

PEACHTREE RIDGE HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL



Old tradition meets new

Lions take on Broncos in 2nd round



Photo: Kevin Hinton
Peachtree Ridge's Brandon Stanley (2) is tackled by Kell's Brian Randolph (37) last week.

BY BRANDON BRIGMAN

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When Gwinnett County football took off in the mid 1990s, it was Brookwood that led the charge. The Broncos were the first Gwinnett County Public school to win a football state championship in 1996.

Since then, Gwinnett has routinely put a team in the state finals. The most recent was Peachtree Ridge in last year's Class AAAAA state championship game.

The two programs meet tonight for the first time in the second round of the Class AAAAA state playoffs. It's a battle

between the tradition-laden Broncos at the upstart Lions.

"I've known about Brookwood a long time. Who doesn't know about Brookwood?" Peachtree Ridge head coach Bill Ballard said. "I'm very familiar with them. They set the standard in Gwinnett County as far as being one of the top programs."

In just seven years of existence, Peachtree Ridge has built quite a tradition itself. The Lions are in the playoffs for the fourth straight season.

They won a share of the Class AAAAA state title in 2006 and won the Region

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Tradition

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7-A AAAA championship last year on their way to the state championship game.

"They have a program for the last few years has been one of the best," Brookwood head coach Mark Crews said.

Brookwood is in its 28th year of football and has 21 playoff appearances, eight region titles and four trips to the state finals. It's a standard of excellence in Gwinnett County football.

"We're trying to emulate Brookwood. Not only athletically, but in the school academically," Ballard said. "They have been a model of excellence and that's what we're trying to do at Peachtree Ridge."

But this isn't the Broncos of old. A power running game has been Brookwood's bread-and-butter for many years. While the Broncos haven't totally scrapped their run-

oriented offense, they do throw the ball more now than ever.

Quarterback Ben McLane has set Brookwood passing records this season and the junior turned in his best game of the year in last week's win over McEachern. McLane was 9 of 14 for 136 yards in the Broncos' 20-10 upset of the unbeaten Indians.

Ballard is very familiar with McLane. McLane's father Benji coached Ballard at now defunct Henderson High School in DeKalb County.

"He can throw the ball and has a great release," Ballard said. "If I had him, I would throw it, too."

Peachtree Ridge used two fourth-quarter touchdowns to beat Kell last

week 14-7. The Lions fumbled the ball six times, losing three.

"Offensively, we've had some turnovers," Ballard said.

"Hopefully, we'll limit those this week. It's weird because we've done really well except the last two weeks with turnovers."

The Lions have a 13-game winning streak at home and have never lost a playoff game at home. It's a postseason success Ballard would like to continue as he tries to model the Lions after one of the county's best programs.

"I feel like our program is growing, but we are not where they are," Ballard said. "I would say Brookwood is the most consistent in Gwinnett."

BROOKWOOD AT PEACHTREE RIDGE

■ **Who:** Brookwood Broncos (8-A AAAA) at Peachtree Ridge Lions (7-A AAAA)

■ **When:** Today, 7:30 p.m.

■ **Where:** Peachtree Ridge High School (From I-85, take the Old Peachtree Road exit and go west. School is roughly two miles ahead on the right)

■ **Coaches:** Mark Crews, Brookwood; Bill Ballard, Peachtree Ridge

■ **Records:** Brookwood 6-5; Peachtree Ridge 9-2

■ **Last week:** Brookwood beat McEachern 20-10; Peachtree Ridge beat Kell 14-7

■ **Winner plays:** Northside-Warner Robins vs. Kell

■ **Brookwood Leaders:**

• **Rushing:** Julian Suber, 911 yards

• **Passing:** Ben McLane, 1,763 yards

• **Receiving:** Andre Sims, 906 yards

• **Tackles:** Cameron Lynch, 120

• **Interceptions:** Nick Moore, 3

■ **Peachtree Ridge Leaders:**

• **Rushing:** Chris Sawdey, 805 yards

• **Passing:** Nick Lombardo, 1,092 yards

• **Receiving:** Brad Roby, 391 yards

• **Tackles:** Tanner Botts, 94

• **Interceptions:** Roby, 6

■ **Game-by-game:**

Brookwood Broncos (6-5)

McEachern*	L	42-32
at North Gwinnett	L	41-13
at Shiloh	W	20-10
Berkmar	W	51-6
at Meadowcreek	W	64-15
Grayson	L	22-12
at Central Gwinnett	W	28-21
Dacula	L	23-17
at South Gwinnett	L	17-14
Parkview	W	28-14
at McEachern	W	20-10

Peachtree Ridge Lions (9-2)

at Harrison	W	35-13
at Lowndes	L	51-17
Northview	W	44-0
at North Forsyth	W	33-0
Duluth	W	42-7
at Mill Creek	W	28-0
Collins Hill	W	21-7
at South Forsyth	W	17-10
Norcross	W	20-10
at North Gwinnett	L	21-7
Kell	W	14-7

*Georgia Dome; ^Overtime

