

Buy-In and Legacy: How Sheffield has Bought into a Legacy Mindset

One of the biggest winners of the reclassification may be Sheffield. They have been in 3A the last two seasons and now return to 2A. A place they have been the better part of the last fifteen years. They average around 70 students per grade, which makes them the fifth-largest 2A in the state. They had been in 3A and one of the 20 smallest 3A's in the state. Coach Michael Parker joked, saying the best part was "We do not play Mars Hill in 2A." Then he went on to talk about the competition aspect. 2A has more county schools; the old 3A was a mix of county, city, and private schools. Coach Parker feels like his team can compete more in 2A.

Sheffield got a new field this offseason. They transitioned from a grass field to a turf field. The players are excited to be the first ones to play on the new surface. One noted how they had talked about getting turf for years. Jaylen Gangar added jokingly, "I'm looking to be the first to score on it." Coach Parker told local media last school year that it should help catch up with other programs around the area that have turf. Sheffield will join a group that includes Deshler, Muscle Shoals, Mars Hill, and Florence, which also play on turf. Sheffield will open the season on the new field on August 21 when they host Haleyville.

Sheffield drops down to 2A but retains some familiar opponents while gaining some new ones. The region includes familiar foes such as Colbert County, Tanner, Falkville, and Lexington, all of which they have played this decade. It also includes Phil Campbell, a team Sheffield has not played since 2017. The region also includes two opponents Sheffield has never played football against: Winston County and JB Pennington.

One topic that came up several times at media days with Sheffield was legacy and buy-in. The players emphasized how the coaches have challenged them to be better with leadership and to leave a legacy that goes on for years. One noted how teams like Mars Hill does not stop for all four quarters, and he wants Sheffield to be like that as well.

Coach Parker took the Sheffield job last summer in an interim role after Coach Johnny Wright retired. This will be his first season with them, with a full offseason. "I've talked a lot with them about what legacy you will leave," he said. Then, going on about how some of the previous players may not have left the best legacy on the field. "The biggest difference is the buy-in," he added. He told a story about when he first got there: the first question he got asked was, "Are we lifting (weights) today?" when they went to the fourth block (last block). Then he explained how now they come in expecting to lift and do it.

The players then discussed how, after practice, they break it down as a family. Coach Parker noted how he will often ask them what does that mean. Then told about how he was at the school one day, working around the field and six players showed up just to see him unprompted.

He then sent a picture of himself and the players to his assistant coaches and said: “We are winning.” Sheffield hopes the off-field wins can lead to more wins on the field this season.

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Shoals Sports Report