

6A North SemiFinal Preview: Clay-Chalkville at Muscle Shoals



R7-1 MUSCLE SHOALS

R6-1 CLAY-CHALKVILLE

VS

2025 AHSAA 6A FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP GAME
FRIDAY DECEMBER 5TH 7:00PM

R3-1 BENJAMIN RUSSELL

R1-1 SARALAND

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When the playoffs began, we had 208 teams hoping to still be playing this week. After round one, that number was 104, then 52 after the second round. That number has now dwindled to 26. Four each in 1A-6A and two in 7A (due to one fewer round). Two of those teams are from the Shoals in Mars Hill and Muscle Shoals. Muscle Shoals has played some of their greatest opponents this postseason, avenging some recent playoff losses. After coasting by Mae Jemison in round one, they faced Parker, who beat them in 2024 (it was the third straight season playing

Parker in the playoffs). Then came Mountain Brook, a team Muscle Shoals had yet to defeat in the previous two meetings. Muscle Shoals came out on top and avenged a 2022 semifinal loss. Now in the semifinals, they will face their toughest test to date and for a third straight season Clay-Chalkville. This is the first time they meet in the semifinals, though they have met in round two or three previously.

Every school dreams of playing deep into the season, but it also comes with challenges of conditioning, injury management, etc. Muscle Shoals is prepping for its 13th game this week. Others are prepping for their 14th. That is three to four additional weeks of practice and games compared to the regular season. Coach Scott Basden praised his senior-led team, crediting them with how having deep playoff runs prepare them for this time of year. “They understand how to prepare, how to take care of their bodies, and how to lock in mentally each week. They know the emotional highs and lows that come with playoff football, and they know how important it is to keep the focus on the next game, not the big picture. They’ve seen what it takes to keep advancing, and that experience helps us stay grounded and consistent as The stakes get higher each week,” said Coach Basden. This group of seniors has been to at least the third round or deeper each of their four varsity seasons. Coach Basden credited his team and community in part to still be playing this week as well. “Being able to practice during Thanksgiving week is something we never take for granted. It’s a sign that our kids, our staff, and our community have all invested at a really high level. To make four straight quarterfinals and now reach our second semifinal in that stretch says a lot about the consistency and character of this program. Our players have bought into the work, and our coaches put in countless hours behind the scenes. To still be on the field this week is a blessing. It means our guys have earned the right to compete for a chance to play for a state championship, and that opportunity is something we’re extremely grateful for.”

Before we dive into the game, let's address the elephant in the room. It is Thanksgiving week. There is a major holiday that involves family gatherings and food on Thursday. Add to that school is out all week, so kids can get out of routine with not having to be up and ready at 7:30am or 8:00am. However, sports are known to be routine-based. Same flow most days, same practice flow, same workout flow, etc. However, Muscle Shoals has had four semifinal appearances before this season and three under Coach Basden. He also has two more semifinal appearances at previous stops at Cordova and Parrish. He had this to say about this topic. “When school is out, the biggest challenge is keeping the routine intact. Our guys are creatures of habit, and this time of year, consistency is everything. So even though we are out of school, we’re still keeping the same practice times, meeting times, and daily structure as much as possible. We want their bodies and minds operating on the same rhythm they’ve been in all season. That means getting them up, getting them moving, and keeping the focus on football when it’s time to work. At the same time, we remind them they’ve got more free time, so it’s important to rest, hydrate, and take care of their bodies.” There is also the Thursday walkthrough/practice to think about for this week, since Thanksgiving is always on Thursday. Coach Basden added, “Thanksgiving Day is special for our program. Our plan is to keep our same routine as far as

working out and practicing. We will have a meal together and just be thankful for these moments. We'll bring the guys in earlier in the day so they can get their work done and still spend plenty of time with their families."

Clay-Chalkville has been ranked top two in 6A all season, they took over the top spot in late September and kept it the rest of the season. They are 13-0 and averaging right at 47 points per game, while allowing 11.5 points per game on defense. They have played a battle tested schedule out of region play including Hueytown (6A quarterfinalist), Brandon (MS) (7A SemiFinalist), Thompson (7A Finalist). They beat Hueytown and Brandon by 50+ combined points and beat Thompson by four. They are led by Senior QB Aaron Frye and Senior WR Corey Barber (four-star Ole Miss commit). Frye has a combined 2,802 yards on the season, rushing for 985 as well. He has a combined 35 touchdowns this season, passing for 20. Barber leads the team in receiving yards with just under 1,100 yards and 14 touchdowns. They are not just pass happy; they can run the ball behind senior RB Joshua Woods, who is averaging 7.3 yards per rush and has rushed for 1,365 yards on the season. Coach Basden credited Clay, "Clay has one of the most explosive offenses in the stateThe key for us is going to be limiting their big plays. You can't let them get comfortable or let their athletes get out in the open field. We've got to tackle well, win first down, and try to make them drive the length of the field instead of giving up chunk plays. Discipline in our assignments is huge—eyes in the right place, good communication on the back end. If we can make them earn everything and avoid giving up explosive plays, we'll give ourselves a chance to keep playing next week." He also added how Clay scores in bunches.

The defenses could be what determines this game. Clay has a combined 27 sacks this season. Keith Richmond has nine sacks this season (including three versus Thompson). Colton McIntyre has eight sacks this season. Clay has eight interceptions this season, led by Jamario Yadao with three. Coach Basden had this to say about their defense: "Clay's defense is one of the best in the state for a reason. They're physical, they're fast, and they don't make many mistakes. To create points against a group like that, you've got to be disciplined and efficient. For us, it starts with winning the line of scrimmage and staying ahead of the chains. They're too good defensively to live in 3rd-and-long situations. We have to be balanced, take what they give us, and capitalize when we get opportunities. Explosive plays help, but against a defense like theirs, sometimes the biggest thing is finishing drives. When we get in the red zone, we have to come away with points."

Muscle Shoals has been known for its defense all season. There was a time where they did not allow a point for 33 days and 146+ minutes of gametime. Jasper came out firing on Muscle Shoals with 15 first-half points. Final score of that game: Muscle Shoals 34-15. Hartselle gave Muscle Shoals fits in the first half with two explosive touchdowns. Hartselle led 14-0, and at halftime it was 17-10. Hartselle leads. Final score 31-17, Muscle Shoals won. Back-to-back second-half shutouts, thanks in large part to the defense. Tylan Smith had two fourth-quarter interceptions versus Hartselle, including a game-sealing pick-six. Kamhariyan Johnson (Alabama commit) led the defensive line in getting pressure on Jasper's QB in that second half.

Then there was the Parker game, where Parker led 14-7 at halftime. Keivay Foster (Arkansas commit) and Christian Pritchard came up with an interception each in that second half. Stop me if you've heard this before. Final score: Muscle Shoals won 17-14. Another second-half shutout. Muscle Shoals jumped to a 17-0 lead at halftime last week at Mountain Brook. Foster had two interceptions. Smith had one as well. Mountain Brook would only score seven in the fourth quarter. To our knowledge, that is the only "competitive" points the Muscle Shoals defense has allowed all season. It made the score 17-7, but Muscle Shoals would add a touchdown late to go up 24-7 and win. At one point this season, this defense was allowing as few as 3.1 points per game. Eight of the twelve games they have allowed seven or fewer points. Coach Basden's best defense in his time at Muscle Shoals was in 2013. That defense allowed 101 points all season across fifteen games. The only two losses they allowed over 9 points (Bob Jones in week 10 and Spanish Fort in the championship game).

This game should be close. Neither team has had its fair share of close games all season, as a sign of dominance. We have expected these two to be at this point of the season all year. Clay's schedule is littered with 40+ points scored. They beat Mountain Brook 49-0 and Gadsden City 44-7. Muscle Shoals beat those two 17-7 and 24-6, respectively. Now, who knows if Muscle Shoals has done the respectful thing all season and scored just enough to win and not embarrass their opponent. They only have 40+ in three games. However, both defenses may show out on Friday, and this game may have 20 total points. Muscle Shoals has never scored over 21 in a semifinal game and has never allowed more than 28. Clay has scored 20+ in seven of eight semifinal games and has allowed 20+ in five of eight semifinal games. There should be no reason or need to get either side hyped for this game. The winner will play for a state championship. Loser is onto basketball season.

Zack Pounders,
Shoals Sports Report



13-0

Record

12-0

46.7

PPG

34.7

11.5

PA (per game)

7.6

9 Semifinal Appearances 5

2023

Last Semifinal Win

2013



5-3

Semifinal Record

1-3

