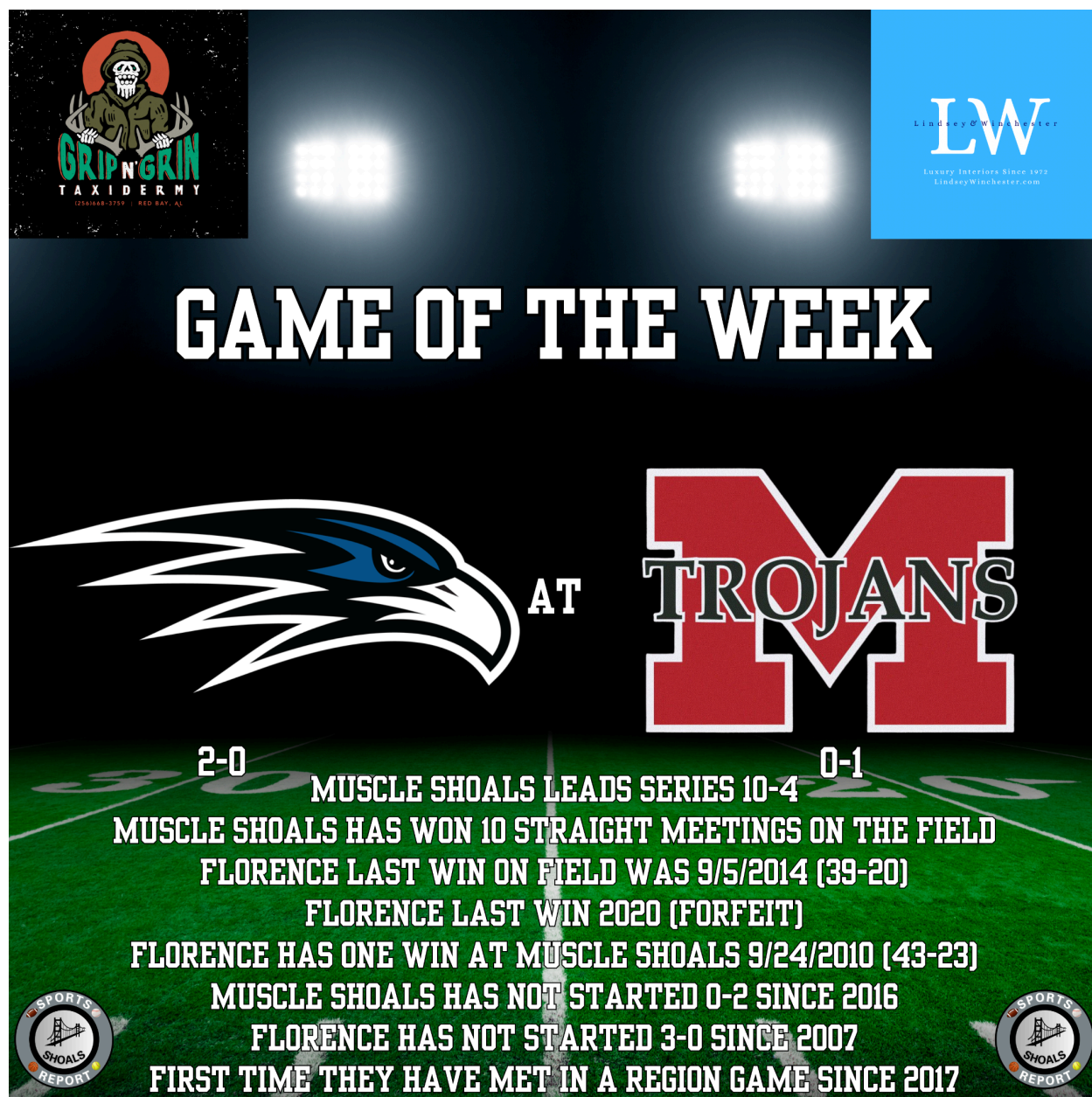


Week 3 Florence at Muscle Shoals Preview



The graphic features a dark background with stadium lights. In the top left is the 'GRIP N' GRIN TAXIDERMY' logo. 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. Below this, the Muscle Shoals falcon head logo is on the left and the 'M TROJANS' logo is on the right, with 'AT' in between. The record '2-0' is above the falcon and '0-1' is above the 'M TROJANS' logo. A central text block contains the following statistics: 'MUSCLE SHOALS LEADS SERIES 10-4', 'MUSCLE SHOALS HAS WON 10 STRAIGHT MEETINGS ON THE FIELD', 'FLORENCE LAST WIN ON FIELD WAS 9/5/2014 (39-20)', 'FLORENCE LAST WIN 2020 (FORFEIT)', 'FLORENCE HAS ONE WIN AT MUSCLE SHOALS 9/24/2010 (43-23)', 'MUSCLE SHOALS HAS NOT STARTED 0-2 SINCE 2016', 'FLORENCE HAS NOT STARTED 3-0 SINCE 2007', and 'FIRST TIME THEY HAVE MET IN A REGION GAME SINCE 2017'. Two 'SPORTS SHOALS REPORT' logos are in the bottom corners.

GRIP N' GRIN TAXIDERMY

LW
Luxury Interiors Since 1972
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GAME OF THE WEEK

2-0 **AT** **0-1**
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SPORTS SHOALS REPORT

We enter week three of the high school football season in a streak of streaks being ended each week so far. In week one, West Morgan's 34-game regular-season winning streak ended. Then Columbia snapped their 101 game losing streak the next night. Week two, we saw Mars Hill's 21-game win streak end. Week three, we have a couple of local streaks being put on the line. Central has eight straight wins over Wilson. Muscle Shoals has 10 straight wins on the field over Florence. We say on-field because 2020 was a forfeit victory for Florence due to COVID-19 precautions. You can see from the graphic above that there is more on the line this week in the

Florence-Muscle Shoals game. Let's not forget this is a region game for the first time in nearly ten years.

The reclassification saw Florence come down to 5A, or the "new-5A," and Muscle Shoals remained in 5A. Coach Michael Darden (new Muscle Shoals Head Coach) said, "It certainly brings a new element to the game that I haven't experienced since I have been here. These guys love playing this game regardless of region play or not. It will be a fun atmosphere for High school football." He has never lost to Florence while at Muscle Shoals as he is in his sixth season at Muscle Shoals. He spent the last five seasons as the offensive coordinator.

Muscle Shoals was off for week two, but before that they traveled to Hoover and lost 14-8. They had to battle a delayed kickoff, then the aspect of playing somewhere they have never played before. Hoover plays home games at the Hoover Met (home of the SEC Baseball Conference Tournament). Different angles, depth perception angles, etc. Coach Darden said this despite the result of the game: "Obviously we had a lot to clean up in all 3 phases of the game. The thing that I was most proud of was that these players played extremely hard for 48 minutes. They never flinched. That is a different environment for a high school football game against a really good football team, and our kids played their guts out." Muscle Shoals used the early bye week like another week of training camp (fall camp). Coach Darden said, "The bye week allowed us time to be able to really break down the Hoover game and spend several days going back and working on ourselves. Last week looked like another fall camp week for us, doing a lot of best-on-best work." That time can be valuable with a new head coach to hammer down details.

Florence is off to their best start since 2013, when they last started 2-0. They have not started 3-0 since 2007. They have done it dominantly, beating Pinson Valley 45-0 and then Jasper 50-21. However, they have not beaten Muscle Shoals on the field since 2014. That is a crazy stat when you think of all the talent Florence has had since then, plus look at the players that have played Division I (FBS) football since then. Guys such as Armoni Goodwin (LSU), Cadarius Thompson (Georgia State), Carson Casteel (Michigan State), Jahlil Hurley (Alabama/Kansas), Kneeland Hibbett (Alabama), and more. Muscle Shoals has also had a ton of talent come through since then as well. Coach Darden said this about Florence: "Florence does a really good job of running the football on offense. They have 3 good running backs. The Offensive Line is very well coached and maintains blocks well. Quarterback (Coston Mahan) is a good player who operates the offense very efficiently. They have some Wide Receivers that can threaten you down the field as well. Defensively, it starts with their Defensive Line. The Noretackle is a very good football player and is a force in the middle of that defense. Linebackers are all good players that fly around and make plays. They are athletic in the secondary. They are a well-coached team in all three phases of the game."

The big thing for Florence this season has been being the "big kid in class." Florence had been the smallest 7A in the state, playing teams with numerous guys going to play DI football and schools near double the size. Florence is now the largest 5A in the state, so while they come

down a class, they really can elevate their game because they had played teams that were bigger and better for such a long time.

This is one of the newer but more marquee rivalries in the Shoals area. It does not have the history like Muscle Shoals-Deshler or Deshler-Colbert County because it is just over 20 years old since Florence consolidated Bradshaw and Coffee into one school. However, it is still a fun one. It may be the only one in the Shoals that has a name, "Singing River Rivalry." For Muscle Shoals, it is the home opener plus the home opener for Coach Darden. He gave us this quote: "It's going to be fun. It's always a great atmosphere. The stadium will be packed. I know our kids love playing in this game, and this is everything that a rivalry game should be. Florence is a very well-coached football team with a lot of good players." We do not do picks at Shoals Sports Report, but we can say this. The buzz around Florence is real, and they feel as if this is their best shot in a long time. I've heard it is the most anticipated game since 2021 (Muscle Shoals won 36-35). Muscle Shoals has won 10 straight in this series. Since the forfeit in 2020, they have had three meetings decided by two possessions or less. The best comparison I can think of is 2022 Alabama-Tennessee. Tennessee had lost 15 straight to Alabama, and everything was coming together in 2022. It was almost a sense of "if not now, then when will Tennessee beat Alabama?" Tennessee won by three that night and snapped the streak. I think everyone on the north side (Florence) of the river feels the same way: if not now, then when will they beat Muscle Shoals on the field?

Zack Pounders,

Shoals Sports Report