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2025 Sports Preview

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Belton Tigers Football Offensive

By Tony Adams
The Belton Journal

The 2024 Belton Tigers offense was a very young unit, with 17 sophomores that had starting time and several of their standouts returning for the 2025 campaign.

The Tigers' offense had some tough times in 2024. Having averaged 268 yards per game, the offense was able to move the ball against some solid defenses despite what scores indicated.

Quarterbacks Will Shepard (junior, 136-of-239, 1,550 yards, 140.9 yards per game, 11.4 yards per completion, seven touchdowns,

12 interceptions) and Graham Chambley (junior, 14-of-29, 208 yards, 18.9 yards per game, 14.9 yards per completion, two touchdowns, two interceptions) carried the torch at the quarterback position, with Shepard having significant yards on the ground, rushing 101 times for 366 yards and 11 touchdowns, which included a 120-yard effort against Cuero. Shepard will be the primary signal caller, with Chambley as backup having moved to starting cornerback this season.

While Shepard led the Tigers in rushing, Gino Zecca (senior, 92-259, touchdown) was a mainstay in



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the backfield. Gavin Ross (junior, 5 rushes, 23 yards) also is a returning back/wide receiver with size and power.

Ross led the Tigers in receiving numbers in 2024, having caught 55 passes for 759 yards and a touchdown, having averaged 69 yards per game in receptions. Zecca (13 catches, 176 yards two touchdowns), Achilles Palomares (12 receptions, 75 yards, touchdown), and Evan Echipare (junior, four receptions, 49 yards) are all returning receivers.

“We were pressed into using Will’s legs a lot last season,” Belton head coach Brett Sniffin said. “But we have three good running backs to complement him back there. Gavin Ross is returning and led us in receiving as a sophomore.”

One thing that the Tigers do not lack is returners along the interior. Junior Beckett Butler (6-5, 265 pounds) is in his third year and continues to get stronger by the

game. Ben Gutierrez is a big talent on the line at 6-3, 285 pounds, as are Edwin Pedraza (6-3, 315 pounds), Jaxon Simmons (6-4, 275 pounds), and tight end Evan Lockett also contribute big height along the offensive front.

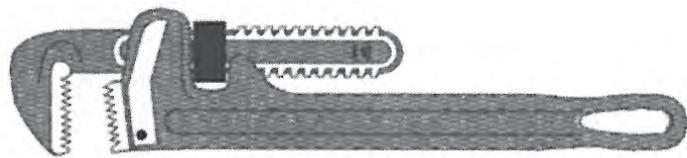
“We return some big bodies up front, where we have most improved at,” Sniffin said. “It is where the biggest improvement has been.”

Belton will face five tough defenses in their three non-district road games at Pflugerville Hendrickson (Aug. 29), Georgetown (Sept. 5), Cuero (Sept. 26) and two non-district home games against East View (Sept. 12) and San Angelo Central (Sept. 19) in tune ups for the District 10-5A-2 schedule.

The district slate sees Ellison (Oct. 9), Bryan Rudder (Oct. 24) and Waco High (Oct. 30) come to town. Belton travels to Waco University (Oct. 17) and Brenham (Nov. 7) in the road portion of the 10-5A-2 docket.



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Belton Tigers Defense Preview 2025

By Tony Adams
The Belton Journal

When it came to the 2024 season, it was one that saw a rash of injuries for the Belton Tigers defense.

Belton allowed 37.2 points per game, 34.4 per contest against District 10-5A-2 foes.

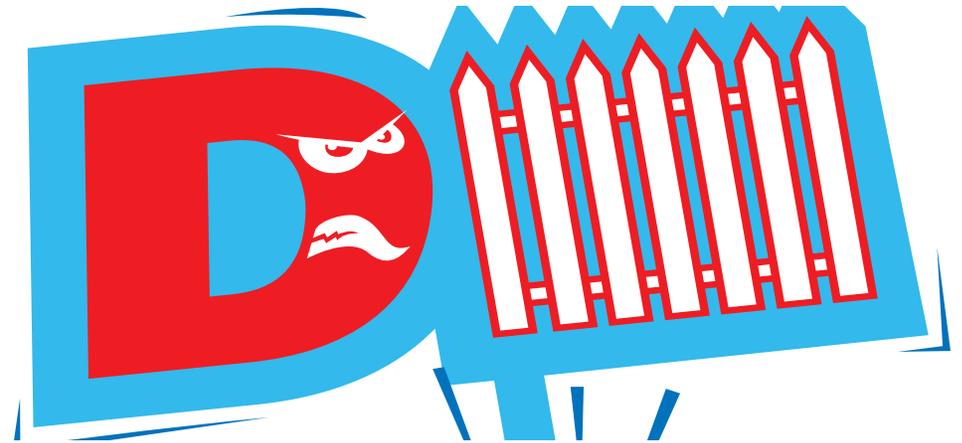
However, the Tigers were all grit when it came to all their competition. Their never quit, team-first mentality had Belton gnawing at opponents regardless the score.

The defense had 70 tackles for loss on the season and 18.5 sacks to go with 24 pass defenses, 10 fumble recoveries, and six

interceptions.

“These kids are fun to coach, are coachable, and work hard,” Belton head coach Brett Sniffin said. “They have improved so much since the spring. I really think that it has been a nice continuity and smoothness from the end of last season through the spring up to now.”

The 2025 defense has several excellent contributors from the 2024 team. J-Anthony Balderas, Camron Ellis, Caleb Heacock, Azian Wilkinson (51 tackles), Adam Gonzalez, Gavin Warne, James Barrera, Jahari James, Jacob Lewis, Brock Baker, Khaiylan Griffin, and Lyric McGinnis all were instrumental in the Tigers’



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defense in 2024 and are projected to return in 2025. Graham Chambley joins the secondary at cornerback this season.

With the Tigers a year older, a year bigger, and a year smarter in defensive coordinator Chris Harbin's defensive system, Belton will be a handful to deal with again in 2025.

"The defense is as fast as it has been," Sniffin said. "They run to the ball really well. They are also picking up what we are teaching them as far as some zone coverages that we have not been able to do in the past. They are doing a good job of that. Just expect some big things out of those guys."

The Tigers face three tough non-district road games (Pflugerville Hendrickson on

Aug. 29, Georgetown on Sept. 5, Cuero on Sept. 26) and two home games (East View on Sept. 12, San Angelo Central on Sept. 19) before their District 10-5A-2 slate that will see Ellison (Oct. 9), Bryan Rudder (Oct. 24) and Waco High (Oct. 30) come to town. Belton travels to Waco University (Oct. 17) and Brenham (Nov. 7) in the road portion of the 10-5A-2 tilt.

"We expect to compete for the district title," Sniffin said. "We have five games to figure things out. We play some of the top individuals in the state in the preseason, with Georgetown's Jett Walker and then the running back at Brenham (Jakoby Dixon). You won't get two guys better to face. That's what we want: to face challenging people."



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RISE UP! RISE UP! RISE UP! RISE UP!

Matchup preview for the Tigers '25 season

By Clay Whittington
The Belton Journal

Last year, the Tigers proved the only thing that matters is how teams perform during district.

Despite losing the season's first seven games, Belton managed to extend its streak of playoff appearances to four consecutive years by earning two critical District 10-5A, Division II wins.

While the Tigers cannot argue with the outcome, they are certainly looking to climb up the standings and potentially claim a third district championship in the last four years.

KILLEEN ELLISON

Oct. 9, home

2024: 5-6, 3-2; Bi-District Finalist

The Eagles lost a wealth of talent on both sides of the ball to graduation, and undoubtedly their offense, which scored 38 points in a 19-point victory versus Belton, will take a step backward. By this point in the season, Ellison might have patched up all its holes, but regardless, the Tigers do not want to be playing from behind in the standings again. History will be on Belton's side, though, as last year was the first time since 2008 the Eagles won in the series.

WACO UNIVERSITY

Oct. 17, road

2024: 7-4, 3-2; Bi-District Finalist

The Trojans have some impressive playmakers both offensively and defensively, and they are capable of changing the complexion of a game in an instant, so the Tigers will have to be locked in at all times, and if they escape with a win, their hopes of a league title will increase drastically. Furthermore, these teams have built a nice rivalry over the last three years with all three encounters decided by 10 points or fewer, including in 2022, when a last second field goal at Waco clinched the district championship for Belton.

BRYAN RUDDER

Oct. 24, home

2024: 7-3, 2-3; No Playoffs

One year ago was the first ever encounter between the Rangers and Tigers, and it marked the turning point of Belton's season. The Tigers rallied in the fourth to win 38-34, and the showing ignited enough spark to help propel Back back into the playoffs. Rudder had a completely different experience, winning its first six games before failing to make the postseason, and the memory has most likely not faded. The Rangers believe they should not have lost to a winless team, and they will be attempting to prove it.

WACO

Oct. 30, home

2024: 2-8, 0-5; No Playoffs

Not only are the Tigers colliding with the district's two teams that missed last year's playoffs and are predicted to be outside the top four again this season in consecutive weeks, but they are playing both games at home. Excluding 2024, when Belton did not win at home, the Tigers have defended their turf with only one loss since Sept. 23, 2021. Regardless of venue, however, the Lions struggle, winning only nine games during the previous seven seasons.

No. 3 BRENHAM

Nov. 7, road

2024: 11-2, 5-0; Regional Semifinalist

These teams have become very familiar with one another during the past three seasons, playing each other four times. Unfortunately for the Tigers, the Cubs have won three encounters by a combined score of 115-55, and they enter this year as an early favorite to hoist the state championship trophy in December. Brenham returns a wealth of talent with nine offensive and eight defensive starters from a squad that outscored its competition by 257 points (537-380).



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Lake Belton Offensive

By Aries Ramos
The Belton Journal

The Lake Belton Broncos enter the 2025 season with momentum and a clear sense of purpose on the offensive side of the football. Following what head coach Brian Cope called the best offseason since the program's first varsity year, the Broncos are aiming to build on their progress with a blend of experienced leaders, emerging young talent, and an offensive philosophy built on toughness and execution.

Offensive coordinator Brandin Byrd pointed to four key returning starters who will anchor the unit this fall, quarterback Maverik Maddux, wide receiver Davion Peters, and playmakers Zion Harness and Christian Onchweri. Each has grown in their own way since last season. Maddux,

now firmly the starter under center, has stepped into a leadership role, guiding his teammates through summer workouts and early practices. Peters has embraced a similar role, setting the tone with his maturity. Harness and Onchweri, meanwhile, have grown more confident, showing the ability to impact games with or without the ball in their hands.

At the heart of Byrd's offensive vision is physicality and execution. "We want to establish being physical on all levels and playing at a high level of all 11 doing their job," Byrd explained. That identity starts in the trenches, where the offensive line has made huge strides since last season. Byrd noted that while there is still plenty to learn as the season begins, he feels good about the group's depth and development, and he is eager to see them reap the benefits of their offseason work.

The wide receiver group has also made noticeable progress. Several



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players have stepped into larger roles, giving Maddux a deeper arsenal of weapons to work with. Byrd pointed to Zyien Dupree, who gained valuable experience as a freshman last season, as a player ready to take another leap. AJ Alexander, an underrated name according to Byrd, could also carve out a significant role, while Peters and Harness headline the unit's leadership and production. "Our skill kids have the chance to make a big impact on each and every play," Cope added, echoing Byrd's excitement for the group.

One area of emphasis for the Broncos this offseason has been situational football, particularly in the red zone and on third downs. Byrd explained that the offense works on red zone execution daily, often running competitive knockout periods against the defense. On third downs, the focus has been on finding rhythm, sticking to what the offense does well, and executing with precision.

Flexibility will also be a key theme this fall. Byrd made it clear that while the Broncos have their core principles, the staff wants to take advantage of what defenses give them rather than allowing opponents to dictate terms. That adaptability, combined with the introduction of new wrinkles and looks as game weeks approach, should keep defenses on their heels.

Beyond the X's and O's, the culture around the program has elevated. Cope emphasized the difference between being "All in" and simply being "All here," a message that has resonated with his players. He praised this senior class as the strongest group of leaders since the first graduating

class, pointing to their willingness to go above and beyond in both preparation and accountability. "We have an energy about our practices that was missing last year," Cope said.

Offseason conditioning has also been a major point of focus, with players adding strength, explosiveness, and muscle to withstand the demands of a full season. Just as importantly, the staff has worked on mental development, helping players handle adversity and stay sharp in high pressure situations.

For a young program still building its identity, Lake Belton has taken meaningful steps forward. With Maddux at quarterback, a group of skilled receivers ready to break out, and an offensive line that has grown stronger and deeper, the Broncos' offense is shaping up to be balanced, physical, and dangerous. Combined with a culture of accountability and leadership emphasized by Cope, the Broncos are primed to make noise this fall.

As Week 1 approaches, the question isn't whether Lake Belton can move the ball, it's how explosive this offense can be. If their offseason work is any indication, the Broncos could be one of the most exciting teams to watch in Central Texas in 2025.



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Lake Belton Defensive

By Aries Ramos
The Belton Journal

The Lake Belton Broncos are entering the 2025 season with a renewed sense of identity on the defensive side of the football. For defensive coordinator Randy Hooton, the message is simple but powerful, play with a “Hunter” mindset. That philosophy, swarming to the football, attacking with relentless effort, and taking the ball away, has become the standard for the Broncos’ defense, and it’s shaping what could be one of the toughest units in the district this fall.

At the core of the defense are leaders Gavin Stewart (safety),

Gavin Owens (linebacker), and Caleb Chandler (defensive line). Hooton praised their approach and tone setting leadership, describing them as players who lead not only vocally, but also by example in everything they do. Stewart, in particular, has elevated his role dramatically. Once a supporting player, he has grown into what Hooton called “possibly the best leader we have had in our school’s short history,” and he’s expected to shine on the field as well.

The Broncos return several other anchors, including safety Braxton Cope and defensive lineman Evan Lazott, who both made significant impacts a year ago. Together, Chandler and Lazott give



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Lake Belton a physical and athletic presence in the interior defensive line, a unit Hooton considers the strength of the defense. Their ability to control the trenches will be vital as the Broncos face off against the high-powered offenses in their district.

The defense's philosophy is built on two key pillars, doing your job and giving relentless effort. Hooton calls it "212 effort", the extra degree of heat needed to make water boil. That mentality was evident last season when the Broncos made a huge leap in forcing takeaways, improving from just eight in 2023 to 24 in 2024. Hooton refuses to call them "turnovers." Instead, the Broncos see it as a matter of will, "We don't believe in turnovers, we believe in takeaways." With another year of experience in this system, the defense is pushing to raise that number even higher.

Still, the defense faces challenges. A large senior class graduated, leaving less experienced depth than in previous years. Hooton admits that while the rotation may not yet be as seasoned, there is plenty of hunger among the players competing for opportunities. Depth and versatility will be critical for matching up with tempo heavy offenses, and the staff is confident younger players will grow into their roles.

Preparation is also a hallmark of the Broncos' approach. Film study plays a central role in weekly preparation, beginning with self-evaluation before moving to opponent scouting. "If they know what to expect, they execute with great confidence," Hooton explained. The staff has also been installing

tweaks to blitz packages and coverages, giving players new tools to use against evolving offenses.

Offseason training has reinforced the foundation for this philosophy. Strength coach Kade Cole has emphasized speed, explosiveness, and durability, helping players gain in the weight room while also taking care of their bodies to limit injuries.

Head coach Brian Cope ties it all together by stressing development beyond football. Through tutoring sessions, leadership councils, small group meetings, and character lessons, the Broncos are building a culture of accountability and growth. "It is bigger than the game," Cope said. That commitment, combined with strong community support and a senior class determined to leave its mark, has fueled optimism throughout the program.

As the Broncos prepare for another tough district slate, their defense will rely on discipline, communication, and the Hunter mindset to carry them. If Stewart and the rest of the leaders can set the tone, and if the defensive line can control the line of scrimmage, Lake Belton has the tools to disrupt opposing offenses and create game changing moments.

For Cope, the excitement goes beyond the box score, "These kids have had a great offseason and summer. Hard work always pays off, and we can't wait to see it all happen this year." With a relentless defense leading the way, the Broncos are ready to hunt in 2025.



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Broncos Matchup preview

By Clay Whittington
The Belton Journal

Entering their fourth year of existence, the Broncos desperately hope to earn their first playoff victory this fall.

Lake Belton flirted with the feat a season ago, when Midlothian narrowly earned a 35-30 win in the first round of the Class 5A, Division I playoffs to end the Broncos' season.

While celebrating a bi-district championship is a massive goal for the program, first, Lake Belton must return to the postseason, which will not be easy in a talented District 8-5A, Division I.

LEANDER ROUSE

Sept. 26, home

2024: 6-5, 5-2; Bi-District Finalist

The Broncos fell short against the Raiders last season, losing 28-20 in their district opener, and it potentially cost them the second seed. Clearly, the outcome will be on Lake Belton's mind, but revenge alone will not earn a victory. Rouse returns a total of nine starters, including five from an offense that averaged 32.7 points per game during district last year.

GEORGETOWN EAST VIEW

Oct. 3, road

2024: 5-5, 3-4; No Playoffs

The Patriots gave Lake Belton a run last year despite their overall record, coming within three points, 27-24, of winning, but East View changed its head coach during the offseason, and the squad could still be adjusting when it collides with the Broncos. A loss in this game, could have prevented Lake Belton from reaching the postseason for the first time in its existence. Expect players and coaches to remember that in this encounter.

LEANDER GLENN

Oct. 10, home

2024: 3-7, 1-6; No Playoffs

Like with East View, a different outcome in this game could have been disastrous for the Broncos' playoff hopes, but they escaped with a 42-41 win, and the rest is history. Glenn returns a wealth of starters with nine coming back on offense and seven on defense, but the Grizzlies simply have not been able to put everything together in recent seasons, missing the playoffs in four of the last five years. Glenn will need to generate some momentum early in the season or their spirits could be dashed by the time this game rolls around.

LEANDER

Oct. 17, home

2024: 4-6, 3-4; No Playoffs

The Lions are coming off their best season in recent history, but like Glenn and East View, Leander is a team Lake Belton should defeat, and it will be imperative to do so with the district's heavyweights waiting to do battle in the upcoming weeks. Leander has been stuck in a rut, winning fewer than five games every year since 2013, but if last season was truly a corner-turning moment for the program, history indicates big things are possible. Between 2005 and 2012, the Lions had at least nine wins on five occasions.

CEDAR PARK

Oct. 24, road

2024: 6-5, 5-2; Bi-District Finalist

If the Broncos want to win a district championship, this is the point in their schedule where they will have to assert themselves. Regardless of what last year's record indicates, the Timberwolves know how to win, and they proved it in Week 2, when they defeated eventual Class 6A, Division II champion Austin Vandegrift 49-46. Lake Belton earned a 28-21 victory at home last year, so expect Cedar Park to be ready to return the favor when the venue alternates.

No. 16 GEORGETOWN

Oct. 31, home

2024: 10-2, 6-1; Area Finalist

Eagles standout running back Jett Walker was virtually unstoppable last season, accounting for school records of 2,348 yards and 38 touchdowns rushing, and the West Virginia commit will probably be even more of a handful this year. The Eagles dominated this contest a year ago, winning by 44 points, 65-21, in the Broncos' most lopsided game of the season. Georgetown's explosive offense returns seven starters, so Lake Belton must find a way to either slow down or keep pace with the Eagles' output.

KILLEEN CHAPARRAL

Nov. 6, home

2024: 2-8, 0-7; No Playoffs

If all goes according to plan, this should be essentially an off week for the Broncos, but their coaches know to expect the unexpected, and the Bobcats are just waiting to have something to hang their hats on. Three years into its existence, Chaparral only has six total victories, and it will be hard for the program to turn things around this year. The Bobcats would relish the opportunity to play spoiler or at least dampen Lake Belton's hopes heading into the playoffs.

Lake Belton Stampede



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(2nd row from top, left to right) Jocilin Kwan (Captain), Reagan Stahl, Ellison Rogers, Adyson Edens, Katelyn Sullivan, Callie Mock, Brynlee Newberry, Kadya Lischer

(3rd row from top, left to right) Ja'Mya McFadden-Rose, Jazzell Jenkins, Isabelle Howson, Jalyann Russell (Captain), Kyliegh Klaus, Juliet Faleafine, David Melendez, Lily Johnson (Manager)

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(Bottom row, left to right) Vanessa Gauna, Jayla Mullens, Katelyn Simpson, Sierra Carter, Abigail Weiss, Katelyn Bailey, Madison Brasher, Gracie Warne, Ciara Patridge, Aubrey Lynch, Coach Veronica Pinedo

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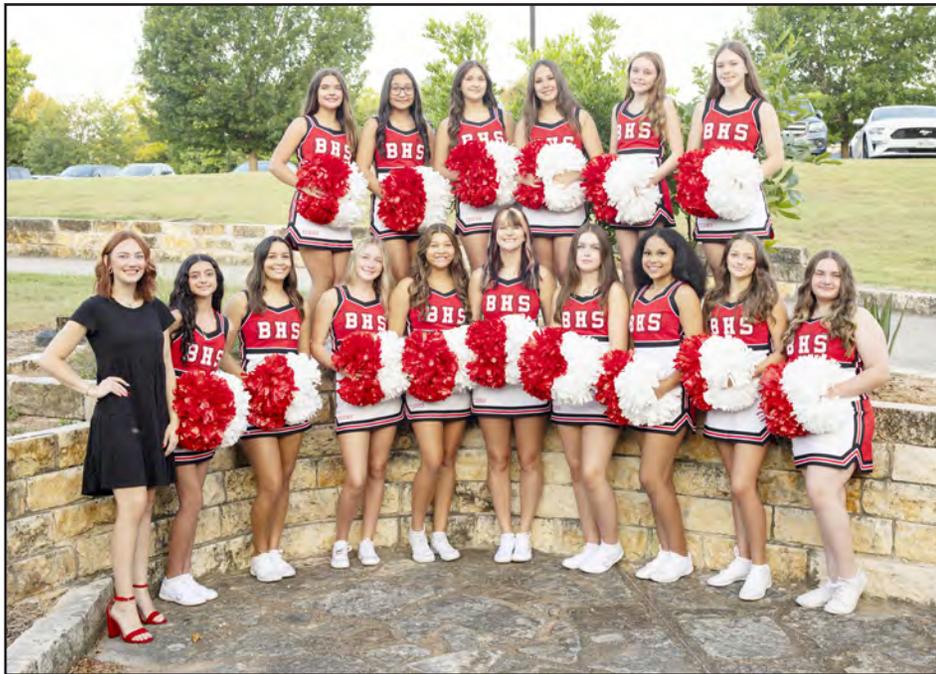
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Wilmot, Kylie Hammond, Jayden
Burr, Reese Cominsky, Natalie
Hunt, Katelyn Churchill, Kiana
Smith, Kayden Hanlon, Vivianne
Haggard



Lake Belton JV Cheer



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Jordin Canady Hernandez, Aspen
Cory, Charlotte Williams

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Isabella Cooper, Zoey Goodwin,
Amya Morell, Joanna Salgado,
Claire Allman

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Rosenbaum, Natilie Montes, Hunter
Hunter, Camryn Rousell, Reagan
Espino, Isabella Canales, Micaiah
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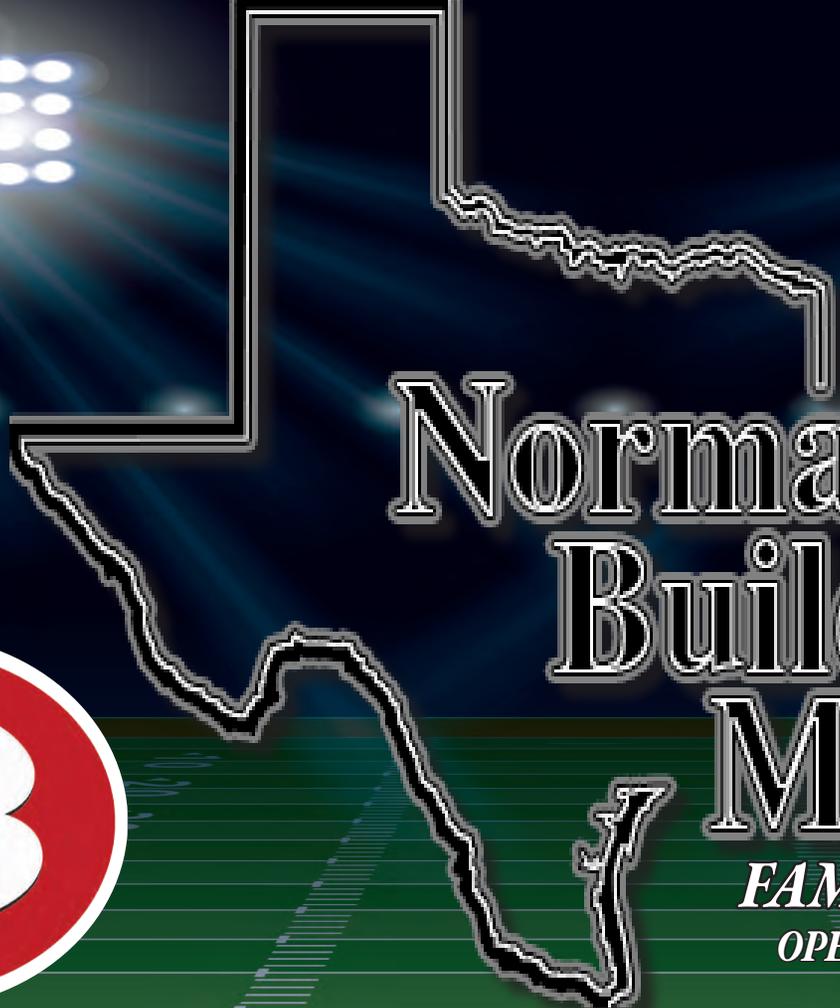
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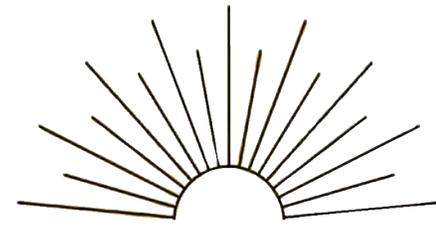


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<p>B</p> <p>Aug 21 / 07:00 PM VS Shoemaker Tiger Stadium Belton, TX</p> <p>Aug 29 / 07:00 PM AT Hendrickson HS Pfield Pflugerville, TX</p> <p>Sep 05 / 07:00 PM AT Georgetown High School Georgetown, TX</p> <p>Sep 12 / 07:00 PM VS East View High School Belton, TX</p> <p>Sep 19 / 07:00 PM VS San Angelo Central Belton, TX</p> <p>Sep 26 / 07:00 PM AT Cuero High School Cuero, TX</p> <p>Oct 09 / 07:00 PM VS C.E. Ellison Belton, TX</p> <p>Oct 17 / 07:00 PM AT University High School Waco, TX</p> <p>Oct 24 / 07:00 PM VS Rudder High School Belton, TX</p> <p>Oct 30 / 07:00 PM VS Waco High School Belton, TX</p> <p>Nov 07 / 07:00 PM AT Brenham High School Brenham, TX</p> <p>B</p>	<p>Broncos</p> <p>U</p> <p>Aug 21 / 06:30 PM AT Copperas Cove, Copperas Cove, TX</p> <p>Aug 29 / 07:00 PM AT A&M Consolidated HS College Station, TX</p> <p>Sep 04 / 07:00 PM AT McNeil High School Cedar Park, TX</p> <p>Sep 11 / 07:00 PM VS Killeen High School Belton, TX</p> <p>Sep 26 / 07:00 PM VS Rouse High School Belton, TX</p> <p>Oct 03 / 07:00 PM AT East View High School Georgetown, TX</p> <p>Oct 10 / 07:00 PM VS Glenn HS Tiger Stadium Belton, TX</p> <p>Oct 17 / 07:00 PM VS Leander HS Tiger Stadium Belton, TX</p> <p>Oct 24 / 07:00 PM AT Cedar Park HS Cedar Park, TX</p> <p>Oct 31 / 07:00 PM VS Georgetown High School Belton, TX</p> <p>Nov 06 / 07:00 PM AT Chaparral High School Killeen, TX</p> <p>U</p>
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