

3A North SemiFinal Preview: Piedmont at Mars Hill



R7-1 MARS HILL

R6-1 PIEDMONT

VS

2025 AHSAA 3A FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP GAME
THURSDAY DECEMBER 4TH 11:00AM

R3-1 SOUTHSIDE-SELMA

R1-1 BAYSIDE ACADEMY

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SPORTS SHOALS REPORT

Familiarity: close acquaintance with or knowledge of something. That is the definition Google will give you. Mars Hill's definition is the same semifinal opponent and the same second and third round opponent for the playoffs. In 2024, Mars Hill's road to the state championship was Midfield, Geraldine, Winfield, and Piedmont. 2025 has been Whitesburg Christian, Winfield, Geraldine, and Piedmont. "Playing the same teams as last year shows we both have good programs and how tough it is to win in the 3a North." Coach Higgins said Black Friday is a

special day for high school football in Alabama, as there are only 12 games in the state for 1A-6A semifinals and only six games in each half of the state. 3A North will have the same matchup, same stadium, and most of the same two teams as it did in 2024, Piedmont at Mars Hill.

Coach Darrell Higgins is in his 10th season at Mars Hill, all as head coach. He has quickly established a standard that most schools dream of. That standard is championships. Whether contending, playing for, winning, etc. Ask any coach at Mars Hill, and they will say it all goes back to a standard of winning. Boys basketball coach (Jeremy Pounders) gave us a quote last season saying, “The goal is to be playing in the last game/day of each season.” Coach Higgins will be coaching his sixth semifinal this week and his fourth at home. Coach Higgins had this to say about playing at home and at this point of the season, “It’s exciting to play in the semifinals!! We have been very blessed to have some great teams over the last 8 years. Our entire staff and community are looking forward to hosting a great team.”

Ironically enough, Mars Hill will host all four rounds before Birmingham (the first team since Fyffe in 2023 to do so). The bracket has to be set up right from the start of the season, then you have to hope for some luck to fall your way as well. Mars Hill has been on the top line of the bracket this season (similar to a number one seed). This is the first time Mars Hill has been able to host the first four rounds. “We love playing at home!! Our fans and students do a wonderful job of showing up and giving us support.” Coach Higgins said about playing at home versus on the road.

Mars Hill is familiar with their opponent, as they played them last season in the same round. Piedmont comes in undefeated once again, as they did in 2024. Piedmont jumped to a 7-0 lead last season through the first quarter. Then came the firestorm, Mars Hill went up 14-7 with 8:35 left in 2Q and did not look back. A 21-7 halftime lead ballooned into a 49-7 lead by the middle of the fourth quarter. The final would be 49-20. Piedmont returns this season with 3A 1st Team All State WR Rollie Pinto (3-star Jacksonville State commit). However, he will not be the only Division I commit on the field. Mars Hill has its own trio of D1 guys in Jaxon Penn (RB 3-star Troy commit), Hudson Higgins (3-star UAB commit), and Samuel Swinney (UNA commit). Then, they have a couple of juniors in Cord Pigg (several FBS offers) and Matthew McIntyre (several FBS offers). Coach Higgins praised Piedmont, crediting them on both sides of the ball. “Piedmont has a very explosive offense and some really good playmakers. The QB and WR are huge keys. The offensive line comes off the ball low and fast. They also have a fast defense and a lot of returning starters back from last year. Our OL must have a great game if we are going to score.”

This week is also a holiday week, with Thanksgiving on Thursday. Coach Higgins summed it up perfectly, “High school football practice on Thanksgiving is the best!! It’s a true blessing to be playing football, and we’re thankful for our extra time together as a team and staff!” This week also comes with challenges, though with school being out all week. Kids can get out of routine, and as a coaching staff, you have to find out how to keep your guys on routine

as well as accountable. Coach Higgins added, “School being out all week is a blessing, and we try to enjoy some off time and still prepare for our game. We practice at normal times on Monday and Tuesday, so we can stay close to our normal schedule.” Then comes Wednesday practice and the big question of what Thursday looks like. Normally, Thursday is a walkthrough practice each week of the season. Coach Higgins and Mars Hill will have their guys in early around 8:00am and then let them go for the day.

Like the other team still playing in the Shoals, Mars Hill has been here before. This group of seniors played in last year's semifinal and has also propelled the program to play 4A football next season (due to the AHSAA competitive balance rule for private schools). They have scored 42 points in each of the last two games. The lowest point total all season is 41 versus 5A Semifinalist Scottsboro. Mars Hill's closest game all season was in week one, versus a 4A Second Round team, Madison Academy, in a 24-point win. Piedmont is also a team that has had a lot of blowouts. Only one game decided by one possession (last week vs Gordo 28-20). Piedmont is averaging right at 48 points per game and allowing just under 10. Mars Hill is averaging 51 points per game while allowing 10.5. They have both been ranked all season, Mars Hill at 1, Piedmont at 2. It is an old cliché, but something has to give on Friday. Will it be offense or defense, we shall see.

Zack Pounders
Shoals Sports Report



13-0

Record

13-0

47.9

PPG

51.6

9.7

PA (per game)

10.5

13 Semifinal Appearances 6

2022

Last Semifinal Win

2024



7-5

Semifinal Record

4-1

LW
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