

The Katy Tigers, seven-time state champions, are training for another impressive season

KATY AREA FOOTBALL PREVIEW

"It's a big challenge to defend the championship - the target on your back just gets bigger. Winning the championship is a very difficult feat to repeat."

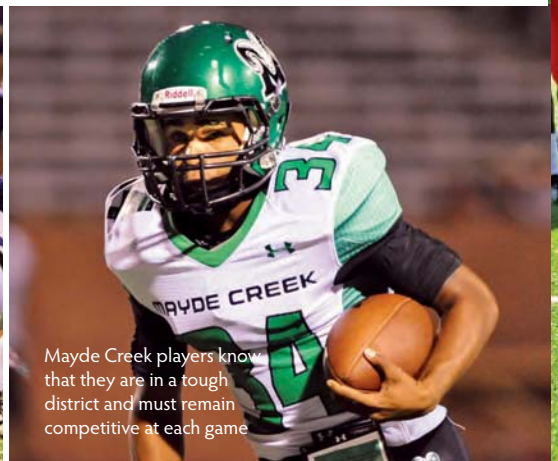
- Gary Joseph, Katy head coach



Head coach Flint Risien is very excited about his Taylor Mustangs' upcoming season



Coach Dave Meadows believes Morton Ranch will make their mark in District 19 this season



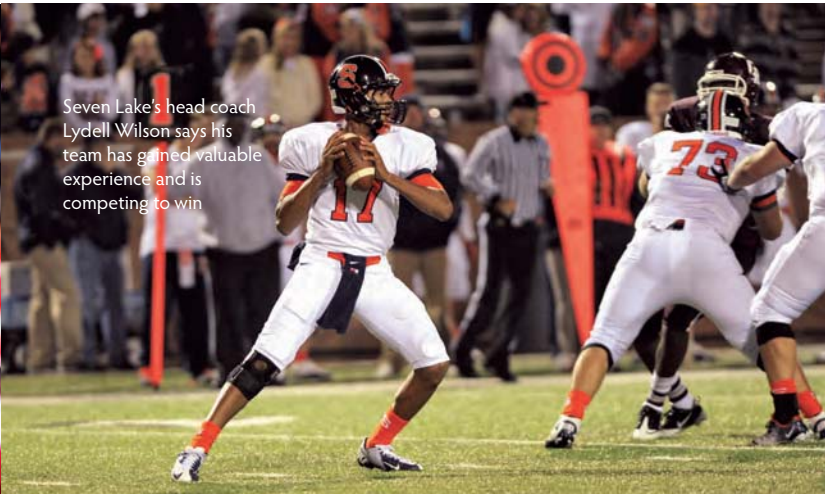
Mayde Creek players know that they are in a tough district and must remain competitive at each game

A look at what's ahead for 6 Katy football teams


Written by Ayla Syed
Photography by Craig Moseley

The different components of a high school football season are coming together in Katy like the bells and whistles of a train, all helping fuel the football machine driven by the coaches and players who have spent numerous days in the sun to prepare for the upcoming season in District 19.

Katy ISD itself has proven to be one of the most competitive in the state, boasting last year's state champions: the Katy Tigers. All six district teams have been practicing with the playoffs in mind and the state championship at stake.



Seven Lake's head coach Lydell Wilson says his team has gained valuable experience and is competing to win



Cinco Ranch's coach Don Clayton is confident that his defensive players will set the tone for the season

1. Cinco Ranch

Cinco Ranch High School finished second in the district last season with an 8-4 record. Don Clayton, Cinco's head coach, says he hopes seniors Nick Mika (quarterback) and Trent Soechting (defensive safety), will serve as good leaders for the team this year.

Clayton adds that seniors Tobi Ilesanmi (defensive end) and Josiah Morgan (defensive tackle) will also play key roles during the season and help contribute to a strong defensive

line. "We hope these defensive players will help set the tone for the season," Clayton says. "It's hard to single out players when the team is collectively good."

The team will include 24 returning lettermen, which includes six starters on the defensive line and three on the offensive.

2. Katy

Katy High School has a reputation for having one of the most competitive football teams in the state, a reputation solidified after the team earned the state championship title last season.

Head football coach Gary Joseph says he is proud of the win but expects a challenging season this year as reigning state champions. "It's a big challenge to defend the championship," Joseph says. "The target on your back just gets bigger. Winning the championship is a very difficult feat to repeat."

Joseph adds that the team will feature many new faces to replace the starters who graduated last year.

Junior Rodney Anderson will be returning as a running back in addition to senior quarterback Kiley Huddleston. The defensive line will also feature prominent returners, including seniors Cody Gessler (nose guard) and Tanner Ebrecht (free safety).

Joseph says he looks forward to the excitement that a new season brings to the community. "Our strategy is to win, and our philosophy is the same," he says. "Our schedule is challenging, but it's something we are looking forward to."

3. Mayde Creek

The Rams finished last season with a 3-7 record and will focus on finishing games stronger this season, according to head football coach Lance Carter.

"We have to find a way to finish with the win," Carter says. He adds that he plans to help the team do this by instilling a strong work ethic in the players.

"The harder you work, the more benefits you reap," Carter explains. "A mindset can carry you through tough times. You have to condition the mind to take the game to another level."

Quarterback Jacob Griese and defensive end Mark Simon will both return as seniors for the Rams this season. "These players could really do special things this year," Carter says. "We play in a very tough district so all of the players have to be competitive in every game."

4. Morton Ranch

Head football coach Dave Meadows has led the Mavericks through many football seasons and says he expects a good season from his team this year. MRHS's

football team held a 7-3 record last season, but faced the loss of a few key defensive players in the midst of last year. Some JV players were brought to the starting line last season to fill the positions, and Meadows hopes they will deliver with a year of experience under their belts.

“We’ve got to climb that mountain and go higher,” Meadows says. “The higher you get, the harder it gets.” The team members begin their summer practices at 6 a.m., preparing for the physical toll each season demands of the athletes.

Senior wide receiver Justin Paige will be a key player this year, says Meadows, adding that the team will have to focus on finishing each game strongly after losing three close games in overtime last season. “We have to demand more out of ourselves,” he says. “We hope to make our mark in District 19 this season.”

5. Seven Lakes

Head football coach Lydell Wilson began as the new coach for Seven Lakes last season and brought the Spartans to the playoffs, marking the second time in the school’s history to have a team compete at that level. “Our kids are hungry,” Wilson says. “They are ready to play again.”

Lydell will be moving up players from last year’s freshman team as sophomore starters this season. The freshman team had a 9-1 record last year.

Sophomores Bryan Moore, Elliot Lege, Brody Williams, and Bryan Sturges will all be starting this season. Jarrett Johnson will return as a senior starter, and Wilson hopes “JJ” will bring a level of maturity to the team. “This team learned a lot last year and gained valuable experience,” Wilson says. “We have to go out and play solid football this year and compete to win.”

6. Taylor

Senior Clay Holgorsen will return as the Mustang’s quarterback, with senior linebacker Cullen Gillaspia also playing a crucial role on the team this year. The team has had strong attendance during strength and conditioning camps.

“Our team held together and fought despite difficult losses last season,” says head coach Flint Risien. “We gained momentum at the end that will help us move forward.” The team will feature 35 returning lettermen, including seven starters on the offensive line and six on the defensive.

“The teams we play are big and strong,” Risien says. “You have to be tough to play in our district. I’m excited about our team - the players have worked extremely hard so far.”

No matter what spirit colors you are wearing this season, one thing is for sure - you don’t want to miss the excitement of Katy’s Friday night lights. **KM**

AYLA SYED is a senior pre-law student at Rice University. She attended high school in Katy ISD, and graduated in 2010.

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