

Three parish teams will be at home in football playoff openers

Written by Jerry Byrd

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Three Bossier Parish high school football teams received high enough seeds to host first-round state playoff games Friday.

Airline is ranked No. 6 and Parkway is ranked No. 7 in Class 5A, while Bossier High is ranked No. 8 in Class 3A. Airline will play host to No. 27 East St. John, Parkway will play host to No. 26 Live Oak and Bossier High will host No. 25 Jewel Sumner.

Two parish teams will be on the road — No. 25 Haughton is at No. 8 Ouachita in Class 5A and No. 29 Louisiana New Tech at Plain Dealing visits No. 4 Mangham in Class 1A.

In individual statistics, Airline quarterback Hayden Hildebrand leads the parish in passing for the second year in a row going into the playoffs. In the regular season, Hildebrand completed 58.8 percent of his passes (155 of 250) for 2,383 yards and 22 touchdowns, with five interceptions.

Parkway's Brandon Harris is second with 112 completions in 222 attempts (50.4 percent) for 2,093 yards and 23 touchdowns.

Haughton's James David Almond is third with 122 completions in 187 attempts (65.2 percent) for 1,860 yards and 22 touchdowns.

To say the least, it took Parkway a while to get the hang of this football business. In its first 18 football seasons, the school's best record was a 6-4 finish in 1983. Five Parkway teams (1970, 1993, 1997, 1998 and 2001) were 0-10. But the Panthers have turned things around in recent years. The 2012 season is their eighth consecutive winning season, and the sixth straight season in which they won seven or more games.

The only blemish on the Panthers' record this season is a 31-13 loss to Airline in Week 8. They won their other nine games by margins ranging from 15 points (Haughton) to 42 points (Loyola, Lakeside.) They are one win away from tying the school record of 10 wins in one season, first set in 1988 and equaled in 1994 and 2010.

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One Bossier Parish school has a longer current streak of winning seasons. This is Haughton's 11th consecutive winning season, and 10 of those teams won eight or more games. But the Bucs have a rich tradition dating back much longer, to their 1977 state championship season. That team had a 13-1 record marred only by a 22-20 overtime loss to North Caddo. Haughton reached the 3A finals again in 1978, but fell to Lutcher, 12-7, at Haughton.

Benton has a losing record (4-6) for the third year in a row. Before that, the Tigers had 13 straight winning seasons.

In Class 5A, Airline had three losing seasons in the previous 11 years. The Vikings were 5-6 in 2010, 1-9 in 2007 and 3-6 in 2006. In Class 3A, Bossier High had 11 winning seasons in the last 13 years. The Bearkats were 5-6 in 2008 and 5-5 in 2010.

With a 31-30 loss to Byrd in its regular-season finale last week, Airline finished the 2012 regular-season play with an 8-2 record, sharing the District 1-5A title with Byrd and Parkway. All three teams were 4-1 in district play. Parkway was 9-1 overall while Byrd was 7-2.

Byrd, the 2011 District 1-5A champion, had one-sided losses to West Monroe (38-14) and Parkway (44-14) during the regular season. Airline's only losses were to Class 4A power Neville at Monroe, 40-13, and the one-pointer to Byrd last week on a field goal in the final seconds. Parkway's only loss was to Airline, 31-13. Haughton has three 1-5A losses — to Byrd, 21-27, to Airline, 14-38, and to Parkway, 26-41.

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