



Hornets Aim to Finish Strong in 2025

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHELSEA HIGH SCHOOL QUARTERBACK CLUB

BY LOYD MCINTOSH

After two years in the mismatched world of 7A football, Chelsea returned to 6A—where they belonged all along—and rebounded with a 6-5 record in 2024. On paper, it was a vast improvement over the two 7A seasons in which Hornets went 3-17; but the reality isn't that simple.

The Hornets jumped out to one of the hottest starts in school history, winning their first six games, including routs over area rivals Calera (56-28) and Chilton County (35-6), and out-of-area teams Mobile Christian (24-3) and Paul Bryant (49-12). However, the good guys finished the season with a rough stretch, dropping their final four regular-season contests and losing in the first round of the AHSAA playoffs to Saraland, 42-4.

However, as kickoff to the high school football season nears, Head Coach Todd Cassity is more than optimistic about the 2025 squad. With six starters returning on offense, seven on defense, and a staggering total of 30 seniors suiting up for Chelsea, Hornet Stadium is going to be the place to be Friday nights this fall.

"This is a group that's got a lot of veteran leadership," said Cassity. "This group is a lot more mature, a little bit of an older group, and I think that will allow us to hopefully be deeper in the playbooks and do some things that we have not been able to do the past few years."

Cassity says the offense is loaded with great depth at the skilled posi-

tions of wide receiver, tight end, and running back. He believes they have the potential to put some big numbers on the scoreboard like they did in 2024, with 56 points over Calera, a 49-spot over Paul W. Bryant, and 35-plus points over Pelham and Chilton County.

Many football coaches will tell you that an offense's success begins with the quarterback position. Who will the Hornets' starting gunslinger be in 2025? Cassity says your guess is as good as his. At the time of this writing, Cassity says they are blessed to have several athletes vying for the starting spot.

"We're trying to figure out our quarterback situation," said Cassity. "We have three really good candidates and we're just trying to figure out which one is going to fit best, and, honestly, at this point, if we started the season today, all three would probably play."

Making a run for the starting QB role are juniors Grant Propst, the Hornets' backup in 2024 and a standout on the baseball team, and Logan Strunk, a 6-foot, 3-inch transfer from Pelham, "your prototypical pocket pass guy," Cassity said. Also in the mix is sophomore Hudson Picklesimer, also standing at 6 feet, 3 inches with tremendous athletic ability who, Cassity says, may help open up more options in the running game.

While Cassity won't say which athlete will start in the season opener against Charles Henderson, he says all three will see significant action throughout the season in some unique ways.



"We seriously might use all three in the same games," he said. "They're all different type players, so it's not like they fit the same mold. It's not a bad problem to have as long as they all understand their roles, and I feel like we can do some different things with each guy."

The platoon of quarterbacks will have plenty of talented players to throw the ball to, with, according to Cassity, eight capable guys in the wide receiver position. Among this group are veterans Turner Simpson, a dynamic senior, and Jack Flowers, a 6-foot, 3-inch junior with exceptional athletic ability. Cassity is also bullish on TJ Spell, a sophomore whom Cassity says is one of Chelsea's best route runners and has an uncanny ability to get into open space.

"We have five more that are ready to step up and play whenever given the opportunity," said Cassity, "and they will be given the opportunity."

At running back, the Hornets have Chase Malone, a 5-foot, 10-inch senior with blazing speed, and Morgan Barnes, a senior who Cassity expects to have a great year after missing action in 2024 due to a broken collarbone.

"I feel like Morgan has had the best offseason of anybody on our team," said Cassity.

On the other side of the ball, Cassity believes the linebackers and safeties are a high point on defense. Cassity says the anchor of defense is senior safety Sam Parrish, a mainstay on the varsity squad since the eighth grade. Also returning are inside linebackers Porter Schott, senior, and Briston Hardy, junior, the Hornets' tackle leaders

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in 2024, players Cassity says have developed tremendously in the offseason.

"They're just weight-room beasts," said Cassity. "They are really impressive. They both put on about 15 to 20 pounds and look really good."

Cassity also highlights the Hornets' special teams, a strong point going into the 2025 season. Returning for his senior year is Tyler Kirkland, one of the top-ranked long snappers in the state, and, according to Cassity, a perfectionist who works diligently on improving his craft.

"He gets upset if he snaps two inches to the left or right."

Handling all kicking duties is John Leith, a senior with a big leg who made an impressive showing at the 2025 Kohl's Southern Spring Showcase.

With the pieces in place, Cassity is optimistic about the 2025 season and believes the team can improve upon last season's 6-5 record. However, even with six home games in 2025, the Hornets will have to navigate one of the toughest areas in 6A with rivals Pelham, Helena, and Spain Park looming on the schedule. This offseason, Cassity has been laser-focused on one concept in particular: closing the deal.

"Something that we've focused on a lot is not just winning the first half, but also winning the second half, and that goes along with the season last year," Cassity said, referring to the Hornets' 6-0 start followed by five consecutive losses. "That's been our mindset; win the second half, and that goes for games and for the season."



CHHS FOOTBALL SCHEDULE

All games are at 7 p.m.

Aug. 22: Charles Henderson

Aug. 29: @ Wetumpka

Sept. 5: Pelham

Sep. 12: Bye week

Sept. 19: @ Calera

Sept. 26: Paul Bryant

Oct. 3: @ Chilton County

Oct. 10: Spain Park

Oct. 17: @ Helena

Oct. 24: Benjamin Russell

Oct. 30: Oak Mountain

Nov. 7: First round playoffs

Nov. 14: Second round playoffs

Nov. 21: Quarter finals

Nov. 28: Semi-finals

Dec. 4: State championship