



# FALL SPORTS PREVIEW

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# Tiger golf back in full swing

The CHS boys and girls golf teams hope to compete for district titles.

By **TONY BRITT**

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Both the Columbia High boys and girls golf teams have their sights set on capturing a district title in 2017. With a strong core of returning players, the team will have experience and skill to lead them through the season.

Krishton Neeley, Columbia Boys Golf Coach, said the boys team has three solid returners and a newcomer that should really help the team reach its goals this year. The team's seven returning players are Lance Minson (sophomore), Zane McCranie (senior), Drew Minson (senior), Chas Cribbs-Hill (sophomore), Dylan Cannon (sophomore), Tyler Yaxley (sophomore) and Trey Rossignol (senior).

"We're going to be scrappy," Neely said. "But if we work hard, we're going to be good."

Neeley said the team's top four players are "pretty loaded" and the other six guys can make a match at any given time.

"We're really going to battle it out and that's good for the sport," he said. "Competition is good."

Neeley said he would like to win district with this year's boys golf team.

"Ocala-Forest is the top dog in our district and I think we'll give them a run for their money," he said.

Last year's CHS boys golf team finished fourth out of eight teams in the district competition.

"I'd really like to advance to regionals this year; get into a top-three spot and I

think we will," Neeley said. "We have a solid team this year. I think this year's team is a little better than last year's team as far as consistency."

Neeley said his players appear to be up for the challenge and they're ready to get out and chase the district title.

"It's just like any other sport, you get tired of practice and you're ready to start playing other teams and doing other things beside just practice," he said.

The CHS boys golf team will play its home matches at the Country Club at Lake City this season.

Neeley said the team's key to a successful season is relatively simple.

"Our boys just have to be consistent," he said. "Last year we had boys shoot even par 36 and come out and shoot 10 over 46 the next day. We need to have that consistency to be able to move on in the district."

The CHS girls golf team is just as determined as the boys squad to make a run at a district title this year.

Todd Carter, Columbia Girls Golf Coach, has lofty expectations, which seem justified with several returning players on the team.

Tiara Carter, a junior and coach Carter's daughter, will be the team's number one seed, while Taylor Shaw, also a junior, will be the team's number two-seeded player. Carter has been shooting an average that's right around par and she's been playing on the Florida Junior Golf Tour and playing in several golf tournaments throughout the year. Carter advanced to regionals last year and is expected have another



Columbia sophomore Lance Minson lines up for a putt. Both the CHS boys and girls golf teams are aiming for improvement this season.

strong season in 2017.

The team's number 3 and 4 seeds haven't been determined yet as there is a battle between Keira Langley, a junior; Sydney Tyre, a sophomore and Nicole Dempsey, the senior captain, Carter said.

"The expectations for the season are pretty good," he said. "The main thing is with our matches, we're just working at trying to takeout the Buchholz Bobcats. All the years that I've coached, the

Bobcats of Buchholz have just always gotten new kids every year and been pretty stacked, but it looks like this year we may be able to take them out."

Carter said for the CHS girls golf team to have a successful season, they'll have to practice, practice and practice.

"We'll have a lot of work on our short games, just chipping and putting," he said, noting it doesn't do much good if you hit a drive 300 yards and miss a putt two inches short.

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# Fort White gets first girls golf team in school history

Tammy Richards will coach the inaugural team this season.

By **ERIC JACKSON**  
ejackson@lakecityreporter.com

Fort White recently named Tammy Richards as the school's first ever varsity girls golf coach.

Richards takes the role after several years developing young players as the head golf professional at nearby Quail Heights Country Club. The former all-state golfer says she wants to evaluate the team's learning curve mainly in the first season.

"It's a learning year," said Richards. "They're going to have to learn the basics because a lot of them are beginners. Learning the rules, how to swing, etiquette and all the aspects of the game. I think this year will mainly be a learning year."

The anticipation for girls golf has been brewing for quite some time at Fort White.

Five girls have already committed to playing for the Lady Indians this fall. Richards is confi-

dent that the new girls team can eventually be a competitive one.

"Just as long as they commit and practice," she said.

Fort White is set to compete against Branford, Trenton, Union, Bell, Lafayette and Newberry in District 7-1A this season. Richards' brother, Todd Carter, is the girls golf coach at Columbia. Carter is helping his sister in picking up more matches. Like Carter, Richards was a standout golfer during her time at Columbia. The 1998 junior girls state champion was the Lady Tigers' No.1 player throughout high school. Richards later continued playing at Florida Southern before embarking on her professional golf career.

After playing on the Futures Tour and other national events, the coach brings years of experience to the new golf program, both as a player and instructor. Fort White's rookie golfers could learn a thing or two from Richards, who strives to lead the Lady Indians to heights never seen before.

"She's awesome," said athletic director John Wilson. "It's not often you get a former pro as one of your coaches. She came and interviewed and I was very impressed."



FILE

Tammy Richards, the head golf professional at Quail Heights Country Club, will coach the Fort White girls varsity golf team this season.

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# Tigers on the prowl

Columbia football aims to take back the league title this season.

By **ERIC JACKSON**  
ejackson@lakecityreporter.com

Fans might want to reserve their seats – because the Tigers are ready to put on a show this season. Columbia is locked and loaded as the 2017 campaign begins.

Near the top of the list of team goals is reclaiming the league title. The Tigers are putting last season in their rearview mirror after finishing as district runners-up.

Columbia reached the playoffs for the sixth-straight season last year, but the squad was eliminated in the second round by defending district champion Robert E. Lee.

The Tigers will seek redemption when they return to Jacksonville to face Lee Sept. 15.

“You’re only as good as your last one,” said Columbia coach Brian Allen. “You look at last season, Lee was the group... We definitely have a salty taste in our mouths from that second round exit, and losing twice to them in a year. We definitely want to better. And with this new playoff system, the only ones guaranteed [playoff berth] is the district champion. We’re definitely eyeing the Week 4 matchup against Lee.”

Columbia versus Lee isn’t the only anticipated matchup on the schedule. The Tigers also hit the road to play Suwannee, Madison County and Bolles in the regular season finale. Columbia will host powerhouse Trinity Christian too.

While some players have tried not to look ahead, other Columbia players have already circled the big games on their calendar.

“Trinity, Lee, Madison, and Bolles,” said linebacker Jaylen Brown.

Columbia aims for a fifth-straight victory over Gainesville when the Hurricanes travel to Lake City for the regular season opener on Aug. 25. The Tigers look for their tenth-straight win over the Bulldogs the following week in Live Oak.

Before the contest at Lee, which



FILE PHOTOS

**ABOVE:** Columbia senior running back Teon Dollard makes a move during the spring game against Bartram Trail.

**BELOW:** Columbia sophomore wide receiver Noah Ruise breaks upfield during the Purple and Gold game.



**TIGERS** *continued on page 12*



## Putting in work

**LEFT:** Columbia senior wide receiver TJ Jones sheds a tackle during the Purple and Gold game. Jones is one of the key returners on the offense this season.

**BOTTOM LEFT:** Columbia junior quarterback Dylan Blair avoids a sack during the Purple and Gold game. Blair is set to lead the Tigers in his first season as a full-time starter.

**BOTTOM RIGHT:** Columbia sophomore quarterback Jordan Smith lobbs a pass during the spring game against Bartram Trail. Smith scored three touchdowns in the Tigers' Preseason Classic win over Raines last week. The Tigers open the 2017 regular season on Friday, Sept. 25 against the Gainesville Purple Hurricanes.

FILE PHOTOS



# Tiwahe Pride

The Fort White football team is ready to fight for a spot in postseason play.



FILE PHOTOS

Fort White quarterback Logan Altopp looks for an open receiver during last season's game against Lecanto High School. Altopp is just one of many returning players for the Fort White Indians, who are looking to earn a spot in the playoffs while facing off against a new caliber of teams.

By **TONY BRITT**

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**F**ORT WHITE - There is no football like playoff football, and the Fort White Indians have become accustomed to playing in high school football's second season.

The Indians hope to continue the tradition during the 2017 season, but this year the road to the playoffs will take a different path.

The Florida High School Athletic Association has changed its philosophy and there are no longer districts. Fort White will compete in a region with eight other teams and based on a point system, teams will be selected for the playoffs.

"We have what we think is a pretty good schedule and we've already seen how the bonus points work out," said Demetric Jackson, Fort White High School head football coach. "There is only one team in our region that has more bonus points than us and that's

Newberry."

Bonus points are based on a team's schedule and opponents who have made it to the playoffs the last two years. A team's record and their opponents records will determine how many points a team accumulates to qualify for the playoffs. At the end of the season, four teams in the region will make it to the playoffs.

"Our goal is to get back to the playoffs and hopefully make a longer run," Jackson said. "I want to do some things our school hasn't done [before]. We've made it to the second round, but we've never made it to the third round. We think we have just as good of a shot as anybody else, but we've got to stay healthy and continue to progress week-in and week-out and the ball has to bounce our way some. You've got to make your own breaks, but you've got to get the ball to bounce your way a few times."

Under the new format, teams will not know whether they've made the playoffs until the end of the season

and that's also when the teams will learn their playoff opponents.

"It's going to be a huge challenge for us, but my focus right now is to take one game at a time," Jackson said. "We play some 1A schools, but we also play some 4A and 5A schools. We even play Terry Parker, a 7A program. We have our challenges up for us, but we have to take advantage of it."

The 2017 Indians' roster has a mixture of young players as well as upper classman, all who have to meet expectations if the team wants to make a sustained playoff run.

Jackson said the team's offensive and defensive lines were the team's strong point heading into the season and their play has continued to progress through spring and summer workouts.

"They have the most experience," he said. "Right now we're throwing a lot at them and hopefully they continue to improve off of that."

The quarterback position was one of the biggest questions for Fort

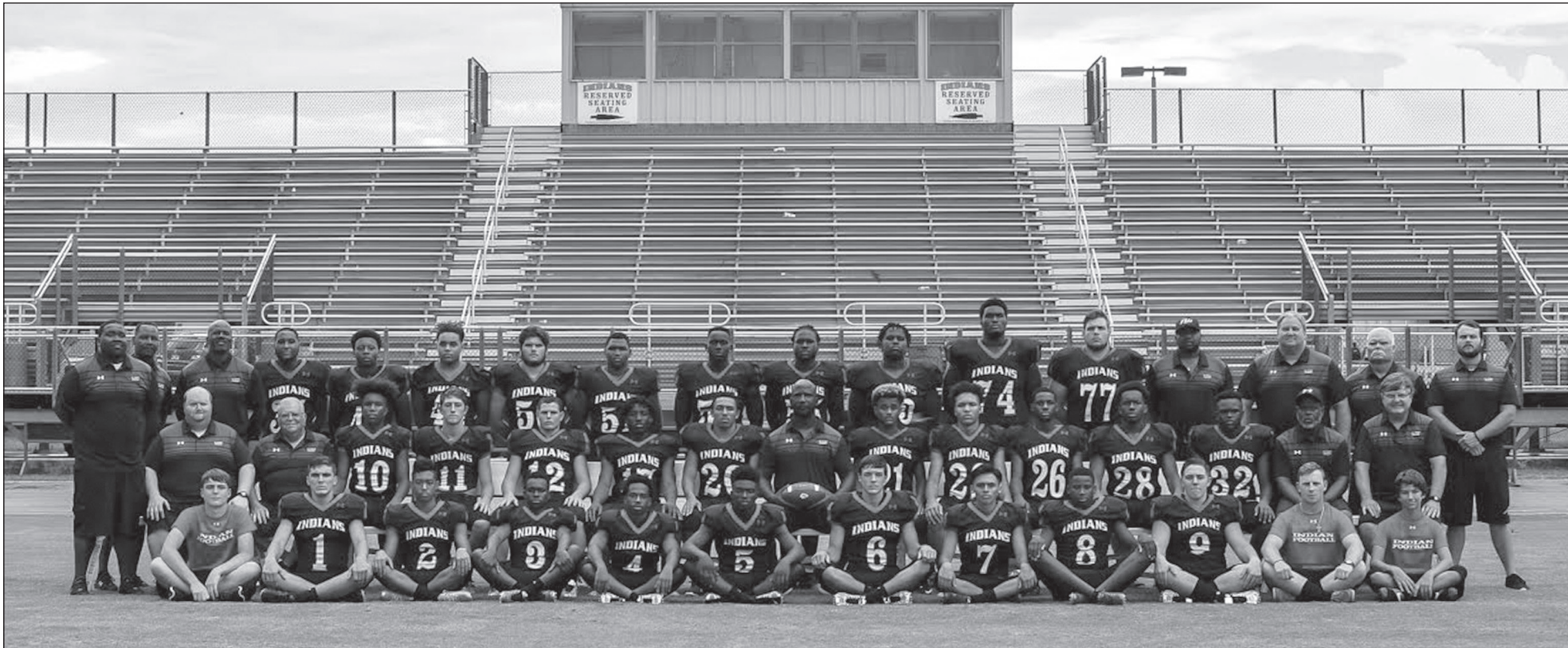
White heading into the off season, but Hunter Morgan, a senior, has accepted the challenge and taken the reins as the Indians playcaller and field general.

"Our quarterback has got to do a lot and I'm really proud of what Hunter Morgan has done," Jackson said. "He's really stepped up and picked up the offense. He's doing some great things and making some nice throws and good reads. I've just got to get him to be more vocal to be more of a leader."

Jackson said JacQuez Pelham and Corey Dryden are good running backs in the back field, following blocks from 'Big' Doug Johnson, JJ Calhoun, Matt Dimauro and others on the offensive line.

The Indians' defensive unit has been led by the outstanding play of Lowell Reed and Dylan Cason.

"We're going to give some teams a challenge, but we also realize we've got some work cutout for us and we have to be ready to go," Jackson said.



CHRISTINA FEAGIN/Special to the Reporter

Fort White's varsity football team (in no specific order): Stephen Pilkington, Deondre Cray, Rahman Paul, Kanell Stewart, Javiel Jones, Hunter Morgan, Marlon Manzanaras, Derrick Roberson, Dylan Cason, Terrance Jones, Logan Altopp, Brayden Summers, Stanley Maxwell, Corey Dryden, Deantalique Shelburne, Izaya Latham, Myles McClain, JacQuez Pelham, Kameron Calhoun, Joseph Aymond, Marquay Watkins, Thomas Williams, Declan Messer, D'Markus Johnson, Lowell Reed, Jaquan Robinson, J.J. Calhoun, Doug Johnson, Matt Dimauro.



The Indians' goal for this season is to make it back to the playoffs and make a longer run, aiming to reach the third round of play.



Fort White's JacQuez Pelham runs the ball up the field after getting a block from Doug Johnson. Both will return to the field for the Indians this season.

# Lady Indians serve up 2017 season

## Fort White's volleyball team welcomes returning starters, new talent.

By **TONY BRITT**

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The 2017 Fort White High School volleyball team started its 2017 season with high hopes and expects to make its dream of a having a winning season a reality.

"We are looking very strong," said Kali Hunter, Fort White head volleyball coach. "We have a lot of returning players in some of our major positions."

In addition to the returning players, Hunter said the team has some additions that came up from the middle school team last year and a few players who moved up from the junior varsity squad.

The 2016 Fort White volleyball team completed its season with a 5-10 record.

"We won 33 percent of our games last year, so we are hoping to improve on that this year," Hunter said. "We're in a completely different district this year and we really think we can be success-

ful in the district."

Hunter said she and her assistant coach, Tracy Sanders, haven't seen a lot of the teams in the new district because they haven't played against them.

"It will be interesting to play the first time and improve upon that when we play them later in the season," she said.

The district opponents are Taylor, Bradford, Keystone Heights, Interlachen and Newberry.

"We really think we can be competitive," Hunter said. "Even though we went up in the district — we were 1A and now we're 5A, I think we can really compete with the teams that are in there."

Rachael Steedley, a junior, who plays setter, is one of the team captains.

"She's definitely the leader of the team," Hunter said. "As the setter, you're basically the quarterback of the offense. Rachael is a great leader and gets everybody motivated and her skill level is just top-notch."

Savana Terry, a senior, is the co-captain of the team and the team libero.

"Savana is basically the leader of our defense and Rachael is the leader of our offense," Hunter said. "They compliment each other very well."

Through Hunter's preliminary assessments of the team, she said she expects the team's strong point to be its setting.

"I feel like we have one of the best setters around and we've added some really good hitters this year," she said.

Paige Dinges, a six-foot freshman, was brought up from the middle school team and is expected to have a huge impact on this year's varsity team.

"She's a really good addition and I think that's going to make our front row a strong point," Hunter said. "In the past our average height has been about 5-foot, six inches. So Paige is helping the average a little bit. She's just a freshman and we're really looking forward to seeing how she devel-

ops."

"Our outside hitters are super-solid," Hunter said. "Both of our outside hitters, are returning varsity players and they're both juniors this year. Andrea Steedley and Bailey Rossell are both solid outside hitters, both returning to varsity, so that will definitely be a strong point."

Parker Terry, who Hunter described as a defensive specialist, is also expected to sure-up the Lady Indians defense as they attempt to win a district championship.

Hunter said she looks to take advantage of serving opportunities through a number of players who have good serves.

"We have some really strong servers," she said. "We've actually been able to practice our place serving a lot this year, which is something we really couldn't do in the past. So hitting our positions and hitting our spots is going to be a strong point for this team, too."



DONNY JOINER/Special to the Reporter

Fort White outside hitter Bailey Rossell spikes the ball over a defender's hands during a volleyball match last season.



CHRISTINA FEAGIN/Special to the Reporter

Fort White's varsity girls volleyball team (in no particular order): Parker Terry, Mariah Longabach, Raven Miles, Bailey Rossell, Savana Terry, Rachael Steedley, Paige Dinges, Andrea Steedley, Shelby DuBose and Aubrey Callum. The team is led by head coach Kali Hunter.



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# Queens of the court

The CHS Lady Tigers are ready to prove that they're the team to beat this season.

By ERIC JACKSON

[ejackson@lakecityreporter.com](mailto:ejackson@lakecityreporter.com)

**A**live and full of spunk, the Lady Tigers take the floor with high hopes this season.

Columbia's volleyball team believes it has what it takes to improve on last year's eight-win campaign. Despite playing in one of the area's toughest districts, the Lady Tigers hope they can break out from the basement of the league standings.

"I think we have a stronger team," said senior RIELLY RUISE. "Most of us have played travel ball. And we're having better communication."

Columbia has opened its season with a full head of steam and sense of urgency.

"We're really gelling together," said junior MIKAYLA COLLINS.

Collins and Ruise are a part of a key core of returners which also include Hanna Hamilton, Daycee Mabile, Madyson Davis and Haley Shallar. With a handful of newcomers, including transfer Erica Faulkner, the Lady Tigers like their chances.

"It's just experience really," said Ruise. "Most of us are more experienced because we played over the summer. We have a young team, but we play with each other a lot."

For the last few months, the Lady Tigers have been building camaraderie through open gym workouts and conditioning. Columbia, this month, has practiced hard leading up to its season opener – striving to get off to a strong start in 2017.

"We want to be better than last year, and win districts," said Ruise.

In a league occupied by regional semifinalist Forest and state runner up Vanguard, Columbia seems like a long shot to claim the District 4-7A crown. But the Lady Tigers refuse to be intimidated – remaining focused on their lofty season goal.

"We're going to be the sleeper team that's going to surprise everybody," said Columbia coach TRUDY ANDREWS. "We're not saying a whole lot. We're just going to show up and let our actions speak for themselves on the court. But yeah, we've set our goals, and winning districts is one of them."

Andrews is in her first year as head coach. The former Union County coach takes over for Heather Benson after serving as Benson's assistant coach last season.

The Lady Tigers, under new direction, enter the season with a different kind of swagger. A new-found confidence, they hope, takes them to them to the top.

"New team, new coach, new everything," Andrews added. "So we're building and rocking and rolling from here."



Photos by BRENT KUYKENDALL/Special to the Reporter

**ABOVE:** CHS junior Mikayla Collins spikes the ball over the net during the Lady Tiger's Purple and Gold game. **BELOW:** Columbia's Daycee Mabile sets the ball during this year's Purple and Gold game.



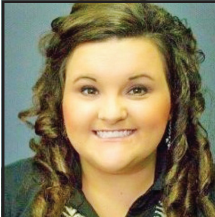


Photos by BRENT KUYKENDALL/Special to the Reporter

**LEFT:** Columbia's Madyson Davis spikes the ball over the net during the CHS Purple and Gold game. The in-house match is hosted so the team can practice playing in a game-like atmosphere before the season officially starts. **RIGHT:** CHS junior Mikayla Collins tips the ball over Erica Faulkner and Madyson Davis.




Lady Tigers' outside hitter Erica Faulkner, a transfer to CHS this year, spikes the ball over the net during the CHS Purple and Gold game.



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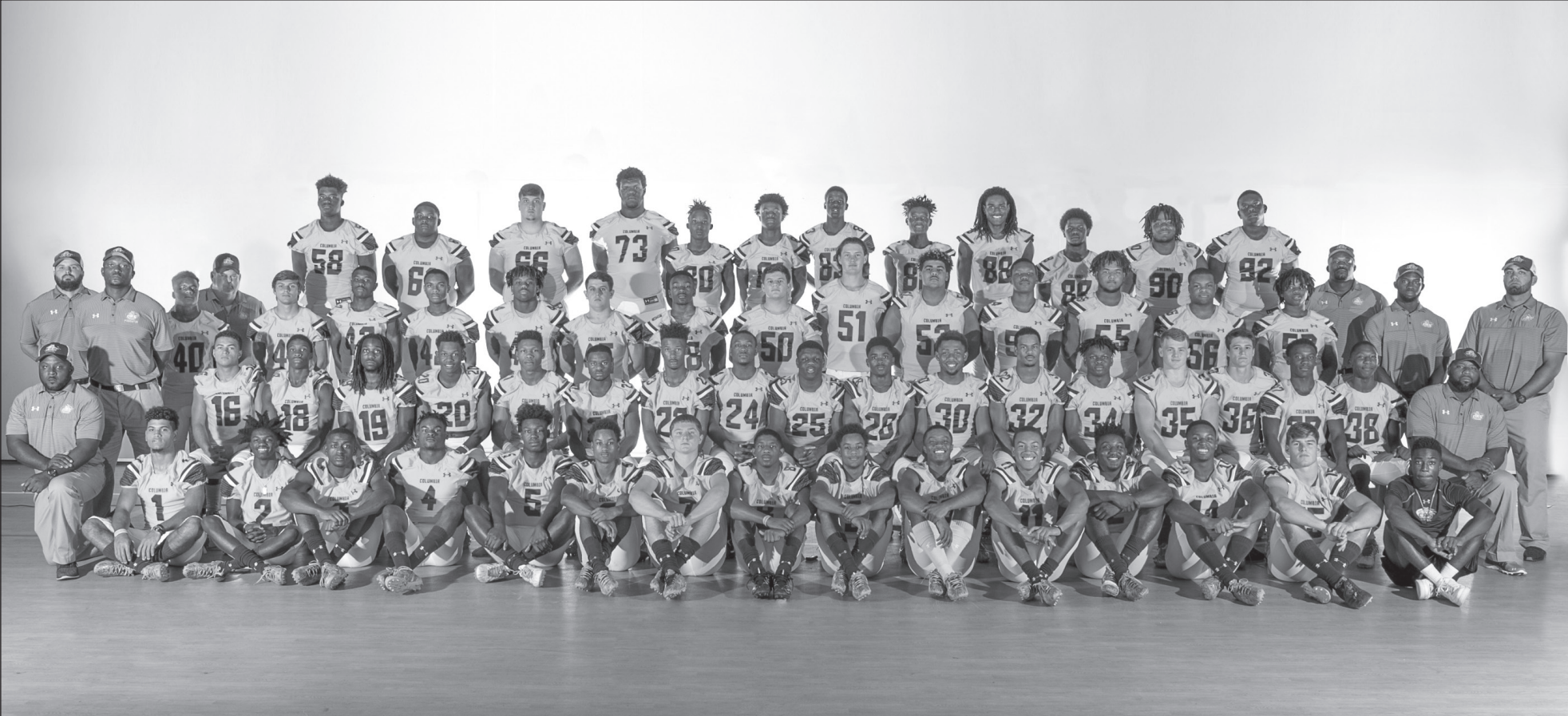
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JEN CHASTEEN/Special to the Reporter

Columbia's varsity football team (in no specific order): Nathan Maxwell, Jordan Smith, TJ Jones, SL McCall, Phillip Dorris, Ahmad Williams, Bobby Fulton, Diamonte Jones, Jai Holley, Darien McQuay, Russell Busse, Dylan Blair, Marcel Bell, Devin Johnson, Andrew Heaton, Jaylen Brown, Avery Scippio, Jamille Bullock, Ethan Umstead, SIRR Rollins, Derek Johnson, Kanell Stewart, Kylen Callum, Taurean Hill, Deondre Cray, Riley Robbins, Michael Scippio, Reggie Sharp, Dominique Jones, Teon Dollard, Lorinza Jelks, Travis Myers, Sylvester Warren, Colin Wimberly, Marlon Pollock, Larry Collins, Peyton Macdonald, Brandon Scott, Deven Gibson, Pharoah Baker, Malik Moreland, Kaden Jones, Chase Fuller, Terrick Ponds, Thomas Williams, Tyler Johnson-Jones, Timothy Ray, Colby Herring, Cody Collins, Dearion Dallas, Myles Allen, Mical Anderson, Tristen Jennings, Damien Lewis, Jevon Williams, Hunter Shoup, Gilshard Newkirk, Tracy White, Alex Green, Connor Davidson, Hunter Keen, Scott Carman, Darius Kimble, Zachary Bedenbaugh, Marvin Farmer, Silas Wright, Quincy Jones, Kylehk Williams, Marquez Bell, Lanadrick Bradley, Anthony Smith, Noah Ruise, Amarey Morrow, Willie Jernigan, Tyrese Peterson, Joshua Johnson, Daylon Lumpkin, Azende' Bryant, Darrell Brown, Edwin Thompson, Jared Frazee.

## TIGERS

*Continued From Page 4*

opens district play, Columbia hosts Buchholz (Sept. 8). The Tigers dropped last year's meeting with the Bobcats.

Following trips to Lee and Madison, the Tigers host reigning state champion Trinity Christian (Sept. 29).

Fresh off its BYE week, Columbia continues district play versus Atlantic Coast (Oct. 13.) and then travels to Jacksonville to face Fletcher (Oct. 20). The Tigers close out conference play when they host First Coast (Oct. 27).

Columbia and Bolles will finish out the regular season against each other in a heavyweight finale on Nov. 3. Inclement weather prevented last year's meeting.

"I'm excited about it because its two playoff-caliber teams getting after it

the last week of the year," Allen said. "It adds where we lost Suwannee in [Week 11], but now there's another exciting game. And it still gives you that playoff-mentality before going into the playoffs."

Columbia is set to begin its road back to the playoffs.

Behind a veteran offensive line, quarterback Dylan Blair will lead the offense which is loaded with talent at both the wide receiver and running back positions.

The woes which caused the offense to stagger early last year are behind them. The Tigers are confident their offensive attack this year will start fast and wreak havoc.

"[If] we do bad then I just need to keep my teammates up" said wide receiver Marquez Bell. "Just keep up the comfort and then hopefully everything will go good."

## CHS football 2017 schedule

**Aug. 25 - Gainesville**

**Sept. 29 - Trinity Christian**

Sept. 1 - at Suwannee

**Oct. 13 - Atlantic Coast**

**Sept. 8 - Buchholz**

Oct. 20 - at Fletcher

Sept. 15 - at Robert E. Lee

**Oct. 27 - First Coast**

Sept. 22 - at Madison County

Nov. 3 - at Bolles

*(Home games are in bold.)*



JEN CHASTEEN/Special to the Reporter

Columbia High School's 2017 Junior Varsity Team.

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# Swimming towards success

The CHS swim team enters this season with a new coach and a new routine.

By ERIC JACKSON

[ejackson@lakecityreporter.com](mailto:ejackson@lakecityreporter.com)

Swim caps on, goggles fastened, it's that time of the year again.

After officially starting fall practice last week, the Tigers are poised to open the season next week after having a successful Purple and Gold meet on Thursday.

"It's meant to get them used to competing again," Columbia coach Courtney Johns said of the annual intra-scrimmage. "Flying over each other, getting used to the order of events, really just a test-run before we go to an actual meet."

Johns is in her first year as head swim coach, replacing longtime coach Mary Kay Mathis. The Columbia alum hopes to improve the squad in areas which lacked during her four-year career on the team. And the young coach hasn't wasted any time shaking things up.

In just a couple weeks on the job, Johns has already begun putting her touches on the program. The former Columbia state finalist has taken a new approach, placing her team through dry running exercises and also installing a nutritious diet plan.

"They are logging their micro nutrients," said Johns. "We want to make sure they're eating enough and healthy...If they're not eating enough, they aren't going to get faster because they just won't have the energy. But it also will help repair their muscles because they're getting their protein. They're also going to recover faster."

It should also help in school, keeping them more focused."

Columbia is set to suit up 28 boys and girls swimmers this season. About a dozen of them are returners from last year. The Tigers will look for their experienced swimmers, like Evan Conklin and Anthony Crews, to anchor the squad in 2017.

Crews is the lone boys swimmer who made a regional appearance last season.

Johns says she also expects a handful of newcomers to make an immediate impact. Abbielle Beiter, Makenzie Conklin and Ally Mitchell are all freshmen who could be top contributors early for Columbia.

The Tigers may be young but they've got their sights set on a special season.

Columbia opens the regular season at Baker against Ridgeview.

"I'm excited," said swimmer Sammy Walker. "I'm ready to get going."



FILE PHOTOS

**ABOVE:** Members of the CHS girls swim team dive into the pool during a meet last season. **BELOW:** Members of the Tiger swim team line up and prepare to swim during practice. The CHS swim team will be led by new coach Courtney Johns this season.



# Going the distance

Columbia's cross country teams are eager for upcoming season.

By ERIC JACKSON

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With their season underway, goals set, the Tigers are ready to go the distance.

Stacked with capable newcomers and a small core of key returners, Columbia's boys and girls cross country teams are prepared for another rigorous campaign. After falling short at last year's district meet, both squads aim to further advance in 2017.

But it won't be easy. Locked in a tough district, the two teams will rely on their returners to anchor. Seniors Bridget Morse and Cassie Pierron are slated to lead the girls team this year. Both runners spent last season recovering from previous injuries, especially Pierron who is now fully healed from a nerve condition.

"Bridget is looking really good," said Columbia coach Shelli Shoup. "And Cassie is injury-free. I think this will be the first time she'll be able to run without being in pain. She went back to [running] camp with Bridget this summer. I think their hard work is going to pay off."

The girls team may be in a rebuilding state, losing runners from last year, but Shoup believes they'll still be a competitive unit despite several newbies.

"It's all really coming together," said Shoup. "The girls

that are coming out are runners – they love to run. Even [the other day] they jumped out and ran four miles without stopping. That's really exciting."

This offseason Shoup agreed to become the boys cross country coach, replacing departed coach Brad Hough. Like the girls team, Shoup also looks for the returners of the boys group to lead as they enter the season. Columbia's Burch Greene and Yassin Raffay are expected to be top contributors after strong seasons last year.

"I'm telling you our boys are going to turn some heads this season," said Shoup.

The boys team is no longer a two-man race, Shoup says. Columbia sophomores like Seth Ziegeaus and Alex McCollum, plus a couple of talented freshmen, have also reached the top of the pack during practice.

On top of the dedication shown throughout the summer, Shoup says she's been most impressed by the early leadership displayed by both Morse and Pierron.

"And Yassin and Burch are our leaders for the boys," said Shoup. "They take care of business just like the girls do. It's 104 heat index out there and they're running back and forth checking on everybody [trying] to make sure everybody's spirits are up. That's what you need for runners. In our sport, there's no halftimes, timeouts or water breaks so you need personalities like Yassin and Arvin [Marcelino]."

## Fort White sets high expectations for young runners

By TONY BRITT

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Successfully ripping and running through a cross country course and competing at a high level has become a right of passage for students on the Fort White boys and girls cross country teams.

Over the past few years the teams have been able to capture district runners-up honors, but this season the younger teams may struggle to repeat past successes.

"We're very young and mostly made up of middle-schoolers right now," said Marco Martinez, Fort White High School head boys and girls cross country coach. "I just have one senior on the team."

However, the lone senior, Sheridan Plascencia, is expected to have an outstanding season.

"She's looking good," Martinez said. "She's going to be ranked in the Top 50 in our district."

The Fort White Cross Country teams placed second in district two years in a row, despite the fact that most of the runners were youngsters — several were in middle school.

"I'm hoping this year's team can pull it out," Martinez said.

Despite the teams' past successful records, Martinez doesn't plan to heap a lot of pressure on this year's teams to duplicate the successes of the past teams.

"If we can be a top-three team and make it to regionals, I'll be satisfied with that," he said. "In the past years I expected at least a runners-up trophy, but this year I'm kind of being more realistic. If we can place top-three, that's going to be a surprise on the upside. With this young of team, we're just going into the season with realistic expectations."

Martinez said the key to having a successful season for both the boys and girls teams, will be for the middle schoolers to put in the work and improve throughout the season from meet to meet.

"That's always a dilemma with having such young kids and not enough upperclassmen to pull them along," he said. "The key is going to be how well our young runners do."



FILE PHOTOS

Columbia cross country runners Bridget Morse (left), Burch Greene (center) and Cassie Pierron are expected to lead this year's boys and girls cross country teams as some of their top runners.

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