

Week 1 Deshler at Russellville Preview



The graphic features a dark background with stadium lights at the top. In the top left is the 'GRIP N' GRIN TAXIDERMY' logo, and in the top right is the 'LW' logo for 'Luxury Interiors Since 1972'. The center text reads 'GAME OF THE WEEK' in large white letters, followed by a large red 'D' for Deshler and a yellow lightning bolt logo for Russellville, with 'AT' in between. Below this, white text on a green field background provides game history: '100TH ALL-TIME MEETING (DESHLER LEADS 49-46-4) HAVE MET EACH YEAR SINCE 1988', 'THREE OVERTIME GAMES (1989, 2018 20T, 2019)', 'FIRST MEETING: OCTOBER 5TH 1923 (DESHLER WON 38-0)', 'MOST RECENT MEETING: AUGUST 22ND 2025 (DESHLER WON 15-14)', 'DESHLER HAS NOT WON AT RUSSELLVILLE SINCE 2004', and 'DESHLER HAS NOT WON BACK TO BACK GAMES SINCE 2003-2004'. Two 'SPORTS SHOALS REPORT' logos are in the bottom corners.

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GAME OF THE WEEK

D **AT** 

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SPORTS SHOALS REPORT

When we look back over the last 100 years of American history, some events and eras have defined it. Great Depression, World War II, the Civil Rights Movement, and most recently the COVID-19 Pandemic. Another thing that has stood the test of time over the last 100 years is the Deshler-Russellville football rivalry.

They first met on October 5, 1923, when Deshler won 38-0. Russellville would get its first win in the rivalry on October 29, 1926, with a 19-0 victory. Ironically, both sides' first win came on the road. The early trends were shutouts in this rivalry. The first four meetings were

shutouts or scoreless ties. Eleven of the first thirteen meetings were shutouts or scoreless ties. Deshler's longest win streak is eight (1947-1954). Russellville's longest win streak is six (2005-2010).

This rivalry did not need anymore juice, but it got some in January when Russellville hired a new head coach, Darrell Higgins (former Deshler assistant 1994-2015), and then most recently, Mars Hill head coach 2016-2025, during which he won four state championships in an eight-year stretch. Coach Patrick Malone (Deshler head coach) played at Deshler in the late 1990s when Coach Higgins was an assistant at Deshler. So this will not be Coach Higgins' first look at the rivalry, but it will be his first in black and gold.

Certain milestones come with looking back at old memories. Coach Higgins noted how his favorite memories involve all the great teams and players on both sides. Notable players from recent history include Deion Belue (2006-2009 Deshler) and Brent Calloway (2007-2010 Russellville) both of whom had the opportunity to play for Nick Saban at Alabama. Deion is now an assistant on Coach Higgins' staff at Russellville. Going back in the 1990s and the turn of the century, you had Aaron Sears (1999-2002 Russellville), who went to Tennessee and played two years in the NFL. Coach Malone gave us his favorite memory: "There have been so many great games between the two and legendary performances by each side. The 2025 game stands out. Season opener, home opener, and we go for two to win it. We called a play called "Tiger." Our offensive coaches prepped it all week, and there was no hesitation to call it when we decided to go for two. The play breaks down, and players make plays. We get in the end zone and are able to hold them in the last two minutes to win the game (15-14 Final)" That would be Deshler's closest game last season until the second-round playoffs at Hamilton.

It takes a lot to make one game happen each Friday. It takes even more to make five home games work. Ten total games, even more with buses, food, etc. To have a single matchup happen 100 times takes a lot of collaboration from coaches on both sides. Coach Higgins noted how the matchup is important to both schools. Coach Malone noted how it is the communities and support from both. He went on to give credit to the coaches each has hired over the years to keep the game alive plus how they get a really impressive gate (admission price) on each side when they play. Coach Malone also mentioned how he hopes to keep the game on the schedule for the years to come. One factor in the rivalry staying alive is the proximity and school size. Deshler is one of the larger 4A's in the state, and Russellville is one of the smaller 5A's but neither has a school in their county the same size outside of Muscle Shoals (for Deshler). Colbert County has a lot of smaller schools. Franklin County the same. Red Bay is a large 1A and Phil Campbell is a 2A.

It is only 20 miles between Deshler and Russellville schools. That short distance is part of what makes it special. They have played early-season either game one or two since 1992. "I believe it's a game that can serve as a measuring stick for each program. Both schools take a lot of pride in their football programs, so you know you will get a good product on the field." Coach Malone added about what makes it special.

Both coaches expect a great environment Friday night. Coach Malone said, “They will play tough, sound, and physical football. The atmosphere will be electric. You take into account it's the season opener, the home opener, the debut of Coach Higgins, senior night, and just the excitement that surrounds Russellville football... It should be a great night for high school football.” Coach Higgins added, “The faces and numbers change, but they still have great players and coaches.”

When you look at rivalries that have stood the test of time, this is up there with several in college football. Rivalries that have been played 100+ times in college football include Florida-Georgia, Alabama-Tennessee, LSU-Ole Miss, Mississippi State-Ole Miss, Army-Navy, Auburn-Georgia, and more. When they take the field Friday, they will join a select club in AHSAA football that includes Lamar County-Sulligent, Cullman-Hartselle, and Albertville-Guntersville, and more that have played 100 or more times.

This rivalry has withstood so much in the last century, as we mentioned earlier. Deshler and Russellville were both segregated into the 1960s. Coach Howard Chappell has coached in this rivalry at Deshler, then stepped down to serve in the Navy in World War II, then came back after the war to coach at Deshler again. The 2020 meeting was ruled a forfeit in favor of Russellville. That is the only meeting that has been ruled a forfeit. This rivalry has seen 49 Deshler wins, 46 Russellville wins, and four ties (1924-1925, 1961, 1973) and three overtime games (1989, 2018-2019). Last season was decided by one point. The last time at Russellville was a Russellville win, 35-21. Deshler has not won at Russellville since 2004 23-13. The last time Deshler won back to back meetings was 2003 and 2004. Deshler leads the all-time series and leads in points, outscoring Russellville 1927 to 1574.

Zack Pounders,

Shoals Sports Report