

HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL

WEEK 1 PREVIEW



Wildcat Stadium, Friday at 7:30 pm
14000 County Line Road, Elgin 78621

Headlines:

- A new pair of brothers takes over on offense for the Wildcats, who have one five playoff games in the last two seasons.
- The Vipers will hit the road with a young defensive squad, but an offense loaded with returning starters. After this road trip, Vandegrift gets three straight games at home.



Photos by Scott W. Coleman

Vandegrift head football coach Drew Sanders is entering his fifth season coaching the Vipers, who will begin the regular season at Elgin on Friday night, Aug. 29. Kickoff is scheduled for 7:30 p.m.

The Vandegrift Vipers will start their season on the road, facing the Elgin Wildcats for the first-ever regular season meeting between the two teams.

The Wildcats ran through their 17-4A schedule last season, easily winning their district after outscoring their district opponents 373-76 — including a surprising 37-0 shut-out win on the road at Georgetown just a few months after the Eagles made an appearance in the Class 4A, Division I state title game in

Arlington.

However, the Wildcats lost two players who were crucial to their success in recent seasons — brothers Da'Trean and Te'Rel Simmons. However, Elgin does return eight starters on offense and six on defense, so they aren't lacking in experience.

Kyle Snell takes over at quarterback from Te'Rel. At 6-4, Snell has the size to pose challenges for defenses, and in a twist of serendipity, returning receiver — and

quarterback Kyle's brother — Colin Snell will likely be on the receiving end of several passes.

New head coach Jim Garfield, who was hired after last season from Wichita Falls Rider, inherits an experienced offensive line to help his new quarterback.

For Vandegrift, the key on defense will be pressuring the quarterback getting his first varsity start. Offensively, the Vipers will look to exploit an Elgin defense with a number of first-year starters.

Vipers still looking for respect

2014 Season Preview

By SCOTT W. COLEMAN
Four Points News

In a new-look UIL district, one contender for the district title is gone, but Rouse's departure is marked by the entry of two new teams — Georgetown and East View — both playoff teams from a year ago.

Entering his fifth year with the Vandegrift program, which began playing football in the 2010 season, head football coach Drew Sanders says the Vipers have won a lot of games, but still doesn't have the kind of respect statewide that the players and coaches believe the team deserves.

"I think we're still looking for statewide respect now that we've been consistently good. It's time to take it to the next level."

In their very first season, the Vipers won four of their ten games — a rarity for a brand new program. The team went on to a bi-district title in their second season and picked up another bi-district title last season.

Their absence from the postseason in 2012 was the result of a three-way tie with Rouse and Vista Ridge, for just two playoff berths. The Vipers were the team left out that season, while Rouse went on to a state semifinal appearance and Cedar Park won its first state title.

Sanders vowed that would never happen to the Vipers again.

"Our players know how close they came. They saw how we were really just a field goal away from what could have been a deep playoff run," Sanders said in 2013.

This year, the Vipers have the benefit of a seasoned quarterback returning behind center, along with two explosive running backs — Christian Reyes and Travis Brannan. The loss of receiver Luke Peterman



Vandegrift's defense forces a fumble during last year's game against Dripping Springs. If a new-look defense can gel quickly and continue forcing turnovers — a Viper staple — Vandegrift will be a force in District 25-5A.

will be felt, but returning receiver Paxton Segina should step in nicely, and Bear Christianson, who recently moved into the district, was also impressive during spring camp.

Sanders said that he's pleased with the look of the offense, and the combination of skill and leadership will give the Vipers a bit more potency on offense.

"We are now built for big plays... not only through matchups, but also tempo," Sanders said.

It will be the losses on the defensive side of the ball that will be most obvious. Defensive lineman of the year Gunner Linhar and all-district selections Elliot Byrd, Justin Hirschhorn, Max Regan and Tristan Prukop were all key playmakers for the Vipers.

However, defensive linemen Kevin Andrew, John O'Grady and Sammy Zugg

were all standouts as juniors last season, and will be expected to lead this year's Viper defense.

Gray Goolsby should play a key role at linebacker, and Sanders said that Cody Walther has been impressive so far in the secondary.

Vandegrift is a clearly a program on the rise. With the school earning state championships in golf and girls soccer last season, and the football season reaching the post-season twice, but struggling to get past the second round each time, Sanders believes that fans will expect more this year... and that's a good thing.

"Expectations are great (and) winners love pressure," said Sanders. "We thrive on pressure, and it makes us focus in on our goals... we should have high expectations for us, because we have them for ourselves."

QUICK FACTS



Head Coach: Drew Sanders (5th season)

Returning Starters: Offense: 7, Defense: 4

Key Losses: DL Gunner Linhart, OL Kyle Nausha, WR Luke Peterman, DB Tristan Prukop, DB Max Regan

2013 Season Grade: Solid, but a disappointing end in the second round of the playoffs

Prediction: Should contend for the 25-5A title

SCHEDULE

Aug. 29	@ Elgin	7:30 p.m.
Sept. 5	Abilene Cooper	7:30 p.m.
Sept. 12	Killeen	7:30 p.m.
Sept. 19	East View*	7:00 p.m.
Sept. 26	@ Leander*	7:30 p.m.
Oct. 3	BYE	
Oct. 10	@ Vista Ridge*	7:30 p.m.
Oct. 17	Cedar Park*	7:30 p.m.
Oct. 24	@ Dripping Springs*	7:30 p.m.
Oct. 31	Marble Falls*	7:30 p.m.
Nov. 7	@ Georgetown*	7:30 p.m.

*District games

2013 REGULAR SEASON—

Aug. 30	McNeil	31-0 (W)
Sept. 6	@ Killeen	36-29 (W)
Sept. 13	Hendrickson	49-14 (L)
Sept. 20	@ Anderson	41-0 (W)
Sept. 27	@ Vista Ridge*	28-21 (W)
Oct. 4	Dripping Springs*	49-10 (W)
Oct. 11	@ Leander*	35-3 (W)
Oct. 18	Marble Falls*	31-27 (W)
Oct. 25	@ Cedar Park*	34-0 (L)
Nov. 1	Rouse*	14-9 (W)

2013 PLAYOFFS—

Nov. 14	vs. Austin Crockett	42-22 (W)
Nov. 21	vs. Alamo Heights	24-21 (L)

9-3 Overall, 5-1 in District 25-4A, Bi-District Champions

A LOOK AT THE VIPERS

Impact Players



TRAVIS BRANNAN
Junior Running Back

Brannan is just one of the Vipers' offensive skill players returning to what should be a potent offense with big play capability. As a sophomore, Brannan averaged 5.9 yards a carry, tallying 879 yards and 13 rushing TDs. He also proved a capable receiver, catching 15 passes, one going for a touchdown. This should be Brannan's year to really shine.



GRAY GOOLSBY
Junior Linebacker

Last year, Goolsby was just one of several young underclassmen on an experienced defensive unit. This season, the junior will be expected to step up into a key role in what is now a young defense. He has the talent and drive to get the job done.



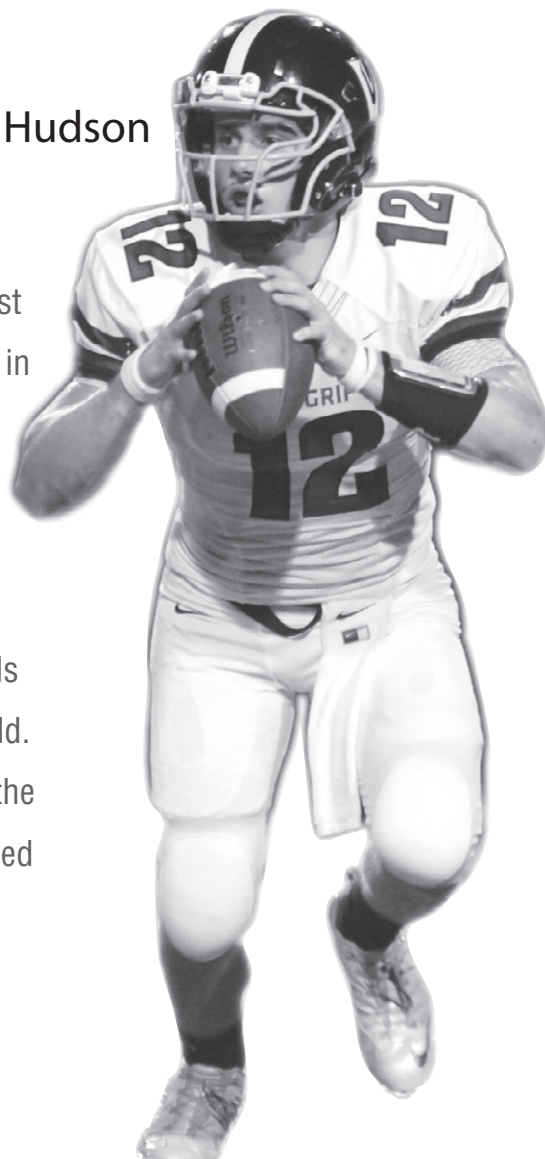
SAMMY ZUGG
Senior Defensive Lineman

Sammy Zugg saw a little playing time on the varsity squad in his sophomore year, but last season showed true potential as a pass rusher. We expect big things from Zugg this season, and the Vipers do too.

Player to watch: Quarterback Jamie Hudson

Jamie Hudson accounted for 25 total touchdowns last season, leading the Vipers in rushing with 1105 yards.

His breakout runs kept defenses off balance, and he's more than capable of putting the ball in the hands of a receiver deep downfield. The senior quarterback is the core of Vandegrift's balanced offensive game plan.



Offense

Offense will be Vandegrift's strength this season, as Coach Sanders returns players at each of the skill positions, including quarterback Jamie Hudson, receivers Paxton Segina and Austin Cooley, and running backs Christian Reyes and Travis Brannan. If the Vipers can score quickly and often, it will take some pressure off a young defensive squad.

Defense

The Vipers lost several key players on the defensive side of the ball. A fairly difficult non-district schedule may be the perfect thing to help the new starters gain experience and confidence. If the defense can gel by the time the district portion of the schedule begins on Aug. 19, the Vipers should be a solid contender this season.

Key Games

Sept. 19, East View—The Patriots reached the playoffs in just their second season last year, and return running back Cornelio Garcia, who rushed for 1832 yards and 26 TDs in 2013. This will be a key early test for the Vipers.

Oct. 17, Cedar Park—Saying a matchup with the back-to-back district champions is a key game is an understatement. This game will be critical for both teams.

Nov. 7, Georgetown—The two new teams in 25-5A bookend the Vipers' district schedule. The Eagles are a perennial playoff team and reached the state title game in 2012. By the time Nov. 7 rolls around, this could be a matchup for the district title.