



2024 FALL BALL

Sports & Recreation

- News • Teams • Players
- Game Schedules • City Recreation News

Special section to The Planter, August 22, 2024 & The Apopka Chief, August 23, 2024

Blue Darters have their eyes on a deep playoff run

As the Apopka Blue Darters enter the 2024 football season they have more to want. Apopka is hungrier than ever coming into this season after a less than spectacular end to the 2023 season with a 42-14 loss to the Sanford Seminoles in the 4M 2023 FHSAA Football State Championship Regional Semifinal.

Before last season, the Blue Darters had been to the State Championship game three of the last four years. In those state Championship games, Apopka lost 21-20 to Miami Christopher Columbus in 2019, 35-7 to Venice in 2021, and 16-13 to Columbus again in 2022.

Last year Apopka was stopped early in their playoff run. Even with a senior-heavy team with years of championship experience Apopka was unable to get the job done. Now going into this season Apopka looks to break back into championship contention this time with a young core that is looking to be the next face of Blue Darter greatness.

After losing to Sanford Seminole in the Regional Semifinal last season, head coach of the Blue Darters Jeff Rolson said he was nothing but proud of his team.

“I’m proud of our kids. We had a solid season – it didn’t go as long as we would’ve liked it to, and we didn’t per-

form as well as we would’ve liked to tonight but, our kids played hard and this (Sanford) is a good football team and we have some deficiencies. And I could’ve done a better job coaching them but I’m proud of them. We had a great run and a lot of people would like to be in the second round, and we’re in it, but that’s not good enough for us.”

The 2024 regular season begins today, Friday, August 23, with a home district game against the Ocoee Knights. The districts were once again reclassified after last season, so this season Apopka’s district is made up of some familiar, as well as new faces.

Apopka belongs to 7A District 5 now and joining them are Ocoee, West Orange, and West Port. Apopka’s first district game will be game one of the regular season against Ocoee slated for a 7 p.m. kickoff. Apopka’s second district game will be a home game where they host West Port and is slated for a 7 p.m. kickoff on Friday, September 13. Their final district matchup will be an away game at West Orange and is slated for a 7 p.m. kickoff.

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Wekiva looks to succeed with its fifth new coach

By Neal Fisher
Apopka Chief Staff

Wekiva Mustangs football entered a new era when hiring Doug Gabriel as the fifth head coach during January.

Primarily a wide receiver, Gabriel was known for explosiveness as a player and is a local product. Gabriel played for the Dr. Phillips Panthers during high school and then the University of Central Florida at the collegiate level. Time was spent at Mississippi Gulf Coast (junior college) in Mississippi as well. A six-season NFL career was made up of playing for the Oakland Raiders, New England Patriots, and Cincinnati Bengals.

“The most and obvious focus of attention (during the offseason) has been on adjusting to a new coaching staff, but not unusual,” Gabriel said. “Regardless of what kind, no relationship begins with a sense of familiarity among the partici-

pants. Needing a period of time to adjust to new relationships is human nature. If experienced and veteran teams need a period of adjustment, inexperienced and young will certainly, too.”

Gabriel has assembled a coaching staff consisting of Steven Brandenburg, Chris Canone, William Evertt Jr., Mike Gaines, Lamarcus Jackson, Tyrek Tisdale, Jedon Smith, and Alex Vazquez.

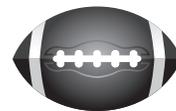
Adjusting to a new coaching staff isn’t the only personnel transition within Wekiva football.

A significant number of players leaving when a new coach takes over is common place. Important because the result is youth and inexperience at those positions with a new starter being the norm. Sixteen players or 73 percent of the combined starters (both sides of the ball) from last season have to be replaced in the Mus-

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2024 Apopka Blue Darters varsity football team



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City of Apopka Recreation opportunities and facilities

The following was written and provided by the Apopka Recreation Division

It's time to dust off the cleats as the City of Apopka Recreation Division welcomes you and your family back for another exciting fall season of athletic programming. However, the action does not stop at the fields alone! The Recreation Division is dedicated to providing the residents of Apopka with a variety of wholesome, innovative, and environmentally diverse recreational programs, activities and facilities.

The City of Apopka truly is "Where the Fun Begins," and we look forward to seeing you. For further information regarding any of the programs or special events listed below, please call 407-703-1784 or visit us online at www.apopka.gov and look for the recreation link.

Online registration

Avoid long registration lines by registering online! Online registration is available for many of the programs offered by the City of Apopka Recreation Division. To register, please visit www.apopka.net, click on the "Register for a Recreation Programs button." You will then be taken to our new CivicRec site. Once you create your Username and family profile (please make certain to enter your birth dates) you will be able to "shop" for activities and pay online!

Athletics

The City of Apopka's Athletic Division offers youth and adult programs and leagues for all ages. Whether you are trying to re-ignite that athletic spirit from

your high school days or introducing your youngster to a new sport, we have you covered! Sports teach life lessons such as teamwork, leadership, and hard work along with promoting a healthy lifestyle. We will see you on the fields!

Youth Soccer (Spring, Fall) @ Northwest Recreation

Youth soccer is offered for boys and girls ages 4-14.

The fees for these programs are currently \$110 for City Residents per season and \$140 for Non-City residents per season and includes a uniform.

Registration for the Spring 2025 season will begin December 2, 2024. Participants may register online by visiting www.apopka.gov or in person at the Northwest Recreation Complex located at 3710 Jason Dwelley Parkway, Apopka, 32712. The Northwest Recreation Complex front office is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Youth Flag Football @ Northwest Recreation

Youth flag football is offered for boys and girls ages 5-14.

The fees for this program are \$110 for City Residents per season and \$140 for Non-City residents. Registration fee includes NFL team-branded reversible jersey and one NFL flag belt and flags.

Registration for the Winter 2024/2025 season will begin September 30, 2024. The season will begin in early December and run through early February. Participants may register online by visiting www.apopka.gov or in person at the Northwest Recreation Complex located at 3710 Jason

Dwelley Parkway, Apopka, 32712. The Northwest Recreation Complex front office is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Youth Basketball

Youth co-ed basketball is available during the Summer months for children between the ages 6-14. The fees for these programs are currently \$110 for City Residents per season and \$140 for Non-City residents per season and includes a uniform. Registration for the Summer 2025 league is expected to begin in early Spring 2025. The program is held at a local school gym. Participants may register online by visiting www.apopka.gov or in person at the Northwest Recreation Complex located at 3710 Jason Dwelley Parkway, Apopka, 32712. The Northwest Recreation Complex front office is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Adult Softball and Kickball

We offer several adult softball leagues throughout the year, including men's and co-ed. All leagues are sanctioned by the USSSA. First place teams will receive a trophy and a T-shirt; second place teams will receive a trophy. On Monday nights, we will also offer our adult co-ed kickball league. Softball and kickball teams are accepted on a first-come, first-served basis. Your team must have a completed registration form and have paid all necessary fees to be considered registered. There must be at least four registered teams for kickball in order to host the league. There will be no summer or winter seasons for kickball.

Games are held at the Northwest

Recreation Complex, 3710 Jason Dwelley Parkway, Apopka, 32712

Adult softball program fee: \$405/team, Adult kickball program fee: \$250/team, Please call 407-703-1784 for registration information and league dates.

Racquetball Court

The racquetball court at Kit Land Nelson Park, 10 South Forest Avenue, is available for play by permit only. City of Apopka residents can purchase a six-month permit for \$100 and an annual permit for \$195, slightly higher fees apply for non-residents. For further information, please call 407-703-1642.

Tennis courts

Northwest Recreation Complex
The city has four tennis courts at the Northwest Recreation Complex, 3710 Jason Dwelley Parkway. Use of the tennis courts for walk-ups is free. Court hours Monday through Friday are 7a.m. to 9 p.m. Weekend hours are 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. Courts can be reserved for a maximum of 2 hours per person per day, 72 hours in advance of the desired date of play at www.apopka.gov for a cost of \$5 per hour.

Other events

Facility and field rental
The Fran Carlton Center, the Apopka Community Center, and the picnic pavilions and athletic fields at the Northwest Recreation Complex are available for rental. Call us before you book your corporate

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2024 Apopka Blue Darters varsity football team roster

No.	Name	Pos.	No.	Name	Pos.	No.	Name	Pos.
			20	Jockee Sanders	RB	51	Delhart Courtney	OL
2	Noah Morgan	WR	21	Malcolm Jones	DB	52	Masiah Fisher	DL
3	Damar'eon Cawthon	WR	22	Jayden Safford	RB	53	Michael Wells	K/P
4	Elijah Frazier	TE	23	Jovan Brown	WR	54	Antonio Thompson	OL
5	Myles Fieldings	DB	24	Aaron Hernandez	WR	55	JaKendel Kemp	DL
6	Alex Rossi	WR	25	Jayden Burton	TE	59	Lamelle Griffin	LB
7	Akemi Caraballo	DB	26	Chistopher Clayton	DB	60	Gamaliel Williams	OL
8	Henry Pickard	DB	27	Keith White	WR	62	Jayden Altamoreno	OL
9	Caleb Reed	LB	28	Christian Bryant	DB	66	Jordan Califar	OL
10	Blake Childs	QB	29	Antwan Walsh	DB	68	Micheal Boruch	DL
11	Trey Muldrow	LB	30	Adrian Simpson	WR	72	Demarco Shaw	OL
12	Tyson Davison	QB	31	Devin Simmons	DB	77	Carlos Paez	OL
13	Tj Frazier	QB	32	Aiden Richardson	LB	78	Nandi Lake	OL
14	Sevonn Edwards	DB	33	Brandon Paul	DL	92	Ashton Sylvian	DL
15	Kingston Shaw	DE	34	Joshua Taylor	WR	95	Titus Terrell	DL
16	Kamron Medina	QB	36	Emir Brinson	LB	96	Jamarcus Tanner	DL
17	Jaquan Walker	WR	38	Judah Harvey	DB	97	Elijah Henry	DL
18	Jaylon Jenkins	WR	45	Kion Maxcean	LB	98	Michael Cooper	DL
19	Ma'carri Gainous	QB	50	Emmanuel Denis	OL	99	Trevon Williams	DL

**The Blue Darter Athletic Department
and Administrative Team**

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2024 Wekiva Mustang's varsity football team



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Athletic Department**

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2024 Wekiva Mustangs!*

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Mustangs: Wekiva will have to learn how to communicate

Continued from page 2

tangs' case.

"Learning to speak football in the big picture is an important process, not only developing the ability to execute plays," Gabriel said. "Of course, every time a coach calls a play, the players attempt to execute. Lacking a deep understanding doesn't always lead to poor execution. Ability to execute plays well and consistently is much better and at a higher level when understanding why or the purpose of the call, though.

"Consistent winning starts with understanding the bigger picture of why decisions are made and the concepts used to answer. Understanding and knowledge of the bigger picture has grown as well as and hand-in-hand with the ability to execute at a high level."

Between 2014 and 2020, why decisions were made and the concepts used to answer were not only understood by Wekiva players, the Mustangs were a strong model to prove understanding of why decisions are made and the concepts used to answer facilitate consistent winning. A 57-23 record and six berths into the FHSAA postseason tournament were compiled.

The record has slumped to 13-18 with only one berth into the FHSAA postseason tournament over the last three seasons.

"In the same vein as the relationship, learning what being an athlete entails requires an adjustment, too," Gabriel said. "Positive or negative, every decision made has consequences, especially at the youth level. Coaching is as much about impressing on the athlete the importance of deci-

sion-making. Impact and weight of a decision is certainly the longest lasting of all the elements involved with success. Strong or poor decision-making tends to be the same in and out of athletics, though. Individuals tend to make poor decisions inside and outside of sports, as well.

"Nor does getting everyone to buy in happen overnight. When coaches focus on decision-making and consequences instead of directly practicing on the sport as expected, some athletes don't buy into its importance. Coaches constantly say the difference between winning and losing is taking the little and behind-the-scenes actions. Strong decision-making leads to taking the actions. However, a strong brotherhood and decision-making work hand-in-hand.

Six players combined (from both sides of the ball) from last season's team started the spring practice contest against the Bishop Moore Hornets on Friday, May 19. The potential that was demonstrated against a state blueblood did not disappoint.

"Competitiveness throughout the contest was much higher than expected, especially with the number of practices under our belts," Gabriel said. "We had an opportunity to win, not just force Bishop Moore to play well to keep the lead.

Nor was the concept of team first and playing as a team lacking. This is always a concern of the coaches when a team takes to the field for the first time,

"The coaches were concerned about pointing of fingers and giving up on teammates. Instead, there never was a question about players working together during the entire contest."

As is often the case during the spring

practice contests, the quality of play alternated between a high level of quality and below par. Play was what is expected during spring practice games in other words. Inconsistency also fostered the play of big impact. The Hornets executed one more play of big impact to take, hold onto and eventually secure the victory by a 20-14 margin.

"Development has been steady, satisfactory and as normal, always the overall positive sought," Gabriel reiterated after spring practice concluded with the spring practice game. "At first, the pace of development was on the slower side. Then the pace progressively picked up with each practice. We are definitely moving in the right direction and continuously throughout spring practice. Best possible position as far as progress made at this point of the calendar year has been achieved. However, the initial period of conditioning and spring practice is only the beginning."

However, the on-the-surface obvious factors previously written about are not the only thing to be addressed if the state of the program changes. List of deeper factors with impact is topped by a strength of schedule among the 15 highest in Class 6A and 40 for all classifications. Fair or unfair, changing the state of the program will have to be achieved while facing a much more challenging schedule than most teams. Certainly, still possible, but a high strength of schedule translates to a much smaller learning curve and perhaps an even smaller window of time to learn how to apply what you learn between practices as well as during contests.

Facing schedules among the most challenging and difficult throughout the state

and all classifications had developed as a standard within Wekiva football before 2021. The challenge of the last three season schedules has been even more intense. The strength of schedule has been among the 15 highest in Class 6A and 40 for all classifications over the last three seasons.

"One of the more difficult schedules obviously," Mustangs coach Gabriel said. "Certainly, the fairness can be questioned when compared to some other teams and if their record is better. On the other hand, the strength of schedule is a means for playoff contendership at the least. Then there is the old saying of there is no better experience than first-hand. When an experience directly impacts the individual, or as in sports, a team, learning the lessons needed to qualify for the playoffs tend to be much quicker."

"A challenging schedule or lack thereof is no different than any other aspect of sports, depends on how it is used and accepted," Gabriel said. "Nonetheless, under the umbrella, for every negative perception an opportunity also exists. If we qualify for the playoffs, nobody can question the validity."

As is usually the case after two seasons, district membership was also changed. The Oviedo Lions, Evans Trojans and Lake Howell Silver Hawks have also been placed in District 6A-4. Unlike other sports and because district championship tournaments aren't held, each district member is required to play the others each season. A home-and-home schedule is also required over the two seasons.

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PRINCIPAL



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ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL



Carol Morris
ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL



Kanishia West
ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL



Katherine Pickels
ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL



Jordan Walker
DEAN



Jett Davison
RESOURCE TEACHER



Gerald Shafer
RESOURCE TEACHER



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RESOURCE TEACHER



Demetria Richard
RESOURCE TEACHER



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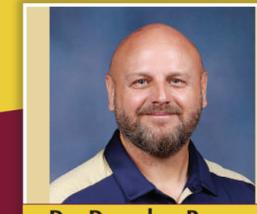
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Dr. Kenisha Williams,
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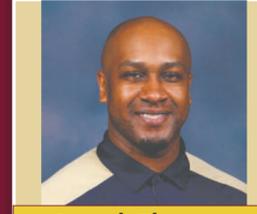
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Dr. Douglas Brown
ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL



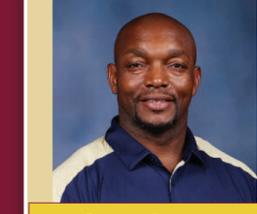
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ADMINISTRATIVE DEAN



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ADMINISTRATIVE DEAN



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Dr. Keshia Brown Griffin
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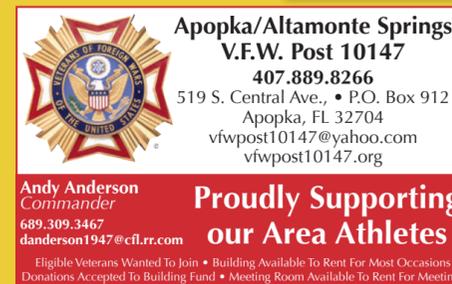
Kayla Boose-Haywood
BEHAVIOR SPECIALIST



Tiquisha Williams
LEAD GUIDANCE COUNSELOR



Cicily Morgan
MATH COACH



2024 Apopka Blue Darters varsity football schedule

Aug.	23	Ocoee	H*#
	30	Evans	H#
Sep.	6	Dr. Phillips	H#
	13	West Port	H*
	20	Edgewater	A#
Oct.	27	West Orange	A*#
	4	Open/Bye	
	10	Cocoa	H
	18	Osceola	H
Nov.	20	Madison County	A
	1	Wekiva	A#

*-District 7A-5 game
 #-Metro Conference game
 Cocoa game is on Thursday.
 Games begin at 7 p.m.
 Ticket prices: \$9 on gofan.co, plus \$1 convenience fee. Cash price at gate will be \$9.
 Games will be broadcast on FM94.9, AM950, TheAnswerOrlando.com, The Answer Orlando app.

2024 Wekiva Mustangs varsity football schedule

Aug.	23	Edgewater	H#
	30	West Orange	A#
Sep.	6	Horizon	A#
	13	Eustis	A
	20	Lee County	A
	27	Oviedo	A*
Oct.	4	Open/Bye	
	10	Evans	H*#
	18	Jones	A#
Nov.	24	Lake Howell	H*
	1	Apopka	H#

*-District 6A-4 game
 #-Metro Conference game
 Evans game is on Thursday.
 Games begin at 7 p.m.
 Ticket prices: \$9 on gofan.co, plus \$1 convenience fee. Cash price at gate will be \$9.

Darters: AHS looks to return to championship contention

Continued from page 2

As the Apopka Blue Darters enter the 2024 football season they have more to want. Apopka is hungrier than ever coming into this season after a less than spectacular end to the 2023 season with a 42-14 loss to the Sanford Seminoles in the 4M 2023 FHSAA Football State Championship Regional Semifinal.

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Last year Apopka was stopped early in their playoff run, even with a senior-heavy team with years of championship experience Apopka was unable to get the job done. Now going into this season, Apopka looks to break back into championship contention this time with a young core that is looking to be the next faces of Blue Darter greatness.

After losing to Sanford Seminole in the Regional Semifinal last season, head coach of the Blue Darters Jeff Rolson said he was nothing but proud of his team.

“I’m proud of our kids. We had a solid season – it didn’t go as long as we would’ve liked it to, and we didn’t perform as well as we would’ve liked to tonight but, our kids played hard and this (Sanford) is a good football team and we have some deficiencies. And I could’ve done a better job coaching them but I’m proud of them. We had a great run and a lot of people would like to be in the second round, and we’re in it, but that’s not good enough for us.”

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Over the past few months of spring practice and off-season conditioning, I’ve talked to Rolson about his expectations for this year. In short, he is confident in his players but knows there will be a sure learning curve with new and inexperienced kids coming in to fill the gaps in the lineup. Apopka lost so much talent to graduating seniors this past May – talent that is not easily replaceable.

Apopka lost nearly all of its offensive line, defensive line, and most of its secondary. So now Apopka will be ushering in a new wave of Blue Darters to get back to championship contention. The only problem is that some of the guys that will be starting this year have never started in a varsity game and some are even freshmen that have never played a high school football game. Even with these challenges, Rolson is nothing but confident in his players’ ability to win.

“But nothing’s going to change. I don’t care if we’re starting, you know, 50 freshmen. I don’t care. It’s the standard here, we just got to coach them through it, you know,” said Rolson

Rolson told me he has three linebackers starting who have never played a down of a varsity football game. But that’s not it. As I said earlier, nearly all of the offensive and defensive line are new starters from last season. That has brought some problems in protection for quarterback Tyson Davison, but more importantly, in Apopka’s patent smash mouth run game.

Even with those issues Rolson has been working with the offensive and defensive line and has seen a lot of improvement just from the spring game against Jones High School in late May. Apopka beat Jones 16-14 in what was a great display of Blue Darter football especially from the younger guys on the team.

See DARTERS Page 15



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City: Senior activities: exercise, social games and day trips

Continued from page 4

seminar, wedding, family reunion, birthday party, or other special occasion. To rent the Fran Carlton Center or the Apopka Community Center, please call 407-703-1642. To reserve a picnic pavilion or athletic field at the Northwest Recreation Complex, please call 407-703-1784.

All rentals are booked on a first-come, first-served basis. A security deposit is required at some locations. Please call the numbers listed above for more detailed information.

Senior adult programming

The City of Apopka Recreation Division believes that leisure time and physical activity help to promote a healthier lifestyle within our senior adult community. With that in mind, the Fran Carlton Center, located at 11 North Forest Avenue, is proud to offer a variety of mid-morning activities, programs, and day trips designed especially for our senior adult members. Please call 407-703-1642 for further details.

Senior memberships

In order to participate in the various senior adult programs offered by the Apopka Recreation Department, you must first obtain a recreation membership. Membership fees are due each January and are good for a full calendar year. To purchase a membership, stop by the Fran Carlton Center located at 11 N. Forest Avenue, Apopka, 32703 or the Northwest Recreation Complex located at 3710 Jason Dwelley Parkway, Apopka, 32712, between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Senior chair exercise class

Chair exercise classes meet every Tuesday and Thursday from 9-10 a.m. at the Fran Carlton Center in Apopka. These free classes are led by certified instructor, Kathryn Duncan.

Senior Zumba gold

Zumba especially for senior adults is offered every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 9-10 a.m., at the Fran Carlton Center. Certified Zumba instructor

Rosemary Zalana will guide you through a series of fun, easy dances such as merengue, cha cha, flamenco, belly dance, reggae, salsa, and more. This “exercise in disguise” will leave you wondering whether it was a workout or a party. Prior dance experience is not required. There is no set class fee, but the instructor accepts donations. 407-703-1642.

Artist’s studio

Come join the fun with our adult painting club. Learn techniques in traditional watercolor and acrylic and find your hidden artistic talent! This group meets on Tuesdays from 10:30 am -1 p.m. There is no set fee for this class; however, there are occasionally guest instructors that will charge a fee. You will be given a supply list at the first class you attend.

Social bridge

Every Wednesday we offer a social bridge group. The bridge is mid-level and new players are asked to sign up in advance to be sure the tables are even. The card group always welcomes new members; there is no need to sign up in advance for this group. Just show up! The bridge group meets at 10 a.m. at the Fran Carlton Center.

Crafts and chatter

Stop by for a morning of creativity at the Fran Carlton Center. Every Wednesday, from 10 a.m. to noon, our craft group meets to work on their projects, share ideas, and share conversation. If you are currently working on a project and can’t seem to find the time to finish it, or just want to get some new ideas, stop by and join in the fun.

Senior trips and movies

Each month, we offer our senior members exciting day trip opportunities to several local attractions and events. To name a few, we have visited DeLeon Springs, the Orlando Museum of Art, and have seen many Broadway productions at the Bob Carr Auditorium. In addition, we host a free movie every month at the Fran Carlton Center. Refreshments are provided so come join in the fun!

Senior pot luck lunch

Every month (usually on the last Thursday) we host a pot luck lunch just for our senior adult members, where we draw for door prizes, host guest speakers, and share in each other’s good cooking! This is a great way to acquaint yourself with our program so why not join today? The cost is \$1 plus a covered dish to share.

Cards

Is held on Wednesdays from 10 a.m. -noon. This is a drop-in format so bring some friends or come alone and make some friends.

Other facilities

Doctors’ Dog Park

Hey, don’t bark up the wrong tree! The City of Apopka invites you and your four-legged friends to join us for a “howling” good time at Doctors’ Dog Park located off Highland Avenue behind Edward’s Field. This 750 ft. by 300 ft. dog park features water fountains, a pet shower, benches and, most importantly, plenty of space for “man’s best friend” to frolic and play. We hope to see you there! For further information regarding the dog park, please call 407-703-1642 or www.apopka.gov.

The amphitheater is encircled with a wide, paved, and well-lit walkway, which provides an excellent location for vendor/display booths on either side. Close by, there is a large, waterfront open-air pavilion that is also available for vendor or private rentals. The park has more than 1,500 paved parking spaces, and unpaved parking for overflow parking during high-volume events that provides around 3,000 additional spaces.

The amphitheater stage is equipped with two 400-amp hook ups or lighting and one 200 amp for audio systems. There are two private dressing rooms with handicap accessible restrooms and showers.

Please contact Carolyn Ray at 407-703-1809 for further details.

Facility Locations

Northwest Recreation Complex

3710 Jason Dwelley Parkway
Apopka, 32712
407-703-1784 (Phone)
407-703-1783 (Fax)

Fran Carlton Center

11 North Forest Avenue
Apopka, 32703
407-703-1741 (Phone)
407-703-1740 (Fax)

Billie Dean Community Center

225 M A Board St.
Apopka, 32703
407-703-1742 (Phone)
407-703-1740 (Fax)

Apopka Athletic Complex

797 Wells Avenue
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407-703-1784 (Phone)
407-703-1740 (Fax)

Apopka Community Center

519 S. Central Avenue
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407-703-1809 (Phone)
407-703-1740 (Fax)

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407-703-1741 (Phone)
407-703-1740 (Fax)

Lake Avenue Park

439 North Lake Avenue
Apopka, 32712
407-703-1741 (Phone)
407-703-1740 (Fax)

2024 Wekiva Mustangs varsity football team roster

No.	Name	19	Amaree Rutland	54	Max Dume
0	Kameron Holt	20	Matthew Beachum	55	Phelps Coupet
2	Michael Ellis	21	Mike Blackmon	65	Hsyden Drabek
3	George Phillips	22	Jaiden Robinson	57	Jaylen Rolle
4	Jabarri Smith	23	Joshua Garvin	58	Dajahn Connell Evans
7	Jackson Kellior	24	Xavier McMurren	59	Kyler Beard
8	Lawrence Pipkin Jr	25	Zion Gammons	60	Jayiden Simpson
9	Brock Billings	26	Noah Sapp	62	Jerone Hill
10	Jaylen Barnes	27	Chris Glenn	72	Zachary Saby
11	Jameer Tyson	29	Davidree Reese	73	Luke Morancy
12	Ty'Kevis Davis	30	Gabriel Prochet	75	Derrius Gaint
13	Dametrious Ellison	32	Tristan Roger	80	Landon Roger
14	Jakarri Bellamy	34	Isiah McNish	81	Kevin Joyner
15	Machi Myers	35	Avante Scott	82	Bakary Manley
16	Nath Fritchley	36	Adrian Jacksonl	85	Dominique Walker
17	Zavier Gates	44	Jacodi Parker		
18	James Biglow	50	Brian Antonie		

Mustangs: Wekiva faces district and conference rivals in 2024

Continued from page 7

However, at least for the 2024 season, former district rivals in the form of the Edgewater Eagles, Jones Tigers and Horizon Hawks are still on the schedule.

Wekiva will also face seven Metro Conference games (including the Preseason Kickoff Classic), six for at least a second consecutive season and another opponent in Georgia. Of course, born out of geography and an end-of-the-season rivalry, the Mustangs and Blue Darters play for an 18th game or every season since Wekiva opened. Four of the last five meetings, also known as the Tater Bowl, have been won by Apopka.

Geography makes for rivalries. However, rivalries become special and distinct when playoff or postseason implications are perennially a part of the annual contest. The Tater Bowl has not disappointed as nine of the last 10 outcomes had an impact on the FHSAA playoffs. In fact, the Mustangs have entered the Tater Bowl facing the simplest and most direct of situations the last three seasons, win and the team is in (the FHSAA playoffs).

Perhaps the two most interesting backstories in sports intersected on August 16. The Preseason Kickoff Classic at and against the Olympia Titans will be Gabriel's first foray as the top stallion. However, Olympia is also coached by Travis, Doug's brother. Then the Classic marks the meeting with the Titans, the second most in the Mustangs' history.

Regular season schedule is made up of the Edgewater Eagles (8/23-Home), West Orange Warriors (8/30-Away), Horizon Hawks (9/6-Away), Eustis Panthers (9/13-Away), Leesburg Georgia Lee County Trojans (9/20-Away), Oviedo Lions (9/27-Away), Evans Trojans (10/10-Home) Jones Tigers (10/18-Away), Lake Howell Silver Hawks (10/24-Home) and Apopka Blue Darters (11/1-Home).

Although not on last season's schedule, Oviedo, Evans and Lake Howell have faced Wekiva at least six times previously. All were members of the same district as the Mustangs at some point in the past.

Gabriel's philosophy as a coach falls under running multiple sets and formations, a specific combination of pro, spread and Power-I formation on offense.

"Most importantly though, the prior-

ity of the staff is matching the players' strengths with the best situation to use those strengths," Gabriel said. "In particular, I don't pursue a philosophy of trying to fit the players into a system or structure first. Players can develop a tendency to think about how to execute more than needed when unable to utilize the strengths. Aggressiveness is also an important part of the philosophy, but under control and with purpose."

Generally, pro-style offenses place a premium on a balance as far as design of the plays. In order to achieve balance, the use of multiple formations is a principle focus. Employing fullbacks and tight ends works hand in hand. Rushing is primarily built on zone and stack rushing schemes at the line. Intention is to create open space beyond the tight ends and tackles at the linebacker level, which the ballcarrier slides into.

Play-action is the trigger for the passing attack. The rushing attack has to gain significant yards for play-action to effectively cause confusion.

However, a wide and diverse range of formations and schemes within the Pro-set will be used as well as the power-I. Quar-

terback lining up in both locations (under center, shotgun) is the most noticeable of the range and diversity. The use of H-backs and tight ends according to the situation and 50-50 rush to pass ratio is featured.

Jackson Kellior is most likely to take over the quarterback position when the regular season starts.

Wekiva rushed on only about 30 percent of the plays last season. The use of the Power-I in itself suggests an expectation for the number to significantly increase. Nature of the rushing game has been transformed since the spring into Lawrence Pipkin taking on the role of primary ballcarrier as well. Michael Blackman has emerged as a strong number two.

Returning as wide receivers are Jabari Smith and M.J. Ellis. Demetrious Ellison and Naeem Willard join the returning wide receivers. Production of the receiving corps will be of a committee nature.

The season begins with an offensive line without any experience at the varsity level. Comprised of Max Dume, Zach Saby, Darius Gaint, Hayden Draybek and Luke Morancy, the offensive line will be

See DARTERS Page 14

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Wekiva: Mustang defense made up of home grown talent

Continued from page 13

in the proverbial position of learning on the job.

The even front with movement on defense will be employed. The use of four down lineman is the basis of the even front. Cover three is also common for how the secondary covers the passing game, when capable of playing multiple positions is emphasized and pursued as well.

As is the case with Smith, Ellis and Willard, who will also line up as defensive backs. Where they are on the field depends on the down and distance indicating more likely to pass or run.

Similarities to the offense as far as the make-up end with Smith's, Ellis's and Willard's inclusion though. The starting lineup of the offense includes multiple transfers. The defense on the other hand will consist entirely of Mustang-grown players. All six of the presumed starters starting for the first time, were learning while waiting for the opportunity to move to the number one positions on the depth charts. Most importantly, all spent last season with the Wekiva varsity or junior varsity teams.

Jacari Bellamy, Maurice Gainus and Juice Davis join Smith and Willard in the

secondary.

Linebacking corps is made up of George Phillips and another still to be determined.

Brock Billings, Kamron Holt and Isaiah McNish line up on the defensive line. However, the linebacker position will also be filled by Holt.

The kicking game is the strongest in about a decade with Nate Fritchley's improvement over the last couple of seasons. Fritchley has been consistently converting 40-yard field goal attempts during spring and fall practices. Nor does Gabriel lack confidence about Fritchley's capability to convert winning field goal attempts.

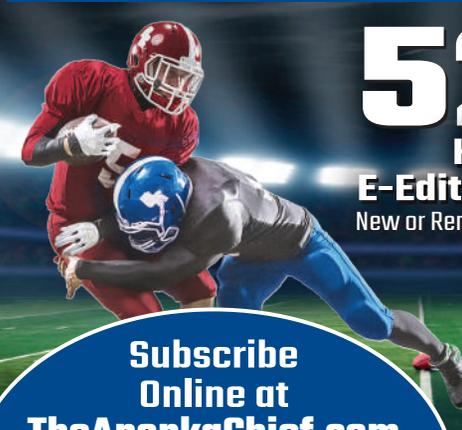
Finding consistency among scoring was a trend carrying over from last season into the Spring Practice contest, even if only six players combined (both sides of the ball) return.

"Continuing the normal progress of development, we are running more advanced plays than when spring practice began," Gabriel said. "However, the majority of the plays we run are still on the simpler, less complex side. The goal is the closer we are to the first contest of the regular season, the bigger the increase in the number of complex plays run."

The Apopka Chief

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Darters: Apopka will open regular season with game vs. Ocoee Knights

Continued from page 10

Apopka's offensive and defensive line looked really good in that game too despite being relatively outmatched. Davison had a lot of time in the pocket and the run game was averaging some good gains.

When I talked to Davison earlier this summer he also had nothing but good things to say about his offensive line.

"I love my big guys, yeah, I've complete faith in those boys. Yeah, no. It's like, if I got into a fight with like a bear, a tiger, or a lion, I'm still taking my guys. Those are my eyes up there, yeah. I mean, I look at everything, but there are some things that you'll miss. You'll miss, like certain stunts, certain maneuvers so they're important to me."

Offense

I want to talk about Apopka's offense going into this season and how it may be different from last season. Most importantly, Apopka's quarterback Tyson Davison is completely healthy and in prime condition. He's done nothing but train and work on his craft since the end of last season and it showed in the spring game. Now with even more experience under his belt and being 100 percent, Davison could truly be the dual-threat quarterback we know him to be.

Last season Davison was hurt in just the second game of the season. He was sacked and injured his ankle, was sidelined for a couple of weeks and then came back to play regardless of him not being completely healed. He told me that this year, "is going to be a movie" and that everyone should be ready for a show every Friday night. He's confident and has been working on his throwing ability, which was the only part of his game that really needed work.

"I don't know how to feel about my performance last season because I feel like I wasn't healthy. I wasn't able to give it all I got. I mean, I was hurt from Week Two on, so it was rough, but I feel like it makes me want to work harder because I know what I could have accomplished," said Davison.

Other than Davison, two other players

in the backfield that are sure to have a breakout year are Elijah Frazier and Jayden Safford. Frazier and Safford are both juniors who are filling a spot that was taken up by two great backs last year, Nathan Jenkins and Reggie McBride.

Last year Safford shared reps at back with Jenkins and McBride and still put up some great numbers. In 11 games Safford has 40 carries for 183 yards and three rushing touchdowns for an average gain of 4.58 yards a carry. Safford was topped by only two people last year in average yards gained per carry; Davison with 5.41 yards per carry; and Jenkins who averaged 4.68 yards per carry.

With more reps and a bigger and stronger build, Safford should be a raging bull on Friday nights. The other back that looks really promising is Frazier. Frazier had a great game against Jones in May. Frazier plays tight end and running back and is a real threat at both positions.

Coach Rolson has been telling me since the spring game that the team is more suited to pass now with some receivers who can get open and catch the ball. One receiver I'm looking forward to having a big year is Noah Morgan. Morgan shared time running and catching the ball last season and was a very coin-flip player.

What I mean by that is he was very explosive when he did catch space and beat a defender often going for a huge gain. But when he didn't, it was a short gain or too much dancing to get away from a defender that got him tackled anyway. I think if Morgan can focus on first downs and not on a huge play every time, he'd be much more consistent and a more reliable target and option for his team.

In general, the offense will be run-first as is the recipe for success here in Apopka. But with the new linemen up front on offense, the run game has been less than consistent. So, we could see the Blue Darters look for the pass more this season if the run game is not working out. Rolson was adamant about wanting to be more of an 80-20 split on run to pass but can see the team throwing more.

Defense

It wasn't just Apopka's offense that

took a hit from this year's graduates but the defense, too. We lost some very key defensive linemen (Lorenzo Payne and Kevin Roberts) as well as secondary players such as Antwone Robinson.

To replace our missing edge rusher, Apopka has shifted star defensive player Kingston Shaw to edge rusher. Shaw, who played middle linebacker last season, is a monster on the field. Standing at six foot four inches and 225 pounds as a junior Shaw is uber-athletic, stronger than anyone else at his age, and loves getting in the backfield.

The switch from linebacker to edge rusher is not an easy or natural one, but it is one that Shaw has taken on with grace. Rolson told me a few weeks back that Shaw is still green but edge rusher is definitely his natural spot on the field.

"He gives you pass rush, gives you physical play on the edge. He will set edges on the defense. He's a junior and it's his first year with his hand in the dirt, so they'll be growing pains. But, yeah, I think he's found where he needs to be home-wise," said Rolson.

Some familiar and key faces of defense this year will be Trey Muldrow, Myles Fieldings, Elijah Henry, and Trevon Williams. These four seniors will be the team's defensive anchors counting on them to lead on the field and make big plays. Muldrow is a linebacker who is also wearing the honorary number 11 jersey this year. Fieldings is a defensive back who rivaled Robinson in football IQ and athleticism. Henry is a defensive lineman who only played six games last season but is bound for a breakout year. And Williams who is also a defensive lineman had an amazing year last year and is only going to get better this year.

When talking about the defensive scheme the team will be running this year, Rolson said the team plays a 4-3 and 4-2-5 defense. Rolson told me that more often than not he's running a 4-2-5 even though he has always been a 4-3 guy. He explained that over time and how offenses have evolved he had to mold and adapt his defense accordingly.

"We have just developed it and changed it so we're more of a 4-2-5 nickel,

yeah, but we can play 4-3 in the box because we got athletic guys that can cover and read at linebacker," said coach Rolson.

Rolson also said Apopka uses a split coverage defensive scheme. This means that the field is split into two halves that could be running separate coverages based on the offense's formation. This allows flexibility in game planning certain formations and makes your coverage less predictable.

"So we tweak the scheme as we go. We add to it when we have problems, make adjustments, and fit that into the overall scheme. But we're four down (linemen) you can call it 4-2-5, you can call 4-3. It doesn't matter, because they're all the same to us. We play split coverage, you know. So, we're playing this coverage over here, that coverage over there. I don't know that we're complex. We may be complex to some, but not to us, because we've been doing it so long. We have flexibility. We can get to a five-man front, like a 5-2 look if we want to. We can get to a 3-4 look if we want to. We can get to a 3-3 look if we want to."

I think this year has the potential to be very exciting with the players that Apopka has. Like Rolson said to me – taking the season game by game and just focusing on playing the best ball they can, will be Apopka's priority. Winning and deep playoff runs just so happen to come with that mentality, so I think Apopka is in a good place.

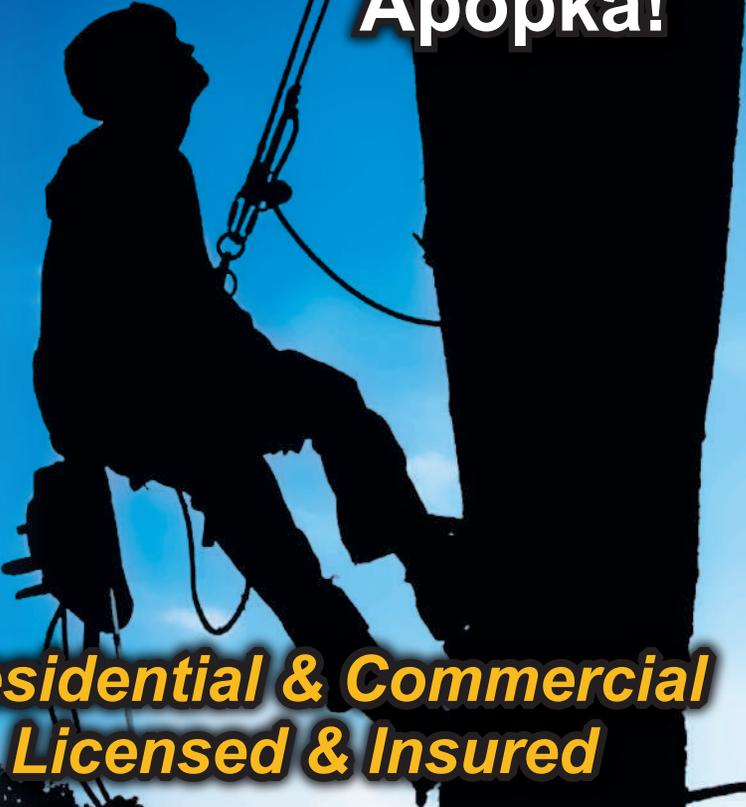
"It takes, it takes some time. Sometimes, it takes pain, you know, to get the message across and kind of get in the flow of where we need to be. And being kind of youthful in a lot of spots at that doesn't help. So, it's a work in progress, but I believe that we have enough ability up front, on both sides of the ball. I believe we have enough skill position guys of quality. I believe in our quarterback, and I believe in our coaches. So, we may not be 100 miles an hour out of the gate, we're going to have a tough schedule and we're really not concerned about whether we're eight and two, seven and three, six and four, or nine and one. It doesn't matter, as long as we're playing our best ball at the end."

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