

State championships bring three new opponents to the table for area finalists

Starkville, West Point and Noxubee County face unfamiliar foes in quest for trophies

By [Alex Murphy](#) • 10 hours ago

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OXFORD — The Mississippi High School Activities Association football state championships in Oxford are mere days away and the Golden Triangle is well-represented.

Three area schools, Noxubee County, Starkville and West Point, will be headed to play at Vaught-Hemingway Stadium, home of Ole Miss, for a chance at hoisting hardware.

Game previews are to come for each team, but this article will take a closer look at the three opponents these teams will be playing on Thursday and Saturday, respectively.

Class 7A: Starkville vs. Oak Grove (11-1, 3-1 Region 3), 7 p.m. Saturday

Oak Grove heads into the Class 7A state championship game on Saturday as the South Half winner, taking down Brandon in a wild semifinal game last Friday, emerging victorious in a 49-45 shootout.

The Warriors avenged their earlier season loss against Brandon, last season's 6A runner-up to Starkville, with that semifinal victory, and they are filled with talent.

It starts under center with quarterback Anthony "AJ" Maddox, the Texas A&M commit who's thrown for nearly 3,100 yards this season and ran for 500.

Maddox has 41 total touchdowns this season for the Warriors, staking his claim as one of the best quarterbacks in Mississippi. The matchup between Maddox and Starkville QB Trey Petty will be one to watch, as both have been electric this season.

There are future Division I players on both sides of the ball, with defensive lineman Caleb Moore and wide receivers Damari Jefferson and PJ Woodland highlighting that group.

Woodland is committed to LSU and plays both sides of the ball, much like Yellow Jackets WR/DB Braylon Burnside. It will be very interesting to see if the two line up against each other on Saturday night.

The Warriors average 40.5 points per game offensively and give up 21.1 points per game defensively, a team with plenty of experience in high-scoring affairs.

Class 5A: West Point vs. Laurel (8-6, 4-1 Region 4), 7:30 p.m. Thursday

Laurel turned things on at the right time after a tough showing in non-district play, going into district play with a 1-5 record, but a 4-1 district record and 7-1 overall record since district play began.

That includes a current four-game winning streak where the Golden Tornadoes have scored 38.3 points per game offensively, winning by an average margin of 19.5 points.

Laurel scheduled a gauntlet of opponents in non-district, playing four teams that ended up winning 10 or more games this season, including a pair of teams set to play in state championship games this weekend: West Jones and Oak Grove.

The Golden Tornadoes might have gone 0-4 against those teams, but three of those losses were one-score losses, including a 28-26 loss against McComb and a 26-23 loss against Jefferson Davis County.

Laurel is led by senior running back and Region 4 Offensive Player of the Year Braydan Jordan, fresh off a 209-yard, three-touchdown performance against Gauthier in the state semifinals last Friday.

In this playoff run alone, he's rushed for more than 600 yards and seven touchdowns, the unquestioned leader for the Golden Tornadoes who will undoubtedly be the focus of West Point's defensive gameplan on Thursday.

West Point and Laurel have faced each other twice for the state championship (1988 and 2016), with the Green Wave winning both games.

Class 3A: Noxubee County vs. Winona (14-0, 4-0 Region 3), 3:30 p.m. Saturday

Winona, Noxubee County's opponent in the Class 3A title game, continues the theme of offensive powerhouses, scoring 44.1 points per game this season.

Their high-powered offense is led by senior dual-threat quarterback Chase Richardson, who's recorded more than 3,100 total yards this season and 42 total touchdowns, throwing for 1,902 yards and running for 1,229 yards.

Richardson is a two-way star, as he leads the unbeaten Tigers with five interceptions, but he's not the only playmaker on this team.

Winona has rushed for nearly 3,200 yards this season and three different players have 10 or more rushing touchdowns.

Right behind Richardson is Zaishun Nash, who has 923 rushing yards and 16 rushing touchdowns this season, one of three players with 900 or more total yards for the Tigers with receiver Troylando Eden being the other.

Eden leads Winona with 763 receiving yards and 11 receiving touchdowns this season.

Defensively, four players have 10+ tackles for loss with junior Tyler Lockhart leading the way. Lockhart leads the Tigers with 93 total tackles, 27 tackles for loss, and 10 sacks.

Noxubee County and Winona have met four times since 1971, with the series even at two games a piece. In the teams' last meeting in 2021, Winona eliminated the Tigers in a second-round playoff matchup.

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