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— 2026 FOOTBALL SEASON —

2026

GRIDIRON GUIDE

SONORAVILLE PHOENIX

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Info, stories, schedules, photos and roster from
Sonoraville High School Phoenix Football and info
on the Marching Phoenix and Football Cheer

August 2026

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Team Preview: Sonoraville Phoenix

Phoenix Football puts in the work over the summer in hopes of deep run in region



BRANDI OWCZARZ/Staff

Sonoraville Phoenix Head Football Coach Denver Pate will have his team ready for the 2025 season which begins this Friday, August 15 against Model.

Brandi Owczarz, Managing Editor
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Sonoraville Phoenix Football has their sights set on building on the momentum from last season and make a run for a region title.

The Phoenix, who went 5-6 overall, (4-4 in 7-AA) last season, plan to utilize some of their up-and-comers with the hope to finish the season ranked higher in region than last season; the Phoenix placed 5th.

Sonoraville Head Coach Denver Pate said he expects his team perform well after a summer of bonding while preparing for the season.

Pate, who has coached for 24 years, has spent the past 12 years at SHS – this is his 10th year as head coach. While the Phoenix lost several key players at graduation, they are returning several seasoned players, and have a young team that is expected to make an impact this year.

Coach Pate talked to the Gordon Gazette about the upcoming season, the preparations the team has made and his expectations for the team.

What did the summer program involve for your team, what was the participation like and how much progress did the players make?

A lot of trying to get players in the correct position and getting them bigger and stronger. We did several 7on7s but it was scaled down from previous years. We were still learning in several key positions but we hope the repetitions they received in the summer will pay dividends this fall.

How did you keep your team motivated and encouraged during this time?

We only go three days a week for the majority of the summer, so being able to give the players time to still be kids and have time off in the summer keeps them fresh and excited the closer we get to Fall.

Reflecting on last season, what do you hope to build on to carry into this season?

It was nice to get back into the playoffs but that cannot be the end goal. We have got to look forward to advancing and making a deep play-off run.

Were there any impact players from last year that graduated where you have a player stepping up to take the lead in that role this year?

Graduated our record-breaking quarterback. Jacob Hood is looking to fill that void. Jayden Cruz was a multi-year starter at running back and he will turn the reins over to his brother Josiah Cruz and Rush Faulk.

What are the biggest keys for this team to focus on in order to have success this season?

Doing the little things better than anyone else and playing with relentless focus and effort.

Who are some of the impact players for your team in 2026?

Braxen McMahan, WR/DB
Ethan Cochran, LB
Branson Mathews, OL/DL
Eli Craig, OL/DL
Ely Fox, LB
Lincoln Lessis, TE/DE
Jaydon Lowe, H/DE
Gunner Washington, WR/DB

Who do you think your toughest opponents in your region will be this year?

Rockmart

What are your overall expectations for what this team can accomplish for the 2026 season?

Having our linebacker back and the majority of our offensive line returning gives us a chance to exceed last years season. We will need some guys step up in key positions and come to play each Friday.



KEY PLAYERS

BRAXEN MCMAHAN, WR/DB

ETHAN COCHRAN, LB

BRANSON MATHEWS, OL/DL

ELI CRAIG, OL/DL

ELY FOX, LB

LINCOLN LESSIS, TE/DE

2026 SCHEDULE

Date Opponent Loc.

Aug. 21 Adairsville HOME

Sept. 4 NW Whitfield AWAY

Sept. 11 Darlington AWAY

Sept. 18 Murray County AWAY

Sept. 25 Coahulla Creek HOME

Oct. 2 Union County HOME

Oct. 9 North Murray AWAY

Oct. 23 Lafayette AWAY

Oct. 30 Ringgold HOME

Nov. 6 Rockmart HOME

All Games at 7:30 p.m. unless noted.



Team Preview: SONORAVILLE PHOENIX

TEAM PHOTO



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

TEAM ROSTER

No.	Name	Year	No.	Name	Year	No.	Name	Year
0	ELY FOX	SR	24	TRENT HENSLEY	SO	56	TRISTAN SILVERS	FR
1	GUNNER WASHINGTON	SO	25	PARKER BROWN	SO	58	GEORGE WHITFIELD III	FR
2	RUSH FAULK	SR	26	DEX OWEN	SO	59	JETT FAULK	SO
3	JOSIAH CRUZ	SO	27	BENTLEY FORD	FR	60	JIONNI SONTOS	FR
4	BRAXEN MCMAHAN	SR	28	MASON FERGUSON	JR	61	CAMERON CAUSBY	SO
5	CADJRIN MCMAHAN	JR	29	DYLAN CANTRELL	SO	62	KOLTER KELLEY	SR
6	JACOB HOOD	SR	30	CORBIN SHIPPY	JR	63	RON SCHEETZ	SO
7	ETHAN COCHRAN	SR	31	AYDEN RENNER	SR	65	JACKSON BROWN	FR
8	HAYDEN MCDANIEL	SR	32	SULLY GOSS	SO	67	CARSON MAPLES	SR
9	JAYDEN LOWE	SO	33	COLE LONG	SR	69	BRANSON MATHEWS	SR
10	JAHMAL SALMON	FR	34	LEYTON HOLT	FR	71	KEVIN WINKLEMAN	SO
11	CARTER BROCK	JR	35	SHUJAH RAJA	JR	72	ELI CRAIG	SR
12	KORBEN BAUCOM	JR	36	JOSHUA REECE	SO	73	JACK JENKINS	SR
13	JACOB MOORE	SO	37	BRYSON CARNES	FR	74	KENNETH CLARK	SR
14	CAMDEN MOORE	SR	39	MICHAEL THOMPSON	JR	78	GIOVANNI BERNIER	SO
15	LINCOLN LESSIS	JR	40	ZAYNE HARDIN	FR	80	JESUS HERNANDEZ	FR
16	PEYTON HUFSTETLER	FR	41	KENDRICK SIMPSON	SO	81	JORDI GONZALEZ	SR
17	ANSEN MEDLIN	JR	42	MALACHI CRUZ	SO	82	MATTHEW WEAVER	SO
18	JAYDON SICAIROS	JR	43	BRYLEE REED	FR	83	LUCAS SANTIZO	SO
19	JACOB PEELER	SR	44	BRAYDEN JONES	FR	84	PRINCETON CRAWFORD	SO
20	CONNER DYER	FR	46	KEVIN TIRADOR	FR	85	ANDY BETANCOURT	SO
21	AIDIN LONG	FR	51	MA'JER GRAY-LOTT	JR	86	COLSON EVANS	FR
22	BENTLEY HAYES	SO	53	TRISTAN HELTON	JR	88	JOHN MICHAEL FARLEY	FR
23	BRAYDEN WOODRING	FR	55	OWEN HUGHES	SO	89	NICOLAS BETANCOURT	FR



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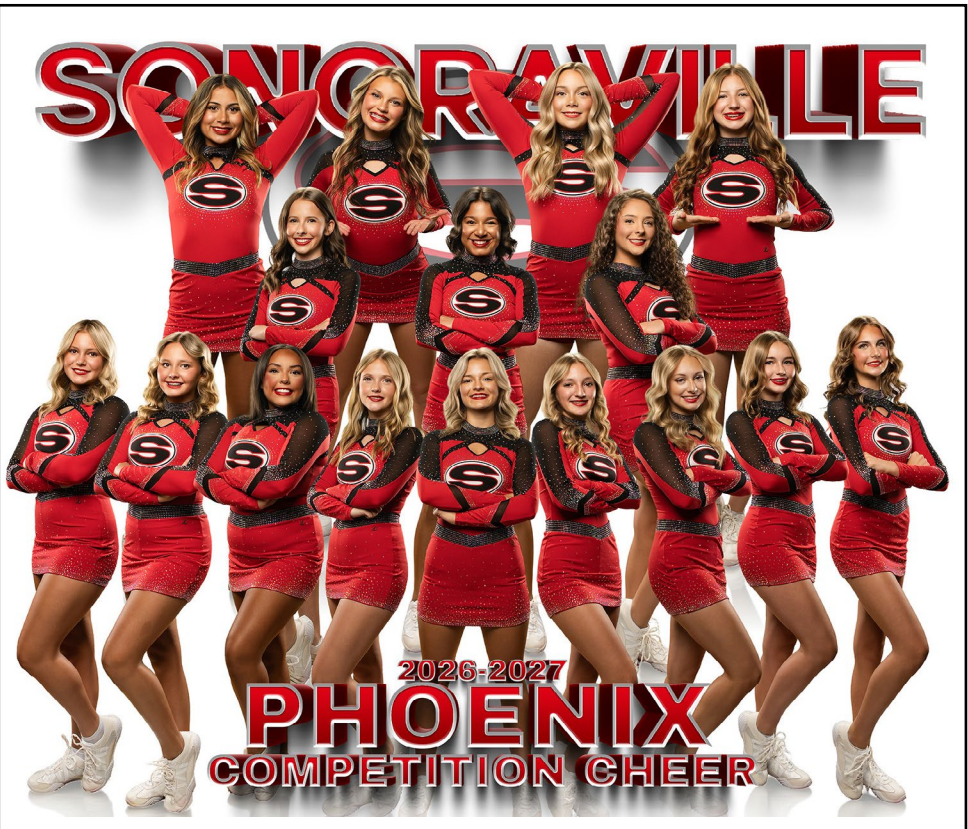
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Cheer Preview: Sonoraville Phoenix



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

2026 Sonoraville Phoenix Football Spirit Sideline Team (left photo) includes: Jaia Aguirre, Lexie Anglin, Ryleigh Blalock, Madison Bridges, Addie Cochran, Bella Crow, Kirsten Culvey, Paityn Hall, Raegan Hughes, Cheyanne Mathis, Kennedy Newton, Blair Parker, Haylee Price, Molly Rampy, Presley Ratcliff, Eva Santizo, Addison Upchurch, Emily Grace Walker and Amelia Ward. 2026 Sonoraville Phoenix Competition Cheer (right photo) includes: Jaia Aguirre, Ryleigh Blalock, Madison Bridges, Addie Cochran, Bella Crow, Kirsten Culvey, Paityn Hall, Raegan Hughes, Kennedy Newton, Blair Parker, Haylee Price, Molly Rampy, Presley Ratcliff, Eva Santizo, Addison Upchurch and Amelia Ward.

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Continuing a tradition of distinction and greatness with Sonoraville Cheer, Science teacher Kirsten Lyles has taken over the cheer program after the retirement of longtime coach Ginger Reeves, but is more than up for the challenge and has both the Football Sideline and Competition Cheerleaders ready for a big season!

The Gazette spoke with Lyles to see what's in store for the upcoming season.

What training/camps did the cheer squad participate in before the start of the season?

We prepared for the season by using the summer to build a strong foundation for our athletes. Our girls participated in summer practices focused on conditioning and preparing their bodies for the demands of the upcoming season and competition routine. Summer practice also gave them time to learn and perfect their material, build confidence and work as a team.

We also incorporated team bonding activities to strengthen relationships and build the team-

work and chemistry needed to be successful throughout the season.

How excited is the squad for this year?

The whole program is excited about the beginning of the season!

What do you have planned on Friday nights to keep the crowd involved?

The football cheerleading team is expected to pump up the crowd with the help of the student body and band. The band is one of the biggest supporters of the cheer-

leaders. SHS loves Friday Night Lights!

The upcoming Cheer Competition schedule includes:

- Sept. 12: At Morgan County High School
- Sept. 19: At Coosa High School
- Sept. 26: At Calhoun High School
- Oct. 10: At Creekview High School
- Oct. 24: At Dalton High School
- Oct. 31: At Cherokee High School
- Nov. 7: At Morgan County High School (Region)
- Nov. 13: At Macon Coliseum (State)

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Band Preview: Sonoraville Phoenix



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The 2026 Sonoraville High School Marching Phoenix.

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Justin Burke has his Marching Phoenix ready for another exciting halftime performance this year under the Friday Night Lights.

This year’s performance will inspire the team and community alike to Fight for the wins!!

Mr. Burke has been the band director at SHS since 2017 and a music educator for 23 years. His previous positions include Director of Bands at Screven County High School in Sylvania GA, Director of Bands at Claxton High School/Claxton Middle School in Evans County, and Assistant Director of Bands at South Effingham High School in Guyton GA. Mr. Burke’s ensembles have received consistent superior ratings at both GMEA Performance Evaluation and marching competitions. The Marching Phoenix under his direction, have won multiple class, division and grand championships in North Georgia. In addition to teaching band, Mr. Burke teaches Music Technology at SHS and is an active adjudicator and clinician.

Mr. Burke has a Master of Music Education degree from Kent State University. He received his Bachelor’s Degree in Music Education from Valdosta State University in 2004, where he studied trumpet with Dr. Kenneth Kirk and conducting with Dr. Joe Brashier. Mr.

Burke is a member of the Georgia Music Educators Association (GMEA), The National Association for Music Education (NAfME), and The National Band Association

(NBA).

Mr. Burke and his family live in Gordon County. He and his wife Kristen have 3 children: twin sons Lewis and Jack (19) and daughter Clara (15).

The Gazette had a chance to catch up with Mr. Burke ahead of the season to discuss the halftime show.

What is your halftime show theme, or what music will you be performing for halftime this year?

“The Fighter” is the name of the halftime show, and includes the following selections:

Walk out- “Til I Collapse”, Eminem

Round 1- “Fight for your Right”, Beastie Boys

Round 2- “Kung Fu Fighting”, Carl Douglas

Round 3- “The Boxer”, Simon and Garfunkel

Round 4- “Eye of the Tiger”, Survivor; “Going the Distance/ Gonna Fly Now”, Bill Conti

What did you do to prepare for the season, and will you participate in any competitions this year?

We held two weeks of band camp in July. We had a full staff of instrumental technicians to assist with setting up the performance.

The Marching Phoenix will be hosting the 2nd Annual “Ring of Fire” Marching Competition at SHS on September 26. It will feature performances by 16 high school bands and an exhibition performance by the University of

Tennessee Chattanooga Marching Mocs! They will also compete in the Yellow Jacket Classic at Rockmart on October 10th and the Legacy of Champions at Carrollton on October 24th.

2026 SONORAVILLE HIGH SCHOOL MARCHING PHOENIX

DRUM MAJOR: Logan Beckman

FLUTES: Fernanda Canchola, Alexis Long, Gabby Johnson, Johnah Kinkead, Autumn Shook, Kynslee Silvers, Chelsea Gragg, Jarely Pedroza, Rylan Benton, Kristen Hansen, Orion Stang, Aria Sanchez, Sparrow Mahon.

CLARINETS: Melissa Vega, Jordan Clark, Shaelyn Bethel, Electra Henderson, Kiersten Gilbert, Karly Gilbert, Macy Parker, Daisy Lara-Olmedo, Camille Thompson, Camila Reyes.

ALTO SAX: William Benson, Sebastian Goswick, Desmond Green, Colton Hudec, Yerik Medina, Phillip Parker.

TENOR SAX: Desmond Worley, Declan Wang.

BARI SAX: Aidan Smith, Dakota Rogers.

MELLOWPHONES: Jet Johnston, Abigail Mershon, Stephen Smith.

TRUMPETS: Luke Harkins,

Robert Lewis Jr., Monserrat Arguiano, Jonathon Overfield-Gilreath, Cooper Elliot, Ben Fantom, Liam Talley.

TROMBONE: Leonardo Parra-Torres, Bryson Sitten, Kaiden Findley, Avrey Mansion, Matteo Salacies, Peter Obi, Braylin Boos.

BARITONE: Daniel Ovalle, Morgan Hudec, Rosslyn Rodriguez.

TUBA: Tanner Abbott, Ian Lopez, Christian Culbertson, Gus Raines.

PERCUSSION: Karaline Mahon, Jordan Payne, Michael Stevens, Brexton Camp, Lucca McDougale, Katlynn Hopper, Zane McFarland, Silas Anduze, Aubree Holder, Veronica Haddox, Natalie Barton, Lula Kernea, Oliver Monica, Lydia Anderson, Dylan Silva, Behr McDougale.

PIANO: Yareli Estrada

GUITAR: Elijah Cornwell

COLOR GUARD: Madison Ensley, Kimberlynn Evans, Ali Richards, Miley Silva, Maddie Anglin, Sophia Cascio, Dixie Martin, Jaidyn Zulueta, Emily Roberts, Alison Vowell, Hydie Mulkey.

MAJORETTES: Riley Miller, Lilly Stone, Jenica Weaver, Sierra Bowers, Megyn Rampy, Clara Burke, Wynn Mashburn.



GORDON Gazette

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