



BACKYARD FOOTBALL NEWS

FULL PREVIEWS FOR 41 AREA TEAMS

HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL

2022 SEASON PREVIEW

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INTERSTATE

AREA RUNNING BACKS TAKE CENTER STAGE FOR UPCOMING WPIAL SEASON



INTERSTATE

2021 Champion: Elizabeth Forward WPIAL 3A

CONFERENCE AT A GLANCE



BELLE VERNON LEOPARDS

The Leopards were WPIAL finalists in 4A last year. There will be no stopping the most loaded 3A team in the state this season. Behind the most talented junior runner in the state, the Leps might be PIAA favorites.



ELIZABETH FORWARD WARRIORS

The Warriors look to defend their conference title with some fresh faces and plenty of experience coming back. The road will be more difficult, but the Warriors will have the talent and depth to be able to play with any.



GREENSBURG SALEM GOLDEN LIONS

The Golden Lions hope the move to 3A fares better than 4A did. There's experience back at every level, which means that the Golden Lions should be in playoff contention. They may even be good enough to make it to Heinz Field.



MT. PLEASANT VIKINGS

The Vikings return two of the three player tandem in the wishbone from 2021. The biggest losses come up front, but the Vikings will once again be in the playoff mix.

S.ALLEGHENY GLADIATORS



A new coach and a new stadium for a fresh faced Gladiators. A top D-Line talent should be enough for the Gladiators to compete in this loaded division.

SOUTHMORELAND SCOTTIES



The Scotties will look to translate tragedy into triumph in 2022. There's some players back, but the Scotties will likely take a step back after years of historic runs.

2021 Final Standings

Rnk	Team	Record(Overall)
1	Elizabeth Forward	6-0 (9-3)
2	Mt. Pleasant	4-2 (7-5)
3	South Allegheny	4-2 (4-7)
4	Southmoreland	4-2 (7-4)
5	South Park	2-4 (2-7)
6	Yough	1-5 (1-9)
7	Brownsville	0-6 (1-8)

PRESEASON SUPER 17

RB	Quinton Martin	Belle Ver.
RB	Jake Gedekoh	Belle Ver.
WR	Evan Pohlot	Belle Ver.
WR	Tanner Steeber	Belle Ver.
OL	Dane Levi	Belle Ver.
QB	Zion White	Eliz. Fwd.
WR	Zach Boyd	Eliz. Fwd.
LB	Charlie Meehlieb	Eliz. Fwd.
DL	Nico Ackerman	Eliz. Fwd.
WR	Cody Rubrecht	G. Salem
RB	Kai Brunot	G. Salem
QB	Tyler Reese	Mt. Pleas.
RB	Robbie Labuda	Mt. Pleas.
OL	William Eicher	Mt. Pleas.
QB	Eric Wehrer	S. Allegh.
DL	Dashawn Carter	S. Allegh.
OL	Kaleb Tkacs	Smoreland

BIGGEST GAMES OF 2022

8/26	GCC @ Mt. Pleasant
9/2	Freeport @ South Allegheny
9/9	Belle Vernon @ McKeesport
9/16	Penn Trafford @ Belle Vernon
9/23	Belle Vernon @ T. Jefferson
9/30	G. Salem @ Mt. Pleasant
10/7	Mt. Pleasant @ Eliz. Forward
10/14	S. Allegheny @ Eliz. Forward
10/21	Eliz. Forward @ G. Salem
10/28	Belle Vernon @ Eliz. Forward



BELLE VERNON LEOPARDS

Interstate

RECORD: 10-0

LEOPARDS AT A GLANCE

LOCATION: Belle Vernon, PA

COACH: Matt Humbert



QUINTON MARTIN

OVERVIEW

This might be the most talented 3A team in the state. Athletes everywhere. Belle Vernon scheduled the first half expecting a deep playoff run. It's not common a 3A team defends a win over the 5A Champs the season after, and might even be favorites in it. If Belle Vernon goes 3-1 in their first four it will be a massive success. There isn't a team on the conference schedule that will give them a healthy challenge, maybe not even in the 3A playoffs. A road matchup against rival Elizabeth Forward at the end of the season could be a let down look ahead spot, but that's it. A good comparison to the 2022 Belle Vernon Leopards might be the 2020 Central Valley Warriors. A 4A team at the 3A level rolling through the competition. Heinz shouldn't just be the goal for BVA in 2022, the sights will be much higher.

KEY GRADUATES

QB	Devin Whitlock
LB	Reiley Wiant
LB	Cole Weightman
DB	Logan Cunningham
LB	Joe Klanchar
DE	Ryan McGrew

TOP RETURNERS

RB	25	Quintin Martin	JR.
RB	10	Jake Gedekoh	JR.
WR	3	Evan Pohlot	SR.
WR	8	Tanner Steeber	SR.
WR	17	Chase Ruokonen	SR.
OL	51	Zachary May	SR.
OL	70	Dane Levi	JR.
OL	60	Jacob Pfarr	JR.

FRESH FACES

QB	14	Braden Laux	JR.
RB	19	Adam LaCarte	JR.
OL	50	Dylan Dewitt	JR.
OL	52	Jake Heckel	JR.
OL	53	Luke Bryer	JR.

2022 SCHEDULE

8/26	Franklin Regional (SCR)
9/2	Laurel Highlands Mustangs
9/9	@ McKeesport Tigers
9/16	Penn Trafford Warriors
9/23	@ Thomas Jefferson Jaguars
9/30	South Allegheny Gladiators
10/7	@ Greensburg Salem Lions
10/14	Mt. Pleasant Vikings
10/21	Southmoreland Scotties
10/28	@ Elizabeth Forward Warriors

2021 RESULTS

8/27	@ West Allegheny	SCR
9/3	@ Chartiers Valley	49-14
9/10	Penn Trafford	27-7
9/17	@ West Mifflin	49-3
9/24	Thomas Jefferson	28-21
10/1	Laurel Highlands	56-14
10/8	@ Ringgold	35-14
10/15	Trinity	49-0
10/22	OPEN DATE	
10/29	McKeesport	46-14

MUST WATCH: Sept. 23rd- @ Thomas Jefferson

2021 RECAP

What a season to remember for the Belle Vernon Leopards. Undefeated regular season. Took down Thomas Jefferson at the Beach with the Whitlock Walk Off, then put their money where their mouth was in the playoffs in round 2 to send the Leopards to Heinz. BV lost to Aliquippa, but dropped down to 3A in the offseason. They're ready to wreak havoc not just on the WPIAL, but the state as well.

OFFENSE

Devin Whitlock is gone at QB but boy is there a lot to be excited for. 5 star RB QUINTON MARTIN is back and he'll destroy 3A defenses. JAKE GEDEKOH is the best number 2 RB across 3A. STEEBER, POHLOT and RUOKENEN are all back at receiver. The line stays mostly intact. The most hype is around Junior QB BRADEN LAUX who has impressed at camps in the offseason. If he's a legitimate college talent like advertised, the sky is literally the limit to how this offense can perform.

DEFENSE

Weightman, Wiant and Cunningham all graduate. That group won't be so easy to replace. QUINTON MARTIN stood out in the secondary in 2021, expect him to lead a young defense that won't be asked to do a lot until playoff time. Watch for DANE LEVI and ZACH MAY in the interior line as well.



ELIZABETH FORWARD WARRIORS

Interstate

RECORD: 8-2

WARRIORS AT A GLANCE

LOCATION: Elizabeth, PA
COACH: Mike Collodi



ZION WHITE

KEY GRADUATES

RB	Davontay Brownfield
LB	Kyle Flournoy
LB	Sean Soukup

TOP RETURNERS

QB	5	Zion White	SR.
WR	3	Zach Boyd	SR.
WR	11	Keilly Rush	SR.
QB	2	John DiNapoli	SR.
LB	60	Jace Brown	SO.
DE	53	Charlie Meehlieb	JR.
WR	1	Charlie Nigut	SO.
LB	56	Ricky Prokop	SR.

FRESH FACES

OL		Chris Climes	SO.
DL	62	K. Murphy-Givens	JR.
DL	61	Joseph Younge	SR.
K	12	Logan Beedle	SR.
WR	17	Nicholas Beck	SO.

2022 SCHEDULE

8/26	@ Ringgold Rams
9/2	West Mifflin Titans
9/9	@ East Allegheny Wildcats
9/16	Shady Side Academy Bulldogs
9/23	@ Knoch Knights
9/30	@ Southmoreland Scotties
10/7	Mt. Pleasant Vikings
10/14	South Allegheny Gladiators
10/21	@ Greensburg Salem Lions
10/28	Belle Vernon Leopards

2021 RESULTS

8/27	@ Ringgold	12-0
9/3	Ligonier Valley	14-26
9/10	@ West Mifflin	0-14
9/17	@ Brownsville	44-0
9/24	Beth Center	40-7
10/1	South Park	48-0
10/8	@ S. Allegheny	36-7
10/15	Mt. Pleasant	35-0
10/22	@ Southmoreland	56-13
10/29	Yough	49-8

OVERVIEW

If Belle Vernon hadn't been a few boys underneath the 4A requirement, Elizabeth Forward might have had the best team in the WPIAL at 3A. Unfortunately for the Warriors, the ceiling in 2022 might just be a trip to Heinz Field. The Warriors will face their three toughest teams on the schedule in the final three weeks of the year. Two of which are at home. An away game against Greensburg Salem in the middle of Belle Vernon and South Allegheny might give Elizabeth Forward fits, but they should have the talent to take down the Golden Lions. The Warriors also get the Mt Pleasant Vikings at home, a team they made quick work of in a shutout in 2021. There's a real expectation with all that's back this season, the Warriors will be back in the WPIAL finals, and if all goes right, they'll find themselves there again.

2021 RECAP

Just a year removed from a WPIAL title berth and a division 1 prospect, the Warriors continued right where they left off. The Warriors went undefeated in conference play, only allowing 5 points a game in the last 7. The Warriors fell in the playoffs, but with North Catholic and Central Valley on their way to 4A, the upper echelon of 3A is up for grabs, why not Elizabeth Forward?

OFFENSE

The duo of ZION WHITE and ZACH BOYD return and hope to continue the improvement they saw throughout last years season. The big question will be who the RB will be with the absence of Davontay Brownfield. The intriguing answer may be former East Allegheny QB JOHNNY DINAPOLI. If not at RB, DINAPOLI will have a role somewhere on offense. The line will have to replace D1 prospect Nick Murphy, but brings back nearly everyone else.

DEFENSE

Elizabeth Forward has found an identity on defense. With plenty of guys back, expect that to continue. Murphy and Kyle Flournoy graduate but there's still a ton to be excited about up front. CHARLIE MEEHLIEB, along with Brownsville transfer CHRIS CLIMES, lead a deep talented unit.

MUST WATCH: Oct. 28th- vs Belle Vernon



GREENSBURG-SALEM GOLDEN LIONS

Interstate

RECORD: 5-5

LIONS AT A GLANCE

LOCATION: Greensburg, PA
COACH: Dave Keefer



CODY RUBRECHT

OVERVIEW

Greensburg Salem drops from one of the top conferences in 4A to one in 3A with some guaranteed victories and an easier path to the playoffs. The out of conference schedule is significantly easier, and 5-0 in the first five isn't outside the realm of possibility. In conference, it will be interesting to see how the Golden Lions match up with the second tier of the old century in Elizabeth Forward and Mt. Pleasant. The Golden Lions had their way with the Vikings in 2021, meaning Greensburg Salem should at least fit in slightly above or below the Warriors. The Golden Lions have that game at home and in the back half of the season which might be a let down look ahead situation for the Warriors. At the very least the Golden Lions will be a playoff team in 2022.

KEY GRADUATES

QB	Hayden Teska
RB	JC Wallish IV
WR	Donavin Waller
OL	Caleb Chismar
OL	Billy McChisney
TE	Jaydin Stevens

TOP RETURNERS

WR	4	Jerome Wallish	SR.
WR	11	Cody Rubrecht	SR.
WR	5	Christian Hostetler	SR.
RB	23	Kai Brunot	SO.
OL	63	C. McChesney	SR.
OL	51	Isaiah Payne	SR.
OL	50	Kaleb Riggs	SR.
OL	73	Ayden Thompson	JR.

FRESH FACES

WR	18	Dom Rosensteel	SO.
TE	3	Julian Stevens	JR.
QB	12	Peyton Chismar	SO.
OL	57	Jacob Geary	JR.
OL	56	Azreal Franklin	SO.

2022 SCHEDULE

8/26	Hempfield Spartans
9/2	Derry Trojans
9/9	@ Ligonier Valley Rams
9/16	Deer Lakes Lancers
9/23	East Allegheny Wildcats
9/30	@ Mt. Pleasant Vikings
10/7	Belle Vernon Leopards
10/14	@ Southmoreland Scotties
10/21	Elizabeth Forward Warriors
10/28	@ South Allegheny Gladiators

2021 RESULTS

8/27	@ Hempfield	14-29
9/3	Connellsville	36-19
9/10	@ Mt. Pleasant	34-6
9/17	@ Knoch	34-13
9/24	Indiana	35-14
10/1	@ Hampton	6-45
10/8	@ Armstrong	16-33
10/15	Mars	19-12
10/22	Highlands	20-40
10/29	@ Plum	27-30

MUST WATCH: Oct. 10th- vs Elizabeth Forward

2021 RECAP

The Golden Lions nearly made it in 2021. After wins against Indiana and Knoch to open up conference play, it looked like it would be the Golden Lions season for a playoff berth, unfortunately, the Lions struggled down the stretch with close losses that ended their playoff hopes. Now in a new classification and a new conference, it might be the Golden Lions time for a deep playoff run.

OFFENSE

The Golden Lions lose two of the thier top athletes in QB HAYDEN TESKA and RB JC WALLISH IV. The latter might be easier to replace with sophomore KAI BRUNOT showing plenty of promise last season. It looks like SO. PEYTON CHISMAR will be under center. The returning protection is deep and experienced and will be the strongest unit on offense in a new conference where line play is at a premium.

DEFENSE

The Greensburg Salem struggled down the stretch against Armstrong, Highlands, and Plum to keep them out of a playoff spot. Expect a step forward from players across the defense. The trenches are deep as well so watch for the Lions to be much better on defense in 2022.



MT. PLEASANT VIKINGS

Interstate

RECORD: 6-4

VIKINGS AT A GLANCE

LOCATION: Mt. Pleasant, PA

COACH: Jason Fazekas

2021 RECAP

Once again, the Mt Pleasant Vikings season was filled with an impressive early start only to limp into the playoffs with a disappointing season cap. The Vikings took care of Burrell in the playoffs but got blown out in the quarterfinals by Avonworth.

OFFENSE

The Vikings bring back two of their three triple option runners from a year ago. TYLER REESE at QB and ROBBIE LABUDA will lead a backfield by committee for the third option. The Vikings line stood out in 2021, and will return 4 of the 6 contributors from it. WILLIAM EICHER and ARRON HELMAN were just two of the unit's standouts. Expect the same consistent play from the Vikings wishbone, and maybe even a step forward.

DEFENSE

The Vikings defense was the identity of the team in 2021. With all coming back expect that to continue and more. LABUDA and REESE will have a top secondary in 3A. The Line is deep as well with pressure from JACOB PROCTOR and MICAH ROADMAN among others. This is one of the most complete defense at 3A and will try to take the step from keeping the team in games to outright winning games for the Vikings.



TYLER REESE

OVERVIEW

In 2021, there was a big gap between Mt Pleasant in second place in the Interstate, and Elizabeth Forward for the conference title which showed in their one meeting with them. Now with the additions of Greensburg Salem and Belle Vernon into the top tier of the Interstate, Mt. Pleasant's path to a conference title is all that much more unlikely. The Vikings will have a brutal mid season stretch against GS, EF and BV, the two toughest of those games on the road. If the Vikings have aspirations of being a playoff team again, they'll have to not only steal one of those games, but also be perfect against South Allegheny and Southmoreland down the stretch. There will be questions whether Mt Pleasant has the talent to be able to pull it off.

KEY GRADUATES

S	Conor Johnson
RB	Aaron Alakson
LB	Jake Levandusky
TE	Maximus Moore
OL	Hunter Dean
OL	Ryan Eutsey

TOP RETURNERS

QB	5	Tyler Reese	SR.
RB	18	Robbie Labuda	SR.
RB	12	Jackson Hutter	JR.
RB	2	Lane Golkosky	SR.
OL	63	Jacob Proctor	SR.
OL	77	Kolby Hudec	JR.
OL	72	Micah Roadman	JR.
OL	66	William Eicher	SR.

FRESH FACES

RB	17	Dante Giallonardo	JR.
LB	10	Ethan Eicher	SR.
OL	68	Arron Helman	SR.
DB	22	William Shipley	SR.
QB	3	Cole Chatfield	SO.

2022 SCHEDULE

8/26	Greensburg CC Centurions
9/2	Yough Cougars
9/9	McGuffey Highlanders
9/16	@ Valley Vikings
9/23	@ Freeport Yellow Jackets
9/30	Greensburg Salem Lions
10/7	@ Elizabeth Forward Warriors
10/14	@ Belle Vernon Leopards
10/21	South Allegheny Gladiators
10/28	@ Southmoreland Scotties

2021 RESULTS

8/27	@ Burrell	40-7
9/3	@ Derry	63-14
9/10	Greensburg-Salem	6-34
9/17	@ Greater Latrobe	0-35
9/24	Southmoreland	34-7
10/1	@ Yough	27-12
10/8	Brownsville	FFW
10/15	@ Elizabeth Forward	0-35
10/22	South Park	28-6
10/29	@ S. Allegheny	7-21

MUST WATCH: Sep. 30th- vs Greensburg Salem



SOUTH ALLEGHENY GLADIATORS

Interstate

RECORD: 4-6

GLADIATORS AT A GLANCE

LOCATION: McKeesport, PA
COACH: Darwin Manges

2021 RECAP

South Allegheny was right in middle in 2021. In conference play, no team was ever really close to beating them or losing to them. Fortunately for the Gladiators, one of those teams was the Mt Pleasant Vikings at the end of the season. That win showed promise looking ahead toward 2022, a season where the Gladiators will look to unveil a new facility and hopefully return to the 3A playoffs.

OFFENSE

ERIC WEHRER is back for his third season under center for South Allegheny. Transformative talent DASHAWN CARTER will find a home somewhere on offense and be a difference maker. Look out for CAMERON EPP to possibly emerge at RB to replace Kavan Markwood. The O-Line brings everyone back and will hopefully improve from where they were a season ago.

DEFENSE

DASHAWN CARTER will be in the backfield all season for the Gladiators. Him alone changes a good defense into one with superstar potential. The secondary is underrated. With VINNY GARASCI and GARRETT KENT back at safety, teams will be less apt to throw against this defense. There are some gaps left at the second level, watch how CAMDEN LEWIS fills in in only his second season.



DASHAWN CARTER

OVERVIEW

It was only two years where a team from the Interstate rode good chemistry, a complete team, and a D1 defensive line prospect all the way to a WPIAL title berth. This year's team isn't as outwardly talented or has enough depth as that team, but watch for the Gladiators to compete throughout 2022. The ingredients are there for a possible playoff berth, but the road might prove too difficult. The Gladiators will have to hit the road against Belle Vernon, Elizabeth Forward and Mt Pleasant. Two of those come in a brutal stretch down the end of the season with Greensburg Salem. If everything clicks, the Gladiators could threaten for a playoff spot. However, under first year coach Darwin Manges, South Allegheny might be the last team looking in.

KEY GRADUATES

RB	Kavan Markwood
WR	Akell Carrington
WR	Dillion Haynes
CB	Jett Jones
DB	Mateo Thaxton

TOP RETURNERS

LB	12	Eric Wehrer	SR.
FS	11	Vinny Garansci	SR.
DE	2	Dashawn Carter	SR.
DB	19	Garrett Kent	JR.
OL	57	Logan Steiner	JR.
OL	64	Marvin Herren	JR.
LB	25	Camden Lewis	SO.
K	32	Gavin Cleary	SR.

FRESH FACES

RB	4	Cameron Epp	SO.
WR	10	Mike Michalski	JR.
DT	58	I. Russell-Akkoyun	SO.
OL	55	Brandon Guest	SO.

2022 SCHEDULE

8/26	@ Yough Cougars
9/2	Freeport Yellow Jackets
9/9	@ Imani Christian Saints
9/16	@ East Allegheny Wildcats
9/23	Shady Side Academy Bulldogs
9/30	@ Belle Vernon Leopards
10/7	Southmoreland Scotties
10/14	@ Elizabeth Forward Warriors
10/21	@ Mt. Pleasant Vikings
10/28	Greensburg Salem Lions

2021 RESULTS

8/27	@ Serra Catholic	0-24
9/3	@ St. Clairsville (OH)	7-38
9/10	Ringgold	10-12
9/17	@ Southmoreland	19-33
9/24	Yough	56-8
10/1	@ Brownsville	63-6
10/8	Elizabeth Forward	7-36
10/15	@ South Park	28-6
10/22	Deer Lakes	14-27
10/29	Mt. Pleasant	21-7

MUST WATCH: Oct. 14th- @ Elizabeth Forward



SOUTHMORELAND SCOTTIES

Interstate

RECORD: 7-3

SCOTTIES AT A GLANCE

LOCATION: Alverton, PA
COACH: Tim Bukowski

2021 RECAP

The Scotties season went almost perfectly in 2021. Southmoreland went undefeated in out of conference play, then only lost to Mt Pleasant and Elizabeth Forward in conference. Tragedy struck the program in the offseason with the unexpected death of assistant Ron Frederick. Tim Bukowski takes over the head coaching job after Dave Keefer left. He'll have his work cut out for him.

OFFENSE

Do it all QB Anthony Govern is gone, along with his top runner in Noah Phillips and top receivers in Bass and Trout. If the QB isn't KADIN KEEFER, it will be someone from another position group. JEFFREY JOHNSON and RONALD COLLINS can fill in at RB and receiver. Fortunately for the Scotties, the line is almost intact minus the loss of standout Kory Ansell. Watch for AIDAN CORVIN, KALEB Tkacs and TROUT-LEWIS to take big steps.

DEFENSE

There's going to be plenty of room for improvement on the Scotties defense with the losses of Govern, Ansell and Phillips. There should be continuity back on a line that struggled to create pressure a year ago. Watch for TRAY WHETSEL to make a name for himself in the second level as well.



RONALD COLLINS

OVERVIEW

Southmoreland made big steps forward in 2021, taking a roster that was less talented than in 2020 and still translating into a winning record and a playoff berth. Now with a new coach, they'll have to do it all over again. This is going to be a retooling year for the Scotties.

Working in new weapons under a new coach against a new, more difficult schedule. There are pieces on the team for a possible run down the road. Southmoreland should at least be competitive in most of their non conference. The home opener against Ligonier Valley will be an interesting litmus test. The Scotties also benefit from hosting EF, GS and Mt Pleasant this season. Southmoreland has a shot to make the playoffs this season, but with a smaller conference, there's going to be less guaranteed wins to get them in.

KEY GRADUATES

QB	Anthony Govern
DL	Kory Ansell
WR	JJ Bloom
WR	Josh Bass
RB	Noah Phillips
WR	Isaac Trout

TOP RETURNERS

DB	1	Travon Lee	SR.
WR	4	Ronald Collins	JR.
LB	9	Tray Whetsel	SR.
RB	21	Jeffrey Johnson	SR.
OL		Ma. Neiderhouser	SR.
OL	55	Aidan Corvin	JR.
OL	56	Kaleb Tkacs	SR.
OL	68	Makai Trout-Lewis	JR.

FRESH FACES

QB	6	Kadin Keefer	JR.
WR	15	Kaiden Grady	SR.
OL		Bailey Kennedy	SR.
WR	8	Wyatt Richter	JR.
		Cody Bateman	JR.

2022 SCHEDULE

8/26	@ McGuffey Highlanders
9/2	Ligonier Valley Rams
9/9	@ Derry Trojans
9/16	Knoch Knights
9/23	@ Deer Lakes Lancers
9/30	Elizabeth Forward Warriors
10/7	@ South Allegheny Gladiators
10/14	Greensburg Salem Lions
10/21	@ Belle Vernon Leopards
10/28	Mt. Pleasant Vikings

2021 RESULTS

8/27	McGuffey	47-22
9/3	@ Laurel Highlands	21-28
9/10	@ Perry Traditional	35-20
9/17	South Allegheny	33-19
9/24	@ Mt. Pleasant	7-34
10/1	Derry	41-0
10/8	Yough	35-7
10/15	@ Brownsville	FFW
10/22	Elizabeth Forward	13-56
10/29	@ South Park	28-14

MUST WATCH: Oct. 7th- @ South Allegheny