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Cadence Baker tabbed to headline 13th annual Jam on Sloss Lake

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Muscle Shoals native and *American Idol* Top 20 finalist Cadence Baker will headline the 13th annual Jam on Sloss Lake, set for Monday, July 4 in Russellville.

Baker, 19, is the granddaughter of Grammy-winning songwriter Gary Baker, and the daughter of Shane Baker, former lead singer for the Christian rock band Cadence. She will headline an evening of local music leading up to a fireworks show around 9:30 p.m.

Baker will follow Joseph Baldwin and Austin Bohannon, who will open the headliner set with plans to join Baker on stage for a few songs.

The annual event is sponsored by the City of Russellville, along with the Russellville Water and Sewer Board, Electric Board and Gas Board.

The Jam on Sloss Lake will be a full day of activities, food and fun, starting with the Cotton Flats Cruisers Car Show, from 7 a.m.-1 p.m. The new Russellville Splash Pad will be open extended hours from 10 a.m.-8 p.m., and there will be inflatables for kids to play on. Several food vendors will be on site throughout the evening.

Music begins at 5 p.m., with the gospel group Purpose. Rewind will take the stage at 6, followed by the Kerry Gilbert Band at 7:05. Baldwin, Bohannon and Baker will perform

See 'BAKER,' page 9

Indictments handed down in death case of four-month-old child

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

When the Red Bay Police Department received a call on March 9, 2022, to come to Red Bay Hospital in regard to the death of a four-month child, Chief Janna Jackson and her officers had no idea what to expect.

What investigators discovered over the next two months was a scandal at Red Bay's Tiny Tigers Day Care that included five people involved in the improper care of the infant, lies about who was supervising the child and where the child had been placed, coercion toward employees to change their stories to police and falsification of records to show eligibility of several employees who were not in fact approved by the State of Alabama.

Those alleged crimes, before, during and after the death of Autumn Wells, were presented to the Franklin County Grand Jury last month. Five people were indicted for various crimes, including Tiny Tigers owner Angelene Chamblee, and employees Payton Nicole Gann, Madison McCalpin, Teia Kay Gann and Hannah Grace Letson.

The most serious charges of Manslaughter, a Class B felony, are pending against Gann and McCalpin, alleging they caused Autumn's death by "placing said infant on her stomach and/or allowing her to remain on her stomach on a Boppy pillow for an extended period of time."

A Boppy pillow is a semi-circular pillow that supports an infant during

See 'INDICTMENTS,' page 7

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Gerald Ray Hester, 75, of Russellville, passed away on Wednesday, June 15th. Interment at Belgreen Cemetery.

Cedric Leon Prince, 83, of Russellville, passed away on Monday, June 13th. Interment at Franklin Memory Gardens.

Margaret Jane Wellington, 72, of Russellville, passed away on Tuesday, June 14th. Interment at Franklin Memory Gardens.

For updates on news and sports throughout the week, visit us on the web at www.franklinfreepress.net! Send your guest columns, recipes, cartoon panels, letters to the editor and other creative submissions to franklinfreepress@yahoo.com.



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Baggett hired as new Franklin County Engineer

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The Franklin County Commission approved a four-year contract to employ Assistant County Engineer Jason Baggett as Franklin County Engineer to replace the retiring David Palmer.

Baggett's new position will begin July 1, 2022, with Palmer's last day of work being June 30, 2022.

Baggett was hired as Franklin County's Assistant County Engineer in March 2021. He came to Franklin County from the Shoals-based Civil Group, where he was a senior engineer.

Although Baggett was not guaranteed the County Engineer job when Palmer retired, his hiring came with the plan that he be a front runner for the position if his time as Assistant County Engineer demonstrated he could handle the job.

The commission unanimously approved Baggett's hiring at its business meeting on June 17th.

His salary will be \$115,804.80 per year, with Franklin County being responsible for 30 percent of that amount, and the State of Alabama paying the remainder through reimbursement to the county.

"I'm grateful for this opportunity and I look forward to the challenges this job brings. I've enjoyed working with you the last year and a half and I realize taking over for David Palmer is a huge challenge," Baggett said. "I will work hard for you and the people of Franklin County and I appreciate your trust in me."

Baggett is a 2002 Rogers High School graduate. He earned his Associates Degree in Business Administration from Northwest-Shoals Community College before attending the University of Alabama, where he graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering, with a minor in Construction Engineering.

Baggett went to work for Bhate Geosciences after graduation. Bhate is a geotechnical and materials engineering firm that tests concrete and soil at construction sites. He joined Civil Group in 2012.

He and his wife Allie live in Killen. They welcomed the birth of their first child, Ruth Ann, in February. Allie works as Assistant Human Resources Officer with TNT Fireworks.

Baggett said he and his family will move to Franklin County, honoring a commitment he made when he was hired to relocate if he became Franklin County Engineer.

Commissioners also approved a resolution honoring Palmer for his 31

years of service to the citizens of Franklin County.

Other agenda items at the commission's June 17 meeting included:

—approving Commissioner Joseph Baldwin as ACCA Legislative Committee Member from Franklin County.

—approving a lease agreement with Macedonia Baptist Church to be a polling place for the Primary Runoff Election on Tuesday, June 21.

—increased the mileage reimbursement for county employees to \$.625 per mile, consistent with the state reimbursement.

—approved payment of an annual fee of \$4,650 for the AlertSense emergency monitoring app.

—authorized Franklin County Emergency Management Agency Director Mary Hallman-Glass to apply for a Homeland Security Grant.

—authorized advertising for bids for the Highway 34 bridge replacement project.

—approved the resignations of Jared Yancey and Lance Biddle as Corrections Officers/Dispatchers and authorized the advertisement of the same.

—approved the hiring of Rikki Tharp, Wyatt Burnett, Greg Smith and Madison Kimbrough as Corrections Officers/Dispatchers.

—approved the resignation of Zack Motes as Assistant Solid Waste Superintendent and the promotion of Ricky Johnston to that position. Matt Miller was promoted to Heavy Equipment Operator and the county will advertise for one Heavy Equipment Operator position. Commissioner Jason Miller abstained from the vote on Matt Miller.



COURTESY PHOTO
Baggett, pictured above with his wife Allie, will take over as Franklin County Engineer on July 1, 2022.

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My take on this... Why act so serious?

Being a parent who takes her responsibilities seriously leads me to the question of 'what does that mean?' Does the parent ever laugh? Is there no room for a child's mistakes? Is there no such thing as a child having an idea or opinion of their own? How serious is serious?



Gail Motes

What about someone who says there is no need of taking life too seriously because you'll never get out of it alive anyway? Well, what does that mean?

When someone asks you, "Why do you always act so serious?" Well, I don't get asked that. I'm asked why I never get serious about anything.

I've even heard some ask another if they ever had a serious bone in their body not one time ever in biology. Did I ever learn about a serious bone? It might have been mentioned when I was talking and didn't hear it, but I seriously doubt it, don't you?

When a conversation begins with, "Now, I'm serious"... that's not usually one I'm looking forward to. "Serious matters" usually end up needing a lot of deep thinking, being very time consuming and something I don't want to discuss at that specific time. It's also a very good possibility I won't be able to get serious.

I know a few people who remain in the "serious mode" all the time about everything. You will not see me around those type of people often or for an extended time limit. My personality tends to annoy them when I linger too long.

As a matter of fact, that's when I'm often asked if I ever get serious at all. Well, of course, I do! Only when it's absolutely necessary and I will find something humorous about something that's sad before the conversation has ended.

I've been around people who didn't understand my "warped" sense of humor. I have always been amazed by them. It's like being given my favorite

toy. It's so much fun to play with. It enriches my imagination. Yes, I'm serious!

I find a lot of things in my life to be entertaining. Words bring about thoughts and emotions, and of course people do also.

I enjoy saying or doing unlikely things to see how people react. Response or actions with no response have always been interesting. It's nothing I do in malice. I'm certainly not serious about it, but it can be fun when taken seriously.

Maybe I've caused you to consider what the word "serious" means to you. Just now, you don't have to get serious about it if you don't want to.

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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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Correction Policy

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

Letters to the editor

The *Franklin Free Press* is published by hometown people, for hometown people.

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

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

There will be an Antique Tractor Show as part of the City of Russellville's Fourth of July Jam on Sloss Lake. The Antique Tractor Show will be held at Sloss Lake from 7:30-2 on July 4. If you're interested in bringing a tractor to the show, call Jacob Murray at 256-668-7607.

The NACOLG Seniorx – Medicine program is a program for free and low-cost medications for the uninsured, underinsured, Medicare coverage gap or disability waiting period. For more information, contact NACOLG Seniorx today. There is no charge for this service. 1-800-AGELINE (1-800-243-5463) Paula Pardue 256-389-0529.

A Fish Fry Benefit will be held for Mary Jo Beecher, a five-year cancer survivor, on Saturday, June 25. The event will be at the Hillman Pavilion, 901 Mullins Ave, from 11-3. Plates are \$15 and include fried catfish, baked beans, slaw and a drink. Call ahead for larger orders by calling 256-460-1195. Delivery is available.

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'INDICTMENTS,' from page 1

breast feeding or supervised 'tummy' time for a short period, with a recommended time of five to no more than 20 minutes.

Gann and McCalpin are accused of leaving the infant face-down on the pillow and covering her with a blanket. According to coroner and autopsy reports from the State of Alabama Department of Forensic Science, the infant had been dead for at least an hour before she was taken to Red Bay Hospital.

Both women are also charged with the misdemeanor offense of False Reporting to Law Enforcement for allegedly giving misinformation to Red Bay Officer Kyle Gober.

Tiny Tigers Day Care was closed by the State of Alabama shortly after the infant's death and has not reopened.

Chamblee, who owned the day care, was charged with six counts of Child Care Act Violations, based on not hiring and staffing the facility with eligible workers, and two counts of Forgery Second Degree, a Class C felony, for allegedly falsifying letters that stated employees Anna Belle Spence and Kaitlyn Avary Garette had been approved through criminal history background checks that were never done.

Gann faces one count of Tampering with a Witness for allegedly inducing McCalpin to lie and say the infant was placed in a swing and not on a Bobby pillow.

Letson's charge of Tampering with a Witness is based on the allegation she attempted to induce Tiny Tigers employee Kaylie Lawler to say she was in the room with the infant rather than McCalpin. Letson also was indicted on one count of Tampering with Physical Evidence for throwing away medications she believed were in violation of state Department of Human Resources regulations.

Franklin County District Attorney-Elect Jeff Barksdale said the cases will likely not come up for trial until next year. Barksdale explained that there's a massive amount of evidence that will have to be reviewed prior to trial.

"Both departments did a phenomenal job investigating the death of Autumn Wells and the extensive reports, records, witness statements, reenactments and other evidence collected by investigators with these agencies was presented to the May 2022 Franklin County Grand Jury," Barksdale said.

In March, Jackson told the *FFP* that a Tiny Tigers employee and Chamblee drove the child to the hospital in a private vehicle.

The department conducted a reenactment of events leading up to Autumn's death. It was through that reenactment that evidence was revealed that Gann had given false information to investigators. She became the first person charged with an offense related to the incident.

Celebrating with class



CELEBRATING WITH CLASS: The Russellville High School Class of 1953 held its annual reunion at 43 Grill earlier this month. Next year, the class will hold its 70th reunion! Pictured above are, front row, from left: Bill and Bea Bowen, Jerry James, Curtis and Chloe Lowery. Back Row, from left: Barbara and Tommy Warhurst, Hazel ames, JB and Beth Robinson, Eyvon and Rosie Holden, Glenda and Dan Long.

COURTESY PHOTO

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Dizzy Dean's Fireworks to light 1,000,000 fireworks at grand opening

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

If your dog hates the sound of fireworks, don't take him to Winfield this weekend.

Dizzy Dean's Fireworks, Northwest Alabama's only fireworks Super Center, will host a special day of fun at its Grand Opening this Saturday, June 25, including the explosion of 1,000,000 fireworks, along with 1 bottle rocket!

The promotion will be part of free public event hosted by owners Glenn and Lavonda Dodd. Visitors can enjoy food plus live music from Nikki Moore from 6-8 p.m., and after the fireworks explosion, a grand finale of aerial fireworks. And of course Dizzy Dean's Super Center will be open for business, both before and after the event, with their famous *Buy One, Get One Free* on everything in the store.

The 1,000,000 firecrackers explosion (and one bottle rocket) will be an Alabama first, Dodd said.

And Dizzy Dean's grand opening continues into the weekend of July 1-4. On Saturday, July 2, Alabama football legend Tyrone Prothro will be at Dizzy Dean's with merchandise to sell and autograph starting at 12 p.m. Shoppers will also enjoy free popcorn, the giant 8-foot prize wheel and a massive 'Disco' firecracker, all part of Dizzy's Dean's 'Explosion of Fun!'

On Monday, July 4, Green Top BBQ will have its food truck at Dizzy Dean's throughout the day.

Dodd, a Winfield native who looks for inventive ways to promote his business, opened his first fireworks store in his hometown more than 20 years ago.

Dodd was living in Huntsville where he and Lavonda worked as youth pastors. Their youth group sold fireworks as a fund raiser for five years to raise money for missions work. The idea of selling a variety of fireworks at fair prices was important to Dodd, so his first store opened a short time later.

With locations all over North Alabama, Dizzy Dean's Fireworks has seen meteoric growth, while remaining a family affair. Dodd's sister Kim is the general manager of the Winfield Super Center, and his brother-in-law and nephews and niece help operate the stores.

There are also Dizzy Dean's locations in Northport, Brookwood, Decatur/Priceville, Rainsville, Guntersville, Boaz, Gadsden, Hueytown and McCalla. All locations are family run or supported by churches that receive a percentage of sales.

"I thought about opening the Super Center in Northport because I now live in Tuscaloosa," Dodd said. "But it was so much easier to come home and work with the City of Winfield and open this new store right on Interstate 22 and benefit my hometown. I loved the idea."

Dodd's original Winfield wood store remains intact inside the Super Center. Local students are working with him to create a museum out of the old building. Dizzy Dean's Winfield location also boasts the 'World's Largest Disco Firecracker,' constructed by students at Bevill State Community College and Winfield High School.

Once each hour, they crank up the 'World's Largest Disco Firecracker' and the 6,000 square foot building turns into "Alabama's largest Disco dance floor," complete with Disco lighting, for three minutes. And being the promot-

er he is, Dodd said that leads into a flash sale where certain items are discounted to 'Buy One, Get Two Free.'

On busy days, Dodd has a staff of up to 24 people working at the Winfield Super Center. His sister retired from Walmart after almost 40 years, so her extensive retail experience is a tremendous asset to the business, Dodd said.

Another Dizzy Dean's promotion is available for any customer who spends \$200 or more in the store. That customer gets to spin the giant 8-foot prize wheel where he or she can win store credits up to \$50, or Dizzy Dean's swag.

Obviously, running a business is about making money, but Dodd also wants customers to have a fun time while enjoying their shopping experi-

ence. The I-22 location means Dizzy Dean's will draw customers from all over, so Dodd wants their drive to Winfield to be worth it. An 'Explosion of Fun.' That's his goal.

"They say Winfield is in the middle of nowhere but close to everywhere," Dodd said. "If you draw a 60-mile radius around Winfield, it touches Tuscaloosa, Birmingham, Florence, Tupelo, Columbus, Russellville and just misses Cullman and Decatur

Dizzy Dean's Fireworks is located on I-22, Exit 30 at 135 Bob Lawrence Drive, in Winfield. The Super Center phone number is 205-430-2719.

The store will remain open through Sunday, July 10, but there's a sign on the door with a phone number customers can call and one of the Dodd family will come to the Super Center and help them find what they need.

For more information visit dizzydeansfireworks.com, or search Dizzy Deans Super Center on Facebook.



COURTESY PHOTO

Dizzy Dean's Fireworks will host a grand opening special on Saturday, June 25 which includes a 1,000,000 firework explosion.

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Applications will be accepted in the Franklin County Commission office until 5:00 PM on Friday, July 1, 2022.

An application and job description may be picked up, faxed or emailed upon request from the Franklin County Commission Office, located at 405 N Jackson Avenue, Monday – Friday, 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM or applications are available at www.franklincountyal.org under the Careers tab.

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'BAKER,' from page 1

from 8:15-9:25 p.m., with fireworks starting shortly thereafter. Russellville City Councilman Gary Cummings is once again in charge of the preparation and planning for the Jam on Sloss Lake. After the event was canceled in 2020, it returned last year with a condensed schedule that did not include day events. This year's schedule is a return to the regular full day of activities included. There is no admission to the Jam on Sloss Lake.

Baker reached the Top 20 of this year's *Idol* competition, along with fellow Alabama residents Tristen Grissett and Lady K. Her Nashville audition, which included a performance of Whitney Houston's *I'm Your Baby Tonight* received rave reviews from *AI* judges Lionel Richie, Luke Bryan and Katy Perry.

Baker will return to Russellville on Saturday, July 9, to sing with the Kerry Gilbert Band at the group's monthly show at Russellville's Roxy Theatre.



COURTESY PHOTO

Baker, above, will headline the 13th annual Jam on Sloss Lake and will follow Joseph Baldwin and Austin Bohannon.

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Russellville set to host 42-team Dixie Youth Rookie State Baseball Tournament

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

42 youth baseball teams, including hundreds of players, parents, grandparents, family members, umpires and state officials, will converge upon Russellville this week for the Alabama Dixie Youth Rookie State Baseball Tournament.

The Russellville Dixie Youth Association, along with the Russellville Park and Recreation Department, will host the event that will see feature more than 40 teams from across Alabama compete for state championships in five age divisions.

Hosting an event of this magnitude requires an immense amount of preparation and planning. That responsibility fell largely on the shoulders of Park and Recreation Department Director Donnie Flanagan and his staff, along with Dixie Youth President Tony Bonds and his board of directors.

In addition to hosting games at the John Blackwell Sports Complex, games will be played at Hal Kirby Jr. Ballpark and on the Russellville High School softball field.

Flanagan acknowledges there were times in the past when the city would not have been able to meet the demands that come with hosting a state tournament, but when Bonds proposed the idea of

See 'TOURNAMENT,' page 13

Raking in the accolades



Brady Petree
Franklin Free Press



PHOTOS BY KYLE GLASGOW
Swinney, left, and Habada, right, were named 3A hitter and pitcher of the year for class 3A in Alabama. Swinney hit seven homers while driving in 52 runs at the plate while Habada spun 74.2 innings of 1.78 ERA ball while striking out 118 batters.

his hit tool and power tool is good enough to rival any high school player in the country. But it was simply a matter of whether or not opposing teams were going to pitch to him enough for him to get into a steady rhythm offensively.

"It's a pretty nice accomplishment. We did fall short of what we ultimately wanted to do as a team but we had a good year and we went further than anyone really thought we would," Swinney said. "It was a great season overall. We came together at the end and things just happened to go their way but it was still a good year for sure. But being hitter of the year, I figured I was going to hit well. I had confidence there. But it was really just a matter of if they were going to pitch to me."

But teams *did* pitch to Swinney, which more often than not proved to be the wrong decision on their part.

Simply put, Swinney was a threat in every facet of the game. But on offense is where he shined the brightest.

Driving in 52 runs and scoring 54 runs, Swinney capped off his senior season with a ridiculous slugging percentage of .824 and an on-base percentage of .605 to give him an OPS of 1.429 on the year. In addition, Swinney also swatted seven home runs while swiping 15 bags in 16 attempts.

On the mound, Swinney was just as dominant.

See 'ACCOLADES,' page 14

PHIL CAMPBELL - It's not an outlandish thing to say that Mason Swinney has a bright future in the game of baseball.

In reality, that might actually be a statement of fact as soon as just a few short weeks.

As Swinney prepares for a potential selection in the 2022 MLB Draft on July 17th, the former Phil Campbell Bobcat knows he will be playing ball at the next level, it just depends on if the phone rings that day or if he will play under the SEC lights in the spring.

But until that day comes, Swinney gets to kick back and relax while enjoying accolades from his final season as a Bobcat continue to pour in.

After being named one of the top-10 baseball players in the state of Alabama in all classifications, Swinney followed that up by being named the 3A hitter of the year. And Swinney wasn't the only Bobcat to come home with such a prestigious achievement.

Phil Campbell junior lefthander Cam Habada was named the 3A pitcher of the year, giving the Bobcats two of the top players at the dish and the mound in the state of Alabama according to the ASWA.

As for Swinney, he knew he was going to hit as

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'TOURNAMENT,' from page 11

bidding on the 2022 Dixie Youth State Tournament to Flanagan early this year, Flanagan was confident they could pull it off in impressive fashion.

"He asked if we could do something like that and I say, shoot yes, let's go for it," Flanagan said. "So we bid on it. We talked with Mayor (David) Grissom and the city agreed to pay our bid fee. That's revenue they will receive back through people staying in our hotels, buying gas here, eating in our restaurants, so we appreciate the city's support in this process."

Age divisions taking part in this week's state tournament include 7 and Under, 8 and Under, 9 and Under, 10 and Under and 12 and Under, Flanagan said.

Russellville Dixie Youth will have two teams competing, one in 7 and Under and one in 9 and Under. Phil Campbell Dixie Youth will also have a team playing for a state championship.

Flanagan called the 42-team event the 'biggest since I was hired' in 2019.

"There has been extensive preparation getting the fields back in shape where people want to come to Russellville to play. At Lee, we've put in new dugouts, nets, backstops and we laser-graded the fields. That helps with drainage and reduces rainouts. Hal Kirby has been top dressed with brick dust twice and the high school field is in great shape.

"We've been really shorthanded with one full-time maintenance guy the last three months, but he, our part-time people and our whole staff has gone above and beyond to get everything ready. This has been a team effort with the Park and Recreation Department, Dixie Youth and the City of Russellville," Flanagan added.

Flanagan has a vision to see Russellville become a fixture for hosting youth baseball and softball tournaments, and he hopes this week will showcase the city and its facilities to visitors.

"I want things like this to happen here in Russellville. I love it. By bringing in so many people we're helping our city and making it better," Flanagan said.

Opening ceremonies will be held at the RHS Football Stadium on Thursday, June 23, at 11 a.m. Flanagan encourages Russellville residents to attend the opening ceremonies as well as games scheduled from Thursday through Monday.

"We hope everyone who comes to our community has a safe and wonderful time and we're excited about the economic benefits to our local businesses. And I hope to see a lot of Russellville people come to this special event. We love baseball in this city and there will be some great baseball played this week," Flanagan said.



COURTESY PHOTO

The Dixie Youth Rookie State Tournament in Russellville will play host to 42 teams from across the state in pursuit of a state title.

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'ACCOLADES,' from page 11

Going 4-2 with an ERA of 2.39, Swinney struck out 41 batters across 26.1 innings pitched.

While the number at the end of the season for Swinney and the Bobcats definitely lived up to their personal expectations, coming into the season was a bit of a mystery. After all, the Bobcats had lost Ridge Raper, Luke Barnwell and a plethora of others due to graduation a year prior.

So no one quite knew where to place the expectations going into the year.

And with only one senior on the squad in Swinney, the Bobcat shortstop took the leadership role and tried to apply it when and where he could. And the results were very apparent.

"We were a totally new team than what we were before. Most of the guys, outside of one or two, hadn't really ever played a varsity game before this year so it was pretty much a whole new team," Swinney said. "It's a lot different than what I experienced in years before. They were calling me coach Swinney and I had to show some of them the ropes and things like that and try to help guide them as much as I could. And I think it paid off in the end because the experience and just the skill level of a lot of those guys, you could definitely see some improvement so that was a plus."

Whether or not a major league club comes calling remains to be seen. Swinney has been in contact with multiple MLB teams including the Padres, Blue Jays and Royals (who had him out in Kansas City for a workout recently) just to name a few.

But if the phone doesn't ring or Swinney isn't selected as high as he feels he should be at the moment, he has a pretty decent backup plan waiting in the wings as he is signed and committed to play at the University of Alabama.

"The dream of mine has always been to play professional baseball. So the fact that there's even a chance that that will happen is just a dream come true for me," Swinney said. "But if I don't go out of high school, I always have Alabama right there. So whether it's out of high school or college, it's just awesome and to have my dream right there hopefully almost happening is just awesome."

As he prepares to move on to bigger and brighter stages, Swinney is positive that he won't forget what the town, community and school of Phil Campbell has done for him across the years.

Coming from a smaller school while having eyes from top-tier colleges and Major League Baseball teams alike is one of the driving forces that pushes Swinney towards success. Something that he hopes he can carry with him as he presses on.

"Coming from a smaller school, people tend to talk down on small schools and that kind of stuff is what drives me. I feel like that's where the best and hardest workers are," Swinney said. "The entire community just supports one another and anytime I go anywhere, people are checking up with me and wanting to know what I've been up to. And the team is especially close too. We're like brothers and we have a bond that no one could break. Just being at Phil Campbell has been the best years of my life and I wouldn't be where I am without the school and the community behind me. It's truly amazing."

Being named alongside a teammate in Habada is just the icing on the cake for Swinney and the Bobcats. To have an ace on the mound that they could turn to in game one during the postseason is something that the Bobcats didn't take for granted at all this year.

"Cam went out everyday and anytime he toed the mound, he was going to shove and we just felt confident that he was going to get us a win. That's why he was our game one guy. He threw extremely well this year and everyone around him just knew that he was going to throw the ball well everytime he stepped out there," Swinney said.

As Swinney takes a slight break over the summer before prepping for either

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See 'ACCOLADES,' page 15

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'ACCOLADES,' from page 14

pro or college ball, Cam Habada is getting right back to work over the summer playing in tournaments across the southeast.

Coming back from a tournament in Atlanta, Habada spoke to the *FFP* about his accomplishment of being named the top 3A pitcher in the state.

"It's honestly just an honor. I got to pitch some last year but not a lot at all. But we really just had a clean slate across the board this year for us," Habada said. "We really got carried by the seniors we had last year and they were great role models for us. And I think having those seniors last year really helped me establish that bulldog mentality out on the mound."

Much like his shortstop playing behind him, Habada was thrilled to be named alongside a teammate as two of the best players in their classification.

The lefty took time to appreciate his teammate and the program that has turned into a baseball powerhouse in the state in just a matter of years.

"Mason is such a good player. I love playing alongside him and he's the best to do it around here in my opinion. And we just have so much talent here that has been here and is coming up through the system and it's just a blessing to be a part of this program," Habada said.

Before the awards handed down from the ASWA came out, Habada wasn't sure about his prospects of being named the 3A pitcher of the year. He knew he certainly had the numbers to back it up if he were selected.

Across 74.2 innings pitched, Habada struck out an outstanding 118 batters while producing a glistening 1.78 ERA. Not to mention that opposing batters hit a measly .161 against him. So there was no question that Habada was certainly *one* of the best pitchers in his class.

But would the writers name him the *very* best?

In true fashion, Habada was on the mound pitching in a tournament the day that he found out.

And once he came off the mound and got the word, his teammates made sure to let him have it, all in good fun of course.

"I was honestly hoping I would get it. But honestly I had no clue. I hoped

that I would make the all-state team but in the back of my mind, I was really wanting to be the pitcher of the year," Habada said.

"I actually pitched the day that I found out and all my buddies started congratulating me after I came off the mound and it was just really a great and overwhelming feeling."

Coming into the season, the Bobcats were searching for who would lead the pitching staff.

Habada absolutely had the talent to do so despite pitching in a limited role in their championship season. However, there was one hurdle that he had to get over in order to take that next step: a mental block.

Once he overcame that block and realized his full potential, he was off and running and the Bobcats found their ace.

"I just realized that I'm not a bad pitcher. I just have to believe in my abilities and locate pitches where I want to and I will be alright everytime I go out there," Habada said. "The main thing for me was that I didn't need to get inside my own head and just tell myself that I could do it. And once I got over that, I knew everything would work out."

And work out, it did.

Habada pitched well-enough to become the ace of the Bobcat staff that was desperate for a leader on the mound and Habada would eventually be named the game one starter for the postseason for Phil Campbell.

And while he goes across the southeast playing in tournaments all summer long preparing for the 2023 season, that season can't get here soon enough according to Habada.

"I'm so excited to play next year. Losing Mason is a big loss but I think the talent we have coming back next year should be amazing. And so I think it's going to be super fun and I really just can't wait to get started next year," Habada said.

Much like Swinney, Habada excelled on the mound and at the plate.

Offensively, Habada scored 40 runs and drove in 33 runs while carrying a .506 on-base percentage thanks to his 36 walks on the season.

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