

Teams Gearing Up For al.com Champions Challenge

AHSAA Media Day Press Conference Features Six Participating Coaches

Hamilton High School head football coach Rodney Stidham explained in one noteworthy comment just how much playing in the 2011 **al.com** Champions Challenge pre-season prep football event means to his Aggies.

"We have been playing football at Hamilton for 100 years, and we have been in the finals one time (2010)," Stidham told the press gathering at the **al.com** Champions Challenge Kick-Off press conference Thursday to highlight the third annual Media Day at the Alabama High School Athletic Association office in Montgomery.

"And we get to play Sweet Water. They've won four of the last five Class 1A state championships. They may be a 1A team, but they can play with anyone and we have our work cut out for us. Our kids are excited and our community is excited. We are looking forward to this challenge."

Stidham was one of six coaches representing the participating schools at the press conference. His Aggies went 14-1 last season and reached the Class 3A state finals before falling to Leeds 42-32. Sweet Water, 12-3 in 2010, beat R.A. Hubbard 36-0 in the Super 6 finals to claim the 1A crown.

Hamilton and Sweet Water will play the Bulldogs at Montgomery's Cramton Bowl at 5 p.m., Saturday, Aug. 20, in the second game of the three-game event. Class 4A defending state champion Thomasville (15-0) meets Class 5A Hueytown (11-2) in the opening game Friday at 7 p.m. The final game Saturday night at 7:30 pits Class 6A defending state champion Daphne (15-0) and Clay-Chalkville (9-4).

The Champions Challenge is an event staged by the Alabama High School Athletic Directors & Coaches Association in conjunction with the AHSAA. Corporate partner **al.com** is the title sponsor.

Capsule previews of participating teams follow:



THOMASVILLE (15-0) vs. HUEYTOWN (11-2)

Friday, Aug. 19, 7 p.m.

Head Coaches: Jack Hankins, Jr., Thomasville (96-22-0), 10th year.

Matt Scott, Hueytown (16-7-0), third year.

2011 Pre-season rankings: Thomasville is ranked No. 1 in the ASWA preseason 4A state rankings, and Hueytown is No. 2 in Class 5A.

Hueytown in 2010: The Gophers scored 410 points in 2010 for an average of 31.5 ppg, and allowed only 276 for a 21.2 ppg average and finished second in Class 5A, Region 4 behind Pleasant Grove. Hueytown was 6-0 at home and 5-2 on the road. Quarterback Jameis Winston, considered one of the nation's top quarterback prospects after finishing tied for first in the National Elite 11 QB Challenge in California earlier this summer, returns in 2011 to lead the Gophers offense. The 6-foot-4, 200-pound standout announced Aug. 3 he will be signing with Florida State. Winston threw for more than 2,300 yards last season and rushed for another 650. Also returning is fellow All-State selection Chris Rabb, a 6-0, 210-pound defensive lineman/linebacker.

Thomasville in 2010: The Class 4A state champion Tigers rolled to a 15-0 record and scored a state high 667 points, a 44.5 ppg average, and allowed only 157 points, 10.5 ppg. Key returning standout from last year's team

is Tyler Hayes, a 6-3, 215-pound two-way standout. The All-State linebacker has already committed to the University of Alabama. Eric Taite also returns at wide receiver/defensive back and noseguard Lukador Lanier is back to help anchor the defense with Hayes, who rushed for 716 yards and 11 touchdowns last season on 72 carries and recorded 72 tackles. Quarterback Tevin Waters also returns after completing 54-of-93 passes for 1,054 yards last season.

Hueytown's key wins in '10: The biggest may have been a 28-14 second-round playoff win over 2009 state champion Demopolis. The most amazing was a 48-47 win over Fairfield in week 7. The Gophers were also 3-0 against 6A competition.

Thomasville's key wins in '10: The Tigers' biggest win came in the Super 6 Class 4A finals at Jordan-Hare Stadium as Thomasville set a Super 6 record with its 59-34 win over Deshler. The toughest victory of the playoffs came in round three in a 35-26 win over previously unbeaten Dadeville. Big regular-season wins came over 2010 Class 1A state champ Sweet Water (26-6), 2009 Class 5A state champion Demopolis (41-7) and 2009 Class 4A state runner-up Jackson (35-7).



HAMILTON (14-1) vs. SWEET WATER (12-3)

Cramton Bowl, Saturday, Aug. 20, 5 p.m.

Head Coaches: Rodney Stidham, Hamilton (53-20-0), 7th year.

Stacy Luker, Sweet Water (140-55-0), 16th year, overall beginning his 10th season at Sweet Water.

2011 Pre-season rankings: Hamilton is ranked No. 3 in the ASWA preseason 3A state rankings, and Sweet Water is No. 1 in Class 1A.

Hamilton in 2010: The Aggies won the Class 3A, Region 5 title with a perfect 7-0 record – outscoring region opponents 337-105. Hamilton totaled 606 points on the year (40.4 ppg) and yielded 225 (15.0 ppg). Key returning players this year include junior quarterback Mitch Stults, running back/linebacker Bud Coleman and wide receiver Doc Holiday.

Sweet Water in 2010: The Bulldogs returned to the championship circle for the fourth time in the last five seasons. Sweet Water scored 581 points (38.7 ppg) and allowed only 140 (9.3 ppg) en route to another perfect season against 1A competition. Key returning players this year include wide receiver Linc Luker, the son of head coach Stacy Luker, running back Michael Thompson and wired receiver/defensive end Ty Morgan. Sweet Water has gone 64-7 in the last five seasons – an average of 12.8 wins per year.

Hamilton's key wins in '10: Ironically, the high-scoring Aggies' reached the state finals for the first time in school history with two big defensive wins – a 3-0 decision over Glencoe in round two and a 27-21 win over defending 3A champ Piedmont in the semifinals. The biggest region win came over Cordova, which finished runner-up to Piedmont in 2009. That win, a 47-43 donnybrook, was one of the ASAA's top offensive games of the season in '10.

Sweet Water's key wins in '10: Perhaps more noticeable are Sweet Water's key losses – to 4A state champion Thomasville and 2A state champion Leroy and 3A powerhouse Handley. The Bulldogs rolled to a 12-0 record versus 1A competition with the key wins coming against arch-rival Linden, first, 21-12 in the regular season and then again, 20-6, in the semifinals of the Class 1A state playoffs. The championship game was anti-climactic at Jordan-Hare Stadium as Sweet Water won 36-0 over R.A.Hubbard.



DAPHNE (15-0) vs. CLAY-CHALKVILLE (9-4)

Cramton Bowl, Saturday, Aug. 20, 7:30 p.m.

Head Coaches: Glenn Vickery, Daphne (207-93-0), 8th year at Daphne.

Jerry Hood, Clay-Chalkville (45-33-0), third year at Clay.

2011 Pre-season rankings: Daphne is ranked No. 1 in the ASWA preseason 6A state rankings, and Clay-Chalkville is No. 6.

Daphne in 2010: The Trojans reached the Class 6A finals for the fifth time since 2000 – beating Hoover 7-6 in the finals to cap a perfect 15-0 season. Daphne outscored opponents 534-147 (34.8 ppg to 9.8 ppg allowed). Returning to lead the Trojans are Auburn commitment running back T.J. Yeldon, place-kicker Brandon Roberts, WR Jacob Olmstead and defensive back Torren McGaster. Vickery is 68-23 at Daphne over the last seven years.

Clay-Chalkville in 2010: The Cougars have gone 8-3 and 9-4 in Hood's first two seasons as head coach. The former Oak Mountain head coach was an assistant coach on Clay-Chalkville's 1999 state championship team. Among the key returning starters for the Cougars are quarterback Jacob Thomas, offensive lineman Matt Allen and defensive back Quintin Clark. Thomas rushed for 807 yards and nine touchdowns on 166 carries and completed 118-of-203 passes for 1,615 yards and 13 scores last season.

Daphne's key wins in '10: The biggest had to be the 7-6 win over top-ranked Hoover in the 6A state finals at Jordan-Hare Stadium. Right behind were playoff wins over Wetumpka (37-0) and Mobile rival Davidson (47-14) in the quarterfinals and semifinals, respectively, and a regular-season 17-13 win over Foley.

Clay-Chalkville's key wins in '10: Clay finished second in rough Region 7 last season with a key 7-6 victory over arch-rival Hewitt-Trussville in week 2. The Cougars also beat the Huskies 30-24 in the second round of the playoffs before losing a tough 35-27 decision to Hoover in the third round.