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Judge finds in favor of county in Madden home equity ruling

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Franklin County citizens will take an \$84,275.32 step forward after a judge ruled in favor of the county in the debate over former Franklin County administrator Crista Madden's equity from the sale of her home.

Madden, who pled guilty in 2018 to two felony ethics violations related to her embezzlement of more than \$750,000 of county funds, is serving a 20-year prison sentence.

Madden and her husband Jeff sold their home for \$339,000 to William Stanley Matthews III in November, according to court records. After expenses, commissions and fees, the remaining proceeds from the sale were \$84,275.32. Franklin County attorney Roger Bedford, Jr., filed a lien on the county's behalf against the property prior to its sale.

Madden and her husband were deeded the property in

2006 by her parents, Franklin County commissioner Rayburn Massey and Brenda Joyce Massey. The Maddens owned the property under a survivorship warranty deed.

Tompkins' ruling was entered January 28 and contained some scathing language as he denied [Jeff] Madden's request to keep half the sale proceeds.

Madden was ordered by the court to pay \$753,889.21 in restitution as part of her sentencing. As of February 12, 2019, a total of \$39,055 has been paid. That money will be paid to the Franklin County Commission and the county's insurance carrier, which paid \$200,000 for losses incurred in Madden's embezzlement.

The law firm that handled the closing of Madden's home filed a Motion to Interplead the \$84,275.32 into the Franklin County Circuit Clerk's Office in order for the court to determine who was legally entitled to the funds.

See 'MADDEN,' Page 3

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Garden Club honors Pilati by donating book to local library

Brady Petree
Franklin Free Press

In addition to her family, former *Franklin Free Press* publisher Jimmie Pilati was passionate about her community.

Pilati was a 30-year member of the Russellville Cultura Garden Club, a long-time board member on the Russellville Library Board and the Friends of the Library, and a volunteer at the Franklin County Archives.

Pilati died January 26, 2019, at her home in Russellville.

Members of the Cultura Garden Club wanted a way to honor her memory, so they combined two of her passions by donating a children's book about gardening to the Russellville Public Library.

Garden Club members presented the book to Pilati's son, John, and librarian Ashley Cummins last Tuesday afternoon.

The book donated in Pilati's memory was *The Saved Seed*, the second

See 'BOOK,' Page 9



(L-R) Eva Diaz, Hillary Hall, John Pilati, Carol Dykes and Ashley Cummins.

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Virginia Lee Bond, Russellville, age 82

Died Friday, February 15, 2019. Visitation will held from 2-3 p.m. on Wednesday, February 20, 2019 at Gateway/Russellville Church of God. Memorial service will follow at 3 p.m. Spry Memorial Chapel assisted the family.

Tommy Bonds, Stuttgart, Germany (native of Russellville), age 62

Died Friday, February 1, 2019. Funeral held at the Russellville High School gymnasium. Interment in Luketown Cemetery, Russellville. Pinkard Funeral Home assisted the family.

Brent Borden, age 50

Died Saturday, February 16, 2019. Funeral held at Spry Memorial Chapel in Russellville. Interment in Mt. Hope Methodist Cemetery.

William "Bill" Spruell Bowen, Huntsville, age 80

Died Friday, February 15, 2019. Funeral arrangements had not been announced at press time. Spry Memorial Chapel of Russellville was directing.

Phyllis Ann Burcham, Muscle Shoals, age 77

Died Wednesday, February 13, 2019. Funeral held at Pinkard Funeral Home in Russellville. Interment in Macedonia Baptist Church Cemetery, Russellville.

Marie Cooper Ellison, Russellville, age 97

Died Saturday, February 16, 2019. Funeral held at First Baptist Church, Russellville. Interment in Franklin Memory Gardens. Pinkard Funeral Home assisted the family.

Betty Sue Lawler Fleming, Muscle Shoals, age 87

Died Tuesday, February 12, 2019. Graveside service held at Liberty Hill Cemetery in Phil Campbell. Spry Memorial Chapel assisted the family.

Herbert Lee Graham, Russellville (formerly of Cleveland, OH), age 72

Died Sunday, February 10, 2019. Funeral held at Pinkard Funeral Home. Interment in Luketown Cemetery, Russellville.

Timothy "Tim" Dale Reed, Phil Campbell, age 65

Died Friday, February 15, 2019. Funeral held at Mountain View Baptist Church. Interment in the adjoining cemetery. Spry Memorial Chapel assisted the family.

Charles Sparks, Russellville, age 75

Died Friday, February 15, 2019. Funeral held at Pinkard Funeral Home. Interment in Belgreen Cemetery.

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Burden BEAR-ers: Students show support to Simpson

Brady Petree
Franklin Free Press

For WHNT News chief meteorologist Jason Simpson, giving presentations to elementary school students about weather is usually a breeze. During a typical presentation, Simpson has everything prepared and has a pretty good idea of what he's going to say to the students.

However, Simpson's recent presentation at Russellville West Elementary School would be just a little bit different than the others he has done. The kindergarten students at West had a surprise in store for Simpson.

Once Simpson had his equipment set up and the presentation was ready to begin, there was only one thing missing—the students. Then the children came walking into the room in two single-file lines, each student holding a stuffed animal, along with the front two students carrying a banner that read "Bears for Brody." This was in support of Simpson's son Brody, who is currently at Children's Hospital in Birmingham battling a rare congenital heart disease.

According to Jennifer Cox, a kindergarten teacher at West Elementary, each grade is given the task of coming up with a service project brought forth by the school's administration. It is then up to each grade to decide what their service project will be.

Cox believes that the "Bears for Brody" project has reached the students on a different level than most other projects might.

"At that age, I don't think the students fully know what exactly Brody is going through, but they do realize that he is really sick," Cox said. "Originally, we were just going to gather stuffed animals to donate to the Children's Hospital, but once we found out about Brody and the fact that Jason comes here all the time, it just seemed perfect.

"Also it seems like the kids have really been able to relate to Brody, and they are still asking about him even after the presentation."

Cox hopes that her students will take at least a small lesson from this amazing experience and realize just how much they touched Brody and his family.

"Hopefully our students learned that no act is too small and that you never truly know what all someone may be going through and how that act may impact their life," Cox said. "Jason and his family needed that encouragement. They have obviously been going through a lot, and it's just a blessing that we were able to help, even if only a little bit."

As the students filed into the room and took their



PHOTO BY BRADY PETREE

Kindergarten students at Russellville's West Elementary donated stuffed animals to Children's Hospital in Birmingham as part of their "Bears for Brody" project. The project aimed to support WHNT News meteorologist Jason Simpson's son, Brody, who is currently at Children's Hospital battling a rare congenital heart disease. Jason Simpson, who visits elementary schools often to give weather presentations, is pictured above with some of the students from West.

seats, Simpson was smiling and fighting back tears as he greeted and said thank you to all the students. Once all the bears were placed at the foot of the stage where Simpson would be giving the presentation, Simpson himself took the stage and again thanked each and every student for their thoughtful gifts.

During the presentation, Simpson gave the students some information about the seasons, what to do during a tornado, and also read to them from a children's book. After Simpson had finished the program, a couple of the students, along with a few of the teachers of West Elementary, presented Simpson with a gift basket from the school which contained a bundle of Russellville-related items. Some of these items included a Russellville hat with the Golden Tiger logo as well as a Golden Tiger Marching Hundred band T-shirt, which Simpson held up (along with the hat), much to the delight of the West Elementary kindergartners.

Simpson said the thoughtfulness of the students was amazing and he was surprised when the students came walking in with their stuffed animals.

"I had no idea that was coming," he said. "I was overwhelmed in the moment, and I was honestly afraid that I wouldn't be able to speak. It's an extremely emotional thing to see kids this age have this kind of generosity and give something like this, which for some kids may be a lot of what that kid has. It's just extremely difficult to put it into words about how much this means to me and my family."

When Simpson's son first began dealing with his condition, Simpson and his family wanted to make sure that others got some kind of lesson out of what Brody and his family have gone through.

"One thing that we have wanted to do with Brody is use our situation and our experiences and hope that they'd be a blessing to other people," Simpson said. "Whether it be to help inspire people to fight through heart surgery or cancer, or whatever it may be, we want to help those like us who have dealt with chronic illnesses and have to go through multiple hospitalizations, because it's not easy. So to see this from the opposite side like what I've seen here today, it truly is a blessing."

'MADDEN' from page 1

Jeff Madden asked the court to award half of the \$84,275.32 to him and the balance to be paid toward restitution. A hearing was held in December to determine what would happen with the equity.

The State of Alabama, through the Attorney General's Office and Bedford, asked for the whole amount of the proceeds from the house sale to apply to restitution. Circuit judge Pride Tompkins, who was specially appointed to hear Madden's case, did not rule the day of the hearing. Instead, he asked the Attorney General's Office to research whether attachment of the sale proceeds was a legal remedy to collect restitution in a criminal matter or whether they would have to pursue a civil case.

Additionally, the AG's office asked Tompkins to enter an order requiring Madden to pay a specified monthly amount of restitution if she is receiving her state retirement benefits while in prison and a percentage of any work release pay she receives while in custody.

Tompkins' ruling was entered January 28 and contained some scathing language as he denied Madden's request to keep half the sale proceeds.

"The Court finds...that Crista Madden and her husband and family benefit-

ed from the fruits of her crimes; building and furnishing a new home, elaborate vacations, travel opportunities for her children, college tuition, gifts, shopping sprees and other day-to-day expenses related to school and extracurricular activities.

"The money stolen from Franklin County was deposited into joint bank accounts of the Defendant and her husband. The net proceeds remaining are from the sale of the property, the fruits of Crista Madden's crimes. It is not equitable for (Jeff) Madden to keep these funds," Tompkins said in his order.

The court's order did not address the issue of Madden's retirement income or work release proceeds.

Madden is being housed at the Montgomery Women's Facility, with a projected release date of June 9, 2038. She did not attend the December hearing. That prison serves as a work release facility for female inmates in the custody of the Alabama Department of Corrections.

Franklin County probate judge Barry Moore, who attended the hearing on behalf of the county, declined specific comment on the judge's ruling, other than saying he was pleased with the court's order.

Honey Do: Chainsaw tips

Chainsaws are one of the best power tools you will ever own. Whether you burn firewood, clean off fence rows or trim trees, a good chainsaw can make big jobs go quickly. But they can be very dangerous, and they demand a lot of respect. Anyone who picks up a chainsaw should be physically able to handle the saw being used and be familiar with its operation.

I have written before on choosing a chain and knowing the proper pitch and gauge to fit the saw and bar you are using, but today I would like to cover some additional tips on maintaining the chain during use.

•**Tension must be correct and maintained.** Never set tension on a hot chain. Chain will naturally expand and loosen as it heats up during use. Always allow the chain to cool for a few minutes before tightening.

Loosen the bar nuts, pull up on the nose of the bar, and tighten the chain until the bottom of the links make contact with the bar. (HINT. Wear gloves any time you handle saw chain.) While still holding up the nose of the bar, tighten the rear bar nut first and then tighten the front nut. Pull the chain along the bar a few times. The chain should

feel snug, but pull freely. Check tension after several cuts (more often if you have put on a new chain).

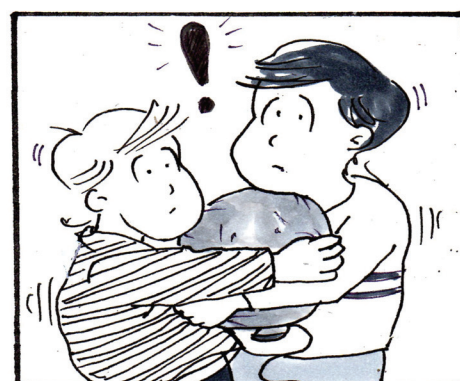
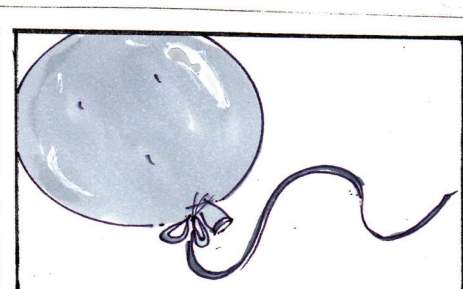
•**The chain must be lubricated.** A dry chain will burn up in no time and destroy the bar in the process. Most saws have automatic oilers. Always fill the reservoir with bar and chain oil. Motor oil should never be used. Bar and chain oil is much tackier and will stay on the chain and in the groove of the bar. Always be looking for oil on the chain. Check the oil level each time you fill the saw with fuel.

•**The chain must be sharp.** A dull chain is harder on you and the chainsaw. You may choose to have the chain sharpened at the local saw shop or buy a kit and do it yourself. Be sure to get the right size file and kit for your chain. The kit will include a file holder that will give you the right angle of sharpening.

•**Depth gauges must be set.** Depth gauges are often overlooked when sharpening a chain. If improperly set, the chain will not cut well



Doug Green



See 'CHAINSAW,' Page 5

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API's four lies about school choice

In a recent editorial, the Alabama Policy Institute (API) attempted to label four of the arguments against "school choice" as myths.

I guess that's what you have to do when the truth doesn't fit your agenda. But the truth does need to be told, and the misinformation coming from the API needs to be corrected.

The first lie that API has been pushing really hard is that charter schools and the taxpayer-funded scholarship program are not taking money out of public schools. They attempt to validate this bogus argument by pointing out that funding for public education has increased over the last couple of years.

The truth is that public school funding increased because the economy got better and the state started collecting more sales taxes and other taxes. But school funding would have increased even more if other tax dollars hadn't been redirected out of public schools to pay for charter schools and the taxpayer-funded private school scholarship program.

The scholarship program alone will cost our public schools up to \$30 million a year and has already taken nearly \$150 million out of our schools since it became law.

The second lie that the API has told is that schools that don't lose students don't lose money. It is true that money follows the student, and that if a student transfers out of a school then that specific school will lose a portion of its budget (approximately \$9,500 per student).

But what the API isn't telling you is that the money that is being redirected out of the education budget to pay for the taxpayer-funded scholarship program comes off the top of the education budget.

So that \$30 million dollars that's coming out of the budget every year to pay for these scholarships reduces the overall education budget, not just a particular school's budget. That means that all schools—including the high-performing schools and the schools that aren't losing students—are losing money, because there's that much less money in the overall education budget. But the schools that lose students are losing more money than the schools that don't lose students.

The third lie being pushed by API is that students who have participated in the school choice programs are improving academically.

The truth is that a study conducted by the University of Alabama's Institute for Social Science Research—and, ironically enough, paid for by the very scholarship-granting organizations that run the taxpayer-funded scholarship program—proved that scholarship students did not perform any better on standardized tests than students in regular public schools.

The API attempted to spin the study's results by claiming that low-income scholarship students performed better than low-income students in regular public schools. But what API chose not to tell you was that the study did not actually compare the scholarship students' scores to the scores from other kids in the schools where the scholarship student was actually zoned.

So API is trying to compare apples and oranges by comparing low-income students from, for example, Auburn City Schools (which received an "A" on the state's report card) to low-income



Craig Ford

See 'LIES,' Page 10



Zero percent interest?

Dear Dave,
I know you're against financing purchases. However, is it okay to finance things like furniture at zero percent interest?

Detrick

Dear Detrick,
We just finished an extensive study of more than 10,000 millionaires. Not a single one of these folks said they became rich by borrowing money to buy things at zero percent interest.

Since none of those millionaires gave credit for their wealth to zero percent interest financing, and since we know banks charge interest on loans, how is it you think these people are loaning money at "zero percent interest?"

Is it possible the pricing of the item has the interest rate built into it? I think the chances of that are pretty high. If not that, companies offering this kind of financing have very accurate and highly researched data that tells them the vast majority of people who take out zero-percent loans don't pay off the loans in the specified period of time. Do you know what happens if you don't live up to the terms of those contracts? It becomes a regular loan, and they back-charge you for the interest.

So, on average you're paying for it all. I don't know why you'd want to play with snakes, Detrick. Snakes bite, and some of them can kill you.

'CHAINSAW,' from page 4

and could be prone to kickback. A good sharpening kit should include a depth gauge. As always, follow manufacturers' recommendations and, if you use a sharpening kit, follow the directions there as well. If a chain is properly set up and sharp, the saw will do the cutting for you and make the job much easier.

There are many different sizes, weights and types of chainsaws available, and there is one perfect for you and your project. For small

Avoid debt like the plague. It destroys your most powerful wealth-building tool—your income.

Dave

Explaining the envelopes

Dear Dave,
I've listened to you for a little while, but I was wondering about the envelope system you recommend. How does it work?

Danielle

Dear Danielle,
Don't let the word "system" intimidate you. It's just grandma's old-fashioned, common sense way of budgeting money.

Back in the day, many people were paid in cash at their jobs. Then, they would take the money home and divide it up into different envelopes. The envelopes held cash for different categories in their budgets—food, clothes, rent and other bills and such. When a particular envelope was empty, they stopped buying that item because the money budgeted for that category was gone. If you wanted a dress, but the clothing envelope was empty, you didn't buy a dress that month.

It's just a simple cash system that, combined with doing a written monthly budget, will help keep you from overspending!

Dave

**Dave Ramsey is CEO of Ramsey Solutions. He has authored seven best-selling books, including The Total Money Makeover. The Dave Ramsey Show is heard by more than 15 million listeners each week on 600 radio stations and multiple digital platforms. Follow Dave on the web at daveramsey.com and on Twitter at @DaveRamsey.*

jobs, electric saws are great, and there have been many improvements in battery-operated models. These allow you to avoid some of the maintenance you have with gas-operated machines.

Maintenance, safety, knowledge and safety (did I mention safety?) are all very important when using a chainsaw. Always wear proper clothing and safety apparel. Remember, help is just around the corner at your local hardware store.

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Congratulations from!



Winning entries received, with the remaining winners running in our February 20 edition. FRANKLINFREEPRESS.NET



Nominated by Carol Murphree. Jimmy Murphree and I have been married 44 years. We met on my very first day of college. The minute I saw him I felt God telling me he would

be my husband. Three years later we married. He has brought me coffee every morning of this marriage. My boss use to laugh at lunch and ask what I had packed for lunch and I would answer, "Let me see what he packed". He is a great man with very strong convictions. He truly lives his commitment to his God and his vows he made to me



Nominated by Angela Cristobal. My husband, Domingo Cristobal Lorenzo, and I have been through so much together over the last 23 years and I can't imagine life without him. He is currently 14 hours away from

me and I won't even get to spend Valentine's Day with him this year but he's working hard to help provide for his family. He always has and always will.



Nominated by Courtney Hester Vickery. Randall Vickery has been my sweetie for almost 15 years. The one who has stuck with me through all the ups and down. The

person who made me a mother to 3 and kept me going when we lost one. The only person I'd ever choose to be their father. The one who loves me even when I don't love myself. The one who puts others above himself. My best friend forever and always.



Nominated by Amber Uptain Lane. Nathan Lane and I will be married for 4 years on March the 21st. Nathan has been an amazing partner. Nathan and I have an amazing love story, we met as kids he was 12 I was 14. Nathan and I knew that we had something special as kids ,but we didn't

know what. We broke up as teenagers and found each other again in our twenties, I with a 4 year old daughter. Nathan never skipped a beat he treated my daughter like his own and has given me two more beautiful children since! My husband is a very talented musician he was the very first bass player for muscle shoals high school band and for UNA band. He played for Riley Green for 4 years. When my husband seen that life on the road was going to take him away from his family he gave up his dream to be with us. He now works full time for Terminx, he still plays some on the weekends to help pay bills. He is a truly remarkable, talented, selfless man and I am oh so lucky to call him mine!!



Nominated by Jean Berry. This is my sweetie Hoyt Berry for the past 50 yrs. He not only is my soulmate but my best friend. He helps me take care of our handicap daughter. He has a heart of gold and always puts

our needs before his own. I am so blessed to have him for my husband and the father of my daughter!!!



Nominated by Melissa Mitchell Godsey. My sweetie Seth Godsey and I met in Toyland at Northwest-Shoals Community College in 2009 and started dating a year later. He is the sweetest because he keeps

adventure and fun in our relationship every day! Rock climbing, skiing, snowboarding, hiking, camping, playing in general - this man does it all! We've been together for 8 years, and married for 3 and it just keeps getting more and more fun! ☑ I love being his girl and I love that he is my man



Nominated by Michael Richards. My sweetie is Brittany Gault Richards. She is my best friend and I love her with all my heart. I appreciate all she does. I love you babe!

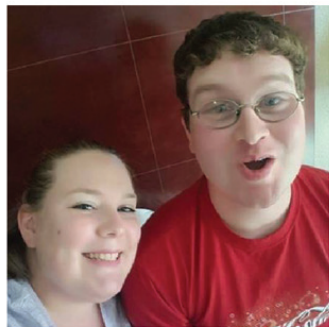


BIG STAR



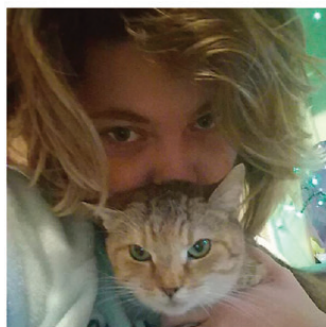
Sweets for My Sweetie

Some winners received a gift basket and some will receive one dozen chocolate covered strawberries from Big Star



Nominated by Elisabeth Kae Evans. My John Evans Jr. Changed my life! I was 5 months pregnant and just weeks past being left a single expecting Mom with no home

by my son's biological father when I met him! He came into my life to be a friend and proved to be my soul mate! We will be 3 years married in April and 5 years together in June. He has been my son's Daddy since the day he was born, before that really! And you couldn't tell either one that they don't belong to the other. ☑ he is the best man, husband, and father I could have ever prayed for!



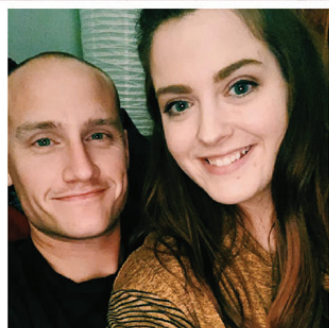
Nominated by Bobbi Lynn Duncan. Yes, I have a picture of my cat. Purrsephone is my love. My mom found her outside of her house and asked if I wanted her. Of course I did. She's been through thick and thin with me. I've

had her for 3 years now and she is the best. She knows when I'm sad or if I'm really happy. She comes and snuggles me if I'm crying. She's taught me responsibility. Since I've gotten her, I've rescued a lot of cats. I currently have 9. I've struggled a lot the past few years but Seph is always there. I love her so much.



Nominated by Chasity Taylor Welch. Aaron Welch has been my sweetheart for 28 years. Our dad's were friends their whole lives. We have known each other our whole lives. We have been

married for 21 years. He is my best friend, the best dad, a wonderful granddad, he works hard everyday, and always makes time to make me feel special. He brings me buttercups off the side of the road when he comes in from work because he knows they are my favorite. Even if we don't win I just want him to know he is my person. The one who with one hug can make all the troubles of the world go away. And he is loved as much as he loves all of us his family and friends.



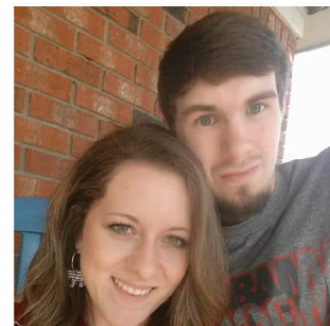
Nominated by Candace Nan Trapp. MY sweetie is Jerrod Goines.♥ This February we will celebrate 9 years together. Jerrod is special for so many reasons! He's an incredible father to our two sons. He's

my rock. He's kept me grounded through one of the worst experiences of my life(losing my twin). He's my best friend.



Nominated by Karen Ozbirn. My one and only is Scott Ozbirn and we will be married for 30 years this year! I was 17 and he was 18 when we got married. He was in the Army when we got married and I did not want

him to leave me when he got stationed away from me. What makes us special is we have grown up together, fought, had kids, grandkids and have made it for almost 30 years and proved a lot of statistics and people wrong. We love each other more today than when this picture was taken in 1989! He is my hero!



Nominated by Brittne Campbell Prince. My sweetie is Richie Prince. We started dating when I was 13 and he was 15. We have been married for almost 5 years. He is an amazing husband and an even better daddy to our 2 children. I'm thankful to have him as my forever

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Fourth annual 'Go Red' luncheon empowers women to take charge of their heart health

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

For Katernia Cole-Coffey, women's heart health is something she takes personally.

Cole-Coffey, the Franklin County Extension coordinator, saw first-hand the importance of being informed about symptoms of heart attack and stroke when her own mother had a heart attack several years ago.

"She said it was indigestion and wanted to take baking soda for a remedy," Cole-Coffey said. "We told her to go to the emergency room, and later that night, the doctor said 'Ms. Cole, you've had a heart attack.'"

The fourth annual Go Red Luncheon, held Valentine's Day at the A.W. Todd Centre, was designed to empower women to take charge of their heart health. The event is jointly sponsored by the Franklin County Cooperative Extension System and the Foster Grandparent Program.

"We want to inform women concerning heart disease and heart attack. It's the silent killer," Cole-Coffey said. "Lots of times women don't feel well

but just say they'll keep on going. Later, they end up with a more severe situation in the emergency room because they haven't taken care of their symptoms, which are different for women than men."

New Franklin County Emergency Management Agency director Mary Hallman-Glass spoke to the crowd about symptoms of heart attack and stroke.

"My mom and dad both suffered heart attacks, and they survived them," Hallman-Glass said. "They're doing great, and it was a blessing for us to recognize those signs and get them help.

"If you do think you're having a heart attack, don't be embarrassed or ashamed to get help. Call 911. If it turns out you just had indigestion, that's okay."

Hallman-Glass said women often experience discomfort, nausea, indigestion and heartburn as a sign of a heart attack more often than men do. Vomiting and coughing can also be symptomatic.

"Pain spreading down your arm, especially your left arm, is a telltale sign to get help. Also, feeling dizzy and lightheaded can be a symptom of heart attack," Hallman-Glass said.

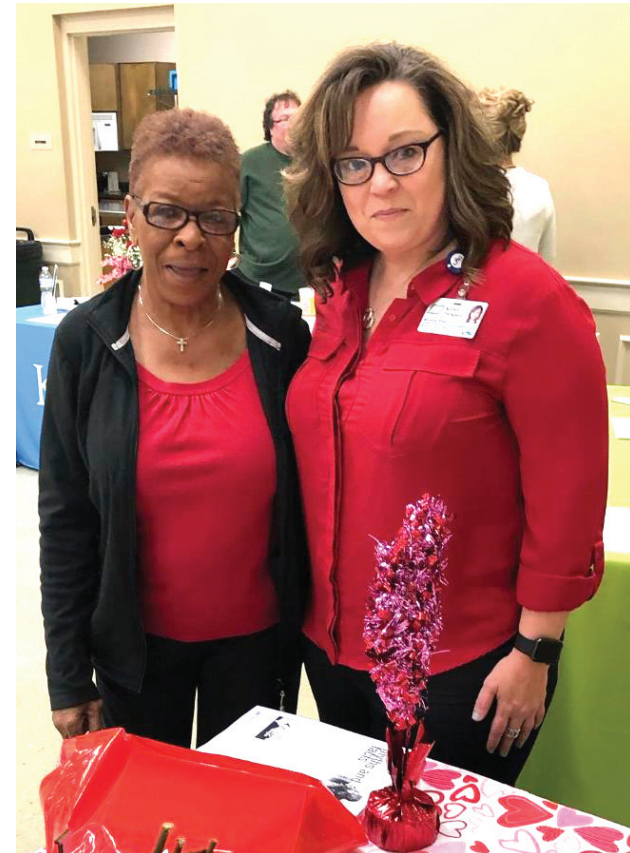
One symptom of heart attack that Hallman-Glass saw with her own mother was throat and/or jaw pain. This occurs more frequently when women are experiencing coronary distress.

"There's simply no easy way to say, 'I'm having a heart attack,' but there is an easy way to know the signs and symptoms to get help quickly," Hallman-Glass said.

The Franklin County Extension Office has written information about heart health available at no cost to the public. The office is located in the basement of the Franklin County Courthouse.

Proper heart care includes the following:

- Getting active.



COURTESY PHOTOS

Above, Priscilla Mosley (left), speaks with Miranda Riley from Keller Hospice during last Thursday's Go Red Luncheon. At left, Mary Hallman Glass, Franklin County EMA director, spoke at the luncheon about symptoms of heart attack and stroke.

- Watching your weight.
- Smoking cessation and staying away from secondhand smoke.
- Controlling your cholesterol and blood pressure.
- Drinking alcohol only in moderation.
- Taking steps to prevent Type 2 Diabetes.
- Managing stress.

Karen Elaine Softley, Human Sciences Regional Extension agent for the Alabama Cooperative Extension System, was the keynote speaker last Thursday. She has more than 30 years of experience in nutrition education.

Cole-Coffey expressed her appreciation to the following sponsors and vendors for their participation in and support of this year's Go Red Luncheon: Annette Oliver and the A.W. Todd Centre, the City of Russellville, Franklin County Commission, Keller Hospice, Northwest Home Health, Russellville Diagnostic, Sam Warf Florals, Whole Hog Express, Cardiovascular Institute of the Shoals, Good Samaritan Hospice, Keller Home Care, Kindred Hospice, Riverbend Center for Mental Health, Russellville Health Care and Schofield Medical.



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East Franklin family seeks aid for ailing son

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Since he was born September 1, 2016, Gunnar Rambo has faced a life full of medical challenges. But the sands of the hourglass are dwindling as Gunnar and his family face his latest battle.

Rambo, the son of Brandon and Jennifer Rambo of East Franklin, was born with a life-threatening condition where his stomach and esophagus weren't connected, called tracheo-esophageal fistula, one of the conditions associated with VACTERL Syndrome.

VACTERL stands for vertebral defects, anal atresia, cardiac defects, tracheo-esophageal fistula, renal anomalies, and limb abnormalities. People diagnosed with VACTERL association typically have at least three of these characteristic features.

Gunnar's latest medical crisis is tracheomalacia. And time is running out for the two-year-old to have the surgery needed to correct this condition.

According to Boston Children's Hospital, tracheomalacia is the collapse of the airway when breathing. When Gunnar exhales, the trachea narrows or collapses so much that it makes it hard to breathe. Tracheomalacia can result in recurring respiratory illnesses or make it difficult to recover from a respiratory illness.

Boston Children's Hospital is the medical home for Dr. Russell Jennings, who Jennifer Rambo says holds the lifeline for her son. Dr. Jennings is surgical director of the team at the hospital's Esophageal and Airway Treatment Center and nationally renowned for the specialty of tracheomalacia surgery.

Unfortunately for now, as Gunnar remains on a ventilator at Children's Hospital of Birmingham, a dispute over insurance coverage is preventing Gunnar from boarding a medical jet and flying to Boston for a poten-

tially life-saving procedure performed by Dr. Jennings.

"He's on a ventilator. Yesterday [Friday], he coded on us and stopped breathing," Jennifer said. "There's a conflict between the doctors here and the insurance company, and it's caused a standstill. They're worried about the jet bill, which could be between \$50,000 and \$100,000, being paid.

"We have told them we'll take care of the jet bill. I don't care if we have to remortgage our house and pay for the rest of our lives. We'll pay it. But they're still concerned about their money."

Gunnar recently had surgery at Children's Hospital of Birmingham to repair a hole in his neck from his tracheotomy. After the hospital discharged him earlier this month, Gunnar was experiencing complications and had contracted a virus from his hospital stay, Jennifer said.

So his parents headed back to Birmingham, but Gunnar's breathing difficulty became so severe his parents had to call 911 and meet an ambulance in Moulton to transport him the rest of the way to Birmingham.

Jennifer and Brandon are spending most of their time in Birmingham with Gunnar, creating a difficult situation of leaving their 10-year-old and six-year-old daughters back home.

"Being away from our other two kids at home is upsetting, and they are upset they don't get to see their brother because only age 14 and older visitors are allowed up here during flu season," Jennifer said. "We want to do all we can to help him have a good life, but the doctors and insurance don't see that. It's all about money to some people."

A recent Go Fund Me campaign helped the Rambos raise almost \$20,000 toward Gunnar's anticipated medical and flight costs, but Jennifer says that wasn't enough to satisfy the hospital and insurance company.

A second Go Fund Me page has

now been set up, and you can find more information and a link to that through the Team Gunnar Facebook page at

facebook.com/TeamGunnarRambo/. Additionally, there are bank accounts to help Gunnar set up at two Haleyville banks, Traders and Farmers and Listerhill Credit Union, and one at Russellville's Valley State Bank will be operational this week. These allow anyone wanting to help the family financially to do so directly in their hometown.

But what Jennifer is really looking for to help her son goes well beyond money. She needs help, from a higher power, to influence hospital and insurance officials to authorize her son's transport to Boston.

"If they take him off the ventilator right now, he won't last very long. And that's what happened yesterday," Jennifer said. "He's working so hard to breathe, it physically exhausts his entire body. Then he wears down and stops breathing because he's so weak.

"We are humbled by the outpouring of love from our wonderful community. We appreciate every donation, call, text, comment, thought and prayer. We're doing all we can but need help to get him there. If anyone has any kind of pull or influence with someone in Montgomery, we could use their help."

And that help is now coming in, as the Rambo family has heard from Congressman Robert Aderholt and Rep. Jamie Kiel, who have agreed to help with Gunnar's plight. As of Monday afternoon, Jennifer said Children's Hospital of Birmingham officials have finally agreed to release Gunnar and authorize his flight to Boston.

The waiting game continues as the Rambos wait for a bed at Boston Children's Hospital to open for Gunnar.

"Dr. Jennings told us they had a bed available for him last Friday, but the hospital wouldn't agree to trans-



COURTESY PHOTO

Gunnar Rambo, the son of Brandon and Jennifer Rambo of East Franklin, was born with a life-threatening condition where his stomach and esophagus weren't connected.

port him then so it went to another child," Jennifer said. "We still don't know about whether the insurance will pay for the flight. But no dollar sign is worth our son's life, so we will take care of the costs, one way or another."

As his days on a ventilator pile up, Gunnar faces additional damage to his airway, his mother explained.

"They have him on so many sedations right now that his CO2 levels are building up, his blood pressure is dropping, and if he comes off sedation, they say he might have to go through detox and withdrawals like an addict," Jennifer said. "We're not wanting him on these so long because that can happen in as little as five days.

"We need help getting him to Boston and everyone to realize how life-threatening and time-sensitive this is. We need someone higher up than we are to speak on our behalf and get something done."

'BOOK,' from page 1

in a series of children's books published by National Garden Clubs, Inc. The book was written by Brenda Moore.

"It's a children's book that encourages kids to get interested in gardening and planting," said Cultura Garden Club president Hillary Hall, who also serves on the Russellville Public Library Board of Directors. "We felt the need to give a book to the library in her memory because she was so involved in the library, as well as her love for gardening. And it's something in her name to help carry on forever the growth of the library, which she was so active in, especially when they moved from the other building to their current location."

Garden Club members Carol Dykes and Eva Diaz joined Hall for the Tuesday afternoon presentation.

"What a wonderful way to benefit the community and the library in my mother's memory," John Pilati said. "The Russellville Public Library was so important to her and my father [Karl], as well as the Cultura Garden Club."

Hall recalled how Jimmie Pilati was instrumental in working with the city to obtain the new library building. Karl Pilati and Bud McMicken worked many hours helping prepare the building to house the library, as they constructed and installed book shelves.

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'LIES,' from page 4

students from Birmingham City Schools Schools (which received a "D") and present it as if the students from those very different school systems were all the same.

Here is what the study actually said in the authors' own words:

"On average, over time, participating in the scholarship program was not associated with significant improvement on standardized test scores...The overall lack of change over time follows the same pattern seen in public school students in Alabama and is likely not attributable to

participation in the scholarship program."

In other words, overall there's not a bit of difference in the test scores between kids who participated in the taxpayer-funded scholarship program and those who didn't.

The fourth and final lie coming from API is that only kids from failing schools are allowed to receive taxpayer-funded scholarships. In this case, after originally labeling this truth as a "myth," the API actually admitted that many—if not most—of the taxpayer-funded scholarships go to kids who aren't in what the state defines as a

"failing school."

The API and other "school choice" advocates are certainly entitled to their own opinions. But they are not entitled to their own facts. And the fact that they can't sell their agenda without telling lies and misrepresenting the truth should be a huge red flag. So how about instead of giving up on struggling schools, we try to fix them?

Craig Ford is the owner of Hodges-Ford Insurance and the Gadsden Messenger. He represented Gadsden and Etowah County in the Alabama House of Representatives for 18 years.

Six local eateries receive satisfactory ratings

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Only six of the nine of the Franklin County establishments that received health ratings during the week of February 4-8 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 management 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.

Six of the nine 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 98, received by Mexico Bakery, 111 Franklin St. SW, Russellville.

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

•N&F No. 2, Inc., 9224 Hwy. 243, Phil Campbell, 79. (No drying device

available at handwashing facility in men's restroom. Slaw sitting out at 55 degrees and no approved course).

•Campbell's Texaco, 3075 Hwy. 237, Phil Campbell, 83. (No date mark on chicken tenders cooked two days previously, sliced tomatoes, cut lettuce sitting out at 55 degrees, chicken tenders, sausage biscuit and potatoes being held at 113 degrees).

•El Quetzal Buena Vista Bakery/Restaurant, 118 E. Franklin St., Russellville, 84. (Food in cooler not date marked, chemical bottles not labeled).

•Wendy's of Russellville 514, 13679 Hwy. 43 South, Russellville, 85. (Various toxic items stored with and above single service and utensils and unlabeled spray bottle of cleaner, no available test papers for quat sanitizer and reach-in cooler holding milk and sour cream at 52 degrees).

•Taco Bell #029124, 15500 Hwy. 43 North, Russellville, 94. (No working/accurate food probe thermometer).

•Panda Buffet, 14633 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 94.

•Vulcan Food Mart, 28485 Hwy. 24, Russellville, 95. (Excessive grease pooled on concrete/asphalt outdoors around grease receptacle).

•Kelly's Kitchen, 17901 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 97.

Of the 24 inspections done in Colbert County from February 4-8, all received scores falling in the range of satisfactory. The high score of 99 was shared by six businesses, including Dollar General #8662, 716 Woodward Ave., Muscle Shoals.

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

What's Happening

256.332.0255

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

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, Tusculmbia. For more info, email nancy537481@yahoo.com or visit the following link: <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/174022.Motherwit>.

To avoid a conflict with Valentine's Day, the next meeting for American Legion Post 64 will be this Thursday, February 21 at 7 p.m. at the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce. Dinner at 6:30 p.m.

First Free Will Baptist Church will have a Food Giveaway this Saturday, February 23. The church is located at 16140 Highway 43 North in Russellville. We will begin distributing food at 9 a.m. until it is all gone.

Revival will be held at Mt. Hebron Baptist Church on February 24-27, with Sunday night service at 6 p.m. and Monday-Wednesday services at 7 p.m. each night. Evangelist will be Bro. Jamin Grubbs. The church is located at the intersection of Co. Road 26 and Hwy. 59 in Spruce Pine. Everyone welcome!

Walking is very beneficial to heart health, but for many it may be difficult to start a walking program or stay with a regular schedule. To encourage both patients and the community at large to lead a more active lifestyle, the Shoals Community Clinic is offering the "Walk Across Alabama" walking challenge to help people set reachable goals for activity and good health. The kick-off for the 2019 Shoals Walk Across Alabama challenge will be Tuesday, February 26 from 4-6 p.m. at the Highland Baptist Church Christian Life Center in north Florence. A free Yoga class will kick off the event followed by a group walk. Registration materials and refreshments will be on hand for participants. The goal for each participant is to walk at least a mile a week during the 10-week challenge. The Yoga class will be presented by Joanna Morrow, who has been teaching for more than eight years. She has been featured on Hawaiian Public Television and has taught classes locally for several years. Her method is accessible for beginners, seniors and those who are physically challenged. Her style is gentle and supportive to all levels of learning. Weekly group walks led by health experts will be at the Christian Life Center on Tuesdays at 5 p.m., and participants can register any time during the challenge at these group walks. Various walks, programs and prizes will be offered to participants throughout the challenge. These walks are free to the public and appropriate for all ages. For more information contact the clinic at 256-760-4713.

The Russellville Bicentennial Kickoff will be held Friday, March 1 at 10 a.m. on the east side of Sloss Lake. A monument commemorating the original site of the town of Russellville will be unveiled, and mayor David Grissom will read a resolution. The public is invited to attend this kickoff event!

East Franklin Volunteer Fire Department will be serving William Earl Bishop's smoked chicken and pulled barbeque pork plates from 4-7 p.m. on Friday, March 1. Proceeds will go toward the purchase of a backup generator. The fire department is located at 10443 Hwy. 81, Phil Campbell, AL 35581. Plates cost \$10 each. Thanks for your support!

The NAACP of Alabama presents its 2019 Gala on Friday, March 1 from 7 p.m.-midnight at the Capital City Club, 201 Monroe Street, Suite 2100 in Montgomery. Cost is \$50 per person. The event is being held in conjunction with the 54th anniversary of the Bridge Crossing Jubilee. For information or tickets, call Patricia Mokolo at 205-534-5204, or log onto www.alnaacp.org.

The gospel group Purpose will be hosting the second annual Russellville Spring Sing/Campmeeting Revival Tour on Saturday, March 2 at 5 p.m. at the A.W. Todd Center in downtown Russellville. Special guests will include Ava Kasich, Epps Family, The Riders and Day Three. Everyone is invited. NO admission fee, but a love offering will be taken. Concessions will be available. For more info, call 256-627-8784 OR go to www.facebook.com/purpose.al.

The Franklin County Emergency Management Agency will be hosting a storm spotter class taught by The National Weather Service of Huntsville on Tuesday, March 5 at 6 p.m. at Belgreen Fire Department (4325 County Rd. 524, Russellville, AL 35653). This is open to the public and all local rescue squads, fire departments, police departments, ambulance services and sheriff department personal. Looking forward to seeing all of you at this class. For more info, please call the Franklin County Emergency Management Agency at 256-332-8890.

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 March 5. All members and friends are urged to attend.

The Kerry Gilbert Band will perform a benefit concert with special guest Billy Lawson at the Roxy Theatre in Russellville on Saturday, March 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. 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. Call 256-335-4356.

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.

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Golden Tigers fall one game short of trip to Hanceville

Mike Self
Franklin Free Press

RUSSELLVILLE - Maybe half an hour after the final buzzer had sounded on Russellville's season-ending 70-64 loss to Madison Academy in last Tuesday's Class 5A sub-regional game, senior guard Devin Buckhalter crossed paths on his way out of the gym with head coach Patrick Odom.

With only a handful of parents and school personnel still milling about on the court, player and coach stopped and shared one final embrace.

"I love you, man," Odom said.

Buckhalter was just a wet-behind-the-ears freshman when Odom arrived at RHS in 2015, fresh off a two-year stint at Belgreen that came on the heels of a 14-year run at Shoals Christian. Four years later, as he left the gym for the last time as an active player, Buckhalter strode toward the exit having scored 1,286 career points at the varsity level (including 21 on Tuesday night) while helping the Golden Tigers win three area tournament titles in four seasons.

Lucas McNutt, a classmate of Buckhalter's and another four-year varsity veteran, topped the 1,000-point mark just a couple of weeks ago and finished his career with 1,062. Caden Parker, the third member of this year's senior class, stepped into a larger role last season as a junior and was a vital contributor who started all 27 games for this year's 20-win team.

"Those three seniors...every senior class I've ever had is tough to let go," Odom said. "But here for me at Russellville, those were the young freshmen when I took over. To see what we've shared together in four years, I love these guys like they're my own. It's tough to see it come to a close. It'll take me a little while to come to grips with that."

In a 20-year coaching career, Odom has bid farewell to a senior class 20 times. It seems safe to say that none of those previous good-byes have been tougher than Tuesday night's.

"Those three seniors...every senior class I've ever had is tough to let go," Odom said. "But here for me at Russellville, those were the young freshmen when I took over. To see what we've shared together in four years, I love these guys like they're my own. It's tough to see it come to a close. It'll take me a little while to come to grips with that."

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Tigers toppled

Record-setting season for Red Bay ends with gut-wrenching loss to Vincent

Mike Self
Franklin Free Press

HANCEVILLE - For the second straight season, Red Bay's boys found themselves facing an uncomfortable deficit in the fourth quarter of a semifinal game at the Northwest Regional.

For the second straight season, the Tigers came storming back by playing inspired basketball when it mattered most.

But, for the second straight season, the late comeback was all for naught, and the final result was the same—a narrow loss, and an early regional exit.

This one, though, definitely felt



different.

"Not sure what to say right now," head coach John Torisky said last Friday, just moments after watching Vincent score the go-ahead bucket on its final pos-

session to end Red Bay's season with a 41-40 win. "I wish we had ten more seconds."

In truth, Torisky wishes his team had three more games. A state championship, after all, was the goal coming into the postseason for a Tiger squad that had gone 14-1 since January 1 on its way to setting a new school record with 27 wins and—for a couple of weeks—ascending all the way to the No. 1 spot in the ASWA Class 2A rankings.

A year ago, Red Bay was a Cinderella story, improving from two wins the previous season to 18 last season and making its first regional appearance since 1995. It almost didn't matter that the Tigers' furious fourth-quarter rally against Mars Hill [they cut a 16-point deficit down to two in

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PHOTOS/KYLE GLASGOW

Corum (top, 12) and company pitched a first-quarter shutout defensively, and Ray (left, 32) came alive offensively with nine points down the stretch to spark a late rally. It wasn't enough, however, as the Tigers lost for just the second time in 16 games since January 1.





Rise up

McCollister leads Red Bay girls past Altamont

Mike Self
Franklin Free Press

HANCEVILLE - Perhaps the only person inside the Red Bay locker room surprised by Destiny McCollister's performance last Friday against Altamont in the Class 2A Northwest Regional semifinals was Destiny McCollister.

Holly Kuykendall certainly wasn't surprised. In fact, Red Bay's first-year head coach expected her sophomore center—who is listed at 6'0 and is probably closer to 6'2—to have a big afternoon.

"Yep," Kuykendall said. "I thought we had a little bit of a size advantage. The last few games, Mallori [Miller, the team's senior point guard and most prolific three-point shooter] has blown it up and played so well, so I knew they would probably play her as tight as possible out top. I knew that was gonna give some openings for Destiny, some nice off-the-ball looks."

"I knew it was coming," Reagan Kuykendall said of McCollister's breakout performance last Friday in Hanceville. "I knew Destiny was gonna have to have a big game for us to go farther."

Reagan Kuykendall, a senior forward and the team's leading scorer on the season, also suspected that McCollister would have to play a key role if the Lady Tigers were to advance.

"I knew it was coming," Kuykendall said. "I knew Destiny was gonna have to have a big game for us to go farther."

McCollister, who already towered over every Altamont player on the floor, stood even taller on Friday, scoring a season-high 14 points on 7-for-10 shooting to lead Red Bay to an ugly-at-times but still satisfying 36-28 win.

McCollister also pulled down eight rebounds and blocked two shots, fulfilling her coach's mandate to come up large on both ends of the floor.

"I even told her, 'No pressure,'" Holly Kuykendall joked afterwards about her

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PHOTOS BY KYLE GLASGOW

After McCollister (left, in back) blocked two shots and pulled down eight rebounds to go along with her season-high 14 points on 7-for-10 shooting, the Lady Tigers were celebrating a berth in the regional final. They were set to face fifth-ranked Cold Springs on Tuesday.



'RISE', from page 14

pre-game chat with McCollister. "But I need you to play well on defense and to blow it up on offense."

And what was McCollister's reaction to having such a heavy burden ["Everybody on my back," she said with a smile] placed on her shoulders in her first-ever game under the bright lights of Hanceville?

"I was really nervous," admitted the soft-spoken sophomore, who entered Friday's action averaging a modest 5.2 points per game on the season and had reached double-figures just three times all year. "I was telling everybody I wanted to cry, I was so nervous."

She definitely didn't show it, scoring the first bucket of the game on a put-back and then converting nice feeds from first Macy Faulkner and then Kuykendall into easy layups as the Lady Tigers built an early 9-6 lead.

After scoring six points on 3-for-3 shooting in the game's first five-plus minutes, however, McCollister managed just two shot attempts and two points over the remainder of the first half. Foul trouble [she was whistled for two] played a factor, but Kuykendall also said her team could have made more of a concerted effort to get the ball inside rather than settling for perimeter shots. [Red Bay shot just 2-for-11 from beyond the arc in the first half.]

"I would have liked to [get the ball inside] a little more," the coach said, "but they did a good job. I've got a lot of girls who like to shoot the ball, which I love, so sometimes it's hard for them to wanna give it up. I told them, in this setting, your nerves can play a part in how you shoot. Why not take it under the basket? And somebody who's closest to the basket would be a nice place for it to go."

After going roughly 10 minutes of game time without a bucket, McCollister scored on a post-up to break a 16-16 tie with 20 seconds left in the first half. Kuykendall then stole the inbounds pass and made another layup, and a block by McCollister on the other end sent the Lady Tigers into the locker room with a four-point lead and a head of steam.

"Right before halftime, when we made those two back-to-back really good plays right there, that gave us some good momentum going into the next quarter," Holly Kuykendall said.

McCollister helped Red Bay keep things rolling coming out of the break, opening the second half with back-to-back buckets (one off an assist by Miller, the other off a nice post entry pass by Kuykendall) to push the lead out to eight at 24-16. McCollister scored on another post-up midway through the third, and then Kuykendall banked in a shot off a nice inbounds pass from Miller to give Red Bay its largest lead to that point at 28-18.

Altamont, meanwhile, suffered through a 1-for-14 shooting performance in the third quarter, scoring just two points and going to the fourth down by 10.

Kuykendall—both of them, in fact—knew better than to think the final eight minutes would be a breeze.

"I knew they were gonna make a run," Holly said. "If we could just make our free throws....we got some great calls. The referees did a great job."

"Especially for us," she added with a laugh.

Said Reagan of Altamont, "I knew they were gonna end up, at some point in the game, going all-out. I was expecting it. I knew it was coming. I was just waiting for it."

Kuykendall opened the fourth quarter with two free throws to make it a 12-point game, but Altamont (20-12) did indeed make a push down the stretch. Red Bay missed five of six free throws during one stretch, leaving the door



Blackburn (22) helped Red Bay hold Altamont to 9-for-42 shooting.



Destiny McCollister

Sophomore Center, Red Bay

McCollister came through in a big way for the Lady Tigers last Friday in the Northwest Regional semifinals against Altamont.

The 6'0 sophomore hit her first three shots of the game and finished the day with a season-high 14 points on 7-for-10 shooting from the floor. She also grabbed eight rebounds and blocked two shots, helping Red Bay earn a 36-28 win and a date with Cold Springs in the regional final.

McCollister arrived in Hanceville averaging 5.2 points per game on the season.



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open, and the Lady Knights took advantage with a 7-0 run that got them within three at 31-28 with 1:31 remaining.

That's when the Lady Tigers delivered their most crucial possession of the night. Faulkner, a sophomore guard, found Miller cutting backdoor for an easy layup to end the run and push the lead back out to five at 33-28 with 1:10 to play. Altamont missed on the other end, and Red Bay sophomore Lila Blackburn grabbed her seventh rebound of the day. She got the ball to Faulkner, who was fouled and made both free throws with just less than a minute remaining to stretch the lead to seven at 35-28.

Altamont missed its final three shots of the game and also turned the ball over, and Faulkner hit another free throw with 12.1 seconds left to seal the deal on Red Bay's fourth straight win—all in the postseason. The Lady Tigers advanced to face fifth-ranked Cold Springs (25-6) in the regional final. [That game was set for Tuesday at 4 p.m., after press time. For details, check out our website at www.franklinfreepress.net.]

The Lady Tigers shined defensively last Friday, holding Altamont to just 21 percent (9-for-42) shooting from the floor, including 1-for-9 from beyond the arc. Kuykendall was particularly pleased with the defensive job Blackburn did in holding Altamont sophomore post player Kalia Todd to just eight points on 2-for-9 shooting.

"I thought we did such a great job on defense," the coach said. "That's where it counted for us the most. We tried to shut that Number 12 [Todd] down. She did have a few little shots there. She is an outstanding player. Not taking anything away from them, but I thought we did an outstanding job on defense. Lila really guarded [Todd] well. I don't know that I even subbed her—maybe just for a minute."

Blackburn indeed logged 31 minutes, one less than Miller and Kuykendall—each of whom played the entire game. Kuykendall shot 5-for-7 from the foul line and finished with 11 points, five rebounds and three assists. Faulkner hit one three and scored six points, and Miller added five points and six boards. It was McCollister, though, who carried the heaviest load on the offensive end.

"It's exciting," she said of coming through with the season on the line. "I'm just glad I could make those shots."

McCollister was the only player on either side to make more than half her shot attempts. Red Bay shot 32 percent (13-for-40) from the field, including 2-for-13 from three. The Lady Tigers shot 8-for-16 from the line and committed 11 turnovers.

Altamont shot 9-for-16 from the line and committed 10 turnovers. The two teams finished dead even on the glass with 33 rebounds apiece.

Winfield stuns PC girls with second-half rally

Mike Self
Franklin Free Press

HANCEVILLE - Voice shaking, eyes filled with tears, Abby Davis put into words what the rest of her Phil Campbell teammates were feeling in the aftermath of Saturday's stunning 47-42 loss to Winfield in the Northwest Regional semifinals.

"It feels like it ended way too early," said Davis, the team's lone senior. "I feel like we could have made it so much farther."

Fresh off last year's Final Four run, the Lady Bobcats arrived in Hanceville as the likely favorites to emerge from the 3A girls bracket and return to Birmingham. They were certainly expected—by most observers, anyway—to get by Winfield, which might have been the most lightly regarded 30-1 team in high school basketball history.

Weak schedule. Misleading record. Paper champions.

So went the narrative on the Lady Pirates—a narrative reinforced by their only loss, a 67-40 shellacking at the hands of a Phillips team that Phil Campbell swept during the regular season.

"It feels like it ended way too early," said Davis, the team's lone senior, who scored 12 points in Saturday's loss and finished her varsity career with 1,792. "I feel like we could have made it so much farther."

Winfield coach Joseph Wilson heard all the talk—some of which came not from critics and detractors, but from friends and supporters.

"A buddy of mine—I won't call his name, because I love him, and I still love him even though he made this statement, not to me but to somebody else—was wishing me luck against Phil Campbell," Wilson said, "and I saw where he commented to somebody, 'Ya'll will thump Winfield.' That's fine to think that. But our kids believed. We've had folks tell us when we got beat by Phillips that we weren't battle-tested and we hadn't played people, kind of like we were afraid to. We're not afraid to play anybody. We scheduled who we got to schedule. But we used that as motivation. I know I did.

"It's not about who you play but how you play, and what your intestinal makeup is and how you prepare."

That's all well and good, but for much of Saturday's first half, it looked as if the haters might have been right. Phil Campbell (24-5) was clearly the better team in the early going, shooting 7-for-8 from the field in the first quarter and dominating the defensive glass to open up a 16-8 lead by the end of one. Winfield then shot 4-for-17 from the floor in the second quarter and turned the ball over five times as the deficit grew to a dozen by the break at 29-17.

At that point, the pre-game narrative appeared to be spot-on. Winfield looked out-matched by the Lady Bobcats, whose impressive regular season included not only that sweep of Class 1A Final Four favorite Phillips but also wins over Class 4A area champion Rogers, Class 4A contender Wilson and Mississippi powerhouse Belmont.

The Lady Pirates were in serious trouble, it seemed, but their head coach wasn't ready to concede anything. And senior guard C'era Beck wasn't ready to go home.

"We had a game plan," Wilson said, "but it didn't go exactly the way the plan went. I've got plans for my life. But, sometimes, other folks have got plans that change your plans, and the people who succeed are the ones who can adapt. The good Lord tells us, it's not always gonna be the way you want it. Heck, I'm sure they've got Christian girls and good people at Phil Campbell—there's no doubt. It's about sticking with your plan and what you believe in, and doing it.

"In that first half, we didn't. We took some bad shots. But some of the ones who took bad shots took good shots in the second half. We got better on our drives, we got some better looks, and we battled and we battled and we battled. That's what winners do. That's why we're here."

Defensively, Wilson decided to scrap the full-court pressure/half-court man-to-man approach he had taken in the first half in favor of a two-three zone designed to neutralize Davis (a UAH signee with nearly 1,800 career points at the varsity level) and junior guard Kallie Allen (last year's regional MVP) while also forcing the Lady Bobcats to make perimeter shots.

"They went to a two-three with a stack on top, and we just didn't shoot the ball very well," said Phil Campbell head coach Craig Thomas. "One for thirteen from three. We didn't make shots right there when we needed them. I thought we got a little tight as the game got closer, and we weren't aggressive like we were in the first part of the game.

"They double-teamed Abby just about all night, and they knew where Kallie was the whole time. Against a two-three, you've just gotta shoot the basketball. I tell them all the time, when you play [against] a zone, you've gotta shoot 'em out of it. We didn't have a good night shooting, and it got us."

After their red-hot first-quarter showing, the Lady Bobcats shot just 9-for-34 the rest of the way—including a crippling 0-for-9 in a disastrous one-point

fourth quarter. Winfield, meanwhile, rallied behind Beck, who opened the third quarter with four straight free throws and then buried a pair of threes to help the Lady Pirates get within five at 41-36 going to the fourth.

"I love this team more than anything in the world," said Beck, who later nailed a game-tying three with 3:15 left to play and scored 17 of her 22 points in the second half. "I did not want it to end yet. This team has been everything to me ever since I was in the ninth grade. I was not ready for this to end. I went out there and I said, 'I'm not giving up.'"

When Beck buried her fourth three of the night to pull Winfield even at 42-42 with three minutes and change remaining, the vibe inside Tom Drake Coliseum seemed to palpably shift—particularly for Phil Campbell. Suddenly, the Lady Bobcats were the team in trouble.

"I feel like we played really good," Davis said, "but whenever the girl made that shot to tie it, we fell apart, kind of."

Thomas, too, could sense the change in momentum.

"[Wilson] called a timeout before I could call a timeout, right there when they tied it," Thomas said. "I was fixing to call one and see if we couldn't regroup. I thought we were getting the looks we probably should have gotten. Again, what I saw on the floor was we were getting the looks we needed. We tried to move some people around. We moved Kallie to the wing instead of the baseline, but we just didn't execute well enough."

The game remained tied for another two minutes after Beck's three before freshman guard Emma Kate Tittle drove the lane for the go-ahead bucket to make it 44-42 with 1:10 left to play. Beck then came up with a crucial steal and got fouled, making both free throws to push the lead to four with 51.5 seconds to go.

The Lady Bobcats missed two more shots in the final 40 seconds or so, capping off a scoreless stretch of more than five-and-a-half minutes to close out the game. Their final point of the afternoon came on a free throw by sophomore guard Caitlynn Mills at the 5:44 mark; even worse, their final field goal came on a driving layup by sophomore forward Olivia Taylor with 40 seconds left in the third quarter.

Afterwards, Wilson had an...um...*interesting* way to describe his team's fourth-quarter effort on the defensive end.

"You might not wanna quote this," he said, "but I call it 'plumber-crack-nasty' defense. You gotta get down, and you gotta guard. They want the ball in Number Three's [Davis's] hands in the middle of the floor, and I don't know that she ever got it in the middle of the floor in the fourth quarter. When she did, we had three or four around her.

"Number Ten [Mills, Phil Campbell's leading three-point shooter on the season with 48 makes entering Saturday] wasn't hitting. She can shoot it, but she was a little off. Down here, it's a little different, and we did a good job closing out. Number 24 [Allen], I don't know if she took an outside shot this game. We did a good job on her. And then we rebounded. That's all we did—just get in a two-three zone and get after it."

Winfield earned another shot to prove the skeptics wrong, advancing to face Lauderdale County in Wednesday's regional final. Phil Campbell, meanwhile, will likely be processing what exactly went wrong in Saturday's second half for a long, long time.

"Tough loss," Thomas said. "I thought we had a very good chance of winning the ball game. We just let it slip away. I'll take the blame for it. I just didn't make the right adjustments in the second half. You almost hate to go in [to the half] with an eight- or ten-point lead, because you feel like you don't need to adjust. I didn't make the right adjustments, and it bit me. This one is probably on me."

The primary stats from Saturday's game were remarkably similar. Phil Campbell shot 16-for-42 from the field and 9-for-13 from the foul line; Winfield went 17-for-46 and 9-for-15. Both teams turned the ball over 13 times, and the Lady Bobcats held a slim 27-25 edge on the boards.

The difference, in the end, came from beyond the arc. After Allen nailed a corner three on Phil Campbell's first possession of the game, the Lady Bobcats went 0-for-12 from distance the rest of the way. Beck, meanwhile, accounted for all four of her team's made threes—three of which came in the decisive second half.

"We knew she was a shooter," Thomas said. "We knew she'd back up. We just didn't get out close enough a lot of times. You just gotta close out on shooters. We didn't execute on that very well. She was, what, four for eight on threes? And some of them were deep. We kept trying to push out, push out, push out, and she was backing up. She banked one of them in, but that's the way basketball goes. If it goes through that hoop, it counts."

Of Beck's 22 points, all but two came from either beyond the arc or at the foul line, where she was 8-for-11. Andrea Harbin added nine points for Winfield, and Shelby Evers had six.

Allen led Phil Campbell with 14 points, 12 of which came in the first half.

See 'STUNS,' page 17

Elite Eight bid eludes Lady Bulldogs again

Mike Self
Franklin Free Press

HANCEVILLE - In two previous trips to Hanceville under head coach Chad Green, Belgreen's girls were out-classed and out-athleted by two opponents (R.A. Hubbard in 2016, Holy Spirit in 2018) who used their superior quickness and defensive pressure to overwhelm the Lady Bulldogs and deprive them of the space they needed to handle the basketball and knock down perimeter shots.

Last Thursday night's matchup with Falkville in the Northwest Regional semifinals was different. Green expected the Lady Blue Devils to play zone [they did] and to not press in the full-court [they didn't]. Falkville didn't have an edge—at least not a decisive one—in overall athleticism or quickness.

Plus, the Lady Blue Devils (who arrived in Hanceville with a good-but-not-great record of 19-11) had lost a pair of regular-season meetings (by 14 and by 17) to Decatur Heritage, a team Belgreen had beaten twice.

Suffice it to say, Green had ample cause to believe this would be the year his team got over the hump and earned that elusive bid to the Elite Eight.

Which only serves to make Thursday's season-ending 51-45 loss at Tom Drake Coliseum all the more frustrating.

"I felt like this was our best matchup," said Green, whose team finished the year at 23-8. "We came in the first time and played a good R.A. Hubbard team. Last year, we had a chance, but we had to play well against Holy Spirit. They had a good team. I felt like this time was definitely our best opportunity out of those three."

The Lady Bulldogs failed to make the most of that opportunity, shooting just 29 percent (16-for-56) from the floor overall and missing 22 of their 30 three-point attempts. Falkville focused its defensive efforts on containing 6'1 sophomore Emma Dempsey, who came in averaging a team-high 12.6 points per game on the season.

The extra attention paid to Dempsey in the post resulted in more than a few clean looks from the perimeter, but Belgreen simply didn't make enough of them to make the Lady Blue Devils pay.

"It was very frustrating, because the looks were there," said junior guard Autumn Bragwell, who shot 3-for-6 from beyond the arc last Thursday and led the Lady Bulldogs with 11 points. "That's usually our biggest thing is trying to get the shots we want. They were there. We just couldn't hit them."

Junior guard Gracie Dempsey opened the game with a three from the left wing, but it was hardly a sign of things to come. Belgreen shot just 1-for-8 from beyond the arc in the first quarter and endured a stretch of more than seven minutes without a field goal of any kind from the midway point of the first to the midway point of the second, watching an early 9-6 lead turn into an 18-10 deficit.

"I knew we were gonna have to make some shots," said Green, whose team entered Thursday's action having hit 151 threes on the season (including 45 by Gracie Dempsey, 39 by Bragwell, 32 by reserve guard Emma Willingham and 19 by senior point guard Gabbie Moore). "And we're very capable. I have four girls that can definitely step out and hit that outside shot. They have all year long. We didn't shoot it as good as what we wanted to tonight."

The Lady Blue Devils may have focused their defensive game plan around slowing down Emma Dempsey in the high post, but head coach Jonathon Lacy said his team was also well aware of how dangerous Belgreen's perimeter shooters could be.

"I'll tell ya, on all the film I've seen, twenty-two [Gracie Dempsey] and three [Bragwell] can really shoot it," Lacy said, glancing down at the stat sheet on the press table in front of him. "Obviously, you look right here, and twenty-two was 2-for-6 [from three] and three was 3-for-6. We knew those were the two we had to make sure we contained."

"As we started flattening out and taking away the top of the free throw line with the big girl, they put those girls in the corners. We made a slight adjustment with where we were gonna defend the corner depending on where the other post was on the block. Our players executed to perfection, and we were

able to contain them enough."

A three by Bragwell at the 4:45 mark of the second quarter ended Belgreen's drought from the field, but Falkville answered with a 6-0 spurt to build its largest lead to that point at 24-13. Gracie Dempsey hit a three to get the Lady Bulldogs back within eight, and they went into the locker room trailing by nine at 29-20.

After shooting just 25 percent from the field (7-for-28) in the first half, Belgreen desperately needed to see the ball go through the net a couple of times to open the third quarter; instead, three-pointers by Katie Dempsey and Gracie Dempsey rimmed out, and Falkville pushed the lead to 34-20.

"I felt like this was our best matchup," said Green, whose team finished the year at 23-8. "We came in the first time and played a good R.A. Hubbard team. Last year, we had a chance, but we had to play well against Holy Spirit. They had a good team. I felt like this time was definitely our best opportunity out of those three."

Just as they had done last Monday night in a come-from-behind overtime win at Mars Hill in sub-regional play, however, the Lady Bulldogs refused to go down without a fight. They got a three-pointer from Willingham and then two free throws and a putback from junior post player Ansley Tate, cutting the lead to eight at 35-27.

When Moore found Bragwell for a corner three to close out the third and cut the lead to six at 38-32, Belgreen's girls started to believe another comeback win might be in the offing.

"I really did," Bragwell said. "When we started picking it up, I really thought it was gonna be like the Mars Hill game. I guess it just wasn't enough."

Emma Dempsey, held without a bucket in the first half, opened the fourth quarter with her second field goal of the second half, and then Willingham nailed a three with 6:10 remaining to make it a five-point game at 42-37. Falkville responded with six straight points to push the lead back into double-digits, but even then Green wasn't ready to wave the white flag.

"When we were down eleven with about four minutes to go," he said, "I asked the girls, 'Does this look familiar?' We were down nine with 4:30 left at Mars Hill on Monday night. The kids didn't give up. The effort was there, especially at the end of the game. We just couldn't find the bottom of the net. But like I told them, I think 45 points is enough. I really do. Even though we didn't shoot a high percentage, I thought 45 was enough. We have to defend better, and we have to rebound the basketball."

"But our kids never gave up, and that's all we ask. Two things we asked at the beginning of the year—good attitude and good effort on the floor. I thought we did that tonight."

Trailing 48-37 midway through the fourth, the Lady Bulldogs got a free throw from Katie Dempsey and a steal and layup from Bragwell to get back within eight. Willingham took a charge, but Belgreen gave the ball right back to Falkville on a turnover, and Casey Barfield hit two free throws to push the lead back to 10 with 1:47 to go.

Moore found Willingham for her third three of the night, and then Falkville missed four consecutive free throws on one possession. A layup by Katie Dempsey closed the gap to five at 50-45 with 15 seconds left, but Falkville was able to run the clock down to 7.8 seconds before the Lady Bulldogs committed a foul. Sydnee Fitzgerald split a pair of free throws to provide the final margin, and the Lady Blue Devils secured a spot opposite Phillips in Monday's regional final.

For the second straight year, meanwhile, Belgreen was left with a sour taste at the end of a 20-plus-win season. The Lady Bulldogs will continue their quest next year to break through that Sweet 16 barrier and finally reach a regional final, but they'll have to do it without Moore, Willingham and fellow seniors Megan Smith and Camie Terrell.

Moore, who finished her varsity career at Belgreen with 944 points and three regional tournament appearances, was asked Thursday night about the legacy she hoped to leave behind for the Lady Bulldog program.

"It means a lot to make it [to Hanceville] three times," said an emotional

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'STUNS,' from page 16

She also grabbed eight rebounds and handed out three assists, shooting 4-for-7 from the field and 5-for-6 from the line. Davis added 12 points on 6-for-10 shooting and also had five boards, three assists and two steals.

Taylor shot 4-for-7 from the field and finished with eight points, four rebounds and four assists. Katie Thomas had four points and eight rebounds,

and Mills also scored four points.

Phil Campbell will have to move forward without Davis, who finished her career with 1,792 points and four regional trips in four-plus seasons. But every other player on the roster will return, and Thomas was already urging his players to use Saturday's gut-wrenching defeat as fuel.

"We just had that discussion," Thomas said at

the post-game press conference. "If we don't wanna feel like this, we're gonna have to work harder. Every time we go to practice and we're not feeling good or somebody's done something to us that day, remember how it feels to lose. And don't let it happen again. It's not a good feeling to lose. But somebody's gotta win, and somebody's gotta lose."

'ELUDES', from page 17

Moore, who scored just three points against Falkville but also had two steals and a stellar 7-to-2 assist-to-turnover ratio in a team-high 30 minutes played. "That's always our goal going into the start of the season. I always tell my team before the games, we can always control our attitude and our effort, and always to give everything you have and leave it on the court. I told them that, like, at least ten times before we left the locker room.

"If I could leave anything for them, it would be to always maintain a good attitude and be humble."

Bragwell finished with five rebounds to go along with her 11 points on 4-for-9 shooting. Willingham shot 3-for-5 from beyond the arc in her final game at Belgreen and scored nine points. Gracie Dempsey added eight points, and Tate had six points and nine rebounds. Emma Dempsey finished with five points, two assists and two steals but shot just 2-for-9 from the floor.

Lacy credited 5'10 senior Ravyn Gilsrap with helping limit Dempsey's touches and effectiveness in the high post.

"They like to put her at the free throw line. They like to get her the ball there because, obviously, she's quick," Lacy said. "We knew it was gonna be a difficult matchup. We tweaked our defense a little bit. Ravyn, in a lot of games, has played the block for us, but we put her up there [in the high post] today. We put her flat so she could defend the top of the key, but we also had to keep the lob from getting in there.

"We knew we had to keep forty-two [Dempsey] from getting the basketball. That's where they wanna go. If we could keep her off the free throw line and keep her from getting those attack angles she likes to get from the free throw line, I thought we'd have a pretty good chance of winning the basketball game."

Dempsey's five points last Thursday leave her with 993 career points heading into her junior season. She'll return next year, along with rising seniors Bragwell (9.0 points per game this season, with 42 threes made), Tate (7.6 points per game), Gracie Dempsey (8.8 points per game, with 47

threes made) and Katie Dempsey (7.7 points per game). They'll form the veteran nucleus of a team looking to make yet another regional run.

Green, though, has done more than win nearly 200 games and make five trips to Hanceville in his 13 seasons as a varsity girls head coach (nine at Tharptown and four with the Lady Bulldogs). He's also gained some valuable perspective on things that matter far more than Sweet 16's and regional final aspirations.

"I wanna thank the good Lord above," Green said. "We know He's number one, and you've gotta always put Him first. My kids, if they don't learn anything from me basketball-wise, I want them to always remember to put the good Lord first. Being saved by God's marvelous grace is the most important thing, and living your life as a good Christian witness and an example to others is what matters.

"We thank the good Lord that we were healthy this year. He kept us safe and gave us another opportunity to get back down here."

'SHORT', from page 13

"This group is special. This stings because you feel like they deserved more. Maybe not *more*, in a sense, but this is a group you don't want to let go of. They're special, and you could see what they've created this year in this gym, with the excitement and the fun we've had."

Last Tuesday marked the third time in Odom's four seasons that the Golden Tigers (20-7) have had a chance to punch their ticket to Hanceville with a win on their home floor—and the third time they've come up short against a team from the Huntsville/Madison area. The Mustangs (8-21) opened this season with 16 losses in their first 17 games, dropping 13 in a row from November 21 through January 3. [That's not a misprint; Madison Academy didn't win a single game between Thanksgiving and New Year's, going oh-for-December.]

Despite that disastrous stretch and poor record, Odom knew the Mustangs would pose a major threat last Tuesday night for two reasons—the precision with which they ran their half-court offense and the brutally tough Huntsville-area schedule against which they had tested themselves.

Sure enough, Mad Acad picked the Golden Tigers apart in the half-court, staging a clinic on ball movement and shot-making en route to drilling 10 three-pointers in the first half alone.

"Credit Madison Academy," said Odom, whose team somehow survived that barrage of threes to trail by just four points at the break, 37-33. "The game played out as I expected. I knew they were gonna be awfully difficult to defend. You can't really zone them, because they shoot it exceptionally well. And they do a tremendous job with what they do. We've seen some good teams this year, but I don't know that we've seen a team better at what they do than Madison Academy. They're scary, because they're so sound. They make you defend multiple actions every possession.

"We were short with our rotation because they were playing five guards, but a couple of those guys are 6'2, 6'3. They put pressure on you with their athleticism, but they can all handle it and they can all shoot it. Because of the personnel, they were able to really defend us. It was a physical type of game. We didn't get a lot of clean looks from the three-point line. They didn't help off anybody. We knew it would come down to a handful of possessions, and we had a couple of great looks that didn't go. There was one possession late where we get three looks at the basket, and it just doesn't go in. In this type of game, you don't want it to come down to one possession, but those are critical because you just run out of time. That's kind of what happened to us."

Freshman guard Drew Blackston was the story of the first half for the Mustangs, coming off the bench to drill five threes (four of which came in a breath-taking second-quarter flurry) and score 18 points.

"Their No. 13 [Blackston] is a good player," Odom said, "but he's not one of the guys that people really talk about in scouting reports. That type of thing happens in games like this. You always see a guy come from off the page to impact these type games. That flurry he had in the first half was...I actually felt good going into halftime, because we kind of weathered that. We had our opportunities. We had a couple of looks late that just didn't go for us."

The Golden Tigers stayed close in the first half largely due to Buckhalter, who made his final four shots—including a pair of threes—to close out the first quarter and had 12 points going into the break. The 6'0 senior guard came out and scored nine more points in the third quarter, and McNutt and sophomore Chandler Dyas each connected from beyond the arc as

Russellville surged in front on a couple of occasions.

The Mustangs responded and took a 53-50 lead into the fourth quarter after junior Spencer Nickles beat the third-quarter buzzer with a putback. The final period was nip and tuck the entire way, with neither team leading by more than five points until the very end. Sophomore reserve Brooks Scott scored Russellville's first two buckets of the fourth, and then a basket by Will Bonner cut the Mustangs' lead to one at 57-56.

Senior Luke Reavis answered with a three-point play, pushing the margin back out to four, but Bonner came right back with a three-point play of his own to make it 60-59 with 3:54 remaining. The freshman point guard grabbed his own miss the next time down and put it back in, giving the Golden Tigers what would turn out to be their final lead of the night at 61-60.

Senior Ty Walker made two free throws to put Madison Academy back in front, and Nickles scored to make it 64-61. Bonner made two free throws to get Russellville back within a point, but then Blackston drove for a layup to make it 66-63. Bonner took a charge moments later but then got called for a charge on the other end, negating a layup that might have turned into a potential and-one opportunity. The Golden Tigers fouled Josh Malone with less than a minute remaining, and the junior guard made both free throws to stretch the lead to five at 68-63.

Bonner got fouled on the other end and split a pair at the line, making it 68-64. Walker missed the front end of a one-and-one (Madison Academy's only missed free throw of the night in eight attempts), but the Golden Tigers failed to capitalize. Dyas had the ball knocked out of bounds on a drive to the rim, and then McNutt came up empty on a foray into the lane. Bonner grabbed the back-tap rebound near mid-court, but Malone came up with a steal and raced the other way for the clinching layup in the final seconds.

The loss ended an eight-game win streak for Russellville that dated back almost a month, to a January 14 defeat at Hamilton.

"I'm just exceptionally proud of our kids," Odom said. "We didn't lose this game because of a lack of heart or a lack of effort. We lost this game because the ball didn't bounce our way a couple of times. That's the cruelty of basketball and the cruelty of sports. There's one team left standing at the end. In your heart, you always want that to be you, but I couldn't be prouder of this team for what we've been able to do.

"We felt good. This is the type of game we've played all year. I looked at our guys in a late timeout and said, 'This is what we do.' Sometimes it just doesn't work out for you. But I just love this group of young men. I feel very blessed and honored to have been their coach."

After sitting at 1-16 in early January, the Mustangs advanced to Hanceville to play in the regional semifinals. [They lost on Saturday, 39-36, to top-ranked Wenonah.] The Golden Tigers, meanwhile, were left to contemplate another home loss in sub-regional play, another area championship season that ended one step short of Hanceville.

"5A basketball is tough," Odom said. "You watch us play tonight, and Madison Academy is so prepared because of the Huntsville schedule they play. We played a tough schedule, too, but you can see how difficult it gets when you get in the playoffs, just because of the athleticism. But that's what makes it fun. If it was easy, it wouldn't be fun.

"I'm proud of what we've done, and we're gonna continue to go to work to keep Russellville basketball in a state of excellence."

'TIGERS', from page 13

the final seconds before ultimately falling to the Panthers 62-58] came up short; there were no seniors on the roster, and the huge finish in the regional semifinals definitely felt like a warm-up act for a much bigger show.

This year's Red Bay team, which entered Friday's action with a sparkling record of 27-5, was a bona fide juggernaut, dropping only two games all season to teams from Alabama. [Those teams, incidentally, were Class 4A contender Deshler and Class 1A No. 1 Decatur Heritage.] Suffice it to say, Torisky and his players no longer viewed Tom Drake Coliseum as a destination; rather, they saw it as merely a stop along the way to an even more significant venue.

Which is why last Friday's loss left Torisky wishing for more of the one thing we can't ever seem to get.

Time.
"That's the main thing—I think we just ran out of time," said Torisky, whose team needed to go the length of the floor in the final 4.2 seconds but failed to get off a shot, turning the ball over instead. "We probably would have gotten at least an opportunity to get a shot. But that's the way basketball goes. You get 32 minutes, and you have to make the most of it. Unfortunately, they came out on top this time."

Leading by eight at 33-25 with 5:25 remaining, Vincent (18-10 through Sunday) appeared poised to pull away and march on to the regional final. The Tigers (27-6) weren't done, however.

Sophomore Braden Ray converted a driving bucket into a three-point play, and then junior guard Clay Allison came up with a layup off a steal to make it 33-30. Moments later, Red Bay senior Gath Weatherford took a charge, and then wiry junior guard Tanner Hamilton rebounded a Weatherford miss on the other end and put it back in to get the Tigers within one at 33-32.

A steal and layup by Ray capped off the 9-0 run and put Red Bay on top 34-33 with 3:30 remaining.

In barely 90 seconds, the Tigers had forced four turnovers and made four baskets to go from down eight to up one in the proverbial blink of an eye.

"I think a little bit of it was just the do-or-die," Torisky said. "Everybody gets it. These guys are competitors. They've competed all year long. When we got a break and a steal and a basket, it just kind of fed off each other, and they were ready to go. That eventually got us into the lead; unfortunately, they just made a couple of shots after that. But our guys are capable of making quick runs."

"We didn't shoot the ball that well today, but we were able to get some steals and baskets off turnovers."

Ray came up with another steal after Red Bay took the lead, but the Tigers turned the ball right back over to Vincent. Jackson McGinnis, a 6'3 junior post player, rebounded his own miss and put it back in, giving the Yellow Jackets a 35-34 lead with 2:19 remaining.

After a miss by Red Bay, Vincent's Chris Hardie went 1-for-2 at the line to make it 36-34 at the 1:36 mark. Weatherford, who was just 1-for-8 from the field at that juncture, nailed a tough turnaround fadeaway from the left baseline to tie the game with 1:20 left to play.

On Vincent's next possession, Red Bay senior guard Colton Corum snatched up a loose ball near mid-court and raced the other way, leading a three-on-one break that seemed destined to put the Tigers back on top. Corum dropped off a behind-the-back pass to Ray, but 6'2 junior Malik

Hamilton came up with a critical blocked shot before grabbing the rebound and getting fouled.

Hamilton made the first free throw, giving Vincent a one-point lead, but missed the second. The Yellow Jackets fouled Ray going for the rebound, and the 6'3 sophomore calmly stroked two free throws to put Red Bay in front 38-37 with 44.1 seconds to go.

The Tigers defended Vincent well on the next trip down, but junior guard Johntavius Keith banked in a tough, spinning 12-footer with Hunter Bays draped all over him, putting the Yellow Jackets back in front 39-38 with 22.1 seconds remaining.

Hardie reached in on Weatherford on the other end and committed his fifth foul, sending the 6'4 senior to the line with 10.8 seconds on the clock. Weatherford, a 75 percent foul shooter on the season, sank a pair of clutch free throws, putting the Tigers on top 40-39. Torisky then called timeout to draw up his defensive strategy for what was likely to be Vincent's final possession.

"I knew [Keith] was gonna get it," Torisky said afterwards, "but I wasn't sure where he was gonna line up. I told the guys, I'll take the blame for that."

Vincent coach John Hadder had Keith take the ball out of bounds. The 6'0 speedster got the ball inbounds and then bolted for the other end, getting the ball right back with a full head of steam and open floor in front of him.

"When he went to throw it in," Torisky said, "I told Hunter, 'Just let him throw it in, and then run with him.' Well, he beat him in a foot race. So, I mean, it wasn't something we did wrong; the kid was just faster. Gath almost got in there and took a charge. I don't know if they would have called it or not. Who knows? But when [Keith] got downhill, I was just hoping he'd miss a layup, because I knew he was getting to the basket."

Keith did indeed get all the way to the rim, and his finger-roll layup gave Vincent a 41-40 lead with 4.2 seconds to play. Torisky called another timeout and drew up a final play to try and get his team a decent look off a full-court press break.

The Tigers wanted to get the ball in to Allison, their speedy point guard, but the Yellow Jackets denied that option. Red Bay instead inbounded the ball to Ray, who dribbled toward mid-court and then tried to advance the ball ahead with a pass to the right wing. Vincent junior Kaleb Wilson stole that pass, sealing the win and punching the Yellow Jackets' ticket to the Elite Eight.

Wilson's steal was the last in a steady stream of defensive stands by both teams on Friday. Red Bay hounded Vincent into six turnovers by the time the game was six minutes old [Weatherford, in particular, was a menace, coming up with two steals and taking a charge] and forcing the Yellow Jackets to shoot 0-for-5 from the field in a scoreless first quarter.

"One of the things these guys are really good at is, we can watch a team and figure out what they like to do, and we can take it away," said Torisky, whose team came into Friday holding opponents to an average of just 35.9 points in 15 games since January 1. "At least that's our goal. In the first quarter, we weren't letting them penetrate into the lane. They were getting some tough shots down low and some threes outside that weren't falling, but for the most part they weren't getting layups at the basket."

"As the game went on, they got in there a little bit, but still not much. They made some tough shots, which they're capable of doing. I've watched them on film. We're not gonna stop those shots, but at least if we make them shoot a tough shot, we've got a good chance of getting it back."

To their credit, the Yellow Jackets picked things up offensively after their first-quarter goose egg, shooting 6-for-9 in the second quarter, 5-for-10 in the third and 6-for-7 in the fourth to finish the night at 17-for-31 (55 percent). The Tigers, meanwhile, made only one field goal (a three-pointer by Corum) in the first quarter and never really found a flow until the final period, when they shot 6-for-12 from the floor and 8-for-9 from the foul line to score 20 points—matching their total output from the first three quarters combined.

Red Bay shot 11-for-32 (34 percent) from the floor on the night, including just 3-for-13 from beyond the arc.

"Their pressure was great," said Weatherford, who hit his only three of the night in the second quarter and finished with seven points. "Their on-ball defense...they were pushing us off the three-point line as much as they could. It really just came down to execution. We didn't shoot it well at all. I don't know the numbers, but we didn't have a lot of shots go in for us."

The Tigers did shoot 15-for-20 from the foul line (with Ray going 7-for-8 and Allison 5-for-6), but Vincent hung in defensively and made the final play offensively to earn a win that Hadder knew would not come easily.

"We told our kids this game that we were gonna have to have some toughness," Hadder said. "That Red Bay bunch has been really good all year long. They're gritty, they're scrappy, they do things the right way. We knew we were gonna have to have a little bit of toughness and grit to grind this one out."

The grind is over for Red Bay (for now, at least), but Torisky was already reflecting on his team's accomplishments during a record-setting season while also turning an eye toward a future that looks extremely bright. Seniors Weatherford, Corum, Bays and Noah Brewer will graduate, but Allison, Ray and 6'5 sophomore Lane Shewbart lead a strong group of returners that should be joined at the varsity level by a wave of talent coming up from the program's lower levels.

Suffice it to say, Torisky expects the Tigers will get more chances to break through in Hanceville and earn their first regional tournament win since '95.

"Someone eventually will break through, but these guys started it all, of course," said Torisky, who has taken the Tigers from a 2-24 record in his second season (2016-17) to a total of 45 wins over the past two seasons. "We did a lot of things this year that we haven't done in a while. We won a county championship, we won an area championship, we broke the school record for wins—the list is endless. I told these guys, this is probably the second-hardest loss I've ever had. The first was losing in the state championship when I played on a last-second shot. So I can empathize with them."

"Just the journey that Gath and those three other seniors have been on is what I'll remember—where we started and where we ended. The guys behind them coming up...we're gonna keep getting stronger. These guys have just set the program up for success because of the way they work and do things. I hate it for them, but at the same time I'm already looking forward to next year, because I know we've got more coming through."

Ray led Red Bay on Friday with 13 points, nine of which came in the fourth quarter. Allison added nine points, and Corum and Weatherford scored seven apiece. Brewer and Tanner Hamilton each had two. Keith led Vincent with 15 points, and McGinnis added 12.

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