

Menchville Monarchs 2008 Preview

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Head Coach: John Byron

Last Season: 2-8

Postseason: Menchville failed to qualify for the postseason in 2007. The Monarchs' last trip to the playoffs was in 1993 when they beat Maury 31-13 in the semifinals before falling to Indian River 28-12 in the Eastern Region Division 6 final.

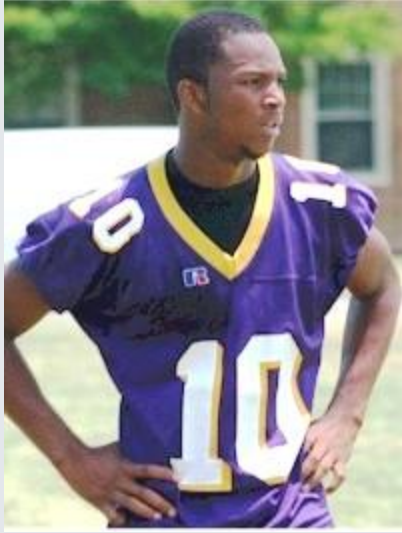
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Positions of Strength

There are some standouts for Menchville to be excited about. Among them is end/defensive end **Mario Thompson** (6-4, 220), a versatile senior who runs a 4.65-40. Thompson made his presence most felt on defense, where he notched 48 tackles and five sacks. Another quality talent the Monarchs look to utilize in a variety of ways will be sophomore quarterback **Clifton Richardson** (6-0, 175). Also a starter at defensive back, Richardson had a 98-yard kickoff return for a touchdown and 12-yard touchdown run in the team's 16-14 victory over Wilson. As a freshman he produced over 400 yards passing and rushing.

Returning starters **Nick Marcos** (6-1, 248), **Xavier Reid** (5-9, 260), **Daniel Sullivan** (5-10, 240) and senior center **Cazzion McCarthy** (5-7, 245) provide experience along the offensive line. Those individuals likely double on the defensive line, plus junior defensive end **Brandon Gregg** (6-3, 210), who recovered a couple of fumbles last season, will have an important role. Senior middle linebacker **Ray Veras** (5-10, 185) ought to help in stuffing the run as well.

Menchville Monarchs



Monarch Clifton Richardson is one of the top rising players from the Class of 2011

Question Marks

Menchville has been a bit offensively challenged as they ranked 36th or worse in the Eastern Region in the four major categories – scoring, passing, rushing and total yards generated. They're desperately trying to uncover that 'gamebreaker.' The biggest culprit has been turnovers since the Monarchs finished -20 in the turnover margin category in 2007, committing 33 compared to forcing only 13.

Byron believes finding adequate replacements at wide receiver and left tackle are their two biggest questions on this side of the ball going into the fall. Junior **Andre Simon** (6-3, 170), a member of the basketball team, could become one of the main targets through the air and use his athleticism to make plays against smaller defenders. Senior defensive back **Cris Courtney** (5-11, 165) is expected to join Simon out wide.

Keep An Eye On

Victor Lawson (5-11, 210), who transferred in from Kecoughtan before last year, will play at outside linebacker after making 68 tackles and a couple of sacks as a junior. Along with defensive backs **Stefon Malone** (5-8, 160) and **Erin VanNorman** (5-9, 165), Lawson could be responsible for getting Menchville's rushing attack back on track.

Recruiting Buzz

James Madison, Richmond, Hampton University and Navy all have expressed interest in Thompson. The nice thing about him is he brings both size and speed to the table. JMU and William & Mary are showing interest in Lawson. Right now Richardson is too young to get any serious looks or offers, but in a couple of years he will draw plenty of interest, probably at the safety position for the next level.

Rivalry Game

Newport News rivals Denbigh (Oct. 23), Heritage (Aug. 28), Warwick (Oct. 4) and Woodside (Oct. 31) are games where city bragging rights will be on the line. They

haven't beaten one of those four since 2003 when they shutout Denbigh 34-0. Denbigh answered that with back-to-back victories in the series by one apiece and that's the top intra-city rivalry team for the Monarchs.

Season Outlook

The Monarchs were able to show marginal improvement in stopping the run, going from 38th overall in the region two years ago to 28th overall last season. They've shown signs of being able to compete with anyone, such as in 2006 when they gave eventual State Champion Phoebus a scare before falling 35-28. Doing that on a more regular basis is now the objective.

"We are optimistic going into the 2008 season with six returning starters on offense and defense," Byron notes. "Our goal, through dedication in our preparation, is to be a contender for the playoffs this season." In order to get closer to that goal, they must be able to be aggressive on defense and do a better job of protecting the football.

2008 Eastern Region Schedule:

http://matthewhatfield.com/Football/2008_ClassAAA_EasternRegion_HighSchoolFootball_Schedules.pdf

Matthew Hatfield has covered Eastern Region Basketball & Football since 2004 for VirginiaPreps.com – the #1 High School Sports Site on the Rivals Network. Check out Hatfield's website – www.matthewhatfield.com – for more on the pro and college sports scene. To contact Matthew, please e-mail hatfieldsports2k4@yahoo.com.