

[Hico Tigers, continued]

Last Year's Record: 6-5, 3-3 in District 7-2A Division I.

Last Playoff Appearance: 2016.

Last District Title: 2014.

Head Coach: Randy Thornton, first year at Hico.

Coach's Record: 0-0 at Hico.

Returning Experience: 15 lettermen, 7 offensive and 7 defensive starters.

Players to Watch: RB-LB Stran McLain, 5-8, 170, Sr.; WR-DB Cooper Conlee, 5-9, 150, Sr.; RB-DB Jacob Smith, 5-9, 170, Sr.; OL-DL Garrett Turner; QB-DB Briley Johnson, Jr.; OL-DL Hunter Koonsman, Jr.

Strengths: experience at offensive skill positions, quickness.

Weakness: size, depth.

Key Stats: RB Jacob Smith had 967 rushing yards and 211 receiving yards and scored 14 TDs last year. QB Briley Johnson passed for 702 yards and 6 TDs last year as a sophomore. Smith added 71 tackles last season from the secondary. DB Cooper Conlee had 33 tackles and 3 interceptions. ... Hico started 5-1 last year and was averaging 37 points per game, but the Tigers lost four of their final five, including a 47-14 bidistrict game to Mart.

Noteworthy: Former Santo head coach Randy Thornton is Hico's new head coach, and he's bringing the triple option offense he used to take the Wildcats to the playoffs four times in 10 years. Thornton

put up a 48-54 record at Santo, including a Class 2A DII state quarterfinals berth in 2014. Thornton replaced Keith Wood, who retired after compiling a 64-38 record in nine years at Hico's head coach. ... Hico leads the all-time series with Goldthwaite 8-6-1, but the Eagles have won three of the last four games.

San Saba Armadillos

Enrollment: 187.

Last Year's Record: 0-10, 0-6 in District 7-2A Division I.

Last Playoff Appearance: 2012.

Last District Title: 2012, 1991 outright.

Head Coach: Jerod Fikac, first year overall; first year at San Saba.

Coach's Record: 0-0.

Returning Experience: 14 lettermen, 6 offensive and 3 defensive starters.

Players to Watch: RB-LB Eric Argote; OL-LB Ernesto Agguire; TE-DE Joseph Watson; QB Sean O'Keefe, So.; LB Josh Lambert, Sr.; OL-DL Junior Jamies.

Strength: fresh start under new coach, talented younger players.

Weaknesses: Only five seniors, inexperienced defense.

Key Stats: San Saba will be rebuilding its defense this season, but LB Eric Argote made 81 tackles last year. He also is the top returning rusher with 259 yards last year. The offense is led by sophomore QB Sean O'Keefe, who had 640 yards com-

bined rushing and passing last year. ... The Armadillos must improve an offense that last year averaged 7.6 points per game and was shut out in four of six district games.

Noteworthy: Jerod Fikac, a former assistant at Wimberley and Weatherford, is San Saba's new head coach. He replaced Jeff Pannell, who went 33-54 in eight years as the Armadillos' head coach. Pannell led San Saba to a playoff win in three consecutive seasons from 2009-2011, but lost 34 of his final 40 games, including last year's 0-10 finish. ... This year's game will mark the 100th between San Saba and Goldthwaite, with the Armadillos leading the series 57-38-4. The Eagles have won 17 of the last 20 games.

Hamilton Bulldogs

Enrollment: 208.

Last Year's Record: 5-5, 2-4 in District 7-2A Division I.

Last Playoff Appearance: 2011.

Last District Title: 2001.

Head Coach: Mike Reed, fourth year at Hamilton.

Coach's Record: 8-22 at Hamilton, 140-41 overall.

Returning Experience: 15 lettermen, 5 offensive and 5 defensive starters.

Players to Watch: RB-LB Martin Najera, 5-11, 180, Sr.; WR-DB Hunter Finley, 6-0, 160, Sr.; OL Diesel Cerisini, 5-10, 270, Sr.;

RB-LB Daniel Bottlinger, 5-9, 160, Jr.; RB-LB Ian Nath, 5-9, 190, Jr.; OL-DE Jack Johnson, 5-11, 230, Sr.; QB Gracen Moore, So.

Strengths: overall experience with more upperclassmen, offensive line.

Weaknesses: inexperienced QB, 10 wins in last 44 games.

Key Stats: Hamilton has no returning first-team all-district players in 2016 for the second consecutive season. RB Martin Najera rushed for 705 yards and 4 TDs last year. He also leads the defense after making 77 tackles last season. An improved offensive line is anchored by juniors Diesel Cerisini, Jack Johnson and Wyatt Catoe. ... The Bulldogs lost to playoff qualifiers Crawford, De Leon, Goldthwaite and Hico last year by an average of 47-12.

Noteworthy: The Mike Reed experiment – a successful six-man coach trying to build an 11-man program – enters its fourth season at Hamilton. Reed started at rock bottom with a 0-10 finish in 2014, but the Bulldogs have improved to 3-7 in 2015 and 5-5 last year. They won their final two district games over Valley Mills and San Saba. Reed was 132-19 at six-man Throckmorton with multiple state titles before moving to Hamilton. ... Goldthwaite won last year's game, 35-15, but Hamilton leads the all-time series 24-21.

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