

Week 8 Lauderdale County at Rogers Preview

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GAME OF THE WEEK

LAUDERDALE COUNTY **AT** **ROGERS**

3-3 (3-1) **5-1 (4-0)**

LAUDERDALE COUNTY LEADS SERIES 34-24-1
LAST MEETING: LAUDERDALE COUNTY WON 39-37
ROGERS CAN CLINCH A PLAYOFF SPOT WITH A WIN
LAUD. CO. CAN CLINCH WITH A WIN+WEST LIMESTONE LOSS
LAUDERDALE COUNTY HAS WON SIX OF THE LAST SEVEN MEETINGS
ROGERS HAS NOT BEATEN LAUDERDALE COUNTY AT ROGERS SINCE 2018
THREE OF THE LAST FOUR MEETINGS DECIDED BY TWO POSSESSIONS OR LESS
LAUD. CO. HAS NOT LOST FOUR REGULAR SEASON GAMES SINCE 2022
ROGERS HAS NOT STARTED REGION PLAY 5-0 SINCE 2017
LAUDERDALE COUNTY HAS NOT BEEN 3-4 SINCE 2018

SPORTS SHOALS REPORT

We all graduate high school at some point, and when you look back, you remember a few games more than others. Some of those games are county rivalries where you play against future coworkers or cousins. Those are the games you talk about five, ten, fifteen years down the road while at lunch or the water cooler. They get even bigger when playoffs are on the line. 23 miles separate Lauderdale County High School and Rogers High School, but they have been in the same region or area across multiple sports the last several years.

The stakes are clear in the graphic above, but basically the winner of this game will clinch a playoff spot. If Rogers wins, they are in. Lauderdale County will be watching the score of West Limestone-Wilson on Thursday, and if West Limestone loses, then Lauderdale County will be in a win-and-in situation. We asked both coaches about the stakes of this game and Coach Reid Newton (Lauderdale County) said, "We just talk about what we need to do to be successful this week. Getting to the playoffs is definitely something we want to achieve, but we focus more on what we can control in the moment," while Coach Daniel Garrett (Rogers) said, "We honestly don't talk much about that. We obviously have goals that we set at the beginning of each year, but we try to focus more on our standard. Each day you have to show up, do your job, and be that standard. And we feel if we can do that consistently enough, all of our goals will take care of themselves." Both sides understand the stakes but realize the more you talk about it, the more pressure it can add. You want your guys to approach a week eight game like it is game one and game ten, where the excitement and energy are high regardless of the opponent. We mentioned West Limestone's impact. Rogers and Lauderdale County both own the head-to-head tiebreaker over West Limestone, but the math is better for Rogers. Rogers is 4-0 in the region, and Lauderdale County is 3-1. West Limestone (at press time) is 2-2. With three games left, it is possible for West Limestone to jump Lauderdale County in the standings outright if both win this week. If Rogers and West Limestone win this week, then West Limestone can finish in a 5-2 tie for the region, but Rogers has the head-to-head and would stay above West Limestone.

Now that we know what's at stake, let's dive into the teams, beginning with the visitors from Rogersville or Lauderdale County High School. Coach Reid Newton had a rough start as head coach, but once he got into region play, it has been smoother sailing. Lauderdale began the season 0-2, then 1-3, but two of the three losses were by a single point (Lexington and Central). Coach Newton said this about the close games: "I think that we learned in close games there's just a handful of plays that will decide those type games and you never know when they're coming." Lauderdale led Central 14-7 at halftime; then it was 21-20 Central with 8:00 to play in the 4th quarter. It would be a 21-20 final for Central. Lexington was a weird game with an extended halftime due to a weather delay. It was 12-7 Lexington at halftime. Lauderdale went up 19-12 in the second half before Lexington went ahead with 9:43 to play and won 20-19. Then Brooks scored 27 second-half points to pull away. Coach Newton said this about the rough start: "I believe we learned to trust each other and just do the job we are assigned on that play." Lauderdale's three wins have been by an average margin of 36.6 points. They had a 35-0 lead at the end of the first quarter at Elkmont last week. Lauderdale County has been tested with some of the best teams locally, as Lexington and Central are a combined 10-2. Brooks is 3-3. One thing to watch is that Lauderdale County is 0-3 vs. intra-county schools this season.

Rogers enters this game at 5-1, and the one loss is out of region to a team coached by one of the all-time greats in North Alabama. Former Decatur Coach Jere Adcock (currently at Whitesburg Christian) is the lone team to beat Rogers this season, and it was 66-20. A little scheduling luck has helped Rogers so far. They have already played the bottom three teams in the region. Elkmont, Clements, and Colbert Heights are a combined 2-16. Rogers won those

three games by an average margin of 25.3 points per game. Elkmont was the closest at an 11-point margin. They then beat West Limestone 20-17 last week after trailing 10-0 in the second quarter, then trailing 17-12 in the third quarter. Coach Garrett said this about the close games: "I think it gives us confidence that we have seen tough situations and found ways to overcome them. We have come from behind in multiple games now to win. Any time you can do that, it shows the perseverance and maturity of your team." Rogers has a high-powered offense that is on pace to be Coach Garrett's highest-scoring regular-season offense (averaging 36.5 per game). Coach Garrett said this about the offense: "We have a QB (CJ Davis) who is dynamic, and then you add that with a group of players who play hard within their assignment, plus good coaches; all of that together is going to equal good things." New offensive coordinator Ches Dye has made a difference as well, coming in from Russellville, and he has been a part of championship teams at St. Paul's (Mobile). Despite the stakes of this game, you can argue that for Rogers the playoffs begin this week as they will play Lauderdale County, Wilson, Central, then rival Lexington to finish the season. If you take Lauderdale County out, the last three opponents are a combined 14-3.

We talked about the county rivalry aspect of this game. To add to that, Coach Newton and Coach Garrett both played in this game with the schools they currently coach at and around the same time frame. We asked both about their favorite memory and what makes this a fun rivalry. Here is what they said, beginning with what makes it fun, and Coach Garrett said, "I think the fact that it is a county rivalry against people you know and want to beat. Like I said before, the stands will be packed on both sides and will be an environment that will be awesome to play in front of." Coach Newton said, "You know you're going to see two physical teams get after each other for 48 minutes." Then came the favorite memory question. Coach Garrett said, "The stands are going to be packed, and it is going to be a tough/physical matchup." Coach Newton said, "There are many memories from this yearly game. I remember the flood of 2009 when the umpire had to hold the ball to keep it from floating off. We completed a pass to our TE that hadn't caught a pass all year, until there was a downpour like that night. I remember running off the field and diving to get off the field, and sliding all the way to the fence. On one of the last offensive possessions we had, we had a touchdown called back with an illegal forward motion. Ended up losing that game, I believe, by a possession. There are other memories, but that's the one that was probably the most memorable, due to the craziest amount of rain I've ever seen." In 2009, Rogers won 28-15.

If you are looking for a local game on Friday, then this is the only one with two teams from our coverage area that are playing each other due to some rescheduled games for fall break. Both coaches reiterated that they expect to see a physical team from each side. Last season it was Lauderdale County 39-37. Then, on top of the physicality, the winner can potentially clinch a playoff spot.

Zack Pounders,

Shoals Sports Report