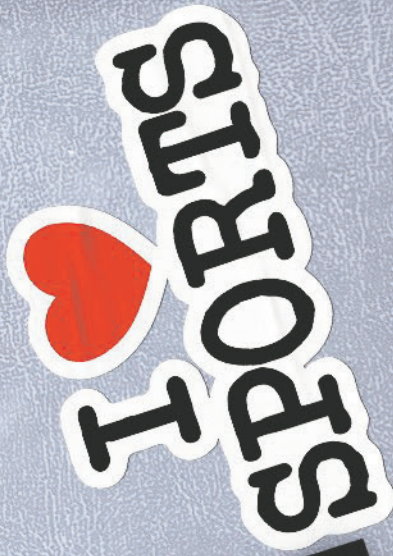




MANTTECA BULLETIN

2026 FOOTBALL SPECIAL SECTION



TOP 25 RETURNING PLAYERS



1. DB/WR Jayden Harris, Manteca, Sr.
Versatile defensive back is coming off a breakout campaign in which he finished among the state leaders in interceptions.
The 6-foot-3, 185-pound Harris earned Co-Outstanding Defensive Player in the Valley Oak League after picking off nine passes, two returned for touchdowns. He also racked up 63, tackles, six for losses, two sacks, two forced fumbles and 11 pass break-ups.
A three-star prospect, Harris has received seven Division I offers and is committed to Washington State. He will get to show off more of his offensive chops this season as a receiver opposite twin brother Jaylin. Jayden displayed his big-play ability with few opportunities, collecting 186 yards and two touchdowns on just four receptions.

2. RB Nikko Juarez, Manteca, Sr.
Manteca coach Mark Varnum is anticipating the best season yet from Juarez, who was called up to varsity duty early in his freshman year and never looked back.
“He’s prime to have his biggest year ever,” Varnum said. “He’s a whole new kid who committed himself to getting bigger, stronger and quicker in the offseason. He looks like a four-year varsity player and the best running back in the Valley. We’re excited for him to prove it.”
Juarez set career-high marks last season, scampering for more than 1,700 yards go with 25 touchdowns en route to garnering Max-Preps Junior of the Year honors in the Sac-Joaquin Section.

3. DT Malachi Joseph, Lathrop, Sr.
“It all starts with Malachi,” Lathrop coach Justin Muschott said of the 6-foot-4, 295-pound colossus.
The reigning Western Athletic Conference Defensive Lineman of the Year anchored a unit that allowed just 15 points per game. Joseph finished second on the team with six tackles for losses, finishing with 43 tackles in all. When he wasn’t making the plays, Joseph was clearing the path for the likes of two-time conference MVP Pablo Peña to clean up.
“When you got Malachi commanding attention in the middle, he’s such a presence that you can have someone else take advantage because he (Joseph) gets those double teams,” Muschott said.

4. G Michael Lopez, Manteca, Sr.
The 6-0, 250-pound pulling guard made the All-VOL First Team as a junior, helping the Buffaloes average more than 300 yards of offense — the majority of it on the ground.
Lopez is back for a third varsity season and stars for an experienced offensive line doing the dirty work for a deep and dynamic corps of skill-position players.
“He’s one of the best technical linemen we’ve coached,” Varnum said. “He does everything right. If guys around him want to know what to do, just watch him.”

5. QB Andrew Shaw, Ripon, Sr.
Ripon’s Gun-T offense revolves around the dual-threat ability of its 5-11, 185-pound signal caller.

Second-year coach Cole Williams believes Shaw is due for a big senior campaign after earning All-Trans Valley League Second-Team recognition.
“He’s really coming into his own,” Williams said. “He had a good season last year, but he has gained maturity and a better understanding of the system. He did a really good job in the offseason putting himself where he needs to be.”
Last year, Shaw completed 55.2% of his passes in the regular season for 1,080 yards, 10 touchdowns and five interceptions. He was also Ripon’s second-leading rusher with 525 yards and 12 TDs.

6. RB/WR Darien East, River Islands, Jr.
Produced as an underclassman in the VOL while with Sierra the past two seasons, earning all-league second-team honors in 2025 with 1,271 scrimmage yards and 13 touchdowns.
East made his varsity debut midway through his freshman year after Sierra’s top running back went down with a season-ending leg injury, rushing for 102 yards and three touchdowns against Patterson. A month later, he played in his first postseason game, accumulating 158 scrimmage yards and a touchdown in a 26-20 win at Yuba City.
East gives River Islands a proven weapon in its pass-based attack, whether it’s as a running back or slot receiver.

7. QB Daryl Carpenter, River Islands, Sr.
Transferred to River Islands late last summer just weeks before the first official practices of the 2025 season, giving him little time to integrate with his new teammates.
Carpenter still passed for 1,579 yards and 10 touchdowns against two interceptions in nine games played, and he was the Riptide’s top rusher with 413 yards (9.4 per carry) and six touchdowns.
Named to the All-Mother Lode League First Team, Carpenter is expected to thrive in first-year coach Nicholas Kendall’s pass-happy spread offense with all of his top weapons returning and the addition of East.
Like East, Carpenter has experience in the rugged VOL, having played for Manteca and Sierra at the lower levels.

8. RB/OLB Nikko Hisatomi, East Union, Sr.
An All-VOL Second-Team cornerback with 51 tackles, two interceptions and seven pass break-ups, Hisatomi’s roles are changing after bulking up in the offseason.
Now at rover, he’ll have the added responsibility as a run stuffer on defense. Offensively, he’s expected to get the lion’s share of carries after serving as back-up to Brayden Camara, who set single-season school records in rushing yards and touchdowns. Hisatomi pitched in with 199 yards (6.9 per carry) and five TDs.

9. C Beau Grisham, Lathrop, Sr.
Stoutly built and highly experienced, the 6-0, 275-pound center enters his third varsity campaign after paving the way for two 1,000-yard rushers. Grisham was selected to the All-WAC Second Team.
“Just go watch the tape,” Muschott said. “Beau is Lathrop football personified as far as

what we want in finishing plays, being physical and playing with motor and energy. When the ball is snap, he’s all go. Everything feeds off of him.”

10. MLB/TE Erick Cortez, East Union, Sr.
Had an explosive start to 2025 with five sacks and seven tackles for losses in the first three games. Cortez continued to give opposing offenses fits, finishing with 57 tackles, 10 for losses, six sacks three forced fumbles and an interception that was returned for a 74-yard touchdown. The overall production landed him on the All-VOL Second Team as a defensive lineman.
With EU’s improved depth on the defensive line, the 6-1, 205-pound Cortez has moved to his natural position at inside linebacker, and he’ll contribute offensively at tight end.

11. OLB/RB/WB Matthew Gaines, Ripon, Sr.
Made the All-TVL Second-Team defense but is a breakout candidate as a multifaceted offensive threat after swelling to 5-10, 185 pounds in the offseason, gaining strength to go with the speed.
Gaines will again play all three phases. He returned four kickoffs for 178 yards and a touchdown last season and totaled 645 scrimmage yards and three TDs on 75 touches.

12. DL/RB Jayden White, Lathrop, Jr.
At 5-11, 180 pounds, White was one of the Spartans’ most productive defensive players with 55 tackles and a team-high seven quarterback pressures, good for All-WAC First-Team recognition.
While he’s expected again to play a big part in a deep rotation of defensive linemen, White is taking over as the bell-cow back for Lathrop’s Wing-T.

13. WR/DB Jaylin Harris, Manteca, Sr.
With top receiver Quinn Martinez graduated, more opportunities are ahead for the big-play threat to get his hands on the ball. Harris will also get more reps defensively in the secondary with twin brother Jayden. Jaylin caught 21 passes for 341 yards and four touchdowns last season.

14. WR/CB Blama Kamara, Sierra, Sr.
The 6-1, 178-pound speedster showed in a short sample what he can do last season after sitting out the first six games because of transfer rules, coming up with 14 catches, 198 yards and a touchdown. Then he broke school records in the spring, reaching the 400-meter finals at the state track meet.

15. DE/TE Isaiah Sanchez, River Islands, Sr.
The Riptide’s most disruptive player amassed 69 tackles, 26 for losses, 2.5 sacks, 16 quarterback pressures, three forced fumbles and three fumble recoveries on the way to earning All-MLL Second-Team honors.

16. ILB/RB Damian Densmore, Sierra, Sr.
Played the final three varsity games his sophomore year, the last two in the postseason.

The 5-11, 200-pound Densmore is now a grizzled veteran after making the All-VOL Second-Team defense, and he’ll get to play some offense as a straightforward, punishing ball carrier.

17. FS/WB Ozias Siga, Sierra, Jr.
Joined Densmore on the All-VOL Second-Team defense after leading Sierra with 55 tackles, an interception and forced fumble. He’ll also have a featured role in the Gun-T offense as its versatile wingback.

18. FS/WR Gunnar Fay, East Union Jr.
Fay was brought up as a sophomore to start as the zero-week free safety and didn’t look back. Now, he’ll get chances to produce on both sides of scrimmage. At 6-2, 195 pounds with track speed, he’ll have an expanded role offensively after EU lost its starting receivers to graduation.

19. C/ILB Brayden McDowell, Ripon, Sr.
Coach Williams calls the 5-11, 200-pound McDowell, “one of the best centers we’ve had in this program” and an “absolute linchpin” for the offensive line.

20. WR Christian Dell’Osso, River Islands, Sr.
Carpenter’s top target in 2025 missed the first two games with an ankle injury but still managed to lead the Riptide in catches (37) and receiving yards (473) and make the All-MLL First Team.

21. OT Colton Madden, East Union, Jr.
The 6-3, 230-pound right tackle had a hand in the Lancers’ program record-breaking season on offense as a sophomore and was selected to the All-VOL second team.

22. RB/LB Lucas Ruiz, River Islands, Sr.
An All-MLL first-team linebacker with 53 tackles, four hurries and two forced fumbles, Ruiz broke through as a running back, averaging 10-plus yards on his 27 carries.

23. DL/T Myles Pollard, Ripon Christian, Sr.
Ripon Christian’s 6-4, 220-pound lineman chipped in nine tackles for losses and two sacks last season and provided protection from the strong side of the offensive line.

24. TE/DT Jude Viss, Ripon, Sr.
A big target for Shaw at 6-4, 190 pounds, Viss is an All-TVL Second-Team selection for offense and a key returner for the rotation of defensive linemen.

25. QB Josiah Van Vliet, Ripon Christian, Sr.
He’ll get his chance after backing up three-year starting QB Mason Tameling and playing outside linebacker. The 6-2, 185-pound was very efficient in his few appearances behind center.

RINGING IN CENTENNIAL



Fueled by semifinal loss, Buffs want to celebrate 100th year with 10th SJS title

By JONAMAR JACINTO
THE BULLETIN

JuJu Ramirez replays the moment in his mind, which continues to serve as motivation in the offseason.

It was one of a few plays that kept Manteca from getting back to the Sac-Joaquin Section Division II final.

With the top-seeded Buffaloes gripping onto a late one-point lead, St. Mary’s quarterback Jaden Galvan scrambled away from pressure and hooked up with tight end Jeremy Krause for a 55-yard touchdown with 2:59 remaining.

“I was part of that,” Ramirez said. “That (loss) was because of us not executing when we needed to. We have to be leaders of the defense. It was a miscommunication, and it’s definitely something we have to fix.”

Then a junior, Ramirez was in at cornerback for that sequence, covering a receiver in the flat. Galvan rolled out to his side of the field and floated it down the sideline to the wide-open Krause, who then cut inside past another defensive back for the go-ahead touchdown.

The No. 4 Rams held on for the 19-14 upset, going onto win the section championship as well as their first state title.

St. Mary’s got to bask in the glory that has eluded the Buffs, who are 0-6 in Nor-Cal bowl games since the California Interscholastic Federation introduced state playoffs for football.

The stinging defeat is the lone blemish for what was one

of the most talented teams fielded by the nine-time section champions. They’ve now been eliminated in the semifinal round three consecutive years since taking the D-II banner in 2022.

“We want that section title,” Ramirez said. “After losing to St. Mary’s the way we did, we have to be more focused in practice and take more mental reps so that whatever is coming, we’re going to be ready for it.

“We have a lot to prove this season. With our preseason schedule, a lot of people are already doubting us, saying we’re not as good as Manteca teams in the past.”

The two-time defending Valley Oak League champion may have lost the majority of its defensive starters from the loaded 11-1 team, but there is still enough star power returning on both sides of scrimmage for Manteca to remain competitive.

Ninth-year coach Mark Varnum expects no drop-off in level as the program celebrates its 100th season. The Buffs are once again setting high goals with two strong classes combining to go with a handful of promising sophomores, and they’ll get tested right away by a daunting non-league schedule.

“We say it every year: Faces and names change, but expectations don’t,” Varnum said. “We’re two-time VOL champions, and we want to defend that belt and get the (SJS championship) ring back.”

There are some familiar faces, such as fourth-year varsity running back Nikko

BUFFALOES AT A GLANCE

► 2025: 6-0 Valley Oak League, 11-1 overall; Sac-Joaquin Section Division II semifinals

► **HEAD COACH:** Mark Varnum, ninth year

► **STAFF:** Paul Camara (DB), Gino Campiotti (OC), Jason Dukes (QB), Dan Eavenson (OL), Rick James (DC), Damon Lynch (DB), Ken Menasco (DL) Ray Stone (OLB/DL), Brian Rohles (JV), Eli Gibbs (frosh).

► **ALL-VOL RETURNERS:** DB/WR Jayden Harris, Sr. (Co-Outstanding Defensive Player); RB Nikko Juarez (first-team offense); OG Michael Lopez (first-team offense).

► **OTHERS TO WATCH:** DT Dominick Amato, Sr.; QB Brody Carabello, Jr.; WR/DB Jaylin Harris, Sr.; DB Jeremiah Orona, Sr.; S/WR JuJu Ramirez, Sr.

Juarez. Paving the way ahead of him is an experienced offensive line led by third-year guard Michael Lopez.

“I think it’s going to be a big surprise for some teams with what we have coming this season,” Juarez said. “I don’t think Manteca High has done this in a while.”

Varnum has relinquished play-calling duties to first-year coordinator Gino Campiotti, who starred as Manteca’s quarterback for the 2016 and 2017 section championship teams. Campiotti has a chance to get creative with dual-threat signal caller Brody Carabello, who spearheaded the 10-0 JV team last year.

“It’s exciting to have (Campiotti) — I’ve been waiting for that for 10 years since I coached him,” Varnum said. “He’s going to take the offense to another level. At our core, it’s the same, old Manteca football, but there will be some different stuff

with Brody’s ability to run. It should be fun.”

With 2024 all-league MVP Quinn Martinez gone to graduation, others are eager to step into more prominent roles in the passing game. Manteca is again deep with receivers, including twins Jayden and Jaylin Harris. Jayden is a reigning VOL Co-Defensive Player of the Year but will get more chances to play opposite his brother on offense.

“Both will play more on the other side, Jayden on offense and Jaylin on defense,” Varnum said. “They’re two of the best all-around athletes and match-up nightmares for anybody we play.”

Track standout Willie Brown, who qualified for the state meet in the 110- and

300-meter hurdles, is another target with size and speed.

“We have some athletes, and we’re excited to let them all loose,” Varnum said.

Up front, Cameron Spino and Jovani Avalos return at center and left tackle, respectively. Junior tackle Terrell Valentine provides additional size at 6-foot-5, 320 pounds.

The defense must replace six all-league players, including Co-Defensive Player of the Year Mathieu Evans.

Washington State-committed Jayden Harris stars in the secondary, where Manteca is most experienced. The 6-foot-3 ball hawk was among state leaders with nine interceptions last season, two ran back for touchdowns.

The safety tandem of Jeremiah Orona and Ramirez got ample experience as depth pieces last year. Junior Bode Hiatt and sophomore Erian Johnson will get the same opportunity in the secondary, and both were productive two-way players on the unbeaten JV team.

“Our strength is the DBs,” Ramirez said. “We didn’t lose too much. We lost both of our (starting) safeties, but Jeremiah and I definitely had some time last year, and we got to see what it’s like to play at this level. We came up together as safeties from freshman to the JV level. Coach (Rick) James is one of the best D-coordinators

in Northern California, and we’re just learning everything we can from him. We know what it means to be a leader of this defense.”

Lineman Dominick Amato is one of the few returning to the defensive front with varsity experience.

The Buffaloes have another set of twins in sophomores Issac and Isaiah Fountain, who will help solidify the linebacking corps along with first-year senior Luke Avila, a productive JV player in 2024.

The varsity rookies will get challenged right away, with Manteca scheduling four tough opponents from four different sections. The Buffs are on the road for games with St. Francis (Mountain View), Buchanan (Clovis) and Chico.

They’ll face Chavez of Stockton, coming off 10-0 regular season, in the home opener on Sept. 11 that will double as a 100th-year celebration for the program.

“These guys want to make history of their own,” Varnum said. “They’re hungry, man. We’ve been pretty blessed the last 10 years or so, but last year, if we were able to pull out one or two more plays things would have gone differently. They’re excited to get back at it. They have something to prove and want to show that we don’t take steps backwards, we want to keep moving forward.”

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LIKE A PHOENIX RISING



Lancers reload after making long-awaited return to section final

By JONAMAR JACINTO
THE BULLETIN

Thirty-six years after playing in a Sac-Joaquin Section championship for East Union, Jason Stock ushered the Lancers back to that stage in his first season as head coach. He hopes 2025 marks a shift in culture and perception for a program that had experienced little success in the years between section-final appearances.

The challenge now is sustaining success and building on top of what has been achieved after losing a deep senior class that includes two receivers who are now playing for Division I universities.

“That’s the name of the game in high school football,” Stock said of the roster turnover. “Those types of athletes don’t come around often, and I was blessed to have them even for just a year. ...

“We just happened to have the right ingredients coaching staff-wise to get them to buy in. Once they did that, they just took it from there. They made it easy.”

East Union broke multiple single-season offensive records on the way to a 9-4 finish, which was just the third time in 20 years the Lancers recorded at least seven wins.

It was a run that not many

outside of the Lancers’ circle saw coming. They lost SJS Division IV final to Roseville on a last-second field goal, 31-29.

Returning players head into the new season with unfinished business, as they take the reins from the talent-rich class of 24 seniors.

“That experience was amazing, and I’m blessed for that opportunity,” senior Erick Cortez said of playing for a section title. “It showed me a lot. I learned that to be a championship team, we need to put in a lot of work.

“The expectations for this upcoming season are high. Some of the other guys and I agree that we want to go back. We’re hungry for a lot more than we got last year. Going that far and losing in that game, we don’t want that feeling again.”

Cortez is one of two returning players who made the All-Valley Oak League Second-Team defense, and they’re both changing positions. He was a disruptive defensive lineman who led the Lancers with six sacks and 10 tackles for losses, but the 6-foot-1, 205-pound scrapper has moved to middle linebacker.

Nikko Hisatomi played cornerback last year but shifts inside to rover after gaining strength in the offseason. The added muscle will allow him to make more of an impact offensively after backing up

LANCERS AT A GLANCE

► **2025:** 3-3 Valley Oak League, 9-4 overall; Sac-Joaquin Section Division IV finals

► **HEAD COACH:** Jason Stock, 2nd year

► **STAFF:** Steve Berchtold (OL/DL), Troy Baker (DL), Jamal Campbell (DC), Teejay Gordon (OC), Elijah Jacobsen (WR), Eddie Lopez Jr. (RB/LB), Thomas Solis (OL), John Abrew (JV HC) Gustavo Ruiz (Frosh HC).

► **ALL-VOL RETURNERS:** ILB/TE Erick Cortez, Sr. (second-team defense); RB/OLB Nikko Hisatomi, Sr. (second-team defense); OT Colton Madden, Jr. (second-team offense).

► **OTHERS TO WATCH:** G/DT Ervin Douglas, Sr.; DB/WR Gunnar Fay, Jr.; RT/DT Jesus Magana, Jr.; OLB/WR Jesse Martinez, Sr.; DB/WR Ricky Soria, Sr.

workhorse Brayden Camara, the school’s new single-season record holder for rushing yards and rushing touchdowns.

“Nikko is going to be a dude,” Stock said. “He can do a little bit of everything. We can put him in the slot if we wanted due to his versatility.”

Gunnar Fay is also expected to make a leap as a two-way performer with his size (6-2, 195) and track speed. He started at safety as a sophomore last season and will get more run at receiver. Older brother Jackson Fay, now at UC Davis, flirted with a rare 1,000-1,000 season — 1,000 yards rushing and 1,000 receiving — for the star-studded 2025 cast and earned VOL Outstanding

Offensive Player

“Gunnar can be a difference maker when he grows into his own,” Stock said. “He’s got a good attitude, and he’s not trying to be his brother. He’s longer and taller and does a few things differently.”

Another younger sibling of a ’25 standout will get his chance under the varsity spotlight.

Max Abrew is part of a three-way competition for the quarterback spot vacated by four-year varsity player Kirk Simoni, who is continuing his career at Montana State Northern.

Abrew was quarterback in the lower levels the past two years, but fellow junior Bryson Ybarra, a transfer

from Foothill in Sacramento, and sophomore Dante Tafoya are pushing him for the starting role.

“It’s good to have competition,” Stock said.

It’s also good to have versatility.

With his speed and shiftness, Abrew can play elsewhere, if needed, much like his brother J.P. — the reigning VOL Utility Player of the Year now at Air Force.

No matter who is behind center, he’ll be protected by a sturdier offensive line. Stock is hoping the added size pays off.

Colton Madden, at 6-foot-3, 230 pounds, was an all-league, second-team selection as a sophomore. He’ll return at tackle and flanked by senior Ervin Douglas, a 6-2, 245-pound guard who showed great improvement over the offseason.

Incoming transfers from the area and beyond can help with depth in the trenches on both sides of scrimmage. Senior Jady Robinson comes from cross-town rival Manteca, Genesis Stewart from Missouri and defensive end Fenix Buenrostro from Tracy’s undefeated JV team.

“We have decent size this year,” Stock said. “Across the board, we’re taller and heavier. Last year, we were kind of short and stocky. Our whole goal is to not run guys both ways, so we still have

some things to figure out.”

Interior lineman Jesus Magana, rover Jesse Martinez, Cortez and Hisatomi lead coordinator Jamal Campbell’s defensive unit that wants to be more stout against the run in a rugged VOL where physical ground attacks rule.

The Lancers will get an early test, as they’ve picked up Auburn-based Placer for their non-league schedule. The Hillmen, whom East Union ousted in the opening round of the playoffs last year, have a winning tradition with the run-based Wing-T.

“Honestly, we’re solid on defense,” Cortez said. “We have a lot of fast guys who are playmakers, and we mesh really good together. Stopping the run even last year has always been a big part of what we want to do, but I feel like this year we’re going to be on top of it.”

There has been a renewed energy on campus on the heels of East Union’s terrific 2025 season. With the influx of transfers, turnout for summer practices was higher for all three levels, compared to Stock’s first offseason. He anticipates to have around 45 players for each team.

“It shows that people want to play for East Union,” Hisatomi said. “For a longtime, everybody overlooked East Union as a program. Now, they want to play for us and be part of the culture.”



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T'WOLVES TOUGHEN UP



Sierra alumnus returns as coach with physical, Gun-T offense

By JONAMAR JACINTO
THE BULLETIN

Back at his old stomping grounds, first-year Sierra head coach Ryan Teicheira held summer workouts behind the home stands of the stadium that bears his brother's name.

Hanging at the top of the press box is a banner commemorating the program's crowning achievement: "2015 CIF STATE FOOTBALL CHAMPIONS."

Teicheira, a 2001 graduate, was offensive coordinator on that team.

The Timberwolves have had just two winning seasons in the 10 years since, including a second Sac-Joaquin Section Division IV championship. In the meantime, Teicheira pursued other coaching opportunities, namely as the head honcho at Lathrop, which he turned into a bonafide contender over five seasons.

Now, he's tasked with helping his alma mater restore its former gridiron glory. Teicheira believes that much of the heavy lifting has already been done by his predecessors. The coaching staff is comprised of returning assistants and other fellow alumni.

To him, the mission isn't necessarily to rebuild a team coming off an injury-marred 2-8 season.

It's more of a reset.

"Coming back to Sierra, I felt the support from the

administration and coaches," Teicheira said. "Family values are a big part of the culture. The coaches have brought up my brother's legacy, talking to the kids about the stadium name (Daniel Teicheira Memorial Stadium).

"This goes beyond my brother. It's all the others from 1997 on, and how people still follow Sierra football and want to see Sierra football going strong. The family orientation centered around the football team has been great to see."

Though some things have remained the same since his previous stint at Sierra, there are a few noteworthy changes.

Teicheira is bringing a new offense, and with it a philosophical switch in the trenches. He has introduced the Gun-T, a meld of the spread offense previously used at Sierra for much of the past 10-plus years and the Wing-T that Teicheira rode to great success with Lathrop.

"I think the offense suits us well," senior Blama Kamara said. "A lot of guys on the team were skeptical, at first, but by now, everybody trusts (Teicheira), and the offense looks great and effective.

"Everybody gets involved, from the outside (receivers) to slot. We have different formations, and we can be really creative. It can be unstoppable, if we can execute the plays."

The 6-foot-1, 178-pound

TIMBERWOLVES AT A GLANCE

►2025: 0-6 Valley Oak League, 2-8 overall

►HEAD COACH: Ryan Teicheira, first year

►STAFF: Mike James (DC), Tony Jimenez (DB), Jake Pruitt (QB), Jay Muschott (WR), Mark Rangel (RB), Joe Rohles (OL), Jeremy Towner (DL), Willie Juarez (JV HC), Derek Rosendin (frosh HC).

►ALL-VOL RETURNERS: LB/RB Damian Densmore, Sr. (second-team defense); DB/WB Ozias Siga, Jr. (second-team defense).

►OTHERS TO WATCH: OG/DL Jaed Alcateur, Sr.; WR/CB Blama Kamara, Sr.; OT/DL Angel Land, Sr.; MLB/RB Mateo Munoz, Sr.; WR/DB D.J. Shepherd, Sr.

receiver was a midseason addition last year, because of transfer rules, and Teicheira plans to make good use of the speedster who is a state track-and-field finalist in the 400-meter dash.

"It's going to be by committee, but there are guys making names for themselves," Teicheira said. "Blama is one of those guys. We'll need to find a way to get him the ball in different spots."

That doesn't mean it will be a one-man show.

Teicheira intends to spread the wealth with slot receiver D.J. Shepherd, wingback Ozias Siga and a backfield rotation including Damian Densmore, Mateo Munoz and Venn Piedad.

Last season, the majority of touches went to second-year sophomore Darien East,

an All-Valley Oak League Second-Team running back who has transferred to River Islands.

Densmore looks forward to contributing offensively after focusing on the defensive side his junior year.

"I haven't done that a lot recently, so it's a change of gears, but I think I'm ready to do it," Densmore said. "We have the dudes that can block. I feel like we can move the ball more than we did last year, we just have to be a lot more physical."

That's where third-year guard Jaed Alcatuer, 260-pound junior guard Alejandro Meneses and senior tackle/center Angel Land come in as the anchors on the offensive line.

"They're going to fall in love with our offense," Tei-

cheira said. "I think our linemen are starting to understand the differences of what we're trying to do by playing physically. They're seeing the competitive side of the trenches. They have to believe they're going to be the dudes that make this team go."

There's a competition behind center between incumbent quarterback Jaysen Martinez and Ishmeet Singh, a senior transfer from Virginia. Last year, Martinez was thrust into the varsity spot as a sophomore after the projected starter unexpectedly transferred late in the summer.

"Jaysen had a good spring, and Ishmeet came in the summer and started pushing Jaysen from Day 1," Teicheira said. "The door is still open for them, and we're eager to see who pulls away. They're the same type of quarterback, which is good, because we don't have to change the offense for one or the other. It's going to be the guy who makes the correct reads, motivates teammates and makes the team better overall."

Densmore and Siga, both All-VOL Second-Team selections, head an experienced and athletic defense.

Densmore continues his partnership with Munoz as middle linebackers. Senior tackle Jesse Marquez-Barrios and junior ends Josiah Benavides and John Marek

join them up front. Teicheira is impressed with first-year player Jacob Soares, a wrestling standout who is in the mix on the defensive line.

"We've improved a lot with a couple all-league guys coming back," Densmore said. "(He and Munoz) have been playing together since freshman year, and we think alike. We have both have the same ideas to lead our defense to the standards that we have. We each have our own sides of the field, and we try to do what we can to make things easier on each other."

The secondary features junior Omar Samadi and Kamara as cornerbacks, and they're backed by second-year junior free safety Siga.

The Timberwolves are optimistic heading into this next era under Teicheira, who acknowledges they have "a lot to prove in terms of outside perceptions."

There are winnable games against Central California Athletic League opponents Enochs, Modesto and Geronimo, which are each coming off a sub-.500 season. The big pre-league test comes in the second week against Teicheira's former team Lathrop, the two-time reigning Western Athletic Conference champion.

"I think we have a talented squad, and guys are stepping up in new roles," Kamara said. "I think we should be able to compete for playoffs this year."

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SPARTANS MARCH ON



Expectations unchanged for WAC champions under revamped coaching staff

By JONAMAR JACINTO
THE BULLETIN

The coaching staff has been reconstructed. The best player graduated.

And yet, expectations remain the same at Lathrop. Longtime assistant coach Justin Muschott is now in charge, and he wants to build on the foundation laid by predecessor Ryan Teicheira.

“Nothing has changed,” Muschott said. “The standards remain the same. The players know that, the coaches know that. There’s never been any question about what our expectations are for the season.”

The Spartans are coming off their two best seasons, both ending with 10-2 records, Western Athletic Conference outright championships and Sac-Joaquin Section Division V semifinal appearances. Two-time conference MVP and Pablo Peña was the linchpin on offense and defense the past three years, leaving with multiple single-season and career rushing, scoring and tackling records.

“We’ll take it as a compliment, but we’re already hearing that (WAC rivals) are sensing blood in the water,” Muschott said. “There’s a new coach, we lost Pablo and things like that, but we take it for what it is. We control what we can control. We don’t take it as pressure. We take it as a compliment, really.”

Muschott and the Spartans are set up well to continue on the trajectory they’re on. Players are moving up from the 9-1 junior varsity and 10-0 freshman teams, joining a senior class that provides much of the bulk.

“Obviously, it’s great having the teams that we’ve had, but it’s really been because of the culture we’ve built over the last couple of years,” Muschott said. “That continues today. Guys want to come out — we’ve had anywhere from 130-140 kids on average this summer. We’ve had up to 160 guys between the three rosters.

“The big thing for us is the kids want to come out. They want to be part of something special, and that mind set has been great across the three levels, and the records show that we’ve been doing things the right way at the lower levels.”

The fulcrum of the team remains at the line of scrimmage.

Third-year center Beau Grisham and reigning WAC Defensive Lineman of the Year Malachi Joseph are the standout returners who set the tone.

“I take the most pride in playing with physicality and technique,” Grisham said. “Even without Teicheira, we’re not going to go to stop being physical. We have to not be scared up front. Even if the guy in front of you is bigger or stronger, you have to figure out how to beat

SPARTANS AT A GLANCE

► **2025:** 7-0 Western Athletic Conference, 10-2 overall; Sac-Joaquin Section Division V semifinals

► **HEAD COACH:** Justin Muschott, first year

► **STAFF:** Reginald Harris (LB), Joey Lopez (OL), Justin Miller (RB/S/S&C), Jesse Meermann (DL), Frankie Romo (WR/CB), Mark Souza (QB), Glen Wyatt (DC), Joshua Larson (JV HC), Gabe Munoz (frosh HC).

► **ALL-WAC RETURNERS:** C Beau Grisham, Sr. (second-team offense); DT Malachi Joseph, Sr. (Defensive Lineman of the Year); DL/RB Jayden White, Jr. (first-team defense).

► **OTHERS TO WATCH:** OG Shane Agbulos, Sr.; RB/MLB Jonah Hernandez, Sr.; WR/DB Dario Joseph, Jr.; QB Daryion Reyno, Jr.; OLB/WB Ekam Sohal, Sr.

him with technique or IQ.”

The 6-foot-4, 295-pound Joseph and second-year junior Jayden White lead a deep defensive line that includes other returners in Sirfelix Barney, Avner Faaaliga and Joshua Tala-lele.

“The defensive line is like the heart of the defense,” Joseph said. “Basically, we gotta win up front to help out the DBs (defensive backs) and linebackers.”

The offensive line is stout between the tackles with the 6-foot, 275-pound Grisham and 6-foot, 280-pound guard Shane Agbulos. Barney and Joseph could help solidify the O-line, but there is enough depth to keep the linemen fresh. Tight end Ayden Louie will also play a big part in blocking.

“We have some good options, some good depth

there,” Muschott said. “We’re still trying to figure out who is going to be the guy in some spots.”

After serving as defensive coordinator the past three seasons, Muschott now calls the offense and will continue operating the Wing-T, but with tweaks catering to the versatility of his athletes.

Daryion “D.J.” Reyno flashed his potential as a sophomore, playing sporadically throughout before taking over full-time in the Spartans’ two postseason games.

“D.J. is undersized, we know that, but we saw flashes of what he’s able to do with extending plays or creating plays with his speed,” Muschott said. “We can use him in the run game a little more between motions and different align-

ments. He has such good command of what we’re trying to do on the offensive end.”

Muschott refers to the rest of the skill players as “positionless,” because of their versatility as blockers, receivers and ball carriers.

A key contributor on defense last year, Ekam Sohal is the main wingback but will get looks at different positions.

“We’ll still be true to our Wing-T standards and what we’ve been, but now, we’re able to move guys around in different spots,” Muschott said. “We’re going more positionless compared to the traditional Wing-T. We’re going to the pistol and moving guys around to better utilize their athleticism and get them in space. We have to be more dynamic, because we don’t have a Pablo Peña anymore to get us a first down on third-and-whatever.”

White was a workhorse running back for the JV two years ago his freshman year, and he’ll get the chance to take on that role in his second varsity go-around.

Senior Jonah Hernandez, junior Dario Joseph and Sohal are penciled in as key two-way producers. Hernandez will get a share of the carries at running back while leading the defense at middle linebacker. His last two seasons were cut short by injuries.

Meelad Khairzadah emerged late last year and

will play at middle or outside linebacker. Sohal, whom Muschott calls the “do-everything type of guy,” is also taking on a hybrid role on 4-2-5 defense.

The secondary is where the team is least experience, but it isn’t short on athletes with the likes of Damian Hermosillo, Dario Joseph, Jaylen Santos and Randle Wright.

“We’ll still be strong up front, and we have a bunch of good skill guys, too,” Malachi Joseph said. “I see the work they’re putting in all summer. I feel like we’ll do good this year. Everyone is working hard on the field and weight room and locked in mentally. I feel like we are in a good position to compete this year.”

The Spartans don’t have to wait long to play in a competitive environment. They’ll head to intra-district Sierra for their second game of the season for a reunion with their former coach. The following week, they take on a strong upper-division Tracy team. Then, after its bye, Lathrop begins the WAC schedule with Johansen, the team that gave it the most trouble in league last season.

“The expectations are to go all the way,” Grisham said. “It gives me motivation having gone so far as the semifinals, but it just makes me want to go out with a bang. I want to make it to a section final and state. I’ll go however far it takes me.”

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RIDING WITH RIPTIDE



New coach leaning on skilled seniors in pass-based spread offense

By JONAMAR JACINTO
THE BULLETIN

River Islands’ senior class is eager to leave a mark in its final act. Under the direction of new coach Nicholas Kendall, the Riptide is primed for an historic third varsity season after missing playoff berths in the first two. “We just want to go as far as we can as a team,” senior receiver Christian Dell’Osso said. “Hopefully, it puts us on the map and helps the classes under us. If we can do well, they can ride that success and maybe get more talent to River Islands.” The returning All-Mother Lode League First-Team selection is one of the many weapons at Kendall’s disposal. He believes the returning standouts fit his Air Raid-esque spread offense that will rely heavily on the right arm of Daryl Carpenter. “I want to pass the ball around 65-35,” Kendall said of his intended pass-run ratio. “Of course, the game dictates everything, and we might have to run the ball with the guys I have, but I think airing it out will be beneficial for our guys.” It starts with Carpenter, who joined Dell’Osso on the all-league first team despite arriving to the team late last summer. His family had moved to Lathrop, and Carpenter made his second high

school transfer after previous stops at Manteca and Sierra. Without having yet mastered the playbook, Carpenter flashed his improvisational playmaking. “Daryl is hungry,” Kendall said. “He wants to do well, wants to lead the team and he’s doing it the right way. He’s picking up stuff fast and asking all the right questions. At first, he was kind of shy being a leader, but as he’s gotten more comfortable stepping into a leadership role, it’s almost like he’s my shadow now.” Kendall thinks he’s due for a big season, with help from the surrounding talent. Carpenter already had an established relationship with Dell’Osso, going back to their time together at Manteca as freshmen. Getting a full offseason with the team also helps. “I think it’s going to make a difference,” Dell’Osso said. “(Carpenter) is getting chemistry with all the receivers and getting all the plays down, so we’re not in a rush like we were last season. That’s huge, because Coach Kendall’s plays are more complex.” Two-way contributors Mikey Figueroa, Lucas Ruiz and Isaiah Sanchez are expected to take on larger roles at wide out, running back, and tight end, respectively. Prince Presley, brought up as a sopho-

RIPTIDE AT A GLANCE

► 2025: 2-4 Mother Lode League, 3-6 overall

► **HEAD COACH:** Nicholas Kendall, first year

► **STAFF:** Sam Hughes (DB), Dante Machado (S&C), Toriyeen Saffold (DC/LB), Romelle Terry (OL/DL), Grant Franco (JV HC).

► **ALL-MLL RETURNERS:** QB Daryl Carpenter, Sr. (first-team offense); WR Christian Dell’Osso, Sr. (first-team offense); FS/WR Mikey Figueroa, Sr. (second-team defense); RB/ILB Lucas Ruiz, Sr. (first-team defense); DL/TE Isaiah Sanchez, Sr. (second-team defense); OL Collin Socheath, Jr. (second-team offense).

► **OTHERS TO WATCH:** RB/WR Darien East, Jr.; OT/DT Santiago Flores, Jr.; OT/DL Dominic Manzanares, Sr.; C Josiah Mattes, Sr.; WR/LB Prince Presley, Jr.

more last season, is another option in the passing game. “Coach Kendall knows how to utilize his weapons on the field, and I do think it’s going to help us throughout the season to show that to defenses,” Figueroa said. “I don’t think anyone can guard us over the top, especially when we have Lucas in the backfield.” A converted tight end, the stocky Ruiz was a revelation at running back late last season. Chibueze Uwaoma, at 6-foot-3, 180 pounds, and junior Hansel Okpah are more speed threats out of the backfield. River Islands’ expect to get even deeper with the incoming transfer of junior Darien East, who starred at running back for Sierra last year and made the All-

Valley Oak League Second Team. With his pass-catching ability, East may be used in multiple spots. “From what I hear, he’s a dog,” Kendall said of East. “If we get him, that just strengthens our stable of running backs. Lucas was pretty good last year, and Hansel did a really good job in the second half of JV last year. “If (East) is what I’ve been hearing about, he’ll just add talent and more grit to our backfield.” While the Riptide adds a dynamic player at the skill positions, it has lost a big presence in the trenches. Malachi Olabanji is one of two River Islands linemen selected to the All-MLL Second-Team offense, but he has transferred to De La

Salle. The 300-pound tackle was moved up to the varsity team as a freshman, along with Colin Socheath, the other all-league honoree. Kendall is still encouraged by what he has seen from the O-line, calling it his “smartest group.” Joining Socheath is senior tackle Dominic Manzanares and senior center Josiah Mattes, along with promising juniors Santiago Flores and Dean Rivera. “You want your linemen to be the smartest group, and they probably are my smartest group,” Kendall said, noting the 6-2, 230-pound Flores’ 4.0 GPA. “They’re all strong, they like each other and they’re starting to jell and pick up things. They’re super smart. If you tell them one way of doing something, they’ll keep doing it and then able to auto-correct when they needed.” The defense is switching to a four-man front with new coordinator Toriyeen Saffold heading the group. Although there is plenty of experience, much of it is coming from two-way players. The Riptide’s top two tacklers are back in Figueroa and Sanchez, who are cousins, at free safety and defensive end, respectively. Presley and Ruiz return as linebackers, while Manzanares and Socheath buttress the defensive line. Seniors Eric

Irving and Adrian Villareal will aid Figueroa in the secondary. “Just excited for what we have in store,” Figueroa said. “I’m really confident in our team this year, and we want to show everybody what we can really do. I played varsity the past three years, and I think a lot of teams on our schedule thought of us as a free win. I think last year, we showed that it’s not going to be the same this year.” In 2025, a Week 10 cancellation from its opponent and multiple heartbreaking defeats kept the Riptide (3-6) from making the playoffs or qualifying for one of the Sac-Joaquin Section’s inaugural one-off bowl games. River Islands found its footing after a 55-0 loss to eventual MLL and Division V-A state champion Calaveras. The Riptide was then in contention for key wins against other MLL powers the next two weeks but fell short in the final quarters against Linden and Summerville. “We can’t leave stuff on the table like they did last year,” Kendall said. “We have to be better with our execution and discipline to be able to compete late in those games. If we can clean up that stuff, I don’t see why we can’t finish around 8-2 and hopefully make playoffs.”



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RIGHT ON SCHEDULE

Area teams seek out tougher competition to prepare for league, increase playoff chances

By JONAMAR JACINTO
THE BULLETIN

With computer ratings determining postseason qualification and seeding in the Sac-Joaquin Section, teams from the area are seeking out tougher opponents to improve their chances — even if means taking a few more losses.

Strength of schedule matters more now that there are less spots available to vie for those section pennants. Last year, the SJS pared playoff brackets down to eight teams while introducing one-off bowl games for the schools ranked Nos. 9-16 by MaxPreps in each division. Only league champions earn automatic berths.

For some teams, it’s not just about boosting their ratings. They’re building early-season calluses to better prepare for league play and beyond.

That’s the case for Ripon, which aims to reach its potential with a promising junior class joining the talented and now-ripened seniors.

Last year, Ripon’s class of 2027, which never lost in the lower levels, coasted to wins against its four non-league opponents. Ripon did not fare as well venturing into the deep waters of the Trans Valley League, going 1-5.

Lesson learned. Now in his second year as head coach, Cole Williams cleared the slate and lined up four higher-division schools coming off postseason appearances.

“They’ll let us know as a team where we are pretty early,” Williams said. “I’m a firm believer in in going out to play the best and the biggest to test yourself. The TVL is understood to be a tough league. Well, let’s go play tough opponents and get ready for it.”

First up on Aug. 28 is a visit from Livermore, which finished 9-2 last year after nearly taking down top-seeded Campolindo in the first round of the North Coast Section playoffs.

Tough match-ups follow with SJS mid-division power Placer and Division II Tracy, both on the road. Tracy brings back much of its top players while welcoming youth talent from its 10-0 JV squad. Ripon also faces SJS bowl-qualifying Pitman.

Lathrop has also scheduled Tracy.

Low MaxPreps ratings led to the Spartans missing the play-offs in 2021 and 2022 despite 6-4 finishes. They’ve since gone after Valley Oak League teams, and following early losses to Patterson, Lathrop went on to win Western Athletic Conference titles and reach the SJS Division V semifinal the past two years.

Lathrop has replaced Patterson with Tracy and dropped Old River Rivalry foe Mountain



Manteca running back Nikko Juarez races into the open field in a non-league game at Marin Catholic on Sept. 13, 2025.

Photos by SEAN KAHLER



Nikko Hisatomi (20) and Erick Cortez (80) combine to tackle Placer ball carrier Alex Lopez during East Union’s first-round playoff game on Nov. 14.

House in favor of Golden Valley, which is expected to be improved.

“It’s big to get (Tracy) on the schedule,” first-year Lathrop coach Justin Muschott said. “We know it’s going to be a huge battle. It’s good to face those types of teams. We felt we needed to schedule up with these teams to better prepare us. With their athletes and the system they run,

we know it’s going to be a challenge.”

The Spartans will see a familiar face across the field on Sept. 4 when they face Sierra for a fourth straight year. Ryan Teixeira, Lathrop’s coach the past five seasons, is back with his alma mater, which hasn’t registered a winning record since 2019.

Lathrop will be the Timberwolves’ biggest test before the VOL, but the Sept. 4 reunion is not on their radar yet.

“It’ll be fun, but we’re going to be focused on the Orestimba scrimmage and our Week (Zero) game against Enochs,” Teixeira said.

Across town, East Union added some umph to its schedule after blowing out four non-league opponents last year. The Lancers will tangle with traditional power Placer, which they beat 58-25 in the first round of the 2025 playoffs.

Typically outnumbered, Ripon Christian has added larger schools to its non-league lineup that already included recent state champions Calaveras and Summerville of the Mother Lode League.

After its opener at Summerville, the Knights are hosting an Stagg team (8-3 in 2025) led by one of the section’s top returning rushers in senior Darnell Holmes. They’ll wrap up their pre-league schedule in Woodland against Pioneer (7-4).

“Getting that 100th win in non-league would be great, but it’s going to be hard,” said Ripon Christian coach Phil Grams, who has a career 98-29 record. “We’re still trying to figure out what Summerville and Stagg have because they’re going through a coaching change, but Calaveras and Pioneer are going to be really good again.”

When it comes to matching up against top competition, no one from the area has done it like Manteca.

Since claiming their last SJS Division II title in 2022, the Buffaloes grappled with in-section heavyweights such as Granite Bay, Rocklin and St. Mary’s. They cast a wider net the past two years, snaring big NorCal fish such as Cardinal Newman and Marin Catholic.

“Anybody, anywhere, anytime,” as Buffaloes coach Mark Varnum always says.

His team is sure to be battle tested by the time it begins a second consecutive VOL title defense.

The Buffs tangle with three out-of-area schools that are among the best in their sections, and a Chavez (Stockton) program on the rise following an undefeated regular season

Up first is St. Francis out of the Central Coast Section. Manteca has some history with the Lancers from Mountain View, who downed Campiotti’s 2017 Buffaloes in a NorCal Bowl Game on the way to a state championship.

The Buffaloes will then face Buchanan of Clovis and two weeks later cap their pre-league run against Chico, the second-ranked team from the Northern Section.

Only the Chavez game on Sept. 11 will be at Guss Schmiedt Field, and Manteca will celebrate its 100th year of football.

“A lot of teams around here are not going to play us, and we’re not going to play Modesto public schools,” Varnum said. “We have to go out and find the heavy hitters. Chico won their section last year, St. Francis is a private-school power, Buchanan is big time and Chavez was 10-0 last year. We don’t shy away from anybody.”

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

WEEK ZERO
Friday, Aug. 28
Manteca at Saint Francis
Enochs at Sierra
Lathrop at Golden Valley
Waterford at River Islands
Livermore at Ripon
Ripon Christian at Summerville
Bye: East Union

WEEK 1
Friday, Sept. 4
Modesto at East Union
Manteca at Buchanan
Lathrop at Sierra
Delhi at River Islands
Ripon at Placer
Stagg at Ripon Christian

WEEK 2
Friday, Sept. 11
Johansen at East Union
Chavez at Manteca
Sierra at Modesto (Johansen HS)
Tracy at Lathrop
River Islands at Modesto Christian
Pitman at Ripon
Calaveras at Ripon Christian

WEEK 3
Thursday, Sept. 17
Sierra at Gregori

Friday, Sept. 18
East Union at Enochs (Gregori HS)
Manteca at Chico
River Islands at Mountain House
Ripon at Tracy
Ripon Christian at Pioneer
Bye: Lathrop

WEEK 4
Friday, Sept. 25
Placer at East Union
Manteca at Patterson
Sierra at Oakdale
Johansen at Lathrop
Calaveras at River Islands
Hilmar at Ripon
Ripon Christian at Escalon

WEEK 5
Friday, Oct. 2
East Union at Central Catholic
Mountain House at Manteca
Pacheco at Lathrop
River Islands at Summerville
Ripon at Hughson
Sonora at Ripon Christian
Bye: Sierra

WEEK 6
Friday, Oct. 9
Patterson at East Union
Central Catholic at Manteca
Sierra at Mountain House
Lathrop at Livingston
Riverbank at River Islands
Ripon Christian at Orestimba
Bye: Ripon

WEEK 7
Friday, Oct. 16
Oakdale at East Union
Manteca at Sierra
Central Valley at Lathrop
River Islands at Bret Harte
Escalon at Ripon
Bye: Ripon Christian

WEEK 8
Friday, Oct. 23
East Union at Mountain House
Oakdale at Manteca
Sierra at Central Catholic
Lathrop at Grace Davis (Downey HS)
Linden at River Islands
Ripon at Sonora
Hilmar at Ripon Christian

WEEK 9
Friday, Oct. 30
East Union at Sierra
Ceres at Lathrop
River Islands at Big Valley Christian
Orestimba at Ripon
Ripon Christian at Hughson
Bye: Manteca

WEEK 10
Thursday, Nov. 5
Lathrop at Beyer (Johansen HS)

Friday, Nov. 6
Manteca at East Union
Patterson at Sierra
Ripon at Ripon Christian
Bye: River Islands

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GEARING UP FOR GAUNTLET



Ripon’s undefeated juniors merge with battle-tested seniors

By JONAMAR JACINTO
THE BULLETIN

Ripon had high hopes for 2025 with an athletic junior class blending with an experienced cohort of seniors led by accomplished linemen.

The season did not go as expected.

Ripon dropped its Trans Valley League opener to Hughson and later ended the campaign on a five-game skid. Most defeats were competitive and came down to a few moments. That was the case in the Sac-Joaquin Section Division VI opener in which Ripon gave No. 2-seeded Liberty Ranch all it could handle in a 30-28 near-upset.

Although it was an encouraging effort for returning players, the loss put Ripon at 5-6 for the season, marking the fourth straight sub-500 record for a program that captured a state title just six years prior.

This could be the year that Ripon returns to its winning ways. Cole Williams, going into his second season as head coach, is meshing two classes that both went undefeated at the lower levels.

“It’s an exciting outlook with the talent that is there, but like I’ve been telling everybody from day 1; talent and potential are all great, but that doesn’t mean anything because we haven’t done anything,” Williams said. “We’re trying to put it together and jell as one.

We’re excited with the direction and how things are going and developing. There is good depth in spots, poor depth in others, so keeping everybody healthy is most important for us right now. If we can get through the season, it could be a pretty good year for us.”

Williams sought out stiffer competition to help his team better prepare for the rigors of the TVL. On slate are four play-off teams in higher divisions.

The seniors learned many hard lessons in their first varsity go-around. And they don’t want their younger teammates to make the some of the same mistakes.

“A lot of ups and downs,” returning quarterback Andrew Shaw said. “We started off pretty strong, but it’s tough to play in the Trans Valley League. We were very junior-heavy, and the inexperience, from myself included, we had in those games showed in those typical, TVL grind-out games.

“I just think the biggest thing we can help (the juniors) with is dealing with adversity. They have to realize we’re not going to win every game, or put the running clock on everyone. When we’re in tough games late in the fourth quarter, that’s OK. That’s going to happen, and we’re going to have to play through adversity.”

In a Gun-T Offense that uses all of its weapons, Shaw is the centerpiece. He was Ripon’s second-leading rusher

RIPON AT A GLANCE

- **2025:** 1-5 Trans Valley League, 5-6 overall; Sac-Joaquin Section Division VI quarterfinals
- **HEAD COACH:** Cole Williams, second year
- **STAFF:** Jake McCreath (OC), Chris Musseman (DC), Nick Hardenbrook (OL/ILB), Jacob Rodriguez (RB/DB), Jason Dougherty (WR/OLB), Matt Tyler (DL/TE), Brian Corcoran (JV HC), Scott Sikma (Frosh HC).
- **ALL-TVL RETURNERS:** OLB/WB Matthew Gaines, Sr. (second-team defense); C/ILB Brayden McDowell, Sr. (second-team offense); QB Andrew Shaw, Sr. (second-team offense); TE/DT Jude Viss, Sr. (second-team offense).
- **OTHERS TO WATCH:** WB/CB Gavin Decena, Sr.; FB/SS Ace Dougherty, Sr.; OG/DT Lorenzo Hernandez, Sr.; FB/ILB Kael Rangel, Sr.; SB/OLB Xabriel Reyes, Sr.

in the regular season and was involved in nearly half of the 49 touchdowns scored, passing for 10 and rushing for 12.

“Andrew plays a huge role with his throwing ability, but not only that, his scrambling and running,” senior wing back Matthew Gaines said. “He has wheels on him and can really move. That just opens up our offense a lot and gives us the ability to do a lot of different things.”

On a team stacked with skill-position players, Williams anticipates a breakout from Gaines, who is drawing interest from college programs. He produces as both runner and pass catcher, special-teams returner

and is a returning All-TVL Second-Team outside linebacker.

Also back is leading rusher Kael Rangel, who missed two games with a concussion. He’ll again split carries with Ace Dougherty.

All-league second-team tight end Jude Viss is a big target for Shaw at 6-foot-4, 190 pounds, and Gavin Decena returns at slot. Juniors such as Gavin Duran, Josiah Perez and Jacoby Salinas add depth at the skill positions, and they’ll be immediate contributors in the defensive secondary.

“I feel like we’re just as talented and athletic as anyone in league,” Shaw said. “If we can be a little more physical

this year and keep our emotions intact late in games, we can be as good as anyone else. For where we are, the sky’s the limit.”

For as much depth as there is at the skill positions, Ripon lacks the numbers and size up front.

That doesn’t mean there aren’t quality linemen. All-TVL Second-Team center Brayden McDowell returns with Lorenzo Hernandez, Matthew Scheffel and Sam Torkelson, who missed much of last season with a knee injury. Ryder Shelton will join the seniors after anchoring the 10-0 JV team’s O-line.

“In the skill positions, we’re really deep, but up front, we’re not,” Williams said. “We have to manage our guys up front, because we’re pretty light there. What we do have is good, so we’re not hurting in that regard. Quality-wise, we’re very excited with where we’re at.”

On the other side of scrimmage, former head coach Chris Musseman has taken over as defensive coordinator. Williams served as DC for Musseman in 2019 when Ripon earned its state crown.

“We’ve been down on the defensive side for a few years, and we want to bring it back to the forefront for Ripon football,” Williams said. “We used to always have a defense that would come at you, and that’s our intention this year. We

want to break it down and keep it simple to let the kids play fast.”

Ripon will have to rely on speed at every level of the defense. Gone are the likes of three-year starter Tipeti Paini, the reigning Outstanding Defensive Lineman in the TVL.

Xabriel Reyes returns as an outside linebacker, and Ripon has a deep rotation of inside linebackers including junior Joshua Gonzalez, senior Jaden Becerra, Rangel and Scheffel. Decena and Dougherty offer experience in the otherwise junior-loaded defensive backfield.

“I feel like we have a really good mix,” Gaines said. “The class below us (seniors) adds a lot to our secondary. I think we have really good speed. We lost some big guys (to graduation), but we improved with a good amount of speed that should make up for the lack of size.”

With these two talented classes combined, Ripon is challenging some heavyweights to get ready for league. On slate are four teams that made the playoffs last year in Livermore, Placer, Tracy and Pitman.

“I’m excited for the challenge,” Shaw said. “We like the hard games, and it’s going to be more difficult this year. Tracy is a really good program, but so are Placer and Livermore. It’s going to help us get ready for that tough TVL schedule.”



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NEW DAY FOR KNIGHTS



Ripon Christian tackling tougher schedule with 22-man roster

By JONAMAR JACINTO
THE BULLETIN

With a senior-dominated roster, the Ripon Christian had more depth than usual with nearly 30 players to start the 2025 season.

And for the first time under coach Phil Grams, who is entering his seventh year at the school, there wasn't a need to have sophomores on the initial roster.

If there was a time to make a splash against its larger public-school rivals, this was it.

In their second year back in the tradition-rich Trans Valley League, the Knights not only proved that they belong. They proved capable of outmuscling some of the heavyweights long known for their physical play.

The unconquerable foil was Sonora, the two-time state champion responsible for two of the 10-3 Knights' losses — including a 56-18 lambasting in the Sac-Joaquin Section Division VI final that quickly got out of hand after two prominent players went down with injuries.

Despite the anticlimactic end, Ripon Christian changed how it was perceived. No longer was it the tiny school that could. Among their many highlights was a thrilling 52-49 road win over previously-undefeated Liberty Ranch in the semifinals.

Eleven players were selected to the All-Trans Valley League team, though all of them seniors. Ten of them were two-way players.

The next senior class recognizes there is much to live up to, but it's also eager to step outside the shadow cast by its predecessor.

"We have some big shoes to fill," senior captain Tom Giulian said. "We've done really well in the TVL the past few years, we just have to keep the legacy going. We're starting to settle in the TVL; it's not something new anymore."

"We do have a smaller roster, which could be a worry, but we pulled up three sophomores and we have full faith in them. We

may lack depth, but all the positions are filled with good players."

It's back to the Ripon Christian of old, with just 22 players going into its opener at Summerville. The future looks more promising depth-wise with 34 underclassmen in the program.

For now, the Knights are embracing the role of underdog as they grind through daunting week-to-week schedule.

"I think people will overlook us, for sure," senior Josiah Van Vliet said. "There are a few seniors coming back who got a lot of playing time last year, and we have a great incoming junior class, too. I think we can be a problem for any team we play in any given night."

The offensive and defensive lines may be where RC has the least depth, but they're also the most experienced position groups on the team. Grams said the offense will go as far as the line takes it.

Mainly a defensive end last season, Giulian got some time as a back-up on the interior of the O-line. He'll be a full-time starter on both sides, serving as the quick guard.

Center Jeremy Molloy and strong-side tackle Myles Pollard are the lone returning starters on offense. Junior Jarret Van Laar adds some needed bulk at 6-foot-4, 258 pounds.

"Our strength is the offensive line," Grams said. "We have four really solid guys on that line. If we can find a fifth starter somewhere out of our juniors and a couple seniors, we're going to be in good shape. We feel good about the offensive line."

Taking over behind center is the 6-2, 185-pound Van Vliet, who played outside linebacker last year while third-year varsity starter Mason Tameling commanded the fly offense at quarterback.

He played the position for two years at the lower levels and was efficient in his few varsity reps as a junior.

"Josiah just loves football and loves to work," Grams

KNIGHTS AT A GLANCE

- **2025:** 4-2 Trans Valley League, 10-3 overall; Sac-Joaquin Section Division VI finals
- **HEAD COACH:** Phil Grams, seventh year
- STAFF: Steve Anastasio (DL/OL), Jake Beukelman (DC), Zack Brouwer (OL/DL), Steve Clark (QB), Jordan Goslinga (Assistant HC), Oliver Pryor (weight training), Jared Stuit (DB), Fred Bunnell (JV HC).
- **ALL-TVL RETURNERS:** None.
- **Others to Watch:** RB/DB Jax Booth, Jr.; DE/OLB/G Tom Giulian, Sr.; C/DL Jeremy Molloy, Jr.; DT/T Myles Pollard, Sr.; QB/OLB Josiah Van Vliet, Sr.

said. "I think we're going to be in good hands there."

A two-year starter as an underclassman in baseball, the 6-3, 180-pound Stadler Postma serves as Van Vliet's back-up after playing QB for the JV team. Grams will make use of his size and athleticism at wide receiver.

Running back Jax Booth and receiver Talen Tameling are other juniors expected to make immediate contributions at the skill positions. Both were called up for the postseason last year, though Booth had to play a few varsity games earlier because of injuries to upperclassmen.

Joining Booth in the backfield is senior Brayden Hughes, a powerful 5-10, 191-pound fullback making his return after bowing out with a season-ending knee injury two weeks into the 2025 campaign. Senior Mason Clark assumes the flyback role.

"I really like our receiving corps this year," Van Vliet said. "We're young with new juniors who are great athletes on the outside and the slot. We have a couple juniors in the backfield who are very explosive runners. I'm not too worried about our offensive production. I think we'll be able to go out and put up some numbers every week."

All of the aforementioned players will also feature on defense, although Van Vliet is likely to focus more offensively as quarterback.

Sophomore Jeremiah Lambdin is an intriguing two-way prospect. The 6-4, 199-pound athlete will play

mores playing up to provide depth.

"We don't have too many returners (on defense), but there are some great athletes coming up," Giulian said. "Stadler Postma has size and speed playing rover for us, and we'll have good size on the D-line with Myles and Jeremy as tackles. We did pretty good in 7-on-7s, so I think our defense has been on par with where we were the past two years. There isn't anything I'm worried about."

It all just comes down to health for this band of 22, which came up with "Bound in Brotherhood" as its theme for the season. Though small in numbers, it's a close-knit group of student-athletes that grew up together at school and sports.

Maintaining health will be a challenge as the Knights navigate a difficult schedule. They'll be well tested by the time they get to league, getting reacquainted with the likes of Mother Lode League powers Calaveras and Summerville, which each have a state championship in the last two years.

Ripon Christian has also added large-school opponents coming off playoff berths in Stagg (8-3) and Pioneer (7-4).

"With 22 guys, it's going to be about staying healthy," Grams said. "Last year, it was nice to have backups for the first time in the history of our program. It's back to the old days where we'd have 20-22 every week."

"Having a good offensive line helps in the TVL, and we're going to have to run the ball."

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