

# 25 FOOTBALL PLAYERS TO WATCH IN EAST/SOUTHEAST KANSAS

## CAIDEN BARBER, PITTSBURG

Barber became Pittsburg's latest back to top the 1,000-yard mark last year, rushing for 1,082 yards and 11 touchdowns. He's one of seven returning starters for the Purple Dragons on offense this year and will be part of an experienced backfield along with fellow seniors Cooper Hayden (quarterback) and Grant Roelfs (running back).



*Caiden Barber*



## DYLAN BIRGE, OLATHE WEST

Birge was a first-team All-Sunflower League selection on the offensive line last year for the Owls, helping them to a 5-4 season. He helped clear the way for standout back Anthony Favrow, who ran for nearly 1,200 yards and 14 touchdowns.

*Dylan Birge*

## JOVANNI BLACKIE, PAOLA

Paola boasted a dynamic backfield last year with Blackie and quarterback Garrett Williams, Blackie was the home run hitter from his tailback spot, rushing for 1,477 yards and 18 touchdowns in leading the Panthers to a 9-1 season that ended with a 45-35 playoff loss to eventual state champion St. James Academy. With Williams having graduated, Blackie will be an even bigger workhorse for the Panthers this season.



*Jovanni Blackie*



*Cruz Blair*

## CRUZ BLAIR, FRONTENAC

A three-year, two-way starter, Blair emerged as one of the top linemen in Class 3A as a sophomore in 2019, helping Frontenac to a 10-1 record. A dominant run blocker for an offense that produced more than 2,000 yards on the ground last year, Blair is a two-time first-team All-CNC selection. He also is an anchor on the defensive line, making 61 tackles and a team-high 14.5 tackles for loss last season.



*Tyler Claiborne*

### **TYLER CLAIBORNE, ST. JAMES ACADEMY**

Claiborne emerged as one of the top receivers in the state in helping St. James Academy capture the Class 4A state championship, the program's first. Last year as a junior, Claiborne caught 76 passes for 1,171 yards and 12 touchdowns. Claiborne had 148 yards and two touchdown catches in St. James' semifinal upset of Bishop Miege and was at his best in the postseason, catching nine of his touchdown passes and racking up 576 yards in five playoff games.

### **LANDON DEAN, FRONTENAC**

Dean is one of the top Kansas high school recruits for the Class of 2022. The 6-foot-2, 270-pound Oklahoma State commit returns looking to get the team's average last season of 19.9 points per game allowed down to number closer to the 7.7 points mark from 2019 when the team went 10-1. Dean, a two-time All-Class 3A selection, had 76 tackles and 7.5 tackles for loss last year and also is one of the top targets in the Raider passing game from his tight end spot.



*Landon Dean*



*Silas Etter*

### **SILAS ETTER, EUDORA**

Etter, a 6-3, 200-pound senior, looks to give Eudora another year of solid play sliding between the linebacker and safety positions with skill and athleticism necessary to play both spots effectively. He also try to put together bigger numbers at wide receiver after finishing with 266 receiving yards and four touchdown receptions in a run-heavy offense last year.

### **ANTHONY FAVROW, OLATHE WEST**

Favrow heads into his senior season looking to clear 1,000 rushing yards for the third straight season. The 5-foot-9, 195-pound running back ran for 1,168 yards a season ago and scored 13 touchdowns for Olathe West, which finished the 2020 season with a 5-4 record. Favrow will build upon his 31 career rushing touchdowns.



*Anthony Favrow*



Jaden Hamm

### JADEN HAMM, EUDORA

Hamm, a 6-foot-6, 200-pound tight end and defensive end, will look to build off his strong sophomore campaign when he had 61 tackles and seven tackles for loss. He'll need to carry more of the load on defense as linebacker Cael Lynch and cornerback Nate Criqui graduated.

### NICK HERZOG, BLUE VALLEY

Herzog, a Northwestern commit, used his 6-foot-4, 270-pound frame to help power Blue Valley to a 6-2 record a season ago. With Herzog as a key cog on the offensive line, the Tigers averaged 28.3 points per game in 2020.



Nick Herzog

### PARKER LEISE, SM EAST



Parker Leise

Leise will step into the starting quarterback spot for the first time this season, but he's expected to shine for the Lancers. The 6-foot-2 junior, who has already received an offer from Kansas, will look to improve the team's 1-6 record from a season ago.

### TYLER LITTLE, GALENA

Little became a starter for Galena from Day One as a freshman in 2019, lining at end on both sides of the ball. A huge target at 6-6, 240, Little caught 30 passes for 330 yards and 3 touchdowns last year, but was even more productive as a run blocker. Defensively, he had 40 tackles and six sacks, earning first-team All-CNC honors for the second straight year.



Tyler Little

### STERLING LOCKETT, BLUE VALLEY



Sterling Lockett

Lockett plans to become a Wildcat just like three of his brothers, which includes Seattle Seahawks wide receiver Tyler Lockett. The Kansas State commit has already shown flashes, despite his stats dipping to 193 receiving yards and three touchdowns through eight games last season. He'll want to put together a season closer to his sophomore year, when he had 516 receiving yards on 28 receptions for an 18.4 average.

## AQUANTEZ LOVE & JACOB PARRISH, OLATHE NORTH



*Jacob Parrish*

Two players to watch in the same backfield, Parrish and Love combined for 1,654 rushing yards and 19 rushing touchdowns, all while fellow senior Noah Palmer picked up 975 rushing yards and 12 rushing touchdowns on his own. With all three players returning, expect Olathe North to dominate with their rushing attack once again. Parrish also stands out at defensive back where he was a first-team All-Sunflower League selection.



*Aquantez Love*

## JALEN MARSHALL, ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

Marshall, a 6-foot-6, 275-pound senior defensive end, gives Aquinas an elite talent slowing down opposing offenses. He racked up 48 tackles last season, with three being tackles for loss. When paired with junior lineman Sa'o Siavi'i, expect the Saints to be formidable up front once again.



*Jalen Marshall*



*Henry Martin (courtesy Keith Kreeger)*

## HENRY MARTIN, BLUE VALLEY NORTH

Martin kept the Blue Valley North offense firing on all cylinders on its way to a Class 6A state runner-up finish. He returns this season after finishing with 2,961 passing yards and 32 passing touchdowns last year, earning All-State Top 11 honors. The 6-foot-1, 195-pound signal-caller returns with most of his top receiving threats, including senior receiver Mekhi Miller.

## MEKHI MILLER, BLUE VALLEY NORTH

Miller, a 6-foot-1, 190-pound senior, returns as the top wide receiver for a Blue Valley North program that racked up outrageous yards and touchdowns through the air in its Class 6A state runner-up finish a year ago. Miller scored 14 of the team's 32 passing touchdowns while going for 1,065 receiving yards, earning first-team All-Class 6A honors.



*Mekhi Miller*





*Alonzo Morgan*

### **ALONZO MORGAN, BLUE VALLEY NORTH**

Morgan, a 5-foot-11, 162-pound cornerback, will look to lock down the top wide receiver on opposing offenses that will likely throw the ball a lot trying to keep up with the Mustangs high-powered offense. He held his own as a sophomore, earning Eastern Kansas League all-league first team honors last season.

### **TAI NEWHOUSE, FREE STATE**

Newhouse, a 6-foot-3 285-pound senior, is the only all-Sunflower League first or second team returner at the defensive lineman position. The Tulsa commit will look to turn around the Firebirds fortunes after going 0-6 last year.



*Tai Newhouse*



*Mikey Pauley*

### **MIKEY PAULEY, BLUE VALLEY NORTHWEST**

In an Eastern Kansas League loaded with top-notch quarterback talent, Pauley certainly stacks up with the best of them. He emerged as a sophomore in 2019, throwing for 1,861 yards and 15 touchdowns, though he was picked off 20 times. In two fewer games last year, Pauley threw for 1,369 yards and 16 touchdowns and cut his interceptions by two-thirds with just seven. He's also run for more than 500 yards each of the past two years with a combined 16 touchdown runs. Pauley has offers from Kansas State and Kansas.

### **BRETT SARWINSKI, GALENA**

The son of Galena coach Beau Sarwinski, it's no surprise he's simply an extension of his dad out on the field at quarterback. He stepped right into the starting role after his older brother P.J. graduated and enters his third year as starter. Last year, he threw for 860 yards and 12 touchdowns and also ran for seven more scores with Galena only getting in eight games, going 6-2.



*Brett Sarwinski*



*Kody Schalk*

### **KODY SCHALK, COLUMBUS**

A 6-foot-4, 265-pound two-way lineman, Schalk came on in a big way last year, earning All-CNC honors on both sides of the ball, including first-team honors on defense. He recorded 35 tackles and four tackles for loss and was a disruptive force up front for the Titan defense that gave up 14 points per game last year in an 8-1 season. He also had nine pancake blocks on offense, helping pave the way for 1,200-yard rusher Gabe Martin.

### **SA'O SIAVI'I, ST. THOMAS AQUINAS**

Siavi'i was a rare freshman starter for St. Thomas Aquinas in 2019 and had an immediate impact on the Saints' defensive front. He recorded 56 tackles and had 12.5 tackles for loss and 8.5 sacks his freshman season. That garnered him plenty of attention from opposing offensive lines last year as a sophomore and though his production dipped slightly, Siavi'i still managed 32 tackles and a team-high 8 tackles for loss and five sacks, earning All-Eastern Kan:



*Sa'o Saivi'i*



*Collin Williams*

### **COLLIN WILLIAMS, BISHOP MIEGE**

Williams, a 6-foot-4 250-pound defensive lineman, recorded 4.5 sacks as a junior. Now he'll return looking to help the Stags improve on their 6-4 record from a season ago.