

Week 9 Florence at Austin Preview



The graphic features a dark background with a green field at the bottom. At the top left is the 'GRIP N' GRIN TAXIDERMY' logo. At the top center is a colorful diagonal striped pattern. At the top right is the 'LW' logo for 'Lindsey Winchester' with the tagline 'Luxury Interiors Since 1972' and website 'LindseyWinchester.com'. The main title 'GAME OF THE WEEK' is in large white letters. Below it, the Florence logo (a blue and white eagle head) is on the left, followed by 'AT' and the Austin logo (a large orange 'A') on the right. The scores '7-0 (5-0)' and '4-3 (4-1)' are displayed below their respective logos. A series of statistics and facts are listed in white text on a black background. At the bottom corners are two circular logos for 'SPORTS SHOALS REPORT'.

GRIP N' GRIN TAXIDERMY
1250 N. 48th St. | Red Bay, AL

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GAME OF THE WEEK

Florence **AT** **Austin**

7-0 (5-0) **4-3 (4-1)**

AUSTIN LEADS SERIES 11-9 (LAST MEETING: AUSTIN 34-6, 9/12/2025)
AUSTIN HAS WON TWO STRAIGHT, FLORENCE HAS NOT WON AT AUSTIN SINCE 2023
FLORENCE IS 3-6 AT AUSTIN, 2-5 IN LAST SEVEN AT AUSTIN
FLORENCE WINS 5A REGION 7 WITH A WIN (FIRST HOME PLAYOFF GAME SINCE 2022)
AUSTIN CLINCHES A PLAYOFF BERTH WITH A WIN
FLORENCE HAS TWO REGION CHAMPIONSHIPS AS FLORENCE HIGH SCHOOL (2007, 2014)
WOULD BE THE SIXTH REGION CHAMPIONSHIP FOR A FLORENCE CITY SCHOOL
BRADSHAW (1991, 1996, 1997) AND COFFEE (1975, 1986)
FLORENCE CITY SCHOOLS HAS NOT HAD A TEAM START 7-0
SINCE 1991 COFFEE
FLORENCE CITY SCHOOLS HAS NOT HAD A TEAM START 8-0 OR BETTER SINCE
1975 COFFEE STARTED 9-0

SPORTS SHOALS REPORT

Everyone expected Florence to succeed in 5A after eight seasons in 7A. I do not know how many outside the locker room could have expected a 7-0 start and a chance to win the region with two games to play, especially after last season's region drama. Florence High School has only won two region championships, and they were seven years apart in 2007 and 2014. Florence is overdue for a region championship. First comes a test they have struggled with historically: Austin. Florence has played Austin twenty times and only won nine times. They only have three wins at Austin, and two of those in the last seven meetings at Austin. Something has to give this Friday.

Let's start with the stakes of this game for both sides. For Florence, it is simple: win, and you win the region, guaranteeing a home playoff game, and the way the bracket is aligned, it may be multiple home playoff games. Florence has not hosted a playoff game since 2022. They have not won a playoff game since 2019, when they beat Mountain Brook 24-21 on a field goal as time expired. If Florence were to lose, you are potentially looking at a region championship game with Austin and Russellville next week, while Florence has the Head to Head over Russellville. The tiebreakers get complicated quickly, but you may be looking at a tiebreaker where it goes to non-region strength of record, which is the teams you defeat out of region and how many wins they have. Florence currently has Jasper (4-3) and Pinson Valley (0-7), Austin has not won a non-region game yet; Russellville has Deshler (6-1) and then Mars Hill (6-2) and Coosa Christian (1-6). The private schools are counted differently, but the Deshler win gives Russellville a nod over the other two for the tiebreaker. Austin needs a win or Athens loss this week (at Hartselle) to clinch a playoff spot. Austin owns tiebreakers over Hartselle and Athens head-to-head but loses the head-to-head versus Muscle Shoals as it is their only region loss.

The large picture stakes is being the 1-seed versus the 2-seed. Currently, the path for Florence if chalk holds (highest seed wins) would be First Round vs Southside-Gadsden, Second Round vs Mortimer Jordan, Quarterfinals vs Clay-Chalkville. That is three home playoff games versus teams traveling two hours or more one way. If Florence is the 2-seed, it would be a home game vs Pell City, then a road trip to Parker (second round). We say this every year with some classes you do not want to be a fill in the blank seed because of the draw. This is one of those years where you want to be the 1-seed from this region.

Let's start with how each team got here beginning with the road team Florence Falcons. Florence is off to their best start ever as Florence High School. The best start by a Florence City School since 1991 Coffee started 7-0. Florence City has never had a school start 8-0 since 1975 Coffee started 9-0. Florence started the season 2-0 before a battle with Muscle Shoals, where it was scoreless until the last 3:00 of regulation. Florence won 7-0. Then came Russellville, where the game was tied at 14 at halftime. Florence put up 14 in the third quarter and another touchdown in the fourth and allowed one to win 35-21. Outside of Muscle Shoals and Russellville, Florence has steamrolled everyone in their path. Through seven games, Florence is on pace to score 372 points this season, averaging 37.1 currently. They are also on pace to allow 132 points, giving up an average of 13.1 per game. Both of those would be the best under Coach Kenny Morson (year five).

Austin started the season 0-2 but lost to James Clemens and Sparkman (combined 12-3). Outside of an outlier loss to Muscle Shoals, Austin has rolled through region play, beating Decatur and East Limestone by a combined 63 points, then had to battle versus Athens and Hartselle to get the other two region wins. Austin-Athens turned into a shootout that Austin controlled until Athens took a 39-38 lead before Austin scored a touchdown and two-point conversion to go ahead 46-39, and that would be the final. Austin was down 21-3 with 10:00 to play last week. Austin cut it to 21-10 with 8:33 to play. Austin would get the onside kick and

make it 21-17 with 6:03 to play. Then Austin scored with under a minute to play to go up 24-21 to win by the same score. Florence has not played Hartselle yet but beat Athens 40-21, and Florence led 34-0 over Athens in the third quarter if you want to use common opponents as a comparison.

These two teams are very familiar with each other. This is not a new opponent or a new field for either side. They have played each other every season since 2012. The winner is clinching something, whether it be a region championship (Florence) or a playoff berth (Austin). The loser could be reeling with their back against the wall heading into the final week of region play.

Zack Pounders,

Shoals Sports Report