

Living the dream

Siran Winston's lifelong love affair with basketball continues as he begins his second season with the Harlem Globetrotters

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Before he could walk, Siran Winston had a basketball in his hands. And the Russellville native's relationship with the sport he loves has now grown to a worldwide level, as Winston begins his second full year as 'Turbo,' a member of the Harlem Globetrotters. Founded in 1926, the Globetrotters combine incredible basketball skill and trickery with acts of goodwill and a special relationship with fans that has spanned more than nine decades.

See 'WINSTON,' Page 3

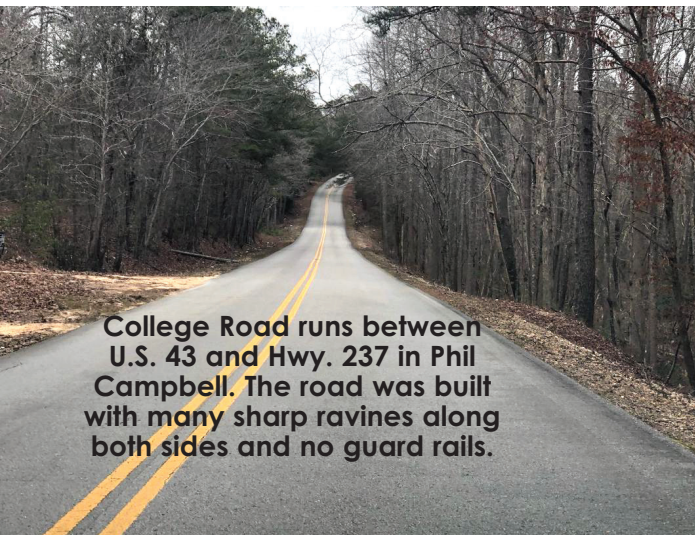


Winston, an RHS alum, thrills fans with his ball handling and shooting skills.



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Grant to provide safety measures for College Road in Phil Campbell



College Road runs between U.S. 43 and Hwy. 237 in Phil Campbell. The road was built with many sharp ravines along both sides and no guard rails.

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Franklin County engineer David Palmer announced last Tuesday a \$296,000 grant that will provide safety enhancements for College Road in Phil Campbell.

The grant, which includes a 10-percent match from Franklin County, was received pursuant to federal High Risk Rural Roads Program funding.

Safety issues on College Road, the lone artery into Northwest-Shoals Community College in Phil Campbell, have been a heated topic for several years since the death of a woman in 2016 in a one-vehicle accident near the school.

College Road is a 16,285-foot roadway that runs between U.S. 43 and Hwy. 237 in Phil Campbell. The

See 'GRANT,' Page 9

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James Leroy "Bubbie" Elkins, Phil Campbell, age 50
Died Monday, January 21, 2019. Funeral held at Spry Memorial Chapel in Russellville. Interment in Spruce Pine Cemetery.

Bertha Josephine Green, age 78
Died Tuesday, January 22, 2019. Funeral held at Spry Memorial Chapel in Russellville. Interment in Bethlehem Cemetery in Russellville.

Mary Pauline Burrow Martin, Trussville (formerly of Russellville), age 90
Died Tuesday, January 22, 2019. Funeral held at Pinkard Funeral Home in Russellville. Interment in Knights of Pythias Cemetery.

Linda Jane Miller, Russellville, age 67
Died Wednesday, January 23, 2019. Funeral held at Spry Memorial Chapel. Interment in Belgreen Cemetery.

Yohalani Mojica, Russellville, age 16
Died Thursday, January 24, 2019. Funeral held at Pinkard Funeral Home. Interment in Franklin Memory Gardens.

Thelma Ruth Murray, Russellville, age 77
Died Saturday, January 19, 2019. Funeral held at Spry Memorial Chapel. Interment in Bethlehem Cemetery.

Jimmie Sue Woodruff Pilati, Russellville, age 90
Jimmie Sue Woodruff Pilati, 90, passed away on January 26, 2019. She was a native of Franklin County, a graduate of Russellville High School and the University of Alabama. She was the first registered dietitian in Northwest Alabama. Mrs. Pilati served a residency at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio, and she taught at Loyola University in New Orleans. She attended First United Methodist Church in Russellville. Mrs. Pilati was a Master Gardener in both Texas and Alabama and was active many years in the Russellville Cultura Garden Club. She was a long-time volunteer at the Russellville Public Library and a supporter of the Friends of the Library program. She wrote a regular column for the *Franklin Free Press* to share her passion of gardening with others. While living in Houston, Texas, Mrs. Pilati did extensive volunteer work and was honored for her volunteer efforts with UNICEF. Mrs. Pilati and her husband enjoyed traveling and visited five continents and many countries together. She was preceded in death by her parents, John C. and Millie Woodruff, and brothers, Harry Copeland Woodruff and Jack Woodruff. She is survived by her husband of 66 years, Karl H. Pilati, daughter Anne Firouzbakht (Ali), son John Pilati, soon to be daughter-in-law Angel Harris, two grandchildren, John Burke and Helena Burke, sister-in-law Doris Woodruff, nephews Mark Woodruff (Patty) and Copeland Woodruff.

Funeral arrangements are being handled by Spry Memorial Chapel. Visitation for Mrs. Pilati will be at First United Methodist Church in Russellville from 12-2 p.m. on Saturday, February 2, 2019, with funeral service immediately following at the church. Burial will be in Franklin Memory Gardens. There will be a private family graveside service.

Family members want to express their gratitude to Nancy Hulsey and Luz Cortez for their care of and friendship with Mrs. Pilati in her final years as well as the staff of Kindred Hospice for their care and support.

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County Commission approves Highway Department request for new employees

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The Franklin County Highway Department will soon see an increase of nine permanent employees after the Franklin County Commission approved advertising for the positions at the commission's January 22 meeting.

Franklin County engineer David Palmer made the request for the additional employees at the commission's work session earlier this month. Palmer, whose department has 13 full-time employees along with some part-time and temporary personnel, said it was crucial to hire the additional nine employees to adequately meet the day-to-day needs of the department.

The positions will be advertised in local newspapers, and Palmer expects to have the new employees in place next month.

"They will work as Class A CDL truck drivers, and medium and heavy equipment operators," Palmer said. "We've lost a number of employees in recent years, and there's been no replacement of those employees we've lost through attrition."

Palmer said the additional employees will allow his department to perform project level work and

work order responses simultaneously while another crew can work on vegetation management and yet another can work on filling potholes.

"Our new pothole truck only requires one person to operate it, so that will be yet another job we can do at the same time," Palmer said. "Vegetation management includes herbicide, mowing and brush cutting."

"With the additional employees, we can now use some of those funds to pay for them with the money we'll save doing the work ourselves,"

Palmer said. "I want to thank the county commission for their support in this much-needed endeavor. It will directly benefit the citizens of Franklin County."

Although the commission did not allocate any additional funding for Palmer to hire the nine employees, he said that funds within his budget could be moved around to pay their salaries. That will include decreasing the number of temporary employees and reallocating some monies that were earmarked for contract-type work.

"With the additional employees, we can now use some of those funds to pay for them with the money we'll save doing the work ourselves,"

Palmer said. "I want to thank the county commission for their support in this much-needed endeavor. It will directly benefit the citizens of Franklin County."

In other action, the commission:

- Promoted Felisha Weeks to lieutenant in the Franklin County Sheriff's Office, accepted the resignation of dispatcher Dale Frederick, approved the hiring of Rhonda Bullion and Alaina James as corrections officers/dispatchers and Kyle Palmer and Richie Michael as deputy sheriffs.

- Approved the hiring of Ricky Johnston and Jason Devaney within the Franklin County Solid Waste Department.

- Approved the expense of \$26,860 to Civil Group for engineering and inspection as part of the Road Gear Industrial Access Project at the Mike Green Industrial Park. This expense will be 100 percent reimbursable from the State of Alabama.

- Approved internal controls within the Franklin County Commission Office to protect and ensure the integrity of finances within the office. These include protocol for making all deposits, picking up mail, reviewing bank statements, blank check storage, purchase orders, journal entries and time sheets.

'WINSTON,' from page 1

Winston was part of the Harlem Globetrotters team that performed Sunday at the Von Braun Center Arena in Huntsville. This was the 28-year-old's closest performance to home since he began touring with the Globetrotters last year.

There are actually three Globetrotter teams (Red, White and Blue) that tour both across the United States and internationally. The Huntsville exhibition was special for Winston, though, as it was his first appearance in front of his parents, Harlan "Peaches" and Linda Winston, and his family.

"The whole family was planning to be there for the first time," Winston said last Thursday. "I'm excited about that. We have our Fan Powered Tour for 2019, and we get a lot of energy from our fans. When we hear a lot of cheering, yelling, screaming, we get more excited and the better the show will be."

Winston, a 2008 Russellville High School graduate, was a standout basketball player for the Golden Tigers before he continued his playing career at Marion Military Institute (Associates Degree 2010) and Tuskegee University (Business Administration Degree 2013).

After college, Winston played semi-professional basketball in leagues in Mexico, Canada, Florida and Georgia. But he believes landing a role in the movie *Uncle Drew* is what really gave him exposure and opened the door for a tryout with the Globetrotters.

"I met a guy on the movie set who played with them. In the movie, I played point guard for the Home Court Advantage Team, the opposing team that played against Uncle Drew," Winston said. "My first day on the set I had the opportunity to shoot some ball with Kyrie Irving. I got to play alongside him in a couple pick up games."

"It was a blessing to get that opportunity and see how seriously he took the game, not to mention Lisa Leslie, Chris Webber, Nate Robinson and

others."

Winston's road to becoming a Globetrotter started with a tryout before one of the Globetrotters' coaches, Barry Hardy.

"He wanted to see what our skill set was. We did some one-on-one, two-on-two and some full-court drills," Winston said. "I was preparing for the opportunity of my life, so when I got that opportunity, I wanted to make the best of it. After that, when I made it to training camp, there were players there from many different backgrounds and playing levels, but what got us there was being basketball players and working hard on our craft."

As 'Turbo,' Winston is known for his ball handling and shooting skills. But for those who know him well, it's Winston's faith, humble character and passion for the game that allow him to excel as part of the worldwide icon Harlem Globetrotters.

"I always wanted to be a professional athlete and wanted basketball to take me places I never dreamed I could go," Winston said. "I'm blessed the Harlem Globetrotters have given me that opportunity and fulfilled my dreams."

"It's about more than just playing the game," Winston said. "Not only do you have to be able to play the game well, you also have to give fans a great show and put smiles on faces and leave people with great memories."

Winston's dribbling skills and ability to handle multiple basketballs at once have become legendary for kids in Russellville City Schools, according to RCS superintendent Heath Grimes.

"He has great talent, and he makes our kids feel proud and see they can accomplish their goals," Grimes said. "It's an amazing thing to have someone in our own community reach that level of success."

Although the team's schedule includes daily practices and conditioning, Winston said he's learned more about what it means to be part of the

Harlem Globetrotters from talking with his coaches, including the legendary 'Sweet' Lou Dunbar and Jimmy Blacklock.

"When I get to sit down with our coaches and talk with them about their experiences, what they went through and hear their stories, it's an amazing privilege to be under their wings," Winston said. "Coach Lou has been with this organization almost 40 years. He's got so many stories about the transition of the game from when he played to now. Everyone is so down to earth."

After each exhibition, Winston said what he appreciates most is the opportunity to interact with children, something he loves.

"As a kid, I always had the older generation looking after me and showing me what was right to do not only on the court but off," Winston said. "Any time I get to inspire a kid, whether by coming to schools talking to students or showing a kid something he never thought he could do, that's an amazing opportunity. When you play for the Harlem Globetrotters, you see smiles on kids' faces. One little moment like that can brighten your day even when you're having a bad day yourself."

"I always wanted to be a professional athlete and wanted basketball to take me places I never dreamed I could go. I'm blessed the Harlem Globetrotters have given me that opportunity and fulfilled my dreams."

Winston invites fans to follow him on Instagram at Lil_Lou_4 or like his Facebook page, which can be found by searching "Lucius Siran Winston."

Globetrotter performances not only feature the almost-automatic victory over the Washington Generals (the last Globetrotter loss was in 1971), but an exhibition from the Flying Globies, the Harlem Globetrotters' acrobatic dunk team.

Tickets and a schedule of all upcoming Globetrotter shows are available online at www.harlemglobetrotters.com.

Honey Do: Frozen pipes

Baby, it's cold outside. And about to get colder. Just in case you didn't get those pipes wrapped and insulated before the hard freeze, here are some tips on thawing them out.

Did you know that ice doesn't cause a pipe to break? Rather, it's water pressure that increases as ice expands inside the pipe. So the pipe doesn't usually burst where it's frozen. That's why it's a good idea to leave a faucet dripping if you think there is any risk of pipes freezing. The pipe may freeze, but the pressure will be relieved and keep the pipe from bursting.

If the pipe does burst, should you repair or replace it? Pinholes and hairline cracks can usually be patched. For a temporary fix, electrical or duct tape may hold a pinhole, if it is tightly wound around the pipe. Be sure to overlap the tape and wrap several inches beyond the leak for a good seal. Hairline cracks that are 2" or less may be fixed with a pipe clamp.

These clamps, lined with rubber, can be fitted around the pipe and secured with a bolt and nut. There are some fiberglass tapes available that wrap around the pipe and harden when dampened.

Much of the plumbing in our

area is PVC. This "plastic" pipe is easily replaced in most situations. Using a hack saw or pipe-cutting pliers, just cut out the frozen section and glue in a new one. Be sure to remove pipe well away from the frozen area, as PVC can swell up for quite a distance. If you don't go far enough back, the new couplings will not fit on the pipe. You may be able to cap non-essential PVC lines and return to the problem when the weather warms up.

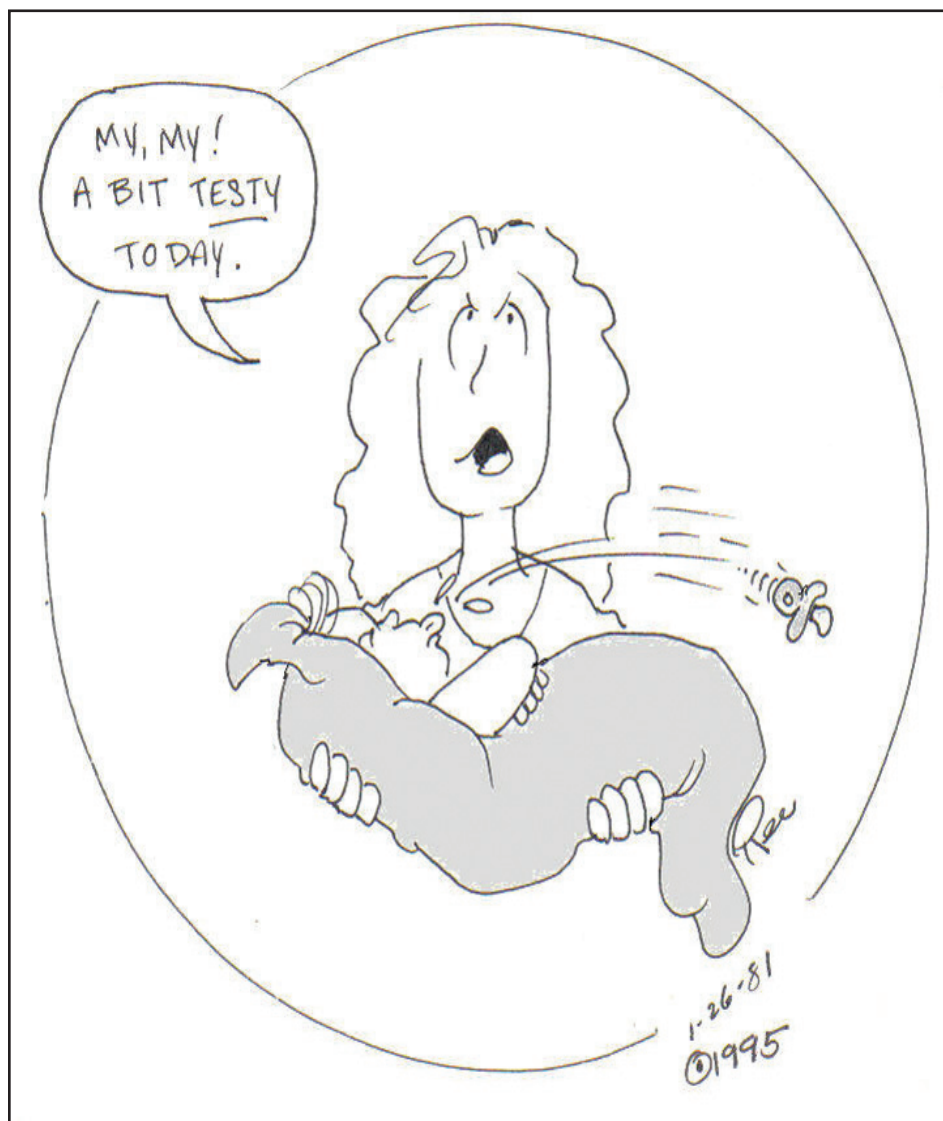
If you decide to thaw a pipe that has frozen but not burst, be sure to cut off the water supply. There are many techniques for thawing a pipe, and if you use anything that requires electricity be extremely careful to avoid shock or fire.

Be sure to re-insulate any pipes that you work on. For a spring project, work on better insulating any potential problem areas. Also, you might install water valves in key places so that you don't have to disrupt water service to your entire home in the case of a freeze.

Remember, help is just around the corner at your local hardware store.



Doug Green



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Correction Policy

The *Franklin Free Press* strives for excellence and accuracy, and we will be pleased to correct any error in our newspaper. To request a correction or clarification, call or e-mail our office.

Letters to the editor

The *Franklin Free Press* is published by hometown people, for hometown people. We urge contributions of all kinds, including guest columns, picture submissions, cartoons or letters to the editor. Send any letters to our office via U.S. Postal Service or e-mail, and we will gladly publish them. Letters must be signed and contain the hometown and phone number of the author. The *Franklin Free Press* reserves the right to edit letters for style, length and content.

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Letter to the Editor

To the editor,

What First Amendment rights do parents have when they request to address a local school board meeting?

The ability to speak directly to a school board is perhaps the purest and most basic form of citizen participation. When speakers who've been restrained from commenting at public meetings bring constitutional challenges, they've generally been successful. Judges have no difficulty recognizing that a government meeting is meant for the airing of complaints, even if that requires naming or criticizing a particular employee.

It's important for parent advocates who may find themselves speaking before school boards to appreciate the strong First Amendment protection for citizen speech to government officials addressing matters of public concern. Indeed, the First Amendment not only protects the freedom of speech, but also the freedom to petition government officials for the redress of grievances, and a restraint on speech to school boards jeopardizes both of these rights.

When a member of the public takes to the microphone to complain about a school superin-

tendent's performance, it's almost always because lower-volume options have been tried and failed. When a parent feels compelled to resort to the podium to air a grievance, it should be recognized as suggesting a weakness in the school superintendent's dispute-resolution process.

On November 13, 2018, I sent Mr. Greg Hamilton a letter stating I expected a written response from him as well as a follow-up phone call to explain to me how he was going to address my daughter's unexcused absences at Tharptown Elementary School. I never received a letter or phone call, so I went to the school board office and asked for an appointment to see Mr. Hamilton, and no appointment was ever made for me. I then went back to the school board office in early December 2018 and asked to be put on the January 2019 school board meeting agenda to address the board about their student absentee policies.

My request was ignored.

Sincerely,
Junior Vinson
Russellville



We love to hear from you! Send your guest columns, recipes, cartoons, letters to the editor and other creative submissions to franklinfreepress@yahoo.com.

For updates on news and sports throughout the week, don't forget to check us out online at franklinfreepress.net!



Relationships and money

Dear Dave,
My father-in-law wants to help us with our mortgage. We've been working hard to pay off our home early, and we've reduced what we owe to around \$35,000. His idea is to pay off the remainder, then let us pay him back over time. In the past, he has loaned us much smaller amounts and everything has worked out fine. What do you think about this?

Brianne

Dear Brianne,
I'm sure this seems like a winning proposition all the way around. My concern is there's a big spiritual and emotional issue that has been left out of the equation. The borrower is *always* slave to the lender, and nowhere is that more true than in a family.

I understand, too, you have a solid track record with this kind of thing. But anytime you borrow money from family you're playing with fire. When you do something like this, especially with such a large amount, the money issue is likely to be a shadow hovering over your relationship. Family get-togethers, special events and holidays will feel different when you're there with your lender instead of just good old dad.

I assume your father-in-law is doing well financially, since he can afford to make this offer. And don't get me wrong, it's a very kind and generous offer. If I were in his shoes, I might offer instead to pay off the mortgage as a gift to my son and daughter-in-law for working so hard to attain a goal. But it would be a *gift*. No strings attached.

If you have a nice, stable family, this debt will always be there in the back of your mind. If you have a dysfunctional, control-freak kind of family, it's going to be right there in front of you constantly. Either way, I don't think it's worth the risk.

Dave

Fight back against fraud

Dear Dave,
We recently learned that my wife's ex-husband used her social security number to establish several credit card accounts. We've written and called the credit card companies, and we're disputing the charges, but is there anything else we can do to protect ourselves and put an end to this?

Ken

Dear Ken,
You bet there is! File a police report immediately, and if possible, have this guy arrested. He has committed criminal fraud, and it's not something you should take lightly. Also, put a fraud victim alert on your credit bureau reports today.

Don't stop with just alerting the credit card companies about this situation. You should be speaking with and communicating via email—plus snail mail, if necessary—directly with the fraud victim division at every credit card company involved. Make sure they understand this is a denial of responsibility and not simply a dispute.

Let them know you're sorry this happened, but explain that all these charges in your names are the result of a criminal act perpetrated against you. You may have to stand your ground with the credit card companies, because some of them might try to get you to pay it anyway. Don't do it!

Dave

**Dave Ramsey is CEO of Ramsey Solutions. He has authored seven best-selling books, including The Total Money Makeover. Follow Dave on the web at daveramsey.com and on Twitter at @DaveRamsey.*

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EVENTS OF INTEREST • FAMILY REUNIONS • PLAYS • CHURCH GATHERINGS • EDUCATIONAL • CLUB MEETINGS

Russellville Masonic Lodge 371 will be selling Boston butts during Super Bowl weekend. Butts are \$30 and may be pre-ordered by calling 256-810-1970. Pick-up will be this Saturday, February 2 from 8-10 a.m. at the Masonic Lodge on Coffee Street.

The Foster Grandparent Program is seeking volunteers ages 55 and older to help tutor and mentor children in day care, head start and schools. Volunteers will receive a tax-free stipend and travel reimbursement. They can call 256-332-6800 for an application.

AARP Tax-Aide will be providing FREE income tax preparation at the Department of Human Resources in Russellville on Thursdays beginning February 7 and ending April 11. You do not have to be a member of AARP, retired or a certain age to use this service. Call Ben at 256-332-0252 for an appointment, which is required.

Franklin County Schools Pre-K registration is NOW open for the 2019-20 school year. Pre-registration is open online at <https://alprek.asap-connected.com> from January 15-March 22. Random selection will be held on March 22 in the Pre-K classroom. These dates are for all six Franklin County Pre-K programs. Some classrooms still have space for THIS school year for students who will be attending kindergarten next school year. Enrollment is open to all children four years of age on or before 9/1/19 who are residents of the state of Alabama. Children who are eligible for kindergarten are ineligible for this program. Enrollees must provide copy of child's birth certificate, proof of residence (utility bill or lease or copy of mortgage). There is no registration fee for this program. Upon enrollment, child's immunization record must be provided.

LifeSouth Community Blood Center will host a blood drive at Russellville Hospital on Tuesday, February 5 from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. LifeSouth is the primary supplier of blood products to Russellville Hospital. Contact Deborah Lindsey to schedule an appointment at 256-332-8676 or deborah.lindsey@curahealth.org. Please be sure to bring your photo ID when you donate. Everyone who signs up to donate will receive a free T-shirt, an appetizer card from Texas Roadhouse, a free cookie dough card from Papa Murphy's and a free meal ticket from Russellville Hospital. We will also be giving away DOOR PRIZES! Please call if you have any questions, and thank you for giving the gift of life!

Spruce Pine Historical Society meets on the first Tuesday of each month at 6:30 p.m. at the Spruce Pine Community Center in Spruce Pine. Next meeting will be February 5. All members and friends are urged to attend.

If you are interested in the study of the Civil War and have an ancestor who was in the Confederate Army, join the Sons of Confederate Veterans. Meetings are held the first Thursday of each month (except January and July) at 6 p.m. at the Russellville Rec Center. Next meeting will be February 7.

Gateway Church of God on Hwy. 43 in Russellville will have revival services with evangelist Floyd Lawhon Friday, February 8-Sunday, February 10. Bro. Lawhon has been around the world preaching the gospel. He has seen thousands come to Jesus and many healing miracles in his ministries. There will be a Special Singing each service. On Friday night, the gospel group "Purpose" from right here in Russellville will be singing. Michael Cummings and Dora's praise team will sing on Saturday night, followed by the Gateway Church Praise Team and Singers on Sunday. Friday/Saturday services will be at 7:30 p.m., and Sunday services will be at 10:50 a.m. and 5 p.m. Please do not miss this revival. It is going to be great!!!! Everyone is welcome! For more info, call 256-332-7176.

East Franklin Volunteer Fire Department will hold a chicken and beef stew fundraiser on Saturday, February 9 at the East Franklin Volunteer Fire Department, 10443 Hwy. 81 in Phil Campbell. Serving begins at 11 a.m. Bring your own containers please. Please come support the fire department!

The Kerry Gilbert Band will perform a benefit concert with special guest Mountain Breeze at the Roxy Theatre in Russellville on Saturday, February 9 at 7 p.m. General admission seating. Doors open at 6 p.m. Tickets are \$10 for adults, \$5 for children ages 6-12, and free for children under 6. Call 256-335-4356. The KGB will be the featured act at a show sponsored by the Franklin County Arts Council at the Roxy on the second Saturday of each month.

The next meeting for American Legion Post 64 will be Thursday, February 14 at 7 p.m. at the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce. Dinner will be at 6:30 p.m.

The Cottages (900 North Jackson Ave., Russellville) will host a Heart Health Fair for Senior Citizens on Tuesday, February 12 from 9:30-11:30 a.m. Blood pressure screening, heart health talk and heart-healthy snacks.

The book *Motherwit: An Alabama Midwife's Story* by Onnie Lee Logan will be discussed at the February 20 10 a.m. meeting of The Readers of the Lost Ark Book Club. The club meets at Coldwater Books, 105 West Sixth Street, Tusculumbia. For more info, email nancy537481@yahoo.com or visit the following link: <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/174022.Motherwit>.

Ronnie McDowell and his band will return to Russellville on Saturday, March 16 at 7 p.m. for another benefit for the historic Roxy Theater. Franklin County's own Joseph Baldwin will be the opening act. For ticket information, please call 256-415-3270 or 256-460-8988. Reservations are going fast! Floor tickets are \$20 to \$30, and general admission balcony tickets are \$15.

RCS Board joins push to repeal Accountability Act

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The Russellville City Board of Education joined a growing number of Alabama school boards to call for the repeal of the Alabama Accountability Act (AAA) at the board's January 24 meeting.

Board members approved a resolution that recommends legislative repeal of the controversial act that, since its passage five years ago, has accounted for almost \$150 million in funds diverted from the state's Education Trust Fund for use in private school scholarships.

Sponsors of the AAA promoted the act as a way to help students in failing Alabama schools have a way out and to provide them another option to attend either a non-failing public school or a providing a scholarship to a private school.

According to Russellville City Schools superintendent Heath Grimes, more than 65 percent of the scholarships are going to students who are not zoned in failing schools, which is violative of the legislation's language.

"I absolutely believe students in failing schools should have other options," Grimes said. "But I think it's being misused in that students not in failing schools are getting scholarship money. If that's true, and every report I get says it is, it's a major deviation from the intent of the act."

According to the resolution, since 2013, \$481,194 has been diverted from Russellville City Schools since the act's inception.

Grimes also has concerns that between \$5 and \$7 million of tax dollars not spent on scholarships but still not going into the Education Trust Fund are actually being paid to scholarship granting organizations, or SGOs.

"I think that is wrong. That number needs to be carefully scrutinized and reduced as to how much can be donated and not taxed," Grimes said.

The resolution outlines the board's belief that the AAA has actually harmed Alabama public education.

See 'REPEAL,' page 9

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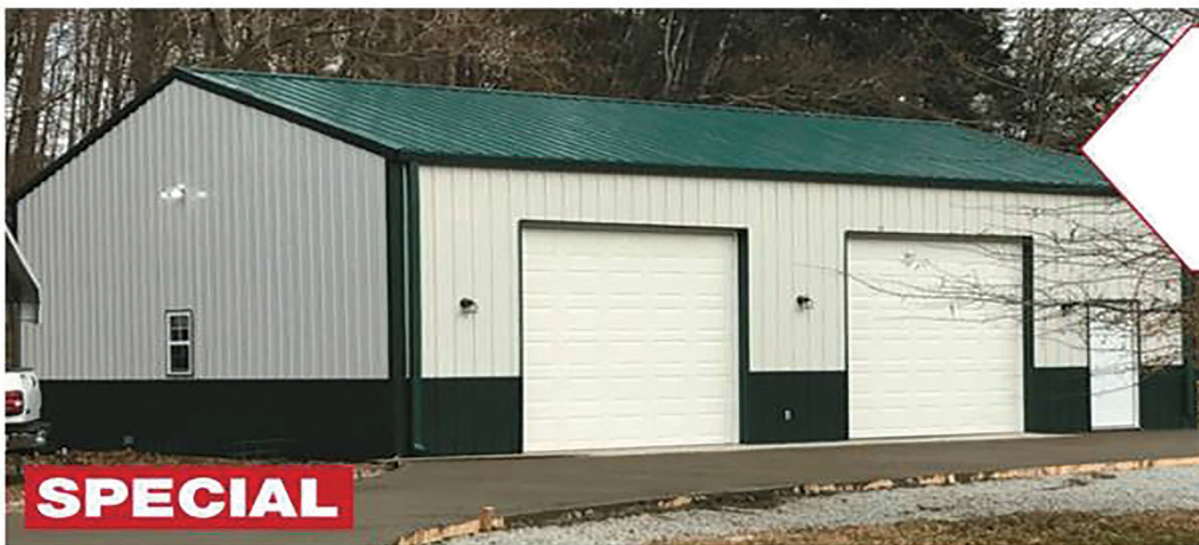
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Sumerel receives scholarship

Submitted to the FFP

Mississippi State University student Nicole Sumerel was selected to receive a scholarship from the Mississippi Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks Foundation.

Sumerel (pictured at left with her father, Michael Sumerel) accepted this award at a luncheon held at the Department Headquarters for Mississippi Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks in Jackson, MS on

December 19, 2018. Nicole will be beginning her senior year at MSU majoring in Wildlife, Fisheries and Aquaculture in Conservation Law Enforcement with a double minor in Sociology and Criminology. She is an active participant in the Wildlife Society and the Conservation Law Enforcement Club at Mississippi State University.

Nicole graduated from Itawamba Community College with a degree in Forestry Technology and an Associate of Arts degree in 2017.

Commissioners receive annual NACOLG update at work session

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Franklin County commissioners received their annual update from officials with the Northwest Alabama Council of Local Governments (NACOLG) at their January work session.

NACOLG executive director Keith Jones shared with the commission the multiple ways his agency works for and with Franklin County officials and citizens, including the agency's Department of Governmental Services, Senior AIDE/Worker Program, Revolving Loan Fund, Department of Planning and Transportation, Dial-A-Ride program and meal delivery through senior centers in Russellville, Phil Campbell, Hodges and Red Bay.

NACOLG is the regional planning and intergovernmental coordination agency created pursuant to 1967 legislation in the Alabama State Legislature. It is a voluntary association of 37 governmental units in the five-county region of Colbert, Franklin, Marion, Lauderdale and Winston, along with the municipalities therein.

NACOLG is not a governmental entity but rather

an extension of city and county government through which officials get together to decide issues of region-wide importance and work together to solve problems that stretch beyond local governmental boundaries. All NACOLG policy decisions are made by local elected officials.

Governmental Services is the part of NACOLG that works with each member government to develop viable community and economic development projects, including infrastructure and community enhancement projects.

The department works with numerous agencies, including the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Small Business Administration and others to secure funding for local governments.

There were a total of six NACOLG Governmental Services applications submitted in 2018, including three that were not funded:

•Town of Phil Campbell ARC Project: Appalachian Regional Commission project for improvements to Phil Campbell Memorial Park including a new entertainment stage with a pavilion, concrete seating area, concrete walkway and restrooms. Application is pending from September 2018.

•City of Red Bay ARC Project: \$202,345 project for sanitary sewer improvements to adequately serve existing, expanding and potential businesses in downtown Red Bay. Application pending from September 2018.

•City of Red Bay Community Development Block Grant-ED: \$347,763 project for roadway, storm drainage and sanitary sewer improvements at the West Franklin Regional Industrial Park for Girard Systems, Inc., who plans to construct a 34,000-square foot manufacturing/assembly/service plant for awnings and a 50-space RV campground for customers. Application pending from November 2018.

The Medicaid Waiver Program had 88 Franklin County clients in 2018. And the State Health Insurance Program that counsels adults on Medicaid/Medicare serviced 211 clients. More than 25,000 homebound meals were served in the county through the Nutrition Program.

For more information on NACOLG and the services it offers, contact the agency at 256-389-0555.

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Eight local eateries earn satisfactory ratings

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

All of the eight Franklin County establishments that received health ratings during the week of January 14-18 had scores that fall into the "satisfactory compliance" range.

Health ratings are required to be prominently posted in all food/lodging establishments.

Scores are graded by the Alabama Department of Public Health inspectors on a 100-point scale.

Establishments with scores of 85 to 100 are considered to be in "satisfactory compliance" and are routinely inspected. Establishments scoring between 70 and 84 will be inspected again in 60 days, and those scoring between 60 and 69 will have another follow-up within 48 hours. Any establishment scoring below 60 will be immediately closed.

Areas of inspection by ADPH include manage-

ment and personnel; food storage, preparation and service; equipment; utensils; linen cleanliness; plumbing and waste; poisonous or toxic material storage; and an inspection of the physical facility or property.

Each of the eight Franklin County businesses listed in the most recent food and lodging establishment ratings scored 85 or above, within the satisfactory compliance range.

The highest score was 100, received by the Little Tigers Preschool, LLC, 1003 East Lawrence St., Russellville.

Inspections of Franklin County businesses, with critical item violations noted, resulted in the following scores:

•Piggly Wiggly #87, 3625 Broad Street, Phil Campbell, 92. (Bottle of bleach stored with paper handtowels).

•Daisy Grocery, 125 North Jackson Ave., Russellville, 92. (No paper towels in

restroom). •Homestead Cafe, 6631 Hwy. 43, Spruce Pine, 92. (Wires frayed and broken on sifter basket).

•B&J Cafe, 1327 Shellnut Loop, Phil Campbell, 92. (Employee using bare hands with ready to eat food).

•Piggly Wiggly #87 Deli, 3625 Broad St., Phil Campbell, 94.

•Discount Grocery and Variety, 201 E. Lawrence St., Russellville, 98.

•Los Dos Hermanos, 409 Madison St., Russellville, 99.

Of the 25 inspections done in Colbert County from January 14-18, all received scores falling in the range of satisfactory. The high score of 99 was received by Calvary Learning and Ministry Center, 1305 W. 12th St., Sheffield.

Health ratings are available at www.foodscores.state.al.us and may be viewed by city or county.

Council extends deadline for RPD positions

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The Russellville City Council voted to extend the application deadline for two patrol officer positions within the Russellville Police Department at the council's January 22 meeting.

RPD chief Chris Hargett said the previous application period did not produce enough qualified applicants, so the council extended the application period an additional week through the close of business on January 29, 2019.

In other action at the brief meeting, the council:

•Approved the vacating of an unnamed street behind Akins Funeral Home after no input was received at a public hearing.

•Approved a resolution authorizing mayor David Grissom to execute a Memorandum of Understanding with Coach Safety Foundation. The agreement requires all coaches involved with Russellville Parks and Recreation Department to complete a course which provides the person with information designed to decrease the likelihood of a youth athlete sustaining a serious injury while

participating in sports.

•Appointed Debbie Beason to the Russellville Public Library Board.

•Approved requests to waive the rental fee of the A.W. Todd Centre from St. Paul CME Church on June 9, 2019; Russellville Middle School Basketball on January 17, 2019; Golden Chapter No. 16, Order of Eastern Star on May 25, 2019 and the gospel group *Purpose* on March 2, 2019.

The next regular meeting of the Russellville City Council is set for Monday, February 4, with work session at 6 p.m. and meeting to follow.

'GRANT,' from page 1

road was built with many sharp ravines along both sides and with no guard rails.

"This grant will be used to install some guardrails, not from one end of the road to the other, that will be strategically placed in the worst areas," Palmer said. "The project will also include new striping, pavement markets, delineator posts, new signage and edge grooving."

Palmer said the grant specifications require that the project be designed and planned by the end of the current fiscal year and that actual work on College Road would likely be done next spring.

Multiple deaths and injuries have taken place as

the result of accidents along College Road with its sharp drop-offs. Palmer said more than half of College Road contains these drop-offs, but it would be cost prohibitive to install guardrails in all those locations.

Additionally, the State of Alabama must grant permission for guardrails to be installed on College Road due to there not being enough footage between the roadway and the area to be protected from, Palmer explained.

In late 2016, an official with the Alabama Department of Transportation acknowledged the safety concerns existed on College Road and indi-

cated the state might be willing to work with local officials to remedy them.

"If they need us to waive some standard if we possibly can, we will look at that to see if some standard can be relaxed for this road," said Curtis Vincent, region engineer with ALDOT. "It's a sub-standard road that has seen several accidents. We want to make improvements, but you can't guardrail the entire road. What if there's an accident in an area where you don't install guardrails? It may be that delineators, better signage and better striping combined may improve the safety of the road, but it will still be a substandard road."

'REPEAL,' from page 7

"The AAA has now accumulated five years of historical data establishing that it has not served its intended purpose, and instead has caused harm to the financial well-being and academic progress of public school systems in Alabama," the board states in the resolution.

As an alternative to repeal, the resolution calls for the "strong modification" of the AAA when the legislature meets in March for its annual session.

Grimes spoke with Rep. Jamie Kiel (R-Russellville) after the resolution was passed.

"We will give Rep. Kiel and Sen. Larry Stutts (R-Tusculum) a copy of the resolution. We spoke about how there are three or four things in the law that are problematic," Grimes said. "They include where the money is going, why students are being given scholarships that don't qualify under the law, what is the cap for scholarships and how schools are deemed to be failing schools."

Kiel said he understood the concerns from Grimes and the board.

"I agree with Mr. Grimes and the board that there needs to be some modification of the act," Kiel said. "It is concerning to me if students are receiving scholarships who do not attend failing schools. I agree with Mr. Grimes that we do need to make sure students in failing schools have the opportunity to receive a quality education."

Grimes still takes issue with how the AAA was passed. Its original version was endorsed by the Alabama Association of School Boards and the State Superintendent of Education at the time, but when the bill went into a conference committee at the last minute, it came out completely changed.

"[The bill] was substantially different and something we never said we supported," Grimes said.

The AAA defines failing schools as those in the bottom six percent based on achievement scores.

Another legislative act, which requires all Alabama public schools to receive an annual report card, has a different set of criteria to determine whether a school is failing.

"Many of the schools on the failing schools list did not receive an 'F' on their report card, and many of the schools that got an 'F' are not on the failing school list," Grimes said. "They're taking the bottom six percent based on achievement. That is very much skewed by poverty, affluence, socioeconomic challenges of the system, English second language learners and special education students. If you just look at achievement scores, that's not telling you if a school is effective."

"We have a lot of students with low achievement, but we're growing and improving at a really high rate. If you improve that substantially in the next year, but are still below the state or national average, does that mean a school is ineffective?"



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RCS Board votes to extend anti-bullying policy

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

In a move following a law passed by the Alabama Legislature last year, the Russellville City Board of Education approved action that extends its anti-bullying, intimidation, violence and threats of violence policy to off-campus student acts as well as online bullying.

The language follows that of the Jamari Terrell Williams Student Bullying Act, passed in 2018, required Alabama school boards to expand their anti-bullying policies to protect against off-campus and online harassment.

The act is named after a 10-year-old Montgomery student who took his own life after

being bullied.

In other action, the board:

- Approved a contract with Larry Kennedy to clean the Russellville Middle School gymnasium after basketball games this season.

- Approved facility use requests for the RHS Driving Range and cafeteria on June 4-14, 2019, by the Russellville Police Department for skid car training, and on February 22-23 use of the RHS gymnasium for a tournament.

- Approved the low bid for new weight room equipment to Wright Equipment in the amount of \$38,348.14.

- Approved personnel moves including: Leave of Absence for Jenny Wynn, WES teacher, from Jan.7-Feb. 4, 2019; Temporary employment in

position for Kirklynn Hanson to fill Wynn's position; Employment in position of Jennifer Lindsey, pre-K auxiliary teacher at WES; Athletic volunteers including Jesus Betancourt, soccer and Cam DeArman, golf; Athletic pro-consults including Matt Spurgeon, RMS Baseball, with maximum \$400 payment to be paid by Baseball Booster Club and Fred Ambrosion as pro consult for soccer, with maximum \$300 payment to be paid by Booster Club. Employment in supplement for Jason Walker and Alissa Moore, Russellville Middle School basketball.

The next regular meeting of the Russellville City Board of Education is set for Thursday, February 28, at 8 a.m. with work session Monday, February 25 at 3:30 p.m.

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An application and job description may be picked up at the Franklin County Commission Office, located at 405 N. Jackson Ave., Monday – Friday, 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM. Applications will be accepted until 5:00 PM on Friday, February 8, 2019. If you have questions or need any additional information, please contact David Palmer, County Engineer at (256) 332-8434.

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Robinson has 27 in return, Deshler boys snap Red Bay streak at nine

Mike Self
 Franklin Free Press

RED BAY - Red Bay coach John Torisky added Deshler to his team's schedule this year with a specific purpose in mind. Torisky knew his team was going to be good, and he wanted them to face a late-season test against a high-caliber opponent from a larger classification.

It makes perfect sense, then, that Torisky wanted Deshler's boys to be at full strength for their visit to Red Bay last Thursday night. A Tiger team weakened by the absence of electrifying senior guard JP Robinson (who had missed the previous two games due to a sprained ankle) wouldn't have served Torisky's purpose as effectively as a Tiger team with Robinson on the floor.

See 'STREAK,' Page 19



PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW

Corum and the top-ranked Tigers were unbeaten in January prior to last Thursday's visit from Deshler.

Who's headed to Hanceville?



PHOTO/KG
 Lucas McNutt (2) and Russellville might be....but first they'll have to survive an up-for-grabs first-round game against Kobe Bowers (24) and West Point at the Class 5A, Area 14 tournament.

By our count, no fewer than six teams from Franklin County have a legitimate path to the regional tourney, and two of them are bona fide contenders to reach Birmingham

Mike Self
 Franklin Free Press

Area tournaments are set to tip off next week, and players and coaches across northwest Alabama have set their sights on the regional.

Here's a breakdown of the six teams from Franklin County that, in our view, have the best chance of making it to Hanceville—and perhaps beyond.

Phil Campbell Lady Bobcats

Record (through Sunday): 20-3 (4-0 in Class 3A, Area 14)

Points per game: 55.1 (three games with 70-plus)

Points allowed per game: 40.0

Threes made: 102 (4.4 per game)

Free throws: 220-for-374 (59%)

The skinny: After reaching the Final Four last season for the first time in 31 years, Phil Campbell may not have to wait nearly that long before getting back to Birmingham again. Winners of nine straight games through Sunday (and 36 of their last 40 overall dating back to last season), the Lady Bobcats have established themselves as the

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favorites once more to emerge from the Northwest Regional—this time in the Class 3A bracket.

Head coach Craig Thomas's team has hung some impressive skins on the wall this year, beating the likes of Class 4A contender Wilson (71-65 on November 19), Class 1A No. 4 Phillips (41-37 on November 29), Class 4A No. 6 Rogers (40-39 in overtime on November 30) and Mississippi powerhouse Belmont (44-39 last Friday). Phil Campbell's only three losses entering the week had come to Belmont, Summertown (TN) and in overtime to Susan Moore, the fifth-ranked team in 3A.

That challenging schedule has prepared the Lady Bobcats for a postseason run that will likely include a sub-regional game at home against either Lauderdale County or Lexington, who split a pair of area games this season and wound up sharing the Area 16 championship. [Phil Campbell has not faced Lauderdale County this year but did hammer Lexington 61-33 on a neutral floor five days before Christmas.]

Second-ranked Winfield looms as a potential obstacle in the regional semifinals, though perhaps a less threatening one after taking its first loss of the season last Friday in the finals of the Marion County Tournament, 66-40 to Phillips. [As previously mentioned, the Lady Bobcats beat Phillips at home in late November, and they were scheduled to play at Bear Creek on Monday night.]

Potential opponents notwithstanding, if the Lady 'Cats play their best basketball when it matters most, they should find themselves back in Birmingham. Phil Campbell showed flashes early this season of becoming an elite offensive club, but the team's calling card remains lock-down defense. Through Sunday, the Lady Bobcats had allowed less than 40 points in six of their eight January games, winning all of them.

Athletic guards Kallie Allen and Caitlynn Mills are quick enough to keep opposing ball-handlers out of the paint, and 5'11 senior Abby Davis is blocking shots at a career-best rate this season. [She's had seven games with at least four blocks, including nine in that loss to Susan Moore on December 27.] Sophomore forward Katie Thomas, another plus defender, is tough enough to match up with an opposing team's top post threat, freeing up Davis to roam the paint and protect the rim (while also helping her stay out of foul trouble).

Offensively, Davis (14.9 points per game) and Allen (12.6 points per game) are still the team's top two scorers (just as they were a year ago), but Mills has made a major difference with her perimeter shooting and playmaking. Through Sunday, the sophomore guard led Phil Campbell by a wide margin with 44 threes made and was also the team's best foul shooter (minimum 30 attempts) at 71 percent (44-for-62). Mills had scored in double-figures 15 times while averaging 12.1 points per game, giving the Lady Bobcats the kind of bona fide three-headed monster on the offensive end that they simply didn't have a year ago.

This is the best shooting team Thomas has had in his five seasons at Phil Campbell, largely due to Mills' sweet stroke but also to the addition of Katie Thomas (19 threes made through Sunday) and to the increased efficiency of



PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW

GETTING DEFENSIVE - Through Sunday, Allen (24) and the Lady Bobcats had allowed less than 40 points in six of their eight January games, winning all of them.

Davis, whose 23 threes made through Sunday were already a career-high.

If Allen, who entered the week averaging 14.6 points in 11 games post-Christmas, gets in a groove from beyond the arc, postseason opponents of the Lady Bobcats could be in serious trouble.

Red Bay Tigers

Record (through Sunday): 22-5 (6-0 in Class 2A, Area 13)

Points per game: 57.1 (three games with 70-plus)

Points allowed per game: 42.6

Threes made: 172 (6.4 per game)

Free throws: 238-for-343 (69%)

The skinny: After breaking through last season to earn their first regional bid since 1995, the Tigers—ranked No. 1 in Class 2A for the past two weeks—have all the pieces in place for a Final Four run in head coach John Torisky's fourth season.

Red Bay has tremendous depth and a bevy of dangerous three-point shooters, but the Tigers still hang their hat on defense—stingy, scrappy, suffocating defense. Through Sunday, they had allowed an average of just 34.8 points in ten January games while holding five opponents to less than 30.

Red Bay possesses all the ingredients of an elite defensive team: Size (6'5 sophomore Lane Shewbart and 6'3 sophomore Braden Ray), length (6'2 juniors Arden Hamilton and Tanner Hamilton), quickness (junior point guard Clay Allison and senior two guard Hunter Bays), toughness (6'3 senior Gath Weatherford and senior wing Colton Corum), elite athleticism (high-flying sophomore guard Jalen Vinson) and instincts (senior guard Noah Brewer). Above all, though, the Tigers compete defensively at a level most teams simply can't match, guarding every possession as if their lives depended on it.

Red Bay has risen to another level as a defensive juggernaut this season by adding full-court pressure into the mix. Already capable of squeezing the life out of opponents with their smothering man-to-man D in the half-court, the Tigers can now deploy the press as they see fit to force turnovers and speed up the game. That pressure element also provides a shot in the arm scoring-wise, as those turnovers often lead to layups (or open threes) in transition.

Weatherford's scoring average (12.6 points per game) is down almost four points from last season, but don't be fooled—that's merely a product of the sharp-shooting big man playing fewer minutes and taking fewer shots on a team that legitimately goes ten deep. Weatherford can still go off on any given night, as evidenced by his seven games this season with 20-plus points. Through Sunday, he ranked second in all of Franklin County with 66 threes made on the year.

Behind Weatherford the Tigers boasts tremendous balance with Ray (9.6 points per game, 22 threes), Corum (8.1 points per game, 19 threes) and Allison (7.6 points per game, 39 threes) all capable of taking and making big shots. Shewbart (4.3 points per game with a season-high of 17 in a mid-December rout of Addison) can be a handful in the paint and is the top scorer on a productive second unit. Another asset for Torisky's team is the foul line, where Allison (33-for-40, 82 percent), Weatherford (33-for-43, 77 percent), Ray (58-for-77, 75 percent) and Shewbart (36-for-49, 73 percent) are all outstanding.

As valuable as Red Bay's depth is, building it may have come at a cost. Torisky typically plays his second unit somewhere in the neighborhood of 10 to 14 minutes a night, which means the starters are playing between 18 and 22 minutes a night. So what happens in a big game when the second unit falters a bit and the starters need to log a heavier workload?

That scenario unfolded last week against Class 4A Deshler, and Weatherford and company appeared to run out of gas down the stretch as Deshler rallied from seven points down to claim a 64-60 win. It's a relatively minor concern (and, quite possibly, Red Bay's *only* concern), but it's worth wondering if the Tigers will have the stamina to survive an adrenaline-filled game against a high-caliber opponent under the postseason lights if their key guys have to play a few extra minutes.

Speaking of high-caliber opponents, it's certainly beginning to look as though Red Bay might be on a collision course with No. 6 Tanner. The Rattlers have been rolling of late, knocking off West Limestone and East Limestone last week to take home the Limestone County Tournament title and improve to 21-6.

Red Bay and Tanner met in Hanceville way back on November 21, with the Tigers prevailing 59-58 on a buzzer-beating three by Weatherford. A rematch in the same building on February 19 with the Northwest Regional championship on the line would come as no surprise.

Russellville Golden Tigers

Record (through Sunday): 17-6 (4-2 in Class 5A, Area 14)

Points per game: 71.6 (six games with 80-plus)

Points allowed per game: 60.3

Threes made: 176 (7.7 per game)

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Free throws: 250-for-385 (65%)

The skinny: Russellville entered the week trending in the right direction, having won five straight games (the last four against high-caliber opponents) to improve to 7-2 in the month of January. The Golden Tigers finished as runners-up in the Area 14 race, but their offensive firepower is second to none.

High-scoring guard Lucas McNutt, who had topped the 20-point mark nine times through Sunday while averaging 17.7 points per game, is having the best season of his four-year varsity career. The 6'2 senior entered the week having made a county-best 75 threes (3.3 per game) and has been better than ever at attacking the basket off the bounce and finishing in transition.

McNutt eclipsed the 1,000-point mark for his career in last Friday's overtime win over Jasper, and he's in good company. Fellow senior Devin Buckhalter hit the same milestone back in mid-December and entered the week with more than 1,200 career points. Buckhalter has been red-hot of late, averaging 21.2 points and knocking down a total of 13 threes in his last four games through Sunday. For the season, the 6'0 guard came into the week averaging a career-high 15.7 points per game with 40 made threes and seven games of 20-plus points.

Sweet-shooting sophomore Chandler Dyas (11.2 points per game through Sunday, with 35 threes made) gives the Golden Tigers another perimeter weapon, and freshman point guard Will Bonner is the engine that makes the whole thing go—and go, and go, and go. Bonner entered the week averaging 10.9 points per game while also leading the team in assists and steals. His ability to handle the ball and run the break has freed up McNutt and Buckhalter to focus their considerable offensive talents on putting the ball in the hole.

The team's third senior, versatile guard Caden Parker (4.6 points per game), sees the floor as well as anybody and has a knack for making the right play at pivotal moments. The savvy Parker ranks second on the team in assists and is a capable perimeter shooter.

Those five guys comprise the starting lineup for fourth-year coach Patrick Odom, but more importantly they also comprise Odom's favorite *finishing* lineup. It's a unit lacking in size but long on skill and basketball I.Q. It's also a strong foul-shooting group, with Dyas (46-for-56, or 82 percent, through Sunday) and Buckhalter (48-for-60, or 80 percent) leading the way.

Odom, who guided the Golden Tigers to two area tournament titles in his first three seasons, has long preached the importance of defending and rebounding; they're the two pillars of the up-tempo style his teams have embraced over the course of a 20-year career at Shoals Christian, Belgreen and now Russellville. With that in mind, 6'2 sophomore Jeb Bishop—the team's most gifted rebounder and shot-blocker—figures to play a vitally important role if the Golden Tigers are to make a postseason run.

Bishop and fellow sophomore Brooks Scott have taken turns playing really well for stretches this season; if both can make meaningful contributions—particularly on the glass and defending the paint—on the same night, Russellville's chances of advancing would only improve.

The Golden Tigers are a classic case of how unpredictable the basketball postseason can be. If they engage defensively for four quarters and hold their own on the boards, they possess the offensive firepower to win a handful of games and perhaps reach the regional final. If they don't defend and rebound, they could lose in the first round of the area tournament to a very dangerous and offensively gifted West Point team. [Russellville and West Point split two meetings this season, with each hitting a last-second shot to win on the other's home floor.]

Should the Golden Tigers (ranked No. 7 in Class 5A) survive what promises to be a highly competitive Area 14 tournament next week at Hamilton, a sub-regional game against No. 6 East Limestone, Madison Academy or



Brant Bragwell (2) and Belgreen are shooting to reach Hanceville for the third time in three years under Isbell (background).

Madison County likely awaits. That's not an easy road to Hanceville, not by any stretch, but it sure beats having to go through the likes of Lee-Huntsville and Mae Jemison.

The Northwest Regional figures to be loaded, with five of the top seven teams in Class 5A (No. 1 Wenonah, No. 3 Fairfield, No. 4 Pleasant Grove, No. 5 Hamilton and No. 7 Russellville) all hoping to reach Birmingham via Tom Drake Coliseum in Hanceville.

Belgreen Bulldogs

Record (through Sunday): 14-9 (7-0 in Class 1A, Area 12)

Points per game: 65.4 (10 games with 70-plus)

Points allowed per game: 57.0

Threes made: 148 (6.4 per game)

Free throws: 221-for-373 (59%)

The skinny: There's good news and bad news for Belgreen's boys with regard to their chances of reaching Hanceville for the third time in three years under head coach Clint Isbell. The good news is, the Bulldogs—who entered the week having won their seven area games by an average score of 80-49—are heavy favorites to win the Area 12 tournament and host a sub-regional game. The bad news is, Class 1A boys basketball in northwest Alabama is loaded this year, and that sub-regional game will almost certainly be against either No. 4 Covenant Christian (19-5 through Sunday) or No. 6 Mars Hill (16-7).

The Eagles and the Panthers split their two meetings in Area 16 play this season, and either would be more than capable—to say the least—of beating Belgreen on the road and denying the Bulldogs a regional berth.

This is by far the most top-heavy and inexperienced team Isbell has had at Belgreen, with precious little consistent production or big-game bona fides

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beyond the battle-tested duo of 6'6 senior post player Mason Bragwell and 5'11 senior guard Brant Bragwell. It's hard to imagine the Bulldogs making it out of sub-regional play without both of those veterans performing at their very best when it matters most.

On the plus side, the very best of both Bragwells might be enough to propel Belgreen back to Hanceville again. Through Sunday, Mason Bragwell had topped the 20-point mark nine times this season while averaging 17.7 points per game (tied with Russellville senior Lucas McNutt for tops in Franklin County). He also has a track record of rising to the occasion on the big stage, having lit up Marion County for 30 points in last season's sub-regional rout. Bragwell has made a career-high 21 threes as a senior; that perimeter stroke could come in handy against either Covenant or Mars Hill, both of whom possess the size to offer at least some resistance in the paint.

Brant Bragwell, meanwhile, had topped the 20-point mark five times through Sunday and was averaging a career-high 15.3 points per game. An underrated driver with the toughness to finish through contact around the rim, Bragwell is at his most dangerous when he balances his perimeter shooting (45 threes made through Sunday) by attacking the basket early and often. It's imperative that he and Mason Bragwell set an aggressive tone for the Bulldogs right from the jump.

If Belgreen is to get past either Covenant or Mars Hill (and have any shot to take down the likes of Pickens County, South Lamar and top-ranked Decatur Heritage in Hanceville), it's equally imperative that the members of the supporting cast make major contributions. That starts with a pair of sophomores in guard Scout Bragwell and post player Isac Willingham.

Bragwell, as the team's most potent scoring option outside of the big two, is particularly important; through Sunday, the Bulldogs were 13-3 when the smooth-shooting lefty had scored in double-figures this season and 1-6 when he hadn't.

Bragwell entered the week averaging 12.2 points per game while ranking first on the team in foul shooting (33-for-42, or 79 percent) and second in threes made (44). As teams in the postseason focus their energy on limiting Mason and Brant Bragwell, Scout Bragwell and Willingham (6.4 points per game, with a season-high of 17 in a January 4 win over Phillips) will be called upon to step up and make plays. Senior guards Gaven Taylor (a defensive spark plug and secondary ball-handler) and Kostner Bryant (a capable scorer and shooter who ranked fourth on the team through Sunday with 15 threes made) will also need to make meaningful contributions.

Isbell's first two Bulldog teams might have had the play-making depth and experience to make some waves in this year's stacked 1A field; whether his third team does or not remains to be seen. It does seem safe to say, however, that every game Belgreen wins after the area championship will qualify as an upset.

Belgreen Lady Bulldogs

Record (through Sunday): 18-5 (5-2 in Class 1A, Area 12)

Points per game: 60.2 (9 games with 70-plus)

Points allowed per game: 44.1

Threes made: 123 (5.3 per game)

Free throws: 248-for-430 (58%)

The skinny: Through Sunday, Belgreen's girls had beaten every team they'd played this season but two—Phillips and Phil Campbell, who between them were responsible for all five of the Lady Bulldogs' losses. Another loss to fourth-ranked Phillips in next week's Area 12 championship game would almost certainly send No. 9 Belgreen to Florence for a sub-regional matchup with No. 8 Mars Hill (16-8).

It's a tough road to hoe—not to mention an unlucky one, since Phillips and



PHOTO/KG

The road to Hanceville won't be an easy one for Bragwell (3) and the Lady Bulldogs, who will likely have to go through either No. 4 Phillips or No. 8 Mars Hill to reach the regional.

Mars Hill are quite possibly the only two 1A teams in northwest Alabama better than the Lady Bulldogs.

If head coach Chad Green, a Hanceville veteran, can find a way to get his team to the regional, things would actually start looking up a bit. The Lady 'Dogs would more than likely draw Decatur Heritage—a team they've beaten twice this season—in the regional semifinals. So a path to Birmingham, however faint, does exist for Belgreen's girls: Knock off Mars Hill on the road in sub-regional play; get by Decatur Heritage for a third time; then shock the world with an upset of Phillips in the regional final.

The Lady Bulldogs' chances for a postseason run of any significant duration start with a balanced scoring attack that features seven players averaging better than five points per game. Post player Emma Dempsey, a 6'1 sophomore, has been dominant at times this season, topping the 20-point mark on three occasions and averaging a team-best 11.8 points per game through Sunday. Dempsey's quickness off the bounce and improved face-up game from the mid-range area can make her a difficult matchup for opposing post players.

Belgreen surrounds Dempsey with a passel of talented perimeter shooters including junior guard Autumn Bragwell (9.6 points per game through Sunday, with 34 threes made), junior guard Gracie Dempsey (9.2 points per game, 34 threes made) and senior guard Emma Willingham (5.8 points per game, 25 threes made). Senior point guard Gabbie Moore, who averages 10.4 points per game and entered the week with 900 points scored in her varsity career, provides the Lady Bulldogs with veteran leadership and another perimeter weapon.

Junior post player Ansley Tate (6.1 points per game through Sunday) scored a season-high 18 in last Friday's win over Brilliant, and junior forward Katie Dempsey (7.5 points per game) posted the team's single-game individual high this season with 29 points in a January 11 win at Pickens County.

The Lady Bulldogs are a highly skilled bunch offensively with the ability to knock down shots and put up points in a hurry. They also have just enough athleticism and quickness to create problems for people with their full-court pressure. If all those elements come together on the same night, Belgreen will be a very tough out.

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'HANCEVILLE,' from page 16

Red Bay Lady Tigers
Record (through Sunday): 11-14, 6-0 in Class 2A, Area 13)
Points per game: 44.9
Points allowed per game: 45.5
Threes made: 89 (3.9 per game)
Free throws: 244-for-422 (58%)
The skinny: Toiling in the shadow of Red Bay's top-ranked boys team this season, the Lady Tigers also ran the table in area play and will host the Area 13 tournament next week. Should they hold serve by beating Sulligent in the opening round and then either Winston County or Addison in the final, Red Bay's girls would earn the right to host a sub-regional game against—more than likely—either Tanner or Hatton.

Hatton swept Tanner in Area 16 play, and the Lady Tigers split two games with Hatton (losing 51-50 in overtime on the road on December 7 and winning 37-33 at home on January 14), so, either way, that sub-regional matchup figures to be a winnable game.

Red Bay's girls hang their hat on defense and controlling the pace of play, but head coach Holly Kuykendall's team will need consistent production on the offensive end from a handful of key players if they are to earn a regional berth. Senior forward Reagan Kuykendall gets to the foul line a ton (186 attempts through Sunday, or roughly eight per game) and leads the team in scoring at 13.5 points per game. She's capable of a big night, having topped the 20-point mark three times this season and eight times since the start of last season.

Senior guard Mallori Miller entered the week averaging 11.1 points per game with 41 threes

made, tops on the team. The Lady Tigers are at their most potent on offense when Miller and sophomore guard Macy Faulkner (6.0 points per game through Sunday, with 24 threes made) are both hot from beyond the arc. [The two combined to make nine threes and score 33 points in the first round of the county tournament against Phil Campbell, helping Red Bay throw a scare into the top-seeded Lady Bobcats with a fourth-quarter rally.]

Lila Blackburn can also get on a roll from the perimeter, and 6'2 sophomore Destiny McCollister (5.0 points per game) can have a major impact with her rebounding and shot-blocking. Cassidy Kuykendall, another sophomore post player, does solid work on the boards off the bench.

Red Bay had dropped five straight games entering the week, but a run to the regional final is not out of the question if the Lady Tigers can right the ship. They're the favorites to win the area tournament, the sub-regional game would be a toss-up, and they likely wouldn't see Cold Springs until the second game in Hanceville.

Phil Campbell's boys won a three-way coin flip last week, earning the right to host the Class 3A, Area 14 tournament and an automatic sub-region berth. The Bobcats, led by sophomore sharpshooter Luke Garrison (13.8 points per game, 48 threes made through last Thursday) and athletic senior forward Isaac Riddle (10.7 points per game) are certainly capable of beating either Colbert Heights or East Lawrence in the area final.

The problem comes in the sub-regional round, where either No. 2 Westminster Christian or No. 6 Lauderdale County will be waiting.



PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW

Sophomore post player Cassidy Kuykendall (25) and Red Bay's girls hang their hat on defense, holding opponents to just 45.5 points per game. The Lady Tigers went a perfect 6-0 in Class 2A, Area 13 play during the regular season and will host the area tournament next week. If they hold serve with two wins on their home floor, Red Bay's girls would likely earn a sub-regional game (also at home) against either Hatton or Tanner, with a trip to Hanceville hanging in the balance.

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Nickels, State Farm lend a hand to RHS athletics

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

An initiative by State Farm Insurance and Russellville agent Lee Nickels will help raise funds for Russellville High School athletics throughout the month of February.

The State Farm *Quotes for Good* initiative will provide a \$10 donation to Russellville athletics for all auto, fire and life insurance quotes requested through agent Lee Nickels' Russellville office, as long as the person requesting the quote mentions the Russellville athletics referral.

All other quotes for auto, fire and life insurance from Nickels' office will qualify for a \$1 donation each, regardless of whether the person mentions the fund-raising initiative or not.

To be eligible for a donation to RHS athletics, the person requesting the quote must be a new customer or an existing policyholder with Lee Nickels State Farm.

If an existing policyholder calls for a quote, it must be for a policy they do not already have in effect.

When he learned of the program, Nickels reached out to RHS varsity football coach John Ritter to see how he might help the athletic program. With a major renovation of the weight room underway, that made for the perfect collaboration between State Farm and RHS.

"Local State Farm agents give back to the community through non-profit organizations, and this is one of the organizations [RHS athletics] I felt good contributing to," Nickels said. "They just redid the weight room, and this will help complete funding for that project."

The Russellville City Board of Education recently approved the low bid for new weight room equipment. Ritter said there was a software program he and other coaches wanted that creates tailored workouts and collects data on each individual athlete regardless of his or her sport.

"It also allows us to customize each person's workout depending on the sport they are in, whether they are in-season or off-season and whether it's game day or not, max day or not," Ritter said. "That's data that would be impossible to collect by hand."

"When Lee came to talk with me about the *Quotes for Good* initiative, he just wanted to help the athletic department any way he could, and that's really cool of him to do that. We're in a situation here where the weight room is used by every athlete, male and female, regardless of sport, and we didn't want to have to ask each sport for money and take away from what they are able to do with their individual programs."

To help RHS athletics and get a free quote on insurance, contact Nickels' office at 256-332-0052 or visit his office at 13760 Highway 43, Suite 6.

The initiative will run through the month of February, Nickels said.



Local agent Lee Nickels (right) reached out to Golden Tiger football coach John Ritter (left) about State Farm's *Quotes for Good* initiative, which will provide financial assistance for Russellville's weight room renovation.

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Rayleigh Guin

Freshman Guard, Vina

Guin helped the Lady Red Devils pick up a pair of wins last week with her outstanding all-around play. Last Tuesday, the freshman guard posted a triple-double in a 65-34 victory over Hubbertville, finishing with 21 points, 10 assists and 10 steals. Then on Friday, Guin put up 17 points, seven assists, six steals and five rebounds to lead Vina past Shoals Christian 62-41.

For the week, Guin averaged 19.0 points, 8.5 assists and 8.0 steals per game while shooting 14-for-19 from the foul line.



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'STREAK', from page 13

"We knew it was gonna be tough," Torisky said, "but we wanted him to play tonight. Because he makes them a totally different team."

Robinson, still slightly slowed by his heavily taped left ankle, did in fact play on Thursday night. And he played well. The 5'9 dynamo scored 15 of his game-high 27 points in the fourth quarter, rallying Deshler past Torisky's team for a 64-60 win in front of a capacity crowd inside the Red Bay High School gym.

The visiting Tigers, ranked No. 8 in Class 4A by the ASWA last week, improved to 19-6 on the season. Red Bay, ranked No. 1 in Class 2A for the second week in a row, saw its nine-game win streak end and fell to 21-5 on the year.

Red Bay controlled the first and the third quarters, Deshler the second and the fourth. In the end, Robinson, who shot 4-for-5 from the field and 5-for-6 from the foul line in the final period, proved to be the difference.

Just as Torisky knew he might.

"He's the best player we've seen, I've seen, this year," the coach said. "We've played some good ones, but just in terms of the total game...mentally, he's so sharp, and he's just got that killer instinct. At the end of the game, he took it on himself. He hit a three in the corner where we went over the screen instead of following through and gave him a wide open three. He nailed that, and then he came down and hit a tough runner. Then he hit [five] free throws down the stretch. That's what great players do."

"They're a great team, especially when JP plays. He took it on himself tonight and said he was gonna win, and we just couldn't stop him. We still played good defense. They just had one really good player that beat us. For the most part, we played really good defense. We just couldn't slow down JP."

Red Bay led by as many as eight in the third quarter and was still up seven late in the period after senior guard Hunter Bays drilled a three to make it 47-40. That's when Robinson started rolling. He closed out the third with a bucket and then opened the fourth with another before nailing a three to tie the game 47-47 with 6:05 remaining.

Arden Hamilton made 1-of-2 at the line to put Red Bay back on top, but then Kevon Summerhill hit a pair of free throws to give Deshler its first lead since the opening minute of the second half. Robinson followed with another three, his fourth of the night, to make it 52-48 just shy of the 4:00 mark.

Clay Allison assisted on a basket by Braden Ray to get Red Bay back within two, but Deshler answered with a crucial 6-0 spurt. Summerhill, who would finish with 13 points and 11 rebounds, scored on a putback to make it 54-50, and then 6'7 center Sawyer Wright came up with a couple of blocks underneath the basket to deny Red Bay on the other end.

Eric Malone hit two free throws to stretch the lead to six, and then Robinson delivered the fatal blow with a high-degree-of-difficulty, tough-angle runner off the glass from 15 feet to make it 58-50.

Red Bay fought to the finish, getting a three from Gath Weatherford, two free throws from Ray and a three-point play by Colton Corum down the stretch, but Robinson went 5-for-6 at the line to help seal the deal and hand the Tigers their first loss of 2019.

"I told the guys, this is like playoff experience for us, and that's the way we treated it," Torisky said. "We've just been using these last couple of games to get us ready for the playoffs. Tonight I feel like we took a step forward. If we play teams like [Deshler] in the playoffs, it's gonna be tough, but I don't think we'll see teams like that for a while."

"We wanted to win, obviously, but this was a chance for us to learn and see where we're at. This was our first challenge since we left the Christmas tournament [at Mater Dei High School in Illinois, where the Tigers went 2-3 in late December], so it was good to get a barometer and see where the team is. I was pleased. Our team is moving in the right direction."

Red Bay came out hot, shooting 9-for-12 in the first quarter and leading 20-15 at the end of one after a late three-pointer by Allison. The Tigers got five points from Allison and four apiece from Lane Shewbart and Arden Hamilton off the bench in the first quarter.

"We broke their press and hit open shots," Torisky said of his team's strong start, which also included a transition three from Corum, a post-up bucket by Weatherford and a driving layup by Bays. "That's what I told them—they're gonna press, and we've gotta be able to get through that first trap and then attack. I thought Clay and Hunter and Braden did a really good job early in the game of attacking the press, and we were finding open shooters and layups."

"We made a lot of layups, but they blocked a lot of shots, too. I thought some of those could have been fouls. We didn't get to the line much for attacking the rim as much as we did. But we can't complain, though. Our kids played really hard. Deshler is just really good and athletic."

Red Bay cooled off considerably in the second quarter, shooting just 3-for-17 from the floor. Deshler, meanwhile, got seven points from Robinson, who hit a three to cap off a 15-0 run by the Tigers and give them a 32-25 lead late

in the half. Corum halted the run with a putback, and then Bays buried a big three in the final seconds to get Red Bay back within two at 32-30 heading into the break.

The Tigers opened the third quarter on a 9-0 run powered by some impressive shot-making from Weatherford. After Ray opened the second half with a three to put Red Bay on top by one, Weatherford went to work. The 6'3 senior scored on a slick up-and-under move to make it 35-32, then tossed in a half-hook from about 12 feet out to push the lead to five.

After a steal and layup by Ray (and then a layup by Deshler's Hayden Stutts), Weatherford drilled a three to make it 42-34. Jalin Johnson countered with a bucket for Deshler, but then Weatherford shed his defender with a behind-the-back dribble and nailed a pull-up jumper from the foul line to make it 44-36 midway through the third.

"He had a couple of shots where...I guess he's been working on those outside of practice, because I haven't seen them," a smiling Torisky said of Weatherford, who would finish with 19 points on 7-for-14 from the floor. "Gath just has that mentality where he's a winner. Tonight he felt like we were kind of in and out and we needed something extra. He tried to take it on his shoulders, and he did for a while, but we just ran out of gas in that fourth quarter."

Deshler out-scored Red Bay 22-13 in the final period, shooting 10-for-12 from the foul line. Red Bay was just 4-for-12 from the field, and Torisky felt fatigue was a factor.

"What hurt us tonight was, against other teams we've played we've been able to go five in and five out and keep our starters fresh," said Torisky, who typically employs a ten-man rotation. "Tonight, I felt our first five was as good as their first five. We just didn't get as much help off the bench, and that forced our starters to play more than they're used to playing. We would get ahead and then lose the lead, get ahead and then lose the lead. By the end, I think our kids were pretty tired. Gath was tired. Clay was tired from running around with JP all night."

"This was good for us, though. We needed a challenge. If our second five had been able to give us a few more minutes, not too much more but just a little more, if we could have subbed out without losing those leads, it would have helped. But they're young, though. That second unit is not used to seeing that type of play."

Deshler finished the night shooting 52 percent (23-for-44) from the field and 13-for-19 from the foul line. The visiting Tigers hit five threes and held a 25-24 edge on the glass.

Red Bay shot 41 percent (23-for-56) from the field with eight threes but attempted only seven free throws, making six. Both teams turned the ball over 15 times.

Bays scored 10 points for Red Bay, and Ray scored nine (all in the second half). Corum added eight points, and Allison had five points and three assists. Arden Hamilton also scored five points, and Shewbart added four.



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