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Return of athletics part of major overhaul of NW-SCC

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

When former Northwest-Shoals Community College President Humphrey Lee announced the suspension of the school's athletic programs on March 21, 2011, it was a dark day for students, coaches and the northwest Alabama community. But weather changes. That dark day now appears brighter with the reinstatement of baseball and softball at NW-SCC coming as soon as the fall of 2022. Approximately 100 NW-SCC students were impacted by the elimination of athletics, which became effective in the fall of 2011. Those students comprised the school's men's and women's basketball teams,

cheerleaders, baseball and softball teams as well as women's volleyball, all of which were eliminated. In a 2013 interview, Lee told the *Franklin Free Press* the college's athletic programs would be reinstated by 2016. That year came and went, and Lee retired in 2017. His successor, Dr. Glenda Colagross, was asked by the *FFP* in late 2017 about the possibility of athletics returning to Northwest-Shoals. Colagross said the school would *have to have a real good recruiting effort to change the budget to include athletics*. That seemingly closed the door on the possibility of reinstating athletics at either of the college's campuses. And that door remained closed

See 'NWSCC,' page 9

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Commission approves increases in scrap tire, transfer station fees

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The Franklin County Commission approved an increase in scrap tire fees and transfer station fees at its September 20th meeting. Commissioners unanimously approved increasing the scrap tire fee to \$100/ton or \$2/per tire. Franklin County Solid Waste Manager Gene Ward said the revised fees are in line with those charged in Colbert and other nearby adjoining counties. When scrap tires are brought to the Franklin County Landfill, they are weighed or counted, depending on the quantity, and a fee is charged for

their disposal. Ward said tires are difficult to bury and with bulldozers going back and forth over the landfill, tires often come up out of the ground and must be buried again. The transfer station fees apply to household garbage that is transported to Morris Farms Landfill in Hillsboro. Commissioners approved an increase of \$3/ton, which raises the per ton cost to \$39. Household garbage is transported to the Franklin County Landfill by the cities of Russellville, Red Bay and Phil Campbell, along with Pilgrim's and a few other companies. The \$3/ton increase is the same increase imposed on Franklin

See 'COMMISSION,' page 8

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Margie A. Hill, 75, of Russellville, passed away on Friday, September 17th. Interment at Knights of Pythias Cemetery.

Gregory Charles Nichols, 63, of Red Bay, passed away on Tuesday, September 14th. Interment at Franklin Memory Gardens.

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Franklin BOE approves \$42.86 million budget

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The Franklin County Board of Education approved a \$42.8 million budget for FY 2021-22 at its September 14th meeting.

That represents the largest-ever budget for the system, surpassing last year's \$40 million threshold.

With anticipated revenues of \$42.55 million, and a \$135,000 surplus of other funding sources, the budget leaves a shortfall of approximately \$177,000, which will be made up out of the system's ending general fund balance, currently at \$4.56 million.

Alabama law requires each public school system to maintain a general fund balance of at least one month's operating expenses, approximately \$2.6 million for Franklin County Schools. The system will have more than \$1.5 million on top of that required amount in its ending fund balance on September 30, 2022.

Franklin County Schools Chief Financial Officer Carla Knight said the \$1.6 million increase over last year's budget was primarily due to the two percent pay raise received by all employees this year. Additionally, the system's unemployment rate increased due to COVID-19 claims, which also factored into the larger number.

Franklin County Schools Superintendent of Education Greg Hamilton told board members he was pleased with the system's fiscal health and that was the result of the collective hard work of school administrators, faculty, staff and students.

"I'm very happy with our financial condition and I appreciate the work Carla does each year with our budget," Hamilton said. "We continue to see solid financial numbers and, at the same time, expansion of our infrastructure. That results from the hard work of the people across our school system."

Revenue from the State of Alabama for FY 2021-22 is anticipated to \$28.17 million. Local revenues of \$7.99 million and federal revenues of \$6.19 million,

See 'BOE,' page 4

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'BOE,' from page 3

along with \$192,500 of other revenue sources, fill in the rest.

The majority of expenditures, \$22.13 million, are allocated to instructional services, with an additional \$4.935 million for instructional support services.

Operations and maintenance costs are estimated at \$3.97 million, with \$6.11 million for auxiliary services, \$1.63 million for general administrative services, \$1.74 million for debt services and \$2.34 million for other expenditures.

The system's projected enrollment is 3,412 students, down approximately 80 students from last year. Tharptown School enrollment (elementary and high school combined) is 878. Belgreen School (K-12) has 526 students. Phil Campbell has 413 in grades 7-12 and another 412 in K-6.

Franklin County Schools employs 545 total employees, including certified and support staff.

In other agenda items, the board:

—approved a memorandum agreement with the Franklin County Commission and Franklin County Sheriff's Office for two school resource officers for the 2021-22 year.

—approved out of state trips for Vina basketball to Tremont, Miss., on January 27, 2022, for games, Phil Campbell High School FFA to Indianapolis, In., for National FFA Convention October 26-29, Red Bay High School FFA to Indianapolis for National FFA Convention, and Vina softball tams to Belmont, Miss., for games on February 19 and March 8, 2022, and to South Walton Beach, Fla, April 1, Smithville, Miss., April 4 and Tremont, Miss., April 14 for games.

—approved a preliminary Teacher Excellence

and Accountability for Mathematics and Science (TEAMS) contract for Phil Campbell teacher Lucas Gilbert.

—approved a contract for speech and language therapy services with Ana Knight and Ashley Crosby at \$65/hour with travel expenses at the prescribed mileage rate.

—approved an agreement with ARC of Franklin County Sarah Dinsmore Center to furnish food service from October 1, 2021, through September 30, 2022.

—approved discontinuing the third Career Tech COVID-19 spacing bus mid-day route from Tharptown High School.

—approved a mandatory mask mandate for ten instructional days, on a school by school basis, if total absences of the student body at that school reach 15% due to COVID-19, influenza or other infectious outbreaks, if recommended by the superintendent. A vote by the board was unanimous and no further vote will be required in the event that the mask mandate is triggered.

—approved the following personnel moves:

—Resignation: Josie Dugan, part-time EL teacher, Tharptown Elementary, Mary Gonzalez, Child Nutrition Program Assistant, Belgreen School, effective Sept. 17, Allie Harris, EFJH elementary teacher, retroactive to July 22, Christopher Judd Franks, intervention aide, Tharptown High School, Lillian Torres, special education aide, Red Bay Elementary, retroactive to August 20, Darby Lindsey, Red Bay Elementary teacher and Savannah Latham, speech-language pathologist, Tharptown Schools, effective Sept. 11.

—Resignation in Supplement: Walker Kennerly, assistant baseball coach, East Franklin Junior High, retroactive to August 6, and Darby Lindsey, girls varsity basketball coach at Red Bay.

—Leave of Absence: Angie Bolton, Vina High School teacher, for medical leave for the 2021-22 school year.

—Retirement: Laurin Schultz, EL Instructional Aide, Belgreen, Phil Campbell School, effective November 1.

—Transfer: Traci Nolen, from Access Facilitator Aide at Tharptown High School to Intervention Aide at THS.

—Employment: Kim Coker, part-time special education teacher at THS, Dana Brewer, EFJH kindergarten teacher, Jenny Ergle, EFJH elementary teacher, Lori McDonnell, computer lab aide at Belgreen, Shonea Englethaler, special education teacher at THS, Rachel Doss, Child Nutrition Program Assistant at Phil Campbell School and Drenda Holland, Child Nutrition Program Assistant at Belgreen, Byron Gann, special education aide PCHS, Jessica Kennerly, special education aide BHS and Robert Langley, bus driver.

—Employment in Supplement: Brooke Williams, girls junior high basketball coach at Belgreen High School.

—Volunteers: Randy Pike, football coach at RBHS, Marty Guidry, girls basketball coach at BHS and Skeeter Benford, softball coach at PCHS.

—Child Nutrition Program Assistant Substitutes: Joann Wood and Erica Cothrum.

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Letters to the editor

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

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 **A** Foster Parent Training Course will be offered by the Franklin County Department of Human Resources starting Sunday, Sept. 12. The Sunday classes will be from 2-5 p.m., and will end on Sunday, November 14. Foster parent licensing requirements include being 19 years or older, passing a criminal background check for all household members 19 or older, clearance of state central registry on child abuse and neglect for all household members 14 or older, family stability, regular source of income, if married the marriage must be at least one year in duration. For more information, contact Leilani Johnson at DHR at 256-331-5940.

 **T**he Russellville Fire Department has started its annual Breast Cancer Awareness T-Shirt Sale fundraiser. Order forms can be picked up at either Russellville Fire Department locations. They are \$15 for short sleeve and \$20 for long sleeve, with an added \$2 for XXL and an added \$3 for XXXL t-shirts. First order will be sent out September 17. But there will be an additional order after that. All proceeds will go to Russellville Hospital fund for those who can't afford to have mammograms done.

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'COMMISSION,' from page 1

County by Miller Farms, so the county is passing on that increase to transfer station users.

When household garbage is brought to the landfill, it is weighed and dumped in trailers that are picked up by Miller Farms for transfer to Hillsboro.

The fee increases will take effect on January 1, 2022, Ward said.

In other agenda items, the commission:

—approved the resignation of Kellie Hargett (bookkeeper/accounting clerk) and Jenny Harris from the Franklin County Revenue Commissioner's office.

—approved the hiring of Ana Montes Lucas as a part-time employee in the Revenue Commissioner's office from September 27, 2021, through January 2, 2022, and approved the promotion of Yashica Nelson to bookkeeper/accounting clerk.

—approved the hiring of Ricky Johnston as heavy equipment operator in the Solid Waste Department.

—authorized soliciting bids for the purchase of a used dumpster truck.

—approved contracts with the Franklin County Board of Education for two school resource officers. One deputy will be paid entirely from school funds and the second SRO's salary and benefits are split between Franklin County and the Franklin County Board of Education, at \$24,000 apiece. The Franklin County Sheriff's Office provides the deputies' guns, ammunition, taser, vehicle and training.

—approved the promotion of Clint Holcombe to Lieutenant and Kyle Palmer to Sergeant in the FCSO.

—approved the resignation of deputy Kerry Hallman, effective August 31, and agreed to advertise the same.

—approved the employment of Joshua Singleton and Jered Yancey as Corrections Officers and Charlie Adcox as Dispatcher in the FCSO.

—approved the lowest responsible bid for resurfacing/stripping on County Road 40 to Rogers Group, at \$524,027. The portion of CR40 to be worked on runs from CR34 to CR83. A \$250,000 grant was previously received for this project, according to Franklin County Engineer David Palmer.

—directed Palmer and Assistant County Engineer Jason Baggett to review the county's subdivision regulations and work on revising them based on the form regulations available through the Alabama County Engineer's Association.

—approved a contract with Printers & Stationers, Inc., for office supplies at a 34% discount off catalog price.

—accepted the high bid of \$325 from Ray Grissom for a 1999 Ford Crown Victoria previously declared surplus inventory.

—appointed Jonathan Emerson to the Department of Human Resources Board.

—tabled an appointment to the Northwest Regional Library Board.

—accepted the resignation of Alan Rhudy from the Franklin County Water Service Authority Board and appointed Arlon Glasgow, Jr.

—reappointed Rhett Bradford and David Corum to the Franklin County Industrial Development Board.

—reappointed LaVon Duboise, Brent Jeffreys and Jerry Groce to the Northwest Alabama Council of Local Governments Board.

—approved a meeting schedule for 2022 with work sessions monthly on the second Monday at 5 p.m., and business meetings the third Monday of each month at 8:30 a.m.



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'NWSCC,' from page 1

until new NW-SCC Interim President Dr. Chris Cox confirmed Friday plans for athletics to be phased back into existence, starting with baseball and softball.

The return of athletics will be one part of a 'major overhaul' of both the Phil Campbell and Muscle Shoals campuses of NW-SCC, Cox said.

"I don't want anyone to think our plans to return athletics will overshadow academics," Cox said. "Our students' education and preparation for their careers is what's most important. I would not be talking about athletics if we didn't have a plan to make sure all our classrooms are state-of-the-art. The academic side of this will take a little longer because of the amount of work that has to be done."

Cox said the Phil Campbell campus will see a 'complete remodeling' of all buildings. What that will look like has not yet been decided, but the plan involves the campus 'looking like brand new,' Cox explained.

"I can't share all we're doing because we're still doing some research. In the near future, we'll announce how much funding we'll receive at Northwest-Shoals and a portion of those dollars will be used for projects at the Phil Campbell campus," Cox said. "There will be more money poured into the Phil Campbell campus since it was built. We'll have that campus looking like brand new in the next few years and we hope that settles concerns about whether we are looking to shut down in Franklin County."

As for athletics, administrators believe the athletic fields for baseball and softball can be prepared for competition the fastest, so those sports will return first.

"We will implement two sports (baseball and softball) at the beginning, see how it goes, with plans to implement more sports as we move forward," Cox said. "We've done a thorough evaluation of our facilities. We looked at the ball fields and gymnasiums, and the sports that seemed to be the quickest to get going and showed the most interest from local high schools were baseball and softball. That's a way for us to get it kicked off."

Cox said both baseball and softball will be based on the Muscle Shoals campus where all home games will be played.

Franklin County Superintendent of Education Greg Hamilton, who played baseball at Northwest-Shoals, met with Cox last week as part of the interim president's plan to meet with all local superintendents. Hamilton liked what he heard.

"I was very impressed and pleased to see his support of Northwest-Shoals Community College and our local school systems," Hamilton said. "That's exciting news for us. To hear the possibility of sports coming back, from a former player's vantage point, is really exciting. There's a lot of talent in Franklin County that can contribute not only academically but athletically at the next level."

NW-SCC officials will consult with the National Junior College Athletic Association to make sure all guidelines for the return of athletics are followed. Cox has met with facilities officials and there was a consensus that the athletic fields will be ready by next year.

A search for an athletic director will begin soon with plans to hire coaches after that. Reinstatement of men's and women's basketball, women's volley-

ball and cheerleading will take place in phases.

The gym in Phil Campbell has been evaluated and repairs on the roof are underway. Cox said a decision about the floor will be made after determining whether the rubber surface is compliant with the NJCAA. New bleachers are possible once the roof repairs are complete.

"We also want to research getting air conditioning in the (Phil Campbell) gym building," Cox said. "We want it to be a place the community can use and a place where games may be played in a comfortable environment," Cox said.

Although there will not be separate athletic teams for each campus, Cox expects that basketball and volleyball games will be played in both the Muscle Shoals and Phil Campbell gyms.

Cox was named interim president last month, after Colagross was abruptly dismissed on August 17. Cox, who served as Special Assistant to the Chancellor at the Alabama Community College System, will not be a candidate for the permanent NW-SCC president.

"I work at the Alabama Community College System so that's not a goal of mine," Cox said.

"The goal for me is, in the interim, to keep things moving at Northwest-Shoals Community College, get better every day until it's time for the chancellor (Jimmy Baker) and the board to get a new president in place."

Cox previously served as Interim President at Lurleen B. Wallace Community College and Beville State Community College. Cox said he had no part in the dismissal of Colagross.

"When I came on a Thursday, I'd found out that Tuesday I was coming to Northwest-Shoals," Cox said. "I wasn't part of the decision making process or anything such as that."

"When I hit the ground on that Thursday, I reassured the faculty, staff and administration I was there to support them and support the institution. We've really not reflected on personnel decisions or anything related to those decisions. The team here is doing great work as they always have," he added.



COURTESY PHOTO
Beginning with baseball and softball, Cox says that sports will be returning to NW-SCC as soon as fall of 2022.



Willodean's
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Tune in to WGOL 100.7 FM to hear "Real Estate Tips with Willodean" weekdays at 8 a.m. and 12 p.m. Davis is the owner/broker of Davis Realty & Associates in Russellville.



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Week six Franklin County high school football preview

Brady Petree
 Franklin Free Press

Last week, Franklin County teams went 2-2 on the week with one of those wins and one loss coming at the hands of some county-on-county matchups with the Red Bay Tigers beating region rival Tharptown.

The Tigers will have a bye week this week, their last of the season, but every other team in Franklin County is currently slated to square off on the gridiron this Friday night.

With two schools testing themselves against higher-classified squads and two schools looking to get back on the right track in the 2021 season, there will be plenty of action for football fans to look forward to this Friday night.

Russellville at Hartselle

Last year, the only regular season loss (outside of the final regular season game being forfeited due to COVID-19) for the Russellville Golden Tigers, was a 38-14 loss to the Hartselle Tigers.

Fast-forward one year later and both teams will be looking to avoid their first loss of the season as both go into Friday night sitting at 5-0 so far.

Russellville has shut out both of their previous two opponents (Brewer and Lawrence County), and are on a roll offensively as well, outscoring opponents in those two games by a score of 95-0.

During the 2021 season, Russellville has outscored their opponents 211-62 while sitting on top of 5A region 8.

Hartselle, on the other hand, began their season

See 'PREVIEW,' page 14

Rising to the challenge

With a win over Lawrence County last Friday night, the Golden Tigers have essentially clinched a playoff spot. Now they turn their focus towards this weeks matchup against Hartselle looking to improve in all facets.



PHOTO BY CHRISTIAN MEDINA

The Golden Tigers are averaging a whopping 42.2 points per game while only allowing an average of 12.4 points per game on defense.

Brady Petree
 Franklin Free Press

RUSSELLVILLE - Through five weeks of the high school football season, one thing is very apparent: Russellville can beat you a plethora of ways.

With weapons aplenty in the backfield, under center, on the offensive line, and a robust receiving core, there's no wonder as to how the Golden Tigers offense is lethal... and one that opposing teams should be on notice for.

Averaging an incredible 42.2 points per game en route to a 5-0 record on the season, the Golden Tigers have eclipsed the 40 point mark in every game except one, the season opener. And that

scoring surge continued as Russellville routed Lawrence County through a rain delay and a soaked field to come away with a 43-0 victory, clinching a playoff spot in the process.

The defense in recent years has been the calling card for the Golden Tigers. And don't get it twisted, the defense has been special in and of its own right, posting back-to-back shutouts to bring the points allowed on the season to an average of 12.4 points per game for Russellville.

But the increase in offensive output, and simply put, the simplicity in which the offense finds ways to score, just adds another thing that opposing teams have to worry about when facing the Golden Tigers.

See 'CHALLENGE,' page 13

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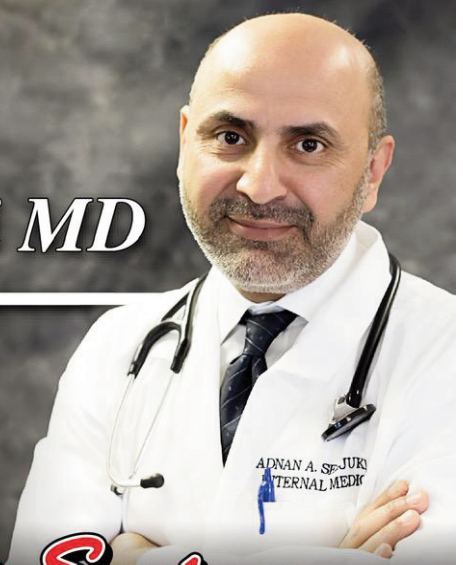
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'CHALLENGE,' from page 11

"I thought we played extremely well and we were very balanced. I think we had 225 yards or so through the air and 200 yards on the ground," Ritter said. "Gabe distributed the ball extremely well and the offensive line did a great job. We pass protected much better overall and I thought we did a good job getting into a good rhythm and were able to do a lot of different things."

The offense, despite the weather leaving the field in less than ideal conditions, got its usual help from the typical suspects such as Arrieon McCulloch and TJ King, but there was a new face thrown into the mix for Ritter and his staff to work with. Wenonah transfer Randall Johnson, who got his first start as a Golden Tiger last Friday night, made his presence felt almost immediately as the wideout tallied two touchdowns through the air during his first game with Russellville.

Having receivers the likes of T.J. King, Bralynn Vincent and Nick McSpadden are dangerous enough in its own right. But if last Friday night was any indication of the impact that Johnson will have on the offense, the potential is there for this Russellville offense to be one for the books.

"With the injuries on defense, we had to put Taylor Crumpton over at the corner. Braylin Vincent and Nick McSpadden have both done a really good job at wideout but the only thing they really lacked was experience," Ritter said. "And now with Randall out there along with those two and T.J, Randall brings a little bit of a different type of weapon than those other guys and when you throw all four of them into the mix, we've got four to five guys that we feel really good about at the wide receiver spot."

And as mentioned above, the defense has been otherworldly in their own right with back-to-back shutouts for the first time this season.

Despite losing multiple seniors both up front on the defensive line and in the secondary, the Golden Tigers have done a phenomenal job in limiting the opposition.

Through five games, the Golden Tigers have allowed more than 15 points in a game once, against Deshler.

The resilience of a defense that had as much turnover in the offseason as the Golden Tigers' did has been a welcomed development for Ritter and his staff.

"With the exception of a few plays we played lights out on defense. They (Lawrence County) threw a couple of different looks and it took us a drive to adjust, just like it takes most people to adjust," Ritter said. "After we adjusted and kind of settled down and got into the rhythm of the game, we were able to stop the run consistently and make some plays with some interceptions and fumbles and really just played a well-rounded football game."

With the win over Lawrence County, the Golden Tigers have essentially clinched one of the four playoff spots in 5A region 8 with a region title in their eyes in the coming weeks.

Clinching a playoff spot this early in the season is sure to alleviate some of the stresses that come week-to-week.

But don't think that the Golden Tigers plan on taking their foot off the gas just yet.

"I think it takes some of the pressure off. We're in the playoffs now, it's just a matter of playing for seeding whether we're going to be first, second, third or fourth. The key for us is just to stay focused on keep getting better and developing what we've got and continue to improve each week," Ritter said. "If we do that the seeding and region championship will sort itself out. This week we're 100% focused on Hartselle and going out and putting together four good quarters against a premier 6A school."

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See 'CHALLENGE,' page 15

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'PREVIEW,' from page 11

Hartselle, on the other hand, began their season with back-to-back shutouts of Austin and Mae Jemison by a 70-0 margin. The Tigers last three matchups, the last of which was forfeited by Columbia due to COVID, Hartselle has gone 3-0 while outscoring opponents 77-35.

Hartselle has outscored their opponents 148-35 as they lead 6A region 8.

The Golden Tigers have owned the all-time series against Hartselle, going an astounding 24-10-1 over the course of the series history. However, Hartselle has had the upper hand in recent memory, taking the last four matchups dating back to 2013.

Phil Campbell vs. Haleyville

The Bobcats secured a crucial region victory two weeks ago with a 37-14 win over Clements which gives them an edge in the 3A region playoff picture so far.

This week, following a bye, the Bobcats will be looking to square off against a higher classification in Haleyville, in hopes that the challenge will pay off come playoff time.

Phil Campbell sits at 3-1 on the season with the only loss coming to Lamar County by a 7-0 final, while beating the likes of Elkmont, Phillips and the aforementioned Clements.

En route to a 3-1 record, the Bobcats have outscored their opponents 119-29, good for an average of 29.7 points per game.

Haleyville has had a rough go of it so far in 2021, with their record being 1-4 with the lone win coming against St. John Paul II.

The Lions were shutout 38-0 in their matchup last Friday night against Gordo. On the season, Haleyville has been outscored by opponents 169-83.

In terms of the all-time series, Haleyville has been in control, going 44-9 in a series dating back to 1928. The Lions have taken the last seven matchups with the Bobcats last win coming in 2001.

Tharptown vs. Cherokee

After going 2-0 to start the season, the Wildcats have hit sort of a skid, dropping their last three matchups against Colbert County, Lexington and Red Bay.

Sitting at 2-3 on the season, Tharptown has been outscored by their opponents 190-37 on the season.

The Wildcats two wins on the season have come against Shoals Christian and Phillips.

Cherokee has had a much worse go of it in 2021, as they currently sit at 0-4 while being outscored by a whopping margin of 188-28 with losses to Sumiton Christian, R.A. Hubbard, Shoals Christian and Hackleburg.

Both teams met in 2020 for the sixth time in the series' history. A game in which the Wildcats won 48-0. However, Cherokee owns the all-time series with a record of 5-2 with the first matchup coming back in 2012.



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'CHALLENGE,' from page 13

The Golden Tigers will face their toughest test to date this Friday night as they'll make the 37-mile trip to Hartselle to square off against the undefeated 6A Tigers in a battle of unbeaten.

Last year, the Golden Tigers came away with their first loss of the season as they hosted the Tigers. And despite the loss, Ritter felt as though the matchup was a significant turning point in the season for the squad that managed to reach the 5A quarterfinals.

While Ritter and his staff would certainly take an opposite outcome here in 2021, they would also be pleased if this matchup once again served as a sort of "launching pad" to propel the Golden Tigers to another level in preparation for the second half of the season and beyond.

"We're going to use this game to improve and as a measuring stick. I really felt that the Hartselle game last year really changed the trajectory of our season. We identified some issues we had defensively and offensively and fixed them," Ritter said. "And so we were able to win six in a row to close out the year off and make a quarterfinals appearance and it was the Hartselle game that I really felt like changed how we did things. That's why we scheduled them two years ago. Because we wanted to play a top-tier 6A program at home here at Russellville and on the road that way we can identify some problems and see how we stack up against a really good team."

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