



2023

FOOTBALL PREVIEW

WEST PLAINS | WILLOW SPRINGS | MOUNTAIN VIEW | THAYER

SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT OF **THE WEST PLAINS DAILY QUILL**

Zizzers Embark on a Fresh Quest After Stellar Season

After a near-perfect debut season that saw the Zizzers reach the coveted Class 4 Final Four, West Plains' head coach, Joel Wyatt, faces a challenge – rebuilding the powerhouse while keeping the winning momentum alive.

In Wyatt's first season at the helm, the Zizzers notched an impressive 9-4 record, culminating in a loss to St. Dominic in the final hurdle. The legacy of that team will not be forgotten, as it elevated two of its stars to Division One programs and another to the prestigious Missouri S&T.

But as the sun sets on a golden era, it rises with a promise of a new dawn.

Though Wyatt admits, "We lost a lot of returning starters," he remains undeterred and confident about the team's grasp of offensive play, noting, "We are way ahead of the curve on learning the offense compared to last year."

A beacon of hope for the Zizzers will be Briggs Hughston, the basketball sensation-turned-football prodigy, committed to FCS heavyweights Northern Iowa. With his commanding 6-foot-6, 230-pound physique, Hughston is poised to dominate as a traditional tight end. He's not the only weapon in the arsenal, though. Senior Rylan Kenslow (6-2, 190) is slated to join Hughston at the receiver spot.

As for the offensive line-up, eyes will be on Dawson Howell. This formidable senior, weighing in at 250 pounds on a 6-3 frame, is set to become one of high school football's most intriguing running backs. Howell, who previously ran a commendable 194 yards with two touchdowns, will be bol-



stered by the likes of Lance Norton and the promising junior Remi Wilson.

Despite a young offensive line, there are stalwarts like all-area sophomore Jaxon Hunter and juniors Peyton Reynolds, Maddox Hawkins, Jeff Edgeller, and Fernando Lopez. Spearheading the charge will be Isaiah Jones, a budding dual-threat quarterback, transitioning from his previous linebacker role.

As for the defense, it boasts names like Alex Judd, an all-area honoree, Lance Norton, and the youthful talent Warren Lawson. A dynamic secondary fronted by Hughston, Kenslow, and the experienced Will Stauffer is set to stonewall adversaries. Still, Wyatt acknowledges the need for bolstering the defense, citing a particular focus on "finding some defensive linemen and safeties."

The Zizzers have a legacy to uphold, having clinched district titles in four of the past five seasons, boasting a stellar 50-11 record. But as the torch passes to a new brigade, the goal remains the same: shine under those Friday night lights.

For Wyatt, it's clear. His faith in the team is unwavering. "They have a hunger to get better and prove people wrong," he said, reflecting on the team's unparalleled work ethic.

As summer winds down, the Zizzers are gearing up for the 2023 season, starting with a jamboree at Fair Grove. The true test, however, is set for Aug. 25 when they open their season against Bolivar.

The stage is set, the challenges are known, and in West Plains, a new chapter awaits.


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WILLOW SPRINGS

A Young Squad Ready to Rewrite History



A

midst the echoing roars and tireless trainings, a determined revival is taking shape. Under the guidance of second-year head coach Travis Payne, the Willow Springs Bears are embodying the spirit of resurgence, and they're not shying away from it.

Even as they stand young, the unyielding spirit of this squad is unmistakable. "This team is young but they have put in the work," Payne asserted. In his eyes, this isn't merely a team; it's a movement, steered by a core group of youngsters set on redefining the expectations of Bear football.

The journey hasn't been without its setbacks. The years 2020 and 2021 saw a collective of three wins. However, the tides began to turn in the 2022 season. Culminating in a 3-7 finish and a 2-5 mark in the South Central Association, the Bears began to showcase their potential. They owe much to the ten senior stalwarts of that year, which included the now-college football players Ryan Koehler and Genadiy Dudko.

As they march into the 2023 season, the Bears are backed by 13 returning lettermen and four steadfast starters. With a robust offensive line led

by the likes of senior Zepplyn Gilliam and juniors John Jones and Chandler McColgin, Willow Springs promises a staunch offense. Throw in players like Dylan Ferguson, an emerging quarterback sensation, and the game changes. Payne's confidence in Ferguson is evident: "His arm strength has gone up and is making decisions quicker in the pass game," he shared.

While the offense is amping up its passing game, the defense is shaping up to be the Bears' crowning jewel. Anchored by the prowess of Gilliam, Jones, Woolsey, and Gibson, this side of the field promises tenacity. The promise? "A relentless defense that gets 11 guys to the ball," as per Payne.

The journey ahead is meticulously charted out. With the Mountain Grove Jamboree scheduled for Aug. 18 and a thrilling face-off against California to kickstart the regular season, Willow Springs is pulling no punches.

To the Bears, this season isn't just another game; it's a statement of intent, of grit, and of relentless pursuit towards excellence. As Coach Payne puts it: "We have the potential to be a great swarming defense and explosive offense."

Willow Springs may be young, but they're ready – ready to charge, challenge, and change the course of their legacy. The Bears are coming, and they're hungrier than ever.

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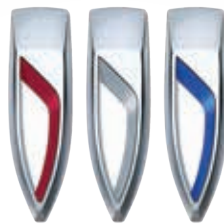
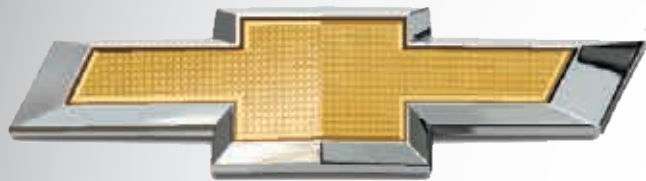
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The Zizzer Varsity Football team is revved up and ready to start a new a new season. After a standout debut season, West Plains' head coach Joel Wyatt is poised to reshape the Zizzers while retaining their winning streak. With basketball star Briggs Hughston transitioning to football and Isaiah Jones taking the quarterback reins, Wyatt's new brigade is hungry to uphold the team's impressive legacy. As the 2023 season beckons, West Plains is set to write a thrilling new chapter.

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A Homecoming King Ready to Lead Liberty's Football Renaissance



The football heartland of Liberty witnesses a poetic return as Jansen Acklin, once the prodigious all-state receiver and an iconic figure of Liberty's golden era, readies to helm the Eagles' football squad. The torch passing is more than symbolic, with Acklin stepping into shoes vacated by Brock Kenega, while keeping the shadow of his father, Darin Acklin, alive and thriving.



Having played an integral role in the Eagles soaring to a 31-6 record during his high school years and subsequently illuminating Evangel's football field with his prowess, Acklin's return is nothing short of a grand spectacle. It's a tale of a son following in his father's footsteps, yet carving his own path, back where it all began.

Speaking on his appointment, an emotional Acklin said, "It's a surreal feeling. I've been a part of this program since my dad became the head coach in 2003. This is a dream come true, and I am committed to upholding the values of discipline, accountability, and commitment that this program has fostered."

The Eagles, already riding high on the back of an 11-1 district championship record from the previous season, find themselves in an enviable position with 12 returning starters. Leading the charge will be the indomitable quarterback, Carter Pruett. Supported by a formidable

entourage comprising receivers Eli Moore, Adrien Pendegraft, and Gavin Reese, Liberty's offensive arsenal promises fireworks.

Beyond their offensive prowess, the Eagles have depth in defense. Speaking about his squad, Acklin said, "Eli is our powerhouse, Adrien is lightning on the field, and Gavin has showcased his versatility since he first stepped onto the field."

Liberty's dominance is not just in their backfield. The trenches, anchored by all-state honoree Brody Rutledge and backed by stalwarts Wyatt Honeycutt, Jake Carl, and Jaren Rutledge, promise to be a fortress, repelling assaults and initiating offensive maneuvers with equal aplomb.

Acklin's blueprint for the season includes integrating fresh talents like Ashton Conley, DeWayne McClellan, and a plethora of others vying for crucial roles, emphasizing that the aim will be to build a "fast and physical defense."

While last year's sting from the loss to Seneca still lingers, the Eagles are laser-focused on the upcoming challenges, notably a fierce face-off with the Big 8 stalwarts. Acklin's game plan is simple, "Embrace adversity and constantly grow. The post-season will see us at our very best."

As the 2023 regular season dawns with a much-anticipated clash against arch-rivals Strafford on Aug. 25, the town of Liberty waits with bated breath. For in Jansen Acklin, they don't just see a coach; they see a legacy returned, ready to rewrite history.

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Liberty Eagles Schedule

DATE	OPPONENT	TIME	LOCATION
8/25	Strafford	7:00 pm	Away
9/1	Adrian	7:00 pm	Home
9/8	Thayer	7:00 pm	Away
9/15	Ava	7:00 pm	Home
9/22	Willow Springs	7:00 pm	Home
9/29	Mountain Grove	7:00 pm	Away
10/6	Cabool	7:00 pm	Away
10/14	Salem	2:00 pm	Home
10/20	Houston	7:00 pm	Home

Liberty Eagles Roster

SENIORS

(12th Grade)

- Pendegraft, Adrien
- Rutledge, Brody
- Pruett, Carter
- Moore, Eli
- Conley, Ashton
- Honeycutt, Colton
- Lopez Miranda, Angel
- Carl, Jacob

JUNIORS

(11th Grade)

- Sharr, Christopher
- Reese, Gavin
- Conley, Joseph
- Rinear, Leon
- Walls, Kenyon
- Thall, Robert
- Foster, Parker
- Reese, Quenton
- Thompson, Brayden

SOPHOMORES

(10th Grade)

- Roberts, Kyle
- Rodriguez, Eddie
- Jester, Tytus
- Mays, Brayden
- McClellan, Dewayne
- Rutledge, Jaren
- Brock, Connor
- Bushong, Matthew
- Powell, Aiyden
- Moore, Samuel
- Oziah, Hayden
- Hester, Jihan
- Glasscock, Tyler
- Thomas, Tucker
- Rutledge, Reese
- Carl, Lukas

FRESHMEN

(9th Grade)

- Melby, Jasper
- Underwood, Braydon
- Smothers, Preston



THAYER

THAYER FOOTBALL SQUAD PRIMED FOR NEW SEASON:

Fresh Talent and Returnees Hold Promise

Emerging from a rebuilding year, the Thayer Bobcats, under the guidance of Head Coach Briar Hancock, showcased undeniable potential in their previous season, ending with a 4-6 record. Their impressive victories against teams like Cabool, Willow Springs, and Pierce City have added a glint of optimism for the forthcoming season.

This summer, the Bobcats have been diligently nurturing their younger players while eagerly awaiting the addition of a promising freshman class. Twelve ninth graders are set to bolster the roster, bringing a renewed vigor to the squad.

"We're fortunate with all the incoming freshmen on the team and some of those guys will have to step up and fill some roles," expressed an optimistic Hancock.

A notable point of attention for the team is their offensive line, which won't feature any seniors this season. Coach Hancock anticipates fierce competition in this area. Returning players like junior Cooper Clark, who has displayed proficiency in both guard and center positions, and sophomore Zeb Dubois are expected to play vital roles. The line-up might further be enhanced by the likes of sophomore Ryan McIntire and freshmen Mason Thornton, Kaleb Tipton, and Christian Pitts.

"Kaleb Tipton is physically way ahead of his years. His stature and capability don't fit the freshman label at all," commented Hancock.

The offensive backfield witnesses a significant change with the 6-foot-6 junior Devin Harrington stepping into the quarterback



position. This transition permits last year's quarterback, sophomore Dawson Harris, to explore other crucial positions. Hancock hinted at a competitive spirit for the quarterback position, indicating that Harris is still actively in the mix, with rotations during practices.

The Bobcats have the luxury of retaining key players, including senior running back Mark Spencer, who delivered commendable stats last season, and senior wide receiver Rowan Spencer, a crucial cog in the team's offense. Both have earned accolades for their performances in the South Central Association.

The defensive aspect sees Mark Spencer transition to the linebacker position from the outside, with Hancock emphasizing the importance of Spencer becoming the "quarterback of our defense". Senior Colt Gonzalez is expected to play a dual role, featuring both as a linebacker and a fullback on offense.

Xavier Gonzalez, a fearless sophomore, and last year's safety, will be more promi-

nently positioned this season after a promising 36-tackle record as a freshman. Clark's return to the defensive line after earning all-conference honors, coupled with talents like McIntire, Dubois, Harrington, and junior Brandon Prince, signifies a strong defense.

Rowan Spencer, holding the fort in the defensive backfield after a season of locking down top receivers, is set to play a crucial role. Prospects like Harris, Xavier Gonzales, Tucker Wade, and freshman Thomas Poole are expected to enhance the defensive prowess of the Bobcats.

All eyes are on the season opener at home against St. Vincent, a fresh challenge for the Bobcats this year. Fans can get an early glimpse of the team in action at Mountain Grove on August 18th during a jamboree.

In sum, the Thayer Bobcats, with a mix of young talent and experienced returnees, are poised for an exciting season ahead. Coach Hancock's leadership and the team's budding potential suggest that Thayer's football horizon is bright.



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BOBCATS

Thayer Bobcats Schedule

DATE	OPPONENT	TIME	LOCATION
8/25	St. Vincent	8:00 pm	Home
9/1	Salem (Ark.)	7:00 pm	Away
9/8	Liberty (Mountain View)	7:00 pm	Home
9/15	Salem	7:00 pm	Away
9/22	Houston	7:00 pm	Home
9/29	Cabool	7:00 pm	Away
10/6	Ava	7:00 pm	Away
10/13	Willow Springs	7:00 pm	Home
10/20	Mountain Grove	7:00 pm	Away

Thayer Bobcats Roster

SENIORS
(12th Grade)

- Spencer, Mark
- Spencer, Rowan
- Gonzales, Colt

JUNIORS
(11th Grade)

- Harrington, Devin
- Prince, Brandon
- Zuchowski, John
- Clark, Cooper

SOPHOMORES
(10th Grade)

- Harris, Dawson
- Gonzales, Xavier
- Ming, Kamdyn
- Wade, Tucker
- Grimes, Blain
- Dubois, Zeb
- Zuchowski, Jacob
- McIntire, Ryan

FRESHMEN
(9th Grade)

- Johnston, Trenton
- Poole, Thomas
- Nicholson, Carter
- Crawford, Kaleb
- Curtner, Lukas
- Boyce, Dominick
- Spencer, Brendon
- Beville, Eric
- Thorton, Mason
- Tipton, Kaleb
- Pitts, Christian
- Cypret, Jasper





Zizzers Schedule

DATE	OPPONENT	TIME	LOCATION
8/25	Bolivar	7:00 pm	Away
9/1	Glendale	7:00 pm	Home
9/7	Hillcrest	7:00 pm	Away
9/15	Rolla	7:00 pm	Home
9/22	Camdenton	7:00 pm	Away
9/29	Kickapoo	7:00 pm	Home
10/6	Lebanon	7:00 pm	Away
10/13	Parkview	7:00 pm	Home
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