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## Russellville council approves sale of beer and wine for 306 Barbecue

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

The Russellville City Council approved an on and off-premise consumption retail beer and wine license for the 306 Barbecue set to open next month in the former Speedy Pig location.

The license, the first of its kind to be issued in Russellville, allows the sale of beer and table wine at the restaurant and the sale of beer (in unopened bottles) and wine (in unopened bottles) to drive-thru customers. The vote came during the council's May 21 meeting.

Before the vote, District Two Councilman Darren Woodruff asked

City Attorney Danny McDowell to clarify what would be authorized for sale under this type of license. Woodruff's concern was about open alcoholic drinks being sold through the drive-thru.

After the specifics of the license were clarified, Woodruff voted in favor of the motion.

In other agenda items, the council: —approved Nate Herring to fill the heavy equipment driver/operator for the city's Solid Waste Division, and declared a vacancy for Equipment Operator II in the Russellville Street Department.

—heard from Russellville resident Amanda Hernandez about her con-

See 'COUNCIL,' page 5

## Stutts announces intent to seek third term for Alabama Senate seat

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

We're inside of one year until Alabama's 2022 primary elections, so the time for rumors and speculation about who will run (and who won't) is underway.

Sen. Larry Stutts (R-Tuscumbia) confirmed to the *Franklin Free Press* last week he will seek a third term representing Alabama District Six.

Stutts, an Obstetrics and Gynecology Specialist in Sheffield, was first elected in 2014, when he defeated incumbent Sen. Roger Bedford in the general election. Stutts easily won the Republican nomination in 2018 and then defeated former Rep. Johnny Mack Morrow

in the general election.

With two terms under his belt, Stutts has built some seniority and that was reflected in his committee appointments. He serves as chairman of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee and vice-chair of the Health Care Committee.

Sen. Jim McClendon, who chairs the Health Care Committee, has announced he will not seek another term, so Stutts stands to receive that powerful appointment if he prevails in the 2022 election.

Though his tenure began in 2015 with some controversy when Stutts introduced a bill that would have repealed the right of a woman to remain in the hospital at least two

See 'STUTTS,' page 7

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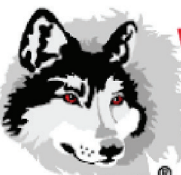
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**Jerry Ray Cummings**, 80, of Russellville, passed away on Thursday, May 20th. Interment at Knights of Pythias Cemetery.

**James Ralph Gandy**, 87, of Tharptown, passed away on Monday, May 21st. Interment at Tharptown Cemetery.

**Lillian Blake Wells**, 88, of Russellville, passed away on Saturday, May 22nd. Interment at Franklin Memory Gardens.

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## Hatton inks scholarship to join the Roar, UNA's competitive dance team

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

To say Destiny Hatton has a fondness for dance would be an understatement.

A respect? An appreciation? A yearning? You're still not there.

You'd have to start by describing the Russellville High School senior's relationship with dance as, at a minimum, a passion.

And Hatton will continue her passion at the University of North Alabama next fall after she signed a scholarship to be part of the Roar, UNA's competitive dance team/pom squad.

Hatton, seated with her parents, signed the papers at a ceremony in the RHS Fieldhouse Wednesday afternoon.

Hatton, who has been a cheerleader at Russellville since the seventh grade, served as varsity co-captain her junior year and, along with Leah Grimes, Hatton was captain this past season.

Hatton's talent for dance caught the eye of RHS Cheerleading Coach Stephanie Mayfield, who allowed Hatton to choreograph the varsity squad's Homecoming routine and new dances to band tunes both her junior and senior years. Hatton also created a hip-hop routine for the squad this year.

"She's been wonderful, so much so that I asked her to come back next year and do our Homecoming and revamp our hip-hop and dance routines," Mayfield said.

The Roar performs at UNA football and basketball games. Hatton's dance talents allowed her to be the first student coached by Mayfield to earn a dance scholarship.

Hatton is the daughter of Dennis and Loretta Hatton. She has one sister, Madelyn, and one brother, Dylan. Hatton plans to major in Criminal Justice at UNA. Loretta served as Chair of the Cheer Moms in 2019, and along with Amy Grimes, served as Co-Chairs this past season.

"It's no surprise Destiny has taken her love of dance to the next level," Mayfield said. "And her hard work and success receiving a scholarship shows our younger cheerleaders what can be available to them at the next level."

Hatton has been part of AFTT Studio for 12 years, both as a student and instructor, as well as a member of Glams.

"When I got the opportunity to choreograph our Homecoming dance our junior year, that really helped me realize how much I truly love dance," Hatton said. "I didn't know I could get a scholarship by making the dance team. Then I found out it pays around \$1,700-\$1,00 so that made it all the better."

"But I would have been happy just making the team with no scholarship," she added.



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PHOTO BY CHRISTIAN MEDINA

Alongside her parents and with her teammates and friends in the room, Hatton put pen to paper to sign on to join the UNA dance team/pom squad in the fall.

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# A 'Golden' dynasty: Heaps has Russellville baseball at Saban-like level

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

When Chris Heaps was hired nine years ago, nobody knew exactly what to expect from Russellville High School's new varsity baseball coach.

For 15 years, Heaps served as assistant baseball coach at Hartselle, working with Alabama's most successful high school coach, William Booth. Heaps was part of a program that won three state championships, so the winning pedigree was there.

But Heaps was limited on experience as a head coach, having coached one year at Central-Phenix City before coming to Russellville. It was a successful year, though, as his team went 31-16 en route to the Class 6A semi-finals.

With more than 80 applicants, then-Superintendent Rex Mayfield and the Russellville City Board of Education saw something they liked in the young coach. So they placed him in charge of a program hungry for success.

Mayfield recalled Heaps' interview and how he had a plan for the program that went beyond just wins on the diamond.

"His attitude really impressed me. He laid out a plan that was more than just baseball. It incorporated character and other things good for our community, our school and our baseball team," Mayfield said. "He went really deep in his first year at Phenix City and that impressed us as well."

Nine years and four state 5A championships later, the man who hired Heaps admits this level of success was beyond anyone's expectations.

"It's been fun to watch his teams, his demeanor and how he has handled the success of the program," Mayfield said. "He's done a great job. I don't think anyone in our community expected we'd be where this program is now.

It's been exciting to watch."

As he read a resolution honoring the 2021 RHS baseball team on another 5A state title, Russellville Mayor David Grissom borrowed one of Heaps' coaching adages: *Uncommon effort yields uncommon results.*

Just saying it doesn't mean anything—a coach's players must buy into the idea or it's just clever coach speak. And the Golden Tiger players have bought in.

And many have taken their games to the next level. Most years are a question not of if any Golden Tigers will sign scholarships, but how many will receive one.

For a school known for its football success, Russellville High School's baseball team has carved out its own identity and can accurately be described as a dynasty.

*Dynasty? Really?* Nick Saban has led the Alabama Crimson Tide to six national championships in 15 seasons, and most folks agree his program is in the midst of a dynasty.

Heaps has led his Golden Tiger teams to state titles in 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2021. Four championships in nine years (and that includes the canceled 2020 season). Dynasty seems fitting.

Coaches never like to compare one championship team to another. Each has its unique personalities and strengths. But this year, Heaps was able to celebrate the championship blue map with his sons, Brayden and Casen, sophomores on this year's team.

You might not realize Heaps is also a talented singer who can croon a George Strait hit with the best of 'em. It's just a pastime, though. Don't expect him to start winning Grammy awards.

But more 5A baseball titles? That's a lot more likely...

Send your guest columns, recipes, cartoon panels, letters to the editor and other creative submissions to [franklinfreepress@yahoo.com](mailto:franklinfreepress@yahoo.com).

For updates on news and sports throughout the week, don't forget to visit us online at [www.franklinfreepress.net](http://www.franklinfreepress.net)!

## FRANKLIN FREE PRESS

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The *Franklin Free Press* is published weekly by Pilati Investments, Inc. Our publication is mailed to our readers at no charge.

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To Whom it May Concern,

Sealed bids will be received by the Russellville City Board of Education at its office in Russellville, Alabama, until the above time and date, and then opened as soon thereafter as practicable.

Heath Grimes, Superintendent

The Russellville City Board of Education is soliciting bids on the following;

The sale of surplus real property known as College Avenue Elementary School, located at 515 College Avenue NW, Russellville, Al. 35653. No errors will be corrected after bid date and time. Russellville City Schools reserves the right to accept or reject any or all bids.

You are invited to bid with the following considerations;

This sale of property will include all three structures (the original school building, the cafeteria building and the old kindergarten building). Also, any property associated with said location owned by Russellville City Schools (Approximately 4.3 +/- Acres). The School Board is requiring bidders to include their plans for the property within their bid package. **The new owner must begin work to repair or demolish the structures within six months of the approval date of the winning bid by the Russellville City School Board.** If actions are not compliant within the six month time frame, the winning bid will be rejected and awarded to the second highest bidder or this bid process will be voided and a second bid process will be completed.

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## 'COUNCIL,' from page 1

cerns with the city's new animal ordinance. Hernandez asked council members to consider issuing permits for exotic animal ownership, rather than an outright ban on them.

Hernandez, who owns a miniature pig, pony, marmosets and rabbits, said she keeps her animals inside and/or confined in a hutch and she's never received any complaints from neighbors.

—authorized purchase of a MagneGrip Diesel Exhaust Extraction System for the Russellville Fire Station. A \$70,000 grant was received by the department from the Federal Emergency Management Agency. The city must match five percent, or \$3,500, of the grant. RFD Chief Joe Mansell said cancer rates are higher among firefighters and part of the reason is breathing in diesel exhaust while the trucks are running, but idle in the station. The new system will reduce exhaust and route it outside of the station.

—approved a proposal for bridge replacement on McGee Street over Payne Creek in District Three. The cost will be \$7,969.

—declared a fire truck surplus in the Russellville Fire Department and authorized the sale of the same. The department recently purchased a new fire truck for \$316,000.

—authorized the North Alabama Council of Local Governments to move forward with a grant application of the Transportation Alternative Program (TAP) Sidewalk and Pedestrian Improvement Project. The project would include sidewalks on Montgomery Street between Coffee Ave., and Jackson, and portions of Limestone Street between Washington Ave., and Coffee.

—approved resolutions and presented framed copies thereof to members of the Russellville High School boys soccer team, and RHS athletes on the girls varsity tennis team, boys track and field team and boys varsity golf team for their outstanding accomplishments in this year's state tournaments.

The next regular meeting of the Russellville City Council will be June 7, 2021, with work session at 6 p.m., and meeting to follow.

For news updates throughout the week, don't forget to check us out on the web at [www.franklinfreepress.net](http://www.franklinfreepress.net)!

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 In preparation for mowing season and before June 1, 2021, please remove all old flowers from the graves in the Mt. Pleasant Cemetery on Highway 724. Donations for upkeep are needed and may be mailed to: Mt. Pleasant Cemetery, 941 Highway 87, Russellville, Al., 35654.

 The Belgreen Boys Basketball Camp will take place June 7 and 8 at Belgreen High School Gym. The camp is for boys from grades K-6. The K-3 group will have camp from 8-10 a.m., and the 4-6 grade from 10-12. The cost is \$30 if you preregister by May 27. Cost is \$40 after May 27. Please make checks payable to Belgreen Boys Basketball. Camp will be run by head coach Marty Cooper and assistant coach Jennifer Cooper. The Coopers have more than 20 years college coaching experience. Belgreen varsity players will also assist. Free camp t-shirt with registration. Call Coach Marty Cooper with any questions at 1-662-790-3672 or email to martycooper@franklin.k12.al.us. There is an information sheet that must be submitted with the registration fee.

 Russellville Masonic Lodge #371 is selling Boston Butts Memorial Day Weekend. Butts are \$30 each and may be pre-ordered by dialing 256-810-1970. Pickup is Saturday, May 29 between 8-10 a.m., at the Lodge on Coffee Avenue.

 A Reunion for the Family of Rev. Sid Hawkins and Dora Thompson Hawkins will be held Saturday, June 12, at Spruce Pine Community Center, beginning at 11 a.m. Please bring a covered dish. Everyone is welcome.

 There will be a Yard Sale fundraiser for the Relay for Life on Friday/Saturday May 28/29, at Southside Baptist Church Youth House, 43 South, in Russellville. The Yard Sale will be from 8-2 Friday and 8-Noon on Saturday. Lots of good stuff at cheap prices!!

We love to hear from you! Please send your guest columns, cartoon panels, letters to the editor, recipes and other creative submissions to [franklinfreepress@yahoo.com](mailto:franklinfreepress@yahoo.com).

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# 'STUTTS,' from page 1

days after giving birth (Stutts later withdrew the bill and never reintroduced it), Stutts said he's enjoyed learning about the intricacies of state government and he believes the legislature has positively impacted Alabama residents' lives the past seven years.

"My background was in science and medicine. I did not know how the Department of Corrections worked or how to reduce the issue of recidivism or how to positively impact third-grade literacy levels," Stutts said. "Now, I sit down and talk with people daily about these and other important issues in our state. And we've made some real differences. Keeping recidivism down is the best way to reduce overcrowding in prisons. And the biggest factor to affect that number is getting these people jobs when they are released.

"If you don't have a job when you get out of prison, the recidivism rate is twice as high as those who are gainfully employed," he added.

The Legislature passed a bill two years ago that mandated if an inmate had a valid Alabama drivers license when he or she went to prison, that person will automatically have a temporary 90-day license upon release.

Stutts' voting record is based on what he believes the people of District Six want and what is in their best interests.

When Stutts voted against Alabama's 10-cent gas tax increase legislation in 2019, he knew that vote wouldn't sit well with Gov. Kay Ivey or the Republican Senate leadership. But he said almost every District Six resident who reached out to him about the bill was opposed to it.

"My biggest objection was the automatic increase. We shouldn't have a tax where it automatically goes up every couple years and no one has to vote on it or address the need to increase it," Stutts said. "It just keeps going up and that's wrong." Although the Legislature's 2021 session has ended, Stutts said there will be at least one special session called by the governor, as redistricting of district lines based on 2020 Census information must be approved this year.

Stutts said he hopes there is only one special session called and he believes there's no reason to limit a special session to one issue. Alabama gambling legislation, which died during the regular session, remains a hot topic, as does the state's prison overcrowding issues.

"We ought to be able to handled more than one thing in a special session. If we are called into special session, there ought to be two or three things on the agenda so we can address all of them while we're there," Stutts said.

While Ivey continues to negotiate private prison management with CoreCivic group, a June 1, 2021, deadline to line up that proposal looms. Stutts is skeptical of private prison management to begin with.

"Right now they don't have their financing lined up so I'm not sure any of

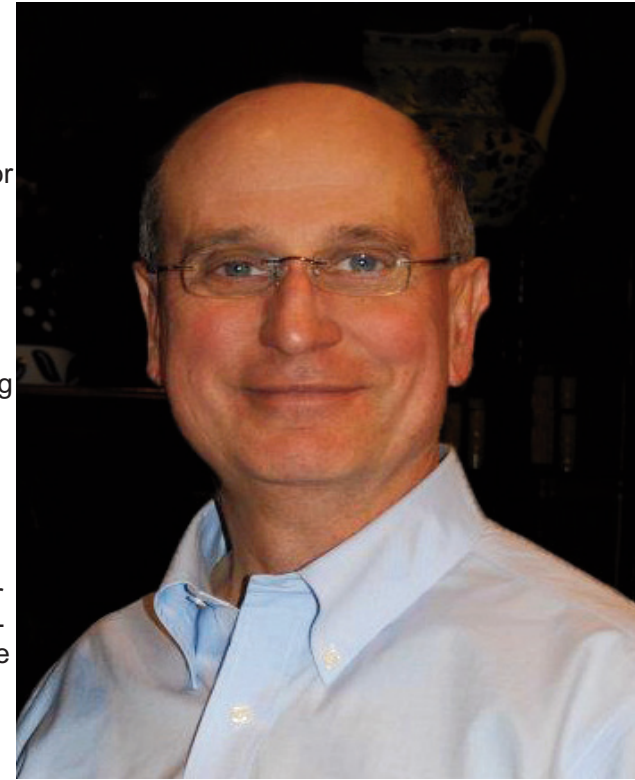
that will go anywhere or not," Stutts said. "I'm not in favor of it. I'm in favor of the state owning and running its own prisons."

He explained that some communities, like Hamilton, where Alabama's Aged and Infirmid Correctional Facility is located, see their prison as providing stable, good-paying jobs with very few problems, as inmates are often older or in poor health.

Conversely, in Elmore County, where the Elmore Correctional Facility is located, inmates often engage in violent behavior, including murder and escape attempts. Stutts said the prison is located on one end of the county, where most of its employees live.

Ivey's proposal calls for a mega prison to be constructed on the other side of Elmore County, and Stutts said that's being met with strong opposition from residents who don't want a prison in their backyard.

There remain many aspects of Alabama's prison problem to be resolved and Stutts said that should be addressed in the same special session as redistricting and/or gambling legislation.



Sen. Larry Stutts

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## RES Student Council project benefits St. Jude Children's Research Hospital

Submitted to the FFP

Our student council helps raise money for school-wide activities and service projects. For the end of the year project, the student council members decided to help Jill Bonds, a teacher at our high school, raise money for her St. Jude Marathon. Our school had a coin drop to help raise money for this cause. The students realized that change could add up to something big—saving lives. Lyza Herring, a third grade student, had a lemonade stand and donated all of her profit to the St. Jude fundraiser. Russellville Elementary students collected \$1351.91 to donate to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.

Russellville Elementary School Student Council with Jill Bonds and Caitlan Swinney, 4th grade student council sponsor

Jill Bonds, high school teacher Lyza Herring, 3rd grader who helped raise money with her lemonade stand Caitlan Swinney, 4th grade student council sponsor.



COURTESY PHOTO

RHS teacher Jill Bonds, left, Caitlan Swinney, 4th grade Student Council Sponsor at RES, right, with the RES Student Council.

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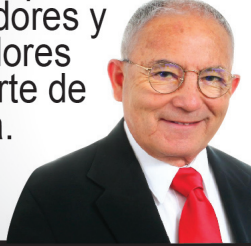
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## Bobcats capture first baseball state championship in sweep

Brady Petree  
 Franklin Free Press

You would be hard-pressed to find a high school baseball team in the state of Alabama that has played more games together than the Phil Campbell Bobcats varsity squad.

For a majority of the Bobcats, they have played baseball with one another in some capacity for a significant portion of their lives, ranging from t-ball all the way up to Thursday and Friday's state championship games with a flurry of summer league games wedged between.

Pouring the amount of blood, sweat and tears into a game alongside the same friends and teammates over the course of many years, there was only one goal left to accomplish together: win a state title alongside one another.

And the Bobcats achieved just that.

After beating Bayside Academy 5-0 in game one behind Mason Swinney's ten strikeout complete game shutout, the Bobcats went into Friday morning needing just one win to clinch the program's first-ever baseball state championship.

The Admirals jumped out to an early 4-0 lead after getting four runs off of Luke Barnwell in the top of the first inning to force the Bobcats to play catch up from the get-go.

And while they might not have found themselves in similar situations over the course of the season all too often, Raper had all the confidence in the world that somehow, some way, his guys would find a way to get the job done.

"Our motto is to keep battling and battling until you find a way to get things done and we did just that in the end. These young men have worked hard all year long and we've been in some challenging situations and they've been battle-tested before so I felt good about things if they were to get out of hand," Raper said.

And he was certainly right to have that level of confidence.

The Bobcats would quickly get two runs back in the home half of the first inning as Austen Baker would double home a run and later score on a passed ball to cut the deficit in half for the Bobcats at 4-2.

Bryant Anthony brought home the third run of the game for Phil Campbell via a sac fly to make it a 4-3 ballgame.

However, the Bobcats would have to mount an even larger comeback after Jake Devalk launched a two-run homer to left field to make it a 6-3 lead in favor of the Admirals.

Forced to then go into his stable of arms, Raper elected to go with Levi Crittenden. On the surface, that decision might not have been surprising as Crittenden possesses a solid arsenal of pitches with good velocity.

However, the junior righthander hadn't thrown a single pitch off the mound since late March.

See 'BOBCATS,' page 13

# STATE CHAMPIONS ONCE AGAIN

Golden Tigers sweep in 5A state championship series to bring home fourth title

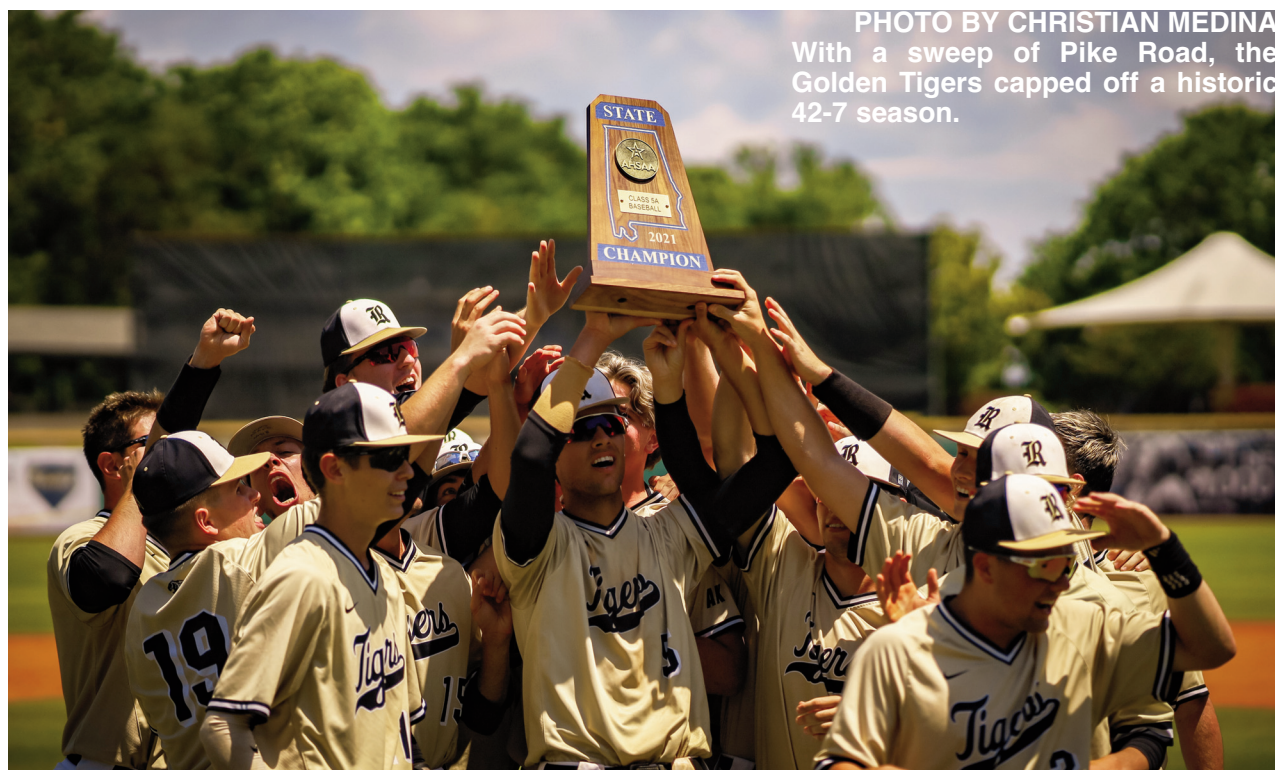


PHOTO BY CHRISTIAN MEDINA  
 With a sweep of Pike Road, the Golden Tigers capped off a historic 42-7 season.

Brady Petree  
 Franklin Free Press

Every team has that saying that they try to build their season around. Whether it's the clichés like "teamwork makes the dream work", "refuse to lose", or some other classic saying, behind every team is a mantra that speaks to what exactly that team is looking to accomplish over the course of their season.

The message for the Russellville Golden Tiger varsity baseball team in the 2021 season was focused around being "uncommon".

And while it might not be uncommon for this Golden Tiger program to find themselves vying for a state championship (of which they have played for in five of the past seven seasons), the way in which they manage to execute over the course of the season is very uncommon. Instead of relying on a high-velocity shut down kind of pitcher or one big bat to carry them through a series, the Golden Tigers focused on doing every small detail, down to the microscopic ones, at a nearly flawless rate.

And to be nearly flawless, you need all nine men on the field executing at a high rate, and that's just what the Golden Tigers got en route to the program's fourth state championship after a sweep of Pike Road on Tuesday morning in a 3-2 win in game two.

"Right when you walk into our facility, the first thing you see is, 'we before me'. Uncommon effort, uncommon attitude among these guys. No one cares about who gets the credit as long as the team does its job," Heaps said. "We have a lot of guys that did a lot of great things for us in this series. The big thing in our program is, there are no small roles. Every role is a big role and if you accept your role and you have the right attitude

and work ethic, we can attain uncommon goals."

Russellville turned to its senior right-hander Rowe Gallagher in game two in hopes of getting the win, and the sweep, to bring home a blue map.

After Pike Road jumped on the board in the second inning, scoring two runs with two outs to give the Patriots an early 2-0 lead, that prompted a visit from pitching Coach David Langston to try and settle his pitcher down.

And Langston worked some of his magic, staying true to form, and managed to get Gallagher back on track.

"When I went out and talked to Rowe today, he had not been throwing to lefties very well today. And in a situation like that, we were going to throw the ball off the plate and if you walk this lefty, you're going to come in and throw a slider to the next guy and Rowe executed it," Langston said. "Rowe is a very even-keeled player, that's his personality. I challenged him when I went out there to talk to him and he responded."

An unsung part of the Golden Tigers success has been the work that Langston has done with the pitching staff for Russellville. And more often than not, when the Golden Tiger on the mound needs a word of advice while struggling, Langston knew exactly what to say to get his guys back on track.

"It depends on who it is we have out there. Sometimes it is a very light situation to calm the guys down and be in the moment and enjoy it. And one thing we've talked about since we've gotten into the playoffs and we've had to go out there and calm some guys down, is that very same thing. Just enjoy the moment and get it done," Langston said. "For our staff, the one thing we've talked about is trust. I know we didn't throw all of our

See 'CHAMPIONS,' page 14



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# 'BOBCATS,' from page 11

So expecting a scoreless outing in game two of the state championship series might have been expecting a little too much.

But Crittenden took those expectations and crushed them into the dirt.

After coming in from rightfield to take over on the mound, Crittenden spun 4.1 innings of two-hit ball while holding the Admirals scoreless the rest of the way.

"I had it in the back of my mind that I might come into this game on the mound at some point. But all I do is throw strikes and as long as I do that, everything will work out," Crittenden said "It had been a few weeks since I last pitched but I came in focused on doing my job and I did my job. It's a great feeling to win a state championship. It's awesome."

While Crittenden was holding the Admirals at bay, the Bobcats still trailed 6-3 heading into the bottom of the third and were in desperate need of some offense if they wanted to make a clean sweep en route to their first title.

Enter Bryant Hyde and Trey Leindecker.

Hyde singled in a run on a fly ball to rightfield to make it a 6-4 game with Leindecker coming to the plate.

Hyde came away with a massive series at the plate for the Bobcats after going 3-7 with a pair of RBIs in two games to help pace the Phil Campbell offense.

"I tell myself to just go out there and hit the ball. Treat every game the same and don't let the moment overcome you and just play baseball how you know how," Hyde said. "It's really exciting to win it. It means the world to win it with my brothers. We pretty much spend six days a week with each other year-round so we're close. To win it with them just adds to that."

Leindecker, the designated hitter for the Bobcats, delivered with his most clutch hit of his Bobcat career.

Singling down the leftfield line, Ridge Raper and Bryant Hyde both came in to score to tie things up at 6-6.

And while Leindecker certainly possesses enough power to push one out of Riverwalk Stadium, and had he gotten the right pitch in the at-bat he just might have done it, he brought a more simplified approach to the plate with a potential tie game on the line.

"Just clear my head and hit the ball. That's really all that went into my approach," Leindecker said.

Leindecker is one of the aforementioned members of the Bobcats that has been apart of this group of teammates for years and to finally see the culmination of years of hard work come to fruition, leaves the senior at a loss for words.

"This is just crazy. There's really no other words for what I'm feeling right now. Winning a state championship is something you dream of since you're a little kid and now we've done it," Leindecker said.

And while things remained tied heading into the top of the fifth, the Bobcats were looking for a play to help swing the momentum back in their direction as they looked to take a lead for the first time in game two.

Then, on a ground ball to third that caught the Bayside runner in a rundown, the momentum changed in favor of the Bobcats.

The Admiral runner charged home and as Anthony received the throw, the runner lowered his shoulder in a violent collision at the plate. Called out on the play, the runner was also ejected from the game as everyone walked away free from injury of any kind.

With adrenaline coursing after the ejection, the Bobcats were in control and they never looked back.

After loading the bases in the home half of the fifth, Mason Swinney strolled to the plate looking for any way to bring home the run. And after working the count to 3-2, Swinney worked a walk to bring home Leindecker and more importantly, bring the lead to the Bobcats.

Swinney earned MVP honors for his work both on the mound and at the plate in the two games in Montgomery.

And for the junior righty, being able to walk in the go-ahead run and help bring home a blue map is a dream come true.

"It's awesome. We've worked so hard for this moment and it's finally here and it's just a dream come true for us," Swinney said. "The MVP is great but it's a team effort. We all battled and fought hard and got it done. Levi did amazing. We were down a few when he came in and he came in and filled up the zone and got us the win. He was great for us."

A one-run lead would prove to be enough as Crittenden would cruise the rest of the way and the Bobcats took game two by a final of 7-6.

For Bryant Anthony, who will be one of the key pieces coming back next season alongside (while also doing all the work behind the plate over the course of the playoffs), getting to work with a group of seniors like the Bobcats had this year will undoubtedly play a huge role in the program moving forward.

"It's always a dream in high school to do this and now we've finally done it. Just crazy. We all grew up together and we all played with the same coach together and it's special to win it with these guys," Anthony said. "We have

a ton of leadership on this team. Six out of the nine starters on this team are seniors. That's leadership. You couldn't really ask for a better group of guys."

Smiles and cheers of joy flooded Riverwalk Stadium after Levi Crittenden struck out Brett Nestsnde for the final out of game two in the 3A state championship series to give Phil Campbell the program its first state title.

However, there was no bigger smile than the one sported by Bobcat head coach Jonathan Raper.

For Raper, who finishes his tenth season at the helm of Bobcat baseball, following in his dad's footsteps of bringing home a state championship.

Raper's father Billy won a pair of titles while coaching girls basketball at Phillips High School in the 80's while Jonathan was front and center for the action.

"It's an unreal feeling and it's a special feeling. My dad had one and then I get to win one with my two boys on the team as well, it's just really special. I'm just really close to these kids because most of them have played ball with my two sons all the way up," Raper said. "We've just all been together so long and we've all been through so much that it's just a very very special feeling."

Raper's son Ridge, who would have gotten the start in game three if needed, will finish his career as a Bobcat on top of the 3A baseball world before departing for Wallace State in the fall.

And the fact that he capped off his career winning a state championship alongside his dad couldn't have ended in a more storybook fashion.

"It's special because his dad won some state championships and he passed away two years ago so we really wanted to come out here today and win it. We came up short in the semis in 2019 against Piedmont and two years later we finally got it done. It's an unreal moment," Ridge Raper said. "Before he passed away, we always talked about how he won his titles and how he hoped we would win one so we could tell our kids and grandkids about it. And so to get a championship right there with my dad next to me, is just unbelievable."

Baker finished the day going 1-4 with an RBI and a run scored while Raper also went 1-4 and one run scored to his credit. Hyde went 2-3 with two runs scored and an RBI while Leindecker went 1-2 with two RBIs and a run scored. Anthony didn't register an official at-bat as he worked a pair of walks and a sac fly but came away with an RBI on the day. Swinney went 0-2 with two walks and an RBI to finish the day.

On the mound, Crittenden finished with 4.1 innings pitched while allowing just two hits and one walk while striking out one.

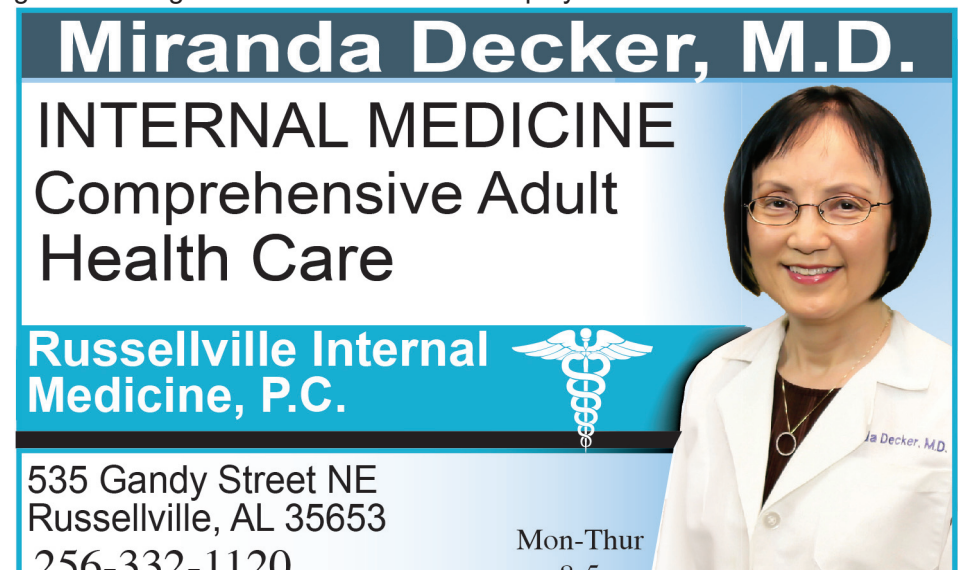
The Bobcats finished the year with a record of 40-5 while only dropping two games during the course of their historic playoff run.



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# 'CHAMPIONS,' from page 11

guys in the playoffs but over the course of the year we've used all of eight or nine of our guys and I've got a lot of trust in them and I feel like they have that level of trust in us as coaches."

After allowing two runs in the second inning, Gallagher was dialed back in. Gallagher spun an absolute gem in the end for the Golden Tigers, going six innings while allowing only three hits and two earned runs with five strikeouts on the day.

"Rowe's last two outings weren't ideal, but today he came out and did exactly what we thought he was going to do. He pitched a great game and Reed came in and did a great job closing it out for us," Heaps said.

For Gallagher, who will see his time at Russellville come to an end with a state title in hand, knowing that he was going to have to make adjustments in order to pitch deep into the game and give his team a chance at a sweep is something that he has done before. And according to the senior righty, facing a certain level of adversity is something he's no stranger to.

"It was just a crazy game. What we always say is we invite adversity to us and that's what we faced today. I faced some in the second inning and after that I just cleared my mind and told myself that I had to fight and whatever happened in the past is done and just move forward," Gallagher said. "I had to work a little bit on my two-seam fastball. Everyone that I walked or hit was a lefty. So I knew that if I just fixed that and kept going at them, things would be fine, and they were."

Russellville managed to get a run back in the bottom of the second inning after loading the bases. J.D. Bishop was hit by a pitch to bring home the first run of the game for the Golden Tigers and cut their deficit in half.

Both Gallagher and Clay Slagle (who got the start on the mound for Pike Road) held the opposing sides scoreless for the next three innings.

That's when the bats for the Golden Tigers finally came alive.

Going into the bottom of the sixth inning, with Pike Road needing just six outs to force a game three, the Golden Tigers needed something to get the offense going.

And after Cole Barnett notched a triple that went over the Patriot center-fielder's head, Russellville turned to a reliable bat off the bench in hopes of tying things up.

Andrew Hatton, who has seen a majority of his time this season come as a pinch runner and pinch hitter (including going 2-2 in his last two pinch hit opportunities), was called upon off the bench to get a hit to come through for the Golden Tigers in a crucial spot.

Hatton did just that – and more.

The junior infielder notched an RBI triple that got away from a diving right-fielder for Pike Road, scoring Cole Barnett and tying things up at two apiece.

"I was trying to go opposite field from the get-go. I didn't really have much time to think before the at-bat to be honest. I always just tell myself to be ready because I never know when that time is going to come and my number is called," Hatton said. "Winning this state championship is an amazing feeling. It's just so awesome."

Once their scoring threat was over after the two-run bottom of the sixth, Russellville called on Reed Hill to come on and slam the door on another state championship. And after sandwiching a double in between two strikeouts and throwing out a baserunner, the Golden Tigers were once again state champions.

Barnett, who went 3-3 in game two with a triple in game two, earned MVP honors for the series and kicked off the offensive attack for the Golden Tigers in the bottom of the sixth with his two out triple.

Coming into the inning, there was no doubt in Barnett's mind that somehow,

some way, the Golden Tigers would find a way to take the lead and take the game. And once his triple left the bat, only one thing was on Barnett's mind.

"Run. That's all I thought. I had just told the guys in the dugout that we are going to win this game because we love each other. There is no other reason besides the fact that we love each other more than you can ever love anyone in the entire world," Barnett said. "Those guys are my brothers and I would do anything for them. I just knew we were going to win. I didn't know how it was going to happen, I just knew that we were going to find a way."

And while the MVP plaque will look nice in the trophy case, it was the last thing that Barnett was concerned about.

"It's not about hearing my name said. It's not about this MVP. It's about the fact that this was the last ride with my best friends and we ended up on top," Barnett said. "There's not another team in the whole entire world that I would trade for these guys. We could've went 7-42 this season and I still would've loved these guys more than anything in the world."

Despite not notching a lead until they were down to their final four outs, Heaps kept a steady hand and lent a word of caution and optimism to his team and reminded them of what had gotten them to this point.

"The one thing I told our coaches and our players is, no matter what the score is or what the situation is, we've got seven innings to play and we're going to play those seven innings with a process that is conducive to winning," Heaps said. "We don't care about the score. We care about the process that we have, the attitude that we have and the love we have for our brothers and that's what makes us uncommon."

Looking for their first lead of the game, the Golden Tigers didn't look to put one into the gap or do too much. Instead, they did what they've done all year long: stick to a plan and execute.

So when Grayson Thorpe strolled to the plate, the junior outfielder already had his next action already planned out, courtesy of his skipper.

Thorpe managed to lay down a perfect push bunt up the first base side where he beat out the throw and more importantly scored Andrew Hatton and give the Golden Tigers the lead for the first time on the day.

"I told Grayson that in his next at-bat, no matter what the situation was, we are going to push bunt to first. I gave him a decoy signal and he did it any-

See 'CHAMPIONS,' page 15

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# 'CHAMPIONS,' from page 14

way. These guys are willing to do whatever it takes to help the team win," Heaps said.

Jackson Lindsey, who has been one of the senior leaders for an experienced Golden Tiger squad, game two might have felt like a little bit of a blur. And with the win in his final game as a Golden Tiger comes a bittersweet feeling along with it.

"It's a mixture of happiness with a little bit of sadness. The game moved by so quickly that we just looked up and it was already in the fifth inning. Cole came through for us with a big hit and Hatton comes through with a huge hit and all of a sudden it's the seventh inning and then I'm at the bottom of the dogpile," Lindsey said. "This is what we've been dreaming about doing since we were kids. Watching the three straight state championships, we said that's what we're going to do. It really didn't sink in until I came up and hugged my dad and just all the work we've put in pays off but in the end it's our last high school game as a team."

Canyon Pace, who came through with an RBI single in game one for the Golden Tigers and caught every game during the Golden Tigers' championship run, will certainly be one of the senior leaders for Heaps and the Golden Tigers next season.

According to Pace, while the Golden Tigers will certainly take time to celebrate their latest state title victory, it's never too early to begin putting in work for next season in order to try and make it back-to-back in 2022.

"My heart started racing near the end of the game but I never had a doubt once we took the lead. Andrew came through for us in a big way and he's always found a way. When he got that hit, I think it gave all of us a big boost of confidence to get the job done," Pace said. "One of the main things, especially this year, is the work we've put in. We've outworked everybody. We've worked nonstop and I think if we can do the same thing next year, we'll be right back down here."

For Heaps, he secures his fourth state championship with the Golden Tigers since taking over in 2013, heading into Tuesday morning's deciding game, he had one final message for his group.

To remind them of what they were playing for and what it truly means to be a Golden Tiger.

"I told our guys last night to look at all the kids looking through the nets

and the fence. Those are going to be future Golden Tigers and they want to uphold them standard. And no one wants to let down this standard. To be able to wear this Russellville jersey is a very proud thing and what it represents is bigger than me and bigger than them," Heaps said. "Our team is one of the most team-oriented groups that I've ever had. These guys love each other and what you saw today is the willingness to do whatever it takes."

Lindsey went 1-2 in game two with a walk while Nick Smith and Hill both went 1-3 on the day. J.D. Bishop also notched a hit on the day to go 1-1 along with his RBI on the hit by pitch. Hill got the save for Russellville after going one inning, allowing just one hit and striking out two.

Russellville finishes their year with a record of 42-7, becoming just the third team in program history to eclipse the 40-win mark.




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**Marty Cooper, Belgreen High School**  
**14420 Hwy 187, Russellville, AL 35653**

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