



# **WNY Athletics**

## **HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL WEEKLY**



**Issue No. 13**

**August 30th 2023**



### **EYE OF THE TIGER**

## **THIS WEEK**

THE RETURN OF  
WNY HIGH SCHOOL  
FOOTBALL

## **2023**

FEATURE STORY:  
TIMON'S O'HARA  
TAKES NOTHING  
FOR GRANTED

## **ALSO**

PRE- SEASON  
TEAM REPORTS  
FROM OUR  
WRITERS



**Photo by Andrew Miller**

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## WNY High School Football Weekly is brought to you by:



# Class AA Preview

## Class AA

*By Francis Boeck @FrancisBoeck*

### **Bennett Tigers**

Bennett comes into 2023 as the defending NYSPHSAA Class AA Champions – their first in school history. Officially – due to forfeiters the Tigers finished the year 7-6 – but on the field they went 11-2 with their only losses coming to powerhouses McDowell (PA) and Austintown Fitch (OH). Bennett was led by Rashard Perry and Jayden Lewis, both of whom are now on Division-I rosters. Luckily, Jameer Thomas and Aaron Roseboro return after playing big roles for the Tigers last year.



*Photo by Andrew Miller*

### **Lancaster Legends**

Lancaster fell in the sectional final for the second year in a row last season. The Legends went 8-2, with their only losses coming to Bennett. Aiden Willard, Tyler Tedesco, and Brendan Mahony are among the key returnees for Eric Rupp as he enters his eighth year as head coach. Lancaster will be a young team with only three starters back on offense and five on defense. Among those losses is two-time Connolly Cup finalist Micah Harry. Some new players to watch out for - Alex Krupa, Danny Ahearn, and Justin Hartwig.

## Orchard Park Quakers

Orchard Park will also be a young team this year. The Quakers lost some big pieces to graduation including Ben Gocella, Dylan Evans and Luke Prince. However last year's leading rusher, Carter Switek returns. Carson Hayek, Jack Ciano, Chris McDonald and Max Landwehr are among the key returning players Coach Michael Cieslik is looking to take on bigger roles this year. Jherek Breske, Brady Ciano, Gavin McWhirter and Aiden Guadagno are among several players that the Orchard Park coaching staff hope make an impact early.

The graphic features the NFHS Network logo at the top left. Below it, the text reads "WEEK 1 FOOTBALL BROADCAST SCHEDULE" in large, bold, white letters. At the bottom left is the "WNY Athletics" logo. The right side of the graphic lists game times and matchups: Thursday - 7 PM (Health Sciences vs. Starpoint), Friday - 7 PM (Williamsville East vs. Sweet Home), Friday - 7 PM (Olean vs. Falconer), Saturday - 1:30 PM (Southwestern vs. CSP), Saturday - 2 PM (Niagara-Wheatfield vs. Kenmore West), and Saturday - 7 PM (Wilson vs. Akron). A photo of football players is in the background, and "PHOTO BY CAL PHILLIPS" is written at the bottom.

## Hutch Tech Engineers

Hutch Tech is hoping to take the next step after going 0-9 in 2022. The Engineers should be improved now that coach Micah Harris has gotten a full offseason with his program. Hutch Tech returns four starters on offense and three on defense. Key returning players are Delonte Frisby, Romeo Kidd, Carnell Young and Ish Adams. New players to watch out for – Adam Kilminster, Arno Mbaiyo, and Keyon Verse.

## Jamestown Red Raiders

Jamestown returns to Class AA after winning the sectional crown in Class A last season. The Red Raiders return five offensive and six defensive starters. The offense will probably look a bit different this year with the departure of QB Trey Drake, who's now off at D-I North Dakota State. Luckily for the Red Raiders, starting tailback Carson Bane returns. Also returning are key pieces Carson Panebianco and Jack Carlson.

## Frontier Falcons

Frontier is also back in AA after going 5-4 playing in Class A. The Falcons return eight starters on both sides of the football including Robbie Kibler, Nate Errington, Nick Shea and Alan Hostetler.

## Niagara Falls Wolverines

Niagara Falls went 1-8 last year with a 28-0 win over Hutch Tech.



# Class A1 Preview

## Class A1

By Colton Pankiewicz @ColtonPankiewi7



Photo by Shawn Turri

### Williamsville North Spartans

After improving from a record of 4-5 in 2021 to 7-4 and 2022, Williamsville North welcomes Orchard Park to town under the lights on September 1st in what could serve as a revenge game for the Spartans after Orchard Park handed them a 27-13 loss last year. The team graduated their biggest playmakers in Kendal Donovan, who tallied 1206 yards on the ground to go along with 14 touchdowns, and quarterback Mitch Kelly who contributed almost 1600 yards combined. The Spartans do however have DJ Leonard returning who led the team in receiving and finished third in rushing, along with Rocco Urbanaczyk to carry the load defensively after leading the team in tackles just a year ago.

### West Seneca West Warhawks

West Seneca West is one of two schools to join Class A1 in 2023 after finishing 6-3 and 4-2 against A2 opponents in 2022. Under head coach Mike Vastola, the Warhawks snuck into the Class A quarter-finals where their season would end in a 33-15 loss to Jamestown. As a sophomore, quarterback Cayden Stupak threw for over 1,100 yards showing promise heading into his junior year. West Seneca West also retained their leading rusher and receiving threat in Bernard Freeman and Ray Kwasniewski which is a formula for success as the Warhawks open the season at SUNY Brockport on September 2nd as they take on Section III power Cicero North Syracuse.



## **Clarence Red Devils**

Clarence's 2022 season was an interesting one, finishing 6-4 with eight games being decided by three or more scores. A streaky team led by head coach Paul Burgio saw five consecutive wins after their loss in the season opener followed by a season-ending stretch in which his team lost three of four, including a loss in the Class A semifinals to Williamsville North. The Red Devils return to 2023 without their passing leader, receiving leader, and rushing leader from 2022 and will head into their season with junior captain Bryce Tubin under center. Tubin was described by his head coach as a "complete QB" who has "all the tools" needed to have a big year. The Red Devils will be led defensively by senior captain Hayden Arrison who finished last year's campaign with 59 total tackles, his 36 solo tackles were a team-high. Clarence kicks off action at Frontier on September 2nd.

## **Lockport Lions**

Lockport's 2022 campaign went so-so, ending their season with a record of 4-5 after winning their last two non-conference games against Starpoint and Hutch-Tech. They enter 2023 with returning superstar wideout, Shey Williams, who finished his junior year with 716 yards and 14 touchdowns in just nine games. The Lions had a handful of players suit up at quarterback last year but for 2023, Lockport will stand behind sophomore signal-caller Graham Schultz heading into their season opener as the Lions host Bennett on September 2nd.

## **Niagara Wheatfield Falcons**

Niagara Wheatfield went 3-7 in Erik O'Bryan's first year as the head coach. They ended the year on a high note winning back-to-back games against Sweet Home and Grand Island. While losing quarterback Alex Fletcher, who threw for 1,826 yards as well as 22 TD's in 2022, Niagara Wheatfield retains senior wideout Shawn Watson who caught a team-high 35 balls for 648 yards and 8 TD's, and senior running back Te'Shaun Matthews who averaged six yards per carry and totaled 623 yards on the ground along with six touchdowns. The squad's starting quarterback is thought to be sophomore Chase Richards going into the season but Matthews is also learning the position as the team prepares for their season opener at Kenmore West on September 2nd.

## **Kenmore West Blue Devils**

After losing two of the first three games in 2022, Kenmore West finished out their regular season undefeated before losing to Jamestown in the Class A semifinals, ending the year with a respectable 7-3 record. They kick off 2023 at home against Niagara-Wheatfield on September 2nd, with an opportunity to win their first season opener under head coach John Haynes since 2020. The Blue Devils will need a playmaker to go along with senior quarterback Danny Klein as he loses his Swiss Army Knife of a teammate in Jermaine Atkins. Atkins led the team in both rushing and receiving yards last year. Defensively the team retained two of their top four players in Hezekiah Mercado, as he tallied 8.5 sacks and Nolan Nobile who finished with 37 tackles and two fumble recoveries in 2022.

## **McKinley Macks**

2023 is also the inaugural season for McKinley's entrance to the A-1 after the program finished first in Class A-2 with their season ending in the quarterfinals to Kenmore West. The Macks enter the 2023 season with running back Tyrone Hughes who was unstoppable a year ago rushing for 1,325 yards and 14 touchdowns as a sophomore. The team also has senior quarterback Brandon Liggins returning under center after throwing for 715 yards and adding another 326 yards on the ground. Head coach Brian Davis will lead his team into their A1 debut against Hamburg on September 1st.

# Class A2 Preview

## Class A2

*By Francis Boeck @FrancisBoeck*

### **Williamsville East Flames**

Williamsville East started off 2022 strong going 4-0 before a handful of close losses and key injuries cost them a playoff spot last year. Luckily, the Flames bring back five offensive and six defensive starters. Will East loses Connolly Cup finalist WR/DE Dorian Facen Jr. along with QB Sean Sansone. However, there has been a lot of noise surrounding new QB Ryan McKinnon. Calvin Kulik along with leading rusher Thomas Orsini are among several key pieces returning.



*Photo by Shawn Turri*

### **Hamburg Bulldogs**

Hamburg went 5-4 in 2022, winning four of their final five games. The Bulldogs return five starters on offense and four defense including captains Dylan Hart, Josh Moore, Andrew Parker and Bryce Terry.

Other key returning players are Zack Jerome, Kayden Bailey, Kyle Jaskolka, Adam Perez, Damanie Robinson and Derek Crowley. The Bulldogs will have to replace dual-threat QB Jeffrey Leavell and LB Aiden Matyas.

## Sweet Home Panthers

Sweet Home is hoping to take the next step after going to 2-7 in 2022. The Panthers started off the year with back-to-back wins but struggled to close out games – with five of their losses coming down to one score or less. Sweet Home will have experience under center with Rocco Panepinto returning. Senior lineman Aidan Janda is expected to be a force on both sides of the ball. Zion Lee, Nakir Kirkland, Andrew Haug have also been named captains. Coach Jeremy Zimmer is looking for big things from Jordan Payne, Marquise Mack, Daquan Stone, Khalik Mellerson, Quinten Wilhelm and Quinton Hood.

## North Tonawanda

North Tonawanda, who went 1-9 last season, will be young team again this year - but return five juniors that had significant playing time in 2022. Junior Christian Earnst is back after leading the team in rushing last season and is very explosive with the ball in his hands. Coach Ben Bunker, who is entering his third year as head coach, is focusing on the ground game in 2023. NT is also returning Matt Grinnell (FB/DE), Demaree Baker (WR/RB/DB) and Aidin Harrigan (IOL/LB).

## Starpoint Spartans

Starpoint was one of only teams to finish its season out on a high note winning the Class A Chuck Funke Bowl. The Spartans are returning four starters on both sides of the football after going 6-4 last year. Key returning players include Derek Kneepfel, Kyler Lee, Lucas Lombardo, Jake Stickney, AJ Anselm, Joe Richardson, Billy Bichler and Zack Genkinger. Coach Tim Racey is expecting big things from new players Mike Grady, Jaemo Clark, Lucas Clark, Brodie Saunders, Frank Buttita, Mike Mikulski and Trent Ostrowski

## Grand Island Vikings

Grand Island is hoping to get off to a better start in 2023 after losing their first five games before finishing the season with a 3-7 record. Dean Santorio, who is entering his 23 rd season as Vikings head coach, is bringing back five starters on each side of the ball. Elijah Linenfelser and Jacob Joseph are back after leading the team in tackles last year. Other key returnees are Doug Crowley, Brayden Willats, and Dominic Nucci. The Vikings have high expectations for Nik Korte, Matthew Martin, Jon Neville, Michael Sole and Anthony Vaccaro.



PHOTO BY ANDREW MILLER



## Class B1

*By Tony Fiorello @anthonyfiorello*

### **South Park Sparks**

Tim Delaney's South Park Sparks were the A3 Division champions a year ago with a 6-3 record and are looking to continue that success at the B1 level. Victor Rivera, Dreon Johnson, Brandon Simmons-Bragg and Cory Williams will be key contributors, but the Sparks' headliner is quarterback Noah Willoughby – who holds every school passing record and is on the verge of breaking the Section VI career mark for passing yardage.



*Photo by Andrew Miller*

### **Amherst Tigers**

6-4 a year ago (and improving on their previous season's record by four games) means that expectations will be high for the Amherst Tigers in 2023. Returning players like Grady Brown and Jaxon Willis and newcomers such as Aiden Sabatino and Seyon Bedell will be key, but coach Jason Beckman will have some challenges to work with as the Tigers graduated 18 seniors last year – including Trench Trophy finalist Patrick Tan and the Tigers' all-time rushing leader in Caleb Nicholas.

### **Kenmore East Bulldogs**

The Kenmore East Bulldogs have fallen on hard times over the last few years, but Matt O'Malley's squad has both the work ethic and the talent to take it to another level this season. Returning 16 starters, O'Malley will rely on veterans like Jacob Boyak (who is coming back from an ACL tear), Michael Bly, Owen Davidson, David Lang and Austin Turnbull while also incorporating newcomers such as Nolan Pryor, Amari Wilbon, Nick Puma, Aiden O'Malley and Alex Orlando.



## **Williamsville South Billies**

A .500 outfit in 2022, Joe Licata's Williamsville South Billies are looking towards bigger and better things this season. Led by captains Caiden Overkamp, Chris Pierce and Austin Knab, Will South will be integrating transfer Marcus Johnson from St. Mary's and some new faces from the team's junior varsity roster in Tyler Crumish, Cam Kolt, Noah Redd, Asher Weinreib and Jack Barr.

## **West Seneca East Trojans**

The West Seneca East Trojans, coached by Jim Maurino, are looking to improve upon a 6-4 record from last season. Led by Luke Osmanski, Brandon Bator, Tavare Farell and Cole Arnone, they will be joined by DJ Benker in 2023 to form an impressive nucleus.

## **Cheektowaga Warriors**

New head coach Bob Mucitelli's Cheektowaga Warriors are looking to take the next step in 2023 by establishing new standards. Helping to teach those mantras are captains Lavelle Gamblin, Matt Barr, Lamont Watkins, Javeail Banks and Jermaine Parsons, and they will be counted on heavily by the new staff.

## **Health Sciences/Buffalo Academy of Science/Global Concepts Falcons**

6-2 a year ago, Health Sciences originally split their roster with WNY Maritime. Now with new partners Buffalo Academy of Science and Global Concepts, Health Sciences will look to make their mark against the B1 division. Ty Parker's bunch comes into this season boasting some serious talent – among them returning captains Shamere Banks, Monttrice Webster, Antwan Ceasar and Sheldon Cunningham.

## **Pioneer Panthers**

Coming off a trip to Highmark Stadium a year ago, the Pioneer Panthers will look to finish the job and win a sectional title in 2023. Captains Luke Matheis (a second-team All-WNY selection last fall), Jimmy Steppe, Dalton Giboo and Nate Bull are the core of a squad that also features Sam Platt, Logan Halladay, Walker Bekiel and Gavin Schwab, and will attempt to run it back this year.

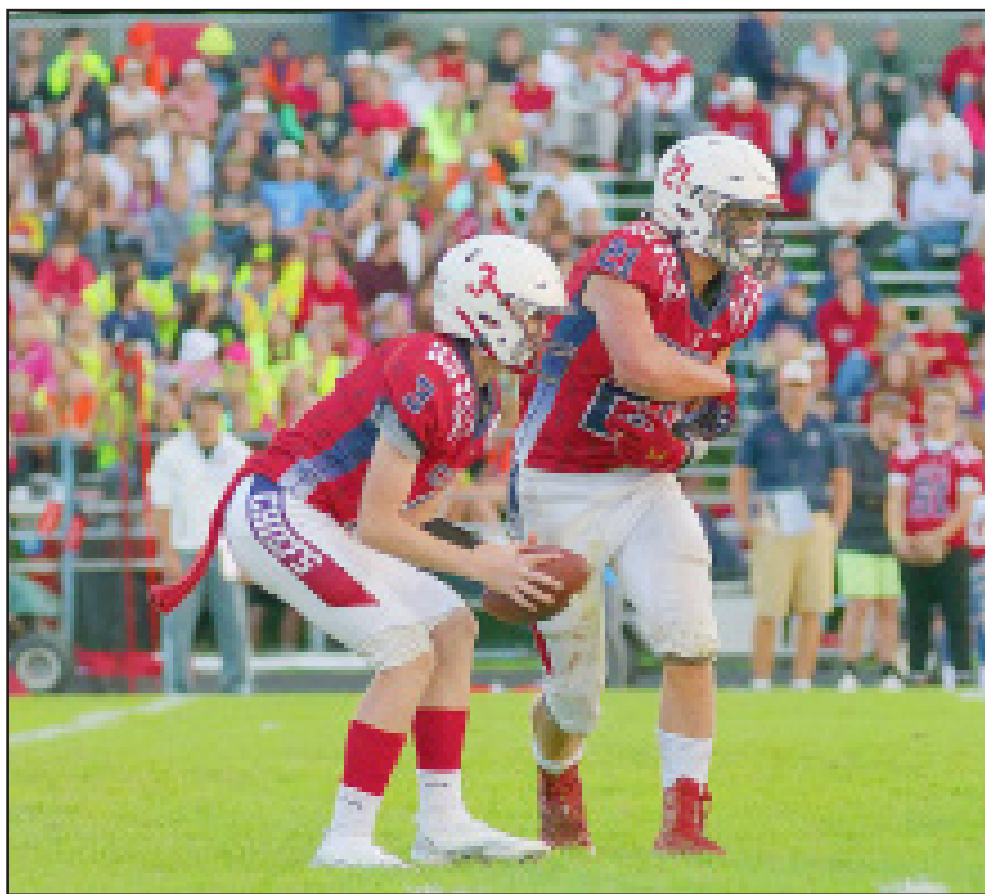


## Class B2

*By Mike Pidanick @mkpidanick*

### **Iroquois Chiefs**

Iroquois appears to be the team to beat again in Class B after winning its first official Section VI championship since 2004. Leading the way for the Chiefs will be 2022 Connolly Cup winner Trevor Barry, who scored 43 touchdowns last season helping Iroquois put up a school-record 510 points for the season. Also back for coach Robert Pitzonka's Chiefs is sophomore quarterback Justus Kleitz, who threw for 2,267 yards and 24 TDs last year. Third-year starter Nate Blair will lead a receiving corps that also includes senior Alex Miller, juniors Gavin Dundon, Sam Donovan and sophomores TJ Domino and Nick Skutnik.



*Photo by Shawn Turri*

### **Lake Shore Eagles**

Lake Shore will be led by junior quarterback Rob Gillette who coach Dan Russell said “will be a real weapon throwing and running the ball.” Junior Ben Maurer will be a weapon on offense in both the running and passing games. Seniors Xander Maurer and Cole Mereck return as starting wide receivers for the Eagles. Seniors Jake Hopkins and Troy Kennedy are expected to be leaders on defense from a team that lost its top two tacklers to graduation.

### **Maryvale Flyers**

Maryvale is also looking for big things after finishing last season 9-1. The Flyers will be strong up front on both sides of the ball, led by seniors Robert Rohde, Keenan Banks and Dylan Cookfair and junior Yianni Moore. The Flyers need to replace All-Western New York running back Justus Hill with junior Brayden Tryon and sophomore Isiash Hill, who will be leading this year's backfield. Junior quarterback Jaxsyn Moritz will have classmates Noah Irby and Matt Prusecki as his top receivers.

### **Lewiston-Porter Lancers**

Lewiston-Porter finished 2-8 last year but hopes bigger things are ahead with talent from a modified program (that includes Grades 7-9) joining the big club. Senior offensive lineman/linebacker Austin Woods has already been named a team captain and is also a standout wrestler for the Lancers. Senior wide receiver Jake Quarantillo and sophomore quarterback Mason Bonito are also players to watch for second-year head coach Derek Tracy.

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### **Dunkirk Maruders**

Dunkirk is looking to get back to its winning ways after going winless in 2022 for the second time in three seasons. Senior quarterback Donny Jackson, senior running back/linebacker Mike Hanlon and senior linemen Nathaniel Garcia and Jonathan Ortiz are expected to be amongst the leaders for the Marauders this season. Dunkirk Alum Edwin Gomez takes over the program as head coach.

### **Albion Purple Eagles**

Albion is looking to build on last year's 6-2 season. Quarterback Blake Preston, running back/linebacker Auston Johnson and middle linebacker/center John Eibel will serve as team captains this season. Lineman Mason Lynch and running back/linebacker Kwame Riley are also expected to be big contributors for the Purple Eagles.

### **Burgard Bulldogs**

Burgard finished 3-6 last year, securing a playoff spot on the last weekend of the regular season with a 32-13 win over Lake Shore. The Bulldogs dropped the postseason opener to Maryvale.

## **WDOE WILL HAVE LIVE COVERAGE OF DUNKIRK AND FREDONIA HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL FOR THE 2023 SEASON!**



Friday, September 1st: Lake Shore at Dunkirk

Saturday, September 2nd: Randolph at Fredonia

Friday, September 8th: Albion at Dunkirk

Friday, September 15th: Southwestern at Fredonia

Friday, September 22nd: Portville at Fredonia

Friday, September 29th: Dunkirk at Southwestern

Friday, October 6th: TBD

Friday, October 13th: Fredonia at Silver Creek

Friday, October 20th: Fredonia at Dunkirk

*\*All games are scheduled to start at 7:00 PM. Schedule is subject to change.*

## Class B3

*By Mike Pidanick @mkpidanick*

### Depew Wildcats

Depew finished 4-1 in the league, the lone setback a six-point loss to Lackawanna. Fifth-year head coach Mark DiRienzo said he expects his Wildcats to have some strong skill players this season. Junior quarterback Tommy Che, sophomore running back/linebacker Justin Refermat, sophomore receiver/defensive back Alphonso Handley and junior running back Jaiden Torres are among that skill group. Senior Tony Weber is one of the mainstays on both sides of the line.



### Olean Huskies

Olean, which finished 4-2 in the division, returns quarterback Joe Mest, who started last year as a freshman. Senior running back/linebackers Ryan Isenberg and Noah Gallo, junior running back/linebacker Aaron Vincent and tight end/linebacker Manoah Miketish are expected

### East Aurora/Holland Blue Devils

East Aurora/Holland will be led by senior captains Jack Brown, a guard and linebacker, and Connor Schmitt, a quarterback and free safety. Running back/defensive end Brady Wiskup and cornerback/wide receiver Tyler Konter are also expected to be key contributors.

*Photo by Andrew Miller*

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## **Tonawanda Warriors**

Veteran head coach Henry Fumerelle is back for his second season at Tonawanda, which finished 1-9 last season. Senior Zach Gallivan is expected to be a stud up front on both sides of the ball. He will serve as a captain along with fellow lineman Alex Chukhanenko.

## **Alden Bulldogs**

Alden finished 3-6 a year ago but hopes to turn things around with some additions from a 5-3 junior varsity team. Senior Layne Jaworowicz and junior Robbie Westmiller will serve as team captains for the Bulldogs and head coach Anthony Buono, a former quarterback for rival Depew.

## **Lackawanna Steelers**

Lackawanna returns to Class B after winning the Section VI Class C title last season, the Steelers' first sectional crown since 2008. Marcus Rivers, who led Lackawanna to the 2006 sectional title and then went on to stand out at the University at Buffalo, takes over as the program's head coach. Senior lineman Rayshawn Handley and junior Sam Ikegwonu are expected to lead the Steelers in the trenches. Running back/linebacker Amir Douglas and running back Jeremy Perez are also ones to watch this season for Lackawanna.

## **WNY Maritime-Tapestry Seahawks**

The first-year Maritime-Tapestry squad is one of the more interesting stories to watch this season. A combination of the Maritime-Health Sciences team that won a sectional title in 2019 along with athletes from Tapestry, the Seahawks expect to be competitive right away under head coach Glynn Molinich, a former UB standout. Seniors Johnny Williams and Mekhi Hawkins will serve as captains for the Seahawks.

## **Springville Griffins**

Springville finished 0-9 last year and 0-5 in the league. The Griffins' last win was at Alden on Oct. 12, 2021.



# Class C North Preview

## Class C North

By Frank Wolf @wolf3328

### Akron Tigers

The Akron Tigers are coming off a 6-4 overall record with some momentum after closing out the 2022 season with a three-game winning streak. Head coach Andrew Clouse is in his ninth season at the helm and is creeping up on the 50-win plateau. The Tigers have won 17 games the past three seasons but with only six returning starters they find themselves turning towards a youth movement in 2023. The JV program had a stellar year going 8-1 after back-to-back one-win seasons. Returning players are Jacob Leach, Logan McClaine, Luke Gulzewski, Alex Schrock and Lucas Vandenbosch. Chris Bergman, the standout QB has graduated, junior Coy Patterson will take the reins under center, he is the son of assistant coach Steve Patterson. Bergman led the Tigers in every major offensive category in 2022. McClaine, Gulzewski, Schrock and Vandenbosch made notable contributions on defense last year. Defense wins championships they say, look for that side of the ball to be this team's identity.



Photo by Shawn Turri

### Eden/North Collins

Mike Sarratori returns to the sidelines as head coach of the Eden/North Collins football team. Sarratori is no stranger to WNY high school football having guided the Dunkirk Marauders to the Section VI Class B Title back in 2016. Eden Central High School is in Sarratori's neighborhood, so it was a natural fit for him to return to the school that his children attended. He had been working with the modified program and has familiarity with this group of Raiders. Eden/North Collins only have a handful of players returning so they'll have to rely on the youngsters if they are going to make any noise in the North division. 2022 ended with a loss at Medina. They had regular season wins over Newfane, Springville, JFK and Alden, all C schools. They also had losses to eventual Section VI champion Lackawanna as well as Depew, Salamanca and Tonawanda. Losing all around playmaker Matthew Sweet is an obvious hole they'll need to fill.



## **JFK Bears**

The JFK Bears had a late coaching change this offseason, turning to Mark Benton who just finished a one-year stint at Dunkirk. The Bears had a rough 2022, going 1-7 after back-to-back 4-4 seasons. Sophomore QB Lukas Barrett has real playmaking ability and could turn some heads this year. Junior Trent Shaw is another kid who has varsity experience that the Bears will rely on to help turn the program around. Other returning players are Mike Mingle, Frank Gutek, Nolan Pijanowski and Dillon Messecar. JFK opens their season at Alden before their home opener in Week 2 against Akron.

## **Medina Mustangs**

It was another banner year for the Mustangs in 2022. Although they were unable to repeat as Class C champs, the Mustangs certainly played that way right up until the end. Eric Valley a former Mustang himself is entering his 28th season with the program, the last 16 as head coach. Although he loses one of the top running backs in program history Noah Skinner and often overlooked QB Aiden Pitts, there is a core group of guys returning that are desperate to reach the mountaintop yet again. Eight offensive and six defensive starters return. Among them are Roosevelt Mitchell, Xavier King, Sawyer Kingsbury, Brody Fry, Noah Cudzillo, Julian Woodworth, Amari Soule, Kaedon Cleveland, Cole Callard, and Jerrell Nealy. There's a lot of talent coming back that also have that big game playoff experience to go with it. The Mustangs are 25-3 the past three seasons. Medina will start the 2023 season on the road in a non-league game against Monsignor Martin's St.

Mary's of Lancaster.

## **Newfane Panthers**

One of the best kept secrets in local high school football is the new athletic complex at Newfane High School. The Panthers were able to break in the new turf in 2022. The team finished the season 2-6 overall but managed to win the final game of the year, a 34-25 victory over rival Wilson at the new place. Chuck Nagel is still the man leading the charge at Newfane, now entering his 12th season as head coach. The past few seasons have been difficult, having won just seven games in that span. They did not have a JV program in 2022, but their modified team finished with a 5-2 record, that means there are some reinforcements on the way. There are almost two dozen players returning this season. Among them are Nate Snow and Landen Braman who have been named team captains. Both athletes combined for eleven rushing TD's last season. Snow will start at QB where he threw for just under 1200 yards in 2022. He also threw 11 touchdowns, Braman caught five of them (tied for most on the team). Ben Dickinson also had 5 TD receptions. He was Snow's main target last year, giving the returning QB another season with his top receivers. Also returning this year will be Jonny Beiter, Ayden Buttery, Jack Cole, Devin DeNardo, Richard Doxey, JJ Lucinski, Ty Mangione, CJ Nagel, Cam Perry, Aiden Perry, Brayden Walker, Bryan Annalora and Aaron Watkins. It's been a while since the Panthers punched a post season ticket, no doubt they would love to have another shot at a playoff game. There might not be a batter stadium to host one then Newfane.

## **Roy-Hart/Barker Bulls**

A new identity for Roy-Hart/Barker as they have adopted a new mascot, going forward they will be known as the Bulls. Additionally, Lyndonville is no longer included in the mix (joined with Holley of Section V for 8-Man). Head coach CJ Knight takes over the program from Joe Suhr. Knight attended Newfane High School and played collegiately at SUNY Brockport, he coached the JV team last season. The Bulls have at least eight starters returning in 2023. Among them include Jackson West (11), Braxton Crosby (12), Jake Gould (12), Dan Aqualina (11), Jake Maracle (12), Josh Hahn (12), Wyatt Sherman (11), Jackson Webber (12), Alex Ark (11) and Blake Schwab (12). This off-season Knight had the boys involved with various 7-on-7 camps involving schools like Medina, Williamsville North and Newfane. That should help the program tremendously as they continue to build this program. In 2022 they defeated Tonawanda, Lew-Port, Alden and Newfane. The Bulls open the 2023 season at home against the Burgard Bulldogs on Friday night.

## **Cleveland Hill Golden Eagles**

Legendary head coach Glen Graham returns for his 20th season. Graham graduated from Cleve-Hill back in '78 and has seen the highs and the lows during his tenure. One constant has always remained, speed. The Golden Eagles are looking to take flight yet again with a mix of sprinters ready to make their mark on the program. Key returning players are London Thomas QB/DB, Doug Hunt, WR/RB/DB, Davion Douglas OL/DL all juniors and Jay'mere Ramadan LB/RB a senior. Thomas and Lyons are co-captains of this year's squad. Thomas didn't see a lot of carries last year, but he made the most out of his touches, averaging over 12-yards per carry. Hunt had by far the most carries of any returning player and finished 2nd in rushing TDs (3) for Cleve-Hill. Douglas had a knack for getting to opposing quarterbacks last season registering three sacks. Ramadan made 35 tackles and forced two turnovers in 2022. Despite losing two college bound athletes in Larry Burgin and Amarion Spivey the program has renewed optimism heading into the season. This past off-season the Golden Eagles suffered a huge loss when Carl Kuras, the former beloved head coach and founder of the Trench Trophy passed away, suddenly. No doubt the team will want to honor his memory and take their talents all the way to Highmark Stadium in November.



## Class C South

By Frank Wolf @wolf3328

### Fredonia Hillbillies

The Hillbillies are coming off back-to-back appearances at Highmark Stadium. Unfortunately, both trips did not yield Sectional titles, but they did avenge the 2021 loss to Medina in the semi-final round last fall. They'll start out 2023 with a new face at QB in Davion White who will have the benefit of playing behind a very strong and formidable offensive line. That should make his transition much more smooth for White, who was receiving passes from Ethan Fry last year. It was White that caught a big TD in the Medina playoff game that helped them punch their ticket to the Class C championship. The big name returning however is Sam Atzrott. A good size runner who is looking to expound on his 3 rushing TDs last season. Atzrott main contributions in 2022 came from the defensive side of the ball, turning in 20 sacks, earning him a WNY Athletics "Mount Crushmore" award. Also returning for Fredonia are Owen Rush and Jameson Quinn. Rush is one of the top lineman in the area while Quinn has emerged into one of the better route runners, equipped with some very good hands. Rush, Quinn and Simon Price (another hulking lineman) were named team captains. There are some fresh faces that head coach Greg Sherlock is awfully excited about when we spoke to him at the teams first practice. Luke Gullo was one of them, but perhaps what Sherlock was most proud about was the strength and conditioning program his team has been using under the guidance of assistant coach Chad Mason.

"Our kids have been getting bigger and stronger each off-season," Head Coach Greg Sherlock said. "I coached all of these assistants when they were kids, my sons Jordan and Justin continue to do a great job for these kids all through the offseason. It's a big family."

Fredonia adds a JV program this season. They will open up week 1 against Randolph at the Orange Bowl.

### Southwestern Trojans

Jake Burkholder starts year five as the head coach of his alma mater. He came in very late in the 2019 season when the Trojans last reached the Stadium. Last season, Burkholder helped guide a team to a 6-3 overall record, compiling some big wins against Depew, Salamanca and Falconer/Cassadaga/Maple Grove to name a few. Their season ended at the hands of eventual Class C Champion Lackawanna 30-14. So to say the program is starting to see a shift back to their winning ways is an understatement.

Burkholder's stamp on the program is evident. The players are buying in. They are expecting six starters on both sides of the ball to return. Key returning players for the Trojans are Brody Larson, Jacky Ni, Owen Hayes, Jameson Walsh, Declan Kennedy, Peter Conley, Neves Hoose, Tavio Hoose. Walsh is an all-around athlete. Although he has the most experience playing QB on the roster,

Owen Hayes is expected to be the starter. Walsh along with Larson gives the Trojans' offense their spark. The Hoose brothers come from a long line of great athletes. Neves is the kicker, while Tavio is a solid offensive and defensive lineman. Tavio recently won a state title at the 184-pound weight class in wrestling. This is a young team with plenty of sophomores but Burkholder says they have the right mix of seniors to balance the Trojans out. The program has 70-plus athletes to work with but no JV team.

"Our sophomores are like sponges, they ask a lot of questions and are picking up the right football mentality from our older kids,"

Burkholder said. "All of these kids come ready to work."

Southwestern will start their season on the road against Clymer/Sherman/Panama on Saturday 9/2, at Panama High School.

### Silver Creek/Forestville Black Knights

The Black Knights continue to try and rebuild and compete in Class C, despite their low numbers. Head Coach Sean Helmer has been with the program for 16 seasons and would like nothing more than to see his team fight for a playoff spot this season.

Silver Creek/Forestville have a number of returning players including Alex Galfo, Hunter Parks, Jake Szumigala, Cameron Ingram, David Barrett. Barrett is the guy that brings back the most experience in terms of running the ball. He averaged just under five yards per carry. Galfo also saw some touches in '22 as well as a receiving touchdown. They lose Caleb Fiegl who was one of the brighter lights last season. There is work to be done here, but Helmer believes he has the right mix of experience and love for the game that should improve the overall performance of the team in 2023. The Black Knights open up the '23 season at home

against Gowanda. If you have not been to the field in Silver Creek, it's a hidden gem on the high school football circuit.



Photo by Shawn Turri

## **Falconer/Cassadaga/Maple Grove Bison**

“The Herd” or the Bison is the new mascot for the Golden Cougars. Falconer/Cassadaga/Maple Grove adopted the new moniker during the offseason. It’s only fitting considering it takes a Herd to move forward collectively. The combined team is in their third year together with Curt Fischer back as head coach. No stranger to winning, Fischer has made 19 trips to Highmark Stadium as coach, winning 2 state titles during his 26-year coaching span. Last season the Golden Cougars played a Class B schedule, it was an up and down year. The team started out with back-to-back wins against Albion and then East Aurora/Holland before facing a run-heavy Cheektowaga team. It was a trend that would plague them as the season continued.



The Herd will play a Class C schedule now as the program is back where they were two seasons ago. They’ll have to make due without Dalton Caldwell, who finished up a stellar career at Falconer (and not just in football). A few returning players that should keep the program competitive are Charlie Reichenbach and Lucas Sopak. Sopak will have his chance to lead the team at quarterback where he has some deep roots at the position within his family. Reichenbach was second in rushing last season. Outside of these two players there are new opportunities for kids to step up and make their marks. Among some of the guys Fischer is excited about are Preston Lanphere, Kenickie Waterman, Landon Jones, Luke Vandeveld, Devyn Morrison, Kole Hawkins, Chaz Sundquist and Mathis Baher. The Bison will start the season at home against Olean on Friday 9/1.

## **Portville/Cuba-Rushford Panthers**

Portville welcomes Section V’s Cuba-Rushford to the family in 2023. The combined team, now in Class C, will not have a JV squad. Josh Brooks will remain as head coach, now in his sixth season. Kaedon Holcomb will be the leader once again after a solid ’22 campaign. Also returning are Luke Petryszak, Nik Manroe, Cody Barton and Henry Schwartz. A new face that should be a key contributor is Ethan Coleman. Petryszak looks to be the teams No.1 quarterback coming out of camp once again. He saw plenty of time last year at the position with Holcomb the top returning target. Defensively, Manroe could be the guy leading the pack. They graduated a number of key contributors. This is a younger team looking to remain competitive, the addition of Cuba-Rushford helps stabilize two programs. Cuba-Rushford went 1-6 last year in Section V. Alex Baron, Landen Schappacher and Kadin Pierce are a few of the guys with Varsity experience joining the Panthers. Portville/Cuba-Rushford welcome Catt/Little Valley in Week 1 at Portville.

## **Salamanca Warriors**

Playing in arguably the best high school football stadium in New York State, the Salamanca Warriors are looking to build on their 2022 season. Head Coach Chad Bartoszek is in his fifth season, after spending seven with Franklinville/Ellicottville. Bartoszek has a strong and energetic bunch returning to his program. The past three seasons the Warriors have compiled a 19-8 overall record with a couple of playoff wins under their belts. Those darn Lackawanna Steelers seem to have the Warriors’ number. Not too shabby considering where the Steelers have finished. However, Salamanca would much rather take what they have learned the past two seasons and put that experience to work here in 2023. They have a number of returners that can help lead the way. Maddox Isaac will be back as QB where last year he was just a few completions away from going over 1,000 yards. He was also one of their top rushers, second only to Jesse Stahlman in yards and TDs. His versatility in the offense could leave room for Bartoszek to allow for Jaxson Ross to take over under center and in order for Isaac to make an impact elsewhere. Tayoni Galante, a good size tight-end and line-backer will be a captain this year. Joshua Auman, Arlen Newark, Cory Holleran, Carmine Hoag, Cameron McGraw, Dekkyn Krantz, Keegan Hardy, and Carson Mohr will also play key roles in this year’s squad. This was a much more physical team then most gave credit to. Even with the loss of Stahlman, the Warriors are solid on the line and that’s where they’ll turn heads in ’23. This is a title contending team if they continue working together. The Warriors will open at home against Franklinville/Ellicottville.

## **Chautauqua Lake/Brocton/Westfield**

Last year Chautauqua Lake head coach went out to Westfield and Brocton and made a pitch to a room filled of student athletes in an effort to draw in new blood to his program. “There had to be 24 kids in that room at Westfield,” Head coach Ryan Gibbs said. At least 12 showed up to that first practice when teams started up their fall practice schedule earlier this month. “We’re still a fairly young team but there are guys here with varsity experience,” Gibbs said. Leading the pack will be one of those Westfield kids in Mason Maring, a junior. Maring is an athletic kid with great size and is smart as a whip. He has a 4.0 GPA and recently became an Eagle Scout. “Maring is a special kid, he started as a freshman for us and has gotten better every year. He wrestled and plays baseball too. He was an all-state wrestler last year.” Gibb’s oldest son Brayden will be the quarterback and he has a nice receiving corps to work with. Devon Hughes, Carson Fairbank and Nate Laurito should factor in nicely for the kind of offense Gibbs has incorporated. The Thunderbirds may not have as much experience as other teams in Class C but seeing how the three schools have come together in a short period of time is comforting to Gibbs. “Effort is free, we tell everybody that comes out, if you show us effort you’ll play,” Gibbs said. As young as they are, they do have something they didn’t when Gibbs took over four years ago, and that’s depth. “There were times I knew we were in over our heads and there was nothing any of us could do about it, when we got here, I had seven kids that played football before, ever,” Gibbs said.

Gibbs needed time to work his magic. It appears on paper that things are starting to develop for this program.

The Thunderbirds open their season on Friday night when they host Monsignor Martin’s Cardinal O’Hara.

# Class D/ 8- Man Preview

## Class D/ 8- Man

By Frank Wolf @wolf3328

### Randolph Cardinals

It was a great ride the past two seasons for Cardinals fans as they were treated to back-to-back Section VI Class D championships and undefeated regular seasons. The playoffs were a different story, but each year the Cardinals went a step further than the year prior. That kind of experience could pay dividends in 2023. Brent Brown has spent 34 years in the program, this is his 11th as head coach. The Xander Hind show has moved onto D3 Mount Union. He was a Connolly Cup finalist the past two seasons, breaking many school records along the way. Jaiden Huntington and Ryan Carpenter also graduated out of the program and will also be playing collegiately next fall. Also lost to graduation was Carson Conley, the teams QB. Make way for Tristan Farnham, Maverick Adams, Connor Braley, Jaxon Morrison, Elial Bryan and Kevin Herrington. The Cards like to run the ball. Braley and Adams have the most touches of all key returning players. Is it a rebuilding year or just time to reload? Tough to tell, but they will open up at Fredonia (Class C) before a week 2 home game against CSP. That's one heck of a test to start the year.



Photo by Andrew Miller

### Cattaraugus-Little Valley Thunderwolves

The Thunderwolves went 0-8 in 2022, amassing just one touchdown in the teams first six games. Head Coach Matt Minnekine is the new head coach. Minnekine is an alum and attended SUNY Cortland. Catt/Little Valley has just seven starters returning. The captains this season are Matt Benzel and DJ Szata. Other returning players are Brayden Young and Perry Snyder. There were no stats entered into the Section website in 2022.

### Gowanda/Pine Valley Panthers

The Panthers are looking to make some noise in 2023. After a few dismal seasons the past few years, Gowanda/Pine Valley is hoping that the returning starters will have enough experience to put them in position to make the playoffs. Among second year head coach Brett Ebling's returners are Quentin Centner, Aiden Ackley, Mike Horth, Kaleb Smith, Evan Fort, Jon Sheldon, Winter Rivera and Dylan Green. Rivera and Centner both averaged 5-yards per carry in 2022, each also scored two TD's. Centner is also the teams QB. Smith is the Panthers top defensive returner, recording 61 tackles last year. Ackley, Horth and Sheldon gives Gowanda/Pine Valley a solid nucleus on defense. Can the Panthers put up enough points to hang with the top teams in D remains to be seen, but their defense should provide the team with better field position and keep them in games. The Panthers will have to remain optimistic and take care of the little things. Should they do that, a playoff berth is well within reach.



# VSE

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## **Clymer/Sherman/Panama Wolfpack**

The 2023 CSP Wolfpack are starting to resemble those teams that won back-to-back NYSPHSAA titles not long ago. Some of the players even share the same last names. Head Coach Ty Harper, now in his ninth season will have to preach all season that one game at a time mentality.

“Many of our players are younger siblings of players that played on our 2018 & 2019 state championship teams,” Harper said.

So the winning attitude has already been instilled in these kids, and they know it’s their time to step up. Nothing will be handed to them, they know how hard they’ll have to work after seeing how Randolph played them the past two seasons. “We’re excited to get back on the field. Last year we weren’t quite strong enough to compete with Randolph and we’ve worked hard this off-season in the weight room and with our 7-on-7 schedule,” Harper said.

Chris Payne will continue his defensive coordinator duties, even though he retired from the Panama School District last spring. John Watson was named a captain, a senior linebacker and full back who carries himself on the field like you would expect from a team leader. He will have Bryce Hinsdale, Alex Barmore and Tate Catanese to lean on. Of all the returning players, Watson led the most in tackles. Hinsdale is just a few receptions shy of the program record. Not only is he one of the hardest-working wideouts in the area, he is also the teams kicker and a pretty accurate one at that. Catanese saw plenty of time under center in ’22 and will once again lead the Wolfpack. Barmore is slowly earning a reputation as a sack master. Much like his older brother Cam, Alex has a nose for getting after the opposing QB. Barmore had five sacks a year ago and will be looking to build on that. The JV team has been successful the past few seasons as well, which certainly helps feed into the varsity squad. CSP has built a winning culture, that’s why year after year it’s Sectional finals or bust. That’s a testament to Harper and his staff.

## **Franklinville/Ellicottville Titans**

Jason Marsh is once again leading the way as head coach. This will be his fifth year at the helm where he has done an exceptional job keeping the Titans in the mix. They’ve won 21 games in the past three seasons. It’s not a program that rebuilds, like CSP they reload. The JV program has gone undefeated the past three years. Key returning players are Hunter Smith, Beau Bielecki, Noah Shenk, Owen Chudy, Billy Slavinski, Isaac Towne, Hayden Callahan, Isaiah Ploetz. Smith and Bielecki will share ball-carrying duties. Smith scored 10 TD’s in 2022, and averaged just under seven yards per carry. He’ll be the feature back, but Bielecki showed ability as well and will be a nice compliment in this offense. They’ll have to find a replacement for Gian Nuzzo, who had an exceptional football season last year. Isaac Towne got some experience at the position last year and is expected to take the job. The Titans finished 8-3 overall last season, with losses coming to CSP and Randolph twice. Reinforcements for 2023 are Ryan Norton, Colin Mooney, Bretton Blecha, Gannon Callahan and Zack Gibas.

## **Wilson Lakemen**

It wasn’t one of those best of times, worst of times experiences in Class D last season for Wilson. A perennial powerhouse in Class C just a couple of seasons prior found themselves playing a D schedule in 2022. They took some lumps early, losing to CSP on the road, then at home against the FE Titans and then again down at Portville going 0-3 out of the gate. In true Bill Atlas fashion, he coached his team up over the next two weeks winning back-to-back games against Gowanda/Pine Valley and Catt/Little Valley (both at Wilson). They would pick up two more wins in 2022, both against Frewsburg who struggled throughout the year. Atlas, now in his 16th season as head coach and 21st in the program, sees the tide turning once again. Seeing so many returning starters give Atlas reason to be optimistic. Among the returning players are Jack Mahar. Wolly Wortkoetter. Hamza Merrick. Braden Lepach. Conner Ernest. Casey Sidote and Conor Peck. Mahar is a work horse. He finished leading in touches and yards for Wilson in 2022, and also made his presence known on defense as well. All the while playing with Diabetes. Ernest will be back under center for Wilson.

A familiar last name is on the roster, Frerichs. Colton, a junior is the younger brother of Steve who was the schools quarterback for four years before taking over at Morrisville State. Mike Jeffords and Ryan Hough are also new faces on varsity this season and Atlas is looking for all three to make contributions.

## Monsignor Martin

*By Tony Fiorello @anthonyfiorello*



*Photo by Cal Phillips*

### **St. Francis Red Raiders**

The St. Francis Red Raiders are coming off back-to-back MMAA A Division titles and Jerry Smith's squad is looking to three-peat. Luckily for Smith, he won't have to rely on many new faces as he returns 13 out of 22 starters. Among them are captains Marcus Harrison – who has committed to the University of Georgia – and Terrence Pendergrass.

### **Bishop Timon-St. Jude Tigers**

Like St. Francis, the Bishop Timon-St. Jude Tigers are also defending champions – in this case of the MMAA B Division and is entering 2023 with the goal of repeating. Matt Weiser's group will be counting on new faces like Vidal Dinkins Jr., Jaliel Davis and Parris Scott Jr. to mesh with returners like James McNeil, Dominic Anzalone and Gerald McCloud to win a second straight crown.

# WEST HERR NEW YORK

## St. Joe's Marauders

Mike Corona's St. Joe's Marauders are coming off a 6-3 season and are looking to avenge last year's semifinal loss to Canisius. Corona certainly has the horses to be able to pull off that type of feat, as he returns 12 starters in 2023 – five on offense, seven on defense. His roster is littered with studs, including names like Peyton Brock, Mike O'Grady, Christian Perry, Benedict Musumbu, Charlie Milbrandt, John Judge, Brady McElroy, Dorian Buckley and Ryan Mucica.

## Canisius Crusaders

Speaking of Canisius, longtime Williamsville South coach Kraig Kurzanski is entering his second season as the head coach of the Crusaders and is in the process of turning his alma mater's program around. 5-6 a year ago, Canisius will look to embark on a winning season with the help of captains Jahyden Clark, Vincent Zimmerman and Patrick Sullivan.

## St. Mary's Lancers

Winning just two games a year ago, the St. Mary's Lancers will enter 2023 with a new coach (Anthony Zito) and new optimism that things will get better from here on out. However, the Lancers return just one starter each on offense and defense so there will be some growing pains. Logan Gray and John Celeste will be leaned on by Zito's coaching staff as they try to take some steps forward this season.

## Cardinal O'Hara Hawks

The Cardinal O'Hara Hawks have won just two games in the last three years combined, but it doesn't mean that help isn't on the way. Shawn Mangold has some quality football players in his program such as Jarrell Green, Jakson Ross and Simmarion Threet, and that trio of captains will take on the responsibility of leading the Hawks back to respectability.

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PHOTO BY CAL PHILLIPS

## Timon's O'Hara Takes Nothing for Granted

*By Jerry Sullivan*

Matt Weiser says it came out of nowhere. Last October, the Bishop Timon-St. Jude head football coach was running his team through some fast-paced drills when he noticed something wasn't right with then junior Ethan O'Hara.

O'Hara, a two-way starter at receiver and linebacker, was struggling to keep up. It was particularly curious for Ethan, a tireless worker who had been a Tiger captain since his freshman year. He was a leader, the kid the others followed.

"He just didn't seem like himself," Weiser said last week before practice at Mulroy Park. "He seemed a little behind and fatigued. I asked him and he goes, 'Yeah, I don't feel right. I feel off right now.'" "

The Timon trainer told Weiser he had noticed the same thing. So they called James and Yasminda O'Hara, who brought their son to the doctor.

"His doctors wanted blood tests and X-rays and stuff like that," James O'Hara recalled. "As soon as they got the result of his blood test the next day, my wife got the call. 'Oh, we've got to rush him up to Children's'."

Ethan spent a week in the hospital undergoing tests. At first, the doctors feared the worst. But the tests ruled out leukemia. It turned out he was suffering from aplastic anemia, a rare condition that occurs when your bone marrow is unable to produce enough blood cells, leaving you prone to infections and bleeding.

"It was a scary experience," said O'Hara, a four-sport athlete who is back with the football team after missing the second half of Timon's championship season in 2022. "Of course, my parents sat with me throughout the whole process."

Ethan needed a bone marrow transplant. The family members were all tested and his younger brother, Isaiah, now a freshman on the Timon football team, was a perfect match. The O'Haras also have a 20-year-old daughter, Belle.



*Photo by Andrew Miller*

O'Hara couldn't return to school after his diagnosis. He stood on the sidelines, apart and wearing a mask to avoid being exposed by others, when the Tigers beat St. Mary's in mid-November to win the Monsignor Martin B championship.

He went into Children's before Christmas to get the bone marrow transplant

Isaiah gave his bone marrow in a procedure at Roswell. Ethan, who went through one round of chemotherapy before the transplant, spent the holidays in the hospital and got out on Jan. 12 — his father's birthday.

“There were some tough times,” said James O’Hara, who had high praise for all the staff at Children’s. “But the doctors always told him to get up and move around. That’s what he did. He was working out in the hospital when he could.”

Ethan was still unable to return to school for classes, but he regained enough strength to compete in spring in track and field. Doctors said he could compete outdoors, where he could socially distance. O’Hara not only competed, he qualified for the state championships in the long jump and 110-meter hurdles.

“I just fought through it,” O’Hara said. “It was a lot of hard work. I have to thank my coaches and family, everyone around me, just supporting me, helping me get through these hard times. I’m just glad to be back out here.”

Weiser is glad to have him back, too. He said O’Hara, who was cleared to play football again a month ago and will be back in classes when school begins, will start at receiver. Ethan lost weight because of his illness, so he might not start at outside linebacker, splitting time at the season’s outset.

O’Hara has been a varsity starter and captain since his freshman year at. He’s also been a captain in track (indoor and outdoor) since ninth grade. At the time of his illness, he was the top man on the bowling team with a 202 average. He has bowled a 279 game. Ethan is also on the National Honor Society.

In short, O’Hara is a coach’s dream, the sort of player who inspires his teammates on the playing field and in the classroom.

“He’s not always going to be the one who’s the loudest or say the speech that gives you goose bumps,” said Weiser, a third-year head man who was a star tight end at UB. “He does everything you ask of him.

He does the right things. He does the little things. He’s the prototypical lead by example guy. “He was playing middle linebacker as a freshman at probably 120 pounds,” Weiser said. “Starting. And there were numerous times watching film where he was getting run over, but he was in the right place all the time.”

Weiser said O’Hara grew frustrated at times during his recovery, but he never felt sorry for himself or lost sight of the larger objective — the team. He said Ethan was constantly asking about the squad, putting his teammates first.

“I’m more of a silent type,” O’Hara said. “But you can still be a leader; you can lead by example. I’ll still go out there and tell some of my teammates what they did wrong, what they did right. I give them feedback. And just doing my own thing. Be sure the team succeeds in every way.

“I’m still trying to get to that 100 percent mark, still working on it,” he said. “Of course, it’s a really hard process, especially mentally.”

The Tigers won the Monsignor Martin B title last November and went 6-3, winning more than five games for the first time in eight years. Clarence Prude, who like O’Hara has started since his freshman year, wrote a letter about Ethan’s character and read it to his teammates before the title game.

“Seeing him go through that showed me that everything in life is not promised,” said Prude, whose 40-yard TD run put Timon ahead for good in the title game. “He showed his love and passion for the team. Even in those hard conditions, he was showing us, ‘I’m not done. I’ll be here for you and show you I’ve got y’all, even though I’m going through this pain.’”

Timon, which opens the 2023 season at home Friday night against Greece Olympia/Odyssey, returns 10 starters on both sides of the ball. This could be a truly special season, propelling the Tigers toward Weiser’s vision to one day return to the Monsignor Martin’s A division to compete with the big boys.

O’Hara said he’s simply thankful to be back on the football field. His head coach is grateful to have an experienced player and leader, one whose very presence reminds his teammates not to take their health and talent for granted.

“When we’re doing some of these sprints, guys might slow up and feel sorry for themselves,” Weiser said, “and Ethan’s out here running as hard as he possibly can. Sometimes, you don’t realize how good you have it until it’s taken away.”



# The Wolf's Den

By Frank Wolf @wolf3328

Like many of you, I've been looking forward to the 2023 high school football season since we closed out 2022.

Once July hits and the Kensington Lions Club Senior All-Star Game kicks-off the excitement only increases. With that said, I wanted to reflect a little on last season and make some prognostications at the same time.



Last season we saw the Bennett Tigers claim the NYSPHSAA Class AA Championship at the Carrier Dome in Syracuse, NY. It was a highlight moment for the Buffalo Public Schools but also for Section VI and Western New York as a whole.

This year, it looks as if Bennett has as good a shot as any team in Class AA to win it all once again. It would be the program's third straight trip to the state title game. Lancaster will be tough as always and are rarely, if ever outcoached.

In Class A, I like what I've been seeing in West Seneca West and Williamsville East the past couple seasons and expect them to be very tough, but I see McKinley coming out of A.

Noah Willoughby, the standout QB from South Park is within striking distance of Joe Licata's all-time passing yards record. The Sparks are a young team but don't let that fool you, South Park will be in the hunt along with Pioneer, Williamsville South, West Seneca East, Olean, Health Sciences and Iroquois.

My guess is a rematch of last year's Class B final between Iroquois and Pioneer.

It'll be a race to the finish for sure in Class C, don't be surprised to hear Cleve Hill make some noise this season. Medina certainly isn't ready to concede anything. Fredonia and Salamanca are both bigger, better and stronger than a year ago. I could see the Hillbillies and Golden Eagles battling it out at Highmark in a few months.

There will be a lot of chatter about the CSP Wolfpack down in Class D. With two State Titles already under their belts, the program is poised to make a run, and there are a number of players on the team who spent plenty of time in Syracuse watching their older brothers (and sister) win championships.

St. Francis is the barometer for Monsignor Martin and has been the past three years. It was Canisius. The Crusaders have been rebuilding as was St. Joe's. Both programs are looking to make giant leaps forward, do they have the size to take down the Red Raiders?

One of the biggest travesties in local high school football is the MMAA playoff picture. Bishop-Timon, Cardinal O'Hara and St. Mary's of Lancaster cannot play for a state title. I think that's a huge mistake, but I understand why they did this. It's a numbers game.

The three smaller private schools have not had good numbers and have struggled to put a quality team together, one that could compete with the larger schools Canisius and St. Francis in particular were much larger and not just in numbers.

Things are starting to change now, Timon is much improved from a few years ago. They may not have the depth, but they certainly match up better than in previous seasons. Cardinal O'Hara will surprise some teams this year. I don't think they are at the level of Timon just yet, but they are a work in progress and there are a few kids in the program that you'll hear about sooner than later.

It's tough to build programs with nothing to play for. Put those three teams back where they belong.

This opening weekend I'll be out on Thursday and Friday before heading out of state on Saturday. I'll be at Starpoint for opening night and then split time on Friday between Olean at Falconer/Cass/Maple Grove and O'Hara at Chaut. Lake/Westfield/Brocton.

I'm going to miss seeing Roger Weiss on the sidelines, this season is dedicated to him, Carl Kuras and Joe Foyle.

Tune into WNYAthletics and the NFHS Network for a great lineup of games. Also, check out the revamped WNYAthletics.com and contribute to the scoreboard!

See you at the field!

# **WNY** *Athletics*

**WNY Athletics would like to dedicate  
this season to Joe Foyle, Roger Weiss  
and Carl Kuras.**