

UIL realignment brings new district landscapes for local teams

By JAMES LACOMBE The Daily News | Posted: Monday, February 1, 2016 10:15 pm

If there's one thing to expect on the biennial realignment day, it's the unexpected.

The University Interscholastic League on Monday unveiled its district realignments for the 2016-18 period, which had some major changes for local football teams and plenty of surprises elsewhere.

"I always love this time of year," Texas City head coach Leland Surovik said. "One thing they always keep consistent is they're always surprising people. In this profession, you never know who you're going to play until this day, and it's always fun to open that packet."

Class 5A

In 23-5A, Ball High, Texas City and Santa Fe will be welcoming three newcomers to the district, including state power Manvel, which drops back down to the Class 5A ranks after a four-year stint at the state's largest classification.

District 23-5A also will feature newcomers Galena Park and Alvin Shadow Creek, as well as incumbents Fort Bend Elkins, Fort Bend Marshall and Fort Bend Willowridge.

Current District 23-5A opponents Fort Bend Bush and Fort Bend Ridge Point moved up to Class 6A for this realignment cycle.

"Honestly, I don't think this district has changed very much," Surovik said. "We lost Bush, and we lost Ridge Point. We replace Ridge Point with Manvel. ... We lost one of the top dogs, but we replace them with another one. Bush and Galena Park are both quality programs, and we just kind of switched those



Hitchcock plays KIPP Sunnyside

Hitchcock running back Josh Daniels looks for the end zone in the first quarter against KIPP Sunnyside on Friday Sept. 18, 2015, at Bulldog Stadium in Hitchcock.

two out.”

The makeup of the district came as a surprise to Surovik, who thought the Fort Bend trio may head to join a more geographically-aligned district with the likes of Rosenberg Terry, Lamar Consolidated and Richmond Foster, and he thought Angleton and Baytown Lee might be joining 23-5A in their place.

Instead, Angleton, a Brazoria County rival for Manvel, joined Terry, Lamar Consolidated and Foster in a Region IV district with Victoria East, Victoria West and Port Lavaca Calhoun, and Lee is headed way east with Beaumont- and Port Arthur-area schools.

“I really didn’t see that one coming,” Surovik said.

As far as the 23-5A newcomers go, Manvel is coming off back-to-back-to-back seasons in which it reached the state quarterfinals, and the Mavericks were state finalists in its most recent season down on the 5A level (then 4A) in 2011.

Galena Park, on the other hand, has struggled in recent years, posting a 1-15 district record the last two seasons in District 21-5A.

Shadow Creek, a new campus opening its doors next school year, will only field a basketball team on the varsity level during this period and will not field varsity football.

The new-look District 23-5A will be matched up in the bi-district round of the playoffs against a completely different District 24-5A featuring all Houston Independent School District teams: Austin, Davis, Furr, Lee, Madison, Milby, Sharpstown, Sterling and Waltrip.

The four teams among that group to make the playoffs last season (Madison, Sharpstown, Sterling and Waltrip) all lost in the first round.

Class 3A

Unarguably, no Galveston County team’s football landscape was changed more by Monday’s realignment than Hitchcock and La Marque.

The new District 12-3A-I will feature La Marque, Hitchcock, Anahuac, Hardin, Hempstead and Winnie East Chambers.

The Bulldogs will have four new district opponents, including county neighbor La Marque, but even more significant is a move from Region IV to Region III.

For Hitchcock, it will be the first time Bulldogs teams have played football in Region III since the 1987 season — when current head coach Craig Smith was a senior at Hitchcock High School.

“We’ve been close to 30 years in Region IV,” Smith said. “It’s definitely going to be something new, being in Region III. We’re going to be looking forward to it. ... We’re working hard, and we’re going to be up for the challenge.”

La Marque also is entering new territory, dropping down a division, but are all too familiar with the level of competition in Region III, where the Cougars and Bulldogs will have to go through the Beaumont-Port Arthur-Orange area and other Southeast Texas schools in the playoffs.

“There’s a whole lot more speed. It’s just incomparable,” La Marque head coach Mike Jackson said. “When you go into the playoffs, you’re working your teams way up into east Texas and the Golden Triangle instead of heading south.”

Among the four teams sharing District 12-3A-I with La Marque and Hitchcock, only East Chambers reached the playoffs last season (losing in the second round), but both coaches feel all of the new district opponents can pose a challenge.

“Those programs have athletes,” Jackson said. “They’re going to match up athletically with Hitchcock and us.”

The bi-district round will see the teams paired with a District 11-3A-I that features an assortment of east Texas schools and has five teams that reached the postseason last year. Only two of those teams (Coldspring-Oakhurst and Kirbyville) made it past the first round, and both lost in the second round.

In Region III-3A-I, all roads to state go through Cameron Yoe, which was a state finalist last season and were state champions in the 2012, 2013 and 2014 seasons.

Unlike in Classes 6A and 5A, the 3A football realignments do not apply across the board to all sports.

The basketball district for La Marque and Hitchcock was also unveiled on Monday, and the new District 24-3A will feature La Marque, Hitchcock, Altair Rice Consolidated, Danbury, East Bernard and Wallis Brazos.

Class 6A

In a minor surprise on Monday, there was a slight change to the District 24-6A lineup, as the teams from Clear Creek ISD, Dickinson and Friendswood will be taking trips to Alvin instead of Brazoswood in the 2016-18 realignment cycle.

With that minor alteration, District 24-6A will feature Clear Creek, Clear Falls, Clear Springs, Dickinson, Friendswood, Clear Brook, Clear Lake and Alvin.

While newcomer Alvin offers strong baseball, softball, soccer and volleyball programs, the Yellowjackets

football team has not reached the playoffs in the last 10 seasons.

It's far from an earth-shattering change in the district for county schools, but bi-district playoffs will be a completely different animal.

The new District 23-6A welcomes last season's Class 5A champion Richmond George Ranch to a group that features perennial contender Pearland and solid programs in Pearland Dawson, Alief Elsik and Alief Taylor. Brazoswood and Alief Hastings make up the rest of the district.

"District 23-6A got a lot more interesting, to say the least," Friendswood head coach Robert Koopmann said. "You're looking at George Ranch, Dawson and that bunch over there. That's going to be a challenge in round one of the playoffs."

Class 1A

Rounding out the UIL realignment changes for Galveston County schools is High Island, which will have all different district opponents after moving up from Division II to Division I in the six-man Class 1A.

High Island will be matched with Chester, Gilmer Union Hill and Laird Hill Leverett's Chapel in District 16-1A-I.

Chester is the district's defending champion and reached the second round of the playoffs last season. The two newcomers, High Island and Union Hill, each reached the first round of the playoffs last season, while Leverett's Chapel finished last in the district last season.

High Island will be paired in bi-district with a five-team 15-1A lineup with only one team that reached the playoffs last season (Savoy, which reached the second round).

To see how all the districts stack up after Monday's realignment, visit www.utexas.edu/uil.