



WEEK 1'S TOP GAMES IN WESTERN KANSAS



WICHITA EAST AT HAYS



All eyes this summer were on Hays major college football recruit Jaren Kanak, who committed to the University of Clemson in late July. Kanak, whose recruiting stock soared last spring during track season, will take over quarterback duties this season for the Indians. He'll also play linebacker alongside another Division I prospect in Gavin Meyers, who holds multiple D-I offers. The Indians are coming off a 5-3 season and Western Athletic Conference championship a year ago. Coach Tony Crough said Hays High will field its most experienced team in recent program history, with most of the starters having two years of varsity experience. Wichita East, meanwhile, is coming off a breakthrough 7-2 season and state quarterfinal appearance. Blue Aces' quarterback DaeOnte Mitchell will be one of the state's top players to watch. He threw for 875 yards and 16 touchdowns while adding 600 yards and nine touchdowns on the ground last year. The game will be played at Fort Hays State's Lewis Field.



NORTON AT SMITH CENTER



Perennial power Smith Center went 9-2 last year, falling to Oakley in the 1A quarterfinals. The Redmen will have to replace some key starters but also return a strong core including Colton Haresnape, Jake Kirchoff and Bentley Montgomery. Sasse rushed for more than 800 yards and eight touchdowns last year. Norton's 2020 season was derailed by COVID-19 issues and injuries. In spite of those setbacks, the Bluejays still managed to put together a 4-3 season. They graduated quarterback Jonah Ruder and standout lineman Christien Hawks. Sean Anderson will take over quarterback duties for Norton.



TMP-MARIAN AT OAKLEY



Fresh off its best season in recent program history, TMP will look to take another step forward as gear up for last year's Class 1A runner-up in Oakley. The Monarchs return a strong cast from last year, including quarterback Kade Harris and receiver Jace Wentling. Harris threw for over 1,200 yards and 16 touchdowns and rushed for nine TDs. TMP finished with a 7-2 record, falling to Beloit in the first round of the Class 2A playoffs. Oakley beat TMP in the season opener to start a magical run last year. The Plainsmen finished 10-3, falling to Olpe in the 1A title game in Hays. Oakley lost star running back Ethan Abell, but key returners include linebackers Christian Koch and Jonathan Temaat.



OSBORNE AT HILL CITY



Osborne followed up its 2019 Eight-Man Division II state championship with a 4-5 season, but the Bulldogs are loaded with experience in 2021. Steve Tiernan's squad returns seven starters on both offense and defense, led by senior running back and defensive back Mason Schurr, who was a 1,000-yard rusher a year ago and has played a big role for the Bulldogs since he was a freshman. Hill City is coming off a 4-4 campaign. The Ringnecks graduated Eight-Man all-stars Jayce Hamel and Brody McDowell. Sophomore Aiden

Aimrein will take over quarterback duties, and senior Derek Keith is primed for a big year at receiver. Hill City won last season's matchup with the Bulldogs, 45-26.



VICTORIA AT LA CROSSE



The Knights made a run to the Eight-Man Division II semifinals, taking their only loss to St. Francis. Grant Schoenrock enters his third year as the Knights starting quarterback. Schoenrock rushed for 1,100 yards and 22 touchdowns while throwing for 794 yards and 14 touchdowns. Victoria graduated standout linebacker and running back Jayvon Pruitt. La Crosse returns six starters off last year's team that went 5-4 in the program's Eight-Man debut. La Crosse running back/defensive back Colby Stull is one of the top players to watch in Western Kansas. Stull rushed for more than 1,500 yards and 32 touchdowns last year.



SOUTH CENTRAL AT MEADE



Former assistant Bryan Luetters is entering his first year as head coach of Meade, which went 4-3 a year ago. The Buffaloes return running back/linebacker Korben Clawson, who rushed for 763 yards and 12 touchdowns last year. He's one of eight returning starters for Meade. South Central is coming off a 7-3 season and a district championship. The senior-laden Timberwolves will be led by Owen Herd, Colby Snyder and Tucker Uhl.