

Previewing teams in Suburban Life coverage area

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West Suburban Gold

Downers Grove South

2023 record: 6-4, 6-0

Coach: Mark Molinari

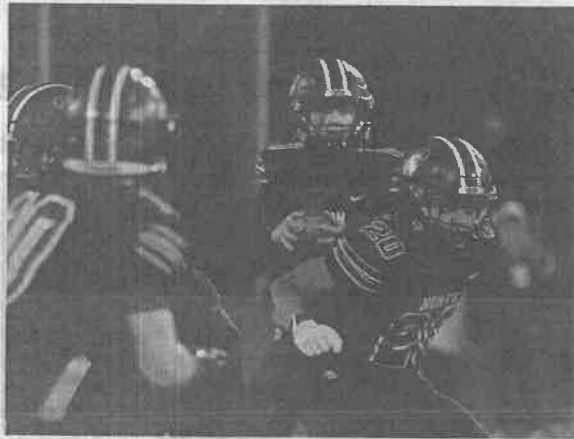
Worth noting: The Mustangs ended the 2023 regular season on a six-game winning streak to clinch their second consecutive West Suburban Gold title and third straight playoff appearance. Downers Grove South reloads with five starters back on offense and five on defense. The strength of the offense should be the running game anchored by a line of returning starter Jonny Klaeren, Jacobi Spraggins, returning tight end James Pieropoulos and returning starter Jonathan Cinco. Kaden Smith takes over at running back and Dominic West takes over at quarterback with returning starters Keon Maggitt and Cameron Kasper at wide receiver. The defense's strength also starts up front with third-year starter Ryker Dudley at nose guard and returning starters Cinco and Pieropoulos at defensive tackle. At outside linebacker, Gavin Powels is back for his third year as starter, joined by Kyle Sigale and Matthew "Mookie" Jacobs. Junior Arnas Ramanaukas and Jace Modine are at inside linebacker. The secondary is led by returning starter Coen Godenschwager at safety, joined by Joey Vieira, Fraja Maggitt and Mick Rapinchuk.

Hinsdale South

2023 record: 4-5, 4-2

Coach: Mike Barry

Worth noting: The Hornets are coming off their third consecutive 4-5 season and near playoff miss. Hinsdale South's last postseason appearance came in 2018. The Hornets have many returning starters. Barry believes there is plenty of speed and big-play potential on the roster if they execute. He said the offensive linemen have dedicated themselves and could be a difference-maker. Top returning players include quarterback Langston Love, running back Mikey Jefferson, offensive lineman Ryder McMurray, offensive lineman Frederick Finnegan, wide receiver/defensive back Nick Okrim, linebacker/wide receiver Grant Dierich, wide receiver/defensive back Ayden Farrare, linebacker/tight end Matt Jaffrey, defensive lineman Tommy Madden and linebacker/



Gary Middendorf file photo

Downers Grove North's Owen Lansu looks to pass against Mount Carmel in the Class 7A state championship game Nov. 25, 2023, at Hancock Stadium in Normal.

offensive lineman Quinn Yurkovich. Newcomers to watch include defensive back/wide receiver Drew Baughman, offensive and defensive lineman Cole Rehfeldt and offensive lineman Gavin Slaughter.

"Being the smallest school in the West Suburban at around 1,500 students creates challenges with depth so staying healthy is the key moving forward week to week," Barry said.

Morton

2023 record: 1-8, 1-5

Coach: Bob Organ

Worth noting: The Mustangs dropped their last six games of 2023 and finished with the program's fewest wins in a full season since 2019. The Mustangs' top players include senior LB/RB Julian Richard, junior QB/DB Jaleel Windfield and junior RB/DB Cameron Jones.

Willowbrook

2023 record: 8-3, 5-1

Coach: Nick Hildreth

Worth noting: Willowbrook made its eighth consecutive playoff appearance last season. Willowbrook won five consecutive Gold championships before Downers Grove South won the last two. The Warriors must replace a four-year varsity starting quarterback in Arthur Palicki. They return nine starters on offense and five on defense. Senior wide receiver KJ Rhodes comes off a monster junior season in which he caught 85 passes for 1,542 yards and 12 touchdowns. Other top returning players include senior DL Jordan

Pate, senior DL Dante Lewis and senior OL John Koterba. Junior CB/WR Otis Powell is a player who has received recruiting interest from MAC schools. Other returning starters are senior WR Charlie Siegler, senior WR Martin Anfinson, senior OL/LB Eddie Devens, senior OL Myles McIntyre, senior OL Josh Puknaitus and senior OL Vince Peshel. OL/DL Elijah Brown is a newcomer to watch.

West Suburban Silver

Downers Grove North

Coach: Joe Horeni

2023 record: 11-3, 4-2

Worth noting: The Trojans enjoyed a breakout 2023 season. Downers Grove North beat Glenbard West for the first time since 2006 and as Class 7A runner-up reached the state championship game for the first time since winning the 2004 Class 8A title and had the most wins since that 2004 team. Some big pieces are gone from last year's team, including workhorse running back Noah Battle and leading tackler Cael Brezina. A ton of talent, though, remains including 11 starters. It starts with junior quarterback Owen Lansu, who just committed to Minnesota. Rated the second-best QB in Illinois' Class of 2026, Lansu threw for 2,200 yards and 24 TDs as a sophomore. He'll have a talented receiving corps at his disposal. Junior Oliver Thulin had 35 catches for 500 yards and six TDs last year, while senior receiver/strong safety Charlie Cruse had 24 catches for 300 yards and three TDs. Junior Jake Gregorio, who could also see time at

running back, returns at middle linebacker to anchor the defense after recording 100 tackles as a sophomore. Junior outside linebacker Weston Waughop is back after putting up 70 tackles. Junior defensive end/tight end Joe Edwards, the brother of the Buffalo Bills' David Edwards, had 40 tackles, three for loss, and two sacks as a sophomore. Other starters returning include junior offensive lineman Omar Duran, junior offensive lineman Aiden Solecki, junior offensive lineman Anthony Bertachi, junior wide receiver Max Troha and junior free safety Ethan Kist. Others to watch include free-safety Favarez Edwards, OL/DL Nate Woods, OL Carsten Lange, LB Joe Lasota and RB Caden Chiarelli.

"Our goal is to compete for the conference championship and state championship," Horeni said.

Glenbard West

Coach: Chad Hetlet

2023 record: 8-3, 5-1

Worth noting: The Hilltoppers, a model of consistency, made their 16th consecutive playoff appearance under Hetlet in 2023 and have won at least eight games in each of those seasons. Glenbard West will look to compete for its 14th conference title in the last 17 years with 13 returning starters and what Hetlet considers one of the faster teams he's had in a long time on both sides of the ball. Mason Ellens, a three-year starter and All-State pick as a junior, is an Iowa State commit who will play defensive back, receiver and returner. The man to watch offensively is senior running back Teyion Oriental, last year's West Suburban Conference Offensive Player of the Year. Michael O'Connell, a 6-foot-7, 290-pound Northwestern commit, anchors the offensive line at tackle. He is in only his second year of playing football and chose Northwestern from seven Power 4 offers. Defensively, senior middle linebacker Val Jones returns after leading the team in tackles as a junior with 108. Other returning starters include senior WR/DB Peter Fanter, senior OLB Cole Glasco, senior OT George Andrianopoulos, senior OG Dylan Vandermolten, senior OG Ben Freeman, senior NT Drew Denenberger, senior DE August Allaway, junior LB Maximus Hetlet and junior DE Jayden Daniel. Others to watch include sophomore TE Brady Johnson, senior TE Dom Seaney, sophomore QB Oliver Valdez, junior RB Jamarcus Kelly and junior RB/LB Jack Davis.

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