

Same Central, New Class: How Central Hopes to Return to 3A Success

Central enters 2026 in a place they have not been in for 20+ years: 3A. Central had been 4A from 2004 to 2005. They also enter with the now longest-tenured coach in the Shoals as Coach Heath Wood enters year 16. Coach Scott Basden spent 18 years at Muscle Shoals before retiring this offseason, making Coach Wood the new longest-tenured coach. When asked about his tenure, he joked, “Who’s counting? And I guess I’ll get my driver’s license this year.”

Central is coming back to 3A alongside longtime county rival Wilson and essentially has a brand new schedule. They will open on August 28th, choosing to take a week one bye before opening with back-to-back road games at Phil Campbell, then Wilson. Three straight home games to follow with Lauderdale County, Elkmont, and Brooks. Then on the road with Clements and Colbert Heights before closing region play at home with West Limestone and a trip across the county to Rogers. The regular season will end on Thursday, October 29th, with a home game versus Hatton. Some familiar opponents include West Limestone, Wilson, Brooks, and Hatton, who were in 4A with Central the last two years. Rogers is also a familiar opponent who went to 3A the last two years but had been in 4A with Central in the past. Coach Wood noted, “Sometimes you take the bye weeks when they come.” Central will play a preseason game on August 14, then have a week between their opening game on August 28.

Schedule notes with the new opponents include playing Clements for the first time since 2015. Lauderdale County and Central have played the last two years non-region but this will be the first region game since 2003. They have not played Phil Campbell since 1997. Everyone else they have played within the last 10 years.

Central has seen success in other sports over the last several years, with baseball making deep playoff runs to the quarterfinals and semifinals. Softball made regionals last season. Basketball on the boys' and girls' side has improved also. The players noted how it gives them something to work off of and keep it going. Central football missed the playoffs in 2025 by one game. Central has only missed the playoffs three times in Coach Wood’s tenure and has never missed back-to-back years in his tenure.

Central has had success in 3A before. In 2002, they were 8-4. In 1992 and 1993, they made the semifinals before falling to eventual state runner-up Lamar County in 1992 and eventual state champion Colbert County in 1993. Both of those remain the farthest they have ever made it in the playoffs. This group is hoping to continue the success under Coach Wood and hopes to recreate some of the 3A magic from back in the day.

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Shoals Sports Report