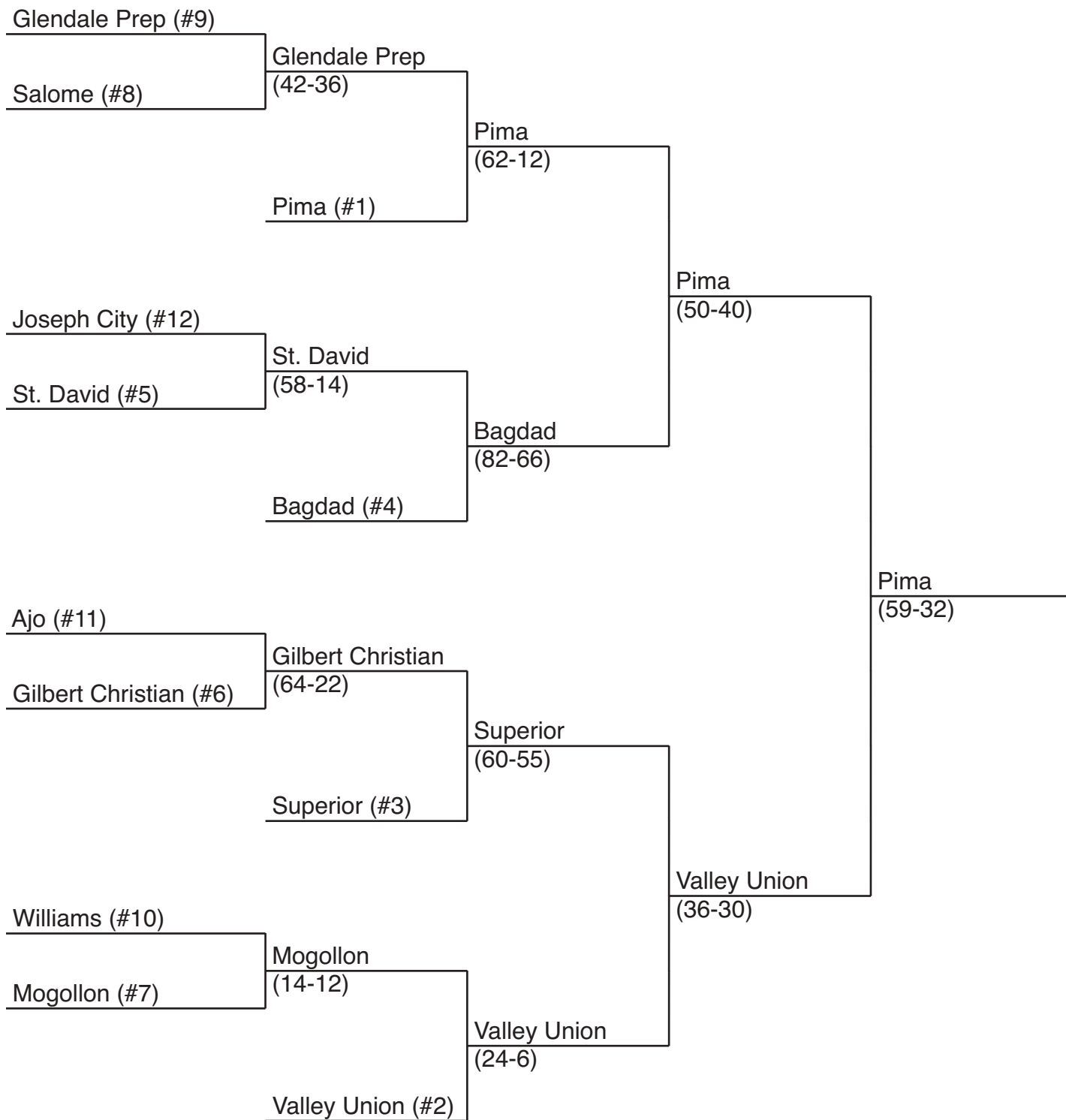
2015 Div. VI State Championship Bracket

Sat, Oct 24

Fri-Sat, Oct 30-31

Sat, Nov 7

Sat, Nov 14



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