

# For 30 Montgomery County teams, the quest begins

## West Division: Games have plenty of local flavor

BY GAZETTE STAFF

There will be rivalry games a-plenty in the Montgomery 4A West this year. With Bethesda-Chase moving up from 3A to join the league now includes every school draws players primarily from Bethesda or Gaithersburg and Northwest add a little county flavor to the mix. Both were among

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## 4A East Division: There are contenders aplenty

BY GAZETTE STAFF

The six teams in this year's Montgomery 4A East Division produced only one playoff appearance a year ago, but what an appearance: Sherwood polished off its unbeaten season with a state championship.

That said, the division is by no means unbalanced. Three other members — Blair, Paint Branch and Springbrook — were all in

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## 2A Division and private schools: Title chasers

BY GAZETTE STAFF

As usual, the county's smallest public schools — just three this year, as opposed to four the last two — play in their own "division," while scheduling games out of county, and sometimes out of state.

Poolesville and Wheaton both believe they can bounce back from sub-par 2008 seasons. Their road to the Class 2A playoffs runs

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## 4A WEST

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the logjam of teams at 6-4 last year, which was good enough for the Jaguars to reach the postseason, but not the Trojans. Both teams return an electric runner (Northwest's Hassan Dixon, Gaithersburg's Axel Ofori), and should again be right there.

Wootton is the West's other 2008 playoff team, beating arch-rival Churchill on the regular season's last day to get there. Both must answer a big question in 2009: Was last year thanks to one remarkable class, or the birth of new perennial powers?

Whitman leads the league in returning players, thanks to three third-year starters and a bevy of late-season junior varsity call-ups. The Vikings are definitely a playoff dark-horse, while Bethesda rivals B-CC and Walter Johnson begin new eras with first-year coaches.

The below capsules are excerpts from the full team-by-team previews, available online at [www.gazette.net/montisports/football](http://www.gazette.net/montisports/football).

### B-CC (2-8 in 2008)

"Our coaches really emphasized the fact that our school is known for getting beat down early in games and then not being able to come back," senior quarterback Casey Fitzgerald said.

B-CC faces plenty of challenges in 2009, not least of which a move up from Class 3A to the deeper 4A field. The varsity roster will only run 25-30 players deep, "not ideal for 4A," according to head coach Rich Noland, and only seven of those are seniors.

The Barons are aware of the chal-

lenges. "I threw in a couple wrinkles," Allen said. "We may throw a little bit more because we have some physical receivers who can run. We want to take advantage of that."

However, the Bulldogs' bread and butter is still their ground attack. Workhorse running back Ryan Quinn, who carried a county-high 233 times for 1,073 yards and 19 touchdowns last season, returns for his senior campaign.

**Gaithersburg (6-4)**  
Gaithersburg has some burners in 2009, be it at running back (senior Axel Ofori), wide receiver (seniors Sean Combs and DeSean Brown) or, most noticeably, linebacker.

The three-senior linebacking corps returns regulars Edwin Johnson (4.5-second 40-yard dash) and Travon Carroll (4.6), and adds converted defensive back Dillon Davis (4.6).

"When it comes time for blitzes, people are going to have to watch for our speed," Johnson said.

### Walter Johnson (1-9)

"Nobody has really respected us for a while now," said Pat Teixeira, who helped Walter Johnson to its first on-field win in four years last season. "That's what we've demanded."

Teixeira (5-foot-11, 285 pounds) and his teammates know all too well that respect comes with wins. But despite some perceived obstacles — first-year coach Jon Kadi has just one year of high school assistant experience, and junior quarterback Cole Ahnell is just 5-6 — the Wildcats sense

in the past, the Jaguars can now look forward to a possible dream in-season.

"We've had a lot of tragedy since I got here and all I can say is that we have a resilient group of young men," said first-year head coach Mark Maradei. "I've been very happy and really amazed at how everyone's been dealing with everything that's been dropped in their laps. I can't imagine being their age and doing what they're doing."

### Whitman (4-6)

Receiver Larry Kline, tight end/defensive back Danny Lee and running back Kevin Cecala will be key cogs in Whitman's machinery, along with junior quarterback Henry Kuhn. Kuhn was brought up from junior varsity to start the last four games of 2008, which included a win over Springbrook to spoil the Blue Devils' playoff hopes.

That quartet will carry most of the load for the Vikings.

Winning a couple of big games late in the season gave them a taste of that thrill of victory we covet so much," said head coach Jim Kuhn.

### Wootton (7-4)

Wootton did graduate the pioneers of this resurgence: Greg Mailing's first freshman class, which included three-year starting quarterback Mike Mooney, the county's leading passer with 3,062 yards and 27 touchdowns, and wide receiver Stephane N'goumou (9 TDs).

But building a program means being able to replace the Mooneys and N'goumou.

"This was our third straight off-season of listening to people say, 'Woot-