

2025 Shoals Sports Report Football Season Review

The pre-season of the 2025 football season had its fair share of storylines. Would Muscle Shoals make a deep playoff run with a loaded senior class? Would Deshler return to the playoffs after missing it by a yard in 2024? Would Mars Hill repeat as champion or move to Class 4A with a playoff win? Colbert County's lengthy playoff streak (it has only missed playoffs once since 1980) would continue with a new coach (Oscar Bonds)? These stories dominated this season, while others popped up along the way.

Muscle Shoals: Dominant Defense Carries the Trojans

Muscle Shoals was put on the map by Coach Scott Baden, who took over in 2008. That would be his worst season as the Head Coach at Muscle Shoals. Following that, he would establish a state powerhouse program in 5A that would later become 6A when 7A was created in 2014. His senior class for the 2025 season had made the playoffs all three years on varsity, from the 2022 semifinals to back-to-back quarterfinal appearances. So everyone was assuming at least a quarterfinal this season. What no one outside the locker room expected was a stingy defense that went into October before allowing more than seven points in one game. They once went 33+ days on the calendar and 146+ minutes of gametime without allowing a point.

Then the season began. Jasper was coming to Muscle Shoals in October with the 4th best offense in 6A and the 11th-best defense in 6A. Muscle Shoals would raise them defensively with the 3rd best defense in 1A-7A, allowing just 3.2 points per game. Jasper came out firing, leading 9-7 after the first quarter. It was the first competitive score on the Trojans all season. They had not allowed a point while the game result was in question until then. Jasper led 15-14 at halftime, and that was all the Vikings would score. Muscle Shoals scored the last 20 points of the game to win 34-15. After an interception thrown by Muscle Shoals, Jasper had a high snap recovered by Devin Smith and returned for a touchdown to make it a 20-15 lead.

Muscle Shoals would then get a well deserved bye week, as what had been dubbed the "Region Championship Game" awaited. Hartselle and Muscle Shoals had finished each season since 2021 as one and two in some order. Each meeting from 2022 to 2024 had been decided by six points or less (one in 2024, six in 2023 plus 2 overtimes, three in 2022). This meeting would deliver the same. Both teams top six defense in 1A-7A, top three defense in 6A, top seven offense in 6A. Something had to give.

If Jasper thought 9 was a good first quarter, how about a 14-0 Hartselle lead after the first? Including a flea flicker touchdown for Hartselle. A nightmarish first half for Muscle Shoals ended with a 17-10 lead for Hartselle. Muscle Shoals added touchdowns in the final minute of both the second and third quarters. Sending it to the fourth tied at 17. If the first half was a dream for Hartselle and a nightmare for Muscle Shoals, well, it would flip in the second half. Hartselle

would not score again. Tylan Smith had two fourth quarter interceptions to lead to a Muscle Shoals touchdown. Muscle Shoals would score the final 28 points of the game to win 31-17 and win the region championship for a third straight season.

Playoffs came once again for Muscle Shoals, and the defense stayed locked in. Allowing 12 in the first round. Then, surviving Parker, in a 17-14 win, to advance to the quarterfinals. Mountain Brook would not score over seven in a 24-7 win. Then came the next big test for the defense in the playoffs. Clay-Chalkville would defeat Muscle Shoals in the semifinal round 30-13. While the season came to an end, it was still successful for Muscle Shoals.

However, the biggest story of this season would be how it would be Coach Basden's final season. He would announce his retirement in late February. He coached Muscle Shoals for 18 years, leading them to 170 wins, eight region championships, making the playoffs each season since 2009, one championship game appearance, and putting Muscle Shoals football on the map as a state powerhouse.

Deshler: Return to the Playoffs

2024 was an odd year for Deshler football, as when the calendar flipped to November, they only played one game on November 1, and it was the season finale. 2025 would be the normal year for Deshler as they returned to the playoffs in a big way. They began the season by defeating Russellville and Hatton, the two that made Deshler begin 0-2 in 2024. The 2024 Hatton game would cost Deshler a playoff spot. Once Deshler got off to a 2-0 start in 2025, everyone was on the same page, it seemed, as we all expected a collision course with West Morgan in the last game.

West Morgan-Deshler has developed into a multi-sport rivalry over the last few years with basketball and football. In 2024, West Morgan entered undefeated and had never had back-to-back 10-0 seasons. Deshler almost got them in 2024. A two-point conversion attempt came up just short in that meeting. In 2025, West Morgan entered with a 33-game regular season winning streak, where the last loss was to Deshler in 2022. Deshler had not won at West Morgan since 2012. The stage was set, both teams were 9-0, and the winner would win the region. The loser would be the two-seed. West Morgan led 6-0 after the first quarter, scoring early on their first drive. It would be 13-0 at halftime, West Morgan leads. Deshler scored late in the third quarter, and Coach Patrick Malone went into his bag and pulled an onside kick. Knowing points were at a premium. Deshler recovered. They would not score and would ultimately be stopped on 4th down with 1:11 to play and two timeouts. West Morgan would win 13-7.

Deshler ran through North Jackson in round one of playoffs then an all-time classic matchup was set Deshler-Hamilton in round two. These two have been in the same region multiple times before. 50 miles separate the two schools. So it was going to be an electric environment. Both sides had air horns, vuvuzelas, and other noisemakers. They had not played since the first round of the playoffs in 2014. However, the only time Hamilton had beaten

Deshler in 18 meetings was on November 14, 1924. This game date was November 14, 2025. So 101 years to the day. Do you believe in due?

Hamilton jumped to a 10-0 lead after the first quarter. The Deshler defense held strong in the second quarter, making it 10-7 at halftime. We skip to the fourth quarter, and it is 10-10. The tie would be broken in the first 13 seconds of the fourth quarter. Garrett Reid caught a pass and took it 60 yards for a touchdown, 17-10, Deshler. Just over a minute later, Hamilton tied it at 17. We go to halfway through the fourth quarter still tied at 17, and it is 4th and goal for Deshler. Price Thornton to Garrett Reid for the third time in the game. 24-17 Deshler 6:07 left in regulation. Hamilton ball, and they play it perfectly with a long drive scoring with 23 to play. They go for the tie, making it 24-24 and sending it to overtime. High School overtime is like college overtime, both teams get the ball, but from the 10-yard line. Deshler ball first, and it becomes 31-24 so Hamilton ball, and they score a touchdown. Lines up the extra point, and everyone assumes double overtime. However, Deshler had other plans; a blocked extra point would propel Deshler to the quarterfinals. Deshler's season would come to an end versus state-finalist Anniston, falling 31-7.

Mars Hill: One Last Ride

The youngest football program in the Shoals has become one of the more dominant. Mars Hill began football in 2014 and quickly has risen to a state powerhouse. They won the state in 2018, 2020, and 2024. They had also never gone 15-0 until 2025.

Mars Hill opened the season with Madison Academy and sent a message from the start. That last year was over, and this year is this year. They won 51-27. The 27 would be the most the defense allowed all season. 50+ would become a theme. Beating Russellville 47-19, another message was sent. Region play began with Colbert County and a 62-24 win. Then they would only score below 52 once in region play when Lauderdale County held them to 42 in a 42-14 win. Scottsboro would hold them to 41 in a 41-14 win.

The playoff bracket could not have been more perfect. Mars Hill got to play at home all four rounds before state and did not score below 42 in a playoff game. Coasting to the state championship game with Bayside Academy.

Bayside would be the first and only team to hold Mars Hill under 40 points. The halftime score was 14-6, Mars Hill leading but still dominating in the stats. Hudson Higgins had more rushing yards than Bayside had total yards at halftime (119 to 88). Bayside got within three in the third quarter, but that would be as close as it would get. Jaxon Penn broke a 89-yard rush for a touchdown in the fourth to seal it. Hudson Higgins iced it with :15 to play and made it 38-21 Final.

Mars Hill had done it. They had repeated and finished 15-0 both firsts in program history. They also played the entire season without trailing. They set a new team record with 757 points scored in a season. That is an average of 50.5 points per game. The defense only allowed 11.5 points per game.

However, what we all did not know was what was coming next. The AHSAA would decide to split the private schools into their own classes for playoff contention. So the 2026 season will not see Mars Hill in 4A (due to competitive balance factor). It will see them in Class Single-A Private with all private schools.

We also did not know this would be the final season of Coach Darrell Higgins at Mars Hill. His son and running back Hudson Higgins graduated, and Darrell would take the job at Russellville who will be a 5A in 2026. He leaves Mars Hill after 10 seasons, five championship appearances, four championships (1A 2018, 2A 2020, 3A 2024, 3A 2025), and 107 wins. Winning 10+ games each season since 2018.

Other Highlights

Each season has its major stories and then its supporting stories. Some programs saw leaps this season, while others saw continued success. Two programs made the playoffs with first-year head coaches and won a playoff game. Colbert County and Oscar Bonds, then Lexington with Brett Mask. Shoals Christian scored a game-tying touchdown as time expired versus rival Waterloo and made the extra point to make the playoffs.

Wilson won three games (most since 2018) in year three of Coach Trey Lane. Beating Danville 45-14 and then in October they won back to back games for the first time since 2018, as well as beating West Limestone and East Lawrence. They will come down to 3A in 2026 and hope to improve on their success in 2025.

What may have been the craziest story of all season and all school year was 7A Region 4. Florence found themselves in a four way tie for the region championship. All four teams (Sparkman, James Clemens, Austin, Florence) were 5-2 in the region, but Sparkman and James Clemens were 5-5 overall, while Austin and Florence were 6-4 overall. To explain this in the simplest way, we will show you the post from our facebook page, breaking it down.

7A Region 4 Result (this is a long explanation)

1 Sparkman

2 James Clemens

3 Austin

4 Florence.

Tiebreaker G: wins over 5-seed (Huntsville), everyone but Austin beat Huntsville.

Austin out of the tiebreak

Go to 3-teams w Florence, JC, Sparkman (and go back to top of tiebreakers)

Tiebreaker H: wins over 6-seed (Bob Jones), everyone but JC beat Bob Jones

Go to 2-teams w Florence and Sparkman (and go back to top of tiebreakers)

Tiebreaker A: H2H Sparkman beat Florence (Sparkman 1-seed)

Start over for 2-seed

JC and Austin both beat Sparkman (1-seed...Tiebreaker C)

H2H JC beat Austin (JC 2-seed)

Start over for 3-seed

Austin-Florence.

Austin beat Florence (Tiebreaker A)

Austin 3

Florence 4

Tiebreakers on Page 10

<https://ahsaa.com/Portals/0/Publications/2025-2026/126391%20football.pdf?ver=Q82VYYDPailMDFt-hrSHFQ%3d%3d×tamp=1753913372577>

Why was it such a big deal? The state had redrawn the 7A bracket outside of the traditional north-south split in order for better playoffs. So this was the first year that Region 4 (Huntsville) would cross and play Region 1 (Mobile). Everyone had assumed it was going to be whoever won in their final game would win the region, which Florence did. However, this happened on Monday of that week, so it was already determined.

Florence and Austin would draw the short end and travel to Mobile for playoffs round one. Florence would get hotel rooms for the night before and charter buses. Unfortunately, all four teams' seasons came to an end in the playoffs.

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Shoals Sports Report