GAMEBREAKERS

Good Luck This Season!
to all our high school teams! May you have a successful football season and school year!

Ricardo Rodriguez
Your District Attorney
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- Joel Martinez

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# 2019 ECISD Varsity Football Schedule

### Edinburg High School

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>VS</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Harlingen South</td>
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<td>*Oct. 18, Fri.</td>
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<td>*Nov. 1, Fri.</td>
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<tr>
<td>*Nov. 8, Fri.</td>
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### Edinburg North High School

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<td>Sept. 19, Thurs.</td>
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*District Games

It is the policy of Edinburg C.I.S.D. not to discriminate on the basis of sex, age, handicap, religion, race, color, or national origin in its educational programs. Es poliza del Distrito Escolar de Edinburg el no discriminar por razones con base en sexo, edad, raza, color, origen nacional, ni descapacidad dentro de sus programas educacionales.
GO WOLVERINES

PSJA MEMORIAL
Early College High School

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Walk-ins welcome! Minimal wait time!
11 Games to Watch

Can't-miss matchups around the Valley in 2019

Mission Veterans vs. Mission High
Friday, Aug. 30, 7:30 p.m.
Kicking off Week 1 is The Battle of Conway as inner-city rivals Mission Veterans and Mission High meet in non-district action at Tom Landry Stadium. The Patriots and Eagles are 5-5 in their last 10 meetings, but Mission High holds a 212-174. The Eagles took last year's battle 24-12, but there are new starters at quarterback on each side coming into this one. Sophomore Jeremy Duran will lead the Eagles against sophomore Ricky Reyna, who is taking place of the graduated Landry Gilpin for the Patriots offense. Mission High also beat Mission Veterans twice over the summer in 7-on-7 action, but now they'll have to do it with pads on. Other Week 1 matchups to see include Brownsville Hanna at McAllen Memorial and La Joya Palmview at La Joya High.

Edinburg Vela at Brownsville Hanna
Thursday, Sept. 5, 7 p.m.
A Week 2 meeting between two teams who reached the third round of the playoffs in 2018? Yes, please. The Sabercats and Eagles are set to clash in non-district action for the second year in a row. Edinburg Vela prevailed 35-20 last season, but this time, the Sabercats must go on the road into Brownsville Hanna's house.

Edinburg Vela at McAllen Memorial
Friday, Sept. 13, 7:30 p.m.
Week 3's Game of the Week will be doozy when two of the Valley's winningest programs in the past decade collide. The Sabercats return one of the area's highest scoring offenses and one of its stingiest defenses, while the Mustangs will enter this matchup with one of the most prolific, high-scoring offenses in the Valley and a much improved defense. Vela topped Memorial in one of the top non-district matches last season, but McAllen Memorial will be looking to avenge that loss on the road this year with a renewed focus on its passing attack.

Rio Grande City at Mission Veterans
Friday, Sept. 20, 7:30 p.m.
First-year head coach Leo Mireles leads the Rio Grande City Rattlers against the defending 16-5A DI champion Mission Veterans Patriots. The Rattlers are a team confident they can shake things up and compete with the big dogs in their 10-team district.

McAllen Memorial at Mission High
Friday, Sept. 27, 7:30 p.m.
This Week 5 matchup between the Eagles and Mustangs could determine an early favorite in the first week of district play. Both teams have established running attacks led by Campbell Speights and the two-headed monster of Tito Moronta and Andrew Maldonado. With two of the best defenses in District 30-6A, this clash could be determined by quarterback play between Mission's freshman-faced sophomore Jeremy Duran and McAllen Memorial's much-improved Joseph Lara. One thing is for certain, these two squads should light up the scoreboard in a good old fashioned shootout.

PSJA North vs. PSJA High
Friday, Oct. 4, 7:30 p.m.
This rivalry game will be one of the fiercest throughout the Valley in 2019. The Raiders return one of the area's top quarterbacks in Izaiah Rangel while the Bears transition quarterback Justin Morales back to the position from wide receiver. Both should be true dual threat options in pass-happy offenses. Last year PSJA High and PSJA North were two of the top three defensive teams in District 30-6A and put on a 10-7 game in favor of the Bears, but expect a shootout with plenty of big plays this time around.

Weslaco High at Edinburg Vela
Thursday, Oct. 10, 7 p.m.
In last year's game between the Sabercats and Panthers, Weslaco High jumped out to a 7-0 lead, but Edinburg Vela fought their way back for a 17-7 win. These are the top two talented teams in 31-6A as the winner will have the inside track at claiming a district championship.

Sharyland Pioneer vs. Sharyland High
Friday, Oct. 18, 7:30 p.m.
It's the fifth Snakeskin Classic in Week 8 as Sharyland High and Sharyland Pioneer get together for their annual meeting. This game always seems to come with district title implications as the Rattlers win over the Diamondbacks last year handed Sharyland High the crown. A last-second field goal from Sharyland High gave the Rattlers a thrilling 38-37 win last season to take a 4-1 series lead against Pioneer in the Snakeskin Classic. It's always a high-scoring affair when these two get after it on the football field, and one should be no different.

Brownsville Pace at Mission Veterans
Thursday, Oct. 24, 7 p.m.
Mission Veterans is reloaded and out to defend its district title in 2019. One of their biggest challengers will be Brownsville Pace who has starting quarterback Jose Banda back behind center. Mission Veterans won last year's contest 48-35.

Weslaco High vs. Weslaco East
Friday, Nov. 1, 7:30 p.m.
A Week 10 rivalry game between Weslaco High and Weslaco East sets up to be must-see action. Two points separated these teams the last time they met as Weslaco High walked away with the 23-21 victory. Expect a slugfest each time the Panthers and Wildcats meet, especially late in the season with district title and playoff implications on the line.

Edinburg Vela at Weslaco East
Friday, Nov. 8 7:30 p.m.
Edinburg Vela blanked Weslaco East last season 21-0, but Ramsey Vasquez and the Wildcats will be out to get their revenge. In the final week of the season, the Sabercats and Wildcats will go at it as Weslaco East hopes to take down the defending District 31-6A champions.
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McAllen High School
BULLDOGS

Moore Es Más

4900 N. 10th St. Suite F3
McAllen, Texas 78504

1-888-56-MOORE
2019-2020
WESLACO EAST WILDCATS

Good Luck to All Teams!

Pol. Adv. pd. for by the David Fuentes Campaign, David Martin - Treasurer, PO Box 91, Weslaco, Texas 78599

COMMISSIONER PCT 1
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
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Running wild: top rushers dominate 30-6A

BY ANDREW MCCULLOCH
STAFF WRITER

They rush to the outside and down the middle, along the sidelines and between the tackles. They’ll run it from the backfield and behind center, from handoffs, options, pitches and scrambles. They’ll dash around defenders and run right over them too, spinning, trucking, juking and high-stepping their way to the end zone.

The eight teams in District 30-6A have earned a reputation as the Valley’s most vaunted and feared rushing attacks. These elite offenses are led by some of the quickest, most elusive athletes in the area, each with his own distinct style and unique abilities.

“I would say in our district the most loaded position is probably running back and it seems like everyone you play it’s like ‘man they have another back,’” Mission High head coach Koy Detmer said. “You’re always having to tackle a quality back. It’s one of those types of districts and it’s challenging on a defense because every week you’re facing a quality running back.”

The Eagles will have one of the top running games in the district this year under Detmer, thanks to their two-headed monster in the backfield. Senior Tito Moronta and junior Andrew Maldonado make up the area’s most dominant duo on the ground.

Moronta and Maldonado combined for 1,467 yards and 16 touchdowns on the ground in 2018. The duo provided Mission High with 133.4 rushing yards per game, and their versatility allowed the team’s pro-style offense to be multiple in its approach.

“We’ve got two really top-of-the-line guys in Andrew and Tito and we really feel that they’re interchangeable for each other in that way. They both are really good ball carriers, strong physical guys with speed,” Detmer said. “They make it really fun for game planning and play calling because they’re capable of doing a lot of things.”

PSJA North senior quarterback Iziaah Rangel and sophomore running back Isaac Gonzalez make up another talented tandem of rushers. Gonzalez was a breakout star as a freshman, rushing 935 yards, 12 touchdowns and a staggering 8.2 yards per carry.

Rangel, meanwhile, shined in his first season playing for the Raiders recording 1,707 yards and 15 touchdowns with his arm and 1,336 yards and six scores with his legs, making him one of the Valley’s most dangerous dual threat signal callers.

“It opens up a lot for me because if the running isn’t open, I’m passing, and if I’m passing, then the running (lane) is open,” Rangel said. “It allows us to add a lot.”

PSJA High quarterback Justin Morales should emerge as a second, equally dangerous dual threat option. Morales, who played wide receiver last season, has elite speed and should add a dimension to the Bears’ pass-happy offense along with JR Vasquez, who ran for 754 yards and 11 scores in 2018.

“A lot of defenses when they go against their own (district) teams, they’re just used to seeing the run. But when they see us on Friday nights, there’s a lot of passing and it kind of throws them off guard a little bit.”

But the two single most dangerous, tough-to-tackle ball carriers throughout the district are La Joya High’s Eddie Villarreal and McAllen Memorial’s Campbell Speights.

Villarreal was a one-man wrecking ball in the Coyotes’ backfield last season and was the lynchpin in their triple option, flexbone scheme. The senior powered La Joya High last season with 1,623 yards and 22 touchdowns on the ground, while toting the ball a district-high 252 times.

His physicality and 5-foot-9, 210-pound frame make him virtually unstoppable running between the tackles and his breakaway speed and athleticism make him difficult to bring down in the open field.

“I’m just a bulldozer. I run over people,” Villarreal said. “I’m not fancy, I just run straight. My coaches tell me not to dance a lot and just run straight forward.”

He’ll be aided tremendously by the plethora of slotbacks at the Coyotes disposal, including Anselmo Davila, Raymond Villegas and Alejandro Hernandez.

“It’s just a run-hard offense, that’s all we have (in this district),” Villarreal said. “Just run hard and that’s what defines us – all of us – because we all run, every team runs the ball hard.”

McAllen Memorial’s Speights, however, may be the most game-changing talent at the district’s most stacked position.

A four-year varsity starter, Speights has tallied 4,973 yards, 73 rushing touchdowns, 28 100-yard games and a 7.7 yards per carry average through his high school career. The Navy commit lead the district last season in rushing yards (1,832) and touchdowns (29).

He has exceptional moves and quickness that help him shed would-be tacklers with ease, and his game-breaking speed means that once he hits the open field, it’s off to the races.

“I’m the type of back who will do whatever it takes to get a couple of yards,” Speights said. “I can make you miss or just run through you.”

Two other McAllen running backs could be poised for breakout seasons too in McAllen Rowe’s Lorenzo Lopez and McHi’s Troy Martinez. Both should have opportunities to excel in their first season as starters, as the position will become as valuable as ever in the near future.

“I think as a position, it’s growing,” Speights said. “I definitely think the running back position is going to be valued a whole lot more in these next coming years.”
U.S. Congressman
Vicente Gonzalez

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**Players to watch in District 30-6A**

**Jeremy Duran, QB, Mission High**
Duran burst onto the scene as the breakout star of the 2018 season in District 30-6A. In seven games as the primary signal caller and limited appearances in four, the then-freshman threw for 1,465 yards and 14 touchdowns to just four interceptions. His 67.9 completion percentage and 115.9 quarterback rating were both tops in the district, and the last time he took the field, he played the best game of his young career. In a playoff loss to Laredo United, Duran completed 23-of-37 passes for 364 yards and four touchdowns through the air. It offers a tantalizing glimpse into what could be a monstrous sophomore season with offensive weapons in 6-foot-3, 245-pound tight end Rey Garcia, playmaking wide receiver Stevie Villarreal and the two-headed monster in the backfield of Tito Moronta and Andrew Maldonado.

**Justin Morales, QB, PSJA High**
Morales racked 389 yards and five touchdowns as a wide receiver last year, but will make the transition over to quarterback for his senior season. He’ll have to replace one of the area’s top signal callers in Trey Guajardo, who threw for a district-high 3,371 yards and 32 touchdowns. But Morales led the Bears to winning seasons as a quarterback on the freshman and JV squads and should thrive in their pass-happy offense. He’ll be bolstered by an elite trio of speedy wide receivers in Miguel Flores, Marco Guajardo and Ethan Castillo. Flores and Guajardo were the two leading receivers in District 30-6A a year ago, and along with Castillo they combined for 2,602 receiving yards and 27 touchdowns through the air. Expect Morales and his veteran receiving corps to put up big numbers again in 2019.

**Seven Sanchez, DB/WR, PSJA North**
Sanchez was one of the area’s biggest defensive playmakers last year and all signs indicate that should continue in 2019. The two-way senior spent most of his time on the field at defensive back, where he racked up 109 tackles, 16 tackles for loss, eight sacks and three interceptions. He was tabbed by Dave Campbell’s Texas Football as the district’s preseason defensive MVP, and he’ll likely be asked to produce even more, surrounded by a young defense. The Raiders return four other starters to their 4-2-5 defensive scheme, which should give Sanchez lots of playmaking opportunities. He’ll be aided up front though by defensive tackle Joel Iracheta and linebacker Aaron Alvarez, who had 100 tackles and 18 sacks last season. Don’t be surprised if he contributes on offense too, as he added 322 yards and two touchdowns as a wide receiver in 2018.

**Campbell Speights, RB, McAllen Memorial**
Speights might have the most raw talent of any individual player in the district this year. The senior workhorse back has accumulated 4,973 rushing yards, 73 touchdowns on the ground, 7.7 yards per carry average and 28 100-yard games in 34 games played over the course of his first three years on varsity. He’s coming off a season with district highs in rushing yards (1,832) and touchdowns (29). The Navy commit is poised to have an even bigger final year behind a seasoned offensive line and with senior quarterback Joseph Lara. Lara appeared in seven games last season and will expand the Mustangs passing game this year with some game experience under his belt. The extra space should be beneficial for Speights, who could very well top the 2,000-yard threshold for the first time in 2019.

**Eddie Villarreal, RB, La Joya High**
No player will be more valuable and integral to his team’s success this season than Villarreal. He was the focal point of the Coyotes’ ground-and-pound offense in 2018. He had more carries (252) than any other player in the district last season en route to racking up 1,623 yards on the ground and 22 touchdowns. His 162.3 yards per game and 6.4 yards per carry make him a nightmare for coaches to game plan against. The 5-foot-9, 210-pound senior can run hard between the tackles, but he’s just as effective as a playmaker in the open field. Villarreal can best be described as an aggressive runner who will use his superior size and strength to bowl over defenders and run right into the teeth of opposing defenses. With a pair of inexperienced quarterbacks vying to start, expect his carries and production to increase.
District 30-6A preview

La Joya High

Coach: Reuben Farias, 4th year
2018 record: 7-4
Last playoff appearance: 2017
Returning starters (O/D): 6/5
Returning lettermen: 14
Key players: RB Eddie Villarreal; LB Josue Bermea; SB/DB Raymond Villegas; OL Alex Rodriguez; LB Danny Salinas; OL Remi Duran; SB/DB Nelson Camero; DB/SB Salvador Camona

2019 Outlook: The Coyotes ran the table in non-district play in 2018, but ran into trouble with their district schedule, losing a few tight games down the stretch and narrowly missing out on a playoff berth. The bread and butter of La Joya’s offense this year will again be their rushing attack spearheaded by senior running back Eddie Villarreal. He ran for 1,623 yards and led the district in carries a season ago, but a talented offensive line led by Rodriguez and Duran should give him plenty of big holes. He’ll be joined by slotbacks Salvador Carmona, Nelson Camero and Raymond Villegas in La Joya’s triple option, flexbone offense, taking the lead with an undecided starter at quarterback. The key to its offense will be how effectively the team can throw downfield and spread out the defense. The Coyotes defense is young, but Danny Salinas (seven sacks) and Josue Bermea (40 tackles) bring veteran leadership at linebacker. They’ll need some help along the defensive line, but a young secondary led by Camero has shown flashes of potential early. If the Coyotes can figure out an effective option behind center and build a tough young defense around their four returning starters, they should be playoff bound this time around.

La Joya Juarez-Lincoln

Coach: Tomas Garcia, 8th year
2018 record: 0-10
Last playoff appearance: 2016
Returning starters (O/D): 8/5
Returning lettermen: 15
Key players: QB Josh Briones; WR Luis Flores; RB/S Jose Marquez; DB Albert Batres; WR Isaac Villanueva; DL Mark Guerrero

2019 Outlook: The Huskies had a rough season in 2018, failing to win a game while also suffering tremendously from the injury bug. Their starting quarterback went down with a season-ending injury in Week 3 last year, which led to then-junior Josh Briones taking over as the team’s primary signal caller. Now entering his senior year, Juarez-Lincoln expects Briones to take a big step up now with game experience and a full offseason as the squad’s primary signal caller under his belt. But the Coyotes were bitten badly by the injury bug again during preseason camp. Linebacker Kenth Hernandez — who was set to be the leader of the defense and the team’s best returning starter with 70 tackles and three sacks in 2018 — tore his ACL in a non-contact drill early in the preseason, ending his year. That leaves Juarez-Lincoln with just four returning starters to a unit that struggled at times. Defensive lineman Mark Guerrero will have to lead the charge in puncturing opposing offensive lines while defensive back Jose Marquez and safety Albert Batres (55 tackles, two interceptions) will be the veteran leaders in an otherwise inexperienced secondary. Offensively, the Huskies will likely utilize a three-or four-man rotation at running back. Briones will be surrounded by wide receivers in Luis Flores, a two-time district and defending area champion in the high jump, a game-breaking talent on the outside with his 6-foot-3 frame and athleticism, while Isaac Villanueva is a burner with exceptional speed.

McAllen High

Coach: Patrick Shelby, 1st year
2018 record: 2-8
Last playoff appearance: 2017
Returning starters (O/D): 4/7
Returning lettermen: 28
Key players: FS Jackson Helmcamp; DE Cirr Arredondo; CB David Chiquito; TE Ed Castillo; LB Trace Gagne; RB Troy Martinez; WR Aldo Morin

2019 Outlook: McAllen High will be hoping for a bounce-back season under first-year head coach Patrick Shelby after a rollercoaster 2-8 finish in 2018. Shelby comes over to McHi for his first head coaching job after spending the past few seasons at Weslaco High as the offensive coordinator. He’ll bring a winning track record and his spread offense to a Bulldogs program in need of some consistency on the offensive side of the ball. Running back Troy Martinez and tight end Ed Castillo will be McHi’s two primary playmakers. Martinez, an elusive back, should fit nicely in the Bulldogs new spread attack as a pass catching back, while Castillo is a big physical tight end that can block well in both the run and pass game while also being a deep threat downfield. Defensively, senior safety Jackson Helmcamp will captain an experienced defense, but shift back to the secondary after being an all-district linebacker last year. Cirr Aredando will be a pass-rushing force at defensive end, while Trace Gagne and Jordan Lopez anchor an experienced linebacking corps. The big question for McHi will be who emerges from an on-going quarterback battle. Senior Robert Armandor and junior Felipe Magana have been auditioning for the starting job after both enjoyed successful seasons at other positions last year as all-district selections as punter and receiver, respectively. Stability at the position could see the Bulldogs thrive in their new offensive scheme.
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McAllen Memorial

Coach: Bill Littleton, 17th year
2018 record: 6-5, bi-district qualifier
Last playoff appearance: 2018
Returning starters (O/D): 6/7
Returning lettermen: 17
Key players: RB Campbell Speights; OLB Michael Morales; C Andrew Ramos; OL Rico Rodriguez; DE Sebastian Turk; QB Joseph Lara; DB Diego Morales; S Michael Petino; S Justin Chaez

2019 Outlook: McAllen Memorial has been great for a long time now, having tallied 11 straight winning seasons. But the Mustangs will be looking to return to their winning ways in a dominant fashion after stumbling in non-district play against a trio of playoff teams and dropping two district games by a combined seven points. Running back Campbell Speights returns as the team’s primary ball carrier in his fourth year as the starter. In his decorated high school career, the senior has amassed 4,973 yards, 73 rushing touchdowns, 28 100-yard games and a staggering 7.7 yards per carry. With a strong offensive line with plenty of size, Memorial will also be looking to expand its offense with a reinforced passing attack behind senior signal caller Joseph Lara. Lara took over at quarterback in mid-October last season throwing for 407 yards, four touchdowns and four interceptions while only attempting double-digit passes once. He’ll be helped by a full offseason of work and uber athletic receiver Zyan Gregory on the outside. Defensively, linebacker Michael Morales, who’s a game changer stopping the run and dropping back in coverage, leads a defense that returns seven starters. The senior tallied 71 tackles, six tackles for loss, four interceptions and two sacks as an honorable mention all-state pick last year. Defensive backs Michael Pequeno (44 tackles, three interceptions) and Diego Villarreal (43 tackles, five tackles for loss, one interception) will hold down an improved pass defense.

McAllen Rowe

Coach: Bobby Flores, 4th year
2018 record: 5-5
Last playoff appearance: 2017
Returning starters (O/D): 5/6
Returning lettermen: 26
Key players: QB Jonas Ortiz; OL Aalok Zimmerman; LB Josiah Alonzo; RB Lorenzo Lopez; LB Derek Luna; WR David Savage; DL Erick Perales; LB Joey DeLeon

2019 Outlook: McAllen Rowe started off strong last season but lost four of its last five games in district play, resulting in a fifth-place finish and missing out on its second consecutive playoff berth. The Warriors will look to return to form under the leadership of senior quarterback Jonas Ortiz. Ortiz, a three-year varsity starter, will be one of the best returning starters at the position in the district and perhaps the most underrated too. He threw for the most yards in the league last year with 1,777, and he also ranked second in completion percentage (63.8) and touchdown passes (14). He’ll be surrounded by a bevy of playmakers in Rowe’s up-tempo spread offense, including wide receiver David Savage and running back Lorenzo Lopez. An experienced and strong offensive line centered around 6-foot-2, 275-pound senior Aalok Zimmermann.

SEE 30-6A ON PAGE 24
Best of luck, Bulldogs!

McAllen ISD
Mission High

Coach: Koy Detmer, 4th year
2018 record: 8-3, bi-district qualifier
Last playoff appearance: 2018
Returning starters (O/D): 8/6
Returning lettermen: 31
Key players: QB Jeremy Duran; RB Tito Moronta; FB Andrew Maldonado; TE Rey Garcia; LB Luis Balderas; WR Stevie Villarreal; DB Ivan Chavez; LB Justin Soto

2019 Outlook: Mission High will be a dark-horse pick to win the district outright in 2019. The Eagles bring back a ton of lettermen from last year and the most returning starters of any team in the district. Their offense should be electric with a plethora of playmakers and dangerous weapons across the field. A majority of the unit will be back for Year 2 under sophomore quarterback Jeremy Duran. Duran made waves after taking over behind center early in the season as a freshman, throwing for 1,465 yards, six 100-yard passing games and 14 touchdowns to four interceptions. He lead the district in completion percentage (67.9) and had his brightest performance the last time he took the field, completing 23 of 37 passes for 346 yards and four touchdowns in a three-point playoff loss to Laredo United. Tight end Rey Garcia and wide receiver Stevie Villarreal will be Duran’s primary receiving targets. Garcia will cause matchup problems for opposing defenses with his 6-foot-3, 245-pound frame and Villarreal’s speed and hands should make him a threat out wide and in the return game. Mission will also have a two-headed monster in the backfield with running backs Tito Moronta and Andrew Maldonado, who combined to rush for 1,467 yards, 16 touchdowns and 133.4 yards per game. On defense, linebackers Luis Balderas and Justin Soto spearhead an aggressive run defense. Defensive end Fabian Ahumada will be a dangerous pass rusher, while defensive back Ivan Chavez will hold down the secondary.

PSJA North

Coach: Marcus Kaufman, 4th year
2018 record: 7-5, area qualifier
Last playoff appearance: 2018
Returning starters (O/D): 7/5
Returning lettermen: 20
Key players: QB Iziaah Rangel; DB/WR Seven Sanchez; RB Isaac Gonzalez; DE Aaron Alvarez; OT Adrian Basaldua; OG Francisco Saucedo; DT Joel Iracheta

2019 Outlook: PSJA North might be the most well-rounded team throughout the entire district with gamebreakers at seemingly every position on the field. Zimmerman should make the Warriors one of the highest scoring offenses in the area. Linebacker Josiah Alonzo will captain a defense that returns six starters. Alonzo, a three-year starter, recorded 96 tackles, 14 tackles for loss and two picks in 2018, and can defend both the rush and the pass exceptionally well. He’ll be aided by 6-foot-2, 265-pound defensive lineman Erick Perales (43 tackles, eight tackles for loss, two sacks) up front and defensive backs Adam Alvarado and Jason Neal on one of the top defensive units in the district.

PSJA High

Coach: Lupe Rodriguez, 3rd year
2018 record: 7-4, bi-district qualifier
Last playoff appearance: 2018
Returning starters (O/D): 6/7
Returning lettermen: 39
Key players: WR Miguel Flores; WR Marco Guajardo; QB Justin Morales; DB Mario Cantu; RB JR Vasquez; WR Ethan Castillo; LB Jacob Sanchez; DB Pablo Trevino; LB Jayden Arrington

2019 Outlook: The defending district champion Bears will have a fresh face at quarterback this year, as senior Justin Morales will transition back to the position after playing as a starting receiver in 2018. He’ll have a tall task in replacing former starter Trey Guajardo, who threw for a district leading 3,371 yards — nearly doubling the second-leading passer — 32 touchdowns and 306.5 yards per game. Morales should add a dynamic to PSJA High’s offense, though, with his ability to run and be a true dual threat at the position. He’ll also be aided by a trio of super talented senior wide receivers in Miguel Flores, Marco Guajardo and Ethan Castillo. Flores and Guajardo were the two leading receivers in yardage and touchdowns last season. Together with Castillo, the trio combined for 2,602 receiving yards and 27 touchdowns through the air. The Bears offense will also be aided by senior running back JR Vasquez, who tallied 754 rushing yards and 11 touchdowns on the ground in their pass-first offense. A young offensive line could be problematic as the season progresses, but PSJA High has enough playmakers to put up a lot of points regardless. Defensively, linebackers Jayden Arrington and Jacob Sanchez can both effectively play the run and drop back in coverage. Defensive backs Pablo Trevino and Mario Cantu will have to provide veteran leadership for a secondary that’s prone to giving up big plays at times.
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Field generals in control in District 31-6A

BY RAUL GARCIA
STAFF WRITER

In the movie “Gladiator,” Gen. Maximus tells his soldiers before leading them into battle, “imagine where you will be three weeks from now and it will be so.”

Likewise, the field generals leading Edinburg Vela, Weslaco High and Weslaco East’s offense under center on the gridiron are asking their teammates to heed the same adage. To believe they can reach the third round of the postseason and beyond.

AJ SOTETOLO

Last season, AJ Sotelo led his Edinburg Vela team to a perfect 10-0 record and to the District 31-6A title while throwing for 2,133 yards, 25 touchdowns and threw five interceptions as he led the SaberCats back to the third round.

“It feels good to come out here and work with these guys every day,” Sotelo said during practice. “We know we’re a good football team, and we work like we’re a good football team.”

He said the SaberCats have all the tools they need in order to have a good playoff run and another undefeated district championship season. He said the mindset of the team is to get to the third round and beyond.

And to do that, the SaberCats are working constantly to get better.

“There is always room for improvement and never a day to rest,” Sotelo said.

Last season, Sotelo came back from an injury with a single practice under his belt.

He tore a ligament in his elbow and worked for three weeks to get healthy and clearance from the doctor to play the day before the first game of the season.

“God helped me out and I was able to get through the season perfectly fine,” Sotelo said. “He doesn’t win on his own. He receives a lot of help from his large offensive line.

“I get a lot of help from Ronnie, George, Sebastian, David and Bailey,” he said as he described his work inside the pocket. “I know I have all the time in the world, and I have those guys working in the trenches for me.”

He said without the offensive line, the SaberCats would not be as good of an offense as they are.

“With these guys, we’re able to give me a lot of time in the pocket,” Sotelo said. “They are able to set up blocks, create gaps and set up all kinds of stuff.”

RAMSEY VASQUEZ

Starting quarterback Ramsey Vasquez for the Weslaco East Wildcats not only will look to lead his team past his district 31-6A competition under center, but he will be taking care of business on defense as the team’s safety.

Last year he had three picks and this year he said he’s looking to add more to his gridiron resume.

“I’m a dual-threat. I’m going to throw the ball and run with the ball, so people won’t know what I’m going to do this year,” Vasquez said. “I’m going to be on the field all game, every game. Making plays, doing good for the team and scoring, doing whatever we can to help us win.”

When he is not looking down field for the deep pass, handing off to his running backs he’s looking for a gap to run down field.

“Our linemen make the offense dangerous,” Vasquez said. “They work day-in, day-out on shooting those hands and blocking for us.”

Vasquez knows the game so well he is comfortable floating from the quarterback, receiver and safety. Last year he was a defensive weapon for the Wildcats and this year the team is leaning on him to help lead the charge for the Wildcats on both sides of the ball for 48 minutes.

“We’re hyped and looking forward to this season,” Vasquez said. “We have big plans this season, and hopefully we can fulfill those plans.”

He comes back to the gridiron with the Wildcats looking to better their 5-5 record from last year. The Wildcats have made the playoffs five out of the past nine seasons. This year Vasquez and the crew are working extra hard to make sure they make a good run in the playoffs and not get bounced out of the postseason in the first round like last year.

“There’s good competition here in this district and I always like the competition,” Vasquez said. “It’s high school football, it’s what we’re ready for.”

JACOB CAVAZOS

The Panthers quarterback vision on the field is almost accurate when he throws the ball or hands it off to his stud running back Peyton Knuab. His vision is to win every Friday and he has the leadership and the weapons on the field to make it a reality. After last year’s 11-2 campaign, the team’s already high expectations have risen.

Cavazos and the Panthers are thinking state championship.

It’s a feat no school has completed since the Panthers neighboring rival Donna High won the ultimate prize in 1955.

“We were pretty successful last year, so we are just hoping to continue that,” Cavazos said. “We are trying to control what we can control and continue to get better every day.”

He said the goal is to come out victorious each Friday night until they can’t anymore.

Last year the Panthers went 11-2 overall and fell short in the regional semifinal, better known as the third round.

Cavazos passed for 1,430 yards last season, and threw 22 touchdown passes to only three interceptions.

“It’s not just me,” Cavazos said. “It takes the whole team to win.” Last season if Cavazos was not connecting passes with his receivers he was evading tackles running the ball. On one particular play after he handed off the ball to the running back. He caught a pass from the back for a touchdown.

The dual threat quarterback can do it all.

“I can throw the ball when I need too, I can run when I need too, and whatever the defense gives me I will just work with it,” he said.

Cavazos said he plans to fix mistakes along the way after every game.

“I will do what I can for the team and be the best version of myself that I can,” Cavazos said. “There is always pressure in this position is always there, you control an entire unit so everyone has to be on the same page.”

rgarcia@themonitor.com
Players to watch in District 31-6A

Gio Guerra, RB, Weslaco East
Weslaco East’s Gio Guerra is the perfect complement to quarterback Ramsey Vasquez in the Wildcats ground attack. Guerra comes into his junior season (656 rushing yards, four touchdowns) ready to take his game to the next level, and through two scrimmages in 2019, he’s done just that. He has displayed the ability to go around, through and over defenders, and if the Wildcats have plans on competing for the 31-6A championship, Guerra will have a lot to do with it.

Adrian Garza, WR, Edinburg High
Garza showed his versatility during his junior season (656 rushing yards, four touchdowns) ready to take his game to the next level, and through two scrimmages in 2019, he’s done just that. He has displayed the ability to go around, through and over defenders, and if the Wildcats have plans on competing for the 31-6A championship, Guerra will have a lot to do with it.

Tyler Bailey, OL, Edinburg Vela
The big man Tyler Bailey is an anchor on the Edinburg Vela O-line, leading one of the top offenses in the RGV. Bailey committed to play college ball at TCU over the summer, but he’s looking to close his high school career with the SaberCats in a big way before turning in his black and blue for black and purple. He’ll be making room for running back Kevin McKinney to run free while protecting quarterback AJ Sotelo from pass-rushers. Bailey’s size, strength and speed puts him in the conversation of best offensive linemen in the Valley.

Peyton Knaub, RB, Weslaco High
The Panthers bring a potent offense into the 2019 season headed by quarterback Jacob Cavazos, but don’t sleep on senior running back Peyton Knaub. As a junior, Knaub totaled 657 all-purpose yards to go with three visits to the end zone. Knaub and Cavazos will be a problem for opposing defenses as they combine for a dangerous 1-2 punch in the Panthers backfield.

Brandon Borrego, WR, Edinburg North
Borrego’s height as a receiver helps him against smaller defensive backs, and Edinburg North will need him to help lead the Cougars back to prominence. Borrego had nine catches and 93 yards as a junior, but his two touchdowns on the season came against Edinburg North’s toughest competition in Edinburg Vela and Weslaco High.

Isaac Mendoza, S, Edinburg Vela
Mendoza was named The Monitor’s 2018 All-Area Newcomer of the Year for his defense in the Edinburg Vela secondary. He finished third on the team in tackles with 47 and picked off two passes. Mendoza and Jaime Perez split the Newcomer of the Year title as both are back to build off a strong season. They give Vela a ballhawking presence deep that is unafraid to step stop the run.
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Coach: Joe Marichalar, 3rd year
2018 record: 0-10
Last playoff appearance: None
Returning starters (O/D): 6/7
Returning lettermen: 14
Key players: QB Brandon Escobar; LB Christian Cortinas; WR Aiden Gomez; WR Rodrigo Rodriguez; DE Jose Gandaria and DT Fabien Martinez

2019 Outlook: The Chiefs enter the season going back to basics. It’s been a rough start for head coach Joe Marichalar and the Chiefs as they look for a win entering their 2019 district campaign. The Chiefs have only won five games in program history. In the last three years the program record is 3-27. But Coach Marichalar plans to change that putting his players in positions to be successful. This will be the Chiefs second season in 31-6A after being moved up from 5A last year. The Chiefs do come back this season with more experience and stronger this season. They return six starters on offense and seven on defense and 14 lettermen. This season the Chiefs have the mindset of playing fast and fundamental. Coming back are quarterback Brandon Escobar. The team believes in their quarterback to make plays. The team will be looking to Escobar to execute in the pocket by connecting with wide receivers Aiden Gomez and Rodrigo Rodriguez for big gains and touchdowns.

Coach: Gabe Peña, 10th year
2018 record: 4-6
Last playoff appearance: 2016
Returning starters (O/D): 4/5
Returning lettermen: 25
Key players: QB Nathan Garcia; RB PJ Soto; OL David Arcos; WR Victor Salinas; LB Brandon Reya;

2019 Outlook: The Jaguars come back to the business of getting better on the gridiron as they kickoff their 2019 campaign in District 31-6A with 25 returning lettermen. The Jaguars will take the field under the leadership of head coach Gabe Peña and his spread attack offense as they work to make their first playoff appearance in three years. Quarterback Nathan Garcia returns as the starter under center. He offers a dual threat attack with his ability to pass or run the ball. Running back PJ Soto returns as the Jaguars primary rushing attack. Soto combined for 376 yards rushing and four touchdowns last year. Garcia will have a large target with his pass attack in Victor Salinas who coaches say shows a lot of promise for the Jaguars. On the defensive side the Jaguars will be led by Anibal Gomez and linebacker Brandon Reyna.
Edinburg High

Coach: J.J. Leija, 4th year
2018 record: 7-4, bi-district qualifier
Last playoff appearance: 2018
Returning starters (O/D): 4/4
Returning lettermen: 26
Key players: RB Jaime Zamora; QB Adrian Garza; AJ Treviño; WR Joshua Gonzalez.

2019 Outlook: The Edinburg Bobcats comeback to the gridiron poised to contend for a district title and another run for one of the four coveted 31-6A playoff spots. The Bobcats are led by head coach J.J. Leija. The team has 26 returning lettermen and senior leadership will be the key to guide the younger players throughout the 2019 season.

Last year the Bobcats made the playoffs for the third straight time. Their season ended 7-4 overall and 3-3 in district, four a fourth place finish in District 31-6A.

Running back AJ Treviño will fill in where Haerlin Benavidez left off last season. Adrian Garza will fill in as the lead signal caller for the Bobcats. Last season, he completed 300 yards passing and four touchdowns with only limited playing time at quarterback. Jaime Zamora returns after a successful last season where he totaled 246 yards rushing and four touchdowns. The Bobcats come back bigger, faster and stronger this season and expect to win some big football games this season.

Edinburg North

Coach: Damian Gonzalez, 2nd year
2018 record: 2-8
Last playoff appearance: 2017
Returning starters (O/D): 6/7
Returning lettermen: 35
Key players: WR Brendon Borrego; LB Malachi Ortega; RB Jacob Perales; QB Michael Rodriguez; LB JJ Rodriguez

2019 Outlook: The Cougars enter the season bigger, stronger and more experienced with 35 lettermen returning. With head coach Damian Gonzalez at the helm, the Cougars look to make some noise in District 31-6A as they work to position themselves for one of the four playoff spots. Last year the Cougars ended their season 2-8 overall and 2-4 in district. The Cougars will rely on the run-first attack with running back Jacob Perales. Returning quarterback Michael Rodriguez will have a large target in the secondary with wide receiver Brendon Borrego ready to run and complete the deep pass in the end zone. Perales rushed for 416 yards and two touchdowns last year. And on defense the Cougars comeback stronger than ever with linebackers JJ Rodriguez, Malachai Ortega and Aurelio Lozano on the other side of the ball. Strong Safety Javier Renteria will look to improve on his 53 tackles from last year as the team’s last line of defense against their opponents.

Edinburg Vela

Coach: John Campbell, 3rd year
2018 record: 12-1, regional semifinal qualifier
Last playoff appearance: 2018
Returning starters (O/D): 7/5
Returning lettermen: 41
Key players: QB AJ Sotelo; OL Tyler Bailey; WR Justin Cantu; RB Kevin McKinney; LB Eddie Salinas.

2019 Outlook: The SaberCats return to the gridiron as the two-time defending 31-6A District champions. Last season, the SaberCats plowed through the district undefeated in route to their second straight third round state playoffs appearance. Coming back leading their ground and pound style play is junior quarterback AJ Sotelo. He led the offense with 2,133 yards passing, 25 touchdown passes and averaging 125 yards passing per game. Some of the same cast of characters who helped lead the SaberCats to two consecutive trips to the third round of the playoffs are back. Also returning are wide receiver Justin Cantu, running back Kevin McKinney and offensive lineman Tyler Bailey. The SaberCats have only lost two games in their last two seasons. The team is poised to go back to business on the field and take each game one at a time while looking forward to breaking through the regional semi-final barrier simply known as the third round of the playoffs. Sotelo looks poised to lead the SaberCats back to the playoffs by hitting his targets from inside the pocket. He will lean on the offensive line to protect Sotelo while he scans the field looking for his targets.
Coach: Mike Burgett, 7th year
2018 record: 6-5, bi-district qualifier
Last playoff appearance: 2018
Returning starters (O/D): 7/3
Returning lettermen: 24
Key players: QB Ramsey Vasquez; Gio Guerra; TE Mario Trevino;

2019 Outlook: Coach Mike Berget and the Wildcats begin their 2019 campaign on the gridiron with dual threat QB Ramsey Vasquez under center. He takes over as the team’s signal caller after an impressive offensive year last season. He tallied 713 yards, 11 touchdowns and 149 yards rushing. The team has a veteran offense with big goals this season. Running back Gio Guerra returns as the team’s go-to rusher with his speed and quickness. He rushed for 656 yards last season and will be the center of the Wildcats run attack. First order of business on the gridiron is taking down their first opponent Aug. 30, Manor Mustangs, on the road. They believe if they can beat Manor they can beat any team. Last season the Wildcats ended their season 5-5 falling in the first round of the playoffs.

Weslaco High

Coach: Roy Stroman, 1st year
2018 record: 11-2, regional semifinal qualifier
Last playoff appearance: 2018
Returning starters (O/D): 9/0
Returning lettermen: 30
Key players: QB Jacob Cavazos; WR Jaden Cavazos; RB Peyton Knaub; RB Jesse Hernandez; TE Rollie Berrones; WR KJ Jones

2019 Outlook: Weslaco Panthers will enter their 2019 campaign with raised expectations. The Panthers had a nearly perfect season heading into the playoffs with a single loss on their record. They went 11-2 and lost in the regional semifinal. This year they return to the gridiron with Jacob Cavazos under center once again. Last year he threw for 1,430 yards, 25 touchdowns while averaging 95 yards passing a game.

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Gamebreakers galore in District 16-5A DI

BY BRYAN RAMOS
STAFF WRITER

In a game of inches, every move matters. Each step, from direction to execution, must be pinpoint. It’s the miniscule distance separating the outstretched hand of a corner back from a ball that lands perfectly in a receiver’s hands; it’s a well-timed trap block from a guard landing on an unsuspecting defender; it’s the swivel of the hips or a dip in a shoulder from a ball-carrier that causes a would-be tackler to whiff, resulting in a big play going to the house.

In District 16-5A DI, that execution made the Rio Grande Valley’s only 10-team district one of the highest-scoring, led by the Mission Veterans offense and Mr. Texas Football 2018 Landry Gilpin, which averaged 48 points over the course of nine games. Seven of the other nine teams posted more than 20 points per game.

But while last year is in the rearview, those same squads are reloaded and ready to fire on all cylinders, and they feel they have something to prove.

“I believe we have a lot of potential,” Mission Veterans senior receiver Mikey Garcia said. “Everyone thinks that just because Landry is gone, we’re going to flop, but it’s next man up. You have to be ready for everything and I think we’re prepared.”

The Patriots’ offense has reloaded with All-State receivers Garcia (765 yards, nine touchdowns in nine games) and A.J. Gonzaque (75 catches, 1,493 yards, 15 TDs), who combine to give new quarterback, sophomore Ricky Reyna, the top 1-2 punch to throw to in the RGV. And that’s not even getting to Danny Cantu, a complete do-it-all back who will help carry the load this season.

“I think our offense is electrifying. Danny Cantu will run it down your mouth. When you see that safety coming down, Mikey will beat you with the speed, and if you play me one-on-one and throw the jump ball, I feel like I’ll get it most of the time,” Gonzaque said.

Mission Veterans is ready to prove the offense won’t take a step back, it’s only forward together, “one heartbeat,” as the Patriots say.

In Starr County, a first-year head coach is looking to revive the Rattlers of Rio Grande City. Head coach Leo Mireles has taken over the program, and just as he’s looking to bring the Rattlers some wins, he has a quarterback with the hunger to bounce back.

RGC quarterback Mario Garza’s junior season ended in just four weeks due to a torn MCL. He’s fired up and ready to roll his senior year in the Rattlers spread attack.

“I felt like I let my team down last year, but I’m happy to be back and playing with my teammates again,” Garza said. “This year I’m trying to come out and put the team on my back.”

But the offenses in 16-5A DI won’t just spread you out. Teams like PSJA Southwest and La Joya Palmview will lineup under center, hand the rock off and let their linemen go to work.

“We’re trying to prove something,” said PSJA Southwest’s Chris Sanchez. “We’re going to go hard every play and try to put up better numbers than we did last year.”

And don’t sleep on Donna High as dual-threat Avery Bowen takes over the quarterback position.

So when a game’s in doubt, look for the offensive onslaughts in District 16-5A DI to break it open.
“Team work makes the dream work.”
by John C. Maxwell

Luis Delgado, Jr., MD and Staff

Wishing All Valley Teams Good Luck this year!

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Players to watch in 5A

AJ Gonzaque, WR, Mission Veterans
He can go up top, he can run right by any defender and he can often be found in the end zone. Mission Veterans junior receiver AJ Gonzaque is the Valley’s top pass-catcher and he’s coming off an All-state season after putting up 1,493 yards and 15 touchdowns on 75 receptions. Gonzaque will be new quarterback Ricky Reyna’s top target, and they already showed chemistry early on as they connected for three touchdown in the Patriots’ first scrimmage of the season.

Avery Bowen, QB, Donna High
Dual-threat junior Avery Bowen, the younger brother of former Donna High quarterback/running back Amonte Bowen, steps into the spotlight as the starter and spark plug of his team’s offense. Bowen’s versatility will allow Donna to open things up and become more creative on the offensive side. The combination of Bowen and running back Marcus Ysaguirre will be leaned on heavily to carry the Donna offense.

Freddy Flores, S, La Joya Palmview
Freddy Flores is a playmaker from his safety position in the La Joya Palmview secondary. His willingness to step up and stop the run game is crucial to the Lobos’ defensive success, but he has no problem dropping back and shutting down the pass. Flores had 59 tackles and five interceptions last season and is looking to close out his high school career with another strong showing.

Avery Bowen, QB, Donna High
Dual-threat junior Avery Bowen, the younger brother of former Donna High quarterback/running back Amonte Bowen, steps into the spotlight as the starter and spark plug of his team’s offense. Bowen’s versatility will allow Donna to open things up and become more creative on the offensive side. The combination of Bowen and running back Marcus Ysaguirre will be leaned on heavily to carry the Donna offense.

Lavar Lindo, WR, Sharyland Pioneer
The 6-feet-4-inch receiver Lavar Lindo towers over cornerbacks across from him and he frequently makes them pay. As a junior, Lindo posted 623 receiving yards and seven touchdowns on just 25 catches. Quarterback Eddie Lee Marburger and the Pioneer offense spread the ball around and play at a fast-pace, but when a big play is needed, look for Lindo going deep. His recruitment has been picking up steam as multiple Div. I colleges have shown interest in the big, reliable target.

Jay Cardenas, RB, Edcouch-Elsa
Senior running back Jay Cardenas can carve up defenses as he leads Edcouch-Elsa’s run-heavy attack into the 2019 season. As a junior, Cardenas had a cool 991 all-purpose yards and 15 touchdowns. Once Cardenas gets going, the Yellow Jackets’ offense is difficult to hold as his big-play ability allows fellow runners Shawn Alvarado and Edward Cardoza to follow his lead.

Damian Gomez, QB, Valley View
Damian Gomez has three years of starting experience under his belt from his time at Mission High. Now, the versatile quarterback will lead the Valley View offense during his senior season. He can deliver any throw asked of him and hurt defenses with his ability to run. A broken collarbone cut Gomez’s 2018 season short, and he’ll be looking to bounce back with a brand new team.

Eddie Lee Marburger, QB, Sharyland Pioneer
Eddie Lee Marburger picked up valuable time as a starter as a sophomore, but now the junior quarterback is ready to let it rip. Marburger ran for 193 yards and two touchdowns and threw for 1,036 yards and nine more scores while splitting time last season. With weapons like Lavar Lindo, Luke Padilla and running back Tristan Castillo to get the ball to, Marburger’s numbers will rise as the Pioneer football program attempts to establish itself among the RGV’s best.
District 16-5A DI preview

Brownsville Lopez

Coach: Armando Gutierrez, 2nd year
2018 record: 2-8
Last playoff appearance: 2017
Returning starters (O/D): 4/3
Returning lettermen: 16
Key players: OL Santiago Castillo; QB Jose Cruz; WR Xavier Vasquez; RB/LB Luis Barrera

2019 Outlook: Brownsville Lopez didn’t fair well in the first year of the 10-team 16-5A DI, but one positive was a victory over rival Brownsville Porter. The Lobos went 2-8 and picked up a surprising Week 1 win over the McAllen High Bulldogs in non-district action. Lopez did show some fight in district play as the Lobos lost four games by one possession. Cruz (1,108 passing yards, 9 TDs) provides experience for the Lopez offense, while Reyes is in line to see action on both sides of the ball.

Brownsville Pace

Coach: Daniel Pardo, 3rd year
2018 record: 7-4, bi-district qualifier
Last playoff appearance: 2018
Returning starters (O/D): 4/3
Returning lettermen: 12
Key players: QB Jose Banda; RB Dylan Barron; OL Rafael Recio; LB Jay Gomez; DB Daryin Jones

2019 Outlook: Brownsville Pace finished 2018 second in the 16-5A DI standings, in large part due to the play of then sophomore quarterback, Banda. Now one year older, stronger and wiser, Banda leads the high-flying offenses in District 16-5A DI.

Brownsville Porter

Coach: Carlos Uresti, 3rd year
2018 record: 1-9
Last playoff appearance: 2015
Returning starters (O/D): 5/6
Returning lettermen: 15
Key players: QB Kevin Garcia; OL Adam Gonzalez; DE Luis Armendariz; LB Luis Palacios; ATH Gabriel Gonzalez

2019 Outlook: Last season was unkind to the Brownsville Porter Cowboys as they finished winless in 16-5A DI with an 0-9 record and 1-9 overall. The Cowboys only win came in a Week 1 win against Port Isabel, but it was all downhill from there. The Cowboys have 11 returning starters looking to shake things up this season, including four-year starting linemen Gonzalez. A quarterback with plenty of varsity experience is a benefit not many quarterbacks can claim. Banda had 1,132 passing yards, 775 rushing yards and 21 total touchdowns. Helping him out on the offensive side will be Barron (496 yards rushing) and Solis (309 yards receiving, 3 TDs). The biggest question will be the Vikings defense. With only three returning starters back, new faces will have to step up to stop some of the high-flying offenses in District 16-5A DI.

Brownsville Veterans

Coach: Ramiro Leal, 7th year
2018 record: 6-4
Last playoff appearance: 2015
Returning starters (O/D): 8/6
Returning lettermen: 22
Key players: QB Avery Bowen; RB Marcus Ysaguirre; DB Ethan Rodriguez; WR Marcos Chavez; LB Pedro Ramirez; WR Marcus Chavez; DB EJ Belmarez

2019 Outlook: The last time Donna High reached the postseason, they were carried by Amonte Bowen, a running back turned quarterback who lit a fire for the team’s offense. Three years later, another Bowen steps into a key role and hopes to lead Donna back into the postseason. Junior quarterback Avery Bowen is a dynamic runner and improving as a passer each time he takes the field, indicating good things to come for Donna High football. Seventh-year head coach Leal coached Amonte and now Avery, and he feels Avery can be even better as he’s a little shiftier than his older brother. Ysaguirre is back for another year to serve as the team’s running back. Defensive backs Ethan Rodriguez and EJ Belmarez form Donna’s strongest unit defensively, while linebacker Pedro Ramirez roams free from the linebacsker position on the second level of the defense. Bowen has the potential to ignite the Donna offense and compete for a playoff spot.

Joel Martinez | jmartinez@themonitor.com

Mission Veterans running back Danny Cantu carries the ball against the Victoria East defense on Nov. 16, 2018 at Tom Landry Stadium in Mission.

SEE 16-5A DI ON PAGE 44
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La Joya Palmview

Coach: Margarito Requeñez, 6th year
2018 record: 6-5, bi-district qualifier
Last playoff appearance: 2018
Returning starters (O/D): 6/6
Returning lettermen: 30
Key players: QB David Gonzalez; RB Carlos Pena; S Freddy Flores; OL Alejandro Mendiola; TE Jerry Galvan; LB Carlos Arjona

2019 Outlook: It’s safe to say La Joya Palmview’s first year at the 5A level after moving down from 6A was a success. Although the Lobos were doubted early on, Palmview proved people wrong and ended up claiming the third seed in 16-5A DI with a 6-3 district record. Heading into the 2019 season, the Lobos again have doubters, but they’d love nothing more than to prove them wrong once more. With six starters returning on each side of the ball, head coach Margarito Requeñez feel his group has the pieces to make a second-straight playoff appearance. Gonzalez, a former receiver, will take over under center for the Lobos as his athleticism and skill adds another threat to Palmview’s patented ground game. Junior running back Peña put up 690 rushing yards and nine touchdowns on limited touches last season, but he’s ready for more responsibility. Flores and fellow safety Fernie Cavazos are Palmview’s last line of defense, but also the strongest. Linebackers Arjona and Guerrero give the Lobos speed from the linebacker position, something Requeñez is excited to see as they’ll face multiple spread offenses throughout the course of district play. After a rivalry game against La Joya High in Week 1, Palmview will begin its quest to continue to build the program at the 5A level.

SEE 16-5A DI ON PAGE 46

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Mission Veterans

Coach: David Gilpin, 10th year  
2018 record: 12-2, regional final qualifier  
Last playoff appearance: 2018  
Returning starters (O/D): 4/3  
Returning lettermen: 22  
Key players: WR AJ Gonzaque; WR Mikey Garcia; RB Danny Cantu; LB Jesse Gonzalez; LB Mike Rodriguez; QB Ricky Reyna; DB Mike Gonzalez

2019 Outlook: Mission Veterans is coming off a magical season as the Patriots became the first Valley team since 2011 to reach the fourth-round of the playoffs. Mission Vets went 9-0 in 16-5A DI to claim the district crown, along with three more gold balls won in the playoffs. Gone is Mr. Texas Football 2018 Landry Gilpin, but according to coach David Gilpin and his guys, “tradition doesn’t graduate.” So, how do they replace Landry Gilpin? It’s all hands on deck, and there’s some of the best hands in football on the Mission Vets roster. All-state receivers Gonzaque (1,493 yards, 15 TDs) and Garcia (765 yards, 9 TDs) will give sophomore quarterback Reyna two top pass-catchers to throw to. And playing next to the new Patriots starter is Cantu, one of the most slept on running backs in the RGV. Cantu can gash defenses for big gains and catch out of the backfield as he had 1,035 total yards and nine TDs last season. The Patriots defense returns three of the team’s top tacklers from 2018 in Rodriguez (112 tackles, 3 sacks), Jesse Gonzalez (122 tackles, 4 forced fumbles) and Mike Gonzalez (92 tackles).

PSJA Memorial

Coach: David Brown II, 1st year  
2018 record: 4-6

2019 Outlook: First-year head coach David Brown II takes over the PSJA Memorial football program after helping Raymondville reach a 9-2 record as the team’s defensive coordinator in 2018. A former defensive back himself, Brown brings an aggressive, attacking style to the Wolverine front-seven defensively. PSJA Memorial managed to win four of its final five games in district play, ending the season with a 4-6 mark and giving this year’s group a nice foundation to build on.

PSJA Southwest

Coach: Mike Evans, 3rd year  
2018 record: 4-6

2019 Outlook: The PSJA Southwest football program has been around since 2012, but a playoff berth has eluded the Javelinas. The arrow is pointing up for the Hogs, however, as they return 12 starters from last year’s squad that closed the season by winning three of five games. A three-point loss to Rio Grande City and a one-point loss to La Joya Palmview prevented the Javelinas from sniffing the postseason, but third-year head coach Evans has this group set on making history. Bocanegra is small, shifty and possesses high-level field vision as he’s coming off a year with 574 rushing yards and four rushing scores. He also has four returners on the offensive line back ready to create running lanes. Playing alongside Bocanegra in the Southwest backfield is two-way player Sanchez. The running back/linebacker splashed onto the scene last season as he chipped in 208 rushing yards, five touchdowns and 46 tackles. Ramirez takes over the quarterback position as he comes in with good size and decent speed.
PSJA HIGH SCHOOL BEARS

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Heavy Hitters drop the hammer in 16-5A DII

BY BRYAN RAMOS  
STAFF WRITER

Nothing makes its return known quite like high school football in Texas. It might be the bright stadium lights in small cities that shine down on the gridiron illuminating two teams going toe-to-toe. It could be the roar of a crowd celebrating a big play or a fight song blaring from the band that can be heard from miles away.

But in District 16-5A DII, it's the sound of a “boom” as heavy hitters meet runners in the hole and drop the hammer.

Defense is key in the seven-team district where some of the Valley's top linebackers rule from the second level crashing running lanes, dropping into pass coverage and delivering demoralizing blows to diminish an opposing offenses will.

Spearheading the Sharyland Rattlers defense is middle linebacker Santino Pascual, a four-year letterman with 73 tackles and five sacks to his name last season. He now takes over a unit that lives by the motto of “9-5-90”, meaning nine defenders within five yards of the ball 90 percent of the time. As a senior and returning starter, he's ready to lead the group and make life miserable for quarterbacks in the district.

“We're not very big, but our defense is based on speed, blitzes coming from everywhere trying to make it a tough time on other quarterbacks every Friday night. I’m trying to lead the defense as far as we can,” Pascual said.

And, there are multiple ways to lead a defense. There are the vocal, loud leaders who have the ability to fire up their teammates with every word. Valley View linebacker Aleksander Gomez is just that type.

Gomez, who had 124 tackles and nine sacks last year, transferred to Valley View over from Mission High for his senior season. He's hoping to add fire and enthusiasm to what he feels is an already-established defensive unit.

“Valley View's defense has always been one of the best in the district, despite their records before. I just look to bring more aggression into that defense, bring that fire and be the man up front,” Gomez said. “The way the play here in this district, they want to spread us out, but we have the athletes at Valley View to match up with everyone and keep people from scoring.”

Sharyland Pioneer senior linebacker Kyle Sullivan is the opposite. He tallied 85 tackles and three sacks as a junior. While he plays with a passion and intensity each time he takes the field, he has the demeanor of “The Terminator”. A man of few words, but effective and getting his point across.

“We're ready to work as a unit. We see no competition,” he said.

Mercedes' Brandon Adame was named District 16-5A DII's Defensive Newcomer of the Year for his play as a sophomore a season ago. He burst onto the scene for the Tigers the same way he busted through blockers to blow up plays, finishing with a team-high 104 total tackles, 13 tackles for loss, three sacks and three fumble recoveries.

“We look to set an aggressive tone, play physical, that's how we play football at Mercedes. We have a big point to prove. Coming off last year, we want to show people they have to stop sleeping on us,” Adame said.

Over at Edcouch-Elsa, defensive ends Ross Uresti, Matt Segura (12 sacks) and linebacker Jack Perez (76 tackles) are trying to bring back the mystique of “The Black Hole” that is Benny Layton Memorial Stadium. A 2-8 season in 2018 is the driving force behind the Yellow Jackets journey to restoring glory.

“We try to bring that Black Hole back — that intimidation, that fear, we're trying to bring that tradition back,” Uresti said.

So don't be alarmed if a loud bang is heard from out of nowhere. There's a good chance it's just football being played in District 16-5A DII.
Edcouch-Elsa

Coach: Christian Navarro, 1st year
2018 record: 2-8
Last playoff appearance: 2016
Returning starters (O/D): 5/6
Returning lettermen: 35
Key players: RB Jay Cardenas; QB Mike Rodriguez; LB Jack Perez; DE Matt Segura; CB Jesse Beltran; RB Shawn Alvarado; DE Ross Uresti

2019 Outlook: After last year’s 2-8 season, the program’s worst outing since 1983, Edcouch-Elsa is determined to right the ship. Athletic director Christian Navarro was tabbed as the interim head coach after six games last season, but now that tag is gone as Navarro looks to restore the grit, toughness and tradition back to “La Maquina Amarilla.” This year’s offense has shown the ability to run the ball effectively with the three-headed monster of Cardenas, Cardoza and Alvarado. Cardenas compiled 991 all-purpose yards and 15 touchdowns as a junior and has proven to be a problem for opposing defenses. Rodriguez will start under center for the Yellow Jackets. The main goal for Edcouch-Elsa defense is to bring back “The Black Hole,” which swallows offenses whole when they take the field at Benny Layton Memorial Stadium. Senior defensive ends Matt Segura and Ross Uresti are solid bookends on the Yellow Jackets defense, while middle linebacker Jack Perez and his 76 tackles from last season will lead the second level. Cornerback Jesse Beltran is dynamic in run support and can go toe-to-toe in coverage against the top receivers in the district. With all eyes on Edcouch-Elsa, the Yellow Jackets have what it takes to carry the program back to the playoffs after a two-year absence.

Mercedes

Coach: Roger Adame Jr., 6th year
2018 record: 5-6, bi-district qualifier
Last playoff appearance: 2018
Returning starters (O/D): 8/8
Returning lettermen: 28
Key players: WR Josiah Cantu; WR Alex Rincon; LB Brandon Adame; DB Ramiro Ortiz

2019 Outlook: The Tigers return 16 starters from last year’s bi-district qualifying team, giving Mercedes a solid 1-2 punch in their spread attack. As a sophomore, Cantu had 780 yards, six receiving touchdowns and made two house calls on kickoff returns for TDs. When they’re not doing damage, running back Sonny Vela (625 rushing yards, 7 TDs) will get to work running behind tackle Aubrey Elizondo and center Zeke Gutierrez. Linebacker Adame was named last year’s Defensive Newcomer of the Year as he’s coming off a season with 76 tackles, 18 tackles for loss, seven sacks and three interceptions. Shutting things down in the secondary is Ortiz, a lengthy defensive back who led the Tigers with six interceptions and 91 tackles a season ago. Mercedes’ losses came at the hands of Sharyland High and Sharyland Pioneer in district play, but this year, the Tigers have hopes of winning the 16-5A DII title.

Roma

Coach: Frank Villanueva, 3rd year
2018 record: 3-7
Last playoff appearance: 2015
Returning starters (O/D): 7/5
Returning lettermen: 22
Key players: QB Johnny Rios; S/WR Hiram Flores; WR Esteban Barrera; OL Akileo Guerra; LB Gabriel Garcia

2019 Outlook: The Roma Gladiators were a Week 11 win against Mercedes from getting into the playoffs last season, but they fell short for the third consecutive year. Entering the 2019 season, the Gladiators are led by third-year starter quarterback Rios, an accurate passer with the ability to pick up yards with his feet. Rios (1,032 yards, 7 TDs) and the Roma offense will open things up to get the ball to tall, athletic options in receivers Barrera (465 yards, 3 TDs) and Flores. Up front, Roma returns four of five on the o-line, spearheaded by the imposing Guerra. Flores is also a force on the other side of the ball from his safety position as he recorded 68 tackles and two interceptions in 2018. As a freshman, Garcia had 74 tackles as the sophomore returns to improve off his debut at the varsity level. Three was the magic number last season, and if Roma can find a way to come up with three victories, the Gladiators could find themselves in the playoffs.
District 16-5A DII cont.

Sharyland High

Coach: Ron Adame, 8th year
2018 record: 8-4, area qualifier
Last playoff appearance: 2018
Returning starters (O/D): 2/4
Returning lettermen: 34
Key players: LB Santino Pascual; DE Ethan Garza; DB Sebastian Hinojosa; DB Jonathon Alanis; WR Mauricio Sanchez; RB Andres Bonilla

2019 Outlook: The Rattlers went unbeaten in the first year of 16-5A DII play, but the Rattlers are ready to defend their district title. Sharyland High returns the lowest number of starters in the district from last season, but they also have the second-largest number of returning lettermen. Eighth-year head coach Adame’s football factory expects to continue functioning at a high level with that experience and winning tradition established at Sharyland High. After graduating quarterbacks Edgar Longoria and Oscar Valdez over the summer, the athletic Valdivia will assume the role and lead the Rattlers offense. Meanwhile, Farias will lead the Sharyland offensive line from his center position as he works to give room to running back Andres Bonilla to run free. Sharyland’s defense will be its strong-suit with linebacker Pascual and secondary members Hinojosa (54 tackles, 2 sacks, 1 INT) and Alanis (3 INTs). A 9-1 season for last year’s JV team also sets up this year’s varsity squad to receive key contributions from some young guns. The two-time defending district champions will have a target on their backs entering 16-5A DII play, but the Rattlers are ready for the challenge.

Sharyland Pioneer

Coach: Thomas Lee, 2nd year
2018 record: 7-4, bi-district qualifier
Last playoff appearance: 2018
Returning starters (O/D): 7/7
Returning lettermen: 26
Key players: QB Eddie Lee Marburger; WR Lavar Lindo; WR Luke Padilla; LB Kyle Sullivan; S Chis’mere Mallard; RB Tristan Castillo

2019 Outlook: Sharyland Pioneer’s 2018 season ended in the first round of the playoffs after a failed two-point conversion in the winding seconds handed the victory to Port La Vaca Calhoun, keeping the Diamondbacks out of the area round by just a single yard. That one yard has motivated this year’s group of Diamondbacks who are determined to make program history and not only reach the second round of the playoffs, but go on a deep postseason run. And they have all the right tools to do just that. Junior quarterback Marburger (1,229 yards passing and rushing combined, 11 TDs) leads one of the Valley’s top offensive units with an arsenal of weapons to spread the ball around. Out wide are six-footers Lindo (623 yards, 7 TDs) and Padilla (479 yards, 4 TDs) who can hurt secondaries deep and over the middle. Junior running back Castillo (1,038 all-purpose yards) will carry the load on the ground for the Dbacks. For a team not traditionally known for its defense, this year’s unit hopes to change that perception. Linebacker Sullivan and McAllen High transfer Mallard provide playmaking on the other side of the ball for the Diamondbacks. Sullivan totaled 74 tackles, three for a loss, while Mallard had three interceptions from his safety spot for the Bulldogs in 2018. Look for second-year head coach Tom Lee and the Diamondbacks to compete for the 16-5A DII title with the potential to be the RGV’s last team standing once the postseason rolls around.

Valley View

Coach: Elifonso Esquivel Jr., 4th year
2018 record: 7-4, bi-district qualifier
Last playoff appearance: 2018
Returning starters (O/D): 7/6
Returning lettermen: 17
Key players: QB Damian Gomez; LB Aleksander Gomez; DL Adrian Rojas; OL Daniel Aleman; WR Richard Ordaz; RB/LB Chris Delgado

2019 Outlook: Valley View is one year removed from making program history as the Tigers qualified for the playoffs for the first time in 2018. This year’s group, led by fourth-year head coach Elifonso Esquivel, is ready to make it back-to-back. Twin brothers Damian, quarterback, and Aleksander, middle linebacker, join the Tigers after transferring from Mission High, giving Valley View all the tools needed to make it a repeat effort. Damian has three years of starting experience under his belt and put up 1,165 passing yards and 17 total touchdowns during his sophomore and junior seasons despite battling injuries. Aleksander is a fiery, vocal leader on the defensive end as the senior tallied 124 tackles and nine sacks in 2018. Playing alongside at the linebacker position are Jose Flores and Brendon Cavazos, while Rojas, a force inside, who had 60 tackles and four sacks last season, mans the defensive line. After finishing 3-3 in District 16-5A-DII last season, Valley View will be looking to improve on that mark and punch its ticket to the playoffs for the second straight year.
Coach: Abel Gonzalez III, 10th year
2018 record: 3-8, bi-district qualifier
Last playoff appearance: 2018
O/D returning starters: 7/6
Returning lettermen: 16
Key players: WR Jesse Garza; WR Santiago Sifuentes; QB JT Trujillo; LB Jorge Guerrero; RB Vidal Lopez; DE Moises Pena; LB/TE Armando Ramirez; WR/DB Josue Barrera; OT Jorge Vasquez

Coach: Monty Stumbaugh, 3rd year
2018 record: 2-8
Last playoff appearance: 2013
O/D returning starters: 8/7
Returning lettermen: 22
Key players: QB Angel Lopez; TE/DE Kyle Perales; LB/WR Robert Toledano; WR/S Gus Sanchez; OL/DL Eduardo Frias; RB/DB Zachary Carrera; DE/TE Dakoda Cervantes; WR/DB Julio Zamorano; OL/DL Samy Zamorano; LB Javier Guerra

Coach: Frank Martinez, 3rd year
2018 record: 3-8, bi-district qualifier
Last playoff appearance: 2018
O/D returning starters: 6/7
Returning lettermen: 16
Key players: QB/RB Josh San Roman; RB Julian Alvarez; RB Juan Casares; WR/DB Elian Rodriguez; DL Adriel Flores; LB Uriel Garcia; WR/DB Jose Luis Vargas; DB Santos Garcia; WR/DB Rolando Perez; OL/DL Fernando Valero; LB Jorge Arredondo; DL Gilbert Garces

Coach: Daniel Perez, 3rd year
2018 record: 7-5, area qualifier
Last playoff appearance: 2018
O/D returning starters: 3/5
Returning lettermen: 26
Key players: QB Sebastian Lopez; WR/DB Manuel Solis; WR/DB, Christopher Rivera; DE Roman Guerrero; FS/RB Damien Felix; LB Jerry Reyes; RB Christian Ortiz
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